

*Australian photographer John Pollard FRPS died in 2018, leaving behind not just a grieving family and a substantial legacy of photographic work in public and private collections, but also an eclectic collection of books representing his varied interests over his life. In this on-going column I hope to stimulate interest and reflection on various aspects of photography based on perusal of John's collection of books. In the process I also aim to periodically shine a light on John's career and his practice.*

### In Praise of Books

In a world where we all use the Web to source our knowledge, and view our images electronically on a screen, it seems strange to be using books as a source of information, stimulation and entertainment. Yet there is a special quality about books, in the same way as there is for the printed image. I should probably have just got ChatGPT to write some articles about John, but it wouldn't be the same.



Front cover image by John Pollard FRPS

In many cases John's books have personal attributions from fellow artists, or personal endearments from friends and relatives; they come alive when taken in the context of a life lived to the full.

Many of us 'Oldies,' educated before the advent of the Web, have substantial collections of books: treasured collections, purchased over many years at great personal expense, or given and received as gifts in admiration, or thanks. Unfortunately, they mostly have no value at all in our modern world. They occupy valuable space, are impossible to search, and unless properly conserved and curated, inevitably decay. They are impossible to get rid of. I recently 'downsized' my collection and after many attempts to find good homes, took them to the charity shop – there they entered the front door and were wheeled straight through to the dumpster at the back! When I asked the staff for an explanation I was told 'we have far too many books, they're not popular, so we just recycle them.' The much beloved second-hand bookshops are all disappearing; those that remain are very particular about which books they will accept. University libraries are now dedicated to efficient electronic access rather than collecting more books. We will all leave a legacy of trees consumed and boxes of wood pulp to incinerate; in the light of disastrous global climate change it's just another thing for us Baby Boomers to feel guilty about!

With the obvious exceptions of the holistic collections such as the National Library of Congress and the Bodleian in Oxford, and the prized 'object value' of outstanding books such as Leonardo's 'Codex Leicester' – which sold for \$30.8 million in 1994 or Birds of America by John Audubon which sold for \$11.5 million in 2010, books have little perceived value.

Even when contemporary books reach heights of popularity they are often not pored over physically, but listened to instead as podcasts or audible books.

So rather like the proverbial salmon swimming against the torrential flow of the river I hope to swim against the digital river and spawn a few ideas based on good old fashioned wood pulp!



A Scattering of Light (left) and Jasmin (above) by John Pollard



Above all else John Pollard was an internationally acclaimed fine art photographer and in 2000 he was invited to join the prestigious London Salon of Photography. Membership of the Salon is limited to forty photographers and is by invitation only. John was (at the time of his death) the only Australian member. Our first book, appropriately then, was published to mark the occasion of the London Salon's centenary in 2010. It is a collection of 156 photographs from London Salon members and no less than five of them, reproduced here, were John's.

