

“Empowering Women: Visual Conversations”

An exhibition of photography by Kat Lynn

The Write Gallery 8-28 March 2024.

“Most subjects are, just by virtue of being photographed, touched with pathos....to take a photograph is to participate in another person’s mortality, vulnerability, mutability” ¹.

So wrote the American writer, and philosopher, Susan Sontag, in her iconic treatise, *“On Photography”*.

The current exhibition at the Write Gallery, “Empowering Women: Visual Conversations,” is an impressive presentation of photographic portraits by local artist Kat Lynn. Appropriately it opened on 8th March, International Women’s Day, and is the epitome of the depth and meaning of Sontag’s words.

The genre of portraiture has a long and respected history that includes the delicate Fayum funeral images from the first and second centuries AD, Leonardo da Vinci’s enigmatic Renaissance portraiture, and Lucien Freud’s brutal honesty. With the advent of photography and artists such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Yousuf Karsh, and Annie Leibovitz, portraiture continued to traverse the territories of identity, recognition, power, position, and respect as well as fashion, notoriety, propaganda, and the narcissism of the ubiquitous selfie.

Portraiture has become much more than the depiction of the appearance of an individual. It engenders an element of trust between the artist and the sitter that becomes something of a collaboration in which the relationship between the two is an intrinsic part of the portrait. The combination of context and intention are significant in drawing out, and subtly capturing traces of the inner person, the complex emotions that are shaped by thought and feeling.

Photography, with its innate combination of art, science, and technology is an eloquent vehicle of expression. Kat Lynn has tamed the medium to embrace a series of discrete narratives that are, however, united in their intimations of strength, resilience, acknowledgement, humour, and courage. Bec, Carmel, Chris, Gay, Jen, and Shelley are six women who are survivors - the veterans and victors of life’s battlefield of lived experience. Their stories are moving and heroic, but while the rather intrusive QR Codes encourage a more in-depth communication, in this era of diminished attention spans, the information overload is a challenge even to concentrated attention. A small didactic panel that briefly introduces each woman would offer an immediate bridge in the artist, subject, and viewer relationship.

The central space of the Write Gallery is punctuated by huge photographs of each woman. These banners of honour create a dramatic context that leads the viewer through to the wall of smaller images. This series of photographs is salon hung in rhythmic clusters that engage the viewer in a visual dialogue that is almost audible.

Kat Lynn has used her lighting in a painterly way that enhances, emphasizes, softens, and highlights facial details as well as articulating and interpreting pose and body language.

Although the artist has designed a particular setting, the black entrance curtain, the floor logo, and the text inclusion, are actually unnecessary embellishments in an exhibition that is starkly dramatic and whose powerful black and white images make a bold and profoundly strong stand-alone statement of artistic integrity.

Sandy Pottinger, March 2024

Sandy Pottinger is a Toowoomba based artist and writer. She is a former photographer and retired lecturer in Visual Arts from the University of Southern Queensland. She was the art critic for the Toowoomba Chronicle, writing the *Around the Galleries* column for twenty-five years.

¹ Sontag, S., *On Photography*, 1977, Dell Publishing, New York, p. 15.