

NATIONAL PHOTO- GRAPHIC PORTRAIT PRIZE 2011

National Portrait Gallery
Learning resource

What is the National Photographic Portrait Prize?

The National Photographic Portrait Prize exhibition is selected from a national field of entries. The exhibition, now in its fourth year, reflects the distinctive vision of Australia's aspiring and professional portrait photographers and the unique nature of their subjects.

Why does the National Portrait Gallery hold the National Photographic Portrait Prize?

The National Portrait Gallery seeks to foster understanding of the Australian people – their identity, history, creativity and culture – through portraiture.

The National Portrait Gallery has a strong interest in photography as a powerful medium for portraiture. Photography is the dominant portrait medium of our time. The National Photographic Portrait Prize is an important aspect of the Gallery's exhibition program that explores diverse approaches to portraiture.

The National Photographic Portrait Prize 2011 was held at the National Portrait Gallery 25 February – 26 April 2011. The exhibition is touring to four regional venues: Bunbury Regional Art Galleries, Geraldton Regional Art Gallery, Fremantle Prison Gallery and the Yarra Ranges Regional Museum.

Dr Sarah Engledow, National Photographic Portrait Prize judge and curator, described the judging process.

What would contemporary photographic portraiture look like if teenagers just said no to portraits? If they refused to pose in attitudes of alienation or contemplation? If they laughed as the shot were taken? What if it were established beyond dispute that taking photographs of yourself in sickness, or in various costumes and personae, will neither help you to come to terms with your illness, nor to know yourself any better? We would be left with photographs of contented individuals with their cats and dogs.

There is nothing that humans can see that is beyond the decisive finger, and subsequent digital revision, of the rudimentarily-equipped photographer. Each of the Gallery's National Photographic Portrait Prizes has attracted numerous images depicting dementia sufferers, intellectually disabled, grieving, blind, maimed and sick persons. This year, there were at least two deceased subjects. Every competition has its images of bondage, of self-mutilation, of perversity. It is as audacious as ever it was, without doubt, for an individual to face the camera, valiantly baring the reality of a mastectomy or some other scar of survival against odds. These sitters are to be saluted. Yet such sober images are a staple of photographic competitions. Photographs that appear to put pressure on boundaries are now amongst the most clichéd.

Often, such works are made in a worthy attempt to counter images of perfection in advertising (although advertising is never far from appropriating that which seeks to subvert it). Some years are propitious for shocking entries. An institution worried it is perceived as conservative can display them as an easy claim to hipness, or a bid for the coveted 'new demographic' amongst visitors. This year, as it happened, few deliberately confronting works were chosen.

Many entrants in this year's prize took photographs incorporating masks, implying that a series of assumed identities is all we offer the world. The idea that we all

comprise multiple selves, too, has a very long history (though like many truisms, it has often been poetically expressed). We have all seen many images representing apparently contradictory aspects of selfhood, and purporting to interrogate gender roles or subvert conventions of masculine and feminine identity.

A photograph in this genre won the National Youth Self Portrait Prize at the National Portrait Gallery in 2010. But only a handful of works concerned with 'notions' of identity made it to the wall in this competition. One was truly confounding; one was funny; one was beautifully, complexly executed; one was teamed with an unusually cogent artist's statement. Photographs have always offered great scope for play, and never more than now. Yet photographs are also uniquely capable of affirming and confirming: here is the human being, real and proudly present in his or her turn on this earth. For every pair of tricked-up images representing the performative aspects of human life, there was one that reminded us that no human moment or situation is too real or distressing to photograph. There is absolutely no sham in the couple willing breath into their lifeless baby, his waxy flesh creased in his mother's desperate hold; the old man stroking the papery, emaciated face of his insensible wife. In these almost unbearable images the contested self is forgotten, irrelevant compared to one person's love and hope for another. Here, truth is not relative; being is no construct. There is a branch of contemporary art photography that is characterised by banal, apparently uncomposed and unpremeditated shots, typically exhibited in series. Laid out in considered array in a contemporary art museum, or a gallery of conceptual photography, these often-ugly, often-clumsy works can arrest the viewer in a way that can only mean they're art (not, though they may look like it, polaroids taken at a teenagers' sleepover, say). In photography – as in humour, or seduction – the combination of intention and context play crucial parts in reception. Scrutinised as isolated specimens out of their natural habitat, as some were by

the judges of the National Photographic Portrait Prize, such photographs can not only look absurdly amateurish – as they're supposed to – but neither cause any consternation, nor achieve any subversive effect. In this case several established contemporary photographic practitioners did not make the exhibition. That is a matter of indifference for judges unfamiliar with their body of work; but it makes for palpable struggle on the part of the judges who have appreciated their work for some time. As different as we four are, we judges – National Portrait Gallery curators Dr Sarah Engledow and Dr Christopher Chapman, Director of Adelaide's Experimental Art Foundation, Dr Domenico de Clario, and National Portrait Gallery Director Louise Doyle – are human, with our own histories and involuntary reactions. We cannot select the best fifty-five of 1 200 photographs by applying a set of independent measures. We cannot even guarantee that the fifty-five we pick are the best; indeed, some photographs were included because they simply made all the judges feel happy. No entrant was advised that their photograph was one of the four hundred classified as 'maybes', or that when sixty remained, theirs was one of the five that still had to go. Many who submitted 'rejected' photographs are left with a great picture of their child, their parent, their holiday, themselves. Photographs play a strong part in shaping histories from the personal to the national level and a good photograph is a treasure that outlasts any show.

Questions for discussion

How would you define photographic portraiture? Could any photograph of a person be considered a portrait? If not, why not?

What is your first impression when you view this exhibition as a group of portraits?

What criteria would you apply to this selection of photographs in order to decide the winner?

All photographers submit an artist's statement with their application for the NPPP that appears on a label alongside their work in the exhibition. How does the artist's statement influence your understanding and appreciation of the portrait?

Do you recognise any of the subjects in the 2011 NPPP? Does this familiarity influence your interpretation of the portrait?

A number of the selected works have been printed in black and white. What is the impact of this on your interpretation of the image?

Find two or more portraits that you find particularly compelling. What is it that makes them so compelling? Describe their similarities and differences?

Facebook claims that more than 3 billion photos are being uploaded to its site every month. Does this proliferation of photographic imagery change our appreciation of the photographic portrait?

Education bulletin

Subscribe to the National Portrait Gallery Education bulletin for educators at portrait.gov.au/site/subscribe.php

Blog

You can post your ideas about the National Photographic Portrait Prize or respond to any of the questions in this learning resource on the National Portrait Gallery blog. portrait.gov.au/blog

Learning resources

NPPP2009, NPPP2010 and NPPP2011 Learning resources can be downloaded at portrait.gov.au/site/education_downloads.php

Tell us what you think

The National Portrait Gallery is committed to providing opportunities for all audiences to access exhibitions and the collection and we welcome any comments or suggestions about this Learning resource. Please contact Amanda Andlee Poland, Education Manager 02 6102 7062 amanda.poland@npg.gov.au

National Photographic Portrait Prize 2011 exhibition venues

National Portrait Gallery
25 February – 26 April 2011
Bunbury Regional Art Galleries WA
27 May 2011 – 3 July 2011
Geraldton Regional Art Gallery WA
15 July 2011 – 28 August 2011
Fremantle Prison Gallery WA
9 September 2011 – 27 November 2011
Yarra Ranges Regional Museum
26 January 2012 – 25 March 2012

National Photographic Portrait Prize 2012

The call for entries for the National Photographic Portrait Prize 2012 will commence in September 2011.

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY EXHIBITION

King Edward Terrace Canberra ACT 2600
Education and group visit enquiries
email_bookings@npg.gov.au or
telephone (02) 6102 7000





The blue of the dawn 2009
Vittoria Dussoni
gelatin silver print

Artist's statement
My son, Anton.

Questions

Who do you think this person is?
Does the title and the artist's statement help you understand the image? If so, how?
How do the formal elements of this photograph contribute to your emotional response?
Does this photograph remind you of the work of other photographers. Why?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your practice?

