



ccp

centre for  
contemporary  
photography

# FLASH

CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY PHOTOGRAPHY  
SEPTEMBER 07–JANUARY 08

ccp.

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photography

The Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP) is one of Australia's premier venues for the exhibition of contemporary photo-based arts, providing a context for the enjoyment, education, understanding and appraisal of contemporary practice. Established in 1986 by the photographic community as a not-for-profit exhibition and resource centre, CCP has played a pivotal role in the support of photo-based arts and public engagement with photography. In 2005 CCP relocated to purpose-designed premises by Sean Godsell Architects.

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#### FLASH #2 →

SEPTEMBER 07–JANUARY 08

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**COVER** Laki Sideris *Beijing Bicycle 12*  
2005, Lambda print, 38 x 38 cm

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2 NOVEMBER – 15 DECEMBER 2007

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**HAYDEN FOWLER**

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COLOUR FACTORY AWARD FOR AN  
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## OBITUARY

### WOLFGANG SIEVERS OAM: A GREAT MODERNIST PHOTOGRAPHER DR ISOBEL CROMBIE

On 7<sup>th</sup> August Australia lost one of the last of its great modernist photographers with the death of Wolfgang Sievers at the age of 94. Sievers was part of a generation of émigré artists who escaped the Nazi regime to resettle in Australia in the 1930s. He brought with him knowledge of a new modernist style of photography that helped alter the course of photographic history in this country. His photographs embody the excitement of New Photography with its dynamic forms and often dramatic and energetic use of angles.

Sievers began his long and productive life in Germany in 1913. His father, Professor Johannes Sievers, was arts advisor to the German foreign office from 1918 until his dismissal, in 1933, by the National Socialists. Professor Sievers encouraged his son to become a photographer and used some of his photographs to illustrate books he wrote on the German architect, Karl Friedrich Schinkel. Following Hitler's rise to power in 1933, Wolfgang left Germany for Portugal to pursue his photographic career. In 1936 he returned to Berlin and attended the Contempora School for Applied Arts. Many of his teachers had formerly been employed at the Bauhaus School of Design in Weimar and applied that institution's approach to encourage links between the arts and industry.

Sievers' training stood him in good stead when he arrived in Australia in 1938. He established a studio initially in South Yarra, Melbourne and became a strong and passionate advocate for the role that photography could play in promoting quality Australian products. Arriving at a time when the last vestiges of Pictorialism were dominating the medium, Sievers' photographic style offered a radical new way to advertise products and he was soon employed by some of the city's leading companies. Underpinning his internationalist style was an ordered but humanistic appreciation of how human labour is used to create modern products, and he spoke often of his desire to show the 'dignity of the worker'. A classic example of this approach is to be seen in *Gears for Mining Industry, Vickers-Ruwolt, Melbourne*, 1967 which features a white coated technician standing – rather improbably – on massive mining gears.

One of Sievers' on-going concerns was with architecture and, in the 1950s, he worked with many of Australia's leading architects including Frederick Romberg, Robyn Boyd and firms such as Bates, Smart and McCutcheon. Sievers worked at a time when the local architecture scene was re-awakening following the end of the Second World War, and his graphic images of modern buildings reflect the new spirit of expansion, prosperity and innovation. His work was perfectly suited to the evolving modernist architectural style and he was able to maximize the dramatic potential of the buildings' clean, strong lines in his own work.

Sievers' photographs were widely exhibited in the latter part of his career. In 1991, a retrospective was held at the Australian National Gallery and, in 2000, a major exhibition was held at the Camara Municipal de Lisboa, Spain. In his last years, Sievers was concerned to bring order to his archive and he ensured that his work was placed in appropriate public institutions including the National Gallery of Victoria, National Gallery of Australia, National Library of Australia, and State Library of Victoria. His efforts will ensure that his photographs will be publicly available and his major contribution to the medium will be appreciated long after his death.

