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FLASH

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MARCH – JUNE 07

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FLASH #1 → MARCH–JUNE 07

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COVER Anne Zahalka, *artist #2*
(*Horst Kiechle*) 1998, duraflex photograph,
72.5 x 72.5 cm

CCP STAFF

Director Naomi Cass
naomicass@ccp.org.au

Deputy Director Rebecca Chew
rebeccachew@ccp.org.au

Curator Karra Rees
karrarees@ccp.org.au

Designer Darren Sylvester
darrensylvester@ccp.org.au

Gallery Assistant & Volunteer Coordinator
Jaana Sahling
jaanasahling@ccp.org.au

Website Sidonie Haass
sidoniehaass@ccp.org.au

Bookkeeper Tony Dutton

VOLUNTEERS

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HALL OF MIRRORS:
ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS
1987–2007

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ERRATUM

Amendment to: Maggie Finch, Book Review on *Art Photography Now* by Susan Bright in *Flash* October 06–February 07, p. 9. In the first paragraph the sentence reading; "In the early 19th century artists such as William Henry Fox Talbot, ..." should in fact read "Artists such as William Henry Fox Talbot, ...". We apologise for this error that took place at the editing stage.



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GALLERY INTERVIEW

HALL OF MIRRORS: ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS 1987-2007

GALLERIES ONE-FOUR & PROJECTION WINDOW 23 MARCH-12 MAY 2007

KARRA REES: Anne, you state in your Masters of Fine Art thesis: "No category in pictorial art is as conservative as portraiture. It is subject to a number of strict conditions for a portrait is not just a likeness of an individual to be preserved for posterity; it is also an image of pride, a projection of a social position."¹ Do you see your portraits as homage, or perhaps a continuation or reaction to traditional portraiture?

ANNE ZAHALKA: I didn't initially set out to pay homage to the 'Old Masters' but rather wanted to understand their influence and the nature of their incumbent value system. Portraiture is deeply embedded in our cultural and social life but we pay little attention to the role it plays in contemporary representations. My engagement with portraiture is concerned with these aspects and is both a reaction to the strictures of traditional portraiture as well as an engagement with its structures and conventions. Portraiture is conservative because it is governed by a set of codes and conditions established through its long history. I like to work within these established codes and find new ways of portraying my subjects.

KR: Historically, portraits immortalised sitters in their finest clothing and jewels, surrounded by worldly possessions indicating their wealth and status. In a similar way, the domestic scenes in *Open House* classify the subjects, defining them by their décor, clothing and possessions. Are the objects and interiors more revealing than the sitters?

AZ: In some ways I see the subject as just another object in the room—I know this sounds appalling! While I am concerned with the subjects and what they project through

their setting and their performance, I am equally interested in the stuff that surrounds them and what this says about them. Ensnared with their 'worldly possessions' they speak about their passions, their wealth (or lack of) and their place in the world. These portraits of my friends have been immortalised in the neon glow of the illuminated light box (in which they were originally cast), at a particular time in history (eg. *Saturday, 2:48 pm* 1995), in a particular domestic place and now in the public space of the art gallery. How much more revealing can this be?



The Bathers 1989 type C photograph 74.0 x 90.0 cm. Courtesy the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Arc One, Melbourne

KR: The original *Artists* portraits were taken in the late 80s with a view to continuing the series, with the most recent work having been made this year. Have you approached the new portraits in the same way?

AZ: The recent portraits are less concerned with playing out the artist stereotypes. They still perform self-consciously, as artists on location, in their own domestic space or against the backdrop of their workplace.

I became more interested in setting them in the environments they work and think in and yet having them still reminiscent of their artwork, so that they looked a little like one of the characters of their own making. The earlier artist portraits were situated in, or against, a representation of their own signature-style of work that had been elaborately constructed in a studio. They played out the various roles of the artist as hero, revolutionary, alchemist, inventor, magician, gambler or game-player which connected them in some way to their practice. Later I became more interested in working with artists who use photography/video or film to also make portraits and see how they might behave when the camera is turned on them. I especially like the collaborative aspect of working with artists and what they bring to the process. It gives me greater insight into their practice.

