

T H E S U M -

M A T I O N

O F F O R C E

Trent Parke and Narelle Autio: *The Summation of Force*

By Gideon Haigh

'T Parke No dates known.' Cricket Archive is a remarkable English database that allows those who enjoy that sort of thing to retrieve scores for almost 700,000 cricket matches over the last 300 years. Among the 1.2 million profiles is one for Australia's only Magnum photographer, Trent Parke, who played some state second XI cricket in 1991 against the likes of Adam Gilchrist and Michael Slater as an almost-but-not-quite bowler of leg-breaks, too obscure to have been required to divulge biographical data. Soon after, Parke trekked from his native Newcastle to take a job on Sydney's *Daily Telegraph*, and realised that because 'the job demanded so much...my sporting career was over.'

Yet Parke's sporting life continued: for five years his camera skills made him a sporting witness, with cricket as a preferred subject; *The Summation of Force*, a collaboration with his partner Narelle Autio, also an accomplished photo-media artist, finds them in the role of sporting parents, and, in the way that parenthood encourages, seeing even familiar things afresh. Autio's own childhood involved sharing a backyard with three cricket-crazy brothers, with its obligatory rites of passage.

The Summation is precluded by home movie footage of Dash's birth, when Jem was two, opening out into informal glimpses of the brothers' earliest spontaneous backyard games. For it is one thing to be born into a home with a love of cricket; nothing advances early development so much as the availability of a playmate, rival, and yardstick. In a recent study of the many brothers who have played internationally, the cricket scholar Scyld Berry detected a trend, solid enough to be statistically significant, for the superiority of younger siblings, forced to keep up, compelled to stretch.

Rivalry excites those merely observing too. For *The Summation* itself originated a couple of years ago when Jem (now 12) and Dash (now 10) began taxing their parents with questions of naïve profundity. How did you bowl fast? I mean, really, really fast? And why could some people bowl faster than others? Was it nature? Nurture? Passion? Providence? Out of custom, Parke and Autio turned to the camera for answers, and filming their ever-willing boys more purposefully turned into an exercise that if not all-consuming certainly consumed the family backyard, transforming it into a cricket academy cum film set with three lights, one camera and one pitch.

It's this further adaptation of the man-made environment we see in the Introduction, the painstaking laying, rolling and baking of twenty-two yards of turf, with the concession to domesticity that the Hills Hoist remains. A trophy gleams, a bat is sanded, sights to excite anticipation, recognition and even envy in any cricket breast – we're reminded, too, how much must occur beforehand in order to retrieve for cricket the pristine appearance that reconnect with its pre-industrial origins. Insect life flushed from cover by the surface disturbance further hint at the organic: pitches, like people, have cycles and characters; they grow and degrade; they can be 'lively'; they can play 'dead'. Cricket's restriction to summer is conventional but arbitrary: much of *The Summation*, in fact, was filmed over 150 autumn and winter evenings between the hours of 5pm and 9pm, but is no less evocative of cricket season for that.



Darkness is a favoured backdrop for Parke's photography, accentuating tones, obscuring inessentials, relieved here by Autio's stark illuminations. Act 1 of *The Summation* begins with Dash, unconsciously mimicking his namesake in *The Incredibles* (2006), sprinting for elongated seconds along darkened pavements – running, somehow, in a way that is perhaps harder to explain than to know, like a cricketer, with its very particular athleticism and rhythm. *The Summation* has universal qualities, but those who have watched the game will experience a special communion, feel their own 'cricketiness'. Watching Dash's dash, I somehow knew instinctively that he was running into to bowl with his left hand and at pace – it was the first of many occasions where the pang of identification caused personal reflection on how natural, how familiar, how warmly reassuring I find cricket's embrace.

