

VCA GALLERY

Margaret Lawrence Galleries at VCA

MEDIA RELEASE

CHRIS BARRY

Encountering Culture: A Dialogue

10 to 27 May 2006

Opening Wednesday 10 May 6 - 8 pm

Exhibition to be opened by Tony Ellwood, Deputy Director, National Gallery of Victoria and Bess Nungarrayi Price, Warlpiri Artist and Cultural Adviser.

Opening night celebrations will also include performances by Steve Gumerungi Hodder, Spoken Word Artist and Jacinta Nampijinpa Castle, Vocal Artist.



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Weds - Sat 12 to 5 pm



Encountering Culture: A Dialogue is a project grown out of Alice Springs/Central Australia through known and sustained relations between the artist (Chris Barry) and her collaborators—and their families and extended kin. In fact, close to 20 families are involved in this project. Alice Springs is a bi-cultural township. Aboriginal families have been permanent residents since time immemorial—in spite of successive epochs of destructive governmental policies. International cultural theorist, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, states that culture alive is its own irreducible counter-culture. She also states that culture is a space of collision. Australian academic, Ghassan Hage, describes how dialogue and the labour involved within intercultural relations creates a symbolic movement—that a dialogic relationship is one of agency and mobility.

Encountering Culture: A Dialogue is a contemporary document on the polemics of urban life in Alice Springs seen through the prism of Aboriginal youth—the site of testimony and lived experience. Identity politics, performance, and self-presentation are played out within the specifics of place—together with the power of encounters and human relationships. This project presents both the mundane nature and theatricality of the everyday. The Todd Mall or Town Pool for instance, both ordinary socialised spaces, become settings for the staging and performance of identity and the presentation of the self. However, the intrusive nature of the camera reminds everyone of the conditions surrounding the event and the dynamics of production. Culture is not a reality objectively recorded by the camera, but one provoked by its active presence. Photography and performance become a form of autobiography. Performance also mediates the politics of identity.

Chris Barry has maintained an on-going relationship with Alice Springs/Central Australia since winning the Alice Prize in 1993, fostering a professional working relationship within that community. The *Encountering Culture* project results from twelve years of physical and emotional journeying into Alice Springs. The photographs on exhibition are one marker of these intimacies and social exchanges.

Bess Nungarrayi Price is a well-known public speaker, cultural adviser and spokesperson for the Aboriginal community in Alice Springs. Steve Gumerungi Hodder is a spoken word artist and Jacinta Nampijinpa Castle is a vocal artist—all three will represent and speak on behalf of the participants in this project—that is, the young people featured throughout the exhibition - and their families and extended kin. An Artist Talk will be held on Thursday 11 May, 12.30-1.30pm (VCA Gallery) featuring Chris Barry, Bess Nungarrayi Price, Steve Gumerungi Hodder and Jacinta Nampijinpa Castle - and will be chaired by Dr. Karen Burns. All speakers will be available for interview immediately after the Artist's Talk.

Encountering Culture: A Dialogue is generously supported by the City of Melbourne. The Artist Talk is supported by the School of Graduate Studies Academic Activity Grants.

