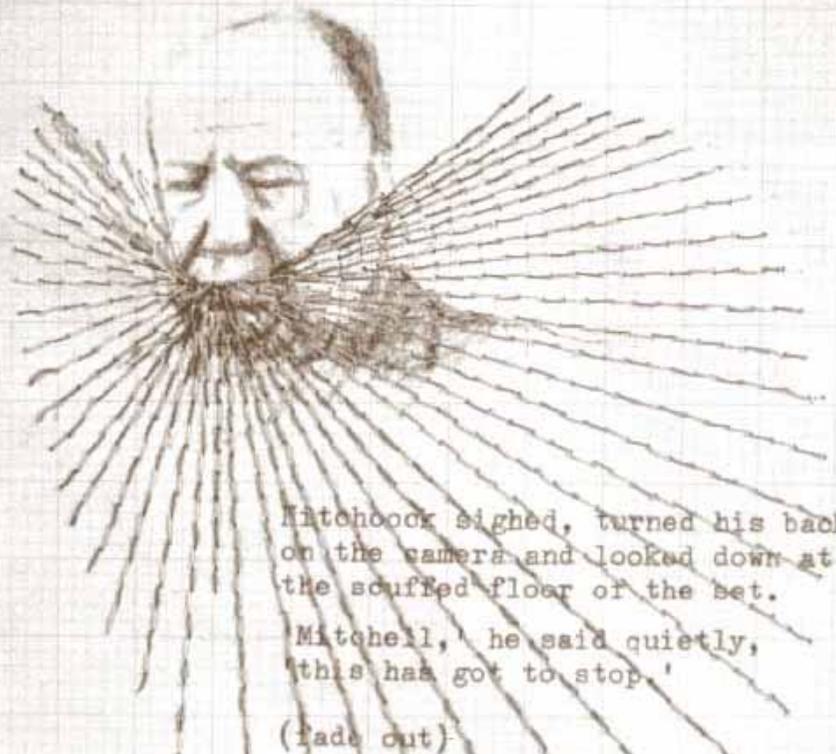


un. magazine

art reviews of other magazines should have ISSUE 2



Mitchcock sighed, turned his back on the camera and looked down at the scuffed floor of the set.

'Mitchell,' he said quietly, 'this has got to stop.'

(fade out)

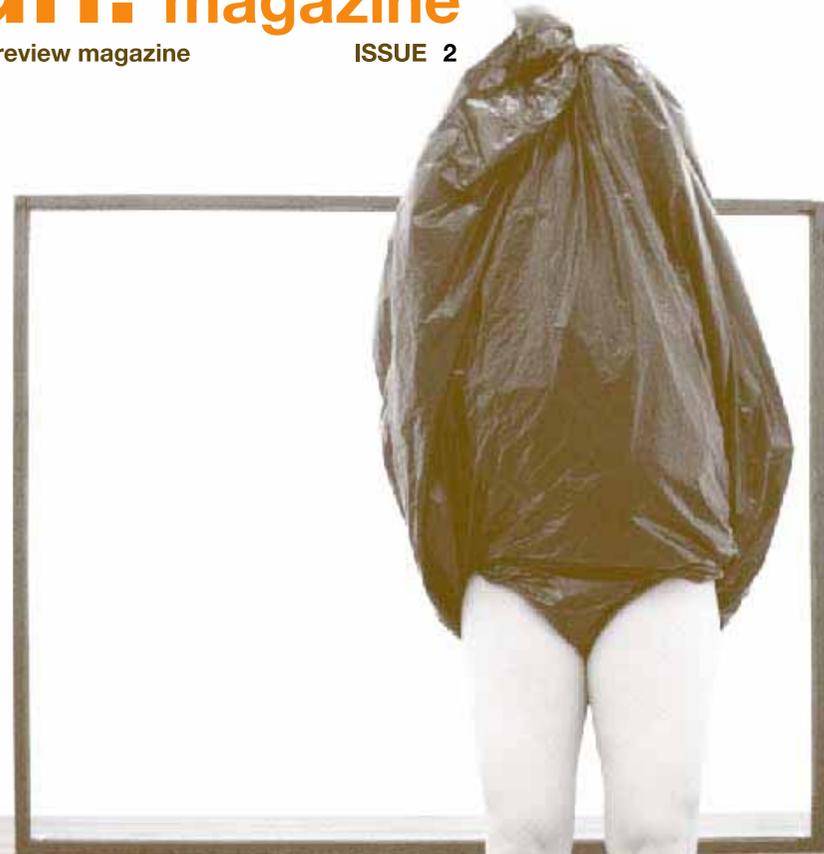
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ISSUE 2



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Deep & Shallow
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un Back cover image:
Chris Bond
July 17, 1959 (as Charles Leonard Mitchell) [detail], 2002
Charcoal, thread, type on paper, 29.7 cm x 21 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

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2004

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ISSN 1449 - 6747

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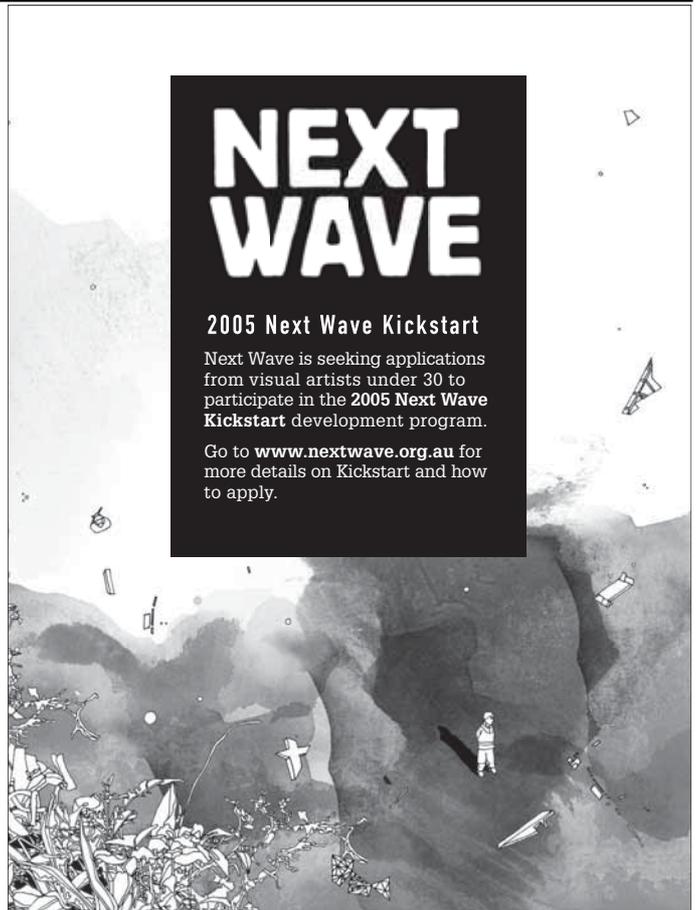
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un Editorial

un Magazine is in the unusual position of accepting proposals for submission, whereby our content is driven by the arts community, enabling us to have an overview of the art scene. Not that this makes the opinions expressed authoritarian in any way, rather, it is the chance to develop a greater diversity of critical voices. It is from this organic model that a few prominent streams of artistic practices and concerns are brought to our attention.

In this second issue of un Magazine the realms and limits of sanity are explored in articles on Chris Bond, Starlie Geikie, Sarah Lynch and the 2004 Biennale of Sydney. On a lighter note, the unreal and the ridiculous are investigated in the recent works of David Keating and Ieuan Wienman, Ed Wakeham, Geoff Robinson, and the New Zealand artist VJ Rex. And our cover image is a still from *Deep & Shallow*, a new video work by Laresa Kosloff that is examined in terms of humour and the body at length on pages 9 to 11.

The topic of politics and art continues, following from (if anyone followed) Philip Brophy's *Picture Perfect Political Art*. In issue 2 we have Tristian Koenig's overview of art, politics and censorship in *A typical observation essay*, on pages 7 & 8. And proving that artists can be politically motivated, a national report on the 'Say no to nothing' action has been compiled, with first-hand accounts from participants and critics and snapshots taken on the day (please note that this article is posted online at www.projekt.com.au). But let's put politics aside, and applaud the artists and contributors included in this second issue of un Magazine. It's a great achievement, and it belongs to all of us.

In closing, I am thrilled to announce that un Magazine has recently established an editorial committee, which is comprised of Zara Stanhope, Jeff Khan, Brendan Lee and Din Heagney; all of whom will be bringing their expertise and dedication to art and arts writing onboard for 2005.

Lily Hibberd

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

For this issue we have inaugurated an online supplement for additional content. We would also encourage you to download the PDF (it's small) to view the fabulous colour images and get a better idea of the art work.

Articles in the online supplement:

'Say no to nothing' national report & photographs

A recent display of drawings by Alex Pittendrigh at MIR11

qnoors_inbox as part of 'Australian Culture Now 2004'

'Absence of Innocence' a review of the *Innocence™* project

'Peloton: an art-critical space opens in the material city'

un Acknowledgements

un Magazine would like to thank: Victoria University of Technology for the supply of copy paper, The Centre for Ideas at the Victorian College of the Arts for use of their photocopier; Grand Ridge Brewery for ongoing support at un Mag launches; Conical Inc. for hosting the event; and Kings Artist Run Initiative for website space. Thanks also to all of the brilliant contributors; plus Jeff Khan and Din Heagney for editorial assistance, Brendan Lee for the slick layout, and most importantly all of our readers, subscribers and advertisers.

un Submissions

We are currently seeking expressions of interest from prospective writers for un Magazine #3. Please specify exactly which artist or artists you wish to review and when & where their exhibition is to be held. We would also appreciate a brief 200 word description of the approach you are planning to take in your article. Priority will be given to articles on artists who are not normally reviewed, as our mission is to create a review forum outside of the mainstream media. un Magazine prefers writing in an accessible and non-academic style. Please feel free to discuss your proposal with the editor, prior to submission.

Submit your proposal by 15 November 2004 via email to lilyhibberd@eudoramail.com

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Chris Bond

'Ungame'
by Penelope Trotter

In the *Penguin, Masters and Slaves* series, shown at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in 2004, Chris Bond has carefully painted two Penguin book covers whilst presenting the original books in separate display cases. They are painted as part of the *Cult Classic*, an exhibition with the premise that everything in the show comes in cult form.

The books are comparable to medieval scriptures engraved on vellum by scribes. They are painted in so much loving detail that we can see the dog-eared corners, cracks, smudges and stains still intact. The titles have been taken away in order to remove their identity. In painting the book covers Bond likes to think he has preserved them from oblivion. They emerge as artifacts from a parallel civilisation similar to our own.

The most prominent features of his book paintings are the abstract shapes that dominate the book covers, which have been influenced by painters from the modernist period such as Piet Mondrian and Kasimir Malevich. Mondrian and Malevich were both abstract painters who, at the height of their careers, were interested in creating an entirely metaphysical style of art by removing any unnecessary elements to the works. To do this they would concentrate on painting pure blocks of colour that would emanate particular emotions. Once when Kasimir Malevich compressed the whole of the painting into a black square on a white canvas he said 'I feel only night within me.'¹ This is similar to some of the references that Bond makes about his own works – but Bond seems to go a few steps further.

Mondrian, in his abstract works, was interested in the balancing of positive and negative with arrays of abstract shapes and blocks of pure colour. Bond is also interested in this balance between positive and negative, as evidenced in his use of raw linen in his book paintings: to him this represents 'negative space.'² In revealing the raw linen behind the book images, he encourages the form to float in negative space.

There is a second aspect to Bond's artistic practice that

Below: Chris Bond
Gianfranco Morosini's Hygrograph
Detail from *The Hitchcock Feldmar Affair*, Gertrude CAS, 2002



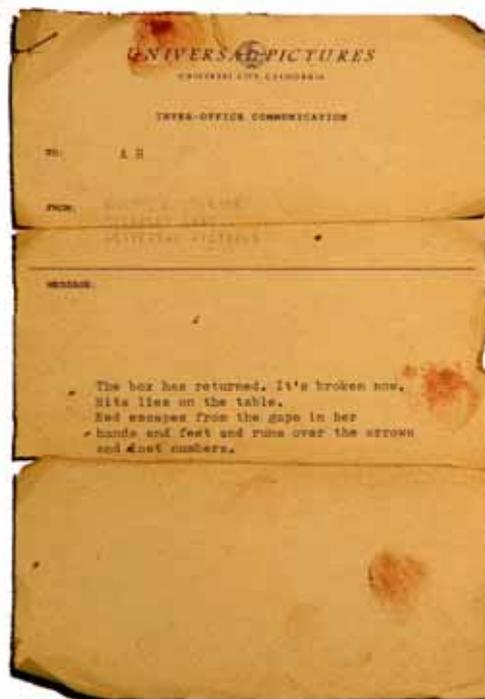
is much more peculiar. Bond uses techniques of method acting and automatic writing to make monologues and paintings of several different alter egos whilst sitting alone in his studio.³ Bond names these his 'fiction' pieces. Two of the images that appear in *Masters and Slaves* are made using this method: *Red Field II 1957* (as Anne Wallace) and *Morton's Wharf 1958* (as Peter Markovich), both of which are abstract depictions of nature. These works appear as vast arrays of tonal contrast and light, and there is a suggestion that they have been constructed via hallucinatory or subconscious means. In Bond's anecdotal works there are even stranger examples of his 'fiction' pieces. In these works Bond entirely enters the frame of the artwork as if it were the space of his own mind.

Below: Chris Bond
 Abstract Remnant 0404.2 2004
 Oil on linen

Penguin – Masters and Slaves, Gertrude CAS, 2004



Below: Chris Bond
 The last memo from Feldmar to Hitchcock
 Detail from The Hitchcock Feldmar Affair, 2002



The first we see of Bond's obsession with Alfred Hitchcock is the work titled, *If it's inside the frame everything should be OK. (Feldmar to Hitchcock, 1953)* (2002). This piece is presented in the form of a memo written by one of Hitchcock's studio security guards to the film director. At a visual level, the most prominent concern is the dialogue that exists around the most appropriate way of creating a formalist painting. Besides the obvious literal definition, the work also prompts us to wonder that if Hitchcock were interested in committing a murder he could avoid being considered as the perpetrator if he included it within the frame of the cinematic image.

With the invention of an alter ego by the name of Charles Leonard Mitchell, Bond introduces the idea of mistaken identity to his work. The *Charles Leonard Mitchell (as Chris Bond)* works have been created as a means of escaping a structuralist methodology and are the most eerie works in the series. Here Bond assumes the guise of an outsider artist to meticulously and sporadically outline his non-ego's alleged interactions with Alfred Hitchcock. Bond refers to these works as constituting a 'Heart of Darkness',⁴ as Charles Leonard Mitchell's pursuit of Alfred Hitchcock is similar to Marlow's search for Kurtz in Joseph Conrad's novel *Heart of Darkness* (1917). In these stories, both characters find themselves going on an intense psychological journey because they are bewildered by 'the illuminating, the most exalted and the most contemptible, the pulsating stream of light, or the deceitful flow from a heart of impenetrable darkness'.⁵

The narrative emerges from works of art therapy made by Charles Mitchell at The Burbank County Hospital in California, where he is in respite after attacking a Universal Pictures security guard. Watercolours of Hitchcock directing his films have dressmaking pins carefully placed around his head – penetrating what would seem to be the impenetrable.⁶ Some of these pins are placed in crucifix formation and threaded with red cotton. Words are typed sporadically, expressing the tortured artist's frame of mind.

It is in his next anecdotal work, titled *The Hitchcock/Feldmar Affair* (2002) that Bond decides to take on the personality of a murderer. More typed notes from Hitchcock's security guard Warren H. Feldmar comprise the installation, but this time they are pieced together to solve the murder of Rita Penhurst. Notes with captions such as 'It can't be a coincidence that I've run out of excuses,' and 'Now listen to me. This is important. The box has a glass face with two arrows and some numbers beneath it, and I see those arrows move sometimes',⁷ outline Feldmar's regression into an acute paranoid state.

Jacques Lacan's 'paranoiac'⁸ has often been referred to and mimicked throughout the history of performance art and modernism, and dates as far back as the paintings of Salvador Dali, as a way of tapping into parts of our subconscious that we often do not accept to be part of ourselves. Lacan's paper presents paranoia as

distinguishable from other forms of delusional disorder because the sufferer is able to 'create for himself a complete and logical systemization of his delusions'.⁹ This is the kind of thing that Bond is simulating in his 'fiction' works.

As we read through Bond's exhibit, Feldmar challenges the science of epistemology in order to try and maintain a grip with reality. From one note to the other, we notice the discolouration of the paper is becoming darker and darker and a plaque at the side of the installation suggests that a gas leak may be what is responsible for Feldmar's madness.

Bond then takes on the alter ego of art critic Anita Bjorklund, who writes a review about Feldmar. This review appears very postmodern but, ironically, we find that it does not make much sense. Bjorklund describes that during Feldmar's regression into madness Hitchcock's secretary Peggy zealously guards each note, or 'the treasures of modernity,' so that they may play some role in the 'afterlife'.¹⁰ We realise that Bond is really speaking of himself and the way that he obsessively guards the treasures of modernity in his own paintings. Thus these 'non-ego,' works could be viewed as a renunciation of the self and an attempt to address the amount of structuralist critique he has put into his paintings. As Bond describes, they are a loosening up of the self conscious and analytic artistic ego.

The next anecdotal work that Bond showed was at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in November 2002. This is a repetition of the work titled *If it's inside the frame everything should be OK. (Feldmar to Hitchcock, 1953) (2002)*, but this time it is presented as part of an ensemble with two other simple *Frame* works. This ensemble includes a small linen covered frame, as well as a semi reflective graphite mirror set into an ornate gold frame. The linen covered frame acts as the purest example of the negative space that Bond refers to when revealing raw linen in his paintings. The semi reflective mirror of Bond's is very shadow like. It stands in strange contrast to the ornate gold frame that encases it, and in a way the golden frame effectively purges the dark aspect of his practice back out of the work. The mirror in this context becomes like the one that Lacan speaks of, as it exposes parts of the self that are unacknowledged or denied by consciousness.¹¹ In Bond's case, his mirror reflects what comes to the surface when he lets go of the constraints of the self-conscious and analytic artistic ego. In this mode we find that aspects of the self are revealed that the artist has no control over.

Even in the most recent works, Bond still combines the metaphysical with ideas gleaned from 'paranoiac' thought processes. This brings us to question the possibility of art as a construct that simply exists as a figment of a person's imagination. In viewing these contrasts between positives and negatives we also realize that Bond's works are not as



Above: Chris Bond
Abstract Remnant 0404.1, 2004
Oil on linen
76 cm x 76 cm
Image courtesy of the artist

detached as they initially seem. It appears that in Bond's practice there also exists the Romantic principle that 'only through acceptance of the soul's dark side can a person become spiritually whole'.¹²

1 Kasimir Malevich cited in George Rickey, *Constructivism: Origins and Evolution*, George Baraziller, New York, 1995, p.24.

2 Theo Van Doesburg, from *Principles of Neo-Plasticism* cited in Paul Overy *De Stijl*, Studio Vista, London, 1969, p.204.

3 Chris Bond, studio interview, 2002.

4 Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, Penguin, 1985.

5 Conrad, *Heart of Darkness*, 1985, p.79.

6 *ibid.*

7 Chris Bond (as Anita Bjorklund), *Dyrythmic endgame scenarios in the memoranda of Warren H.Feldmar*, 2002, p2.

8 Jacques Lacan, 'The mirror stage as formative of the function of the "I" as revealed in psychoanalytic experience,' (1949) in *Ecrits: A selection trans A. Sheridan*, Norton, 1949, 19, pp.1-7 & Lacan, "Aggressivity in Psychoanalysis," in *Ecrits* pp.8-29.

9 Marina Scharf, *Liberation Through Art: Dada and Surrealism*, The Open University, Sussex, 1976, p.70.

10 Bond (as Anita Bjorklund), 2002, p.2.

11 Lacan, 'The mirror stage' and (1949) 'Aggressivity in Ecrits, pp.1-29.

12 Ken Johnson, 'Cindy Sherman and the Anti Self: An Interpretation of Her Imagery,' *Arts Magazine*, Vol.62, No.3, 1987, p.47.

Penelope Trotter is a Melbourne based performance artist and a lecturer in Fine Art Theory at Monash University Gippsland and Latrobe College.

