

THE DOUGLAS SUMMERLAND COLLECTION

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ABSTRACT

The *Douglas Summerland Collection* is a fictional “monographically based history”¹. In essence this research is concerned with the current debates about history recording, authenticity of the photograph, methods of history construction and how the audience digests new ‘knowledge’.

The narrative for this body of work is drawn from a small album of maritime photographs discovered in 2004 within the archives of the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum in New Zealand. The album contains vernacular images of life onboard several sailing ships from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the *DH Sterling* and the *William Mitchell*.

Through investigating the ‘truth’ systems promoted by the photograph within the presentations of histories this research draws a link between the development of colonialism and the perception of photography. It also deliberates on how ‘truth’ perception is still a major part of an audience’s knowledge base.

¹ Anne-Marie Willis *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, London. 1988:253

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INTRODUCTION

All you can do is take part in the illusion of the world and challenge it with the perfect crime, with the radical substitutability of things.²

The *Douglas Summerland Collection* is a fictional “monographically based history”³. In essence this research is concerned with the current debates about history recording, authenticity of the photograph, methods of history construction and how the audience digests new ‘knowledge’.

Whilst investigating the “truth” systems promoted by the photograph within the presentations of histories, this research draws a link between the development of colonialism and the perception of photography. It also deliberates on how “truth” perception is still a major part of an audience’s knowledge base.

The report is broken into four sections. The first section considers the function of photographs and photography in the early colonial era. A section that discusses the nature of photographs follows this. Issues concerning the depiction of history and museum structure precede the final section that illustrates the components of the exhibition.

² Jean Baudrillard, Nicholas Zurrugg (ed.), *Art and Artefact*, Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997.

³ Anne-Marie Willis *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, Angus & Robertson Publishers, London, 1988, p. 253.

The narrative for the *Douglas Summerland Collection* is drawn from a small album of maritime photographs discovered in 2004 within the archives of the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum in New Zealand. The album contains vernacular images of life onboard several sailing ships from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including the *DH Sterling* and the *William Mitchell*.

The photographs in this album come from an era that is no stranger to controversy, particularly in regards to the performance of photography. It is the current angst over the use of photographs in the depiction of history that is the central concern of this report and the resulting exhibition.

CHAPTER 1

Photography and Photographs of the Colonial Period

Early colonialism can be broken into three periods. The first, 1851 to 1870, was concerned with national economic growth, establishing trade links and the application of foreign aesthetics in design and architecture. In the second, between 1870 and 1885, the British Empire was involved with developing government administration and stabilising the introduced social structures in foreign lands. The third, from the late 1880s until 1909, celebrated the achievements of the empire through increased international exhibitions coupled with the building of permanent museums in Britain and the colonies.³

It is from the Victoria and Edwardian eras that John Tagg has devised some of his theories/histories on the idea of photography. From this period in history Tagg has placed emphasis on the institutional control that guided the application of photographs and their use in assuring the continuance of social structures. Interacting with photographs from this period in history requires acknowledgement of the effects institutionalised photography had on the advancement of colonialism. Tagg directs us to social powers when it comes to considering the history of photography:

³ Tim Barringer, "The South Kensington Museum and The Colonial Project", in Tim Barringer & Tom Flynn (eds.), *Colonialism and the Object*, Routledge, London, 1998, p.12.

We must know more about [social] power to discover where and how it touches photography.

He precedes this statement with:

This analysis of power and photography will take us far beyond the boundaries of conventional art history into the institutional spaces of the modern state. Our starting point must be power itself and the attempts that have been made to theorise its functionings.⁴

As with today, photography in the period of Douglas Summerland's album was utilised to perform several functions. The predominant use, however, in Britain was to promote the empire, national identity and the objectification of the colonised.⁵ Photography and Imperialism were great allies. Photographs employed by governments as tools to endorse ideals of national interest saw wide distribution. Historian Anne Maxwell sees the photograph as an effective means of the reaffirmation of imperial policies for the British, Dutch, French and later the Americans that complemented the popular international exhibitions that began in the 1860s.

These exhibitions, also known as “world fairs”, presenting the exotics, such as crafts, produce, minerals and live exhibits⁶ of the

⁴ John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation-Essays on photographs and Histories*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1993, p. 67.

⁵ Anne Maxwell. *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities*, Leicester University Press, London, 1999 – 2000, p. 2.

⁶ Roslyn Poignant, *The Making of Professional “Savages” in Photography’s Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), Duke University Press, Durham and London, 2005, p. 70. P.T Barnum had been using people in live displays since the mid 1830s.

colonised were initially concerned with disseminating the potential wealth that could be obtained by offshore investment. Maxwell states that these exhibitions “were a fashionable form of international public relations to encourage trade, tourism and immigration, and a mandatory exercise for countries aspiring to become world powers” ⁷. After twenty years of this type of public exhibition, working class knowledge about matters of state had grown.

By the mid 1880s, the purpose of the displays and supporting photographs was redirected towards expelling, from the collective consciousness, the destructive side of building an empire, genocide and involuntary assimilation.⁸ The use of stereotypes is a clear result of institutions pampering to the rise of public knowledge. These stereotypes were portrayed in live exhibits and on photographic postcards with the sole aim to put forth the hierarchical systems⁹ that governed the colonised and later the colonisers.

The stereotype that had the most impact in the displays was that of the “Savage”. P.T. Barnum introduced the “cannibal savage” as early as 1850 in his America Museum; the display made up of

⁷ John Allwood, *The Great Exhibitions*, Studio Vista, London, 1977, p. 75, ‘Aloha kalakaua Alta, 3 February 1875, p. 1 quoted in Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities*, Leicester University Press, London, 1999 – 2000, p. 4.

⁸ A. Maxwell op.cit., p. 3.

⁹ Ibid., p. 2

three Fijians became a blueprint for the larger international exhibitions.¹⁰

In Britain, at the Crystal Palace Great Exhibition of 1851, the public live displays of “native” peoples from distant lands began.¹¹ These exhibits gradually turned from being purely anthological in their study, to a more engineered model using the “Savage” as their totem. The pictorial postcard became a product of these exhibits essentially to function as reminders of racial difference.

Anthropologists relied on these postcards and other photographs for their ethnological studies. The middle and working class used them to experience the “other” without having to leave London, Amsterdam, Paris or New York.¹²

Anne Maxwell points to the photographs of colonised people as crucial in the act of colonialisation:

*In an age when few people traveled, these images were regarded as evidence of what was happening in the distant regions located at the edge of empire. By representing colonized people as savage and primitive, the images reassured Europeans of their unique claim to civilization.*¹³

¹⁰ Roslyn Poignant, *The Making of Professional “Savages” in Photography’s Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 71.

¹¹ Maxwell. *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions*, 1999-2001, p. 1.

¹² Ibid.: 1

¹³ Ibid.: 7

The longstanding use of the “Savage” as an institutional justification is clearly demonstrated by the first international exhibition to take place in New Zealand from November 1906 to April 1907. This exhibition held at Christchurch brought together groups of “Savages” from the Pacific region including the Cook Islands and Fiji. There was a special reconstruction of a 1700s traditional Maori village built to mark the occasion. Sir John Gorst delivered the opening speech of the exhibition: “Could one find an uncivilized race living in perfect amity and equality with the civilized race, and enjoying all the advantages of civilization?”¹⁴ Anne Maxwell states that Gorst, a member of English Parliament, used these words to “assign New Zealand’s indigenous peoples to the space of savagery...”¹⁵

Maxwell regards the photographs produced at the exhibition of the “Savages” as proof behind the motives of the live displays. One image she discusses is titled “Maori Group at Exhibition in Christchurch 1907” by an unknown photographer. The photograph portrays a “natural” setting of six Maori men and one woman in front of the constructed village. All are in traditional dress, holding spears, clubs, wearing head feathers. At a glance, the photograph presents what is expected. However, Maxwell turns our attentions to the faces of the men which are adorned with moustaches; it is the facial hair that counteracts the intended message of the

¹⁴ J. Cowan, *Official Record of the New Zealand International Exhibition of Arts and Industries held at Christchurch 1906-7*, N. Mackay Government Printer, Wellington, 1910, p. 352. Quoted in Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities*, Leicester University Press, London, 1999 – 2000, p. 137.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 1910, p. 352 & 1999 – 2000, p. 137.

photograph. Maxwell's text accompanying the photograph summarises her feelings:

*The traditional framing of this tableau at the Christchurch exhibition in 1907 belies the complexity and sophistication of its subjects. Gilbert Mair (seated) captained Maori during the Maori Wars. At rear, third from the right, is Maggie Papakuura, the famous tourist guide, who also studied at Oxford; on her left is Te Rangihiroa (DR Peter Buck) who was soon to enter Parliament.*¹⁶

Britain and its colonies' exhibitions increasingly promoted the principles of civilisation including science, industry, art and education on the back of the "Savage". The "Savage", however, brought spectacle to the exhibitions and from our perspective today worked against the motives of the organisers. Spectacle introduced the notion of doubt to the authenticity of displays¹⁷ and was of no advantage to the government's cause. The displays produced to promote empires did not have the same freedom that a showman like P.T. Barnum had with his commercial ventures. Imperialists had to have the people believe.

Visitors in Britain in the late 1890s, and certainly the Christchurch Exhibition in 1907, almost certainly had opportunities to converse

¹⁶ Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions*, 1999-2001, p. 137.

¹⁷ Roslyn Poignant, *The Making of Professional "Savages" in Photography's Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 71.

This is from the perspective of the British government of the time and was not shared by America who supported such spectacle as P.T Barnum, J.Baily and J Hutchinson's three-ringed circus featuring the "Ethnological Congress of Strange and Savage Tribes".

with the live displays. It was at the 1907 exhibition that the contingent from the Cook Islands received a reprimand for insisting on wearing western trousers.¹⁸ Then, there was the reality of “Savages” studying at Oxford to overcome. By the early 1900s, colonists had benefited by interracial relationships and the British working class, especially women,¹⁹ realised they experienced similar inequalities as the “Savage” in the colonies.

Photographs and postcards produced from these exhibits were central in the dilution of any doubt caused by spectacle. The institutions used the photograph to tame the live exhibits and promote government policy on Social Darwinism²⁰. “The photographs of colonized peoples that were in general circulation were widely believed to offer an accurate visual record of life in the colonies. Truth in this instance was regarded as equivalent to empiricism”.²¹ Without the advent of photography and the resulting photographs, perhaps British colonialism might not have lasted as long as it did.

In 1888, George Eastman introduced the Kodak Instamatic Camera, which was the forerunner in a new type of photography, the “snapshot”. The portable camera gave the colonials increasing access to image making. It signaled a change in the operatives of

¹⁸ A. Maxwell, op.cit., p. 136. Because the Cook Islands were a favourite destination for tourists and evangelists, the islanders learnt very quickly about western style dress.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 8.

²⁰ Ibid., p. 3.

²¹ Ibid., p. 11.

the photograph in relation to its subject matter. Institutions used photography to objectify the ruled classes.

There is little difference in the motives behind the imperial and colonised photograph “Colonial Photography too was in the business of confirming and reproducing the racial theories and stereotypes that assisted European expansion.”²² With portraiture and the vernacular, some colonial photographers strove to capture “a strong national self-image to counter the image of dependency and inferiority foisted on them...”²³ These photographers were able to break away from the objectivity of the empire and bring certain subjectivity to their scenes.

Anne Maxwell continues by commenting that the ideology behind this type of photographic pursuit was determined by the consumer’s needs and equally by the photographer’s cultural experience.²⁴ The portable camera allowed the middle and working class the opportunity to pictorially create their experience of the colonial era. The majority of these images serviced the private needs of their producers and saw little public circulation. The vernacular images were kept as mementos that served as personal verifications of the individuals standing within the highly constructed society of the empire. These photographs captured family members, properties owned, a new suit or pair of shoes or, in the case of the seaman Douglas Summerland, chronicled his

²² Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions*, 1999-2001, p. 9

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

travels. These photographs in essence form realist chronotopes²⁵ for the author and sitter.

*Photographs [for the colonial] offered indisputable evidence that the trip had been made. By taking pictures of pyramids and temples, tourists appropriated the things photographed and put themselves into a knowledgeable and powerful relation to the world. Photographs helped them to take possession of space in which they might have felt insecure.*²⁶

Because some of these vernacular images were produced outside the constructed guidelines of the institutionalised photograph and studio practice of the time, they can be a valuable resource for historical research. This is not to say one should only look at the vernacular as a source of factual historical information.

