The enormity of his impact on culture, on millions of people, was never really clear when he was alive; it was mostly hidden. When he died, the event was a kind of explosion that went off silently, in minds and hearts; out of that explosion came many fragments, edging slowly into the light, taking shape, changing shape, again and again as the years went on. No one, I think, could have predicted the ubiquity, the playfulness, the perversity, the terror, and the fun of this, of Elvis Presley’s second life: a great common conversation between spectres and fans, made out of songs, art works, books, movies, dreams…


30 years after Elvis Presley’s earthly demise, RMIT Gallery presents LIVING ELVIS, an exhibition that celebrates Elvis’ artistic creativity through the work of an eclectic collection of contemporary artists.

LIVING ELVIS will consist of two exhibitions curated by Peter Barnes and Suzanne Davies, and an engaging Public Program of events. A key feature of this program will be a symposium titled King Power: Designing Masculinities organised by RMIT University School of Architecture and Design, RMIT University.

With each passing year it becomes clearer that Elvis’ hold on the collective imagination continues to grow ever stronger. The reasons for this are many. In the academy a sub-speciality within the discipline of cultural studies has evolved to grasp just this question via research into the cultural myths of the Elvis sign and its supporting fan culture. In recent years fiction writers and film makers have been the most prominent interpreters of the Presley myth, yet artists and musicians have had the longest and most sustained dialogue with Presley’s actual work (be that image creation or musical performance) and may be best placed to give Presley’s art its due. By this we mean taking from and giving to Presley’s art as he himself borrowed, refigured and returned the raw materials/sources which inspired him and were at the same time transformed through his work.

While Presley’s central role in the establishment of modern popular music and its accompanying visual culture is now well established, the relationship between his creative work - his studio practice - and the studio traditions of the ‘fine arts’ is still very much a work in progress. LIVING ELVIS will sketch out some of the history of this relationship, and re-open the creative dialogue that visual artists have had with Elvis over the preceding 50 years.

Call for expressions of interest.
LIVING ELVIS celebrates not just the 30th anniversary of Elvis death, but also the 20th anniversary of the death of Andy Warhol, whose 1963 Elvis series stands as a landmark in the history of Elvis Art.

Andy Warhol
Elvis 1963
synthetic polymer paint screenprinted onto canvas
208.0 (h) x 91.0 (w) cm
© Andy Warhol. © Elvis Presley Enterprises Inc.
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RMIT GALLERY had originally negotiated the loan of Warhol’s Elvis (1963) from the collection of the National Gallery of Australia, however the loan was subsequently withdrawn as it was recognised that such a significant work was essential for the rehanging of the NGA collection. Not to be deterred, the RMIT Gallery will devote a number of galleries to works that seek to engage and rework this most iconic of images, and do so with the same spirit of surprise and invention with which Andy Warhol and Elvis Presley each pursued their own creative desires.

We would like to receive an expression of interest from you regarding your participation in this exciting project. Works are requested to be 2D and no greater than 160cm²

Please register your interest with exhibition coordinator Sarah Morris on 03 9925 1720 or sarah.morris@rmit.edu.au by Friday 8th June 2007. Following registration, Sarah will supply further instructions regarding the deadlines for delivery and selection.

We look forward to your response and thank you in anticipation.

Yours sincerely

Suzanne Davies, Director and Chief Curator, RMIT Gallery with Peter Barnes