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20 YEARS

FLASH
CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY
JUNE-SEPTEMBER 06

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY

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20 YEARS

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FLASH #2 → JUNE-SEPTEMBER 06

ISSN 1039 6489

COVER Derek Henderson, *Haast Beach Motor Camp. Haast Jackson Bay Road, West Coast. 8.00pm, 23 February 2004* (detail)

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GALLERY 3 GUY BEN-NER
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Paper supported by Red Connect.



GALLERY

INTERVIEW: RENEE SO, *FAMILY RESEMBLANCE* CCP GALLERY TWO 8 SEPTEMBER–21 OCTOBER 2006

Rebecca Chew, CCP Deputy Director (RC): Can you discuss the influence of photography in your work?

Renee So (RS): I began to use photos and found images in my work at the same time as I was learning intarsia techniques for knitting (picture knitting). It was in the late 90s, when new media art was really beginning to take off and I liked the juxtaposition of craft with technology and the identical use of pixels and stitches to form an image. Using photography as a basis was important because the process

(RS): Yes and no. By knitting a photograph, it takes on the formal qualities of the new medium, and those qualities dominate the original source. I'd say it is more of a personalisation of a photograph rather than an enhancement. The photo is altered by my choices in composition, colour and also by the restrictions of the grid (that is, resolution). Often the removal of detail leads to abstraction, where certain details important in the reading of a photograph become illegible, incidental or insignificant in the knitted work.

language, culture and identity—that I was only experiencing for the first time... as a tourist.

(RC): You have just completed a residency in London. Can you discuss your latest work or new projects?

(RS): The residency actually finished at the end of 2005 but I am still floating about in London. Due to my practical travelling nature, I did not bring my knitting machine (although I bought another one recently), and have been busy painting and making ceramic busts. My recent interests have been *chinoiserie*, tang



Great Grandmother 2003, knitted cotton, MDF, 48X57cm

of knitting an image is all about breaking the picture down to its simplest form whilst still being able to recognise it. I used to grid all my images by hand which was quite laborious, but over the years I have found short cuts and improved my technique. I still use photography and found images in my work but I have also incorporated drawing and collage.

(RC): Is your two-dimensional work a type of 'enhancement' of the photograph?



Assorted Travel Snaps From Beijing, China and Hong Kong 2003, knitted cotton, plywood, dimensions variable

Also, knitting tends to flatten images out so perspective is lost. In that respect, my work is both a personal enhancement and a formal 'deterioration' of photography!

(RC): Can you discuss the subject of your work, *Assorted Travel Snaps from Beijing and Hong Kong* 2003? For instance, I presume that it was your trip to China? In what way was that trip significant?

(RS): *Assorted Travel Snaps from Beijing and Hong Kong*, was the second part in a series of autobiographical works I made in 2003/04 concerning my family's immigration to Australia in the 1970s. This work was a direct result of a recent trip to Asia with my family and my first trip to China. The mood was one of discovery, nostalgia and loss—of a



Untitled 2004, knitted cotton, plywood,

dynasty ceramics, scholar's gardens and the Beijing Opera. The paintings will be exhibited in a group show in Berlin in September and the busts, plus a bit of knitting are going to an international exhibition called *Satellite*, as part of the Shanghai Biennale 5.

Family Resemblance curated by Rebecca Chew. Artists: Tim Gresham, Renee So and Michelle Ussher.

GALLERY

INTERVIEW: GUY BEN-NER *SELECTED VIDEO WORKS 1999–2004* CCP GALLERY THREE, 7 JULY–26 AUGUST 2006

Naomi Cass, CCP Director (NC): Making one's children subject of one's art is an age-old practice, which only rarely renders work of interest beyond the family. In *Wild Boy* 2004 there is a tension between what's real and what's play (play is the child's work), yet there is never any question about the veracity of your relationship with your son, the wild boy.

