

Artwrite 48

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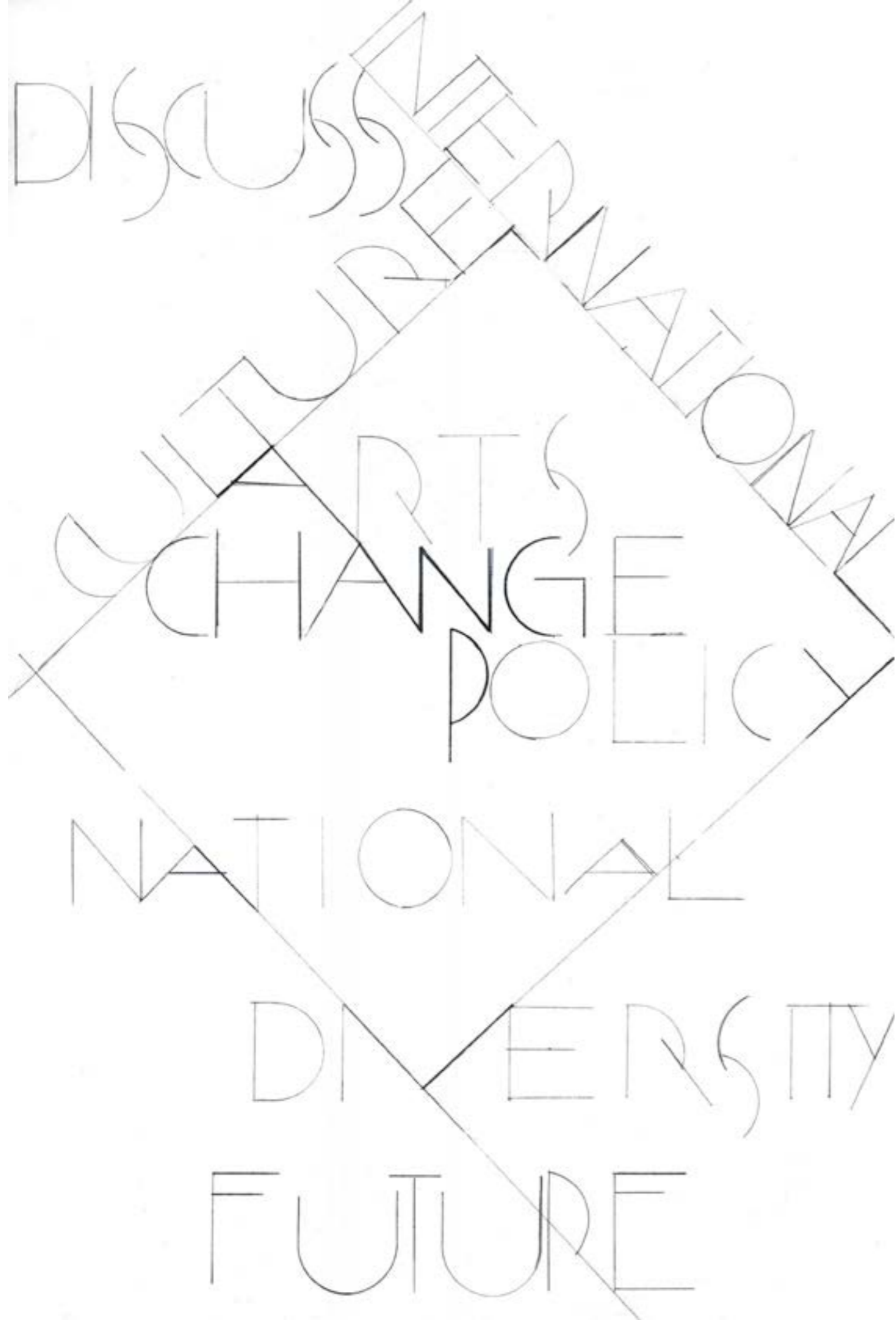
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Office for the Arts

NATIONAL CULTURAL POLICY

DISCUSSION PAPER

JUNE 2012.



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EDITORIAL.

2012 is a big year for the arts and culture sectors in Australia. Our new National Cultural Policy ~~will shortly be released~~ (postponed due to budget concerns - a victim of the surplus!) and will hopefully reflect, inspire and, most importantly, commit to supporting Australia's incredibly diverse and vibrant arts communities.

Our class this semester is made up of people from many different backgrounds, cultures and walks of life. The defining idea behind this issue of Artwrite is to provide a snapshot of Australia's artistic and cultural life on the eve of the National Cultural Policy.

The four goals of the forthcoming Policy are:

1. To ensure that what the Government supports – and how this support is provided – reflects the diversity of a 21st century Australia, and protects and supports Indigenous culture.

2. To encourage the use of emerging technologies and new ideas that support the development of new artworks and the creative industries, and that enable more people to access and participate in arts and culture.

3. To support excellence and world-class endeavour, and strengthen the role that the arts play in telling Australian stories both here and overseas.

4. To increase and strengthen the capacity of the arts to contribute to our society and economy.

This issue of Artwrite addresses all four goals of the National Cultural Policy. It mirrors the diversity of a 21st century Australia; it uses both established and emerging technologies in its development and distribution; it supports excellence in writing, thinking and expression; it tells Australian stories that will be shared online and furthered abroad by our international students; and it strengthens the arts' contribution to the economy by forming part of our training to become future arts administrators, managers, artists and writers.

Included in this issue are articles on such diverse topics as recent contemporary art exhibitions in Australia, the secondary art market in the Asia Pacific region, and reviews of collections in Australia and abroad.

Though the proposed policy represents a significant shift in the direction of the arts in Australia, it also emphasises the need for arts workers to reiterate the importance of the cultural sector within society. The implementation of the policy itself is not enough to elicit change – we need to actively ensure that the arts remain a priority for a government determined to return the budget to surplus. The recently released review of the Australia Council proposes more funding for emerging artists and new art forms; our articles echo the vitality and importance of such practices in contemporary Australian society, and internationally. This issue of Artwrite is a way to express our thoughts and opinions in relation to these current circumstances.

As students, participants, lovers of art and 'key stakeholders', we are constantly exposed to topical currents in the arts and culture sectors, both domestic and international, and we are gaining some measure of insight and a deeper understanding of significant events. This issue of Artwrite is also a way to share, communicate, and express our understanding of the contemporary Australian art scene as it stands today.

Our thanks go to everyone in this semester's Writing for Different Cultures class, with particular thanks to Terence Maloon, Nina Berrell, and Joanna Mendelssohn. The collaboration and mutual exchange involved in bringing this edition to fruition has been inspiring.

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POLI-ISM: A NEW DIRECTION?

By Miriam Williamson

The position of the arts in the Australian political landscape has ebbed and flowed over time.

In early May this year, the arts sector waited with anticipation for the launch of the National Cultural Policy. It was due to be launched the week of the 2012-13 budget, only to be sidelined under concerns for the budget surplus.

Prior to this, Australia's only national policy with a vision for the arts and culture was *Creative Nation* introduced by then Prime Minister, Paul Keating in 1996. Unfortunately when he lost government 18 months later, the policy was shelved.

The process of developing a National Cultural Policy has been unusually long, dating back to 2007 when then Shadow Minister for the Arts, Peter Garrett included it as a component of the Australian Labour Party's *New Directions for the Arts*.

On taking the arts portfolio in 2010 Arts Minister, Simon Crean has been far from complacent. The arts portfolio, Office of the Arts, is now advantageously placed within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet.

In August 2011 the Minister released the National Cultural Policy discussion paper, calling for comment. Hundreds of responses were received, 378 of which can be viewed on the National Cultural Policy site: <http://culture.arts.gov.au/submissions>. The number and breadth of submissions reflects the sector and community's enthusiasm for a new policy.

As part of the consultation process a cultural policy reference group was formed, made up of 21 significant people representing a range of interests from across the arts and government.

The National Cultural Policy will provide the framework for government support for the arts, culture and creative industries for ten years. It is anticipated the policy will now be released later this year.

On 13 May, the report on the independent review of the Australia Council was released, producing 18 recommendations supporting dramatic changes to legislation, governance and funding. This positioned the Council to be more responsive to increased technology and innovation. The review, conducted by Angus James and Gabrielle Trainor, was commissioned by the Minister to assess whether the original purpose of the Council is relevant today. Included in their methodology was an online survey receiving 2,007 responses. The report is available for public viewing at the following site: <http://culture.arts.gov.au/review-australia-council-2012>.

As our national arts funding body, the Australia Council was established 43 years ago and legislated under its own Act (*Australia Council Act 1975*). The Act clearly defines its functions, including funding decisions that are at an arms length from the government.

However, like all government authorities, it is not immune to the priorities and 'culture' of the government in power. Its role as advocate and its influence on policy has varied under successive governments, as has the department to which it is accountable.

The review addresses criticisms of arts funding allocated by rigid arts board structures that no longer reflect the diversity in the field. Recommendations call for a more flexible approach including a 'pool of arts peers' (a successful Canadian model) that can be drawn on to assess applications across art forms. This model is more transparent and allows funding to be responsive to changing priorities, for example digital art forms.

It also recommends that the Council take a stronger role in advocacy and research (to inform policy), leaving the responsibility of policy and program management to the department. The review calls for the Australia Council to be legislated under a new Act through parliament, similar to the template used to establish Screen Australia. This would allow a restructure in governance

bringing it into line with conventional boards. It is proposed the Board would consist of people with a strong arts background, who would select the Chief Executive Officer, the Minister appointing the Chair. This is a way of de-politicising appointments.

Included in the review is the suggestion that the government consider a role for the Australia Council based on the *White Paper on Australia for the Asian Century* currently being prepared by former Secretary of Treasury, Ken Henry. It may be fortuitous that the National Cultural Policy was delayed, allowing it to consider both reports, and perhaps source increased funding prior to being launched. By this stage the implementation of the National Broadband Network will also have progressed.

The government will formally respond to recommendations of the Australia Council Review in the National Cultural Policy. It remains to be seen which of the recommendations (if any) will be adopted.

The government needs to move quickly if it is serious about change. On 16 May, Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced a 500-day campaign leading up to the next federal election. *Creative Nation* was introduced eighteen months prior to an election and was not picked up by the incoming government. It would be unfortunate for any major reforms in arts policy to once again be at the mercy of the electoral cycle.

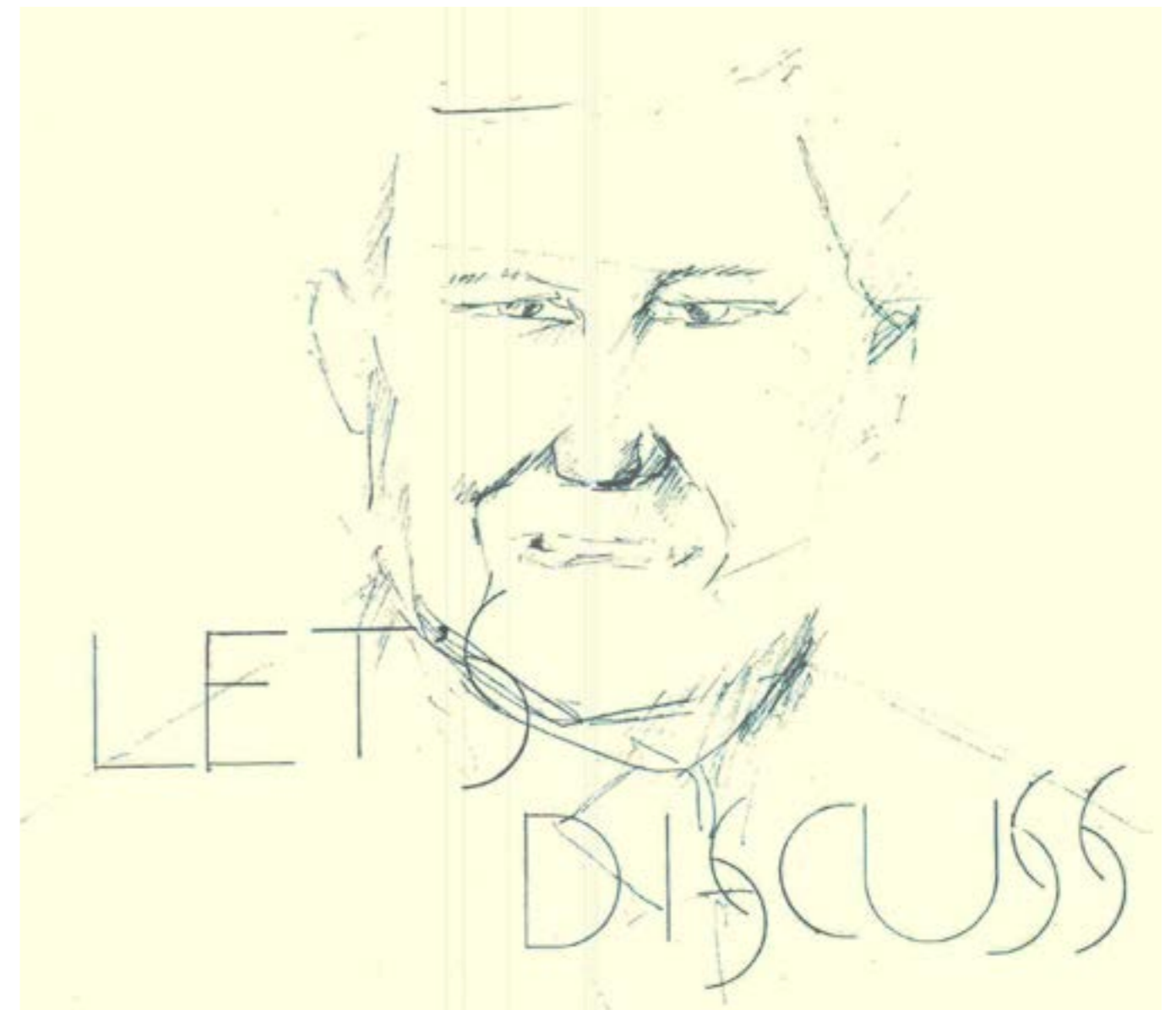
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Below: **Joan Cameron-Smith**, illustration 2012



OUT WITH THE OLD, IN WITH THE NEW - MAYBE?

By Joan Cameron-Smith

After six months of construction, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney has opened the doors of the new Mordant wing. Marking this occasion, the aptly named exhibition *Volume One: MCA Collection*, a selection of works from the museum's collection, is a significant marking point – this is a new chapter for the future of the MCA and within the visual arts landscape of Sydney.

Walking up the great wall of stairs from the Circular Quay side entrance, the first gallery visitors will encounter houses the beginning of *Volume One: MCA Collections*, a selection of works from the museum's four thousand-piece collection. Emily Kame Kngwarreye's *Untitled (Body painting series)* (1995) is placed near Hossein Valamanesh's, *The Lover Circles His Own Heart* (1993) while Ricky Swallow's *Caravan* (2008) – bronze cast balloons playing home to barnacles are – are all grouped together. Curated by the MCA's Glenn

Barkley, the hang actively allows for dialogues to be created between works without these dialogues being dictated. One may feel lost at first, with only a few of the works hung with didactic texts, but this allows for greater freedom as a viewer, or rather a greater challenge. No more reading for visitors here: they are encouraged to look, and to look hard. In what is a trend throughout this exhibition, the works jostle and rub up against each other. Viewers may find themselves leaping visually from one work to another, from one medium to the next.

Barkley has not accounted for timelines. The visitor doesn't travel through time; rather, the works are

Below: **Emily Kame Kngwarreye.**
Untitled (Awelye). 1995.
Synthetic Polymer Paint on paper, 77 x 52cm.
Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art.



grouped through delicate themes and their aesthetic nature. It is a smart arrangement – this is a show about contemporary art and there is no luxury of hindsight. With relative newcomers exhibited along with juggernauts of Australian contemporary art, it is evident that this is a show about richness, and about the diversity of contemporary art. This is the main feature of the exhibition – democracy. Some may wonder if the fluid groupings are effective. In some cases it is and then in others perhaps not. Emily Kngwarreye's *Untitled (Body painting series)* (1996) and Justene Williams' video piece *Crutch Dance* (2011) are such different works that their placement together is an almost abrasive pairing. The former is a series of paintings depicting ceremonial body paint lines that relate to the artist's dreaming, Awelye, while William's piece is a mixed media work containing videos of abstract and bright environments that become the stage of odd actions of jumping and running on a treadmill. However, the later juxtaposition of another Kngwarreye piece, *Untitled (Awelye)* (1995), with the abstract work *T.T.* (2004) by Ildiko Kovacs is highly effective. Rather than the differences being so overt, the subtleties highlight the material and thematic nature of each work more effectively and with greater complexity. These paintings are not what they seem. Emily Kngwarreye, described as the impossible Modernist¹, unknowingly straddles her own ancient traditions with that of Western abstract painting. While Kovacs' paintings are a result of knowledge of Abstract Expressionist painting meeting with Indigenous traditions, the power of both Kovacs' and Kngwarreye's work is the use of line,

¹ Akira Tatehata, "The Impossible Modernist" in *Utopia: the Genius of Emily Kame Kngwarreye*, ed Margo Neale. National Museum of Australia Press, Canberra, 2008.

gesture and tonal references in representations of the Australian land. The inclusion of these works highlights the complexities of Australian contemporary painting.

This fluid inclusion of Indigenous art is the show's other great feature. Not isolated with other contemporary Indigenous artists, works are shown in context with something bigger. That is not to say that the works blend in and are overlooked – rather that they are placed within a varied, complex and multi-layered conversation on contemporary art in Australia. This is no more apparent than in Vernon Ah Kee's series of beautiful charcoal drawings, *Fantasies of the Good* (2004). A striking band of men, these portraits depict Ah Kee's family, relatives and ancestors. The gazes of these men are anything but passive as the faces – over life-sized in scale – stare down at their viewers. They make their presence felt. Later in the exhibition, works by Gemma Smith (her *Adaptable* pieces, reminiscent of architectural models) and John Nixon's abstract paintings on hessian and metal are positioned near the large woven works by Mabel Anaka-anburra, Minnie Manarrdjala, and Mary Walatjarra, which use reed to form representations of the natural world. All of these works are a wonder of material transformation.

There are moments where viewers may feel a little daunted. This is most strongly felt in the second room

Above: **Vernon Ah Kee.**
Fantasies of the Good. 2004.
Charcoal on paper, 102 x 67.5cm each.
Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art and Vernon Ah Kee.

of the exhibition on the second level, where the space feels quite crowded. There are many works to view here and this is where the new building arrangement still shows its limitations – the lack of comfortable viewing spaces. Here some editing would have been beneficial to give the works more space. This is particularly significant when viewing larger scaled works, particularly the Ah Kee work, where more distance from the work, or being able to approach the work head on, would have suited the work's scale and nature.

Glenn Barkley has actively included video art. Shaun Gladwell's *Storm Sequence* (2000), a serene slow motion video depicting the artist skilfully turning and spinning in a pirouette fashion on a skateboard is a notable example. Gladwell, precariously positioned on a concrete platform that juts out over a rocky headland of Bondi beach, effortlessly spins and turns in the rain of a distant yet approaching storm. Composed with the artist in the middle of frame, it is a simple and melodic representation of the beauty of human movement. The depiction of movement is also the key element of Julie Rrap's work *360° Self-Portrait* (2004). It is a curious portrait of the artist, as we, the viewers, try to account for the slight, minute, yet troubling, changes of her expressions. Her eyes begin to bulge, tears start

to collect but never eventuate, while her skin shifts, falls and returns to normal. It appears as though she is being tossed about. In fact her camera, fixed in front of her face, has captured the slight changes of facial movements as her body is rotated on a giant spinning wheel. Both works are inherently concerned with a representation of movement that only the moving image is able to capture. Both videos are slowed down and are noteworthy pieces that examine their medium's mechanical and representational powers.

For all the questions that may arise from *Volume One: MCA Collection* - what does the collection say about the MCA; what is the collection's role within this institution; what are the thoughts that drive a collection's creation; what is its purpose? - the main point here is the diversity of works and artists. Rather than one agenda, one emphasis, this exhibition wants to look at Australian contemporary art as whole, with as many of its manifestations in there as it can muster.

Below: **Shaun Gladwell.**
Storm Sequence (Still). 2000.
 Video.

Courtesy of the Museum of Contemporary Art.



TIME IN REALITY: MARKING TIME

By Caren Lai

Marking Time, an exhibition whose title fittingly marks the opening of the new Museum of Contemporary Art, explores the ways artists visualise and conceptualise time and its transit. The exhibition opened on 29 March 2012 and features major works by eleven Australian and international artists, including: Jim Campbell, Tatsuo Miyajima, Rivane Neuenschwander, Edgar Arceneaux, Daniel Crooks, John Gerrard, Lindy Lee, Tom Nicholson, Katie Paterson, Gulumbu Yunupingu, and Elisa Sighicelli. The exhibition is presented through a wide range of media, including drawings, installations, sculptures, sound, and light. These accompany the study, concepts and representations of time.

The contemporary art world continually challenges artists in their creation and treatment of their subjects; it seeks to motivate and challenge the way viewers perceive art in various social settings and contexts. The choice of subject matter in *Marking Time* is as defiant as its representations and treatments in contemporary art. Time, in the view of Immanuel Kant, is part of a fundamental intellectual structure that is neither an event nor thing, and thus is not itself tangible. Hence, through varied interpretations, configurations and reflections of the subject, the exhibition aims to capture the transitory and intangible nature and effects of time in its full dimension.

In an untitled work by Californian artist and leading figure in media art, Jim Campbell, electronics and light sensors are utilised to magnify and capture the flow and effects of time. By recording the percentage of sunlight remaining in the day through a sensor positioned at the exterior of the museum and an electronic counter which tracks and reflects the information, Campbell reconfigures the invisibility of time through a visual experience. While in *Home Movies 1040* (2008, custom electronics, 1040 LEDs), he draws attention to the ebb and flow of time through LED lights that consecutively brighten and dim to convey various moments of major events in life.

On the other hand, Japanese artist Tatsuo Miyajima

considers humanity's perception of time in relation to mortality in *Death Clock* (2003). The concept of time as reflected through the human cycle of birth, death and regeneration is blatantly illustrated and documented by the numerical counters in Miyajima's photographic archive of black and white portraits, which are mounted in a grid-like manner across four enclosing panels.

Movement is also used in the deliverance of the concept and visualisation of time. Gallery visitors are invited to witness the transcending nature of time in Brazilian artist, Rivane Neuenschwander's interactive installation *Continente-nuvem* (*Continent-Cloud*) (2007-08). Thousands of tiny white styrofoam balls are blown around by timer-activated fans in an illuminated overhead light box to create time on different scale – the experience of the continuous movements of clouds or, alternatively, the shifting continents on our planet.

The exhibition presents works from a variety of genres and from a culturally diverse group of international artists. It has effectively achieved a commendable effort in curating and delivering a concept as elusive as time. The diversity among the works, coupled with their unrestrained approaches to the subject matter, has contributed successfully to the core energy and dynamism of the exhibition. Viewers are called upon to witness time through movements, sounds, lights, and space. The creative use of space, multi-media and technology, such as Campbell's monumental installation *Scattered Light* (2010) that comes to life only at night, contributes to the achievement of an enhanced physical and visual experience and synergy between the viewers, the environment and the artworks.

The overall setting and arrangement of the exhibition is well thought out with comfortable lighting and sufficient space catered for viewing, while ensuring smooth human flow around the exhibits. Space has also been creatively employed within some exhibits, which physically engages and motivates the audience in the works while creating a more interactive environment that allows

viewers to experience the effects, development and movements of time. Wall texts are generally succinct and clear in their descriptions. While the positioning of some video installations within exposed wall cavities gives them an edge in their settings, their placements creates a visual and physical displacement with the rest of the works which may hamper the viewer’s experience, thus, weakening their respective presence within the entirety of the exhibition.

Even though the diversity and multitude of approaches, genres and interpretations in relation to the responses, treatments and documentations of the subject of time contributes to the vibrant disposition of the exhibition, the distinctiveness of particular works, though interesting in their own way, may weaken and obscure its connection to the entirety of the show. Consequently, it creates a slight sense of ambiguity regarding the relevance and complexity of the relationship between the work itself and the subject matter, displacing them from the rest of the exhibition. As such, the flow and assimilation of a number of works, to a certain degree, appears contrived and affects the overall resonance and connection to the theme of the show.

Nonetheless, the creative techniques of interpreting, documenting and capturing the essence of time and its passing gives the exhibition an added edge. In relation to the redevelopment of the museum, *Marking Time* has contributed coherently to the overall theme that frames and marks the opening of the new MCA. It is also seamlessly integrated into the permanent collection of the museum that is currently on display; it adds a complimentary charm and level of breadth and depth to the history of the museum and its collections. The unique intra-force that it possesses between time and space contributes to the overall pulsating energy within the MCA and its launch into the new era of contemporary art.

Due to the universal concept of time, *Marking Time* lends a general mass appeal and draw; gallery visitors are also able to establish intimate and personal relationship and appreciation towards the notion and visualisation of time through its diverse body of works. The thoughtful effort that has been put into the formulation of the exhibition is apparent and admirable through the quality and organisation of the works selected for *Marking Time*, making it worth a visit.

IS IT THAT TIME ALREADY?

By Clement Lai

In recent years, there is no doubt that Christian Marclay’s *The Clock* (2010) has been one of the most celebrated contemporary artworks, receiving rave reviews worldwide in London, New York City, Los Angeles, Boston, Ottawa and now Sydney. In last year’s 54th Venice Biennale, Marclay was crowned the Golden Lion for best artist for *The Clock*. Mr John Macdonald, a filmmaker and writer, describes himself not as a contemporary art exhibition habitué, returned to see *The Clock* for the fourth time and had waited for an hour and a half in the cold outside the Paula Cooper Gallery in New York City.¹ Even the art critics Waldemar Januszczak of Britain’s *The Sunday Times* and *The New York Times* Roberta Smith have praised *The Clock* as the year’s best exhibition.² Why is it that Marclay’s *The Clock* is so successful and has aroused such enormous interest from the general public that they queue outside galleries and museums to see it, while being revered by the arts industry?

1 (Kennedy n.d.)
2 (Westwood n.d.)
10

In this article, I will examine the constitution of *The Clock* and the reason for its popularity.

As a collagist, Marclay expressed his interest in manipulating existing materials, including sound, images and moving pictures to put them together to create a new meaning. Marclay stated that his governing impulse as an artist has been to take ‘images and sounds that we are all familiar with and reorganise them in a way that is unfamiliar.’ For example, the sculpture, *Tape Fall* (1989) was a reel to reel tape player perched on a ladder playing water sounds, however the takeup reel was missing and the tape cascaded to the ground.³

He also remixed the music and sound, turning it inside out, bringing forward crackles, retrograded reversed sounds and hisses. *Telephones* (1995) was a cinematic sequence of people

3 (Zalewski n.d.)



Left: **Rivane Neuenschwander**
Um dia como outro qualquer/A day like any other 2008, installation view, XXVIII, Sao Paulo Biennial 24 modified flip clocks, Inhotim Collection, Minas Gerais.

dialing, phones ringing and people answering.⁴

The Clock, which premiered in London’s White Cube in 2010, is a 24 hour film that is compiled from thousands of fragments from films made over a century. In each clip, as little as a fraction of a second, or a glimpse of a clock face or watch, or dialogue about time is synchronized to the real time. Albeit these fragments are narratively incoherent, they have one connection, which is the central conceptual idea of this masterpiece: time. This artwork challenges and juxtaposes our philosophical perception of time, Symbolic Time, which is marked by clock, and Imaginary Time, which is our subjective idea of length, of duration. While you are viewing *The Clock*, you are constantly reminded of the time, creating some anxiety and tension within. It is evokes the Capitalist motto, ‘time is money’. You could ask why are so many people prepared to spend their time queued for up to an hour to watch *The Clock* for hours?

