*The Regional Tour of this exhibition has been organised by the Bathurst Regional Art Gallery which is supported by the Bathurst City Council, the Regional Galleries Association of NSW through the Ministry for the Arts and the Australia Council, the Federal Government arts funding and advisory body.*

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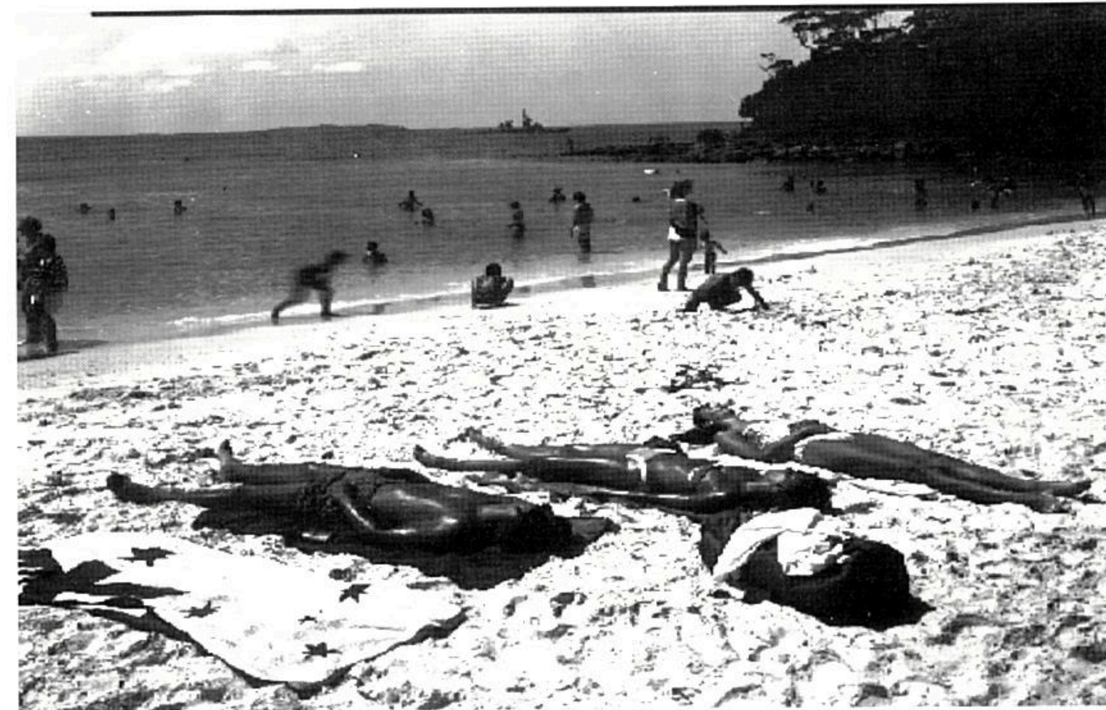
# From the Empire's End



• ***Peter Elliston*** *View North from Greenpatch Park, Jervis Bay 1988*

## TOUR DATES

| | |
|---|---|
| Bathurst Regional Art Gallery | 23 Apr - 30 May 1993 |
| Tamworth City Gallery | 11 June - 25 July |
| Moree Plains Gallery | 30 July - 27 Aug |
| Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney | 30 Sept - 23 Oct |
| Drill Hall Gallery, ACT | 4 Nov - 27 Nov |
| Albury Regional Art Gallery | 16 Dec - 30 Jan 1994 |
| Campbelltown City Art Gallery | 24 Mar - 24 April 1994 |

Bathurst Regional Art Gallery

# From the Empire's End

*by Terence Maloon*

This is an exhibition about differences, but it was conceived to avoid the kind of presentation that European audiences could construe as Difference pure and simple.

Australians have a history as colonizers *and* as a colonized people. For this reason, some of the most thoughtful Australian artists are suspicious of a penchant for exotic experiences and for the picturesque in all its forms.

"*Exotic and picturesque for whom? Exotic and picturesque for what purpose?*", they may wonder. Whenever the question of Australia's cultural identity arises, there is usually the prior assumption that this identity is something a travel agent should be able to summarize in a paragraph, that a tourist on a package-holiday could verify, or that could be conveyed in an exhibition like this one.

