

Melbourne OUT LOUD

A State Library Victoria Exhibition

Life through the lens of Rennie Ellis

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A celebration of Melbourne by renowned photographer, Rennie Ellis (1940–2003), highlights his love of the city and its people. From footy fans' intense passion at the MCG to Melburnians' relationship with the beach, Ellis long captured the spirit of Melbourne at moments of social and community gathering. For nearly four decades, he passionately documented Melburnians at work and play – often at their flamboyant and riotous best – from Moomba and the Melbourne Cup to campaigning for social justice and liberation.

A photographic essayist and self-described obsessive collector of images, Ellis sought out the extraordinary within the ordinary. The exhibition balances his high-energy, colour photographs with an intimate look into his early black-and-white photography. It also records the establishment of Brummels Photography Gallery, which played a pivotal role in showcasing emerging talent in the Australian photography scene during the 1970s.

State Library Victoria holds the largest public collection of Rennie Ellis photographs. It comprehensively records his diverse practice from the late 1960s to the early 2000s and his role as a committed social chronicler of his times. The images shown here feature his iconic photographs alongside a selection of those rarely seen.

Case 1 label

In addition to being an image-maker, Rennie Ellis was an obsessive note-taker. The small Spirex notebooks, usually kept in his pocket while out photographing, are filled with dates, locations, names, contact information and, sometimes, a few scribbled lines about his subject; for example, 'woman with blue dress and pink bow'. Working mainly before the ubiquity of digital photography, Rennie used the notes to later reference the who, what, where and when of his photographs.

Rennie Ellis

Spirex notebooks 1980–1990s

MS 15790

Norman annual diaries 1970s–1980s

MS 15790

Rennie Ellis photographer media passes 1990s

MS 15790

Case 2 labels

... this book is Me. It is both the outline and guts of my experience, my identity, my desires and fantasies, my loves. Somehow it makes my place in the world, my existence become real and concrete.

–Rennie Ellis

Ellis conceived the idea for 'Decade Book' in the late 1970s, when he handmade this mock-up. After receiving a grant from the Australia Council to produce the book, he failed to deliver the manuscript to the publisher. After his death, the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive honoured his wish, and in 2013, in partnership with State Library Victoria, a more extensive version of the original book was published as *Decade 1970–1980*.

Rennie Ellis

Rennie Ellis with camera 1974

Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis

Photographic Archive

Rennie Ellis

Decade Book: An Experience of the Seventies in Australia 1979

MS 15790

A prolific letter writer, Rennie Ellis was a strong advocate against censorship, and he lobbied federal ministers to change regulations that banned certain books, magazines and films. In this 1970 letter to Minister for Custom and Excise Don Chipp, Ellis congratulates him on undertaking a review into censorship. Minister Chipp successfully overturned censorship of printed publications. He sent a reply to Ellis, thanking him for being part of the community calling for a change to archaic censorship laws.

Letter from Rennie Ellis to Minister Don Chipp 1970

MS 15790

Letter from Minister Don Chipp to Rennie Ellis 1970

MS 15790

Having initially trained as an advertising copywriter, Rennie Ellis was an accomplished writer and orator. His photographs in magazines and other printed materials were often accompanied by his text. His charm and wit were regularly called upon, with invitations to give speeches at various events, from parties to school graduation ceremonies, exhibition launches to charity causes.

Through the speech notes displayed here, for the launch of *Australian Graffiti* and for Mental Health Week in 1994, we get an understanding of his interests and inspiration regarding the world of photography and of his personal observations on emotional wellbeing.

