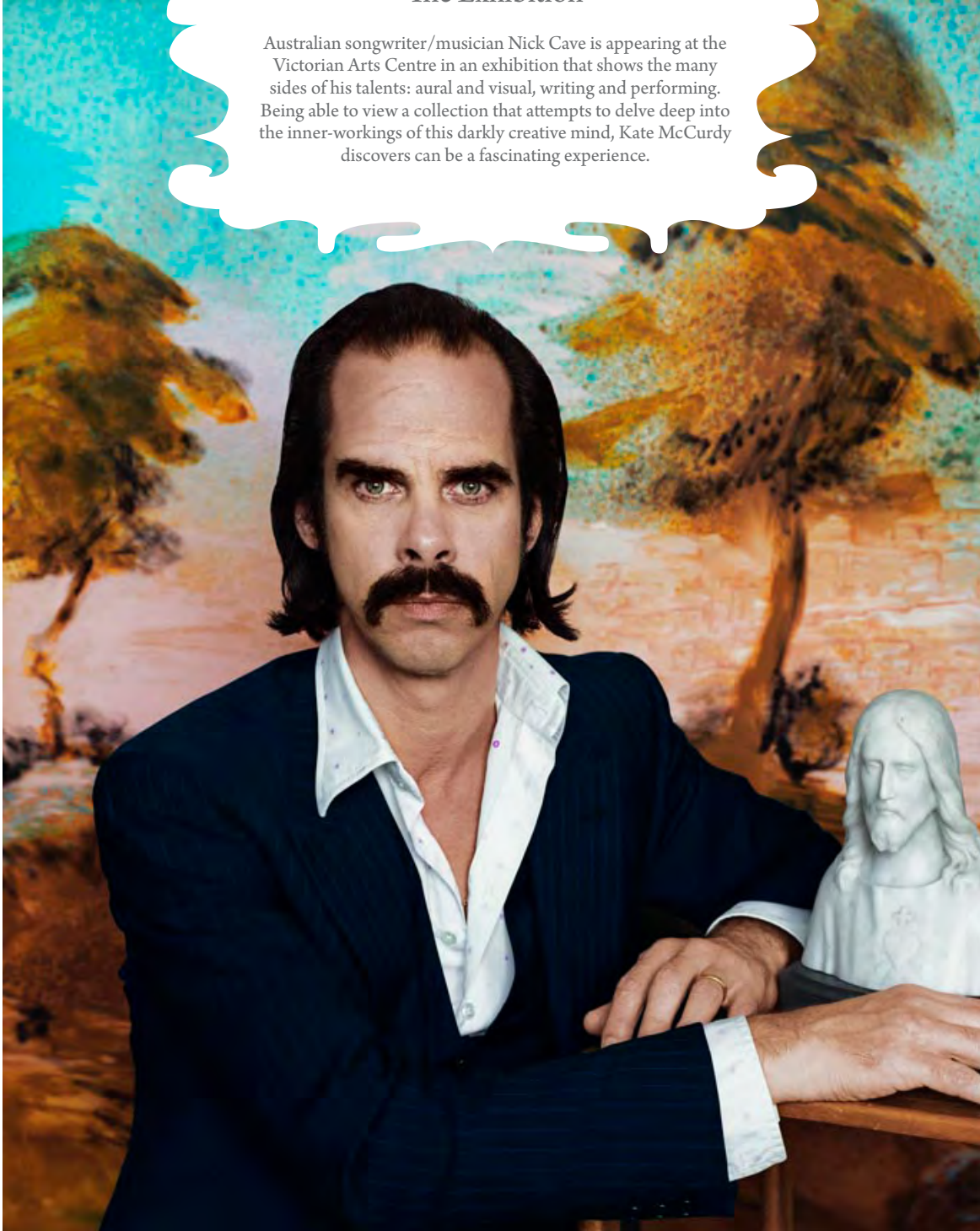


Nick Cave

The Exhibition

Australian songwriter/musician Nick Cave is appearing at the Victorian Arts Centre in an exhibition that shows the many sides of his talents: aural and visual, writing and performing. Being able to view a collection that attempts to delve deep into the inner-workings of this darkly creative mind, Kate McCurdy discovers can be a fascinating experience.



