

# Up Close

Carol Jerrems

with Larry Clark, Nan Goldin and William Yang



Robert Ashton  
*Carol Jerrems, Prahran 1970*  
gelatin silver photograph on cardboard  
52 x 41.9cm  
Private collection  
©Robert Ashton

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## Up Close



Carol Jerrems  
*Waiting*, 1975  
gelatin silver photograph  
13.4 x 14.8 cm  
Courtesy Ken Jerrems and the  
Estate of Lance Jerrems

Up Close traces the significant legacy of Australian photographer Carol Jerrems (1949–1980) and situates her work alongside that of other photo-based artists—Larry Clark and Nan Goldin from New York and William Yang from Sydney. Sharing an interest in subcultural groups and individuals on the margins of society, each artist candidly portrays bohemian life of the 1970s and early 1980s. Their intimate depictions of people, places and events provide glimpses of semi-private worlds, amplifying the emotional tenor of the times.

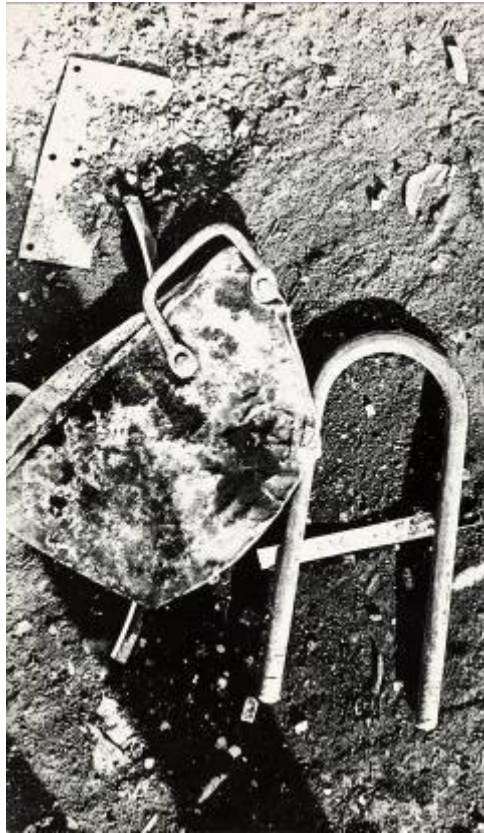
An extensive display of Jerrems' photographs includes *Vale Street* (1975), her iconic photograph of local teenagers; portraits taken for the landmark feminist publication *A Book About Australian Women* (1974); a suite of prints documenting life on campus at Macquarie University, Sydney; and a series she took in hospital while she was dying from a rare illness, including frank self-portraits. The exhibition also features little-known films and archival items including Jerrems' personal writings and notebooks.

Complementing Jerrems' photographs are Clark's images of marginalised, delinquent youth from his *Tulsa* and *Teenage Lust* portfolios; Yang's celebratory photographs of Sydney's gay and artistic scenes in the 1970s; and Goldin's *The Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1981–1996), a projection of hundreds of slides that chronicle the lives of her friends, family and lovers, a work Goldin describes as 'the diary I let people read'.

Forging a movement away from a detached style of documentary photography, these four artists express an intense, empathetic connection with their subjects. As Jerrems says: 'Any portrait is a combination of something of the subject's personality and something of the photographer's. The moment preserved is an exchange; the photograph is the communication'.

Natalie King  
Guest Curator

## Carol Jerrems



Carol Jerrems  
 A  
 from the Alphabet Folio (1968) dated 1969  
 1 of 25 gelatin silver photographs  
 19.1 x 11.5cm  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1971



Carol Jerrems  
 G  
 from the Alphabet Folio (1968) dated 1969  
 1 of 25 gelatin silver photographs  
 19.1 x 11.5cm  
 National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne  
 Purchased 1971

Carol Jerrems was an impassioned photographer of social relationships in the 1970s, an era intoxicated by the ideals of free love, youth and beauty but also touched by social conflict and violence. Influenced by feminism and with an instinctive empathy for subcultures and dispossessed groups—especially Aboriginal communities—Jerrems was interested in photography's socially restorative capacity. 'This society is sick and I must help change it', she said.

