

# NEW LIGHT PHOTOGRAPHY NOW + THEN

EXHIBITION PARTNERS

architectus™ Conrad  
Gargett



## New Light: Photography Now + Then Exhibition Labels

Photographs open a window into the past. As archival documents, they share precious insight into time and place. Although rich in information and detail, photographs provide a subjective account of history. They are constructed by photographers, and left to interpret by viewers.

When looking at a photograph, consider: who took it and why? What is included and what is left out? How has the content been framed? Has it been manipulated?

*New Light: Photography Now + Then* directs these questions towards one of the most significant photographic archives held by Museum of Brisbane. The Elliott Collection comprises hundreds of photographs largely attributed to amateur photographer, Alfred Elliott (1870-1954). Found beneath a house in Red Hill in 1983, the archive captures Brisbane over 50 years from 1890 to 1940.

The Elliott Collection constructs a particular view of Brisbane, shaped by Elliott's personal interests and lived experiences. It emphasises Brisbane's colonial progress at a time when the city was undergoing population growth, infrastructure expansion and technological development.

Seven contemporary photographers have been commissioned to unpick the nuance and bias found within the Elliott Collection and the narrative it presents. Jo-Anne Driessens and Tammy Law search for gaps and silences in the archive, exploring parallel histories and reflecting on their own lived experiences. Carl Warner considers the composition of Elliott's landscapes, while Joachim Froese disrupts the hierarchy of his portraits. Marian Drew and Nina White emphasise the subjectivity of the archive, encouraging us to think more deeply about how we 'read' a photograph. Meanwhile, Keemon Williams uses Elliott's images as a primed canvas for his futuristic imaginings.

Alongside these commissions, the Brisbane photography community have been invited to respond to the Elliott Collection. Photographers of all levels were encouraged to draw on the archive and capture their own photograph of Brisbane's built environment. Sixty-eight images were chosen to be part of *Viewfinders*. This

display looks beyond Elliott's singular vision of Brisbane, reflecting the myriad ways in which people understand and experience the city.

Through contemporary intervention and community contribution, *New Light* encourages new ways of looking at our past, our present and this place.

## **Easy Read**

This exhibition draws on one of the largest photographic archives held by Museum of Brisbane. The Elliott Collection contains hundreds of photos of Brisbane taken by a photographer called Alfred Elliott (1870-1954). Each photo reflects Elliott's personal interests and lived experiences. Seven contemporary artists were asked to create new works in response to the Collection. Their works draw attention to the role photography plays in shaping our view of the world. Alongside these works, the Brisbane photography community shot their own photos inspired by the Collection. The artists' works and community contributions encourage new ways of looking at our past, our present and this place.

## **Part 1 – The Elliott Collection**

The Elliott Collection is one of the most significant photographic archives held by Museum of Brisbane, part of the City of Brisbane Collection. Acquired in 1983, the Elliott Collection was found stored in cedar cigar boxes under a house in Red Hill. For 30 years, it was believed to comprise over 300 glass-plate negatives and a tailboard camera. In 2014, an additional cigar box containing over 400 film negatives and 92 prints was uncovered in the Museum's storage facility. This exciting discovery expanded the Collection to cover 50 years, from 1890 to 1940.

## **Easy Read**

The Elliott Collection is one of the largest photographic archives held by Museum of Brisbane. It was found more than 40 years ago beneath a house in Red Hill. The Collection contains hundreds of photographs taken between 1890 and 1940.

## Part 2 – Alfred Henrie Elliott

Alfred Henrie Elliott was born on 16 January 1870 in Paignton, Devon, England. He was the youngest of seven children to Joseph Frederick Elliott and Elizabeth Ann Pitts née Stone. In 1875 at age five, Alfred sailed with his family from England to Australia aboard the *Gauntlet*. The family departed Gravesend, Kent in September and anchored at Cape Moreton in December. Due to a typhoid outbreak onboard, all passengers and crew were sent to the quarantine on Peel Island. On 7 February 1876, Alfred and his family finally set foot in Brisbane.

The Elliott family likely settled in Redcliffe. Alfred and his siblings attended Humpybong Provisional School, where their father Joseph Frederick became principal. After Joseph Frederick died in 1882, there is no record of where Alfred and his family lived or who supported them.

Alfred resurfaces in the archives after entering the workforce. He was employed as a law clerk and professional shorthand writer for a while, but spent most of his career as a bank clerk.

On 16 April 1900, Alfred married Elizabeth Ellen née Goldsbrough at her family home *Stourton Cottage* on Goldsbrough Road, Taringa. Over the next five years, the couple had two children: Elizabeth Ann Dorothy Elliott (called Dorothy) and Alfred Goldsbrough Elliott.