**Dr Isobel Crombie is Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria.**



Wolfgang Sievers OAM was a great supporter of CCP through donations and engagement. *Wolfgang Sievers 1913 - 2007: Work* is exhibiting at Glen Eira City Council Gallery, 13 September - 7 October. Image: *Ropemaking, Miller Rope, Melbourne* (1962, printed 1972) gelatin silver photograph, 60.7x50.5cm, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased through the Victorian Arts Board, 1972

## GALLERY REPORT

### MERCE CUNNINGHAM DANCE COMPANY PHOTOGRAPHY PORTFOLIO I & II

CCP GALLERY ONE 7 SEPTEMBER - 27 OCTOBER 2007

**PORTFOLIO I:** GREGORY CREWDSON, CHUCK CLOSE, WILLIAM EGGLESTON, OLAFUR ELIASSON, PETER FISCHLI/DAVID WEISS, CANDIDA HÖFER, VERA LUTTER, CINDY SHERMAN.

**PORTFOLIO II:** DARREN ALMOND, ROBERT GOBER, RICHARD HAMILTON, CHRISTIAN MARCLAY, BRUCE NAUMAN, ERNESTO NETO, GABRIEL OROZCO, TERRY WINTERS

As part of the 2007 Melbourne International Arts Festival program, CCP presents two Photographic Portfolios featuring large prints by 17 internationally renowned artists. The Portfolios have been produced as a tribute to and fundraiser for Merce Cunningham, who is regarded by many as a pillar of modernism and the greatest living choreographer. The collections are a celebration of Merce Cunningham's continuing commitment to innovative dance and his collaboration with visual artists. Olafur Eliasson and Merce Cunningham have collaborated directly, while the eight artists who contributed to Portfolio II have all designed sets for Merce Cunningham Dance Company (MCDC).

In keeping with MCDC's longstanding practice of artistic collaboration, the Portfolio images reflect the interests of the maker. Not one photograph speaks of dance. For instance, Portfolio II opens with a large diptych by British artist Darren Almond, showing a broken railway bridge in Northern Siberia. The title *Minus 60,000 Double Plate 4* refers to

the death of 60,000 Gulag prisoners during construction of this most northern railway in the world. It is a striking example of Almond's investigation into the industrial past, time, memory and geography. Also building on memory and emotion—while capturing moments of displacement and disappearance—are Robert Gober's ambiguous *Untitled* image from his Venice Biennial installation, Gabriel Orozco's mysterious *Dotball*, and Ernesto Neto's sequence of footprints vanishing in the surf.

Meanwhile, Richard Hamilton's surrealist *Readymade Shadows*, Terry Winters' *Marseille Templates* and Bruce Nauman's *Studio Floor Detail* allude to both art history and personal history. Christian Marclay's *Luzerner Theater*, an image of a 'silent' blue MCDC crate on stage with the word SOUND stamped on the outside, not only pays homage to Merce Cunningham but also unites our primary senses of sight and sound.

Trevor Carlson, Executive Director of the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, explains that Cunningham shied away from collaborating directly with photographers because of photography's strong narrative thrust, which Cunningham felt might conflict with other story telling elements in his work. However Carlson comments that the medium of photography was selected for the fundraiser due to its accessibility for young collectors and appeal to established collectors, given the international standing of the artists engaged in the project. The quality of these magnificent folios on exhibition at CCP is testament to the broad recognition of Merce Cunningham as an artist.

**Lisa Richardson**  
**Melbourne International Arts Festival**

**Darren Almond** *Minus 60,000 Double Plate 4* 2001, 96.5 x 71 cm, two black and white optical fibre prints



## REVIEW

# EXPECTATIONS OF GENDER

ANONDA BELL

*Sexual difference is one of the major philosophical issues, if not the issue, of our age. Each age has one issue to think through and one only. Sexual difference is probably the issue in our time which could be our 'salvation' if we thought it through.* Luce Irigaray<sup>1</sup>

Many artists have assumed the mantle for this exploration, taking issues of gender and identity as the starting point for their work. The artists involved in three recent exhibitions in New York address gender issues as the impetus for creating work.

