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UN.MAGAZINE ISSUE 2.2 NOVEMBER 2008

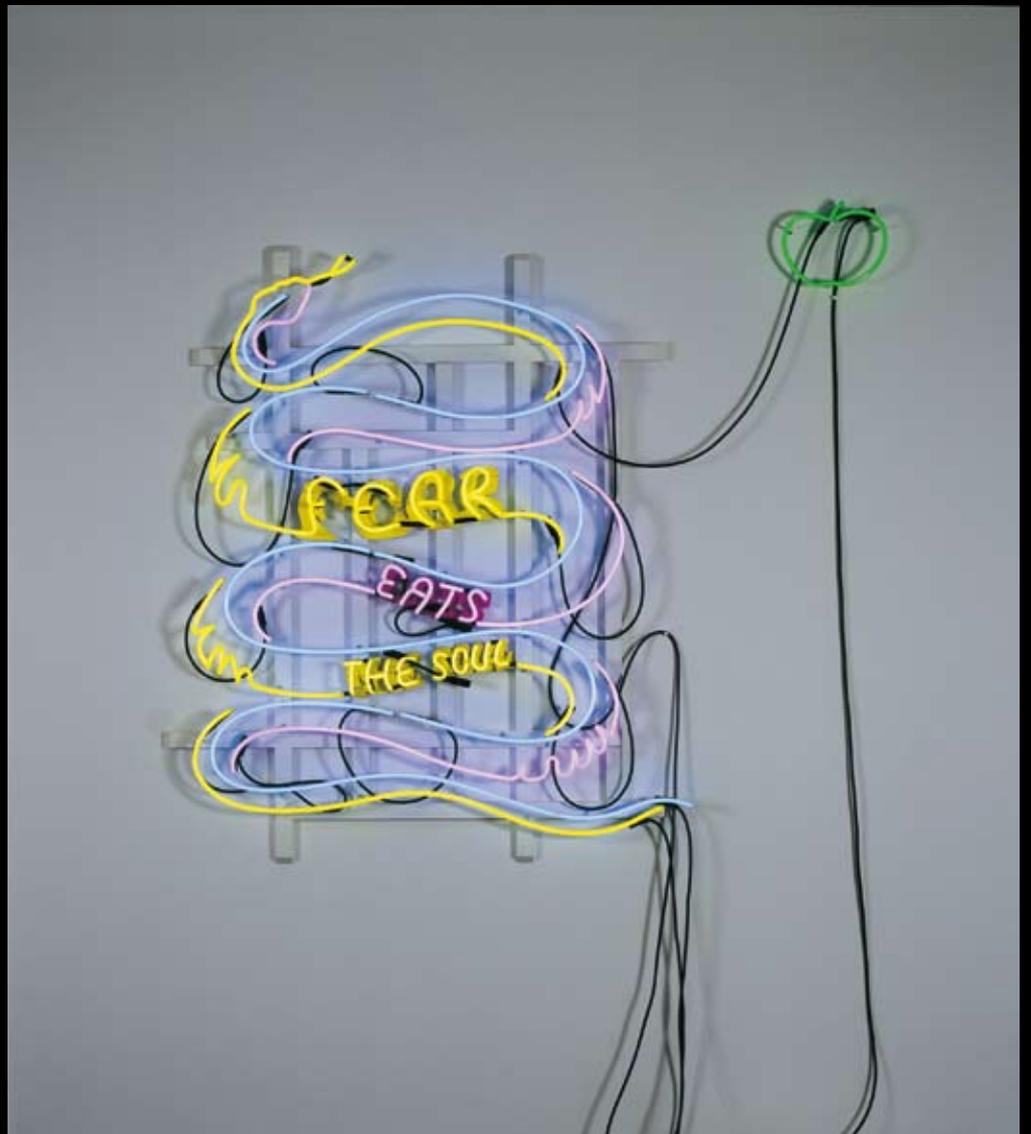
(clockwise from top)
Simon Horsburgh
Still, 2007
 Plastic bag, monofilament, silver screen
 Installation detail
 Conical Inc., Melbourne
 Image courtesy the artist

Starlie Geikie
Magdalene, 2008
 Pencil on craft paper
 45 x 33 cm
 Image courtesy the artist
 Photo credit: Neon Parc

Pataphysics / Publishing Issue
 146 pages, 210 x 297mm, colour and B&W,
 perfect bound. Published 2005
 Image courtesy of Yanni Florence

Janet Burchill & Jennifer McCamley
Fear Eats The Soul, 2003
 Neon, electric cables, fittings
 and transformers, acrylic on timber
 Image courtesy the artists and
 Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

**Liv Barrett, James Deutscher, Chris Kraus,
 Christopher LG Hill & Evergreen Terrace**
Foto-Ography, 2008
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 CCP, Melbourne
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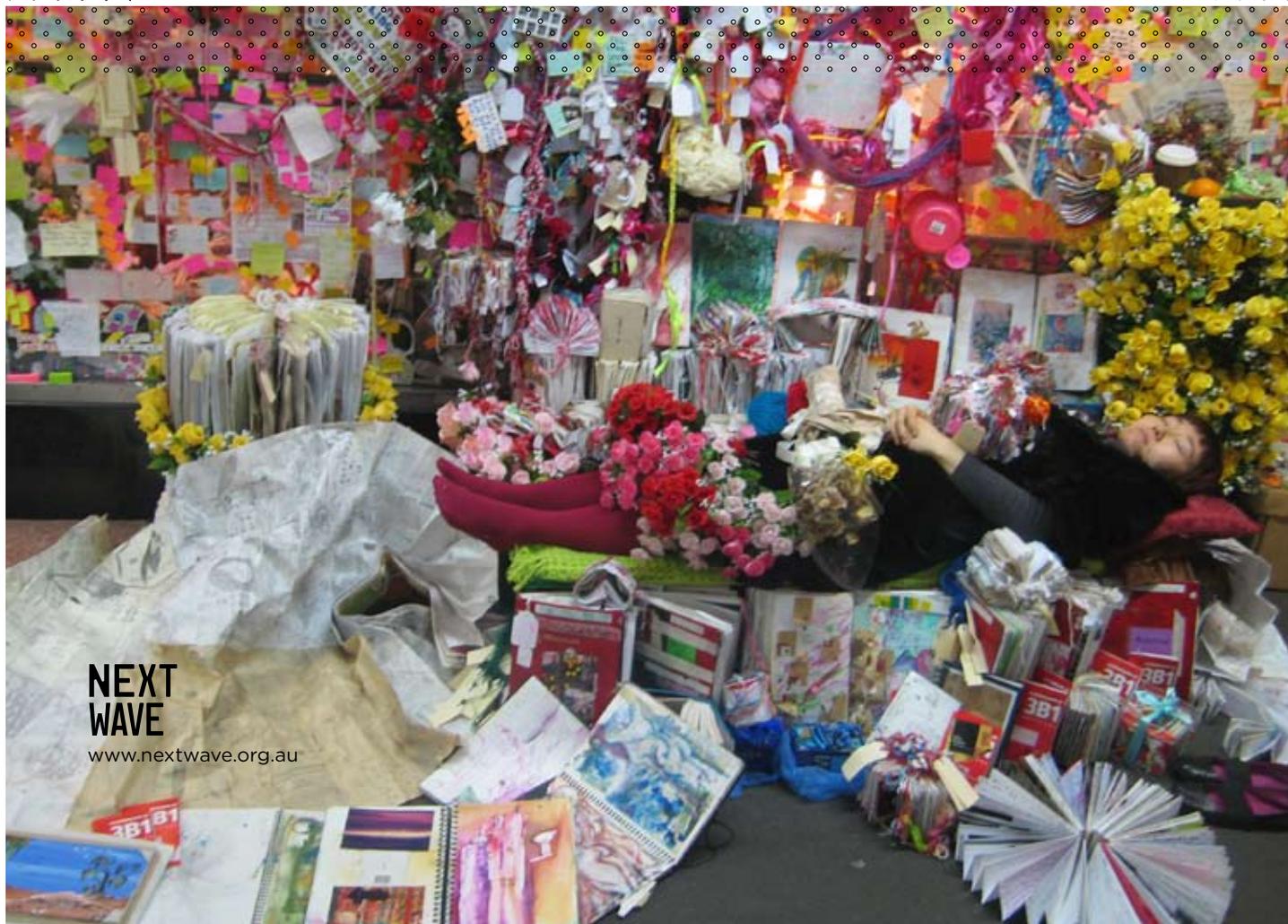
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Photo of Next Wave Kickstart 2007 artist Hiromi Tango's *Absence*, as part of the 2008 Next Wave Festival.



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(image) *Unearthing The Hawke*, Lane Cormick September 2008

VOLUME TWO ISSUE TWO

Art magazines are signs of their times; always concerned with catching the current conversations, yet also aware they are becoming a resource for a future art history. We've recently had all issues of *un Magazine* indexed. The index (which you can find on our website) reads like a 'who, what, where' of contemporary art in Melbourne since 2004. Looking at the magazine's content in this way gives a sense of the archive it contributes to. In some cases *un* has provided the only published review of a particular show, or the first feature on an artist, and for dozens of new art writers it has been the site of their first published work.

Our mentoring program has provided eight emerging writers with significant support and advice in the drafting and development of their texts for this issue. Earlier in 2008 a partnership between *un Projects Inc.*, Next Wave and Express Media also set up a forum for emerging art writers to workshop and develop critical and creative texts for publication. *un* was also involved in presenting the Critics' Masterclass for young and emerging writers in the Adelaide Festival of Arts 2008 Artists' Week.

Engaging in critical conversations, *un 2.2* provides space for the dialogue between and amongst artists and writers in many forms and guises. Here we feature correspondence between artists and writers reflecting on projects (Tessa Zettel and Hiromi Tango), discussing work in development (Rosa Ellen and Sary Zananiri), Jared Davis interviewing sound artist Yasunao Tone, and visual responses from artists to the work of their peers (see pages by Helen Johnson, Simon Denny, and Matt Hinkley). Our online supplement for this issue, *Unfolded Interview*, is an extended conversation between artists Tamsin Green and Alex Martinis Roe, Kel Glaister and Simon Horsburgh (see pages 36–37 for an extract and download the full piece from www.unmagazine.org).

Three artists also contribute new works to the issue; Anastasia Klose, Veronica Kent and Deborah Kelly. Kelly's postcard insert is a mini-version of her work *Big Butch Billboard*, designed in reference to the 'Maria Kozic is Bitch' billboard by Kozic, exhibited in Melbourne in 1989.

Meanwhile, our talented contributing writers provide commentary and opinion on current trends and developments in contemporary practice across several articles, and critique recent exhibitions in the *un Covered* reviews section.

ROSEMARY FORDE
EDITOR

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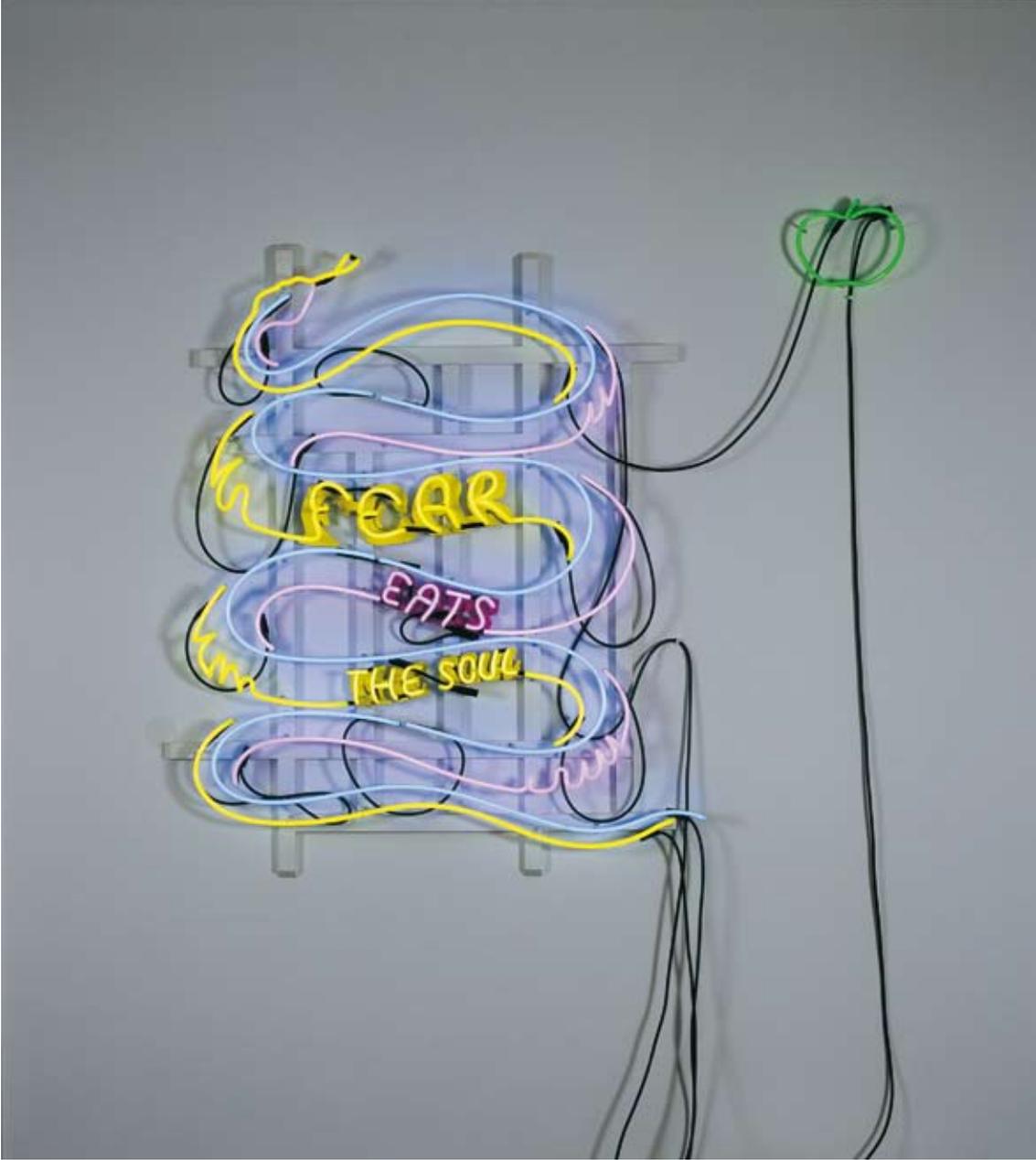
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**ARTS
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Janet Burchill & Jennifer McCamley *Fear Eats the Soul*, 2003. Neon, electric cables, fittings and transformers, acrylic on timber. Image courtesy the artists and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

the Soul (2003). Here, the myth of the Fall was reworked with reference to Werner Fassbinder's 1973 film of the same title, an incisive portrait of German racism. Paranoia around racial difference was the presiding subject of several of the selected works, including Costa Rican artist Lucía Madriz's short digital video *Hispanic* (2006) which presented a golden-tinted sunset scene with the word 'Hispanic' slowly bloating into the words 'his' 'panic' as the background moved from saccharine to sombre hues. Most of the works in *Regarding Fear and Hope* effectively reappraised the ingrained social fear of the 'Other' and identified fear or xenophobia itself as the repository of something malign. Collectively, the works presented a potent critique of the politics of exclusion.

This thematic was also echoed across certain historical works included in the 2008 Sydney Biennale, such as Adrian Piper's confronting video installation *Black Box/White Box* (1992) showing full-length footage of the infamous bashing of Rodney King, and Mike Parr's unforgettable lip-stitching in violent empathy with detained asylum seekers in the performance piece *Close the Concentration Camps* (2002). Although neither works were recently made, the socio-cultural conditions to which they speak continue to resonate.

The stratified nature of anxiety was comprehensively conjured by Felicity Fenner's 2008 Adelaide Biennial exhibition *Handle with Care*. Fenner prised open the clichés of resilience and optimism so often used to characterise the Australian temperament, asking if national bravado might in fact harbour 'a fear of confronting deep anxieties about our relationship to the world'.²

The exhibition used the motif of fragility in response to an array of socio-political and environmental stressors. This focus on fragility was not just a unifying conceptual framework but was also, as Fenner notes, materialised in the 'visually or formally delicate'³ composition of the works themselves. Certainly Lorraine Connelly-Northey's suite of rusted wire sculptures, which simultaneously mourned and recreated the possum skin cloaks worn by her Indigenous ancestors, held a complex delicacy of symbolic and material affect. As did Sandra Selig's almost unbearably fragile spray-painted spider webs.

In Janet Laurence and Suzann Victor's works, the tension underlying the imperative to 'handle with care' was approached through the strategy of suspension. Laurence's dead tree hanging inverted in the gallery space affixed with plastic tubing suggested medical intervention into natural vascular systems, and referred inexorably to dying treescapes. Victor's installation of chandeliers encircled by a maze of water-filled glass tubes exploited the inherent fragility of glass to encapsulate both fragile balance and the nearness of destruction.

Anxiety over ecological destruction featured even more prominently in several institutionally curated exhibitions in 2008, most notably *The Ecologies Project* (MUMA) curated by Geraldine Barlow and Kyla McFarlane and *Heat: Art and*

Climate Change (RMIT Gallery) curated by Linda Williams.

Heat: Art and Climate Change clearly argued the anthropocentric causes of environmental catastrophe. Williams' curatorial selection included artists such as Jill Orr, whose concern with environmental issues dates back as far as her *Bleeding Trees* series of 1979, and Bonity Ely, who contributed a reworking of her 1980 performance piece, *Murray River Punch*. These veterans were placed alongside younger artists like Ash Keating whose project *2020?* redirected tonnes of industrial rubbish to the gallery space at the Meat Market, reconfiguring the definitions of art and waste.

The focus on a younger generation of artists like Chris Bond and Christian Thompson and their response to environmental destruction was more pronounced in Barlow and McFarlane's *The Ecologies Project*. In an interesting tactic, the exhibition included the iconic 1979 photograph of the Franklin River by Peter Dombrowski: an image that was arguably the most important element in mobilising public support for the environmental campaign to stop the proposed damming of the wild Tasmanian river 30 years ago. It has become the symbolic marker, not only for how the topography of environmental politics has altered over the decades, but how differently ecological concerns are expressed in the contemporary artistic vernacular. For artists like Andrew Hazewinkel and Ash Keating, detritus is now indissociable from our relationship to the environment, and for Ricky Swallow or Nick Mangan, obsolete objects of everyday life become synecdoches for the life-world.

While these exhibitions make for sombre reflection on attenuated forms of cultural anxiety, such gravitas was irreverently inverted in A Constructed World's mini retrospective at ACCA, *Increase Your Uncertainty*. Renegade in intent, works by A Constructed World (aka Geoff Lowe and Jacqueline Riva) celebrated instability by confounding the binaries of author and audience, success and failure. For this collective, experimentation—with its attendant embarrassment or failure—has been embraced. An emphasis on the open-ended and provisional was embodied in the materiality of the works themselves: found objects, scrawled text, sketches, post-it notes.

For Vikki McInnes, Director of VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, A Constructed World's self-styled mottos like *No need to be great, Stay in groups* 'reflects their anxiety about the breakdown of community—a particularly contemporary concern, extrapolating the failure of late capitalist society to care for or about its individual members'.⁴ The openness to supposedly negative terms like failure, and dialogue on the efficacy of working in groups, was expanded in a series of public forums. By redirecting the focus from the artwork to the relations between the participants, A Constructed World created shared spaces that could become, in their own words, 'a working model of culture'.⁵

A more muted form of doubt was poetically explored in David Rosetzky's *No Fear*, included in Jan Duffy and Alex



(top)
Andrew Hazewinkel
Turbulence, 2007
 Video projection, 7 minutes
 Image courtesy the artist

(right)
David Rosetzky
No Fear, 2008
 Installation with sound
 Image courtesy the artist and
 Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
 Photo credit: Dean McCartney

(opposite)
A Constructed World
Charts 1998–2007, 2008
 Charts and lists on paper
 from ACW workshops
 and group projects
 Installation view
 Australian Centre for
 Contemporary Art, Melbourne
 Image courtesy the artists and
 Uplands Gallery, Melbourne
 Photo credit: John Brash



(Endnotes)

1 Victoria Lynn, 'Regarding Fear and Hope' in *Regarding Fear and Hope*, Monash University Museum of Art, 2007, p. 5.

2 Felicity Fenner, 'Fragile State' in *Handle With Care: 2008 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2008, p. 18.

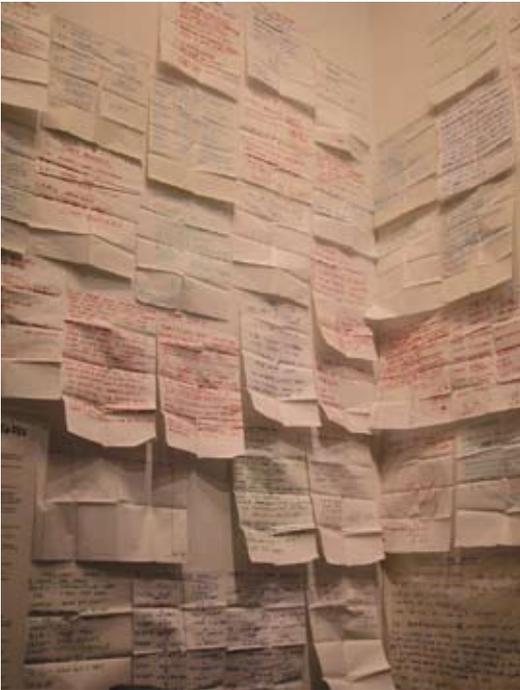
3 *Ibid.*, p. 17.

