
Contemporary Sculpture Festival Canberra 2005

Dimensions Variable

by Erica Seccombe

*Below: Peter Vandermark
Breakdown, 2005
MDF, rubber, laminates & veneer
270 x 300 x 300cm approx.
Image courtesy the artist*

This year's Canberra Contemporary Sculpture Festival, *Dimensions Variable*, ran from 13 July to 13 August. The three principal exhibition venues were the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, the Craft ACT Craft and Design Centre and the Australian National University's School (ANU) of Art Gallery. And the Festival program also included three curated exhibitions, a series of public lectures, artist talks, on-site performances and sculpture tours around the town. Additionally, The National Gallery of Australia's National Sculpture Prize coincided with the Festival and many local institutions and commercial galleries participated by holding complimentary exhibitions.

The *Dimensions Variable* exhibitions catalogue was worthwhile reading, especially Deborah Clark's introductory essay. Clark perfectly described the sculptural topography of this region. 'The city and its suburbs are spread through wide, rolling plains punctuated with singular hills and ringed, in the distance, by impressive mountain ranges, visible from nearly every angle.'¹ Clark also wrote about the remarkable history of sculpture and performance in the ACT. Citing pertinent works such as *House proud* (1998), Neil Robert's neon text wrapped around the Canberra Play House. Clark also recalled the 2003 controversy that surrounded Jennifer Turpin and Michaelie Crawford's monument to women's suffrage, *Red Fan* (2003), which was scrapped because of the sculpture's proposed siting within the parliamentary triangle. The paradox of being both the Nation's capital city and a large country town has encouraged Canberra to develop a significant and visible sculptural legacy, and this festival was established as a response.

Canberra has always had a strong cultural life, enjoyed by a diverse range of artists and crafts practitioners. Major local events such as this festival have been viewed as a significant social occasion, even in the middle of winter, drawing visitors from interstate and overseas. While there have been some strange curatorial decisions across the three exhibitions, I think as a whole *Dimensions Variable* successfully addressed the Festival's grand premise, 'to broaden the awareness of what sculpture has



come to mean by the 21st century'.² Much of the work encapsulated a sense of exploration and possibility, as the title *Dimensions Variable* suggested. What this Festival offered to the public were a range of sculptural practices, the interests that inspired the sculptors' works, and the connections they made between process and outcomes.

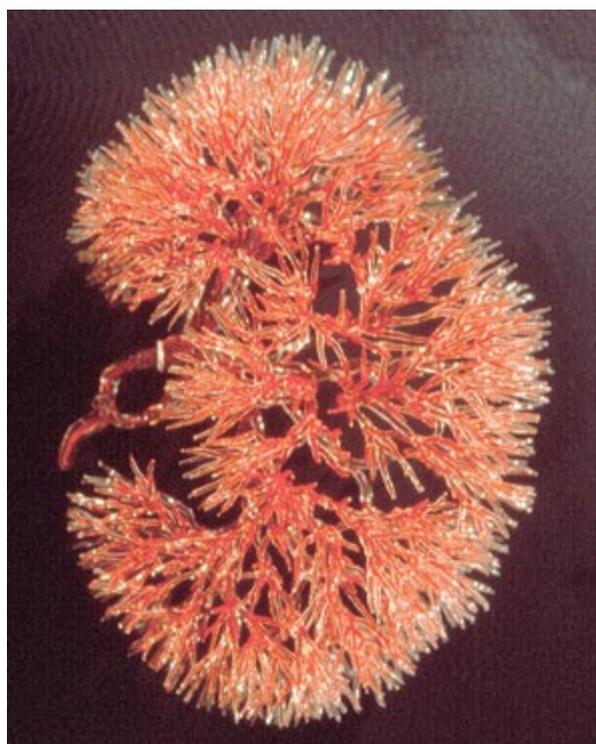
In the first exhibition, *Dimensions Variable 1.1* held at the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Director Lisa Byrne brought together eight artists; Peter Vandermark, Rachel Bowak, Kirsten Farrell, Justin Andrews, Stella Brennan, Andrew Hazewinkel, Anton Marin and Sandra Selig. These artists explored and used space and forms

Below right: Nick Stranks
B.A.T (detail), 2004
Silicone bronze
Photo credit: ANU Photography

Below: Akié Haga
Filtering my emotion, Storing my memory, 2004
Lamp worked glass
42 x 39.5 x 39.5 cm
Image courtesy the artist

Page over: Ellis Hutch
Imagining Antarctica 2005
Glue, cardboard & paper
Dimensions variable

