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JULY 2010 \$7.95 NZ \$9.90

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FotoFreo 2010: Women In Focus

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Gary, by Amy Stein
from the exhibition
Stranded.



FotoFreo's Femme Fatales

Alison Stieven-Taylor talks to the female photographers and artists who participated in this year's biennial City Of Fremantle Photographic Festival.

The 2010 FotoFreo featured a strong female presence which I decided to highlight for this article about the most recent City Of Fremantle Photographic Festival. I spoke with a group of diverse, talented, creative and ultimately generous female photographers. They are photojournalists, documentarians, conflict journalists and artists – and they are all individuals, yet their work is universally understood.

Claire Martin is a young Western Australian who has turned her interest in social work and urban issues into an award-winning career in documentary photography.

Narelle Autio lives in South Australia and has made the transition to photographic artist after years as a media photographer. Her exhibition, *The Summer of Us*, is incredibly vibrant and the images are almost transcendent. This is high 'Pop Art'.

Amy Stein is an astute New Yorker who has recreated herself as a photographer. She began her professional life in politics and as a successful 'dot com' business development manager. When the dot com boom went bust she chose photography. Her thesis culminated in the exhibition *Stranded*.

Joy Horwood was fascinating to talk to. Around 80 years of age, Joy was once the 'poster girl' photographer for South Africa. In the 1950s the Rhodesian-

born photographer was chosen to take photographs of South African life to show the world a new and improved South Africa.

Finally there is Slovakian Magda Stanova who brands herself a "visual artist". Her work is an installation. It is esoteric, but the central theme is how photography in all its forms is used to influence thought and emotion.

Claire Martin - Slab City

Over a period of two years Clare Martin photographed two unique stories – *The Downtown East Side* shot in Vancouver, Canada, and *Slab City*. Last year this

graduate from the Edith Cowan University won the 2009 Sony World Photography Award for 'Up And Coming' Portrait Photographer of the Year and also the Emerging Talent For Reportage award by Getty Images. After graduation, Clare left Perth for Vancouver.

There she met photographer Lung Liu who introduced her to the world of documentary photography and inspired her to follow her instincts.

She says documentary photography is suited to her natural curiosity to explore social issues that are perhaps unpopular. Galvanised by Liu's positivity, she put her fears aside and headed to the downtown east side of Vancouver where the city's derelicts and

Photograph by Claire Martin from the exhibition *Slab City*.

addicts dwell. Everyone on her side of town told her she shouldn't go. It was too dangerous. Clare had been fascinated with the area since she'd arrived. Lui said she'd be fine.

"I was prepared to lose my gear," she states, but then adding that none of her fears materialised. Over a period of months she captured startling images of junkies shooting up in alleyways, half-starved men sitting in cramped tenement apartments and people living hard on the street.



PROFILE



Small Black Glove, by Narelle Autio from the exhibition *The Summer Of Us*.



Eagle Ray, by Narelle Autio from the exhibition *The Summer Of Us*.



Blue Knickers, by Narelle Autio from the exhibition *The Summer Of Us*.

Lung Liu also introduced Clare to Slab City, a community of people who had chosen to drop out of society and live an alternate, isolated lifestyle in the Colorado Desert in south-eastern California.

The pair visited Slab City for a short stay, but it was long enough to pique her interest. She returned on her own to pitch her tent. In the first week she slept with a can of mace and a tomahawk at hand.

"I didn't get much sleep," she laughs in her raspy manner. "Then I moved closer to people I felt more comfortable with". She stayed on and off for a month, roughing it to capture some of the most poignant portraits of people living on the edge of everything – society, sanity, reality.

Amy Stein – Stranded

New Yorker Amy Stein is a determined, fast-talking, highly educated woman. Her series *Stranded* began



Photograph by Amy Stein from the exhibition *Stranded*.

as her thesis and has become a gallery success. At the time of Hurricane Katrina in 2005 Amy was working on her series *Domesticated*, driving from New York to Pennsylvania. At night the TV news bulletins were consumed with stories about the displacement of US citizens in the wake of Katrina and the ineptitude of the Bush administration to adequately respond. Amy ingested the reports like bitter pills. The question, 'What would it be like to be left on your own in times of need?' persisted in her mind. She began noticing people with broken-down cars at the side of the road. And the idea for *Stranded* was formed.

"In the States we don't stop to help people. We have AAA and assume people have these safety nets around them, but a lot of people don't. This is what I've learned; they don't have money to fix their car and certainly don't have money to call a tow truck to come and pick them up," she explains.

