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Image: *Indemnity*, Shaun Elstob & Viveka Marksjo

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Matt Hinkley
JA! 2004
Pencil on digital print
 59 x 44cm
 Image courtesy of the artist

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Editor Lily Hibberd

Design Brendan Lee

un Committee

Zara Stanhope, Din Heagney,

Anthony Gardner, Brendan Lee & Jeff Khan

un Magazine

PO Box 2016

NORTH MELBOURNE

VICTORIA 3051

Email: lilyhibberd@eudoramail.com

Phone: 0412 714 767

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David Noonan, *Untitled* 2004-5, still from super 8 film. Courtesy the artist and Uplands Gallery, Melbourne and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

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Editorial

In ideal forums of mainstream art writing there aren't conflicts of opinion. You know that little disclaimer that gets run on the inside leaf of every mag: *The views expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the editors and publisher.* Well, in this journal the attitudes presented are not a reflection of an overarching view held by all. Art is a subject that invites interpretation and works of art are invariably read differently according to who is looking at them. The problem with so much art writing today is that it presents a united front – like we all have to submit to a single point of view... This role of the author as omniscient has arisen out of a lack of opportunity for new or alternative voices to emerge in the field of arts writing. In an attempt to create a diverse landscape of opinion, un Magazine compiles articles that represent a variety of styles and attitudes and cover many different approaches to art making. In this issue we have a range of critical modes, from acclamatory to scathing. The paradox of publishing these articles is that even amongst the editorial committee conflicting opinions emerge. Take for instance Anthony Gardner's contribution on Michael Conole. Although Gardner (a committee member) complements Conole for his bravery, there is not much praise to be found in this review. Ironically, two other committee members loved this exhibition. This and other pieces in the current issue are exemplary in that they are based on forthright attitudes; which is what Melbourne's art scene needs after so many years of articles made up of mere description. Just remember it's only one person's point of view and you are welcome to disagree.

The entire issue of un Magazine and the separate supplement are available in full colour online at www.projekt.com.au

We encourage you to download the PDF (it's small) to view the fabulous colour images and get a better idea of the art work.

Articles in the online supplement:

Charlotte Hallows reviews Nadine Christensen & Kate Rohde at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Gorman House
Paul Andrew interviews Simone Le Amon
The full version of *Contemporary Art & Cultural Critique* by Christine Morrow... it's bloody long.

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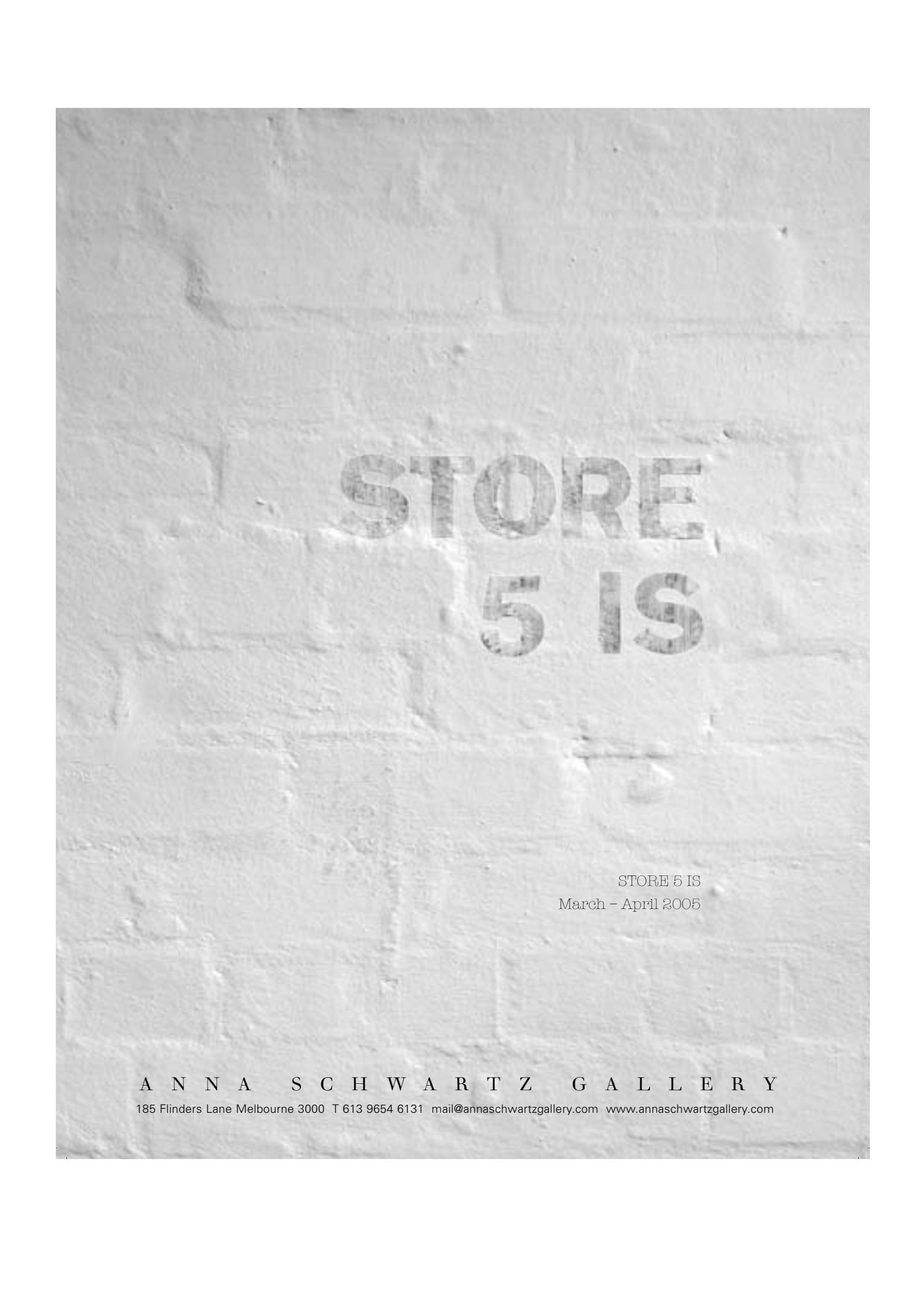
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un Issue #2 launch



Sarah Lynch, live performance at Conical, 2004



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The Ancestors

The recent work of Eliza Hutchinson

by Ruth Learner



Above: Eliza Hutchinson
The Ancestors, 2004
Light-jet print
101.4 x 79cm (6 photos)
Image courtesy the artist

The Ancestors is about the dislocation of Hutchinson's subjects – in place and in time. This is achieved through a process of extreme and unnatural physical displacement, and not through methods of digital manipulation. The waxy distended faces appear preserved, pickled perhaps – bits of hair sticking up like badly placed toupees. The eyes are buried in flesh, veins pop out and what could be a pained smile is distorted into smugness; the subjects seem full of themselves. For all this excess, the portraits are subtly rendered in black and white, with the customary curtain backdrop and film noir style costumes.

Hutchinson's interest in death and preservation can be traced from earlier works, like *Memphis Minx* (1999) that documents the mummification of a model using extreme armature. An excessive narcissism (death being an ultimate state) is represented by the preservation of the model through fashionable clothing and fixtures. Yet it is the revelation of the processes underlying the performance that grabs our attention and we are invited to contemplate the work's overall construction.

The Entertainers and *The Ancestors* are a distillation of these earlier themes. In this work, Hutchinson explores the construction of the imagery solely through her subjects. Here we are confronted by the effect of a prop on a body. We do not see the prop in the portraits, but merely the uncanny effects on the subjects after they have been placed into this prop and then relocated in space. This is examined by Hutchinson through the lens of a large format camera and recorded onto photographic plates, reminiscent of daguerreotype photography. Also evocative of this early photography is the stiff nature of Hutchinson's portraiture (due in the early daguerreotype photography to the long exposures sitters had to endure). In *The Ancestors* the theatricality is encapsulated in the forensic detail and through the performance undertaken in the production of each image. Once relocated in space, the staging of Hutchinson's sitters is further exaggerated, extending and relocating the boundaries of traditional portraiture. Ultimately, although the photographs are the product of careful, time-consuming staging, the experience of the sitter placed within the prop is fleeting and dangerous. Unlike early portraiture, the stakes are much higher and the effect more radical.

In its day, early portraiture was experimental. Photography was a new science and the photographer very much the pioneer. The outcome was not always predictable. This sense of experimentation and uncertainty also exists in Hutchinson's portraits. Extreme conditions are imposed on the models and we witness the effects. The results reveal something about the physique and psyche of specific subjects. If, for instance, a subject is particularly thin, their veins may pop out more, they may feel more



*Left: Eliza Hutchinson
The Entertainers, 2002
Pegasus print
62.5 x 49.3cm (4 photos)
Image courtesy the artist*

pressured, they be more at risk of passing out. Essentially, it is the unpredictability of the outcome that engages the spectator, and perhaps drives the artist.

The portraits too focus our attention on the nature of emotional ambivalence. This is manifest in the artist's willingness to 'experiment' on humans, in the sitters' willingness to be 'experimented' upon, and in the viewers as compliant spectators of the 'experimental' product. It is also manifest literally in the portraits, which present contradictory emotions. The waxy distended skin reminds us of death, and yet popping veins and a bright-eyed greediness evokes life. This extreme state gives the subjects the appearance of fanatics, arousing our suspicions; we are unsure of their motives. The desperation of these Jim Thompson-like characters¹ is intensified through the staging of the portrait; the urgency most palpable in the swollen flesh and strained expressions – they are bottled up and ready to pop.

In an essay discussing Piccinini's *Still Life with Stem Cells*, Linda Michael states, 'Historically a still life (or *natura morta*) was often an allegory on the transience of life or the inevitability of death. Is the destruction of life implied in this scene?'² Michael is concerned with the tableau effect of the work and its self-containment. She suggests that the viewer is presented with suspended or frozen moments from which they are excluded, allowing for an impartial engagement with the work. This notion of the still life and the implication for the spectator is explicit in Hutchinson's work. It can be found in her first exhibition *The Still Life and the Cleaner*, an installation shown at 200 Gertrude Street from 1995. In this work Hutchinson presents the stark white equipment of a cleaner – or a prostitute – her uniform, gloves, cleaning fluids and hotel room ephemera placed on a white forensic table in a kind of fetishistic tableau. Although the character is anonymous, the scene implies ritual and in turn spectacle, as the viewer is forced into an awareness of mortality.



*Right: Eliza Hutchinson
The Ancestors, 2004
Light-jet print
101.4 x 79cm (6 photos)
Image courtesy the artist*

The sense of suspended animation in *The Ancestors* is at once alluring and repellent. Although the subjects gaze directly at us, the constructed world they inhabit gives the illusion that they exist beyond us. The truth, all the same, is staring at us. We are uneasy in the knowledge that we too could be exposed...

This contradictory portrayal of motion in still life imagery is manifest in nineteenth century cadaver 'action' portraits. The most notable Australian images are of bushrangers, in which the dead hero poses with gun in hand, memorialised in-situ. The mourning portrait was also popular at this time, and was also considered to preserve the spirit of the dead. Again, the gravity of the portraits was due to the long exposures, which also produced a fitting ethereal quality. On a more literal level, the mechanical process of exposing the silver-coated copper plates to light generated a pseudo authenticity by 'capturing' an imprint of the deceased.

Hutchison's portraits achieve a different kind of preserved excess – a slippage in both time and human flesh. The theatricality is neither stiff nor artificial, but is uncanny and sensational. The moment resonates and our voyeuristic senses are stirred as we are offered a glimpse into extremity.

The Ancestors was exhibited at TCB art inc. from 13 July to 6 August 2004. It was also shown at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in July 2004, as a part of Supernatural Artificial curated by Natalie King.

Ruth Learner is a Melbourne based writer.

<notes>

¹ Crime writer Jim Thompson created a cast of seedy, ambiguous, obsessive characters, see in particular Sheriff Nick Corey (*Pop. 1280*, Gold Medal, 1964), Deputy Sheriff Lou Ford (*The Killer Inside Me*, Lion Books, 1952), and femme fatale Fay Anderson (*After Dark My Sweet*, Popular Library, 1955)

² From Linda Michael's essay 'We Are Family', in *We Are Family: Patricia Piccinini* exhibition catalogue, 50th International Biennale of Art, Venice, 2003, p.13

Contextual Geometry

Matt Hinkley

by Danny Lacy

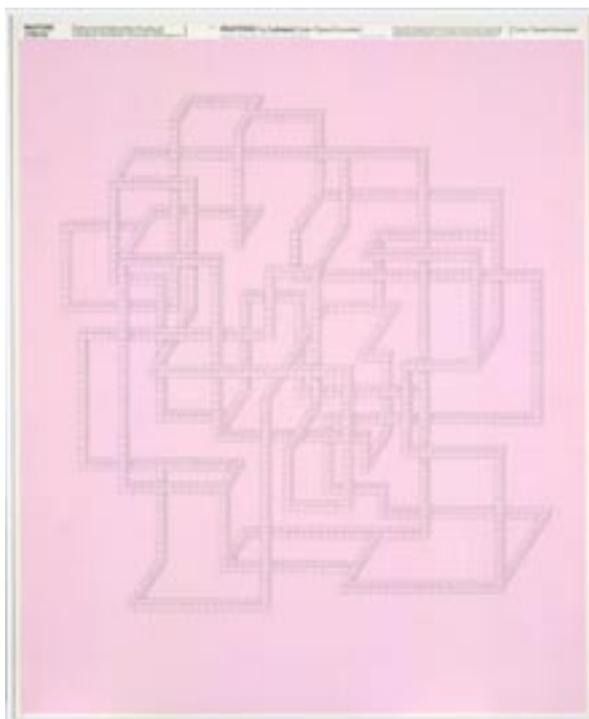
A growing social awareness of his place within much larger systems is helping Matt Hinkley to become actively involved in expressing his opinions and strengthening his resolve to make art. Opportunities in lecturing first year Graphic Design at Monash University and working as a studio assistant to John Nixon for three months leading up to Nixon's *EPW 2004* exhibition at ACCA also contribute to a process of maturation that are revealed in and around the conception of Hinkley's latest exhibition, *JA!*

Hinkley's art appreciation skills and critical approach in exploring and reading the many histories of Minimalism and Graphic Design is exhaustingly thorough, supplanting a huge visual database with which to reference and locate his own practice. His studies in archaeology have led to a self-proclaimed 'over romanticisation of certain eras', in particular European constructive design of the mid to late 20th century.¹ The design aesthetic that Hinkley is obsessed with is epitomised by the work of Karel Martens (Holland), Rolf Harder (Germany), Bruno Weiss (Germany) and Josef Müller Brockman (Switzerland).²

The 'romanticisation' that Hinkley talks about extends beyond minimalist surface tensions to a wider historical materialism primarily based in the authenticity of pre-computer design. This authenticity situates itself within the history of Graphic Design when labour intensive manual assemblage and sound technical knowledge and skills were pre-requisites in the production of work. Borrowing a work ethic from this era as one way of staying true to the past, Hinkley's laborious style of illustration aims at re-authenticating an art form that has become commodified by computer tools and technology.

Hinkley's first major solo exhibition *Safe From Books and Botany*, at TCB Art Inc. in late 2003, signals a new direction and a new beginning within his art practice. *Bif Rost (Rainbow Bridge)* 2002 is the pinnacle of his earlier experiments with terra-forming abstract space, consisting of an expansive floor sculpture that mapped the flow of timber grain with poured paint.³ *Safe from Books and Botany* is a stylistic leap in form and complexity from the organic, fluid forms prevalent in this early work.

*Below: Matt Hinkley
Safe from Books & Botany, 2003
Pencil on Pantone paper
63 x 51cm
Image courtesy of the artist*



Safe From Books and Botany reveals a constructivist alphabet soup with individual letters floating amongst a rhizomatic structure of hand drawn little cubes. These geometric subterranean networks transverse within the frame of pastel coloured Pantone paper, looking like a collision between the crystalline constructions of the Dozers from *Fraggle Rock* with the broken signifiers of a dyslexic dictionary. Influenced by styles of architectural drawing, diagraphics and information graphics, Hinkley's drawings map an abstraction inhabited by multiplying and expanding cubic units that form a textual geometry.

In his latest series of drawings *JA!* – exhibited at Clubs Inc., Melbourne in August 2004 and Mop Projects, Sydney in September – Hinkley continues to extend and refine the line that *Safe from Books and Botany* begins to draw. The Constructive building blocks that floated randomly within *Safe From Books and Botany* now present a unified, if not utopian solidarity lined up in formation. Like a model for a hardcore avant-garde version of *Sim-city*⁴ designed by Le Corbusier or Rem Koolhaas, Hinkley's planometric cubic constructions rise up out of the backdrop of different coloured gradients forming a text based modernist high-rise. The identical repetition of *JA!* at first conceals the fact that each of the five poster prints has been treated individually.



Above: Matt Hinkley
JA! 2004
Installation shot
Image courtesy of the artist

For *JA!* to successfully mimic the digital, a process of re-articulation is evolved, with consecutive syllables of digital and analogue information layering together to build the artwork. This process of construction involves initial hand drawn sketches that get scanned into a computer, redrawn in Illustrator and then reintroduced as pencil drawings on top of the masked digital prints. The outcome exposes a split between the digital inkjet print of the background and the skilfully rendered pencil line work of the foreground. What Hinkley manages to do so successfully is to translate the flatness between these two layers, disrupting the dialectic between digital and analogue and creating a space that traverses the boundaries between the smooth and the striated.⁵ While maintaining a mimetic and symbiotic relationship to computer technology, Hinkley's work understates the inherent complexity in combining such digital technology and traditional craftsmanship.

This discourse produced by *JA!* can be read as symptomatic of Hinkley's wider practice that ultimately challenges the disjuncture between art and design. *JA!* displays a

progression towards the refinement of a personal style heavily anchored within these combined histories. If art, and design for that matter, can be read as a personal vocabulary then Hinkley is in the process of expanding a dialogue within an abstract constructivist language, envisaging an awareness of the visual culture of the past through the eyes of the future.

Matt Hinkley is curating an exhibition of poster art at PB Gallery, Swinburne University, Prahran Campus in late February, 2005.

Danny Lacy is a Melbourne based curator and writer and committee member of Mir 11.

<notes>

- ¹ Matt Hinkley, interview with the artist, November 2004
- ² See Karel Martens, *printed matter/drukwerk*, Princeton Architectural Pr, 1997 & Josef Müller Brockman, *Art without Boundaries: 1950-70*, Thames & Hudson, 1972, pp.154-55
- ³ *Bif Rost (Rainbow Bridge)* was exhibited at 1st Floor Artists and Writers Space in 2002
- ⁴ *Sim City*. Maxis, Electronic Arts, 1993
- ⁵ Gilles Deleuze & Felix Guattari '1440: The Smooth and the Striated' in *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism & Schizophrenia*, The Athlone Press, London, 1988 pp 474-500

Mysticism, imaginary landscapes and sublime transmissions

Irene Hanenbergh

by Charlotte Hallows

Irene Hanenbergh transforms painting into a digital reproduction marked by the base elements of expressionism and the popular genres of horror and fantasy. Her work explores the occult that haunts hyper-reality. The artist's work is implicated in concerns of authenticity, originality, reproduction and the aura that have troubled painters since the emergence of photography in the 19th century. In hyper-reality, images can now be fabricated, circulated and consumed in the space of the simulacrum. The electronic reproduction can be transmitted across time and space in a conscious and unconscious, perceived and imagined hallucination. Using paintbrushes created digitally from software programs, Hanenbergh prints onto cold, metallic aluminium surfaces. She engages in the possibility of painting in a world without painting. She presents aberrations from a desert of instantaneous immanence.

Hanenbergh explores the residues of a sublime and melancholic aesthetic in popular culture and media. Her work is marked by themes of self-effacement, displacement and dwelling, priority and belonging. The artist engages with the work of Hieronymus Bosch, Albrecht Dürer and Casper David Friedrich. These artists approached painting as a mystical act by fusing images of earth, heaven and hell. In hyper-reality, Nature can be reproduced artificially. New media can fabricate absolutely the real thing demanded by the imagination. The artifice of the reproduction glorifies nature while simultaneously denaturing it in a sterile spectacle without a hint of habitation. Hanenbergh raises questions about the relation between technology and the state of nature. She considers how the world and art is governed. By machinery or by magic? By reason or excess?

Hanenbergh traces an imaginary and mysterious topography. This is a dialogical encounter in which one is intrigued by the discovery of similar cultural forms in distinct parts of the world, regardless of geographical distance and considerable historical years. In Hanenbergh's work, the imaginary realm includes esoteric elements drawn from high art, folk art, popular culture, the grotesque and bad taste. She produces images



*Above: Irene Hanenbergh
outward-out (Wolga banshees in New Orleans) 2004
Zund-print on aluminium, 80 x 60cm
Image courtesy the artist, Photo credit: John Brash*

that include pagan and Christian, eastern and western forms. The work presents real and imaginary forms including churches, pagodas, mosques and bridges.