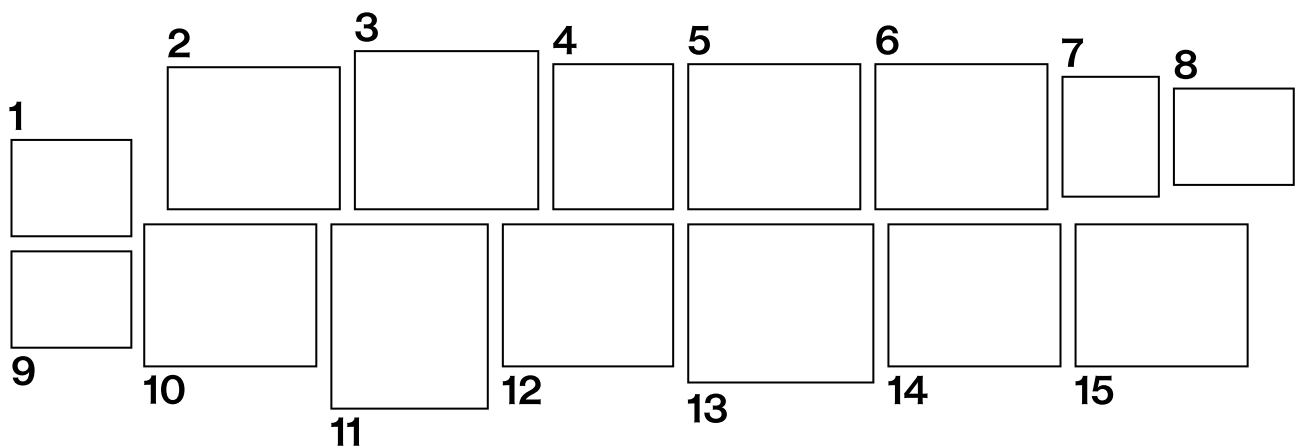
**Speech note cards for the launch of his book, *Australian Graffiti*
1975**

MS 15790

Speech notes for the launch of Mental Health Week 1994

MS 15790

Wall artworks



1 *Smash the Housing Commission, Fitzroy 1974*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.217/11

2 *Johnny Ray Fans, Melbourne 1974*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.216/14

3 *JJ McRoach Election Day, Melbourne 1977*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.216/13

4 *Labor Party Rally, Melbourne 1975*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.217/8

5 *My Son Josh Learns To Swim 1972*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.216/20

6 *Whitlam Dismissal Protest, Melbourne 1976*

Silver gelatin photograph

H2013.216/7

- 7 *Wilson Bookie, Melbourne Cup 1970***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/5
- 8 *Cars and Surfboards, Lorne 1968***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/4
- 9 *Dancing Queen, Gay Dance 1975***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/6
- 10 *Bay City Rollers Fans, Melbourne 1975***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/3
- 11 *Mick Jagger, Kooyong 1973***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/17
- 12 *3XY Rock Concert, Myer Music Bowl 1983***
Colour C type photograph
H2013.217/16
- 13 *Portugal Out Protest, Melbourne 1973***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/21
- 14 *Mr Australia, Inflation Nightclub 1980***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/19
- 15 *Ronnie Burns and Issi Dye at Melbourne Cup c1970***
Colour C type photograph
H2013.217/14

The music selection and mix accompanying the main screen videos in *Melbourne Out Loud: Life through the lens of Rennie Ellis* is a collaboration between Melbourne's DJ MzRizk and SLV Video Producer Jim Arneman.

The Church, 'Under the Milky Way'

Helen Reddy, 'Angie Baby'

The Saints, 'This Perfect Day'

Models, 'Local and/or General'

Christine Anu, 'Party'

Richard Clapton, 'Capricorn Dancer'

Australian Crawl, 'The Boys Light Up'

Sherbet, 'Summer Love'

Mel & Kim, 'Showing Out' (MzRizk mix)

Paul Kelly, 'Leaps and Bounds'

AC/DC, 'Long Way to the Top' (MzRizk mix)

Madonna, 'Vogue' (MzRizk mix)

Rolling Stones, 'Miss You' (MzRizk mix)

Big Pig, 'Justifier' (12" Lucky Break remix) (MzRizk mix)

