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One of Us Cannot Be Wrong
Curated by Karra Rees
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One of Us Cannot Be Wrong addresses self-representation and the navigation of identity in an increasingly media-saturated, technology-dependent and celebrity-obsessed Western society. Presenting the work of seven artists from Australia and abroad, the exhibition explores the impact of these phenomena on self-esteem, self-realisation and ‘finding one’s place in the world’.

Never before have individuals been so heavily scrutinised under the photographic gaze. As video surveillance and digital photography have become more and more ubiquitous, the idea of ‘authentic’ identity has become correspondingly problematic. In our increasingly interconnected and commercially driven visual environment, where interactions and disclosures are often experienced remotely, opportunities for fluid and adaptive self-representation and expression have grown. For a generation obsessed with youth and celebrity, conditioned to ape their idols and strive for unattainable ideals, the contemporary ‘self’ today risks becoming a cipher for inflated and manufactured icons; an amalgam of fluid and fickle ideals, smoke and mirrors.

Photomedia’s ability to seamlessly traverse these boundaries of reality and fantasy makes it an effective agent of deception. Accordingly, the artists in this exhibition self-reflexively employ photography and video to both critique and contribute to popular culture’s commodification of identity. Co-opting the commercial world’s media of choice, they each respond to the tropes of popular culture, its documentation and dissemination, and its power to enrich and dull our lives.

For me the question arises, is there some redemptive intent in the work exhibited in One of Us Cannot Be Wrong or are we left an infinite dance between being attracted to and repulsed by celebrity culture.

Curated by Karra Rees
Does Leonard Cohen’s 1967 song title imply that one of us must, by deductive reasoning, be right? Is there always a right and wrong? If his ‘us’ here represents the complete landscape of an individual’s identities and internal dialogues, Cohen’s words can be read as a metaphor for a twenty-first century model of transient self-representation and competing inner-selves. A paradigm where divisions between reality and fantasy become increasingly klare as our multiplicity of identities dissolve and interlace with adaptive protein flow. But can one only rely on the claim to being the ‘authentic’ self?

The ubiquity of photography and surveillance in the contemporary landscape invites us to constantly perform for the camera, as we propel ourselves into an exciting, technologically-advanced future. The influence and prevalence of contemporary modes of communication, ‘authentic’ self?

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Darren Sylvester’s You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship (2006) reincarnates two iconic music videos so deeply ingrained in our collective memory that even in his silence viewers can hear them. Performing both roles, Sylvester recreates definitive David Bowie and Kate Bush clips with remarkable precision, inviting questions pertaining to the roles of authenticity and the value of reproduction. The two of him—stocratic male and hysterical female—remain forever caught in a cycle, trapped, unable to communicate and incapable of walking away from their respective destructive relationships.

Sylvester’s images, like memories, become frozen moments in time. Icons become relics; objects and brands become nostalgic reminders of particular events, triggers of time and place. Accentuating the role of popular culture in the formation of identity, Sylvester emphasises the vulnerable, tenuous social constructs and shifting codes of behaviour that govern adolescent subcultures. As adolescence increasingly encroaches into early adulthood, this twenty-first century infantilism serves to prolong the disappointment and disillusion that it has always inspired.
Endnotes

2 For further information about the Up. Series see:http://eveduj.org.uk/Up/Series_Upl/

3 Quoted from Philip Boffey’s artist statement for Evaporated Music.


5 Andy Warhol’s ‘Screen Tests’ were made from 1964–1966, models were asked to sit as still as possible while he was filming, and try not to blink.

6 Australian artist Mike Parr is particularly well known for his self-mutilation and endurance-based performance art. He has documented a performance in which he held his index finger over a lit candle until his skin burnt. Mike Parr Light a candle. Hold your finger in the flame for as long as possible 1972.

7 This project was achieved with the support of Sketch’s owner, Mound Measour and two private sponsors.


9 Sylvester recreates David Bowie’s Heroes and Kate Bush’s Wuthering Heights music videos, replicating costumes, make-up and re-enacting their every move and expression.

