

Working to a theme



Children all over the world enjoy artistic activities. I am fascinated by this, and wherever I go, make a point of photographing children and their creations. I have found kids' art on everything from brick walls and corrugated iron sheds to water tanks. Some towns are festooned with it. Some of these works (I am not referring to graffiti) are outstanding and obviously supported by the local community.

Apart from the occasional publication, I have not yet made a final decision on how to use this material, but it serves as an example of how you can work to a theme and build a collection for some later use. To sell a batch of work to a magazine, for example, it is important to shoot in a theme, preferably illustrating a short article or story – see page 172.



Top left, insert: Children's art on a wheelie bin at Halls Creek, WA [135/80-200mm, f11].
 Top: The children at Morgan Primary School on the River Murray, SA. I was entranced by the school fence so I asked the teacher's permission to have her class pose [135/80-200mm zoom, f11].
 Above left: Children's art from the streets of Broken Hill, NSW.
 Above right: Art from Quorn State School, SA. [120/43mm, f5.6].



The comfort zone

Well, how would you react if you were a small boy from Cape York and you were confronted by a big scary white fella with bushy hair, a beard and a camera that makes a strange noise? Motor-driven cameras – in fact, anything that is out of the ordinary – can send bush kids, particularly the very young ones, screaming for their mother. This little chap was one of a dozen or more playing at the edge of a small community. Even though I had been around for several days, when I moved into this child's comfort zone he decided enough was enough. You can keep your distance by using a longer lens [135/105mm, f8].



Children and animals

The moment an animal, a creature with a mind of its own, is introduced into a photographic session with a child, all hell can break loose. The biggest challenge is managing to get the angle of the child's head, the direction of the eyes and the facial expression to combine in a way that appeals to you, at the same time as you've lined up the same things in the animal. Usually it's one or the other. Whenever possible, make the child's eyes your primary point of focus. The only real solution is to take lots of pictures and act casual. If you feel tense, don't show it: your feelings should not be allowed to influence the situation. Nowadays, unless I see a child who really appeals to me as a subject for a picture, I don't seek kids out. Most shots are made by way of chance encounter, and are spontaneous. I am usually interested in the overall "goings on"; if a child pops up, terrific.

If you are on a homestead and have been given the go-ahead by the parents, then the best way to get a child's confidence is to ask to see their favourite pets. You can bet your bottom dollar you will be presented with a wide array of domestic and native animals, most of which are young orphans. So you then have the vital ingredients for great shots. Young children and young animals – what more could you ask for?

Top left: James and his heeler pups, Cape York, Q [135/80-200 mm, f8].

Top right: Wendy and her pet jey, south-east Q [135/80-200 mm, f11].

Centre left: Jane and her pet Koala, NSW [135/80-200 mm, f5.6].

Bottom left: James the junior ringer from the Kimberley, WA [135/300 mm, f5.6].

Below: Jimmy practising rodeo riding, Alice Springs, NT [135/80-200 mm zoom].

