

Artwrite 42

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WELCOME

Welcome to Issue #42

Shivangi Ambani

As Pitkin put it, life begins at 40, and so this 42nd issue of Artwrite is buzzing with ideas, uncovering new and emerging territories of art as well as digging deeper into established practices.

As students of the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, for many of us Artwrite is the first opportunity to publish our works, and it is an opportunity for which we are grateful to Associate Professor Joanna Mendelssohn.

Themes for this issue emerged from student discussions in class and online forums. The debate around graffiti as an art form has been a continuing fascination for this class. Nikki Akbar comments on the stoush over Casula's legal graffiti walls. Nick Phillipson profiles Peter Strong's social activism through graffiti. Ricky Lau questions whether graffiti can be collected, preserved and curated as a cultural artefact. Purnima Ruanglertbutr takes us on an alluring journey through Melbourne's graffiti subcultures.

Meanwhile, the diversity of the class is reflected in the range of art practices and concepts delved upon in this issue. From the textural world of Bram Bogart, to Francesca Rosa's chaotic yet beautiful photographs; from the MCA's rising tide of contemporary video art to a child's perspective on the weirdly wonderful world of Pablo Picasso.

This and much more interesting comment and debate lurks inside this issue of Artwrite. We hope you will enjoy reading it as much as we have enjoyed creating it.

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LETTERS

Art Prizes: Artists's cash cow?

Does Australia have too many art prizes? Are these awards too irresistible for cash strapped artists to ignore? Is a \$100,000 prize too alluring when, according to David Throsby in his article "[Don't Give Up Your Day Job](#)" (Australia Council for the Arts, 2003), the average creative income for visual artists is approximately \$3,100 annually? Is the Australian desire for competition and sport pushing our artists to race and perform? Do art awards limit the scope, production and controversial nature of an artists potential? Can the desire for public recognition and a cash payout encourage artists to surrender their artistic integrity? How can we then make art available to the public without the spectacle of blockbuster exhibitions and awards?

Tegan Sullivan

The AGNSW's most recent gaff

Of the numerous regrettable decisions made by Australian collecting institutions, paying \$16 million for a second-rate [Cezanne](#) is the latest. Is the Australian passion for French Impressionism so overwhelming that a leading institution willingly perpetuates the myth of the inferiority of Australian art? Auctioning off the work of major Australian artists to pay the record price is irresponsible and damaging to the domestic market. The Cezanne has its merits and can be cited as a jewel in the AGNSW collection, but only for an institution that perceives the value is in the artist's reputation and not the quality of the work itself.

Yasmin Green

The lingering connection between art and politics

Artworks usually are related to propaganda, whether political or individual. The [Art and China's Revolution](#) exhibition, held at the Asia Society in New York City, shows the aesthetic merit of artworks which were largely produced during the period of China's Cultural Revolution (1966-76). However, most of these artworks received great critical attention in the art market because of their political sensitivity, rather than their aesthetic value. As a Chinese art student, I wonder when Chinese artworks could be valued with less political intention.

Zhisheng Sa

Re-figure: A contemporary perspective on figurative representation in art

The suggestion that twentieth century representational figures, which exist as a testament of "traditional skill and idealism", should be perceived as the pinnacle of contemporary public art is beyond my understanding. Surely Librado's problem with our multicultural society is his failure to grasp its ability to inspire – the very same traditional ideal that appears in contemporary public art, but with less didactic purposes.

Neil Broadhurst

The (non)issue with public art

"Outdoor art isn't what it used to be" – thank goodness! [Ken Johnson](#) (New York Times, 25 July 2009) mourns the decline of monolithic, neo-Classical heroic sculpture in favour of contemporary public art that offers "relatively empty experiences", reflecting "the absence of any consensus of values in our pluralistic, multicultural society". Contemporary outdoor art will not be to everyone's taste, precisely because it does reflect our "pluralistic, multicultural society", rather than a colonial, militant culture where conformity is the key to success. Give me giant flowers over generals any day.

Judith Thomas-Meulman

"There's got to be a better way of bringing people to the arts".

Culture for the dinky-di Aussie

"Aussie! Aussie! Aussie!" Ken Oath. During my four years overseas, I cringed every time I heard the cry. I return home to see Shane Warne: the Musical advertised above a urinal. Bloody awesome. Is this what we're into now? Perhaps the lowest common denominator is the key to attracting a paying audience? I can't wait for the exhibition of Memorable Moments of Merv Hughes' Mo. There's got to be a better way of bringing people to the arts.

Michael Wilton

Hope and Graffiti

The news that American artist, Shepard Fairey was arrested for graffiti while travelling to Boston for his first solo exhibition is disheartening ([ABC News, 7 July 2009](#)). Fairey created the image of Obama for the immensely successful Hope campaign, which now hangs in the National Portrait Gallery in Washington. The 'Zero Tolerance' policy is an outdated response to graffiti. Melbourne has a better idea: the [City Lights Project](#) - a changing exhibition held in Melbourne's laneways. The exhibition celebrates street art and recognizes that graffiti adds to the city's heartbeat. When will law enforcers realise that most graffiti has moved beyond vandalism and consider exercising some discretion?

Adela Zverina

Britian's Got Gormley

Anthony Gormley's [One & Other](#) public project on the fourth plinth at the Triangular Square is debilitating. Gormley argues that the living effigy becomes a metaphor to reflect the diversity and vulnerability of our multifaceted society. Unfortunately, such frivolous and whimsical conduct sadly reiterates how obsessive we are with "Britain's Got Talent". Gormley underestimates the length of an hour and the short-lived span of people's attention. Andy Warhol has cracked the conundrum 40 years ago; Gormley's plinth watch deflates before the 15 minutes, shorter if you Twit.

One & Other, a public project funded by Arts Council London, involved placing a different person on the fourth plinth for 1 hour, 24 hours a day for 100 days, creating 2400 living sculptures.

Ricky Lau

Low-brow cabaret

Tim Maybury, I'm afraid your recent presentation at the MCA's Creative Sydney 2009 was more low-brow than [Lo-Fi And Loving It!](#) What a mish-mash of random, disjointed performances. It quickly degenerated from a choir of sweet old ladies to a bizarre cabaret of black PVC leotard clad gimps, simulating anal sex with power tools upon a pink Chewbacca; that is, before I walked out. I was told by the event's media release to expect the unexpected. I just didn't anticipate being embarrassed for the state of contemporary art.

Alison Van Der Linden



REVIEWS AND OPINIONS

Why Does Picasso Draw Like That?

Pei-chen Chien

A long time ago, in Paris, there was a young artist called Pablo Picasso. He was so unknown and nameless that no one bought paintings from him. Without money to buy food, the poor artist was always hungry. One day a rich man came to the young artist and asked him to draw a portrait, and promised to pay ten thousand francs for it. A week later, the young artist finished his work. It was a great painting, but the rich man wanted to go back on what he promised. The stingy rich man did not want to pay as much as he had agreed.

"That is MY portrait! No one else will buy it. Why should I pay so much for it?" said the rich man.

"But a promise is a promise," the young artist argued.

"One thousand, sell it or not, I will not pay more."

The rich man was so sure that the poor artist would sell him the portrait. The young artist felt very angry and humiliated. "I will not sell it. But I promise you, you will pay for what you have done today."

A year passed by, the rich man had totally forgotten about the young artist and the portrait. One day, some of his friends came by and said, "It is so strange. We went to an exhibition by a famous artist, and there was a portrait that looked just like you. You may want to buy it, but it is really expensive!"

That famous artist was Pablo Picasso.

Pablo was born in Spain, but moved to Paris to become an artist when he was 19 years old. He changed his last name from Ruiz to his mother's last name - Picasso, which he thought was more artistic. And because it had a double 's' just like other great artists he admired: Matisse and Rousseau.

During his time in Paris, something else happened to young Picasso. His best friend Casagemas died. Poor Picasso, far away from home, was living in a very bad condition, and lost his best friend. He felt so sad and lonely. And he started to draw everything in blue. For Picasso, blue was the colour of sorrow. He wanted everyone to feel his sadness. He drew the poor, the

homeless, the desperate and prisoners. Picasso became a painter of misery. Strangely, people started to think he was special, because he drew so differently, and the colour blue seems to relieve the unhappiness. They called this the 'Blue period'.

However, Picasso's friends just wanted him to be happy. They took him to the circus, and WOW, Picasso was fascinated by the clowns, dancers and everything. He began to draw in pink, yellow and orange, just like the colours of the circus. His paintings look cheerful again, and people named this the 'Rose period'. The circus performers remain as a subject in Picasso's paintings throughout the rest of his long career. But the 'Rose period' did not last for a long time, because Picasso and his friend Braque found a new style of painting called 'Cubism'. His paintings started to look even stranger and he became even more famous. And that is another story.

On Ugliness

Edited by Umberto Eco, translation by Alastair McEwen, 2007
Available from Rizzoli Publishing

Evelina Timokhina

**"Beauty is but skin deep, ugly lies the bone;
Beauty dies and fades away, but ugly holds its own."**

- Old Proverb

It is an indisputable truth that ugliness is considered to be the opposite of the beautiful. But what is ugly when applied to the arts? Does a work of art necessarily have to convey a sense of beauty and admiration? What are the historical and cultural criteria for any artwork to be labelled obscene, repulsive and ugly? Is it the famous La Tour Eiffel that once irritated the citizens of Paris by its grandiose monstrousness? Perhaps it is the graffiti painted on the wall? Or Marilyn Manson's striking appearance?

On Ugliness, which is a sequel to previous best seller *History of Beauty*, is a chronicle of the 'hideous' side of art history. Edited by one of the most acclaimed and influential semioticians and literary critics of our time, Umberto Eco's book is an aesthetic survey of the grotesque, odious, monstrous, frightening and awkward. Accompanied by the author, the reader embarks on an unforgettable journey through nightmares and horrors, death and torments, monsters and miracles, sorcery and devil-worship. *On Ugliness* is a book where feelings of disgust and disruption can be found adjacent to gusts of compassion and curiosity. Disfigurement is portrayed as merely a continuation and a distortion of beauty itself that takes a more sophisticated and diverse shape. Eco emphasizes the juxtaposition of the notions: that attractiveness can sometimes take grotesque shapes, thus becoming simultaneously seductive and repellent, and wholly abominable.

In this historical survey of the Ugly, Eco explores the phenomenon of the repulsive and its transformation throughout the centuries in the visual arts, philosophy and literature. The models for beauty and ugliness have been established in accordance to religious beliefs,

scientific discoveries and aesthetic canons. The Italian philosopher embraces a vast period of time – from ancient Greece to the present, concentrating his research on the alteration of the concept of ugliness in Western culture. The narrative is buttressed with quotes and excerpts from the greatest minds of the past and their contemporaries. Plato, Desiderius Erasmus Roterodamus, Honoré de Balzac, Stephen King, William Gibson are all included, as well as an astonishing collection of images - from ancient Greek effigies through to kitsch and pop culture.

On Ugliness makes a brief foray into contemporary art by presenting one of the most provocative and repelling images of modern art to the reader. [*Hanging Kids*](#) (mixed media, 2004) by Italian contemporary artist Maurizio Cattelan, is an installation featuring three young boys hanging from an oak tree. This is the exception rather than the rule as, apart from that, the book makes very little reference to contemporary art. As an editor, Eco reserves critical judgements about artworks thus providing the readers with considerable food for thought. *On Ugliness* is designed to acquaint the reader with the opposite side of beauty and its transformation in art rather than analyse how the concept of 'ugly' was shaped, challenged, canonised and accepted.

On Ugliness is no doubt a great addition to any coffee table. With startling images occupying sixty percent of the book and an outstanding selection of excerpts from literature and poetry, this is an excellent read for anyone, whether you are a fan of Eco's prose or just a curious reader.

**It attracts a broader audience
to the art scene with its
uniquely personal chronology.**

Book Review: Justin Paton's *How to look at a painting*

Author: Justin Paton, 2005
Available from AWA Press

Yu Ran Kim

In *How to look at a painting*, Justin Paton attempts to help 'ease' the casual Art viewer into a mindset that will allow them to interpret works for themselves at a deeper level. Current gallery attendance of Australia has increased enormously in the past few decades. The audience consists of both professional and lay-people, proof that a visit to the art gallery has become part of everyday life. However, response to a work of art varies from person to person. If one has formal training and knowledge of art, it is natural to understand and appreciate a piece of artwork at a deeper level than an audience member from the general public. This could sometimes result in the lay-person becoming frustrated or apathetic as a result of not understanding what they are seeing.

A senior curator of Contemporary Art at Christchurch Art Gallery, Justin Paton invites the readers to travel through the worthwhile experience within the New Zealand art scene. His book, *How to look at a painting*, begins with his childhood encounters in the 'art room', where he encountered various artistic objects and old paintings. The book consists of different places, times and experiences aimed at enlightening the public on how to begin appreciating paintings.

Paton's discussion of his experiences as a child helps the reader to understand that it became a foundation of his career as an art curator. He encourages the reader to take time to observe and question what they notice from any given painting. He recommends the reader to read the artist's or curator's statement about the painting. This will encourage the viewer to break the painting's enchantment and enable the audience to converse with the artwork more intimately. He signifies that when trying to gain a deeper understanding of an image, it is important to trust the painting and your intuition. Paton introduces the reader a range of paintings from Caravaggio to Jude Rae, a contemporary New Zealand

painter, in order to demonstrate the changes in the art world from the old European masters to living artists. He meets the artists, art dealers and curators, and shares his experiences and thoughts about these people in the book. He discusses how the museum's structure has changed; the effect of the museum if the emphasis is on the scale and appearance of the site rather than on the artwork. He offers the readers a glimpse behind the scenes of the industry.

Justin Paton is very aware of the existence and significance of paintings. He alerts the reader to the idea that painting is the foundation of all art and puts forth the notion that it should actively be undertaken by artists to preserve the tradition. He does not enforce his opinion and perception on the reader, but persuades them by travelling with the reader through his own experiences. He gently guides the reader to a better understanding of how the painting enthalls its participants and what the artist does to create that enchantment.

How to look at a painting imparts new ways of encountering art and yields more opportunity for people who enjoy paintings. It attracts a broader audience to the art scene with its uniquely personal chronology. The book becomes an instrument that guides the reader to a place of intimate observation rather than just plain viewing. It allows paintings to be appreciated at a deeper level by both artists and lay-people alike. As the 2006 Montana New Zealand Book Award for Lifestyle & Contemporary Culture recipient, *How to look at a painting* would be a brilliant book to begin experiencing the art scene.

Kings Way: The Beginnings of Australian Graffiti: Melbourne 1983-93

Authors: Duro Cubrilo, Martin Harvey and Karl Stamer, 2009

Available from [The Miegunyah Press](#)

Judith Thomas-Meulman

In recent years there has been a tremendous increase in credible publications about graffiti, nationally and internationally. This can be attributed to the popularisation of the medium, thanks to advertising, design, fashion and fine art. The argument for graffiti as a valid artform is stronger than ever. The time seems right for a historical retrospective of Australian graffiti, to add an air of legitimacy. Sadly, *Kings Way* is not that book.