Why *are* Australian artists embarrassed, defensive, angered by these presumptions about our collective identity? The fact of the matter is that the majority of Australians are, and are not quite, Europeans. This derivation is writ large, but in a slightly altered, slightly distorted form all over our lifestyles, cities and mother tongues. If there are perceptible divergences – many details differing from not one, but from a variety of European (and also non-European) sources and prototypes – then these are too petty, accidental, incoherent and unconscious to advance any claim for a genuinely autonomous and (touristically speaking) impressively Different national character.

And this is the stigma most colonies have to bear in relation to their European ancestry. In a sense, every colony is disadvantaged because it holds the very basis of its culture – the idioms, traditions, conventions, usages – in common with the Old World. For potential audiences in the Old World, those shared idioms, traditions, etc, are the root cause of a colony's inherent and incorrigible unoriginality. The privilege of origination and the right to originality have always been maintained by Europe itself. Thus, from a European's usual, prejudiced perspective, the cultural expressions of the Second and Third Worlds will be rated, first of all, in terms of Dependency and Difference.

If a tourist is disenchanted with the standardized modernity of Australian cities and disappointed by the cosmopolitan character of contemporary Australian art and culture, then he or she can look for consolation to Nature, to the Desert and perhaps to the tribal Aborigines living in remote regions of the country – assuming that these provide more meaningful, authentic, welcome experiences for Europeans than the rude shock of finding themselves, their ideas, attitudes, values, social experience and, ultimately, their history of imperialism reflected back via the distorting-mirror held up by a colonial society.

Yet it is not only overseas tourists who search for a "true" Australia in the bush, the desert and in Aboriginal lore (or an Aboriginal mystique). Australians themselves have done so, and continue to do so, because *they also* doubt the adequacy and authenticity of their own (European) cultural sources. This alienated, schizoid relationship to culture is, of course, typical of colonial societies.

The imagery of the bush, the desert and Aboriginality have dominated modern Australian art since the 1920s and monopolized Australian kitsch. In addition, unusual or unique features of our artistic patrimony and artificial environment have been so eagerly sought by cultural experts and entrepreneurs, that we have witnessed many cases of anachronism, misapprehension, naïveté, ignorance and ineptitude being singled out for special appreciation in the name of Australian Difference.

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**In 1595 a fleet of Spanish vessels commanded by Alvaro de Mendaña sailed into the Pacific Ocean. Their mission was to find King Solomon's mines. The expedition erupted into full, virulent craziness upon reaching the Marquesas Islands, where the crew went on a murderous rampage, killing 200 native inhabitants. When they landed on the Solomon Islands (named after King Solomon's mines, which they believed they had reached), they resumed their massacre of natives. The slaughter was going on in full spate whilst members of the ship's company were engaged in building a church on the island.**

**Captain Mendaña died before leaving the Solomon Islands and his wife took over command of the expedition. The crew reverted from killing natives to killing one another, but many weeks later the fleet limped into Manila harbour, bearing the survivors of a "guideless voyage against contrary winds, in rotten ships with a starving, dying company".**

**Undeterred by the epic nightmare he had endured, the chief pilot of one of the vessels, Pedro Fernando de Quirós, requested and received royal permission in 1603 to return to the Pacific in search of a legendary fifth continent, *Terra Australis Incognita*.**

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Idealism, fantasy, violence and broken dreams fall into recurring cycles which typify the Europeans' search for a New World. As a nation which is predominantly composed of migrants, Australia preserves a heritage of romantic images of *Australia Felix*, "the Lucky Country". An equally powerful and persistent image, compounded by many generations of settlers, is that of *Terra Nullius*, a hostile desert of broken dreams and disabused ideals. These are two sides to one coin, the two faces of romantic idealisation.

**Judith Ahern**, like an anthropologist, has assembled for our scrutiny a collection of other people's snapshots. She collected them while she was working part-time in a colour-processing laboratory in Sydney, where the machinery would occasionally dysfunction, double-printing strips of negatives and misaligning images. Her collection gives a glimpse of a passionate wish for *Australia Felix* which haunts the popular imagination. Multiplied, garbled and surrealized by beserk machines, these radiant moments become more poignant as they grow more unreal and unapproachable. They swell and burst like iridescent bubbles, then are cancelled by an indifferent employee's wax crayon.

Like the majority of works in this exhibition, Ahern's series is an example of deterritorialized photography. She has misappropriated other people's snapshots, reproduced them on a different scale, endowed them with an entirely different intention, and transported them into an alien context. It will dawn on the viewer that the people in the pictures are not smiling for us and do not suspect our interest in them. What breach of trust has the artist perpetrated by exposing them to surveillance by strangers? Is the viewer discomforted, shamed by a sense of illegitimate curiosity?

