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02

# Art

Wildlife Photographs of the Year  
See Message



Photoshop till you drop. Edited by Darryn King

## Creation



The artist had an absolute ball working on her latest exhibition Catherine Nelson's *Bourgeois Spring*

With a little bit of pixel pushing, a photographic artist becomes a creator of worlds. By *Bethany Small*

Catherine Nelson's *Creation* series is a set of technically amazing and very beautiful photographic representations of natural subjects, reconfigured into the form of floating worlds.

In these ultra-detailed images, flowers, a pond covered in lily pads, a flock of birds or trees surrounding a lake are digitally transformed into planetary spheres with the proportions all perfectly intact at the centre of the frame and the sky shaped into a flat surrounding 'ground' from which they emerge. The whole landscape is caught in the picture, but becomes

something else entirely: a perspectival fantasy. When you look long enough the distortion seems to take on a propulsive aspect. These worlds aren't quite steady around the edges: they seem to be expanding outward, stretching and swelling.

The series title, *Creation*, could refer to the natural world so closely examined in them – visual testimony to the existence and benevolence of a higher power. It also alludes to creation as a process, the self-perpetuation of worlds as elemental and biological function. Neither of these possibilities seems like a stretch for an artist who takes curious and loving pictures of the world and how things in it look; one who, moreover, has been short-listed for the Blake Prize in spiritual and religious art.

Nelson followed her fine arts studies in painting in London and Sydney with qualifications in computer animation and visual effects for film. She's the same Catherine Nelson who appears on IMDb with 26 credits to her name for films including the second *Harry Potter*, *300*, a couple of Baz Luhrmann films and *House of Wax* for video effects and as a digital compositor. *Creation* is at once deeply informed by this work and distinct from it. There's another meaning of the title at work here. Human creation: something invented, something made up, something synthesised. Nelson's work is proof that human creation can be beautiful too.

**Creation** Australian Centre for Photography, 4 Feb–12 Mar

## Tales from Elsewhere



Puppy love *The Debutants*

Polixeni Papapetrou's love of dress-ups, performance and her own children is on display in a new retrospective. By Darryn King

**It's been said that realism is not your thing. Correct?** For sure, I'm not a documentary photographer. I like the idea of transporting the viewer into another space where they can experience a feeling of wonder. I would also hope that when someone looks at my pictures they may also take on a more reflective view of the world. I try to build enough reality to convince you that you are in the real world, but enough ambiguity to induce fantasy.

**What draws you to child subjects?** I think that photographs of children hold a certain magic because, when we look at children, there are things we cannot yet know: their future is a mystery. The period of childhood is relatively short in the context of a lifetime, but it's an important time because many formative things happen.

### "Photographs of children hold a certain magic"

**Your children, Olympia and Solomon, are 14 and 12 now. Tell us about working with them through the years.** When I became a mother in 1997, it felt necessary to record my life with my child, but not in a literal way. I wanted to reflect on the poetic dimension of childhood and how children and adults can find common ground in art. When I started photographing Olympia and then her brother, I got on a roller coaster ride and I can't get off – until the ride comes to an end. We're still on that ride.

**Does working with your family have its own challenges?** We always make an event of the shoot, whether it is a picnic with lots of food or going away for a holiday to make the picture. It's always a great time for us as a family, to make something collectively.

**Polixeni Papapetrou** Australian Centre for Photography, 4 Feb–12 Mar