Nevertheless, without such photographs there is a tendency by theorists dealing with history to overlook the individual who lived through a history. Devoid of the vernacular, there is a danger of misreading moments in history just as there is if we discard the photographs produced as a result of social powers.

This is not to subscribe to what Anne Marie Willis cautions us against: how a contemporary audience can see a photograph as a “transparent record of history which although incomplete needs

²⁵ Christopher Pinney, *Notes from the Surface of the Image in Photography's Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 216.

²⁶ S. Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin, New York, 1979, p. 4,9, quoted in Heike Behrend, “Imagined Journeys” in *Photography's Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 222.

only the addition of descriptive facts to come to life and speak a total and ostensibly indisputable truth.”²⁷

There can be no doubt that through the passage of time a photograph's meaning changes. The institutional imagery of the Victorian and Edwardian periods have exchanged their meaning from promoting colonisation to condemning it. Vernacular photographs from that era have gone from forming private collections to becoming historical commodities for the public to reminisce.

A historical record of the colonial life is present in the personal photographs that have entered the public domain. These photographs are not always a reliable source for the “indisputable truth”²⁸ but there can still be clarity in certain images that assist in the construction of a history. Vernacular photographs make us less dependant on the institutionalised photograph or written account by the privileged. What can be a danger, though, is that these images can experience the same theoretical treatment as their counterparts. This action can cause a misreading of information contained within them.

Christopher Wright points to this misreading in his footnotes to and within the text of *Supple Bodies: The Papua New Guinea Photographs by Captain Francis R. Barton*. “In the wake of theorists like Michel Foucault and John Tagg, among many others, we have a ready-made interpretive frame for this photograph, one

²⁷ Willis, *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, 1988, p. 258.

²⁸ Ibid., p. 258.

in which a male colonial gaze is implicated in the subjection of other, often female, bodies.”²⁹

The photograph that is the motive behind Wright’s investigation is one from Barton’s anthropological archive taken between 1904 and 1907 of an adolescent Hula girl. Although Barton was a government official at the time of producing his 1,500 glass negatives in Port Moresby and surrounds, he used photography to create a personal record of his travels. It can be argued that the images of native girls that Barton took were intended to produce another colonial stereotype, that of the “Native Belle”³⁰. Wright refutes these claims by drawing our attention to the actual practice and subject matter that Barton had invested his interests. Barton had photographed this particular girl during the several stages of being tattooed, a symbol of the individual passing through adolescence to womanhood. There is evidence of the photographer’s interest from the inscribed crop marks Barton drew on the glass negatives.

Another supporting factor to Barton’s practice, unlike that of Charles Woolley and Johannes Lindt³¹, is that there is no artifice of “Savage” or the heavily used theory of the “Dying Race”³² depicted

²⁹ Christopher Wright, *Supple Bodies in Photography’s Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson, & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 150.

³⁰ The Native Belle stereotype was still in production up until the mid 1970’s and is still a commodity today; you can purchase these from a Dutch website <<http://www.bendav.nl>>.

³¹ Peter Quartermaine, “Johannes Lindt: Photographer of Australia and New Guinea”, in Mick Gidley (ed.), *Representing Others: White Views of Indigenous Peoples*, Exeter University Press, Exeter, 1992, pp. 103-19. Quoted in Anne Maxwell, *Colonial Photography & Exhibitions: Representations of the “Native” and the Making of European Identities*, Leicester University Press, London, 1999 – 2000, p. 137.

³² Ibid., 1992, pp. 103-19 & 1999 – 2000, p. 137.

in his photographs. Wright continues his statement in regards to analyzing images in an archive:

Within this frame the focus has been on photography as a carceral technology, a part of the colonial apparatus of surveillance that “imprisons” others by “fixing” them... as particular “types” and as objects for display. Yet there is a sense in which such frames can, if taken on their own, remain largely within a colonial perspective; the emphasis tends to be on the colonial gaze to the exclusion of other histories and perspectives.³³

Photographs taken in the nature of Barton, or indeed Summerland, allow the audience to bring their judgments to bear. They insist on the audience dealing with their prejudices more so than directorial images produced by the governments of the time. To further this point it is useful to consider postcolonial photography practice to gain an idea of how colonial images are structured.

In *Photography's Other Histories*, Christopher Pinney introduces the idea of surfacism as reaction of postcolonial attitudes after colonial photography. Pinney use examples from post 1950s photography practice in West Africa and India to study surfacism. In regards to the images by Seydou Keita and other post colonialists, Pinney describes surfacism as a refusal of the realist chronotope. Pinney states that this form of image capturing:

³³ C. Wright, op. cit., 2005, p. 150.

engages with texture, where everything springs out of the photograph toward the viewer, rather than a field of spatio-temporal certainty receding within the image...a refusal of external verification prompted not by Greenbergian angst but by a desire to consolidate the intimate space between the viewer and image.

To expand on this idea Pinney concludes that:

a common concern [in postcolonial practice] is not with space of the photograph as a window on a reality marked by internalised lines of flight, but with the photograph as a surface, a ground, on which presences that look out toward the viewer can be built. ³⁴

The colonial photograph with its structure based on internal space created by the frame (the window effect) and not surface can be very useful when looking at personal histories. These images were, perhaps unconsciously, structured using the well established painting guidelines of diminishing perspective. The photographers who were mostly amateur used these tools of composition to create a connection with their lives and those of the viewers. This image structure draws the viewer into the colonialist's world by allowing enough space for the viewer to move around. This is a great piece of manipulation, once the viewer engages with a

³⁴ Christopher Pinney, op.cit., 2005, p. 216.

photograph at this level they are obliged to pay credit to “the mark of lives successfully lived.” ³⁵

Usually, in this type of image construction, the viewer must traverse a foreground before they reach the subject matter. The frame or window of the photograph sets the line of engagement. These pictures cultivate the notion of quiet study; postcolonial images do not allow the viewer that sense of comfort, the subject of the photograph has already stepped over the line to greet the audience. Colonial photographs encapsulate the subject for the viewer to discover.

The photographs in the Douglas Summerland album are taken using the colonial pictorial constructs. Created by the photographer, the viewpoint invites the audience to stand on the deck of the *D H Sterling* as it rounds Cape Horn in a squall, or stand on the rigging while the top sheets are set. In the portrait of Summerland (Fig.1) taken onboard the *William Mitchell*, the use of perspective lines allows the audience to consider the conversation between two crewmembers in the background of the photograph.



³⁵ Ibid., p. 207.

Fig.1: From the album discovered in the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum archive 2004.

Summerland's photographs were taken not as part of an official record of the colonial time but for pleasure, perhaps as a Bauldrillard escape measure from the "banality"³⁶ of ship life. The *William Mitchell* which Summerland served on has been described as a:

*dull ship in maritime history... At the beginning of 1920, she [the William Mitchell] sailed from Buenos Aires for England and was prevented from making Leith by winter gales that kept her in the North Sea for 40 days; after securing a tow, her final time was 107 days. In October of that year, she was caught in a hurricane at Gulfport, Mississippi. After two weeks of repairs, she sailed for Buenos Aires with timber. Light and contrary winds kept her at sea for 147 days before she made Barbados; she finally arrived at Buenos Aires 266 days out.*³⁷

The images although posed, still retain a sense of the immediate snapshot. Rather than turn the camera on the trade activities of the ships, Summerland points it towards his companions, the surrounds and himself. The photographs are a record of life at sea and onboard friendships. It is an introspective and, perhaps with hindsight, a naïve camera that Summerland sets.

³⁶ Jean Bauldrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997, p. 10.

³⁷ Lincoln P. Paine, *Ships of the World: A Historical Encyclopedia*, Houghton Milfin, Boston 1997.

See: <http://college.hmco.com/history/readerscomp/ships/html/sh_100600_williammitch.htm>

CHAPTER 2

The Nature of Photographs

When the intention is to investigate a moment within the colonial era, as in the case of this research, the “truths” and “reality” encapsulated in photographs must be successfully navigated.

On the worn cover of the Douglas Summerland album the word “Photographs” is embossed. (Fig.2) Considering the period from which the album emerges, it seems a word of significance. To a degree, this word “Photographs” insists that the viewer pay particular attention to the evidence enclosed, of a life overlooked by recorded history.



Fig.2: Front cover of the album discovered in the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum archive 2004.

In *The Past Within Us*, Tessa Morris-Suzuki turns our attention to a quote by Japanese Nationalist Historian Fujioka Nobukatsu:

“Everybody knows that words can lie. In contrast, the word ‘Photograph’ [shashin] is written with the characters which mean ‘to reproduce the truth’.”³⁸ Fujioka continues with the sentiments that this is a “naïve” view of how the photograph functions and that “Photographs tell greater lies than words”.³⁹

Governments, commercial industries and numerous others present ideals that support this notion of truth held within every photograph. It is still relevant to accept that no matter how many fraudulent images are produced in society, this unique quality is ever part of the belief system of an audience when confronted by photographs.

What makes photographs different from any other image making process, including digital imaging, is that photographs cannot avoid capturing some type of “reality”. Whether that reality is true of its time or a fantasy, the moment has taken place and been rendered by a camera. Within the most basic form of photographic practice, there is usually a person operating the camera and someone or something photographed. Baudrillard states that photography is “irreversible” and that “it offers tangible evidence of the world at a certain given moment.”⁴⁰

³⁸ Fujioka Nobukatsu, *The Rape of Nanking' no kenkyu*, Fujioka Nobukatsu and Higashinakano Shudo (eds.), Tokyo, Shodensha, 1999, p. 54, quoted in Tessa Morris-Suzuki. *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, Verso Books, New York. 2005, p. 75.

³⁹ Ibid., 1999, p. 54 & 2005, p. 75.

⁴⁰ Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), 1997, p. 30.

If a photograph of the recreation of the early twentieth century sailor Douglas Summerland is taken in the twenty first century (Fig.3) does not that moment exist in reality? Even though incongruent with the rest of the subject's history or that of the photographer's, in that split second of time something is captured on film. A photograph is the object borne from the act of photography⁴¹, discarding known manipulations such as collage and multiple exposures, a photograph is the document of the captured; a reality. This is a simple reading or perhaps an ill directed hope by someone who engages with the practice of photography. It is perhaps the sentiments that every first time photographer believes in, certainly their audience does. However, even though there will always be a residue of this sentiment in this photographer's thinking, it would be an error not to acknowledge where the photograph's message is ultimately delivered.

⁴¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Orders Profoundly Altered: Photography and Photographies*, West 1, 1, 1989, p. 18 & Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997, p. 28.

Geoffrey Batchen states, "According to Tagg and Willis, photography can no longer be understood as a singular entity. Rather, it must be seen as a dispersed and dynamic field of technologies, practices and images ordered only momentarily by the institution or discourse which harnesses them in any specific instance." For this paper, the term *photography* is used to represent the act of someone releasing the shutter of a camera. I acknowledge the worth of Tagg's and Willis's views on photography in the context that it is used.



Fig.3: Douglas Summerland portrait taken in studio 2003.

Geoffrey Batchen states, “a photograph is never impartial in the delivery of its internal truth.”⁴² The history that a given photograph represents, the moment in history of viewing the photograph and the actual history of the photograph contribute to the meaning that it contains. With this Batchen alludes to the ever-changing meanings of photographs. This is a key point of navigation when considering photography as a reference tool for the visual presentation of history.⁴³ From the time they are taken to the moment they are placed within an archive, public or private, it is important to understand “photographs can only ever be experienced as an ongoing and dynamic activity of productive reading, and that the photograph’s identity lies not in its origin but in its destination.”⁴⁴

⁴² Ibid., 1989, p. 18.

⁴³ Ibid., 1989, p. 19.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1989, p. 19.

CHAPTER 3

Depicting Histories

History thrives on historians continually reworking its parameters. Improved access to resources such as archives allows the continued remix of facts and outcomes. Practitioners of history are becoming more aware that only dates are a relative fixed point in the process of reconstruction. With the rise of technology and online access to archives, the process of historical research gives the impression of an effortless task for both the professional and amateur alike.⁴⁵

This maybe true in regards to the “detective work”⁴⁶ involved in formulating a historical account. However, owing to the expansion of postmodernist theories in the practice of history, the alignment of a historian to a particular reading of an archive is becoming more complicated. Mary Fulbrook states:

*Postmodernist challenges to what might be called empiricist, or traditional, views of history range from the less to the more skeptical, and are rooted in a variety of philosophical positions.*⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 2.