**Bill Henson**'s images are deterritorialized in the sense that there is an unsolvable mystery about the photographs' origins. Do these people belong to one place or various places? Were the photographs taken on one day or over several days or years? Is this Sydney or Melbourne? Australia or Europe? Eastern or Western Europe? In the many hundreds of photographs of crowds Henson produced between the 1970s and 1982, he reprised what Walter Benjamin, in a famous essay, described as the catalytic experience for certain forms of literary and artistic modernism in the nineteenth century: the confrontation of an individual consciousness with a metropolitan crowd (*1).

A state of erotic anticipation mingled with paranoia overtakes the solitary walker in the metropolis – Henson's photographic installation seems to echo Baudelaire's poem *"A une passante"*, memorably glossed by Benjamin in his essay. However, a hundred years later and perhaps half a world away, there are crucial differences between the modern crowds Henson has photographed and the Parisians of Baudelaire's epoch. For Baudelaire, the crowd was an unfulfilled symbol of democracy and a potential revolutionary mob. The crowds Henson depicts are the representatives of a "mass" society: they are evidently acclimatized to their political impotence, alienation and social atomization. Consequently, it does not really matter what geographical location they belong to: theirs is a no-man's-land which we can assume, either in reality or by an analogy based on common factors of remoteness and exile, is as much "Australia" as anywhere else.

The theme of deterritorialization extends to other features of Henson's work: the urban environment is, first and foremost, a *psychological* landscape, and any distinction between the photographer's "documentary", "expressive" and "imaginative" intentions is no longer perceptible. I regard these as unproductive distinctions and sources of misunderstanding about photography, and hope that this exhibition will contribute to their further blurring.

The unrelated faces in the crowd suggested a strategy for the combination of images: Henson took up the option in his subsequent (post-1981) installations. The uncertain relationships between people, the unaccountability of time and place, and the indeterminate, contradictory meanings of the series as a whole gave way to jarringly discordant image-clusters – for example, Henson's series **"Untitled 1985-1986"** created an elaborate counterpoint of images of ancient Egyptian buildings, studies of the contemporary suburban landscape, and portraits of people under fluorescent lights in supermarkets and petrol stations (*2).

Henson has instigated a rhetoric of the fragment, refusing to resolve his discordant parts into a false harmony. His way of presenting images in groups and series denies to viewers their customary manner of looking at pictures – pictures whose visual wholeness and self-sufficiency go unchallenged; pictures which promise to disclose a sovereign, overriding meaning once we have grasped their "point".

Instead, Henson's installations are fields of ricocheting cross-references and clashing

perspectives. They imply that the world commonly available through our eyesight and understanding can refract into plural, often disputed and incommensurable realities.

One of the more strenuous paradoxes Henson's work has sustained over many years is that these gloomy images of social wastelands can actually stimulate ways of reconceiving "the Social". By denying an experience of visual wholeness, the installation may have the effect of side-tracking viewers into more lateral, global ways of thinking. Reading between gaps, wondering about strategic omissions and what might be unsayable and unphotographable, considering the social world as a dynamic configuration of interchange, affect, stresses, contradictions and discords – these are some of the advantages a rhetoric of fragmentary glimpses can offer to thought.

It may assist a more fruitful approach to the question of social identity and how, for example, "Australia" might (or might not) be representable in an exhibition such as this one. Not the least of its benefits is that it maintains a strict sense of relativity and positionality that would prevent us, for example, from assuming that anything we encounter in this context could be *essentially* exotic and Different, or *essentially* familiar, derivative and Dependent.

Inheriting the consciousness of the colonizer as well as consciousness of the colonized, many Australians have gained bitter insight through first-hand experience into the way essentialist conceptions about nations and peoples tend to shade into racism.

**Rozalind Drummond** seems to endorse Henson's melancholic vision of social wastelands and universal alienation with her images of resoundingly vacant concourses and stairways.

She represents these environments as diaphanous theatres of time and motion. Her photographs resemble certain Italian Futurist paintings by Carlo Carrà and Umberto Boccioni. Their spooky atmosphere and spectacular scale also hint at black-and-white science-fiction films of the 1950s and '60s. In addition, viewers with a taste for the bleaker theses of "post-modernist" sociology will feel that Drummond's images prompt the recollection of certain key words and phrases which became fashionable a while ago (e.g.: "simulation", "hyperreality", "the shadow of the silent majorities", "the desert of the real itself"). All of these cognates – the paintings, the movies, the sociological jargon – are, in their own ways, varieties of futurism.

