

**TRACEY MOFFATT**  
**MY HORIZON**

# My Horizon

# Tracey Moffatt

***Homo sacer***

Romaine Moreton

**My people are buried here Beneath the cracked earth of the clay pan  
My people are buried here In accustomed and unrelated lands  
My people are buried here Within pounding ocean curls and distant shores  
My people are buried here Their breath tasting of blackened bloodied soil  
My people are buried here In this transocean funerary vault  
My people are buried here Their open mouths burping sea salt  
My people Home of the sacred  
Homo sacer Staring through the horizon  
As though a string Towards the North Pole, past Polaris  
And then south again Our bare skin  
This sun-kissed life Our bare skin  
Now bare life The dagay<sup>1</sup>  
Ghosts from another land The dagay  
Gun in hand The dagay  
Shipwrecked upon our shore The dagay  
Wants to make us no more My people We are wagay<sup>2</sup>  
Spirit of a living man *Wagay*  
Spirit of our living lands**

<sup>1</sup> *dagay* – Bundjalung word for 'ghost'; also means 'white man'.

<sup>2</sup> *wagay* – Bundjalung word for 'spirit of a living man'.

## Chairs’ welcome

The Australia Council for the Arts is delighted to present *Tracey Moffatt: My Horizon* at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, La Biennale di Venezia.

Australia’s cultural ambition is evident in our contemporary visual artists having presented their work to international audiences at the Venice Biennale for more than sixty years. La Biennale di Venezia plays an important global role in supporting the creation of exceptional art that enriches the lives of current and future generations.

Australian culture is unique, and is deeply shaped by more than 70,000 years of continuous Indigenous place-making and storytelling. Our culture also reflects the settlement of Australia across more than two centuries by people from around the world, and our cultural strength and relevance lie in this diversity.

The year 2017 is a significant one for Australian arts and culture for a number of reasons. Internationally acclaimed artist Tracey Moffatt is representing Australia at La Biennale di Venezia in the Australian Pavilion. We are excited to experience Tracey’s beautiful and evocative work as she undertakes an exploration of personal and fictional identity within a global context.

The year 2017 also marks the fiftieth anniversary of the announcement by the Australian Government that the Australia Council for the Arts would be established. The formation of the Australia Council has had profound consequences for our nation’s artists, art organisations and audiences, and will continue to do so.

Australia’s participation in Venice is made possible through the enthusiastic support of many individuals. This commitment and support is a significant endorsement of this project, and enables critical international exposure of Australian artists that allows them to build their careers and connect with new audiences and markets around the world.

Our national community of supporters has been inspired by the leadership of the 2017 Australian Commissioner, Naomi Milgrom AO. On behalf of the Board of the Australia Council, we extend our sincere appreciation to Naomi for her passion for and commitment to advocating Australian art to the world. We also acknowledge the work and dedication of our exhibition curator and editor of the publication, Natalie King, whose expertise and collaboration with Tracey has resulted in a truly poetic exhibition.

The Australia Council acknowledges the Commonwealth Government of Australia; the Minister for the Arts, Senator the Hon. Mitch Fifield; and the generous support and invaluable contributions of our many partners in making this project a reality.

We acknowledge the work of Australia Council’s CEO Tony Grybowski, and its Venice team, led by Wendy Were and Tamara Harrison, and thank them for their significant contribution. We also offer sincere congratulations and appreciation to Tracey for her poignant and uncompromising vision in realising this important project.

**Rupert Myer AO**  
Chair, Australia Council  
for the Arts

**Lee-Ann Buckskin**  
Deputy Chair, Australia  
Council for the Arts

## Commissioner’s foreword

Tracey Moffatt is one of Australia’s most successful artists. She has forged an extensive international career brought about largely by her move to New York in 1997, creating a body of work that is a collection of carefully constructed narratives exploring race, gender, sexuality and displacement, often drawing on her own personal history.

I couldn’t believe my luck when as Commissioner I had the enviable task of letting Tracey know she had been selected to represent Australia at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition – La Biennale di Venezia. It was a thrill to make that phone call. The Venice Biennale is the ultimate showcase for any artist. For me, too, as the Commissioner, it has been an absolute privilege to be involved.

My relationship with Tracey began the moment she answered the phone. We are two women with different life experiences, seemingly with little in common, but over time we have discovered just how much we actually share, and now enjoy a deep, unexpected friendship. Tracey is my hero. She has approached our time working together with dedication, focus, discipline and a ferocious commitment to producing two extraordinary suites of entirely new photographs and two new films.

*My Horizon* is an exceptional experience. Tracey has transformed and activated the Australian Pavilion with her poignant narratives that position desperate human journeys, border crossings and belonging as global concerns independent of a particular time or place.

Instrumental in mounting this exhibition and realising Tracey’s vision in the Australian Pavilion as a moving, personal experience has been the work of curator Natalie King. I congratulate her for guiding this project with such exemplary skill and unparalleled curatorial knowledge. As editor of this publication, Natalie has created an insightful compendium to accompany Tracey’s exhibition. I am inspired by the writers who have contributed to this catalogue, all of whom take us on a journey through Tracey’s work.

The entire Australian Venice Biennale project is underpinned by a dynamic public–private partnership between the Australia Council for the Arts and our generous philanthropists. Unprecedented numbers are supporting Tracey Moffatt on the world stage at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. I am most grateful to our major partner, the Balnaves Foundation, for making this project possible, and to all the generous individuals and foundations who have funded this project: Maddocks, Neilson Foundation, The University of Melbourne, Naomi Milgrom Foundation, Marc and Eva Besen, Sam Meers, Simon and Catriona Mordant, Rupert and Annabel Myer, Mark and Louise Nelson, Roslyn and Tony Oxley, Peter and Doris Weiss, Carla Zampatti, Susan Armitage, Hamish Balnaves, Daniel Besen, Luisa Bosci, Andrew Cameron, Deborah Cheetham, Penny Clive, Debbie Dadon, Paul Eliadis, Jo Featherstone, Adrian Fini, Jan Frolich, Helen Gannon, Charles Green, Mark Henry, Jo Horgan, Peter Jopling, Ros Morgan, Paris Neilson, Dick Quan, Carol Schwartz, Eleonora Triguboff, Terry Wu. With thanks also to our 2017 Champions and Donors.

My sincere gratitude to Fiona and Ruffy Geminder from the Pratt Foundation for generously supporting the first major publication on Tracey Moffatt’s work in over a decade. This book will enrich our experience of *My Horizon* in Venice and play an important role in bringing her work to the world well beyond the 2017 Venice Biennale.

### **Naomi Milgrom AO**

Australian Commissioner for the Venice Biennale 2017

# Contents

- 2 Fall into my fiction  
**Natalie King**
- 10 Tracey Moffatt in conversation  
with Natalie King
- 18 In praise of shadows  
and otherness  
**Djon Mundine**

## Body Remembers

- 24 'Body, remember'  
**C.P. Cavafy**
- 46 Touch  
**Nakkiah Lui**
- 48 Of performance art and feminism  
**Moira Roth**
- 50 Thought patterns:  
*Body Remembers*  
**Tracey Moffatt**

## Passage

- 78 Emigration of identity  
**Germano Celant**
- 82 *Mother and Baby*  
**Susan Bright**
- 84 Thought patterns:  
*Passage*  
**Tracey Moffatt**

## Vigil

- 96 Elizabeth Taylor:  
Hollywood's pagan queen  
**Camille Paglia**
- 98 Reverse shot  
**Adrian Martin**

## The White Ghosts Sailed In

- 112 A sublime passage  
**Judy Annear**
- 113 Tracey Moffatt talks with  
Simone Brett about  
*The White Ghosts Sailed In*
- 114 Odyssey of the horizon  
**Alexis Wright**

- 122 Chronology
- 132 List of works
- 134 Notes
- 136 Credits
- 139 Further reading
- 142 Contributors
- 144 Artist's acknowledgements
- 144 Curator's acknowledgements
- 145 Australia Council for the Arts'  
acknowledgements

## Fall into my fiction<sup>1</sup>

Natalie King

‘My fantasy is in my strange brain – I can sit still and go places you’d never dream of!’

– Tracey Moffatt (2009)

‘You can allow your eyes and heart to see. See the injustice, cruelty, and you can also hear the laughter and the love.’

– Lisa Belleair, *Dreaming in Urban Areas* (1996)

‘I am beset by memories and dreams.’

– Elizabeth Taylor in *Night Watch* (1973)

### Memory theatre

Somewhere between fiction and history, the work of Tracey Moffatt is redolent with imaginative narratives. Working across photography, film and video, Moffatt takes the tempo of our times in highly staged photo dramas. Her carefully constructed scenarios are replete with a distinctive theatricality and resonant with references to film, art and the epic history of photography. Moffatt’s incidents and vignettes depict disturbing, tender, funny and cinematic sequences. Through a type of photographic filmmaking, she accentuates the role of staging and framing in emotionally charged imagery. She writes: ‘world cinema fuelled my inbred manic excitement for images and drama.’<sup>2</sup> With a voracious imagination and insatiable consumption of images, Moffatt depicts psychodramas that are taut visual arrangements with filmic twists, turns and tribulations, linked with the dense history of photography. On this subject, Moffatt has declared: ‘There is nothing quite like the power of the frozen negative image. In a way it is sexy. You can stare at it for as long as you like and as well you can think about it as you climb into bed.’<sup>3</sup>

A highly receptive child of the 1960s, Tracey Moffatt grew up in foster care in a working-class suburb in Brisbane, avidly consuming images from magazines, films and television. The media fascinated her with its randomness and emotional confluence – images of fantasy and other realities from across the world combined with the evening news. Film sequences were filed in her personal memory theatre, but Moffatt didn’t dream of being the object of the hero’s gaze – she wanted to direct the film. Popular cinema was the gateway to her youthful imagination, Moffatt has said:

Cinema outings were rare. The first film I saw in a cinema was *Mary Poppins* at age five. I remember the outing vividly. To this day I still believe *Mary Poppins* to be a cinematic masterpiece. Those 1960s big budget Disney technicolor works of art remain a yardstick on which I judge almost all films, and possibly all other art . . . I’m always hungry for an image.<sup>4</sup>

The heightened colouration of Disney’s palette, with its unreal qualities, captivated Moffatt. While still a child, she began to explore her theatrical preoccupations and feminist ideology. She directed a growing cast of cousins and siblings in various home dramas with improvised props and make-up, sets and costumes: she had already become an amateur dramaturg and scenographer. Moffatt also began performing in plays at church camp on the Gold Coast.<sup>5</sup> As a teenager, she worked as a live-in babysitter, where she read her host’s copy of Germaine Greer’s *The Female Eunuch* (1970) ‘because I was intrigued by its cover – I thought it was going to be a dirty book. I was fifteen.’<sup>6</sup>

Since graduating from Queensland College of Art in 1982, Moffatt has relished in experimentation with the possibilities of the medium of photography by extending its parameters into other realms. Each new series involves extensive testing of materials (rag paper, metallic paper, undercoats, painted textures, the Hallmark card palette) and techniques (stereoscope, daguerreotype, magic lantern photography) to arrive at a unique format. Manipulation of the photographic medium has become a stalwart of her rigorous practice: ‘If I’m not experimenting with a new “look” to my work then I have no interest, I may as well go open a coffee shop on Bondi Beach (which would actually be a thrill to do).’<sup>7</sup>

By staging her photographs at mysterious locations, Moffatt ensures that her images are essentially anywhere but also nowhere. ‘No actual “place” town – or landscape has ever influenced my work – I feel I could make art anywhere,’ she says. ‘My dream is to live isolated in a tiny cabin on a mountain with bush on one side and ocean vista beyond . . .’<sup>8</sup> Moffatt does, however, consciously reference the canon of Australian paintings dependent on an apprehension of place, especially those of Russell Drysdale, whose inhospitable and dried-up terrain – hot, red, isolated and desolate – is the setting for restless, brooding figures.



Tracey Moffatt, *Self Portrait* 1999

*Here the poetic and personal meld as we ponder how to look out and beyond towards the unobtainable.*



Russell Drysdale, *Desert Landscape* 1952

The despair induced by the endless heat and drought depicted in Drysdale's rural landscapes is taken up by Moffatt. Her scenarios could be any one of multiple locations, although she says, 'My love of Australian nature and land is my Aboriginal side.'<sup>9</sup>

Currently living in Sydney but with a house on Castaways Beach in Queensland looking out at the Coral Sea, Moffatt previously spent twelve years in New York's Chelsea from 1998. Both her Sydney and Noosa abodes have panoramic vistas out onto the ocean: where the horizon has been described as a line where the sky kisses the sea. Moffatt's new work is elegiac, melodramatic and fantastical while reflecting on the way we live in precarious times of seismic upheaval.

For the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, she has assembled two new photographic series – *Body Remembers* and *Passage* – and two filmic videos – *Vigil* and *The White Ghosts Sailed In* – under the rubric *My Horizon*. Here the poetic and personal meld as we ponder how to look out and beyond towards the unobtainable. Capacious and tantalising, *My Horizon* is open, expansive and personal: 'There are times in life when we all can see what is "coming over the horizon", and this is when we make a move. Or we do nothing and just wait for whatever it is to arrive.'<sup>10</sup>



Paul Strand, *Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico* 1931

### ***Body Remembers and the house of spirits***

*Body Remembers* is a desolate, sensual suite of ten large photographs tinged with sepia. Moffatt's images depict an isolated location in an unforgiving desert reminiscent of the looming greyness in Paul Strand's *Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico* (1931). Bleak and mysterious, Strand's photograph captures billowing clouds above curving adobe lines and delineated shadows. Moffatt achieves the same barren tone in her unframed *Body Remembers* photographs, which have both the appearance of vintage prints and the epic scale and narration of mural frescoes. The title of the series is derived from the Greek modernist poet C.P. Cavafy, whose poem 'Body, remember' (1918) is an exhortation to remember the power of desire and passions to do with forbidden love. Cavafy celebrated the memory of desire as an antidote to the ravages of ageing and loneliness.

*Body Remembers* evocatively tells the story of a maid returning to a ruin wearing a 1950s black dress trimmed with lace, a white apron and Victorian mourning earrings. These domestic scenarios recall Moffatt's mother, Daphne Moffatt, and her matrilineal history of domestic servitude, but here Moffatt casts herself as the protagonist. Previously, she has appeared in a red cheong-sam in *Something More* (1989), as Ruby Morphett in *beDevil* (1993), and in a compendium of roles in *First Jobs* (2008). 'When I "perform" in my art,' she says, 'it is always vaguely semi-autobiographical . . . tis all.'<sup>11</sup> Here, she stands in apertures – windows, doorways, openings and thresholds – within a self-contained world of soft light and a gentle breeze.

Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Australia, thousands of Indigenous girls and boys were stolen as young children from their parents and placed in institutions as part of an officially sanctioned government policy of 'protection'. They experienced estrangement from their families, immense hardship, rape and even torture. The girls were trained as domestic servants, many of those in New South Wales at Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Training Home (1912–74), where they endured a pervasive experience of psychological and physical abuse.<sup>12</sup> The young Aboriginal girls forcibly removed from their families were sent out as slaves to farming properties, with the government exercising complete control over their wages. The documentary *Servant or Slave* (2015) charts the history and legacy of domestic servitude forced upon Aboriginal girls in Australia told through the harrowing stories of five women. As Professor Larissa Behrendt clarifies in the film:

**a child who is getting no wages or is severely under paid, the United Nations Human Rights standards would say that is slavery. People will**

**say well you know that's what happened in the Southern States of America and we didn't have that here. But for the child who was working for nothing in someone else's kitchen with no other choice, cannot escape, is beaten when they don't do their work, is abused in other ways ... it's slavery.'**<sup>13</sup>

Moffatt recalls her mother working as a domestic for a doctor in the 1950s, and their ancestor Maggie Moffatt was a cook and domestic on a mountainous cattle property in Central Queensland around 1910: 'My mother was bored and hated it. She escaped to the city, she had affairs, she loved music and hung out in nightclubs, she met visiting African American jazz musicians and then had me.'<sup>14</sup>

Another complex and often fraught mother–daughter, servant–slave relationship appears in Moffatt's film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990), featuring Marcia Langton as an adoptive daughter ministering to her disabled, toothless mother in the incandescent desert.



Tracey Moffatt, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* 1990 (film still)



Jedda 1955 (film still)

The overblown melodrama is shot entirely indoors, and the interior set of the cattle property's main house is partly inspired by Charles Chauvel's film *Jedda* (1955). When the orphaned newborn Aboriginal infant in *Jedda* is laid on the table before the white mistress of the house, they both begin to cry in pain and anguish.<sup>15</sup> In an earlier image from Moffatt's oeuvre – *Doll Birth* 1972 (1994) – her childhood black baby doll Cindy is featured, but there is no mother in sight.<sup>16</sup>



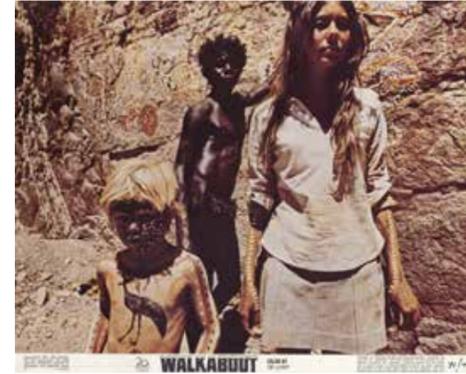
Tracey Moffatt, *Doll Birth* 1972 1994

In *Body Remembers*, set in an abandoned, crumbling ruin within a barren wasteland, we view Moffatt as the maid in an isolated location, taking refuge within the ruinous intimacy of her mind. It is as if we can glimpse inside her preoccupations as she caresses a wall in *Touch*, looks dolefully out of a window towards an entangled cluster of brambles with a stove nearby in *Kitchen*, or is poised on the edge of a shadow in *Worship*. Possibly confined in mourning, the maid is trapped within a ruin. *Bedroom*

depicts her lost in thought, having completed her cleaning, whereas in *Washing* she is a shadow of a woman hanging the laundry on a sinewy line. The colouration hints at the ochre pigments of Aboriginal rock art and the sprawling fields of Andrew Wyeth's realist paintings, known for their intimate depictions of the land and sea. As the maid stares at the dusty walls of the abandoned house, the mood is wistful and sensual. In *Shadow Dream*, her reverie could be embedded in the hint of an off-the-shoulder gown revealing itself in the patterned shadow of her garb, while her silhouette looks towards a faint comet created by the sun. Is she imagining escape from the site of her domestic employment or mourning the passage of time? We return to 'those desires that glowed openly' in Cavafy's poem, the libretto to these emotive images.

The house can also be considered as a character in this drama. A similar abode has appeared throughout Moffatt's oeuvre, and is a significant motif in *Plantation* (2009), *Laudanum* (1998) and *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990). In the supernatural glow of *Spirit House*, the shadowy figure of a mysterious man appears in the doorway, with a light glowing in the dry grass: the rural surrounds are barren. Steeped in yearning, desire and longing, Moffatt's languid landscapes are dreamy: 'I think all my imagery comes from my subconscious, from dreams. I am not talking about when I dream at night (these are far too weird and sick) but the dreams I have when I am awake. We can dream with our eyes open.'<sup>17</sup>

*Body Remembers* also references the scene in *Walkabout* (1971) where David Gulpilil and Jenny Agutter, who play the film's main characters, wander in and out of an abandoned farmhouse, peering and walking through shadowy portals. *Walkabout* is the hallucinogenic tale of two stranded white children who are discovered by an Aboriginal boy. In her take on this story, Moffatt reinforces her geometrical composition within the photographic plane by accentuating textured shadows. Wandering around the ruin, the maid displays a reflective state of mind as she hovers between interior and exterior, sorrow and regret. Here Moffatt also cites Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba* (1945), a play about isolation, fear and repression. Set in a house of mourning in Andalusia with five daughters, a housekeeper and an elderly mother, Lorca's drama pivots around an eight-year mourning period in the household. Moffatt conjoins the real with the unreal, light and shade, the viewer and the viewed: her character is silent, alone and still.



Walkabout 1971 (lobby card)

### **Passage: all these souls are escaping**

**This is the last journey, whatever the outcome. The boat is a disposable bark with a disposable cargo: Eritreans, mostly, some Somalis and Syrians, with a couple of Tunisians, men and women and children. There are 41 unaccompanied minors — the youngest is 11. They look back at their last view of Africa. The distinction between an economic migrant and a refugee is simple: are you running from or to? All these souls are escaping.**

– A.A. Gill, 'Welcome to Death Island' (2013)<sup>18</sup>

In the searing afternoon glare, a mother stands at a port clutching her baby. She has taken a perilous and dangerous journey similar to A.A. Gill's account of the treacherous plight of refugees, narrated in turmoil with evaporating grief. Tracey Moffatt's protagonist has no partner and nowhere to go, a stowaway with no luggage except her precious child. Dressed for travel and hiding with a baby, she needs to escape. Or perhaps she has alighted from a boat, attempting to enter an unwelcoming port. She is poised beside a cage and cast in a malevolent light. In this operatic and incendiary image, the young woman might be seeking illegal passage. Somewhere between fiction and reality, *Mother and Baby* is part of an unfurling drama, with characters furtively appearing in doorways, alleys, windows and alongside buildings. Part of a heightened mise en scène, the baby tries to pull away but we can't see the mother's face. Mother and baby merge in an atmospheric haze.

Caught between heaven and hell, the cast of *Passage* is haunted, adrift in the silent, foggy harbour. Moffatt implies intrepid voyages, represented in a suite of twelve vivid, glossy colour photographs. Here she depicts the passage of characters through the afternoon light, doused with the acidic colouration of *Solar Man*, posed before a dockland scene, or the phosphorous silhouettes in *Hell*. *Window Man* references the smoke billowing from Linda Blair's window in the poster for the supernatural horror movie *The Exorcist* (1973). This ensemble of frozen film stills slips through the cracks of place and time, yearning for somewhere else. Moffatt's feverish colouration creates an inferno of figures trapped in billowing mist and sudden flares. She is inspired by the mood of southern American writers such as Carson McCullers, with her array of misfits and outcasts struggling in the heat: 'These writings always remind me of where I come from – the north of Australia, the sub-tropics. In a sense a holiday paradise – the heat, the joy, but also the terrible mood of fear and racism.'<sup>19</sup>



Tracey Moffatt on location photographing her photo series *Passage* in late 2015

Photographing into the sun at a low angle, Moffatt flexes her camera into the heat and haze seeking 'The smell of diesel and the look of it in flames.'<sup>20</sup> But these images could also be scenes from a 40s movie that was never made. *Passage* depicts scenes from a dockland while recalling the saturated atmosphere and theatricality of Moffatt's iconic series *Something More* (1989). At the same time, the filmic narrative brings to mind Moffatt's feature films *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990) and *beDevil* (1993). These films display carefully constructed scenography and high drama, which continue in Moffatt's oeuvre. With technical dexterity, Moffatt undertakes tremendous

post-production labour and experimentation with her photographs to accomplish a painterly, Turneresque atmosphere: ‘You know when it comes down to it I wish I was a painter,’ she has said. ‘There isn’t anything greater and nothing hypnotises like painting.’<sup>21</sup>



A digital mock-up of *Shadow Man* from Tracey Moffatt's storyboard for her series *Passage*

A filmmaker and cinephile, Moffatt storyboards her choreographed compositions with cinematographic precision. Here are the lost hours of temporal travellers, those who continually roam. By dismantling the conventions of storytelling, she portrays a tale of travel and refuge, flight and forgetting. The storyline is not fixed, although we can piece together the arc of a mother and baby at a port, a slick dude in a sharp suit and hat with a cigarette, an authoritative cop, and various accoutrements – tugboat, motorbike, car, street lamp, signs and fences.



Warren Richardson, *Hope for a New Life* 2015

In February 2016, Moffatt sent me a prescient documentary image from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, a haunting black-and-white photograph of a male refugee passing a baby under a barbed-wire fence. The image captured the agony of crossing the border between Serbia and Hungary just as more than a million people fought their way across Europe. This haunting image was taken in the dead of night without a flash. In the *Passage* series of photographs, Moffatt alludes to this current global crisis of displacement and its impact on the human condition. We are reminded of mass human movement across borders and terrain: the timeless narrative of forced migration.

In *Mad Captain*, the result of a fascination with the shipwrecks in the film *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935) and Katherine Anne Porter's allegorical account in her book *Ship of Fools* (1962), Moffatt portrays her character entangled in nautical rigging. With outstretched arms, the captain is engulfed in flames, immolating with dappled burns piercing his face. Simultaneously, Moffatt cites the 19<sup>th</sup>-century punishment on ships, where prisoners were strapped and hoisted to the mast for flogging. Other literary references include maritime historian Joan Druett's *Island of the Lost: Shipwrecked at the Edge of the World* (2007), which recounts the tale of Captain Thomas Musgrave and his crew of four aboard the schooner *Grafton*, which was wrecked in 1864 on the subantarctic Auckland Islands in the middle of the Southern Ocean.

When telling me of the conceptualisation of the *Passage* series, Moffatt recounted the profound devastation and shock she felt as she watched the Christmas Island boat wreck on the television news. At 6.30 am on 15 December 2010, a boat carrying around ninety asylum seekers, mostly from Iraq and Iran, sank off the coast of the Australian territory of Christmas Island in the Indian Ocean: ‘This tragedy has haunted me, as do many news stories.’<sup>22</sup> Moffatt's fragmented group of carefully calibrated scenarios narrates a harrowing, sad saga. She reimagines the grim plight of refugees, her vision drenched in a fictional film-noir sensibility to do with desperate journeys and dispossession.

### ***Vigil*: a watchful unease**

Have we become a society of voyeurs? In her montage *Vigil*, Moffatt shows rickety boats overflowing with refugees adrift at sea, spliced with excerpted images of white movie stars watching from windows. Elizabeth Taylor stands aghast at a window-like aperture, while Kathleen Turner and Julie Christie peep through binoculars. Using cinematic devices such as the film still and close-up, and set to a menacing and foreboding soundtrack, this video utilises windows as framing devices to accentuate the psychology of surveillance: the viewer and the viewed. Once again, Moffatt turns to Hollywood to explore privilege (and under-privilege) in a fast-paced riff of movie stars and boat wrecks. She has further intensified the images of the boats by manipulating each still with a painterly cut-out effect and adding a blood-like hue to the sea to accentuate carnage and terror.

