The Spread of Time The photography of David Moore

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Lifesavers at Manly 1959 gelatin silver photograph, Collection of the National Gallery of Australia Gift of David Moore 1983 © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

In the Spring of 1951 the gleaming new Orient liner Oronsay departed Sydney on its return run to England. On board was David Moore, a 24-year-old photographer who was curious to see the world, but this was not just a pleasure trip. Moore had turned down a flattering offer of a junior partnership with his boss, the top Sydney photographer, Max Dupain, to pursue his ambition to work for the big picture magazines and newspapers based in London. In return for taking promotional shots of the *Oronsay* en route, Moore had secured a subsidised ticket, a signal of his future organisational skill and business acumen.

Since the late 1930s, young photographers across the world had been in awe of the flourishing picture magazines and illustrated newspapers that contained the work of globetrotting photojournalists from Europe and America such as Robert Capa, Eugene Smith, Henri Cartier-Bresson, Brassaï, Bill Brandt and André Kertész. Closer to home, Moore knew of New Zealand-born war photographer George Silk, whose iconic 1942 shot of a wounded Australian soldier being led to an aid station by a New Guinea native orderly had been his passport to a job with *Life* magazine.¹ Other photographers in Australia such as Axel Poignant also aspired to join the exotic new breed of 'photojournalists'.² Apart from the Tourist Board picture magazine,

Walkabout, there were virtually no sympathetic outlets in Australia for the range of work shown in overseas picture magazines.



Self portrait, Corio, Victoria 1942 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

Moore had been serious about photography since he was 11, when a relative gave him a Coronet Box camera. During his years as a boarder in private schools – with darkrooms – Moore had progressed to a Kodak 1A folding camera given to him by his father, the Sydney architect and painter John D Moore. Inventive and dexterous, the schoolboy photographer experimented around 1940 with copying the latest high-speed flash photographs of the famous American electrical engineer Dr Harold Edgerton. Moore's

photographs, however, were doomed to fail as he did not have the essential flash equipment. His first published photograph appeared in 1940 in his preparatory school magazine, *The Tudorian*, and showed fellow pupils – including future prime minister Malcolm Fraser – sailing their model boats.

Despite geographical distance and the continued slow recovery from the wartime rationing of imports, Moore was well informed about contemporary European and American photography. In 1945 in his last year at school, Moore's father had brought home Edward Weston's 1940 book *California and the West*. Moore had been instantly entranced. Speaking later about the impact of Weston's images he said that they were, 'sharp,

clean and purposeful ... unaffected and true'.- The book acted subtly but surely to eventually influence the young Moore, who had intended to follow in his father's profession as an architect, to make his hobby his vocation.⁴ By the time Moore left Sydney in 1951 he had absorbed all that the Australian photographic world had to offer, having worked since 1948 with Max Dupain after having spent a year as an apprentice in Russell Roberts' American-style advertising and illustration company. David Potts, his good mate from Russell Roberts' studio, had already made the journey over to London with the same ambition: to work for the big picture magazines and papers.



Departure of the 'Himalaya', Sydney 1950 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail



Port Brisbane, Pyrmont c1947 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

Like many of his contemporaries, Moore was fired up by the pre-war social ideals and realist aesthetic of the Documentary movement in film and photography. He admired the work of the American Farm Security Administration team including photographers such as Walker Evans and Dorothea Lange. Although he had done relatively little landscape work up to 1951, Moore had clearly imbibed elements of Weston's sensuous abstract forms and dynamic flowing lines as well as Walker Evans' fascination with the myriad details and ambience of places and spaces in rural and urban America.

While working for Dupain, Moore had been inspired by his mentor's passion for modern photography and his

belief in its social and aesthetic value as a medium of expression. Moore built up his own small library of books on European photojournalists like Bill Brandt, Brassaï, André Kertész and Henri Cartier-Bresson. In Moore's bags on the *Oronsay*, however, he carried only two books: the slim 1948 monograph on Max

Dupain's 'best work since 1935' and *Poet's Camera*, a gem of a book published in 1946 by Byran Holme.⁶ The lyricism of the Europeans, the American's love of precise delineation and Weston's dynamic rhythms would remain Moore's leitmotiv. Moore's professional kit on the voyage were a couple of Rollei twin lens roll film cameras. Known at the time as 'miniatures', 35mm cameras were not yet the norm for professional photographers.