KR: In *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific*, you restaged two iconic Australian images; Max Dupain's *Sunbaker* (1937) and Charles Meere's *Australian beach pattern* (1940). Did you anticipate your images would, in turn, become iconic images?

AZ: I had no idea how significant these works were to become and that they would appear on the covers of books, catalogues and anthologies, or as posters and postcards, and be studied by art students; now even my daughter is studying *The Bathers* in her primary school text book, *Australian Readers Discovering Democracy!* I made *The Sunbather #2* and *The Bathers* during a six-month residency at the Bondi Pavilion, and exhibited them at the end of the residency in the gallery there to a very broad audience. Sandra Byron, then curator at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, walked into the gallery on the last day of the show and acquired five works from the

series for the exhibition *Twenty Contemporary Australian Photographers from the Hallmark Cards Australian Photographic Collection*. Once they were out in the public domain they were swept along with the whole multicultural tide. The photographs were made at a time when we were questioning the dominant images of the nation and I wanted to rewrite these to reflect a more culturally diverse and balanced idea of its community.

KR: Continuing your meditation on the dynamics of stereotypes in Australian culture, your new series, *Scenes from the Shire* photographed at Cronulla, follows on from *Bondi: Playground of the Pacific*. The subjects however, are set against the sand and surf, not a painted imitation. What has inspired this return to the Australian beach and how has your approach changed?

AZ: I wanted to revisit the beach following the aftermath of the Cronulla riots and see what signs of racism might exist there. Like most people I was horrified when racial violence erupted there a year ago on such a mythologised site of our nation, the beach. I realised the beach has always been a contested site for different ethnic and social groups—it's just that one seems to have more claim on it than another. Having been given some background reading to the history of Cronulla and the riots written by my friend Julie Rose,² and an introduction to Aheda Zanetti—an Australian Muslim dynamo who recently launched the burqini, a new design of modest swimwear for Muslim women—I felt equipped to return. I also knew of a documentary film being made following the recruiting of Lebanese men and women into the lifesaving club. It seemed like there was change adrift on the beachfront. Having moved away from the staged studio tableau work of the late 80s and working in a more documentary style since my *Fortresses and Frontiers* series through to *Leisureland*, I became more interested in using the location as a kind of ready-made set to place my figures in or against, thereby contextualising them in a real place. While the portrait still appears staged there is the obvious participation of the subject. I think this gives these portraits an interesting tension between being part of the scene and yet performing in it.

KR: You highlight the camera's ability to distort the truth and blur the boundary between reality and fiction. What do we really learn about a person from a portrait?

AZ: The making and taking of portraits is such a contrivance. There is nothing natural about the process, yet the aim is for it to appear so and for the subject to appear natural and unselfconscious. Few people are comfortable with the camera (except those who are trained for it)



Saturday, 5:18 pm 1995 type C photograph 81.0 x 66.0 cm.
Courtesy the artist, Rosyln Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Arc One, Melbourne

and we often want to be told what to do. I give very little direction to my sitters—I prefer to let them find their own way of sitting. Increasingly I am more interested in the unease expressed in the pose. It is confronting to see oneself in a bad light so to speak and even more confronting when we know this is how we may appear to others (even if we don't see ourselves this way). The photograph is evidence and in this case it doesn't lie. But a photographic portrait is also only one moment in the course of a sitting and many expressions pass across the face during this time. So while we might want to read into the person presented before us in the photograph, through their face and eyes—the so-called 'window to the soul'—there is no real way of knowing. Everything else in the picture however is a clue.

1. Anne Zahalka, *The Language of Gesture Towards a Lexicon*, The Author, Sydney, 1994, p. 10.

2. Julie Rose, 'Sur la Plage: Again, and Again', *Log*, 7, Winter/Spring, Anyone Corporation, New York, 2006, p. 100.

Selected from the interview published in HALL OF MIRRORS: ANNE ZAHALKA PORTRAITS 1987-2007. This fully illustrated catalogue features an interview between Anne Zahalka and curator Karra Rees with essays by Dr Daniel Palmer and Julie Rose. The catalogue can be purchased from CCP for \$20.00.

