

Transfer

16 April – 15 May 2016

The Australian Centre for Photography presents a new exhibition *Transfer* that looks at the ambivalence of transitory processes, the experience of being in-between. Exploring diverse photographic forms, *Transfer* brings together seven contemporary artists around the themes of migration, nomadism and environmental changes. Implicitly conceived in response to the ACP's current state of transition, *Transfer* ultimately interrogates our abilities to adjust and locate ourselves within evolving contexts.

Curatorial Rationale

Transfer begins with an enigmatic triptych that seems to hover between times and places. Although they belong to different conversations, the three photographs contain a similar evocative and lyrical intensity. A great example of Modernist photography taken in 1950, *Tree Tracery* sees the renowned Australian female photographer Olive Cotton (1911–2003) focusing her lens on a relatively prosaic subject matter while conveying her love and fascination for the natural world. Highlighting the purity of the form through an unusual low viewpoint, it emphasises the beauty of nature and reveals its fragile and delicate structure, as if calligraphed. While travelling to the Mississippi River in Louisiana (USA), Deb Mansfield discovered the aftermath of 2005's Hurricane Katrina, which she captured in *The Jumbled House*, 2008. With its warm tones and deserted street, the palladium print evokes a disturbing quietness following the traumatic event. The tension between the contemporary resonance of the catastrophe and the visual qualities of the historical photographic process reinforces the idea of nature considered as a threatening force. More ambiguous, Katrin Koenning's image seems to surface from an otherworldly vision that alludes to the uncertainty of future relations between humans and their environment.

Together, the three photographs generate a friction in which chronological and spatial referents dissolve to underline our conflicting links to the natural world and undefined position within it. They reveal one of the narratives underpinning this exhibition: how do we relate to and situate ourselves within constantly changing environments?

Whilst 'transfer' alludes to the action of moving, *Transfer* posits the near impossibility of a linear progression, instead suggesting that human beings constantly navigate liminal spaces. As humans, we traverse transitional experiences that continuously reshape one another, thereby producing new frameworks with which to understand and experience reality. Envisaging the uncertain states that emanate from changing situations, *Transfer* makes space for the indefinite and the invisible, focusing on the ambivalence of transitory processes and the complexities of existing in between. Considering themes such as migration, nomadism and environmental changes, this exhibition questions concepts of home and belonging in relation to our idea of place, ultimately interrogating our abilities to adjust to evolving contexts.

Named after the Australian Aboriginal activist, actor, and author *Burnum Burnum* (1936–1997) – best remembered for planting the Aboriginal flag on the white cliffs of Dover on the Australian Bicentenary Day of 26 January 1988 – Sydney-based artist Leila Jeffreys' vibrant portrait of a wild gold and green budgerigar welcomes visitors into the gallery space. Budgerigars are a highly migratory species known to move significant distances in response to climatic conditions. It is believed that their name derived from the Indigenous Australian word 'betcherrygah' meaning 'good food' and that, by following the birds, Aboriginal people were able to locate water and food plants. Over the last century, budgerigars have become one of the best loved Australian family pets. Placed alongside the large portrait of the wild bird, three small domesticated 'budgies' remind us of our conflicted relationship with wildlife and how disconnected humans have become from other animal species.

Concerned with the impact humans have made on the climate and environment, Melbourne-based artist Katrin Koenning reflects on nature in states of disappearance, adaptation and transition in her new series, *The Crossing*. Like confined particles, Koenning's images seem to whisper the stories of a wounded Australian ecology existing within a political context that favours short-term

economic growth. More broadly, Katrin's work speaks of the Anthropocene, the current geologic time period in which Earth's ecosystems have significantly been altered by human activity. Delicate and intense, these images expose traces left on the earth by mining, cattle industries, irrigation and waste systems. In this way they are gestures of urgency and supplication. Inspired by *The Bureau of Linguistical Reality*, a public participatory artwork by Heidi Quante and Alicia Escott that focused on creating new language to better understand our rapidly changing world, Katrin Koenning humbly defines new ecological imaginaries through suggestive visual imagery and resonant titles. Whether the artist crafts her own words, or borrows those of French philosopher Michel Serres, or film director Jean-Luc Godard, each work's title inspires a myriad of interpretations, culturally and emotionally referencing our paradoxical and constantly evolving relationship to the environment. Underlining the ambiguity of places where traces of human life are both present and absent, that are neither wild nor domesticated, *The Crossing* speaks about our uncertain position and our essential responsibility towards the environment to which we fundamentally and necessarily belong.