At the Chelsea Art Museum, Japanese artist Miwa Yanagi displayed two distinct bodies of work on the subject, the first series titled *Elevator Girls* and the second *My Grandmothers*.

The *Elevator Girls* are an iconic representation of the embryonic stage of identity development, where what is expected by society is performed by the individual, before they have the confidence to be who they are. In the images Yanagi presents the subjects to us—we see row upon row of polyester clad forms, uniformly groomed young women, offered in the temple like epicenters of commodification, generic shopping malls and their elevator chambers. So ubiquitous are the girls to their native habitats in Japan, in their absence when elevators first became automated, signs had to be posted to remind riders to push their own buttons. These girls embody the stereotypes of femininity—they are pretty and docile creatures, existing only to serve the customers and facilitate trade. While they share enclosed and intimate spaces with

passengers, no exchange of personal data occurs, as their regimented interaction forbids anything outside the barest of necessary banter. By way of contrast to this, Yanagi's *My Grandmothers* series predicts potential future lives imbued with individuality, self expression and levels of self determination that could only exist in the dreams of the *Elevator Girls*. To create the series, Yanagi asked young women to cast aside taboos associated with gender and provide a positive declaration of a speculative hope for a future life. The resulting unconventional scenarios were then simulated literally by the artist, using the participants, prosthetics and some digital manipulation to capture the ideas, in their entire Technicolor splendour. Each image challenges the viewer's preconceptions about old ladies—as a flame

**Miwa Yanagi** *Eternal City I* 1998, from the series *Elevator Girls*, type C-print, Deutsche Bank Collection, © Miwa Yanagi



haired woman rides a motorbike, another woman flies solo in a plane, whilst a grey haired lesbian couple with many decades together snuggle next to a table littered with red wine glasses, evidentiary detritus of a very good party. Yanagi's work both engages and challenges us by presenting a hyper real version of the stereotype of "woman" (in *Elevator Girls*) and contrasting this with optimistic visions of lives free from gender determinism.

Almost a century earlier, Claude Cahun started life as Lucy Schwob (1894 - 1954). Creating work in a number of mediums, it is in her photographs that we can most clearly see her influence on the likes of contemporary artists such as Nan Goldin and Cindy Sherman. Schwob chose the androgynous pseudonym of Claude Cahun as a reflection of a conscious desire to eschew a life preordained by her biological status. Her life was played out on the fringes of society, as she pursued creative endeavors with the surrealists and a political agenda as an active member of the World War II resistance. Living and working with her stepsister and lover Marcel Moore (born in 1892 as Suzanne Malherbe); as a female artist, Cahun's work has predictably been under appreciated, growing in popularity no doubt through a recent presentation as projected images in the garden of a church as part of a cultural festival curated by David Bowie. Of Cahun, Bowie enthuses, "You could call her transgressive or you could call her a cross dressing Man Ray with surrealist tendencies." Cahun's work plays with notions of sexuality and gender, and many of her photographs are self portraits, but not of the standard documentary kind. They are instead fictitious and fanciful depictions of herself in experimental poses, with odd costumes, makeup and incongruous props. The reality we see portrayed is one to which she aspired, she delighted in undermining people's assumptions about what a woman should be.

From the glamorous grand dame Rose Sélavy (alter ego of Marcel Duchamp) to Andy Warhol's posse of drama queens (Candy Darling, Jackie Curtis and Holly Woodlawn), the theme of role reversal has been a subject of fascination for many artists. Evidence of this was provided by

a comprehensive, 27 artist group exhibition at Sean Kelly Gallery titled *Role Exchange*. The reversal strategy is oft employed by artists who query or despise that which is expected from birth; from the instant that gender is assigned in the delivery room to subsequent treatment that ensues as a result of this classification. This exhibition brings together many recognisable iterations of gender exploration. Adrian Piper was well known for her *Mythic Being* projects, when she assumed the guise of fictitious male characters. Through inhabiting the role and exhibiting overtly masculine behavior, such as a

