

Tracey Moffatt (with Gary Hillberg)

Permeating the work of Australian artist Tracey Moffatt is a fascination with the Other. Moffatt's chosen mediums—film, video, and photography—allow her to deal with issues of power and powerlessness at their site of origin. By emphasizing the construction of such representations while reworking a master narrative of power relations, Moffatt offers alternative realities, ultimately creating an arena in which futures can be resolved.¹

In her short video *Lip*, made in collaboration with Gary Hillberg, Moffatt culled clips from several films and television shows in which a black maid is working for a white woman. Moffatt carefully sequenced the clips, opening the video with the master narrative: the maid in a position of complete subservience to the boss-woman. As the story unfolds, however, the narrative shifts: the maid becomes less and less compliant until finally she holds and wields the power.

Stylization and artifice are important devices in Moffatt's work. A member of the 1980s generation of artists who distrusted the camera's claims to truth and understood all images to be systems of representation and power, Moffatt has embraced staged tableaux and kitsch in order to demonstrate the constructed and artificial nature of representation.² In both her photographic piece *Something More* (1989) and her video piece *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989), Moffatt utilized highly saturated colors to paint totally surreal, Dali-like backdrops. From these highly stylized stage sets to carefully sequenced photographs or film clips, Moffatt always informs the viewer that the image or set is a site of meaning and production, thereby ultimately questioning the social construction of representation. These constructs are rooted in Moffatt's childhood experience or memories as often as not derived from images and stories generated from the mass media, yet ultimately they are neither subjective nor autobiographical.³



Something More, 1
1989

Tracey Moffatt was born in 1960 in Brisbane, Australia to an aborigine mother.⁴ She was raised as a foster child with a white family in a working-class suburb of Brisbane.⁵ Having grown up during the 1960s and 1970s, Moffatt spent much of her time absorbing popular culture. Television, film, and magazines offered her a space in which to dream and create stories, later providing her with material for her art.

Moffatt's interest in images and story-making led her to study both film and photography in college. After graduating in 1982 from Queensland College of Art, she moved to Sydney and began making short films and videos for local aboriginal organizations and also worked on various photographic projects.⁶

Moffatt's photographic works are widely collected. Her short film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* was selected for official competition at the 1990 Cannes Film Festival. Her first feature film, *Bedevil* (1993), was selected for Uncertain Regard at the Cannes Film Festival in 1993.

Tracey Moffatt currently lives and works in Sydney.

¹ Gail Newton, "Tracey Moffatt: Cover Girl," from *Fever Pitch*, Tracey Moffatt, 1995, p. 22.

² *Ibid*, p. 14.

³ Lynn Cooke, "A Photo Filmic Odyssey," from *Free Falling*, DIA Center For the Arts, 1996, p. 31.

⁴ Gail Newton, p. 13.

⁵ Gail Newton, p. 13.

⁶ Gail Newton, p. 14.