We devour our idols as if they were consumables, whilst the diversionary preoccupation with their behaviour simultaneously impedes the capacity to accurately reflect on our own. Collectively the artists in One of Us Cannot Be Wrong explore the impact and pervasiveness of this obsession with celebrity and popular culture on identity. In a generation fed by the willing and often duplicitous hand of the media, have celebrities become our Gods? The declining influence in the West of organised religion has seemingly made way for a new worship of these glittering celebrity deities, whilst the pervasive idolisation of celebrity has seemingly engendered. Does living vicariously through others relieve us of our boredom and insecurities; or relieve us of ourselves?

How to Look Amazing in Photographs

Sometimes the world lets me in on its secrets. Not its important secrets, just its special little ones. The kind of secrets that help me to uphold a wonderful illusion of cleverness in the eyes of my friends and family.

For example, I know how to look amazing in photographs.

A little while ago I took a trip on an aeroplane. Sitting next to me on the aeroplane was a girl with long hair and curled eyelashes. She was reading a glossy magazine.

“Hey,” she said.

“I’m on holiday,” I replied. As I walked away I turned to her and said, “Just that single word.

The girl passed me the magazine.

On the cover was a photograph of Scarlett Johansson. In the photograph Scarlett looked especially amazing. I looked at her for a long time without opening the magazine and while I looked at her, I asked myself a question that I often ask myself when I am looking at amazing photographs of beautiful ladies: How come you look that amazing?

Her hair was all everywhere, eyes looking into my eyes, mouth doing something that secret thing that model mouths do. It was amazing.

I couldn’t bring myself to open that magazine; for an hour or more I just kept looking at the cover. We had hit a little bit of turbulence and the girl beside me had turned white.

“I got so scared on aeroplanes,” she said.

“You’ll be fine,” I said and squeezed her hand. Then I went back to looking at the cover of the magazine.

Outside the sky was dark and empty. When the turbulence had settled down the air hostesses came out with wine and lemonade. And then an eerie thing happened: I heard a sound. Not an aeroplane sound or the sound of a glass being dropped, but something like a whisper. It was coming from somewhere very close to me. I looked at the girl beside me. She was asleep. I heard it again.

“How come you look that amazing?” she asked. “Do you want to read this magazine?” she asked. “I’ve finished with it.”

I was grateful for her kindness, as it wasn’t the kind of aeroplane with television screens on the back of every seat and I had made a bad choice of paperback in the airport newsagency.

“I’m on holiday,” she said.

Okay,” I said. “Thanks.”

The girl passed me the magazine.

The photograph on the page opposite was a picture of the celebrity. But on the aeroplane that day the memory seemed too good to be true and I couldn’t guarantee that I hadn’t made it up. Things were very strange.

The girl next to me was awake now and looked much better.

“You’re welcome,” she said. “Great cover isn’t it?”

“Yeah,” I said. And then I decided to be very bold. “Hey, can I ask you a question?”

She answered, “Shoot,” she said.

“Shhh,” it said.

She lowered my voice to a whisper. “Well, it’s a bit of a personal question, but, you see I’m doing some research for a health magazine and I wondered. Do you, um, douche?”

She looked at me in a sideways way and didn’t say anything. The girl next to me was awake now and looked much better.

“I couldn’t bring myself to open that magazine; for an hour or more I just kept looking at the cover. We had hit a little bit of turbulence and the girl beside me had turned white.

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“Shhh,” it said.

When I looked down I realised a very scary thing. The sound was coming from the glossy magazine in my lap. I picked the magazine up carefully and very slowly put my ears to Scarlett Johansson’s lips. And this is what I heard:

“Don’t douche.”

Just that simple word.

“When did you say ‘douche’?” I whispered in Scarlett’s ear, but the sound was gone.

I drank my glass of wine in one mouthful. I wondered if this was what it was like to lose your mind.

DOUCHE: A SHOWER IN FRENCH; NOT A SHOWER IN ENGLISH.