⁴⁶ Mary Fulbrook, *Fact, Fantasy and German History* (1999 Annual Lecture of the GHI Washington), *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute Washington*, No. 26, Spring 2000, pp. 3-34.
See: <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin26S00/b26fulbrookframe.html>>

⁴⁷ Ibid., 2000, pp. 3-34.

From a distance there seems to be two distinct views when it comes to historical practice. The first being the advocate of undeniable historical “truth” while the other promotes the questioning of the existence of “truth” within recorded history. Contrary to this view, postmodern historical practice in itself contains numerous notions of how to deal with the past and truth represented in an archive. For the sake of scholarship, Fulbrook attempts to simplify the divisions in postmodernist theories. One approach adhered to by postmodernists:

*views history's function as a substitute for, rather than attempt at faithful (if partial) representation of, the past. This version thus collapses history into art or politics (or both). The other line of attack does not dispute the reality of the past or at least the reality of surviving traces of a real past but rather focuses on the imaginative ways in which these surviving traces are actively selected, combined, and shaped by the historian to produce an essentially imagined account in the present... This version, then, collapses history into a form of creative literature.*⁴⁸

Stephen Loosley, in his article “History Needs More Respect” published in the Sunday Telegraph, picks up the debate about the depiction of history with the lines: “History ought to be treated with a measure of respect, and be told accurately as well as

⁴⁸ Ibid., 2000, pp. 3-34.

dramatically”.⁴⁹ This was Loosley’s reaction to how director Steven Spielberg handles the history of the event depicted in the movie *Munich* as “merely junk”⁵⁰ (secondary) to the narrative. In “The History Question: Who Owns the Past?”, published in October 2006, Inga Clendinnen redirects this plea towards novelists dealing with Australian historical content.

Clendinnen sees novelists’ motives as taking advantage of the history wars with the intent “to bump historians off track.”⁵¹ Novelists, in Clendinnen’s view, see it as their role to write Australian history and present it to the country with the goal of “nurturing its soul”.⁵² Clendinnen uses the novel *The Secret River* by Kate Grenville, a story about the early settlement of Australia, as a case in question. Particularly, Clendinnen takes Grenville to task on the topic of empathy and her disregard of the claim by empiricists that history should be objectively told.⁵³

Grenville states that she only allowed herself to identify with the white settlers of her narrative during the course of writing *The Secret River*. In Grenville’s mind “there has been enough appropriation already” of the Aboriginals. Clendinnen uses this line and the following transcript to prove her point about Grenville:

⁴⁹ Stephen Loosley, *History Needs More Respect*, News in Review Section The Sunday Telegraph News Limited, Sydney February 19, 2006, p. 87.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 2006, p. 87.

⁵¹ Inga Clendinnen, “The History Question: Who Owns The Past?”, Black Inc, Melbourne. 2006, p.16.

⁵² Ibid., 2006, p. 16.

⁵³ Ibid., 2006, p. 17.

*I do believe that you have to draw on what you know to write well, and I don't pretend to understand or be able to empathise particularly with a tribal Aboriginal person from 200 years ago; that's beyond me.*⁵⁴

The main thrust of the empiricist's argument in this debate is that novelists, artists and anyone else, including postmodernists who use imagination in their engagement with history should cease all activities. Mary Fulbrook's empiricist historians, in general, do not recognise the worth in the subjective portrayal of historical content. Clendinnen does not subscribe wholly to this sentiment; her view is that the creative person involved with history should instead be wary of their empathy-guided knowledge. Clendinnen sees the "real past"⁵⁵ as uncontrollable and that it is hard to predict in its scenarios. She states that this is in contrast to the constructed past of the novelist [and visual artists] where "everyone behaves delightfully "in character", and everyone submits to the plot. The novelist might surprise her readers. She will never surprise herself."

Clendinnen, a researcher of Aztec history, continues:

Access to the actual past is slow, always problematic, and its inhabitants can be relied on to affront our expectations. I was cured of any residual faith in the utility of empathy by

⁵⁴ Kate Grenville interviewed by Ramona Koval on ABC Radio National, "Books and Writing", 8 January 2006, See: www.abc.net.au/rn/arts/bwriting/stories/s1527708.htm quoted in Inga Clendinnen. "The History Question-Who Owns The Past?", Black Inc, Melbourne, 2006, p. 16.

⁵⁵ Clendinnen, "The History Question-Who Owns The Past?", 2006, p. 16.

*spending more than a decade with Aztecs. I knew they were human. I was reminded of that a dozen times a day. But it quickly became obvious that their minds and their emotions were ordered differently from mine. This meant that if I were to penetrate any distance at all into the Aztec world of the imagination, I would have to keep my own imagination on a very short leash, because my imagination, like my emotions and assumptions, has grown organically out of my own experiences within my own cultural milieu.*⁵⁶

Perhaps, Grenville's approach and that of other novelists is more in tune with what Anne Marie Willis, in relation to the writing of photography history, states as a case of creation to quench "today's prevailing taste for nostalgia..."⁵⁷ and to entertain a contemporary audience more so than present the facts.

Morris-Suzuki disagrees with Inga Clendinnen's thoughts on empathy as a destructive act when it comes to historical account. In recalling the past, Morris-Suzuki asserts that our link to the past is not just advanced by a purely factual and intellectual approach. And that the process:

also involves imagination and empathy. Museums, heritage sites, historical novels and films (as well as many academic history texts), invite us to enter into an empathetic relationship with the people of the past: to imagine their

⁵⁶ Ibid., 2006, p. 22.

⁵⁷ Willis, *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, 1988, p. 258.

*experiences and feelings, mourn their suffering and deaths and celebrate their triumphs. Often, this identification with others in the past in turn becomes the basis for rethinking or reaffirming our identity in the present.*⁵⁸

Historical accounts are, by their nature, fragmented. This is where the past is different to the present; only the main elements of any event are remembered. Those parties involved in the debate of the depiction of history, have recently recognized the role memory plays in the process of historical recording. Humanistic qualities are lost in historical recollection. This is where the narrative or art piece can substitute this loss of the author. An artist can take on the role of filling in the gaps that history delivers. The problem in the empiricist's mind is that filling in historical gaps with speculation, empathy and fiction disserves the pursuit of recounting historical truth.

The moments that are lost to historical account when, for example, Louis Daguerre introduced photography to the French Academy of Sciences on 7 January 1839 are his thoughts leading up to announcement. If not the beads of sweat on the top of his lip, perhaps the instance the first image emerged from the void and the realisation the immense change his discovery would have on civilization, have been lost to the past. All that the historian has left from this momentous time in history is a date, a process, an artifact and a biography.

⁵⁸ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 22.

These fragments of a life and event in history are all easily archived by an institution. There is a practical side to this style of archiving, if every drop of sweat was to be recorded from a figure in history then the search for information would become preposterous. Institutionalised History itself is only representative by nature and bound to present objective facts. Tessa Morris-Suzuki claims postmodernists' scepticism towards depiction of historical truth is not being as revolutionary as they would submit. Empiricists have considered the debate over the difference between a lived history and one that is remembered since before the nineteenth century.⁵⁹ Morris-Suzuki cites Alessandro Manzoni to illustrate this point:

*History not only openly confesses doubt but, when necessary, promotes it, sustains it, and attempts to substitute it for false convictions...History makes you doubt because it intends to have you doubt, quite unlike the historical novel which encourages you to believe while at the same time removing what is necessary to sustain belief. In the doubt provoked by history, the mind comes to rest – if not quite at its goal, at least at the limit of its possibilities.*⁶⁰

Considering the process a piece of history goes through before reaching an audience in a creative work, there can be little doubt that absolute truths (apart from dates and biography) do not exist,

⁵⁹ Ibid., 2005, p. 20.

⁶⁰ Alessandro Manzoni, *On the Historical Novel*, Sandra Bermann (trans.), Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1984, p. 74, quoted in Tessa Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us- Media, Memory, History*, Verso Books, New York, 2005, p. 20.

to suggest the contrary is irrational. Even the most empirical of historians can manipulate history through the act of choice, choice in their subject matter, choice of the inclusion or non-inclusion of facts. Morris Suzuki states:

Historical truthfulness thus involves a kind of ongoing dialogue, through which we listen to an expanding repertoire of voices from the past, tell and retell the stories that we have heard, and so define and redefine our position in the present. In this sense I want to suggest that it provides a possible starting point for combating historiographies of oblivion while accepting the impossibility of any complete and perfectly “correct” representation of the past.⁶¹

⁶¹ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 28.

CHAPTER 4

Museum Structure in Art Practice

This notion of “truth” has been part of the syntax of photography since its conception in the mid 1800s and is why photography and historical account complement each other so well. Jean Baudrillard relates to photographs as the artefacts of photography.⁶² Museum curators have used these artefacts and others since the early 1850s to construct the “truth” system of historical account. This sentiment of “truth” presented within the displays of museums is what the “historical consciousness”⁶³ of the lay-audience still assumes. Even with countless writings on the dubious nature of historical “truths” and the advent of digital imaging, photographs presented as artefacts can still “allow the detail to rise of its own accord into affective consciousness”.⁶⁴

It is important to briefly define the types of museums that exist, their purpose, and how they define history before looking further into the consumption of history⁶⁵ by a lay-audience. Gaynar Kavanagh cites the 1987 survey of British museums by David

⁶² Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Nicholas Zurbrugg, (ed.), Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997, p. 28.

⁶³ Mary Fulbrook, *Fact, Fantasy, and the German History*.

⁶⁴ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1984, p. 55.

⁶⁵ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 21.

Prince and Bernadette Higgins-Mc Loughlin when defining the types of museums that exist in the 21st century. Out of the numerous types presented in the survey, Kavanagh selects twelve museum types that he considers “broadly historical”⁶⁶:

- Archaeology and ethnology
- Architecture
- Decorative art
- Fine art
- Industrial archaeology
- Maritime history
- Military and service
- Music
- Rural social history
- Science
- Technology and transport
- Urban social history

Kavanagh continues:

*Even if a common definition could be found, the different approaches to collections and the sheer variety of current museum provision represents forces that will not be bound by simple formulas.*⁶⁷

Although it is clear that there will be endless recreations of the historical museum and curatorial policies, there are generic display

⁶⁶ Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, Leicester University Press, London. 1990, p. 3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 1990, p. 3.

methods devised in the 1850s that are still in use today. They include the use of artefacts, cabinets, labels, lighting and photographs. Along with the continual use of these methods of presentation and the introduction of multimedia presentations, Kavanagh says that museums also share a “broad philosophical framework through recognition that objects have value as evidence...and that their explanation through the medium of exhibition has genuine value.”⁶⁸

In relation to the curatorial practice, Kavanagh⁶⁹ summarises three points that must be considered when presenting history in a museum. They are:

- *The relevance to the public of the curatorial activity.*
- *The representation and interpretation of elements of the recent human past must be pursued through the diverse media that distinguish a museum as a public institution.*
- *The records and “histories” produced should be accessible to a wide audience, both now and in the future.*

In the *Poetic Museum*, Julian Spalding shares this same sentiment:

How can a museum encourage its visitors to look more intensely at less remarkable, though potentially fascinating things? Partly just by putting them into a museum. The artificiality of the museum space legitimises, for example, the

⁶⁸ Ibid., 1990, p. 3.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 1990, p. 54.

*presence of a shark in a tank in a gallery, whatever one thinks, it is a work of art. Over the last decade or so, modern art galleries have come increasingly to be like museums run by curators who have lost their marbles. The very existence of museums depends on their right to lift something out of one context and use it in another. The object itself has not changed; it is just that our view of it has.*⁷⁰

By the inclusion of historical works as reference points to contemporary practice and vice versa, the line between the museum and art gallery is blurring increasingly. Exhibition curators of *Looking South* at the Plimsol Gallery in Tasmania and *Breaking Ice* at the Adams Gallery in New Zealand included historical photographs to assist the audience in engaging with the contemporary works. Because of their “truth”, the photographs perform the duty of legitimising the other works on display, including the clearly constructed. The historical content attracts new audiences to the art galleries, people who may be unfamiliar or untrusting of art. These audience members approach a museum with the expectation that they will learn something new or at least have their existing knowledge on a subject reaffirmed. By placing historical works alongside contemporary ones, art galleries do what other museums have done for decades; give the people what they want and, more importantly, create a secure environment for the audience to engage with new information.

