

... media release ...



Above: *Buffalo Boy*, 2006 (from *Darwin Lads*)
Right: *Stefan 17*, 2009 (from *On the Verge 2*)



On Mars all men shall be beautiful ...

Gary Lee: *Men at Ease*, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane

Photographer Gary Lee's latest solo exhibition, *Men at Ease*, reveals a longstanding subversive approach to male portraiture. In contrast to the stereotype which regards men as 'martians' – red-blooded, aggressive and emotionally inept – Lee's portraits present masculinity as a state of both becoming and being which centres on individuality and diversity.

The notion of beauty is also central to Lee's practice. This notion, in Lee's hands, once again skirts stereotypes:

My photography is a way to record the beauty of ordinary men. This beauty is not just a matter of youth or maturity. It's partly about an attitude, a look. The men might exude innocence as much as sexuality. Often it's a kind of beauty that they aren't even aware of – and that attracts me.
(Artist statement, 2010)

Men at Ease, curated by Maurice O'Riordan for Woolloongabba Art Gallery and part of the Queensland Festival of Photography, marks a significant mini-retrospective of Lee's photography, drawing on 4 photographic series which collectively date from 1993 to 2010. O'Riordan elaborates:

The exhibition also conveys the span of Lee's subjects: from the largely street photographic impulse of *Nice Coloured Boys* to the more deliberately constructed *Skin* series (also from India and Nepal) with Lee's play on ethnic camouflage in front of the lens; and closer to home with diverse Aboriginal male beauty and tropical splendour inspiring *Darwin Lads*, and his recent attention to white boys and youth with *On the Verge 2*.
(*Men at Ease* exhibition catalogue)

As an Aboriginal man travelling through India in the 1970s, Lee was struck by the look of Indian men resembling men from his own and other Aboriginal families in his hometown Darwin. Two decades-plus later he returned to India (and Nepal and Bangladesh) and began work on *Nice Coloured Boys*, an ongoing series which now amounts to over 1000 portraits and through which Lee aims to challenge perceptions about Aboriginal/coloured/'third world' masculinities.

Lee's 'attention to white boys and youth' in his series *On the Verge 2* is a fresh departure, and only half the story. 8 of the 16 images from this series relate to Indian boys (taken during Lee's recent visit to Varanasi) who are also 'on the verge', belonging to that transient, partly vulnerable and often underappreciated state of emerging into young manhood.

Details: *Men at Ease*, 23 April to 22 May, Woolloongabba Art Gallery, Brisbane, www.wag.com.au wed to sat, 11-6pm;
www.festivalofphotography.com.au

Exhibition opening, Friday, 23 April, 6:30 to 9:30pm

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