

## **Scrutiny through the lens**

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Photography has captured the hearts of millions around the world for the almost two hundred years since its development in the 1820s. Following the rapid rise in amateur photography, it is almost uncommon for a family not to own at least a couple of digital cameras. With the abundance of photographs available and taken every day, photographers have adapted to their audience's appetite for intriguing and more interesting scenes and topics being portrayed through film.

Many photographs are constructions of images which are greatly influenced by the social, political, cultural and personal interests of the artist. Consequently, in these instances, there is not an actual depiction of reality, as each individual's subjective perception of reality is different. Not only does the appearance of a photograph affect the reception of the work; this is also affected by the way in which people have been trained to read images, which deeply influences the aesthetic impact of a piece. The construction, merging, gathering and selection of particular subject matters often is subconsciously chosen by the artist to portray their own reality. Tracey Moffatt, a well known Australian photographer, successfully portrays her own constructed reality throughout her artworks.

Tracey Moffatt was born in 1960 to an Aboriginal family living in suburban Mt Gravatt in Brisbane. Her works are based on experiences she had when growing up in her extended foster family. Arguably, she is Australia's most successful contemporary artist, focusing on directing photo-narrative short films and expertly incorporating fake constructed scenes of stereotypical Australian settings. The treatment of race and gender issues associated with Aboriginal Australians, is encapsulated for her audience through symbolic and political influences.<sup>1</sup> By representing indigenous Australians immersed in popular cultures in Australia as well as Britain and the United States, Moffatt successfully engages her viewer. 'I don't see it as my duty because I am an Aboriginal to present a fairy tale image of black Australia.'<sup>2</sup> As outlined by Moffatt, 'I'm not concerned with capturing reality; I'm concerned with creating it myself'.

Tracey Moffatt's artwork from the 'Something More' series (1989), is a good example of the stylised photography of the artist. Moffatt is the focus of the artwork as she stands foregrounded in the centre of the image. She wears an oriental styled dress which is the focal point of the piece. She gazes off into the distance from the camera whilst two children and an Asian man are placed on the left of the work in the background; their spontaneous movements have captured a blurred motion. Another woman stands mysteriously against the door frame, behind the central woman, holding a cigarette. Inside the basic wooden structure, a man sits at a table admiring his woman whilst enjoying his beer, a stereotypical trait of the Australian 'battler' male. This deliberately fake construction of the Australian outback confuses the various cultural identities of Australia. The bright, deliberately composed and confrontational scene provokes reflections on contemporary Australian life.

Tracey Moffatt constructs images of her own reality through the stylised scenes for which she is renowned. Her influences and cultural background are portrayed through her artworks and help to achieve the appearance of reality of life in Australia and the other locations she depicts. Deliberate constructions of an artist's perceived reality often are associated with being the 'real thing', however they may contradict 'actual' life. Although photographs may seem to be only mirrored or captured scenes from everyday life, they are still seen as art because of the choices and scrutiny which the artist must undertake in order to capture them.

**Notes**

1. Sue Melville, Julie Rollinson, 'Tracey Moffatt 1960', *Australian Art and Artists*, Science Press, Marrickville, 1996.
2. Quote by Tracey Moffatt from Melville and Rollinson, *ibid.*