

black+white®

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number

9 771038 942006

australia | october 1997 | \$12.00

emma harrison
fabrizio ferri
scott irwin
james houston

(gallery)

Employing his camera's shutter like strong fingers moulding clay, James Houston treats the human body as sculptural form.

His appreciation for the aesthetic became apparent in the high school art room. At weekends, the young artist would experiment with clay at a potting facility near his home on the NSW Central Coast. At just 19, he held a 30-piece exhibition of ceramic sculpture.

Undergoing a metamorphosis from sculptor, art director and model to fashion and portrait photographer, the 32-year-old Sydney-based artist is regarded as one of Australia's leading photographers. His cover for Australian *Vogue* last January was the magazine's first nude cover.

This selection of black-and-white images is from Houston's recently published book *RAW*. As a culmination of five years photographing nudes against the world's most exotic landscapes, *RAW* embodies Houston's personal perception of beauty and his unique ability to transpose intangible concepts into two dimensional form.

"Most of the places I like to shoot, whether Australia, Greece or Santa Fe, have simple, graphic architectural lines and rugged environments," says Houston. "I take these elements and translate them across to the form of the human body that I'm working with. It's almost like the human form is being eroded out of that environment."

Citing sculptor Henry Moore as a distinct influence on his photographic style, Houston's composition is kept simple, clean and strong. Often faceless and devoid of personality, his powerful figures are chiselled from blocks of light and shade and contorted into unnatural form.

"I find that the face tends to distract from the line of the body. As soon as you see someone's face it changes things. You start to look at that person and think what they would be like. When you take it away, you're looking at the body as a piece of art."

As a regular contributor to *black+white*, Houston has captured the undressed bodies of Australia's most recognised actors and performers including Marcus Graham, Damien Walshe-Howling and Christine Anu.

james HOUSTON

JAMES HOUSTON'S SCULPTURAL UNDERSTANDING OF THE HUMAN FORM BRINGS A TACTILE QUALITY TO THE NAKED SUBJECTS OF HIS PHOTOGRAPHY. TEXT / PRUE PORTER

Houston's work is, naturally enough, compared to his photographic influences: Avedon, Weber, Ritz and Roversi. "I'm happy for people to make those comparisons because they are all very successful photographers. But I feel that my work is quite different."

Houston's classicism is indeed comparable. However, the confidence with which he approaches his subject and the easy sensuality of his work make it apparent that Houston is an artist hitting his stride, and sets him apart as an Australian artist with a strong and distinctive creative vision.

RAW, SPONSORED BY HUGO BOSS AUSTRALIA, IS PUBLISHED BY CRAFTSMAN HOUSE/FINE ARTS PRESS. THE RAW EXHIBITION WILL BE HELD AT THE BYRON MAPP GALLERY, SYDNEY FROM OCTOBER 8 TO NOVEMBER 3; THE PHOTOGRAPHY GALLERY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA, PERTH FROM NOVEMBER 8 TO 29; AND GEORGE GALLERY, MELBOURNE FROM JANUARY 29 TO FEBRUARY 15, 1998.