



The Art of Observation

15 December 2025 - 8 May 2026

Maribyrnong Civic Precinct and Community Hub



The Art of Observation

This exhibition celebrates Council's photography collection, bringing together generations of photographers who invite you to look closer, think differently, and rediscover the familiar.

Works by Suzie Blake, Wilfred Disney Chapman, Jody Haines, Grant Hobson, Karenne Ann, Anna Kiparis, Viv Méhes, Kip Scott, Gayle Slater, Simon Terrill, Pierre Vairo, James Voller, Sarah Watt and Ammar Yonis are exhibited along with documentary images by unidentified early twentieth century photographers.

While some photographers use the camera to record their environments, others adopt it as a tool for creation. Examining the parallels, differences and connections between constructed and documentary photography and exploring artists' intentions and processes, *The Art of Observation* considers not just what we see but how we see.

Front page: Ammar Yonis, *Salon Gâr* 2023, 35mm film photograph on silk, 140 x 157cm

This page: Sarah Watt, *Temple* 2011, hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas, 20 x 30cm

Exhibition details

15 December 2025 - 8 May 2026 Monday to Friday 8:30am to 5pm

Maribyrnong Civic Precinct and Community Hub, Footscray Town Hall
(corner Hyde and Napier Streets, Footscray)

Guided tours: 11am on the first Thursday of each month, commencing February 2026. Bookings online.

For group and school bookings and more information call (03) 9688 0200
or visit: maribyrnong.vic.gov.au/TheArtofObservation



Wilfred Disney Chapman, *South Kensington to West Footscray – Bunbury Street tunnel 1928*
inkjet print, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Photography in the Collection

The City of Footscray launched its Local Art Collection in 1981 when Council formalised the acquisition of artwork through prizes, commissions, festivals and donations. Annual exhibitions showcasing painting, tapestry, woodwork and craft were displayed at the Town Hall and in the neighbouring Footscray Historical Society with awarded works acquired and now forming part of the City of Maribyrnong's Art and Heritage Collection.

In the 1970s, photography as an artform had gained international recognition, yet the City's first photographic acquisition occurred only at the end of the twentieth century.

Today, photography is the most prevalent artform in the Collection, comprising of portraits, landscapes, conceptual photo-media works and documentary photography. The breadth of works provides a lens to consider the art of observation, and the processes artists have employed to document, construct and interpret their surroundings.



Capturing a changing City

Photography in the City's Collection dates back to the turn of the nineteenth century with images by unknown photographers recording the City's development. Often used as a tool to advocate for social change, documentary photography dominated as a style in the mid-twentieth century.

In the 1920s and 1930s, Wilfred Disney Chapman (1891-1955), an engineer for the Victorian Public Works Department, photographed building sites across the west. His images reflect the area's working-class identity, with figures embodying camaraderie and steadfast determination in action.

Following the rebuilding of the Footscray Town Hall in 1936, Lyle Charles Fowler (1891-1969) of a prominent Melbourne-based firm, The Commercial Photographic Company, recorded Footscray's new civic landmark. His sleek black and white images crystallised the building's modernity and elegance and stood to represent the City's progress, sophistication and growth at the end of the Great Depression.



Top: Unknown maker, *Footscray Railway Station*, Footscray c1900, inkjet print, 40.6 x 50.8cm

Bottom: Unknown maker, *Footscray Fire Station*, Droop Street 1926, inkjet print, 43 x 52.5cm



Footscray In Transition

Capturing the essence of place – and recording the municipality’s burgeoning development – has been an incentive of past commissions and the impetus behind *f5: Footscray in Transition* 2011-2016. During this project, photographers were tasked with capturing visual and cultural changes across ten iconic sites in Footscray. While the destinations remained fixed, creative freedom was given to participating artists: Karenne Ann, Grant Hobson, Pierre Vairo, James Voller and Kip Scott.

As Hobson noted, “bounded only by a general description of location, this project provided a licence to explore, approach people and through them interpret the place that is our home”.



