

## Exhibition Opening

### Proof – Photo Essays from the Top End

Chief Justice Michael Grant

Supreme Court Foyer, Darwin  
10 August 2016

Good afternoon ladies and gentlemen. The Court is very pleased to host this exhibition of Photo Essays from the Top End. As you will see on viewing the works, the curators have given the term “Top End” a liberal interpretation. In addition to images from the Northern Territory, the exhibition includes photographs from Port Moresby, Singapore’s Indian quarter and Yogyakarta – and is all the richer for it.

Art is essentially a response to things in the world, and the artist’s response to experience. It is a fundamentally humanistic endeavour, and has much value in teaching, stimulating, challenging and entertaining the public. This Court is a public building, and it is appropriate that it hosts exhibitions like this given the public benefit they bring. As an institution, this Court and its Judges have long recognised that art enriches the fabric of society. That is evidenced by the care taken in the curation of the Court’s own collection, and the very great public interest in it.

There are 10 artists represented in this exhibition. The works cover a wide variety of subject matters and styles. What elevates photography from mere technology to art is the vision of the photographer. Anybody can point a camera at a pretty thing and take a photograph of it. Only a very few can take photographs that make us look at the world differently. Those who can deserve to be exhibited as these artists are here. The photographs in this exhibition are, like all good photography, accessible and democratic in a way that some other art forms are not.

Without playing favourites in any way, I would make particular and brief mention of a few of the artists represented here.

Glenn Campbell is both a photojournalist and an artistic photographer. His work lies at the intersection between art and documentary. His evocation of Territory life in all its diversity performs both functions. It is beautiful, thought-provoking and authentic, and very clearly demonstrates the power of photography to inform and educate, as well as to stimulate and entertain.

Miriam Charlie brings an insider’s eye and perspective to the depiction of her community in Borroloola. There is a very clear political element in the work directed to the adequacy of housing in that community; but neither the message nor its tone is hectoring or strident. This somehow lends the work a power that a more aggressive visual polemic might not carry.

Max Hynes is the youngest artist represented here. He was given a camera and told to take photos as part of the inaugural *Spectrum* program. The program was

designed to allow kids on the autism spectrum to express themselves through photography. I have discussed the matter with Max's mother, and both she and Max are more than happy for the program and Max's involvement in it to be discussed. One of its primary functions, apart from affording the children involved some artistic voice, is to raise public awareness and understanding of autism spectrum disorders. I am sure you will agree on inspection that Max's work discloses a highly personal take on his environment and affords the viewer an insight into Max's perspective that would otherwise simply not be available.

Finally, there is a series of works by Fiona Morrison which were commissioned to commemorate the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Darwin Visual Arts Association. The works are all portraits of artists. They go further than mere portraiture, however, in depicting not only the artist but also cataloguing in various ways the creative processes they employ. The works also have the interesting element of depicting artists as seen through the eyes of another artist. They demonstrate the power of photography as portraiture in capturing the personality of the subject.

The work of the other six photographers involved is no less engaging, each in its own way.

I congratulate Maurice O'Riordan and his co-curators, Aaron Burton and Glenn Campbell, for putting together this very stimulating exhibition, and I declare it open.

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