A typical observation essay

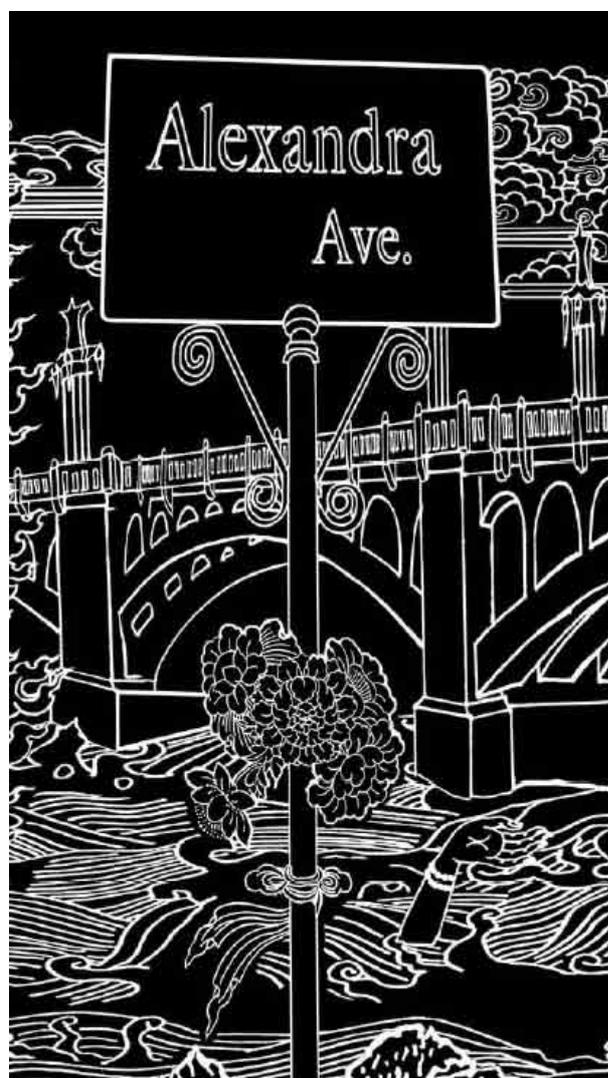
by Tristian Koenig

Earlier this year a certain gallery, 24seven (an Artist-Run Initiative on Flinders Street in Melbourne), had two exhibitions, *Fifty-Six* and *Alexandra Avenue*, which pissed off at least three different cultural groups: Jews, Palestinians and Vietnamese. While it's not great that these groups felt offended by the art works, what is good was that these exhibitions made people think, act and speak. Admittedly some voices were quickly silenced whereas others wouldn't shut up and some actions were absurd – like holding press conferences in front of the art works, or categorically denying the art works were art (hadn't they heard of Reinhardt, Judd or Kosuth?).

Fifty-Six was conceived as a collaborative installation between Azlan McLennan and Utako Shindo. From what I've heard, they intended it to be a perversion of the surrealist game *Le Cadaver Exquis* (exquisite corpse) in which one artist would have their installation in the window of 24seven for one week, the other would then respond, and so forth for the month-long duration of the exhibition. We all know that Azlan had the first week and what happened next.

The removal of the first instalment of *Fifty-Six* on the basis of factual errors it contained was really interesting for two reasons. Firstly, it offended people who scoffed at the removal, those who would appeal ultimately in some way to the Magna Carta by saying some crap about freedom of speech and expression. Secondly, while appearing to appease 'the powers that be,' I think the removal of the work by the artists was strategic. The admission that one of the pieces of information the installation displayed was incorrect actually reinforced the seriousness of the points and other vital statistics that *Fifty-Six* was trying to make public with respect to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

This wasn't the first time that 24seven had exhibited supposedly anti-Semitic work. Paul Quinn's *Work Sets You Free* was a colourful child-like inscription across the gallery's windows shown in 2002. *Work Sets You Free* is an English translation of the German text 'arbeit macht's frei' found above the gates of forced labour and concentration camps during the reign of the Nationalist



Above: Mark Hilton
Alexandra Avenue, 2004
260 x 908 cm
Backlit lightbox
Installation detail, 24seven

Below: Mark Hilton
Alexandra Avenue, 2004
260 x 908 cm
Backlit lightbox
24seven installation shot



Socialist Government. Making fun of the people parking their cars in the Wilson Park on their way to work, Quinn provoked no public outcry. Similarly at ACMI's *Empires, Ruins + Networks* conference last year, the European information architecture collective *Multiplicity* discussed their use of spatial information derived from Israeli and the Palestinian territories that was a clear indictment of Israeli policy, however no-one batted an eyelid and it provoked no ire (maybe because it had been in *Documenta* and we were told it was good?).

So what are the implications of this? It's okay to be anti-Semitic so long as your references are coded in irony and aestheticised (or anaestheticised) but legible and clearly articulated representations are out?

If this is the case, why is it that the Church can have as many depictions of the 'Slaughter of the Innocents' as they like? You know, that story in the Gospel of Matthew about how some Jewish punk kid was going to fuck with King Herod's mojo, so he killed all the little Jewish baby boys. It's not like there has ever been any suppression of religious artists and their work – such as I don't know, Duccio or whatever – in academic courses and journals, church postcards and the like, and neither has there been a moratorium on this image. So it's odd when the Director of the NGV Gerard Vaughan talks about how a single visitor was offended by a swastika on a Vivienne Westwood garment, and that the gallery then exhibited the offending article inside out. As for the recent NGV exhibition, *2004 Australian Culture Now*, I found some stuff offensive – and I don't mean Nat & Ali – but it's unlikely that Jason Smith or Gerard Vaughan are going to see my point and go, "Yeah, sorry we missed that one – thanks TK, we'll rectify it immediately."

In this context it came as no surprise that the Vietnamese community called for the instant removal of *Alexander*

Avenue by Mark Hilton when it was exhibited only two months after *Fifty-Six*. This constituency however, had neither the political clout, nor the mitigating circumstances to warrant the removal of the piece. Particularly because – as Councillor So was quoted in *The Age* – the work was "artistic" and very "oriental". Mark himself had told me some time ago that he'd wanted to do a work on the Salt nightclub murders, information that I locked away in a cul-de-sac of my consciousness at the time but in no way prepared me for the resulting work in all of its 3 x 9 metres of glory.

What I find funny in this instance is that in a perverse way I see *Alexander Avenue* as a commemorative monument; like what Janet Lawrence did recently in England for Australian soldiers who died in service of the Motherland. While there was no public outcry, I bet if you went into any RSL in the country and showed some of the diggers Lawrence's work they'd be like: "it looks like it ain't finished" or "that modern art stuff" or "my mate Bluey died and that pile-a-rock is a god damn outrage" and so forth. I am hoping Vietnamese people (and not their representative organisations) would find some artistic merit in Hilton's work – but let's not have an argument about cultural authenticity now, okay.

In the end, all art is in some way implicated in politics. It's like Jerry Rubin said, "politics ain't who you vote for, but how you live your life, man..." and I'd like to think it's the same with artists, their art works, cultural institutions and also with art appreciation. I don't have any other witticisms to offer except that my mum's Jewish, my dad German, and sometimes I feel Palestinian, oh and I've been to Vietnam – for real.

Tristian Koenig is an amateur visual arts enthusiast.

Assorted thoughts on the work of Laresa Kosloff

Making a knob of oneself...
by Lily Hibberd

On Friday the 9th of July this year Laresa Kosloff opened her studio at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces for a one-night presentation of her recent video work *Deep & Shallow*. Projected on a large screen at the far end of the space, the footage comprises five minutes of physical performance sequences carried out by a group of six women in an empty, white studio space. Each performer wears a black garbage bag tied in a knot over her head at the top, and tucked into a pair of bloomers at the hip. While ordinarily the upper half of the body seems proportionally greater than the lower parts, here the obliteration of the head and torso shifts the focus to the legs, and they look longer. The loss of identifying human features in the upper realms also instigates an appearance of truncation, even decapitation of the figure. Other than variations of height, the legs remain the only individualising feature for the six bag-wearers, however these lone appendages are strangely similar. It is not only that they are distinctly female – with small feet, narrow ankles and chicken-like inner thighs – it's also because they share the same proportions of these features. On the flyer produced for the exhibition, Kosloff states that she chose them 'because their legs looked similar to mine'.¹ This is an odd prerequisite on which to select your actors, and most women would consider that having the shape of one's legs publicly analysed under fluorescent lighting borders on the lunatic. Adding to the folly is the rustling of the garbage bags made with every movement, which is the video's only accompanying soundtrack.

In the company of Kosloff's previous works, *Deep & Shallow* is not alone in its offbeat approach; many of her pieces are quirky, often funny, and sometimes even disturbing. Looking over these works, Kosloff's practice is difficult to define: she uses Super 8 video, stop animation, found footage and video recordings of live choreographed performances. Shifting between various structures, subjects, mediums and presentations, it becomes apparent that to apply any concrete parameters to Kosloff's work is pointless. The prominent form in the more recent works however, are video and performance. With these genres, like Kosloff's oeuvre, the issue of clear definition is an ongoing dilemma and both are

Below: Laresa Kosloff
Deep & Shallow, 2004
Video still
Image courtesy of the artist



distinctly interdisciplinary practices, which relish such shifting boundaries. If only to appease the archivists among us, one could categorise *Deep & Shallow* as video art, primarily because the work has no intention to present itself live to an audience at any time. The other distinction here is that video eliminates one thing that is essential to performance: risk. The potential of failure in live works, and the now commonplace crossing of the barrier between the audience and the performer (thespians call this 'the fourth wall') elicits an anxiety in the audience that is becoming a consistently less popular sensation in the forums of popular culture. This is concurrent with the rise in media that further encourage the suspension of disbelief through virtual realities and immersive environments. Performance art stands apart from these mainstream sensibilities, and that's probably why it is making a strenuous comeback in artistic circles.

Accordingly, even though we are presented with video, the premise of *Deep & Shallow* is performance art. And surveying the history of the genre, Kosloff's piece is not merely about performance, it shares many of the concerns explored in various stages of its evolution: the



Left: Laresa Kosloff
Deep & Shallow, 2004
Video still
Image courtesy of the artist

body, human gesture, ritual, the absurd, a social canvas, political discourse, symbolism and feminism.

In *Deep & Shallow* the most evident pattern of behavior is ritualistic. This applies directly to body art as:

...a particular genre of performance art, exhibited by the body of the artist and performed actions on that body... Some insisted on the ritual aspects associated with such acts (a modern 'primitivism') others claimed to be analysing social rites and stereotypes. The division between private and public was tested and crossed as artists performed private rituals in public spaces, everyday life events became art, and artists became objects.²

As the garbage bag women shuffle around in circles, they might well be acting out a tribal ceremonial dance. Even the costumes are significant, for there is a long history of '... art as magic, as ritual, as disposable object, as body-adornment...'³ For instance, in researching this article I discovered a photo of a tribal penis hat. Need I say more?

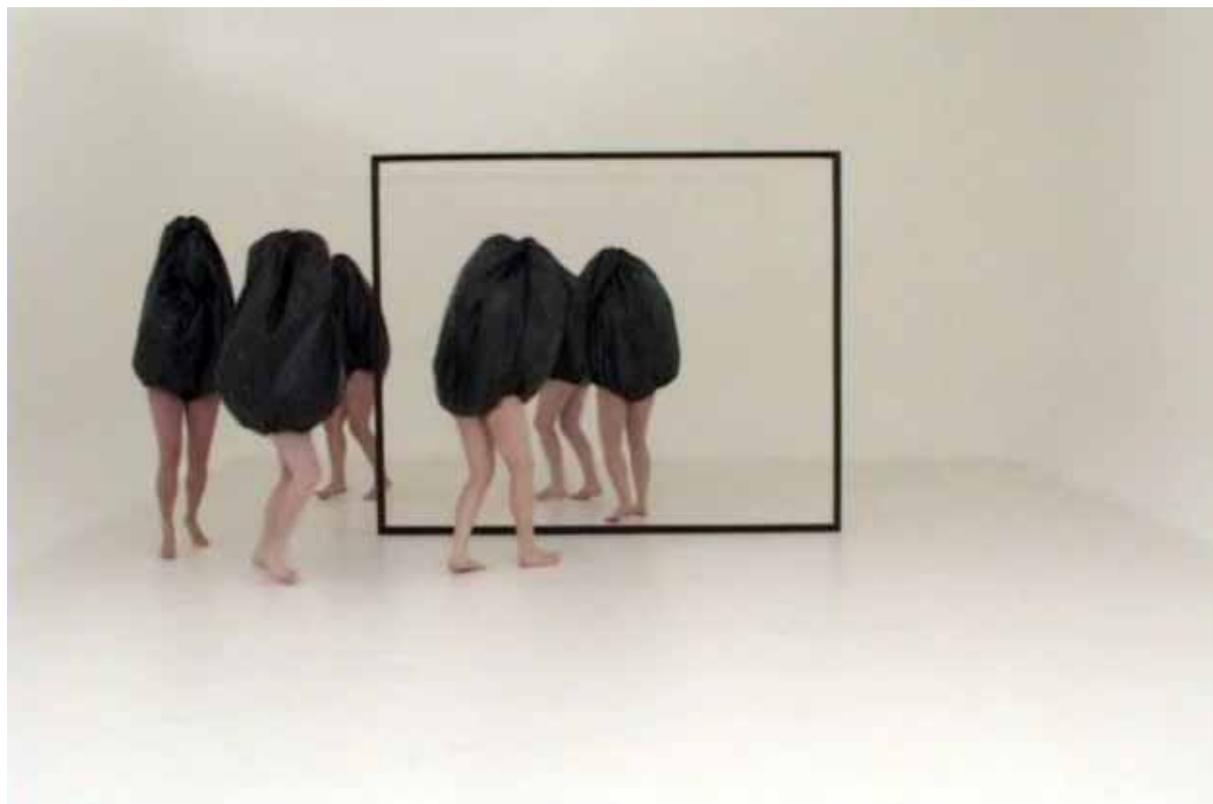
Superficially the appearance and actions of the performers in *Deep & Shallow* is ludicrous and yet these foolish patterns of group behaviour possess features of consequence. In this, the suspension of meaning of every movement is due to their isolation from their explicit contexts, a little like the apparent absurdity (at least to the uninitiated) of contemporary dance movements. The action of this slow, shuffling around in circles is like those poor people sent on workplace group therapy exercises; a ritual that DAMP (a Melbourne based collaborative artist group) have used extensively to explore the limits of the team spirit.

The restricted and repetitious movements of *Deep & Shallow* are definitely in the spirit of the oppressed; whether they be the prisoners of war or military cadets,

such pointless repetition and aimless exercises are mind numbing and possibly soul destroying. So many human endeavours feature rigorous physical training without purpose or meaning – none more than in sport, a sentiment which Kosloff has made palpable in the 'Nike' sequence of *Deep & Shallow*. In this footage, a lone garbage-bag character makes every effort to diagonally cross the space, however her crudely painted 'Nike' shoebox shoes unexpectedly decelerate her motion across the floor. This is an intentionally ironic moment, and also a sly reference for fans of British artists Jake and Dinos Chapman. In another sequence, the entire group of characters are arranged in various supermodel type poses, changing position every few seconds, with a rustle of plastic, each wearing a pair of shoebox shoes painted with flags representing nations such as Japan, Australia, America, Britain and Germany. With this display the precocious endeavour of beauty modelling is completely ridiculed. Undeniably, Kosloff is pointing us to Vanessa Beecroft, a contemporary American performance artist who presents hundreds of nude women in big galleries slowly acting out modelling poses. Beecroft's work is highly crafted and clever, but it is also very pretentious, the feminist undertones lost in the excess of brazilian waxed beavers.

A little bit of humour goes a long way, and Kosloff articulates it well, with her use of ridiculous movements and props: the shoes and the garbage bags are not employed purely for their appearances, it's the movements and characterisations of the (amateur) actors that imbues them with (non)sense. This goes right back to the 1920s, where a clear apparition of performance art can be identified with the formation of a physical, non-verbal theatre as envisaged by Antonin Artaud; whose scripts were not properly realised until after World War Two by protagonists of the 'Poor Theatre' such as Jerzy Grotowsky. In this latter movement the notion of the

*Below: Laresa Kosloff
Deep & Shallow, 2004
Video still
Image courtesy of the artist*



performer being freed from naturalistic representations was paramount; whereby the actor is transformative, not reliant on conventional period costumes or props. This notion of appropriated objects being at once symbolic and bizarre was also a crucial component of the Dada movement – exemplified by the work and life of Marcel Duchamp – a movement which is defined as, ‘...a deliberate courting of the anti rational, negative gesture; and a commitment to social or political action’.⁴

Deep & Shallow has resolute political messages too, take for instance the shoebox shoes with the painted flags. In this situation they might seem arbitrary but in their preposterous employment we can see them much more truthfully. Flags are emblems, a way of identifying an allegiance, a symbol of patriotism. On a recent trip to the USA, Kosloff states that she was overwhelmed by the sense of nationhood and power of the country, and this gave rise to the flags as a feature in *Deep & Shallow*. I get a feeling that a few other themes were incited by Kosloff’s encounter with this global super power. The appearance of a large black frame in the video acts as a metaphor for structure. As the circling characters step through the black frame they are engaging with alternate dimensions. The frame exists as a virtual plane in Kosloff’s visualisation of the space and as a reference to the constructs of Cartesian geometry, which represents a high (or low) point in Western thinking: pure rationalisation. The frame also creates division and difference, as each figure

is either included or excluded from its space. This speaks of segregation and distinction, and this disengagement from society is the emotional world of the derelict. Funny that – it was on her recent visit to New York that Kosloff was astonished by a homeless man who ‘wore layers of garbage bags to keep warm’. She recounts that:

He had a big garbage bag nest and garbage bag hat, and he liked reading the newspaper. It was in the middle of Soho... and in three months I never got used to seeing him there.⁵

¹ Laresa Kosloff, artist statement *Deep & Shallow* exhibition flyer, 2004

² Anne Marsh, *Body and Self: Performance Art in Australia, 1969-92*, Oxford University Press, Melbourne 1993, p.15.

³ Adrian Henri, *Total Art: Environments, Happenings and Performance*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1974, p.7.

⁴ *Ibid.* p.17.

⁵ Kosloff, *op cit.*

Laresa Kosloff gratefully acknowledges the generous support of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

Damiano Bertoli

in conversation with
Zara Stanhope



Left: Damiano Bertoli
Continuous Moment, 2004
PVC, polyurethane, wood, plaster
Photo credit: Christian Capurro

Damiano Bertoli is a Melbourne artist who has been exhibiting since 1991. Bertoli's intention, it seems to me, is to present an art that penetrates the third and fourth dimensions. The work he has exhibited ranges in media from 'drawings' to installation, combining forms and images that provoke sensual stimuli and expansive ideas. Most recently his work 'Continuous Moment' (2004) was seen at the Ian Potter Centre, NGV Australia, at Federation Square, as part of 2004 Australian Culture Now. In talking about his practice, Bertoli tells me he is both an aesthete and a child of the 1960s – oh, yeah, the very late 1960s – and these are two features I don't immediately think of as related.

Zara Stanhope: Damiano, What are the main interests that you have been working with in your practice?

Damiano Bertoli: I guess the idea of time travel is important; in the way art history retains a contemporary relevance in the studio, and in what can result from being repeatedly drawn to certain moments from the past. Over time, the way these tendencies are negotiated and combined has become the main focus, and it is the engine that generates much of the work.

I'm definitely interested in the way that the identity of an artist's work can be a construction, rather than

an expression, of what's around. So in this sense, my practice is almost autobiographical, it speaks about me through explorations of aesthetic and cultural situations to which I'm intuitively drawn. It's no coincidence that one of these situations took place around the time I was born...

ZS: In works such as *Continuous Moment* (2004), where you give the viewer the ability to spatially and conceptually experience a version of the painting *Das Eismeer* (1823-35) by Caspar David Friedrich (1744- 1840), you extend the democratic nature of other creative projects. This focus can be found in your cosmological drawings. Does it come out of your interest in practices, such as the work of architects Superstudio and their utopian social or imaginary ideas? Can art still offer some social potential, some new meaning?

DB: Friedrich's *Das Eismeer* (The Sea of Ice) and the projects of Superstudio are propositional in nature, and both use the idea of landscape to project possibility. *The Sea of Ice* is quite a unique work in Friedrich's oeuvre. It's a total fiction: from the narrative of the shipwreck that never occurred, to the collaged pictorial structure. It's speculative as well as representational, and is an overtly

'frontal' image. In *Continuous Moment* (2004) I thought it would be interesting to play on the idea of artistic license by offering the viewer a proposal of how the reverse of Friedrich's painting might appear. Friedrich seems to have exploited natural forms to expose the mechanics of his composition rather than describe human tragedy. *Das Eismeer* describes a more contemporary sensibility than most of his other work.

Superstudio's project exists entirely within the realm of the propositional. It describes, with great ambivalence, the simultaneously logical and illogical conclusion of utopian ideology in late 1960s Europe. By presenting these unrealised situations on paper, Superstudio recognised the importance (and absence) of play and imaginative thought in architectural practice. This attitude is very much of its time, a nostalgic example of late 60s counter-culture attempting to liberate creativity from labour. It provides a convenient metaphor that is related to the idealised 'pure' space of the artist's studio as a field of play and perceived freedoms of artistic practice.

Both of these projects illustrate a concept that's crucial in my work: that an idea or artwork is fluid, ambiguous and always in the process of happening. I think the propositional approach that I try to adhere to is honest, and it refers to a certain continuity of artistic practice, in the way that any sense of conclusion or finality is always deferred. There's always another piece to make.

ZS: Sol le Witt said that to avoid making 'just another rational step' intuition is important in art making. Does intuition have a role in your work?

DB: The motivation for making work is always about chasing an instinct or an intuition, and the form it takes depends on how much the intuition is affected by the natural inclination to order things as they materialise. I think it's about trying to apprehend a small moment, trying to isolate, define, and repeat it. Also, the capacity for the accidental to present itself is always exciting, and in a sense, my work is an attempt to cultivate an environment that allows this to happen in an interesting way. One of the aspects of Friedrich's painting that drew me in was the fact that it resembled a pile of renovation rubbish, or discarded work materials from the studio. Often these accidental forms, composed of repeated, unintentional gestures, are quite dynamic and sophisticated formally. In *Continuous Moment* (2004) the narrative of a tragedy at sea is replaced by a different kind of human endeavour, the residue of an event or activity, an accumulation of material and time spent. The focus shifts from the product to the waste generated by the process...

