

Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007

Mark Arundel



Mark Arundel's *Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007* is an unusual exhibition for PhotoAccess. And not just because of its very long title.

Our exhibitions are seldom linked to highly visible moments in the nation's history. The 2007 Federal Election ended the Howard years and resulted in the election of Labor to government after nearly twelve years in Opposition. Election day and the reporting of results will be remembered by most Australians because of the change of government, because of their mandatory involvement in the vote and the media's saturation coverage. Kevin '07, Labor leader Kevin Rudd, graciously accepted the will of the people and John Howard, also graciously, walked away from politics.

Mark Arundel has chosen to give us a particular perspective on the 2007 Federal Election—not the politics but the mechanism and people that delivered the poll result to the nation.

You didn't have to be in the National Tally Room on 24 November 2007 to know that the noise and goings on of the huge crowd on the Tally Room floor was annoying the hell out of ABC TV's Kerry O'Brien and Anthony Green. If you were in the Tally Room you will have picked up on the wave of excitement that accompanied the unfolding events. You may have seen the long queues including, surprisingly, families and visitors to Australia, all waiting their chance to enter the Tally Room to experience the vibe and the eventual election result.

In creating the images for *Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007* Mark Arundel has gone beyond the television moments to represent the whole story of the National Tally Room with:

... 3689 single framed digital photographs and a time-lapse video of the entire process of building and running the NTR between 12 November and 28 November 2007. As well as single framed photographs I also produced a set of 180-degree panoramas of the build taken from three fixed locations in the NTR, three times a day. I have been told by staff from the AEC that my collection is the first ever continuous photographic record of the build from start to finish.

Arundel's technical accomplishment is staggering. We only see a fraction of the result in this exhibition, but what he has given us is a powerful and insightful narrative that humanises and makes real the culmination of an election, a narrative that argues a case for retaining the National Tally Room as a critical institution at the heart of our democracy.

PhotoAccess is very pleased to present Mark Arundel's *Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007* in the HUW DAVIES GALLERY at the Manuka Arts Centre.

David Chalker

Artist's statement

In March 2007 as we were driving back to Canberra from a film shoot in Sydney we tuned into ABC radio and found ourselves listening to a discussion regarding the future of the National Tally Room (NTR). The story and resulting discussion had been prompted by the Australian Electoral Commissioner's proposal to abolish the NTR in favour of publishing the federal election results on the Internet.

The NTR is one of the largest single media events held in Australia, and it would appear, uniquely Australian. Built in the Budawang Building at the Canberra Showground, the NTR has been a fixture of Australian federal elections for over 40 years.

At the 1998 election, as well as publishing the count on the board at the NTR, the AEC introduced the Virtual Tally Room and published the continuous count of votes on the Internet. The Virtual Tally Room became Australia's biggest ever live Internet event.

In reality the tally board now only serves as a backdrop for television, and the room provides the buzz and atmospherics for both television and radio election coverage.

With the cost of storing, building and running the NTR exceeding \$1.06m in 2007, as well as the costs of the TV and radio stations building temporary studios, it is easy to understand why its future was being discussed.

Since the early 1970s I have lived in or within a 100km radius of Canberra and during all these years I never visited the National Tally Room on election night. It was one of those planned experiences, but one which there was always no rush to do. So as we drove back into Canberra from Sydney we undertook to definitely visit the NTR on election night in 2007.

Through the middle of 2007 as the Federal election loomed closer I began to become more inquisitive about the logistics of building and running the NTR. What was involved and how did the AEC build the board and temporary television studios in only two weeks, and then dismantle it all in less than three days?

I began to search for information and, finding very little, I began to ask if anyone had photographed the entire process of building, running and then dismantling the NTR. Although I could find some photographic records there did not appear to be a continuous record from start to finish. So I decided to see if I could get permission to take the task on as a private project. In September the AEC agreed to give me access to the site, so from that point on it was just a matter of waiting for the election to be called. The ABC also gave permission to follow their studio build.

At the time I had no idea what I would come away with. But the willingness of staff at the AEC, ABC and Spotless, the firm constructing the Tally Room, to help and facilitate my access made me believe that the result was going to be interesting. No one knocked back my requests for access, information or assistance.