"I was interested in people. A lot of people around me were doing portraits of their friends and I was thinking, 'What is this about? What do I want to know about these people?' It isn't about the individual; it's about what the individual wants to show us and will show us. So I decided to start photographing stranded motorists as a way to investigate a state of mind, a state of experience, predicament, vulnerability".

Narelle Autio – The Summer Of Us

Multiple award-winning photographer Narelle Autio's exhibition *The Summer Of Us* comprises photographs of items she found on trips to the beach in Adelaide where she lives. The items are meticulously arranged and shot on top of a lightbox. Narelle photographs ordinary, everyday things – a child's shovel, a pair of knickers, assorted shells and broken sunglasses – and turns them into highly collectible works of art.

She is enjoying a second career, having traded newspaper photography for art. She is married to Trent Parke whom she describes as "the most generous

photographer" and they have two young sons. It is on walks with her children along the beach that the idea for this collection germinated.

One day, after a storm, Narelle found a dead penguin. The way the bird was spread across the white sand, its flippers posed as if swimming, inspired her. She took the penguin home and "stuck it in the freezer along with the peas" until she could figure out what to do with it. This acquisition was the first of many dead things.

"I bought myself a freezer for the rotting stuff," she confesses with a grin.

The photograph of her blue Eagle Ray is the centerpiece of an eclectic assembly of images that singularly are clever pop art, but together create a story about beach life that captures the imagination with a subject that is familiar to all.

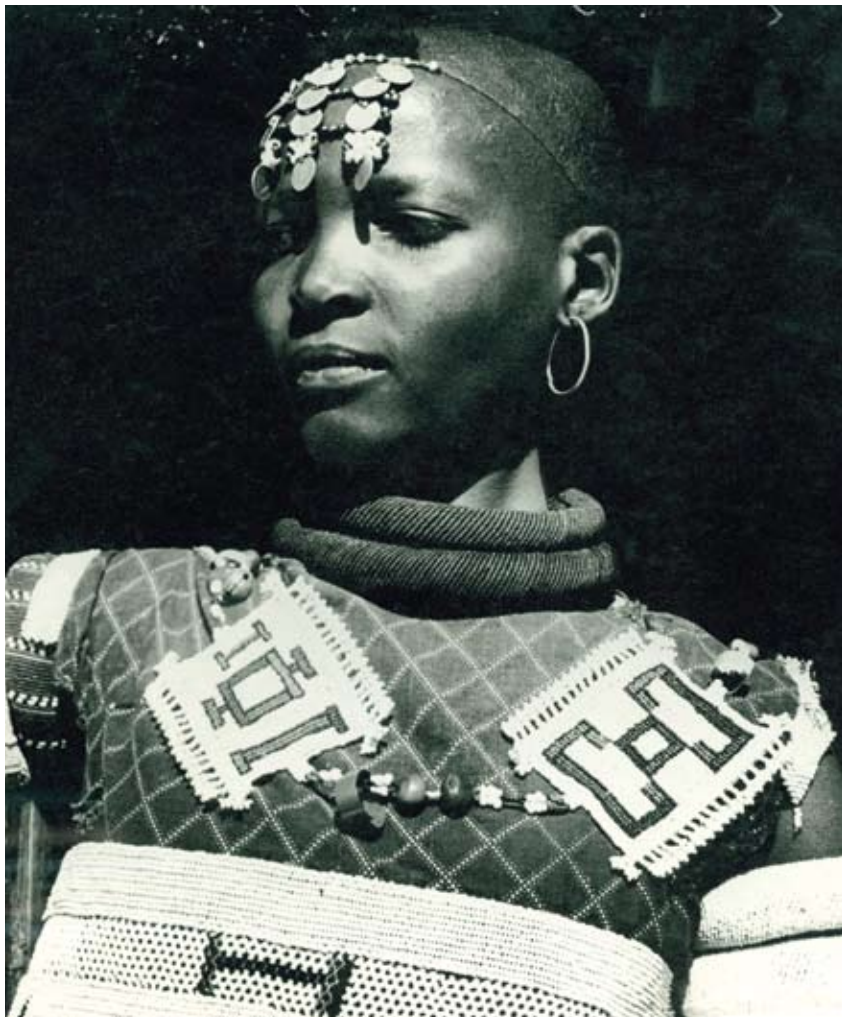
Joy Horwood-Cooke – A Vision of Africa

More than five decades after the pictures were first shown in Australia, Joy Horwood-Cooke's photographs of life in South Africa in the mid-1950 were dusted off and hung at the Fremantle Arts Gallery.