Image courtesy ANU School of Art Gallery

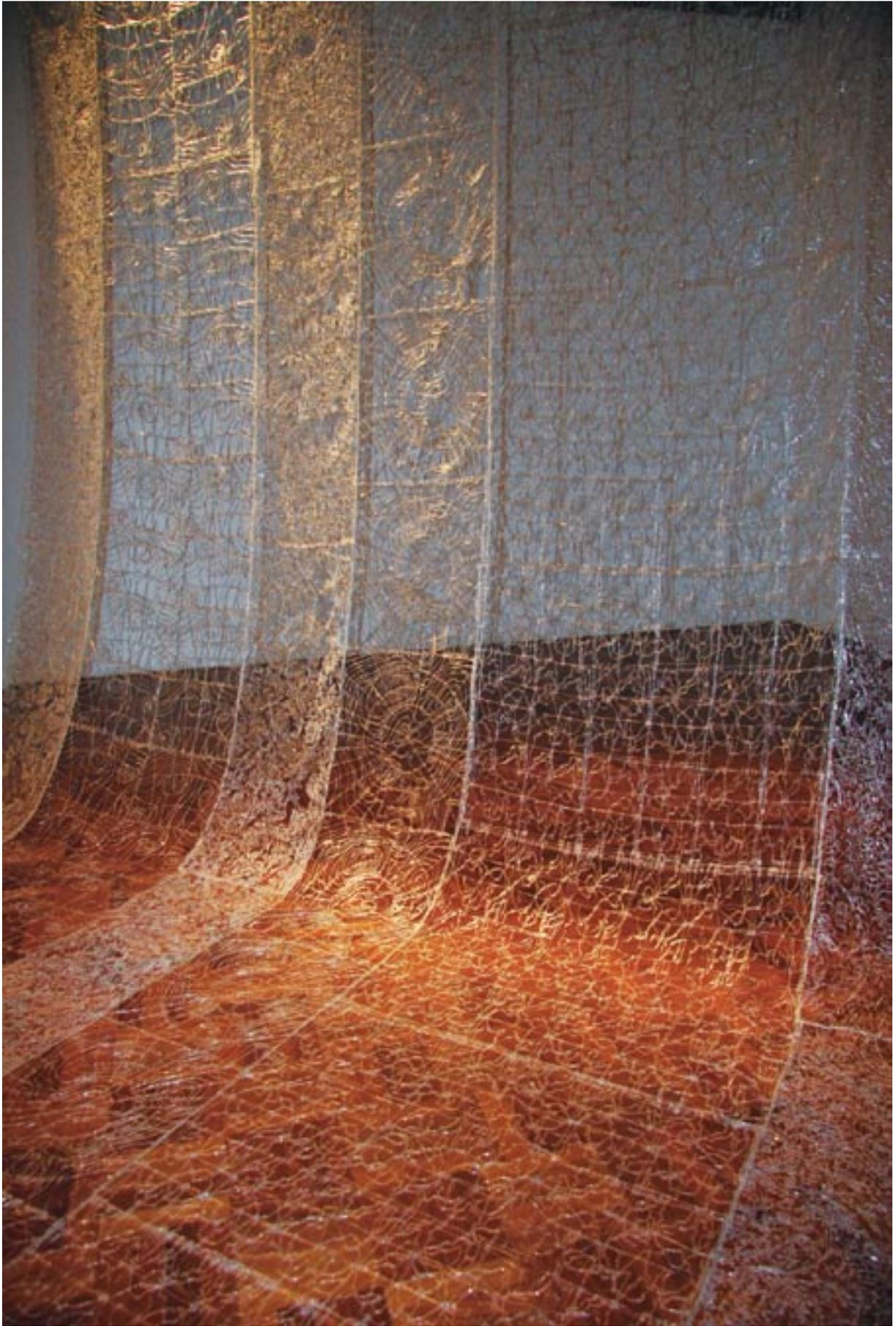


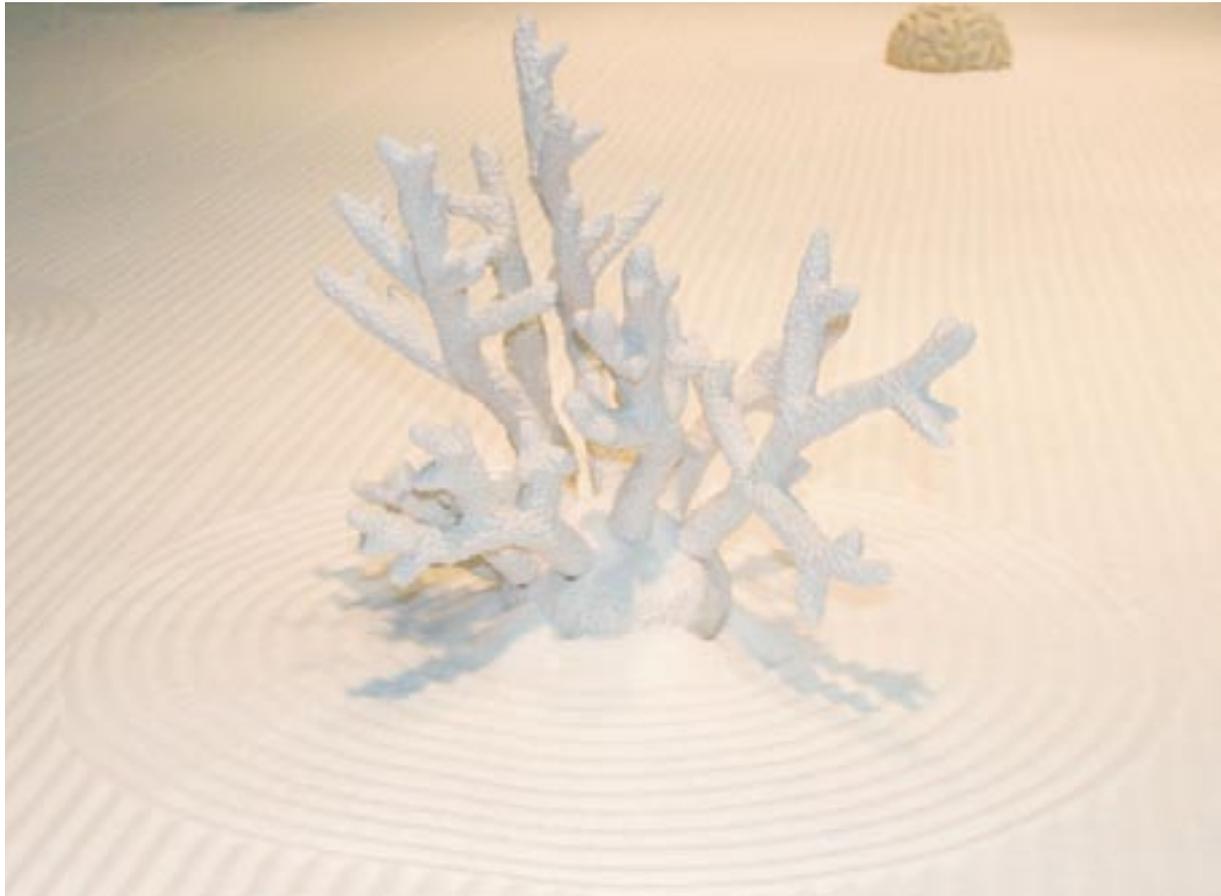
of geometry in very diverse ways. For example Peter Vandermark's *Breakdown* (2005), influenced by a Russian avant-garde aesthetic, occupied a corner of the gallery. By employing strong geometrical lines and totemic wedges, Vandermark's intentional use of this space created a magnetic presence that pulled the viewer's line of sight into its realm. Rachel Bowak's *White noise* (2005), on the other hand, was a quiet autopsy of a refrigerator. Central to our every-day lives, this domestic object was transformed through Bowak's investigation of its internal and external casing. An arrangement of suspended metal shelves cast shadows on the wall adjacent to a precise and minimal metal drawing of the fridge cavity, and on the floor a white, plush, upholstered refrigerator laid on its back, curiously coffin-like.

Dimensions Variable 1.11 at ACT Craft was an interesting component of this exhibition series because it demonstrated the intersection between craft and design disciplines and contemporary art practices. Curator, Jason Hugonnet chose five artists; Anna Gianakis, Akié Haga, Bev Hogg, Zeljko Markov and Nick Stranks, who have

each worked in more traditional mediums such as bronze, wood, glass and ceramics. Nick Stranks' *Classic Bronze Series* (2004) deliberately referenced the historical role of sculpture while at the same time memorialising our increasingly disposable culture. Stranks' solid bronze objects were detailed casts of a late 20th century fax machine, an early apple Macintosh computer and a few other recently obsolete technologies – reminders of a not-so-distant past. Akié Haga's lamp-worked glass pieces are poetic investigations describing the internal workings of the body and soul. Her installation, *Inside my pulse 11* (2004), was a forest of droplets and vein-like strands of pulled glass which had the quality of organic structures seen under a microscope. Haga's *Filtering my emotion, Storing my memory* (2004) was a delicate glass model of the branches of blood vessels in a single kidney. Evoking early medical investigations and romantic notions of the human body, Haga set this beautiful object against polished black glass in which its reflection appeared, completing the symmetry of these two vital organs.

At the ANU School of Art Gallery, the work of four installation artists – Ellis Hutch, Daniel Maginnity,





*Above: Ken Yonetani
Underwater 3 Feb 05, 2005
White sugar, sugar paste, ceramics & Styrofoam
Image courtesy ANU School of Art Gallery*

Ken Yonetani and Jennifer Angus – were included in Dimensions Variable 1.111, curated by Bronwen Sandlands. The large gallery space at the ANU had unusually high ceilings that allowed each of the artists' works to be expansive and adventurous, creating intriguing dialogues in the process. Imagining Antarctica (2005), by Ellis Hutch, was an elaborate hot-glue drawing of Antarctic weather patterns; it draped from ceiling to floor creating spidery polar perspectives of the earth's grid. Beside it stood three small tubes of black cardboard suggestive of travellers' lanterns. On each cardboard tube Hutch had cut out miniature shapes of intrepid explorers, that caused the ceiling lights to cast faint shadowy figures on the floor. Ken Yonetani's Underwater 3, Feb '05 (2005) was a super-white bed of refined sugar combed into mesmerising patterns, rippling around bleached bone-like coral. While the precision of Yonetani's work was largely informed by scientific knowledge, this piece was also emotionally challenging as it invited contemplation of our impact on the natural environment.

