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centre for
contemporary
photography

CCP DOCUMENTARY
PHOTOGRAPHY AWARD
Education Resource

cover image:
Fiona Morris
*Twenty-year-old Ayor
getting ready backstage
2010 (detail)*

About this Education Resource

This education resource is intended as a starting point for generating ideas and classroom activities before, during and after a visit to the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* and is intended to complement and be used in addition to information provided in the downloadable exhibition catalogue, gallery wall texts and on the CCP website. The resource includes an introduction to the exhibition, suggested points for discussion and practical activities for junior and senior students. The accompanying Student Response Sheets and Artists' Q&As are designed to use with this education resource.

The eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* education resource is based on a resource written by Kate Barber, Audience Development and Public Programs Officer, Monash University Museum of Art.

Pre-viewing Planning

Before visiting the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* it is recommended that you contact gallery staff at the venue you plan to visit to determine:

- Opening hours and whether admission fees apply
- The suitability of the exhibition content and subject matter for the year level you plan to bring
- Staff availability to give introductory talks
- Transport options, parking and cloakroom facilities

PLEASE NOTE: It is suggested that you visit the exhibition yourself prior to a school visit (or read the on-line catalogue <http://www.ccp.org.au/publications.php>) to determine suitability. During your visit students should be supervised at all times.

Using the Education Resource, Student Response Sheets and the Artists' Q&As

This education resource addresses the following areas:

Introduction to the exhibition

Pre-visit discussion

- Photography and Truth
- A Difficult Terminology

Post-visit discussion and reflection

- Investigating Themes and Ideas in the *CCP Documentary Photography Award*
- General Discussion and Reflection

Activities

- Written
- Practical

Student Response Sheets

(suitable for use in the gallery, or as starting points for student investigation/discussion)

- Senior
- Junior

Artists' Q&As

(interviews with the artists on the technical aspects and methodology of their series)

Introduction to the Exhibition

left:
Thomas Breakwell
Squat #6 2010
inkjet print
50 × 60 cm



right:
Thomas Breakwell
Squat #1 2010
inkjet print
50 × 60 cm



The inaugural *CCP Documentary Photography Award* and exhibition was held in 1997, with the goal of supporting documentary photography, and establishing greater discussion around its definition and practice. Since then the award exhibition has been held biennially, representing a unique initiative supporting current documentary photographic practice, and offering exhibition and touring opportunities to the finalists.

Every two years CCP makes a public call for entries to the *CCP Documentary Photography Award* and receives submissions that are considered by a panel of judges. Entrants can submit multiple entries in 'essay' format of up to six recent photographs demonstrating or developing an original and considered appreciation of the chosen subject. Entries are submitted as work prints (no larger than 200 × 260 mm). A short written statement about the work is submitted with the photographs and accompanies the series of images selected for exhibition.

A panel of judges, made up of artists and arts industry professionals, judge the entries 'blind' (without knowledge of the finalists' names), selecting a shortlist, which through a process of discussion, results in the selected finalists. An on-line catalogue is produced to accompany the exhibition, contextualising the works and offering a discussion of the often contested and controversial definitions of documentary. Since 2005 the terms and conditions of entry were extended: allowing the submission of works in either analogue or digital formats, reflecting the diversity of current documentary photographic practice. Whilst photographers can still employ the use of darkroom manipulation (for example dodging and burning or increasing contrast), digital manipulation of the content of the images is not permissible.

The finalists' works are exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Photography (CCP), Melbourne and then tour nationally to metropolitan and regional galleries throughout the following two years. The exhibition is a celebration of documentary practice and provides a fascinating entry point into the variety of approaches and concerns that characterise contemporary documentary photography.

In 2011 the panel of judges included: **Dr Isobel Crombie**, Senior Curator, Photography, National Gallery of Victoria; **Bill Henson**, Artist; and **Naomi Cass**, Director, CCP. Twelve finalists' series of images were selected for exhibition and national tour. The 12 artists selected for the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* are: **Ying Ang, Paul Blackmore, Daniel Boetker-Smith, Thomas Breakwell, Stephen Dupont, Janina Green, Natalie Grono, Glendyn Ivin, Fiona Morris, Christina Simons, CJ Taylor and Lisa Wiltse.**

The eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* is generously supported by the Copyright Agency Limited (CAL) Cultural Fund.

