

SPOTLIGHT



**Curator NATALIE KING, 55, lives with her husband and three children in Melbourne. She has just installed a photography exhibition in Japan via Zoom**

Sean Fennessy

INTERVIEW BY BRIDGET CORMACK

**Have smartphones ruined the art form of contemporary photography?**

I think they have made photography more accessible and infinitely more appealing. Everyone can take a photograph. Yet when you go and see a [work by, say, Australian artist] Polixeni Papapetrou you are transported to a misty forest with a character wearing a rabbit mask, to these other places of the imagination.

**Papapetrou is one of eight Australian and Japanese artists — and the only non-living artist — in the exhibition Reversible Destiny, which you have co-curated and installed via Zoom for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics Cultural Olympiad. Why did you include her?**

I have a long history of working with Polixeni [who died aged 57 in 2018] and we became very close friends. Her work deals so much with the idea of "reversible destiny"; life and death, beginning and ending, adolescence and adulthood, fantasy and reality. It's just in this other-worldly place. I was particularly interested in her final body of work, Her Heart, Still So Full of Her, where she went back and looked at her negatives from the 1980s — she was a very methodical person and trained as a lawyer — and revisited and printed them on a canvas

with a gold or silver glow. I think she was thinking about what's to come and her own mortality.

**You're curating New Zealand's participation in the 59th Venice Biennale, postponed to 2022 due to the pandemic. What's the temperature or mood around the event right now?**

Many of the countries have announced their artists, the dates have been set. If it's any indication, Venice has just had the Architecture Biennale that was getting around 1000 visitors a day, so culture is really still active and museums are open.

**For the initiative Mentor Walks you help guide women in their careers. Can the professional and the personal ever be separate?**

Often they're completely intertwined. In Mentor Walks, mentors like me are assigned two or three emerging leaders, not necessarily for the arts, and we walk with them for one hour, usually at dawn on a Friday morning, once a month. They bring a burning issue and often it's a very similar issue; self-doubt or wanting to advance. Usually I find the mentees have the answers within them [already]. To become a mentor you have to become a mentee. I actually

preferred being on the other side of the table! We all need people to talk to. The arts are hard. It's really competitive and it's hard for women.

**Do you think it's harder for women?**

I don't know if it's *harder*. We are starting to see change. We have Rhana Devenport as director of the Art Gallery of South Australia, Katrina Sedgwick [heading] ACMI and Claire Spencer as CEO of Arts Centre Melbourne. We are starting to see different kinds of leadership models that are maybe more empathetic. We are starting to see change.

**Who has been your greatest mentor?**

I would have to say Naomi Milgrom has been a mentor to me. In 2017 she was the Commissioner for the Venice Biennale when I was the curator and Tracey Moffatt was the artist [exhibiting at the Australian Pavilion]. We were a formidable trio.

**Reversible Destiny: Australian and Japanese contemporary photography is showing at The Tokyo Photographic Art Museum until October 31, topmuseum.jp. An online symposium around the exhibition will be held from October 15-17, and will be broadcast via the Museum's YouTube channel.**

**FROM THE EDITOR**  
**TIM DOUGLAS**



The Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, nestled in the historic Rocks district and overlooking picturesque Circular Quay, is one of the most visited places in Sydney. But, like the rest of the city, it has for more than 100 days cast a ghostly presence over the harbour as Sydney endured its second major Covid lockdown. It's fair to say the MCA won't know itself next week when it — along with every other major cultural institution in the Emerald City — opens its doors to the long-locked down people of NSW. And it is reopening with a bang with a major exhibition of the work of American multidisciplinary artist Doug Aitken. The show, which as Ashleigh Wilson writes today on Pages 8-9, will feature photographs, objects and installations and is being held as part of the annual Sydney International Art Series. (The Art Gallery of NSW will on November 20, as part of the art series, open Matisse: Life & Spirit — Masterpieces from the Centre Pompidou, Paris). Doug Aitken: New Era will be a litmus test for galleries in Sydney, and perhaps in Melbourne, too, when it reopens. How strong is the appetite for contemporary art post-lockdown? For Aitken's part, his work often has been described as "instagrammable", the new currency for directors and curators the world over. The show has been curated by Rachel Kent, the former longtime chief curator at the MCA who was recently appointed to run Bundanon, the sprawling Arthur Boyd estate on the NSW south coast. Kent will oversee the opening of a new multimillion-dollar gallery at the site. The changes at the MCA, of course, run deep with longtime director Liz Ann Macgregor stepping down in this, the gallery's 30th year. Suzanne Cotter, director of Luxembourg's Musée d'Art Moderne Grand-Duc Jean, will take up the director's role in January.

NSW's Freedom Day, as October 11 is being called in some circles, will also see the reopening of cinemas in NSW. But it coincides with the national rollout of Hollywood films that have been backlogged for, in some cases, almost two years. With new iterations of the Bond, Spider-Man, Top Gun, Ghostbusters and The Matrix franchises rolling out, the next few months would seem to be a Gen X cinephile's dream. But, as film critic Stephen Romei's list of must-see new film (Pages 4-5) makes clear, there is something in a multiplex or an arthouse cinema for everyone. I can almost smell the popcorn already.

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