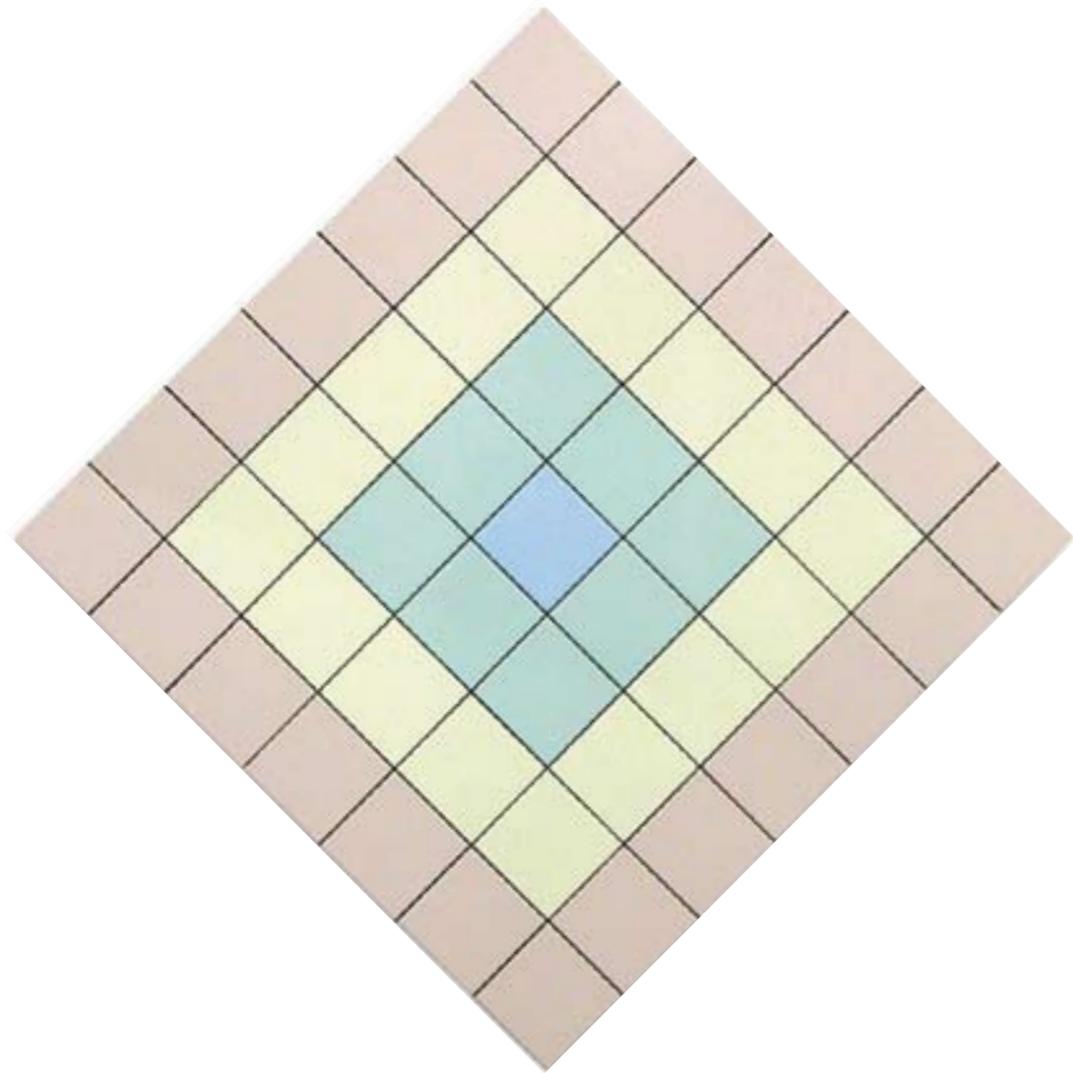


Front | Back cover: *Astro Black: A History of Hip-Hop (Episodes 0-2)* by Soda_Jerk
2007-08 (video stills), 3-channel video, episodes 0-2
Digital video, Dur: 6.21 mins each episode
Post production with Sam Smith

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It lies around us, ankle deep, the rich humus for current thoughts, actions, reactions – some think that overseas it's up to their necks – the past that is. It's up to us to gauge the depth though – to give it the gravity we choose, no matter what centre of cultural production we hark back to.

Is that the case? "The Old" – the smelly pair of socks we have to roll up and down. Not a burden, not necessarily a privilege but undeniably the thing that lies between what we walk on and the huge, dangerous ball spinning beneath our feet. In Australia the past and our history has been up for grabs in the rhetoric of politicians – ferreting their concerns ass-up in the high school syllabus. In our 'Australian' art the past beggars identity – driving us, through what has happened, to asking who we are.

This issue of Das Superpaper is looking at artists that find anchorage in the past, in the actions, events, traditions, techniques and values of days gone by. We are born from it and are forever making it but how are we relating to the past and what does the past mean to us?







King No Beard

- Installation view of 'Optimism: Contemporary Australia'
Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Image courtesy: Queensland Art Gallery
- *King No Beard* (2007) by Daniel Boyd
Australia b. 1982
Oil on canvas, 167.2 x 122cm
- *Looking Back* (2007) by Tom Albert
Image courtesy the artist and Charles Nodrum Gallery, Melbourne

Local Optimism Looking Forwards

EXHIBITION PROFILE

William Sturrock

**Contemporary Australia: Optimism,
Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane,
15 November 2008 – 22 February 2009**

Brisbane is the third most populous city in Australia and an unabashed tourist portal for many of its parent state's popular holiday destinations. It has historically been viewed as possessing a cultural life that merely shadows those of its older and wealthier southern counterparts, but this former underdog status has been significantly departed from in recent times. With thanks to the Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art hosting the internationally prominent Asia-Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT) series, since 1993, the beloved sunshine-state capital, colloquially referred to as BrisVegas has been home to one of the most progressive and vibrant programmes in the contemporary art world.