REVIEW

PERFECT FOR EVERY OCCASION: PHOTOGRAPHY TODAY MELISSA MILES

In the three decades since Robert Rooney described the camera as a “dumb recording device,” we have come to view photography as not only vocal but multi-lingual.¹ Far from being transparent documents of their subjects, photographs are popularly understood as partial and contingent products of their cultural, social, economic and political contexts. The high level of visual literacy that characterises contemporary photography is framed in *Perfect for Every Occasion: Photography Today* by curator, Zara Stanhope, in terms of the abundance of photographs in society. A series of news photographs drawn from the immense archive, Getty Images, appears at the entrance to the exhibition. Despite their small scale, the monumental quality of the images of the ‘falling man’ from the September 11 attacks, AIDS in Uganda, tsunami survivors in Sri Lanka, the Sydney Olympics and bush fires in the Grampians are potent reminders of the power of photography to filter our experiences and penetrate collective consciousness.

The pervasiveness of photography in our daily lives is reiterated in the variety of photographic technologies that are used by the 18 artists in this survey exhibition. Chantal Faust's *Blue Svetlana* (2004) is made using an office scanner, and Patrick Pound employs a mobile phone camera in his *Soft Real Estate Model* (2006) to isolate, magnify and abstract details in newspaper real estate photographs. It is interesting that the results of both Pound's and Faust's experiments with these everyday photographic technologies are presented as traditional fine art prints. Faust's large type C print and Pound's lush giclée prints on rag paper stand in sharp contrast to the small-scale news photographs that introduce the exhibition, and raise pertinent questions about the point at which photography becomes 'Art.' These issues have been hotly debated



Vanila Netto *Exercise in exorcism- this is not a mike* 2007
inkjet print 100 x 122.5 cm. Courtesy the artist, Sherman Galleries, Sydney and Arc One, Melbourne

throughout photography's history, dismissed in the wake of postmodernism, and here resurface in response to the proliferation of new, cheap and highly accessible photographic technologies that currently facilitate extraordinarily high levels of photographic production, distribution and exhibition.

Perfect for Every Occasion is a critically motivated survey exhibition, and the wall panels and catalogue essays that provide its interpretive framework refer to the prevalence of performativity and a cinematic drive in contemporary photography. Paul Knight,

Darren Sylvester, Andrew Best and Vanila Netto engage with the performative potential of photography with humour and intelligence. Netto's hooded self-portraits, *I'm a Lousy Frangipani* and *Exercise is Exorcism* (2007), invoke movement as a cathartic gesture against the pressures of contemporary life, while Sylvester's luridly coloured recreation of Joy Division's *Closer* album cover in *No Fun, No More* (2006) draws our attention to the feelings of melancholia and isolation that persist across generations. Although performative photography is nothing new (think Julia Margaret Cameron, Frederick



Justene Williams *Red Foto* 2005 (still)
video transferred to DVD
Courtesy the artist and Mori Gallery, Sydney

Holland Day and more recently, Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall and Tracey Moffatt), what is particularly interesting about this exhibition is the ways in which these contemporary artists reinvent the tradition of photographic performativity through their critical and personal approaches to the languages of their mediums.

Justene Williams makes this process explicit in her video works, *Blue Foto*, *Green Foto* and *Red Foto* (2005), which were Stanhope's initial inspiration for this exhibition. Williams has had a long career working with simple, popular photographic technologies such as disposable cameras and photo labs. In *Blue Foto*, *Green Foto*, *Red Foto* Williams uses her photographs as stage and costume to transform herself into a monstrous 3D embodiment of the 2D images. As Williams reanimates the still photograph with her repetitive, robotic movements, she addresses the saturation of images in our daily lives and the disjunction experienced when becoming a photograph.

Gary Carsley's *D. 37 Kurnell (Botany Bay National Park)* (2005) speaks to the artificial 'nature' of photography. After photographing

cultivated landscapes designed to mimic existing, pre-colonial parks and estates, Carsley uses a computer to replace each section of the photograph with images of wood grains. Carsley's reference to these monoprints as 'draguerreotypes' encapsulates the performative character of photographic reproduction where power, discourse and codes of representation do not cloak the photograph or its subject—they form its very substance. The spectator is also central to this photographic economy. As we move from side to side in front of Sarah Ryan's lenticular photographs in an effort to appreciate the effects of light shimmering through branches and leaves, photography is figured as an embodied and performative process for viewer and photographer alike.

