

mac

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Bill Molly
c. 1974/2008



Josephine Molly Mac
c. 1930/2009



Blonde boy with girls
c. 1982/2008





The Waves
c. 1950/2008



Diane and Darrian
1974



Kim outside
1965



Old country
c. 1974/2002



Dom and Erica
2002

FOLK

There is a photograph in this exhibition where the two of us are 'collaborating' for the first time. We had an old hat in the backyard and were wasting film. I must have been about eight or nine. Mac was about twelve. I have a vague memory from around then of my father setting up a makeshift darkroom in the kitchen to teach us photography. Thinking back now, I recall being too short and somehow caught behind, so I couldn't quite follow what was going on. The kitchen wasn't big enough or it was really Mac who was getting the lesson.

I remember too that I struck a silent bargain with my brother around that time: if he were to be the photographer, which is what I thought he was, I needed to find something else. The first image of us playing in the backyard (*Canon Demi*, c. 1965) would as likely have come from these earliest darkroom

experiences under the guidance of our father. Seeing it again now, it is a little daunting to think of how circumstances and affects are set in motion, how apparently defining casually explicit 'decisions' can be. And also how in our poor brains images and motifs and their attendant meanings seem to have been released from their original settings to shift around and react with all sorts of other unconscious thoughts and pressures.

Why is this interesting? Because it says something about how to approach the photographs in this exhibition, or at least how Mac and I approach them. The images all address the same people, parents and siblings, cousins and sons and daughters, their vulnerability and temperament, the clothes they wear. The settings are usually houses and bricks and the surrounding yards. Where he adopts earlier

photographs—family photographs from as far back as 1930—Mac is interested where the camera-work is either by someone ‘in the family’ or someone close by.


For whatever reason, Mac and I associate photography with reaching and looking downward into our own biological potential. It was never about transfiguration or upwardly transcendent movement or seeking to overcome materiality. All these photographs are of immediate relations and circumstances—the people who would stand before and look back at the camera. At a point it is an accumulation of accidental encounters.

I think of German photographer August Sander (1876–1964) with respect to Mac’s interests: Sander’s images of farm workers on the way to church on Sunday for instance, where you know in your bones that the workers he photographs on the road in their best clothes are siblings too, or cousins or second cousins, and his focus is always conscious of inherent traits.

The relatively constant centre to each of Mac’s photographs is recognizable first by a specific feeling in the work. What is being looked at is not a literal narration, or definitive subject matter and its context, but abstract terms

and affective qualities, so that every part of the image becomes fused with an emotional tone that goes beyond simple identification of this or that person. The movement is not via storytelling, giving an account to strike a memory or place these moments in time, and its object is not to speak about ‘identity’ or, crudely, of where we come from. These are private family photographs, but without attendant names; they are unfamiliar and unavailable more widely, but this is not the point. Their pointedness does not suggest narrative, but moves between narrative, between roots. It is the tone and specific structure of feeling we associate with and reciprocate, and imagine that photography is capable of revealing.

The first photograph we selected for the exhibition was *William in the dark* (2004), where William wears a pinstripe shirt. Mac used

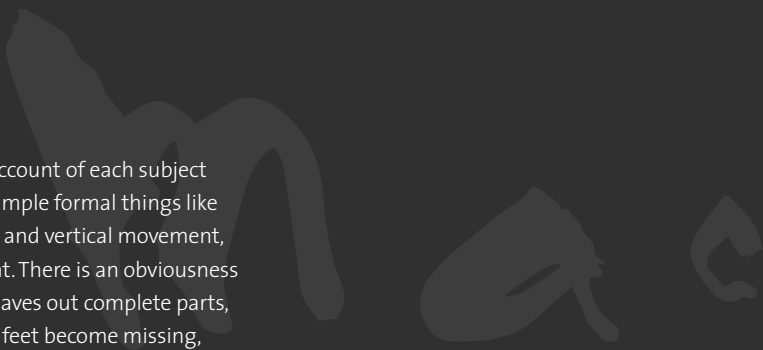


a flash and his subject is standing against a black sky. He is looking away a little, uncertain about his relationship to the camera, but isn't going to be concerned either way. It's a type of image often repeated across this short photographic history. Each photograph shows a different individual from a different generation or era, but there is often the same mouth or eyes or stance. In lieu of speaking and identification and hierarchies there is a fortuitous silence and casualty, a sifting through abstract sensations for movement and rhythm that can nonetheless be accounted for in photographs (see *Bill Molly*, 1974/2008). Mac looks to his siblings and children and parents and earlier for equivalences—a nervy sort of commonness. He finds equivalences also in the corners of houses, and shade provided by buildings and the habitual traits of individuals, like shyness or annoyance or ways of

touching. Elements like the wetness of jumpers or stains or the saturated darkness of foliage (see *Kim outside*, 1965) or group portraits where everyone gets included.

The look and style of Mac's photographs have not strayed. He keeps the small monochrome format. His methods and subjects, professional and social pressures or not, haven't been renovated over four decades. The pictures don't grow bigger or more colourful or morph into new media. His more passive and congenial response instead recuperates some of the odd contemporary pressures and inconsistencies that attach to representational idioms.

Mac doesn't crop an image, even where he adopts existing photographs. His compositions are casual and unselfconsciously constructed. They have a familiar orderliness that makes room for



a proper account of each subject and also simple formal things like horizontal and vertical movement, and weight. There is an obviousness too that leaves out complete parts, where say feet become missing, or where there is an informal casual movement of figures. To crop the image, and do away with these strange weights and measures would be to intervene and lose the sensation of who was behind the camera. Mac is not interested in pursuing arbitrary disconnected moments frozen by the camera and intensified. Rather, he pursues exactly the opposite: the pale likeness of a photographer's face, whoever they were, their handiwork and notions of what an image can do.

Mac's habit is to grasp a close viewing, as much tactile and haptic as exclusively visual (see *Blonde boy with girls*, c. 1982/2008). His movement is passive, in proximity to what is close and immediate, and describes the presentness of the figures. Never over-reaching or without immediate purpose, he animates the image in a tracking movement across the photograph, running his eye to and fro by way of searching inclusion. The camera, and more exactly the photographer, is occupying the same presentness as the figures in the frame.

Mac produces an interior image instinctively. The slight but necessary disorder and fretfulness in his work is the influence of a sensible intuition. In my mind there is always a slight wavering to the image, a sort of residual after-effect or hangover that separates out different motifs. Not necessarily physical or formal but immanent mental forces in the workings of images or at least in the way Mac and I experience them. In these photographs we feel our own habituations to a point of strangeness; our own hesitations and movements precede us, but as well run ahead.

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