



Story  
PIPPA MOTT

Photography  
MICK RICHARDS

# Kim Guthrie

## No Filter

IN LIFE AND ART, KIM GUTHRIE ISN'T AFRAID TO TELL IT LIKE IT IS. INFUSED WITH WIT, WORDPLAY AND LYNCHIAN ABSURDITY, HIS PHOTOGRAPHS CAPTURE THE EVERYDAY AND THE ORDINARY WITH COMPULSIVE FOCUS. GUTHRIE'S SEEMINGLY CASUAL COMPOSITIONS ARE SATURATED WITH INFLUENCES FROM ART HISTORY, LITERATURE AND POPULAR CULTURE, AND MANAGE TO CONSISTENTLY STRIKE A BALANCE BETWEEN TAKING THE PISS AND REVELLING IN MOMENTS OF PROFOUND HUMANITY.

***Y***ou studied a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the VCA (Victorian College of the Arts) in 1981, majoring in painting. Indeed, many of your photographs, such as those in your 'Colour Field' (2013) series, possess a painterly character. What catalysed your transition into photography, and what did you carry over from your painting practice?

I've had an interest in photography for a very long time. As an artist it is a prerequisite to document your work – many artists from other disciplines know their way around a camera, for economic and practical reasons. Some are seduced by it – I'm one of those. I won my first film camera in a sandcastle building competition one summer, as a kid. I bought my first 35mm SLR film camera in 1976, for a photography subject at Frankston Technical College. In 2003 I bought a digital SLR when my wife and I made an art crawl of Western Europe. The immediacy grabbed me and I was hooked completely.

Photography suits my obsessive nature and fascination with detail. I'm tuned in to seeing with 'viewfinder eyes' when out in the world, fully engaged, acutely aware of my surroundings. You have to be to do this work. It's really not that different to painting. Instead of working with paint, I'm working with light. To the untrained eye, my photographs might look like snapshots but they are anything but. They are consciously composed in-camera, then tidied up in post-production.

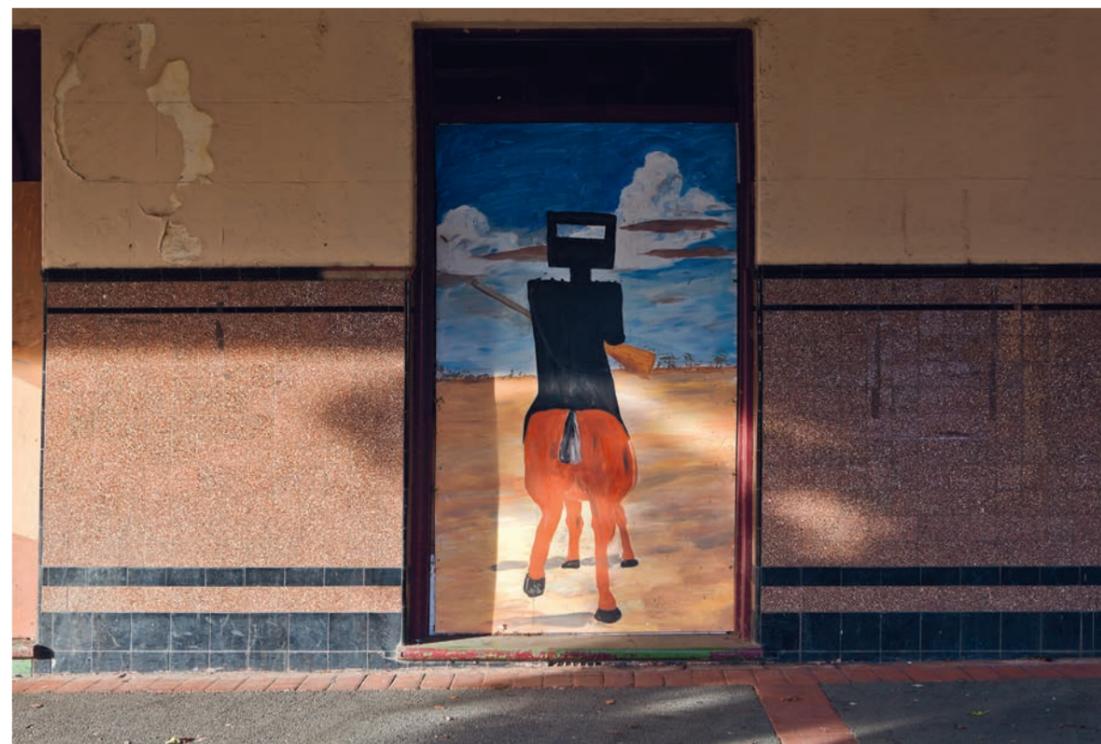
The 'Colour Field' series is a nod to one of my favourite developments in abstract painting. The inaugural exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968, 'The Field', had a huge bearing on my psyche, having attended art school in that building. The exhibition was a landmark coming of age in Australian art. My 'Colour Field' series is a photographic reference to this, extracted from the built environment. One of my favourite photos in this series is Purple piece (2013) – a clumsy attempt at colour matching wall paint to cover up graffiti. It's a really beautiful accidental artwork. Elaborate New York City graffiti artworks are known as 'pieces' and a 'purple patch' is a run of success or good luck. It's about seeing the funny side of council regulations and their regular failure.



