

RE: RERELEASE

DEREK HENDERSON

Words: Emil McAvoy



A second edition of Derek Henderson's popular book *The Terrible Boredom of Paradise* is forthcoming—completely reworked, revised and expanded—featuring previously unpublished photographs and new accompanying texts. The new publication, along with its accompanying exhibition, may prompt audiences to take a longer look at Henderson's practice—uniquely positioned across Aotearoa New Zealand, Australia and abroad, and spanning the often mutually exclusive realms of 'art' and 'commercial' photography.

Reflecting on this unique position, his Aotearoa gallerist Melanie Roger notes,

"Despite Derek Henderson's significant influence on contemporary photography in Aotearoa and internationally, he remains an understated and, in many respects, underrated figure whose work continues to reward sustained attention and critical reappraisal."

I asked Chris Corson-Scott, art books editor for Compound Press, about the publication. He notes, **"I've always thought *The Terrible Boredom of Paradise* was one of Aotearoa's most important yet underrated photographic works. I knew about the book just a few years after its release—in 2009, when I started making large-format photographs—but it was so rare and collectable I never found a copy."** He goes on, **"I felt it needed to be back in print so it could reach new audiences, and be reappraised. As I started talking to Derek about a reprint, we discovered a large number of good images that had been overlooked. Between adding this unseen content, editing the sequence, rescanning the 4×5-inch film negatives, and colour-grading the images with the better technology now available, the project felt timely."**

Henderson could also be considered a bit of an elusive figure in Aotearoa—always flying in for a couple of days and lifting the room with his gregarious presence—only to disappear soon after, on to the next thing. At the time of writing, he is shooting in Paris once again, while also working remotely on bringing the finishing touches of the book together. You have to catch him while you can.

I invited Henderson to the studio recently during a fleeting trip to Aotearoa. He brought a bottle of French rosé and we discussed his work, travel and thoughts on photography.

Before we discuss the new book further, can you tell us more about the origins of the project? When, where and how did it begin?

I started around the top of Te Waipounamu [the South Island] in January 2004 with a loose idea of travelling around Aotearoa in a campervan with my then-partner Margot. We were living in London and coming back home to New Zealand was a way of escaping the winter in the UK. At the time I was interested in large-format photography using colour-negative film. The detail you could get over the entire frame interested me. It's beyond 20/20 vision. The camera has the ability to get everything in focus, unlike the human eye, which tends to focus in on what you are directly looking at. I like the idea that you can scan your eye across the surface of a large-format photograph and see everything in focus. It becomes almost like a cut-out set in a movie, where the background and foreground are so sharp it's almost unbelievable.

PAGE 116 Derek Henderson, *Ratana Church, Te Puke Marae, Ohakune to Raetihi Road, Raetihi, Rangitikei, Whanganui. 6.49pm, 10th March, 2004.* Courtesy the artist, Melanie Roger Gallery and Space Gallery.

PAGE 117 Derek Henderson, *State Highway 25, Thames, April, 2004.* Courtesy the artist, Melanie Roger Gallery and Space Gallery.

BELOW Derek Henderson, *Tess Street, Oamaru, Otago, 16th February, 2004.* Courtesy the artist, Melanie Roger Gallery and Space Gallery.



BELOW Derek Henderson,
*Coal Creek Road, Lake
Roxburgh, Otago, February,
2004.* Courtesy the artist,
Melanie Roger Gallery and
Space Gallery.

RIGHT Derek Henderson,
*Settlement Road, Otira, West
Coast, 6.30pm, 27th February,
2004.* Courtesy the artist,
Melanie Roger Gallery and
Space Gallery.

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I'm particularly interested in the inclusion of new images here. Are these photographs taken during the same period? How did you go about selecting and sequencing images in these different versions of the book?

Yes, the new images in the second edition were all taken in 2004, they just didn't make the first edition, for whatever reason. Probably, if I remember rightly, it was because I wasn't happy with the print quality I could get at the time—not so much the image itself. For the first edition, we did hand-prints on C-type paper, which I like, but it has its limits sometimes. In the second edition, the 4x5-inch colour negatives have been rescanned, which gives you a whole lot more detail to play around with in Photoshop, so you can bring out even more detail in the final images. The sequencing in the first edition is chronological, but in the second edition with Chris Corson-Scott we decided to start at the bottom of Te Waipounamu and move up through Aotearoa.

The new book is co-published by Compound Press, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland, and Daylight Books, New York. How has working with new art book editors and publishers influenced the shape and feel of the new edition?

The first edition was self-published, and designed by Fabio Ongarato, who helped immensely with the design, printing and paper choice—as it was my first book and I didn't really have much of an idea of the process. In the second edition, Chris Corson-Scott has been managing the colour files and correcting things, as scanning negatives has its own problems that have to be overcome. It's a science that's not perfect. Chris has the brain to work these things out, and loves the process, so he's been a great help. He's also been involved in which images we're using in the second edition. His love of large-format photography is something we have in common, so we have a similar reference to that going on. He's also written a text that will appear in the book, along with an introduction by Joseph Akel, a New York-based writer and editor, and a revised essay by local writer and curator Hanna Scott.

