

## Fabulous Faraway Foto Festival FotoFreo 2006



How many photo festivals allow you to start the day with a dip in the Indian Ocean, day long sunshine and an average temperature of 30 degrees in March? FotoFreo certainly had its 'unique selling points' "despite taking place in the most isolated city in the world," notes Bob Hewitt, Chairman of FotoFreo.

Situated in and around the delightfully colourful and bohemian historic port town of Fremantle, Western Australia (bordering Perth), FotoFreo is a relative newcomer to the Festival circuit, 2006 being its 3rd Biennial. However, a full month long (March 25th–April 25th) FotoFreo made a lasting impression on all its participants—and has placed it firmly on the map and in the diary. Photographers, curators, writers and critics from around the world descended on Freo for an action-packed two week programme of exhibitions, audiovisual projections, workshops, forums, seminars, films and a conference that all took place in over forty venues throughout Fremantle and Perth. Venues ranged from dedicated art galleries (Fremantle Arts Centre, Maritime Museum) to quirky exhibition spaces such as shops,

restaurants (Gino's Italian cafe), the Fremantle Prison, and the Moores building; in the street, via telephone and on the web and really allowed the visitor to get a flavour of the place whilst engaging with work from more than 200 international and Australian photographers and artists.

Stamina was required as we launched ourselves into a lively and extremely enjoyable timetable focussed on making connections rather than sales, having conversations, discussions, seeing and showing work, and sharing and exchanging ideas with each other. Leading cultural and photographic commentators included Susan Bright (curator and author of the recently released *Art Photography Now*), François Hébel (Director of Rencontres d'Arles de la Photographie.), Mark Haworth-Booth (former Senior Curator of Photography, V&A Museum), Alasdair Foster (Director Australian Centre for Photography), Shahidul Alam (online publisher, photojournalist and media activist, BANGLADESH), and Gael Newton (Curator of Photography, National Gallery of Australia);



Opposite: Jessica from the series *Suburban Melancholy*, 2005. © Graham Miller  
Below: From the series *Merge*. © Emma Critchley/Sara Haq.

not to mention countless like-minded photographic practitioners who were all easily accessible for at least a coffee (if not a glass or two of delectable Western Australian wine) and a chat.

Though un-themed overall, FotoFreo engaged in a range of contemporary photographic practices within documentary, photojournalistic and art-based photo media inviting both well-established and emerging artists into an even playing field.

The festival featured some important and striking, cutting edge shows including Magnum photographer Antoine d'Agata's evocative and intimate *Until the World No Longer Exists*, made up of 200 plus images of varying sizes full of brutal beauty, pain, darkness, light and feeling. The sheer quantity of them and the intriguing stories behind each and every image told of a life lived to the full. Quiet, watchful, witty, constantly observing—but not just visually; sensually. D'Agata senses moods, moments and atmospheres, getting inside and under the skin of the experience.

Graham Miller's *Suburban Melancholy* series was

developed over a period of time, with consideration and using a more directorial and conceptual approach. Miller plays on a fine line between truth and fantasy as he shows a disquieting insight into the everyday Australian psyche. His chosen locations and the people in them became familiar places and faces, some of which I came to know.

Important voices from China resulted in a show of monumental proportions (not just in terms of quantity and scale). *Transformations: New Chinese Photography*, emerging contemporary photo-artists from China, was curated by Shi Guo Rui and featured Jiang Jang's striking prints from the series *Orphans*, which compassionately yet unsentimentally reveals the delicate social quandary of children with no families within a hugely populated country in social, economic and ideological transition. Geographically FotoFreo is ideally placed to showcase some of the new and exciting voices from this part of the world, forging links between 'eastern and western' ideologies that can only get stronger.



Naturally an international festival wouldn't be complete without its celebrity veteran photographers, so legendary Hollywood photographer Douglas Kirkland was on hand leading workshops, as was photojournalist Tim Page complimented appropriately with a show by *National Geographic* underwater photographer David Doubilet.

Unlike some of the more established photo festivals, many of the exhibitions and events were free; and access to artists, photographers and curators was intimate, relaxed and informal in a most hospitable setting that was conducive to forming lasting, significant bonds and friendships. Start saving now—the airfare and travel time will be well worth your while—bring on FotoFreo 2008—the even greater Antipodean Adventure.

— SARA HAQ

Sara Haq is a Photographic Artist invited to FotoFreo 2006 as part of *1+1=3: Collaboration in Recent British Portraiture* curated by Susan Bright. Haq collaborated with Emma Critchley. Other artists in *1+1=3* included: Melanie Manchot, Wiebke Leister, Paul Jeff, Anna Fox and Broomberg & Chanarin.

See [www.fotofreo.com](http://www.fotofreo.com) for more information.