Even before going to work for Dupain, Moore had already made strong resolved images of the urban character of the city and his portfolio for London contained his own 'best work' since 1947. The images were mostly documentary photographs taken around the city and the harbour including moody shots of Martin Place which made the commercial heart of the city look a little like New York, as well as street scenes of Sydney's slum areas and their inhabitants who had not yet found their share of postwar prosperity. The rather blandly titled *Redfern interior* 1949 showed a young mother and child with neighbours in a slum tenement from which they faced eviction. Now famous, the image was first published in US Camera 1954 and the following year in the catalogue for *The Family of Man* exhibition mounted by Edward Steichen at the Museum of Modern Art, New York.⁷

Most importantly, however, Moore's portfolio contained his 'photoessay' of the arrival and departure in Sydney of the Orient liner *Himalaya* the previous year. Moore had displayed considerable initiative in making this essay over the ten days the liner was in her southern terminal port. He had arranged time off from the Dupain studio and negotiated access with the Line managers. Moore went out in a pressboat at dawn to board the ship as it entered the Heads, and followed cargo loading and reprovisioning, as well as the emotional departure scene. Moore had been photographing ships and the docks and the harbour since 1947, developing a distinctive formal signature of complex overlapping lines and forms, deep perspective, elegant outlines and dynamic – often arabesque – forms flowing out of the pictures.



Surrey Hills Street 1948 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

Around 1948, Moore also made a number of images that were indicative of the direction of his later work and aesthetic. These were semi-abstract studies of light patterns such as night shots of car lights and the ferris wheel lights at the annual Royal Agricultural show. For an image of horses trotting, Moore deliberately made a slow pan so that the horses were blurred.⁸ These images indicate that Moore was feeling his way towards an aesthetic which embraced what he would come to call 'the soft spread of time' as opposed to the single decisive moment of photojournalism. On arrival in London, Moore shared digs with his friend David Potts and also undertook a five-week camping trip by car through Europe with two New Zealanders whom he had met on the ship. Moore made contacts in Lucerne which resulted in his work being included in the 1952 *World Exposition of Photography* in Lucerne.

Back in London, Moore set about trying to sell some pictures as a freelance photographer. By October 1951 he had sold his Himalaya story to *The Sphere* and it also appeared in the Swiss weekly *Die Woche*, each running a dozen or so images. Moore found the hard-boiled editors of *Picture Post* hard to crack, but one of his images of a swan appeared in February 1952 in *The Illustrated Weekly of India*, and another of

pedestrians dodging traffic at Piccadilly was run in their October issue. In July 1952, several Australian images, including an evocative image of early morning traffic on Sydney Harbour Bridge, appeared in the *Observer.*⁹



Sydney - William Street looking west 1961 gelatin silver photograph Gift of David Moore 1983 © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

In his early years in London Moore shared several darkrooms with New Zealand photojournalist Brian Brake who had settled in London in 1953 and became a member of the Magnum photoagency in 1954. Moore also made useful contact with a number of expatriate Australians in the UK including George Johnston, the London editor for the *Sydney Sun* newspaper (who published Moore's pictures in the Australian *Pix* and *People* magazines), and Norman Hall, the highly influential and progressive expatriate picture editor of *Photography* magazine and yearbook (who included Moore's works in issues in the late 1950s). He also dealt with Michael Davie, the Sports Editor at the *Observer*, who was married to an Australian. Moore approached Gene Farmer, the Bureau Chief in London for *Life* magazine, for work. Farmer wanted to see some informal portraits, so Moore went out and took some. Farmer liked what he saw and said, 'We can use you.' However, it was not until Moore asked for a place on the Life team to cover the coronation in 1953 of Queen Elizabeth II that he had an assignment from the magazine. Moore chose to focus on the spectators.

