Façades

urban interactions

heysen gallery
hahndorf academy
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dirk hr spennemann
According to the Oxford Dictionary, the meaning of façade is: “...the principal front of a building, that faces on to a street or open space.” The second meaning is a lot less literal: “...a deceptive outward appearance.” Behind the façade is a truth that can only be interrogated by crossing the threshold. A quest, if you like, to venture beyond outward appearances in order to find ground truths and examine reality.

Photography has often been associated with truth and realism. In the art world, painting always reflected the artist’s interpretation, but it was thought photography could only show what was visible to the naked eye or lens. We now know that this isn’t true; for as long as photography has been around, so has the manipulation of the image – primarily through cropping, camera viewpoint and selective focus. With the advent of digital imaging and Photoshop, the photograph, once held in high esteem as a ‘document of the real’, is now viewed with a more sceptical and discerning eye. As viewers, we have become accustomed to looking beyond the façade and asking ourselves if we believe what we see.

On first appearances, Façades: urban interactions appears to have been shot on ‘old school’ film. The monochromatic sepia tones and the soft focus suggest days of old, when lens technology was less than perfect and film was de rigueur. This is a façade: the images
are taken with the latest-technology Nikon equipment projected in the bi-convex glass viewfinder of a 1946 French Olbia Eikon. The image suggests ‘old world’, but the reality is ‘cutting edge’.

*Façades: urban interactions* takes us on a journey around Australia’s major cities: a whirlwind visit from Melbourne to Sydney to Brisbane and on to Adelaide, before returning to the artist’s home town of Albury. Geometry and line interact with text, reflections and the people who inhabit the urban landscape. Drawing on the traditions of street photography, Spennemann plays with shapes and urban synergies. In *Lassoed; Mortlock & State Library*, Adelaide, rope, glass and steel frame the historic State Library building in a complex layering which invites the viewer to delve beneath the surface.

Spennemann both combines and juxtaposes the two meanings of ‘façade’ in the titles of the works, which lead the viewer to interrogate the images. In *Wrecking Ball; Former Treasury Building, Brisbane Square*, Brisbane, Spennemann asks us to go beyond the façade of public art and to look at the consequences of the Global Financial Crisis. Likewise, in *Hedonist Maze; Queen Victoria Building, Sydney*, the discombobulating array of floors and escalators is juxtaposed with the dystopian blur of the astigmatic lens to lead the viewer to step behind the curtain of consumerism.

Returning to his base town of Albury with *M is for Murder; LibraryMuseum*, Albury, Spennemann cleverly draws reference to this converged facility’s dual collections: from fictitious murder mysteries shelved according to the Dewey decimal system, to the gruesome death mask on display of the famous ‘Pyjama Girl’, who was murdered and dumped in an Albury culvert in the 1930s.

Jules Boag is curator of the National Photographic Collection at the Albury Regional Art Gallery.
On her way

Union Lane, Melbourne
Wrecking Ball

Former Treasury Building, Brisbane Square, Brisbane
A city's biography is written in its buildings

Australia is one of the most urban countries in world, with over 92% of its population living in cities. Leading busy lives, much of our urbanite gaze is focussed on the immediate street level, rarely skyward. The denser the urban space, the less we see the layers of history which surround us.

Drawing on several Australian cities, the photographs in this exhibition expose the layers of cumulative history that gives every city its own unique character. Progressive or traditional, plain or highly ornate, a building's architecture is a representation of the ideas and aspirations of its makers and its age. Through the device of façades architects consciously frame people’s perceptions of the built landscape, and determine how they move through it.

The eye of the photographer captures this process, selectively reframes it, and refocuses the audience’s gaze on the subconscious ways in which façades influence how we move through, and interact with, urban spaces.

Dirk Spennemann
Ivy League
Victoria Barracks, Melbourne

Lassoed
Mortlock & State Library, Adelaide
Shine Dome
Australian Academy of Sciences, Canberra

Sculpted Lines
National Library, Canberra
Big Mouth

Luna Park, Sydney
Out with the Old
Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne

Facing the World
Rose Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne
Fallen Edifice
La Trobe & State Library, Melbourne

Rubble
Rail Line out of Town, Albury
About the Technique
Through-the-viewfinder images are shot by photographing the viewfinder of one camera with the lens of another. The resulting images have a magic quality, where part of the image is in focus and the rest drifts into a gentle blur. Dirk uses a self-designed NikΩmega art camera that uses a modern digital SLR to capture the image projected in the bi-convex glass viewfinder of a 1946 French Olbia Eikon.

About the Artist
Dirk Spennemann is an Albury-based photographer whose work explores the interaction of cultural heritage, landscape and human experience. He is Associate Professor of cultural heritage management at Charles Sturt University.

Art Exhibitions
2011 Light Lines
Albury, NSW
2011 Façades
Hahndorf, SA
2011 Dead End
Anchorage, AK, USA
2010 1000 Prayers
Benalla, Vic.
2009 Tantalizing & Troubling Visions
Saipan, Micronesia

Cross-Over Exhibitions
2011-12 Solitude (re-)Captured
Riverside, CA, & Juneau, AK, USA
2010-11 War on the Tundra
Anchorage, AK, USA
2009 eyes } world { hands
Albury, NSW
2008-09 Echoes of the Past
(Touring Exhibition, NSW and SA)
dirk spennemann photography

www.ausphoto.net