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**You tend towards depictions of Australian suburbia and country towns, championing these areas as places with heart and history.** I'm looking for timelessness. Location is irrelevant. Authenticity in people and places – that's what I'm championing. I want to be open and recognise the beauty in ordinariness. I think all good art has the author present. I shoot wherever I find myself, the subject presents itself to me and I have to be ready to accept it.

**There is a history of photographers since the Great Depression, such as Walker Evans, who sought out marginalised members of the community to capture as representative of the time. How do you choose your subjects and what are you trying to achieve by documenting them?**

Artists are mostly marginalised, not necessarily by choice. I've always enjoyed living on the fringes of mainstream society. It's where the action is and where discoveries are made. I gravitate towards outsiders because I've always felt like I don't fit in either. It's my belief that everyone is important and I hope that the people I photograph feel valued.

I want to reconfigure observed encountered reality and the everyday into a high art context – not as documentary. There

has to be a sense of recognition; a look, a feeling, or an attitude that triggers my interest. A lifetime immersed in art informs everything I do and my creative decision-making is rapid-fire and intuitive. It's quite an electric sensation when you are in the zone.

**Based on your encyclopaedic documentation of Australia, how would you sum up the 'Australian character'?**

My documentation is far from encyclopaedic; it's my experience only; it's limited. I'm a bowerbird, a collector, observing my environment. I explore ubiquity: AC/DC paraphernalia; myth; Ned Kelly 'such is life' tropes and other ephemera, hoping something deeper is revealed by providing these Aussie armatures to collate groups of images. I'm exploring Australianness but it's really about me, a self-portrait if only by virtue of what I choose to photograph. On an individual level, I usually find the people I approach to be accommodating. People tell me this is a result of my personality, my openness. I don't know, it's hard to tell from within. But I love my interactions and it's part of the reason I do what I do. I'm a talker.