Grace Jones, 'Pull Up to the Bumper' (Dave Lee remix)
(MzRizk mix)

INXS, 'Need You Tonight' (MzRizk mix)

Mondo Rock, 'The Modern Bop' (Jellybean remix)
(MzRizk mix)

Olivia Newton-John, 'Physical' (MzRizk mix)

Mo'ju, 'Change Has to Come' (MzRizk mix)

Goanna featuring Emma Donovan & William Barton,
'Solid Rock, Sacred Ground' (MzRizk mix)

Cinema

Rennie Ellis Photography

Rennie Ellis's earliest photographic work included documenting the diversity of Melbourne communities and culture. The film in this cinema features a selection of work that appeared in magazines, newspapers and later via Rennie's commercial photo library, *Scoopix*.

In these photo essays, Rennie captured the day-to-day activities of the Fitzroy City Council, The Flinders Lane '*Ragtrade*' strip, Italian Communities of Melbourne, images from his unpublished Decade book and a selection of graffiti photographs highlighting messages of social justice which still resonate today.

Rennie Ellis's earliest photographic work included documenting the diversity of Melbourne communities and culture. The photographs often appeared in magazines of the time and later via his Scoopix Photo Library.

In 1969, Rennie captured the day-to-day activities of the Fitzroy City Council, including youth council members at the Fitzroy Town Hall, Community food deliveries, senior citizen meetings and community gatherings.

In the 1960s, Flinders Lane was host to the bustling textile and clothing trade of Melbourne with many of the fashion and design houses located along the 'Ragtrade' strip

In the early 1970s Rennie Ellis photographed the Italian communities of Sydney and Melbourne. Many of these images later featured as part of his picture library service – Scoopix and published in newspaper articles and magazines.

Ellis conceived the idea for 'Decade Book' in the late 1970s, when he handmade this mock-up. After receiving a grant from the Australia Council to produce the book, he failed to deliver the manuscript to the publisher. After his death, the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive honoured his wish, and in 2013, in partnership with State Library Victoria, a more extensive version of the original book was published as 'Decade 1970–1980.'

Graffiti - struck me as being worth recording, if for no other reason than to document a minor but nevertheless significant insight to what a legion of Australians thought about themselves and their society.

Rennie Ellis 1975

Australian Graffiti Book by Rennie Ellis and Ian Turner 1975

Main screen

Melbourne Out Loud

Melbourne Skyline c1980

In the pub c1970

John Morrey Salon Toorak Road 1970

In a hurry Flinders Street Station 1973

Gilbert & George NGV 1973

Cosmetics salesgirl Toorak Road 1970

Bay City Roller fans 1975

River caves Luna Park 1974

Drag queens and security guard 1973

Father & son playing pool 1977

Queen Victoria Market c1976

Girl and Dog In Supermarket c1970

Windsor c1970

Windsor c1970

The gang, Windsor c1970

Victoria Market c1970

Victoria Market c1970

Waiting, Victoria Market c1970

Victoria Market 1974

Kids on bikes c1970

Mates 1974

Kids on dragsters 1980

Kids on dragsters 1980

The gang Windsor c1970

Coburg graduation ball 1977

Concertgoers Kooyong 1976

Mates Prahran 1975

Sharpies 1973

NGV water wall 1988

Street performer NGV 1984
Moat diving NGV 1977
Moat diving NGV 1977
Punk hair c1982
Hare Krishna procession 1976
Botanic Gardens c1976
Botanic Gardens c1976
Clown act c1978
Whippy van 1980s
Lamb on Brunswick shop kront c1980s
Marios sign c1980s
Anzac Day Shrine of Remembrance 1984
Anzac Day Shrine of Remembrance 1984
Jeanne Pratt and VSO guests Exhibition Gardens 1985
Firefighters Aireys Inlet 1983
Prahran Market 1986
Cambodian Buddhist ceremony 1985
Beekeeper Acland Street St Kilda c1990
Timorese disco party 1998
Moomba Princess Bridge 1979
Moomba 1977
Moomba Princess Bridge 1971
Melbourne show 1984
Moomba 1984
Moomba Alexandra Gardens 1984
Fringe Festival 1998
Greek Festival 1982
MCG 1976
MCG 1976
Ken Rosewall and Rod Laver, Kooyong Tennis Centre 1976
Fringe Festival 1999
Fringe Festival 1998
Lygon Street Festival 1984