*Vigil* is a devotional act of watching, a frenetic wakefulness induced by the fiction of Hollywood and the wretched fate of refugees – what Moffatt describes as ‘white people gawking at desperate poor brown people in boats.’<sup>23</sup> Since 1999, Moffatt has been making cinematic montages where filmic frames accrue in intensity and pace with the juxtaposition of images with sound. The pervasive human predilection for looking and watching is harnessed by Moffatt with prying curiosity. Aided and abetted by the camera, voyeurism and surveillance pose uneasy questions about the transgression of looking.<sup>24</sup>

### ***The White Ghosts Sailed In*: invasion of the senses**

Fused with Australia's dark history as a penal colony, and stories of dispossession, pending violence and turmoil, clandestine and secretive encounters unfold in Moffatt's suspenseful make-believe world. *The White Ghosts Sailed In* is a loaded video filmed at Sydney Heads. Journeys and arrivals, occupation and dispossession, colonisation and massacres are contained within this short footage alluding to settlement in 1788. Projected in a large timber frame like planks from a pirate ship, this could be a slowly moving and degrading photograph. Filmed from the vantage point of Moffatt's cottage studio, with its panoramic vista of Sydney Harbour, this piece layers the film with the quality of old nitrate footage. An uneasy and unnerving soundscape of

howling wind, a baby crying, the beat of a military drum, clap sticks and crackling fire is syncopated with this tainted footage. At one point, the film becomes frenetic and disorientating. As if drenched in coagulated blood-spill, the video references the invasion of the colonisers and the massacres that ensued for Aboriginal communities. For Moffatt, ‘The more I look at this found footage, I can only conclude that it depicts an invasion.’<sup>25</sup> Her topographical rendition of the entrance to Sydney Harbour allows us to look out and beyond, to ruminate on what might lie over the horizon.

### ***My Horizon*: somnambulant stories**

In *My Horizon*, Tracey Moffatt relishes in a diverse plethora of sources, including writings, poetry, experimental films, pulp fiction, trashy television and music. Added to this giddy mix are cinematic devices such as cutaway, flashback, close-up, reverse shot and dream sequence: Moffatt choreographs a cast of characters against otherworldly backdrops. Simmering with loss, longing and pending violence, *My Horizon* alludes to issues of race and gender, sexuality, desire and identity, and human connection and estrangement.

In her work, Moffatt sets up clearly configured tableaux, episodic chapters and storylines that have a narrative thread but in which many tales are being told: she ‘spins a yarn’. Themes of violence and sentiment mingle, past and present times are combined, and the supernatural forever invades the familiar world. To this mix Moffatt brings her perspective on identity in terms of her Aboriginality and femininity, but she also carefully styles her narratives to allow multiple readings beyond the specifics of politics. Her stories highlight how we live in a tumultuous era of displacement and upheaval.

How does the imagination create a world? Marrying deft formality with stylistic experimentation, Moffatt's photographs and videos reference her own childhood fantasies in coalescence with real-life contemporary dilemmas. Telling stories through photographic and filmic images, Moffatt alludes to memories, and discontent and its aftermath. Her somnambulant characters are consigned to shadows and dreamy scenes within an imaginary world of exile and crisis. Like the border crosser, Moffatt moves freely between narrative elements of observation and imagination, restlessly seeking elsewhere.

*We are reminded of mass human movement across borders and terrain: the timeless narrative of forced migration.*

*Her stories highlight how we live in a tumultuous era of displacement and upheaval.*



Tracey Moffatt, *I Made a Camera* 2003

**Natalie King:** You grew up in Brisbane, Australia, attending Mount Gravatt High School. As a teenager, you made 8 mm home movies of your family sent by self-addressed envelope to Kodak for developing. It seems that from a young age you were 'spinning a yarn'. What is the role of fiction and make-believe in your staged photo fictions?

**Tracey Moffatt:** It is true, from an early age I used my Kodak home movie camera and my small instamatic stills camera to create low-budget fictions around the house. I would force my brothers, sisters and neighbourhood children to 'act' for me. They were my early models in my staged tableaux. I would fashion the costumes out of whatever I could find – sheets, bedspreads and bits of cardboard. I particularly loved Middle Eastern garb, which could be created with a rolled-up towel: 'Here, put this on your head,' I would say, 'be an Arab.' The stories came from the Bible or from mid-70s TV shows, such as the brilliant *Planet of the Apes*. These staged set-ups were mostly created for my amateur camera lens. The dress-up, 'set-up' and posing would only be for the camera. Once the shot was made, the game would be over.



Tracey Moffatt, *Planet of the Apes* 1973 1998

My teenage play with the camera was a continuation of my extremely early make-believe dress-up dramas that I would create and direct with other children. Even as a toddler, I recall making my older tough cousin Roxanne Moffatt climb in and out of a baby basket at my whim. When I was five we stayed on a farm and I dressed my little brother and his mate as Batman and Robin with bits of painted paper and cardboard and tissue. My recollection is clear because I remember the adults in the farmhouse watching me and chuckling at my handiwork. I remember not understanding why they thought it was funny, as I was absolutely diligent about my fiction and the scenarios that I would 'direct'.

At Christian holiday camp on the Gold Coast, Queensland, at age ten, where we shared cabins with other children, I was the costumier and make-up artist for dress-up night, spitting onto a child's colour drawing pencil and using it as eyeliner to turn a girl into Cleopatra.

I find none of what I have described above unusual or extraordinary, it was nothing but childhood play. My adult practice as an artist is only an extension of my childhood shenanigans, though I like to think that my current artworks at least have 'adult themes'. I have always been enthralled by make-believe and the 'set-up'. I have never been very interested in capturing reality with a camera, but rather creating my own version of reality. I can use fiction to comment on my own personal history or serious issues of social history or reflect on what is going on in the current political landscape.

**NK:** You are renowned for experimenting with the medium of photography, inventively manipulating form so that photography enters other realms. Can you elaborate on the influence of early vintage photography such as daguerreotype, glass plates or magic lantern image projection in *Body Remembers*? You have enlarged these old-fashioned-looking toned photos to small billboard size.

**TM:** I am always looking at my photo history books and hardly anything inspires me more than a grainy vintage black-and-white photograph. I stare with fascination at reproductions of the first recorded photograph ever made with a camera in 1826 by Niépce, who shot a view of Paris rooftops, I believe. I read that the picture was made using bitumen of Judea, which sounds biblical to me, and it even comes from the Middle East and has also been called Syrian asphalt.

## Tracey Moffatt in conversation with Natalie King

*One of the dreamy qualities that I like in an old photo is the indistinct. What one can't see beyond the grain and blur.*



TOP Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *View from the Window at Le Gras* 1826 or 1827 ABOVE Reproduction of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce, *View from the Window at Le Gras* 1826 or 1827

I want to make a photograph using this ancient process but it sounds complicated, and it is probably dangerous to inhale.

Bitumen is that black tar substance that you would squish underfoot on a new-built road. As a child, when I would run errands barefoot, it was gooey and jet-black and it would stick to me, burning my feet. It was the colour and texture of the licorice-stick candies that I was dying to buy and still want to eat. I always wonder now if I could scrape up the hot bitumen, I could form a photo like Niépce: crude yet ethereal, with the image barely there.

One of the dreamy qualities that I like in an old photo is the indistinct. What one can't see beyond the grain and blur. Often in my own photos I strain to obtain the 'indistinct', but because I work with narrative I must work towards a visual clarity.

I print a photo and show it to a friend or my art dealer, and if they can't understand or 'read' any narrative at all then I think that I have failed. I must correct the image;

it is exactly like editing a movie. A movie producer can hover over the director as they edit a movie and say: 'But I don't understand why the guy is walking into the burning building. What is his motive? You didn't set up the reason beforehand. I don't understand this guy, therefore I'm going to walk out of the cinema.'

I always look at vintage photography because I am looking for a purity of intention, a type of naivety. I look for a moment that was not intended. I collect early tourist brochures of country towns showing 'scenic views' with text descriptions, as well as early government pamphlets showing the food production industry. Recently I found some from the 20s of the Blue Mountains just outside Sydney. I stare at the paper stock and simplicity of layout and design, how the early offset printing ink fades or bleeds from the photo images.

With my ten-image *Body Remembers* photo series I wanted to create an oversized, overripe sepia-toned memory bank. I hope the large photographs fall somewhere between Surrealism in the tradition of a Giorgio de Chirico painting, with his shadows of the afternoon, and the black-and-white illustrations of Napoleon in Egypt in 1799.



Giorgio de Chirico, *Piazza d'Italia* c. 1950

**NK:** You have a personal family history of 'service'; your first job at fifteen was as a live-in nanny for a family on the Gold Coast in Queensland over summer. Your mother, Daphne Moffatt, worked as a domestic for a doctor in Brisbane in the 50s, and your grandmother Maggie Moffatt was a cook and domestic on a mountainous cattle property (ranch) called Mount Moffatt Station in Central Queensland around 1910. How have you cast yourself into *Body Remembers* as a female maid mourning the passing of time, lingering with longing in an arid ruin?



Frank Hurley, *Brenda Waldron on her Pony 'Cupie', Rider under Marlong Arch, Mount Moffatt Station, Queensland 1949*

**TM:** My *Body Remembers* series has been a personal journey, and I play the role of a maid in this work. The maid with upswept hair is dressed as if from the 50s, and she returns to the ruin of the house where she once worked: a place of memory and where she felt a sense of security and perhaps a lost love. We see the interior of the house as it once was and again as a ruin. The dream-like distilled images have titles such as *Touch* and *Worship*, and I hope they might be viewed as if in an unnamed country, not only Australia but possibly North Africa, Mexico, South America, the Middle East and even Italy. Any country with small stone hamlet ruins that dot a desolate landscape. The ruins become a type of rock altar or like a large abandoned headstone at a gravesite.

My *Body Remembers* images are suspended in a nowhere space and time. We don't know if my maid character projects her life into the future, where the house she works in has become a ruin. Or is it that my maid character returns to the ruin to relive a strong memory, perhaps of someone she knew in the house? We see her perhaps remembering someone and their presence in the third image entitled *Touch*.

I photographed this *Body Remembers* series in a remote region, and I created a fiction around the locale. I may in part be paying tribute to my own mother Daphne and my great grandmother Maggie Moffatt, whom sadly I don't know a lot about. Some years ago, while I was creating *Spirit Landscapes* (2013), I wanted to visit the cattle property where my great grandmother lived and worked. I wanted to walk where she walked and stand in the ruin of the kitchen where she once cooked. The Mount Moffatt cattle station ruin is almost unreachable, but perhaps someday I will make it there.

I have often worked like this in creating my photo dramas. I find the location first, then I start to spin a story. The location inspires the stories and then the characters emerge. Then, after that, the 'look' of the artworks starts to appear.

**NK:** Can you discuss the desolate house and ruin in *Body Remembers*, with the female protagonist (you) standing in apertures, at a window, in a doorway, by a bed or before a hearth?

**TM:** All ruins have intrigued humans forever, and the image of the ruin appears throughout the history of painting. Ruins can trigger nostalgia about past grandeur or, if it is humble such as a farmhouse, it can move one to think of a simpler rural, happier existence. A ruin can take us out and away from our present-day troubles. Therefore one is attracted to ruins, and teenagers are known to break into abandoned houses and desecrate them even more.

In my series *Body Remembers*, the maid played by myself appears to be revisiting a house where she once 'served'. Memories flood her. The images switch back and forth between the past and present, and nothing is visually explained. The images operate in the realm of Surrealism, where nothing appears to be what it really is.

I quote here the last paragraph of 'Insomnia' by American poet Elizabeth Bishop:

. . . into that world inverted  
where left is always right,  
where the shadows are really the body,  
where we stay awake all night,  
where the heavens are shallow as the sea  
is now deep, and you love me.<sup>1</sup>

**NK:** The series of photographs in *Passage*, rendered in saturated colour, is set in a fictional location that could be a mysterious port on the edge of the Indian Ocean or North Africa or the west coast of Australia, searing with the prospect of danger and escape. Can you discuss how this locale invokes places of transit, hidden journeys and illegal passages?

**TM:** My photo series *Passage* has the look of film-noir 40s Hollywood movies but in colour. The setting is a grim docklands, a 'waterfront' that could almost be in any country. I have tried not to 'locate' the story so that it can hopefully 'move' and be 'read' by many cultures. It isn't that

I feel limited by always having to comment on Australia, the country where I am from and where I now live; it is that I have always wanted my artworks to ‘cross borders’, so that my photo scenarios can be instantly recognisable to anyone.

In the twelve images from *Passage* I have a small cast of characters, some of whom look African though they could also be American. The setting could be Brooklyn in New York or New Orleans or more exotic, and most of all I would love it to be read as some colonial African outpost port – it could be Nairobi or Entebbe. I love city names that seem to sweep you up into a story as you are saying them. The best one would have to be Kinshasa in ‘the Congo’: Kinshasa sounds like a drumbeat as you are saying it.

I want the 40s era to read as ‘of the past’, but the storyline speaks about what is happening in the world today with asylum seekers illegally crossing borders. But I don’t want the images to read as a dated news story, because in fact the asylum-seeking storyline is not a new story but it is one as old as time. People throughout history and across cultures have always escaped and crossed borders to seek new lives.

You and I, Natalie, for sure, have had relatives from our past who would have had to ‘jump ship’ to go ashore into ‘new lands’ or climbed on board ships illegally as stowaways. I have always loved artist Willem de Kooning’s story of how he was an illegal stowaway on a ship, arriving in the US in 1926. He hid below deck and then managed to get himself into New York; here is someone who reinvented himself. He went from sign painter to genius Abstract Expressionist. I find reinvention so thrilling because it takes guts. Though with asylum-seeking now, as we all know, such journeys are done out of desperation. The recent illegal sea voyages are full of danger.

The storyline I have invented for *Passage* involves a young woman dressed for stowaway travel and a baby boy who isn’t, a prowling motorcycle cop and a sharp-suited ‘middleman’ dude who smokes a lot. They all meet in dark streets and laneways by the harbour and all are tortured individuals. I have never liked to finalise my scenarios but rather leave them open to interpretation. The inferno of emotions visible in my images has to do with the baby boy, who is either sold to seek illegal passage or he is rescued from being sold.

In the opening photo, entitled *Mother and Baby*, the young woman nurses him and she is showing him the horizon line, which could represent his brand-new future with or without her. We see the mother in a swirl of yellow fog gripping her baby boy. She is saying goodbye to her baby, but he is squirming away from her. She could be

reunited with him, or she could be about to give him away as she is fading into the yellow murk of fog. The baby’s face is turned away; he looks outward towards his different future. His mother will fade from his memory, as is the case in such real-life situations. His mother’s face is already unreadable and hidden in a cloud; he will not remember her face, but he might remember the feel of her. When I photographed this image I set a fog machine to create an ambience. I hoped that the effect would look painterly and soften the harsh real-life look of the digital photo, and that the afternoon light would refract with the fog as it drifted.

When I worked on printing this picture, I tried to make the image of the young woman solid and strong, but she would not come through the fog. In the end, I knew that the mysterious process of photography was not letting me ‘have her’. Photography was telling me my *Passage* story. The young woman might fade away from the baby’s life and be nothing but a distant memory to him. I have often felt that when I develop my photo dramas my characters emerge, like in a novel. Fiction writers talk about their characters taking over and speaking to them as they write.

**NK:** Can you discuss the tense and taut relationships between the characters in *Passage*, especially the cop, the mother and baby, and the smoking guy, who are all part of an intriguing mise en scène?

**TM:** We see the mother by the water waiting for a boat in the fifth image entitled *Tug*. The motorcycle cop in the foreground stands as if in vigil. It could be read that he is an authority figure and that he is preventing the young mother’s escape, or that he could be assisting her escape. s the old tugboat in the background chuffs into the harbour, we can surmise that both parties are alert to it. The mood is unrelaxed; it is ‘taut’, as you suggest.

The sharp-suited smoking dude character in his hat could be viewed as the ‘middleman’, and he is possibly making the appalling baby ‘exchange’ happen. He lurks around the docklands half-hidden in shadow; he is in thought. In the third image entitled *Hell* we see him in silhouette, cocky in stance as he puffs on his cig. His slim sexy body is like a chic devil, and the red colouration across the image is awful. In this image the three main ‘characters’ come together on a hilltop bathed in searing rays of afternoon light. The hilltop might overlook the harbour. The young mother looks out and away, the motorbike cop in the background backs off, apart from the two figures in the foreground.

*Heaven* is captured on the same hilltop location but the mood is different. The sky is bright and the light is ethereal. We see that sexy ‘middleman’ in silhouette again but he is downcast with his head lowered; he seems apologetic. He might be cowed by his own unforgiveable ‘middleman’ actions. The mother here though seems strong and spiritual, with the rays of light sweeping past her face. She seems resolved on something. She is perhaps facing life and her decision to give up her child. She might be thinking that she has done the right thing.

In the image *Cop and Baby* by the wire fence, the motorbike cop holds the baby as if in a heroic stance, like a saviour, or it could possibly the opposite – he could be a baby snatcher. The cop is awkward and he holds the baby like a trophy he doesn’t know what to do with.

**NK:** You are influenced by a limitless array of sources, such as cinema, the American surrealist filmmaker Maya Deren whose work you studied at Queensland College of the Arts in the early 80s, and iconic films including *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935), starring Clark Gable. Can you discuss the cinematic influences and qualities, what you have referred to as ‘the deliciousness of cinema’?

**TM:** *Passage* is both cinematic and operatic. I want the images to look full of heightened visual emotion: full of flames with unreal colour in the skies and settings. I was always aware from my early movie-viewing experiences that emotion and drama come from the visual, from where a camera is placed and the way lighting is used, particularly on an actor’s face. For example, with the *Cop and Baby* photo, I knew that I could change the mood of the image by darkening the cop’s face. The shadow on his face was not originally there, I shot the image ‘clean’ but later in Photoshop added the menacing face shadow.

I also play with afternoon sunlight in *Heaven* and *Hell*: the two separate images of the three main characters in silhouette on the hilltop lane. As I was shooting these photos, the afternoon light was ripping through the fog in dramatic shafts. The original raw files of these images look almost the same, but for the print I added saturated colour for effect. While shooting these images on that afternoon I was so excited by the incredible streaking light that I went berserk and I shot for hours directly into the sun, moving my actors around here and there as ‘shapes’ until I got the ‘look’ I was seeking. I also think I hurt my eyes permanently – I am still seeing circles . . . I am terrified to go to a doctor. I won’t go. I will.

Other times during my *Passage* photo shoot, I looked for photographic stillness and tranquillity. With one of the key images, *Tug*, which is of the motorcycle cop and the young woman standing by the harbour, both look with longing at the tugboat chuffing in. Again, here I posed and directed this scene: Me: ‘You look across the water . . . no, no look at the woman . . . no, no both of you stare at that boat . . . I can’t believe that old tugboat is coming in as I’m shooting this!’ When I shot this image there had been bushfires nearby and the sky was full of pink haze.

Another still, silent image is entitled *Indian*, with the young woman standing strong with the powerful motorbike. She stands triumphant or as if at a vigil as she looks out over the sea that we don’t see, but we might guess that she is standing on a ‘lookout’. The young woman has strength and she has accepted her decision in life, and whatever this decision is we don’t know. I titled this image *Indian* after the bike; I also had in my mind those other motorbikes with names such as Scout or Triumph.

**NK:** Can you discuss the painterly aspects of *Passage* that recall the diffuse light of Turner or the shady figures within a de Chirico? Is painting a significant influence?

**TM:** I have often aspired to the realm of painting in my artworks, be it film or photography. The mechanics of making the photo image can be frustrating for me, and I have never understood camera technology. I speak of looking for a certain colouration or ‘palette’ in my different photo series. This must be how a painter thinks, or tries not to think. There is no point in overthinking. I prefer not to pinpoint certain artists of the past as defining influences on me because in truth they have or haven’t inspired anything visual in me any more than the back of a Cornflakes packet. I look constantly at everything in my daily life, from advertising and packaging to a segment in a television documentary about World War II on the History Channel.

I have spoken in the past about what I like to look at. This can include an Agnes Martin painting but also a small-town cafe billboard on the side of the road. I look constantly at how commercial poster or magazine-page mechanical offset inks fade over time. I don’t ever mind what is written about my artworks or how my works are perceived by different cultures. I consider myself lucky if years after having made a certain artwork it has managed to crawl its way out into the world.

*I have often felt that when I develop my photo dramas my characters emerge, like in a novel.*

**NK:** You have said that art-making is like witchcraft. What is the role of the spirit, the supernatural, the uncanny or the paranormal in your haunted scenes, whether the glowing halos within *Passage* or mysterious shadows of *Body Remembers*?

**TM:** Art-making can be a very mysterious process, where one must stay open to one's imagination and alert to all things visual. It can be like entering a world of dreams and the supernatural. The ongoing appearance of images is something that cannot be explained. Art can decide when it is ready to emerge. One can literally get a shock when an image appears. I say to myself, 'Oh, so it (the art) is going to look like that. Who would have thought that?' My Venice artworks have possessed me for eighteen months. It has been a constant 'play' of experimentation and of changing and printing images that has not been fun. My images have come out of my Moffatt memory bank; they come from everything I have ever seen and experienced and also from what I have imagined.

Sunlight can play across a wall or object and ricochet in strobes off glass or a camera lens like gifts from heaven. Human shadows and the distortions they cast can be visually stunning and strangely telling of a person's inner world. I can see a shadow thinking. I can 'read' a person when I see their shadow. My own shadow features in my *Body Remembers* photo series. It was as if, while I was photographing this series out there in that remote location, I inhabited the shadow of someone from the past.

**NK:** *Vigil*, which continues your ongoing montages of filmic riffs, is imbued with scopophilia, especially a terrorised still of Elizabeth Taylor combined with footage of asylum seekers in perilous boats. How has the plight of refugees informed this new, urgent work?

**TM:** The television news story about the asylum-seeker boat that crashed on the Christmas Island shoreline back in 2010 is a horror. About fifty people drowned. The boat, carrying mainly Iranian and Iraqi Kurds, disintegrated in rough seas before our eyes. It is a tragedy that has haunted me since, as do many news stories. We can never fathom the desperation of the people who got onto that awful boat and crossed the horizon and tried to make it to some sort of freedom in Australia. The smashing of that rotten wooden boat is symbolic of how borders around the world are

disintegrating. The old world is out, the new world is coming in and borders cannot stay closed. Human beings, in their desperation, will always find a way 'in'; they always have.

In *Vigil*, I juxtapose images of white movie stars gazing out of windows at dark-skinned people arriving on boats. I have created graphics based on recent images we have seen in news stories of refugee people in boats. *Vigil* therefore can also be read as a blatant commentary on 'race'. There is nothing subtle in the editing and construction of my *Vigil* video piece.

**NK:** You read and watch films voraciously. What have been the seminal literary and cinematic influences on your new Venice Biennale work?

**TM:** Oh dear, where do I begin to pinpoint references? All of my artworks come from almost everything I have ever read or looked at or have experienced in real life. My memory bank is huge.

I hope my *Body Remembers* photographs have the look of a visual poem (and I do love poems, too numerous to mention), but in the end the images are meant to be visual art – they are not words on paper. The *Body Remembers* images have their own strange colouration. I have worked with ochre hues of reds, browns, yellows, greys, blacks and pulsing whites. I want the images to vibrate as if they are out of the earth and the sun. My *Passage* photo-drama series is a definite homage to old movies, 40s film noir, though in hot colours, not in black and white.

It has taken me more than twelve months to find my 'palette' for all of my new Venice Biennale photo works. My never-ending experimenting and testing at the photo-printing labs has made me insane. The moment I stop printing is when I think I have hit a mark, when I think that I have never seen such an image before. I only stop when I think that the image is finally original. I also stop when the image is 'working' in terms of the narrative I have created. For example, I decide whether I need to open up a shadow or to darken it down. It is about creating a visual mood.

**NK:** The title of your exhibition is *My Horizon*, which has been described as a 'line where the sky kisses the sea'. How are the poetic and personal a feature of your new work?

**TM:** *My Horizon* can be about one wanting to see beyond where one is. It can mean to have vision. It can mean to project out and exist in the realm of one's imagination. This is what artists do, this is what I do, and it is what saves me. Or one can accept the title in a more literal way in the reading of all of my artworks in my Venice Biennale exhibition.

The image of the horizon line is featured in most of my images; in my two photo-drama series, *Passage* and *Body Remembers*, my fictional characters are seen to gaze off out to the horizon line. My characters possibly dream of escape, or they are weighed down by their own memories or histories. The same can be said of my two video pieces, *The White Ghosts Sailed In* and *Vigil*.

*My Horizon* can describe reaching one's limitations or wanting to go beyond one's limitations. It can be likened to a dream state, like when one looks out and beyond where one is. The horizon line can represent the far and distant future or the unobtainable. There are times in life when we all can see what is 'coming over the horizon', and this is when we make a move or we do nothing and just wait for whatever it is to arrive.

**NK:** You moved back from New York to Sydney after twelve years of living in Manhattan. Can you describe your current studio environment and working rituals? Do dreams inform your visual compendium?

**TM:** I have never had a studio to work in. For the Venice Biennale I was granted the use of a room in an old cottage in Sydney bushland. It has been wonderful to have a separate workspace apart from my small apartment where I usually work. I have no routine to my working day, apart from trying for thirty boring minutes at the gym. When I am supposed to be working on my art I can easily spend two hours in a shopping centre staring into space. I can spend five hours a night watching television. I can lie on my back for eight hours riveted to a book that I can't put down.

I might spend days seeing no one and doing nothing but house-cleaning and perhaps chatting on the phone to friends and laughing my head off really loudly. What I describe above can be viewed as wasting time, but it is only that I am 'emptying out'. I empty out all of life's important responsibilities. I am then able to conjure images and ideas, or rather make space for creative thoughts to enter me.

