

LARRY SULTAN'S PICTURES FROM HOME

Curated by Neha Kale



LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home*
(MACK, 2017)

Opposite
Top to bottom
LARRY SULTAN
Pictures From Home,
2017 published by
MACK

LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home*
(MACK, 2017)

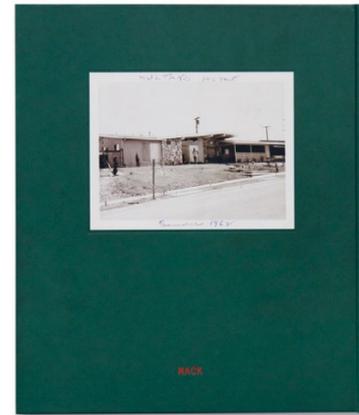
LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home*
(MACK, 2017)

Courtesy the artist,
The Estate of Larry,
Sultan and MACK

A woman, face crumpling like paper, stands framed in a doorway, one hand gripping a Kermit-green wall. An elderly man swings a golf club in a lounge room, the curve of a paunch displacing once-youthful muscle. Later, the pair convenes over a Hoover as the desert light trickles in.

In 1983, Larry Sultan, the legendary California photographer who's best-known for *Evidence* (1977), a series of found images scavenged from government archives, and *The Valley* (2004), which unpeels the artifice of middle-class life via full-colour shots of porn sets, trained his lens on his parents – New Yorkers who'd immigrated to Los Angeles in the 1940s and retired in an enclave near Palm Springs. *Pictures from Home*, which was first published in 1991 to critical acclaim, combines images, home movie stills and Sultan's own writing. It's an elegy to his family and a portrait of Reagan-era America that expands the narrative possibilities of photography in moving ways.

To commemorate the new, extended edition of *Pictures from Home*, recently republished in hardcover by MACK Books, VAULT presents a series of its defining images and invited three fiction writers to write short stories in response.



CROSS-SECTION

By Julie Koh

My son is 40 and a hotshot photographer. He wants to shoot me.

He invites me to his warehouse studio. In the studio, he's built a horizontal line of rooms – a one-storey cross-section.

'I've reconstructed every room we've ever lived in,' he says, 'in chronological order. Do you like it?'

'Six years I haven't heard from you,' I tell him, 'and now you want me for one of your damn photos.'

He walks me down the line. It's long. There's the wallpapered kitchen, his mother's favourite bathroom, the dining room with the macramé owl. We arrive at the last room. It has a television and green carpet, and a white curtain lit up from behind.

'What do you think, Dad?'

'Are you suggesting this is my final living room? I'm retired, not dying.'

He sets up his camera and light, and gives me instructions. Cross your arms. Tilt your head. Read the newspaper. Fix this vacuum cleaner.

He hands me a golf club and tells me to demonstrate my swing.

'Dad,' he says, 'I want you to imagine that elusive hole in one. That perfect shot you never got.'

But when I stand on the carpet and do the swing, it doesn't turn out right.

'Not like that,' he says. 'What are you doing?'

He checks my alignment, bends my knees, adjusts my grip. As he walks back to his tripod, I lose my balance.

When he turns to see his work undone, his eyes are sour but his voice is smooth.

'That's fine,' he says, 'I've got all day.'

'I'm doing you the favour.'

'You never trust what I tell you. I'm not an idiot.'

I swing and swing, over and over. Nothing satisfies him.

'Okay,' he says finally. 'We're done.'

He begins to pack up his equipment.

'Wait.' I drop the club. 'I want a portrait of my photographer.'

I walk him back past the macramé owl, his mother's favourite bathroom, the wallpapered kitchen.

We arrive at the start of the row.

'Your first room,' I say, 'but not mine.'

I stand facing him. He's a head taller than me. I peel off his clothes, layer by layer. I wrap him in a nappy and pin it in place. I push a dummy into his mouth. I put him in the cot in the corner and I tuck him in and I kiss him on the forehead.

'You were my perfect shot,' I tell him, as he begins to cry.

