

**Lisa Garland:
Still Reverence**

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13 August – 25 September 2016

Solo Commission 2016

Introduction

Each year the Devonport Regional Gallery commissions an artist to present a solo exhibition at the Gallery, with the commission providing funding and support for an artist to develop a new body of work. In 2015 Lisa Garland was selected for this year's Solo Commission. The work Garland has produced is the result of twelve months research and documentation.

For this commission, Garland has continued to photograph people in her region, with a strong focus on people and places in the Devonport area where Garland is now teaching. Garland has also extended her practice to include videos made inside the homes of three of her Devonport subjects. The large black and white photographs and video works are representative of the reverence Garland has for her friends and the people she befriends.

It has been a fascinating process following the artist's progress and hearing the many stories that accompany her photographs and video work. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Lisa Garland on her dedication and work produced for this Solo Commission.



Carl's Shed, 2016



John, 2016



Fred's Kitchen, 2016



Fred's Wall, 2016



Mick's Kitchen, 2016

Extended Family

Ellie Ray – Curator

Lisa Garland has always been curious about her world, particularly the people and places that surround her. As a child she would take off on her bicycle and explore the neighbourhood, observing the homes, the families and the characters that were a part of her community. Later, when Garland began working with a film camera, her natural sense of curiosity was heightened as a result of these early encounters and she began turning her observations into photographs. The accumulated memories of her childhood explorations have played a pivotal role in the personal language she has developed within her photographic practice.

Garland began photographing her friends and family, and people in the community who sparked her curiosity. She introduced herself to people she had observed – total strangers – and formed lasting relationships with many of the subjects she photographed. Like an obsessive collector, Garland's practice is an accumulation of portraits. In a sense, the artist has created an extended family that is both in the world and in her photographs.

An ongoing theme in Garland's photography is that of the home as loci. Most of her subjects are photographed amongst their possessions, within their own dwellings. Garland's photographic art pays great attention to domestic interiors and the transitory and permanent objects that accumulate within these spaces. Photographing in black and white, the shape, form, texture and contrast become more apparent than in colour, and her monochromatic images convey a union of architectural space, objects and people. This is not to say that 'home' is necessarily represented as a sanctuary but, rather, her work highlights or at the very least hints at the ambiguity of home as both a loving space and a heartless space; a private space made public through the act of photographing.

For this Solo Commission, Garland has photographed a selection of non-peopled images that are linked to the portraits through their personifying physical and emotional elements. In one such photograph, the dried remnants of a once thriving vine shaped like an uneven heart remains, clinging to a large stonewall. Home may very well be where the heart is, yet this larger than life heart is fading away, personifying the inevitable mortality of all living things. Installed between portraits, this scenic device not only provides a space for quiet contemplation, but it also sets the stage for each series of domestic scenes that are played out between photographer, subject and viewer. In the same way the dying vine clings to the wall, Garland's subjects cling to life, sometimes despite the odds.

The stories and friendships collected by Garland are shared through her photographic essays. When Garland speaks about her photographs, empathetic narratives slowly unravel: she speaks of the joys and struggles of individuals, couples or families; the stoic nature of many of her subjects; or the quirky nature of another's existence. The artist doesn't burden us with the technical issues of photographing her subjects; the issues she is predominantly concerned with are either the vulnerability of the people she meets or their ability to live simply and not be subsumed into popular culture's appeal for consumerism.

American photographer Roger Ballen who has been living in South Africa for the past thirty years, made a series of photographs titled 'Platteland'. The majority of photographs represent country people who spend most of their time in their homes. Ballen was curious about their lives as white South Africans who were literally hiding in their homes. He wanted to learn more about them and what went on behind their closed doors so, equipped with a camera, he



Ivy Wall, 2016

began knocking on those very doors and introduced himself. Ballen photographed a world that had previously been hidden under the mantle of white supremacy. Ballen has remained friends with many of the people he has photographed within their homes and speaks empathetically about them. Garland follows a similar methodology to Ballen – inquiring about the people she observes. She spends time getting to know people she is not familiar with in order to understand them, and herself, better. With both of these artists, a high level of trust must be established in order for them to successfully and truthfully represent an aspect of their subject's being. In Garland's photography this trust is extended to include more detailed aspects of her subject's intimate and private spaces.

When Garland took up a teaching post this year at Don College in Devonport she instinctively observed her new surroundings on the way to work – the flora, the people, and the buildings that were a part of the college neighbourhood. One of these observations turned into an encounter that inspired the making of a video. In her daily travels to work Garland noticed an older couple seated before a large window of their house that looked out onto the street. From this window the couple would sit at their table and observe people going about their daily business amidst the changing seasons – the neighbours, the postman, and students arriving and departing. Garland's curiosity got the better of her and one day she knocked on their door and introduced herself to them. From then on she was a visitor in their house listening to their stories and observing their lives from the 'inside'.