In the end I am an artist who is dead serious about wanting to move forward and experiment with the photographic or film and video form. I still strive for old-fashioned artistry with the camera, and I want to push the photo image into other realms. Still, after forty years of camera play, I get as excited to see the results of my photo shoots as when I was a teen and I would dash to the chemist shop after school to pick up my latest photo Instamatic creations. It has been a struggle for me to develop this new work for the 2017 Venice Biennale. Art-making is not easy, and it does not appear overnight. It is a system of painstaking process beyond one's control. Artwork images decide when they are ready to emerge; the artist can only funnel them to a type of completion. Art is never, ever 'done'.

## In praise of shadows and otherness

Djon Mundine OAM

**Wungguli is a Djambarrpuyngu Aboriginal word that means both 'creative spirit' (or 'god') and 'shadow'. When Europeans invaded their lands, it came to describe the first photographic images seen by these people.**

More than a century later, in 1933, the Japanese writer Junichiro Tanizaki published *In Praise of Shadows*, an essay on aesthetics that looked to shadows to understand variations in culture, society and people. This appreciation of subtlety begins with an unlikely meditation on the banal, the Japanese toilet in Shinto temples.<sup>1</sup>

Our emotions can be thought of as acute tonal variations, most of which we probably miss and, in the Australian experience, official records never notice. A shadow glides across genders, genres, politics, histories and classes of the Australian contemporary art world. Australia's history has no soul without talking to its Aboriginal core.

Two strings are woven into Moffatt's emotional gatherings. First, the gifted but crippled lonely outsider, such as those in the 'southern gothic' of Carson McCullers' 1940 novel *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* and the 1957 trash paperback *Mandingo*, which Tracey enjoyed for its exotic colour. Margo Jefferson sums up this condition perfectly in the opening of her memoir *Negroland*:

I was taught to avoid showing off.

I was taught to distinguish myself through presentation, not declaration, to excel through deeds and manners, not showing off.

But isn't all memoir a form of showing off?

In my Negroland childhood, this was a perilous business.<sup>2</sup>

As a teenager, Tracey produced a series of Instamatic images of dress-up games that she reworked in 1998 as *Backyard Series*. In another reflection on her own teenage years, and those of her colleagues, she restaged their painful and tragic moments as offset photolithographic prints in *Scarred for Life* (1994) and *Scarred for Life II* (1999).

The second string, allied to the first, is a love of the 'other', and of people in transit – in tension physically, socially and sexually. If beauty and truth exist, they do so on the edges, in the margins, the in-betweens, as much as if not more so than at the refined, often boring centre of society. In early photography practice, portraits required long exposure times where the subject had to remain still. Children would

often be seated with their mother, who was hidden behind a curtain or covered with cloth to be rendered invisible so the focus could be centred on the child. The search for mother is an evergreen theme. The very popular 1960 illustrated children's book *Are You My Mother?* by P.D. Eastman tells the story of a baby bird who hatches while its mother is out finding food and who, feeling abandoned, goes in search of her. It's also the title of a 2012 graphic memoir by Alison Bechdel, a psychoanalysis of her relationship with her mother. Tracey Moffatt's work is littered with references to mother, family and home.

For this exhibition, Tracey Moffatt has created four new artworks. In her moving images, she has presciently aligned two seemingly separate events in history. On the one hand, the fear, anxiety and incomprehension provoked by a colonial invasion of Australia by what were essentially refugees from the 18<sup>th</sup>-century British class wars and Scottish Highland and Ireland removals; on the other, the current arrival of refugee boats on the shores of Australian territory, and the movement of people worldwide.

In the first of these works, *The White Ghosts Sailed In*, a moving image of the entrance to what is now Sydney Harbour speaks of the day British colonists arrived on the Australian continent. In 1815, Bungaree, an Aboriginal Caliban-type character, was given back land on the northern harbourside shore of Tbughawle (Sydney), along with the animals and utensils he needed to 'civilise' him as a farmer. From here he could observe every European ship that entered the harbour. One cannot visit the site of Bungaree's Farm on Middle Head without being overwhelmed by the powerful image of the entrance to Sydney Harbour, still in an almost pristine forested pre-colonial state in 2017. In the moving image, the sound of a rainbird (or a dove) and a baby's cry are metaphorically the sounds of the beginning of the world. From this flooded valley of the Eel River, eels spew forth to head out across the Pacific to near New Caledonia and give birth to transparent, glass-like and almost invisible newborns that then make their way back thousands of kilometres to the place of their mother's origins. The white ghosts of Sydney Heads intensify our expectations, like a birth (or a disaster) about to happen.

The second moving image, *Vigil*, intercuts actual footage of the shipwreck of a refugee boat on rocks in the Australian territory of Christmas Island in which forty-eight people died in December 2010, with snippets of moving-image clips from well-known films featuring



Greg Weight, Tracey Moffatt 1995

white Western stars such as Elizabeth Taylor looking through large glass windows in horror. Are they horrified by the disaster, or that soon these survivors will be among them?

Most stories have three parts: a beginning, a middle and an end – thesis, antithesis and conclusion or, as in the contemporary movement of people, origin, transit and destination. Although seemingly random at the start, the way Tracey’s series of photographic images is presented allows the viewer to arrange them in any number of ways to construct their own story. In this work, she mixes the everyday with glamour and melodrama to bring important issues into focus.

We should remember that Tracey came into the moving-image field in the pre-digital era with chemical film – twenty-four frames per second – splicing and editing by hand. She had to intellectualise her work, to think through and forge her ideas – perhaps a different approach from the way artists create themselves now across the digital line, when technology allows art to be quickly put together, as a friend remarked, like infotainment. Moffatt herself has said that she saw the repetitive flow of framed images, and the repetition of the same image in a series, as a ‘visual chant’. Each frame carries an emotionally loaded image, like blinking rapidly.

*Passage*, the third work, a series of photographs, narrates the apparent arrival of refugees, who negotiate with the authorities and citizens they meet. It’s drawn from clips of an array of Hollywood pictures we’ve all seen showing European refugees arriving in a port, like New York, struggling to survive. The images embody desperation, but also the allure of the exotic, the forbidden. They are about the attraction of handsome rugged tough-looking men, beautiful exotic women, other foods, languages, music, and forms of Bohemian life on the edge.

In Western philosophy the sun is powerfully male, and the moon, a reflection of the male, is female. In Aboriginal beliefs, however, the sun is female, with overpowering constant sexual strength. The moon is male and periodically dies but is reborn to die again. These beliefs come powerfully to mind for me in an image in *Passage* of a mother holding her little boy – she seems to be already leaving him, disappearing into a solarising glare.

In Maya Deren’s 1943 surrealist film *Meshes of the Afternoon*, a dream sequence follows a mysterious dark-hooded, mirror-faced figure of a woman as she moves from one building to another – we cannot see her real face.

In 2004, Australian photographer Greg Weight’s portrait of Tracey Moffatt referenced this image, photographing her from the back with her eyes gazing at the viewer in a hand-held mirror in front of her face. Moffatt’s fourth work, another photograph series, *Body Remembers*, comprises a set of figures of a woman, but only seen from the back. We see her face once, and I think in fact we don’t need to. We already know her: Moffatt’s mother or grandmother. Dreamlike, we are watching her at work; we stand behind her, together, looking in the same direction. She is every historically domesticated, enslaved Aboriginal woman: servant and slave.

*Body Remembers* is a series of sepia-toned black-and-white images of a maid on an isolated colonial property. We see the maid at work, see her place of work, and her alone pondering her future. In Claire Denis’s first feature film, *Chocolat* (1988), a young ‘white’ European woman returns to the site of her colonial life as a child. Her presence stirs memories of racial and sexual tension – forms of the master–slave relationship between her family’s ‘house boy’ Protée and her mother, and his role as the child’s minder and close friend. Several post-colonial films use this narrative metaphorical device of such a character returning to the scene of colonial life and finding the former ‘empire’ completely changed, if not in ruins.

In 1960, the year of Moffatt’s birth, the most popular song in the Australian recording charts was ‘Little Boy Lost’, playing on the Australian colonial trope of an innocent white Western child in the wild ‘primitive’ land – our Aboriginal land. While the great anxiety for the lost white child was being expressed in this song, in the same society, tens of thousands of mixed-race Aboriginal children (‘illegitimate’, deserted by their white fathers) were stolen by church and state from their Aboriginal mothers to be re-educated as good little home-makers, domestic servants or farm labourers.

Tracey and her siblings, although knowing their mother, lived with a ‘white Australian’ foster mother. Tracey’s career is heroic in the sense that she refused to accept the path and structure that might have been forced upon her. To break this seemingly pre-ordained servitude is quite remarkable. Tracey has never denied her Aboriginality and in 1987 clearly declared, ‘I’m Aboriginal but I’m an artist. I’m an artist but I’m not an Aboriginal artist,’ in effect refusing to be stereotyped, pigeonholed, and definitely never disrespected as a token.

In the most iconic scene of the 1922 German expressionist film *Nosferatu*, we see the vampire’s shadow cast on the wall but not the creature itself. For Aboriginal people the shadow is the soul, and in other stories a metaphor for a mother’s child or your own past. In 1960, Aboriginal singer Jimmy Little had a hit song with ‘The Shadow of the Boomerang’, from the film of the same name. When light shines on something or someone, a shadow is always cast. A person can never desert their shadow and a shadow cannot leave its human original. Every shadow has its own presence and absence. And never more so than in this Australian continent, full of ghosts and shadows honeycombing the historical, social and physical landscape. Each story is a ghost story loaded with shadows – a kind of ‘Scar’ story.<sup>3</sup>

In this new suite of works, Tracey Moffatt uses moving images; photographic images, which are really a form of shadow, referencing film scenes; and older printing techniques to provoke nostalgia, to draw uncontrolled emotions and memories from the viewer. Art imitating life imitating art – imitating art in a ‘second life’.

*Every shadow has its own presence and absence. And never more so than in this Australian continent, full of ghosts and shadows . . .*

# Body Remembers

***Body, remember***

C.P. Cavafy

**Body, remember not only how much you were loved, not only the beds you lay on,  
but also those desires that glowed openly in eyes that looked at you,  
trembled for you in the voices – only some chance obstacle frustrated them.  
Now that it's all finally in the past, it seems almost as if you gave yourself  
to those desires too – how they glowed, remember, in eyes that looked at you,  
remember, body, how they trembled for you in those voices.**





















## Touch

Nakkiah Lui

**Even on her deathbed my grandmother was a clean woman. Every night for the last few months she was in hospital, I would do the same routine. Shower and dry her, all over and under the skin folds. Powder her body, everywhere and in huge puffs until the scented talc made my nose itch. Dress her. Rub pain cream on her arms and legs. Clean her nails. Braid her hair.**

The last night I bathed and dressed her, I plaited her hair and looked back twice to say I love you. A few hours later she was gone.

Now the cleaning ritual that I both loved and resented feels like I was prepping the body before a funeral. That I was not a granddaughter caring for her grandmother, but a mortician, cleaning to give her body life, to make her acceptable to eyes that were not her own.

My nana smelt like sweet musk, baby powder and eucalyptus. She always smelt so clean. When she got sick I'd wash her in the shower. As I'd lather up the soap and rub it down her back, I'd try to connect the moles on her back into images. I'd wash and wash, staring hard at those moles, trying to give us purpose and meaning, because this couldn't be luck and must be some divine design, because otherwise why? Why me? Why us? Why her?

My grandmother fell through a floor and died because the White people who forced her into her housing commission home refused to fix the floor that termites had eaten away.

She was clean, my grandmother, so clean, so clean. She was houseproud and planted roses at the front that pricked my fingers and made me bleed if I ever tried to pick them. She was obsessive with how she cleaned the house every morning. It would be tiring to repeat. She'd iron the bedsheets before putting them on. When I was nine, I complained to my mother about how boring it was to visit my nana in the mornings during school holidays because of her obsessive cleaning, and my mum told me not to complain. Nana cleaned like that because when they were little, the White people would look for any reason to take the children away.

When I got my period, my nana sat me down and explained how to throw away a used pad correctly. How to soak my underwear so no trace that I bled, that I was a woman, that I was human was ever there. My nan used to tell me how, when she was a girl,

she'd wash her underwear in hot water over a camp fire; even now I can see the blood darken the water around it and smell the warm metallic scent of blood.

You wash your moot, your bobcat, your privates . . . your lady bits . . . your fanny. Morning and evening, with a washcloth and soap or a bath. You must be clean, always clean. I'm just not sure why we are so dirty or what we are washing away. My best friend Joan Collins' mother blamed me for giving Joan Collins nits. 'My mum said I can't wear your hat. She said the Aboriginal kids are dirty.' That year my mother made a point of inviting Joan and her mother to my birthday.

The words 'I'm Aboriginal' are always forced out of my mouth. Heavy and gravelly, the tip of each letter digging into my tongue and lips. When the words leave my mouth and enter the air, they are foreign and dangerous, like some contagion that could kill us. I know I should be so proud, but even now I'm still surprised by how I have to force them out whenever a stranger asks me

WHAT  
AM  
I?  
. . .

First, the pause and then the words come up, blocking my airways until I reluctantly release them, so fearful of what will come next. Will they hurt me? Hit me? Take me away? I reassure myself with the thought that I'm one of the lucky ones. But it's hard to have dreams when your life is built on broken backs.

'Get over it,' they say, in the comments on articles, in the threads of Facebook, to my face. But I can't get over something that is inside of me. Her blood is my blood, her pain is in my DNA. Her oppression is the scent that wafts out of my skin. Her spirit that is in me is the closest thing I'll ever have to a soul.

I can't get over it because it is me. I can't get over it because I don't have the choice. I am not mine. You are not yours.

We are a cultural commodity.  
Our self-determination lies in our purity.  
Our strength lies in our perfection.  
We are strong, BLACK women, incapable of weakness and flaws.  
We are theirs.  
And when we are not theirs we are the enemy.

Sometimes I just want the world to burn because I know that the people I want to love me the most are the ones who will never know how to or might not even want to. They are people I don't know and don't see. They are people not even born yet. But I need to believe they want to love me because otherwise what do I have left?

The moles on my nana's back . . .  
they have to make sense . . .

I have fought so hard to reclaim my body that I have destroyed it. I have tried to set fire to myself and be Nero, playing the fiddle as I burned. I have cut myself open and tried to heal. I have tried to be beautiful and I have tried to give up. I still try to fight this war for my body that I will never win: to be seen and to disappear; to be sovereign craziness, my victim narrative and my self-oppression, but to have never been here at all.

And I rage. I rage at the world. At the sky. At everything. But mainly myself. I rage so hard my head floods. I sit in the shower for hours with hatred filling up my stomach and I keep raging. The rage makes me sick and sick and sick, but the hate never leaves my stomach. I cry and scream and let the water surround me until I'm an island. I constantly feel like I'm gaslighted in my own skin. That what I know and feel in my own body is only my own.

My whole body tells the story of my family. My body has waged war with colonialism. Here my skin has never been right: it's always been too dark to be White and too white to be Black. Here are my stretch marks from obesity. Here are the keloid scars from my weight-loss surgeries. Here are the damaged nerves from where my boyfriend hit me. Here are the hands that prayed to the God that my colonisers forced on my people. As my grandmother wailed in pain all night, I'd close my eyes and pray to God, any God, asking for her pain to stop, thinking, 'Maybe the missionaries are right.'

And maybe the missionaries were right. Because her pain did stop. The night she died. Clean, so clean, in the antiseptic hospital sheets.

I still sit out the front of my grandmother's house. I think about the Aboriginal family who are there now. I wonder if their car in the yard works. I picture the house being torn apart as the earth becomes scorched and barren as it dies from all our sins. I think back to this land before it had a house on it. I think about the people who lived here before colonisers arrived and if they knew that one day that place would never be their home again.

But most of all, as I sit in my car, between street lights, in front of my nan's house late at night, I imagine the light is still on in her room. I imagine that we are still together and when we are together we are happy. Between those thin walls of fibro, magic happens. Because we are all still alive and together. We are together and happy.



Tracey Moffatt, *Touch* 2017

*Sometimes I just want  
the world to burn  
because I know that  
the people I want to  
love me the most are  
the ones who will  
never know how to . . .*

## Of performance art and feminism

Moira Roth

*In 2012, I met Tracey Moffatt in Australia. We sat and talked by the sea on Bondi Beach, New South Wales, when I was visiting as the blogger for the 18<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney.*

*More recently, in 2016, we exchanged emails with one another for months (although it often felt as if these were handwritten letters shipped leisurely back and forth between Australia and my home in California). She also sent me a cluster of images of the work to be shown in the 2017 Venice Biennale.*

*On 29 July 2016, Moffatt emailed me: 'I have never been so alone in my entire life. I have had to isolate myself in order to concentrate, but the artworks are finally looking like something – what a relief! Here is my studio cottage in the Sydney Bay bushland and the magnificent view from it of the entrance to Sydney Harbour, historically interesting as it is where the 1788 First Fleet sailed in.'*



Images by Tracey Moffatt sent as part of an email exchange with Moira Roth, 2016

*Inspired by the two snapshots she sent and her artwork Shadow Dream, I wrote a poem in September 2016 called 'The Dreaming Shadow':*

### The Dreaming Shadow

Sitting in her Sydney studio in  
September of 2016,  
The artist stares out at the sea.  
There, in 1788, watched by the  
Eora people,  
The British First Fleet sailed into the Sydney Harbour  
to invade their land.  
Finally she turns away from the sea  
To look back at the desert, which was once water.  
She wonders to herself what history its sands hold,  
And what lies beyond its horizon.  
And most of all, she wonders  
If this inland desert  
Can best allow her shadow to dream.  
Or should she return to the sea?

As I reflect on Tracey Moffatt, I keep returning to the question of how her art practice stands in relation to performance and feminist art, two subjects upon which I have written frequently. It is perhaps ironic that while immersed in musings over Moffatt, I have been teaching a class in California devoted to the history of performance art. Often in the classroom, as we studied photographs and videos of American feminist performances in the early 70s (for example, by artists involved in Judy Chicago's community at Fresno State), I have found myself staring at the screen thinking about Moffatt. After all, there was a period of years, when Moffatt was travelling back and forth between southern Australia and New York, in which she would have encountered both American feminism and performance art. I am curious if she sees her work as a kind of performance art and, if so, how.

When I begin, on 9 November 2016, to email her with these questions, she replies: 'Yes, in a sense some of my photographic works can be considered "performance art". I perform within my photo dramas as if in character. The characters I "play" are never intended as self-portraits but instead emerge out of my imagination; they are a "fiction", not me.'

'My characters,' she adds, 'come out of my weighted-down image bank, which is my overworked Moffatt brain. My Moffatt memory bank must contain everything I have ever experienced and seen. Often I use myself in my images because it is quick and easy and instant. A character inside of me can "nag" at me, and I want to get this image out fast. I want to see the "character" on paper. So then my Moffatt characters come through – I hope unfiltered. Like the energy of a 1950s Abstract Expressionist painter, the original "line" coming directly through from the brain, through the eye and onto the canvas. Or like the automatic writings of the American beat poets – seemingly unedited.'

Moffatt continues: 'Since photography was invented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, photographers have placed themselves in front of the lens. As I write this, images of Robert Mapplethorpe come to mind. There is a portrait of him with devil's horns on his head. This image is composed and probably in part is autobiographical. It is about the demon inside of himself, an image that is not playful as his pretty eyes are awful and give us shivers. And his unusual lighting makes his white skin look alabaster and sculptural.'

'I pinpoint Robert Mapplethorpe,' Moffatt says, 'because he was an artist who moved the photographic form to greater heights and originality. I have always tried to do the same; I also try to be inventive in colouration and composition.'

'Often when I am making my photo works I get insecure and look desperately around for a similar palette,' she indicates, 'but I can never find one. The new Moffatt artworks lead me down an unexplored garden path of experimentation.'

I also ask her about how she relates to feminism – both in Australia and during the time she spent in the United States. 'Are there any American feminists you are particularly drawn to?' I inquire.

'I think that the 70s American feminist artists were so "out there" and so anti-establishment,' she emails me. 'Where does one begin to enshrine Carolee Schneemann and her erotic film *Fuses*? I studied her at art school in Brisbane, Australia, in the early 80s. Then there is Louise Fishman, whose wild 70s paintings I was to see and experience when I lived in New York from 1997 to 2010. And Ti-Grace Atkinson, the writer/philosopher, whom I consider a performance artist. I loved how she spoke, though, of course, I have only seen her on film. There is a stunning YouTube video of Ti-Grace visiting Fresno State University in 1971. Wild!'

'But none of these women have had a direct influence on me as an artist,' Moffatt insists. 'No one has had a direct influence on me.'



Robert Mapplethorpe, *Self Portrait* 1985

*I pinpoint Robert Mapplethorpe because he was an artist who moved the photographic form to greater heights and originality.*



**Passage**















**LOAD LIMIT ON WHARF**

10000	10 TONS AXLE
20000	10 TONS CAPACITY
30000	10 TONS CAPACITY
NO TOWERS OR CRANES TO BE USED ON THIS WHARF	











## Emigration of identity

Germano Celant

**Tracey Moffatt's photographs and films, produced throughout her artistic career since 1986, illustrate and coincide with the story of her own life. They speak of her and her world, leaving behind stories told from her perspective but legible and interpretable, a posteriori, by those who have not been involved in their construction. Thus the unitary meaning of the story is clear to the artist, but for observers it is proposed only through interrogation of the image-chapters presented for their attention.**

Moffatt is a storyteller who mixes her intentions and her intuitions with the incidents of the times and places through which she passes. She never follows in someone else's footsteps, nor takes the same route. Her photographs look familiar and yet are new, irreplaceable and unexpected, tracing a delicate feeling that has an inner significance but cannot be defined. Each sequence of still or moving pictures branches out into endless other stories. She investigates herself, the situation in which she finds herself, and the nature of the traits that emerge from the similarities between her surroundings and her origins, in order to decipher all human beings. In her work, the connections between her

own figure – a constant of her performances, often appearing in her films and photographs – and the multifarious interpretations of her account permit reflections on and analyses of ourselves and others. Her sequences of pictures aspire to lateral and alternative possibilities.

In Moffatt's narratives, poised between the personal and the universal, the secret plays an essential role. Indeed, it is part of the tactical operation carried out by the artist to render its comprehension impenetrable, to stimulate a dynamic response that continually asks to be brought to life by the investments of others. Thus the sequences do not offer absolute transparency, and it is necessary to go in search of implied subjects, following their labyrinthine routes and spiral movements to find a modulation and a form that, while variable, share a *raison d'être*.

Initially, although always in an enigmatic manner, the artist's desire to work on the mystery of a photographic sequence and a cinematic story – from *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990) to *GUAPA (Goodlooking)* (1995) – found expression in an examination of the genocide of the Aboriginal people, of rural poverty, and of the erotic and seductive relationship between woman and man in a culture oscillating between the timelessly ancient and the global. Culminating, as early as 1997, in a series of

twenty-five images in *Up in the Sky*, which tells the story of a mother whose son is placed in the care of nuns. A narrative sequence unfolds in the passage from one element to another, through the mediation of shots and colours, often as unadorned as the subject itself, which feeds on mixtures of storytelling and performance, shifting over and over again but in the end coherent, so that the story remains the same: violence towards human beings.

In fact, in all her work Moffatt seems to draw on the 'dark side' of her life. Or rather, on her unconscious creative instinct, on the inner voice of someone who comes from Queensland, in the north of Australia, where her childhood was overshadowed by ignorance and violence, but in a sublime setting, removed from but haunted by spectacular desert landscapes: 'I like to create my version of reality, the work comes from me, what I know. Things that I have seen and experienced, and things that I think I have seen and experienced.'<sup>1</sup> It is a shadow the artist allows to emerge and become her companion. She makes it speak through 'phantoms' in her media, from photography to film, and turns it into a monologue. The images form an organic whole with her inner voice that through art, as in *beDevil* (1993), achieves a perfect act of communication. It is as if she were fated to delve into the traces of her existence in order to accept what she now is: 'It is a personal mythology that I use . . . For me the film is deep and it probably has something to do with my relationship with my mother . . . Must be a Freudian thing when artists say that the work "repulses them"?'<sup>2</sup>

Her environment condemns her to search for an incessant murmur of confused and enigmatic figures echoing through her life. She reaches out into the void of memory, swallows it and expels it, always the same and always different, not changing but finding different moments of communication: 'Oh it is all still a "challenge", to stay one's self, and stick to one's original vision in making and presenting new ideas in contemporary art, my extreme my "cocksure" confidence does help a lot.'<sup>3</sup> The individual works move between the conscious and the unconscious, between waking and sleeping. They fight for existence, dealing with personal 'issues', such as her relationship with her family or with her racial origin, which Moffatt wants to make visible so that its existence can be sensed without having to be explained. Each sequence, moving or static, speaks of the impossibility of communicating the drama of human relationships.

Every individual image tends to reawaken just its echo, and therefore can be a collection of fragments of films and traces of television programs, as in *Love* (2003), with Gary Hillberg. She hints at a moment, often connected with her self-portrait or her participation in a performance, so as to amplify the exposure of herself and stimulate a sense of participation in viewers, encouraging them to reflect on the possibility of telling their own personal story. By including herself in the work, the artist induces everyone to reflect on the narration of themselves. It is one way of legitimising herself, as a woman and an artist, in full autonomy, away from the gaze of the (male) other. Out of this awareness came *Heaven* (1997), in which the feminine quality of the perspective establishes an alternative to the sexual univocality of men and their phallogocentric mode of relating, suggesting a portrayal that expresses an opposite and complementary identity. It is the affirmation of a reciprocal mechanism in which the narratable passes through self-narration and gender: Australian male surfers are turned into beach strippers. It is almost a reflection on female voyeurism, achieved through a play of mirrors. An overturning of the criteria by which the dominant gaze operates, so as to invent new laws of observation, where the woman is a soft and fanciful protagonist bringing fluid and magical thinking to the account, as well as a carnal dimension.

The sequence of *Invocations* (2000) enunciates an unfolding of unfathomable inner landscapes. It tells of concupiscent and metaphorical emotional 'inspirations' alluding to an enigmatic and inaccessible world. For Moffatt, the female human being is a complex entity that cannot be shoehorned into any one definition, and the same is true of Australia's multicultural nature. It can only be sensed by its visionary spirit. That entity, subjected to constant tensions from childhood to maturity, is exposed to heterogeneous influences and passes through multiple scenarios, and thus is imbued with ever-changing variety. It is in continuous movement and always in the process of becoming, like the figures in *Under the Sign of Scorpio* (2005), where the inflections and different facets of womanhood become a manifestation of fiery and disruptive energy. In contrast to the standardised, cold feeling of a conceptual photograph or film, which accepts a systematic and theoretically conventional procedure, Moffatt tends to generate imbalances. She offers a vision of an intelligence engaged directly with existence. She takes her inspiration from a feeling steeped in anxiety and fear, as in *Something More* (1989), as well as in sensuality and desire, as in *Adventure Series* (2004).