In considering Yonetani's piece amongst all of the artists' work across the three exhibitions, narrative appeared to be one of the current central concerns in contemporary sculpture, whether in a historical context, in reference to place or time, by methods of process, through technology, or in found or familiar objects. Dimensions Variable revealed that in the 21st century, artists are still compelled to find ways to describe and make sense of the world in which we live.

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<notes>

1 Dimensions Variable, Contemporary Sculpture Festival Canberra 2005. Exhibition Catalogue, CCAS, Crafts

*Below: Hans Schabus, Austrian Pavillion
Mixed media, 2005
Installation view
All photo credits: Tristian Koenig*

Art & Nation-States: A Bad Idea

by Tristian Koenig

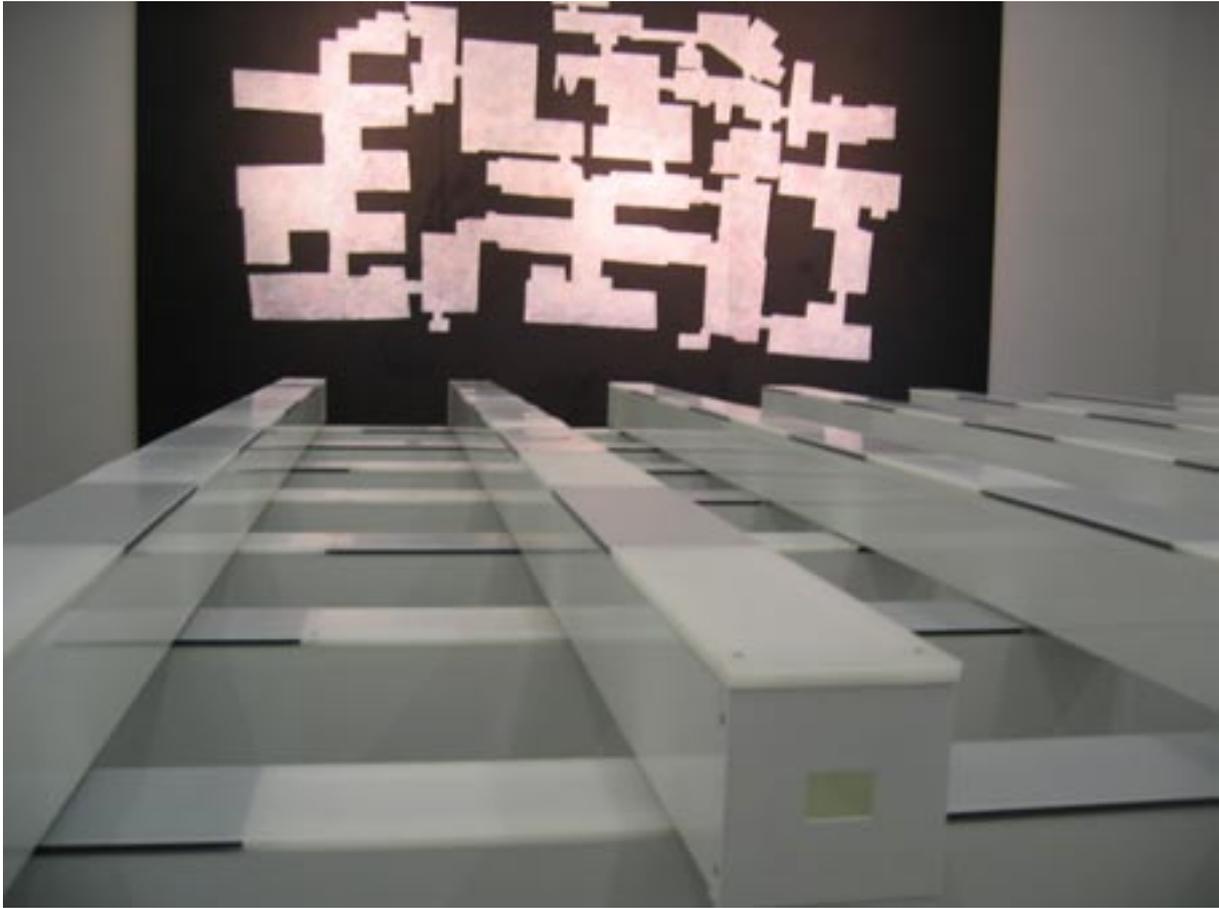
Now in its 51st incarnation, the Venice Biennale is arguably the world's premiere art event. The model of curated exhibitions combined with national pavilions, which the 'biennale of biennales' originated and champions, has been adopted by many subsequent biennales around the world, including the one and only Melbourne International Biennale. Yet it is interesting to note that while the Venice Biennale began in 1895, it didn't initially incorporate national pavilions into its structure. Although in its infancy the biennale hosted international artists and art movements, particularly those of Germany and France, it was not until 1907 that the first national pavilion, Belgium, was built. This was followed in 1909 by the construction of the British, German and Hungarian pavilions, with the expansion continuing up until today, where many national pavilions lie well beyond the tranquil garden grounds of the Giardini della Biennale.

Aside from the two main curated exhibitions at this year's Venice Biennale, *The Experience of Art* and *Always A Little Further*, you couldn't get past the fact that the visiting audience's interest laid primarily in the national pavilions. Sitting down and drinking free coffee provided by one of the biennale's numerous sponsors, people from different countries talked and exchanged opinions about their respective national pavilions and the other pavilions they enjoyed, but not about the merits of the two main shows. Given the current quagmire of global geopolitics, this was no surprise. With the world awash in a frenzy of xenophobia and good old-fashioned Cold War McCarthyism, nationalism has emerged with renewed fervour because, let's face it, the world is in a bit of mess right now. What other recourse do people have but to bury their heads in the sand that surrounds them? 9/11, Kosovo, Chechnya, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, North Korea, Guantanamo Bay, London, Madrid, a Tsunami and Africa. And in our own backyard: Cornelia Rau, the Tampa, Bali, Embassy bombings and the erosion of workers' rights – these are just a few symptoms of the global condition that I am referring to. So rather than simply describe the art at the Venice Biennale, I'd like to talk about the art in the national pavilions in the light of these global events surrounding the art.



The inclusion of Ed Ruscha representing the United States, and Gilbert & George representing Great Britain, were in some ways the smoking gun. Given both nations have nostalgically attempted to relive history through neo-crusades, it was no surprise that they included artists that are part of 'art history'. Joseph Kosuth once remarked with respect to Picasso that the artist had eclipsed his work, making it impossible for us to see his paintings as they once had been.¹ The same was true of Ruscha and Gilbert & George – they are a part of the canon so to speak (pun intended).

Given Germany's opposition to the current war in Iraq, Hans Haake's 1993 Germania installation in the German pavilion and the confluence of art and politics in Germany since the beginning of the 19th century, what the hell was going on this time round? Thomas Scheibitz's quirky modernist vernacular was well executed, but sadly unmoving. While Tino Sehgal's performative



*Above: Greek pavillion, George Hadjimichalis
Hospital, 2004-2005
Mixed media
Installation view*

invigilators who sang “this is so contemporary, this is so contemporary”, left you feeling totally disenfranchised and almost in agreement with Peter Timms’ *What’s Wrong with Contemporary Art* (not!).

