

Renowned for her passionate and unique approach to photography and image-making, Sue Ford was one of the most important practitioners to emerge from the wave of 1970s feminist photographers in Australia. Her work is both personal and political, and shows a fascination with private, shared and little-known histories. It was often made collaboratively and involved her family, friends and colleagues.

Several thematic concerns emerge when surveying Ford's practice: the influence of personal biography and a questioning of identity; an interest in gender issues and feminism; a serious connection to social discourse and contemporary politics; and a passion for reconsidering the histories of Australia and its Indigenous population. Ford's prolific output also demonstrates her experimentation with a wide range of media and techniques – processes which were connected, from the very beginning, by an interest in the politics of representation.

Ford constantly reviewed her archive, revisiting and using images from the past in new and different contexts. As such, this exhibition is presented thematically, rather than chronologically. It brings together key photographs, digital prints, collages and films, including several works never before exhibited, as well as important archival materials, in a survey of Ford's works created between 1960 and 2009.

The works in this room play with images and information from different years and periods as a way of reconsidering one point of time in the context of another. For Sue Ford the process of taking, looking at and using photographs was implicitly connected to a sense of time. This was not a static reading of time as a linear progression, with the past at one end of the spectrum and the present at the other, but one in flux: a continuum in which the past can be experienced in the present. Portraiture was an enduring interest for Ford, and through it she presents sequences of faces that, when displayed in pairs and grids and series, allow for the development of narratives and a consideration of the effects of time and change.

Ford again returned to her archive in the early 1980s, and with ‘incredulous eyes’ discovered the dominance of portraits of women dating back to the early 1960s. Bringing together long-forgotten photographs with her contemporary works, Ford came to consider the difference in the representation of women over the twenty-year period. As she defiantly stated, this was a difference that ‘*women* have defined ... because no-one else was going to do it’.

Ford made a selection of fifty-four portraits and printed them at a consistent large scale – a group of which is displayed here. The photographs were exhibited at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, in 1982, under the title *The Photobook of Women: 1961–1982*. In 1987 the images were published in book form as *A Sixtieth of a Second: Portraits of Women 1961–1981*, selected captions from which are quoted here.

The revival of these images in the 1980s, when Ford was immersed in feminist filmmaking and the Women’s Art Movement, offered her a critical lens through which to review her archive. The photographs are consensual, objective and non-exploitative and tell an important story of women’s lives – documenting Ford’s own journey as much as the lives of her subjects.

From the mid 1970s Ford was actively documenting the artistic community she associated with, her 'dense web of friends'. Key within this network was a group of women artists who met regularly, the core members of which went on to form the Women's Art Movement in Sydney, led by Barbara Hall. The Melbourne contingent was closely connected to the Ewing and George Paton Galleries, University of Melbourne, staging exhibitions of women artists under the directorship of Kiffy Rubbo. There are photographs of Ford working and socialising with fellow photographers and friends, such as Micky Allan, Ruth Maddison, Bonita Ely and Ponch Hawkes, with whom she collaborated and organised exhibitions.

Ford's photographs and films from this time are a reminder of the crucial support networks active during the period, particularly among female practitioners. As she later described, these 'doco-portraits' were her attempt to 'make a record of people that I know well, and the way that they are, the way that they look, just finding a moment of stillness to make a record of women artist friends'.

In the late 1960s Ford created several bodies of highly experimental works that involved complex montages, photograms and layered negatives, revealing hours of darkroom experimentation in her Eltham studio. These coincided with her burgeoning interest in left-wing politics (both global and local), and exposure via media sources to critical events such as the NASA moon landings and Vietnam War. Ford incorporated imagery and ideas relating to these events as well as her current interests in environmentalism, in these abstracted, Surrealism-inspired works.

Ford's research into Indigenous histories, which began in the mid 1980s, led to her 1989 exhibition *A Different Landscape*. It consisted of images from three events in 1988, a selection of which is displayed here.

The first event was the Barunga Festival of culture and sports, held in Katherine, Northern Territory, which received a historic visit by then prime minister Bob Hawke and Aboriginal affairs minister Gerry Hand. They met with senior Aboriginal men to discuss a proposed treaty and to receive the Barunga statement calling for land rights and reconciliation, respect and self-management for Aboriginal people. Ford was invited by members of the Northern Land Council to photograph the events of the day. The second group of images document a journey to Bathurst Island, Northern Territory, during which Ford was invited to teach photography to a group of Tiwi women. She later helped the women mount an exhibition of their works in Darwin and Melbourne. The third event Ford documented was NAIDOC Week.

She printed the photographs in black-and-white but at a large scale, distancing them from an historical documentary reading. The images, copies of which are currently on display at a Yolngu library in Gulkula, form a vital part of Aboriginal cultural heritage and exist as important social and political records of these significant events.

From the mid 1980s onwards Ford's works became increasingly engaged in what she described as her 'own personal response to "official versions" of Australian history in our own postcolonial society'. A visit in 1986 to the Museum of Hobart, Tasmania, and the broader social debates at the time regarding 'official' history since colonisation, prompted the beginnings of Ford's research into the relationship between Indigenous and white settler histories. At the heart of this research was a fascination with the idea of history as a present, insistent force.

Images of people taking photographs appear frequently throughout Sue Ford's archive. Several key examples are brought together here to consider her ongoing fascination with thinking about the 'mediated landscape' – that is, the landscape as it is seen through the lens of a camera.

Sue Ford's interests in Buddhist ideas and teachings became the subject of this collaborative work made with the Buddhist scholar and teacher Geshe Sonam Thargye. This immersive eight-screen installation incorporates footage filmed by an unknown monk at a Buddhist teaching festival in Tibet in the late 1990s. As curator and art historian Ross Gibson described, a monk 'was asked to take a cheap handycam through the crowd, documenting the event so that the undeniable existence of these devout people could be "captured"'. When Ford and Geshe Sonam viewed the footage years later, they felt it possessed 'the makings of a meditative environment that could bear witness to the compassion that is the subject of so much Buddhist teaching'.

Guided by the logic and sequences of Buddhist teaching, Ford and Geshe Sonam worked with editor Ian Bryson to create what Gibson described as 'endlessly repeating images of ordinary Tibetan people', so that visitors would 'find themselves in the midst of a consciousness that knows how the past, present and future are all folded into each other, in endless remembering'. There is an effacement of the individual in this work similar to that in Ford's earlier studies of faces and time, and again her role as artist is intentionally ambiguous.

