

.THE THOUSAND MILE STARE.

PRESENTED BY THE VICTORIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY.

A PHOTOGRAPHIC EXHIBITION

1988

'The Thousand Mile Stare' is a celebration and scrutiny of recent photography in Victoria. Both the exhibition and the catalogue provide a document of photographic practice in the State over the last twenty-five years, and the forums and educational tours arising from the exhibition will offer an opportunity to examine the legacy of this work in the light of present concerns and critical debates. This project has involved us in a demanding and exciting process of investigation and dialogue over a period of a year and a half. Many individuals within the arts and business communities have made significant contributions to its realization.

In 1985 the Victorian Ministry for the Arts commissioned Melbourne photographer Bernie O'Regan to evaluate the needs of local photographers engaged in commercial, fine-art, community and journalistic work. His study revealed a disparate and comparatively fragmented community and proposed as a solution the establishment of a resource centre which might serve as a focus for these diverse interests. With the collective efforts of a few individuals involved in the practice and the teaching of photography, The Victorian Centre for Photography was established the following year.

O'Regan's study also highlighted the absence of any major photographic exhibitions or publications in Victoria. If practitioners in the different fields were working in relative isolation, this was because their work was largely invisible to one another. The V.C.P. formed an exhibition sub-committee to consider ways of redressing this absence. Our concerns were both practical and programmatic. It was clear that we would require a curator willing to go beyond a predictable display of work by established photographers. We saw the best of curatorial practice as combining ideological commitment with personal insight, critical awareness with a new and particular way of seeing.

With the support of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council, Joyce Agee was appointed curator in 1987 and invited to construct a personal version of Victorian photography. Originally from the United States, Joyce has worked in London and Sydney as photographer and curator, and brings an open but informed approach to the wealth of material submitted for the exhibition.

Joyce has been committed to showing as many photographers as possible, but from the outset she saw the exhibition as a chance to explore emerging themes in recent work rather than to 'showcase' individuals. She has responded to this opportunity by identifying visual and thematic links in areas such as our construction of gender roles, critical appraisals of contemporary society, the media's effect on our perceptions of self, and within all this an exploration of national character as a construct – an emphasis particularly pertinent in this Bicentennial year.

'The Thousand Mile Stare' offers us a new point of departure for re-examining the images which shape our experience and for understanding the distinctive photographic culture in which, directly or indirectly, we all participate. It makes visible the models of excellence and pathways to innovation previously in eclipse and reflects back at us, in its complexity and diversity, our own social and cultural milieu. We expect this exhibition to act as a catalyst for debate: photographers, publishers, galleries and the media are invited to explore and promote photography in new ways; their audiences are invited to take a new critical pleasure in the images they put before us.

'In this glum desert,' writes Roland Barthes, 'suddenly a photograph reaches me, it animates me and I animate it . . . this is what creates every adventure.'

Chris Doig
Stephen Henderson
Carolyn Lewens
Margot Rosser
(V.C.P. Exhibitions Sub-Committee)

Truth is not a quality inherent in any kind of discourse but a way of looking at things; not an aspect but a test of reality.

Angela Carter

'The Thousand Mile Stare'? Photography is classically a stare, a one-eyed observation. War correspondents speak of 'the thousand yard stare' – the distanced, apprehensive look of the soldier in combat, eyes fixed on a threat at the limits of vision. It is the look of people who are radically distanced from their environment, the hallucinatory state people experience when they are snow-blinded or too long away from society. Multiplied two thousand-fold, it becomes the gaze of the visionary, the prophet, the artist. Enhanced by technology, the thousand mile stare can also become the photographer's stare.

This exhibition is an anthology of images by fifty-four photographers who have used the medium to locate themselves in relation to their cultural past, gender roles, mass media, environmental issues, modern technology and art history. Any art may address these issues, but Australia's geographic position lends a special distinctiveness to its photography, charged as it is by 'the thousand mile stare.'

Not a photographic survey show in the traditional sense, attempting a definitive overview of the work and the artists, this is rather one version of this State's photography, a pictorial diary, subjective in its viewpoint, chosen from a large body of work created over two decades from a statewide open submission.

Work has been drawn from areas as diverse as commercial and industrial photography, photo-journalism, community photography and fine art. Labels such as 'fine' and 'applied' art, generated by the market-place, are here put into question by the juxtaposition and integration of photo-silkscreen, photomontage, hand-coloured prints, sequential images, photographic *objets d'art*, publications, posters and 'straight,' i.e., unstaged, as well as staged photography.

The initial curatorial brief was to select an exhibition from work produced over the last five years. My research was hampered, however, by the lack of any previous major exhibitions and the dearth of recent critical writing on Victorian photography. To establish some understanding of the historical and social context of contemporary work, it was crucial to draw upon the personal recollections of individuals who had significantly contributed to the development of contemporary work, those influential in education, galleries, commercial photography and publication in Melbourne and Victoria (many of them are mentioned in the essays and acknowledgements in this catalogue). These included Rennie Ellis, who in 1972 opened Pentax Brummels, the first photographic gallery in Australia, and Jennie Boddington, curator of the country's first public photographic collection, established that same year at the National Gallery of Victoria. Equally significant has been the support for photography provided by regional galleries with enterprising collections policies, institutions like the Horsham Art Gallery, and the collective efforts which brought into being Melbourne's Gallery 18 and Visibility, and the nascent Victorian Centre for Photography.

Over a period of four months my research and interviews with practising photographers began to define the parameters of the exhibition. It was clear that many of the individuals who had been influential in the 1970s in promoting new ideas and work methods were still active influences in the 1980s. Despite this, younger photographers had little or no information about Victorian photography prior to the 1980s. This effectively created a kind of 'tunnel vision,' which 'The Thousand Mile Stare' is in part an attempt to redress. The strong links between contemporary practice and past work have been obscured by the vagaries of photographic fashion and overseas models. Hence the idea of an exhibition which would identify and illustrate the thematic,

stylistic and emotional continuities in Victorian photography over the last twenty-five years.

