



Curator Natalie King and artist Polixeni Papapetrou enjoyed a decades-long friendship that carried them through motherhood, a passion for photography and ultimately over the threshold of Papapetrou's terminal illness.

When Papapetrou's days were increasingly spent at home, King remembers visiting her there, when the signs of foreboding would fall away and be replaced instead by conversation, laughter and shared interests.

DESIGN

The art of remembrance

A book series preserves treasured memories of Australian artists.

We'd be in her bedroom surrounded by her beautiful books and artworks, and I'd often bring her lunch, she says. The afternoon would unfold with conversation and it never felt so different from the times we'd go to a cafe, even though she was ill. I always felt slightly lost in her conversation because I loved our friendship so much.

Now, a year after her friend's death, King is the series editor behind two books that form part of Thames & Hudson's new Mini Monographs series,

Words **RACHELLE UNREICH**

SEAN FENNESSY



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POLIXENI PAPAPETROU



DEL KATHRYN BARTON

The Mini Monographs series celebrate Australian photographer Polixeni Papapetrou and two-time Archibald Prize winner Del Kathryn Barton.

which celebrates Australian female artists. One is on Papapetrou, the other on two-time Archibald Prize winner Del Kathryn Barton.

Both are miniature treasure troves, each filled with up to 80 images, and featuring a writer's reflections on the featured artist's work.

For Papapetrou's book, another long-time girlfriend relays the secret whispers of friendship: playwright Joanna Murray-Smith deftly relaying the complicated shorthand of two women.

We gave equal time to existentialism and good underwear, she writes.

We could move conversationally from how we are all bound to our mothers for good and ill to what Nicole Kidman wore at the Emmys.

King says Papapetrou taught her so much, particularly on the art of gift giving.

She often had a small trinket waiting for me whenever I went to visit her—a little notebook or a coin purse or a scarf, something that would have been very much handpicked for me, she says.

When I curated the Venice Biennale [in 2017], I didn't know what shoes to wear, and she lent me her Stella McCartney platform shoes.

She [later] gave them to me to keep. I still wear them all the time. But giving was reciprocal, with King behind the publication that's become a tribute to the friend she simply calls Poli.

She recalls the thrill of handing an advance copy to Papapetrou's two children, including daughter Olympia who made it onto the book's cover.

In that photograph by her mother, *Heart* (from the series *Eden*), she wears a floral dress and peeps out from behind a heart-shaped flower wreath, blending into the backdrop of flora that she stands against.

The photograph is just one that Papapetrou and King selected together, ordering the book's sequence and ensuring it had the optimum rhythms inside.

The back of the book features a rousing endorsement from Frances Morris, the director of Tate Modern, who says the series celebrates Australia's most captivating artists—and their best loved works—but it's this cover photo to which King returns. The way the foreground and background merge, it's like time being compressed. I wondered if she was thinking about the Garden of Eden, paradise and the afterlife. ●

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