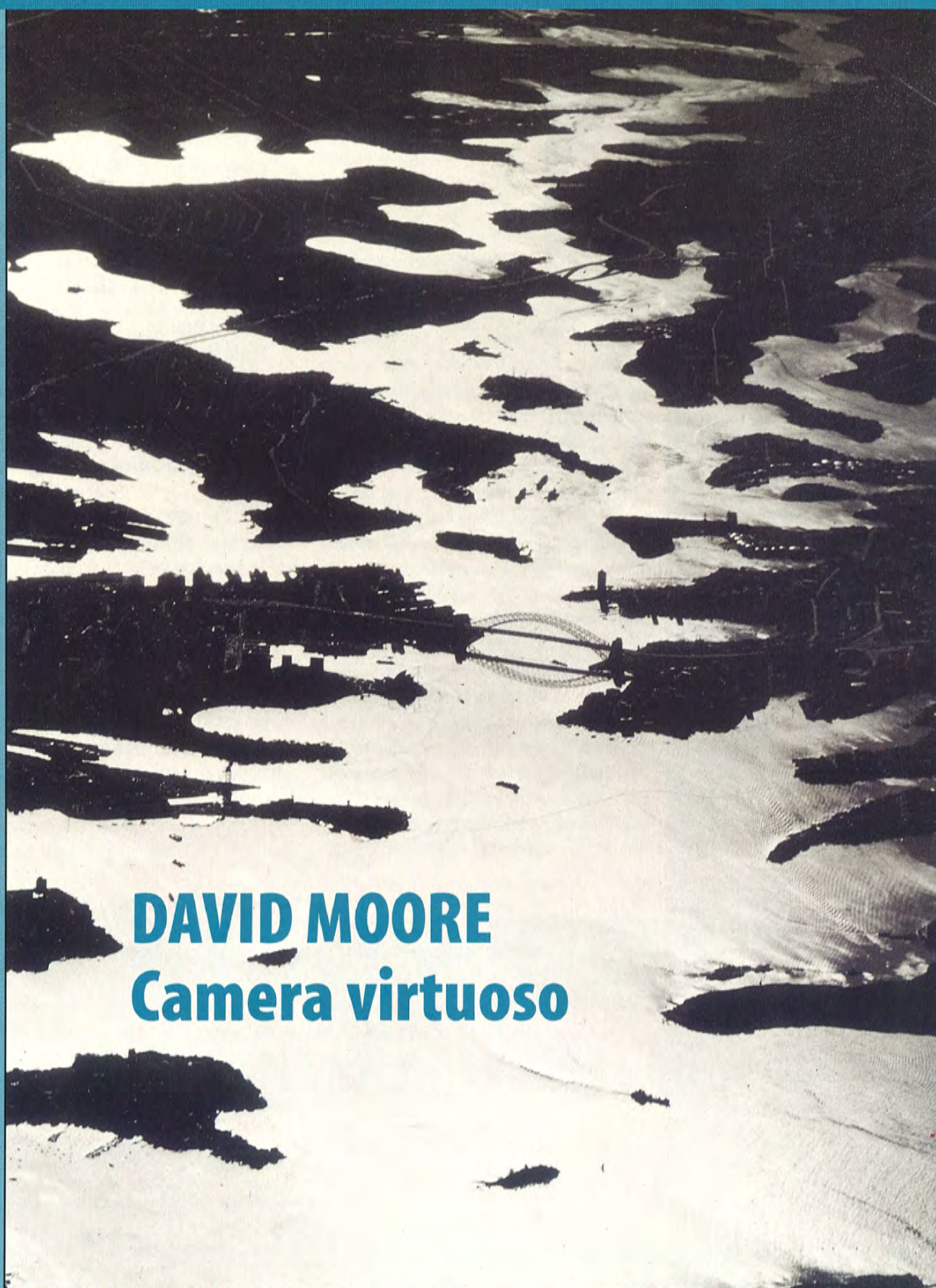


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# UPFRONT

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**DAVID MOORE**  
**Camera virtuoso**

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# CAMERA VIRTUOSO

DAVID MOORE'S PHOTOGRAPHS OF SYDNEY HARBOUR  
FROM THE '40S TO THE '90S

BY MICHAEL MANGOLD

ON VIRTUALLY ANY NIGHT of the year dozens of tiny flashes of light emanate from the cameras of visitors attempting to photograph Sydney Harbour from behind the glass of Centrepont Tower's viewing deck. The faith these photographers place in technology as they try to light Sydney Harbour with the power of a light source not much greater than the spark from two flint stones being rubbed together is sublime.

