



"Imagination is more important than knowledge"

Albert Einstein



Montalbetti + Campbell self-portrait

Montalbetti + Campbell

Denis Montalbetti born: Nakusp, Canada 1957
Gay Campbell born: Winnipeg, Canada 1958
Live and work in Sydney.

Denis Montalbetti educated Langara College, Vancouver.
Gay Campbell is self taught.

Awards include: Canon AIPP Professional Photographer of the Year (2007) and section winners of Canon AIPP Photographer of the Year, open award (2009 and 2008), illustrative award (2007), advertising award (2005); Head On, critic's choice award (2008); Communication Arts Photography Annual (USA) awards of excellence (2003, 2000, 1999, 1998 and 1996); New York Festivals International Advertising Awards (USA) gold world medal (2000); Australian Writers and Art Directors Awards, bronze awards (1997, 1996, 1994 and 1993); Western Magazine Awards (Canada) best fashion (1989 and 1988) and best portrait (1989); Art Directors' Club of Toronto, 7 merit awards (1988).

Solo exhibitions: *Significant Others*, FotoFreo International Festival of Photography, Fremantle 2006, *Heroes*, Byron Mapp Gallery, Sydney 1998. Group exhibitions include: National Portrait Gallery, Canberra (2009, 2002 and 1999); *Head On*, Sydney (2009 and 2008); International Women's Day Exhibition, Melbourne (2009); The Museum of National History, Frederiksberg, Denmark (2006); Powerhouse Museum, Sydney (2003); Fuji Photo Salon, Tokyo (2003).

Represented in public, private and print collections nationally and internationally including the National Gallery of Australia; National Portrait Gallery of Australia; Australian Museum of Sport; Australian Institute of Professional Photography; Australia Commercial and Media Photographers.

Featured in numerous publications and books worldwide including: *Chinese Commercial Photography* (China, 2008); *Victor by Hasselblad*, "World's Top 5 photographers" (Germany, 2007); Lurhzer's *International Archive* (Germany, 2005, 2000 and 1995); *MAC on Campus guide for photography students* (USA, 2004); *Communication Arts*

Photography Annual (USA, 2003, 2000, 1999, 1998 and 1996); *PDN* (USA, 2003); *American Photography Annual* (USA, 2002 and 2001); *Portrait* (Australia, 2002); *Fuji ACMP Photography Collection Annual* (Australia, 2001, 2000, 1999, 1998, 1997 and 1996); *Graphis Photography Annual* (Germany, 2000); *Black & White* (Australia, 2000); *Commercial Photography* (Australia, 1999); *Shots* (UK, 1998); *Exposure: 20 Years of Photographing the World* (USA, 1997); *Rolling Stone: The Complete Covers 1967-1997* (USA, 1997); *Best Australian Sports Writing and Photography* (Australia, 1997 and 1996). Regular features and covers stories in: *Better Photography*; *Capture*.

Broadcast media includes guest appearances on: *Australia's Next Top Model* (Fox 8, 2009); *Make me a Supermodel* (Channel 7, 2008); *The Joint* (Channel 5, 1998); *Today Show* (Channel 5, 1998); *Sports World* (Channel 5, 1998).

Fine Art Representation: Sandra Byron Gallery, Sydney.

Commercial Representation: IS Production, Sydney and Michael Ginsburg Associates, New York.

Cassandra Scott-Finn

Born Melbourne, 1984
Lives and works in Sydney

A former fashion editor of *iLove* magazine and *Ego Magazine*, Cassandra Scott-Finn is a stylist working in the creative advertising, fashion, film and music industries. She has styled portraits and music videos for artists including Natalie Bassingthwaighe, Sarah Blasko and The Veronicas. Her clients include the Australia's Next Top Model, Canon, Channel 10, Fashion Targets Breast Cancer, La Fille d'O lingerie, Insight, Make Me a Super Model, Nokia, L'Oréal Melbourne Fashion Festival and Wittner shoes. Publications include *Fashion Trend Magazine*, *GQ Magazine*, *Manifesto Magazine*, *Rolling Stone*, *V Magazine* and *Who Weekly*.

Cassandra Scott-Finn works freelance.
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MONTALBETTI + CAMPBELL
The Sensualists



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EROS AT WORK EROS AT PLAY

DENIS MONTALBETTI + GAY CAMPBELL.

You know their work, even if their names aren't familiar. You know, they did that photo of Mulder and Scully at the height of their X-Files fame, together in a bed: maybe they'd canoodled, maybe they were just about to. And radio bad boy Kyle Sandilands as King Kong, cartoon ape-man looming over a peppy night-time metropolis. Oh, there's the Tim Tam ad too, the one with the chocolate swirls wrapping-come-ravaging a blond girl, like she's the soft centre of a present, like eating is sex, like chocolate is semen, like she is overcome by its geyser flow.

