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centre for
contemporary
photography

20 YEARS

FLASH

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY
OCTOBER 06-FEBRUARY 07

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The Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) is one of Australia's premier venues for the exhibition of contemporary photo-based arts, providing a context for the enjoyment, education, understanding and appraisal of contemporary practice. Established in 1986 by the photographic community as a not-for-profit exhibition and resource centre, CCP has played a pivotal role in the support of photo-based arts and public engagement with photography. In 2005 CCP relocated to purpose-designed premises by Sean Godsell Architects.

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FLASH #3 →

OCTOBER 06–FEBRUARY 07

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COVER SIMRYN GILL, *32 Volumes*
(detail) books, dimensions variable, 2006.
Photography by Jenni Carter

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27 OCTOBER–16 DECEMBER 2006

GALLERY 1

CHRISTIAN THOMPSON
THE SIXTH MILE

GALLERY 2

**ROGER HANLEY: 2006 COLOUR
FACTORY AWARD FABLES &
RECONSTRUCTIONS**

GALLERY 3

GAVIN HIPKINS THE VILLAGE

GALLERY 4

SIMRYN GILL 32 VOLUMES

PROJECTION WINDOW

DOROTA MYTYCH MUTATIS MUTANDIS

SUMMER PROJECTION WINDOW

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GALLERY INTERVIEW

GAVIN HIPKINS *THE VILLAGE*

CCP GALLERY FOUR 27 OCTOBER–16 DECEMBER 2006

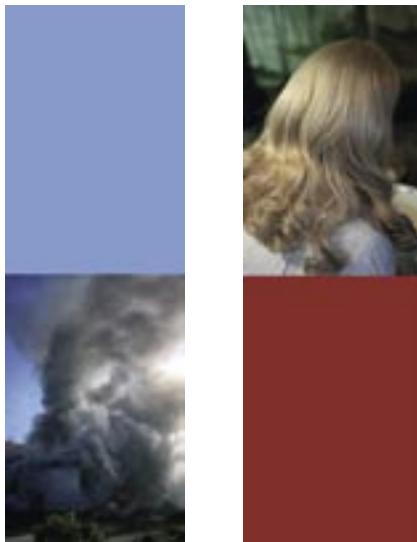
Karra Rees: Continuing your exploration of nationhood, *The Village* depicts details of a collection of nostalgic artefacts and everyday objects juxtaposed with idealistic tourist destinations. However, unlike your earlier work, each photograph in this series is displayed alongside a block of colour sampled from the image. Why have you decided to include these colour fields?

Gavin Hipkins: The colour blocks paired with each image emerged from my use of the outdoor billboard format in *The Mine* 2004. Using the conventional vinyl print material and scale of billboards, the format of these pictures dictated the need for a blank colour block intended to denote the space where a logo or advertising slogan would typically be positioned. The colour blocks therefore, function at both graphic and psychological levels. Their pairing with corresponding figurative elements affects the reading of the images, while at the same time implying an absence or lack within the associative narrative.

KR: *The Mine*, (commissioned by a gold mining company) is a permanent installation of nine huge, outdoor billboards forming part of a heritage and art park at Macraes in Otago on the South Island of New Zealand. What inspired you to take the billboard format—intended for outdoor display—inside the gallery for *The Village*?

GH: The shift indoors of billboard-scale work was originally conceived as a means of transforming the gallery space. Dominating an interior by taking a format that is more comfortable on the façade of a building—outside the gallery—dragging it inside and placing the printed vinyl in a space where it doesn't belong. These earlier works were stretched on frames and assembled in the gallery. The result is a space displaying works

that are obviously too large to fit through the door. There is an absurdity and magic in this action akin to the ship in a bottle trick. With the second suite of *The Village*, I have shifted from the standard, industrial, horizontal, panoramic format to the vertical hanging banner. The casual unfurling of the images is more elegant and harks back to my earlier works of long strips of prints hung in clusters. Those terrifyingly beautiful fascist banners



The Village (House) and The Village (Blonde), 2006, inkjet on vinyl print, 105x300cm

from the 1940s were an influence here, as too were the contemporary corporate use of banners at trade shows and in promotional displays. It was interesting to see just how persuasive these works were in architecturally transforming Starkwhite Gallery in Auckland earlier this year when they were first shown. The banners dominated that large gallery space and I am curious to see how they will operate in a more intimate space such as gallery three at CCP.