Guy Ben-Ner (GB-N): I work a lot with a very old tool called "play within a play". Lacan gives *Hamlet* as an example of his notion that "truth comes in the structure of fiction". By staging a play, in front of his mother and the king, Hamlet is able to see the guilt in their reaction to the play. So truth comes in the guise of fiction (the staged play). As for me, I find it easier to get at things I am interested in with my kids through a fictive story. I can, for example, tell my kids about my wish to be alone, to get rid of them – through sea adventures like Robinson Crusoe. I don't believe in the ability of a documentary to touch anything truer. Actually, I do not believe there is any such thing as documentary (or fiction). *Wild boy* is also a movie about a director and his child actor. About the idea of directing a child, about the impossibility of that situation; the moral issues involved. And also, about silent cinema as a feral child that was tamed by language (sound).

(NC): You do seem stranded or isolated, physically at least in a number of your works. Can you speak about this as a subject, for an artist, a father, an Israeli?

(GB-N): Israel is a political island (though not a physical one); you cannot leave it by car (you would need a plane or a boat). It also has the feel of an isolated cultural province, wanting desperately some communication with the outside world, like many other places around the world.

(NC): Literate and engaging, your movies are nevertheless poorly made. Is this a particular strategy or aesthetic? Can you speak about your 'poor cinema'?



Berkeley's Island 1999, video still

(GB-N): I never separate strategy from aesthetics. Both are consequences of beliefs and ideas that guide me (as my belief that art should have the possibility of being made very cheaply, even a movie). For example, whenever I saw a movie I got the feeling that I was excluded, that I could never do that. If you go to an exhibition of painting, photography or sculpture you can always get encouraged. The implications of budget don't usually arise with other art forms, however cost is a big issue in cinema. The money issue is so closely connected with movie-making that it is a defining issue (such as low-budget movies). After all, it is the true place where time is money. And also, cheap movies are life's necessity for me.

Currently on a DAAD (Berlin Artist in Residence Program) residency, New York based Israeli artist, Guy Ben-Ner represented Israel at the 51st Venice Biennale in 2005 (traveled to the Adelaide Art Festival, 2005). Ben-Ner completed a Bachelor of Education, from Hamidrasha Art Teachers School, Israel in 1997 and a Master of Fine Arts from Columbia University in 2003. Solo exhibitions include Contemporary Arts Center, Cincinnati, OH, 2005; Center for Contemporary Art, Tel Aviv, 2005 and Postmasters Gallery, New York, 2003, 2005 and 2006. Full biographical details can be found at <http://www.cca.org.il/guy-ben-ner/>

REPORT

PHOTOMEDIA IN NEW YORK

DARREN SYLVESTER

Ahh, to spend one's days exploring the galleries of New York... is really tiring. With the commercial gallery district of Chelsea holding hundreds of exhibitions, this once (and in some ways still) meatpacking district is now filled with sparkling steel facades, heavy glass doors and birch coloured floors, all fronted with pretty boys and girls behind high counters – silently reorganising ordered shelving systems – or selling Alex Katz paintings to people on a whim for US\$750,000. After your twentieth gallery in a morning you suddenly find yourself becoming the fastest-critic-on-the-west-side. Judging whilst walking past gallery glass frontage. "Another abstract painting show?" Or, "Oh, that looks just so bad." Or, "I can't see anything so they're either installing or it's minimal. Next!" and so forth to next-door where another gallery awaits. You become hungry for another good hit. What follows is a few memorable photomedia exhibitions I felt deserved a write up. So grab that Artforum like it's the Art Almanac, order a half-regular-half-decaf coffee, and lets go.

Pierre Huyghe was everywhere in New York. His video for the Whitney Biennial, *A Journey That Wasn't* – about the search for a mythical white penguin in Central Park, via an expedition to Antarctica – was used as the Whitney's poster image and made headlines in *The New York Times*. Along with this though, he had another video work at Marian Goodman Gallery, *This is Not a Time for Dreaming*, which I found more appealing. Described by the artist as being about "The difficulty in coming up with an idea, becoming the idea", the work continued Huyghe's preoccupation with overlaying meaning and narrative to create something new. For Huyghe, the finished work is not his main concern; it's the collaboration with others to work through ideas. I admit whilst watching I had no idea what was going on,



Pierre Huyghe *This is Not a Time for Dreaming* 2006, single channel video, 24 minutes