Kings Way: The Beginnings of Australian Graffiti: Melbourne 1983-93 is beautiful to look at – it has a fairly standard art book layout, a lovely glossy ‘coffee-table’ quarto that helps to position its contents as Art. Following the introduction are three main sections – *Walls, Bombin’*, and *Panels* interspersed with brief tid-bits revealing graffiti landmarks, techniques and materials. The book is loaded with detailed images, the majority taken by amateur photographers who possess a passion for graffiti, including Train Driver Ron, who concealed his zeal for documenting the subculture by pretending to be a trainspotter. The pictures are supplemented by brief paragraphs of information about well-known sites, and a quote about the artist/s. *Kings Way* touts itself as a history documenting the beginnings of Australian graffiti. However, whilst the linear layout of the images creates a visual dialogue for the reader, the text is sorely lacking. The introduction forms the main body of text and starts promisingly, by presenting tantalising allusions to the influences that spawned graffiti subculture in Australia, including music, film and dance. The book hints at an insight into the mythologizing of urban warriors, and the difference between ‘writers’ and street-artists but fails to deliver a strong argument

Despite the engaging, conversational tone, the text soon deteriorates into a nine-page list of who did what with whom and where that reads like a teenaged brag sheet. There is no mention of motives, political and social debate, or even the most basic discussion of artistic merit, technique, or development. This is made worse by a saturation of graffiti jargon – writers getting up with



Kings way: The Beginnings of Australian Graffiti Melbourne 1983-93.
Image courtesy of Miegunyah Press.

epic burners and mad bombin’ - without any explanation of terms, making it unintelligible for the uninitiated, and a hard slog even for those with some point of reference.

However, *Kings Way* is not entirely without historical merit. The authors highlight the importance of the Youth Information Services and later the Victorian Association of Youth in Communities for championing the integration of graffiti into the city by sourcing legal sites, gaining permits, and by initiating competitions and training for ‘writers’. But paradoxically, there is no discussion of how these early efforts led to Melbourne’s current graffiti fuelled public art projects.

Two pages serve as testament to what could have been – the preface to *Bombin’* describes the phenomenon of bombing (prolific, intense ‘tagging’ or signing of a name), and exposes the culture behind it. The author explains motives, kudos, and techniques, and reveals why certain numbers, words and letters were chosen, as well as examining the impact on the wider community. This small section is concise, informative and engaging – if only the same could be said of the whole book.

WATER TANKS

Water Tanks, Spray Cans and Crabby Councillors: The stoush over Casula's legal graffiti walls

Nikki Akbar



Water Tanks at Casula Powerhouse
Image Courtesy of Leaderpool Leader

Casula Powerhouse - like the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney and even the Tate Modern in London - was a functioning electrical plant, supplying power to surrounding suburbs in western Sydney throughout the 1950s. Today, the Powerhouse is a heritage site and centre for contemporary art. It contributes significantly to contemporary art practice and dialogue in Sydney's art scene, whilst simultaneously providing access to cutting-edge art to the residents of Sydney's western suburbs.

Recently, however, the Powerhouse has come under scrutiny from the same government body which provides Casula's funding for the advancement of the arts in Western Sydney - Liverpool City Council. Why? Because as one of the many initiatives implemented by Casula, its resident water-tanks have become legal graffiti walls. And the problem? Liverpool City Council believes that these legal walls encourage the wide-spread tagging and vandalism occurring in Liverpool. But the legal walls act as a canvas for those who consider themselves 'graf artists' to practice their craft. Graffiti has come a long way since the 1960s, and with its pedigree in American hip-hop culture, graffiti has become a recognised art-form. Graf and street-art have become a political, social and cultural outlet for the younger generations in the Liverpool area, many of whom are from non-English speaking backgrounds or come from disadvantaged families; this in turn reflects the importance of graffiti as a avenue of expression for minority and fringe groups throughout Australia.

Liverpool councillors Gary Lucas and Peter Harle passed draft graffiti management strategies - including cash rewards for reporting vandals and the potential closure of Casula's legal walls to public access. These councillors have been avid campaigners for 'graffiti management' in the local area, even if this does involve impinging on cultural institutions and their creative



Water Tanks at Casula Powerhouse
Image courtesy of Nikki Akbar

pursuits. The most pressing problem here would be the loss of historical heritage, along with the loss of accumulated cultural heritage – the enormous tanks are home to layer upon layer of planned and creatively executed images, slogans and symbols particular to local graffiti artists. Liverpool is a centre for both vast multicultural and indigenous populations, and Graffiti has become a universal means of communication for the younger generations. Why destroy pieces of cultural heritage, especially when initiatives like legal graffiti walls provide local kids with free lessons on how to harness their love for the spray can creatively, all under the watchful eye of practicing artists? Kids participating in these types of community-oriented workshops are participating constructively by creating works of art in a specifically allocated space, rather than tagging and vandalising public property.

Water Tanks at Casula Powerhouse, Nikki Akbar, 2009
The controversial issue was protested at Liverpool City Council chambers in early August. The Street University

– a youth-aid initiative in western Sydney – beat-boxed their way from HQ in Liverpool city to council chambers in an attempt to make their point. The legal walls are a place of creativity, artistic invention - a place for “young people to express themselves.” ([Danielle Long, Liverpool Leader, 29 July 2009](#)).

The councillors, after hearing out the protesters, agreed to keep the legal walls open – at least until the next time [Cr Gary Lucas](#) decides to threaten to “shoot the bastards” (‘Sticky Beak,’ *Liverpool Leader*, 5 August 2009) engaged in vandalising Liverpool, or when he decides to mouth-off against graffiti artists. I think the best way to counteract these “ferals” ([Danielle Long, Liverpool Leader, 5 August 2009](#)) from vandal and hoodlum activity is to keep kids in schools, educate them adequately on the laws surrounding vandalism, and provide more legal walls around the Liverpool area where they can create murals and public art. Rather than destroying the tanks, would it not be logical to provide more sites to cultivate creativity?

Name Your Price

Alexia Estrellado

The name game is not just child's play, but is often at the heart of success and failure. We might begin by asking ourselves, what is the importance of the name? I'm sure that there's a great long list of answers, but let's reduce it to two specific functions: identity and reputation. To know the name of something or someone is to identify the object or the person. Knowing the name brings forth expectations, functions and subtle relationships of association. It is here, in this dynamic, that a reputation is built.

Oh to have reputation! It is the envy (or misfortune) of artists and accountants alike. The naïve would proclaim, they don't care about what other people think or say and do as they please. The fact is, everyone cares. Why? Quite simply, it is because we live, work and exist with others. A reputation is not the opinion of one. No, it is something much more substantial. It extends from the individual to the public and becomes a means of social evaluation and progress. It is how artists are praised and their talents recognised.

The art world is subjective, but it cannot avoid the certainty of commerce. Art must be worth something and artists need money. The question is how do you begin to value or put a price on works of art? Most of the time people are left scratching their heads and looking into empty wallets. Perhaps, the answer is found with the name of the individual that held the brush and not with the painting.

The most prestigious museums and galleries will exhibit artists as though they are pedigree dogs: only the best on show. The names alone captivate their audience's attention and draw crowds from all demographics.

Like a juicy bit gossip, they draw closer. They come to see if what everyone else is saying is true, to see if the accolades of awards were rightfully bestowed and to quench their curiosity. In the art world there are implicit and explicit exchanges that set the price and create culture, as we know it.

The reputable name is a powerful resource and should be used with great caution. It engages with society and feeds the hunger to want more. At times the use of a name can be seen as another product on the shelf of consumerism: great artists are added to collections and cities are built from the purchase of celebrity names. However, like with any facelift there are times when it's gone too far and you realise there's no refund or exchange.

In any market, there is the risk of debt and ruin. Arguably, in a cultural market there is a greater consequence that needs to be considered: cultural debt and cultural ruin. Reputable artists, galleries and museums present to their communities a valued knowledge and experience that enriches the cultural identity of society. There is a mutual exchange of confidence founded and based upon their name. Yes, a reputation is the measure of trust of community, but it can be a single name that redeems.

You may have sold your soul, but do not let them take your name as well!

SHORT, SHARP AND SWEET



Artist: Bram Bogart

Title: Master

Date: 2007

Image courtesy of the artist and Annandale Galleries.

Bram Bogart – *Paintings from the Other Side*

[Annandale Galleries](#)

12 August – 12 September 2009

For those who grew up with the highly textural play dough worlds of Trapdoor, Gumby and Pingu, here is the visual portal to reacquaint many with those lost childhood realities. The solo show of Dutch-born Belgian painter Bram Bogart at the Annandale Galleries is an incredible display of post-war Dutch abstraction with a heartily physical impasto presence, like vividly coloured meringue. Coinciding with Intensely Dutch at the AGNSW this tactile exhibition of 'paintings as object' documents some of the pinnacle explorations of this tachiste pioneer.

Jasmin Dessmann

Salvador Dalí – Lobster Telephone (Aphrodisiac Telephone)

Salvador Dalí has lent this painted plastic sculpture an erotic subtext by aligning the lobster's sexual organs over the phone's mouthpiece to draw an analogy between food and sex. Dalí associated lobsters with feminine sexuality, admiring their tough exterior and soft centre; he draws a connection to the telephone, emitting soft sounds through hard handsets. The idea arose when Dalí was eating lobsters and tossing aside shells and one landed on the phone. The sculpture is an exemplar of a surrealist object that celebrates desires of the unconscious. Here, Dalí fused commonplace items in irrational conjunctions, undermining our understanding of reality.

Purnima Ruanglertbutr

Artist: Francesca Rosa
Title: Interior Disaster #5
Image courtesy of the artist.



Can there be beauty in chaos?

[The Australian Centre for Photography](#)

17 July - 22 August 2009

[Francesca Rosa](#)'s forensic-like, photographic documentation of the havoc wreaked by Cyclone Larry on homes and lives, captures the beauty of line, form and colour in wreckage.

A twisted mattress, an upturned table and loosely hanging cables lay strewn about, but compose a balanced frame. Light filtering through gaps in the ceiling forms lines and patterns, bringing an eerie symmetry to the disarray. A ceramic bowl, brightly wrapped chocolates and a lone flower add touches of colour.

Interior Disaster is a moving memorial of the devastation.

Shivangi Ambani

Ricky Maynard - *Portraits of a Distant Land*

Museum Of Contemporary Art, Sydney

4 June - 23 August 2009

Ricky Maynard's retrospective at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney is breathtaking. *Portraits of a Distant Land* (4 June - 23 August) engages the audience with images both haunting and imposing in their scale. Curated by Keith Munro, the exhibition comprised of six main bodies spanning twenty years of Maynard's practice. As a documentary photographer, Maynard endeavours to give voice to stories, which normally remain unheard. Often responses to events of significance to the Indigenous Australians, Maynard's images are provoking, calling on viewers to face up to the collective history of Australia.

Akbar Ruab

“Playful? Yes, but there’s

something more here”.



Lauren Brincat, *It's A Long Way To The Top*, installation view, Artspace, Sydney, 2009.
Photo: Silversalt Photography.

Helen Lempriere Traveling Art Scholarship

Artspace, Woolloomooloo
7-22 August 2009

From the beautifully poetic to the outright strange, the *Helen Lempriere Traveling Art Scholarship* doesn't disappoint. Lauren Brincat's winning video piece 'It's a long way to the top' features the artist rolling a drum to the crest of a hill. And then? She rolls the drum back down. Watching, I felt the childish satisfaction that ubiquitous toy, the slinky, gives as it trips down a staircase. Playful? Yes, but there's something more here. Brincat's movement contrasts with the stillness of the dry grass and lone tree, gradually transforming the scene into an animated version of those Australian bush paintings that are so familiar.

Adela Zverina

Advertising Art

Adela Zverina

I came across an interesting picture of a cold New York day recently. The effect has been created by an image of a cup printed on vinyl and placed over a steaming man-hole that leads to the sewer system, creating the impression of a steaming [hot coffee submerged in the road](#). It's a visually appealing, clever and engaging image - an everyday object with its purpose subverted. So, who is the artist? Take a closer look. Running along the bottom rim of the cup are the words: *Hey, city that never sleeps. Wake up. Folgers*. This is not an artist's intervention. It is an advertisement.

The line between art and advertising is becoming increasingly blurred. As marketing agencies are forced to be ever more creative to catch their audience's fleeting attention, artists are realising the importance of being media savvy if they want to get noticed. [Saatchi & Saatchi](#) have dominated the advertising landscape since the 1970s (they are the agency responsible for the Folger's ad described above), and they understand the new playing field that is advertising better than anyone: "More than nine years ago, we removed the word "advertising" from our name. Why? Because we felt that the future was not for companies that excel in creating advertising; it was for companies that excel in creating ideas..." (Saatchi & Saatchi 2009)

**"We felt that the future
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creating ideas.."**

(Saatchi & Saatchi 2009)

The advertising conglomerate was founded by the Saatchi brothers, Maurice and Charles, and quickly grew to become one of the biggest names in advertising.

The company's success can be attributed to its uniquely clever and masterful ads, which could easily be called artworks. As Martin Davidson, author of *The Consumerist Manifesto* notes: "[one of] the three biggest things that happened to advertising during the 1980s [was] its assumption of the status of an artform... one agency has more to answer for this than any other... Saatchi & Saatchi." (cited in Bogart, 1995)

To cite a recent example of this art-advertising blend, in 2005 Saatchi & Saatchi were commissioned to sell a Brazilian spirit to Londoners. Tapping into graffiti art, a culture usually identified as anti-capitalist, the agency spray painted the advertiser's image on walls in trendy areas of the city ([Malvern 2005](#))

The Saatchi brothers sold their business in 1995, and subsequently founded another, M&C Saatchi, which has now superseded its predecessor. Charles Saatchi is no longer involved in either company, but is today one of the most influential collectors of contemporary art. [The Saatchi Gallery](#) in London displays his extensive collection, and has shaped the careers of many emerging artists. Charles Saatchi is responsible for boosting the profile of megastar artists such as Damien Hirst and Sarah Lucas. It is interesting that an advertising mogul holds such an influential position within the artworld.