Raised in Ivanhoe in the vicinity of Heidelberg, Jerrems used her camera to acutely observe her physical and social environment. She was one of the first to graduate in photography from Prahran Technical School where she had studied under the influential tutelage of filmmaker Paul Cox. Part of an emerging local scene, Jerrems exhibited her work in a number of galleries newly established to show photographic art: Brummels Gallery of Photography and The Photographers' Gallery in Melbourne; and the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney.

Jerrems loved Warringal Park (also known as Banksia Park, adjacent to Heide) and frequented its sandy banks along the Yarra River with her dog, Free. These parklands became the backdrop for photographs of local 'sharpie' youths whom she met while teaching art at Heidelberg Technical School. It is here that she met Mark Lean and Jon Bourke, who appeared in her unfinished film

*School's Out* (1975), and her most famous image, *Vale Street* (1975), photographed in a St Kilda backyard.

Portraiture is central to Jerrems's oeuvre, as seen in her many photographs for the feminist publication *A Book About Australian Women*, published in 1974. These are tender portraits portraying women from diverse walks of life—artists, writers, activists, friends, mothers and prostitutes. Using her 'beaten-up Pentax' camera with a 50 mm lens in natural light, Jerrems resisted cropping and the use of a flash or wide-angle lens, preferring an unmitigated engagement—she liked things 'to be real, to be natural'.

## Vale Street and Sharpies

"He, and the gang he hangs with in Heidelberg, like bashing, beer, sheilas, gang-bangs (rape), gang fights, billiards, stealing, and hanging about..."

Carol Jerrems, 1975

In March 1975, Carol Jerrems went to a house in Vale Street, St Kilda with Mark Lean and Jon Bourke, two sharpies who were her students from Heidelberg Technical School, and aspiring actress, Catriona Brown. It was here that they photographed *Vale Street* (1975), Jerrems's most famous image. Though they had not all met before, Jerrems managed to set the scene by carefully orchestrating the placement of her subjects, eliciting their direct eye contact with the camera and using natural light to emphasize tonality. The contact sheet showing the sequence of images taken at Vale Street reveals that in the course of the shoot the three participants remove their tops. Catriona steps forward in an act of assertion while the tattooed teenagers recede under the shade of ivy.

Jerrems was fascinated by local sharpies (a youth subculture of the seventies) and she spent time photographing and filming them swimming in the Yarra River and hanging around backyards, especially for her unfinished film *School's Out* (1978). Jerrems also photographed and filmed Ron Johnson, a young Aboriginal student, whose mother Joyce Johnson was a member of the United Council of Aboriginal Women.

## Alphabet Folio

*Alphabet Folio* (1969) is a student work made by Carol Jerrems while completing a photography degree at Prahran Technical College. An assignment set by her teacher, filmmaker Paul Cox, the folio comprises twenty-five images based on letters from the alphabet. Jerrems went on to use this assignment in her own teaching as 'an exercise in looking, and applying imagination' that would encourage her students' capacity for observation. She asked her students to 'photograph shapes etc. found in man-made and natural forms, resembling letters from the alphabet'. She stipulated that 'the composition should be made at the time of the exposure' using the 'full frame', an instruction which highlights her own desire to avoid cropping images in the darkroom.

ASSIGNMENT ONE: THIRD YEAR, 6-3-1979.

"THE ALPHABET."

AN EXERCISE IN LOOKING, AND APPLYING  
IMAGINATION!

1. TO PHOTOGRAPH SHAPES ETC. FOUND IN  
MAN-MADE AND NATURAL FORMS,  
RESEMBLING LETTERS FROM THE  
ALPHABET.
2. THESE 'LETTERS' ARE TO BE FOUND,  
RATHER THAN MADE.
3. THE IMAGE SHOULD COMMUNICATE THE  
LETTER CLEARLY.
4. THE COMPOSITION SHOULD BE MADE IN  
THE CAMERA, AT THE TIME OF EXPOSURE.  
(I.E. USE FULL FRAME.)
5. PRINTS ARE TO BE MADE ON  $6\frac{1}{2}" \times 8\frac{1}{2}"$ ,  
PRINTING THE FULL FRAME OF THE  
NEGATIVE.

MINIMUM: THREE PRINTS.  
MAX!: 26.

DUE DATE: MARCH 27TH.

