

# THE REFLECTING EYE

Portraits of Australian Visual Artists



NATIONAL  
PORTRAIT  
GALLERY

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#### Acknowledgements

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*Helen Ennis*

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Curator: Helen Ennis  
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Front cover: Athol Shmith (1914–1990) **Mirka Mora (b.1928)** 1954  
Back cover: David Moore (b.1927) **Fred Williams (1927–1982)**, **Upwey** 1964

## FOREWORD

*It might excite a wider interest in our history and society. It might encourage us to learn the story of Australia and to better understand the story of our fellow Australians.*

*It might help us to understand what it is to be Australian and what it was to be Australian. What it is to be an Aboriginal Australian. An Australian woman. An Australian with your life hanging on a thread during the Second World War. A child living in Australia in 1814.*

The Prime Minister  
at the opening of the National Portrait Gallery,  
Old Parliament House, 30 March 1994

The National Portrait Gallery was established to celebrate Australian achievement in all fields of endeavour. It sits at the crossroads of social history and art, and builds its programs around the relationship between these two disciplines. The National Portrait Gallery seeks to entertain, educate and engage the visiting public with a mix of all portrait media, formal and informal, 'high' and 'low'. It is concerned to develop an identity which is appropriate for its time and place.

And now, with this exhibition, the National Portrait Gallery is reaching out into communities around the country, so that Australians everywhere can participate in the pleasure of the art of portraiture, and join the debate which portrait exhibitions raise on issues of contemporary national significance.

As the first National Portrait Gallery travelling exhibition, *The Reflecting Eye: Portraits of Australian Visual Artists* represents an important milestone in the history of Australia's National Portrait Gallery.

The National Portrait Gallery is a program of the National Library of Australia, which has been developing touring exhibitions for a number of years as part of its commitment to providing increasing access to its remarkable collections.

I commend to you *The Reflecting Eye: Portraits of Australian Visual Artists*. Guest curator Helen Ennis has assembled a lively exhibition of portraits of painters, printmakers and photographers from the turn of the century to the 1990s. In looking at formal photographic portraits, personal photographs and press images, the curator discusses how changes in photographic style and practice influence perceptions of the subject.

Warren Horton  
Director-General  
National Library of Australia  
May 1996



Attributed to Talma Studio (est. 1893-1900)  
Barak (1824-1903) at work on a drawing at Coranderrk c.1895  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Frances Boyd

## THE REFLECTING EYE

### Portraits of Australian Visual Artists

There is a central thread that holds together the diverse photographic portraits in *The Reflecting Eye*. It is not, as one might expect, the subject—portraits of Australian visual artists, be they painters, printmakers or photographers. Nor is it simply the common medium—photography. It is in fact more fundamental: a belief in and commitment to a notion of the ‘truth’. For the works in *The Reflecting Eye* share some basic assumptions about photography, portraiture and human identity. These are that a portrait can encompass an individual’s identity, and that photography can faithfully represent the external world. Thus a photographic portrait is regarded as a truthful representation of an individual.

The portraits in *The Reflecting Eye* span more than 70 years, beginning with a photograph of Aboriginal artist William Barak taken at the turn of the century. The focus on the period 1900s to 1970s is deliberate, as it appears relatively coherent in terms of photographic portraiture. A different

story has emerged in recent years: its key elements include the sheer proliferation of visual artists (the baby-boom generation reaching maturity); the prevalence of informal modes of portraiture (a small selection of which is included in the final section of the exhibition); and the emergence of fabricated or fictional portraits.

*The Reflecting Eye* is structured around three kinds of portraiture, each of which is governed by its own modes of production, distribution and reception. The categories are treated equally and works from each are interspersed throughout the display.

The first, **formal portraiture**, comprises photographs that are generally produced on commission but have an independent life, that is, as exhibition-quality prints. Formal portraits are usually the domain of professional photographers, a significant number of whom are represented here. Jack Cato, Harold Cazneaux, Max Dupain, Margaret Michaelis, May and Mina Moore, David



Walter Barnett (1862–1934)  
Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) and Nora Streeton (nee Clench),  
with Pat, the dog, at their Hill Road home, London c.1909  
print from platinum photographic print  
National Gallery of Australia



Bernice Agar (1885–1976)  
 Thea Proctor (1879–1966) 1927  
 As published in the *Home*, 1 October 1927

Moore, Alec Murray and Athol Shmith were all recognised portraitists.