**Fergus Greer** *Leigh Bowery: Session I/Look 2*, November 1988, digital C-print

**Claude Cahun** *Don't kiss me I'm in Training*, 1927



swaggering gait and the splayed leg pose of a seated man, she became the art object and was able to critique that which she mimicked. Janine Antoni brought her parents in on the act, asking them to pose for classic but twisted double portraits, where they were disguised as each other. Australian representative Leigh Bowery negates his genesis in suburban Melbourne, and assumes the plomb of a member of the French court. However, while his demeanor in this regal portrait mirrors that of French royalty, we note that there is something very, very wrong here. What collaborator Fergus Greer has captured through the lens defies our expectations—where we anticipate an elaborate hair construction, Bowery instead allows streaking blue paint to run off his bald pate. His proudly displayed ample cleavage is not at all alluring once you recognize that it is constituted by rallied roles of fat drawn from nether regions. Through out his life he willfully and consistently shocked viewers, delighting in testing our sensibilities, sincere in his attempt to draw attention to our sometimes shameful prejudices. His presentation in this work is a very literal indication of the sometimes meretricious nature of sexual identity. As Simone de Beauvoir stated, "One is not born, but becomes a woman."<sup>2</sup> The same could be said of either gender, and the artists in these exhibitions have explored many of the contrary and capricious notions associated with gender and identity.

**Anonda Bell** is an Australian born, New York based freelance writer and curator. In Australia she worked at Bendigo Art Gallery and the National Gallery of Victoria. In the United States she has worked at the Everhart Museum, Pennsylvania and Chelsea Art Museum, New York.

### Exhibitions

*Claude Cahun*, Highline Festival, Historic General Theological Seminary of the Episcopal Church, 18-20 May, 2007; *Miwa Yanagi*, Deutsche Bank Collection, Chelsea Art Museum, 4 May - 25 August, 2007; *Role Exchange*, Sean Kelly Gallery, 24 June - 3 August, 2007.

1. Oliver, Kelly, *French Feminist Reader*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., Oxford, England, 2000. p.226.

2. de Beauvoir, Simone, *The Second Sex*, New York: Pantheon, 1952, p. 249.



The **MGA Foundation** would like to congratulate **Ray Cook** on his winning entry to the

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## **Rebecca Ann Hobbs**

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## REVERIES; PHOTOGRAPHY & MORTALITY

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY 27 APRIL TO 5 AUGUST 2007

KARRA REES

Throughout time, and across media, mortality has been a popular subject with artists; works depicting skulls, the dead and dying, revered. However, when confronted with photography addressing death, its spectre often appears more present, more vivid and more arresting. Photo-based art exploring mortality resonates, evoking empathy and associations distinct from other media. Such photography also raises questions relating to intent, consent and ethics. While the veracity of photography is frequently challenged, the medium still remains intrinsically entwined with the 'real'. *Reveries; Photography & Mortality*, curated by Helen Ennis, presents the work of 25 artists from Australia and New Zealand who have explored the transience of life and the certainty of death via photo-media. Her brave and considered study of mortality through this sensitive medium offers a diverse, intelligent and intriguing insight.

William Yang's intimate portraits of the deterioration of his friend Allan are heartfelt and moving. In his book *Friends of Dorothy*<sup>1</sup> there's a photograph of William and Allan from 1981—they were dating—young and good-looking, you couldn't wipe the smiles off their faces. Years later, Yang photographed Allan as HIV/AIDS stole his health, good looks and eventually that smile. This well-known suite of images titled *Sadness* (1988-90) is included in the exhibition, as well as a previously unseen post-mortem photograph that Yang has now decided to share. Poignant, honest and open, there's no earnest sympathy or pathetic poses; we come to know Allan through Yang's lens. Clearly collaborative, Allan almost always looks to the camera and the bond between the two is portrayed with a heart-rending beauty.

