

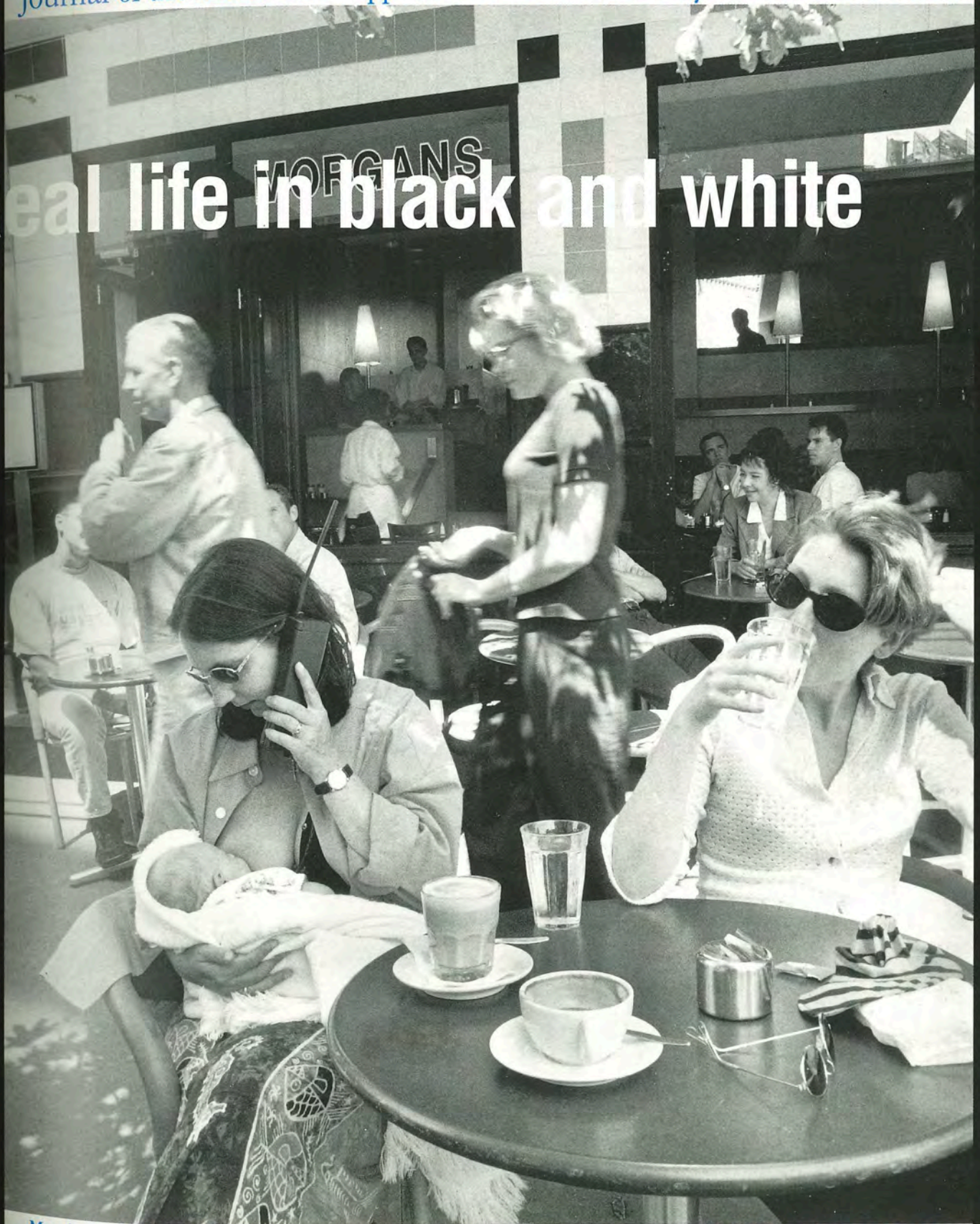
N2027.594405
2

UPFRONT

STATE LIBRARY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
1 MAR 1996
GENERAL REFERENCE LIBRARY

Journal of the friends and supporters of the State Library of New South Wales

Real life in black and white



pp
11

March, April, May 1996

Vol 8 No 2 ISSN 1033-0224

Real life in black

BLACK AND WHITE photographs of people invite our attention and engage our imaginations, emotions and memories in ways that can make film, television, video, and computer images look clumsy by comparison.