There are few artists whose star power is so huge that the art they make matters less than the cachet of their name. [Damien Hirst](#) is one - his name today is more similar to a brand. Of his trademark spot paintings, he claims to have painted only five, and that they weren't very good ([www.artinfo.com](#)). "They're shit...

the best person who ever painted spots for me was Rachel...The best spot painting you can have by me is one painted by Rachel." It is precisely the brand-status

Why do artists who are already established agree to put their names to a commercial brand?

that Hirst has achieved that allows him to distance himself from the process of making. As Charles Saatchi puts it, “an unknown artist’s big glass vitrine holding a rotting cow’s head...may be pretty unsellable. Until the artist becomes a star. Then he can sell anything he touches.” ([Sunday Telegraph 28 November 2004](#))

Hirst believes that the creative process is about conception, not execution ([artinfo.com](#)) His career continues to flourish, his name is cemented in art history, and his estimated wealth is \$388 million (*the Forester* 20 May 2009). Despite this, he is one of many artists who has participated in the the advertising campaign for Absolut vodka, a long running collaboration between the art and advertising worlds: “hundreds of artists, designers, fashion designers, photographers, musicians and craftspeople [have] contributed their talents to the [ABSOLUT VODKA](#) advertising campaign...Versace, Damien Hirst, Maurizio Cattelan...are just a few.”

This strategy was in fact started by Andy Warhol in 1985, when he painted the internationally recognisable bottle. Why do artists who are already established agree to put their names to a commercial brand? Absolut has their own theory: “The experimental, cutting-edge nature of the brand [has] inspired some of the world’s leading artists to create their own interpretations of [ABSOLUT](#)”.

To some extent the ‘brand as inspiration’ theory is probably true. The Absolut brand has become so pop, that now everyone wants in, including big name artists. The man responsible is Michel Roux, the CEO who introduced Absolut to the USA, and who “made liquor cool, by recognising the power of art to transform Absolut and the power of Absolut to transform art.” (Lewis 2005) The creative challenge is probably another consideration for the artists’ involvement, and it doesn’t hurt that art idol Warhol set the precedent. Perhaps the biggest incentive though, comes from the challenge of getting noticed in a world now saturated with images. No wonder artists seize the opportunity for free publicity by collaborating with Absolut. Whatever the reasons, the collaboration acknowledges that advertising can be an artform. Absolut’s campaign is in fact so successful that books have been published about it, and a visit to their website is revealing. One of the first ‘frequently asked questions’ listed is “Where can I buy an Absolut

ad?”. An advertiser’s dream, people not only willing to look at, but actually pay for their marketing. However, what is Absolut’s response? “We do not sell or give away any advertisements...” Consequently, a website [www.absolutads.com](#) has been established complete with links to “buy ads”. The choice to purchase an advertisement is the ultimate example of the blurring of advertising and art. When images are produced to persuade people to buy a product, projected at the public repeatedly (for free) and then become saleable, it is the final affirmation that the gap between advertising and art is a slim (or possibly non-existent) one.

Artists have been involved in the advertising process since its birth. In the 1880s, Henri Toulouse-Lautrec was one of several artists commissioned to create artistic posters (Bogart 1995), mostly advertising caberets and theatre productions. It seems at that time there were fewer questions surrounding the advertising/art borderline: “...the advertising poster was widely regarded as an exciting new art form at the turn of the century. In the view of many artists, writers, and businessmen, good posters would oil the machinery of economic progress; the harmonious conjunction of art and commerce would also help society to reach its full potential.” (Bogart 1995 p.79)

The list of notable artists who have lent their skill to the advertising sector is a long one. Before Brett Whiteley established himself as a career artist, he worked for Lintas Advertising Agency in Sydney in the layout and commercial art department ([Brett Whiteley Studio](#)). On moving to Sydney in 1917, landscape painter Lloyd Rees worked for advertising firm Smith and Julius ([Australian Prints 2006](#)), a firm established by cartoonist Harry Julius, and which had a habit of employing artists, including [J. Muir Auld](#), [Percy Leason](#), [Roland Wakelin](#), [Adrian Feint](#) and John Passmore ([AboutNSW](#)). In fact, a search for artists “occupation: commercial” on the [Dictionary of Australian Artists](#) Online returns fifty-eight results.

As so often happens when discussing key moments in contemporary art history, the name Andy Warhol comes to mind. Warhol studied commercial art at the Carnegie Institute of Technology in Pittsburgh. On graduating, he moved to New York where he began his career as a

On the other hand

may the best

(idea) win.

successful commercial illustrator for magazines such as Vogue and Harper's Bazaar (Artelino 2009). This lay the foundations for his art practice, when he later used (or embraced) existing advertising, reproduced it and called it art. Forcing us to examine the objects in a new light, he pointed out their aesthetic potential, and raised their status from low to high-culture. He also did something else. Warhol made a point about art, as much as commercial advertising: art is a commodity like any other, to be bought and sold and from which to profit.

Of course, there was a time when an artist's success was directly determined by their skill with a marble slab or paintbrush, coupled with their ability to run a workshop. This shift has set art free. The artist can now do as he/she pleases, and so we see art that shocks, is ugly, esoteric, referential. As Charles Saatchi said in a 2004 interview with the Sunday Telegraph, "there are...conservators out there to look after anything an artist decides is art". But with this freedom comes a new challenge: people are overloaded with images. It is a hard task to stand out above the billboards, TV commercials, online pop-ups, flyers, and multitude advertising devices. As early as 1928, Germany's Mannheim municipal gallery director Gustav Hartlaub declared, "Advertising art is today the one true public art" (cited in Hatton & Walker p.20). How can artists compete? The answer must be marketing... and so we come full circle.

Does it matter if we can't tell the difference between an artwork and an advertisement anymore? Maybe this is now more an issue of semantics, struggling with our old vocabulary to find the right label for something newly created, or struggling to define the difference between these terms, when today, as Saatchi & Saatchi point out, what we are really talking about is ideas. But no, there is still a difference. Art is an expression, or a response to our world. It can hold a mirror to society, and reflect or ask questions. Advertising may employ artists, but exists only as a means for selling, manipulating people to achieve its end. So to some extent, yes it does matter if we can't tell the difference. As advertising agencies can now operate independently of artists, they are an artist's biggest competition. And what hope does an artist have in making an impression if he/she is now competing against multinationals?

On the other hand, may the best (idea) win.

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Attack! A-Tag!

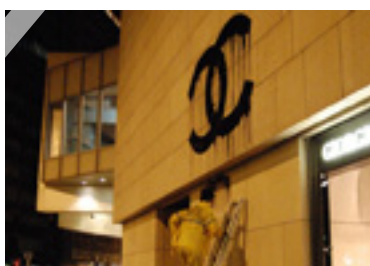
Ricky Lau

Can graffiti simply be collected, preserved, curated and presented to the public as art and cultural artefact?

Ricky Lau considers this question.

On Sunday 19 July 2009 a Parisian man was arrested in Hong Kong after he allegedly 'liquidated' a gigantic Chanel sticker on the Giorgio Armani building. Christophe Schwarz pleaded guilty to one count of criminal damage and was given two weeks suspended sentence.

Schwarz (aka ZEVS) is a Parisian writer renowned for his *Visual Attacks* and *Liquidate Logo Series*, which subvert well-known icons such as McDonald's and Louis Vuitton. When 'liquidating' the Chanel logo, ZEVS first adheres the 'double-Cs' onto the sandstone wall. He then drips black water-based pigment along the façade and onto the pavement creating a trompe-l'œil. The work deliberately attacks the brand's vacuous character by depicting its inability to maintain a solid state. The visual melt down also conveys a sense of urgency, commenting on the infatuation and obsession about the logo.



Artist: Zevs
Title: Dripping Chanel
Image courtesy of the artist.

Dressed in a luminous yellow parka, trilby hat and a translucent mask, ZEVS proclaims his 'flashy' outfit as a camouflage that weaves his presence into the urban fabric. His appearance and anonymity resembles *Rorschach* (a.k.a. Walter Kovac) - a vigilante and

nihilist in Alan Moore's graphic novel *Watchmen*, who expresses his hatred and frustration towards the absolutism of society by taking justice into his own hands.

ZEVS's *happening* can be interpreted as a contest against the dictatorship of brand culture. It also signifies Hong Kong's hyper-consumerism and invokes critical alertness and awareness.

What is more astounding is that the entire assailing process was documented. ZEVS was filmed in action on site without secret cameras, interruptions or interrogations. The angular shots and the sequential frames were aesthetically calculated and executed, recalling the voltage and hostility of an action flick. When ZEVS completed his masterpiece, he had enough time to pack up and dispose of his ladder and equipment onto an awaiting truck, with auxiliaries and legal team on standby, before a deliberately timed arrest. ZEVS was apprehended just hours before the Opening of his *Liquidated Logos* show at the Art Statements gallery in Hong Kong. What could generate more noise for the gallery than the seizure of its artist and his subsequent prosecution? Interestingly, ZEVS' ordeal will be broadcast, debated, followed (Tweeted) and forgotten, mirroring the transience and ephemeral nature of the work. The artist also underestimated Hong Kong's frenzied consumerism and its citizen's loyalty and devotion to brands: the intended resistance and endurance of his **bomb** has been undermined and mistaken for yet another Chanel pop-up store.

ZEVS might NOT have expected arrest and imprisonment, but what he and his gallery probably were probably least aware of, is the "[surrealistic](#)" invoice of the tag.

Is graffiti simply an act of vandalism? Or is it a legitimate aesthetic and cultural movement, conceived by the urbanization and fragmentation of societies, fermented by dislocation and alienation, and born of a revolutionary spirit and a will to resist?

Can graffiti simply be collected, preserved, curated and presented to the public as art and cultural artefact?

Perhaps graffiti is an anthropological phenomenon able to be dissected, analysed and studied before it is subverted by the advertising agencies and cashed-in at the fashion houses.

Can graffiti simply be collected, preserved, curated and presented to the public as art and cultural artefact? The exhibition *Born in the Street: Graffiti* at the Fondation Cartier Paris attempts its first **hit** at the urban myth, tracing the origins of the graffiti movement. The exhibition offers the public an opportunity to re-engage with a cultural emulation and artistic expression that is illicit, ephemeral, ubiquitous, and highly mutative.

Cartier and presented in a controlled-chaotic manner. Gérard Zlotykamien reproduces his *éphémère* (ephemerals) on the glass façade. The work is inspired by the human silhouettes left on the walls of Hiroshima in 1945. During the 1970s, while Paris was undergoing major urban renewal, Zlotykamien was spraying these phantoms onto abandoned buildings and construction sites, bearing witness to the evaporation of social histories. The ghost resurrected at the exhibition has a layer of frost emerging from the black outline and its blood-red mouth, eerily sucking vitality from the curators and visitors to procure immortality.



Artist: Zevs
Description; View of exhibition 'Born in the Streets - Graffiti'.
Image courtesy of the artist and Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain.

The show opens with a billboard-like structure along the boulevard Raspail. Graphic essays and urban jamming has been specially commissioned by the Fondation

Nine full-height glass panels have been heavily **bombed** by Barry McGee's *Amaze*. His signature **throw-up** twists, curls and coils into a canto of letters, immersed

within the urban fabrics to which Adrian Frutiger referred as 2-D architecture. McGee is crowned for his intricate skills and subtle manipulations of the spray can. His **piece** is **fat** and **skinny** at the same time and impossible for other writers to **bite**. Sadly, the integration of the work sees the **King** being entrapped by the architectural structures and tranquility of Lothar Baumgarten's *Theatrum Botanicum*, transpiring not vibrancy but melancholy and despair.

The most impressive work is Evan Roth's *Graffiti Taxonomy: Paris* (2009). Branched from his *Graffiti Analysis*, Roth photographed over 2,400 graffiti tags from each of Paris's twenty districts. Each specimen was archived, tagged and sorted by letter. He identified and extracted the ten most commonly used alphabets by Parisian graffiti writers for further investigation (A, E, I, K, N, O, R, S, T and U). From each of the letter group, eighteen tags were selected to represent the range and diversity of that specific character. Roth's categorisation has no intention to rank and grade the graffiti tags, but aiming to highlight the diversity and heterogeneity of the characters.

Each of the tags were digitally cropped from their contexts and presented as solid black against a white background, he then enlarged the highlighted letter (in red) in the tag and placed it adjacent to the original for comparison. All of the eighteen characters were placed into a grid and 180 proliferated tags were mapped onto the pristine façade of the building during the exhibition like a transparent urban Periodic Table.

Evan Roth's project can be used as a tool to dissect and decipher the semiotics of graffiti writings and despite the randomness and arbitrariness of the methodology, *Graffiti Taxonomy: Paris* is an audacious anthropological exercise if not a freestanding wallpaper.

The basement gallery exhibits a series of wall works, archival photographs,

sketchbooks and seminal films. It is compelling to see Part One's **wildstyle** expressionism rubbing shoulders with Seen's *Hand of Doom* in a civilised manner. The later is a replica of Seen's 1980 **burner** presented in conjunction to Henry Chalfant's astounding camera work. Other photographs by John Naar and Martha Cooper enthrallingly capture the ambience of New York underground scenes in the '70s and '80s. **Piece books**, uniforms, vintage spray cans from Rustoleum, Red Devil, Wet Look and Krylon are showcased inside these sleek, minimalist black tables encased in diaphanous glass. The metaphysical distance between viewers and objects is engulfed and the sense of alienation and segregation colligates the encounter to the cabinet of curiosities.

Herve Chandès, Director of the Fondation Cartier emphasises that the exhibition is not a retrospective on graffiti; instead it focuses on gesturing and language, the tradition of wall painting and the performative aspects of street art. The truth is *Born in the Street: Graffiti* is more a taxonomy preserving and embalming endangered activities.



Artist: Zevs
Description; View of exhibition 'Born in the Streets – Graffiti'.
Image courtesy of the artist and Fondation Cartier pour l'art Contemporain.

“In the very act of celebrating graffiti, the curators

cannot help also murdering it, for graffiti is

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The curator also compiles a wide range of film programmes. These documentaries, some visceral and others tumultuous and highly controversial, stimulate the ongoing debates on street art. A film co-produced by the Fondation Cartier records the phenomenon of the [pixação](#) movement. A **clique** from São Paulo is responsible for scaling buildings at night and tags them with Fraktur and Runic scripts in Gothic calligraphy – *píxo*. These ornamental writings, monumental in scale, are less about style and symbolism than the relationship between the writer's body and space. The *giant ductus* vastly exceeds the limits of the hand and waist, requiring movement of the entire body – a performance of scriptural practice in the urban framework. Interestingly, a crew of 30 *pixações* hijacked the Choque Cultural gallery to protest “[the marketing, institutionalisation and domestication of street art](#)” by the galleries and media. Paintings by old masters and ‘blue-chip’ street artists such as Gerald Laing, Speto and Titi Freak were **killed**. The idea of a public institution like Fondation Cartier acknowledging a group of social outlaws infiltrating another institution is absolutely absurd.