Amanda Maxwell
photograph of Scarlett stared out at me from her seat pocket. “Sorry,” I said. “Let’s pretend I never asked you that.”

“Okay,” she said, still looking at me in that sideways way.

“Okay,” I said. I pulled my eye mask on in a hurry and faked sleep.

“I think a glossy magazine just spoke to me, and all it said was the word ‘douche’.”

“Yeah, douche.”

“Diet Coke?”

“Yeah, dudes.”

“Diet Coke?”

“Yeah, so I don’t get pregnant. It kills sperm.”

“Diet Coke?”

“Yeah, dudes.”

“Diet Coke?”

“Yeah, but only with Diet Coke after we, you know, do it.”

“‘We?’”

“‘We?’”

“‘We?’”

“Yeah,” she said quietly. “I mean, I have. I mean, I do sometimes.”

“Thanks for sharing that with me,” I said.

“Okay,” she said, still looking at me in that sideways way.

“Okay,” I said. I pulled my eye mask on in a hurry and faked sleep. “Sorry,” I said. “Let’s pretend I never asked you that.”

One of Us Cannot Be Wrong

Sarah Baker

in—where else?—a hotel-room in Vegas (sadly, not a Hilton Hotel back in county jail for parole violations, or all of the above. Some—legal types and other parasites. It’s no wonder celebrities end up on given celebrities are pursued by innumerable paparazzi, lickspittles, of failure that’s absolutely at one with the values of the market: are constantly teetering on the verge of failure anyway, but the kind

So—let’s be honest—since they’re not really actresses, and they’re enjoyment from our new celebrities? Why do we have such an paradises whose ontological status is radically volatile. This is,

in them?

from every transmitting device on the planet? A little bit of Paris is

But that’s no surprise, for where does ‘Paris’ exist, except as an

world, and eviscerated in reality. As Paris herself says, ‘My
desexualised, at once eminently available in the artificial spectacular

of time. Paris is forever, even if, in ten years, it’s possible only

from every transmitting device on the planet? A little bit of Paris is

find themselves having to denounce the intimate enemy of celebrity

Endnotes


Denver is a four-hour flight away. We had a half hour wait before our connecting flight, so to pass time in the departure lounge I bought the Washington Post while you bought The Times. The coffee house was a chain exactly like the one we were at yesterday in Seattle. Brochures by our seats pitched sightseeing day trips we could take if we ventured into the city, yet looking around we really could have been in any other airport lounge we had waited in throughout our lives. The design and layout of everything was very familiar. For example, earlier I walked to the bathroom and realised I didn't even look for it, I just knew. When you think about the organisation, the efficiency, the sameness and sense of security that all this offers, it's really impressive. We're always shifted without fuss from one thing to the next, always passing through on the way to something bigger yet non-specific. Something invisible and anonymous, completely out of our control.

I was thinking about air travel, how we now measure the time passed, not the distance travelled. A country is only hours away, a sleep away—a stop over in Hong Kong away. I used to enjoy flying but now I'm completely removed from the experience. The familiar coffee chains and signage. The relatives and lovers crying in the departure lounge. Our bodies hurtling fast and vulnerable, miles from the rotating planet beneath us, with no concept of the physical distance and cultures we've covered. You interrupted my thoughts by pointing out a story in your newspaper about how the money in our savings account was linked to a major financial network, being used to profit and gain interest for a company neither of us had heard of.

“We're all part of this global community, whether we like it or not,” you said without lifting your head, “It makes me feel more alone than ever before. It feels nothing like a community.”

This was our conversation, pointing out stories the other may not have noticed in our respective newspapers. I was tired and in need of a shower. You slipped on your headphones. I could hear the music clearly, it was the compilation you had burnt from CDs at home—Lauren Hill and an old Wu-Tang Clan album. From inside the aircraft the Earth didn't seem as large. I look out and can almost imagine the entire circumference and all the people beneath us. Some would crash the car on their way to work today. Some would be in love with co-workers. Some are waiting by the phone. As the plane moved, I looked further across the horizon and could see how the same things would be happening elsewhere, then happening again, over and over. After a while I realised everything is pretty much the same. You rested your head on my shoulder. We watched the sunset begin. Later the plane banked left to begin our descent and I noticed you sleeping. I turned down the volume on your mini disc. I wanted time to slow down. To slow down so much that you and I would form a clear colour photograph and become trapped here together, over the blue Denver mountains.


