



ccp.
centre for
contemporary
photography

CCP DOCUMENTARY
PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD
EDUCATION RESOURCE

ABOUT THIS EDUCATION RESOURCE

This education resource is a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to the seventh *CCP Documentary Photography Award*. It is intended to complement and be used in addition to information provided in the online PDF exhibition catalogue available on the CCP website and from gallery wall texts. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition as well as points for discussion and research for Years 7–10, Years 11 and 12 and tertiary students. It is suggested that teachers select relevant sections of this resource to compile their own exhibition response sheets for students prior to their planned visit.

PRE-VIEWING PLANNING

Before visiting the *CCP Documentary Photography Award* it is recommended that you contact gallery staff at the venue you plan to visit to determine:

- The suitability of exhibition content and subject matter for the year level you plan to bring
- Staff availability to give introductory talks
- Opening hours, transport options, parking and cloakroom facilities

CURRICULUM LINKS AND CONNECTIONS

This exhibition will tour nationally, so teachers are encouraged to adapt the curriculum links given in the list below to suit their school state curriculum. Use this list to generate points for discussion, practical activities and research. Contact education staff at your local gallery for further suggestions.

Visual Art and Media

- Photographic practice: ideas and inspiration, techniques and working in a series format
- Relationships between the photographer, subject, gallery and audience
- The way that documentary photography can respond to and represent current social, environmental and/or political issues and events

English

- Responding verbally to visual images
- Creative writing and responding
- Writing critical essays and reviews

Humanities

- Social issues including; war, poverty, health, Indigenous issues and the environment
- Documentary photography as a reflection of contemporary culture and society
- Photographs as documents that record the interconnectedness between people, society and the environment

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cover image:
Georgia Metaxas
Untitled #2 2007
archival pigment print
60.8 × 50.8 cm
courtesy the artist

INTRODUCTION TO THE EXHIBITION

Andrew Quilty
Untitled, Humevale 2009
Giclée print
18.5 × 50.0 cm
courtesy the artist



The *CCP Documentary Photography Award* aims to support documentary photography and establish greater discussion around its definition and practice. Since the inaugural *Leica/CCP Documentary Photography Exhibition and Award* in 1997, it has been held biennially and represents a unique initiative supporting current documentary photographic practice and offers exhibition and touring opportunities to the Award finalists.

Every two years CCP makes a public call for submissions to the *CCP Documentary Photography Award* and receives proposals that are considered by a panel of judges. Entrants can submit multiple entries in 'essay' format of up to six recent photographs demonstrating or developing an original and considered appreciation of the chosen subject. Entries are submitted as work prints (no larger than 210 × 297 mm). A short written statement about the work is submitted with the photographs and accompanies those selected for exhibition.

A panel of judges, made up of artists and arts industry professionals, judge the entries without knowledge of the entrants' names, selecting a shortlist, which through a process of discussion, results in the selected finalists. An online catalogue and artist interviews are produced to accompany each Award.¹ Since 2005 and in response to changing technologies, the terms and conditions of entry were extended; allowing the submission of works in either analogue or digital formats, reflecting the diversity of current documentary photographic practice. Whilst photographers can still employ the use of darkroom manipulation (for example, dodging and burning), digital manipulation of the content of images is not permissible.

The finalists' works are exhibited at CCP, then tour nationally to metropolitan and regional galleries throughout Australia in the following two years. The exhibition is a celebration of documentary practice and provides a fascinating entry point into the variety of approaches and concerns that characterise contemporary documentary photography.

The 12 artists selected for exhibition in the seventh *CCP Documentary Photography Award* are **Matthew Abbott, Paul Batt, James Brickwood, Darren Clayton, Georgia Metaxas, Simon O'Dwyer, Andrew Quilty, Leah Robertson, Dean Sewell, Laki Sideris, Tom Williams** and **Krystle Wright**.

¹ Visit: http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/catalogues/2009_CCP_Documentary_Award.pdf

USING THE EDUCATION RESOURCE AND STUDENT RESPONSE SHEET

Several themes emerge from the exhibition providing useful starting points for investigating the series exhibited in the seventh *CCP Documentary Photography Award*. These thematic groupings are not definitive and many of the photographers' series could fit across several of the themes. Students can come up with their own themes based on the subject matter explored by photographers in the exhibition and use these to generate discussion. Age and year level appropriate questions and activities are included at the end of the four thematic sections. The student response sheets are suitable for use in the gallery and offer starting points for student investigation.

