

## Selected Bibliography

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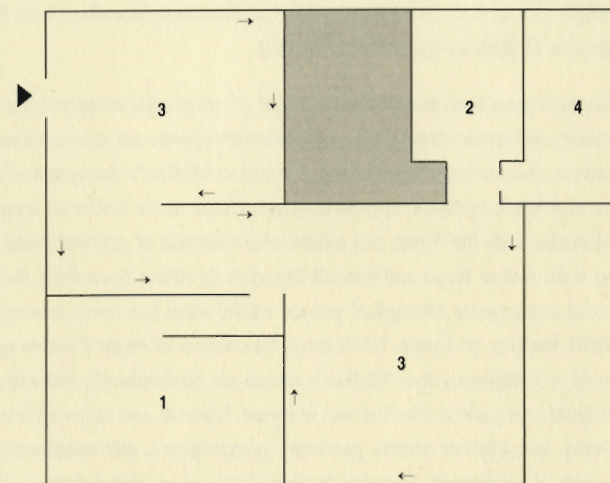
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Born on November 12, 1960, in Brisbane, Australia, Tracey Moffatt studied visual communications at the Queensland College of Art, from which she graduated in 1982. She then moved to Sydney, where she continues to live and work. Moffatt first gained critical acclaim for her short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, which was selected for official competition at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival. Her first feature film, *Bedevil*, was shown in Un Certain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993. She has also made documentary film and music videos. Since her first exhibition in 1989, Moffatt has shown her photographically based art in numerous exhibitions in Australia and abroad. This is her first large-scale exhibition to date.

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## Site Map



1. *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, 1989  
35 mm. film shown on video laser disk  
17 minutes  
Courtesy Women Make Movies, Inc.
2. *GUAPA (Good Looking)*, 1995  
10 black-and-white photographs on  
chromogenic paper  
30 x 39 7/8 inches each
3. *Up in the Sky*, 1997  
25 offset photographs  
28 7/8 x 39 7/8 inches each
4. *Heaven*, 1997  
videotape  
28 minutes

*Free-falling*

DIA CENTER FOR THE ARTS

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548 West 22nd Street, New York City

## TRACEY MOFFATT

### *Free-falling*

*I am not concerned with verisimilitude....I am not concerned with capturing reality, I'm concerned with creating it myself.*

—Tracey Moffatt

*I am not recognized as an inventor of stylistic formulae, but for the degree of intensity to which I bring the contamination and mixture of styles.*

—Pier Paolo Pasolini

Stylization and artifice are the hallmarks of Tracey Moffatt's art, irrespective of medium. For whether working in film, video, or photography, she is never engaged primarily with producing reality, with taking pictures, but with making pictures. The worlds that Moffatt constructs, usually via a form of nonlinear narrative, typically fuse personal memories within a larger historical compass. Thus, although most of her key works are rooted in childhood experience or in cherished memories, memories as often as not derived from images and stories generated by the mass media, ultimately they are neither subjective nor autobiographical.

Growing up in Mt. Gravatt, a working class suburb of Brisbane, Moffatt's adolescence was as shaped by pop culture and television as by her native heritage. Subsequently, courses in visual communications at the Queensland College of Art allowed her to consolidate this early fascination with mainstream mass culture as well as giving her extensive exposure to an enormous range of works from the history of twentieth-century film, video, and photography.

Her earliest mature works, notably, the nine-part photo tableau *Something More* (1989) and the short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989) marry these diverse formative interests with sophisticated inclusiveness. Focusing on the paradigmatic relationship that reciprocally binds a mother and daughter, in *Night Cries* she explores in extremely succinct yet affecting terms their interdependence, and through that issues of loss, separation, need, and rejection. This brief story is framed and intercut with footage of Jimmy Little, a renowned Aboriginal entertainer, who lip-syncs the song that won him national acclaim in

the 1950s. If Little represents a notable and early instance of assimilation between Aboriginal and white societies, the mother-daughter relationship points to a different phase in Australian race relations, to the time when it was official policy to remove Aboriginal children from the care of their natural parents and place them with foster families (echoed in Moffatt's own personal history).