In Sue Ford's archive are numerous vintage studio prints of her early portrait photographs, many of which she revisited for *The Photobook of Women: 1961–1982* exhibition. The earliest works, from the early 1960s, date from the time when Ford first took up photography. In 1961 she was employed as a delivery girl for Sutcliffe Photographers in Melbourne, and soon enrolled in a photography course at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (one of only two females in a class of thirty students). In 1961 she set up a small photographic studio with Annette Stephens above a cafe at the top end of Collins Street, Melbourne.

Sue Ford described the excitement and earnestness that she felt about working in the inner-city studio:

Surprisingly enough, lots of friends wanted their photos taken ... I loved being in that room, looking out the window at the passing city life, printing until three o'clock in the morning ... I always had to print at night as the 'darkroom' wasn't really dark enough to work [in] during the day. I must have taken hundreds of photos in my room.

These studio portraits were intimate, empowered images that, as Ford later recognised, had a 'ceremonial seriousness' to them.

Ford's photographs from the early 1960s are markedly different to the sharply focused black-and-white images depicting scenes of glamour, influenced by European modernism, which emanated from the studios of Melbourne's commercially successful photographers, such as Helmut Newton, Athol Shmith and Wolfgang Sievers in the postwar period. As a young woman associating with bohemia, jazz and the beat generation, Ford's approach was open, experimental and collaborative, and inspired by alternative filmmakers such as Jean-Luc Godard and Ingmar Bergman.

Annette, studio print
c. 1961–62
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Portrait of a woman), studio print
c. 1961–62
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Portrait of a woman), studio print
c. 1961–62
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**No title (Woman with Cinzano bottle),
studio print**
c. 1961–62
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Carmel and Trish, studio prints

1962

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

St Kilda, studio print
1963
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sue Pike, studio print
1964
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sandra, Bundoora, studio prints

1968

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Bliss, Magritte Room, Yellow House,
Sydney, studio prints**
1972–73
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**A Photobook of Women 1961–81,
sample book**

c. 1981

photocopies, staples, pencil, 70 pages

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Untitled (Notebook with groupings for
A Photobook of Women)**

c. 1981

scrapbook: ballpoint pen, 26 pages, cardboard
cover, spiral binding

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**A Sixtieth of a Second: Portraits
of Women 1961–81**

by Sue Ford, published by Experimental Art
Foundation, Adelaide, 1987

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Shaw Research Library

When Ford published these photographs in book form, she changed the title to *A Sixtieth of a Second*, because, as she said:

I always use a 60th of a second on my camera when I can because I'm so slack with technology, I can't be bothered with it. I chose not to become a technically perfect photographer but it also chose me because of the economics of the situation. As far as I was concerned high-tech photography only involved one thing, and that's dollars. I got really fed up with the idea that it was not accessible to me.

**Sue Ford: A Sixtieth of a Second:
Portraits of Women 1961–81,
exhibition catalogue**

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne,
25 June – 17 September 1988, published by
Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Shaw Research Library

Wayne 'Bird' Delisle, studio print

c. 1979

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Reg Mombassa and Wayne 'Bird' Delisle,
studio print**

c. 1979

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979

colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Reg Mombassa, studio print

c. 1979

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Reg Mombassa and Wayne 'Bird' Delisle,
studio print**

c. 1979

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979

type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979

type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979

type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Reg Mombassa

c. 1979

type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Belinda the rag doll, mock-up book

1967

book: collage of cut gelatin silver photographs
and cut typewritten paper on paper, adhesive tape,
blu-tack, pencil and blue ballpoint pen, 26 pages,
spiral binding

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The magic garden

c. 1967

book: typewriting on 28 pages, stapled
cardboard cover

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Mary and Catherine and Helen
didn't like living in the big city at all**
from *The Witches' Letter* project
c. 1969–74, printed 1974
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Cityscape)
from *The Witches' Letter* project
c. 1969–74
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The Witches' Letter, end page
from *The Witches' Letter* project
c. 1969–74
collage of cut gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The Witches' Letter, mock-up book

c. 1969–74

book: collage of cut gelatin silver photographs on paper, ballpoint pen, purple fibre-tipped pen, adhesive tape, staples, 43 pages, cardboard cover, glued binding

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The Witches' Letter, title page
from *The Witches' Letter* project
c. 1969–74, printed 1974
collage of cut gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

As a young mother with two children in the late 1960s, Sue Ford documented her children extensively and also experimented with concepts for children's books, pairing images and text in imaginative narrative sequences that were often connected by a theme of escape. None of the children's books was published, but *The Witches' Letter*, c. 1969–74, was printed and displayed as an exhibition at the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, in 1992.

The Tide Recedes series, studio prints
1969–71
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ford's fascination with experimental photographic techniques such as the photogram, multiple exposures and mirroring of negatives was evident in her first solo exhibition, *The Tide Recedes*, at Hawthorn City Gallery, Melbourne, in 1971. The images were of female nudes, photographed in a studio, superimposed with images of sea, coral and sand – the bodies shown to be metamorphosing back into nature, expressing an anxiety that people were becoming too removed from nature. These are a selection of vintage studio prints which Ford produced as development works for the exhibition, trialling combinations of images and effects before deciding on the final, large-scale compositions.

**Invitation to The Tide Recedes exhibition,
Hawthorn**

1971

offset-photo lithograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The invitation to the exhibition uses the title of each work in a vertical sequence to form a spatial poem.

Untitled, diptych

from the *Suburban* series 1969–71

1969–71

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Suburban)

from the *Suburban* series 1969–71

1969–71

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Suburban), studio prints
1969–71
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

These prints are documentation of photographs on display in Ford's first solo exhibition in 1971 at Hawthorn City Gallery, Melbourne. They were part of a series she called *Suburban*, and were shown alongside works from *The Tide Recedes* series. Created while Ford was living in Eltham, they use complex layering of negatives and montage techniques to present dystopian views of the suburban experience.

Man off the moon
c. 1969, printed 1995
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The photo-collages *Man off the moon*, 1969, were a critique of the first moonwalk by NASA astronauts Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin. Ford shot images on a television screen, then printed the images and placed her hand into the scene, directing the cut-out astronauts like puppets in a way that asserts her own presence and questions the intention of the Americans on the lunar landscape.

No title (Man off the moon, contact sheet)

c. 1969

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Vietnam: the six o'clock news

c. 1970

collage of cut gelatin silver photograph on offset-
photo lithograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ford's interest in the impact of television on the mediation of information and knowledge, echoing Marshall McLuhan's famous dictum regarding the symbiotic relationship between content and medium ('The medium is the message'), is evident in this photo-collage. Here the bloodied face of an anonymous Vietnamese civilian, photographed from a news report, is superimposed over an archetypal suburban house, emphasising the split reality of the victims of war whose plight was watched on television nightly in lounge rooms around the world.

