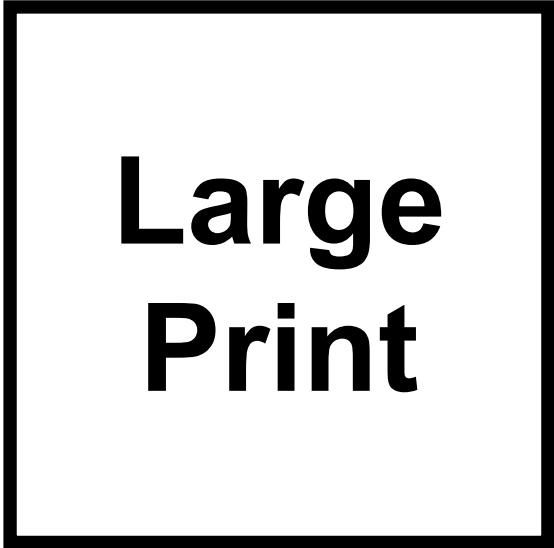


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**Bad Aboriginal
photography**



**Large
Print**

Bad Aboriginal photography is an exhibition of cheeky work by three Indigenous Australian artists: Brenda L Croft, Destiny Deacon and Tracey Moffatt. In different ways they each venture into the badlands of social etiquette. Croft speculates about her father's mysterious past, Deacon makes fun of Aboriginal stereotypes, and Moffatt finds entertainment in personal trauma. With a sense of mischief and humour, these artists explore the underbelly of public history and personal memories.

As well as being bad or naughty in attitude, these artists also embrace the badness of low-quality photography. Motion blur, flash bulb flares, haphazard composition, poor light and fuzzy focus haunt the images in this exhibition. By using modest and popular forms of visual communication, like those found in snapshot photography and family albums, these artists aim to engage the audience in active storytelling rather than passive contemplation.

Like many contemporary artists, Croft, Deacon and Moffatt take inspiration from a childhood spent sharing the pleasures of popular culture with their friends. The lack of pretention in their work, and their enthusiasm for storytelling testifies to the fact that these artists are products of late-twentieth century media culture.

But these artists are also the descendants of Indigenous traditions, where art and creativity are embedded in storytelling and interactive performance. By engaging with photography as a medium that can be used to activate memories and inspire a yarn, these artists celebrate the vitality and ongoing importance of oral histories. The fact of the matter is that bad photography makes for good storytelling.

Tracey Moffatt

Tracey Moffatt's Scarred for life is a series of works based on true stories about traumatic childhood experiences. Moffatt collected these stories from friends and acquaintances, and then staged photographs to illustrate the tragic tales. The photographs have been made to look like snapshots from a family album, emphasising the everyday nature of the incidents as well as their ongoing significance as personal memories. The presentation of the images mimics the format of the 1960s American magazine Life, which was well known for publishing photo-essays in this captioned format. Moffatt often draws on the story-telling conventions of magazines, cinema and other popular forms of visual communication in ways that give her photographs a heightened sense of drama.

Tracey Moffatt (b. 1960) is an Indigenous Australian who was raised as a foster child with a white family in the suburbs of Brisbane. She graduated from Queensland College of the Arts in 1982, having majored in film and video. She is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Tracey MOFFATT

born Australia 1960

Birth Certificate, 1962 1994

Doll birth, 1972 1994

Useless, 1974 1994

Mother's Day, 1975 1994

from the series Scarred for life

four offset prints

Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection
acquired 1998

MGA 1998.12; MGA 1998.08; MGA 1998.06;
MGA 1998.10

Brenda L Croft

Man about town is based on a collection of slides that Brenda L Croft found among her father's personal belongings after his death. Her father Joseph Croft (1926–96) was a vocal member of the Stolen Generation and a man who made a significant contribution to Indigenous politics in Australia. These images capture glimpses of Joseph Croft from a time before he became a prominent public figure; a young man disconnected from his Indigenous heritage, posing for snap-shots with unknown people. By circulating these personal photographs in the public sphere, Croft affirms the importance of story telling while celebrating the complexity of her father's life.

Brenda L Croft (b. 1964) is of the Gurindji and Mutpurra people of northern Australia. During the 1980s she was closely involved with Aboriginal activism in Sydney, and was one of the founders of the Boomalli Aboriginal Artists Cooperative in 1987. Croft has continued to play a prominent role advocating for Indigenous artists, while also maintaining her own artistic practice. She is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney, and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne.

Brenda L CROFT

born Australia 1964

A hostile landscape 2003

Man about town 2003

Don't look now 2003

from the series Man about town

three pigment ink-jet prints

Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection
acquired 2004; donated through the Australian
Government's Cultural Gifts Program by Brenda L Croft
in memory of Mrs Dorothy Jean Croft (1938–2010) 2012
MGA 2012.042; MGA 2004.22; MGA 2012.045

Destiny Deacon

Destiny Deacon's art practice is intentionally bad; her jokes are crass, she revels in bad-taste kitsch, and her photographs are out-of-focus, instamatic snapshots. This hard and fast approach allows Deacon to deal with serious issues in ways that are disarmingly humorous and critically engaging. In the triptych 'Blak lik mi', Deacon has taken Polaroid photographs of Australiana knick-knacks that portray Indigenous women as exotic beauties. These intimate snapshots beg for a sentimental response, but the title turns them into a sarcastic critique. Deacon often uses black dollies from the 1940s, '50s and '60s to stage sardonically racist scenes for her camera. In the image titled 'Being there', a cute vignette of mateship mocks stereotypes of Aboriginal delinquency.

Destiny Deacon (b. 1957) is of Erub/Mer (Torres Strait) and Kuku (Far North Queensland) people. Deacon grew up in the Aboriginal community of inner city Melbourne, and has been involved with Aboriginal activism and conscience-raising throughout her life. She studied politics and worked as a teacher before embarking on an artistic career in 1990. She is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney.

Destiny DEACON

born Australia 1957

Blak lik mi 1991–95

two ink-jet prints

Monash Gallery of Art, City of Monash Collection

acquired 2000

MGA 2000.131–132