I am a photographer interested in Art. I am hoping to establish myself as a photodocumentary and portrait photographer.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website? No.

What is your relationship to the subject? The subject is my son, therefore, between us there is an intimacy impossible to establish with other subjects. He had woken up and was not happy; nevertheless, he agreed to be photographed. When he looked at me I felt he knew that I knew exactly what he was feeling. It was a unique moment, and the image is as true to the event as an image can ever be.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

When I took the photo I did not have anything in mind other than the desire to photograph, document, what I saw. But now I think that the idea surrounding that picture, like an halo, is teenagers' angst. You can see the almost elegant and natural position of his body. However, at the same time, paradoxically, he is tense and will, probably, not be sitting like that for long. Also, he is in a corner; a lonely figure. In the image we can find both beauty and discomfort, almost anguish.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph. I like using natural light and, in order to have more flexibility of both aperture and shutter speed, I use 400ASA film.

What type of camera did you use?
Rolleiflex

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?
No. I do not use digital manipulation. My images are silver-gelatin prints.

How was the final print made? Is it part of an edition? It was made in the darkroom and it is one of two fibre-based prints.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait.

The tiniest detail of my subjects is very important to me. I like to show every little line that will eventually make up the final aspect of the subject's face and look. For this reason, very often, I choose the larger fibre-based paper size. Also, I use traditional frames and framing dimensions.

Who would you nominate as your influences? August Sander, Walker Evans, Paul Strand, Dorothea Lange, Robert Frank, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Andrei Tarkovsky, Giuseppe De Santis among others.

Do you have any advice for young or emerging photographers (eg. students)? Learn technique with basic equipment and look at the work of as many great photographers of the past as possible.

Anton described the experience of having his photograph taken by Vittoria Dussoni.

To say the least, I was not in a good mood that morning, but I think the photo says it all. My mum had been pestering me for the two months leading up to this to take a photo of me, but I continually refused. I woke up this morning and told her; 'It's now or never.' I don't know why I was suddenly in the mood, but I soon forgot all about it and after getting changed to go swimming, I fell asleep again and found myself being woken up by her. You can only imagine my mood at this point. We came to an agreement where I was sleeping while she measured the light. It's never easy being photographed/painted by a member of your family or someone close because there is not that aspect of professionalism; however, I also think the outcome of this photo shows exactly that. My mum really got to the essence of what I was feeling at this moment in my life, behind any type of mask I could have put on for someone else. The fact that it was my mum who was taking this photo enabled me to show my true self, something which would have been near impossible for someone else. Obviously I am not complaining about the outcome, so in the end it was all worth it.

A viewer's response

No mum this is not a good time for a photo-shoot.

Invasion of space is not the same thing as showing someone you care/are concerned about them.

Personal space is nice to have sometimes
My emotions are not there to be exploited and used.

It is not necessary for you to know everything about me.

I'm not happy but I don't need you; I don't need this.

Am I depressed?

Is there a strange sort of pleasure to be derived from witnessing the evidence of someone-else's pain ... a sort of validation or confirmation that you are not the only one ... that what you feel is normal ... that it is ok to be vulnerable sometimes, when no one can see.

I do not need help.

JS, tertiary student



Release 2010
Donna Gibbons
digital print

Artist's statement

Thursday 8.20am 11 February 2010. My father, Rex Brooke Sulway, passed away quite suddenly and peacefully. He was finally released from the anguish of living with Alzheimer's disease. Living in aged care, he was very aware of what was ahead. He often said, 'those poor buggers'; referring to the residents in the locked, high-care ward. Dad's death took us by surprise. He'd told his mate Kevin Grady, that he'd see him in the morning. Nine months on, I realise now that it was a merciful way for dad to pass from this world. He nurtured in me his love of photography. I had to photograph him in his room one last time, before they took him away. He is finally free.

Questions

How do you feel looking at this portrait?
Why do you think the photographer has chosen this viewpoint to photograph her father?
In what ways is this photograph similar or different to other images of deceased people?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your practice?

I consider my practice to be more photojournalistic. I have a great interest in documenting part of a subject's life.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?

catchlights.com.au

What is your relationship to the subject?

The subject is my father. I was his carer for four years. My two sisters and I became his voice when he found it difficult to speak up for himself. He fought hard to retain his dignity. We brought him home for dinner, organised medical appointments for him, washed and ironed his clothes and provided other functional and emotional support while in the aged care facility. I took Dad on several 'road' trips during this time, as he'd lost his licence. We went to places of significance, travelling to Berry and Jugiong

to clarify some family history he'd informed me about in the past; finding his Mother's grave for the first time; visiting relatives and old friends. There was almost an urgent plea from him to record what he knew, before he could no longer.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

This photograph was a spontaneous response to a moment. It was taken seven hours after Dad's death, when his five children had all arrived to see him. I remember the funeral people describing what they needed to do to remove him from his room. I wanted to help lift him off his bed and onto the trolley, but was drawn to take a couple of photos instead. This is the second of two images taken one after the other. Over the period of six hours that I had been in the room, I took several photos, as family were arriving. I asked my daughter Penny to photograph me too. I felt Dad wanted me to do this, as he often stated how important it was in the grieving process, to be viewed. So, once I felt in a bit more control, I photographed what I could.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait?

I just wanted to capture what was happening to Dad. I started documenting his affliction with Alzheimer's disease from when he was first diagnosed in 2006. I put some of the photos in a diary and he wrote about what he felt at the time. The last time he wrote was two weeks before he died. My father was always outspoken in the many work related and community projects that he was part of throughout his adult life. My father always had a strong sense of social justice. This was still evident in his life in aged care, when he insisted that we talk to a local MP about the inadequacies of the living as a dependent, aged resident. This is about what was happening to my Dad. It shows him almost being uplifted to the care of (what he referred to as) his Higher Power. Having struggled throughout periods of his life, he has finally let go and is being released from his daunting affliction with Alzheimer's. Fortunately, Dad still had a sense of humour and a twinkle in his eye; could hug and squeeze my hand tight; and at most times, listened intently. We were lucky too! It was through his long involvement with The 12 Step Program, that he was able to turn his life around; making amends to people he had hurt in the past and being conscious of living his life fully each day. As a primary carer, I had some control over some aspects of his life, but this event was

a huge shock to us all. Dad showed some acceptance of his illness in the few months preceding his death. He was still involved in Al Anon, which he'd been part of for 40 years; he still went to regular movies with friends; and had a session with his personal trainer, two days before.

The last public space he had visited was the National Portrait Gallery, six days previously.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph. I took the photo using 800 ISO, free hand and no flash. I didn't think about this too much. It was more about leaving his side for a few moments, to get a couple of photos as soon after his death as possible.

What type of camera did you use?
Canon EOS 5D

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? When I arrived, I was conscious of the low light in the room, so I drew back the curtains to allow as much natural light in as possible.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

It was photographed as a RAW file, so I converted it in Adobe Bridge. There was a small, fine line on the cupboard beside the bed that I felt was distracting, so I cloned it out. However, when I showed the original to Lewis Morley, he said I needn't have. He said it (the image), was all about being as raw as possible. Otherwise, the image was as is. I first processed these photos in early November, nine months after Dad's death. This one stood out immediately. I hadn't noticed the strong shaft of light over Dad's head in the view finder or the wonderful floating movement of the sheet, as he was being covered. It was quite puzzling.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? I had it printed by Stephen Best (Macquarie Editions) on rag paper. I chose a matte finish with some texture to present it as closely as possible to its natural state. I like to think of this image as part of a series, but feel it also stands alone.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait? After conferring with a few friends, I printed it at A3. I had asked Stephen Best to print another, the next size up from A3, but decided that the A3 size was still big enough

to see what was happening in the portrait and also small enough to reflect its intimacy and personal nature.

I selected an off white matte board of at least 10cm and a simple black frame to bring the focus back onto the portrait.