*Passage intertwines two alterities, exploited and exploiter, migrant and trafficker, that turn on the figure of a child . . .*

The feeling that clearly predominates in the artist's photographic and cinematic narratives is, however, of the unsurmountable drama of childhood trauma that warps the future existence of the adult. In particular, the disorientation and psychological rupture that are the consequences of an experience of racial discrimination and migration. Ever since *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990) and *Scarred for Life* (1994), the artist has sought to formulate, through iconographic, chromatic, formal and narrative variations, the emotional process linked with violence done to an innocent creature. She has connected it, once again in *Invocations* (2000), with a society, a history and a community – from the tribal to the global – always linked to her memories of life in Australia. These find expression in figures of dream and nightmare that highlight a projective and magical identity, a fragile and defenceless creature that can be seen as a little boy or girl but also as the artist herself. In this last case, her art becomes a process of exorcism. It alleviates the psycho-physical damage inflicted by the trauma, shifting it towards a disembodied and imaginary state.

The creation of an imaginary world and the desire to give a semi-personal twist to the account along with its social and racial aspects, tackled from all possible perspectives in fragmentary photographs and film, continually underpin her discourse on identity. This also includes the concept of the stranger, the foreigner, a human being who appears to be an intruder and seems to threaten our home. This is an increasingly common figure in our globalised society characterised by the mass exodus of migrants: those columns of human beings traversing the surface of the earth in search of better living conditions. They are 'others' who set off to cross borders and thresholds, ready to make an impossible journey to reach a promised and yearned-for land.

In *Passage*, the happiness of a break with one's own existential and social situation is already evident from the first photograph, *Mother and Baby*, the image of a mother who, from a window, 'shows' her child, in a hazy and indeterminate landscape. Both seem imprisoned by a cage, and their gaze is directed towards an undefined area, the vague setting of a lagoon or the sea, where we can see a strip of land and a boat. It is a remote and unfamiliar world with the air of something imaginary, something enigmatic and fantastic. The pair, mother and baby, viewed from behind, are focused on, almost seduced by the idea of a possible journey to that world. They are alone in front of it, and their condition is similar to that of migrants: beings

considering a moment of passage in order to arrive at another destiny, one of life and liberty. Or they have just landed in an unfamiliar country and are looking back at the journey they have made. 'The fictional setting could be a mysterious port on the edge of the Indian Ocean,' Moffatt says. 'The country could be North Africa, it could be the West Coast of Australia. It could also be New York Harbour. A young woman dressed for travel as a "stowaway" with a baby needs to escape, or the opposite; she could have come off the boat and she is trying to "enter in".'<sup>4</sup> The two figures reappear in the succeeding photographs. The woman, recognisable by her headdress, is connected with an elegantly dressed male figure, with a hat and cigarette, whose conduct is ostentatiously egocentric. His presence, in the same architectural (*The Arches*) and urban (*Hell*) setting, seems to imply a relationship between them, although this is once again hazy and undefined: he is the phantom of an exploiter, who has grown rich on people-trafficking to the point where he can afford a luxury apartment (*Window Man*).

In the subsequent images we see a policeman with a motorbike appear, next to the mother, and on a shore closer to the fishing boat, symbol of the trafficking of people (*Tug*). He is an armed and rigid figure, representing order and force. With respect to the position of the child, a future migrant with his mother, the motorcyclist is the 'intermediary' who, with his boat or yacht (*Mad Captain*), can make possible their entry or their passage from one shore to the other. He is a menacing expediter of migration, since he is violent and dictatorial in his relations with the fragile creature, just as the nuns of *Up in the Sky* (1997) had been.

In the end, the three of them form a universe of solitudes that aspire, legally or illegally, to enter or move within an 'elsewhere' (*Heaven*). The evolution of the phenomenon of migration and liberation is defined in the last two images, in which the mother is shown near the motorbike, *Indian*, attesting to her acceptance of intervention by the 'policeman'. It is the latter with whom the series of pictures ends, photographed with the child in his arms as he begins to move from the outside to the inside or from the inside to the outside, from one enclosure to another, towards a point of no return (*Cop and Baby*).

*Passage* intertwines two alterities, exploited and exploiter, migrant and trafficker, that turn on the figure of the child, a symbolic being who by nature is eager for meetings and journeys, feeding on them to grow and complete its metamorphosis, and who is thus the perfect migrant.

The mother's situation, however, is overshadowed by her social and economic condition, which keeps her in a cage or forces her to accept being put in a cage. She does not expect anything. She wants to stay alive and seeks an encounter with the male in power, at the risk of losing her child. It is the situation of coercion and social vulnerability typical of poor and disadvantaged women in Australia as elsewhere in the world. Her appearance develops a discourse on the need to flee in order to survive, both as an individual and as a family. It intertwines abandonment of one's child with the forced migration that

often signifies the loss of one's own genetic and cultural heritage. Something that can be measured in terms of space – the distance between shore and shore – but also of duration and form, often marked by the physical and emotional impositions of the 'intermediaries' of order and exploitation. It is a story told in pictures that represents, realistically and poetically, a constrained and imposed identity, at a time when it is ever more necessary to ensure the possibility of free movement and migration without exploitation, for people to be able to realise their own dreams of life.

## Mother and Baby

Susan Bright

**The mother in this picture, perhaps the most vital element in terms of the photograph's narrative core, is obscured by light or fog. We can't grasp her; she is literally out of sight. Instead, three elements in *Mother and Baby* are dominant: the baby, the harbour and the wires on the right of the image that look like a cage.**

**The idea of a 'hidden mother' plays out repeatedly in the history of photography. In early Victorian studio pictures a cloth camouflaged her so she could hold the baby still but not take the attention away from the main focus of the child. She would later be cropped out altogether by the frame. In snapshot photography the mother is usually the one holding the camera, so she is strangely silent in the stories told within a family album. In contemporary art a mother is rarely the subject at the heart of enquiring artists' minds as they grapple with the immense changes in the photographic medium. But here in *Mother and Baby* she is an absent presence in a dense narrative. In this photograph she is hard to make out due to the yellow sunlight or mist that envelopes her face.**

**She is already irrelevant in comparison with her son – a hard fact many mothers have to face as they experience the unnerving circumstance that they are no longer the main character in the narrative of their own life. She fades into the background as the next generation takes centre stage – both literally and figuratively.**

I myself can only read this image in terms of displaced peoples. Our news is dominated by stories of refugees and immigrants, of distressing images of people fleeing cities that resemble Hollywood versions of Armageddon. Millions are in transition: leaving, arriving and starting again. They arrive in unknown lands often having witnessed atrocities, leaving family and loved ones behind. Today's news reminds us that history is cyclical; people's need to cross borders to seek new lives is a narrative as old as humanity. And so this picture demands empathy: with the struggle of the mother, who has a new language and culture to learn; and with the child, whose transition we hope will be free of xenophobia and racism, both of which the mother will undoubtedly experience in her new country.

I don't know if the baby is a boy or a girl, but in my reading it's a boy. He looks outward. Metaphorically, it's

easy to see this as looking to the future, but in reality he is probably just squirming, as babies are prone to do. However, the intense light, the heightened atmosphere and the cinematic style lead to a more melodramatic reading that does not feel exaggerated or overly theatrical. The language of cinema, as adopted by Moffatt, encourages the reader to be relaxed and imaginative in their interpretation, lending the picture a sound track or the promise of a whisper between mother and son. Unlike with film, however, the viewer is not dealing with movement or the consent of illusion, but with all that is its opposite – stillness and a 'reality'. The photograph does not reveal everything like cinema does. Moffatt taps into those in-between spaces with intelligence and rigour, the stillness of her photographs tempering the motion of the imagined film. This is the seduction of her work – the skilful combination of the language of cinema and the absence that lies at the heart of photography. What this means is that the mise en scène developed here around the baby boy is equally full of suspense, reflexivity and freezing while also diffuse and ambiguous. This combination disrupts the familiar metaphor that photography is like a point and film like a line. *Mother and Baby* is not quite photography, but not quite film either.

Where the baby looks out to is unknown. A harbour, or a port, conjures up all kinds of connotations. It can be a place of hard work or luxury. Depending on your outlook, it can be a site of either exciting ethnic communities or dangerous foreigners. It is a place of transition, as goods are imported and exported, but also one filled with romance and hope. Stories of castaways, runaways, soldiers, ocean liners and separating lovers run through one's mind. The harbour here looks like a working one, but where it might be is not clear. Perhaps Australia, perhaps Africa, perhaps Europe. The specific location is not important – it represents hope, either in leaving or arriving; a chance for a new start, fresh beginnings and a safe future. The photography may be highly orchestrated through digital collage and theatrical staging, but it is not unlike real-life scenes of transition being played out all over the world, illustrating, once again, that fiction is not always the opposite of fact.

And finally, the last element dominant in the picture: the cage – if indeed it is a cage. The mind is quick to think of human trafficking, but it's more likely to be a construction to hold luggage. That is what I prefer to think, as the idea of a mother and baby being sold is too horrible to bear. It adds harshness to an image that could otherwise be read

as romantic or picturesque. It is an unforgiving dénouement to a story of hope. In a sinking ship, women and children are led first to the lifeboats (if we are to believe what the movies tell us), and so here too *Mother and Baby* is the first in a series of images that unfolds around harbours and ports with a host of characters. Could the cop, who concludes the series, have taken the boy from his mother? Or is it the other men who wait for the couple to come onshore? These are stories whose endings we will never know, as, like much of Moffatt's work, *Passage* can be read neither as a line nor a point.



Tracey Moffatt, *Mother and Baby* 2017

*The language of cinema, as adopted by Moffatt, encourages the reader to be relaxed and imaginative in their interpretation, lending the picture a sound track or the promise of a whisper between mother and son.*

# Thought patterns: *Passage*

Tracey Moffatt



Sally K. May, Rock art painting of sailing vessels at Djulirri, 2010



Fred Blackwell, Teenagers at lunch counter sit-in, Jackson, Mississippi, 28 May 1963

**Vigil**









## Elizabeth Taylor: Hollywood’s pagan queen

Camille Paglia

**Hollywood, America’s greatest modern contribution to world culture, is a business, a religion, an art form, and a state of mind. It has only one living queen: Elizabeth Taylor.**

My devotion to Elizabeth Taylor began in the late Fifties, when I was in junior high school and when Taylor was in her heyday as a tabloid diva. I was suffering sustained oppression in the Age of Perky Blondes: day after day, I reeled from the assaults of Doris Day, Debbie Reynolds, Sandra Dee. All that parochial pleasantness! So chirpy, peppy, and pink, so well-scrubbed, making the world safe for democracy.

In 1958, Elizabeth Taylor, raven-haired vixen and temptress, took Eddie Fisher away from Debbie Reynolds and became a pariah of the American press. I cheered. What joy to see Liz rattle Debbie’s braids and bring a scowl to that smooth, girlish forehead! As an Italian, I saw that a battle of cultures was under way: antiseptic American blondeness was being swamped by a rising tide of sensuality, a new force that would sweep my Sixties generation into open rebellion.

Three years later, adulteress Taylor was forgiven by the American public when she caught near-fatal pneumonia in London. She was photographed being rushed unconscious on a stretcher into a hospital for an emergency tracheotomy. This brush with death seems, in some strange mythic way, to have divinized her. A worldwide surge of popular sympathy helped her win the Oscar in 1961 for *Butterfield 8*. There was a brilliant series of glossy colour pictures of her in *Look* magazine that year in which her melting beauty was frankly set off by the unconcealed pale white scar on her throat.

Suffocating in the tranquil, bourgeois Fifties, I escaped by studying ancient Egypt and Greece – and worshipping Elizabeth Taylor. At one point, I had collected 599 pictures of her. I sensed that she was a universal archetype of woman. At the very moment that I was rebelling against the coercive role of femininity and modelling myself on my other heroine, the intrepid, masculine Amelia Earhart, I also recognized that Taylor’s mystery and glamour were coming from nature, not culture.

Elizabeth Taylor is pre-feminist woman. This is the source of her continuing greatness and relevance. She wields the sexual power that feminism cannot explain and has tried to destroy. Through stars like Taylor, we sense the world-disordering impact of legendary women like Delilah, Salome, and Helen of Troy. Feminism has tried to dismiss

the femme fatale as a misogynist libel, a hoary cliché. But the femme fatale expresses woman’s ancient and eternal control of the sexual realm. The specter of the femme fatale stalks all of men’s relations with women. There is an absurd assumption in the air that Meryl Streep is the greatest American actress. Meryl Streep is a good, intelligent actress who has never given a great performance in her life. Her reputation is wildly out of sync with her actual achievement. Cerebral Streep was the ideal high-WASP actress for the fast-track yuppie era, bright, slick, and self-conscious.

Elizabeth Taylor is, in my opinion, the greatest actress in film history. She instinctively understands the camera and its nonverbal intimacies. Opening her violet eyes, she takes us into the liquid realm of emotion, which she inhabits by Pisces intuition. Richard Burton said that Taylor showed him how to act for the camera. Economy and understatement are essential. At her best, Elizabeth Taylor simply *is*. An electric, erotic charge vibrates the space between her face and the lens. It is an extrasensory, pagan phenomenon.

Meryl Streep, in the Protestant way, is stuck on words; she flashes clever accents as a mask for her deeper failures. (And she cannot deliver a Jewish line; she destroyed Nora Ephron’s snappy dialogue in *Heartburn*.) Streep’s work doesn’t travel. Try dubbing her for movie houses in India: there’d be nothing left, just that bony, earnest horse face moving its lips. Imagine, on the other hand, lesser technicians like Hedy Lamarr, Rita Hayworth, Lana Turner: these women have an international and universal appeal, crossing the centuries. They would have been beautiful in Egypt, Greece, Rome, medieval Burgundy, or eighteenth-century Paris. Susan Hayward played Bathsheba. Try to picture Meryl Streep in a Bible epic! Streep is incapable of playing the great legendary or mythological roles. She has no elemental power, no smouldering sensuality.

Elizabeth Taylor, it is true, lacks stage training; in live theater, she shrinks. Her weakest moments on film are when, as in *Cleopatra*, she pushes her voice for grand effects and ends up sounding shrill. But she already is grand. Her mere presence is regality enough. In retrospect, the terrible irony of *Cleopatra* is that the fall of the love-sick Antony, played by Richard Burton, mirrors that of Burton himself, who threw his brilliant stage career away to follow Elizabeth Taylor around the world. Taylor is too attractive to play the real Cleopatra, who from our scanty evidence seems to have had a large nose and weak chin. But the scenes of

this film are magnificent in their own right: the subdued, dignified Cleopatra, austere cloaked, escaping from Rome by torch-lit boat after Caesar’s assassination; Cleopatra, magically garbed as Venus, arriving by fabulous royal yacht to meet Antony at Tarsus.

Over the span of her long career, Elizabeth Taylor has produced a remarkable body of work. Her great performances include those, as in *Elephant Walk* (1954) and *Giant* (1956), of lovely, sensitive young wives painfully isolated in a harsh world of men. In *Suddenly, Last Summer* (1959), Taylor did in a single, punishing, protracted take Catherine’s cathartic memory of the death-by-cannibalism of her cousin Sebastian Venable. Her superb, fiery performance as Maggie in *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1958) remains for me the definitive reading of that role. When the highly touted Jessica Lange did Maggie for a television production, I could not contain my scorn. Lange, in this role as in her others, is a pallid wax doll with as much substance as a Ping-Pong ball. Finally, everyone has to admit that Taylor, daringly haggard and all slatternly, gritty vigor, chewed up the scenery in *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966).

Because so much of her mythic power is nonverbal, Taylor flourishes in iconic images, ideal for movie posters. For *Suddenly, Last Summer*, she kneels in a white bathing suit, like Venus rising from the sea. Her face is anxious, averted; her legs are pressed tightly together; her breasts, half-exposed, fall forward for our gaze. It is an astonishingly rich picture, full of the paradoxes of concealment and exhibitionism that make woman so elusive and so dominant.

In both *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* and *Butterfield 8*, Taylor appears in a tight white silk slip that looks as if it were sewed onto her body. What a gorgeous object she is! Feminists are currently adither over woman’s status as sex object, but let them rave on in their little mental cells. For me, sexual objectification is a supreme human talent that is indistinguishable from the art impulse. Elizabeth Taylor, voluptuous in her sleek slip, stands like an ivory goddess, triumphantly alone. Her smooth shoulders and round curves, echoing those of mother earth, are gifts of nature, beyond the reach of female impersonators. *Butterfield 8*, with its call-girl heroine working her way down the alphabet of men from Amherst to Yale, appeared at a very formative moment in my adolescence and impressed me forever with the persona of the prostitute, whom I continue to revere. The prostitute is not, as feminists claim, the victim of men but rather their conqueror, an outlaw who controls the sexual channel between nature and culture.

One of the most spectacular moments of my moviegoing career occurred in college as I watched Joseph Losey’s bizarre *Secret Ceremony* (1968). Halfway through the film, inexplicably and without warning, Elizabeth Taylor in a violet velvet suit and turban suddenly walks across the screen in front of a wall of sea-green tiles. It is an overcast London day; the steel-gray light makes the violet and green iridescent. This is Elizabeth Taylor at her most vibrant, mysterious, and alluring, at the peak of her mature fleshy glamour. I happened to be sitting with a male friend, one of the gay aesthetes who had such a profound impact on my imagination. We both cried out at the same time, alarming other theatergoers. This vivid, silent tableau is for me one of the classic scenes in the history of cinema.

Elizabeth Taylor is a creation of show business, within which she has lived since she began as a child star. She has the hyper-reality of a dream vision. Meryl Streep, with her boring decorum, is welcome to her pose of unpretentious working actor. I’ll take trashy, glitzy Old Hollywood any day. Elizabeth Taylor, heartily eating, drinking, lusting, laughing, cursing, changing husbands, and buying diamonds by the barrel, is a personality on the grand scale. She is a monarch in an age of glum liberals. As a star, she has, unlike Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, and Katharine Hepburn, no sexual ambiguity in her persona. Earthy and sensual, passionate and willful, yet tender and empathetic, Elizabeth Taylor is woman in her many lunar phases, admired by all the world.

Sex, Art, and American Culture: Essays. Vintage, New York, 1992, pp. 14–18; first published in *Penthouse*, March 1992



Tracey Moffatt, A still from video projection *Vigil* 2017. Test screening at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, 2017

*At her best, Elizabeth Taylor simply is. An electric, erotic charge vibrates the space between her face and the lens.*

## Reverse shot

Adrian Martin

**It is among the most basic techniques in audiovisual grammar: shot and reverse shot. The cut from someone looking to what they are looking at, or from the speaker to the listener in a conversation. Two images set into an indelible relation of logic, cause and effect, proximity and mutual implication. The technique can be used innocently, or perfunctorily (as much television does). Or it can be deployed in a dramatic, meaningful manner, as Sergei Eisenstein, Jean-Luc Godard and so many other media artists have demonstrated. A proposition and its contradiction. A thesis and its antithesis. The face-off between two starkly contrasting worlds or sets of values. The French call the reverse shot a *contrechamp*, literally a ‘counter field, an opposing frame of vision, a dialectical counterpoint. A simple editing connection then becomes the more charged practice known as montage.**

In addition, as Orson Welles well knew and frequently demonstrated in his films, the reverse-shot technique can also be wielded as a cunning trick. The first shot in a sequence was photographed in a certain place years ago; the reverse shot that follows may belong to another time and space altogether. But the technique of editing brings them together into an indelible relationship. It forces a dialogue between images (and/or sounds) where none may have originally existed.

In *Vigil*, Tracey Moffatt proposes a strong, blatantly political drama. Initially inspired by the tragic event of asylum seekers (mainly from Iran and Iraq) who drowned off the coast of Australia’s Christmas Island on 15 December 2010, its symbolic scope widens to evoke many such refugee situations around the world in recent years.

As often in Moffatt’s art, the pitch is deliberately, defiantly melodramatic. People she describes as ‘white movie stars’ – Elizabeth Taylor, Donald Sutherland, Audrey Hepburn and Cary Grant among them – gaze through windows at a refugee tragedy. This, at any rate, is the imaginary scene conjured by the cross-cutting of shot and reverse shot. In fact, the materials come from many diverse times and places, spanning many fictional films and real boats. But the montage effect is coherent and powerful, almost comic-strip-like in its didactic clarity. ‘There is nothing subtle in the editing and construction of my *Vigil* video piece,’ Moffatt declares.

Moffatt has always used artifice in a heightened, pronounced way in her work. All documentary references are stylised and promptly removed from their immediate, realistic context. The specific news images of the refugees, through being treated in a painterly, graphic manner, become emblems of a general, too-often-repeated social phenomenon. And it is profoundly characteristic of this artist that, in seeking to comment (at a primary level) on the ‘white Australia’ she knows so well, she employs images not of Australians (whether ordinary or famous), but glamorous movie stars, most of them from Hollywood.

This brings starkly to mind that even the most concrete and vivid political events of daily life necessarily enter our minds (and memories) reshaped through the imagery and fictions supplied by the media we consume. This is not any moralistic finger-wagging on Moffatt’s part about the supposedly sinister effects of screen spectacle; I am certain she enjoys the Hollywood movies she references here – classic and trashy alike – as much as any film fan does. Rather, Moffatt reaches for, and creatively twists, the audiovisual language that comes to her most naturally and immediately; and, as is often the case in her work, a humorous level of camp irony instantly fuses with an absolute seriousness of purpose.

For a spectator of *Vigil*, being able to identify the specific films Moffatt draws upon in *Vigil* – among them Alfred Hitchcock’s *North by Northwest* (1959), John Schlesinger’s *Darling* (1965) and his later *The Day of the Locust* (1975), Louis Malle’s *Atlantic City* (1980) and John Waters’ *Serial Mom* (1994) – is less important than having a sense of the associations that accrue to these borrowed screenshots. What unites them all is a certain ‘technology of vision,’ whether it be the binoculars wielded by Julie Christie or, most prominently, the windows behind which most of our white movie stars stand, gawking in horror. All the looking that these larger-than-life iconic movie figures do is mediated, not direct. The technologies of vision place something between them and the reality they encounter.

A simple but deep question: what is a window? Not merely as physical fixture, but as cultural object: what function does it serve? As with most daily objects imbued with social value, that function is dual, paradoxical, ambivalent: windows both protect us in our homes and allow us to observe the world outside. They let us project ourselves into a larger space, to dream (just like the movie or television screen), but at the same time they allow us to shut ourselves in, to avoid or erase the terror of a nearby reality.

Windows are all about distance – the distance that allows a safe perspective, removed from direct involvement. The great cultural philosopher Vilém Flusser noted that the ancient Greeks called this type of detached observation, precisely, *theoria*: ‘perception without danger and without experiencing anything’. He is compelled to ponder: ‘Are experiments carried out through the window (i.e. in theory) valid? Or does one have to go out the door to experience things?’<sup>1</sup> Moffatt, in her own manner, poses the same question: when will this vigil at the window end and a genuine, engaged response begin?

The window is a limit, a boundary, a border. Moffatt ingeniously places her window motif right at the ‘edge of the cut’ – separating not only the beholder from the beheld, but also one image from the next. As in a suitably sensationalist television segment, Moffatt speeds up the intercutting as the piece proceeds, uses moody dissolves rather than straight cuts, and introduces ever more frantic zoom-ins to artificially animate the static frames. Dramatic music by Rod McCormack whips up our involved, emotional reaction even further.

The aura or tone of the popular genres evoked is part of *Vigil*’s wideranging effect. Moffatt covers, with a light but deft touch, vastly different types of cinema here, thereby evoking a diverse set of responses to the horrific events of our world. From a knowing, satirical comedy such as *Serial Mom*, Moffatt draws an image of mock outrage – from within a story where an over-inflated regard for ‘normality’ leads to the most monstrous antisocial acts on the part of Kathleen Turner’s character. This is conservatism gone mad – a grimly apt analogy for several nations in the era of Brexit, Donald Trump and Australian Liberal Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull.

Audrey Hepburn’s sad gaze out a window, on the other hand, expresses something quite different: longing, frustration, melancholy – precisely a desire to break free from repressive social convention. With Hepburn, such longing was usually rendered as wistful and romantic, but not so for ‘hellcat’ Dorothy Malone in Douglas Sirk’s expressionistic melodrama *Written on the Wind* (1956), in which lives of privilege give way to cascading catastrophe.

For the even more blocked and fearful figure played by Donald Sutherland in *The Day of the Locust* (1975), the terror reflected in his eyes is precisely that of seeing his deepest, most private nightmare materialise into reality out on the streets of America, exploding in flames and violence.

An image of Karlheinz Böhm from Michael Powell’s notorious *Peeping Tom* (1960) nudges us from the sphere of ‘quality’ drama or slick melodrama into the pulpier realms of thriller and horror cinema. Powell’s film is a virtual treatise on voyeurism, depicted as full-blown, psychotic, murderous scopophilia: a gaze that is at once removed and aggressive, fundamentally suspicious of any ‘otherness’ it spies, construing it as a threat. More mundanely, the sight of Isabelle Huppert in an almost forgotten movie, *The Bedroom Window* (1987), reminds us that an entire cycle or subgenre labelled the ‘intimacy thriller’ gave us, from the late 80s to the mid-90s, endless scenarios that played on a paranoiac fear of ‘home invasion’ – which is, once again, an apt metaphor for those nations baulking at the influx of refugees.

The act of someone looking, within a work of art, can signify many things: desire, fear, shock, disgust, envy, exclusion, regret. The situations built around such dramatic looks are just as numerous: secrecy, spying, hiding, plotting. The outrage or disquiet felt by the voyeur at the window can lead to either a sinister plan to intervene in and manipulate the events witnessed, or, at the other extreme, a compulsion to withdraw even further inside the dark shadows, to the point of catatonia. In her selection of window images (and others closely related to moments of mediated gazing), Moffatt plays on all these tones and possibilities. What is missing, she seems to say, is a commonsense response to the type of tragedy embodied by the refugees: to simply ‘go out the door’, as Flusser put it, to get in and help, however you can.