As the title of the show implies, 'The Thousand Mile Stare' is both an external and an internal gaze. It looks outward at the distinctive history and achievements of photographic culture in Victoria.

It also looks inward at the influences which have informed that history, influences that are implicit, 'understood,' but which link the present to the past, the local to the international. Names we could associate with the most formative of these influences would range from Edward Weston, proponent of the 'fine print,' and the German studio portraitist August Sander, to Diane Arbus, with her harsh and uncompromising street portraits insisting on a new social awareness; from Olive Cotton and Max Dupain, who reacted against the constraints of pictorialism and found a voice in Modernism, to Cindy Sherman, with her incisive investigation of the nature of images and their role in the construction of gender; from ideologues such as John Szarkowski and Sontag in the 1970s to Foucault, whose influence has been less direct but pervasive in the 1980s.

The diverse cultural backgrounds of the participants in this exhibition (Polish, Italian, Anglo-Saxon, Turkish, Lebanese) diminishes any clear argument for an indigenous Victorian photographic movement or a distinctive regional style (unless the ability and desire to access so much information in itself constitutes a distinguishing feature of Australian photography, an instinctive postmodernism). For these photographers, culture, like photographic history and technique, is material to be shaped, analysed, manipulated, endlessly reworked.

It is still too early to attempt a full analysis of the forms into which this raw material is being reworked, but among the strongest impulses to emerge, especially among artists within the gallery tradition, has been the feminist use of photography, with its diarist style and emphasis on the personal. In the 1970s, Micky Allan, the late Carol Jerrems, Ruth Maddison, Sue Ford and Ponch Hawkes, reacting against the technocratic and patriarchal American West Coast 'fine print' tradition then being promoted by The Photographers Gallery in Melbourne, began to use photography as an intimate expression of their individual concerns. These photographers extended the possibilities of the medium using narrative, hand-colouring and sequential images, and their experimentation was echoed in the increasing popularity of all photography that had freed itself from the formal constraints and elitist associations of fine-art models. What has emerged in the 1980s is (to use the American term for the chaste cohabitation of two females) a 'Boston marriage' of the two preoccupations, autobiographical content in sometimes uneasy alliance with technical assurance, in the work of both women and men.

The gallery tradition which contributed a new appreciation of the personal has introduced to commercial and industrial image-making a new respect for individual insight and imagination, observable in the trend to credit photographers in journals and commercial publications. Individuals are now routinely acknowledged for their specialities or their distinctive styles: Angie Heintz for her studio and fashion photography, for example, and Wolfgang Sievers for industrial photography. As more graduates of photographic schools enter the work-force, this process will accelerate.

From the interplay between fine-art and vocational work has also developed a self-reflexive use of photography, which comments upon the medium itself and analyses its influences on the ways we perceive and interact with the world. Necessary as this process of introspection or self-scrutiny is, it also has its price. As one community photographer, Wendy Rew, asked: 'Does the decline in the fashionability of street photography and photo-journalism reflect an increasing indifference to human needs and concerns?'

In this century we have seen the photograph as a source of information rival and then surpass the photograph as curio and art

object. We live in a culture based on images, printed and otherwise. The inclusion in 'The Thousand Mile Stare' of publications and posters acknowledges the growing political utility of photographs, especially in promoting community arts, the peace movement, union activities and education. The 1970s saw a flourishing of small presses in Victoria, such as Backyard Press, and the appearance of photographic magazines like *Lightvision* suggested a 'renaissance' in independent publishing. That this vigorous subculture is sadly diminished today is one reason for representing the achievements of the previous decade in 'The Thousand Mile Stare.' The publications section of the exhibition also pays tribute to those individuals who began their careers as commercial photographers, working on advertising, editorial and photo-journalist assignments, and who later became important influences in photographic education in Victoria. Notable among these are Athol Shmith, John Cato, Paul Cox and Henry Talbot.

1988 marks the thirtieth anniversary of the Australian tour of 'The Family of Man,' Edward Steichen's optimistic, humanist exhibition of photography which asserted the unity of human experience, the commonality of racial interests and the inevitability of global harmony. Seen today, in the light of Vietnam, Aboriginal issues, the feminist insurgency and (post)structuralism's interrogatory sophistication, the attitudes which shaped Steichen's show seem naively antique. 'The Thousand Mile Stare' belongs to a different moment in cultural history. Its photographs stress the specificity of personal experience and the plurality of the interests that images can serve and the meanings they can carry. We may have re-emerged from the wilful optimism of the 1950s, but does an exhibition like 'The Thousand Mile Stare' merely illustrate Susan Sontag's claim that 'often social change is replaced by a change of image'? I prefer to think not. To review feminist photographic work from the 1970s and consider its role in subverting stereotypical images of women is to be reminded that in some ways photography is better placed than any other medium to be, in Donald Horne's words, 'reactive to social change and [able to] articulate new information and values'.

'The Thousand Mile Stare' is consciously eclectic. It combines established with lesser-known photographers, it links the development of photographic culture with publications and posters over the last three decades, and it surveys a wide variety of photographic practice. It illustrates how photography can explore the contradictions and paradoxes in our experience of culture, and it reminds us of the duality of all images, in which our perceptions of reality and our conventions of representation are inseparably bound up with one another.

