



Murphy's law: looking at life in a roundabout way

Catharine Munro

PETER MURPHY is not averse to taking a knife to his camera lens and chopping off a bit of the casing. It is one of the less delicate techniques he uses to create his whimsical photographs of Sydney.

The 60-year-old photographer has pounded the city's streets for decades, obsessed with documenting anything from Hulk Hogan wrestling matches to anti-whaling campaigners docked at Sydney Cove. When Gough Whitlam was dismissed in 1975, he captured the protests that followed and the resulting exhibition was opened by the deposed prime minister himself.

Murphy studied maths and perception for a Sydney University science degree in the 1960s and has been using his training ever since to manipulate the beholder's eye. An exhibition of his work, entitled *Model*

City, will open at Customs House on Thursday.

"I would hope that little kids would grab their mothers and drag them over to work out what the pictures are about. It's for people to see the city in an unfamiliar way," Murphy said.

Capturing the image is just the start. Not satisfied with a two-dimensional image of what he has seen, he builds all sorts of camera equipment to capture images and then manipulates them using software. The end results appear to be three-dimensional.

Murphy's current interest is to create "little planets" out of panoramic images. There are still versions and moving ones, which are reminiscent of the 1980s cult film *Koyaanisqatsi*. The technique is used by Google Street and by real estate agents for virtual tours of houses.

Murphy keeps the wolf from the door by working for museums, using his technology to document spaces that have limited access to the public, such as the historic Rouse Hill House in north-west Sydney.

But in his personal work Murphy wants to "immerse" the viewer. He places two cameras facing in opposite directions to capture a 360-degree view. The footage from the two cameras is then stitched together using software that has been available only for the past 18 months.

The technique promises to "deconstruct" news photography, Murphy believes, because the viewer is given an on-the-ground sense of where he is. Photo-journalists should be sending home such images from hotspots such as the Gaza strip, he said.



He's got the whole world in his hands ... a picture of last year's Mardi Gras picnic, using technology that stitches together footage from two cameras. Photo: Peter Murphy