Untitled (Collages for Wonderbook of Empire)

1995

collages of cut printed paper and colour offset-
photo lithograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ford took scans of nineteenth-century *cartes-de-visite* from the NGV collection for the *The Wonder Book of Empire* series, conflating those images with others sourced from the cover of a children's book of the same title, which propagandised British colonisation, that she had found in an op-shop. Also mixed into the blend of imagery were scans from a jigsaw of wooden soldiers representing British forces. After scanning the various sources Ford then collaged the images together by hand before re-photographing the works and using a laser printer to print them at a larger scale.

Harry GOLDING editor

The Wonder Book of Empire

early 20th century

published by Ward Lock & Co. Ltd, London,
Melbourne and Toronto.

book: letterpress and colour offset photo-
lithographs, 256 pages,
cloth and cardboard cover, stitched binding,
4th edition

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

John WRIGHT

active in Australia 1865–69

**No title (Bearded young man),
carte-de-visite**

1865–69

albumen silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of C. Stuart Tompkins, 1972

PH155-1972

John WRIGHT

active in Australia 1865–69

No title (Three girls), carte-de-visite

1865–69

albumen silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of C. Stuart Tompkins, 1972

PH154-1972

Ephemera
Ferns
(c. 1970s)
organic matter

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ephemera
Soldiers jigsaw

no date

colour offset photo lithograph on wood

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ephemera

No title (Theodora Tipiloura, Nina Puruntatameri, Sandra Kantilla and Emmie Tipiloura at the Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi exhibition).

Thank you card to Sue Ford from Tiwi Island women.

**Yimanka ngini Tiwi wupamurrumi
amintiya kularlaga wunimima yinkiti
(Photos of Tiwi people working and
hunting together), exhibition catalogue
1989–93**

type C photographs, offset-photo lithograph,
green pencil on paper

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For Kids

Sue Ford loved spending time with her kids, and taking pictures of them, and decided to make picture books for them and their friends to enjoy. Here we can see some of the pages from one of these stories called *The Witches' Letter*. Make up a story about The Witches' Letter based on these pages. Give it a beginning, middle and an end.

From top to bottom, left to right

Helen, 1962; Helen, 1974

from the *Time series*
1962–74
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery
Society of New South Wales Contempo Group 2013 59.2013.4

**Annette, 1962; Annette, 1974;
Annette, 1982**

from the *Time series II*
1962–82, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sue, 1962; Sue, 1974

from the *Time series*
1962–74
gelatin silver photographs

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 NGA 83.2271, NGA 83.2281

Jenny, 1962; Jenny, 1974

from the *Time series*
1962–74
gelatin silver photographs

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 NGA 83.2270, NGA 83.2279

Kevin, 1963; Kevin, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1963–74
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Vardy, 1963; Vardy, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1963–74, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Toni, 1964; Toni, 1974;
Toni, 1982**

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1964–82, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ross, 1964; Ross, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74, printed 1974
gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board
and the KODAK (Australasia) PTY LTD Fund, 1974 PH171.a-b-1974

Ashe, 1964; Ashe, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery
Society of New South Wales Contempo Group 2013 59.2013.2

Riley, 1964; Riley, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Gift of the artist 1979 7911Ph81(a&b)

Joy, 1964; Joy, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74, printed 1996
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1996 259.1996

Lynne, 1964; Lynne, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74, printed 1974
gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with the assistance of the Visual Arts Board
and the KODAK (Australasia) PTY LTD Fund, 1974 PH168.a-b-1974

Sue, 1964; Sue, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74
gelatin silver photographs

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 NGA 83.2272, NGA 83.2284

**Jim, 1964; Jim, 1969;
Jim 1974; Jim 1979**

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1964–79, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Anne, 1964; Anne, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1964–74, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Abigail, 1965; Abigail, 1974;
Abigail, 1980**

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1965–80, printed 1981
gelatin silver photographs

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane
Purchased 1995, Queensland Art Gallery Foundation 1995.120a-c

**Fabian, 1966; Fabian, 1974;
Fabian, 1980**

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1966–80, printed 1982
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery
Society of New South Wales Contempo Group 2013 265.1996

Emile, 1966; Emile, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1966–74
gelatin silver photographs

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased with funds provided by the Art Gallery
Society of New South Wales Contempo Group 2013 59.2013.3

Kerry, 1966; Kerry, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1966–74, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Piers, 1967; Piers, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1967–74
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Tony, 1967; Tony, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1967–74
gelatin silver photographs

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 NGA 83.2276, NGA 83.2287

Vicki, 1967; Vicki, 1974

from the *Time series* 1962–74
1967–74
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Robin and Jenny, 1969;
Robin and Jenny, 1982**

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1969–82, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

John, 1969; John, 1977

from the *Time series II* 1962–82
1969–77, printed 2014
gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Self-portrait with camera series

1960–2006, printed 2011

selenium-toned gelatin silver photographs,
type C photographs, gelatin silver
photographs, colour polaroid photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Throughout her life, Ford was a fastidious collector and organiser of her prints, negatives and associated ephemera. In her archive are hundreds of self-portraits, which she drew upon for several different projects throughout her career, culminating in this extraordinary serial project which was first exhibited, posthumously, in 2011. Like many of her projects, the series involves a conflation and compression of time. It includes some of Ford's earliest photographs alongside her most recent, and is deeply personal yet ordered and objective at the same time.

For Kids

Lots of artists make self-portraits or take photographs of themselves. Self-portraits can sometimes help you to see yourself in a different way.

Sue Ford took hundreds of self-portraits. This series shows her holding lots of different cameras. Some of these pictures show her reflection in a mirror.

Have you ever taken a photograph of yourself? Did you notice anything about yourself in the photograph that you don't usually notice in the mirror?

Growth (or Paul grows a beard)

1975, printed 1995

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For Kids

Sue Ford loved to use photography as a 'time machine' to capture how people change as they get older.

This series is of Sue's friend Paul. Over twelve days he grows a beard, and then he shaves it off. On another wall in this room there are pictures of her friends taken over many years.

Can you think of something about you that has changed in the past year?

Somewhere in France, 1917

1999

digital plan prints on paper

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1999

1999.96.1-54

In 1995 Ford received a parcel from a relative containing a manuscript by her long-deceased grandfather, Jim Keating. The manuscript, based on a diary Keating had written in the trenches during the First World War, is a critical account of the horrors and pain of war. In a type of posthumous collaboration with her grandfather, Ford juxtaposed his writings with images of marble busts that she photographed during a residency in Besozzo, Italy. Displayed in a grid formation, the work explores how personal histories can intersect with social histories when connected visually with content and imagery from different times, cultures and contexts.