Given the success and acclaim of the APT there is little confusion as to the QAG and GOMA's decision to formulate a new triennial series, Contemporary Australia, to focus directly upon the incredible talent of contemporary artists currently practicing in our local Australian surrounds.

The naming of Contemporary Australia's first installment, Optimism, succinctly articulates the curatorial thematic adopted for the exhibition. In one word it captures the essence of a positive attitude towards the world, what Julie Ewington, Curatorial Manager of Australian Art at QAG describes in her introductory essay to the exhibition as 'a belief in the most favourable outcome, where good will inevitably prevail'. Looking forwards, allowing for obstacles to be overcome by an enduring sense of hope, optimism underwrites the insistence upon greater good ahead. This definition may also lend to the possibility of a common motivation behind contemporary art practices which are actively resilient to dreary economic forecasts and visions of a seemingly condemned fate for society.

Optimism exhibited a visual exploration and initiated a dialogue, about how and why optimism is at the core of contemporary Australian art.

The spectrum of contemporary visual art and culture included animation, drawing, installation, painting, performance, photography, sculpture, video, cinema, and comedy. To mention only a few participating artists, the exhibition featured Vernon Ah Kee, Tony Albert, Del Kathryn Barton, Daniel Boyd, Sean Cordeiro & Claire Healy, Timothy Horn, Natasha Johns-Messenger, Michael Leunig, Kate Murphy, Robert Owen, Debra Phillips, Patricia Piccinini, Tony Schwensen and Arlene TextaQueen.

While it delivered an accessible and relevant theme for the exhibition, optimism was communicated from diverse attitudes, at times disparate from each other. However, amongst these differing manifestations of optimism the most common elements were undoubtedly satire and the humour it evokes; and colour, or in its absence, dramatic scale or optical stimulation.

An expression of their unique interpretation of optimism, aware of the past's importance in the evaluation of and projection of the future, was Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy's *Not Under My Roof* (2007).

This work consists of an entire house's floor, with its roof and walls removed, realigned from its horizontal plane, exhibited as a plan on a vertical wall. The old saying, 'if only the walls could talk' or rather, the well trodden surfaces of this formerly dwelled-in residence shown on a wall, allowed for an emotional encounter with a relic of an anonymous private history. Relocating an intimate familial sanctuary, though apart from its context, questioned the notion of physicality of residence, the emotional realm of homely place and the values that these things continue to have upon contemporary life. The work takes apart an iconic Queensland house and reveals its past through marks and crack on its linoleum floors and skirting boards. Inanimate yet abandoned, the work allowed the audience to ponder the aspirations and disappointments present in stereotypical Australian life. In this public space the work emitted an overwhelming but every-day beauty, an allegory for how optimism operates now, in the present but for the future, and will become recorded by the remanence of the past.

Another constituent of Contemporary Australia's apt exhibition of optimism was its inclusion of the Salon Project. From the Seventeenth Century, the Salon de Paris exclusively exhibited the works of its contemporary masters and by its penchant for conservative values, systematically rejected early Modernist, Courbet and soon after, the impressionists. For Optimism, the Salon Project again reversed this conservative distain and curiously surveyed contemporary Australian representational paintings in the traditional 'salon-style.'

More than a collection of true-to-life works, it centred around optimistic expressions of the visual world, however slightly augmented by historical reflection and the sensibilities of surreal interpretation. Featured in the Salon Project was *Looking Back* (2007) by Tom Albert, depicting a recreation of Diego Velázquez' *Las Menias* (1656) loaded with striking reconfigurations of perspective, subjects and their gazes and a stylistic preference for our traditional notion of true-to-life. Rather than continuing the historical preoccupation with photorealism, the purpose of which was arguably realised with the invention of photography, Albert opts for a painterly, sombre depiction of the master's work. As the original was formed with its contemporary devices, the grid and camera obscura, Albert represents his vision with hindsight of the original work's importance to the cannon of Western Art.

As the first in this major new national triennial series of thematic contemporary Australian art exhibitions, Optimism confirmed the value of artists' committed practices in questioning and inventing. Now rejuvenated with optimism, audiences may look forward to the next installment in 2011.



- | 'Captain Sterling' by Monika Behrens
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Smith, Melbourne



Monika Behrens

INTERVIEW
Marcus Browne

What inspired you to so directly interrogate Australian history in your work?

Before I began this series I had concentrated so much on looking outward. The series Silent Bang was based on global acts of terrorism. The works focused on the war in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay Prison, individual acts of terror such as the Beslan School siege and the Bali bombings. Being Australian and living so far from the rest of the world and the subject of the works gave me an interesting perspective when creating them. Looking in your own backyard is always more challenging than checking out the neighbours.

When I started to scrape the surface of the Australian History Wars there was so much brutality and so many devastating accounts of wars and battles. By reviewing the history wars I hope to remind Australians of our past. The paintings in this series are not created to shock, but allow the audience to understand acts of violence through an unconventional approach.

To me, a lot of your work seems to address two layers of Australian history; the first is an exposition on the atrocities committed during the colonisation of Australia, while the second reflects on the more recent reinterpretations of this history by conservative commentators during the Howard years. To what extent has this recent Australian experience informed your work?

The “Great Australian Silence” was a term created by Professor W.E.H. Stanner in 1968 when discussing how documentation of Australian history is incomplete and deliberately ignores Indigenous Australians. Since then the Australian History Wars are a continuing public debate based on the interpretation of the colonisation of Australia and the disputed details of Indigenous massacres throughout the settlement. Australians are encouraged to forget, disregard and become ignorant to our bloody past and continuing mistreatment of Indigenous Australians.