At the other end of the photographic spectrum is David Moore whose upcoming exhibition and book to be launched simultaneously at the State Library in October this year reveal an altogether different depth of experience. David was given his first camera in 1938 at the age of eleven. Some of the earliest images in the exhibition and book date from his boyhood wanderings on the shores of Sydney Harbour.

In the beginning, photography for David Moore was like the harbour itself; an element of wonder in his boyhood. "All children need playgrounds: for me the harbour waters and foreshores existed as a world of delight, adventure and mystery".<sup>1</sup> His camera was "the magic instrument"<sup>2</sup> which enabled him to record it.

It was on the eve of adulthood that the pleasure Moore derived from photography began to take hold as a passion in need of expression through a career. Having committed himself to following his father in architecture he found himself seeking permission to change course.

Contrary to expectation, his father, who was a painter as well as an architect, encouraged him. The receptiveness of an open mind and the steadfastness of a disciplined approach seem to be paternal legacies char-

acterised by the strong visual structure and technical mastery of David Moore's photographs.

"I think that all good pictures contain structure and that does not only mean photography. If the structure's not there the picture will fail just as a building can fail if the structure's not sound."<sup>3</sup>

Within a few years however, the euphoria of freedom David Moore experienced after joining the studios of Russell Roberts and then Max Dupain, gave way to feelings of restriction. He found the controlled lighting and predictable nature of commercial photography, especially in studio, to be things which isolated him from the realities he wanted to pursue with his camera.

David Moore returned to Sydney Harbour in search of the inspiration and joy photography had brought him as a boy. At this stage the influence of the photojournalistic movement which had grown up so rapidly overseas during and after the years of World War II began to pull him towards Europe.

Soon after photographically documenting the arrival and departure of the ocean liner *Himalaya* in Sydney Harbour for an assignment he had set himself, and having politely turned down Max Dupain's offer of a junior partnership in his studio, David Moore boarded the *Oronsay* and headed for a career in photojournalism. It began with the sale of his story on the *Himalaya* to *The Sphere* magazine in London, his port of arrival. Assignments for *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, *The Observer*, and other magazines followed.

In 1956 when *The Family of Man* exhibition was mounted at the Museum of Modern Art in New York it featured 583 pho-



Painting the 'Himalaya', Sydney - 1950.



tographs selected from "over two million photographs from every corner of the earth".<sup>4</sup> David Moore's photograph of the despair of a family living in a room in Redfern was one of those selected.

Two years later, having declined the offer of Picture Editor of

*The Observer*, David Moore and his young family boarded the *Oronsay* for the return voyage to Sydney. David's father met him at the same Pyrmont dock he had farewelled him from seven years before.

The experience of re-entering Sydney Harbour at dawn was profound for a photographer now at the height of his powers and one which was destined to become a signature experience of this book and the State Library exhibition. The panorama of 360 degrees photographed from Fort Denison at sunrise in 14 panels is the tour de force of a brilliant artist.

And yet the panorama is but one part of an orchestration of approximately one hun-



Barbecue picnic at Store Beach — 1967.

dred and fifty photographs. The subject, Sydney Harbour, emerges from these images in ways that will have an enduring effect on those who see the exhibition. The shores, the surface and the skies of Sydney Harbour are frozen in time, again and again, over a period of fifty years.

The changes are phenomenal and remarkable even for the photographer himself who captured each instant. "This is one of the interesting things that I find about photography, that well within my own lifetime, and particularly in a country like Australia, my early photography has achieved historical value."<sup>6</sup>

Photography is one of contemporary cul-

ture's most interesting art forms. Anyone can take a photograph and delight in the feeling of 'having been there' and being able to relive the moment. But in the hands of a virtuoso like David Moore the camera is an instrument that will bring audiences of his exhibition the pleasure and entertainment of a fine performance.

#### QUOTES:

- 1 from Sydney Harbour page 8
- 2 from David Moore Australian Photographer Volume 1 pages 22 & 41 respectively
- 4 from The Family of Man page 3
- 3 & 6 from unpublished interview with David Moore, McMahon's Point, July 1993

## Sydney Harbour — David Moore

### In the Galleries

On display from  
19 October 1993  
to 27 February 1994

### THE EXHIBITION TEAM

From L to R Caroline Chapman, Exhibition Assistant, Phil Verner, Exhibition Development & Design Project Management, Louise Cornwall, Installation & Production, Margaret Hamill, Publications and Design Coordinator, Martin Wale, Detail Design, David Moore, Photographer, and Sally Gray, Curatorial/Creative Direction and Project Management. (Absent: Jo de Monchaux, Exhibition Designer.)



PHOTO: ELLEN COMANKEY