ZS: The varied ways art and time become connected is interesting. The ideas that inform the creation of a work, consciously and unconsciously, can accrue for far longer



Above: Damiano Bertoli
Continuous Moment, 2003
Pencil on found image, 21 x 27 cm
Image courtesy the artist

than the time of production, and meanings adhere to art over time, enlarging the potential of a work. For example, I have only just read that, apart from *Das Eismeer's* sublime and spiritual interpretations, the image has also attracted a political reading. It is thought that the sea of ice could symbolise the frozen climate in Europe in the years preceding the painting, when hopes for personal freedom for low, after the wars of independence against Napoleon and passing of legislation to suppress political independence. Art historians would say there is a hopeful glow in the painting's sky, however! What meanings do you hope might adhere to your work over time?

DB: I think contemporary art will accumulate meaning in a different way to historical art... who knows what will happen when one reflects on a practice or mode of thinking which is already reflective. For me, participating in the extension of a pre-existing work such as *Das Eismeer*, presents an opportunity to play with a series of loaded meanings, without the work being explicitly about personality, or the idea of 'self'. It's a way of making art that's about what it means to be an artist. Hopefully, there's enough idiosyncrasy built into the work; this tends to occur eventually anyhow, without needing to accentuate it with unnecessary gestures. It's a fine line though...

Zara Stanhope is Senior Curator at Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne.

Helen Johnson

You Must Have Been in Strange Places
West Space
Gallery 3
4 – 19 June 2004
by Carl Williams

Walking into Helen Johnson's most recent show in the cul-de-sac known as Gallery 3 at West Space, you find yourself amongst a sea of equivalences. Or is it something slightly different? Disguises perhaps? Could these forms be covering the very things they are trying to represent; 'ideal' leaves projected onto a screen of actual leaves, or pretty lichen perched on woolly rocks like so many fried rubber eggs?

You Must Have Been In Strange Places (2004) presents nature-cum-lounge room. In other words it shows a domestication of Australian flora – a process that at once appropriates the distinctive character of the Australian environment while transforming it into something familiar, something whose presence does not present difference but invites coalescence. It's a lived-in environment; it's pre-loved; it's a terrain of the interior, speaking both psychologically and literally. A faux-comfort zone that is as disconcerting as a wave of *deja vu*.

Just about everything in here is made of felt and haberdashery. From the ceiling hang mobiles of thread-entwined branches and felt leaves, all meticulously cut out by hand in order to mimic the original and lend authenticity to the redirection of it's function. Low slung floodlights cast the shadows of these forms onto the wall and floor, creating eerie, shifting patterns and a barely perceptible movement of air that suggests either a recent departure or an immanent arrival. These lights shine in your eyes as you enter, and their effect is one of mild discomfort, like inadvertently stepping into an open stage. They drag you unwittingly into the *mise-en-scene*, as well as serving to heighten the sense of its artificiality. On the floor, covered in felt (remember to take off your shoes) are more scattered leaves, pillow-rocks and felt-twig ephemera. Beige 'baffles' line the lower walls, failing to cover completely the architectural characteristics behind them. Instead this obvious artificiality is phased across the wall – much like images flashed up on a screen – that stages the production of space as an articulation of a surface.

This device is continued with the actual objects included on the floor, such as the discarded bra, condom and necktie,

Below: Helen Johnson
You Must Have Been in Strange Places
Felt, wood & string
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy the artist



that when juxtaposed with the anachronistic felt Fosters cans, stubbed out cigarettes, boot markings and felt vomit (presumably produced and consumed by the bra's owner and condom's wearer) creates a disjunction that focuses on the body itself as a site of cultural production. It's this playful use of signifier and sign – setting up cul-de-sacs of connotation – that ultimately characterises this work.

Helen's use of nature as a model for a constructed environment is worthy of note insofar as it attempts to dissolve distinctions between the natural and urban environment that would serve to give nature a place outside cultural interpretation. Moreover, what she is rehearsing is the alignment of visuality in both the built and the natural environment that endeavours to reconcile contradictions between what nature is and what we perceive it to be by conflating these two modes of looking. *You Must Have Been In Strange Places* simultaneously asks us to look at two things the same way, and the same thing in two ways.

Carl Williams is a Melbourne based writer currently studying a Bachelor of Arts at the University of Melbourne.

Christopher Bell

Sufi Disco and Small Leap with Gravity
Yarra Sculpture Gallery
23 June – 11 July 2004
by Ruth Learner

If sculpture is to art as poetry is to writing, then Christopher Bell's latest installation is pure haiku. With a background in industrial design and study in the progressive sculpture department at the Sydney College of the Arts, Bell has created an impressive work that is almost transcendental in its rich simplicity.

In *Sufi Disco* eight light bulbs hang from four pairs of long ropes of black flex. The flex is attached at ceiling level to four motor driven cylinders that slowly rotate, each one at a slightly different speed, varying the arc or circle of dancing light. The bulbs skate languidly across the surface of a coarse concrete floor, a soft star-like reflection tracing their mesmerised dance. Although appearing to intersect, at times even threatening to collide, the bulbs are moving in four discrete circles.

Bell's interest in light and motion is inspired by architectural concerns, in particular how structures engage with the sun. It was the extremes of sunlight he experienced as a child, moving between sun-soaked Sydney and his waning ancestral Ireland that led him to focus on light. "The sun has a cosmic connotation," Bell states. "The Neolithic Irish built passage tombs where the sun penetrates into the chamber at a particular time. This gave me a sense of the power of light, and of drama." This drama is clearly evident in *Sun Drawing*, Bell's permanent installation at Federation Square. In this work, a pod of robotically controlled mirrors tilts with the sun's movement. Embedded sensors respond to electronic smog. The more diffuse the light sketches on the side of the Alfred Deakin building opposite, the more invisible congestion created by two-way radios (courier, police and ambulance activity) is in the air. As this disturbance wanes, the reflections knit back together and the mirrors begin a new performance at sunrise.

As the title of Bell's current installation suggests there is a trance-like quality to the movement, as well as lightness, both literal and metaphorical. "Sufism and disco are two kinetic pursuits that humans do," says Bell. "Whether it's in the high discipline of Sufism or high hedonism of disco, dancing is an innate human joy... an uplifting

Below: Chris Bell
Sufi Disco, 2004
Lightbulbs, flex, custom motor drives & steel
cylinders
Dimensions variable



act." The equilibrium and tension too makes full use of the scale and rawness of the warehouse space. "Adapting work to different galleries yields possibilities... using the light qualities and closing off the rest of the world creates a theatre with a captive audience." The pliant cord weighted by the brittle elegant light bulb, and the purity of the light itself reflecting the rough concrete, raises the tension. This is coupled with the ease of movement against the precariousness of 240-volt powered lights... any disturbance could result in collision and smashing glass.

There is tension too in Bell's experimental installation in the neighbouring space at Yarra Sculpture Gallery. Here he is attempting to build a freestanding arch from blocks of butter. Called *Small Leap with Gravity*, it is all about stress; push and pull, and again uses unexpected juxtapositions. Butter is the very opposite of the highly compressible, durable material from which arches are usually built. Yet, by using it Bell exposes the effectiveness of a simple principle. Butter, like light bulbs, is a bare necessity. Its humble origins and commonplace associations draw on Bell's love of the rudimentary, both in design and in principle. "We're in a very sophisticated age," he professes. "Continually negotiating complicated structures and relationships. I relish getting a bit of wonder and reprieve out of the elemental stuff." And it is precisely this notion of being transported from the business of life – of turning off and in – that takes us back to Bell's cosmic roots.

Ruth Learner is a Melbourne based writer.

Caroline Love

The Big Knit
Seventh Gallery
31 August – 11 September 2004
by Charlotte Hallows



Above: Caroline Love
The Big Knit (Detail) 2003
Dimensions variable
Image courtesy of Caroline Love and the Artists

The Big Knit is an ongoing collaborative work. Caroline Love has collaborated with family, friends and strangers not just in the production of a finished work, but to facilitate community, connections and a therapeutic action of transformation, expression and energy. The artist sits, knitting in the gallery encouraging visitors to participate in the activity with her, and prior to this project, she has been participating in a number of communal knitting groups around Melbourne.

Visitors to Seventh Gallery encounter an embodied, tactile and ecological work produced by a number of knitters. Each contributor expresses their own unique approach and the work is marked by differences. *The Big Knit* is both ephemeral architecture and social network. The work exceeds formal categorizations of two or three-dimensional work. Knitted pieces hang and stretch in the gallery space between ceiling and floor in the kind of intimate grandeur that conditions liminal work. The work

concerns the limit of labour and the limit between self and other, body and object. Cast into the world, Love's premise is that knitting is produced by the immensity within each entity that brings about an expansion of being. The pieces express varying textures, shapes and shades. Some pieces contain apertures which entice the viewer to interact with the work. In this sense the tactile work, neither object nor thing, has an anthropological life of its own. The knitting is composed by repetition and spacing, as much material as emptiness and void gaping open, touching lightly and making an ephemeral modulation of the world. It holds with all its fibres onto the fabric of the visible. The ambiguity of the visible is present in the knitted veil which reveals while it conceals and withdraws an utterly attractive milieu: so profound and so empty, so threatening and so enticing.

The rich and celebratory red knit has strong associations with Beverly Semmes' installations of billowing garments. Love is aware of the history of her work in feminist community art and tactile works by Louise Bourgeois and Eva Hesse. The artist composed the work from predominantly red wools and fibres. The colour is both a material and ephemeral effect of the work and its space; red stretched toward orange and yellow. Red attracts or is attracted. Red is the colour of building bricks, the flags of the revolution, certain terrains and garments, fields of adornments and of uniforms. Red is the symbolic colour of the Revolution of 1917 and The Red Army Faction.

The knit conflates the visible and the tactile through the appeal of fascination, an eccentricity which has the potential to seize being. Fascination concerns the visibility of a terrifying and tantalizing presence that reminds us of death. This is the space of ecstasy, rupture, rapture and madness. Knitting concerns a desire to go beyond the limits of a life that curbs and arrests. And knitting is the endless labour of an endeavor that always starts again.

Charlotte Hallows is a keen knitter who is interested in dialogue between text and textile as an expression of singularity and diversity.

David Keating & Ieuan Weinman

Passenger
Bus Gallery
22 June – 10 July 2004
by Geoff Newton

Romancing the Stoner

I am always surprised to find that there are few surprises in contemporary art these days. I think – Iggy Pop? A Wesley Snipes flick? Nope. But maybe the latter is perhaps more palpable, given the ratio of Hollywood hijack blockbusters to recent terrorist attacks. Enter.

Intrigued by a small-decorated elephant at the front desk I creep in past the skinny gallery and immediately bump into one of Ieuan's small coffee table sized works, *Dead Terrorist (floor piece)* 2004. It glowers up at me red and black as I go to kick it to defend my shin, but I stop my leg just above my head as there appears to be some kind of blood-soaked cardboard bum or angel. It's *Dead Terrorist (wall piece)* 2004, threatening to blacken my eye with an outstretched arm. Argh.

Cautiously I shuffle to the middle of the gallery where I'm presented with a kind of chicken-or-the-egg situation. Bombs? Bacardi? Iraq? Ibiza? Seems I've just crossed the border from David Keating's sprawling leafy jungle daydream to Weinman's post hijack pin-up constructions and noise! Flashes of dust, champagne bottles and mounds of rubble flicker before my eyes and, whoa, I pass out cold on the floor with a thud. I dream of a blonde steward awkwardly crawling over bodies and debris, handing me a scented towelette for cleaning up blood and vomit. I think they're playing Kruder and Dorfmiester. Yikes! I let out a whimper, wake up and check my vitals.



Right:
Ieuan Weinman
*Dead Terrorist (floor
piece)* 2004
Oil, pine, MDF

Below: David Keating
Mile High Club, 2004
Paper, glue balsawood, pins,
fibre glass craftwood & pine
175 x 120 x 65cm



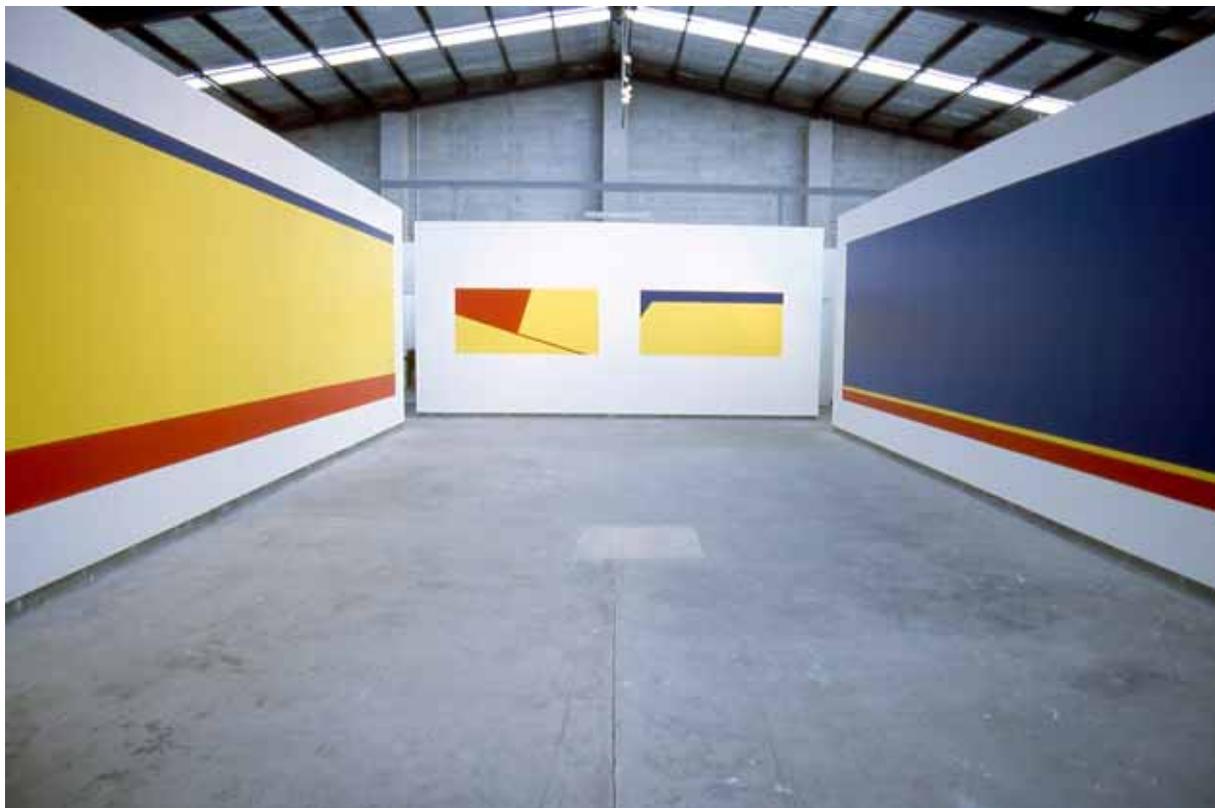
Underneath a large paper model by Keating, *Mile High Club* (2004), I spy a tiny cocktail umbrella the size of the cigarette butt I'm comparing it with. The cigarette is smoked past the butt, smeared with orange lipstick on the end. I sniff it tentatively as I peer over towards the back of the gallery, the quizzical scent of Chanel mixed with jet exhaust making me woozy. I prop myself up on one arm, at nose level with a miniature control tower, and make out the words 'HGIH ELIM', which must be the name of the Taliban's Hawaii hideout, or at least a bootleg Playstation version. I can't see any barrels of oil though, or weaponry. Must have traded them for some old turntables I notice sunken in the clear blue paper river.

A distorted scream echoes from a corner of the gallery and I nervously clamber to my feet, inching towards a coloured construction, *Yellow Box* (2004), brushing off confetti and spent ammunition. A jet screeches overhead. Loud. Standing in front of the box almost feels like I'm part of a simulated airport evacuation, dressed in a fluorescent vest, simultaneously horrified and checking my watch. It's then I realize that the whole time I've been clutching Sangeeta Sandrasegar's essay, which I mop my brow with and run out, weak kneed, groggy and elated.

Geoff Newton is a Melbourne based artist.

Patricia Todarello

MACHINE AESTHETIC PHOTO/COPY
Kings Artist Run Initiative
6 – 21 August 2004
by David Thomas



Above: Patricia Todarello
Machine Aesthetic: Apparent Horizon
Installation view Short St, 2004

SIMPLE COMPLEXITIES

Space is mediated in Patricia Todarello's wall works at Kings and so is time.

... UP the stairs of Kings... I am confronted with painted surfaces, paintings on walls... initially the wall functions as a support for images... not immediately as structure or as architectural space... as if in agreement with the nineteenth century German architectural theorist Gottfried Semper's aspirations.

We are enveloped in a psychic space as well as a physical one.

Over time my attention turns to the READINGS OF THE SITE with all the ramifications that this entails concerning location and content, (social, cultural, political and historical) ... and then to a consideration of visual LANGUAGE, of PICTORIAL READINGS... here, meanings cycle... These works ask us to think about... not just what they are... as paintings on a wall... but also what are they of...

Patricia Todarello's works are REPRESENTATIONS... of many things...of corners, of memories, of perceptions, of paradoxes, of a sensibility... of spaces that are flat... of photos that do not exist in the space, of the spaces that the paintings sit in... yet these representations are not fixed, they shift and are IN MOVEMENT... The paintings use angles, 2D shapes to suggest 3D corners but they are generic... the images do not directly relate to the viewers' viewing positions in the space... they do not seem to be particular representations of particular corners. Yet they certainly are particular works. The artist is precise yet meanings are.... PARADOXICAL AND FLUID, rich in their generation of associative readings. Todarello employs framing, repetition, variation, and shifts in scale, tone and colour in a sensitive and skilful manipulation to create dynamic harmonies... formally the works are cool virtuoso applications of hard-edged painting.

CYCLING CONVENTIONS

I think of this work in relation to a long and diverse history of wall paintings including those of an older generation, Blinky Palermo in Germany, or a newer one, Jeena Shin in New Zealand or Craig Easton in Australia. Todarello's work shares some similarities and several differences in content and sensibility with these artists. Although Todarello's paintings may reference Concrete and Constructivist Art her practice is of a particular hybridised nature. Her work is abstract, in the specific sense of the word... an abstraction of something, an abstraction presented as a new reality.... and it is capable of cycling meaning as well as conventions.

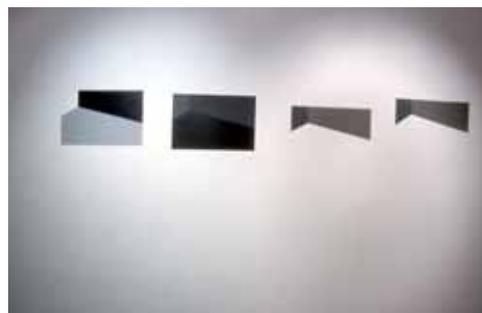
REPETITION, RECYCLING AND DIFFERENCE AGAIN

Her images, (which are only one aspect of her work; location and their actual material realities being others) start as abstract pictures... flat wall works... their edges and borders shift... in the end their harmonies and slippages fuse to generate EXPERIENCES... my awareness shifts from experiencing the external phenomena of language into a recognition of experiencing... the subtleties of the tonal and chromatic shifts... the dynamics of angles... When do angled lines or shapes stop being flat and planar, and shift into representations of corners? What is the actual colour of the wall? What does the gloss and matt do to my understanding of surface?... of intentions?...

These works are not dumb old abstracts... nor are they dumb transcriptions of the reproduced, they are not really about a machine aesthetic photo/copy. I LIE... they are about all of these things... but more importantly for me, these works enable perception, memory and imagination to function, they enable me to participate in the construction of readings... in the particular circumstances of this specific site. They enable me to perceive my own process of perceiving.

This is what makes them real and relevant.

David Thomas is a Melbourne based painter and installation artist. He is a Senior lecturer in the School of Art & Culture at RMIT University.



All: Patricia Todarello
 Top & centre: *Machine Aesthetic: Photo/copy*
Kings Artist Run Initiative (detail) 2004
 Above: *Machine Aesthetic: Apparent Horizon*
Installation view Short St, 2004

Editor's note

A companion exhibition to *MACHINE AESTHETIC: photo/copy* was recently held by Patricia Todarello at Short St art space, entitled *MACHINE AESTHETIC: apparent horizon*. In this installation, Todarello played with the complementary relationships of high-key primary colours. The four white walls were each composed with huge planes of flat colour, in configurations of red, blue and yellow. These colours were carefully harmonised (even though they clashed) by Todarello's spectacular shapezoids. Weird distortions of triangles, performed spatial gymnastics; and our sense of perspective warped, as if di Chirico were pulling the strings. Although the obvious forms of the work were abstracted, you could not avoid the sense of landscape in the compositions: rooftops, skylines, and apparent horizons.

Ed Wakeham

The Purveyor of Life
Westspace, gallery 3
14 – 30 May 2004
by Laresa Kosloff



Left: Ed Wakeham
The Purveyor of Life, 2004
Westspace (installation shot)
Mixed media drawings, photos & text on wall, television
monitors & DVD
Photo credit - Christian Cappuro

In a world where social, political and economic power structures determine how we live, Ed Wakeham finds empowerment in his adulation of Safeway and the pineapple. In one of the many drawings and pieces of writing covering the wall in *The Purveyor of Life*, Wakeham writes that 'Safeway and Woolworths offer liberty' and 'people who don't shop there are evil... they hate the peace that Safeway channels to us'.

This inspired obsession seems nutty and inappropriate; shopping at Safeway always feels like a *deja vu* experience to me, generic and impersonal. The image Safeway projects in their advertising (everyone seems thrilled to work there and passionate about their jobs) is so different to the to the dull, corporate, disempowered reality of the place.