Mary Fulbrook writes:

⁷⁰ Julian Spalding, *The Poetic Museum: Reviving Historic Collections*, Prestel, Munich and New York, 2002, p. 65.

[for] most “laypeople” history is concerned with telling the (absolute) truth about the past: countering propaganda, myth, and legend with an honest, objective, unbiased attempt to tell it “as it really was”. For most lay visitors to historical museums and exhibitions, or lay viewers of television documentaries, or if there still are any lay readers of academic history books, there is an implicit assumption that what they are consuming is an accurate representation of some facet of the past as it actually happened. ⁷¹

Morris-Suzuki suggests the importance of guarding against the audience’s misreading of evidence by educating them in matters of representing historical “truths”. ⁷² The emphasis of such instruction would be to dispel the belief that the tools (including photographs) used by historians, curators or artists present complete true depictions of history.

Who benefits if this education does not take place or at least is limited? The audience and the artist profit by the continuation of “truth”. This can be a positive transaction between both parties. By not destroying the “truth” still functioning in most types of museums, historical accounts and photographs, we allow at least one form of access to the past to exist. With some of the spectator’s beliefs intact, the artist is able to penetrate the

⁷¹ Fulbrook, *Fact, Fantasy and German History*, 2000, pp. 3-34.
See: <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin26S00/b26fulbrookframe.html>>

⁷² Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, pp. 27-30.

collective consciousness of a reluctant audience. Through this access, Gaynor Kavanagh speculates that the audience can process issues of the future by belief in the past.⁷³

The display methods that have existed since the 1850s are perfect vehicles for an artist to initiate this transaction of the imagination. Photographs being a native source of communication in the museum environment and containing their own “truth” system have an extended value in this process. Of course, all depends on the knowledge a particular person brings to the photographs or other elements presented. However even with a glimmer of “truth”, an artist can encourage a false sense of security within the audience by presenting what is expected to be experienced in a museum. By borrowing established display methods, artists are able to embed their artwork into the audiences existing knowledge on a specific topic.

Artists such as Jean Fontcuberta and Patrick Pound have relied on their audiences’ beliefs in the museum system of discovery to present their concerns. These artists have in some way installed their work into or simulated the museum archive practice. The works produced have represented the artist’s everyday items as collectables, interacted with the collection to readdress narratives or create new works of art using archives. Whilst operating within such structures these artists’ works, as well as the *Douglas Summerland Collection*, are concerned with taking the audience beyond the conventions of institutions.

⁷³ Gaynor Kavanagh, *History Curatorship*, 1990, p. 4.

This practice of the artist interacting with the museum archive and theoretical constructs is a valid form of history making in the view of Mary Fulbrook. She states, “the facts alone are not enough”.⁷⁴ Facts or truth cannot successfully present themselves without the intervention of some interpretive process on behalf of the presenter. This process as we have already seen can take the form of including historical images with contemporary artwork or in a more extreme measure when an artist like Tim Hunkin fabricates new exhibits using established methods of museum presentation.

Fulbrook continues:

We can agree, against the more extreme postmodernists, that the facts are important and can exercise a form of veto power. But there is or has to be more to the defense of history than the appeal to the facts can deliver. There has, in short to be some means of combining fact and fantasy, that which can be said to be true or false as an individual statement, and the larger pictures that do not appear to be firmly anchored in the facts.

If we adhere to Baudrillard’s notion that “Art is generally nothing more than the metalanguage of banality,”⁷⁵ the artist’s last valuable role in society might be that of “history retelling” and “history

⁷⁴ Fulbrook. *Fact, Fantasy and German History*, 2000:3-34.
See: <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin26S00/b26fulbrookframe.html>>

⁷⁵ Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, 1997, p. 10.

construction". Where majorities of historians feel they must align themselves with a particular "paradigm"⁷⁶, artists can shift positions within the history debate, constantly seeking out the weakness in each formula to assist in presenting their concerns. As a result of postmodernism and the debates surrounding the splinter theories, artists have been able to implement fraudulent practices to draw attention to historical reality.

⁷⁶ Fulbrook, *Fact, Fantasy and German History*, 2000, pp. 3-34.
See: <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin26S00/b26fulbrookframe.html>>

CHAPTER 5

Image Structure

What Roland Barthes calls the “Punctum” and Jean Baudrillard struggles to find in contemporary art can, in the case of postcolonial portraiture such as Seydou Keita photographs, exist outside of the image’s frame. The Punctum, in fact, may just be the creative workings of a theorist to draw attention to the possible extent to which an audience member can interact with a photograph or piece of artwork. Barthes speculates that the Punctum is the detail in a photograph that triggers an emotional response from the audience. The problem is that the Punctum in a photograph for Barthes may not be the same for another audience member. Barthes goes as far as to state:

Many photographs are, alas, inert under my gaze. But even among those which have some existence in my eyes, most provoke only a general and so to speak, polite interest: they have no Punctum in them: they please or displease me without pricking me: They are invested with no more than Studium.⁷⁷

In *Camera Lucida* Barthes pays particular attention to a photograph by photographer Keon Wessing that depicts nuns and soldiers in the same image to express the difference between the

⁷⁷ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, Fontana Paperbacks, London, 1984, p. 27.

Studium and Punctum. In his essay “Baudrillard, Barthes, Burroughs, and ‘Absolute’ Photography”, Nicholas Zurbrugg uses this same image as a starting point to discuss the existence of the Punctum in Baudrillard’s theories.⁷⁸

Overall, this is not a good example to illustrate either concern. This is how Barthes describes the photograph:

*I was glancing through an illustrated magazine. A photograph made me pause. Nothing very extraordinary: the (photographic) banality of a rebellion in Nicaragua: a ruined street, two helmeted soldiers on patrol; behind them two nuns.*⁷⁹

He continues explaining why the image attracted his attention but did not retain it. An example of the non-existence of the Punctum; but for whom? Barthes, Zurbrugg, Baudrillard? Certainly not for this audience member.

This is in keeping with Barthes’ sentiments about how the audience brings their experiences to photographs. Barthes states there are two helmeted soldiers in the photograph but, in fact, there are three. It is with this third soldier, the one standing on the right hand street corner that the Punctum may exist. It’s the shiny black shoes, the rolled up jeans, the cigarette casually held, the

⁷⁸ Nicholas Zurbrugg (ed.), “Zurbrugg, Baudrillard, Barthes, Burroughs, and ‘Absolute’ Photography” in Jean Baudrillard, *Art and Artefact*, Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane. 1997, p. 160.

⁷⁹ R. Barthes, op.cit., 1984, p. 23.

wristwatch and sunglasses that hold the attention and perhaps suggest CIA operatives in 1979 Nicaragua.

Why did Barthes not mention this third soldier, and has this oversight caused a misreading of Wessings photograph? Was the CIA pleased with Barthes' oversight? Was Barthes a CIA operative following orders from the institution? All these questions could go into constructing a new historical account of Barthes (or a new piece of work for this artist). However, what the use of this example is intended to illustrate in this paper is that the Punctum is different for each audience member just as an experience within an exhibition can be. Perhaps the Punctum is not a point in some photograph but only the imagination and emotions of an audience member engaged.

Christopher Wright states:

Photographs trace multiple trajectories: for all their superficial fixity and their inclusion in structures like the archive that seek to contain them, they are processual and constantly in motion. What brings meanings to photographs are performances of them, specific readings and enactments. The photograph crystallizes these performances, providing a site where meanings both appear and disappear. What is important is not so much what the image contains, a meaning that resides within it, but what is

*brought to it, how it is used, and how it is connected to various trajectories.*⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Christopher Wright, *Supple Bodies in Photography's Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson, (ed.) & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 166.

CHAPTER 6

The Douglas Summerland Collection

The earlier works of Joan Fontcuberta, *Fauna* (Fig.4) and *Sputnik* and Patrick Pound *Memory Room* and *C.V. – A work in Progress* (Fig.5) have influenced the planning of this project.

Fontcuberta has stated that:

the meaning of a work highly depends on the institutional platform where it is presented. My works have often been conceived as a 'Trojan Horse' that should allow to tear down the walls; this is the defensive structure of a certain authority, those institutions. That is what happens when I present Fauna in the Natural Science Museum. The 'real' permanent collection seems in trouble with my collection of 'fake' animals and the visitor must determine the mistake in that confrontation.⁸¹

I had the privilege of seeing Fontcuberta's *Fauna* series at the Australian Centre for Photography as part of the Peter Hill curated exhibition *Stranger Than Truth* in 2002. I was only aware of Fontcuberta's *Sputnik* series at the time. In hindsight, having a lack of knowledge about *Fauna* was the best way to experience it as the artist intended. This made me vulnerable to all the hooks and triggers that Fontcuberta had put in place for his audience's

⁸¹ Joan Fontcuberta, *Non-reality virtual: An interview by Guillermo Yanez*
See: <http://malojo.com/ingles/_html/htmlsarticulos/jfontcuberta_entrevis.>

benefit. *Fauna* taught me about the importance of pace and the placement of details in fabrications.

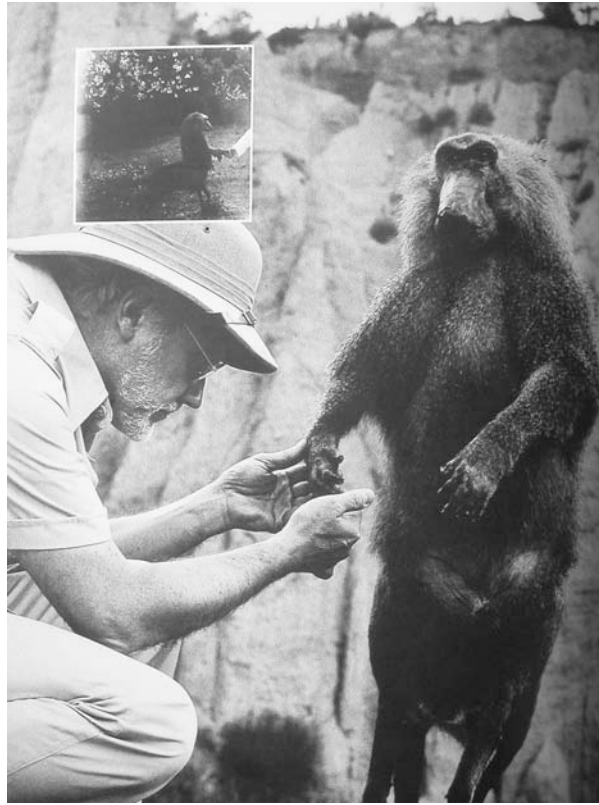


Fig.4: Joan Fontcuberta *The Professor examines Centaurus' hand* from *Fauna* ND ©1985.⁸²

For the *Douglas Summerland Collection*, the audience will have an assortment of historical facts presented to them of the protagonist's life. The cabinets will assist the audience to absorb this knowledge. Using the audiences "taste for nostalgia"⁸³ to capture their imagination, the historical subject matter will aid in drawing their attention to the video content of the exhibition.

The *Douglas Summerland Collection* is a more subdued affair on the audience's senses than Patrick Pound's piece *Memory Room*. Pound's work was also presented in the *Stranger Than Truth*

⁸² Peter Hill (ed.), *Fictions*, Photofile, April Edition 2000, p. 8.

⁸³ Willis, *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, 1988, p. 258.

exhibition in 2002 at the Australian Centre for Photography. In *Memory Room*, Pound brought together a multitude of disparate items into one space and then under the guise of a fictional character fanatically resolves the illogical links between his facts, which in a reality other than the artist's would be impossible.

The historical facts in the *Douglas Summerland Collection* are there for the audience's scrutiny and act as the foundation for their new knowledge base. In Pound's *Memory Room* his fictional character seems to present the audience with the results of past endeavours from the "imprisoning treadmill of our culture's passion"⁸⁴ and plays to audiences want of instant knowledge. Pound provides his audience with "A sacred hideaway from the horror of the redundancy of our souls and the quest to understand everything".⁸⁵



Fig.5: Patrick Pound CV: a work in progress © 1990 Photography by Kenneth Pleban.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Miller, *Sanctuary*, 2002, p. 6.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 2002, p. 6.