When Prime Minister John Howard stated “people no longer ask me for an apology” he genuinely believed that he had conquered the Australian ‘cultural wars’ and resolved the issue of the settlement of Australia. He also believes that white settlers deserve more recognition in the development of Australia and its culture. Australians are encouraged to pull a blanket over the past while continuing to wave our flag representing our colonisation. The works in the “History Wars” series aims to be a remembrance of massacres that took place in Australia’s invasion years from 1788 to the late 1800’s.

- | *Phillip's Lure* by Monika Behrens
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Smith, Melbourne



Let's talk about Phillip's Lure, was this inspired by a particular historical event?

Phillip's Lure is based on the spearing of Governor Arthur Phillip on the beach of Manly Cove in 1790. This painting is not about the isolated event of the spearing it is also based on preceding events involving the kidnapping of Woollaraware Bennelong, a Wangal man and Colebee, a Cadigal warrior. Phillip used hostage-taking strategies to gain knowledge of local indigenous people in order to control and stabilise conditions for the early colony. In 1789 Bennelong and Colebee were captured on a beach north of Sydney harbour. The two warriors had been lured with the offering of fish. They were deprived of their clothing, shaved and dressed in white men's clothing and detained in leg irons. They were housed in Phillip's quarters in preparation for their introduction to all the "benefits of civilisation" and for Phillip's introduction to their local knowledge. Colebee escaped a week later. Several months later Bennelong liberated himself by stripping off his "decent" clothing, leaving them behind and walking off.

On Manly cove in 1790 Willemering fired a spear at Phillip, it pierced him just above the collarbone, and blood flowed profusely from the wound, so much that he dictated a will. Spearing Phillip was an attempt on part of the Eora to register their unwillingness to be taken captive. The spearing is a contested and fairly unacknowledged event of early Australian history probably due to its illustration of colonial weakness and Indigenous resistance.

Interestingly, ten days after Phillip was injured he sent a gift of 30 fresh salmon to Bennelong as a sign of peace and reconciliation. Some historians describe this as evidence that the most successful tactic of the early colony was friendship and betrayal.

Within this work red satin is stabbed by a compass (also a navigating tool) to represent Phillip being speared. The salmon which hangs above was a tactic Phillip used to lure indigenous people for inside information.

Your work evokes a very 'colonial' New South Wales vibe with its focus on Bathurst and some other early areas of settlement, is there an element of personal connection there?

There is not so much a personal connection with the district as I grew up in Melbourne but Bathurst is famous for its car racing. And even though it is very well known not many Australians can relate Bathurst with the most brutal Australian massacre which took place over six years.

The Bathurst Massacre began in 1824, during the time of the Wiradjuri resistance, and is often referred to as the Bathurst War. More than 100 Wiradjuri people were murdered after the death of seven Europeans, when martial law had been declared.

The Wiradjuri nations were the largest group of Indigenous people in NSW. Clashes between European settlers and Wiradjuri were very violent from 1821 to 1827, particularly around Bathurst, and have been termed the 'Bathurst Wars'. Fishing grounds and significant sites were lost through farming and many Aboriginal people were killed – spearing attacks on cattle and stockmen, and so forth, followed this. In the 1850s there were fewer clashes but corroborees around Mudgee still occurred. After these battles European settlement had taken hold and the Wiradjuri nation was in steep decline.

The title of this work is Windradyne's Way. Windradyne (c1800-1829) was an Aboriginal warrior of the Wiradjuri nation, central-western New South Wales, Australia. Windradyne, (also known as "Saturday" by settlers who could not pronounce his name), led his people in the resistance movement against the invasion of their lands. To end the war and claim the rightful land back Windradyne led a party of Wiradjuri past the guards and over the Blue Mountains and into Parramatta to the Government house to meet with Governor Brisbane.



You also investigate the Westward push through Australia's interior, culminating in the settlement of Western Australia, what inspired this aspect of your work?

For this series of work I wanted to focus on the whole of Australia not only the eastern coast, which is usually highlighted as the most interesting and diverse section of Australia. For this series I also focused on the Canning Stock Route – the longest cattle route in the world and the settlement of Pinjarra.

From 1906 to 1907 Canning Stock Route was built, within this time an unrecorded number of Mardu people were captured and tortured to serve as 'guides' and reveal sources of natural wells across the desert. Many Mardu were raped and massacred after being 'run down' by men on horseback, restrained by heavy chains 24 hours a day, and tied to trees at night.

The Battle of Pinjarra and Reflecting Pinjarra are based on the same attack that took place in 1834. In the official report 14 Aboriginal people were killed, but other accounts place the figure much higher. The battle was between 60-80 Binjareb people and 25 soldiers and policemen run by Captain Stirling. Aboriginal activists have criticised the naming of this event a "battle" – they see the event as part of an invasion of land and think that the true nature of the conflict is that of a massacre.

Within the works the bird emblem of Western Australia, the black swan, drifts into its placement on the flag. The swan is surrounded by British forces – the horses, the gun and the Stirling silver coins. In the background 'kitchen ducks' symbolise the destruction of the natural wetlands that largely sustained the life of the Binjareb people. Valleys of tea towels surround the river representing colonisation and damage to the land. The Kangaroo Paw, the floral emblem of Western Australia, is placed in the backdrop to reinforce the placement of Western Australia.



Aesthetically speaking, your work conveys a wonderful sense of childlike imagination. Would you say that this was of particular importance in the resolution of this body of work?

In order for the political content to be translatable to the viewer a palpable visual language was required. The translation of the paintings were pivotal to their success, therefore the choice of still-life objects were imperative. The objects were chosen by breaking down each act of violence into "good guy versus bad guy". The works were then constructed within these narrow categories. Incorporating this formula and using toys and everyday objects introduced a sense of play.