‘You’ll be seeing this nightmare every night for the rest of your life.’ Such was the tagline on the promotional poster for *Night Watch* (1973), which happens to be the Elizabeth Taylor vehicle so generously sampled by Moffatt in *Vigil*. Moffatt has long been fond of this message embedded even in the lowliest horror–thriller flick: problems are never settled simply by looking away from them, and the dead have myriad ways of returning to haunt and disturb us. The window, finally, protects us from nothing – the tragedies of the world will seep into our consciousness, whether we want them to or not. The vigil, like the window frame, will not hold; the reverse shot not only insists, but also attacks. To invert the proclamation of the hero in Jean-Luc Godard’s *Le Petit Soldat* (1960): ‘The time for reflection is over; the time for action has come.’



Tracey Moffatt, A still from video projection *Vigil* 2017. Test screening at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, 2017

**The White Ghosts Sailed In**











## A sublime passage<sup>1</sup>

Judy Annear

Tracey Moffatt’s short film *The White Ghosts Sailed In* presents a twilight world of sea, earth and sky that, through the convergence of sound, image and text, conjures up what could be described as the phantasmagoria of history.<sup>2</sup> In this film the ghosts are largely invisible; they can be heard rushing by, perpetually beginning again, endeavouring to be made flesh, encountering other kinds of spectres emerging out of sea, stone and sky. The residue of photosensitive emulsion becomes a stand-in for this history and a metaphor for this flesh, the supposed emptiness nullified by the guiding human eye. *The White Ghosts Sailed In* is a direct representation of a single yet continuous event. It is not spliced like Moffatt’s collaborative cinema montages with Gary Hillberg, which use repetition to turn stereotypes back on themselves, but spliced nonetheless to conjure time.<sup>3</sup>

Phantasms have appeared regularly in Moffatt’s still and moving work, from her feature film *beDevil* (1993) to the series of still images *Spirit Landscapes* (2013). In a sense all her work is haunted, thick with memories that are her own as much as those from other people, other times and cultures.<sup>4</sup> Moffatt plays with those hauntings, usually giving form to the outsiders and bringing them into her tableaux to participate in melodramas. *The White Ghosts Sailed In*, however, is bordered by a battered Georgian frame that literally and metaphorically reframes its historical contingency.<sup>5</sup> Further, the Georgian frame gestures towards cinema’s prehistory, where magic lantern shows were presented at night in charnel houses in England and elsewhere, ghosts hovering above terrified audiences.<sup>6</sup> There the mechanics of human manipulation were hidden from view, and hand-painted slides of demons and corpses were projected onto floating screens.

In Moffatt’s film, where ocean and decay of the recording medium dominate the view, ghosts meld with audience and maker. We are channelling living presences, and the eye is alive and unremitting. In its brevity *The White Ghosts Sailed In* is redolent of, rather than explicit about what is seen from any vantage point at any time and place when Indigenous societies encounter colonists; the time that intersects and expands when it connects with eye and mind, carrying all its history within it.

That time is focused here on the entrance from the ocean to the immense drowned river valley now known as Sydney Harbour – a sublime and wide passage. Inside the harbour the view out from the panoramic heights of Middle and Georges Heads is even more compelling, for there is nothing beyond the horizon line, the rise and fall of waves, and alterations of light and cloud in an enormous sky. The headlands either emerge directly out of the sea, forming sandstone cliffs; or more gently like fingers, which shelter bays in the webs between.

Eighteen thousand years ago, when the last Ice Age was at its height, the sea was 130 metres lower and what became the harbour was a series of populated gorges. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, the ground cover was low scrub shifting to woodlands to forest, sheltering marsupials, reptiles and birds just as the harbour contained much in the way of fish and aquatic mammals. Rather than Edenic, life was delicately balanced for survival.<sup>7</sup>

The Cannalgal and Borogegal clans living on the northern side of the harbour saw the arrival of the colonists in 1788, when the English sailors rowed in through the wide aperture between harbour and ocean.<sup>8</sup> Shifting focus, the embodied eye and mind record the changing elements and activities. The sea rises and falls like a heart, the clouds shapeshift, and the wind turns everything in its path, howling. That sublime aperture is perceived by the all-seeing eye; the human lens is guiding the mechanical, whether gun sight or camera.

Young English émigré Charles Bayliss, who became one of Australia’s most accomplished 19<sup>th</sup>-century photographers, photographed Sydney Heads from a similar vantage point to that of *The White Ghosts Sailed In*. He made a panorama in 1874 to encompass the breadth of the heads and far horizon. He was also pulling back to expose the exceptional span and height of the defensive location and numbers of artillery, revealing the extent and strength of the stone fortifications to demonstrate the security and maturity of the eighty-six-year-old colony.<sup>9</sup> Today, among the ruins of 19<sup>th</sup>-century colonial pride, Aboriginal engravings in the sandstone re-emerge, as does the story of Bungaree (c. 1775–1830). The first Australian-born person to circumnavigate the continent in 1802–03, accompanying cartographer Matthew Flinders, Bungaree was ‘given’ land on Middle Head in 1815 by Governor Lachlan Macquarie.<sup>10</sup>

Tracey Moffatt breathes the complexity of enduring life into the phantasmagoria of history in the short film *The White Ghosts Sailed In*.

**The artist, Tracey Moffatt, speaks with Simone Brett, historian at the South Pacific Film Archives, Canberra, Australia.**

**Tracey Moffatt:** This very old film was shot over two hundred years ago. I found it in a sealed-up vault here at a former Aboriginal Mission right in the centre of Sydney. For my Venice Biennale exhibition I have tried to resurrect and restore this film footage and present it as it may have been presented over two hundred years ago. Thus you see in the Venice Pavilion how the film is projected into an old picture frame, which is how they would have presented it back then in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

**Simone Brett:** Tracey, I am surprised at your old film footage find, as I didn’t think that film cameras existed in 1788.

## Tracey Moffatt talks with Simone Brett about *The White Ghosts Sailed In*

**TM:** Yes, Simone, film cameras did indeed exist though in a primitive form. Joseph Banks the botanist aboard Captain Cook’s *Endeavour* on the earlier ‘discovery visit’ to Australia was known to have left the film camera with the local Aboriginal people in Sydney. Banks had used the camera to document the local flora and fauna. He left the camera in Australia, as the ship *Endeavour* was too weighed down for the journey back to England.

**SB:** Hard to believe, but it is fascinating. So you believe that this footage was in fact shot by the local Aboriginal people as a type of memoir to that time in 1788 when the First Fleet sailed in to ‘settle the country’?

**TM:** Yes, this footage was actually shot at that very time in 1788. It is hard for me to pinpoint the actual

shooting date. Experts have analysed the footage, and the charred nitrate exposure on it indicates a possible date of 26 January 1788.

**SB:** Gosh, 26 January is actually our Australia Day. This is the day that all Australians celebrate the ‘Birth of a Nation’.

**TM:** Yes, they do, Simone, but Aboriginal people see 26 January 1788 as a day of mourning. In fact, you can hear the wailing sounds on this 1788 day of mourning film footage. I can also hear a newborn baby crying. I think the Aboriginal filmmakers may have been trying to tell us that despite the European attempt to destroy them, there is still a continuation of culture with the new births. A moving forward ... new thinking, new art, a new magnificence.

**THE END**

*Read the extended interview on page 140.*

## Odyssey of the horizon

Alexis Wright

### 1. the old wind

The waves you see will continue to heave and wash away boundaries of imagined borders, and mighty storms of the times will erode and break down the walls we build in our minds to imprison ourselves, just as the barricades erected with steel and barbwire to keep other people out will be broken. There are no boundaries in the ocean's currents stirring the waters we have touched for the fish to feel, and nothing that will stop any forgotten God living under the waves from weighing up what our will is worth. We breathe air mingled with the breath of others, and even the old wind that blows around the place always creates its rattle-and-skittle symphony from our trash for all to hear.

On the horizon one day, at Weé-rong or Warran (Sydney Cove), in the language of the southern continent's Darug (Eora) nation belonging to this part of the land, white ghosts arrived to break the boundary of a land that was not theirs to take. The old wind spirit guarding the coastline slipped through the nooks and cracks of the ghost ships, smelt its stench of death, and felt the fear of the white ghosts while pressing her cheek against the slimy sides of the vessels, and against the grimy pallid skin of its prisoners. The terribleness she sensed was manifest and foretold. She recoiled, fled from the fear like a stricken animal. Then, like some old aunty, she stormed off over the waves while screaming in rage, and leaving trails of spit in her wake. She sped wildly away, up and down the coast, and dragged clouds of migrating butterflies with her in gusts of wind howling over the sea while she tried to clean her pristine skin.

Up in the atmosphere, she sped thousands of kilometres around the continent to spread the news of her violation, and then the most major ancestral spirit started bringing up the northern cyclones and gale-force winds to rip down the eastern coastline, and it stirred the skies across the country with black storm clouds in its dance of thunder and lightning, while the mighty ancestors living under the waves, rattling and shaking the strange floating ghost ships rocking on the crests of waves, could not make them go away. The ships remained silent, like some dead things that were devoid of spirit. The timber hulls gave up nothing of their essence to the ancestral creation beings who had made this place. There was not a word of communication about their trespass, and nothing else was heard by the ancestors except for the *ding, dong, ding* of ship bells, and unknown voices – not Gods – shouting demands.

This had been an epic eight-month sea journey for the initial eleven ghost ships of the invasion that had set sail from a faraway Britannia, from where ancestor Gods like Brân the Blessed, the old king God called a crow, had taught men how to rule by the sword. A brutal, conquering kind of people moved about on the ships with bloodstained whips, guns and the enslaving ways of their old war Gods flowing strong in the bloodstream, and down in the cargo hold, the sea of Manandán mac Lir, son of a sea God, also flowed through the veins of many of its prisoners.

On board the wooden ships with their great flowing canvas sails, a flurry in the wind, there were one thousand, three hundred and thirty-six living souls on 26 January, more than two centuries ago, in 1788. Most were convicts kept in the overcrowded holds of some of the ships. Just a lot of poor souls convicted of some crime, mostly petty and insignificant, hardly warranting a punishment of being sent far away from their homeland to the other side of the world forever, to be forced by the whip to labour in a plan to establish a penal colony. Their faraway government, and the government that was established on this continent in the name of a British Queen, just believed then, and went on believing that this country was uninhabited, because its inhabitants – *Well! Blacks* – were less than human.

It would take two centuries for those who followed the initial trespassers to recognise through the High Court of Australia that the Traditional Owners who occupied the entire continent had one of the most highly developed and sophisticated ancient law and governance systems in the world that cared for the country in its entirety – as holy places, the whole country forming the biggest law cathedral on earth. This was a library land, its knowledge stored in and created from the country itself through epic stories from ancient times. An almost unimaginable massive archive, cared for by its people through their spiritual connections to various parts of the physical landscape.

The epic stories were the continent's foundation laws, kept sacred for countless millennia, and had been continuously renewed and read in ceremonies by the caretakers of their story country. These librarians of high religious order had kept this knowledge alive since, their dependents would still say, the beginning of time. But sadly for the Traditional Owners, this invasion never stopped, and all of its dire consequences continue to this day.

Imagine on the day the white ghost ships arrived, how totally shocked the Darug people would have been to see hundreds of people looking like ghosts leave these

ships, disembarking on the sands of this country, with no connection to or interest in the power of the traditional law stories of this place. It must have been a total shock to see what, in terms of today's world population, would have looked like eleven thousand strangers turning up, and the Darug people would have known that the ignorance of the white ghosts would make the spirits of the country dangerous.

### 2. of belonging to Country

Imagine the ships arriving, and what the Traditional Owners of the country would have known of the oldest law stories governing their land, from that immense body of knowledge in their law book for belonging that was held in the mind and read from the country itself. A guide created and given by the ancestors, preserved and continuously passed down the generations in the longest surviving culture in the world. How noticeable any change would have been to a people immersed in so much ancient knowledge of looking after Country, where even the most minuscule change such as the movement in waters could be detected, and deciphered.

Would these people, in this first contact with the white ghost people, have gathered together in a huddle of bullies hell-bent on out-bullying each other in order to form an operation sovereign border policy, and prepared for war with the invaders by carving a million spears for a million warriors, or built a stone wall around the entire country to imprison themselves by keeping everybody else out? Or else created off-shore detention camps in a poor neighbouring country for locking up these boat people for the rest of their natural lives? No. The ancestral stories would have guided them differently, their logic and thinking would have been based on the law stories that had always led them to do what their most important ancestors would have done – perhaps sought knowledge, reciprocal understanding to uphold their ancient laws, to keep the country alive, to keep it from becoming dangerous.

These ancestors had highly sophisticated practices that tied them to their storylines for this part of the country, where they were guided by its laws. Those old people, who came from a long line of men and women well versed in the practice of laws for caring for this country, would have noticed the story of the dance of the sea,

or known the mood of breezes or a butterfly's flight, or how to read the ancestral stories to the battering gales of storms, or of wind gusts lashing hard rain, or when rain refused to fall at all. They would have known how to see the ocean as it had always been seen in its ways and habits, and would have spoken to it often in long song cycles they regularly performed, and read the signs in known stories that had been passed down to them through countless millennia.

Let us say then, the howling sea was being read by the Traditional Owners of this part of the country, maybe who knows from several days previously, or even months before the ships with white sails arrived. *Old woman must be crying, what for?* they might have said about this. They would have known how the sea breezes should be moving for this time of year because they were closely related to the ancestor, but instead, the relative held so dear and beloved had been disturbed, and begun to behave strangely. They had known nothing like this before, even as the blustery winds hit the weathered sandstone escarpment, and you could hear the whispering heard by some important families for Country who were now camping and waiting for the unexpected, perhaps waiting with the ancestors rising from the country that had already seen white ghosts in the atmosphere overlooking the sea.

They may already have felt the invasion's enormity in their bones, felt that some important essence of life was being tugged out of their bodies by an unusually strange occurrence – the fast-paced continuous cooing of troubled wonga pigeons – and then, of feeling they were becoming shadow people, and in this feeling of great vulnerability, felt what it was like to be searching an endless future to find again the essence of one's soul. The old men and women kept talking to the country's spirits in hushed voices, trying to calm a restlessness they could hear in the endless chatter of the pigeon birds annoying one another, which could find no peace and would not be quietened. These people hardly slept now thanks to the noise of these black-head and white-body spirit birds far up in the trees coo-cooing all night, saying how troubled they felt. They talked of being overcome with such enormity of sadness, flooding them as they heard these old spirits crying in the wind. *They knew.* They would already have sensed something was changing for all times, and those people may have wondered how this could have happened – how the old laws had been broken – because they believed they had continued to carry out the responsibilities of their ancestors very seriously, and had

*When the mist lifted on that day the clanspeople knew the seascape had changed forever. The ghost ships had stayed.*

kept the stories strong and alive for the laws that had looked after this powerful place for untold millennia.

From a place where ferns grew out of the crevices, in the bushland of old eucalypts bent by strong winds, the songs of birds too numerous in varieties – bellbirds, cockatoos, lorikeets – of multicolours and canorous sounds, were filling the country with an extra-heightened crescendo of song well before dawn. In the darkness, a chorus rippled, and began to be repeated through vast stretches of bushland and continued further inland, so that before too long, the cries of birds were being repeated and returned in waves of chatter, across the entire country. In the thickets below the tall gum trees, where the lizards, geckos, snakes and other animals lived, yellow-coated dingos sensed the uncertainty in the alarming bird cries, and were already cantering away through their lanes in the undergrowth, sauntering into secret hideaways among the rocks, rolling themselves in tight balls inside caves of sacredness, and closing their eyes to sleep away what was happening in the world outside their dens.

Even before dawn, these oldest Gadigal clanspeople from families of the Darug people, on the headlands for important law business about the stories of this area, were awakened by the startled cries of the black male storm bird, the koel cuckoo, and then felt its call reverberating through other koels further away, where the echoes instantaneously carried its storyline right around the coast of many thousands of kilometres to reach the other side of the country. The clans recognised the bird’s *quoy, quoy, quoy* warning call but knew it could also have been a greeting, while they were talking in low voices, almost whispering in the darkness to each other in the Darug language. They watched the fog lift, then saw the whiteness of ghosts out in the bay, and perhaps thought the phenomenon was ancestors of the sea returning, and they were quietly saying to each other that the birds’ adagio seemed unnecessarily agitated.

Then no sooner had they stopped speaking to each other about the sea ghosts, than the long, repetitious coop-coop moaning call of the swamp coucal could be heard coming from the grasslands and swamps. Nobody said anything about the premonition, but it was like a story of ancestors calling a warning to think of its story, which would give them direction about what to do. Was this something to do with the new baby (this was what might have been thought), and it crossed the old peoples’ mind to leave it alone right then – perhaps they would speak of it later.

They began talking and laughing now with the mothers and babies, the newest member, born only hours before, sleeping in a wooden carved coolamon nestled in her grandmother’s arms after her father had held her up and introduced his child to her ancestors – for all the creators of their traditional lands to see. And these clanspeople spoke together about how the names given to their children will always have a special meaning, with responsibilities for country, because this was the law.

This baby girl’s name was already known and had been agreed upon by the old people, because it was a loved name associated with laws that had been kept sacred, and that carried ancient wisdom and meaning, and because of this would place her in a web of responsibilities and links, like countless other lines running throughout the entire continent and connecting it together.

In these early hours of the morning, as smoke rose from camp fires and spread through the bush, you could hear in the wind mothers calling and cooing the baby’s name over and over so the ancestors would hear it, and so, by creating memories for the child of a life map linked to the ages, making sure that the first sounds the baby knew were the voices of her people. Many of the clan gathered on the heads as the morning light set in were looking out onto the horizon covered in fog, waiting for the wind to pick up. Some women were singing to the water, telling the story of the ancestral spirits that charged the waters and had made it so. And maybe they were waiting for the family of whales soon to be passing, just as they had always done according to the law; later on, the men would go out and greet the whales, to talk to them about their spirit journeys, and listen to the whales’ stories, as they would to any other relatives coming by.

When the mist lifted on that day the clanspeople knew the seascape had changed forever. The ghost ships stayed, and so began a long story about how these ghosts kept increasing in numbers, and creating wars to destroy much of the land’s ancient archives, kept sacred for scores of millennia by the guardians of high religious degree who had the storied responsibilities of caring for this country.

### 3. the memory of reeds

A body always remembers the stories of the chase into silence, of escaping and never going back, of never reaching home again, of what it feels like to be enslaved, of how it feels being tied to a tree in the hot sun and left there for days, and to be beaten with a whip with barbwire attached to the end of its strands until every part of your skin has been cut into ribbons, or of being raped, and what it felt like hearing your family being murdered, begging for your children not to be dragged from your arms by men on horseback and then swung against a rock and tossed aside, *do not kill*, and of your lands stolen and its stories destroyed. What laws were in the archives that told you how to stop being persecuted and despised like vermin on your own land? While the mind begins afresh, the body carries the memories of the chase far into the dreams of the generations to come.

Would the stories say that the world should dream itself into escaping, of searching for its caretakers who were missing from the stories of their traditional land and seas? Country must dream of what becomes of these caretakers. Does the world dream in its shadow? Sigh at lost spirit places?

A long-ago traditional mother of this country who heard the white ghosts taking over the land would have run for her life like many millions of other war-torn people in the history of the world. She ran after seeing her husband killed by a pack of ghost men. She carried her baby away, as she ran blindly through the swamp lands to escape, just like those frightened people, running for their lives, had once followed their Neptune sea God among the salty marshes of the Adriatic Sea, and hidden in the small islands among the channels and shoals of a Venetian lagoon, where they lived like birds on platforms of wattle and the shoots of the willow tree.

The members of the clan who ran with the woman, the grannies and protector of the baby, already knew deep in their hearts that the child’s name, which had been loved by their people through the ages, would become a distant memory of a sacred place story. The woman knew she had become nothing because she could not even feel what she was any more. She did not even know what she was doing. Words became nothing. Sound unable to form in her mouth as she looked all around herself, and was frightened by the story of this part of the country where she should

not be, away from her Dreaming place. She could hear nothing any more, not even the cries of her baby.

Deaf to the world, and silenced where she was being chased, she became a non-existent shadowless presence as she crawled on her belly with the tiny newborn baby in one arm. She moved through the reeds covering many kilometres of low-lying wetlands. She followed the tracks of birds and insects, the flight of reed moths that had been chased by dingos and goannas. The baby had already learnt about silence by listening to the fear of her mother’s thumping heart, a trembling body, while being held close in the watery reed thickets at night. But this woman dared not sleep while hiding with her family. Silenced, she remained alert, speaking only in hand signals, as the hidden listened to the concealed bush stone-curlews becoming spirit women. Sensing danger, the spirits of grey and brown feathered cloaks sent their high-pitched wails across the watery expanse of reeds. The night became haunted with their calls echoing back and forth in their tales about death, then were silenced when rifle shots rang in the mist at dawn. In this dawn without bird call, it felt as though the land had started to mourn for hundreds of years.

### 4. the swallows’ house

She flew off. That girl. Daughter’s daughter’s daughter of so and so’s, so forth and so on from some other place, long way off, poor thing, one time ago. Escaped from the spirit house where swallows nest and return to its crumbling walls from flights of migration to rebuild their mud nests. In a nervous flight, her thinking flitted in the skies like these birds, chasing insects while rushing away from plunging eagles, in the time of becoming ready for the moment to fly off on their long migration. She had flown for her life too. What did she tell herself as she ran – that she did not like the black maid’s life? Did she literally fly from the shadows of the house in a pure-white ball gown of fine lace like people say, just to lose herself in the incautious bright lights of a splendid dream that gushed with splendour in her mind?

It was visions like this that could push their way right through the uncertainty that grew in her mind like brambles, an impenetrable thicket constructed to block her view of the horizon by voices telling her to do this and do that, that she never did anything right, *lie in the bed like*

*I showed you*, that told her she would never become anything because the bed could never be put back tidily in shape and perfect enough. It was monstrous to hack a track with the tiniest tool of hope in her imagination. Stem by stem, she parted the thickets and, through endless night-time mellow yellow grasses, found her way to a most wondrous faraway world that lay hidden beyond the isolation of sown fields to every horizon, and that had locked her in a remote homestead where she had been forced to work. Maybe it was just too many starry skies that got in the way of a young woman's dreams of never knowing what lay outside the kitchen window from where she had once stood for years and stared for so long at the horizon.

Then once she had flown, the history sadness of this place was continuously thrown around like trash at the wondrous world. No distance would ever be far enough to stop her thoughts from forever returning to a sense of knowing this one place, of migrating to and fro like a swallow, to this familiar sorrow. She walks slowly around the crumbling house, takes her time while touching its walls over and over again in her daydreams, after travelling the longest distances to get back. She frequently talked in the bright lights of the city about how lovely and quiet that old house was, and as though she was standing far away in the remoteness, feeling how good it felt, where she was always well treated, she said. She dances in city nights with men that are like swallows that flit to and fro while her dress swirls like clothes billowing in the wind on the clothesline of that place, where she watches the swallows fly to the drain to collect droplets of mud to construct their nest to preserve the walls.

It only takes moments to be back at the kitchen window to wash the dishes in scalding hot water, then leisurely spend ages cleaning grease from pots and pans while looking at the grey dust rise over the windswept yellow-grass-stubbed landscape, her inland sea, which linked her to a clear vision of herself travelling back from the horizon, over the flat plains, in search of the memories of a story, to find the little bits and pieces of the entrapment, *where the shadows are really the body*.<sup>1</sup>

While being entrapped again by this horizon, she sometimes felt as though there was a young girl whom she might have once known, who was being carried to the house on horseback. It is this image that fed in to her sense of a timelessness where nothing changes, where the only narratives that exist are interchangeable jumbled-up

threads of memories, and in her devotion, it felt as though she was a deeply religious person in a place of worship. This was where she kept her imagined self in a perpetual state of cleanliness, where she was constantly searching for grains of soil of country, the mud that must never splash on her clothes, which should always be properly ironed and without any creases, nor be marked with a sense of country in any way. Her window belonged to an eternal state of wakefulness that required a heightened sense of vigilance, to be on guard against the future, to wait for the past to show up, for what could never be resolved in her mind.

She would always be alone, caught in a shadowy archive of what was already dreamt even as she walked crowded city streets, and in the loud jazz of life she would remain trapped in the silent spirit house, and watching it crumbling into ruins while swallows tried to rebuild its walls to conserve a story of once seeing a little girl brought in on the men's horses without her people, and becoming . . .

## 5. where a nightingale sings

This was the complete enigma of the thing: she was already gone – had it up to the eyeballs with this place, with life, the lot. Only the body remained. An empty shell was all that you saw left of the woman staring out to sea in a new time, in another part of the world, a descendant of too many generations left on the run. Her spirit, that same old thing that was supposed to give you enough sustenance to keep going, to take that extra mile, had disappeared. It was not there. Somewhere else long ago, the thing had left, sped from her head, itself frightened from wars that never stop, escaped the violence that kept her hiding behind walls, to live in shadows. But the thing was, this poor old homesick spirit that had lost its sense of Country came crawling back. It knew it had no choice but to remain in a way sentimentally attached to the woman, and could never leave her alone. In its odyssey of making every step she took just that bit harder in her journey towards reaching the unreachable horizon, the loose spirit kept dragging her on roads that had put tens of thousands, many growing millions, on a thousand yesterdays' road trip over desert sands, gravel and clay soils. Then finally at the water's edge, when she stood on the next point of the journey towards the final horizon to reach a new life, it was the spirit that egged and connived in its negotiations with the Gods and sleazy

people-traffickers for a safe passage to cross the ocean.

