



## BIOGRAPHY

Andrew Tenison was born in Albury in 1984 and currently lives in Wollongong. He completed a Bachelor's degree in Photography at Charles Sturt University, Albury, in 2005; and a Masters in Photomedia at The College of Fine Arts (UNSW) in 2008. Tenison has been exhibiting in Australia since 2003.

In 2004 he was selected for the prestigious Josephine Ulrick National Photography Prize for Portraiture at Tweed River Art Gallery, NSW. He has photographs in the works on paper collection of Albury Regional Art Gallery and in various private collections. This is his first solo exhibition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Ashley Milne, Kate Taylor, Coralie Fleming, James Woolley, Laura Roberts, Aurey Pullen, Richard Milne, Andrew Milne, all the bookmakers, Janet Varley, Jules Boag, Sandra Barnard, Peter and Paula Tenison, the Milne family, Monday Mob, all who worked on the light boxes, all the artists who inspired Calenture, all gallery staff for this opportunity. Those who simply prayed and offered encouragement.

Above: *Gather*, 2010, Ilfochrome photograph

Cover: *Reverence*, 2010, Ilfochrome photograph.

# Andrew Tenison CALENTURE



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 open Tuesday to Friday 10.00am - 5.00pm  
 weekends 12.00noon - 4.00pm



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## FOREWORD

Wollongong City Gallery has great pleasure in presenting *Breathing Space* an exhibition of recent work by two of Illawarra's most senior and respected artists.

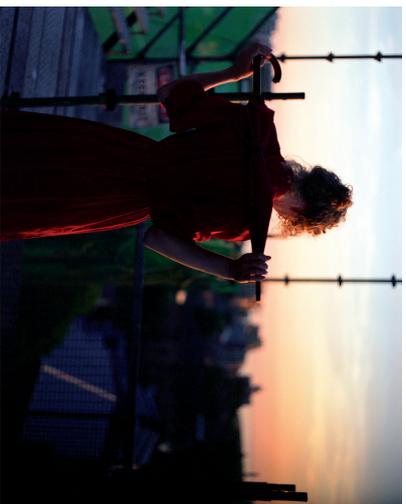
As both artists and educators, Liz Jerneld and Diana Wood Conroy have influenced and inspired a generation of artists in this region and continue through their work to have a significant and positive impact on the local and regional art community.

Id like to thank Liz and Diana for their commitment to this project and for sharing their unique perspectives on the sensory experiences of place/space and the rhythms that permeate and help define our place within them.

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**John Monteleone**  
Program Director



Above: *Sunday*, 2010, type C print  
Below: *Memory Of The War*, 2010, blackchrome photograph  
Right: *Remember The Light On The Hill*, 2010, type C print



## CALENTURE

Touching on the traditions of theatre and painting, Andrew Tension evokes poetic and mysterious photographic worlds. Serious images become playful as elements of the surreal impinge on the domain of normalcy. A stickler for traditional techniques and fine craftsmanship, Tension photographs with transparency film using a medium format camera. Much of the work in *Calenture* has been hand-printed. In this age of image-saturation and digitisation, it is a rare opportunity to view finely crafted, meditative images like Tension's.

Tension works in the tradition of constructed photography, also known as tableau vivant (literally meaning 'living picture'). The tableau tradition can be traced back to medieval liturgical dramas and mystery plays where costumed actors represented biblical scenes in a silent, motionless tableau. The lengthy tradition of using tableau in narrative painting was carried over to photography upon its invention. Tableau vivant has fascinated many contemporary photographers such as Jeff Wall (b. 1946) and Anne Zahalka (b. 1957) who, like Tension, have employed this style as a tool to communicate their own artistic vision. The dramatic and painterly roots of the tableau tradition can be discerned in Tension's photographs.