CAROL JERREMS

Carol Jerrems  
Assignment One: Third Year 6-3-79  
"The Alphabet"  
Courtesy of Ken Jerrems and the Estate of Lance Jerrems

## Larry Clark

Larry Clark's photographs from the 1960s and 1970s give subjective expression to the nondescript town of Tulsa, Oklahoma, where he was born in 1943 and spent his teenage and early adult years. From the age of thirteen, Clark developed his photography skills working alongside his mother, a door-to-door baby photographer. From the age of sixteen he began photographing his amphetamine-shooting coterie of friends and peers, producing a candid body of images documenting their drug-use, violence and sexual activity.

Clark achieved notoriety in 1971 with the release of *Tulsa*, his first self-published book. On its back cover the contents were described as 'a collection of photographs that assail, lacerate, devastate. And, ultimately indict. These are pictures that shimmer with a ferocious honesty'.

Several images from the *Tulsa* portfolio of prints are shown here. In them Clark exposes a world of sex, death, violence, anxiety and boredom, capturing the aimlessness and ennui of teenagers. The images are beautifully composed and his predominantly male subjects are sympathetically presented. As a member of the peer group he depicts, Clark is able to invest his images with a powerful immediacy offering a lived rather than merely observed experience. *Tulsa* influenced Nan Goldin and a generation of artists who aspired to break with traditional documentary modes in order to engage empathetically with their subjects.

Clark's second self-published book, *Teenage Lust* (1983), continued to candidly explore themes of adolescent sexuality and identity. Images from this series shown here include a young man hustling in New York's Times Square and a teenage couple 'making out' in the back seat of the car.

Luhring Augustine, New York website, Larry Clark artist page  
<http://www.luhringaugustine.com/artists/larry-clark>

## Nan Goldin

Born in Washington in 1953, Nan Goldin grew up in Boston in the 1960s. Affected by the suicide of her older sister in 1965, she saw photography as a way of holding onto memories and recording day-to-day life, a view still central to her work. For Goldin, photography is a way of expressing her connection to others: 'Taking a picture is a way of touching somebody—it's a caress', she has said.

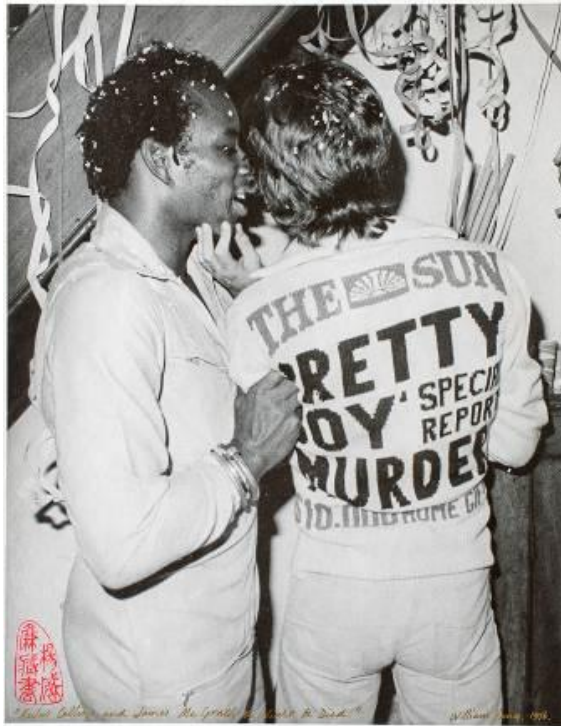
After gaining a degree in photography in Boston, Goldin moved to New York in the late 1970s where she began documenting the post-punk, new wave scene, gay and hard-drug subcultures, particularly located around New York's Bowery area. These images form part of *A Ballad of Sexual Dependency* (1981–96), a slide projection work first presented in an earlier version at Frank Zappa's birthday party at the Mudd Club in New York in 1979.

Depicting Goldin's friends, lovers and family with riveting intimacy and candour, *Ballad* has since evolved into an iconic work of its time, a visual diary of almost 700 slides accompanied by an evocative soundtrack of music. Goldin's photographs are emotionally charged, tender and sensual, characterised by saturated colour and close framing. They bear witness to sorrow and joy—to the devastating impact of AIDS and drug addiction on her community, but also to the strength that friendship and love can provide.