This education resource addresses the following areas:

- Photography and truth
- Investigation of themes and ideas: points for discussion and research
 - a. Private moments in a public space
 - b. The beach, celebrations and rituals
 - c. Travelling around the corner and the world
 - d. Fire and its aftermath
- Photographers' technical information
- Student response sheets Years 7–10
- Student response sheets Years 11 and 12

PHOTOGRAPHY AND TRUTH

Dean Sewell
The Path, Steel Creek 2009
archival pigment print
41.0 × 54.0 cm
courtesy the artist



Since the invention of photography in the late 1830s, photographs as documents have had a reputation for presenting a situation with truth and accuracy. This stems from the invention of photography as a mechanical means to record information that had previously been gathered by hand: the camera replaced the topographical draughtsman, the botanical illustrator and any number of patient, anonymous image-makers. Photographs can cross language barriers, communicate directly and convincingly describe events.

The term 'documentary' was first coined in Britain in the 1920s by filmmaker John Grierson. Many of the films produced under this term examined the lives of little-known people in exotic places, or were used as government propaganda. The term 'documentary photography' was popularised in the 1930s when Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn used photography as a tool to record rural and urban poverty in the hope of bringing about social change.² The subject matter is however unlimited, it can encompass suffering, celebration, war, poverty, the urban environment and a range of human emotions and interpersonal relationships. Documentary photographs can reveal important information about the world, making us think about the human condition in new ways.

Contemporary documentary photography traverses the spectrum from reportage and photojournalism at one end to art photography and highly constructed images at the other. In the digital age, (when photographers can seamlessly manipulate images via applications accessible on most computers) can the photograph as document continue to hold relevance, and can we still expect truth and accuracy from a photograph? As the seventh *CCP Documentary Photography Award* finalists demonstrate, while the term may remain contested, the subject matter and style of documentary photography continues to be appealing.

² The Farm Security Administration photographic project of the 1930s commissioned photographers (among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn) to document rural poverty and urban decay.

INVESTIGATION OF THEMES AND IDEAS

Laki Sideris
Little Crowds #3 2008
type C photograph
40.0 × 50.0 cm
courtesy the artist



a. Private moments in a public space

Contemporary photographers in Australia and internationally continue to photograph people—often unawares—entangled in their own world in the public domain. Many work in the tradition of Henri Cartier-Bresson and Garry Winogrand, within the photo-journalistic genre of street photography. Others, in their photographic practice, prefer anonymity—as Walker Evans did in his portraits of the 1940s where he used a camera concealed under his jacket to photograph strangers on the New York subway, or as Philip-Lorca diCorcia did in his series *Heads* (2001), taken on the streets of New York with a concealed flash. Paul Batt, Leah Robertson and Laki Sideris play with ideas of voyeurism, surveillance and capturing a person's private moments in the bustling populated streets within our cities.

Paul Batt's series *Service Station Portraits* (2006–2008) is an unobtrusive exercise in photographing people in a state of mental transition and indifference, already looking past their current location to their destination. Taken with a telephoto lens, these images are reminders of surveillance imagery captured on a security camera, rather than simply portraits of individuals trapped in a melancholic moment of necessity.³

Where Batt's work focuses on portraying the individual between thoughts with no specific editing to create a contrived atmosphere around a single person, Leah Robertson's series *Framed* (2008) seeks the opposite. Limiting her selection of images to those that suit her purpose, Robertson uses photography and selective editing as a tool to create an artificial reality in which the subjects of her images are drawn into narrative—which challenges ideas of the photograph as a true representation of what we see.

Laki Sideris explores the personal moments of stillness in life we experience within a busy crowded setting in his series *Little Crowds* (2008). Selecting the images to suit the purposes of the series after careful consideration during the digital darkroom process, Sideris, like Robertson, challenges our ideas of photography as a true representation of our world. Where Robertson creates tension and directly disputes photography as a truthful representation, Sideris challenges our ideas of what crowds are supposed to be and how we perceive our behaviour within them.

³ See article by Ashley Crawford, 'Paul Batt: Everyone is a Suspect', *Photofile* 86, March–June 2009, pp. 54–59.

left:
Leah Robertson
Framed #1 2008
Giclée print
32.5 × 48.8 cm
courtesy the artist



right:
Paul Batt
Untitled #3 2008
type C photograph
34.0 × 50.0 cm
courtesy the artist



POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

Years 7–10

- Why do you think photographers choose to photograph people in everyday life?
- Compare these two photographs by Leah Robertson and Paul Batt (see images above). How has colour, lighting and focus been used in these photographs to portray atmosphere or mood?
- Look at the expressions of the people's faces in this section. Do you think they know they are being photographed?
- Discuss and write about the similarities and differences you see in the ways these three artists have approached street photography.

