

Streets of Sydney

Frank Plicka

Frank Plicka is one of a legion of photographers who have depicted the streets and people of Sydney.

Most of the earliest images were portraits of the wealthy and powerful, or images celebrating their property, leisure and business interests. These through the lenses of commissioned photographers skilled in the arcane science that was early photography.

Subject choices expanded when dry plate processes freed late nineteenth century photographers—professional and amateur—to walk the streets. And so the tradition of street photography began.

Photographers began to tell stories of the rich and the poor, the beautiful and the grotesque, sometimes for payment but more often in the name of truth and a visual aesthetic.

Australia has a significant street photography tradition. In the case of Sydney, also embracing its beaches. Max Dupain's iconic *Sunbaker* and other beach images assert a proud, heroic vision of Australia. David Moore, whose long and influential career began in Dupain's studio, photographed migrants and working class people, including workers involved in some of Sydney's great building projects. Jon Lewis (a 2009 PhotoAccess artist in residence) produced playful and sometimes self-mocking images of people on Bondi beach in the mid 1980s.

Unlike the higher profile photographers, Frank Plicka is a quiet observer. After 31 years in Australia, Plicka has had only a small number of exhibitions and very little financial reward for his work. But he is a patient, honest and empathetic observer of the human condition and a skilful darkroom printer.

Andrew Gash summed Frank Plicka up in his Foreword to *Streets of Sydney* (Brandl & Schlesinger, Sydney, 2001):

Frank's work is even more remarkable in that it is not the career work of a professional photographer with all the benefits that this brings, but it is the work of one who is totally committed to his craft. Frank was often working two jobs, with limited time for his photography and has never been paid to take a photo. His passion for photography is the purest of passions.

Frank Plicka is represented in the collections of the State Library of NSW and the Museum of Sydney.

We are very pleased to present Frank Plicker's fine black and white work in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at the Manuka Arts Centre. Gilbert Herrada's assistance has been invaluable.

David Chalker

Supported by the ACT and Commonwealth Governments



Young magician - Circular Quay



Beach - Sydney



Shoe shine - Victoria House



Artist statement

In 2004 my close friend and digital mentor, photographer Gilbert Herrada persuaded me to start with digital photography. He gave me countless advice. I am now able to achieve satisfactory printing. However my camera and film processing did not change.

Frank Plicka

This essay is the product of many years of friendship and conversations with Czech photographer Frank Plicka.

At about fourteen Frank was being initiated in photography at a friend's family, the home of a photographer. For his keen interest in the darkroom he was rewarded with an old battered bellows camera, which was replaced later by Russian Zorki and Kiev. Frank printed with a Czech Opemus enlarger. He was early on involved in all sorts of photography, but mostly sports for which he used the German Practina.

In 1952 he acquired a Leica B2 and shot the two pictures: *The beggar with the Policeman* and the *Blind couple in the train* (see *Australian Photography magazine*, April 2008, pages: 38, 39, Yaffa Publishing Group Pty. Ltd., Sydney). It was the beginning of the shift towards street photography.

Frank Plicka was born in former Czechoslovakia, where he took a degree and graduated as a pedagogue at Charles University in Prague. With the study of psychology he learned to know people, to anticipate their behaviour, and to shoot from an unbelievable close distance. Frank is very careful not to disturb or compromise a situation.

1968 was the year Frank immigrated to Australia. It took him 35 years to accumulate material for the making of three books. However because of a financial crisis only one has to date been published. With the exception of six exhibitions (including the present show), Frank avoids publicity and is fully dedicated to his work.

The equipment used in Australia was Leica M3 with 50mm Elmar; 35 mm Sumicron. He enlarged the images on an Agfa varioscope and Leica Focomat 35. His film of choice was Kodak Tri X developed in Rodinal diluted 1:25 or 1:50.

Gilbert Herrada
August 2009



Great joy – Art Gallery of New South Wales



Tired – Art Gallery of New South Wales

Exhibitions

- 2009 *Streets of Sydney*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY, PhotoAccess, Canberra
- 2006 *Streets of Sydney*, Cross Bay Gallery, Sydney
- 2005 *Streets of Sydney*, Randwick Public Library, Sydney
- 2004 *Surf Impressionism*, Bondi Junction Public Library
- 2003 *Streets of Sydney*, Bondi Junction Public Library
- 2002 *Surf Impressionism*, Thomas Johanes Gallery, Sydney
- 2001 *Streets of Sydney*, Thomas Johanes Gallery, Sydney