The work brought together in this exhibition can be approached in numerous ways. Interleaved with the other essays in this catalogue is a pictorial essay which articulates one view of the work this show surveys. Seeking, as it does, the challenge which photography can pose to our habits of perception, however, the success of 'The Thousand Mile Stare' must be judged by its ability to unsettle our customary ways of seeing and the expectations we bring to photography itself. Proust might have been speaking of this most contemporary of arts when he wrote: 'The only real voyage is not an approach to landscape but a viewing of the universe with the eyes of a hundred other people.'

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Joyce Agee
Curator

THE MELBOURNE MOVEMENT

*fashion and
faction in the
seventies*

Geoff Strong

We are in the age of the bottom line, the dollar is god, the accountant is high priest and Australia's current crop of heroes includes people like John Elliott and Alan Bond. From this vantage point it is hard to imagine a time when idealists and enthusiasts would sacrifice time and money to something as unprofitable as a worthy cause.

About 15 years ago, something like this started to happen in Melbourne and one of the causes thought worthy was photography.

It prompted otherwise sensible people to give up comfortable, well-paid careers to pour their savings into a gallery that could never make a profit, or to produce a world-class magazine that chewed up cash like a garden mulcher. It inspired others to abandon established photographic businesses to try to teach a younger generation in a dingy basement, and gave fire to the most naive of all: those who thought they could make a living as photographic artists. Without much concern for their own percentage, they flung themselves into it like camera-clutching lemmings.

With hindsight, most of those involved dismiss the suggestion that this golden age was some kind of Australian photographic renaissance – that would be an insult to the older generation who had done much of the work without the support or the fanfare.

But something happened in that decade. A convenient starting-point would be when Brummels Gallery first opened with Carol Jerrems' and Henry Talbot's 'Erotica' exhibition in 1972. A convenient finishing-point would be Joyce Evans' decision to close her Church Street Photographic Centre a decade later.

The years between saw what was probably the greatest out-pouring of photographic energy that had ever happened in Australia. A lot of people did a lot of work – most of it was mediocre and imitative. That was understandable. They were in the shadow of the dominant culture and so they got their photographic style where they bought their *Time* magazine and Kentucky Fried. But the imitation created debate – it fertilised ideas and a handful of those people did something exceptional.

The aim of most of them was to promote photography as an art form (and, it was hoped, promote themselves in the process). Rennie Ellis, that roaring boy and self-confessed dilettante of Melbourne photography, started Brummels Gallery in South Yarra in 1972. He said he did it by default because no one else had started a photographic gallery. It was the first in Australia.

'People were enthusiastic,' says Ellis. 'They all said what a good idea. No one asked if it would cost a lot of money, whether it was viable or not. They just didn't think of such things in those days. No one even asked how much the rent was.'

But there was a well-publicised renaissance happening at the time, even if it wasn't in photography. It was that of the Australian film industry. About the only thing the

two movements had in common was that they both happened around the same time. Unlike still photography, the film industry had enough status with the politicians to earn itself tax write-offs. The best that photography could manage was seven per cent of Visual Arts Board funding, if it was lucky. Film, with its obvious attractions for politicians, was a hard act to follow: it created large numbers of jobs and was able to satisfy everything from nationalist ardour to providing a backdrop for the tourist industry.

During this decade there was no great search for a regional identity in photography. It was nothing like the great music and art movement in France at the end of the last century, no Antipodean equivalent of the quest for 'Ars Gallica.'

It was more likely that the camera was the perfect instrument for the baby-boom bulge. In the beginning of the 1970s there was the spectacular but short-lived Whitlam Government, which had demonstrated quick solutions were possible. Just days after it was elected, kids were no longer being sent off to be killed in Vietnam and the leaden hand of censorship, a legacy from the Menzies era, was lifted with a stroke of the legislative pen. The camera fitted in with this; it promised a kind of instant artistic gratification – pick it up and make a great work. There seemed to be little need for the boring self-discipline involved in being a painter or sculptor, or the years of practice needed to be a musician. Whammo! – in a blinding flash, anybody could be creative.

Many came to photography in that frame of mind, and some prospered in a climate that even accepted the snapshot as high art. Sloppy technique seemed to go hand in hand with wholemeal bread and unrefined sugar. The hippies who made the switch from stitching leather belts thought it was more honest to make a feature of the scratches on negatives and grain the size of golf balls. Some of these people were even art school graduates.

Then along came something to spoil it: The Photographers Gallery. It arrived three years after Brummels, and what a contrast! With its pretentious little marble plaque next to the front door and its vestal white walls, it looked as if it were trying to be a temple to the pure in photographic art, and in a sense it was just that. It was spic 'n' span as an American ice-cream parlour, offering a stark alternative to the European-flavoured Brummels, with its tatty demi-monde atmosphere, like the upstairs of a beatnik café.

Its earliest days aside, The Photographers Gallery was run by a pair of young men with very particular tastes, Ian Lobb and Bill Heimerman. Love them or hate them (and it seems many photographers privately hated them), they influenced the course of Melbourne photography for the rest of the decade, and like a pair of blinkered bulldozers, they imported a style of photography that was to become extremely

influential in the city – the fine print.

But there was another stream: those people who wanted to change the world. And in the great tradition of the European avant-garde movements of the 1920s, they thought they could do it through art. There was a certain irony in this, because the new breed of concerned photographers tended to be much more conservative in their imagery than the dadaists or Surrealists, who tried to be shocking in both the medium and the message.

Jerrems was one of those idealists. 'I like things to be real and natural,' she said in a 1971 interview with *Men Vogue* magazine: 'I don't want to exploit people. I care about them. I'd like to help them, if I could, through my photographs.' Some years later, in *New Australian Photography*, she went further: 'My main interest in photographic art is in living and giving – learning and sharing. This society is sick and I must help to change it.'

