

Mark Adams, Anne Noble, Fiona Pardington, Frank Schwere,

Introduction

A portrait seems relatively straightforward — a picture of someone — but across time it has proven to be a much more elusive beast. There are self portraits, re-photographed photographic portraits, abstract portraits, celebrity portraits, memorial portraits, portraits of animals, portraits of home interiors and portraits that are just “piles of candy.” For any rule you might devise to define a portrait, there is always a portrait that defies that rule.

In this exhibition four photographers, with their individual sensibility bring a distinctive “take” on contemporary portraiture, demonstrating it remains a rich and limitless territory open to new and creative possibilities.

MARK ADAMS

Tony Fomison Portraits

Mark Adams’ extended portrait of his friend, Tony Fomison, began in Christchurch in 1971. It became a long-term collaborative project. They made a loose pact that Adams would do a portrait every year until Fomison died, and then he would do a last one of him in his coffin. (Fomison died in 1990.) That didn’t always happen but Adams believes the images in the series, including images of Fomison’s interiors and personal collections in his home in Auckland, form a single, cohesive work.

Three of Adam’s first studies, “*Portrait of Tony Fomison at Tai Tapu, Banks Peninsula*” 1972, “with crazy patterning as if the emulsion is parting company with the acetate base, were the next element of this multi-faceted, multi-dimensional, heavily refracted portrait.” 1

Adams captures Fomison in a raging southern storm against the backdrop of the windswept hills of Banks Peninsula, his body braced against the elements. “ The strange, almost archaic presence of the artist points to a deeper connection between the two men, their shared fascination with the past.” 2

The mode of the portrait changed after both men moved to Auckland in the early 1970’s. While retaining the focus on the individual subject remaining a portrait, Adams documents Fomison’s engagement with his extraordinary collections, amongst which he lived and worked, (such as artefacts - some rare and precious, works of other painters, especially the naïve, books, his personal collections of humbler things like eggcups, cake tins, walking sticks, and furnishings)

“Adams achieves a special intimacy in these photographs of the artist and his spaces: although clothed, Fomison often enough appears somehow naked before the camera; you have a sense of encountering not just the physical form of the person but also his psyche, as if looking into the recesses of his soul. However casual their occasions might have been, these portraits memorialize an act of self disclosure performed for the camera.” 3

Adams later took the remarkable series of photographs, which document the process of Fomison receiving the full *pe’a* (Samoan tattoo) by the late Sulu’ape Paulo. The first palagi to receive the full *pe’a*, Fomison almost died several times during the process.

“Adams’ photographs of the tattooing are naked in a different way. They show the actuality of Fomison’s narrow thighs and skinny buttocks, his hairy chest, under the hammer, the chisel and the inks of the tattooist. They are pictures of pride and pain, and they mix the personal and the public in an unexpected manner.” 4

Since then Mark Adams has gone on to document the people and the processes of the Samoan tattoo in a more comprehensive way.

* 1-4 Excerpts from Martin Edmond’s essay “Mark Adams Tony Fomison Portraits”; From the Collector's edition *Mark Adams: A Portrait of the Artist Tony Fomison 1971-1990*, reprinted courtesy of Baker+Douglas Publishing, 2012'

ANNE NOBLE

Ruby’s Room

Anne Noble’s major photographic series ‘Ruby’s Room’ consists of 45 exuberant images of her daughter Ruby. Produced over eight years, the photographs were captured as Ruby played and performed in the course of daily life. Each image of has a sense of immediacy and child-like playfulness, documenting fleeting moments of sensory play or pleasure with face-pulling, tongue poking, bubble-blowing abandon.

Anne Noble has said that the photographs present a record of “...growing up through close scrutiny of a site where life happens - the mouth. The mouth that speaks, tastes, smiles, reacts, learns, loves, etc. They celebrate and magnify moments of growing up that are not normally celebrated, and they're deliberately not erotic, not romantic, not ideal, not perfect. ...I was interested in overlooked moments that when depicted might create a discordant challenge to the adult romance with childhood as lost innocence...”

Had they lived

Anne Noble’s decade long exploration of Antarctica is her “reverential and original” homage to Antarctica’s power and history. Noble's project has been to critique and unpick clichéd representations so often associated with the Antarctic, to expose the subtleties and delicacies of exploration and exploitation in a challenging and inhospitable environment. Her interest is in photography's unique ability to create and shape perceptions of landscape and place in the collective imagination.