Lygon Street Festival 1984
Sunbury Festival 1973
Calder Park concert 1974
Myer Music Bowl 1986
Concertgoers 1984
Passenger 1977
Princes Bridge 1978

Celebrities

Molly Meldrum 1984
Lillian Frank 1994
Bon Scott and Angus Young 1978
Aaron Pederson 1995
Mirka Mora
Bob Hawke c1988
Gary Foley 1986
Judith Evans and Michael Gudinski 1980s
Lindsay Kemp 1982
Jerry Hall 1996
Derryn Hinch, Jackie Weaver and John Farnham 1986
Prince Charles and Princess Diana 1988
Uncle Jack Charles at Marios 1980s
Bon Scott, Moorabbin Town Hall 1974
Madonna 1993
Grace Jones 1982
Tina Turner 1977
Chris Bailey and the Saints With Nick Cave In the Crowd at
the Tiger Room Richmond 1977
Olivia Newton John at the MCG 1986
Slim Dusty 1984
Lou Reed 1974
Venetta Fields, Lindsay Field and John Farnham 1980s
Pink Floyd 1988

Deborah Conway 1993

Bob Dylan 1978

Mick Jagger 1973

Molly Meldrum 1984

Keith Richards 1973

Kate Ceberano 1991

Protest

Vietnam war moratorium protest Melbourne 1970

Gay Pride Week march and picnic 1973

Land Rights Anti-Mining protest 1974

Womens Equality protest c1974

Contraception rally 1974

Anti Portugal Colonialism protest 1973

Anti-Apartheid protest Springbok rugby tour 1971

Anti-Nuclear protest 1984

Anti-War rally 1991

Labor rally Anti-Dismissal Anniversary 1976

Second screen

Rennie Ellis, born in 1940 in Brighton, Melbourne, was an award-winning photographer who charmed and connected with the people he photographed. Educated at Brighton Grammar School, he won a scholarship to the University of Melbourne in 1959 but dropped out to embark on a two-year journey around the world. Returning to Australia, he focused on photography and capturing the essence of Melbourne. He established Brummels Gallery of Photography in South Yarra in 1972, the country's first photography gallery. In 1975, he moved his studio to Greville Street, Prahran, where he operated until his death in 2003.

Ellis's work appears in 21 dedicated photographic books and numerous exhibitions globally. His legacy was later championed with the establishment of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive and the dedicated work of Manuela Furci and Kerry Oldfield Ellis.

The State Library Victoria houses the largest public collection of Ellis's photographs, documenting his diverse practice from the late 1960s to the early 2000s, showcasing his role as a committed social chronicler of his time

There is a kind of magic to being a photographer that opens closed doors and gives me access to people and situations that would normally be outside my experience or not available to me. And herein lies my fascination.

Sometimes my need to record the antics and idiosyncrasies of my subjects can be quite obsessive. My photography is a kind of addiction.

Rennie Ellis 1989

I think people were the great love of Rennie's life. He didn't chase gurus or seek solace in nature. He engaged totally and constantly with all those around him. He encouraged them, he nurtured them, he made them laugh and he made some of us close to him cry. He was a frustrating bugger. Always late, always somewhere other than where he was expected.

Robert Ashton 2003

He was a person of his generation who had an absolute gut feeling of where the zeitgeist was going and in that he was 10 years ahead of the art school, refined art photography, social documentary and personal documentary movements.