Go for it, spirit. Talk it up to the big ones. Many whispered prayers flew off in the wind blowing across the waves where old forgotten Gods like Poseidon of the Atlantic lived. In the race to be heard, some of those prayers might even have reached a fierce Neptune standing with his marble seahorses in a Florence fountain. These prayers would have joined those of the millions who have prayed on the wharfs of the world. Those seeking their crossing of the Mediterranean sea who might have prayed to Yemaya, the African Goddess of the living ocean, or Agwe, or Yu-Kiang ruler of the ocean, or from elsewhere, where Susulu the mermaid daughter of the sea king shifted the waters, or Gods moving the waves and sea currents like Samundra, Vellamo, Sumiyoshi sanjin or Susanoo, God of storms and the sea, Watatsumi, Njord, or Varuna – Lord of the Eternal Ocean – or Mazu, who was still counting the millions of prayers and incense sticks burnt in temples from travellers of the seas.

In a story that had taken countless numbers of people through an enslavement of man-made deserts to reach this point and along the way, by placing more of life into the hands of dangerous people, to come somewhere that was supposed to be safe. Her mind was drifting like the mist in that early dawn as she waited on a creaking wharf that might have looked like any other in the world. Places where the smell of fish and the sea was strong, and where all the bony pussy cats scraped to catch fish bones flung by fishing men to sea Gods, or where a nightingale sang its mournful lullaby from a chimney stack in the darkness, while people queued secretly with the people-smugglers to board some unseaworthy boat that would take them away.

The little nightingale sang an epical song of journeys, which might either have been about migrating thousands of miles to South-East Asia, or Europe to replenish its species, or of the journey for blue skies in migration to its wintering homeland, back in sub-Saharan Africa. Yet it continued singing nonstop and unheard in rising light, even as the woman stared blankly out onto the harbour, where ships and fishing boats had been using these safe waters for centuries. It had been a long time since she had listened to bird song that once signified seasons for crops or planting, or a memory of her buried man's breath in the night. A bird's song had no meaning for her any more. She was far away in her dream of being elsewhere from fabled places, to be in another fable she was fashioning with her life, in her story of sinking into oblivion, of never existing.

There was no safety in this wharf for her as she waited with the wind at play, to stare at nothing. The baby boy she held tightly to her had already sensed their future separating. He looked restless, as though he was cutting himself loose from her, and you could see that he was already forgetting her as he kept pulling away, as though he wanted to fly from her arms.

His spirit was charging towards the *papilio*, a black-and-white swallowtail butterfly of his homeland that he watched flying behind them – perhaps coming to say goodbye to its people leaving, a multiple of silent human souls starting to fill up the waiting fishing boat, a vessel so old that an ancient mariner might once have owned it. The baby boy almost recoiled from the arms holding him tightly, as though he was being held by a stranger craving the warmth of his closeness. He squirmed and strained, wiggling to fly after the butterfly of his peoples' legends, heading into the darkened streets where tens of thousands of the world's displaced people jostled for living space, as though it was leading him back towards what he knew of life, a place where cyclones ripped these shanty towns apart and sent rotten fishing boats flying into makeshift life.

Baby boy was already like the old wind that slipped through the door of his dwelling of packing cases nailed together, plastic and sheet iron tied with bits of rope and wire. The abandoned place of a long line of refugees that his mother had found in which to give birth alone to a child conceived by rape on the road by soldiers. The cradle he knew was rocked by the noise of thousands of people living cheek by jowl in tight, overcrowded, threatened and controlled space. This was what felt like home, his family, the sounds that lulled him to sleep. Perhaps she knew this too, that the sound of the sea disturbed the baby. A God had already spoken to him. She was already travelling alone, sheltered by the sea, feeling the movement of fishing boats and ships travelling thousands of miles away from deserts where tens of thousands herded like animals on the run.

The men, concealed in their cigarette haze, acted calming while making deals with peoples' lives. They had been telling her for months how they wanted to help women like her if she played her cards right. Her story, they said, *was foretold. Gamble fate*, they said, until finally, having paid their price, she was half embarking on her only chance, some broken-down fishing boat docked in the fog, tied up below the wharf. In the dim haze of the wharf's only street light, she now belonged to a world of paranoia, with everyone boarding the boat chaotically, and she was already

*Like so many before, and possibly tens of thousands more to come, the woman had one last chance to call out the name of the baby she had left behind.*

panicking, because she knew in her heart that there would not be enough room for any more people still struggling to get on board.

She stared at the faces of hundreds of people standing and huddled together, who stared up at her from the overcrowded boat. Nothing felt safe, but she knew there was nothing else to do but go while she had the chance. Her money was spent, and she could pay no more. *Hurry! Hurry! Get on board, you fool!* There could be no other time for her, and she felt someone from among those surging to get on board pushing her towards the boat. She tried in those rushed moments to manage the bundle of her belongings in one arm and the baby held tighter in the other, and perhaps she already sensed in the desperation on the faces staring at her and others who still needed to get on board, that it must be the ancient God of this place who was rocking the boat.

With so many people now crammed on board they all stood unsteadily while being pushed tighter together, and the realisation came to her like a silent scream of fear from all these people who were already foreseeing the sea journey over a sea God who did not remember them. She sensed already, in her instinct to flee, that the other passengers cramming together were deliberately swaying, rocking the boat, trying to make it impossible for her to go aboard. The boat was now crammed. She knew this in her guts, and she knew right there and then that the sea of hands reaching out to her from the boat would push her and the baby off the side of the wharf as she tried to board, and they would fall into the now ink-blackened sea.

Perhaps it was in these fast panicked moments of a hushed decision of fate, where nothing was heard except water lapping the sides of boats, and the distant sound of foghorns and ships’ bells rocking in the swells, as she was being roughly pushed to board by the corrupt cop – his record clean – who had collected the fares like some travel-agent ocean God, and was determined to get the last of his cargo on board undetected even as if anyone was watching his beat, and while the hands of so many reached out to stop her from boarding, that she was forced to navigate the rest of her life in a few split seconds of flashing thoughts of those rumours she had heard in common talk floating around about people getting a rough deal on some shonky passage like this, and in her mind she saw dead people underneath the wharf being rocked carelessly by a God who had no clue who these people were. And then, quicksilver images paraded endless faces of strangers who had died far

out at sea in a crossing from anywhere else on the planet. They were as she saw herself: sinking with the weight of eternity and never reaching her destination.

It was over in just an instant – the first time she really thought it through, of watching herself and the baby falling into the sea to join other excess cargo, like the dead among a ghost God’s tangled kelp forest in one part of the world, or in another, *Posidonia oceanica*, the vast seaweed bed swaying down below the wharf. The sea of people standing unsteadily on the half-submerged hull kept rocking it about like a baby’s cradle. It swayed precariously, and almost without thought in a life-or-death decision, in the final shove forward, where to steady her fall in that split second of thinking she had nothing to reach for to teach her child, she handed the baby to the policeman already shoving the boat off from the wharf and into the watery darkness with his boot.

## 6. the vigil

They say that hundreds of people were on board an old and broken-down fishing boat that had started to list uncontrollably at sea in a storm, then after it started to capsize, people scrambled over one another as they tried to cling by their fingernails to the sides of the broken boat rolling in the waves, but none were able to hold on while being thrown against one another in the frenzy of the sea. When the boat fully capsized, all these terrified people were thrown into the ocean, where they were washed back and forth like seaweed in the waves lashing a steep rocky coastline, where many drowned. Maybe, like so many before, and possibly tens of thousands more to come, the woman had one last chance to call out the name of the baby she had left behind. And maybe, in those last moments as she sank towards a watery grave among vast fields of seaweed, she realised that she had taught her child how to survive.

What were their names? Who were they? It makes you wonder. What were the names of all these people who were once the caretakers of their homelands through eras and epical stories, just as the land was once their caretaker?

Walls of barbwire, sheets of steel, bricks, stones, reinforced cement, and the prisons we construct in the mind to keep others out require constant vigilance.

*They can’t come here.* Godlike, we have become an army

of watchers, to anxiously guard ourselves against a world of strangers. Privilege stares suspiciously out of self-erected watch towers to fend off the simple dreams to stay alive of sixty-five point three million globally displaced people in the world today. *Not on our watch*, we say. High noon needs a new time for every one person in one hundred and thirteen of the world’s population, those millions escaping with their lives, those millions trapped for decades in refugee camps in a foreign country, those who are being persecuted, and those who are now roaming the planet in search of a haven, a place to be, to try to begin their lives again, or living in dreams of going home.

What was her name, then – the woman with the baby boy, and what was his name? What are the names of the world’s homeless, the millions of people who need a new time? Do we know the special names given to these people by their families, clanspeople or tribes, who gave children names that meant something? Was it a name given as a blessing for the future, just like a baby girl would have

been given a loved name way back in 1788 on the headlands of Botany Bay, or a baby given to a people-smuggler by an ill-fated mother who was given a moment to decide? Were all these millions of people given the learned names of centuries, a name meaning great gladness, or the person who looks after his clan, or a name meaning trustworthy, someone who is safe and worthy, or ray of morning sunlight, or to be a teacher, or to be fearless, or to be imaginative, or named after his beloved homeland where the sweetest dates or flowers grow? Or the name of an important flower of the mountains or deserts, or as a child of a sky God, hope, or tenderness, servant of God, power of the tribe, learned, a man of wisdom, to illuminate, a servant of compassion or a worshipper, dear to his people, friend, or a deer or gazelle, or of a beloved olive tree grove of the homeland, or forgiveness or generosity, or called after a worthy character of the oldest fable in the land, or a beloved Goddess, or was she named for one who is worthy of praise?

# Chronology

Compiled by Hannah Presley

1960



Big Pineapple 1976/2007

On 12 November, Tracey Leanne Moffatt is born in Brisbane, Queensland, to mother Daphne Moffatt. At the age of three, Moffatt is moved with her siblings to a foster family in the Brisbane suburb of Mount Gravatt

1971

Aboriginal Tent Embassy is set up at Parliament House, Canberra, to highlight the inequality faced by the Aboriginal community nationally.

1973

Australian Aboriginal Arts Board is set up to raise awareness of contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art. No specifically Indigenous arts body existed previously.

1975

Moffatt works as a live-in babysitter on the Gold Coast, Queensland, at the age of fifteen, where she reads her hosts' 'dirty' books and observes other people's lives.

1977

Senior at Mount Gravatt High School, Brisbane.

1978

Works in factories, shelling prawns and peeling pineapples. This work inspires the 2008 series *First Jobs*.

1979

Acquires her first camera at the age of eighteen, a second-hand Asahi Pentax Spotmatic, which she takes on a nine-month trip backpacking around Europe.

1980

Commences a degree in visual communications at Queensland College of the Arts, Brisbane, graduating in 1982. Here she is exposed to a variety of influences – significantly, the work of Maya Deren, an American avant-garde filmmaker.

1982

Moves to Sydney and works as an assistant on documentaries, including *Guniwaya Ngigu (We Fight)*, directed by Madeline McGrady, about the Brisbane Commonwealth Games protests.

Becomes involved in the Sydney Filmmakers Co-operative (1970–86).

1984

Embarks on a trip to Central Australia with Professor Marcia Langton; works at Central Land Council in Alice Springs, compiling the annual report. Langton will go on to play the daughter in Moffatt's 1990 film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* and remains a longstanding friend.

*Koori Art '84*, curator Ace Bourke, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney.

1985

*The Movie Star* shows David Gulpilil at Bondi Beach, Sydney, challenging the stereotypes of the time about fame and race. David Gulpilil AM (1953–) is a Yolngu man from Central Arnhem Land. His career as an award-winning actor, dancer, musician and storyteller spans forty years.



The Movie Star: David Gulpilil on Bondi Beach 1985

Involved in a political protest; organises a petition and demonstration at the Australian Embassy while attending an ANZART event in Auckland, New Zealand.

Works as stills photographer on the five-part SBS TV documentary series *The Rainbow Serpent*, which promotes awareness of Aboriginal heritage and culture.

1986

*Some Lads*, a series of black-and-white photographs depicting dancers Russell and Stephen Page from the Aboriginal and Islander Dance Company.



Some Lads #2 1986

1987

Writes and directs her first short experimental film, *Nice Coloured Girls*, which tells the story of three Aboriginal women who take advantage of an intoxicated white man they refer to as a captain. The film contrasts the experiences of Aboriginal women in past and present contexts, incorporating voice overs from white settlers and sailors.



Nice Coloured Girls 1987

Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Co-operative is established as one of Australia's longest-running Aboriginal art galleries, where Aboriginal artists based in New South Wales come together to claim a space in the mainstream contemporary art scene.



Margaret Olah, Boomalli Founding Members 1987

Moffatt exhibits in *Art and Aboriginality*, curator Ace Bourke, at Aspex Gallery, Portsmouth, United Kingdom, and is subsequently arrested for protesting at a First Fleet re-enactment.

Writes and directs 'Watch Out', the first episode of the documentary series *Women 88*, directed by Aboriginal women to mark the Bicentenary and the sombre history of Aboriginal women since European colonisation through dance, voice and photographs.

1988

*Moodeitj Yorgas (Strong Women)*, an experimental documentary featuring prominent Indigenous women, is commissioned by the West Australian Women's Advisory Council to the Premier.



Moodeitj Yorgas 1988 (film still)

*Aboriginal Memorial* is installed at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, comprising 200 intricately decorated coffin logs from Central Arnhem Land commemorating Aboriginal lives lost since 1788; concept curator Djon Mundine OAM.

Creates *Spread the Word* health promotion video for the Aboriginal Medical Service, Redfern, Sydney. Marcia Langton later describes it as 'experimental and avant-garde at the time with distinctive artificial sets, comedic characterisation, computer-generated art and rap music'.

1991

*Pet Thang*, a photo series commenting on the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, depicting sheep – a colonial, introduced species – juxtaposed with erotic images of the artist.



Pet Thang #4 1991

1992

*Tracey Moffatt* held at Centre for Contemporary Arts, Glasgow, United Kingdom, Moffatt's first international solo exhibition.

Writes and directs *A Change of Face*, an experimental documentary focusing on ethnic stereotyping in Australian film.

*Shades of Light: Photography and Australia 1939–1988*, curator Gael Newton, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Moffatt travels to Maningrida Arts and Crafts, Arnhem Land, Northern Territory, to photograph artists and their weavings for a promotional poster designed by Diane Moon, funded by the Aboriginal Arts Board of the Australia Council and the Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

1993

*beDevil*, starring a young Jack Charles and Tracey Moffatt, is an Official Selection for Cannes Film Festival, Un Certain Regard: Director, Screenplay, and Actor. *beDevil* tells three Australian stories of the supernatural. The central character in each story is haunted and taunted in some way by ghostly apparitions.

*The Boundary Rider*, 9<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Sydney.



beDevil 1993

Directs the music video 'The Messenger' for iconic Australian rock band INXS.

1989

*Something More* commissioned as part of Albury Regional Art Gallery's Artists in Residence Program. The iconic nine-image photographic series is shot in a cinematic film-still style, telling the universal story of a young woman escaping the isolation of a small country town and heading to the big city with tragic consequences.

*Something More*, first solo show at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.



Something More #5 1989

1994

Directs the music video 'Let My Children Be' by pioneering Aboriginal singer/songwriter Ruby Hunter.

Selected for major touring show *Antipodean Currents* at the Kennedy Center, Washington, DC, United States.

*Scarred for Life*, a photographic series utilising photolithography, normally employed in newspaper printing. The series places images of family and childhood traumas in suburban settings, above captions in the style of a 60s *Life* magazine.



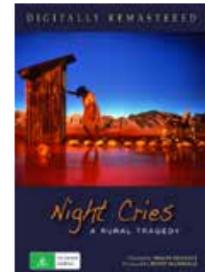
Job Hunt, 1976 1994

1990

*Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, a short experimental film exploring the relationship between an Aboriginal daughter and her adoptive white mother. Shot entirely in the studio, the textures and vibrant colours of the sets are deceptive, alluding to an endless expanse of desert that compounds the sense of isolation and loneliness. It has also been interpreted

as a continuation of the relationship between the mother and daughter in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda* (1955), from which Moffatt modelled the house interior for *Night Cries*.

*Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, Official Selection, Cannes, France, In Competition.



Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy 1990

*Moodeitj Yorgas (Strong Women)* heads to New York, United States, for the video art group show *Satellite Cultures* at the New Museum of Contemporary Art.

Seva Frangos curates the first Aboriginal-focused exhibition representing Australia for the 44<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, presenting artists Rover Thomas and Trevor Nickolls.

*Beauties* (1994–1997), a portrait of an unknown Aboriginal stockman found by Moffatt and retouched in three bold Pop Art colours, highlighting the history of exploitation and stolen wages for Aboriginal stockmen.



Beauty (in Mulberry) 1997

1995

Directs music video 'My Island Home', a Warumpi Band cover performed by Torres Strait Islander singer Christine Anu.

*Scarred for Life, Telecam Guys, 1977*, wins a prize at inaugural Gwangju Biennale, Korea.

*GUAPA (Goodlooking)*, a photographic series capturing women from Texas re-enacting roller derby, conjuring beauty and heroism and the violence of sport.



*GUAPA (Goodlooking) 1* 1995

Given Creative Fellowship Award by Prime Minister of Australia Paul Keating.

1998

**'I wanted to be read as an artist ... and I could only do it by getting out of this country; by not being confined to the basement of an art museum where they're showing Aboriginal art.'**

*Backyard Series*, three vintage images from 1973–74 of children posing for the camera, all staged by a young Moffatt.



*Nativity Scene* 1974 1998

1996

Awarded Campo 6, Galleria Civica d'Arte Moderna e Contemporanea, Turin, Italy.

Fundação Bienal de São Paulo, Brazil.

*Jurassic Technologies Revenant*, 10<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney.

1999

*Lip*, a ten-minute experimental video, the first of many in the fast-paced montage series created in collaboration with Gary Hillberg.

*Laudanum*, a series of photogravures shot at Elizabeth Bay House, Sydney, a Georgian farmhouse and printed in Massachusetts by Robert Mapplethorpe's famed printer. In gothic cinematic style, *Laudanum* presents an elegant world simmering on the verge of madness, in which ghostly figures reflect the drug-induced fantasies conjured by the title.



*Laudanum #1* 1998

*Kunstwelten im Dialog*, Museum Ludwig, Cologne, Germany.

127

1997

Significant solo exhibition *Free Falling* at Dia Center for the Arts, New York, United States. *Heaven* is commissioned by Dia Center for the Arts.

Featured in *Aperto*, at 47<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, curator Germano Celant.



*Heaven* 1997

Moffatt makes the move to the United States to live permanently in New York City. Moves into a cosy studio apartment on 10<sup>th</sup> Avenue, above Italian restaurant Bottino, in the heart of New York's Chelsea gallery district.

Brenda L. Croft, Hetti Perkins and Victoria Lynn curate *Fluent*, representing Australia at 47<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale, presenting work by Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Judy Watson and Yvonne Koolmatrie.

2000

*Scarred for Life II* revisits the 1994 series of the same title. The additional ten works are created in the same magazine-style layout, documenting specific moments of historical trauma and humiliation.



*Responsible but Dreaming*, 1984 1999

*Invocations*, a series of thirteen silkscreened photographic prints illustrating a journey through a fantastical landscape featuring witches and apparitions. Constructed models were used to create cinematic sets for each scene, referencing Goya, Hitchcock and Disney. Moffatt engages a master printer and together they create a textured printing process that amplifies the eerie quality of the work.



*Invocations #10* 2000

*Up in the Sky*, a large photographic series of twenty-five monochrome and soft-focus photogravures depicting a narrative of race and violence shot on location in a desert environment, which heightens the sense of ruin and desolation.



*Up in the Sky #1* 1997

2001

*Fourth*, inspired by the idea of being the official photographer for the Sydney Olympic Games in 2000. The photographic series captures a range of emotions and discomfort conveyed by competitors who came fourth in the Olympic Games.



*Fourth #4* 2001

2002

*Tracey Moffatt*, Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand.

126

2003

*I Made a Camera*, a single image depicting a young girl photographing siblings with two maternal women watching supportively. The scene mirrors Moffatt's own family and is unmistakably autobiographical.

**'When I was eight years old I made a camera out of a cardboard box.'**

*Tracey Moffatt*, a major survey exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.

Returns from New York for an artist residency at the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and creates *Adventure Series*.

2008

*First Jobs*, a series of digital colour photographs commenting on the variety of jobs Moffatt held over the years leading up to her artistic career, including in a corner shop, a meat-packing factory and a pineapple-tinning factory.



*First Jobs, Corner Store 1977 2008*

*Revolutions – Forms That Turn*, 16<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney, Sydney.

2004

*Adventure Series*, featuring Moffatt as one of the characters, a highly stylised series taking inspiration from a cartoon strip about the Royal Flying Doctors. Vibrantly painted backgrounds and lighting add to the fake cartoonish look of the models and animals, which were sourced from Steve Irwin's Australia Zoo.



*Adventure Series 5 2004*

*Seeds and Roots: Selections from the Permanent Collection*, the Studio Museum in Harlem, New York, United States.

*Supernatural Artificial: Contemporary Photo-based Art from Australia*, curator Natalie King, Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography and Chulalongkorn Art Center, Bangkok.

Awarded honorary doctorate by Griffith University, Brisbane.

2009

6<sup>th</sup> Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Brisbane, Australia.

Göteborg International Biennial for Contemporary Art, Gothenburg, Sweden.

2005

*Under the Sign of Scorpio*, photographic series depicting Moffatt dressed as forty well-known extraordinary women from history and popular culture all born under the astrological sign of Scorpio.



*Marie Curie 2005*

*Being Under the Sign of Scorpio*, an accompanying series of forty contact sheets, each corresponding to the final images selected for *Under the Sign of Scorpio*. This series exposes the creative process, revealing both the artist and her small New York loft, which was transformed for each character.

Sharjah Biennial, United Arab Emirates.

Prague Biennale 2, Czech Republic.

2010

Returns from New York to live permanently in Australia. Moves an hour and a half from her hometown of Brisbane to Castaways Beach, where she lives in her subtropical pied-à-terre in the shape of a revolver, designed by Australian architect Gabriel Poole.

*Plantation* is presented as a set of diptychs, the series has an elusive setting, channelling the plantation landscapes of Cuba, America's South and Far North Queensland.

*Tracey Moffatt* at the Bronx Museum of the Arts, New York, United States.



*Plantation (Diptych No. 10) 2009*

2006

*Tracey Moffatt: Between Dreams and Reality* at Spazio Oberdan, Milan, Italy, Moffatt's first international retrospective exhibition.

2007

*The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt* by Catherine Summerhayes, the first major monograph of Moffatt's work, published in Turin, Italy.

*Portraits*, a series portraying people from the art, fashion, entertainment, business and political worlds who crossed Moffatt's path.



*Roslyn Oxley Is My Art Dealer in Sydney 2007*

*Family Pictures*, Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum, New York, United States.

*Global Feminisms*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, United States.

Recipient of Infinity Award for Art by the International Center of Photography, New York, United States.

2011

*Tracey Moffatt: Still and Moving*, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, United States.

*Other*, exhibited at the Singapore Biennale 2011 Open House.

*Unfolding Tales: Selections from the Contemporary Collection*, Brooklyn Museum, New York, United States.

2012

*Tracey Moffatt* at the Museum of Modern Art, New York, United States.

2013

*Spirit Landscapes*, comprising five photographic series and a moving-image work. A response to her return to Australia, each series looks at connection to Country, memory of place and the difficulty of returning.



6. *As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land* 2013

*As I Lay Back on My Ancestral Land*, a series of large-scale colourful photographs revealing Moffatt's naked torso merging with the landscape.

*Pioneer Dreaming*, featuring Hollywood stars from westerns pondering the scenery, paired with images of the same landscape that was in fact stolen from First Peoples.



6. *Pioneer Dreaming* 2013

*Night Spirits*, an evocative series of photographs exposing spirit energies captured at night at sites Moffatt believes may be haunted. At the time of photographing there was no indication of the ephemeral presence that appears in each image.



*Night Spirits* No. 6 'River in Green, Nunnery in Blue, Over the Bridge in Red' 2013

*Suburban Landscapes*, portraying the suburban streets where Moffatt wandered as a child. Each image has a shared site-specific memory written in youthful crayon.

***'It was the pull of nature and land that drove me back here . . . I really am Indigenous to here, there is no denying the powerful "pull" of Country.'***



*Picturesque Cherbourg* No. 3 2013

*Picturesque Cherbourg*, a powerful series of images presented in the style of a tourist brochure. The series was shot around the Aboriginal mission where Moffatt's extended family has resided since the 20s. Each image is brightly coloured, with torn sections that create a sense of dislocation and hidden histories.



*In and Out* 2013 (still)

*In and Out*, a short, low-tech moving-image work depicting brothel doors opening and closing, punctuated with images of open-pit mines. The looped still images connect sex work with the Australian mining boom.

Receives Australia Council Visual Arts Laureate Award at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney.

2014

*Art Calls*, a lively video work in the form of a chat show hosted by Moffatt via a Skype-style connection. In each episode Moffatt gives an elaborate introduction and then asks artists and creatives, such as Destiny Deacon, Jenny Kee and Jan Billycan from the Kimberley, what art means to them.

*Tracey Moffatt: Spirited: In the Gallery and on TV*, Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.



*Art Calls: Episode One* 2014 (video still)

2015

*Kaleidoscope*, a major survey exhibition at Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth.

*What We Call Love: From Surrealism to Now*, curator Christine Macel, Irish Museum of Modern Art, Dublin, Ireland.

2016

Made an Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for distinguished service to the visual and performing arts as a photographer and filmmaker, and as a mentor and supporter of, and role model for Indigenous artists.

*Love*, Prospectif Cinéma 2016, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France.

The 56<sup>th</sup> October Salon, *The Pleasure of Love*, Belgrade, Serbia.

2017

Represents Australia at the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale with an exhibition of new work titled *My Horizon* in the Australian Pavilion.



