



LEAH KING-SMITH

*Family
Myths*

*Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
19 August – 2 October 1994*

Family Myths

The use of the term 'myth' refers here to the idea of a traditional narrative that embodies beliefs associated with society or culture. It is not meant to imply an 'untrue story' as myth is sometimes understood. It is meant instead to suggest stories with a certain power, stories which are valued and continually re-asserted and retold within the family. Neither however, is the term 'myth' intended to imply an over ambitious attempt at absolute truth. Memories and family photos present us perhaps with as much truth as we can bear, or are happy to reveal.

'Family Myths' looks at how human nature is represented through stories within the family culture. Within the family conversation and the family routines, stories and photos help create the vocabulary by which the past is understood. They become part of the language that the family speaks, circumscribed by custom to certain usages, seen and heard on certain occasions. Comfortable or poignant, they map the family's progress, create the family history.

In this exhibition, Pearl and Tom have agreed to allow their stories and photos to be taken out of the family setting to which they are intimately attached. The re-contextualisation of these valuable items takes them away from their meaning within the original family conversation. They are shown in a different light, more or less as artefacts – seen from all sides as it were.

All families have their myths. The photo album is our most popular shrine. Tom King's vast collection of photographs date back to when he was eight with the gift of his first camera, a Box Brownie. His interest in photography led him to adapt camera lenses, to construct his first enlarger. With the exception of a few recent colour photos, the selection made for this installation comprises black and white photos taken and printed by Tom from 1935 to the 1960s. In this period he grew up, commenced his teaching career, met and married Pearl and raised six children with her.

Pearl's stories in this exhibition go back to her childhood in Dirranbandi. When she and Tom began courting, their relationship was a controversial affair within the society of the time, as it was indeed for both their families. Pearl speaks nowadays about the pioneering aspect of their marriage. In Queensland at that time it was simply not acceptable for blacks and whites to wed.

'Family Myths' has come about in response to an invitation for Leah to produce an exhibition dealing with her cultural identity. Leah has chosen to draw on the historical narratives of her parents, whose stories speak of the influences of two diverse cultures. Yet, there's something which is shared, that transcends the 'historical'. Conversations with Tom and Pearl often turn to their strong spiritual beliefs where they might speak of tools of divination, affirmations, or the divine in all things. To bring out this powerful influence, Leah and Duncan have drawn from the environment at Traveston in south-east Queensland where Tom and Pearl live to create images and sounds that speak of the natural world and its spirit essence.



Tom King and Pearl Rigby
Southport, Qld. 1947-48

Front: Tom and Pearl King
Holland Park, Brisbane, 1949
(detail)

Leah King-Smith

Born 1957 Gympie, Queensland

INDIVIDUAL EXHIBITIONS 1986 'Malvern Winter Festival', Malvern Town Hall, Melbourne 1992 'Patterns of Connection', The Victorian Centre for Photography, Melbourne; The Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney 1993 'Patterns of Connection', University of Montana, Missoula; Canadian Museum of Civilisation, Quebec; Southeast Museum of Photography, Florida; Webster University, St Louis; Embassy of Australia, Washington DC; Cologne Art Fair 1994 'Patterns of Connection', Julie Saul Gallery, New York; New Zealand International Festival of the Arts, Wellington; Palmer Museum of Art, Pennsylvania; Wolfson Gallery, Miami; Adelaide Festival Centre; Art Fair, Madrid; 'Time on Earth: Symbols of Becoming', Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne; 'White Apron—Black Hands', Brisbane City Hall Gallery, Brisbane **GROUP EXHIBITIONS** 1986 Group Show, Lighthouse Gallery, Melbourne 1987 St Kilda Arts Festival, Linden, Melbourne 1988-89 'The Thousand Mile Stare', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne and touring Victorian regional galleries 1991 'Women's Images of Women', Westpac Gallery, Melbourne 1992 'My Story, My Country: Aboriginal Art and the Land', The Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney; 'Southern Crossings', Camerawork Gallery, London and various UK venues; 'Salon Obscura', 24HR ART, N.T., Centre for Contemporary Art, Darwin 1993 'Can't See for Lookin'', National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; 'Aratjara', Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Dusseldorf; Hayward Gallery, London; Louisiana Museum, Humblebaek 1994 'Sweet Damper and Gossip', Monash University Gallery, Melbourne; 'Eidetic Experiences', Noosa Regional Gallery, Queensland; 'Faciality', Monash University Gallery, Melbourne **BIBLIOGRAPHY** 'The Thousand Mile Stare: A Photographic Exhibition', presented by the Victorian Centre for Photography, Melbourne, 1988; Leah King-Smith, 'Patterns of Connection', exhibition catalogue, Melbourne, 1992 'Southern Crossings/Empty Land', In the Australian Image, exhibition catalogue, Camerawork Gallery, London, 1992; Rebecca Lancashire, "Putting the Picture Right", 'The Age', 16 April 1992; Christopher Allen, "Leah King-Smith at the Australian Centre for Photography", 'Asian Art News' Vol.2, No.3 May/June 1992; Kate Darian-Smith, exhibition review, 'Public History Review' Vol.1 1992; Paul Fox, "Leah King-Smith Patterns of Connection", 'Agenda' No.24 July/Aug 1992; Wayne Tunnicliffe, "Patterns of Connection", 'Photofile' No. 36 Aug 1992; Leah King-Smith, "Crossing Time to Heal", interview, 'Asian Art News' Vol.2, No.6 Nov/Dec 1992; Leah King-Smith, "The 19th Century Photographs in Patterns of Connection", interview, 'Art Monthly Australia Supplement: Aboriginal Art in the Public Eye', 1992; 'Aratjara: Art of the First Australians', Bernhard Luthi and the Australia Council, 1993; Catherine De Lorenzo, "Delayed Exposure", 'Art and Australia' Vol.31 No.1 Spring 1993; Clare Williamson, "Patterns of Connection", 'Photofile' No. 41 March 1994; Simeon Kronenberg, "Presenting a Personal Archaeology", review, 'Photofile' No.42 June 1994 **COLLECTIONS** National Gallery of Victoria; National Gallery of Australia; Art Gallery of New South Wales; Western Australian Art Gallery; Queensland Art Gallery; State Library of Victoria; Waverley City Gallery; Horsham Art Gallery; Southeast Museum of Photography, Florida. Private collections.

Leah King-Smith is represented by Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi, Melbourne

Leah King-Smith: 'Family Myths' 19 August – 2 October 1994

Photography Leah King-Smith and Tom King **Stories** Pearl and Tom King **Exhibition Design** Leah King-Smith **Sound** Duncan King-Smith **Acknowledgement** Assistance with sound equipment generously provided by 21st Century Party Entertainment. **Catalogue** published by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, August 1994, ISBN 0 947220 38 0, Edition 300. © Copyright: The authors/Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. No material, whether written or photographic, may be reproduced without the permission of the artists, authors and the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. The opinions expressed in this catalogue are those of the authors and not necessarily those of the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Catalogue design by Ian Robertson. Printing by Econoprint, South Melbourne.

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