City Tattersall's Club - Sydney



Espresso bar - Newtown



Family – Old Sydney



Mall off Pitt Street

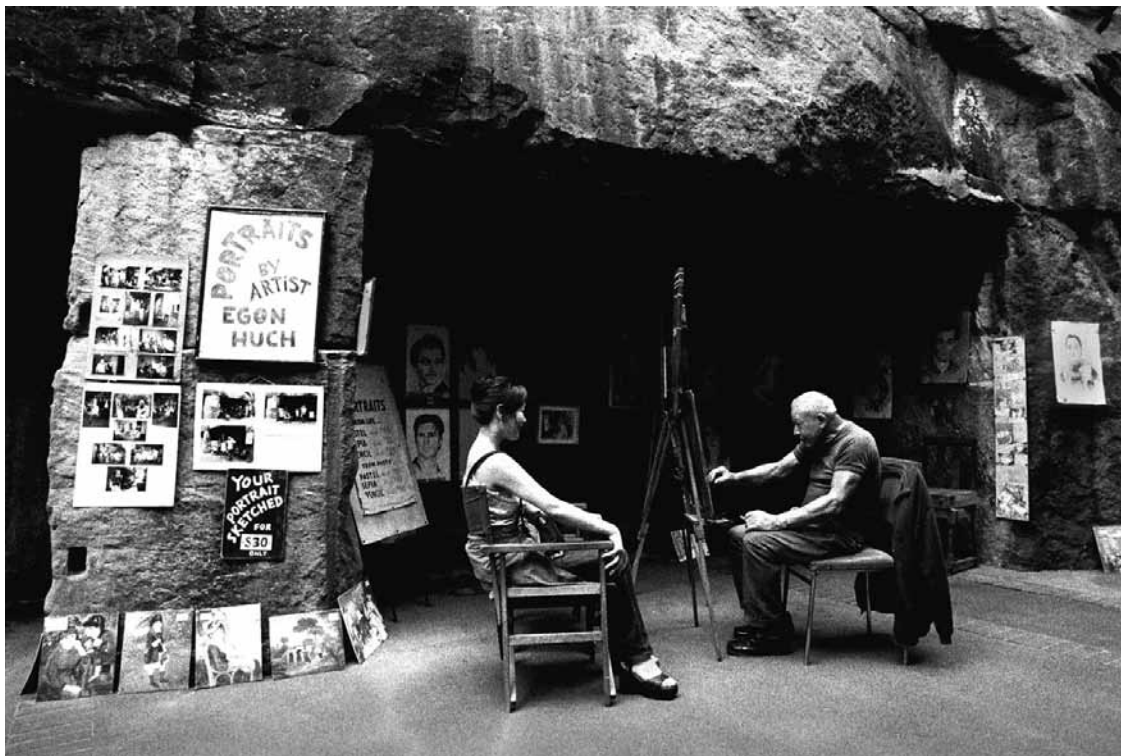


Long night – Sydney tavern

List of works

All works are framed black and white silver gelatin prints on resin coated paper, most selenium toned (some with a faint sepia toning). Image size: 215 x 155 mm; 420 x 320 mm overall
\$320 framed as shown (including a copy of *Streets of Sydney*; copies available separately for \$60)

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|----|--|----|--|
| 1 | Australia Square - cafeteria, 1996 | 20 | Young magician - Circular Quay, 1971 |
| 2 | Long night – Sydney tavern, 1994 | 21 | Circular Quay, 2001 |
| 3 | Hot evening – Paddington, 1992 | 22 | Lady and clown - Sydney, 1983 |
| 4 | Cafe in Sydney, 1969 | 23 | Shoe shine - Victoria House, 1991 |
| 5 | In the Pub - Newtown, 1996 | 24 | In the Rocks - Sydney, 1994 |
| 6 | Paddington, 1997 | 25 | Vanishing old street - Woolloomooloo, 1968 |
| 7 | Pub - Newtown, 1971 | 26 | Family - Old Sydney, 1968 |
| 8 | Strictly business, 1996 | 27 | Central Railway Station - Sydney, 1968 |
| 9 | Mall off Pitt Street, 1993 | 28 | ANZAC parade - Sydney, 1998 |
| 10 | Café - Newtown, 1987 | 29 | City Tattersalls Club - Sydney, 1996 |
| 11 | Australia Square, 1984 | 30 | In the Rocks - 'Egon Huch', 1992 |
| 12 | McDonald, Martin Place | 31 | In the train, Redfern line, 1992 |
| 13 | Pub, 'Cooper Bar Saloon' - Newtown, 1996 | 32 | Pitt Street, 1983 |
| 14 | Great joy - Art Gallery of New South Wales | 33 | 'Rakhee' people - Sydney foreshore, 1994 |
| 15 | Art Gallery of New South Wales 2 | 34 | Wedding - Bronte, 1995 |
| 16 | Tired - Art Gallery of New South Wales | 35 | Beach - Sydney, 1976 |
| 17 | Art Gallery of New South Wales 3 | 36 | Dangerous fun - Bondi, 1993 |
| 18 | Face of the actor, 1994 | 37 | Nude beach - Darwin, 1982 |
| 19 | Espresso bar - Newtown, 2001 | | |



In the Rocks - 'Egon Huch'