The most common venue for formal portraits is publications, especially magazines and journals but also books and exhibition catalogues. Harold Cazneaux's portraits were frequently published in the fashionable *Home* magazine; the image of Margaret Preston in her garden at Berowra on Sydney's North Shore was featured in a double-page spread on the artist and her home environment. Margaret Michaelis' photograph of the painter Weaver Hawkins appeared in *Australia: National Journal* in an essay on members of the artistic community at Mona Vale in Sydney.

Formal portraits are invariably made in full knowledge of the artistic or stylistic conventions of the day. Max Dupain, for instance, makes dramatic use of the modernist idiom in a

striking portrait of fellow photographer Olive Cotton, taken in 1935. The composition is marked out by the strong vertical accents of the telegraph pole and Cotton's upright figure. On the other hand, Carol Jerrems' portrait of the painter Grace Cossington Smith is in a naturalistic style that was prevalent in the 1970s. Jerrems photographs her elderly sitter in a relaxed pose; the room is flooded with light recalling Cossington Smith's own light-filled paintings of domestic interiors.

The second group of photographs in the exhibition derives from **reproductions**, principally in newspapers. They often record a newsworthy occasion such as Lady Gordon opening Miss Dorrit Black's show in Adelaide in 1930, or Michael Brown, Ross Crothall and Colin Lanceley installing the second *Imitation Realist* exhibition in Sydney in 1962. The photograph of Bea Maddock sketching aboard the ship the *Ice Bird* in Antarctica was originally published in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*. In contrast to formal portraits, the authors of these photographs are rarely credited, and so are now generally unknown. Nor is print quality an issue: the photographic print exists only for the purposes of reproduction, not for exhibition.

*The Reflecting Eye* incorporates one other area of portraiture—**snapshots** which would normally be found within a family archive, framed on mantelpieces, in photograph albums or even stored in shoeboxes. These portraits usually speak of intimacy and privacy in accordance with the particular conventions of family photography (such as the use of medium-distance viewpoints and the adoption of happy expressions and so on). They come about because of an intimate relationship between photographer and subject and invariably show the artist as a participant in his/her own private life. Novelist and printmaker Barbara Hanrahan is photographed sitting in the garden in her favourite chair for writing; her face is suffused with light, her expression alert and engaging. The photograph of Russell Drysdale was taken by his son Tim; the artist is photographed without ceremony, shoes off, cigarette in hand, sketching materials at the ready.

Artists like Drysdale and Albert Tucker have also been keen photographers, taking informal snapshots of their artist friends which convey a strong sense of community and camaraderie. Drysdale, for instance, photographed Jean Bellette, while Joy Hester, Sidney Nolan, Josl Bergner and Adrian Lawlor were among the many artists photographed by Albert Tucker.

To introduce a personal dimension to the exhibition, some photographs were chosen by the artists themselves or by members of their families. Vivienne Binns, for example, selected one of her favourite photographs, of herself as a young girl. It was taken by her elder brother Peter in the family lounge-room one Saturday morning—the young subject, her hair not yet bound up in braids, is artfully posed with one hand on a late Victorian vase. Jo Steele selected the portrait of his partner, Barbara Hanrahan. Regardless of their origin as formal portraits, newspaper reproductions or family photographs, all the portraits in *The Reflecting Eye* fulfil a representational function. They offer a visual image of individuals who might otherwise be known to us only by name. Additional information is offered in the numerous environmental portraits included in the exhibition. In them, artists are pictured in particular work or domestic environments rather than the unspecific space of a photographer's studio. Those photographed at home include Arthur and Nora Streeton whose dog Pat is lovingly acknowledged in both the portrait and its title. 'Stonygrad', the stone house Danila Vassilieff built in the Victorian countryside, is the backdrop for the double portrait of him and his wife, Elizabeth. Ian Fairweather is pictured amidst the amazing clutter of his humble studio/home on Bribie Island off the Queensland coast.