Wakeham claims that, 'Safeway and Woolworths offer liberty'. Rather than critiquing ritualised consumption, Ed embraces it. His ridiculous obsession seems to emphasise our own ambivalence and complacency. Ed knows no boundaries, photographing merchandise in the stores, writing fan letters to the Safeway website, drawing customers, and even embarking on a trip to Queensland to see 'The Big Pineapple.' There's something empowering about his absolute conviction, sense of purpose, and relentless energy for the subject matter. What can we place faith in these days? What can we be sure of?



Above: Ed Wakeham
The Purveyor of Life, 2004
 Westspace (detail of installation)
 Mixed media drawings, photographs & text on wall
 Photo credit: Christian Cappuro

One of the works on the wall is an email Wakeham sent to the new Queen Victoria Safeway (that opened in Melbourne late in 2003). It's a fan letter, telling the manager that he was the first proud customer and that he noticed employees taking photographs of the first people to shop in the store. In the email, Wakeham requests a photograph as a souvenir, explaining that his excitement is 'sort of like riding a train for the first time'. Wakeham receives a standard reply, in fact it becomes clear that Safeway has not read his letter, and have assumed it to be a letter of complaint. They write: 'Your feedback has been referred to the Regional Office for their attention and response... thank you for bringing this matter to our attention via the Woolworths website'. The reply has the same non-committal tone as supermarket music, or the spiels companies make you listen to while holding on the telephone. This series of emails reminded me of *Stan*, a song Eminem sings about an obsessive fan who ends up committing a murder-suicide when Eminem fails to reply his increasingly agitated letters.

lyrics that get stuck in your head, dockets from Safeway, and photographs of pineapples (all looking the same and yet different) from Oakleigh, Ashwood, Moorabbin and Heidelberg. They covered the back wall of the gallery from floor to ceiling and were flanked either side by two television monitors on lurid synthetic green plinths. One television showed the artist's pilgrimage to Queensland and 'The Big Pineapple.' The other showed him stalking Safeway stores, cruising slowly along in his car. It's not the people or cars in the carpark Wakeham wants to film, but the big Safeway logo, predictable, reliable, and weirdly comforting.

It would have been easy for this show to translate as comfortably ironic, but Wakeham's work comes across as sincere rather than cynical, and his relationship to the subject matter is convincing. The show was entertaining as well as insightful, and clever on so many different levels.

The biro and texta drawings in the show were exquisite, inspired portraits of generic scenes and places: carparks, customers, shopping centres, television ads, old song

Laresa Kosloff is a Melbourne based artist, a committee member of Clubs Project Inc. and a studio artist at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

*KZ**

Constanze Zikos

*MIR 11
6 – 31 August 2004
by Din Heagney*



*Left: Constanze Zikos
KZ*
Side installation view with scrap contact
Photo credit: Din Heagney*

Patches Sequences Rhythms

I had ventured out on a drenched Melbourne afternoon to arrive at a chilly Flinders Lane car park where I dumped my bike, wiped down my wet arse and made my way clunking up an elevator to the 11th 'satellitic' floor otherwise known as MIR 11. Whatever my initial expectations for this car park space they soon dissipated as I stood dripping and pondering a misplaced piece of designer graffiti that marks the entrance to an architectural design studio – something not quite right here.

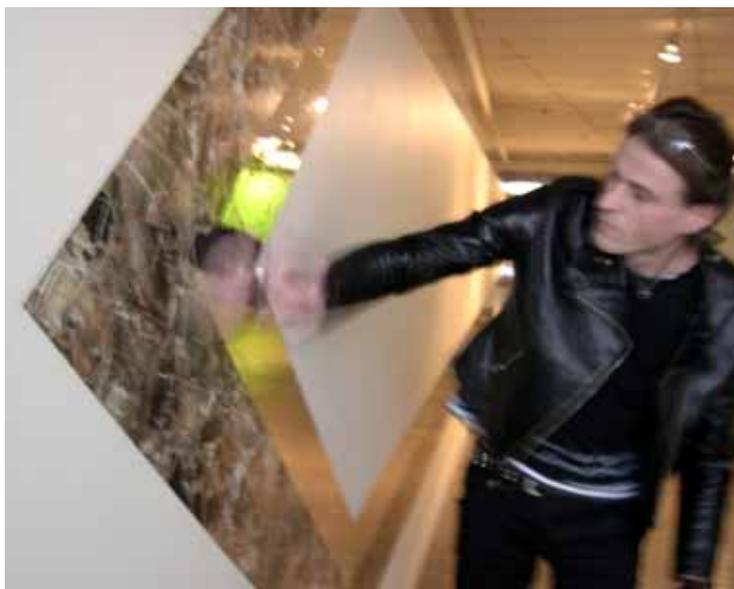
Were it not for Constanze Zikos at work smoothing the contact bumps on the back wall, one could easily stroll into the studio thinking it was part of the exhibition area. Well actually, I did have a sticky but didn't get far as a pair of black rims at a desk looked up at me with a silent and

disdainful regard. So spinning on my heel, I shot back into the foyer – if you can call it that – and inadvertently wandered into another studio and only to receive similar solemn looks. Design is a cool and serious business.

MIR 11 is an unlikely exhibition space, open and bottlenecked with patchy light, too many cars and an over supply of architects – that heightened breed of creative class attempting to force a purely constructed world into conscious living by surrounding and wrapping everything in the superficial materials of modernism: concrete, steel, glass and everyone's favourite plastic. Fantastic, just fit the space or get out.

This partly repolished concrete car park may function sufficiently well as a working space for architects who

*Right: Zikos polishes his reflexive silver surface.
Photos credit: Din Heagney*



can look down on the people fighting for sunlight and parking, possibly even being inspired by the endless reproduction of ‘architectural’ takes on boxes with holes that pop up in the city like so many weeds. Yet as a space for contemporary art, MIR 11 leaves little room for redefinition and instead feels more like a too cool postmodern take on the corporate foyer, a place where bold art can liven up a bland wall, a sometimes unfortunate but common indictment on the potential markets of modern and contemporary art. In any case, it’s not what you’ve got but what you do with it – evidently.

Despite my ambivalence to the space itself, Zikos’ work lifted the potential of this top floor of concrete. There was a subtle irony in his slippery, faux constructed surfaces that neatly streamed between the studios, reflecting the walls and the floor back inside itself in a double-pointed geometric form that outlined negative space. What is a work of art that wraps a space, that reconceptualizes its walls to make us question, if we can be bothered, why is this space here at all? Is it the space containing the art that we are looking at? Or are we looking at the work framing that space? A smooth white wall is revealed, only by the act of covering, to be a mass of bumps and creases, lines and patches. One illusion replaced by another illusion. This is what Zikos does with the finesse of an interior decorator fuelled by the mind of a classical philosopher on amphetamines.

This artful deception of cheap resurfacing abounds in modern Australian culture from suburban bathrooms to national galleries. Are we as consumers fooled? Mostly. We are wrapped tightly in the veneer of natural imitation while we wipe down the dust blowing from the land we too easily pretend isn’t there. So we quietly, perhaps apathetically, celebrate this condition by our oft unspoken and secret artistic desire for aristocratic high

cultural indulgence – that lingering cultural hangover from European migration peculiar to an increasingly refashioned white minority.

As Sue Cramer writes in Zikos’ recent MUMA retrospective catalogue: “In an urban culture where nature is rivalled by artifice, where ‘authentic’ or genuine articles are often replaced by synthetic versions, Zikos shows us how fakes can sometimes ring with truth more enticing, more compelling than the real.”¹

This wall-mounted piece at MIR 11, in reflective silver and marble print contact, is an extended version of a sequence of works by Zikos, exhibited individually at Tolarno, the Caroline Springs Home Show, MUMA and Tribeca, NYC. These reflective rooms and his related paintings explore the artificial surfaces of plastics, laminex, and veneers. They reflect our desire for them and the displaced meaning those same products have in the resurfacing of design, art, and history. Their materials are removed from their original context of domestic and commercial interiors. The forms they cover cease to perform in their standards of decoration and protection, becoming instead a point of absent query, or as Zikos describes it: “light and asphyxiating – like being stuck inside a glass blown pipe”.²

¹ Sue Cramer, catalogue essay, *Anathematic: The Work of Constanze Zikos 1990-2003*, Monash Museum of Modern Art MUMA, 2003, p.5.

² *Conversation with the artist*, August 2004.

Din Heagney is a writer and artist based in Melbourne.

Astro-Chimp

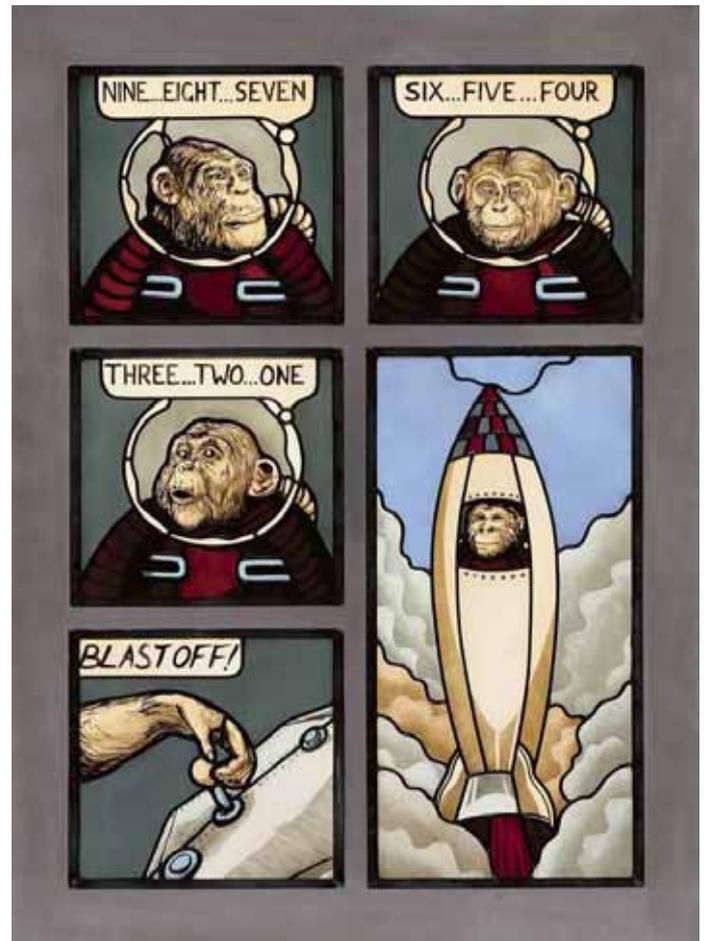
Lisa Roet

Karen Woodbury Gallery
6 August – 4 September 2004
by Danny Lacy

The Amazing Adventures of Ham the Astro-Chimp
In the beginning there were apes, and for a time it was good. Then there was God, and soon after Man; who was lucky enough to be given reign over every beast of the land, every fowl of the air and every thing that creepeth upon the earth. Before too long humankind had evolved to forget it's primitive past. In 1961, an extraordinary thing occurred whereby primates once again took the ascendancy over man, with Ham the Astro-Chimp becoming the first American astronaut to enter outer space. While Ham's brief sojourn into the heavens made him a heroic symbol of the American Space Race during the Cold War, even landing him on the cover of Life Magazine, he was but a mere monkey, conditioned like a soldier to perform his set task. Lisa Roet uses Ham's intrepid adventure as a vehicle for further exploring her language of representing the complex inter-relationship between primates and humans in an extremely well presented exhibition at Karen Woodbury Gallery.

This exhibition is an example of the art of art production at its finest. It features impressive large framed charcoal drawings of chimp's fists, stately bronze chimpanzee busts and comic-strip stained glass windows with corresponding digital inkjet prints depicting the amazing adventures of the Astro-chimp. The centrepiece of the show is a monumental 1.6 metre tall bronze chimpanzee finger that points towards the psychological space of innate desire or want in much the same way that *E.T The Extra Terrestrial* points skywards longing for home, or the Statue of Liberty reaches towards the heavens lighting the path to freedom.

There exists a playful incongruity between such traditional forms of production as the bronze and stained glass works with the Pop comic strip and chimp faces. This clever convergence can be seen as immortalising the story of Ham not just in a bronze statue but also within the rhetoric of classical forms. Roet's multi-faceted aesthetic approach also allows the viewer to meander around varying interpretations in her work ranging from the intertwined human-simian dualism, issues of animal welfare and aspects of primate research grounded in communication and language.



Above: Lisa Roet (in collaboration with Almond Glass works)
Astro-Chimp 3, 2004
Traditional stained glass and steel
110 x 80cm
Images courtesy of the artist and Karen Woodbury Gallery

Astro-Chimp continues Roet's long-standing thematic exploration and continued interest into the nature of primates. By aligning much of this exhibition with the story of Ham the Astro-Chimp we are reminded of the inherent contradictions present in this story. An unlikely national hero who was taken from his home, conditioned to push buttons when lights flashed, sent into foreign territory and held up as a symbol of the heroics and subsequent martyrdom of war. With Roet's re-contextualised immortality of Ham in a bronze statue, Charlton Heston may have been right when in *Planet of the Apes* he said, "We never forget our heroes".

Danny Lacy is a Melbourne based independent curator and writer.

Bonbeach Bourgie Wourgie

Jarrad Kennedy

Linden St Kilda Centre for Contemporary Arts
3 July – 14 August 2004
by Toby Miller

Below: Jarrad Kennedy
Bonbeach Bourgie Wourgie, 2004
Video still
Image courtesy the artist



Like much of recent video art, Jarrad Kennedy's video installation and performance piece, *Bonbeach Bourgie Wourgie* (2004) configures itself principally around the thought of painting.¹ By this I mean that the work in question not only partakes of many of the elements normally associated with painting, but rather, that a large part of what the work can be said to achieve turns on its ability to establish a relationship with the nature of painting in general. Part of this can be seen in the work's fabrication, which involves two small cardboard constructions and a short, looped segment of video projected onto a white sheet attached to the back wall. A further aspect can be seen in the carefully framed video itself, which consists of a single, unedited, reduced frame projection of the window frontage of local Melbourne bar 'Bourgie', decorated by the artist to resemble the abstract 'compositions' of early twentieth century Dutch painter Piet Mondrian. A final and ultimately more ambiguous element can be seen in the content of the video which,

played in reverse, documents the artist as he repeatedly writes and erases the word 'wreckless' onto the interior of the bar's window.

The various aspects outlined above do not add up to a relationship with painting that is in any way simple or clear, rather, what they might be said to produce is a complex commentary on the way art historical, and particularly modernist avant-garde, narratives figure in the logic of contemporary artistic practice. Analyses of this type are not new and might even be said to comprise a sizeable portion of significant artistic practice from the 1960s onwards. Nevertheless, Kennedy's work is a refined example of the theme, of which, it might be claimed in the words of the American critic Hal Foster, aims less to act out art historical models in an hysterical pastiche 'than to work them through to a reflexive practice – to turn the very limitations of these models into a critical consciousness of history, artistic and otherwise'.²

*Right: Jarrad Kennedy
Milk crate
Detail of Bonbeach Bourgie Wourgie, 2004
Cardboard
Image courtesy the artist*



The limitations of the model supposed by Mondrian's paintings are well known: and one need only think here of his desire to render painting obsolete via a reductive search for universal formal truths to see the basic stakes of the modernist-formalist project as Mondrian envisages it. Kennedy's translation of these stakes is allegorical in tone and works to undermine the notions of autonomy implicit in any such claims. As such we find in Kennedy's video a subtle rejection of Mondrian's favoured palette of primary hues, replaced instead by a kinetic scene in which the contingencies of shadows, movement and lighting serve to destabilise the unity of the tableau. That such spaces may be literally inhabited points to a further rejection of modernist painting's claims to autonomy.

The intervention of the artist into the space of the video also points to Kennedy's other main concern – that of the status of 'the artist' – the effects of which flow neatly out from within the video to the installation itself. Of interest here is the visibility of the work's construction, which even a cursory glance around the room makes apparent. There is perhaps even a sequence to our looking which begins with the crudely assembled wooden frame behind the video projection and moves down through the visible traces of cutting evident in Kennedy's cardboard sculptures to the presence of tools and equipment left scattered around the room. Such disclosure of the work's fabrication, its signification of non-completion and impermanence, has no place in the formalist project of De Stijl and leaves open many questions regarding notions of artistic expression and authorship.³

Concerns such as these are often gathered around a certain critical node that can best be described as anti-humanist. This node is also at the core of much French theory and so it is worth drawing attention to the similarity between the work's most rhetorical act – Kennedy's repeated writing and erasure of the word 'wreckless' across the visual screen – and certain strands of current French thought which seek to lodge at the core of subjectivity a non-decipherable kernel.⁴ From our perspective, what is important in these thoughts is the constant fashioning of subjectivity around a constitutive

void that both resists and impels attempts to locate and ground the subject's agency. The main point to be drawn here is that it is not simply a question of choosing either a process resistant to subjectivation against a founded and complete subjectivity, but rather, one of acknowledging that an act of artistic creation makes itself precisely out of this undecidable wager. These last two terms open neatly onto a word like reckless, and if we cannot quite claim that Kennedy holds investments in a notion of the subject understood explicitly in these terms, we can suggest that his installation encourages us to view the work of art anew, writ large through a gaze that is both open to and founded upon a form of radical contingency.

¹ I am thinking here of a loose association of artists which would include Shaun Gladwell, James Clayden and Guy Benfield as recent examples.

² Hal Foster, *The Return of the Real: the Avant-garde at the end of the Century*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Mass, 1996, p.3.

³ Esther Boix (Trans. Richard Rees), *Reason and Dream*, Ediciones Poligrafa, Barcelona, 1995, p54.

⁴ Good recent examples include works by Slavoj Zizek and Alain Badiou.

Toby Miller is a Melbourne based arts writer.

When The Sleeper Wakes

Starlie Geikie

*TCB Art Inc.
1 – 12 June 2004
by Johannah Fahey*

*No one who conjures up the most evil of those half-tamed demons that inhabit the human breast, and seeks to wrestle with them, can expect to come through the struggle unscathed.
Sigmund Freud*

Geikie's installation transforms the gallery into an unsettling domestic setting inhabited by a proliferation of hands. These fragile, obviously feminine, yet sinister forms are the stirrings of the unconscious mind manifest as emerging curled fingers. Tense and convulsive physical gestures, induced by the trance-like mental state of hysteria, create a psychologically charged space where the possibilities of abnormal femininity arise – a rude awakening from slumber.

Her body is the doomed home to a wandering womb left barren for too long. She is the angel of the house entrapped by the devil down below. It's too late to tread lightly as too soon the sleeper wakes. From under the carpet spawn a brood of delicate feelers. Hands hatched in the darkness scrape the surface as a reaching mass of gesture, half-formed endings of the body that signal the beginnings of something bad. Once swept under it is now still becoming.

When The Sleeper Wakes draws inspiration from Jean-Martin Charcot's medical photographs of hysterical women. Charcot was the director of the Salpêtrière Hospital, the notorious Parisian asylum for insane and incurable women, in the latter part of the nineteenth century. He documented the characteristic symptoms of hysteria by photographing his female patients, and presenting public lectures that included live demonstrations of their hysterical attacks. It was Freud's studies of hysterics and use of hypnosis under Charcot that informed his notion of the unconscious mind, and initiated the birth of his 'talking cure' or psychoanalysis. From the ancient Hippocratics to the psychoanalysts of the nineteenth century hysteria remained an exclusively female disease as diagnosed by men.¹ This diagnosis implied that a woman's very femaleness was something that was apt to betray her at any moment, a force that would ultimately drive her to distraction.



*Above: Starlie Geikie
When The Sleeper Wakes, 2004
Carpet, polyurethane plastic, velero, yellow fluorescent lights
4 x 5 metres, installation detail
Photo credit: Ben Glezer*

Lying beneath a sallow light above and stemming from deep down in the abode of the dead, her deviance is arising from the depths of her repression. The doctor is the silent witness to this creeping crawl of flesh, armed with a diagnosis that is particular to her alone, the foundations for his nascent remedy, the means to keep her caged inside his home. And so she's fallen victim to a female malady, at best a swooning heroine, at worst a dangerous convulsive and a hazard to his health, with contractions in her extremities, reaching the finger tips, expressing emotion in excess.

¹ *The Hippocratics thought that the physical manifestations of hysteria were created when a woman's womb detached itself from its usual home and wandered off at will through her body. There also believed that grounding the womb through pregnancy was the only cure to this wandering.*

Johannah Fahey is a Melbourne based academic and writer.

Big Dirty Love

A Constructed World

Uplands Gallery
3–28 August 2004
by Rob McKenzie



Right: *A Constructed World*
Big Dirty Love, 2004
Uplands Gallery (installation view)
Image courtesy the artists &
Uplands Gallery

How do you talk about something in transit? Something that is still moving and solidifying? Much art writing is about defining subject and meaning. But for *A Constructed World* (ACW), a collaborative duo consisting of Jacqueline Riva and Geoff Lowe, the contention seems to be that meaning is uncertain, that meaning is created through discourse and communication rather than in the limited parameters of a finite object. Their work seems to be about how things always change and reform. From the perspective of ACW, history, politics, knowledge and libido are constantly being debated. People are continuously responding and forging paths through these various energies.

A mammoth body of material could be brought within the confines of the ACW project. For this reason there is a zooming in and out effect, details are highlighted and other areas left for a later event. Their exhibition of eight videos and a series of drawings at Uplands Gallery creates a conversation. Projections, television monitors and a very low, relaxed couch are scattered through the space. Ideas about power, the unspoken, repression and desire, global politics and personal politics all intermingle. These themes keep shifting, changing meaning with the contributions or interactions of each viewer.