Children's workshops are usually the highlights of the Fondation Cartier's exhibitions. *Graffiti Workshop* encourages the participants to piece and to learn about aerosol painting techniques. At the end of the workshop, the participants will collectively create a large-scale mural to be exhibited in the *Theatrum Botanicum*. The philosopher Alain Milon conducts a series of *Sociological Walks*, inviting visitors on a sociological stroll around Paris' 11th and 20th arrondissements. By tracing the footsteps of urban artists, the participants would question the etymology of graffiti movement and the nature of illicit expressions. While some might question the legitimacy and overriding paradoxes which arise from the shows and workshops, Robin Blake from the Financial Times sums up the exhibition succinctly: “In the very act of celebrating graffiti, the curators cannot help also murdering it, for graffiti is not just born in the streets, it can only survive there.”^[1]

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^[1] Robin Blake, “The writing on the wall,” *Financial Times: Life & Arts*, July 18 & 19 2009.

See Glossary page 51

Rising Tide: Film & Video works from the MCA Collection

26 June – 23 August

Alison van der Linden

Ali van der Linden recently visited the MCAs video collection and was swept away by the calibre of contemporary film art in Australia.....

Video and film art could be said to be a rising tide in the contemporary art scene, internationally and at home, steadily gaining momentum in Australian art. The MCA's *Rising Tides: Film and Video works from the [Museum of Contemporary Art's Collection](#)* which recently concluded, was an exhibition devoted entirely to the medium of film and video (Young, *Sydney alive* 2009). All works, by contemporary Australian artists, have been acquired by the Museum of Contemporary Art's collection in the last six years and all have been previously displayed in a similar format at the MCA in San Diego. This was an impressive selection of contemporary video art from Australia.

In *Rising Tides*, moving images has been used as a means to explore traditional themes such as self-portraiture (Kate Murphy), landscape (Todd McMillan) and social commentary (the Kingpins). Many of the artists have also worked previously in more traditional medium's of painting and sculpture before venturing into digital art. As raised by J Matthews in the *Artkritique* blog (27 July 2009) "The works by women were definitely the most engaging and thought provoking", an idea which I concur, with the ladies varying subject matter still all indicating clever narrative. These diverse narratives challenged the audience with stories of family, inferred the existence of under-water people, apocalyptic viruses and questioned the validation of masculinity in popular culture.

The sole focus on moving images in *Rising Tides* is a deliberate acknowledgement of the increasing popularity of film art by artists as technology becomes cheaper, easier and more accessible. "Over recent years- even the last six years since these films were acquired- the exhibition of digital art in galleries has become

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increasingly sophisticated and prominent" states D Angeloro, MCA educational co-ordinator (resource 2009). The recent awarding of the national Blake Prize (for spiritual and religious art) for the first time to a video artist, Angelica Mesiti, further indicates how much moving images has infiltrated popular visual culture and awards. The Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship was won in August by a video/sound experimentalist, and selected finalists were predominantly video or digital installations, a further indication of growing dominance of this discipline in Australia.

Video is also a far more affordable art form for institutions to acquire, with compact storage and cheap transport/courier costs to other countries. Investment in top quality projection technology enhances works, and can be used repeatedly to display a multitude of films in the MCA collection.

Overall *Rising Tides* was well executed; the exhibition and layout was well considered in relation to moving images and the requirements of lighting, projection and sound to exhibit such works. As each artist's work had a designated room or specific space at a distance from other works, films varying in content and intention didn't have to compete for attention of the viewer, and could be enjoyed singularly in the moment. However, the lack of signage and directions to the exhibition on the fourth level is a continuing problem that the MCA needs to address if it hopes to attract crowds off the street and into its shows.

Patricia Piccinini's *Sandman* (2002) film was originally part of another exhibition incorporating installation, film and sculpture. Her narrative film begins with a girl swimming in choppy seas with some difficulty; it

becomes clear she is more at ease under the water's surface than above it. Whilst she is floating tranquilly beneath the sea we notice gills on the side of her neck; could she be a mer-person or hybrid water creature? Our imagination is stirred and we want to discover more about this elusive creature. The water scenes are beautiful, however, at times it did seem contrived; I felt as if I was watching an episode of Chanel 10's tween series "H2O; just add water" (in which three attractive beach babes develop a strange genetic mutation which enables them to transform into mermaids and invariably save their ocean habitat on a regular basis).

Equally tranquil were the four floating boats in Jess MacNeils' *The shape of between*, gently gliding over the river Ganges in the misty grey of early morning simultaneously away and towards each other. A sense of calm prevails, and as the boats never intersect each other, you could easily watch this perpetual state of floating for hours. The grey early morning sun gives the river scene a spiritual and soft glow. The installation of this film in the naturally semi-lit room, alongside the horizontal shadows working their way up the *Opera House steps*, worked beautifully to enhance the serenity of both works. The horizontal slithers of shadow on the Opera House (but strangely no figures creating them) are entrancing and elevate the mundane to the fascinating. *Passenger* by Susan Norrie is a series of stunning black and white footage. The hollow, eerie sounds compliment the floating, delayed quality of the films (projected onto all four walls of the large room). The isolated, darkened room for the work created a sound vacuum around the series of vintage holiday reels and scenes of scientists clad in bio-hazard suits collecting specimens, as though a scientific catastrophe had befallen the holiday destination.

The *film noir* quality of suspense is easily evident in reels depicting the floating ferris-wheel, and combined with the haunting images of the scientist's, a sense of narrative develops. Has civilisation been eradicated by a virus? Are the clad men immune, and surveying the carnage from the safety of their suits? Did they create this situation in their labs; or have we simply jumped to this conclusion because of the sensational coverage of SARS and Swine Flu virus in recent years by the media? The whole work was like a spine-tingling, suspenseful

Patricia Cornwall novel, clinical yet quietly threatening and intimidating.

Similarly David Noonans' *Owl* (2004) also took elements from *film noir*. Shadowy and grainy with the owl half concealed by night-fall, it was reminiscent of the "blow up" of those alleged crime scene photographs from Michelangelo Antonioni's (1966) masterpiece with its raw, smudged edges and the haunting gaze of the owl. Social commentary is the order of The Kingpins collaborative work *Welcome to the jingle*. Obviously subverting Starbucks, and its world wide franchise of stores that look and smell the same any where in the world from the US to Egypt; the universal model of consumerism and globalisation. The choreographed routine by the drag-kings (women dressed as men) and original music was absolutely hilarious, compounded by the fact the customers in Starbucks don't even look up from their coffees when the Kingpins' routine was unfolding beside them.

They satirise the consumerism and global bland (brand) of the Starbucks franchise, by capturing the public's indifference to their routine. Even the sores on the artists' faces (actually intended to be teenage acne) appeal as a sort of symbolic festering lesions- a poignant symbol of excess and degeneration in society. I have to wonder why the Kingpins dress in drag; is it to "validate" their art, or is it a simple case of tongue-in-cheek? As men, is their choreographed routine a substantial method to critique consumerism, whereas by women the same method is deemed merely entertainment – a song and dance? With the two screens set up opposite each other, at each end of a long room, a "Tennis match" effect occurred when watching- flicking your attention from one screen to the other. Perhaps it would have been more effective if set up on adjacent walls in a corner, having the moving images on both screens work in tandem.

The Neddy Project by TV Moore (Timothy Vernon Moore) was another effective display of works by a sole artist separately. A series of films about two mythologised outlaws named "Neddy" – Ned Kelly and the underworld figure Neddy Smith- who morph as mirror images and extensions of each other (R Kent, MCA education resource 2009) from the centre of each screen. With

the success of *Underbelly* and underworld television shows in recent years, characters of crime and violence have become celebrity figures, revered by men as idols or anti-establishment rebels. In one sense the artist has captured this sense of awe in the two figures, but ultimately the constant comparison, repetition and intersection of the two personalities rendered the two very different characters as one and the same, bleaching them of uniqueness.

The most enjoyable work by a male artist was Shaun Gladwells' *Tangara* - a cleverly deceptive piece which at first appears to be filmed in a space shuttle as the artist clutches to a steel handle to avoid floating off in zero-gravity. In fact, the artist is hanging upside down from a hand railing in a Sydney train, the *Tangara*, the film flipped the wrong-side up and slowed down to enhance a sense of gravity loss in space. In San Diego, RL Pincus (San Diego Union-Tribune 25.06.09) thought the work was a "A thoroughly childish, yet clever, distortion of being 'down under' " a comment which suggests Americas pre-occupation with that notion (That, and we all ride kangaroos to work) than our own consciousness to being wrong way up, or "other". I simply found Gladwells' work intriguing and quirky, as it took several moments to comprehend the scene he had constructed. In contrast, Daniel von Sturmers' work was rather dull. His investigation of the aesthetic, physical and conceptual properties of materials read more like a static film of a pile of plasticine and rubbish sitting on a desk. Whilst Todd McMillans' time lapse film of himself in the landscape *By the Sea* was, in his own words, a failure. By standing on the headlands "from dusk until dawn—facing towards the bleak ocean in search of enlightenment... in the end nothing was achieved; ultimately introspection and self reflection did not bring any answers or renewed wisdom, and a longing for more remained" (R Kent MCA educational resource 2009) as well as feeling thoroughly frozen I'm sure! None of these works really challenged the audience nor induced a sense of narrative beyond what is placed in front of you.

There was no direct theme which connected the works in *Rising Tide*, but that wasn't necessary, due to the layout of works in separate confined spaces, making each individual experience one to be enjoyed and savoured. The "link" between MCA San Diego and

Sydney was rather a weak, mute point as the exhibition was self-contained on its own. Perhaps there could have been more of a dialogue between the two institutions, a mix of Australian and contemporary American video works on display in a reciprocal exhibition. The need to justify the exhibition with the relationship to MCA San Diego was unnecessary, as contemporary Australian film art, particularly the narratives developed by female artists, is clearly well developed of its own accord.

Rising Tide: Film & Video works from the Museum of Contemporary Art collection *will be showing at the MCA from 26 June – 23 August 2009*

Time to Get Trans-humanist: Robotic Art and Automaton

Jasmin Dessmann

From robot pole dancers to mechanical dead rabbits, Jasmin Dessmann takes a look at Robotic Art.

When greeted by a dress-wearing robot who chats in a stilted man's voice about the weather, dancing and other robots, there are many feelings of social absurdity which start to come to mind. This is Wade Marynowsky's *Bourgeoisie Robot* (2008) and according to the theories of Japanese Roboticist Masahiro Mori, in situations like these I could feel intrigued and friendly towards this automaton impersonating a polite and pleasant, if not charming, bourgeoisie with the best of conversational decorum and exquisite Victorian flair, or I could run screaming (Mori, 1970). This is one example of the complicated and elusive balance in the imaginary relationship between humans and robots, a subject which inevitably has become inherent in the practice of Robotic Art and in its parallel to robotic technologies. It is here at these blurred intersections of science and art, where the obscure place of Robotic Art is alive.

Advancements in robotic technology mostly began in the fifties and its potential to revolutionize all areas of our lives was quickly identified (Hunt, 1990). For the military, robotic warfare is the ideal martial resource. For industry, it is the unyielding labour for factory production. For domestic life, it provides technological convenience in the home and future carers for our aging populations. In all, robotics signifies a new era of civil service covering multitudes of fields and industries to which many, such as Robot Scientist Rodney Brooks, are predicting as an imminent and essential change.

The first of many questions surrounding this relatively new technology is how to define a robot. From early Greek Mythology constructed figures in the human image, such as *Pygmalion's* Galatea, have spawned varying ideologies of what constitutes an artificial being. With the surge of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century, concepts of the future expanded to include artificial entities including automata, cyborgs, androids, and replicants. In literary history, Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* generated a tenacious image of horror and intrigue forming the pervasive foundation for other

such classic examples as E.T.A. Hoffman's *Olympia* – inspiring the 1870 ballet of *Coppelia* – Gustav Meyrink's version of the Golem, Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, the imagined clockwork housekeepers of G. K. Chesterton in his *Father Brown* series of the 1920s, as well as Karel Capek's play *R.U.R.* – which in 1922 first coined the Czech word 'robot' – and many of the iconic robot series by Isaac Asimov who also defined the three laws of Robots, and whose novels have recently come to be thought of as an inspiration to Islamic militant group [al-Qaida](#). The robot was also given visual verity by the introduction of robots in film such as *Metropolis*, *Forbidden Planet*, *Star Wars* and Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner* to name only a few.

Yet in Robotic Art, artists may ignore all of these definitions and historical references whilst also not adhering to any single medium exclusively defined as robotic. Eduardo Kac evaluated developments in Robotic Art and identified three main aspects of its use in contemporary art : remote control robotics, robotics as cybernetic entities, and robotics which are autonomous in behaviour. Aside from these genesis areas which define key beginnings, the medium is dynamic by its very design and constantly manoeuvres between kinetic art, light art, machine art, cybernetic art, performance, installation, theatre and inter-communication technologies. Simon Penny, a robotic artist and art theorist, suggests that "...artists do basic research into the cultural implications of emerging technologies". So it is becoming something of a cliché to say that art and science exist on far opposing sides of a chasm. With this in mind, the human-robot relationship has undergone many explorations with different artists within the last few decades.

Inherent in the original concept of the robot was first the practical notion of servitude. The idea that robots exist merely as tools has been explored by many, most notably Stelarc who experimented with extending the human body with a robotic third arm. More recently, this

subject was drawn upon by artist Ken Rinaldo in his experimental use of robotics to extend the capabilities of fish using rolling, mechanical fish-bowls that could be manoeuvred by the control of the fish. Here the robot is subservient in making attainable what is otherwise impossible. Norman White looked at the reverse of this idea with *Helpless Robot* (1987-96) which asks repeatedly for its audience to spin it around and so highlights the contradiction of the creation designed to assist which relies wholly on being assisted. Opposite the perspective that robots are our slaves, is the alternate aspiration that robots may soon become our friends. Edward Ihnatowicz had first focused on the subject of creation of life through robotics with his autonomous piece *Senster* (1970) and expressed interest in the audience's tendency to anthropomorphise inert objects in which certain inherently human characteristics are perceived. *Senster*, a computer-programmed robot, which via sensors moved away from louder audience

members appeared to display 'shy' behaviour like that of an animal.

In 2002 at Converge, Adelaide Art Festival, Patricia Piccinini presented her animatronic sculptures titled *SO2 – Synthetic Organism 2*. Based on the appearance of a long extinct species, the wriggling robot creates the illusion of life, inspiring its audience to further ponder extinction. Like much of Piccinini's sculptural anamorphic creatures, hyper-realism evokes innate feelings, but with skin so real it looks clammy, like a ghoulish parody of life, feelings are not always of affiliation.

Masahiro Mori – and also Sigmund Freud in 1919 – investigated this sensitive balance of what we feel attracted to or repulsed by in the theory of the [Uncanny Valley](#) (1970) and Isaac Asimov described this as the Frankenstein complex.



Artist: Wade Marynowski
 Title: The Hosts
 Date: 2009
 Image courtesy of the artist.

The temptation to speculate on which human behaviours could extend to robots in a robot - human future.

