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Kasia Werstak, Applause (detail)

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•\ COVER IMAGE

BEN ALI ONG
Songs for Sorrow #5 (2009/10)
Type C photograph
120 x 80 cm

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ENTRY POINT

This May is a month to celebrate contemporary art around the country.

With three integral biennials coinciding for Sydneysiders and Melbournites, exciting contemporary art is just around your unsuspecting corner. Biennials play an important role in our cultural make up; they are exhibitions that are spoken about and reflected upon in time. They not only give the audience insight into current ideas and trends locally and internationally, they are a chance to see art in a lively and festive environment where works' meanings flow into each other and the biennale becomes greater than the sum of its parts.

One of the best lecturers I had at art school made me very passionate about contemporary art and one of the biggest lessons he passed on was to treat contemporary art like any other profession or passion, he said that like long-jumping or physics you have to work at it to get the rewards.

When attending contemporary art exhibitions like biennials I try to go along to gallery talks or research the artists and curators' previous work, or even just read a wall text if one is around: all this adds to my experience tenfold. I find that asking a question of the work begins a dialogue and this helps me to enjoy art that can sometimes seem difficult to find an entry point into. Reading about the contemporary artists and upcoming biennials presented here, I hope you can enjoy the questions we have asked on your behalf and begin your own dialogue with these exciting, emerging and established Australian artists.

In conclusion (as the third speaker for the negative) art is a social sport, sometimes even a contact sport, and most of us find it much more enjoyable with friends and a glass of wine to share it with and wash it all down.

Happy Biennial-ing!

BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS

CIRCLE PIT

INTERVIEW

Craig Dermody

Circle Pit is the name given to describe the creative relationship which exists between Angela Bermuda and Jack Mannix. Through this they create on many different levels, producing music, film, painting, songs and conversation a continual dialogue of two minds in physical form – a partnership that reaches beyond the realms of convention and seems to know no limits.

Craig Dermody is a Melbourne residing artist currently showing his latest work at FirstDraft Gallery in Surry Hills. He is a key member of Spider Vomit, Lindsey Lowhand as well as his own solo project Scott & Charlene's Wedding. Craig has found his niche in the art world by bringing pre-loved op-shop-found landscapes back from the dead and into something strange, necromantic and amusing.

Craig, Jack and Angie have been good mates for years.

Even though there are only two of you, I always look at Circle Pit as a kind of gang. Can you talk about your relationship and how it works in regards to both your art and music?

Angie: I like this idea. It is definitely a collaborative project in every sense of the word. We are very different people, and are creative on our own, but Circle Pit is just the name for our friendship, which has almost taken on a life of its own over the years. Even if we just sit around and talk, we'll come up with plans to save the world, lots of lyrics, song ideas and plans for the future.

Jack: I really love that analogy of Circle Pit being a gang of two, but it runs deeper than that. Angie and I have this intense, inexplicable connection that I can't imagine I will ever find in another person. It's deeper than love or family, and stronger than friendship – it's this kinship that outshines any other I've experienced. We have a psychic understanding of each other, and although we're quite different, there's a part of us both that only the other can reach. This makes it totally effortless to create collaboratively, because it's as if we're both tuned-in to the same frequency which only we can hear. We want the same things, and are turned-on by the same sounds or images – there's magic between us that I can't explain, and it's this mystery and fortune that keeps me alive.

You two have a show opening at Somewhere Gallery in April. Can you talk about some of the work that is going into the show?

[J] This is the first time we're showing as Circle Pit. We have two video works which will be displayed on TV's – one is a video clip for a song, the other is a conversation about music and life. We are also creating a shrine of sorts, made up of personal effects, handmade memorabilia, sculptures, collages, mail and junk that we collect – it will be an evolving installation. There will also be a performative aspect to the show, at the 'opening ceremony' we will perform live inside the gallery, but also as the exhibition continues we will spend time in the space, creating handmade record covers for a re-press of our 7".

[A] How has the reception of your work affected the way you see it? Are people always giving their own interpretation and explanation of your paintings? >>

• Stills from *Another Trick* (2010)
Video work by Circle Pit
Courtesy of the artists

• / *Friendship* (2010)
Oil on Found Print 90 x 40cm
Photo and work by Craig Dermody
Courtesy the artist





Yeah people are always telling me a story that they see in the work but it hasn't really affected the way I see it personally. I do think that when people see something else happening it's no more or less true than the idea I had, so I'd never correct anyone because the way they see it is the truest way to them.

I've always been in love with slacker culture. Can you explain what drew you to this kind aesthetic in art and music?

[J] Our aesthetic is integral to what we do, a large part of both rock'n'roll and art is the character or persona behind the work, whether it is real or created. It's something that we're endlessly fascinated by – this idea of the personal and public, who you are inside and what you choose to share with the world. We're quite contradictory – I think in many ways we are a product of our environments and circumstance – being from a lower-class background, living on the fringe of society, the outskirts of sanity, and at the same time choosing a path that is perhaps more difficult or uncouth, for the sake of experience and personal growth.

[A] I think that a lot of art and music that is aesthetically and technically considered 'good' is not as interesting as something done more in the moment, that is honest and confronts truths, whether they are pleasant or not.

[J] Your studio is an incredible space in Northcote, Melbourne. Being an old factory, how does this setting affect the way you work and live?

It is an unusual place to live. At the moment my bed is in a teepee covered with tie-dye fabric. Living in a warehouse is full of unusual challenges, like having

a weird bathroom or having no walls, but the space does help with art and music. We had to board up the windows to keep the sound down so if I do happen to spill some painting medium the smell really hangs around, it can put everyone in a strange mood for a while.

How do you find the process of creating music to that of creating art?

[A] To perform music you have composed in front of people is easy to set up, free and you can perform music you wrote that day. Art, especially video art which is the form I am most interested and involved in, is more of a slow burn project that evolves over time and eventually may be shown. Art is also powerful in the sense that it generally takes on the form of a contained object, where as music is more elusive, on the wind – the melody is there and then it is gone.