The Santerian Twins (2003) presents the ghostly apparition of disembodied twin faces who stare out above a fantastic pagoda. The illusion enabled by the imaging technology is also nonsensical as the artist refers to Santeria carvings witnessed in Cuba. A pantheistic Afro-Cuban religious cult associated with the practice of voodoo, this is a hybrid religion that includes elements of Catholicism and is perceived as occult. Her geographic sites connect with the Wolga River and the Alborz and Hekla mountain ranges. Mythical creatures including bulls, tigers, horses and cats merge with settings of fantasy and horror. In *Presence* (2003) feline creatures are offered up to the viewer as if dissected. These inanimate faces have the frozen stare of masks.



*Above: Irene Hanenbergh
Santerian Twins, 2003 & Presence, 2003
Zund-print on aluminium
60 x 40cm
Photo credit: John Brash
Image courtesy the artist*

The work *Outward-Out (Volga Banshees Living in New Orleans)* traverses space and culture, past and present. The boundaries between high and low, outside and inside, human and animal, are scrambled by these imaging technologies. This work presents the spectre of the werewolf or Steppenwolf. These aberrant creatures neither announce nor recall anything but the intimate penumbra of omens. The wolf is a kind of event or 'Haecceity' of becoming in art and culture. Animals offer the possibility of a liminal threshold or passage for humans in metamorphosis and transformation. Jurgis Baltrusaitis suggests animals have become 'an obsession that corresponded to a way of thinking and feeling about nature and about life'.¹ Baltrusaitis writes that the knowledge of 'animal physiognomy' produced images out of an 'alphabet of signs' of a 'humanity that is tinged with something evil and terrifying, a humanity that escapes words or understanding'.² The werewolf is a monstrous hybrid of human and animal possessing two souls, a

being caught between the bestial and human, nature and culture, past and present. The figure is melancholic, homeless and 'outside of all security and innocence'.³

Hanenbergh's artificial images engage with nature and diversity, technology and human utilitarianism, reason and unreason, beauty and the sublime and their inverse in monstrosity and the grotesque. This is a drama of illusion and belief. The work engages the eye on the dazzling surface of the image and creatures move their weight and presence against this surface, with the threat and poignancy of an existence in a magic theatre of hyper-reality.

Charlotte Hallows is a writer and artist.

<notes>

¹ Jurgis Baltrusaitis, *Aberrations*, Cambridge and London, MIT Press, 1989, p.37

² *Ibid.*, p.22

³ Hermann Hesse, *Steppen Wolf*, London & New York, Penguin, 1965, p.28

Contemporary Art & Cultural Critique

Cycle tracks will abound in Utopia
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New Social Commentaries
Warrnambool Art Gallery
4 September – 17 October 2004
by Christine Morrow

Two recent exhibitions displayed work that foregrounds social and political critique: a curated show at a metropolitan gallery (*Cycle Tracks will abound in Utopia*) and a regional gallery's prize exhibition comprising entries submitted in open competition (*New Social Commentaries*). These exhibitions followed two similarly-themed shows from 2003: *Utopia Station* at the 50th Venice Biennale, with its series of scrappy installations featuring heavy-handed politics and, closer to home, Monash University Museum of Art's *Feedback: Art, Social Consciousness and Resistance*. The concern with overt critique expressed by self-consciously political work may represent a new mood in contemporary Australian art.

While the theme of the *Cycle Tracks* exhibition was 'utopia', it had a much looser structure than this concept might suggest, drawing on a wide pool of references from economics, political protest and activism rather than simply showing works that depicted or critiqued utopian visions. Utopia comes in a wide selection of flavours and the principal one served here was socialist. If there was a single concern addressed by most of the works that gave the exhibition its logic, it was communality and collectivity, particularly the power of collective action to engender social transformation.

Of all the arts, literature has proven the most sympathetic medium for exploring utopian themes and if utopia were a book, you'd find it under both Travel and DIY. It is no accident then that the most compelling work at ACCA, the one that provided the richest insights into utopianism, was also the most literary: Guan Wei's lush, narrative wall-painting. It depicted a series of scenes much like book illustrations designed for an epic poem, an *Odyssey*, a *Gilgamesh* or a similarly vast allegorical tale of natural disasters, mythic events, population movements and struggle.

Three works in *Cycle Tracks* took high-density apartment blocks as their subject. With their vertical mastery of space, tower blocks are often viewed in terms of the Enlightenment project, representing the triumph over gravity by human intellect and achievement that began



Above: Alban Hajdinaj
Eye to Eye, 2003
Video on dvd, colour, sound, subtitles
4 minutes, 30 seconds
Courtesy of the artist and gb agency, Paris

with tall buildings and presumably ends with space travel. But when considered in terms of housing, these buildings are the subject of tired and tiring back-and-forth utopia–dystopia debates.¹ One camp claims that high-density housing serves communitarian principles: it is a tool for social engineering, facilitating positive social interactions through sheer proximity, as detached housing cannot. The other camp claims it encourages only negative social interaction leading to sad ghettos full of criminals, crack-heads and junkies.

The three works by Alban Hajdinaj, Martin McInerney and Callum Morton edged towards the latter position. Each conceived such buildings as drab, colourless, soulless, even ghostly since the works were neither concerned with the actual people who might live in the buildings, nor what lives they might lead there.

The curator of *Cycle Tracks*, Juliana Engberg, struggled to integrate the numerous video works within the space and resorted to stylistic gimmickry to vary the presentation, incorporating projections, multiple screens and the placement of monitors at various heights on the wall, on the floor and stacked on top of each other. In both



*Above: John Bodin and Penny Jenz
Visceral, 2004
Type C photographic colour print collage
36 x 264cm
Courtesy of the artists*

Edward Bellamy's and Samuel Butler's 19th century conceptions of utopia (in *Looking Backward* and *Erewhon* respectively) machines were banished because of their tendency to tyrannise and enslave the humans that made them. I found a little unintended irony in the odd spatial arrangements the monitors were forced into, designed to overcome the tendency of each to look exactly like the clunky, squat, black plastic monitor next to it.

The best video works tackled economic themes head-on. A deceptively straightforward video by Katya Sander called *What is capitalism?* documented a series of staged interviews. The interviewer stopped passers-by as they traversed an otherwise empty stretch of scrubland. They were asked the same question in turn, 'What is Capitalism?' and they gave the various off-the-cuff, and not particularly insightful answers you might expect. What was intriguing, though, was that the video's staging – interviewer and subject encountering one another in the country – rehearsed the motif of Courbet's famous painting *The Meeting* (1854), which depicts the artist encountering his patron, Alfred Bruyas, and the wealthy man's servant while out walking. Sander's work echoed Courbet's concern to put the social, economic and political relationship between artist and patron under the spotlight by insisting that the artist's role is to interrogate the political and economic system in which he or she participates.

An exhibition can never be exhaustive of its subject matter but an obvious omission haunted *Cycle Tracks*. You cannot hold an exhibition anywhere in Australia with the words *utopia* and *tracks* in the title and avoid

the issue of Aboriginality. For *Utopia* is the name of an Aboriginal community north-north-east of Alice Springs that has produced some of Australia's greatest artists in Emily Kame Kngwarreye and Gloria and Kathleen Petyarre. And tracks can refer to the mark humans and animals leave in the landscape, a dominant motif on many Aboriginal paintings, ceremonial body markings and cultural artifacts. The absence of any work by Indigenous artists was experienced as a real lack within the exhibition, an omission that was named and amplified in the exhibition's title.

Other examples of artists adopting positions of cultural critique could be seen in the exhibition *New Social Commentaries* at Warrnambool Art Gallery. This exhibition's approach was more varied than ACCA's because of the wider scope for interpretation offered by the theme of social commentary, and because no one can predict what work will be submitted in competition for a prize.

Mostly, the subject of social commentary was well understood by the artists themselves and adhered to by the selectors, with some of the various themes encompassing commentary on family relationships, consumer culture, asylum seekers (including detainees) and the war in Iraq. But there were one or two odd inclusions. Marcel Cousins' painting *From Shinagawa* depicted what appeared to be an enlarged Japanese train ticket. The work was accompanied by a text that identified the creation of cultural identity as its theme. What exactly a Japanese train ticket might communicate about the formation of cultural identity was left unexplained.

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(editor Brendan Lee) OUT APRIL

Photofile covers: (left) © Mike Gray *Macho Grande* (detail) 2003, (right) © Darren Sylvester *How Do You Know If It Is Real Love* 2002

Main Image © Philip Brophy *Fluorescent*
Production still 2004 (Photograph by Robyn Lea)
courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery
Melbourne



*Left: John Bodin and Penny Jenz
Visceral (detail) 2004
Type C photographic colour print collage
36 x 264cm
Courtesy of the artists*

There were several instances where artists made claims about social commentary in the text accompanying their work, claims that the work itself simply could not sustain. Merrin Eirth presented a large-format oil painting featuring geometric motifs and chemical names and numbers. The explanatory text elaborated a consumer's fear and confusion when faced with chemical additives listed on food packaging. As the painting had none of the forcefulness of the text with its qualities of wild diatribe, I wondered whether she ought not to have submitted the text alone in the form of concrete poetry.

Elizabeth Newman was another artist whose explanatory text made unsustainable claims. Her installation *Soul...* was selected as the prize-winner and comprised an installation of glossy magazines on a coffee table, a clock on the wall, a mattress on the floor, a painted hessian banner, t-shirts and posters. The artist's statement implied that *Soul...* critiqued the way in which, under capitalism, the human subject is constituted through acts of consumption. However the installation was conceptually underdone, possessing no overall coherence except as décor. The loose, theoretically disparate elements failed to convince the viewer that their conceptual disconnections were deliberate or necessary. If this installation of furniture, posters and t-shirts was intended as the locus of some anti-capitalist resistance, then it was one that could only have been conceived within the pages of an IKEA catalogue. The artist's priority was the creation of a hip ambience generated by laid-back consumer items and a slacker aesthetic. You could almost see the quotation marks around the ironic slogans on the posters and t-shirts. I think the title gave it away; the ellipsis signals an omission in a sentence; in this case, it was social commentary that

Newman avoided. *Soul...* used all the right jargon but failed to live up to the claims it made for itself. It seemed to lack the courage of its own convictions.

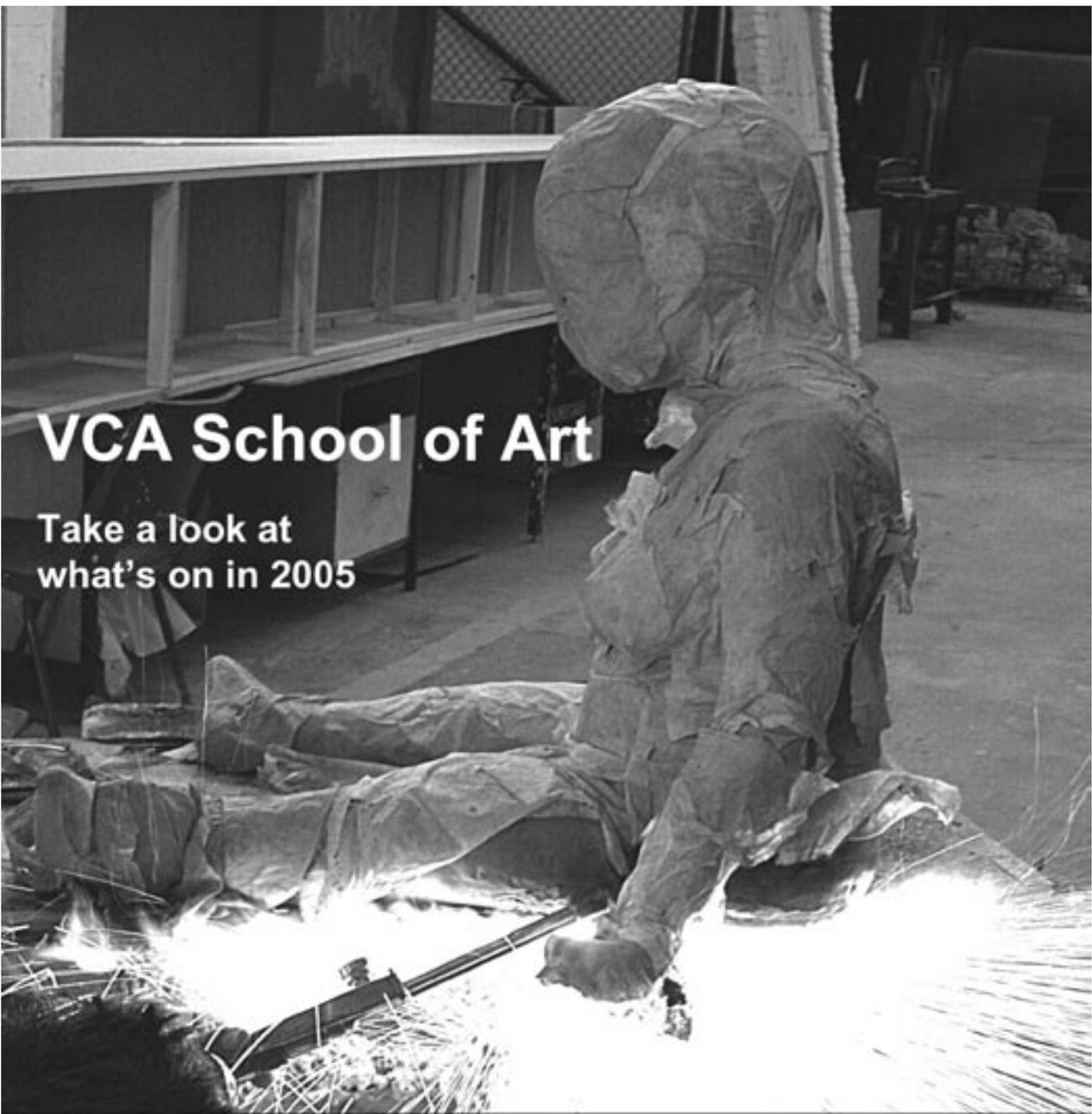
By contrast, a collaborative photographic work by John Bodin and Penny Jenz, entitled *Visceral*, fulfilled and even exceeded the claims the artists made for it. Its concerns were enumerated as 'race, deception, fear and primal instinct'. The photographic portraits employed the techniques of montage to create grotesque distortions of the subjects' physiognomies. They spoke of the deception of everyday appearances and hinted at discontinuities and ruptures that lie beneath the surface of the faces we show to the outside world, revealing the evil, torture, madness and existential terror that skulks there.

The paradox raised by a competition focused on social commentary is that it will principally attract works that the entrants self-select as being 'critical'. Social commentary is a much more elusive concept than 'landscape' or 'works on paper'. Sometimes artworks readily identified by their authors as social or political commentary are the most unsubtle; sometimes those works that offer the richest insights or are the most powerfully oppositional do not trumpet their own claims to critique the loudest.

Christine Morrow is an artist who lives and works in Melbourne.

<note>

¹ For a recent discussion of this debate, focusing on Callum Morton's work, see Peter Timms, *What's wrong with contemporary art?* Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2004, pp 82-86



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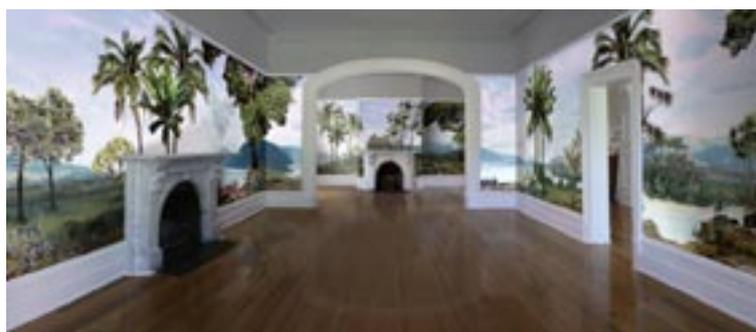
VICTORIAN COLLEGE OF THE ARTS
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With a View to Paradise

Valerie Sparks

Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts
26 November – 19 December 2004
by Ulanda Blair

*Below: Valerie Sparks
With a View to Paradise Gallery 1, 2004
Light-jet print
200 x 85cm
Image courtesy of the artist*



The 19th century family home that now houses the Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts boasts a grandiose history ripe for site-specific installation. With its imposing staircase, intricately decorated fireplaces and ceiling-to-floor bay windows, this Victorian mansion demands attention in its own right – an appeal that was recently heeded by digital artist Valerie Sparks.

With a View to Paradise presented four large-scale photographs of the Linden interior, which was rendered strangely unfamiliar through digital manipulation. The usually bright and airy gallery spaces were garbed in gaudy, early 19th century French wallpaper that featured assorted visions of a Pacific tropical paradise. From the window panes and cornices sprouted palm trees and succulents; along the skirting boards lay cobbled rocks and ferns; and enfolding the windows and doorways was a floating seascape panorama, replete with a lush, mountainous backdrop. Packed with pictorial detail, colour and visual depth, the prints were installed sparingly, creating an uneasy tension between the stark, light-filled interiors of the actual galleries and their re-presentation as heavily concentrated, curiously claustrophobic spaces.

A photograph displayed in the Linden entrance depicted the space around you, albeit walls transformed. Here a grey-on-white, hard-line tropical vista sprung from the skirting board, its palms spreading across the lemon-coloured Victorian wallpaper that was supposedly pasted above. Three other impressions of Linden showed the walls adorned with sultry island fantasies, their stark European light belying their supposed Pacific origins. Above the entrance to Gallery One was a skerrick of distressed, digitally produced wallpaper suggestive of Linden's domestic past.

With a View to Paradise Gallery 3 was arguably the most remarkable print in the series. The faux wallpaper was rose-tinted like idealisation itself and depicted a misty mélange of colonial flora that could just as easily have been appropriated from a kitsch 1970s tourist brochure bearing the exhibition's flippant title, as from a piece of décor favoured by bygone French aristocracy. In this photograph a view of the dense shrubbery and stately architecture of Linden's real exterior could be seen through the Gallery's bay window – confusing the eye with its partial and not-quite-perfect incorporation of the familiar into the foreign. Mobilising an uncanny amalgam of two-dimensional and three-dimensional space, realism and replication, familiarity and exoticism, proximity and distance, Sparks's slippery imagining of a colonialist paradise rested within one's grasp and yet eluded it.

With a View to Paradise placed the authority of a white, mythic, pre-immigration Australia, along with its socially retrograde concept of the exotic, within a perspective of historical and cultural relativism. Eschewing the simple temptation to disregard Linden's history and to treat the space as a tabula rasa, Sparks explicitly engaged with her surrounds, and in doing so interrogated an area of social, political and historical contestation. Like a hazy, part-forgotten memory, or a dream image slipping out of consciousness on the moment of waking, *With a View to Paradise* explored a weird and wonderful place and I feel all the better for having been there.

Ulanda Blair is a Melbourne based writer and is Gallery Coordinator at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

Lyell Bary, Anne Harry, Katie Moore, Steven Rendall & Constanze Zikos

Veneer

Curated by Christine Morrow
Blindside
21 October – 6 November 2004
by Martina Copley

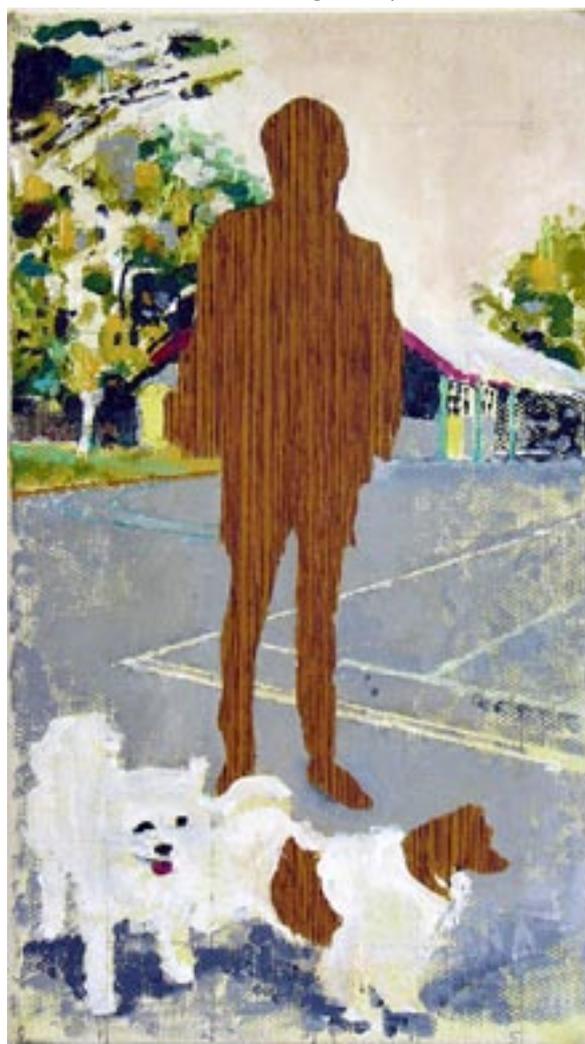
Veneer is a fake take on nature, a covering that is all surface and doesn't hold solid. Something you might use to camouflage something else, or to make it appear as other than it is. Mimicking the look of wood, it's not the real thing – stuff leaks from behind or under, the veneer cracks. With few pretensions to resemblance or deception, veneer is an iteration in low-tech from real to artificial. Manufactured to delight us with its deliberately decorative quality, veneer is non-eventful to the point of being almost invisible. Rigorous in its looseness, it is a kind of ornamentation tempered by restraint.