This theory is also seen in the Canadian partnership Janet Cardiff and George Bures Miller's interactive robotic piece *The Killing Machine*, (2007) presented at the 2008 Edinburgh Art Festival. This work, despite having little appearance of the human form, could be seen as being heavily imbued with animalistic and human qualities. As the audience watch, needle-tipped, robotic appendages stab a writhing sheepskin covered dentist chair. Similar to the work of Piccinini, this robotic construction ignites our deepest empathies counting on the inevitable human ability to humanise.

Consistent with Philip K. Dick's question "[Do androids dream of electric sheep](#)", is the temptation to speculate on which human behaviours could extend to robots in a robot-human future. Like the delicate automatons of Vichy, a surreal allure pervades in seeing ourselves imitated. In 1964, Nam June Paik and Shuya Abe introduced their remote-control robot *K-456* to the streets of New York. He mingled with pedestrians, spouted John F. Kennedy's inaugural speech and excreted beans.

In a creepy mimicry of a masquerade ball Wade Marynowsky's *The Hosts* (2009) also presents this aesthetic dimension of modelling behaviour in a hypnotic dance impersonating social play of the Victorian ballroom, with his corseted automatons. Elements of this are also active in the work of Giles Walker who presented his installation of pole dancing robots titled *Peepshow* in 2009 at the inaugural London Kinetica Art Fair. This piece utilized robotism as social commentary on what robots should really do if they are to accurately imitate life. With hypnotic gyration, the pole dancing robots become a science fiction caricature of impotence and lust, showing things that are commonly perceived as ordinary human behaviour as bizarre when translated through robotic mimicry. Devoid of emotion or sexual organs, the female robot is emblematic of a science fiction future where the robot-human relationship is very blurred, and very complicated.

Ultimately, the Frankenstein myth dies hard and the human-robot interaction comes full circle to mirror the entropic predictions of Hollywood and a *Matrix*-esque Robotic Armageddon. Mark Pauline is one of the

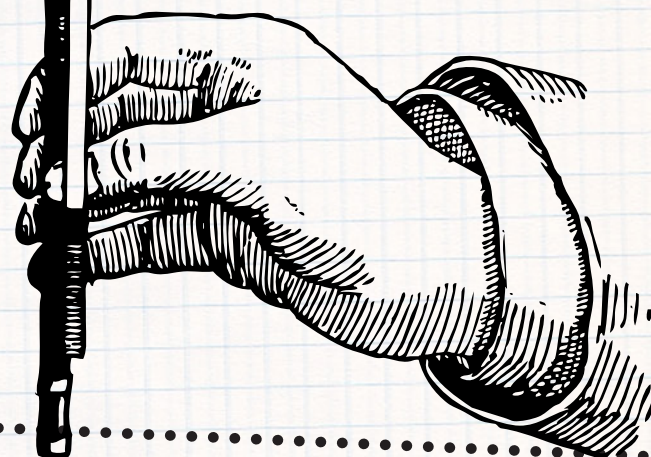


Artist: Giles Walker
Title: Peepshow
Image courtesy of the artist.

most notorious to actively explore these issues in his vivid and destructive installations, created with artist collaborative SLR – Survival Research Laboratories –, often involving explosions, music, fire, and a degenerative display of robotic anarchy. Pauline also went as far as to mechanically animate dead animals such as *Rabot* (1981), a rabbit grafted to a mechanical exoskeleton, echoing Mary Shelley's suggestions of the larger-than-human powers of technology. More recently American artist Bill Vorn also has made robotic installations which display similar characteristics of technological chaos emphasizing the possible bitter after-taste of a robotic revolution.

On the model of artist and engineer interactions in Art, Billy Kluver, a research engineer from the prestigious Bell Labs who collaborated with Robert Rauschenberg, remarked that: "All the art projects I have worked on have at least one thing in common... From an engineer's point of view, they are ridiculous." A point enthusiastically exaggerated and gleefully examined as more artists dabble with robotic technologies and ponder the implications of the medium; the social scientists of the post-industrial pre-futuristic age.

Largely, from Asimov's fiction to Hollywood horror, the fascination robots instil in us is a powerful frontier which has been ripe for imaginary debauchery both for artists and scientists alike. Each prone to disappear down the rabbit-hole in their investigations of this complex relationship we are building with trans-humanist technologies. In everyday reality, however, we have yet to see the full social, political, and emotional implications these technologies may include. Robotic Art exists as a dynamic practice between these fields and with shades of a *Coppelian* curiosity we can prompt and poke at the enticing idea of the human-robot connection. Robots are not yet our homeboys, but with Robotic Art it won't be long.



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Different Experiences of Sacred Books

Zhisheng Sa

*Examining two contemporary art exhibitions about the Bible and the Qur'an, **Zhisheng Sa** continues the discussion about art and religion.*

Two recent exhibitions in different parts of the world have rekindled the debate about the relationship between art and religion. As a part of [Made in God's Image](#), visitors to the Gallery of Modern Art (GoMA) in Glasgow were encouraged to write their thoughts on the Bible. Patrons did so with the vast majority choosing to deface the Bible by writing down abusive and obscene messages. The other exhibition was by the California based artist [Sandow Birk](#) who created a series of images which related to his own English version and understanding of the Qur'an, which was exhibited in San Francisco. Before the exhibition opened, it had already received some unwelcome publicity from Muslim groups.

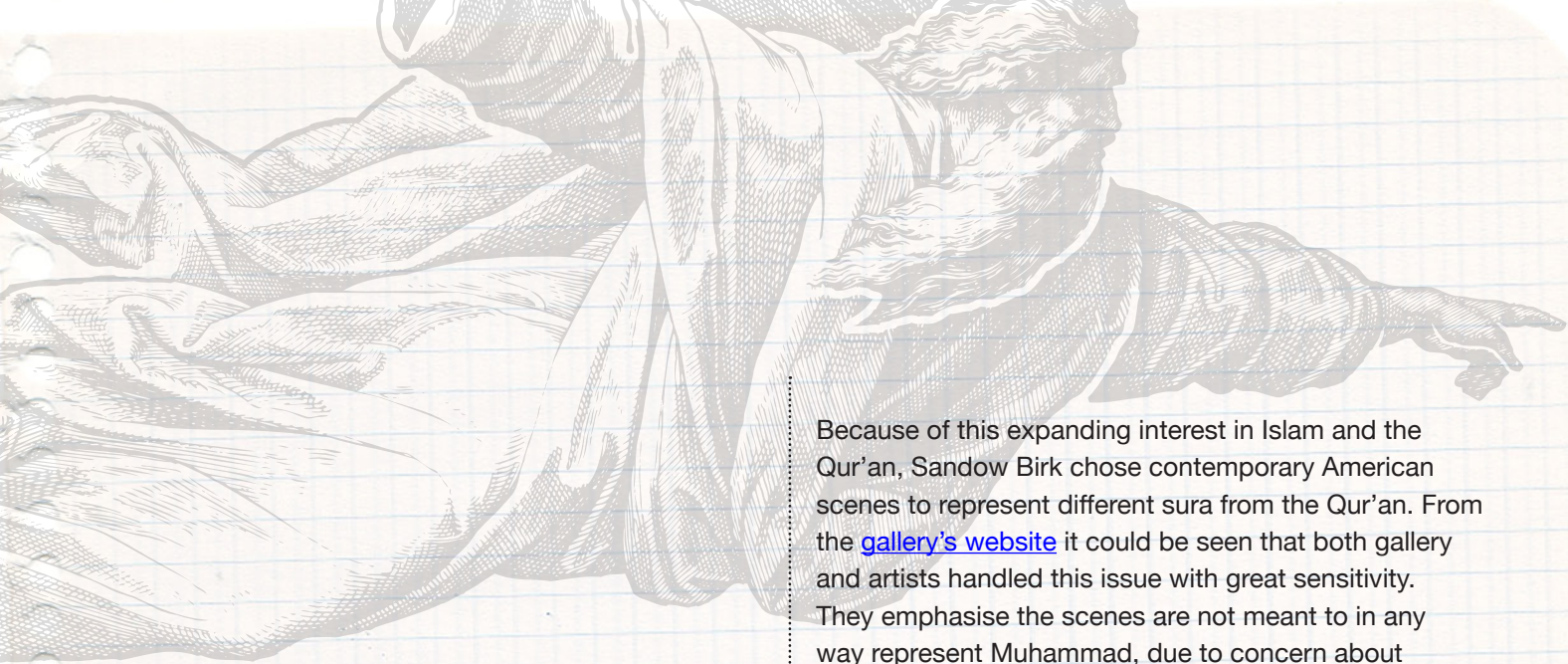
Compared to earlier controversies concerning [Serrano's Piss Christ](#) and the [Jyllands-Posten Muhammad cartoons](#), these two exhibitions seem insignificant. However, these exhibitions and controversies do reflect the tension between art and religion in contemporary society and the ongoing debate surrounding them. The open and friendly gesture of the exhibition in Scotland poses several questions. Who are the audiences in attendance at such exhibitions? Who defaced the Bible? And what is the purpose of doing so? Today, contemporary art's regular audiences most likely share similar interests with the contemporary artists they go to see. As recent generations have grown up they have been influenced by multiple converging ideas, philosophies and movements advancing upon previous generations' concepts of what is interesting and appropriate, such as the different avant-garde movements, globalisation, communications, technology, Postmodernism and the 'breakout' of the 1960s. Contemporary art as a result of all this is more likely to focus on questioning the world and society, than on purely representing it.

**For humans by humans has
turned into a new battle
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religion and art.**

Christianity, which is one of the strongest metaphors and incarnations of traditional order and power in Western society, has been criticised, questioned and doubted almost continuously in many contemporary artwork. This is also coupled with a growth in secularism in society since the 18th century, not necessarily a bad trend, but it is a contributing factor for the attitudes of today's audiences of contemporary art. This can be seen as internalising a default tendency to question Christianity, as it begins from a different view point and is seeking to understand it through a different lens.

Far less is known about Christianity today by the average person than in past eras and has lead to a situation where mainstream society debates complex ethical issues surrounding the religions (be they Catholic or Protestant), while possessing only a rudimentary understanding of why they takes such positions. This is strongly expressed through the guise of postmodernism and deconstructionist art regarding important Christian symbols, leading to a breakdown of art for art's sake and its politicisation. This produces murky waters in which religious art is shown, talked about and interpreted, but with a central crux being to go against tradition and challenge authority in all forms (which is now quite fashionable). Ironically such art then imposes the mainstreams' views on others, thus becoming a new symbol of authority. In short, it has deposed the Bible and inadvertently replaced it with itself.

As such, GoMA offered an olive branch of inclusion, itself an initiative of the new authority by asking patrons to write their own original verses, which they would like to see in the Bible in order to make it a more inclusive document. For humans by humans has turned into a new battle ground in the debate between religion and art.



The relationship between art and Christianity has changed throughout the past 2000 years. In Western culture, the Bible is the cornerstone upon which the laws, government, and society at large have relied on since the end of the Roman Empire. From Byzantine art to Romanticism, Western art was intimately related with the Biblical story. Although from the fall of Rome until the start of the Renaissance the overwhelming majority of Western art was not necessarily Biblical, it was still religious in nature. Paintings of and allusions to religious scenes are one of the most common themes in Western art history as Christians announced that to do so added to the praise, worship, and glory of God.

Once the Industrial Revolution resulted in opportunities for mass education, enhanced productivity and the rise of mass media including newspapers, this led to new ideas, with different ideologies including democracy, agnosticism, atheism and freedom of expression. There was a resulting escalated tension between art and religion. This freedom has been maintained and expanded to the point where artists are now able to freely challenge authority, opening a whole new world of "what if". This has been crucial in producing the society we live in today and its relationship with art, and for providing an environment for the exhibitions in Glasgow and San Francisco to take place.

If the exhibition in Glasgow shows the scepticism of contemporary art, the exhibition regarding a personal version of the Qur'an may force us, perhaps at knife-edge, to rethink the terms of freedom of expression. Have we applied double standards on Christianity and Islam? After 9/11, sensitivity towards Islam has been highlighted globally. While the world was shocked by the violence of Islamic terrorists, the distinct nature of Islamic cultures has caught the attention and growing curiosity of the world.

Because of this expanding interest in Islam and the Qur'an, Sandow Birk chose contemporary American scenes to represent different sura from the Qur'an. From the [gallery's website](#) it could be seen that both gallery and artists handled this issue with great sensitivity. They emphasise the scenes are not meant to in any way represent Muhammad, due to concern about repercussions from the Muslim community. Indeed it was intentional that no irony or satire would be used in any of the artworks. Although it has been stressed that the artist created these works with the best intentions, negative responses have been received from the Muslim community. For Muslims, the sacredness of the Qur'an, the source of religious power strongly influencing politics and sentimental attitude contribute to the narrative style figurative images created by the artist being unacceptable and insulting to the Islamic faith. Islam, like Christianity, is not homogenous and it has a variety of views from liberal to fundamentalist, as well as national variations. However throughout Islam it is forbidden to create art which depicts the noble Qur'an because it is seen as defacing God and challenging his creation by trying to form our own creations. Hence, in Islamic society there is a general aversion to Western contemporary visual arts.

In 2005, the Danish Jyllands-Posten cartoons depicting Mohammed resulted in murders and rioting. Despite this, it remained undoubted that freedom of expression in art should be maintained. Is it worth potential loss of life in exchange for this freedom? Should freedom of expression be sacrificed to threats, intimidation and media and political pressure? Indeed, self-editing was evident in the style chosen by Birk for his San Francisco exhibition for this very reason. Is it possible to find a balance between respect for religions and freedom of expression?

From these exhibitions we clearly see disparities in how people deal with Christianity and Islam. If violence is part of the reason for society treating Islam much more cautiously and thoughtfully, then why do not extremist Christian organisations, which also exist and commit terrorist bombings each year, produce the same effect? Perhaps it is not because of violence that we are seeing respect, rather because Islam has come to

western art in the postmodern and post 9/11 world, one which is much more understanding and sensitive to difference particularly to those of new origin. This new found awareness may be due to recent gains by other marginalised people in western society i.e. non-Anglo/Caucasian peoples, homosexual, bisexual and transgendered people, as well as anti discrimination laws.

Islam has emerged into an environment where from our view it is given the chance to flourish, yet this western 'great sensitivity' still clashes with the worldview of many Muslims. This presents another consideration and limitation when balancing art, but a major advancement in the relationship between art and religion, a sign that the olive branch has been accepted.

Interestingly, if we apply these issues to other religions such as Buddhism, we get a very different outcome: here it is hard to find any artwork which has reflected strong opinions that criticise and doubt it. This could be attributed to the different features of religions. Buddhism has less controversy because it allows variety, opposite opinions and has for a long time been less connected with politics than in most Christian and Islamic countries.

Perhaps this shines light on why patrons chose to deface the Bible at the GoMA exhibition, as there is in Scotland a tradition of religious art work, religious politics and free speech colliding with those they suppressed, who are now given an equal status. There is also the tradition of a strong rivalry between Catholics and Protestants and it would be interesting to know the religious background of those who chose to write offensive comments.

