

*Dark Rooms:  
Women Directing  
the Lens 1978-98*

12 July – 25 August 2018

Exhibition  
Labels

# Dark Rooms

## Women Directing the Lens 1978–98

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Photographic media proliferated throughout Australia during the 1970s, following the increased affordability of snapshot cameras and colour film processing. By the 1980s, colour photography was widely used by artists, who continued to explore a range of photographic approaches and techniques, from the immediacy of 'point-and-shoot' techniques to staged compositions. Their work referenced narratives of history and power and appropriated artistic strategies from advertising, cinema, and the televisual. By the 1990s, computer-generated imagery and increased access to the internet offered new languages with which to address pressing issues.

Photographs made by many women artists during this period differed in a significant aspect by refusing the male gaze. Against the backdrop of the feminist movement and influential thinking and activism in arts and politics, women took authorial agency into their own hands. Acutely aware of the ways in which the lens could empower or reduce the subject, they put themselves, friends, and family in the picture, and in doing so, changed the cultural landscape of Australia.

Photomedia became an important instrument with which these artists confronted racism and the objectification of peoples; disrupted and subverted sexually violent imagery; and forged a renewed interest in the tropes of psychoanalytic theory.

The *Dark Rooms* exhibition surveys works that are emotional and intensely charged. Evocations of intimacy, fantasy, and trauma appear alongside humorous, politically astute, and confrontational pieces.

Drawing largely on works from the Griffith University Art Collection, *Dark Rooms* also features loans from artists, private collections, and public institutions, including The Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne, and HOTA: Home of the Arts, Gold Coast.

Artists: Maree Cunningham, Destiny Deacon, Linda Dement, Marian Drew, Bonita Ely, Fiona Foley, Elizabeth Gertsakis, Lesley Goldacre, Janina Green, Fiona Hall, Leah King-Smith, Lindy Lee, Anne MacDonald, Ruth Maddison, Wendy Mills, Tracey Moffatt, Jill Orr, Nat Paton, Eugenia Raskopoulos, Julie Rrap, Robyn Stacey, VNS Matrix (Virginia Barratt, Francesca Da Rimini, Julianne Pierce, Josephine Starrs), Heather Winter, Jay Younger, Anne Zahalka

Curator: Naomi Evans



@GriffithUniversityArtMuseum  
#GUArtMuseum  
#DarkRooms

# Fiona Foley

b. 1964

## *Modern Nomad* 1994

Type C photograph

Collection: William Nuttall and Annette Reeves, Melbourne

Fiona Foley is an interdisciplinary artist whose work explores politics, Aboriginal identity, cultural memory and the construction of histories. In 1987 she co-founded the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative in Sydney, and her early photographs used the conventions of ethnographic photographs to disrupt their colonising, stereotyping and exoticising functions.

Putting herself in the picture of *Badtjala Woman* (1994), for example, she reprised the pose of an unnamed woman in a 19th century photograph found in the archives of the John Oxley Library, Brisbane. In the 're-enactment' of the photograph, Foley asserts her agency as well as her continuing culture.

The self-portrait *Modern Nomad* similarly performs a pre-existing work – in this case Lewis Morley's 1963 portrait of Christine Keeler sitting astride a reproduction Arne Jacobsen chair. The film studio that hired Morley insisted that Keeler be photographed naked despite her reluctance, saying that it was a requirement of her contract. Morley proposed a compromise so that Keeler could technically fulfil the contract, while preserving her modesty. In *Modern Nomad*, Foley controls the presentation of her body, and wears traditional shell and reed necklaces and a grass skirt over leggings and chunky platform sandals. Foley's sustained gaze challenges the viewer – an iconic image of that succinctly rejects categorisation and voyeurism.

# Lesley Goldacre

b.1953

## *Untitled* from 'Rites of Passage, series 2' 1993

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1996

My art practice has been central to my working life, although as all artists must, I found other ways to support myself financially in teaching photography in the community, lecturing for 20 years, freelance photography, working in a clinic and teaching yoga. My interest is in the internal human condition, particularly that of women. [...] In 1980, during a period of convalescence after a major car accident I hatched the idea of a community access photography centre in Canberra, secretly for the use of women, since photography was such a male dominated pursuit. Almost 30 years later PhotoAccess still operates in the way in which I envisioned it, empowering everyone to make use of photography as an expressive and political medium.<sup>1</sup>

Lesley Goldacre's work explores family, feminism, and the role of autobiography in her work. Her *Rites of Passage series 2* was taken over a five-year period, documenting a mother and her two daughters underwater. This process of documentation exposed the changing dynamics between these women. 'Each year there appeared changes in the relationships between them, signified by the unconscious body language of the figures. The sequences address issues of the feminine, the mother / daughter relationship, the biophilic gesture.'<sup>2</sup>

1. Lesley Goldacre, Artist statement, 2018.

2. Lesley Goldacre, Artist statement, 1995

# Lesley Goldacre

b.1953

## *Untitled (The green dress)*

From the series 'Perpetual Alibi – A Familiar Mythology' 1992

Type C photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1996

Lesley Goldacre's photographic series *Perpetual Alibi – A Familiar Mythology* consists of images of women's clothing laid out on a dark background. The stark presentation does not immediately signify anything about the person that owned the clothing – only that they are women's garments ranging from a modest bridal dress through to what may be a type of uniform, as in *Untitled (The green dress)*. In the absence of a wearer – a person – the dress can be closely examined as evidence of a cultural norm, a costume, a construction of a role, an identity. Using the dress as an alibi also avoids the process of engaging with the appearance of a particular individual. Viewers are allowed space with a symbol of a femaleness, one that may trigger memories, and in doing so Goldacre symbolically represents an experience of everyday life, negotiating processes of looking and being looked at.