Years 11 and 12 and Tertiary

- An unspoken rule of street photography is that you do not interact with your subject. Do the subjects of these photographic series seem aware of the photographer's presence?
- Compare Laki Sideris' and Leah Robertson's (see image on page 6 and above) use of editing and selection. Write a short response discussing how they have used the same method to different effect and how it is represented in their photographs.
- All three of these photographers have taken photos of individuals without their permission. Do you think this is an invasion of privacy, or because the photographs were taken in the public domain that there was no invasion of privacy? Would you ask permission to take photographs of people on the street?⁴
- Henri Cartier-Bresson used only his camera and intuition to spontaneously capture 'the decisive moment' while Sideris and Robertson created their 'decisive moment' during the editing stage. Discuss how this affects the genre of street photography.

⁴ Visit: <http://www.artslaw.com.au/LegalInformation/StreetPhotographersRights.asp>, the Arts Law website and research the legal rights of a street photographer. Visit: <http://www.photoreview.com.au/tips/shooting/guide-to-street-photography.aspx>, the Australian Photo Review website and read their 'Guide to Street Photography'.

b. The beach, celebrations and rituals

Simon O'Dwyer
Coming of Age #6 2009
archival inkjet print
40.6 × 50.8 cm
courtesy the artist



Beach culture has been an important theme explored by Australian photographers since the early twentieth century, particularly with the lifesaver and surfer as subject matter.⁵ In this exhibition Krystle Wright continues in the tradition of photographing Australian beach culture, with sport photography and the ritual of sport, central to her practice. She explores the demanding—both physically and mentally—sport of ocean swimming seen in her series *Ocean Swim Racing* (2008–2009). A background and involvement in sport has helped Wright gain a better understanding of ocean swimming and has helped her successfully shoot these events. It is evident, particularly through camera angle, that Wright was physically involved in the event—with all its challenges—from the rush of entrants into the water and stampede of swimmers, to the lone swimmer.

Simon O'Dwyer and James Brickwood have been drawn to documenting celebrations and rituals of Australian youth culture. Brickwood's study of underground youth culture and subcultures was exhibited in the sixth *Leica/CCP Documentary Photography Award* with his series *Schoolies* (2005–2006).⁶ He continues to photograph youth culture, as seen in his series *Warehouse* (2008) in this Award, which is part of an ongoing story where Brickwood has been 'documenting the illegal party scene in Sydney's abandoned industrial sites since 2005.'⁷ In his series *Coming of Age* (2009), O'Dwyer has documented a group of young girls involved in a ritual and celebration undertaken by many at this age—their debutante ball. It is not apparent when viewing these images however that these debutantes, as O'Dwyer states, have 'suffered violence and neglect at the hands of the people who were supposed to love them the most.'⁸

5 For a more in-depth analysis of Australian beach culture in photography see Isobel Crombie, *Body Culture: Max Dupain, Photography and Australian Culture 1919–1939*, Peleus Press in association with the National Gallery of Victoria, 2004.

6 Simon O'Dwyer and James Brickwood were both represented in the sixth *Leica /CCP Documentary Photography Award*: http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/leica/sixth_leica_education_kit.pdf

7 James Brickwood, *Warehouse*, *CCP Documentary Photography Award*, PDF exhibition catalogue, 2009, p. 10: http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/catalogues/2009_CCP_Documentary_Award.pdf

8 Simon O'Dwyer, *Coming of Age*, *CCP Documentary Photography Award*, PDF exhibition catalogue, 2009, p. 16: http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/catalogues/2009_CCP_Documentary_Award.pdf

The series *Lower Your Ears* (2007) by Georgia Metaxas links closely to the genre of early social documentary photography particularly the work of August Sander, Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans. Metaxas explores the manifestations of rituals and in this series. Her subjects are people who live in Fitzroy, Melbourne participating in a free haircutting session at St Mary's House of Welcome, a non-profit centre servicing the homeless and marginalised community in Fitzroy. Through staging each image using the same lighting and background with each participant wearing a barber's apron, Metaxas strips the portraits back to their essential formal elements of black and white focussing on the character of the sitter at that moment.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

Years 7–10

- Do you think the people in these photographs have control of how they are represented?
- In a photograph we only see what the photographer wants us to see. Can you imagine what might be happening just outside the frame of these photographs?
- By allowing themselves to be photographed might there be any consequences for the subjects?
- In small groups do a 'documentary photography' style shoot at a location around your school—it could be a series of portraits of your school friends, or a sporting, dance, drama or other event.