*Night Cries* has also been read as a pointed critique of colonialist ethnographic film, which traditionally addressed Aboriginal issues through idioms and conventions particular to naturalistic documentary filmmaking. Central to Moffatt's disruption of these conventions is her trademark synthetic approach, typified here in the fusion of scenographic compositional modes with the forms and palette characteristic of postwar Australian landscape painting from Arthur Boyd and Russell Drysdale to Albert Namatjira, the latter a highly successful and popular Aboriginal painter whose work has never, however, been sanctioned within the fine art canon. Ultimately, the content of *Night Cries* is no more exclusively local or indigenous than Moffatt's means are tendentiously didactic, political, or feminist: it speaks to generic familial ties in broad, layered, and nuanced terms. In her subsequent works, too, Moffatt inverts, pastiches, contaminates, and transforms her miscellaneous sources into strangely haunting but insistently open-ended statements.

*GUAPA (Good Looking)*, 1995, based on the theme of the roller derby, was shot during a residency in San Antonio, Texas, in 1995. Again, childhood memories fueled the choice of subject, for this ersatz sport with its faked violence and erotic posturing fascinated Moffatt from a young age, when she avidly watched it on television. Her highly stylized reconstruction dispenses with any background, suspending the dramatic encounters in a frozen silent ambience. Printing the final images in a soft magenta further enhances the effect of studied choreography, an effect also found in Maya Deren's seminal films of dancers from the 1940s. Detail, anecdotal immediacy, and stark physicality are consequently suppressed in favor of a tempered moodiness that replaces rhetoric and aggression with something ultimately more calligraphic than contestatory. Although typical moments or incidents from within the sport's standardized repertoire of events have been drawn on in such a way that a quasilinear narrative could be construed, Moffatt's plot finally remains as elusive as her point of view, which steadfastly resists easy definition.

*Up in the Sky* (1997), her latest photographic suite, ostensibly reverts to an Australian milieu though its references are more wide-ranging. And, again, Moffatt interweaves multiple allusions to film as well as to photographic history, fusing in this multipartite epic the episodic structure of cinema with an unexpected soft focus, derived here from the technique of preflashing and offset printing.

*Night Cries* took as its reference point one of the earliest Australian movies to address the predicament of Aborigines entering a mixed race society (*Jedda*, 1955) and rewrote it to focus on a different aspect of the given story, namely the mother-daughter relationship. *Up in the Sky* basically does the same, this time with Pasolini's *Accattone* (1961). Where the Italian director—whom Moffatt greatly reveres—concentrated on the macho world of the pimps, emphasis is now given the whore-mother coterie; Moffatt's chief protagonist is a pregnant woman, her figures of authority nuns and her social marginals female auto wreckers/salvagers. In so doing, she undermines the mockery implicit in a refrain sung jestingly by one of the pimps about his "meal ticket," turning this phrase, which she adopts as her title, into a term of hope. Borrowing from Pasolini's style and structure, confirming his interest in a realism that refuses all forms of naturalism and sharing his preference for street actors over professionals, Moffatt, like her mentor, is a pasticheur by passion rather than calculation. Nonetheless the epic dimension first adumbrated in *Night Cries* remains once again filtered through the colloquial and vernacular. The result is a laconic poetic statement that, like Pasolini's, could be said not to make sense as much as to suspend sense.

*Heaven*, Moffatt's first video installation, takes as its point of departure one of the major icons of contemporary Australian culture: the surfer. Utilizing manifestly low-tech means as employed for home videos, Moffatt wields the camera in a provocative, flirtatious, voyeuristic manner, eliciting ambivalent responses from her subjects. As she alternately teases, flatters, and goads them, she deliberately flaunts the borders between an admiring fixation and an invasive exposure. If the subjects of her video display a contradictory combination of preening, posing, and strutting, as befits a pin-up, with the macho attitude particular to a sport jealously guarded as a quintessentially male preserve, Moffatt's responses, in turn, are no less contestatory: humorous, taunting, and guaranteed to antagonize.

L.C.