

History associated with Contemporary Photography within Australia (2020)

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Introduction

This history is about the use of the term 'contemporary', as it relates to photographic styles and photographic practice. In particular, to justify the current Australian Photographic Society's (APS) Contemporary Group as something that is not unique to APS, but rather to recognize that this group is actually an extension of other groups from the past, created under the same name, for the same reasons. That is, to create a justifiable history which can be promoted by APS, citing what existed within the contemporary photographic scene outside of APS prior to its development and beyond.

In addition, I hope to show that the formation and practice of contemporary photography within APS, is very similar to the formation and practices within other groups, who used and are still using the name of contemporary to address a photographic practice, which goes beyond using a traditional or repetitive style of photography mostly designed for competition. In addition, I will endeavour to link this material to APS wherever possible.

Harold Cazneaux (1878-1953) & Laurence Le Guay (1916-1990) (Sydney Photographic Circle, Miniature Camera Group & Camera Club of Sydney)

Sydney Photographic Circle (1916-1978)

Harold Cazneaux was a founding member of the Sydney Photographic Circle which began in 1916. Other founders were Cecil Bostock, Malcolm McKinnon, James Paton, James S. Stening and William Stewart White. Their aim was to promote pictorialist photography. ⁽¹⁾ At the time, pictorialism was deemed to be exciting and new and this group was a breakaway group from the traditionalists who had very set ideas about photography. This new group included a merging of professional and amateur photographers, which previously had not been done. According to Roger Skinner, *'Pictorialism was probably the first "Photographic Movement" which represented a distinct deeply romantic style, as opposed to the hum drum, the replication, the accurate description of the item or image as specimen'*. ⁽²⁾ This statement by Skinner is about the first movement away from the continuous repetition of images that existed within the early years of photography.

Laurence Le Guay joined the group in 1940 as a young man, a protégé of Cazneaux at the time, more information about Le Guay further on. Cazneaux himself says that it is *'his personal belief that the amateur was the moving factor in the early movements that involved a fusion of artistic thought and conception in the production of a photograph'*. ^(3 pp. ix-xiv) This was based on the professional having to live within rules set at the time, with the amateur free to pursue options outside of them. Le Guay also promoted the combination of these two groups within his publications, possibly related to Cazneaux's influence. (See p3)

This Circle of photographers was the driving force of photography, over the 60+ years it existed but dwindling membership caused its downfall, ceasing to exist after 1978. Competition related to its membership came from the Australian Photographic Society, APS (formed 12th May, 1962) and the Camera Club of Sydney, which was previously known as the Miniature Camera Group of Sydney. On

the 18 November, 1943, Harold Cazneaux was made an honorary member of this club before its change of name, which occurred on 20th August, 1947. ⁽⁴⁾

In 1951, Cazneaux finally acknowledged that the '*...romance and spirit of pictorialism was no more*'. From this statement, I am assuming that Cazneaux meant that once again, the energy and movement of change had waned and the spirit of '*artistic thought*' ⁽³⁾ had gone. Perhaps his statement also relates to today. As replication of images styles is still very much alive and well, especially within APS and throughout the Camera Club movement, whose main focus relies on competition. ^(5 p. 8/chap2)

Miniature Camera Group (1938 -1948) Camera Club of Sydney (1948)

In the 1930's development of the small format cameras, such as the Leica, brought about more change within photographic circles. Being smaller and more manageable than the larger format cameras of the time, made them easily accessible to more people and many were sold to aspiring photographers of the time. However, they were not considered equal to the larger format, mostly because of their smaller negative size. Disputes arose about their use, especially in relation to the quality of the photographs produced, as well as to the increased number of camera users.

Regardless of that, quite a number of photographers moved away from the traditional large format cameras, which had restricted mobility, and into the smaller format which allowed them to move beyond the studio and into the community. The advent of such changes brought about many different photographic styles, including that of documentary photography. It also was the decider for the foundation of the Miniature Camera Group which began in 1938, with Le Guay, once again a founding member.

