

SUZANNE SPUNNER ON

"THE RITUALS OF WEDDINGS"

JULY 7

The decision of whether or not to get married is a private one; a decision between the two of you. Once made, the potential groom tends to slip into the periphery while the women of three generations are called in. From that private decision, the events leading up to and including the actual wedding, become a very social activity. An activity where every woman in the family has a job, an area of control. Where girlfriends, sisters, mothers and grandmothers each have an opinion about how the event should be. And where every little detail becomes a part of the ritual of weddings...

Suzanne Spinner is a theatre critic, teacher and playwright. Ever since her own wedding she has been interested in these rituals and their place in our social history. She is particularly interested in what makes up these amorphous fantasies we may have about our weddings, how we put them into practice and how we cope when they jostle against other people's fantasies.

On July 7th Suzanne will be talking about these and other matters. She would very much like you to come armed with photos, stories and memorabilia of your own or other people's weddings.

Suzanne is currently a lecturer in Critical Studies at the School of Drama, Victorian College of the Arts. She is a regular contributor to Theatre Australia and The National Times and has written reviews, interviews and articles on film, theatre and the arts for various publications. Her first play "Not Still Lives", is about the life and work of Margaret Preston and Thea Proctor and is scheduled to open in August.



When A Girl Marries 1979 Ruth Maddison

This work came about as a result of a job I was asked to do. I had never sought work as a wedding photographer but, when I received the phone call asking me to do this one, I was delighted. Although I didn't know the family, I knew the 'bride-to-be' and her 'attendant'.

I asked if I could take some photographs of the preparations because I'm always more interested in the process than in any idea of 'decisive moments'.

The afternoon was interesting. On one level it was like all the times all of us girls would dress up and pretend to be brides; and on another level it was quite solemn, like 'the most important day of your life'. We had a lot of laughs, but there was also a certain amount of tension.

Some time later, I was offered an exhibition in Sydney at the Australian Centre for Photography. I accepted, without knowing what I would show.

While I was working on the wedding print order I began to see a series of images that said various things about getting married. They applied to all of us who have married: how we affect (effect?) a situation by entering into it, and how we, in turn, are affected by the situation; how we take on another relationship/role — to friend and daughter we add wife; how it is special and particular, but also common and familiar.

I remember talking that afternoon about my wedding, which had been very different — a rush job at the Registry Office — but it had the same mixture of delight and tension, of fantasy and reality.

I was given permission to use an edited selection of the photographs, and they were exhibited at the Australian Centre for Photography in 1980. Subsequently, many people have told me the story of their wedding day.

Sometimes I think what I like to do with the camera is make a short film with stills. I tend to analyse situations as parts of a process — what is happening now is connected to what has happened and will affect what will happen next. I think that's why I'm more interested in photographing in series rather than single images.

Original dimensions: thirty two photographs, each 16.5 cm × 24 cm.