Between 1901 and 1902, Alfred and his family lived on Cairns Terrace, Red Hill. They later moved to Taringa, living first on Waverley Street then Stanley Terrace. The family settled in a house called *Tibrogargan*, which remained the family home until after Alfred's death on 30 April 1954.

**Easy Read**

Alfred Elliott was born in England in 1870. When he was five years old, he sailed to Australia with his family. Elliott attended school in Redcliffe and became a bank clerk later in life. He and his wife Elizabeth had two children together: Dorothy and Alfred Goldsbrough. The family lived in a house called *Tibrogargan* in Taringa.

## **Part 3 – Photographic Subjects**

In the 1890s, Alfred Elliott began photographing as a hobby. Although he captured a variety of subjects, he photographed with clear intention. Certain places and events seem to have appealed to him more than others, and this was reflected in what he chose to document. Together, his photographs construct a deeply personal account of Brisbane during a period of great change.

By the time Alfred began practising photography, Brisbane was already transforming from a country town into a modern city. Between 1890 and 1940, Brisbane tripled in population. This rapid growth ushered in a period of infrastructure development, suburban expansion, technological progress, social change and increased global engagement.

Alfred documented Brisbane by photographing streets and civic structures, processions and parades, recreation and sporting activities. His images present a typically colonial view of Brisbane. In turn, they lack a deep understanding of the lives and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and other communities outside his own.

One subject Alfred returned to repeatedly was the visibility of the British Empire. He actively participated in the extravagant celebrations that accompanied royal visits, and proudly documented Queensland soldiers preparing to support Britain in the Boer War. The sheer number of photographs related to the British Empire in the Elliott Collection indicates Alfred felt a sense of loyalty to the Crown, especially considering he only took three photographs related to the Federation of Australia.

Later in life, Alfred redirected his focus to documenting his extensive travels around Queensland and northern New South Wales. In the mid-1920s he bought a Citroën

car, followed by a Hillman car in the 1930s. These purchases afforded him an increased level of mobility and led to many road trips.

### **Easy Read**

Alfred Elliott photographed Brisbane at a time when the city was rapidly growing. His photographs feature streets, buildings, parades, picnics and sporting activities. He had a particular interest in photographing events related to the British Empire. These included royal visits and coronation celebrations. After he bought a car, Elliott began taking photographs of his trips throughout Queensland and New South Wales.

## **Part 4 – Photographic Technology**

Over the 50 years that Alfred Elliott practised photography, he embraced the new technologies of the time and experimented with different methods of production. Elliott's early photographs follow the dry-plate process. Invented in 1871, this method revolutionised photography. It involved coating a glass-plate in a gelatin emulsion and leaving it to dry; placing the plate in a camera and exposing it to light; then processing the plate to produce an image. Prior to this method, most photographers used glass-plates coated in a collodion solution that was only sensitive to light when wet. This meant the plates had to be coated, exposed and processed in one sitting. Dry-plates could be stored until exposure and processed at a later date. They could also be manufactured, which enabled people to focus on photo-taking rather than photo-making.

Many of Elliott's glass-plate photographs are examples of stereographs, or stereo views. Stereographs are an early form of three-dimensional technology that use the binocularity of human vision, the use of two eyes at once, to create the illusion of depth. They are composed of two almost identical images positioned next to each other – one for the left eye and one for the right. When viewed through a set of lenses called a stereoscope, the two images appear to combine into a single three-dimensional image. Elliott was likely drawn to stereographs as a popular form of entertainment.

By the 1920s, Elliott had fully transitioned to film photography. Pioneered by George Eastman and his company Kodak, film made it possible to take photographs in quick succession. Photographers simply had to load a roll of film into their camera; push a button to open the shutter and expose the film to light; then advance the film and continue snapping. Once used up, rather than having to do it themselves, photographers could send the film to be processed. Among the many benefits of film cameras, ease of travel would have certainly appealed to Elliott.

## Easy Read

Alfred Elliott followed the dry-plate process when he first started photography. This process involves coating a glass-plate in chemicals, then exposing it to light. Some of the photographs Elliott took feature two images side-by-side. These are called stereographs. When you look at them through a device called a stereoscope, the two images turn into a three-dimensional image. Later in life, Elliott switched to using a film camera. This made it easier and quicker for him to take a photograph.

## Joachim Froese

Montreal, Canada

*Dorothy's Birthday 2.0* 2024

Digital inkjet print from original negative and images displayed on smartphones

Joachim Froese's practice spans analogue and digital photography. Embracing a wide range of technologies and techniques, from salt prints to smartphones, his work investigates the role of photography in shaping our perceptions and understandings of the world.