Julie Koh is the author of *Capital Misfits* and *Portable Curiosities*. Her short stories have appeared in *The Best Australian Stories* and *Best Australian Comedy Writing*. In 2017, Julie was named a *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Australian Novelist. She is the editor of *BooksActually's Gold Standard* and a founding member of *Kanganoullipo*. thefictionaljuliekoh.com



THE QUIZ

By Max Olijnyk

'Darling,' says my dad, calling me out of my reverie of porridge and newspaper and tea, 'on Saturday mornings, we do the quiz.'

'Your dad loves the quiz,' confirms Joy, giving my dad's knee a little rub.

'Oh, I know about the quiz,' I reply. I can't stand the quiz. The quiz makes me feel stupid. The quiz makes me fantasise about running out of this house and down the street in my pyjamas.

'Okay, first question: In which Scandinavian country is the Nobel Peace prize awarded?'

'That's in... where is it?' says Joy, looking to me for confirmation.

'I have no idea,' I say.

'Stockholm,' says Joy.

My dad scrunches up his eyes and looks sideways at Joy with a pained expression.

'Not Stockholm. Okay,' says Joy.

'In which Scandinavian country,' says my dad.

'Norway then,' says Joy.

'But...' I start to protest, then retreat back to my porridge.

'Yes! How did you know?' says my dad, laughing.

'Name the lead singer of the rock band Florence and The Machine,' says my dad, leaning back and deferring to me, the pop culture expert.

'Florence?' I guess angrily.

'Florence *who*?'

'I don't know,' I say. 'Florence Machine?'

'*Welch*,' he says.

'Is she any good?' asks Joy.

'I have no idea,' I say.

'In which Australian state is Ringarooma Bay?' says my dad, and then he pauses, staring at Joy. He thinks he knows the answer.

'It's in Sydney isn't it?'

'No, it's not in Sydney,' says Joy.

'It's not? Ringarooma Bay, where is it? Is it in Victoria?'

'Max?' says Joy. 'Is it in Victoria?'

'I don't think so,' I say. I thought it sounded like it was in Sydney, too.

'Is it in Queensland?'

'Hmmm...' says my dad, checking the answers.

'Any more guesses?' he says.

'South Australia,' says Joy.

'It's in Tasmania,' says my dad, and we all laugh. 'We were way off!'

'Okay,' says Joy, getting up from the table and gathering our empty bowls. 'Max, would you like a coffee?'

'Yes please,' I say. 'Thanks Joy.'

Max Olijnyk is a writer, editor and photographer. His first book *Some Stories* was released in 2016.

maxolijnyk.com

Pictures From Home (2017) by Larry Sultan published by MACK
mackbooks.co.uk
larrysultan.com



WANTED

By Miles Allinson

So yeah, the thing I was saying was, last time I was out here, last year I guess it would've been, I was driving through town one morning, sparrow's fart, streets are dead and I spot the old man just standing on the side of the road. Just right there, out the front, yeah. And this would be what, six in the morning and three, four ks from the home, which is a long way when you can't walk properly, can't drive anymore, can't do much of anything really, which he couldn't, so I was a bit taken aback to be honest. Also, it'd been a while since I'd seen him myself, a year maybe, although we'd spoken on the phone pretty regular after mum passed on. He was always calling at funny times, you know. I'm like dad, it's the middle of the night, and he'd be like, argh, I was just thinking about this and that and then he'd be off about something that happened 60 years ago, some old thing that just popped in his head about his neighbour or some kid he knew who'd drowned in a pond or got run over by something. Anyway, there he is on the side of the road, old bugger, and he's wearing his dressing gown and a pair of train pyjamas and he's staring at this piece of paper, holding it up to the sun like a whatcha-ma-call-it, you know, a wanted poster he'd just found nailed to a tree, like in a cowboy movie or something. That's what it reminded me of. I thought: They're coming for you, you old bastard. But nah, I didn't stop. Figured the home'd be out to get him soon enough. Yeah. I forgot about how that happened, actually, til just now.

Miles Allinson is a writer and an artist. His first book, *Fever of Animals*, is published by Scribe.

milesallinson.com



LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home* (MACK, 2017)

Opposite
Top to bottom
LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home* (MACK, 2017)

LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home* (MACK, 2017)

LARRY SULTAN
Image from *Pictures From Home* (MACK, 2017)

Courtesy the artist,
The Estate of Larry,
Sultan and MACK