4 Vikki McInnes, unpublished interview, September 2008.

5 A Constructed World, Geoff Lowe and Jacqueline Riva, 'Not-Knowing as a Shared Space: Part 6', in *A Constructed World: Increase Your Uncertainty*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2007, p. 89.

6 Simon Horsburgh, unpublished interview, September 2008.

7 Linda Williams, 'Reshaping the Human Self-Image: Contemporary Art and Climate Change' in *Heat: Art and Climate Change*, RMIT Gallery, 2008, p. 5, p. 14.



Taylor's co-curated exhibition *My Doubtful Mind*. This audio work layered a string of psychological musings on self-doubt over an ambient soundscape. Questions like 'Do you admire certainty?' and 'Do you fear expressing your feelings, opinions, yourself?' were spoken in an anonymous voice-over. The work mimicked the style of self-help manuals and relaxation tapes with their mellifluous delivery and soothing sounds, coaxing the listener into considering their own inner landscapes of doubt.

Perceptual indeterminacy threaded its way through several of the works in the exhibition *Doubt*, facilitated by Kiron Robinson and Lani Seligman. This was most delicately realised in Simon Horsburgh's *Froth* (2006). Placed on a reflective aluminium surface, this small sculpture of broken shards of light bulbs resembled a cluster of diaphanous bubbles and hovered beguilingly between its literal and figurative readings. Horsburgh notes of the work, 'It's the celebration of a moment and, I guess by extension, the uncertainty of those moments, those observations—the uncertainty that resides in the transformative potential of everyday material and objects.'⁶

The curatorial style of each of the exhibitions negotiates the twin notions of anxiety and uncertainty in idiosyncratic ways, and each has an individual thumbprint. For *The Ecologies Project* disparate artworks were grouped together in tight clusters, mimicking the feel of an ecological system: interlinked organisms in a state of growth. *Increase Your Uncertainty* accentuated indeterminacy in its scattered tents and provisional viewing rooms. In *My Doubtful Mind* the Victorian architecture of Linden Gallery was effectively chosen for its capacity to conjure memory and be dissolved and reconstructed through conceits of light.

Linda Williams deftly articulates the problematic of cultural anxiety when she uses the term 'self-image' to ask what kinds of new self-images artists are constructing in the face of uncertainty and fear.⁷ It's a question that locates the zeitgeist at the interface of world and representation, and can be used to diagnose our times. The matrix of contemporary exhibitions premised on uncertainty and anxiety constitute a curatorial turn that pivots on a heightened awareness of complex cultural transformation. This turn gives primacy to an engagement with critical reflexivity—and all its eddying currents of doubt.

Sophie Knezic is a Melbourne-based visual artist and writer, and Committee Member of Kings Artist-Run Initiative.

Special thanks to Vikki McInnes, Simon Horsburgh and Adrien Allen for their comments on the subject.

YASUNAO TONE
INTERVIEWED BY
JARED DAVIS



Born in Tokyo in 1935, Yasunao Tone is a leading sonic artist and original Fluxus member whose work has traversed five decades. The artist's compositions have explored strategies of improvisation, chance, electronics and computer systems. Works have included *Musica Iconologos* (1985) in which the artist digitised scans of Chinese poems and used software to convert this digital binary data into sound files; *Music for 2 CD Players* (1986) where Tone 'prepared' CDs by placing Scotch tape with pin-pricks on their undersides, causing the binary data of the disk to be read in a completely random manner; and *GGGong* (2007) where a fault in the artist's computer led to the data of old audio files being randomly scrambled into new chance sonic creations.

JARED DAVIS: Your work GGGong was the chance creation of a computer glitch. Does your interest in this stem from concerns regarding chance processes, or more from an interest in the language of computers and technology? Indeed, language and (mis)interpretation seem to play quite a strong role in such pieces of yours as Musica Iconologos and Lyrictron.

YASUNAO TONE: Yes and yes, my interest in both chance/mistake as well as language and/of technology have remained from the beginning of my career. But, I am not interested in chance as in the way John Cage thought of it. My attitude to chance is that I don't exclude chance and I don't use chance as a method to achieve something I intend. Rather, I accept chance as part of the lives of things. Da Vinci's throwing of paint absorbed sponges and Mozart's throwing dice to decide a note are simply methods to get a good result. So, I don't use chance in that way. And I don't use chance for decision-making very often, as Cage did. *GGGong* is a result of my acceptance of the mistakes my computer made.

Language and technology have also interested me from the beginning. However, if you think it is about (mis)interpretation of language, this is misleading. The main thing is the transformation of language. For instance, in music the traditional relationship of sound and language (text or words) is writing a melody according with the composer's interpretation of the lyric. I don't do that either. I think language can be music in its own right.

JD: With works such as Musica Iconologos and Lyrictron, would you see these specifically as critiques of language in general (textual, visual or sonic), critiques of technology, or something different altogether?

YT: I'm not using the word 'language' as language in general, as you defined it—such as visual language or sonic language—but language in particular. In short, in *Musica Iconologos* I have transfigured text into image according to a very strict study of grammatical etymology. There is no element of arbitrariness in the process of transfiguration. It's also worth mentioning that I use only Chinese characters for the piece. The significance of this is that written words in Chinese, as logograms, have not only phonetic value, like the Western alphabet, but also semantic value and figurative value. So, when I use the Chinese characters in the process of digital transformation they move between sense, image and sound very easily and coherently. But that doesn't mean an image of the word is equivalent to a visual representation of meaning, which is always conflicting with grammatical-etymological research. That, I think, constitutes a critique of language.

On top of that, the piece is a critique of phonocentrism/ethnocentrism in its use of Chinese characters for the text. Because, like Friedrich Kittler's remark in his *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*,¹ texts and scores were Europe's only means to store time before mechanical reproductions and alphabetisation. It is no coincidence that this system includes the seven tones (with staves as a subsystem)—the diatonic system from A to G that forms the foundation of Western classical music. Consequently, Western classical music and its tonal system are inside a phonographic alphabet. My sound pieces, with the use of Chinese characters, are outside the Western musical system.

Lyrictron is the piece where a flautist playing sounds generates a text. The textual manipulation part of *Lyrictron* is almost a classical use of the Surrealist method, *cadavre exquis*. So, this piece employs a chance method; there is no particular critique of language there other than the use of chance.

JD: How has your work with Fluxus in the 1960s influenced your practice today? Would you say there has been a particular trajectory or element of continuation that you feel you have followed throughout your career?

YT: I was involved with Fluxus people before Fluxus officially started, so naturally my practice was that of Fluxus in part. But, as my friend the late Dick Higgins pointed out, Fluxus was a practice after eight hours work and if he was an artist he would start Fluxus work after eight hours of artistic work. So, there should be a distinction between Fluxus practice and artistic practice.

Yasunao Tone has written extensively about his own practice and other sound artists. In this short extract he discusses 'noise' and his work *Musica Iconologos*:

The result was noise in all senses of the word. I explained the process: The original source material of the piece was a poetic text from ancient China. I converted the text's Chinese characters into appropriate photographic images (of read-made), from which the Chinese characters were derived by studying their ancient pictographic forms, which are closer to images than are their modern forms. I scanned the images into the computer and digitized them, converting them to binary code (simple 0s and 1s). I then obtained histograms from the binary code and had the computer read the histograms as sound waves; thus I obtained sound from the images. Therefore, I used visualized text (images) as the source—that is, the message—which after encoding was recorded on a CD. Now, when playing the CD what is received are not images as message, but sound that is simply an excess. According to information theory the resultant sounds is none other than noise. As the French word for (static) noise, parasite, indicates, noise is parasitic on its host, that is, the message. But in this case there is no host, only a parasite on the CD. Therefore, this CD is pure noise. Technically speaking, the sound of the CD is digital noise.

—From Yasunao Tone, 'John Cage and Recording' in *Leonardo Music Journal* vol.13, issue 1, 2003.

And here, discussing the 'preparation' of the CD of *Musica Iconologos* in making another work, *Solo for Wounded CD*, Tone considers this combination of unrepeatability and uncontrollability:

Recording presupposes that with repetition, each multiplied record or tape is identical, no matter how many copies are made or how many times they are listened to. However, recording as such is not an ideal medium for composers who write music... a composition is just a process of the musical or sound piece that will only be complete by performance and reception as an active intervention.

—From Yasunao Tone, in *Cyber Arts: International Compendium Prix Ars Electronica 2002*, Hans Leopoldsdorfer & Christine Schopf (editors), Haajr Cantz Publishers, 2003.

I saw a whole bunch of nonsense trying to force the connection of my work to Fluxus. For instance, my prepared CD pieces are sometimes connected with Mian Knizak's fractured and reassembled SP records. There is no connection between the because his idea was making collages exactly the same as artists do with paper—so that you can visually see it—and the auditory result is predictable. Meanwhile, my idea is based on alteration of the binary coding which is completely unpredictable and has nothing to do with collage.

Besides, my work with Group Ongaku is from the pre-Fluxus period but they are considered as Fluxus works.

JD: Your early work with Group Ongaku saw you seeking to produce musical works using unconscious techniques that you have likened to automatic writing. Certainly it appears that the processes involved in your work continue to be an important factor in your practice. Do you feel that you approach your sound works in a conceptual, as opposed to a more compositional, manner?

YT: With a conceptual approach to creating sound, it can be said that the concept is a mould that is negative space, which has to be filled with material; therefore it doesn't show itself to the audience. The audience has to recreate the concept from the sound made. The concept is absent from the work itself but the audience is able to recreate it from the negative space. So, audience participation is a very crucial part of the conceptual approach.

JD: Indeterminacy has been a key theme within your work for decades. Is there an aspect of chance processes that interests you in particular?

YT: Indeterminacy is the word John Cage used referring to his method, but it is limited to notation and its interpretation. It's basically for Cage to not determine notational components like pitches, duration, dynamics, etc., which covers only a limited kind of music and not the entirety of Cage's work.

I'm not in favour of using the term 'indeterminacy' in the sweeping way that people use it. Cage also distinguished it from the term 'chance operation'.² You can't use the term for my prepared CD pieces nor the pieces for eight channels with a frequency-dividing device [*Paramedia Centripetal*, 2005].

If you use the term to characterise a certain piece or a certain composer's practice, then the term is not able to adequately address larger issues, such as the deliberate use of uncontrollability. The sound generated by my prepared CDs has nothing to do with indeterminate notation but more to do with a 'disavowal of representation as re-presentation', which covers the domain Cage wanted to explore with the term indeterminacy. In plain words, the sound I generate does not come from my conscious mind or projection of my mind. I don't know what will come out beforehand.

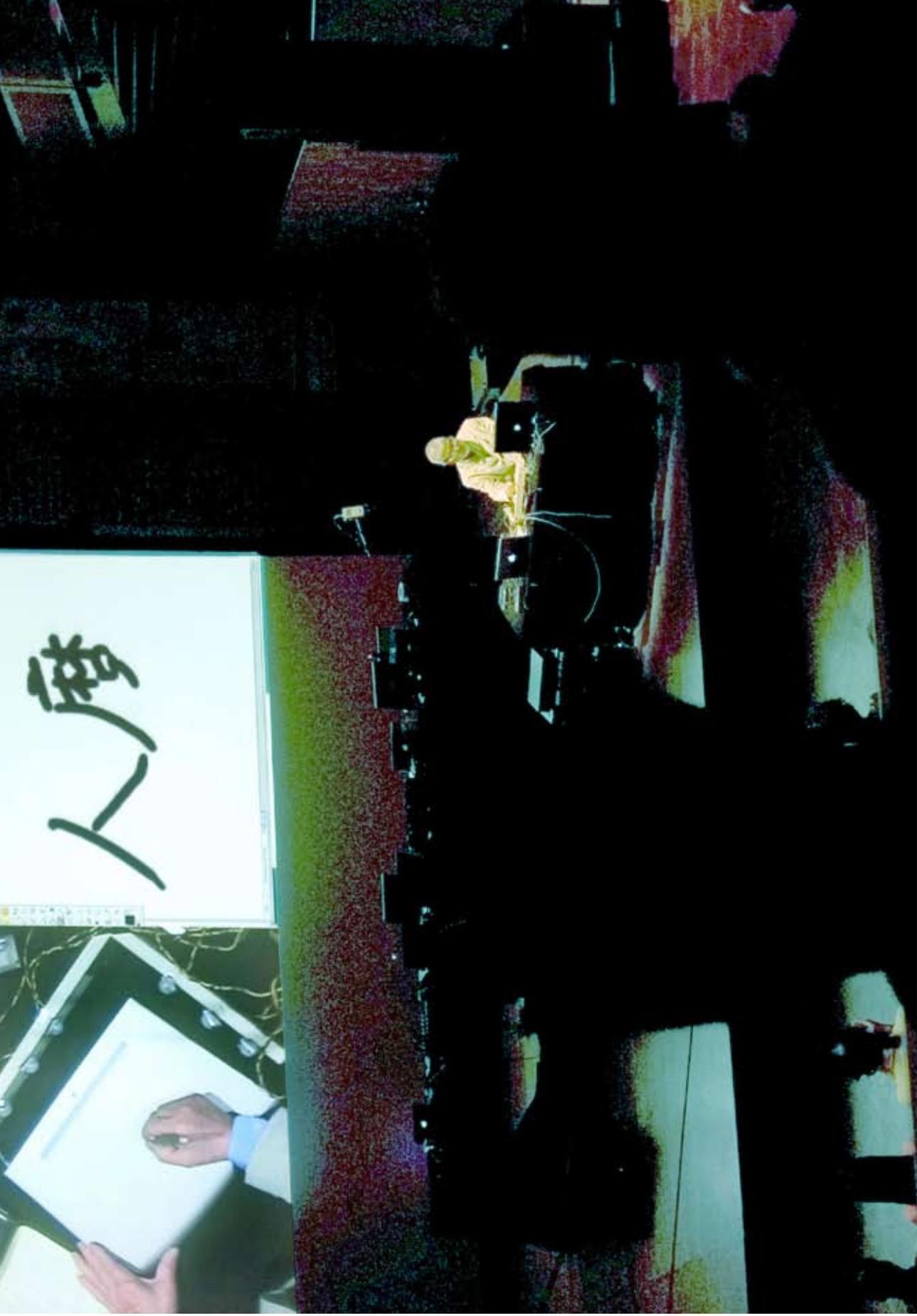
JD: This disavowal of 're-presentation' is interesting, particularly with regard to your interest in language. Language relies strongly on the re-presentation of linguistic material in order to establish meaning, to stop it existing as the meaningless information that is sometimes referred to as 'noise'. Your prepared CDs behave differently and unpredictably each time they are played. Are you interested in the listeners' perceptions of this 'noise'? Or how they attempt to decode this unpredictability?

YT: It's very true that language strongly relies on representation. I don't disavow the representation of language in language *per se*. This interview cannot be conducted without it. What I have disavowed is, in other words, the type of work that acts like language as signs, a means of communication. As Derrida says, 'A sign which would take place but "once" would not be a sign'. When I use words as signs I must operate within a structure of repetition whose basic element can only be representative. For me, that means the work is an event: an irreplaceable and irreversible empirical particular. So, disavowal of representation also entails disavowal of repetition. My strong tendency to avoid repetition is also rooted in this context. Even the use of language can be a disavowal of representation if the language is used as a material without signification. That is the case where Chinese characters are converted into pictorial images; decoding the character is a return to a phenomenon from a sign. Exactly as you remarked, 'to cease it existing as the meaningless information that is sometimes referred to as "noise"', linguistic materials in my work have been de-signified so that they don't constitute meanings.

Jared Davis is a Melbourne based writer, composer and sound artist.

1 Friedrich A. Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Michael Würz and Geoffrey Winthrop-Young, Stanford University Press, 1999. Originally published in German as *Grammophon Film Typewriter*, 1986, Brinkmann & Bosc.

2 Richard Pritchett, *The Music of John Cage*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp.105-137. See also 'Indeterminacy' in John Cage, *Silence: Lectures and Writings*, Wesleyan University Press, 1973.



(pp. 10 & 13) **Yasunao Tone** *Panmedia Centripetal*, 2005. Performance with the London Symphony Orchestra, St Luke's, London. Image courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Alex Delfanne.



Normal

**Everyone has a normal
My normal is not your normal
Your normal is not my normal**

**My friends have the same normal as me
Do your friends have the same normal as you?
It's a really good sign to share a concept of
'normal' with someone.
Otherwise
(I am sorry to say)
You are totally alone in the world.**



Kirsten Farrell

Pretty Ulysses, 2008

Acrylic paint on acrylic sheet 80 x 180 cm

Image courtesy the artist

(opposite)

Emily Floyd

Temple of the Female Eunuch, 2007

Installation detail

Vinyl, polyurethane and poker on wood.

Image courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

It was at the age of twenty that Gabriel Charles Dante Rossetti rearranged the form of his name to take Dante as his first. As a fledgling painter and poet, from then on to be known as Dante Gabriel Rossetti, this gesture was not only a nod to the Italian poet Dante Alighieri who so greatly inspired him, but also signifies how literary models were to become a powerful source of legitimation for the artist's controversial blurring of the boundaries between the written word and the visual arts in his own work.

If the twentieth century saw a break away from narrative and storytelling with Modernism's emphasis on rupture from past models, this can no longer be said to be the case today. On the contrary, a growing number of visual artists are taking literary works as springboards for their art-making, locating in stories from the past a vehicle to communicate contemporary concerns while simultaneously challenging conventional ways of 'reading' and interpreting artworks.

Julia Robinson is an Adelaide-based artist whose sculptural objects often reveal a particular interest in examples of eating in fairytales and mythology. At Über Gallery in 2007, the artist installed *Infernal Cake*, a towering wedding cake hand-stitched from bridal satin and embroidered with the grotesque characters that populate Dante's classic nightmare vision of the afterlife, *Inferno*. Robinson displayed *Infernal Cake* alongside the



surreal and highly cinematic photographs of Italian artist Paolo Consorti, who likewise finds in Dante a means of critique for the decadence of contemporary life. Robinson's juxtapositions—of characters suffering brutal punishments for sins of avarice, envy and greed with the enticing, pillowy opulence of a satin cake—would surely have resonated with any viewer who has ever suffered at the hands of a 'bridezilla' or witnessed the spectacle of an overblown modern wedding.

Drawing on her background in the 'feminine' crafts of dressmaking and costume making, Robinson's highly personal re-imagining of Dante's text (members of her own family and friends are sewn into the scenes) also has a subversive undercurrent in the way the artist lightly and humorously threads herself into a master text. It's the kind of irreverent attitude similarly discernible in the installation works of Melbourne artist Emily Floyd, whose ongoing treatment of literary works has led one critic to argue such texts are 'emblematic of her life and the cultural landscape she inhabits—a bibliography to her biography.'¹

At Anna Schwartz Gallery in February 2008, Floyd tackled the feminist text that became an emblem of an era, Germaine Greer's 1970 stir to women to recover their repressed sexuality, *The Female Eunuch*. Snaking across the gallery floor, Floyd's *Temple of the Female Eunuch* consisted of an assembly line of carved sculptural torsos and wooden blocks stamped with text and tinged with the bold reds, blues, oranges, purples and greens of the 1960s flower power colour scheme. Marking a departure from existential fictions focused on personal struggle, Floyd's shift to a polemical treatise poses certain challenges and while the work may embody the utopian spirit of the period,² the largely decorative use of text and rather subdued treatment of Greer's rallying themes arguably sees the installation fall short of the text's revolutionary impetus.

In contrast to Floyd's installations which play with the materiality of words, Canberra-based painter Kirsten Farrell employs literary references as a means of challenging conventional ways of interpreting an abstract work. In *Pretty Ulysses and Other Paintings*, exhibited in July–August 2008 at MOP Projects in Sydney, Farrell

presented a series of striped abstract geometric compositions rendered in acrylic that recalled Bridget Riley's *Egyptian Palette* stripe paintings of the early 1980s. Pairing her paintings with titles

that referenced both Joyce's *Ulysses* and fragments of text from email spam and other 'low culture' sources, the artist sought to disrupt the cool formalism of her abstractions. In *Ulysses*, a text famed for its encyclopedic obsession with codes, Farrell found a good fit for her scheme as such references challenged the viewer to 'read into' the paintings. However their flat surface and lack of content could only frustrate any such attempt.

In her artist statement, Farrell wrote that 'one of the similarities between painting and fiction is that they are both windows into other possible universes.'³ This may be true, however, the ways in which meaning is constructed in the introspective act of reading a literary text varies greatly to how one appreciates a visual artwork. Yet in borrowing something of the relational nature of narrative, artists working from literary models widen the web of reference points creating quiet and complex works that, like a good story, allow a viewer room to breathe, to reflect and to lose oneself in an imaginary world.

Worlds Beyond Words

Ella Mudie

¹ Sarah Tutton, *The New Silhouette* exhibition catalogue, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2006.

² As argued by critic Charlotte Day in 'Temple of the Female Eunuch', *Art World* issue 1, February/March 2008, pp. 62–64.

³ Kirsten Farrell, artist statement for the exhibition *Pretty Ulysses and Other Paintings*, MOP Projects, Sydney, 24 July – 10 August 2008.

Ella Mudie is an arts writer based in Sydney.