⁸⁶ Peter Hill (ed.), *Fictions*, Photofile April Edition 2000, p. 46.

Is this what Pound is really up too? The work is done in an amusing way and the audience is able to marvel at the artist's wit. Pound states that, "I am an artist who reads the world as an endless series of overlapping lists".⁸⁷ A sentiment that would easily prescribe to what is presented in *Memory Room*. But nothing is that easy in Pound's world. He continues with, "I am copying the world in the form of the index".⁸⁸ Surely the audience is part of his world. If this is the case, are they part of a temporary collection within *The Memory Room*? Pound turns the "gag" back onto the spectators and his fictional character's labour is really a mirror reflecting the souls of the audience.

Christian Caujolle when talking about Fontcuberta's *Fauna* uses the same analogy:

*To present "Fauna" in a science museum is neither a whim nor a gimmick. It shows an intellectual consistency that, while exploring the nature of photography, also holds up a mirror to the institutions that calls it – or ought to call it – into question.*⁸⁹

It is by way of imposing on the archive (traces of a spent life) that the *Douglas Summerland Collection* creates a history. Where *Fauna* depends on the audience's memory of previous photographs they are familiar with and *Memory Room* plays on the

⁸⁷ See: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/18/pound.php>

⁸⁸ See: <http://www.cabinetmagazine.org/issues/18/pound.php>

⁸⁹ Caujolle, Christian, *Joan Fontcuberta*, Phaidon Press Ltd., London, 2001, p. 11.

audience's thirst for a conclusion; through a reconstructed memory, the *Douglas Summerland Collection* presents the audience with their own fate.

The *Douglas Summerland Collection*, a practice balanced between fact and fiction, uses the findings of an artist in a museum archive to present the audience with a set of concerns. The intention behind the body of work is not to particularly engage with those who are aware of such tools of history construct such as the academic historians. Nevertheless, given the current climate towards the depiction of Australian History this could be timely. The objective is to interact with a lay-audience that invests time and money into visiting museums. The transaction of imaginations between the artist and the audience that will take place is concerned with the function and social ramifications that working with photographs as evidence brings to the formation of histories using museum methods.

The fabrication of a historical museum opposed to the presentation of the *Douglas Summerland Collection* in a contemporary art gallery seems to be the ideal portal for this transaction to take place. Such a constructed environment takes full advantage of the belief systems that an audience that frequents museums use to consume information.⁹⁰

The form of the *Douglas Summerland Collection* was developed from a previous project, *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South*, which dealt with the portrayal of the 1911-1913 British Antarctic

⁹⁰ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 21.

Expedition lead by Captain Robert Falcon Scott. This earlier project attempted to “bridge the gap between the knowledge of the past as it presented itself in the present and the past as it actually was”.⁹¹ Diary accounts and letters written by men of the expedition and the surviving self-portrait photographs taken by Captain Scott at the South Pole were referenced to achieve this new historical account.

Captain Scott’s history presents a classic example of how fact and fiction come together to set the historical perception of the audience. There are few gaps within the Scott story but just enough for subjective speculation to enter. Ever since his reported death in 1912, Captain Scott’s history has been polarised: from the building of the myth to protect the interests of the imperial reign to the detractors intent on using Scott’s name as another example of the imprudent nature of the British Empire. Both positions are products of the historical process, one preceding the other.

By using what already existed in the collective consciousness of the audience about Captain Scott, *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South* was able to modify a perception of a history. Scott’s narrative (that is all it is, a narrative) has been constructed over a period of hundred years to fulfill both political and artistic purposes. Once based on supposed fact, Scott’s story has been continuously twisted by the numerous published accounts so that the “real” history has been lost forever. E.H. Carr has written “the common sense view of history...[is that of] something written by individuals

⁹¹ Ibid., 2005, p. 21.

about individuals.”⁹² Nevertheless, perhaps this statement should be revised to reflect the current use of history too; the common sense view of history is that of something written by an individual to serve that individual’s needs. Captain Scott’s diaries of the events that took place during the 1911-1913 British Antarctic Expedition signaled this shift in the modern historical account.

The published diary accounts of Captain Scott have been heavily edited by the institutional power system of the time to service their needs. The original diaries, kept at the Scott Polar Research Centre in Cambridge, should also be approached with the knowledge that Captain Scott produced them for several reasons other than to tell the “Truth”. The British Antarctic Expedition of 1911 -1913 left England in debt. With the hope of recovering costs, Scott entered into a contract with the Daily Mail of London to write a daily account of the expedition’s progress. When Scott lay in the “Tent of Death”,⁹³ he well knew that this diary would now take on a much larger financial role, that of securing compensation for the expedition member’s families that perished with him. Captain Scott’s last entry into his diaries demonstrates his sense of their monetary value: “It seems a pity, but I do not think I can write more. For Gods sake look after our people.”⁹⁴

⁹² E.H.Carr, *What is History?*, Penguin Books, England, 1967, p. 54, quoted in A. Willis, *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, London 1988, p. 253.

⁹³ Petty Officer Williamson: Diary Entry November 12, 1912, Canterbury Museum Archives Christchurch, New Zealand.

⁹⁴ Reginald Pound, *Scott of the Antarctic*, World Books with Castle & Company Ltd, London 1968, p. 293.

Latitude 79 Degrees 50 minutes South consists of fictional artifacts, a series of large colour photographs that mimic the original photographs that were taken by Scott's men and the expedition's photographer Herbert Ponting. The fictional artifacts are presented in museum style cabinets with accompanying labels to help reinforce their historical significance. (Fig.6) These two elements come together to create an atmosphere of familiarity (even when present in the art gallery rather than a venue of history) for the audience. Interacting with the idea of perceived "truth" that such a display system promotes, enables the insertion of new knowledge into the "historical consciousness"⁹⁵.

In *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South* the cabinets of artefacts became an unexpected smokescreen to observe the process of the notion of "truth" held within a photograph and the variety of readings that come from numerous spectators⁹⁶. This act of fabrication could be seen as subversive, but the intention is to add, not to subtract from the audience's experience when dealing with photography and history. (See Appendix 1)

⁹⁵ Fulbrook, *Fact, Fantasy and German History*, 2000, pp. 3-34.
See: <<http://www.ghi-dc.org/bulletin26S00/b26fulbrookframe.html>>

⁹⁶ Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 1984, p. 9.



Fig.6: Cabinet from the Hobart presentation of *Latitude 79 degrees 5 minutes South*, showing the image "Tent of Death" in the background, 2005.

I have never intentionally dispelled an audience's belief in the photographs or the artifacts that appear in *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South*. Although there is the existence of a lighter side, the "joke" to the work, this is a by-product, not the main concern. If an audience member has a life-fulfilling experience, they are allowed to leave the exhibition with that intact. Another audience member might experience the jubilation of finding the fraud or disgust that

the artist is preying upon their “truth” system. It is the variety of readings and experiences in regards to authenticity that is the main interest of presenting this exhibition. An ethical consideration in the use of photographs and artifacts by Tagg’s institutions of power in the presentation of historical facts can draw in the most vigilant of audience members.

The Venue: The *Douglas Summerland Collection* was exhibited in February 2007 at the Palm House (Fig.7) within the grounds of the Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney. This venue is no stranger to presenting artists’ works that deal with the archive and the notion of presenting history. In 2001, Robyn Stacey displayed the series *Hot House 2*⁹⁷ consisting of digitally enhanced images of species from the National Herbarium. Before this, the artist Michael Goldberg installed the work *Ground Zero*⁹⁸ into the Palm House as part of *Perpecta* 1996.



Fig.7: Palm House Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, February 2007.

⁹⁷ See: <<http://www.stillsgallery.com.au/artists/stacey/>>

⁹⁸ See: <<http://www.michael-goldberg.com/main.html>>

The Palm House in Sydney's Royal Botanic Gardens was the third on a list of venues that were approached to exhibit the *Douglas Summerland Collection*. The Sydney Maritime Museum and the Macleay Museum were unsuccessfully solicited. Of these two, the Sydney Maritime Museum has a record of presenting temporary exhibitions in the institution's South Gallery and the curatorial mission seemed to link most closely to the Summerland archive. After several months of correspondence and a submission of an exhibition plan, the museum declined the proposal due to having no vacancy in their programme. (See Appendix 2) The Macleay Museum also requested an exhibition plan after a phone call and several emails. To this date no reply has been received.

The advantage that these two venues have over the Palm House is that they are well-established museums. It would have been easier using the existing display policies of these venues to assimilate the *Douglas Summerland Collection* into a historical framework that would convince an audience. Alas, this type of presentation will have to wait until this project is installed in the Port Chalmers Maritime Museum in late 2007. For now there is the Palm House to consider, a venue with a historical significance of its own and a very liberal policy on the work it will exhibit.

There have been several considerations made for this venue all of which have taken into account how to best present the work to obtain:

- maximum audience experience
- a balance between the suspension of "Truth" and the fostering of doubt

- a clear expression of the body of research.

Just presenting the Whanganui River photographs taken in October 2005 as large prints mounted on aluminium, with the view of presenting an art gallery experience, was considered. The images do work on their own as single or series pieces and may do so in the future as a more commercial venture. However, their function in this exhibition is to take an audience on a journey down a particular river during a specific period of history. Overall, the only plausible option to achieve this artist's objectives was to construct a museum type experience (Fig.8), consisting of banners, cabinets, artefacts and the video work of an artist in residence. It is in this form that the audience was able to clearly explore the notions of "Truths".



Fig.8: Internal view of the Douglas Summerland Collection installation at the Palm House Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney, February 2007.

Cabinets and Artefacts: There is a transformation that takes place once a cabinet is introduced into the space. Encapsulation of the photograph or object brings a new sense of meaning to an item that does not exist in other forms of presentation. The *Douglas Summerland Collection* contained twelve cabinets (Fig.9) that housed the Whanganui River photographs, artefacts from the protagonist's life and several small (7 inch) LCD screens.



Fig.9: Cabinet with LCD screen, artefact and inkjet print at the Palm House Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney February 2007.

The artefacts are all fabrications in one form or another. None have any direct link to the originator of the album of photographs. They are either from this artist's personal collection of family mementos or purchased from the eBay Edwardian maritime auctions. Their primary function as objects is to account for the absence of the protagonist. Most of the artefacts originate from the period of Douglas Summerland and some have been modified to mimic ones that did exist during the Edwardian period. They are

stereotypes in themselves of the masculine. The pipe, playing cards, oyster knife, etc. reflect the perceived notions that the audience might have of such a historical character. They transport the fictional into some type of fact.

A performance that I have delivered on several occasions is that of handing around an artefact while giving an artist talk. The sense of touch seems to materialise the past. One example is the geological sample used in the *Latitude 79 degrees 5 minutes South* artist talk. When told that the specimen was retrieved from the sled found outside Captain Scott's last camp, "The Tent of Death", the audience members handled this common rock with a sense of awe. Introduced to the audience is the notion that they can practically feel the cold of the Beardmore Glacier from where the artefact was collected from by Scott and his men.

Several members of the audience usually agree with the sentiment. Each exhibition of this project contains a new fabricated rock sample picked up in the area of the venue, usually from the side of the road (ACP), railway siding (Port Chalmers) or quayside (Hobart).

By such a simple performance the audience's attention is drawn back to the images for a second "knowledgeable" reading. A similar device was used in the *Douglas Summerland Collection*. This time the audience was greeted with the standard sign found in a museum or gallery: "Do Not Touch Exhibits". However, the temptation to touch the artefacts was increased by the fact that the cabinets were missing their glass tops. What should have been protected was not.

In the *Douglas Summerland Collection* the artefacts filled in the blanks more than redirect the audience's attention. The artefacts were engineered so that the audience would continually think of Douglas Summerland (the man) while looking at the photographs in the cabinet. A key artefact was a sailor's "Dixie cup" hat, which can be traced back to the author of the maritime images presented on the room banners. The accompanying label to this item purposefully referenced the banner image to serve as a reassurance of "truth" for the audience member. The artefacts coupled with the labels validate the history presented.

