

Ballarat International Foto Biennale FTW

Preview
**KIM
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CURRENT MEMES OF THE 'WOKE' ARE TACKLED IN THIS YEAR'S BIENNALE. FROM THE COLONIAL MINDSET, CHANGING IDEAS ABOUT CELEBRITY, AND LGBTQIA+ SEQUINED RAZZMATAZZ, TO THE CONSEQUENCES OF GLOBAL WARMING, FEMINISM IN INDONESIA AND POVERTY. ART-AS-PHOTOGRAPHY, THE UBIQUITY OF SOCIAL MEDIA, THE BUILT ENVIRONMENT, AND GREEK MYTHOLOGY ALSO GET A LOOK IN. IT'S A FOTOGRAFIC MIX WORTH INVESTIGATING.

What comes to mind when Ballarat, the regional Victorian town in the Central Highlands northwest of Melbourne, is mentioned? The gold rush of the late 1850s that swept this fledgling colonial outpost, and curiously Australia's only attempt at a revolution: the fairly timid blink-and-you'd-miss-it Eureka Stockade uprising. Rebellion is a pretty neat thing to be remembered for even if it is coupled with the greed of wealth creation. But where does photography fit in all of this? This weird mechanical and alchemical process doesn't result in more wealth or revolutionary thought . . . or does it?

In its sixteenth year, the BALLARAT INTERNATIONAL FOTO BIENNALE (BIFB) that runs over eight weeks comprises a vast program of photo-based media exhibitions shown throughout the fabric of the greater Ballarat community. Headlining this Biennale at the Art Gallery of Ballarat is *Linda McCartney: Retrospective*.



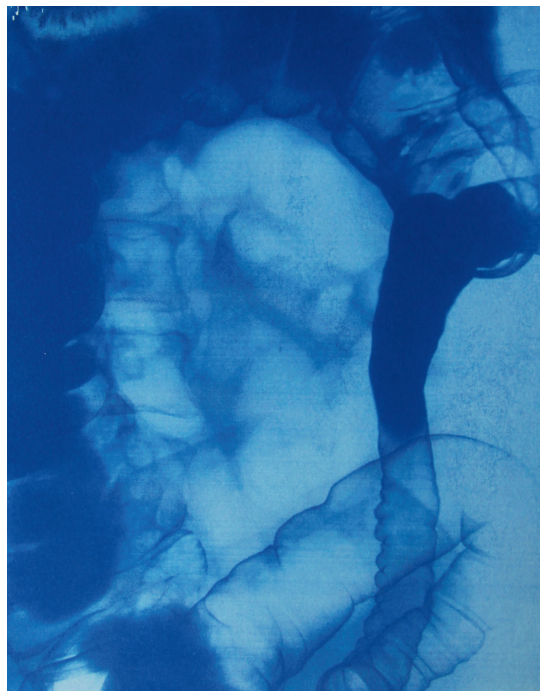
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Linda McCartney is an interesting choice when what it means to be a celebrity is in flux, where anyone can be famous for not much as long as they have digital currency. The world has gone photo-loco, with every iPhone slinger capturing the innocuous minutiae of everything that stands still – or doesn't. Millions of images are posted to social media every day and the emergence of a new celebrity culture – the influencer – has taken hold.

There has been a rapid slide into fake fame; people being famous for being famous, like a snake eating its tail. Photography, however, manages to survive

and thrive in this hostile digital environment, and it is interesting to consider how this exhibition sits against this backdrop. The exhibition will feature more than 260 photographers and many more photographs, including images of the McCartney family, the 1960s music scene, and a series of prints from the McCartneys's time in Australia between 1975 and 1993. It has been curated by Paul, Mary and Stella McCartney, making the celebrity factor part of the DNA of this show.

Today you can buy 'followers' and 'likes' with a click of a mouse from your local



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profile farmer, apparently. This wasn't the case when Linda McCartney married one of the most famous rock stars on the planet. It gave her access to the exclusive world of rock and roll from the inside. As a keen photographer it was a perfect marriage: she was a fly on the wall with access to rock and roll royalty, and she documented it. A simpler time!

Showing at the National Centre for Photography are the elaborately staged and constructed photographs of gay/queer/homoerotic photographer Steven Arnold, whose photographs are pretty gay/queer/homoerotic. They are probably an astute choice given the profile of all things LBGTQIA+ these days. Arnold's work reminds me of David LaChapelle but rendered in black and white. Obviously he was around before LaChapelle, but I'd never heard of him previously – it appears LaChapelle was possibly influenced by Arnold's tableaux. The work also reminds me of a time when everyone could do and be whatever the fuck they wanted and be loved without the labels. Apparently he was a student of the maverick genius Salvador Dali. That is probably not a good move if you want your work to see the light of day yourself.

Also exhibiting at the National Centre for Photography is the French artist Alix Marie. She will premier new work that employs 3D sculptural aspects, effectively experimenting with the removal of the image from the wall and frame to transform her images into capital A-R-T. It's not too far removed from the installation art that pervades many *serious* art galleries. I'm always left wondering what happens to it after a show if it isn't purchased by an institution – ironically, it may well be photographically documented.

Showing in the less conventional space of St Andrews Uniting Church is Erik Kessels, the creative director of Dutch advertising agency Kessels Kramer. A designer and curator with an interest in vernacular photography (another popular thread in contemporary photographic practice) his work appears to rely on the multiple for its impact. It is an effective *modus operandi* employed successfully by many artists, including Kessels.

There is much more work on exhibition across the region, both indoors and outdoors. Some of it is squirrelled away in previously unused venues like the Ballarat Mechanics Institute basement, housing a

tribute to the godfather of Australian rock and roll and owner of the Mushroom Group, Michael Gudinski. 'Number One|Gudinski' will be curated from a public call-out for related imagery.

FTW, the title for this preview, is an acronym borrowed from the outsider/criminal community meaning fuck the world. In a nod to the Biennale title and ubiquity of modern photography I like to think it stands for *Fotograph The World*: a world where there's gold still to be extracted from subversive photographic truth. ■

@ballaratfoto

EXHIBITION

Ballarat International Foto Biennale
28 August – 24 October 2021
Throughout Ballarat, Victoria

01 Steven Arnold, *Lighting the Path*, 1985, 76.2 x 76.2 cm

02 Alix Marie, image from photographic installation *Styx* (detail), 2021, dimensions variable

03 Linda McCartney, *Jimi Hendrix, London*, 1967, black and white C-type print, 30.9 x 40.6 cm

Courtesy the artists, Ballarat International Fotobiennale, and The Steven Arnold Museum and Archives