Who would you nominate as your influences? My influences include Lewis Morley, William Yang, Greg Weight, Sahlan Hayes, Olive Cotton, Anne Noble and Annie Liebovitz. My father (Rex Brooke Sulway) was a major influence, giving me one of his cameras to use at aged ten. He shared my interest in documenting what he saw, right to the end of his life. Pat Morley was a wonderful mentor and friend. She was a tremendous support and provided me with her great insight. There are many others that I am grateful to, who have provided me with some direction and positive feedback, including Silvia Velez, Denise Ferris, Lewis Morley, Andrew Sayers, Richard Larter, Ella Whateley, Melissa Beowulf, Helen Ennis and Lucinda Boyd.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (e.g. students)? I believe in working on a project you feel passionate about; being persistent in trying to achieve what you want; and building up a network of friends/colleagues to talk to about your work and the development of ideas. I have made some wonderful contacts with other artists that I admire, through my membership of the NPG since 2005.

A viewer's response

The subject of this portrait is a person I have seen before. I remember a tall, well-dressed man whose long life was deeply etched in his skin. A man whose eyes sparkled. Seeing a photograph of this same man laid out to rest - legs exposed, eyes closed, alone - I ask myself "should I look?" This intimate view of a person, who was neither a stranger nor a friend, leaves me feeling unsettled. Like an unwelcome guest. But this is the power of photography. The camera, as witness, has the ability to both freeze living moments and capture the stillness of death. In this image the two appear simultaneously.
Sam, adult



Clare and Bella 2010

Lee Grant
digital print

Artist's statement

This is a portrait of Clare Jolly and her cat Bella. Having recently worked with a 19th century collection of colonial studio portraits, I was inspired to frame Clare using a contemporary and colourful take on conventional vintage framing tropes.

Questions

Does this remind you of any other photograph you have seen before? How is it similar and/or different?

Describe the use of colour, format and scale.

Why do you think the cat, Bella, is included in the portrait of Clare?

Describe the use of colour, format and scale.

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

Has your approach to photography changed since you were a finalist in the NPPP2010? I don't think my attitude to photography has changed all that much and certainly in terms of my own work. I have however begun to think more deeply about the way in which I make my work and the intent behind my efforts. It's important for me to be intuitive and to pursue ideas until they are completely exhausted. I'll always return to a subject matter until I feel I have nothing left to say.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?

leegrant.net

What is your relationship to the subjects?

Clare is the daughter of my friend Martyn Jolly (who was also my supervisor whilst at uni). She is also friends with my own daughter, Pia. I've actually photographed Clare before with her sister Lucy as part of my Sister Love series. Clare is incredibly intuitive with the camera and quite comfortable with direction. Some kids are just like that. I suppose too, photography is a big part of her life since Martyn himself is involved in photography, as an artist, curator and writer. I hope to continue photographing both Clare and her sister Lucy, for a while yet.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

This particular image was definitely constructed, at least in the sense that I had a very specific picture in my mind. I'd also planned and arranged a time to photograph Clare at home. The setting is also a studio one (albeit on location), so in a sense the point of the image is that it is constructed, in the same way old studio portraits were formally approached as 'sittings'. Nevertheless, the beauty of capturing a moment is that sometimes you can be rewarded with the unexpected. In this case, Bella the cat was roaming the room when Clare snatched her up for a photo.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait?

For almost the last year and as part of my day-job, I have been working on a 19th- and early 20th-century collection of colonial Dutch-Indies photographs. The photographs that I have found the most interesting are the formal studio portraits commissioned by everyday people in established portrait studios. These aren't dissimilar to modern day photography studios but the way the images are presented are much more interesting. From the ubiquitous carte de visite to enlarged prints simulating a painted portrait, I was quite taken with the conventions employed by the photographic studios. And whilst my practice is very much embedded in the modern world, I loved the idea of referencing some of those tropes. I was also captured by some of the faces in the portraits. Who were these people and what ultimately happened to them after Indonesia gained independence? Part of the mystique of photography lies in its ability to endure time and to reveal something from the past – memento mori, a reminder of our mortality.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph. My philosophy has always been to keep it as simple as possible: camera, lights, location, sitter.

What type of camera did you use?

This particular photograph was shot on a Hasselblad film camera, which is probably the camera I continue to use most.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting?

I use a single flashlight on a stand powered by a portable battery pack. I also try to use whatever available window or artificial light there is.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

Not really, apart from some spotting and a bit of dodging and burning. Although all my post-production is done digitally these days, I do try to maintain the same type of processing methods I would use in a traditional darkroom. The beauty of Photoshop is that you do have more control, processes are far less messy and you have the luxury of working from home or on location.

How was the final print made?

Is it part of an edition? The final print was printed digitally onto cotton rag paper, so the best of modern technology for an old-world inspired image. All my work is editioned and this particular photograph is no exception. It's one of eight in that dimension.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait.

I think today, there is a lot of pressure to go big. I'm certainly partial to this myself depending on the context. However, there's something to be said about intimacy and drawing a viewer in. Given that my work draws its inspiration from very early photographs which were rarely enlarged beyond 8x10, I didn't want to go overboard. It's 50x70cms in its rather simple frame, designed not to draw attention away from the image itself.

In the NPPP2010 Learning resource, you listed a number of influences on your work. Are there any other influences you would identify as having had a significant impact on the development of your practice?

I undertook a workshop with Trent Parke last year and though I didn't really think about it at the time, some of his advice has really helped shape the way in which I both edit and sequence my work, particularly in the context of book making.

Do you have any advice for young or emerging photographers (e.g. students)? Persist with your endeavours, work really hard and believe that you can achieve your goals. I can't emphasise this enough! Even when you think you are drowning in hard work, you probably need to push yourself more. It's easy to become self-absorbed – I'd say that's partially what being an artist is about – but perspective helps to ground personal experience into a broader (and more interesting) context. The line between navel-gazing and stepping into (and engaging) with the world isn't as scary as it might seem. The world is ripe with photographic opportunities, whether at home or somewhere else – be a part of what's going on and show us how you see things. It'll be far more interesting.

Clare described the experience of having her photograph taken by Lee Grant.

Lee came to my house on Saturday to take my picture. I'd had my picture taken by her before, but that was with my sister as well so it was different this time. We went to find a place in the house to take a picture. In the end we found the blue wall in the study. We moved all the stuff out and got Mum's chair for me to sit on. We went into my room to choose clothes. Mum wanted me to wear my pink floral dress because it would 'bring out my eyes'. While we were taking the pictures Lee said to me: "Just so you don't blink in the picture close your eyes and I'll say 'one two three', then open your eyes and I'll take the picture". We'd taken about three photos when my cat Bella walked in from outside. I walked over and picked her up so I could have a photo of her as well. She looked at the camera when we took the photo and just after the flash had gone off she jumped out of my arms. I don't know why Lee was taking the picture. I didn't know it would be shown in the National Portrait Gallery. My parents told everyone and it was very embarrassing. I liked having my picture taken by Lee.

A viewer's response

What immediately strikes me about this portrait is the creepy, almost haunting, sense it imbues. This, in turn, leaves me wondering how such a seemingly ordinary image is able to leave such a lasting impression; is it the combination of contemporary imaging with a typically older portrait style? Is it the addition of a cat in the girl's arms? Or, is it the girl's complacent expression juxtaposed with the cat so as to create an apparent likeness between the two? In my opinion, it is the combination of all these factors that leave

the portrait with such an effect. When looking at a portrait of this typical colonial style I wouldn't expect to see such bright colours or subject matter; that is, I would normally associate this iconic style with sepia tones and rigid, colonial families. Not only do I find the portrait visually confronting in this sense but I believe the subtlety of the similarities between Clare and her cat, Bella, adds yet another striking element to the portrait. Clare's eyes particularly seem to have more of a cat-like quality when compared with Bella. In this way, I find that overall this portrait is ostensibly simple yet extremely effective. Ady, tertiary student



Kumantjayi 2010
Rhett Hammerton
digital print

Artist's statement

Kumantjayi Raggett comes from Luritja country. His 13 years have been tumultuous, being raised by family and having little contact with his biological parents. Despite learning difficulties, Kumantjayi speaks West Arrernte, Luritja, and Pitjantjatjara as well as English. Whilst being educated in the traditional ways of his heritage, the influence of Western culture, in particular gangster rap, is a persistent distraction. 'Kumantjayi' is a traditional name used to replace a person's original name when it is the same as, or similar to, that of a deceased person.