Goldin published *Ballad* as an artist's book in 1986. In the introduction she describes her deeply personal approach to photography: 'I sometimes don't know how I feel about someone until I take his or her picture. I don't select people in order to photograph them; I photograph directly from my life. These pictures come out of relationships, not observation'.

Matthew Marks Gallery, Nan Goldin artist webpage  
<http://www.matthewmarks.com/artists/nan-goldin/>

## William Yang



William Yang  
*Rufus Collins and James McGrath*  
*the Night He Died, 1976*  
 gelatin silver photograph  
 38.3 x 29.2 cm  
 Courtesy of the artist

William Yang was born in Far North Queensland in 1943. His grandparents had migrated from China to northern Australia in the 1880s. While studying for an architecture degree in Brisbane in the 1960s, Yang began to explore his interest in both photography and theatre, fields that would continue to shape his work as a visual and performing artist.

Yang received his first camera as a gift from his cousin at age seventeen, 'a cross between a box-brownie and an instamatic', as he describes it. His next camera purchased at age twenty-one was a 35mm Pentax with a zoom lens which allowed him to get 'up close' to his subject. After moving to Sydney in 1969, Yang began documenting his social life and the people around him. He moved in artistic scenes around theatre, fashion, the visual arts and literature, and he produced a number of compelling portraits, including those of actor Kate Fitzpatrick and author Patrick White. He was friends with designers Linda Jackson and Jenny Kee of the fashion label Flamingo Park, shown here at one of their parades. Yang came out as a gay man in the 1970s although, in his own words, 'I never consciously came out as a gay man, I was swept out by events at the time'. His collection of photographs of the emerging gay scene in Australia, set against a background of Gay Liberation, is an important document.

Yang's first solo exhibition in 1977, 'Sydneyphiles', caused a sensation due to its frank depiction of gay and party scenes. These images were later shown in a larger exhibition in 1984, 'Sydney Diary', which was also published as a book of the same name. Most of the photographs on display in this room are from 'Sydney Diary' and 'Friends of Dorothy', a later exhibition and book from 1997–8, which takes its title from a euphemistic descriptor for a gay man.

Yang journeys into his particular social milieu with ease, depicting flamboyant parties, gallery openings and intimate liaisons. His images unflinchingly tell stories of love, friendship and desire and their aftermaths, providing a distinctive chronicle not only of celebrities but of marginalised groups that until the 1970s had been virtually invisible.



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Educational tours are tailored to meet individual student group capabilities and needs across all year levels from K-12. This can be taken as a stand-alone excursion or combined with a Creating and making workshop (see below for more information).

#### Heide History

Students learn about Heide's unique history as the birthplace of Melbourne modernism with guided tours of the 16 acre site, including the famous 'scar' tree, Heide I heritage-listed farmhouse and Heide II modernist architecture, the Sculpture Park and Kitchen Garden. Students discuss John and Sunday Reeds' art patronage, the lives and practices of the artists known as the Angry Penguins, Sidney Nolan, Albert Tucker, Joy Hester, Arthur Boyd and John Perceval.

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Looking at highlights of the Heide collection displayed in Heide II, students gain an insight into the Australian modernist art movement through to contemporary art practice. Students will be provided with an immersive experience and opportunity to analyse and discuss the ways in which artists from different times have created aesthetic qualities in artworks, communicated ideas and developed styles.

VELS: Personal learning, thinking processes, civics and citizenship  
ARTS DOMAIN: Exploring and responding  
VCE ART: Analytical frameworks, art and cultural context, interpreting art, discussing and debating art  
VCE STUDIO ART: Developing and interpreting art ideas, styles and materials. Professional practice, art industry contexts

#### Creating & making workshops

Practical art-making education programs are conducted in the purpose built Sidney Myer Education Centre. Creative programs are tailored to meet student groups' capabilities and needs across all year levels from K-12. Tasks can be extended or designed to be a collaborative exercise to encourage team building, developing communication and negotiation techniques.

VELS: Physical, personal and social learning, communication, creativity  
ARTS DOMAIN: Creating and making  
VCE ART: Art making, cultural expression and personal meaning  
VCE STUDIO ART: Exploration of materials and techniques

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Bookings are essential for all programs.

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Teachers are encouraged to visit Heide prior to a booked school visit (complimentary ticket available) to familiarise themselves with the exhibitions and facilities.

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