One of the most significant reasons is the diversity of genres that make up *The Clock* that evokes memories for viewers connecting to their daily life. These flashes may encompass humor, horror, sex, anger, distress, love and in particularly death, drawing on the emotions of the viewer. These elements are essential components of reflection on life and mortality, which is implied in this 24 hour artwork. Furthermore, these fragments connect to day-to-day life in our capitalist society. At 8am the clips feature people waking up, having breakfast and rushing to work. They convey a sense of urgency for every moment, people waiting for the bank to open in a panic, kids rushing out of the classroom, a woman who refuses to pay for her pizza that’s passed its time, a fight over late afternoon tea, rushing home after work to trim a tree, men and women hurrying to meet appointments and the most explicit dialogue, ‘I’m late’, ‘You’re late’, ‘It’s too late’.⁵ These kinds of fragments echo events and struggles that viewers face every day. This essential connection enables viewers to

4 (Westwood n.d.)
5 (Vitiello n.d.)

participate in the artwork and make it fell relevant to them, hence their interest in viewing it again and again.

Another connection that stimulates viewers’ interest is the recognition of the source of the clips. As an American artist, Marclay predominantly composed *The Clock* from popular Hollywood films and stars, for example, Fred MacMurray in *The Apartment*, Joseph Gordon in *Brick*, Matthew Broderick in *Election* and Harold Lloyd in *Safety Last*.

Marclay extracted the excerpts from films dating as far back, as the first projected motion picture by the Lumiere Brothers 115 years ago. These extensive sources, from black and white and silent film to contemporary film, allow people from different age ranges to find their own connection with the artworks.

This allows for recognition and connection is to not only the character and the film name, but time and place and personal experience with which you associate that particular film with. Then after this little flash back, you would sigh, ‘time flies like an arrow’. The young and older face of the same actor throughout time also confronts the viewer. Starts such as Orson Welles, Robert De Niro, Edward G. Robinson, Sean Connery, Anthony Hopkins, Marcelo Mastroianni, Gunnar Bjornstrand appear in *The Clock* at various points in their career.⁶ This juxtaposition stimulates viewers to trace back through their own memory and establish a profound sentimental connection with the artwork. Marclay includes clips from different languages such as French, German, Cantonese, and Thai, for example, Tony Leung in *Infernal Affairs* from Hong Kong. A striking aspect of *The Clock* is the unexpected sequence of movie fragments. Contrasting with the logical narrative in ordinary movies, *The Clock* imposes enormous fractions, displaying merely the clock face. This both challenges the

6 (Franks n.d.)

viewer and entices them to continue watching, waiting for connections to previous images.

The accessibility of *The Clock* attracts a diverse audience from a range of backgrounds and age groups. During the Modernism and Post-Modernism movement, artworks were quite often obtrusive and dehumanized for an audience of other artists, alienating many people. *The Clock* becomes accessible through the audience's ability to identify with scenes throughout. Furthermore, it does not require explanation, but becomes a personal experience to the viewer. Some might enjoy recognising the sources of the clips, some might recall the whole story of particular fragments, for some it might trigger personal memories. Whether personal, cultural or philosophical the work does not dictate to the viewer but is open to individual experience.

The success of Christian Marclay's *The Clock* can be attributed to the diversity of film fragments from different genres pieced together with no narrative. This collage of film stimulates an extraordinary paradoxical enjoyment in the viewer without telling a story. The pleasure in viewing this work comes through recognition of source, time, place and experience with which the audience engages. As a contemporary artwork, Marclay's *The Clock* both challenges and enlightens. It is definitely well worth taking the time to have a look.

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CHILD'S PLAY

By Emily Sinclair

Museums and galleries are turning to their youngest group of art lovers in an attempt to make education a top priority in their exhibition programs.

Centuries ago, when the very notion of the art museum first emerged, it was Sir Henry Cole who saw it as a means of deterring the average person from the 'gin mill'. By providing a more refined experience for the general population, he intended to showcase the wonder of expert craftsmanship and various narratives of history. As time has passed, however, the nature of the museum has inevitably evolved. Today, museums are cultural institutions that retain an important place within our society, as they promote above all creativity,

knowledge and education. It is only in recent decades that museums have wilfully opened their doors to the youth of society, who as it turns out happen to be some of their biggest and most loyal enthusiasts.

The emphasis on education within an exhibition has long been a focus for many artistic and cultural institutions. In recent years, however, there has been an increasing trend amongst institutions to expand their demographic of traditional museum and gallery attendees to actively include children and young adults. This inevitably impacts on the types of programs produced and the distribution of museum resources allocated to various departments.

Museums throughout Australia, both regional and metropolitan, are at the forefront of progressive children's educational exhibitions and public programs. Institutions such as the Queensland Art Gallery's Children's Art Centre and Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art have taken the framework of museum education even further by constructing purpose built learning facilities for children to actively participate in exhibitions. These facilities enable young children to engage with the art on display, and also aids in their interpretation of the artist's concepts and practices.

Kate Ryan, curator at the Queensland Art Gallery's Children's Art Centre, emphasises that in recent years there has been a distinctive shift in the art museum sector. Ryan recognises that public perceptions of museums are changing, with a stronger emphasis being placed on enriching visitors' experiences¹ and less on perpetuating the elitist nature of museums and galleries of the past. The Children's Art Centre achieves this for young children and their families. Since 1998, more than one million children have participated in the gallery's exhibitions and associated public programs.² This number reflects the Gallery's strong commitment to the continued development of educational programs, as well as its place in the local community as a destination for young children.

The Children's Art Centre, which emerged in the 1990s as an experimental program, now produces some of the most innovative and forward thinking educational and children's programs in contemporary art institutions today. Since the opening of the Gallery of Modern Art in 2006, the Children's Art Centre has established dedicated exhibition spaces for children and families, as well as an annual large-scale exhibition, and a touring

exhibition,³ which offers children in remote areas the opportunity to engage with the exhibitions off-site.

In 2010, having experienced over a decade of success with children's programs and exhibitions, the Children's Art Centre established a dedicated publishing program to extend the opportunities for engaging young children with visual arts to home and school environments. Such programs enable the Gallery to communicate with a more diverse demographic, and allow the Gallery to extend their exhibitions beyond the museum walls.

Similarly, the newly unveiled National Centre for Creative Learning at the re-vamped Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney emphasises the distinctive shift occurring in art museums of the twenty-first century. The new establishment is a clear advocate of the education of children in an art context, with their new multi-million dollar facilities placing the institution at the forefront of museum programming and development.

The new wing boasts workshop rooms, interactive digital media rooms and artistic development rooms, among others. Most notable, however, is their dedication to the development and production of digital resources, which are readily accessible to educators in schools throughout Australia. The digitalisation of

cultural institutions such as the Museum of Contemporary Art provides children with the ability to engage with exhibitions and collections away from the museum and in a familiar environment, such as in the home or classroom.



Above: **Su-Wen Leong,**
Illustration 2012

However, there have been opposing arguments voiced in the arts community concerning the privilege of children's education in a museum or gallery environment. Resident Sydney Morning Herald art writer John McDonald implied that such spaces are no more than an attempt to prove to funding bodies the dedication of the museum to youth programs and education. In his review of the National Centre for Creative Learning at the Museum of Contemporary Art, he quips with a hint of sarcasm that *'the children even get million-dollar views of the Harbour Bridge and the Opera House'*.⁴

While the art education of children is important, the new National Centre for Creative Learning is ultimately an attempt to break down the barriers, which to an extent remain between the physical *place* of the museum and the public; in this instance, this happens to involve a room with a view.

The emphasis placed on digital learning within the Museum of Contemporary Art's new Creative Learning Department is undoubtedly immensely beneficial for children in remote school environments. It does, however, raise pertinent issues regarding the construct of the museum and its sense of permanence as a vital cultural structure within society. If the need to visit the museum or gallery to experience art is removed, there arises a greater difficulty to create an enriching museum experience. It is indeed an innovative and contemporary approach to museum education; however, the excitement of a school excursion replaced by a computer screen seems to hinder the overall educational process and understanding that arises when viewing an exhibition. It seems that time will ultimately be the judge of the success of the initiative at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Despite being steeped in a more traditional history, the Art Gallery of New South Wales holds engagement with the public as one of its core organisational values. This ultimately incorporates educational programs and opportunities for young children. The Art Gallery's most recent exhibition, *Picasso: Masterpieces from the Musée National, Paris* offered many educational programs for children to participate in. Most notable were the 'Children's Trails', where children were guided through the exhibition with information and activities, which continued beyond the gallery walls, with additional material children could complete after their visit.

An obvious commonality between these museums is the desire of art institutions to engage public audiences

beyond the museum environment by attempting to connect with people in a place that is more familiar, such as the home or school ground. This shift is reflective of the changing nature of the museum as no longer a place cloaked in perceptions of elitism, but of community and educational opportunities that extend to everyday life.

Exhibitions and youth oriented programs are not particular to larger institutions, with many smaller organisations focusing on the education of young children in an

the works of five established Australian and international contemporary artists, who managed to engage young children with interactive elements of their artworks. The success of this exhibition can be seen as a result of having artworks specifically targeted at children, not adults.⁵ Executive Director and Chairman of SCAF, Dr Gene Sherman AO, explained on the eve of the opening that this exhibition promoted 'tolerance, interconnectedness, respect for others, and an understanding of other cultures'.⁶ These qualities formed the foundation for

staged 'Animal Days' to coincide with themes of animal and environmental welfare in Laurence's work. These 'Animal Days' involved young families and children being invited to bring their cats and dogs to the Goodhope Street gallery, where they learnt about the proper care of animals from the Animal Welfare League and a professional dog trainer. An additional service of free animal dental and health check-ups, and a consultation with an animal behaviour specialist was also provided to animal owners visiting the gallery space.

In addition, while promoting Yang Fudong's 2011 *No Snow Under the Broken Bridge*, the Foundation held a workshop, which enabled children as young as three to engage with Chinese culture and artistic practices. Art and craft activities, group discussions, and a showing of the film and associated activities were offered, which succeeded in facilitating the children's understanding of the artist and his practice. Such educational programs provide young children with the necessary knowledge and skills to arrive at their own interpretation of the artwork, and the overall exhibition.

Interestingly, a comparison can be drawn between art museums and advertisements by tobacco companies of the early-mid twentieth century, which aimed to appeal to younger generations. Their mentality of 'we've got them for life by getting them early' can be applied to the various children's programs that museums have adopted in targeting younger demographics. Although this can be interpreted as a way of ensuring future patronage and continued interest in educational opportunities within museums, it can also be viewed as museums having ulterior motives when devising such programs: are museum officials genuinely interested in enriching the education of young people through art, or does their concern lie in increasing the attendance numbers in years to come? As the education of children in museums has only taken off in the last few decades, future reviews will surely shed light on the current model.



artistic environment. Sydney's Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation produces educational programs as a major aspect of its exhibition program, with particular importance placed on children's programs. Since SCAF's highly successful 2010 exhibition, *Contemporary Art for Contemporary Kids*, the gallery has become a must-see destination for young families in both the immediate area and surrounding Sydney suburbs.

Contemporary Art for Contemporary Kids combined

further educational activities at the Foundation in association with this particular exhibition, including artist workshops and interactive group activities for children.

SCAF's current exhibition, *After Eden*, by esteemed Australian artist, Janet Laurence boasts an array of educational programs for young children, despite the fact the exhibition is not specifically targeted at such a young demographic. Over several Saturdays throughout the duration of the exhibition, the foundation has

Though the education of children in a museum environment is currently in vogue, its popularity offers the impression that it has quickly become a permanent fixture of both long established and newer art museums. Despite the fact that some may question the effectiveness of digital learning in an off-site location, or the very thought of a once quiet site of contemplation and reflection now likened to an upmarket crèche, children are irrefutably an integral part of museums in the twenty-first century.

Who knows? Perhaps the next insightful comments you hear in a museum will come from the cohort of six-year-olds at the other end of the gallery. Listen carefully, because they may just teach you a thing or two.

Endnotes

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Courtesy of Sherman
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CABINET OF CATASTROPHE

By Miriam Williamson

“Perhaps I can only show a pathos and expose a tenderness” Janet Laurence 2012

The successful commercial enterprise Sherman Galleries was transformed in 2008 to the Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation (SCAF), established as a not for profit arts organisation to promote research, education and support innovative contemporary art from the Asia region. In addition to SCAF, members of the Sherman family established Voiceless, an organisation to promote the welfare of animals.

After Eden is the twelfth major arts project exhibited by SCAF since their incarnation, an installation by internationally renowned Australian artist Janet Laurence, and the first artist from the former Sherman Gallery stable to have been commissioned.

Laurence’s work incorporates themes of natural history, our relationship with the environment and our interrelationship with animals. *After Eden* encompasses elements of her past work to highlight the threat of extinction to certain species, all mammals.

Laurence is admired for her tenacious research

and intrepid exploration of the environment and natural history. Her work can be likened to the Wunderkammer (cabinets of curiosities) popular across Europe in the late 19th Century. In part a cultural bent of ‘Empire’, Wunderkammer were created through a genuine fascination for exotic species, stuffed, dried, treated, contained and displayed with pride. It is the disparity between the preciousness and care of museum and private collections and the ongoing disregard for the living species within their natural environment that is apparent in *After Eden*.

After Eden unashamedly draws an emotional (but not necessarily sentimental) response from the viewer. In comparison to the shock tactics used to effect by some animal rights activists, there is a ‘femininity’ and fragility to this installation that evokes empathy and reminds us of the power we wield over the destiny of the ‘voiceless’. Much has been written about this exhibition in the three months of its duration and it appears to have challenged both viewers and arts commentators. There is no ambiguity here; it is ‘political’ and provocative. In art critic, John McDonald’s recent article in the *Sydney Morning Herald*¹, he suggests Laurence’s role in *After*

1 McDonald, J. Spectrum Sydney Morning Herald May 5 2012 pp.12-13



Eden is more that of curator than artist, and questions whether the placement of existing objects within a space, without undergoing transformation, constitutes art.

SCAF’s projects are commissioned and artists are well remunerated for their work, (approximately \$120,000). The history of commissions in both art and natural history collections has been one of power, price, control and influence. The wealth of the Catholic Church generated some of the greatest works of the Italian Renaissance; yet artists, even those sympathetic to the Church, must have felt a responsibility to deliver work in line with the ideology of the commissioner.

The relationship between Janet Laurence and the Sherman family has been ongoing for some years. In a recent forum held at COFA on 24 April², Gene Sherman began the discussion by asking Laurence the differences between developing a body of work and delivering a work for a client with the restrictions of deadlines, budgets etc. Experience has given Laurence the capacity to select carefully, only taking commissions that are conceptually compatible and in line with her own concerns. Arriving at SCAF I enter the dimly lit space. On the left is a menagerie of owls, the most traditional diorama in the exhibition. As I walk, their ‘whoohoot’ calls softly behind me. Their calls carry throughout the space, providing a melancholy soundtrack.

Continuing into the room, the sense of a sanctified space is enhanced by illuminated cylindrical curtains of gauze surrounding carefully arranged plant and animal

2 COFA Forum Gene Sherman interviews artist Janet Laurence, Tuesday 24 April 2012 (venue)

specimens, scientific glassware, medical tubing and backlit photographs. Each veiled ‘tube’ houses a story. Some allow you to pull the veil aside and enter; others are sealed leaving you to peer through the gauze, creating a dream like haze. Shadows play a strong role in many of the works.

Each space is individually named. In *Blood and Chlorophyll*, stuffed koalas are on ‘life support’, tubes of pink fluid running from their limbs to the ceiling. Approaching *Love and Extinction*, claw-like shadows wave over the gauze. Inside is a double negative image of a thylacine, and a dingo stands alert centre front, posed with a sense of its foreseeable fate.

The most dominant work in the space, *Sancturied*, contains footage shot in animal sanctuaries in both Aceh and China. On the back wall is a divided screen. On the large square screen to the left is a close up of the beating chest of a Panda. The fur forming a V is separated rhythmically by its breathing. The camera rises and pulls back, then closes in on the panda’s face as its eyes engage the viewer for an uncomfortable period of time. After inspecting us at length, the bear takes a slow bow and exits bottom left. On the narrow rectangular screen to the right is slow motion footage of two young pandas at play on a branch, blending from

Above: **Janet Laurence.**
After Eden. 2012.
Installation view.
Commissioned by Sherman
Contemporary Art Foundation.
Image courtesy of Jamie North.

negative to positive footage. They embrace, clinging to each other as though consoling, then fade away.

Another image emerges, a close up of an elephant, chains visible, again making eye contact with the viewer. Rarely do we get close enough to stare into an elephant's eyes for this length of time, the proximity both disconcerting and hypnotic. There is no distraction, each facing the other as though waiting to see who blinks first.

After Eden is a memento mori for an extinguished Earth, a reminder not only of the impact of our greed, but of the fragility of the environment that surrounds us, and all that live in it, and the cost of our unbridled consumption.

Many of Laurence's exhibition titles have been sourced from books. In this instance, in a biblical reference from *Genesis*, man and woman were expelled from the Garden of Eden for their travesty, a betrayal of trust. Having come full circle around this solemn sanctuary I head towards the exit, birdcalls accompanying me to the door. I disembark and head east.

Below: **Janet Laurence.**
After Eden. 2012.
Installation view.

Commissioned by Sherman Contemporary Art
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Image courtesy of Jamie North.



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GET SMART

By Ronsie Chan

Ronsie Chan investigates the annual festival that has targeted the young minds of Sydney's emerging artists.

The youth are always seen as the future pioneers. Emerging artists should be seen as the future 'new ground breakers' of the art industry; they are the group of artists who have the spark of creativity burning brightly within them; they are determined to establish themselves with their own particular style. These artists often produce the most exciting works and are definitely worth drawing more attention and appreciation from the public. The important contribution that they make to the vitality of Australian cultural life

should be valued by providing them opportunities and exposure.

Smart Arts is a youth arts and cultural festival showcasing the creative talents and initiatives of young people in the various areas of visual arts, film, performance and music. The festival is the creative platform for the City of Sydney's annual Youth Week celebrations and is drawn from the creative talents of 16-25 year old Sydneysiders. The festival brought together the city's most talented young artists in an exciting showcase of various areas. Not only the artists benefited from this opportunity to expend their career. By providing opportunity and exposure to the youth and emerging artists from all those fields, greater

Below: Smart Arts Youth Festival Logo. 2012.
Courtesy of the City of Sydney.



understanding and appreciation of contemporary art, craft and design practice was also drawn from the public.

Sydney Lord Mayor Clover Moore MP said, 'Sydney is a global city which is bursting with cultural energy and creativity. Festivals like smart ARTS are the perfect way of showcasing the many different art forms that are alive and well in our city. This is the only youth arts festival of its kind in Sydney, and it really gives local up-and-coming artists, performers and designers a chance to shine.. The festival was packed with a variety of creative workshops, exhibition, forums, parties and other fun activities. Audiences were able to immerse themselves into a diverse range of inspiring and stimulating issues and ideas.

The festival commenced with an art exhibition and launch party featuring performances by the Sydney Youth Orchestra as well as light projections by award-winning filmmakers Punk Monk Propaganda. Both performances definitely helped in attracting the public eyes to the festival. The opening of the Interpretation Art exhibition at Pine Street Gallery was held after the launch party. The exhibition showcases the next generation of emerging artists in a very engaging approach where artists were asked to respond to six unique statements given by the curators. The result was an assortment of different artistic interpretations in range of mediums. Besides this exciting exhibition, two sustainable workshops were held as part of the festival - sustainable jewellery and sustainable bookbinding. Participants were given the chance to directly discover the art of using a variety of recycled and reused material to create jewellery, recycled bookbinding, and much more while being tutored by some of Sydney's best artists at Pine Street Creative Arts Centre.

As part of the tradition, discussion forums and seminars were also included as part of the event this year. 'Creative pros: kick start your art' was a career-focused visual arts seminar featuring guest speakers from a range of different areas within the art industry. The interactive discussion forums provided a great opportunity for young people who had questions and uncertainties about the arts industry to find their solutions and to get more in-depth information about the

industry. The guidelines and answers from the professionals were intended to assist those with ambitions and enthusiasm towards the arts. Another engaging activity was the *Street Art Jam*, which was a local tour of Chippendale's street art sites. Participants were supplied with a range of equipment to use in the studios, giving them a chance to experience making an actual piece of street art. The festival ended on the 27 April 2012 with a closing party which concluded with a remarkable group of young people combining youth film screening, music performances, and live art and projections at Fraser Studios, Chippendale.

One of the key aspects of the festival is that opportunities are created for young people's artistic production to be seen by the wider community in a range of forums and venues. As part of this, arts organisations were encouraged to embrace the needs and employ the skills of young people within their planning and programming. The arts are important because they socialise and civilise, and because they contribute to the development of healthy, adaptable individuals and societies. Smart Arts has taken action on this idea by acknowledging and embracing the significance of young people in the art industry.

PROJECT 5: VOLUME FOUR

By Sophie Rose

Project 5 (now in its fourth year, or 'Volume Four') is a public art event running over two weeks (9-22 March). It is designed to showcase established and emerging talented Australian contemporary street and stencil artists and to raise proceeds for the Information and Cultural Exchange organisation (ICE). The entire event includes live art demonstrations, artist talks, a charity auction event (of the finished art from the live demonstrations), and a retrospective gallery exhibition of previous *Project 5* work. The project is a collaboration between Ambush Art Gallery, The Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, Bay East Auctions, four selected artists, and the ICE. This year the event brought cutting-edge artworks created by Australian street artists E.L.K, Reka, Vexta and HAHA to the historical Rocks precinct.

What is street art?

Street art is a relatively young contemporary art movement that involves the creation of visual art in public spaces, often without approval from the site owner. It is differentiated from traditional 'graffiti' not only by its focus on aesthetic and meaning, creating a dialogue between the viewer and their surroundings, but also by its range of encompassed

art forms, including spray and stencil work, painted artwork, murals, posters, (paper) paste-ups and stickers. Pioneering artists worldwide have transformed the novelty of 'graffiti' into a new genre which is becoming increasingly popular and acknowledged across the art world as one concerned with innovation, individuality, and the representation of powerful social and political messages.

In Australia, the movement grew from a small number of experimental artists and crews operating in the late 1970s and, since a surge in the mid 1990s, has evolved into what is now the diverse, experimental and increasingly populated contemporary street and urban art scene.

Street art is, by its early definitions, ephemeral: a mural, stencil or paste-up which may adorn city walls for anywhere from a day to months, depending on location, visibility, materials, and council laws. With its rise in popularity, visibility, and global recognition, street art is moving into a new era where the ephemeral work becomes collectible. Many of the artists work on commission for public or private murals and paintings and produce studio versions of their art (originals, or limited

edition stencils and prints).

Project 5 manages to combine these two aspects of street art into an easily accessible platform that raises interest and awareness about the genre and also the talents of the individual artists. Its live art sessions, freely open to the public, provide audiences a behind-the-scenes view of the artists' process and techniques, which normally would be confined to studio work or covertly operated mid-night spray and paste-up sessions. Still, the end result is a studio-quality canvas work - collectible and permanent.

From a curatorial perspective, *Project 5* essentially provides an annual snapshot of the current art making practice and trends of the contemporary Australian street art scene. The selection of four different (well-known and recognised) artists each year captures the ever-evolving shift in technique, artistic inspiration, and talent - intentionally pulling together a group comprised of members with diverse art making practices.

The artists of 2012 were E.L.K (Luke Cornish), Reka (James Reka), Vexta (Yvette Bacinova), and HAHA (Regan Tamanui).

Reka, of Melbourne's Everfresh crew, is a self-taught artist active amongst the pioneers of Melbourne's street art scene since 2002. His influences are grounded in pop culture, cartoons, and illustration. Over the years, Reka has transformed these inspirations into his instantly recognisable Surrealist-style paintings and murals featuring bold colours and line work. Reka's art can be found on the streets and in contemporary galleries worldwide and his work was recently acquired by the National Gallery of Australia.

E.L.K is arguably Australia's premier stencil artist, having rapidly risen to nationwide fame and recognition since humble beginnings in 2007. His work is renowned for its technical skill, involving up to 90 layers of hand-cut acetate stencils and even more layers of spray painting in the creation of a single piece. E.L.K has pioneered the stencilling genre in Australia and broken new grounds into an era of hyper-realism, particularly through his portraiture works such as his portrait work "Father Bob", which was a finalist in the Archibald Prize, 2012.

Vexta has been creating her unique brand of psychedelic, neon street art since 2003, working between her hometown of Sydney and her current residence in Melbourne. Vexta's art, primarily stencil and paste-up work, finds influence in cultural and visual debris and the notion of urban mythologies.

It also incorporates found objects, bones, wood and feather materials.

HAHA is a Melbourne-based stencil artist most widely recognised for his iconic images of Ned Kelly scattered throughout Australian streets and galleries. His work encompasses a vast range of subject matter but is primarily concerned with the power of mass media and pop culture within Australia, which is evident in his style: bright, bold pop-art stencils and murals. Self-taught, HAHA experiments with layering stencils and the use of rollers and spray paint to create intricate his unique Pop Art-style imagery.

Together, these artists and their wildly original and differing styles are a small but quality representation of the diversity of contemporary Australian street art and a fantastic introduction to those as yet unfamiliar with the scene.

The purpose of Project 5 is threefold: to promote contemporary Australian street art, its key artists, and their supporters (Galleries and sponsors); to raise funds for the arts-based charity organisation ICE; and to increase the profile of The Rocks as an arts area (particularly during Art Month Sydney). *Project 5* addressed these goals through four key events held over the two-week period. The **live art events** held over the initial three days (9 – 11 March) in The Rocks Square were the key attractions for the public audience. The live

art sessions ran from 10am - 3pm each day, in addition to an opening evening event on the 9 March, with free public access to come and go as desired, effectively serving as an "open air artists studio". Four large, blank canvases were arranged in the centre of the square and, over the course of the sessions, the artists brought these to life with each of their unique creations – HAHA and E.L.K working side by side with stencils and spray paint, opposite Reka and Vexta who focused on painted stencil art and brushwork. The entirety of the artwork was created over these three public sessions with the finished pieces to be held for the charity auction event on 22 March. Although there was overlap in general methodology, each artist's technique and individual style was vastly different. HAHA worked quickly, rolling on bright yellow for the base of each individual portrait of the late 'Carmen' Kiwi (drag queen) and capturing her charismatic vibrancy with each upbeat yet precise movement and coating of orange-hued spray paint. Alongside, E.L.K. maintained a much more visibly thoughtful and cautious approach, headphones in and concentrating on the minute detail and precision placement required for each of some fifty hand-cut stencil masks to produce a subtle yet intense photorealistic work which perfectly captures the urgency and desire behind a moment of intimacy. Meanwhile, Reka and Vexta worked opposite, both with steady and cautious brushwork. Reka built layer

upon layer of brushstrokes, mostly freehand but with stencil-mask precision, to produce an intricate Surrealist urban portrait - its subject hovering somewhere between robotic and human, in industrial browns, dirty whites and a blazing crimson red. Vexta exercised similar precision whilst creating one of her signature neon skull compositions, first painting the comic-realism style skull which ends up looking surprisingly gentle and organic in muted tones, juxtaposed with neon shards and several tiny, bright hummingbirds spewing forth from its jaw. The artworks themselves are enough to draw a crowd, but patrons linger, entranced by the opportunity to watch these artists doing what they do best. Furthermore, the artists are happy to chat when they step away from the canvas for a break, affirming their down-to-earth personas as artists who bridge the gap between contemporary and accessible art.

