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Study for Hattah Man and Hattah Woman, 2013. From The Ghillies. Pigment ink print, 70 x 105cm. Edition of 8. Courtesy the artist.

POLIXENI PAPAPETROU

IN CONVERSATION WITH NATALIE KING

***P**olixeni Papapetrou flexes the camera's hold on her subjects: her children, their friends and the Australian landscape. Whether embedded in rural settings, disguised by masks and costumes or embellished with accoutrements, she is a masterful narrator. These carefully arranged scenarios are tales without endings; stills from a lifelong inquiry into our relationship with each other, with ourselves and our context. Intimate and poignant, each vignette has a taut composition that tells stories of love and loss.*

Over three filmed sessions at the end of 2012, Polixeni Papapetrou was interviewed by Natalie King and filmed by Roy Chu in her home-studio in Melbourne. This is an extended extract of these candid and revealing conversations, augmented by further reflexion by the artist.

Natalie King: Initially you trained as a lawyer and then became a practicing photographer. Can you tell me about the early transition from a very different field?

Polixeni Papapetrou: At school I focused on academic subjects rather than art, as my ambition was to study law at Melbourne University. During my time at university, I was approached on the street by the artist John Money who wanted to paint my portrait. In his studio, I saw a copy of Diane Arbus's monograph with *Identical Twins, Roselle, New Jersey* (1967) on the cover. This book intrigued me because I identified with the outsider people she photographed, but I also wanted access to these people. It was this moment and book that introduced me to the idea of photography as an art form.



Salt Man, 2013. From *The Ghillies*. Pigment ink on print, 120 x 120cm. Edition of 8 + 1 unique print at 150 x 150cm. Courtesy the artist.

While working as a lawyer, I bought a camera and started taking pictures of people who could have belonged in Diane Arbus's photographs. I began by photographing homeless men who lived at a city shelter. At that stage I was using a 35mm camera, but felt that my composition wasn't working. Yet within the frame of Diane Arbus's pictures, everything looked perfect. I bought a square format camera and through this lens the world fell into place. In the beginning, my work had a documentary quality to it as I was photographing people as I encountered them with little intervention on my part.

NK: Can you elaborate on the idea of otherness in both Arbus's work and in relation to your world making?

PP: Diane Arbus grew up in a privileged household and was drawn to people who were different from her, people who lived their lives on the border of conventional society. Growing up as the child of Greek



from left: *Despondency*, 2013. From *Melancholia*; *Grief*, 2013. From *Melancholia*. Courtesy the artist.

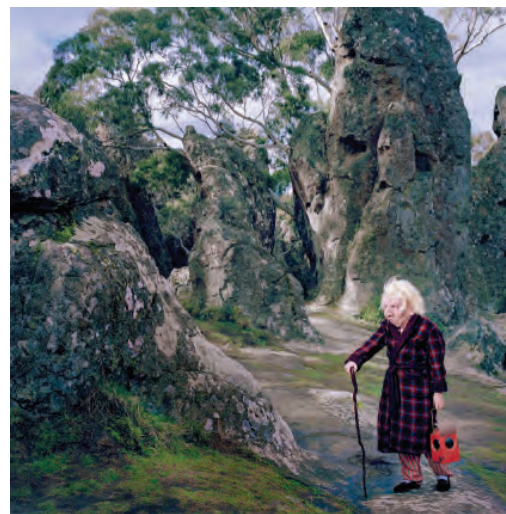
immigrant parents in Melbourne in the 1960s, I felt as if I was living on the margins, living a life that was different from mainstream Australia. When I started primary school I could not speak English, I had a foreign name that nobody could pronounce and I was the outsider. My name was changed to Pauline in the hope that I could fit into an Australian way of life and my Greek background was suppressed to the point of shame. But rather than aspiring to be like my Australian friends, I felt more comfortable in the company of the other outsiders as we were cut from the same cloth.

NK: Does this relate to the hidden, mysterious narratives that have unfolded in your work? If you were confused about your own identity and there was a sense of shame, then other forms of imaginary identities might emerge.