Darren Sylvester
If You Fall In Love Again, You're A Little Older, A Little Less Trusting 2006
lightjet print, 90 x 120 cm

Sue Dodd
Frozen Sperm 2008 (detail), single channel digital video, stereo sound, 8 min 6 sec, dimensions variable (production still)
Sue Dodd
*Is it True? (Remix)* 2005–2008 (details) single channel digital video, stereo sound 3 min 34 sec, dimensions variable (production stills)
Kate Murphy, *Britney Lust 2000*, single-channel digital video installation, stereo sound, 7 min, dimensions variable (video stills)
Kate Murphy Britney Love 2007 (detail), single channel digital video installation, stereo sound, 9 min, dimensions variable (video stills)
Philip Brophy, Evaporated Music 2: At the Mouth of Metal 2006–2008 (b) Lap Dance Choking Whore (details) single channel digital video with Dolby Digital 5.1 audio, 2 min, dimensions variable (video stills)
Philip Brophy, Evaporated Music 2: At the Mouth of Metal 2006–2008 (a) My Song Growls Wasted Air (details) single-channel digital video with Dolby Digital 5.1 audio, 3 min, dimensions variable (video stills)
Pipilotti Rist, Open My Glade (Flatten) 2000, single channel digital video installation, silent, 9 min 52 sec, dimensions variable (video stills)
Pipilotti Rist

Open My Glade (Flatten) 2000, single channel digital video installation, silent, 9 min 52 sec, dimensions variable (video stills)
Darren Sylvester: The Object Of Social Acceptance 2003, lightjet print, 120 x 120 cm

Darren Sylvester: Doomed 2008, lightjet print, 90 x 120 cm (diptych)
Sarah Baker
The Birthday Party 2007
300 type C photographs, dimensions variable
Photography: Jet
Courtesy the artist

Phil Brophy
Evaporated Music 2: At the Mouth of Metal 2006–2008
(a) My Song Growls Wasted Air
(b) Lap Dance Choking Whore
single channel digital video with Dolby Digital 5.1 audio
5 min, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne & Sydney

Sue Dodd
Frozen Sperm 2008
single channel digital video, stereo sound
8 min 6 sec, dimensions variable
Sound production: Phil Dodd
6 di Thou (Remix) 2006–2008
single channel digital video, stereo sound
3 min 34 sec, dimensions variable
Sound production: Phil Dodd
All works courtesy the artist

Kate Murphy
Britney Love 2000
single channel digital video installation, stereo sound
7 min, dimensions variable
Britney Love 2007
single channel digital video installation, stereo sound
9 min, dimensions variable
All works courtesy the artist

Pipilotti Rist
Open My Glade (Flatten) 2000
single channel digital video installation, silent
9 min 52 sec, dimensions variable
Camera: Filip Zumbrunn; co-editing: Mich Hertig; production management: Cornelia Providoli; production assistance: Arthur Miranda; graphic design: Thomas Rhyner; direction, editing, cast: Pipilotti Rist.
Commissioned by Public Art Fund, New York for the Astorvision Screen at Times Square NYC
Courtesy the artist and Hauser & Wirth Zürich London

Darren Sylvester
You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship 2006
single channel digital video, silent
3 min 31 sec, dimensions variable
All works courtesy the artist and Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney; William Mora Galleries, Melbourne; and Johnston Gallery, Perth unless otherwise stated.