Meanwhile, from 9 – 22 March, a **retrospective exhibition** of previous works from the *Project 5* series was held in the old Bank Building, 47 George St, The Rocks. The exhibition was not heavily promoted, with only a few flyers placed at the side of the live art event, and the pop-up gallery space was potentially difficult to find unless actively sought out by keen audience members or those already in the know. This is unfortunate as the works (in fact, sleek canvas prints of the originals) were a dynamic and vibrant representation of the

top Australian street artists involved in the project from 2009-2011. Artists on display included Ben Frost, Shannon Crees, Phibs, Beastman, Ears, Deb, Anthony Lister, Kid Zoom, Ghostpatrol, with a standout work by James Jirat Patradoon. Although the display space was very limited, the curation could have utilised this better in a few simple ways – more information about each particular work would be welcome, either on the artwork plaque or within the promotional flyers for *Project 5* and Ambush Gallery left at the side of the room.

The small gallery space in the Bank Building was also a base for the **artist talk and discussion panel**, Monday 12 March 11am-12pm. In my experience, artist talks are never the most popular element of an event and unfortunately at this year's *Project 5*, this seemed only to be compounded by its lack of promotion, difficult to find and space-restricted location, and inconvenient timing. Although still successful in its purpose, what was promoted as a fantastic opportunity for open discussion with the artists could have been even more so, but only with better organisation and execution. However, the artists were also (of their own choice) open to questions and brief discussion during the live art sessions, so any members of the general public who were truly keen for discussion were presented with ample opportunity earlier in the program.

Finally, the private **charity**

auction to raise proceeds for ICE was held on Thursday 22 March, at the Cleland Bond Store, The Rocks. ICE is a Sydney-based organisation that provides support and resources to disadvantaged youth and other minority social groups with opportunities through the arts and creative industries in the Greater Western Sydney area. Over the first three events, *Project 5* has raised \$40,000 for the organisation, with this year's effort adding another \$12,800 to the total.

The charity event was invitation only with VIP invite available on request. In effect, this restricted the crowd to serious buyers, appreciators and collectors from the street and contemporary art community, and commercial gallery representatives, but also allowed for a large number of media, colleagues and friends of the artists. It could be argued that this format somewhat restricted the visibility of the finished works to a commercial atmosphere, which seems to oppose the underlying principles of the event and of the genre of street art itself (to make art accessible to the whole community). However, this argument would then delve deeper into the current controversy: does the commodification of street art change its value, and is it still really street art?

In terms of this event, the answer is irrelevant. The collaboration between government organisations, Ambush Gallery and the artists meant that once again,

Project 5 was successful in its primary goals after the completion of Reka, Vexta, HAHA and E.L.K's four fresh artworks and a rewarding charity auction for ICE.

Although the new location for the Project at The Rocks this year and its reliance on walk-through interest as a 'pop up' event may not have been ideal, attracting lower crowds than previous years at Cockle Bay Wharf, the event (particularly the live art events) provided a wonderful opportunity for both newcomers and enthusiasts to engage with some of the top artists in Australia's contemporary street art scene today. *Project 5*, much like the genre of street art itself in Australia, is just finding its ground with Sydney audiences but managing to achieve significant

improvements (particularly growth in fundraising) each year. With the amount of raw talent circulating the Australian street art scene, the 2013 line-up of artists and events will definitely be something to look forward to.

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yard by creating a pleasant (if uninspiring) public park, as well as surface parking which would help pay for the project. The Chicago architecture firm of Skidmore, Owings and Merrill were entrusted with the design for the park in 1998 and produced a plan akin to that of nearby Grant Park – a traditional Beaux Arts layout that would quietly complement the skyline of Michigan Avenue, slated to open by 2000. However, Project director Edward Uhler had bigger (and better) ideas. He urged the city to consider more innovative proposals, ideas which echoed Chicago's grand history while ultimately propelling the city landscape into the new millennium. The new venture would be risky – the site double from its original proposed 12 acres, the opening was pushed back four years and the initial budget of \$150 million was increased by \$325 million. The changes caused controversy throughout Chicago as furious residents claimed that such extravagant government spending was a misappropriation of tax funds. However, thanks to the tireless efforts of business man and dedicated arts patron John H. Bryan, \$205 million of the overrun was picked up by private donors.

Bryan and Uhler, together with private donors and corporations, worked to import renowned and talented artists to design contemporary art and architecture for the newly proposed millennial theme. The *coup de grace* came with the involvement of legendary architect Frank Gehry who was commissioned to design the music pavilion. The wealthy Pritzker family footed the bill for the enormous structure (thusly named the Jay Pritzker Pavilion) which had a two-birds-one-stone effect; wealthy families followed by example and donated exorbitant sums toward the project, and the pavilion set the forward-looking tone of the park.

Internationally recognised artists, architects, designers and sculptors followed in Gehry's stead, creating interactive and brilliant works for public display. Every park should have a fountain and Barcelona born artist Jaume Plensa did not disappoint. He created *Crown Fountain*; two 15meter slabs of steel framed glass block placed in a thin film of water. One thousand Chicagoans were taped close up and their faces merge from one to the next on LED screens, water streaming out of their lips every few minutes – much to the delight of children during the summer months. The park is also home to Thomas Beebe's black box theatre for music and dance, Kathryn Gustafen's secluded garden, a 16 000 square foot ice skating rink below the Bean which turns into

outdoor dining during the summer, and Frank Gehry's first ever footbridge - a snaking walkway above the freeway connecting Millennium Park to Grant Park and Navy Pier.

Despite its controversial beginnings, Millennium Park has been a huge success in more ways than one. When asked for recommendations and site seeing around the city, Millennium Park is always the first recommendation by Chicagoans and it is not difficult to see why. In the first six weeks alone, Chicago officials estimate more than a million people poured through the \$475 million, 24.5-acre park.

The pavilion, which offers free concerts throughout the summer offers 4, 000 fixed seats and 95,000 square feet of lawn which accommodate a further 7, 000 people. The innovative acoustics ensure that no matter where you watch the show, there is no chance of missing out. The interactive nature of the park mirrors the values and ambitions of the information and technological age – tourists and resident's mill about the parklands at a leisurely pace, the surrounding works of art providing for easy conversation and laughter.

The works on display communicate directly with the people – the highly polished stainless steel of *Cloud Gate* is a direct reflection whilst the *Crown Fountain* provides a more personal connection with the residents. Free concerts, shows and family days immerse the public with culture, gently encouraging park goers to visit the nearby theatre district as well as the Art Institute of Chicago (conveniently located next to the park).

Millennium Park has proven to be a space like no other in America – it is a meeting place, a family friendly outing, a relaxed space for residents and visitors and a tourist draw card. Architect and planner Richard Hitchcock says, "Overall the space is magnificent... people are distributed throughout. You don't have to go out of your way to find it, it sucks you right in. The public votes with its feet."¹ It is not only residents and tourists benefiting from the aesthetically pleasing and fun park – nearby businesses have seen an increase in profit since the opening in 2004. Bennigan's, a nearby restaurant, doubled its sales in the first week and has been enjoying constant traffic of customers ever since². Real estate

1 Black, J. (2005). *New Millennium Park is ambitious, expensive – and popular*. Retrieved from dev.libraryo.com/Article.aspx?num=130726206

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CITY OF BIG SHOULDERS; BIGGER ARTWORKS

By Natasha Mikitas

A giant concrete skyline juts aggressively hundreds of meters into the sky; the overwhelming size of the buildings makes it hard to feel anything but inferior. Opposite these massive structures are the icy waters of Lake Michigan, startlingly blue and unwelcomingly frozen over. Hundreds of people are congregated between the concrete monsters and the icy waters, but their attention is focused on neither. They walk slowly around a lone structure, touching its smooth surface and laughing as they walk below it, staring up entranced at their own reflections. They are impressed by the enormity and engrossed in the almost perfect mirror images on its surface. This is *Cloud Gate* (2004, Stainless steel), and it is (in my experience) the best thing I have ever seen in a

public park.

Cloud Gate is the 110-tonne creation of artist Anish Kapoor. It is affectionately known as The Bean (it's resemblance to a kidney bean is uncanny). *Cloud Gate* is only one of the many impressive, stop-you-in-your-tracks, works of art in Chicago's Millennium Park. The highly reflective surface presents a unique view of Chicago's already beautiful skyline, not to mention entertaining self-photo opportunities (the inside reflections are almost akin to a funhouse mirror).

Millennium Park began as an initiative by Mayor Richard M. Daley. The objective was to grass over a sunken rail

development and condominium sales have also benefited from the park. This part of Michigan Avenue has been home to some of the most significant early 20th Century buildings in Chicago – however its position to the south of the Magnificent Mile (one of the United State’s most expensive stretches of shopping) had left the area with vacancies and low end retail. Millennium Park’s opening boosted sales – high rise luxury units were sold within weeks and Mayor Daley himself bought a unit overlooking the park.³

Although Millennium Park is the biggest public art project in Chicago, it is certainly not the only one. In 1978, Chicago’s City Council approved the Percent for Art Ordinance. This stipulated that “1.33% of the cost of constructing or renovating municipal buildings and public spaces will be devoted to original artwork on the premises.”⁴ At least half of the commissions were to be awarded to Chicago area artists, providing opportunities to the local arts community. At that time, Chicago was one of the first cities to legislate the incorporation of public art into its official building program. Today, there are more than 200 similar programs throughout the United States, due in large part to the success of the Chicago ordinance.

The public art program aimed to provide the citizens of Chicago with an improved public environment by enhancing the city buildings and spaces with quality works of art. Each site-specific artwork is commissioned through a community-based process. Program staff partner with aldermen, City agencies, and the Chicago artists’ community to administer design competitions for the selection of artwork. A minimum of two meetings are hosted in the community to solicit suggestions for artists and types of artwork for consideration for each Percent for Art Ordinance project. An artists’ registry is open to all living, professional artists free

of charge. There are currently six art projects underway throughout Chicago – four in libraries, one in a police station, and one in a seniors centre.

The overall success of Millennium Park has led to a number of U.S. cities and metropolitan areas developing their own major civic projects. Atlanta has been developing a 35km ‘emerald necklace’ that is greatly



expanding the city’s supply of parkland while helping to meet the transportation needs of the heavily congested area. In Boston, 27 acres of parks and cultural facilities have been planned on top of the submerged \$14 billion Big Dig. In Washington D.C. a three block linear park

has been developed as part of the cities improvements to lower income and developing neighbourhoods – the park is to be the focal point for retail, housing and office development.

Smaller metropolitan areas such as Munster, Indiana have already seen the benefits of public art. As in Chicago, a public art project is a requirement of Munster’s tax

where the works are situated. He cited the Picasso at Daley Plaza in Chicago as an example of an artwork people associate with the city.

With the help of the Percent for Art Ordinance and the Public Art Program Mayor Daley, dubbed Chicago’s ‘Johnny Appleseed’ has transformed the city landscape. Chicago’s skyline has always been striking, holding its own against the likes of New York and San Francisco, but Daley transformed the streets themselves. Public art works intersperse the gigantic rising towers, creating a welcoming feeling that the city otherwise lacked. A 26 foot tall statue of Marilyn Monroe designed by Seward Johnson, *Forever Marilyn* (2011, stainless steel and aluminium) delighted tourists and residents alike, a welcome (and surprising) sight in the Pioneer Court. The Chicago Loop Alliance’s light installation – fittingly called *Lightscape* (2012, LED lights)– was placed on State Street throughout January and February 2012. This one of a kind light and sound installation created vibrant patterns of colour, choreographed to music. Residents and tourists were encouraged to tweet and text in love song dedications which would be randomly played throughout the day, creating a joyful atmosphere on the cold streets, as well as spontaneous dancing.

Chicago’s public art programs and initiatives have provided cultural, social and economic value. Millennium Park has distinguished the city, setting a trend in innovative and interactive civic projects which benefit the larger community. The works have invigorated dull public spaces, created conversation between strangers and provided and invaluable sense of community pride. Freely accessible works of art have engaged social interaction and are a reflection of the place and time (in the case of *Cloud Gate*, this reflection is literal). Millennium Park was a product of the Percent for Art Ordinance, but it was a catalyst for regeneration, community culture and pride and

Above: **Anish Kapoor.**

Cloud Gate. 2004-2006.

Stainless Steel, 10 x 20 x 13m.

Photo courtesy of Natasha Mikitas (2012).

abatement program. Any business receiving abatement must spend 1% of the value of the abatement on some form of public art. Gregg Hertzlieb, director and curator of the Brauer Art Museum at Valparaiso University, said that public art, especially larger pieces, can become synonymous with the community or neighbourhood

³ Black, J. (2005). *New Millennium Park is ambitious, expensive – and popular*. Retrieved from dev.libraryo.com/Article.aspx?num=130726206

⁴ Dluzen, R. (2011) *Chicago Public Art Program Announces New Projects*. Retrieved from <http://chicagoartmagazine.com/chicago-public-art-program-announces-new-projects/>

a new way of looking and thinking about the meaning and importance of public art.

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Below: **Juame Plesna**. Crown Fountain. 2004.

Black granite, LED screen, glass brick, 15m. Photo courtesy of Natasha Mikitas (2012).



ON THE EMERGENCE OF LOSS

By Peter Johnson

Process Emergent 2 is a group show that I recently curated at At the Vanishing Point (ATVP), an artist-run initiative in Newtown. The works were selected from the end of year shows held by the major tertiary institutions in Sydney: the College of Fine Arts (University of New South Wales), Sydney College of the Arts (University of Sydney), and the National Art School. Each of the six selected artists completed their degree with Honours in 2011 and, in my view, represent the best of their cohort – those artists who dedicated a year to producing not only a body of work, but to intense academic engagement with their practice.

The works were selected purely on their individual merit; on the subjective responses of the Director of ATVP, Brendan Penzer and myself. However, in considering the works in relation to one another, my attention was drawn to the striking similarities between them: a repeated representation of things fading out, being drawn away.

Critics, art historians and curators have often sought to draw out the common threads that bind together a group of contemporary artists and their works. At times it can almost seem like a competition to correctly identify the creative

antecedents to particular practices in order to anticipate and enunciate the coming zeitgeist. Theorists rushed to claim the Grunge movement of the early 1990s as the cultural by-product of Reaganomics or the embodiment of Julia Kristeva's 'abjection'; to identify its precursors in the work of Paul McCarthy or even Marcel Duchamp.

However, the idea of rolling avant-garde movements, of identifiable schools of thought or visual analysis seems increasingly antiquated. Artists (no doubt encouraged by arts institutions) pursue individual aesthetic and conceptual strategies and it seems decreasingly possible to identify any sort of collectively pursued concerns or aspirations.

This is nothing new. This is Post-Modernism where nothing is new.

As such, it is not my intention to make a claim over the artists in *Process Emergent 2* or their peers, to insist that they belong to a new and easily identifiable movement. However, if it is possible

Above: **George Shaw**.

Tomorrow is Another Day (series). 2011.

Giclee Prints, Video.

to identify a theme running through the selected works, to perhaps lift the lid on our cultural milieu just a fraction, it seems to be one of *loss*. Each work, in its own particular way, speaks to what has been lost and, if not mourning its passing, acknowledges the emptiness left in its absence.

The aesthetic strategies employed by the six works differ considerably, from delicate porcelain sculpture to an eight-hour performance piece, from DIY photocopying to environmental installation. Despite this seeming heterogeneity, each work confronts and explores an experience of loss from the personal to the metaphysical.

Mee-Sun Kim Park's ceramic sculptures deal directly with the loss experienced in moving to a new country, culture and language. Towering plumes of smoke stretch above the small house-like structures. Upon closer inspection, the viewer realises that the plumes are constructed from a jumble of Roman alphabet letters (interlacing T's and R's and Q's) on which Korean script has been subtly stamped – an indecipherable



hybrid language going up in smoke. The sculptures are so light and delicate that it seems even the slightest breeze might cause them to crack, that the idea of home is just as fragile.

George Shaw's *Why do you always act like it will be this way?* also deals with the domestic, with the sense of loss that accompanies watching children grow into adults. The video component of the work tracks an eight-hour performance in which his adolescent son draws messages onto his father's body that he could not have otherwise expressed. The four life-size prints show these messages slowly fading away after showering each day. Shaw creates a new space for intimacy through his work, an attempt to reconnect and open lost lines of communication with his adolescent son, while demonstrating the impermanence and mutability of that same effort.

How to Make a Photocopy Transfer challenges our loss of knowledge about the processes behind so much of the technology that we use every day. By driving the process back into the analogue, Luke Turner is seeking to re-establish a personal, hands-on relationship with technology. However, the work is underscored by the irony that paper and photocopying are already heading to the dustbin of obsolescence. As we see the copies degrade, their clear lines fade away, and the work becomes less a how-to guide than a demonstration of the way in which knowledge is corrupted through endless reproduction.

Visual loss is repeated in Laura Ellenberger's suspended portraits, which seem almost like faded film negatives. The multiple layers build up

an image to create a sense of the sitter that is at once unrecognisable and somehow much more intimate. Her process – working from 'death masks' taken of the subject in plaster – abandons fidelity in an attempt to get at some much more personal truth. The individual

features have been washed away and in the end the viewer is only able to garner the faintest glimpse of the original face.

Diffuse (which Jesse Horner reconfigured and reduced in scale for the purposes of this exhibition) provides an immersive meditative environment, shutting the viewer off from the rest of the gallery space. The work creates a contemplative space that invites the participant to quite literally lose their mind – to abandon the razor edge of rational thought and instead drop down into inarticulate, universal consciousness.

Of all the works selected, Alvarez-Sharkey's video installation perhaps speaks most directly to loss. The work renders a heavily distorted image of the artist dancing to rock'n'roll in full *Rebel Without a*

Cause get-up. He invokes the cultural forms of the 50s and 60s, transposing them onto strange angles and distorted lenses, found objects scattered in their wake, weathered and worn from the passing of time – acting as a slanted peephole view on the past.

Exactly what has been lost varies from one piece to another – personal, cultural, and even formal – but the longer I considered the works in conversation with each other, the more I was filled with a sense of yearning for that which has gone before and which, by its very nature, can never be returned.

I found myself comparing these works to those of the Modernists, perhaps by mere association of dates (the early decades of a new century). In particular, to the urban paintings of the Impressionists, whose vibrant images abandoned accurate representation of line and form in favour of light; and to the Cubists, who represented a splintered vision of time and space. Those early decades of the twentieth century marked a time of vast social upheaval and technological innovation across the globe, and in particular for the West. Europe saw the rise of

industrialisation and the discovery of previously inconceivable scientific advancements; massive migration to cities and the ensuing psychological dissonance of living in close quarters with complete strangers; and two world wars which introduced the idea of shellshock, not to mention mechanised cruelty and carnage on a scale never before seen.

It was this era that gave rise to a multiplicity of vanguards and competing modes of thought – to the Futurists and Dadaists, the Existentialists and Surrealists, to Fascists, Communists and Anarchists. At a macro level it seems almost as though the human organism, faced with radical changes to its environment, was evolving novel and fanciful forms in response to, and in anticipation of entirely new ways of seeing and living in the world. A Cambrian Explosion in human society and thought. At a

personal level, the widespread discussion of 'nervous exhaustion' and atomisation of the self reflects how the increased pace of life, enabled through new technologies and economies of scale, was a cause of real anxiety and concern for the individual. The veteran returns from war uninjured yet broken inside; the *flâneur* stalks the streets as an observer at once part of, and irrevocably dislocated from, his own society; and, T.S. Eliot's Prufrock must 'prepare a face to meet the faces that you meet'.

The cultural products of early Modernism present an apprehension of, or lust for, the technologically fuelled changes occurring at the time. The sensation of speed provided by the motorcar; the wonder and thrill of reproducible moving images on cinema screens; the tensions between the consciousness of a global citizenry and the subconscious repressions of the individual.



Clearly, the works of *Process Emergent 2* do not reflect the same anxieties or concerns as those produced a century earlier. However, I believe that there are certain sympathies and similarities between our

two times that might illuminate the sense of loss present across the works. The wonder and fear of rapid technological development has been assuaged, replaced with a fear of not moving fast enough. (What if we can't double the number of transistors on a microchip by next year?) The atomised individual reigns supreme and what causes concern now is the idea that we might one day have to deal with that threat to our identity as discrete social agents – our neighbours.

Opposite Page: **Luke Turner.**
How to Make a Photocopy Transfer (still). 2011.
Mixed Media, Video.

Above: **Mee-Sun Kim Park.**
Around the Corner. 2011.
Porcelain, ink stain.

And yet our age is undergoing a rapid technological change unthinkable even fifty years prior. Information travels around the globe at the speed of light; our social spaces have been replicated and increased on the world wide web; mobile devices mean that we are always connected, only a few finger movements away from numerous forms of communication and the repository of all human knowledge. A central part of this development has been the proliferation of self. Where Prufrock prepared a face to meet the faces, our faces exist again and again in social networks and across online fora. Even when our physical bodies are asleep, half a dozen versions of ourselves continue to exist in the information ether, beaming out half a dozen different ways in which we want to be perceived.

In every way that the Modernist sense of loss of selfhood was acute, our own is inevitably dispersed.

In every way that new technologies were a source of excitement or apprehension, our own response is filtered through an understanding of technology as inherently unstable and disposable. For every new grand narrative seeking to explain the world, we are struck with a sense of having heard it all before.

This is the context in which the works in *Process Emergent 2* have been produced. These concerns, I strongly believe, are part of the larger social forces that have shaped the creation of these works.

...the longer I considered the works in conversation with each other, the more I was filled with a sense of yearning for that which has gone before and which, by its very nature, can never be returned.

When we accept as normal the increased diffusion of self and the impossibility of any one universalising theory, is it any surprise that our generation experiences a pervading sense of

loss? When the rate of change has become so fast and so normalised that it is impossible to predict the future, is it any surprise that artists turn their attention to the failure of personal communication (such as Kim Park and Shaw), re-enact modes from the past (such as Alvarez-Sharkey), or find beauty in obsolescence (such as Turner)?

There are obvious dangers in drawing neat lines between larger social changes and specific instances of cultural production. For that reason, I am not seeking to articulate a particular vision of what these artists are, or are not, attempting to express through their works. However, the sense of loss, degradation and fading away that is present across all six works, which was also indicative of many of their peers, colours each and every one of these works and speaks to the underlying anxieties of our time.

***Process Emergent 2* was open from Thursday 22 March until Sunday April 15, 2012.** Visit At the Vanishing Point - Contemporary Art Inc. for more information.

Left: **Akira Alvarez-Sharkey.**
Lonesome Town (still). 2011.
Video.

Opposite Page: **Laura Ellenberger.**
Portrait Suspended. 2011.
Pigment and mulberry paper



THE (CONTEMPORARY) ART OF WAR

By Christiane Keys-Statham



You wouldn't know it, but the contemporary art scene is alive and well in Kabul, Afghanistan. Scratch the surface of media reports into the horrors of war, the poverty, gender inequality, suicide bombings, IEDs, tribal warlords and puppet governments, and you'll find some thriving and diverse arts organisations and NGOs quietly plying their trades in the streets of Kabul.

The large Australian collecting institutions and galleries prefer to represent the art of Afghanistan and Iraq purely through the antiquities and archaeological treasures of those countries, which are without doubt important and worth saving. However, the time has come to expend some more energy in providing the Australian public with a broader view of Middle Eastern art and culture.

Some smaller Australian galleries are attempting just this. The Cross Arts Projects in Kings Cross is currently showing the work of Khadim Ali, a young Afghan artist and COFA student. His paintings are due, at the close of the exhibition, to be shown at documenta13 in Kassel, Germany, and will then make their way to Kabul to be exhibited there. Ali is a member of the Hazara ethnic minority, who are currently under constant threat of attack in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

The Cross Arts Projects is a small gallery that aims to show the work of contemporary artists and curators "who create critical projects that question and/or reflect our present circumstances"¹. The Khadim Ali show, titled *Haunted Lotus*, certainly raises some questions about Australia's present circumstances regarding its engagement with Afghanistan. The exhibition provides an example of cultural exchange that is conspicuously absent, for the most part, in the broader political arena. It presents some issues regarding ethnic minorities, and their treatment in Afghanistan and Pakistan, which are

overlooked by the mainstream Australian media and in the exhibitions of large collecting institutions. The role of the artist and curator in instigating and facilitating political dialogue is an important component of this exhibition. The paintings are exceptionally beautiful, too.

Elsewhere, regional galleries have related exhibitions. Wagga Wagga Art Gallery is currently showing *Framing Conflict: Iraq and Afghanistan*, an Australian War Memorial travelling exhibition. This exhibition showcases the work of Australian artists Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, collaborative artists who travelled to Iraq and Afghanistan in 2007 in their role as Australian War Memorial artists. The exhibition includes "exotic and beautiful works [that] reveal the strange and complex nature of contemporary warfare"².

Closer to home, the Casula Powerhouse continues its tradition of interesting and inspiring exhibitions with *No Added Sugar: Engagement and Self-Determination*, an exhibition of the work of Australian Muslim women artists. This show promises to present some new aspects of contemporary art practice in Australia, and to raise awareness of the concerns and lives of artists who are, sadly, serially underrepresented by major collecting institutions in Australia. The exhibition is a significant arts and community engagement project, with workshop and education programs, and it will embark on a national tour after its time at Casula. Perhaps it could tour to a gallery in central Sydney.

Large Australian galleries and museums in major cities should take note of exhibitions such as these, and consider their own role in international relations when it comes to exhibition programming. The Australian public is interested, educated and aware of some of the political and financial issues at stake in conflict

and post-conflict zones, but remains largely unaware of the contemporary arts scenes in these countries, and the concerns of their young artists. It is evident that exhibitions of the contemporary Middle Eastern arts are not common in the larger Australian museums and galleries, and now is the time to turn this around.

Endnotes

- 1 The Cross Arts Projects website, accessed 16 May 2012, <www.crossart.com.au>
- 2 Wagga Wagga City Council – Art Gallery website, accessed 16 May 2012, <www.wagga.nsw.gov.au/www/html/6704-framing-conflict-iraq-and-afghanistan.asp>

Opposite page: **Khadim Ali.**
Haunted Lotus (work in 4 parts). 2012.
Watercolour, gouache and ink on wasli paper,
c. 75 x 56 cm.

Below: **Khadim Ali.**
Haunted Lotus, 2012.
Watercolour, gouache and ink on wasli paper,
c. 75 x 56 cm.



