

# Under the sun

Reimagining Max Dupain's **Sunbaker**

Peta **Clancy**  
Christopher **Day**  
Destiny **Deacon**  
Michaela **Gleave**  
Nasim **Nasr**  
Sara **Oscar**  
Julie **Rrap**  
Khaled **Sabsabi**  
Yhonnie **Scarce**  
Angela **Tiatia**  
Christian **Thompson**  
Kawita **Vatanajyankur**  
Daniel **von Sturmer**  
Justene **Williams**  
William **Yang**



Under the sun:

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FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

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@ Australian Centre for Photography

#### Message from the Minister

What better way to celebrate Australian contemporary photography than to attend *Under the sun: Reimagining Max Dupain's Sunbaker*, an innovative and thought-provoking exhibition in which 15 leading artists respond to Max Dupain's iconic image, *Sunbaker*.

In *Under the sun*, each newly-commissioned work represents a unique interpretation of the 1937 photograph and incorporates a wide range of techniques, showcasing the talent and diversity of the participating artists.

The Australian Government is proud to support *Under the sun* through the *Catalyst – Australian Arts and Culture Fund*, which encourages arts organisations to innovate, collaborate and attract private sector support.

I congratulate the Australian Centre for Photography on this inventive new exhibition, which allows audiences to explore Australian culture from a range of perspectives, and challenges us to think more deeply about our national identity. I also acknowledge the outstanding work of curator Claire Monneraye and all artists involved.

Following its Sydney presentation, *Under the sun* will be touring across the country, and I encourage people of all ages who have the opportunity to visit.

**Senator The Hon Mitch Fifield** Minister for the Arts

Under the sun:  
Reimagining Max Dupain's *Sunbaker*  
Curatorial Notes

'That bloody *Sunbaker*, there it is again'<sup>1</sup>

Again.

Few images in the history of Australian photography have marked people's consciousness as profoundly as the *Sunbaker*. And yet this photograph was never intended to occupy such a prominent place in Australian culture.

Revered Australian photographer Max Dupain (1911–1992) took the photograph of *Sunbaker* around 1937 while on holidays at Culburra Beach, NSW, where he camped regularly with friends. The already successful photographer had completed his apprenticeship with Cecil Bostock and opened his own studio, quickly establishing a reputation in Sydney photographic circles with his bold, innovative style. A simple holiday snapshot, the *Sunbaker* depicts British builder and close friend Harold Salvage lying on the burning sand after a swim. A familiar scene in Australia, this ordinary subject matter is enhanced by its low-angle viewpoint, which abstracts the landscape and monumentalises the sculptural figure, creating an ideal canvas to spark imagination, admiration and identification.

In 1948 the *Sunbaker* first appeared in print, in a monograph dedicated to the photographer by respected publisher and art patron Sydney Ure Smith.<sup>2</sup> However, this was one of two similar photographs taken and not the version that has now traversed history. With different framing and viewpoint, the image seemed more anecdotal and incidental. Preferred by Dupain, the sole original print of the *Sunbaker*, with clasped hands as opposed to the more familiar pose, exists in the Vandyke album.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise known as the 'camping album', this extraordinary historical record gathers 108 prints from Dupain's trips, providing context for the making of the *Sunbaker*.

### *Sunbaker* resurfaces

Twenty-seven years later the *Sunbaker* resurfaced. In 1975, the Australian Centre for Photography presented Max Dupain's first retrospective exhibition. By that stage the negative of the version printed in the Vandyke album had been lost and the newly established institution chose to reproduce the now famous version of the *Sunbaker*. This previously overlooked version was not only included in the exhibition but also became the key image for the promotional poster, entering the public arena and the Australian consciousness.

Subsequent exhibitions featuring the *Sunbaker*, including the 1980 retrospective curated by Gael Newton at the Art Gallery of NSW,<sup>4</sup> positioned Dupain as a leading Australian modernist photographer. These exhibitions highlighted the modernity of his works, which were influenced by his adaption of international avant-garde styles favouring form over content and creative experimentation that abandoned pictorial conventions.

In the 1970s, when photography was struggling to be recognised as an art form, the will to anchor the modernity of the medium was strong, as it would secure public support and funding. In this context, *Sunbaker*, alongside a careful selection of Dupain's works from the 1930s to 40s, became an emblem for Australian modernism. And, as argued by Geoffrey Batchen, it 'provided a ready-made genealogy on which an argument for Australian art photography could be built'.<sup>5</sup>

### A national self

At a time when Australia was facing a 'crisis of national meaning,'<sup>6</sup> photography was crucial in shaping notions of a national self. In the mid 1960s the demise of the British patriot dream pressed Australia to rethink its own sense of national community and embrace its multicultural identity to reshape community and social cohesion. In the 1970s when Gough Whitlam's new nationalism emerged with strong values of 'self-confidence, maturity, originality and independence of mind', the *Sunbaker* began to progressively reflect a new kind of Australian nationalism.

Does the *Sunbaker* represent this 'distinctive Australian culture', embodying a free, optimistic, independent and inclusive 'Australianess'? This concept is as true as it is misleading, revealing the paradoxical expectations raised when we use images to envision ourselves. It also highlights the role photography plays in mythologising national identity.

If the *Sunbaker* embodied a certain vision of Australia, between the 1960s and the 80s photographers such as Mervyn Bishop, Rennie Ellis, Sue Ford, Carol Jerrems, and Michael Riley focused on other issues. They represented Australia's migrant origins, subcultures, feminism and the survival of Indigenous culture, critiquing the clichés and providing alternative visuals for a national identity.<sup>7</sup>



Max Dupain, *Sunbaker*, 1937

### Layered with meaning

In the late 1990s to early 2000, cultural studies pointed out that the *Sunbaker* was layered with meaning. Made during the interwar years, notably after the Great Depression, the image carries with it the 'mythic qualities of the beach' – a 'site of physical vitality', a democratic and free playground. Also, as Isobel Crombie has argued, it was the quintessential representation of a 'white Australia', largely influenced by the philosophy of vitalism and the prevailing pseudo-science of eugenics.<sup>8</sup>

In spite of this – as generously traced by Martyn Jolly in his essay – the *Sunbaker* has continued to resurface in exhibitions, publications and advertising. It has been reinterpreted and re-enacted by countless artists and amateur photographers, and, as a viral image, it occupies multiple social media platforms.

This holiday snapshot was clearly not the simple affair that Max Dupain would have preferred.<sup>9</sup> A milestone in the history of Australian photography, the *Sunbaker* has been elevated to the rank of cultural and national icon, with all the controversies such an association embodies. The *Sunbaker* has never stopped producing meaning far beyond its original intention.