So she followed the example of that other great urban realist, Diane Arbus, the influential American photographer who suicided in 1971. Jerrems had a similar approach to photography and, it seems, to life. She lived hard, by all accounts, and certainly died young in 1980, aged just 31. She would probably have been very disappointed with the rest of this decade.

At the height of the boom in 1978, the Australian photographic magazine *Light Vision* listed thirteen galleries in Melbourne and five more in country Victoria with photographic collections on display.

Sydney, at the time, could list just three; and that was the point, a sore point to many Melbourne photographers, because the Federal Government-bankrolled Australian Centre for Photography was in the harbour city. Still labelled the 'Sydney Centre' by many Melburnians, it has long been an irritation to southern photographers. The Sydney argument in those days was that the centre was needed in that city because Melbourne was so well served by private and semi-government galleries. They pointed out that the oldest public photography collection in Australia was the National Gallery of Victoria's. Its first curator, Jennie Boddington, was appointed in 1972.

It was true that Melbourne was well served by private galleries, but by the end of the decade, all of the private photography gallery directors were considerably poorer for their experience. Meanwhile, because of Boddington's enigmatic collections policy, the National Gallery had (by her own admission) almost entirely ignored the work of a generation that was producing right under her own nose. She gave substance to the adage that it is hard to be a hero in your home town. In an interview before she retired early last year, she made no secret of her disdain for contemporary Melbourne photography. Interviews with others involved indicate that the dislike was in most cases reciprocated. 'A lot of this work is junk,' she said, 'it will be of no more interest

in 100 years than to show what a self-centred generation we were, and that is not good enough. I have always disliked egocentric indulgent work and that wipes out half of them. I like pure photography, straight photography that is about something that has some content.'

She blamed what she saw as the problem on the teaching in art schools, particularly Prahran College. This was a little strange, because the first head of that school's photographic department, Athol Shmith, was one of the prime movers in establishing the National Gallery's Photographic Department and in creating the position of photographic curator.

'The effect of fashion in photographic education is destructive,' Boddington said: 'The poor little things are not educated enough – there is no sense of literature, no sense of anything else. They want to be famous photographers, but they just haven't got enough to bring to it and that is because they don't get enough in these institutions.' All this serves to illustrate the other feature of the decade in Melbourne photography: factionalism.

It might be argued that Melburnians have made factionalism their own speciality. Take politics and religion, for example. The great 1955 split in the Labour Party had its roots in Melbourne and it has maintained its most bitter factional divisions in the city ever since. The recent power struggle over ordaining women priests in the Anglican Church had its beginnings in Melbourne.

Photography in Melbourne was no different. Factions were rife: The Photographers Gallery versus Joyce Evans' Church Street Centre; the fine print faction versus the feminists and street photographers; the private Photography Studies College versus Prahran College of Advanced Education Photography Department, and almost everybody versus the National Gallery.

Even in the interviews for this essay, some of the key players of this era still couldn't resist digging up the hatchet. Heimerman, for example, with his sceptically faint praise of Brummels Gallery when he first saw it in 1972: 'Kooky little place. I liked the grease on the walls, thought this is neat ...'

Ellis was similarly complimentary to Heimerman: 'I have great admiration for him because he has stuck with it; he's brought some great exhibitions to Australia, but when he goes off on an esoteric rave, it's terribly elitist. Robert [Ashton, his assistant] and I would have no idea what he was saying – he would just be talking gobbledegook.'

And Joyce Evans, who with her ambitious Church Street Photographic Centre probably invested more money than anybody, felt the factionalism very keenly:

There was a report a year after we started which said there were as many schisms as there were photographers. Unfortunately that was true, and one of

the most unfortunate schisms was between The Photographers Gallery and Church Street. This preceded the opening of our gallery. They didn't follow the policy of 'the more, the better.' Every time we tried to do something, we'd find they'd try to get it too. It even got to the point where we'd tie up certain overseas exhibitions only to find they had gone and tied them up as well. The first of this came to light with Robert Besanko. We put on his first show and had arranged that he would be exhibiting with us; then he came and said he would be exhibiting with The Photographers Gallery. I was very hurt, probably because I was also naive.

Although The Photographers Gallery was started by two well-established photographers, John Williams and Paul Cox, it was taken over after just a handful of exhibitions by Lobb and Heimerman. In 1975 they moved into the photographic scene with all the front of a pair of carpet baggers and immediately went to work to establish a colony of the American West Coast style. Lobb, a local, had done some photographic workshops with big American names like Ansel Adams and Paul Caponigro, and Heimerman, an American, was by his own admission only learning when they took over the gallery.

Lots of noses were out of joint, but The Photographers Gallery didn't care. In Heimerman's own words: 'I wasn't trying to be a popular person. I wanted to be respected for the work I did, but there was a certain resentment by certain individuals in certain institutions. I think our biggest crime was that we didn't get permission. We did it on our own – no one had sanctioned us. We did it well and, what's more, on a fraction of their budget. We were embarrassing the government-sponsored galleries: in the mid-seventies we were having a thousand people a month coming through our doors.'

Even the detractors of The Photographers Gallery acknowledge that it was one of the key factors in the movement towards technical quality which was a distinguishing feature of Melbourne photography at that stage. Though a relative novice himself, Heimerman was disgusted by the lack of craftsmanship that existed in Australia at the time, and he believed this was perpetuated by the schools:

Until we came along, Australian photographers treated their prints like beer coasters. They might have talked about film development in terms of the amount of time it took to smoke a cigarette. We introduced the zone system and we taught it. We were doing it as much for ourselves as for anyone else. We couldn't find tuition, so the only way we could better our craft was by using books from overseas.

The year after The Photographers Gallery opened, Evans got her Church Street Photographic Centre under way. It was an ambitious full-scale commercial gallery and

bookshop, started by Evans after she had travelled overseas to find something to do with herself and discovered photography while she was there. It was a holiday romance she brought back home and, with some money that had been left her, she turned it into the Centre.