Although the Belgian pavilion explored the similar terrain of self-reflexivity and formalist aesthetics, the poetics were far from boring. Honoré 'O's *The Quest* was a large process-based installation, which was the DVD equivalent of the ‘making of,’ rather than the actual film itself; for 'O the filmic component of the DVD was in fact an impossibility. The installation was confused and in places claustrophobic, process-based and studio like, with the work commanding authenticity through sheer pragmatic affect, something which seemed to be lacking in the vast majority of pavilions.

The Greek, Spanish and Romanian pavilions each presented work that advocated art as ‘socially transformative’. George Hadjimichalis’ piece, *Hospital*, in the Greek pavilion, was a response to the World Health Organisation’s 2005 report. Combining various media, *Hospital* also included organising for gallery-goers to give

blood at a Venetian hospital. *On Translation*, Muntadas’ ongoing project in the Spanish pavilion, combined previously discrete bodies of the work to great effect, exploring issues of transcription, interpretation and translation, through a plethora of media, which were conceptually tight and spatially well orchestrated. In the Romanian pavilion, Daniel Korr’s invisible artwork was easy to make fun of, however it wasn’t a joke.² Yeah, the pavilion was seemingly empty, but if you hung around long enough and thought about it hard enough, there was plenty of content. The traces of previous pavilion occupants, combined with the ensuing inequity of Eastern European artists and nation-states such as Romania, against their (Western) ‘other’ provided more than enough food for thought.

Sticking with Eastern Europe, the 51st Venice Biennale included Albania for the first time. Maybe it was the lack of funds, or just maybe there was no space, but Albania didn’t actually have a pavilion, at least in the traditional sense. Artist, Sislej Xhafa produced an impressive temporary public sculpture on the seaside border of the Giardini, next to the atrocious, and unfortunately



*Above: Daniel Kovr, Romanian pavillion
European Influenza, 2005
Installation view*

now permanent, *Mare verticale* by Fabrizio Plessi. Xhafa's work, a 23-metre tall Klu Klux Klan hood that cried tears, recalled the horror of war that Albania has suffered right through the 20th century. Affective, poetic and with obvious popular appeal, *Ceremonial Crying System PV* was in some ways eclipsed by another contribution from Albania, although it wasn't part of the official program. In conjunction with the e-flux organisation, Kosovo artist Albert Heta produced a media release as an artwork, announcing the existence of a Kosovar pavilion. Of course Kosovo is not a nation-state, and hence they obviously would never have been given a pavilion, but the curious thing was that people really believed there was a Kosovar pavilion.

A similar situation that fostered an equitable solution was seen in another Eastern European pavilion, namely Serbia/Montenegro, where each of these countries is represented in an alternate biennale. *The Eros of Slight Offence* included the work of Igor Racevic, Jelena Tomasevic and Natalija Vujosevic, all from Montenegro. Vujosevic's video installation *In case I never meet you again*

was one of the highlights of the biennale. In it, a centrally projected image of a man and woman looking at each other in profile was flanked by two small monitors playing snapshot-like stills on either side. The music was simple and haunting, like a funerary organ from *Bladerunner*. While the main image hovered through slow transitions, producing ghost like after-images, the visuals on the monitors played like rapid-fire memories from the two protagonists. The work captured the effect of what it is like to say goodbye to someone you love, even if only for a few hours. Yet, in relation to Serbia/Montenegro's recent history this could have been forever.

Also in the biennale's pavilion program were the Central Asian Academy of Art (CAAA) and Istituto Italo-Latino Americano (IILA) that each included more than one nation-state. The CAAA represented artists from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, which the biennale's catalogue argued are collectively one of the last remaining blackholes on the art world map. IILA took in a gamut of Latin and Central American countries including Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba,



*Above: Sislej Xhafa, Albanian Pavillion
Ceremonial Crying System PV, 2004
Iron, PVC & water
Installation view*



*Below: Jelena Tomasevic, Montenegrin Pavillion
Joys of Life, 2004
Mixed media
Installation view*

The Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Panama, Paraguay and Peru. It was obvious that both the CAAA and the IILA could have done with more space and resources in the realisation of their pavilions, even though they had an urgency and immediacy lacking in many other exhibits. Artforum's September issue will be devoting a feature to the CAAA pavilion, while Curator of the Sydney Biennale, Charles Merewether, although he didn't want to name who's who in the forthcoming biennale, got excited and spilled the beans about artists from Central Asia for Sydney. In this context, it will be interesting to see what happens to the art and artists of this region in the near future... maybe their own biennale?

Overall there were 55 participating nations in this year's Venice Biennale pavilion program. Of this number, 51 pavilions were devoted to individual nation-states, while 4 pavilions combined more than one country. It is also worth considering how individual artist's practices were represented across the pavilions. There were 30 solo exhibitions (of which five were collaborative) and 25

group shows, with four of these being collaborations and one exclusively devoted to paired collaborative practices.

You know that myth, which proposes that if the world gave away just one per cent of its annual arms budget we could end world poverty? Sure you do. Well I'd like to conclude on the thought that maybe we should mandate the same percentage of global art budgets in the context of 'national representation.' Seeing social, economic and cultural inequities spatialised through art can be heart breaking. When using art as a tool, the forge is never called into question.

Tristian Koenig is a Melbourne based writer and curator.

<notes>

¹ Joseph Kosuth, 'On Picasso,' Art After Philosophy and After: Collected Writings, 1966-1990, (ed) Gabriele Guercio, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1991. pp. 195-198. pg. 195

² Daniel Palmer, 'Wood and other media,' Realtime, No. 68. August/September, 2005. pg. 54

History in the making...

Pitch Your Own Tent

Art Projects, Store 5 & First Floor
Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton
23 June – 27 August 2005
by Brett Jones

Pitch Your Own Tent has brought a specific lineage of artist-run spaces (or ARIs) into the academy of art history: Art Projects, Store 5 and First Floor. Although we have seen shows that profile individual spaces – such as *Inhibodress 1970-1972*¹ at the Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane) in 1989, and more recently in 2005 *Store 5 is...* at Anna Schwartz Gallery – this was the first time that this kind of exhibition has been mounted in such a historicised manner. The intergenerational survey approach of *Pitch Your Own Tent* evidenced the activities of artist-run spaces having become worthy of mainstream academic scholarship.² Which ironically seemed far removed from their original motivations and intentions.

But is it? Was this particular lineage of artist-run activity really outside market-institutional codes and authorising systems? Were they oppositional models in the true sense of the radical avant-garde or were they market leaders for new art? Just where did their aspirations lie and how foreseeable was their entrance into the mainstream annals of contemporary Australian art?

I want to touch on these questions by trying to determine how these spaces and artists went about setting the conditions for their histories to be written. And who indeed, contributed to writing these histories. As an artist, writer, and Director of an ARI, I have often commented that artist-run spaces should be the ones inscribing their own histories, partly out of necessity as no one else is going to do so, but also because their ethos of self-determination entitles them to carve out a historical space. Whether these histories are noticed or embraced by the art academy is another issue.

The 'strategy of curatorial positioning' first adopted by Art Projects represented a direct relationship with the 'system dynamics of art'³, consistent with an understanding that artists required market-institutional recognition in order to develop some form of sustainable practice. While Art Projects may be seen within a radical vanguard tradition, especially through the work of Mike Parr (and Inhibodress⁴), this perception was indexed to a local context. Within the international arena, what was



happening in Melbourne in the early 1980s was largely unexceptional. The local application of the term 'avant-garde' was more of a reaction to what the major art galleries and commercial galleries considered innovative art in Australia at the time.