ON THE RUN

By Megan Monte

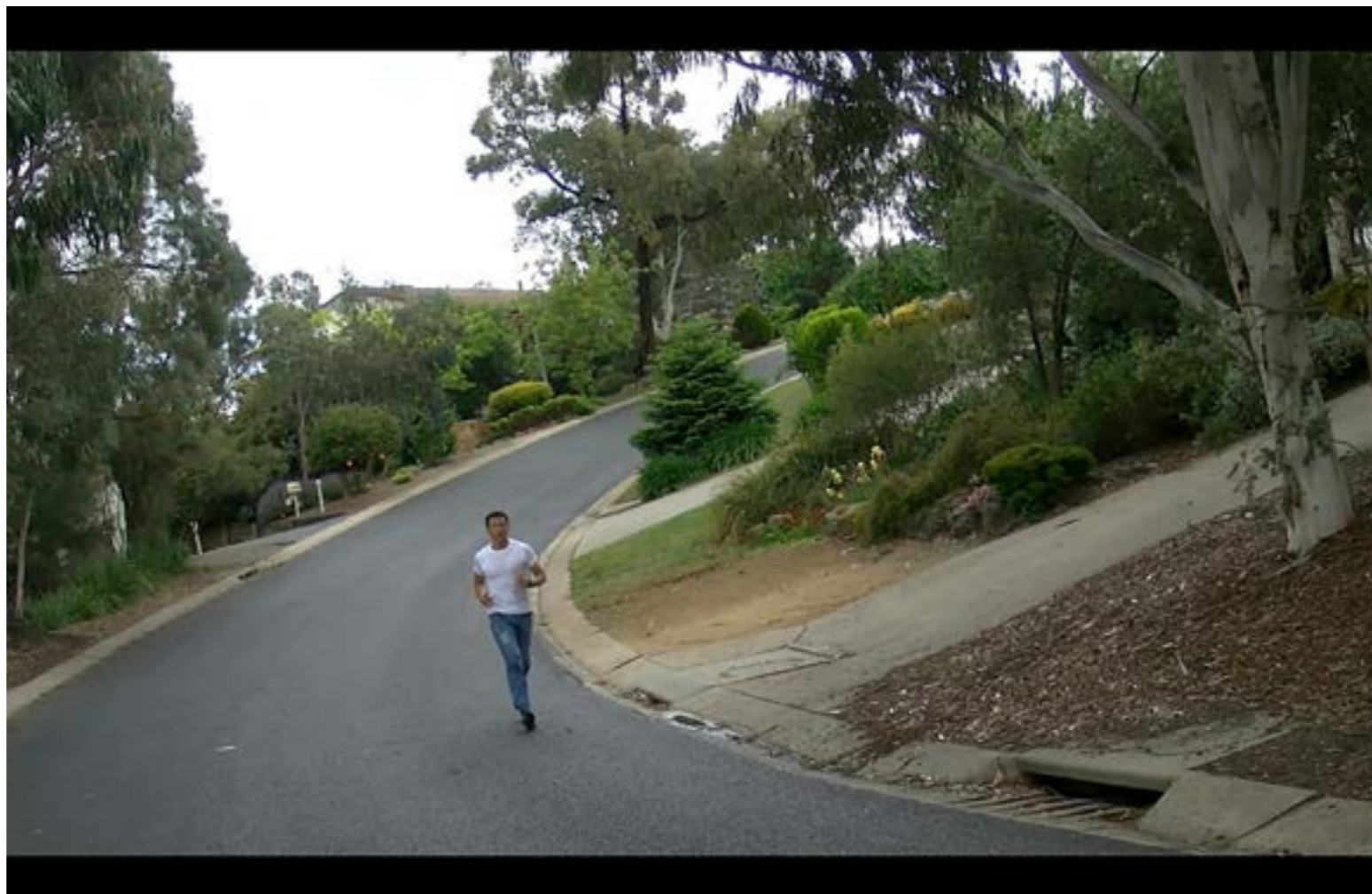
All over the world, people – children, elderly, men and women fleeing their homes, their families, their cultures, and their lives – become refugees within foreign countries that at times are hostile towards them, whilst their own country is in the midst of turmoil due to war or devastated by natural disaster. People and entire communities have become displaced from their countries; choice is often out of their hands. The devastation of war and disaster has caused havoc on communities and individuals all around the world, a crisis that continues with no means to an end and with an unpredictable future for many countries.

When considering global issues, we see people all around the world are seeking refuge. This is currently happening in Jordan, Turkey and Lebanon, as people escape the violence in Syria. More than two thousand people fled to Lebanon in the first week of March alone, bringing the total estimate of Syrians in that country to at least thirteen thousand. The ongoing war within countries in the Middle East has seen hundreds and thousands of people fleeing all over the world to escape. Many of those have sought asylum in Greece, hoping that Europe will bring a better life for them away from their war-torn country. Across northern Africa - in Kenya, Sudan, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya and Somalia, to name a few - civilians are displaced by war. In Somalia, home to the world's worst humanitarian crisis, over nine hundred thousand are suffering from famine, starvation and mistreatment, causing thousands of Somalis to flee internally to Ethiopia and through Egypt, to seek humane refuge in camps as a means of escape from their home country.

With thoughts of turmoil, displacement and loss it is difficult for one to comprehend what these people are enduring on a daily basis - seeking and searching for solace, freedom and the basic right to live. This article will examine the practice of Vietnamese/Japanese contemporary visual artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba

who is responding to these notions of 'fleeing', seeking refuge and the constant displacement and unknowing; these are themes which reoccur in his ongoing performative work *Breathing is Free 12,756.3*.

Nguyen-Hatsushiba took to the global art stage with the



video work, *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam: Toward the Complex – For the Courageous, the Curious and the Cowards* (2001), presented as part of the 2001 Yokohama Triennale. The video presented an underwater rickshaw race, a bizarre spectacle that served as a social and economical comment on Vietnam's economic turmoil. Set in the opaque dreamlike world of the ocean floor, the work acts as

a memorial, a token of national identity using the recognisable bicycle taxi service. Nguyen-Hatsushiba continues to comment on this turmoil with video works, *Ho! Ho! Ho! Merry Christmas: Battle of Easel Point – Memorial project Okinawa, 2003* (2003) and *Memorial Project Minamata: Neither, Either nor Neither – A Love Story, 2002 - 2003* (2002-03). The films are poetic in rich and dramatically endearing images, all of which lack spoken dialogue and are set in a picturesque natural environment. These particular works are set underwater, commenting further on environmental issues and injustices experienced by communities within Vietnam and surrounding countries. Nguyen-Hatsushiba takes an activist approach, both working with and speaking for the community. *Memorial Project Minamata: Neither,*

Either nor Neither – A Love Story, (2002 – 2003) refers to the resulting effects of a human disaster that occurred in the Japanese town Minamata. The river system was poisoned by methyl mercury from 1932 to 1968, which accumulated in the local seafood in teratogenic lethal concentrations over a thirty six year period.

There is an emphasis on process when looking

at Nguyen-Hatsushiba's practice. Dramatic sensational imagery, along with the endurance of body, is developing as a strong aspect of the creation and development of concepts within his practice. At this stage of his career Nguyen-Hatsushiba is not physically participating in the artwork but is directing and producing. Physically experiencing the idea in an extreme format exemplifies the sense of sufferance, endurance and injustice. *The Ground, the Root, and the Air: The passing of the Bodhi Tree* (2004 – 2007) was presented at ATP6 (Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art) in 2009-2010. In it, Nguyen-Hatsushiba orchestrates a flotilla of riverboats to travel the Mekong River in Laos. In each boat stands an artist attempting to capture the landscape while moving at a moderately fast speed along the river. Buddhist chants, the drown of the boats and the methodical sounds of the river fill the ears of the viewer as the painters sporadically enter the water swimming towards a Bodhi tree, similar to the one that Siddhartha Gautama meditated under before becoming the Buddha. All aspects are deeply centred in the communities surrounding the Mekong River, reflecting Asian values and the river as a metaphor for the procession of time.

Process, dialogue and imagery are an ongoing focus in the development of Nguyen-Hatsushiba's practice and are further explored in *Breathing is Free 12,756.3km*. This project is a bold proposal to run the diameter of the earth, 12,756.3 kilometres; a mammoth number for anyone to contemplate but proving to be achievable as Nguyen-Hatsushiba has already completed over 3000 kilometres so far. Having completed runs in Geneva, Ho Chi Minh City, Luang Prabang, Tokyo, Taichung, Taipei, Singapore, Manchester, Guangzhou, Chicago, Yokohama, Sendai, and most recently in Canberra as part of the Edge of Elsewhere project presented at Campbelltown Arts Centre and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art in January 2012.

By exploring running, and the process of running kilometre after kilometre, Nguyen-Hatsushiba is attempting to achieve a means of getting close to the physical experience of a person in flight, of the refugee. Nguyen-Hatsushiba aims to raise awareness, not as a figure or speaker of the public, but as a contemporary artist, by removing the spoken dialogue and replacing it with demographically

diverse video installations conjuring up the current and ongoing issues of the global refugee crisis.

Focusing on the process of the most recent running project in Canberra, Nguyen-Hatsushiba completed the project with a small team consisting of a videographer, photographer and a navigator; all individually important components in an epic 90.2km trek through the suburban and rural part of Canberra; the track forming and following the shape of Christmas Island. Over seven days, the team planned and executed up twenty five kilometers of walking and running every day. A path; a direct, unchangeable and uncompromised line that lead through dense bush land, pine forests, rural properties, cliffs, mountains, industrial and road construction, suburbia, and even undisturbed and seemingly impossible swamp land river crossing; each day introduced a different mental and physical challenge for the team.

Christmas Island is a non-self governing territory of Australia and home to a temporary immigration detention facility. Recent years have seen torment, frustration, and anger amongst detainees who have already suffered through living in countries in turmoil, to be then placed in a restrictive environment, detached from society and the community. Nguyen-Hatsushiba reflects on this indirectly with his running project, not through a spoken dialogue but through the journey of running. Indeed, running is the visual dialogue of his practice.

Running as a creative outline and process to project an idea is central to the novel *What I Talk About when I Talk About Running* by Haruki Murakami. The book is a memoir of his running and his writing; a means of learning, developing and enduring writing as a creative process. At first the link may seem odd; however, when looking at this parallel, Murakami refers to the close kinship he has with running and writing, both reflective of each other. Throughout the book Murakami describes how the mile-clocking marathon can be seen as a metaphor for the hour-by-hour word processing of a novel. The self-discoveries of running, the discipline and unyielding regiment of its process have been the drive to his success as a writer.

Although the creative medium differs - Nguyen-Hatsushiba creates video installation and Murakami writes books - a link can be established with running, within the context of art, as a mechanism that is

relatable to a wider audience and a wider generation. The act of running represents a number of aspects of human existence. Metaphorically, it represents the primal, escaping, struggle and torment but also strength, power, endurance and ability. Running is used differently by both artists - Nguyen-Hatsushiba as a physical experience of refugees and Murakami as a physical experience of writing. Nguyen-Hatsushiba is creating a memorial to generate awareness for those who have struggled, and who continue to struggle, as refugees, displaced from their homes and communities.

A link can be drawn between the physical processes as a creative means of expression for Nguyen-Hatsushiba and Murakami despite having different contexts. It reflects more of the process rather than the outcome. Looking at contemporary art, there is a shift in practice and outcome to an emphasis on the process, development and engagement of an artwork. Looking at the artistic process for the Nguyen-Hatsushiba's *Breathing is Free 12,756.3km* and Murakami's *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*, one can see that both have used the process of running as a creative act or as a drive in their practice.

Ending with a passage from Murakami that is ironically reflective and descriptive of Nguyen-Hatsushiba's *Breathing is Free 12,756.3km Canberra Running Project*:

“For me, writing a novel is like climbing a steep mountain, struggling up the face of the cliff, reaching the summit after a long and arduous ordeal. You overcome your limitations, or you don't, one or the other. I always keep that in mind when I write.”*

*Murakami, Haruki. *What I Talk About When I Talk About Running*. Random House, New York 2008. p. 99

Previous Pages: **Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba.** *Breathing is Free: 12, 756.3 Canberra Christmas Island (Still)*. 2011. Video.

Courtesy of Jun Nguyen-Hatshushiba.

THE SHOCK OF THE OLD IS STILL NEW

By Emily Sinclair

In a world in which society claims to be desensitised to images of violence and war, Emily Sinclair writes how one museum still manages to unsettle its audience.

It seems that in contemporary society, violence and innocent people killed by roadside bombs are a common occurrence in everyday life. It has become so frequent that it is difficult to watch the evening news without an update on some sort of bloodshed, be it domestic or international. Images of warfare are so readily accessible; it is no wonder we have become less impacted by confronting pictures and video footage in the media. The War Remnants Museum in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam, is an exception in this case. It is an institution enveloped in grief, which, without trying, manages to pull at the heartstrings of the visiting public.

The Museum is central to the chaos that is the old Saigon. It sits behind an almost fifteen foot wall with large iron gates, behind which passersby can see old wartime artefacts. This multilevel museum has approximately eight smaller exhibition rooms, including rooms dedicated to heavy military artillery used by American soldiers in combat, and distressing photographs of the impact of the war on the local people of Vietnam. A larger exhibition space is dedicated to the effects of the defoliant chemical used by the US soldiers, known as 'Agent Orange'.

The juxtaposition of impenetrable metal and steel artillery with photographs depicting the broken bodies of its victims is unnerving. The cries of the local Vietnamese men, women, and children have long been silent; however, they are forever preserved in a state of pain in these black and white photographs. It was Susan Sontag in her famous 1973 work, *On Photography*, who argued that photographs have more impact on viewers than television. While television is transient and constantly updated, a photograph is a permanent memory, which never fades. The photograph as an eternal memory enables the viewer to experience the trauma of the memory from the past, in the present. In this case, we can visibly experience the trauma depicted in these photographs from forty years ago.

Christina Schwenkel, an acclaimed writer, has written extensively on the Vietnam War in contemporary Vietnamese society. She argues that the War Remnants Museum is a unique contemporary museal institution, which evocatively exhibits the horrors, not the victories of war¹, through a visual narration primarily of photographs from wartime journalists.

The most affective room in the Museum is consumed with images of children born with traumatic side effects due to exposure from Agent Orange. This room emphasises that though the war has long ceased, its effects are still present in contemporary Vietnam. Images of deformed babies, conjoined twins, and infants with mental and physical disabilities born two generations following the conflict are plastered on the walls. It seems unnatural and inappropriate to privilege such works in a museum environment; however, it is impossible to escape the realisation that this institution is giving a voice to victims who cannot speak for themselves.

The War Remnants Museum is not a typical history museum experience. It is a confronting visual encounter that places the spectator in the presence of a powerful and devastating memory. The impact of seeing these photographs *en masse* is not fleeting either; the overwhelming tragedy and anguish resonates with the viewer and remains with them. Its intention is not to be a museum of sorrow, but of deeper understanding and reconciliation. The War Remnants Museum achieves this through its innovative visual curatorial approach to the Vietnam War, which guides the audience through Vietnam's collective history; this leaves the viewer truly affected by the plethora of photographs on the museum walls. A museum like no other, it connects with its audience at the very core, exposing simultaneously the humanity and brutality of modern society.

1 Christina Schwenkel *Exhibiting War, Reconciling Pasts: Photographic Representation and Transnational Commemoration in Contemporary Vietnam*, *Journal of Vietnamese Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1 (Winter 2008), University of California Press, pp. 36-77

PROTECTING CULTURAL PROPERTY IN WAR

By Christiane Keys-Statham

What is Australia's position on the protection of cultural property during armed conflict?

The 1954 *Hague Convention on the Protection of Cultural Property in the Event of Armed Conflict* was ratified by Australia on 19 September 1984. This international treaty covers the protection during armed conflict of cultural property including museums, religious buildings and libraries, as well as privately owned cultural property. In this article, I will examine Australia's responsibilities under this Convention, and contrast its position on the protection of cultural property during armed conflict with the measures taken to protect cultural property within Australia.

The Convention is based on a belief system that assumes cultural heritage is of great importance to all humanity. This is demonstrated in the second paragraph, wherein the High Contracting Parties agree that they are 'convinced that damage to cultural property belonging to any people whatsoever means damage to the cultural heritage of all mankind, since each people makes its contribution to the culture of the world'. This is an internationalist approach, one that assumes a shared, international patrimony of cultural heritage.

The reference to the 'culture of the world' displays the idealism of such treaties and hints at the difficulties inherent in their implementation. By ratifying this Convention, Australia, in effect, guarantees that it will treat the cultural property of other countries with the same respect it affords its own. This is particularly important during armed conflict.

Protection of cultural property entails 'safeguarding' and 'respecting' cultural property. The safeguarding of such property involves measures taken in peacetime, within Australia's own borders, to protect its own cultural property. Australia's collecting institutions, museums, and galleries have internal policies designed to deal with the protection of their collections. Risk management is a growing field in the management of Australian museums, although it usually focuses on the possibility of natural disaster rather than domestic armed conflicts. This may be because Australia is fortunate enough not to have been invaded since the Japanese bombing of Darwin in 1942-43, whereas natural disasters

are an increasing threat to Australian collections.

Australia has two main organisations dedicated to the protection of movable and immovable cultural heritage; Blue Shield (the cultural equivalent of the Red Cross), and DISACT (ACT Public Collections Disaster Recovery). DISACT conducts workshops and training all over Australia on risk management and disaster preparedness for collecting institutions. However, this training does not include specific preparation for armed conflict within our borders.

Under the 1954 *Hague Convention*, Australia is required to safeguard cultural property within its territory against 'the foreseeable effects of an armed conflict'. Safeguarding collections against the threat of armed conflict would include the creation of inventories and risk management policies. Most Australian museums and galleries have the former, if not the latter, already in place.

Therefore, this aspect of Australia's requirements under the 1954 *Hague Convention* is being fulfilled on a national level, in public institutions at least, although not specifically in the context of armed conflict. Most Australians do not believe there is any likelihood of Australia being invaded by a large armed force in the near future. However, if war did come to our shores, Australia's collections would be relatively well protected.

The same cannot be said of collections in places like Afghanistan and Iraq. Unfortunately, countries whose museums hold collections of some of the most important archaeological treasures are the most at risk when it comes to armed conflict. Dictatorships, civil wars, looting – not to mention invasion by proportionately much larger forces – seem to occur often, although not exclusively, in the Middle East, which is sometimes referred to as 'the birthplace of civilisation'. It was in modern day Iraq that the one of the first recorded instances of writing was used, and where the wheel was invented (in the city of Ur, in Mesopotamia, around 3,500 BC).

What is Australia doing to protect cultural property in countries such as Iraq and Afghanistan? The answer to this question is extremely difficult to ascertain due to

the classified nature of military operations in conflict zones. The Australian Defence Force (ADF) has stated that items of cultural heritage in conflict zones are treated as 'civilian objects' and are thus afforded extra protection under Australia's *Law of Armed Conflict* (2006). All ADF personnel receive training on the *Law of Armed Conflict* throughout their careers.

The *Law of Armed Conflict* is available through the ADF website and describes the 1954 *Hague Convention* in section 1.29-1.30. It also has a section on cultural objects and cultural property (5.45-5.47), vessels containing cultural property (6.35), cultural property on the battlefield (7.44), and specially protected cultural objects and property (9.27-9.28). It describes the distinctive emblem of the 1954 *Hague Convention* (the blue shield), which should be applied to buildings containing cultural property in conflict zones. The training of ADF personnel in these issues indicates that Australia is committed to fulfilling its obligations under the 1954 *Hague Convention* and related international law. Whether this training regime has been successful will only be ascertained when the armed conflicts are over. At that time, tourism to such countries can recommence, and cultural heritage will undoubtedly form an important part of potential tourism initiatives.

There are two additional Protocols to the 1954 *Hague Convention*, neither of which Australia has ratified. The first of the two Protocols deals with the import and export of cultural property from occupied territories. Some of these issues are covered by Australia's *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act* (1986), which covers the import and export of items into or out of Australia that have been illegally removed from source countries including conflict zones. Further protection of such items is also provided under the 1970 *UNESCO Convention on the Means of Prohibiting and Preventing the Illicit Import, Export and Transfer of Ownership of Cultural Property*, which Australia acceded in 1989. The protection of important and immovable cultural property within Australia is covered by the 1972 *UNESCO Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage* (otherwise known as the *World Heritage Convention*), which Australia was one of the first countries to ratify in August 1974.

The Second Protocol to the 1954 *Hague Convention* is slightly more contentious than the First Protocol. Australia's obligations, were it to ratify this Protocol, are potentially more difficult and expensive to implement. These responsibilities would include designating our own valuable cultural property with 'enhanced

protection status', committing to the prosecution (and possible extradition) of Australian citizens who damaged cultural property during armed conflict, and contributing financially to an intergovernmental committee formed to oversee the implementation of these requirements. With a Defence Force budget of around \$73 million a day in 2011-2012, one hopes that funding could be sourced for the additional expenses incurred by signing the Second Protocol.

Australia would clearly need to spend more money and resources than it currently commits to the protection of cultural property during armed conflict if it signed these two Protocols. It is vital that these Protocols are ratified by Australia if it is to demonstrate that it provides the same protection to the cultural heritage of other countries as it does to its own. Neither the United Kingdom nor the United States has ratified these two Protocols. Therefore, this is a chance for Australia to be forward thinking, progressive, independent and serious in its commitment to the importance of preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

...this is a chance for Australia to be forward thinking, progressive, independent and serious in its commitment to the importance of preserving cultural heritage for future generations.

A review in 2009 of the *Protection of Movable Cultural Heritage Act* includes a recommendation that Australia undertake consultations with key stakeholders to ascertain the potential impacts of becoming a party to the two

Protocols to the 1954 *Hague Convention*. More recently, an official pledge was made by the Australian Government at the November 2011 International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent to give consideration to acceding to the two Protocols ahead of the next (quadrennial) International Conference in 2015. Hopefully, the Australian Government will set a positive example for other Western nations by ratifying the First and Second Protocols to the 1954 *Hague Convention* without further delay.

Finally, another issue is the support that Australia provides to cultural organisations in post-conflict zones for regeneration and renovation programs. The reemergence of cultural activities after conflict is an important indication to the population that normality is returning. Australian Defence Force personnel, overseas missions, and peacekeeping forces should be contributing to cultural programs and the restoration of collecting institutions in countries like Afghanistan. The Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade has a small Afghanistan section that occasionally instigates such programs, but more funding could also be sourced for this. Cultural exchanges between Australian artists and collecting institutions and their counterparts in post-conflict zones would demonstrate a different side of Australian culture and

act as a balance to the existing Australian military and peacekeeping presence in such countries. The recently released Australia Council review has also indicated that more funding should be committed to emerging art forms in Australia. Perhaps it is not unreasonable to suggest that a portion of this money could be diverted to supporting emerging artists in post-conflict zones where Australia has a military presence.

Committing to the protection of cultural property, even if it is situated in a country with which Australia is at war, is an issue that the Australian Government needs to confront if it is to become involved in such armed conflicts in the first place. The Government has ratified the 1954 *Hague Convention* and now must ratify the two additional Protocols in order to demonstrate its belief in the importance of cultural heritage for all people. It affords such protection to cultural property within its own borders and therefore should protect it everywhere, for everyone, and particularly in countries where it is involved in armed conflict.

Further reading:

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ways by various artists. However, on the wooden bench the peony adopts a utilitarian role in joining the wood bench. Under the integrity of the traditional pattern, the edge of the peony is delicate, but when rendered in wood it takes on rougher, harder image.

A handmade textile artwork located close to the stairs is a rounded and colorful pattern made of waste plastic bags. No sooner had this artwork appeared right before my eyes than my memory was pulled back to my childhood. In the Chinese countryside, women often use waste fabric scraps to sew and mend mats. Not only are the mats attractive, but also comfortable and inexpensive. This plastic bag pattern is designed in a similar way. Rural life influences contemporary art and vice versa, and this artwork also demonstrates the intelligence of Chinese rural labourers.

The White Rabbit gallery is well equipped to exhibit digital and multimedia artworks. The unparalleled imagination of the artists provides visitors with diverse exhibitions. In one work moving images of beautiful women in the last century in Shanghai are shown on a screen. Some of them wear the Chinese Chi pao; some of them are putting on their make up; others stand and enjoy the scenery. All of these images are controlled by an iPad. The technology allows the elegance and style of women in Shanghai to be conveyed with every nuance.

On the second floor, a frozen tree appears, and you can feel the cold air emitted from its trunk. The body of this artwork is bare branches, without leaves, and ice coats the surface of the trunk. You can imagine that you are standing in a garden, the weather has started to warm up, and the first signs of early spring have arrived. The frozen trunk begins to melt and you can immediately feel that the tree is preparing to bloom. These are both examples of the place both science and technology have in contemporary Chinese society, particularly in creating works of art.

Last but not least is a work built by recycling waste material and transforming it into an object that is both beautiful and educational. Natural resources in China are limited and increased industrial development is having an impact on the natural environment. In a previous exhibition, there was a ten metre high artwork, which was like a Christmas tree. It was not clear at first that it was made of abandoned plastic bags, waste milk bottles and paper. The huge ‘Christmas tree’ extended the entire length of the staircase. It was a dynamic piece dominating the exhibition space.

Although the White Rabbit is a showcase for Chinese contemporary art in Sydney, it does have some disadvantages. As a private collection it is eclectic, and the exhibitions do not have an overall theme. I have been there several times, and each time found that only a small group of visitors were there. I was uncertain whether the locals were not interested in Chinese culture and art, or unwilling to visit for another reason. Throughout the exhibitions, each artwork seems to be individual and independent, which makes people ignore the overall integrity of the exhibition. In terms of publicity the White Rabbit fails to target potential visitors, especially students, young artists and other art lovers.

The establishment of White Rabbit gallery has had a significant influence on the exchange of culture and art between Australia and China. It has built a bridge for the communication of culture and art that allows the different backgrounds and history to blend together. A great number of Chinese artists are passionate about engaging in partnerships. They have grown up with the development of China and witnessed its transformation in recent years. In Australia they are provided with more space and support in a relaxed atmosphere to express their ideas without censorship. There is the added benefit of cultural partnerships and networking that is outside of trade and business markets. Art can assist in building stronger relationships and racial harmony. One day in the future, perhaps, an equivalent gallery can be built in China.

The gallery provides the opportunity for both countries to better understand each other, not only artists, but the general population. Although there needs to be some improvement from the management and publicity point of view, the art market in Australia will increase its interest in Chinese contemporary art through the exhibitions at the White Rabbit.

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RUN ‘RABBIT’ RUN

By Chen Chen

In a former industrial area of Sydney, not far from Chinatown, is a former knitwear factory, now converted into an exotic contemporary gallery. Within this space is a collection of artworks telling the story of the development of the Chinese contemporary art movement. This is the White Rabbit Gallery, the largest private collection of Chinese contemporary art outside China.

The gallery name is auspicious. In Chinese culture the Rabbit signifies kindness and elegance, and some suggest the name also refers to Hans Christian Anderson’s *Alice in Wonderland*. However, the director of the White Rabbit, Judith Neilson, claims that the name suddenly came to her one day. The collections and paintings exhibited in the White Rabbit are all by significant Chinese contemporary artists. Most of them reflect contemporary life in China, especially after the year 2000. When you enter through the door of the White Rabbit

gallery, you step into a fantastical world. You are struck by the artists’ inspiration and the diversity of the works. The gallery covers four levels of the building, exhibiting a wide scope of mediums including painting, collections, installation, craft, multimedia and so on. Chinese contemporary art is delivered vividly from plane to stereo, from static to dynamic. The first impression is the size and diversity of the collections. Chinese paintings absorb nutrition from day to day life, and transform it. Always held in high esteem in Chinese culture, the arts concentrate and refine contemporary society. The White Rabbit is a beautiful world created by each artist’s personal orientation and emotions.

Initially, I was struck by two artworks taking domestic objects and transforming them into aesthetic artworks. The first one that impressed me is a wooden bench that is so large it occupies almost an entire floor. The peony, the national flower of China, symbolising dignity and grace since ancient times, is interpreted in numerous

MARCO MAGGI IN SAO PAULO

By Rakel Yamanaka

The exhibition of Marco Maggi at Tomie Othake institute in São Paulo is another great example of Latin American artists, such as this Uruguayan from Montevideo, currently based in New York.

Internationally recognised, his artworks are part of private and public collections, including MoMA, Whitney Museum of American Art in New York, the Museum of Contemporary Art in Los Angeles, the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston, and the Daros Collection in Zurich, Switzerland, among others.

The minimalism and elegance present in his work is remarkable, and the exhibition *Disinformation Functional Drawings in Portuguese* is no different. Consisting of 12 works from 2008 and 2012, the installations are always astonishing and intriguing at the same time. Do not be

misled by the word “drawings” as nothing seems to be one dimensional; they are much more than a piece of paper.

The body of work reveals unusual ways of creating a drawing with the use of different materials such as hundreds of A4 sheets piled and framed in acrylic boxes, pencil on tiles made of clay or graphite on a sheet of graphite, among many other strategies and materials to allow us to see a drawing in an unexpected way. His ability with a box cutter transforms common paper into tridimensional geometrical shapes, with incisions and engraving so precise they look like laser cuts.