Questions

What are the clues in this portrait that tell us about the subject?
How would you describe the expression on the subject's face?
How does his pose contribute to our reading of this portrait?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? The majority of my work outside of studying has been based in photojournalism, so I guess I'd say I'm a photojournalist. But not really in the traditional sense.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website? I have a website (www.rhethammerton.com) it has basically no content, I just needed a site where people could get in contact with me if need be.

What is your relationship to the subject? I met Kumantjayi when I was spending time in Alice Springs. One of my friends teaches at a school called Yipirinya, which is attended by mainly kids from the camps in and around Alice. My friend invited me to do a class with some of the kids on photography.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

Basically for the class I set up a digital camera on a tripod and a speedlite and umbrella. Everyone took turns taking portraits of each other. I was also able to get in and take some shots of the kids and in turn I had to do a few sittings for them. It was a great class and I think we all learned a lot. Towards the end of the class I noticed that I had taken everyone's portrait except for one - Kumantjayi. Kumantjayi was reluctant to get involved and showed very little interest in engaging with the activities. After convincing him to try shooting some portraits of his classmates he became a lot more interested. He quite happily took photographs of a few of his friends, and gradually warmed to the idea of a portrait sitting. I asked if he could quickly sit in front of the camera which he agreed to. I counted him down and at the last second he threw his hands up into the double V hand sign associated with American gangsta culture.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait? After spending some time in and around Alice Springs I was amazed at how vibrant Indigenous culture is there, and also the amount of poverty and poor standards of living. Spending time at Yipirinya school made me realise there is a lot of work to do in relation to child welfare and education in central Australia. The kids were great to work with and a lot of fun, but unfortunately opportunities that some of us take for granted are not as readily available to them. By entering Kumantjayi's portrait into the NPPP, I was hoping to communicate a little about kids in central Australia. Being as young as he is and having experienced so much I think Kumantjayi is a prime example of contemporary Indigenous youth in central Australia. It is my intention to simply get people thinking about the relevance of children growing up in Australia in what is considered by some to be third world conditions.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? This shot was taken with Kumantjayi sitting on a chair taken from one of the classrooms, the brick wall behind him is the side of the classroom. It is actually cropped down from a horizontally framed image.

What type of camera was used to capture your image?

Canon 5d Mark II

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait.

So this image is taken under a verandah so I employed the natural light, then I combined that with a speedlite on a flash stand and a shoot through umbrella. The flash stand was positioned up and to the right of the sitter.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

Typically I like to keep my post production to a minimum, although in this case I thought the black and white treatment would suit the image. Essentially I took the colour file and reproduced it in black and white then spent some time working very broadly on contrast and sharpening to achieve a result I was happy with.

Who would you nominate as your influences?

Richard Renaldi is a big influence, I would probably go so far as to say he is one of the most important portrait photographers working right now. I am also a big fan of Australian historical photographers with my main interest being the work of Beaufoy Merlin.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)?

I think the best bit of advice I could give is to remember that there is no set structure for what defines a photographer. Being paid to work as a photojournalist is great, but this isn't necessarily the proof that you are a great photographer. I think the most important thing is to be true to yourself, take the photographs you want to take, and if you really believe in your medium, good things will result.

A viewer's response

When I first set eyes on this work my initial reaction was a sharp intake of breath. My heart hurt when I saw this young man. There is a profound sadness in the way he looks at you – so poignant. He has great physical presence, his body looks strong, but I can't get past his expression. He seems lost, pining for something, there is a deep yearning there that tears at my heart. As a mother I want to hug him. Comfort him. His eyes are such dark pools it's hard not to fall into them. His hands crossed in front of his chest, two fingers pointing up, he seems to be protecting himself, an amour,

or a warning to stay back or does he just want us to know he's a gansta? (Poignant is defined as – 'painfully or deeply affecting the feelings, to make an impression'. That is absolutely what this photograph does to me.)

Jody, adult



Miss Alesandra 2010
Jacqueline Mitelman
digital print

Winner

Artist's statement

I first took photographs of Suzi Alesandra over 25 years ago, and it has been almost that long since I last saw her. I did not recognise her immediately. I thought she was a very interesting looking woman and I liked her hat. As we spoke, she became again the person I had known, an original, striking woman, of courage and spirit. I loved this portrait because for me it captures the self that has always been there.

Questions

What do you first think about when you look at this portrait?

What do you think are the strengths of this photograph?

What personal qualities of the subject do you think are revealed in this portrait?

How does the gaze contribute to the reading of the portrait?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice?

I have worked as a photographer since studying at Prahran College in the mid-seventies, under the tutelage of Athol Shmith, Paul Cox, and John Cato. My commissioned and non-commissioned work has had a variety of subject matter, as has my exhibited work, but it has been mainly portraiture of one sort or another. A range of private commissions has resulted in a considerable collection of portraits of culturally significant Australians. My works represented in public institutions are mostly portraits. I have a large, bare studio with wonderful natural light and within these givens I have a lot of freedom for exploration and spontaneity when I am taking a portrait.

What is your relationship to the subject? The subject is a friend I haven't seen for twenty years or more.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

After re-encountering her again, I asked if I could take her portrait, so she came to my studio.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait? I found her as striking and interesting as she had been in her youth, and I wanted to show both the wear of time, and some continuity of the spirit. The image I chose reminded me of classical painted portraiture.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? The photograph was taken in my studio using available light with a Nikon digital camera.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

I used digital imaging to adjust contrast, etc – nothing major.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? The final print is an inkjet print. It will be a small edition.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait?

I chose the size I thought was optimal for image, I find the choice of framing difficult!

Who would you nominate as your influences? My early influences were August Sander, Jacques-Henri Lartigue and Julia Margaret Cameron, but so many things are an influence.

A viewer's response

A deep soul and open heart. Warm chocolate brown eyes look to me, through me, beyond me. There is also a questioning there, what is she asking? A gentle face reflects love, pain, patience, tolerance and oh so much experience. A wealth of knowledge flows from those pink lips. Wisdom personified. Strong jaw held firm, firm against what? Is that determination I see? Stoicism? Courage? Maybe all of them and more. She is sure – self reliant. Rugged up against the cold, fine, soft grey hair flows over the rich deep red, intricately patterned pashmina like a waterfall of knowing, of history, of a life lived. She has kept her hair as the years went by; she is brave not to conform.

Jody, adult



Stormtroopers 2009
Scott Newett
digital print

Artist's statement

This photograph of Dan Preston and Piers Greville is part of the 'Talent' series, which depicts a bunch of blokes with a distinct lack of talent – these guys do not have a clue. Hinting at nefarious activities and epic fails, my characters appear ready for action, but something always disrupts their intentions. Using a signature lighting technique to augment key colours, shadows and warped perspectives, I aim to create hyper-real images that playfully hint at fragments of narrative, but ultimately remain unresolved. Outside of the forceful world of advertising, I encourage the viewer to make up their own minds.

Questions

What do you think this portrait is about? In this double portrait what do you notice are the similarities and differences between the subjects?

The faces are concealed by helmets. What effect does this have on your reading of the subjects?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? Advertising photographer

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?

www.scottnewett.com.au
My agent is cocoproductions.com.au

What is your relationship to the subjects?

Friends of my stylist, Hayley Callander.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

It was part of a series of over-age BMX guys we've been shooting. I'm a little obsessed with things being a little odd or weird in my images. Even if it is just the tiniest detail. Hayley Callander's styling eye really comes to the fore, I believe, in my work.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait?

A lot of my portrait work has an odd element or theme, this is generally not an obvious element but something that appears in the picture.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? Using flash as the main light source with underexposing the ambient light. It creates a surreal feel.