Nick Cave, 2007, Photograph by Polly Borland / Original painting by Tony Clark, Polly Borland, born Melbourne 1959, type C print;122 x101 cm
Tony Clark, born Canberra 1954, Section from Clark's Myriorama, 2007, synthetic polymer paint and fibre-tipped marker on canvas;240 x 180 cm
Commissioned by the Arts Centre in 2007



Nick Cave, the enigmatic frontman of early bands The Boys Next Door and The Birthday Party, to the ever-evolving Bad Seeds and new project Grinderman, and with a novel and a few screenplays under his belt, is now the subject of his own exhibition in Melbourne. Visitors are taken on a journey into the imaginative world of Nick Cave - his music, writing, artwork and those whose work are inspired by him - at The Arts Centre's George Adams Gallery. Nick Cave has donated over 800 items to the Arts Centre's Performing Arts Collection, and the artist himself personally selected many of these items to be featured in the exhibition which has been created and designed by The Arts Centre. His inspirations are arranged in an eclectic manner, together with his own work, in a creative office/studio-like space. The man's charismatic image adorn the walls of the carefully designed spaces, his amplified voice alternately growls and screams the lyrics to *Loverman* or recits passages from his novel. Rare video footage of performances and documentary material has been provided by long-time friend, collaborator and fellow Bad Seed, Mick Harvey. The high level of involvement by Cave in the exhibition appears to be motivated by his desire to be identified as an Australian

musician, despite being based in Brighton, England and living abroad for much of his life.

The Sculpture

This desire has also been shown by *The Sculpture*, by British memorial sculptor Corin Johnson, who created the memorial for Princess Di in London, as he wanted to give something back to his home town of Warracknabeal. The shipping to Australia from England, and subsequent U-hauling across the country to its intended destination was to be the subject of a documentary by Cave and longtime collaborator John Hillcoat. However, in the end Cave didn't want the process to be filmed, as he felt it would defeat the purpose of the act and isn't certain that his gift would indeed be accepted. He playfully remarks that if they didn't want it he'd take it and 'dump it in the desert somewhere'. For a man fascinated by Australian history, his personal library including books on Ned Kelly and the history of bushrangers, and having represented the outback in his film *The Proposition*, the figure of Nick Cave seated astride a rearing horse against the backdrop of the harsh Australian landscape would perhaps not look entirely out of place.



The Sacred Heart of Jesus (top)

c.1950s – 60s, marble; 23.5 x 20.5 x 13.0 cm, Nick Cave Private Collection

Notebook known as Sacred and Profane

1985, paper, card, cloth, metal; 17.5 x 13.0 x 5.0 cm, Gift of Nick Cave, 2006 the Arts Centre, Performing Arts Collection



Violin Cat

1933
Louis Wain, born London 1860;
died St Albans 1939
gouache; 77.5 x 58.5 cm
Nick Cave Private Collection

Artistic influences

Nick Cave gives the impression of a man who lives his art. Evidence of this rests in his astonishing number of notebooks, whose contents range from a dictionary of his favourite words, to lyrics and sketches for album covers, to a weather diary and even shopping lists for black hair dye. As a young man he frequented flea markets in Berlin, amassing an eclectic collection of photographs, old albums and books that were made into visual journals. He is inspired by music, literature, history, cinema and the arts. He lists his favourite painters in no particular order:

'What painters do I like? Well, let's see... Piero della Francesca with all that lovely blue... the blood and guts and commonality of Grünewald...Stephan Lochner, very nice... El Greco I love that view of Toledo...eerie Brueghel and nasty Bosch...de Chirico's brother Savinio (Tony Clark turned me on to him)... Puvis de Chavanne's 'Beheading of Saint John the Baptist' at the National in London...Bellini (of course)... Balthus and his brother Pierre Klossowski's big, big drawings... Michelangelo's Rondanini Pieta... late, late Simeon Solomon (I have one), Louis Wain of course, the