Sue FORD

Australia 1943–2009

Ben FORD

born Australia 1968

Faces 1976–96

1976–96

black and white 16mm film transferred to DVD, silent, 13 mins

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For *Faces*, Ford enlisted friends and colleagues, framing their heads at close range to create portraits which, when projected at large scale, are both monumental and intimate. The charged, non-sentimental emotion of the film creates an intensity that oscillates between performance art, in which duration is of vital importance, and the 'decisive moment' of documentary portraiture. Twenty years later Ford revisited *Faces* and collaborated with her son Ben Ford on a second version of the project. Revisiting many of the original subjects, Ben filmed their faces with the same consistent composition, duration and lighting. Interestingly, many of the gestures and details are mirrored across time.

'For some time I have been thinking about the camera itself. Trying to explore its particular UNIQUENESS, coming to terms with the fact that I had been trying to ignore for some years, that the camera is actually a MACHINE. The machine has an enormous power easily abused. Man seems to misuse his machines continuously, with disastrous results for this century. In *Time series* I tried to use the camera as objectively as possible. It was a time machine. For me it was an amazing experience. It wasn't until I placed the photograph of the younger face beside the recent photograph that I could fully appreciate the change. The camera showed me with absolute clarity something I could only just perceive with my naked eye.'

Sue Ford, 1974

In 1973 Sue Ford was awarded the Ilford Scholarship, which afforded her a cash stipend, access to darkrooms and the opportunity to study at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne. She radically changed her ideas about photography and came to recognise its unique place as an objective medium. The *Time series* was conceived at this time: it involved the display of two black-and-white portraits of the same person taken around ten years apart, with a third or fourth portrait sometimes added later. The small portraits invite intimate viewing, but are neither sentimental nor confessional.

Ford was involved with film from the early 1960s and began making her own productions in the early 1970s. Her involvement with the medium was intrinsically related to her photographic practice – films and photographic projects overlapped physically and conceptually and each medium had a significant formal impact on her understanding of the other. The seriality of her images, the use of the camera to record and document a progression of information related to the effects of time, and experimentation with multiple negatives, collage and montage effects were crucial concerns across both media.

Low deposit, easy terms

1970

colour 16 mm film transferred to DVD,
sound, 8 mins

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Time changes

1977

colour 16mm film transferred to DVD,
sound, 25 mins

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Time changes used footage filmed over four years and shot by multiple camera operators. It had no script, and its only 'agenda' was, Ford said, 'to be a documentary about time and change, focusing on four men who were filmmakers and close friends'. As she described:

There is an obvious relationship with my interest in the camera, how it records time changing. That's the connection with my photography. The film camera can do the same thing as a still camera, but of course you've got a lot more things to play with: sound and movement. The film is a diary, it's happening as I happen.

For Kids

Sue Ford thought it was important to put together a series of photos *of* women taken *by* a woman. She felt this was a good way to show what women are really like. Ford shows some of the things that make each woman different, as well as some things that they share in common.

Think about a woman you know well.
What makes her special?

Lyn and Carol

1961, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1988

372.1988

'[Lyn and Carol were] co-workers in the coffee lounge downstairs [from our studio on Collins Street], where we all worked to pay the rent. Ours was 30 shillings a week.'

Carol

1961, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Carol

1961, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Carol

1961, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Woman in window)

1961, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sarah Nicholls

1961, printed 1988
gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH107-1988

'A friend from school, wearing her
favourite jumper.'

Carmel and Trish

1962, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH108-1988

‘A combination of “trying it out” and
“sending it up”.’

Annette

1962, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'My business and studio partner. One of our sessions trying out different "effects".'

Lyn

1963, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH109-1988

'[Lyn] in the studio – with Chianti bottle and bongos. It must have been a party.'

Sue Pike

1963, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH110-1988

'[On] the morning of her wedding.'

Sue Pike

1963, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Annette

1963–64, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

““Fabulon Girl” ... we were doing the
Woman as Consumed series – this was
one direction we did not want to go.’

Annette

1964, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Joy

1964, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Vicki and Javanta Howard

1972, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH111-1988

‘Vicki with her first child at Eltham.’

No title (Two Indian women)

1972, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Orpheus

1972, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH112-1988

'At a party at "Dunmoochin", Cottles Bridge.'

Denise Gibb

1974, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Denise Gibb

1974, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Leonie Reisberg

1975, printed 1988
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Micky Allan

1975, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1988

PH113-1988

'Painter/photographer – a photo session in
Micky's backyard at Fitzroy.'

Janie Knox

1976, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Martina and Darcy O'Doherty

1980, printed 1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased, 1988

PH114-1988

'Surry Hills, Sydney – nappy change time.'

Susan Weis

1980, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Jenni Mather
1980–81, printed 1982
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Tina Morgan-Payler and Joe

1978, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Bonita Ely

1980

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Artist – Fitzroy – making a sculpture of
a fifty-foot suspended material tree.'

Madelon Wilkins

1980, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Most women could organise more freedom for themselves if they'd only help each other more. Men aren't going to help to get that day free to paint or pot or study or just go into town. But by forming a group and taking care of each other's children, it can be achieved.'

In 1963 Ford moved to the outer fringes of Melbourne and two years later married Gordon Ford, a renowned landscape gardener. Their two children, Emma and Ben, were born soon afterwards. The family lived in a mudbrick house built by Gordon at Laughing Waters Road, Eltham. Here Ford made what she described as 'candid' photographs, including commissions for child portraits, weddings and landscape gardening and architectural projects. She was actively involved in the alternative and environmentally progressive community, and much of her photographic work from this time involved her circle of friends and acquaintances, including notable artists John Perceval, Lawrence Beck, Clif and Marlene Pugh and Myra Skipper.

Lawrence Beck

1962

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Clif and Marlene Pugh in the studio

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Marlene Pugh – artist – watching painter
Clif Pugh being filmed at “Dunmoochin”,
Cottles Bridge.'

Marlene Pugh

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Riley

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The Barnes family

1966

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Myra Skipper

1970

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

‘[Myra], jeweller and painter – on a painting trip to the bush near the Yarra River.’

**Ann Stephen, Sue Ford,
Janine Burke, Micky Allan,
Emma Ford, Isabel Davies
and Bonita Ely
(Women's Art Group)**

1973, printed 2014
type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The early meetings of feminist artists and curators, as pictured in this photograph, were described by art historian and curator Janine Burke as 'gregarious occasions that often took place at artists' homes: photographer and filmmaker Sue Ford welcomed us to her Eltham property while multimedia artist Isabel Davies and painters Lesley Dumbrell and Chris Berkman invited us to their urban studios'.