Exploring the Elliott Collection, Joachim was particularly drawn to a photograph Alfred Elliott took of his daughter Dorothy's ninth birthday party. In the photograph, Dorothy sits outside with family and friends. Even though everyone has gathered to celebrate her birthday, Dorothy has been relegated to the edge of the group. Her brother, also called Alfred, has taken her rightful position front and centre. Dorothy frowns at the camera, nursing a doll in her lap, while Alfred rests a toy boat on his knees.

Since this photograph was taken in 1911, the world has experienced waves of social and technological change. Yet our desire to preserve moments from family life has remained steadfast. Reflecting on our perpetual want to 'freeze' memories, Joachim has translated Elliott's photograph of Dorothy's birthday into a contemporary context. He uploaded portraits of the partygoers onto what is now the most common type of camera: smartphones. Joachim restored and manipulated the portraits, and rearranged them into a new composition. By doing so, his work disrupts the hierarchy and gender roles presented in the original image. In Joachim's version, Dorothy is the centre of attention, smiling and holding the toy boat.

## **Easy Read**

Joachim Froese uses different photographic techniques in his practice. He has created a new version of a photo Alfred Elliott took of his daughter Dorothy's birthday party. In the original photo, Dorothy sits at the edge of a group, while her brother is in the centre. Joachim uploaded everyone's faces onto smartphones and rearranged the group. In his version, Dorothy is in the centre.

## **Carl Warner**

Brisbane

*Persistent Vision 2024*

Kodak Endura Metallic archival paper face mounted to acrylic

Carl Warner uses photography to draw attention to unseen and overlooked details in the natural and built environment. He isolates these details from their original contexts and renders them abstract, encouraging new ways of looking at the world. Carl was fascinated by the glass-plate photographs in the Elliott Collection.

Immediately, he noticed there was a pattern underpinning the landscapes. He found that the images share a horizon line, and in turn, the same ratio of foreground to background. They also frame the focal point of the scene in a similar manner. The reason Alfred Elliott chose to compose his photographs this way is unknown. He



could have been limited by the technology of the time, or perhaps it was an aesthetic choice. Either way, this 'way of seeing' defined much of his early practice.

Carl's series embraces the recurring pattern that emerges in Elliott's landscapes. Each work is printed on acrylic, recalling the materiality of a glass-plate. The first work features a photograph Elliott took of Enoggera Reservoir in 1893. In the second work, Carl has overlaid the photograph with different shapes to reveal the pattern it follows. In the third work, he has completely removed the photograph, leaving behind only the pattern. In the final two works, he has applied Elliott's 'way of seeing' to his own image of Brisbane. Together, Carl's works take you on a visual journey spanning a century.

## **Easy Read**

Carl Warner draws attention to details in the natural and built environment. When he looked through the Elliott Collection, he found a recurring pattern in many of the photos. He created this series to show you what the pattern looks like. There are five works and in the last one, Carl followed the pattern to take his own photo of Brisbane.

## **Nina White**

Brisbane

*An impenetrable past that is finished 2024*

Archival pigment on cotton rag smooth paper

Nina White's photographic practice is underpinned by extensive research. She studies existing photographic archives, and sometimes compiles her own, as part of her artistic process. Nina's work explores themes of family, memory, history and social norms.

From the outset, Nina was fascinated by the complex history of the Elliott Collection. The archive was a private collection until, through a series of unknown circumstances, it ended up beneath a house in Red Hill. After being rediscovered, it entered the City of Brisbane Collection and became publicly available. As the

custodianship of the archive has changed, so too has its purpose and condition. The Elliott Collection has transformed from a cache of personal memories to an informative historical record. It has been re-housed and re-categorised a multitude of times, evidenced by the various handwritings on the folders and boxes it is stored in. Nina's work draws attention to personal moments in the Elliott Collection that we rarely notice. She combed through the glass-plate photographs, seeking out details that contain little historical relevance, but carry a tenderness or were completely incidental. She cropped a range of details: hands clasping flowers, delicate lace collars, shadows on the road. She also cropped details related to the condition of the glass-plates: fingerprints, handling marks, emulsion cracks, glass breakages.

Together, the cropped images form a constellation of fragmented memories. There is no clear narrative to the work, highlighting the ambiguity of the Elliott Collection.

## **Easy Read**

Nina White is a photographer who likes to study archives. To create this work, she cropped lots of details in Alfred Elliott's photos. There are close-ups of hands, flowers, lace and shadows. There are also smudges, cracks, gaps and fingerprints. The cropped images are displayed together. They do not have a clear story, but share a tender and personal feeling.