KR: The installation of your work is always extremely considered and precise. To what extent does the size and architecture of different gallery spaces dictate or alter the effect you intend to create?

GH: Each hang constitutes a unique install and engages the architectural setting. My major photo-works are multi-part installations. An early work *The Field* (1994-95) for example, comprises around 1600 silver gelatin prints. *The Colony* (2000-02) consists of 100 framed photos hung in different configurations according to a specific gallery space. It is rewarding to see the metamorphosis of a work with different hangs. This component of my practice reflects an enduring interest in histories of photo-installation, particularly moments belonging to the avant-garde and modernist museum blockbusters such as MoMA's *The Family of Man* 1955.

KR: In 1996 you were awarded a research grant from Creative New Zealand to photograph neo-classical and fascist architecture in Germany. Has this interest and research continued to be an influence on your work?

GH: This was a very important trip for me. It was minus 20 degrees outside, I had just come out of a long relationship, and Hamburg's harbour had frozen over for the first time in decades. I spent a lot of time at architectural sites designed to intimidate. At a certain point, the architectural and historical weight of these imposing façades crumbled, becoming ridiculous. The camera has this wonderful ability to miniaturise and deflate all that takes itself too seriously. Photographing civic monuments in Canberra in 1999 I had a similar experience. It is this discourse of the monumental and the ridiculous that I think is still present in my work.

GALLERY INTERVIEW

SIMRYN GILL *32 VOLUMES*

CCP GALLERY FOUR 27 OCTOBER–16 DECEMBER 2006

Naomi Cass: Your exhibition, *32 Volumes* concerns a bold erasure of all text from the ubiquitous mid 60s *Life World Library*. Now modified, your complete set is installed museum-like, in gallery four at CCP with white walls, shelves, table, and gloves. In removing the context of each image—the photographer, title and description—are you revealing the bare essence of the photographs or are you forcing a rereading of the all encompassing enterprise of documentary photography and the *Life World Library*?

Simryn Gill: I simply wanted to see what the pictures in these books would give of themselves when freed from captions and text. In this sense the erasure is an experiment: I didn't set out to show, reveal or tell. Rather, I followed a 'what if', line of thinking. What if these books had no writing in them? How would one see the pictures?

NC: Changing political and cultural borders have played a significant role in the continents in which you were born, have lived and studied. Borders are quite literally evident as different volumes in the *Life World Library* and reflect a particular worldview. In removing the text, are you reflecting upon the arbitrary demarcation of colonial mapmakers?

SG: It's impossible to get away from questions and histories of how the world is divided up when looking at this series of books. Perhaps that's what these books are about: how the world is divided. I erased borders, in a sense, by removing the marking on all maps. The cover of each book has been made into a blank, empty surface, by whitening out with gesso (rather than a white paint).

NC: Is there a danger, in erasing the text, that *32 Volumes* reduces the world to a silent and ravishingly beautiful spectacle, giving in to the ideology of the commissioning editors?



Simryn Gill *32 Volumes* books, dimensions variable, 2006. Photography by Jenni Carter

SG: Yes, perhaps there is this danger. They are achingly beautiful pictures, in many instances.

NC: You have an engaging relationship with photography (and books) across the broad range of your work. It seems that the function of photography in your work, is utilitarian or playful, depending on the context, rather than as an end in itself.

SG: I have trouble thinking about the word *function*. I make pictures, I collect them redeploy them as a way of animating my

uncertainty and fascination with them. I am seduced by photographs and also don't trust them. I think that I approach photos as objects, things, rather than as information and am drawn to the question of how they move through the world as things do: changing hands, acquiring a patina, shifting in meaning and content, as they move through different dimensions as, perhaps, depictions of newsworthy events or personal records, or fish and chip wrapping or school project fodder or art, to mention but a few.