Dutch documentary photographer and filmmaker Jeroen Toirkens has been following the lives of various nomadic tribes in Central Asia, Russia, Mongolia and the Arctic region since 1999. Resting upon the fundamental idea of adjusting to the environment, the trust in the ability of the natural world to provide and an ethos of sharing with others, the nomadic lifestyle is, in many ways, the archetype of sustainability. More than a poignant portrait of nomadism in the 21st Century, Toirkens' images reveal how globalisation, poverty and climate change have impacted this traditional way of life. With the development of modern agriculture, industrialisation, and national borders, the incredibly diverse cultural heritage embedded within nomadic communities – whether they be hunter-gatherers, pastoral nomads, or peripatetic nomads – is now increasingly threatened, if not predestined, to disappear. In being forced to adjust to external circumstances, not only a lifestyle, but also a way of perceiving, interacting and understanding the external world, is at stake.

Sunk Without A Sound continues Kurt Sorensen's investigations into the unsolved dramas of nations where the landscape is central to the national consciousness. Realised while in residence on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Arizona in 2014, this series references the story of Glen and Bessie Hyde, who attempted to travel the rapids of the Colorado River in 1928. Their journey was as extraordinary as it was perilous – the newlyweds disappeared, never to be found, leaving behind only their boat and Bessie's collection of poems. With his medium format Hasselblad from the 1950s, Sorensen has developed a photographic language that links history and the now through the emotional exploration of unquiet landscapes. Over the years, the ongoing resonance of the Hydes' story – enveloped in fascination, hope and fear, in the region and beyond –has subliminally defined a limbo-like dimension in which the protagonists would now be floating. Not only revealing the precarious relationship that prevailed between early European settlers and the harsh landscapes they found themselves in, Kurt Sorensen's eerie images invent a space that drifts between times and wanders about somewhere between the real and the fictional.

Deb Mansfield's practice examines peripheral spaces as a way of investigating the nature of boundaries and borders. In choosing spaces that are neither here nor there, and by conflating truth and fiction, she draws attention to the precarious nature of in-betweenness. Mansfield's two photographic tapestries were produced in 2009 from images that the artist took in 'littoral zones' – where water meets land – near Launceston, Tasmania and Newcastle, New South Wales. Drawing attention to the ambiguous identities of these areas, where rich but often undiscovered ecosystems and myths developed, the artist's photographic tapestries conceal the boundaries between mediums. Existing between photography, textile art and sculpture, Mansfield's installation gives materiality and texture to the idea and the experience of in-betweenness.

Rachael Ireland's series *Passing By* and *Making Place* find their starting point in a residency at Haefligers Cottage in Hill End, New South Wales, where the artist spent time in one of the small tourist town's historic cottages. Investigating shifting and multiple perspectives of place, these two series specifically focus on disrupting thresholds and cancelling constructed distinctions between home and non-home, real and unreal. Through the use of spatial interventions, as well as darkroom and digital processes, the artist dissolves the photograph's specifics of time and perspective and proposes an expanded reality that questions how we locate ourselves between the internal and external.

Stacy Mehrfar's video work *The Moon Belongs to Everyone* depicts the contemporary experience of migration, of shifting continents and mindsets, hybridisation and dislocation. A kaleidoscope of seemingly diverse individuals viewed in isolation against a common, indeterminate landscape, the artwork stands as a metaphor for an increasingly ubiquitous, non-specific and ever-changing, global

identity. Mehrfar's subjects hail from different parts of the world – they don't know one another, nor do they share the same heritage – yet, they each find themselves caught in a similar liminal space, hovering somewhere between 'here' and 'there.' *The Moon Belongs to Everyone* acts as an allegory of a new global identity positioned in the in-between: an identity suspended between origin and destination, located in the crosshairs between the dissonant and the lyrical. Altogether, *The Moon Belongs to Everyone* suggests that identities, histories, and memories, are continuously in flux.

Claire Monneraye
Curator

Featured artists and works

Olive Cotton

Tree Tracery 1950, *Dead Sunflowers* 1984
silver gelatin prints

Recognised as a pioneer of modernist photography in Australia, Olive Cotton (1911–2003) found inspiration in the beauty of natural forms and the camera's ability to record light. A defining feature of Cotton's landscapes and still life photographs is her astute observation and use of contrast and shadow, which occasionally rendered her subject matter abstract and revealed the purity of the forms. Her images frequently utilised surprising macro and low camera angles to focus on the intricate and imperceptible details of a flower or the slender silhouette of a towering plant against the sky.

Cotton enjoyed a lifetime of photography, having been given her first camera at age 11 and continuing to practise her craft for the next six decades. In 1985, the Australian Centre for Photography held Cotton's first solo exhibition, *Olive Cotton – photographs 1924-1984*. The annual Olive Cotton Award is dedicated in memory of her role as one of Australia's leading 20th century photographers.

Leila Jeffreys

Burnum Burnum 2016, *Portrait of a Budgerigar Jimmy* 2008, *Portrait of a Budgerigar Spencer* 2008, *Portrait of a Budgerigar Suzie* 2008
inkjet pigment prints

Working closely with animal rescue and environmentalist groups, Leila Jeffreys has been documenting birds by way of photographic portraiture since 2008. Just as in human portraiture, Jeffreys' carefully composed pictures convey the unique physical characteristics and individual personalities of each of her subjects, while inspiring a deeper concern for the conservation of these birds.