The group was created specifically for these new cameras and for photographic change associated with them. The aims of the group were to '*encourage high standards in informative, educational, and cultural photography with a fresh and original approach to the craft of picture-making...in ways other than what is usually called, pictorial photography*'. ^(5 pp. 1,7/chap1)

The group held its own for ten years until, in 1948 the name was changed to the Camera Club of Sydney to '*more accurately describe the size of the club and to remove the restriction on negative size*', which had been created specifically for the miniature cameras: ⁽⁴⁾ Here the change was around cameras and techniques, so perhaps the change of name and the increased member size saw stagnation towards a photographic style which favoured the repetitive, without the signs of personal expression or innovation. The style quite favoured in competitions.

Rossi sourced her information about these organisations from an article written by Cliff Nobel published in the Contemporary Photography (CP Magazine) June-July edition 1950. ^(5 pp. 7-8/chap 1) From my investigations, I have also found a Cliff Nobel listed as having received an AFIAP in 1960. He is also amongst the group of photographers who were included in Le Guay's book *Australian Photography a portfolio 1948* (See p4). So I am assuming he was one of the members of APS in its early days as well as being a member of the Camera Club of Sydney. ^(6 p. 10)

Contemporary Camera Groupe, Contemporary Photography Magazine

Contemporary Camera Groupe (1938 - unknown)

in November 1938 Laurence Le Guay ARPS was invited by Max Dupain OBE EFIAP and Olive Cotton to join them in forming a *Contemporary Camera Groupe* with others, including Douglas Annand, Harold Cazneaux, Damien Parer, Cecil Bostock and Russell Roberts. Dupain formed the groupe after he came in conflict with judges associated with the 1938 Salon held by the Photographic Society of NSW. He criticized them for accepting '*traditional European style works instead of contemporary works.*' ^(5 p. 5/chap1) Le Guay also criticized post-WW11 salons for '*not displaying the vitality and new creative spirit*' which had emerged within photography after the war. According to Rossi, Le Guay said that '*In the salons, there are still too few glimpses of reality*' coming through in the finished photograph. This factor, he believed, should come as a result of '*the personal interpretation of the photographer*', which was not happening. Because of the invisibility of these things, Le Guay determined that '*pictorialism had stagnated*' ^(5 p. 5/chap1) If Le Guay was talking about the change within imagery that came with pictorialism, rather than the actual style, it could mean that he was referring to something that was now quite static and quite repetitive, which no longer was new and innovative: Hence the creation of the Contemporary Groupe.

The Contemporary Group proclaimed themselves Modernists, seceding from pictorialism which had been held in esteem for a number of years. The youngest members were, like Le Guay, commercial photographers. Unfortunately this group was interrupted by the 2nd World War, especially when Dupain and Le Guay left Australia as war photographers, engaged by the services for its duration. ⁽⁷⁾

Little else is known about what happened to this group beyond its beginnings as mentioned here. Other than it took some time to get going because of the war. Whether it existed after the war is unknown, although the practice of modernism under the guise of contemporary, continued beyond the war. ⁽⁸⁾

Contemporary Photography Magazine - Le Guay (1946-1950)

In January 1946, as an offshoot to that group and on his return from the war, Le Guay founded the magazine *Contemporary Photography*, the first Australian photographic magazine not published by a photo supply firm. Throughout this magazine, he encouraged photographers to bring '*vitality and personal expression*' to their photographs. It was his wish to use the magazine to challenge pictorialism's reign within photographic salons based on competition, which dominated photographic practice. He also wanted to use it as a means of portraying a record of society for the future. ^(5 pp. 1-9/chap3)

During the magazine's time period, naturalistic photography had emerged amongst some of the contributors and this work began appearing within the magazine. Close to the end of the continuing publication of it, Le Guay featured a selection of Cazneaux's works within it, dating back to 1904. The title accredited to the works was "Sydney of Yesterday". Le Guay described these images as '*being of great pictorial and documentary value to Australia*', which in many ways was related to his personal view of photography being used to document society over time. The magazine continued on until 1950, when it ceased publication for the want of an editor. This came about when Le Guay resigned in order to concentrate on his own personal practice. ^(5 pp. 1-9/chap3)

In 1948, Le Guay published his first book *Australian Photography a Portfolio*. His intention was 'to show a cross-section of the best creative work of Australian photographers'...'made up of almost equal proportions of amateur and professional'. The work came from a submission of over 5000 prints that had been printed over the previous two years within his contemporary photography magazine. His reasoning for this selection was 'that these prints show more clearly the trends of photography in Australia' at this time. He rejected many of the landscape images because they were felt to be 'pictorial, characterised or documentary' and 'because they are an end in themselves'. In other words, according to Le Guay as quoted earlier, they were 'not displaying the vitality and new creative spirit' which had emerged at the time (See p2).^(9 pp. vii-viii)