What type of camera was used to capture your image? Leaf AFI

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. I use broncolor. This image was shot using a versoA4 pack on the front with a beauty dish as the key light source. Then using a couple of mobile bare heads as 'clip' light on the talent.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

Not really. This image has really just been colour graded, contrast bumped up etc. Few areas lifted to bring out more detail in the blacks etc.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? Large scale Epson printer. Yes, this is edition 1 of 6.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait?

I just thought it was quite a bold stance from both talent so why not see it on a larger scale.

Who would you nominate as your influences? I love Kiran Master's work. I think we are all in awe of Nadav Kander.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? Take pics, pics and more pics. Try and put yourself under as much simulated pressure as you can, like you really 'have' to make this image, or idea work. I feel like my learning curve skyrocketed when someone actually agreed to give me a job.

Dan Preston and Piers Greville describe the experience of having their photograph taken by Scott Newett.

Piers is an old buddy of mine so we had a good laugh on the day this was taken. Scott and co made it easy for us to slip into character..in a weird way it was an alter ego thing coming to the surface ... I'd do it again in a flash!

Dan

The day of the shoot started off feeling like dress-ups. But getting comfortable with my new look, it soon felt like we really were back in another time, shooting a bona fide 1982 BMX commercial. It really took me sometime afterwards to work out who and where I was.

Piers

A viewer's response

Raiders of the past heading back to the future. BMX bandits revenging the nerds. Two lost boys on a mission impossible. Child's play or a war of the worlds?

Sam, adult



**My ancestors, myself
and my alternate** 2010

Phuong Ngo
digital print

Artist's statement

History that I have had no part in making, defines who I am as a Vietnamese Australian/Australian Vietnamese. Cold War theories and policies have resulted in a fortunate life in Australia, which means that I have gained from the misfortunes of war. This work is an investigation into my being and that of a generation born following the Vietnam War. It analyses the relationship between those who determine war and those who have formed an identity from it.

Questions

In what ways does this photograph challenge your assumptions about what a portrait should be?

What ideas is the photographer conveying through his self portrait?

To what extent do you think this portrait is about an individual?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? I define my practice as artistic with photography as one of the mediums that I utilise in creating work.

What is your relationship to the subjects? As a self portrait, my relationship to the subject is quite obvious. However, the replacement of identity in the image is important in understanding the work. The figures obscuring my face represent a selection of key historic decision makers who have impacted on my existence and how I have come to identify myself.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

This image came about as the result of analysing how events that took place prior to my birth have impacted on the formation of my identity. Although the image is a

constructed image, in the sense that it was planned and designed, it goes deeper in assessing the idea of what defines a person. Each figure within the work is a separate 35mm frame, using artificial lighting in a studio set up. The images were individually treated though Photoshop and composited as is presented in the final work.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait?

As the child of Vietnamese boat people, I have always felt somewhat displaced within Australia. Am I Australian? Am I Vietnamese? Am I Australian Vietnamese? Or am I Vietnamese Australian? My practice revolves around these questions of identity and culture. *My ancestors, myself and my alternate* is an investigation into the memory and history that informs my existence, at the expense of extreme suffering in Vietnam. In creating this work I have considered Cold War politics, Vietnam War policies and the decisions of my family, and how it has impacted on the way I view my life in Australia.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph?

F 5.6, 1/30 shutter speed, 28mm lens, 400iso BW 35mm film – the choice of this film was a deliberate decision to reference the documentary photography from the Vietnam War.

What type of camera was used to capture your image?

Canon AE-1 Programme – A camera produced in 1981. It was important for me to use a camera and technology that referenced the Vietnam War and reflected the period of my parents migration.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait.

This image was lit using artificial light. Each figure was lit using 3 light sources; florescent lights to the left and right of the image and one direct light source from above.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

Yes. Though I captured my images with 35mm film, it was digitally scanned, edited and composed though Photoshop.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition?

The final work is an inkjet print on archival rag paper. This work has an edition of 6 + 2AP.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait? Beyond the physical constraints with things such as the maximum printer size, my choices with the presentation of my work were selected based on the themes and ideas I was dealing with. The size of the figures accommodates the physical limits of the paper, but also references soldiers and toys; the idea that war is a political game. In selecting the mount and frame, I did not want to detract from the work. I selected a simple white shadow box frame, as it does not limit my work, giving it ability to speak, allowing me to lay my identity bare on the gallery wall.

Who would you nominate as your influences? Key influences in my practice are Song Dong and his 'They' series, Kurt Tong and his series 'The Peoples Park' and Danu Li's 'The Mother of all Journeys'. These works all analyse the relationship between history, memory and identity; they have been crucial in advising my practice.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? In a fine art context, it is important to understand your voice and what it is you are trying to talk about when making images. Research is always key to my practice, whether it is conceptual or technical. It is important to seek answers to questions and in doing so understand why we create work. It may seem silly in saying this, but it is also important to be engaged and interested in your own work as well as having fun in creating it.

A viewer's response

Who am I? – the layers of history that have combined and contrived to make me this person, in this place. I see this portrait as the story of lineage; the lineage of ideas and their interpretation, the lineage of conflicting ideologies, the lineage of documentation both public and personal, the lineage of family, the lineage of national traditions. Ngo lays out these components of self like a DNA sequence. The final two portraits in the sequence, act as punctuation, a final statement and summary. Ngo is the man standing simply seemingly at ease. He is also the man torn and dissected, looking back and looking forward, Vietnamese and Australian, hybrid. It was a different war that resulted in my father coming to Australia, but it too was a clash of ideologies that left people dislocated from their traditional heritage and led to reestablishment in a different place far away. My father wove together

traditions from his past with those of his new home. War contributed to who I am. Ngo's self portrait has made me ponder what actions of mine contribute to the sense of self of another.
Kryisia, adult



Mr King was once on Countdown

2010
Ben Searcy
digital print

Artist's statement

Not to be outdone by the young 'fullas' strutting their stuff at the 2010 SA NAIDOC Ball, SA NAIDOC Chair, Richard King, busts a huge break-dancing move to everyone's amazement. 'We have to show these kids that we were young once too' he said afterwards, before revealing, 'I was once on Countdown!' Richard is an inspirational leader who wants us to be 'part of the solution rather than contributors to the problem'. By simply break-dancing at the NAIDOC Ball, he reminds us that we are capable of so much more than our expectations lead us to believe.

Questions

What is your first response to this portrait?
Where do you think this photograph might have been taken?
Who do you think the portrait is of? Why?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? Up until recently I have just called myself a photographer, but I am starting to use the term artist, as I am now working with different media and developing my own conceptual practice.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?

bensearcy.com.au

What is your relationship to the subject/s? On some level I usually have befriended my subjects by the time I take the photographs. I do shoot commissioned portraits but that is a slightly different process. In commissioned portraits the sitter may not be interested in my interpretation of themselves or the story that I am interested in.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

This was a candid encounter, you have to be prepared for luck though!

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait?

I suppose this shot touches on many of the themes that I try and thread through all my work. There is no judgement or stereotypes in the image, there is something unexpected or unusual about the moment, there is information in the image that may have not been seen at first. The image shows people in a way that they are not usually seen.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph?

I only had a few seconds to realise that something interesting was about to happen, so I had to fall to the floor to get the angle to capture the ladies faces and a sense of all the commotion.

What type of camera was used to capture your image?

Nikon d700.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait.

Usually I work with natural light, so this image is an exception. I needed the flash to freeze the motion.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?

Yes, I removed distractions such as the exit light. I think it is OK to remove extraneous things that don't really add to the context or meaning of the shot.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition?

It will be part of an edition. It's a Giclee digital print.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait?

Scale was important to this image, due to the lack of file size in the original, I thought the scale was more important than the digital artifacting that can be seen in the ladies faces. That way you can stand back and look at it for a long time, notice the personalities in all the faces, and notice the coin and business cards on the floor.

Who would you nominate as your influences?

I look at everything I can, certainly the documentary work of people like Sebastio Salgado, Dianne Arbus, through to the more stylised views of

Robert Mapplethorpe or Max Dupain. I am probably more influenced by people's ideas and philosophy than individual photographers. Writers, film makers and musicians are just as important as they are all involved with communicating ideas.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)?

