

TRACEY MOFFATT

narratives

A MONASH GALLERY OF ART TRAVELLING EXHIBITION
EDUCATION RESOURCE

Tracey Moffatt: narratives features three important photographic series by the internationally recognised Australian photographer Tracey Moffatt. Each series engages story telling: *Up in the sky* (1997; pictured right), *Invocations* (2000) and the searing 1994 series *Scarred for life*.

Narrative is a vital aspect of Moffatt's work. Her many films and 'photo-narratives' use images to build non-linear and open-ended stories. The three important series included in this exhibition provide the opportunity to fully appreciate this feature of Moffatt's practice.

Together, the three series provide a coherent and visually striking sense of Moffatt's work, and the basis upon which her substantial international reputation is based.

KEY THEMES:

Australian history & mythology
Popular visual culture & cinema
Childhood & memory
Gender & race
Story-telling & narrative structures



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 designs 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 *TRACEY MOFFATT: narratives* 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

NATIONAL CURRICULUM LINKS

ENGLISH (v1.0)

LITERATURE & LITERACY: *Creating Texts*

Eg. the works on display could be used as a launching point for creating personal stories and narratives.

LISTENING & RESPONDING:

Recognising & responding Eg. read aloud the language employed by Moffatt in her *Scarred for Life* series and explain the influence on the audience's emotions.

HISTORY (v1.0)

Indigenous History & Culture

YEAR 9: THE MAKING OF THE MODERN WORLD & AUSTRALIA 1750–1901

Depth study 2: Asia & the Pacific World

Depth study 3: the making of an Australian Nation

YEAR 10: AUSTRALIA IN THE MODERN WORLD 1901–PRESENT

Depth Study 2: struggles for freedom and rights

Depth Study 3: social & cultural influences

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VICTORIAN CURRICULUM LINKS

VELS – VICTORIAN ESSENTIAL LEARNING STANDARDS

ENGLISH Levels 5&6

Reading, writing, speaking & listening

HUMANITIES > HISTORY Levels 5&6

Historical reasoning & interpretation

THE ARTS Levels 5&6

Creating & making, exploring & responding

COMMUNICATION Levels 5&6

Listening, viewing & responding

THINKING PROCESSES Levels 5&6

Inquiry, creativity & reflection

VCE – VICTORIAN CERTIFICATE OF EDUCATION

VCE ART Units 1, 2, 3 & 4

VCE STUDIO ART Units 1, 2 & 4

VCE MEDIA: PHOTOGRAPHY

The influence of photographs on personal, social, cultural and national identity; exploring symbols, meanings and messages; comparing processes, technologies and styles.



photo: Jenny Luzzza



photo: Andrew Chapman



photo: Kate Trenschning

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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.



Tracey Moffatt

Job Hunt, 1976
After three weeks in jail, Job Hunt looks a little better. He is now up to his neck in his 'scarred' and 'pinned' days.

Tracey MOFFATT **Job Hunt**, 1976. 1994 from *Scarred for Life* (a series of 10 images) off-set print. 80 x 60 cm (image size) Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection 1998.04 courtesy of the artist and Rosilyn Oxley9 Gallery

The nine works that make up this series are based on true stories about traumatic childhood experiences. In response to each story, Moffatt has staged and photographed a scene that illustrates the tragic tale. The photographs have been made to look like snapshots from a family album, emphasising the everyday nature of the incidents and their ongoing significance as memories.

The photographs have been presented in a way that mimics the format of the 1960s American magazine, *Life*, which was well known for publishing photo-essays in this captioned format. Moffatt often draws on the story-telling conventions of magazines, cinema and other popular forms of visual communication in ways that give her photographs a heightened sense of drama.

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Sometimes it's like I use technology to make my images, but to go backwards, to make my images look like something from the past.

Tracey Moffatt 2001¹

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1994

Scarred for Life

PHOTOGRAPHY & MASS COMMUNICATION

Newspapers and magazines have in the past been the main sources of news and current affairs, alongside radio, for the general public. Information is now much more easily accessible electronically through the internet, especially international news.

THE ART OF THE PHOTO-ESSAY

- Why would Moffatt want to include text with her photographs? Is the story important?
- Think of a newspaper, the caption is usually provided to describe who or what is happening in the photograph.
- Do Moffatt's captions help you understand her work? Or do they just raise more questions?