In this new series Noble references the ghosts of human history in Antarctica - a history entwined integrally with a place that has never been a site of permanent human habitation.

“ Had we lived...” is based on a reproduction of an original photograph taken at the South Pole by Herbert Bowers after he, Scott, Wilson, Oates and Evans had arrived to find Roald Amundsen had already been there, planted a Norwegian flag, and then headed home.

This photograph was the inspiration for a re-photographic project that reflects on the tragedies of heroic exploration and the memory of the Mt Erebus disaster. I re-photographed the image as well as the tent where Scott, Wilson and Bowers died, and images of Mt Erebus crash site downloaded from the internet.” Anne Noble

“Had we lived I should have had a tale to tell of the hardihood, endurance and courage of my companions which would have stirred the hearts of every Englishman. These rough notes and our dead bodies must tell the tale...” Antarctica 2012.

FIONA PARDINGTON

She is the unknown goddess, as uniquely New Zealand-Aotearoa as Rita Angus' *Rutu*, and like one of Bill Hammond's bird creatures she is trapped in her metamorphosis between human and bird, indigenous and introduced, North Island and South Island. She is partly Kurangaituku the fearsome bird-woman who seems a distant Polynesian cousin of European fairy-tale witches like Baba Yaga and the hags recorded by the brothers Grimm – themselves devolved from goddesses of death and magic like Hekate and Lilith. She is as seductive and protean as a Lamia. More specifically she is kaikaiawaru, a taniwha or perhaps a god, sometimes described as taking a bird-like form, associated with Kaiapoi Pa and sacred to Pardington's paternal Ngai Tahu ancestors.

Like the Egyptian divinities Thoth (god of wisdom) and Ra (god of the sun) she wears a bird's head – the extinct huia with its long curving beak reminiscent of an Elizabethan doctor's plague masque. The huia alludes to the North Island and Pardington's maternal ancestors. She is also the Cailleach – a Scottish bird-woman-goddess in her destructive aspect, the Veiled One, Queen of Winter, connecting to Pardington's Gaelic ancestors. The five-pointed star suggests Venus in her aspect as morning and evening star, connecting her to the Mesopotamian fertility goddesses Ishtar and Inanna. In reality it is a fired shotgun cartridge that has opened out like a jasmine flower, a symbol of potential force, and echoed again on top of an inverted sherry glass (a yoni symbol). Pardington found the cartridge washed up on Ripiro Beach each near her home, a gift from Venus born from the sea. Because the cartridge is "dead" it can transform itself into something new – it has chosen to be the morning star Kopu.

Rising up on candle smoke, her body is banded with green symbolising nature, the life force, regeneration, and pounamu. Green is the divine colour in Islam, it is the colour of angels. She is the unknown goddess, but quintessentially our goddess.

FRANK SCHWERE

Bull Market

The full frontal, three quarter and one-quarter profile headshots of the Angus stud cattle are close-up portraits, photographed in a classical manner. The result of careful observation by photographer Frank Schwere, the portraits provide a unique glimpse into the complexity of our relationship with animals. The images resonate with the uncanny human-like pose and expressions of the subjects. Their vulnerability and humanism create an unexpected sense of intimacy and empathy that play with our own emotions and sensibilities. Despite the authenticity of the images, the artist has shifted the experience to allow us to re-engage, to see these magnificent cattle anew.

Creating a minimal studio setting, the cattle have been intentionally separated from context. Schwere says "I photographed them in a corral that was temporarily transformed into an outdoor studio with backdrop and studio lighting. Normally we view cattle only from the distance, or in very different forms and circumstances in the supermarket or on our dinner plate. These portraits provide us a rare chance to confront these magnificent, thoroughbred animals face to face, eye to eye, to have a glimpse into their soul."

This series titled *Bull Market* is a metaphor for an overheating global financial stock market within the larger context of global concerns, of which Schwere's regal bull becomes a symbol. Despite unsustainable world consumption, we are experiencing at the same time a bull market that is characterized by optimism, investor confidence and expectations that prosperity will continue. Ignorance and denial continues despite alarming warning signs such as dwindling world resources, extreme weather patterns, and environmental pollution.