Pre-visit Discussion

Lisa Wiltse
Calvario settlement 2010
digital lambda print
32 × 48 cm



Photography and truth

Since the invention of photography in the late 1830s, photographs as documents have had a reputation for presenting a situation with truth and accuracy, hence the often-used expression: 'the camera never lies'. This reputation for accuracy stems from the invention of photography as a mechanical means to record information that had previously been gathered by hand: the camera replaced the topographical draughtsman, the botanical illustrator and any number of patiently anonymous image-makers. Photographs can cross language barriers, communicate directly and convincingly describe events.

Since Jacob Riis (a newspaper reporter of the late-nineteenth century) picked up his camera to record the squalor of New York's slums—wanting Americans to see for themselves what he had been writing about, photography has been used to hold a mirror up to society. Riis hoped that by revealing human suffering and misery through his photographs people would be forced to act against these conditions.

The term 'documentary' was first coined in Britain in the 1920s by filmmaker John Grierson. Many of the films produced under this term examined the lives of little-known people in exotic places, or were used as government propaganda.

Throughout the 1930s and 1940s photography was used to document and reveal the living conditions of the underprivileged and campaign for social change. Photographs taken by the Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographers (including Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn) of the devastating effects of the Depression on rural America were the first documentary photographs to be known as such, and the term 'documentary photography' came into popular use to denote a picture with a social purpose, and the hope of bringing about social change.¹

Documentary photography often has to operate between two extremes; balancing concern for clarity of presentation with the way the photographer feels about the situation they are

¹ *The Farm Security Administration* photographic project of the 1930s commissioned photographers (among them Walker Evans, Dorothea Lange and Ben Shahn) to document rural poverty and urban decay.

Paul Blackmore
Aral Sea Kazakhstan 2009
type C photograph
36 × 55 cm



recording. Photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson advocated that the photographer maintain a sense of detachment, and be a dispassionate observer. And yet the more strongly the photographer feels about a particular situation the more tempting it surely becomes to present it in a powerful way.

There has been a long tradition of photographers recording violence, wars and conflict. Amongst the earliest war photographers were Roger Fenton, who documented battlefield landscapes in the Crimea in 1855 and Matthew Brady who documented the American Civil War, from 1861–1865. War photography has sometimes been used as propaganda by governments. However, the photographer W. Eugene Smith hoped to persuade those who viewed his World War II photographs that wars and conflict must end. As an official war correspondent for *Vogue* magazine American photographer Lee Miller's unflinching photographic documentation of World War II shocked and informed the world of the horrors and futility of war. A photograph that made the front pages of most newspapers in 1972—that of a naked South Vietnamese child sprayed by American napalm running down a road towards the camera, was instrumental in turning the tide of public feeling against the Vietnam War.²

Documentary photography has usually been associated with objective truth, but as photographic practice has developed the notion of 'truth' in photography has been intensely debated. The term 'documentary photography' is a slippery and contested one: with much contemporary documentary photography traversing the spectrum from reportage and photojournalism at one end to art photography and highly constructed images at the other. In the digital age (when photographers can seamlessly manipulate images via applications accessible on most home-computers) can the photograph as document continue to hold relevance, and can we still expect truth and accuracy from a photograph?

As the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* finalists demonstrate, while the term may remain contested, the subject matter and style of documentary photography is endlessly captivating: it can encompass images of war and its aftermath; social and environmental issues; family and everyday life; health and poverty; urban and rural environments; leisure and entertainment, ritual and celebration and the whole gamut of human emotions and interpersonal relationships. Perhaps the best documentary photographs can reveal important information about our world and make us think about the human condition in new ways.

² Susan Sontag, *On Photography*, Penguin Books, USA, 1977, p.18.

Janina Green
Mr Hucul 2009
type C photograph
21.5 × 25 cm



A difficult terminology

Sandy Edwards³ writes; 'photography's terminology has changed and the inherently descriptive terms for different styles have become self-limiting. Words such as 'straight' and 'traditional' as opposed to 'art' photography are totally inadequate. The term 'documentary' itself is widely misunderstood, often confused with its brasher cousin, photojournalism.'⁴ Although there is no universally accepted definition for what constitutes documentary photography, a range of definitions follow to indicate what might be included in this category.

Documentary work is 'ostensibly dispassionate with an ability to tell a story in a visually powerful and economic way.'⁵

Dr Isobel Crombie, Senior Curator, Photography, National Gallery of Victoria.

