



ReViewing

DEVONPORT
REGIONAL
GALLERY

ReViewing

13 MARCH -
10 MAY 2015



Robert Vaudry Robinson

R82 YORK



Lisa Garland

Mrs Dick

2015

Giclée print - 59 x 74 cm - Courtesy the Artist and Despard Gallery

THE STUDIO AND THE COLLECTION

In 1927 a young photographer, Robert (Bert) Vaudry Robinson, started a business on the north-west coast of Tasmania. Operating until 1975, the Robinson Studio produced images which have come to represent a significant part of the region's history, and which now belong to the people of Devonport as a single collection of around 80,000 photographic negatives. The sheer quantity of images is only a slight indication of the real historic value that this collection holds.

THE BUSINESS OF HISTORY

Bert began his photographic career with his brother Frederick in Launceston, working with him between 1916 and 1927, after which time Bert moved to Devonport and established his own business. Bert operated his first photographic studio in Steele Street – next to what was then Luck Brothers hardware store – where he also lived with wife Annie Bertha and their six children. In 1932 Bert's son Albert joined his father's business, continuing in the family tradition.

Expanding their reach to surrounding towns, including Ulverstone, Wynyard, Burnie and Wilmot, the Robinson Studio profiled a large cross-section of the local community.^[1] The subject matter was just as diverse as the locations. In 1918 Hugh Wright, the first librarian of Sydney's Mitchell Library, drafted a list of what local photographers should document in their practice. He included industry and trade, public buildings, prize animals, Aborigines and 'any other phase of life', adding that:

... the public is apt to forget that what does not interest one man may be of great value to someone else ... because those [prints] of events to-day become historic as years roll on, and those of townlets to-day are the genesis of cities of tomorrow.^[i]

If they knew of Wright's statement then both Bert and Albert certainly noted it, photographing carnivals, horse races, sporting events, local buildings, shops and nature. They were also commissioned to take family portraits and capture weddings, balls and other social occasions. While commissioned photographs form a large part of the Collection, so too do images that show the photographers' personal reflections on their urban and rural surrounds. After Bert's death in 1953, Albert took over the business and worked until his own death in 1975. What has been passed down to us from those fifty years of work is an invaluable trail of history that defined the north-west region as well as the 'townlet' that became the city of Devonport.

THE ARCHIVE

As the custodian of original negatives from the Robinson Studio since 1993, the Devonport Regional Gallery has cleaned, catalogued and stored them according to international museum standards. More recently we have yet another means by which to preserve the Robinson Collection for posterity. As the original negatives – some of them ninety years old – deteriorate physically, we will have transferred the images they hold (that is, the visual information captured in time and space), onto a digital medium of 1s and 0s through a process of digital scanning. Much like what the original negative used to be, this medium becomes a 'memory support technique' without which our 'experience of the past would ... not be possible'. ^[iii]

Preserving the Collection also keeps it alive in our imagination. The Gallery has produced fifteen Robinson exhibitions since the Collection was acquired in 1993 in the hope that the local community would gain a better understanding of, and form a stronger connection to its past. For some this past might be distant, and for others entirely unknown, but with each exhibition we seek to discover new ways of viewing the past through the collection. As a vast history treasure trove, the Robinson Collection has the potential to inform, educate, inspire and incite our imagination. One way of exploring that potential is by giving artists access to our archives. By trusting them, we become open to viewing our collections in a different light.

Dunja Rmandic, Curator of Collections

^[i] While Bert operated alone the business was called Robinson Photography Studio. The name changed to Robinson & Son Studio when Albert joined in 1932. In 1953 when Bert died, Albert operated under the name Robinson's Studio until his own death in 1975.

^[ii] Quoted in Alan Davies, *An Eye for Photography: The Camera in Australia*, The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne, 2004, p. 120.

^[iii] Marina Gržnić, 'The Time Space Paradigm: Biomechanics and Memory', in Marina Gržnić, *Situated Contemporary Art Practices: Art, Theory, and Activism from (the East of) Europe, Revolver – Archiv für aktuelle Kunst, Frankfurt am Main, Založba ZRC, Ljubljana, 2004, pp. 59–76.*



Lisa Garland

Sarah-Jane

2015

Giclée print - 59 x 74 cm - Courtesy the Artist and Despard Gallery



Robert Vaudry Robinson

R3666 Devonport wharf



Ilona Schneider,

Untitled [Spirit of the Night]

2015

Giclée print on Museo Silver Rag - 56 x 78.5 cm



Ilona Schneider,

Untitled [Spirit of the Present Age]

2015

Chromogenic Type print on metallic pearl paper - 56 x 81.8 cm

SCANNING THE ARCHIVE

The exhibition ReViewing represents photographs made from negatives that form part of the Robinson Collection together with newly commissioned photographs and video work created by four contemporary artists working in photo media. The exhibition examines the sphere of photography from analogue to digital, documentation, social history and fine art.

