

&+ BLACK DOCUMENTING
WHITE INDIGENOUS
AUSTRALIA



A MONASH GALLERY OF ART TRAVELLING EXHIBITION
EDUCATION RESOURCE

HOW TO USE THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This resource is intended to be used as a starting point for teachers and senior students to explore the exhibition. The questions and activities have been designed to address a broad range of study design and curricula. It is suggested that teachers use this resource as a basis for their own exhibition response worksheets or as a launching pad for further investigation.

PRE-VISIT PLANNING

Before visiting *Black & white: documenting Indigenous Australia* it is suggested that you contact gallery staff to determine the following:

- Suitability of exhibition content for the year level you wish to bring
- Whether staff members are available for guided tours or introductory talks
- Opening hours, admission fees, tour charges, parking arrangements
- Additional in-house guidelines for education/group tours



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photo: Stephanie Richter



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photo: Katie Tremeschng

MONASH GALLERY OF ART

MGA is recognised as one of Australia's key public galleries promoting excellence, access and education within the visual arts. Specialising in Australian photography, MGA produces exhibitions, programs and publications that enable audiences to access and engage with photography.

THE COLLECTION

MGA's collection of Australian photography is one of the finest in the nation. It traces the early development of Australian photography and includes examples by many of the country's most important twentieth-century photographers, including Max Dupain, David Moore and Olive Cotton.

MGA's collection of contemporary photography is equally strong. It is broad in its scope and includes substantial holdings of work by individual photographers such as Bill Henson and Anne Zahalka. Together, the more than 1600 photographs in the collection tell the complex story of Australian photography and provide a rich cultural asset for the people of Australia.

EXHIBITION INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal people have featured in the photographic history of Australia since the earliest days of the camera, first appearing in daguerreotype images produced during the 1840s.

Throughout the nineteenth century, cross-cultural photography was influenced by an Enlightenment ambition to document and comprehend the nature of 'other' races. To that end, indigenous people were frequently presented as generic types, rather than identified as individuals. Nonetheless, there are a variety of approaches to photographing Aboriginal Australians during this period, ranging from clinical ethnography and racial condescension through to empathetic humanism and exotic voyeurism. Over the course of the twentieth century this diversity of photographic approaches has continued.

It would be misleading to think that indigenous Australians have simply been passive specimens under of the gaze of the white man's lens. Recent research indicates that Aboriginal people quickly became collectors of photographic images in the nineteenth century, and were actively involved in commissioning and staging their own portraits by the 1890s. With the introduction of affordable Kodak cameras in the early twentieth century, indigenous Australians joined the ranks of amateur photographers across the world, filling their own homes with images of relatives, friends and sporting events. Albert Namatjira used a camera during his plein air painting trips in the 1930s, and, in 1933, the Birdsville Track storekeeper reported that 'nearly all' young Aboriginal men of the district passed 'through a Kodak stage'.

Drawing primarily on material in the MGA Collection, this exhibition examines the representation of Indigenous Australians in black-and-white photography from the nineteenth century through to the present. The unembellished quality of black-and-white prints has often been favoured by documentary photographers because it suggests a certain honesty and clarity. But, rather than rendering Australia's colonial history in stark, black and white terms, the prints in this exhibition lead us through a grey history of uncertain encounters and ambiguous relationships.

BLACK & WHITE PHOTOGRAPHY

We see black and white photographs everyday in newspapers, whilst there is an economic factor (colour printing is expensive!), black and white images are also seen as being more 'honest' or 'real' than their coloured counterparts.

Black and White photography has been the favoured medium for photojournalists as it removes the emotion of colour from the scene.

Imagine if you could see the colour of the Aboriginal flag or the clothing in Brenda L Croft's image (pictured right).

Which element of the image captures your attention now? How might colour change the way you first look at the image?



Brenda L CROFT
War memorial takeover, Redfern Park, Redfern, Invasion Day, Long March of Freedom, Justice and Hope, 26 January 1988
gelatin silver print 39 x 29 cm
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection 2009.053
donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by the artist in memory of Joseph Croft 2009

ANALYSING A PHOTOGRAPH:
COMPOSITION

Blurred background is caused by selecting shallow depth of field. One way of achieving this is to use a long lens with the largest aperture, which would increase your depth of field allowing you to precisely focus on just one area.