*Calenture* is the photographic fruit of Tension's six month residency at Wollongong City Gallery. The photographs are borne out of Tension's research into works held in Wollongong City Gallery's collection. From over 2000 works Tension selected pieces by artists who worked in the Illawarra including photographer Max Dupain (1911-1992) and the painters Antonio Dattilo-Rubbo (1870-1955), Joan Meats (1920-2003) and George Glines (b. 1949). Tension used these artworks as a starting point from which to create new work inspired by the artists' lives and their art making.

The artistic oeuvre and biography of the painter, Joan Meats became a key focus of Tension's study of the collection. Meats was an English born, surrealist-inspired painter. She lived through World War II in England, miraculously surviving a German V-1 flying bomb that destroyed the building she was in. After the war she studied art at Cheltenham College, supported herself by teaching and eventually settled in the Illawarra in 1957<sup>1</sup>. Tension has a keen interest in surrealism, particularly the work of the Belgian painter René Magritte (1898-1967), and was drawn to Meats' painting for its dreamlike, surrealist-inspired subject matter. Interestingly, Magritte's painting was also a source of inspiration for Meats.

Tension's *Memory of the War* is a statement about the potential for narrative to define us, the power of memory and the strength of family bonds. It is a poetic reflection on the tragic death of Meats' brother who was killed off the English Coast in 1944 while serving as a Spitfire pilot. In this image a wounded soldier sits in the shadows, his head bandaged, a single eye glazed over in anxious thought. Behind him is an opening filled with light. Tension uses this door-like opening to symbolically correspond with the entrance motif in Meats' painting. Meats often painted openings in her work - in sea-shells, egg-shells, empty onion skins and trap-doors. In Meats' work these openings are sometimes

insistent and hint at unseen danger; in other cases, the opening is sexually charged and appears symbolic of possibility. In *Memory of the War* Tension's depiction of an opening bursting with light alludes to the possibility of escape. This is an offering of hope - that the individual may have the capacity to transcend the situation.

The world that Tension evokes in *Calenture* often edges towards the fantastical as compositions blend the familiar with the strange. Tension comments, "All the works have ambiguous elements, they are about the disruption of the literal and the mundane. They are about looking for the extraordinary in the ordinary". In *Reverence* a woman stands alone at a telephone disguised in deep shadow, she is waiting patiently, perhaps lost in thought. The meditative, almost melancholy, mood of the photograph is playfully disrupted by the egg-like stripes suspended behind her head. Are these symbolic of her thoughts? Is this image a dream-sequence? Tension's

photographs elude direct interpretation. Like a film still, there seems to be a narrative locked in the frame that can only be entirely explained by rewinding the scene, or else willing the image to move forward. The photographic medium renders this impossible and places the viewer in a tricky and simultaneously exciting position of imaginatively negotiating the constructed scenes.

The exhibition's title, *Calenture* was chosen by Tension after the Australian band, The Trifids, who named their 1997 album *Calenture*. The Trifids' use of the word was in reference to sailors who, while sick with tropical fever, deliriously perceived the ocean waves to be green fields and wished to leap into them. Rich with spiritual allusions, the songs in the Trifids' album depict characters who are searching for salvation. Tension strongly identified with the spiritual overtones of the album and the ideas it raised - of a people yearning for a transcendent being and of the blurring of the boundary between reality and non-reality. These ideas are evident in the photographs and are all the more intriguing due to Tension's own profession of the Christian faith. "I will remember the days when art was my religion. For me, Christianity is not a religion but a faith".

*Calenture* melds the everyday with the bizarre to evoke fantastically familiar worlds. Perhaps this intrusion of the surreal on the everyday alludes to what we know of life; the surreal being symbolic for all that we cannot comprehend within this complex existence. This element of the inexplicable is the zest of the work, something that Tension conveys with humour and with hope.

**Ashley Milne**  
June 2010

<sup>1</sup> Michael Beare, "A Regional Cultural Treasure Returns", *Joan Meats: A Survey*, Wollongong City Gallery, Wollongong, 2008, p.7.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>3</sup> All quotes are from conversation with the artist, 21 June 2010.