



The
Royal
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Victorian Chapter NEWSLETTER

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WALTER WOODBURY SEES A GHOST!

Even while he was busy solving the problems of getting his photorelief process finished and patented, Walter found time to write to *The Photographic News* with a report of an “interesting experiment”.

If we take a negative (the larger the better) and place it in a window with a piece of ground glass behind it, and darken all the other panes but the one on which the negative is placed, and then look steadily at one particular part of it for, say, half a minute; on directing the eyes to the dimly illuminated ceiling of the room, we see there depicted a beautifully distinct positive of a rich sepia tint. The illusion is really astonishing, and forms a striking illustration of the persistency of vision. If this is shown to a person who is acquainted with the subject of the negative, he will not recognize his friend on looking at it, but on looking at the ceiling he will have a perfect ghost of the person there presented to his vision. If the eyes are not kept on the same spot, a blurred vision will be the result. By looking closely at the negative, a large figure will appear, and vice versa. By the aid of a magic lantern, this might be well shown to a large number of people.

Walter was always alert to photographic curiosities, eventually leading to his series of articles *Science at Home*. It is interesting to note that, even at this early stage in his career he was thinking about using the magic lantern as a means of instructing a mass audience.

Incidentally Woodbury's patent for his photo-relief process was filed on 23 September 1864.

Reference: *The Photographic News*, 12 July 1864, p. 359.

Alan Elliott ARPS

HISTORY GROUP NEWS

Since the last *Newsletter* we have received very ready acceptance from the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade in Canberra of our offer of a copy of *Walter Woodbury: A Victorian Study* for presentation to an Indonesian university, because of the historic importance of the Woodbury and Page photographs from the 19th

century Dutch colonial period and, of course, the account of the setting up of this famous studio in Batavia and its subsequent history. The book will be presented by the Cultural Office of the Australian Embassy to the library of the Universitas Muhammadiyah Yogyakarta (UMY) 'due to its interest in the subject and its links with the Australian Embassy and the Australia-Indonesia Institute'.

This month we were pleased to read in the latest issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal* a review of our publication.

The review is very favorable; particularly as it is evident the reviewer has carefully read the text and studied the illustrations. For the Group members who gave so much time and sustained effort to the Woodbury project it is very satisfying to read the words of a stranger who has responded so enthusiastically to our study. It seems we have been able to transmit some of the pleasure we derived from the project. As for Walter Woodbury, the central figure of the study, it is clear the reviewer has responded to our account of the achievements of this major figure in the history of European photography and that, in essence, is what we strived for.

The review opens with a brief description of the book, its contents, the Victorian Chapter, and the History Group, saying it is 'well illustrated with colour plates, engravings and maps'. Woodbury's years in Victoria during the gold rush years are traced before turning to his years in the Dutch East Indies and subsequent return to England and his inventions, notably the Woodburytype and Stannotype.

Here are some quotes:—

For me, the main value of the book lies in the excellent reproductions of more than 30 of Woodbury's images from the Australia-Java Album, most in crisp sepia colour. The images of colonial Java are arresting in the way they show aspects of the life of the region in the 1850s and early 1860s. Also of value to the Victorian historian is the juxtaposition with present day photographs. For example, Woodbury's photograph of a building on the corner of Little Lonsdale and Exhibition Streets is shown above an image of the same building today. So, too, his image of a woolshed (sic) in the Ovens is shown above the same scene as it is today.

... Those interested in the technicalities of photography are well served by chapters on Woodbury's inventions and patents, many of which are illustrated by engravings. There are also examples of Woodburytypes and Stannotypes from local collections.

... There are two eccentric aspects to this book. First, is the inclusion of colour photographs of the team of researchers and historians on their various field trips and seminars around Victoria to places where Woodbury took his photographs. To the staid scholar, they look odd printed among the Woodburys, almost like 'holiday snaps'. The other novelty is the description in some chapters of finding and writing about the various sides of Woodbury. Yet, I found this a refreshing way of telling the story. The reader shares the team's methods, and the joys and disappointments that most scholars experience but too often hide. We see the team on a picnic or watching

a demonstration of coating a glass plate with collodion in the garage of one of the members.