In addition to having work published in the illustrated papers, Moore was singled out as a new talent in the June 1953 issue of the high quality Swiss magazine *Camera*, which gave him a cover and portfolio with 12 pictures accompanied by his own commentary. Moore had shown that he could deliver top quality photojournalism across a wide range of subjects from architecture to landscape, portraiture to action and political events. By 1953 Moore was a regular on the *Observer* newspaper team (the colour magazine did not launch until the 1960s) and could say he had realised his aspirations of 1951. Moore found the *Observer*, which had a reputation for greater latitude and sympathy with behind the scenes photographs, most sympathetic. As he commented later, the *Observer* was 'free thinking, adventurous and liberal, with a reputation for responsible, independent journalism perhaps unrivalled anywhere in the world... They were

never the obvious images which other newspapers ran. *Observer* pictures were sensitive and often lyrical.¹⁰ In particular Moore began to develop a reputation for sports and action photographs. His dramatic silhouetted images of parachutists at Aldershot appeared in *Life* magazine's 'Speaking of Pictures' feature in 1953, which was devoted to more adventurous images. In the same year Moore also worked as an assistant to Arnold Newman, an American photographer whom he much admired when the latter was on two assignments in London for Holiday magazine. That year Moore also had his first exhibition, a show titled *People in Photographs* at the Architectural Association building in London.



Redfern interior 1949 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

In London in 1954, Moore met Edward Steichen and showed him his own and David Potts' work, which led to Moore's *Redfern interior* being included in Steichen's *The Family of Man* exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art in New York the following year. In 1956 Moore had had a number of foreign assignments from various papers but his first trip to the United States came at his own initiative as a project proposed to the *Observer* to photograph various important people and documentary subjects including the American Negro communities in Washington. It was to be the beginning of his intoxication with the energy of New York city but it was also at Washington airport that Moore took what remains his most famous image, a group of Sisters of Charity nuns. Alternating between the graphic and the photographic the image is pure design: an extraordinary distillation of a scene from daily life orchestrated into forms and planes, solids and voids, lines and patterns but also movements in space. The image is more closely aligned with Moore's late-1940s photograms than anything documentary.



Battersea Fun Fair, London 1951 gelatin silver photograph, Gift of David Moore 1983 Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

Moore was also assigned to cover the tour of Queen Elizabeth II to Nigeria in 1956 for *Camera Press*, yet it was his sports pictures which gained him the most attention. That year striking multi-page spreads of his 'Sports in Flow Movement' pictures appeared in *Picture Post, Settimo Giorno, Jours de France, Le Patriote Illustré* and *Die Woche*, accompanied by texts referring to him as 'a new talent' and 'one of the major photographers of our time'. In these articles Moore explained his techniques and how he believed that impressionistic images were truer to human vision than the frozen stop-action shots of traditional sports coverage. The sports pictures featured in the profiles on Moore were taken for the *Observer* and were made using a Rolleicord, but soon after he had arrived in London Moore had written back to Max Dupain about the freedom offered by the 35mm cameras being used by the top photojournalists. ¹⁰ Moore's first 35mm camera was a Practica and then a Canon rangefinder which he bought from Life photographer Carl Mydans, and later a Pentax. These small format cameras were looked down upon by traditional press photographers and did not become the standard tool until the 1960s.

The exposure given to Moore's dramatic blurred sports pictures reflected a wider trend of these years as picture editors sought to catch the eye of the readers in face of the competition for advertising revenue being lost to television. For example, in the early 1950s George Silk, in California, was reassigned to the New York office by *Life* magazine to broaden the appeal of sports stories with dramatic new images. He began with a ski story in 1952 with bold blurred colour shots taken on a wide angle camera attached to a ski. The impact of the new media on the mass circulation illustrated papers would however, be considerable, *Picture Post* closed in 1957 and even the mighty millions-of-copies-per-week *Life* magazine would fold in 1972.