The Robinson Collection is undoubtedly a valuable archive. It is a repository for items and information both recent and long past. The purpose of the archive is to maintain items and prevent deterioration through the best means possible, thereby allowing the archive to be accessed and used for research and exhibitions.

Archives help us look back and understand aspects of the past, but they also offer the opportunity to question the relevance and meaning of what is held in a collection. What is contained within, as well as missing from a collection allows the opportunity to make reasonable comparisons with the present and, importantly, question the supposed objectivity of an archival collection.

It is common practice nowadays to develop exhibitions that explore museum and gallery collections in ways that are less conventional than previously seen in traditional practice. The brief given to the four artists for this exhibition was to view images in the archive and create new work based on a response to that process. There were no expectations as to how the artists would respond and each artist was given the freedom to create work according to their individual practice, their interest in a particular subject matter, and their relationship to the north-west region of Tasmania

Lisa Garland's photographs are based loosely on viewing one particular Robinson photograph featuring a woman in her home surrounded by displays of flowers that cover the floor and various surfaces of the room. The photograph reminded Garland of a selection of photographs from her personal archive that had yet to be resolved. This process provided Garland with an opportunity to reappraise personal imagery and create a new body of work.

Ilona Schneider has created a new series of work inspired by what the artist considers is 'missing' from the Robinson Collection in terms of streetscapes - observing 'taking pictures from the backstage of the town is rather revealing in contrast to the renovated front facades with their mostly franchised shopfronts'.

Brian Sollors has taken inspiration from representations of the urban environment in the Robinson Collection. Sollors' photographs reflect his interest in the urban constructed environment. In his attempt to maintain a perceptually objective point of view, the artist is well aware that his intellectual and emotional connection to the subject matter cannot be totally erased from the process of making photographs.

Prior to relocating the Devonport City Council Permanent Collection to a purpose-built facility, a small number of Robinson negatives were identified as deteriorating. While the degree of deterioration varied, all of the impacted negatives were removed from their storage location and placed in separate containers to prevent contamination of other negatives. These negatives are currently being scanned in order to record any remaining details. The appearance of these negatives is disturbing as it indicates the permanent loss of both images and subject matter that formed an aspect of the Robinson family business. However, when Troy Ruffels viewed these negatives he discovered a strange beauty in their deterioration.

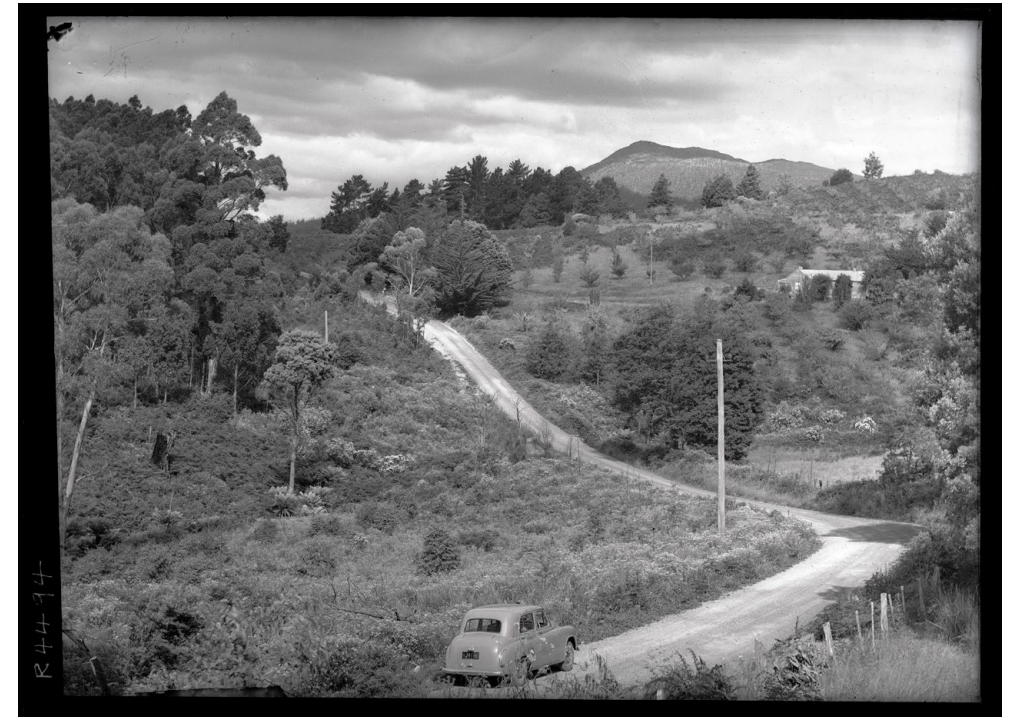
He has used scans of the negatives to create a body of work that shifts the viewer's attention away from the actual subject matter photographed to the chemical changes in the photographic emulsions and cracked surface structure of the negatives. Through new technologies, the artist breathes an alternative life and interpretation into these 'dying' negatives.

