

# Australian escapades

Aggie

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## Visual arts

### TRACEY MOFFAT

Victoria Miro Gallery  
LONDON ★★☆☆

Brash, sassy and not slow in coming forward, Tracey Moffat draws on her own life as subject for her work. In the summer of 2004, during her retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, her self-portrait seemed to adorn every billboard and bus shelter in the city. But that was not the "real" Tracey Moffat but the artist posing as a photographer and cultural tourist.

For, like her US counterpart, Cindy Sherman, Moffat assumes many guises to highlight the themes of her work: gender roles, racial and sexual stereotyping and the distorting lens of colonialism. As with Sherman, ambiguity is her hallmark. As a true postmodernist, Moffat produces eclectic narratives around the lives of her constructed cast of "characters", which draw on collective memory and popular culture.

Using photography and

video, she explores Australia's past. Given that she is of Aboriginal origin, and was adopted by a white working-class family in Brisbane, it's hardly surprising that her territory is a post-colonial Australia riven with dispossession, racial conflict and sexual exploitation.

In her photographic series *Adventures*, she uses methods analogous to filmmaking that employ cinematic composition to construct her scenarios. Her influences are images from Seventies television, film and comic books.

Each of the 10 works is divided into three frames, implying narrative. Things are suggested, not stated. Backgrounds are gaudy Technicolor and touch on all clichés associated with Australia—endless sandy beaches, blue seas and kangaroos.

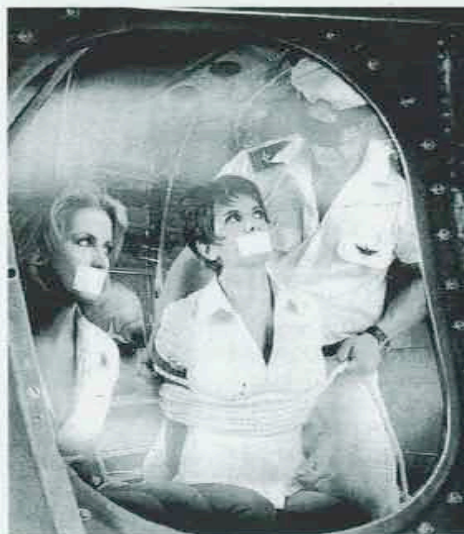
Peopling this landscape are stereotypes of race and gender rather than individuals; the blonde babe, the handsome airline pilot, the homoerotic poster boy, the "tamed" Aboriginals in their "native" costumes who've been reduced to clownish tourist emblems.

There are jeeps and light aeroplanes, rubber-clad scuba divers and air crew being bound and gagged. But there is also an implicitly eroticised subtext of sexual exploitation.

The Asian babes, the well-honed beach boys, the daredevil, Bond-style women all seem to be either exploiters or available for exploitation. A shower on the beach shows what appears to be an ironic version of paradise. Further along the beach there's an ambiguous encounter between two men. There is something rotten in this Eden.

Moffat's video *Love* was made in 2003 and revisits the cut-and-paste format used in *Lip*, 1999, and *Artist*, 2000, where she spliced together scenes from famous Hollywood movies such as *On the Beach*, *The Graduate* and *Cleopatra*. (Movie buffs will enjoy seeing how many they can identify.)

Silly, funny and ultimately dark, the video begins with an array of spliced kisses from various iconic films. As it progresses, the scenes change to men berating their wives for not coming up to scratch. All I ever



**Artful cliché:** Moffat's 'Adventures' series

wanted, bemoans one stud is "beauty, sex, children and homemade cookies". Disappointment turns nasty, from the odd female to male slap to violence and murder.

In the final frame, as John Travolta kisses Olivia Newton-John, one of them asks: "Is this the end?" No, the other replies, "Only the beginning." It's a bleak



image of the trajectory of sexual relationships.

Sue Hubbard

To 18 February  
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