Phil Collins *dünya dinlemiyor* 2005, single channel video, 58 minutes



but was glued nonetheless, trying to figure out a narrative which I discovered afterwards was about architect Le Corbusier's struggle and negotiation in creating an Arts Centre at Harvard University, where Huyghe had been commissioned to make this work. Presented as a live puppet-opera featuring marionettes which included the artist, Le Corbusier, Harvard University's curators, and a mythical black insect (representing Harvard University), the video described two situations; the architect's misadventures whilst making the building and the difficulty of the artist meeting the expectations of a commission. At times the paper model building expanded and contracted, portraying debate over construction. At other times a small red bird laid seeds where paper vines sprawl over the stage, describing the architect's belief it would be covered in vines from bird seedlings. Sometimes the footage cut to show that the puppet performance was actually a live concert for students, or cut to present the skill of the puppeteers, at other times we see the finished building at Harvard University today.

Phil Collins exhibited *dünya dinlemiyor* at Tanya Bonakdar Gallery, part of the same exhibition that had him as finalist in the Deutsche Börse Photography Prize. Shot in Istanbul, the work documented the disaffected youths of the city who are seen performing karaoke renditions of songs from The Smiths' album *The World Won't Listen*. As you'd imagine, it was funny, however it was also tender and emotional. The work documented a melancholic portrait of society, in a local and global sense, the work being a study on the mediating power of popular culture to which, despite its boundaries, we are all exposed. In one song, a Turkish boy nervously sings (as they all do, in fractured English) the lyrics from a piece of paper, sips a beer, is obviously drunk and towards the end, falls over. In another song, a woman singing *Rubber Ring* shakes with emotion throughout and by the end has tears in her eyes, screaming out the refrain, "Do you love me, like you used to?" This exhibition was, in both instances I went to see it, the busiest. For a commercial gallery to have 20-25 people continually watching video



Florian Maier-Aichen
Untitled 2005, type C-print, 174x220cm

work for half an hour or more on a Wednesday afternoon means something is going right – or a Smiths convention is in town – I'm not sure.

A highlight in photography was without doubt Florian Maier-Aichen's exhibition at 303 Gallery. Working with varying degrees of straight photography and digital technology, he created work that challenged the viewers understanding of the photographic image. Most of the show featured massive landscapes. In one black and white photo, around two metres square, Los Angeles is pictured from a helicopter at night – the black landscape completely littered with tiny dots of white light. In another, the Californian coast has its hue changed in Photoshop to create a vivid, red tree landscape. A smaller picture has a cruise liner digitally shrunk, floating down a lake. The Twentieth Century Fox logo, I presume taken from television, is shown as an Albumen print, a method dating back to the nineteenth century. From what I can understand, Maier-Aichen is a new breed of young German photographer whose aim is to dismantle the traditions recently set by German colour photography.

Mary Boone Gallery had a great three-stage curated exhibition called, *I Love My Scene*, curated by Jose Freire from Team Gallery. Team Gallery has a crop of what can only be described as, like, really hot artists including Slater Bradley, Pierre Bismuth and



Pierre Bismuth
Link #8 1999-2006, dimensions variable, single channel video

Ryan McGinley. The artist Pierre Bismuth actually came up with the original idea for the screenplay, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* by pitching the idea to director Michel Gondry (what would happen if people could selectively erase memory?) Gondry then asked him to write a treatment for the film, for which he was paid \$7000 – four years later, and now written by Charlie Kaufman, it won an academy award for best original screenplay. Bismuth described in an interview that in retrospect he should have asked for more money. In part two of this exhibition series, his work *Link #8* was, at first, nothing special – a video of people's houses, seemingly from different countries, times and backgrounds. Each room included a television, playing the movie *Sleuth* starring Michael Cain. Soon you realised that every time there was an edit in the film, Bismuth also edited his work, and you were in a new house. Sometimes for a second, sometimes a minute. Suddenly you were second-guessing the movie's edit points, jumping from one lounge room to the next. Crossing continents and time zones – yet watching the same narrative. At once making the aspect of watching a film at home not a personal experience, but a global and homogenised one.