Robin Hely's video work *Sherrie* (2002), recently exhibited at Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art as part of *The Dating Show*, curated by Robert Leonard, features 'hidden camera' footage of the artist going on an agency-organised blind date with a single mother. The video begins with an image of Hely on the phone, warmly lit by red light. He is flirting with Sherrie after rejecting a 25-year-old slim brunette. He seems like a Bond-style spy as we watch him strap a camera to his naked chest, all done to the sounds of a pumping *Bloodhound Gang* soundtrack. The video then cuts to the date: in grainy black and white footage we see Sherrie, poker machines singing in the distance. Sherrie likes magazine competitions and is looking for love. As the date goes on we hear less from Hely's alter ego 'Robert' as, over numerous wines, Sherrie's unrefined niceties turn into a monologue of desperation and despair, of a heart broken and dreams shattered. Eventually Robert interjects: '*I don't like fat chicks that much...*' before bluntly asking Sherrie to go home with him.

The last sequence is of Sherrie in a gallery, discovering the footage of her that 'Robert' has filmed and exhibited. The sequence only lasts for a few seconds and is captured with a shaky camera. Sherrie is enraged, swearing and yelling '*What do you think you're doing?*' An unknown commentator states, '*Ah, that's pretty harsh...*' Sherrie has all the elements of a well-made play: characters, narrative climax, and an emotionally engaging plot. Utilising the familiar aesthetics of reality television, it is a work of both everyday banality and tragic emotionality.

Sherrie never explicitly states whether it is real or a construction. I ask the gallery assistant. He doesn't know. The implication is that Hely has filmed Sherrie without permission, and this possibility infuriates me. I don't know where the art starts and reality ends, so I sit, transfixed, watching him perform acts that I feel are completely unethical. I think that this experience is the most captivating part of *Sherrie*. I judge him, harshly, for using a real person as fodder for his artwork. I feel dirty afterwards, and yet I sat all the way through, silent, transfixed. In researching this article, I found that the artist chooses neither to confirm nor deny the reality of the situation, preferring to leave it ambiguous.

Sherrie has no acts of extreme violence, no grotesque bodily fluids. However, its slimy subtlety unsettles; it asks; it challenges. Performance maker Tim Etchells, of theatre company *Forced Entertainment*, writes of the drive to create a spectator who is also a kind of witness:

... because to witness an event is to be present at it in some fundamentally ethical way, to feel the weight of things and one's own place in them, even if that place is simply, at the moment, as an onlooker.¹

To quell my confusion, I am compelled to ask myself what lines have been crossed by Hely. What does it mean to film someone without consent, and then make a spectacle of it for your own gain? Should Sherrie's vulnerability be respected, kept private? How does the gender relationship matter in this work? Where does the artist stop and the asshole begin? Are there actions that should not be permissible, even in the name of art?

My attention keeps coming back to her, to the fact that she is a real person. I'm reminded of Chris Burden asking someone to shoot him in the arm (*Shoot*, 1971). However this act was done with consent: it was his pain, his body, and also his glory afterwards, his reward. Seeing documentation of Mike Parr sewing his own lips together in protest (*Close The Concentration Camps*, 2002) is an incredibly visceral experience, but part of what we are watching is the decision by the artist to use his body as the site where his ideas become manifest: again, they were his actions. But Sherrie gave no consent, and as viewers we are complicit in her emotional embarrassment. In this exploitation, she is an innocent, and I feel responsible for her.



It could be said that we have made a work together, Hely and I. In the time and space of watching, his video has activated a response in me, a narrative of sorts. *Sherrie* is provocateur; the real work is in the watching.

But what are Hely's responsibilities? Artists often engage in questioning or aggravating the dominant moral compass of the time. Art needs to push boundaries and, yet, there must be some accountability somewhere. Is there a way to question ethics, ethically? We spectators act as a barometer. We decide what brushes close to a sense of the taboo, what is transgressive. However, borders move, opinions change.

I was later told that Hely used an actress in this work. It seems that his theatre was, in fact, a theatre. At first, I was relieved to learn of the forgery, then disappointed. I had been tricked; my emotions were engineered. And yet, it was powerful and I am impressed. Regardless of whether he manufactured *Sherrie*, he left a bruise on me in the real world, extended beyond fiction, and held me responsible.

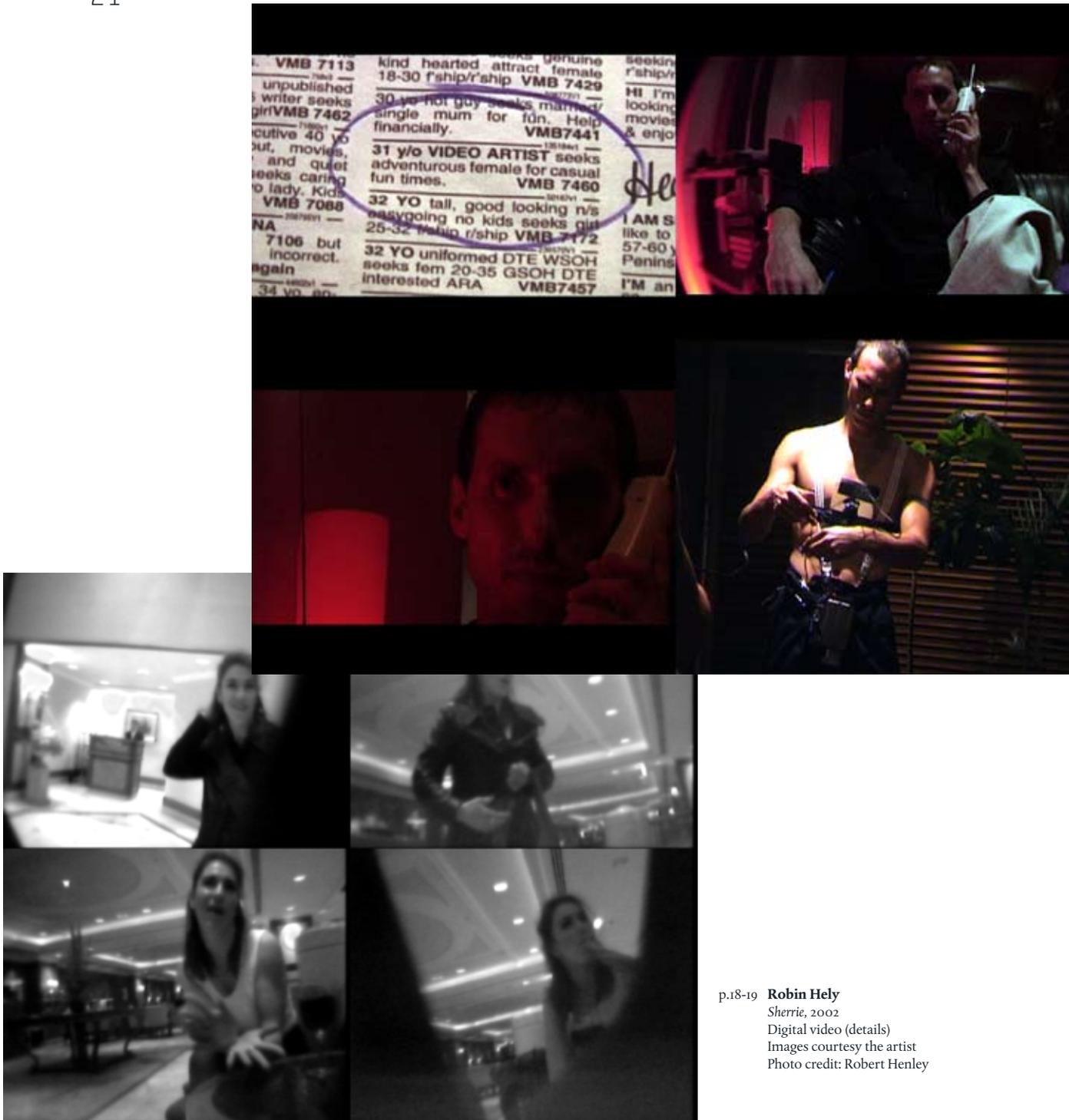
In order to challenge his audience to consider where their individual ethics sit, Hely puts his own persona on the line. He portrays himself as the tyrant, and it is he who is subject to our judgment. However, it does feel like he played dirty in order to get my attention. He is in control, and I'm not sure if I respect his decisions. I'm reminded that controversial acts should always be approached with a degree of skepticism.

Mish Grigor is a Sydney-based performance maker, writer and curator.

¹ Tim Etchells, *Certain Fragments: Contemporary Performance and Forced Entertainment*, Routledge, London, 1999, p.17.

AT WHAT COST:
ETHICS IN ROBIN HELY'S 'SHERRIE'

21



p.18-19 **Robin Hely**
Sherrie, 2002
Digital video (details)
Images courtesy the artist
Photo credit: Robert Henley

me and
Daddy



RITE OF RETURN: ROSA ELLEN IN CORRESPONDENCE WITH ARTIST SARY ZANANIRI

FROM MELBOURNE:

In September 2008 28-year-old Melbourne artist Sary Zananiri prepared for a trip to the Middle East, because as he says, it was ‘somewhere I could get away from the Melbourne winter’. The previous year he had visited Jordan—the country where he spent most of his childhood—with the purpose of making a video about being in exile, so close but so far from his family’s original home in the Occupied Territories. The idea was to sail paper boats across the Dead Sea from Jordan to the West Bank and then to film them capsizing before they reached the other side. However, unplanned obstacles intervened. The artist’s father insisted on coming along and throwing around some creative weight: he thought the launching place ought to be the more photogenic ‘public’ beach. Unfortunately the beach’s security guards ordered them not to film because there were women swimming nearby. Finally, police patrolling in speedboats sent waves splashing over the paper vessels, ruining the footage Zananiri was covertly taking. It was a filmmaking disaster; one that ensured the story became a mission unaccomplished.

The impetus for his new project came from photographs Zananiri’s mother brought back from Ramallah after the violent 2003 Israeli (re-) occupation. The photographs horrified him. ‘People can’t always conceptualise where the West Bank is, yet they’ve heard of it. But Ramallah? There’s no recognition.’ Or, more likely, recognition hovers vaguely around explosive news headlines: news around the siege on Yasir Arafat’s compound in 2003, or images of the grim fortress of the Israeli separation wall. When Zananiri arrives in Ramallah, he will search for buildings still resonant with the 2003 destruction. He plans to cast moulds from the damage and transport the pieces back to Melbourne, where he will finish them in materials such as glass or resin, as if collecting evidence.

Zananiri has been taking moulds from life since he came across Inglenook, the curious Carlton residence

of 19th century decorative plasterer Jack Cormack.¹ Since this encounter, Zananiri has recreated finely turned banisters, cornices and chairs in glasswork (the medium he trained in) and fashioned spectral glass repairs to the abandoned domestic objects of his old family farmhouse.² The Ramallah project seems quite a departure from the re-imaginings of long-ago ‘craftsmanship’. It is, however, not without its own nostalgia. Zananiri has chosen to create a site-responsive work in a place he has minimal physical connection to, but for which he has intense personal and political feelings. His father’s family were urban Palestinians from Jerusalem, a place they left in 1967. On a previous attempt to visit Ramallah, Zananiri could not get a visa for longer than three days and spent eight hours crossing border checkpoints. Preparing for this trip, he is not entirely sure what materials will be available for taking casts, or if locals will object to his on-site cast-making.

Bullet holes are an important part of the Ramallah Zananiri wants to capture. He would like to find a public building or a significant one like Yasir Arafat’s compound, although from pictures it looks perhaps *too* destroyed. ‘You hear people talk of bullet holes in Europe and you immediately think, “Oh that’s old. It’s more historic”, whereas I think of the bullet holes in the West Bank as much more ruptured ... fresher.’

The lack of any war-damaged building in Melbourne, the final destination for this work, is also of great concern for Zananiri. ‘My daily experience is very different to people living in Ramallah’, he says. ‘That’s something that I’m very wary of. I don’t want to be speaking for Palestinians who are under occupation ... I want to reflect my own thoughts about what’s going on. I suppose when I designed the work it was designed to be experienced.’

‘Have you heard of the “Sarajevo rose”?’ I ask Zananiri. They are the concentric pockmark patterns on Bosnian roadsides, left by mortar shells during the Bosnian War (1992–95). They are often filled with red resin making them look like a fragmented rose, and they mark the spot where three or more people lost their lives. He says he has heard of them, and refers to a photograph that he finds very moving taken in 1948, the year of the *Nakba* when the State of Israel was declared. Taken by Palestinian photographer Ali Zaarur, the black and white photograph shows a ceiling that has been hit by a shell, only just missing a framed icon of the Virgin Mary. The black, neat hole has crashed in at halo height above the picture, creating a kind of tragic, incidental shrine. ‘I find it influential’, he says. ‘Not in a religious sort of way ... but their faith’. We talk about the ‘little house’ altars

his grandparents kept constantly lit in their house. 'I really love those sorts of shrines, that makeshift nature.'



International Art Academy of Palestine, Ramallah, 2008 Photo:Sary Zananiri

FROM RAMALLAH:

The phrase 'Crossing the Bridge', which describes movement between Jordan and Israel, sums up a tide of weary apprehension for Palestinians. But, for Zananiri, the wait at the Allenby Bridge was not so long this time, and once at the border he was given a three-month visa to stay in Ramallah. Architecturally, the city looks quite different to what he was expecting; the white limestone is more similar to modern Amman than old cities like Jerusalem or Bethlehem.

Unlike Amman it doesn't have a dusty black film covering everything. The effect of the late summer sun seems almost blinding. I can see how the Orientalists were captivated by all those pastel colours. Ironically, in this very modern metropolis I have not seen one bullet hole yet, or even signs of destruction ... I think my project is going to be more difficult than I thought!

'There are no bullet holes!' he says again over the phone, and in an email: 'Oh Rosa, this project is turning into a disaster!' Since the siege, when Israeli tanks rolled through the streets and houses were fired at, the city has seemingly undergone a rapid restoration. Even Arafat's compound has been replaced by a gleaming memorial and tomb. It is not like people are not talking about what happened in 2003: '[They're] more than happy to talk about politics. A friend was talking about Israeli tanks going up and down the street. The way she was talking about it was almost a joke; "Something happened—ha ha ha!"'

The prospect of finding physical scars is proving elusive. 'I am looking at those layerings ... It's a

surprisingly small town. It probably takes half an hour to walk from one end to another.' Three days pass, and the layers become more evident:

When I wander around the city I see the sites where houses once were and I ask myself, has this been pulled down to make way for a new building or is it the site of another house demolition? There seems to be a blurring of lines that I can't quite comprehend.

As part of his residency at the philanthropic Al-Qattan Foundation, Zananiri is giving lessons in glass and resin casting to students at the International Art Academy of Palestine. He finds their enthusiasm touching. 'There's also nothing in the way of art supplies' he says, requiring him to search industrial sites for materials. The project fits robustly into what he thinks is a Palestinian penchant for documentation—all art catalogues are full colour and multilingual and the library at the Academy holds a wealth of books on Palestinian art he's never seen before. 'It makes me think, if the conflict ends, that Palestinian art from this period will be safely archived and highly accessible. In this respect, I see cultural production here geared towards the future.' 'Unlike my work', he adds.

My project seems to be based in a Ramallah that was under siege and in the international spotlight, as opposed to the vibrant, if not immobile, reality of this wonderful city.

'When it's finished,' Zananiri says, 'it'll be very much about being within a space. Rather than a typical installation ... I'd really like it to inspire some sort of physical response.' Ramallah's almost complete reconstruction has introduced a jarring aesthetic to the work, erasing the imprints of violence which, perhaps more as an outsider than a Palestinian, originally compelled Zananiri. His ideas are now moving away from myths and towards the experience of his friends and students during the conflict. 'I think that giving these workshops at the art school will be a means of dispelling some of the myths for me. The workshops were unexpected for me, but I have gotten progressively more excited about them since I arrived.' This is just what Zananiri's anticipated location, when it's found, won't reveal: the giving that goes on behind the taking.

ROSA ELLEN IS AN OCCASIONAL WRITER LIVING IN MELBOURNE.

- 1 *Inglenook*, a collaborative work with Joshua Daniel, was exhibited at Spacement, Melbourne, June–July 2005.
- 2 Exhibited in *Lawler's Farm*, a site-responsive exhibition in Bright, Victoria, October 2005.



بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ
صَلُّوا عَلَىٰ إِبْرَاهِيمَ إِنَّ اللَّهَ مَعَ الصَّابِرِينَ
لَا أَحْيَاءَ وَلَكِنْ لَا تَشْعُرُونَ
الْمُشْهَدِيُّ يَا سِرَّ عَرَفَاتٍ
شَهَادَتُهُ فِي ١١ / ١١ / ٢٠٠٤ م
لِفَاتِحَةَ





يا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اسْتَعِينُوا بِالصَّبْرِ وَالصَّلَاةِ
وَلَا تَقُولُوا لِمَنْ يُقْتَلُ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ أَمْواتٌ
بَلْ هُمْ أحياءٌ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ يُرَوِّدُونَ
الَّذِي وُلِدَ ١٩٢٩/٨/٤ وَأَسْرًا
لِرُوحِهِ الطَّاهِرَةِ تَوَابًا



Warren Beatty once said of pop icon Madonna, 'She doesn't want to live off-camera. There's nothing to say off camera. What point is there existing off-camera?' With the continued privileging of vision and the prominence of the camera in contemporary Western culture, to be unrecorded and off-camera is to cease to exist, to be invisible. If, like our 'friends' in the *Big Brother* house, your life is constantly being recorded, you are inscribed as culturally significant and deemed worth watching, at least for 15 minutes. This helps explain the increasing trend towards self-surveillance via the endless possibilities of Youtube, Facebook, Myspace and webcam sites that allow live and pre-recorded broadcasting 24 hours a day. In a commodity driven culture, to project an image is to be empowered and granted entry into the consumable cultural economy of capitalism.

The postmodern desire for omnipresence through communication technologies has informed much contemporary art practice, particularly in relation to video and performance. Video technologies provide artists with a means to explore the power relationship established by the camera and the role it can play in informing self-image and identity. It is no coincidence that since the 1990s there has been an explosion in the production of performance-based video art. What better way to explore the insatiable desire to be visible than by turning the camera on yourself and those around you? Writing in 1997, British critic

Joanna Lowry noted a dominant trend for artists using video and photography to 'transform each and every one of us into performance artists, performing the everyday in the real time of video.' Rachel Scott and Kate Murphy are two Sydney-based artists working within this continuing tradition. They capture the performative aspects of everyday life through the visual language of home movies, documentary and reality television.

In Rachel Scott's single channel video *Hot Not* (2006) the camera captures the artist in the private setting of her suburban home. As with many of Scott's works, *Hot Not* operates like a confessional, self-reflexive diary entry, blurring the boundaries between the public and private life of the artist. Her front porch is transformed into a theatrical stage on which she performs a choreographed dance in her tracksuit pants to *Don't Cha* by the Pussy Cat Dolls. The static gaze of the camera, which is carefully positioned behind the front window inside the house, is reminiscent of the ubiquitous perspective evident in reality television programs. We voyeuristically watch the artist as she watches herself performing to and for the camera. However, what begins as a playful attempt to recreate the choreography and female posturing of the music video soon falls apart. Scott begins to scrutinize her body, evaluating and dissecting her reflected image in comparison to the image of the pop stars in the music video. A subtle reflection of the camera lens on the glass window casts an ominous ring around the artist. This reflection indicates how self-image is inextricably linked to the camera and televisual culture.

Kate Murphy's *PonySkate* (2004) explores the camera's influence on subjectivity through two intimate and in-depth video portraits of a seven-year-old boy and girl. Murphy supplied each child with a video camera to record their lives over a 24 hour period. As the children go about their everyday routines, Murphy simultaneously sets her own camera upon them. The results are shown as a dual-screen presentation of each child's life, one from the perspective of the subject/participant and the other from the more conventional, slightly removed position of the filmmaker. Through these multiple perspectives, *PonySkate* investigates not only the effect of the ever-present camera on the child's evolving sense of self, but



BEING SEEN ON SCREEN

DI SMITH



also how video, in the form of both the home movie and television, have become intrinsically linked to childhood development. The video camera has become the medium of choice to capture memories, replacing the still camera in the documentation of day-to-day activities and special occasions. This is apparent in Murphy's work as we see the children control and interact with the video camera with complete confidence. The familiarity with which the two children handle the video camera and adopt the dual roles of producer and subject is indicative of the way in which the lens and televisual culture have infiltrated all aspects of our personal and social experience.

As both Murphy and Scott's works suggest, it is through the apparatus of the camera lens that we commonly see the world and may watch ourselves performing in that world.

The continued rise in self-surveillance and the relentless consumption of images suggest that the privileged position of the camera and the desire to be seen on screen are only gaining momentum. It is no surprise that a generation of artists including Murphy and Scott are developing new modes of video practice—informed by the language of home movies, documentary, reality television and increasing online self-surveillance trends—in response to this camera-centric culture. These works provoke a series of questions about the role and ability of the artist to interrupt or intervene in a commodity driven culture obsessed with its own reflection. Does this type of work perpetuate or critique the contemporary compulsion for one's image to be inscribed by the camera lens? Does it reveal a level of complicity with the dominance of televisual culture? What distinguishes the artist's approach from the self-made

Internet celebrity who uploads their videos on Myspace, for instance? While there is clearly a different cultural framework and intention operating in the artists' videos, when art and life collide and the boundaries between public and private are deliberately blurred—as in the work of Scott and Murphy—it becomes increasingly difficult to draw a clear distinction between the two modes of visual production.