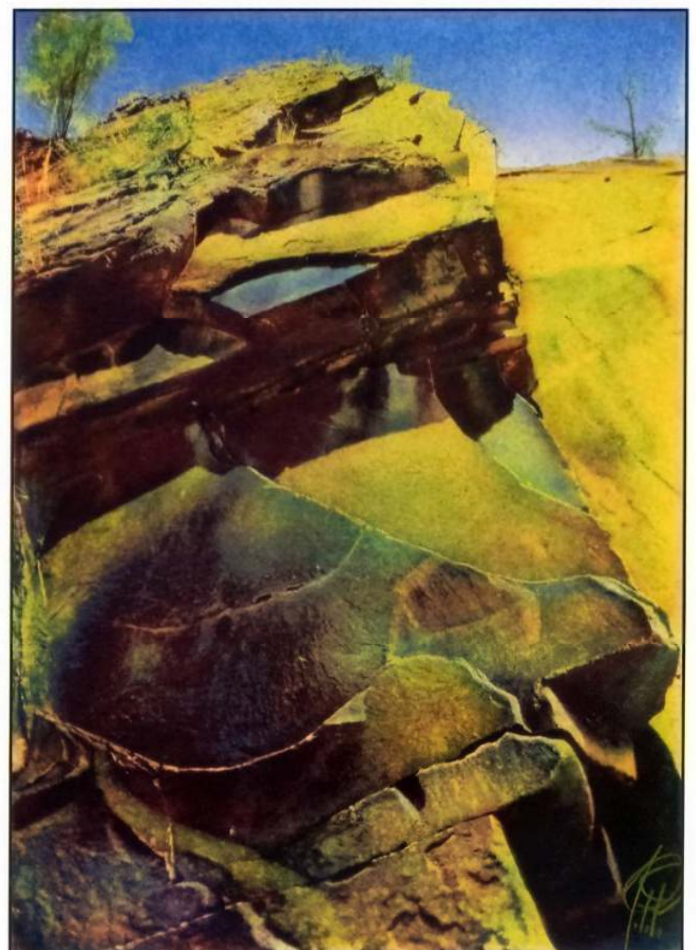
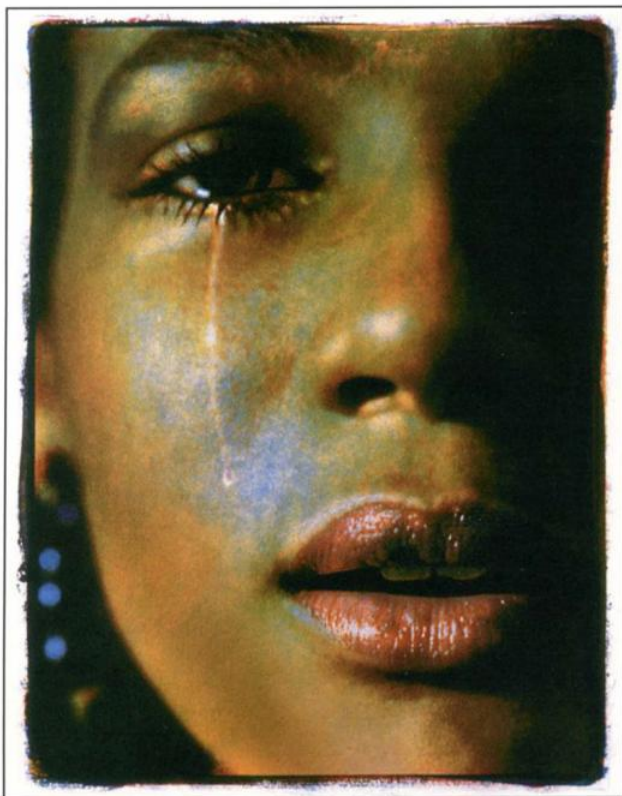
The London Salon was the successor of the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring formed in the 1890s as a breakaway group from the RPS to advance the cause of artistic photography.

Its aim was and still is 'to exhibit only that class of photographic work in which there is distinct evidence of artistic feeling and execution.' If you think the current debate raging within the RPS about generative artificial intelligence images is unusual for a learned society – think again! In 1892 The Photographic Society (the predecessor of the RPS) was ripped apart because of arguments concerning the balance of attention given to artistic work over scientific work, especially in the selection of images for the annual exhibition, or 'salon' as exhibitions were called in those days. Henry Peach Robinson, the then Vice-President and George Davidson, another Council member resigned and set up the Brotherhood of the Linked Ring in opposition to the Society. But more of this in another *Newsletter* with another book from the Pollard collection.

As the wave of hysteria over AI continues unabated, I'll leave you with a quote from a gorgeous little book in the Pollard Collection called 'Springs of Roman Wisdom':

***'It is a general human weakness to allow things,  
Uncertain and Unknown, to set us up in hope,  
Or plunge us into fear.'***

*Gaius Caesar*



Africa (above) and Escarpment (right) by John Pollard FRPS