



EDITORIAL



Hiromi Tango, *Insanity Magnet #1*, 2006–13, inkjet pigment print on paper. Courtesy Sullivan + Strumpf and courtesy and © the artist.

FEATURE

Photography With Extras

by [Tracey Clement](#) | Posted 01 Aug 2014

When visiting a gallery called the [Australian Centre for Photography](#) one might expect to see, well, photographs. But this winter at the ACP expect to see the unexpected. The gallery is showcasing work by three artists: [Terry Burrows](#), [Hiromi Tango](#) and [Rodney Pople](#). None are known as photographers but they all utilise the medium. It's photography with extras.

According to ACP curator Tony Nolan, he put the winter season together, alongside assistant curators Belinda Hungerford and Claire Monneraye, in order to address the question: "What is the photographic medium today?" As Nolan points out, many contemporary artists no longer feel even remotely constrained by the old boundaries of various media. Instead, they range freely across genres as the need arises. "It is our

responsibility to be aware of what is happening out there and to present that within a photographic context,” he says. So, in the ACP’s current round of exhibitions, painter Terry Burrows presents documentary photos that mimic his abstract canvases, Hiromi Tango seamlessly weaves photographic imagery into her textile sculptures and Rodney Pople transforms photographs into mixed-media paintings. But don’t worry. “We aren’t dumping photography,” Nolan explains. “But we are asking people to think outside traditional definitions. Because that is what practitioners are doing.”

In his show *Banaras Backs*, Terry Burrows is the only artist presenting ‘straight’ photography during the winter season. But he’s not about to give up his day job. “Suffice to say that these photographs wouldn’t exist if my painting practice hadn’t led me to them,” he says. Burrows was undertaking a residency in Varanasi, India, when, he recalls, “I started noticing all these backs, just people sitting on the ghats really still, looking at the river. They were very sculptural, very statuesque. When I started translating them into drawings I thought, this is probably not necessary. The photos themselves are abstract enough and intriguing enough I didn’t need to extract them into any other medium. So I decided to make it a photographic project.”

Burrows admits that he became obsessed with these images of people sitting contemplating the Ganges. So obsessed in fact that he took over 4000 photos, all shot exclusively from behind, without the subjects’ knowledge. And it is easy to see why. The abstract shape these bodies create is already part of his painter’s lexicon.

In *Banaras Backs*, Burrows presents a mural wall featuring all 1008 images from his book of the same title, as well as 28 pairs of larger prints. Viewed en masse like this, both the uniformity of the shapes and the uniqueness of each image become evident. And perhaps the most striking feature is the subtle colours: blue, grey and turquoise punctuated by bursts of orange, a palette sympathetic with his paintings. Burrows has managed to avoid the photographic cliché of a colour-saturated, hyperreal India and has instead captured real people as abstract forms.

“I don’t take many photographs,” Hiromi Tango admits. “If I really love a moment, it won’t be recorded. I don’t have any framed photos in the house.” Yet she is also attracted to photography and fascinated by the role it can play in not only recording events, but in shaping memory.

Tango is known for performances and sculptures made from massive amounts of coloured wool tangled up with various other items, from soft toys to personal letters. In 2009, during the dust storm that swept across Queensland and New South Wales, she combined performance and sculpture to create *Insanity Magnet*, a series of haunting photographs that documented a difficult time in her life.

In *Dust Storm* at the ACP, Tango returns to these images to create a mixed-media installation. “I am interested in the role of repetitious movement (weaving, wrapping, dancing or drumming) in the trauma recovery process. Repetitious movement definitely has an ability to create new memories in my brain,” she says, “and I applied this same process to photography and video by engaging with the same images over and over again.” In *Dust Storm* this process manifests as soft sculptures, glowing light boxes in citrus colours, still and moving images, and neon lights spelling out “new” and “memory”.

In 2012, Rodney Pople won the Glover Prize for landscape painting. In 2008, he was highly commended in the Wynne, another prestigious painting prize. But technically, Pople’s works aren’t paintings. They are mixed-media pieces with photography at the heart. “The process of the work is very much in the digital realm,” he explains. Pople layers and manipulates photographic images before printing them on canvas and over-painting them. “In the end, it’s very much a seamless combination in which photography meets oil paint and oil paint meets photography.” While some painters use photography as a starting point, for Pople it is an integral part of his work, literally embedded.

Pople studied photography at the Tasmanian School of Art, so it’s not surprising that he is aware of its potential and is willing to push its boundaries to “expand what photography can be in this digital age”. In many ways, what Pople is doing is using paint to take the

transformative power of Photoshop one step further; his images jump off the screen and back into reality.

In *Lie of the Land*, Pople presents several large portraits of endangered animals as well as his signature-style combination of wild beasts incongruously inhabiting interior spaces. These images conjure up a sense of post-apocalyptic malaise and have an ethereal, dreamscape quality. More uncanny than surreal, they render the familiar both strange and slightly sinister. In the standout piece of the show, *Santa Maria Della Salute*, 2014, a shark swims through a Renaissance cathedral. Somehow, his use of paint makes this impossible image seem not only possible but also probable, an effect that Photoshop alone could never have achieved. In Pople's work painting and photography are much more than the sum of their parts.

In fact, the same can be said about the entire winter season at the ACP. All three exhibitions use photography synergistically as a vital part of a broader practice. As Tony Nolan says, they are part of a "discussion about what the photographic image can be in the 21st century".

Terry Burrows' *Banaras Backs*, Hiromi Tango's *Dust Storm* and Rodney Pople's *Lie of the Land* are at Australian Centre for Photography Until 17 August 2014.