

# Girls on Film *Tracey Moffatt*

## Tracey Moffatt

Born in 1960, the artist grew up in suburban Brisbane. An early fascination with mainstream mass culture saw her enroll in visual communications at the Queensland College of Art. Here she studied photography and film, she later confessed that she enrolled in the course simply to get away with spending hours on end watching movies!

### A Successful Career

Since establishing herself as an independent filmmaker and photographer, Moffatt has become one of the most successful Australian contemporary artists. Her work has been exhibited in numerous national and international exhibitions and film festivals including the Venice Biennale and Cannes Film Festival. Some of her documentaries and dramas have been shown on Australian television.

**Moffatt** has also written and directed music videos for musicians such as **INXS** and **Christine Anu**.

The kinds of images she makes are often confronting, thought provoking reflections on contemporary Australian life.

Currently, Moffatt lives and works in New York.

*"I have always made photographs, and the photographs have always...felt like small films...It's usually a twisted storyline. Like me"*  
(Tracey Moffatt 1998)



Tracey Moffatt, *Up in the Sky*, 1997, photo lithograph on paper, detail.

## Photo media

As individuals, we make sense of our place in the world by looking at the way we interact with our families, the workplace and wider social institutions. We can try to understand more by looking at how we are influenced by gender and culture.

At some stage in our lives we will use a camera to record this world. The photographs we take of family and friends are no different to those we find in the media or gallery. They are all reflections on an individual's idea of reality.

The photographic images we see in public places allow us to look through a window into the lives of others in a way that would not normally be possible. New forms of technology and mass communications, allow us unprecedented access into people's private worlds. Whilst technology has also created new ways to produce photographs it remains the image, not the mode of production, that holds the power of meaning in the photograph.

**X-POSING** young people to the  
**State Art Collection**

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The Gallery's Youth Program

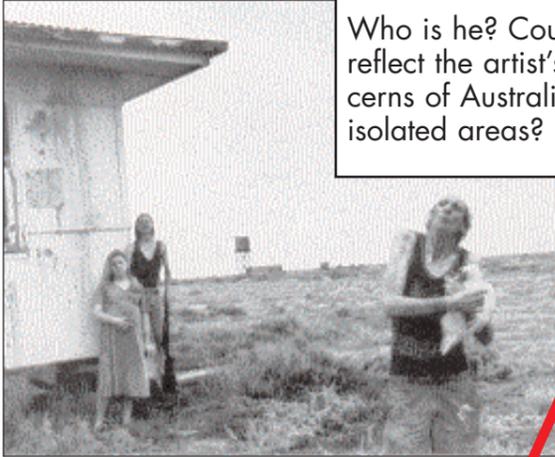
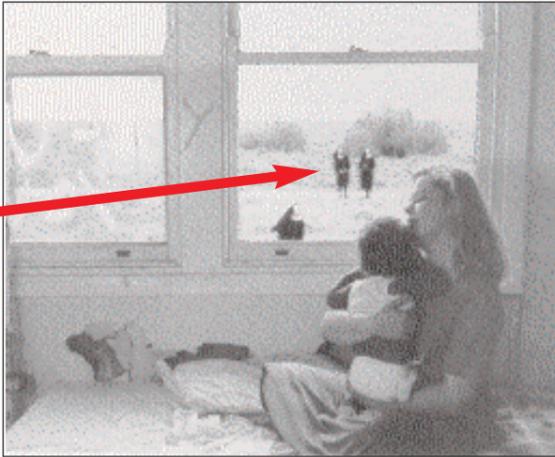
# Up in the Sky