Incubator, 2012 is the central installation of this exhibition. More than 350,000 sheets of A4 paper in piles of 500 are disposed of on the floor, creating a trail to nowhere. The first sheet of each pile – only in primary colours: yellow, red and blue and also white are used – has a

small incision so delicate and subtle that it bears a resemblance to *Kirigami*, the traditional Japanese art of cutting paper.

Another highlight is *Global Myopia (Parking Mirror)*, 2010, which consists of multiple incisions on a convex mirror, exactly like one of those in parking lots. The result is a fascinating engraved surface, which looks like a city map with all its streets and little buildings, depicted as if seen from an airplane.

The obsession of the artist to surfaces of all sizes, shapes and materials make the visitor automatically bend in front of the pieces and start analysing the details, eventually leaving the room with a feeling of astonishment.

Below: **Marco Maggi.**
Incubator (detail). 2012.
Photo Courtesy of Ding Musa, 2012.



KOREAN ART TODAY

By Elio Lee

area, and a multipurpose hall, as well as function rooms.

One of the first projects in the art sector was the exhibition *Korean Art Today*, which was held from the 18th of May 2011 to 16th of March 2012. *Korean Art Today* was composed of more than 50 artworks created by 42 artists, and focused on the Korean sense of humour and cultural dynamics. It also described the importance of nature to Korean people and related the importance of the wisdom gained from communing with nature. The exhibition consisted of various art forms, including media, paintings, photographs, craft and sculpture.

Director Kim Young-soo reported that this exhibition showed the vitality of the active cultural exchange between Australia and Korea, stimulated an ongoing interest in each country's culture, and played an important role in developing awareness of Korea in Australia. Curator Seo Min-seok said that the exhibition provided great opportunities for the public to see the aesthetics of contemporary Korean art, various cultural phenomena and other lifestyles in the Korean region (Kim 2011).

The Korean Cultural Office has another exhibition titled *Through Your Eyes* after the *Korean Art Today* exhibition, and plans to have exhibitions regularly. At this point in time, an important question might be whether the exhibition of *Korean Art Today* was successful or not. This paper will analyse whether the exhibition achieved its goals, which included developing awareness of Korea and providing great opportunities for the public in Australia. To examine the development of awareness of Korea, three art works, *HUHAHA* (2009) by Kim Joo-ho, *PAUSE-Scattering* (2004) by Min Jae-young and *Dalbbit* (2008) by Lee Jae-sam, will be analysed as

Above: **Lee Jae-Sam.**
Dalbbit (detail). 2008.
Oil on canvas.



The Korean Cultural Office was established on the 4th of April 2011 in the heart of Sydney, as part of the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Australia and the Republic of Korea. The Korean Cultural Office aims to strengthen the bonds between Australia and Korea, in addition to showcasing quality contemporary and traditional art. Dr. Lee Dong-ok, Chief Officer, believes cultural exchange is the best way for people of differing backgrounds to establish friendships, and that the same applies for nations. The Korean Cultural Office includes a multimedia exhibition area, craft exhibition



Above: **Kim Joo-Ho.**
HUHAHA. 2009.
Medium, Dimensions.
Courtesy of Gallery.

examples of how these art works contributed to awareness of Korea art in Australia. To examine the second goal of providing great opportunities for Australians, a number of media releases by the ABC, the Telegraph, the Australian and Sydney Morning Herald newspapers, as well as the results of Google searches, will be analysed.

The work *HUHAHA* (2009) by Kim Joo-ho gives an idea of how Korean sense of humour comes out through the artworks. Koreans, both individually and socially, have been working hard as a nation to develop industries, democracy and their economy, since the end of the Korean War in 1953. During this time, people faced many problems in the workplace. The artist is interested in communication and relationships between people, and has included small moments of happiness in daily life in his works to communicate with audiences. His works are not isolated or obstructive and share life's small moments of happiness with his audiences. The figure of a person in the work

is not a hero of the century, nor a man who becomes a big success; he is just the everyman who can be seen everywhere. The work gives a feeling of being free and easy, as well as humorous. This work is a rounded cylinder with a flat back and front, but the cylinder is connected in and out through its mouth, and has a cross-structure. The structure of the mouth allows to overcome its simplicity of form and to have a more humorous character. This figure was made from the red terracotta clay that Korean people have used for building houses and making bowls for a long time.

Signs of dynamism may be found in any representation of daily lives, from the Internet to city environments where everything changes due to the demands and the flow of time in present Korea. Seo Min-seok, curator of Seoul Art Centre, said that the word 'dynamics' is from the psyche of Korean people in regards to prioritising reality and

their earnest attitudes toward life, where they put most of what they plan into action with confidence, based on the assumption that 'nothing is impossible' (Kim 2011). Min Jae-young's work *PAUSE-Scattering* (2004) expresses busy city life. There is a large group of people who are going to their destinations in their normal daily life in the city, which is a familiar recurring urbanite experience. Familiar people on a familiar road, ordinary moments; these are subject matter for Min Jae-young. She gives the audience a different point of view of daily life in the city through her works, as well as the opportunity to take time for self-reflection. This work looks like a paused screen, showing a large group of people in a public place from the point of view of a surveillance camera, while still giving a sense of moving gesture, rather than stopped movement. The title *PAUSE-Scattering* actually comes from that situation. Many horizontal scanning lines can be found in this work, which reminds one of TV scanning lines, indicating the indirect



experience through mass media that most people in a city unconsciously feel. It is the metaphor of this work. Ink and hangi (traditional Korean paper) are used in this work.

Nature has been a favourite subject of Korean artists for a long time. Seo Min-seok, curator of Seoul Art Centre, found a typical example in food culture. There are a variety of side dishes cooked with meat, seafood and vegetables, which come together to resemble a natural scene, and which are held to promote wellbeing in Korean cuisine. Within Korean art history, it is true that most Korean traditional art contained natural subjects before Korea's modern art movement. Koreans' love of nature may be also found in this exhibition. One of them is *Dalbbit* (2008) by Lee Jae-sam. He simply reproduces the beauty of nature using a realistic technique in charcoal. *Dalbbit* means 'moonshine' in English.

Opposite: **Min Jae-Young.**
PAUSE-scattering. 2004.
Medium, Dimensions.
Courtesy of Gallery

The moon has played a special role in Korean history. One example is the knowledge of Korean people regarding the best time to plant flowers and vegetables, according to the phases of the moon. In this work, an image of bamboo is created in a dark space where the happening occurs. A tranquil black shadow creates strong visual contrast with the finely detailed central subject of bamboo. Although it can be assumed that there is nothing at the back of the bamboo, and only bamboo is in the work, the contrast allows the audience to vividly imagine the drift of a breeze or the splash of moonlight over the scene, creating a three-dimensional world with its own unique space and imaginative suggestions. Basic charcoal pencils were used to return to the most fundamental element of painting: representing the essence of nature by the artist.

A number of media releases may be examined to ascertain how the Australian public received the exhibition. However, there is no particular news focused on the *Korean Art Today* exhibition by the ABC, the Telegraph, and the Australian newspaper. Only one article written by John McDonald on 16th July 2011 was found in the Sydney Morning Herald, but the article is not actually about *Korean Art Today*, it is about the exhibition *Tell Me Tell Me: Australian and Korean Art 1976-2011* which was held at the National Art School Gallery from June 17, 2011 to August 24, 2011 as part of the celebration of the 2011 Australian-Korean Year of Friendship. John McDonald wrote only a few words about the *Korean Art Today* show at the end of the article, which he said allowed a comprehensive glimpse at one of the world's most vibrant art scenes. That is only one article found from four major news channels (John 2011). In addition, there are only eight websites that mention the exhibition. They are 'What's on, only Sydney, Art Month, BCL clogs, Around-you, about Australia, Live-guide, and the University of New South Wales. On the other hand, there are many news items and reviews about the previous exhibition, *Tell Me Tell Me: Australian and Korean Art 1976-2011*, related to Korean Art at the National Art School Gallery.

The high quality of the art in the exhibition addressed the first goal of developing awareness of Korean art, however, the lack of media releases meant that fewer opportunities for the public were provided. Although it could be said that awareness of Korea was developed by this exhibition, an improvement for future exhibitions could be to focus more on media releases to increase opportunities for the public to attend the exhibitions.

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THE COLA PROJECT

By Harreen Johl

Coca Cola is the world's most popular beverage and has phenomenal global branding power. However, of all the artists who have used Coca Cola as a subject in their work, He Xiangyu is the first to bypass the red and white branding and focus purely on the product itself. With the help of ten factory workers in his home town of Kuandian, China, over a period of one year the 26 year old contemporary artist boiled down 127 tons of Coca Cola until it morphed into a toxic tar-like sludge and, eventually, a resin resembling coal or gravel. Although the exhibition was unable to be called 'The Coca Cola Project', due to trademark laws, no other brand of cola was used.

The manipulation of the cola has changed the way in which the viewer, who is also the consumer, views Coca Cola as a product. The mask of branding has been stripped away, revealing the elemental physical properties of the product, which have previously been hidden from us. The mind turns to what else we consume that, if transformed by this process, would be equally as shocking.

The exhibition is not aggressive. Aspects of the exhibition are unsettling, but not in an overtly emotional way. He Xiangyu does not display any animosity towards Coca Cola. He is perfectly accepting of it in his life and drinks it regularly. He is personally removed from the project; the destruction Coca Cola causes is portrayed in an objective way, without unnecessary theatrics. The standout works of the exhibition are the jade skeleton and the paintings, although the huge pile of cola resin is the first impression of the exhibition on the ground floor of the 4A Gallery. It is confronting to experience Coca Cola in this form, as the result of the boiling process.

The elegant traditional brush paintings are akin to those of the Song Dynasty, although they are not direct reproductions. The largest of these paintings is made up of a combination of ten of the artist's favourite Song

Dynasty paintings. In this way, what appears to be the most conventional piece in the exhibition may in fact be the most personally revealing for the artist. These paintings are, on the surface, beautiful traditional paintings, but they have in fact been infiltrated with ink derived from the resin of this iconic consumer product. The cola resin is combined with glue to create a brown ink, which is used to depict blooming plants in the paintings. This flora stands out against the black ink landscape, suggesting they are not native but an introduced species. This draws parallels to the prevalence of Coca Cola in the lives of so many cultures from both the East and West. To many, this synthesised beverage is preferable to water. It has a permanent place in the hearts and palates of people around the world.

The foreign, cola-coloured plants in these paintings could also be seen as representing the industrialisation of China. The growth of factory production in China has had an enormous impact on its economy and culture. The shift from socialist to more capitalist economic policies opened the Chinese economy to increased foreign trade and investment and, in doing so, changed the social climate by fostering a labour intensive manufacturing industry. The inclusion of factory workers in this project also alludes to China's role in the modern global economy, whereas the use of jade represents ancient Chinese culture.

The painstakingly made and beautifully crafted skeleton made entirely out of jade is chilling. Parts of it have been submerged in Coca Cola over a period of hours. In these areas, the jade takes on a brown hue due to corrosion from the cola. The skeleton's surface is the silent battleground between the old and the new. It has been modelled on the artist's own skeleton, and he used x-rays of his own body as a reference. Jade is an ancient precious stone that is highly revered, particularly in the East. It is known for its absorption properties; after time a jade bangle, for example, will change colour as it

absorbs the oils from the body. It is believed that jade will take in any poison, rather than the wearer, thereby purifying and protecting the body. In this way, the use of jade is deeply metaphorical; the area damaged by Coca Cola relates to concepts of external influences of consumerism affecting both the culture and the body.

A more capitalist economy that responds to the market will necessarily be far more affected by outside influences. It will follow what the market dictates. If the rest of the world follows a consumerist culture, in one way or another it will influence Chinese contemporary culture. The area of the skeleton that had been subjected to Coca Cola was primarily around the pelvis, and reproductive area, suggesting that the effects of a consumerist culture are systemic and will be passed onto the next generation. Whether these effects are perceived as benefits or costs, aspects of Chinese culture have been altered and are continuing to change gradually, just as Coca Cola continues to corrode the jade. Widespread industrialisation has also significantly opened China up to the effects of pollution while the land and natural resources suffer the consequences. The cola could be seen as polluting the previously pristine jade skeleton.

The 4A exhibition includes glass cases that contain pots, shovels and even the gloves used by the factory workers for the boiling process. These items are extremely damaged, covered in a thick, viscous substance, resembling tar. The shovels especially have been eaten away purely from the contact they have had with the toxic substance. By including these items in the exhibition, He Xiangyu emphasises the process of boiling, particularly when juxtaposed with the graceful ink paintings. The final products need to be seen in the context of their production. Similarly, eight photographs in the exhibition provide an insight into this curious process. These compelling images show an underrepresented side of the factory environment, drawing attention to the conditions under which the factory employees in China work to produce goods that are exported worldwide. These goods are manufactured at an extremely low price. The consumer only sees the refined finished product, whether it is a t-shirt or kitchen appliance, not considering the means by which it was produced.

The process itself has none of the glamour or positive associations of the brand. By boiling the product down into an unrecognisable form, He Xiangyu cleverly alludes to how meaningless and arbitrary a brand can

be. Having such a familiar product reduced to a form so unexpected, the viewer begins to realise how little they know of the product. It cannot be replicated exactly and the notoriously secret recipe, rather than being unsettling or suspicious, has been shrouded in a sense of mystery largely created by marketing campaigns. With the removal of the trusted brand, the product once so familiar, quickly becomes foreign. This demonstrates the power of Coca Cola from an entirely different perspective.

He Xiangyu is able to pull his own perception of Coca Cola out of the work and merely accepts that of all the food and beverage products to be deconstructed in this way, this one is the most appropriate, because it is widely used, well established, manmade and, most importantly, malleable in a different state. It has been manipulated, to highlight its interaction with other materials and separated from its brand to be considered in a new and more basic context. Coca Cola is quite destructive, yet it is commonly enjoyed and its consumption is encouraged via continual marketing. Ultimately, this poignant exhibition explores the interrelationship between tradition and modernity. Traditional aspects of Chinese culture are combined with this very contemporary material to explore the effects of the industrialisation of China and the conflict between socialism and capitalism.

Opposite Page: **Xe Xiangya.**
Cola Project
Production Image. 2009.



DELVOYE'S BODY OF WORK

By Amy Hartmann

MONA's recent exhibition by Belgian artist, Wim Delvoye explores the aesthetic of the most unlikely source, writes Amy Gentle.

Wim Delvoye is an extreme artist who relishes in creating art works that provoke and shock. As such, there is no better place to host his first retrospective show in Australia than at Hobart's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). Delvoye juxtaposes themes such as the body and machine, high art and popular culture, and industrial technology and traditional craftsmanship. He does this by creating beautiful and disturbing artworks out of materials such as tattooed pigskins and elaborate machinery that creates faeces out of food.

Born in West Flanders, Belgium in 1965, Delvoye has exhibited his work since the 1990s in major international art festivals, including the Venice Biennale in 1999 and *Documenta IX* in Germany in 1992. He has had solo shows across Europe and the US, and at museums such as Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris and the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York. In recent years, the artist has built exciting monumental architectural towers out of laser-cut corten steel with beautifully intricate incised designs of gothic filigree.

To contrast with the beauty of his laser cut sculptures, Wim Delvoye also created *Cloaca Professional* (2010, mixed media), which is perhaps the most confronting of all his works. It is a room-sized installation of six glass containers connected to each other with wires, tubes and pumps. Every day, the machine receives a certain amount of food such as meat, fish, vegetables and pastries. These are passed through a giant blender, mixed with water, and poured into jars filled with acids and enzyme liquids. There the food receives the same treatment as the human stomach would supply. Electronic and mechanical units control

the process and after almost two days the food comes out of a filtering unit as something close to genuine, human excrement. You have to feel sorry for the poor gallery attendant looking after the space as the smell was overwhelming. *Abject* is an understatement for this mechanical digestive system.

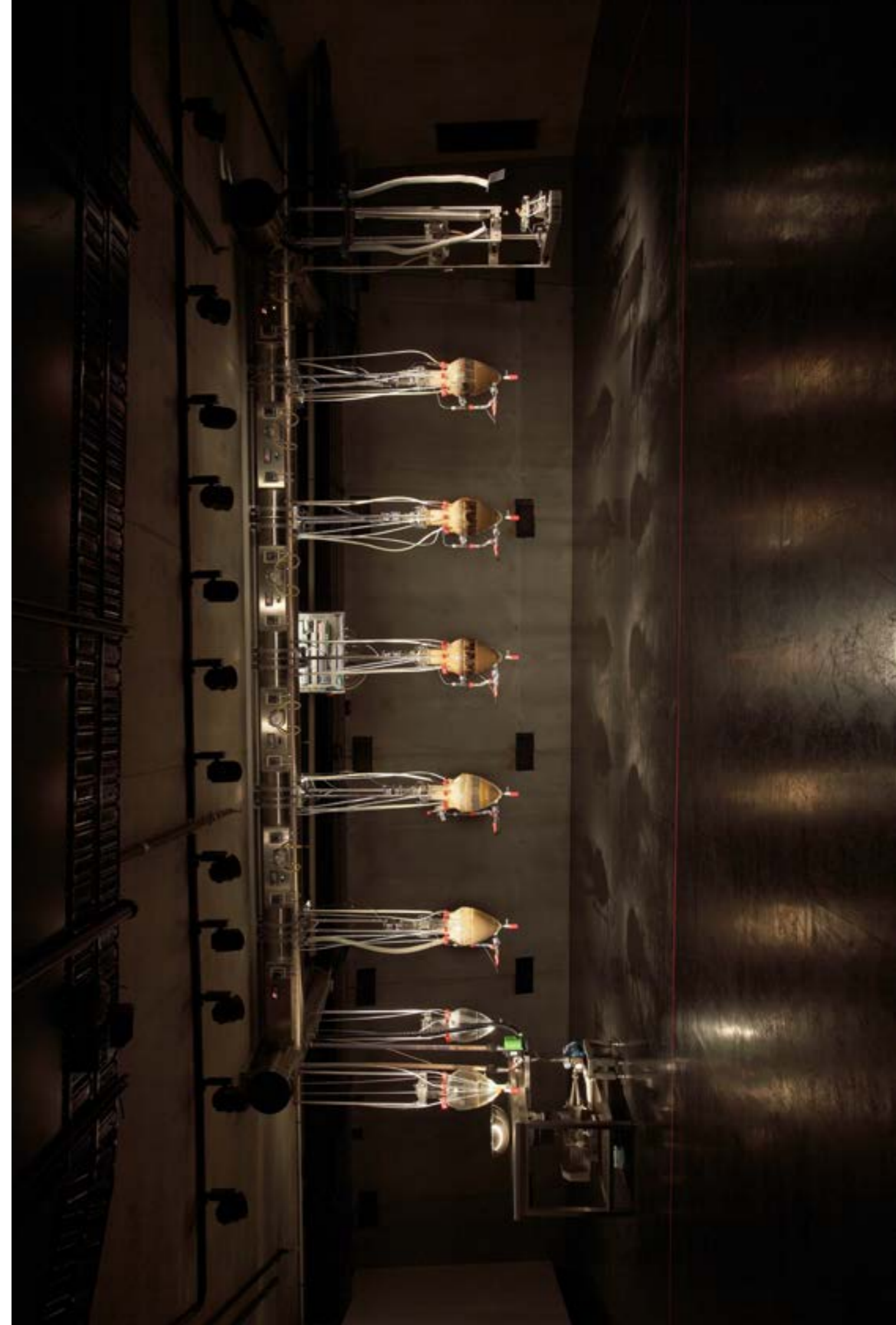
For his tattooed works on pigskin, Delvoye created a pig art farm in Belgium where he farmed pigs purely for their commoditisation into artworks. He argues that this is not dissimilar to animals being bred for consumer items such as handbags and clothing. The Belgian government did not share in his artistic crusade and banned him from continuing with his animal art farm practice. As a result, the artist moved his pigs to China, where he has permission to breed his pigs for art.

Wim Delvoye is always courting controversy and executing beautifully crafted works. It is this dichotomy that makes his work interesting. This exhibition is highly marketable because the artworks generate great conversation and debate. The venue at MONA gives the work a safe place to be viewed and imbues it with greatness for being different.

Wim Delvoye, The Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, December 10 2011 – April 9 2012.

Abject is an understatement for this mechanical digestive system.

Opposite Page: **Wim Delvoye.**
Cloaca Professional. 2010.
Mixed media, 275 x 710 x 175cm.
Courtesy of MONA Museum of Old and New Art, Hobart, Tasmania.



WILLIAM KENTRIDGE: A FRAGMENTED SYNTHESIS

By Ben Messih

I was first introduced to the work of South African artist William Kentridge in 2008 at the 16th Biennale of Sydney. Kentridge's works, *I am not me, the horse is not mine* (2008; installation of eight film fragments, DVCAM, HDV transferred to video) and *What will come (has already come)* (2007; steel table, cylindrical steel mirror, 35mm animated film transferred to video) were exhibited in the beautifully derelict Cockatoo Island. These installations – amongst Kentridge's most accomplished to date – had a profound impact on me: technically masterful, poignant, satirical and insightful. The language of Kentridge moved me as I had never been moved by a work of art before. Subsequently, four years after first falling in love with his political, poetic synthesis I found myself at Melbourne's Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) to revisit his work in the acclaimed major traveling retrospective *William Kentridge: Five Themes*.

ACMI's incarnation of *Five Themes* represents the eighth manifestation of the internationally traveled 2009 exhibition – a joint production of the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art and the Norton Museum of Art, Florida. The exhibition, a brave undertaking by curator Mark Rosenthal, examines the prolific career of William Kentridge between 1979 and 2008, fragmenting it into five easily digested tangential themes: 'Ubu and the procession', 'Soho and Felix', 'The Artist in the studio', 'The Magic flute' and finally, 'The Nose'.

I found myself promptly submerged in the first of the five themes: 'Ubu and the Procession' and, considering the tremendous aspirations of the exhibition, I was thankful there was no mucking around. Kentridge uses this body of work to examine the events and consequences of South Africa's 1995 Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which existed to give light to the human rights violations under Apartheid, the events of which run as an undercurrent throughout Kentridge's entire oeuvre. As such, 'Ubu and the Procession' can be seen as a logical launching point into *Five Themes*. 'Ubu and the Procession'

is confrontational, diverse, and powerfully moving. Through works such as *Shadow Procession* (1999; 35mm animated film transferred to video) and *Portage* (2000; collage on book pages), we are instantly exposed to Kentridge's penchant for the theatrical and his passion for social justice through a developed exploration of colonial oppression, dispossession and the human condition.

Kentridge's second thematic drive, 'Soho and Felix', primarily takes shape in the praised *Nine drawings for projection* (1989 -2003; 35mm and 16mm animated film transferred to video) – a fragmented narrative examining life in Apartheid South Africa through the eyes of the fictional characters Soho Eckstein and Felix Teitlebaum. Soho and Felix are juxtaposed characters; each other's alter egos; each a reflection of the artist's self-perception; each cast in the artist's own image. Eight large-scale charcoal production drawings line the walls, providing a glimpse into Kentridge's labour-intensive animation process.

'The Artist in the Studio' represents William Kentridge at his most self-reflective. This fragment of his practice depicts Kentridge examining the processes that culminate in the production of his work. In *Seven Fragments for George Méliès* (2003; installation of seven film fragments, 35mm and 16mm animated film transferred to video) [fig.2], Kentridge pays homage to one of his major cinematic influences in a series of cleverly manipulated films produced exclusively in his studio. Kentridge has reversed the process of his production in these works by placing the emphasis on his practice of construction. The films are presented with the support of an excellent

Opposite Page: **William Kentridge.**
Drawing for II Sole 24 Ore (World Walking). 2007.
Charcoal, Gouache, Paste and coloured pencil on
paper, 84x59 inches (213.5 x 150cm).
Collection of the artist, Courtesy of Marian Goodman
Gallery, New York and Goodman Gallery,
Johannesburg.



array of prints and drawings that enhance our understanding of the relationship between the artist and his studio.

Just as gallery fatigue starts to set in, we are led to Kentridge's exploration of Mozart's 1791 opera *The Magic Flute*. The theatrette is set up with the *Preparing the Flute* (2005; model theatre with drawings, 35mm animated film transferred to video) and *Black Box/Chambre Noire* (2005; model theatre with drawings, mechanical puppets, 35mm animated film transferred to video) installations set across the room from each other with *Learning the Flute* (2003; 35mm animated film transferred to video and projected on blackboard) mediating the two large model theatres. 'The Magic Flute' is intelligently formalised and represents the most inventively curated environment in the exhibition – instantly slapping the viewer out of any dawning visual-induced coma. The sequential progression of projections forces the audience to shift their viewpoint throughout the nearly hour-long experience in which Kentridge adopts the opera as a means to explore the dualities of light and dark, positive and negative, and good and evil.

'The Nose', Kentridge's most recent body of work included in *Five Themes*, suitably closes the exhibition. The works act as a theatrical exploration of the short story by Russian author Nikolai Gogol (1835-36) and the play of the same name by Dmitri Shostakovich (1927-28). Kentridge has used 'The Nose' as a vehicle to examine the short lived Russian Constructivist movement, which was crushed under Stalinist Russia. Culminating with the extraordinary *I am not me, the horse is not mine* (2008) [fig.3], 'The Nose' throws back to Kentridge's earlier work in his use of the procession motif and his interlacing of animation and live action footage. Kentridge describes the work as an 'elegy... both for the formal artistic language that was crushed in the 1930s and for the possibilities of human transformation that so many hoped for and believed in during the revolution'.¹ Thus, a profound conceptual parallel is drawn to his personal experiences in Post-Apartheid South Africa.

Spatially, *Five Themes* takes form in ACMI's gallery one - an isolated corridor-like space several levels below the bustling foyer of the Federation Square institution. A title projection of an awkwardly candid Kentridge pacing around his studio greets patrons before they descend to the serene, spotlighted space below. Five theatrette rooms are strategically positioned along the elongated, weaving space, each housing projections pertaining to their

respective theme.

Ten audio-guide hotspots are marked throughout the show, a fact that I was reminded of constantly as the elderly couple keeping pace with me evidently forgot to bring their headphones. A tastefully designed – but suspiciously well-written – 'Follow the Nose' kids trail is sporadically spread throughout the show, designed to engage children with interpretations from sixth-grade students. Credits at the end of each projection tie Kentridge to the cinematic art form and act as signifiers of a new fragment within the projected film series.



William Kentridge's bleak colour palette of smudged greys, intensely contrasted black and white and sparsely used, yet highly charged hints of red and blue pastel is intelligently presented against the soft grey walls of the space. The almost total lack of seating throughout the general exhibition space – the exception being a large rotund lounge in front of the monumental *Drawing for Il Sole 24 Ore [World walking]* (2007; charcoal, gouache, pastel, and coloured pencil on paper) [fig.4] – gives the exhibition a notable sense of flow and aids in placing the curatorial emphasis on the works presented in the five unlit theatrette rooms.

The thematic structure of *Five Themes* prepares us to best understand the depth, ingenuity and complexity of William Kentridge's practice. In successfully classifying the artist's work into five primary categories – or fragments – we are positioned to observe that Kentridge, much like his multidisciplinary predecessor Pablo Picasso, never truly abandons a theme. Instead he allows it to run as an undercurrent, occasionally resurfacing years later; perhaps further developed as in the works of 'The Artist in the Studio', or as another chapter in an unfolding narrative, as exemplified in 'Soho and Felix'.

hour which form the nucleus of Kentridge's 'Soho and Felix' exploration. Having previously viewed the final film in this series, *Tide Table* (2003; 35mm animated film transferred to video), in isolation as part of the Art Gallery of New South Wales' contemporary collection, I was struck by how much better prepared I was to comprehend Kentridge's motives when viewing the film here as a striking conclusion to the 'Soho and Felix' series. *Tide Table* depicts Soho, previously the conscienceless businessman profiting from the suffering of his fellow South Africans under Apartheid, begin a process of consideration or reflection. Soho does not achieve a resolute breakthrough as there is no metamorphosis. However, he becomes a metaphor for a South Africa still attempting to come to terms with its horrific and ugly past.