## **Tammy Law**

Nambour, Qld

*We were thought to be mysterious and alien...* 2024

Digital photographs printed on photo adhesive and transparency film

Tammy Law's reflective and evocative works explore stories of migration, home and belonging. Spanning photography and bookmaking, her practice draws on her lived experiences as a Chinese-Australian woman, raised on the Sunshine Coast (Kabi Kabi and Jinibara land) and based in Meanjin, Brisbane.

Tammy approached the Elliott Collection looking to identify the stories and experiences it omits. The archive covers a 50-year period (1890-1940), coinciding

with a time of extreme turbulence for the Australian Chinese community. In 1848, the first Chinese people arrived in Brisbane as indentured labourers. Followed in small numbers, they mostly worked as shepherds and farm hands. Twenty years later, Queensland's gold rush brought a far larger influx of Chinese migrants. The success of many of these goldminers led to anti-Chinese riots throughout Australia. In 1901, the White Australia policy effectively stopped the immigration of people of colour, causing the Chinese population to decline. This policy remained intact until 1973. Tammy's work comprises photographs from the Elliott Collection and archival images of Queensland's early Chinese migrants. Placing these records in dialogue with one another, she asks – what was the relationship between Alfred Elliott, his social circle and Brisbane's Chinese community? Her work encourages greater consideration of the parallels and discrepancies between settler and migrant experiences. Alongside the historical photographs, Tammy has included contemporary portraits of her family. She took the portraits in quintessentially Australian environments – the bush, beach and 'burbs. Her photographs carry a sense of disorientation and unease, reflecting the tension that comes with living on colonised lands.

## Easy Read

Tammy Law explores themes of home and belonging. She has displayed photos from the Elliott Collection with photos of Queensland's early Chinese migrants. She has also included pictures of her own family. By bringing all of these images together, Tammy invites you to think about the different experiences of these groups of people in Brisbane.

## Marian Drew

Bundaberg, Qld

*Tibrogargan* 1890-2024

*Enoggera Creek* 1893-2024

*A Cordory Bridge, Maroochy River* 1890-2024

Dye Sublimation on mirror glass

Marian Drew's experimental approach to photography brings together elements of sculpture, performance and installation. She explores the role of photography in

shaping our view of the world, and in particular, our attitude towards the environment.

Delving into the Elliott Collection, Marian felt an instant connection to the photographs of Brisbane's natural landscapes. She found the images both familiar and uncanny. They prompted her to reflect on the act of looking at a photograph; of looking at the past through the present. When we 'read' a photograph, we do so through the lens of our lived experiences. We project our own thoughts and feelings onto the image, and as such, it becomes a mirror to our psyche. Depending on who is viewing it and in what context, the meaning of a photograph can radically shift. Marian applies this school of thought to the Elliott Collection. She created her work by digitally manipulating three of the Collection photographs, then printing them onto sheets of mirror. Looking at Marian's work enables you to feel part of Elliott's images – you literally see yourself reflected in his photographs. In that moment, the present folds into the past, and the past into the present. By printing onto mirror, Marian seeks to convey how the reading of a photograph reflects the lives and experiences of the viewer. In her own words, "Photographs have many incarnations of which we are necessarily a part".

## **Easy Read**

Marian Drew was drawn to the photos Alfred Elliott took of Brisbane's natural landscapes. When we look at a photo, we think about it in terms of our past experiences. That means a photo will mean something different to every person. Marian has edited and printed some of Elliott's photos onto sheets of mirror, so you can see yourself reflected in them.

## **Keemon Williams**

Brisbane

Koa, Kuku Yalanji and Meriam Mir people

*Archival Open World 2024*

Digital print

Keemon Williams works across photography, digital technologies and sculpture. He uses his practice to critically examine different aspects of his identity, including his relationship to place and culture, often within the broader context of being 'Australian'.

Exploring the Elliott Collection, Keemon was drawn to a photograph of Point Danger, taken from Duranbah Beach in Tweed Heads. Snapped by Alfred Elliott in 1923, the photograph depicts two horses on a deserted shore, bordered by rugged cliffs and the ocean. At the time, Tweed Heads was only just beginning to transform into the urban centre it is today. Nowadays, much of the terrain has been replaced by billboards, roads and high-rise apartments. Examining Elliott's photograph, Keemon wondered what the landscape would look like if it were freed from the colonial-capitalist system in which it operates, where much of the natural environment has been defaced.