[J] Like Angie said, the relationship between the two is relatively seamless. I suppose my music informs my art and vice versa. Both are an extension and expression of who I am, who I aspire to be, and who I would like people to think I am. In that sense, you could say that our subject matter tends to be quite personal. Rock'n'roll and art are made up largely of smoke and mirrors, the mystery and the legacy – these themes are probably the most prominent connection between the two creative pursuits.

●
www.myspace.com/circlepit
www.myspace.com/scottcharlene39swedding

Circle Pit will show at Somewhere Gallery, Melbourne, from April 9th through to the 3rd of May. Craig Dermody will show at First Draft Gallery, Sydney, from March 24th until mid April.

BEN ALI ONG

INTERVIEW
 William Sturrock

Of all the photographic exhibitions we're likely to see in 2010, the long anticipated solo show of Ben Ali Ong's latest series is guaranteed to be among the best. While the softly spoken artist may often be too humble to admit it, his thoughtful and thought-provoking bodies of work are nothing short of brilliant. He has been selected as a finalist in countless prizes including the Blake, Moran Photographic and Olive Cotton, as well as regional gallery and industry competitions, most recently winning the Gosford Regional Gallery's Sharpe Brothers Acquisitive Prize and Mosman Photographic Art Festival Prize.

Often menacingly dark, Ali Ong's works confront audiences to think about mortality; of a subject's, or their own. A stare from one of Ali Ong's figures into a void we cannot see, or a scream we cannot hear but only imagine the piercing timbre of, can be chilling to even the most adoring fan of Film Noir. Like the recollections of a vivid dream, scenes of even the most familiar settings are pulled apart by the presence of memory. Vistas are sublimely hollowed of their romance by the uneasy presence of fear, so that beauty becomes mystery. His entrancing works are in a league of their own.

Ali Ong's upcoming exhibition with Tim Olsen Gallery in Sydney will mark his tenth solo show in five years, adding to an impressive record of exhibitions in Australia and overseas.

What and who do you cite as the earliest influences on your artistic enquiry, and how did photography become the avenue for exploration?

The Japanese photographer Eikoh Hosoe. In 9th or 10th grade I went to the Art Gallery of New South Wales to see the *World Without End* exhibition and I saw some of the prints from his *Ordeal by Roses* series. I remember being immediately stunned by them, I couldn't explain it but they were just so different from anything else I'd ever seen. From that point on I decided to pursue photography as an art form seriously.

I also used to watch, and still do, a lot of old black and white films, usually with the volume off, ever since I was a little kid. I've always been fascinated by them, there is a romantic and timeless quality that they have which I really enjoy. I've loved Goya's etchings for as long as I can remember too, looking at them as a kid, they were like some mysterious gothic fairytale.

A completely pedestrian question, but I'm interested to hear your rationale – in an age of sophisticated digital photography and imaging, what personally draws you to analogue photography?

I love digital cameras and have nothing against them, there are lots of people I know who shoot digital and I love their work, I just don't need it for what I do. I'm making only black and white work, and I use elements of the films characteristics like grain, so to shoot digital would be like starting at some backwards point. I'd have to convert the images to black and white and then try to add grain to them to make them look like film, so I don't see the point, I might as well just shoot black and white film. Plus it's just what I'm used to, I studied analogue photography at college and I'm still using the same cameras I had back then, so it's convenient too. It's the whole 'if it ain't broke don't fix it' mentality I guess.

One of your signature processes is referred to as the 'sandwiching' of negatives. What is this process and how did you come to adopt the technique?

I layer two or more pieces of film or some other object together in the enlarger or the scanner. Lately I've been scanning everything but it's the same process, I'll start with the main negative, put something like tracing paper over it, maybe another negative of something else that I photograph, like some texture from a wall. I also have clear pieces of plastic with paint splatters on them that I put on top too. Anything really to get that textural element I'm after.

I came about this way of working just by experimenting and playing around. The actual shooting process has always been just one part of it for me, the negative is only fifty percent, maybe even less to the whole process. I love trying things and taking my time, being hands on in the scanning and/or printing process to manipulate the image. I was looking at the early Pictorialist photographers, their work always had those imperfections but it was beautiful. I was trying to emulate that I guess, just in a more controlled and ordered manner.

In your *Black Sun* (2009) and *Refluent Hours* (2008) series, there is a balance of intimate, studio compositions as well as landscapes taken in the field. Throughout these series I find the landscapes stage a context for the drama of the studio works. Is this effect intentional or incidental?

It's intentional. Going back to the influence of early black and white cinema and film noir, to create that disjointed narrative and ambiguous world I'm after, I need to present different things in the same context. Portraits mixed with the landscape, desolate buildings, silhouetted birds in the cloudscape, this sort of thing. To play on the tension between everything, the internal and external worlds and environments, and if you read spiritual text or new science, the oneness and unified theory exists between everything anyway.

Art critic and author John Berger once wrote: 'photographs do not translate from appearances... they quote from them.' In his opinion, unlike other forms of representational art, photography does not interpret its subjects but traces a physical account of them. Your figures and sublime, majestic landscapes, muted by monochrome are far from a black-and-white documentary of the 'real.' Your works inspire fantasy and entice viewers to join you on what can be, at times, a mysterious, brooding journey. There is an abundance of documentary photography in the world of art, especially in Australia, so I'm sure you can agree with Berger to a point. However, you possess a talent for manipulating what your camera shoots into something else. Would you agree?

Wow that's a great statement and question, and yes I absolutely agree. Photography has its roots in reportage and documentary, and I respect that. It's just not something I have ever been or will ever be interested in.