Ponch Hawkes and Sue Ford

1974

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Lucy Lippard visit to Ewing and George Paton Gallery), studio prints

1975

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ford documented the American curator and theorist Lucy Lippard's women-only talk at the Ewing and George Paton Gallery (EGPG) in 1975, a highly influential visit for local practitioners which coincided with International Women's Year. Lippard discussed the development of the feminist art movement as it was occurring in America, and showed slides of works by women artists in New York. Local artist Lesley Dumbrell was inspired by Lippard's talk to start a feminist art group in Melbourne, and approached the director of the EGPG, Kiffy Rubbo, to assist. EGPG hosted the first meeting of the Women's Art Register in September 1975.

No title (John Nixon and Jenny Watson at their Prahran home)

1975

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

These photographs document the artists John Nixon and Jenny Watson standing in front of their home in Prahran, Melbourne. Ford later created a detail from this shoot, cropping around the image of Jenny, for inclusion in *The Photobook of Women: 1961–1982* exhibition.

Jenny Watson, painter; film made by Sue Ford

c. 1975

colour VHS transferred to DVD, sound,
18 mins 12 secs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

In this fascinating video portrait of friend and fellow artist Jenny Watson there is discussion of Watson's practice and issues of subjectivity and feminism. When Ford asks about support from feminists, Watson replies:

The most support comes from other women artists, people like yourself, or people who are in this very tiny field, because they understand the problems from a sort of gut level, and a whole lot of things are understood – we've got a common denominator. But I suppose philosophically, any feminist writing supports your position because it supports the idea of women doing things and not maintaining men as their prime activity.

Bonita Ely, driving to Adelaide

1976

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

‘Artist – Adelaide – we were on the way to Adelaide to show our work in a “Post Object” exhibition. Bonita’s entire “living room” installation [is in the] cardboard box, strapped on the roof.’

Sue Ford and Micky Allan

1980

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Claire Jager, Sue Ford, Susan Weis and Carole Sklan (Reel Women)

c. 1980

colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Women generally have to make filmmaking fit into their life, not their life fit into a career of filmmaking, which is generally the case with men. This is the most important element in my filmmaking. The film is simply about the struggle of daily existence ... Women's films attempt to hold up a mirror to other women.'

Monique Schwarz, Madelon Wilkins, Susan Weis, Sue Ford, Virginia Fraser, Claire Jager, Alison Tilson, Carole Sklan, Natalie Green (Reel Women), studio print

c. 1980

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

In 1979 Ford became heavily involved in filmmaking again. She was a founding member of the Melbourne-based feminist collective Reel Women, which was active in the distribution and exhibition of feminist films. With weekly meetings held in lounge rooms in Fitzroy and Carlton, it was agreed Reel Women would 'function within a democratic, non-hierarchical structure which included flexibility and collective decision-making, advocating our needs as independent feminist filmworkers'. Following a rental and distribution agreement with the Australian Film Institute in 1979, various films from associates of the Reel Women group were available to rent, with Ford's *Woman in a house* being one of the most popular.

**No title (Reel Women),
studio print**

c. 1980

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Hanna Dunn, Kerry Dwyer,
Natalie Green, Sue Ford,
Claire Jager, Maureen
McCarthy, Madelon Wilkins,
Halfway House Collective,
Women's Collective, Monique
Schwarz, Carole Sklan**

Reel Women, poster

1981

colour offset-photo lithograph

Private collection, Melbourne

This is one of several posters made by the Reel Women group to advertise their film screenings, this one held at the Ewing and George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne. The group also held training workshops for women – an existing flyer from the time describes the intention of providing ‘women with an opportunity to acquaint themselves ... with the technical aspects of filmmaking and information regarding access to equipment, editing and distribution’. Reel Women founding member Claire Jager is featured on the poster, and the photo-lithographs were created using source photographs taken by Ford during filming for one of the Reel Women projects.

Sue Ford and Micky Allan

c. 1980

colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Girls' Garage Band

1981, printed c. 1986

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999

H99.223/2.

This photograph documents the all-female, feminist, new wave group Girls' Garage Band performing in a backyard in Northcote (from left to right, Sylvie Leber, Fran Kelly, Nina Bondarenko, Vicki Bell, Hellen Sky and Eve Glenn). The band later changed its name to Toxic Shock (related to news reports regarding the outbreak of illness in the late 1970s caused by high-absorbency tampons) and performed around Melbourne at universities, pubs and women's events. They recorded three of their original songs, including the satirical tune 'Intoxicated', which contains the lyrics: 'They put a man on the moon, and all they can offer us in feminine protection is toxic shock!'

Sue FORD

Australia 1943–2009

Paul REED photographer

active in Australia 1970s

**No title (Women's meeting
in a river – Sue Ford, Micky
Allan, Virginia Coventry
and Viva Gibb)**

1977, printed 1986

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased 1999

H99.223/5

'We had been approached to do a photography book on "Men" and were having a meeting on a hot day at the river near where I lived. We never did the book. The photo was taken by a friend, Paul Reed.'

Janine Burke
1981, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Janine Burke

1981

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

‘Writer – at her house in Carlton during the writing of her book on the Australian artist Joy Hester.’

Reel Women

1981, printed c.1986
gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999

H99.223/6

Reel Women initially ran the group out of the boot of an old ute owned by Claire Jager, as documented in this staged image of the group's key members posing on and around the vehicle. An image of strength and independence, the photograph was re-used by Victoria's Department of Education in 1981 as an Equal Opportunity poster emblazoned with the words: 'Jobs for Girls: Film Makers: Reel Women'.

Sue Ford, Micky Allan and Ruth Maddison

1981

colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Mental As Anything, poster

c. 1979

colour offset-photo lithograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Mental As Anything

c. 1979, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

A little-known aspect of Ford's life and work was her brief but intense connection to Sydney band Mental as Anything. When Ford left Melbourne in the late 1970s for Sydney, she met and formed a relationship with the band's then drummer David Twohill (now known as Wayne 'Bird' Delisle). She documented Mental as Anything on- and offstage in casual snaps and Polaroids, and also shot several promotional images for them at sites around Sydney. A playful image of the band larking about a car was used as a poster and was later revisited for the cover of the *Best of Mental as Anything* album (2003).

Mental As Anything

c. 1979, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For Kids

Sue Ford loved spending time with her kids, and taking pictures of them, and decided to make picture books for them and their friends to enjoy.

Here we can see some of the pages from one of these stories called *The Witches' Letter*. Make up a story about The Witches' Letter based on these pages. Give it a beginning, middle and an end.