# Fiona Hall

b.1953

## *Untitled* from the series 'Embryonic' 1983

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1986

## *Untitled* 1984

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1986

Fiona Hall's early photographs reveal her interest in systems of knowledge and the constructed nature of meaning. Her photographs from the 1970s are startlingly straightforward but focus our attention towards to the minute, the fleeting or the strange – be it views of home gardens, details of people, or botanical patterning. Hall's photographs of collaged paper, tin and painted compositions later emerged, precursors to her series of much loved sardine-tin sculptures *Paradisus Terrestris* (1989-90). The *Untitled* images presented here exemplify one of Hall's strategy – paying homage to history while simultaneously obscuring it – in the brevity of a single print.

As Mark Hinderaker writes:

[Hall's] work seeks to establish a synthesis between the recognizable world of the everyday and the greater themes that come from human spiritual and intellectual inspiration, if not the metaphysical yearnings that seem unanswered. It is in the collaged work that the imminence of the apocalypse and the mundane, our highest aspirations and our abject weakness, our tools and our perdition, are juxtaposed.<sup>1</sup>

1. Mark Hinderaker, *Fiona Hall*, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, 1984

# Leah King-Smith

b. 1957

## *Untitled no.16*

### From the series 'Over the Garden Wall' 1995

Direct positive colour photograph, digital print.

Courtesy of the artist

Leah King-Smith's photography practice is concerned with issues surrounding identity and cultural disharmony as well as metaphysical and spiritual themes. King-Smith acknowledges her Bigambul descent, and also in her work as a university lecturer she is acutely aware of the photograph's capacity to be used as a weapon to colonise and displace peoples.

*Over the Garden Wall* presents a series of photographs that exemplify the artist's distinctive techniques of combining historical photographs with her own captured images of landscapes, gardens and flora. *Untitled no.16* presents her philosophical approach that allows multi-dimensional time and knowledges to be understood as contiguous. The vignetting in the photograph, a Victorian era device, for example, frames the work like an arched gateway. The title provides a cue for us to think outside of boundaries, beyond ideas where land is delineated and contained for ownership.

# Nat Paton

b.1970

## *Untitled*

### From the 'Hot stuff' series 1997

Ilfochrome photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1998

Nat Paton is a Brisbane based artist whose practice incorporates photography and performance. Her works are essentially self-portraits and she rails against the portrayal and censorship of women in Western culture. Humorous and unapologetic, her portraiture aims to reclaim power over female physicality through photographic mediums.

The *Hot Stuff* series took form in 1997 as a series of billboard vinyls installed throughout Fortitude Valley and Brisbane CBD. Featuring the artist in several of her many personas, these works humorously comment on popular culture and modern society's 'fear of fat'. The association of food with sex and sin is addressed in the She-Devil billboard, where Paton lasciviously lounges on an open refrigerator, with a phallic looking chili poised just near her licking-lips. This may be a response to how the desire for food is often asserted as being correspondent with sexual desire and the 'seven deadly sins' in advertisements - consider for a moment ads for ice-cream or chocolate. In the minds of many people, food and fat equates to: giving into temptation; sloth; greed; avarice, and even stupidity. By using the mythic figure of the She-Devil, Paton attempts to confront the viewer with their own assumptions and prejudices.



# Lindy Lee

b.1954

## *Untitled* 1987

Triptych: photocopy on paper; photocopy and acrylic on paper; photocopy and acrylic on paper

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1987

Lindy Lee's practice across three decades has explored the nature of perception, and in particular, the question of what constitutes authenticity in artistic practice. Growing up in Brisbane, as a first generation Chinese Australian, Lee began investigating issues of selfhood and identity through the concepts of the copy and the original as a way of challenging Western cultural hegemony. She has described her early experience of cultural identity as feeling like she was a 'bad copy'.

Lee investigated the European and American canon of portraiture, in the early 1980s, and through a strategy of appropriation also drew on Pop Art, Minimalism and postmodern theory. Early photocopies of Old Masters were painted and splashed over with ink, and scenes from religious renaissance and mannerist paintings were remade by carving (excavating) the scene from wax covered canvases.

Lee's *Untitled* (1987) features three photocopies of a single page from an art history reference book. The plate reproduces a photograph (another reproduction) of a painting by Antonello da Messina titled *Portrait of an Unknown Man* (1465). In the manner of Warhol's serial prints, Lee subverts the original picture via successive copies. In a calligraphic gesture she literally defaces the gaze of the man but with the addition of acrylic paint, she reinvests the picture with a signifier of authorial uniqueness.