Pitch Your Own Tent and its accompanying publication made little attempt to give the activities of the three spaces and the art they exhibited any kind of international context. Though this was not necessarily a problem – because the exhibition dealt with contained local histories – it did reveal how the spaces affirmed themselves through a localised community. Although *Inhibodress*, for example, was connected to Art Projects through the exhibition of work by more senior conceptual artists such as Mike Parr, including *Inhibodress* in *Pitch Your Own Tent* would have complicated the curatorial premise by referencing activities beyond Melbourne and Australia. Perhaps it would have made the exhibition unwieldy and presented too many loose threads. Yet it would also have demonstrated just how regional these

Below & previous page:
Pitch Your Own Tent: Art Projects / Store 5 / 1st Floor
Installation view
Monash University Museum of Art, 2005
Image courtesy MUMA



three spaces were, as there were few examples of these artist-run spaces working with organisations overseas or benchmarking their activities with parallel organizations outside Australia.⁵

It is valuable to see exhibitions that provide research and scholarship about strains of practice in Australian art that are less visible to mainstream audiences. New research in museums, however, should also be excavating the obscured, marginalised, underground and non-mainstream activities of artists in Australia. The activities of the three spaces in *Pitch Your Own Tent* were never obscured or marginalised. And though their accomplishments were largely invisible to a general public, they were recognised in varying degrees by the mainstream art world of the day. This dilemma in essence depends on what roles art museums should assume. In the case of museums attached to universities renowned for research, it is appropriate for them to encourage and initiate research into areas not undertaken by the larger state galleries and museums.

Pitch Your Own Tent packaged a linear history that is well bracketed. The connections and links were transparent and the context was well defined. The historical value of the exhibition was predetermined. In fact, it is possible to argue that the historical value was determined by the spaces themselves, while they were operating. Max Delany, curator of the exhibition and Artistic Director at the Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), pointed out '...the exhibition contends that it is artists themselves who are principally responsible for the way in which contemporary art practice is interpreted, and art history written'.⁶

While the extent to which artists are able to influence the writing of their histories is arguable, in the case of the artists represented in *Pitch Your Own Tent*, there were clear indications that they were well aware of the impact of their actions and activities. In this sense, their galleries acted as platforms where discourse and identity could be located. While there were some attempts at framing this discourse within historical, conceptual and aesthetic

*Below: Peter Tyndall
A Person Looks At A Work Of Art/
someone looks at something... (detail), 1980
Courtesy the artist & Anna Schwartz Gallery*



tenets, ultimately all three spaces were determined by operational issues and peer networks, relative to the cultural conditions of the time. For example John Nixon's declaration of Art Projects as a 'radical alternative', or Store 5's emphasis on new abstraction, can be viewed more as individual postures by dominant voices than any kind of doctrinal or programmatic approach embodied within an organisational framework.

As the publication notes, all three organizations had principals who were not only responsible for guidance and management, but also acted as central points for peer networking. Their influence on the direction and preferences of their spaces cannot be downplayed, even through other individuals had significant input. This is most obvious with Art Projects, through the self styled 'private gallery' nature of the enterprise, but was also evidenced in the low-key contained network of Store 5 and the extended social opportunities created by First Floor.

Nixon's predilection for institutional sounding names – Society for Other Photography, Institute of Temporary Art, Art Projects Annex Program – though not intended without irony, implied a proclamation of (self)importance and quasi-institutional alignment. At the time these names probably carried little currency with the 'legitimate' institutions, but they created a certain aura amongst aficionados that has guaranteed them more than a footnote in the artist's biography. Nixon, 'foreseeing the importance of demonstrating that a history of radical art existed in Australia'⁷, ensured that all exhibitions were well documented. Along with numerous publications consisting solely of 'artists pages' bound together, and many letters to curators and institutions, Nixon anticipated and even foretold the positioning of Art Projects and its artists within mainstream Australian art history. These connections were echoed and fostered in Art & Text magazine (est.1981), which was recognised as the 'radical' equivalent of Art Projects.

Store 5 opened in Melbourne in 1989 with a group exhibition that included work by Nixon. Nixon took on a mentoring role at Store 5 and exhibited regularly in the space as well. Robyn McKenzie mounted an argument for the artists involved with Store 5, as continuing the unfinished project of modernism from a contemporary perspective with, 'real, alive and present things to say'.⁸ This direction provided a logical reason for Nixon to act as a mentor, but it also indicated a kind of Melbourne solidarity for revamped modernist abstraction that did not embrace the predominant trend of trans avant-garde practices based on overtly post-modern ideas.

Yet it could be misleading to say that Store 5 solely stood for a new Australian non-representative art. Tony Clark for example, who exhibited at Art Projects, presented work that did not fit so literally into the non-representational modernist canon. Although his significant role in the network, as with many other artists involved with Store 5, overcame any differences of aesthetic preference and art historical affiliation. Tony Clark also exhibited with First Floor, making him the only artist to have exhibited across all three spaces, thereby providing a specific example of the lineage. Clark and other senior artists taught at Victoria College, Prahran where members of Store 5 and First Floor had studied. His involvement with First Floor was similar to Nixon's mentoring role with Store 5 and the way Parr exhibited with Art Projects.

In comparison with the other two spaces, First Floor reflected a less restricted approach to who could exhibit, symptomatic of a move away from perceived 'house styles'. First Floor's aesthetic was more eclectic and socially expansive, while it also had a more collectivist approach to its operations. Whereas Store 5 had little engagement with self-produced critical writing, First Floor represented the new Art & Text generation. Its claim of being an 'artists and writers space' ensured a direct engagement with the reinvigorated emphasis on theory and writing coming from educational institutions at the time. Self-produced writing conformed to the expediencies of the system, but it also harkened back to spaces such as Inhibidress who recognised the text as the work. Though the links to 1970s conceptual art had been thoroughly filtered by this point, the provision of cheaply produced handouts did perpetuate the ethos of the avant-garde.

If these three spaces have contributed significantly to the development of contemporary art in Australia over the last 25 years, as claimed by Delany, then they represent a particular affinity with an art history built with market

and institutional affirmation in mind. They demonstrate the potency of networks and shared experience amongst artists in achieving certain levels of recognition. They demonstrate the potential of artist-run activity to set agendas and influence debate on what constitutes new art.

The exhibition at MUMA raised several problems however, in its presentation of such fluid and active histories in a museum context. Some of the work seemed to sit uncomfortably, relying on identification with the gallery space as a contextualising device. Each of the ARIs represented in *Pitch Your Own Tent* was defined by its location within a separate room at MUMA. One problem is that it is impossible to replicate, or even approximate the context of this work as it was presented at the time; not necessarily due to the specific spatial properties of the work in the actual spaces at MUMA, but because the three artist-run spaces all operated within specific social, cultural and economic circumstances that have not been adequately dealt with in the exhibition. Although the catalogue provided a good historical narrative for the operations of the spaces, neither the catalogue nor the exhibition provided sufficient analysis of the cultural conditions that underpinned the existence – and identity – of these three artist-run spaces.