Gael Newton 2024

He was a humanist more than a photographer. He was interested in the essence of people.

Manuela Furci 2023

I try to use the camera as an instrument of intuition and spontaneity. Sometimes I feel my camera allows me to leave my own time and space to occupy, if only superficially, and for a short, while another time and space. For me, photography comes from that impulse that makes you want to turn round and say – ‘hey did you see that?’

Rennie Ellis 1989

Rennie was very humble in his own way. He was this obsessive collector of images of people everywhere from all forms of life. That in itself is wonderful.

Rod McNicol 2023

He works everywhere. I mean, he leaves advertising marketing behind for photojournalism. The amount of work and projects that he initiated and carried out, people he supported, things that he took an interest in, and at the same time managing to run a business...absolutely phenomenal.

Gael Newton 2024

Cinema

Brummels Photography Gallery

In 1972, Rennie Ellis established Australia's first independent photography gallery, Brummels Photography Gallery, above the Brummels restaurant at 95 Toorak Rd, South Yarra. The Gallery was critical to shaping the landscape of photography at the time and featured over 80 exhibitions of both emerging and established photographers until it closed in 1980.

The film in this cinema highlights many of the exhibitions and photographers that featured at Brummels and the commitment of Rennie Ellis to providing photographers a gallery to showcase their work. Predominantly self-funded by Ellis, the gallery featured the works of photographers such as Ponch Hawkes, David Moore, Sue Ford, Jane England, Wes Stacey and many more.

Brummels Gallery

95 Toorak Road, South Yarra

Australia's first independent photography gallery

Founded by Rennie Ellis in 1972

In 1972, Rennie Ellis established Brummels Photography Gallery above the Brummels restaurant in South Yarra. The Gallery was critical to shaping the landscape of photography at the time and featured over 80 exhibitions of both emerging and established photographers until it closed in 1980.

Rennie travelled overseas and could see how other photography galleries were operating and how important they were, he couldn't understand why photography wasn't taken seriously here.

Manuela Furci 2023

It was often a bit smoky and smelled of chicken from the downstairs kitchen, but we didn't worry too much about that. The idea of the archival never quite came into it. We just opened the windows...openings always turned into a party.

Robert Ashton 2024

Rennie didn't really have a political, ideological or conceptual agenda. He was interested in people and the images they were making at the time - it made for a very eclectic and exciting group of exhibitions. He pulled it all together with his personal charm and dedication.

Robert Ashton 2024

At the nearby Prahran college, photography was being taught by two extraordinary people in John Cato, Athol Shmith and, to a certain extent, Paul Cox. They represented a huge spectrum and transition of values as to what photography could or could not be. That teaching mix created some of the output of that generation of photographers, as did the Brummels Gallery.

Gael Newton 2024

The exhibition at Brummels made my name as a photographer, that series of work has been bought by many state galleries...it was different to what everyone else was doing.

Ponch Hawkes 2023

Pictures remind us where we've been and give other people somewhere to go.

Carol Jerrems 1970s

The Jerrems pictures are all intensely personal, and they have a youthful evocative quality. When nebulous emotions drift between nostalgia for an unknown future and a past not yet seen as lost, all the world's erotic.

Beatrice Faust 1972

The *Debris of Surprise* exhibition, it was very forward thinking, very conceptual - a sort of art happening. He got a whole lot of Polaroid cameras and film and invited all sorts of people from celebrity types, friends and photographers to come, turned on champagne, food and gave everyone a camera and said 'go for it, take pictures and stick them on the wall' and they did. It was an amazing show, and it stayed up until it started to stink and then we had to clear it.

Robert Ashton 2024

It is only in the last two or three years that we in Australia have had any chance to see exhibitions of fine photography.

Rennie Ellis 1973

It is also good to know that the Brummels Gallery exists, and we would of course be interested in receiving information concerning your program.

John Szarkowski 1973

Last night the Council passed for payment a donation of \$50 and requested that the money be exclusively used for improvement in lighting for exhibitions.