They are also, in their own ways, reflections of the charisma of the United States of America. Earlier this century, all the West looked towards America and assumed it was the herald of things to come – the skyscrapers, the affluence, the gadgets, the emphasis on individual liberty, the dynamism, the mobility. In Australia since World War II there has been a quasi-official policy, implemented by the private sector and by all levels of governement to overhaul the English-colonial foundations of our cities and lifestyles and to affect a thorough-going Americanization. Like most Western nations, Australians are fascinated by a mediatized, mythical America tinged with the spirit of futurism and science-fiction.

The immense familiarity Australians feel with this totally fantasticated "America" is no doubt part of the reason why the theories of the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard exerted such a strong appeal to Australian artists and cultural theorists during the 1980s (*3), because Baudrillard's futurology stems from a fascination with the same fantasticated, semi-caricature of America which he persists in believing represents the future of the West. When he sketches an explanation of an historical process which, he claims, has brought about the "death of the Social" in advanced Western nations, then it is middle-America that emerges as his prime example of social moribundity.

In a 200 year-old colony, where the distress and despair of being uprooted and rootless are not unusual, and where the artificial environment and the mass media seem to confirm one's sense of displacement and placelessness, Baudrillard's description of hyperreal America with its "shadow of the silent majorities" seems to illuminate important aspects of our collective experience. Moreover, the parallel he suggests between Australia and America is flattering to Australians, who formerly thought of themselves as chronically provincial and behind-the-times, but have now become avant-garde, if we read between Baudrillard's lines, because our scattered, benighted, unreconciled suburban millions seem to exemplify the most advanced kind of post-society.

A range of Baudrillard's topics offers possible keys for the interpretation of Henson's, Elliston's, Grace's and Dement's images, as well as resonating in the echo-chambers of Rozalind Drummond's pictures. However, it would be fatuous, in my opinion, to harp on the fact that the airport concourses and station stairways Drummond has photographed are not the sociable piazzas and agoras of times past – nor are they the cafés or picnic grounds of today. Surprisingly, the artist emphasizes a straightforward documentary intention: she says she is interested in airports and subways as artificial cities which "sustain themselves as self-reflexive networks where information and time become the focus ... rather than architecture" (*4). Her



transformation of the commonplace into science-fiction is a feat in the tradition of Jean-Luc Godard's film *Alphaville.*

From Cornwall to London to New Haven, Connecticut; from Los Angeles to Auckland and Belfast – these are places **Adrian Hall** lived and worked before coming to Sydney in 1979. Several glimpses of the far-flung landscapes that were and are part of his life are shuffled together, and elements originating from some of his earlier artworks converge in "**Shadow/Blot: Procession**", a series of seven deliberately placed cibachrome photographs.

Hall is best known in Australia as a sculptor specializing in mixed-media installations. However, photography has often figured prominently in his installations, and he has made numerous independent photographic works – some of them wondrous – which he calls "sculptograms". The photographs in "**Shadow/ Blot: Procession**" are an outcome of complicated media-mixing and genre-juggling, including multiple slide projections, drawing, painting, collage, assemblage and even, arguably – because the artist includes himself in the final image – performance. These are seen as a suite or circular narrative.

It is typical of Hall's practice to set up very abrupt, bizarre conjunctions of objects and images. Viewers are invited to discover links, to find connecting ideas, and to reconcile parts into a formal unity which, I think, can be seen or sensed right from the start, but which we tend to reject or disbelieve because that unity is compounded from such an outrageously ill-assorted, unfamiliar mixture of elements.

However haphazard and miscellaneous any of Hall's work may seem, it is worth bearing in mind the admiration he professes for some of Kandinsky's abstract paintings. Always finical about the details of his compositions, Kandinsky explained his paintings and drawings in quasi-musical terms of their vibration or *"Klang"*. Extending this musical analogy, Adrian Hall could be characterised as a fastidious orchestrator of spectacular discords.

These cibachromes are theatres of time, motion and transformation. One of the recurring motifs in them is a Rorshach blot – a graphic device used in psychological tests to stimulate a patient to project and freely associate his or her ideas. However, the word "blot" also carries the meaning of obliterating, censoring, blocking – as in the expression "to blot out". Hall's images imply a flux of consciousness, a threshold of visions crystallizing and disintegrating.