Moore married an Australian girl in London in 1956 and their first child was born the following year. Moore's career was going well and in 1958 he had an exciting offer to become the picture editor at the *Observer*. The couple, however, decided it was time to return home. This time, Moore travelled first class on the *Oronsay* having arranged with the company to update the promotional file material he had first shot in 1951 on the voyage over. When the *Oronsay* docked in Sydney early in the morning in 1958, Moore had been away seven years. His home city and the nation was a different place with high-rise development restrictions being lifted, the Cahill expressway under way and the winning design for the Sydney Opera House announced. Moore hoped that he could provide stories and pictures for the American and European magazine market from a base in Australia but it took some time to develop his new profile. He mounted an exhibition entitled

Seven Years a Stranger at art galleries in Sydney in 1958 and Melbourne in 1959 and was present in 1959 when *The Family of Man* reached Australia.



Poster for 'Seven years a Stranger ' exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne 1959 gelatin silver photograph, collage Gift of David Moore 1983 gelatin silver photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate <u>more detail</u>

For a year Moore worked out of Dupain's studio before setting up on his own and later in 1960 in North Sydney establishing a shared studio complex with designers Harry Williamson and Gordon Andrews. Moore shot stories for various clients; this included the photograph *Lifesavers at Manly* in 1959 for *Ambassador* magazine. In this image the pattern flowing through the frames of the image is striking. Other assignments took him to Western Australia and Central Australia. It was on an assignment for a US medical magazine in 1959 that Moore made the well-known portrait of an old couple at Finnis Springs Mission. These jobs gave Moore an opportunity to really begin to portray the Australian landscape but it was not until the mid-1960s that he had major assignments in Australia and New Zealand for Time-Life Books Division and *National Geographic* magazine. These gave him the opportunity to report on an Australia which was vital and on the move from pedestrians in the city to the free play of children in the outback. In these years Moore, like his old boss Max Dupain, was energised and excited by the rising forms of the Opera House and devoted considerable time and effort to recording its progress. Moore had an assignment for *Life* on the controversy surrounding the resignation of Danish architect Joern Utzon in 1965.

Moore had started to work with colour professionally in 1953 in England but it was not a major part of his published work until the 1960s. In the lead up to the Tokyo Olympics in 1964 Moore covered sports across Asia for *Sports Illustrated* in colour and all stories for *National Geographic* were in colour. It was while shooting an assignment *National Geographic* in 1966 on the state of New South Wales – the Vietnam war had generated overseas interest in the region – Moore made his now iconic image of passengers on board the *Galileo Galilei* docking in Sydney. It was a colour image meant to reflect the increased quota of European migrants being encouraged to immigrate to meet Australia's growing labour shortage. The magazine did not use this version of Moore's shot. When exhibiting the image for the first time in the 1970s Moore chose to present the image in black and white, giving it more of the resonance of older classic documentary work.¹¹



Migrants arriving in Sydney 1966 direct positive colour photograph Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

In 1969, Moore, with photographer David Beal, provided the illustrations for a book written and edited by Craig McGregor called *In the Making*, on the interrelation of all the art forms, including photography, in Australia. It was a lavish, brilliant publication inspired by Bryan Robertson's *Private view: The lively world of British art* of 1965, which had photography by Tony Armstrong Jones. The cultural life of Australia may have been alive and well in its creative artists but the public were not so interested and sales of the book were poor.¹² The association with designers in the 1960s strengthened Moore's own interest in design. For Gordon Andrews' designs for the new decimal coinage, Moore had made a series of Flow pattern images of ink in water in 1964.

In the 1970s a new mood and a new generation of young photographers appeared on the cultural scene as the first golden era of the great picture magazines and photojournalism ended. Moore, however, was busy on a variety of assignments through his agency Black Star, which he had joined in 1958. He became part of the new wave of photography and his work was exhibited and collected. With photographer Wesley Stacey, he was a prime mover in the establishment of the Australian Centre for Photography which opened in 1974 and was modelled on the organisation of the International Centre for Photography which opened earlier the same year in New York.