But it is not only information about particular individuals that the photographs in the exhibition provide, fascinating as that is (especially when it caters to the contemporary interest in private rather than public lives). As a group the portraits have other stories to tell—about the changes in photographic practice that occurred in the period 1900s to 1970s and about the changing image of the artist in Australian society. The former can be seen in the move away from studio or formal portraiture to more informal modes, especially as subjects become more used to being photographed. The photographs from the 1920s and 1930s are remarkably similar in stylistic terms, recalling traditional portraiture in oils. The subject is generally positioned centrally within the composition, extraneous details are eliminated, the lighting is well controlled and the tones of the print beautifully modulated. These are works by name photographers, such as Jack Cato, Harold Cazneaux and May and Mina Moore, whose professionalism was marked by consistency of style.



Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953)  
**Margaret Preston (1875–1963), Berowra 1937**  
 print from gelatin silver photograph  
 Collection of the Cazneaux family

A taste for drama can be seen in the portraits of the 1940s and 1950s which employ unusual poses and theatrical lighting. Athol Shmith's portrait of Mirka Mora is deliberately reductive, directing all attention to Mora's striking profile. By the 1960s a greater informality is evident in the preference for outdoor settings, for immediacy, action and animated gesture. Mark Strizic's relaxed photograph of John Olsen and Clifton Pugh at work in the bush at Dunmoochin in Victoria is just one of a whole series produced there. David Moore, who brings to his portraiture his rigorous photojournalistic training, shows Michael Johnson in the process of spray-painting his canvas. The photographic exchange between Axel Poignant and Arthur Boyd has all the spontaneity of a conversation, one in which Boyd is shown in full flight.

The changing photographic conventions are a reflection of complex, subtle changes in Australian society, particularly in relation to the role of the artist. In the earliest portraits the



Olive Cotton (b.1911)  
Max Dupain (1911-1992) 1938  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Olive McInerney

valorising of respectability can be seen in images of the well-dressed 'gentleman' and 'lady painter', self-absorbed and serious. On the other hand, the flamboyant portraits of thoroughly modern women—Daphne Mayo, Hilda Rix Nicholas and Thea Proctor—are still charged with daring. Bohemianism is celebrated in photographs of the group of artists associated with John and Sunday Reed at Heide in Melbourne. From the 1960s onwards the images are more disparate, ranging from David Moore's workmanlike *Fred Williams, Upwey* to the highly self-conscious portrait of the much photographed painter Brett Whiteley. Contemporary portraits of Jeffrey Smart and Emily Kame Kngwarreye by Greg Weight are deliberately studied, making reference to more traditional modes of portraiture.

Many of the portraits in *The Reflecting Eye* are concerned with representing the artist at work: teaching, as in Cazneaux's portrait of Julian Ashton, but mostly in the act

of making art. Tools of the trade—palettes, paint brushes, easels, sketchbooks, canvases—are visual cues used to establish the artist's profession. So too is the environment in which the artist is pictured. Aside from the studio, it is the landscape that appears as a favoured location for Australian painters: Barak, Elioth Gruner, Hans Heysen, John Olsen, Clifton Pugh and Fred Williams are all presented *en plein air*. A twist to this theme is provided by Bea Maddock who appears in the unexpected location of Antarctica.

There is one other aspect to the portraits in *The Reflecting Eye* that, although unanticipated, cannot go unnoticed. It is the almost palpable sense of discomfort which runs through so many of them, especially those from the turn of the century up to the 1950s. Many sitters show little enthusiasm for being photographed, adopting self-conscious poses and tightly controlled expressions. Their participation, one suspects, has come reluctantly—out of duty, rather than



Photographer unknown  
Danila Vassilieff (1897–1958) and Elizabeth Hamill at Stonygrad, Victoria 1947  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of Felicity St John Moore

desire. This may in part be related to the fact that very few of the portraits have been initiated by the artists themselves. More often than not, they have come about in response to external requests—from dealers, publishers and others involved in the circulation of images (of both artworks and their makers).