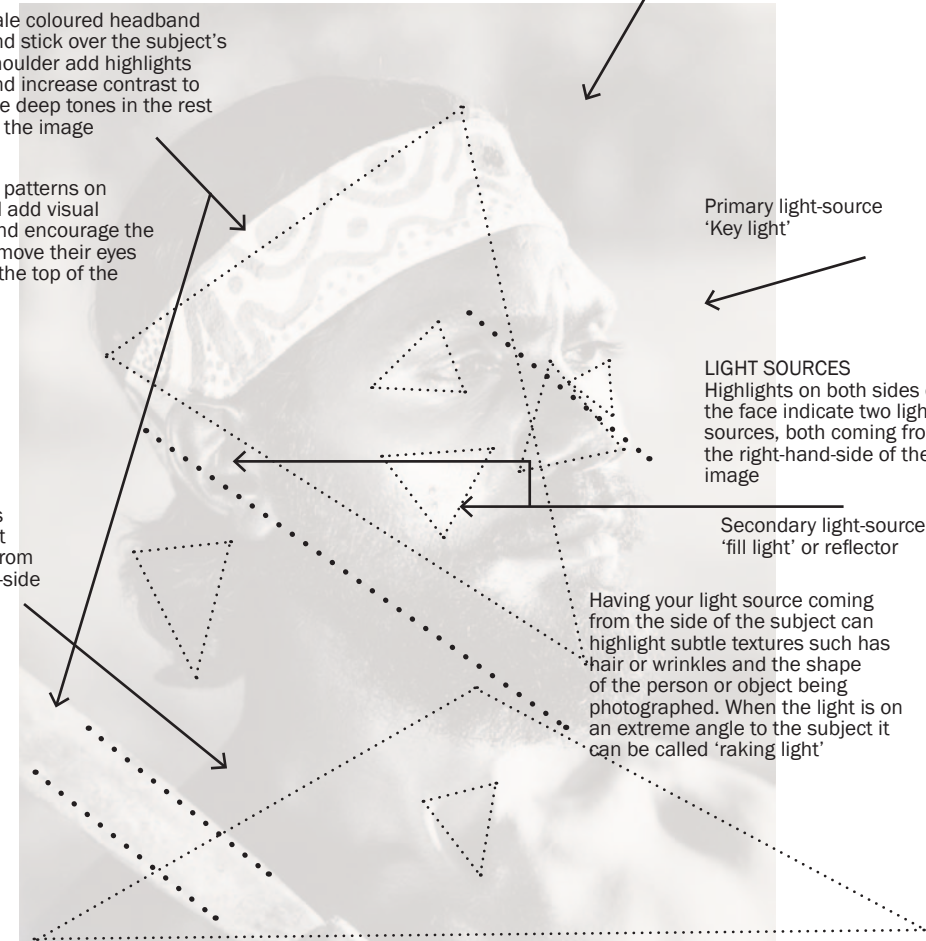
The photographer has chosen to focus on the face of the character, deeming the background unimportant or distracting.



Pale coloured headband and stick over the subject's shoulder add highlights and increase contrast to the deep tones in the rest of the image

Lines and patterns on headband add visual interest and encourage the viewer to move their eyes across to the top of the frame

Deep shadows caused by light source being from the right-hand-side of the subject



Primary light-source 'key light'

LIGHT SOURCES
Highlights on both sides of the face indicate two light sources, both coming from the right-hand-side of the image

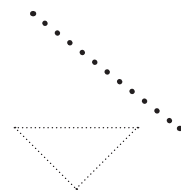
Secondary light-source 'fill light' or reflector

Having your light source coming from the side of the subject can highlight subtle textures such as hair or wrinkles and the shape of the person or object being photographed. When the light is on an extreme angle to the subject it can be called 'raking light'

Phillip J PIKE **Untitled** (portrait of Robert Tudawali as Marbuck in Charles Chauvel's *Jedda*) c1954
gelatin silver print 24.3 x 19.2 cm
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection 2008.279
Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Richard King in memory of Murray Stewart Smith 2008

LINE, SHAPE AND REPETITION IN COMPOSITION

Pike has used diagonal lines to compose his image, turning the subject away from the camera his jaw-line forms a central diagonal that cuts through the frame. This angle is repeated by the stick on the shoulder and the bridge of the subject's nose.



Pike has also used the angled light to create visible triangles that encourage the viewer's eye to move throughout the frame. The angle of the subject's head and shape of his hair also form triangles within the image.

ANALYSING A PHOTOGRAPH: OTHER TECHNIQUES

FORMAL FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS

TECHNIQUE :

- Was it taken in a studio? Or outside? What tells you this?
- Using film or digital technologies? (can you see the edges of the negative? the date of the work might help you decipher the technique)
- Has the work been manipulated in any way?
- Is the photographer working in a documentary-style (finding an event and photographing it as it happened without interference?)
- Have they constructed the scene? Using a backdrop and props or costumes?
- Does it fall somewhere in the middle? Have they come across a scene and asked somebody to stop so that they can take their photograph?
- Where is the light coming from?
- Is there more than one light source?
- Is it natural light or artificial? Is it a combination of both?
- What type of print is it?
- Has the photographer printed it themselves?
- Was it printed at around the time the photograph was taken?

SYMBOLS & METAPHORS :

- Look at the size of the work: what is the photographer trying to tell us through the scale of the work? (e.g. postcard size - to be handed out or sent, large - to make a statement)
- Are there and parts of the image that might contain symbolic meaning and/or metaphors? Consider the content, composition, medium, technique and style.