The photograph that resulted from this encounter, titled 'Freddy and Gwen', is a seemingly straightforward image of a couple in their living room, yet it is a complex work and is explored



Freddy and Gwen, 2016

further by Garland through a video set up in the same room. Within this image, the strata of observations and observers is endless. The artist observed the couple watching their outside world through the living room window; she befriended them and observed them through her camera. Now through print and video the viewer is in a position to 'observe the observers' from a similar vantage point to the photographer. The camera allows the viewer to become privy to this couple's fascination with looking while, at the same time, drawing them into the spectacle as they unwittingly become involved in a cycle of voyeuristic observing.

The video of this couple is compelling. The viewer is drawn into their living room, which is also the room where most of their daily rituals are performed. Gwen sits at the table writing some notes. She leaves the table and Freddy sits by the window at the end of the table adorned with items that will be in use that day. The focus shifts to the repetitive action of Gwen pegging washing to a makeshift clothesline. The viewer is again caught up in a voyeuristic act of trying to work out what Gwen is hanging on the line. The multiple, similar items pegged on the line could well be underwear yet from the viewer's vantage point it is difficult to know. The viewer's gaze is again directed to Freddy.

Another image and video represents a home that, like Freddy and Gwen, is full of items necessary for daily existence, yet the majority of these items are books. Recently Garland introduced herself to Fred who lives in Don. Fred has a love of books and a passion for collecting them. The photograph of Fred reveals this aspect of his life – his living-working space is lined with books. In the minimal video of Fred, the viewer is witness to his passion for reading as he sits at his desk. To the left a gentle breeze is blowing a sheet that is hanging from the doorway.



Like a slow pulse, it moves and ripples as the viewer waits to see what Fred will do next. Fred keeps reading until near the end of the video, when he exits through the doorway. The pulse continues after his departure.

A very different series of portraits highlight the faces of three of Garland's close female friends. In contrast to the distance Garland often places between herself and her subjects in other series, in these works the faces of her subjects are brought into focus. These close-ups eliminate their surroundings – apart from a mantelpiece complete with objects that is seen in the background of each portrait. The objects represent collected items, which tell a story about the individuality of the women photographed.

Whether photographed close-up or at a critical distance, Garland aims to reveal personalities that might otherwise appear as anonymous faces in the crowd. Gaining the trust of her subjects, she affords the viewer a glimpse into their homes, possessions and lifestyle. She speaks of her subjects' stoicism, oddities, loss and loneliness, beauty, love, humour and resilience. She is a great admirer of her subjects – speaking of their unglamorous life-styles and contentment with what they have and who they are. Garland's photographs could almost be shrines to people whose lives might otherwise go unnoticed. Garland offers her photographs to the viewer as if welcoming them into the fold of her extended family; a family that will continue to expand along with the artist's enquiring mind and reverence for her subjects.

Bibliography

Roger Ballen, *Platteland, images from rural South Africa*, St Martin's Press, New York, 1996





Still Reverence



Karina, 2016



Janet, 2016



Cath, 2016



Peter, 2016



Vita, 2016



Fred's Fireplace, 2016



Freddy and Gwen's Table, 2016



Jill, 2016

Biography

Lisa Garland holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the Tasmanian School of Art (1992) and a Diploma of Education. She currently teaches photography at Don College in Devonport, Tasmania. She has been shortlisted for the National Photographic Portrait Prize, the Hobart City Art Prize and the City of Devonport National Art Award.

In 2007 she was awarded the Moorilla Prize (now the MONA Scholarship). Her work is held in public and private collections, including the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, the University of Tasmania, Burnie Regional Art Gallery, Devonport Regional Gallery and MONA.

Garland is represented by Despard Gallery, Hobart.