Di Smith is a Sydney based artist and one of the directors at firstdraft Gallery



1 Warren Beatty in *Truth or Dare*; In *Bed with Madonna*, Alek Keshishian and Mark Aldo Miceli (directors), 1991
2 Joanna Lowry, 'Photography, video and the everyday', in David Britain (ed.), *Creative Camera: 30 Years of Writing*, Manchester: University Press, 1999, p.281. (First published, *Creative Camera*, August/September 1997.)
(right) Rachel Scott *Hot Not*, 2006 Digital video (detail). Image courtesy the artist
(above) Kate Murphy *Pony/Skate*, 2004 4 channel digital video installation 2 channel stereo sound, 24 minutes
Image courtesy the artist.

Artist run initiatives (ARIs) rarely survive long in Sydney. The scene fluctuates and rejuvenates with short-lived and new spaces, with some long-term spaces providing stability. ARIs with possibly short-term prospects—such as Serial Space, a DIY warehouse conversion in Chippendale—inject a spurt of energy into the scene, providing space for sound artists, bands and exhibitions that may not receive mainstream support. Two relatively new ARIs with potentially long-term prospects have opened in Sydney with affordable, well-constructed and supportive gallery environments.

Locksmith has been operating since the beginning of 2008 and is directed by two young artists, Kenzee Patterson and Samuel Villalobos. The pair live upstairs from the small but beautifully constructed shopfront exhibition space on Regent Street. The location is at the intersection of Alexandria with Redfern and Waterloo—all traditionally working class suburbs rapidly being gentrified and sometimes politicised by the New South Wales government's plans for the urban and economic development of the area. The gallery sits comfortably alongside second-hand furniture shops, migrant-run bakeries, grocery stores and barbers. It encourages a laidback, community vibe with openings and events sometimes accompanied by BBQs in an outdoor courtyard. Locksmith's directors aim to make their exhibition space free for artists, and not surprisingly, it has held a number of strong exhibitions by some of Sydney's more exciting young artists including Mitch Cairns, Adam Constenoble, Will French, Anna Kristensen, and the directors themselves.

The exhibition *Keys Cut* showcased the directors' work. A series of sculptural objects by Villalobos and a window installation and small work on paper by Patterson drew from the Australian vernacular. Villalobos' work included *Bloody Banana* (2008) a sculptural installation of life-size post-box shaped objects, one standard-red and the other express-post-yellow. This work faced \$3.85 (2008), a collection of Australian coins that appeared to be plastic replica toys, but which were actually cast from silver and gold.

Patterson included *The Southern Cross* (2008), an astronomically correct map of the Southern Cross constellation, placed on the outside of the gallery's window. The work was made from car stickers of the Southern Cross usually seen on the back windscreens of cars driven by patriotic (or perhaps occasionally nationalistic) young drivers. Accompanying the installation was *The Coal Sack* (2008) a curious work on paper made of ingested coal dust and saliva, spat by the artist

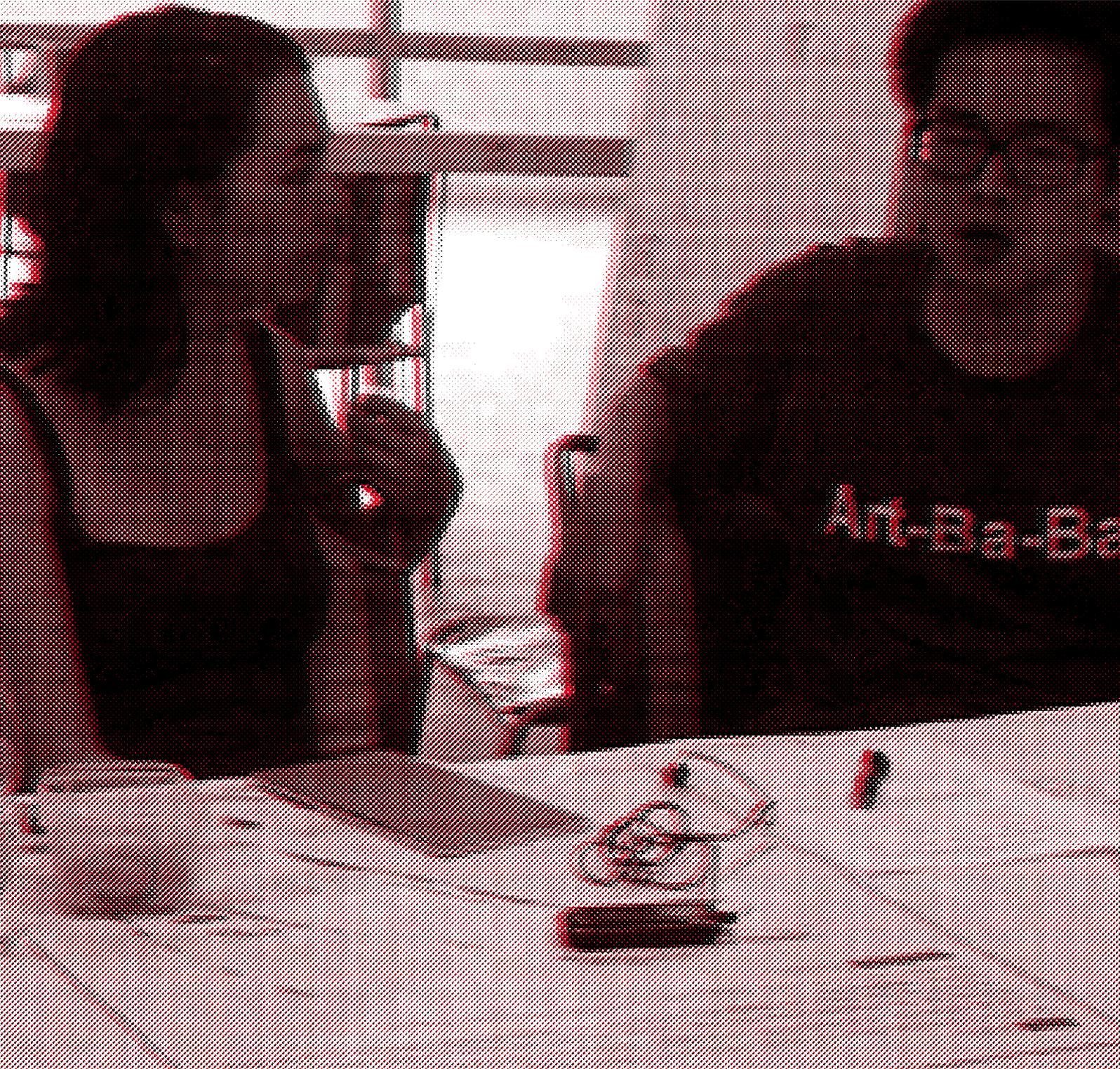
onto paper after his safety mask failed during a drawing experiment. Both artists' works displayed a dry sense of play and refined aesthetic sensibility and craftsmanship. While very different in form and execution, the two bodies of work point to a shared appreciation of the idiosyncrasies of urban landscapes and Australian cultural identity.

A walk away from Locksmith up Regent Street, past Redfern Station and along Wilson Street leads to the cheekily titled Institute of Contemporary Art Newtown, or ICAN. Like Locksmith, ICAN has window street-frontage, which opens the gallery to the surrounding environment of a leafy, spacious and comfortable part of Newtown—an advantage for a space that focuses its exhibition program on conceptual art practice, which can often be perceived as inaccessible.

ICAN was opened by artists Carla Cescon and Alex Gawronski, and gallerist Scott Donovan. The trio responded to a need for a gallery dedicated to art practice that might not fit within commercial gallery models. They bring years worth of experience of the Sydney art scene, having previously been involved in artist-run and commercial gallery ventures. Their experience, relative maturity and long-term dedication to ICAN set it apart from other ARIs. The gallery does not purport to support 'young' artists, 'emerging' artists or 'mid-career' artists. They're interested in good art by anyone and have exhibited work by Australian and international artists of repute such as Pipilotti Rist and Ronnie Van Hout. This approach emphasises the significant role ARIs play in the art community—a role that goes beyond being a 'leg-up' for emerging artists into a commercial gallery. ICAN acknowledges that an artist's career does not necessarily run a straight course (from art school to exhibitions at ARIs, then commercial gallery representation followed by museum shows) and that value is measured by many factors besides commercial success.

Appropriately fitting to this endeavour is the current exhibition by Philipa Veitch. Entitled *Statecraft*, it critically evaluates how creativity is understood in relation to productivity in our contemporary capitalist society. This is a pertinent enquiry that resonates beyond the arts community. It raises questions about worth, and in particular how individuals and communities might find a balance between commercial interests and cultural imperatives.

Elise Routledge is an art educator, curator and writer based in Sydney.



CANTONESE CONCEPTUALISM

Thinking about ‘Chinese contemporary art’ immediately evokes a flurry of images. From Cai Guo Qiang’s enormous firework performances, to the reworked Chinese characters of Xu Bing’s *Book from the Sky* and Ai Weiwei’s beautiful disfigurement of antique Chinese furniture, certain works have become inextricably tied to China’s contemporary art industry. Utilising visual attributes such as fireworks, Chinese characters and furniture, such works are immediately locatable within a distinctly *Chinese* geographical, political and social framework and have led to the coining of the term ‘Chineseness’ as a way to describe the aesthetic. Over the past decade, the reputation of this aesthetic has developed to the point where a self-conscious ‘Chineseness’ is perceived as *the* aesthetic of Chinese contemporary art. While just a few years ago, Factory 798 in Beijing and Moganshan Lu in Shanghai were dusty, run-down warehouses filled with labyrinths of artists’ studios and small galleries, now, due to the global art market success of ‘Chineseness’, these spaces are unrecognisable. Filled as much with tourists, coffee shops and expensive fashion houses as they are art, one cannot look anywhere without being met with the satirical pop art Maos and grotesque Yue Minjun laughing faces. But, in China’s so-called third art city, Guangzhou, ‘Chineseness’—thankfully—is yet to dominate the art scene.

The trappings of commercialism that encircle Beijing and Shanghai seem like a distant fantasy in the sub-tropical city of Guangzhou. Whereas galleries at 798 are sandwiched by such companies as Omega and Nike—literally and figuratively ensconced by commercialisation—in Guangzhou, galleries and creative spaces are found at the end of open-air markets and tucked behind construction sites. There are no specialised maps for art spaces here and stories of successful artists are few and far between. The most recent art heroes, Cao Fei and Ou Ning, have both relocated to Beijing. For critic Jin Feng, Guangzhou is ‘no longer considered one of the epicentres of visual culture’ and would ‘definitely

disappear from the art map’ if it weren’t for the Guangzhou Triennial.¹ Is this really true, though? Is Guangzhou an artistic black hole? Far from it: though independent contemporary art practices in China can sometimes be difficult to find (especially that rare breed, the non-profit art space), the key to locating them in Guangzhou is for us to look harder.

While Beijing and Shanghai have long traditions of artistic heritage, Guangzhou is a relative newcomer to the contemporary art scene. It was notably absent from the avant-garde movement in the 1980s that has been historicised as the birth of contemporary Chinese art.² Nor does Guangzhou have any of the artistic infrastructure and market success that Beijing and Shanghai now exude. While there is a strong sense of community in Guangzhou there is still an absence of any centralised precinct for art production and exhibition. While some students from the Guangzhou Academy of Fine Art may lament that their hometown is not like Beijing where ‘they have this place called 798 filled with artists’, the lack of commercialised infrastructure has allowed and encouraged a relatively unfettered art community that is neither pressured by stereotypes of ‘Chineseness’ nor enticed by them.

This independent spirit may be partially due to the relative youth of Guangzhou’s art scene. When contemporary art began to take flight in the late 1970s in Beijing and Shanghai, artists were charged with breaking down expectations and limitations of creativity. The climate in which they were seeking to both create and exhibit in was fraught by the sheer fact that they were the first to break artistic allegiance to the state. By the late 1980s, when contemporary art happenings began to occur in Guangzhou, the artistic climate had been through ten years of tumultuous development: artists had skipped through the pages of Western art history at an alarming rate while simultaneously wrestling with a response to the devastation of the Cultural Revolution. But by the end



(p.30)
Mikala Tai and Vincent He
in discussion at Vitamin
Creative Space, Guangzhou,
September 2008.
Photo Credit: Phoenee Chun

(above)
Xu Tan
Keywords School
Installation view, Vitamin Creative Space, Guangzhou, 2008
Image courtesy the artist
Photo credit: Vitamin Creative Space

of the 1980s, artists began to turn their focus from the past to the more pressing and urgent questions of the present and future. It was in this moment of refocusing that Guangzhou emerged as the ‘third’ cultural city of China.

It is important to note the timing of this emergence. Artists in Beijing and Shanghai started contemporary cultural production in the late 1970s with a distinct focus on painting and sculpture and experimented for almost ten years before conceptualism became mainstream. Works such as Xiao Lu’s *Dialogue* (1989) utilised conceptual means to question the future. In Beijing’s National Art Gallery, Xiao fired a gun at her installation as a warning that passive acceptance of the arts was not an assurance of real shifts in the Chinese government’s essential mandates. Not only was this performance powerful in communicating Xiao’s point, but, read in a more historical light, the work can be seen as a conceptual premonition of the student protests at Tian’anmen Square just two months later.

It was in this climate of conceptual investigation that Guangzhou became artistically active. The emergence of an art scene grounded in the conceptual—rather than one rooted in the traditions of painting and sculpture—has had an ongoing influence on the development of Guangzhou’s contemporary art. One of the seminal works to emerge from Guangzhou at this time was the 1988 performance piece, *Words and Men*, by Hou Hanru and Yang Jiechang (both Guangzhou natives who later left and established successful international careers). The work has been canonised by Michael Sullivan who, in his book, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*—one of the first compendium-style books to document contemporary Chinese art—refers to this work as one which speaks of ‘isolation and despair.’³ While little detail remains about what actually occurred in this performance, that so many in the local art community, from students to gallerists, continue to refer to and debate the work,

illustrates its status as a critical moment (however mythologised) in the development of Guangzhou’s art scene.

Collaborative and conceptually focused practices have continued to distinguish the Guangzhou art scene from its Beijing and Shanghai counterparts. In the wake of Hou and Yang’s early work came the collective Big Tail Elephant Group—a group established in 1991 with a focus on the effects of urbanisation—and soon after, other collaborations such as Yangjiang Youth and U-Theque as well as art spaces such as Libreria Borges and, more recently, Vitamin Creative and Ping Pong. With a distinct lack of commercial art galleries, international visitation and global recognition (with the exception of the Triennial), Guangzhou’s art scene is less reliant on the art market than Beijing’s and Shanghai’s are, and can instead focus on art and art theory. It is clear that the exchange of ideas that can be created through critical discourse is paramount to Guangzhou artists as the city has more places for artists to gather than it does for artists to make sales. Because the art market’s insatiable demand for object-based art has not yet pervaded their workspaces, Guangzhou artists have been able to pursue a more conceptual road. Their distance from prevailing trends of ‘Chineseness’ has ensured that their work is far from simply a slave to the market; their freedom from commercial incentives is thus accompanied with a degree of artistic abandon and critical independence.

However, this is not to say that artists in Guangzhou are not market savvy. When the mammoth one-stop-shop that is the Guangzhou Triennial took up residence in the northern autumn 2008, local artists and artistic spaces all unashamedly sought to capitalise on the moment. Having mounted independent exhibitions to tie in with the Triennial thematic, the local art spaces hoped that the jet-setting art elite would stay longer than the opening week and venture a look at emerging local art

practices. While the art exhibited in the air-conditioned white cube of the Guangdong Museum of Art pondered the Triennial's ambitious curatorial framework, *Farewell to Post-Colonialism*, it was the work that lay in the local art spaces that responded most fervently and conceptually to the theme. The shows at these spaces focused on topics such as trade, dialogue and shared community—all of which are essential to the conditions of art in our post-post-colonial world.

Vitamin Creative is the site for Xu Tan's *Keywords School*, a project engaging with the very concept of a 'Chinese' aesthetic. For the past two years, Xu, with the support of Vitamin Creative, has been interviewing artists in the hope of finding 125 keywords to describe Chinese contemporary art. These words appeared on the gallery's walls, tables and chairs, with excerpts from the interviews providing examples of their colloquial usage. Two students entered the space while I was there, and began loudly discussing their opinions about the words, gesturing pointedly when they agree and, in one instance, banging on the wall in obvious disagreement. This is the sort of interaction that both Xu Tan and Vitamin Creative encourage. It is in such dialogue that the inherent 'value' of the work lies. The students' heated exchange reveals the essence of Xu's work: the negotiation and trading of ideas. To anchor this work more firmly within the community and to ignite further discussion, Vitamin Creative has offered a series of focus groups chaired by Xu Tan where people gather to debate the status of these keywords in contemporary society. Anybody can attend the sessions, with topics ranging from 'body, fashion, market, play, illegal', to 'popular, fame, power, popularity, society.' And because its greatest significance lies in discussion, Xu's work is essentially uncollectable. *Keywords School* will remain a momentary and precarious exploration of the conceptual, even if a large institution collects the work and occasionally restages it.

Conceptual work of this type is prevalent in Guangzhou. While it is some of the most critically engaged work to



Entrance to the Guangzhou Triennial at the Guangdong Museum of Art, 2008. Photo Credit: Mikala Tai

emerge from China in recent years, it remains relatively unnoticed. This is due not only to its status as uncollectable but also, and more influentially, because it does not respond to the internationally recognised label of the 'Chinese' aesthetic. In the spirit of post-post-colonialism, my view is to abandon this notion of 'Chineseness' as a conceptual frame. We might have to compartmentalise the glossy works of political pop and critical realism to a bygone era, but only then will we be afforded a glimpse into what is *really* happening on the Chinese contemporary art scene.

Mikala Tai is a Melbourne based writer and researcher currently completing her PhD at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW.

1 Jin Feng, 'How Can We Understand Shanghai's Art Ecology?' in *Yishu* September 2008, Vol.7, No.5, pp. 18–19.

2 Wu Hung, 'Major Traditions in Chinese Contemporary Art' in *Transience: Chinese Experimental Art at the End of the Twentieth Century*, University of Chicago Press, 1999, p. 16.

3 Michael Sullivan, *Art and Artists of Twentieth-Century China*, University of California Press, 1996, p. 274. Sullivan uses an alternative title for the work, referring to it as *Speaking, Communication, Mankind*. The title *Words and Men* is as listed in the book *Performance Art in China* by Thomas J. Berghuis (published by Timezone 8, 2006). The discrepancies in the titling of this work reflect ongoing debate and mythologising of the early performance piece.

by Simon Denny



Two of Nick Austin's acrylic-on-newspaper-behind-glass aquarium paintings (2007), are hung at "TV height" in a black-carpeted room previously used for video projections. The two windows in the room are left open, letting the sound of the river outside provide a soundtrack for the re-staged paintings. The windows then act as stereo speakers. A third work, *Untitled* (2002) – a woolen blanket sprinkled with coffee granules – sits folded on the floor, which sets the smell at coffee. A black couch provides a suggested viewing position and a rope is



added, cordoning off the paintings from close viewing.

In an adjoining white room, a second black couch sits against the wall that separates the spaces. Two identical towels are hung opposite each other at the same height as the paintings, each showing a different side but facing the same way in horizontal space. The towels are produced using a digital image of two lingering tube televisions on display shelves in a shop. Because of the woven construction of the towels, the image is pixelated into cotton threads and the picture appears positive on one side, and negative on the other. The fluffy image then has a front and a back. The towel showing the image from the front has ground coffee stuck in it, similar to the way sand might stick to a towel when sitting on it. The paintings are spatially and pictorially animated in a clumsy translation of one set of ideas and images into another. Nick's tight, silent two-dimensional space is un-collapsed awkwardly into my loud, clumsy three-dimensional space.

UNFOLDED INTERVIEW

KEL GLAISTER AND SIMON HORSBURGH IN CONVERSATION WITH TAM SIN GREEN AND ALEX MARTINIS BOE



(top) **Simon Horsburgh** *Still*, 2007. Plastic bag, monofilament, silver screen. Installation detail Conical Inc., Melbourne. Image courtesy the artist
(above) **Kel Glaister** *These endless days*, 2008. Rugs. Image courtesy the artist. Image credit: Amy Marjoram

Tamsin Green:

Simon, in your exhibition *Forthcoming and Untitled* (Conical Inc, 2007), a real plastic bag was suspended in space, seemingly frozen mid-flutter. Once the audience came into line with the screen they experienced this object as an image. I can't help but be reminded of the dominant role played by the cinema screen in our experience of beauty. Indeed, there is a very strong reference here to the film *American Beauty*. I wonder if this is a celebration or derision of representation? Would you prefer us to go out and experience the beauty of plastic bags in the real world?

Simon Horsburgh:

The work you are referring to is *Still*. I think both examples you describe are a celebration of incongruous beauty. But from my perspective, whether that beauty is experienced via the cinema or elsewhere is neither here nor there. As you suggest, the screen's capacity to convey an image is important, and collapsing the object/image binary along a particular sightline is significant, but the portability of that particular screen should not be overlooked. For me it becomes more about moments and encounters and yeah, the reality of things—be they plastic bags or silver screens. I've seen a lot of plastic bags that weren't in *American Beauty*.

