

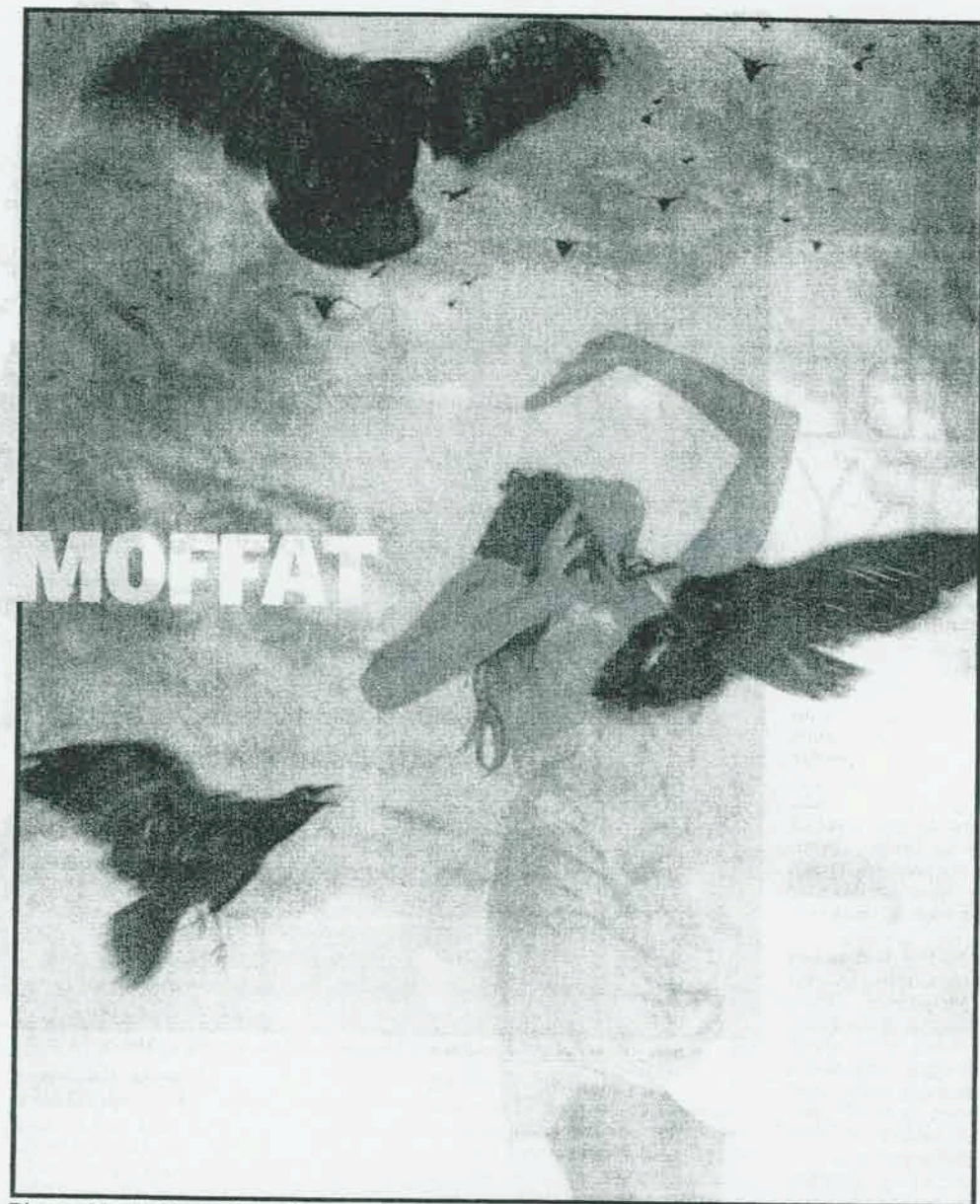
LITTLE MISS MOFFAT

VISUAL ART
TRACEY MOFFAT
FRUITMARKET
GALLERY, EDINBURGH
BY MOIRA JEFFREY

"IF I wasn't making films," Tracey Moffat once wrote, "I would be going around slashing cars with a butcher's knife." Her art, be it in film, photography or printmaking, is one in which frustration and confrontation are a constant brooding presence. Happily, Moffat is no teen vandal but a sophisticated media brat who has filtered her own childhood circumstances, lived under Australia's assimilation policy, through the lenses of Hollywood and British drama as well as classic Australian cinema.

As an Aboriginal child growing up with a white family in working class Brisbane, and as a film student, Moffat has been an avid movie consumer.

Two of her rapid-fire video clip compilations are comprehensive and sly in their references; *Lip*, in which black housemaids talk back to their white mistresses and *Artist*, which wryly reveals the Hollywood take on the avant-garde, both draw from such sources as *Brideshead Revisited* and *Ab Fab* to *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* The haughty, histrionic figure of Elizabeth Taylor in the latter, and in such movies as *Cat On A Hot Tin Roof*, stalks through much of Moffat's work. As do Southern writers such as Tennessee Williams. Moffat explores her own drama, a love-hate



Disney Meets Goya, from the *Invocations* series by Tracey Moffat

relationship with her adoptive parents and the country that tried to obliterate her own racial and cultural origins, through a much broader examination of power relationships and images.

Her key work, *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy*, a short film shown to great acclaim at Cannes in 1990, portrays a long frustrating night in the outback where a middle-aged Aboriginal woman cares for her now-helpless and frail adoptive mother; it's a claustrophobic cycle of need, duty and loss. Lit as if it were a lurid movie poster from the 1950s, *Night Cries* is at once raw in its emotion and sophisticated in its movie references and clipped, silent style. The

characters are based on the 1955 movie *Jedda*; one of the earliest films to articulate the predicament of adopted Aboriginal children removed from their natural parents.

This is Moffat's largest solo show in the UK to date; bringing together four films with three series of prints and photographs. *Scared For Life* apes the horrors parents inflict on their children from alcoholism and violence to hand-knitted jerseys. *Laudanum* is a fraught Victorian tale of servant abuse, echoing colonial photography and erotica. Like many of Moffat's works, it alludes to altered states: images of drug-induced torpor, hallucinations, bad dreams and veritable

nightmares are a strong strand in her work which come to the fore in *Invocations* – a series of prints which fuse Disney, Goya, Hitchcock and Southern Gothic.

All stirring stuff, but while this is a good chance to catch up with Moffat and particularly with the powerful *Night Cries*, there's an overall sense for the visitor that this is not the museum-quality show the artist deserves. It feels carelessly hung and curated and a little dusty. The signs throughout the gallery advising that work is for sale suggest this is a clear out rather than the retrospective one would hope for.

Showing until May 12