Importantly, the meaning of an image can never be dissociated from the ideas, beliefs and political agendas of its time. Geoffrey Batchen has argued that photographs 'exist only as a state of continual fabrication, constantly being made and remade within the twists and turns of their own unruly passage through time and space'.<sup>10</sup>

With this framework in mind, *Under the sun: Reimagining Max Dupain's Sunbaker* questions what this image signifies today, reminding us that ways of depicting cultural identities are, and should always be, multiple. More than mere illustration or mirror, the photograph inhabits a complex place where identity can be interpreted and challenged – always a construction and never simplified to a single reading.



William Yang, *Splashproof* #2, 1994/2017

### The exhibition

Almost 80 years after its making, and more than 40 years after entering the public sphere, the Australian Centre for Photography has commissioned 15 artists to create new work in response to the *Sunbaker*. Examining the legacy of its past and questioning its future relevance, *Under the sun* relocates the image in contemporary Australia. Drawing on artists who reflect Australia's multicultural and multi-ethnic nature, the exhibition promotes intergenerational voices. It also gives a distinctive voice to female artists, redressing the historical imbalance of women's stories as part of written art history and how we define collective cultural identity.

Far from merely restaging the *Sunbaker*, the 15 artists have used unexpected perspectives to confront some of the most explosive issues of our time. *Under the sun* reflects deeply on Australia's colonial history and its ongoing impact, body and gender politics and environmental issues. The artists variously challenge the stillness and quietness of the image, question the hidden gaze of the figure, consider masculinity, explore the vagueness of the background, and interrogate the symbolism of the beach as a frontier or a place for encounters. Viewed together, these works raise a constellation of possibilities while pointing out the dangers of visual simplification.

### An expanded field

The exhibition translates the intricate cultural history of the image as well as providing a space to discuss identity and its photographic representation. With the medium of photography as a starting point, *Under the sun* expands the field in which artists employ photography: through videoworks, performance and installation based works. The artists employ formal strategies to convey the incredible fluidity of the photographic medium. Through their works they play with the poetics of colour, black and white, layering and collaging, explore the relationship between soft and sharp, exploit macro and micro perspectives and fuse the potential of analogue and digital.

With works informed by memory and personal stories, driven by political and social concerns, one might see the symbolic gestures and loaded signs of reinterpretation, assimilation, inversion, alteration, contradiction, tension, abstraction, appropriation, combination and amalgamation. Challenging the idea of a definite order of things, the exhibition acknowledges the continuous flux of change in which societies and individuals endlessly redefine themselves.

Ultimately, *Under the sun* questions the devotion to and the construction process of an icon. It asks us to consider the ambivalence within one image and to welcome other perspectives. In a global framework of intertwined cultural influences, the exhibition interrogates the ingrained belief that:

'what has been will be again,  
what has been done will be done again;  
there is nothing new under the sun.'  
Ecclesiastes 1:9

### Claire Monneraye

Curator  
Australian Centre for Photography



- 1 Interview of Max Dupain by Helen Ennis, *Max Dupain: Photographs*, Australian National Gallery, Canberra, 1991, p.18
- 2 Max Dupain. *Photographs*, Introd. by Hal Missingham, Ure Smith, Sydney, 1948
- 3 *Album, Camping trips on Culburra Beach, NSW, 1937*, Max Dupain and Olive Cotton. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Anthony C Vandyke and John A Vandyke, May 2012. Collection of Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales
- 4 *Max Dupain photographs, 1928–1980*, Ed. and with biographical essay by Gael Newton, David Ell Press, Sydney, 1980
- 5 *Each wild idea: writing, photography, history*, Geoffrey Batchen, Cambridge, Mass; London: MIT Press, 2001, p. 100
- 6 *A crisis of national meaning: Prime ministers and the dilemma of Australian nationalism*, Public Lecture by Dr James Curran, 2004 JCPML Visiting Scholar on 19 April 2004, Curtin University of Technology
- 7 A crucial reference in this context, the 2015 exhibition *The Photograph and Australia* curated by Judy Annear at the Art Gallery of New South Wales explores how Australia has been represented and imagined through photography. Weaving together the multiple threads of Australia's photographic history, the exhibition proposes a new way of thinking about the connections between photography, place and identity. It is accompanied by an extensive publication *The Photograph and Australia*, Judy Annear, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2015
- 8 *Body culture: Max Dupain, photography and Australian culture, 1919–1939*, Isobel Crombie, Images Publishing Group in association with National Gallery of Victoria, 2004
- 9 Interview of Max Dupain with Helen Ennis, loc. cit., p.19
- 10 Batchen, loc. cit., p.106

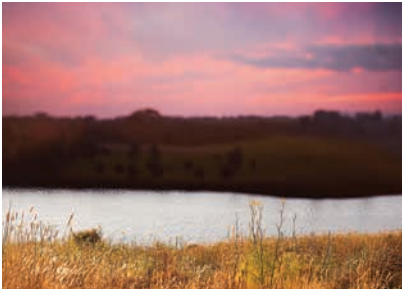


Sara Oscar, *Pleasant Island (The Pacific Solution)*, 2017

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William **Yang**





## Peta **Clancy**

Born in Melbourne, VIC, 1970.  
Lives and works in Melbourne, VIC

### *Fissures in time #3 #1 #2 #4, 2017* (from left to right)

Inkjet pigment prints

Over an extended period of time, Peta Clancy repeatedly visited and photographed with her large format camera several locations in Victoria, drawing on memories of landscapes that she wandered through as a child. Informed by her research into the Massacre Map published by the Koorie Heritage Trust, which identifies sites where settler massacres occurred between 1836 and 1853, the artist has produced placeless images that question our relationship to landscapes of trauma and interrogates our perception of reality.

Clancy's allegorical photographic process of scarring and creating anew involves a complex succession of engagements with the photograph and its subject matter. After photographing a site, she returns to install a large print on a custom-designed frame in front of the exact same landscape; slicing through the paper, Clancy then reveals sections of the scene behind before re-photographing it.

A composite of different layers of reality and time, the resulting images explore the thin frontiers between the real and the perceived, challenging the viewer to focus on what might never have been noticed.

Courtesy the artist.