Some photographers from the magazine as recorded in Le Guay's *Australian Photography a Portfolio 1948*. This list includes Cliff Noble whom I mentioned previously (See p2).⁽¹⁰⁾

John Allnutt	JDS Hearder ARPS	Cliff Noble AFIAP
A Boddington	N Herfort	Scott Polkinghorne
John P Carney ARPS	Rob Hillier	David Potts
F Leonard Casbolt	Frank Hurley	G Powell
H Cazneaux FRPS	Tom Jackson	G Purcell
L Collins	K Krischock	D Rich
Tony Cleal	John Lee	Ainslie Roberts ARPS
E Cranstone	Ray Leighton	Noel Rubie
Margot Donald	LA Lyons ARPS	Athol Shmith FRPS EFIAP?
Kerry Dundas	Molly Lyons	Dr Julian Smith, FRPS
Max Dupain OBE EFIAP	RH McKinney	AGW Sparrow
D Gadsby	NMW Mansill	G Sprod
G Grant-Thompson	KJ Mierendorff	Neil Town
Laurence Le Guay EFIAP ARPS	Paul Moline	J Williams
Kenneth Hastings	John Nisbett	John Wray

Le Guay's influence and the input he gave in educating amateur photographers 'to be more progressive and spontaneous in their endeavours' with the aim of producing work beyond what had become stagnated was immense.^(5 p. 7/chap 1) These efforts of his resulted in the expansion of contemporary as a photographic style over the years that he continued his practice and beyond.

Honours and Associations within APS

Another person from the list shown above, Athol Shmith FRPS could well be the Athol Smith, listed in the APS membership directory as receiving his EFIAP. Both Athol Shmith and David Moore (See p7) were part of the photography scene at the same time. David Moore received his EFIAP the same year as the listed Athol Smith. The only difference is the spelling. I am inclined to believe they were one and the same person. It is possible Shmith used the spelling of Smith for simplicity; alternately it was an error in the spelling.

Max Dupain was a member of APS, received EFIAP in 1961 as well an OBE in 1982 for service to professional photography. Lawrence Le Guay, also a member of APS, received his EFIAP in 1960 and a Commonwealth medal for service to professional photography in 1964. Lawrence Le Guay,

also a member of APS, received his EFIAP in 1960 and a Commonwealth medal for service to professional photography in 1964. ⁽⁶⁾

APS Contemporary Group (1993-present)

The current Contemporary Group within APS was established in September 1993. It began with three current members, Roger Skinner, Ruby Spowart and her son Doug. ⁽²⁾ They too had become disenchanted with current trends in photography within APS and Camera Clubs and wanted to move more into the contemporary styles within art practices that Le Guay had spoken of as being '*more progressive and spontaneous*' than what existed within APS at the time. (See P4) ^(5 p. 7/chap 1)

Reasons for Establishing the Group

In 1980 Ruby Spowart and her son Doug Spowart opened a photographic art gallery in Brisbane called *Imagery*. Concept and objectives of this was the following:

- To provide an exhibition venue for photographers*
- To assist those wishing to share their imagery with others*
- To provide a meeting place for those interested in photography*
- To provide a centre of photographic learning*
- To provide a resource centre on photography and photographers'*

Their first exhibition was held in the same year of establishment and the last one closed in 1995, as did the gallery. Altogether they had a total of 205 exhibitions. ⁽¹¹⁾

According to Doug Spowart, running this gallery expanded his & Ruby's view of photography away from competition and more towards the arts. Roger Skinner too, was engaged in the art scene and all three of them hoped to use their knowledge and experience to expand the views of APS's members by forming a contemporary group within it. Doug also spoke about Graham Burstow being part of the same art scene at the time, mostly for his documentary work. ⁽¹²⁾ (See more p9)

This was very similar to what had happened in 1938, when Max Dupain and Olive Cotton set up the earlier contemporary group in order to expand photographic practice into the arts and beyond the stagnation of pictorialism, which was still controlling much of the practice of photography and the camera club movement at the time. As well, their aims were very similar to Le Guays about the provision of education to promote the changing styles within contemporary practices, so many years earlier.