And, of course, when you were watching, as I was, avidly, *Make me a Super Model*, they happened to be one of the shooters. Remember? Three figures, one, a dude, in harlequin duds, two girls, as under-arm candy, floating, hovering, in front of an ebullient, romantic sky. What we viewers learnt watching the process that went into the image's production, though, was that such playfully voluptuous scenes are hard won. There was much pain as the models learned how tough it was to submit oneself, fully, to another's vision, to be truly pliable and thereby self-less in the process. They were learning how to become not simply a preening part of the world as it is, but part of the world as it might be, components of a true art of artifice.

LEFT TO RIGHT
 Montalbetti + Campbell *Emmanuel* – *The Last Man* 2009
 Montalbetti + Campbell *The Dream* 2000
 Montalbetti + Campbell *Nick Tosches* 2002
 Montalbetti + Campbell *Katania* 2006

This totally tricked out artifice is, of course, the pictorially hyper-expressive heart of Montalbetti + Campbell's work, a form they've been honing over a quarter of a century. During this time, they've fashioned an aesthetic that is practically unique in its ability to embrace the pleasure of photographic possibility. Their art is, frankly, unapologetically, ambitiously, the art of desire. As such, they make use of the camera not as the tool of record but as that of creation – a buoyantly over-the-top creation at that. In their work, therefore, the unity of the picture-making tradition that photography was said to halt, to break from, is restored. Indeed, their work can be traced to a painterly tradition as much as the photographic and it, in fact, flutters

somewhere between the two, as it also does between the commercial and the artistic, the sensuous and the provocative.

This fluttering is kinda important. What I mean is that it does not speak to, or of, a single pictorial period or tradition. It is the shifting amalgam of references made coherent by their overall vision that is significant. So, even if you might not get the exact references, you can feel that there's some dark Flemish action going down, some Pre-Raphaelite spin, some Baroque curling. And, then, the picture plane is foreshortened in a pre-Renaissance way which suddenly, as we spy a made-up eye, a pouting glossy lip, flips out to *Buffy*, to *Twilight*, all that impulsive drama. And then, they riff against the



visions of new contemporary artists such as Mark Ryden, David Stoupakis, Aya Kato and the like, who operate in the same visual field, just with paint, not photos. You stare at the work and your mind is going in a million different places.

Now, as these amazingly crafted images do their genre, and period, shuffle they do so not for the sake of earnestly arguing for the critical lightness of a post-modern über-referentiality. That stuff might be there, sure, in the background, or as a foundation of possibility, but their stuff appears more like that of obsessive film-maker, a genre junky working to create immersive experiences: by staking the image deck, layering it, building it, clue by clue, feeling by feeling. One thinks, maybe, of Terry Gilliam, the

pomp, the delicious spectacle, the crazy image-mash being the deal. It is the ability of each photo to operate on all these levels of reference that makes the works not only engaging but essentially restless entities flowing with the waves of image-culture within an instantly recognizable style of their own. I think that quality, actually, is super hard to get down – to hold such a wide frame of reference and yet never stray from a Montalbetti + Campbell visuality.

Because of the way they've got such an easy handle on this, all of the work is completely easy on the eye. Yet, if there is something challenging about their work, is it the pleasure this affords. We are not so comfortable with that, not outside the commercial world. It is hard for us to let go, to follow



the libido, to not over think. To see the wantonly sexy is a challenge. To go with it, maybe harder still. But that is what we are presented with. The subjects are caught mid-writhe. These images, therefore, act like Venus fly traps. They want to catch you, not to teach you something, not to convince you of something, not to make you a better person, but to please you. They want to titillate, to tease, to entice, to toy with you. They want your jaw to drop in front of the spectacle.

The fact that the work moves between commercial and non-, locates our pleasure so very firmly in this economy of possibility. Desire, after all, is about what we want after we've had what we need. Desire too, as is well known, is impossible to slake, so the

idea of a spectacle without end, without bounds, positions Montalbetti + Campbell's work in the heart of the contemporary Western world's relation to image and commodity in general.

With that in mind, I think Montalbetti + Campbell's is an art Marie Antoinette would dig, or at least Sofia Coppola's version of her. It is shiny, it is dark, it is Eros at work, Eros at play, made-up like a courtesan, continually inventing ways to seduce, to capture, to share the liminal state between life and death and the back-arched sensuous cloud-and-flesh chasm between the two.

Robert Cook Associate Curator of Modern and Contemporary Photography and Design, Art Gallery of Western Australia.