## Christopher Day

Born in Melbourne, VIC, 1978.  
Lives and works in Melbourne, VIC

### *untitled, 2017*

Pigment print



Never fully divulging itself, Day's surreal photo-montage emerges from a slow and deeply considered sedimentation process. After processing, developing and scanning the photographs taken on his 35 mm camera, the artist assembles, crops, combines and rearranges the images, again and again. Blending together personal and historical narratives, Christopher Day's complex imagery is ambiguous and seemingly absurd.

An open field of humorous references and allegorical meanings, *untitled* suggests a romantic correlation between the act of eating and the definition of one's identity. A shiny round apple baring visible teeth marks eludes to the fable of *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs* – each character embodying a specific set of clichés including Snow White herself, whose beauty and feminine charm become her undoing. The artist also makes reference to *The Breakfast Club* (1985), in which five teenagers navigate issues associated with forming identity. Day's work, formally and conceptually, challenges the stereotypical and simplistic definition of identity and gender.

Courtesy the artist.

## Destiny Deacon

Born in Maryborough, QLD, 1957.  
Lives and works in Melbourne, VIC  
KuKu (Cape York) and Erub/Mer  
(Torres Strait) Peoples

*Sand minding, 2017*  
*Sand grabs, 2017*

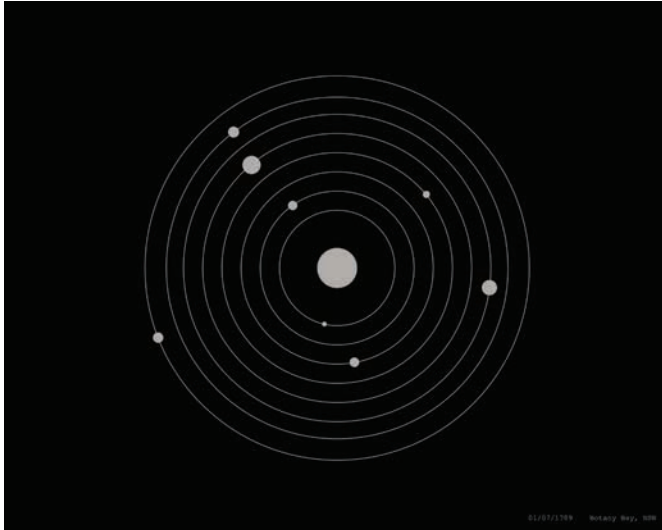
Archival inkjet pigment prints

Throughout her career, Destiny Deacon has orchestrated a personal and political theatre of kitsch and poignant 'Aboriginalia' in which she exposes and deconstructs Indigenous issues. Incredibly acerbic and thoroughly cunning, Deacon's anti-art aesthetics confronts the viewer with the cruelty of racism and the sombre reality of Australia's colonial history.

Acknowledging the sand as centrally important to Dupain's photograph, Destiny Deacon denounces the extreme violence of the sand mining industry on the ecosystem, the land and its peoples. Whilst hands are performing a destructive soil surgery, two uncanny dolls emerge from the sand and rest upon it as if trying to protect where they come from. Both whistleblowers and guardian of the land, they invite us to consider a highly topical issue and its evident consequences.

Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery, Sydney.





## Michaela **Gleave**

Born Alice Springs, NT, 1980.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

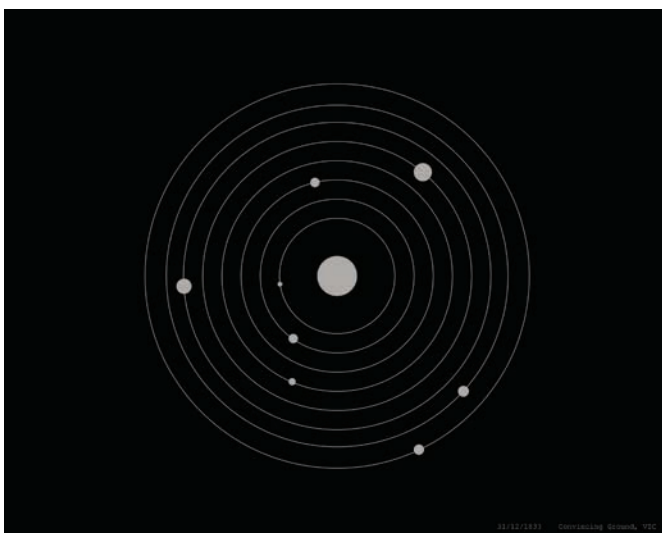
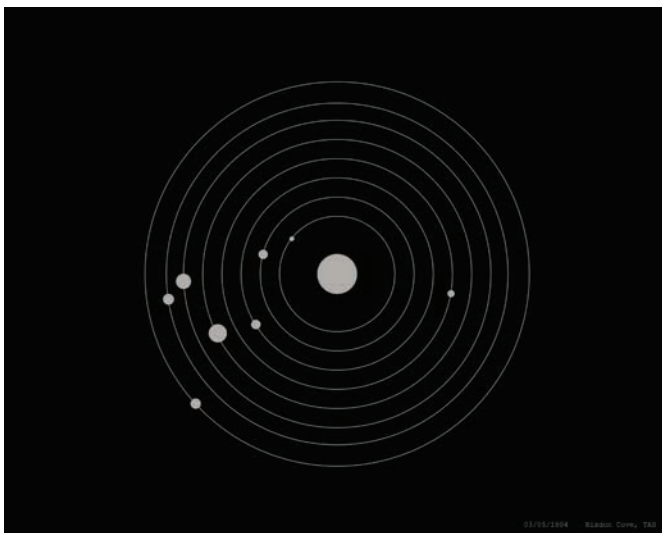
### *Under One Sun*, 2017

63 silver gelatin prints

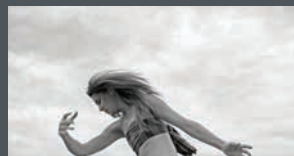
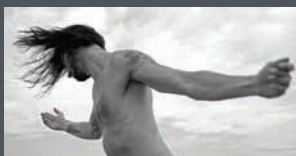
Interrogating the *Sunbaker* as an archetypal representation of a "white Australia", *Under one Sun* highlights the ambivalence of representing identity and the complexity of discussing colonial history. Using Wikipedia's open-source listing of Indigenous massacres in Australia, Michaela Gleave highlights the lack of exhaustive and verified historical data associated with this history. Her dramatically zoomed out installation documents the positions of the planets between 1789 and 1928, when 63 massacres of Indigenous peoples took place.

James Cook's first voyage of the Pacific was aimed at documenting the 1769 Transit of Venus from Tahiti and investigating the possible existence of *Terra Australis Incognita*. This eventually opened the way for the European settlement in Australia. Drawing parallels between the development of photography, science and colonisation, the artist reminds us that technological advances in astronomy and navigation were crucial to the expansion of the British Empire, and science was often a justification for the atrocities committed.