Beginnings

Roger Skinner was the inaugural Chairman of this new Group and retained that position until he resigned in 2003. One of the main activities of the Group was to stage exhibitions of contemporary work as well as making presentations about contemporary photography during the different APSCON's (APS Conference) over the years. Many times Skinner was brought back as a guest artist to make a presentation within these APSCONS, as he was a well recognised artist within Australia and his expertise was always welcome. His efforts in establishing this group was written about in a book published by the Muswellbrook Regional Arts Centre in 2008. Katrina Rumley from the

Moree Plains Regional Gallery referred to Roger Skinner as a '*Muswellbrook artist, having 43 of his works in their permanent collection*'. She refers to the aims he had for the APS Contemporary Group as '*moving towards the appreciation of photography as a communication medium*'. In other words, Skinner wanted to move away from the illustrative and picturesque approach which was popular at the time. ^(13 pp. 117-118) Rumley referred to Skinner's own work as being able to capture the '*stillness and sometimes the ordinariness of a scene, rather than magnifying accepted notions of beauty and grandeur*'. This she referred to as a '*zen contemplative approach*'. ^(13 p. 118) The meaning of this approach is to move away from conventional thinking with fixations on goals or subject matter to a more simplistic and intuitive style of imagery. This contemplation approach was carried forward by Skinner as a photographic style which could be utilized by members within the newly established contemporary group within APS.

This movement away from tradition by Skinner and the Spowarts over the years was similar to what Le Guay did within the earlier contemporary groups from the past. As well, the production of his Contemporary Photography Magazine provided a similar purpose of encouraging change, by him publishing different images and essays about the changing face of contemporary photography. At the time, it was also considered a way of exhibiting the work, instead of just on the walls. But it is unknown how many photographers within the group, exhibited in galleries during the 1940's and beyond. ⁽¹⁴⁾

Exhibitions by APS Contemporary Group

The first exhibition of the Contemporary Group was *Decadence*. It was exhibited at the Dubbo Regional Gallery after APSCON 1995 in Canberra and interestingly it was held alongside a Harold Cazneaux exhibition which was opened by Gael Newton, from the National Gallery. *Decadence* was also exhibited at the Muswellbrook Regional Gallery after the exhibition in Dubbo.

Other exhibitions that followed were - *Transformations: Edges and Balances* which was exhibited at the L&P Gallery in Sydney in 1997. That was followed by *Mirage and Metaphor* in conjunction with APSCON 2000. Beyond that was the exhibition *Contemporary Pictorialism* which was held during APSCON 2001 in the Shepparton Art Gallery. ⁽²⁾ Other exhibitions from 2004 are listed within the Contemporary information on the APS website. All or most of them were held in conjunction with the various APSCON's over the years and were aimed at providing education to photographers who were instilled within the competition framework. However, there were many times these exhibitions were ignored by APS members, especially in the earlier years.

See <https://www.a-p-s.org.au/index.php/c-div-exhibitions>

Growth of Contemporary

The contemporary group continued to grow under Skinner until he resigned from the society in 2003; Kay Mack was persuaded to continue as Chair where she too remained for many years until her health forced retirement in 2015 with Brian Rope temporarily filling the role. During Mack's time period, the name of the group was changed to Contemporary Division, but in later years it was one of the first to revert back to the original name Contemporary Group when it was offered as an option to all Divisions within APS. This happened around the same time Brian Rope was officially

appointed chair in 2016. Currently he is still holding that position. I joined Contemporary during Kay Mack's time in 2005. ⁽¹⁵⁾

With reference to Le Guay's 1940's Contemporary Photographic Magazine, the APS Contemporary Group produced a regular bi-monthly newsletter to all members in 2009. Now it occurs monthly and is recognized within APS as a newsletter worthy of going to all members within the society, instead of being restricted to just contemporary ones. ⁽¹⁶⁾

Early photographers spoken about and others who are linked in other ways to contemporary and their membership of APS

David Moore (1927- 2003)

David Moore was '*Australia's most renowned and widely travelled photojournalist*'. ⁽¹⁷⁾ He was a member of APS and received a Commonwealth medal for service to professional photography in 1979. ⁽⁶⁾ He was not listed amongst the group of photographers on p3 who had works within the book *Australian Photography a Portfolio* by Le Guay in 1948. ^(10 pp. iv,v,vi) Yet his images appear in the other two books by Le Guay, one in 1976, the other in 1978. (See also p4) Based on that, he is acknowledged as having contributed to the Contemporary Magazine between the years 1948-1950. ^(5 pp. 5-7/chap2)