Born in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe), Joy lived with her parents on a cattle and tobacco farm in Salisbury in the southern part of the country. Part of the upper class, she was well connected, educated in London and then trained in photography. When the South African government was looking for a PR photographer she was the natural candidate.

The festival's publicity said the exhibition was a "social critique sympathetic to domestic issues and day-to-day living". The images were shot for the South African government which commissioned her to take photos that would improve the country's profile.

In 1957 Joy Horwood married and moved to the wheatbelt of Western Australia with her husband,



LEFT Photograph by Joy Horwood-Cooke from the exhibition *A Vision Of Africa*.

BELOW Joy Horward at work in South Africa in the mid-1950s.



Cooke, with whom she had four children but later divorced. Despite having lived in Australia for more than 50 years, she has lost none of her cultured Rhodesian coolness. She has already told me that Rhodesia was different, "sophisticated and aristocratic". She is proud of her heritage.

I estimate she is aged somewhere around 80, but she chirps like a 50-year-old. She tells of how those Africans who lived in makeshift mining towns "...slept in dormitories that were spotless. Their clothes were always very neat and clean". The words are from another time.

Magda Stanova – In The Shadow Of Photography

Magda Stanova says, "When you look at images, one of the fascinating things is that you see the person in the image and it seems like it is right now. Photographs represent reality".

In *The Shadow Of Photography* Magda explores the notion of reality through a grouping of curious and ambiguous images, some photographs, others sketches and also film and crude animation.

In one installation she couples photographs of ordinary people with famous faces. Next to the images she writes a few lines explaining that we, as the viewer, already know what has happened to the person in the photograph.

She uses an image of JFK in the car with Jackie Kennedy moments before he was shot. Next to the image the words tell that the man in the photograph will be dead within minutes, but he doesn't know that yet. We are like fortune-tellers.

"I didn't want just to have disasters like JFK," she says by way of explaining the inclusion of a picture of two children who, the accompanying

"I was thinking of showing the father as a child and the son as an adult. It is an interesting contrast. This is what happens in family albums, but not usually side-by-side." – Magda Stanova.

text says, "later grew up to marry each other and have six children".

"This inclusion makes the work for a broader audience," she says quietly, exhausted from jetlag and long hours working on the installation.

Another image is of a father and son. "I was thinking of showing the father as a child and the son as an adult. It is an interesting contrast. This is what happens in family albums, but not usually side-by-side".

It is this twist on the accepted way to view photography that makes Magda Stanova's work interesting and culturally transportable, if somewhat ephemeral.

Social Butterfly

FotoFreo wasn't just about the art. The biennial event draws photographers from around the world and it is a virtual hive of social activity. Brad Rimmer, who I interviewed for the April 2010 issue, took me under his wing and introduced me to everyone – David Dare Parker, Martine Perret (the subject of a future profile), Philip Blenkinsop and Jean Chung. Max Pam and I had coffee. He illustrated and signed my copy of his book *Atlas Monographs* which I wrote about in the Summer 2010 issue. I now have an original Max Pam artwork. On my last day in Fremantle the heavens gave a

repeat performance of the hailstorm that had thrashed Melbourne two weeks earlier. The sky darkened and the clouds clapped together in thunderous roar. Rain turned to hail. Lightening broke the icy air lighting up the Fremantle Arts Centre in ghostly white revealing a landscape of deep green trees and shining wet stone.

In this stormy scenario photographer and critic Robert McFarlane held court. Thunder punctuated his sentences and, as if by design, paintings moved on the walls in concert with his tempo. Robert was taking a small, attentive group through his exhibition *Received Moments*. Later I sat down to dinner with Robert, and Graham and Lena Howe. We dried out with red wine and solid Italian fare followed by Amaretto and espresso and spoke of art and music. It was a fitting end to a fantastic five days at FotoFreo 2010. **CP**

Thanks to Bob Hewitt, Laura Beilby and Amelia Twiss from FotoFreo for their help and hospitality.

Alison Stieven-Taylor is an author and photographer based in Melbourne. For more information visit www.realityillusion.com and www.astloveslife.blogspot.com. Her latest book, *Rock Chicks*, profiles the leading female rock stars from the 1960s to today.