I've always come from the idea that an artist is not merely the slavish announcer of a series of facts, and have tried to make work that is a visual fable that finds its truth >>



• *Songs for Sorrow* #12 (2009/10)
Type C photograph,
80 x 120 cm

Black Sun (the art of dying) #4 (2009)
Type C photograph
100 x 70 cm

Black Sun (the art of dying) #10 (2009)
Type C photograph
100 x 70 cm

- *Exodus from Oblivion – For Pollock* (2008)
Type C photograph
120 x 150 cm

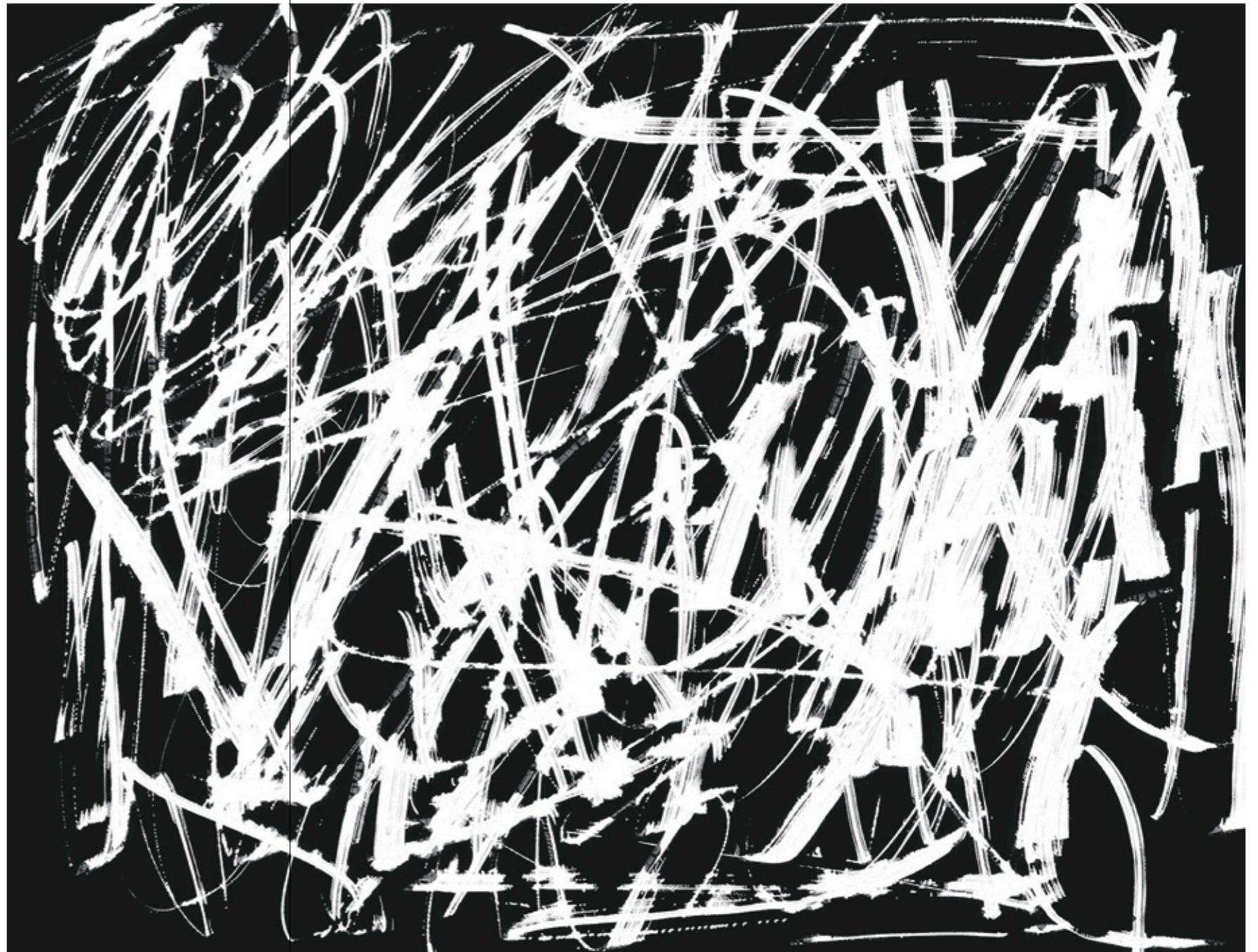
All images courtesy the artist and Tim Olsen Gallery

Songs for Sorrow will be on exhibition from May 5th 2010
The Annex, Tim Olsen Gallery

in imaginative resonance rather than hard evidence. So although the images appear to exist in an external world, they are very much the imaginings of myself, the artist.

Months ago, you and I were discussing Francis Bacon's ability to present in his works, and procure from the audience, a sense of uneasy anxiety. The 'open mouth,' as art historians now refer to it, anticipates a scream of fright and terror. Allegedly inspired by a film still, Bacon obsessively used the open mouth motif to emotionally interrupt, even disturb viewers of his works – I refer especially to Bacon's studies *After Valazquez' Portrait of Pope Innocent X* (c. 1953). From the *Black Sun* series, numbers four and ten will always have a similar effect on me. Do you consider yourself to be a master of horror?

If my works can have the same effect on you as Francis Bacon then I can die now happily! I adore Bacon and his distorted, dripping faces have always fascinated and influenced me. Not just because of the 'horror' aspect, but the notion of time that they play on. A blurred image is achieved by a slow exposure, so you're compressing time into a single image, and that alone is fascinating. When NASA tried to demonstrate the idea of multiple dimensions they showed people a blurry photograph of a red dot. There was a dot on each side of the page joined by a smudge – people couldn't see the big deal but NASA was trying to explain that things exist outside of our perception and general understanding of the relationship between time and space. Einstein writes a lot on this too, I could go on forever. When you consider all this in relation to Photography, and how it is composed in relation to time or by the 'has-been', the ideas are endless. I think that is the real appeal of these images, to Francis Bacon who was hugely influenced by photographic images, and to us. There is a shock you first get when you look at them that goes beyond something trivial like horror – it resonates something deep inside us that we perhaps already know as human beings but have forgotten, like a hidden knowledge. ●



ZOE McMAHON

INTERVIEW

Emma Letizia Jones



In 2009 Zoe McMahon spent six months travelling across America's historic Route 66 highway, eventually settling to live and work in Flagstaff, a small town at the edge of the Grand Canyon National Park. During her travels she began to photograph her surroundings using an old and much loved medium format twin lens Yashica camera. The images she created during this time began a body of work exploring notions of transience, displacement and the uneasy relationship between the self and unfamiliar landscapes, which has become the basis for her exhibition *That Other Place*.