# Wendy Mills

b.1950

## *View of divine union: a temporary affair* 1983

Cibachrome photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1986

Wendy Mills has a diverse practice incorporating photography, video, site-specific public art and installation. Her practice is driven by recurring elements such as light and water as well as geometry and the materiality of surface and structure. Much of her work involves the construction of a sacred space which enshrines an experience for artist and viewer alike.

Produced in 1983, Mills' series of photographs depict installations containing geometric shaped and thematically symbolic objects. Tightly suspended veils, as if levitating, form a pyramid. A long, dagger-like prism pierces the centre of the layered pyramid and a cube structure stands underneath.

Writing about 'Transcience -an installation by Wendy Mills' for the Queensland Art Gallery, Jenny Harper wrote:

Before making *A Temporary Affair*, Mills erected a much larger polythene film font in the middle of her studio and slashed the bottom in a self baptising ritual. She says that this was necessary before she could proceed with the final concept.<sup>1</sup>

1. Jenny Harper, "Transcience - an installation by Wendy Mills", QAG In Focus, 1984.

# Eugenia Raskopoulos

b.1959

## *Untitled* from 'Goddess, mother, daughter' 1991

Black and white triptych photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1992

Eugenia Raskopoulos has contributed significantly to contemporary feminist art practice in Australia, often adopting an autobiographical approach to respond to her personal experiences of being a second generation Greek-Australian and the complexities of negotiating ethnocentric and sexist discourses. Her work is concerned with the representation of women, dealing with issues of sexuality, femininity, ethnicity, translation and power.

The triptych format, long used for religious imagery, symbolises "Goddess, Mother, Daughter" which is a feminisation of the paternal Christian God: Father, Son, Holy Spirit. In this work the artist reveals the persistence of ancient feminine stereotypes. In the central 'mother' image, the female torso is portrayed holding a jar, referencing the ancient metaphor of woman as vessel springing from ancient beliefs that men were the sole genetic contributors to children and that women were merely an incubating chamber. The symbolisation of the 'daughter' panel with overlaid Greek text, the 'mother-tongue', may be understood in reference to psychoanalytic theory such as Jacques Lacan's assertion that the unconscious is structured like a language, or Julia Kristeva's theory of the semiotic – a pre-symbolic, innately feminine property of language, born of the mother-child dyad.<sup>1</sup>

1. Beth Jackson, Griffith University Art Collection, March 1993

# Eugenia Raskopoulos

b.1959

## *Untitled no.6 and no.10*

### From the series 'Dangling Virgins' 1992

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1993.

*Dangling Virgins* depicts fragmentary images of a child on a playground swing. Raskopoulos crafts an atmosphere of foreboding and horror as the images are superimposed over wax tablets inscribed with the names of Greek women who have committed suicide by hanging.

The work is rich in mythological symbolism –numerous Greek myths tell of virgins hanging themselves in order to avoid rape or other disastrous fates. Raskopoulos's themes of sexual, social and political repression of women in ancient Greece suggests connection with the experience of migrants in Australia.

# Eugenia Raskopoulos

b.1959

Left to right:

## *Untitled no.3, 5 and 9* 1998

Ilfochrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2000

A recurring theme in Raskopoulos' work is the subjugation of women through physical violence, visual objectification and stereotyping. *Untitled no.3, 5 and 9* critically explore the exploitation of Asian women in screen cultures, specifically Japanese pornography on cable television and the internet.

Raskopoulos captured frames of a pornographic film from television, then altered the images to mask explicit sexual acts. The pixelated mouths could be read as metaphors for the silencing of women and loss of subjectivity. These semi-explicit, semi-abstracted images raise awareness in the viewer about their voyeuristic role while establishing a power play between the viewer and subject.

# Tracey Moffatt

b.1960

## *Pet Thang* 1991

Cibachrome photographs

Collection: Gallery at HOTA. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Diana and Gary Willemsen 2018

Tracey Moffatt's photography and film practice draws upon themes of identity, gender, race and sexuality. Much of the artist's work suggests incomplete narratives – some the product of fantasy, historical research, literature and others refer to personal experience and acknowledge her Aboriginal heritage.

The *Pet Thang* series was produced in 1991, two years after one of her most renowned works *Something More* (1989) explored, through the language of cinematic 'stills' photography and Australian landscape paintings, a sado-masochistic subtext of desire and subjugation.

*Pet Thang* juxtaposes the female form of the artist's body with that of a sheep and a lamb. Modelled and objectified in chiaroscuro lighting, the human body and that of the sheep are equated to a sum of parts – domesticated, traded, exploited, murdered.

# Tracey Moffatt

b.1960

## *Something More* #1 from 'Something More' 1989

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, 1989.

Tracey Moffatt's series *Something More* deals with filmic and media-constructed notions of pleasure, fulfilment and desire – a glossy unreality, beneath which are glimpsed the issues of sexual and racial discrimination.