She was even newer to the photographic world than her rivals at The Photographers Gallery and in some respects she learned the hard way. But she was less locked into a style than her main rivals and from the beginning she seemed more enthusiastic to show Australian material, including the work of what has become known in retrospect as the Carlton feminist faction.

She made a feature of showing vintage exhibitions and had on her staff an expert in photographic restoration. Some of her shows were quite unorthodox. One, entitled 'The Book and the Image,' featured a series of famous photos she had for sale, juxtaposed with the same photos reproduced in books displayed on music stands next to them. The show was not a great commercial success and it did even less for the sale of books. The poor printing quality of most photographic publications was something she would choose not to highlight again, at least while she had the bookshop open.

While some of Heimerman's fondest memories of his early years involve mixing it with the immortals in American photography and convincing them to show and sell here, Evans did the reverse. She recalls how she tramped around the streets of London, Paris and New York with a folio of Australian work in tow on a little suitcase luggage-trolley. She sold quite a bit of the work and organised a number of touring exhibitions. In those days many in the art world derided her as a commercial exploiter. She recalls how Prahran students used to come into her gallery and grind muddy boots into the carpet. In the 1980s she would probably get an export award for helping the balance of payments.

At the time, some of the commercial painting galleries also showed photographic work, but it was usually the supporting feature, not the main show. The Ewing and George Paton Galleries at Melbourne University Student Union were an exception. They regularly put on photographic exhibitions as the main attraction, showing works that were often the antithesis of the fine-print phenomenon, and regularly gave space to photographers with a clearly-defined political bent.

Printed publications dealing with art photography began to appear. In 1977, *Light Vision*, that *haute couture* of Australian photographic magazines, first appeared in the shops. It was run by Jean-Marc Le Pechoux, Kalli Pulos and a varying cast of others. It was superbly printed in Melbourne, but this faith in local industry gave it a five-dollar cover price, extraordinarily high for its time, and although it only lasted two years, it succeeded in presenting Australian photographers in a new context. Local

photographers' work was seen side by side with big international names. But its quality automatically aligned it with the fine-print faction and other styles failed to get much of an airing.

WOPOP also appeared at about this time. It was a contrastingly low-cost publication, whose title was an acronym for Working Papers On Photography. It was produced by two former Prahran students, Euan McGillvray and Matthew Nickson, and what it lacked in print quality it made up for in the weighty high-brow material it published. It was the most overtly political photographic publication in Australia and in its first editorial it announced its conviction that: 'A critical history of photography should be concerned with the ideology of the image and its effect on society.'

While *WOPOP* encouraged writers from other disciplines to develop a photographic critique, the turgidity of its writing often lost it the very audience it was aiming at. It is a practice continued today in the Sydney magazine, *Photofile*.

Meanwhile, at what was generally regarded as the main photographic school, then known as Prahran College, some of the students had become restive. It began in 1976, well past the era of the mass student demonstrations at the universities. The working-class solidarity sympathies in those institutions fizzled out soon after there was no further threat that middle-class kids might be sent off to war.

Jennie Boddington, judging from her comments mentioned earlier, would have been surprised at the reason for the Prahran unrest. But she is unlikely to have known about it, since it was kept fairly quiet. The students were angry at the seeming lack of direction to the course and an almost total lack of any critical assessment of the nature of photography and its place in the world of art and communication. When this anger surfaced in 1976, it was mainly among the second and third year students. The author of this essay was in second year at the time. In retrospect, it seemed we were very avant-garde. It was about the same time that American writer Susan Sontag was churning out her milestone critical work, *On Photography*, which was to change for ever the direction of photographic criticism and cure insomnia at the same time.

The students felt the course was too imprecise and there was no understanding of the criteria used for assessment of their work (a common problem in art schools). They held a series of meetings, boycotted classes, printed manifestos criticising the course and even put on, in the guise of street theatre, a play lampooning the course for the benefit of in-coming First Years in 1977. It ended with a song to the tune of Elvis Presley's 'Jailhouse Rock,' called 'Basement Rock,' whose first verse (one of whose names is here omitted for legal reasons) was:

Murray's in the darkroom, doin' all the work,
[]'s on the phone with another lurk,
Athol's tryin' ta pacify the student strife,

And Cox's on the look-out for the meanin' of life,

Let's rock ...

Athol Shmith, one of Australia's most respected fashion photographers, who had been head of the department since 1972, took the students' complaints very personally, but he did attempt some changes. Peter Turner, former Assistant Editor of the respected British magazine *Creative Camera*, came out from London for six months as guest lecturer. And for the first time in an Australian photographic school, photographic history, taught by Norbert Loeffler, was offered as part of the course.

Towards the end of the decade, two other new photographic galleries opened their doors: Gallery 18, in 1981, and Visibility, the following year. Gallery 18, which operated from a shop in Albert Park, was run by four graduates from Photography Studies College. It showed such things as the travelling exhibition of NASA space photographs, but seemed to suffer from an inconsistent exhibitions policy and closed down in 1983. They got off on the wrong foot with Joyce Evans by ringing her up just as she was going out of business, asking for her guest-list and the names of people who would buy photographs. She said that if they had been a little more sensitive about it, she would have helped them.

Visibility, which ran from a disused shop owned by Robert Colvin in Carlton, was the only photographic gallery run as a collective. Its members were all former Prahran students and although they showed a lot of students' work, they did also attract names like Fiona Hall, John Gollings, Ruth Maddison and Christine Cornish. One of their specialities was work with a socio-political flavour. They showed a series on uranium mines, industrial women, photo-journalism from Afghanistan, and even 'The Pine Gap Show' by a group of women photographers. They closed in 1985.