One exhibition I was looking forward to was Wolfgang Tillmans' *Freedom From the Known* at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Centre. Over a



Wolfgang Tillmans
Freedom From the Known installation P.S. 1 Contemporary Art Centre

number of rooms, works were spread thin and jumped in size and construction, however it left a feeling of perhaps bad curating or hanging. Or on reflection, his usual style of taping, or pinning work together on walls was abandoned for works being framed behind glass or held inside Perspex boxes, which made everything disjointed. His super-large-scale, abstract colour works are pretty, however that's about all, and giving them titles such as *it's only love give it away*, made them feel twee. Smaller versions with big creases in them, held inside the clear boxes, simply looked like the colour processing machine had eaten them up – the type I made a thousand times at university but threw in the bin. What a waste! Other works like the type C prints of blown up faxes – images of stubble and a soldier holding a gun – were more interesting, yet it was a case of something lo-fi being made hi-fi. "Wow, a huge fax!" Maybe I'm being too critical here, however the works that resembled earlier ideas – beautiful images of the detritus of the everyday, dead flowers fallen onto a kitchen table, the left-overs-from-the-night-before fast food, seemed more sensitive and true.

Darren Sylvester is a Melbourne-based artist and CCP's designer.

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Keller c. 1924-30 Silver gelatin print 29.6 x 24.3 cm

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ESSAY

A DECISIVE MOMENT FOR PHOTOGRAPHY?

KATE MACNEIL

Photography's decisive moment might be now. While arguments persist about its art status and the opportunities that new technologies have offered to capture, manipulate and distribute images, the documentary nature of photography appears to be, once more, its most powerful characteristic. In a political climate where information flows are stage managed, the particular quality that photography has to tell some sort of truth continues to make it a powerful weapon.

Truth, is of course a fluid concept – and we should not unquestionably accept the accuracy of an image. But the inherent power of the photographic image is the primary reason why the US military refused to allow the circulation of photographs of returning coffins of dead soldiers from the Iraq war. The photographs of torture at Abu Ghraib have similarly transcended any cynicism regarding photography's fragile relationship to the truth. There has never been any attempt to argue that these photographs arose from some sort of digital manipulation, for the very reason that the obvious staging of the scenes was, itself, a crucial aspect of the photographs' 'truth'. The images showed US troops totally in control of their captives – and so left little room for any doubt as to what had happened in the moments before and after the generation of the photographic image.

At a more mundane level, it was the documentary aspect of photography that landed the Geelong Camera Club members in trouble recently after they were reported to police for taking photographs of an oil refinery. Would an artists' society have received the same treatment if they had set up their easels at Webb Dock to paint their homage

to Jeffrey Smart? In warning the members not to take such photographs in future, the police exceeded any existing legal authority. Nonetheless a South Australian police website includes photographing of 'significant premises, installations or infrastructure' among its list of 'suspicious events' that might warrant reporting to the security hotline.



These events reflect a trend towards restricting the use of cameras in a variety of settings. Together with existing paranoia about photographs of children and celebrities it is no surprise that photographers are wondering where the boundaries of lawful activity lie. Why are such anxieties associated with the camera? Invariably they relate not so much to the fact that a photograph has been taken – but concerns the person taking the photograph intends to use it for some unlawful purpose. If there is any rationale to the disparate areas of law relating to the taking of photographs, and to their circulation, it is that of the actual or potential use that

might be made of the images. Photographs of infrastructure might cause concerns in some circles – but the far more common source of complaint is when photographs contain an image of a person.

Problems most often arise when a photograph may or may not have been taken with the express consent of its subject, is widely circulated in the media in a context that casts the person portrayed in a way that they find offensive. A commonly provided example is a photograph of a woman enjoying a cocktail at a function, first published in a magazine's social pages. Some years later the image is pulled from the publisher's files and used to illustrate a story headlined 'Problem Drinking on the Rise'. It would be understandable if at this stage the woman consulted a defamation lawyer. A more notorious example is that of the rugby league footballer photographed under the shower in the club rooms. He sued for defamation when the photograph ended up in a magazine. The court was required to determine, among other matters, whether or not it displayed his genitals. The defamation case was ingenious, and is widely thought to have succeeded principally because of the absence of any other legal remedy, such as breach of privacy.