Several subjects in the exhibition are infected with HIV/AIDS, yet despite the wasting virus, they display humour and joy even in the face of adversity. *Reveries* focuses on this celebration

of life, addressing the inevitability of death, which is not depicted as grim, merely part of life's myriad experience. Extending the idea of portraiture, the exhibition examines notions of representation and considers mortality from varied perspectives. There's no blood, guts and gore, nor desperate attempts to shock, instead the photographs are respectful and carefully selected. Compassion and tenderness seem to prevail as the exhibition investigates customs, conduct and procedures accompanying death and dying. What disturbs, is the power the work has to revive memories and facilitate contemplation of one's own mortality.

Frances Mocnik documents procedures and rituals around death and dying, the images included here are part of a larger body of work. Compelling and horrifying, she discloses

a decayed and rotting corpse, a body left unattended for so long that skin has crawled back to reveal skull and skeleton alone. Viewers are left to wonder how someone's absence remained undetected so long; forgotten and left to die alone—did no-one care?

A large proportion of the exhibition is documentary, black and white, small and framed. Michael Riley's celebrated series *Cloud* (2000) stands out in vivid colour and large scale. In mute colour, Craig Potton's documentation of his wife Beverley battling cancer, arrests viewers on another level. In this private space viewer becomes voyeur; intensely intimate and personal, there is an indescribable presence and physicality in each image conveying her increasing pain. Initially,



**Carol Jerrems** *Self Portrait* 1979, 1979, silver gelatin photograph from a group taken while a patient in the Royal Hobart Hospital, Tasmania, 20.2 x 25.2 cm. Courtesy of the Jerrems family.

Beverly addresses the camera; calm, although vulnerable. As illness takes a toll on her physical and mental state, eye contact is lost and Potton's constant recording intensifies—his adoration palpable. The audience witnesses her demise, and the final images are shattering.

Several artists reflect on the loss of a parent. Following the death of her mother at a young age, curiosity about the clandestine journey of the post-mortem body propelled Bridgit Anderson's series *Caring for the Dead* (2005–06). Her photographs capture tender, intimate moments as cadavers are prepared for funeral. Anne Ferran's image of the dispersal of her father's ashes is remarkable. She creates an idyllic portrait of him, a ghostly impression forming itself in the atmosphere as his ashes are thrown and scatter over a creek in sunlight. This large, colour photograph is beautiful, tranquil and reverent. Anne Noble's grainy, black and white images of her father, following



Anne Ferran *Dad passing over Wheeny Creek* 2006, inkjet print, 100.5 x 65.0 cm. Courtesy Stills Gallery, Sydney and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

his unexpected passing, trace the daily details of his existence. Magnified sections of his skin make visible every crease, wrinkle and tiny hair. One high-contrast image exposes the back of her head as she stands over her dead father. The over-exposed corpse, white as marble, appears like a sculpture. The most intriguing image from this series, reproduced in the catalogue and exhibition publicity, but noticeably excluded from the show, depicts Noble's father lying on a bed fully dressed in suit and tie. Two grandchildren lie either side of him, one strokes his forehead lovingly and with curiosity, while the other appears distracted.

Ennis is cautious to remind viewers that death does not discriminate; it takes the old and the very young alike. *Scenes from Every Day Life: Intensive Care* (1987) by Jonathon Delacour is not easy to look at. When someone elderly dies we can be grateful for the time we have shared—celebrate their life—but what remains when a newborn dies? Ben Stacey is barely visible, his tiny body covered in cords and medical equipment, yet the accompanying caption reveals he is one of the few survivors from Delacour's series. We are conditioned to photograph birthdays, weddings, celebrations, not death and the dead. Yet it seemed so necessary, Delacour recorded the precious little time the family had with the child; shared moments immortalised.

Ennis included work by Max Dupain, Olive Cotton and David Moore made towards the end of their lives when they were conscious time was limited. The images are rich in symbolism and metaphor. Nature becomes a focus; light holds significance, as do patterns and formations occurring in the natural world. David Moore's *Moon writing* (2002) is a fascinating departure from his previous work, abstract and rhythmical, these bright lines are a mystery until we read the title. Olive Cotton's *Moths on the windowpane* (1995) employs the same high contrast. In a frantic attempt to reach light insects hurtle their tiny bodies against the glass, their ghostly silhouettes white against the black night. This drama erupts outside as Cotton observes and records from inside her home.

