

Art Radar

Contemporary art trends and news from Asia and beyond

Travelling through the art of Tracey Moffatt at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York

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Australian artist Tracey Moffatt is renowned for her photography, film and video work.

Tyler Rollins Fine Art presents two back-to-back solo exhibitions of the artist's works until 27 July 2018 in New York, which mark the first showing of two series of photographic work outside of Venice, following their debut at the 57th Venice Biennale. *Art Radar* takes a look at Moffatt's presentations.



Tracey Moffatt, 'Spanish Window' (from the series "Body Remembers"), 2017, digital print on archival rag paper, 152 x 227 cm (60 x 89 ½ in), edition of 6 + 2AP. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art

Billed as one of Australia's **"most successful artist ever, both nationally and internationally"**, Tracey Moffatt is celebrated for her groundbreaking work in photography and film. Over her longstanding career, which has spanned nearly three decades, Moffatt has incisively used her chosen media to capture slices of intimacy, struggle and poignancy, positioned against the wider backdrop of societal issues.

Born in 1960 in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, **Tracey Moffatt** has participated in over 500 exhibitions around the world. She has exhibited in major venues around the world, such as the Dia Centre for the Arts in New York, the **Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum** and the Brooklyn Museum. She is also the recipient of numerous accolades, including being made an Officer of the Order of Australia. In 2012, the **Museum of Modern Art** in New York mounted an **exhibition of her film and video works**. Her work has been included in major museum collections all over the world, in countries spanning from Europe to Asia and beyond.



Tracey Moffatt, 'Mother & Baby' (from the series "Passage"), 2017, digital C-print on gloss paper, 102 x 153 cm (40 ¼ x 60 ¼ in), edition of 6 + 2AP . Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Beginning with her 1989 series, *Something More*, which *ArtForum* described as **"an enigmatic narrative of a young woman looking for more out of life"** amidst violence, Moffatt's works have developed into a collective body that addresses the pain in human experiences. Laced with riveting grittiness, the subjects of her works are often engaged within a broader narrative form that performs intriguing tales about life in a different place and time.

After *Something More*, Moffatt found further acclaim for her next series of works. *Scarred for Life* (1994), which investigated acts of micro-aggression within banal, suburban environments, addressed a myriad of small, yet deeply painful acts that were closely relatable to viewers. In 1998, Moffatt created the series *Laudanum*. Comprised of a series of 19 photogravures, *Laudanum* is a dizzying series that acts out a narrative of sexual violence, colonial power and racism between a white mistress and an Asian servant, seen through a drug-tinted lens. Borrowing elements from cinema, magazine photography and other mass media-related aesthetics, Moffatt's work blends astute storytelling with consummate performance.



Tracey Moffatt, "Vigils", 26 April – 2 June 2018, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

This summer, Tracey Moffatt's third solo exhibition with **Tyler Rollins Fine Art** began with a display of her series *Body Remembers* (2017). Until 2 June 2018, ten large-scale photographs and a single-channel video work, entitled *Vigil*, were presented at the gallery in "**Vigils**". A second exhibition of Moffatt's work, "**The Travellers**", which opened on 7 June and runs until 27 July, presents a different photographic series entitled *Passages*. Both series were shown at the Australian Pavilion at the **57th Venice Biennale** in 2017, and the exhibitions at Tyler Rollins Fine Art mark the first time that *Body Remembers* and *Passages* are shown outside of Venice.



Tracey Moffatt, 'Touch', (from the series "Body Remembers"), 2017, digital print on archival rag paper, 152 x 227 cm (60 x 89 ½ in), edition of 6 + 2AP. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Body Remembers calls to mind a game of dress-up: Moffatt, dressed in an old-fashioned uniform, comes face-to-face with a crumbling house set in a desert landscape. The series sees Moffatt's character exploring various rooms of the house – ostensibly, as Moffatt explains to the gallery, "The maid returns to the house where she once worked, a place of memory and of where she felt a sense of security and perhaps a lost love." Moffatt's work obtains a kind of posed, theatrical sheen: her character looks out of windows, hands placed neatly on her lace collar, her hair tightly curled into an updo. In other pictures, Moffatt's character clutches the wall of the ruined house, as if embracing the crumbling surfaces of the building. Behind a patina of copper glossiness, it is as if the viewer is transported to the set of old soap dramas, waiting to see the story unfold. Moffatt has often let her work be influenced by cinematic sensibilities, and *Body Remembers* appears to be no different.



Tracey Moffatt, 'Shadow Dream' (from the series "Body Remembers"), 2017, digital print on archival rag paper, 152 x 227 cm (60 x 89 ½ in) , edition of 6 + 2AP. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

A more direct, distinct link to cinema can be seen in *Vigil*. Moffatt splices and sews together a montage of film clips and contemporary imagery, interspersing scenes of white movie stars gaping in horror with captured footage of boats packed with darker-skinned immigrants. A cheeky poke at the horrified reactions that the global migration crisis has sparked in certain demographic groups, the work was partly inspired by an incident that occurred in 2010, where a boat of asylum seekers sank off the coast of Christmas Island, an Australian territory. Co-opting a certain "meme" aesthetic, the work offers Moffatt's view on the inherent racism embedded within the reactions towards the current immigrant crisis.



Tracey Moffatt, "Vigils", 26 April – 2 June 2018, Tyler Rollins Fine Art, New York. Image courtesy Tyler Rollins Fine Art.



Tracey Moffatt, 'The Arches' (from the series "Passage"), 2017, digital C-print on gloss paper, 102 x 153 cm (40 ¼ x 60 ¼ in), edition of 6 + 2AP. Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Vigils is followed by a second presentation of Moffatt's work entitled "The Travellers", which spotlights a second photographic series entitled *Passages*. The series reimagines a fictional journey, following the figures of a mother and baby, a policeman and a well-to-do man within a port location. Shot in a stylised manner, the work plays out various narrative possibilities within ten large-scale photography stills, leaving viewers to fill in the blanks regarding what could have transpired between those moments. Similar to *Body Remembers*, *Passages* is a highly dramatic photoserries that emphasises the staged qualities of the works. Rather than employing a candid, documentary-style approach to her work, Moffatt's photography feels as though they are highly produced.



Tracey Moffatt, 'Hell (from the series "Passage")', 2017, digital C-print on gloss paper, 102 x 153 cm (40 ¼ x 60 ¼ in) , edition of 6 + 2AP . Image courtesy the artist and Tyler Rollins Fine Art.

Moffatt remains lauded as a powerful visual storyteller by critics around the world, despite the intentional ambiguities within many of her photoserries. Her works spark the viewers' imagination, allowing them to explore the different scenes through the lens of their own personal experiences. In some sense, Moffatt's work elegantly weaves themes of gender, identity, class and race into the photographic medium, all the while avoiding the pitfalls of didacticism. Moffatt holds the title for being the first indigenous artist to present a solo show in the Australian Pavilion at the Venice Biennale, a title which lays testament to her influence both at home and abroad.

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"Tracey Moffatt: Vigils" was on view from 26 April to 2 June 2018, and "Tracey Moffatt: The Travellers" is on view from 7 June to 27 July 2018 at Tyler Rollins Fine Art, 529 West 20th Street, 10W, New York, NY 10011.

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