By now the Hills Hoist has been adapted as part of the training equipment, the roof is an inconvenient trap, the window an all-too inviting target; the equipment is spartan; the helmet is superfluous, except for holding balls; and, as in every backyard axis, the older bats while the younger bowls. The contest is wonderfully willing and uninhibited – the lack of inhibition, perhaps, best expressed by competing brothers. Not far from the Parke/Autio home is the backyard in which the three brothers Chappell played their own fierce and uncompromising boyhood games, out of which emerged two fierce and uncompromising Australian captains. When Dash bounces a waterlogged ball, Jem hooks, ducks and deflects, and the pair fight over a bat, like the barefoot Sydney urchins in Ken G. Hall's famous featurette *That's Cricket* (1931), they are exploring the possibilities for hostility within bounds of consanguinity.

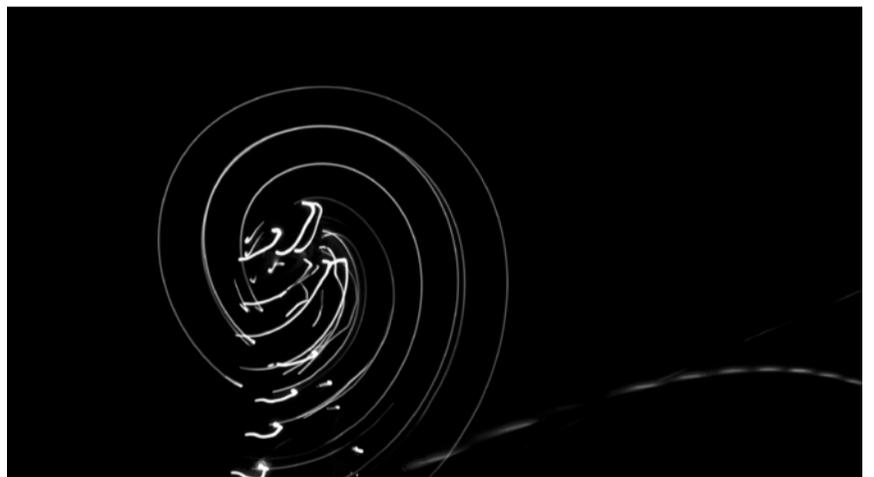
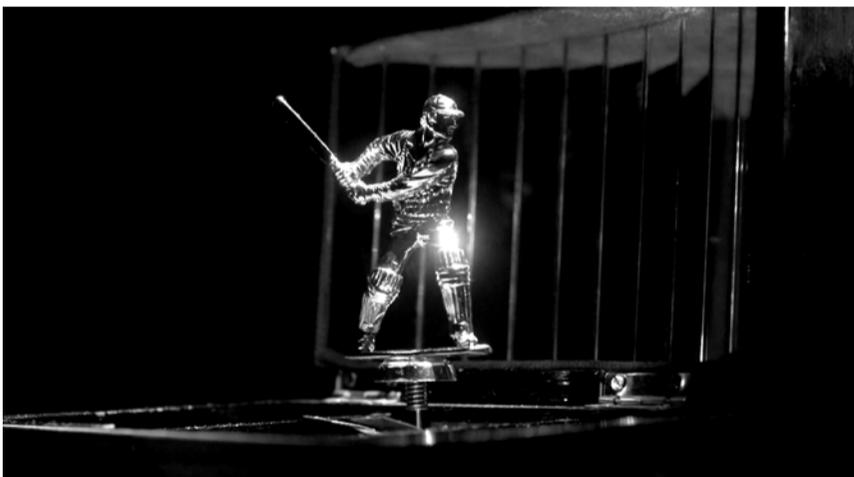
In Act 2 of *The Summation*, individual prowess is collectivised into team activity, as Jem and Dash are subsumed into whiteclad junior XIs parading before a dark-clad adult gallery – sport is ever youth on display before an older audience. The teams, all padded and prepared to bat, mime a unanimous forward stroke with martial cohesion, then as the act unfolds peel off one-by-one – here is cricket's unique quality of dissolving into individual games within games, interspersed with waiting, so much waiting. Within that, once a balancing ball has been added, so much variation on a set of seemingly rigid technical principles, as we see when the screen is broken up into a score of bowlers, all exploring more or less the same set of motions in identical attire yet as distinguishable as their physicalities and personalities. At length we are sideways to the action – for cricket is a decidedly sideways game, and in some respects from this vantage the more exquisite, revealed in its arcs, rotations, speeds and angles, the height of its leaps and the length of its strides. A batter and bowler perform in silhouette; a wicketkeeper squats patiently motionless, until at last he juts out a reflex hand.