Temporarily

from *The Tide Recedes* series 1969–71

1969

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1996

1996.768

This is the only surviving large-scale vintage print from Ford's first solo exhibition, *The Tide Recedes*, in 1971. It demonstrates Ford's fluid, almost filmic working methods in which individual images are grouped in pairs, sequences or extended series and then distorted, repeated and mirrored.

Untitled

from *The Tide Recedes* series 1969–71
1969, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Bush performance montage)

c. 1969

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gerstl Bequest, 2000

2000.59

No title (Nude montage)

c. 1969

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gerstl Bequest, 2000

2000.58

No title (Curled hand in front of garden steps)

c. 1970

gelatin silver photogram

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Photogram of two hands and garden path)

c. 1970

gelatin silver photogram

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gerstl Bequest, 2000

2000.60

No title (Two figures on garden steps)

c. 1970

collage of cut paper on gelatin silver
photogram

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Gestation

from the *Continuum* series

2003

digital type C print

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 2004

2004.48

Submerge

from the *Continuum* series

2003

digital type C print

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 2004

2004.49

The recurring themes of displacement, survival, being and time underpinned Ford's *Continuum* series of 2003. In these layered works, images from Ford's personal archive are combined with new photographs to create complex scenes inspired by memories of a bushfire that swept through Eltham in the mid 1960s. Ford survived the fire by seeking refuge in the Yarra River.

Woman in a house

1972

colour 16 mm film transferred to DVD,
sound, 11 mins

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

This film presents a feminist critique of suburban married life. Despairing of her mundane situation, a woman escapes through surreal dream sequences and eventually in a physical sense, when she is shown lying on a beach. As critic Freda Frieberg wrote, Ford 'dramatises the dissatisfaction of women with the suburban dream, giving artistic expression to Betty Friedan's critique of the feminine mystique'. Coinciding with the breakdown of her own marriage, Ford wrote: 'I had to make it, to try and sort out for myself the confusion of different realities of my own and other women's life at the time'.

For Kids

In the 1980s, Sue Ford set out to photograph important things that were happening in the lives of Indigenous Australians.

Sue said that being at the special events shown in these photographs and spending time with Indigenous people helped her to see Australia's landscape 'in a totally new way'.

Have you ever spent time with someone from a place or culture different to your own? Did you learn anything new from them?

**Bob Hawke and Gerry
Hand receiving a painting,
Barunga, Northern Territory,
June 12, 1988**

1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Gift of the artist, 1989

PH176-1989

**Discussions after the Barunga
meeting between Gerry
Hand, Bob Hawke, Galarrwuy
Yunupingu, chairman of the
Northern Lands Council and
Frank Chulung, chairman of
the Kimberley Lands Council
1988**

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by
Hallmark Cards Australia, Pty Ltd, 1989

PH173-1989

**Discussions between
Bob Hawke and
Galarrwuy Yunupingu**
1988, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Emmie Tipiloura rests
in the mangroves during
a hunting trip**

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Theodora Tipiloura, Nina
Puruntatameri, Sandra
Kantilla and Emmie Tipiloura**
1988, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Koori women and children lead the march: Sydney 1988

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Lajamanu women dancing 'Yawulu'

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Lajamanu women hold
discussions with Hazel
Hawke and Maree Hand**

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Leading the NAIDOC march
to the city are Koori children,
Coen Brown, Charlie Williams,
Turbo Brown, Rovvie Thorpe,
Alan Brown, Peter Rotumah,
Andre Williams, Alice Edwards
and Delta McGuinness**

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Paddy Wainburra of the
Mirrnitza clan dancing with
Willie Jaylama, Billy Lakanini
and children from Barunga**

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Peter Rotumah, program
director of the Victorian
Aboriginal Childcare Agency,
speaks to the crowd during
a sit-down at the corner
of Bourke and Swanston
Streets, Melbourne**

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

**Theodora Tipiloura
investigating a tree for
possum habitation,
Bathurst Island**

1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased with funds donated by
Hallmark Cards Australia Pty Ltd, 1989

PH174-1989

Nina Puruntatameri

1988, printed 2014

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ephemera

**No title (Theodora Tipiloura,
Nina Puruntatameri, Sandra
Kantilla and Emmie Tipiloura
at the Gallery Gabrielle Pizzi
exhibition).**

**Thank you card to Sue Ford
from Tiwi Island women.**

**Yimanka ngini Tiwi
wupamurrumi amintiya
kularlaga wunimima yinkiti
(Photos of Tiwi people
working and hunting
together), exhibition
catalogue**

1989–93

**type C photographs, offset-photo
lithograph, green pencil on paper**

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Yellowcake

from the *Van Diemen's Land to Video Land*
series 1990–92

1991

colour photocopies

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1992

PH215.a-vv-1992

Continuing her interest in social and political issues relating to the Australian landscape, this work and the related *Rum jungle* address issues of uranium mining and environmental degradation. Both make use of a range of materials and technologies to distort and fracture the source imagery as a means of creating these large-scale, apocalyptic visions of landscapes that have been forever altered.

As Ford said: '[The works] reconstruct a contemporary *electronic* landscape. Both the *electronic* landscape and the *convict* landscape are reinvented from a European cultural and historical perspective. The relationship between the two landscapes is their sense of containment and control.'

Rum jungle

from the *Van Diemen's Land to Video Land*
series 1990–92

1992

colour photocopies

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1995

1995.613.a-vv

In the early 1990s Ford experimented with a Canon 200 laser printer, continuing the fragmentation of imagery she had begun in darkroom experiments in the 1960s. When Ford visited the Northern Territory in 1991 she captured hours of video footage; this was played on a television from which she took still photographs, which were then enlarged into these multi-page installations. This work derives from images of the open-cut uranium mine at Rum Jungle. Recalling a paused video, the swirling, fractured and abstracted pattern in acidic tones of green and yellow create a distorted landscape ravaged by human intervention.

No title (Leaf skeletons)

c. 1986

gelatin silver photogram

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Skeletal leaves)

c. 1986

gelatin silver photogram

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Photogram (Branches, twigs amoebic forms)

c. 1986

gelatin silver photogram

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1996

262.1996

Photogram (Dark fern, death)

c. 1986

gelatin silver photogram

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1996

For Kids

A darkroom is the special place where photographs are made using light and chemicals. Sue Ford loved to experiment with photography by trying different things in her darkroom.

These pictures of fern leaves are called photograms. They were made without a camera! The actual leaf was placed on photographic paper in the darkroom and a light was shone on them to make the picture.

