

23	Alex Flannery, <i>Dinner, three men</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
24	Alex Flannery, <i>Woman statue</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
25	Alex Flannery, <i>Jiu Jiu & friend</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
26	Alex Flannery, <i>Waigong & firecrackers</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
27	Alex Flannery, <i>River & jumping board</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
28	Alex Flannery, <i>Jumping girl</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
29	Alex Flannery, <i>Sun & man</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
30	Alex Flannery, <i>High rise</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
31	Alex Flannery, <i>Hair</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
32	Alex Flannery, <i>City skyline</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
33	Alex Flannery, <i>City Qingmin Jie</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
34	Alex Flannery, <i>Woman with scarf</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
35	Alex Flannery, <i>Boy & grandmother</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
36	Alex Flannery, <i>White building at night</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
37	Alex Flannery, <i>Man with cloak</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
38	Alex Flannery, <i>Coffin door</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
39	Alex Flannery, <i>Truck under street lights</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
40	Alex Flannery, <i>Man sleeping in park</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
41	Alex Flannery, <i>Flying spirit</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
42	Alex Flannery, <i>Wedding</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
43	Alex Flannery, <i>Youngman</i> 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
44	Alex Flannery, <i>6 white cloths drying</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
45	Alex Flannery, <i>Ladder & Mao</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
46	Alex Flannery, <i>Potato salesman</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
47	Alex Flannery, <i>Mother & child on bike</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188
48	Alex Flannery, <i>Basket of eggs</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 25 x 20 cm	1/10	\$188
49	Alex Flannery, <i>Youngwoman in jacket</i> , 2019, gelatin silver print, 20 x 25 cm	1/10	\$188

Huw Davies Gallery
21st April - 21st May 2022

photo
access

Eating Wild Weeds **Alex Flannery**

Eating Wild Weeds is a collaboration between photographer Alex Flannery and Chinese born Australian poet Ouyang Yu. Images and words combine to investigate seeing, knowing, and experiencing life in another country, engaging questions of visitation, migration, communication and being part of a multi-national family.

Flannery's photographs reflect his experience as an Australian of Irish descent in the Chinese cities of Xiangyang and Wuhan during 2019. Paired with Ouyang's poetry recording the immigrant experience in Australia, the exhibition explores the complexities of cross-cultural understanding.

Rest as Resistance

Eating Wild Weeds is a body of work that is, to my eye, a call to view the texture of every day as a gentle refutation of the impossibility of geopolitics. In the images by Alex Flannery, and the poems by Ouyang Yu, the day-to-day living that defines everyone's life is given space and intimacy. In doing so, one cannot help but feel more sympathetic with those who are photographed.

Eating Wild Weeds functions as an exhibition that seeks to look into who and what China is. Like any country, we often see appealing images meant to attract tourists and celebrate achievement, yet Flannery's images avoid such heady content and tries to connect with the fabric of living. As an outsider, Flannery is positioned optimally to notice what makes every day living worth noticing and distinct. Rather than focusing on the headline, this photography is all about the fine print.

Flannery's images depict a variety of completely routine actions: visiting graves, playing with children, pausing while working. There is, in this, a sense that Flannery was not trying to grapple with the politics of place or people, but rather the quality of living, the mutual experience of getting up, going to work and looking after family, finding in this approach a common ground.

After all, despite the headlines, publicity stunts and the past 150 years, we all do just have to keep on going. Flannery's work is built on that point of empathy: wherever you are in the world, whomever you are, life truly is made up of absolutely routine moments and in taking a photo of such moments they become slightly less forgettable and slightly more humanising, slightly less wearing and slightly more connective. Worth remembering simply because in the quotidian we do truly find our common humanity.

Yet, it's hard to deny that the places and spaces shown have a unique appearance, we aren't just anywhere, after all. Flannery has a knack for finding ways to show audiences something we can easily recognise, be that a home, shop, apartment, but allowing it to seem unusual, perhaps even special. In a key point of juxtaposition, Flannery's images show old buildings and elderly people, the mutual patina forming a query about how long each will last. The Mao-era buildings are interesting because their personality almost defies the industrial method of their creation. Yet, like the generation who built and lived in them, there are questions about what the world will look like when they are gone. China is, both in terms of people and place, constantly reinventing itself: bulldozing Hutongs, removing tradition, embracing technology. Curiously, I found that the images of older people felt incredibly close, an interaction shown between people and the camera. Yet those of teenagers or young adults are often obscured by phones, a bit of melancholy perhaps. A reminder that some things we will miss as they ebb away.

Key to this exhibition is the poetry of Ouyang Yu, much of it gently resistant and quietly rebellious. In 'I love sleep', Yu writes of rest as a form of anti-busyness, almost a form of reproach towards the endless development, hustle and energy of the world. Like Flannery, Yu defends the more mundane parts of life as a-political, equalising and essential. Sleep is a form of freedom from the more complex (but less essential) worries of our lives, Flannery's photos show something similar as well. The line 'I love sleep knowing I am wasting my life' contains so clearly that gentle reproach, a rejection of the need for constant energy and expansion. In China, much like in Australia, young people feel squeezed - caught between the unkindness of a job heading for burn-out, the rising cost of living and the despair at the underwhelming prospects in front of them. China's 9-9-6 culture (working 9am-9pm, 6 days a week) is particularly brutal, robbing people of a chance for any sort of life, friends, relationships, even rest. In this context, loving sleep, precisely because it is wasting one's life, is a very quiet form of counter-culture.

Eating Wild Weeds is not a loud or brash exhibition. Both the photography of Alex Flannery and the poetry of Ouyang Yu are more implicit than outspoken. However, when looking and reading these works, what we see is a defence of the texture of the mundane and the view that what ultimately connects almost all of us is the sense that we have to get up in the morning and make the best of it.

This exhibit is about finding the moments of leisure and connection that buoy us up and keep us going. With the unavoidable context of Australia and China's shared history, the recent flare up of geopolitical posturing and the similar difficulty young people face in each country, Eating Wild Weeds offers a sly counter-cultural view to the heavy-handed bluster that is more visible. At the end of the day, this exhibition reminds viewers that the people we have more in common with are the people resting, trying and doing, not always the people speaking.

Matthew Dunne

Matthew Dunne is an artist and writer living and working in Melbourne, Australia. His work focuses on the complex relationship between people, nature and place.

About | Alex Flannery

Alex Flannery is a Canberra based photographer who uses analog cameras and a smart phone to explore his surrounds. His aim is to create photos that are both documents of this moment and also of his personal sense of time, that is to say, things that are meaningful to him.

His larger format photos focus on capturing the beauty of form as it is revealed in various types of light. In his 35mm photos Alex embraces chance, accident and a snap-shot aesthetic. He continues his inquiries into the enigma of photography in the darkroom.