

MEDIA RELEASE

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PRESENT TENSE

Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the New Media Age is the principal exhibition in the National Portrait Gallery's 2010 exhibition calendar. It will be displayed from **22 May to 22 August 2010**. We are entering an exceptional time for portraiture and visual culture in general as the art world embraces the digital age. Traditional portraiture is responding to the application of new technologies and this imaging process is reshaping our interpretation and reading of the face.

Present Tense considers the alliance between portraiture and technology, showing how different ways of imaging in this contemporary, digital world reflect the way an individual is perceived and the various mechanisms of imaging that are used to manipulate that perception. The exhibition is comprised of works by Australian and international artists' and includes examples of the informal and immediate images made on mobile phones, images recorded with sonograms that reveal faces that cannot be seen by the unaided eye, 2D and 3D portraits generated exclusively from binary code, as well as the more expected streaming digital works and manipulated photographs.

'Some of the images in *Present Tense* are confronting and some are positively endearing', said exhibition Curator Michael Desmond. 'The exhibition surveys the possibilities of portraiture today, with the premise that the inhabitants' of our digital society are pictured in a technological mirror'.

The use of digital technologies by artists is increasing, providing affordable alternatives to traditional media and offering a new tool set and the possibility of a new aesthetic. This is not to suggest that older media has been abandoned, or is associated only with conservative practice, rather that artists' have greater choice in the materials that they use and the style that they wish to engage with. Chuck Close is one of artists' in the exhibition who ignores the rising tide of digital imaging processes to favour old technology, creating powerful images with the archaic daguerreotype technique. Other artists' in *Present Tense* include: Loretta Lux, Patrick Pound, Stelarc, Jonathon Nichols, Petrina Hicks, Ghostpatrol, Patricia Piccinini and more.

'At one time, oil on canvas or bronze was the medium for portraits. The medium now is technology. In an inversion of one of Modernism's classic aphorisms, digital technology allows function to follow form; the function of the portrait - to illustrate an individual's character and physiognomy - is established by the stamp of the technology that created it', said Michael Desmond.

What: Present Tense: An Imagined Grammar of Portraiture in the New Media Age
Where: National Portrait Gallery, King Edward Terrace, Parkes, Canberra
When: 22 May to 22 August 2010
Entry: Free. Open daily 10 am to 5 pm
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