Fire appears in three of the videos. *Money Fire* (2003) is a charged work showing an American dollar bill being turned to cinders. This potent image alludes to the dense discourses around capital, capitalism, poverty and prosperity. The flame is used as an ambiguous device. For me it is aggressive, but also defiant and emotive. Desire for cash, mixed with frustration at its necessity, affects my response.

World Fire (2004) presents an inflatable plastic globe being consumed by flames. The products of this action are black smoke, tortured plastic and various musings on global politics. The aim of the work seems to be to get a response from the viewer. It is angling for a reaction. Through this process, understandings about international conflict are written onto and create the artwork. The third video featuring fire is *Camera Fire* (2003). Here we see a video recorder being set alight and engulfed by flames. The camera collapses and twists. It is serene iconoclasm. We are shown the symbolic destruction of images. I see a surprising optimism to this gesture. I guess I want to think of it as an action of freedom; we can eradicate images and still possess something. Something will still be active.



Left: *A Constructed World*
Ecstatic Torino, 2004
DVD
3:30 minutes
Image courtesy the artists &
Uplands Gallery

The five other videos in Uplands Gallery continue to walk through diverse terrain. *Ecstatic Torino* (2004) shows Riva and Lowe dancing in a small apartment. Riva is naked except for the post-it notes stuck to her skin. Lowe is presented in a suit and holds two signs, each saying 'No need to be great.' Failure is given reverence through hypnotic dance. The collaborative work *We just want to get out of here* (2003) has art duo Nat and Ali talking about Australia. There is something very frank and honest in it. Racism and repression buzz and affix themselves to national identity. I was forced to consider my part in the concerns Nat and Ali presented.

In the title work for the show *Big Dirty Love* (2004) a model plane travels through space, people step on and off trains, a person sits at a computer and someone busks. These are casual or even haphazard observations of people doing, moving, thinking, and the video provides time to meditate on what is produced through travel, busking and invisible cognition.

Ecstatic Dancing (2004) is a grouping of three ink and acrylic drawings. The imagery is based on stills taken from the video work *Ecstatic Torino*. They are painted in iridescent green and opaque white, and there is something minimal, almost alien about them. The video stills have been translated into a more concentrated form through exacting brushstrokes, as Riva and Lowe are posed at different points in their *Ecstatic Torino* dance.

One of the difficulties with the work of ACW is that their subject is around, rather than in, the object. The crux of the artwork is in a grey zone between the art object and its audience. This type of art refuses set meaning. The work becomes barren with attempts at a closed reading. I think ACW have a practice that acknowledges and tries to utilise an uncontrolled, external subject. For this reason, the seductive objects they produce are only the beginning. An open discourse, productively unstable, is the subject of their work and the core of its meaning.

Born in Melbourne, Rob McKenzie enjoys good health and art criticism.

multipleMISCELLANEOUSalliances

Clubsproject Inc.
26 June – 10 July 2004
West Space
25 June – 10 July 2004
by Anthony Gardner

Artistic focus on social relations and inter-human encounters has recently become a strong, if not dominant, aesthetic among Melbourne's emerging artists. Practices range from collaborative ventures, such as the *Office of Utopic Procedures* developed by Bernhard Sachs and various Victorian College of the Arts students and associates, to works by individual artists such as Andrew McQualter and Bianca Hester, both of whom have figured strongly in past *Primavera* exhibitions at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. Central to these practices is art's role in catalysing or presenting physical interaction between artists and artworks and their audiences. Unlike 'process art' of the 1960s and 70s, where the means by which the artist completed an artwork itself became the work, this emergent aesthetic uses art as a spark, a friendly opportunity, from which artists and audiences can negotiate with each other to develop new ideas, social relations and, perhaps, future projects. Such practices inhabit a grassroots or micro sphere of individual interaction from which to re-conceive broader social and creative relations and networks. Yet they simultaneously reflect a self-conscious concern for art's public reception and its continued relevance amid today's focus on all things accessible and easily digestible, its service economies and infotainment industries.

This 'relational aesthetic' has been central to European art of the 1990s, under the auspices of French curator and critic, Nicolas Bourriaud, who coined the term and wrote a book of the same name.¹ It has also informed the work of A Constructed World, DAMP, and others exhibited in Stuart Koop's recent VCA Gallery show *Concern*,² and was the focus of a highly attended CCP forum, entitled 'Relational Aesthetics', held soon after *multipleMISCELLANEOUSalliances* closed.³ *mMa* was another opportunity to explore the efficacy of this artistic rhetoric, this time in relation to Melbourne's artist-run circles and especially the works of many Clubs regulars, including McQualter and Hester.



Above & below:
mMa reading corner at CLUBS
June 2004
Photo credit: Bianca Hester



mMa was effectively a compression of Clubs' exhibition calendar into a two-week showcase of art committed to the Clubs motto of being 'perpetually provisional'. Highlighting the theme of networks and negotiations, *mMa* spanned two venues: West Space, where a list of events hyperlinked with lengths of string comprised part of Lisa Kelly's *Resistance through Rituals* exhibition; and that show's 'sister exhibition' at Clubs, where the events listed took place and which was the main focus of *mMa*.

In keeping with the 'perpetually provisional' motif, different artworks were shown at Clubs on different days, unsettling any comforting opportunity to return to many of the works and reflect upon their strengths and weaknesses. It was a clever tactical manoeuvre, preventing any extended judgment of (and thus a sense of power over) various works and instead requiring audiences to engage with them in that brief encounter alone. Certain works did stay the distance, especially Mick Douglas and Katie Bowman's *KNOTWORK* project, which required visitors (often with the assistance of other audience members) to wrap themselves up in the ropes and wood provided by the artists. Also surviving the fortnight was a large bookshelf displaying a range of catalogues and other texts that various *mMa* artists had supplied for the show. These texts often related directly to the theme of artists working collaboratively with each other and their audiences, forming laboratories of new ideas and relations within cramped studios or artist-run spaces. And as with much of Hester's past practice, a photocopier allowed visitors to photocopy sections from these texts to take home as souvenirs or incentives to re-conceive future social relations, simultaneously undermining copyright regulations and their canonisation of the singular author in society.

mMa was also an excellent opportunity to catch up with Azlan McLennan and Utako Shindo's now-infamous *Fifty-six* – a Star of David superimposed with allegations of Israeli violations against Palestinian human rights and international law, appended with footnotes to information sources. The wall-painting, which had been notoriously censored in May 2004 amid cries of anti-Semitism,⁴ was redisplayed within Clubs' annex, alongside booklets informing audiences of the censorship debates. Art's public utility (if any) and social relevance were the display's focus, rather than the painting itself. Such topicality also underpinned one of the numerous forums and information sessions held as part of *mMa* and its aims to ignite public discussions between artists and audiences about art's potential intervention in social and cultural politics.

mMa was a strong, thought-provoking display; one that did not simply adopt Bourriaud's Eurocentric relational aesthetics but instead highlighted the specifically local concerns of practices emerging from Melbourne's artist-run spaces. I also had a lot of fun playing with artworks and hanging out by the heater with friends as though it were a cozy house-warming. And this may be *mMa*'s main problem: if art is to provoke a re-evaluation of contemporary social relations, doesn't it need to break that coziness down and erupt directly and virally into the public sphere? Given *Fifty-six* barely raised a ripple of concern when re-shown at Clubs, it would seem that 'public intervention' of whatever kind may be nullified when contained within the four walls of an artist-run space. It is a predicament of which the artists are clearly aware,⁵ and one that may well inform projects by many of the *mMa* artists following this fascinating intellectual, artistic and participatory experiment.

¹ Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance, Fronza Woods and Mathieu Copeland, Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002. See also Bourriaud's follow-up, *Postproduction: culture as screenplay: how art reprograms the world*, New York City: Lukas and Sternberg, 2002. For an alternative viewpoint on similar material, see Hans Ulrich Obrist and Barbara Vanderlinden (eds), *Laboratorium, Antwerp: Antwerpen Open and Roomade*, 2001.

² *Concern*, VCA Gallery, Melbourne, 29 July – 20 August 2004.

³ Centre for Contemporary Photography, 'Relational Aesthetics' Forum, 11 August 2004, Gryphon Gallery, 1888 Building, The University of Melbourne.

⁴ See, for example, Gabriela Coslovich, 'The Politics of Art', available through the *The Age* website:

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2004/05/13/1084289821310.html>

⁵ See the online forum through the Clubs website, involving Bianca Hester, Tom Nicholson and Lisa Kelly:

<http://www.clubsproject.org.au/phpBB2/viewtopic.php?t=9>

Anthony Gardner is a writer based in Melbourne and Sydney. And to pinch Zara Stanhope's line, he is also an advocate of any forum for the discussion of contemporary art.

The Polish Game

Bernhard Sachs

Ocular Lab Inc.
8 August 2004
by Stephen Haley



Above: Bernhard Sachs
The Polish Game, 2004
Installation detail
Photo credit: Julie Davies

There are not too many exhibitions that actually injure the audience, but this was one. Bernhard Sachs conceived *The Polish Game* as a process. He occupied the space at Ocular Lab Inc. for five weeks, producing a series of large scale, intricately worked, charcoal drawings designed to cover every wall surface from floor to ceiling as an elaborate monochrome fresco. The space was transformed into something between a grand Baroque palazzo and a less than Platonic cave. Incorporating imagery from sources high and low – Cavellino's *Judith and Holifernes*, newspaper photographs of globalisation protestors, slogans from an avant-garde past – these works glowered in the dim light of the room. Most included a characteristic trope, rendering the image as though it were an x-ray of a painting, to resemble an art conservator's working photograph. The device poetically suggests, among other things, a historical layering, a forensic examination of painting, and visually reveals the image's 'supports,' both mechanical and conceptual.

A crucial element, and the penultimate event of the installation, was a formal dinner party for 24 people held in the exhibition space. A long table with elegantly dressed diners sat beneath a miasma of grey cigarette smoke, seemingly emanating from the works themselves. It was here that the injuries began. Collaborator Alex Rizkalla presented his *Cassoulet Alexandrin de Rizkalla* to the assembled gourmands, a heady, sumptuous assemblage of six meats, borlotti beans and a welter of goose-fatted gravy. It was hurried on its way to the bowels by rivulets of rich, red wine. The giddy fragrance and disparate range of ingredients were the perfect accomplice to the brooding distillations shrouding the walls. At the end of the night (in the middle of the morning) the meal's carcass was abandoned to remain as the centrepiece of the exhibition over the weekend. Thus an existential narrative unfolded; from a pageant of operatic splendour to chaotic, festering remains that marked the debased shame of excess. What once seemed an odour from heaven had begun to stink to high heaven over the next few days. Thank Christ somebody took the gorgonzola home.

Sachs is coy about the significance of the title 'The Polish Game' but it does appear as an incident in an early Roman Polanski film. Here the protagonist attempts suicide by throwing himself from an upper storey window. Despite sickening bone crunches and violent ruptures, he survives and must drag his quivering remains back up the stairs for another go. A failed death, an inglorious end, not with a bang but a whimper: all, perhaps, an analogy for representational painting and drawing in a postmodern age. Hasn't such work, with its quaintly old fashioned love of the hand-made, the laboriously worked, been outlawed? Didn't we ban it in the 1990s? What about its nasty tendency to create saleable art objects, to promote hierarchical discourses of mastery and skill? Why, in short, didn't it fucking well die? And, since it refused to die, what is that faint putrescent smell that surrounds it?

By the mid 90s traditional mediums had been thrown out the window by a number of artists and an even greater number of curators – a kind of involuntary participation in a Polish Game. The a priori supposition appeared to be: trad bad, not trad good. As if (gasping for breath) video and installation were not traditional mediums! As if the 70s never happened! Bluntly stated perhaps, but there was, and still remains, an inference that somehow, certain mediums are morally better than others – self evidently pristine – and many a pinched-mouth curator, born of puritan stock, was prepared to burn any number of heretics in the cause of a lame, teleological avantgardism that was calculated to underwrite their own fatuous claims to authority. Frankly, the whole debate was a bore. Mediums certainly have an internal logic, but not one is intrinsically better than another; it's what you do with it that counts – as the bishop once remarked to the actress.

Sachs' work is about much more than just the continuance of a tradition potentially anachronistic in a world of quick, glam mediums. Nor is he championing one over the other, but is in fact, impurely, even sluttishly, working across a range of mediums at once: drawing, painting, process work, performance and installation. When looking at these intricately worked drawings that recall the weight of their own historical tradition, it is hard not to imagine broader allegorical readings of the event. These are works of many layers, both physically and conceptually, and they reference many an imperfect death, both high and low. These are very aware works that speak of their position within a broader historical and philosophic tradition. They acknowledge recent



Above: Bernhard Sachs
The Polish Game, 2004
 Photo credit: Julie Davies

suspicion of the mark, and of representation itself. Yet there is something glorious within these works that requires no qualifications. Despite the odds, their perilous positioning, they survive, they live – albeit injured and marred – not what they once were and perhaps the better for it.

More than could be said for many following the day. I awoke – and found myself alive. Barely, but acutely, alive. My personal attempt to kill myself had failed once more. Shattered, mind excoriated, lungs the remnants of two burnt condoms attached to a charred, bronchial twig – I had lost the Polish Game. Or, perhaps, I had won. Or, again, maybe you just can't win.

Stephen Haley is a Melbourne based artist and writer.

Paintings 2003

Andrew Taylor

Crossley & Scott
1 – 17 July 2004
by Andrew Gaynor

If, as a university lecturer once proclaimed, the sublime is anything bigger than your head then Andrew Taylor's exhibition *Paintings 2003* are a strong visual argument in support of this principle.

Painters are illusionists by trade, manipulating both the physical space of their canvases and the materiality of their paint into the perceptual space of a final frontier of the mind. In *The Sunset Plaza*, for example, Taylor constructs a cosmos from the inky blue-black of a stained drop sheet. The background tones percolate from light to dark and evoke murky, psychological depths. Shimmering over the top is a shower of coloured daubs and marks, which have the authority of calculated painterly technique, yet also manage to maintain the dynamic of random splatters. Puddles of cadmium yellow dashes – like nascent, golden galaxies – communicate across the void with aqua marine pools slightly higher to the right. Are these truly the heavens, or Monet's lily pads fractured through the prism of consciousness-raising party lights? Or is it simply bacterial scum floating o'er stagnant waters? Such questions on the dilemmas of illusion keep the eyes engaged.

Taylor's painting technique is truly absorbing and, dare I say it, harks back to Fred Williams' highly coloured canvases of the 1970s. His brushmarks are economically spare against the stained grounds, 'slubby' where necessary, then scumbled and gouged. Here and there is evidence of frottage: the artist having pressed coarse-grained materials (the back of a piece of masonite?) into the wet paint, which are then removed, leaving puckered impressions. Some backgrounds are delicately in-filled, occasionally highlighted around the edges, then frugally over-glazed. The joy of these works is as much in unraveling the construction, as in the pure aesthetics of the final piece

Focal points are duly dispensed with, as in the majestic canvas *Ms Yu*. Looking for all the world like a meditation on a Tim Johnson painting (without the UFOs or Buddhas) Taylor includes the sparing application of gold and silver paint, which is used to emphasise the existence of a series of little grottoes. These cavities have been

Below: Andrew Taylor
Ms -Yu, 2004
Oil on canvas

Image courtesy of the artist and Crossley & Scott Contemporary



further articulated by a technique of vertical hatching that mimics the tendril vines of an Amazon jungle, inviting the viewer to imagine what lurks within, be it mystery or enlightenment.

Balancing the scale of these larger works, Taylor displayed a series of smaller studies of tangled weeds crafted on both canvas and unprimed board. From the melancholy violets and mauves of *Through the Weeds, Thursday 7pm*, to the moody viridians and olives over-painted with powder blue tracteries of *Friday 1am*, or the autumnal gold delicacy of *Sunday 4pm*, these paintings articulated a refined sense of design amidst the apparent chaos.

Crossley & Scott has been quietly building a reputation of championing artists who are interrogating the physicality of paint. These practitioners, including Tim McMonagle and Peter Westwood, are not bound by the strictures of Greenberg's Modernist dictums regarding the image, nor are they merely presenting computer designs recreated in paint. The synthesis of concept, exploration and technique is integral to these artists, and Andrew Taylor is a fascinating addition to their ranks.

Andrew Gaynor has decided to change his by-line. This is the new one.

Thick as...

Cate Consandine, Chantal Faust, Louise Hubbard & Sanja Pahoki

*Conical Inc.
13 – 29 August 2004
by Jeff Khan*



*Left: Louise Hubbard
Shorncliffe 2004
Installation view
Image courtesy the artist*

The self-consciously renovated interior spaces of Conical in Fitzroy are rich fodder for site-specific installation, providing a responsive and challenging exhibition environment in which local artists have experimented with a plethora of spatial and conceptual concerns. In turn, Conical responds through periodical changes to its interior configuration, providing challenging new contexts for creating and exhibiting new work.

Thick as... was a group show at Conical by four artists who are building a reputation on the Melbourne art scene for making intense, challenging works that explore sublimated psychologies and sexualised states. From the psychosexual tension of Cate Consandine's haunting installation projects; to Sanja Pahoki's playful and investigative practice; the liminal, sexed-up fuzz of Chantal Faust's large-scale photographs; and Louise Hubbard's assemblages of raw, loaded, semi-industrial materials, all four artists have a growing oeuvre of works (from a solid exhibiting history) which explore the uncanny sides of psychology and sexuality.

So why, on the occasion of their first group exhibition together, did their work fall strangely flat? Coming into the exhibition with admittedly high expectations of transformed atmospheres and a strong dialogue between works of a shared sensibility, there seemed instead to be a kind of tension which arose from too strong a focus on individual works and a lack of emphasis on cohesion, connection or even shared space. Considering these four artists are known for making highly seductive, charged works, there seemed to be a certain frisson lacking between the pieces in their collective display, which in turn detracted from each work's communicative power, rendering the exhibition oddly subdued and lacking a strong focus or sensibility.

Faust's photographs hung on Conical's white wallspace in a conventional manner, which offset the other works with their tense spatial arrangements and responsiveness to Conical's architecture. These were odd photographs of strange found objects, some out of focus. Sharing a quirky, idiosyncratic quality, the objects in Faust's

Right: Louise Hubbard & Sanja Pahoki
Thick As... 2004
 Exhibition installation view, Conical



photographs were the kind of things that are worthless but invested with multifarious personal meanings and attachments. Under Faust's lens these implicit connections to personalised, psychological states were amplified, with lashings of ambiguously sexual signification thrown in for good measure.

Consandine's work saw Conical's bisecting wall painted pale blue and smeared with dirt, creating an unsettling, grimy patina. In front of this wall was a beige armchair, resplendent in its dreary ordinariness, except for the blue resin hand which lay on one of its arms. Equipped with talon-like white nails curling in on themselves, the hand provided a dramatic counterpoint to the other, banal yet vaguely disturbing elements of the work. The performative tension which arose both from the subtle traces of action and the fascinatingly overwrought sculptural object was refreshingly restrained in comparison to Consandine's other recent installations, adding a new depth to an already strong, intriguing practice.

Pahoki's eccentric, wall-based work took the form of a large orange rocket, constructed from small orange squares stuck onto the wall, which launched upwards towards Conical's ceiling. Adjacent to it, scrawled on the brick wall, was Pahoki's address, followed by the 'extra' directions of 'Earth, Universe'. This strange pairing seemed to be an ironic commentary on the 'stellar' trajectory of the artist – experienced by a lucky few – that sets an impossible standard for artists to follow in a resource-starved industry. Another allusion hovered here, to the isolation and associated questions of connection (or failure to connect) that haunt artists and artistic practice. The obviously phallic rocket also deconstructed such notions of artistic trajectory as decidedly phallicentric, aligning it to the masculinist implications of 'exploration' and space travel.

Teetering between two and three dimensions, the installation-drawings by Hubbard map out the psychological states inherent in the choreography of popular culture and everyday life. Hubbard's installations invoke a scene or a sequence from memory, film or other sources, and flatten it into an assemblage of materials in which only the most rudimentary forms and figures remain. The loaded materials and psychoanalytic premise of Hubbard's work usually makes for strangely compelling viewing (as in her recent installation *brickhedging* at West Space, which was something of a tour-de-force) but this work suffered from being flattened out a little too much – cut back and leaving too little to snare the viewer's imagination.

Ultimately, *Thick as...* was an uneven exhibition which may have benefited from a stronger editorial hand. Each artist's work was carefully tweaked and (sometimes a little too) pared back, lessening the possibility of dialogue between works which should have spoken more strongly to each other. Despite the considerable talents of the participants and a gallery environment laden with potential, the exhibition felt strangely awkward, leaving its promising proposition unfulfilled.