I think it's imperative to respect the particular nature of found materials, otherwise there is no point using them. Obviously I'm interested in them for their transformative potential, but they come with a history, sometimes a function, so it's never a case of ramming ideas into them. *Still* draws heavily on the reality of plastic bags. We are having a moment of stillness with an object that is almost never quiet and still—especially when it is inflated and airborne. I also consider *Still* as being part of an installation. The proximity of the bag to another work in the show, *Squash*, was also important. *Squash* is a work made from a mangled galvanised rubbish bin. It is approximately the same scale as the inflated bag and the two forms share similar surface contours. On another sightline, the bag floated like a shade or a dream above the bin. So in response to your question, I'm certainly more interested in the nature of things. I'm acutely aware that I am working in a context and a tradition, but given the choice, I'll take 'frozen mid-flutter' over 'cinematic representations of beauty' every time.

Alex Martinis Roe:

Kel, sometimes you use rhetorical filmic tropes in your work. For example, you made dead bodies wrapped in Persian rugs for your show *These endless days* (Blindside, 2008). This work reads as a paradox because the 'dead bodies' are entwined as though engaged in coitus. Quite apart from the fact that they have

apparently been murdered, their genitals are separated by carpet. I can't help but see a literal correlation between this work and the loss of ego during orgasm, otherwise called 'the little death'. Is this an intentional reference, or was your aim with the work to more broadly question how believable sex and death scenes are in film? The work could also be seen as a presentation of what we find entertaining: sex, death and the forbidden. How do you respond to that assertion?

Kel Glaister:

The use of a filmic type of image is about using images that are common knowledge or accessible via pop culture, so shared. I didn't aim to debate representations in film really, for me it was a matter of using those images—the sex scene, the cliché of corpses transported in rugs—to set up my own allegorical narrative or scene.

Although I know a lot of people don't see the death thing in this work. It doesn't matter—the figures certainly look asphyxiated at least. And yes, making a work that's literally about sex and death is a jokey kind of nod, both in the direction of what it is that entertains, and also what's considered big and important (a category which generally doesn't include dirty jokes about the production of meaning).

And there is something really appealing about the *petite mort* pun. Most of what I found interesting personally about the absurdist situation of corpses fucking each other was an attempt to set up an allegorical relationship between the narrative of the work and the relationship between artist, the work and audience. That there is a constant attempt at perfect communication—at filling the gaps between those three things—but you might as well be having sex from behind a rug, while you're both dead.

I guess like most of my works, *These endless days* picks up some stuff and throws it at all the other stuff. Wrap an absurd or overly literal proposition, often a joke or a trick, around a broad question like why make work? why communicate? And there really isn't an answer proposed. Maybe I'll get around to that one day.

To read *Unfolded Interview* in its entirety, visit www.unmagazine.org and download the online supplement for this issue.

At the opening of *Absence*, midway through Hiromi Tango's month-long residency in the grimy underground transit space of Platform, clumps of people holding plastic cups of wine gather around a tiny shop window plastered with psychedelic sticky notes in fruit tingle colours, edges peeling away. Scrawled messages include 'I really hope this never ends' and 'I still love you'. Through what's left of the glass, the occupied interior is just visible—an improbable tangle of spidery webs of wool and thread, balloon strings and little blank gift tags. Peering into this miniature world, Hiromi herself can be seen pinning up elusive statements like 'I am so sad and I miss you terribly' and notes offering cups of tea from a newly acquired electric kettle. When a packet of jelly babies pokes out of a letterbox in the door, someone politely bends down and takes one, returning a minute later to slip through a drawing in return, which subsequently turns up in a clear patch of window, sticky-taped from the inside.

There are many kilometres of suburbs and dry farmland and rainforest and bitumen stretching between us now, and I wonder where you are exactly and if you are sewing a floating page of someone's diary into the folds of someone else's handwritten note to no-one in particular.



Hiromi Tango *Absence*, 2008. Installation details. Images courtesy the artist. Photo credit: Jorge de Araujo

A week later two teenagers are writing letters at a nearby counter that is spilling over with pens and notepads. Hiromi drops in to collect something and a guy in a puffy black jacket asks her bluntly what 'this' is. She beams and tells him it's whatever he wants it to be. He seems disarmed and asks if it's hers, to which she answers 'it's ours!'. This brief exchange somehow captures the simplicity and sincerity at the heart of the project, which unfolds as an open platform for interaction, a multi-directional conversation that is shaped and owned by participants. Usually based in Brisbane, Hiromi has spent eighteen months researching for the project in the USA, New Zealand and around Australia, collecting letters and notes and personal objects from people she encounters and stitching these into little books: micro-architectures of human emotion that reveal our capacity to share pieces of ourselves with complete strangers. These handmade books form part of the installation, as do plastic milk crates laden with bunches of pink and yellow fabric flowers and moments of unexpected intimacy that bloom between cracked concrete and stuffy air.

Your work makes me think of the Pitjantjatjara concept of reciprocity, Ngapartji Ngapartji, which is also the name of an intercultural arts and language project based in Alice Springs that Karl and I have been working on as designers for the past few years. We work with them remotely and have only been to visit once. I'd like to go back and see everyone again but the plane tickets are so expensive. Ngapartji Ngapartji underlies social relations in Pitjantjatjara culture and means 'I give you something, you give me something'. In this case I give you a page torn from my diary, you give me a biscuit, I give you a bedraggled piece of my heart or a date-stamped sticky note with the words 'raisin toast makes me happy', you give me a wide open-eyed smile or maybe one end of a ball of red wool.

Much discussion has emerged in recent years around relational aesthetics, whereby an artwork consists mainly of inter-human relations. Regular passers-by become attached to *Absence* and bring presents; around the subway floats a kind of ad hoc, temporary community, a space between people that is active and real and would otherwise be absent from this somewhat dank corner of the city. There is an inherent tension between absence and presence in the work and the way we encounter it. Stories of loss and distance remind us that physical absence is always there, hovering at the edges of daily interactions and routines that connect us to the circumnavigations of work and life. But we are also being asked to make presence matter, to be present in the moment and not absent from it, to make the present meaningful and connected.



Karl and I ended up at an opening at the Blender one night, which I remembered was the warehouse you were camping in. Behind the gallery I found your tent wedged between studios, and was astonished at how similar this makeshift living space was to the installation at Platform, dripping with plastic flowers and half-buried between notes and books and multi-coloured paraphernalia which, in its obsessive compulsive profusion of detail, somehow looked deliberate and 'artful'. In front was a cardboard sign that said: 'In memory of Hiromi Tango, Died 24-5-08, Age 32, four months pregnant, Franklin St. Melbourne'. There were a lot of people around, drinking and whatnot, but no-one I knew, and perhaps they hadn't yet noticed the sign. I felt very quiet and anxious, and when we eventually came across Tai she thought we'd had a fight. Actually I was worried that you had in fact been killed in some kind of car accident. I had expected you to be there but you were not.

Andrew Benjamin describes the city as 'a site of movement' in which interventions undo the rigid distinctions of modern urbanism.¹ The insertion of a space for lingering, for laughter, surprise and memory, into a thoroughfare connecting retail space to networks of transport and labour certainly complicates our experience of urban space. There are threads here leading back to the Situationists who, in 1950s Paris, proposed 'constructed situations' as an antidote to the burgeoning spectacle of modernity. These engineered moments combined environment and people to generate new ways of seeing the world, evoking a future social life of human encounter and play. The Situationists envisaged the reconfigured city as a heterogenous patchwork of different emotional zones—the Happy Quarter, the Bizarre Quarter, the Sinister Quarter and so on. The most tangible articulation of this was Constant Nieuwenhuys' *New Babylon*, a vision of a new city overlaid above the existing one, with moveable superstructures that allowed drifting, experimental interaction. It is tempting to see in *Absence* a tiny, inverted pocket of *New Babylon*, overflowing with melancholy, heartfelt expression and offered up for ordinary citizens to construct as they wish. At this micro-scale, the world is accosted with a post-it note that declares 'I feel like destroying something beautiful'.

Thanks for sending me your 'special pregnant woman love wave (5 months limited edition)'. I hope you are in good health and have found time to take something of a pause ... Karl and I both miss having you nearby and look forward to spending some time in the same city one day soon, when we can cook delicious soup and go for walks together whenever we like.

On the final day, Hiromi lies stiff and unmoving across a row of milk crates outside the curved shopfront, head resting on an embroidered silk pillow, arms folded over a bouquet of flowers. There are piles of the little books everywhere, spilling from the wall and the floor and Hiromi herself. What does it mean for art practice when a work occurs just below the rhythms of daily life, with the artist present and able to respond, so that it can continue to bounce back and forth and take on new intentions and formulations as it grows? Perhaps under these circumstances the city can breathe through it. In the Next Wave festival program, *Absence* is credited as a collaboration between 'Hiromi Tango and the people of Melbourne'. This is suggestive of the warmth and generosity behind the work, and of the potential empowerment at stake when an artist takes the risk of inviting 'audiences' to become active producers of public art. As a kind of elegy to departures and dreams, she rests silently beneath a kaleidoscope of colour and words, in which the city is broken up into a million tiny pieces and refracted back in shifting human patterns that fall away and recombine on every turn.

With love, Tessa



Tessa Zettel is an artist, writer and curator who sometimes teaches Design Studies at the University of Technology, Sydney. She is also one half of Makeshift.

¹ Andrew Benjamin, 'Fraying Lines', in Richard Goodwin, *Richard Goodwin: Performance to Porosity*, Craftsman House, Fishermans Bend, Vic, 2006, p. 157.



SYDNEY OPERA HOUSE SYDNEY OPERA



- Kate Smith's work is Aussie in a really good way.

- Kate has fights with painting & esp. what it means to be a woman and a painter in Aust. The bones show.

- It's funny, and that's really important.

- There is hope in it.

- Tough & simple

- Feminist discourses



- Kate knows how important to use text in art.

EVE WAS FRAMED





- 45 **REVIEWS** / ANUSHA KENNY / LITTLE DEATHS
ANNA DALY / SALLY MANNALL SELECTED VIDEO WORKS 1994—2008
JARROD RAWLINS / YOUNG OLD HOT: TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS FOR 10 YEARS
HELEN HUGHES / LAUREN BERKOWITZ / STARLIE GEIKIE
KATE WARREN / NICE STRATIGRAPHY
CASSIE MAY / EMBODIED ENERGIES
PAIGE LUFF / GOD-FAVOURED, RODNEY GLICK: SURVEYED
PATRICIA TODARELLO / DEPOT
RYAN JOHNSTON / LOST & FOUND: AN ARCHEOLOGY OF THE PRESENT
ANDREA BELL / FOTO-OGRAPHY
SVEN KNUDSEN / TO OCCUPY
THOMASIN SLEIGH AND ANDREW CLIFFORD / ONE DAY SCULPTURE
VERONICA TELLO / A PLACE TELLS A STORY



Little Deaths

Curated by Stuart Bailey
Artists: Lane Cormick, Hao Guo,
Andrew Hurlle, Rob McHaffie
Apartment, Melbourne
2–24 August 2008

Apartment, a gallery in a block behind offices in St Kilda Road, was the ideal venue for *Little Deaths*, a group show investigating the place of pornography in four artists' practices. Visitors had to walk up flights of carpeted stairs and find the right unmarked door—the whole experience was slightly creepy. Once inside, it became clear that the show was also serendipitously timed, opening in the wake of the Bill Henson controversy when the difference between pornography and art was the line in the sand everyone was looking for. Nevertheless, *Little Deaths* wasn't aiming to contribute to that debate, and instead used humour and tenderness to look at pornography as subject matter for art.

A recurring theme was fandom, particularly artistic homage to favourite porn stars. The artist book that accompanied the exhibition showed a selection of art works alongside found bits and pieces from porn magazines. In an interview fragment from *High Society*, a woman talks about the things fans have done for her, including one fan in jail who carved her picture into a bar of soap and coloured it using the food dye in M&Ms. Rob McHaffie's photographs of Sexpostars (one signed by 'the dirtiest girl in porn, 2007') and his incredibly convincing oil paintings of scrunched-up pages from porn magazines (*I found her and I*

found her again, 2003) also gave it a sense of the celebrity worship and desire.

Not only does this say something about creativity itself, but it brings to mind questions about the purpose of representing sexual acts: the copying of photographs from magazines essentially moves you further and further from the actual sexual event. Andrew Hurlle's ongoing investigation into the relationship between industrial printing processes and pornography is interesting in this regard. His work systematically clears out and degrades pornographic images and magazine layouts until all that is left is the topography of what was. For example, *Hard Core* (2000), showed the front cover of a porn magazine stripped of all text and images, leaving only the masthead, colour scheme, and emptied out rating-sticker. In another context, this work would be an opaque abstract. Here, the layout alone is coded as illicit. This brings to mind Argentinean artist Juan Tessi's painting series *Thumbnail Nail Gallery Post*, which depicted the thumbnails of videos on porn websites. Like Tessi, Hurlle's tiny black and white view of a horse's rear end abstracts an image at the edges of sexual appetites.

The focus on print media as a mode of receiving pornography suggests nostalgia, as it is safe to say that girly magazines have been outmoded by the internet. These days it would almost be quaint to have a stack of magazines under the bed, such as that depicted in Lane Cormick's *Untitled* (2007). A pile of painted magazine covers—a mixture of porn, Greyhound booklets, and Kawasaki catalogues—in a corner of the gallery evokes

teenage boys' bedrooms and the smell of old socks. Lane Cormick has reproduced the mess of a teenager in the same way that fans of porn-stars might fetishise their likenesses in fan art doodles. Here however, the longing is not for porn, but for youth and slackerdom.

At this level, *Little Deaths* betrayed itself as very Generation X in spirit, preoccupied with bygone modes of production and consumption and mournful of the passing of the 1980s and '90s. However, the exhibition was taken in a contemporary, more relevant, direction by Hao Guo. *Surgery* (2008), a digital print of a black man's penis superimposed on a white man's body, is an attempt to build the perfect male 'body-by-numbers' according to clichés based on race. The implication is that the masculine stereotypes presented in pornography can have negative implications on the individual's regard for his own body, and that despite the fact that many porn images take women as their subject, when men are included they are often depicted as sexually insatiable and without 'weakness'.

In a discussion of the status and effects of porn, it would have been beneficial to include a female perspective. But maybe that would have been a different show. What *Little Deaths* contributed was a humorous, playful and surprisingly gentle look at pornography from four male artists' perspectives.

Anusha Kenny is a law student and curator-in-residence at Platform in Melbourne, and is currently undertaking the Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces and Art & Australia Emerging Writer's Program.

Ocular Lab Retrospective Projects # 3:
Sally Mannall
Selected Video Works 1994–2008
Curated by Raafat Ishak and Sandra Bridie
Ocular Lab, Melbourne
20 September – 5 October 2008

(opposite)
Lane Cormick
Untitled, 2008
Mixed media on paper
Image courtesy the artist
and Neon Parc, Melbourne

Sally Mannall
Case, 2008
DVD, 12 minutes
Image courtesy the artist

Sally Mannall's retrospective at Ocular Lab was well-timed considering many institutions' focus on video art in recent years. It was also an example of a good retrospective, creating a cohesive shell around the collage of text- and image-based works that have constituted her practice. Consisting of major works and one sketch, a diverse range of work managed to retain a sense of visual and conceptual consistency. While Mannall's work bears traces of video's genesis in conceptual, performance and body art—particularly in its expressions of rhythm, repetition and gesture—Mannall is a rarity in that her concerns are chiefly photographic. As such, composition, colour, the figure / ground relationship and stasis are the primary means through which an interrogation of other, darker themes occur in her work.

Ocular Lab's series of *Retrospective Projects* were initially conceived as an opportunity to exhibit a selection of an artist's works with an emphasis on earlier pieces—providing a platform for artists, peers and curators to observe the development of themes that have informed entire bodies of work. While not overtly intended as an alternative to institutional retrospectives—where, historically, the focus is on late-career or deceased artists—the series works as an observation on the relationship between artists and exhibiting institutions. The exhibitions themselves are relatively informal and seem to be as much an opportunity for professional workshopping as they are for general exhibition.

In Mannall's exhibition, small monitors set on short plinths across the length of the gallery played an inspired selection from the artist's oeuvre, ranging from the whimsical to the deadly serious. Both *Lapse* (2004) and *Sleeper* (2004) have a light-hearted, though meditative, air about them. Making the most of the sea's hypnotic potential, *Lapse* captures the movement of ball-like sea shrubs as they wash up onto the shore only to be swept away again. The heavily cello dominated soundtrack breathes narrative intention into the otherwise opportunistic occurrence. *Take Cover* (1998), on the other hand, operates like a generalised plea for help. Wearing a bib that reads 'Take Cover', a lone cyclist pedals a stationary bike furiously to no effect—save for the exacerbation of his/her own panic. The anxiety is infectious and serves to instil a similar feeling in the viewer, though we never find out what the trouble is. The music-box soundtrack provided by the nearby *Skirmish* (2000) only enhanced the effect.

A pivotal work in the exhibition was the 20-minute video *Life as Life's Beyond* (2006). The power of the time-based medium comes into its own in this piece, which is at once beautifully composed, fascinating and deeply disturbing. Two initially steadfast teams of rowers power through training-pool waters.

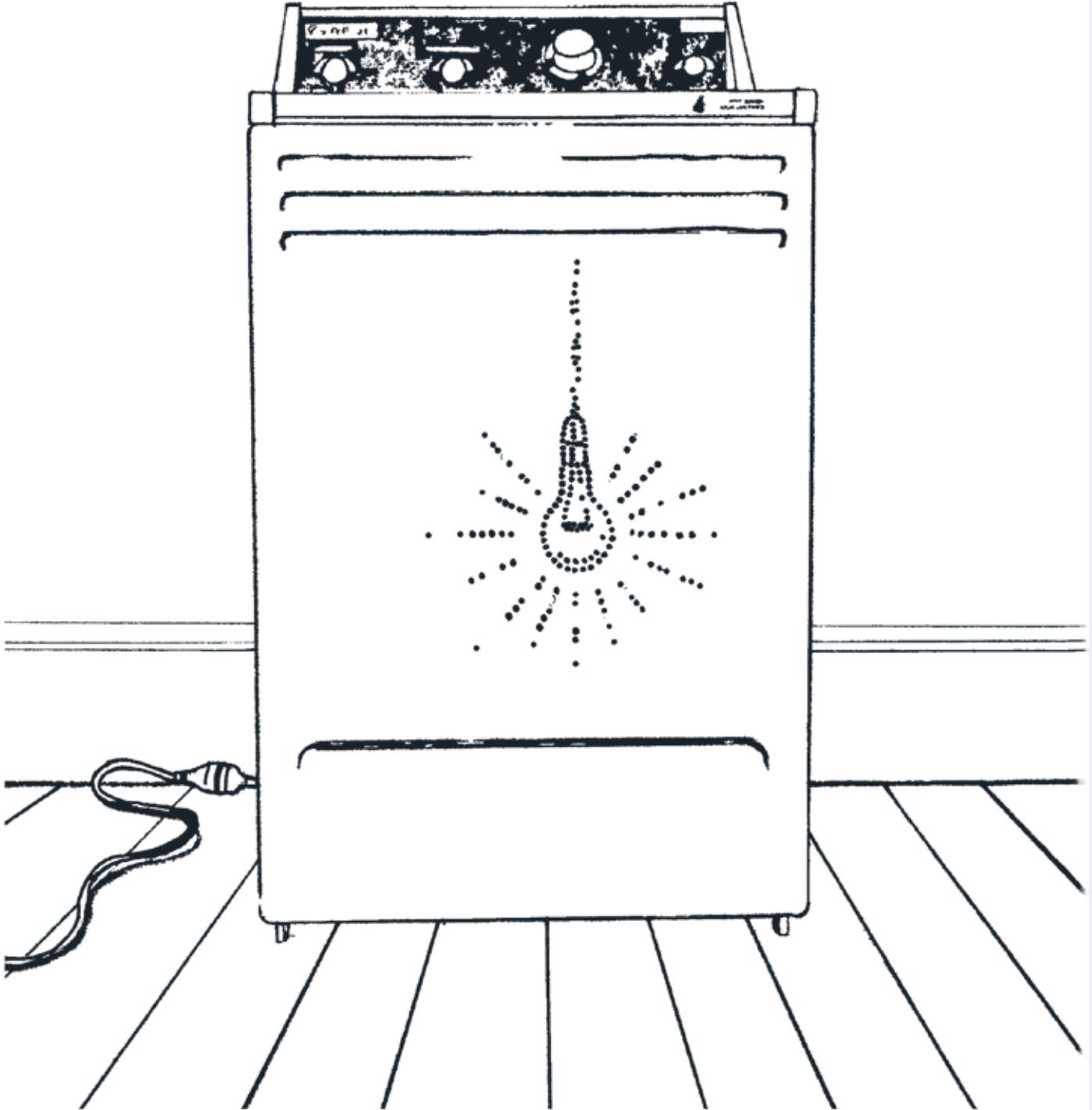


The depiction of their increasing fatigue peels away the vicarious pleasures offered by armchair sports, but we continue to watch as the young teammates struggle to maintain momentum. The uniforms, clear grey light and gangling white limbs lend an atmosphere reminiscent of 1920–30s callisthenics programs and the associated eugenicism. Alongside *Take Cover* and two text-based pieces, we get a sense of the strongly absurdist vein that runs through much of the artist's work: Mannall is particularly inter-

ested in the experience and rationalisation of everyday fear. It's appropriate then that she adopts the existential and Dadaist strategies informing early-twentieth century absurdists to engender a sense of discomfort in her audience.

Anna Daly tutors in the Department of Theory, Faculty of Art and Design at Monash University.

STILL TAKING CARE!