Zoe tells me: **'During that transient part of my life photography became my anchor. When I was moving constantly from one place to another it became the single most defining way in which I experienced the world, and a way of finding a personal affinity with an otherwise unfamiliar place or landscape.'**

Travelling, as an often solitary and lonely pursuit, is explored through these images; they give expression to the intensified emotions the traveller experiences when thrust into places, cultures and situations that may be outside of their comfort zone. Inspired by the work of playwright

Louis Nowra and the cinematography of films like *Picnic at Hanging Rock*, Zoe presents the landscape of her travels as a dominating presence that can stir feelings of romance and idealism, as well as alienation, even terror. There is no mistaking that the landscape is the primary personality in her work, although in this case it is as much man-made as natural.

In some of the photographs of Flagstaff's surrounding wilderness areas, nature often takes on a claustrophobic quality; it encroaches on the lens like a stain. Intense contrasts between light and shadow; the 'ghosting' of images caused by deliberately blurred exposure; and magnified compositions that exclude crucial elements of the broader scene all serve to heighten this feeling of disquiet.

Other images give a voice to the traveller's experiences of restlessness and temporality: they possess the ungraspable quality of dreams or passing subconscious memories. The use of the imperfect Yashica lens, which gives the images an indefinite, nostalgic quality, only enhances this sense of the contemplative.

Zoe particularly cites the influence of the poetry of Pablo Neruda and the writings of Italo Calvino on her work, as both writers are able to personify urban or organic landscapes:

"I am interested in the point at which the lines between the outer landscape, and the inner landscape of the self, are blurred and merge, and this is primarily what I have come to explore through my work."

Inspired by classic Americana and its associated imagery of dusty highways, deserts and roadside diners, the photographs are far from simply travel snaps from a jaunt along historic Route 66. McMahon gives us something more than a postcard, or the objective documentation of a travel journey. She gives us reality, but it's a reality distorted through the veil of her own inner life coaxed gently through the lens, revealing the world to us in new, and very personal ways. ●

Zoe McMahon's work can be viewed online at zoelairecmahon.blogspot.com

- *Like the birds in me #1* (2009)
20" x 20" Photographic Print
Courtesy of the artist
- *That other place* (2009)
28" x 28" Photographic Print
Courtesy of the artist

All images taken on a Yashica D Twin Lens Reflex, Medium Format camera with colour slide film.



ROSE VICKERS FLOWHAWK

PHOTOGRAPHY Rose Vickers

SCULPTURE: Amalia (PoHo)