The scene conflates representations of good and evil in the cinematic style of a Sergio Leone 'Western', with a set that quotes paintings by Australian moderns Russell Drysdale and Albert Tucker. In a pose evocative of Judy Garland and 'The Wizard of Oz', Moffatt is the star of the picture, dreaming of escape.

# Anne MacDonald

b.1960

## *No.1* from 'The Romance' 1987

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, 1989

Anne MacDonald's photographic practice draws from the *vanitas* still life genre to engage with themes of beauty and mortality. MacDonald works exclusively in the studio with large format camera, exploring the symbolic potential of objects as they are preserved by the print.

The work titled *No.1* presented here is isolated from its original appearance in a large installation of over 50 framed images created in 1986-87. Central figures of a woman and a man reaching toward each other yet separated by a fabric veil were surrounded by images of funerary floral arrangements, valentine chocolate boxes, knives and goldfish among others.

The composition of *No.1* powerfully encapsulates multiple readings of art as a thing that beguiles and seduces, makes promises of meaning and yet withholds. The reproduction of the satin covering of a heart-shaped box is mounted onto actual satin fabric, making overt the distance between the real and the reproduction. And yet the photograph is given a distinctly corporeal form as it features a wound or gap (one might refer to the Barthesian *punctum*), while the hooks hint simultaneously to being taken in (tricked) and to psychoanalytic and phenomenological theories of the gaze and the suture (Lacan and Merleau-Ponty).



# Jill Orr

b.1952

## *Blinding surface* 1978/1996

Cibachrome photographs printed from colour negative

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, 1996

Jill Orr is an artist whose enormous contribution to Australian art from the 1970s onwards has earned her canonical status. Her physical performance art, photography and video have explored and subverted notions of identity, history and place whilst considering the interrelating factors of social and individual behaviour.

*Blinding Surface* depicts moments within a performance by Orr that took place at the Ewing and George Paton Galleries, University of Melbourne, in 1978. The performance incorporated mime, ballet movement, body painting and installation. The cibachrome photographs captured during the performance were printed from colour transparencies, which gives them an inverted effect.

# Julie Rrap

b.1950

*Persona and Shadow: Virago* 1984

*Persona and Shadow: Madonna* 1984

Colour photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1985

Julie Rrap often works with her own body as subject matter and as a physical, performative tool. Rrap's art practice grew out of performance in the 1970s and later evolved to include photography, video, painting and sculpture. Her 1982 series *Disclosures: A Photographic Construct* placed the artist at the forefront of feminist art.

The series *Persona and Shadow* presented an opposition to the social constructs and stereotypes that restrict the authority that women have over their body and its visual portrayal. Like massive altarpiece cycles or *retables*, nine large-scale prints presented constructions of photographs and paintings. The archaic definition of *virago* is 'A woman of masculine strength or spirit; a female warrior'. In contemporary usage, it has a pejorative meaning: 'a domineering, violent and bad-tempered woman' (Oxford). In *Persona and Shadow: Virago* Rrap wears masculine effects and confronts the viewer not only via the gaze but by aiming her camera directly at us as she takes her own picture. In *Persona and Shadow: Madonna* the artist adopts the pose of the woman central to Edvard Munch's 'Freize of Life' series and the painting originally called *Kvinne som elsker* (Woman making Love). Rrap's wearing of a religious habit, however, does not cloak her staunch disavowal of the Munchian limits to the feminine – described as the Madonna/Whore dichotomy.

# Robyn Stacey

b.1952

## *Blue* from 'Redline 7000' 1988

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1988

Since the 1980s, Robyn Stacey's extensive photographic practice has explored fields such as the cinema, botany and museology. She was among the first photographers in Australia to use a computer to generate and enhance images, alongside the production of large hand-coloured and manipulated images. Her work continues to innovate and extend the possibilities of photography.

Stacey's early photographic series mined the genre of film-noir, and in particular, the complexity and precision of movie posters that, by design, function to elicit desire. The title of the series *Redline 7000*, from which *Blue* derives, has its source in a 1965 film directed by Howard Hawks. In relation to driving and racing, the 'red line' is where an engine is pushed to its limits. Stacey's montage is constructed from several black and white images and incorporated hand-colouring. Janet Cook wrote of the work:

Stacey's subjects in the Redline 7000 series are principally women. [...] She carefully manipulates, edits and focuses upon each masquerade and the evacuation of any real sexual passion or presence becomes a strategy of evasion. The shamelessly provocative, overcompliant women presented are both enigmatic and artificial; the finely judged irony in Stacey's deployment of formal aesthetics effectively translates subjects into hyper-real objects suspended between the familiar and the unknown. Expressions are limpid, faces as pool-like as the Cibachrome finish, lending an aura of cosmetic-ad perfection.

# VNS MATRIX

Virginia Barratt (b.1959), Francesca da Rimini (b.1956), Julianne Pierce (b.1963), Josephine Starrs (b.1955)

## *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 1992

Billboard: lithographic print mounted on ply

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Gift of the artists, 2000

VNS Matrix are a cyberfeminist media art collective, first active 1991-97. They formed in Adelaide, South Australia to engage with the sexualised and socially provocative relationship between women and technology.