PERSONAL FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS

- What kind of relationship might the artwork have to the artist's experience and life or philosophy?
- As a viewer do we have the same emotional response as the artist? Why or why not?
- How might our personal experience or background influence our interpretation of the artwork?

CULTURAL FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS

- Interpret how the artist and therefore their artwork might be influenced by the place, time, political and cultural setting in which it was created.

CONTEMPORARY FRAMEWORK QUESTIONS

- Interpret the artworks in the context of contemporary art ideas and issues, irrespective of when the work was created. For example: the JW LINDT studio portraits, where the subjects are posed in a studio set with 'traditional' clothing and weapons - how do these images make us feel today in a post-apology Australia?

NEW ACQUISITION

–Derek O'Connor

On the 13th of February 2008, the day when Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised for decades of state-sponsored mistreatment of indigenous Australians, the MGA Committee of Management ratified the acquisition of a new series of photographs that highlight the on-going challenges of cross-cultural politics within this country.

Derek O'Connor took the four photographs in this series during the early 1980s while he was living at Amata, an Aboriginal community situated in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara/Yankunytjatjara Lands in the far northwest of South Australia. They show a group of Aboriginal youths congregating around a campfire on the outskirts of the township, casually incorporating various elements of capitalist culture into their own communal space. Second-hand 70s clothing, a portable cassette player, a tin can with a Hans Heysen label, and petrol. It's an edgy scene. At an emotive level it flickers between tragedy and jubilation, affirming life in all its contradictions.

Photographs of this sort, which represent Aboriginal people as fringe-dwellers on the margins of White Australia, date back to the nineteenth century. Early examples of this genre typically cast Aboriginal people as a dying race, whose way of life was rapidly being undermined by the colonial regime. In O'Connor's photographs, however, the Aboriginal youths personify a sense of persistent vitality, in spite of their circumstances. As O'Connor explains, "there is no self-pity or passive resignation in the way they face the camera." Their quiet defiance has a palpable sense of integrity."

–STEPHEN ZAGALA, Curator



images above
Derek O'Connor
Untitled (Amata Series), 1981-1984
gelatin silver prints
4 prints, 61 x 51 cm each
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection
2008.01 2008.02

GLOSSARY OF PHOTOGRAPHIC TERMS

This glossary outlines the terminology currently used by Monash Gallery of Art to classify the photographic items in its collection. In keeping with standard museum practice, we avoid using brand names such as "Lambda" or "C-Type", in favour of technical terms that describe the material qualities of the print itself.



Detail: Gordon BENNETT
Self Portrait (Nuance 2) 1994
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection
Reproduced courtesy of the artist



Detail: Fred KRUGER
Untitled (Aboriginal Couple in front of their humpy)
circa 1870-1880
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection

Gelatin silver print: Gelatin silver prints are black and white photographic prints that have been created using papers coated with an emulsion of gelatin and light-sensitive silver salts. After the papers are briefly exposed to light through a negative, a chemical developer renders the latent image as reduced silver, which is then fixed and washed. This technique was first introduced in the 1870s and is still used today.

Albumen paper print: This technique was invented in 1850 and used until 1890. It was made by floating a thin sheet of paper in a bath of beaten egg white, dried and then painted with silver nitrate and dried again, this time in the dark. This sensitized paper is then sandwiched with a glass or waxed paper negative in a hinged frame to be exposed in sun light for a few minutes or hours. The print is then fixed in a solution and washed thoroughly.



Detail: Robert ASHTON
Jackpot, Fitzroy 1974
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection
Reproduced courtesy of the artist

Ink jet print: Also known as Giclee prints or Bubble jet prints, these are photographs generated by computer printers from digital files using pigment inks on paper. A series of nozzles spray tiny droplets of ink onto the paper in a precise pattern that corresponds to the digital image file.

OTHER TERMS :

Key light

The primary light source used in photography; the dominant light in a scene. Not limited to studio photography, sunlight could also be termed the key light.

Fill

A secondary light source, also called a 'fill light', typically with less intensity than the key light. This light can be substituted for a reflector (fill reflector).

Reflector

In photography, an object used to redirect light at a scene, material can range from professional specialised equipment to improvised paper, card or metallic surfaces.

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mga

MGA is the
premier cultural
facility of the
City of Monash



**ARTS
VICTORIA**



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PLEASE NOTE: THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE AND ACCOMPANYING EXHIBITION
CONTAIN IMAGES OF DECEASED ABORIGINAL PEOPLE, WHICH MAY CAUSE
DISTRESS TO SOME VIEWERS

IMAGE OPPOSITE:

PHILLIP J PIKE **UNTITLED** (PORTRAIT OF ROBERT TUDAWALI
AS MARBUCK IN CHARLES CHAUVEL'S JEDDA) c1954
GELATIN SILVER PRINT

MONASH GALLERY OF ART, CITY OF MONASH COLLECTION 2008.279
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PROGRAM BY RICHARD KING IN MEMORY OF MURRAY STEWART SMITH 2008