Can you find the fern leaves Ford used to make them nearby?

Photogram (Light fern, life)

c. 1986

gelatin silver photogram

Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Purchased 1996

263.1996

Off to Van Diemen's Land

from the *Van Diemen's Land to Video Land*
series 1990–92

1990–92

colour laser prints

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Re-enactments at St Kilda Beach

1991–92

brush and ink and watercolour

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Alongside the laser prints which Ford displayed in the exhibition *From Van Diemen's Land to Video Land* were several paintings, which she described as forming 'a visual diary of a response to questions of history and identity' and the bicentenary events held around Australia in 1988. Using strong outlines of Chinese ink with watercolour washes, these works are a surreal merging of Ford's personal responses to memories of a re-enactment of the landing of Captain Cook at a beach in St Kilda, Melbourne, in 1991.

Shadow portraits

1994

colour photocopies

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1995

1995.614.a-bbbb

This series was inspired by Ford's research into marginalised histories of the colonisation of Australia. She took scans of nineteenth-century *cartes-de-visite* and emptied the figures, filling their silhouettes with her own photograms of indigenous Australian flora. Ford confronts the aspirations of colonial people coming to Australia in the nineteenth century and their representations of self, in which they were physically in Australia but, often, mentally and culturally tied to Europe. This split reality intrigued Ford; the flora-filled bodies represent an idea of the colonists being overcome by the Australian bush – this history being the 'shadow' haunting non-Indigenous Australians.

Bima, Brenda and the Madonna

1992–93

colour laser prints

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For Kids

The images in this work have been on a journey. First they were videos, then Sue Ford played them on her TV and took photographs of the screen. She then split those pictures into smaller sections and arranged them into the cross shape you see here.

There is another work on the nearby wall that was made in the same way.

How can you tell that the images were once on a TV?

Video land (Kakadu river tour)

1994

colour photocopies

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased, 1995

1995.615.a-xxxxx

This work begins with footage that Ford recorded of visitors at the Kakadu National Park. Not unlike a comic strip, each frame (photographed from a television screen while playing back the footage) highlights the incongruity of visitors to this spectacular wilderness who are preoccupied with recording and documenting the landscape for consumption back at home. The video, television, camera and laser copier that Ford used to produce the final large-scale work create layers of abstraction, further paralleling the physical, ecological and spiritual gulf that Ford felt existed between many non-Indigenous urban Australians and the land.

Apparition

from the *Last Light* series

2007

colour lightjet print

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Dissolution

from the *Last Light* series

2007

colour lightjet print

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'In a sense [the *Last Light* works] are a continuation of *Video Land* [which] was about tourists in Central Australia using their video cameras to direct their own landscapes. These photographers are in an unspecified coastal area engaged in the classical mode of attempting to capture a sunset where the light is constantly changing, all with digital cameras. This work is looking at photography, landscape and illusion referencing the digital world where everybody is now a photographer. I have chosen to work with this subject in a digital mode, intentionally using the particular qualities of digital imaging to produce this body of work.'

Sue Ford, 2007

The photographers, studio prints

2008–09

colour inkjet prints

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The photographers

2009

colour inkjet print

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

At the time of Ford's death in 2009 she was creating works that, sadly, remain incomplete. Information from her archive allows us to piece together these works. Like many of Ford's projects, the ideas derived from her autobiography in relation to broader cultural and historical enquiries. In *The photographers*, scenes of people photographing the landscape sourced from Ford's visits to Barunga and Bathurst Island in 1988 are overlaid with technical drawings of cameras and maps – following on from ideas of the mediated landscape she explored in the *A Different Landscape*, *Van Diemen's Land to Video Land* and *Last Light* series.

The ancestors, studio prints

2008–09

colour inkjet prints

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

This is a selection of working prints from another project that Ford was working on at the time of her death, *The Ancestors*, 2008–. She described the concept as follows:

My plan is to research and develop a new work using photography and video. The subject is based on one of my direct descendants, Edward Munday, who came on the First Fleet. My interest is to explore the connections between myself and these early family members ... The photographic work comprises texts from Watkin Tench composed with montages of early colonial prints, animals and birds, bush landscapes and scenes re-created from Edward's life from Botany Bay to Port Jackson, Norfolk Island.

Sue FORD

Australia 1943–2009

Geshe Sonam Thargye

born Tibet 1962, arrived Australia 1998

Mind of Tibet

2003

colour digital video transferred to DVD,
sound, 33 mins

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

For Kids

Sue Ford was interested in the teachings of Buddha. He believed in generosity, compassion and respect for all living things.

Ford created this work from video footage shot at a special teaching festival in Tibet. For this festival, people came from far and wide to learn more about Buddha's beliefs.

You can hear the sounds of bells and people at the festival singing and chanting together. Do you ever sing with other people? When, and why?

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979

colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Dancers at the City Square, Kurnai Dance Troupe

1988

gelatin silver photograph

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Purchased with funds donated by Hallmark Cards Australia Pty Ltd, 1989

PH175-1989

Judy Goldstraw and daughter

1967, printed 1982

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

From top to bottom, left to right

The Barnes family

1966

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Riley

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Myra Skipper

1970

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'[Myra], jeweller and painter – on a painting trip to the bush near the Yarra River.'

Lawrence Beck

1962

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Clif and Marlene Pugh in the studio

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Marlene Pugh – artist – watching painter Clif Pugh being filmed at "Dunmoochin", Cottles Bridge.'

Marlene Pugh

1964

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

From top to bottom, left to right

No title (Lucy Lippard visit to Ewing and George Paton Gallery), studio prints

1975

gelatin silver photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ford documented the American curator and theorist Lucy Lippard's women-only talk at the Ewing and George Paton Gallery (EGPG) in 1975, a highly influential visit for local practitioners which coincided with International Women's Year. Lippard discussed the development of the feminist art movement as it was occurring in America, and showed slides of works by women artists in New York. Local artist Lesley Dumbrell was inspired by Lippard's talk to start a feminist art group in Melbourne, and approached the director of the EGPG, Kiffy Rubbo, to assist. EGPG hosted the first meeting of the Women's Art Register in September 1975.

Ann Stephen, Sue Ford, Janine Burke, Micky Allan, Emma Ford, Isabel Davies and Bonita Ely (Women's Art Group)

1973, printed 2014

type C photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

The early meetings of feminist artists and curators, as pictured in this photograph, were described by art historian and curator Janine Burke as 'gregarious occasions that often took place at artists' homes: photographer and filmmaker Sue Ford welcomed us to her Eltham property while multimedia artist Isabel Davies and painters Lesley Dumbrell and Chris Berkman invited us to their urban studios'.