In this exhibition, curated by Christine Morrow, artists Lyell Bary, Anne Harry, Katie Moore, Steven Rendall and Constanze Zikos incorporate wood grain in their work. It appears in various guises – actual and simulated – as vinyl, laminate, veneer, hand-painted wood grain and plywood.

In Katie Moore's life-sized *Bench and Shears & Stones*, ordinary things suggestive of some kind of usage are transposed to the gallery site. You might for a moment consider sitting on the bench but then you understand that the foam seat would collapse; the clippers cannot be plied or sharpened; the stones are ringed with pale wood grain. Alluding to a sense of time and organic formation, these artifacts – like wood – contain their own history. There is a sensual delight in the intrinsic nature of the forms and materials, and a sense of slowness due to process. Joins and cuts in the Contact are obvious. With no attempt at disguise, Moore proposes 'mimicry without deception'.¹

Constanze Zikos's installation *Joy in Kleptomania* is reminiscent of a looted church interior where painted flecks mimic cool marble. A self-conscious translation, Zikos's veneer is a vertical patterning in foil vinyl that imitates the vocabulary of masonry. The intimate grandeur of this piece is devotional. Two open-ended columns border the window in runs of silver and grain, while the window frames a view of the city's cultural sites – museum, station, river and shrine. A mock temple – perhaps a sacrament to everyday living and our devotion

Below: Steven Rendall
Tears, Abuse and Accusations of Subterfuge, 2004
Oil on canvas
41 x 23cm
Image courtesy the artist, Blindside



to cultural edification, this work refers to the processes by which culture is reiterated across different contexts and histories.

Lyell Bary and Anne Harry engage with the suggestive quality of 'natural' wood grain by effacing it. In Bary's *Cuckoo II* the intersection between an Ellsworth Kelly drawing and the lines of wood grain in the plywood support offers a basis for composition that is unique and random. Crossings are rearticulated as flowing stencil-like shapes in purples and black that resemble parts of the body, leaves or flowers. Working with beech veneer in an ornamental grid formation, Anne Harry scorches the surface to submerge the grain. This blackness loosens the

Below: Constanze Zikos & Katie Moore
Veneer (Installation View) 2004
 Image courtesy the artists, Blindsight, and Tolarno Galleries (Zikos)



formula. Subtle shifts in the lie of the veneer, along with circular modulations pressed randomly into some of the tiles, allow for a delicate play of variation and repetition.

The deliberate slap-dash sketchiness of Steven Rendall's work defies hierarchical distinctions between real and fake. Like Moore, Rendall's works confuse their referents: part-painting, part-sculpture, *Caulfield #4* is an ashtray made from assorted combustible materials, a humorous memorial to the passing of time. A veneer shadow falls on a mock shelf and crawls up the wall behind like smoke. The cigarette filters made with cork effect contact add faux to faux. The title alludes to the artist's interest in formalism, transposition and artistic lineage.

The camouflage effect is disturbing in Rendall's paintings of imitation wood grain. *FA* is a painterly collage of an artist's studio where the subject is 'grained-out' against the gridded studio space to become a veneer simulacrum peeled away from the canvas, revealing the underside. This visual confusion between painted world and wood grain relates to the equivalent nature of adhesive laminate.² In *Tears, Abuse and Accusations of Subterfuge* veneer acts as counterfeit, obliterating the subject – a man with two dogs

standing in an unidentified location whose very image renders him invisible. *Monkey Painter* presents the artist as 'ape', mechanically replicating veneer on a roll, toying with ideas of representation, iteration and the natural.

Playful in its upending and refusal of traditional hierarchies, *Veneer* is not about illusion or immersion. It is not about an orchestrated emotional response. It unravels. All of the works speak of a kind of archaeology of memory. Any trickery is deliberate and transparent. A grotesque structural vocabulary in many of the works lends an arbitrary logic to the way in which strategies and processes transpose and carry private meanings and predilection. Low-tech methods of construction and materials point to the conventions that define everyday living and to the space where mistranslation is possible and creative.

<note>

¹ Christine Morrow, *Veneer*, exhibition catalogue, Blindsight Editions, 2004

² Ibid.

Martina Copley is a Melbourne based freelance curator and writer.

Disappointment Now

Matthew Griffin

Uplands, Melbourne
2 – 27 November 2004
by Lily Hibberd

Below: Matthew Griffin
spare girlfriend, 2004
Pegasus print
50 x 61cm

Photo credit: Cath Martin
Image courtesy the artist & uplands gallery

The Griffin Conundrum

Disappointment Now is an exhibition rife with puns and riddles, largely fashioned for the artist's own amusement. It is rare that an artist relishes making work, with little apparent regard for its appreciation. With the imagery being entirely urbane, *Disappointment Now* runs the risk of being too audacious. Maybe this is why there are haiku reviews supplied on the exhibition catalogue, as an overt foil to 'traditional' interpretation.

Disappointment Now is about the manipulation and contortion of artistic methods and imagery. Each work forms an aesthetic and material play on the form and content of another. With most contemporary artists the medium is subservient to a specific concept, but in *Disappointment Now* the order is messed up. In it Mathew Griffin melds photography with sculpture, which intersects with the installation pieces, and drawing is indistinguishable from painting. The transitions are not always comfortable – nor are they meant to be. Each of the six works has a twist that switches on your brain.

First up are a couple of photographs depicting a girl in a blue satin dress, posing as a fashion model. In one shot a paper cut-out, reading 'Remain Untamed', drools from her mouth. The girl is both very striking and weird looking. It's a beauty versus gross-out situation; the force of our attraction to the model rammed up against revulsion at the ooze of words. This image messes with the slickness of photography. In addition, the temporal logic of the portrait is distorted by the inference that the words are melting; the still moment is imbued with the performative. In a second photo, this girl has a white plastic bag on her head, printed with another girl's face. This is a brilliant picture because the paper bag implication is so foolish and farcical. A third shot shows a different woman – in fact it's the girl whose face imprinted (like the shroud of Turin) on the bag. This chick has the paper words coming out of her gob as well.

The games with the plastic bag continues across other pieces. As an item of an everyday order and an inordinately



wasteful thing, it's a superb object. In earlier exhibitions, Griffin included imagery of teenagers chroming. There aren't any in this show, but as an essential tool for the chromer the plastic bag is a throwback to the subject. Here the bag from the photo is readmitted as a scenario on the gallery floor: two googly eyes next to a deflated balloon-brain stare out of the open bag, wet paint spews out of the bag onto the floor. The pools of paint form the words 'Disappointment Now', which I take as an admonition: don't get your hopes up this show is not guaranteed to satisfy. A good way to lower expectations and also a witticism on the use of 'Now' in titles of recent institutional shows. I'm sure a few sharp players got this in-house art joke.



Above: Matthew Griffin

Images courtesy the artist and uplands gallery, Photo credit: Cath Martin

Left: London Dungeon, 2004

Balloon, drum sticks, drum stool, matchsticks, paper, table tennis balls, acrylic paint & marker

Dimensions variable

Right: disappointment now, 2004

Plastic bag, acetate, balloon, table tennis balls, acrylic paint & marker

Dimensions variable

In being both arty and anti-art, Griffin is taking a classic post-modern stance. In this genre high and low culture intermingle; art historical references are continually interspersed with ironic and playful allusions to popular culture. Griffin's haiku reviews attest to his signature exploitation of street culture. For instance, 'bogan rock and hip hop schlock'¹ and 'Gothic font versus dribbles. Rap metal freakout'.² Recent works of Griffin are littered with bongos, faded hip-hop artists, tattoos and wasted teenagers, but don't assume that they're included as a social commentary, distinctions aren't made between aesthetic and moral values. For Griffin vomit and graphic design are on an equal footing – a chromer as fascinating but as cursory as an etching by Albrecht Dürer.

Disappointment Now is a taste of the stuff that happens in the studio, a series of 'elegant solutions'.³ In it, we can read Griffin's playful exploration of little trains of thought, wherein the new things that intrigue him are allowed to ricochet off an anthology of the old ones. The brain emerges once again in a sculpture set up in the corner of the room. Two baseball bats lean on a drum stool encased in model-maker's balsa wood struts, and a third bat rests against the wall. There's melting paper text drooling off the seat... 'I don't want to be here'. The brain (a deflated balloon) is suspended in a ball made out of these same sticks. It's a wacky work of art and it takes on a funny persona the longer you look at it, the bats as arms and the ball as a head with bloodshot eyes. First-class contradictions emerge in the conflagration of found objects with craft techniques, as art objects, dodgy but skilfully made.

Definitely on the arty side of the battlefield is a large wall drawing. This piece combines raw materials with a design aesthetic. Standard size panels of masonite are bolted directly onto the wall, and adhesive vinyl cut outs create an intricate line drawing. A woman is kneeling, a long scroll draped over her shoulders. Parts of a lyric from a Black Flag song are revealed among the furls. 'This fucking city is run by pigs. They take the rights away from all the kids.'⁴ The composition and sharp linearity is akin to Renaissance etching, which has strong ties to universal styles of contemporary illustration. Maybe it's the Gothic line-work but this piece has a distinctly religious flavour (very similar motifs are on the quilted works that hang in Anglican churches). In relation to the rest of the show this is not an overly articulated work of art and it's evident here that the artist is not trying to homogenise the ideas for the sake of conceptual ease.

In the end it is much easier to produce and sell an exhibition with a series of works of a similar appearance. It is to Griffin's credit that he has freed himself the constraints of these customary roads to success, made all the more remarkable for being a commercial gallery show.

<notes>

¹ Lisa Radford, Haiku Reviews, Matthew Griffin *Disappointment Now* exhibition catalogue, 2004

² Geoff Newton, Haiku Reviews, Matthew Griffin *Disappointment Now* exhibition catalogue, 2004

³ An extract from a conversation with Matthew Griffin at the Town Hall Hotel, December 2004

⁴ Lyrics by Black Flag, from 'Police Story', *Damaged*, 1981

[im] mortal mortal

Pauline Lavoipierre

Intrude Gallery

26 November – 7 December 2004

by Georgiana Archer

Chasing the uncanny

Pauline Lavoipierre works in photographic, digitally manipulated prints along with sculptural forms. She uses a combination of latex, moulded plastics, plasticine, foam, paint and Vaseline. In previous explorations, Lavoipierre has looked at voodoo, cults, dolls, and other uncanny fields. Lavoipierre's inspiration is derived from a bizarre range of visual and literary references which border on the unthinkable, untouchable and unviewable.

This new work is the result of distilling these complex and varied concepts into a single, refined thought. The exhibition plays out a range of visual manifestations of the grotesque, on the edge of beauty and the uncertainty of our perception. The desire to touch these works is overwhelming but the sensations are repulsive. There is an association formed between the familiar and that which is too confronting to consider. Out of the ornate, traditional, picture frames ooze forms that morph between sexual, organic sea-forms and varying surface textures: varying between wet, plastic, tacky, spongy and smooth.

Mens Sana (2004) and *Corpore Sano* (2004) dominate the first room of the exhibition. These organic extrusions bulge obscenely from their Victoriana-style frames expressing the kind of grotesquery that evokes strange reactions such as the desire to suck, pull, poke, and lick the fleshy forms. There is beauty within that is reminiscent of our own corporeality. The horror of determining whether or not this beauty is internal or external conflicts with our tactile desires and brings into question the boundaries we obey within our normative frameworks.

The Victoriana-style frames present an image of grand beauty that represents an era defined by its repression. Instead of containing restrained images of refined gentry, Lavoipierre's frames project forms that cannot contain themselves; they grow, move and express with no regard for niceties. There is certainly an aspect of the abject feminine, the recognisable disturbance that occurs between the corporal experience that as women



*Above: Pauline Lavoipierre
Mens Sana (Sound Mind) and Corpore Sano (Sound Body), 2004
Installation view
Photo credit: Pauline Lavoipierre
Image courtesy the artist*

we grow to accept and the delicate beauty that even in contemporary society we identify with generally.

Mens Sana means 'sound mind' and *Corpore Sano* means 'sound body'. Given that these two works appear more like the internals of some living being, what could Lavoipierre mean? Perhaps she points to the only real certainties in life, that we are formed of organic matter and we are nothing more than this. Maybe a sound body and mind are the pragmatic acceptance of our own mortality and that anything beyond this idea is mere fantasy.

The work presented in the exhibition *[im] mortal mortal* is the result of a two-year exploration into defining the uncanny. Lavoipierre has fused ideas of spirituality, sensuousness, and life or death transition in a search for the strange spaces that exist between what we think we know.

Georgiana Archer is a Melbourne based artist, lecturer and writer.

Love Letter

Noël Skrzypczak

MIR 11

19 November – 10 December 2004

by Geoff Newton

I must admit I'm finicky for titles. If 'love' were a single letter what would it look like? A big X? Three X's? Or maybe a zero? Something to be filled – a hole or whole lotta love? Nah. Ok. Love letters. Raw. Beautiful. Honest. Self-conscious, full, brimming with laughter, ecstatic, giddy and fluid. Scrawled x's, smudged scented smooches and poetic touches are secretly folded into an envelope, anxious for reply, maybe adulation. A beginning.

In preparation for her installation at MIR 11, Skrzypczak spent months drawing, mixing paint and working from sketches and designs of the gallery space. Skrzypczak works directly with colour, spontaneity and painting's materiality—specifically pouring acrylic paint. The pouring technique is simple yet calculated in its conception. Paint is mixed in measured volumes, tinted to a desired hue then carefully blended and applied onto large mylar-surfaced sections. This process becomes a voluptuous and shadowy seduction, the paint lazily oozing onto the plastic coated surface, colours twisting and mixing against another, bubbling and sliding. The musky perfume of mediums and pigment becomes intoxicating. Colours slow down to become marbled and physical. Shapes become impossibly delicious muscular deformities. Thick acrylic bands of twisted colour are then collaged directly onto the wall like a selection of exotic underwear for private viewing. It is then these dreamy serpents begin slithering in deep space, careening off smooth edges and occasional bumps, fumbling for articles of clothing and flesh. They encompass the viewer entwined in mid-air embrace. Think Murakami meets Bazelitz in a choreographed studio battle, gracefully jostling for wall, chainsaw and airbrush alike – with Dale Frank directing.

In MIR 11, Skrzypczak's deep greens, powdery pinks, blues and greys thrash motionless on the wall, about to collapse in elegant exhaustion. It's action painting in freeze frame. Huge brushstrokes defying gravity. They emit static calm over the space. It's warm. Must be the steamy part of the letter, where it whispers dirty words in your ear and slips one hand down the front of your trousers. Ahem. Walking down the narrow gallery space towards the window, the rich tendrils of colour seep



*Above: Noël Skrzypczak
Love Letter (detail) 2004
Synthetic polymer paint on wall
Dimensions variable
Photo credit: Cath Martin*

across the wall, spreading like a weed or a fever, they puddle for a moment on the floor, then curl back on one another while your back is turned. Stretching out like some post-coital couple they coo and tickle those last few woozy sensations from their skin. They murmur and giggle, drunk on bodily perfumes, eyes and mouth. A creature writhes onto the window toward the cityscape outside. How far does it go? This is the biggest love letter I've ever seen! I'll never know how it ends.

Geoff Newton is a Melbourne based artist.

Finola Jones & Geneine Honey

Artificially Reconstructed Habitats

Finola Jones

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Front Gallery

29 October – 20 November 2004

You Will Grow To Love Me

Geneine Honey

Westspace Gallery 1

29 October – 13 November 2004

by Brendan Lee



Lions and Tigers and Bears

The past twelve months have seen a phenomenal amount of gallery space dedicated to video art. It's always been here of course, but not in the shovel loads we've had to endure recently. This would supposedly make reviewing video art easy, so I decided to take a look at two video artists exhibiting simultaneously. Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces concealed the works of Finola Jones and Westspace revealed the kiddie-cute Geneine Honey installation *You Will Grow To Love Me*. With the *Cremaster Cycle*, Shirin Neshat and Tony Oursler all fresh in my mind, I was hoping to champion a bit of local content and, with a bit of luck, challenge the international style oozed out by the educational canon. Thankfully I found out that Finola Jones was Irish not Australian and not all video artists make music videos.

Cliché number one: Quality over quantity. Finola Jones presented for our multi-screen pleasure a gaggle of videos under the banner of *Artificially Reconstructed Habitats*. Sounding like Selina Ou's titling of her photographic

works, I was horrified to be confronted with such a haphazard style and the lack of attention being paid to most aspects of this work. I loathe to even think of calling it an installation, when the only considered part of the work appeared to be the painting-out of the most redeeming feature of Gertrude's front space: its windows. The DIY-style of the placement and construction of the monitor housings left more of a resonance in the works than the banal videos themselves. The final product was a room full of still life video works and an unmasked video projection. I thought the days of out-monitoring the last show were over. Still, sourcing all that equipment must have been fun.

*Above: Finola Jones
Artificially Reconstructed Habitats, 2004
Installation view
Six channel video, projector & monitors
Photo credit: Christian Capurro
Image courtesy of the artist*



*Above: Geneine Honey
You Will Grow To Love Me, 2004
Single channel projection & installation
Installation detail
Image courtesy of the artist*

In 2002, Gertrude CAS had Shaun Gladwell's 'What art can I make on holiday' (not the title) in the same room with a bank of television monitors. These pieces were equally as banal and Flight Centre-like, however unlike Jones's work, Gladwell's moved (as a moving image should) and they could not have been replaced by photographs, making the viewer acknowledge the medium rather than wonder why a slide show wasn't employed. Regardless, most of my time in Jones's video habitat was spent waiting for one of the caged animals to drop a shit, because that would have been more thought provoking than this show.

Cliché number two: Don't work with children or animals. Does the same go for using them as your subject matter? Well, Honey's installation certainly looked the part. There were painted walls, which diminished the mortuary feel of Westspace, an oversized teddy bear and large learning letters. The components were an obvious toying with the concept of a child's view of consumption. The drawcard for me was to see another of Honey's holographic attempts. As we all know, holograms are impossibly difficult, but it is within the realm of artists to attempt the impossible and suspend disbelief in the viewer. Honey had created a double-ended glass baby's bottle through which she projected an image that was distorted by the shape of the

vessel. Here was my point of contention: the beautiful image Honey chose to use was that of a four door SRV or a Toorak Tractor. Now if we put the elements of the show together, such as the child's playroom, bottle and teddy, we come up with a valiant attempt at critiquing Australia's upper-middle classes. Honey's claim that the 4WD is a status symbol on par with children in wealthy families, only proved to be a distraction in a beautifully assembled installation.

What interested me in comparing the installations of Jones and Honey was how the high craft aesthetic, as championed by Australia's institutions, had infiltrated the video artist's oeuvre. Has video art come to the point where it takes gimmicks and props to garner the attention of the public? Possibly. If Jones had stuffed one of those animals and plopped it in the corner (rather than filming animals that appeared stuffed) viewers could have lurked around her installation ignoring the boring videos (I heard you Phil). Or better still, what if Jones hadn't painted out the windows? We may have seen a Chrysler Jeep lumber past to pick up the kids.

Brendan Lee is a Melbourne based video installation artist and curator who thinks ACMI should turn the lights on.

+reduction

Robert Mangion

Kings Artist Run Initiative
22 October – 13 November 2004
by Bianca Mann

You find yourself giddied by the steep perpetual staircase at the threshold of Kings ARI, on the seamy end of King Street. The eerie sounds of violin and cello creep through the narrow, ascending passage and guide you to the gallery space in which *+reduction*, a collaborative installation by visual artist Robert Mangion and composer James Hullick, is on exhibition.

