



Judy Anderson

# Images

## of life and death

**G**old Coast artist Mari Hirata has teamed up with fellow Griffith University arts graduates Sarah-Mace Dennis and Kalyi Amoto for *Currency*, a photographic exhibition at Metro Arts in Brisbane.

Exploring the age-old issue of human mortality, the exhibition raises more questions than answers. Amoto, also the exhibition's curator says the title *Currency* was chosen not for its association with money, but for the flowing images it conjures; a current being a body of water or air moving in a certain direction, or an ordered movement of electrically charged particles.

The recent death of Amoto's mother became the catalyst for *Passing*, a sequence of images depicting the hospital bed in which her mum died. The work documents the transition from one dimension to another, emphasising the infinite, rather than the physical finality of death.

"Last year I was at my mother's bedside when she passed away. I experienced and actually saw a lot of energy movement in the last hour of her passing, which I have attempted to reproduce in the series of images.

"Many people would say I was hallucinating or imagining something that was not real, yet I believe it was as real as any material object, maybe even more so," she says.

Her choice of photography as a medium allows her to construct the image as if it really happened and, according to the artist, it did.

Similarly, Sarah-Mace Dennis challenges the concept of time as being fixed or finite.

She manipulates her images, in the manner of traditional spectral photography (fake photos of ghosts or disturbing phenomenon), to show the past and present in one image.

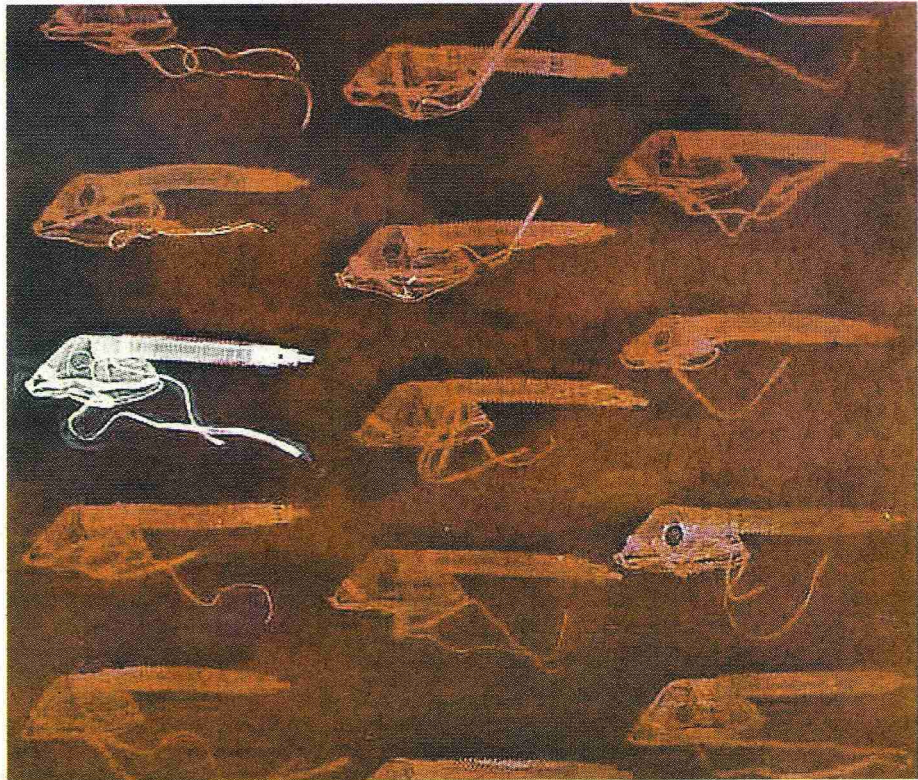
Often using multiple images of herself in her work, Dennis creates a narrative of overlapping parallel lives, moments occurring simultaneously, suggesting that reality is more complex and multi-layered than we might think.

Her *Houdini* series uses images of cells, landscapes and her own falling figure, fuelled by a desire to photograph empty rooms and spaces.

"Sometimes the energy that seems to circulate in empty spaces carries a presence that's beyond comprehension," she says.

"The series began with the shot of a cell at Fort Lytton in Brisbane. For me the cell has been about containment, confinement, of going nowhere, but being at Fort Lytton made me realise that it's also about hiding."

The haunting landscape shot was taken of the willow trees and horizon on a property at Glenn Innes.



**In *Beginnings 3*, Mari Hirata (pictured left with Kalyi Amoto and Sarah-Mace Dennis) links birth and death through images of oxygen masks. Main photograph by Wayne Jones**

For the figure shots, Dennis uses a self-timer so she can pose for them herself. She works in a dark room in her partner's house, built in the 1800s at Hill End, near Bathurst.

"Hill End is known for ghosts," she says, "and I suppose we went there looking for them. To some people there, ghosts really aren't that out of the ordinary.

"I've overheard conversations in the pub about how annoying the 'spooks' in their houses are.

"I like exploring the idea that time is parallel rather than linear," Dennis says.

"So perhaps there aren't really ghosts just people still alive in other rooms, in other pieces of time."

Hirata's *Beginnings* series explores the relationship between birth and death.

"In my work, the very first breath of oxygen by a newborn baby connects with the last for a life that has arrived at the end of its path. It is speaking of life and death in the same breath."

Her series of photograms are hand developed in the darkroom.

"I place the oxygen masks I've collected onto photosensitive paper, arranging them as if they are swimming through some sort of an infinite, unknown space.

"Once the objects are in place, the paper is exposed to a flash of light and the area that the light has touched turns black. Any area the light hasn't exposed remains white. The oxygen masks were transparent plastic, so all the delicate features of the masks are imprinted onto the paper."

The effect resembles the illusion of single-cell organisms as if seen through a microscope, with the image of the original oxygen mask being barely recognisable.

■ *Currency* continues at Metro Arts, Main Gallery, 109 Edward Street, Brisbane, until October 8, Monday to Friday, 10am-4.30pm.

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