There were no contexts provided for other artist-run activities occurring in Melbourne or Australia during the same period, or the industry issues these spaces confronted. In this sense, *Pitch Your Own Tent* presents a discrete history that privileges the art and the career paths of the artists included. Yet I found the histories of the organisations more interesting than most of the work. This struggle, between the identity of the gallery and that of the individual artists, is most transparent in this kind of institutional exhibition, where homogenised themes for interpretation need to be provided. There is only so much ground this type of exhibition can cover; within its scope it has told an important and relevant story. But when one understands the real challenges facing artist-run spaces, the reality is not so neat.⁹

I would have liked to see some of these difficulties played out in the show. This would have made for a different kind of exhibition: it would have focussed on the role of artist-run activity as a form of social and political 'way finding', and a way for artists to discover their place in society. But it would have given less credence to the authority of the art object and the monograph. I hope that future exhibitions of defunct artist-run spaces will activate their

*Below: Pitch Your Own Tent: Art Projects / Store 5 / 1st Floor
Installation view
Monash University Museum of Art, 2005
Image courtesy MUMA*



pasts with all the richness and playfulness they created; the uncertainties and difficulties they encountered; and the experimentation and learning they fostered.

Brett Jones is an artist who, writes and initiates projects. He is Director of West Space Inc.

<notes>

¹ Curated by Sue Cramer

² In contrast, the exhibition *Situation: Collaborations, Collectives and Artists' Networks from Sydney, Singapore and Berlin* curated by Russell Storer showing concurrently at MCA, presented the activities of three artist-run initiatives/collectives currently operating. This exhibition discussed collaborative and exchange based practices from an international perspective.

³ Carolyn Barnes, *Defiance as a Constructive Principle Art Projects: 1979 – 1984*, in *Pitch Your Own Tent*, Monash University

Museum of Art, 2005, p.5

⁴ *Inhibodress* operated for 2 years (1970-1972) and was located in Woolloomooloo, Sydney. It was established by Mike Parr, Tim Johnson and Peter Kennedy, who became the three principle artists behind its operation, and subsequent recognition.

⁵ The exception being First Floor's connections with The Physics Room and Fiat Lux in New Zealand.

⁶ Max Delany, *Pitch Your Own Tent*, Monash University Museum of Art, 2005, p.2

⁷ Carolyn Barnes, *Defiance as a Constructive Principle Art Projects: 1979 – 1984*, in *Pitch Your Own Tent*, Monash University Museum of Art, 2005, p.10

⁸ Robyn McKenzie, *The Local group: Store 5 1989-1993*, in *Pitch Your Own Tent*, Monash University Museum of Art, 2005, p.39

⁹ Importantly, a couple of these difficulties are raised by Tessa Dywer, D.J. Huppatz and Sarah Tutton in their text in the catalogue.

The Spaces of the New Museum of Modern Art, New York

The New MoMA

by Kyle Weise

*Below: Exterior view of the
David and Peggy Rockefeller Building
The Museum of Modern Art
designed by Yoshio Taniguchi
Photo © 2005 Timothy Hursley*

In November 2004, the rebuilt and renovated Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in Manhattan reopened to mark the institution's 75th anniversary. The statistics about the rebuilding are vast, various and widely advertised: 150,000 objects, 630,000 square feet, US\$858 million total expansion cost, \$120 million annual operating budget, two million annual visitors, US\$20 admission. The process was lengthy (planning began in the early 1990s), the consultation well documented¹ and the reviews ubiquitous.

Yoshio Taniguchi, the new MoMA architect, claimed that, with a large amount of money, he 'could provide great architecture', but that with a really large amount of money he 'could make the architecture disappear'.² In the constant repetition of the word 'elegant' in descriptions of the new building the neutrality of the new space is much vaunted. The visitor's guide exemplifies this, contrasting the 'elegant' design with the 'dynamic' artwork. Yet the guide also gives us a sense that the space itself is a central attraction. The photograph on its cover shows only the breathtaking scale of MoMA's central atrium, with the space entirely emptied of artwork. Predictably *The New Museum of Modern Art* book, which documents the building and is well illustrated with pictures and designs (of the building, not its contents), is prominent throughout the enormous gift shop.

Elsewhere in the museum Michael Wesely's *Open Shutter* photographic exhibition (20 November 2004 – 27 June 2005) brings the spectacle of the construction into the collection itself. Using the extremely long exposure times that define his work, Wesely documents the entire three-year construction in a single photograph.⁴ There are plans to permanently install several of these photographs on a third floor walkway. No people are evident in Wesely's photographs, their movements too transient to register on such a long exposure, and this is a detail worth keeping in mind. Wesely's work forms part of an overt engagement with architectural and public space that is evident throughout MoMA's current configuration and special exhibitions. There is an obvious reflexivity here as these engagements resonate with debates about



the museum's physical presence within the New York cityscape. No doubt, such concerns have been inspired by both the MoMA renovation and the broader city planning debates about the redevelopment proposals for the World Trade Center site.⁵

Visitors to the new MoMA have their first sustained encounter with the collection in the Contemporary Galleries on the second floor. Two particular works provoke critical reflection on the gallery space and its relationship to the artworks displayed there: Gordon Matta-Clark's *Bingo* (1974) and Rachel Whiteread's *Untitled (Room)* (1993).⁶ The significance of these works results partly from their large scale, but is further reinforced by their inclusion in the Contemporary

Below: Heather Rowe
False Hopes/Silver Clouds, 2005
Wood, sheetrock, plexiglas, wallpaper, paint, carpet, and mirror
Courtesy of the artist
From: *Things Fall Apart All Over Again*
Curated by Cecilia Alemani and Simone Subal