Jeff Khan is a Melbourne-based writer and is Communications Coordinator at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

A Lane Away

Briele Hansen

Lush Lane, Melbourne
22 September – 12 December 2004
by Jason Maling



Right: Briele Hansen
A Lane Away, 2004
Video Still
Image courtesy the artist

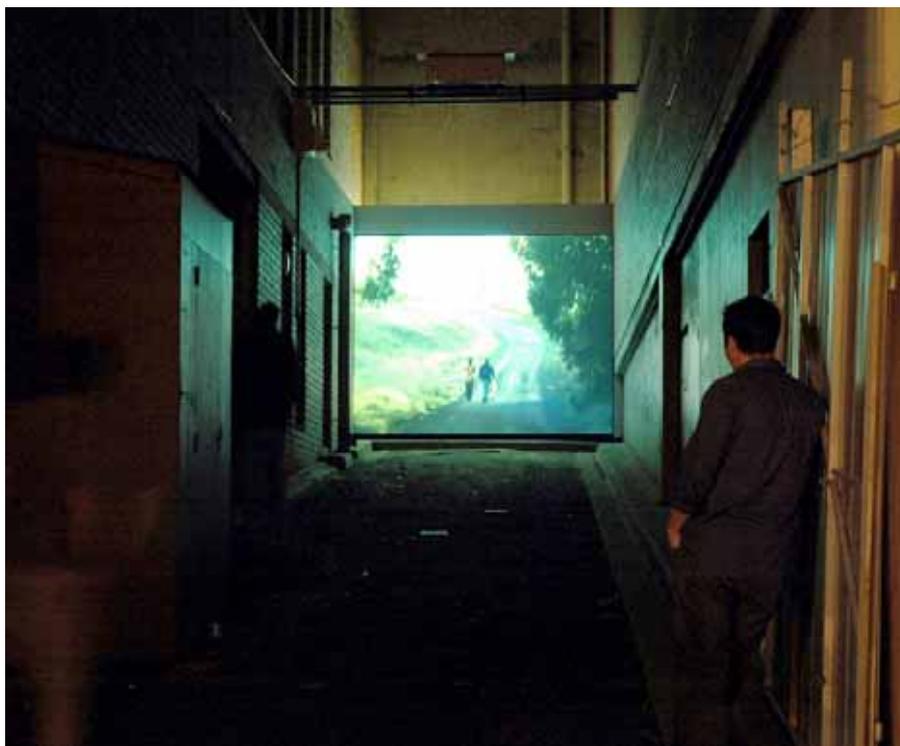
Hooks and Sinkers

The first thing we saw was a shuffling figure with slightly buckled legs hunched over a rickety old pram. As we drove a little closer we noticed a thick cord extending from the front of the pram and connecting to the back of another shambling figure. This one had a large strapped-on metal frame that arched around the side of her head to a camera protruding just beyond her chin. You could be forgiven for thinking intensive care patients had been abandoned in the wilderness.

These characters had been walking non-stop since 5pm the previous evening. Their ramblings crisscrossed the city, then headed directly northwest, the orientation of the inner-city laneway from which their journey began. They had braved the outer suburbs in the late evening and broken through the depressive hours of the early morning to emerge into crisp sun-lit pastures way off the Melways. Myself and another colleague were the last-leg support crew for those on their last legs.

To Briele Hansen, “Walking is a physical manifestation of the ramblings of the mind.” The performative simplicity of walking non-stop from sunset to sunset in one direction could certainly have been a successful piece in itself. But to film the entire journey in one continuous shot, with the intention of editing it down to a 12 minute sequence, demands a curious sensitivity to both the limits of one’s body and technology.

When I met up with Briele to see a preview of the images that make up the final sequence for the installation *A Lane Away* (commissioned as part of the City of Melbourne’s Laneways) 2004, she seemed submerged and frustrated with the scale of the editing project. “I feel like I’m doing the walk five times over.” This contradiction between the painstakingly static process of editing and the expansive freedom of the walk is a good example of the principal tension that pervades every facet of Hansen’s practice: from the conceptualizing, through the production, to



*Right: Briele Hansen
A Lane Away: The Walk, 2004
Photo credit: Zain, Mark & Shaun
Image courtesy the artist*

the final installation. Experiencing her work is a little like fishing; an acutely mannered exercise in the ephemera of time and the unpredictable. Her use of technology is a well-considered fly cast into a deep pool of sensation. We the viewers sit comfortably on the bank eating the sandwiches. Hansen states that:

I am interested in creating a transitional experience, an experience that pulls one into the work, some kind of journey, but that also highlights one's presence within the here and now. There's a pull in the work between the alluring, the motion and rhythms and the actuality of the moment.

By setting such defined parameters for generating the images, Hansen faces the difficult task of realising an experience for the viewer that both explains and transcends the concept. This duality must also be reconciled in the dislocation between a prolonged experiential stillness and a condensed, imaginative exit. "I couldn't anticipate what the process was going to do so my idea was to frame the activity within the technology and do the same again by transcending the technology through the content. I'm interested in the relationships between places and how our mind and our body can both separate and connect us."

The final sequence is projected onto the back wall of Lush Lane, an inclined narrow, lesser-known alcove of the city. According to Hansen, as you look "up into this

void between two buildings... the imagery will become an extension of the laneway. I want to absolutely immerse and transport people within the urban space but at the same time create a means of escape."

'Techno-pastoralist endurance art' was what I thought as I watched the closing moments of the 24 hour walk. It was one of those unanticipated, godly moments. The closure was that the walkers ceased moving wherever they were at 5pm. Obviously Briele knew the sun would be descending; what she nor anyone else could have planned was that a few minutes before five, the walkers would turn around a bend – ascending onto a high plateau – and that the sun would descend behind a ridge of hills ahead at precisely that time. If *A Lane Away* goes halfway towards framing the sublimity of that moment it will be a unique and powerful work.

The installation of A Lane Away will be visible in Lush Lane from dusk to midnight from 22 September – 12 December 2004.

Jason Maling is a Melbourne-based artist and writer.

The Myth of Voss: Death By Landscape **Gary Willis**

Baillieu Library, University of Melbourne
5 July – 27 August 2004
by Barbara Bolt

Mimesis and the marking of 'whitefella sorry business' in Gary Willis's *The Myth of Voss: Death By Landscape*.

Located on a number of levels in the Baillieu library at the University of Melbourne, Gary Willis's exhibition *The Myth of Voss: Death by Landscape* snakes its way up the spiral staircase and insinuates itself into every nook and cranny of the library. In contrast to the uniform grey order of the library stacks, Willis has filled every available wall space with the reds, oranges, yellows and disorder of the central Australian desert. Everywhere one looks, a painting or a photograph stare back.

For those who know Willis's work from the twentieth century, or have read his *Diary of a Dead Beat Modern Art Type* (1982), Voss is a decidedly odd show. Willis has long held a reputation for pushing the envelope of contemporary art practice. In this series of works however, the subject of his attention is not the limits of art itself. Rather, here Willis attempts to put art in the service of a cultural critique of the colonising ego of white Australian culture.

The research for this exhibition came at a time when Willis had returned to Australia after an extended period working overseas. As a result of his interest in Patrick White's novel *Voss*, Willis 'went bush' to explore the inspiration for the character of Voss, which was based on the disappearance of the explorer Ludwig Leichhardt. Following in the footsteps of Leichhardt, he documented his travels through plein-air painting and photography. Partway through the journey Willis arrived at Urapuntja in the Northern Territory to find that the community had gone into mourning and was immersed in 'sorry business'. During this time, Willis sat and waited and thought again about his preoccupation with Voss. His experience of mourning in the Urapuntja community allowed him to revise his thinking about the role that Voss plays in contemporary Australian culture, and ultimately to speculate that Voss is a myth about 'whitefella sorry business'. *The Myth of Voss: Death by Landscape* is Willis's reworking of this myth.



Above: Gary Willis
Voss: Jump, 2001-2
Oil on linen
122 x 92 cm
Image courtesy the artist



Modelling his painting style on the Antipodean painters Nolan and Boyd, Willis offers a series of paintings about an “anti-heroic struggle in the face of the relentless and merciless landscape”. For Willis, Voss becomes an “antipodean scapegoat, sent out into the desert as a sacrificial offering, marked for death by landscape”. The paintings also serve as a metaphor for Willis’s own struggle to come to terms with the social, cultural and physical landscape of a colonized Australia and accept culpability for the colonizing instinct of white Australians. In this spirit, it could be argued that the *Voss* narrative paintings double as both a re-enactment of the Voss myth and as self portraits. *Voss’s* failure mirrors Willis’s own failure to come to terms with this complex landscape.



Willis’s *Voss* paintings are stylistically and thematically reminiscent of Arthur Boyd’s paintings. In his forward to the catalogue, Bernard Smith refers to the 1959 *Antipodean* exhibition, where Arthur Boyd exhibited six paintings on the theme of the *Love, Marriage and Death of a Half-caste*. This was to make the point that it is creative artists such as Boyd, White and Willis who bear the burden of our own ‘sorry business’. It is clearly Willis’s intention to take this on, but whilst the narrative series achieves this, the overall exhibition sits more ambivalently in its relation to ‘sorry business’. *Death by Landscape* is not just played out in the narrative of the *Voss* series, but also in the other works that make up the body of the show. In a series of plein-air landscape paintings, portraits of elders standing before their own sacred sites, and photographs of a community in mourning, Willis’s work sits in an uneasy relationship to his claim of responsibility and culpability. His paintings and photographs raised several questions for me. Do the photographs of a community in mourning engender empathy or are they invasive and colonising? And what of the paintings and the argument that mimetic painting involves mastery over its subject?



Whilst I felt a strong ambivalence towards the photographs, the plein-air paintings demonstrate an awkwardness that undermines their mimetic authority. Thus Willis’s portrait of Albert Akamarr Bailey presents as a cardboard cut out against a washed out landscape, whilst his landscapes reflect a struggle to create any form under the glare of the Australian light. Here Walter Benjamin’s argument that the mimetic facility involves the capacity to become and behave like something else, is useful in understanding this failure of representation and the difficulty of mimesis in marking ‘whitefella sorry business’. In these paintings, it was not just Voss who is marked for death, but in his persistent attempts to become other, Willis too experienced his own death by landscape.

Top, centre & above: Gary Willis
Voss, 2001-2
 Installation detail, Baillieu library
 Images courtesy the artist

Barbara Bolt is a Melbourne based writer.

...don't fence me in

Matthew Davis & Natasha Frisch

*West Space
4 June – 19 June
by Olivia Poloni*

...don't fence me in was the result of a unique collaboration between video and sound artist Matthew Davis and sculptor Natasha Frisch. Davis's previous body of work closely investigated the appropriation of self-portraiture through the media of video and sound art, and at first glance, in many of Frisch's earlier paper sculptures illustrate the purity and innocence of the everyday, whilst at a closer investigation highlighting the malevolence within it.

The sculptural element of the installation by Frisch created the key insight that gave this work its edge. She made a tall white fence, constructed from tracing paper, with tiny gaps between each panel that forced the viewer's eyes to strain in order to see what was on the other side. This component both intrigued and fascinated the viewer by blurring the vision behind the fence and forcing the viewer to look and concentrate deeply on the image, stirring up a sense of curiosity. The fence created a boundary that segregated the viewer from where the video lay. Behind this barrier a video screen featured a young boy gazing up at the 'starry skies above,' swaying on a porch swing and shining a torch on his face.

Viewing this work from an Australian perspective, the footage is loaded with feelings of isolation inherent to the vast Australian outback, creating a sense of loneliness, and also a paradox, as this gallery is not in the outback but a building in the centre of Melbourne's CBD. And yet, one felt the same solitude, and in this way the work explores some of the conditions of modernity by forcing the viewer to recognise their situation within its context. The situation of the innocent boy swinging on a porch bench, alone with the melodic sounds, asserts the mundane subtleties of existence and it is this feature that activates the installation.

At closer examination it became apparent that the video is a two minute loop of a scene extracted from the film *E.T. The Extra Terrestrial*, in which the character Elliott is waiting for E.T. to appear from a shed. *...don't fence me in* pays homage to this cult eighties film and focuses on a scene within the film which evoked a sense of



*Above: Natasha Frisch & Matthew Davis
... don't fence me in, 2004
Sound, video and sculptural installation
Image courtesy of West Space*

nervousness. The participant in *...don't fence me in*, by closing one eye to look through the fence, takes on the role of the camera and observes or records the feeling of anxiety and discomfort expressed by the main character at this point in the film. This device deconstructs the conventional role of the spectator by placing them within the work. The anxious nature of the installation was reinforced with an eerie guitar solo in the background, composed and played by Shaun Zapadlo who based his music on the score of *E.T.*

...don't fence me in was a fascinating sound, video and sculptural installation that asked viewers to take on a role, thereby forcing them to physically interact with the settings. The work had a duality; exploring nostalgia by subtly introducing an iconic Hollywood film sequence that subsequently drew upon feelings of marginalisation and unease. As Davis's contribution suggested apprehension by quotation, so Frisch's fence set the viewer up for an interesting voyage into the endless possibilities of what lies on the other side.

Olivia Poloni is a Melbourne based arts writer and gallerist specialising in contemporary art.

The Visible and the Invisible *Leslie Eastman*

Swoon
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
29 May – 25 July 2004
by Kerrie-Dee Johns

Right: Leslie Eastman
The Visible and the Invisible, 2004
Stainless steel, polycarbonate, mirrored
film & sensor lighting
Dimensions variable
Photo credit: John Brash



Through Streets of Glass to the City of Gold

On wanderings through city streets down narrow arcades and via shopping plazas, often I entertain a romantic notion that somebody the same as I orbits the city in a figure of eight; a doppelganger who echoes my own habits and my tastes. One day it occurred to me, that when a green light flashes as I cross the street, that ahead of me it could possibly be my duplicate who has come to a stop before a red light. Like a protagonist of a sci-fi novel, with an increase in my stride and the squint of my eyes, I may just be able to seize upon a moment of surveillance. But when I saw the exhibition *Swoon*, curated by Juliana Engberg, I at once realised the error of my imaginings; my wanderings could be prescribed as the very streets I had been orbiting were designed. In the installation of Leslie Eastman I had come to the end of a dead end street to be suddenly face-to-face with my duplicate (oops...my, my).

Leslie Eastman's site-specific sculpture, *The Visible and the Invisible* (2004) presents architecture of associations: his mirrors, a reflection of excess reality. Like a Rococo salon, his palace of the picturesque provides an infinite array of avenues for the imagination. As Joseph Addison once said:

...the pleasures of the imagination arise in two ways, firstly, from such objects as are before our eyes, and secondly, from the thought of visible when these are not actually present. They proceed not only from the sight of what is beautiful, but also from the sight of what is great and uncommon.¹

Despite the Renaissance plan, it was Piranesi who produced architectural etchings that create a sense of wonder in opposition to an ideal of symmetry and order. "Before 1750, architectural beauty was generally regarded, on the authority of Vitruvius, as a matter essentially of proportion, related absolutely to a harmonious system of abstract mathematical intervals,



*Right: Leslie Eastman
The Visible and the Invisible 2004
Installation detail
Dimensions variable
Photo credit: John Brash*

and related analogously to the proportions of man.”²

A sentiment romantically captured by a character in a novel called *The Fountainhead*. She had heard him saying to her: ‘I didn’t know a house could be designed for a woman, like a dress. You can’t see yourself here as I do, you can’t see how completely this house is yours. Every angle, every part of every room is a setting for you. It’s scaled to your height, to your body.’³

The sculpture of Eastman plays with subtle variations of light affected by the subject’s movement. In his house of mirrors, the subject becomes the object in a play of perception. If one is still, the light decreases and transparency takes effect, but as one passes through the wall of glass is rigid like a mirror. Rather like a house I once inhabited, the time of day made for variations of transparency in the surface of the windows; when it was light the outside came indoors and panoramas beheld, whilst at night we became its victims trapped between reflective layers of glass, a spectacle for midnight strollers. In my lived version of modernist architecture, nature was something to be kept at a distance, to be tamed, stuffed like a taxidermist animal and hung above the fireplace, the terror of the sublime to be frozen in time like Casper David Friedrich’s *Sea of Ice* (1823) and today this is how many of us approach nature.

The Visible and the Invisible creates a passage for the visitor and makes them aware of their own presence, perception and materiality. This is similar to the work of Piranesi, which is characterised by the thoroughfare defined by Yve-Alain Bois as ‘an indifferent place, with no other identity than the one conferred on it by the passers-by, a non-place that exists only through the experience of time and motion that the stroller may make of it’.⁴ In Eastman’s work there is an experience in which the movement of the body through space has primacy over the organ of sight; a multiplicity of views that rivals the two-dimensions of Renaissance perspective of which only allows for one point of view and an imperialist one at that. As with moving through the circular doors – popular with eighties office buildings – it is an experience that allows for a subtle shift in perception. Pure parallax.

¹ Addison quoted in: Peter Collins, *Changing Ideals in Modern Architecture*, Faber and Faber, London, 1965, p.44.

² Collins, *op. cit.* p.47.

³ Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead*, p.571.

⁴ Yve-Alain Bois, ‘A Picturesque Stroll Around Clara-Clara’ in Richard Serra MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, p.76.

Kerrie-Dee Johns is a Melbourne based arts writer.

Legions in the Ceiling: An Entrance Between Two Spaces

Geoff Robinson

Bus
27 April – 15 May 2004
by Philip Brophy

Below & bottom: Geoff Robinson
Legions in the Ceiling: An Entrance Between Two Spaces
Plywood, timber, sound & video animation
Installation shot, Bus Gallery 2004
Image courtesy the artist



Geoff Robinson is deaf in one ear. This makes him a more interesting installation artist than those with balanced hearing. To the impaired, sight and sound are treated less as sensory comfort and more as unqualified phenomena. Images, echoes, forms, resonances, shapes, harmonics, shadows, drones, glare – all are reworked as suspect material in Geoff's installations. His work is seeded with doubt and apprehension. His materials are less about fragility and more their unsettling tactility. Water is about to pour over an edge; clouds rise like steam; light shafts stun the eye; trees grow unpredictably; indistinct rumbles disorient perspective.

In *Legions in the Ceiling* at Bus, all sound and vision are located in the roof: the ceiling is peeled back to reveal strange shadows and bursts of light. Lo-fi rumbles suggest chairs being dragged across the crawlspace above. Someone's doing something not-nice. This is Geoff doing cinema without being photo-precious about it. This ain't sepia turn-of-the-century poetic crud with a few dried apples in Joseph Cornell boxes: this is carney spooksville

abstracted. It's pop without Pop Culture 101; it's the fetid inversion of materials in order to bypass references (references are for dorks). Don't open the fridge. Don't go down the basement. Don't go up the attic. *Legions in the Ceiling* points at you: it saw what you did and it knows who you are. Geoff is with the people who live under the stairs. They are legion. He's making noise with them. He's deaf in one ear but he hears cinema better than you.

Fibres of Philip Brophy's hair as well as some nail clippings can be found at www.philipbrophy.com

Sweetiepie

Sarah Lynch

George Paton Gallery
24 August – 3 September 2004
by Lucinda Strahan

Below & bottom: Sarah Lynch
Sweetiepie, 2004
Video, installation shot George Paton
Photo credit: Wendy Cooper

I think Lyndal Walker first nailed it down in her work *Femme* (2000) and here it is again crystallised in a perfect punk performance by Sarah Lynch: post-feminist identity is so rock. Lynch's video installation *Sweetie Pie* is an unadulterated, go-sister Yeah! feminist work. A huge, defiant close-up of Lynch's face stares-down visitors to Melbourne Uni's George Paton gallery, from the minute they reach the top of the stairs in the Union Building some 15 metres from the gallery's entrance. It's a text book feminist-filmmaking opening. Lynch's defiant stare signals her awareness of the camera's objectifying gaze, allowing her to appear on her own terms in the rest of the work. But past the monstrous giant face, the installation changes tack, scaling down to four TV-sized monitors on which Lynch appears as a feminist activist for the music video generation. In four looped videos of a few minutes each, Lynch appears in hilarious form acting out her personal vendettas against femininity. In one she dresses in red lipstick and a blonde wig taking feminine accoutrements to the point of absurdity. In another she gives us a camera point-of-view shot of the whizzing sky as she spins in hysteria. In a third she stands on the median strip in the middle of a busy road and flashes her minge at passing motorists. But it is in the fourth that she intersects directly with pure punk when she squats in the corner of the infamous Ron Robertson-Swann sculpture, *The Vault* (better-known as the Yellow Peril) and pisses on the floor. If gender is constructed and performed (which we can pretty much take as a given now that even prime-time has gone queer) then its no surprise that rallying against it runs Lynch smack into the archetypal performance of rebellion. But more than this, *Sweetie Pie* shows how gender has now become so fluid that it is a matter of personal style, as Lynch's edgy gender identity strikes a tuneful chord with popular culture's current punk rock revival.



un Obscure: gallery profile

Dudespace

Brunswick, Victoria

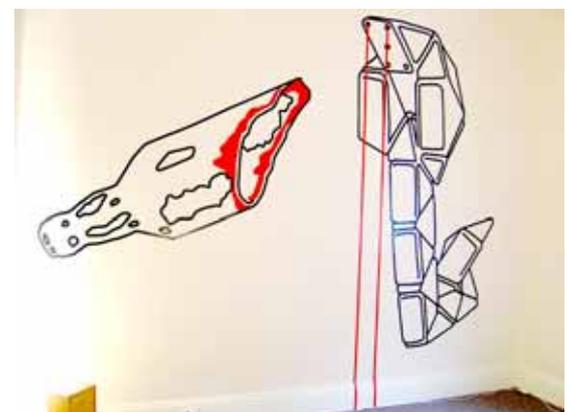
Aware that to progressively uncover the most obscure gallery is a self-defeating venture, the temptation to bring this next gallery to your attention is putting this segment seriously at risk. We may well end up covering car boots and brick-in-the-wall spaces, but as long as there are signs of dedicated programs of display we will endeavour to give these obscure galleries a profile.

Dudespace is the recent initiative of three young artists, Geoff Newton, Justin Andrews and Bryan Spier. The fact that they happen to be three boys in a shared household should not lessen our perception of the magnitude of their commitment. Rather, the use of their spare bedroom as a regular exhibition space should be seen in the light of a definite context.