PP: The question of identity has been a puzzle to me because, growing up, I didn't know how to define myself. When I went to university, I decided to change my name back to Polixeni. It was a profound moment in defining myself as Greek and having a sense of belonging. At university, I had the liberty to define my adult identity and I began to experiment with my dress and appearance as a way of being someone. That curiosity with role-play made its way into my work, whether I was photographing people who were themselves role-playing or later by creating the characters myself.

NK: With your early work were you aware of photography's capacity to freeze time, to capture moments?

PP: Photography has the ability to freeze a moment in time, to capture reality and transform it to memory. I think that this type of insight happens after the photograph is made and you are not conscious of this in the process of making the picture. When you make a photograph, you are in that moment rather than how that moment will be remembered in ten or one hundred years time. However, when photographing children you are reminded of the passage of time as children change so rapidly, but their child form is memorialised by the still image.



clockwise from top: *The Wanderer No. 3*, 2012. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *The Lantern Keeper*, 2012. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *The Joy Pedlars*, 2011. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6. From *The Dreamkeepers*. Courtesy the artist.

NK: Let's look more closely at this body of work that you made on your first overseas trip. Can you tell me where you went?

PP: In 1991, I decided that I should have my first overseas trip. I opened an atlas with a map of the world and thought that I would go to the place on the page where my finger landed. That place was Nepal and I went there via Bangkok. I took my Hasselblad camera and it was the first and only time I photographed

overseas. In Thailand, I photographed drag queens at the Calypso Cabaret, where I somehow talked my way into photographing the drag queens backstage. In Nepal I photographed children and holy men.

NK: It's interesting because your work is so much about the Australian landscape and the Australian vernacular and history, and yet on your first trip you were steeped in Asian culture. What was that experience like?

PP: The experience of taking pictures in Asia was fascinating and exhilarating. It was one of the most memorable times in my life and the trip still stands out for me. It happened at an important stage of my career where I was thinking about subject matter such as children. I made this trip six years before I had children, but even then I was drawn to photographing them. During this trip, I photographed a sense of otherness that I saw in drag queens and children. I returned to this theme years later at home.

NK: From very early on you were interested in people who occupied the margins or the fringes of society.

PP: I probably wanted to emulate Diane Arbus, but as I was living in a different time and place to her, my work took a different course. What I have noticed about my earlier work is that compositionally the frame was quite tight and the encounter with that person was intimate. I was drawn to them and I think that their gaze reflects the engagement between us.

NK: I wonder if that has to do with your empathy with the subjects as a gesture of connecting with them.

PP: Connecting with my subjects has been important to me. I have been in situations where there could be hundreds of participants in a contest or at the Elvis memorial or at a drag queen event, but I have captured a still moment, we have connected and I have taken their portrait. At crowded events such as the Miss Alternative World Ball at the San Remo Ballroom in Melbourne, I was able to ask drag queens as they walked through the door if I could take their portrait. At that moment, the crowd seemed to disappear and the only person in the room was the one looking into the camera.

NK: There is a clear complicity with the subject in your removing them from their performance on stage and taking them somewhere quiet and intimate.

PP: Perhaps this act moves the work from being documentary to having an aspect of direction and collaboration. By focussing on the individual I was able to talk about role-play and performance in my work.



The Harvesters, 2009. From *Between Worlds*. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 8. Courtesy the artist.

NK: Let's discuss the characters that you depict who are part of ambiguous narratives or stories without endings. You have said, 'the tragedy that is the end is present in the beginning'. Can you elaborate?

PP: I was thinking about death when I made this statement. The connection between life and death has been a driving force in my life and looking back now, this feeling was prescient. In 1997, when I gave birth to my daughter Olympia, a feeling of profound sadness swept over me. I realised that with birth comes death; the one cannot exist without the other. The sadness in life has to be the end of life, but it is not something that we want to dwell on. Strangely I have felt an urgency about this life which unconsciously drove me to photograph the children and record their lives.



clockwise from top: *The Loners*, 2009. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 8; *The Mourner*, 2012. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 8; *The Caretaker*, 2009. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 8. From *Between Worlds*. Courtesy the artist.