Some of the most compelling works in this exhibition embrace the open-ended and fugitive qualities of photography to articulate personal experiences, narratives and memories. Alex Kerhsaw spent a year photographing his grandmother in her home and garden for his *Petalody* series (2005-06). Mirroring his grandmother's interest in *ikebana*, Kershaw's series is as much about the process as the finished result. The staged quality of many of these photographs – such as the beautiful image of Kershaw's grandmother sitting pensively in her bathroom below floral wall paper punctuated with pink camellias from the garden—speaks to the deeply personal relationship through which the photographs were made. To Kershaw, "photography is a way of spending time."²

One of the challenges of curating survey exhibitions like *Perfect for Every Occasion* is to address broad trends without losing sight of the specific and the individual. Stanhope is aware that survey exhibitions (like photographs themselves) can never be all-encompassing and complete, and instead focuses on raising



Alex Kershaw *Soft Tempers* 2006
c type photograph 72 x 50 cm from the series *Petalody* 2005-2006
Courtesy the artist and GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney

questions about past and present directions of photography through contemporary works that engage, provoke and surprise.

Dr Melissa Miles is based at the Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University.

Perfect For Every Occasion: Photography Today
Heide Museum of Modern Art
17 March – 1 July 2007
Curated by Zara Stanhope

1. Robert Rooney quoted in Robert Lindsay, 'Less than five hundred works in retrospect – Robert Rooney', *Notes on Robert Rooney, Project 8* [exhibition catalogue], Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1975, unpaginated.

2. Alex Kershaw, artist statement in *Perfect for Every Occasion: Photography Today* (exhibition catalogue), Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, 2007, p. 50.

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ANNE ZAHALKA

The Girls #2 Cronulla Beach 2007
Type C photography
70 x 14 cm

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REPORT

THE FIFTH ASIA-PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART ULANDA BLAIR

The business of making accessible the richness of the world we are in, of making dense and substantial our ordinary, day-to-day living in a place, is the real work of culture. It is a matter, for the most part, of enriching our consciousness... so that we possess the world we inhabit imaginatively as well as in fact.

David Malouf ¹

The Asia-Pacific Triennial (APT), now in its fifth incarnation, is the only biennale or triennial event in the world that is entirely dedicated to presenting contemporary art of the region. Developed by a team of curators at the Queensland Art Gallery and framed, by default, as representative of the Asia-Pacific, the APT5 at the Queensland Art Gallery and new Gallery of Modern Art in Brisbane has no overarching theme and makes no overt gestures towards a grand narrative. Whilst this isn't to say that the latest APT has miraculously transcended the fraught legacy of the white cube, the Australian-based curators do ask that we let the works speak for themselves, in a context unhindered by a unifying thematic framework.

One outcome of this 'no-hands' approach is an accumulation of stories; stories very much grounded in specific but diverse locales within the Asia-Pacific region. Meaning is gathered through various articulations of place, each with their own shifting traditions, values, symbols, objects and landscapes. These works aren't the expressions of the rootless, peripatetic artist commonly fetishised within the popular discourse of trans-national globalisation. Rather, the APT5 is consistent in its inclusion of artists that communicate a delicate and often ambivalent connection to a particular place, and who illuminate historical and political, as well as personal and imaginative understandings of these encounters. So whilst Australian novelist David Malouf's quote at the beginning of this piece speaks of poetry's affective power and

its ability to possess the land imaginatively, the APT5 presents an opportunity to consider the efficacy of contemporary art, and more specifically photography, in this way too.