And so, the encounter between photographer and artist—even if known to each other—may have nothing happenstance about it. But the discomfort that distinguishes many of these portraits cannot be simply explained in terms of ‘advance warning’ about the photographic session. More significant is the fact that, at the moment of being photographed, the artist is acknowledging an audience. It is the audience’s implicit presence as readers of the publication, or as viewers of the exhibition that instils the session with gravitas.

All the portraits in *The Reflecting Eye* are made in good faith and regarded as truthful representations of their subjects. Ultimately, however, they reveal very little about individual identity. There is one other irony. The work for which these visual artists is known has invariably been made in private, often in solitude and over a long period of time—none of which can be pictured.

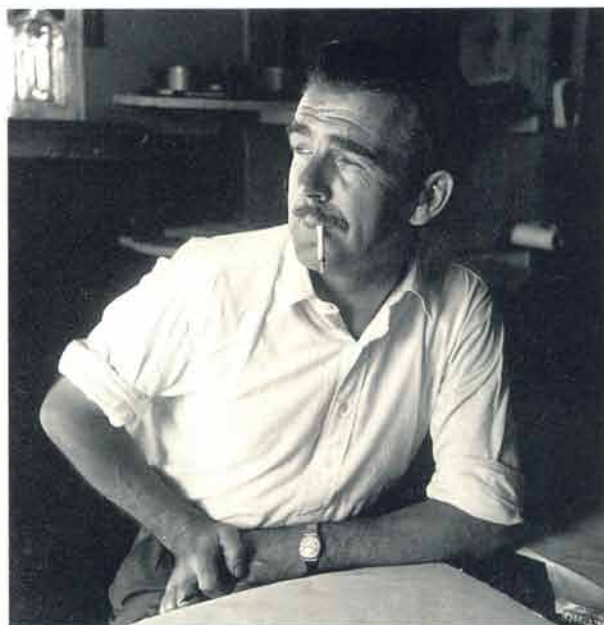
*Helen Ennis*

*Exhibition Curator*

**Helen Ennis** was Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Australia from 1985 to 1992. She has written extensively on aspects of Australian photographic practice; her publications include *Australian Photography: The 1980s* (1988). She has also contributed to *Cazneaux: The Quiet Observer* (1994) and *Olive Cotton: Photographer* (1995), both published by the National Library of Australia. She is presently Lecturer in Art Theory at Canberra School of Art and the photography reviewer for the *Canberra Times*.

#### FURTHER READING

Brilliant, Richard, *Portraiture*. London: Reaktion Books, 1991  
Clarke, Graham (ed.), *The Portrait in Photography*. London: Reaktion Books, 1992



Max Dupain (1911–1992)  
William Dobell (1899–1970) 1942  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

#### EXHIBITION NOTE

The photographs in *The Reflecting Eye* have been selected from a wide range of sources, including public and private collections, and publications such as newspapers, magazines and exhibition catalogues. The final selection of artists was determined to some degree by the availability of photographic material; individual images were chosen according to their visual interest.

Due to the length of the exhibition tour and the variety of venues, *The Reflecting Eye* comprises copy photographs rather than original photographic prints. Prints have been made either from pre-existing negatives or from pre-existing prints. In the case of the latter, all care has been taken to replicate the original in terms of size and print quality. The majority of photographs were printed by the National Library of Australia’s photographic staff.

The mounting and framing of the photographs reflect the three categories of photographic portraiture outlined in the essay. Formal portraits are presented in traditional window mounts and frames; photographs reproduced from publications are printed to the edge and presented in clip frames; and informal photographs are affixed to their mounts with photo-corners as in the conventional family photographic album.

## LIST OF WORKS

(Type C photograph refers to a colour photographic print made from a negative. Direct positive colour print refers to a colour photographic print made from a transparency.)