Initially, I experienced guilt when photographing the children, feeling that mothers who work with their children in an artistic way are judged for ‘putting their children to work’. Indeed, in July 2008, the art critic John MacDonald made the remark on radio that I was a stage parent and thus inferred that I was exploiting my children for the purposes of my art practice. When I was diagnosed with cancer in 2007, I felt that the work that I had made with my children was one of the legacies that I could leave them.

NK: Can you expand on this idea of mortality and the role of illness because in ‘The Dream Keepers’ (2012) there are many props that relate to ageing and the infirm, such as crutches, a walking stick and a frame?

PP: I’m interested in liminal and transitional stages in life such as childhood, adolescence and old age. In ‘The Dream Keepers’ (2012), my idea was to collapse the idea of youth and old age into one body. The whole point about being a child is to grow and with that growth eventually one can become old. We carry the germ of ageing within us. Similarly, when you reach the end of your life, childlike traits can emerge as you let go of worldly concerns and enter the space of your mind and imagination. I don’t think that children are necessarily bothered by the external world, concepts of reality or with materialistic or earthly things until they are much older. Possibly as we age, we revert to that beautiful state where we experience the world in a non-grasping way.

NK: Do you have an affinity with childhood traits?

PP: Yes, but my sense of play took a while to develop. When I was young, both my parents worked and I was expected to help. By the age of five I was doing housework and by ten I was cooking for the family. At the age of six, I was looking after my two younger siblings. I experienced childhood as being useful to others and purposeful. It was not a time where I could indulge in my fantasies. I don’t remember playing with other children but I spent a lot of time by myself doing cut and paste activities. That sense of being useful and working hard continues. When I had children, I was curious to understand what childhood could be, like the way that I saw it in movies. The first time I understood the importance of playing at children’s dress-ups, or even reading books to children was when I had my own. I grew up in a house without books and games, but this was not uncommon in migrant households as parents were more preoccupied with working and building a future for the family rather than entertaining their children.

NK: That seems remarkable given the backdrop to this interview is your vast library which you draw upon to make your work with a thorough research methodology. Can you discuss the importance of books and literary references in your practice?

PP: My passion for collecting books probably has its origin in childhood. I grew up in a house that did not have any books. At the age of five, I was severely disciplined by my parents for stealing a book from the school library. I was discovered after



Hanging Rock 1900 #3, 2006. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6. From *Haunted Country*. Courtesy the artist.

a note had been sent to my parents and the book was found concealed in my wardrobe. All I wanted was to own a book. As a teenager my parents bought me a set of encyclopaedias, which I read tirelessly. Now I collect books and in particular try to get first edition signed books by the author.

NK: Recently you have accumulated books as part of your research into clowns, especially Cindy Sherman's photographs of clowns and Diane Keaton's book on clowns.

PP: I have found some beautiful books on clowns ranging from the history of the clown in art, to books on amateur paintings of clowns found at junk sales. I can't remember when my interest in clowns and the circus began, but in the late '80s I spent a lot of time photographing at Ashton's Circus and



from left: *The Wimmera 1864 #1*, 2006. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *Whroo 1855*, 2006. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6. From *Haunted Country*. Courtesy the artist.

Silver's Circus. The idea of photographing clowns has remained, but the execution of the idea became complicated because my pictures could not be a replica of Cindy Sherman's clown series.

I find the clown an elusive figure, the ultimate outsider. The clown can be traced back to Renaissance Italy, or in Shakespeare he appears as the jester or fool. My interest in the clown is in the clown's status as other—the clown as mask. I am intrigued by how the masked face can reveal emotion rather than conceal it, how the clown can express feelings that are universal through that masked exterior. I first used masks in 'Phantomwise' (2002) and liked their effect in concealing the identity of the subject, expanding the reading of the subject as a universal type of figure and shifting identity from the real to the imaginary.

In 2010, I began collecting masks, wigs and vintage costumes in preparation for a clown project. I experimented with a clown figure in *The Wanderer No. 3* (2012) in 'The Dream Keepers' (2012). More recently I made some pictures of clowns in the studio.

NK: I wanted to ask you about your current predicament and illness and whether you think this has impacted on the way that you are making your work?