This series was created in 1994, but the works were made to look as though they come from the American news magazine *Life*. Moffatt does this in a number of ways: through the settings and clothing of the subjects; the colour tones and pale printing of the image itself (as if it might be fading over time); the off-set printing process and finally through the captioning of the image.

- Why might Moffatt use contemporary technology to make her work 'look like something from the past'?

ABOUT LIFE MAGAZINE

Life was a weekly magazine, published during the 1960s–1970s, and widely recognised for its contribution to photojournalism and belief that photographs could do more than just illustrate a story – that they could *be* the story. *Life* employed and published some of the most well know photographers of its era. Including Alfred Eisenstaedt; Margaret Bourke-White and Robert Capa to name just a few.

See the RESOURCES section on page 11 for some more information and a link to view past issues.

PHOTOGRAPHY & MEMORY

Photographs by their nature freeze time and provide viewers with an understanding that at *that* moment something occurred. However we also know that the events depicted in these images did not occur at that point in time, that we are being deceived: Moffatt's photographs are *reenactments of memories*, as told to her by others.

- What memories do you choose to record in photographs? Your friends? Happy occasions?
- Do you ever photograph sad moments? Why/why not?
- Why might Moffatt want to capture these true stories of moments that have 'scarred' the lives of others?
- If you had to select a memory to reenact for a photograph, what would it be and why?

CREATE YOUR OWN PHOTO-ESSAY FOR A NEWSPAPER OR NEWS MAGAZINE

Put yourself in a photojournalist's shoes:

Keep your story text to a minimum, let the images tell the story. You could emulate Moffatt's approach and leave the text fairly ambiguous (giving your reader an *idea* of what is happening but not telling them directly) or it could be more descriptive like a newspaper (telling your reader exactly what is happening in the scene).

Be sure to research your topic first, so that you know which photograph will tell the story best. eg. Is the shot of your grandmother's hands going to tell your readers more about her than a photograph of her favourite plant?



Tracey MOFFATT *Up in the sky* #1 1997
 from *Up in the sky* (a series of 25 images)
 off-set print 61 x 76 cm (image size)
 Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection 2008.061
 donated by Simon Rosenthal through the Australian Government's
 Cultural Gifts Program 2008
 courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

COMPOSITION & DISPLAY

This series of 25 images has no pre-determined layout, leaving the curator of the exhibition to make the decision on how they want it to be displayed.

Some things a Curator might need to consider when displaying *Up in the sky*:

- Sheer size of the works and the series as a whole, this might mean that some works need to be hung across multiple walls, or in a large grid for example, just to fit them all in!
- Some of the works are very similar: creating a repetitive look if placed closely together. Also there are two colour casts to the works, some blue, some a golden yellow/brown.

- Consider the story they wish to tell: are there some particular images that they wish to highlight more than others by placing them at the beginning or the end or in a prominent position?

Look at the way the series has been displayed, what do you think the Curator considered when hanging the work in this space? Ask the gallery's Education Officer or Curator.

NON-LINEAR STORYTELLING

The series has no definite beginning, middle or end, leaving the visitor to determine their own story or interpretation of the series.

Why would you choose to not tell a story from the beginning?

FURTHER RESEARCH:

AFI award winning film *Memento* (2000); director: Christopher Nolan; rated MA15+ follows Leonard, a man with short-term memory-loss (Guy Pearce) as he tries to piece together who killed his wife, using the non-linear storytelling method of dual storylines and travelling from an event backwards through time.

PHOTOGRAPHY & FILM

Working like a 'Stills photographer' on a film set and also as the 'Director' of the film, Moffatt often employs technicians when she makes her pictures. This allows her to step back and direct both the actors and the photographer.

There is evidence of this in the work itself - can you find Moffatt's self-portrait?

FURTHER RESEARCH:

Australian stills photographer Lisa Tomasetti works on feature films, theatre productions and her own personal artwork. <<http://www.lisatomasetti.com/>>

ART INDUSTRY: COMMISSIONS

Tracey Moffatt was commissioned by the DIA Center for the Arts/ DIA Art Foundation (New York, USA) to produce *Up in the sky*.

To commission a work means that the artist was employed by the centre (could also be a private individual or large corporate organisation) to produce a piece or body of work for them to display and own. Sometimes they may request a certain type of work, perhaps similar to what the artist has produced before or perhaps a customised work, a portrait of a family member for example. And other times the artist will be given free-reign to produce the work, with the only constraint being cost.