Building on a flare of colour in Act 2 where the bowlers' velocities ignite speed guns, a flickering television, solitary aerial and a billowing net commence Act 3, dedicated to the cricketer being watched, consumed, measured, analysed. The techniques spontaneously arrived at in the previous acts are now undergoing monitoring, refinement, modification and harnessing. Jem and Dash are accoutred in suits of lights that map their movements amid lightning-like flashbulbs; Jem's endurance is tested by a treadmill; Dash's stamina is honed by a training parachute; we are offered a fielder's eye view of a slashing square cut. The game's newest variant, Twenty20, has inspired unexampled experimentation, unending novelties; it has enclosed it, too, in an apparatus dedicated to translating cricket into data – and dollars. The 'cricket system' is routinely referred to without irony, and without contemplation of its entailments.

The same boys who frolicked obliviously in Act 1 are in Act 3 themselves spun and scrutinised, simplified to firing synapses and pulsating nerves - at last, in the epilogue, they converge and fuse ecstatically. Within a few years, Jem and Dash, who've already represented South Australia at indoor under-age level, will attract talent scouts; their father, himself a Level 2 coach, may watch them offered the sporting career he forsook. And among the most pleasing qualities of *The Summation* is that it never loses sight of the allure of such a pursuit – cricket is made to look dynamic, beautiful, powerful, joyful – amid the game's myriad dimensions.





Trent PARKE and Narelle AUTIO
The Summation of Force (detail), 2017
HD video, 16:9 with sound, 8 channel
video installation, 27 minutes

Courtesy the artists and Hugo Michell Gallery,
Adelaide and Stills Gallery, Sydney

Trent Parke and Narelle Autio: *The Summation of Force*

30 June — 1 September 2017
Gallery 1

Published by the Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia
GPO Box 2471, Adelaide SA 5001 T 08 8302 0870 E samstagmuseum@unisa.edu.au
W unisa.edu.au/samstagmuseum

Copyright © the artists, author and University of South Australia

All rights reserved. This publication is copyright. Except as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part of this publication may be reproduced by any process, electronic or otherwise, without permission in writing from the publisher. Neither may information be stored electronically in any form whatsoever without such permission.

ISBN 978-0-9943350-7-4

Author: Gideon Haigh
Exhibition Curators: Erica Green and Gillian Brown
Graphic Design: Xtra Shiny

Trent PARKE and Narelle AUTIO, *The Summation of Force*, 2017, HD video, 16:9 with sound, 8 channel video installation, 27 minutes

Presented by the Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art in association with Closer Productions and the Adelaide Film Festival

Directors: Trent Parke and Narelle Autio in association with Matthew Bate
Editor: Raynor Pettge
Sound Design: Leigh Kenyon
Composer: Jason Sweeny
Animation: Convergen
Actors: Jem and Dash Autio Parke

Trent Parke and Narelle Autio are each represented by Hugo Michell Gallery, Adelaide, Australia and Stills Gallery, Sydney, Australia — www.hugomichellgallery.com / www.stillsgallery.com.au

Samstag Museum of Art Director: Erica Green
Curator: Gillian Brown
Associate Curator: Fulvia Mantelli
Curatorial Researcher: Joanna Kitto
Curatorial and Art After Dark Assistant: Sophia Nuske
Samstag Administrator: Karen Devenport
Gallery Attendants: Claire Robinson, Emily Clinton

The Samstag Museum of Art wishes to express our special gratitude to Trent Parke and Narelle Autio whose enthusiasm and dedication to telling uniquely Australian stories lend this epic and ambitious project its power.

Our sincere thanks also go to Gideon Haigh for his lively and engaging essay, to Matthew Bate and the Closer Productions team for their production prowess and to Amanda Duthie and the Adelaide Film Festival for their generous support.



SAMSTAG
MUSEUM