However rather than equality and respect thriving, it seems that history is repeating itself. Could we inadvertently be creating the same situation with Islam? The road to Hell is paved with good intentions.

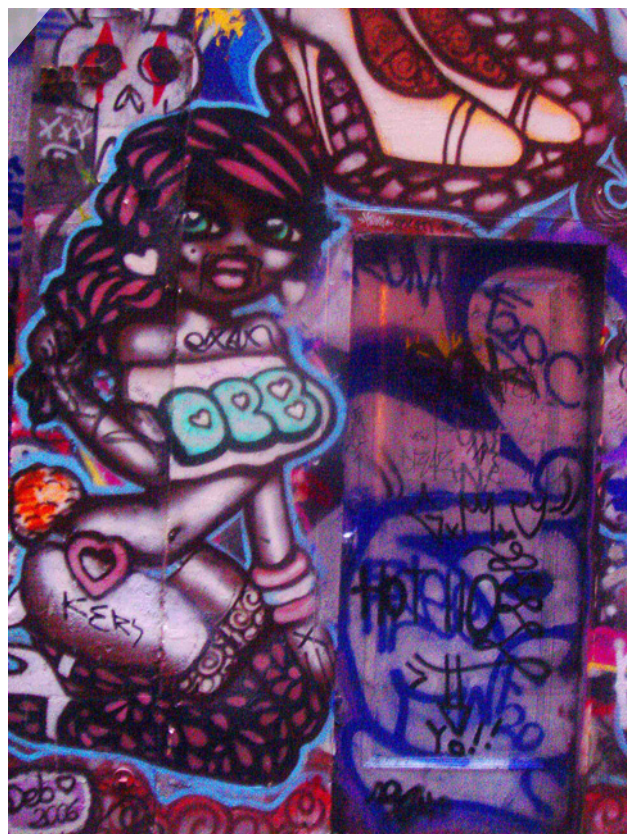
The Melbourne Stencil Festival sprays itself onto the city's cultural agenda

Purnima Ruanglertbutr

The city of Melbourne's allure lurks underground, created by its subcultures

Melbourne is the "stencil capital of the world," according to Jake Smallman and Carl Nyman, authors of the book *Stencil Graffiti Capital: Melbourne*. Such a declaration hardly comes as a surprise, as Melbourne has an extensive history of street art with an array of established stencil artists and a vibrant community that supports the artform. Tucked away in remote laneways are enigmatic stencils made with spray paint, attracting film, advertising and fashion shoots. A stroll down Hosier Lane at the Southern end of the city illustrates how intrinsic this artform is to Melbourne's street culture. Hundreds of wild creations swirl in myriad sizes and forms, overlapping and jostling for the attention of passersby. Tread into the heart of the CBD and walls adorned with spray paintings depicting politicians, animals, sexy ladies, robots, pop culture icons, cartoons, skulls, and symbols reveal themselves one after another. Hosier Lane, Carlton's Canada Lane and Centre Place have transformed into public galleries and form a unique tourist attraction.

The popularity of the medium is attributed to its quick reproducibility, needing only to be sprayed onto walls through cutouts, or sprayed onto poster paper and then pasted on walls. Stencil art created by respected graffiti writers have achieved a heritage status, preventing other graffiti writers from working over them. This ephemeral artform is becoming preserved by street artists and the public, who are beginning to value particular pieces and places as significant cultural sites. In 2005, Melbourne's street art drifted off the street and into the galleries, many of which now have special exhibitions on street art, such as *Until Never*, *Per Square*, *Artholes* and *696*. Moreover, Melbourne's dynamic street art scene has attracted travelogues including the Lonely Planet Six Degrees television series, and has prompted the publication of an increasing number of books dedicated to Melbourne's street art.



Artist: Anonymous
Description: Stencil Graffiti on Degrares Street,
Melbourne

For a city that has a zero tolerance policy and strained relationships with its street artists, this growing appreciation and diverse display of spraying comes as a surprise. Now known as the Mecca of street art, Melbourne has moved beyond its primal beginnings in the '80s when its underground scene was termed as 'unwanted graffiti' and vandalism. During this time, Australia revolted against Melbourne's hip-hop subculture and aerosol graffiti, which had its roots in the American subway-style graffiti. So what occurred to transform Melbourne into a stenciled graffiti capital, not only of the nation but of the world? Is it true to say that our perception of this marginalised art form has wholly changed?

Much of the growing legitimacy and positive public reception of the art form is attributed to the Melbourne Stencil Festival, an annual ten-day program celebrating Melbourne's street art as a vital component of the city's urban fabric and a legitimate contemporary art practice. Whilst many considered graffiti to be a perverse art form which has taken off since the 1990s (and many considered it not to be art at all), others, such as festival co-organizers, Satta and Jan-Dirk Mittmann, found inspiration. "Graffiti is a very important subculture here," Satta stated in an interview with *The Age* in 2006. "Melbourne is known worldwide for its street art,



Artist: Anonymous
Image: 1 Spray Painting on Degrares Street, Melbourne

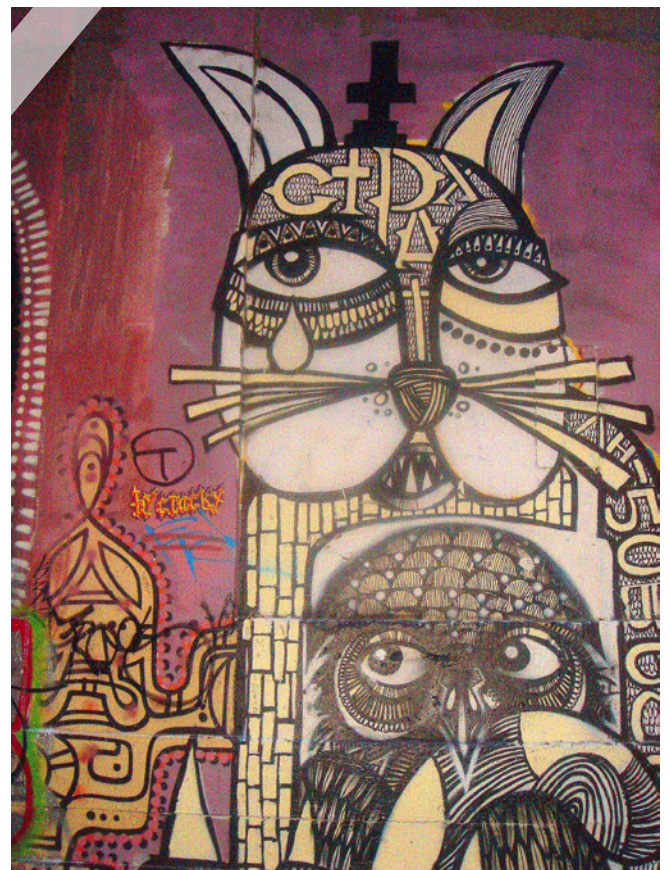
especially stencil art,” Satta enthuses. As the popularity of stencil art incremented in 2003, with artists such as Civil, Ghostpatrol and HaHa who consciously imbued their art with political messages, the festival organizers perceived Melbourne as a graffiti haven whose vitality proved too arresting and formed the impetus for the Melbourne Stencil Festival, which now sets the city aglow in an idiosyncratic manner.

Launched in the height of the street art boom in 2004, the festival has sprayed itself onto Melbourne’s cultural agenda, transforming the way Melbourne has treated the art form, giving it prominence. According to the festival’s 2008 Annual Report, last year’s event featured over 300 works by 75 emerging and established stencil artists from across 12 countries, including Iran, France, Germany, Portugal and America, and attracted over 5000 visitors. What began as a low budget affair involving a 3-day exhibition in a North Melbourne sewing factory, has blossomed into a sponsored non-profit major event that has gained support from Arts Victoria, the City of Melbourne, and now from the City of Yarra and ArtTruck. The festival encourages community participation through exhibitions, live painting demonstrations, t-shirt printing workshops, kids workshops, street art documentary film screenings, panel discussions, artist talks, walking tours led by stencil artists, and a charity auction of works created during the festival. The accessibility of the artists provides audiences with a distinctive insight into their personalities and motivations, tactfully educating the public on stencil art, whilst contributing to public debate. Moreover, the festival amalgamates different cultures and classes, not only reinforcing Melbourne as a global center of stencil art, but one that tolerates and encourages difference, expressly reinforcing Melbourne as a center for artistic and intellectual production.

Undoubtedly, those who benefit most from the festival are the street art community and practicing artists. Initiatives such as the Pinxit Young Artist Award, that saw thousands of entries, has lent an increasing diversity to the street art scene and fosters young talent by enabling practicing artists to exhibit their work to the wider community. It also offers opportunities for artists to tour regional Victoria, Sydney, Brisbane and Perth, increasing the festival’s public presence, reputation, and its supporters. Moreover, it has enabled young people to form social and artistic networks through workshops, competitions, mentoring and legal painting opportunities. Being the first Stencil Festival in the world,

it is unsurprising that the event has received extensive media coverage in daily newspapers, community radio and street press, which not only publicizes the artists but also reinforces stencilling’s stature as a legitimate art form.

Such legitimacy is furthered by the festival channeling artists into the commercial arena. Larger numbers of street artists are exhibiting their work in galleries, making it is safe to claim that the festival is becoming an institution that generates industry and that contributes to graffiti’s commodity status. An increasing number of shops sell graffiti products such as glossy magazines, fashion labels devoted to graffiti design, and high-quality spray paints that provide artists with a broader selection of colours. Likewise, advertisers are appropriating the artform to sell goods to the youth market whilst businesses are commissioning the painting of murals on their walls, particularly in locations where young people spend their money. Consequentially, graffiti communities are becoming hierarchical and competitive in their desire to achieve recognition for stylistic and technical distinction.



Artist: Anonymous
Description: Paste-up Graffiti Hosier Lane, Melbourne

By nurturing the creative environment, graffiti is becoming viewed as a symptom of democracy as opposed to a sign of urban decay.

On the surface, it may seem that the city is supportive of the arts and that Melbourne's historical reputation as a center for political activism results in a higher tolerance of graffiti. By nurturing the creative environment, graffiti is becoming viewed as a symptom of democracy as opposed to a sign of urban decay. However, stencil artists and street artists still assume names that the law does not recognise in fear of arrest from government authorities. This is due to the illegal nature of the artform and their desire to use public art as a form of social and political commentary or for 'beautifying' harsh urban landscapes.

Despite the festival's celebratory nature, the art form continues to attract controversy. Whilst the City of Yarra in Victoria spends \$125,000 annually on finding solutions to the 'graffiti problem,' such as surveillance systems, graffiti-cleaning companies, research and development of chemicals for stripping paint from building materials, – it simultaneously sponsors the Stencil Festival. Whilst they promote the development of graffiti skills through 'diversionary' programs on legal graffiti walls, municipally funded youth programs, community education, the commissioning of graffiti murals in high traffic areas, they claim to be against graffiti in their municipality. One may question *how* the festival established such admiration.

Part of the public's acceptance is attributed to the attitude among city officials and the festival organizers who draw a line between stencils and graffiti – the line that separates graffiti from 'art,' from stencil art, advertising and signage – the line of the law. With the overriding perception of graffiti as 'messy' and chaotic, the festival markets stencil art as requiring high levels of technical and artistic skill, where artists are valued for their design, flair and execution. Paradoxically, graffiti requires equal amount of skill and adheres to a strict aesthetic criterion – evenness of paint coverage, the steadiness of line, harmonious choices of colour, the 'flow' of letterforms. Both stencil and graffiti artists are concerned with style and spend time perfecting their designs and technique. Whilst both use the medium of an aerosol can, graffiti is more suggestive of territorial conquest, risk-taking and dominance – as a destructive rather than a creative activity. However, Christine Dew, author of *Uncommissioned Art: An A-Z*

of *Australian Graffiti*, highlights that behind the motive of graffiti and stencil art lies a universal human desire to leave one's mark, presence, ownership, or voice in public. Counteracting such similarities between the two technical disparities, was JD Mittman's statement made in an interview with *The Age* in 2006, whereby he stated that "stenciling is not graffiti, it just happens to be with a spray can...stencillists don't spray every wall – they're very aware of their environment." Thus, rather than being termed as 'vandals,' the festival promotes stencil art as improving the public's perception of local space and that imbues the city with an enlivening cultural legacy.

At present, Tourism authorities and government bureaucrats are lifting Melbourne's profile and marketability by making the Stencil Festival sit firmly on the tourist calendar. Judy Morton, former Mayor of the City of Yarra even proposed publishing a street art guide for tourists to navigate the city's 'hot spots'. Despite anti-graffiti laws, Melbourne's street art continues to pulsate. Even the world's most influential website on stencil graffiti, *Stencil Revolution*, was prompted by the recognition of the festival. Yet the irony remains – whilst Melbourne supports young people, the culture and the arts, it forcefully prohibits one of the prized artforms for which it is internationally celebrated.

Social Resistance and Activism via Street Art

Nick Phillipson

Street Light - An Exhibition of Lightbox Art by Peter Strong

In recent years, the contemporary artworld has seen a rise in the popularity and saleability of artworks typically associated with street and graffiti art. These works are often created by artists who use non-traditional art materials and techniques. Their choice of imagery is commonly appropriated stencils, silhouettes or illustrations of icons and symbols from popular culture. The works are multi-layered, witty, ironic and visually intriguing for the audience.

Some artists, including Sydney based Peter Strong, are now finding their way into commercial galleries. His exhibition titled *Street Light* consists of nine light-box based works, communicating his personal ideas on social struggle and cultural empowerment. Strong declares, in an email interview, that his work “challenges the status quo... [and] explores the idea of art resistance”, a term used to describe street and graffiti artists whose work acts as a statement of social activism or rebellion against the dominant culture. For many street and graffiti artists, their practice is influenced not by set rules and conventions surrounding the process and techniques used to create their works, but by their way of life. [Will Robson-Scott](#), author and graffiti art researcher claims that “Being a writer [street artist] informs the way you see the world, it’s more than writing on walls. Spaces and landscapes take on a new meaning, almost every aspect of your life is influenced.” For Strong, this statement articulates how his actions influence the creation of his artworks within his personal and social world.

Strong says on his website (www.vectorpunk.com) that he is heavily involved in local action groups, artist collectives and community building programs within the Inner West of Sydney, mainly Newtown, St Peters and Marrickville. He has been involved in underground art, music and social justice movements working with others on projects such as Vibe Tribe, Ohms Not Bombs, Reclaim the Streets, Graffiti Hall of Fame, Earthdream and Mekanarky. Currently he is part of the Tortuga

warehouse which was established in St Peters, Sydney, early 2008.