By employing toys the works trigger memories of youth and playfulness, the works use the methodology of child's play. Since toys are part of everyday life, the content of what they represent is often overlooked.

For this series I used toys and organic objects within a staged environment to create interesting and logical compositions. The objects within the works will be selected for their symbolic or metaphoric relationship to the specific event being represented. A great deal of research has taken place into the appropriate still life objects for each work. One of the works based on the Tasmanian Black War consists of a van with devil horns (to represent Van Diemens land) wearing a crown and knocking apples (Tasmania is known as the apple island) off a cliff made of fabric. A Grenadier Guard band is parading the van, as a boat full of Tasmanian tigers is sent off into a sea of blue satin, cardboard cut outs of storm clouds are dangled above the stage by string.

Still Life has served as an ideal genre to communicate a message to a wider audience for the reason that it is not typically associated with political art. A dialogue is created using this genre by using symbolism, metaphors, particular compositions, light and scale. The audience can absorb these indicators and interpret them through their own thoughts and imagination. By using these staged environments I hope to connect to an audience that wouldn't usually take the time to discover more about our history.

- \ *Canning Stock Route* by Monika Behrens
- \ *Black Line* by Monika Behrens
- | *Flame Tree at Pigeon Creek* by Monika Behrens
Images courtesy of the artist and Gallery Smith, Melbourne



- | *Van Diemens Land* by Monika Behrens
Image courtesy of the artist and Gallery Smith, Melbourne





- *Untitled (ashes)*, 2008, tintype, 240 mm x 200 mm, Courtesy the artist and McNamara Gallery
- *Untitled (from the Borderland series)*, 2008, lightjet print, 1040 mm x 870mm, Courtesy the artist, McNamara Gallery, Brett McDowell Gallery and Darren Knight Gallery



Ben Cauchi

INTERVIEW

Rose Vickers

In this seemingly all-star digital age the processes of the past are rarely investigated for contemporary uses. This is not the case for photographic manipulator and artist, Ben Cauchi. Cauchi, manned with his 100 year old wooden camera has been described as 'a member of photography's antiquarian avantgarde'. His often ghostly and hauntingly blank images are produced in-studio using time consuming and supposedly 'out-dated' processes. There are mysterious light sensitive salts, metal plates and fascinating unique photographic processes including ambrotype, cyanotype and van dyke brown! To most of us these terms are merely confusing, to some they are 'the old way of doing things' but for Cauchi they are his link to the future.

Where did you begin with your photographic journey and what have you discovered?

One of the things that brought me to photography as a medium was finding out about these earlier processes and seeing there were other ways of making an image beyond the normal film and paper combination. I've worked with quite a few processes starting out with a modern version of the van dyke print and gradually working my way backwards to wet-plate ambrotypes and tintypes. I don't want to over-play the process side of the work. In fact it's simply a case of using a process that suits the work you want to make best.

To what extent do you accept the element of surprise in the image making process?

It's like anything, isn't it – if you don't get a surprise every once in a while things tend to become a bit boring. I think if you're making art you need to be open to chance, serendipity, 'the happy accident' – if something that happens works with where you're going then that's a good thing in my mind. I think there's a line though, it needs to work and it won't make a bad image good.

- | *Untitled (mirror)*, 2009, tintype, 240 mm x 200 mm,
Courtesy the artist and Brett McDowell Gallery



Can you describe the experience in 2007, of working out of the back of your mobile darkroom van in Dunedin?

I bought a van shortly after moving to Dunedin for the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship and set it up as a portable darkroom. I'd been keen for a while to do some work outside the studio and for a number of reasons Dunedin seemed the perfect place to start doing it. On one hand it was refreshing to work away from the studio – new possibilities and so on, but it also came with quite a major downside which was it drew quite a bit of attention whenever I was pouring plates. The smell of ether's hard to miss and most people seemed to think the van was a meth lab on wheels – the first outing was met with some guy yelling out “stop selling drugs on my patch”.

I'm interested in your idea of the 'non-decisive' moment. Why is this idea significant to you, in terms of your own life experience and expression as an artist?

I can see there's been a shift since the first works from that show were made. I'm not sure quite what that's to at the moment, but one thing that's remained a constant is my interest in the in-between, the lulls, the before and the after. I find the lead-up to an event is usually more exciting than the event itself – there's more possibility there – and from a narrative point of view it's what builds the overall picture.

Some of your images seem to be reminiscent of Tarkovsky's 'The Mirror' – Is film an influence?

Sure, good film has always been an influence for me. I haven't seen 'The Mirror' but I remember watching 'Solaris' a good number of years ago. Herzog's a definite favourite of mine. In terms of my own work I often think of them as vignettes – snippets taken from a whole – and what I enjoy in films are those same moments, the bits away from the central action that build the story and set the scene.

Is there a spiritual or a metaphysical story behind your work, or is that just something that comes out through the aesthetic of antiquated process?

I'm not a spiritual person in the religious sense, although bit superstitious perhaps, but that kind of spiritual subtext isn't really a part of it. I suppose there's an element of the metaphysical - the orbs, shrouds, etc are all part of that. Transcendence is something to aspire to.



