

Happy snaps that flatter and splatter

Angst is out in a new portrait series, writes **Richard Jinman**.

ARTISTS are not renowned for walking on the sunny side of the street. Rembrandt's shadows, Munch's existential scream and Hirst's pickled shark (or *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* to give its official title), suggest that serious art dwells on life's darker moments.

Tracey Moffatt, the artist once described as Australia's "photographic megastar", would beg to differ. In her new show *Portraits* - unveiled last night at Sydney's Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery - she presents 12 attractive people wearing expressions that run from satisfaction to jubilation.

Moffatt photographed her subjects "paparazzi-style", using a simple digital camera and flash gun at gallery openings, fashion shows and "glamorous parties" in New York, London, Milan, Sydney and Melbourne. She told jokes to get her subjects in the mood and the sunny results were enhanced by the addition of bright backgrounds.

"I wanted to get people in a

very heightened state," says Moffatt, who attended last night's opening. "I wanted them to be relaxed and looking good, so I didn't want to do traditional studio portraiture.

"My wonderful, neurotic Jewish friend in New York said, 'But Tracey, everyone is basically unhappy.' I don't agree. I think we're all happy and we're only sometimes sad."

Moffatt's particular brand of happiness comes at a cost. Pictures in the series are priced at \$US15,000 (\$17,500) each (each edition has five prints) - recognition of her status as one of Australia's most successful contemporary artists.

Many of the faces fit the public perception of Moffatt as a jet-setting art star. Ann Slater is identified as a New York socialite, Roslyn Oxley is Moffatt's Sydney art dealer and Michele Oka Doner is an artist who "lives in both New York and Miami".

The exception appears to be Lloyd Moffatt, a Brisbane plumber. The artist says her "macho" brother was happy with his photo, but slightly uncomfortable with the extravagant use of hot pink in the background.

Moffatt says she went to great pains to flatter her subjects. The



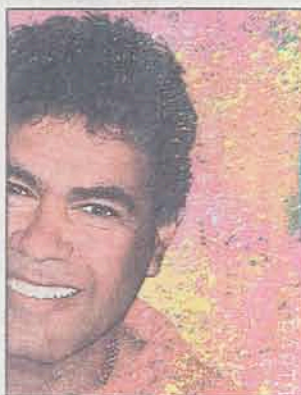
Gallerist ... Glenn Scott Wright.



Art dealer ... Roslyn Oxley.



Actress ... Lillian Crombie.



Brother ... Lloyd Moffatt.

use of flash helped because: "It leaches out detail, let's put it that way. It's very popular with women."

She shot from above - it thins out the face and makes the eyes look bigger, apparently - and used a three-quarter crop that is

"everyone's most flattering angle". "Getting that gleam in the eye isn't easy," she says.

Portraits and Doomed, a video collaboration between Moffatt and Gary Hillberg, is at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery until July 28.