Strong’s involvement within these groups, collectives and organisations have clearly shaped his choice of imagery as elements of social justice, music, conflict, environmental concern and social struggle are common within his work. He believes, “that street art shows a certain honesty and non commercial intention by adorning the public realm with thought provoking, funny and visually complex images”. Key works from the *Street Light* exhibition such as *Climate Crossroads*, *The Urban Blues Part Two* and *Radio Resistance* convey these ideas.

Climate Crossroads is a large, bold piece, heavy in symbolism and composed from multi-layer stencils. As the title suggests, Strong’s theme within the piece is climate change and its environmental consequences. This is communicated through the use of appropriation, a technique *Strong acquired* from his career as a DJ and music producer. In our interview he described his artworks as a “cut and paste” or “visual sample.”



Title: Climate Cross Roads

Date: 2009

Image courtesy of artist and Urban Uprising Gallery.

We are inspired into a sense of activism and social awareness.

In the foreground of *Climate Crossroads* five figures struggle to erect a tall wind turbine, a symbol for the development of environmentally friendly energy production. The composition of the figures and the wind turbine is a clear reference to the 1945 photograph of US Marines raising the American Flag on Mount Suribachi, Iwo Jima. With the implied action of the figures, in erecting the wind turbine, it stands as a defence or guard against the imposing tsunami raging out through the centre of the image. The design of this tsunami stencil is also an appropriation: Strong has borrowed from Hokusai's *The Great Wave*, 1831. Through this use of symbolism and composition the viewer is able to perceive a narrative and action taking place within the work.

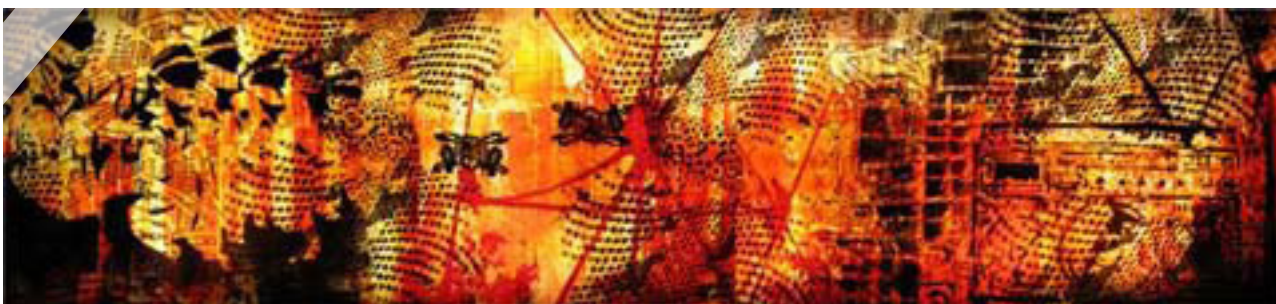
The title is an acknowledgement of the current debate and discourse in mainstream culture. The world is

beginning to see the consequences of climate change through extreme global weather patterns and the increasing frequency of natural disasters. *Climate Crossroads* encourages the audience to act and implement changes in our society to better our world. We are inspired into a sense of activism and social awareness.

The Urban Blues Part Two is another example of Strong's work being based in time, place and cultural influences. His cityscape is reflective of long back streets, alive with activity, break dancing, BMX riding, skate boarding and groups listening to music. These blurred and multi-layered actions all take place below the silhouette of a Sydney skyline, similar to Strong's own environment of St Peters, in the Inner West of Sydney.



Artist: Peter Strong
Title: *The Urban Blues Part Two*
Date: 2009
Image courtesy of artist and Urban Uprising Gallery.



Artist: Peter Strong
 Title: Radio Resistance
 Date: 2009
 Image courtesy of artist and Urban Uprising Gallery.

In *Urban Blues Part Two*, Strong's technique of applying spray painted stencils directly onto the Perspex covering for the light box is especially successful. The blue monotone colour scheme allows the layered stencils to create an illusion of depth and detail which is then extenuated by the light shining from below the surface of the image. Overlapping shapes and lines create interest and encourage the viewer to spend time observing its silhouettes. These overlapping shapes and lines also work as a reference to graffiti pieces painted on public walls, buildings, streets and train carriages. In the public domain, graffiti and street art are often painted or pasted over again and again, washed away or reworked by other artists. Over time, remnants of each piece builds a layered and blurred composition similar to *Urban Blues*. Strong describes this practice as building a "collaborative spirit, the layering of many artists' works makes a pleasing visual jam".

Radio Resistance highlights Strong's belief in social activism. The long rectangular image contains two dominant stencils— one of a large radio with its antennae stretched and the other is a parade of soldiers in full uniform being watched over by their superior. Connecting both stencils is an overlay of rhythmic dots indicative of a radio speaker pulsating with loud music. In this work Strong juxtaposes two opposite forces. The ordered, obedient and disciplined soldier, a powerful symbol for control within society; while the second is the anonymous and informative voice spreading a message via mass media, symbolising resistance and youth. This message is also the acknowledgement of 'lore', a state Strong witnessed at underground dance parties during the 80s and 90s. He describes 'lore' as being "self policed" and a sense of "harmony coming from the wisdom of many minds at the same understanding". This is the opposite of a watchful policed state, as represented by the parade of soldiers. It is self regulating

and works as a consciousness or message across society creating connection and harmony. This desire of a conscious connection and social activism spread via lines of technology is an idea often associated with cultural advocates, disenfranchised social groups and marginalised individuals within society.

Through these three works, the audience is able to experience more than the traditional belief of simple aesthetics and blocked in colour that are offered by graffiti and street artists. Strong's use of appropriation and symbolism builds up a narrative and message to inspire audiences with a sense of activism and rebellion. The *Street Light* series grants the audience a window into a different world and culture where art is a way of life and a form of social resistance and empowerment. *Peter strong's exhibition, Street Light, will be showing at the [Urban Uprising Gallery](#), 314 Crown Street, Darlinghurst, August 20 – 31, 2009*

Warning: The following article may contain the names and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased

Art that bridges cultures

Shivangi Ambani



Artist: Tim Johnson
Title: Two Phoenix
Date: 2004
Image courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery

*Tim Johnson's works are striking cross-cultural dialogues—fragmented pieces of imagery, that **Shivangi Ambani** enjoyed deciphering*

Indian mythological characters, Radha and Krishna are locked in their eternal dance, the *Garba Raas*. However in Tim Johnson's version, they are surrounded by a Tibetan pagoda and an airplane flying alongside a beautiful peacock.

Painting Ideas, a retrospective exhibition of Johnson's works, charts his explorations across cultures and media over the four decades of his practice thus far. The exhibition has been developed by the [Art Gallery of New South Wales](#) (AGNSW), in association with the [Queensland Art Gallery](#) (QAG). It showed at the AGNSW in early 2009, and then travelled to QAG, before it moves on to the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne in early 2010.

“Art was a process of deconstruction. Sometimes the audience became part of the art.”

The exhibition chronologically traces the artist's career from the 1970s, beginning with his early works as a conceptual artist. Johnson told Julie Ewington, Curatorial Manager of Australian Art at the QAG, that at the time he believed painting was exhausted. Instead, he chose to explore his ideas using a wide variety of media including light works and visual kinetics, performance and photography.

“Art was a process of deconstruction. Sometimes the audience became part of the art,” Johnson said during an artist talk at the AGNSW, referring to the series of photos titled *Light Performances*. “I was getting rid of the distance between the artist and the viewers.” From 1979-83, Johnson depicted Australian, English, and American Punk musicians and fans using his own photographs or images from the press. This forms the next part of the exhibition. “My paintings recording the Punk musicians—I thought that they would disappear,” said Johnson. “But they are still here in this exhibition. My ideas became interesting to people retrospectively.”

During this time he travelled to India, Nepal and Japan. “I went to India in 1976 and again in 1980. I visited the Ajanta Caves and travelled around for several months,” said Johnson in an email interview. “During the first [visit] I painted while I was travelling and also recorded imagery to use on my return to Australia. I painted things like temples, mosques and images from the culture including deities.” His most recent works incorporate Indian deities such as Krishna and Radha, Ganesha, Hanuman and Gaura/Nitai.

Travelling east to find an alternative to the materialism of western society, Johnson discovered a new way of life and the profound influence of these travels resonate in his work to date. “In the ‘80s I discovered the values and the ways of living in Buddhism—not putting yourself first.”

His works soon became a representation of his own spiritual journey and Buddhist messages. Imagery of the *Pure Land* from Buddhist traditions—the realm of perfect beauty, where one is freed from *samsara* (reincarnation –



Artist: Tim Johnson
Title: Radio Birdman, Oxford Funhouse
Date: 1983
Image courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery

the circle of life and death) and full enlightenment can be attained—is a continuing feature in his works.

Johnson also made his first trip to Papunya, Central Australia in 1980, and since then his growing friendship with Aboriginal artists, such as Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, Turkey Tolson Tjupurrula and Michael Nelson Jagamara has led him to discover new meanings in his art and another form of art practice.

“During my visits to Central Australia I found the artists producing master pieces in really humble surroundings. Their works were unique—the language in painting, the mythology and geographic mapping,” said Johnson during the artist talk at the AGNSW.

His initial works were representations of Aboriginal life and their art making practice. For instance, in *Visit to*

Soon, the artists began inviting him to paint with them, which eventually led to about 30 collaborative works.

Eagle Dreaming and *Wildflower Dreaming* are both works he created in collaboration with Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, employing his visual language.

It is from these collaborations, that Johnson’s interest in dot painting arose. The dotted background of many of his works remains a controversial gesture of respect that many see as being exploitative. “I used their style, but not in their abstract form. (My work) is representational,” said Johnson during the artist talk. “I saw Central Australia as a Pure Land,” he said.

In Johnson’s *Pure Land*, all the varied cultures – Australian Aboriginal dot painting, Buddhist and Hindu



Artist: Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri
Title: Eagle Dreaming
Date: 1988
Image courtesy of Queensland Art Gallery

Papunya II, several of the Aboriginal artists Johnson encountered during his visit, are depicted standing alongside their works, all arranged almost equidistant from each other, on a single plane – a child-like, distanced study of the subject of his work.

deities, Japanese Manga characters, Christian angels as well as Tibetan monks and pagodas – co-exist. His *Pure Land* paintings are stream-of-consciousness works – a landscape of his mind – where ideas race through and come together in ways previously unimagined, and the audience is asked to keep pace.

The paintings are a reflection of his belief in the seamless interaction that can exist between diverse cultures. While he is aware of the many differences, and the varied paths to spirituality offered by each culture, he is more interested in exploring the similarities and links. "I see links between Hinduism and Buddhism – there is the historical connection as well as the fact that Buddha taught in India. Many of the deities are similar, sometimes in appearance, but more so in meaning," said Johnson in an email interview. "There are similarities between the practice of these beliefs as well. Aboriginal culture is so old that it predates many of the better known religions. But the idea of creation ancestors, the idea of spirit in matter and many other fundamental beliefs are common to most other older cultures."

In *Tjirana*, devotees dance around the idols of Krishna and Radha, surrounded by images of Nelson Mandela and the Beatles, the Statue of Liberty, and the Sydney Opera House, while Chinese-stylised clouds float alongside flying saucers. "Deities often come from the extra terrestrial," said Johnson at the artist talk. He has been fascinated with how extraterrestrial creatures and spaceships appear in mythologies from various cultures. Johnson's works are as influenced by his travels as by his personal relationships. His involvement with Aboriginal art was sparked by his former wife, the leading social scientist and art historian, Vivien Johnson, who was beginning her groundbreaking research on Western Desert artists. The couple were avid collectors of Aboriginal art, and today theirs' is one of Australia's most significant collections of Central Desert painting, according to the exhibition catalogue.

Similarly, his friendship with Aboriginal artists, led to successful collaborated works. Later, he went on to work with his partner, My Le Thi.

Artistic collaborations have been an important part of Johnson's practice and he has also worked with trained Tibetan *thangka* painter Karma Phuntsok, as well as Daniel Bogunvic, Brendan Smith and most recently with Nava Chapman, an Australian Hindu devotee. "For the last 2 years I have been collaborating with Nava. He has painted the Hindu imagery in many of my recent works," says Johnson.

The works are as much the collaborating artist's narrative as Johnson's. For instance, in *Ganeshji*, Lord

Ganesha is accompanied by the cartoon character Dumbo the Elephant, an Indian wrestler, a street-side food hawker, and even a scene from the film *Slumdog Millionaire*, all superimposed upon the background of meticulously painted dots.

"There is a narrative related to Nava's personal experiences in London where he was receiving teachings from his Guru," says Johnson. "Like a poem, every part doesn't have to be logical or located in the same time/space continuum. A painting can create a fragmented reality that is interpreted by the viewer. Everyone sees things differently anyway. I create a collage of imagery in the work – fragmented like life itself."

Johnson explains the process of their collaboration thus: "I send him a canvas and he paints various images – usually after discussing it with me on the phone. After he sends the canvas back to me, I add more imagery." "Some of the imagery is traced, some of it is done using stamps and stencils and some of it is improvised. Then, the imagery is masked with a masking fluid and the background added. Then, the masking fluid is cleaned off and dots added," Johnson adds. "These paintings use imagery from a variety of sources – the internet, books, my own photos and so on. Nava draws on his knowledge of Hinduism and sources imagery on the internet," he said.

At the artist's talk, Johnson revealed that some of the imagery in his works is painted by projecting an image onto to the canvas and then tracing it. He said that a colleague once told him, "Sydney Nolan does it, so it must be ok!" "Since the 80's artists have been quoting, integrating and re-looking at art history," he said. The stylised clouds often seen in his works, are copied from Chinese embroidery using carbon paper, he revealed during the artist talk. "Think of art as not something special or skilful, but accessible—something that everyone can do and enjoy."

Tim Johnson – Painting Ideas will show at the Queensland Art Gallery until October 11, 2009, and then at the Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne from November 11, 2009 to February 14, 2010.
Images courtesy of the Queensland Art Gallery.



Title: Censorship

On Censorship, Moral Panic and Art

Tegan Sullivan

Today we find ourselves on a slippery slope heading downhill towards the censoring of our creativity. The classification of artworks and the censorship of their production present the public merely a dumbed-down experience of culture: a palatable blandness. "Art is one of the most powerful forces on the battlefield of ideas: we should never allow its privilege to be eroded" (Burnside, 2008, p.11). Art allows us a glimpse of truth and both recently and historically confronts the sensibilities of its audiences. Art offers a response to the questions thrown up by a society still defining itself. This occurs in a way that often sparks controversy. This controversy creates fierce disputes and through the public's reaction and the media furore, a desire is voiced to tighten the leash around the throat of artistic expression.

Freedom of speech is a basic democratic right but the censorship debate looks at what happens when this free expression infringes on community sensibility. Foundations are eroded and thought is stifled. Can art enable us to witness a greater truth? As a consumer of art ideas and images, am I not entitled to make my

own judgments on what is appropriate? Or do we need protection, the covering up of the rude bits in life to save us from ourselves?