Don Mcdonald 1974

Carol Jerrems 1974 (thanks a lot mate letter)

Case 3 labels

Brummels Photography Gallery was founded in 1972 by Rennie Ellis. Located in Toorak Road, South Yarra, above the Brummels Restaurant, it was one of Australia's first private photography galleries, and quickly became a hub for emerging and established photographers.

Ellis funded the predominantly artist-run gallery, with rent paid to the restaurant landlord via commission on the sale of works. A champion of photography as a legitimate art form, Ellis constantly wrote letters in search of sponsorship and funding for the gallery and questioned the institutional lack of interest in featuring and collecting Australian photographers. Brummels eventually received funding from the Commonwealth Visual Arts Board in 1976, and from 1977 until it closed in 1980 it received sponsorship from Pentax. More than 100 Australian and international photographers exhibited work at Brummels, including Wes Stacey, Jane England, Carol Jerrems, Rod McNicol and Sue Ford.

Letter from Jennie Boddington to Rennie Ellis 1973

MS 15355

Rennie Ellis

Brummels Gallery interior

MS 15355

Rennie Ellis

Brummels Gallery South Yarra exterior 1970s

MS 15355

Unknown photographer

Rennie Ellis and Robert Ashton 1977

Uncatalogued

**Letter from Rennie Ellis to Polaroid Company seeking funding
1975**

MS15355

**Poster for the Polaroid Show Exhibition at Brummels Gallery
1976**

M15355

Ellis's larrikinism endeared him to photographer Carol Jerrems; their enduring friendship is evident in the correspondence between them. Ellis first met Jerrems when she lived in a share-house with photographer Robert Ashton. Her first exhibition at Brummels, in 1972, titled *Two Views of Erotica: Henry Talbot and Carol Jerrems*, was opened by filmmaker Paul Cox. Jerrems was a regular at Brummels' openings and later exhibited with Ellis in the exhibition *Heroes and Anti Heroes*. In this 1976 letter to Ellis, she discusses the art and craft of photography and muses on its broader appeal to the viewer.

Rennie Ellis

Carol Jerrems at Brummels Gallery 1975

Letter from Carol Jerrems to Rennie Ellis 1976

MS 15790

Case 4 labels

the exhibition made my name as a photographer, that work has been bought by many state galleries...it was different to what everyone else was doing.

–Ponch Hawkes

Melbourne photographer Ponch Hawkes held her first solo show at Brummels Photography Gallery in 1976, subsequently selling work from the series *Our Mums and Us* to the National Gallery of Australia. She was surprised when she realised this didn't happen on a regular basis. Hawkes credits Ellis with supporting her early career and his commitment to exhibiting the work of other women photographers at this time.

Rennie Ellis

**Ponch Hawkes in front of her exhibition at Brummels Gallery
1976**

Brummels Gallery of Photography

**Poster of Ponch Hawkes and Ann Noon exhibition at Brummels
Gallery 1976**

MS 15355

**Letter from Rennie Ellis to Ponch Hawkes offering her the
exhibition at Brummels Gallery 1976**

MS 15355

Brummels Gallery of Photography

Poster for the *Between Light and Dark* exhibition at Brummels Gallery 1976

MS 15355

Brummels Gallery of Photography

Poster for the *Heroes and Anti Heroes* exhibition at Brummels Gallery 1976

MS 15355

Invitation to the opening of Sarah Moon exhibition at The Pentax Brummels Gallery of Photography 1977