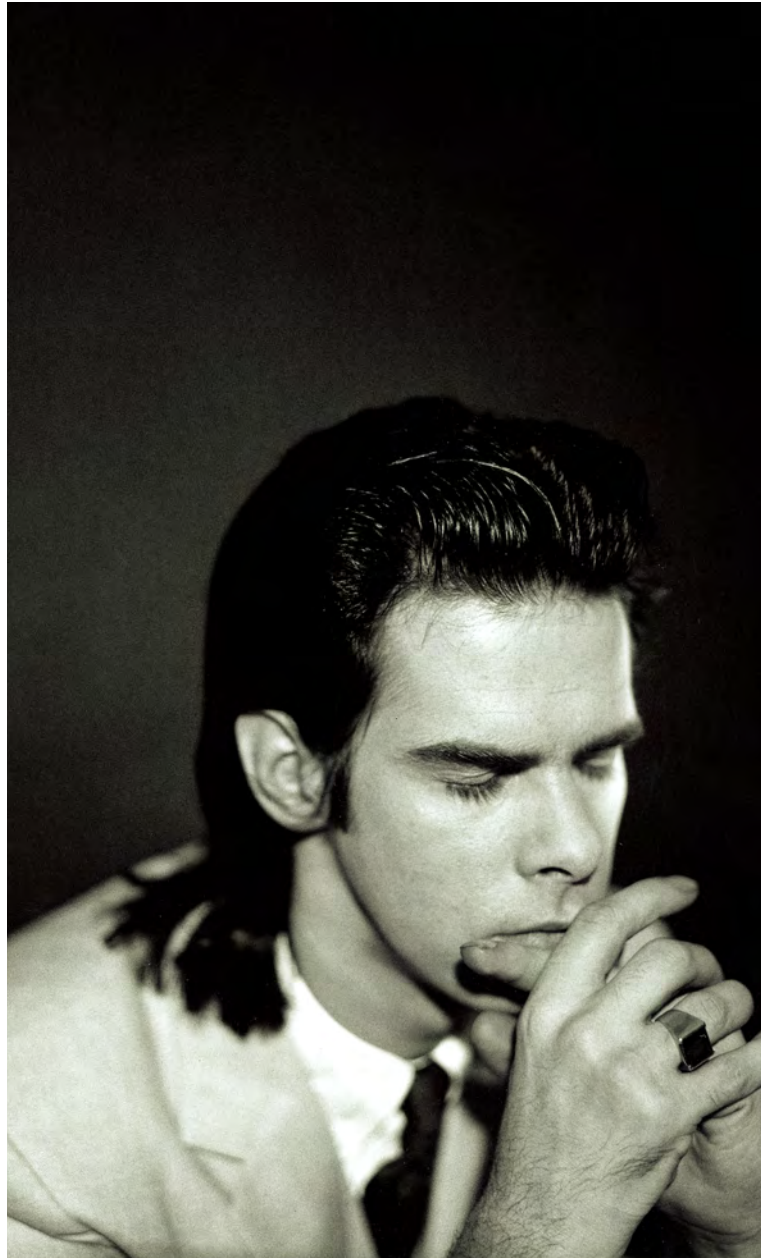
Rothko room at the Tate, Dure's Madonnas, Goya and Velasquez, Munch's Puberty, Leonardo's spooky vaginas, and so on, I dunno, I'll tell you some more tomorrow. I'm a big fan of the Doric column...'

The anthropomorphised cats of Louis Wain (works from *The Man who Painted Cats* on loan from Cave's personal collection) are of particular significance to Nick Cave. Introduced to him by Australian artist Tony Clark, Cave identifies with the 'extraordinary spiritual energy that inhabits [the] paintings' but also help him keep 'anchored to [his] past in Melbourne.

From paper, to the screen, to paper again

The creative journey can sometimes be more fascinating than result, and this is shown the way Cave's songwriting process is documented in the vast array of notebooks on display in the exhibition. However, it is interesting to note that Cave stopped using notebooks and the typewriter (which is also on display) in the late 90s in an attempt to achieve 'a more refined, simple less chaotic form of songwriting'.