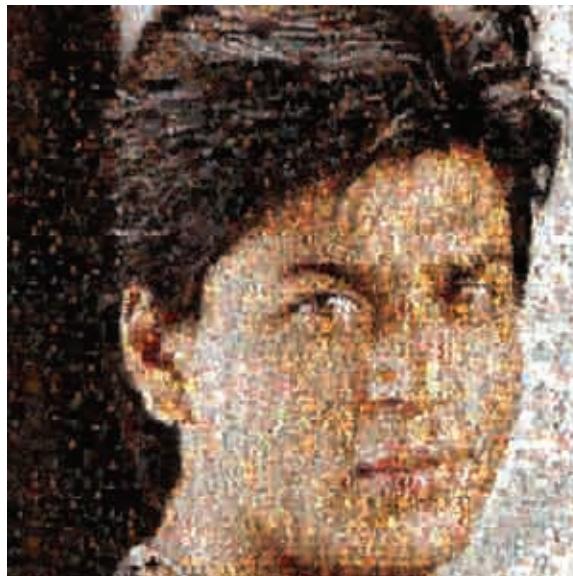
Photography has a complex history of shifting intentionalities related to nation, economy and self-representation. In the APT5, the indexical quality of photography is mobilised time and again to reinforce an artist's lived experience in the Asia-Pacific, and to thus legitimise their often critical and reflexive use of the medium.

Take for example Pakistani artist Rashid Rana's breathtaking photo montage series *Ommatidia* (2004) in which he has pixellated together hundreds of tiny photos of his fellow citizens to form the faces of famous Indian Bollywood film stars. In approaching these works the audience must re-adjust their focus, zooming in from a global macroscopic perspective to a local microscopic one, to register the minutiae

of an image that is literally more than the sum of its parts. Here Rana draws upon the disputed tradition of miniature painting—bound as it is historically to national preservationist strategies in Pakistan—to critique the glut and spillage of Indian celebrity culture in South Asia and to reveal the complexities of Pakistani nationhood. Tiny documentary photographs taken in the chaotic streets of Lahore provide a wider picture of celebrity as figment; a mass media construct sustained by the projected, collective dreams and aspirations of ordinary Pakistani society as it jostles politically and culturally with neighbouring India.

Photography has certainly played a vital role in nation building exercises across the Asia-Pacific, most particularly in China where the official photographic representations sanctioned by the Communist regime have had a longstanding and pervasive effect on the landscape of visibility both within Chinese

Rashid Rana from the series *Ommatidia* 2004



borders and beyond. Today, as China experiences rapid urbanisation, and propels itself wholeheartedly towards a market economy, marginal or 'folkloric' art practices from peripheral Chinese locales remain conspicuously absent on the mainstream and international exhibition circuit. The legacy of the Chinese Communist Party's hold over cultural production, combined with ambitious economic reforms, has led to a situation in which a surfeit of supposedly representative contemporary Chinese art has flooded the biennale circuit, whilst an incalculable number of artists and practices that do not fit into the elitist and mainstream international narrative of 'contemporary' have been disregarded.

The multi-artist Long March Project, which occupies a whole exhibition space in the Gallery of Modern Art, goes some way in redressing this totalising cultural reaction.² One artist who was 'discovered' by the Long March Project is Li Tainbing, a village photographer in the Fujian province who for the past 60 years has documented significant personal events in isolated Chinese communities. Using a vintage 1930s camera and rudimentary film processing techniques involving natural light, candlelight, chopsticks, blankets and the water from local rivers, Li's evocative black-and-white snapshots in the APT5 provide a compelling and unique historical record of rural Chinese life in the second half of the twentieth century.

By bringing 194 of Li's photographs into the formalised contemporary art space of the APT5, and accompanying them with a stunning documentary by filmmaker Shen Xiaomin titled *The Village Cameraman and his Son* (2001), the Long March Project curators (and by default, the APT5 curators) have instilled international contemporary art with localised Chinese idiosyncrasies, dissolving elitist distinctions between 'folk art' and 'high art', and 'traditional' and 'contemporary' art practices. Li's photographic practice in itself does not display the same level of self-reflexivity or critical consciousness as Rashid Rana's, however his inclusion in the APT5 serves to highlight how the Asia-Pacific region is clearly marked by national developmental inequalities that impact on who can afford to participate in the globalised contemporary art scene. Even the APT5, an event heralded by Queensland Art Gallery Director Doug Hall as offering a thorough engagement with the Pacific region³, has under-represented artists from Pacific countries, and it provides very little in the way of photographic practice from the region.

