Pat Brassington

Born in Hobart, Tasmania, where she has lived all her life, Pat Brassington embarked upon an artistic career after marrying and having two children. As a survey, this exhibition is a selection of works that offers a particular perspective on her career so far. Brassington began studying printmaking, graduated to black and white photography and later to digital photography using colour. Throughout her career she has demonstrated a consistent interest in the seductiveness of visual imagery, especially photographs, and the way they suggest something beyond that which they appear to represent. While paying homage to surrealist artists such as Man Ray, André Kertész and Max Ernst, Pat Brassington’s black and white photographic compositions (1982–95) explore a rather morbid dimension of Freud’s association game. She used old photographs from medical textbooks, art-books, the family photo-album, postcards, ‘found’ objects and ephemera that she photographed herself. Employing techniques such as serialisation, repetition, collage, juxtaposition and a variety of strategies for framing, Brassington confuses the genres and contexts to which these photographs originally referred. By these means she presents a peculiar set of eroticised symbols and ambiguous settings, which does not unfold as a coherent narrative so much as evoke a range of affective responses. Her lugubrious, feminised imagery is uncanny, both familiar and strange. Sometimes it is exquisitely beautiful, sometimes scary, sometimes disgusting and sometimes wry. We are kept guessing as to what all of this means. The images might move us, but uncertainty and discomfort prevail.
Work in progress

In the 1990s Pat Brassington experimented with new ways of enhancing the potential for weirdness in visual images. In the early 1990s she submerged photographs and objects in water and photographed them. This resulted in images of floating, soggy, waterlogged forms that, when discreetly framed as art, can be read among other things as symbols for mysterious, hidden or repressed parts of the female body. The dissolving effects of water and its rippling, reflecting surface translate onto the flat plane of the photographic image as a murky, weightless realm resembling that of dreams. Another technique involved compressing women’s stained underwear under glass and photographing it, then arranging each image in a giant grid. Patterns of folded material form elegant, abstract patterns that cut across these sordid remnants of intimate apparel, emphasising their threat of disruption. Digital printing offers opportunities for manipulating imagery through Photoshop, which Brassington used in the mid to late 1990s to produce images of odd, hybrid beings inhabiting a fantasy, post-human world. The gloomy associations of her earlier black and white works give way to uneasy acceptance of artificiality. A distorted sense of space, the unsettling effects of ex-ray vision, superimposition, morphing and the use of bland colours suggest a plastic future of robots and freaks whose human aspect is vaguely disturbing. In Brassington’s latest works a performative strategy is resurrected from old family shots in which close relatives play-act for the camera. They enact various methods of disguise and self-transformation, as though mocking our expectation of reality. The possibility of personal significance that these family shots propose is new in Brassington’s work.