Its not always about the beauty of the image, have something that you want to communicate and are passionate about and the rest will probably fall into place.

Richard King described the experience of having his photograph taken by Ben Searcy

Having known Ben for some years, I have always found him to be extremely professional and easy to work with. He has an ability to blend into any given situation to the degree that you don't remember the photos being taken when you review them. His personality and respectful manner has served him well and granted him access to groups that are usually guarded.

A viewer's response I view this image as an insight into how people judge and stereotype other people and how we react when these stereotypes are broken or our judgements are proven wrong. For me a particular part of this image sparks an element of curiosity. Why is there tape on the floor? Was it to remember where a table went? To mark the centre of the dance floor? Or was it to mark where Mr King was to perform his move? My question is: 'was this stunt planned or was it in the spur of the moment?' Not centre stage, but caught in the spotlight, my eyes are first led to a row of joyous, shocked, and laughing women. By seeing these women in such a state we conclude that they are at a party of some kind and something unexpected has occurred. Mr King is seen by the public as your average middle aged business man and in this respect he is expected to behave in a certain way. We put people in stereotypes every day to decipher how to behave around them. This image of Mr King break dancing at the SA NAIDOC ball shows us that no matter what your appearance, age or occupation you are capable of doing much more than people are led to believe.
RR, Year 10 student



**Halloween – Sam Slater and
Andy Lavender** 2009

Raoul Slater
digital print

Artist's statement

Even though his five-year-old form is mostly obscured, I can tell from the confident gun-fighting stare that it is my boy Sam under that blood-stained sheet. My favourite portraits, whether of people or wildlife, conceal more than they reveal.

Questions

How would you describe the subjects in this photograph?

In what ways is this photograph more than just a family snap? Why?

Describe the use of scale and distance. How do you think this affects the portrait?

**The photographer and the portrait –
an interview**

How do you define your own practice? I am a keen semi-professional photographer specializing in wildlife (especially birds) and nature photography.

**What is your relationship to the
subject/s?**

The boy under the sheet in the Halloween photo is my six-year-old son, Sam. The boy in the foreground is his friend Andy. Although Andy dominates the frame, I consider this to be a portrait of Sam.

**Was the photograph a result of a
constructed or candid encounter?**

The majority of my work is with wildlife and is done with a super-telephoto lens. I am not comfortable with a wide-angle lens, although I carry one to record wild landscapes. I went to this Halloween party with the idea of photographing the children in their various costumes as a group and so took along only the wide-angle so as to force myself into a different way of seeing.

Once at our friend's house, I realized that the only place where I could use the wide-angle and have a "filled" background was this spot (I have a morbid fear of sky in photographs – I don't just dislike sky, I HATE it) so I parked myself there with the intention of snapping whomever came past. Wouldn't you know it, but kids need to be really close to fill a wide-angled frame and the only kid that ventured close to the nutter with the big camera was Andy – one photo all day. He was obviously unaware of me but Sam in the background is trying to work out how to put up a pair of bunny ears from under his white sheet, God love him.

**What are the ideas or themes
underpinning your portrait?**

The subject here is Sam, the boy under the sheet, and is part of a 30 year piece of work I've done on obscured portraits. Admittedly my former subjects have been wildlife, but the idea is the same. Wild animals are so often glimpsed from the corner of the eye, and this is something that I try to show sometimes with my bird photos – the fleetingness of our connection with a truly wild animal. Small boys can be as ephemeral as the shyest falcon, don't you think, when they aren't in your face demanding a Nintendo?

**Describe the technical aspects of
your photograph?**

My main technical challenge was to hold a decent depth of field from few inches away to 20 feet, yet shoot hand-held at a speed that produced an eye-lash crisp image. My usual operating mode with wildlife is to shoot aperture priority and wide-open, but in this case I stopped down a little (but not enough!) Looking at the technical info now, I see that it was shot at 320th of a second at f5.6. I reckon I could have held the sharpness hand-held at a 60th and given a second chance would have used that speed in shutter priority and gone for more depth of field. You can see the camera and I struggled a little with the focus too as the image is crispest on Andy's hind eye- don't tell the judges!

**What type of camera was used to
capture your image?** A Canon EOS 5D II – I love it. After shooting film for 30 years, anything this camera does comes as a miracle.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. Natural light, shot in shade. I had to do some post-processing to reduce the blueness in the image.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image? It was cropped a fraction, and the edges burnt a little. There was some sky reflected in the window, and I gave this a stern spanking to make it behave (did I mention that I hate sky in photos?).

How was the final print made? The print is on fibre-based paper to reduce reflections.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait? I made a print for the 2010 Moran Prize that was gothic in its hugeness, glossiness and framing. It did not compare favourably to a room of elegantly simple and understated works. In fact, I was a bit embarrassed by my attempt to impress. The scale and framing of "Halloween" is an attempt to rein things back a bit. You learn from your mistakes, hopefully.

Who would you nominate as your influences? My main influence has been my father Peter Slater, who was one of the world's leading nature photographers during the dawn of colour photography. When I was twelve, he gave me his cameras and taught me how to get close to birds. My favourite nature photographers are Jim Brandenburg, Frans Lanting, Mike Nicolls and Vincent Munier. Some other photographers stun me by their ability to drill every shot to the core, but they are out of my league in terms of influence; Anton Corbijn, Sally Mann, Michael Kenna, Sam Abell, Steve McCurry, Mary Ellen Mark. Man, so many great photographers, I wonder why I bother.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? Spend more time with your camera than with your computer.

A viewer's response The person in the white costume I think is a ghost because it is white and it looks like it is wearing a cape on its head which goes from the front and back. The boy in the front I think is a skeleton because on his shirt I think is a skeleton. I think he is eating something because his cheeks are wide, puffed out and there is something coming out of his mouth. The person in the background with a blue top I think is a green slimy monster and getting ready for Halloween because he is looking down at his clothes. I think the other person with black hair is a witch and she is a helper for all the kids. I think she has put some clothes out in case some people don't have anything to wear.

I feel weird when I look at it. The first thing I see when I look at it is the boy who is a skeleton and then I see the white ghost because it stands out because it is the only white thing, basically. I feel weird because the boy's mouth looks quite funny and the ghost has big eyes and a big mouth and there is a big red spot on the white cape which I think is a stain but they could use it as blood.

I think it is in someone's backyard and they are getting ready to go trick or treating. I think that the ghost is very happy because the ghost is smiling. And I think the skeleton is nervous because he is frowning and I think it might be his first time going trick or treating and the person in the blue top just feels normal because he has a straight face.

When I look at it I wonder if when they go trick or treating if they are going to get anything.

Lola, Year 2 student



Robert 2010
CJ Taylor
gelatin silver print

Artist's statement

The Scholars is a series of portraits of young scholarship winners taken over the Australian summer of 2009–2010 in Canberra. Realised as tintypes, a 19th-century dry plate photographic process, this series is a record of a particular time and place, of future scientists, mathematicians, sociologists and artists thrown together by circumstance in the second decade of the 21st century. Photography is a child of science, it informs our way of seeing and being, revealing previously unknown, small truths that add to the world and lead our way through it. This is a portrait of Robert Wilson.