The term 'Asia-Pacific' provides a deceptive tidiness to an area that is marked by extreme geographical, political and creative disjunction. Unsurprisingly then, the APT5 as a survey of contemporary art from the Asia-Pacific region gestures at some kind of coherence and commonality, but the overall effect is a reinforcement of disparity and diversity. Until very recently, a hallmark of contemporary art was its increasing resistance to containment within national, racial or formalist boundaries. The APT5 however reflects the international return to local specificity in the face of globalisation's homogenising effect on culture. In this respect, it could

Jane Burton 30 May - 16 June



Hilwood 2006/07
Type C photograph
110.0 x 110.0 cm

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be said that the real accomplishment of the APT5 lies in its presentation of true localised forms of cultural production that offer multi-layered perspectives on notions of place, whilst avoiding overly simplistic nationalistic or regionalistic cultural frameworks.

Ulanda Blair is Special Projects Coordinator at the Next Wave Festival.

The Fifth Asia-Pacific Triennial

Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art Brisbane
until 27 May 2007.

1. David Malouf, *A Complex Fate*, The Boyer Lectures, The Australian Broadcasting Commission, Sydney, 22 November 1998.

2. The Long March Project, founded by curator Lu Jie in 1999, seeks to integrate the production, consumption and interpretation of Chinese contemporary art. It has involved over 100 artists retracing the route taken by Mao Zedong and his followers in 1934-35, and has included exhibitions, public art projects, performances, forums, screenings and multimedia projects at historically significant sites. It introduces marginalised art traditions into the realm of the contemporary and transmits international art discourses back into the local sphere. As both a discursive and practical model of curatorial practice the Long March Project provides an ongoing critique of contemporary mainstream exhibition culture.

3. Doug Hall, 'It's All About the Destiny Isn't It?', *The Fifth Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art* catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery Publishing, Brisbane, 2006, p. 12.

CCP MEMBERS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

ROBYN BEECHE *BATHAIN WOMEN WAITING BEFORE TAKING ON MEN* 1989
JENNIFER PHIPPS



Robyn Beeche *Bathain Women Waiting Before Taking On Men* 1989
During Holi, the life of Krishna, his consort Radha and his brother Balaram are re-enacted by revellers. Women of Jabat beat men to pay back Balaram for teasing Radha. "If on this day women of Jabat [Radha's wedding place] are victorious [attacking the men to capture the flag of Balaram], the next day their men visit Bathain [Balaram's temple] to be beaten up and their heart won over by the local women. In love there is no victory and no defeat." (Goswami Shrivatsa, *Celebrating Krishna*, Vrindavan, 2001, p. 224. Photographs Robyn Beeche).

Bathain Women Waiting Before Taking On Men reminds me of Leigh Bowery, not only because of the heads closely covered with decorated and beautifully embroidered textiles, but because of the wholly transgressive nature of the image: anonymity, trans dressing—women disguised in eloquently arranged sequined scarves and wearing men's shirts—and the threat of organised violence. Leigh Bowery's self transformations owe something to India. His black and white eye makeup and spectacles, for example as Miss Bucket in an Alternative Miss World Contest, resemble the startlingly alive eyes on a black Krishna sculpture. Flip between this image and Leigh Bowery at the opening of the Lucien Freud retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York and, without disrespect, you sense a similar ordering through ceremony and play on the familiar.

Robyn Beeche, a London photographer of fantasy and beauty, was one of the first to photograph Leigh Bowery. She now lives in India, recording the customs and ceremonies of Vraj, where the first film she made was on Holi, the festival of colour. The *Bathain Women Waiting Before Taking On Men* photograph made me reflect on Australia's part in the



Robyn Beeche *Leigh Bowery at Divine Tribute Night in London* 1989

creativity of these two Australian artists. Both Beeche and Bowery went to London during the 70s, in their early twenties and worked with design and performance at a time when Australia's prosperity was founded in trade with Japan. My colleague Paul Fox reminded me of how important Asia had then become to Australia, in marked difference to how Asia, particularly Japan and India were seen from England.