At once, striking red wall text attracts your eye just before fading steadily into oblivion. The first line of the text is bright red but in subsequent lines the colour fades, until it finally blends with the white of the wall. This text abandons spacing so that each word runs directly into the other, imparting a cadence that correlates with the rhythm of violin and cello sounds that slink into the ears. One of the main themes in the exhibition is the articulation of space, form, sound and words on the basis of chance procedure and impermanence. This develops Mangion's inquiry of intertextual practice that he presented for the Melbourne International Arts Festival in 2003, with the work *Act of Refusing to Dance*.

Acting on visual perception as a continuous textual field the words are flanked by two dark, abstract panels of similar dimensions on either side. Inverted versions of one another, the paintings are underlaid with a vibrant red ground that glows through the transparent dark skins of the surface in the form of a thin, morphing line that dominates both pieces. These paintings allude to a post-minimalist geometric abstraction and a simplification of the human head. This entire component of the exhibition forms one seamless, rectangular entity. The work explores ideas about what lies beneath the surface of perception and the way visual matter is subject to slippage.

Turn around and you have the binary oppositional words: sea-land, bordered by expansive panels of blue, mauve and red in linear intervals of altering duration. The intervals in the paintings correspond with those in the ascending cello and violin sounds, deliriously audible through 12 speakers, delicately suspended with long wires throughout the cube-like space, creating the effect of disembodiment and sculptural mass. The



Above: Robert Mangion
Sea Land, 2004
Mixed media
Dimensions variable
Photo credit: Brendan Lee
Image courtesy the artist

sound transports the viewer seamlessly from one work to another. On the adjacent wall, Mangion has placed a constellation of 25 template forms that echo the effects of the floating speakers both visually and sculpturally. The forms extrude a nuance of colour from deep red to maroon and blue. They are layered with a compressed graphite surface that has the appearance of heavy metal.

There is a sense of experimentation in the way the artists combine concept and method, creating a delicate balance between a sophisticated reductionist expression and an emotive response to the lived experience of being in the environment. In *+reduction* you are prevented from focusing on a single aspect, instead you take in the context of the work as a whole. One senses the use of a complex layering of different visual and sonic narratives that subtly inform the experience of the work itself.

Bianca Mann is a Melbourne based freelance writer.

The Love-sick Girl: Series On Hysteria

Violeta Capovska

*Aikenhead Gallery, St Vincent's Hospital
12 – 14 November 2004
by Angela O'Rourke*

After working for several months as artist-in-residence at St Vincent's Hospital, Violeta Capovska installed *The Love-sick Girl* at the Aikenhead Gallery. Linocuts, photographs and video were arranged around the exhibition space, providing an initial impression of sensuality and quiet. Printed lines on organza overlapped to create veiled moiré effects. Texts and images were playfully repeated and reversed in linocuts, while the meticulous carving of text and line suggested a welcome therapeutic value in the making of the work itself. Underlying this exhibition was an understated virtuosity in the linocut medium. The delicate tones of these prints, the black and white photographs and sombre-toned videos evoked the monochromatic medical imagery of MRI scans or ultrasounds.

A closer look was more unsettling. Words appeared in lists: the names of women in Freud's famous cases, or mental illnesses. Sometimes the words were reversed; all were printed a grey as soft as murmurs through the space. There were images of institutionalised female madness and allusions to contemporary maladies like eating disorders and post-natal depression Capovska, familiar with the psychologist D W Winnicott's writings on motherhood, also expressed motherhood's ambiguity and life-and-death imperatives: 'I'm a good enough mother', 'breastfeeding is bliss', 'missing mother', 'protecting mother'.¹

Some texts were printed on organza cutouts that could have been hospital shifts or an asylum's uniforms. These were laid over various linocut images of Dr Charcot's hysterics or images of nineteenth-century medical instruments for curettage. These ghostly allusions to 19th century garments echoed the garments in Capovska's carefully restaged photographs from Dr Charcot's lectures at the Salpêtrière Hospital, in which women acted out poses of their hysteria while under hypnosis.

Feminist writers have long championed 'hysterics' like Freud's Dora – 'someone who has her words cut off, someone for whom the body speaks' – revealing their power as disrupters of the status quo and received



*Above: Violeta Capovska
The Love-sick Girl, 2004
Video installation & linocuts printed on chiffon
Dimensions variable
Photo credit: Kenneth Pleban
Image courtesy of the artist*

history.² But the particularity of the hospital location gave this work an unmediated relevance, as did the unsettling video of spoken extracts from the medical archives of women patients at St Vincent's from 1904 to 1907.

'Art is like a secret', says Annette Messenger, 'an epigraph.... We must not try to show too much, to divulge everything, to unveil too much. We must give some small clues, even unnecessary clues'.³ Capovska did not try to claim too much in this poetic installation; connections were not to be forced. Her work was instead alive with the horror of the disavowal of a woman's ability to know what she needs and the language and spectacle that surround women's desires and sufferings. And in a nicely-judged touch, following Charcot and Freud, was a final video. Actress Olivia Davis, who had featured in the Salpêtrière tableaux, broke out of her hypnotic poses and was herself: a 21st century woman wryly telling her own story.

Angela O'Rourke is a Melbourne based writer.

<notes>

¹ D W Winnicott, *Through Paediatrics to Psychoanalysis*, Karnac Books, 1992

² Hélène Cixous & Catherine Clément, *The Newly Born Woman*, University of Minnesota Press, 1986, p.154

³ Annette Messenger, in an interview in *Journal of Contemporary Art*, 1995

<http://www.jca-online.com/messenger.html>

Leslie Eastman & Natasha Johns-Messenger

Pointform

Conical Contemporary Art Space Inc.

5 – 20 November 2004

by Kit Wise



Pointform, a collaborative spatial installation by Leslie Eastman and Natasha Johns-Messenger, proposed that the space of the gallery itself was both the subject and the spectacle of the work. *Pointform* seemed to present a philosophical problem, perhaps a variation on the seminal essay by Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded field', concerning how the site of an art work and the work in that site is seen to 'collaborate' in the perception of the viewer.¹ In addition to focusing on the remarkably beautiful gallery, a central concern was the impossibility of registering the space of the work in isolation from the active viewer. That much-vexed notion of perception was given a thorough going over. Not only was the perceptive act of individual viewers deconstructed; there was the experience of observing other people in that space – the perceiving of the perceivers.

Subtle shifts in the reading of the architecture of Conical were overpowered by the seemingly fragmented bodies of the other viewers – floating hand gestures, disembodied heads, absent torsos – caused by a deceptively simple device. A mirrored wall bisected the gallery, with the middle band removed and placed across an adjacent corner. The mirror was a highly reflective membrane, stretched over a triangulated steel frame and heated with blowtorches to be pulled absolutely taut. The material suggested the infinitely sensitive chemical surface of a photographic negative or cine-film. Perhaps solarisation, the lower-tech forerunner of such processes, where the negative or shadow of an object is recorded through sunlight falling over it and onto specially treated paper, more accurately described the interplay of presence, absence and light in the installation. Curious moments



Above & across:

Leslie Eastman and Natasha Johns-Messenger
Pointform (detail) 2004
 Reflective film & steel frames
 Dimensions variable
 Image courtesy the artists and Conical

of *mise en scène* proliferated, often reminiscent of the 1933 film *The Invisible Man* (1897) directed by James Whale,² as the field of our peripheral vision became a mutable and fluctuating zone, a blind spot in our experience of the gallery.

The revolutionary illusionism of Whales' early special effects seemed to resonate throughout the installation. Voids in perception were encountered in the locations where the reflective surface of the work and the fabric of the architecture met. Too intimate to be disrupted by the reflected image of the viewer, these small sites created Rorschach-like patterns, an effect emphasized by the mottled texture of the distressed walls of the gallery. As intended with the original psychometric tests, these quieter instances in the installation where the imagination of the viewer projected through the perception of an image represented unformed absences. Capable of registering the act of perception alone, they excluded the absolutes of both the space and the viewer.

Assume that any notion of space can be taken as an absolute in the advent of quantum mechanics and string theory; in which space bends under gravity and the three dimensions are reconciled with another seven (if not twenty three...). In this context, Eastman and Johns-Messenger could be said to have introduced a 'singularity' into the gallery: a unique point (or point-form) such as a black hole, which answers only to its own rules of physics and in doing so poses profound questions about the medium that has created it.

Perhaps it is not the answers provided by science but its hypotheses that were of real interest to the artists. The pictorial systems of classical perspective and analytical

cubism were both interrogated by the installation. The dependence on vanishing points and horizon lines on the one hand; and refracted, unfolding multiple-views of objects (viewers) in space on the other. Perhaps the work operated as Einstein predicted, by deforming vision and the perception of space, through the 'gravity' of the installation. Rather like a diffraction grating, which is capable of bending light into curving, converging trajectories, *Pointform* conflated figure and ground, content and context, revealing perception as the glue or gamut of the two conditions. In doing this, the work accelerated a familiar aspect of current Melbourne practice via a collaborative methodology, both in the partnership of Eastman and Johns-Messenger, and within the scope of the project itself. This very timely ambition harnessed the potential of relational aesthetics³ with the best of post-Minimalist abstraction: able 'to boldly go and seek out new life...'⁴

Kit Wise is an artist and occasional art writer.

<notes>

¹ Rosalind Krauss, 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field,' Hal Foster (ed.) *The Anti-Aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture*. Seattle, Washington, Bay Press, 1983.

² James Whale (1893-1957), director of *The Invisible Man* and *Frankenstein*

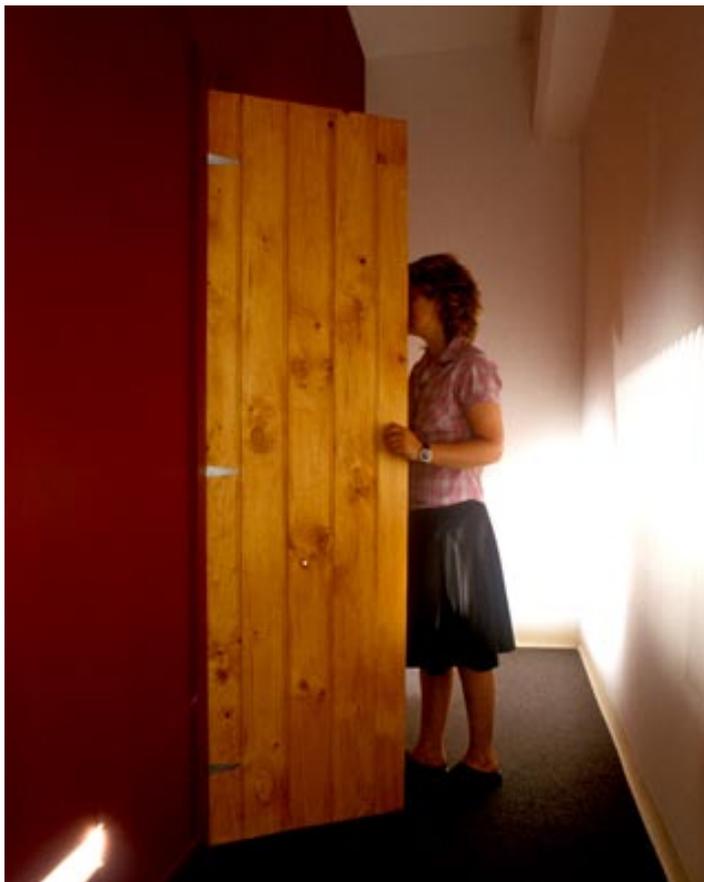
³ 'Relational aesthetics' describes a strand of contemporary art in which the sphere of human relations constitutes the site of the artwork's meaning. See: Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, les Presses du Reel, Dijon, France, English version, 2002

⁴ Attributed to Gene Roddenberry, creator and executive producer, *Star Trek*, US television series, 1966

Dust My Broom

Camilla Hannan

*West Space Inc, Gallery 3
19 November – 4 December 2004
by Bruce Mowson*



*Right: Camilla Hannan
Dust My Broom, 2004
Plasterboard, timber, DVD audio & 6 speakers
Dimensions variable
Images courtesy the artist
Photo credit: Christian Capurro*

You are standing in pitch black, your whole body is straining to listen. You cannot help but do so: in the darkness your hearing is in control. The backs of your knees sense scratching at close proximity. The nearness makes your stomach tighten up. Your head shrinks down into your neck and rotates to the right. From over the left shoulder comes more soft but hard sounds. They surround you, trying to get in. In the dark you don't know what they are but, because you can hear, you know exactly where they are. And because you can hear, you know how they work. They have small instruments: drills, chisels and knives. They press into the soft wood, gouging, furrowing and cleaning.

Sometime in the future, there will be a flashback. You are in the closet again and the quiet drills are carrying

out their smooth attack, coming from behind and from the sides. This is how it will feel when they finally reach your skull. Then you will hear them directly, not through your ears but through your bones. They know that they cannot fail, because you are out of control. Your body reacts before your brain can think. They know they have you.

You were tricked and they got to you. When you saw the doors in the false wall, you opened them. Walking into the closet was the next step. There were no visible signs. No visible clues. You never had a chance. You've been cleaned out.

Bruce Mowson is in your closet.

New Work

David Rosetzky

Sutton Gallery

27 November – 22 December 2004

by Kerrie-Dee Johns

The Chemistry Between Us

In the new work of David Rosetzky, characters fade in and out of their portraits only long enough to grace us with a superficial presence, then leave again, pulled back from where they came from by the gravity of glittering disco balls in Rosetzky's installations. The people that occupy Rosetzky's work inhabit a separate sphere of existence; they are people we see about, people whose names come up in gossip, people who we will never know, somehow separated from us for no special reason.

Modern isolation and atomisation: the topic of conversation on the lips of contemporaries including Rosetzky, Muntean/Rosenblum and Darren Sylvester. They speak of it with camp humour and irony. In the artists' portraits of modern life, models mimic poses in magazines; sing the sentiments of pop songs and epitomise the idealism of advertising. With blank stares, the models act as empty vessels to be filled with the projected desires of their audience. These art works offer no solution to the modern dilemma, only present a lesser nihilism than the eighties novels of Brett Easton Ellis. "But how well do we ever know anyone", asks Sean Bateman in *Rules of Attraction* (1987).

In the first room of the gallery, illustrations are accompanied by written dialogue of an unseen protagonist. An inner dialogue draws us into a play of pathos that is never resolved but lies open-ended like a novel that has lost its last pages. In the second room of the gallery we find ourselves surrounded by a room of doppelgangers, the portraits arranged around the room all looking inwards. Cut and constructed from one set of images, they share the same aesthetic and emotional deprivation. The images are composed physically of multiple layers. Like sedimentary rock, they show evidence of an evolution over time: with every skin, a life lived. These people are a breed of chameleons; more reptilian than human, their transformations come courtesy of digital software. Grouped together in some sort of collective, we can come to the conclusion that they share the same cultural lineage and pictorial pedigree, perhaps descendants of



Above: David Rosetzky
Self Contained, 2004

Type c photographs, stained Victorian Ash, acrylic sheets, nickel chains & acrylic on mirror balls. 145 x 144 x 181 cm
Image courtesy of the artist and Sutton Gallery

the dandy, middle-class, educated and urban.

If the dandy was an emblem of social relations in 19th century Paris, these figures may have some comment on the social relations of our time, but instead they remain mute and mysterious. They do not draw us into their dramas but force us towards introspective excess. To this end they persuade us to think about our own social relations. How community has been reduced to demographic statistics and lifestyle choice. How success is awarded to those who are the most individually ambitious, not the most humanitarian. How love can be made to appear synonymous with beauty. They gaze outwards into a social sphere where forces are not poised and still, like the icons of yesterday, but active and metamorphic like us.

Kerrie-Dee Johns is a freelance curator and arts writer based in Melbourne.

Cate Consandine, Kate Fulton, Starlie Geikie, Bianca Hester & Katherine Huang

Mir11

22 October – 12 November 2004

by Helen Johnson

Imagining five arresting practices converging in a narrow, elevated space can conjure all sorts of fancies, none of which were likely to align with what really awaited us. The wildest thoughts about the entry to this show did not stretch to vodka shots and coffee-coated lemon wedges on a spread of crocheted blankets, but the refreshments made more sense on the way out than in.

Cate Consandine, Kate Fulton, Starlie Geikie, Bianca Hester and Katherine Huang all have feisty individual practices and each contributed a work in keeping with her oeuvre. Nevertheless, the decision to confine all work to the tapered end of the gallery suggested a collective reading. Despite this (or perhaps because of it) the works at first seemed to relate to one another like patients in a doctor's waiting room, curious but aloof. I chose to see the aesthetic shifts between the works as an exquisite corpse of sorts, each adding to an intensifying story that became a discourse on domestic dystopias; one that only contained or referred to items manufactured or crafted by humans.

The first work met with was Geikie's skillfully embroidered sampler of girls' names. Although each had its own style of font – suggesting uniqueness of identity – it was implied that these imagined girls were all cut from the same cloth. Geikie's work reflected the same limited concept of 'choice' based on presumed ideals that serve as a medium for the concentrated consumerism of teen magazines.

To the right, Consandine created the residue of a makeup-fuelled rampage. It was wonderfully ambiguous: the product of tearful rage or joyful abandon? Watery streaks of mascara, feverish rouge, madder lipstick and spectrum blue eyeshadow were smeared about the remains of what I first thought was a violently removed false fireplace (though on reflection I decided to see it as a mirror). The fireplace viewed as a metaphor for the vagina – don't look at the mantelpiece whilst stoking the fire – along with the lurid makeup, spoke of a desire to explode the myth of woman as object. Seen in conjunction with Geikie's work there was a whiff of cynicism towards the struggle

*Below: Detail of works by Kate Fulton,
Katherine Huang & Bianca Hester
Photo credit: Bianca Hester*



for aesthetic perfection. Was Consandine presenting an orgy of self-hatred brought on by the unseen woman's realisation that she could never be the Laura-Jordan or Juffie-Kane of Geikie's prettily embroidered monikers?

Hester's work emanated an intense feeling of superstition in its careful placements and compulsive relations. On the opening night an architect (from the adjacent offices) stood before Hester's work proclaiming the merits of spatial intervention, but to me it contributed more subtly to a conversation with the other works. It engaged masculine conventions of architecture in a deconstructive way; blueprints becoming objects, objects becoming facsimiles, facsimiles becoming propositions. It flirted with the possibility of coming to an agreement with the interior, then shrugged the notion off like a fickle adolescent.

Huang's assemblage – involving toys, pegs and chip packets – reconfigured the daily residues of early motherhood in contemporary society, complementing Geikie's pre-adolescent idealism and Consandine's fervid femininity. Abstracted, and in turn freed from function, Huang's objects read as a coping mechanism, an escape route from neurosis. Disposable child-distractors were beheld afresh, synthesized into miniature landscapes and gentle, aesthetic orders.



*Above: Opening picnic in the Mir11 foyer
Photo credit: Justin Andrews*

Fulton's plumbing pipes blended seamlessly into the space whilst aligning formally with Hester's work, creating a bridge between the artworks and their environment. For those unaware of Fulton's practice, the installed pipes may have passed unnoticed but acknowledging them as works of art in turn revealed them as being empty or impotent. Whilst the other works gravitated towards the window as if seeking connectivity with the external world, Fulton's pipes worked as an anchor to the interior.

I found myself wondering – politically correct or not – whether the threads of sexual identity running through this exhibition were partly an unconscious result of mounting an all-female group show in a space run

predominantly by males. Issues of identity and sexuality in an object-based, post-consumerist context are relevant to us all, and this exhibition provided some rich food for thought on the matter.¹ On the way out a lemon-and-coffee imbued vodka shot on an old baby blanket seemed somehow appropriate.

Helen Johnson makes art and writes in her native town of Melbourne.

<note>

¹ The term post-consumerism describes an increasing trend towards the rejection of a lifestyle based around spurious objects in favour of a simpler, more functional existence and a return to an engagement with natural systems

Historical Nature: Ruin

Michael Conole

*CLUBS*project inc.

6 November – 27 November 2004

by Anthony Gardner

I recently, naughtily overheard an editor of a quarterly art rag bitching about *un Mag*. Aside from the obvious – the art moguls are actually taking note of the young upstart – what the editor elicited was the usual litany of reasons to reject anything emergent: treading on one's turf, the lack of any need for a new art magazine (hmmm) and the lack of anything good coming from either emergent writers or emergent artists (again, hmmm). The urge for a little daddy-killing (metaphorically, of course) had not, for me, been higher.

Why raise this banal tidbit of artworld oedipalism in a review on contemporary emergent practice? Surely 'emergent art' scenes have matured beyond such desires? We need only compare *un Mag* with previous, vaguely similar magazines (Like, being the standout) to recognise an important shift. The dual discourse of the early 90s – a disingenuous fear that emergent artists will be 'discovered' and pinched by Flinders Lane and Paddington; the rejection of that market by cultivating networks of emergent spaces in acts of opposition and self-legitimation – has seemingly passed. In its wake reigns a harmonious coexistence of established and emergent practices and markets. Artists can now comfortably hop from one side to another as freely as any neoliberal professional should.