The result was 3689 single framed digital photographs and a time-lapse video of the entire process of building and running the NTR between 12 November and 28 November 2007. As well as single framed photographs I also produced a set of 180-degree panoramas of the build taken from three fixed locations in the NTR, three times a day. I have been told by staff from the AEC that my collection is the first ever continuous photographic record of the build from start to finish.

This exhibition is a fraction of the collection and its purpose is to give a small indication of what occurs at the NTR during its 14 day existence. Rather than a display of fine art it is a photographic record of what occurred.

The future of the NTR is unclear, with some arguing for its abolition on cost reasons alone, whilst others want to 'update' the manual tally board with an electronic one.

Although the board has outlived its original purposes, the room itself remains symbolic of the democratic process in this country. Throughout the world Australia is renowned for its open and efficient election process and representatives from many countries visit to observe and learn from what we do. The NTR forms an important part of this transparent process. Unlike other democratic countries, our electoral system has never come under criticism for being corrupt and there has never been any hint of scandal in determining the outcome.

It is my opinion that if the manual board is replaced with an electronic board the high costs involved in producing an electronic system that could not possibly fail on the night will see the abolition of the NTR. Using such simple technologies as string, bulldog clips and numbered cards to get the results on public display, the current board has proven to be fail-safe and is an important link to our past. I hope the 2007 NTR was not the last as was originally suggested, even though that was what sent me down this investigative path.

Thank you to PhotoAccess for allowing me to show this work.

Mark Arundel

November 2008

Biography

Mark Arundel is based in Canberra and along with his wife owns and runs visual communications company Multilocus Interactive Pty Ltd (www.multilocus.com.au) (www.photosbymultilocus.com.au). For the past 10 years Mark has provided photography services to Multilocus' clients. This is his first major privately funded project and exhibition. Mark is also working on a photographic narrative about the 2007 National Tally Room that he plans to self publish.

Solo Exhibitions

2008 *Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007*, HUW DAVIES GALLERY at PhotoAccess, Manuka Arts Centre



Capturing The Moment For Perhaps The Last Time—The National Tally Room 2007

List of works

1	<i>8.17 am 13 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
2	<i>8.32 am 13 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
3	<i>9.54 am 14 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
4	<i>6.05 pm 15 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
5	<i>8.55 am 16 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
6	<i>1.28 pm 17 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
7	<i>2.06 pm 18 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
8	<i>9.14 am 19 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
9	<i>2.08 pm 20 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
10	<i>5.47 pm 20 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
11	<i>1.32 pm 21 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
12	<i>2.27 pm 22 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
13	<i>6.26 pm 22 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
14	<i>6.39 pm 22 November 2007</i>	368 x 295 mm
15	<i>6.45 pm 22 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
16	<i>10.19 am 23 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
17	<i>3.20 pm 23 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
18	<i>3.31 pm 23 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
19	<i>6.55 pm 23 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
20	<i>7.48 pm 23 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
21	<i>2.22 pm 24 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
22	<i>6.19 pm 24 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
23	<i>7.04 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
24	<i>8.16 pm 24 November 2007</i>	790 x 250 mm
25	<i>8.59 pm 24 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
26	<i>9.01 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
27	<i>9.33 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
28	<i>9.35 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
29	<i>10.46 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
30	<i>11.03 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
31	<i>11.04 pm 24 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
32	<i>11.40 pm 24 November 2007</i>	300 x 450 mm
33	<i>10.44 am 25 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
34	<i>1.05 pm 25 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
35	<i>7.54 am 26 November 2007</i>	450 x 300 mm
36	Timeline: 218 selected time sequenced images	30 900 x 170 mm
37	DVD: One image each minute from 12 to 27 November, compressed to 15 minutes	15 minutes
38	Slideshow: 444 selected images taken over the period 12 to 28 November	22 minutes

Individual images are available as unframed inkjet prints on Hahnemuhle Photo Rag 308 paper.
Three sizes: 450 x 300 mm (\$250); 360 x 240 mm (\$170); 240 x 160 mm (\$90)