**Spanish Window**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Spirit House**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Touch**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm 162 x 244 cm



**Mother and Baby**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**The Arches**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Hell**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Window Man**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Rock Shadow**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Bedroom**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Weep**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Tug**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Shadow Man**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Solar Man**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Mad Captain**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Shadow Dream**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Kitchen**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Washing**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Heaven**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Smoking Guy**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Indian**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Cop and Baby**  
from the series *Passage* 2017  
type C photograph on gloss paper  
105.5 x 156 cm



**Worship**  
from the series *Body Remembers* 2017  
digital pigment print on rag paper  
162 x 244 cm



**Vigil 2017**  
digital video with sound  
2.00 minutes



**The White Ghosts Sailed In 2017**  
digital video with sound  
2.00 minutes

## List of works

## Notes

### Fall into my fiction – Natalie King

- During one of my many studio visits and discussions, Tracey Moffatt said: 'Natalie, I just want you to fall into my fiction . . .', which became the title of this essay.
- Tracey Moffatt, 'Fever pitch', in Tracey Moffatt & Gael Newton, *Tracey Moffatt: Fever Pitch*, Piper Press, Sydney, 1995, p. 5.
- Moffatt, 'Fever pitch', p. 6.
- Moffatt, 'Fever pitch', p. 6.
- Steven Alderton, 'Foreword', in *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Lismore Regional Gallery, 2009, no pagination.
- Moffatt, 'Fever Pitch', p. 6.
- 'A conversation between Tracey Moffatt and Steven Alderton', in *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Lismore Regional Gallery.
- Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Lismore Regional Gallery.
- Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Lismore Regional Gallery.
- Unpublished notes from Tracey Moffatt to the author, 2016.
- 'A conversation between Tracey Moffatt and Steven Alderton'.
- For an account of the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Training Home and evidence of the government policy of taking Aboriginal children from their families, see [environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5061346](http://environment.nsw.gov.au/heritageapp/ViewHeritageItemDetails.aspx?ID=5061346), accessed January 2017
- Professor Larissa Behrendt in Steven McGregor (director), *Servant or Slave*, 2015.
- Author's notes from a studio visit, 2016.
- In her curatorial notes for Australian Screen, Romaine Moreton states, 'Jedda was made during a time when race division was prominent in Australian society, and the narrative is informed by the idea of assimilation, and the forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families by the government in order to "civilise" Aboriginal peoples. At the premiere of the film, Aboriginal people were kept separate from white people, with only the two Aboriginal stars allowed to sit with the white folk.' 'Jedda (1955)', Australian Screen, [aso.gov.au/titles/features/jedda/notes](http://aso.gov.au/titles/features/jedda/notes), accessed January 2017.
- Gael Newton, 'Tracey Moffatt: cover girl', in Tracey Moffatt & Gael Newton, *Tracey Moffatt: Fever Pitch*, p. 13.

17 Gerald Matt, 'An interview with Tracey Moffatt', in *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2002, p. 33.

18 A.A. Gill, 'Welcome to Death Island', 8 December 2013, *Sunday Times*.

19 Matt, 'An interview with Tracey Moffatt', p. 34.

20 Tracey Moffatt, 'Thought patterns: *Passage*', p. 84 in this volume.

21 Matt, 'An interview with Tracey Moffatt', p. 34.

22 Correspondence between author and artist, December 2016.

23 Correspondence between author and artist, December 2016.

24 For a discussion of voyeurism and surveillance, see Sandra S. Phillips (ed.), *Exposed: Voyeurism, Surveillance, and the Camera since 1870*, exhibition catalogue, San Francisco Museum of Modern Art in association with Yale University Press, New Haven, Connecticut, 2010.

25 Correspondence between author and artist, December 2016.

### Tracey Moffatt in conversation with Natalie King

- Elizabeth Bishop, 'Insomnia' in *Poems: North & South: A Cold Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1955, p. 76

### In praise of shadows and otherness – Djon Mundine

- Tracey Moffatt herself uses this everyday ritual in *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1990), which has three scenes where the characters use the toilet as a place of reflection, or by necessity are assisted to it. In 'Choo Choo Choo Choo', part two of *beDevil* (1993), Moffatt enters left from what appears to be the house toilet.
- Margo Jefferson, *Negroland: A Memoir*, Pantheon Books, New York, 2015.
- Scar literature is a genre of Chinese writing that appeared after Chairman Mao Zedong's death (1976) and the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966–76). It dealt with corruption and human rights issues during the previous decade, and Mao's regime in general. *The Cambridge History of Chinese Literature* notes: 'Derived from Lu Xinhua's short story "Scar" (Shanghen, 1978), the term refers to works in the late 1970s and early 1980s that portray the psychological "scars" that resulted from the Cultural Revolution' (edited by Kang-i Sun & Stephen Owen, vol. II, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2010, p. 651).

### Of performance art and feminism – Moira Roth

- 'Ti-Grace Atkinson', YouTube, [youtube.com/watch?v=4cKCYWWz77A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cKCYWWz77A), accessed December 2016.

### Emigration of identity – Germano Celant

- Gerald Matt, 'An interview with Tracey Moffatt', in *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand, 2002 p. 33.
- Matt 'An interview with Tracey Moffatt', p. 35.
- Eileen Abood & Sancintya Simpson, 'Interview with 2013 Australia Council Visual Arts Award recipient Tracey Moffatt', transcript, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney, 2013, [australiacouncil.gov.au/arts-in-daily-life/aartist-stories/interview-with-2013-australia-council-visual-arts-award-recipient-tracey-moffatt](http://australiacouncil.gov.au/arts-in-daily-life/aartist-stories/interview-with-2013-australia-council-visual-arts-award-recipient-tracey-moffatt), accessed November 2016
- Tracey Moffatt, *Passage*, exhibition notes, 2016.

### Reverse shot – Adrian Martin

- Vilém Flusser, *The Shape of Things: A Philosophy of Design*, trans. Anthony Mathews, Reaktion Books, London, 1999, p. 82.

### A sublime passage – Judy Annear

- Thank you to the Art Gallery of New South Wales Research Library, Martyn Jolly, Djon Mundine and Cara Pinchbeck for their assistance.
- For a concise and pertinent history of phantasmagoria and its relationship to the evolution and perception of cinema and the imagination, see T. Castle, 'Phantasmagoria: spectral technology and the metaphors of modern reverie', *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 15, no. 1, autumn 1988, pp. 26–61. For the application of Castle's ideas to the cinema of Moffatt, see G. Turcotte, 'Spectrality in Indigenous women's cinema: Tracey Moffatt and Beck Cole', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, vol. 7, no. 43, 2008, pp 7–21.
- See S. Smith, 'Lip and love: subversive repetition in the pastiche films of Tracey Moffatt', *Screen*, vol. 49, no. 2, summer 2008, pp. 209–13.
- See A. Martin, 'Tracey Moffatt's lost highway,' *Artlink*, vol. 18, no. 4, 1998, pp. 13–15.

5 The Georgian era in England encompasses 1714–1830 and therefore includes the colonisation of the Australian continent. It was also the era of British empiricism, where the mind could be seen 'as a kind of magic lantern capable of projecting . . . traces of past sensation . . . onto the . . . backcloth of the memory'. See Castle, 'Phantasmagoria', p. 30.

6 Magic lantern shows related to the enchantments of shadow play and enabled the collective hallucination we still experience in the dark room at the movies. See 'Heritage in the limelight: the magic lantern in Australia and the world', School of Art, Australian National University, [soa.anu.edu.au/heritage-limelight](http://soa.anu.edu.au/heritage-limelight), and L. Mannoni, *The Great Art of Light and Shadow: Archaeology of the Cinema*, ed. and trans. R. Crangle, University of Exeter Press, Exeter, 2000.

7 See B. Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*, Allen & Unwin, Sydney, 2011, pp. 239–50.

8 '1780s' and 'Before Cook', A History of Aboriginal Sydney, University of Western Sydney, [historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/north-coastal/1780s](http://historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/north-coastal/1780s) and [historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/north-coastal/before-cook](http://historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/north-coastal/before-cook); 'Caba-Caba: Middle Head, Georges Heights and Chowder Bay', in Sydney Harbour Federation Trust, *The Plan*, 2003, [harbourtrust.gov.au/system/files/pages/8f218079-46e1-0834-6185-c9fe52751d07/files/chpt-7-middlehead.pdf](http://harbourtrust.gov.au/system/files/pages/8f218079-46e1-0834-6185-c9fe52751d07/files/chpt-7-middlehead.pdf), p. 4; all accessed October 2016.

9 See 'Bayliss, Charles', in J. Annear (ed.), *The Photograph and Australia*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2015, p. 273, and *Middle Head Defences* (1874), illustration, pp. 68–69.

10 K.V. Smith, 'Bungaree', Dictionary of Sydney, 2011, [dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/bungaree](http://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/bungaree), accessed 1 October 2016; D. Mundine, *Bungaree: The First Australian*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, 2015.

### Odyssey of the horizon – Alexis Wright

- Elizabeth Bishop, 'Insomnia' in *Poems: North & South: A Cold Spring*, Houghton Mifflin, Boston, 1955, p. 76.

## Credits

All measurements are height before width.

### page 3

*Tracey Moffatt*

*Self Portrait* 1999

hand-coloured photograph

33.5 × 22 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 4

Russell Drysdale

*Desert Landscape* 1952

oil on canvas

102.9 × 128.3 cm

Collection: Art Gallery

of New South Wales, Sydney

purchased 1959. OA15.1959

© Estate of Russell Drysdale

Image courtesy of the Art Gallery

of New South Wales, Sydney

### page 4

Paul Strand

*Ranchos de Taos, New Mexico* 1931

platinum print

25.2 × 32.1 cm

© Aperture Foundation Inc.,

Paul Strand Archive

Image courtesy of the Aperture

Foundation Inc., Paul Strand Archive

### page 5

Tracey Moffatt

*Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* 1990 (film still)

© Ronin Films

Image courtesy of Ronin Films

### page 6

*Jedda* 1955 (film still)

© Ric Chauvel Carlsson

Image courtesy of Chauvel Film

Enterprises Pty Ltd

### page 6

Tracey Moffatt

*Doll Birth* 1972

from the series *Scarred for Life* 1994

off set print

80 × 60 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 7

*Walkabout* 1971

lobby card

© Euro London Films Ltd

Image courtesy of National Film

and Sound Archive, Canberra

### page 7

Tracey Moffatt on location photographing

her photo series *Passage* in late 2015

Photo by Helen Taylor

Image courtesy of Tracey Moffatt

### page 8

A digital mock-up of *Shadow Man*

from Tracey Moffatt's storyboard

for her series *Passage*

Image courtesy of Tracey Moffatt

### page 8

Warren Richardson

*Hope for a New Life* 2015

© Hollandse Hoogte

Image courtesy of Hollandse Hoogte

### page 10

*Tracey Moffatt*

*I Made a Camera* 2003

lithograph

38 × 43 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 11

*Tracey Moffatt*

*Planet of the Apes* 1973

from the series *Backyard Series* 1998

offset print on natural snow gum paper

using light-fast ink

44 × 35.5 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 12

Joseph Nicéphore Niépce

*View from the Window at le Gras*

1826 or 1827

heliograph on pewter plate

Image courtesy of the Gernsheim

Collection, Harry Ransom Center,

the University of Texas at Austin

### page 12

Reproduction of Joseph Nicéphore Niépce

*View from the Window at le Gras*

1826 or 1827

gelatin silver print with watercolour

applied by Helmut Gernsheim 1952

Image courtesy of the Gernsheim

Collection, Harry Ransom Center,

the University of Texas at Austin

### page 12

Giorgio de Chirico

*Piazza d'Italia* c. 1950

oil on canvas

25 × 35.2 cm

Collection: Art Gallery of Ontario

Gift of Sam and Ayala Zacks 1970

Image courtesy of the Art Gallery of Ontario

© Giorgio de Chirico and SIAE,

licensed by Viscopy 2016

### page 13

Frank Hurley

*Brenda Waldron on her Pony 'Cupie',*

*Rider under Marlong Arch, Mount Moffatt*

*Station, Queensland* 1949

nla. obj-157538903

Image courtesy of the

National Library of Australia

### page 19

Greg Weight

*Tracey Moffatt* 1995

gelatin silver photograph

50.4 × 40.4 cm

Collection: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra

Gift of Patrick Corrigan AM 2004,

donated through the Australian

Government Cultural Gifts program

Image courtesy of the National Portrait

Gallery, Canberra

© Greg Weight, licensed by Viscopy 2016

### page 25

C.P. Cavafy, ‘Body, remember’ is reprinted

with permission from C.P. Cavafy, *Collected*

*Poems*, revised and edited by George

Savidis, translated by Edmund Keeley

& Philip Sherrard, Princeton University

Press, Princeton, New Jersey, 2009, p.g 157

### page 48

Images by Tracey Moffatt sent as part of

an email exchange with Moira Roth, 2016

Images courtesy of Tracey Moffatt and

Moira Roth

### page 49

Robert Mapplethorpe

*Self Portrait* 1985

© The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

Image courtesy of Art + Commerce for

The Robert Mapplethorpe Foundation

### page 50

Edward Hopper

*Hotel Room* 1931

oil on canvas

152.4 × 165.7 cm

Collection: Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza,

Madrid. Inv. N:1977.110

© Museo Thyssen-Bornemisza, Madrid and

Scala, Florence 2016

Image courtesy of Museo Thyssen-

Bornemisza, Madrid and Scala, Florence

### page 50

*The Back of Beyond* 1954 (film still)

© The John Heyer Estate

Image courtesy of the National Film

and Sound Archive, Canberra

### page 51

Racist road sign, South Africa, 1956

© Getty Images

Image courtesy of the EJOR, Hulton Archive

and Getty Images

### page 51

Gary Foley

*Pardon Me for Being Born into a Nation*

*of Racists* 1971

Image courtesy of the Foley Collection

### page 51

Tracey Moffatt location scouting for

her series *Body Remembers* in 2015

Photo by Tracey Moffatt

Image courtesy of Tracey Moffatt

### page 85

Teenagers at lunch counter sit-in,

Jackson, Mississippi, 28 May 1963

Photo by Fred Blackwell

© Fred Blackwell

Image courtesy of the Wisconsin

Historical Society

### page 85

Rock art painting of sailing vessels

at Djulirri, 2010

Photo by Sally K. May

Image courtesy of Sally K. May with

permission of Traditional Owner

Ronald Lamilami

### page 122

*Big Pineapple*

family photograph 1976 retouched 2007

Image courtesy of Tracey Moffatt

### page 123

Tracey Moffatt

*The Movie Star: David Gulpihil*

*on Bondi Beach* 1985

type C colour photograph

48 × 72 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 123

Tracey Moffatt

*Some Lads #2*

from the series *Some Lads* 1986

black and white photograph

20 × 24 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 123

Tracey Moffatt

*Nice Coloured Girls* 1987

DVD cover

© Ronin Films

Image courtesy of Ronin Films

### page 123

Margaret Olah

*Boomalli Founding Members* 1987

© Margaret Olah

Image courtesy of Boomalli Aboriginal

Artists Co-operative

Left to right (back row): Michael Riley,

Bronwyn Bancroft, Arone Raymond Meeks,

Jeffrey Samuels, Avril Quail, Fernanda

Martins; (front row): Euphemia Bostock,

Fiona Foley, Brenda L. Croft, Tracey Moffatt

### page 124

Tracey Moffatt

*Moodaitj Yorgas* 1988 (film still)

© Western Australia Department of

Premier and Cabinet

Image courtesy of the National Film

and Sound Archive of Australia

### page 124

Tracey Moffatt

*Something More #5*

from the series *Something More* 1989

cibachrome

98 x 127 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 124

*Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* 1990

DVD Cover

© Ronin Films

Image courtesy of Ronin Films

### page 125

Tracey Moffatt

*Pet Thang #4*

from the series *Pet Thang* 1991

black and white negative printed on

colour paper

110 × 71 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 125

*beDevil* 1993

DVD Cover

© Ronin Films

Image courtesy of Ronin Films

### page 125

Tracey Moffatt

*Job Hunt, 1976*

from the series *Scarred for Life* 1994

offset print

80 × 60 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and

Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### page 125

Tracey Moffatt

**page 126**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Up in the Sky #1*  
 from the series *Up in the Sky* 1997  
 offset print  
 72 × 102 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 127**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Nativity Scene 1974*  
 from the series *Backyard Series* 1998  
 offset print on natural snow gum paper  
 using light fast ink  
 35.5 × 44 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 127**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Laudanum #1*  
 from the series *Laudanum* 1998  
 toned photogravure print on rag paper  
 76 × 57 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 127**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Responsible but Dreaming, 1984*  
 from the series *Scarred for Life II* 1999  
 offset print  
 80 × 60 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 127**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Invocations #10*  
 from the series *Invocations* 2000  
 photo silkscreen  
 146 × 122 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 127**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Fourth #4*  
 from the series *Fourth* 2001  
 colour print on canvas  
 36 × 46 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 128**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Adventure Series 5*  
 from the series *Adventure Series* 2004  
 colour print on Fujiflex paper  
 132 × 114 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 128**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Marie Curie*  
 from the series  
*Under the Sign of Scorpio* 2005  
 archival pigment ink on acid-free rag paper  
 43.2 × 58.4 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 128**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Roslyn Oxley Is My Art Dealer in Sydney*  
 from the series *Portraits* 2007  
 archival ink on rag paper  
 74 × 53.5 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 129**

Tracey Moffatt  
*First Jobs, Corner Store 1977*  
 from the series *First Jobs Series* 2008  
 archival pigments on rice paper with  
 gel medium  
 71 × 91.5 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 129**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Plantation (Diptych No. 10)*  
 from the series *Plantation* 2009  
 digital print with archival pigments, InkAid,  
 watercolour paint and archival glue on  
 handmade Chautara Lokta paper  
 46 × 50.5 cm (each)  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 130**

Tracey Moffatt  
*6. As I Lay Back on my Ancestral Land*  
 from the series *Spirit Landscapes* 2013  
 digital print  
 128 × 187 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 130**

Tracey Moffatt  
*6. Pioneer Dreaming*  
 from the series *Spirit Landscapes* 2013  
 digital print on handmade paper  
 hand-coloured in ochre  
 27 × 61 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 130**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Night Spirits No. 6 'River in Green, Nunnery  
 in Blue, Over the Bridge in Red'*  
 from the series *Spirit Landscapes* 2013  
 photographs mounted behind acrylic  
 26 × 150 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 130**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Picturesque Cherbourg No. 3*  
 from the series *Spirit Landscapes* 2013  
 digital print collage on handmade paper  
 57 × 78 cm  
 Image courtesy of the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 130**

Tracey Moffatt  
*In and Out* 2013 (still)  
 photo montage in digital frame  
 looped  
 Image courtesy the artist and  
 Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

**page 131**

Tracey Moffatt  
*Art Calls: Episode One* 2014 (video still)  
 HD video  
 28 minutes  
 stereo sound  
 Image courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9  
 Gallery, Sydney and Mulesfilm

Abouchar, Barbara, *A Matter of Identity: Four Aboriginal Artists*,  
 Open Training and Education Network, Redfern, 1994

Cooke, Lynne, *Tracey Moffatt: Free-Falling*, exhibition catalogue,  
 Dia Center for the Arts, New York, 1997

Hentchel, Martin & Gerald Matt (eds), *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition  
 catalogue, Cantz Verlag, Stuttgart, 1998

Maggia, Filippo (ed.), *Tracey Moffatt: Between Dreams and Reality*,  
 exhibition catalogue, Skira, Milan, 2006

Newton, Gael, *Shades of Light: Photography and Australia*,  
 exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Australia,  
 Canberra, 1988

Newton, Gael & Tracey Moffatt (eds), *Tracey Moffatt: Fever Pitch*,  
 Piper Press, Sydney, 1995

Reinhard, Brigitte (ed.), *Tracey Moffatt: Laudanum*,  
 exhibition catalogue, Cantz Verlag, Stuttgart, 1999

Robinson, Julie, *Antipodean Currents*, exhibition catalogue,  
 Guggenheim Museum, New York, 1995

Savage, Paula & Lara Strongman, *Tracey Moffatt*,  
 exhibition catalogue, City Gallery Wellington, Wellington,  
 New Zealand, 2002

Snelling, Michael (ed.), *Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue,  
 Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1990

Summerhayes, Catherine, *The Moving Images of Tracey Moffatt*,  
 Charta Artbooks, Milan, 2007

*Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Lismore Regional Gallery,  
 Lismore, 2009

*Tracey Moffatt*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art,  
 Sydney, 2003

*Tracey Moffatt: Invocations*, exhibition catalogue, Drill Hall Gallery,  
 Canberra, 2001

*Tracey Moffatt: Spirited*, exhibition catalogue, Gallery of Modern Art,  
 Brisbane, 2013

## Further reading

Interview continued from page 113:  
Tracey Moffatt talks with Simone Brett  
about *The White Ghosts Sailed In*

**SB:** Honestly, Tracey, you can't be serious ... How could Aboriginal people and the early settlers have even *made* the celluloid film needed to crank through an old film camera?

**TM:** Simone, the early film was actually made from animal glue, from melted-down pig's hooves. The glue was laid out in thin strips to dry in the sun. Convicts were then forced to picture the edge of it with tiny files. Some convicts were caught actually using these files to file off their ball and chains that the poor bastards had to walk around in. Once almost dry, the pig-glue strips were then dipped in gunpowder from muskets. The British military were annoyed at first that the Aboriginal people borrowed their guns. Governor Phillip, who encouraged creativity and in fact championed the early Australian film industry, asked the British military to be lenient.

**SB:** Tracey, what are your opinions about the style and way this film footage, let's call it *The White Ghosts: 1788* was shot?

**TM:** Well obviously it is quite minimalist in approach, the cutting from shot to shot of just a horizon line – the horizon line of the Pacific Ocean seen through the entrance of the Sydney Harbour 'Heads'. The very harbour into which the European settlers first sailed in ships, to create the British colony of Australia. (Note: the view of the horizon can also be read as an escape.)

It was obviously shot by a local Aboriginal person. I know this from the lofty angle and positioning of the camera – note the camera's high positioning. My reading of this angle is that it was filmed from a superior vantage point on Sydney Harbour. The Aboriginal people *were* superior

people who could survive off the harsh Australian land for thousands of years, and they were psychically powerful. I know that during hunts they were able to 'project' themselves above the trees to see 'game'. To see where the kangaroo was. This was a survival technique.

This survival technique was something of course that the Europeans like your French ancestors, Simone, did not have, and historical documents indicate that many early settlers at Sydney Cove in fact starved to death; I am not making this up.

In the 1788 old film footage we hear the way Sydney sounded like then, centuries ago; it was full of beautiful nature and of tropical birds. Then the sound of a camp fire and ceremonial clap sticks.

British military drums then drown out these ceremonial clap sticks used for dance, and the film becomes

awful-looking and agitated and disintegrated-looking. This indicates the arrival of the British, who settled Australia and, as we know from our history books, for the next two hundred years all hell broke loose.

**SB:** Yes, the soundtrack is a type of narrative, if one can follow it. I found no trouble hearing it, considering, as you say, how old this actual film is.

**TM:** This found film footage is a gem, though a sad, haunting type of gem. On the soundtrack is also a terrible spirit-like wailing. I have always liked the title, which I found on the wax that surrounded the old rusting film tins. The title is *The White Ghosts Sailed In: From an Eyewitness Account at Sydney Cove Australia 1788*.

**SB:** Yes, many indigenous peoples around the world referred to

Europeans as ghosts upon first seeing them. Wax? You say that this title was actually on the wax?

**TM:** Yes, scrawled in beeswax. Governor Phillip was known to have kept beehives at the early Government House. It was said that he took possession of this film footage and that he had the tins dipped in beeswax. This preserved the footage from deteriorating and thus it kept for all this time.

**SB:** Do you think there may have been any screenings of the footage, perhaps in London at the time?

**TM:** Yes, I have been told that the Royal Society of Arts in London held a few screenings and that the Aboriginal filmmakers, then referred to as 'The Collective', were invited. They were the toast of London and



Tracey Moffatt, *The White Ghosts Sailed In* 2017

went about in 18<sup>th</sup>-century garb and fancy frills. They hated the food, though, and couldn't wait to get home to Sydney Cove.

**SB:** Thank you, Tracey, for sharing this, and I know that I will now watch *The White Ghosts Sailed In: From an Eyewitness Account at Sydney Cove Australia 1788* with new eyes and a new enlightenment.

## Contributors

**Judy Annear** is an independent writer and curator based in Sydney. Her specialisations include Japanese photography and contemporary art, American and European modern art, and contemporary photography. Her field of research is modern and contemporary practice underpinned by a focus on periods of major technological change. In 2016, she initiated the online writing project *Exquisite Consequences* and was one of sixteen contributing writers. From 1995 to 2016, she was senior curator, photographs at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, where her major curatorial projects included *The Photograph and Australia* (2015), whose accompanying publication she wrote for and edited.

**Susan Bright** is a curator and writer based in Paris. She was responsible for co-curating the first major exhibition of British photography at the Tate, London – *How We Are: Photographing Britain* (2007). Other major curatorial projects include the touring exhibition *Home Truths: Photography and Motherhood*, which was shown at the Photographers' Gallery, London (2013–14); the Foundling Museum, London (2013–14); the Museum of Contemporary Photography, Chicago (2014); and Belfast Exposed (2014). Bright has written numerous publications, including *Feast for the Eyes: The Story of Food in Photography* (2017); *Home Truths: Photography and Motherhood* (2013), *Auto Focus: The Self-portrait in Contemporary Photography* (2010), *Face of Fashion* (2007) and, with Val Williams, *How We Are: Photographing Britain* (2007).

**Germano Celant** is an art historian and theoretician based in Milan. He is internationally acknowledged for his theories on Arte Povera. He has written more than one hundred publications, and curated hundreds of exhibitions in museums and institutions both in Italy and internationally. His current roles include artistic and scientific superintendent of Fondazione Prada, Milan; curator of Fondazione Aldo Rossi, Milan; and curator of Fondazione Emilio e Annabianca Vedova, Venice. His previous curatorial projects include project director of *The Floating Piers*, Lake Iseo, Italy (2016); and curator of *Arts & Foods: Rituals since 1851*, La Triennale di Milano, Milan (2015).