Courtesy the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery, Melbourne.







## Nasim **Nasr**

Born Tehran, Iran, 1984.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

### *Still for Eighty Years, 2017*

Single channel HD black and white video,  
10 mins 38  
Archival inkjet pigment prints

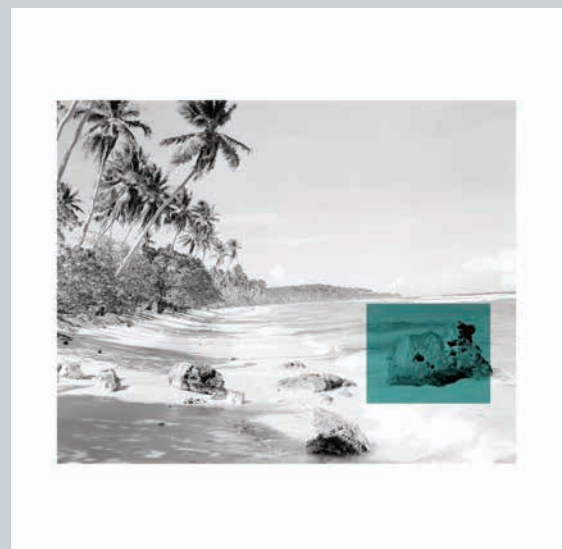
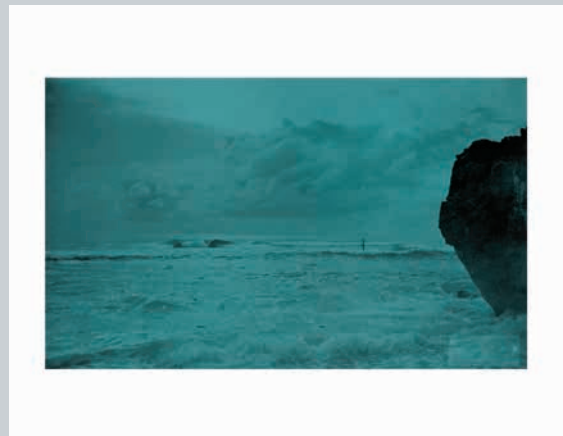
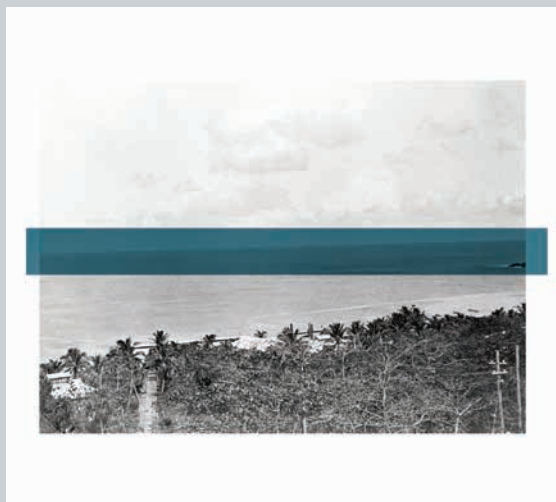
Drawing from her personal experience, Nasim Nasr's multimedia practice explores the cultural differences between the East and the West and envisages the complexities of identities that exist and evolve at their nexus.

Shot on Culburra Beach, New South Wales where Max Dupain photographed his *Sunbaker* almost eighty years ago, *Still for Eighty Years* juxtaposes traditional and emblematic motives from the Middle East with the archetypal Australian beach landscape. Here, the beach becomes a place for cross-cultural dialogue. Inviting the viewer to contemplate their mesmerising Sufi-inspired choreography, the dancers wear an hammam cloth, symbolically worn for this performance.

Incorporating motion and multicultural depth into the iconic image, Nasr proposes a lyrical and meditative piece to reflect upon the transient and composited nature of identity.

Courtesy the artist and GAG Projects, Adelaide.

Music: Bijan Kamkar, Overture  
Cinematographer: Jose Alkon  
Editor: Jess Hayhow  
Choreographer: Mandy Liddell  
Costume Design: Negar Tajer  
Performers (left to right): John Fabry, Heather Maltman,  
Negar Tajer, Shannon Belcastro, Mandy Liddell and Leon Veskovick.



## Sara **Oscar**

Born in Sydney, NSW, 1975.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

### *Pleasant Island (The Pacific Solution), 2017*

Inkjet prints on Hahnemuehle paper

In her work, Sara Oscar draws and unveils connections between the present and the past. Interested in the capacity for time to change the meaning of images, her practice is drawn to systems of language and poetics, such as allegory or metaphor.

In late 2015, photographs circulated widely of the lifeless body of three-year-old boy Aylan Kurdi, a refugee, lying face down on a beach in Turkey. The pose has come to symbolise the plight of all refugees and now haunts the figure of the *Sunbaker*.

A picturesque island in Micronesia that imprisons refugees to Australia under the Pacific Solution, Nauru is the subject of this series that draws connections between the themes of colonialism, beach culture and immigration. Historical archival images of Nauru are layered through digital collage and painting. A constellation of images and forms obfuscates the meaning of the Nauruan images, in the same way that the framing abstracts the political dimension of the *Sunbaker*.

Courtesy the artist.



## Julie Rrap

Born in Lismore, NSW, 1950.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

### *Speechless, 2017*

Bronze and steel

Julie Rrap's long interest in the politics and the emotive nature of the human body led her to investigate the evocative quality of the *Sunbaker* pose. A casual holiday photograph that became a symbol of leisure and freedom in the 1970s, Dupain's photograph was in fact taken at a time of major economic uncertainty that lasted until the Second World War.

Exploring the ambivalence of the pose within this framework and transposing this contradiction to contemporary Australia, Rrap draws attention to the paradox of a nation seen as a sun-blessed paradise whilst the country's shores have been a place of contestation and misery.

Reflecting on this slightly fraught reading of the innocence of the pose, Rrap invites the audience to perform with the work, playfully and critically. Presented as a lectern, *Speechless* places the viewer in two positions – one who speaks out or one who keeps their head down.

Courtesy the artist, Roslyn Oxley 9 Gallery, Sydney and ArcOne Gallery, Melbourne.

