

# Creators

VENICE BIENNALE

## Tracey Moffatt's Venice Biennale Show Tackles Global Issues with Personal Stories

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She's heading up the Australian pavilion, but Moffatt's work resonates with an international audience.

The 57th Venice Biennale opened this past weekend and Sydney-based artist Tracey Moffatt is representing the Australian pavilion. Her new body of work, which consists of photographs and short films, is inspired by 1940s film noir, poetry, and the refugee crisis. Entitled [\*My Horizon\*](#), the show is an imaginary romp through uncharted territory that deals with the horizon of leaving or arriving at a place.

Moffatt, who has been pushing the limits of art photography for over 25 years, takes everything we think know about the form and reimagines it entirely through a fictional lens. She doesn't disclose the location of where her pictures are shot, nor the names of her models. The only thing

we know is the plot she has created. "My imagination was flared from the complete boredom of growing up in the suburbs," says at the press preview. "I storyboard my photos like a film director."

The look she is going for is not location-specific. "My photos have an 'anywhere' look," says Moffatt. "I work in Australia but I want the work to be anywhere."

Her series *My Passage* is inspired by the refugee crisis but draped in the look of old film noir classics. "I have taken an element of the truth and made it operatic," says the artist. "It is staged; I love fiction, storylines and narratives."



"Cop and Baby" from the *Passage* series

The horizon, a sunset or sunrise over a body of water, can be viewed from the migrants or those on the homeland. "It's about arrivals," she says. "People set out to go beyond their own horizons, while others we see what's coming in from the horizon."

When asked about her own experience with the refugee crisis, she takes a global standpoint. "The refugee crisis is happening all over the world," says Moffatt. "My work is symbolic of borders; the old world is out and the new world is in and borders are going to be smashed open."

A separate series in the show is far more personal. *Body Remembers* has the artist dressing up in an old fashioned maid's uniform and posing around an abandoned house. "The location—I won't tell you where it is because I want it to read as anywhere, it could be the Middle East, the

American southwest, somewhere dry and arid," she says. "It's influenced by surrealism, cinema, a play with time, backwards and forwards of the past and present."



"Bedroom" from the *Body Remembers* series

Moffatt often uses herself as a model because she is "cheap and available," but the self portraiture also ties into a very real desire to be in front of the camera. "The camera is where I feel at home," she says. "I'm a bit of a performance artist, like Cindy Sherman when I am occasionally in the picture, playing different roles."

The staged photos are meant to tell the story of a maid who returns to the room where she once worked and has a feeling for the space, as if it were somewhere she has been in a past life. "Or she is projecting into the future, a space she will be," said Moffatt, who took the title from a 1918 poem called "Body, remember" by the Egyptian Greek poet C.P. Cavafy, which tells the story of a forbidden love affair.

