list of works

Simon Terrill

Crowd Theory Adelaide: Victoria Square / Tarntanyangga, 2013
type C print
three panels, 160.0 x 93.5;
160.0 x 202.0; 160.0 x 93.5 cm
Commissioned by the Samstag Museum
of Art, University of South Australia, 2013
University of South Australia Art Collection

Simon Terrill's work is a photographic engagement with groups, crowds and the spaces they occupy that has involved large scale stage-managed events and also images of groups of people captured in motion, unaware of the camera's presence. The focus on the crowd is centered around an idea of a contrasting and oscillating space between the personal and the public, the individual and the collective and the impact of these fluid definitions on architecture, portraiture and the photograph.

Crowd Theory Adelaide is part of an ongoing series of international photographic events by Terrill. For each event, a time and place is specified and people are invited to respond to the site, but their specific actions on-site are left undirected and uncontrolled. Through this random orchestration of bodies in site-specific venues, *Crowd Theory* seeks to expand upon accepted definitions and perceptions of what it is that constitutes a 'community' and how this converges with the notion and implications of a 'crowd'.

Terrill completed a BA in Sculpture (1998) and a Masters degree at the Victorian College of the Arts (2004) where he also taught Art History and Critical Studies for five years. He was awarded the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship that resulted in him being a Graduate Affiliate at the Slade School of Art in London (2009). He has been the recipient of a number of awards, including grants and residencies from Arts Council England (2010), the Australia Council (2009, 2002 and 1998), Acme Studios' London Bow Cross Artist Residency. Recent exhibitions include *Balfron Project II*, National Trust Ernö Goldfinger House, London; *Negotiating this world: Contemporary Australian Art*, National Gallery of Victoria; *Rencontres d'Arles Book Exhibition*, France; *Phantom*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne; *Summer Exhibition*, Royal Academy, London. His works are held in public and private collections in the UK and Australia. A monograph of his work titled *Proscenium* was published in 2011 by M.33.

Simon Terrill: Crowd Theory Adelaide

3 May – 5 July 2013

Gallery 3

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Terrill's triptych *Crowd Theory Adelaide: Victoria Square / Tarntanyangga* 2013 is commissioned by the Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia. The *Crowd Theory Adelaide* event was initiated and produced by the Samstag Museum of Art.

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Composer: David Franzke
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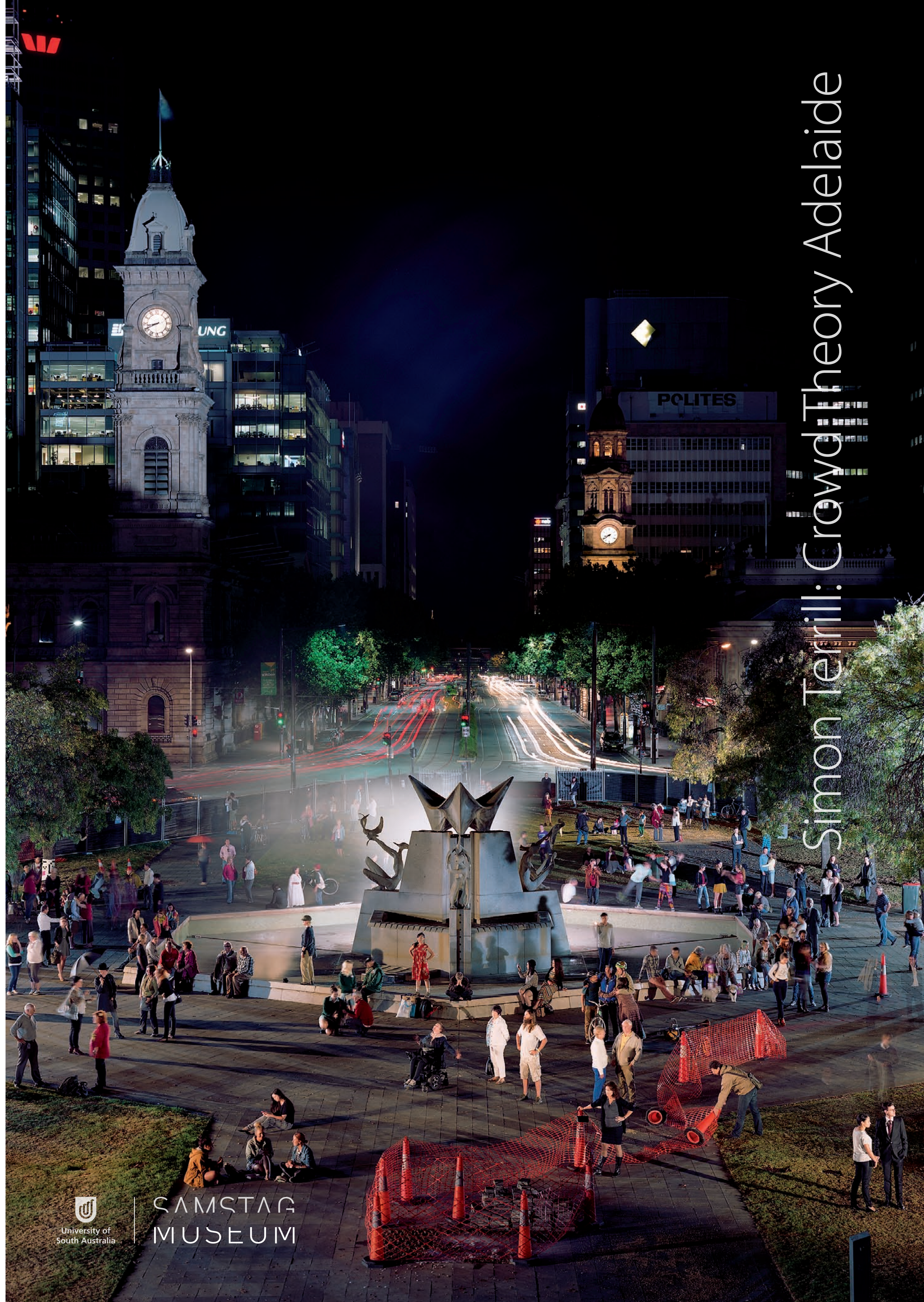
Cover and opposite: Simon TERRILL, *Crowd Theory Adelaide: Victoria Square / Tarntanyangga* (detail), 2013
type C print, three panels, 160.0 x 93.5; 160.0 x 202.0; 160.0 x 93.5 cm. Commissioned by the Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2013
University of South Australia Art Collection, image © and courtesy the artist, represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne



