

## **Opening Address at Vigex 2017** by Bronwen Casey EFIAP MAPS

Thank you for the invitation to open the 19<sup>th</sup> Vigex International Print Photography Salon. It is truly an honour to be part of this significant exhibition on the world stage.



I have had a long history with this salon initially as an entrant, but then as a helper, committee member and on two occasions a judge. Vigex was in fact where I gained my first international exhibition acceptance and award and thus holds a special place in my heart given the huge journey in photography this result saw me embark upon. When I say long history, I refer to the last 17 years, yet for many I am a mere newcomer. This salon has been part of the photographic fabric of Geelong, and indeed one of the cornerstone print salons in the world, since 1980. The International Federation of Photographic Art (known as FIAP), who I describe as the United Nations Organisation of the photographic world, have awarded patronage to this salon from the second salon onwards, with the salon having proven itself in the running of it's first exhibition. The records for FIAP salons only extend back to 1978 and Vigex was one of only 72 salons listed 4 years later for 1982.

Whilst the team running this exhibition has seen many changes over the years, it is a testimony to the commitment of these volunteers that some have been involved for up to three decades. Such involvement comes with a huge time commitment and a dedication to the belief in photography as an important art form. It stems from the knowledge that this Vigex International Salon is not just important to Geelong but to photographers around the world that produce their images in physical form. Vigex embraces the FIAP rule that states:

FIAP Patronage can only be awarded to events with a marked international character and accessible to participants from all over the world without restrictions. Events with purely commercial purposes, as well as salons with nothing but a strongly restricted subject or any other discriminatory factor, are excluded from the benefits of the present regulations.

I have spoken once before at a Vigex opening, back in 2013 on behalf of the judging team. Back then I spoke of some of the huge changes that had happened around the world in relation to photographic salons. Changes driven by the growth in digital photography and the convenience and cost saving of sending images over the internet. I spoke of the move from print and slide salons to digital salons where the only form of exhibition was a screened slideshow. There had been a huge growth in the digital salons, with the demise of many print salons that had higher costs associated with them, and indeed a much more significant workload. The figures I quoted for 2012 showed that in the two preceding years there had been a 50% increase in the number of salons with FIAP patronage, yet there were only 10 other salons in the world that specialised in just print entries and only 4 that, like Vigex, weren't restricted to a small print size.

So here we stand in 2017 and look at the relentless march towards a world where so many of our images will die with the digital hardware upon which they are stored without ever being produced in physical form. Photographic art that may never hang in a home, become part of an art collection, hang in a gallery with other art mediums or become precious historic records. Vigex once again, among a small number of salons, promotes the physical presence of the printed photograph.

The figures for salons with FIAP patronage in 2016 have now reached more than double that of the 2012 figure. 503 salons ran last year. Only 60 of these salons had print sections and a mere 20 of these were exclusively Print Salons. Only 15 were similar to Vigex where they weren't limited to small prints. Of even more significance, most of these specialist print salons were in Europe and ALL of these specialist print salons in 2016 were held in the northern hemisphere as the Vigex Print salon only runs every second year.

Unless something has changed this year, Vigex is not only the only international salon running in Victoria that is approved by FIAP, the Photographic Society of America and the Australian Photographic Society, but it is the ONLY FIAP approved specialist print salon that runs in the Southern Hemisphere and it's here, in Australia, in Geelong. ....

Geelong has been home to Vigex since that small dedicated band of Geelong photographers, with vision, launched this significant event on the world's photographic calendar in 1980. The first salon was hung in the foyer of the State Government Offices, in Geelong but then, for the next 34 years, the Geelong Art Gallery became the venue for this significant exhibition. Indeed the very name of this salon Vi for Victoria, gex for Geelong Exhibition reflects the fact that this world class event is an integral part of Geelong's art scene. Countless photographers have made group and individual outings to Geelong over the years, drawn to see the wonderful photographic prints awarded in Vigex over its first 36 years. Despite the convenience of being able to see art of any medium via pictures on a computer screen or in a book, it is just not the same as being able to stand in front of the physical piece of art. Indeed this is why people visit galleries and exhibitions. The role of a public exhibition of the physical work is a vital one.

Thirty seven years since the first Vigex salon, thousands of the worlds great images have graced the Vigex judging days vying for acceptances into the salon and those coveted awards that are so hard to win. Having a 6 section salon also means Vigex attracts many specialist photographers working in areas such as Nature, Portraiture and Creative.

This salon, here in the Southern Hemisphere, here in Geelong has exhibited many images that have won top awards in the largest photographic salons in the world. Entrants over the years have included people such as Argentineans', Raul Villalba and Luis Alberto Franke, both of whom have won the FIAP Best Author of the Year award for being the most successful photographer in international salons for the year. Australian photographers, such as Graham Burstow, whose images have been acquired by the National Library of Australia, the State Library of Queensland and the Queensland Art Gallery, have been regular exhibitors in Vigex over the years. Even when one looks at the very exclusive list of photographers who have been bestowed with the title Master of FIAP for their incredible works, it is interesting to note that at least 16 of these Masters have exhibited their work in Vigex over the years. I see that we have a photograph by one of these masters in the awards on display here today. These are all people whose works are held in photographic art collections. I have the list of these people here if anyone wishes to look at it.

There will be countless other Vigex entrants whose photographic prints are similarly held in museums, galleries and corporate collections around the world. I wonder what images we have here today that may indeed become iconic or significant pieces of artwork for future generations. Who among our exhibitors this year might become a renowned photographer when people look back upon them in the future.

Today we gather in the Cranbourne Gallery at Sacred Heart College; who are gracious hosts to this year's Vigex. What a wonderful opportunity for this school to have these world class photographs grace their walls and a great thing that this salon was not lost to the Geelong community in the urgent securing of an alternate venue at short notice. This afternoon, we get to not only enjoy this wonderful exhibition but to celebrate with some of those that have had success with their images and those that should take a bow for running this prestigious event.

Take your time to look at the photographs.

Stand and appreciate what you see.

Share your thoughts and observations with those beside you for these are things you cannot do when sitting in a slideshow or alone on your computer.

Take inspiration from these award winning images and immerse yourselves in the physical presence of these photographic works of art.

I commend this salon to all and it is with great pleasure that I declare the  
19<sup>th</sup> VIGEX International Print Photography Salon, 2017 to be officially open.

**Masters of FIAP Photographers**  
**Who Have Entered Vigex Over the Years**

Amleto Bocci	Argentina
Rudolf Bieri	Switzerland
Robert De Vos	Belgium
Vaja Doberlet	Slovenia
Luis Alberto Franke	Argentina
S. (Palli) Gajree	Australia
Manfred Kriegelstein	Germany
Jan Michiels	Belgium
Josef Palfrader	Austria
Elek Papp	Hungary
Jan-Thomas Stake	Sweden
Arnold Umlauf	Germany
Jacques Vanneuville	France
Gary Weber	Australia
David Wheeler	UK
Robrecht Verwerft	Belgium





## VIGEX International Print Salon 2017



*Photos – Gerry van der Meer*