REPORT

SINGAPORE BIENNALE 2006: SIMRYN GILL'S *STATION* PHILIP BROPHY



Simryn Gill *A Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station, Singapore*
Photograph by Ming, Courtesy of SB2006 and NAC.

Walking along the concrete pathways bordering the compounds of Tanglin Camp—the military barracks converted into installation sites for the inaugural Singapore Biennale—my shoes scuffed the stencilled lettering of words placed at intervals on the concrete walkway. Words like “truth”, “belief”, “power”—actually, I can’t really remember them because they were so meaningless to me, but I do recall they all targeted ‘big issues’.

Most of what I could say about self-proclaimed acts of politicised art practice currently channeled through the world’s ‘biennialia’ is as unnecessary as most of the art and its curatorial scaffolding. Politics may be numero uno on the agenda, but I can smell

humanism downwind from 40 metres. I get the impression that most of the contemporary art world suffers from severe nasal blockage. The Singapore Biennale’s late-announced theme of ‘Belief’ could have potentially sent shivers down my spine—but it didn’t. Despite the curatorial possibility that ‘belief’ may have reinscribed some personal and even artistic modulation of the world’s ‘big issues’, I really don’t care what anyone believes, nor do I think you warrant respect solely because you ‘believe’ in something—especially if your belief intersects with a ‘big issue’.

Being lubed and inserted into the Singapore Biennale with my gorgeous work *Fluorescent*, I was hesitant as to how my work would

(again) be presumed apolitical because of its refusal to flagellate my ‘self’ with ‘relational humanism’. But curator Eugene Tan I think saw past the obvious in selecting me. Furthermore, many of the artists I met there were not so binary with political mandates of art. A number of them confirmed my long-standing suspicion that contemporary art ‘practice’ (yes, the word irks me) is problematised by a disjuncture between acts of declaration and actual artistic schismatism. That is, many artists now are interesting to talk to (trust me—in the 80s this was sooo not the case) but their artworks seem to contain uncoded glimmers of the spiky energy they express when simply discussing things and making ad hoc lateral



Simryn Gill *A Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station*, Singapore Photograph by Ming, Courtesy of SB2006 and NAC.

connections through their conversation. The overtly obtuse nature of so much 'installation art' (surprise: that term irks me too) might be a global strategy against 'journalistic' art and its ethno/anthro/eco-centric finger-pointing, but its very obscurantism can fatefully reposition the artist as his or her own shamanistic myth-maker. Both strategies seem born of a muted crisis that stems from an inability to propose something freely decontextualised from the zone of one's actions.

Australian artist Simryn Gill deftly side-stepped this terrain in the Singapore Biennale. (And not just because her passport dictated that she be listed as a Malaysian artist rather than an Australian artist.) Her work *Station*—like a sizable portion of the works in the Biennale—is site-specific. But whereas much 'site-specific' practice is ultimately an act of urinary territorialisation by the artist (yes, it's true), Simryn Gill's work is the extant site itself. The murals at the Tanjong Pagar Railway Station—like so much public art that has been accidentally preserved—seems to

hover in an alternate dimension. A series of six looming vertical murals evoking stain glass yet composed of painted rubber sectioning, depict archetypal colonialist endeavours in mock Indo-Chinoise. The standard fare of indigenous people harvesting the fruits of their labour for British colonists is emblazoned in each panel. Too high to be defaced, too bland to attract any sexy interventionist action, they bask in the station's ambience like lost sea-lions.

For her contribution to the Biennale, Simryn has produced a small publication (*Guide to the Murals at Tanjong Pagar Railway Station*) where she matter-of-factly describes the contents of the murals—their actions, their actors, the stages for their tasks. The quietitude of her guide serves to amplify the 'alternate dimension' of these murals that seem to not notice how times currently frame their depicted scenarios. Accompanying her polite prose is a series of black-and-white photos she took of the station as it is now. The murals appear nowhere in these images (save for the beautiful front-cover fold-out

poster), and instead she focuses on the use-level of the station—the people sitting at ground level, waiting for trains to transport them north to work along the Malay Peninsula. A melange of ethnicities and backgrounds, her head-cropped populace of indistinct shapes captures the silent yet visible workforce flowing in and out of Singapore.