Simon Terrill: Crowd Theory Adelaide

View from the fountainhead

Crowd Theory Adelaide
Victoria Square / Tarntanyangga
27 February 2013

Image: Simon TERRILL, *Crowd Theory Adelaide: Victoria Square / Tarntanyangga*, 2013, type C print, three panels, 160.0 x 93.5; 160.0 x 202.0; 160.0 x 93.5 cm
Commissioned by the Samstag Museum of Art, University of South Australia, 2013, University of South Australia Art Collection, image © and courtesy the artist, represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Study any 'artist's impression' of future architectural projects and you will see an assortment of people distributed artfully through the imagined space. Known in architectural jargon as 'entourage' these figures establish the size of what might otherwise be abstract scale-less form, while their poses and actions implicitly give instruction about what the space or building is for. They carry this obligation visibly, as if aware of their demographically representative roles – the purposeful office worker, a placid mother pushing a pram up a ramp; contented senior citizens sitting in the shade of a canopy; even a skateboarder zipping out of the frame for urban credibility. Most are styled with the awkward self-consciousness of clothing catalogue models.

In Simon Terrill's seventh addition to the *Crowd Theory* photographic series started in 2004, there is entourage aplenty to fill the vast pitch of Adelaide's Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga, on a moody February evening. Yet these are no fantasy folk, but around 300 people who have taken up Terrill's offer to come at an in-between hour, during in-between weather, for something in-between theatre and candid camera. Like the figures in architectural renderings, they seem to be taking their presence in the Square with some earnestness. Many have come prepared, and are performing with intent. Some have props; briefcases, heavy legal tomes they are pretending to read. Two or three beanies on the warm night suggest more than a casual reference to 'Where's Wally' crowd scenes. Many are, like diligent postmodernists, photographically recording the photographing, with serious equipment or iPhones. A hipster on his bike makes slow loops through the crowd. A man hops in deep measured intervals. This is entourage on steroids.

In contrast, a trio of Indigenous elders just settle. They have no desire, or need to do more. Their connection to Tarntanyangga is ancient, embedded and tacit.

Like the young women perching on the edge of the empty fountain, a *Crowd Theory* project is always a precarious balancing act, replete with tensions and contradictions. Are the resulting works about the event, or the photographic artefact? Are these portraits of people or urban landscapes for archival posterity in the manner of the photo cartography of Parisian Eugène Atget?[1] Terrill's minutely detailed panoramas are loaded with oxymoronic clarity and ambiguity. Even the ghosts of moving people, lights and cars freeze the moment with verisimilitude. But it is a pseudo-authenticity, as these are artificial communities, complicit in orchestrating an image that captures the slippage between what is real and what is constructed. Terrill plans his campaigns in rhythmic detail, so that inevitably the 'mechanical ritual' of the ten long-exposure shots taken over an hour from dusk reveals the crowd in some spontaneous interaction. At the core of these projects is Terrill's fascination with crowd behaviour as a form of sanctioned social promiscuity, but in contrast to other contemporary photographers of mass gatherings, there is insistent scrutiny of how people respond to their material surroundings in these theatres of the everyday.