Their *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* reflected the environment of emerging networking culture, incorporating elements of collaboration, plagiarism, propaganda, and pornography. This billboard was inspired by theorists such as Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant and was installed outside the Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney in 1992. VNS Matrix first used the term 'cyberfeminism' in this work.

Lots of computer technophiles jack into the machine and want to forget about the body, to reject the meat of the body. In our work we're not finished with the body. The body is an important site for feminists.

Griffith University's collection of VNS Matrix material also represents the major holding of work towards the projected interactive video game 'All New Gen' Gamegirl, which was never completely realized because of the geographical dispersal of the artists, and lack of resources. 'Gen' stands in for gender in this context.

1. Josephine Starrs in Bernadette Flynn, 'Interview with VNS Matrix, 1992, included in [https://monoskop.org/images/1/1e/VNS\\_Matrix\\_and\\_Virginia\\_Barratt\\_interviewed\\_by\\_Bernadette\\_Flynn\\_1994](https://monoskop.org/images/1/1e/VNS_Matrix_and_Virginia_Barratt_interviewed_by_Bernadette_Flynn_1994)

# Jay Younger

b.1960

## *Untitled II* 1997-98

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2000

Jay Younger's *Untitled II* was first exhibited at Smith + Stoneley (Brisbane) in *Bite* – a show themed around the mouth as a site and object of exploration. The counterpart work, *Untitled I*, is a vibrant soft-focus image of hot pink glitter encrusted lips that frame teeth adorned with braces, which in turn hold and frame a large gleaming diamond. *Untitled II* on the other hand, is a close-up shot of a bare arm with a human bite mark impressed into exposed flesh covered with goosebumps.

Together, these works explore female eroticism and fetishism. *Untitled II* was created as Younger requested Brisbane artist Georgie Pinn to bite the arm of fellow artist Matt Dubrowski, Younger's then partner. Whereas aesthetic and photographic impressions are limited to unfeeling media, there is a distinct return of corporeality and pain in this image. As Edwina Bartleme noted,

Pain may be a stimulus of sexual desire and the bite itself might be an erotic sign, communicating moral boundary crossing and physical transcendence. Thus, associations with erotic Sado-Masochistic practices may be aroused, and the notion of pain and pleasure as subjective perceptions may become more meaningful, as one contemplates the bite-mark in Younger's photograph. It can be argued that Younger's 'portrait' [...] reveals as much about our own materiality, psychology, desires and fetishes, as it does about the indiscernible subject.<sup>1</sup>

1. Edwina Bartleme, Griffith University Art Collection, February 2001

# Maree Cunnington

b.1949

Left to right:

*hon-our*

*Breath*

*Trust*

*Loss of Memory*

From 'Secretions' 1997

Ilfochrome photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1999

Maree Cunnington is a Brisbane based visual and performance artist. In the *Secretions* series, Cunnington investigates the idea of concealment, or secrets, in private and public life. The title is also a play on words, referring to the bodily fluids – blood, tears, milk – that are a vital part of what is to be human. The work was originally presented as an intermedia performance at Cherry Heering, Brisbane, in 1997.

While Cunnington employed a surrealist strategy in *Secretions* – of combining images and text in strange and affective syntheses – her work also alludes to her brother's progressive loss of communication and recognition as he suffered a fatal brain tumour. She has dedicated the series to the memory of Dr Bert Cunningham.

# Destiny Deacon

b.1957

## *Whitey's Watchin'*

### From 'Smiling Dangerously' 1994

Light jet print from Polaroid

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection.

Purchased 1995

I prefer icons/objects of imagery. I want my pictures to tell a story. Stories of Black/Koori Identity. Racism and sexism. Plus the truth as I know it.<sup>1</sup>

Destiny Deacon is an artist, performer and activist. She is highly regarded for her photographic tableaux, role-play scenarios, and her early soft focus Polaroid images featuring family members, dolls and Aboriginal and Australiana kitsch. Her use of 'blak' humour – expressed with filmic, art-historical, literary and pop culture references – directs viewers' attention to the realities of Indigenous Australian peoples.

In *Whitey's Watchin'*, the familiar Melbourne icon of Luna Park takes on a sinister appearance, reinforced by the Orwellian phrase 'Big Brother is watching'.

1. Destiny Deacon, in *Flowers, Herbs, Human Sweat and Animal Breath* exh cat, curated by Lesley Goldacre, Long Gallery, University of Wollongong, 1993.



# Destiny Deacon

b.1957

## *Me and Virginia's Doll (Me and Carol)*

1997/2004

Light jet Polaroid print

Collection: The University of Melbourne Art Collection.