Years 11 and 12 and Tertiary

- Look at how the artists have represented their subjects. Choose a series and discuss it in terms of style; the use of light to create atmosphere; the use of cropping and framing devices; and the use of narrative. What does this series tell you about the subjects' lives?
- Many Australian artists use their artwork to raise awareness of subcultures, celebrations and rituals—particularly as they relate to youth culture. In a classroom discussion select one of the themes explored by these photographers and reflect on the issues that are raised and how it relates to your life.
- Research the work of Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn and others who used photography as a tool to record rural and urban poverty in the hope of bringing about social change. Compare these images to the work of photographers in this exhibition whose works engage with social and/or political themes.
- Research the photography of Max Dupain from the late 1930s that focuses on Australian beach culture—seen in his iconic photograph *Sunbaker* (1937). Compare Dupain's work to contemporary photo-based artists Anne Zahalka, Narelle Autio and others who have also documented Australian beach culture.

Krystle Wright
Swimmer Stampede 2008
archival pigment print
36.5 × 54.8 cm
courtesy the artist



c. Travelling around the corner and the world

left:
Darren Clayton
Cambodian Troops on Parade 2008
inkjet print
40.0 × 40.0 cm
courtesy the artist



right:
Tom Williams
Daniel, a dancer, nine months after breaking his foot 2008
inkjet print
39.0 × 39.0 cm
courtesy the artist



From the earliest advent of the camera, photographers have documented their travels and the cultures of the lands they visit. Early travel photography involved transporting heavy cameras and equipment around the globe to often quite isolated and far-reaching areas. With the advent of more practical means of photography, the exploration of both national and international cultures by travellers became much more accessible. As early as 1853, Roger Fenton documented the Crimean war, exploring not only the culture and people in different parts of the world, but also the atrocities to which they were exposed. Possibly one of the most notorious images of war *Moment of Execution* (1968) by Eddie Adams, allowed the public to witness the violence of war that seemed so distant.

Apart from documenting specific events or conflict, one of the purposes of any travel photograph is to explore the culture of locations we travel to, whether it be an international location—as both Matthew Abbott and Darren Clayton have done with their explorations of Istanbul and Preah Vihear respectively—or a local site, as Tom Williams explores in his series shot in Sydney at the Redfern-Waterloo public housing estate.

Though Abbott and Clayton shot their series internationally, both are exploring very different sides of the cultures they have immersed themselves in. Whilst travelling in Istanbul at a time of supposed transition (Turkey's candidacy of accession in to the European Union), Abbott wanted to explore the extreme diversity of history, class and culture that meet in this ancient and modern city. Endeavouring to document the city's inhabitants and culture as they are, one could class Abbott's series *Istanbul* (2008) as street photography, though taking into account the sensitivity with which he approaches his work, this series is most definitely also an exercise in exploration of Istanbul's eclectic culture.

Differing to Abbott's exploration of cultural diversity, Darren Clayton's series *Images From Preah Vihear* (2008) explore an aspect of South East Asian culture that is centuries old. Clayton's work focused on the clash of cultures surrounding the thousand-year-old Preah Vihear Hindu temple on the boarder of Thailand and Cambodia. In an effort to truthfully depict the political and societal cultures of both the Thai and Cambodian people involved and the temple itself, Clayton has stayed neutral to the bipartisan dispute. He has tried to document the situation so that we as an audience may better understand the narrative that surrounds the lives of the people living in the midst of this border conflict.

Where Clayton and Abbott explore international culture through their series, Tom Williams examines the culture of his own backyard in his series *Neighbourhood: The Redfern-Waterloo public housing estate (2007–2009)*, home to around 9,000 people from diverse cultural backgrounds, on the outskirts of Sydney's CBD. Although a low, socio-economic community with inherent problems, Williams has focused more on the sense of community and characters that make up this neighbourhood. Part of an ongoing project, he has photographed his subjects alone or with family and friends in their home environment in a dignified way. Williams has developed a rapport with these people and was granted access to their homes and family life.

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

Years 7–10

- How does the representation of people differ in Matthew Abbott's series *Istanbul* (see image below) and Darren Clayton's series *Images From Preah Vihear*? (see image on previous page). Compare the different styles of each photograph.
- Compare the black and white photographs taken by Darren Clayton to those of Tom Williams (see images on page 11). How has tone and focus been used in these photographs to portray atmosphere or mood?
- Do you think the people in the photographs know they are being photographed?
- Discuss and write about the differences you can see between the ways these three artists have photographed different cultural groups.