He says this about his works '*I would like my pictures to reflect a little of the respect I have for great masters of the past, at the same time as celebrating the mystery of ambiguous elements which are often embedded in photographs.*' David Moore 1997 ⁽¹⁷⁾

Another quote by him talking about the viewer in relation to his work: '*Like any creative discipline this one can contain layers of meaning which, at best, impart a greater richness.* *Photography can pose question for the viewer as well as attempting to answer them.*' David Moore 1997 ⁽¹⁷⁾

Rossi speaks of him as '*Far from being a true Documentary photographer, his personal works were a project in aesthetic realism rather than social reform, never the less his slum pictures have since become icons of the depressed life many lived after WW11*'. ^(5 p. chap2/p5)

This was related to Cazneaux's thinking, that images such as these 'slum pictures' could be a source of social reform, should they be used for this, rather than as an historical record.

Athol Shmith (1914 - 1990)

Shmith was a Melbourne based professional photographer who '*thrived on specialisation*'. He ran a studio in the 'Paris end of Melbourne' with a focus on '*social portraiture and fashion*', photographing many famous people during his time. ⁽¹⁸⁾ The work included in Le Guay's 1948 book *Australian Photography* by Shmith, ^(10 p. 65) showed a photograph of Vivien Leigh, a well known actress. Being included within this book, meant he was also a regular participant within the Contemporary Photography Magazine during the years 1948-50. According to Ennis, she described his work as having a visible '*implied narrative*', instead of being just a portrait. She also said his work had an '*international style that also had an Australian inflexion in his images.*' Shmith too had

broken away from the traditional portrait style of the time, being studio based, and moved more into the casualness of using the outdoors and other places for his portraiture. ⁽¹⁸⁾

It was my believe that Shmith was also the person listed as having received EFIAP within the APS membership directory in 1960, regardless of the changed spelling listed, that of Athol Smith. It fits within what was happening at the time and it also links with other people tied up with the Australian Contemporary Magazine and APS during the 1960's. (See also p4/5) ⁽⁶⁾

Henri Mallard (1884-1967)

Henri Mallard was made an honorary life member of APS in 1962 ⁽⁶⁾ and, although I have not mentioned him previously, it is worth including him for three reasons, being founding member of the Sydney Circle, his movement into documentary and film, which was quite new at the time and his continuing framework of pictorialism as a style in photography. Another reason that links him to the word contemporary is the mention of him by Gael Newton within Le Guay's book *Australian Photography a Contemporary view 1978*.

Mallard's main work of fame was the film documentation of the Sydney Harbour Bridge during its construction. A book was printed containing a collection of Mallard's still images taken during the bridge construction in 1978 and reprinted again in 1980 called *Building the Sydney Harbour Bridge*, Sun Books Australia. ⁽¹⁹⁾

Within this book is an introduction to Mallard and his work by Max Dupain. In it, Dupain refers to Mallard as being '*one of the authorities on photography whom one looked up to*'. He referred to Mallard as being '*one of the founding members of the then Holy of Holies - The Sydney Camera Circle*'. He was deemed to be one of the experts in the field and photographers, including Dupain '*were almost in a queue to talk to him during his lunch break*' outside of Harrington's Photo Store, Sydney, Mallard's place of work. Dupain writes about Mallard's venture to photograph the Harbour Bridge during its construction as '*a herculean task...done solo for the challenge it meted out to him*'. ^(20 pp. 5-7)

To come back to contemporary as a photographic style, the essay by Gael Newton in Le Guay's book, titled '*Pictures in Print*' was about photography and exhibitions, plus publications such as Le Guay's and Mallard's books which were providing an alternative to exhibition.