The exhibition successfully synthesises Kentridge's juxtaposition of playful and serious, it speaks a language which enables the audience to best digest the arrestingly powerful, often difficult subject matter tackled by the artist, yet never risks simplifying the work. The beautiful, often whimsical soundscapes that accompany Kentridge's projections diffuse through the surrounding rooms, contextualising and strengthening the prints, drawings and sculptural pieces on display whilst beckoning us into the almost sacred spaces of the theatrettes.

I realised on leaving *Five Themes*, a journey lasting nearly five hours, that I had been keeping pace with an elderly couple, a young family and a teenage couple out for a Sunday date, and was immediately struck by the exhibition's success in this regard. What a joy it was to be able to actually stop and engage with the work and witness others doing the same. I recalled my experiences at recent 'blockbuster' exhibitions, herded from room to room after a momentary glance at the works until finally being deposited into the gift shop. I am thankful that this experience was not trivialised, as appears to be the current trend amongst many major cultural institutions. ACMI's superb treatment of the exhibition is to be commended.

Despite its tremendous strengths, including the technical brilliance demonstrated, the immense scope of the themes explored, the refined presentation and sensitivity instilled in the work by Rosenthal and the ACMI, on leaving *Five Themes*, I

Above: **William Kentridge.**

A Lifetime of Enthusiasm (still). 2008.

DVCAM and HDV transferred to video,

6:01 minutes. Collection of the artist, Courtesy of Marian Goodman Gallery.

¹ William Kentridge 2009 *William Kentridge Five Themes* p205

couldn't ignore a niggling feeling of simply wanting more from the exhibition.

On reflection of the otherwise successful thematic curation, I came to realise that the passing of time has meant that the premise of *William Kentridge: Five Themes* is in itself problematic. No recent work is presented in *Five Themes* and no suggestions are given for what the prolific artist has been up to since the exhibition's inception in 2009.

Has Kentridge continued to work within these fragments or has he explored new themes? Has the artist's recent work been shunned to preserve Rosenthal's curatorial integrity, to maximise the exhibition's marketability, or to prolong the commercial lifespan of the accompanying catalogue? Why should exhibitions remain motionless when the world around them is perpetually changing, when artists are still creating?

Perhaps the more pressing question to ask is whether or not these issues of context and relevance should overshadow an otherwise superbly crafted and curated exhibition? Are Rosenthal, Kentridge and the ACMI asking us to take the exhibition for what it is, a snapshot of a career's work taken in 2009? Is this a fair question to ask of us? Or do we as the audience deserve more from our curators, our artists, our institutions?

The work contained within *William Kentridge: Five Themes* is undoubtedly amazing. Kentridge is masterful in his incredible ability to explore universal experiences through deeply personal narratives. The nature of Kentridge's practice, synthesising experiences and emotions at the core of the human condition enriches his work with a timeless quality. The same, however cannot be said of the fragmented curatorial hang, which at a time had perfectly supported the work of Kentridge, now threatens to weigh it down in static irrelevance.

William Kentridge: Five Themes is on at The Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne until Sunday May 27, 2012.



Above: **Van der Mewe.**
Portrait of William Kentridge.

Opposite Page: Istanbul Biennale.
Photo Courtesy of **Lorraine Chung** 2011.



UNTITLED (12TH ISTANBUL BIENNALE) AND ITS OMNIPRESENT MUSE

By Lorraine Chung

The 12th Istanbul Biennale, *Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial)*, is an uncommon one, from the choice of title to the choice of muse. The term 'untitled' may seem like a sign of absence; naming an artwork *Untitled* is usually the result of a conscious choice by the artist. Since the development of the Modernist movement, untitled artworks have played a huge part in the historical context of contemporary art. The title of this year's Istanbul Biennale, *Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial)*, 2011, 'is not a mere tribute to the Modernist movement but is a specific reference to the artist Gonzales-Torres, in which he named most of his works "Untitled" followed

by a description in parentheses'. 'By calling his works "Untitled," Gonzalez-Torres suggested that a work's meaning might shift through contexts and time; that there might not be only one interpretation of it. This inspired our strategy for titling the biennial,' state the curators Jens Hoffmann and Adriano Pedrosa.¹

The curators based this biennale around the late Cuban American artist Felix Gonzales-Torres, who died of an AIDS-related illness in 1996. The title *Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial)* takes

on Gonzales-Torres work, and is extended to five themes; *Untitled (Abstraction)*, *Untitled (History)*, *Untitled (Passport)*, *Untitled (Ross)* and *Untitled (Death by Gun)*, all based on themes in the works of Gonzales-Torres. Five group shows are taken up by the title, surrounded by 50 solo shows. The solo shows have connections to the themes of the group shows; they act as the links between themes, constructing a map that correlates each topic together. One work might be under a specific theme but can also be associated with others, creating a dialogue incorporating the whole of the exhibition. Most biennales have a title, a topic, and a theme from which the

¹ Hoffmann, Jens, and Adriano Pedrosa. "Introduction." Introduction. *The Companion- Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial)*, 2011. 23. Print.

exhibition departs and circles around. Usually there is a sole dialogue that runs through the discourse of the exhibition. Some biennales take up authors or philosophers and literary figures or writers as a starting point, and from there the curators develop their research, mapping out the exhibition with art works that complete the dialogue. But it is certainly unusual to take on an artist as a model of reference, and not from a single piece but from his artistic practice as a whole.

Since 2003 the Istanbul Biennale has been known for its emphasis on political context. This time the curators want to continue that focus without sacrificing aesthetics; ‘We thought it was important to maintain that focus on politics and art informed by politics,’ headed. ‘But we wanted to somehow rescue the concern with aesthetics, formal issues and the visual, the realm of the visual, which we thought was perhaps a bit left aside, particularly in the recent editions, which seemed to have taken into consideration more of art and politics but with a documentary or with a social or politically activist approach,’ Mr. Pedrosa said. The last edition of the Istanbul Biennale had a very strong emphasis on activist art, documentaries, and political and social practices. Although this kind of art is very direct and strongly impacts on the viewer, it is easy to neglect the form and aesthetics. ‘When you are looking at the documentary, for example, or when you’re looking at the activist practices, they are not so concerned with the aesthetic, visual and formal.’ This time they want to focus on bringing in art that has a social or political approach but has an aesthetic, formal, visual approach as well. ‘With these concerns in mind,’ Mr. Pedrosa said, ‘we thought, who is a very fine example of an

artist who articulates politics, and the body, and personal issues with aesthetic and visual concerns? For us, the artist is Felix Gonzalez-Torres. That is how he became our reference — an important figure — as an inspiration for the research and for the exhibition in general.’²

Felix Gonzalez-Torres incorporated many different methods, from conceptualism to high modernism. His aesthetics are very minimalist, referencing works from Donald Judd or Carl Andre, though his method is unlike the traditional minimalist approach, which focuses on the

As time goes by, the clock batteries wear down, and the clocks gradually become out of sync; a subtle yet profound metaphor for relationships.

purity of geometric abstraction and minimalist forms. Traditional minimalists claim their works are not works of self-expression, but that they try to alienate the artist from the work, in order to achieve the aim of making ‘objective’ art. Felix Gonzalez on the other hand, brings the human side back to minimalist art, showing how geometric abstractions and minimalist forms can take on personal, political and bodily themes. For example, one of his most well-known works, entitled *Untitled (Portrait of Ross in L.A.)*, (1991), which inspired one of the five themes of this exhibition, consists of an ‘ideal weight’ of 175 pounds of candies individually wrapped in variously coloured cellophane in an endless supply. Visitors can take pieces of candy from the work, and every morning the pile is topped up back to 175 pounds.

² Fowler, Susanne. ‘A Simplified and Secretive Istanbul Biennial’ *The New York Times*. 15 September 2011.

This work is seen as a portrait of Gonzalez-Torres’ lover Ross, who died of an illness from AIDS complications. The pile of candy is the ideal weight of a grown man; being consumed through time, its weight fluctuates, but is then replenished, much like the human body.

Though Gonzalez-Torres’ work is nowhere to be seen in the actual biennale, his presence is everywhere in the exhibition, and his ghost lingers throughout. He is referenced in various ways throughout the exhibition, aside from the title and selection of the themes. The structure of the exhibition is very much based on Gonzalez-Torres’ philosophy and aesthetics, and there are also works that elaborate upon specific works by him, works that take on or share his artistic style. This is most obvious in the *Untitled (Abstraction)* section. Mostly, the works that have been chosen take on the issues Gonzalez-Torres wants to discuss, and these works fit perfectly together in the exhibition. But rather than having a broad, generalising term as the topic, designating the themes in the context of the work of Gonzalez-Torres puts the exhibition at risk of being unfocused, which has been a problem with many biennales.

Untitled (Abstraction) is the hardest to comprehend for people without background knowledge of the language of contemporary art and Gonzalez-Torres’ works, but it is also the theme that has the most direct link to Gonzalez-Torres’ aestheticism. This part of the exhibition effectively transcribes Gonzalez-Torres’ concept of minimalism with a human touch through the various artworks of individual artists. It changed my opinion towards minimalist art, as I had always thought of minimalist art as

elitist and removed.

Adrian Esparza’s solo exhibition is a great example of how the works in the exhibition relate to Gonzalez-Torres aesthetically. The artist has unpicked a traditional Mexican rug and arranged it into a beautiful graphic pattern spreading across the room. According to an interview with the artist, the Mexican rug ‘serape’ comes from a long interwoven tradition of American and Mexican cultures but, like so many other ethnic crafts, it has evolved into eBay merchandise. Unravelling the thread is unravelling the history the rug represents to become another symbol of culture. Landscapes can reflect the way the people of certain background and culture see the world, as can the actual icons that are artefacts of who and what inhabited and created the landscape. At first sight the work seems like a minimalist, geometric pattern. On the opposite wall a painting of the Bosphorus banks reflects the graphical patterns of the rug. With the juxtaposition, the pattern of the unwoven rug jumps out of the wall to become a three dimensional representation of the Istanbul landscape. Triangles and rectangles become blocks that symbolise mosques and buildings. It almost works as an optical illusion. This work embodies the artistic style of Gonzalez-Torres, making it fit perfectly into the *Untitled (Abstraction)* section, but it can also easily be linked with *Untitled (Passport)* or *Untitled (History)* because it discusses the landscapes that reflect our knowledge of the land and history.

The concept of geometric abstraction and the grid constantly comes up throughout the show. Another interesting work that plays with the idea of the

grid was Adriano Pedrosa’s self-portrait *Autorretrato* (1995). The artist recorded her body scientifically through blood tests, electrocardiograms, heartbeats, and traced her face and body onto grid paper, recording it inch by inch. The work is divided into three categories; formless face structure, formless heart structure, and formless blood structure. This work has very strong similarities to Felix Gonzalez-Torres’ *Untitled (Bloodwork-steady decline)* (1994) and *Untitled (T-cell count)* (1990), but interestingly enough Adriano Pedrosa had no prior knowledge of Felix Gonzalez-Torres or his work. They share a similar approach in representing their physical presences without knowing of each other’s work.

Some works are directly inspired by Gonzalez-Torres’ work. Nicolas Bacal’s work, *the geometry of space-time after you* (2010), takes a direct reference from Gonzalez-Torres’ *Untitled (Perfect Lovers)* (1991). Both works consist of two factory-produced battery-powered clocks. Looking closely to Nicolas Bacal’s clocks, one might notice (or by reading the very informative catalogue) that on each second the clock writes the word ‘vos’ (meaning ‘you’ in Argentinian Spanish). The clocks only have a second hand, the hour and minute hands having been removed. This work takes its inspiration from Gonzalez-Torres’ *Untitled (perfect lovers)* (1991), a work that consists of two identical clocks set alongside each other. As time goes by, the clock batteries wear down, and the clocks gradually become out of sync; a subtle yet profound metaphor for relationships.

For Nicolas Bacal it is much more literal. This work is more about the feeling of falling in love, how the sense of time (or timelessness)

varies between people and states of mind. Compared to Gonzalez-Torres’ much more sentimental, and arguably depressing, take on love, Nicolas Bacal’s work is much more romantic.

The works that have been chosen for the show were not commissioned as direct homages to Gonzalez-Torres, and the works do not specifically pay respect to him. The five topics act as five individual and very different inspirations, and can successfully be recognized even when leaving out the reference to Gonzalez-Torres’ specific works. Background knowledge of Gonzalez-Torres’ art and his individual artworks is not essential for viewing this biennale. Even if you have never heard of Gonzalez-Torres, there would be no difficulty in understanding the exhibition. ‘People who know the work will of course have a different access to it, but you don’t need to know the work to understand it, to access this exhibition,’ Mr. Pedrosa said. ‘That would be too elitist of us, but he does come up. And we did have that concern all the time. Instead, after viewing the exhibition, as well as reading the catalog closely, the viewer would be able to understand Gonzalez-Torres much better as an artist, without actually seeing any of his work’.³

But is Gonzalez-Torres’s art a sufficiently strong foundation for such a show as the 12th Istanbul biennale? Personally I would say it is. It is substantial enough, yet does not overshadow the exhibition with his legacy. Some would put Gonzalez-Torres as the main attraction to the exhibition, acknowledging him as a representation of the modern experience, and take

³ Fowler, Susanne. ‘A Simplified and Secretive Istanbul Biennial’, *The New York Times*. 15 September 2011.

the exhibition as a contribution to his way of approaching the world. ‘Gonzalez-Torres in his life and work was exemplary for the experience of living in the late 20th century. Most of us, one way or another, feel that we are living in a gap, an in-between space, that we trespass borders of different kind while pursuing our desires,’ said Achim Borchardt-Hume, chief curator at the Whitechapel Gallery in London. ‘The biennial opens a space to think about this—and thinking in a seeing, feeling way - which is as valid for somebody from Istanbul as it is for me flying in from London.’⁴ Some, on the other hand, are not entirely persuaded by the unconventional curatorial approach. Ralph Rugoff, director of the Hayward

⁴ Exerpt from Harris, Gareth, ‘Istanbul Biennial Is a Show of Many Parts’, *The Art Newspaper*, 19 September 2011.

Gallery in London, pointed out that Gonzalez-Torres’s work has been ‘enormously influential’, but felt that structuring the biennial around particular works, rather than his overall artistic approach, ended up ‘feeling a bit constricted, narrowing down the range of possible ways in which artists might have responded to his example’⁵.

The show departs from his essence while avoiding his real presence. As a person who had almost no knowledge of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, the exhibition was enjoyable and easy to understand, without being shallow and low on content. It is an exhibition that takes time to read, absorb and comprehend, and this is advisable, as it is a very large exhibition. Although there is a large amount of work,

⁵ *Ibid.*

it avoids the element of the specular. Most works are small and require time and patience to read. It avoids the familiar marketing strategies of large biennales such as big names, big works, works that are shocking or specular, and attention-grabbing exhibitions. The way in which the curators developed the dialogue made it easier to immerse oneself in the show. Gonzalez-Torres holds together the exhibition, but doesn’t hoard all the attention. He becomes a guideline that viewers can follow, a string that runs through the exhibition like a silk thread is to a string of pearls.

its diversity. When you open the *Art Month* website, or free App, even the brochures, the use of vibrant colors with lively and vivid geometric graphics reflected the rich and diverse energy of the festival. Moreover, information related to the festival was comprehensively presented and easily accessible in the website, brochures, as well as the free App. The apparent effort placed into the branding and marketing of the event can be observed from the tailored designs and concepts, which had its intended audience in mind. This was clever publicity to attract public’s attention, while showcasing the qualities of the upcoming activities. It had so served to enhance the status of the festival.

Art Month 2012 was an engaging event for art lovers in Sydney. *Art Month 2012* divided the event into several programs such as *Art at Night*, *Conversations*, *Creating*, *Art Appreciation*, *Exhibitions*, *tours*, *Art & Food*, *Family and Art Offsite*. The programs were held over a broad range of timings, with some even featuring extended hours, which made it more accessible and convenient to the general public.

Visitors were able to enjoy the vibrancy of art after-hours with the dedicated *Art at Night* program. They were able to take advantage of the extended opening hours at targeted arts precincts across the city. You could even take a DIY tour of local galleries from 6.00-8.00pm before heading to the closest Art Bar, where there were performances and drinks served from 8.00pm.

The *Exhibitions Strand* showcased works by about 200 artists. Visitors were able to look for the *Art Month Sydney* sticker on the window of the galleries and have a look inside. There were high quality exhibitions distributed across 102 galleries in Sydney, such as Grant Stevens at Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Paul Davis at Tim Olsen, Craig Waddell at gallery 9, McLean Edwards at Martin Browne Contemporary, as well as the internationally lauded Red Gate Gallery (Beijing) that presented a touring exhibition of artists at Damien Minton Gallery.

In addition, *Art Month 2012* also provided opportunities for experts to answer the everyday questions and misconceptions, which often surround contemporary art. From emerging to established artists, the unknown and the notorious, it was a rare chance to hear from Sydney’s contemporary art influencers as to what they believe makes good art, and why, which was hotly debated at a separate discussion during the program.

Furthermore, *Art Month 2012* also provided art beginners the rare chance to learn the basics of various contemporary art practices from leading Australian artists. The *Wonderful Weekend Workshops* for adults included everything from paper cutting sessions to traditional life drawing classes, and sessions in the exquisite Korean Hanji crafts. This was an interesting way to allow artlovers to try to make their own arts.

Meanwhile, *Art Appreciation* aimed to provide suggestions to audiences who wished to be collectors, but had no idea or in-depth knowledge of collection. The *Art Appreciation* sessions helped to demystify the art buying process and created informed discussions about the art market in Australia today.

The *Art and Food* sessions had a natural harmony. Artists, chefs and designers had come together to share their passion in a cross collaboration of talents, in the experience of art, while engaging one’s senses in a relaxed and delicious environment.

Moreover, *Art Month 2012* had offered such wide varieties of interactive events that there was something to suit any age group. An invitation for kids and their parents to participate to art workshops was *Art Month 2012*’s contribution to engage families in the events. In addition, there were also cycling tours that took participants into the heart of some of Sydney’s vibrant art neighbourhoods. The abundance of events and programs assisted *Art Month 2012* in making an attractive festival that appealed to all.

Hundreds of galleries across Sydney shone as they put on a show for the

public with the charm of art. This feast was also a comprehensive display of a thriving local arts scene through all mediums such as painting, printmaking, sculpture, photography, installation, sound and video art. Contemporary, indigenous and international art was put on display for the public.

The diversity of the art festival brings more opportunities to both artists and the public. *Art Month Sydney* has become a stimulant, active every autumn in Sydney through abundant cultural activities, bringing a wonderful enjoyment of art to Sydney citizens. (Somerville J, 2012)

The diversity of this arts event had offered a variety of opportunities as well as environments to encourage artistic creations. Arts festivals such as *Art Month* have indeed provided a lot of opportunities for artists and art workers. Nonetheless, the opportunities that *Art Month* had brought were of a different kind; it was one that contained an actively competitive and developed opportunity. It is not only opening doors for artists, but it also helps to uncover excellent talent for art galleries and arts groups. For example in ‘*the art interview*’, which was a unique networking opportunity for 20 emerging Australian artists. Over 140 artists had applied for the chance to showcase their work in Sydney’s top galleries. 20 talented artists were selected to meet with 20 of Sydney’s top galleries in this specially curated *Art Month 2012* event. The artists had an opportunity to communicate with art curators and directors, exchange and present their ideas and inspirations, and to widen their art social circle. Galleries and art institutions had also indicated their expectations of the artists, their views on contemporary art and their thoughts on the future developments of contemporary art. This form of interview is a good way to establish and share ideas and visions for the future of the arts.

The diversity of the arts activities had enabled more people from different ages, education levels, and backgrounds to join and enjoy art. It not only provides opportunities for people to experience the arts, but also

ART MONTH SYDNEY: A DIVERSIFICATION OF ART EVENTS

By Yuning Sun

Art Month Sydney 2012 is the third annual contemporary art festival that celebrates the vibrancy and diversity of visual art in Sydney. It offers dynamic series of art events ranging from exhibitions, talks, tours, artist studio visits, to children’s art activity trails. More than 200 artists participated in *Art Month 2012*, which was held in more than 100 galleries across Sydney, mostly in the precincts of Surry Hills, Paddington and Danks St, Waterloo. *Art Month* has become an anticipated annual event among art lovers and artists. ‘We want people to get excited about

contemporary art and to make them feel welcomed and involved’, notes *Art Month 2012* Director, Eliza Muldoon (Davies K, 2012). The festival offers everyone the chance to interact with the contemporary artists and their works. Through diversity, *Art Month* has allowed valuable exchanges of knowledge between the artists and the public.

Art Month 2012 was aimed at a wide target audience, which involved individuals from diverse cultural and professional backgrounds. It also aligned its agenda and

marketing concepts towards capturing a diverse target audience.

In creating and attracting visual attention to the event, *Art Month 2012* adopted various methods of marketing. This included media coverage, extensive advertising, VIP invitations, and the use of social media to extend its marketing outreach to its audiences. By doing so, this helps to create and build up a sense of pre-event excitement and immersion until the lead up to the event. The graphic design of *Art Month 2012* also reflected

serves to stimulate public interests in art. This alludes to the possibility of attracting commercial institutions, which could potentially lead to lucrative business partnerships allowing better development within the arts. (Heidimaier, Mar 2012)

The *Art Month 2012* offered people of all ages and levels the chance to interact with living contemporary artists and their works. This was a wonderful opportunity for everyone, an opportunity to popularise contemporary arts. As Muldoon expected, ‘the key of this program is a broad range of categories and events that means everyone can engage with contemporary art in whatever way they feel comfortable.’ (Art Month Sydney, 5 February 2012)

In addition, a successful art event would attract commercial elements, which are interested in supporting the development of contemporary arts. This diversity increases the port of business and artistic events, thus, providing greater opportunities for business access to stations in the art industry and promoting contemporary art to the public. This year, *Art Month* sponsors were from varied industries such as, banking and automobile industries. For instance, one of *Art Month* exhibitions, *The Art of Singleframe* was located in the Audi Centre Sydney. This is a perfect incorporation of the high quality of the car and the elegant arts. Audi’s display of elegant art within its premise, flaunted the charms of its brand; at the same time, this had also garnered increased public attention towards contemporary art. This is an effective way to develop and encourage contemporary arts. By attracting different forms of commercial sponsorship, and providing diverse opportunities to sponsors through arts events, could indirectly help to achieve greater support for contemporary art.

Art Month 2012 had successfully brought contemporary art to the public, and had encouraged people to engage with them, while removing the barriers people perceive around accessibility. The programs had revealed an amazing breadth and depth of Sydney’s contemporary

artists. It had gotten people thinking about ways of approaching the arts, and brought in new audiences.

Art Month Sydney has produced a very positive impact on the arts industry. It encourages art creators and practitioners to recognise the changes in the market. However, exactly how long the intense stimulation and encouragement can be preserved cannot be controlled. To continue to encourage the artists and art workers still needs a variety of different forms. But the diversity of the arts event is, indeed, a display of the development of the state of the arts industry and is a good way to promote the development of the arts industry. The art promotes social progress and community participation within the development of the arts, which is both beneficial for art and society.

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REVIEWING THE RENAISSANCE

By Jinghan Wu

Renaissance is a term that means revival or rebirth. It was an era that marked a change in the culture and art of Italy between 1400 and 1600, a period when people began to appreciate Classical Antiquity. The basis for development of the humanities was the study of ancient texts. The Renaissance was an era when there was increased questioning of the natural world as well as exploration and experimentation in sciences and arts. With the aid of new technologies like gunpowder, the printing press, optics and watches, and the exploration of the New World, Renaissance society was transformed, resulting in the emergence of today’s Europe (Brotton, 2006)¹.

The National Gallery of Australia is one of the most popular galleries in Australia and the general public is greatly influenced by it. The gallery’s collection exceeds 120,000 works of art. The Australian Government established the Gallery in 1967 as the country’s public art gallery. In late 20th century style, the defining characteristics of the building are its raw concrete surfaces and angular masses. A series of sculpture gardens were planted with Australian native trees and plants, which surround the building. A triangle is the basis for the building’s geometric motif, which is evident in the entire building as depicted by triangular columns, and stair towers. Though the building is primarily constructed using concrete, the interior walls have been covered with painted wood. The design is large enough to accommodate display and storage of art works (NAG, Web)². There are several major exhibitions that have been held in National Gallery of Australia, but it is Renaissance: 15th and 16th century Italian Paintings from the Accademia Carrara Bergamo that will occupy this article.

The exhibition centres on Italian paintings of the 15th and 16th centuries from the collection of the Accademia Carrara in Bergamo. Bergamo city is located in the region of Lombardy in northern Italy. And lies between Lake Como and Milan. The long and interesting history of the city can be traced back to the time of Celtic settlement, with later settlement by the Romans. The Republic of Venice ruled the city from the 15th century. In 1810,

the elegant neoclassical building of the Accademia Carrara was completed. The main donor and founder was Count Giacomo Carrara, who was interested in building an art school in Bergamo city, and collected artworks to serve as examples for students of art to copy. The picture gallery is better known compared the art school it originally served, owed largely to the high quality of Carrara’s paintings, as well as the paintings added by other donors like Giovanni Morelli and Count Guglielmo Lochis (Stourton, 2003)³.

A number of the painters that are represented in the exhibition include Titian, Giovanni Bellini, Botticeli, Sandro, and Raphael. It was possible for the National Gallery of Australia to borrow more than seventy artworks from Accademia Carrara, due to the display spaces of the Accademia being under renovation, and museum being temporarily closed. These paintings are of extraordinary quality since they were made in Renaissance culture centres like Florence, Venice, Padua, Bergamo, Siena and Ferrara. The subjects of the paintings range from Biblical stories to depictions of a Child, Madonna and lives of the Saints (NAG, Web).

Among the notable works of art in the exhibition is Madonna and Child (1475) by Crivelli. The painting portrays an ornately dressed Mary who is crowned as Heaven’s queen. Mary holds her son in a protective manner with her elegant hands. There are elegantly curved arches shaping the panel, which reminds viewers of Renaissance art’s early sources. The elements of Christian history are clearly represented by the carnation and beautifully executed fruit symbols. The setting of the landscape is also striking since it shows a contrast between harsh scene and a verdant one. Owed to the fact that Crivelli worked in central Italy’s marches, far away from contemporary cultural centres, his art pieces present Gothic aesthetic features like relief on the clothes of the virgin (Marshall, 2004)⁴.

Saint John the evangelist (c1480) by Lorenzo Costa is another work included in the exhibition. Originally, the artwork was painted in tempera

and then transferred to canvas at a later time. Lorenzo makes use of clear and bright colours to portray St. John. The dead tree and live cypresses represent death and eternal life. The apostle’s life in the Roman Empire is located by a severe marble structure. Costa demonstrates his love and knowledge of classical architecture while at the same time providing a counterpoint to the fabric’s lush folds.