This has resulted in what would have been pages of scrawled poetic ideas and verses, instead reduced to a single clean page of computerized text, with no trace of how it came to be. Cave acknowledges himself that 'the downside [to this way of working] is that the whole journey to the final creation is lost and in so many ways it is this stuff that is the heart and soul of the song'. Fans will be delighted to hear that the new Bad Seeds album was 'written by hand, on paper, and this album is an absolute haermorrhaging of words as a consequence – no delete button'.

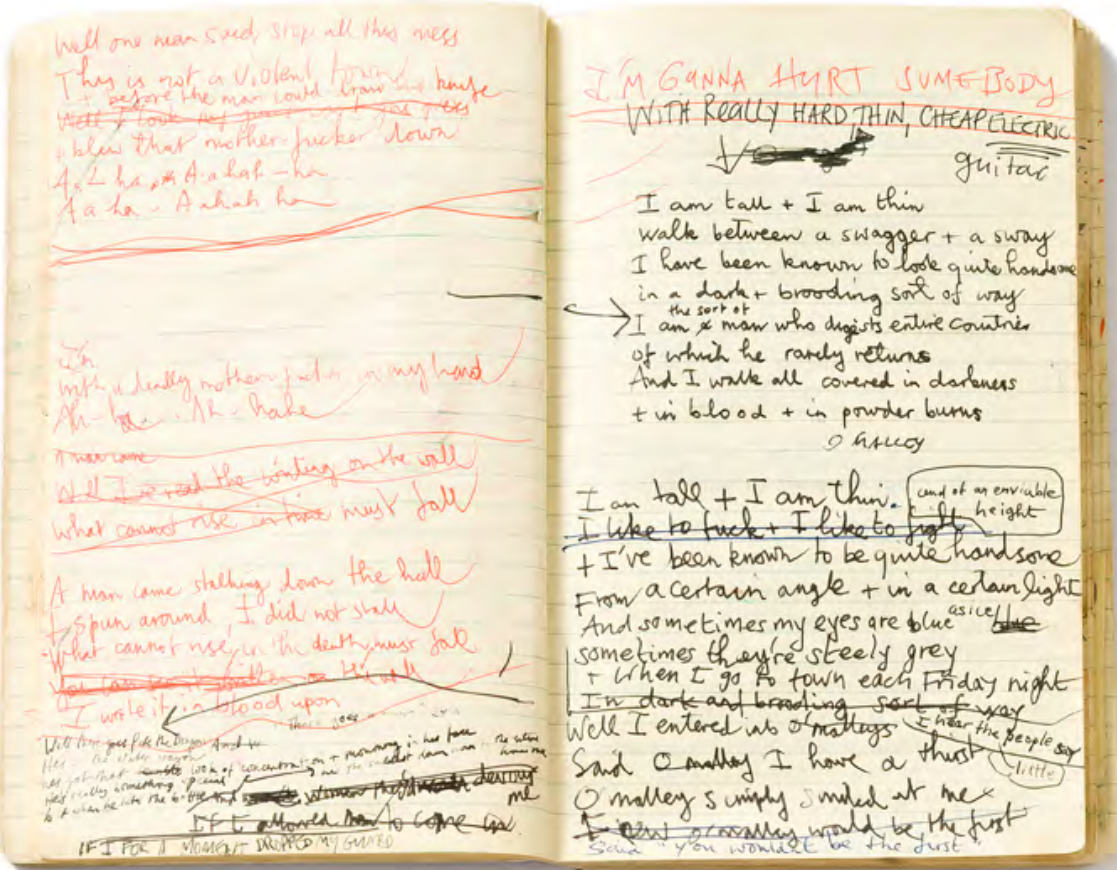
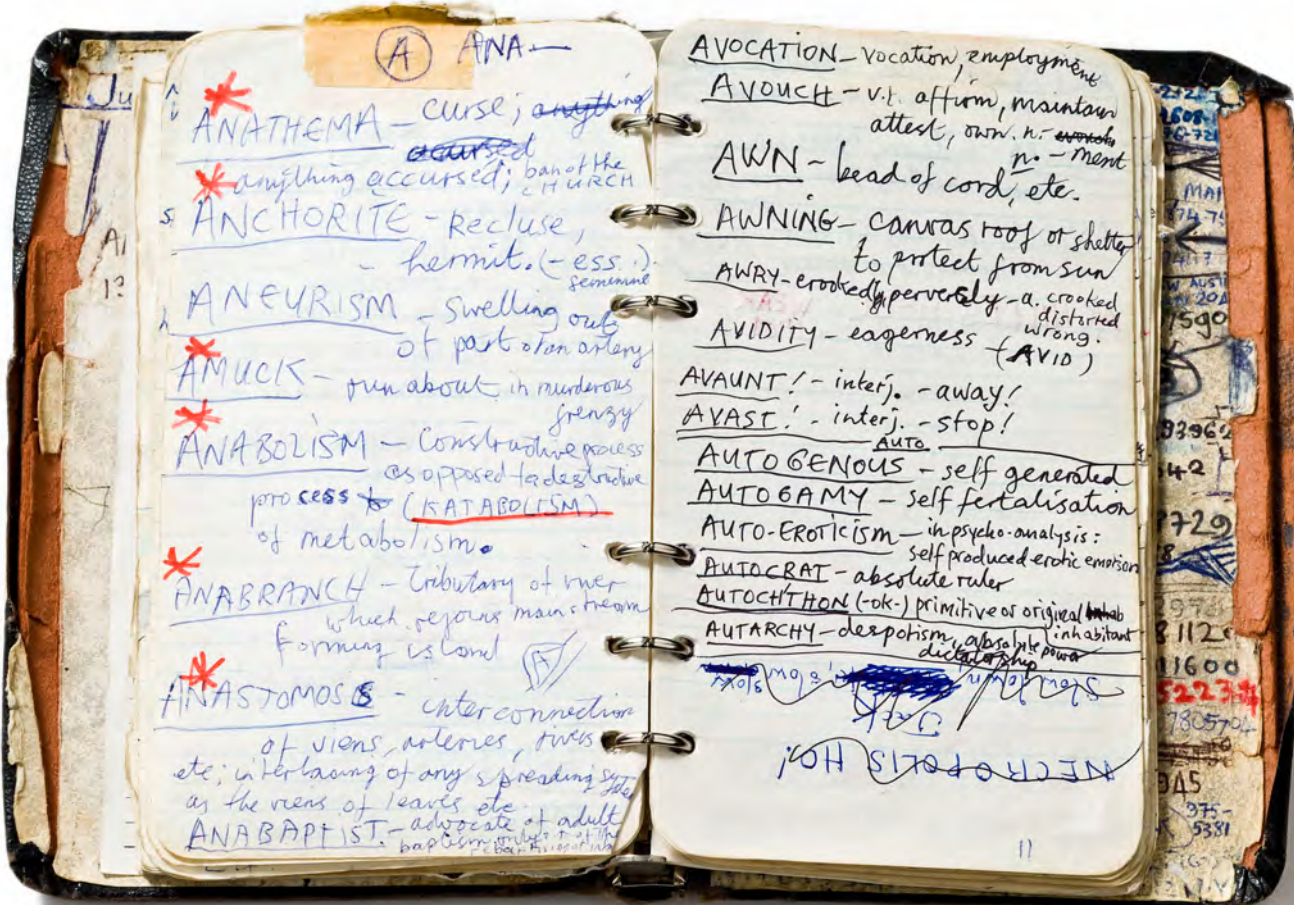


How to capture the man

The exhibition contains a mini gallery of a collection of images (most often black and white) of Nick Cave, accompanied by quotations of each photographer's experience with their subject. There are contradictory accounts: Steve Gulick claims that Cave is 'easy to photograph, any bad pictures are down to photographic error', while Penny Borland concedes that although 'Nick is incredible to look at', he is in fact 'hard to photograph well. He is striking and handsome, but not terribly photogenic', putting this down to Cave not trusting his looks or the process. David Tonge and Anton Corbijn acknowledge that