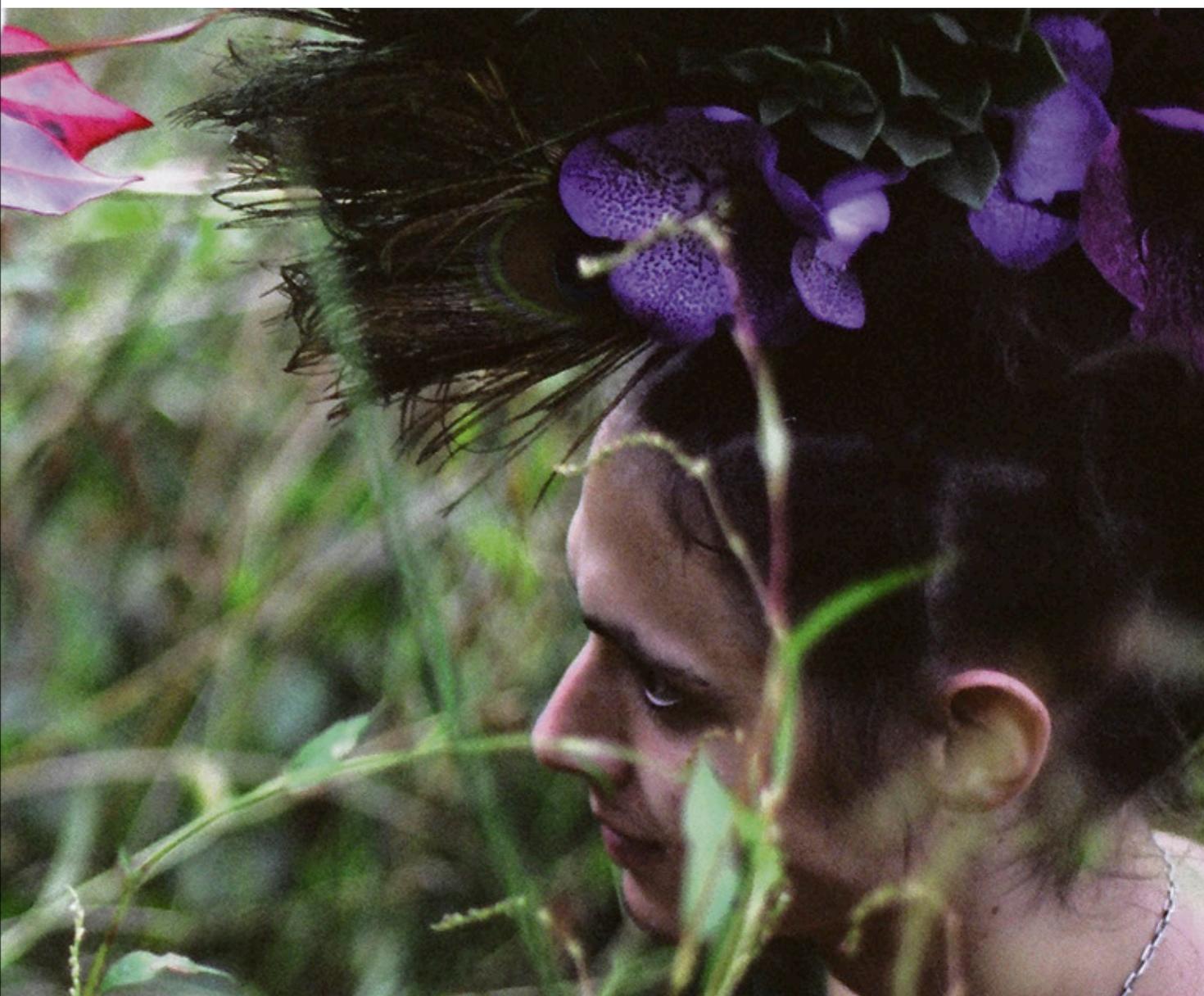
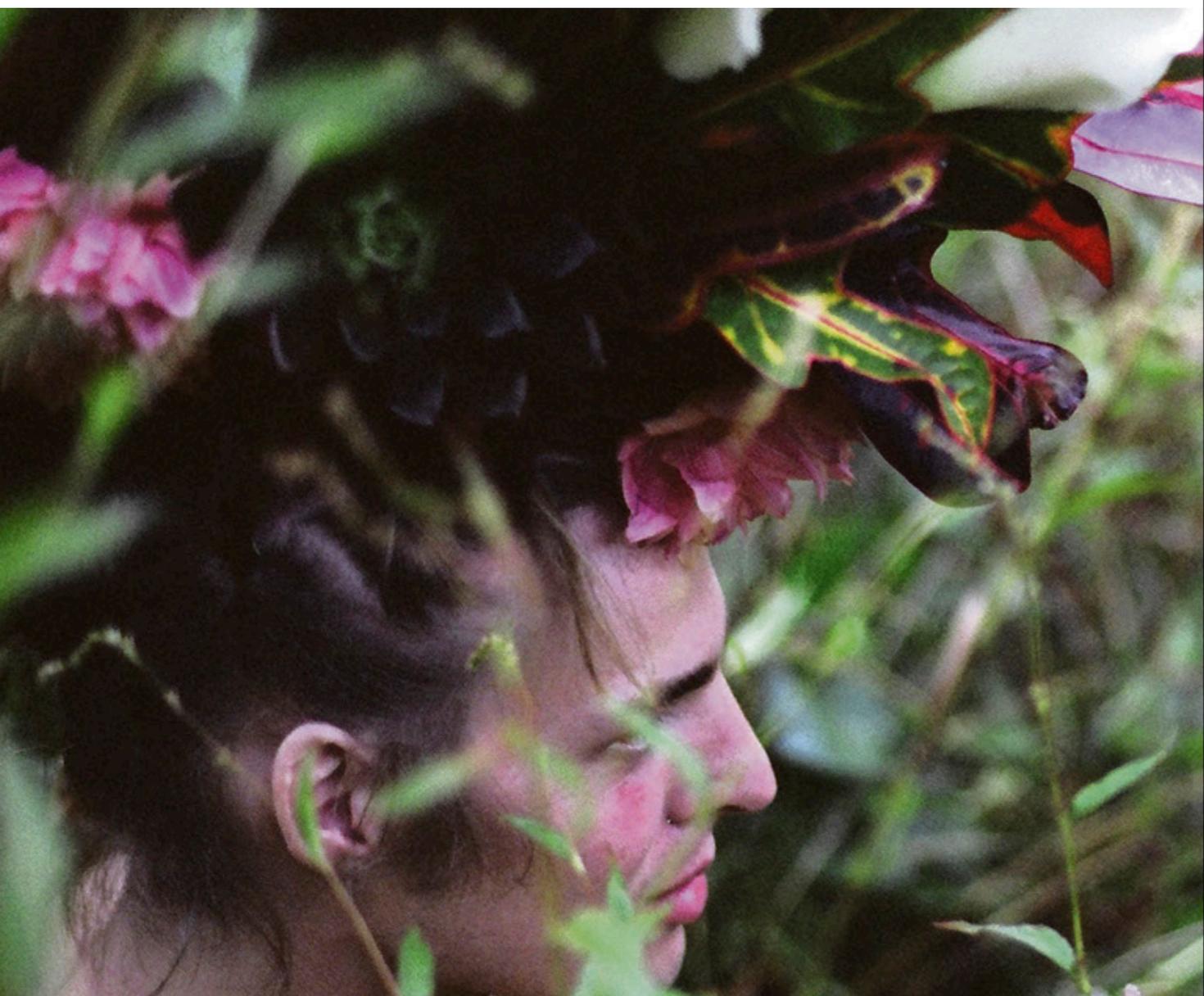
HAIR Luke Brian Davis (DLM)

STYLING James McKenzie

MODELS Maximillian and Felix (Priscillas)









THREE BIENNALES

THE 17th BIENNALE OF SYDNEY THE BEAUTY OF DISTANCE, SONGS OF SURVIVAL IN A PRECARIOUS AGE

INTERVIEW

Mariella Everett

The 17th Biennale of Sydney promises a curio cabinet of contemporary delights, where tricksters dance in the rain with diasporic peoples and share a drink with gods and ghosts.

One of the great joys of arts festivals on a grand scale is that they throw open the doors of contemporary art to audiences that may have been intimidated by it in the past, or have had little opportunity to experience it. The Biennale inspires creative freedom and thought by providing open access to a free program that includes film, photography, fine art and live performances. It has provided local artists a place on the international stage, as well as having shown the work of over 1355 artists from 82 countries.

In contrast to the questionable success of the 16th Biennale *Revolutions: Forms That Turn*, and former Artistic Director Carolyn Christov-Bakangier's sometimes unpopular idea of a 'terrorist act' to 'withdraw art' from exposure and accessibility, this year's exhibition will see the city become a moving, ticking, musical piece of art – bringing our famous harbour and its surrounds to life and shining the spotlight on the Arts in Australia.

Presenting an incredibly diverse exhibition program, the 17th Biennale's Artistic Director David Elliot has taken our remote setting, and the artistic and political principles of artist and experimental filmmaker Harry Everett Smith and his *Anthology of American Folk Music*, as the starting point for this year's theme: *The Beauty of Distance, Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age*. This theme is developed with the work of artists that engage with global contemporary issues and human experience. Here he takes the time to discuss the Biennale and the themes that tie it all together.

As a thriving international city, in a still emerging nation, Sydney provides the perfect plinth for a contemporary art festival. How does one first go about directing and curating a festival on such a grand scale, with such diverse exhibition areas?