Keemon used Photoshop to create a new narrative for Elliott's photograph. He inverted and colour graded the image, then experimented with the Clone Stamp tool. This tool enables you to copy one part of an image and paste it over another. It is often used to erase unwanted or accidental elements, such as photobombers. Keemon used the tool to transform Elliott's photograph into a futuristic landscape. The scene recalls an 'open world video game' (a virtual world in which players can approach objectives freely). Similar to these games, Keemon's work evokes a sense of exploration and escapism. It emphasises the value in using your imagination to connect with, and in some cases reclaim, objects and places that, at first glance, may feel distant or unrelatable.

## **Easy Read**

Keemon Williams was drawn to a photo Alfred Elliott took of two horses on a beach in Tweed Heads. He used Photoshop to turn the photo into a futuristic landscape. Keemon added new objects to the image using a tool called 'Clone Stamp'. He used his imagination to connect with Elliott's photo, which at first, was difficult to relate to.

## Jo-Anne Driessens

Brisbane

Guwa-Koa and Kuku Yalanji people

*Out on a bunya limb, Musgrave Park*

*Bunya-scape, Musgrave Park*

All works 2024

Digital image on SwissQ metal mirror finish and Ma4e varnish

*Indooroopilly bridge and bunya tree*

*Surf's up, Story Bridge*

*Redcliffe ebb and flow bridge views*

All works 2024

Medium format black and white negative on SwissQ metal mirror finish and Ma4e varnish

Jo-Anne Driessens is a social documentary photographer with a passion for archival research. Raised by a non-Indigenous family, she has found photography to be a powerful tool in finding and connecting with her Aboriginal family and the wider community.

Jo-Anne resonated with many of the places Alfred Elliott photographed, both personally and culturally. Having spent most of her life in Brisbane, she realised she had walked the same streets as him, especially those in the western suburbs. Across his photographs, she was particularly drawn to the recurring presence of bunya pines. These magnificent dome-shaped trees are considered sacred by Aboriginal people and were once an important food source. Every three years, groups from near and far would gather in the Bunya Mountains and Blackall Ranges to feast on the nuts, exchange knowledge, perform ceremonies and settle disputes. Jo-Anne worked like a detective, scouring Elliott's photographs for any trace of a bunya pine, even just the shadow of a branch.

Over the course of a week, Jo-Anne retraced Elliott's steps through Brisbane. Of the many photographs she took, she selected five for display. Two of the photographs pay tribute to the bunya pines in Musgrave Park, a site of significance for many Aboriginal people. The park was once Aboriginal camping ground, and since the 1960s, has been the focus of significant Aboriginal protests and cultural events. Next to these photographs, Jo-Anne has captured three bridges of importance to both her and Elliott: Walter Taylor Bridge in Indooroopilly, Story Bridge in Kangaroo Point and Houghton Highway in Brighton. Her work offers a new reading of the Elliott Collection, one rooted in her lived experiences.

## Easy Read

Jo-Anne Driessens discovered there were lots of bunya pines in Alfred Elliott's photos. Bunya pines are considered sacred by Aboriginal people and were once an important food source. Jo-Anne created her work by photographing the bunya pines in Musgrave Park. She also photographed three bridges of importance to her that also feature in the Elliott Collection. Jo-Anne's work offers a new reading of the Collection based on her lived experiences.

## Viewfinders

*New Light: Photography Now + Then* features contemporary responses to one of the most significant photographic archives held by Museum of Brisbane. The Elliott Collection comprises hundreds of photographs largely attributed to amateur photographer, Alfred Elliott (1870-1954). Traversing a variety of subjects, these photographs capture Brisbane over 50 years from 1890 to 1940.

As part of *New Light*, members of Brisbane's photography community were invited to respond to the Elliott Collection. Photographers of all levels were encouraged to study the photographs Elliott took of Brisbane's urban landscape and consider his use of subject, composition and light. They were then invited to hit the streets and capture their own photograph of Brisbane's built environment. There were few restrictions, only that their photograph had to be black and white and landscape in orientation.

Sixty-eight photographs were chosen to be part of *Viewfinders*. This display looks beyond Elliott's singular vision of Brisbane, reflecting the myriad ways in which people understand and experience the city. Many of the photographs draw attention to unseen or overlooked details of Brisbane's urban landscape. Others shed new light on iconic buildings and structures. As a whole, the photographs reveal the extent to which the city has changed over the past century. From intimate close-ups to breathtaking wide shots, *Viewfinders* highlights the incredible talent and diversity of Brisbane's photography community.

### **Easy Read**

Photographers of all levels were invited to look through the Elliott Collection and take their own photos of Brisbane's built environment. Sixty-eight photos were selected to be part of *Viewfinders*. This display highlights the incredible talent and diversity of Brisbane's photography community.