Image © ACP, Michael Waite



## Khaled **Sabsabi**

Born in Tripoli, Lebanon, 1965.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

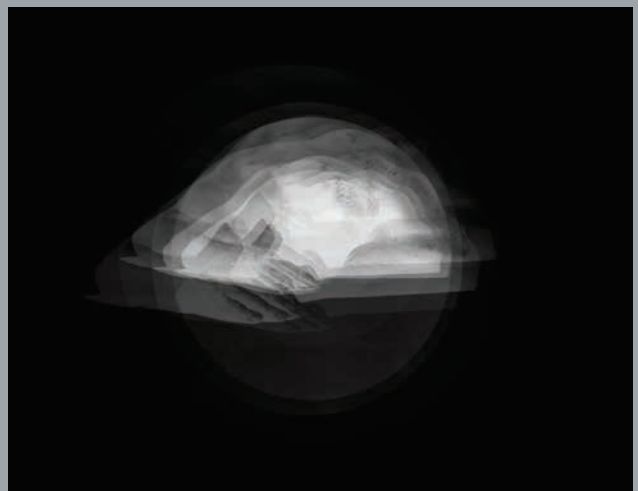
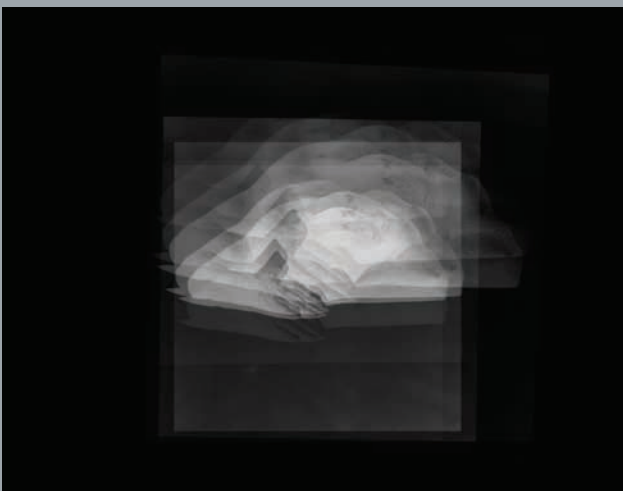
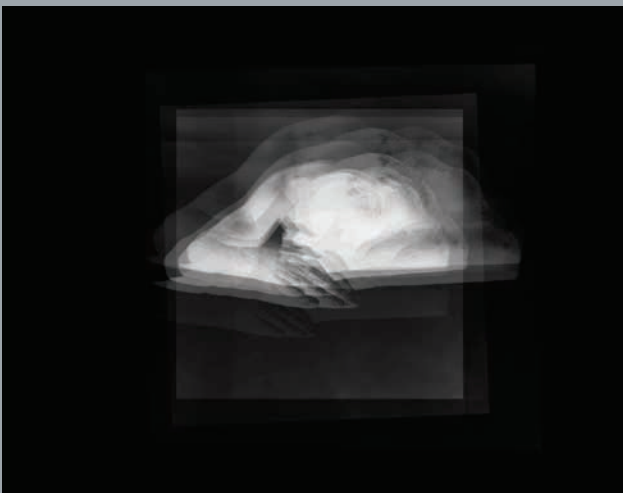
### 229, 2017

Three-channel videowork with sound 3.49 mins,  
hand-painted laser prints on transparency and  
C-type prints

In this multi-media installation, Khaled Sabsabi subverts the iconic photograph and what it signifies by expanding the creative possibilities of the politically loaded gesture of appropriation and inversion.

Reframing the image and playing with the essential codes of the photographic medium, Sabsabi has recreated the negative of the *Sunbaker*. Multiplied, hand-painted and digitally animated, the photograph resonates loudly and deeply as a symbol of the 229 years since colonisation. Visceral, 229 challenges the representation of race by inverting black and white, forces us to question the imperceptible alterations that disappear with endless recurrence, and interrogate notions of copyright and origin – ultimately asking the viewer to be actively engaged and socially responsible.

Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane.





## Yhonnie Scarce

Born in Woomera, SA, 1973. Lives and works in Melbourne, VIC and Adelaide, SA  
Kokatha and Nukunu Peoples

### *Working Class Man* (*Andamooka Opal Fields*), 2017

Inkjet print on cotton rag, vintage metal bucket, blown glass

In this deeply personal work, Yhonnie Scarce sensitively pays tribute to her Grandfather, who endured many hardships during his life as an opal-mine worker in South Australia. When looking at this family photograph, Scarce felt a compelling responsibility to tell her Grandfather's story – a man who provided for his own family and contributed to the broader society, yet remained excluded from the rights of Australian citizenship until 1967.

Beyond the nostalgic, Scarce's ongoing inclusion of vernacular photographs in her installations translates not only a strategy of controlling her own personal narrative but also the humble will to reaffirm the presence of the lesser-knowns in socio-cultural discourses. 'Politically motivated and emotionally driven', *Working Class Man (Andamooka Opal Fields)* epitomises the experience of many Indigenous Australian people whilst interrogating the permeating effects of colonisation on future generations.

Courtesy the artist and This Is No Fantasy + Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne.

Image © ACP, Michael Waite



## Angela Tiatia

Born in Auckland, Aotearoa, New Zealand.  
Lives and works in Sydney

### *Dark Light, 2017*

Videowork 4 mins, self-adhesive inkjet  
pigment print

With *Dark Light*, Angela Tiatia deconstructs every element of the *Sunbaker* to reconfigure its exact opposite – the male and female body, the barren terrain against a lush landscape, the bright sun and artificial low light. Through a dialectical conversation with the iconic photograph, the visual and sensual tension created by this inversion process forces us to interrogate the familiar by presenting the unfamiliar.

Symbolic of opulence and power, the chandelier is suspended outside of its usual context of grand palaces and institutions. As it hangs above the artist's body, the chandelier becomes an opposing social statement; One of empire, Western technology, domination and oppression.

In *Dark Light*, Tiatia challenges the complicated and pervasive forces of colonialism that are embedded throughout Samoan culture. As the artist confronts the observer's gaze, Tiatia reveals deep contradictions. Her nude body bears the *malu* – the female-Samoan tattoo (tatau). In pre-Christian times, the malu was considered clothing, protecting young women entering adulthood as new guardians of the community and environment. As a result of European Christian contact, the malu and male equivalent (*pe'a*) were condemned and banned. Colonialism gave rise to a new cultural practice of hiding the malu and shaming the female body, and as time passed, the male body escaped Christian patriarchy and became free to publicly display the pe'a without repercussions of verbal or physical control.

In *Dark Light*, Tiatia uncovers the female body. A subversive and political gesture that re-centres female power, highlighting the fragility of both symbols of potency – the chandelier and female body.