Now in his 40s, Moore found the new interest in free personal expression liberating. He produced a large body of landscape and figurative work including female nude figure studies which were unprecedented both in his oeuvre and within Australia. He articulated his aesthetic as one in which 'photography can pose questions for the viewer as well as attempting to answer them'. Meaning that photographers no longer had to work to a one-dimensional brief or be explicit as 'little remains fast, secure and absolute', indeed, 'a rigid viewpoint denies the possibility of lateral vision'.¹³ Moore travelled overseas frequently in these years, including to New York where he took on a personal essay titled *Up in New York* which sought to create semi-abstract images expressing the energy of the city. In this work Moore was inspired by painters like Ellsworth Kelly but perhaps the works also align with the legacy of an earlier generation of photographers including Paul Strand and Alfred Steiglitz whose famous New York views have echoes in Moore's late 1940s shots of Martin Place in Sydney.



Sisters of Charity, Washington D.C. 1956

gelatin silver photograph, Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate <u>more detail</u>

Moore's comments in 1970s publications suggest a radical new direction: 'The old picture editors taught us to hunt for the supreme moment that carried the most obvious drama of the situation ... in the new approach, our problem will be not to isolate the moment, not to stop life, but to express the situation within its period of being'.¹⁴/₋ Time and space flows in and out of the frames of Moore's pictures, but this orientation away from the earth-bound and concrete is visible as far back as the early 1940s, in Moore's teenage enthusiasms for the motion photographs of Harold Edgerton – even if he later rejected the frozen image.

Moore's lyricism and lateral vision fitted well with the mood of the 1970s counter-culture from his eerie mannequins in factories, whorls of hair on the back of his son's head and a female nude/landscape, which is like a gentle Zen rebuff to the introspection and masculine pyramid in Max Dupain's famous *Sunbaker* of 1937. Moore's social and political concerns were also in sympathy with the views of the younger generation, and can be seen in his picture of prime minister Harold Holt kowtowing to US President LB Johnson at Canberra Airport in 1966.

By the end of the 1970s Moore was working for a number of corporate clients including Exxon, and Columbus Line (for whom he made some of his best colour images). These now had an emphasis on design and form. He also produced a number of abstract collages of the concrete forms of the Western Distributor in Sydney. Some aspired to the distilled elegance of abstract painters he admired like American painter Ellsworth Kelly or the Australian abstract expressionist Michael Johnson or the perspective/perception meditations of Dutch conceptual artist Jan Dibbets. The works present a radically stripped back version of the cantilevered forms evident in his earliest works.

In addition to his involvement in contemporary work Moore also took an interest in photographic heritage in the 1980s when he researched and compiled a history of Australian photography called *Australia: Image of a Nation 1850–1950* which was published by Collins Australia in 1983. In the past decade Moore has undertaken large documentary projects on heritage old and new including documentation of the abandoned Everleigh Railway Workshops in Sydney and the building of the wondrous Anzac Bridge at Glebe Island. He has also undertaken the production of many books and exhibitions drawn from the whole gamut of his sixty-year archive.

Gael Newton

Senior Curator of Photography



Western Distributor, multiple 6 1979 gelatin silver photograph Gift of the Philip Morris Arts Grant 1982 Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail



Offering candles, Centenary at Lourdes, France 1958, gelatin silver photograph Gift of David Moore 1983 Collection of the National Gallery of Australia © Courtesy David Moore estate more detail

<u>1</u> See Gael Newton, *Going to Extremes: George Silk Photojournalist*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 2000 [exhibition brochure]. Silk's younger countryman photojournalist Brian Brake also left for England in the early fifties and shared darkrooms with David Moore in London. See Gael Newton, *Brian Brake: Monsoon*, Canberra: National Gallery of Australia, 1998 [exhibition brochure].

2 Anglo-Swedish by birth Axel Poignant tried the photoessay format in Perth in 1935. In 1956 Poignant resettled in London. See Gael Newton, *Axel Poignant Photographs 1922– 1980*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1980.

3 David Moore, *'The Early Years', David Moore: Australian Photographer volume 1*, Sydney: Chapter & Verse, 1988, pp. 22-25. Moore regarded American photographers as a major inspiration. Weston's book was the outcome of his 1937 Guggenheim Fellowships for which he had a grant to enable him to 'photograph life' through the built and natural landscapes of California.