Unless, it seems, you're Michael Conole, in which case your artistically oedipal complex is a little more complex than most. Conole's 'daddy' is about as big as they get today. Conole's the master craftsman who actually makes many of Ricky Swallow's painstakingly carved sculptures: *Killing Time*, *Come Together*, *Sleeping Range* with a couple of *Darths* thrown in as well. As Emilia and Jeanne-Claude (who?) were to Kabakov and Christo when they were superheroes, so Michael is to Ricky (well, without the marriage factor).

In between being shipped around the globe to carve for Ricky, Conole also has his own art practice – and it's a doozy. Concurrent with the 2004 *Archibald Prize* (pardon my French), which showcased Conole's stoic portrait of Ricky surprisingly sans halo, was Conole's solo show



Above & across: Michael Conole
Historical Nature: Ruin, 2004 (installation view)
Wood, carved cypress pine & watercolour on paper
Dimensions variable. Image courtesy the artist

at CLUBS, *Historical Nature: Ruin*. A little sketch of a decrepit, Italianate thoroughfare oversaw Conole's struggle with making sculpture beyond the OCD of his collaborations with Swallow. Chunks of very roughly hewn wood lay in piles here, standing together as a ramshackle arch or pillar there. Large gaps were forming between these modular fragments as the wood dried out and splinters cloaked the floor. Conole occasionally reconstructed or tore down forms during the exhibition's duration, playing with the wood as a baby might play with something a little browner.

And that was the show.



It would have been breathtakingly banal were it not for the myth of Ricky sweating through the space. Forget the modernist associations of historical amnesia or cultural vanguardism against European Classicism. Instead, Conole publicly played with one of Melbourne's more private and pressing struggles: how to still make and speak 'art' amid the force-fed Swallow? Do we kill him off, refusing the finish fetish of *Killing Time* through rough-as-guts aesthetics? Do we delicately incorporate that fetish, articulating a graceful harmony between the emergent and Big Daddy? Can we ignore it? Is all this rhetoric about harmonious existences (whether for artists or for writers) a porkie?

There's a bravery and more than a little pathos shown in Conole's public struggle with such key questions and such a key figure in his career, a moment of *Oprah* or (eek) *Ricki* right in the heart of Fitzroy. And while I know that I should be treating Conole's work independently of Swallow's, the overt antinomies at play – rough-clean, CLUBS-biennales, a dead-weight past and a burdensome present – make that impossible. The work was also just too damn bland not to foreground that relationship. Besides which, I always like a bitch-fight around the Builders Arms – what would Dr Freud say about that?

Anthony Gardner is a contributing editor to un Magazine.

Anchor Women/Political Correspondent (2004)

Rorschach Test (Psychodiagnostics Plates/Psychodiagnostik Tafeln)

Deborah Ostrow

Spacement

14 – 30 October 2004

by Kirsten Ramm

Ostrow's exhibition *Anchor Women/Political Correspondent (2004) Rorschach-Test (Psychodiagnostics Plates/Psychodiagnostik Tafeln)* was a further shift towards the production of objets d'art and away from her identity as a performance-based or installation artist, though elements of both remained intrinsic to the work.

Her previous exhibition, *Search and Rescue Mission + Gallery Run*, at William Mora Galleries in 2003, could be seen as a rudimentary step in this direction. *Search and Rescue Mission* was a series of works that documented *Flygirl* – an event staging her helicopter 'rescue' from the roof of the PS1 building – and *Gallery Run* that documented her fleeing through various exhibitions in New York. Both were raw cut-and-paste photographic collages exploring states of creative anxiety following a 'failed' 1999 collaboration at PS1 between Ostrow and then-UN Chief Weapons Inspector for Iraq, Richard Butler; failing because Butler horrendously cancelled his reading of an ode to Baghdad by the Sufi poet Rumi at the eleventh hour.

Installed on specially made shelves, the works in *Anchor Women/Political Correspondent* were highly finished three-dimensional objects-in-themselves. Resting in molded and coloured 'rocks', representing stones thrown in war, war rubble or the stoning of women as cultural practice, a dynamic series of colourful Photoshop collages were displayed vertically behind glass 'screens'... Think Duchamp's glass works – *The Bride Stripped Bare of her Bachelors*, or in terms of scale, his *Nine Malic Molds* – but Ostrow incorporated new methods, subject matter and materials referencing commercial display stands and television screens emitting multiple, mediated images of world events.

Ostrow immersed herself and audience in the visible and 'invisible dramas of experience',¹ particularly in relation to the recent War on Iraq. In the work a centrally placed anchorwoman or political correspondent, wearing a helicopter-pilot's helmet that doubled as a reference to the aforementioned *Flygirl*, appeared embedded in a war zone. Rather than fleeing, this time Ostrow led us through depictions of destruction, brutality, torment and sexual

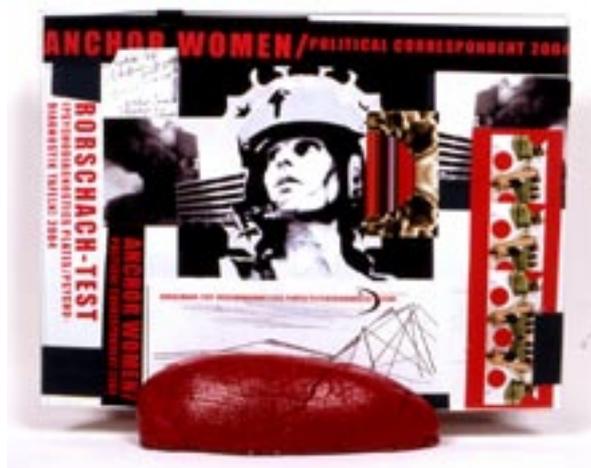
Below: Deborah Ostrow

Anchorwomen political correspondent

Rorschach-Test (psychodiagnostics plates) 2004

Ink-jet photo paper, cardboard, industrial tape, glass, plaster & enamel paint, 30 x 64cm

Photo credit: Jeremy Dillon



humiliation and we witnessed the 'rational', 'humane' and 'religious' auspices of war, like a Nietzschean exploration of the 'will to power'.

At the same time, the collages resembled the flashing images of televised news broadcasts or music video clips. Combined with text, notes, tape and other material, the fragmented media and internet images of terror, inhumanity and debasement were simultaneously historical documentation and critique of the media's exploitation (or entertainment?) of the War on Iraq and the ensuing process of desensitisation.

Throughout, Ostrow added layers of meaning by playing with philosophical, art historical and psychological references such as 'Double Aspect Theory' or pop art-like dots, or holes, that appeared over certain images – a reference to Warhol, censorship and 'war hole'. But the Rorschach method dominated: an analytical device used to uncover and resolve problems via a series of inkblot patterns regarded as ambiguous stimuli (like elements in her work). A person can project their personality through features or interpretations they select and, with no right or wrong answers, the responses become analyzable (psychodiagnostic) clues to unconscious or difficult-to-voice concerns.



*Above: Deborah Ostrow
Rorschach Helmet, 2004
Plaster & enamel paint
44 x 25cm
Photo credit: Jeremy Dillon*

Ostrow deployed the Rorschach method to highlight several things. The mirroring within each collage was constructed so that the subject in the image simultaneously looked inwards and outwards. This suggested that those involved in war should observe and question not only the world but, through self-analysis, one's own actions and responsibilities... Does the end justify the means, or the means justify the end? And by foregrounding the subjective nature of interpretation, her artworks invited the audience to analyse their response to mass-media information and the world at large, particularly in times of war.

Here a strong link to Dada seemed prevalent, as some 'found' text on one of her works suggested:

Dada... was a reaction against the brutality of war, the expediency of art + literature + the dangerous inadequacy of rational thought... it spat out contempt for the spiritual + moral decadence of a whole intellectual, cultural and social system... disgust with a morally culpable bourgeoisie + a spiritually nerveless art which had no objective beyond a simplistic social photography, a faith in its own function as anodyne + a reprehensible dedication to self-fulfilment...

While evoking a map of Ostrow's thought processes, the selection and compilation of various materials also explored the artist's role, and art's effectiveness, in a political context. A renewed Dadaist aesthetic also emerged by, first, including herself as model and subject, thereby extending Dada's feminist lineage in collage (Hannah Höch); second, her persona as anchorwoman or correspondent was politically, morally and socially 'active', unlike Duchamp's aestheticised alter ego, Rose Selavy; and finally, the technique of visual dissociation attributed to Dada (fracturing and juxtaposing appropriated media imagery, style and text) was extended by layering and changing the work's presentation and context into three-dimensional psycho-diagnostic tests. This was an astute paradigm critical to and of the issues and events dealt with in the exhibition because the audience was required to do the work.

Kirsten Rann is an independent curator and writer based in Melbourne.

<note>

¹ William S. Rubin, *Dada, Surrealism and Their Heritage*, The Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1968, p.17

Incident in the Museum 2

John Meade

Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton

4 November – 17 December 2004

& 1 February – 24 March 2005

by Rebecca Coates

Fetish, Modernism, religious iconography and the uncanny are seemingly strange bedfellows, but each makes its appearance in John Meade's new project as part of Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA)'s new series *Incident in the Museum*. Meade's is the second in this series instigated by new Artistic Director Max Delany. This succession of temporary exhibitions not only recontextualises works in the permanent collection, but reinvigorates what can be a challenging space.

John Meade's solution to these challenges is to darken the space to near blackness. From this velvety void he dramatically spotlights the three sculptural elements, *Black duo: self portrait as Mary Magdalene and nude with pitchfork* (2004), *Baby misere* (2001) and *Progeny* (2004) theatrically overlaying *Baby misere* with a blood-red glow. The effect not only isolates the three individual components of the show, but also creates a tight relational dialogue that may not have been as successful without this dramatic effect.

A number of common threads run through Meade's work, one of which is the relationship of the viewer to scale. He consistently plays with this relationship: in his very large, serpentine, suspended sculpture *Nighttime #3* (1997), most recently shown in *Orifice* at ACCA in 2003; in his Sutton Gallery show in 2003, where he displayed exquisitely made hand-sized objects on delicate Japanese-esque tables in a geometric grid formation; his project *Mean Yellow #1* (2000), where a crane suspended a massive nylon wig of shrouding hair in the Arts Centre forecourt; and now in this exhibition at Monash. This exhibition reflects our own human scale, with the scissoring legs of *Progeny* almost parallel in height and stride to our own. Whilst the wig of *Black duo* is of human proportion, with human hair, the shrunken hands and feet introduce a smaller and thus fetishised quality associated with many of Meade's earlier works.

These figures are at once human-sized and shrunken forms. Referring to Donatello's wooden hair-shrouded Mary Magdalene conceived for the exterior of the Bargello in Florence, Meade's *Mary Magdalene* is a small white doll-like figure, so hair-enveloped that its features



Above: John Meade

Progeny, 2004

Aqua resin, Styrofoam & pigment

113.5 x 40 x 116cm

Photo credit: Andrew Curtis

Image courtesy the artist & Sutton Gallery

exist more in the imagination than reality. The reality is a wig of black human hair that stretches from the figure's crown to the ground, obscuring all but the Magdalene's outstretched hands and feet. Partly hidden by the figure is a pitchfork component: a slickly black, dismembered bronchial tract atop a floating dais of bamboo matting, allusive again of a neo-modernist or Japonist aesthetic.

And the self-portrait? To appease our desire for meaning, there is an obvious reading: the figure's hands and feet are the artist's own, cast and shrunk to half their original



*Above: John Meade
Black duo: self portrait as Mary Magdalene and nude with pitchfork, 2004
Human hair, reducit, steel, aqua resin, pigment, bamboo & MDF
100 x 200 x 140cm
Photo credit: Christian Capurro
Image courtesy the artist & Sutton Gallery*

size. But Meade is never straightforward, and if referential at all, perhaps the title alludes to Donatello's depiction of Mary Magdalene as both penitent whore and survivor of ravages. This ambiguity teases our desire to explain and clarify the uncertain.

Behind the stillness and immovability of the penitent Magdalene figure is the kinetic energy of *Progeny*, which is Boccione-esque in its dynamic movement and optimistic faith in the machine-age and technology. Sumptuous in its modernist sleekness, at the same time it has a tactility of surface, a materiality that is absorptive rather than reflective in its finish.

In each of these elements, there is an ambiguity and openness to interpretation. Should they be read as a whole, individually, or should we overlay any sort of narrative at all? It is this open-endedness that I find interesting in the

show, and where Meade's work has developed since his Samstag scholarship in New York during 2004. The hair, the blackness, the exquisite finish, and the fetishistic quality not only of material but also subject matter: all these elements can be traced through Meade's work. However the latest work is less tightly controlled in terms of relationship and subject matter, which makes for a more complex and interesting proposition.

Rebecca Coates is Curator at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art and Project Manager/Curator for the Melbourne International Arts Festival Visual Arts Program.

Flying Carpets

Simon Horsburgh

Conical

26 November – 12 December 2004

by Quentin Sprague

A blank surfboard, unformed on the gallery floor, is draped in roughly painted thong straps made to look like discarded banana skins – learning to surf is a slapstick experience. A long curling waveform is repeated in curved plywood and a sheet of graph paper. You can lean in and look down the length of the frozen break. A light bulb found on the beach, washed opaque by the ocean, is sunk into a light box in the floor and lit from below so it becomes a fuzzy and perfect sphere resting on light, its impassive surface altered to contain strange possibilities. Another light bulb, attached to the wall with a bent bicycle spoke, juts clumsily into space like a bad idea. Surf wax clings to its surface in clumps. Elsewhere a photo of the same piece records a different play of ambient light on the bulb's surface, maybe late afternoon somewhere.

In Simon Horsburgh's recent work at Conical, elements roughly linked by the familiar world of surf culture are bleached out and altered by a careful, analytical approach and an odd material poetry where surfboards become flying carpets and curling waves are made from wood.

Five-tens, Six-threes and Seven-sixes (2004) is a piece where a breaking wave is rendered in a number of different materials and scales. The largest is made from plywood and propped up with bare struts against the wall, looming in scale. Smaller versions rest directly on the floor, one made more simply from ply and the other paper. It's like the big wave that threatens to dump you and the smaller ones that lap around your feet, but a messed-up version: made from hearsay for scientific purposes.

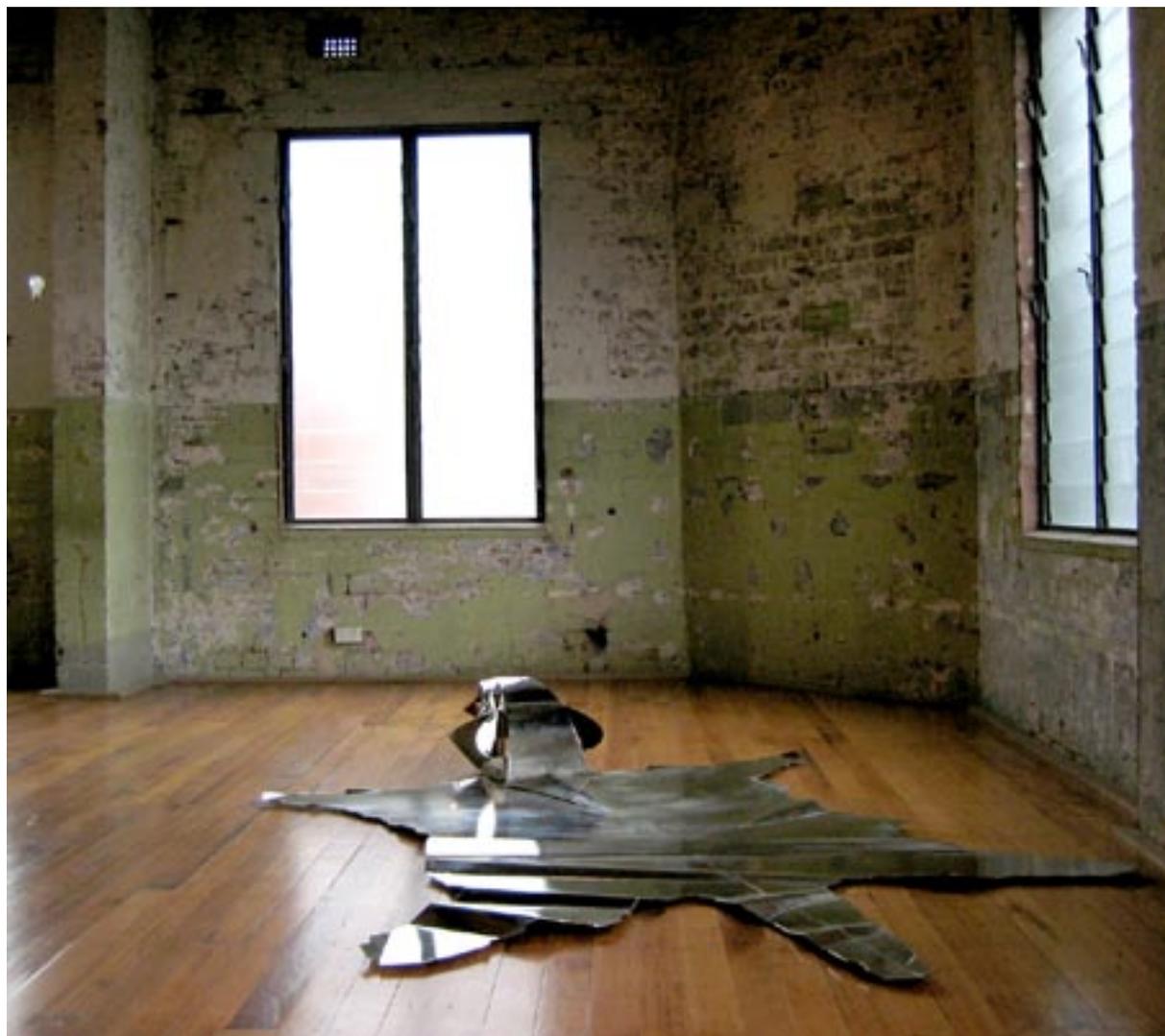
First Descent (2004) is a photo of the waveform made from lightly curved graph paper held in place by tape. The paper's blue measurement lines, extruded around the curvature of the wave, hint at a mathematical attempt to render natural form by analysing its essential properties. This approach eschews artifice in favour of laying bare the machinations of the pieces. The materials maintain an aesthetic of poverty and economy, lending works a stripped-back, reduced feeling reminiscent of model making.



*Above: Simon Horsburgh
Five-tens, Six-threes and Seven-sixes. 2004
Plywood, pine & graph paper
225 x 90 x 136cm
Image courtesy the artist*

The different levels of intervention vary greatly from piece to piece – some may seem too bare and thin next to other more densely made objects. The high finish of some of the more intensely crafted works is often partially negated by haphazard elements that serve to create unexpected rifts and departures, an approach that can result in strangely engaging pieces.

Icarus (2004) is a polystyrene block placed on the floor of the gallery. Its placement and geometric form relate to a shape caused by a chance overlapping of the electric blue insulation material viewed through the rafters directly above. This two-dimensional form has been



*Above: Simon Horsburgh
The Curse of the Chrome Tiger, 2003–2004
Nickel plated mild steel & Ajax
20 x 175 x 28cm
Image courtesy the artist*

modelled into three dimensions, its planes extended and scaled down. The model itself is impeccably formed, like a design prototype except for a rough surf wax build-up on the top. This imperfection reads like a genetic defect caused by the translation of the polystyrene from one state (a surfboard) to another (the model). The interruption to the highly finished form evidences that this translation has somehow been flawed, exposing elements of a past configuration.

Also highly finished is *The Curse of the Chrome Tiger* (2003-2004), a nickel-plated, mild steel tiger skin, modelled from hard angles and laid out on the floor like a Holden fanatic's hunting trophy. The initial perception that

this form is fanatically maintained and perfected is also contradicted, but in this case by smears of an improperly applied cleaning solution (Ajax) on the under-polished surface. This can be read as tongue-in-cheek evidence of the artist's hand or as traces of failed maintenance. This combination of the highly finished and the carelessly maintained creates an unexpected juncture that equally intrigues and irritates, eventually drawing attention to other 'imperfections' on the surface – small dings and scratches. The 'curse' of the title may be the obsessive and constant upkeep involved in protecting the perfect form from inevitable decay.

Quentin is a Melbourne based artist.