Having Compound Press publish my recent book *The Tranquility of Solitude* has helped develop a relationship that I feel comfortable with and committed to. It's a lot of work putting together a book—a whole lot more than people think.

You're widely known as a highly successful fashion photographer. You are also represented in the art collections of the National Gallery of Victoria in Naarm Melbourne, Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetū and The Arts House Trust Collection in Tāmaki Makaurau. I know many professional photographers in Aotearoa admire your ability to span the commercial photographic industry and the 'art world'. Of course it's complex, with professional photographers largely excluded from contemporary art contexts for many reasons. Can you speak to your lived experience of this terrain?

Yes, I agree most people think of me as a fashion photographer—that was true in the early days when I was living in London and L.A. I pretty much just did fashion as a way to make a living as a photographer. But slowly that has changed, and now I do a lot more travel-based work of landscapes and portraits for fashion houses in Europe. They like the idea of stories for their social media feeds, mainly Instagram, where you are travelling and taking images as you come across them. They are looking for your personal style that they see in your art-based practice. So, in a way, I'm now being engaged to do these stories as commissions that I would take independently anyway.

I've done a few of these in Aotearoa for some of the fashion houses in Paris and Milan, and have an ongoing relationship with them. They also have sustainability departments I work for. That can involve photographing communities that are suppliers for these brands. They use the images, again, for social media and their websites. They like that I can go on my own, and come back with an array of images the brand can use. I still do some fashion photography and enjoy it very much.

"IT ONLY TAKES A 60th OF A SECOND TO CAPTURE AN IMAGE, BUT IT TAKES A LIFETIME TO KNOW WHAT THAT IMAGE IS WHEN YOU SEE IT."



PAGE 123 Darryl Ward, *Derek Henderson, New Lynn, Auckland, 1987*. Courtesy the artist.

BELOW Derek Henderson, *Broadway, Mangaweka, Rangitikei. 4.24pm, 10th March, 2004*. Courtesy the artist, Melanie Roger Gallery and Space Gallery.

RIGHT Derek Henderson, *From Linnet Street looking east, Taihape, Rangitikei. 2.15pm, 2nd March, 2004*. Courtesy the artist, Melanie Roger Gallery and Space Gallery.

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BELOW Derek Henderson,
Palmerston Street, Westport,
West Coast, 6.05pm, 2nd
February, 2004. Courtesy the
artist, Melanie Roger Gallery
and Space Gallery.



You're Aotearoa born, raised in Te Matau-a-Māui Hawke's Bay, and now based in Gadigal Sydney, Australia. What are your reflections of living and working across the two countries and cultures?

I love living in Sydney, my wife is Australian and my two children were born there. I find it helps me to compartmentalise my life. When I'm with my family, I don't have a camera with me and I'm not really thinking about taking images or ideas so much. I'm trying to be more in the moment with my family in Sydney. When I travel to New Zealand by myself, that's when I'm thinking of projects and executing them. Of course, ideas can come at any time, but I like being on my own when I'm taking images. I find it easier to get into the vibe. It can be quite hypnotic in a way. Even though I think the images I'm looking for can be fleeting and ephemeral, that's what I think photography as a medium can be really good at. It only takes a 60th of a second to capture an image, but it takes a lifetime to know what that image is when you see it. I like working around the light, form and composition more than subject. That comes later, when I look through the images and see if there was anything there of interest to revisit. A place is enough of an idea for me to start with.

You also travel more widely, particularly in Europe. How does this shape both your professional and personal photography? And can you tell us more about your recent trip to Paris?

There is something innately human about travel. We all somehow love doing it for the most part—I know I do. The economy class flights I don't like, but once I'm there, I soon forget. I love being somewhere I've never been to before—it's exciting and a little nerve-racking, which I feel keeps me interested in the world and therefore alive.

I was in Paris for the month of April for some work and to see the clients I have there. I started trying to work out if there was something new I could work on while I was there. It took me three and a half weeks to work out what I wanted to do on the streets of Paris. I got two images I was happy with, so when I return in July, I'll have something I'm looking forward to revisiting.

Sometimes you get commissioned to go somewhere you'd never go to for yourself, and discover something you then return to for your own personal work. That's a bonus, and I think it widens your view of the world and the human condition.

What else are you working on at the moment? Growing old and not being too pissed about it.

I love it, thank you. 🏠

*The Terrible
Boredom
of Paradise*

COMPOUND PRESS, DAYLIGHT BOOKS

The Terrible Boredom of Paradise is released in mid-November 2026 alongside a solo exhibition at Melanie Roger Gallery, Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland.

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Featuring texts by Hanna Scott, Joseph Akel and Chris Corson-Scott.