Years 11 and 12 and Tertiary

- Henri Cartier-Bresson advocated that the photographer should maintain a sense of detachment and be a dispassionate observer. Yet the more strongly the photographer feels about a particular situation the more tempting it becomes to present it in a powerful way.
- Is strictly objective photography possible? Discuss the reason for answers given.
- Is it possible to capture a particular moment in time that represents the event as it actually was, or do other questions also come into play?
- How does the framing of the scene photographed affect our perception of what we are looking at? We might wonder what is just outside the frame and how that extra knowledge of what we cannot see might affect our perception of what is inside the frame.
- How do the three photographers in this section place their subject in the picture frame? Where do you think they are positioned when taking the photograph? Select at least two photographers to compare. Can this influence the mood or intensity of the photograph?

Matthew Abbott
Untitled #3 2008
type C photograph
32.6 × 48.6 cm
courtesy the artist



d. Fire and its aftermath

Andrew Quilty
Untitled, Baldspur 2009
Giclée print
18.5 × 50.0 cm
courtesy the artist



Fire has been an important subject matter for artists and photographers in Australia since the late nineteenth century. In the painting *Black Thursday, February 6th, 1851* (1864, State Library of Victoria) by William Strutt, the devastating bushfires that struck Victoria in February 1851, are depicted in a highly dramatic way. Another nineteenth-century painting *Gippsland, Sunday night, February 20th, 1898*, by John Longstaff (1898, National Gallery of Victoria) relates to the bushfires that ravaged Gippsland in the summer of 1897–98; the worst day being Red Tuesday, 1 February 1898. Some of the most destructive fires in Australia's history have been documented by photographers and include Black Friday, 13 January 1939; Ash Wednesday, 16 February 1983; as well as the devastating bushfires which occurred in 2003 in the Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales and Victoria.

The Black Saturday bushfires, which occurred in Victoria on Saturday, 7 February 2009 were the worst in Australia's recorded history—due to strong winds and temperatures of up to 46 degrees Celsius a total of 173 people were killed. Two photographers in the seventh *CCP Documentary Photography Award* exhibition, Andrew Quilty and Dean Sewell, used the aftermath of the Black Saturday bushfires as subject matter for their series of photographs. In his series *Victorian Bushfire Aftermath* (2009), Quilty focused mainly on the extreme environmental destruction caused by the bushfires. These black and white images were taken by Quilty in one day using a panoramic camera. The scenes depicted in this series are taken in Kinglake, Flowerdale and Hazeldene—some of the areas most devastated. Dean Sewell has been documenting Australian bushfires over the last 20 years. In this series *Victoria's Black Saturday Bushfires* (2009) Sewell has dealt with the subject matter of the aftermath of fire, in a highly representational way—'producing a more sombre, quiet and considered observation than that produced by the mainstream media.'⁹

9 Andrew Quilty, *Victorian Bushfire Aftermath*, *CCP Documentary Photography Award*, PDF exhibition catalogue, 2009, p. 18: http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/catalogues/2009_CCP_Documentary_Award.pdf

POINTS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

Years 7–10

- Compare the two series documenting Black Saturday. How has each photographer chosen to depict this event? Include reference to compositional format in your answer.
- How have the artists used design elements in the images? For example—tone, use of colour, line, focus and space.
- Which series do you think deals most effectively with the subject matter of 'fire and its aftermath'? Why?
- How do these images compare with media images you saw at the time of the fires?
- Research other major fires that have occurred in Australia since settlement and how they have been documented.

Years 11 and 12 and Tertiary

- What is your first impression of these photographs?
- Describe the ways each photographer has chosen to represent Black Saturday. Refer to subject matter, compositional format, style and the photographer's intention.
- How do the photographs by Andrew Quilty (see image on page 14) and Dean Sewell (see image below) compare with media images you saw at the time of the Black Saturday fires?
- Do confronting images desensitise us to these extreme conditions? Is it necessary to show graphic images to show the impact of natural disasters?
- Is there a social, political or environmental issue that you feel strongly about? Research the issue and either write a short piece of prose or make an artwork that expresses your thoughts and ideas about this issue.

Dean Sewell
Slippery Dip, Kinglake West 2009
archival pigment print
41.0 × 54.0 cm
courtesy the artist