The Photographers Gallery is the only one of the bunch still left, but since 1982 it has not been able to run a full schedule of exhibitions.

What killed it all off? Probably the bottom line had something to do with it. Joyce Evans closed her doors when the Fraser Government's razor gang slashed funding for art gallery acquisitions. Purchases from the institutions were what had allowed her to survive until then.

For Rennie Ellis, it happened two years earlier:

All Brummels ever did was cost me money, but I kept it going eight years with about ten exhibitions a year. I kept putting in money out of my own pocket, but I enjoyed doing it, because I thought it was worthwhile. I finally had to stop in 1980. By then, my enthusiasm was dying. I'd done my bit. Things have a beginning and an end. There were two other galleries. I was going broke and needed to put the money into my business.

Many of the photographers also ran out of steam. They got older, they got mortgages,

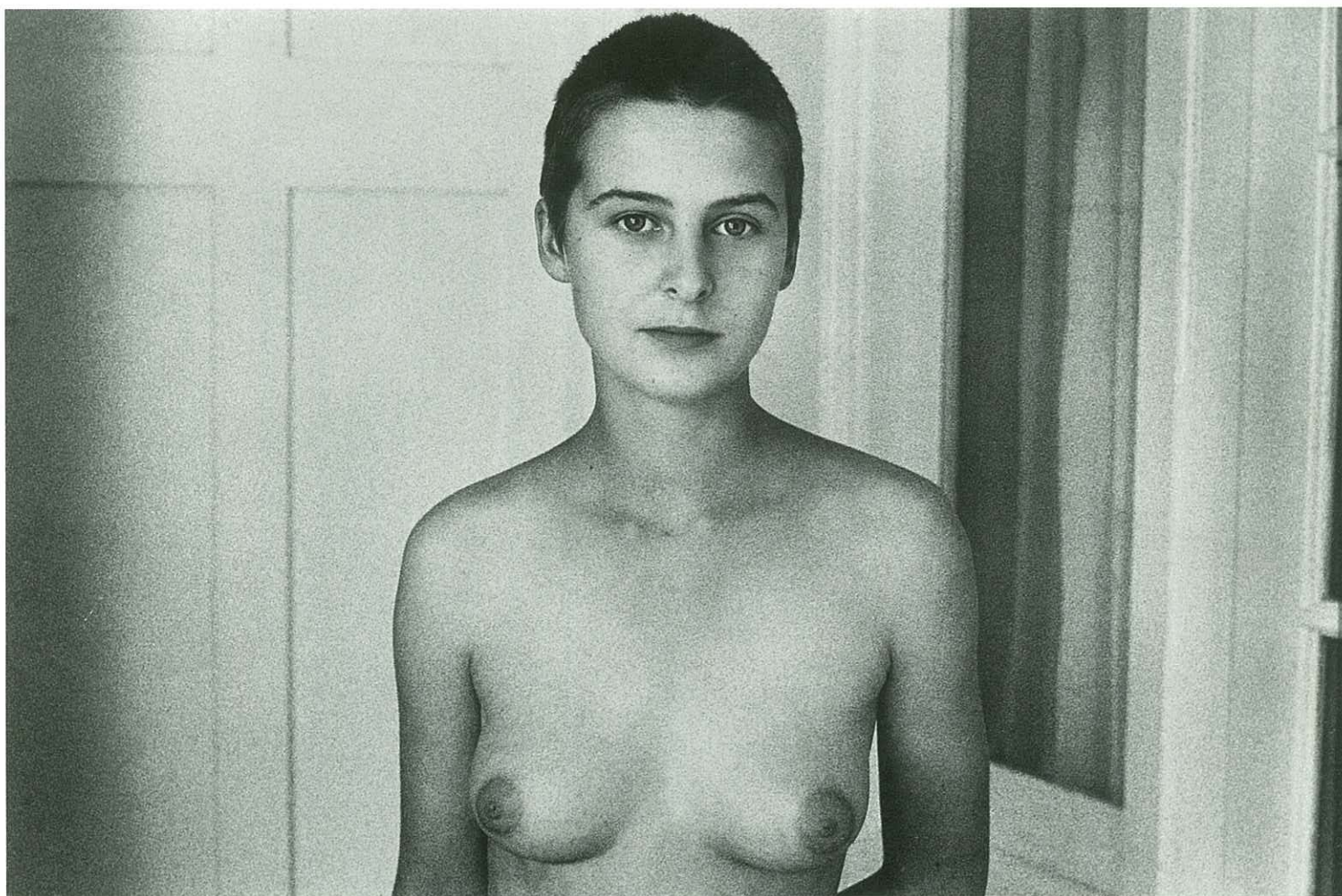
and the fantasy of living as an artist had been soured by the reality that art photos do not sell in anything like sufficient quantities to pay the Kodak and Ilford bills, let alone to make a living. Some went into teaching, others had to concentrate on their commercial photography to make it pay.

Another set-back for the 1970s photographers has been the 1980s. They have been eclipsed by an era that is less concerned with community and more concerned with self. Naturalism is dated and there is less interest in the external world, and far less interest in the kind of 'caring and sharing' sentiments expressed by Carol Jerrems. Photographs these days are much more likely to express a private than a social vision and fantasy imagery provides the escape hatch rather than the dream that somehow art can change the world.

In one way, Australia's photographic succession was hit by the recession, although for many 1970s photographers the bogey was postmodernism and they simply did not want to go along for the ride. But for the others, their malaise might be better called post-visualism – they simply dried up ■

Geoff Strong works as a journalist with *The Times on Sunday*.

The background for this essay comes from a series of interviews conducted by Joyce Agee, from research by Sigrid Warne, and from the personal recollections of the author, who was a photography student at Prahran College from 1975 to 1978 and photography critic for *The Age* newspaper from 1981 to 1983.