Raised in Perth, Leila Jeffreys spent much of her childhood travelling, most especially in India where she grew up surrounded by wildlife. Last year, her book *Birdland* (Hachette, 2015) was highly commended in the Australian Photobook of the Year Awards. Jeffreys' work has been exhibited widely throughout Australia, the United States, Hong Kong and the United Kingdom. She is represented by Olsen Irwin Gallery, Sydney.

Katrin Koenning

The Crossing (selection) 2009-2016
inkjet pigment prints

Suggestive and lyrical, the work of Melbourne based photographer Katrin Koenning is concerned with our physical and emotional connection to place, and our relationship to the environment.

In 2014, Koenning received the Bowness Photography Prize, People's Choice Award and was a finalist last year in the Josephine Ulrick & Win Schubert Photography Award. She has published and exhibited widely in Australia, Europe and the United States, and has won many other international awards and prizes. Koenning was recently featured as one of Alec Soth's favourite 5 Instagrammers in *TIME Magazine*. Her work is held in numerous public and private collections across Australia and Europe, and she is a former editor of *Australian PhotoJournalist Magazine*.

Kurt Sorensen

Sunk Without A Sound (selection) 2016
c-type prints from large format film

Divulging the unsolved dramas of nations where the landscape is central to the national consciousness, Sorensen's eerie images, captured with an old large format camera, reveal the precarious relationship that prevailed between the early European settlers and the harsh Australian and American landscapes.

Currently based in the Blue Mountains, Kurt Sorensen has won the Iris Award, Judges Prize (2011) and has been a finalist in numerous other photography prizes such as the Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award, the Josephine Ulrick & Win Schubert Photography Prize and the Festival of Fisher's Ghost Art Award. His work has been widely shown in Australia including at Bathurst Regional Gallery, Perth Centre for Photography, Queensland Centre for Photography and Hazelhurst Regional Gallery.

Deb Mansfield

The Jumbled House 2008
palladium print (artist proof)

The long drop down 2009, *The long tangle up* 2009
photo-tapestries

Deb Mansfield looks to peripheral sites – islands, travel, care – as a way of investigating the nature of boundaries and borders. In choosing spaces that are neither here nor there, and by conflating truth and fiction, her practice echoes the type of exploratory travel that first inspired it. She makes use of these stop-overs, moments of respite in her navigation across a contemporary cultural landscape.

Since 2000, Mansfield has participated in over 35 group exhibitions and has had 19 solo exhibitions. She has completed several artist residencies both locally and overseas and has received a number of awards and public art commissions including Australia Council of the Arts grants, COFA Travel Grant, APA Research Scholarship and the Siganto Travel Scholarship.

Rachael Ireland

Making Place (selection) 2015
pigment prints

Passing By (selection) 2014-15
silver gelatin prints

For Rachael Ireland, the act of photography functions as a tool to investigate shifting and multiple perspectives of home and place. Guided by inquiry into personal and social histories, cultural perspectives, and place-making industries, her photographic art practice reflects on how these intersect to create constructions of place, and inform our experiences of home and non-home.

Since graduating in 2011, Ireland has exhibited regularly, participated in local and international artist residencies, and has work held in private and public collections. She has been a finalist in the Muswellbrook Photographic Award; created an interactive photographic installation for the Art Factory Project Space at Maitland Regional Art Gallery.

Jeroen Toirkens

NomadsLife (selection) 2000-2007
inkjet pigment prints

Dutch photographer Jeroen Toirkens focuses on social documentary photography and slow-journalism, frequently capturing radical societal and ecological changes.

Based in The Hague, Toirkens has worked internationally as an independent photographer and filmmaker since 1995. In 2012, he was awarded the Dutch CANON prize for his book *Nomad* (Lannoo, 2011), a diverse and often poignant picture of nomadism in the 21st century. Toirkens has published extensively in national and international newspapers and magazines. His work has been exhibited in the Netherlands, Russia, Italy, Germany and the United States.

Stacy Mehrfar

The Moon Belongs to Everyone 2015
8 Channel HD Video, iMac Screens, Loop, 16:9, Colour Stereo Sound. Approx. 7 mins 30

American-Iranian photographer Stacy Arezou Mehrfar predominately works on long-term projects that investigate cultural identity and migration. Her photomedia works explore distinctions of the self and the human habitation of environments, be they geographically specific or indeterminate virtual spaces.

Stacy Mehrfar holds an MFA (Research) from UNSW A&D, a BA from the University of Wisconsin, Madison, and a certificate from the International Center of Photography, New York. She has been exhibited in the United States, Australia, Poland and Germany.

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