## Tracey Moffatt

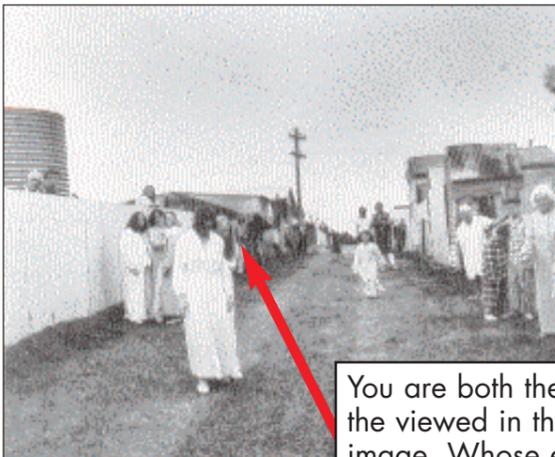
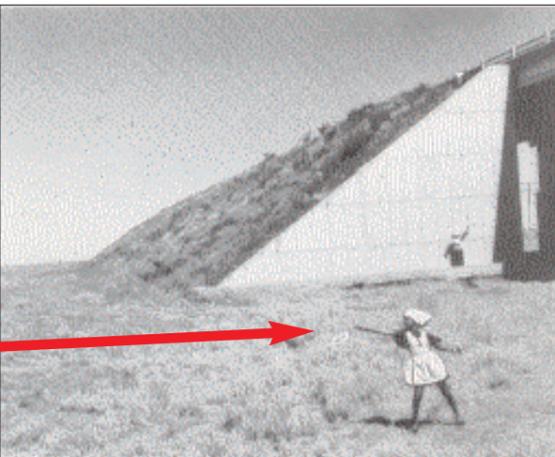
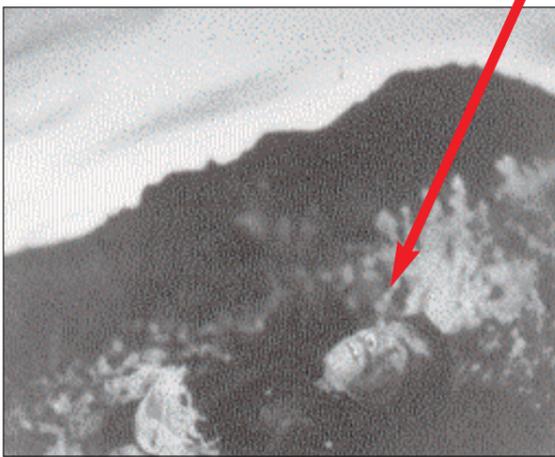
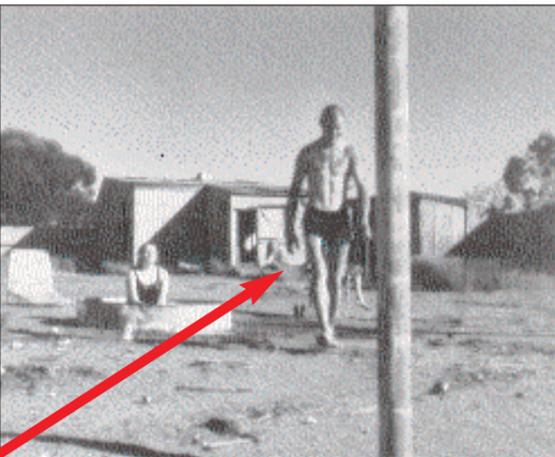
**Up in the Sky** is set in a lonely and decrepit place somewhere in outback Australia. The photographs tell a story, however they do not progress chronologically creating a sense of mystery. The viewer must find other ways to link the photographs together.

**Isolation**  
Desolate and run down, this is a place where people are alienated geographically and in some cases from each other. A man lies alone in bushland. Who is he? Could this image reflect the artist's wider concerns of Australians living in isolated areas?

**Coming for the baby?**  
This image is very powerful. We see the nuns making their way to the house. Are they coming for the baby? Do we assume this because the removal of Aboriginal children is part of a collective memory of recent Australian history? Is Moffatt referring to both this collective memory and her own personal experiences? Doesn't everybody construct their idea of reality from this combination of personal experience and the influence of culture?



**Film Conventions**  
Many of these images look like film stills, appearing as if something is about to happen, or has just taken place. In this picture, what has just been said? Who is the man walking away? Moffatt also uses film techniques in the way she frames her photographs. Look at how the pole dissects the photograph. Does this symbolise a division in the relationship between the two people? This image is framed quite dramatically. Is this little girl the baby we see in other photographs? Could the stark whiteness of her dress and scarf symbolise the attempts by the nuns (as representatives of institutional authority) to "purify" her and deny her Aboriginality?



Tracey Moffatt, *Up in the Sky*, 1997, photo lithograph on paper, detail.

You are both the viewer *and* the viewed in this dream like image. Whose eyes are you looking through? Why do the people stare? Do you feel marginalised and uncomfortable? The slightly fuzzy quality of the image gives a cinematic quality to these photographs.

**Photo Journalism**  
Everyday the media presents us with images that allow us to look in on someone's private world. Despite having this access we can never fully understand the lives of these strangers. Moffatt has deliberately constructed these photographs. Do you get the sense that they are difficult to piece together? Is this because they appear to tell someone's private story?