- |• *Astro Black: A History of Hip-Hop (Episodes 0-2)* by Soda_Jerk
2007-08, 3-channel video installation
Installation view, 'Primavera 08', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
Photo credit: Jenni Carter
- / *Astro Black: A History of Hip-Hop (Episodes 0-2)* by Soda_Jerk
2007-08 (video stills), 3-channel video, episodes 0-2
Digital video, Dur: 6.21 mins each episode
Post production with Sam Smith

Soda_Jerk Versus Reality: the Myth Science Improv Remix Approach

ARTICLE

Timothy J Maybury

While being interviewed for *The Wire* in 1990, three years before the end of his tenure as a visitor of Planet Earth, Sun Ra was asked to explain his phrase 'Astro Black Mythology'. To the question came forth a response: "I'm talking about space. I'm talking about not being a part of this planet. They got this planet on the edge of chaos and destruction. Everything they got here is improper: it doesn't fit with universal law, it's selfish and egotistical. People been misled, they deep in ignorance." Like many other African American people throughout history, Sun Ra was a powerful and radiant extraterrestrial – born on Saturn to be precise. Amongst an array of otherworldly gifts, the traits for which Sun Ra will long be remembered were his mystical knowledge of the past and his profound ability to see into the future.

(For effect, imagine this next section is narrated by Morgan Freeman.)



Sun Ra and his Moog-powered rocket

Although the exact date of Sun Ra's touchdown is a fact that can never be known, the discernable truth of the matter was thus: his descent was chartered towards an America whose black citizens were struggling to breathe amidst a noxious atmosphere of post-apocalyptic desolation. Corrosive side effects of racial segregation were providing daily reminders of the inadequate steps that had been taken towards correcting the violent inequalities of slavery. Although NASA was just about geared-up to land the first white man on the moon, houses in the black ghettos were still burning to the ground. The need for the guidance that could be offered by a cosmic messiah was as great as ever.

Arriving as an ambassador from the intergalactic regions of outer space, Sun Ra set forth on a mission of emancipation, accompanied by his legendary entourage of disciples known as the Arkestra. This gold sparkling procession traversed the land together, city to city and town to town, adorned in mysterious flowing garments and elaborate headdresses, riding atop a cloud of chaotic drum rhythms, space-centred chanting and atonal brass harmonies. Everywhere he went Sun Ra preached to his alienated brothers and sisters, shedding light on the truth of their ancestral heritage, as understanding this was the first necessary step towards unobstructed progress and realization of their full potential. The story he told began thousands of years earlier in the northern African land of ancient Egypt, a thriving black civilization that owned the power long before the birth of the modern world and the reigning supremacy of white man. A society known for its technical prowess, the skills of advancement possessed by the ancient Egyptians had indeed been granted to them by superior beings who too had once travelled to Earth from beyond the stars.

As Sun Ra proclaimed, these secrets of the universe were not only planted within the pyramids, but they also remained embedded in the hearts and minds of the African American people, albeit faded and buried beneath scars of persecution and oppression. Yet, never again was there to be fear, for the moment of a shift in consciousness had arrived, and the life force that was to fuel this revolution pulsed through the vibrations of Sun Ra's mind-altering, interstellar jazz. Sun Ra's divinely conceived, hyper-futuristic musical instruments, never before used by any other jazzman, served as evidence for what could be made possible through science. His transcendental experimentation with celestial electronics was capable of reopening old gates to alternate dimensions, places where no white men would ever tread. No longer were black people to be left behind, the way of the future was now laid right before them. Through Sun Ra's insight they could develop and command unbeatable tools of technological agency to rise up and Fight the Power. United they discovered the means to leave this planet not dead but alive, hitching rides through portholes humming with sonic energy, landing in luscious utopias far, far away, utopias that were already built on remote landscapes deep in the Universe, waiting for them.

Sun Ra's message was clear: forget Earth, Space is the Place.

- | *Astro Black: A History of Hip-Hop (Episodes 0-2)* by Soda_Jerk 2007-08 (video stills), 3-channel video, episodes 0-2
Digital video, Dur: 6.21 mins each episode
Post production with Sam Smith



Black knowledge society

Not only was Sun Ra's skull a vessel for what was inarguably one of the most brilliant, forward-thinking musical minds of the 20th century, his vocal revelations of a brighter tomorrow in which there will be no tears, prophesized as early as the 1950s, can be identified as breathing life into a cultural tendency that continues to zap, shimmer and/or beam. Whether or not you want to judge it as fiction, a recurrent divulging of the stirring secret that salvation is tucked just behind the next solar system can be plotted along a timeline through subsequent decades and into the present day. For examples, read the novels and plays of Ishmael Reed and LeRoi Jones from the 1970s. View manifest alien activity in the street art of Jean-Michel Basquiat. Listen to the disco-funk of George Clinton's Parliament/Funkadelic, or Afrika Bambaata dropping the space-robot melody from Kraftwerk's Trans Europe Express into Soul Sonic Force's Planet Rock.