**Natalie King** is a writer and curator based in Melbourne. She curates multifaceted programs that include exhibition-making, publications, lectures, workshops, colloquia and cultural partnerships across contemporary art and Indigenous culture. She has curated exhibitions for numerous museums, including the Singapore Art Museum; Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography; National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta; Palazzo delle Prigione, Venice; and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne. She is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, Paris, and is widely published in arts media. She has edited major publications that include, with Larissa Hjorth and Mami Kataoka, *Art in the Asia Pacific: Intimate Publics* (2014); with Victoria Lynn, *Hou Hanru* (2013); and *Up Close: Carol Jerrems with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang* (2010). Her concurrent roles include chief curator of Biennial Lab, City of Melbourne and Melbourne Festival 2016; and senior research fellow, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

**Nakkiah Lui** is a writer and actor and a Gamillario/Torres Strait Islander woman. She has received various awards, including the Malcolm Robertson Prize (2014), the Green Room Award for Best Independent Production (2014), the Dreaming Award (2012) and the inaugural Balnaves Foundation Indigenous Playwright Award (2012). Previous residencies include artist in residence at Griffin Theatre Company, Sydney (2013), and playwright in residence at Belvoir Street Theatre, Sydney (2012–14). Her most recent projects include *Blak Cabaret* (playwright), Sydney Festival (2015) and Malthouse Theatre Company, Melbourne (2015); *Kill the Messenger* (actor and playwright), Belvoir St Theatre, Sydney (2015); and *Black Comedy* (writer/actor/associate producer), Australian Broadcasting Corporation (2014).

**Adrian Martin** is an arts critic and audiovisual artist based in Vilassar de Mar, Spain. He is currently adjunct professor of Film and Screen Studies at Monash University, Melbourne, and co-editor of the online journal *LOLA*. Previously, he was the film critic for *The Age* newspaper from 1995 to 2006. Since 1979, he has published seven books on cinema, as well as hundreds of articles and reviews in international magazines and on websites. His most recent publications include *Mise en Scène and Film Style: From Classical Hollywood to New Media Art* (2014) and *Last Day Every Day: Figural Thinking from Auerbach and Kracauer to Agamben and Brenez* (2012).

**Romaine Moreton** is a member of the Goenpul Jagara people of Stradbroke Island and the Bundjulong people of northern New South Wales. She is a writer of poetry, prose, short stories and film. In 2012, she was commissioned to contribute to the Notebooks Series, *100 Notes / 100 Thoughts* at *dOCUMENTA(13)* in Kassel, Germany. She has published numerous poems, prose and short stories with international acclaim, including three poetry anthologies: *Poems from a Homeland* (2012), *Post Me to the Prime Minister* (2004) and *The Callused Stick of Wanting* (1996). Moreton has also written and directed two short films: the award-winning *The Farm* (2009) and *The Oysterman* (2012).

**Djon Mundine OAM** is a member of the Bundjulong people of northern New South Wales. A curator, activist, writer and artist, he is renowned as the concept curator for the Aboriginal Memorial, permanently installed at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Mundine is currently a PhD candidate at the University of New South Wales Art & Design. Major curatorial projects include *Bungaree's Farm*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney (2015), which was awarded best exhibition in the Museum and Galleries National Awards in 2015; with Natalie King, *TarraWarra Biennial 2014: Whisper in My Mask*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville (2014); and *Bungaree: The First Australian*, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney (2012).

**Camille Paglia** is a US-based writer, social critic and feminist. She is a professor of Humanities and Media Studies at the University of the Arts, Philadelphia, where she has taught since 1984. Paglia's writings on art, literature, popular culture, feminism and politics have been widely published and translated. Her major publications include *Glittering Images: A Journey through Art from Egypt to Star Wars* (2012); *Break, Blow, Burn: Camille Paglia Reads Forty-three of the World's Best Poems* (2005); *Vamps and Tramps: New Essays* (1994); *Sex, Art, and American Culture* (1992); and *Sexual Personae: Art and Decadence from Nefertiti to Emily Dickinson* (1990).

**Hannah Presley** is an Aboriginal curator based in Melbourne and currently First Nations Curatorial Assistant for Natalie King at the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale 2017. Her practice focuses on the development of creative projects with Aboriginal artists. In 2016, Presley was awarded Best Emerging Curator at the Melbourne Fringe Festival.

**Moira Roth** is an art historian, poet and playwright based in California. She is the current Trefethen Chair of Art History at Mills College in Oakland, California. She works internationally and cross-culturally, and has written widely on performance history and feminism in the United States. In 2012, she was the blogger for the 18<sup>th</sup> Biennale of Sydney. She has been published in various arts journals and catalogues, and has edited several books, including *Rachel Rosenthal* (1997) and *Abraham's Daughter: The Life and Times of Rose Hacker* (1996). She is currently working on various fiction projects, including the narrative work *Through the Eyes of Rachel Marker*.

**Alexis Wright** is a member of the Waanyi nation of the Gulf of Carpentaria. She is an author and essayist writing fiction and non-fiction. She has written widely on Indigenous rights and has organised two successful Indigenous Constitutional Conventions in Central Australia: Today We Talk About Tomorrow (1993) and the Kalkaringi Convention (1998). She is a Sidney Myer creative fellow and a distinguished fellow in the Writing and Society Research Centre, Western Sydney University. Recent publications include *The Swan Book* (2013), which was awarded the Australian Literature Society Gold Medal in 2014; and *Carpentaria* (2006), which was awarded the 2007 Miles Franklin Award.

## Artist's acknowledgements

I would like to thank all of the Venice Biennale team at the Australia Council for the Arts and the team in Venice for helping to install and promote my 2017 exhibition.

My artworks could not be displayed in such a beautiful newly designed Venice Pavilion without the dedication and hard work of former Australian Venice Biennale Commissioner Simon Mordant, many other patrons, and Elaine Chia, formerly of the Australia Council for the Arts.

Key talented people assisted me in the production and final display of my 2017 Venice artworks: Claire Reynolds, Claudia Fitzpatrick, Cliff Jones, Warren Macris, Anita Gigi Budai, Rod McCormack, Gotaro Uematsu and Tom Hungerford; many young interns and art students; and the models and actors who appear in my photodramas.

Love and encouragement while on my Venice journey came from my Moffatt family and a myriad of friends at home and the world over – their phone calls and emails were more than appreciated.

I thank my gallerists, Tyler Rollins in New York and Roslyn and Tony Oxley in Sydney, for talking to me whenever I needed.

Finally, I applaud two magnificent women in Melbourne who never faltered in their support of me. Curator Natalie King, who always gave insightful commentary on my new developing artworks. And my extraordinary Commissioner Naomi Milgrom, who called me to say that I had been selected to represent Australia in Venice in 2017, she allowed me space to be an artist but also made sure that I was feeling 'okay'. I thank Naomi for supporting me through one of the greatest opportunities an artist can ever have, and that is to exhibit at the glorious Venice Biennale.

## Curator's acknowledgements

I thank Tracey Moffatt for the enormous privilege and joy of working with her and her astonishing new work on the occasion of the 57<sup>th</sup> Venice Biennale. I extend my sincere gratitude to the Commissioner, Naomi Milgrom, for her vision and unwavering support. It has been a professional and personal highlight working as a trio with Tracey and Naomi.

I am indebted to Laura De Neeffe and Hannah Presley for their loyalty, talent and invaluable work preparing biographies, captions, photography requests, research and so much more; and Anita Gigi Budai for her exceptional exhibition design.

Special thanks to colleagues at the Australia Council for the Arts for shepherding a project of this magnitude and complexity to fruition.

My appreciation to Roslyn and Tony Oxley and the staff at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

I acknowledge Kirsten Abbott (and her team) at Thames & Hudson for her calm precision and expertise with every aspect of this book, and Evi Oetomo and Daniel New of OetomoNew for designing our book with flair.

I thank all the writers who contributed to this publication for their insights, words, poetry and reflections: Judy Annear, Susan Bright, Germano Celant, Nakkiah Lui, Adrian Martin, Romaine Moreton, Djon Mundine, Camille Paglia, Moira Roth and Alexis Wright.

I also wish to thank Su Baker and Jon Cattapan from the Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne, for their ongoing support.

Numerous colleagues have provided invaluable camaraderie and advice, in particular Rebecca Coates, Simeon Kronenberg, Lynda Roberts and Sarah Tutton.

Finally, to my family – David, Lilly, Coco and Woody Weissman – thanks and love as always.

## Australia Council for the Arts' acknowledgements



The Balnaves Foundation has supported Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale since 2007.

Founded in 2006 by Neil Balnaves AO, the foundation disperses more than \$2.5 million per annum to organisations that aim to create a better Australia through education, medicine and the arts, with a focus on young people, the disadvantaged and Indigenous communities.

In the arts, the foundation partners with a number of key visual and performing arts organisations in Australia. It funds free teenage programs at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in Sydney and the Art Gallery of South Australia, and provides financial support to Kaldor Public Art Projects.

In the performing arts, the foundation supports the production of Indigenous plays at Belvoir St Theatre in Sydney, and provides funding to enable Ensemble Theatre Sydney to build new audiences and new partnerships. It supports Bangarra Dance Theatre's Community Nights, and a project that gives young choreographers the opportunity to produce new work at Sydney Dance Company. The foundation also subsidises tickets to the Sydney Opera House so that socially and economically disadvantaged families can attend performances for just \$5 a ticket.

The Balnaves Foundation is proud to again be the Major Partner for Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale 2017.

## NAOMI MILGROM FOUNDATION

The Naomi Milgrom Foundation, established in 2014 by business leader, philanthropist and art collector Naomi Milgrom AO, aims to enhance society through the initiation and support of great design, architecture and cultural projects. Encouraging an innovative, risk-taking and multidisciplinary approach, MPavilion, the foundation's annual flagship project, facilitates a four-month free public program promoting the role of design, architecture and culture in building creative and equitable cities and communities. MPavilion is the most publicly visited design exhibition in Australia.

Milgrom is deeply involved in a broad range of philanthropic projects. Her significant contributions to the community have been recognised with many accolades, including being made an Officer of the Order of Australia in 2010, an Honorary Doctorate of Business from RMIT University in 2010, a Distinguished Alumni Lifetime Achievement Award from Monash University in 2010, the Australian Institute of Architects' President's Prize in 2015, Creative Partnerships Australia Philanthropy Leadership Award in 2016 and an Honorary Doctorate of Business from the University of New South Wales in 2016.

In 2015, Milgrom was appointed Commissioner for Australia for the 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition, Venice Biennale 2017.



The University of Melbourne is a world-leading research university dedicated to engaged conversations that connect its teaching, students and research with communities – locally, nationally and globally.

As part of this commitment, the University of Melbourne is proud to support the Australia Council for the Arts and Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale in 2017.

This year at the Biennale, the Faculty of Arts is supporting interns from the graduate programs in the School of Culture and Communication to work with the Australian contribution's arts administration, event coordination, marketing, public programming and stakeholder management, and university academics will contribute to talks, tours and conversations. Professor Charles Green is representing the university as a member of the Commissioner's Council.

The University of Melbourne's support and involvement forms part of a deeper history – artist graduates and staff of the University's Victorian College of the Arts have represented Australia at the Venice Biennale consistently since 1978 – and a broader story of research and teaching across the university in disciplines such as studio art, art history, art curatorship and arts management.

## Neilson Foundation

The Neilson Foundation is a philanthropic trust established by the Neilson family in 2007. Since its inception, the foundation has distributed more than \$70 million in a number of key areas, including the arts, with the intention of enriching the cultural landscape and furthering artistic programs in Sydney and throughout Australia. In addition, the foundation assists organisations working towards social cohesion, with a focus on offering support to vulnerable populations.

As a key partner of major Australian cultural institutions, including the Biennale of Sydney, the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and the Art Gallery of NSW, the Neilson Foundation is deeply engaged with organisations that embrace innovation and diversity to deliver exciting and accessible programs

The Neilson Foundation delights once again in supporting the Venice Biennale, with its long and pioneering status as the leader in exhibiting global contemporary art.



Maddocks is a proudly independent Australian law firm that works closely with corporations, businesses and governments throughout Australia and internationally. The firm advises clients across the education, government, infrastructure, healthcare, professional services and technology sectors from its Canberra, Melbourne and Sydney offices. Founded in 1885, Maddocks has built a reputation for developing long-standing client relationships that allow it to make real its goal of working together to make a difference, every day.

Maddocks is committed to supporting the contemporary arts. As the first Australian corporate sponsor for the Venice Biennale, the firm has supported Australian artists exhibiting at the world's premier contemporary art event since 2001. Maddocks seeks to have its partners and people engage with art in a way that brings our community closer together. Its vision as a firm is to be acknowledged for innovation, and as nurturing a culture of collaboration, respect and diversity.

In 2017, Maddocks once again awards the Maddocks Art Prize, enabling an emerging Australian artist from Sydney and Melbourne to attend the Venice Biennale.

## Professional Development Program



## Commissioner

Naomi Milgrom AO

## Venice Visionaries

Marc Besen AC and Eva Besen AO  
Catriona and Simon Mordant AM  
Annabel and Rupert Myer AO  
Mark and Louise Nelson  
Roslyn Oxley OAM and Tony Oxley OAM  
Peter Weiss AO  
Carla Zamnatti AC

NELSON MEERS FOUNDATION



## Commissioner's Council

Susan Armitage  
Hamish Balnaves  
Daniel Besen  
Luisa Bosci  
Andrew Cameron AM  
Deborah Cheetham AO  
Penny Clive  
Debbie Dadon  
Dr Paul Eliadis  
Johanna Featherstone  
Adrian Fini OAM  
Jan Frolich  
Helen Gannon  
Professor Charles Green  
Mark Henry  
Jo Horgan  
Peter Jopling AM QC  
Roslyn Morgan  
Paris Neilson  
Dr Dick Quan  
Carol Schwartz AM  
Eleonora Triguboff  
Dr Terry Wu

## Donors and Champions

Brian Abel  
Dr Ian Airey and Mrs Judeen Airey  
Lesley Alway and Paul Hewison  
Philip Bacon AM  
John Barrington and Fiona Harris  
Anita Belgiorno-Nettis and Luca Belgiorno-Nettis AM  
Stacey Bishop  
Bambi Blumberg  
John and Linda Bond  
Professor Wendy Brown  
Robert Buckingham  
Morena Buffon and Santo Cilaurio  
Anne Marie Casey  
Robyn Clune  
Warren Coli and Linda Coli  
Mr J. Andrew Cook and Mrs Sophie Ullin  
Mrs Caroline Cornish and Mr Philip Cornish  
Marilyn Darling AC  
James Darling AM and Lesley Forwood  
Peter de Campo  
Robert and Jasmine Dindas  
Marco D'Orsogna  
Richard and Harriett England  
Barbara Flynn  
Andrew Forrest AO and Nicola Forrest  
Jonathan Frolich  
Helen and Tony Gandel  
Sophie Gannon  
Raphael and Fiona Geminder  
David Gilbert and Hannah Michell  
Lisa and Danny Goldberg  
Lucy Greig and Josh Black  
Julian and Stephanie Grose  
Kim Harding and Irene Miller  
Jane Hansen and Paul Little AO  
Michael Hawker  
Amit Holckner  
Andrew Kaldor AM and Renata Kaldor AO  
Evan Kaldor and Dr Allison Salmon  
Nicola Kaldor and Mark Knight  
Julie Kantor  
Lesley Kernaghan  
Wendy Kozica  
Marita Leuver  
Elizabeth and Walter Lewin  
Marita and James Lillie  
Darryl Mack and Helen Taylor  
Mark McMahan and Rita Zhang  
Macquarie Group Foundation  
Susan Manford  
Sam Meers  
Hugo and Brooke Michell  
Jan Murphy  
Louise Myer and Martyn Myer AO  
Mark Newman  
Dr Clinton Ng  
John and Angela Nicolaidis  
Susan Oliver  
Vicki Olsson

Mimi and Willy Packer  
Roslyn Packer AC  
Elizabeth Pakchung  
Garry and Wendy Prendiville  
Veronique Ramen  
Jonathan and Katrina Raymond  
Susan M. Renouf  
Michael and Rosalba Renzella  
Eli Zaikos-Ridley  
Andrew and Judy Rogers  
Angie Scanlon  
Richard and Jacqui Scheinberg  
Morry and Anna Schwartz  
Wyborn and Jenny Seabrook  
Sue Rose and Alan Segal  
Penelope Seidler AM  
Vivienne Sharpe  
Dr Gene Sherman AM and Brian Sherman AM  
Dr Michael Slancar and Fiona Kernaghan  
Dr Jacqui Strecker  
Catherine Sullivan  
R. Swart  
David and Lisa Thurin  
A. Tindale  
Aida Tomescu  
Dr Francis Tomlinson and Dr Beverley Rowbotham  
Greg and Janice Taylor  
David and Judy Tynan  
Lorena and Richard Uechtritz  
Mark and Tracey Van Weelde  
Leonard Vary  
John S. Walton AM  
Len and Elena Warson  
Kim Williams AM and Catherine Dovey  
Four anonymous

## Artist

Tracey Moffatt

## Curator

Natalie King

## Australia Council for the Arts

Rupert Myer AO, Chair  
Tony Grybowski, Chief Executive Officer

## Venice Biennale Project Team

Dr Wendy Were, Executive Director, Strategic Development and Advocacy  
Tamara Harrison, Director, International Projects  
Tara Kita, Senior Project Officer, Venice Biennale  
Bronwyn Papantonio, Project Officer, Venice Biennale  
Matthew Loftus, Project Officer, Venice Biennale  
Amrit Gill, Manager, International Projects  
Kate Clark, Director, Communications  
Celia Pavelieff, Manager, Marketing  
Enid Charlton, Manager Co-Investment  
Rebecca Kenny, General Counsel

## Exhibition Team

Anita Gigi Budai, Exhibition Design  
Diego Carpentiero, Australian Pavilion Supervisor  
Katrina Hall, National Public Relations  
Adam Meredith, MEGS Lighting; Lighting Design  
Andrew Moran, Exhibition Installer  
Trigger Design, Graphic Design  
Elisa Torcutti, Venice Events Manager  
Grant Wallwork, Exhibition Installer  
Gotaro Uematsu, Audiovisual Specialist  
Polskin Arts; International Public Relations

## Curatorial Assistant, First Nations

Hannah Presley

## Emerging Curators

Jessica Clark  
Katina Davidson  
Coby Edgar  
Emily McDaniel  
Shilo MacNamee  
Kimberley Moulton  
WA representative

## Australian Pavilion Exhibition Team Leaders

Alice Clanachan  
Kelly Fliedner  
Sarah Gürich  
Ruth Langford  
Sarah Pirrie  
Kimba Thompson  
WA representative

## Australian Pavilion Exhibition Attendants

Shannon Brett  
Dean Cross  
Jane Gillespie  
Jirra Lulla Harvey  
Sebastian Henry-Jones  
Rebecca Holmes  
Miranda Johnson  
Amy-Clare McCarthy  
Melissa McGrath  
Georgia MacGuire  
Georgia Mokak  
Adelina Onicas  
Rebekah Raymond  
Myles Russell-Cook

## The University of Melbourne Interns

Lara Dykun  
Jessica Row

## The Australia Council acknowledges the assistance provided by la Biennale di Venezia

Paolo Baratta, President  
Christine Macel, Director, 57<sup>th</sup> International Art Exhibition  
Manuela Lucà-Dazio, Executive Manager, Visual Art and Architecture Department  
Micol Saleri, Visual Arts and Architecture Department  
Maria Cristiana Costanzo, Press Office

## The Australia Council warmly thanks the following people for their contributions to the project

Kirsten Abbott, Joachim Abrell, Greg Anderson, Rebecca Anderson, Tahlia Anderson, Judy Annear, Tina Baum, Nicholas Baume, Cassandra Bird, Dr Michael Brand, Yvonne Brandl, Alison Brennan, Susan Bright, Alison Buchbinder, Clothilde Bullen, Maria Cabrejas-O'Malley, Sarah Caldwell, Claire Campey, Dr Stefano Carboni, Phil Carruthers, Germano Celant, Elaine Chia, Dr Rebecca Coates, Franchesca Cubillo, Nici Cumpston, Jane and Frank Da Mosto, Clara Edwards, Meryl Feinstein, Nicole Foreshaw, Stephen Gilchrist, John Gollings, Will Gouthro, Karen Hall, Glenn Harding, Lisa Havilah, Charlie Hernandez, David Jaffe, Carly Lane, Nakkiah Lui, Bruce McLean, Enzo Magris, Tom Maguire, Adrian Martin, Freya Middleton, Penny Miles, Nick Mitzevich, Dr Romaine Moreton, Liza Muhlfeld, Kingsley Munday, Djon Mundine, Lucy Nelson, Tim O'Loughlin, Sean L. O'Malley, Emma Page Campbell, Tomasz Piotrowski, Suhanya Raffel, Leigh Robb, Andrew Rogers, Moira Roth, Chris Saines CNZM, James Sim, Christopher Sims, Kate Taylor, Sarah Tutton, Nikki Van Der Horst, Daniel Watts, Alexis Wright.

With special thanks to Raphael and Fiona Geminder from the Pratt Foundation for their generous contribution to the publication.

Tracey Moffatt is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia, and Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York, United States.



Photo: Naomi Milgrom

**TRACEY MOFFATT** is one of Australia's most celebrated artists with significant international acclaim. Since her first solo exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney in 1989, Moffatt has exhibited extensively including at Cannes Film Festival; Venice Biennale; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She has been selected for the Biennales of Gwangju, Prague, São Paulo, Sharjah, Singapore and Sydney. Her work is held in major international collections including the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Tate Gallery, London; and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo.



Photo: Kate Bailis

**NATALIE KING** is an Australian writer and curator. She has curated exhibitions for numerous museums including Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; and National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. She has edited major publications including *Art in the Asia Pacific: Intimate Publics* (2014); *Hou Hanru* (2013); and *Up Close: Carol Jerrems with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang* (2010). King is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, Paris. Her concurrent roles include chief curator of Biennial Lab, City of Melbourne and Melbourne Festival 2016; and senior research fellow, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

First published in Australia in 2017  
by the Australia Council for the Arts  
in association with Thames & Hudson Australia Pty Ltd on the occasion  
of the exhibition Tracey Moffatt: MY HORIZON, curated by Natalie King,  
for the Australian Pavilion at the 57th International Art Exhibition –  
La Biennale di Venezia, 13 May – 26 November 2017

© Australia Council for the Arts and Thames & Hudson 2017  
Text © copyright remains with the individual copyright holders  
Images © copyright remains with the individual copyright holders

English translation by Christopher Huw Evans for Language  
Consulting Congress, Milan

20 19 18 17                      5 4 3 2 1

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or  
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopy, recording or any other information storage or retrieval  
system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher is sold subject to the  
condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold,  
hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in  
any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and  
without a similar condition including these words being imposed on a  
subsequent purchaser.

ISBN: 978 050050 099 6

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry.

Tracey Moffatt: MY HORIZON / Natalie King (editor).  
9780500500996  
Moffatt, Tracey.  
Artists--Australia.  
Photography, Artistic--Exhibitions.  
Other Creators/Contributors:  
King, Natalie, 1966- editor.

Front cover image: Tracey Moffatt, *Hell* 2017

Editor: Natalie King  
Copy Editor: Nicola Young  
Design: Evi O. & Daniel New / OetomoNew  
Printed and bound in Australia by Blue Star Print

Australia Council for the Arts  
372 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
PO Box 788  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
ABN: 38 392 626 187  
australiacouncil.gov.au

Thames & Hudson  
11 Central Boulevard Portside Business Park  
Port Melbourne Victoria 3207  
ABN: 72 004 751 964  
thameshudson.com.au



Photo: Naomi Milgrom

**TRACEY MOFFATT** is one of Australia's most celebrated artists with significant international acclaim. Since her first solo exhibition at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney in 1989, Moffatt has exhibited extensively including at Cannes Film Festival; Venice Biennale; Centre Pompidou, Paris; and the Museum of Modern Art, New York. She has been selected for the Biennales of Gwangju, Prague, São Paulo, Sharjah, Singapore and Sydney. Her work is held in major international collections including the Guggenheim Museum, Museum of Modern Art, New York; Moderna Museet, Stockholm; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Tate Gallery, London; and Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo.



Photo: Kate Bailis

**NATALIE KING** is an Australian writer and curator. She has curated exhibitions for numerous museums including Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Tokyo; Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney; Singapore Art Museum, Singapore; and National Gallery of Indonesia, Jakarta. She has edited major publications including *Art in the Asia Pacific: Intimate Publics* (2014); *Hou Hanru* (2013); and *Up Close: Carol Jerrems with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang* (2010). King is a member of the International Association of Art Critics, Paris. Her concurrent roles include chief curator of Biennial Lab, City of Melbourne and Melbourne Festival 2016; and senior research fellow, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne.

First published in Australia in 2017  
by the Australia Council for the Arts  
in association with Thames & Hudson Australia Pty Ltd on the occasion  
of the exhibition Tracey Moffatt: MY HORIZON, curated by Natalie King,  
for the Australian Pavilion at the 57th International Art Exhibition –  
La Biennale di Venezia, 13 May – 26 November 2017

© Australia Council for the Arts and Thames & Hudson 2017  
Text © copyright remains with the individual copyright holders  
Images © copyright remains with the individual copyright holders

English translation by Christopher Huw Evans for Language  
Consulting Congress, Milan

20 19 18 17                      5 4 3 2 1

The moral right of the author has been asserted.

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced or  
transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical,  
including photocopy, recording or any other information storage or retrieval  
system, without prior permission in writing from the publisher.

Any copy of this book issued by the publisher is sold subject to the  
condition that it shall not by way of trade or otherwise be lent, resold,  
hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in  
any form or binding or cover other than that in which it is published and  
without a similar condition including these words being imposed on  
a subsequent purchaser.

ISBN: 978 050050 107 8

National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry.

Tracey Moffatt: MY HORIZON / Natalie King (editor).  
9780500501078  
Moffatt, Tracey.  
Artists--Australia.  
Photography, Artistic--Exhibitions.  
Other Creators/Contributors:  
King, Natalie, 1966- editor.

Cover image: Tracey Moffatt, *Worship* 2017

Editor: Natalie King  
Copy Editor: Nicola Young  
Design: Evi O. & Daniel New / OetomoNew  
Printed and bound in Australia by Blue Star Print

Australia Council for the Arts  
372 Elizabeth Street  
Surry Hills NSW 2010  
PO Box 788  
Strawberry Hills NSW 2012  
ABN: 38 392 626 187  
australiacouncil.gov.au

Thames & Hudson  
11 Central Boulevard Portside Business Park  
Port Melbourne Victoria 3207  
ABN: 72 004 751 964  
thameshudson.com.au