Kellie Wells
Tryng To Be Beautiful While My Hand Is Burning 2007
single channel digital video, silent
4 min 30 sec, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist

List of Works

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Courtesy the artist
Sarah Baker is an American-born artist who currently lives and works in London. She completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at San Francisco Art Institute, and a Master of Fine Art at Goldsmiths College in London. Baker has received several commissions, and has exhibited in a number of venues, including an Arts Council England Individual Grant for A Portrait of O.V.M. In 2007 she was a guest speaker at Serpentine Gallery in London. Baker has had solo exhibitions in Italy, Spain, Belgium, and the UK, and her work has been widely exhibited in group exhibitions throughout Europe and America. In 2008, Biennale in London presented a solo photo of her video installation Studs.

Philip Brophy lives and works in Melbourne. Since forming the notable experimental music group ‘tsk tsk tsk’ referred to as ‘tsk tsk tsk’ in 1976, Brophy has enjoyed a prolific and acclaimed career working as a musician, composer, sound designer, filmmaker, writer, artist, curator, educator and academic. More recently he has produced a range of audiovisual works focused on pop, sex and contemporary forms. He curated the major retrospective Tezuka—The Marvel of Manga in 2006 for the National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne that subsequently toured to major museums nationally and internationally. His work is held by many important art collections worldwide. Pipilotti Rist is represented by Hauser & Wirth Zürich London and Luhring Augustine Gallery, New York.

Darrin Sylvester lives and works in Melbourne. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Art Photography and Graphic Design at Charles Sturt University, New South Wales and is currently undertaking a Master of Fine Art at Monash University, Melbourne. Sylvester’s practise encompasses photography, video and sculpture. He has received a number of awards and grants including an Australian Council residency in New York in 2004. He has had solo exhibitions throughout Australia, and his work has been widely exhibited in group exhibitions both nationally and overseas. In 2008, the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney presented a survey of his work. Many important public and private collections nationally and internationally hold his work including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa; Museum of Modern Art, New York; Musée d’Art Moderne et Contemporain, Paris; Kunsthalle Basel; Museum of Fine Arts, Houston; and many others. Sylvester is represented by Sullivan-Novak Fine Art, Sydney, William Morris, Martin Clark, Australian Galleries, Sydney and Simon Groom, Sydney.

Kate Wells was born in Melbourne. In 2007 she graduated from the Victorian College of the Arts (VCA), University of Melbourne. Since 2008, she has exhibited at a number of exhibition spaces including West Space and the Photography Gallery in Melbourne and the Photographers Gallery in Perth. In 2008 she exhibited in a group exhibition at Aperture in New York and her video work, Embryo (2008) is currently part of the collection of the exhibition Move-On-Aux. Wells participated in the 2008 Next Wave Festival in Melbourne and also exhibited at MetroArthouse North Perth of Institute of Contemporary Artists (ICA). Her recent work has been acquired by a number of private and public collections, including the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) in Tasmania.

Curator Acknowledgements
It has been a delightful and rewarding experience to bring together the work of these artists for exhibition at Centre for Contemporary Photography. For their commitment to the project and creative input I thank Sarah Baker, Philip Brophy, Sue Dodd, Kate Murphy, Pipilotti Rist, Darren Sylvester and Kate Wells. This catalogue has been achieved through the generous support of Copyright Agency Limited (CAL), Cultural Fund to whom I am sincerely grateful. I am indebted also to sponsors who have assisted to realise this project. I thank Scannell & Theodores, Roy, Comodile and Kodak Professional, initial my thanks to organisations who have generously named technology equipment for the exhibition and The Lowther Museum of Art, Ward, as well as ongoing in-kind support Stofel and Jet Design. Thank you also to my colleagues Naomi Cass, Rebecca Chen, Tony Dunford, Florence Frankfurt, Michael Hauser and Lisa Pfeiffer and the hardworking team of dedicated CODA staff. Thank you also to the sponsors who have contributed: Justin Clemens, Amanda Moored and Darren Sylvester for their wonderful words; Danny Jackson for his handsome design; Ulrica Blax for her helpful support; Veronique Raines for her thorough and generous assistance, Leonard Cohen for the exhibition’s CD, Justine G statues, Kimmy Harwood and Scott Mclellan.

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Artist Biographies

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