

ARTIST PROFILE

The Artists Behind The Art

South of no North

By Jillian Grant | March 21, 2013



South of no North is a modest evocation of everyday life, curated by Glenn Barkley, and featuring artists Noel McKenna, Laurence Aberhart and William Eggleston, drawing on themes of place and purpose. The curatorial premise of this ongoing series of exhibitions at the MCA situates an Australian artist within an international context, displaying the work of international artists alongside to draw connections and affinities. Painter Noel McKenna exhibits with photographers Laurence Aberhart from New Zealand, and William Eggleston from the USA, facilitating interesting comparisons. Aberhart works almost exclusively with black and white photography, as opposed to Eggleston, who by contrast, produces colour images.

The work of these three artists together paints a portrait of life; trivialities and the mundane. Together, they portray a common humanity; McKenna's somewhat naïve works perfectly complementing the stripped back, honest photographs of Aberhart and Eggleston. Commenting on his choice of artists in the two photographers, McKenna recalls a conversation with his longtime friend Aberhart on a road trip in New Zealand.

“We got to talking about colour photography and Laurence said he did not have much time for it at all. I think I said ‘what about William Eggleston,’ after a brief pause Laurence replied ‘except for Eggleston.’ That brief exchange has stayed in my mind and 14 years later the three of us are in an exhibition together,” he says.



“From the first moment I saw an Eggleston photograph, I knew there was something special about his work. His world is the south in America. I have never been there but through his photographs I feel I have been there. His work has an authenticity about it that draws you in.”

This statement in itself sums up the essence of this exhibition, and of the utility of placing these artists and works alongside each other. One feels, as they walk around the exhibition, as if they are getting a glimpse into another world – one that is unfamiliar, but at the same time familiar. The honesty of these works, the conceptual simplicity of it all, allows the viewer into their world and gives them access to this unfamiliar place in a way that is recognisable.



Curator Glenn Barkley draws attention to the fact that central to all these artists' work is the snapshot, both in a formal and conceptual sense, explored through centrality. Childhood is a common thread in the exhibition, explored through this idea of the snapshot. Aberhart captures his children in moments of contemplation and wonderment, beautiful isolations of everyday life. Eggleston's famous photograph *Untitled (Memphis)* 1970, presents a tricycle from the view of a child, whilst McKenna's works "tap into this wonder through his series of paintings of 'big things' – a very Australian civic obsession," according to Barkley.

South of no North is a narrative – a disjointed visual tale of the everyday. While the stories are individual, together they reflect universal considerations and experiences. Glenn Barkley comments on the fact that this exhibition is being staged at the same time as Anish Kapoor, highlighting the intimacy of *South of no North* by contrast. "Holding this exhibition at the same time as Anish Kapoor, who is working on such a large scale, and all of these artists are working on a small scale. The best way to look is one on one," he says.

Museum of Contemporary Art
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Images:

1. Laurence Aberhart, *Reuben, Russell*, 14 April 1993, 1993, silver gelatin, gold and selenium toned. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney and the artist
2. William Eggleston, *Untitled (Memphis)*, 1970, dye-transfer print. Courtesy Cheim & Read, New York and Eggleston Artistic Trust
3. Noel McKenna, *Boy dressed as Batman*, 1991, oil on plywood. Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney and the artist. Photograph: Simon Hewson