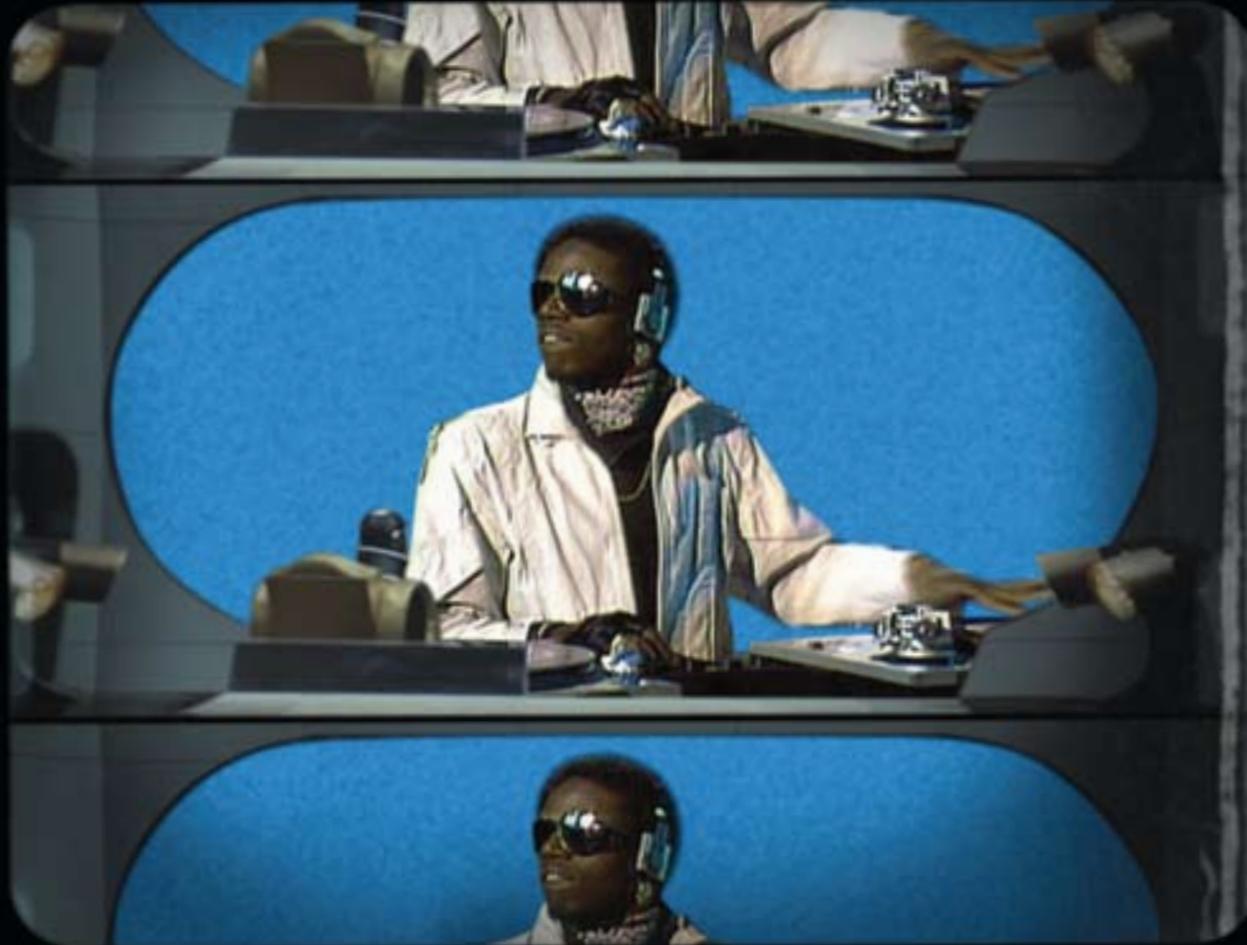
At first a scattered thematic, in the past ten years or so cultural theorists have applied the term Afrofuturism to unify the works of these and various other writers, artists, musicians, filmmakers and so forth who appropriate tropes of science fiction to place a specifically African American face on the future. Although the aims and methods of the Afrofuturist project are subject to debate, it is feasible to suggest that the recurring motif of science fiction – a genre that often references themes of abduction, displacement and alien-nation – has been chosen because it serves as an appropriate metaphor for black life and history. As scholar J. Griffith Rollefson suggests, at the core of the larger Afrofuturist trajectory is a play off between the conceptual polarities of 'myth' and 'science', typically portrayed via racialized constructs of black magic and white science. By uprooting the black body, historically overwritten with bogus fantasies of primitive voodoo subjectivity, and placing it in the context of equally anti-real cybernetic fabrications of sci-fi, artists have afforded themselves a pan-dimensional tool to critique their contemporary society.

Astro Black: the myth-science history of hip hop

Taking their lead from the galactic perceptions of Afrofuturism, Sydney-based remix duo Soda_Jerk (along with the assistance of longtime collaborator Sam Smith) have constructed a warped, three-part narrative entirely from found audio and video footage, titled *Astro Black: A History of Hip Hop (Episodes 0-2)* (2007-08). You may have viewed it installed at the MCA when it was included in last year's edition of the Primavera exhibition. Logically, Sun Ra features quite prominently, as a large portion of the samples used in the work are borrowed from his astounding blaxploitation sci-fi wig-out *Space is the Place* (perhaps available at your local Video Ezy – it is at mine thankfully). Released in 1974, the original maps out somewhat of the definitive blueprint for the mythic consciousness Sun Ra swore by throughout his life and thirty-five year career. As Soda_Jerk themselves describe, their video stretches Sun Ra's narrative backwards and forwards in time, beginning with a depiction of how he originally acquired his astral-musical power during an abduction from a dancehall in Chicago, 1942. Returning to Earth years later, dressed as a golden Pharaoh, he then beams DJ Kool Herc, Afrika Bambaata and Grandmaster Flash up into his UFO and transports them to a rendezvous with his blue-skinned masters, the controllers of Planet Rock. During the communion these flag bearers for the next generation learn of the aliens' scientific hip hop research, which is considerably advanced, and agree to carry out a mission of operating hip hop to the people of their world. In telling the tale, D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1915) cops a rip; so do *The Knife*, Robert Johnson, *Solaris* (the George Clooney one), Benny Goodman, *Independence Day* (1996), Macy Gray, Aphex Twin, the World Trade Center, Ronald Reagan, and of course, Morgan Freeman. Through it all, the interstellar progression from ecstatic free jazz to high-tech hip hop is laid bare.