Of interest to us is her evaluation of Mallard the photographer, as '*having leanings towards documentary...but in his still photography he never broke with the pictorial canon, that subject matter was only the starting point for a beautiful, self-contained image*'. ^(21 pp. 6,7) Another statement found associated with Mallard was again by Newton within another source which still refers to the same thing. '*Despite a strong interest in film and documentary work, Mallard was faithful to the canons of the pictorial style*'. ⁽²²⁾ Considering both of these quotes, there is the beginning of a possible definition for the pictorial style as being 'a self contained image that is technically composed'. An addition to that could be, 'one that is able to be judged under a set of rules which goes across all,' making it very easy for organisations to control process. Also with her talking about him being always a pictorialist, it implies that pictorialism was still continuing during the 1960's, at a time when Dupain and others, were invested heavily in modernism. This had

started after the war along with Le Guay's Contemporary Photography Magazine and was still well alive.

Graham Burstow (1927-present)

Burstow joined up with Spowart about the same time Spowart set up his gallery in 1980 and before the inauguration of the Contemporary Group within APS in 1993. Mostly because of his social documentary style of photography, which, in the early days was considered quite new and possibly contemporary? ⁽¹²⁾ As well, he was included as a contemporary photographer within Le Guay's book, *Australian Photography - a contemporary view, 1978* ^(23 pp. 65-66) and within the earlier one, *Australian Photography 1976*. This earlier book, is not defined as contemporary, but does include contemporary work, rather than pictorial. ^(24 p. 149)

Burstow was a well recognized documentary photographer within the Amateur photographic circles. More especially within the Australian Photographic Society, when he established a 'Social Documentary' category within the Society and beyond. I see a very strong link between his work and that of David Moore, both of them true & recognized social documentary photographers. They each had a real interest in this style of work, both creating work within the same era of photography, each being born in the same year.

The differences I see between them were associated with Moore being a professional, being paid for his time and work, and Burstow an amateur but no less accomplished as a photographer, volunteering his time for the advancement of photography within amateur circles. He also, in many ways, is connected to many of the photographers, who moved away from pictorialism and into other areas that were deemed contemporary. ⁽²⁵⁾

Burstow too, used books as an addition to exhibiting his works. His first one *Touch Me* came out in 1998. Beyond that was, *Flesh: The Gold coast in the 1960s, 70s and 80s* published in 2014. ⁽²⁵⁾ *Closer* is his latest one printed this year and I am of the understanding from Burstow himself, there is another one due very soon. ⁽²⁶⁾

In 1974 he was awarded a Commonwealth Medal for services to Amateur Photography and in 2004 he was awarded the Order of Australia Medal for Services to Photography in Australia. In 2006 he was made an Honorary Life Member of APS. He has also received many other honorary and photographic awards across the world, plus he is also a founding member of APS (1962). ⁽⁶⁾

His main achievements, according to his website: ⁽²⁵⁾

- the staging of his solo exhibition ***Flesh: The Gold Coast in the 1960s, 70s and 80s*** and the publication of the related book, both in 2014
- the publication of a book of his prints called ***Touch Me***, in 1998
- his inclusion in a group of six prominent Queensland-based photographers chosen by the Queensland Art Gallery to document aspects of Queensland life for a major exhibition, ***Journeys North***, as part of the bicentenary celebrations 1988

Regardless of his initiatives, Burstow never actually joined the APS Contemporary Group. He was happy with his inclusion within the social documentary category that he established within APS. ⁽²⁶⁾

Royal Photographic Society's (RPS) Contemporary Group

In 1989 London, a meeting was held within the Royal Photographic Society (RPS) to look at the possibility of change. The intention was to consider the inclusion of a photographic style beyond what had had existed within the society for quite a few years. At the time, much was happening within other circles beyond the Society which was '*completely different from that exhibited by the RPS*', that of photographic art. As well, a number of other photography groups had set up their own agendas and were following the newer styles which had arisen within the UK. These groups were against the typical camera club competitive process and preferred the development of a more personal style of work.⁽²⁷⁾

According to Steptoe, this inaugural meeting showed strong support for the creation of the group within the society and the RPS Contemporary Group was formed. The emphasis in this group was about the creation of '*personal work*' which had '*meaning and purpose*'. This became the underlying premise of the newly created Contemporary Group.⁽²⁷⁾ However, this style of work was very different to what had existed previously, creating much discussion and questioning around the name 'Contemporary'. Members wanted clear definitions to its meaning, without accepting the differences. To address this, the group came up with a revised definition in 2013, which was '*Photography that conveys ideas stimulates thought and encourages interpretation: photographs 'about' rather than 'of*'.