The Robinson photographs in ReViewing have been selected according to their relevance to the contemporary works produced by the four artists. In some instances the artists have been very specific about the Robinson photographs selected for display. Others have made work that has become somewhat removed from their viewing of the Robinson photographs and negatives, and have left the selection of related images to the discretion of the curators.

Connections and comparisons between some of the Robinson photographs and those commissioned for this exhibition can be made; however this is not the intention of ReViewing. The exhibition represents the interplay of past and present within the context of photography and the photographic medium.

It is impossible to present photographs of the past as the past, but we can look at aspects of the past through the Robinson Collection and create conversations about photography in the context of its history and practice; the meaning of the past in the present and our being as part of that past. Both the Robinson photographs and the contemporary photographs in ReViewing provide the viewer with an opportunity to contemplate the past and the present through lenses that represent not time but, rather, moments in time that are a part of the photographer's and the artists' being.

Ellie Ray
Director



Robert Vaudry Robinson

R4494 Car Travelling along road, orchard area



Brian Sollors

Housing Development

2015

Giclée print on archival paper - 37 x 112 cm

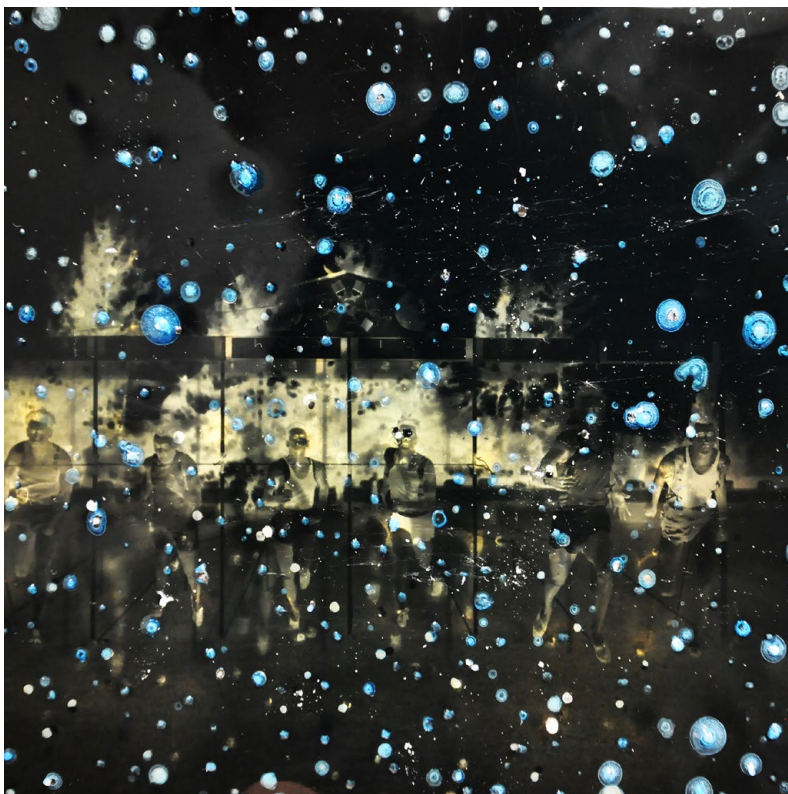


Brian Sollors

Transfer Station, E-Waste,

2014

Giclée print on archival paper - 37 x 55.5 cm

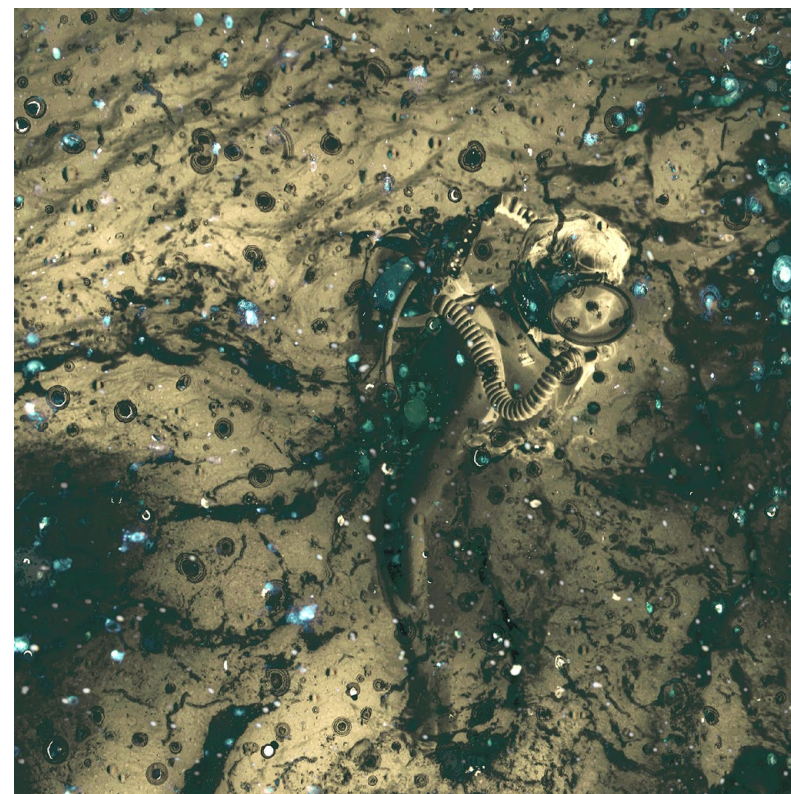


Troy Ruffels,

Found image #3

2015

Giclée print on Composite Aluminium - 107cm x 107cm
 Courtesy the Artist & Bett Gallery



Troy Ruffels

Found image #4,

2015

Giclée print on Composite Aluminium - 107cm x 107cm
 Courtesy the Artist & Bett Gallery



Robert Vaudry Robinson

R2624 Kingsford Smith Latrobe Carnival



Robert Vaudry Robinson

R4170-1 Star Channel Theatre

LISA GARLAND

Lisa Garland lives and works on the North West Coast of Tasmania. She is a photographer who specialises in large-scale silver gelatin portraits printed in a traditional darkroom. For fifteen years Garland has documented the lives and homes of interesting and often eccentric locals through large format portrait photography.

Garland completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart in 1992 followed by a diploma of Education. She has been shortlisted for a number of awards including the National Photographic Portrait Prize, the City of Hobart Art Prize and the Tidal: City of Devonport Art Award. Garland won the Moorilla Prize in 2007. Garland's work is held in private and public collections, including the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the University of Tasmania, Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Devonport Regional Gallery, and the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA).