An action for breach of privacy, not as yet in existence in Australia, would enable a person to sue if a photograph was published showing them engaged in a private activity. This was Naomi Campbell's concern when a newspaper published a photograph of her leaving a Narcotics Anonymous meeting. In Australia, the 2005 discussion paper 'Unauthorised Photographs on the Internet and Ancillary Privacy Issues', commissioned by the Standing Committee of Attorneys-Generals, included

the statement: 'publishing images of a person without their consent removes their freedom to chose how they present themselves to the world:'

Of course, the best way of controlling the way in which a person's image is presented to the world is to severely restrict the opportunities for images to be taken. This is usually achieved by a very clear demarcation between public and private spaces and physically preventing the entry of cameras: celebrities favour large private estates and indoor concert venues. You can't take photographs of Kylie Minogue in concert, not because there is a law against taking photographs of Kylie Minogue, but because it will be a condition of entry to the venue that you not take photographs. Similarly shopping centres and other venues restrict photography by making it a condition of entry on to their property.

So if you are taking photographs that include recognizable images of people there are a few things of which you should be aware. Taking the photograph alone should not cause problems, unless of course you have contractually agreed not to, but the manner in which you display it might. The addition of text or locating the image in a particular context might be implicitly convey something inaccurate about the person – in other words create a misleading impression. Any additional privacy protections would have further implications for photography – for it would not be the act of misleading that would offend, but rather that of telling the truth.

Kate MacNeill lectures in law and the arts at the School of Creative Arts, University of Melbourne. If, as an artist you have a query in this area the Arts Law Centre of Australia has a free legal advice service specifically for artists, and an informative website.

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CCP MEMBERS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

NATASHA NEWMAN ON NARELLE AUTIO'S *UNTITLED #16*

I have a postcard... I have a postcard of a photo... I have a postcard of a photo that for some reason I still have after picking it up for someone five years ago.

It is a postcard that has been pinned up, stuck on the fridge, used as a bookmark and propped up on the alarm clock that sits on my bedside table. This postcard is worn, traveled, dog-eared and has a horizontal rip on its right edge.

It is untitled, but has been allocated #16 by its creator, photojournalist Narelle Autio.

Untitled #16 is one of many photographs that Narelle took whilst traveling the NSW coastline with her partner and collaborator Trent Parke. After two years of roving this slice of Australia (while documenting its varied beachgoers both above and underneath the waters surface), a body of work titled *The Seventh Wave* was later exhibited. The images were also the subject of a neatly designed publication, also titled, *The Seventh Wave* in 2000.¹

The seventh wave is a folklore of the sea in which waves come in sets of seven, and it is the seventh that is the steepest.²

In Henri Charriere's autobiography (fiction to his critics) *Papillon*, he claims it is the seventh wave that propels and washes him from his island prison to freedom. Like Papillon, as he lay on his raft, anticipating the seventh wave, I wonder if the board riders in Autio's photograph may also be patiently waiting and anticipating the seventh wave, that like Papillon's, will propel them as they freely cut, weave and navigate their 'rafts' across the waters' free surface.³

On many a miserable wet afternoon, looking over at this postcard, I have almost felt the cold water slapping against my belly, with my feet slowly numbing, whilst imagining that I can almost hear my voice shivering while discussing the next set with these faceless surfers.

On warmer days, I have looked over at the image and imagined myself holidaying in Seal Rocks, sharing the open space with friends as the sun warms our shoulders. A light salt spray blowing off the surface, the weightlessness of my legs floating in the tepid waters and this time laughing with my friends about how we should just give up, go, and have a drink, as the surf just "ain't up".

More recently, lying in bed thinking about

my fanatical board-riding brother-in-law. I purchased the postcard, but for some reason never sent it to him. I kept it.

Over the years, this image has provided me a space to imagine and continue the intrigue as to what may or may not be going on above the-glass like-surface.

Untitled #16 is an image that has and will always stay with me.



Untitled #16 from *The Seventh Wave* Series, 1999–2000

writing this piece, I feel myself gradually sinking beneath the surface of a translucent silence, while at the same time calmly looking back up towards the top, knowing that the bodies I could see attached to their surfboards could neither see or hear me. I was not frightened, I was not drowning, I felt calm.

This is a postcard of a photograph that, I thought to myself, I should buy for

1. Trent Parke and Narelle Autio, *The Seventh Wave*, (Hot Chilli Press 2000)

2. <http://www.abc.net.au/catalyst/stories/s648588.htm>

3. Henry Charriere, *Papillon*, (Hart-Davis Macgibbon Ltd January 1970), isbn: 0246639873.

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