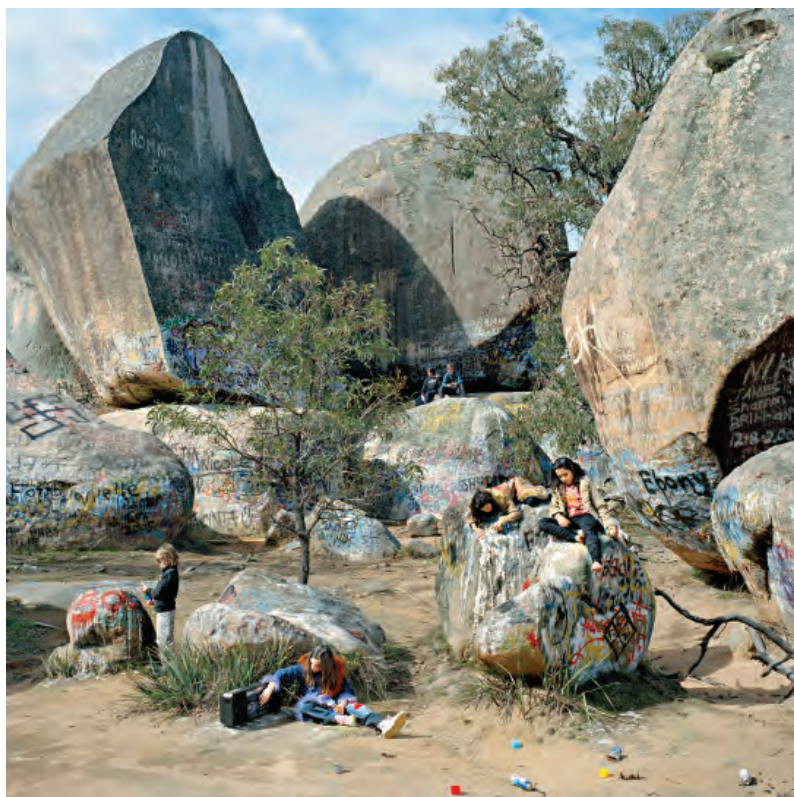
PP: In late 2007, I finished making the series 'Games of Consequence' (2008) when I received the diagnosis of cancer. After the news and during the treatment, I made the series 'Between Worlds' (2009) where I portrayed the children as animals. It was about this time that my style was changing. Prior to this, the work that I made was based upon pre-existing narratives. Whether I was restaging Lewis Carroll's works in 'Dreamchild' (2003) and 'Wonderland' (2004), or looking at the experience of children in colonial Australia in 'Haunted Country' (2006), there was an element of narrative in the work. After the diagnosis, I began making pictures in a more intuitive way, relying less on literary narrative and allowing my unconscious to feed my ideas. Many of the characters I created in 'The Dream Keepers' were based on people that I remember from my early childhood growing up in Port Melbourne.

NK: Can you discuss more closely *The Mourner* (2012) that depicts Olympia dressed as a rat in a Victorian mourning costume standing on a beach, poised and holding a mourning fan?

PP: I finished the series 'Between Worlds' in 2009 but in 2012 I had an idea to make three further works for this series. In *The Mourner* (2012), I wanted to portray Olympia as a rat partly because we were both born under the sign of the rat in Chinese astrology, but more importantly, I imagined the influx of Europeans to colonial Australia appearing like a plague of rats to the Indigenous people. I read this picture differently now as it is the last picture that I made of her before my diagnosis of terminal cancer.

The works I made just before the cancer returned such as *The Mourner* (2012) and *Hattah Man and Hattah Woman* (2013) are in retrospect prescient works. In October 2012, we went to the Mallee region in Victoria to finish making a body of work called 'The Ghillies' (2013). In this work, I photographed my son wearing a ghillie costume which is a camouflage outfit used in military and hunting contexts. We went to a place called Hattah where I made a picture of Olympia and Solomon called *Hattah Man and Hattah Woman*. When I showed this image to a friend, he remarked that the image was haunting and spooky because it was as if the figures were marching towards their graves.