Up in the sky

1997

Up in the sky consists of 25 images, making it one of Moffatt's largest photographic series. The wide range of characters, captured in different scenarios, suggests a narrative of epic proportions, but there is no beginning, middle and end to lead the viewer through this story. Moffatt's photographs function like film stills, highlighting poignant scenes in a larger drama that is never fully disclosed.

This series takes many of its visual cues from the neorealist cinema of 1960s Italy. Moffatt has even followed the neorealist method of shooting on location, with non-professional actors, to achieve a gritty realism. By employing this no-nonsense aesthetic, Moffatt creates an air of seriousness around the issues of race and religion that are alluded to in the photographic imagery.

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We took nine months to make the work and print it. It's all by hand, colour after colour, screen after screen, so the pictures have this sort of built up feel: like a pastel or a watercolour.

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Tracey Moffatt 2001²

Invocations

2000



Tracey MOFFATT *Invocations* #5 2000
from *Invocations* (a series of 13 images)
photographic silkscreen 146 x 122 cm (image size)
Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection 2008.090
donated by Daniel Isakow through the Australian Government's
Cultural Gifts Program 2008
courtesy of the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery

Moffatt explains that the imagery of *Invocations* was derived from one of her own dreams. Broken narratives and highly dramatic scenarios are often used by Moffatt to create a dream-like quality in her work, and these same techniques are evident here. Her dream has been restaged as three disjointed stories about a little girl in a haunted forest, a man and a woman in a desolate wasteland, and an ominous host of ghouls.

The 13 photographs in Moffatt's *Invocations* series have been printed as photo-silkscreens. More than 20 screens were used to build up the layers of colour in some works, giving the images a painterly appearance. The photographs were shot on theatrical sets, adding to the sense of artifice in the final images. The stage sets, designed by Moffatt, took inspiration from the psychological landscapes of Francisco Goya, Alfred Hitchcock and Walt Disney.

INSPIRATION

Have you ever tried to write down a dream? What about photograph it?

- Keep a dream diary for a week; try to write down as many details of your dreams as you can, as soon as you wake up.
- Pick one or two of your most detailed dreams and try to recreate them as a photograph or series of images.
- Pay attention to colour and mood. How did you feel during the dream? Try to make your viewer feel the same way when they see your photograph.

SET & STAGED

Moffatt used elaborate sets for these works, she is not the only Australian artist to have done this. Polixeni Papapetrou's *Wonderland* (2004) series uses painted backdrops and props to recreate scenes from Lewis Carroll's book *Alice's adventures in wonderland*.

Polixeni's partner Robert Nelson painted the backdrops and their daughter Olympia played the role of Alice. You can see the images here: http://polixenipapapetrou.net/works.php?cat=Wonderland_2004

- Create your own studio backdrop and props for a scene. Perhaps you can use a backdrop from your school's drama department, or maybe an old sheet from home.
- Experiment with placing props and items between the model and your camera to add depth to your scene, just like in *Invocations* #5 pictured left.

BEYOND THE PHOTOGRAPH

Why might Tracey Moffatt want her work to look like a pastel or watercolour?

Building up layer on top of layer of ink allowed Moffatt to change the texture and mood of the photographs.

- Select a photograph and experiment with different papers to print on. How does a soft watercolour paper change the mood of an image compared to a highly-reflective photo paper? Stick these in your visual diary and note the differences.

SCALE AND SHAPE

Remincent of church windows, tondos, arches as well as rectangles, this series has a number of different formats and scales.

What do the different shapes and sizes do to you as a viewer?

How do they change the way you look at the image?

- Sketch one of the arched or round shapes, adding lines and spots for points of interest, just like a map. Show where your eye looks first, mark it with a '1'. Try to track how it moves across the surface of the image. Do the same for a rectangle image and compare.

Glossary

Resources

PHOTO-SILKSCREEN

'Silk screening' or 'Screen printing' is a popular commercial printing technique commonly used in the production of advertising, cinema or street posters and printing onto CDs, DVDs and fabric such as t-shirts, amongst its many other uses.

The process has its origins in China during the *Song Dynasty* (960–1279 AD) and the artist Andy Warhol is credited with popularising the technique for use in the production of art (see POP ART).