Richard Beck (1912–1985)

**Douglas Annand (1903–1976), Sydney** 1974  
gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Barbara Beck

Harold Cazneau (1878–1953)

**Julian Ashton (1851–1942) and model** 1920s  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Attributed to Talma Studio (est. 1893–1900)

**Barak (1824–1903) at work on a drawing at Coranderrk** c.1895  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Frances Boyd

Jack Cato (1899–1971)

**George Bell (1878–1966), artist, Melbourne**  
c.1929–32  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of John Cato

Russell Drysdale (1912–1981)

**Paintings Studio, Jean Bellette (b.1909)**  
April 1957  
print from direct positive colour print  
National Gallery of Victoria, presented by  
Lady Drysdale, 1982

Albert Tucker (b.1914)

**José Bergner (b.1920) and Adrian Lawlor (1889–1969), Warrandyte** c.1941  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Albert Tucker

Peter Binns (b.1928)

**Vivienne Binns (b.1940)** c.1948  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Vivienne Binns

Photographer unknown

**Lady Gordon (centre) opening Miss Dorrit Black's (1891–1951) show. Miss Black is on the left.**  
As published in the *Sydney Morning Herald*,  
11 September 1930

Charles Lefebvre (working 1920s)

**Stella Bowen (1893–1947), Paris** 1928  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Private collection

Axel Poignant (1906–1986)

**Arthur Boyd (b.1920), London** 1962  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Helmut Newton (b.1924)

**John Brack (b.1920) with Self-Portrait**  
1955  
As published in *Vogue Supplement for Australia*, March 1956

Photographer unknown

**Michael Brown (b.1938), Ross Crothall (b.1934), Colin Lanceley (b.1938) installing the second *Imitation Realist* exhibition, Sydney** 1962  
Photograph by Mirror Newspapers Ltd  
Courtesy of Richard Haese

May and Mina Moore Studios (est. 1911–28)

**Ethel Carrick (1872–1952)** c.1913–16  
print from toned gelatin silver photograph  
Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of  
Mrs W.H. Schneider, 1976

Monte Luke (1885–1962)

**Harold Cazneau (1878–1953)** 1928  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of the Cazneau family

Carol Jerrems (1949–1980)

**Grace Cossington Smith OBE (1892–1984), Turramurra** c.1974  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Gallery of Australia, gift of  
Mrs Joy Jerrems, 1980

Max Dupain (1911–1992)

**Olive Cotton (b.1911)** 1935  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Olive McInerney

Photographer unknown

**Noel Counihan (1913–1986)** c.1980  
print from type C photograph  
National Library of Australia

David Moore (b.1927)

**Janet Dawson (b.1935), Paddington** 1966  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Max Dupain (1911–1992)

**William Dobell (1899–1970)** 1942  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Tim Drysdale (1940–1962)

**Russell Drysdale (1912–1981), Glen Helen Gorge Camp, Northern Territory** 1956  
print from direct positive colour print  
National Gallery of Victoria, presented by  
Lady Drysdale, 1982

Olive Cotton (b.1911)

**Max Dupain (1911–1992)** 1938

print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Olive McInerney

Photographer unknown

**Ian Fairweather (1891–1974), Bribie Island**  
September 1970  
Illustrated in Murray Bail, *Ian Fairweather*  
(Sydney: Bay Books, 1981)

Alec Murray (b.1917)

**Adrian Feint (1894–1971)** c.1948  
Illustrated in *Alec Murray's Album* (Sydney:  
Ure Smith, 1948)

Alec Murray (b.1917)

**Donald Friend (1915–1989)** c.1948  
Illustrated in *Alec Murray's Album* (Sydney:  
Ure Smith, 1948)

William Buckle (1894–1947)

**Elioth Gruner (1882–1939) painting on the banks of the Molonglo River, ACT** 1937  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Gallery of Australia, gift of  
Mrs William Buckle, 1979

Attributed to Jo Steele (b.1939)

**Barbara Hanrahan (1939–1991), Adelaide**  
c.1978  
gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Jo Steele

Margaret Michaelis (1902–1985)

**Weaver Hawkins (1893–1977)** c.1947  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Gallery of Australia, gift of  
the estate of Margaret Michaelis-Sachs,  
1986