Purchased by the Ian Potter Museum of Art, 2007

Photography is white people's invention. Lots of things seem really technical, for example the camera and the darkroom. Plus it's expensive. Plus I think it's not fair that only white people should be the only ones who can do 'photography'. I've started taking the sort of pictures I do because I can't paint... and then I discovered it was a good way of expressing some feelings that lurk inside.<sup>1</sup>

Destiny Deacon's visual language alludes to narratives and histories that have interventionist functions. Her photograph *Me and Virginia's Doll (Me and Carol)* reprises a self-portrait painting by Frida Kahlo titled *Me and My Doll*, 1937. Whilst the doll in Kahlo's work came from her own collection – much has been written about Kahlo's collection of pets and dolls as child substitutes -- Deacon's work includes a doll owned by Virginia Fraser, the writer and artist who has worked with Deacon in various ways for over 25 years. Deacon faithfully reproduces and wears the *tehuana* dress that Kahlo adopted as a way of expressing her politics and support of indigenous cultural identities. In re-staging this work, Deacon suggests parallels between her artistic concerns and those of Kahlo.

1. Destiny Deacon, in Hetti Perkins and Clare Williamson, 'Blakness: Blak City Culture', Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1994.

# Linda Dement

b.1960

## *Arm and Cut Mouth (cut wet like at the touch of a lover)* 1993

Type C photograph (computer manipulated image)

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1993

Linda Dement has been producing work since the 1980s using photography, video and evolving computer-based technologies. Between the late 1980s and early 1990s, Dement became especially interested in the advent of 'the digital age'. Her works tap into personal experience and abject aspects of corporeality associated with 'the feminine' – bleeding, lactating, oozing and swelling – while also embracing notions of the 'monstrous feminine' and the castrating woman, through the use of the *vagina dentata* (vagina with teeth). *Arm and Cut Mouth (cut wet like at the touch of a lover)* exemplifies the artist's experimental combination of photography and computer software to create a manipulated image.

I always exercise fascistic control over the mediums I choose... This lets me work with that which I cannot control: madness, unreason, the dark areas, indefinite and nebulous. Creativity allows me to use my abrogative, destructive tendencies, to wander over both sides of the line that marks out 'reasonable'. There is value, knowledge and danger in the unreasonable, in madness, in pain. In making art I can use that which threatens me and in doing so, decrease the threat by working through it... The computer is the prized toy of our essentially male culture. To use technologies which are really intended for a clean slick commercial boys' world, to make personal, bodily, feminine work, and to re-insert this work into mainstream culture, into art discourse and into society, is a political act.<sup>1</sup>

1. Linda Dement, *Artist statement*, unpublished, Griffith University Art Collection, 1993.

# Marian Drew

b.1960

Left to right:

## *Drawn with Figures* 1990

Type C photograph, ed. 2/3

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 2011

## *Figured 1* 1990

Type C photograph, ed. 2/3

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 2011

Marian Drew's current works examine relationships between humans, animals and the environment. She is perhaps best known for her work that positions deceased wild animals (usually roadkill) in tableaux influenced by European *vanitas* and 18th century still-life paintings.

In 1989, Drew was awarded a residency at the Australian Visual Arts Board Greene Street Studio in New York, and it was soon after returning that she created *Drawn with Figures* (1990) and *Figured 1* (1990). Already known for her technical exploration of in-camera manipulation, projectors, flash and torchlight application through long exposures, in *Figured 1* Drew explores the dynamic composition of bodies and the depictions of mediums on a larger scale. The images depict the complex relationship photography has to embodied subjectivity and the stilling of time. The images also fuse and remove difference: the photographic plane rendering equivalent dance, abstraction, sculpture, collage and drawing.

# Bonita Ely

b.1946

## *Breadline* 1981/1996

Three cibachrome photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body, 1996

During her extensive career, Bonita Ely has produced sculpture, video, photography, installation and performance art. A key figure in the women's art movement from the 1970s, her work continues to be debate-centred. In her 1980 work *Murray River Punch* for example, she dressed as a Country Womens Association (CWA) ambassador offering up drinks of toxic phosphates, chemicals and animal waste to passersby on a busy Melbourne street.<sup>1</sup>

Created in the same year, Ely's performance *Breadline* explores the relationship between bodily nourishment and economic income. In the three photographs presented here, women knead and shape bread dough while images of women are shown on a screen behind them. The malleable dough (transformed through mixing, rising, baking and eating) suggests the phases of metamorphosis that a woman will experience over time and posits that while she provides sustenance, she also requires sustenance. At the end of *Breadline*, Ely baked and served the dough as she washed off in a bath of milk.

# Elizabeth Gertsakis

b.1949

## *Beautiful Daughters*

From the series 'A Glamorous Private History'  
1989

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased with assistance from the Australian Government through the arts funding and advisory body of the Australia Council, 1989

Gertsakis explores different representative tropes to reveal ways in which gender and cultural identity is constructed and is restrictive. In *Beautiful Daughters*, the central image is a photograph of the artist's mother in northern Greece during wartime; the left image is taken from popular culture – the face of Hollywood star Elizabeth Taylor; while the right image is a reproduction of Corot's *Woman with a Pearl* (1870). In juxtaposing these images, *Beautiful Daughters* functions to deconstruct the artifice of performing the feminine – whether demure, or the siren. Gertsakis's combination invites us to search across the images for resemblance.