Questions

What do you first notice about this portrait?
How does your impression change after you look more closely?
What do you think the photographer's intention was using a 19th-century photographic technique?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? Photomedia artist and documentary photographer.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?
cjtaylorworks.com

What is your relationship to the subject? Situational fancies – fellow scholarship awardees attending ANU in Canberra between Nov 2009 – Feb 2010.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?
Both. In the summer of 2009/10 I set off on a journey to Canberra as a result of being awarded an inter-University scholarship between the University of South Australia and the Australian National University. Ostensibly a research scholarship, my practice has always been resolved in the

making of objects – primarily photographs. And so it was during this residency at the ANU School of Art that I befriended a number of scholars from the sciences – physicists, mathematicians, psychologists. Through my research into 19th-century original photographic processes, techniques themselves born of science, I was determined to document that time and place through portraiture. I constructed a set, fabricated some props and called for volunteers to turn up at a given time over two days bringing with them an object that was important to them in their displaced state, far from family and friends, and whomever happened along I candidly photographed.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? Wet plate collodion images are an original photographic process invented by Frederick Scott Archer (1813–1857) in 1848. The Tintype, so named for its use of iron as the substrate (in other words the photographic 'paper', oddly no tin was ever used) had surfaced by 1856 and was popularised during the American Civil War as an affordable way of recording soldiers portraits. The tintype effectively democratised photography, taking a fragile and expensive process and making it robust and affordable. Photographers would travel with portable darkrooms (the 'darkbox'), sensitise the plate in the field and expose in the camera for a unique image. However, the technique used for this series is an ersatz dry plate process based on the same principle yet allowing plates to be exposed from transparency film later after coating the plates in the darkroom. The dry plate process allows multiples to be made however due to the temperamental nature of the process no two plates are ever the same.

What type of camera was used to capture your image? Mamiya 7II medium format rangefinder (transparency film).

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. Natural lighting with a sheet of white cardboard to reflect light back into the shadow side of the face.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?
None whatsoever.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? The plate is made by cutting the metal with tinsnips to the desired size (in this case an original 'standard' size known as a 1/4 plate); blackening one side to enable the image to be seen once the emulsion is exposed; pouring the emulsion over the plate and allowing it to cool (but not set); placing the transparency film in a medium format enlarger; exposing the plate, developing and drying as in the field. Due to the serendipitous nature of the process no two dry plates are ever the same however multiples of the same image can be made. At this stage *Robert* is a single unique print.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait? All these elements are essential considerations for *The Scholars* series, particularly so for *Robert* being a relatively small image. As the series is calling to an aesthetic of the past – a formal 19th-century portrait remaindered in the present day – I wanted to situate the picture in a relatively large and ornate frame both as a contrast to the monochromatic simplicity of the image itself and as a counter to the current fashion of geometric plain frames favoured by contemporary portraitists. The plate is set off the background to achieve a sense of depth and to allow the viewer to appreciate at a glance that it is on a piece of metal. Each corner of the plate was also 'tin-snipped' off prior to exposure as much to reference the original technique as to break the contemporary expectation for perfect corners of the modern photograph.

Who would you nominate as your influences? Photographers Max Dupain, Gerda Taro, Evelyn Hofer, Hiroshi Sugimoto, Joseph Beuys' coyote, painter Arthur Boyd for making me stand still and look, and latterly William Henry Corkhill of Tilba Tilba, pastoralist, purloiner and photographer from 1846-1936. Also TV presenter Bill Collins for exposing me to the wonderful shadows in many beautiful prints of film noir movies made during the golden years of Hollywood and for his joyous enthusiasm for same.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? Work doggedly at your craft, perfect as many techniques as possible, exclude all else, make the imagery your own. And get used to cheap wine, art doesn't pay.

Robert Wilson described the experience of having his photograph taken by C J Taylor Having my portrait taken was a very surreal experience – attempting to keep a neutral expression, imagining how the final image may look, while waiting for the sun to make an appearance through the cloud cover. It was interesting to observe the other participants and the objects they brought to the shoot, because I learnt something about what is significant to each individual. I would definitely be keen to work with CJ again in the future.

A viewer's response At first glance I thought this was in the wrong exhibition – not the NPPP 2011 but in perhaps the NPPP 1889. Immediately I thought of Australia as a convict colony – making this image reminiscent of old convict photographs I've seen in the NPG's historical galleries. Something about the colour of the photograph, the expression of the sitter and the minimal background. The background speaks of the eureka stockade with the normally blue flag washed out with sepia tones. The striped top looks almost like prison garb and then I saw them – the contemporary necklace design, the headphones and light blue jeans – this is not an historical figure – but a contemporary one and even though I could speculate that he might have his heritage in the eureka time period and be of convict stock I feel I'm falling into popular theories of that older time based on pseudo sciences of physical types as opposed to really knowing this man at all. I can read the type of photograph – it's an uncomfortable memory from my historical past – but have no idea who the subject is, let alone the music he'd like to listen to on his headphones. I love it – it makes me continue to think about the power of an image to transcend time and space.

Amy, adult



The press conference 2010

Jeremy Thompson
digital print

Artist's statement

This picture was taken at a 'doorstop' interview with the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, in March, 2010. It was during the time Chinese authorities were prosecuting the Australian Rio Tinto executive, Stern Hu, over bribery allegations. The photograph shows both Samantha Hawley (ABC Radio, left) and Latika Bourke (Fairfax Radio, centre) taking close interest as Mr Rudd warns China, 'The world will be watching' the outcome of the Hu case. I was struck by the intensity of the reporters' expressions – particularly the acute gaze of Bourke.

Questions

Where do you think this photograph was taken? Why?

Who do you think is the subject of this photograph?

Consider the expressions in this portrait. What do they tell us about the relationship between these people?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice?

Enthusiastic amateur. I've been a keen photographer since I was about 10, when my parents gave me a camera (an Agfa Clack!) and I learned how to develop and print my films. I graduated to a Pentax Spotmatic and the school photographic society with its proper darkroom. I've been at it ever since. As a journalist I take my camera everywhere and provide pictures to ABC online – I guess I could be called a photojournalist.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?

I use Flickr because I love the community nature of the site, lots of feedback, chat and even friendships with like minded people can be made. flickr.com/photos/jthommo101/ There is a vigorous Canberra photographers group and I'm also active in the Pentaxian group.

What is your relationship to the subjects? The subjects are colleagues in the Press Gallery.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?

It was a candid encounter. I was taking pictures of the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, presenting prizes in the Wally Brown Awards for young gallery journalists – the main subject of my photograph, Latika Bourke (Fairfax radio) was a finalist. Before he left, Mr Rudd gave a 'doorstop' interview and I was struck by the intense expressions on the journalists' faces so I shot the scene to make the reporters, not the Prime Minister, the subject. ABC journalist Samantha Hawley (left of frame) told me later the press pack was surprised and sceptical because Mr Rudd was 'warning' China over the trial of Rio Tinto executive Stern Hu. I found Bourke's expression particularly striking as she quizzed the Prime Minister.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait? The photograph (I hope) captures a moment in time which combines the intensity of a surprising political moment with a slight incongruity of the main subject 'done up to the nines', hair up and spectacular earrings. Bourke, of course, was dressed up for the awards. Her expression, and that of Hawley's, is what makes the photograph for me.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? The photograph was taken at f2.8, 1/100 sec iso 100. It breaks the 'rule of thirds' by having the main subject in the centre but the other elements – the PM's head on the right, Hawley on the left, other journalists out of focus in the background – balance the picture nicely.

What type of camera was used to capture your image? I used a Pentax K20D with the superb Pentax FA77/1.8 lens.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. It was natural light, no flash, in an outdoor courtyard at Parliament House.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition?

I slightly cropped and desaturated the photograph in Adobe Lightroom but no other special post production techniques were used.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait?

I had the picture printed and framed by Canberra framer Mark Stewart. We poured over several matte and frame types before settling on the white matte (for contrast) and dark frame (to compliment the picture). Mark used an Epson printer I believe. The scale of the print was a result of my wish to provide one slightly grander and with more presence than the version I have at home.

Who would you nominate as your influences? I love the work of Henri Cartier-Bresson.**Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)?**

Learn your camera inside out so you don't have to think about the technicalities. Then your mind will be free to see the shot, change the settings if need be and shoot quickly. Since I began taking pictures auto-focus has made it so much easier to get that shot. Get to know your imaging software too. I use Adobe Lightroom and sometimes play around with my images – but nothing beats getting the shot right in-camera. And practise, practise, practise. Also (despite what I said above) learn the rule of thirds – it works!