NK: You have had significant international acclaim with your work. I wonder if you could let me know how you would like your work to be remembered?



clockwise from top left: *Sisters Rocks*, 2008. From *Games of Consequence*. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *Miles from nowhere*, 2008. From *Games of Consequence*. Pigment ink print, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *The Beating Drums*, 2003. From *Wonderland*. Type C photograph, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *Flying Cards #2*, 2004. From *Wonderland*. Type C photograph, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6. Courtesy the artist.

PP: From the beginning of my trajectory, I was interested in talking about identity and more recently about the various guises of childhood identity. But beyond this my work has felt like an act of love, a collaborative act that has involved

many people. Photography has never felt like an exploitative act—although Martin Parr once said to me that all photography is a form of exploitation. When I look into the camera, I feel a deep connection with the person whose image I am making. I have loved making pictures and after my family, it's possibly the second biggest love affair of my life.

NK: There is tremendous intimacy and connectivity in the images.

PP: The pictures feel intimate because the audience reads this into the work, seeing me as a mother working with her children and their friends. I have, however, tried to speak about the condition of childhood beyond my own experience and in a more universal way. Olympia said to me 'Mum, I'm really happy we made that work together because we created something separate from us, that exists in the world. It is as if we created another entity'. My children have shaped my identity as a human being and as an artist and being interested in understanding identity; it would be difficult for me to suppress this in my work.

NK: Poli, I want to ask you about the role of props, accoutrements and caricature in your recent work.

PP: Before I started photographing children, the people I photographed came to me with their own props. The drag queens wore their elaborate evening gowns, make-up, wigs, and false nails; the Elvis Presley fans wore 1950s rockabilly gear, the wrestlers wore elaborate capes and masks and the body builders arrived bearing their oiled and sun tanned bodies. They helped me to understand the importance of dress and appearance in constructing identity, roles and gender.

NK: Can you just discuss how you sourced these props and how a number have been modified so that they can inhabit your photographs in a meticulous way?

PP: I have sourced my props in various ways such as from Opportunity Shops, on eBay and, where I have not been able to find the clothes that I wanted, my mother has made them. More recently, I was able to source a collection of costumes that were once used by the Victorian State Opera that were being sold when a costume store was closing down. Some props have been given to me by friends, such as the unusual woven picnic basket used in *The Wanderer No. 3* (2012).

NK: Your source material has come from the theatre world and your recent work is melodramatic and staged. I would like to discuss the segue between the performative or theatrical and your photographic environments.

PP: The theatrical influence comes from my love of 19th century *tableau vivant* photography. The Victorians were great theatregoers and they brought the language of the stage and performance to

photography. Photographers such as Julia Margaret Cameron, Charles Dodgson (or Lewis Carroll) and Oscar Rejlander, known as the father of art photography, created work in the *tableau vivant* tradition. The staged photography of the 19th Century has been an inspiration to me and informed my work in recent years.

NK: Let's return to the role of the clown figure and ideas of caricature, pantomime and their evocative emotional range.

PP: Yes, we touched on that before. The clown is the definitive outsider, a figure that is either comical or grotesque, who never quite fits in, but is not without insight. In more recent times, especially in film, the clown is portrayed as an evil and sinister character having morphed from the benign loveable character that we know from literature and in the circus. Historically, the clown's painted face was designed to entertain us or to make us laugh, but we always knew that it was a cover for the sadness that lay behind the paint or mask. This archetype of the clown, a sad and lonely figure who brings joy to others, was explored in *The Joy Peddlers* (2012). I portrayed a male and female clown sitting on the beach looking incredibly sad, but wanting to bring joy to others' lives. I'm interested in the idea that happiness and sadness co-exist within us, as do youth and old age.

NK: We were talking about the dichotomies that inhabit all of us and of course Sigmund Freud wrote



from left: *Grannie*, 2003, Selenium toned silver gelatin print, 85 x 85cm. Edition of 6; *Gatsby Gal*, 2003. Selenium toned silver gelatin print, 85 x 85cm. Edition of 6. From *Phantomwise*. Courtesy the artist.



from left: *Olympia as Lewis Carroll's Xie Kitchin as Chinaman on tea boxes (on duty)*, 2002. Type C photograph, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6; *Olympia as Alice dreaming by the Riverbank*, 2003. Type C photograph, 105 x 105cm. Edition of 6. From Dreamchild. Courtesy the artist.

the key text 'Mourning and Melancholia' which relates to the title of *The Mourner* (2012) and the new body of work 'Melancholia' (2013).