A number of artists anticipating death photographed from the confines of a room. Axel Poignant's last roll of film exposed a sunset through his bedroom window, while Max Dupain's *Still lives in my life* (1990) show his desk and possessions alongside a window with the blinds tightly drawn; viewers are left wondering what is concealed. Carol Jerrems photographed the moon in the night sky, also through a window. This notion of confinement, and observing the outside world from a distance is most powerfully articulated in Jerrems' work. In this, her last series, she documents herself and the hospital in which she spent three and a half months. Several self-portraits made in the mirror of her bathroom record her decline following surgery. These images of Jerrems, the hospital and the staff are clinical and detached. The hospital is depressing and she appears distant while staff work around her, apparently oblivious to her isolation and loneliness. Her body becomes a separate entity; the details to be recorded. Her proclivity to photograph seems to be her sanctuary and only respite—or escape. High in contrast, the final photograph, an empty corridor, looks like the moment of death itself; the cliché we come to associate with the transition from this life to the next: a long dark corridor with a bright light at the end, that we slowly move towards.

### **Karra Rees is the curator at CCP.**

*Reveries; Photography and Mortality* is touring to University Art Museum, The University of Queensland 1 September to 4 November 2007 and Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery 19 March to 18 May 2008.

The exhibition catalogue is available from the CCP shop.

Helen Ennis is speaking at CCP about the exhibition on Saturday 29 September at 3pm.

1. William Yang *Friends of Dorothy* (Sydney: Pan Macmillan Australia Pty Limited 1997) p. 42

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## CCP MEMBERS ON PHOTOGRAPHY

REBECCA FORGASZ



**Frédéric Brenner** Amedeo Moscato, David Rossi, Carlo Terracina, Pacifico Di Consiglio, Marco Di Porto, Alessandro David Terracina, Vittorio Moscato, Lazzaro Di Veroli, Fabrizio Pavoncello, Amphitheatrum Flavium, Rome, Italy 1992

*Alive among stones, alone among strangers,  
more Roman than Rome. First shall be last;  
and last will be first. When in Rome...*

André Aciman<sup>1</sup>

An amphitheatre in Rome. Rows of macho Italian men, helmets tucked under their arms, the modern version of gladiatorial armour. But wait, these men are Jewish. How do we know? Because the photographer, Frédéric Brenner, tells us they are Jewish. Because they appear in an exhibition of photographs of Jews. But the first thing I notice about these Roman Jews is how Roman they look!

Rome is writ large in the Jewish historical imagination. Almost 2000 years ago, the ancient Romans conquered Jerusalem, destroyed the sacred Temple of the Jews, and exiled the Jewish people from their homeland across the breadth of the Roman empire. Rome. The matrix of Western civilization, but also the matrix of the Jewish diaspora.

So what does it mean to be a Jew in Rome? To live as a descendant of slaves and exiles in the city of one's historical enemy? To adopt as

one's own the cultural heritage of the other? This photograph, deliberate in its symmetrical composition, commanding in the frontal gaze of its subjects, and loaded with symbolism and metonymy, unflinchingly raises these questions.

On the one hand, we have posed here a horde of young, hefty, upright Jewish men. Proud, defiant, even, in their stance. Behind them, the crumbling remains of the empire that once vanquished their ancestors. Ancient Rome has fallen but the Jews have survived. There is something noble about this reversal of fortunes. Testament, perhaps, to the resilience and the spiritual tenacity of the Jewish people. Over the centuries, Jews in Rome have been enslaved, exiled, confined to ghettos and expelled. Yet today they remain.

