

Receive our FREE weekly arts newsletter, with reviews and the latest arts news. Just fill in your email address and click subscribe. [View a sample newsletter.](#)

State of the Arts magazine is published four times each year in print. Available from quality bookshops and also [by subscription](#).



John Williams, Clovelly Beach

Lee Tran Lam - *John Williams' Sydney Diary*

18 May 2004

The most frequent images we see of Sydney seem over-familiar and one-dimensional – namely the tourist postcards and the B-list celebrities glitzing it up for the society pages. So to view this much-photographed city through John Williams' unaffected black and white pictures is a refreshing invitation. John Williams' Sydney Diary 1958-2003 shows us what has altered and aged and what has remained, unfortunately, as it was. The latter is epitomised by a sober image of a haggard, weary-looking man, possibly homeless, hunched with a newspaper under his arm, and a bottle protruding from his pocket. Behind him is the detritus and rubbish associated with forgotten construction sites and makeshift dumping grounds. In the distance, a daggy, outmoded billboard featuring a buoyant Colonel describes how Kentucky Fried Chicken is "finger-licking good".

During his career, the now 70 year old Williams was dismayed at the ocker, beer-guzzling image of Australian culture, and the wideranging images in Sydney Diary happily counter this view. Unknown faces emerge from different eras and worlds, such as the girl who falls asleep at a Greek wedding in Newtown in 1971 to the masses at the anti-war rally in Hyde Park only last year.

There's a theme of intriguing contrasts in Sydney Diary. In Williams' pub crawl series, the images range from the most stony, dour-looking old ladies ever caught on film to young women happily hamming it up. There's also a shot of middle-aged men holding beer in plastic cups, looking lost and contemplative. As testament to Sydney's evolving face, in his most recent photo of Haymarket, near Chinatown, there's a crowded mix of many different faces crossing the intersection. In a snapshot taken in a similar spot in 1976, the one figure present is an Asian man, while the impending shadow of another person emerges.

Like a diary, this exhibition documents the past in an unembellished, unflinching, and poetic way.

- Lee Tran Lam

More Information:

John Williams' Sydney Diary 1958 – 2003

Until 28 November
Museum of Sydney, Cnr Phillip and Bridge Streets, Sydney
Admission: \$7
Details: (02) 9251 5988
Website: <http://www.hht.net.au/>

[home](#) | [reviews](#) | [news](#) | [hit-list](#) | [arts directory](#) | [newsletter](#) |
[about us](#)

Copyright © 1996-2005 State of the Arts - All Rights
Reserved