Censorship in our community can fall into two main categories. As outlined by Australian journalist and lawyer, David Marr, there is the censorship of desire and that in the pursuit of power (Derricourt, 2006, p.1). The censorship of desire revolves around ideas of morality, religion, sexuality and the physical body. So much of what we view is classified for us. Our history, as a country, shows many examples of operating as a censored society, emerging in the 1980's as a relatively libertarian culture. Art in Australia has, for a couple of decades managed to avoid this system of classification which limits our access to the unsavory parts of humanity in its drive for sex, wealth and power.

The different media used throughout art practice brings alternate focuses to the realities of life. The framework of art and the questions it can raise illuminates perceived truths. Photography offers the chance for a heightened, instant depiction of reality. Through this medium Bill

"A society that censors is a society that lies to itself about its nature."

Henson came into the general public consciousness quite abruptly last year, when the police seized his works at the Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery and the exhibition was closed. This was a strong statement of censorship. The media panic occurred in the wake of an exhibition invitation showing a photographic portrait of a nude adolescent girl. Questions were raised regarding artistic exploration versus sexual exploitation. The images were seen by many not associated with the arts, but as pornography. Their reading of the nude figure threw out much of the history of Western art and plunged the Australian community into panic. In their eyes nudity, under the guise of certain modernizations like the Internet, is never without a sexual context. The difference between the pleasure received through viewing the chiaroscuro elements of a Bill Henson image, the soft focus and gentle peering of his lens, become hard to distinguish from the sleaziness of a deviant sexual leer.

In the Henson case, the artworks, the facts of the matter, were removed from the gallery walls and its website catalogue. The public were left with mere headlines and [images](#) distorted by black bars to judge this contention. How were they to make up their minds? According to Tamara Winikoff of NAVA: "Public engagement with art is an important right which needs to be protected" (Winikoff, 2008, p.3), yet the debate over the freedom of artists, the protection of innocence and the bubble wrapped timidity of society was never presented on even ground. Moral outrage distorts, the discussion was politicized and the opportunity for dialogue was crippled.

Marketing and advertising introduce the community to small fragments of artistic practice. There is no contextualisation. Media grabs and spin machines can distort and misrepresent the intended climate and context of a work. The public face of art, especially art seen by open means such as the Internet, can deny a work the privacy of gallery walls and the freedom of expression that this entails. As the art critic Andrew Frost states, "Art represents a wide set of values and attitudes to the world and, while some might argue that there are limits to artistic freedom, the measure of a society is how it responds to a minority opinion." (Frost, 2008 p.1). The health of our culture can be gauged by

the ferocity of these debates. Can censoring the artists protect us from what really scares us? Do we need it to?

Through censoring our desires the power of religion becomes a force of authority. Religion and its control over much of our outlets as humans can often lead to the suppression of ideas and images. The case of the Catholic Church and Cardinal George Pell's attempts at suppression highlight the delicate balance between the belief of faith and the questioning involved in artistic practice. Andres Serrano's *Piss Christ* was displayed in the National Gallery of Victoria in 1997, until this controversial work was removed and ultimately silenced by an inability to keep the environment surrounding it safe. The ultimate censorship of the work ensured safety from the ideological harm Pell suggested we would face by associating the glory of Christianity with the base humanity of a certain golden hued liquid. *Piss Christ* was a blasphemous statement, one the general community needed protecting from. Even the confines of a National gallery, where its very walls sanction images as art, could not separate it from public outrage. Religion and the clout of the Church restrict. The moral rules which govern our society, enforced by our spiritual leaders, protect us from arts constant desire to enquire as to the meanings behind our existence.

The sins of the flesh, our sexuality and the base response of the body is a reality. The supposed ugliness of these instinctual responses guides much repression and constructs many of the rules which govern our society. The safety of sanitizing these parts of our world will deny us of so much of our Australian art canon. Gone will be the fantasies of Norman Lindsay, the thick, sensual lines of Brett Whiteley, Albert Tucker's images of Modern Evil, and explicit nature of Juan Davilla's paintings. "A society that censors is a society that lies to itself about its nature." (Wark, 1997 p.1). We would inhabit a more modest place, but one which surrenders to a conservative outlook, one without the questioning which fuels momentum.

The other idea raised by Marr, the Censorship of Pursuit of Power explores notions of political silencing, of controlling a population and its history. Australia's relatively new anti-sedition laws fit this description all too well. The real threat of legal action sees artists taming

The ideas are dangerous

to artistic spontaneity.

their creative practices to conform to mainstream tastes. The threat of terrorism and the need for community approach has stripped many civil liberties, not just those in the art world.

The conservatism of the Howard Government era in arts recently came to an end. Kevin Rudd and his government have been seen as a welcome break. However, the realities of a Christian conservative Prime Minister set about protecting us from our own excesses have only recently become a little clearer. Politicians fighting for re-election respond quickly to the moral hysteria of the media and the thoughts of a researched public. Our political leader's opinions can change to follow and absorb the heat of public argument. The aftermath of the Bill Henson issue has seen the introduction by the Australia Council of certain guidelines and protocols for working with and the protection of children. The ideas are dangerous to artistic spontaneity. They require new levels of bureaucratic documentation. A strong link has been forged between the symbolism of voluntary guidelines and the realities of the withdrawal of public funding. No decision, it seems, on freedom of expression is made without a political agenda. Funding at arm's length as a principle is a luxury for times not filled with public fear and uncertainty.

This debate continues to rage, as we see the Federal Government's plans for ISP internet filtering and their desire to clean up the internet, sanitise what the Australian people can view and create a safe online environment for our children. Our consumption of art and culture has, through the Internet become a private, domestic activity. The public act of viewing art on gallery walls can be replaced with the seclusion of a laptop screen. The filtering of the Internet: what could become a mandatory measure, protects us from the big bad thing that is the World Wide Web. It ultimately is protecting us from a mass of thoughts and the communication of possible obscenities, all of our own creation. The focus of censorship has shifted with these new technological developments.

"...What really matters is when we become complicit in our own enslavement" says Australian playwright Stephen Sewell (Derricourt, 2006, p.2). Artists may be

going through a process of self-censorship in order to make sales, meet funding requirements and keep their art away from harshness of the media spotlight and its hysteria. It becomes quite a simple situation. Those artists who do not comply with the new protocols and all the intricacies that this involves will not get public funding. They will not eat or pay their rent. Or at least they won't do this from the proceeds of their artistic practices. The invisible nature of this censorship makes it difficult to monitor, control or even prevent. The cultural environment of Australia will be poorer, becoming stagnant, with little creative drive to push the boundaries or few artists left in the country to pursue them. The real threat comes when artists temper their projects to make them more palatable for what could and in many ways has become, a smaller, more conservative and intolerant society.

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C3West: The MCA's Outreach program – a bit of a stretch?

Michael Wilton

If thinking outside the box is what it takes to keep cultural institutions afloat, then the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) is certainly giving it a shot. Under the guidance of their director, Elizabeth Ann Macgregor, they are implementing C3West, “a long term project, seeking innovative ways of working with art, commerce and the community” (www.mca.com.au). The aim is to “broker close collaborative relationships between artists and businesses in Western Sydney... [and] to align business strategies with arts practices, while involving communities in innovative ways.” (Macgregor, p.173) The project raises a number of important questions: How does the meaning of art change when it is used as a business tool? How far do museums have to go to expand their audiences? What is the function of an artist?

Although funding was announced by the Australia Council in December 2006 (\$225,000 over three years), the public has only seen one work so far. A portrait series titled *Heads Up* by Craig Walsh. The work was born out of an artist residency at the Penrith Panthers Leagues Club, organised by the MCA and its partners – Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Penrith Regional Gallery, and Campbelltown Art Centre – and exhibited during the finals season from 4 September to 19 October 2008.

“Seventeen large format, full-colour photographic portraits, taken within minutes of the final whistle at a series of Panthers home games, capture intimate responses from both players and supporters to the outcome of the game” (www.mca.com.au)

As a precursor to the C3West project, Jock McQueenie was commissioned to undertake a feasibility study. “The study encompassed the partners’ strategic objectives and common aims, government priorities in the region, the needs of local artists and emerging debates around the social engagement of art” (Macgregor, p.174). For art literate audiences it is almost impossible to look at Walsh’s series of photographs and not consider the myriad of influences he had while creating the work. The MCA may be successful in creating new avenues for

artists to get paid, but are they making art? This leads to the more philosophical question: What is art? Although such a question at this juncture is too broad to consider, it should be fair to state that the work produced by Walsh is art, but it would be naïve to view the exhibition in terms of a ‘standard’ gallery experience.

Macgregor admits that the “artists needed to accept that the work they would propose had to answer the objectives of the company” (Macgregor, p.176). However, she also claims that the C3West project differentiates itself from conventional art commission practices. There is no pre-determined way in which the artist has to respond to ‘the brief’. She suggests that the ultimate aim of the project is to allow artists the freedom to develop solutions that no one had thought of before. But what are the implications of an artist being a consultant? How do you discuss the work that comes out of that relationship? Does the work take on a different meaning when it is displayed as part of an art exhibition at the MCA versus a marketing strategy at Panthers Leagues Club?

As an experiment designed to bring two stereotypically different audiences together, the exhibition was announced over loudspeakers during home games. Macgregor states in her essay, ‘A Tale of Two Cultures’ (*Griffith Review*, Edition 23, March, 2009, www.griffithreview.com) that two key aspects of the MCA’s mission are to “[build] new audiences for contemporary art; and [create] new working opportunities for contemporary artists.” (Macgregor, p.174) This would appear to be the cornerstone of the C3West program, an initiative that challenges the stereotypes of both the Panthers Leagues Club and the MCA. Although Macgregor claims that attendance numbers exceeded expectations for the exhibition, there is no information as to what these expectations were or whether or not the audience was new to the gallery and planned on returning.

Macgregor is continuing the trend of breaking barriers through outreach programs (further illustrated by the work of John Kirkman – Penrith Performing & Visual

Objects can be polysemic: they have multiple meanings to different people depending on their unique experiences.

Arts and Kon Gouriotis – Casula Powerhouse) via the intersection of sport and art. As trends come and go, it will be interesting to see if this model stands the test of time. Stephen Weil, in his essay 'The Museum and the Public' (*Making Museums Matter*, Smithsonian Institute Press, 2002) suggests that there is a "revolution" under way which is seeing a broader public occupying the dominant position. He suggests that this is in part due to the need to appease the tax payer as a great deal of funding comes from the government. The C3West program is largely funded by the Australia Council although there is a stipulation that the business partners must ultimately match the grant. Weil argues that audiences are dissatisfied with the curators 'version' of events, or hierarchy of relevant information. In response, curators and public program officers are championing the notion that objects can be polysemic: they have multiple meanings to different people depending on their unique experiences. The aim of which is to dispel the notion that art is elite and for a specifically educated audience. This would appear to align with Macgregor's desire to expand the MCA's audience to previously unreachable groups. In this model however, Macgregor is attempting to create an environment where businesses would approach artists for solutions as opposed to the traditional avenues of consultants. Weil further suggests that rather than communicating new information, the primary focus of the museum should be to engender a sense of self-affirmation.

People want to walk away from an exhibition feeling good about themselves and their position in the world. It is not important that they read every label, or remember every fact about the objects on display. To some degree, this sense of self-affirmation can be seen through Walsh's *Heads Up* series. "Keep your head up!" is a term often used in response to loss or disappointment and these portraits capture this attitude. Pride in oneself and the team is reflected in their faces through an attempt to disguise the disappointment of the loss" (Macgregor, p.177)

Macgregor goes as far as to suggest that the work produced by artists is of a greater value than work produced by a 'layperson'. This belief underpins the ideals of the C3West project. She points to the work of Ross Harley in the feasibility stage of the project. As a practical demonstration of the way in which C3 West

was going to work, the MCA approached the recycling and waste management company SITA Environmental Solutions. SITA wanted to create a video to promote their new facility. The MCA suggested that they use an artist (Harley) instead of going to a video company. Macgregor claims "SITA got its outcome but with a level of imaginative visualisation and community engagement – well regarded by the local council – that would otherwise not have been achieved" (Macgregor, p.174), perhaps a reflection of the age-old notion of artist as genius.

As the 'video company' was never given the opportunity to work on the project, it is problematic to assume that they would not have produced good work. Although my instinct might be to agree with Macgregor, it does appear to put 'the artist' on a pedestal. This stands in contrast to Macgregor's stated mission to address the stereotype that contemporary art is elite. It may even call into question the value of the project; further, one must consider how the artists are chosen.

C3West is still in its infancy. Craig Walsh proposed three works and Panthers wants to produce them all. It will be interesting to see the rest of the work. There are also a number of other artists who are involved with the project whose work has yet to see the light of day. Macgregor claims "C3West has the potential to demonstrate a way of artists working with businesses that can provide unforeseen and highly beneficial solutions to their needs, which go far beyond writing a sponsorship cheque" (Macgregor, p.178). Time will tell. At the very least it is an imaginative way of bringing new funds to the visual arts, an industry which historically struggles for wide acceptance.

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GLOSSARY

Bite – To copy another writer's style.

Bomb – Prolific painting or marking with ink.

Buff – Any means employed by the Transit Authority to remove graffiti from trains. To "buff" is to erase.

Burn – To beat the competition.

Burner – A well-done wildstyle window down whole car; a burner is a winner.

Cap, fat or skinny – Interchangeable spray can nozzles fitted to can to vary width of spray.

Crew – Loosely organised group of writers, also known as a clique.

Def – Really good (derived from "death").

Ding dong – Relatively new stainless-steel type of subway car, so named for the bell that rings just before the doors close.

Down – In or part of the group or action.

Fade – To blend colours.

Flat – Older slab-sided type of subway car; the most suitable surface for painting.

Getting up – Successfully hitting a train.

Going over – One writer covering another writer's name with his own.

Hit – To tag up any surface with paint or ink.

Kill – To hit or bomb excessively.

King – The best with the most.

Lay-out - Sideline where trains are parked overnight and on weekends.

Panel piece – A painting below the windows and between the doors of a subway car.

Piece – A painting, short for masterpiece. To piece is to paint graffiti.

Piece book – A writer's sketchbook.

Rack – To steal.

Ridgy – Subway car with corrugated stainless-steel sides, unsuitable for graffiti.

Tag – A writer's signature with marker or spray paint.

Tagging up – Writing signature with marker or spray paint.

Throw-up – A name painted quickly with one layer of spray paint and an outline.

Top-to-bottom – A piece which extends from the top of the car to the bottom.

Toy – Inexperienced or incompetent writer.

Up – Describes a writer whose work appears regularly on the trains.

Wak – Substandard or incorrect (derived from "out of whack").

Wildstyle – A complicated construction of interlocking letters.

Window-down – A piece done below the windows.

Writer – Practitioner of the art of graffiti.

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