Dude is the right word for it. Not in the sense of oh-so-cool, but more like 'The Dude' that Jeff Bridges played in *The Big Lebowski*... laid back, chilled out and relaxed. And the role of an artist run initiative like Dudespace is specifically to provide an informal setting for presenting art. Even though Melbourne has a plethora of artist run galleries, there is always room for a new place for artists to show. One of the consequences of a strong and thriving gallery system is that the spaces become more structured, and also more formalised. Where artist run galleries were once the sole territory of highly experimental and edgy art works, many have become like miniature public spaces. This is natural progression for the ones that last, anything that is around for while is liable to be institutionalised, so in opening a new space, there is a provision for artists with a less of an inclination for 'finished' museum presentation-type work. Geoff Newton of Dudespace sees this as "a casual step between the studio and the artist run space". Since December 2003, Dudespace has held displays of work by artists such as, Amanda Marburg, Matthew Griffin, Narrelle Desmond, Rob McHaffie, Sharon Goodwin and Ry Haskings (illustrated). The most recent show in September was called *Rock 'n' Roll Wall of Flame* with Colleen Ahern, Jon Campbell, Kristen Perrett, and Erica Van Zon. Naturally the situation of a household environment is ultimately private and therefore oriented around a group of people who know each other. And yet, the Dudespace crew are keen to open up the program to a broader audience... such as you.

Dudespace holds exhibitions (very casually) once a month: check the Art Almanac for details. Note the T-shirt signalling that the gallery is open to the public... and please knock.

Top & Centre:
Dudespace from the street
Bottom:
Ry Haskings
Dudespace, 2004
Photo credit: Justin Andrews



A Place to Tremble

Matt Warren

INFLIGHT
Hobart, Tasmania
7 – 29 August 2004
by Emidio Puglielli



Right: Matt Warren
A Place to Tremble, 2004
Digital image
Courtesy the artist

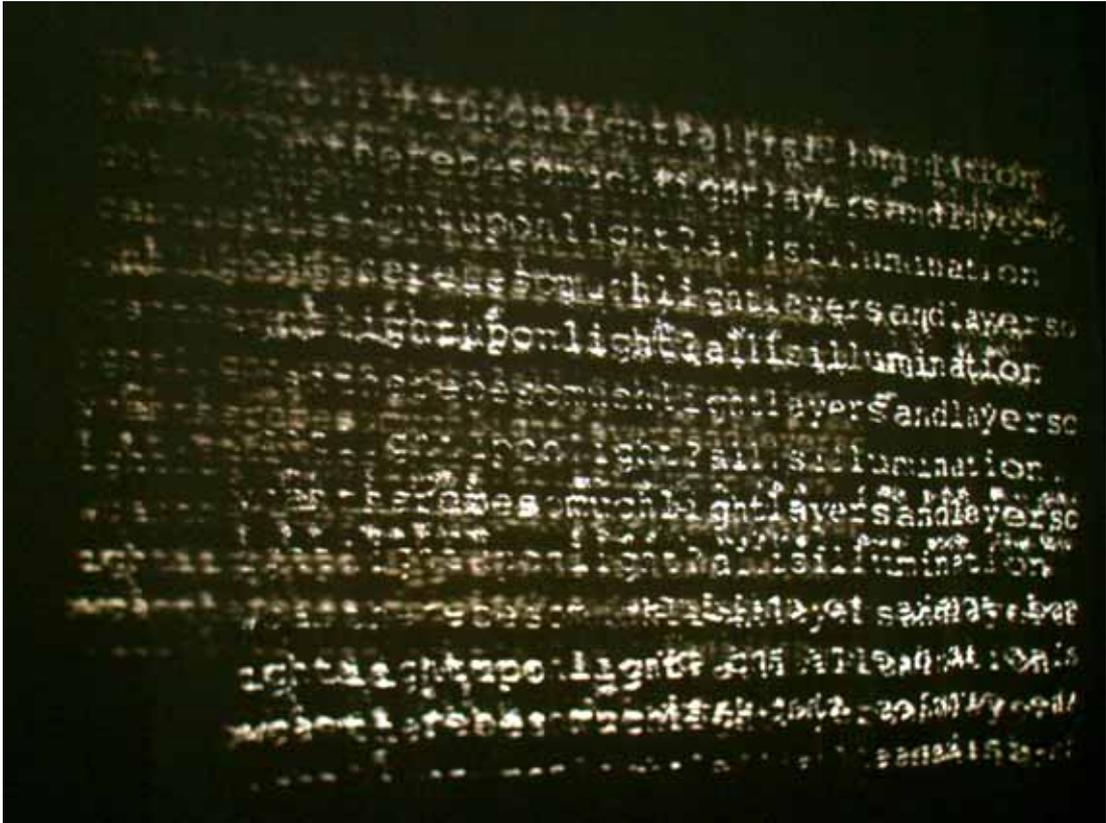
A Place to Tremble is an evocative title, the image on the invitation looked great and the media release promised 'an exciting new sound and text installation'. Matt Warren, himself, comes with some impressive credentials: an Australia Council for the Arts, Skills & Arts Development Grant in 2003, and the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship for 1999. Given the public relations campaign, I was anticipating an immersive and spectacular experience, however, this became problematic when my expectations were not met by the work.

The artist's statement explained that the piece aimed to create a space that reflected the trepidation experienced when voicing personal opinions on subjects such as spirituality, the soul and transcendence: it's a fragile emotional arena as there is little tangible evidence to support such beliefs. The space was acting 'as a blanket that surrounds these opinions and gives them a protective context in which to be spoken'. At the entrance to the gallery, the viewer's anticipation was heightened by

several things: a closed door, a sound scape of droning bass notes with grabs of voices emanating from inside, and a sensor pad taped to the floor. I was already sensing a disparity between my expectations and what I was reading.

I walked into *A Place to Tremble*. The space was dim. The sound scape grumbled and chattered through me. The mechanics of the show were laid bare: another sensor pad on the ground, large speakers, slide projectors (propped up by rolls of gaffer tape) a video projector and taped down power leads. All this equipment, and yet everything was still. I wanted something to happen, I tapped my foot on the sensor pad, nothing happened.

Two smallish scrim curtains were suspended diagonally from each other at either end of the gallery walls. They carried static slide projections of text executed in white lowercase Courier-style typeface. The text was difficult to read as the words ran together, but 'God' and 'oracle' stood out, and maybe this confusion was a conscious



Above: Matt Warren
A Place to Tremble, installation detail
Slide projection on scrim curtain
Photo credit: Emidio Puglielli

reference to the inadequacy of words to express deep subjects. I was finding the space a bit disturbing, as if I was in the title sequence from a horror film that somehow had been paused with the sound track still running.

For much of this time the video projector was very subdued, casting only a dark glow. I was looking at it for answers when I noticed something moving out of the corner of my eye, I missed it. I stared into blank space waiting for more movement, I don't know how long for, but then a beautiful string of text 'fear of the finite' snaked diagonally up the wall towards the ceiling and then vaporized. I waited for the next offering, a minute or more, and there it was 'sense of awe' I waited even longer and saw 'so can hell be.' Whereas the curtains had seemed mute and the sound scape repelled, this, I felt, was an engaging element.

So, it was the publicity material that created my initial disappointment with the show. In some ways, this is my fault for not being a savvy punter, even so, the installation did not offer an alternate satisfying experience. My time

with *A Place to Tremble* was a struggle to reconcile the balance and function of its elements. The underlying premise for the installation, which was an emotional and ethereal one, was not allowed to fully present itself. The presence of the mechanics weighed heavily – the screens seemed insignificant in the space and could not compete with the technical apparatus. Maybe it just wasn't dark enough in there. I think Matt Warren was attempting to weave difficult elements together with materials that ran counter to the content. Consequently, I wasn't able to interpret the work in line with the artist's statement. The beautiful moving text couldn't carry the premise alone and ultimately the installation didn't deliver for me.

A Place to Tremble was a precursor for a different work, this underlines the importance of Artist Run Initiatives like INFLIGHT, they allow artists to explore and experiment with unresolved works. I look forward to Matt Warren's subsequent versions of this installation.

Emidio Puglielli is a MFA by research candidate at the Hobart School of Art.

Bianca Barling & Paul Gazzola

Below: Bianca Barling
Art Lover
DVD and live performance
2 June 2004

Public Performances
Various dates June – July 2004
Downtown Art Space
Adelaide, South Australia
by Andrew Best

It's not much to say that artists alter our perception of time and space – in many respects this is the stock and trade of lots of artists. Perhaps also interesting is the work of artists attempting to capture and represent a particularly everyday sense of temporality and spatiality. Downtown Art Space's shift to a new venue ties in with several projects which have instigated memorable explorations into the temporally and environmentally prosaic.

The new Downtown site on Waymouth Street (to the west of the city) would seem in some ways to have less potential for evocative performances than the previous one. The memory of the old space as a dark and vast, trashed-out dodgem rink, reached through a maze of back alleyways, kitchen rubbish and other detritus, is in stark contrast to the experience of two moderately proportioned, more conventional white cubes at the current site. In many instances the journey into Downtown's old spaces became the evening's main performance, as in one notable intervention that included work by Toronto's Zin Taylor, who used sound and occult symbols to amplify an already existing and palpable set.

The new site has a large window onto the street and higher profile location that more directly invokes a general public (rather than a private subculture), and hence invites a more generalised notion of performance. In June, Bianca Barling took the front gallery and converted it into *Art Lover*, an 'art band' of performers drawn from various scenes in Adelaide, reconfigured to an overnight 'sensation'. Playing only once (and then again only-once a second time), *Art Lover* were as aestheticised as they were frustratingly brief and bland. The performance was distanced from any other number of real acts, in its amped-up, camp take on an already sophisticated vocabulary of contemporary pop. The performances at either end of their three minute pop song (an important part of any pop group's routine) provided an equally important aspect of the event – strolling in from the street hyping the crowd, and then leaving in a similarly overly visible way – *Art Lover* brought the 'outside' into the gallery and to the attention of the audience.

Barling's work used the blank gallery context to distance and analyse cultural events, in a sense taking the frame



of the gallery out into our experience of the world. Paul Gazzola enacted perhaps the inverse of this operation. Dividing his time between Australia and Europe, Gazzola uses artist run initiatives (like Downtown) as well as public institutions, to maintain a loosely connected community, through shared participation in various, almost arbitrary events. *IF I GO LIKE YOUÉ*, first shown at the Panacea Festival at the Stockholm Modern Museum, involved the audience swapping their clothes. Using a simple clothes rack, changing room, and the contagious actions of a crowd (after all, what else were you to do?) *YOUÉ* not only simply changed how people presented themselves in public, but hence the social and power relationships working across a room. Similarly, the video installation *WEED*, a palm tree projected on the ceiling and viewed from a blow up mattress, brought a social and contextual shift from the simple act of lying on a bed with strangers, and taking part in a common experience. Both events as spatial interventions were more illuminating than hallucinatory experiences.

Just before Gazzola moved on to Berlin to take up a Podewil residency, he presented another work for the *Manifesto* show at Downtown (curated by Bridget Currie). Adding note pads bolted into the wall, bank-like pens hanging from strings, and a lump of blue tack, Gazzola enacted a simple bulletin board where manifesto-like pop lyrics grew like a multi-fan blog. *Riot on the Radio/ You Only Get One Shot/ Don't be a Macho Man* – like Barling and her constructed group, Gazzola's presence was an invisible hand, activating a collision between pre-existing and already active subcultures.

Andrew Best is an Adelaide based artist, and co-founder of Downtown Art Space.

On Reason and Emotion

The 14th Biennale of Sydney

*Sydney, New South Wales
4 June – 15 August 2004
A reasonably emotional response from someone on holiday
by Lucinda Strahan*



*Left: Jimmie Durham
Still Life with Stone and Car, 2004
Image courtesy Biennale of Sydney
Photo credit: Jenni Carter*

A guide at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art was heard to say that the 14th Biennale of Sydney, *On Reason and Emotion*, was a "slow show", an exhibition that deliberately veered away from works that delivered the crowd-pleasing, wow-factor. Rather, it could be said that the wow-factor in this year's Sydney Biennale was catered to by one single wow-work. Jimmie Durham's *Still Life with Stone and Car*, which spectacularly crushed a brand new red car under a huge lump of granite, on the steps of the Opera House (no less). This prompted predictable wow-factor responses like "Wow! This contemporary art stuff is a load of bullshit" from the general public, and "Wow! What a shit piece of art" from the intelligentsia. But yes, aside from that spectacular photo opportunity, the majority of work in *On Reason and Emotion* could be said to be a quieter collection than what we would expect.

Curator Isabel Carlos' main premise for the exhibition was an interrogation of the mind and body conceptual binary, which fosters the dominance of rational thought over emotional feeling, summed up by Descartes infamous saying: I think therefore I am. The biennale was an 'exploration of perception and its borders,' Carlos explained in the free exhibition guide, suggesting that 'feeling and thinking are perhaps much more connected than we have been taught'. The immediate and logical up-shot of this was the inclusion of work that dealt directly with themes of sanity and its boundaries. For instance, Mario Rizzi's *The Sofa of Jung* that recreated the famous psychoanalyst's study and explored, through archival letters and diary extracts, the relationship between Jung and his first patient Sabina Spielrein (and Freud, who was confessor to both).

Below: Mario Rizzi
The Sofa of Jung, 2004

Sound installation in two rooms, mixed media
Dimensions variable

Image courtesy of the artist & Biennale of Sydney

Made with the assistance of Modern and Contemporary Art Museum, Trento
Photography by Jenni Carter



Upstairs at the MCA, Javier Tellez presented *La Passion de Jean D'Arc (Rozelle Hospital)* that juxtaposed the film of 1928 with the personal stories of female psychiatric patients at Sydney's Rozelle Hospital. But it wasn't the outsider art that resonated most strongly. Most striking throughout the exhibition was the preference for lesser-known, regionally-based artists over the big names of the global art scene. This seemed to be connected to Carlos' 'particular focus on the south' as a parallel challenge to the mind/body split, following from the notion that European stereotypes have historically made linkages between the South with emotion and the North with reason'.

What exactly was meant by 'north' and 'south' was confusing (us being upside down and all), but it was possible to take it as the all too well-known notion that the centre of the (art) world is situated firmly in the northern hemisphere, and Carlos' deliberate focus on lesser known artists as a direct reaction to it. Throughout the exhibition there was a marked lack of sophisticated, first-world concepts and aesthetics in favour of craft and what almost looked like a lot of emerging work. It was as if art had never gotten groovy, and it was normal to exhibit cat paintings from New Zealand as part of an international showcase.

This focus on craft and an almost complete lack of postmodern irony was refreshing and very rewarding in certain cases. Michael Raedecker's embroidered canvases washed in purple and grey inks were a case in point (interestingly though, Raedecker is London-based) as was Michael Sailstorfer's (again London-based) drum kit made from the body parts of a police bus and recycled construction wood. But then there was the glut of heavy-handed, crashing-bore video works like Brazil-based artist Amilcar Packer's *Video #02* which, in five projections, showed the naked artist squirming around a room trying to get underneath the carpet, or Jeroen de Rijke and Willem de Rooij's 20 minute pan of a Persian carpet *The Point of Departure*.

The question then, is whether *On Reason and Emotion* actually interrogated those binaries it set out to cross-examine, or fell into the trap of reinforcing them by blindly supporting the underdog: the outsider artist, the minority artist, the emerging artist... and on it went. I heard a lot of people complain about this biennale and I think that's because it was a bit light-on, a bit easy perhaps. Coming through Sydney on the way back from holidaying in Queensland I looked forward to re-engaging with complex and imaginative ideas but, disappointed, I found the show was all too easy to take in.

Lucinda Strahan is currently accepting applications for the position of Sugar Daddy.

Wherefore Art Thou, Perth?

*An overview
Perth, Western Australia
23 June – 5 July 2004
by Andrew Gaynor*

*Below: James Street, Perth
Photo credit: Brendan Lee*

I know they're out there somewhere, but Perth's more challenging artists were notable for their absence during the wet and windy days that ended June. The city itself seemed to acknowledge this and presented a bunkered-down appearance full of boarded shop fronts, bland corporate facades and vacant lots where hope had died eternal. For those who've never experienced Perth, it must be stated that the city delights in a state of semi-permanent amnesia regarding its culture. Locals may howl in protest at this statement but there was such artistic vibrancy in Perth 15, 10, even 5 years ago, that it magnifies the despair to discover how little is currently evident or even remembered.

But firstly, credit where credit is due. The Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) continues to present a broad swathe of great work across all practices on a budget that makes ACCA look positively wealthy. The present incumbent was *Hatched*, the annual survey of recent visual arts graduates across Australia. This behemoth staggers into PICA each year, threatening to collapse under its own weight. It is of resounding credit to the gallery's staff that any kind of coherence is maintained, and that delicate works get as much air as the overwrought. However, to be blunt, little of the current work was compelling enough to actually stick in the memory. Powder puffs of inspiration dissolved in the presence of preening vanity and/or the bleeding obvious. I have no desire to single out individual names from such an accumulation of artists, however, one particular work summed up the crises at hand: a video screen test of a shabby scarecrow wanna-be from *The Wizard of Oz* had it right. He danced like a robot; he hitched up his pants; he slumped from the futile effort. The soundtrack was 'If I only had a brain.' If only, indeed.

Apart from PICA, alternative contemporary art can supposedly be found at Breadbox (the Artrage/Festival Fringe venue), Spectrum (an outpost of Edith Cowan University), Free Range (mostly for Curtin University Graduates) and Kurb (a weird little gallery that now seems to operate as a private joke for disgruntled academics and critics). I say 'supposedly' because it does seem particularly unfortunate that in the 12 days I spent in Perth, Breadbox



was the only gallery in this group that actually managed an exhibition. This was a collaboration involving exchange and response between two artists, and was only mildly interesting.

Before the lynch mobs start burning my effigy on the steps of the Cultural Centre, let me point out that I visited almost 20 galleries in Perth from the major institutions (AGWA, LAWAG) to the slickly commercial (Goddard de Fiddes, Hudson, and Dusseldorf), the bland (you can fill in the details here) and on through to the venues already listed above. I searched in vain for more than random evidence of the city's stencil crews (Yok, War on Trevor, The Craigie Mob). I talked at length with artists (including the Symbiotica Group and the urban chronicler Peter Matulich), curators and gallery directors. I just didn't get to see anything contemporary that actually made me think – apart from Matulich, who casts his jaded gaze upon the forgotten sites of Perth. At his two recent sell-out exhibitions, the artworks' titles were given codes.

Scrolling down the lists, this coding indicated which of the buildings depicted was now demolished, renovated, under threat of redevelopment or on its way out. Sadly, there were many such marks, for his drawings, like Perth, were full of ghosts.

Promises, Promises

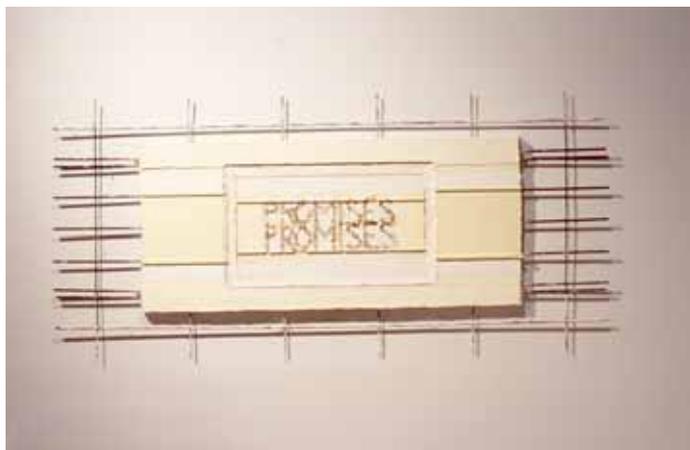
Sharyn Woods

*Contemporary Art Services Tasmania (CAST)
North Hobart, Tasmania
15 May – 13 June 2004
by Felix Ratcliff*

Ten years ago, I found myself standing silently with eyes transfixed and hands and fingers outstretched, next to a mute, imposing, yet curiously human-scaled concrete construction. That work, *Degrees of Tolerance*, part of *Constructing Space*, a 1994 exhibition mounted at the Centre For The Arts' Plimsoll Gallery, deftly mimicked the spatial and architectonic logic, and structural function and visual weight of the columns punctuating the gallery in which it was installed. Woods' 'additional' columns were, however, separated by concrete screens, and tensioned with steel frames and diagonal bracing. Becoming warmer under the gallery lights, the initially cool, smooth monochromatic finish had insistently demanded a second material questioning and inquisitive caress from this visitor. Industrial materials, construction methods and finish notwithstanding, the overall effect was both strangely alienating and seductive.

A decade later I again stood transfixed alongside Woods' sculptural work, this time at her solo exhibition at the CAST Gallery. Still strongly in evidence was the familiar recipe of hard-won fabrication techniques and materials that characterise her practice; so too, the tension between emotional and psychological elements and the sheer physicality of techniques and materials. Yet a palpable shift had occurred. The source of this changed status? The emphatic presence of text; in particular, the employment, in the exhibition's title and in one wall-mounted work, of the doubled and plural usage and repetition of the unquestionably loaded verb, 'to promise'.