Steptoe refers to this definition as extending photography beyond '*the visual image to include purpose and value*'. The image is then not '*distinguished by the technical aspects and composition of an image*'. Instead it is about the answers associated with three questions. '*What does it say? How well does it say it? Was it worth it?*' All criteria that is used by the group when assessing the work or determining its value.⁽²⁷⁾

Membership of the new group expanded over time, but once again issues arose associated with the newer moves towards '*creative image-making*'. Many had joined the group with the opinion that this practice belonged within contemporary, only to discover they were not correct. Membership shrunk again to its earlier numbers. Down the track this group began expanding into exhibitions as well as creating their own honour system for contemporary.

In 1992, the first honours were awarded to members within the panel system. However, these awards were not specifically only for Contemporary Members, they were open to all RPS members within the Society. In 1999 the first criteria was created for assessing contemporary submissions. This also included the requirement for a written submission about the work as an assessment tool. The work was assessed against this text, very similar to conceptual evaluation. At one stage the group considered bringing in outside artists to do the evaluations, but this was refused by the Society, with all assessors being required to hold the honours of fellowship. Some years later in 2007, distinction rules were changed for consistency reasons between all groups within the society. This made it less easy for contemporary group members to achieve honours.⁽²⁷⁾ Here again you see '*aspects of competition*' rearing its head, around a uniform process attributed to every image within all sections and groups. These criteria make for a very simple assessment by the same judges across all. Plus training judges becomes simple as well.

According to Steptoe FRPS, founder member of the group, RPS still has difficulties around wanting to apply 'common standards across all aspects of its members. This includes the different perspectives which exist within it. However, the group still exists and the expansion continues. As well, the objectives developed for the group are still able to remain as it was intended. This fits within the future expansion of the group as it endeavours to keep up with the changing boundaries of what is considered photography, over time.⁽²⁷⁾

Summation

Over the years many changes have occurred within photography but what still exists is the continual practice associated with competition. This practice fits easily within photographic societies and camera clubs. It is all about repetition with each person chasing images with similar styles and more, to suit judges who have at most, 2-3 minutes each to award points out of five for each image, with designated criteria for each point. Hence, the 'wow factor' or impact on the judges as being something to aim for. This is done through the creation of a work which will grab attention within a minimal time frame to achieve higher points.

Over time, this practice has continued with little or no change, other than more advanced technological improvements around editing and more advanced equipment. What we see within the Sydney Photographic Circle was the beginnings of change in breaking away from the 'hum Drum or replication' as Skinner describes.

Originally pictorialism was considered a new concept with its expansion beyond the photograph as a scientific process. Because of this, pictorialism was deemed to be '*unphotographic*' by photographers who aspired to technology. In contradiction to this, the breakaway group who founded the Sydney Circle upheld pictorialism to be new and different, inspiring its members to take it into the future. However, Le Guay, one of the founding members of the Sydney Circle in later years warned camera users against pictorialism. He was concerned that this practice '*would turn photography into an automatic process*' without any artistic thought.^(5 p. 1/ch1)

Yet in 1938 we see original members of the Sydney Photographic Circle moving away from pictorialism and looking for alternatives. This move was influenced by Dupain, who believed pictorialism had become stale and fixed, with its focus on competition and regulated judging rules. These ideas tie into Le Guay's earlier warning about pictorialism easily becoming an automatic process. The simplicity of maintaining fixed rules and standards work very well if one style of work is maintained over time. Hence the creation of Dupain's first recognized Contemporary Photographic Groupe within Australia, formed as a rebellion against photography being defined by a universal parameter, which brought all works under a set criteria allocated to each.

That same year we saw the creation of the Miniature Camera Group, whose members were made up of many of the same members of the Contemporary Groupe. This time the Miniature Camera Group was related to advance technology, the birth of the small camera. Making it possible for photographers to become more portable, taking them away from a fixed studio and into the community. It also saw the birth of documentary photography as a contemporary genre. Many photographers of the time took this up as a practice, both professionals and amateurs alike. It is here we see people like Dupain, Le Guay, Moore, Schmith, Mallard and even our Graham Burstow direct much of their work towards documentary in various ways.

Soon after the advent of the Contemporary Groupe after the war, Le Guay established the first Contemporary Photographic Magazine which upheld the ethos of bringing a 'vitality and personal expression' into individual's work. This magazine accepted contributions from both professional and amateur photographers, another merging of two unique photographic groups. This also occurred within the Sydney Photographic Circle.