A viewer's response When I first glanced at this photograph, I was rather taken with the central figure's large, questioning eyes. She looks so determined, so steadfast, but she's waiting for an answer. I thought it was her, Latika Bourke, being interviewed, until I realised the microphones were facing the other way. The person out of focus is the interviewee, and even though he is blurred and we can only see the edge of his face and the back of his head, most of us can recognise him as former Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd. I find this fascinating because he has been the subject of so many news articles, particularly in 2010, yet the camera has been turned around to focus on the journalists. So many metaphors can be drawn from this image about Kevin Rudd, about the power of journalists, but the one I find the most powerful is the metaphor of us as Australian citizens waiting for answers.
Tamsin, tertiary student



**Wang Lan, Xini, Shen
Jiawei and Billy** 2010
Greg Weight
digital print

Artist's statement

My friend Jiawei and I have developed a tradition of making portraits of each other. In July he made a drawing of me and my partner Carol, and I made this portrait of Jiawei, Lan, Xini and their pet, Billy. They are artists whose lives were irrevocably changed by the Tiananmen Square massacre in Beijing in 1989 which occurred five days after Xini was born. In the background of this photograph is a self portrait by Jiawei. The tones of the photograph relate to Jiawei's painting palette and I like to think that the serenity in the atmosphere in this photograph evokes the peace and recognition they have found here in Australia.

Questions

What do you think is the purpose of the photograph?
What do you read as the relationships between the subjects?
What portrait conventions do you think are used and what effect do they have?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? Artist/fine art/photography/landscape/portraiture.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?
gregweightphoto.com.au and on australiangalleries.com.au

What is your relationship to the subjects? I try to see all my subjects objectively and with this family portrait I was looking at each individual separately and collectively.

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?
We met coincidentally and I put the question to Jiawei that I shoot a family portrait to which he agreed. I was visiting Bundeena and arranged to do the shot the next day. There was hardly any planning as far as clothing other than the decision for Wang

Lan to wear her lovely shawl. Then their dog insisted on being involved. This is the only shot where the dog did the right thing.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait? I am interested in families that are involved in the art world. This idea has grown out of my long history of photographing artists.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? Most of my portraits are shot on analogue (film) then scanned for computer-generated printing. On this occasion I had my digital camera with me and decided to see what I could do using digital right from the start.

What type of camera was used to capture your image? Nikon D700.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. Combined natural lighting and flash fill lighting.

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image?
Yes the image was adjusted in Photoshop to suit print quality.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? The print was made on a Epson 12 colour (3 blacks) printer on matt cotton rag paper.

Describe your consideration of scale, mounting and framing in the presentation of your portrait?
I wanted the scale to be modest in that I believe family portraits are personal and are suited to not being printed too large. As far as the frame is concerned I used a deep mount and a gold frame mainly because this style of frame has a traditional appearance and family portraits are very traditional, also there is something very formal with the composition and tonality of this portrait.

Who would you nominate as your influences? Arnold Newman, Alfred Steiglitz, Dorothea Lange, Eugene Smith.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? The most original thing in photography is you and your camera.

Jiawei, Lan, Xini, and Billy describe the experience of having their photograph taken by Greg Weight.

We met Greg last century. He was born in the Year of the Dog. We often call him 'Dog Photographer'. We all love him so much and I tried to catch his 'bitter smile' in my Archibald entry, and in retaliation, he took my face for a photo competition. We all won: I was a finalist and he was a winner! Now once again, I did a cartoon portrait for him and he took photo for all of my family.
Jiawei

In the moment when Greg pressed down the shutter, together with his hands were his great experience of photography and full understanding of art. He had well caught the light, the color, the rhythm, and the composition. This is what makes it a unique photo.
Lan

All I noticed was Greg waiting for Billy to raise his head off the floor, so I murmured his name.
Xini

Yip yip, woof woof! (Yes, Yes! No, No! – translated by Jiawei)
Billy

A viewer's response

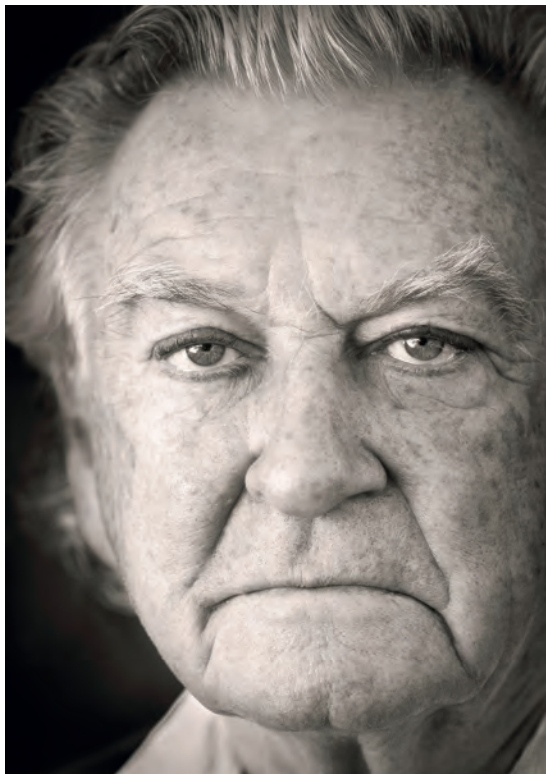
The Gifted Dog

Dear old Sangi had a litter in China. Wongi, the most scared in the litter, wanted to show Sangi that he was the wisest because there was a sign which said 'wisest wins the sands of luck'. Wongi would have never entered the competition but he was picked by the Royal Three, so he was determined to try it.

The great dane Jim-So was extremely wise, so he said. But when the day came to leave to go to the journey to the Royal Three, Wongi was feeling brave. All the way there animals told him advice and he thanked them. Stopping everywhere slowed him down but when he got there he wished Jim-So luck. Jim-So just bit him and snorted, he was too slow.

The Royal Three came out and took two points off Jim-So's score-board and checked if Wongi was okay. Inside it was Jim-So's turn first. He walked in. Wongi heard a lot of growling, snorting and a few cheers. Jim-So's score turned out to be twenty-one. Then in was Wongi's go. Wongi said that he was sure that he wasn't going to win it because Jim-So was very wise.

The Royal Three explained that Jim-So boasts about being smart but never actually is. Wongi is smart in a way that the world cannot explain. Animals give him advice because he is a kind and cheerful dog. Wongi ended up with a score higher than anyone else's. His score was eighty-four.
Grace, Year 3 student



Bob Hawke 2010
David Young
digital print

Artist's statement

This portrait of Bob Hawke was taken at the Byron Bay Writers Festival, 2010. It captures something of the resoluteness and intensity of the man that seems not to have diminished with age.

Questions

What do you notice first about this image? Why?
What effect does the cropping of the face have on your response to the portrait?
What do you think the subject was thinking at the time this photograph was taken?

The photographer and the portrait – an interview

How do you define your own practice? Advertising and Fine Art photographer.

Do you have a website or are you represented on a website?
davidyoung.com.au

What is your relationship to the subject? He was attending the Byron Bay Writers Festival and I asked him if I could photograph him (I was the 'official' photographer there).

Was the photograph a result of a constructed or candid encounter?
See above. I found a suitable spot to photograph him, did a test shot with someone else and then had about two minutes to shoot him.

What are the ideas or themes underpinning your portrait? To simply record the person, in my own style and in a way that was not a typical 'smiley' portrait.

Describe the technical aspects of your photograph? As few as possible! 85mm (120mm equiv) lens at f1.8 on a Nikon DSLR.

What type of camera was used to capture your image? Nikon D300 DSLR.

Did you work with natural or artificial lighting? Describe the lighting system used to create your portrait. Available light (open shadow).

Did you employ any digital imaging processes to create your final image? Adobe Lightroom and Photoshop, convert to BW and minor retouching only.

How was the final print made? Is this print one of an edition? Unlimited print. Epson digital print on a matte paper.

Who would you nominate as your influences? Many – painters, photographers, cinematographers, etc.

Do you have any advice for a beginning photographer (eg. students)? Live it, breath it, be it.

A viewer's response

When you pass by me,
Hallow a mate,
For the strength of union is mighty.
Roxanne, adult