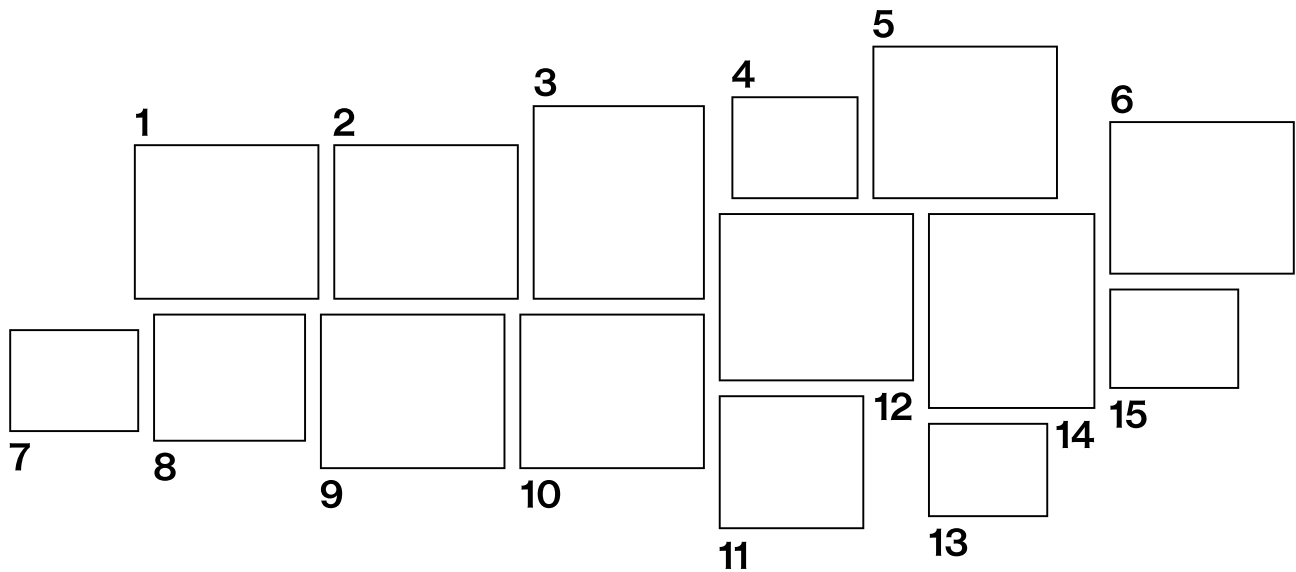
MS 15355

Brummels Gallery of Photography

Photographic proof sheet of the first exhibition, *Erotica* at Brummels Gallery 1972

MS 15355

Wall artworks



- 1 *Anzac Spirit, Melbourne* 1980**
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/2
- 2 *A Closer Look At Melbourne* 1987**
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/1
- 3 *Ron Barrassi, MCG* 1975**
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/22
- 4 *Liberal Party Faithful, Melbourne* 1980**
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/9
- 5 *Chappell Brothers, MCG* 1980**
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/4
- 6 *Calder Park Pop Festival* 1977**
Colour C type Photograph
H2013.217/13

- 7 *Toorak Ladies, 1979***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/12
- 8 *Beauty Pageant, Lorne 1977***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/3
- 9 *Sir Henry Bolte and Lady Clarke, Sunbury c.1983***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/15
- 10 *Mother and Daughter 1970***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/18
- 11 *Senior Citizens Club, Fitzroy 1969***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/1
- 12 *Dismissal, Labor Party Rally, Melbourne 1975***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/25
- 13 *Fun Run, Melbourne 1980***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/7
- 14 *Essendon Fan, Grand Final 1984***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.216/9
- 15 *Pot On, Carlton 1975***
Silver gelatin photograph
H2013.217/10

A State Library Victoria exhibition

Acknowledgements

Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive Manuela Furci and Kerry Oldfield Ellis Exhibition Contributors

Ponch Hawkes

Robert Ashton

Gael Newton AM

Rod McNicol

Curator: Angela Bailey

Video producer: Jim Arneman

DJ: MzRizk

Sound Design: Third Axis Salon

Graphic Design: U-P

Architects: Baracco + Wright Architects

Lighting Design: MEGS lighting

AV Consultant: Creative Technology Projects

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