Over the Hills and Far Away Furrries Come to Play

Harriet Turnbull

Seventh

9 – 20 November 2004

by Lily Hibberd



Right: Harriet Turnbull
*Over the hills and far away the
furrries come to play, 2004*
Installation: DVD, wrapping paper
& boxes

Dimensions variable
Image courtesy the artist

Sometimes you have to work hard to understand an exhibition. Although artworks aren't always produced for obvious reasons, it's normal for the artist to have clandestine expectations and ways of quantifying the work's merit. Furthermore, the artist's motivations are not often made evident in contemporary practice, which features the shrewd layering of potential ironic interpretations, perhaps as armour against criticism. Accordingly, visitors must make their own way through the pretexts and layers of insincerity. Like many post-modern strategies of artistic production, it is more than probable that this tactic is self-defeating.

Harriet Turnbull's show at Seventh, *Over the Hills and Far Away Furrries Come to Play*, wobbled on a tightrope between success and failure. Turnbull seemingly had specific intentions for the *Furrries* show; it was conceptually tidy, the title, invitation and installation making a coherent package. The invitation was one of those party cards that get sent out for a three-year-old's birthday, on it were brightly coloured balloons and in big shiny lettering the word, 'Party!' The gallery contained stacks of large boxes,

gift-wrapped in silver foil and embellished with balloons of a similar style to the invitation. For a few moments it appeared as if this gaudy, tacky pile of gifts was all that the show could offer, but in doing the 'appreciating sculpture' wander around the boxes I discovered two televisions cleverly concealed inside the pressies, with the wrapping ripped away to reveal the screens.

On the first TV was a chat room scenario unfolding between two characters: 'Squirrel' and 'Bunny'. As there was no reason to engage with these anonymous dialogues I didn't bother reading the scrolling lines very closely, but apparently they were part of an exchange made in a real chat room that Turnbull had created. She used the chat name 'Bunny' and the person behind 'Squirrel' proceeded to use their – let's assume his – personae to get smutty and use animal-type innuendo.

Around the other side of the pile of boxes, video footage was showing on a second screen. This component was clearly the show's central motif and instantly the other stuff became mere popcorn. Not to be harsh, because



*Above: Harriet Turnbull
Over the hills and far away the furrries come to play (detail: digital still) 2004
Installation: DVD, wrapping paper & boxes
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy the artist*

Turnbull had come up with a clever solution to the problem of how to display video. It was just that the extra elements made the route to the most rousing element of the show more arduous.

It was easy to become engrossed in the video and I watched the unbroken footage for several minutes. A camera had been plonked in a lovely patch of the Royal Botanic Gardens, facing a neo-classical rotunda on an idyllic mound of grass. Before the lens, a group of performers in animal suits romped on the lawn. Typical of television characters like Fat Cat they were dumb, yet there was some kind of audio playing... a big band instrumental version of the Teddy Bears' Picnic. The performers – dressed in panda, rabbit, lion and dog costumes – looked like they were improvising, except there wasn't a moment where they didn't know what they were doing. In this accomplished production, Turnbull had written a script and spent lots of time getting the performance right. No editing or cuts were evident, and at this juncture it reminded me of the silent film genre more than Fat Cat. In keeping with the style of the talkies,

Furrries Come to Play had a fixed camera with melodramatic acting and a theatrical setting. The performers seemed oblivious to the camera, as if they were unaware of any audience. The more I watched, the more ridiculous it became. No plot emerged and the animals continuously played like children in the sun. The silliness of it all made me laugh out loud.

Over the Hills and Far Away Furrries Come to Play was an exhibition made up of inane manifestations but, like all childish things made by adults, it had dark undertones. The dramatic sequences of animals at play included violent scenarios. All the shiny superficiality was kind of sick, just a bit too much, whereby the innocence became tarnished. Who can truly know what Turnbull's intentions were for the show? We can be sure, surface appearances aside, that not all was as simple as child's play.

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Raja Pink

Platform2 Gallery
 15 November – 2 December 2004
 by **Veronica Tello**

Step into the world of *Raja Pink*: a phantasmagoria of the fantastical, the degenerate and the banal. Such a myriad of thematic and visual content can be directly attributed to the broad curatorial theme of the exhibition – to respond to the location, context and audience of Platform2.¹

Situated in Campbells Arcade, one of the subway tunnels connecting to Flinders Street Station – Platform2 is consequently subject to flows of human traffic. In response to the monotonous pedestrian rhythms that echo throughout Platform2, Elizabeth Sampson – one of the nine artists exhibiting in *Raja Pink* – composed an immense black pen drawing – on white tracing paper – of numerous people walking in various directions. Effectively, Sampson's illustration elicited a mis-en-abyme effect: a mode of self-reflexivity in the audience as her drawings the reflected and mimicked the actions of pedestrians who walked past the gallery.

Like Sampson, Jessie Scott also drew her inspiration from pedestrian activities – namely window-shopping. Employing the design of Platform2's gallery space – a series of glass cabinets set within the walls of Campbells Arcade that resemble a line of shop-windows – to her advantage, Scott was able to emulate a shop-window display by installing multiple yellow paper hair sculptures, hung in formation. Within the context of Platform2, a gallery neighbouring a number of small retail outlets, including a wig shop, Scott's installation propelled a simultaneously comical and self-conscious mode of spectatorship.

In contrast to Scott's tongue-in-cheek response to Platform2, Luisa Rausa investigated a significantly darker facet of subway tunnels: their sterility and bleakness. Her installation – multiple and variously sized cylindrical shapes, wrapped in black cloth and silk set against a stark white background – projected a distinctly affective and distancing aura. As a result, Rausa's installation brought to light the desolate, isolating and potentially horrific experience of subway tunnels – as has so often been represented in Slasher films, especially in their representation of women as abject.²

Below: Jessie Scott
Untitled, 2004

Found images/photocopies, acrylic paint & fishing wire
 300 x 110cm

Photo credit: Elizabeth Sampson
 Image courtesy the artist



The diversity in *Raja Pink*'s aesthetic was epitomised by the juxtaposition between Rausa's distancing response and Tawale's warm and inviting installation: images of the artist transposed onto a garish yet idyllic Fijian landscape. Tawale's Fijian-scape provided an opportunity for pedestrians to transcend their drab surroundings and vicariously journey to a fantastical landscape: a quintessential imaginary paradise.

From Tawale's escapist imagery to Scott's parodies of shop-window displays, *Raja Pink* presented extensive but disjointed thematic and visual content. Despite the disparity there was a consistent conceptual thread woven through the exhibition – a critical address of the everyday. And, it is precisely within this area of cultural commentary that the artists discussed here were able to extrapolate the most poignant and gauging observations on the activities and cultural life that exists within Platform2; pedestrian acts, consumer culture and the banality that pervades in metropolitan life.

Veronica Tello is a Melbourne based writer.

<notes>

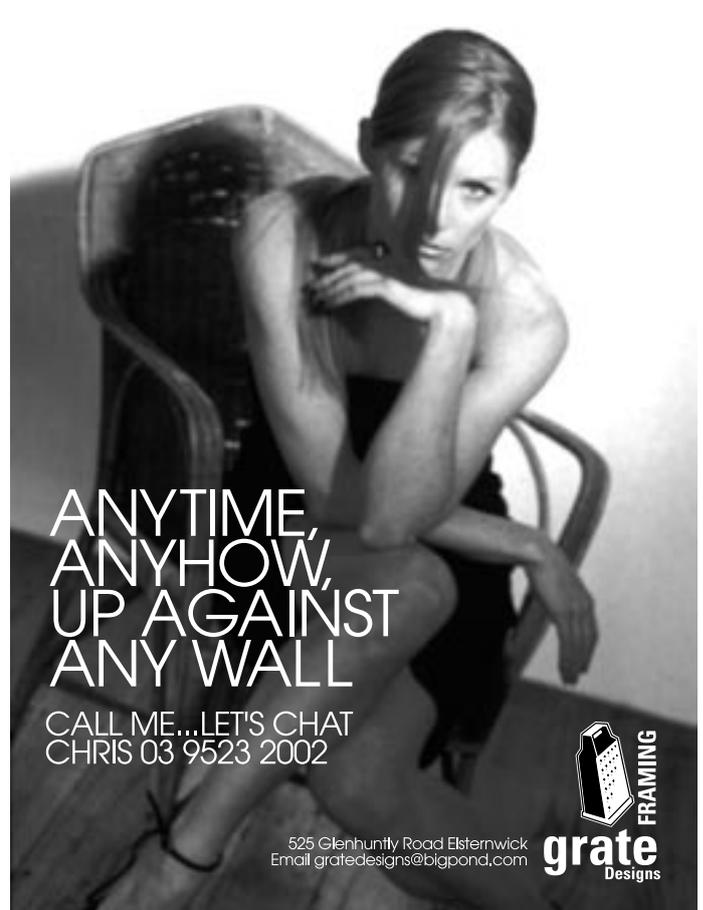
¹ Only four artist's works from *Raja Pink* have been discussed, as they epitomise the core conceptual threads of the exhibition
² For further reading on the subject see: Carol J Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1992 and Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis*, Popular Fiction Series. London; New York: Routledge, 1993



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pollock

Sue Dodd, 2004

un *Obscure*

Geelong Arts Alliance
Artists' Republics of Geelong
by *Phil Edwards*

The relationship between an artist or arts grouping and the society within which it exists is complex one. Outside major metropolitan centres such as Melbourne or Sydney, in what are classed as 'regional' areas, the relationship between local contemporary artists and their community can be strained. Too often contemporary art in a regional area can be viewed with suspicion by a community that has its social focus based on its sporting clubs. Too often the arts finds its place constricted to craft based activities that do anything but challenge or engage with the mores of the community in which they were conceived. This may be one reason why many regional and non-government funded arts bodies outside metropolitan areas exhibit material that is not challenging and often barely noticed by the community in which it is exhibited.

The Geelong Arts Alliance (GAA) is a different kind of local arts body. Established in 1998, until recently it was affiliated with Regional Arts Victoria. Defined as a cross artform, membership based organisation, it is committed to community cultural development in the Geelong region, collaborative actions by local artists and arts workers, and the development and production of new contemporary art and ideas.

The activities of the GAA often have a political edge to them in the sense that they explore and interact with the social fabric of the Geelong community in a way that other local art galleries filled with gum tree paintings or the Geelong art gallery (a major public gallery) do not.

In 2002 the GAA co-ordinated a series of art actions in public spaces. *FAST (24 Hour Actions)* was intended to be a joyful, political, provocative and unpredictable program, in which the spirit of 60s art groups like Fluxus and the Situationists were invoked. Over one year, 14 actions took place and a number of public spaces were commandeered. Activities such as the wrapping of public sculptures Christo-style by Mark Cuthbertson, or the projection of daylight videos at intersections at night-time by Mardi Janetzki and Scott Walker, were meant to involve the local audience in the identification of art's relationship to their community.



Above: Artists' Republics of Geelong, 2004
Geelong Arts Alliance
Photos credit: Glen Smith

Recently, for the 2004 Next Wave Festival, the GAA set up a series of 'Artists' Republics' in the lanes of Geelong. Republics – with names like *Beige Nation*, *Camp X-Ray*, *City A Go Go*, *Everyloya*, *Greener Land*, *Illusio*, *Rogue State*, *Writers Republic* and *State of Delusion* – were set up art zones that had their own passport checks, visas and manifestos. Many of these Republics mirrored the general political issue of the Australian Governments stand on refugees. Additionally, the artwork designed by Glen Smith and Susan Hartigan for GAA publications are stylistic appropriations of official documents and government forms, that have the unsettling affect of mocking stereotypical responses to authority. Further, GAA's links with David Dellaflora's mail art and work for the dole programs integrate notions of the identity of the artist within a community.

The GAA artist headquarters can be contacted at www.geelongartsalliance.org

Politics, community and art outside of the big smoke, Phil Edwards outlines the activities of the Geelong Arts Alliance.

fathom

Below: Stephanie Valentin

Fathom #3, 2004

Type C photograph

Courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery

Stephanie Valentin

STILLS Gallery

Sydney, New South Wales

13 October – 13 November 2004

by Tash Murray

What arises when the worlds of biotechnology and fine art-photography meet? The results can be found in *Fathom*, the latest exhibition from photo-media artist Stephanie Valentin at Stills Gallery, Sydney.

Entering Valentin's exhibition is akin to being submerged several leagues into Jules Verne's underworld. Oversized flora studies ripple iridescently on walls either side of the viewer, leading to a grid of black and white lightjet prints installed at the far end of the gallery. The prints feature enlarged crustacean-like creatures that appear to be part animal, part plant. These microscopic studies of marine micro-organisms have been etched, or milled, with shapes that don't occur in nature, such as squares, numbers and abstract forms. All the while alluding to the presence and manipulation of subvisible species by the human race.

Sydney based Valentin has long been fascinated with the results of collaborations between science and art. In her previous series *pollinate* (2002), she worked with scientist Paul Munroe of the University of New South Wales Electron Microscope Unit, employing an electron microscope technique to etch words and marks onto the surface of microscopic plant pollen before photographing the grains. *Fathom* is a continuation of this 'interest in the sub-visible and enigmatic terrain of nature'.¹ This time her subject matter is marine nature – its plants, plankton and micro-organisms.

Collecting specimens around Sydney Harbour, she has isolated each subject under a Focused Ion Beam microscope and physically 'carved' and altered the surface of the microorganism using charged atomic particles. Valentin modifies her subjects so that the viewer is confronted by what appears to be otherworldly artefacts. In *Marine Micro Organism/Artefact 1* a single-celled plankton specimen has been transformed into languorous naval wreckage, while in *Marine Micro Organism/Artefact 2* a milled shell-like organism resembles a geometric lunar ammonite.

These highly finished microscopic images are juxtaposed with the more rudimentary photographic technique



of the colour shadowgram (or photogram). Valentin employs the photogram as a primitive form of microscopic imaging. In this way oversized studies of seaweed, such as *Fathom #8*, reveal more than just the delicate structure of the plant. They highlight the intrinsic eco-system of organisms hosted on the plant itself.

According to Valentin, '*Fathom* is both a contemplation on the complexity, novelty and diversity of nature, but also a reflection on how these attributes inspire human invention and intervention, and how we might balance these technologies with the biological world.'² She continues to be inspired by biotechnology and the processes through which the human race is increasingly leaving its mark on nature.

Contrary to rumours, Tash Murray is still alive.

<notes>

¹ Stephanie Valentin, artist statement *Fathom* exhibition, 2004

² Ibid., p.2

*Amanda Maxwell, Ben Sullivan, Conor O'Brien, Ed Whatling,
Michael Payne & Ryun Archibald*

The Ceiling is Getting in the Way of the Sky

*Arthouse Gallery
Perth Cultural Centre
Northbridge, Western Australia
8 October – 1 November 2004
by Bec Dean*

Lilly's small face is covered by her right hand and her thin frame is flanked by trees and a bicycle. Closed-eyed and serene, the gesture seems to bear a degree of deliberation and purpose that her youth belies – it's altogether too grown up – it is not made through fatigue or defiance but mimicry. Her pose emulates the white print of a skeletal hand on her t-shirt. The image of *Lilly* by Conor O'Brien is one of the many visual beacons within a sea of photographs by six Perth-based artists, for the collaborative exhibition *The Ceiling is Getting in the Way of the Sky*.

Held at Arthouse (one of our town's longest running galleries) as part of Artrage '05, the show is comprised of thirty-something photographs by these twenty-something photographers. All of the works are salon-hung on the far wall of the space and roped-off at each side to encourage a more distanced viewing from the extended lounge area and bar. The photographs are identically mounted and installed, to be considered as a whole – like a collective instant – or to get gallery patrons to make subjective arrangements of images into a series of idyllic slacker narratives.

My eyes wander from the open face of Ed Whatling's traveller, *Boy Blue*, his blonde head framed by a map of yellow roads stuck liberally with pins, to Ben Sullivan's photo from an aeroplane window-seat, *Jet Stream*. From here I shift my gaze toward some furry yellow terrier legs leaving footprints on *Bones Beach* by Amanda Maxwell, then to Ben Sullivan's portrait of an amused, toothless local posing up against a wall, *Stan*. Michael Payne's *Shoes* in a basketball hoop evoke afternoons of idle play, while Ryun Archibald's *Rocking Horse* on fire speaks of idle (if aesthetic) destruction. For the image *Australia*, Ed Whatling composes a sea of blue amidst the sweltering heat of an uninhabited desert landscape – a dichotomy of various aquamarine, enameled finishes on cars, buildings and signs atop a carpet of dust – as if representing water would make it rain.

The Ceiling is Getting in the Way of the Sky is a response to the reunion of these six friends back in Perth after years



*Above: Conor O'Brien
Lilly, 2004
Digital print mounted on aluminium
30.5 x 45.7cm*

of travel and working in other cities. While the exhibition presents a random selection of whimsical moments from each artist, it avoids the kind of closed cliquiness associated with making work with and for your friends. It's possible to identify with the sense of recent nostalgia conveyed by the collective presence of the works and therein the intractable aspects of losing your youth: falling in love for the first time and not breaking your leg skating. Like the deathly reflection captured in the subject of *Lilly*, *The Ceiling is Getting in the Way of the Sky* celebrates life in the shadow of mortality and responsibility as it encroaches on a clear blue nothing.

Bec Dean is an artist, writer and exhibition manager at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

The Kingpins

by Mark Pennings

*Below: The Kingpins
Welcome to the Jingle. 2003
Video still dual screen version*



The Kingpins seem to be everywhere recently, from *Primavera* in Sydney to the *2004: Australian Culture Now* show in Melbourne... then there's, Brisbane, Gwangju (South Korea), Taipei, New York... the list goes on! They are acclaimed by fashionable curators and elicit admiration from the 'Entertainment Generation' that is just coming of age. Those in the know tell us that the Pins are the embodiment of post-feminist liberation. That when they're waving their butts in front of video screens (while rocking to DMC), they are performing acts of 'mimicry' that alert us to the pervasiveness of female sexual stereotypes. They are also supposedly articulating the 'performativity' notion of gender roles when running around with false beards. In another video, they ride around in shopping trolleys dressed as pirates while singing "Will I ever see your face again?" In this case we are informed that they are demobilising Homer's *Odyssey* in a clever deconstruction of venerable masculine master narratives and mythologies.

This may all be serious stuff, yet they look like they are just having a lot of fun to me, and I reckon the primary reason for their success is their entertainment value. To be more precise, the Kingpins don't really draw a line between art and entertainment in any substantial way and their work has all the hallmarks of classic post-Pop. As a

response to consumer culture the Kingpins partake in 'Dress-Ups' and other whimsical activities. This has little to do with a critique of culture and a hell of a lot to do with reflecting the values of their generation. This includes that segment of the youth market that is fascinated by 'pretending to be something other than what you are', celebrity lifestyles, narcissism, and so on. You know, the type that believes they exist only after seeing themselves on television. Where the Pins are remarkable is that they offer this ideology of entertainment as a generational aesthetic.

Surely art can do better than this? Some suggest that the Pins come across as superficial entertainers but are actually secretly subverting the music industry game. Sorry, but I don't buy it. It's a bit like Nicholas Bourriaud (the master of Relational Aesthetics) claiming that Rikrit Tiravanija produces radical art when he invites the audience to his exhibition space so that they can cook their own food. Well, if cooking your own food and running around performing lame adolescent acts is going to foster a positive change to culture and society then I'm really worried about this up and coming generation.

Yes, art can entertain – only isn't that what the whole global corporate order is about anyway? I know



*Above: The Kingpins
Dark Side of the Mall 2004
Video still
Image courtesy the artists*

Hollywood exploits most forms of cultural production, but do we have to feed 'art as entertainment' to the forces of capitalism as well? The whole purpose of this game is to turn art into capital, to instrumentalise it and prepare it for incorporation into broader markets. The freedom and the independent thinking that much art engenders is thus under constant pressure to become a price tag.

One thing that keeps these forces at bay is independent and critical thinking. Engaging in a thoughtful and decisive way about the direction of society is something that must be maintained in a global order that only wants us to show discrimination when it comes to deciding which products and lifestyles to buy. Art would be better served by artists putting forward propositions for debate and argument about how things can be better, instead of some of the current work that seems to surrender or actively contribute to today's conditions.

Ultimately, the Kingpins, like many of today's practitioners, seem to accept rather than resist the global market and its corporate requirements. This means that they eschew the leftist model of the critical theory tradition – where

society is continually challenged and questioned – in favour of a more ambiguous expression of art's place in the world. Instead of thinking the system can be changed from outside, the world is accepted pretty much as it is and the artist is happy to fine-tune art practice here and there. Some take it even further by rearranging this practice so that it might be more aligned with corporate goals. There's a point there for sure – as times have indeed changed – but in the end I just can't buy a product that doesn't have enough critical art ingredient.