Bonita Ely, driving to Adelaide

1976

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (John Nixon and Jenny Watson at their Prahran home)

1975

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Bonita Ely

1980

gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Artist – Fitzroy – making a sculpture of a fifty-foot suspended material tree.'

From top to bottom, right to left

Janine Burke

1981, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Ponch Hawkes and Sue Ford

1974
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Artist – Adelaide – we were on the way to Adelaide to show our work in a "Post Object" exhibition. Bonita's entire "living room" installation [is in the] cardboard box, strapped on the roof.'

Sue Ford and Micky Allan

1980
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sue Ford, Micky Allan and Ruth Maddison

1981
colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Sue Ford and Micky Allan

c. 1980
colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (John Nixon and Jenny Watson at their Prahran home)

1975
gelatin silver photograph

This photograph documents the artists John Nixon and Jenny Watson standing in front of their home in Prahran, Melbourne. Ford later created a detail from this shoot, cropping around the image of Jenny, for inclusion in *The Photobook of Women: 1961–1982* exhibition.

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

From top to bottom, left to right

Sue FORD

Australia 1943–2009

Paul REED photographer
active in Australia 1970s

No title (Women's meeting in a river – Sue Ford, Micky Allan, Virginia Coventry and Viva Gibb)

1977, printed 1986

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999

H99.223/5

'We had been approached to do a photography book on "Men" and were having a meeting on a hot day at the river near where I lived. We never did the book. The photo was taken by a friend, Paul Reed.'

Girls' Garage Band

1981, printed c. 1986

gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999

H99.223/2.

This photograph documents the all-female, feminist, new wave group Girls' Garage Band performing in a backyard in Northcote (from left to right, Sylvie Leber, Fran Kelly, Nina Bondarenko, Vicki Bell, Hellen Sky and Eve Glenn). The band later changed its name to Toxic Shock (related to news reports regarding the outbreak of illness in the late 1970s caused by high-absorbency tampons) and performed around Melbourne at universities, pubs and women's events. They recorded three of their original songs, including the satirical tune 'Intoxicated', which contains the lyrics: 'They put a man on the moon, and all they can offer us in feminine protection is toxic shock!'

From top to bottom, left to right

Reel Women

1981, printed c.1986
gelatin silver photograph

State Library of Victoria, Melbourne
Purchased 1999

H99.223/6

Reel Women initially ran the group out of the boot of an old ute owned by Claire Jager, as documented in this staged image of the group's key members posing on and around the vehicle. An image of strength and independence, the photograph was re-used by Victoria's Department of Education in 1981 as an Equal Opportunity poster emblazoned with the words: 'Jobs for Girls: Film Makers: Reel Women'.

Claire Jager, Sue Ford, Susan Weis and Carole Sklan (Reel Women)

c. 1980
colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

'Women generally have to make filmmaking fit into their life, not their life fit into a career of filmmaking, which is generally the case with men. This is the most important element in my filmmaking. The film is simply about the struggle of daily existence ... Women's films attempt to hold up a mirror to other women.'

Monique Schwarz, Madelon Wilkins, Susan Weis, Sue Ford, Virginia Fraser, Claire Jager, Alison Tilson, Carole Sklan, Natalie Green (Reel Women), studio print

c. 1980
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

In 1979 Ford became heavily involved in filmmaking again. She was a founding member of the Melbourne-based feminist collective Reel Women, which was active in the distribution and exhibition of feminist films. With weekly meetings held in lounge rooms in Fitzroy and Carlton, it was agreed Reel Women would 'function within a democratic, non-hierarchical structure which included flexibility and collective decision-making, advocating our needs as independent feminist filmworkers'. Following a rental and distribution agreement with the Australian Film Institute in 1979, various films from associates of the Reel Women group were available to rent, with Ford's *Woman in a house* being one of the most popular.

No title (Reel Women), studio print

c. 1980
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Hanna Dunn, Kerry Dwyer, Natalie Green, Sue Ford, Claire Jager, Maureen McCarthy, Madelon Wilkins, Halfway House Collective, Women's Collective, Monique Schwarz, Carole Sklan

Reel Women, poster

1981
colour offset-photo lithograph

Private collection, Melbourne

This is one of several posters made by the Reel Women group to advertise their film screenings, this one held at the Ewing and George Paton Gallery at the University of Melbourne. The group also held training workshops for women – an existing flyer from the time describes the intention of providing 'women with an opportunity to acquaint themselves ... with the technical aspects of filmmaking and information regarding access to equipment, editing and distribution'. Reel Women founding member Claire Jager is featured on the poster, and the photo-lithographs were created using source photographs taken by Ford during filming for one of the Reel Women projects.

From top to bottom, left to right

Mental As Anything

c. 1979, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

A little-known aspect of Ford's life and work was her brief but intense connection to Sydney band Mental as Anything. When Ford left Melbourne in the late 1970s for Sydney, she met and formed a relationship with the band's then drummer David Twohill (now known as Wayne 'Bird' Delisle). She documented Mental as Anything on- and offstage in casual snaps and Polaroids, and also shot several promotional images for them at sites around Sydney. A playful image of the band larking about a car was used as a poster and was later revisited for the cover of the *Best of Mental as Anything* album (2003).

Mental As Anything

c. 1979, printed 2014
gelatin silver photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Mental As Anything, poster

c. 1979
colour offset-photo lithograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

No title (Mental As Anything)

c. 1979
colour polaroid photograph

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Self-portrait with camera series

Self-portrait 1960
Self-portrait 1961
Self-portrait 1962
Self-portrait 1963
Self-portrait 1965
Self-portrait 1968
Self-portrait 1968
Self-portrait 1969
Self-portrait 1969
Self-portrait 1971
Self-portrait 1972
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Self-portrait 1988
Self-portrait 1989
Self-portrait 1990

Self-portrait 1991
Self-portrait 1991
Self-portrait 1993
Self-portrait 2003
Self-portrait 2003
Self-portrait 2004
Self-portrait 2004
Self-portrait 2004
Self-portrait 2006

1960–2006, printed 2011
selenium-toned gelatin silver photographs,
type C photographs, gelatin silver
photographs,
colour polaroid photographs

Sue Ford Archive, Melbourne

Throughout her life, Ford was a fastidious collector and organiser of her prints, negatives and associated ephemera. In her archive are hundreds of self-portraits, which she drew upon for several different projects throughout her career, culminating in this extraordinary serial project which was first exhibited, posthumously, in 2011. Like many of her projects, the series involves a conflation and compression of time. It includes some of Ford's earliest photographs alongside her most recent, and is deeply personal yet ordered and objective at the same time.