

# THE TROPHY

Text by Lance Hyde, Curator of Royal Perth Hospital Art Collection, 2013

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Photography was once a rare language that few had access into. Photo-technology today is universally understood and commonly employed as an international product, however, even with this universal acceptance and understanding, most people will fail to notice the intentional artistry within Christopher Young's images.

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As viewers we rarely stop to analyse or examine, what it is we are actually consuming when it is presented as a photographic image. We know what we like, and we know what we know, but we really don't know how to interpret what an artist, is presenting to us?

So, how does an artist deliver something new, or unknown, to the public? The artist has to give people something of what they know, and at the same time introduce the new, and hope the audience has the skills to explore these intentions. Sadly I believe this will not be the case, and Christopher Young's wonderful images will be trapped in the viewer's romantic sentimentality.

The greatest fear for any 'Camera Artist' is to be sidelined by the glamour of the medium that they employ. We consume photo images unthinkingly because that is the purpose of most images, to satisfy our unrealised wants, or to shore up and help define our personalities. Photographic imagery has become, by its very nature, the ultimate outdated consumer product, a victim of universal familiarity. So our eyes eat everything and question very little of what the artist's narrative is actually about.

I would urge viewers to consider using the outlines below to interpreting Young's work. First, look at his images as if they were a set of painted Russian Dolls, in that we know the objects purpose well enough, to expect the answers to be within the layers beneath. Much of Young's surface imagery, has the stillness of devotional objects that have been arranged on a chapel alter. Several of these works have a compositional sensitivity to rival that of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, and in others works, the quiet balance of remembered Victoriana. In several works you feel the presence and hint of Neo Realist Cinema, from the early 1960's Italian film noir. It is only by peeling back these first layers that you can find out what is actually inside these photographs, and what it is, that Young, wants us to discuss.

Take for example the image of a golden, trophy tennis player. This work sits very easily in our mind, and some of us,

may have a trophy similar to this at home. It is a well known, familiar, and well understood icon. So what is this artist asking us to do with this information? To reconstruct memories of our youth, to relate our sports experiences to others, or to start up conversations about our children's athletic achievements? These are all well intentioned and sensitive approach to help you read an art work, however it misses the artist point by a country mile. We have to decode, decipher and unravel Young's photographs. Young's works are like scenes from a CSI television program, full of readings and clues, stacked with counterpoint messages and references to the human experience. Perhaps the following suggestions may help you think about this work:

- What is cultural branding?
- What is Olympic imagery?
- Is this theatre?
- Using nature's tools, darkness and light, or the absence of light.
- Cinematic overtures, the rise of the eye language.
- Nüremburg styling, the *Triumph of the Will*.
- Socialism rallies from the 1930 to 60s.
- The Winners.
- Unfocused environments.
- Between the real and the dream.
- The actual location of the image, is it a home, the hearth, a club house or trophy room?

## Conclusion

When you examine this group of works don't just gulp them down like some ravenous nostalgic beast. You have to work hard to interpret art, and it is not the easiest way, that provides the best clarity. We must always pull away the curtains of our consumer sentimentality, and question what it is, that the visual artist is referring to. Our eyes eat everything and question very little, while a focused mind interprets everything and questions everything.