Like an exaggerated outdoor room, Victoria Square is the most internalised setting of the *Crowd Theory* series, and demands to be framed as the classical single-point perspectives of Brunelleschi's invention, and numerous Renaissance renderings of the *La Città Ideale*.[2] Terrill recognises and relishes the architectonic aspect of this new situation, whilst not abandoning now trademark references to the compositional devices of Brunelleschi's approximate contemporaries, Hieronymous Bosch and Pieter Bruegel. Both painters subverted orthodox, monocular views of space, by flattening and populating scenes so that perspectival depth or architectural proscenium became subordinate to the depiction of the narratives of daily life. Figures appear both *within* an accurate spatial field, and at the same time, transcend it and any hierarchical system it might imply. In an uncanny mirror of the bizarre, bulbous fountain in Bosch's *Garden of Earthly Delights* (1500–1505), Adelaide artist John Dowie's 1968 *Three Rivers fountain* occupies the exact middle of Terrill's eventual triptych composition, the first time he has used this form.

Bruegel's *The fight between Carnival and Lent* (1559), where the action is encircled by buildings of allegorical significance, provides a clue to Terrill's handling of the built frame and his selection of spectator point. The Adelaide Town Hall and GPO take the place of Bruegel's church and pub, while illuminated bank logos and Polites signs supplant crow-stepped gables of shops and guilds; but throughout both images, civic buildings denote the character of the place, and the water source at the centre provides an animating nucleus.

There is perhaps something in the water – or lack of – that is telling, for though the *Three Rivers fountain* is empty, people anchor themselves to it like a magnet. It's not merely that it is one of the few places to sit in the Square, or that it promises cool in this shadeless expanse, but that it cognitively marks the spot where something communal *should* be celebrated or acknowledged. In a city that prides itself on its ordered grid and ordered origins, the relentless centrality of the Square imposes symbolic expectations as the core of Colonel Light's 'vision'.[3] Disputed and elusive as any single history or consolidated version of Victoria Square has been, the mythology remains, that this is an important civic locus.

Does this explain the heightened performative quality of the *Crowd Theory Adelaide* event? That for all the demonstrations of things that *could* have happened there, just as many *poseurs* indicated an accumulated frustration with a space that has refused to live up to its municipal potential, a place where, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein, when you get there, there is no *there* there. Consider, for example, the number of deliberate choreographies, of blurred shifting bodies, revealing that the place is predominantly one for passing through; or the obsession of amateur photographers recording the spectacle of a Square actually full of people doing diverse things for a change. Terrill sees his *Crowd Theory* events as gathering the recent and lived past, and refers to Roland Barthes' declaration of the photograph as a death mask: resolutely retrospective.[4] But in recording this instant between Victoria Square/Tarntanyangga's chequered past and aspirational future, as the first sod of the new masterplan is turned, has he paradoxically portrayed and animated its future?

Terrill may deny authorship of this serendipitous phenomenon, but he cannot deny agency. The nuanced 'lack of control' over the use of these communal spaces under his guidance, is precisely the same effect that architects and planners strive for – predicting and supporting human occupation of a place, yet not prescribing in detail how, or for whom. In Ayn Rand's polemical novel *The Fountainhead* the hero architect Howard Roark demands total control over every aspect of his work, or risk its artistic dilution. If such arrogance is now seen as an outmoded stereotype, how to plan for the unplanned remains a delicate task for the professional placemakers of our cities. How to foster that worrisome entity – the community – and all its unruly mob mentality, and still allow space for the individual and idiosyncratic? The view from Terrill's fountainhead suggests a way. *Crowd Theory* gatherings are spacious by nature – comparatively sparse as befits a modestly populated nation, with latitude in who is involved, and how they deport themselves. In as much as these loose, happenstance communities are defined by their visual register on the photographic plate, so they are activated by the interstices between them, for like the silent intervals in music, or the unprogrammed spaces of a building, park or square, it is the space between that gives articulation to the sound, scope for the activity, or distinction to the person – the space of imagination and possibility.

Rachel Hurst, April 2013
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Endnotes

[1] Eugène Atget (1857–1927) is credited as the founder of documentary photography, based on his comprehensive photographic recording of the urban fabric and street life of Paris over more than three decades. His work was influential for a number of 20th century artists, particularly the surrealist artist and photography Man Ray.

[2] 14th century Florentine architect Filippo Brunelleschi (1377–1446) is best known for the design and engineering of the dome of Santa Maria del Fiore (the Duomo) and rediscovery of the classical method of accurate linear perspective projection.

[3] Colonel William Light (1786–1893) was the first Surveyor-General of South Australia and responsible for the selection of site and planning of the city. For an interesting discussion of whether Light or his Deputy Surveyor, George Strickland Kingston designed the layout, see Johnson, D. and Langmead, D., *The Adelaide city plan: fiction and fact*, Adelaide: Wakefield Press, 1986.

[4] Interview with Simon Terrill, 20 February 2013. For an extended discussion of this idea see Barthes' seminal (and final) publication *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, London: Flamingo, 1984.