'Documentary photography and photojournalist/reportage are two ends of the same spectrum with an enormous amount of overlap and shared history.'⁶

Peter Milne, photographer and teacher

3 Sandy Edwards is a photographer, Creative Producer of ARTHERE and a Curator at Stills Gallery, Sydney.

4 Sandy Edwards, 'Surfacing', *Photofile* 58, December 1999, p.12.

5 Dr Isobel Crombie, in conversation with Geoffrey Batchen, 'For the record', *Photofile* 58, December 1999, p. 34.

6 Peter Milne, in conversation with Sandy Edwards and Virginia Baxter, 'The photoshop', *Photofile* 58, December 1999, p. 51.

Post-visit Discussion and Reflection

Glendyn Ivin
Untitled #2 2010
pigment print
33 × 50 cm



Investigating themes and ideas in the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award*

Several themes emerge from the exhibition which can provide useful starting points for investigating the documentary series exhibited in the *CCP Documentary Photography Award*, and/or to compare and contrast with the work of well-known documentary photographers from the past.

These thematic groupings are not definitive and many of the photographers' series could fit across several of the 'themes'. Students are encouraged to come up with their own themes based on the subject matter explored by photographers in the exhibition and use these to generate discussion:

- war and its aftermath
- social and environmental issues
- family and everyday life
- health and poverty
- urban and rural environments
- leisure and entertainment

General discussion and reflection

- Was the exhibition similar or different to what you expected?
- What were the most interesting and least interesting aspects of the exhibition?
- What new ideas did you discover about photography?
- Did any of the series of images teach you something new about an event, issue or situation of which you were previously unaware?
- Which series did you think best engaged with its theme or subject?
- What questions would you like to ask the judges who selected these artists?
- Which finalist would you have selected as the winner of the *CCP Documentary Photography Award*?
- What do you think you will remember most about your visit to the *CCP Documentary Photography Award*?

Activites

left:
Christina Simons
Flying Ladies 2010
digital print
30 x 45 cm



right:
Natalie Grono
Weightless 2011 (detail)
inkjet print
30.2 x 40 cm



Written

- Write a review of the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award*. Include an overview of the exhibition and your personal response to at least three photographers' series of images.
- The term 'documentary photography' was popularised in the late 1930s when photography was used as a tool to record poverty and injustice in the hope of bringing about social change. Are there issues that you feel strongly about? Is there an issue or situation you would like to see changed or improved? What would you photograph to bring this issue to people's attention?
- Senior Curator of Photography at the National Gallery of Victoria, Dr Isobel Crombie writes: 'Documentary photography will always have a place and it will, in all probability, be considered a major tool for social change and commentary for many years to come.'⁷ Can documentary photography still be an effective form of social commentary? Given the images of human suffering that we see on our television screens and in the daily press do images still have the ability to affect us? Choose a series of images from the exhibition, and in a short essay use them to support your argument for or against Dr Isobel Crombie's statement.
- Have a class discussion about taking photographs of people in public and what is ethical. (For further information visit <http://www.photoreview.com.au/tips/shooting/guide-to-street-photography.aspx>, the Australian Photo Review website and read their 'Guide to Street Photography' as well as *Taking Photographs 'in public': What's Lawful and What's Not?* <http://www.ccp.org.au/docs/Davison-Legal-Manual.pdf> by Professor Mark Davidson and Mr Tobias Gattineau). Ask students to write a short essay about these issues addressing the following questions:
 - a. Would you ask permission to take photographs of people in public places?
 - b. Do you think it is an invasion of privacy to take photographs of people without their knowledge or permission?
 - c. If photographs are taken in the public domain is there an invasion of privacy?
 - d. By allowing themselves to be photographed, might there be any consequences for the subjects?
 - e. Consider how the camera affects the behaviour of the subject being photographed and how the images might differ when subjects know or don't know they are being photographed.

⁷ Geoffrey Batchen, 'For the record', *Photofile* 59, December 1999, p.36.

CJ Taylor
The Wait 2009
digital print
32 × 48 cm



Practical

- Ask students to select a body of work that they are interested in for the basis of a mini presentation to the class. They should highlight formal aspects of the images in terms of composition, use of light, line and so forth.
- Following a visit to the eighth *CCP Documentary Photography Award* exhibition have a class discussion about what the students have learnt about art and documentary photography. Ask the students to select a theme from the exhibition as a basis for making an artwork. Ask them to write something about the ideas they have explored in their work.
- After discussing the genre of documentary photography, explore and suggest to students other major documentary photographers as a basis for each student in creating a documentary style artwork. Ask them to write something about the influences affecting the creation of their work.
- In small groups carry out a 'documentary photography' style shoot at a location around your school—it could be a series of portraits of your school friends, or a sporting, dance or drama event, or something else that you find interesting.

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Touring Supporters

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