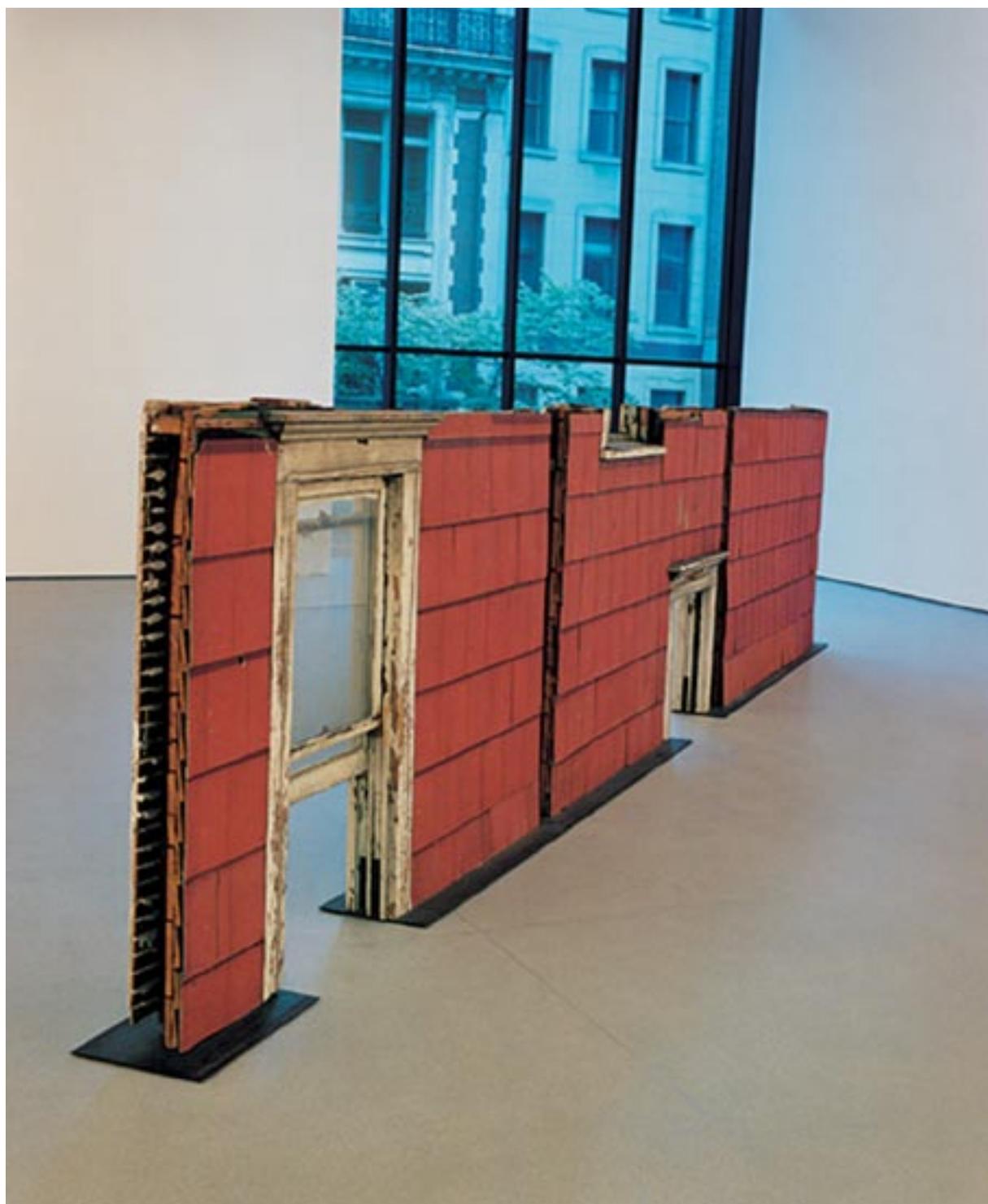
Galleries brochure. *Untitled (Room)* is a plaster cast of a room, drawing attention to the details of ‘empty space’, whether of banal architecture, or a gallery’s exhibition spaces. Yet the effect produced here is simply amazement that the gallery’s enormous volume could so invisibly and effortlessly engulf Whiteread’s room-sized structure, neutralising its site-specific engagement.

Nonetheless, Whiteread’s solidified negative space contrasts with the new MoMA’s celebrated ‘openness’ and permeability, attested to in its many strategically placed windows. Tanaguchi clearly sought continuity between the gallery and the surrounding city space, an association seen in MoMA’s promotional photograph of *Bingo*. An artwork consisting of three large sections from a house façade placed next to each other, the promotional shot of *Bingo* accentuates the work’s confusion of inside with outside, as the windows connect the work to façades visible across the street from MoMA. Yet for the physical observer the room’s massive size and towering, empty white walls effectively work against such productive confusions,

turning the Matta-Clark and Whiteread works into aestheticised objects instead of architectural challenges. MoMA thus promotes the gallery as a container of art, rather than a collaborator in our experience of art. It is this very absence of collaboration that privileges the aesthetics of the gallery space itself at the artworks’ expense.

The evocations of personal lived spaces in Whiteread’s and Matta-Clark’s works share the conceptual and structural concerns for architectural space in *Things Fall Apart All Over Again*, which was curated by Cecilia Alemani and Simone Subal for another New York gallery, Artists Space. Included in this show was Carlos Bunga’s *Artist’s Space Project* (2005), which involved the construction of a cardboard house in the gallery. This was subsequently torn down in a performative gesture, leaving only a few remains for the viewer to access. The process of construction and demolition was shown in photographic slides near the remains. Heather Rowe’s *False Hopes/Silver Clouds* (2005) and *Untitled* (2005) used

Below: Gordon Matta-Clark
Bingo, 1974
Building fragments, three sections
175.3 x 779.8 x 25.4 cm
Gift of Joan Tisch and purchase
© Estate of Gordon Matta-Clark/Artists Rights Society (ARS), New York



Below: *Carlos Bunga*
Artists Space Project, 2005
Cardboard, packing tape, paint, light box & slides
Courtesy of the artist
From: Things Fall Apart All Over Again
Curated by Cecilia Alemani and Simone Subal



both raw and finished building materials to evoke those invisible structures that separate interior and exterior, while also revealing the signifying potential of even the most banal objects when their context is altered. Rowe's spaces of mirrors and broken glass, like Bunga's 'house', elicited imagined constructions of the former lives and uses of Artists Space, as well as the distant, scattered and personal spaces which each work implied in its partial (re)construction. The relatively intimate space of this gallery, and the careful consideration of relationships between works, undid the binary of inside and outside through the site-specificity of the gallery as itself a 'space' to be explored. This exhibition then, produced the reflexive spatial dialogue that MoMA resisted.

Paradoxically it is the open-plan layout of MoMA that fades the works into the background and leaves the viewer unengaged.⁷ Some works are visible from numerous galleries, countering reflection on any particular work alone. There is an apparent desire here, as noted by

various critics, to impel people to move quickly through the collection, spurred on by seeing other works ahead. However, the connection of this effect to 'reduced attention spans' (according to Benjamin Buchloh) and the 'electronic age' of channel surfing (Yve-Alain Bois) has a questionable moralistic edge.⁸ Nevertheless, the gallery's open-plan layout and its vistas of masterpieces does preclude sustained engagement with individual works. Such foregrounding of the Collection would be less problematic if curatorial choices were based on more than just the decade of the works' construction. Bois's grumbling over the historical collection's construction of a history of apparently innocuous plurality, rather than engaged disjunctions, is ultimately warranted, and applicable to the contemporary collection as well.

If MoMA sought integration with the urban environment of New York, as part of this ascendancy of neutrality over polemic, then its foil is that other New York art icon: the Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Solomon R. Guggenheim

Museum. Significantly, this relationship between the Guggenheim and the city was explored by filling the gallery interior with Daniel Buren's monumental installation *Around the Corner* (2000-05). This work was the centrepiece for Buren's retrospective, *The Eye of the Storm: Works in Situ by Daniel Buren* (25 March – 8 June 2005). Two enormous mirrored walls intersected at ninety degrees and extended vertically from the foyer to the full height of the central rotunda. The structure was reminiscent of the glass-curtained skyscrapers that fill Manhattan, among other large wealthy cities. As the viewer walked up the spiral and behind the façade, they were confronted with exposed scaffolding, a sight that also defines much of the visual landscape in the constantly changing metropolitan environment. The effect was to juxtapose the Guggenheim spiral with the grid of Manhattan and to assign a kind of violence to the supposed regularity of the city. A dynamic interaction emerged between Buren's work and the gallery, and in this case a dramatic engagement with conceptions of public space and architecture.

An engagement with architecture and public space is perhaps inherent in the design of the Guggenheim and Buren's work plays off this. MoMA, by contrast, confines such topics to its exhibition program, soberly exploring this through three special exhibitions running simultaneously: *The High Line* (20 April – 18 July 2005), *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape* (25 February – 16 May 2005),⁹ and *Thomas Demand* (4 March – 30 May 2005).¹⁰ Resonating with each other across the museum's various departments and galleries, the architectural and spatial concerns of these exhibitions again drew our attention back to the building itself.