In their last major work, the feature length *Pixel Pirate II: Attack of the Astro Elvis Video Clone* (2002-06), Soda_Jerk criticized the oppressive copyright laws that remain a cumbersome barrier in the way of the free future of their art form. Naturally, this was presented in the guise of a sci-fi biblical epic featuring Elvis Presley battling against Moses from *The Ten Commandments* (1956) along with every other action hero from mainstream cinema history. As a follow up, not only is *Astro Black* a conceptually savvy and often hilarious response to the Afrofuturist legacy, the work also draws attention to certain parallels between aspects of Soda_Jerk's own remix work and hallmarks of the musical styles it references, and the pair's strength lies in their nuanced awareness of this. To explore a history of hip hop makes sense considering that the origins of remixing sit alongside the invention of turntable science in the late 1970s/early 1980s. Yet given *Astro Black* connects ecstatic free jazz to high-tech hip hop through an account of interstellar intervention, what is notable is that the video also reveals similarities between improvisation and remixing in real life too, a relationship that may not seem so obvious at a first glance. After all, isn't one about snatching a sound, sample or gesture and making your own through a calculated process of composition, while the other is about abandoning structure, unlocking the gates and going to the crossroads?

- | *Astro Black: A History of Hip-Hop (Episodes 0-2)* by Soda_Jerk 2007-08 (video stills), 3-channel video, episodes 0-2
Digital video, Dur: 6.21 mins each episode
Post production with Sam Smith



Making it up as they go along

In his notes on the pleasures of experimental improvised music, New York based musical dice man Ricardo Arias writes “free improvisation opens the door to dissolution and immersion in sound and silence, in which we hear a playful voice behind us always suggesting, ‘why not try this?’” For Soda_Jerk, spending hours, days, weeks, months and years trawling through mountains of DVDs, VHS, CDs and MP3s with no clear idea of what they are looking for inevitably means having to wait for that tap on the shoulder, grasping what they stumble upon and following it to somewhere new. As they share, “for us the key thing about improvising is the open dynamics of the process. It involves forfeiting control to outside influences, whether that is the input of the musicians you’re jamming with or the recorded material that you’re trying to remix. We think of the creators of the source material we sample as our wider sphere of collaborators.” In Soda_Jerk’s constellation there is no room for diametrically opposed views of remix and improvisation, because in their eyes both rituals are geared towards the same outcome: multiplicity. It’s a scientific fact that the Universe is forever expanding.

As a father figure of 20th century avant-garde jazz, Sun Ra viewed the collective improvisation of his Solar Arkestra as unleashing patterns of energy that could launch any audience on a musical voyage into orbit and beyond. Reflected within his cosmic wavelength was a powerfully evocative, politically charged vision in which past and future, fact and fiction were collapsed on one another. So too have Soda_Jerk harnessed an art that combines retrospective and futuristic movement: video remix as a technics of time travel. Their manifesto declares that by pressing play on a video or DVD you are instantly teleporting a fragment of history into the present moment. By gathering cultural materials from the past and shaping them into visions of the future, they portray worlds that are infinitely more complex – and space-age-mystical – than one that is rationally narrativized in chronological order. Soda_Jerk haven’t merely taped themselves to the side of Sun Ra’s spaceship; they’re riding in the cockpit alongside him.

www.sodajerk.com.au

Further Reading

- Ricardo Arias, “I Know It’s Only Noise but I Like It”, *Leonardo Music Journal*, 12 (Pleasure 1992).
- Graham Lock, *Blutopia: visions of the future and revisions of the past in the work of Sun Ra, Duke Ellington, and Anthony Braxton*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1999).
- J. Griffith Rollefson, “The ‘Robot Voodoo Power’ Thesis: Afrofuturism and Anti-Anti-Essentialism from Sun Ra to Kool Keith”, *Black Music Research Journal*, 28.1 (Spring 2008).
- Mark Sinker, “Loving the Alien – Black Science Fiction”, *The Wire*, 96 (Feb 1992).
- David Toop, “Frames of Freedom: improvisation, otherness and the limits of spontaneity”, *Undercurrents: the hidden Wiring of modern music*, Rob Young, ed., (London and New York: Continuum, 2002).



Costume Dramas

INTERVIEW

Jasmine O'Loughlin-Glover

Art isn't always to be found on the walls of galleries. Some people like to wear it on their sleeves (so to speak). This month, *das Superpaper* talks to Jeremy Valentine and Grant Francis about Shag and the outrageous style of our senior citizens...

Hi Jeremy and Grant. Tell us a bit about what you are each wearing in these pictures.

Jeremy: In this photo I am in Seoul and it's minus five, so I am dressed for practical purposes. I have a permanent lumberjack aesthetic, so although I love high fashion, I always end up wrestling both although lumberjack usually wins.

Grant: I thought this photo of me was an appealing one as the contrast of the pale, flesh-coloured outfit accentuates my hairy face. I also do quite like to hide behind a bold outfit. Sometimes your outfit can do the talking for you, and I can find that restful.

So you're responsible for creating and curating the Shag boutiques - Can you tell me a bit about how these treasure troves came to be?

Jeremy: A manic love of shiny pretty things. We are simply validating a shopping addiction.

Grant: Yes. I tend to hoard and Jeremy is much better at culling, so it was a match made in heaven. I first started op shopping in the 70's as a punk teenager and it quickly developed into a chronic addiction

I understand you both have a background in fine arts. How do you think this has influenced your point of view on fashion?

Jeremy: Grant and I met at the Victorian College of the Arts in 1991. As artists we have an inherent love and awareness of aesthetics but more importantly the way many different things, colours or elements look together. I love the mixture of new and old; trashy and kitsch with elegance and couture.

Grant: Ditto. For me clothes are to fashion what paint is to a painting. Some days a quick sketch will suffice and other days are for creating masterpieces. Personally, I've always been one who appreciates a clash.

There is a long history of differentiation between 'high' and 'low' art and the idea that the fine arts is a 'higher' art form than fashion. What do you think about these divisions and comparisons?

Jeremy: There is a great deal of snobbery when people get involved with the 'high and low' concept. We used to have an elderly customer and she was the wife of a diplomat and had lived in various British Crown Colonies back in the day. She had a hand full of rings - some were priceless and excessive and others plastic and obviously from a toy store. She used to buy the tallest 70's platform shoes we could find and wear them with her classic cut Chanel. I thought she was amazing.

