



Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory

MEDIA RELEASE

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The Policeman's Eye: the photography of Paul Foelsche 1870s – 1890s

On display from Saturday 21 January 2006 until Sunday 19 March 2006 at the Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin.

The Policeman's Eye is a stunning insight into colonial Australian life as captured through the lens of Paul Foelsche – the Northern Territory's first head of Police.

As Darwin (or Palmerston as it was then known) took shape in the 1870s and 1880s Foelsche collected images of the growing town and captured key moments of its development. These images are juxtaposed with Foelsche's photo-portraits of the local Aboriginal people who were being displaced and dispossessed by European settlement.

The Policeman's Eye combines a selection of the best of Foelsche's images with a range of rare Aboriginal artefacts collected from the Darwin region by Foelsche. This unique series of images and artefacts has never been assembled or seen in one place before.

Several of the artefacts feature in Foelsche's Aboriginal portraits and studies. More than a century after their collection, these fragments of ethnographic 'evidence' help to reposition Foelsche's subjects in the present, enabling contemporary practice to encounter past traditions.

The Policeman's Eye is curated by Dr Philip Jones of the South Australian Museum and Tim Smith of the University of Melbourne, in collaboration with Larrakia, Djerimanga and Iwaidja communities.

Dr Jones said the exhibition is not only important historically, but also from an anthropological perspective.

"Foelsche's cultivation of photographic portraiture provides both an element of policing strategy and a contribution to the then emerging discipline of physical anthropology," Dr Jones said.

"In this exhibition, Foelsche's Aboriginal portraits are presented not only as exemplars of the emerging genres of physical anthropology and police photography, but as 'witnesses' to Foelsche's townscapes and landscape images.

"Recent research has revealed the individual identities for these Aboriginal portraits, helping to reposition those individuals as historical actors, rather than as passive colonial subjects.

"This exhibition documents the frontier of Aboriginal/European contact in a new way, by reconstituting the individuals from the social groups who witnessed and participated in that contact."

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