The Harbour area in Sydney is a terrific stage for contemporary art – where thousands of people can experience it. *The Beauty of Distance* uses these outdoor spaces as much as possible but we would have liked to have done more. We are very grateful for the support we receive but, of course, so much more could be done in the future that would enable a larger scale outdoor impact. Basically I have approached this Biennale as I would any other large thematic exhibition, but I have also taken into account the history and redolence of the different places I decided to use for it and have also focused on what I think are vital issues for contemporary art across the world.

What part does 'The Trickster' play in the 17th Biennale of Sydney?

One of the ways that art can work is to transform, through experience, what you previously thought you knew. There are lots of Tricksters in the show all working at different levels. When 'reality' is unexpectedly subverted or disrupted, you can sometimes see things more clearly.

The concept of Bentham's Panopticon versus the modern museum idea of the wunderkammer creates the wonderful image of Sydney, its parks, island and harbour, becoming a contemporary curio cabinet. This non-hierarchical idea of display sits very well with your hope to reflect Harry Everett Smith's political belief that: 'Creativity is the liberating birthright of us all', but seems in paradox with Beauty of Distance and the idea that art requires distance to maintain authority. How do you reconcile these ideas, and do you think it is truly possible to display and consume art without any sense of hierarchic value?

Authority and power are not the same thing. I am interested in the particular kind of power that good art has which is very different from other kinds of power – political, social or economic. If art has any power it is because it is disinterested, only concerned with its own aesthetic definition, although in the process it may refer to many different aspects of life. Unlike religion, ideology, politics, the media, or even education, it will never 'tell' you what you should think, feel or experience – that is for you to decide – a very rare privilege in such a heavily mediated and controlled world! Perhaps it is the mixture of disinterestedness with creative freedom and aesthetic quality that makes control freaks, including politicians, extremely edgy about it sometimes. Perhaps this is because it will not submit to any control other than its own internal logic?

The Festival's subtitle Songs of Survival in a Precarious Age is inspired by Everett Smith's Anthology of American Folk Music, for which he

is perhaps best known, and subsequently there is a large emphasis on sound and music as elements in works, encouraging audiences to engage with the visual arts as well as concerts and live performances. Smith said he saw 'America changed by music'. As perhaps our most readily consumed art form, do you believe music to have the most potential to precipitate or act as a catalyst to change?

To quote the title of an Australian song: 'From little things big things grow...' and popular music is a widely accessible art form. But I'm mainly interested in pop/folk music as a kind of metaphor that overturns hierarchies. If 'All music is folk music', as Louis Armstrong was once supposed to have said, then by the same measure 'All art is folk art' – it's made by people for people. And the most important question is whether it is any good – that's the only reason one would want to include it in an art exhibition. I'm including in this show quite a lot of art made by indigenous people from all over the world, but the main reason they are in this show is not because they are indigenous but because their work is good and stands >>



up against the other, non-indigenous work. I also think of a 'song of survival' as a kind of breath of life force – an irrefutable utterance of how precious and beautiful it is to be alive, even in the toughest of circumstances.

How important do you think it is to make contemporary art accessible to the general public?

It is part of our culture so it is everyone's right to have access to it at some level. We make it accessible by making a really good exhibition that is free of charge to the public. There's a (free) guide book describing each artist's work and mapping out how and where to find it, and a hefty catalogue that goes into ideas behind the Biennale in greater detail. We also have a free program of events including artist talks, forums and guided tours which allow the public to engage with the art, artists and the ideas behind it all.

Throughout your career you have created many new and exciting platforms for contemporary art – what do you hope audiences will take away from this year's Biennale, what new ground do you hope to have broken, and what will be its legacy?

A sense of quality that is difficult to pin down at first because it is related to so many other ideas and fields – an appreciation of beauty in the individual works even when the works themselves may touch on horrible or disturbing things – a greater appreciation that we are presently living through one of the great turning periods in history, rather like the last fifty years of the eighteenth century must have been – and how contemporary artists are expressing these changes. In achieving this it will be both a platform and a challenge for the Artistic Director of the 18th Biennale.

FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

Cockatoo Island will again be ringing with music and movement, playing off its history as a prison and providing a unique backdrop for the work of over fifty artists. Moscow-based group AES+F's animation *The Feast of Trimalchio*, a satire set in a luxury hotel, combines Beethoven and a 'multicultural' fantasy in an evocation of decadence and debauchery that examines consumerism and globalisation. *Inopportune: Stage One*, a nine car installation by Chinese born, New York based artist Cai Guo-Qiang will occupy the Turbine Hall, tackling terrorism and destruction, while the Tiger Lillies' post-punk opera *Cockatoo Prison* will spill through the trees near a solitary stoic hero in Brook Andrew's *Jumping Castle War Memorial*.

For the first time the MCA's space will be entirely dedicated to the Biennale, housing a diverse range of works including bronze sculptures by French born artist Louise Bourgeois, and 110 memorial poles by Yolnga artists from North-East Arnhem Land, supervised by New York Chinese artist Jennifer Wen Ma's *Monkey King*: a projection on the Sydney Opera House. A little bit of Tokyo will invade the harbour down in Woolloomooloo, with the installation of *Superdeluxe*, an experimental gallery, performance venue, bar and club that will, amongst a varied program, host creative forum PekaKucha Nights every Thursday evening. ●

- John Bock
Fischgrätenmelkstand (2008)
- Brook Andrew
Castle (2010)
- Lara Baladi
Justice Mother (2007)





safARI 2010

INTERVIEW

Annalice Creighton

SafARI began riding the Biennale of Sydney slipstream in 2006, capitalising on the timing of this mega-exhibition to spotlight those formative hot-houses of creative industry, Sydney's artist-run initiatives (ARIs). The artists in SafARI are selected from a lucky dip of applicants bound together solely by the criterion of 'emerging and unrepresented'. There is no prescriptive curatorial rationale, no festival-sized budget, and no telling what wonders lay in wait with each edition of this anticipated exhibition. Have your binoculars at the ready! SafARI is on the horizon.

On May 7th, 2010, the 3rd edition of this initiative spreads its wings into MOP Projects, Firstdraft, Locksmith Projects, Serial Space and the FBI building.

