

WISH YOU WERE HERE
Kim Lehman

15 October – 19 November 2009

NEW Gallery, University of Tasmania

If travel broadens the mind, it also focuses the emotions...

Roland Barthes wrote that, "A photograph is always invisible, it is not it that we see..." suggesting that it's the evoked memories and emotional responses that matter.¹ Kim Lehman's photo-media work recalls snapshots and postcards, presenting the human subject indistinctly as shadow, allowing us to place ourselves within his experiences. In doing so we can recall and even re-experience the thrills and adventure of iconic tourist destinations, mundane airports and lonely hotel rooms and the longing for home and family. With 12 ironically titled images he invites us to share the range of emotions that build up to and down from solitary travel.

Travel has much to recommend it; I remember quite clearly how my view of myself, and of Tasmania changed with my first overseas trip. Whilst it is the destiny of island dwellers to leave, I had little comprehension of the positive influence a broader perspective would have on my sense of Tasmania – isolated, inclement, insular and short-sighted as it seems at times, Tasmania remains one of the most wonderful places I know – different, but as good as anywhere I've been, and better than most. I actually found that concept hard to accept – I think I wanted to be able to resent, even dislike Tasmania – perhaps to make it easier to leave again, as I knew I had to when I finished art school.

Travel is also hard, especially now that we have the post 9/11 interminable waiting in line, delayed and cancelled flights and all sorts of sundry restrictions. The odd numbness of voluminous spaces, long concourses, the sameness of airport retail and gate lounges – the franchise chain stores, the fright of coming out of a daydream and forgetting which airport you're actually in. The airport is a liminal space – an in-between – a process towards change, expectations of imminent encounter with the new and the different.

Lehman's images remind me that it was travel that gave me my first real understanding of the difference between being alone and being lonely. I remember the thrill of being alone on a Cretan hillside over looking the Mediterranean – such vivid blues – and of climbing the dark winding, narrow tower stairs of Gaudi's unfinished Sacred Family church in Barcelona – and knowing that nobody I knew was aware of where I was or how I felt at those moments; moments of feeling more complete and wonderfully happy. The experience of events in other places that one would normally just read about or see on

¹ Barthes, Roland. *Camera Lucida*, New York: Hill and Wang, 1981

TV – the 1987 overnight hurricane that tore through London – uprooting most of the south east and scattering autumn leaves through my hotel room while I cowered under the covers. The progressively ashen-faced businesswoman trapped with me on the train from London to Edinburgh leaning out the door at every short station stop to call for updates on the collapsing world share market in October 1987. Dinner table stories back at home, but extraordinarily self-affirming moments within one’s life that, with so many other fears and thrills, establish that part of oneself to which non-one else is ever fully able or permitted to access.

But, as Lehman’s images also evoke memories of living out of suitcases, running low on money, feeling unwell, unrelentingly similar airports and hotel rooms, the inability to share the big and small moments with loved ones can be terribly lonely. There’s that stage of most trips where the thrill of expectation turns to actuality – to the business, socialising and discovery that can reward deeply, but that eventually gives way to an emotional gear shift as the preparations for returning home commence – forming in the back of the mind at first, then the packing, bringing the airplane clothes and kit to the surface, and the building ache to get it over with, get home and to sleep in your own bed.

Lehman sees the images in *Wish you were here*, as self-portraits, however his blurring of the human subject opens the work up allowing the viewer to consider other elements often emphasised by sharp focus. We can see familiar places, the Venetian Casino, the Louvre museum and Dallas’ famous ‘grassy knoll’, and more generic hotel and airport spaces, but also activities and items that are clearly quite personal, but equally familiar – a wash pack and wheeled suitcases, self-timed photographs and a solitary meal. The images also recall the Baudelaire’s 19th century flâneur, the gentleman strolling city streets as a detached observer of the urban condition. Lehman places his observer in the global village, allowing his viewers to become the subject – encouraging us to identify with the places, things, activities and emotions, making them self-portraits of us, just as much as of Lehman.

Noel Frankham
Head of School
Tasmanian School of Art

"How I wish, how I wish you were here." 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



Leaving on a jet plane/I'm the only person at the airport. 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



Here I am at the (not in Las Vegas) Venetian Casino. 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



I went to the Louvre, twice! Yeah, yeah! 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

80 x 120 cm



Waiting for Francis Bacon. (Sorry Samuel, I couldn't resist!) 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



Jamón Ibérico and Manchego for breakfast. 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



Guess where I am! 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

80 x 120 cm



Remember this beach? 2009
Pigment print on cotton paper
120 x 80 cm



A sinister man appears on the Grassy Knoll! 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

80 x 120 cm



Finally found that dumpling restaurant... 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



I have no idea why I took this, but there's the present you gave me. 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

120 x 80 cm



I'm on my way home. 2009

Pigment print on cotton paper

80 x 120 cm



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Exhibition: 15 October – 19 November 2009

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