The story of Virginia the Roman (1498) was created by Botticelli, the Florentine artist, in the form of a large panel. Botticelli narrates a story of a young girl who faces a tragedy that leads to the saving of the Roman republic. Reading the painting from the left, the audience can follow Virginia’s fate. The painting is a representation of a theatrical scene in the form of three acts, creating a triptych. It is not only rich in colour but it is also rhythmic in movement. In Saint Sebastian (1501-02), Raphael is portrayed with an arrow in his hand. The arrow would later become an instrument that torturers would use. The artist presents a rich and elegantly dressed young man instead of the traditional iconography of a full length, partially draped man. Some of the pictorial devices employed by Raphael include the oval face of the Saint mirrored in the loop of a chain and a curved halo that is echoed in the Saint’s eyebrows. Therefore, the central subject, or idea of Italian landscape during the Renaissance era, is the early Christian subject.

Overall, the National Gallery of Australia managed to display great art pieces from the Renaissance era in Italy. The exhibition does not only have the capacity to enrich Australian cultural life but it also strengthens the bond and friendship between Italians and people from Australia.

Among the key strengths of the exhibition is that it displays magnificent art pieces by famous Italian artists. The major focus of the exhibition was to explain various materials and techniques that were employed in Renaissance art. Clear emphasis is laid on the physical attributes of the art pieces instead of history or background information concerning the works. The layout of the exhibition is impressive; there are separate rooms for different pieces. In the first room of the gallery, three paintings from the 18th and 19th centuries were displayed. The paintings belong mainly to the founder of Accademia Carrara and the trustees. Following the first room are rooms for the Madonna and Child, Gothic to Renaissance periods, portraits, the late and high Renaissance eras, and finally the Northern Italy. Within the paintings, there is a strong depiction of religion, typical of Italian Renaissance paintings (Brotton,

2006).

Large arches, which serve as additional framing devices, are also used to connect the separate rooms of the gallery. Close to the entrance, there is a set of arches arranged in a row to form a set of four paintings that are hung at the end in a niche. This creates a powerful effect that focuses all interest to the paintings, which include: the Archangel Michael killing a dragon; Madonna and child; Saint Peter; and the Trinity above. In the last rooms of the exhibition, the style used to depict haloes is much simpler; that is, fewer lines emanate from the head, or simply, thin gold rings (NAG, Web). A painting that particularly caught my attention was Botticelli’s Christ the Redeemer. The style used to create this painting was less realistic compared to that of other art pieces. It depicted a face that expressed ten times the feeling of all other paintings displayed. Though the layout was impressive, some paintings were displayed in such a way that viewers felt as though they were looking at the paintings on a television screen, or on a computer, because of the glass in front to the works. In most areas of the gallery, the lighting is exemplary, which allows viewers to make clear distinctions between the art pieces. The colour scheme is also effective; by matching the colours of the walls in each room they do not overpower the art works. The colours scheme could also help in telling more about the portraits. For instance, in the last room, the dominant colours were royal blue and rich red; two colours that clearly stand for portraits of successful and wealthy individuals.

Despite the aforementioned strengths, a major weakness noted about the exhibition is that several paintings lacked a detailed explanation regarding their background. The explanations given only tell viewers the present, while ignoring the past. For instance The Story of Virginia the Roman gives an explanation of what the portrait represents, but fails to inform viewers of the story behind the portrait (Bourdeau at el, 2001)⁵. The same case is also noted in portraits representing Saints. One of the major recommendations for future exhibitions is to give background information and a brief history behind different portraits or art pieces displayed; this would be of great benefit to viewers who may lack extensive historical knowledge.

It is evident that the renaissance exhibition in the National Gallery of Australia is a source of historical enrichment, especially regarding Italian history during the Renaissance period. The gallery collected a great number of famous artworks, which contain historical meaning as well as their influence. Despite the information provided of the history and

structure of the exhibition, there are many benefits to the layout, making it possible to get a clear contrast between different art works displayed in different rooms. The classical antiquity of the works, a distinct characteristic of the Renaissance era, clearly comes out in the paintings displayed throughout the exhibition, making it a memorable and once in a lifetime viewing experience.

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JENNY TUBBY: THE OCTAGONAL CURIOSITY

By Rebecca O’Shea

Jenny Tubby is the 2012 Artist in Residence at the Wollongong City Gallery, a residency that will cumulate in the exhibition *Octagonal Rooms* (26 May -26 August 2012). This opportunity provided Tubby the space and resources to see out an idea that was born in her final year of university. The genesis of this exhibition, now retitled the *Original Room*, was produced in 2009. It was first seen in the Wollongong University’s graduating exhibition of the same year, *Grad Wrap*, and in 2010 travelled to Perth for the National Graduate Show *Hatched*. Now executed in 2012, the original room is seen with many intriguing extensions.

Octagonal Rooms describes multiple facets of personal and cultural histories. Being enclosed in these spaces is an experience that stipulates a blend of narratives and references, each open to their own interpretation and further connection. Four octagonal rooms conjoined by four smaller square hall-like spaces tessellate around a central octagonal space. Each room stages a separate curiosity. The installation, largely constructed from

hand-made, recycled and collected materials, forms a duel between the systematic and seemingly random. The multiple layers of materials are, in their new home, reconceptualised. In many cases the meaning or significance of an object or material has been inverted, challenging the audience with what’s real and what’s constructed, blurring the line between reality and fiction. To uncover this time capsule is like walking into the dwelling of a fictional explorer, their findings mapped out in fragments on the walls. Within these fragments are clues to interpreting and analysing the systems of knowledge that construct both our own and the fictional explorer’s understanding of the world.

Tubby’s practice is a process that is methodical and experimental, letting the journey of creativity take her in an intuitive direction. The catalyst for the octagonal form is an object of personal significance to Tubby, a small eight-sided cardboard cotton holder, a family



heirloom.¹ This item was uncovered in her great aunt's sewing cabinet, in a family home in Ballarat, previously owned by her great grandfather, a tailor. This small, unique object offers a majestic quality; a red, octagonal, cog-shaped piece of cardboard, with golden thread wound between the points, coded fragments of printed text peek through the gaps. Tubby discusses the cotton holder as a metaphor for where we come from. The threads can be seen as a representation of the way family is bound together.² Many synonyms of the original object are present throughout the installation, both in the octagonal form of the rooms and curios they contain.

The cotton holder has also informed previous work of Tubby's from 2004 to 2008, including a series of paintings and works on paper. This keepsake has offered her a flow of associations that has allowed her practice to have both a departure point and probable continuum. The *Model Room*, part of the octagonal installation, fosters this idea. As Barbara Campbell suggests in the catalogue essay, the growth of the installation seems only to be contained by the constraints of the gallery walls and it could extend through 'any number of additional rooms' (2012). The miniatures in the *Model Room* recall the scale models of an architect alluding to plans of an octagonal city, each form having an individual mood and aesthetic.

The important marker for this progressive tangent is the *Original Room*, created in 2009. The rest of this interlocking octagonal series extend on this foundation, which informed the ideas for them. The new editions to the work are aptly named the *Pattern Room*, the *Film Room*, the *Model Room* and, the *Internal Room*. These titles, like the names of areas in a home, designate the purpose of the rooms. Although drawing on the structure of a dwelling, the installation can also be compared to the internal space of the mind. It reduces the systems of knowledge that form the domains of personal and social identity into a visual space, a space that can be explored, and considered emotionally and intellectually.³ The *Octagonal Rooms* are an amalgam of references to aspects that construct the self. In discussing her choices of materials Tubby explains that she is systematic in her approach. For example, the books used 'need to have a certain quality about them, like the feel and texture of the paper, its age and colour, or aesthetic, but also its content.'⁴ The multitude of pages that make the interior and exterior wallpaper of the rooms are like an inverted library. Amongst the collaged wallpaper are mathematical and scientific textbooks, dictionaries, maps, language translation guides, a shorthand guide and a Chinese bible. The collection of pages and their relationship to other elements within

¹ Jenny Tubby, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Hatched 2010 www.pica.org.au/view/Hatched+2010%3A+National+Graduate+Show/40/bio/

² Jenny Tubby, personal interview with Rebecca O'Shea, April 2012

³ Jenny Tubby, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Hatched 2010 www.pica.org.au/view/Hatched+2010%3A+National+Graduate+Show/40/bio/

⁴ Jenny Tubby, personal interview with Rebecca O'Shea, April 2012

the space encourage an interpretation of language as well as the variety of doctrines we use, essentially, to explain, interpret or understand our existence.

These wallpapered pages are juxtaposed with handwritten text-like symbols, scrawled on the walls, in a language that is yet to be defined. The fragments of a shorthand guide and guides to language translations perhaps offer a key to its interpretation; but the question is, is it able to be read? A sense of meaning can potentially be deduced by the gesture and form of the symbols, or their association to signs and languages that are more familiar. As a text, these symbols are possibly indecipherable, commenting on the fact that just because you cannot read something, does not mean it is devoid of meaning. Being a work that links to identity, this code, if decipherable, may reveal any number of secrets. For now, its message is understood only in the subjective interpretation of the viewer.

In the *Film Room*, there is a similar air of secrecy to the handwritten scrawls as well as an exploration of language and its meaning. Hidden behind cardboard vents, reminiscent of the metal grills in Federation houses, are films of the artist as a fictional character. She speaks and sings in tongue within the Royal National Park. This tongue is reminiscent of a number of languages; a feeling of its content only appreciated through the conviction of her voice. This, and the character's stance, suggests an urgency or importance to what is being said. A decipherable moment in the dialogue is 'Captain Cook' being shouted. She is absorbed in her communication and absorbed in the landscape, perhaps she is engaged in a prayer to the spiritual keeper of the place who may understand her implied frustrations.

As this character speaks in a tongue that is seemingly multilingual, it evokes a sense of the many cultures that compose Australia, cultures whose presence can be found both literally and metaphorically throughout the installation. As Campbell notes, a bird's eye view of the installation identifies with Islamic architecture, and angled cross-braces on the walls exterior are reminiscent of European building techniques, which are centuries old and were introduced to Australia during colonisation.⁵ The Royal National Park was established in 1879, being the second oldest national park in the world. Although it suffered with introduced species and logging of native trees, it is now National Heritage listed, a classification that protects this picturesque place.⁶ A discussion on different attitudes toward the landscape is perhaps contained inside the talking walls, an evocative post-colonial narrative engulfed within the Octagonal Rooms.

⁵ Campbell, B 2012, Jenny Tubby Octagonal Rooms, Wolongong City Gallery.

⁶ NSW Government, Office of Environment & Heritage NSW National Parks & Wildlife Service <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/NationalParks/parkHome.aspx?id=Noo30>

Opposite Page: **Jenny Tubby.**
Artist in Situ. 2012.
Royal National Park.
Photographer – Sarah Miller



Following colonisation there have been continuous waves of immigration to Australia as a result of politics, warfare or other occurrences, such as the gold rush, and each has played its role in developing Australian identity. Due to the gold rush, towns like Ballarat in Victoria were established; a town where Tubby's great grandparents' house resided and from where many of the curios originate. The hoarding by members of her family is a preliminary aspect of this work both in its conception and execution. These objects, passed down through her family, now inform the ideas and concepts in the work, as well as becoming part of it, in a similar manner to a cabinet of curiosity.

Tubby's acquiring of materials is a central to her process, some collected by her, others gifted, having attachment to the individuals that make up her ancestry. The importance of these items are questioned, re-contextualised and in some cases devalued. Amongst found materials that cover surfaces throughout the work are things that would make some specialised interest historians or collectors squirm, including colonial stamps, antique oddities and a catalogue of household receipts dating from 1895-1995. The receipts, detailing general living expenses such as water, sewerage and electricity, originate from Tubby's great grandparents house in Ballarat and have become a part of the collaged wallpaper. Amongst the earlier handwritten receipts are typewritten and computer generated receipts, showing the progression of technology and how the way we live has changed. If this peculiar construction can be seen as a home, these receipts also

draw attention to the facilities it lacks as a habitual environment. Although, there are hints toward an occupant, whose story it is is for the viewer to determine.

The studio became the workplace and second home for Tubby during her residency. Noting the importance of working to a deadline, she explains that there were probably only five days in the past eleven months that she had not paid the studio a visit. The materials for the work were sometimes set up in the style of a production line as each wall gradually neared completion. In the progression of the work, Tubby has made an effort to limit the amount of waste and make use of everything that was cut up or pulled apart. Scraps from cut out holes become new objects and book covers with pages ripped out land in a box for the next project.

Octagonal Rooms is a multidisciplinary work where Tubby intends to 'blur the lines between fiction and reality.'⁷ In its realisation Tubby has used a variety of mediums and practices including sculpture, printmaking and drawing, as well as contemporary notions of installation and performance. The *Octagonal Rooms* are both sculptural and architectural. The installation imitates a home, allowing the viewer to feel comfortable within the space whilst investigating its contents like a voyeur. It is layered with small and large-scale objects, and collages that interrelate. Drawing is explored as a plan, a symbol and an aesthetic. The presence of draft work and plans become part of the work, being pasted on the walls, and becoming ornamental, making the

⁷ Jenny Tubby, personal interview with Rebecca O'Shea, April 2012



physical space, and the ideas of its creation intertwine. The viewer is presented with a space that they can explore and contemplate, which engages curiosity and evokes personal narratives. As Tubby explains, 'when people walk in I want them to lose track of where they are and what they're doing because they become so absorbed by the space,' much like being engaged by a good book.⁸

⁸ Jenny Tubby, personal interview with Rebecca O'Shea, April 2012

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Jenny Tubby, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Hatched 2010 www.pica.org.au/view/Hatched+2010%3A+A+National+Graduate+Show/40/bio/

Opposite Page: **Jenny Tubby.**
Octagonal Room (detail). 2011-2012.
Mixed Media.
Photographer – Derek Kreckler.

Above: **Jenny Tubby.**
Octagonal Room (The studio – work in progress).
2011-2012.
Mixed Media.
Photographer – Derek Kreckler.

MALANI'S 'MOTHER INDIA'

By Bronwyn Hadkins

A short walk through the Asian wing of the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW) leads into a room with two video works. They belong to Indian artist Nalini Malani. It has been a long time since I have entered the gallery and came across works so confronting, yet also moving. The themes that Malani addresses, such as war, displacement, gender roles, death, and identity, are understood on a global scale. However, she brings to her work a personal reach that confronts viewers and forces them to question their understanding of their place within society and in a greater politicized world.

When viewing Malani's works, it is important to explore first the context from both male and female perspectives. Malani's works resonates significantly on a personal level. It brings into question the ability to personally identify with both the artist and the identities presented within the works of art. It seems obvious that Malani intends to create a strong emotional connection between female viewers and the protagonists in her works. I would like to examine the integral role gender plays in the interaction with Malani's themes. Both installations suggest a looming and threatening male presence. Furthermore, through text and voice-overs, it is suggested that the men are representative of family members (brothers and fathers) and more anonymous figures (such as army personnel, political leaders, and strangers). The contrast of gender roles in these works highlights the alienation that women in India have lived with through generations.

There is a depth to Malani's work that is rare to find in contemporary video and multimedia works. This can be partly attributed to the fact that her works are based on Veena Das' highly charged essay, 'Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain'. Her exploration of how women's bodies have become de-gendered and dehumanised signifiers of war has inspired Malani's works. Das explores the idea that men appropriate the bodies of women as territories. 'A woman's body must be made to bear the signs of its possession by the enemy.'¹ It is this sexual and psychological marking of women that Malani sees as integral in the continuous definition of females in both historical and modern India.

Malani highlights this in her five-minute video work *Mother India: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* (2005). She contrasts emotionally charged images of Hindu gods, vulnerable and subversive female

faces, and images of lone young girls transposed over maps, while documenting the movements of women during conflicts to connect the viewers to the pain of displacement. Not only does Malani focus on the trauma attached to the obvious presence of physical and sexual violence, she also challenges audiences to consider intrinsic parts of identity and collective memory, through trauma and disconnection of the individual. This displacement of identity and heritage is emphasized by the images of Coca Cola symbols hovering over the young girl's face. Fear is communicated through the brightness of the red Coca Cola symbols that loom in the foreground, which also act as references to the influences of western cultures and economic power.

The sight of a cow alludes to woman as mother - passive, functional, and there to feed her young. Although the cow is a symbolic and revered animal in many cultures in India and Pakistan, it acts as a reference to the fertility of women and their roles; as an entity to produce and reproduce, controlled by a process and system. In addition, the video sequences also show the close up of a female's mouth - moving in slow motion, with the teeth and tongue the dominating elements. It draws subtle reference to the female genitalia and their bodily form and function. It is at once confronting, vulgar, and visceral.

The audio experience and faltering sounds shock the viewers and encourage them to empathise with the women displayed on screen. The audio is projected throughout the space, surrounding and attracting audiences closer to the sights. The physicality of the work encompasses the room - the five screens are oversized and are displayed next to each other in a slight curvature, as if embracing the viewers. This is supported not only by the audio overlay for this work, but also by the sound from the second video work in the space. This appears to be an intentional curatorial strategy, intended to create a tense and unsettling atmosphere in the room through the overlapping of voices. During the silent moments of *Mother India*, the voice of a child is heard from *Unity in Diversity* (2003).

This second work is presented on a much smaller scale, but is no less poignant and moving than its predecessor. *Unity in Diversity* follows the same implementation as *Mother India*. The images are blurred and interchanging with audio layered over the images. However this time the voice is male, reading from an original text by Heiner Muller. The text references a man who has been condemned by the authorities and is being prosecuted, and so he is communicating home to his family.

The work is based around the work *Galaxy of Musicians* (1889, oil on canvas) by Ra Raja Ravi Varma, which represents both the diversity and the collective identity of Indian women. This idea is communicated by one of the central images interlaid in this work - that of an abortion. Over the images of faces and moving bodies, viewers are able to witness the confronting and charged image of a child abortion. This tactic could be read in many different ways; the image can be seen to represent the burden on the health of women who suffer the sexual violence of collective conflict and its long-term ramifications. However, I believe this image is there to shock the viewer into understanding the significance of such a morally ambiguous procedure. Unborn children are not simply to be understood as unborn by-products of conflict, but as individuals and future generations that fail to survive the atrocities of the conflict. They suffer in the same way as breathing bodies as a result of the conflict.

These two works are unique in their ability to capture viewers' emotions. At the same time, they represent the history of women in this conflict under the physical and sexual violence that had displaced them geographically and psychologically. The significance in Malani's art making practice lies in the fact that she chronicles a time in recent history that is widely undocumented and unrepresented. Her abilities to communicate emotions allow her to display the collective history and the impacts of the events on families and communities at that time. She is able to reach beyond the screens of her work to create a spatial voice and presence that is a rare quality in video works of today. As she explains, 'I work with de-forming the colours in video - keying them in as I would with watercolours. Or as my work in reverse painting - 'throwing' colours, embedding them into the supports.'² It is this ability to compose and engage the viewers' sights with colours that makes her works so successful.

Malani uses her works to identify a recent history in time that is vastly undocumented and unnoticed. It is for this reason that she plays a significant role in the contemporary landscape of women artists. Her ability to layer and juxtapose video is what makes the works so dynamic and forthcoming. Her importance should not be downplayed: she represents the twentieth century female

who has yet to realise equality and who is attempting to heal the gendered and political wounds of a nation's history and identity. As Malani notes, 'we have been through a time of intellectual and political debilitation in the past 15 years in India. Civil society is getting somewhat unhinged. We have to find strategies and subterfuges to address issues.'³ This is what she is trying to achieve in her works. It is not so much critical as it is complex. She does not over emphasize the violence of men, but rather focuses on female protagonists as an exploration of lost identities and the question of whether they can ever heal.

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3 *ibid.*

Below: Installation view of Nalini Malani's *Mother India: transactions in the construction of pain* 2005. Courtesy of The Art Gallery of New South Wales



¹ Das, Veena *Language and Body: Transactions in the Construction of Pain* Daedalus, 1996 Vol 125 Issue 1 Pgs 67 -91

RICHARD TIPPING

AT THE AUSTRALIAN GALLERIES

By Mitchell Keith Eaton

Outside the entrance to the gallery the first work displayed is on a stand, with a placard carrying words in graphics that we are accustomed to, but with an ironic change: 'sorry, we're open'. This simple sign is a foretaste of what is inside and an indication of Richard Tipping's playful mind, with words and visual imagery fabricated from conventional street signage products.

The exhibition contains many kinds of artworks, from photographs to big steel signs, to street barricades, to the clever *Bi-cycle* (a bicycle with two handle bars; one at the front and one facing the back with no seat) the sculpture *FLOOD* and giclée printed works on paper.

Richard Tipping's social sculpture works started with a poem in 1979 in Adelaide, in a suburb called Mile End, near a main road that led to the Airport. One night Tipping climbed up on the hood of his car and placed an 'E' that he had made over the 'R' on the 'AIRPORT' sign, so that it read 'AIRPOET'; it is this catalyst that began his play of visual acuity and of the poetry that was his first love. The sign belonged to the people as an idea. It is in the belonging to the people, as an idea, that Tipping's signs are utilitarian. The doctrine that the greatest happiness of the greatest number should be the sole end of public action is both implicit and explicit in Tipping's work. The irony is to be awakened by the

visual cues that the work takes on from the public space and then converting them to public and private knowledge or joke. In Tipping's work there is humour and a certain pathos that requires the viewer to look beyond; as the artist proposes in one work, to 'QUESTION AUTHORITY'. It is a questioning of his very own medium, in questioning the instantly recognizable signs and symbols of the 20th and 21st century, that these public authority symbols and signs are questioned irreverently. Tipping's wordplay questions this authority with the bright primary colours of reflective tape on aluminium and paper with his own poesy and iconic visual branding. This is ideally executed in the work *GFC 2010/12* with the image of the iconic founder of the Kentucky Fried Chicken corporation: the Colonel and the graphics of the brand of KFC, with the letters altered to 'GFC'. The impact is subtle, and yet it questions the whole realm of western standards of consumption and exploitation, and incorporates the doubt that one will ever see the fast food corporation KFC in the same light again. In this era of the Global Financial Crisis, addressing corporate greed and the entire culture of immediate consumption, this work is time specific.

Most of Tipping's other works involve the triumph of the human spirit, particularly his *SING* (originally from a *CROSSING* sign in North Bondi Beach;

erasing the 'CROS') and *HUM* (erasing the end 'P' in 'HUMP') works. These works, as well, speak to the public the optimism of an artist working in the public domain. *FORM 1 PLANET* (derived from 'Form 1 Lane') and naturally the original *AIRPOET*. *Private Poetry – Trespassers welcome* is another play on words with a reversible; a sign that makes you want to stay there in the gallery exploring the depths of the work. *ART FREEWAY* also falls into this category of lifting the human spirit. An altered sign eliminating the 'ST' from 'START', a photograph of this sign is displayed with the lines of the freeway's concrete disappearing towards infinity. Although Tipping is careful where he places his poetry so as not to cause any harm to the motorists or pedestrians, it is the altered view that one must be careful of once having seen the signs that lift the human spirit. And once seen, the signs are incredibly powerful in changing the viewer's perception of their surroundings of the current time and their perception of a future that is necessarily brighter and more optimistic; particularly if one sees the arts as the catalyst for making the world a better place, through ideas and creativity. These signs, once described by a worker as a 'worker's Christmas present' are exactly that, although the hope is to effect positive change and an awakening.

Richard Tipping also works in subvertising, as in his reflective tape on steel frame *PREPARE*



TO SHOP – the sign of easily recognizable graphics of 'Prepare to stop'. Addressing the consumer culture of today's society, one might almost see this in reality at Mr. Lowy's Westfield complexes (and, one would be surprised if Mr. Lowy has not acquired this work for his extensive collection). The work *REDUCE NEED* (a play on 'REDUCESPEED'), made from reflective tape on a box-edged steel sheet, is perhaps a work that does not apply to Mr. Lowy's ethos but certainly underlines the artist's interest in the environment and sustainability.

The artist's questioning of 'what is art' perhaps comes from the artist's own insecurity about whether he is an artist or a poet. *Free art before art frees you!*, made from reflective tape and plastic, metal stand, and *End artwork, artwork ahead* fabricated from conventional street signage materials of reflective tape on box-edged steel sheet and A-frame legs, *Sub-*

merging artists (the reversible of emerging artists), fabricated of reflective tape on aluminium – these represent Tipping's idea of subvertising quite clearly - and *Art keeps going in one eye and out the other*, also made from reflective tape on aluminium, are all works that speak to the artist and public about the very nature of the artist and are somewhat Dadaist and Fluxus at the same time. The latter work, made from what one sees daily on the streets of an English-speaking locality, subverts the original authoritative message, questioning itself as to whether it is art, and asks the viewer to address the works from their own visual and artistic vocabulary. Effectively, this pushes the viewer's thinking about artists: what they are, what they represent and the role they play in today's multi-media digital environment.

Inspired by Fluxus, Tipping creates *The Whispering Fence*, made from fence palings engraved

Above: **Richard Tipping**,
Horizon (Road to Woop Woop),
1981.
Photograph

with reversible couplets; for example: 'welcome stranger, this is not yours' and 'flaming galahs, we all immigrated'.

It is these colloquialisms, and references to Australian, i.e. Australian idiosyncrocies, Australian legal and political subject matter, that are current to the artist and the day, and which mark Tipping as a truly Australian artist with global flair. *The Whispering Fence* is very clearly an important work for Tipping, as it represents being able to communicate with the audience his poetry, which he finds very dear to him. Contrasting the wooden fence palings in the outside courtyard with the bold primary colours of the poetry in the interior gallery space, it seems that Tipping maintains a subtlety in the

positioning of his poetry. He truly adheres to his sign - *PRIVATE POETRY TRESPASSERS WELCOME*. An edict, perhaps, from an art form ready again to be heard and read. As the artist's aim is to get poetry into the art world, I believe that he is truly accomplishing his objective, and the reversible couplets on the fence are a part of that. Another way that Tipping's work is characteristically Australian is in what one can understand as the larrikin sensibility. This sense of irony, and again the questioning of authority through the larrikin's sensibility, in turn brings about the humour of the signs and the alleviation of the thoughts behind them, giving them a pure and simple quality. This is a quality of a pure Australian spirit. One does question, is this a result of the Australian convict heritage, or a triumph of the human spirit? Or are they some form of dangerous subversion? Wilfully hoping that one will sing when

at North Bondi Beach or hum at the University of Sydney (or to prepare to shop at Westfield). Surely this is, on the whole, beneficial for the community; hence my belief that these basic 'erasureables' by Tipping enhance the human spirit.

Tipping even audaciously places his thumbprint over the map of Australia, which I thought was a kind of ASIO marking, but now I come to realise this represents his ambition to place his thumbprint all over Australia. Or it represents his belief that, by mere virtue of changing signs locally, he can affect the minds of others throughout the country who have seen his works. It becomes a new way of seeing signs and of knowing how to read them. This new way comes from the reality of Tipping's signs converting to those of a more pastel variety. Tipping's view of colour is that he likes 'big bold,

bright colours'¹. The simplicity of the colours is for the signage. The way of seeing more is enhanced by the basic primary colour combination, as it is repetitive.

Reversing the symbols and signs is also part of the artist's vocabulary – the red *STOP* sign with the word 'GO' instead keeping the sign red; the *UP* with the arrow pointing down. The artist calls these simply 'reversibles'; as it is your responsibility to question the status quo, it becomes another way to change the way signs look, after you have seen the signs. It is in this state of 'after the sign has been viewed' that one can question how long the new experience lasts; is it the next thirty seconds on the freeway, or is it 20 minutes, or 73 minutes, or seven hours, or seven days - or has the awareness become permanent? It is this gift that the artist offers for all to see.