ILONA SCHNEIDER

Ilona Schneider is an Austrian-trained photographer who has worked throughout Europe and Australia for over 20 years. In 2013 Schneider completed a Bachelor of Fine Art from the University of Tasmania, majoring in Photography and Electronic Media. Her interest lies in human stories that consider the idea and ontology of place. Through technological means, Schneider's work focuses on the intersection of industry and the landscape within the context of dwellings.

BRIAN SOLLORS

Since 1987, Brian Sollors has worked in the broadcast television and video production industries (both commercial and non-commercial) undertaking a range of work that also extended into print media. In 2013 he received an Australian Commercial and Media Photographers (ACMP) Student Photographer of the Year Award for the 'Architecture, built urban & rural environments' category. Sollors will complete a Diploma of Visual Arts (Photography) from TasTAFE in Devonport this year. ReViewing will be his first commissioned exhibition.

TROY RUFFELS

After graduating with a Bachelor of Art in 1996, Troy Ruffels was selected for the Museum of Contemporary Art's 1997 'Primavera' exhibition for emerging Australian artists and was named Young Tasmanian Achiever of the Year (Visual and Performing Arts Category) for 1998. In 2000 he was awarded an Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship and studied at the Glasgow School of Art. Ruffels' practice crosses over painting, new media and photography. He has exhibited widely (in solo and group survey exhibitions) both nationally and internationally in Spain, Malaysia, Singapore and the United Kingdom. In 2003–04, Ruffels undertook the Rimbun Dahan Residency Program in Malaysia and is the recipient of over a dozen grants and awards including three New Work Grants from the Australia Council. His work is held in public and private collections both in Australia and internationally. Ruffels currently lives and works on the North West Coast of Tasmania and is Head of Photomedia at the Tasmanian College of the Arts, Inveresk Campus, University of Tasmania. He has a Bachelor of Fine Arts Honours degree and a PhD from the Tasmanian School of Art.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The curators would like to thank Lisa Garland, Troy Ruffels, Ilona Schneider and Brian Sollors for their commitment and belief in this project.

We acknowledge the assistance of past volunteers who worked on the Robinson Collection, and Gallery staff for their continuing support and expertise.

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FRONT COVER

Star Theatre, Stewart Street Devonport, 1937, The Robinson Collection, Devonport City Council Permanent Collection, scanned from the original glass plate negative, R4170.1 (Detail)

BACK COVER

Robert Vaudry Robinson
R4494 Car Travelling along road,
orchard area (Detail)

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DESIGN Readings Advertising

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