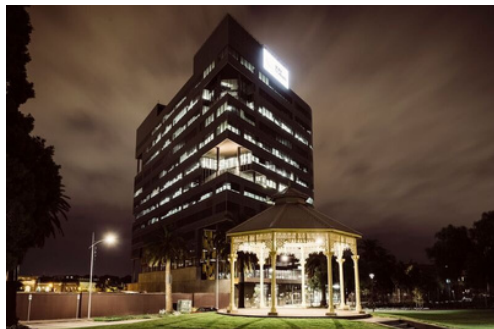
Grant Hobson, *Mairem - Nicholson Street Mall* 2012, inkjet pigment print, 60 x 78cm

Top: Karenne Ann, *Franco Cozzo* 2011, Pigment ink on Museo Portfolio Rag, 53 x 64cm

Karenne Ann, the first of the *f5* artists, experimented with novelty cameras, multiple exposures and photomontage to evoke mood and atmosphere over realistic representations of place.

Ann embraced the inherent qualities of film photography to blur the boundary between abstraction and realism. Incorporating optical effects and layering imagery, Ann produced transient impressions of Footscray’s shifting character.

In contrast, Kip Scott used light to dramatic affect to seamlessly connect elements of the area’s past with the region’s rapid development. Scott’s large atmospheric urban landscapes show the City in a twilight zone between dusk and dawn, where light, colour and movement take centre stage.



Kip Scott, *McNab Avenue* 2016, Lustre Chromira photographic print, 70 x 99cm

Portraits of Power and Presence

In the same year that Scott was photographing key sites in Footscray, Suzie Blake was commissioned to produce her series *Women of the West*, which comprised of twelve environmental portraits depicting women in their surroundings, including artists, business owners and bureaucrats.



Following the tradition of feminist photography of the 1970s, Blake uses photography to examine women's presence in the public realm, where private experience is reframed as a site of political significance. Yielding agency over the sites in which they were photographed, these portraits ensured that the contributions of women and their stories are represented in the City's holdings.

Our River in Focus

Included in the Collection are eleven images from Viv Méhes *Big River* series. This project explored the lower Yarra River and the connections of the people who lived and worked around its industrial heartland.

Méhes spent two years with the river communities, working together taking photos and collecting stories and personal photos. This series was developed into a collaboration with social historian Jenny Lee, and two artists: performance poet Jeltje, composer and sound artist Zane Trow. This resulted in recorded soundscapes, poems and writings that produced dialogues to further reflect the stories and the landscape of the people of the lower industrial River surrounds.



The artist's initial idea stemmed from her time living in the western suburbs, writing in the 1995 catalogue: "being close to the river, I realised that it was through this river mouth that Melbourne was colonised. The nearby reclaimed wetlands seemed to indicate a spiritual reawakening to the river – something that had not been part of our psyche for at least 200 years".



Méhes *Big River* series reflected on cultural, social and environmental histories; a practice later echoed in the work of other contemporary artists in the Collection.

For artist Jody Haines (palawa), the practice of deep listening and sitting with and on Country plays a pivotal role in her creative practice. Her installation *The Last Supper* reimagines the forgotten wetlands and waterways between North Melbourne and Footscray.

Composite images of wildlife on pristine wetlands act as a poignant symbol of how the landscape once looked for the Kulin peoples and what could have been today. A wetland lost during destructive settler colonisation, Haines says this work “stands as a site of ongoing resistance and de-colonial intervention to imposing narratives”.

Composed across seven panels which are suspended by butcher’s hooks, they act as a chandelier above a table adorned with a ‘last supper’ and feathers of birdlife that once thrived on the lake. Haines poetically describes the she-oak that surrounds the table as “carrying the whispers of the stories that once filled the air”.



Top (detail) and bottom:
Jody Haines
The Last Supper 2021
installation (7 digitally printed
Perspex panels, table, she-oak
needles)
dimensions variable



Simon Terrill, *Crowd Theory* – Braybrook 2004, C-type print, 90 x 181.5cm. Collection: Footscray Community Arts

Staged Realities

Re-imagining places and constructing new narratives underpin Simon Terrill's *Crowd Theory* series, first commissioned by Footscray Community Arts (Centre) in 2004. Over fourteen years, Terrill staged ten large-scale photographic events across Australia and the United Kingdom including *Footscray*, *Braybrook* and *Footscray Station*.