Recall, too, that the rabbis of Jewish tradition, hated the amphitheatre! To them, it represented the arrogance and cruelty of Roman power, the hedonism and banality of gentile culture. The rabbis dreamed not only of the destruction of the amphitheatre, but of its transformation into a house of study!<sup>2</sup> Yet here, in modern day Rome, their sons wear not the skull caps of scholars, of

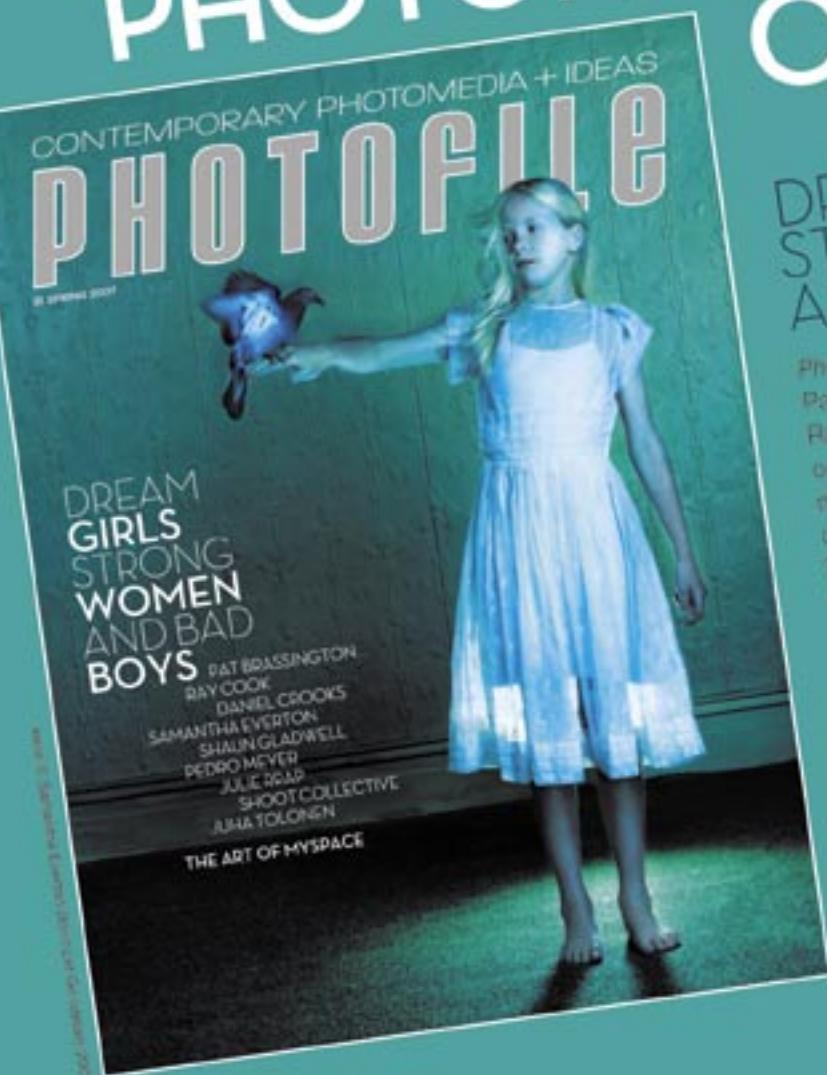
religious Jews, but the bikers' helmets of ordinary Italian men. Isn't this, in fact, a loss, a defeat, the ultimate conquest? How can one become the other, ponders Brenner, yet remain true to oneself?

Brenner's photographs expose the ironies and irreducible tensions of diasporic Jewish identity. They do so with subtlety and sensitivity but without sentimentality. They explore what historian Simon Schama describes as "the impurity of Jewish life, the ragged edge that frays into the surrounding culture"<sup>3</sup>; the ambiguous and ever-shifting border between self and other, which is negotiated on some level—be it cultural, religious or psychical—by us all.

This photograph can be viewed in the current exhibition *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile Photographs by Frédéric Brenner*, Jewish Museum of Australia until 28 October 2007.

1. From *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile. Vol 2 – Voices*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.
2. Stephen Greenblatt in *Diaspora: Homelands in Exile. Vol 2 – Voices*, HarperCollins Publishers, 2003.
3. Simon Schama, "Introduction", *Jews/America/ A representation*, Harry N Abrams, 1996.

# PHOTOFILE 81 OUT NOW



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