



Top: Rennie Ellis, Putting the final touch to a fashion model, 1984. Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, H2010.126/2164

Above: Rennie Ellis, Group from 1984 Young Melbourne Designers Fashion Parade, 1984. Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, H2010.126/185

Rennie Ellis Collection

Pictures Collection

Acquired 2010-16

I have a confession to make: I never got to meet Rennie Ellis. His unexpected death, from a cerebral haemorrhage at just 62, happened several years before I moved to Melbourne. Still, Rennie and I have a pretty significant relationship.

I had been working at the Library for only a few months when I met Manuela Furci, Rennie's former assistant and now director of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive, at an exhibition opening. She told me a little bit about the archive she had co-founded with Rennie's widow, Kerry Oldfield Ellis, and that Rennie had wanted his images to eventually find a home at State Library Victoria, in the city he loved.

Little did I know, as I sipped my champagne, that I was about to undertake the largest ever acquisition of a photographic collection by the Library. Rennie Ellis was a renowned Melbourne photographer and his collection, covering the late 1960s to 2003, comprised more than half a million original negatives and transparencies. It was unique in providing a view of the postwar generation in Australia through the eyes of a photographer immersed in the culture he was recording.

Purchased with the support of the State Library Foundation and the National Cultural Heritage Account, this historically important collection has taken more than seven years to transfer to the Library, a huge effort by many staff at the Library, and by Manuela and Kerry from the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. This successful partnership has resulted in 25,000 images becoming available online; two publications showcasing his contribution to photography, *Decade: 1970 to 1980* (2013) and *Decadent: 1980 to 2000* (2014) published by Hardie Grant Books in association with the State Library; and many of Rennie's images featuring in the Library's exhibitions and programs.

Choosing images to illustrate this article is like being asked to pick your favourite child. Each has its own character and significance. In the end, as my impressionable teenage years occurred in the 1980s, I've focused on Rennie's fashion photography. In this decade, Rennie's work as a social photographer for major fashion and lifestyle publications such as *Vogue*, *Rag Times*, *Pol* and *Mode*, introduced the candid shot and the first street-fashion-style shots (as opposed to the posed or set-up photo) and changed the course of social and fashion photography in Australia. Rennie loved to capture the action behind the scenes, photographing the models as they prepared for the runway, making last minute adjustments and having fun.



Top: Rennie Ellis, At a fashion shoot for Myer. Rennie Ellis at front, 198?
 Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, H2010.126/1807

Above: Rennie Ellis, Dressing room at the Australian Fashion Awards, Melbourne, 1988.
 Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, H2010.126/1120



Top: Rennie Ellis, Exhibitionists Parade, with Alannah Hill, Pussy and Robert, 1984. Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, awaiting accession

Above: Rennie Ellis, Security guard back stage, c. 1985. Courtesy of the Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive. Pictures Collection, awaiting accession