Simryn's *Station* operates at the meta-level of positioning itself not as an act or statement, but as an intersecting point between artist and place. Presented completely outside of the visible scaffolding of the Biennale (no 'big concept' stencilling here), it refuses to stand as an act of intervention in the space. Indeed, it can be purchased at the station kiosk as what most would presume to be an official guide. More a self-contained curatorial document of personal contemplation of public space, *Station* maintains itself at the level of conversation rather than blasts itself like a T-shirt slogan. In an era of platformed declaration and stencilled markers, *Station* is that brief but affecting chat by chance you have with someone waiting for the train.

Philip Brophy is a artist, writer, lecturer and curator based in Melbourne. The Singapore Biennale is on until 12 November 2006.



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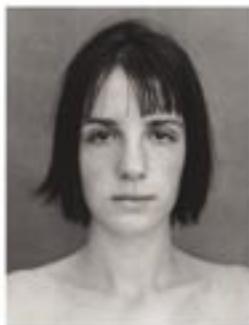
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Bethina Hicks Lauren 2003
from the Lauren series 2003.
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BOOK REVIEW

ART PHOTOGRAPHY NOW. SUSAN BRIGHT MAGGIE FINCH

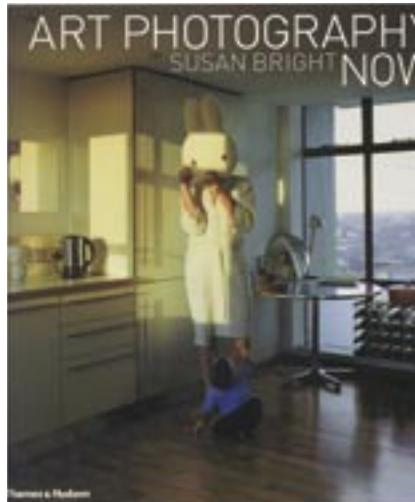
The reproduction of photographs in books, journals and albums has been crucial for the evolution, dissemination and enjoyment of photography since its conception. In the early 19th century artists such as William Henry Fox Talbot, Eugène Atget, Robert Mapplethorpe, Nan Goldin and Juergen Teller have arguably exerted greater influence through the mechanical duplication of their images in print than the presentation of original photographs.¹

Digital technologies have afforded greater access to global art practices through online galleries, artist websites and blogs. But the digital image does not necessarily allow for the same tactile experience as the printed one. And without having the luxury to jet to galleries and studios around the world and see photographs 'in the flesh', books on photography remain popular and essential for staying in tune with worldwide trends and movements.

Art Photography Now provides such an opportunity. Written by the independent author and curator Susan Bright in 2005, this lavishly illustrated publication presents the work of approximately 80 contemporary photographers from different parts of the globe.

Bright establishes a comprehensive context for the featured artists. She traces a brief history of photography, focusing in particular on the theoretical, technical and social movements that have influenced the medium. Bright discusses the way perceptions towards photography have changed, from being a mere 'humble servant' to painting, to being widely embraced by both artists and the art world. She contends that photography "has now become the medium of choice for many artists, as contemporary art has become increasingly photographic."

The book has a relatively conventional structure—artists are separated into one of seven genre divisions including portrait, landscape, narrative, object, fashion, document and city. Bright acknowledges the possible limitations of this arrangement: "...as we search for a definition as to what photography



actually is and the varied ways in which it has become accepted as art, we repeatedly see a collapsing of boundaries that may seem rather at odds with the more traditional genre-based way in which this book is structured."

The potentially rigid divisions are overcome however by the use of brief introductions to each genre which offer a conceptual overlap between chapters. This allows for a surprisingly flexible reading that feels as though you are traversing thematically assigned rooms in a gallery space, glancing backwards and forwards occasionally to see

what came before and what lies beyond.