The way his work dramatizes displacements and discontinuities seems to be a symptom of an immigrant's consciousness. Yet there is nothing remotely nostalgic, no lament for a broken life, a damaged identity or a diverted sense of purpose anywhere in his art. The rhetoric of fragments Hall has adopted reflects the basis of his art in a creative, self-examining life. The art – and the life – have adapted to and learnt to welcome the shocks and challenges of many encounters with Difference.

**Linda Dement**'s photographs are battlefields, although several of the conceptual opposites she has set at loggerheads are easy to disentangle: still-life and performance, innocence and perversity, beauty and butchery. Her images are emphatically artificial. They cultivate the hard-edged, splintery look of photo-montages, but this is an illusion she conjures with her constructed sets and expert use of studio lighting.

The "shattered" surface of the photograph is a signal of the artist's iconoclastic intent, because these images make a furious assault – firstly, on what we might consider seemly or decent in art; secondly, on the unconscious limitations we might place on women artists and the range of knowledge and experience we expect them to manifest; and thirdly, on what we understand about the political economy of pornography – i.e. about the representations of sexuality made by, merchandised by, and purchased (we assume, exclusively) by men.

Dement's richly coloured, shrine-like settings for sado-masochistic tableaux-vivants remind us that some religious traditions share similar imagery with pornography. The important question she raises at this juncture is: what separates a metaphorical domain from a literal one? What separates fantasy from fact, the law from the flesh, the word from the world?

Her work fails to recognize, or does not indicate to us any clear demarcation between one domain and the other. Such literalism is shockingly provocative. We might recognize, for example, that the figurative language used in contemporary criticism and cultural theory – with its favourite tropes of "deconstruction", "splits" and "ruptures" in "texts", etc – is manifested quite literally in Dement's photographs in the form of physical mutilations. She seems to have made an equally literal translation of the rationale of avant-garde art: instigating shock through the willful deformation and mutilation of the human image, by de-naturing the codes of representation, by transgressing taboos, by trampling traditions, etc. Why do sectors of her audience find the literal renditions of these figures of speech so gut-wrenching when they revel in the metaphors of violence in their own discourse? And then there are

the metaphors of so-called normal sexual relations and practices: what would happen if *these* words were made flesh?

In photographs, a rhetoric of fragments can lend itself to graphic expressions of aggression and violence – a proliferation of dangerous edges akin to shards of broken glass or, at the opposite extreme – in **Helen Grace**'s work, for instance – a format fractured into a grid has the effect of distancing and ironizing the image held between the lattice. In her original version of the work, Helen Grace presented three gridded pictures for dispassionate analysis - or, rather, she re-presented them, because they are second-hand images taken from the mass media.

She bracketed them under the title: "**Money is No Object**". When they were first exhibited in Sydney's Mori Gallery, they were accompanied by small portraits of Australia's richest men and short texts which gave highly unfavourable psychological profiles of the arch-capitalist type of male. There was an embarrassed awareness of the fact that the artist was a woman, while women were conspicuously absent from the images and were more or less strangers to the "bullish" and "bearish" mentality exemplified by the knights of modern capitalism. From this alienated vantage point, we were invited to consider the means whereby men consolidate their power.

However, the three large images in Grace's original series actually invited an initial *misrecognition:* at first they seemed to portray men's solidarity in the spheres of culture, labour and politics. The apparent subjects of the photographs were male choristers, union leaders at the time of a strike, and a revolutionary army. In actuality, all three images were taken in Stock Exchanges.

The artist has deliberately refrained from giving the photographs a personalized touch. Perhaps as an expression of scepticism or distaste for the topic at hand, she has had the images mechanically enlarged into luridly coloured laser-prints. However, the processes of enlargement and transposition have caused the images to decompose into flame-like arabesques – swirling configurations which are as impersonal, abstract and placeless as international capitalism itself, and as phantasmagoric as the mass-communication networks that constitute true power in our time.

Both Helen Grace and **Tracey Moffatt** are award-winning independent film-makers. Another characteristic they have in common is that they use their artworks to comment upon and criticize prior images and representations. Tracey Moffatt refers us to cinema history and to the crude racial and sexual stereotyping that occurs in it, while she also ruffles the iconography of colonial history in Australia.

Tracey Moffatt extends her rôle of film director to these photographs which are the product of teamwork. They resemble her recent films – the obviously fake painted sets; the strained, dreamlike atmospheres; the stylised narratives and economy of gesture in the storytelling. The "stills" in this exhibition are excerpted from a larger work entitled "**Something More**", which develops a disjointed, violent, not-quite-explicable story-line through nine images.