Each project followed the same process of inviting people connected to the site to assemble before dusk, where Terrill would take ten exposures on an 8 x 10 camera. While the setup was meticulously organised and preparatory sketches produced, actions remained unscripted with participants free to shape the final image. Orchestrated with collaborators who coordinated lighting, catering, music and closing off streets, the work captures a performance of place-making.

These monumental works have become contemporary historical documents that reflect the experiences of those in the crowd and the personal narratives within each work.

Extending this dialogue between documentary and constructed imagery is the series *Suburbanology* by Anna Kiparis. This photographic triptych depicting Footscray at night was originally exhibited as A0 posters for the City of Maribyrnong and Victoria University's festival, *One Night In Footscray*.

Acquired in 2021, this evocative work references architectural film-noir with its use of high contrast and low-key lighting. Emphasising formal elements of familiar civic markers, the urban landscape becomes a backdrop of an eerie narrative that invites speculation and intrigue.



Anna Kiparis, *Footscray Park After Dark, Midnight Mass and Hello, Welcome* (Suburbanology series) 2019
inkjet on cotton rag, 78 x 53.5cm (each work)

A recent addition to the Collection by Harari–Australian artist, Ammar Yonis, is *Salon Gâr* (front cover image). Acquired through the Footscray Art Prize in 2023, this work explores friendship and migration through a cinematic display. Reminiscent of seventeenth century Dutch genre painting, which popularised the depiction of everyday people in domestic settings, this contemporary scene was captured on 35mm film and printed on silk.

Interested in using photography as a vessel for storytelling, Yonis invites viewers into an opulent living room, a space of reflection where the line between fiction and reality is blurred. The work’s presentation echoes the curves of the living room curtains, transforming the display itself into a form of veil. Through this work, photography becomes a tool for both storytelling and stagecraft—a medium for intimacy, memory and performance.

Spanning more than a century of practice, photography in the City’s Collection has evolved from documentation to collaboration, from civic record to poetic reflection. Early photographs established a visual archive of place and progress, while contemporary artists have used the camera to challenge perception and shape culture, questioning identity, representation and historical narratives.

Together, these works trace an ongoing dialogue between artist, subject and site—an art of observation that reflects the medium’s shifting paradigms and the area’s creative legacy. Just as the Collection has evolved, so too has our perception and connection to these works, shaped by the experiences, identities and memories that form how we see the world around us.

Lili Belle Birchall, Collection Curator

Index of works

Below is a list of artworks exhibited, in descending order of their creation:

Ammar Yonis
Salon Gâr 2023
35mm film photograph on silk
140 x 157cm

Jody Haines
The Last Supper 2021
installation (7 digitally printed
Perspex panels, table, she-oak
needles)
dimensions variable

Anna Kiparis
Footscray Park After Dark
Midnight Mass
Hello, Welcome
(*Suburbanology series*) 2019
inkjet on cotton rag
78 x 53.5cm each work

Suzie Blake
Franca Stadler, Women's Circus
Women of the West 2016
canson platine fibre rag
46 x 68cm

Suzie Blake
Larissa MacFarlane, Local Artist
Women of the West 2016
canson platine fibre rag
46 x 68cm

Suzie Blake
Mischa Merz, Mischa's Boxing
Central, Women of the West 2016
canson platine fibre rag
46 x 68cm

Suzie Blake
Phuong To, To's Bakery Footscray
Women of the West 2016
canson platine fibre rag
46 x 68cm

Kip Scott
Heavenly Queen Temple 2016
Lustre Chromira photographic
print
70 x 99cm

Kip Scott
Little Saigon 2016
Lustre Chromira photographic
print
70 x 99cm

Kip Scott
Olympic Donuts 2016
Lustre Chromira photographic
print
70 x 99cm

Kip Scott
McNab Avenue 2016
Lustre Chromira photographic
print
70 x 99cm

Kip Scott
Footscray Skyline 2016
Lustre Chromira photographic
print
70 x 99cm

James Voller
Donut Van (at Footscray Station)
2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle
Photo Rag
47 x 64.5cm

James Voller
Nicholson Street Bridge 2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle
Photo Rag
47 x 64.5cm

James Voller
Irving Street 2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle
Photo Rag
47 x 64.5cm

James Voller
McNab Avenue 2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle
Photo Rag
47 x 64.5cm

