

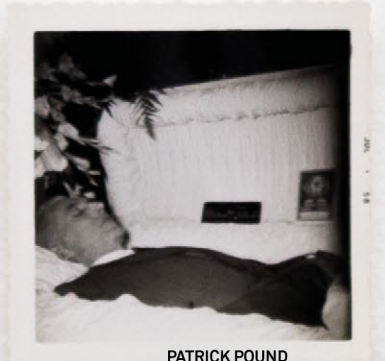


OBSESSIVELY OBSESSED

Patrick Pound has adopted the role of a human search engine, uploading a torrent of ephemeral data for the browser to download.

FEATURE *by* KIM GUTHRIE

THE ART OF PATRICK POUND



PATRICK POUND
The big sleep, 2016–20
found photographs
150 x 500 cm (approx)
Courtesy the artist and
STATION, Melbourne



Is making art obsessive behaviour? We'd argue it is, otherwise artists would stop after producing one artwork. Yet they don't. They're driven by the overwhelming need to make more, possibly in order to improve, maybe to disseminate a visual record of their humanity, to leave a lasting legacy or to unravel and make sense of life. The reasons are infinite, and it stands to reason that someone would follow this compulsion down the rabbit hole and make a career out of being an obsessive.

Aotearoa born and now a resident of Melbourne, Patrick Pound has taken full advantage of the old minimalist axiom 'less is more' and turned it on its

head. Pound starts with a simple idea and then obsessively overpopulates the idea by sourcing found photographs, objects and ephemera that align with or illustrate the theme. Ordering them like a pseudo-scientific gathering of specimens, the items are pinned out and placed in display cases resembling the collections of a Victorian-era museum.

In 2017, the National Gallery of Victoria staged a major survey of Pound's work, accompanied by a monograph. The title, *Patrick Pound: The Great Exhibition*, was a nod to the obsessive collecting of the Victorian-era and to *The Great Exhibition* held in Hyde Park, London, in 1851, the

first in a series of world fairs that exhibited the best of culture and industry. It is an apt title, given Pound's preference for collating ephemera into ordered pavilions and referring to these collections as 'museums'.

It's odd that Pound is often lumped in with photographers given that he doesn't actually take photographs with a camera in the traditional sense. Rather, his practice aligns more with 1970s minimalism and conceptual art practices.

The gallery text for Pound's 2020 show, *The Museum of Air Photography* at STATION, reads:

Patrick Pound is interested in photographs of things you can't really see. This exhibition is compiled of a vast collection of 'found' photographs, each of which captures an 'idea' of air. From a snap of a woman blowing a bubble, to a newspaper photograph of a deflated balloon, a picture of a child blowing out a birthday candle and a found photograph of an air conditioner, we become aware of the presence of air as it moves through these still records. Pound collects photographs in categories: from people who look dead but (probably) aren't, to people holding a single thing. Standing before these collections, as Pound tells us: "We see familiar things differently, and then of course, we find the rest of the world sneaks in."

Indeed we do. There's some kind of prevailing magic in repetition that captures the imagination. Take something as every day and familiar as a word, for example, any word. Repeat it over and over for an extended period and it takes on an otherworldliness. Trance dancing, a practice employed in Shamanic ritual,

has the same disorienting effect of transporting the practitioner to another state of consciousness.

In thinking about the conceptual rationale of *The Museum of Air Photography*, the mind shifts to other air related artworks. First Marcel Duchamp's *Air de Paris (50 cc of Paris Air)* (1919), a glass phial filled with genuine Parisian air, and Piero Manzoni's *Body of Air (Corpo d'Aria)* (1959-60), when the artist contemporaneously produced *Artist's Breath (Fiato d'Artista)* by self-inflating balloons on the presumption that the physical excretions of an artist were more valuable than those of mere mortals. Manzoni continued this interrogation of the limits of what constitutes an art object, parodying the art world's obsession with permanence. We're also reminded of Andy Warhol's *Silver Clouds* (1966), helium filled silver foil pillows adrift in a space, and, more recently, Martin Creed's *Work 200: Half the Air In A Given Space* (1998), where a space was half-filled with inflated white balloons

which contained half the air in that given space, the other half of the air free from constraint.

The idea of making the everyday strange, or physically representing something that the audience takes for granted (in this case, the physical presence of air), is something Pound has in common with all of these artists and artworks; the idea is king. On *The Art Story*, critic Jonathan Jones commented of Creed's work, "it's not the artwork that matters, but the way it sets up relationships between people. You become a member of an airy commonwealth."

Pound's conceptual development doesn't stray far from this notion at all. He creates a kind of alchemical re-evaluation and context for otherwise ubiquitous images, which in turn conjure an enchanting stream of consciousness that's not entirely forthcoming and is indeed at times bewildering. For example, as Julie Robinson points out: "Pound embeds his work with at least one 'unknowable' piece, for instance:

"I used to collect things that related to my artwork. Sometimes those things fed into the work, then they started to become the work."
— Patrick Pound, 2016





Above
Installation view
PATRICK POUND
The big sleep, 2016–20
found photographs
150 x 500 cm (approx)
STATION, Melbourne

Installation view
PATRICK POUND
The big sleep
(detail), 2016–20
found photographs
dimensions variable
STATION, Melbourne

Pages 34–37
PATRICK POUND
The museum of air
(detail), 2015
collection of the
National Gallery of
Victoria

Courtesy the artist and
STATION, Melbourne

in *The Gallery of air* that [the unknowable piece] was a tram ticket and it had nothing to do with air on it at all, but if you were born in the right time and you were born in the right place and you had the right job, you would know that it was a free tram ticket from Sydney for air raid wardens during the war so that went in *The Gallery of air*, but no one got that one.”¹

Pound assembles a collection of items that are preserved, catalogued and managed for the purposes of his obtuse propaganda of ideas. It is democratic artwork tailor-made for a social media age that is paralytic drunk on the overindulgence of images – from the outright incomprehensible to the creepily dubious and the vacuously pointless, through to mind-blowingly

worthy posts – created by the ironically monikered *smart phone*.

Patrick Pound constructs his analogue Google image search of things so ubiquitously that they reveal their out-of-context-strangeness to the viewer while simultaneously excluding and frustrating with their occasional deep state conspiracy theory, red herring or fake news story interventions, an element of truth buried somewhere within their whereabouts. Pound has rendered himself an art world influencer, populating his obsession with the same images that appear to have engulfed humanity in a blurred tide of visual vomit, then capitalising on the zeitgeist of obsessive image-making and rendering it his.

As Pound humorously quipped over the phone, “my career really took off when I stopped making the work.” He truly is an artist for our age. **V**

Patrick Pound is exhibiting as part of *Shadow Catchers* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales until May 17, 2020; the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie, *The Lives and Loves of Images*, in six exhibitions across three cities in Germany until April 26, 2020; *A Collection of Stranger Things* at Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery until April 26, 2020; and at STATION, Melbourne until May 23, 2020.

At the time of printing, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Biennale für aktuelle Fotografie and the Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery are temporarily closed to the public in response to COVID-19. All exhibition dates are current however, due to the unfolding circumstances of COVID-19, please refer to institutional websites for further details.

Patrick Pound is represented by STATION, Melbourne, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney and Melanie Roger Gallery, Auckland.

artgallery.nsw.gov.au

biennalefotografie.de

mprg.mornpen.vic.gov.au

stationgallery.com.au

1. Robinson, Julie, *Divided Worlds*, 2018 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 2018, p. 76.

