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Kooka(borough)

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Neil Overton

Abstract

The Kookaburra as iconic Australian bird is represented in this photo-series exploring photomention principles, of photographing the "decisive moment" but rather than documenting it fully, applying documentation theory of "glancing" or incorporating in passing through. This follows on in the vein of Group f/64 who through the lowest f stop sought to achieve detail and specificity that was beyond realist painting's capabilities. Of which, Henri Cartier-Bresson wrote: "In photography, there is a new kind of plasticity, the product of instantaneous lines made by movements of the subject. We work in unison with movement as though it were a presentiment of the way in which life itself unfolds. But inside movement there is one moment at which the elements in motion are in balance. Photography must seize upon this moment and hold immobile the equilibrium of it." This seizing of the "frozen moment" at which movement/moment are aligned towards a new geometry of spontaneity forms the basis of my aesthetic towards realist iconic immediacy - of phot(icon)ography.

A "borough" is a subdivision of a city, for example London or New York - where a "borough" is administered with limited powers given to it by the city's local government. In a city such as Wagga Wagga, we relegate nature to the "borough" of an administered domain, wherein nature itself has been "provided" limited controls over its own agency. This photograph series, in this case "Kooka(borough)" clearly, decisively aims to restore nature to its primacy.

The work continues its enquiry into the "decisive moment" aesthetic, and of naturalism and observed opportunity. It is not a photoshopped or otherwise altered or mediated photograph in any manner. A kookaburra alighted on the main flag-pole in the Historic Gardens in Wagga Wagga, and the Australian flag fluttered. The occurrence of our national symbols being naturally juxtaposed in this manner would be rare indeed; perhaps three million to one - this is a straight photograph of just such an instant where "the real" is beyond the range of normalcy. The photograph was shot on a hand-held Canon A480, rather than Cartier-Bresson's preferred 35mm camera. My photographic practice continues to explore these principles of straight photography, and autojournalism, to investigate observed iconic moments.

Author Biography

Dr. Neill Overton is Senior Lecturer in Art History and Visual Culture at Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga. His research interests are in contemporary Australian drawing, art prizes, awards and surveys. He was a lecturer at RMIT, Victoria College, and Melbourne University in Art History and Drawing, and worked extensively as a newspaper illustrator, exhibiting artist, art reviewer and novelist. He has curated major exhibitions towards histories of Australian film, theatre and television. His PhD was on Icons and Images in Australian Drawing 1970 - 2003, and his critical essays address the relationship between contemporary regional and urban art.

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