



**NATIONAL
PORTRAIT
GALLERY**

**IMAGING IDENTITY:
MEDIA, MEMORY AND VISIONS OF HUMANITY IN THE DIGITAL PRESENT**

A symposium hosted by the National Portrait Gallery and the Humanities Research Centre, RSHA, Australian National University. To be held at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra 15-17 July 2010.

In conjunction with the exhibition 'Present Tense' at the National Portrait Gallery and the 2010 Biennale of Sydney, 'The Beauty of Distance: Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age'

Keynote speakers

WJT Mitchell, Gaylord Donnelley Distinguished Service Professor of English and Art History, University of Chicago

David Elliott, Independent curator and Artistic Director of the 2010 Biennale of Sydney

David Marr, Journalist, author and commentator

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Understandings of self and other occur universally through images. Traversing history and cultures, the production, presentation and apprehension of images has been essential to how we come to know ourselves and make sense of our relations with others. Images reflect different conceptions of what it is to be human and reveal continuities and discontinuities over time. At a moment of deep global uncertainty, images from the past and present provide a vital and potent medium for envisaging our collective future.

This symposium is concerned with the many ways in which humanity images identity. Within this broad frame lies a more particular interest, to understand what images of personhood are and how particular kinds of images operate in diverse social contexts. Can it be said that certain image making practices are associated with particular ways of being human? Do imaging media have different effects cross-culturally? What kinds of pictures of self and other emerge from such understandings of images? Under what conditions can images produce or encourage empathy?

In posing these questions we invoke debates about the efficacy, impact and agency of images. How do images mean? What does an image carry with it? In what ways do context and temporality influence our regard of images?

The digital age presents both new possibilities and new challenges to the way we image identity, enabling new kinds of multi-media production and distribution, providing unprecedented access to visual information, but also carrying with it what might be perceived as a new cultural attitude to images, in which the properties of material form and particularities of context can be overlooked.

This symposium seeks to explore this potent and complex set of issues around the relationship between persons and images in the present. We particularly welcome proposals that respond to the theme Imaging Identity in the following areas:

- The possibilities of **portraiture**: what can a portrait reveal about past and present understandings of the human condition?
- Relations between **images and persons**: how are these understood at the interface between the humanities, social and natural sciences?
- **Persons and place**: how is this relationship figured visually across and within cultures, and in the precariousness of the present?
- **Empathy and conflict**: how do images function as sites of contestation or reciprocal understanding between persons?
- **Art museums and their audiences**: how are these relations being reconfigured in the digital era?
- **Seeing and temporality**: does digital mediation influence the way we regard other kinds of images?
- If there is such a thing as an image for our times what might it look like?

Conveners:

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Please send a 2-300 word abstract plus a 100 word biographical statement to melinda.hinkson@anu.edu.au by Friday 5th February 2010.