Grant: 'High', 'Low', its all the same to me, they are just terms given to make people feel at home with their choices in life and for me just another way of creating a clash.

Speaking of fabulous seniors, the theme for this issue is 'The Shock of the Old'. How do you draw on the past, to create a fresh approach to dressing?

Jeremy: As trends change we draw from the limitless world of vintage to complement our range of new fashion and sometimes vice-versa.

Grant: For me, I think of fashion as 'action and reaction', with my personal inclination being towards reaction. I tend to buy for the shops with 'action' in mind, but the magnetism of 'reaction' often overwhelms me. Another theory of mine is that if something was really popular at one point in fashion history, it will come back again no matter how ugly it was. Cargo pants for instance!

Sometimes I come across old items of clothing that are so shockingly outrageous, it makes me wonder whether we are actually regressing into conservatism. Given your experience, what are your thoughts on this idea?

Grant: The thing that I find the most shocking is the regression into conservatism over the past decade or so. There are a few brave individuals who are straying from the subtly constructed confines of current 'cool' fashion, and who look amazing without necessarily being fashionable. Maybe young people have just given up in the face of the enormity of the subtle shunning they will receive if they actually do wear something different from the 'cool-different' of their friends and family. I suppose I just wish every day was a dress-up party for everyone. How great would that be?

Quite frankly, that would be my idea of heaven. Do you have a particular icon who is holding your dress sense captive right now?

Jeremy: I have been a totally devoted fan of Róisín Murphy for years now. Other icons of style include Little Edie of Grey Gardens and anything in the Canadian lumberjack workwear catalogue.

Grant: Jenny Kee, now that she has gone a bit mad, is interesting to me again. Gumnut applique, beer singlets and Aboriginal motifs in combination with a Zandra Rhodes style of print on sheer organza - an I can feel it 'coming in the air tonight' kind of vibe. But truly, who could ever go past the incredibility of Leigh Bowery and the staying power of Anna Piaggi? I feel a couple of kindred spirits there. In past weeks I have tended towards a sort of very early 90's prison look, with a bit of mystic Aussie tourist and Bros. (Stock, Aitken and Waterman) thrown in for good measure. It might just be the hot weather! On a daily basis, however, it is really determined upon how deeply I can be bothered to dig into the avalanche that crashes from my wardrobe every time I open it.

Shag stores can be found on Oxford Street, Paddington, and in Windsor, Fitzroy and Collins St, Melbourne.

- \ Jeremy Valentine
- Shag Chapel Street Interior
- Grant Francis



What's on in April

06 March to 18 April	Vain Efforts Ming Wong ASIA-AUSTRALIA ARTS CENTRE 181-187 Hay Street, Sydney	08 April to 25 April	Visage Robert Habel, Michelle Hanlin, Julian Hoooper, Matthew Hopkins, Rob McHaffie Mark Rodda and Jake Walker FIRSTDRAFT 116-118 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills
19 March to 24 April	Grant Stevens – Wobbly GALLERY BARRY KELDOULIS 285 Young Street, Waterloo	08 April to 26 April	Rio – Marita Fraser Trick of the Light – Benjamin Hirte, Alex Lawler, Sonia Leimer, Tove Storch, Nadim Vardag curated by Marita Fraser MOP 2/39 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale
21 March to 16 April	Anwen Keeling - Shadow of a Doubt LIVERPOOL STREET GALLERY 243a Liverpool Street, East Sydney	09 April to 25 April	Fear and Might Leah Fraser BLACK AND BLUE 302/267-271 Cleveland Street, Redfern
26 March to 18 April	Hany Armanious – Uncanny Valley ROSLYN OXLEY9 GALLERY 8 Soudan Lane (off Hampden Street), Paddington	15 April to 29 April	Hasbeligkeiten – Lena Obergefell Panorama – Alex Lawler and Stephen Hodge HORUS AND DELORIS CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE 102 Pyrmont Street, Pyrmont
31 March to 19 April	Darren Sylvester SULLIVAN AND STRUMPF 44 Gurner Street, Paddington	16 April to 09 May	John Nixon ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY 185 Flinders Lane (Melbourne)
02 April to 25 April	The Phi Ta Khon Project – Alex Kershaw Black Mirror – Heidi Yardley Rawhide – Catriona Stanton GRANTPIRRIE 86 George Street, Redfern	16 April to 09 May	Spring Rockers – Jasper Knight CHALK HORSE 94 Cooper Street, Surry Hills
03 April to 25 April	Apparition Andrew Browne KALIMAN GALLERY 56 Sutherland Street, Paddington	21 April to 19 May	Private Treaty 2 SULLIVAN AND STRUMPF 44 Gurner Street, Paddington
03 April to 02 May	r e a – PolesApart BRENSPACE 289 Young Street, Waterloo	23 April to 16 May	Flames from the Dragon's Pearl Lindy Lee Yayoi Kusama ROSLYN OXLEY9 GALLERY 8 Soudan Lane (off Hampden Street), Paddington
04 April to 02 May	Robert Klippel ANNA SCHWARTZ GALLERY 245 Wilson Street, Darlington	24 April to 23 May 2009	Sensible World – Lareska Kosloff Super Segue – Alicia Frankovich Sympathy for the Devil – Shane Haseman ARTSPACE 43 - 51 Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo
07 April to 02 May	Robert Hirschmann KING STREET GALLERY ON WILLIAM 177 William Street, Darlinghurst		
07 April to 03 May	Introducing II...– Michael Edwards, Amanda Schulz, Clare Toms Precursor – Lezlie Tilley BRENDA MAY GALLERY 2 Danks Street, Waterloo		