PP: In hindsight, I was sensing an existential sadness about being itself. Part of the human condition is dealing with pain and suffering. Academics, theologians and religions generally have tried to explain this condition and how faith is tested during times of great suffering. I'm interested in these ideas. I think that the biggest mystery of our lives is existence and grappling with what it means to be human. We are privileged as a species in that we have the ability to think and intellectualise but we cannot explain the nature of being itself. This remains a mystery.

NK: There is enormous profundity in your work and I was wondering about how your children were once so visibly depicted yet now they are subsumed by disguise and masquerade.

PP: By suppressing the identity of the children, I felt that I could speak about childhood in an abstract way. My children became actors taking on various guises and characters and suppressed their own identity. In 'Between Worlds' (2009–12), 'The Dream Keepers' (2012) and 'The Ghillies' (2013), and to some extent in 'Phantomwise' (2002–03), the subjects are my children but because they are

disguised and cannot be named, they can speak universally about the condition of childhood and its paradoxical ability to act the role of others. By concealing their identity, I can reveal the ideas in my work without prejudice.

NK: Your current body of work 'Melancholia' (2013) looks at the clown and you mentioned that you have been staging images of Olympia in various clown costumes. Can you tell me about this new series where you return to your home-studio?

PP: I have not worked in the studio since making 'Wonderland' in 2004. I have often entertained the idea of coming back to the studio but it didn't happen until now. It has become more difficult for me to venture into the landscape. In these pictures, Olympia is dressed in clowns' costumes, wears a mask over her face and a colourful wig. She's fully masked; it's not a traditional painted expression mask on her face but rather she is wearing a rubber mask of neutral facial gesture. Despite the fact that she is fully masked you can sense her feelings as expressed through her body, like the angle of the head.

NK: Cindy Sherman always casts herself, and you cast your children. I am wondering about the role of autobiography in this suite of work.

PP: Yes. Each time you make a photograph you are revealing something about yourself. Leonardo said something similar, that every painter paints himself (or herself).

NK: Are there particular thoughts that you are articulating through this clown series 'Melancholia' (2013)?

PP: I had considered 'Melancholia' as a title for a future series even before I was sick, but it feels more necessary now. I think that there is a certain pathos in being human and the clown is symbolic of that pathos and melancholy. Clowns may appear happy on the surface, but we sense that the happiness is a façade. Even though my clowns wear a mask, the face in the mask is unpainted, as if paradoxically exposed and unmasked.



Child wearing bonnet Kathmandu, 1991. Courtesy the artist.

NK: You have exhibited in many museums around the world and in numerous curated exhibitions including Photographica Australis in 2002, curated by Alasdair Foster.

PP: That was the first international show that I participated in with images from 'Phantomwise' (2002-03). In 2005, I was selected to participate in Le Mois de la Photo, a photography festival in Montréal where I exhibited 'Dreamchild' (2003) and 'Wonderland' (2004). More recently, 'Haunted Country' was shown at Photofestival Noorderlicht (2012) in the Netherlands, and 'Between Worlds' was shown in Fotográfica Bogotá (2013).

NK: You have exhibited at the National Art Centre in Tokyo, and there has been a focus of exhibiting your work in Asia, particularly in North Asia in Taiwan, Korea and Japan.

PP: I have also shown my work at photography festivals in Europe and, as you said, in Tokyo, where in 2008 I exhibited 'Haunted Country' (2006) and 'Games of Consequence' (2008). In Korea, I participated in the Seoul International Festival, 2008, in Bratislava at the Mesiak Fotografie, 2010, and at the Athens Festival of Photography, 2010.

NK: How long does it take you to conceive and execute a body of work? What is the usual timeline?

PP: It can take up to two years to make a body of work. If there are fifteen images that involve numerous trips into the landscape it can take up to two years to execute the pictures, taking into account false starts due to inclement weather and so on. If the studio pictures involve scenic backdrops, each may take weeks to be painted.