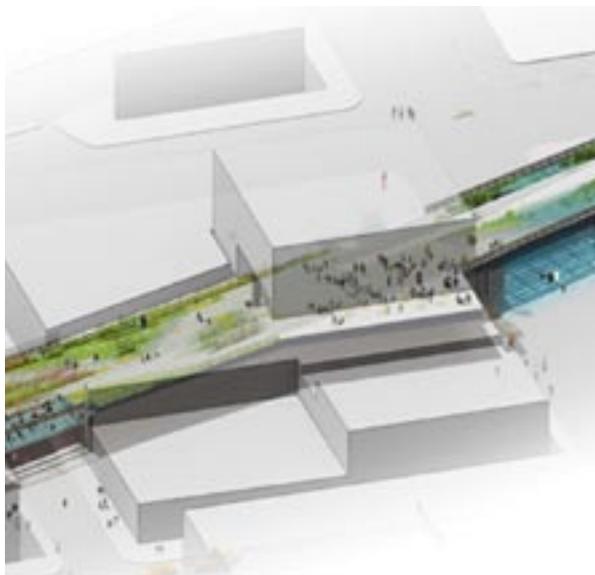
During my tour through these exhibitions, two works from the Contemporary Galleries, where I began my journey, constantly returned to my thoughts: Gerhard Richter's *Cityscape* (1970)¹¹ and *The Voluntary Prisoners from Exodus, or the Voluntary Prisoners of Architecture* (1972) by Rem Koolhaas and Elia Zenghalis with Madelon Vriesendorf and Zoe Zenghalis.¹² Both works comment upon institutional constructions and representations of architecture and public space. *Voluntary Prisoners* presents, through diagrams and text, an absurd and savagely satirical futuristic architectural vision. A massive and architecturally complex, though largely decorative, walled structure cuts across central London. Inside this heavily fortified and guarded structure, we find the voluntary prisoners, blissfully separated from the degenerating city outside, as they embrace a rigorously

regimented life of repetition, homogeneity, organised death and hallucinogens.

As I wandered amongst the models and graphic illustrations of *The High Line* exhibit, *Voluntary Prisoners* immediately sprang to mind. *The High Line* shows models for a recreational public space to be built on a disused elevated rail line along mid-Manhattan's far west side. The site appears to be the perfect public space, because of its easily patrolled two entrances ("DVS Associates, Site Security"). The elevation provides a public space that literally has no need to consider its context, as it exists above and separable from the messy reality of the surrounding city.

In *The High Line*, as in the *Groundswell* exhibition that showcased twenty-three projects for public space from around the world, the aerial perspective dominates. This recalled Richter's *Cityscape*, a painting based on an aerial photograph of a city and reminiscent of the military reconnaissance photographs associated with Edward Steichen.¹³ Moving closer to *Cityscape* serves to blur details rather than sharpen them. The painting thus critiques both the institutional dominance of aerial photography and also its instrumentality, for the detailed texture of a pedestrian's point-of-view is irrelevant to the use or value of such images (be this for planning a military strike, or a public works project). There is a certain utilitarian explanatory requirement for the synoptic perspectives that define *The High Line* and *Groundswell*, but they also allow for such public sites to be understood as exercises in formal elegance; their significance to be found in the symmetry of the technical diagram, or in decontextualised models over which we can cast our eye. Similarly, anything approaching a pedestrian view or experience of MoMA is ignored in the most common promotional shots of the museum, as in the one reproduced here (and as with the Wesely photographs). If human scale and physical interaction with the artworks seem irrelevant to the new MoMA's design, this is probably because the building, and by extension the work that it contains, is most appropriately experienced on the Internet, or in the pages of art magazines anyway. Such images of MoMA, and other institutions at the nexus of art, architecture and commerce, perform obviously vital and practical functions, and are crucial to tourism and funding. The consequence is that these sites, just as with Federation Square in Melbourne, become spaces rather than places: together with their famous collections they function and circulate most comfortably in the realm of electronic and mechanical reproduction, and this is a design principle.

Below: Field Operations and Diller, Scofidio + Renfro.
*The High Line, preliminary design, axonometric,
West 13th Street to West 14th Street. Computer-generated image.*
© 2005. City of New York. All rights reserved.



The concurrent retrospective of Thomas Demand's photographs at MoMA is of particular relevance to these ideas. Demand uses cardboard to recreate life-size models of scenes portrayed in found images (usually from the media), excluding from these life-size models any representation of human figures in the original images. Demand then photographs these physical reconstructions to produce the large colour prints that constitute the displayed artwork. The resulting images are uncanny, in that they seem both familiar and unfamiliar. His images denaturalise physical space, while simultaneously drawing our attention to the significance of photographic images in defining and constructing our understanding of contemporary spaces and places.¹⁴ When considered in relation to the ideas raised by these various special exhibitions, my earlier concerns over the physical visitor's visual experience of the works in the Contemporary Gallery seem irrelevant to what, in many ways, is MoMA's most significant function: the production and publication of photographs of artwork.

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<notes>

- 1 See, for example, *Imagining the Future of the Museum of Modern Art*, Studies in Modern Art 7, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1998.
- 2 See, for example, Kelly Devine, "Modernizing the Modern", *Artnews* Nov. 2004, pp.142 – 146; and Terry Smith, "Making Manhattan Modern, but not Contemporary, Again: The Museum of Modern Art, New York, Reopens", *Art Monthly Australia*, Apr. 2005, pp. 3 – 9.
- 3 Mark Wigley, "The 425 Million Steps from Intimacy to Elegance", *Artforum* Feb. 2005, pp. 133 – 136, 191, 194.
- 4 See Sarah Hermanson Meister, *Michael Wesely: Open Shutter*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2004.
- 5 See, for example, Suzanne Stephens, *Imagining Ground Zero: Official and Unofficial Proposals for the World Trade Center Site*, Rizzoli, New York, 2004.
- 6 *Bingo* is a recent acquisition, while the significance of *Untitled (Room)* had been asserted by the MoMA previously, in Kirk Varnedoe, Paola Antonelli, Joshua Siegel (eds.), *Modern Contemporary: Art at MoMA Since 1980*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 200, p.359.
- 7 One MoMA brochure claims that the Contemporary Gallery can be divided into smaller spaces, though the current decision at the moment is to leave it open.
- 8 Yve-Alain Bois, "Embarrassing Riches", *Artforum* Feb. 2005, pp. 137 – 139, 194, 200-201; Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, "Our Own Private Modernism", *Artforum* Feb. 2005, pp. 141 – 142, 201, 206.
- 9 See Peter Reed (ed.) *Groundswell: Constructing the Contemporary Landscape*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2005.
- 10 See Roxana Marcoci, *Thomas Demand*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2005.
- 11 Sometimes titled *Townscape*. For reproductions see: Robert Storr, *Gerhard Richter: Doubt and Belief in Painting*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2003, p.30.
- 12 Notably, this work appears in *MoMA Highlights: 325 Works from the Museum of Modern Art*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1999, p.294. The entire work is documented in Jeffrey Kipnis, ed. *Perfect Acts of Architecture*, Museum of Modern Art, New York, 2001, pp.15 – 33.
- 13 See Allan Sekula, "The Instrumental Image: Steichen at War", *Artforum* Dec. 1975, pp.26 – 35.
- 14 Notably, Demand's work was exhibited in Melbourne two years ago as part of *Real Space Conceptual Space* (RMIT Gallery, 6 January – 1 March 2003), a show exploring photographic engagements with public space. See Ute Eskildsen (ed.) *Real Space Conceptual Space: Photographic Works: Susanne Brügger, Thomas Demand, Heidi Specker*. Trans. Helen Gibbons and Ingrid Taylor. Institut für Auslandsbeziehungen, Stuttgart, 1998.