Co-curators, Danielle Hairs and Lisa Corsi took a moment to lead me through the life and times of SafARI as they prepare for this year's show.

The name SafARI sounds like an adventure. How did the concept for this event come into being?

Lisa: In 2004 Frederic Post, a Swiss artist and good friend of my then boyfriend, was in Sydney as a participating artist in the Biennale. He asked a very simple question: '...but what else is happening in Sydney?'. Margaret Farmer and I discussed this over dinner one night. It was clear that we had identified a void that we couldn't ignore. We decided to play with the idea of setting up a biannual exhibition for unrepresented and emerging artists across ARIs, timed to coincide with the Biennale of Sydney.

2010 will be SafARI's third incarnation – it has established itself as one of the most significant fringe events in the Sydney arts scene. How has this exhibition come of age?

[L] Like most experiments, SafARI has grown as a result of an incredible amount of enthusiasm and support from everyone involved over the years. So many fabulous things have come out of SafARI for many people, whether it be new volunteers signing up to participating ARIs, increased visitation to ARIs, artists selling works or being invited to participate in other exhibitions and more importantly, the understanding that these initiatives are a real labour of passion that thrives on community involvement.

The latest development is that SafARI is now recognised as an artist-run initiative (by the Australia Council). This was really important for us because we also wanted to question what shape an ARI forms. While we don't have a fixed gallery space, we work within the ARIs and associated networks as an initiator. The SafARI board is comprised of a nice balance of artists, curators, writers and arts workers (including our straight-shooting art lawyer) that meet around an often messy dinner table.

Danielle: This is the first SafARI that I have been involved in, however, 2010 is also the first year that an emerging curator model has been put into place, which is such a great initiative. This year, I'll be the 'green' co-curator muddling my way through things and learning everything that I can. Then next year Lisa will step back from curatorial responsibilities and another emerging curator will come on board to co-curate the show with me. This same spirit of nurturing and learning exists for the artists, designers, arts workers and volunteers as well. SafARI becomes a kind of rite of passage for emerging arts people.

What do you think is most valuable about the Sydney ARI scene?

[L] That it exists, that it is always changing, that it is always having to be creative, that it is always having to readapt to current situations, that it is flexible and dynamic.

[D] ARIs are a place for unhindered exploration and experimentation. Artists don't have to be established or commercially appropriate to exhibit there. But at the same time, they can be. They are a place where ideas can form without restraint.

What would you like to see more of?

[D] ARIs that aren't necessarily attached to physical spaces. The last word in 'ARI' is 'initiative' not 'gallery', after all. If an ARI doesn't have to be a gallery space, what other kind of activity can an ARI initiate? It opens up a lot of interesting possibilities.

[L] I think that ARIs need to be less concerned about 'trends'. I personally would like to see less formality and greater experimentation encouraged, not only from the artists, but also from the very initiatives that provide the opportunities. >>

The 2006 SafARI presented twenty-six artists and a mobile exhibition space across six ARI venues, some as far flung as Wollongong. 2008 was more concentrated – eleven artists and three galleries. How has the shape and scale of this exhibition transformed in 2010?

[L] In 2006 we thought of doing a ‘satellite’ SafARI in Wollongong which was a nice idea that didn’t really get off the ground. A great deal of effort went into trying to make it work but distance made it difficult. Consequently, we thought that in 2008 we’d keep it to Sydney only and that worked really well because our visitors did get to all three venues. In 2010...

[D] Fourteen artists across four ARIs and over the FBI Radio building!

There is no theme to SafARI, however in any group exhibition there are often tendencies/conversations that run between different works. What do you see as being the most visible directions in the artists’ works for 2010?

[L] Proposed works from this year’s group of SafARI artists seem to suggest an acknowledgement of an indulgence in the confusion and cathartic processes symptomatic of creativity in an increasingly complex world. Reflections, reinterpretations, usage, boundaries, clarity or lack thereof and stereotyping are just some of the ideas coming through.

[D] There really is a great cross-section of styles, mediums and themes in this year’s SafARI. The works are humorous, both dark and light, create immersive environments, are witty and inventive, ambitiously creative and provocative.

What are some of the rewards and challenges of curating an exhibition in this format?

[D] I am someone who came to the arts after spending a fair chunk of time on a very different career trajectory. In light of this, the biggest reward offered by SafARI is simply the opportunity to be involved. I’m still a bit

shocked that I’m in the position of co-curating such a dynamic and exciting show. But I’m relishing every minute of it. Challenges? Probably working around other work and time commitments. I think most of my floor plan ideas were scribbled down during bus rides to work...

[L] Like Danielle, juggling family and paid work is hard but to see and learn of so many positive things that have happened to people involved in SafARI is priceless. It is even better when you know these things have happened long after SafARI was up. Personally, I get a huge amount from working with people in a constructive and collaborative way.

What have you gained/learned from your experience with SafARI?

[D] I’m still learning! How to work with artists to help them realise the best presentation of their work, how to create an exhibition of totally distinct pieces that still complement and speak to each other, how to work with a number of venues that each have their own needs and requirements. I’m yet to learn how to write a grant acquittal, but I’m told that’s waiting just around the corner...

[L] The beauty of people power.

Can we have a preview into SafARI 2010?

[D] Absolutely! Wander into Locksmith Projects, First Draft, MOP Projects, Serial Space or past the FBI building during May to see engaging and intelligent works. Or if you like company, join the SafARI walking tour of all the ARIs and hear each artist talk – this is shaping up to be a real highlight. So is the Forum at First Draft. And the opening and closing parties of course... It’s all terrific!