Mark Pennings, Lecturer in Visual Arts at Queensland University of Technology.

city living

Luke Jaaniste

*Metro Arts
Brisbane, Queensland
18 November – 3 December 2004
by Kris Carlon*

*Below: Luke Jaaniste
Lego Blocking (on light switches box) 14 November 2004
Metro Arts, Main Gallery
White & black Lego bricks placed on light switches box
Image courtesy the artist*



I knew what I was getting myself into when I first walked into the gallery. I realised this work would be hard to find, even invisible, that there would invariably be gaps in my experience. I have subsequently recognised my oversight: Jaaniste's work was already spread out before me throughout the CBD and in timeframes that had already eluded me. *city living* was more about an interaction with perception and the echo effect that is Jaaniste's work than about simply showing a body of work.

city living was an exercise in working in-situ. By performing subtle manipulations on the surrounding built environment Jaaniste intended to alter the perceptual habits of his viewers. He took readymade materials and surfaces, like accumulated dust and applied readymade gestures (such as the wiping of that dust with the finger) in order to make us aware of our own presence in the gallery. These interventions also took the form of systematic sticky-taping and the Lego-blocking of the features of the

space according to its internal logic. Whatever the result, the components that comprised *city living* were more about the ways in which we perceive them than they were about themselves as works of art.

Site-specificity governed many elements of the work. The sticky-tape strips, Lego-blocks, finger marks, and the gaps between them, corresponded to aspects of the space and the physical properties of the materials. The connection between the present and the absent – or the applied materials and the untouched spaces between them – combined with the link between features of the site and the materials, produced the echo effect that resounded throughout Jaaniste's exhibition. Each work reverberated from a specific point of intensity, like ripples on water, ever expanding. Individual Lego-blocks referred formally to the window within which they were framed, then to the wall the window was in, then to the room, the building, the city block, and so on ad infinitum.

*Below: Luke Jaaniste
Sticky Taping (on pillars and floor) 16 November 2004
Metro Arts, Level Three
Masking tape stuck between pillars and floorboards
Image courtesy the artist*



The echo chamber that Jaaniste constructed functioned because he made the intervention equivalent to the untouched. The remaining dust between each wiped mark became as much a part of the work as the clean section and implied a serial continuity beyond the physical limits of the actual finger marks. Accordingly, Jaaniste's entire practice can be seen as a macro-version of the micro-echo each individual work produces: each separate work is like a single element within a larger piece, a piece which could theoretically expand to universal scale. Likewise, each work present in the show referred not only to the other pieces in the gallery but also to those that no longer existed, as well as to the work yet to come.

Photographic documentation in the main gallery charted the pieces in the show, plus the works that had been destroyed or were not within the physical boundaries of the site (Jaaniste's interventions in shops and other transient works exist now only in documentation). I

wondered if the opening night crowds, instantly drawn to this glossy imagery, were missing the point. Shouldn't they have examined the show first, like forensic investigators searching for clues? After all, there was plenty of work still to be seen. Was the photo-documentation and map of work-locations given out at the opening some kind of short cut? Or were they essential tools for someone wanting to fully experience Jaaniste's work?

Considering the subtlety of many of his interventions the map seemed logical – helping the viewer to perceptively engage with the space and the work. It also gave the uninitiated the chance to observe more than they otherwise would, as no matter how finely attuned one may be to Jaaniste's work, you could never see it all.

Kris Carlon is a freelance writer based in Brisbane.

Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek

Siri Hayes

Benalla Art Gallery

22 October - 12 December 2004

by Phip Murray

Something is out there

Siri Hayes's large-format photograph *Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek* shows an immense canopy of trees that dwarfs three tiny people standing on the banks of a creek in inner city Melbourne. Apart from sublime statements about Nature, the tangled branches metaphorically speak of the mess that the land is in. The images in Hayes's series explore an ecosystem in a downward spiral, where the effluvia of modern life – the proverbial Coke cans, plastic bags and ubiquitous syringes – choke up waterways and spoil the picture-postcard view. Merri Creek is still a picturesque landscape under Hayes's treatment, but an essentially troubled and deteriorated one. Her images rely on the tension between soiled and sublime views: think Claude Lorrain's idyllic vistas reconfigured for a post-Exxon Valdez generation.

Hayes's photographs of Merri Creek represent the familiar sight of an Australian terrain where homesick Anglo settlers have replanted the area with English pastoral vegetation in an attempt to declare a corner of Australia 'Forever England'. Decades on, the willows have gone feral, the water is greasy with toxic bile spewed up by the factories upstream, and the refuse of a thousand Safeway trips hangs from the boughs. There is something Chernobyl-esque about *Lyric Theatre*: small lonely figures trying to build lives on the banks of a murky river. Everything is derelict and everything is poisonous.

A referent for Hayes's photographs is the classical tradition of landscape painting – such as Poussin – with its rules for framing the landscape and ordering it according to golden mean ratios and lofty ideals. Artists have sought to represent the sublime for centuries. In seeking to contain the vastness and magnitude of life, the symbols used to represent the 'sublime' are appropriately grand, with capital letters: the Power of Nature, the Solitude of the Mountains, the Fury of the Sea, and so on. Hayes's artwork portrays a more down-home and dog-eared version of nature with the oiliness of the river, the omnipresence of plastic and the grime on the banks. Hayes recognises our need for a rose-coloured view of the world but refuses the



*Above: Siri Hayes
Lyric Theatre at Merri Creek (from the Lyric Theatre series) 2002
Type C photograph, 120 x 150cm
Image courtesy of the artist*

idealism of the sublime, offering a reality check instead. In *Untitled*, the babbling brook is polluted, the frolicking faun has been replaced by a harried downcast figure and the Grecian ruins bathed in sunlight have become poobrown 70s brick-veneer flats.

Lyric Theatre is a contemporary extrapolation of Poussin's painterly exercise in melancholia *Et in Arcadia Ego*, in which toga clad figures huddle sadly around a country tomb. The title can be translated to mean the regretful 'And I too once lived in Arcadia', as well as the more haunting, 'And I, Death, am also in Arcadia'. This cuts straight to the heart of *Lyric Theatre*, only Hayes has the contemporary overlay of ecological devastation. For we too were granted Arcadia but we botched it.

Hayes has sought out natural amphitheatres at Merri Creek in which to stage her narratives and has arranged her figures with overt theatricality. These are not relaxed snapshots or images comprising 'the decisive moment'; these are rigidly arranged tableaux in which the character's poses are overstated. The acting is meant



*Above: Siri Hayes
Untitled (from the Lyric Theatre series) 2003
Type C photograph, 120 x 150cm
Image courtesy of the artist*

to be wooden. *Lyric Theatre* is a quasi-Greek tragedy in which the female figure plays the role of a contemporary Cassandra, one suffering under her 'gift' of prophesy.¹ Holding her wad of office paper and oriented towards us ready to deliver her speech, this oracle's announcement might only be spooky in an 'I see dead people, they're everywhere' kind of way.

The scenes at Merri Creek borrow from this *Sixth Sense* cinematic genre of spooky-suburbia: images of city outskirts that, post-David Lynch and *The X-Files*, are easily loaded with eerie portent. Landscapes where, if you look closely enough amongst the tangled branches, you expect to see Laura Palmer, wrapped in plastic. *Lyric Theatre* also reminds me of Douglas Coupland's *Girlfriend in a Coma* in which characters glibly trade stories of childhoods imbued by dread of when the nuclear 'Flash' would happen. I can relate. It's the fear that the world is sliding into a toxic quagmire. Maybe the river is clogged with belly-up poisoned fish; maybe the air is carcinogenic; maybe some malevolent force hangs, Blair Witch-style, in that net of trees. Something is out there.

Hayes's large format images are beautifully crafted with meticulous detail. They are also perfectly sited at Benalla Art Gallery. Situated on the banks of the Broken River, the view on the opposite bank seems to talk back to her images by offering up glimpses of uncanny narratives, not unlike her own.

Phip Murray is a Melbourne based artist and writer.

<note>

¹ A figure in many Greek myths and legends such as Homer's *The Iliad* and Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Cassandra was given the gift of prophesy by Apollo because he wanted to seduce her. She wasn't interested in him and so, to punish her for spurning him, he placed a curse on her gift of prophecy. The curse was that no one was to believe her prophecies. Consequently, although Cassandra accurately predicted disasters, no one believed her and she was powerless to help them.

Le Mois de la Photo (The Month of the Photo)

The Paris 2004 Photography Biennale

Paris, France
November, 2004
by Toby Brennan

Liberating photography

Sometimes it feels like the dominant response from artists and curators to the problem of art's consumability is to make the helpings so large that no one can finish them. This is the age of photographic mega prints like Gursky's, endless biennales of endless rooms, and international art fairs of epic proportions. The senses are easily (over)stimulated but rarely does any clear sense emerge. The Paris 2004 Photography Biennale, *Le Mois de la Photo*, is a nice exception, demonstrating how size can be used to more poignant ends.

The festival is not lacking in scale. There are over 75 shows at venues that include many of the major national museums, a swathe of international cultural centres and a generous helping of private galleries. This enormous program is whittled down from some 350 applications and attracts over 500 000 visitors. The 2004 biennale takes place as part of the inaugural European Month of the Photo, with simultaneous festivals in Berlin and Vienna and exchange exhibitions between the three.

It would require a superhuman effort to see it all. Exhibitions open and close faster than I can eat a pain au chocolat. The mountain of catalogues grows beside my bed. Yet as I jump from metro to metro with aching gallery legs an impression emerges. The sense I get is not of photography as art but of photography as everything else, as a practice embedded within so many forms of human endeavour, within so much of our history.

The 2004 *Mois* is modestly titled 'Histories, histories, from the document to fiction.' The festival was founded in 1980, largely to assert a place for photography within art. Almost 25 years later, the festival is reflecting critically on this very objective and its consequences. This reflection is not another twee rhetorical device, asserted in a turgid catalogue essay but totally lacking in practice. *Le Mois* does not ram its message down your throat – there is no catalogue essay – but the sense is clear. The enormous scale is the necessary means to demonstrate that photography is a character that plays many different

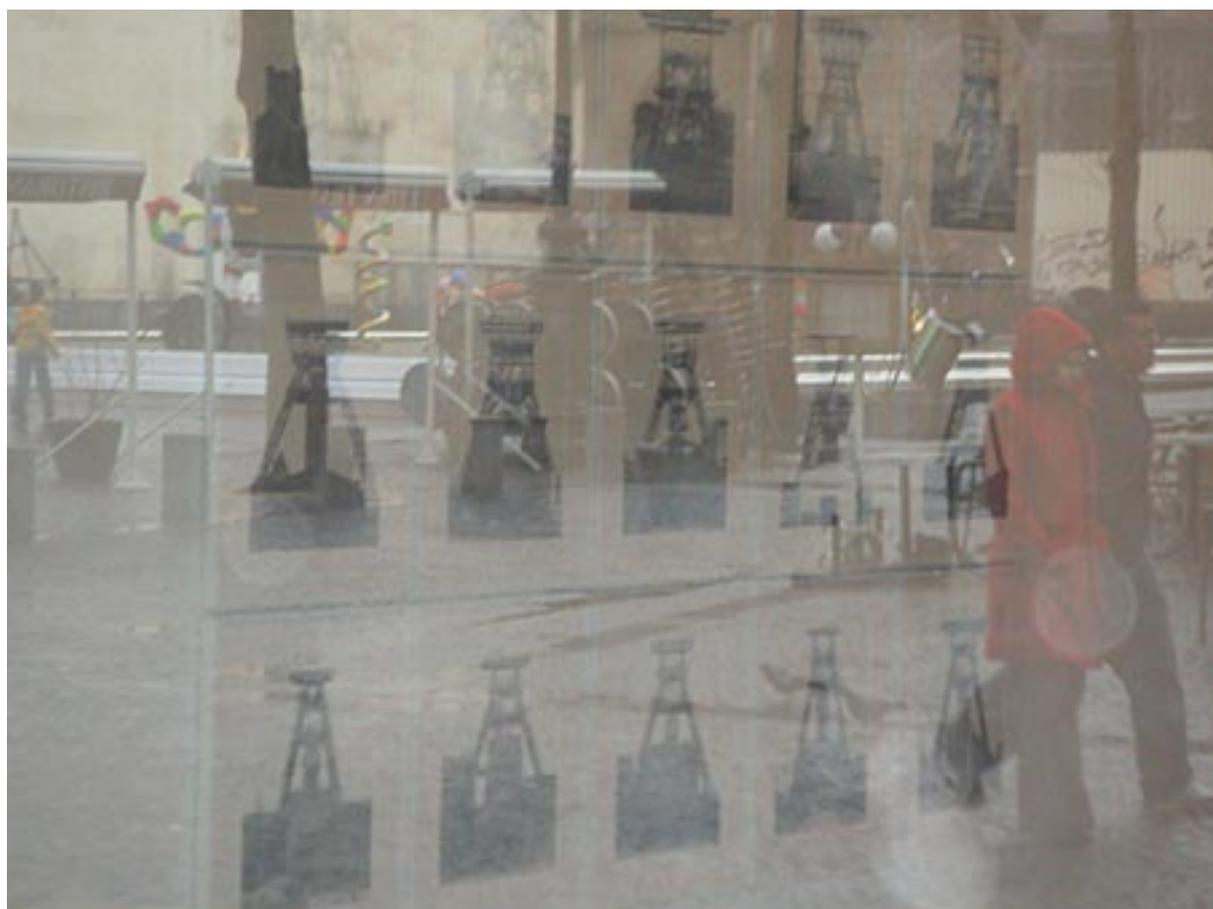


Above: Pain au chocolat, Paris 2004
Photo credit: Toby Brennan

roles. This breadth casts the narrowness of a conception of photography as simply art in sharp relief.

At the Musee d'Orsay, *Mouvements de l'air* displays French scientist and inventor Etienne-Jules Marey's fascinating photographs of his smoke-machine experiments on aerodynamics at the beginning of the last century. The deep relationship between photography and the occult is explored by *Le troisième oeil* at the Maison européenne de la Photographie. The dim lighting to preserve old prints only enhances their (literally) halucinatory quality. The Centre Culturel Canadien's *Images première* takes just one image, that of the driving of the last spike in Canadian Pacific Railway in 1885, and examines its reproduction and imitation in everything from advertising to political cartoons as a primal image of nationhood. The result is breathtakingly simple but incredibly effective, and this show perhaps more than any other embodies the ethos of the festival, a true social history of photography.

Below: Bernd & Hilla Becher
Winding Towers, 1997 (through a window)
Photo credit: Toby Brennan



The contemporary shows are not as plentiful but equally impressive. Sean Hillen's *Photomontages* at the Centre Culturel Irlandais use pastiche superbly in reimagining the Irish Troubles. In *Déplacés* at Galerie Camera Obscura, Rip Hopkin's photos of Soviet era exiles in Uzbekistan are beautifully coloured and terribly humane.

There are disappointments. *Berlinskaya lazur; jeune photographie berlinoise*, an exhibition of young Berlin photographers, is underwhelming and horribly displayed at the Pavillon de l'Arsenal. But such failures melt under the triumph of so many individual shows and the festival as a whole.

The approach of the 2004 *Le Mois* is not entirely new. Photographic historians like Geoffrey Batchen have called for greater attention to so-called vernacular photography – photography created for purposes other than art. The strength of *Le Mois* is in displaying what has been lost

in the desire to establish photography as art. Nothing evokes that loss more than the major retrospective of the German architectural photographers Bernd and Hilla Becher. Their remarkable body of prints of water towers, blast furnaces and other industrial structures was initially recognised only by historians of industrial architecture. Now it has been wholly recuperated by the art world as a significant contribution to minimalism and it becomes difficult to see past this aesthetic.

Much as I love this festival, I have a nagging doubt. I wonder whether *Le Mois* in attempting to exhibit vernacular photography inevitably participates in the process of recuperation, making photography into art yet again.

Toby Brennan is living in Paris doing 'research' for his Honours thesis.

New Wellington Artists

Milky Way Bar

Michael Hirschfield Gallery at City Gallery

Wellington, New Zealand

18 September – 17 October 2004

Curated by Sarah Farrar

by David Cross

Until recently Wellington has not been a place of real energy for the production of critically engaged artwork. While a few established practitioners are probably erasing my name from their lists of potential dinner party guests as they read this, the fact is that Wellington is traditionally a place to show work, not to actually produce it. In the last few years this has begun to change as increasing numbers of younger and emerging practitioners have made Wellington their home. This is partly the result of the new Massey University School of Fine Art producing its first graduates in 2003, but other factors also seem to be at play. A small, but dynamic, artist-run space scene has evolved including Enjoy and Show and there is a growing culture of curating and writing about new work that has developed around these spaces. The artists in *Milky Way Bar*, curated by Sarah Farrar, are all key contributors to this scene and this exhibition at Wellington City art gallery constitutes one of the first attempts to frame the issues and aesthetics that mark out their work.

For a group of artists who have cut their teeth together there is a surprising diversity to what is on show. The work is quite cool (not in the groovy sense of the word) and in the great Kiwi tradition it avoids getting in your face. There is a concern with emphasising conceptual rigour but at the same time a concomitant lightness of touch, whereby meanings unfold subtly over time. This is art that believes in the slow burn approach and there are precious few didactic moments or one-liners to let the spectator off the hook. Having said this, the work is not dour or precious, but mostly carefully irreverent and inclusive.

This lightness of touch is evident in Gregory Sharp's *Bad Vibrations*. The artist has exhibited a pair of socks filled with margarine and these disembodied alien feet sit quietly on the gallery floor. While the effect may seem like a reductive homage to Robert Gober, something very different and enjoyable is going on. Mounted above the socks are speakers that play a continuous soundtrack of demented cartoon music. The near monotone sounds have an incredible capacity to suggest movement and thus a palpable tension is established between the static socks



Above: Marnie Slater

Never to be sure, 2004

Mixed media

& Daniel du Bern

Back to Nature, 2004

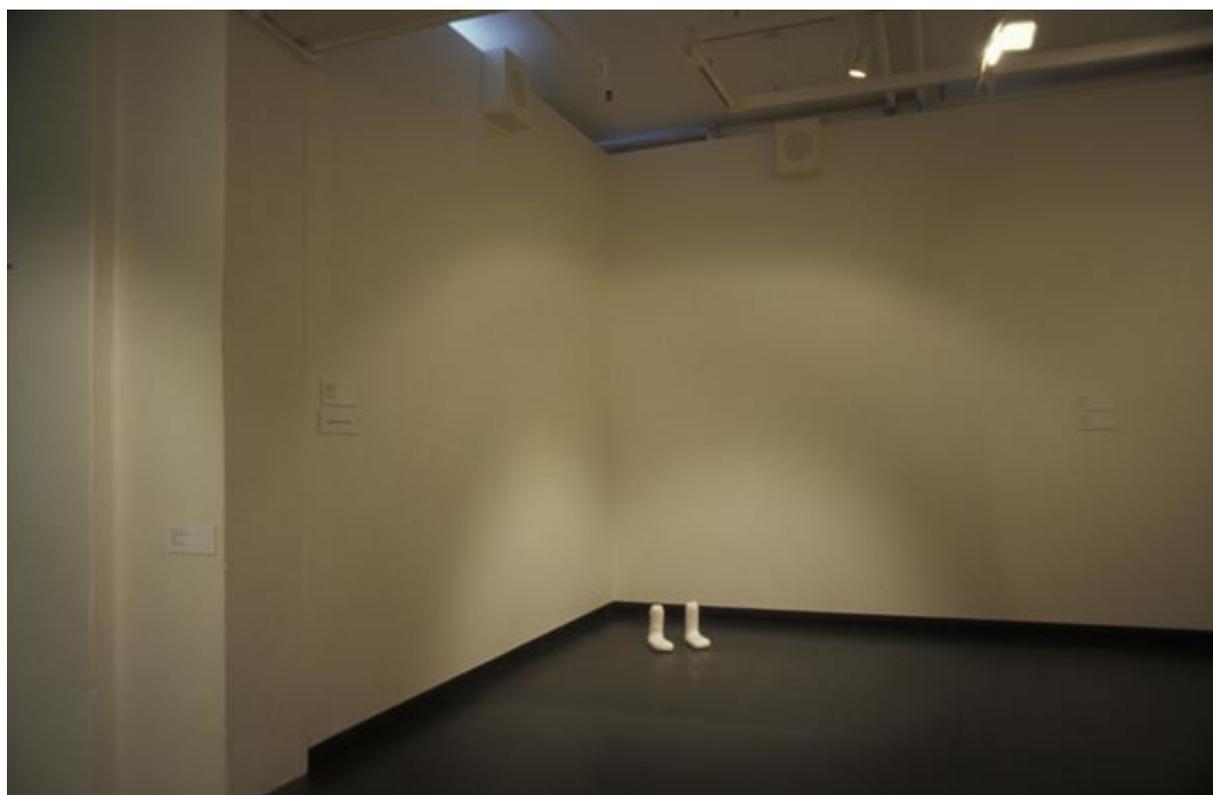
Courtesy of the artist & City Gallery Wellington

Photo credit: Michael Roth

and the low volume music that is coaxing them into life. A similar uncanny quality exists in Daniel du Bern's video *Back to Nature*. This work consists of looped footage of a paddock that borders a nature reserve. From a distance we observe someone appear from out of frame holding what looks like a cabbage. The person then proceeds to hurl the cabbage into the dense forest and retreat back out of the scene. This is the Burkian sublime taken to an absurd level and the effect gets more interesting the more the gesture is repeated.