# Janina Green

b.1944

## *Reproduction: Blondes* 1986

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1987

Janina Green and her family immigrated to Australia from Germany at the end of World War II; an experience that has informed Green's understanding of identity as fluid and dynamic. In her work, Green draws from her own identity (immigrant, woman, artist) to convey her ideas about identity. Green's practice is strongly influenced by the work of Richard Prince and Jean Baudrillard: the idea that we invent ourselves from images – that 'reality imitates the image'.

In *Reproduction*, Green re-photographed magazine images dating from the period when the artist was a teenager. Green focused on a small section of the original, reproduced and enlarged it, thereby isolating the image from the commercial product it connoted, altering its reading. In so doing, Green's interventions reveal the deliberate way images are formulated and viewed, disrupting the male gaze, unsettling ideas around originality and beauty. The word 'reproduction' was embossed on each image in the series.

# Ruth Maddison

b.1945

*Box Hill over 90s club*

*Rose Stone, 69*

*Beth Coldicutt, 77*

*Bettina Woodburn, 67*

From 'Women over Sixty' 1991

Gelatin silver photograph with handwritten text on mount

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1993

Social documentary and portraiture are central to Ruth Maddison's work. Her lengthy career began in the 1970s and she is considered to be one of Australia's most important female documentary and portrait photographers of her generation. Across her wide body of work, Maddison's human subjects form a large and diverse group.

Maddison's pivotal *Women over Sixty* consists of a series of enigmatic portraits of Melbourne women aged sixty and over from varied economic and cultural backgrounds. Motivated by her own experience of early menopause and her home becoming an empty nest, Ruth Maddison produced these works to offer a glimpse into the personal lives of these women. By recording their thoughts on growing older and including the handwritten text with each photograph, Maddison presents an intimate depiction of her subjects. In doing this, the artist also reveals her own fascination with the untold stories and everyday lives of others.

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# VNS MATRIX

Virginia Barratt (b.1959), Francesca da Rimini (b.1956), Julianne Pierce (b.1963), Josephine Starrs (b.1955)

## *A Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century* 1992

Billboard: lithographic print mounted on ply

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Gift of the artists, 2000

VNS Matrix ('VNS' could be read as 'Venus' or as a corporate acronym) are a cyberfeminist media art collective, first active 1991-97. They formed in Adelaide, South Australia to engage with the sexualised and socially provocative relationship between women and technology.

Their *Cyberfeminist Manifesto for the 21st Century* reflected the environment of emerging networking culture, incorporating elements of collaboration, plagiarism, propaganda, and pornography. VNS Matrix first used the term 'cyberfeminism' within its text.

This billboard was inspired by theorists such as Donna Haraway and Sadie Plant and was installed outside the Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney in 1992.

Lots of computer technophiles jack into the machine and want to forget about the body, to reject the meat of the body. In our work we're not finished with the body. The body is an important site for feminists.

Griffith University's collection of VNS Matrix material represents the major holding of work towards the projected interactive video game 'All New Gen' Gamegirl, which was never completely realized because of the geographical dispersal of the artists, and lack of resources.

# VNS MATRIX

Virginia Barratt (b.1959), Francesca da Rimini (b.1956), Julianne Pierce (b.1963), Josephine Starrs (b.1955)

*Oracle Snatch* 1992

Photographic print and construction

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Gift of the artists, 2000

*Oracle Snatch* in its distinct black and white film print, staged body, and non-digital presentation recalls the surrealist photographs of Claude Cahun. The use of the word 'oracle' links to classical mythology where one visits a shrine to hear predictions from the oracle (or goddess), as well as to the domains of cyber-gaming and relational database management systems.<sup>1</sup>

1. Definition: Oracle Database (Oracle DB)', <https://www.techopedia.com/definition/8711/oracle-database>, accessed 8 July 2018

# VNS MATRIX (Virginia Barratt, Francesca da Rimini, Julianne Pierce, Josephine Starrs)

## *Beg and Gen in the Bonding Booth* 1993

VHS

Duration: 5 minutes

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 2000

An initial interest in the way women participate in the electronic media through pornography led to VNS designing means through which female sexuality could dominate and aggressively contrast the submissive roles reserved for women in popular technological culture. They also stressed the need for strongly identified lesbian work to counter the emphatically male heterosexual milieu towards which existing cyberculture was directed.

We're interested in being provocative...talking about technology and the body, putting some sort of guts and viscera into that clean and sterile environment and talking about sex.<sup>1</sup>

*Beg and Gen in the Bonding Booth* is a pink video that VNS Matrix describe as a virtual setting within which to explore 'femme-domme mastery'. In the scenario, identity and sexuality are simultaneously reconstructed and interrogated. 'Gen' provides the voiceover of this encounter, turning the language of computers, networks and codes into scripted erotica, while the AI character of 'Beg' serves as a cypher for female domination.

