

JENNIFER MILLS

Ron

24 June – 22 July 2017

Ron is a new series of 40 watercolour & ink drawings by Jennifer Mills, which pays tribute to one family by remembering and retelling their story.

This project started with the chance discovery of a remarkable visual family history. Purchased on eBay as a "bulk lot of old family slides" it revealed a rich visual archive from one family living with disability in the 1950s, 60s and 70s

The images featured those of a son, father and mother: Ron, Reg and Ada. They were photographed over several decades, mostly in and around their suburban family home in Adelaide. Snapped sitting on the couch, relaxing in the backyard and celebrating Ron's 21st.

Inspection of the images and research online revealed much about the subjects' identities and the lives they led. Ron, just 5 or 6 in the early images, grows into a man, Ada's hair greys and Reg's hairline recedes. Ron has cerebral palsy. He progressively loses mobility, and his health visibly deteriorates. Reg and Ada are clearly devoted to Ron's welfare. He is their only child. Reg builds a wooden frame to support Ron, allowing him to "stand" to mark a footy. Ada bakes a lavish banquet for Ron's 21st. They go on holiday together with the wheelchair. Reg and Ada document Ron's achievements and write loving captions on the slides.

I have a deep respect for and connection with Ron, Reg and Ada. I too have a child with a disability; my son Darcy has severe autism. Prejudice and disadvantage is a reality for such families, even today. Sixty years ago parents of "spastic" children with severe disabilities were commonly encouraged to institutionalise them. Reg and Ada did not.

Ron died in 1992, a few years later Ada and then finally Reg. The family home was sold and the family slides found their way to eBay. Without family, Ron, Reg and Ada seem to have been forgotten, their stories lost. This project remembers them. Ron, Ada and Reg's story is important. How many stories like theirs have been lost or have been untold. I will respect their story, but I will also tell my own as part of this process. – Jennifer Mills 2016

An essay written by Jen Cabraja, which offers a personal response to this body of work, will be published online and made available throughout the show. The exhibition will also be accompanied by a selection of Mills' recent school photo drawings.

Jennifer Mills has exhibited regularly since the mid-1990s. Earlier this year her work was shortlisted for the 2017 Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney.

She has been a finalist in a number of prizes including the *2016 National Works on Paper*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria; *Sunshine Coast Art Prize*, Caloundra Regional Gallery, Queensland (2016); *Geelong Contemporary Art Prize*, Geelong Gallery, Victoria (2016); *2016 Jacaranda Acquisitive Drawing Award*, Grafton Regional Gallery; *Hazelhurst Art on Paper Award*, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, Sydney (2015) and the *2014 National Works on Paper*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria.

Her work has been included in group exhibitions, including *Remix. Post. Connect.*, The University of Queensland National Artists Self-Portrait Prize, Brisbane (2013); *The past is easy*, Kings ARI, Melbourne (2013); *Contemporary Australia: Women*, Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2012); *Contemporary Australian Drawings 1*, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne (2010); *Magnetic Islands*, RMIT Project Space / Spare Room, Melbourne (2010); *Darwin's bastards*, Verge Gallery, University of Sydney (2009); *All in an afternoon*, Monash University Faculty Gallery, Melbourne (2007); *Strange beauty*, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Melbourne (2007); *Polar mark*, RMIT Project Space / Spare Room, Melbourne (2007) and *Getting on Mother's Nerves*, Mother's Tankstation, Dublin, Ireland (2006). In 2002 Mills was awarded the Robert Jacks Drawing Prize, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria, Australia. This is Jennifer Mills' ninth solo exhibition with Darren Knight Gallery.