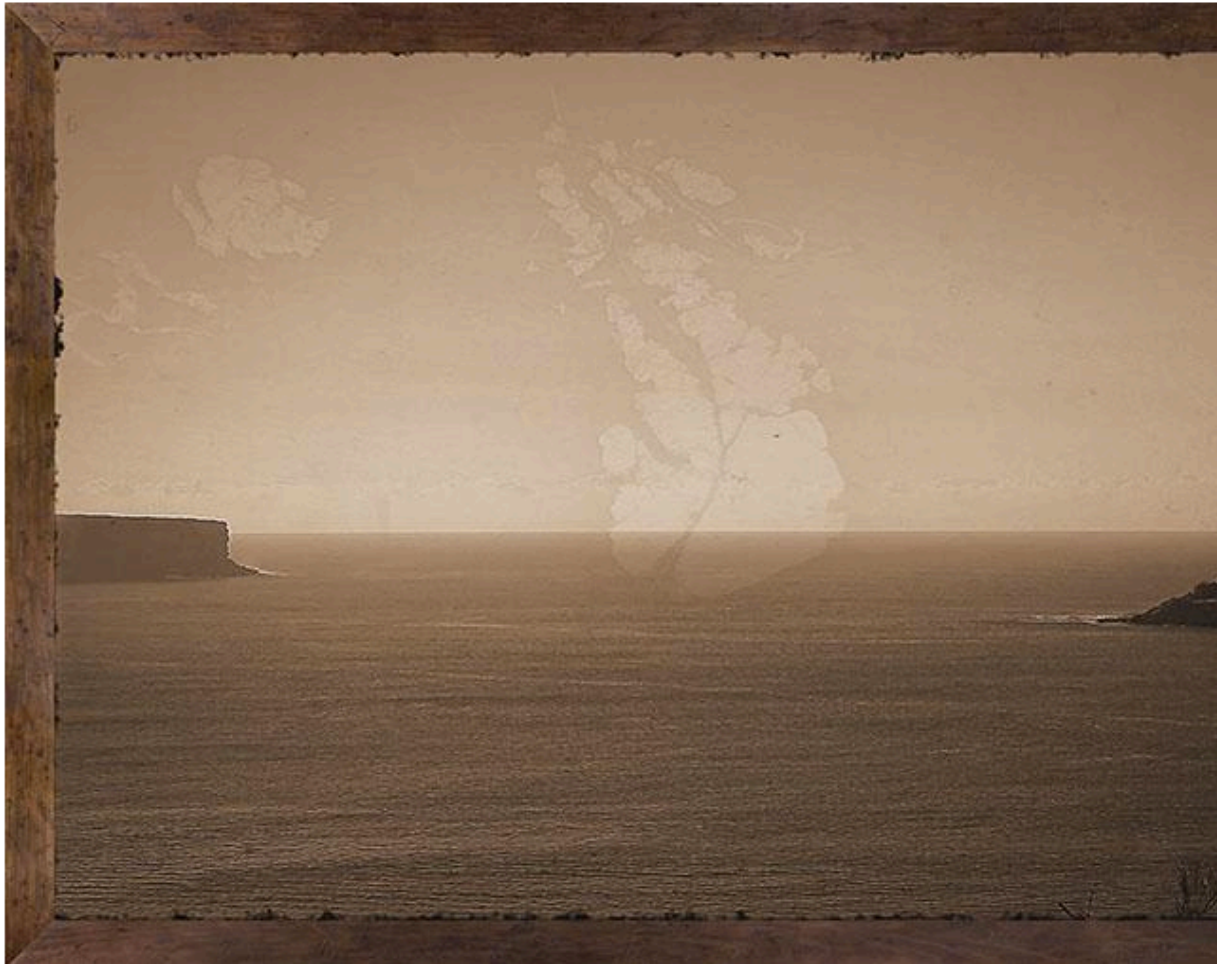
The series also alludes to American writer Elizabeth Bishop, who wrote a poem called "Insomnia." The [famous line](#) reads: "Where the shadows are really the body, where we stay awake all night, where the heavens are shallow as the sea is now deep, and you love me."

The series ties into Moffatt's family history too: both her mother and grandmother worked as domestic cooks. Her mother ran away from the post. "She was a rebel," says Moffat.



One photo in the series is called *Kitchen* and shows Moffatt standing by a window, gazing outward. "It's about the comfort of the domestic, the escape to the window, the outside world is a ramble and to some, it's safer to stay inside."

A video work, *The White Ghosts Sailed In*, shows a calm body of water. The video fades to black as a chaotic soundtrack takes over. Moffatt's fictional story behind the video is that she found the 200-year-old film in a vault in an Aboriginal mission in Sydney. It was shot by Indigenous people, who call Europeans ghosts because they're so pale.



Still from *The White Ghosts Sailed In*

"It's the entrance of Sydney harbour shot from camp sites," she says. "The soundtrack gets chaotic, referencing British military sounds as all hell breaks loose and the film has an old-looking quality because I smashed it with sledgehammer and made it look dirty by soaking it in Italian espresso."

When asked why she prefers fiction over documentary, Moffatt has a snappy response. "Could I have made a documentary and bored you all to death?" she asks. Yes, of course. But as an artist, she has licence to go a different route.

"So you go along and play with my story, my narrative, that's my work."