'Carolyn', 1976
Silver gelatin
20 x 30.4
Collection: Joyce Evans

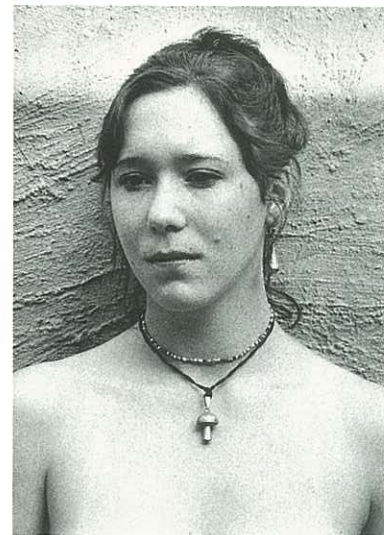
CAROL JERREMS



1962

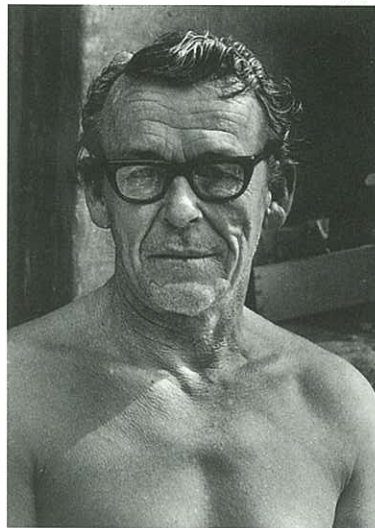


1974

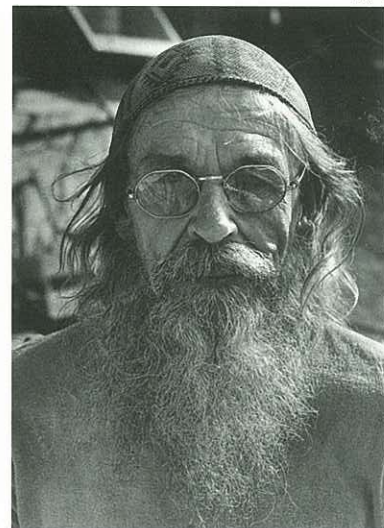


'Riley', from 'Time Series - II', 1962-74
Silver gelatin
11 x 8

1964



1974



'Jim', from 'Time Series - II', 1964-74
Silver gelatin
11 x 8

1961



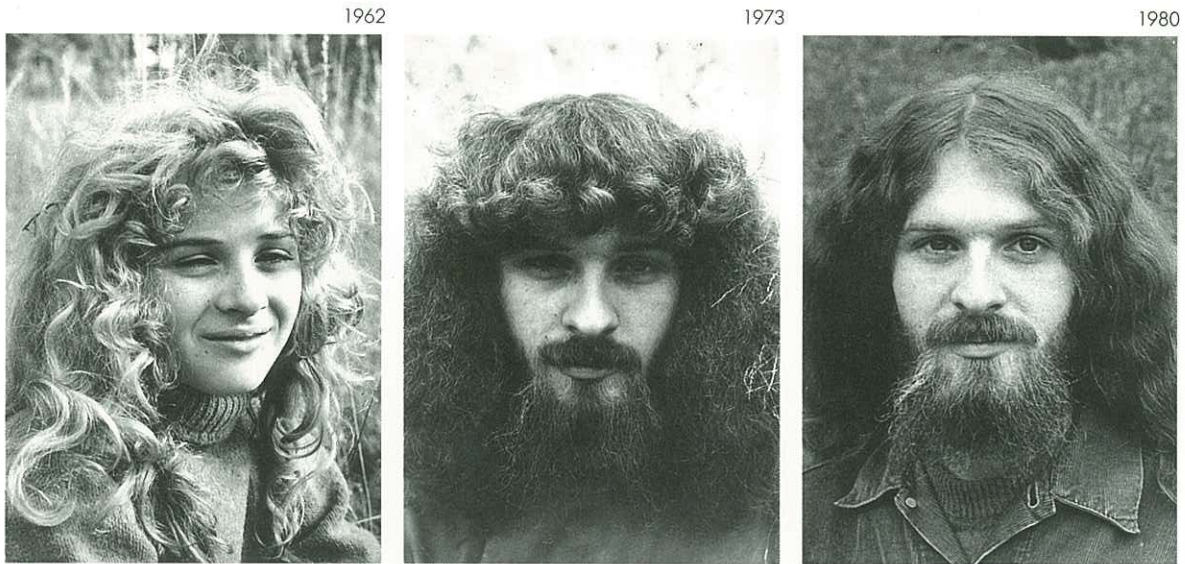
1973



1981



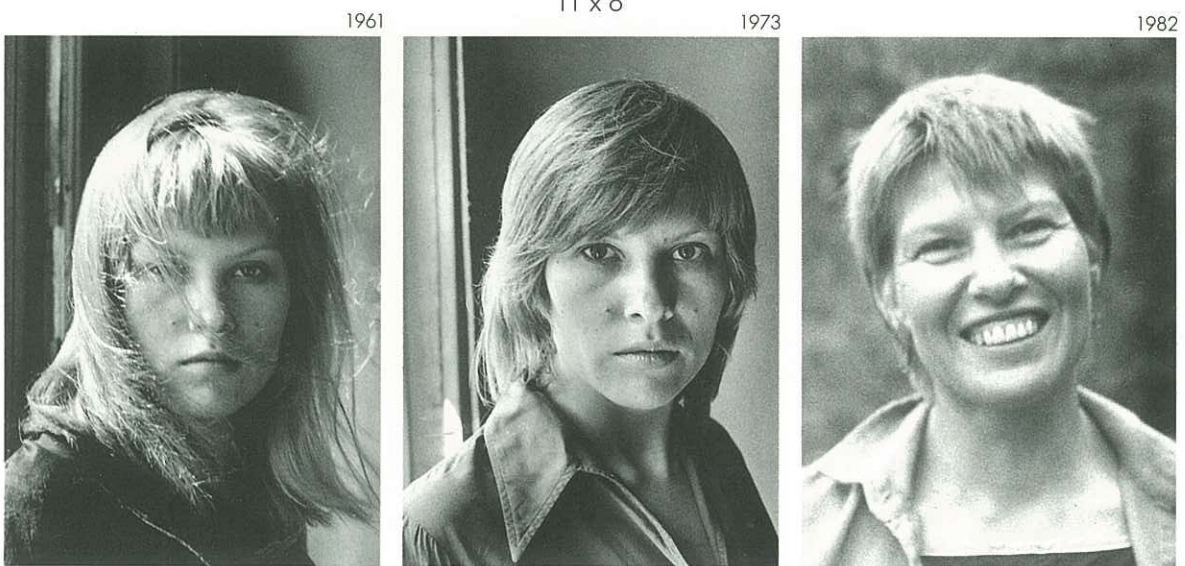
'Sue', from 'Time Series - III', 1961- 81
Silver gelatin