Another strength is the prominence given to the voices of the artists themselves. Each photographer is quoted extensively (a highlight of the book), which offers insights into the working methods of the artists: Melanie Manchot describes how "to make these images, I work performatively on location with people who happen to pass by." The quotes also describe the differing relationships that exist between photographers and their subjects. In the case of Katy Grannan, anonymity is vital: "it is important for me that I photograph people I don't really know."

The choice of artists is in some ways predictable—there is, undoubtedly, a trend towards large-scale, staged colour prints which is reflective of recent international curatorial trends. Big name artists such as Wolfgang Tillmans, Cindy Sherman, Jeff Wall and Andreas Gursky all take their rightful place. Bright also includes numerous lesser-known photographers such as Nikki S. Lee, Jean-Luc Moulène and Uta Barth, which balances the scope of the survey.

Above all else, the passion of the author to promote and educate the reader about current trends in photography is evident and infectious. The vivid illustrations and intelligent text make this handsome book a fantastic introduction to international contemporary photographic trends, and one to covet.

Maggie Finch is Assistant Curator, Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria. *Art Photography Now* by Susan Bright is now available at the CCP Bookstore.

1. Richard B. Woodward, 'Altered States', ARTnews, March 2006.

OBITUARY

OUR TRUTH WILL BE TOLD—THE ART OF LISA BELLEAR 1961–2006 CHRISTIAN THOMPSON

In a radio interview for 3KnD earlier this year Lisa Belleair said to me that the thing she loved about my *Emotional Striptease* series was that, to her, these works said that no matter what, our truth will be told. I was flattered and touched. This statement reveals much about Lisa, her fearless commitment to her community and the warmth she generated to those in her presence.

Anyone who knew Lisa, I am sure would be able to recount a moment where at a community event she would pass you an unassuming white envelope, inside which would be photographs she had taken of you, sometimes years earlier, with your name, the date and place scrawled on the back in purple texta.

Her photographs are personal moments capturing our community at its proudest, strongest and most beautiful. This gesture was a simple act of recognition giving our people an intimate exchange which would have an ongoing and profound impact. She made people feel good about being blak.

The dominant culture survives on generating positive images of itself for itself. However for Indigenous people the opportunity to see positive, strong and realistic images of our selves and our culture in the mainstream public realm are very few and far between.

Lisa knew that this inability to form a cultural mirror was a kind of racial casting in the minds of whites, which sought to exclude and disenfranchise us from our sense of self and to break our spirits. Lisa Belleair I am sure was acutely aware of this social symptom and her photographs were medicine to our people.

Her spontaneous images utilising instamatic photographic techniques captured unique

moments and often caught the subjects unaware. This allowed an insight into the real political struggle and collective task of reconciling our pasts, a space lost by media and political conservatism. It is this space that Lisa revealed, a human space, filled with pain and happiness.

The act of unveiling the contents of these human spaces through her photographs—re-



Lisa Belleair *Untitled 2005*, laser prints
from the exhibition, *Black on White* held at CCP 2005

creating the moment in which they were captured by passing them onto the subjects—is a mechanism for locating and recording a geographic, social and cultural presence of our people.

This is art as an unstoppable force, defying the borders, political regimes, fleeting media grabs and historical tragedy which have systematically disenfranchised us from the national and international consciousness.

It is at this level that Lisa was most politically active and like her photographs her personality and exuberance for the struggle of all people was like a contagious aura that whipped you into a frenzy. Her images, like Lisa herself,

will continue to surface in the most unusual spaces, always present, always fighting, always proud.

Our truth will be told.

Christian Thompson, Bidjara.
Thompson's *The Sixth Mile* is exhibiting in gallery one at CCP 27 October–16 December 2006.