We make no apologies for these *eccentricities*; we readily acknowledge that it was an enjoyable project.

My chief criticism of the work is that only 75 copies were printed (through the generosity of the Royal Photographic Society) and that organization does not allow the book to be sold. Copies have been given to various libraries in Victoria, including the Royal Historical Society of Victoria and the State Library of Victoria. As people are unable to buy the book, I urge them to seek it out in libraries where they may read and enjoy the 115 informative and absorbing pages at leisure”.

The full text of this review is contained in the June 2009 issue of the *Victorian Historical Journal*, Volume 80 No. 1, pp. 134-136.

The date of the next Group meeting will be advised.

Max Melvin ARPS

FROM YOUR SECRETARY

Our 2009 Exhibition

This *Newsletter* includes details of our Victorian Chapter's 2009 Exhibition to be held in September. This is a major event in our calendar and we urge all members, whether in Victoria or further afield, to enter. We are really keen for our interstate (and overseas!) members to take part in this, and as you'll see from the enclosure, images may be submitted on CD for digital projection at the exhibition, as well as framed prints for the gallery walls. September will be with us in no time, so don't leave it until the last minute – start planning your entry now!

News of Members

- Our member in Japan, **Sudo Hidesawa ('Hide')**, has been part of a group photographic exhibition in Osaka called *The Month of Photography, Osaka 2009*. This is a big undertaking, with some 150 photographers using a lot of galleries such as the Nikon Salon gallery, the Canon gallery and Fujifilm gallery. It celebrates Photography Day (June 1st) in Japan. Congratulations, Hide. And isn't it an interesting concept – to have a national Photography Day.

Hide sends his good wishes to all our Victorian Chapter members, and he's also forwarded a package including publicity for the Osaka exhibition, a book of "school memories" from his former university, and a copy of the latest issue of the RPS Contemporary Group Journal which is most interesting. More of that later in this *Newsletter*. Thank you for it all, Hide.

- Winter is now with us and several of our members have been on the sick list lately. We send them our best wishes for a speedy recovery.

Portfolio Two

This is a reminder that all members are invited to submit images for possible inclusion in *Portfolio Two*. All details are on the Entry Form enclosed with the May issue of the *Journal*. Closing date 31 October 2009.

Art Photography Dealer?

I have received a request from a non-RPS member asking if I could suggest any photography-specific dealer/art house in Melbourne where she could sell a “fine art” photograph which she purchased several years ago. Please contact me if you know of any such place.

Elaine Herbert ARPS
Hon. Secretary, Victorian Chapter

TARRAWARRA IN JUNE

Picture rolling hills, autumnal vineyards, a crisp day, and members of the Victorian Chapter enjoying Australian paintings – and a delicious lunch – in a wonderful architectural setting. Such was our June meeting at the TarraWarra Museum of Art last Thursday.

We started with an introduction to the gallery and its collection by Jenna Blyth, the museum’s Assistant Curator. She explained that it is a not-for-profit organisation set up by philanthropists Marc and Eva Besen to share their collection of modern Australian art with the public. An architectural competition was held in 2000 to seek an appropriate design for a building to house the collection; the design selected was by Melbourne architect Allan Powell – and we were all agreed that the result is stunning. The gallery nestles into the landscape. It has been beautifully positioned to fit in with the contours of the Yarra Valley, while from inside the views across the vineyards and gentle hills are superb.

Marc and Eva Besen have been collecting Australian art since the 1950s, making many of their purchases by young artists then relatively unknown. As the years have gone by, the collection has grown and so has the stature of many of the artists, now recognised as having shaped the development of modern art in this country.