**Young Old Hot:
Taking Care of Business for 10 Years
TCB art inc., Melbourne
6–23 August 2008**

With the increasing professionalisation of the artist-run-initiative sector, where what was once a 'space' of self-assured self-evaluation and unaffected snafu, is now a new tier of commercialisation demonstrated by number growth, marketing strategies and programming choices. This evolution is not restricted to small unprofitable ARIs: the same condition is gaining momentum at what was once the next tier, 'the art space'. There is a product for sale here; it is called opportunity, legacy, tuition (replacing intuition), guidance and introduction.

This new market driven non-commercial sector with its boosterism and second-tier commercialism is creating mixed messages on the relevance of making mistakes and producing failure. In addition, this condition reinforces the development of an amateur luxury-good market while creating a history of also-rans (American Apparel is not the only place bringing back the '80s).

The relevance of this recent shift in Melbourne's DIY exhibition culture to the TCB art inc. 10th anniversary exhibition, *Young Old Hot*, is that despite the evolution of DIY art space culture into quasi-dealerships and inoculating centers (see art pruning) a handful will retain a valuable amateur outlook, and in the words of illustrious chaos theorist Ian Malcolm, 'life will find a way'.

TCB art inc. has evolved with changing committee memberships, sites, professional relationships, programming demands, funding opportunities, and Melbourne art space culture itself. (NB: I am moving freely between the terms art space, artist space and artist-run initiative as the evolution is demonstrating that these terms are no longer mutually exclusive, there is now little or no difference and all are now operating on the same tier.) It can be easily claimed that TCB is one of very few art spaces surviving the current professionalisation coma precisely because of its lack thereof. (Reader, take care here not to confuse my professionalisation with the prompt returning of emails or the patching of walls with high-end putty from the Netherlands, for all of which TCB are the exemplar: professionalisation is an outlook, an attitude, a plan, and it is market-driven.)

TCB's ten years of ARI-ing has seen many notable exhibitions, numerous important decisions (see moving in with a commercial gallery), and has become a special place for many members of the Australian art world. But if this anniversary article goes on to make a list of those household names of Australian art who 'began their careers' at TCB (yes, those single quote marks represent droning sarcasm) I would be complicit in the professionalisation, I would be part of the new selling of the art space. Or if the article provides anecdotes revealing mistakes, chances or problems that are behind-the-scenes and ultimately uninteresting when

compared to the program history, I would be providing a higher form of secondary gossip—something akin to an art blog or photographs of artists rather than their artwork—and I would again be selling you something (which is my day job, not my writing methodology).

In this second-tier exhibition culture we would have expectations that an anniversary exhibition with a fundraising component would market two options: 1) all I have mentioned in the above paragraph—ask artists now celebrated in the market to produce a second-tier luxury good to be released at a reasonable and accessible price, edition it, pay or get a private collector to pay the production expenses, market it, and keep the revenue to subsidise operating expenses such as wages and publishing; 2) ask artists who have previously exhibited, now celebrated in the market, and those who are not, to submit an artwork representative of their current (marketable) practice and of reasonable



value but no more than approximately 50 x 50 cm. Due to what is called the 'economy of wall space' the work cannot be larger than this unless the artist is of significant value to important collectors. The important equation for art space fundraising working on a 50% commission is: 50cm = \$500 net per single hang, and 50cm = \$800–\$1000 net per double hang. This should raise enough funds per metre to cover a full re-paint, update the website, print something—pamphlet, catalogue, book.

What do we get when these two models are not followed? Well something with a bit of heart, humour and clarity for a start. We get something matter of fact, the unprofessionalised truth if you like, the unmarketable sale. Of the artists invited to produce a screenprint with TCB for the anniversary exhibition (see list below) some have been on the committee, all have exhibited at the gallery, some are easily marketable, some are managers past

and present, some helped get the beer and paint the walls, but all have been long time supporters and friends of the gallery. *Young Old Hot* had no hierarchy, something that is so transparent in fundraising exhibition options one and two listed above, no matter how much effort is made to disguise and dilute what is ultimately the debasing of a history.

Quickly reflecting back on the professionalisation of an amateur tier, where the inflation of opportunity is a dangerous game to play with egos, *Young Old Hot* had such clarity as a celebration of a decade-old humble and clever project space that any relationships the participating artists have with the art world today seemed to be of no significance to the exhibition. It was the relationships built through the gallery that came into focus, and it was almost possible to forget who had and who hadn't made a print. At a time when the biggest capitalist nation in the world is about to become the biggest socialist nation in history

Matthew Griffin
Note to Self, 2008
Screenprint
57 x 76 cm
Image courtesy the artist
and TCB art.inc., Melbourne

(opposite)
James Lynch
Untitled, 2008
Screenprint
57 x 76 cm
Image courtesy the artist
and TCB art.inc., Melbourne

there was something refreshingly socialising about this celebration, something not so saleable, not so professional, and aligned with the pending global economic crisis, it was at least something born from risk.

Young Old Hot: Taking Care of Business for 10 Years featured limited edition screenprints by: Amanda Marburg, Sharon Goodwin, James Lynch, Thomas Deverall, Matthew Griffin, Jon Campbell, A Constructed World, Lisa Radford, Pat Foster & Jen Berean, Rob McHaffie, Rob McLeish, Liv Barrett, Meg Hale, Kain Picken & Rob McKenzie, Fergus Binns, Ry Haskings, Christopher LG Hill, The Estate of Blair Trethowan. If you would like to purchase a print contact the committee. www.tcb.org.au

Jarrold Rawlins is the director of Uplands Gallery in Melbourne. He is an advocate for more nepotism in the private sectors of the art world and less in the public sector.

Lauren Berkowitz/Starlie Geikie
Curated by Rebecca Coates
Neon Parc, Melbourne
16–26 July 2008

The Women's Art Movement that developed in Melbourne in the 1970s trenchantly attacked the received purist forms of European Modernism and American Minimalism and disavowed the myth of the individual male genius. Influenced by the feminist matriarch Lucy Lippard and given a mouthpiece by *Lip* magazine, Melbourne's feminist artists of the period attempted to shatter the existing patriarchal art culture by focusing on communal practices and collective concerns, such as environmental issues. In 2008, however, when equal rights are largely taken for granted and figures like Kate Millet and Germaine Greer seem like doyennes from a bygone era, it would appear that feminism has, hypothetically, won. For these reasons, Rebecca Coates's curated exhibition *Lauren Berkowitz/Starlie Geikie* asked all the right questions, namely (and portentously), 'is feminism dead?'

This exhibition was not alone in addressing this topic in Melbourne during 2008. *A Time Like This* at the Victorian College of the Arts Margaret Lawrence Gallery (17 July – 16 August 2008) notably explored the modes

by which feminism has been shaped by late capitalist society. *Berkowitz/Geikie* however, addressed a slightly tangential, but equally important set of issues related to feminism in Australia in the 21st century. Coates's exhibition set out to discern the generational nuances associated with such contemporary feminist art practices in Australia by contrasting the work of two Melbourne practitioners, Lauren Berkowitz, and a recent exponent of the Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces' studio program, Starlie Geikie.

Berkowitz produced two suspended installations: one delicate and vestigial, the other solid and obtrusive. The first, *Residual Forms* (2008), comprised a motley selection of empty white nets (once used to hang and preserve delicatessen meats) and created a spectral presence in the gallery. Likewise, *Spinning Webs* (2008) was made from discarded factory off-cuts of lurid yellow, pink, orange and vermillion cricket balls. It was a suspended constellation of the abandoned, a retrieval and restoration of the industrial object. Here, as in earlier environmental works and in line with the concerns of feminist predecessors like Bonita Ely and Jill Orr, Berkowitz assumed the role of a cultural archivist by attempting to retrieve the fading collective memories of women. Gathering, arranging and preserving these artefacts that were created with limited life spans, Berkowitz indexed the ethereal in

monuments to the mundane and repetitious labours of the female sex.

In a similar vein, Geikie's contribution to the exhibition—a complex, tetrahedral floor structure and a series of five intricate, monochrome drawings—functioned as an homage to vanishing memories and collective legacies. Geikie's drawings, derived from the patterns of Gee's Bend quilts and named after their respective creators, were both delicate and deferential in their execution, treading a tightrope between representational and abstract, feminine and feminist.¹ Like Berkowitz's practice of controlled chaos, these dualisms in Geikie's works were emblematic of what Coates crucially articulated as the dichotomy of the feminine and the abstract.² By transposing these highly geometric and gendered quilt designs into drawings, however, Geikie sutured the two by moulding the angles of hard-edged abstraction into lightly curvaceous and amoebic forms. Where these once towering, more 'masculine' modes of abstraction have traditionally forced the spectator back into a detached state of reverential contemplation, Geikie's drawings assumed a more modest and intimate scale. They lured the viewer closer, inviting them to scrutinize the surface details—the off-white tones, the irregular grain, the subverted geometries. Where Berkowitz's practice literally salvaged objects from the fate



of extinction, Geikie's was a rather more votive act, akin to the process of immortalisation.

Though bereft of the moralising rubric that characterised much feminist art from preceding decades, Berkowitz/Geikie nonetheless made a subtle gesture towards feminism past. Rather than representing a call to arms, the works exhibited here engaged with notions of remembrance and reverence. Berkowitz's frail sheaths of industrial discharge and Geikie's gently variegated patinas imprinted on the viewer a lingering sentiment of communality and collective achievement. And for these reasons, as Coates intimates in her essay, this was an exhibition that needed to happen.

Helen Hughes is an art history student and research assistant at Heide Museum of Modern Art.

(Endnotes)

1 Gee's Bend is a small and destitute African American hamlet in Alabama, USA, that is renowned for its eponymous quilting collaborative.

2 Rebecca Coates, 'Neo-neo feminisms', *Lauren Berkowitz/Starlie Geikie* exhibition catalogue, Neon Parc, 16–26 July 2008, unpaginated.

(opposite)

Installation view

Lauren Berkowitz/Starlie Geikie,
Neon Parc, Melbourne, 2008
Image courtesy the artists
Photo credit: Neon Parc

Nice Stratigraphy

Curated by Gourney Detoure

**Artists: Damiano Bertoli, Gourney Detoure,
Peter Grziwotz, Mimi Al Hafidh, Andrew
Hazewinkel, David Simpkin, Richard
Stringer, Jensen Tjhung
Conical Inc, Melbourne
30 August – 20 September 2008**



David Simpkin
Watercooler talk, 2008
Olive oil cans, monitors,
microwave oven.
Image courtesy the artist
Photo credit: Christian Capurro

Most artists, curators, writers or creators would acknowledge that it is almost impossible to fix meaning to creative ventures. Artworks or exhibitions can be borne out of particular themes or interests, and they may act as potent vehicles for their creators to communicate certain ideas. Despite the intentions of the creators, however, one cannot prescribe or dictate the meanings that viewers will imbue into such pieces, through their own individual interpretations and personal experiences.

Therefore it is understandable that to curate an exhibition precisely *about* the creation of meaning through artistic practice would be a particularly challenging undertaking. *Nice Stratigraphy*, curated by Gourney Detoure and exhibited at Conical, was one such attempt. As if this task wasn't difficult enough, the exhibition's title and curatorial rationale drew upon the geological and archaeological process of measuring time—a process called stratigraphy—with each artwork embodying profound and unseen temporal layers of meaning.

This was a challenging concept, and some of the works were more convincing than others in articulating this complex temporal layering. One of the most compelling pieces was Peter

Grziwotz's installation *All tomorrow's parties*. An exploration of the artist's own memories, Grziwotz's piece resonated beyond the purely autobiographical. It revealed the fleeting nature of the 'momentous' occasions of our everyday lives and the celebrations we use to mark them, such as birthdays, house-warmings, marriages, anniversaries and births. The installation presented the 'remnants' of past celebrations with an assortment of scrapbook-like sketches and half-deflated balloons. These were symbols of how our memories are morphed and transformed through our attempts to recall and re-live them in the present, sometimes becoming unrecognisable remnants of the original experience. A cassette tape, that nostalgic and outdated piece of technology, had its magnetic ribbon strung about like a forlorn party-streamer. The artwork's title ironically exposed how these celebrations were as much about reflecting, even dwelling, on the past as they were about looking towards the future.

This idea of 'what remains' was evident in Jensen Tjhung's installation *Ready to burn*, perhaps the most overtly 'temporal' piece in the exhibition with its combination of pre-recorded footage, live video-feeds and

uplicated spaces. An Australian flag was suspended above a wooden platform, the words 'Gwan Nation' scrawled over the Southern Cross. Broken beer bottles, wilted pot plants and roles of masking tape lay underneath, like the aftermath of a violent outburst. An accompanying video revealed a masked figure standing in front of this flag, ranting incoherently in a vitriolic diatribe. A video camera taped crudely to the top the television offered a live feed of these residues, an offering to the viewer to step into the lingering remnants of violent nationalism, anger, intolerance and frustration.

As we know from our own experiences, time can be measured politically, according to the often cyclical nature of past and present political climates and debates. Issues and incidents often gain political currency when they resonate or impact on a personal level with the broader public. Mimi Al Hafidh's artwork *Il Harib Ama* was a concise and conceptually thoughtful representation of a dense, layered contemporary phenomenon: female suicide bombers. Al Hafidh's piece was a sculptural collage that used symbols of femininity to represent and confound issues that are traditionally designated as 'masculine'—warfare, martyrdom, violence

and political manoeuvrings. The word OIL was spelt out using felt flowers, referencing Yasser Arafat's description of female suicide bombers as his 'army of roses'. Alongside each letter was a Barbie doll, each wearing combat boots and an opaque veil over the head. One of the dolls had a strip of sewing pins wrapped around its figure, evoking an ammunition belt. Another was bent in prayer and the third stood within the letter 'O', as if passing through a military check-point. With this elegant work, Al Hafidh confronted the viewer with some of the uncomfortable realities of modern-day warfare, conflict and assumed gender roles.

While other pieces in *Nice Stratigraphy* also represented the passing of time, they did not convey the same depth of exploration into this weighty subject. Damiano Bertoli is an artist whose practice has long interrogated time, history and shifting modes of representation.² These themes were evident in his wall text *Ed/On #*, which juxtaposed two loaded historical terms, SADO/SODO. As imposing as it was, the work's minimal aesthetic seemed to get lost amongst the highly embellished, multi-component artworks in the exhibition. Andrew Hazewinkel exhibited *Overflow*, a meditative video of Rome's Tiber River that conceptually communicated the eternal flow of time and history, but lacked the historical or mythical contextualisation to present the viewer with new insights into this rich subject. The peeling strips of coloured masking tape in Gourney Detoure's installation *3x1x1* conveyed the often transient, and yet recurrent, modes of fashion, design and décor.

The exhibition catalogue describes the artworks as 'discrete spaces that when read make meaning of time.'³ This is perhaps an unintentionally revealing statement. These pieces clearly aligned with the curatorial themes of the exhibition, revealing and representing various layers of time and meaning. However, the aesthetic and conceptual approaches of the works were so varied that there lacked an overall sense of cohesion, and the curatorial framework was too abstract and fluid to foster a sense of communication between the individual artworks. This was a great shame. As stand-alone pieces, many of the works spoke strongly, but they remained disconnected from each other. In appropriating an archaeological and geological concept such as stratigraphy, what was lacking in the exhibition was a sense that such layers do not accumulate discretely, randomly or in isolation from one another. Like the strata of geological rock formations, these layers build upon each other to create something that is, for lack of a better expression, greater than the sum of its parts. *Nice Stratigraphy* fell somewhat short in this regard.

Kate Warren lives in Melbourne where she works as a curator and writer.

¹ Kelly Oliver, 'Battles of the sexes', *Times Higher Education*, 4 January 2008, <http://www.timeshighereducation.co.uk/story.asp?storyCode=400045§ioncode=26>, accessed 21 September 2008.

² See Damiano Bertoli and Zara Stanhope, 'Damiano Bertoli in conversation with Zara Stanhope', *un Magazine*, Volume 1 Issue 2, 2004, pp. 12–13.

³ Gourney Detoure, *Nice Stratigraphy* exhibition catalogue, Conical Inc, 2008.



SADO/SODO



Installation view, *Nice Stratigraphy*,
Conical Inc., Melbourne, 2008

Jensen Tjhung

Ready to burn, 2008
Sign, beer bottles, Australian flag,
monitors, live video feed
Image courtesy the artist
and Niagara Galleries, Melbourne

Damiano Bertoli

Ed/on #, 2008
Vinyl lettering on wall
Image courtesy the artist
and Neon Parc, Melbourne

Photo credit: Christian Capurro

Embodied Energy
Curated by Edwina Bartlem
and Penny Algar

Artists: Tony Adams, Ros Bandt, Hannah Bertram, Robyn Cerretti, Lorraine Connelly-Northey (Waradgerie), Mary-Louise Edwards, Mandy Gunn, Chako Kato, Vin Ryan, Deb Taylor, Georgia Thorpe, Vicky West (Trawlwoolway), Ilka White.

Counihan Gallery In Brunswick
6–29 June 2008

Mainstream interest in environmental responsibility has recently permeated to the forefront of media and political debate. Green issues have become a heightened concern for activists, office workers and suburbanites alike. Australian artists have also entered the debate taking various approaches to sustainability, with recent examples including Ash Keating's *2020?* (2008), Jill Orr's *Southern Cross—To Bear and Behold* (2007) and Ken Yonetani's *Sweet Barrier Reef* (2008) as part of the RMIT Gallery exhibition, *Heat: Art and Climate Change*.

Working internationally, curators Maja and Reuben Fowkes examine the philosophies of environmentalism through art and culture, and write extensively on the relationships between ecology, memory and translocal exchange.¹ Concerned with socially and environmentally engaged art, they raise issues regarding ecological citizenship, collaboration, ethical living and energy consumption.

On a parallel platform, Melbourne curators Edwina Bartlem and Penny Algar have observed an analogy between sustainability in art practice and the accounting methodology

called 'embodied energy'. Predominantly used in the building industry, this term describes the sum of all energy invested into the life cycle of material, from the acquisition of natural resources, through manufacture, construction and ongoing maintenance.

Inviting thirteen Australian emerging and established artists to consider how their own practice may fit into an environmental framework, the exhibition *Embodied Energy* encouraged participants to reconsider their techniques, consumption of materials and thematic content. What arose from the sculpture, embroidery, installation, works on paper and multimedia, was an analysis of the consequence of human impact upon the environment.

Using ephemeral materials in their work, Chako Kato and Hannah Bertram thoughtfully navigated away from the concept of art as a consumer-based product. Kato's *A Weed-Scape, Weeds Project* (2007) explored the delicate relationship between nature, art and economy, through the artist's strategy of 'grass drawing'. An ongoing installation, dried strands of grass were woven around pins in the wall. Kato's work made reference to art critic Robert Hughes's discussion of 'Slow Art': 'It doesn't get its message across in ten seconds ... it hooks onto something deep-running in our natures'.² Kato finds her backyard an intimate space that expresses the simultaneous fragility and strength of life in a micro and macro climate.

Bertram's *I found you in the garden. Someone had left you there* (2008) featured embellished discarded windowpanes with delicate organic patterns. Removed from decomposing ground matter and placed in the gallery, her

work drifted between presence and absence, visibility and invisibility, creation and loss.³

Lorraine Connelly-Northey's *O'Possum Skin Cloak* (2008) addressed the theme of consumption of natural resources, like Bertram's work, through the reconfiguration of discarded materials. Mounted on the wall, the sculptural form was constructed from rusted fencing wire. By combining found metals with traditional Aboriginal weaving techniques, the piece depicted a symbolic interpretation of the Murray River as a serpent in the landscape.

The process of gradually making art to savour, without instant consumer digestion, was reflected in Tony Adams's *Green Waste Sorting Station* (2008). Using the gallery space as a studio, Adams' collection of green things—bottles, plastic, notes and a desk—continually changed. Focusing upon the non-permanence of the sculptural object, the audience was invited to become involved by confessing their 'green sins' or to reconfigure the work by contributing personal objects to the installation.

Hope for symbiosis between humans and nature was manifest in Ros Bandt's series of eight *haiku* poems and soundscapes. Featuring the *Isobue*, a special sea whistle made by the free diving 'ama' after surfacing from great depth at Suga-shima, Japan, Bandt reflected upon Dr Kumi Kato's theory on combining traditional knowledge and ecological ethics for the benefit of community connection to the environment.⁴ It has become a dying art.

Embodied Energy presented a range of works that were made from recycled and reused



materials, or which otherwise inspired the audience to think about sustainability. The exhibition provided a forum in which artists suggested solutions to environmental conflicts in art practice. Reconsidering traditional techniques of weaving, collaboration, harvesting of natural resources and the permanence of an art object, *Embodied Energy* successfully reflected the current zeitgeist of environmental consciousness.

Cassie May is a Melbourne-based artist and writer.

(Endnotes)

1 Curated exhibitions include *Revolution is Not a Garden Party* (Budapest, Manchester, Norwich, Zagreb, 2006) and *I Love You* (Thessaloniki, Budapest, Birmingham, 2008) with accompanying publications.

2 Robert Hughes, quoted by Chako Kato at the 'Embodied Energy Forum', 21 June 2008, Brunswick Town Hall. Available online: <http://www.chacokato.com/en/notes/an06.html>

3 Hannah Bertram, artist statement for the exhibition *Embodied Energy*, Counihan Gallery In Brunswick, 6–29 June 2008.

4 Dr Kumi Kato, School of Languages and Comparative Cultural Studies, University of Queensland.



**God-favoured, Rodney Glick: Surveyed
Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth
13 June – 10 August 2008**

God-favoured. The finger said it all, left arm pointing aloft, puncturing the horizon like the 'raised finger of Leonardo's St John'.¹ Is this a metaphor? Are these sculptures and photographs of multiple arm poses a ciphered message to be cracked? For instance, this gesture is of Glick in restful repose, in a state of Nirvana. This is the 'up yours' gesture, the 'I'm making a mockery of you' pose. This gesture is of Glick at one with the universe.