4 Moore left Geelong Grammar in May 1945 to enlist in the Royal Australian Navy as a trainee ordinary seaman. With the war over shortly after he enlisted he was able to get an early discharge. Moore then spent some months in 1947 on the Queensland property of artist Kenneth Macqueen (who also took photographs and had a darkroom). In Queensland, Moore had made his first serious landscapes modelled on those of Edward Weston.

5 For details of Moore's reading see Sandra Byron, 'Introduction', *David Moore: Australian Photographer volume 1*, Sydney: Chapter & Verse, 1988.

6 *Max Dupain Photographs*, Sydney: Ure Smith, 1948. Moore considered 'Dupain was producing the most interesting photography in the country. His pictures of the many moods of the city combined with strong, clean images of people at work and play seemed to be important documentary statements in the finest sense'. David Moore, 'The Early Years', *David Moore: Australian Photographer volume 1*, Sydney: Chapter & Verse, 1988.

7 For details of the search for the subjects of *Redfern interior* see Carmel Egan, 'Snapshot of a suburb's soul revisited', *Weekend Australian* 17–18 June 1989, pp. 1, 5.

8 An abstract photogram of c. 1948 is reproduced in Judy Annear, *David Moore: The Unseen Images*, Sydney: Art Gallery of New South Wales, 1997. The shot of the trotters and a group of vintage prints of light studies are in the artist's archive. 9 The David Moore archive is held in the Mitchell Library, State Library of New South Wales, and includes correspondence from London to his family and a large group of tear sheets from various magazines and newspapers in which Moore's pictures were published, ML 1086/86. See also David Moore, 'The 1950s London & the United States', Judy Annear, *David Moore Australian Photographer volume 1*, Sydney: Chapter & Verse, 1988, pp. 39–40.

10 Max Dupain, 'David Moore', *David Moore: Contemporary Photographers 1*, Melbourne: Richmond Hill Press, 1980, unpaginated.

11 The variant image of the passengers on *Galileo Galilei* was published in Howell Walker's story, 'New South Wales: the State that Cradled Australia', *National Geographic*, November, 1967. See also Helen Ennis, 'New Australians', in Daniel Thomas (ed.), *Creating Australia: 200 Years of Australian Art 1788–1988*, Adelaide: Art Gallery of South Australia, 1988. See also Leonore Nicklin, 'Top Pic shame about reality', *The Bulletin*, 21 December, 1993, pp. 36–37.

12 Snowdon's book and the generation following that of Moore and his contemporaries is discussed by Martin Harrison in his *Young Meteors: British photojournalism*, 1957–1965, London: Jonathan Cape in association with the National Museum of Photography, Film & Television, Bradford, 1998

13 From David Moore, 'Photographer's Statement' in Judy Annear, *David Moore: Australian Photographer volume 1*, Sydney: Chapter & Verse, 1988, pp. 7–8.

14 David Moore quote dated March 1970 in his own commentary for *David Moore Contemporary Photographers 1*, Melbourne: Richmond Hill, Press, 1980, unpaginated.

For Australia Day 2003 the Gallery will be opening an exhibition to mark the 75th birthday of the eminent Australian photographer David Moore. Drawn from the Gallery's extensive collection of over 300 of Moore's photographs, a highlight of the exhibition is the selection of 1950s vintage prints from *Seven Years a Stranger*, an exhibition that Moore mounted on his return to Sydney in 1958. He had spent the previous seven years working out of London as a photojournalist on assignments in the United Kingdom, continental

Europe, Africa and the United States for the *Observer, Time, Life, Fortune* and *Look magazines*. The prints from Seven Years a Stranger were donated to the National Gallery of Australia by the photographer in 1983 and joined a complete set of later prints acquired by the Gallery from Moore's retrospective at the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney in 1976. The national collection also holds further gifts from the photographer and smaller groups of later purchases while the Gallery's Research Library holds Moore's gift of the 35mm colour shots and black and white prints on the arts renaissance in Australia for *In the Making*, a milestone publication of 1969.