On first appearance, the artefact with a standard museum label by its side will look legitimate. It was only through an eye for detail or extensive knowledge of the subject that an artefact as fake was revealed. This is not a failing in the work but another trigger which, if released, can set in motion an additional reading of the work. The artefacts also served the purpose to confuse certain audience members that were aware of my art practice with the aim to reset their memory. This is also the function of the cracked glass treatment (Fig.10) on the prints that the cabinets house.



Fig.10: Fabricated image of the Whanganui River 2005.

Both artefact and print can cause a two-way perception, one of truth and the other doubt. A possible dilemma that the audience member might have experienced is this: I know this item (A) is fact but I think this item (B) is fiction. But if (A) is not fact could (B) point to the truth? The audience at some stage of their viewing will know Douglas Summerland existed because they are presented with the truth generated by the object.

However, due to the number of triggers set in this exhibition they may at any moment experience the impulse to rethink their new knowledge. The audience should slowly ask questions of the authenticity of history and how this affects their everyday experience.

Display Method: Only one or two artefacts were presented in each cabinet. Each item invested with its own significance in the life of Douglas Summerland helped the audience construct of a narrative. The limitation of artefacts prevented “case stuffing”, a term and device used by UK artist Tim Hunkin in his 1996 project *The Secret Life of the Home* presented at the Science Museum in London. This display device of jamming as much artefact into one cabinet is useful when approaching board histories or extended periods in time. However, when dealing with an individual or a brief moment in history this “case stuffing” can be more of a hindrance in forming the narrative than a benefit.

Another device of displaying artefacts that was avoided in this exhibition is what I call the “volley method”. In this style of presentation a number of examples of similar items are placed side by side to give an idea of the breath of the collection on display. It can also serve as a way to validate an item and understand a particular technology in use by the subject in question.

An example of this method is found in the exhibit *Cook's Pacific Encounters* on show at the National Museum of Australia in 2006. This exhibit presented more than 350 artefacts from the Cook-Forster Collection of the University of Gottingen, Germany. The format of display consisted of large cabinets that each housed numerous samples of a similar artefact. There were at least three cabinets that contained examples of paper textile from the collection and one large case of fishing hooks. Labels that

presented the possible origin, date, materials and the items descriptive title accompanied the artefacts.

This vast collection of artefacts was supported by an antechamber which the audience passed through as they entered the main exhibition. The room contained “Cook-iana”⁹⁹ sourced from several other national institutions. The antechamber consisted of a portrait oil painting of Captain James Cook, illustrations of the demise of Cook at the hands of natives, charts, maps, personal items and lengthy text panels. This room was designed to allow the audience access to some knowledge of the collector before they addressed the collection. Unfortunately, the information in the antechamber was too broad and the text panels presented were too drawn out to achieve this purpose.

The history felt estranged and distant which dispelled any empathy with the collector or the maker. There was a sense of removal created by this form of display. Perhaps this is an example of true historical presentation that historians such as Inga Clendinnen lament over. I was left with a sense of little satisfaction and the lingering thought that the curators of this exhibit had made little attempt to engage with their public’s imagination.

The *Douglas Summerland Collection* was presented in a way that fostered a transaction between the curator and audience as their ideas of history came together. The particular display methods used created room for the audience to meld their experiences with

⁹⁹ Crispin Hull, “Cook’s Souvenirs”, Special Promotion Section The Sydney Morning Herald, 24-25 June 2006, pp. 2-3.

the historical content delivered. Tim Hunkin describes it as an audience “creating their own interpretation and stories relating the exhibit to their own experience.”¹⁰⁰

The floor plan of the exhibition at the Palm House took into account the way the majority of audience members address a museum or art gallery display. Hunkin observes that “if you watch people for a short time it’s obvious they don’t go around a gallery in any logical order; they flit from one exhibit to another, occasionally getting engrossed in one detail.”¹⁰¹ The result of this action is that the audience does not obtain the complete narrative or “story”¹⁰² that is presented. The cabinets in the Douglas Summerland exhibit were presented in a non-linear fashion to take advantage of Hunkin’s observations. The floor plan broke the space up so that the audience could approach the work from either the left or the right.

The Photographs: Cabinets within this exhibition housed the photographs taken as part of the research project on the lower section of the Whanganui River in October 2005. These photographs retrace a similar journey taken by the author of the album sometime from 1920 to 1940. For the benefit of the narrative the new images are dated circa 1912 and credited to Douglas Summerland, not Peter Fitzpatrick.

¹⁰⁰ <<http://www.timhunkin.com>>

¹⁰¹ Ibid.: no pagination

¹⁰² Ibid.: no pagination

The photographs taken in 2005 functioned on a similar operative as the “Tent of Death” image in the *Latitude 79 degrees 5 minutes South* project; both fill a gap in a history. The image “Tent of Death” illustrates the written accounts of the rescue party findings in Captain Scott’s tent. The Whanganui River images extend on the photographs that a photographer took during what can be assumed by the accumulated images in the album as a shore leave in New Zealand. (See Appendix 3)

The audience was presented with ten to twelve of these history gap fillers. (Fig.11) By the addition of dust, scratches and the subtraction of information through the breaking of the glass plates these images have the presence of time embedded. The missing elements of the images were as important as the resolved parts. Through such a treatment it is possible to instil a sense of wonder and authentication into the work. The black void is a spacer for the audience’s imagination and adheres to the principles Morris-Suzuki describes as the function of historical novels of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries:

The novel presented the past as a social phenomenon – a process of change – in which the living experience of all individuals was bound up. This vision has two effects. It encourages people to project the processes of the past into the present, and to see their own lives as shaped by the forces of history. At the same time it also encourages them to direct their personal consciousness backwards in time, and to see the actions of ordinary people in the past...as contributing to the course of historical events in ways which

*are open to imaginative reconstruction and ethical scrutiny.*¹⁰³

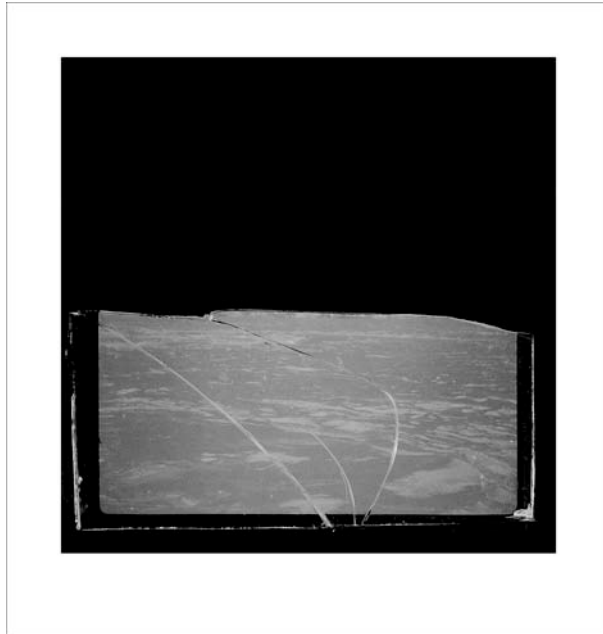


Fig.11: Fabricated image of the Whanganui River 2005.

The river photographs were labelled as digital fine art reproductions of Douglas Summerland's original lanternslides. The process used to print these images left no doubt that they are digital reproductions and the 24 inch format enhances their status as fine art. The addition of digital recreations could be viewed as counterproductive to the delivery of the authenticity of the images.

However, digital reproduction is a growing part of how museums disseminate their archives and the life experience of the audience member. It is becoming an accepted part of practice for someone

¹⁰³ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us: Media, Memory, History*, 2005, p. 40.

working in the regeneration of an archive, public or private, to employ digital technology. These images are constructed for the debate of authenticity to take place. Questions possibly posed by the digital process are countered by the cracks and missing pieces of the images.

The digital print images directly inform about the process of working with an archive. They also deal with the concept of historical construction alluding to the purposeful deletion of information in archives to serve the purpose of the institution. For the “experts” that invest some time with the images, they will come to the conclusion “the original” lanternslides are fabrications. The glancing general public, however, will be seduced by the photographic “truth”.

Video Pieces: As the audience dealt with the contents of the cabinets they also needed to consider the video work created by the artist in residence in the archive. These pieces promoted a disruptive quality to the exhibition environment. There were three delivery points for this video work.

- Small LCD screens placed in the cabinets
- One large monitor towards the far end of space
- Two smaller monitors mimicking a security point.

In a similar vein to the film *Forgotten Silver*, by Peter Jackson and Costa Botes, the audience was presented with snippets of film footage captured by Douglas Summerland on his adventures. The majority of hand processed super 8 footage (Fig.12) was taken on

the Whanganui River and off the coast of the Otago Peninsula New Zealand in 2005. This footage is inter-cut with single chip mini DV footage taken at the same time. Once more this blending of the supposed historical and new digital technology guided the audience's imagination in a particular direction.



Fig.12: Super 8 footage Otago Peninsula 2005.

Unlike *Forgotten Silver*, the silver-based footage presented in the *Douglas Summerland Collection* contained no significant historical event.¹⁰⁴ All they deliver are images of the mundane visuals of Summerland's life, the sea, river and wildlife. As the video works progress they begin to present the "Art" component of the exhibition to the audience. Unless particular attention was paid to the time period the Douglas Summerland narrative takes place, the video works seemed remarkably out of place. Again, this trigger was only be tripped if the audience's eye is trained towards the details.

¹⁰⁴ *Forgotten Silver*, video recording, Costa Botes & Peter Jackson, First Run Features, US Distributor, 1995.

The process of engagement with the video work was governed by the five to ten minute loop duration of each piece. Although similar in their duration, the pieces had a random feel as if they have taken on a life of their own. I have experienced this same atmosphere in the kinetic works of Australian artist Ken Unsworth. One such piece by Unsworth is *The Skidderump*, produced in 2000, which entraps the audience imagination by its air of random control.¹⁰⁵

The pinnacle of the randomness in the Douglas Summerland exhibition was present at the security post installed in a corner of the temporary museum. This location contained two monitors that flash security style images of the exhibition. Interlaced with these images was footage taken after a six-hour hike on the island of Rangitoto (Fig.13). Also appearing on these monitors was a clip of a ceramic ashtray that depicts the universal stereotype image of a “Savage” laden with spent rifle cartages. The security monitors were placed on an angle so that the audience would only become aware of their content after spending some time with the exhibit.



Fig.13: Footage from Rangitoto Island 2005.

¹⁰⁵ See: <<http://esvc000946.wic004u.server-web.com/Biennale2002/pdf/kenunsworth.PDF>>

The Imagery: Given the historical location of the Palm House there was serious consideration in the introduction of Aboriginal imagery into the exhibit. Postcards produced by the Adelaide photographer G.Muller¹⁰⁶ or those of Sydney based company Kerry & Co¹⁰⁷ could easily be presented as artefacts of Douglas Summerland. This would, however, implicate the protagonist more than the era. By shifting the imagery away from the historical site, the exhibition may be able to present a broader view of the institutionalisation of history, while avoiding the didactic. Replacing the site-appropriate Aboriginal imagery with a stereotype of the “Savage” may raise questions about guilt by association for the audience. Morris-Suzuki claims:

*The prejudices which sustained past acts of aggression also live on into the present, and lodge themselves in the minds of the present generation unless we take active steps to remove them. Though we may not be responsible for such acts of aggression in the sense of having caused them we are ‘implicated’ in them, in the sense that they cause us.*¹⁰⁸

To a certain extent the imagery of the “Savage” peels away at stereotypes that are infused in this artist’s subconscious. Perhaps it is social suicide to state this but the “Savage” is still intertwined with my reading of the plight of indigenous communities in this and

¹⁰⁶ Nicolas Peterson, *The Changing Photographic Contract in Photography’s Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005 p. 126.

¹⁰⁷ Willis, *Picturing Australia: A History of Photography*, 1988, p. 258.