Photo Documentary, Recent Images of Everyday Life is a new exhibition at the State Library of New South Wales that reveals the society around us from a viewpoint no other medium can duplicate. The work of the fourteen photographers selected for the exhibition by the State Library's Curator of Photographs, Alan Davies, brings us eye to eye with scenes from the society around us that we might ordinarily not give a second glance to because of their familiarity.

Alan Davies' concept of the role photography has in society is lightyears beyond the crude power of a camera to isolate and sensationalise. *Photo Documentary* has much more to do with the integrity of reflections from real life than the intrusions of telephoto lenses and strobe lighting.

"Every photograph in this exhibition has people in it, that's its strength," Alan Davies said. "All of the photographs are in the collections of the State Library. If you look at the list of names of the photographers, most of them are totally unknown."

The perceptive eyes of these documentary photographers reveal the contexts and textures of sometimes remarkable but more often than not quite ordinary events in the daily lives of Australians in urban and rural New South Wales.

"Over the last decade or so we have added something like 222,000 photographs and negatives to the collection, by far the greatest

number of them have been donations," Alan Davies explained. "The images show us something about ourselves and this exhibition is the first time we have had the chance to actually show some of it to the public."

"We don't know why these documentary photographers take the photographs they do, a few of them are professionals but most are amateurs who in some cases have been



involved in creating photographic records of particular communities and lifestyles for more than 20 years.

"They have a basic need to go out and record the life around them, it's quite unusual. It certainly takes enormous confidence to take photographs in real life situations where you are not always wanted."

The value of documentary photography compared with the staple fare in 'tabloid' magazines is that it records the details of a moment in time not just the blandishments of a pretty scene or an expressive face.

The State Library's photography collection includes the earliest extant photograph in Australia and extends to the present day. These photographs enable us to look back and see how things used to be, especially the enormity of changes in our society that have occurred within living memory.

Alan Davies is always looking at

and white

BY MICHAEL MANGOLD



ABOVE: *Aboriginal Debutante Ball, Moree, 1994.*
PHOTO: JOHN WILLIAMS

RIGHT: *Shooting Hoops, Darling Harbour, 1995.*
PHOTO: SCOTT WAJON

PREVIOUS PAGE TOP:
Telephone Booths in Pitt Street, 1992.
PHOTO: MARK TEDESCHI

PREVIOUS PAGE BOTTOM:
P.A.S.H.O.N. (Perverts Against Sexual Hypocrisy Out Now) Taylor Square, Darlinghurst, 1995.
PHOTO: C. MOORE HARDY



photographs from the past and he says even the most obvious changes are astonishing. "Change in everyday life has been very rapid and unless we have some sort of documentation of it it is very easy to forget the way things were."

"One of the problems with photographers is that they tend to show us those things that are appealing or different. How much film must be used on the Opera House each year but is that all Sydney is about?"

"There are no photographs of the Opera House in the photo documentary exhibition! I look at extremely large numbers of images from the 19th century and all photographers ever seemed to photograph then were churches and the Botanic Gardens. They are still there and the changes are only fairly slight. What they can't show me are people's lives and how they have changed."

THE PHOTOGRAPHERS

Teny Aghamalian
Emmanuel Angelicas
Ellen Comiskey
Peter Elliston
Brendan Esposito
Mervyn Fitzhenry
Barrie Flakelar
David Hancock
C. Moore Hardy
Steven Lojewski
Phong Nguyen
Mark Tedeschi
Scott Wajon
John A. Williams

*Photo Documentary,
Recent Images of
Everyday Life*

opens in
the Galleries
2 March 1996 until
28 July 1996