1. Virginia Barratt interviewed by Bernadette Flynn in "Electronic Arts in Australia", ed. Nicholas Zurbrugg, Continuum, vol. 8, no. 1, 1994, p.421

# Heather Winter

b.1961

## *Tales of Madness I* 1990

Gelatin silver photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1991

Interested in photography from a sociological perspective, Winter's early work experimented with image production in which built and natural environments were imbricated with layers of images and slide projections. Fairytale, gothic literature and art histories informed her use of a court jester motif, for example, to parallel the role of artists who must construct stories and cloak metaphors in order to represent truths to the state or church in a way that can be heard.<sup>1</sup>

In the series 'Tales of Madness', Winter constructs a macabre domain of feminine madness or 'hysteria', that isolates the disempowered through clinical and institutional means. Developed while Winter was undertaking a Masters at the Victorian College of Arts, *Tales of Madness I* pictures the tower of Monsalvat Church (Eltham, Victoria) at night. The church is modelled in light via Winter's images projected onto its exterior, including a portrait of a woman and child from William Hogarth's 1751 engraving 'Gin Lane'. Hogarth's image is filled with death and hopelessness, as people displaced by the industrial revolution suicide, self-medicate and/or go mad.

As Hogarth documents the institutional cruelty towards people who were already in weakened positions, Winter projects this reality back onto the structure of the church. Her contemporary works continue a commitment to those 'that struggle if they don't conform to the capitalist system that overrides spiritual values.'<sup>2</sup>

1. Heather Winter interviewed by Naomi Evans, unpublished, 7 July 2018.

2. Ibid.

# Jay Younger

b.1960

*I dream of you at night*

From 'Tragic Romance' series 1986

Gelatin silver photographs

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Purchased 1986

Jay Younger's photographs may be seen as part of a feminist strategy to engage with and subvert the politics of mass media and cinema. They incorporate a range of symbolic and technical mechanisms to parody and comment on how culture impacts on our psyche, identity, and aesthetics.

Younger's early series 'Tragic Romance' explores power dynamics in relation to female identity and representation, and was inspired by a 19th century painting by George Stubbs of a man holding the reigns of a horse. Visible in the background of *I dream of you at night*, Younger's image highlights a certain genre of capitalist art based on the representation of ownership.

Younger used her loungeroom to stage the work, and invited performance artist Michelle Andringa to collaborate as the model. Referencing the problematic misogyny that characterised the film noir genre (Robert Aldrich's *Kiss Me Deadly*, 1955, for example), Younger crafts an atmosphere of unease and suspense. It is as if a breach occurs in the subconscious where the woman becomes aware she is trapped in the image, has become an object and must bear witness to her own nightmare where symbols of possession and power overshadow female subjectivity.

# Jay Younger

b.1960

## *Untitled II* 1997-98

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2000

Jay Younger's *Untitled II* was first exhibited at Smith + Stoneley (Brisbane) in *Bite* – a show themed around the mouth as a site and object of exploration. The counterpart work, *Untitled I*, is a vibrant soft-focus image of hot pink glitter encrusted lips that frame teeth adorned with braces, which in turn hold and frame a large gleaming diamond. *Untitled II* on the other hand, is a close-up shot of a bare arm with a human bite mark impressed into exposed flesh covered with goosebumps.

Together, these works explore female eroticism and fetishism. *Untitled II* was created as Younger requested Brisbane artist Georgie Pinn to bite the leg of fellow artist Matt Dubrowski, Younger's then partner. Whereas aesthetic and photographic impressions are limited to unfeeling media, there is a distinct return of corporeality and pain in this image. As Edwina Bartleme noted,

Pain may be a stimulus of sexual desire and the bite itself might be an erotic sign, communicating moral boundary crossing and physical transcendence. Thus, associations with erotic Sado-Masochistic practices may be aroused, and the notion of pain and pleasure as subjective perceptions may become more meaningful, as one contemplates the bite-mark in Younger's photograph. It can be argued that Younger's 'portrait' [...] reveals as much about our own materiality, psychology, desires and fetishes, as it does about the indiscernible subject.<sup>1</sup>

1. Edwina Bartleme, Griffith University Art Collection, February 2001

# Anne Zahalka

b.1957

## *The Artist (self portrait)* 1986, printed 1987

Cibachrome photograph

Collection: Griffith University Art Collection

Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist, 2013

I am deeply cynical about the idea that a portrait can reveal or capture the inner life of a subject. I want to raise questions about what portraits mean and what are the conventions governing them. My earlier approaches to portraiture were informed by postmodernism and led to a questioning of representations and historical conventions.<sup>1</sup>

Anne Zahalka is one of Australia's most esteemed photomedia artists having exhibited both in Australia and internationally for more than thirty years. Portraiture is a central element of her practice, which deftly explores artifice and its relation to the real.

*Zahalka created *The Artist (self-portrait)* while on residency at the Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin from 1986-87. During this time she also produced the 'Resemblance' series, which appropriated the aesthetic conventions of 16th and 17th century Flemish genre painting, and restaged tableaux with friends and props to signpost the 20th century subject's status, occupation and intellectual pursuits. Rather than directly quoting painters such as Vermeer for example, Zahalka includes visual foils and playfully inserts anachronistic elements: in her self-portrait we see devices such as a wristwatch, Rolleiflex camera and other inventions.*

1. Anne Zahalka, in 'Naomi Cass, Director of the Centre of Contemporary Photography, in conversation with Anne Zahalka', <https://www.portrait.gov.au/exhibitions/hall-of-mirrors-2007>, accessed 8 July 2018.