



Catherine Bell

Mum's the Word

opening

thursday november 24th, 6pm - 8pm

gallery hours

november 25 – december 17, 2011

gallery hours

wednesday to saturday, 1 – 5pm

Mum's the Word is the latest exhibition from Melbourne-based artist Catherine Bell. Presented by Sutton Projects, Bell builds on her longstanding interest in motherhood, surrogacy and deviant maternity, and also presents new ideas relating to the performative nature of public space.

Drawing upon research undertaken by Bell during a recent Australia Council studio residency in New York, *Mum's the Word* utilises photos of black nannies caring for white babies in Manhattan. Taken surreptitiously by Bell, these images extend her interest in the artist as ethnographer and social commentator. As Bell describes: 'I worked as a nanny in London for three years and was surprised at the number of African American nannies I witnessed during my time in New York. Child care is often a thankless and unrecognised task and I felt compelled to illuminate the anonymity of the nanny from invisible to visible.'¹

Her covert snap shots bring to the fore questions of personal privacy; especially given the unauthorized presence of children in Bell's documentation - the source of much controversy in recent times. It is also a satirical twist on the paparazzi, eager to capture famous mothers with their newborns; these images are more concerned with the anonymity of the nannies, than the notoriety of the Park Avenue offspring. Meanwhile monthly photo shots of famous actresses, and their newly adopted African babies, are being published on the front cover of *Who* magazine. Bell is interested in these juxtapositions of social reality and popular culture and how the street becomes a site for exposing and undermining cultural and social relations.

Bell graduated with both a BA in art history and a Bachelor of Visual Arts (sculpture) in Queensland before completing a PhD at Monash University in 2008, when she was awarded the Mollie Holman Doctoral Medal for the best doctoral thesis in the Faculty of Art and Design.

Alongside regular exhibitions at Sutton Gallery since 1994, Bell has presented many solo exhibitions including *Waste not Want not*, Death be Kind, Melbourne 2011; *Love and Other Bruises*, Monash Faculty Gallery, Melbourne 2007; and *Felt is the Past Tense of Feel*, Galapagos Art Space, New York, USA 2007. Bell is currently exhibiting as part of *Selectively Revealed*, a 2011-12 international group exhibition presented by Experimenta Media Arts and Asialink, touring to Korea, Jakarta, Taiwan and Thailand. Other recent group shows include *What's Yours is Mine*, curated by Catherine Bell and Jan Duffy, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne 2011; *The Animal Gaze*, Sheffield Institute of Arts Gallery, Sheffield, UK 2011; *International Seminar: Art and Nature*, Matilha Cultural, Sao Paulo, Brazil 2011; *Becoming Animal – Becoming Human*, NGBK, Berlin, Germany 2009; and *True crime – murder and misdemeanour in Australian art*, Geelong Gallery, Geelong, Victoria 2008. She has also participated in significant Australian exhibitions including *Truth Universally Acknowledged*, Australian Centre of Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2005; *The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, 1996; *Small Monuments*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 1995; and *Perspecta*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1993.

Bell's work is held in many public collections including National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane.

¹ Artist's statement in *What's Yours is Mine*, exhibition catalogue, Linden Contemporary Centre for the Arts, p.4.