Courtesy the artist and Alcaston Gallery, Melbourne.





## Christian **Thompson**

Born in Gawler, South Australia.  
Lives and works in London, England.  
(Bidjara People)

### *This Brutal World, 2017*

C-type print

Christian Thompson's practice engages with a process of auto-ethnography. Transcending the ethnographic gaze, his performative images, coined as a type of 'spiritual repatriation', emerge between lived experience, historical, personal archive and the contemporary present. With *This Brutal World*, Thompson harnesses his focus on portraiture and its ability to disturb the relationship between past and present.

Where Dupain's *Sunbaker* conveys what is considered to be a quintessential example of Australian identity, Thompson reminds us that policies of assimilation were first outlined at the 'Aboriginal Welfare' Initial Conference of Commonwealth and State Aboriginal Authorities in 1937.

Here, the artist wears a costume borrowed from London's National Theatre, his eyes covered with dried roses and own body superimposed on the glittering shallow creek beds, captured during trips to his traditional homelands in outback Queensland. Whilst historically, Australian Aboriginal people were managed as part of Australian flora and fauna as a means to disregard agency and sovereignty, Thompson employs references to the natural world to evoke spirituality.

The subject is transformed into an equally enchanting and haunting form, whose iconic aura unlocks a unique and disturbing dialogue with Dupain and Australian iconographies.

Courtesy the artist and Michael Reid Sydney + Berlin

## Kawita **Vatanajyankur**

Born in Bangkok, Thailand, 1987.  
Lives and works in Bangkok and Sydney, NSW

### *Carrier, 2017*

Video, running time 5 mins

In this performative video work, Kawita Vatanajyankur reflects on her personal experience of migrating to Australia, especially exploring the shift of identity that occurs when moving from one place to another. Allegorically celebrating women's strength, endurance and resilience, Vatanajyankur's captivating, seductive, and yet disquieting videowork proposes an acute critique of the challenges faced by migrant Asian women in relation to everyday labour.

Referring to her performances as 'meditation postures', the artist undertakes physical and psychological experiments that playfully and painfully test the limits of her body. The artist's self-objectification strategy is part of the long history of feminist art that reclaims the female body, both as a medium of deliberate submission and active resistance.

Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney.







## Daniel von Sturmer

Born in Auckland, New Zealand, 1972.  
Lives and works in Melbourne, VIC

### *Sunbaker, (MGA replica), 2017*

Unique archival pigment print

Concerned with the different ways we view objects in reality and through recorded media, Daniel von Sturmer's practice investigates perception and the relationship between real and pictorial space through a wide range of approaches.

Continuing his *After Images* series (begun in 2013), Daniel von Sturmer has photographed the shadow cast by a replica of Dupain's *Sunbaker* held in the Monash Gallery of Art collection. Using a specially constructed 'set', the resulting work is a 1:1 image of the *Sunbaker* shadow. Inextricably bound to the physical object, *Sunbaker, (MGA replica)* questions the idea we have of the 'original' image-object and the relevance of its iconicity considering the existence of multiple and concomitant reproductions.

Interrogating the indexical nature of photography as an accurate and truthful capture of the real world, this abstract black square becomes a projection that draws connections between an image-object's meaning and transference of signification whilst also questioning the aura held by the unique, original artwork.

Courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery.

Image © ACP, Michael Waite



## Justene **Williams**

Born in Sydney, NSW, 1970.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

### *Home security – out of the sun, 2017*

Dye sublimation print on chromaluxe metal

Unveiling a lesser known aspect of Max Dupain's career, *Home security – out of the sun* is inspired by the photographer's involvement in the Department of Home Security during the Second World War as part of the Sydney Camouflage Group. In 1941, the group began to officially work for the Australian Government, deploying visual illusions inspired by surrealism, cubism and abstraction to conceal military equipment. With his astute photographic eye for shadows, exposure, and patterns, Dupain contributed with others to the publication of *The Art of Camouflage*, a manual that described techniques he later taught to soldiers in Darwin and Papua-New Guinea.

Inspired by the sheltering trees of Sydney College of Arts Callan Park Campus and the dazzle-swimwear based on wartime camouflage schemes in fashion in the 1920s, this work continues Williams' exploration of the poetics and politics of camouflage. With her own vibrant and jazzing aesthetics, Williams makes us consider the visual qualities of an image, and the contradictions between visible and disguised, real and abstract, clear and indeterminate, present and obfuscated.

Courtesy the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney.