NK: What are the main differences between working in a studio which is a well-controlled environment and the landscape which can be unruly and unpredictable? How have you transitioned between studio and landscape?

PP: In fact it's not difficult at all. I can do both very easily. Having just gone back into the studio I feel slightly nervous as I became accustomed to working with the conditions I encountered outdoors. I feel as if I have forgotten all of my studio techniques such as working within a limited space and with artificial lighting sources.

NK: Can you just elaborate on how ideas percolate and how you work through the parameters of your ideas?

PP: As an artist you are always engaged in the process of thinking about new ideas. For me, it can be as far ranging as imagining the children as animals, or children portrayed as aged people. My ideas are enriched by looking at paintings in the history of art, religion, mythology, film and literature. These different sources can leave their mark on you and lead you onto a different path. There is an element of faith and panic involved but I always have faith that something will emerge for me to work with.

NK: How do you record these ideas?

PP: I'm a poor diarist and keep the ideas in my head. This is how I have always worked. I feel terribly guilty about not leaving much in my archive by way of notes and diaries.

NK: When you are photographing in the landscape, do you sometimes adopt some of the contingencies, the mistakes or the unforeseen moments?

PP: Yes, the contingencies are what I wait for, as they guide me. As for directing, I think that the children are much better than me at this and intuitively know what they need to do. I often wait and watch the children to see how they relate to one another. It is in that process of observing that I often see the picture emerge. The children are comfortable before the camera and with that ease and fluidity a pathos emerges. It's their fluidity and elasticity that enables them to adopt personas and, like actors, create believable characters.

NK: The maternal relationship is also being enacted.

PP: It most likely is. We enjoy working together and it is a form of play between mother and child. We seem to have a lot of fun.



from left: *Miss Alternative World Ball*, 1989; *Miss Alternative World Ball*, 1993. Courtesy the artist.

NK: The background is of humour and family affair. Can you discuss how you find your locations? Do you have a particular vista or a landscape in mind and what kind of methodology is used to find these unique destinations?

PP: Over the years, I have built up a memory bank of locations. Sometimes I am introduced to new locations by friends. What I look for in a location is a flat surface like the beach or a mountaintop where I have a vista or frame to work within. Sometimes I have gone back to the same location because its possibilities are endless. Examples include Hanging Rock, the Mallee and the high country. The methodology I use to find these places is either by research, accident or word of mouth. I tend to visit a site before making pictures there, photograph it and file it for future reference. But we have also gone out on forlorn trips, not finding the right mood, and I've had to plan a trip to another region.

NK: The site is the starting point.

PP: Exactly. I have a store of locations and if I am doing a picture that requires an ocean location with rock faces or mountains, or rural cultivated land or scruffy bush, I'll know where to go and what could work in that location in terms of *mise-en-scène*.

NK: Can we discuss other influences such as cinema?

PP: Cinema and literature are a constant source of inspiration. I love early Australian films that were made in the landscape such as *Jedda*, a favourite. The story behind the making of that film is fascinating. When making the movie, the film was sent to the studio in England for processing and the rushes were then sent back to Australia. The film of the very last shoot was lost when the plane that was taking it to the UK sadly crashed. As the crew could not return to the outback, these scenes were re-shot in the Blue Mountains. Then there are films like *Rabbit Proof Fence* and Australian road movies such as the *Mad Max* films and *In Search of Anna*.

NK: *In Search of Anna* was made by Esben Storm who was Carol Jerrems' partner. She shot the publicity stills on a road trip from Melbourne to the Gold Coast and it's about a photographer.

PP: I saw this movie by chance on TV many years ago and was totally mesmerised by *In Search of Anna*. I would like to see it again.

NK: Are there other aspects to your sphere of influence?

PP: I get inspiration from observing people, how they walk, talk, behave and inhabit the world. I develop characters in my work as a playwright would develop a character. The biggest influence is life itself. ■

Natalie King is a Melbourne-based curator, writer and editor. She is co-curator, with Djon Mundine, of the 2014 TarraWarra Biennial.

Polixeni Papapetrou is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney; Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne; Jenkins Johnson Gallery, New York; L MD Galerie, Paris and ARTITLED, The Netherlands.