Lisa Belleair was a Goernpil woman of the Noonuccal people of Minjerribah (Stradbroke Island), Queensland. She was a poet, writer, visual artist, academic and social commentator who was actively involved in Indigenous affairs throughout Australia. She was an executive member of the Black Women's Action in Education Foundation (BWAEF) and was a volunteer broadcaster on 3CR community radio for eleven years on the 'Not Another Koori Show.'

In 2005 Lisa exhibited at CCP in the *Black on White* exhibition, curated by Megan Evans and Maree Clarke. Belleair is well loved for her readings at literary festivals, pubs and conferences across Australia and in the USA and has been published nationally in literary journals, newspapers and anthologies.

In 2006 Lisa received a Deadly Sounds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Music, Sport, Entertainment and Community Awards, Outstanding Achievement in Literature, for *The Dirty Mile : A History of Indigenous Fitzroy*.

Lisa died unexpectedly at her home in Brunswick, Victoria on the 6th of July this year.

Additional biographical details supplied by AustLit: The Resource for Australian Literature www.austlit.edu.au

CCP MEMBERS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

JOHN B. EATON'S *CATTLE TRACKS* 1935 WARWICK REEDER

Growing up in Ballarat in the 1950s my father and mother often took the family for a Sunday Drive; myself, my older sister and younger brother rugged up in the back seat with a blanket over our legs in winter. Our longest journey was to Melbourne on the then Western Highway, a three hour trip one-way. My father would sometimes stop about halfway at the pub in Myrning, now bypassed by the Western Freeway. I remember on reaching these rollicking hills that the journey seemed closer to Melbourne, as on a fine day one could see the outskirts on the horizon. It is this vista that John B. Eaton photographed for his famous *Cattle Tracks, Pentland Hills*, although the skyline is much changed with high rise buildings visible from the same viewpoint today.

John B. Eaton (1881-1966) was also a Sunday driver; he and his wife Elsie travelled hundreds of miles in the 1920s through the 1930s over all parts of Victoria. Apart from regular visits to Gippsland to visit Elsie's brother Sidney Dovey at his family farm at Clover Lea, Darnum, the Eatons travelled not to see friends, but to make photographs of the landscape.

Eaton's search for the most interesting pictorial view was not easy. Eighty-two year old Colin Dovey remembers as a young boy in the 1930s, watching his Uncle Jack set up his Graphlex camera and tripod at Clover Lea in the morning and remaining beside it until early evening without taking a picture. "The light wasn't right", Eaton said. Observant of the changing weather conditions, Eaton often waited for hours to get the right effect before clicking his shutter.

His masterpiece of 1935, *Cattle Tracks, Pentland Hills* was taken on the old road at Myrning that my family traversed to and from Melbourne. Taken from a high vantage point as though from an aerial perspective, *Cattle Tracks* captures the veiny, dark meandering tracks made by dairy cows moving between paddock and gate during milking time. It is exquisitely printed to emphasise the vastness of the shadowed plains, the cattle tracks and the light on the horizon. Parts of the post and rail fence have been retouched.

The composition is pleasing to the eye, the 'main line' of the composition forming a letter S with the dark foreground leading to a shimmering horizon. Eaton adopted Hogarth's maxim of "the line of beauty", a compositional device he used frequently in his landscape photographs.

Cattle Tracks was his most celebrated photograph and caused a stir at the 80th annual international exhibition of the Royal Photographic Society.

Harold Cazneaux wrote to Eaton congratulating him for putting "up the picture of the year", and it was reproduced in *The Year's Photography* in 1935. Deservedly, it continues to be the single most reproduced image in Eaton's photographic oeuvre and is a favourite with photographers, museums and collectors.



Cattle Tracks is on view in *Sunlight & Shadow. Pictorial Photographs by John B. Eaton FRPS (1881-1966)* at The National Trust Gallery, Tasma Terrace, 4 Parliament Place, Melbourne until 20 December 2006. The monograph of the same name is available from the CCP BOOKSTORE for \$36.

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



Photo by Mark Waller.
Everybody's got a dog face
but nobody's going anywhere, 2006.
Oil on canvas, 102 x 152 cm,
courtesy the artist and
Damon Knight Gallery, Sydney



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