01 Guy Retif, 2014, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)

02 Dominic Shinia & Dwayne, 2014, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)

03 Commercial Hotel, Yass, 2017, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)



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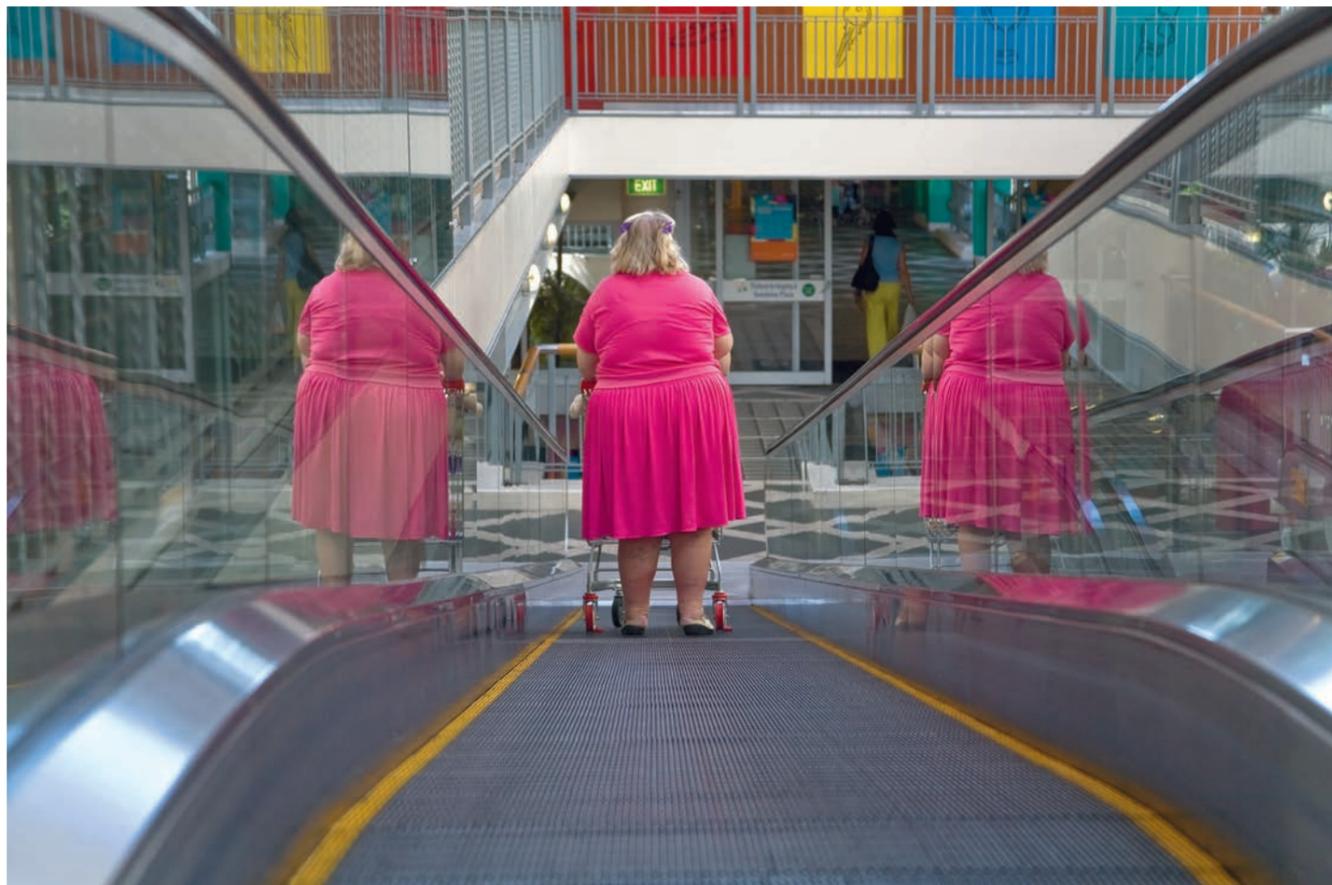
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*“ I’m not sure I know what the Australian character is.  
It’s a complex subject in this digital age ”*

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At a societal level – we are a complex and varied bastard nation of immigrants and dispossessed First Nations people. I think Australia has a deluded sense of our international standing. We are basically China’s quarry and the USA’s lapdog ... how undignified. But seriously, I’m not sure I know what the Australian character is. It’s a complex subject in this digital age, where individual national characters have blurred substantially.

**The Australian photographer Rennie Ellis once said ‘without my photography life would be boring. Photography adds an extra dimension to my life. Somehow it confirms my place in the world’. Do these words resonate with you?**

I love Ellis’s work, I have a signed copy of his Kings Cross book. But Rennie was a city boy embedded in social activity and that isn’t my scene now. The natural environment is where I live and it’s never boring. Photography is a language I employ to talk to others about how I feel and what I encounter in my experienced environment. It’s a very valuable and important discipline for me to employ but it doesn’t confirm my place in the world. I don’t think I have a confirmed place in the world – it’s this constant becoming that keeps it interesting. ■



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- 04 *Man with his dog*, 2008, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)
- 05 *White Cattle in Grey Fog*, 2018, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)
- 06 *Triptych*, 2007, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)
- 07 *Surfers Paradise*, 2019, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)
- 08 *Purple piece*, 2013, Giclée print, ed. 5 + 2 A/P, 70 x 47 cm (image)

Courtesy the artist, TWFINEART, Brisbane and Fletcher Arts, Melbourne