

Parallel Relations: Seriality in Photography
Curated by Jess Bradford & Esther Rolfe

The 2015 Annual University Student Union Art Collection exhibition, *Parallel Relations: Seriality in Photography*, brings together four photographic series by artists George Gittoes, Bill Henson, Alex Kershaw, and The Twilight Girls (Helen Hyatt-Johnston and Jane Polkinghorne).

Drawing upon the etymology of 'series' – to join together or to connect – *Parallel Relations* examines the kinds of connections that can exist between individual photographic images within a series. The possible relations between images are numerous – temporal, thematic, aesthetic, stylistic, sequential. Never simply a random grouping of works, a series is governed by a unifying principle that allows formations of multiple images to operate together on a level of continuity in time, thought, or narrative. As a series is a form that has no clear limits, fixed parameters of scale, number or style, the logic that then ties together these groups of images has become the focus for our examination of photographic seriality. The formal and conceptual diversity of works chosen for *Parallel Relations* exemplifies the breadth of methodologies available to create photographic series, as well as the diversity and eclectic nature of the USU Art Collection.

George Gittoes is an acclaimed Australian artist and filmmaker, who is particularly well known for his documentation of war zones across the globe. From 1993 onwards Gittoes has accompanied the Australian Army on peacekeeping operations to Somalia, Cambodia, Western Sahara, Egypt, Israel, Lebanon, and South Africa. In 1995 Gittoes visited Rwanda with an Australian medical contingent as part of the UN Assistance Mission. Based at Kibeho in the largest camp for internally displaced persons, Gittoes witnessed and documented the horrific Kibeho Massacre.

On his return to Australia, Gittoes expanded the series of artworks he produced in Rwanda with paintings and drawings based on the photographs he had captured. Working in the format of a large, multi-media series enabled Gittoes to document the Kibeho conflict zone more extensively, and thereby convey a sense of the suffering and terror he bore witness to. *Parallel Relations* presents a selection of photographs from that series, which we believe highlight Gittoes' remarkable ability to capture the atrocities of war in unflinching detail, whilst also producing visually arresting, exquisitely composed photographic works.

Bill Henson is one of Australia's leading contemporary artists. In his photographic practice Henson draws together elements of the cinematic and painterly in order to capture the drama, mystery and melancholy of everyday life. *Untitled 1980/1982* is a series of 220 images, originally hung in 26 groups. In 1993 the USU purchased 13 prints from the series, 9 of which are exhibited in *Parallel Relations*. The series captures crowds on the streets of various cities around the world, including Berlin and Melbourne. Henson's images focus on the faces that emerge from the urban throng, exquisitely capturing the haunting beauty, tenderness and subtle humour in expressions and gestures that would otherwise go unnoticed.

Henson intended the series to be exhibited in groups, so as to convey a sense of the patterns, fragmentation, and movement inherent in the aesthetics of a crowd. The

arrangement of the works in *Parallel Relations* is intended to highlight the image of the crowd as the governing condition of *Untitled 1980/1982*, and also to allow for new interpretations and relationships between the images to emerge.

Alex Kershaw uses photography and video to examine symbols and rituals, which emerge from the reciprocal relationships existing between people and their surrounding environment. Kershaw has produced a body of photographic work over a number of years, in which he captures mundane objects and sites, transforming them into unlikely monuments to the everyday, ambiguous moments in life.

Notice Board, purchased by the USU in 2000, captures the ways day-to-day activities define our surroundings, which in turn shape our perception of that location. By framing the image in order to focus our attention on the notice board's statuesque, obelisk-like form, and intricately collaged surface, Kershaw elevates a forgotten object into to a monument to the quotidian rituals of life.

Notice Board is exhibited in *Parallel Relations* with two other works from Kershaw's body of work on 'Monuments' - *Construction for Watching Waterloo*, 2006, and *Untitled Monuments #1*, 1998-2001. Despite the diverse geographic locations and subject matter of these three works, the overarching conceptual and stylistic focus remains constant across the images. Within this group of photographs it is the play between both similarities, and differences across the works that functions to connect the images as a series.

The Twilight Girls is the collaborative duo comprised of artists Helen Hyatt-Johnston and Jane Polkinghorne. *Parallel Relations* presents works from the series *The Power and The Glory, I-VI*, which was first shown in the exhibition *Resistance and Ritual*, at Westspace Gallery, Melbourne, in 2004. Later that year the USU purchased the first photograph in the series, in which Polkinghorne stands atop the phantasmagorical gelatinous terrain, wrapped in sausages. The highly absurd sausage-suit, suggestive of fleshy feminine mounds and multiple phalluses, lampoons media-driven stereotypes of the ideal body. By placing themselves within the series, The Twilight Girls use their own bodies as a site on which to explore the relationship between identity, body image, and gendered stereotypes.

By sparking our interest in the implications of reuniting a series of images, *The Power and the Glory I*, was in many ways the starting point of *Parallel Relations*. Through re-exhibiting multiple images from *The Power and The Glory, I-VI* we hope to convey the intended narrative and aesthetic of the series, which can only become apparent when the photographs are viewed in this way.

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List of Works (clockwise from left)

Alex Kershaw, *Notice Board*, 2000, LightJet print on Lexcon. Purchased by the USU in 2000.

Alex Kershaw, *Construction for Watching Waterloo*, 2006, Type - C print on aluminium. On Loan from the Artist.

George Gittoes, *Phantom Sniper*, 1995, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

George Gittoes, *Machete*, 1995, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

George Gittoes, *Blind Man*, 1995, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

George Gittoes, *Sci fi UN*, 1995, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

George Gittoes, *A father's grief*, 1995, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

George Gittoes, *A last look before leaving his parents*, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

Alex Kershaw, *Untitled Monuments #1*, 2006, Type - C print on aluminium. On Loan from a Private Collection.

George Gittoes, *Real and symbolic UN barrier*, colour Ilfochrome on ilford clmik. Donated by the Artist to the USU in 1995.

Bill Henson, *Untitled 1980/82*, 1980-1982, 9 gelatin silver photographs. Purchased by the USU in 1993.

The Twilight Girls, *The Power and the Glory I*, 2004, C-type LightJet photographic print. Purchased by the USU in 2004

The Twilight Girls, *The Power and the Glory III, V, VI*, 2004, C-type LightJet photographic print. On Loan from the Artist.

The Twilight Girls, *The Power and the Glory*, 2010-2015, single channel video. On Loan from the Artist