11 x 8



'Fabian', from 'Time Series - III', 1962-80
Silver gelatin
11 x 8



'Abigail', from 'Time Series - III', 1965-80
Silver gelatin
11 x 8



'Annette', from 'Time Series - III', 1961-82
Silver gelatin
11 x 8

SUE FORD

10

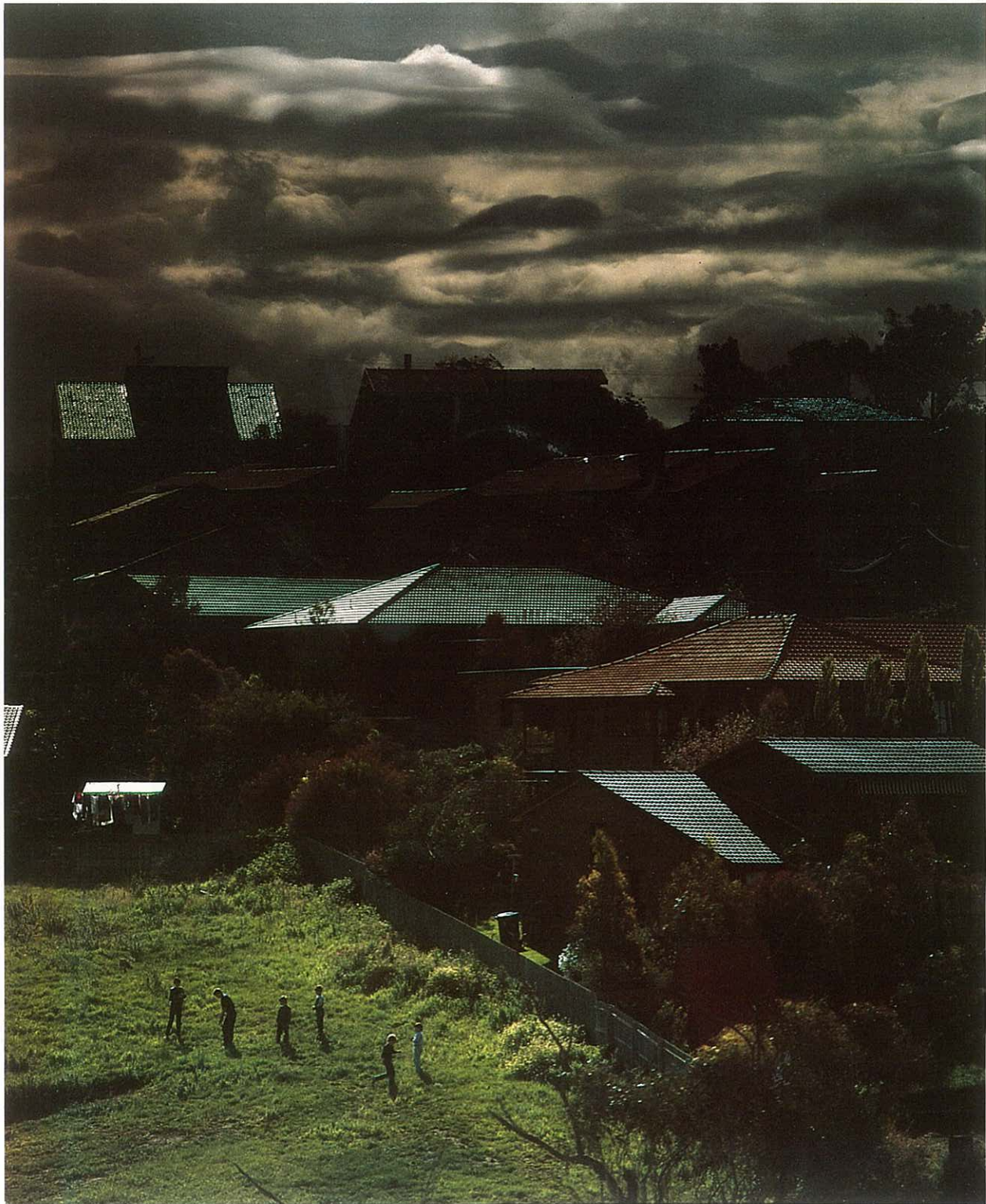


Image from Untitled 1985/86
Type 'C' colour print
106.5 x 60.5



'Portrait of Arthur Hibbert, Sculptor and Painter', 1986
Silver gelatin
38 x 38

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

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