Reveries
Photography & Mortality

Helen Ennis
REVERIES  Photography & Mortality

NATIONAL PORTRAIT GALLERY, Old Parliament House, King George Terrace, Parkes, ACT
31 AUGUST TO 4 OCTOBER 2007

UNIVERSITY ART MUSEUM, The UNIVERSITY OF QUEENSLAND,
within The James and Mary Emelia Mayne Centre, St Lucia, Qld
31 AUGUST TO 14 OCTOBER 2007

MORNINGTON PENINSULA REGIONAL GALLERY,
Civic Reserve, Dunns Road, Mornington, Vic 19 MARCH TO 18 MAY 2008

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COVER: RUTH MADISON  The beginning of absence 1996
Tell me how you die and I will tell you who you are.

This project was totally dependent upon the good will and generosity of many people and I am indebted to everyone who assisted me by providing leads, information, discussion and, most importantly, conversation about their own personal experiences.

My thanks to Roger Blackley; Naomi Cass; Christopher Chapman; Jim Cotter and Kathryn Favelle; Leanne Crisp; Kate Davidson; Lynda Edridge; Fiona Hall; Stephen Hyde; Magda Keaney; Sue Laganza; Shaune Lakin; Sally McInerney; Ian McLean; Roslyn Poignant; Kaye Ranson (Canberra Hospital); Francesca Rendle-Short; Hephzbah Rendle-Short; Sarah Rice; Penny Taylor; Monique Van Nieuwland; Jen Webb; and Jill White.

In New Zealand, Paul McNamara, Director of McNamara Gallery in Wanganui, provided a rich stream of information, and Janet and David Ennis alerted me to useful material.

I would also like to thank those who made it possible to exhibit works by the late Carol Jerrems: Ken Jerrems and Lance Jerrems; Kathy Drayton; Roger Scott (who made the prints in the exhibition from Carol Jerrems’ negatives); and Stills Gallery, Sydney.

Lisa Moore and Toni McDowell generously provided information on the work of the late David Moore. Les Walking printed the negatives of the late Bernie O’Regan with the greatest care and was instrumental in securing the works by Peter Kennedy.

On behalf of Jonathon Delacour I would like to acknowledge the assistance he received for his project from the parents of the babies and the staff of the Royal Children’s Hospital in Sydney, in particular, Dr Peter Barr, and Associate Professor Kaye Spence who assisted in writing the captions.
Director's foreword

In 2004 the National Portrait Gallery partnered with the newly revitalised University Art Museum at The University of Queensland to mount To Look Within, a survey of the artist's self-portrait in Australia. That exhibition focused largely on the painted self-portrait and it was always intended that a further exhibition would examine the photographic self-portrait in Australia. When I discussed the idea with Helen Ennis she immediately countered with a proposal that took the idea of the photographic self-portrait into an area of profound significance; she revealed that for a long time she had been thinking about photographic self-portraits made in the presence of mortality. The idea developed further and the result, Reveries, has emerged as one of the deepest and most important projects to be mounted by the National Portrait Gallery. In bringing the idea to fruition we have been assisted by two institutions; we are grateful to the University Art Museum for their assistance with the catalogue and to the Australian National University School of Art which has made it possible for Helen Ennis to work on the exhibition.

Reveries examines a question of undeniable significance—how do we face death? There are two dimensions of importance to this question. As an institution specifically devoted to portraiture, a National Portrait Gallery will always have a commemorative role. In this context it is always relevant that creating portraits is a strategy by which we hope to cheat death. A portrait preserves a living likeness that we know will pass away. Throughout history portraits have been motivated by a desire to transcend death and achieve immortality. Yet even where immortality is not an explicit motivation in their creation, portraits...
stand outside of time. This has been an observed phenomenon of photograph, a medium that subdivides time, able to preserve only the minutest moments of the broad flow of a lifetime.

The way in which we face death is now an issue of widespread community debate. This debate, prompted by the prospect of an ageing population against a background of the possibilities held out by medical science, reveals that there are as many positions on death as there are individuals. There are complexities and nuances, shades of feeling and belief. Art illuminates these positions and helps us to see a range of individual responses. The resolute understatement and meditative quality of so many of the works in Reveries attests to the truth of a stanza in Joseph Brodsky’s great poem ‘Nature Morte’:

Scythe, skull, and skeleton –
An absurd pack of lies.
Rather: ‘Death, when it comes,
Will have your own two eyes’.

Andrew Sayers
I have a story to tell you about Nicole. To be more precise.

I don't think of her sitting there, bare-legged in the dark, up in

the movement of the seas.

I only think of her sitting there, bare-legged in the dark. Up in

the movement of the seas.

I have a story to tell you about Nicole. To be more precise.

I only think of her sitting there, bare-legged in the dark, up in

the movement of the seas.

I have a story to tell you about Nicole. To be more precise.
There are some of the problems that would arise in the real world and its correspondent authority.

The image of the child—photographed in his hospital bed and in his other moments of life—photographed by someone who never met him, someone who never knew him, someone who never had a chance to play with him, someone who never knew him, someone who never had a chance to be his friend.

The black-and-white film of the photographer—photographed in his hospital bed and in his other moments of life—photographed by someone who never met him, someone who never knew him, someone who never had a chance to play with him, someone who never knew him, someone who never had a chance to be his friend.

The dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead child, the dead 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