The central character is a racially indeterminate "woman of colour". Is she meant to be Chinese, Mexican, Aboriginal? As an all-purpose "exotic", she's not the only caricatured identity. Other details raise disturbing questions which won't yield a definite answer – for example: is the jagged hem of the central character's dress a fashion gimmick, a sign of poverty, or evidence that she has been sexually abused?We have all sat through films which mete out comparable punishment to desirable "exotic" women, I imagine. Following an old Hollywood formula, the make-believe of "**Something More**" turns serious and even threatens to become real: the overripe colours of the cibachromes suddenly alternate with sober, "documentary" black-and-white images.

There is no mistaking the fact that the central figure constitutes an object of desire, but by whom is she desired? She represents an exotic Other, but to whom is she other? Like most works in this exhibition it tosses questions back to the audience – to an audience which habitually considers itself a homogeneous "we". We, the ideal audience, are normative and empowered. Hypothetically, "we" are white, western, male, middle-class, heterosexual, etc, etc. We create outsiders by defining "them" as our opposites. Furthermore, given the solidarity with which we uphold our norms and enforce our laws, we can punish troublemakers and dispose of whoever threatens what "we" are about.

This, in fact, is what seems to happen to the central character in the narrative who is victimized because of her sex appeal. In the final black-and-white frame, the fake scenery acquires a real Australian place-name: Brisbane, long a by-word for political conservatism and appalling race-relations. A roadsign points in that direction, and parallel to it a woman's body lies abandoned in the gravel, with only her rose-patterned dress to identify her.

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**In 1768, His Majesty's ship the "Endeavour" sailed from Plymouth harbour in England, under the command of Lietenant James Cook. Its destination was Tahiti, where Cook was ordered to observe the 1769 transit of Venus – an event occurring every 105 years when the planet Venus passes between the earth and the sun. Once he had completed this mission, he was instructed to open a package of secret instructions, which directed him to investigate a "Continent or Land of great extent" situated in the South Pacific, where he was requested:**

***"... carefully to observe the Nature of the Soil, and the Products thereof; the Beasts and Fowls that are to be found in the Rivers or upon the Coast and in what Plenty; and in case you find any Mines, Minerals or valuable stones, you are to bring home Specimens of each ... You are likewise to observe the Temper, Disposition and Number of the Natives, if there be any ..."***

***"You are also with the consent of the Natives to take possessions of the Convenient Situations in the Country in the name of the King of Great Britain; or if you find the Country unhabited take Possession for His Majesty by setting up Proper Marks and Inscriptions, as first discoverers and possessors".***

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The charter which effectively began the European colonization of Australia made a significant elision of the activities of observing, representing and taking possession of the land. When photography was introduced into Australia not much more than forty years after the arrival of European settlers, photographers pursued basically similar objectives to those laid out in Cook's secret instructions: observing, representing, setting up and legitimizing marks and inscriptions which made claims of ownership upon territory.

In the hands of explorers and pioneering settlers, the camera could record moments of shock when (to generalize the nature of these encounters) Western Consciousness confronted extreme manifestations of Otherness – landscapes which seemed awesomely weird, flora and fauna which were different from anything European émigrés or Australian city-dwellers had seen before, or "savages" whose languages and attitudes were indecipherable. These photographs may unwittingly have marked a turning-pont in the history of a tract of land or a group of people whose destiny dramatically changed as soon as they encountered the agents of Western technology, economy and law.

Australia's bicentenary celebrations in 1988 brought about a spate of exhibitions, publications and other retrospective reflections which have tended to increase Australians' awareness of a purely local history of photography (*5). Hence it is no coincidence that the most straightforwardly documentary images in this exhibition make us reconsider the ideological usages of photography, the rôle that images have traditionally played in the colonizing process of Australia. The "Others" most prevalent in colonial discourses and colonial artistic expressions reappear in **Peter Elliston**'s pictures in the guise of the wilderness landscape, and in **Sue Ford**'s series in the guise of Aboriginal people.

Ford's and Elliston's contributions differ markedly from the other artists in this exhibition because they seem more outward-directed, interested in the precise facts of places, events and people. The first-hand authenticity of the photographer's vision, his/her objective reflection of "the truth" or "a truth" set these images apart. In contrast to Elliston and Ford, the other exhibitors tend to concentrate on general or symbolic truths rather than particular, concrete ones, or they set up artificial situations which make no pretence of objectivity or universal significance.