Glick's most recent work in this 15-year survey exhibition, the *Everyone* series (2008), is indicative of the artist's sense of humour—its implication that everyone can be god-like is at once humble and bordering on sacrilege. It is a sophisticated use of paradox. The sculptural works were made by woodcarvers in Bali who traditionally make sculptures of Buddhas,

Ganeshas and Hindu heroes, but in this case it is Glick and his collaborators who have been carved in god-like poses. Photographs from the same series carry through similar poses and gestures using digital manipulation. The series explores 'the Balinese concept of *Tri Hita Karana*, which is that balance in life comes from having harmonious relationships with God, with fellow human beings, and with the environment'.² Another series of works, *I love animals and most of nature* (2008), provides a museological offering and sacrifice to the various sculptures and the gallery space. These works of feral animal skins are prepared by taxidermists and decorated with colourful flowers.

Time is a feature explored in many of Glick's works and it is either suspended or manipulated. In *Clock* (2001–2003), a nail on a wall with two lights angled to cast shadows indicates a moment where time is suspended, though, as is observed in the 1987 film *Withnail and I*, 'even a stopped clock tells the right time

Rodney Glick
Defaced—Two Women, 2005
Digital print
100 x 75 cm
Image courtesy the artist

(opposite)
Chako Kato
My Dear Garden, 2008
Grass, dressmaking pins
(artist installing)
Image courtesy the artist
Photo credit: Chris Bond

twice a day.' *Down on His Luck* (2006–2008) and *Cubavision* (2006–2008), created in collaboration with Lynnette Voevodin, follow on from earlier works such as *Earthquake* (1999–2001), in which 24 snippets or slices of everyday life are recorded and presented in a widescreen panorama or landscape, condensing the period of a day into one hour.

The creation of truths and lies through fictional realism is explored in many of Glick's works. In *Joe Binsky's Tree of Life* (1995), an identity is constructed using the cheesy, stock photos that come with picture frames. Accompanying letters explain the context of the photographs to tell the story of Binsky's family. In the *Glick International Collection* (late 1980s – early 1990s), 'one of the world's greatest, but under-recognised, collections of modern and contemporary art'³ is created. Blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, Glick and collaborator David Solomon inserted their own documentation into catalogues from the Venice and Sydney Biennales. Who is to say this collection is not real when documentation suggests otherwise? Glick also explores the disfigurement of history in his *Defaced* series. In these works, curator John Barrett-Lennard suggests, 'Glick has done some violence to his family and their memories, and the real begins to resemble fiction'.⁴ Through the erasure of faces, the images take on an anonymous quality; these images could be your family or mine.

Through Glick's signalling system an alternate—albeit false—but equally real experience is created in which we, the viewers, are invited to soar to the heights of gods. I'll take you up on your offer. As Madonna would say: strike a pose.

Paige Luff is an artist, librarian and writer.

(Endnotes)

- 1 Jacques Lacan, *Ecrits: a selection*, Routledge, London, 1989, p.305.
- 2 Christopher Hill, 'Call to arms: work from Rodney Glick's *Everyone* series', in *God-favoured* exhibition catalogue, The University of Western Australia, 2008, p.18.
- 3 John Barrett-Lennard, 'Who, Me? When, now? Rodney Glick's questions for everyone', in *God-favoured* exhibition catalogue, The University of Western Australia, 2008, p.10.
- 4 *Ibid.* p.12.

(right)
Installation view, *Depot*, Grenda's Bus Depot, Melbourne, 2008

James Carey and Campbell Drake
10 Lines East West Trajectory, 2008
Image courtesy the artists

Ben Morieson
White Wash, 2008
Image courtesy the artist

Photo credit: Hilton Stone Photography





Depot

Artists: James Carey, Campbell Drake, Susan Jacobs, Ben Morieson, Matt Morrow, Cameron Robbins, Robbie Rowlands

**Grenda's Bus Depot, Dandenong
6–13 April 2008**

There has been a trend toward the temporary in art practice. *Depot*, an exhibition of site-specific artworks at Grenda's decommissioned bus depot in the City of Greater Dandenong, exemplified this trend. Artists James Carey, Campbell Drake, Susan Jacobs, Ben Morieson, Matt Morrow, Cameron Robbins and Robbie Rowlands constructed artworks from on-site materials and considered the context of the site. *Depot* mediated the physical space of its surrounding buildings and explored the site's previous use as a bus depot. Projects like *Depot* demonstrate how site-specific installations can disrupt the systemic commodification of art and art practice. Intuitive and temporary, the artworks created for *Depot* contemplated value from the perspective of the history of these everyday working spaces—moving their concerns beyond that of a gallery-based site-specific artwork where considerations may focus primarily on the physicality of that space.



Ben Morieson's installation *White Wash* measured time as considered through form, colour and duration, by turning a bus-washing machine into a painting machine. Constructing a white-cube replica of a bus to run through the machine filled with blue paint, Morieson's performance recalled what would have been a much-repeated sequence on the site.

Robbie Rowlands' installation, *The Upholsterer Will Fix It*, stripped away a thin line of materials from the floor to the ceiling of the interior of the upholsterer's workshop area. Though removed, these materials remained attached to their original surfaces and presented a problem to be solved: pieces that still had the potential to be put back into place. The whole scenario referenced a situation that an upholsterer at a bus depot would face on a daily basis, conducting repairs and putting pieces back together.

James Carey and Campbell Drake's *10 Lines East West Trajectory* graded time through the simple gesture of line, extending from and within the forecourt and office areas of Grenda's. Painted yellow lines stretched

outward from the structure marking a future path, while the line continued into the site, carved from both the body and the objects of the building—presented for a brief moment in transition between the past and the future.

Matt Morrow's sculptures *Left*, situated in the vacant upper-level offices of Grenda's, constructed a temporal displacement of both physical and material perspectives. As ghostly figures displaced in time, Morrow's copies of dated office equipment drew on memory and referenced the temporal. The achromatic quality of the materials elucidated the standardised function of these everyday items within an office environment.

The temporary experience of *Depot*—in both the making and viewing of the artworks—proposed an alternate system of value for art. However, while such projects may reflect current trends in art, there are strong historical precedents for temporal site-specific practice. One example is *The Bridge, Construction in Process (Cip) VI*, which was exhibited for one month in 1998. An expansive project, *The Bridge* involved more than 100 artists from around the globe and took place in dozens of sites around central Melbourne and the outer Western suburbs.

As with *Depot*, the artists involved in *The Bridge* project, such as Avraham Eilat and William Seeto, responded to the materials and context of the site of their installations. Australian artists David Cranswick and Tex Skuthorpe contributed *The Land Remembers*, a propositional work dealing with the past, present and future of its West Gate Park site. Reflecting on memory and the desire to surpass the present, Australian artist Kim Power's *The Nest* explored the essence of change using materials both collected and found to interpret this continual process. This element of change is common to both *The Bridge* and *Depot*, projects that have employed the collective experience of transition as a temporary condition in continual flux between the past, present and future.

The artistic approaches seen in *Depot* and earlier projects like *The Bridge* rely on a canny use of the materials at hand and an improvisation within the environment to create work from salvaged, found, and discarded objects. In their construction, these works suggest the temporal nature of such materials and the limitations of time that these situations present to artists. For the viewer, the transient qualities and experience of such projects can activate memory and new understandings of utilised sites and can ultimately suggest alternate systems of value for art. This value system is sustained from a presentation of art that is considered through the method from which it is made, and the context it draws from, through a process of continual change.

Patricia Todarello is a Melbourne-based artist and writer, currently completing a Master of Fine Arts program at RMIT.



Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present

Curated by Charlotte Day

Artists: Brook Andrew, Hany Armanious, Eve Armstrong, Tony Clark, Mikala Dwyer, Diena Georgetti, Simryn Gill, James Lynch, Nick Mangan, Linda Marrinon, Anniebell Marrngamarrnga, Dane Mitchell, Callum Morton, TV Moore, David Noonan, Stuart Ringholt, Ricky Swallow, Francis Upritchard, Michelle Ussher, Ronnie van Hout and Rohan Wealleans.

TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville
1 August – 9 November 2008

The TarraWarra Museum of Art is home to Australia's youngest and most compact Biennial, now in its second installment. The Biennial's general brief is broad and equivocal: 'to present an independent view of contemporary art that is not necessarily subject to the vision and acquisition policy of the museum', while making a 'strong unifying statement in the context of an often diverse art scene'.¹ Whereas Victoria Lynn's inaugural Biennial in fact actively promoted the museum's 'vision and acquisition policy' with its focus on recent Australian painting, *Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present*, curated by Charlotte Day, was an altogether more adventurous and ambitious affair.

With *Lost & Found*, Day proposed that there has been an archaeological turn in contemporary art, a turn she explored via the work of 21 of Australia's and New

Zealand's best and brightest. The familiarity of her cast was largely counterposed by the intriguing rubric under which they were (re) assembled. Day broadly characterised this archaeological turn as the artistic 'revisiting or reinterpretation of historical forms'.² Unlike appropriation art, which she argued operates via a strategy of recontextualisation,³ the artist-archaeologists here were distinguished by a tendency to isolate or decontextualise their historical subject, usually via self-conscious play with artistic and museological convention, not to mention the myriad plinths, shelves, vitrines, cabinets, platforms and variations thereof.

For Day, these procedures have been highly productive insofar as they open a space in which history can be critically, actively and self-reflexively engaged; a space where 'history is not necessarily chronological and the present is not new'.⁴ Seen against the backdrop of history's persistently (chronically?) fraught status in contemporary Australia, this archaeological turn is not especially surprising. More surprising is the optimism with which Day has greeted it. Nonetheless, this is a generally compelling attempt to get the measure of much recent art, and one that raises some serious questions that will hopefully resonate beyond the duration of the show. What and whose history are we talking about here? How has it been excavated? Under what authority or custodianship?

For many of the included artists, their objects are the flotsam and jetsam of the recent cultural past. Simryn Gill has preserved the

physiognomies of typewriters with graphite rubbings, as if they were monumental brasses (*Caress #1 - #7*, 2007–08). Dane Mitchell cast a piece of plastic bubble wrap in bronze and encased it within a perspex vitrine (*Bubblewrap #2*, 2008). Ricky Swallow cast one of his own artworks, a cardboard model of a 1980s cassette player of the type for which he shot to fame just over a decade ago. This was also in bronze and displayed on a small plinth (*Idol with Handle*, 1997–2007). While registering the arbitrariness with which objects ascend to the status of artefact there was, nonetheless, something disconcertingly glib about many of these newly-minted monuments.

It is worth mining this exhibition's own buried past to recover a longer tradition of opposing archaeology to causal and rationalist conceptions of history, a tradition that stretches back at least to Surrealism and in which Robert Rauschenberg and Michel Foucault, among others, also played a part. However, as Eugenio Donato has highlighted, the danger is that archaeological convention manifests, rather than contests, the conception of history as causal. Perhaps even more importantly, he goes on to warn that if the universe really is governed by the system of entropy—the ineluctable collapse of difference—then all these artefacts don't illuminate but occlude the past.⁵

Seen from this perspective, Mitchell's *Bubblewrap #2* came across as more complicated than critical, especially when compared to the 'artefacts' he infamously once excavated from ACCA's dumpster. Likewise, by

casting his fragile and laboriously crafted model in bronze, Swallow at least partially collapsed the critical distance his signature technique established, and self-reflexivity consequently veered toward nostalgic self-regard. Put simply: there is a risk that all this sifting through the abundance of culture might achieve little more than burying our own heads in the sand.

This play with 'artefactuality', the dominant theme, proved far more effective when this problematic was not effaced but embraced. Eve Armstrong's environmentally themed landscapes assembled from second-hand office supplies, Francis Uprichard's mysteriously ritualistic empty vessels, Rohan Wealleans' kitsch space junk, and Stuart Ringholt's revisioned sculptural monographs (in which the work of Moore and Giacometti are given his 'Circle Head' collage treatment) all exploited, however variously, the mode of the artefact for precisely its potential for fabulation.

Along with all these real and imagined artefacts, *Lost and Found* also featured a discernible, if less pronounced, concern with actual and specific social histories. TV Moore's understated, poetic and uncanny

enlarged and screenprinted on to gigantic 2 x 2.5 metre pieces of coloured tin foil mounted on canvas. These small and obscure images were recoded by their enlargement as history painting, while history painting was in turn recoded, by the shimmering brilliance of the foil, as lurid spectacle. However, as Kate McNeill has argued regarding Andrew's earlier work, his use of archival materials is never just about making hidden histories visible, nor deconstructing their representational operations (although he does both adroitly); rather, Andrew generates an *experience* of their failures or collapse.⁷ A similar strategy underpins *The Island*, where closer inspection revealed the foil had been rent and was peeling back to reveal the blank canvas of unwritten and unspoken histories beneath, histories haphazardly papered over. Yet, at the same moment that these tears became discernible so too did the viewer's own shadowy reflection in the foil surface, implicating us to imbricate past, present and future. A self-reflexive space indeed.

As archaeology's natural home, the museum was, appropriately, another common site of excavation. In the beautifully installed 'contemporary gallery' (so-called for the huge picture-window that has the capacity

which said fictional janitor's 'office' had been transposed. Despite the apparent invitation to sit back, relax and enjoy the film on one of his battered and paint splattered plastic chairs, nobody did.

The last and first word went to Callum Morton. His was the only art work allowed outside to play, and it greeted and farewelled visitors from just inside the entrance to the TarraWarra Estate. *Into the Pines* (2008) was a familiar sight: a perfect, scale version of the triangular blue and white light-box that adorns the many suburban branches of Le Pine Funeral Services. If, for Adorno, the museum and the mausoleum were of the same genus, then clearly for Morton this moment has passed.⁸ In an age of endlessly proliferating Biennales, the museum, it seems, is now more like a funeral parlour. No grand monument to the culture embalmed within, but a franchised, homogenised and reassuring space wherein culture pauses only briefly to solicit our respects en route to the crematorium of history. It was an aptly circumspect epigraph to the very prospect of an archaeology of the present, as well as to a varied but ultimately salutary show.

Ryan Johnston is (still) writing his PhD in art history at the University of Melbourne, where he also teaches.



(Endnotes)

1 Maudie Palmer, 'Foreword', in Charlotte Day (ed.), *Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present*, TarraWarra Museum of Art Ltd., Healesville, 2008, np.

2 Charlotte Day, 'Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present', in Charlotte Day (ed.), *Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present*, TarraWarra Museum of Art Ltd., Healesville, 2008, p.51.

3 *ibid.* pp. 51–2.

4 *ibid.* pp. 52 & 60.

5 Eugenio Donato, 'The Museum's Furnace: Notes toward a Contextual Reading of *Bouvard and Pécuchet*', in Josué V. Harari (ed.), *Textual Strategies: Perspectives in Post-Structuralist Criticism*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1979, pp. 213–238. These concerns are closely related to those motivating 'post-processual' archaeology, emergent in the 1980s.

6 Moore's film was included in the online component of this year's Biennale of Sydney and can be viewed here: <http://www.bos2008.com/revolutionsonline/?p=424>

7 Kate MacNeill, 'Undoing the Colonial Gaze: Ambiguity in the Work of Brook Andrew', *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art*, 6:2 & 7:1, 2005–06, pp. 179–194.

8 Theodor Adorno, 'Valéry Proust Museum' (1953), in *Prisms*, The MIT Press, Cambridge, 1981, p. 175.

Callum Morton

In the Pines, 2008

Aluminium sign boxes, acrylic display panels, steel frame

Image courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Commissioned by TarraWarra Museum of Art, Melbourne

Photo credit: John Brash

(opposite)

Installation view, *Lost & Found: An Archeology of the Present*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, 2008

Diana Georgetti

Case Study Design for Villa Planchar, Caracas 1954

(*Made with Garage Tools*), 2008

Acrylic on wood panels

Image courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Mikala Dwyer

I Maybe We, 2005

Fibreglass; 8 parts

Image courtesy the artist and Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

Photo credit: John Brash

looping and redubbing of a 1960s doco on counter-cultural vagrants in Kings Cross, *The Forgotten Man* (2006), Anniebell Marrngamarrnga's giant pandanas *Yawkyawk Spirit Figures* (2008), and Brook Andrew's new series *The Island* (2008), all stood out not for their reimagination but reactivation of history, and the negotiation of its persistence in the present.⁶

For *The Island*, Andrew once again delved into the archive of colonial representation. Drawings of Indigenous Australians inhabiting a landscape bizarrely rationalised by classical formal structures (all taken from William Blandowski's mid-19th century colonial taxonomy *Australia in 142 Photographic Illustrations*, but of uncertain authorship) were

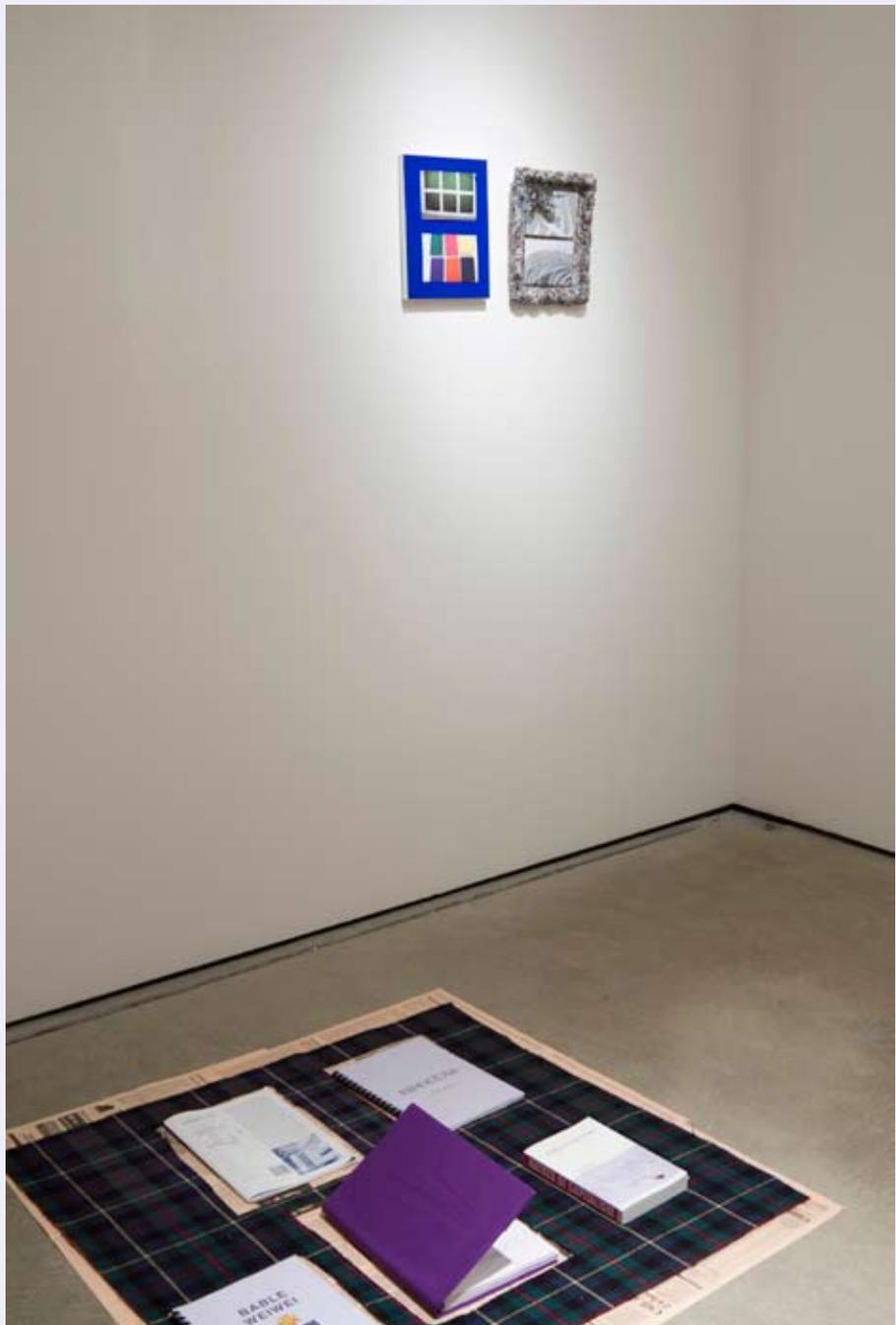
to transfix dozens of tipsy daytrippers simultaneously, but which damages older and more important artworks), Diana Georgetti had done some papering-over of her own. An entire wall was covered by a screenprinted reproduction of an iconic late modernist domestic interior by Gio Ponti in and on which she 'housed' her own curiously retro, late modernist abstractions. While Georgetti wilfully and eccentrically re-surfaced the historical particularity (not to mention the body) white-washed by the museum's pristine walls, the labour expended to perform this white-wash was displayed opposite in James Lynch's *Doubleday* (2008). Here, an elegiac animation of a cleaner polishing and buffing a museum after-hours (the eponymous double day) was screened on a platform to

Foto-Ography

Artists: Liv Barrett, James Deutsher, Christopher LG Hill, Chris Kraus and Evergreen Terrace
Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
12 September – 25 October 2008

Operating from World Food Studio, the interdisciplinary practices of Liv Barrett, James Deutsher and Christopher LG Hill engage a range of collaborations across diverse media. These include, but are not limited to, drawing, painting, photography, fashion, performance and music (Moffarfarrah), publishing and editing (*Y3K newsletter*, *Evergreen Terrace*), web publishing (*Y2K blog*, Evergreen website), contributions to other publications (*Patterns of Creative Aggression*, *Jah Jah Sphinx*) and various exhibitions (most recently Next Wave's *Unsheltered Workshops* at the Victorian College of the Arts).