¹ Richard Tipping, Saturday May 5 2012 at Australian Galleries Paddington



SOMETHING OUT OF NOTHING

By Su-Wen Leong

The receptionist instructed me to proceed to Level 4 to view the exhibition. I checked my lipstick in the mirrored walls of the elevator and - feeling like a willing participant in a science fiction film - saw multiples of myself converged into oblivion. An unsettling process had just begun. The circular corridor built around the column from which I had just emerged led me to 16 hotel rooms, of which 15 were open for viewing. It was hard to tell which room I had just come out of, or whether the doors I opened would lead to bedrooms or bathrooms. It was also difficult to know what I was supposed to be looking at: the photograph on the wall, the 1970s décor, the Sydney cityscape view outside the window, or the obscure laminated text sitting in front of the mirror.

German artist Thomas Demand recreates interiors and scenes in cardboard. He photographs these labour intensive scenes and then proceeds to destroy the original creation. The artwork itself is the moment captured on film. He started working this way as an art student when he noticed how much space his sculptures were taking up, which he could not possibly house. Demand's art practice involves making models to full scale in paper card as well as photography. Both disciplines have origins that relate to time processes: the tradition of photography as documenting reality, and model making as an architectural prototype or pre-cursor to the real thing. However, Demand uses these mediums in his work out of synch from their original intentions.

Demand's replicating skills are profound. The fact that he can imitate cigarette butts and sand, or replicate plastic through paper and cardboard is not an easy task. In *Daily #13* (2011, framed dye transfer print) a stack of two plates are placed on a table that appears to have a crisp white tablecloth covering it. Almost like a cherry on top, a red rubber band sits on top of the topmost plate. In the background is a wall surface that might be marble or tiles, a wooden doorframe, and pink carpet. A simple familiar scene has been recreated entirely out of cardboard, including tablecloth creases, bevelled edges and texture. It is only when one stops to consider how this was physically possible that we can appreciate what a skilled craftsman Demand is. His attention to detail is mind-boggling. How could someone realistically recreate a rubber band that is stretchy and elastic out of a piece of card?

In one of the 16 bedrooms on Level 4 of the Commercial Travellers' Association (CTA), *Daily#13* hung on a wall next to a silver mounted light fitting, above a rust

coloured wool blanket covered single bed looking out into the Sydney cityscape, a view framed by teal curtains. The circular shape of the plate echoed the formation of the corridor, as well as the curved architecture of the building itself. A subtle scent wafted throughout the rooms – pleasant, yet not intoxicating or overpowering, familiar yet not specific.

Located in hotel rooms that are for transient use, these are constructed spaces that aim to feel like home. The CTA in the MLC Centre, Martin Place, was built in the 1970s by Harry Seidler and Pier Luigi Nervi with the purpose of hosting travelling salesmen. The hotel has not been modernised for the 21st century and was carefully selected by Demand as the location to host this commissioned Kaldor Public Art Projects exhibition, *The Dailies 2012 Thomas Demand*. The rooms themselves reference the decade in which they were constructed with minor remaining interior details, yet could also be viewed as being timeless in a sense which creates a surreal and disquieting backdrop for showcasing *The Dailies*.

Demand has created narrative and meaning essentially out of not a lot.

What are we looking at? And what does a photograph of a cardboard replica of some cigarette butts stubbed out in an oversized white ashtray hanging on a hotel room wall really mean?

Devoid of detail or the human element, the depicted scenes in the photographs are strangely familiar. They are generic objects that the viewer understands easily. Despite the lack of humans within the scenes, the photographs communicate the human element not only through a process that is hand-crafted, but also alludes to human interaction through imperfection. Creases, crinkles, wonky blinds, broken electrical fittings, rolled building material, and squashed coffee cups jammed into fencing convey human involvement. The artist's handicraft skills in themselves document hand-labour of the most intensive kind. It is quite remarkable that a person can imitate shower curtains, frosted glass, door handles, linoleum floor coverings, and tiled surfaces out of pieces of cardboard with their bare hands.

Opposite: **Thomas Demand**, *The Dailies*. 2012. Image Courtesy of Kaldor Public Arts Projects.

Nestled between the room’s mirror and bottle of wine was a laminated piece of text that could have easily been missed or possibly mistaken as a menu or the emergency exit procedures. ‘*He wears his black greatcoat, the faithful companion of uncounted train journeys.*’ Excerpts from a short story by Louis Begley lend a literary narrative to the situation of a commercial traveller, Gregor, and his encounters in Sydney. Is the viewer encouraged to assume the role of Gregor by retracing his footsteps? The absurdity of the whole situation was thoroughly entertaining to say the least, if not also baffling.

‘I don’t really see the point of it at all’ was a comment I overheard while bumping into another visitor opening the hotel room doors in the corridor. To the average art patron, perhaps this is understandable as an initial response. However, upon further investigation and a more rigorous approach to reflecting upon *The Dailies* in their entirety, it is a case of the sum being more than its parts. The work can be viewed as singular moments or can be processed as a whole series of moments and experiences.

Photographs capture reality, yet in this case they capture a fictional reality. *The Dailies* refers to a film industry term of looking at what footage has been shot throughout the day by looking at ‘the dailies’ in the evening. Demand had been working on finding the moments he wished to poetically convey from the initial phases of the project since 2008. These moments occurred whilst walking or travelling the streets, editing the highlights for keeping.

By engaging all senses, our experience of the artwork is intensified and embedded into our memories in a way that is more powerful than sight alone. This particular format of being an active participant in seeing an artwork draws upon our deeper consciousness and allows for a reflective and complex reading of what the artist is communicating.

Seeing the photographs in the CTA context had a greater effect on me than if I had seen the images in a white walled gallery. My enjoyment came from the entire experience of opening doors and looking out the windows, as opposed to being enamoured by purely the photographs themselves. The images became more interesting to me as they were part of something bigger and had further possibilities of seeing the work in relation to the space itself or the view outside. Each singular experience of a room created an artwork in itself by piecing together elements of a bigger picture and by repeating this process multiple times we, as the viewer, gain an entire art experience of moments that mirror Demand’s art making process.

Painstaking efforts were taken to achieve a certain look. Demand sourced dye transfer printing machines that are only one of a handful of the remaining oldest

colour photographic processes. They produce images of unrivalled depth and richness and each print takes roughly 40 hours to make.

What is intriguing is the artist’s choice of method - a slow time consuming process that harks back to the arts and craft movement. For an artist at the forefront of contemporary art whose work has such poignancy in the modern world, it is interesting that his practice goes against mass production and technology.

Whether the images are real or not is not the question at hand. It is this experience of questioning depicted representations and creating memories in which the artist is interested. Viewers become part of the exhibition and are encouraged to consider what they are seeing, which has multiple entry points and windows to look through.

How are these images familiar to us? We all visit offices, we all look down into the gutter when crossing a road, we all hang out the washing on a line.

How do we know what these daily snapshots of life represent? In the case of the clothes pegs on a washing line depicted in *Daily #17* (2011, framed dye transfer print), I know that those white lines and pegs clipped onto the lines refer to washing clothes through the given context against a blue sky, which conjure up memories from my own past regarding washing. Yet I do not recognise those specific pegs or a white coloured washing line from my own personal experiences. Demand has provided enough detail that we recognise the situation by association yet has omitted enough detail that the viewer questions whether this is a memory of theirs or not. By simulating reality, a new reality may be formed in someone’s mind.

It is at this point that we enter a philosophical framework of understanding Demand’s work through which the artist is asserting that human experience is but a simulation of reality, rendering perceived reality to be meaninglessness. In an exchange of symbols and signs, Demand’s message to us as the viewer is one of simulacra and simulation. He carefully selects the environments he recreates for his artworks, capturing a moment and recreating this through cardboard. Through the use of recognised elements, the viewer is able to detect the image conveyed which has a certain familiarity to it. It is not because we have personally experienced that particular scene before but through the signs given with enough detail we begin to create a memory of our own.

For Demand, “*depicting reality is just as much a reality as that which is depicted.*” [Thomas Demand: A conversation between Alexander Kluge and Thomas Demand. Serpentine Gallery catalogue 2006. p78]

These blurred perceptions of reality contribute to

understanding our own lives. This element that underlies Thomas Demand’s artwork is where the beauty really lies. The fact that all of these thoughts can be instigated by looking at paper simulations of urban landscapes is mesmerising.

At the CTA I was taken on a poetic journey along an abstract path that led me through a series of experienced fictions, a string of narratives that were cleverly created and had a cumulatively powerful effect. Looking at something banal and interpreting perceptions of what constitute elements of our daily lives, while questioning realities and how our minds can create memories that are shared through depictions of things presented to us, they become a reality in our minds.

Upon further reflection, weeks later, *The Dailies* is an artwork that keeps giving. It is almost like a riddle unsolved that reveals further mysteries the more one thinks about its meaning. Instead of accepting truths, we are encouraged to raise questions.

I am left wondering - Is what I think is real merely a figment of my own imagination? And how many of my own memories are my own? - which is something I have Thomas Demand to thank for.

The Dailies 2012
Thomas Demand
With contributions by Louis Begley and Miuccia Prada
23 March- 22 April 2012
CTA club, MLC Centre, Martin Place, Sydney
Kaldor Public Art Projects

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THOMAS DEMAND: THE DAILIES

By Judy Wills

THOMAS DEMAND, *THE DAILIES*, Sydney. *The Dailies*, the current installation by celebrated German artist Thomas Demand premiered at the Commercial Travelers’ Association (CTA) Club in Sydney. The building is a modernist concrete capsule designed by architect Harry Seidler in the mid 1970s. Curiously, it is unknown to most Sydneysiders despite standing arrested in time in the middle of Martin Place, at the mouth of the MLC Centre. For Demand the opportunity for *The Dailies* to be exhibited in a “...big white elephant in the public sphere that nobody sees, even if it is so big that you cannot not see it” was perfect.¹ This

1 Thomas Demand and John Kaldor’s discussion of

McDonald, J. Enter new realms. The Sydney Morning Herald Spectrum April 14-15, 2012. p 12.

Thomas Demand at the Serpentine Gallery 6 June – 20 August 2006 Catalogue. The Serpentine Gallery London 2006

Bonini, C. Farquharson, A. Storr, R. Yellow Cake Thomas Demand Catalogue. Fondazione Prada, Milan 2007

<http://www.wallpaper.com/art/book-the-dailies-by-thomas-demand/5677>

<http://garagemag.com/docs/editorial-layer/thomas-demand>

<http://www.phaidon.com/agenda/art/events/2012/march/16/thomas-demand-teams-up-with-miuccia-prada/>

www.kaldorartprojects.org.au

The Dailies 2012 Thomas Demand exhibition program/ brochure courtesy of Kaldor Public Art Projects

highly visible yet overlooked building complements the duality of Demand’s work which is both original and reproduced, simple and complex, independent and connected, created and destroyed. *The Dailies*, as described in the exhibition catalogue is a collection of “contemporary still-life images.”² These images reflect the momentary glances that exist in the periphery of our daily lives. By

The Dailies. Online, <http://kaldorartprojects.org.au/project-archive/thomas-demand>

2 Sophie Forbat’s essay, “Thomas Demand and the CTA” features in Thomas Demand and Kaldor Public Art Projects #25 Catalogue, *The Dailies*. Mack and Kaldor Public Art Projects, Sydney, 2012.

presenting these images that would otherwise rarely make it through one’s filter of what is important - a flower trapped in a drain or the missing tiles of an office ceiling amongst fluorescent light panels - Demand draws our attention to those spaces in between, always present and seldom noticed. Each composition is an individual work that captures only a minor detail of an everyday scene or object from an eye-level perspective. Demand describes them as the nucleus of a narrative but still very trivial. As though they are “like a poem where you just have three lines and you just describe the sound of a door closing in a distant room and then that’s it...”³ They are devoid of people but suggest human activity. There is a sense that something has just happened or is about to happen, an anticipation, inviting the audience to create a narrative in response to the scenes. Collectively these familiar and fleetingly observed images evoke a day’s recollection of details, as though one is sifting back through the discarded frames of an edit room floor.

The Dailies hints at the existence of a wider story that transcends the documentation of Demand’s staged environments. In one sense the scenes in *The Dailies* are highly personal. Each work represents Demand revisiting a memory of a photograph. The photograph, in the first instance, was taken by Demand as an instinctive response to something that caught his eye. In an Interview with John Kaldor AM, a collector of Demand’s work and director of Kaldor Public Art Projects which commissioned *The Dailies*, Demand explains that these scenes are derived from random photographs he has taken “from all over the place, one is in Japan in a gym, one is from Melbourne doing a site visit, one is in Sydney, one in France, two from Berlin, one in a Fed Ex office in LA...”⁴ In another sense the scenes are impersonal. They prima facie reveal little about where and from whom they originate. At first glance they could be framed snapshots accumulated on any random cell phone depicting the homogenised bland spaces that make up much of our modern cities. The scenes are at once personal and impersonal, familiar and foreign, beautiful and mundane.

Demand’s creative process is layered and rigorous. He meticulously creates life-size sculpted architectural scenes from paper and paper products, only to destroy the model once he has captured it in a photograph. The artwork is the photograph, yet Demand describes himself not as a photographer but as a conceptual artist

3 Thomas Demand and John Kaldor’s discussion of *The Dailies*.

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for whom photography is an essential part of his creative process.⁵ In fact Demand began his career as a sculptor, creating and then destroying his models. It was only in 1993 at the suggestion of sculpture Fritz Schwegler, his Professor at the Kunstakademie Dusseldorf that he began to photograph his work to document his evolution. The destruction of the recreated scenes adds an interesting dimension to the relationship between what is a reproduction and what is an original in Demand’s practice. The artworks are the only proof that these constructed realities ever existed. In the context of *The Dailies*, the ephemeral nature of Demand’s work is even more nuanced because the original still, from which the constructed reality is derived, is a fleeting observation. Demand needed each reenacted scene “to makes sense some 2 or 3 years later completely in a different context.” So each of *The Dailies* was shot in the same lighting, sometimes outside on the street, to reflect the original conditions of Demand’s observations.⁶ In the artwork we see Demand’s observations as he first saw them and at the same time it is impossible to resist the compulsion to scrutinise the photographs to find evidence of his process. We are tempted to identify a papery fold, indeed any traces of artifice in the artworks that are at once permanent and a permanent reminder of the inherent transience in Demand’s process.

American author, Louis Begley has contributed a short story to *The Dailies* entitled “Gregor in Sydney.” Gregor is a traveling salesman, flying from city to city for work, living out of a suitcase in different hotel rooms and encountering new people. Not surprisingly, arriving in Sydney, “the end of the known world,” in black coat, black suit and black boots in February, when it is a place even hotter than a “furnace,” Gregor feels discombobulated.⁷ Approaching his room at the CTA club surely exacerbates this feeling as he emerges from the lift into a central circular corridor from which sixteen single bedrooms fork off in mirrored pairs. Demand explains “I imagined all the businessmen of the last 150 years spending moments of estrangement

5 Lucy Davies, “ Thomas Demand: One I made Earlier,” The Telegraph, 15 March, 2011. Online, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/photography/8383931/Thomas-Demand-One-I-Made-Earlier.html>

6 Thomas Demand and John Kaldor’s discussion of *The Dailies*.

7 Louis Begley, “Gregor in Sydney” features in Thomas Demand and Kaldor Public Art Projects #25 Catalogue, *The Dailies*.

Opposite: **Thomas Demand**, *The Dailies*. 2012. Image Courtesy of Kaldor Public Arts Projects.



in this place and I wanted to give the audience a sense of that.”⁸ Having left Dusseldorf to spend the next eight years traveling the world. Setting up home for two years in each of London, Paris, New York and Amsterdam before moving to Berlin in 1995 for fourteen years - and recently relocating to Los Angeles, Demand can no doubt relate to this feeling of dislocation. Exhibiting *The Dailies* on the fourth floor of the CTA, each work hanging in one of 15 identical rooms above each bed, forces the audience to navigate the maze-like space, and layers their experience with disorientation. It is this immersive experience for the audience that is the artwork. The staging is as important as the photographs. The interiors of the rooms remain defiant to change. Furnished in a traditional way - each room has identical carpet, bedspread, light and half bottle of wine on the fridge. The window of each room is sealed off from the outside so the entire range of sensory input is tailored to Demand’s vision. For *The Dailies* Miuccia Prada formulated a unique new scent, perceptible only on the fourth floor of the utilitarian CTA. Demand explains that “You don’t hear anything but see bustling city life. [It is] completely mute inside. You’re inside a dreamscape or something, the quality is quite amazing.”⁹ The only differentiating factors in each room are the unique works from *The Dailies*, which hang above each bed and the view from the windows, which have a different perspective. Appropriately, from some of the rooms the Prada store is visible. Each work has been deliberately placed with consideration to the view outside the window so that, it is possible something visible outside resembles the work. For example, the ashtray in Daily #2 is reflected in the two ashtrays at the opening of the MLC Food-court. *The Dailies* in Sydney is the first series Demand has exhibited outside of a museum or gallery and the context of the CTA has added a unique dimension to the audiences’ experience. *The Dailies* is now at its new temporary home in London, Sprüth Magers, a contemporary art gallery. And with a new venue will no doubt come an altered experience of the exhibition. *The Dailies* represents a departure from the subject matter of Demand’s past works; namely, sites of historical or current significance. Notably those include the *Presidency* series of 2008, which recreated the Oval Office, a famous room known to all, yet one which most will never enter; and the *Yellowcake* series of 2007, which recreated the

⁸ Candida Baker, “Finding inspiration in a hotel for businessmen,” Sydney Morning Herald, 12 February 2012. Online, <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/finding-inspiration-in-a-hotel-for-businessmen-20120216-1tbm3.html#ixzz1pkGwSbvB>

⁹ Thomas Demand and John Kaldor’s discussion of *The Dailies*.
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Niger embassy in Rome. In 2001 the embassy was the site of an unresolved burglary of letterheads. The letterheads were subsequently used to forge sale contracts of yellowcake to Saddam Hussein’s regime and contributed to the evidence justifying the American invasion of Iraq in 2003. In contrast to *The Dailies*, which are almost personal and intimate, these past works are informed by and rely on images and knowledge embedded in the public memory. *The Dailies* is also the first series in which Demand has printed images employing the dye-transfer process, an endangered craft that uses gelatin to fix dyes to ordinary paper. Kodak stopped making dye-transfer equipment nearly twenty years ago when ad agencies and fashion magazines converted to digital processing. Now there are only a handful of masters left who practice this labour-intensive process. Demand explains that the really precious part of the process is not the unique sheet that takes forty hours to make by hand but the master’s “requisite level of expertise [that] could perhaps be compared to that of a juggler who can keep sixty balls in the air at the same time for a whole week while delivering a monologue on alternative history....”¹⁰ This technique, like Demand’s artistic process, runs counter to the fast paced digital world and using it for *The Dailies* adds another layer to the work. Many of the images depict reflective materials: mirrors, glass, metallic surfaces. The tonal scale of the dye-transfer process combined with meticulous lighting intensifies the reflections on the paper models, further enhancing the artifice of reality. *The Dailies*, as a filmic reference, is a nod to the raw footage amassed by a director from a day’s shoot. But the name is misleading for a project that took three years to come to fruition. Even when Demand is approaching the final stage of his painstaking process, preparing the paper for the photographs to be printed, the better part of two days’ work for a master craftsman is required. Perhaps with *The Dailies* there are only two important ingredients accomplished in a day, the destruction of the models, and the best part, your visit.

¹⁰ Introductory essay by Thomas Demand features in Thomas Demand and Kaldor Public Art Projects #25 Catalogue, *The Dailies*.

Opposite: **Ben Ali Ong**, Portrait.
2012. Image Courtesy of Ben Ali Ong.

AN INTERVIEW WITH BEN ALI ONG

By Vanessa Anthea Macris

At 30 years of age Sydney photographer Ben Ali Ong has achieved an immense level of success. He has been a finalist in the Blake and Moran photographic prizes to name a few, has exhibited extensively and in 2010 was one of the first photographers to be represented by Tim Olsen galleries. This year he will stage his 13th solo exhibition of his dark, brooding and poetic photographs. Ben kindly took some time out to have a chat about his history, techniques and to provide some tips for emerging artists looking for representation by a gallery.



Can you give a brief rundown on your personal and professional history?

I was born in Singapore in 1982 and lived there for a year or two before moving to Brunei and shortly after Malaysia. My dad works in the hospitality industry so we were always bouncing

around. By the time I was 15 years old I had lived in Singapore, Brunei, England, Australia, Burma and Malaysia. During this time I had been going to different international schools and even studied via correspondence for a period of time, but all the systems varied so I decided to move to Sydney as my older sister was already studying at university there. So at 15 years of age I left Mum and Dad and moved in with my sister who was living in Strathfield, where I completed high school. From there I attended TAFE and completed my Diploma in Photography. During my final year at TAFE I got a job at a commercial photographic studio where I’m still working part-time today. In those early years at TAFE I had a few friends who were staging independent art shows and running small gallery spaces so started hanging out with them. Before long I ended up holding my first exhibition in one of these spaces. I kept up the independent shows at least once a year as well as working on my own publicity and eventually got lucky in finding a commercial gallery to take me on. After a few group shows with them and an art fair I was approached by a bigger commercial gallery who wanted to take me on and so I ended up going with them where I’m still showing today.

What do you feel your role is as an artist?

I’m corny and I believe that knowledge and creating is the closest thing to God. I think art has the ability to touch people and take them to a place that nothing else can, to force an individual to stop for a moment amidst the chaos that we call life. Art allows us revel in the moment and consider things greater than our understanding and ourselves.

What first sparked your interest in photography?

In year 10 at high school I met an art photographer Des Crawley for whom my sister was modeling. I expressed interest in what he was doing and so he let

me hang around a bit in his darkroom and basically took me under his wing. I remember he took me to the Art Gallery of NSW where I saw a photograph by Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe. It was an image from his 'Ordeal by Roses' series and it was probably then that I decided that photography was something I wanted to pursue. That style of photography and the whole avant-garde movement associated with it really stuck with me and shaped my style of photography.

Do you have photography heroes?

Eikoh Hosoe as I said was the first that really struck me and made me fall in love with photography. After studying and learning more about photography and different artists, I began looking to and became influenced by Edward Steichen, Daido Moriyama, Nobuyoshi Araki, Andreas Gursky, Bill Henson and Antoine D'agata. Other non-photographer artistic influences include William Turner, Mark Rothko, Cy Twombly, Francis Bacon, Francisco De Goya, Carravagio, and the writer Yukio Mishima. Also David Noonan and Dale Frank are amazing.

What photography gear do you have in your kit?

Well, there are all my film cameras. I have two Nikon F100s, which I have several lenses for, an FE2 and a 35Ti. I also have two Contax T3s, a Ricoh GR1s and a Fuji Klasse S. To be honest I only really use one of the F100s, how stupid is that?! So that would be my favourite. Other essential tools are my scanner and computer.

What inspires or has inspired your body of work?

Just life I think. Anger, joy, love, depression and hate. I think I'm the biggest inspiration to myself, because I could talk all day about how my work is about this or that, but in the end I am just making the works that I enjoy making. The style, mood and metaphor are just a representation of my tastes and aesthetic. Of course you include things that are important to you, motifs, reoccurring symbols and themes that if analysed tell a lot about your inner self. So the works are just little pieces of me.

You shoot 35mm black and white film. What quality do you get from film that you cannot get from digital?

Mainly the film grain and lack of perfection. Digital has a very smooth and sharp look that doesn't suit my work, although to be honest it's easy to replicate the film look with filters in Photoshop. With 35mm film and some of the lenses I use, when you make a big enlargement it has a soft hazy patchiness to it that I exploit. It reminds me of the beauty in the imperfection of the early photographic process. In my early work I used to scratch into the negative and layer negatives in the scanning process which resulted in quite random outcomes. I am more refined in the approach now even though I still hatch into the image and do the layering. It's just



much more pulled back and not as in your face, for lack of a better word. I think in this sense it is much more mature work as it still carries the same feeling and textures of manipulating the film by hand, without the risk of it being too gimmicky.

How do you find your subjects?

The landscape stuff is just from my travels. My family is so spread out and I visit them annually. I'm lucky in that I have lots of opportunities to photograph new places. The portraits are usually

friends or people I know.

What part of the photography process do you most enjoy and why?

I would have to say the printing stage. When you are shooting even though its fun, you never really know if you have got anything usable, especially with film. Same with the conceptual side; you could have all these grand ideas but you may not be able to execute them. But after you have had your film developed, started to scan and manipulate them in

work?

At first I think I did, but now I'm so used to it and it just comes out that way. I think that now I'd have to deliberately think about not making work fit into my style.

Have you always been represented by a gallery? If not, what was the transition process and what tips do you have for emerging artists looking to be represented?

No. I started just by holding my own shows at independent galleries where you hire the space and hold a show. At the same time I would enter every competition and art prize or residency I came across. I would also send out my portfolio to galleries. Early on I got lucky and received a call back from one of the galleries I had sent a portfolio out to. I think it did help that by that time I had a decent CV with previous exhibitions that I had held and also major competitions where I had reached the shortlist stage for, so I think it is a good idea to do that stuff. But at the end of the day it came down to finding someone who believed in me and would give me a chance. I know a lot of people who went to art school and made a lot of connections that way. Art schools always have crowds or crews and so knowing the right people will definitely help. Importantly though, your work has to be confident. I think it's important to have something that people recognise you by whether it's your style of work or whatever.

After I started to sell quite well with my first gallery I was poached by Tim Olsen. At the time the gallery I was with was closing down so of course I went with Tim. He has a big gallery with a lot of artists and the transition was and still is not an easy one. Being represented by a small emerging art gallery compared to a large major commercial gallery with many significant artists on their books is like two different worlds. It's not so black and white, where you can say one circumstance is better than the other. So my best advice would be that if you are lucky enough to choose a gallery to show with, the most important aspect to consider is choosing a gallery that you can build a real friendship and relationship with. The gallery that represents you must truly value your work and be there to work for you. I know many people who are extremely successful and are only showing with smaller

Above: **Ben Ali Ong**, 1000 Years Beside Myself. 2012. Image Courtesy of Ben Ali Ong.

You have a very particular style. Do you think consciously about your style and try to keep new work in keeping with previous

galleries.

What are the routine steps you take in preparing for an exhibition?

Well, since I have been with my current gallery it usually starts with them giving me a date for my next show, so I know I have a body of work to produce by then. I always try to continually produce work when I can. I also have a scrapbook with sketches of ideas that I might want to try do later and a lot of these just live in my head as well. So I do have general ideas to work towards before I have even started. But sometimes it will just happen. Like with the landscape stuff, if I am travelling obviously I will always take all my photo gear along with me and try to shoot as much as possible in the hope of getting something to work with. Other times I might just get lucky and spontaneously think of something or be influenced by something in my environment and a work will come out of it. After I have built up a number of works that I'm happy with, I can then start to plan the exhibition a bit more. Things to consider include the space where it will be installed, figuring out what size the works should be in order to fit the space and look their best, the number of works I need and a title for the show. I will also work with a publicist when I can afford it a few months before the show, although I have not been able to do that the last few times.

Is it important for you that your photographs reach a wider audience than simply an art



audience and why?

Yes. I used to be a bit narrow minded about that thing, but have come to realise that you can't live in your artistic ivory tower forever. Well I guess you can, but it is not what I want to do anymore. I am open to doing a lot of things now, I have done two commissions for a fashion label where I have installed work for them at store openings and functions, and I have designed graphics for clothing companies. It's an honour that these people would ask me to do such things and I'm not above it in any way. Everything is art, including music and fashion.

What long-term goals do you have and wish to share? Are you preparing work for a new show?

I would love to just keep exhibiting successfully and regularly with my current gallery. I would also love to find another gallery overseas or interstate to exhibit regularly with. Another aspiration is that I would also love to start to teaching photography.

I have an upcoming show in August that I'm currently working on which will be on show at Tim Olsen Gallery in Sydney.

Below: **Ben Ali Ong**, 1000 Years Beside Myself. 2012. Image Courtesy of Ben Ali Ong.