## William **Yang**

Born in Mareeba, QLD, 1943.  
Lives and works in Sydney, NSW

### *SUMMER, A suite of images, 2017*

Digital pigment prints

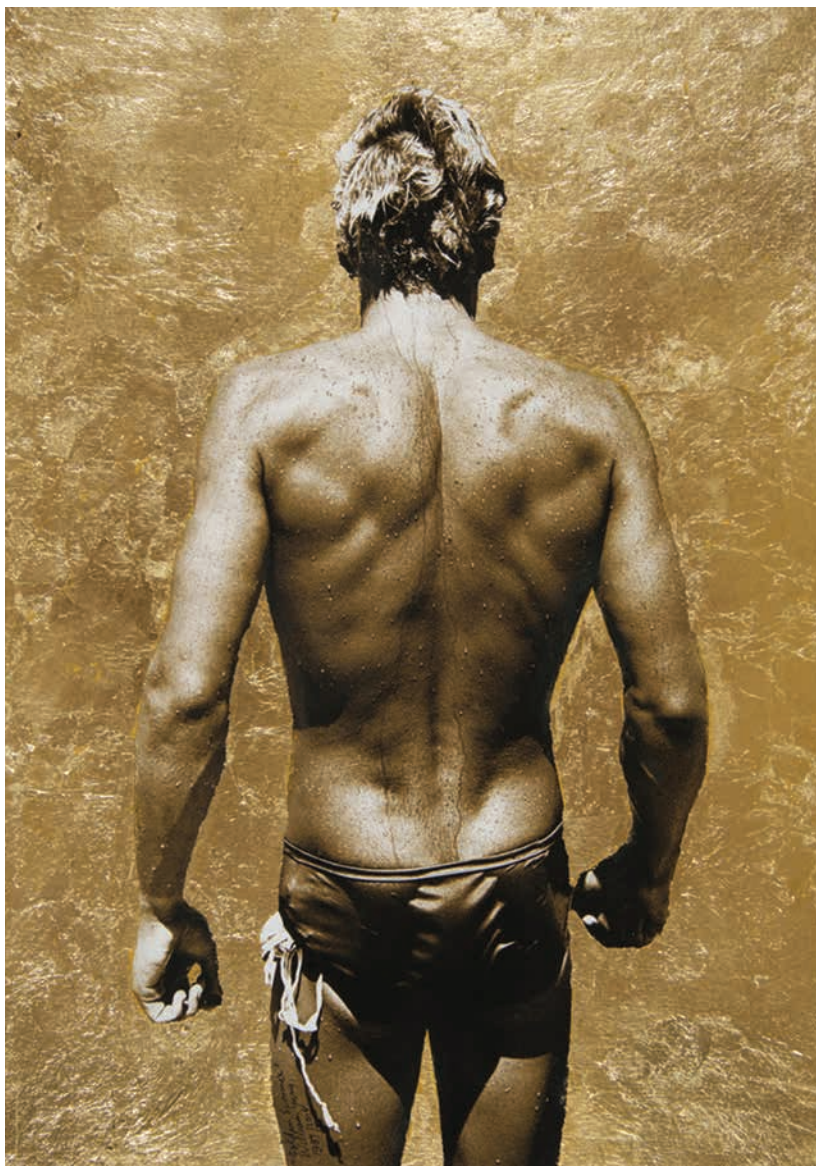
### *My time at South Bondi, 2017*

Video with music by Daniel Holdsworth, 4 mins

A prolific documentary photographer, storyteller and performer, William Yang's works have an intimate, autobiographical narrative.

For this installation, William Yang draws from his extensive archive of images, memories, and sensual experiences to recount the unique atmosphere of freedom that prevailed on the Sydney beaches in the 70s, 80s and 90s. Around Bondi and Tamarama, Yang has captured the joy of an era and the beauty of the elements with humour and generosity. More than merely reminiscing and exposing the past, Yang tampers with his images, revealing new temporal and sensitive connections that provide insightful reflections on cultural identity.

Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney.





## Sunbaker

The *Sunbaker* photograph was taken eighty years ago. That's an entire lifetime. After eighty years it's time to look back at your life. But if we were able to wake the sunbaker up and tell him what had been happening to him he might reckon it was all a bit of a soap opera.

The *Sunbaker* we know was conceived on Culburra Beach near Nowra in 1937, during the camping trip of a bunch of friends from Sydney who were all twenty-something years old and brimming with sex. Two of the group, Max Dupain and Olive Cotton, took photographs of the trip that are horny and aesthetic at the same time. Taut skin and patterned sunlight predominate. Our *Sunbaker* was born one of twins, a pair of negatives Max Dupain shot of Harold Cyril Salvage – an English bookseller and avid reader, rower and pipe smoker – who, in Dupain's words, 'slammed himself down on the beach to have a sunbake' after a swim.

A small print of one of the negatives was made for a personal album of the trip compiled by one of the party (the album is now in the State Library of New South Wales). In 1948 a signed and dated enlargement, now lost, was reproduced along with other documentary-style photographs in the book *Max Dupain Photographs*. Here, the *Sunbaker* lies darkly and heavily at the bottom of the frame, one hand grips the other, and the distant surf rolls creamily through the crook of his elbow while clouds demarcate the backdrop of sky. He is located. He's on a particular beach at a particular time. The book was limited to an edition of 1000 copies, didn't sell well in any case, and is now rare, but on its contents page the *Sunbaker* was christened. The photograph is not titled 'Harold Salvage', but 'Sunbaker'. And not 'Sunbather', but 'Sunbaker'. According to the Oxford English Dictionary 'sunbaker' was an exclusively Australian variant to the more globally accepted word 'sunbather'. It implies an excess. Not a genteel luxuriant bathing in therapeutic rays, but a vigorous and transformative baking, like a steak slammed down on a BBQ.

Fast forward to 1975. Photography is now art, not documentary. It is the International Year of Women. Gough Whitlam has been in power for almost three years. His wife Margaret has just opened the Australian Centre for Photography. Max Dupain is sixty-four. It's time for his first retrospective. The ACP is the place. The negative Dupain had printed before had been lost to history during one of his studio moves, so he prints the second negative, our negative, our *Sunbaker*. Harold Salvage is moved upwards in the frame and the line of surf disappears behind his forearms so the figure floats abstractly against fields of tone. The hand unclenches so the wet fingertips rest on the sand. Water droplets roll over his muscles. His forearm hair forms rivulets down from his elbows.

This *Sunbaker* was chosen for the retrospective's poster and the rest is history. No longer a document of a particular beach, nor a dark glowering print from wartime Australia, it quickly became mobilized as a bright national symbol within the visual environment of seventies Australia. As the figure, photographed thirty-eight years earlier, lay suspended against the non-perspectival bands of sand and sky, it looked as contemporary as an abstract 'colour field' painting of the day. In its composition it almost felt as bold as the new Aboriginal flag, designed in 1971 by Harold Thomas, which graphically deployed the same three symbolic elements of sun, land and people but in an entirely different configuration. Perhaps it even reminded some of Ayers Rock (now Uluru) in its timeless monumentality. Or even, as Harold Salvage's physically engineered shoulders arched across the frame, it reminded us of the tensile strength of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, opened five years before the *Sunbaker* was made.



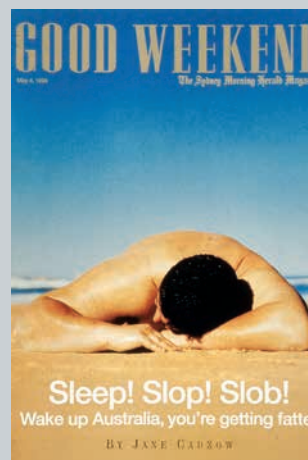
Caption for the poster: *Poster for the exhibition Max Dupain Retrospective 1930-1975, Australian Centre for Photography 1975. Courtesy Australian Centre for Photography*

In the following decades until his death in 1992 Dupain made about 200 prints from the surviving negative. The print exhibited at the ACP in 1975 was priced at \$85, but eventually he was selling them for \$1,500 each. As he iterated prints from the slightly overdeveloped negative he incrementally made the *Sunbaker* even more abstract, lightening the burned-in borders of sky and sand at top and bottom, and dodging the thick shadows around his head so he is suspended with even more high-tensile strength against the void. The image was frequently reproduced. It became an icon seemingly as delicate and solid as the Harbour Bridge itself. Before his death Max Dupain professed to being embarrassed by all the attention it was getting, from jingoistic Australians in general, and from gay couples decorating their new flats in particular. He said he preferred other of his classic shots such as *Meat Queue*, 1946, where there is more going on in terms of content and composition.