¹⁰⁸ Morris-Suzuki, *The Past Within Us- Media, Memory, History*, 2005.

other countries. Although we have set dates for colonialism, its sentiments still live in society today. In the catalogue essay for the exhibition *Sanctuary* Alex Miller states:

*The left intellectual of today is as much a colonist as any Queensland pastoralist of the mid-Nineteenth Century was. Left intellectuals, however, often write as if they are unaware of being implicated themselves in the transformed agenda of European colonialism, but consider themselves to be morally in occupation of a higher ground...Indeed the left intellectual is not only a beneficiary of the past processes of colonialism but is also embedded within colonialism's transformed contemporary project.*¹⁰⁹

The “Savage” icon in the exhibition is in place to pose questions to the audience on how such stereotypes still exist in this era where we can quickly correct history through the media. Perhaps the government of today should be busy with a program of understanding rather than constructing a national identity based on the defunct notions of mateship or what E.H.Carr calls the “subordination of reason to the assumptions of the existing order.”¹¹⁰

In the Douglas Summerland maritime images of the crewmembers, mateship is visually present. It is for this reason they appear on the

¹⁰⁹ Alex Miller, *Sanctuary*, (an exhibition catalogue for *Sanctuary* – and other island fables curated by Maudie Palmer, Herring Island, Parks Victoria Gallery 14 February – 13 March 2002 by Lyndell Brown, Charles Green and Patrick Pound) University Melbourne Press, 2002, p. 1.

¹¹⁰ Carr, *What is History?*, 1967, p. 155.

exhibition banners. On the surface these images read as documents of high jinks on the seven seas. A reading of mateship, the one item that our government is determined to drag out of Australia's past and entrench it into this nation's future, closely follows this. It is only when the image of Douglas Summerland's friends *Charlie and Nute* (Fig.14) is addressed that statements of mateship evaporate into questions of onboard relationships. The embrace that appears in this photograph is filled with such tenderness that the stereotype of the "Sailor" comes to mind. This is a valuable example of how images bear different meanings through time.¹¹¹



Fig.14: Front cover of the album discovered in the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum archive 2004.

This image is a key point that dissolves the hardy heterosexual mateship within the series of photographs into what a conservative audience may read as sordid. Or would such conservatism see

¹¹¹ Geoffrey Batchen, *Orders Profoundly Altered: Photography and Photographies*, West 1, 1, 1989, p. 18.

only the surface value in the images? *All Dressed Up and No Where to Go* (Fig.15) another image in the album, coupled with the knowledge provided by the *Charlie and Nute* photograph, drifts between a well known maritime tradition of crossing the equator into a sexual performance heavily embedded with the gaze¹¹². Through the passage of time, questions of what life on board the *William Mitchell* and the *D.H.Sterling* really involved appear.

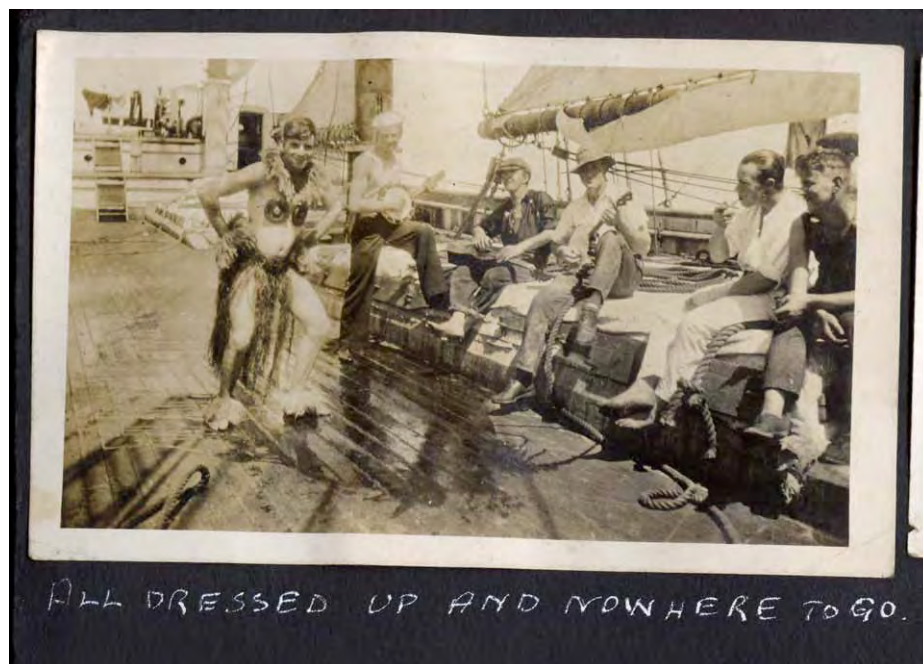


Fig.15: "All Dressed Up And Nowhere to Go" from the album discovered in the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum archive 2004.

Another component of the exhibition is the excerpts from letters that appeared as either text panels within the cabinets or on another set of banners. The origins of these letters are from my family archive, written by my grandfather to my grandmother in the spring of 1913. These letters contain the recordings of everyday

¹¹² Christopher Wright, *Supple Bodies in Photography's Other Histories*, Nicholas Peterson & Christopher Pinney (eds.), 2005, p. 150.

events; they are not overt love letters yet they do contain a lover's code.

The excerpts are a point of contact for the audience and counteract the messages of the onboard ship images. Containing no more information than the signing off, "I remain your loving husband" and a lover's code, these extracts are engineered to give a particular impression about the relationship of Douglas Summerland and his wife.

The purpose behind all these cross points of reference was twofold. First, they represent the passage of research that has taken place over the past four years. This research has been so fluid that it is difficult to conclude that it resolves any single concern. It does, however, truly reflect my art practice to date. The second purpose was to allow the audience enough triggers to access the research while also accessing what Rembert Heuser describes "as a chance for initiating more precise, surprising and motivated contextualisations [of an archive]; an approach that goes beyond those adhering to a mere logic of reconstruction."¹¹³

¹¹³ Afterimage, November/December 2005: Review Section, "Rembert Hueser Review " *Archival (RE) Collections*, Nacey Ann COYNE: Archiving Memory Uni Of Minnesota, Elmer L. Anderson Library. Feb 7-Sept 30 2005, p. 48.

CONCLUSION

The *Douglas Summerland Collection* addresses a moment in history that exists in the archives of the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum. This history represented in an album of photographs holds little relevance to today's society. It speaks of the past and not to the future. It is history lost.

To speak to this history it has been important to look at how photographs were used by the generation from which this album comes to us. As a result, the Victorian and Edwardian periods have been researched in an attempt to lay a foundation for the critique of the photographs within the album. This study moved into the institutionalisation of photographs understood by Postmodern theories which lead to the wider discussion of the contemporary depiction of history by artists. The research has resulted in an internal manipulation of an archive to restructure the authenticity of the photographs it contains.

To exhibit the findings of this research, the structure of museum presentation was analysed and adapted for the final presentation. In hindsight, the use of the museum model was not the most effective way to present the resulting body of work.

The components that went into the construction of the museum environment at the Palm House were overcomplicated to the trained eye. The video work and Wanganui River photographs that

were introduced to the exhibit to reference the foundations of the research were muted by formal elements such as the museum labels, cabinets and artefacts. What was meant to be jarring to the audience was somehow engulfed by the confines of the museum environment. The video pieces were less obtrusive on the audience's experience than was my intention. For the majority of the general audience that I observed over the two weeks of the exhibition, the digestion of the new knowledge presented was effortless. Even the crudeness of construction of the cabinets did not obstruct their acceptance of the fabricated facts. I attribute this to how the museum presentation was utilised to deliver the history on display.

The exhibition received on average sixty people per day. Of these, approximately eight patrons per day spent more than fifteen minutes with the exhibit. These people on some level engaged with the work. Some of the other attendances were discouraged by the humidity within the Palm House, while the majority had no interest in the topic and the *Douglas Summerland Collection* failed to connect with their imagination.

Truth is so embedded into the audience's knowledge base that it has become unrecognisable. It has become an automatic given that the questioning of truth of a photograph or historical fact is defunct. After twenty years of audience observation, albeit unquantifiable, the audience of the *Douglas Summerland Collection* behaved in a way that was not unexpected. Perhaps in the presentation structure I played too much to this, my knowledge

base, that the exhibition was closed to presenting the audience with any new experience or revelation.

The relevance of the *Douglas Summerland Collection* to the debate of history recording and depiction has somewhat diminished over the four years of this research. The topic of photographic truth and its use in the recording of history has been extensively studied since the advent of Postmodernism. Except in the institutions such as museums that depend on its existence it, photographic truth holds no critical weight today. The *Douglas Summerland Collection* is a simulation¹¹⁴ of a reality that once was, a copy of the copy of the original argument. If the *Douglas Summerland Collection* offers anything more to the arguments of such artists works as Patrick Pound or Joan Fontcuberta, it is the historical subject matter studied. Beyond this the *Douglas Summerland Collection* is only a mere echo of previous Postmodern concerns.

Postmodernism taught us to question the foundations of image, truth and the institution. That moment is in itself history and now the questions asked of history and photography in regards to authenticity must be laid to rest. It is only through spending time making images that speak of the present that art can assist in history remaining relevant to society. Photography has never been about recording reality but the action of creating a reality that is easier to archive.

¹¹⁴ Jean Baudrillard, Sheila Faria Glaser (trans.), *Simulacra and Simulation (The Body In Theory: Histories of Cultural Materialism)*, University of Michigan Press, Michigan, 1995.

APPENDIX 1

During the presentation of *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South* in 2005 at the Plimsol Gallery in Hobart artist Helena Psotova had this experience to report:

There was a funny moment at the opening, which I thought you would have enjoyed...

I was looking at your images and suddenly I felt this piercing gaze on me. Standing next to me was a respectable looking lady.

Smiling I nodded to her, saying that it (your work) is quite hilarious. Her eyes opened in disbelief and defensively she replied: "You find THIS hilarious!?" Surprised, I said that yes, I think it is very funny but she seemed upset even more. Then I thought to myself that perhaps she could have been a distant relative of Mawson... So, I explained to her that it has been set up, that you actually did not go down there to make the pictures... (sorry about giving it away..) She pondered the idea. Next thing, I heard her telling someone else how quirky your work was and with them admiring the details, searching through the little clues. No doubt, many more had fun looking closer.

*The subtlety and playfulness with potential seriousness are rare to find and I liked it very much...*¹¹⁵

At the same opening there was a heated discussion going on between staff of the Australian Antarctic Division on how such an extensive collection of Captain Scott artefacts had come to exist in the archives of the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum.

¹¹⁵ Email to a Peter Fitzpatrick from Tasmanian artist Helena Psotova April 2005.

This museum allowed the use of their name on the labels to help authenticate the items. There have been numerous other experiences expressed by the audience from the different shows of *Latitude 79 degrees 50 minutes South*. They have included an audience member commenting on how they had studied the artifacts “all their life” and how seeing them finally altogether, under one roof was life fulfilling. Others have been amazed at the fact that Captain Scott was able to take colour photographs at the South Pole in 1912 or at the grotesque nature of the image taken inside the “Tent of Death”.

APPENDIX 2



Peter Fitzpatrick
PO Box 518
Civic Square
ACT 2608

28 July 2006

Dear Peter

Thank you for the correspondence, and catalogues, on your proposal for an exhibition at the Australian National Maritime Museum based on the Douglas Summerland Album in the collection of Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum, New Zealand.

Your interpretation of Douglas Summerland's album is an interesting perspective that has been considered by our exhibition team. It would certainly be a different kind of exhibition for our visitors.

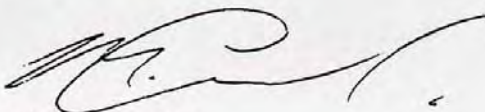
Our temporary exhibition gallery program is scheduled for several years ahead and unfortunately it is not possible to offer an exhibition space at the moment.

If you are in agreement I would like your proposal to be held on file for possible future consideration.