There are currently two exhibitions in the gallery. A selection of works from the permanent collection titled *Revisited* gives a glimpse of the Besens’ choices. It shows works which have been included in various exhibitions in both public and commercial galleries, in Australia and overseas. By drawing on a range of material such as exhibition catalogues, archival documents or details recorded on the back of the art work, it illustrates the journeys of the various paintings on display. Thus, the viewer is able to learn not just where a piece may have been previously exhibited but why it was included there, or perhaps the significance of that exhibition in the artist’s career, or its impact on the contemporary viewers. As the catalogue notes, *Revisited* invites today’s

viewer to reminisce, rediscover and revisit.

But, of course it also enables new viewers to consider each art work with 21st century eyes. We saw works by painters such as William Dobell and John Perceval, John Olsen and Arthur Boyd, Fred Williams and John Brack, now all recognised as having made a significant contribution to Australian painting.

The second, smaller exhibition titled *Light and Land* shows six works by Tim Storrier, a landscape painter. Two of these depicted fire in the Australian landscape, a strong reminder of the recent devastating bushfires in the area; looking out the window beside these paintings you can see the remnants of burned trees on a nearby ridge and realise just how close the fires came. Another work in this set, *Cove Studio*, brings together elements of a Middle Eastern landscape and colonial Australia, with a table set for a light meal in the foreground.

And so to lunch, a very pleasant meal in the TarraWarra Estate Restaurant, part of the museum complex. We enjoyed this in leisurely fashion beside an open fire with great views across the valley. Then there was time for some photography of the building and its setting, and another circuit of the exhibitions, before setting off back to Melbourne.

In reflecting on this visit, the over-riding impression is of a beautifully designed building housing modern Australian art and showing the Yarra Valley landscape to great advantage. We are indeed fortunate that the Besen family have made this possible through their generosity. The TarraWarra Museum of Art would be well worth a future visit; the changing exhibits within and the changing seasons without would offer continuing inspiration.

Elaine Herbert ARPS

WHAT MAKES AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY?

At our recent visit to the TarraWarra Museum of Art, one of our members asked the guide if modern Australian paintings had anything in common which made them identifiably Australian. A big question indeed, and one to which our guide gave a careful but general reply. However, this led me to think about Australian photography and what – if anything – characterises it.

My thoughts on this have also been triggered by a recent review of an exhibition in Brisbane in which American and Australian paintings of the 19th century were compared. I wondered what conclusions could be drawn by comparing American and Australian photographs of the same period, and would they show the same national characteristics as paintings?

It is odd how, once you are started on a train of thought, other instances crop up all over the place. For example, a day or two ago I received notice of a forthcoming exhibition at the Monash Gallery of Art on new photography from Germany. The PR notes say that, "... new generation German photography is defined by the diversity

of its style and interests". So not many clues there! But then I thought of the recent inaugural exhibition of the new RPS Chapter in Germany, *The Art of the Spectator*. Looking at the images from that exhibition, I was struck by how different they are from the work we are producing here in the Victorian Chapter. National characteristics emerging? Or simply, individual approaches? Is it just a difference in subject matter? Or would national trends be evident even if the subject matter were the same?

What do *you* think? I would be interested to hear the views of our members on this. So let's get some discussion going through the pages of our *Newsletter*.

Elaine Herbert ARPS

AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY: FIRST IMPRESSIONS FROM JAPAN

Now, here's a coincidence. In the mail this week I received a package from our Japanese member, 'Hide' (Sudo Hidesawa), with a copy of the latest issue of the RPS Contemporary Group's publication, *Contemporary Photography*, published in the UK. It includes an article written by Hide after his recent visit to Australia and gives his first impressions of Australian photography. It couldn't be more timely!

So, to start the ball rolling on our thoughts about Australian photography, here is his article, written for an international audience, which he has willingly agreed to be reproduced. Thank you, Hide.

THE FIRST IMPRESSION: AN OVERVIEW OF AUSTRALIAN PHOTOGRAPHY, FROM MY LAST PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY, by Sudo Hidesawa

What is Australian photography? Frankly, it seems as difficult to describe its great diversity as the land of Australia itself.