Promises, Promises saw the verbal rendered concrete; encased within a skin of subtly coloured plaster, submerged within a frame of wood and underpinned by an armature of steel reinforcement rod. Despite severe yet elegant means of imprisonment and support, the pointed rust-bound phrase insistently broadcast its message via the dot-screen-like metal mesh providing its shape and identity. By framing the textual material in this way, Woods stripped it of future-orientated implications and associations of assurance, and powerfully recast it as a searing couplet forever saturated in sardonic and ironic allusion. Lacking any playful post-modern conceit,



*Top: Sharyn Woods
Degrees of Tolerance, 1994
Concrete & steel
Image courtesy of the artist
Above: Sharyn Woods
Promises, Promises, 2004
Plaster & steel
Image courtesy of the artist*



Left: Sharyn Woods
Promises, Promises, 2004
 Installation view, CAST
 Image courtesy of the artist

irrespective of any alternate readings the materials may have allowed, it left this viewer in little doubt as to the intensity of emotion barely sublimated within its mode of presentation.

Pull-Apart commanded the CAST Gallery's eastern wall; a steel and plaster construction displaying shapes and curves reminiscent of archaic undergarments, moralities and enforced body fashions, yet resembling a fragment cleaved, or glimpsed amidst, derelict domestic or partially demolished industrial structures. Although roughly textured, and bearing obvious signs of having been repeatedly trampled, if not deliberately abused, the fragile rust-stained plaster skin of this work – tensioned by steel armature and rubber strap – remained a skin nonetheless. Opposite each other on the north and south walls were *Scorch Drawings I & II*, burnt and scraped serial template images akin to large-scale fowl-bite etchings. Here, pincer, ovoid and womb-like motifs faced gaping sharks-jaw, maw-like symbols. Barely two-dimensional, the interplay of negative and positive space via violent mark-making was strongly realised.¹

Words covered the western wall, 'written' in Woods' copper twine cursive, rhythmic remnants of an obsolete educational model and telling signs of the sheer breadth of human habits, expectations and yearnings. Operating as a Rorschach test or psychological barometer, the mental state of the viewer became as much the subject in question as the artist's choice of words and phrases. Here, despite the ostensibly personal nature of the text – if read narratively or narrowly – the sheer diversity and open-ended nature of language re-manifested itself with a vengeance. From a finite number of elements, emerged

a work that offered countless combinations of meaning and association. Bisecting the gallery was the erroneously entitled, *Barrier*. Rather than a structural obstacle or barricade, this eleven-element cantilevered cruciform work formed instead a horizontal spine, its serial line of MDF vertebrae constituting the geographical heart and backbone of an exhibition that posed a material challenge to fragile notions of any 'public/private' divide.

A counterpoint to the visual and psychological weight of the other works was *The Gift*, a cube-like sandwich of MDF and plywood, topped with a looping steel bow. Although not quite intended as such a kinetic piece, it apparently traversed a sizeable percentage of the southwest quadrant of the gallery during the show, its steel bow also being similarly much swiveled and spun. Perhaps it offered for some a childlike distraction from the persistent visual and intellectual demands of an exhibition that posed a cerebral, visual and tactile challenge to the gallery visitor.

Given their shared interest in the social and sculptural potential of identifiably 'industrial' materials, it would not be improper to conclude by modifying a phrase from Le Corbusier. Woods' recent works are undeniable, 'phenomena of the emotions', standing as they do between, 'questions of construction and beyond them'. The affective power of Woods' conceptual and material strategies constitutes an indivisible architecture of heart and mind.

¹ Le Corbusier, *Towards a New Architecture*, (Etchells, F., trans.), Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1989, p.19.

Felix Ratcliff is a Hobart based writer.

You know what they say *Catherine Brown, Rachael Haynes, Sandra Selig & Jemima Wyman*

*Main Gallery, Metro Arts
Brisbane, Queensland
5 – 20 August 2004
by Sally Brand*



*Above: You know what they say, 2004
Installation detail: foreground with Jemima Wyman's Chatterboxes
Photo credit: Sandra Selig*

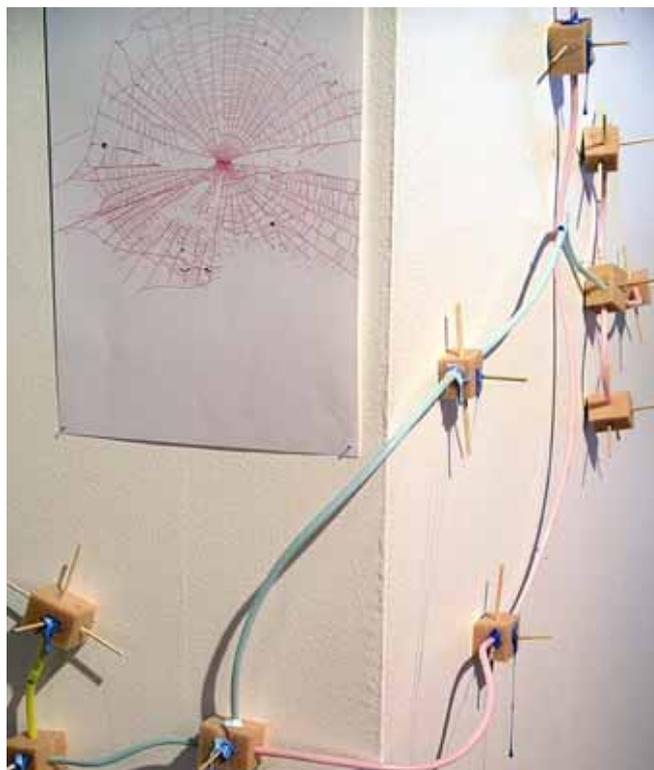
The mind's eye whirls into action when encountering the recent exhibition *You know what they say* by Brisbane artists Catherine Brown, Rachael Haynes, Sandra Selig and Jemima Wyman. This is the first time these four artists have exhibited together, even though for the last five years they have met regularly on Sunday afternoons to talk about art and life, and to critically assess each other's practice. There are clear individual tendencies in each artist's work, but their shared intimacy has no doubt led to overlapping interests and preoccupations. For me, what seems most evident in this first collaborative exhibition is the curiosity that these artists share with spaces and instances that shift beyond the possibilities of human norms and expectations.

The exhibition begins with a flutter of precarious constructions as Rachael Haynes continues her *Impossible sites* series. This work includes a great collection of Haynes' paper models delicately attached to the gallery's curved wall. Haynes often presents these paper models within a photographic frame, using images of empty architectures or the folds of a person's collared shirt as habitats. Through digital manipulation or 3-dimensional interventions, Haynes' models occupy these sites apparently without attachments, impossibly suspended in space. Here, on their own, they are vulnerable, and you feel like your breath might just be enough to loosen their tentative position. Up close, they defy your presence, remaining poised, their lithe bodies almost appearing to breathe themselves.

Following Haynes' fluttering models, we are led to a work by Sandra Selig, comprised of two small glass jars jutting out of the gallery wall. The sides of the jars are painted black and upon peering through one of their glass bottoms we view a tiny owl caught in flight across a midnight sky. Across the gallery where Selig has glued styrofoam balls over the white frame and glass panes of the gallery's large window we are again able to peer into the night sky. As darkness falls on the city, the white balls that were almost indiscernible during the hours of daylight bring the galaxy within our reach (and we almost don't notice our feet lifting off the floor).



Above: Rachael Haynes
Flutter Site (detail), 2004
Ink on paper
Photo credit: Chris Handran



Above: Installation detail
Catherine Brown *Collide/Non-collide* 2004 &
Sandra Selig 3 pieces of paper stuck to 3 spider webs 2004
Photo credit: Sandra Selig

Jemima Wyman's practice regularly challenges our looking. In her incredibly colourful *Vulva Girl* (2003) video installation, she performs strip tease in a young girl's bedroom setting, wearing a full body suit with hot pink extensions from her breasts, vagina and mouth. Somewhere between *Play School*, soft porn and a horror film, the viewer is inescapably involved in the work by shock, embarrassment, arousal or any other number of reactions that they might experience because of Wyman's strange world. *Chatterboxes*, her work included in this exhibition, is similarly concerned with the viewer's unavoidable interaction, though on a much more formal level, as the dazzling pink, yellow, blue and green 'chatterboxes' spill across the gallery floor and beat against the viewer's retina, folding them into this bright playground environment.

Crawling up and creeping over one of the gallery's central freestanding walls – adjacent to Wyman's all-over colour work – is Catherine Brown's *Collide/Non-collide*. Made of plastic tubing connecting foam squares in a complex array, we appear to be looking at a larger than life molecular structure. It is an image that we find in chemistry textbooks, describing the underlying order of the world. Blown up to this scale, we seem in comparison to have shrunk to the molecular level, dissolving into our pure chemical elements; as if swimming through such fluid, we could make sense of the world from here.

Using ordinary objects such as paper, old glass jars, plastic tubing and thread, Brown, Haynes, Selig and Wyman whisk us away from our everyday human existence. Their works are not heavy, but laden with strange possibilities.

'Chatterbox' is the name that Wyman uses to describe the folded paper constructions that school children (especially girls) make and inscribe with numbers, colours and answers as a playground oracle.

Sally Brand is a freelance arts writer, curator, and co-editor of the Brisbane based publications *Local Art* and *Summer*.

What's happening in? Regional Victoria

Velvet Light Series 2
Tara Gilbee
Allans Walk Artist Run Space, Bendigo
29 June – 24 July 2004
by Tamara Marwood

As a new comer to Central Victoria Tara Gilbee didn't let one second slip before immersing herself into the contemporary art activities of Castlemaine and Bendigo. Tara was awarded an Arts Victoria grant to develop *Velvet Light Series 2* in February 2004, and she recently exhibited the first arrangement of this sculptural photographic work at Allans Walk Artist Run Space, Bendigo. *Velvet Light Series 2* builds upon a practice centred on a notion of the 'Space in Between' that she has explored over a number of years, both in her personal practice and as a curator.

Allans Walk is located in the heart of Bendigo, in an old run down, once beautiful and ornate arcade. It is a shop front, similar to the old TCB space, or like Platform, only on a larger scale. *The Velvet Light Series 2* sat inside Allans Walk as a number of Perspex boxes. Within each box, one of the six panels was a mirror. On the opposite panel to the mirror was a translucent image of a face breathing upon the surface of a mirror. The boxes were varied in size and groupings that captured particular light reflections according to how they were installed and lit. The boxes were arranged in such a way to mingle the reflections so that viewers were required to stop and demystify the image. This engagement is intentional as Tara states, "You can not impart or resonate knowledge about concepts without creating an experience within them... if the audience relinquishes passive observation, they become engaged and the passage of information follows through to a conceptual realization".

The space in between that Tara is examining in *Velvet Light Series 2* is a kind of personal space: the body and its relationship to the inner unconscious warmth of our existence. Our breath on the glass quickly fogs up, magically alerting us to our hidden life within. The examination and reflection upon our inner life in front of a mirror is a personal closed activity. It is an uncomfortable experience suddenly to become aware of another entering this space and catch you examining your reflected self, the illusion of personal space quickly retreats and the inner thoughts are hidden from view. These images of Gilbee's breathing people are



Above: Tara Gilbee
Velvet Light series I (installation detail) 2004
Perspex boxes, translucent photographs and mirror

nevertheless quiet and relaxed; they appear unaware of their viewer. Their space is with themselves, calmly aware of their own breath and reflection.

Allans Walk is a challenging space for the shopper out and about 'down the street.' Artists exhibiting will often find that the general public is a little reluctant to step inside the gallery because once inside observing the art, the viewer is also the viewed. Art within a public space promotes a different kind of commentary to that generated in a closed gallery environment. The public's responses to Tara's work conveyed that her work did not 'fill' up the space. Sometimes this is a challenge for contemporary practitioners working within a regional location, because their new audience lacks any long term history of viewing and appreciating conceptual art, especially outside of formal gallery spaces. Allans Walk requires exhibiting artists to interact with a non-art audience and the context of its locale simply because it is regionally sited.

Tamara Marwood is a Bendigo based artist and co-ordinator of Allans Walk Artist-run Space.

VJ Rex

Outer Nebular Drifter

Prospect 2004
New Zealand Biennial of Art
New Zealand Film Archive Gallery
Wellington
30 May – 12 July 2004
by David Cross

Below: VJ Rex
Outer Nebular Drifter, 2004
Mixed media installation
Photo credit: Guy Robinson



VJ Rex loves to over signify information. This Wellington based artist has become well known for building spaces that flicker and hum to a range of visual and haptic signals. Multiple screens of found footage, sound loops, and carefully chosen readymade digital prints and objects form the basis of his belligerent, yet finely considered installations. They mess with you, and at first encounter seem to give the finger to a 'less is more' sensibility. His spaces are amorphous simulacra of urban sites, part drum and bass club zone, part boys own bedroom television obsession, and part postcolonial wonderland. In his exhibition at the New Zealand Film Archive as part of *Prospect 2004 New Zealand Biennial*, Rex has constructed an installation that elaborately synthesises issues of Maori identity and cultural reference points with a meditation on how our bodies are responsive to different technologies of affect. The result is a jarring and provocative work of mega-medium art.

Rex is an artist whose practice is concerned with how we filter and experience intensive and continuous stimulation. In place of formal retinal contemplation, he asks more of the participant's body, quite a lot more. We are forced to absorb multiple images of cowboys and aliens in discontinuous narrative sequences, projected side by side. We are dragged through different time signatures and picture qualities, while moving simultaneously from time-based work to static objects. Although it is something of a head fuck, he is not trying to flagrantly annoy or aggravate, but to place the participant in a particular time-space reality. Standing in a Rex installation is akin to experiencing the outside world from the inside of a spin drier. One of the strengths of the work is the balance he achieves between sonic and visual vibration, and the static discrete object. Amid the excess there is a carefully considered and finely honed aesthetic that draws on Rex's interest in product display.

*Below: VJ Rex
Outer Nebular Drifter, 2004
Mixed media installation
Photo credit: Guy Robinson*



He understands the logic of object placement intimately but messes with it by increasing and decreasing the pulse of the various components. The result is feral minimalism meets process art broken up with a wildly oscillating range of beats per minute.

While he is a bricoleur of 70s popular culture, Rex's work is not a nostalgic romp through spaghetti westerns and Space 1999. He is concerned to chart how popular culture (especially the C grade American kind) bombards us with but never completely colonises cultural difference. Rex has willingly digested, like all of us, the Bonazafication of the wild west yet what he spits back is curiously strange and culturally hybrid. He is the Maori sheriff with the toyshop badge shooting at the bad guys. He is also the reflexive Maori artist who knows how much stereotypes

corrode and disempower. His work deliberately sits between these poles pushing and prodding at the rough edges, and this is why the video work in places has a slightly worn appearance. Everything seems filtered through a haze of smoke or a television that only has average reception. This, after all, is how popular culture is really disseminated. We get it, but never in its pure form and always with our own regional inflection. Rex presents an unusual take on the global transmission of culture but one that works on a range of complex levels.

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

The Stations Of The Cross

David Bailey & Damien Hirst

*Gagosian Gallery
London, United Kingdom
30 April – 5 June 2004
by Christopher Jones*



*Left: David Bailey & Damien Hirst
Veronica Wipes the Face of Jesus, 2004
C-print on aluminium
6 x 4ft
Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery*

At the foot of Damien Hirst, naked but for a head wrap, David Bailey bends to one knee, eyes aimed up at the face of his hero. Responding to the gaze with a slight postural curve, Hirst sends his gaze toward heaven, far beyond mere mortal distraction, his palms bleeding stigmata. To their left, a lanky man dusted in white powder, his eyes tight shut, receives a similar degree of reverence from a busty young woman clasping a long ash Camel cigarette. And to their right, the side of a woman's heavily made-up face streaks with drips of blood, a barbed-wire crown of thorns piercing her forehead. These 3 large photographs and 11 more like them are *The Stations Of The Cross*, a Hirst and Bailey swagger through Christianity's iconography.

Famously, back in 1989, Andreas Serrano trameled this same iconic ground in a considered and cerebral way, photographing a figurine of Christ in a vessel of urine. *Piss Christ* became a seductive, curiously banal colour image, interrogating the power of Christianity's pivotal symbol to transcend such mortal stuff. At another extreme, Joel Peter-Witkin composes headless Mexican torsos (or Mexican torsos with heads sewn back on) to make lavish photographic tableaux that jab at the standard of morality in beauty. David and Damien, revered for steering clear of mainly brainy concerns, or testing the seesaw of morality and art, tread the same terrain with a slicker, boozy stomp.

Like Serrano they reference Christian iconography with crosses, nails, and a crown of thorns, and with the image of Jesus and Simon. And like Witkin, they do so in a dramatic, visceral way; buckets and mugs overflowing with blood; naked bodies, powdered, cropped and shaved, lit by theatrical light. But, and bearing in mind the weight of imagery on their palette, each picture comes over as lightweight.

Jesus Is Condemned To Die I depicts a human figure with a bull's skull for a head. At the end of outstretched arms, it points two shiny knives toward the viewer. Radiant light overhead highlights the central figure whilst subordinating the crucifix in the background. This image is definitely iconic and Christian but its effect, rendered through a high-gloss surface and aggressive pictorial composition, is closer in tone to

Bailey's celebrity shots paraded in gallery 2 down below. This is cocky and aggressive advertising photography – a hero shoot and the hero is Damien Hirst.

The exhibition's plot appropriates icons from Christendom and supplants them with Damien Hirst; or it mixes them up with icons from his oeuvre. In *Jesus Falls A 2nd Time VII* a freshly cut cow's head descends between a woman's knees, free after years of being pickled in formaldehyde. In *Jesus Dies On The Cross XII*, a small crucifix covered with fag ends rekindles Damien's affirmation "I don't trust people who don't smoke." And in *Simon Helps Jesus V*, we have the man himself, ogled by a kneeling Bailey. What congregates before us in *The Stations Of The Cross* is a slick and ballsy photo shoot, suffusing icons of Christianity with those made famous by Hirst.

Separating Hirst's oeuvre from that of Christianity, exposing the basic dilemma of each photograph is the problem of time. The Jesus story has accumulated weight through millennia, being refined and made singular by its journey. As a result, Christianity's icons are drenched with distinct Christian meaning, and the stains don't come off easy. Conversely, Damien's lexicon of cow's heads, sheep, and long, verbose titles is still, as it were, down on one knee. It remains part of the everyday scene we see in magazines, on buses and TV, thus retarding its singular impact. The practice of cutting up his oeuvre and pasting it to the Church is a dependable method of post-modernism, but in a dialogue with the lexicon of Christ we're left with an imbalance of biblical proportions.

The disproportion betrays the exhibition's basic flaw. Damien and David offer an entertaining sexy and chat with Christianity simply by mouthing the lines of the latter, thereby maintaining its singular voice. The fag and cross image would be sillier than it is, if not for the peculiar visual strength of the crucifix. And if he weren't kneeling in the posture of a sure and cliched scene, the reverence of Bailey would droop to a schoolboy crush. With slaughtered cow in tow, Hirst and Bailey offer up another slick tale of The Crucified Idol, while gathering with mugs and buckets to guzzle up the blood.

Christopher Jones, Artist and Writer.



*Above: David Bailey & Damien Hirst
Jesus Dies on the Cross, 2004
C-print on aluminium
6 x 4ft
Image courtesy Gagosian Gallery*

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un Zipped

Dear Un zipped,

I was blessed with a very brief meeting with a certain 'junior' curator in the employment of an important contemporary art institution. As I was whisked out the door she told me that she had not seen my three recent shows because she and her partner had bought 'a little weekender' and went away every weekend these days. I didn't like to inform her that as a curator, seeing exhibitions isn't actually a leisure activity. But, I could be wrong, I am just an artist after all.

'I haven't had a weekend since 1994' Collingwood.

Unzipped,

It seems some will never stop harboring the Melbourne-Sydney divide. A certain bloated and bow-tied Surry Hills dealer recently described the Melbourne scene as "stitched up" and Melbourne artists as "rude". On a recent trip south no one knew who he was, he complained, and artists were cold and undiplomatic about introducing him to their work. "She seems to have everyone scared to death" he also said about a well-known Melbourne dealer and described being signed to another big-hitter in the Fitzroy scene as "a fate worse than death". Oh dear. Perhaps the tirade was prompted by insecurity at not knowing any of the rising Melbourne names who are being quickly snapped up by savvy Paddington stables. When asked if there were any Melbourne artists he was interested in, his answer was "oh, Al Mitelman".

Joshua Bindley

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Dear Editor,

It is with great enthusiasm that I read your inaugural edition of un Magazine. Your journal supports all that is good about contemporary art. Many people say that contemporary art is difficult. Contemporary art is easy.

The contemporary art arena gets difficult for some because of their original motivation to be involved in the first place. For us, we are involved in this space for the sheer joy of seeing raw, pre-emerging & emerging artist works. We get involved because we see this space as being very important to the community. The most important thing that any collectors can do to support young artists is to buy their paintings! They are usually young, un-represented and needing the money. Where many 'collectors' struggle is that they see the contemporary art as a commodity to be traded as any other. Too many are simply looking for the next big thing. The next Jason Benjamin. The next Tim Maguire. These collectors are simply relying upon their advisors to expand their horizons for them rather than embracing the space themselves. One of the great joys is to set off to artist run spaces to view the unknown. And just occasionally something just jumps off the wall at you. This is what makes contemporary art easy.

I look forward to the next edition.

*Yours sincerely,
Joyce Nissan*

un Zipped

You ever felt like you needed to get something off your chest? Well, here's your chance.

un Zipped gives the average arts aficionado a voice. This is media-watch meets gossip column. Anything you send will be accepted, but it may not be printed....

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Susan Norrie, *Natural Disasters, one* 1995
Monash University Collection, image courtesy the artist and Mori Gallery, Sydney

BEFORE NIGHT...

Selected works from the Monash University Collection

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