In 1989 we see the establishment of the Royal Photographic Society's Contemporary Group (RPS). This group, like others before them, was formed as an adjunct to the Society's fixation of competition and sameness which still continued to flourish within their members. Many were dissatisfied with this practice and wanted change, as well as a focus on new ideas which had grown outside of the society within the photographic arts scene. They too broke away from the existing and formed their own group within RPS.

In 1993, the Australian Photographic Society had within it, another breakaway group of photographers who were dissatisfied with competition and repetition of similar work within the various sectors. This had become the mainstay of the society. They wanted to bring about change as others had done before them. A group was formed to focus on different practices within the photographic art scene. Once again, another Contemporary Group was created within Australia, being founded as a special interest group within APS in 1993. This group still remains today as does the Royal Photographic Society's Contemporary Group in England.

Conclusion

The Contemporary Group within APS is not unique; it has a history over generations. Tradition has followed change and it still remains today. Visions of the past remain as visions of the future. Much of what has occurred over the years links to APS and other organisations that have been and gone. Our group continues with the movers and shakers that have pursued change for the same reasons the movers and shakers did in the past.

We are also not unique in the present. The Royal Photographic Society Contemporary Group and the Australian Photographic Society Contemporary Group have each undergone the same challenges over the years and yet we both still continue into the future. What is exciting is the recent link created between the groups that had not existed before. Now that we are aware of each other, we are able to share ideas and support each other with the challenges to come as we expand into the future.

I would like to finish up with a quote I found quite recently within a book. This quote is not about photography, instead it is about seeing.

Reading it I am reminded of the perfect image which has been referred to as complete within itself, or having an absence of self and vision perhaps.

*'Yes our eyes may perceive, yet they do not observe;
They may believe, yet they do not question;
They may receive, yet they do not search:
They are emptied of desire, with neither hunger nor passion'* (28 p. chap18/p300)

Written by Muriel Barbary, *Elegance of the Hedgehog*, 2008

Translated from the French by Alison Anderson (From Chapter 18 - Flowing Water)

Chronology as relevant (1853 - 2020)

- 1853 Foundation of the Royal Photographic Society (RPS)
- 1916 Foundation of the Sydney Photographic Circle
- 1938 Foundation of Contemporary Photographic Groupe by Dupain was formed
- 1938 Foundation of the Miniature Camera Group
- 1940 Le Guay joined the Sydney Photographic Circle
- 1943 Cazneaux made life member of the Miniature Camera Group
- 1946 Contemporary Photography Magazine was published
- 1948 Laurence Le Guay published his first book *Australian Photography a Portfolio*
- 1948 Camera Club of Sydney began as extension of the Miniature Camera Group
- 1950 Miniature Camera Group changed its name to Camera Club of Sydney
- 1951 Harold Cazneaux said Pictorialism was no more
- 1962 Henri Mallard received honorary life membership of APS
- 1962 Foundation of Australian Photographic Society (APS)
- 1964 Laurence Le Guay awarded Commonwealth Medal for service to professional photography
- 1974 Graham Burstow receives Commonwealth Medal for service to amateur photography
- 1976 Laurence Le Guay published his second book *Australian Photography 1976*
- 1978 Sydney Photographic Circle ceased to exist
- 1978 Henri Mallard's first book published - *The Building of the Sydney Opera House*
- 1978 Laurence Le Guay published his third book *Australian Photography - a Contemporary View*
- 1979 David Moore was awarded a Commonwealth Medal for service to professional photography
- 1980 Doug and Ruby Spowart opened their photographic gallery in Brisbane
- 1982 Max Dupain was awarded OBE for service to professional photography
- 1989 Establishment of RPS Contemporary Group
- 1993 The Contemporary Group within the Australian Photographic began
- 1995 First Exhibition by the APS Contemporary Group
- 1998 Graham Burstow publishes his first book *Touch Me*
- 2004 Graham Burstow is awarded OAM for service to photography
- 2006 Graham Burstow given honorary life membership of APS
- 2014 Graham Burstow publishes his second book *Flesh etc*
- 2020 Graham Burstow publishes his third book *Closer*
- 2020 Link established between APS Contemporary Group and RPS Contemporary Group

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