

MAY 8

Tracey Moffatt: Vigils

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Rock Shadow (from the series Body Remembers) 2017 © Tracey Moffatt courtesy of the Tyler Rollins Fine Art Gallery

By: Scarlett Davis

In 2017, Australian artist Tracey Moffatt, was the first Indigenous photographer to have their art featured in the Australian pavilion in the Venice Biennale. Now, for the first time shown out of the Italian mise en scène of gondolas and serpentine canals, the Tyler Rollins Fine Art Gallery (<http://www.trfineart.com/about/>) will feature Moffatt's haunting yet elegiac solo exhibition *Vigils* from her larger collection *My Horizon*, previously featured at the Australian pavilion in 2017. Tracey Moffatt, born in Brisbane, has had a distinguished career as a multidisciplinary female artist in photography, as well as film and video with a cadre of work of twenty-five plus years, with global recognition having done 500 exhibitions around the world, featured in the museums of Paris, Tokyo, and Stockholm along with the familiar art hubs of LA and NYC.

Moffatt's oeuvre is very distinct and memorable for its ability to transcend photography into narrative. At her core, Moffatt is a supreme storyteller and her photography reads like cinematic magic, incorporating actors, props, and costumes, as well as her earlier film influences of Maya Deren. *Vigils*, denotes a period of awaken or pray, and is a befitting title for the collection, which explores escapism, memory, trauma, gender, identity, class, race, and oppression with the Australian landscape as a lens. The landscape is an integral part of the larger tradition of Australian art, and while the landscape is superficial, the meaning is deeply rooted in the Australian history. *Vigils* functions one two levels: showcasing the short film *Vigil* as well as *Body Remembers*. *Body Remembers* is a collection of ten large scale photographs and is the singular narrative of a woman, played by Moffatt herself, dressed in an old fashioned maid's uniform. In all of the photos, the woman's face and identity are intentionally obscured, highlighting the mystery behind this woman and this house, which would seem at one time she would have called home.

The title comes from the poem "Body, Remember" by Greek poet, Cavafy, which is a beautiful rendering of the sentiment of what most can identify as learned memory, written into our body's memory like when our fingers can remember to play an instrument. The poem goes even further in illustrating how our bodies become in alienable to our notions of the self. Cavafy instructs to vision our desires through the gaze of others and remember the body through the frame of an outside perspective of admiration. Moffatt's *Body Remembers* similarly encapsulates upon this out of body experience and as Adrian Searle had wrote in 2017 in *The Guardian* (<https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2017/may/10/tracey-moffatt-my-horizon-australia-pavilion-venice-biennale>), something about this depicted scenario feels uncanny, the cast of the shadows are off, the light from the paraffin lamp is at odds with the time of day, as seen by the day light cascading through the window. Searle was also astute in

observing the earrings, which appear to be Victorian Mourning earrings, begging the question: what is this woman mourning? She alights into frame like a ghost, revisiting her past, not quiet among the living with a story not quite ready to be told.

Moffatt is known to experiment with her printing process. *Body Remembers* was created to look worn, printed on rag cloth and has sun damage, not preserved with glass barricades like most art, reflecting the decay and ruin seen within the photos. Shifting gears in telling another story, the film *Vigil* intercuts video of refugees in boats with a montage of old Hollywood stars like Elizabeth Taylor and Cary Grant who look on through binoculars with mock horror and other practiced affects. There is a level of inherent detachment to both works. Perhaps, we are to surmise that both act as a commentary on society's disingenuous reaction in witnessing terrible points in history. The artist said the video was inspired by the real life incident where asylum seekers heading toward the coast of Australia sank off the coast of Christmas Island. *Body Remembers* was more personal in that Moffatt's great-grandmother worked as a cook on a cattle farm in the outback of Queensland and her mother had worked as a domestic. Like our own narrative, these stories depicted are both layered and fractured, with a hint of some said jeopardy looming over, like a house of cards waiting to fall. Immediately following *Vigils* on display from **April 26th, 2018 to June 2nd, 2018** is the continuation from the larger collection *My Horizon* with the exhibition *Passenger*, on display from **June 7th, 2018 to July 27th, 2018** at the Tyler Rollins Fine Art Gallery.



Spanish Window (from the series *Body Remembers*) 2017 © Tracey Moffatt courtesy of the Tyler Rollins Fine Art Gallery

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