In Marnie Slater's *Never to be sure* nature gets a look in. The artist has built a kiddie-scale white mountain, complete with stepladder and the obligatory flag – mounted Edmund Hillary-style – on the top with the word 'Now' emblazoned onto it. The audience is encouraged to think about climbing the mountain or more accurately stepping up onto the mountain to achieve that desirable 'Now' effect. The artist is effectively exploring the notion of decision making and particularly what she sees as the strange obsession of prioritising the end result over the

Below: Gregory Sharp
Bad Vibrations, 2003
Socks & margarine
Courtesy of the artist & City Gallery Wellington
Photo credit: Michael Roth



undulating journey of arriving there. Is she talking about the art world? Maybe, but the work is sufficiently open and elastic to include a variety of big picture meanings.

Louise Tulett, like Slater, is interested in the complex relationship between the big and small pictures. Her text-based work involves spelling out the words *No small wonder* using strings of decoration lights. It isn't small as she suggests in the title and it does make me wonder about how text can be used in visual art. The work certainly has an enigmatic quality and is not especially didactic, but the layered resonances that this artist is known for fade too quickly.

While most of the work in *Milky Way Bar* has a pleasantly demure quality, one exception is Ryan Chadfield's *Tooth Hat*. This gloriously abject object is mounted on the wall emitting a kind of decayed dental glory. From a few meters away it looks like a bathing cap with ribbons attached but on closer inspection you realise in true paranoid critical method that it's not what you thought

it was. This is fetishistic-object-making101 and it makes you feel bad about the last time you properly flossed. It is immensely captivating and disturbing in equal measure. Where did he source the teeth? From the dump master out the back of his local dentist in true *Fight Club* style, or have his family been contributing to the work over the years? It's probably best not to go there.

David Cross is a Wellington based artist and writer and Senior Lecturer at Massey University School of Fine Art.

distance and time

Anna Finlayson

Centre d'Art – Marnay Art Centre (CAMAC)
Marnay-sur-Seine, Region Champagne Ardenne, France
5 November 2004 – 5 January 2005
by Tara Gilbee

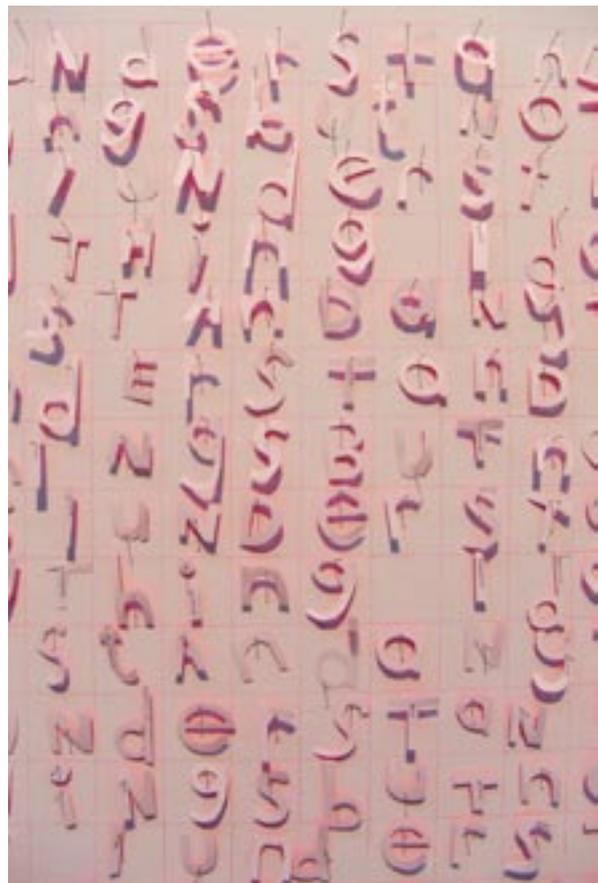
Understanding Each Other

Attending a residency with other artists from different cultures is a great opportunity to look at the various ways we seek to understand others and their creative work. This happens even if another artist is from your hometown, as was the case when Anna Finlayson and I attended the Centre d'Art Marnay Art Centre (CAMAC) France at the same time. Anna's work was subsequently selected for a show, *WO/MAN*, following an application for the 2004 UNESCO artist's bursary. The body of work was called *distance and time* and it presented a mixture of intuitive and responsive ideas to the experiences of the residency.

The works Anna created and exhibited at CAMAC were indicative of her current focus on drawing. Using metallic and fluorescent pens Anna drew lines and circles. The circle work consisted of tiny circles of roughly the same size, drawing 50 at a time and creating a tally of these at the bottom of the page. The tally remained part of the drawing and marked the time spent creating the work. Each circle was approximately equivalent to one second and these works were titled according to the number of circles in the particular drawing, like *7500 circles equivalent to 7500 seconds* (2004). This repetitive almost meditative process reflects the solitude and total isolation that was CAMAC, near Paris but in a very tiny town of mainly weekend inhabitants.

The circle and line drawings combined colour and close repetitive forms that resulted in oscillating texture. Anna made these works utilising her own intuitive language and process to guide the image. The rhythm of marking time and space, was the manner in which she guided the image. This marking on the page appeared to me as a proportioning of time, creating a visual image that resonated beyond the image. An impression of feelings and notions like a musical score or the sound of a clock ticking.

Within the same body of work Anna created a series of drawings of repeated lines, called *the space between 372*



Above: Anna Finlayson
I don't understand anything, I understand some things but not others, I understand everything, 2004
Fluorescent painted grid
Each grid square 80 x 90cm & letters 5 x 5cm
Photo credit: Tara Gilbee

lines (2004). A vertical line was drawn, then a second line parallel to the first followed as closely as possible and this process continued until the page was full. Once again, Anna notated the process as part of the work; she counted the spaces between each line and the time it took to draw a number of lines. Anna described this as, 'following the naturally occurring movement of a hand drawn line, creating an organic pattern that develops slowly as the drawing is completed. A wavy texture is created that resembles water, fabric, a topographical image or some kind of data print out of brain waves or thought patterns'.¹



*Above: Anna Finlayson
the space between 372 lines, 2004
Fluorescent pen on paper
50 x 65cm
Photo credit: Tara Gilbee*

The abstract nature of her works intrigued me. Anna's work was a surface created over time, consolidating layers of thought as a performative process based work. It was playful and had an immediacy that invited the audience to enter the space and engage with her extended thinking process. The works also had similarities with pure abstraction and op art, like the work of Agnes Martin and Bridget Riley – Anna even titled an early sketch *thanks Agnes*. The use of the fluorescent pen, illusive and sometimes difficult to visually register, added to the optical effect, making the lines vibrate slightly before the eyes. The results had references to art and design as well as inanimate objects such as water, fabric and sound waves.

Next to these drawings Anna installed a piece in the form of a poem pinned directly onto the wall, *I don't understand anything, I understand some things but not others, I understand everything* (2004). The piece was composed within a grid of 228 squares, each letter individually cut from a larger painted fluorescent sheet. By painting on the reverse of the sheet, there was another side to the image and the fluorescent colour was illuminated but hidden. There was no punctuation, but words could be found within the mass of letters and picked out like a puzzle.

I don't understand anything presented itself as a code, with an ambiguity that encouraged the viewer take time to try to work it out. The English speaking observer could make out that the words of the title were repeated three times, yet it was probably puzzling to the mainly French audience viewing it. This continuous flow of words – or stream of consciousness – read like a hum or mantra, again returning to the notion of meditation. It also highlighted the abstract nature of language, disengaged to become an object of contemplation.

As I flew home I looked at Russia covered in snow, the lights of Tokyo, then the crop fields of New South Wales, all from above. From a distance everything has an organic but intervened, man-made order and place. As humans we also cross these binaries; from afar we imagine others, up close we understand things differently. Anna used her strong process of deciphering experience, contemplating it through repetitive processes. Ultimately, she provided an extraction of the congruous and incongruous to create a rich body of ideas.

Tara Gilbee is an installation artist and independent curator.

<note>

¹ From a conversation with Anna Finlayson, January 2005

Below: Rodney Graham
Coruscating Cinnamon Granules, 1996
Installation view

16 mm film, 3:00 minute continuous loop

To be projected in a cinema bearing the dimensions of a modest kitchen

Installation size: 108 h. x 185 1/4 x 123 3/4 inches

Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

A Little Thought

Rodney Graham

The Museum of Contemporary Art (MOCA) Geffen
Los Angeles, USA

25 July – November 29 2004

A Little Thought by Natasha Bullock

Rodney Graham's a bit like a magpie. In scavenging (in the nicest possible way) and referencing diverse sources from psychology to popular culture, music and literature to make art Graham creates work that can be humorous, subtle and breathtakingly beautiful. The survey exhibition entitled *Rodney Graham: A Little Thought* highlights the artist's deft capacity to coalesce the conceptual and the visual across a variety of media. One such gem is *Coruscating Cinnamon Granules* (1996) a 16mm film depicting the results of cinnamon burning on hot plates. Golden, glowing halos appear like stars glimmering in a pattern in the night sky or, in the words of the artist, the stars that appear before your eyes after a blow to the head. The beauty of this work is in its simplicity, in the discreet presentation (the size of the projection copies the dimensions of Graham's small kitchen) and the transformation of homely subject matter into an abstract context. *Coruscating Cinnamon Granules* highlights Graham's sensorial approach to film. Other works by him, however, such as the costume drama *Vexation Island* 1997 – a film of a parrot and a coconut falling on the head of a Robinson Crusoe character – reveal his interest in history and the machinations of the moving image.

A Little Thought features other well known works by Graham besides *Vexation Island*, such as the photographs of upside down trees. In our heads we can't help but flip those trees the right way around! In this way, Graham encourages us to think beyond the obvious and question our perception of things, or indeed the space between reality and perception. He also alters perception by manipulating time and dispelling expectation. As Australian video artist TV Moore said when we walked around the show together, "Graham is the master of the loop." I wholly agree. Sometimes it's just impossible to even gauge where a work begins and ends. But to Graham, 'the trip is the thing'. In equal parts subtle and obvious, dense and light-hearted, Graham's vision is an iconoclastic approach to art making. Little thoughts maybe, but they propagate to become big ideas.

Natasha Bullock is the Assistant Curator, Photography and Contemporary Art, Art Gallery of New South Wales.



A Little Thought by TV Moore

Rodney Graham's exhibition at MOCA Los Angeles is part James Bond, part Patricia Highsmith novel, part Sesame Street messiah (in a Wayne Coyne kind of way) and part Syd Barrett on lithium. Graham has a definitive quirk factor within his practice that doesn't merely stop at a 10-cent punch line, but rather lends itself to further inquiry and interpretation. Sure there is joy here, and in Graham's case it is handled seamlessly with the perfect dose of smarts, which makes for great work indeed.

Graham's costume trilogy of films, *Vexation Island* (1997), *How I Became a Ramblin' Man* (1999) and *City Self/Country Self* (2000) are all meticulously made. These period works are usually directed by someone other than the artist but conceived, scored and storyboarded by Graham. They place Graham as the protagonist referencing human interaction with carefully chosen surroundings. Using the Hollywood star model rather than an auteurian mode of

production, Graham takes on an assortment of identities, from the outcast Crusoe, a Western ramblin' man, to the absurd old-school Frenchman. All three films are staged as genre comedies where the central character (Graham) performs a task of some kind or another which loops endlessly, blurring both start and finish point. But like all successful spoofs and satires a deep unrest and tragedy lies beneath.

The real magic of Graham's film work is the execution and structure of the filmic loop. It doesn't matter when the viewer enters one of Graham's films, as each entry point is as cohesive as the next. Without a definitive beginning or end, they require multiple viewings but it is an effortless journey. It is this awareness and punctuation of loop structure that lends a certain mastery to Graham's work and sets him far apart from most artists working with the medium of film and video in contemporary art. It's the balance of craft and quirk that stays with you.



Other standouts of *A Little Thought* were *Phonokinetoscope* (2001), a 16mm film projection with turntable. This piece made for a great ride with its low-fi technology, fun ethos and absurdist concepts – think Syd Barrett riding around a park tripping and singing to himself endlessly. Plus his cinnamon films, *Coruscating Cinnamon Granules* (1996) were worth a look. To be honest there were far too many great works to mention here, however I would recommend listening to his CD, *Rock is Hard*, if you get the chance.

One can't deny the ambition of the works of Graham and for this reason he is frequently compared to Matthew Barney – except Graham's work is far less dry than Barney's costume sculptures. With Rodney Graham it's a glorious sense of absurdist drama that is hard to place and never dull.

TV Moore is a Sydney based artist, currently in Los Angeles on a Samstag scholarship.

All images: Rodney Graham, Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
Above: Vexation Island, 1997 (Video still)
Video/sound installation, 35 mm film transferred to DVD
9:00 minute continuous loop, Video projection in cinemascope, screen size: 76 h. x 180 in., Stereo soundtrack

Right: Loudhailer, 2003 (Production still)
Two unsynchronized 35 mm films with separate unsynchronized CD audio, Two 35 mm films, two 35 mm projectors, two loopers, CD player and speakers, Video 10:00 minutes, continuous loop; Audio 3:00 minutes, continuous loop

Below: A Reverie Interrupted by the Police, 2003
see p.65 for full caption



Rock is Hard 2004 by Brendan Lee

How refreshing it is to hear music by an artist – one of the best mind you – which isn't self indulgent shit that sounds like Chinese water torture mixed with dolphins. Not only has Rodney Graham created music within the already prescribed formula of the medium, he can also play the glockenspiel. From the first track – that sounds scarily like the old rocker character Billy Mack from the movie *Love Actually*, to a Canadian bear hunting song, Graham does his best Bryan Ferry interpretations to swoon as many middle aged women as Tom Jones. Every song is as catchy as the last and demonstrates that he knows how to construct or imitate the perfect melody. The highlight of the album is definitely track four: *What's so funny I don't get it*, where he telecines the paranormal states of consciousness exhibited in his video art practice into words. Lyrics along the lines of, 'my mind has fled this sorry planet' and 'same suburban crap café, second Saturday, month of May', are as nihilist as any Blur or Suede concoction which strangely makes me feel happy in a 'time waster' kind of way.

Brendan Lee is a Melbourne based artist who is leaving his DVD players to ACMI in his will.



SEX SEX SEX

adultshop.com erotic art award exhibition

Australia-wide call for Works and Proposals

SEX is a large survey exhibition, being mounted by adultshop.com and Artrage to occur in October 2005 at Perth's Breadbox Gallery as part of WA's ARTRAGE Festival. The exhibition will feature a curated selection of works short-listed for the inaugural adultshop.com Australian Erotic Art Prize (\$10,000).

SEX seeks new and existing works that respond to the thematic of SEX in all its myriad diversities: Exploring, illuminating, interpreting and challenging the many notions of sexuality, pornography, eros and the erotic.

Works in all media and mediums are encouraged including photography, video, new media, animation, sculpture, installation, graphics, painting & print. Both established and non-established artists and creatives are encouraged to submit proposals. Artist fees for selected works will be provided.

To find out more and to access an exhibition proposal pack, visit www.artrage.com.au, www.sex.adultshop.com or call 08 9227 6288.

Exhibition proposals are due Friday May 27 2005



Page 63, top right: Rodney Graham
A Reverie Interrupted by the Police, 2003
Production still, 35mm film transferred to DVD
DVD, DVD player, video projector, four speakers, subwoofer and amplifier
7:59 minutes, continuous loop
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago



Above: Rodney Graham
How I Became a Ramblin' Man, 1999
Video still
Video/sound installation
35 mm film transferred to digital videodisc, DVD player, projector, 4 speakers,
AV receiver, 9 minute loop
Courtesy Donald Young Gallery, Chicago

***A Little Thought* by Zara Stanhope**
He's a noise man, a man for our times

Rodney Graham: A Little Thought, is Graham's first major survey exhibition. Its arrangement in the cavernous space of MOCA Geffen is problematic; sounds overlap, other exhibitions intrude and the layout of the works has no inherent order. This lack of logic in the installation is probably intentional and, on reflection it doesn't matter, as works and ideas overlap. The mature intelligence of this artist shines through, blended with romance, humour and attention to detail (read perfectionism) in Graham's contemplation of exterior and inner worlds. *A Little Thought* is fascinating for the accumulation of both literary and popular references across the 19th century, modernism and pop culture. Graham has an ability to work seamlessly yet idiosyncratically across film, video, object making, photography, musical scores and song writing amongst other forms. His is a breathtaking labyrinthal oeuvre, much like its installation.

This exhibition raises acknowledgment of Graham as one of the most important artists of the last decade. For the

general viewer his work accessible; it's not art for art's sake and he's not only an artist's artist. Despite the Geffen's inhuman scale, it feels like Graham is writing, playing, singing, directing and acting for me. He's in my head as I stroll alone through this art giga-warehouse. Infatuated by his earnestness and wit, I give up attempts to categorise works that defy systems, interrogate conventions and play with ideas. And I relax in the effervescence that emits from Graham's attempts to alter my consciousness.

A Little Thought – a typically understated title – is an inspiring insight into lifelong research and intellectual and aesthetic elegance, a keepsake of the paradox that is Rodney Graham.

Zara Stanhope is Senior Curator at Heide Museum of Modern Art but would prefer to be a Ramblin' woman.

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Downtown Art Space

233 Waymouth Street, Adelaide SA
08 8211 7022 / www.downtownartspace.com

MOP Projects

Room 16, Level 2, 617 Elizabeth Street, Redfern NSW
www.mopprojects.org

Rocketart

488 Hunter Street, Newcastle NSW
www.rocketart.org

MIR 11

11th Floor, 522 Flinders Lane, Melbourne VIC
mir11@netspace.net.au

CLUBSproject inc.

First Floor, 211 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy VIC
www.clubsproject.org.au

Apartment

19/618 St Kilda Rd, Melbourne VIC
03 9521 4685 / apartment@ihug.com.au

Ocular Lab Inc

31 Pearson Street, Brunswick West VIC
krann@vicnet.net.au

Kings ARI

171 King Street, Melbourne VIC
www.projekt.com.au

Breadbox

233 -239 James Street, Northbridge WA
08 9227 6288 / www.artrage.com.au

Peloton

19 Meagher Street, Chippendale NSW
gilesryder@hotmail.com

Umbrella Studios

Flinders Mall, Townsville QLD
4772 7817 www.umbrella.org.au

Wall

115 Union Road, Ascot Vale VIC
www.wallgallery.com.au

West Space Inc.

1st floor 15-19 Anthony Street Melbourne VIC
www.westspace.org.au

Allan's Walk Artist Run Space

Shop 5, Allan's Walk, Bendigo VIC
www.allanswalk.com

Short Street Art Space

5 Short Street, Footscray VIC
www.shortst.com.au

BUS Gallery

117 Little Lonsdale Street, Melbourne VIC
03 9662 2442 / www.bus117.com

Conical Contemporary Art Space Inc.

First Floor, 3 Rochester Street, Fitzroy VIC
03 9415 6958 / www.conical.org.au

Inflight

237 Elizabeth Street, North Hobart TAS
www.inflightart.com.au

Spacement

Watson Place, Melbourne VIC
www.spacement.com.au

Blindside

Level 7, Room 14, 37 Swanston Street, Melbourne VIC
www.blindside.org.au

Seventh Gallery

155 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy VIC
seventh@labyrinth.net.au

Phatspace

Room 35, Level 2, 94 Oxford Street, Darlinghurst NSW
www.phatspace.com

Platform Artist's Group

Platform2, Campbell Arcade, Melbourne VIC
www.platform.org.au

TCB inc. art

1/12 Waratah Place, Melbourne VIC
tcbinart@yahoo.com

24Seven

32-44 Flinders Street, Melbourne VIC
www.24seven.org.au

Dudespace

Brunswick, VIC / look out for flyers

Don't worry if you're not on the list – it will be different next time.

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Please email Lily for the submission guidelines and then submit your proposal by 10 March 2005 via email to <lilyhibberd@eudoramail.com>

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