

Anne Ferran is one of a generation of photographers whose influence on contemporary Australian photomedia has been profound, as both an artist and an educator. She taught for many years at the Sydney College of the Arts and has maintained an active national and international exhibition profile since the mid 1980s.

For the last twenty years or so, she has worked primarily and extensively with historical collections and sites, following an impulse toward examining lost or difficult histories and giving voice to oppressed, colonised or disregarded people through photography. She is interested in what we don't know and can't know of people's lives, especially those whose lives essentially leave little or no trace behind. Her projects have explored the experience of women incarcerated in prisons, asylums and hospitals.

In 1999, Ferran was awarded a New South Wales Women and Arts Fellowship to work on an archive of thirty-eight photographs of women who were psychiatric patients incarcerated in Gladesville Hospital in Sydney. Ferran found copies of the photographs in the Government Printing Office Archive by typing 'asylum' into the state library's database. The reason for taking and archiving the photographs, dated to 1948, is no longer known. Ferran was unable to discover the names of the women or why they were committed, as she was neither a patient's family member nor a medical researcher. Because of this, she was unsure how, or if, she should proceed.

In the end, however, she decided to make what she described in an interview with Jonathan Holme, published in *Anne Ferran: the ground,*

the air, as a 'second, shadow archive'. She made four books from the archival material, each focusing on different details of the original images, as well as a series of photographs titled '1-38' which she recently gifted to the NGA for the national collection.

The highly emotive series shows only the women's midsections. The images are tough, almost unbearably moving and difficult, at times, to look at. Hands anxiously clutching, reaching out for reassurance, arms held awkwardly. The inmate's clothing is makeshift, sometimes little more than a hospital gown, and often crumpled and institutionalised. The viewer does not need the faces of these women to understand on some level what is going on here. The women's anxiety and suffering is writ large in their gestures. They either stand forlornly alone or their confined state is reflected in the gestures of the nurses who reach in from the side to steady their patients or to keep a firmer hold of them.

This is a powerful and intense work by Ferran, and one that continued her interest women who were on the edges of society.

Anne O'Hehir, Curator, Photography

Above, from top: Tacita Dean *Ballon des Aerostiers de Campagne* and *Story of Minke the Whale*, from *The Russian* ending 2001, photogravure. The Poynton Bequest, 2018

Right, from top: Anne Ferran *No 8* and *No 18* from the series *1-38* 2003, pigment inkjet prints. Gift of the artist, 2018. Donated through the Australian Government's Cultural Gifts Program. © Anne Ferran. Represented by Viscopy