However, Elliston and Ford are not naïve documentary photographers in the sense I have implied: their works are far from innocently conceived. Both are acutely aware of other, prior and contemporary representations of their elected subjects. They are not simply presenting isolated images of real places and events, but are deliberately working upon a genre, working upon a history of representation of those subjects.

With scrupulous care to provide a context for individual images, Ford and Elliston conceived their photographs to appear in series which, for reasons of space have been abbreviated in this exhibition. But their main departure from the colonialist tradition of documentary photography occurs in relation to the latter's habitually unself-conscious and unself-critical assumptions about the beholder's point-of-view and right of access to the people or territory represented.

As I will explain in more detail presently, Peter Elliston seeks to make viewers aware that, through the instrument the photographer holds in his hands and the technological culture it belongs to (Elliston is a trained scientist), he and his viewers are not at all detached from, but are vitally implicated in the marks and claims that have been made on the land. When Sue Ford photographed Aboriginal ceremonies in the extreme north of Australia, the images of dancers she captured would evoke for Australian viewers dozens, perhaps hundreds of similar images. However, when she photographed the rows of backs turned to her camera and the various impassible foregrounds framing and partly obscuring significant events in the middle-distance, she broke with a long-established Australian

convention: in her photographs, the viewer is made conscious of exclusion, of being out of place, perhaps of trespassing on other people's land and taking an illegitimate interest in their affairs.

Ford's use of flash in conjunction with natural light can create an effect of heightened unreality. In two especially significant images we see, caught in the crossfire of twilight and flashlight, two men of approximately the same height locked in conversation. The axes of their shoulders are almost parallel, as if they were non-coinciding mirror-images, each an opposite and analogue to the other. One man wears a crisply pressed, white short-sleeved shirt, while the other's face and naked torso are daubed with ceremonial body-paint. The traditional cultural values attached to juxtapositions of black and white Australians (positive and negative, civilized and savage, empowered and dispossessed) are ambivalent here to the point of being reversible.

One of the men is the then-Prime Minister of Australia, Bob Hawke, and the other is Gularrwuy Yunupingu, Chairman of the Northern Lands Council. Just which of the two has ultimate jurisdiction over the land they are standing on is a disputed point. However, the Prime Minister has arrived to make a public gesture of conciliation towards tribal Aboriginals and consequently seems to be acknowledging their struggle for land rights. In reciprocation of this well-meaning overture, he and his wife have been invited to witness an important ritual ceremony and are presented with a large bark painting. (The decorative cross-hatching on the painting is fortuitously echoed by an assortment of plaid shirts worn by Aboriginal men in the foreground of the photograph).

One of Peter Elliston's photographs shows a swirl of rocks which resembles an immensely ancient bone exposed to the light of day. The image has connotations which will elude non-Australians, unaware that virtually every unusual geological formation of the continent is, or once was, a focal point of Aboriginal creation myths – so these rocks were probably a sacred site. However, there are few if any Aborigines in evidence in Jervis Bay today – nor are there many non-Aboriginals, to judge from these strangely vacant photographs.

Depending on where you come from, they are liable to seem the most humdrum or the most exotically "Australian" of pictures. However, virtually everyone will wonder why the photographer selected *that* hotel, *that* holiday cottage, *that* scarred crest of a monotonously scrub-covered hillside: we find it provocative that such unexceptional, flat, mediocre, unpicturesque sights have been singled out for special attention. Because Elliston juxtaposes images of primeval rocks, an Aboriginal rock-shelter and the wilderness landscape with the banal sights of a seaside resort, he makes us consider these events in the landscape as marks and inscriptions of European colonization. Prompted by the drift of suggestions he sets in motion, we start to notice large aerials, cables, broadcasting antennae, warships in the bay – the place is bristling with the means of surveillance, scientific monitoring and communication. The photographer knows that Jervis Bay was once, and is now again under threat of re-colonisation by a much more powerful and hazardous network of intelligence and technology. In the 1960s, stretches of the bush were cleared to prepare the site for a nuclear reactor (which was never built). In 1988, when Elliston took these photographs, the coastal resort had been earmarked for development as a major base for the Australian navy.