Screen printing for an artistic purpose has also been termed Serigraphy, from the Latin 'Seri' meaning 'silk' and the Greek 'graphein' to 'draw or write'.

A mesh screen (historically made from silk, contemporary technology uses synthetic woven polymer fibres such as polyester) is coated in a light-sensitive emulsion then dried.

The artwork to be printed is then 'burnt' into the screen using Ultraviolet (UV) light. The image is turned into a *negative*, either by using a hand-cut stencil or by printing your image digitally onto a clear sheet of acetate. The light hardens the areas of emulsion that you don't want printed, leaving the areas you do want to print empty of emulsion once the screen is rinsed.

A different screen needs to be created for each colour you wish to print! When printing, the screens need to be carefully *registered* (lined up) so that your print is accurate. The colours are made from ink which is squeezed through the mesh of the screen using a squeegee.

POP ART

The 'Pop Art' movement, which began in the mid-late 1950s saw artists take inspiration from themes and techniques used in the mass production of popular culture items, from advertising posters to comic books. Artists emphasised the everyday or banal, most often with humor or irony, in an attempt to question and critique the perceived elitest nature of the art world at the time.

REFERENCES

- 1 Tracey Moffatt, transcript of an interview with Michael Cathcart on ABC Radio National (9 JAN 2001). <<http://www.abc.net.au/m/arts/atoday/stories/s229128.htm>> (last accessed 2 July 2010)

- 2 *Ibid.*

OFF-SET PRINTING/ OFF-SET LITHOGRAPHY

For a detailed description of the process visit: (it follows the life of a magazine from design to finished product)

<<http://www.howstuffworks.com/offset-printing.htm>>

There is a simple animation on this page that illustrates the printing process:

<<http://www.howstuffworks.com/offset-printing4.htm>> (site last accessed 2 July 2010)

BASIC COLOUR SCIENCE

<<http://www.itp.uni-hannover.de/~zawischa/ITP/introcol.html>> (last accessed 2 July 2010)

ANDY WARHOL

The Andy Warhol Museum has classroom activities and worksheets for free download and use:

<<http://www.warhol.org/>> (last accessed 2 July 2010)

LIFE MAGAZINE

Copies of LIFE have been archived by *Google Books* and are accessible online. Please note that the majority of advertising of the time (in particular issues from 1970s) include cigarettes and alcohol and your discretion is advised for classroom use.

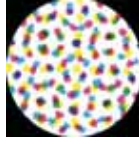
<http://books.google.com.au/books/serial/ISSN:00243019?view=1&source=gbs_navlinks_s> (last accessed 2 July 2010)

OFF-SET PRINT

Off-set lithography (also known as 'off-set printing') is a widely-used technique for commercial printing of magazines, books and promotional material, also commonly termed 'junk mail'. The process works on the principle that ink and water don't mix, remaining separate from one-another, allowing easy transference of the image and/or text.

The image or text to be printed is transferred from a digital file to four printing plates using a chemical and light reaction process, similar to the creation of photographic negatives and prints.

Prior to transferring to the plates the file is separated into four colours (CMYK: cyan, magenta, yellow and black). Each colour plate is printed separately onto the page in a pattern of small dots. When viewed the human eye blends the four colours together to form multiple colours, depending on the dot's transparency and placement on the page.



This magnified image shows an area of 'light grey' as printed by an off-set printer, highlighting the four-colour separation. Off-set printing is also referred to as a four-colour process.

Once mounted in the printing press on large rollers, each plate is first coated in water, then inked, the water keeps the ink away from the non-image areas. The inked plate is then rolled onto a rubber blanket, transferring the image, which is then pressed onto the paper, this all happens at very high speed. This transfer or 'off setting' of the image from the *plate to blanket to paper* is what gives the process its name, where traditional lithography sees the print made directly from the inked plate or stone.

See the RESOURCES section for further information.

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A MONASH GALLERY OF ART TRAVELLING EXHIBITION

mga

MGA is the
premier cultural
facility of the
City of Monash



**ARTS
VICTORIA**



TRACEY MOFFATT: narratives

EDUCATION RESOURCE

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Education resource content & design:

Stephanie Richter

Exhibition introduction & wall texts:

Stephen Zagala & Stella Loftus-Hills

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TRACEY MOFFATT: narratives installation view (detail)

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