

# Found Perceptions

Tessa Ivison

“All that we see or seem is but  
a dream within a dream”

- Edgar Allan Poe

Found Perceptions explores the infinite number of ways we can perceive and interpret the world. Traditionally, cameras are used to share a photographer’s perspective. However, in Found Perceptions, Ivison asks what if the camera has its own way of seeing?

The artist has created a series of unique pinhole cameras from found objects, designed to record a single moment from many perspectives. The resulting photographs question common assumptions associated with the medium and how we interpret the world.

## Pinhole by Catherine Rogers

The pinhole camera – as a concept and in practice – absolutely blows apart any preconceptions we might hold about what photography, or a photograph, is. Tessa Ivison’s work with pinhole cameras shows us why. Her cameras and their images reveal how photography (that is, the objects, processes and procedures of photographic image production) and the resulting photograph itself, cannot be pinned down as certain, known, or even immediately recognisable as a photographic image. Pinhole images, as Tessa’s images reveal, can vary enormously in their appearance – which is the pleasure of working with a self-made camera and exploiting its endless possibilities.

With her cameras and photographs, Tessa Ivison questions common assumptions about photography, showing us what else is possible visually and photographically, when the photographer is not tethered to a manufactured, lensed, single view-point camera, or to fast exposures and quick pictures. Embedded in pinhole photography’s processes and procedures is the critical and distinguishing factor of time.

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When compared to contemporary, lensed camera photography that deals in fractions of seconds, pinhole photography is usually an extended activity with exposure of seconds, minutes, hours and even days depending on the camera, the pinhole and its location. From the time of making an exposure to the production of the image, the slower pace of pinhole photography is conducive to a more contemplative approach to image making as Tessa's images show.

A self-made camera, designed by the photographer herself, can be made to view the world in many ways – and all at once too, as Tessa shows us with the wonderful 104 pinhole camera made from a plastic tray, the camera itself also becoming an art object. Time is registered in distinctive ways in the multiple pinhole camera – from its gathering of many unique exposures to the fact that each pinhole creates a different image (having a different view-point) and this extraordinary accumulation of images can be viewed later, all at once. It's a complex and an extraordinary idea to render simultaneous times.

Tessa also makes single view-point pinhole cameras to create beautiful photographs that also challenge the notion of the single or singular point of view that popular photography appears to support. She also shows how pinhole camera photography dispenses with the assumption of an essential link between the human eye and the camera body. The idea of multiple viewpoints is a valuable intervention into both the visual and philosophical worlds of looking and seeing, so too, an eye-level point of view can never be assumed in pinhole camera work. (A rough viewfinder can, of course, be added to the pinhole camera.) Long exposures, typical of pinhole (especially in analogue, or darkroom) photography generally, preclude hand-holding the camera which is usually placed anywhere solid, such as on the ground. The pinhole camera, detached from both the eye and from the hands of its operator, is separated from the human body, unlike manufactured cameras with built-in viewfinders that tie both the eye and the users' hands and body to the camera.

The charm of the pinhole camera image is that it is not perfect – it is not perfectly sharp and the image is often full of visual surprises that can appear to have little to do with the subject itself. But then pinhole photography really has no rules – except the law of nature that light waves cross when passed through a small aperture into a darkened chamber. No matter what size the hole, slit or aperture in the camera, light is bent as it brushes past the edge of the pinhole aperture itself causing an amount of 'softness' or blur in the resultant image. While a pinhole image will never be super sharp, it will have infinite depth of field and an equal sharpness across the image creating a different kind of looking for the viewer and our eyes must survey the entire surface of the image. Tessa's rich Internal Landscapes work with this kind of all-over rendering of the image, invite the viewer to look into the apparently fluid forms and the rich colours which make up her suggestive landscapes.

Tessa's images made with pinhole cameras are challenging in their scope and engaging to contemplate. They ask us to reconsider what we think we see and how we see it.

There is still so much magic to be experienced in photography through pinhole photography, whether it be using digital or darkroom technologies – lens-less image investigation and creation have much to offer the curious photographer. Pinhole photography is an adventure that can begin very simply with a self-made camera with its own, unique pinhole or light-leak. The pinhole camera photographer can embrace any of the infinite possibilities that pinhole photography has to offer, just as Tessa has so ably done.

#### About | Catherine Rogers

Catherine Rogers is a photographer whose work is marked by curiosity, humour, erudition, and strong aesthetic motivations. Her practice began in the 1970s, and her copious body of work was surveyed in the exhibition *Evidence and the Visible* at Drill Hall Gallery in June 2022.

## Image list

17	Tessa Ivison, Bus stop panorama, 2022, digital print, 42 x 59 cm	*
18	Tessa Ivison, Bus stop obscura, 2022, digital print, 21 x 29 cm	*
19	Tessa Ivison, The Beast, 2022, multi-pinhole camera	NFS
20	Tessa Ivison, Through they eyes of the beast, 2022, digital print, 84 x 118 cm	*
21	Tessa Ivison, Panopticon, 2022, multi-pinhole camera	NFS
22	Tessa Ivison, Untitled, 2022, digital print, 59.4 x 42 cm	*
23	Tessa Ivison, Box obscura, 2022, pinhole camera	NFS
24	Tessa Ivison, Blackbird, 2022, photogravure with chine-colle, 20 x 20 cm	\$350
25	Tessa Ivison, Monolith, 2022, photogravure with chine-colle, 20 x 20 cm	\$350
26	Tessa Ivison, Mountain, 2022, photogravure with chine-colle, 20 x 20 cm	\$350

\* Price on request

## About | Tessa Ivison

Tessa is a contemporary artist based near Yass, NSW. She enjoys exploring experimental photography, from lumen prints and pinhole cameras to pushing the boundaries of digital media. She has previously exhibited with Photoaccess, Canberras' Gallery of Small Things and the Head On photo festival in Sydney.