

Vertigo

8 May-28 June 2009

Extended label texts © Monash Gallery of Art 2009

<Dupain, Sievers>

Throughout the twentieth century photographers sought out oblique perspectives in the new vantage points afforded by modern architecture and industry. Their photographs typically invite the viewer to look up through the geometry of skeletal towers, peer out over city streets below or look down the side of skyscrapers. Max Dupain and Wolfgang Sievers both explored the formal potential of vertical perspectives in and around Australian cities.

Unlike avant-garde artists in Europe, who used oblique perspectives to produce radically abstract photographic images, Dupain and Sievers hold onto figurative references; we recognise the content of these images, but the camera's point-of-view suggests a new relationship with our surroundings. Dupain's elevated perspectives encourage the viewer to look out over modern Australian society with a sense of comfortable tenure and national pride. Sievers' vertical perspectives – looking straight up through soaring skyscrapers and down across a happy workforce of engineers – celebrate the wonder of modern industry.

<Moore>

David Moore is famous for his straight, social documentary photography. But one of his most celebrated images, "Sisters of Mercy", testified to his sustained interest in using oblique perspectives. This photograph was shot from the mezzanine level of Washington National Airport, looking down on a group of nuns wearing traditional wimples. From this angle, the headdresses are transformed into a flotilla of highly stylised forms drifting across a black background.

Throughout his career, Moore explored the ways in which different camera angles can be used to wrest forms from their habitual familiarity. Like Dupain and Sievers, Moore was reluctant to push photography into pure abstraction, but his oblique points-of-view serve to set viewers adrift in a world of stylised form and visual movement.

<Paauwe>

Deborah Paauwe is well known for her photographs that peer through layers of lace and across voluptuous folds of satin, into the personal space of young women. "Eternal Spell" is part of a series titled *Carouse!*. The photographs in this series all adopt an aerial perspective, picturing women from above with vintage dresses fanning out in circular forms around them. The artist describes these works as being concerned with surveillance and, more specifically, the religious notion that God is like an eye in the sky that watches over every individual.

<Stephenson>

These photographs are from a series of 60 images that David Stephenson shot looking up into the cupolas of Classical and Baroque buildings. The dome of each of these majestic buildings is topped with an opening that invites people to contemplate the infinite. Decorated with various *trompe l'oeil* and geometric conundrums, the cupolas were designed to provoke a feeling of sublime vertigo in the viewer as they gazed into the heavens. Stephenson translates these vertiginous effects into photographs that stare, through long exposures, into the dizzy space of the dome.

<Terrill>

Simon Terrill's photographs of crowds are shot from light towers, cranes and other elevated positions that allow him to study group dynamics in public spaces. The photographs on display here were taken during musical concerts held in open-air venues. Terrill's aerial perspective flattens out these social situations into diagrams of relations. And, by using long exposure times or combining multiple exposures in the same shot, Terrill's images trace the movement of individuals within a crowd.

<Wicks>

Arthur Wicks' collages are composed of multiple photographs, shot from high vantage points within major cities. This series of *Solstice* works includes a range of cities in which Wicks has lived and, as such, constitute a type of geographical autobiography. By arranging the images into spherical panoramas he makes each metropolis look like a self-contained planet; each being another world that the artist has explored, experienced and perhaps colonised in his own way.

<Gollings>

John Gollings' aerial photographs look down onto landscapes that have been scorched by bushfires. Viewed from an airplane, without any horizon line to give a sense of scale or orientation to the terrain, these charred landscapes take on the appearance of hairy skin. Gollings uses this ambiguity to great effect, making the dirt tracks look like wounds that have scarred the surface of the Earth. In this respect, the effects of aerial photography allow the images to be read as abstract ciphers of ecological trauma.