After Dupain's death the *Sunbaker* continued his apotheosis. His studio, which continued to be run by its manager Jill White, made posthumous editions of his famous negatives and the *Sunbaker's* edition of ninety, printed slightly lighter still than Dupain's own prints, virtually sold out at up to \$8000 each. Importantly, the *Sunbaker* began to be pastiched and parodied by photographers and cartoonists. In 1989 Anne Zahalka photographed a pale-skinned red-haired 'Sunbather' growing a fine crop of pre-cancerous cells. And in 1985 the Indigenous photographer Tracey Moffatt pointedly displaced him entirely with her photograph of 'The Movie Star' David Gulpilil reclining at Bondi complete with boardies, a tinnie, a surfboard, a ghetto blaster, dreads and tribal face paint.

Parodists pounced on the *Sunbaker* to exploit the incipient ambiguities of his state of mind, which could become a stand-in for the national state of mind. As he claims the beach for himself, sucking up spiritual sustenance from the land and exposing his back to the benedictions of the Australian sun, is he poised, ready to spring into virile action, or is he experiencing the ultimate state of relaxation, in blissful post-coital communion with the beach? Or, is he in some heat-induced stupor, or asleep? In an historical coma, or dead? An example of these many parodies is the cover of the *Sydney Morning Herald's Good Weekend* magazine from 1996, where an obese *Sunbaker* snores away on the beach above the tagline 'Sleep! Slop! Slob! Wake Up Australia, you're getting fatter!' Many other cartoons and photographs used the *Sunbaker* to comment on Australia's high sun cancer rates, its general political torpor, its sexism where public space was ruled by men, and his persistent claim to a supposedly 'pure' Australian Anglo Celtism in the face of an ethnically diversifying Australia. But, for a time, all these parodies only reinforced his iconicity.

Meanwhile the *Sunbaker* still had his unalloyed fans. In 1995 the retail artist Ken Done made a series of paintings which gridded the *Sunbaker's* instantly recognizable muscular arch in a gestural shorthand across a bright orange field. In the year 2000 the Max Dupain Studio licensed the photograph to QANTAS, who obviously still saw it as an unproblematic image of 'The Spirit of Australia'. For the Sydney Olympics they published it on billboards and across both pages of broadsheet newspapers with the tagline: 'The Spirit of Australia: When it comes to the art of relaxation, Australians are recognized as truly world class. Perhaps that's why the people at QANTAS are so naturally good at making you feel at home, wherever in the world you happen to fly.' QANTAS's copywriters summed up the essence of his iconicity: the *Sunbaker* is at home in Australia, truly relaxed in his decisive claiming of the land. He's baked in.



Top to bottom: Cover of the *Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend Magazine*, 4 May 1996; Geoffrey Pryor, political cartoon, *The Canberra Times*, 29 December, 1995 'The *Republican's* Editor, Miss Sybil Nolan, with a copy of a free souvenir edition', undated newspaper article, 1997 Advertising postcard for *The Republican* newspaper, 1997 QANTAS newspaper advertisement, 2000

But Harold Salvage slammed himself down on a very different beach to the beaches of today. In the 1930s, before the rise of bohemian surf culture in the post war period, beaches were unproblematic places for collective displays of health, vitality and nationalism. Surf lifesavers were idolized as embodiments of racial purity, and at annual club carnivals they marched across our metropolitan beaches with Nuremberg like precision. More remote beaches like Culburra could also become tabula rasa sites of personal potential for idealistic groups of young people such as Dupain and his friends, but they were again centred around the vigorous, vital, pure, white body. If the *Sunbaker* awoke from his coma today we would have to gently break to him the news of the Mabo decision of 1992 which overturned the concept of terra nullius; the Cronulla race riots of 2005 which revealed fault lines in assumed cultural rights of beach 'ownership'; the advent of the burkini which challenged the hegemony of the body in the scopoc regime of the beach; and the inexorable rise in skin cancer mortality rates.

Nonetheless, *Sunbaker* prints continue to command good prices in the art market. A standard sized print from amongst the 200 or so Dupain printed will set you back between twenty and thirty thousand dollars, while a special larger print from his family estate recently sold at auction for 105 thousand dollars. But there are signs his popular iconicity in the media is fading. Image icons need to be continually reproduced to survive. Unlike the Harbour Bridge or Uluru the *Sunbaker* is no longer in our face every day. Even though in 2013 his son, Rex Dupain, made a new sunbaker on a Xperia Z1 smartphone for a charity auction, we certainly aren't seeing the same number of parodies as before. The complexity of contemporary debates around our national identity may have superseded his graphic usefulness for cartoonists. And today's teenagers can't seem to place him. 'It's a guy on a beach', my daughters helpfully tell me.



Cover of the Sydney Morning Herald Good Weekend Magazine, 7 August 2004

In 2004 the *Sunbaker* made it to the front cover of the *Sydney Morning Herald's Good Weekend* magazine for the second time. This time it was not a parody, but the precious, auratic, original negative that appears, held up to the camera by a white-gloved hand. The lurid tagline, 'How this tiny negative of *Sunbaker* came to be at the centre of a tale of love, money and ambition', refers to an article by the journalist Janet Hawley about the legal tussle over Dupain's will. Seeing the negative in public for the first time (it has recently been purchased by the Stare Library of New South Wales) we noticed a shadow in the lower right hand corner that had been cropped out of all of the enlargements. It looks like the shadow of the camera strap on Dupain's Rolleiflex, cast as he lay on his stomach in front of Salvage grabbing his two shots. This common 'mistake', made every day by generations of photographers, immediately takes us back to the holiday that started it all. Those friends. That beach. That moment.

Martyn Jolly

(Thanks to Gael Newton for the conversation and access to her remarkable research archive)



## Australian Centre for Photography

As the leading agency for photography and photomedia, for over 40 years the Australian Centre for Photography (ACP) has supported and promoted contemporary artists, educated audiences and students of photography, and inspired conversations through lens-based artistic practices.

ACP showcases exciting contemporary photomedia art from Australia and overseas, in an agile and site-responsive program of exhibitions and public forums. ACP's national and international touring program consists of ACP-curated exhibitions travelling to museums and galleries in regional Australia and overseas.

The ACP Workshop continues to offer photographic education to adult students covering diverse areas such as Camera Craft, Street Photography, Darkroom, Lighting, Architecture and Fashion Photography. Students of all levels of expertise can learn first-hand from leading professional photographers.



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