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The timing of this exhibition, appearing in Spain during the run-up year to the anniversary of Columbus's first voyage to America, enabled it to pose to European audiences some timely questions:

At the present time, when European nations have disbanded their empires (at least in name) and seem to be poised on the brink of unification, are we at the dawn of an inward-looking, self-preoccupied phase? Will the commemorative events of 1992 leave a fading, disavowed memory of Europe's imperial history and encourage a renewed blindness to the effects of European attitudes, technology, economics, laws, etc, on other regions of the world?

Alternatively, will those same ceremonies of prospect and retrospect have encouraged a greater recognition of an indispensable complement to European self-knowledge provided by images and voices issuing from the empire's end?

**Footnotes**

(1) Walter Benjamin: *Charles Baudelaire – A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, Verso, London, 1983, p.124.
(2) See Terence Maloon: "Notes on Bill Henson" in *The Australia Bicentennial Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1987, pp.46-53.
(3) See André Frankovits (ed): Seduced and Abandoned – The Baudrillard Scene, Stonemoss, Sydney, 1984.
(4) Letter to the author, 29th January, 1990.
(5) For three very different approaches, see David Moore and Rodney Hall: *Australia: Image of a Nation*, Collins, Sydney, 1983; Anne-Marie Willis: *Picturing Australia – A History of Photography*, Angus and Robertson, Sydney, 1988; Gael Newton: *Shades of Light – Photography and Australia*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1988.



# List of Works

**Sue Ford**
Bob Hawke and Gerry Hand receive a painting at the men's meeting. Present are men from Gumatj, Rriratjingu, Dhainangu, Ganalpoyungu, Gipapuyngu Baruwga clans from North East Arnham Land. Seated right Warlipiri men in head dress and men from the Pitjantjara 1988.
B&W photograph
39.3cm x 59.8cm image

**Sue Ford**
Lajamunu women hold discussions with Hazel Hawke and Maree Hand 1988
B&W photograph
39.3cm x 59.8cm image

**Sue Ford**
Paddy Wainburra of the Mirrnitza clan dancing with Willie Jaylama, Billie Lakannia and children from Barunga 1988
B&W photograph
39.3cm x 59.8cm image

**Sue Ford**
Discussions between Bob Hawke and Galarrwuy Yunupingu. (Galarrwuy is painted with his father's body designs from the Gumati clan) 1988
B&W photograph
39.3cm x 59.8cm image

**Sue Ford**
Discussions after the treaty announcement between (L to R) (Gerry Hand, Bob Hawke, Galarrwuy Yunupingu, chairman of the Northern Lands Council and Frank Chulung, chairman of the Kimberley Lands Council 1988
B&W photograph
39.3cm x 59.8cm image

**Peter Elliston**
Series "Jervis Bay"
10 B&W photographs
43 x 55cm image

**Tracey Moffat**
Series "Something More" 1989
Family Scene
Brisbane 300 miles
1 cibachrome and 1 B&W photograph
150cm x 90cm image

**Adrian Hall**
Series "Shadow/Blot" 1990
7 photographs/cibachrome
51.5 cm x 73.2cm image

**Helen Grace**
Series "Money is no object"
A "Logic" 1989
mosaic of 16 colour laser prints
31.5cm x 42cm image

**Helen Grace**
series "Money is no object"
C "Reason" 1989
mosaic of 16 colour laser prints
31.5cm x 42cm image

**Linda Dement**
I Hate Sex 1989
photograph (colour)
38.5cm x 35cm image

**Linda Dement**
Fuck me Dead 1989
photograph (colour)
35cm x 35cm image

**Linda Dement**
Pig and Daffodils 1990
photograph (colour)
44cm x 44cm image

**Linda Dement**
Self and Cut Stomach 1990
photograph (colour)
44cm x 44cm image

**Linda Dement**
Self and Poppies 1990
photograph (colour)
44cm x 44cm image

**Bill Henson**
"13 Images out of 26 groups from Untitled 1980-1982"
B&W photographs
39cm x 43cm x 10
24.9cm x 49.7cm x 2
44cm x 44cm x 1

**Rozalind Drummond**
Series "Shadow Zone" No 2 1990
(staircases)
B&W photograph
96cm x 147cm image

**Rozalind Drummond**
Series "Shadow Zone" No 3 1956
(turnstiles and crowd)
B&W photograph
103.5cm x 103.5cm image

**RozalindDrummond**
Series (Shadow Zone) No 4 1990
(foyer of station)
B&W photograph
98.4cm x 98.4cm

**Judith Adhern**
Series "Untitled"
16 photographs in a grid installation