Thank you for your interest in contacting us about an exhibition, and my apologies for the delay

Best wishes

Yours sincerely

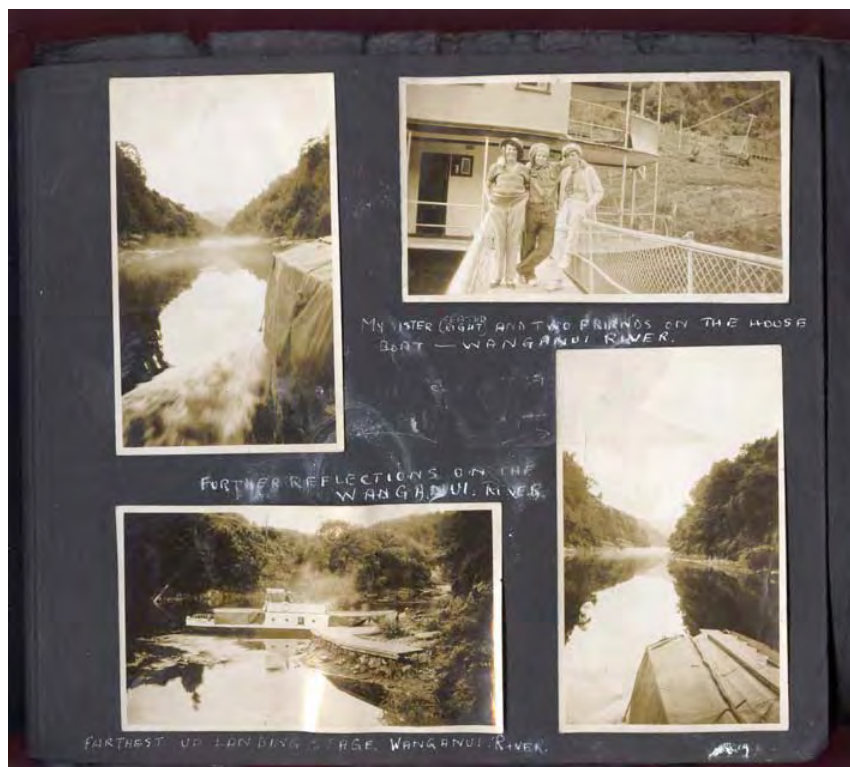


Michael Crayford
Assistant Director
Collections and Exhibitions

APPENDIX 3

The last pages in the album contain photographs taken by the protagonist on a trip up the Whanganui River by riverboat with his sister and two of her friends. The set of photographs contain an image of the three women standing on the boat's deck, one of the boat itself and six images titled Reflections on the Whanganui River.

Compared to the other maritime images in the album this set seems out of place. It was this disjunction that inspired my solo canoe trip down the Whanganui River in 2005. These images raise the question of what the photographer was doing in that particular place taking such photographs. Are these just a set of images one finds in most amateur collections or are they pointing to a particular interest of the photographer or to an extensive study of the region which is now lost to history?



The last page in the album discovered in the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum archive 2004.

APPENDIX 4

The name of Douglas Summerland is a fictional creation.

Douglas: Anglicised form of the Gaelic name *Dubhghlas*, which meant "dark river" or "blood river" from Gaelic *dubh* "dark" and *glais* "water, river".¹¹⁶

Summerland: In the Victorian and Edwardian periods Summerland was recognised by mystics as a place where after death an individual soul would pass to if they had learnt their life lesson. This notion of Summerland can be traced back to the Swedish theologian Emanuel Swedenborg 1688 - 1772.¹¹⁷

The number seventeen was an unlucky number for Captain Robert Falcon Scott.

17 Dec 1911: Amundsen realising he has excess fuel for the return journey from the South Pole, deliberates whether he should leave it for Scott. He decides, having faith in Scott's organization skills, to take it with him just incase of misadventure. Scott's party runs out of fuel on the return trip home.

17 Jan 1912: Scott reaches the South Pole only to find Amundsen has beaten him to the prize.

17 Feb 1912: Petty Officer Evans dies at the foot of the Beardmore Glacier.

17 March 1912: Captain Oates walks to his death in a blizzard.

The name Douglas Summerland is made up of seventeen letters.

¹¹⁶ See: <<http://www.behindthename.com/php/view.php?name=douglas>>

¹¹⁷ See: <<http://swedenborg.newearth.org/>>

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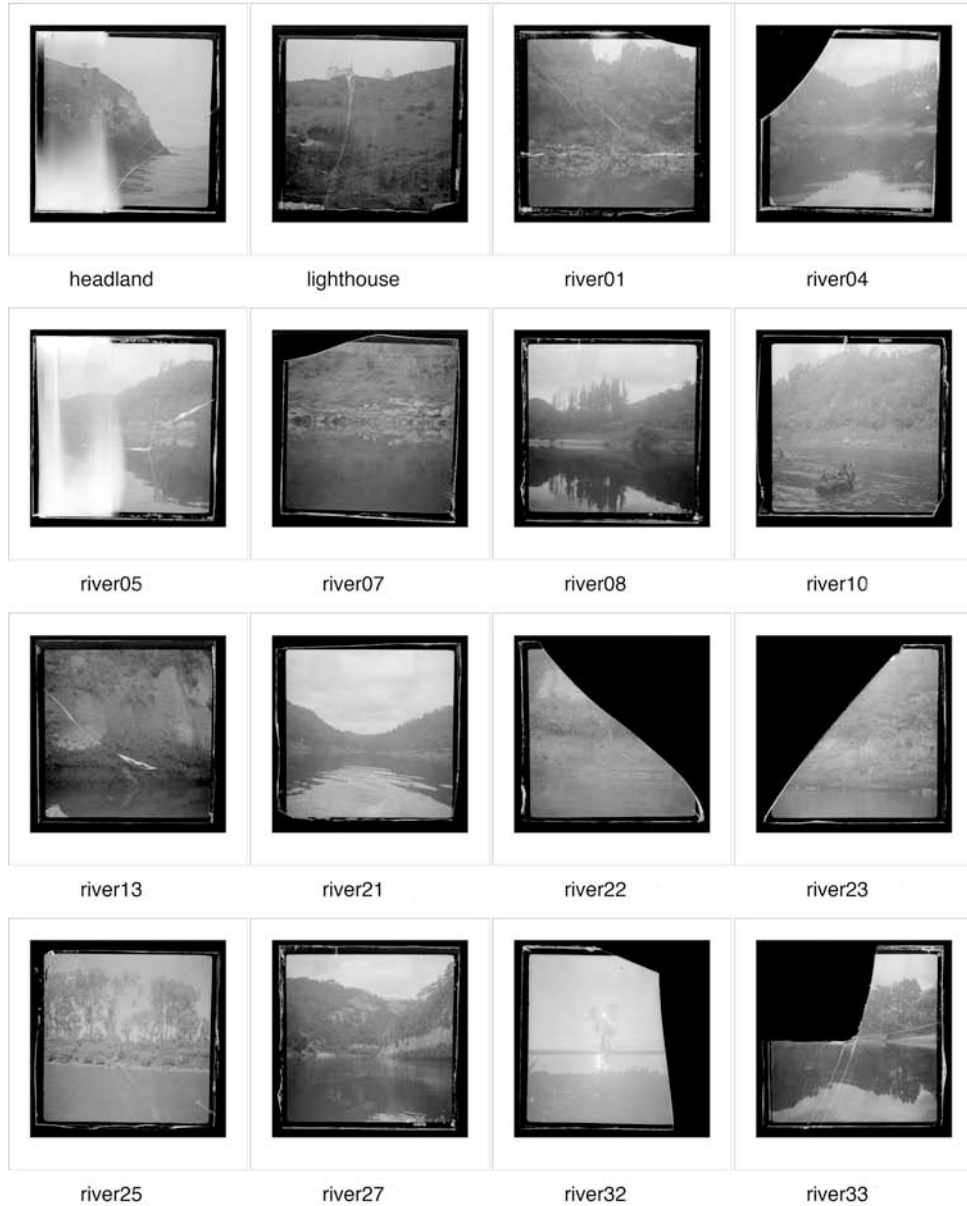
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CATALOGUE OF WORKS

Exhibition Prints



Images printed on Des Soft Cotton Inkjet Paper 26 x 26 inches using Epson 9600 printer. Pigment Prints. From the Douglas Summerland Collection 2007.

Video Works



Colourfinalsuper8



colourriver



feet



head-fruit



king



lighthouse



native



rip



seaweed



smoke



smokestack



walk

Super 8 films transferred to DVD:

Colourfinalsuper8	(LCD Screen 1)	Duration: 3.12 minute loop
Colourriver	(LCD Screen 2)	Duration: 2.39 minute loop
Lighthouse	(LCD Screen 3)	Duration: 1.06 minute loop
Smokestack	(LCD Screen 4)	Duration: 1.11 minute loop

Single Chip Mini DV Footage:

Feet	(Main Screen)	Duration: 6.24 minute loop
Head-Fruit	(LCD Screen 3 Altern)	Duration: 10.14 minute loop
King	(Security Monitors)	Duration: Varied sequence loop
Native	(Security Monitors)	Duration: Varied sequence loop
Rip	((LCD Screen 3 Altern)	Duration: 10.14 minute loop
Seaweed	(Main Screen)	Duration: 2.45 minute loop
Smoke	(Main Screen)	Duration: 2.42 minute loop
Walk	(Main Screen)	Duration: 2.15 minute loop

Installation

Installation of the Douglas Summerland Collection in The Palm House Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney 16 – 28 February 2007.



A.



B.



C.



D.



E.



F.

A. Museum display method showing banners and album in glass case.

B. Cabinet with LCD screen, inkjet print and artefact C. Cabinet with artefact and inkjet print D. Artefact label E. Spoon artefact F. Mock security station

Website

1. The URL: <http://www.summerland.org.nz>

summerland.org.nz

NOW SHOWING
16 - 28 February 2007
The Palm House at the
Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney



This web site documents an independent research project and may not reflect the views of the Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum Board. All enquires should be sent to the info@summerland.org.nz

Sponsored by



The Port Chalmers Regional Maritime Museum has the pleasure of presenting the Douglas Summerland Collection.

2. The Index page.

summerland.org.nz

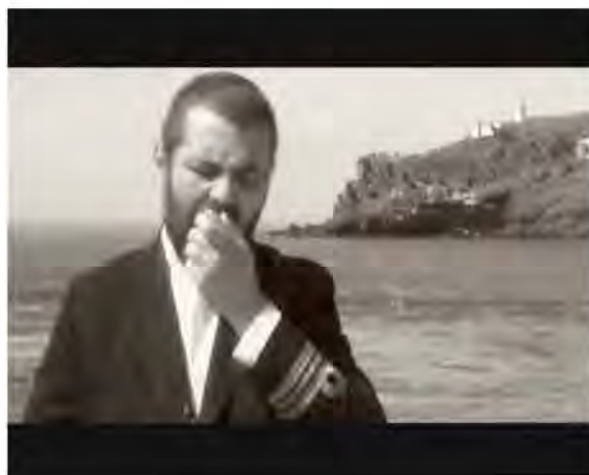
Peter Fitzpatrick has been utilising the archives at the Port Chalmers Regional Museum to produce his photographic and video works since 1996.

In 2004 he was an artist in residence and worked closely with the Museum's staff researching the life of Douglas Summerland.

From his initial findings Fitzpatrick went on a solo road trip in 2005 around the North and South islands of New Zealand. It was his intention at this time to visit the particular places that had a connection to Douglas Summerland.

The result of this trip is a collection of short video pieces made at the specific sites, including the Otago Peninsula, Whanganui River and Whangarei.

[ENTER VIDEO GALLERY >>>](#)



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3. The Artist page.

summerland.org.nz

Douglas Summerland served as a crewmember onboard the last of the early twentieth century ships of sail.

The ships included the:

[William Mitchell](#)
[Dorothy Sterling](#)
S.V. K.V. Kruse
S.V. Garthneill
Glenard
Marborough Hill
S.V. Margaret F. Sterling

The following images are from the pages of an album Summerland kept to record his adventures at sea.

[ENTER ALBUM GALLERY >>>](#)



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4. The Sea page.

summerland.org.nz

Circa 1912 Douglas Summerland travelled down the Wanganui River documenting the reflections on the water and the surrounding landscape.

All that remains of the images taken by Summerland are four photographs found on the back page of the album and a collection of lanternslides.

The purposes of the trip or the images are not known. However the fact that the images take the form of lanternslides alludes to their use for some type of public performance.

[ENTER RIVER GALLERY >>>](#)



© PC Museum 2004

5. The River page.

summerland.org.nz

Douglas Summerland was born circa 1891.

His family has links to Phillip Island in Victoria, Australia.

It is speculated that his father was involved in pastoralist activities on the Island before he relocated the family to Whangarei in New Zealand.

All other knowledge about Summerland's history lies within the artefacts and photographs that are deposited in the Museum's archive.

He was a seaman & photographer.

This image, in the style of [Dr. C. L. Gabriel](#) (1857 -1927), was taken on the banks of the Wanganui River by Summerland circa 1912.



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6. The History page.