James Voller
Nicholson Street Mall 2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle Photo
Rag
47 x 64.5cm

James Voller
Footscray Hotel 2015
digital print on Hahnemuhle Photo
Rag
47 x 64.5cm

Pierre Vairo
Nick's Perspective 2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo
In the Derelict State We Trust 2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo
Rain over Saigon 2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo
The Decline of the Motor Vehicle
2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo
S. Martin's Contribution 2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Pierre Vairo
Remnants of Nicholson Street
Bridge 2013
digital print on Museo Portfolio
Rag
41 x 54cm

Grant Hobson <i>Binks Ford</i> 2012 inkjet pigment print 60 x 78cm	Sarah Watt <i>At the Station</i> 2011 hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas 20 x 25cm	Viv Méhes <i>Big River (The A.M. Vella Dredging the River)</i> 1994 silver gelatin print 69.5 x 86.5cm
Grant Hobson <i>Nicholson Street Bridge</i> 2012 inkjet pigment print 60 x 78cm	Sarah Watt <i>Brick Clinker</i> 2011 hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas 30.5 x 25.5cm	Viv Méhes <i>Big River (Series 1)</i> 1995 silver gelatin print 77 x 76cm
Grant Hobson <i>Footscray Station</i> 2012 inkjet pigment print 78 x 60cm	Sarah Watt <i>Christmas House</i> 2011 hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas 30 x 30cm	Gayle Slater <i>Pause</i> 1994 toned silver gelatin print 68.5 x 58.5cm
Grant Hobson <i>Irving Street</i> 2012 inkjet pigment print 59 x 110cm	Sarah Watt <i>Temple</i> 2011 hand rendered photograph with pastel and paint on canvas 20 x 30cm	Gayle Slater <i>Kiss</i> 1994 toned silver gelatin print 68.5 x 58.5cm
Grant Hobson <i>Mairem - Nicholson Street Mall</i> 2012 inkjet pigment print 60 x 78cm	Simon Terrill <i>Crowd Theory – Footscray Station</i> 2006 C-type print 132 x 185.5cm	Lyle Fowler <i>Footscray Town Hall</i> 1936 Series of eight works inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm
Karenne Ann <i>Franco Cozzo</i> 2011 archival pigment print on Museo Portfolio Rag 53 x 64cm	Simon Terrill <i>Crowd Theory – Footscray</i> 2004 C-type print 111.5 x 138cm Collection: Footscray Community Arts	Wilfred Disney Chapman <i>South Kensington to West Footscray – Nicholson Street bridge</i> 1928 inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm
Karenne Ann <i>Little Saigon</i> 2011 archival pigment print on Museo Portfolio Rag 56 x 54cm	Simon Terrill <i>Crowd Theory – Braybrook</i> 2004 C-type print 90 x 181.5cm Collection: Footscray Community Arts	Wilfred Disney Chapman <i>South Kensington to West Footscray – Bunbury Street tunnel</i> 1928 inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm
Karenne Ann <i>Nicholson Street Bridge</i> 2011 archival pigment print on Museo Portfolio Rag 56 x 54cm	Viv Méhes <i>Big River (Unloading Sugar C.S.R. Wharf)</i> 1995 silver gelatin print 77 x 76cm	Unknown maker <i>Footscray Fire Station, Droop Street</i> 1926 inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm
Karenne Ann <i>Nicholson Street Mall</i> 2011 archival pigment print on Museo Portfolio Rag 56 x 54cm	Viv Méhes <i>Big River (John Pulis Electrician, I.C.I. Yarraville)</i> 1995 silver gelatin print 77 x 76cm	Unknown maker <i>Footscray Railway Station, Footscray</i> c1900 inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm
Karenne Ann <i>Olympic Donut Van</i> 2011 pigment ink on Museo Portfolio Rag 56 x 54cm		Unknown maker <i>Geo Law & Sons – Produce Merchants</i> unknown date inkjet print 40.6 x 50.8cm



Contact us

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Maribyrnong City Council is proud to represent a municipality filled with important and significant Aboriginal history. Council acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of this land, the Kulin Nation, and acknowledges the rich culture and considerable contributions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have made and continue to make to this City.