Cave is a man who is undergoing constant development and change. Tonge describes a man whom in different circumstances can be 'a true professional...a true romantic...a true philosopher' to being 'truly scary'. Like his music, the power of Cave's iconic image reaches far and wide; photographers often return to attempt to capture a constantly evolving man. Corbijn suggests that it is not his skill that allows his images to display more of the human being behind the icon, rather that 'Nick is becoming more and more himself, and [he enjoys] documenting that process'.

Photo shoot for Nick Cave's book, *And the Ass Saw the Angel*, 1988
Polly Borland, born Melbourne 1959
type C print; 24.4 x 19.3 cm
Kindly lent by Polly Borland



Handwritten dictionary contained in notebook, (above) 1984 vinyl, metal, paper and pen; 18.0 x 12.0 x 2.0 cm

'O'Malley's Bar' (left) Recorded January 1993; released on *Murder Ballads*, 5 January 1996, black leather notebook, c.1990 Reproduced with permission of Mushroom Music on Gift of Nick Cave, 2006 the Arts Centre Performing Arts Collection

Creative collaboration

As was made very clear in his 'acceptance' speech for being inducted into the ARIA Hall of Fame in 2007, Nick Cave refuses to take sole credit for his work, insisting that the fellow members of the Bad Seeds be acknowledged for their valuable contributions. In fact, it is impossible to ignore the influence of Cave's collaborators throughout his career. A few in particular stand out in the exhibition, Tony Clark, John Hillcoat, Warren Ellis and Mick Harvey, especially as they continue to work closely with Cave. When asked to come up with a landscape that reflected the music of the Bad Seeds, Tony Clark painted an 'extraordinary triptych of six crippled olive trees

blasted by a bloody red light' for the 'Best of' album, and his work has also featured on several other album and EP covers for the band. John Hillcoat's eye for direction seems to be a perfect match for Cave's work and they have worked together on many film projects including *The Proposition*, *Killing Ma* and many music videos for the Bad Seeds and Grinderman. Of course, the members of the Bad Seeds themselves such as Mick Harvey and Warren Ellis have made a resounding impact on Cave's career, and both continue to work closely on different projects. All of these people and others have contributed to a community of creativity that is inspired by, and in turn inspires, Nick Cave.



Sections from Clark's Myriorama

1997
Tony Clark born Canberra 1954
synthetic polymer paint and oil on canvas;
61.0 x 96.0 cm (triptych)
Nick Cave Private Collection

A personal journey

The exhibition can be viewed in a number of ways, as one discovers that there are many aspects to Nick Cave. The musician, songwriter, performer, author and artist are all represented here, either by works by the man himself, his own collections of others work, and the inspiration other artists draw from him in photographs and paintings. Nick Cave's words and voice permeate the exhibition, not only through carefully selected video footage of performances and of the rare film of Cave reciting an abstract from his novel *And the Ass Saw the Angel*. Additionally, one can open the doors of boxes to listen to audio recordings as the man himself describes the items on display. This brings a very personal aspect to a very public exhibition of a man's life. Hearteningly, this

isn't just a collection of nostalgia, but an attempt to understand a man who is in many ways at a new height of his career. Teetering on the brink of the mainstream with his work in the film industry (and a new film on the horizon), his somewhat reluctant induction into the ARIA Hall of Fame and the pending release the highly anticipated new Bad Seeds album titled *DIG, LAZARUS, DIG!!!*, such an exhibition seems a not only timely, but well deserved celebration of the career of this Australian icon.

The Arts Centre presents
Nick Cave - the exhibition
10 November, 2007 - 6 April 2008
The Arts Centre
George Adams Gallery, Melbourne
Free



**Euchrid's Crib, Nick Cave in
Yorkestrasse**
West Berlin, 1985
Bleddyn Butcher, born London 1953
silver gelatin print; 17 x 24.8cm
Kindly lent by Nick Cave