Before I went to Australia, I knew hardly anything about Australian photography except for the names of Max Pam and Helmut Newton (a German photographer). We don't have a lot of photographic information from Australia.

Since the beginning of Japanese photographic history, it has been mainly influenced from Europe and North America and it still is, by such people as Henri Cartier-Bresson, W. Eugene Smith, Robert Frank and William Klein.

When I stayed in Melbourne last year, it didn't take much time to realize that Australia has a long and profound history in photography too. Interestingly, the development of Australian photography took the same steps as European, American and Japanese photography. Since it was introduced from Europe, they also had Australian pictorialism, modernism and photo-documentary. That was why I felt some familiarity with Australian photography.

For me, looking at Australian photography is just like looking at a parallel universe

or alternative reality. It's like a mirror of the photography of the Northern hemisphere because there is no big difference between them.

Just as Japanese photography has its localism, there is surely localism in Australia and the environmental influence such as Australia's vast nature is not to be ignored. Nor are family, friend or scenes on the streets. Australian photographers can also seek motifs and themes in its nature and outback more easily than Japanese photographers.

What I would like to tell you is that eventually we are the same people no matter where we reside on earth. Australian photographers make images of the same things as European, American and even Japanese. The 'seeds' of photography that were born in Europe and travelled all over the world have grown and now have shown us their own beautiful flowers.

After studying the history of world photography, I am now sure that Australian photography is to be ranked on the same level with that of European and American photography. I believe it should be introduced and promoted more, especially in Japan.

Also, needless to say, Australia therefore has produced a lot of fine photographers in its long history. Maybe you might already know some (or all) of them but in here let me introduce them for your interest and reference: Harold Cazneau, Max Dupain, David Moore, Laurence le Guay, Lewis Morley, Ian Dodd, Ingeborg Tyssen, Carol Jerrems, Sue Ford, Fiona Hall and Les Walking (and many more!). You can easily find their names on the internet as well.

Lastly, more than anything else, my gratitude goes to the Australian photographers, especially Elaine Herbert ARPS Hon. Secretary Victorian Chapter, Alan Elliott ARPS, and Max Melvin ARPS from the RPS Victorian Chapter. Without their kind help and guidance, obviously I couldn't have achieved any photographic research in Australia.

(Note: Sudo visited Melbourne and Sydney in 2007 to attend his art exhibition and also to do his photographic assignment from the Centre of Australian Studies at Otemon Gakuin University in Osaka Japan.)

References:

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A Century Exposed, Alan Elliott, The Melbourne Camera Club, 1991 (Limited Edition)

Australian Photographers of the Seventies from the Collection of the National Gallery of Australia, Philip Morris Arts Grant, 1994

The Australian Photographers Collection 1. Craftsman House. 1995

Dupain's Sydney, Chapter & Verse, 1999

Lewis Morley, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2006

Ingeborg Tyssen Photographs, T&G Publishing, 2006

Photography and Australia, Reaktion Books, 2007

Photography: Art Gallery of New South Wales Collection, 2007.

Article reproduced from *Contemporary Photography*, the RPS Contemporary Group Journal, Spring 2009. The original article also contains four of Hide's photographs taken on his visit to Australia in 2007, which unfortunately we are unable to reproduce here.

2009 EXHIBITION

Included with this issue of the *Newsletter* is your entry form for this year's RPS Victorian Chapter Exhibition, which will be held at the Melbourne Camera Club in September. Full details are on the form, and we would appreciate an early response.

FORTHCOMING MEETINGS

There will be a Digital group meeting on Wednesday 15 July at 10.30 am at the Royal Historical Society of Victoria, corner of A'Beckett and William Streets (enter from A'Beckett), to hear Jeremy Daalder of Image Science talk about Digital Colour Management.

This *Newsletter* is appearing early because of the proposed visit by the Editor to Darwin next week. However, the July *Newsletter* deadline will be the weekend of 25-26 July.