Photographer unknown

**Joy Hester (1920–1960) in Heide library**  
c.1944  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Heide archive, National Gallery of Australia

Harold Cazneau (1878–1953)

**Hans Heysen (1877–1968), Hahndorf** 1937  
print from toned gelatin silver photograph  
Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of  
the Cazneau family, 1978

Harold Cazneau (1878–1953)

**Nora Heysen (b.1911)** c.1939  
print from bromide print  
Art Gallery of South Australia, gift of  
the artist's daughters, 1978

David Moore (b.1927)

**Michael Johnson (b.1938)** 1969  
type C photograph  
Collection of David Moore

Richard Beck (1912–1985)

**Roger Kemp (1908–1987)** c.1975–78  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Greg Weight (b.1946)

**Emily Kame Kngwarreye (born c. 1916)** 1992  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953)

**Norman Lindsay (1879–1969), the etcher**  
1921  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Bob Finlayson (b.1939)

**Artist Bea Maddock (b.1934), Antarctica**  
c.1987  
As published in the *Weekend Australian Magazine*, 28 February–1 March 1987

Photographer unknown

**Daphne Mayo (1895–1982) and her cure for giddiness, Brisbane** 1927  
As published in *Woman's World*, 1 October 1927

Photographer unknown

**Max Meldrum (1875–1955)** c.1945  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Athol Shmith (1914–1990)

**Mirka Mora (b.1928)** 1954  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mirka Mora

Photographer unknown

**Albert Namatjira (1902–1959)** c.1945  
Photograph by Australian Information Service  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Photographer unknown

**Hilda Rix Nicholas (1884–1961) painting in the Cobargo area** c.1927  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Rix Wright

David Moore (b.1927)

**Sidney Nolan (1917–1992)** 1962  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Mark Strizic (b.1928)

**John Olsen (b.1928) and Clifton Pugh (1924–1990), Dunmoochin** 1969  
type C photograph  
Collection of Mark Strizic

John Delacour (b.1948)

**Parr family (Mike Parr (b.1945), Felizitas and Adrian Parr)** 1977  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mike Parr

Mark Strizic (b.1928)

**John Perceval (b.1923) painting 'Veronica and the Conspirators'** 1967  
type C photograph  
Collection of Mark Strizic

Harold Cazneaux (1878–1953)

**Margaret Preston (1875–1963), Berowra**  
1937  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of the Cazneaux family

Bernice Agar (1885–1976)

**Thea Proctor (1879–1966)** 1927  
As published in the *Home*, 1 October 1927

Max Dupain (1911–1992)

**Lloyd Rees (1895–1988)** 1979  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Art Gallery of New South Wales, gift of Lord McAlpine, 1995

Elizabeth Mahoney (working 1920s)

**Tom Roberts (1856–1931)** c.1926  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Castlemaine Art Gallery

Richard Beck (1912–1985)

**Jan Senbergs (b.1939)** 1978  
gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Mrs Barbara Beck

Greg Weight (b.1946)

**Jeffrey Smart (b.1921)** 1992  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Walter Barnett (1862–1934)

**Arthur Streeton (1867–1943) and Nora Streeton (nee Clench), with Pat, the dog, at their Hill Road home, London** c.1909  
print from platinum photographic print  
National Gallery of Australia

Photographer unknown

**Albert Tucker (b.1914) on the left bank of the Seine opposite the Ile Saint Louis, Paris** 1951  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of Albert Tucker

Photographer unknown

**Danila Vassilieff (1897–1958) and Elizabeth Hamill at Stonygrad, Victoria** 1947  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
Courtesy of Felicity St John Moore

Jack Cato (1899–1971)

**Napier Waller (1893–1972), artist, Melbourne** c.1929–32  
gelatin silver photograph  
Collection of John Cato

Greg Weight (b.1946)

**Brett Whiteley (1939–1992)** 1973  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

David Moore (b.1927)

**Fred Williams (1927–1982), Upwey** 1991  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia

Greg Weight (b.1946)

**Salvatore Zofrea (b.1946), painter** 1995  
print from gelatin silver photograph  
National Library of Australia