Freddy and Gwen Morning, 2016



Freddy and Gwen Night, 2016



Pulp Office, 2016

List of Works

Giclée Photographs printed from scanned large format black and white film

Ivy Wall, 2016, 188.2 x 150.5 cm

Pulp Office, 2016, 188.2 x 150.5 cm

Balfour Track, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Carl's Shed, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Cath, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Freddy and Gwen Night, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Freddy and Gwen Morning, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Freddy and Gwen, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Fred, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Fred's Wall, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Fred's Kitchen, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Janet, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

John, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Karina, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Mick's Kitchen, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

King River Trading Company Wall, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Peter, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Jill, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Vita, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Lillico Trees, 2016, 105 x 130 cm

Paste Ups printed from scanned large format black and white film

Fred's Fireplace, 2016, 3 x 2 m (approximately)

Freddy and Gwen's Table, 2016, 3 x 2 m (approximately)

Videos

Freddy and Gwen, 2016, duration 9 minutes (looped)

Fred, 2016, duration 5 minutes (looped)

Acknowledgments

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Cover Image

Ivy Wall, 2016 (detail)

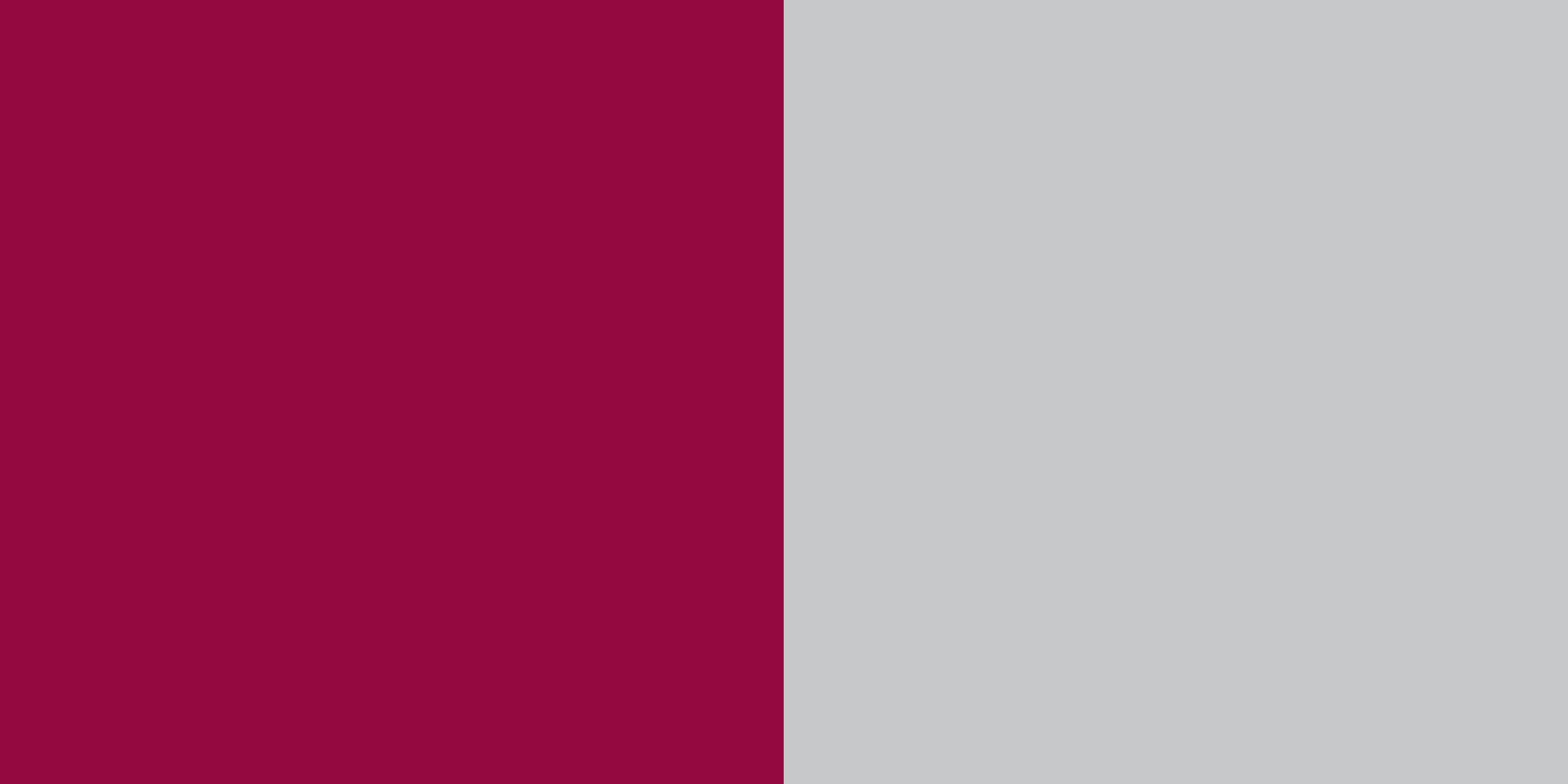
Inside Images

Balfour Track, 2016 (detail)

Lillico Trees, 2016 (detail)

Ivy Wall, 2016 (detail)

King River Trading Company Wall, 2016 (detail)





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