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# • nellie castan gallery

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## MEDIA RELEASE

### ***Darren Siwes: Just Is***

**22 February – 12 March 2005**

Challenging the non-indigenous view of Australia's history, South Australian artist **Darren Siwes's** latest photographic series ***Just Is***, considers the well-known antipodean idea of the association between here and there. With half taken in London whilst studying for his Masters of Fine Art and then half in locations around South Australia, **Siwes's** strength of belief has enabled him to develop a distinctive idiom.

As with the preceding series *Mis/perceptions*, ***Just Is*** consists of haunting nocturnal photographs of deserted zones, eerie atmospheres redolent of Symbolist paintings from the turn of the twentieth century and the Spirit Photography of these times.

Created using large format cameras and long exposure times, **Siwes** who is consumed with the turn of the last century, constrains himself to using nineteenth century photographic techniques. The same applies to his selected locations, often Victorian or Edwardian settings showing neo-classical Australian Federation architecture, portraying Australia at a time in its history when the white Australia policy became law.

Ian McLean describes Siwes's work in his essay *Uncannyas*

... very studied, very concerned with pictorial and textual language (immediately evident in the titles of his works), and with themes of philosophy, history, colonialism and a type of post-Aboriginal identity that seeks to move beyond the colonialist essentialising of identities and towards more complex and nuanced postcolonial frames of reference.<sup>1</sup>

**Siwes** places himself in all his photographs making them in one-sense self-portraits, though it is anonymity that he is exploring. A melancholy mood pervades all of his work, with a clear sense of loss and alienation apparent. The ghost like figures are often masked, another of **Siwes's** historical references, this time to Plato's *Republic*, with its utopian vision of society that inspired neo-classical thought of the nineteenth century.

As Ian McLean says, **Siwes's** photographs are "true icons of that absence of place that forever troubles Australian identity".

Awarded a Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship in 2002, **Siwes's** photographs have been acquired by: the National Gallery of Australia, the Art Gallery of Queensland, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, the Art Gallery of South Australia, Artbank, Flinders University and Monash Gallery of Art.

<sup>1</sup> *Uncanny*, Ian McLean, exhibition catalogue, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide, Australia, 2004

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level 1, 12 river street, south yarra, victoria 3141

**opening: 2-5pm saturday 26 february** exhibition ends: saturday 12 march

hrs: tuesday to saturday 11am - 5pm t: 03 9804 7366

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