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# • nellie castan gallery

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## PRESS RELEASE

### darren siwes: *mum, I want to be brown*

2 – 24 June, 2007

Exploring issues of race relations and displaced people, Darren Siwes's *Mum, I want to be brown* initiates a dialogue concerning 'brownness', as opposed to black and white. Still empowered by dramatic lighting and challenging non-Indigenous views of white Australia, this body of work introduces narrative and an esoteric play on social demarcation and power relations.

Set just a few years after settlement, Siwes humorously arranges an outdoor account of middle class white Australia. Displaying a fantasy world where the children desire to be brown,



'their world is not yet tainted by prejudicial family and social codes, although the photographs explore those tensions aplenty'.<sup>1</sup>

Siwes challenges the non-indigenous view of Australia's history and, through subtle inversions, presents the possibility of an alternate past where indigenous Australians lead the nation and white outsiders look on. In *Terra Nullius* Captain Cook is black, and the white people hold no power. *Follow the Leader* reveals black society leading a newly federated state while the white inhabitants observe.

Brownness is an idea imperative to Siwes because of his Dutch/Indigenous Australian decent. Somewhere between black and white Siwes finds himself and his children confronted with a different kind of identity search. *She Gave Her A Brown Transfusion* explores this notion by staging children playing as doctors and nurses and mimicking a colour infusion.

Siwes was awarded a Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship in 2002 and has held solo exhibitions in Australia and Spain, as well as participating in group exhibitions in Prague, Belfast, Japan, Jakarta and the Netherlands. His 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, Adelaide Festival Centre, Monash Gallery of Art and Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Madrid.

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

**opening: 6-8pm thursday 2 june**

exhibition ends: sunday 24 june

hrs: tuesday to sunday 12-5pm t: 03 9804 7366

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<sup>1</sup> Catherine Speck, *Mum, I want to be brown*, exhibition catalogue