Leigh Bowery came from a Salvation Army family in western suburbs Melbourne where life was communally multi-cultural. Robyn Beeche became a photographer through her drive to do so, leaving her teenage beginning as a solicitor's secretary. The two artists would have been open to, and somewhat apart from, how Asia was seen in England. The colour and customs offered up by Indian sub-continent immigrants were novel and inspiring. How ironic that Leigh Bowery, one of the fiercest critics of suburban western life, was inspired to do so by one of the oldest religions.

If you would like to contribute to this regular column by CCP members, please email your idea and image to Jaana Sahling, *Flash* Coordinator, jaanasahling@ccp.org.au



At the heart of the image



Nikon D40X

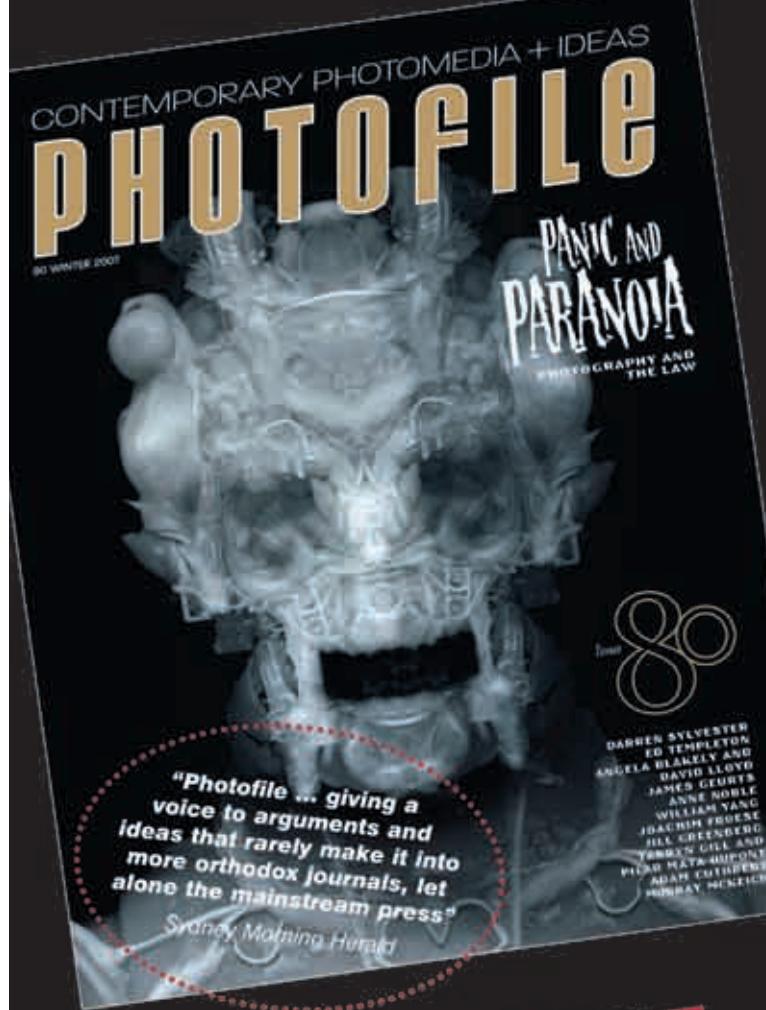
Nikon's smallest digital SLR combines a 10.2 megapixel CCD with a simple, intuitive operation.

Resolution power makes it easy for users to print up very large sizes or crop aggressively without losing any fine details. The D40X is loaded with everything you need for truly amazing images: a 10.2-megapixel CCD, Nikon's exclusive 3D Colour Matrix Metering II, an improved Image Processing Engine and superb Auto White Balance. Together with a world-famous Nikkor lens, these features combine to ensure perfect exposure, refined details and natural, vivid colours.

D40X Major Features

- Intuitive, simple and trouble-free operation
- Superior image quality and resolution
- Fast and precise responses
- Accurate automated and manual control for predictable results
- Retouch Menu for creative in-camera image edits and effects
- Seamless integration with Nikon Total Digital Imaging System

For further information please visit www.nikon.com.au



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