Foto-Ography—a neologism that exists somewhere between an object and a practice and is an amalgamation of the two—is an apt title for the artists' latest project. Occurring within the



wider context of the aforementioned activities, this exhibition brought together a range of recontextualized and recycled materials, publications and video. More than a mere bricolage of found objects, the works evoked a range of dialogues, both within the gallery and extending laterally along the lines of other collaborations. Most obvious in this sense were the publications displayed cleverly on the stock market pages of the *Financial Times*, itself a document of capitalist exchange. These included a babel-fish translation of Ai Wei Wei's blog, a Semiotext(e) Anthology, and collaborative publications by the three artists. *Evergreen Terrace 002* '...all digital content', a compilation of computer screenshots, became a record of the connections and exchanges between contributors—the files, emails, blogs, links and Myspace sites that the artists visited. Like the ongoing blog *Jah Jah Sphinx*, the meaning of this project lies

behind what is shown on the screen(s). Here, the artists are more interested in the networks, processes and intentions that led to the appropriation of the images than the images themselves. This prioritising lies behind what others may dismiss as the random aesthetic typical of the artists' work.

Many of the minor works in *Foto-Ography* also made subtle reference to one another and the conditions of their making. For example, a block of foam from which a pair of slippers was carved appeared again as padded backing for a photo pinned to the wall. Similarly, the amateur photos of Ai Wei Wei's Olympic 'Bird's Nest' linked to the printed edition of the artist's blog. In turn, the papier-mâché frame on which these photos were mounted resonated visually with the bags of shredded newspaper. And the amorphous tangled technicolour beanbag, stitched together from

t-shirts, served as a structural metaphor for the artists' practice as a whole—made of many interwoven changeable elements, some tightly knotted, others hanging only by a few threads.

As the latest materialisation of the artists' activities, *Foto-Ography* represented a practice that is as much about the transitional process as the end product. While on the surface the digital postmodern pastiche of projects like *Jah Jah Sphinx* and *Evergreen Terrace 002* may be seen to be symptomatic of a broader lack of criticality in contemporary art, the rhizomatic nature of these interwoven practices can be seen to record a multiplicity of connections and potential points of engagement.

Andrea Bell is a writer and curator with an interest in collaborative practice.



To Occupy: Panoramic Interiors of Concrete Fortifications

Alison Bennett

**Photospace Gallery, Australian National University School of Art, Canberra
4–15 August 2008**

Alison Bennett is a Melbourne-based photographer, currently completing her Master's research project on the theme of 'negotiating inhabitation'. Through her photography of interior spaces, Bennett attempts to capture and communicate the experience involving the artist and her surrounds the moment the shot was taken. The final artwork is a collage of several similar shots seamlessly stitched together; rendering what was once a three-dimensional room into a single, large-format image. Her small, solo exhibition at Photospace Gallery was part of the Vivid National Photography Festival held in Canberra.

The four images selected for this exhibition were taken from a larger series Bennett had produced that focus on the interiors of concrete fortifications dotted along the east and south coastlines of Australia. This series, entitled *To Occupy*, is merely a single phase from a body of work gathered over a number of years that covers many different forms of interiors: from historic farmhouses to caves, shearing sheds from derelict buildings and ruined forts.

During our early colonial period, many of the entrances to Australia's major seaports were heavily defended with solid fortifications and large-gun emplacements. What terrified Australians at that time was not terrorism as we now know it, but more a fear of attack or raid by an enemy's naval fleet entering directly into a port, destroying shipping and shelling the city. Our collective anxiety led to the first fixed defence sites being built in the 1830s. While always prepared for an attack, the only serious threat came in May 1942 when three Japanese midget submarines entered Sydney Harbour,

fired several torpedoes and caused more mayhem than damage. However, the incident highlighted the limitations of these forts as a last line of defence for protecting Australian citizens and interests, and suggested they were more for the psychological reassurance of the populace than a realistic solution. After the Second World War, fixed defence sites became fundamentally irrelevant as battleships were capable of firing shells over several kilometres to their intended targets. Today, the remnants of these abandoned forts can still be found silently standing guard; their monolithic concrete structures are totems to a bygone era.

Interestingly, Bennett refuses to name or identify the location of these forts, which would destroy the mystery or ambiguity of the image. By leaving this information ambiguous, Bennett invites the viewer to suggest and fabricate their own narrative. 'I don't want to explicate. I refuse to be precise. I will resist telling you where they are or when they were built or who lived there. I want to cut these places loose from the weight of analysis and narrative that binds "heritage" interpretation and history methodology.'¹ Nonetheless, despite Bennett's desire to free her photographed interiors from these constraints, their history and stories are intrinsic and inscribed in unexpected places. Her photographs depict stained and well-worn surfaces, discarded objects and litter, ghostly rooms, graffiti-covered walls or the charcoaled remains of a fireplace among many other traces of human occupation and inhabitation. A fingerprint left on a dusty windowsill or footprints upon the sand-covered floor suggest previous events and itinerant residents.

Like a time capsule, the interiors photographed by Bennett preserve not only evidence of our colonial times, but reveal that they are also alive and continually changing environments. Originally built on the city's outskirts, in some instances these defence sites have been swallowed up by the urban sprawl. However,

these forts were and still are, officially 'out of bounds' and fenced-off for a reason: not only to protect what they once housed, but for one's own personal safety. 'They are places you are not supposed to go. They are cast as dangerous, unsafe. Indeed, "to occupy" has a dual meaning—"to inhabit" and "to invade".'² Yet while the buildings may appear abandoned and disused, it is simply that their initial utilitarian function has changed, and they now attract new tenants. Decommissioned and devoid of their primary purpose these forts have become home to those who, at the time of their construction and use, were excluded. Kids looking for somewhere to hangout, a squatter needing shelter for the night or curious locals having discovered their whereabouts, have reclaimed these sites for the general public. As Bennett's photographs attest, these spaces are shared by many: trespassers, teens, tourists, invaders, vandals, delinquents, the homeless and the inquisitive, even artists, who have entered and left their trace.

Sven Knudsen is a Canberra-based arts writer.

(Endnotes)

¹ Alison Bennett, 'Dereliction and the space between', paper presented at Melbourne University *anti*THESIS symposium, University of Melbourne, 7 July 2006. Available online: <http://www.alisonbennett.com.au/page3.htm> p. 2.

² *Ibid*, p.10.

Alison Bennett

Untitled (To Occupy: panoramic interiors of concrete fortifications), 2007

Stitched digital photographs, pigment ink on canvas

230 x 111 cm

Image courtesy the artist

(opposite)

Liv Barrett, James Deutsher, Christopher LG Hill,

Chris Kraus & Evergreen Terrace

Foto-Ography, 2008

Installation views, CCP, Melbourne

Images courtesy the artists

Photo credit: Oliver Parzer

One Day Sculpture
A New Zealand-wide series of temporary art works

Initiated by Litmus Research Initiative and Claire Doherty
June 2008 – June 2009

One Day Sculpture is currently underway in New Zealand. It's an ambitious project—a series of sculptures taking place around the country over the course of a year. The trick is each work only appears for 24 hours, before they are relegated to the graveyard of writing and photographs.

I've only seen two of the works in Wellington so far, so can't make any claims about the series as a whole. What can be said is that *One Day Sculpture* presents art that can either try to say a lot in a short space or simply let the silences grow until audience and artist are comfortable with them.

I thought the limited timeframe that was allowed for the works in *One Day Sculpture* not only proposed some new parameters for art-making but could also be reflected in the writing that responded to it. Fifteen minutes is all that has been allowed for the following considerations of works by Maddie Leach and Kah Bee Chow in Wellington, and Nick Austin and Kate Newby in Auckland. Minimal editing, sketchy ideas, and hurried descriptions: the following is some stuff Andrew Clifford and I thought about the first collection of works.

Maddie Leach, *Perigee #11*, Wellington, 28 August 2008

It felt like it had been raining for about six months. But on this day, it was beautiful. It was a day when Wellingtonians did crazy things like open their windows and even perhaps hang out their washing.

I drove out to Breaker Bay. I was worried my car wouldn't make it. But I made it and it was such a nice drive and I drove under the new tunnel that goes under the airport runway and there is this funny mural thing on the side which made me think of transformers.

So I got there and parked my car and walked down to the boatshed. 'Nice day for it', I said to some people outside, and they laughed because in fact Maddie Leach had hoped that it would be the opposite. *Perigee #11* was a tiny boatshed which Maddie Leach had slightly renovated—relined the walls, painted and cleaned. It was nestled in the corner of Breaker Bay. With the help of some weather forecasters, Leach had selected a day when there was supposed to be this terrible storm, and people could come to this small boatshed and take shelter from the raging waves and rain. But, funny how these things happen, the weather was completely the opposite.

Inside was lined with cedar and it smelt like carpentry and I wanted to touch it so I did. Looking out onto the outside was a small window, the size of a tiny canvas, and as I was looking out the ferry from the South Island was drifting past. In some of Leach's



other works there have been monitors showing a ghostly ship on dark waters. It had always confused me and I couldn't figure out how it related to the other works. Standing in the boatshed, watching the ferry drift past, suddenly Leach's work seemed to fit altogether.

The next day I was talking to Laura and she said 'It seemed to me like the boatshed was longing for its boat', and I thought that was a great line. Because one of Leach's other works was a wooden boat, presented up the top of Te Papa, looking out to the harbour. I thought about pretending that I had come up with that idea, but then decided to attribute it to Laura because she might read this and then where would I be?

— TS

Kah Bee Chow, *Golden Slumbers*, Wellington, 30 August 2008

Haining Street used to be the old Chinatown in Wellington. The New Zealand Government was horrifically racist towards the Chinese who came here in the 19th century to work in

our country's goldmines and set up market gardens. We had awful things like poll taxes for the Chinese immigrants. When I worked at Archives New Zealand I looked at a docket book of the Chinese immigrants who came in and paid their £100 poll tax or whatever it was. A Chinese man was shot dead in Haining Street.

Now it looks normal enough, the usual ugly retail/industrial streets of Wellington as the central city peters out and becomes Mt Cook. Kah Been Chow had set up a luxurious golden tent down the back a small alleyway—totally in juxtaposition with the industrial blandness.

Soup was served to those who came. TVs showed histories of people who had lived on Haining Street or who had researched the site. I didn't have any soup because I had just had curly fries for lunch.

There was a sense that everything could be packed up and moved away at short notice. Dotted about were plants in canvas bags and pots, as well as what I assumed were Asian

vegetables planted in boxes. At the drop of a hat movers might have been able to sweep in, collect everything and transport it all away. It was both a traveling circus and a place for serious consideration about humans dealing with each other.

This work needed to be at a very specific place, but at the same time it had an uneasy relationship with that site. It was transportable and permanent. It was
– TS

Kate Newby & Nick Austin, *Hold Still*, Auckland, 30 August 2008

Without even the most basic institutional structures, such as walls, to help frame and contextualise art, the audience needs to work much harder to establish exactly what it is that they are experiencing in a public space where all sorts of extraneous stimuli are present. Which is probably not such a bad thing if an active engagement with the work is the desired result. On arriving at Western Park for Nick Austin and Kate Newby's *Hold Still* project, it was hard to know what to expect and what to attend to. Perhaps the person walking their dog is a performer? Is the seemingly abandoned cardboard box part of the work? Fortunately, before I started analysing the grain of the grass, I encountered a couple who had already seen the work and pointed me in the right direction.

Austin and Newby's intervention is very much about this kind of self-aware gaze, situating a telescope on a tripod to frame a tableau further down the track of a fake seagull perched on a seemingly abandoned newspaper on a picnic table. Across the gully another two seagulls perch on and alongside a bench. Popular walking tracks traverse the slope and link the three sites. With a deft touch, the artists manage to occupy a transitional site without excessively intruding on it. Such contingent materials as that day's paper are worth less with each passing hour and worthless on any other day—today's news is tomorrow's wrapping paper, as they say. A little like the old trick of gluing coins to the pavement, but with an inbuilt expiration date for the duration of the project.

Watching through the telescope, other people come into view and enter the scene. Are you watching other viewers taking a closer look, or are they encountering the work for the first time? As they give the artificial bird a curious tap, are they aware of being watched and is it, therefore, appropriate to be watching so closely if they don't know? It was a wintry late afternoon when this writer visited *Hold Still* and the artists, who were supervising the telescope, were beginning to unpack torches for the night ahead. It would have been interesting to see how the nature of the encounter was transformed by darkness.

– AC

Andrew Clifford is a freelance writer and sound artist who works as curatorial assistant at the University of Auckland's Gus Fisher Gallery.

Thomasin Sleight lives in Wellington where she works at the Adam Art Gallery, is slowly writing her Masters, and does other writing projects when the opportunity comes knocking.



***A Place Tells a Story*
Published by And Collective, Melbourne
September 2008**

The independent publication *A Place Tells a Story* is an achievement of grand proportions and offers an incredible perspective on the history of local place. Managed and conceptualised by the Melbourne-based *And Collective*, the book features the work of 22 writers, artists and musicians over 104 pages and a 16-track compact disc. The result is a series of micro-tours of nearby cities and regions in a manner that is often poetic, usually ethnographic and sometimes experiential.

Much of the imagery in the book, particularly the photographs by Warwick Baker and Justine Ellis, guide us through a range of desolate spaces: bus shelters, train stations, industrial wastelands, and highways—urban non-spaces—a subject matter arguably overdone and often dull. However, produced with what seems to be a particular care and delicacy, the photographs divulge a rich aesthetic, brimming with detail, indicating a personal connection between Baker, Ellis and their subjects. In fact, this personalised mode of creative production is prevalent in most of the pieces in *A Place Tells a Story*, giving the publication an affective sincerity.

It should be clarified that the 'personal' tone in Ellis and Baker's photographs is intricately woven with an objective one, which is relatively more critical and contemplative, saving these works from entering into an indulgent, emotional and nostalgic narrative about place. This intuitive and clever hybridisation of the personal and the critical is also embedded in Dan Rule's story, *Cream O' the Oat*, a wonderfully written account of the history of a 1930s marketing mural on the façade of a milk bar in Melbourne's Northern suburbs. Through a subtle evocation of the tales and personalities that write, re-write and possess the mural's history, Rule's story reveals the foundations and potentialities of histories. Brigid McCarthy also achieves this in her short story, *The Fence*, which demonstrates a moment when the recognition of history of 'place' and its palimpsests creates a shift in the perception of self, place, present and future.

Other texts, such as Meg Mundell's *Road* and especially Memuzin Rivers' *Alice in Leyla*

Land will acquaint readers with intriguing subject matter. However, neither of these stories managed to harness that grey zone of intellectual vigour, prose, poetics and strong narration demonstrated by Baker, Ellis Rule and McCarthy. While all of these artists and writers tell a story worth paying attention to, sometimes it is how you tell that story that matters more.

Seven sound artists took the book's theme, 'every place tells a story' and conjured up sonic realms detailed with the sounds of crickets, breezes, trains, thunderstorms and clarinet, baritone guitar, reed organ and cello. Combining instruments with samples from their current homes and sometimes where they grew up, the artists featured on the compact disc played with our audio perceptions, triggering memory and flights of imagination. The highlights include *Hopeful*, *Houses in Stereo*, *From Messina* and *Boardwalk*.

While some works are stronger than others, *A Place Tells a Story* is certainly one of the most exciting and intelligent artistic productions of 2008.

Veronica Tello is an art historian and critic based in Melbourne.

(above)
Warwick Baker
Pages from *A Place Tells A Story*, 2008

(opposite)
One Day Sculpture

Maddie Leach
Perigee # 11, Wellington, August 28, 2008
Installation detail
Image courtesy the artist

Kate Newby & Nick Austin
Hold Still, Auckland, August 30, 2008
Installation detail
Image courtesy the artist

Photo credits: Steve Rowe

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**ARTS
VICTORIA**



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K.W.DOGGETT Fine Paper

MONASH UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART PRESENTS

PRIMARY VIEWS

CURATORS:
STEPHEN BRAM;
JANET BURCHILL &
JENNIFER McCAMLEY;
JUAN DAVILA

Primary Views invites the insights of four artists represented in the Monash University Collection. Each has been invited to curate a self-contained exhibition from the Monash University Collection, according to their own areas of interest, expertise and aesthetic/discursive predilections. Alternative to classical or canonical art-historical readings, *Primary Views* considers the role of the artist as curator, encouraging new readings of the collection, and more partial, polemical and aberrant artistic historiographies.



Jacky Redgate, *From Anonymous (Probably Daguerre or Niepce de Saint-Victor) 'table prepared for a meal' c.1829.1990*
library buckram, glass, ceramic, cardboard, coated timber, Monash University Collection, purchased 1992

LINDEN 1968

INNOVATORS 4, LINDEN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS, 7 NOVEMBER - 14 DECEMBER

'WHERE THE WEST COAST MEETS THE EAST COAST IN A YEAR THAT CHANGED THE WORLD'



Department of Culture and the Arts
Government of Western Australia



Linden
CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ARTS



ONE OF US CANNOT BE WRONG

31 OCTOBER → 13 DECEMBER 2008

SARAH BAKER (USA/UK)
PHILIP BROPHY (AUS)
SUE DODD (AUS)
KATE MURPHY (AUS)
PIPILOTTI RIST (CH)
DARREN SYLVESTER (AUS)
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OFF-SITE EVENT

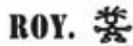
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Courtesy the artist and Arna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne & Sydney

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Richard Lewer
*True stones—Australian crime:
Walsh Street shootings (detail) 2008*
enamel on acoustic board
Collection of Ken and Lisa Fahly
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Image: Scott Miles Hoodhead No.5, oil on board (detail), Art Spectrum Finest Colours 3rd Prize Winner Linden Postcard Show 2008

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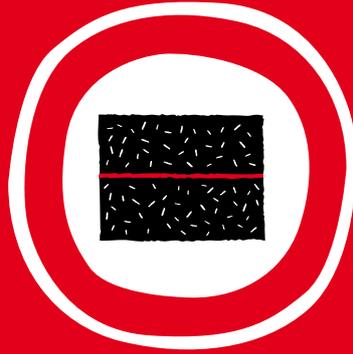
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IMAGE: Jiang Zhi, Things Would Turn Awful Once They Happened (2008), Photograph, Lightbox, 150cm x 200cm. Courtesy of the artist and Long March Space, Beijing.

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ISSUE 2

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13.03.08 UN 2.1 LAUNCH / THE TOTE, MELBOURNE



Special thanks to those who provided support and entertainment at The Tote launch of issue 2.1, including Warren Taylor and all the poster artists who donated their work, plus the live performers, and Christian Capurro for his paparazzi photography.



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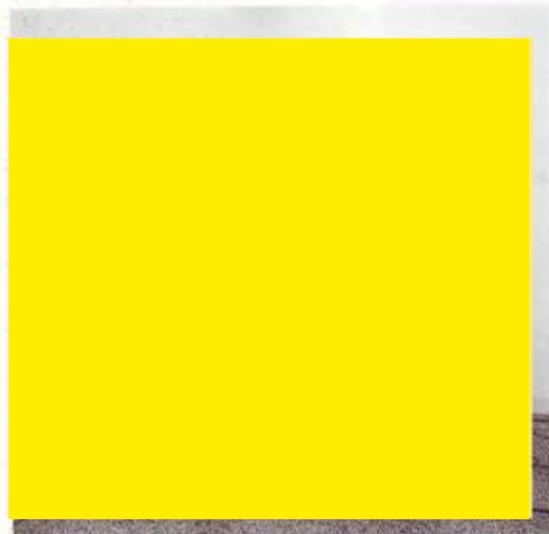


conditions of a discontinuous reality without postulating an alternative, it accepted that it had to work on a continuum of the present, refraining from making strategic projections into the future. The performance art of the UFO group and the purely theoretical designs of Superstudio, Archizoom, Pettena and the 9999 bore no hint of a further process of realization. It had been discovered that doing architecture did not just mean making houses, or constructing useful things in general, but signified expressing oneself, communicating, arguing and freely creating one's own cultural habitat, according to the instinctive right that every individual has to create his own environment, but from which the division of labour in society had totally alienated him. Doing architecture became an activity of free expression, just as making love means not just producing children but communicating through sex.

In contrast to the unwitting utopia of modern architecture and town-planning, which proposed an impossible order for the world, avant-garde architecture turned the process on its head: it assumed utopia as the given basis of the work and developed it realistically. Once the process was completed, nothing was left out: everything was accomplished in an act that was perfectly executed in itself, as pure creative energy transformed, without loss, into constructive energy. The utopia was not the end but the reality of the situation; there was no allegory in it, just purely natural phenomena. Paraphrasing Flaubert, we were able to say: "l'architecture c'est moi."



132) Archizoom Associati: "Gazebo's inc. Export-Import", *Planeta Fresco* no. 1, 1967.



133) Archizoom Associati: "San Remo" palm lamp, Design Center, 1971.

134) Plastic gazebo lilies, 1969.

135) UFO Group: "Dollaro" lamps, 1969.

136) UFO Group: "Paramount" lamp, 1970.