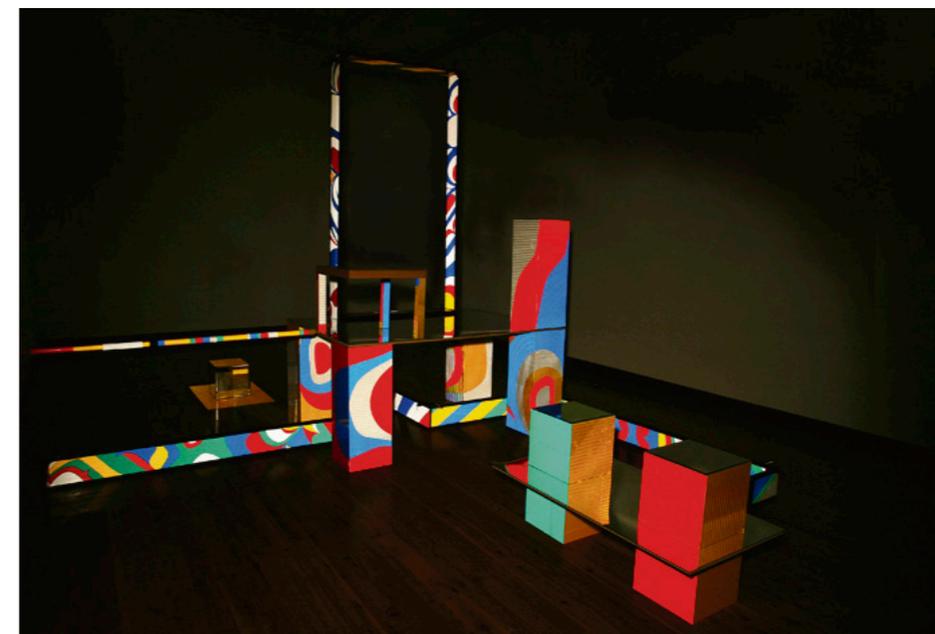
What part of this exhibition are you most excited about?

L: Too hard a question. All of it and we’re particularly excited about letting Frederic Post know how far we have come in 2010. ●

• Karla Dickens *Black Virgin* (2009)
Mixed media on canvas, 110 x 110cm.
Courtesy the artist.

Rolande Souliere *Platform* (2008)
Street barriers, reflective sheeting,
mirrors, wood, metal and clamps.
Courtesy the artist.

Biljana Jancic *Untitled* (2008)
Garbage bags, dimensions variable.
Courtesy the artist.



For more information about the safARI Festival visit safari.org.au

NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL NO RISK TOO GREAT

INTERVIEW
Kelly Royds

Subversive gender and defiant sexuality. Apocalyptic fantasies. One-on-one encounters. Protest and activism. Local hazards and monotonous labour. The raw, the messy and the unfinished...

This May, the thrilling and risky works of over 300 artists will invade Melbourne's rooftops, streets, sporting fields and community art spaces. Next Wave Festival is Australia's leading curated festival for emerging artists and offers an extensive program for 2010. This year's theme, No Risk Too Great challenges artists to respond to an overly cautious,

risk-averse and security obsessed society. Over fifty projects will tackle this theme and ask the question: is our society and our art too safe?

Some of the events include a huge multi-artist project at the MSG called 'Sports Club', free talks and artist presentations, intimate dance encounters and video art in Federation Square.

I spoke with Next Wave's Artistic Director, Jeff Khan, to learn more about his vision and hopes for the festival.



• Images from
Private Dances

What does it mean to have content made by emerging artists?

It's about who the most exciting new artists are in Australia. This festival is more national than we have ever gone before – just under half of the artists are from outside of Victoria. So it's a twofold thing – it's about presenting a cross section of exciting artists and also promoting new art and new possibilities.

It's shaping up to be a very exciting festival. What was your vision coming into the festival?

The theme of this year's festival is No Risk Too Great and it's really about looking at, or encouraging, artists to take creative risks and also to look at risk as a concept that permeates our culture. I believe that we're living in a risk adverse time and that this is not only having an effect on our lives as citizens, but also on the kind of art people are making and what kind of ambitions they have for their art practices. So we've encouraged artists to step outside their comfort zones and think in a big and ambitious way about what they want their work to say on an ideas level, what they want to achieve, and what they want the audience to get out of it.

Do you think there has been a lack of risk taking in the art world recently?

I believe the time we are living in is quite conservative. We self-censor a lot because we are living in such tightly controlled times. So for me it is also about stepping through that self-censorship.

What about explicit censorship, the things you can't exhibit or show in the festival?

Well, I guess that is the kind of painful and difficult side to choosing the theme No Risk Too Great and encouraging artists to think so ambitiously. We embarked with fifty amazing and highly risky works and we have come up against a lot of bureaucratic red tape. But it also brought some creative challenges – making works that speak to big issues and still have them connect with an audience, and work as an experience on the ground level. When

I look at what we've got in the end, it's still incredibly exciting to see what people have managed to achieve and those challenges often strengthen people's ability to think creatively and outside of the square. For us it's not only about pulling off ambitious projects but developing excellent artists who can grow through the process.

What is unique about Next Wave?

We're Australia's only curated festival for young emerging artists. We make the program tight, coherent and punchy. Next Wave is increasingly getting a reputation for making work that is site specific and unconventional. So a lot of the work happens on the streets, on rooftops, in abandoned office buildings.

What has it been like for you to curate such a broad festival?

It's incredibly exciting because the parameters are so open. I guess that's the exciting and terrifying thing. We are not tied to a venue and we have an ever changing demographic, so you're not working with the same people all the time or the same venues. Being a curated festival there is an incredible amount of freedom to invent it from scratch. But there is also an incredible amount of responsibility to make it a meaningful experience for artists and audiences. It's a big task to build it from the ground up every time but it's also what makes the festival unique, because each festival is different in feel and focus.

And finally, what would be the best outcome for you from the festival?

I think that if people have moving experiences, or the works drive people to have strong feelings, whether positive or negative, that would really be the measure of success. ●

Find out more about Next Wave Festival and see the program at www.nextwave.org.au

JESSE OLSEN WITH INK AND EYE

INTERVIEW

Bronwyn Bailey-Charteris

Jesse Olsen is currently a Melbourne man, a skateboarder and sometimes artist. His drawings are the amalgamation of a high school pastime turned passion. Olsen is talented with ink and his occasionally bleak, always evocative and floating images, induce a sense of the overflowing and melodramatic. Olsen is an emerging artist weaving his own path, detouring right out of art school and into the slipstream of independent thinking and the formation of an intriguing art practice.

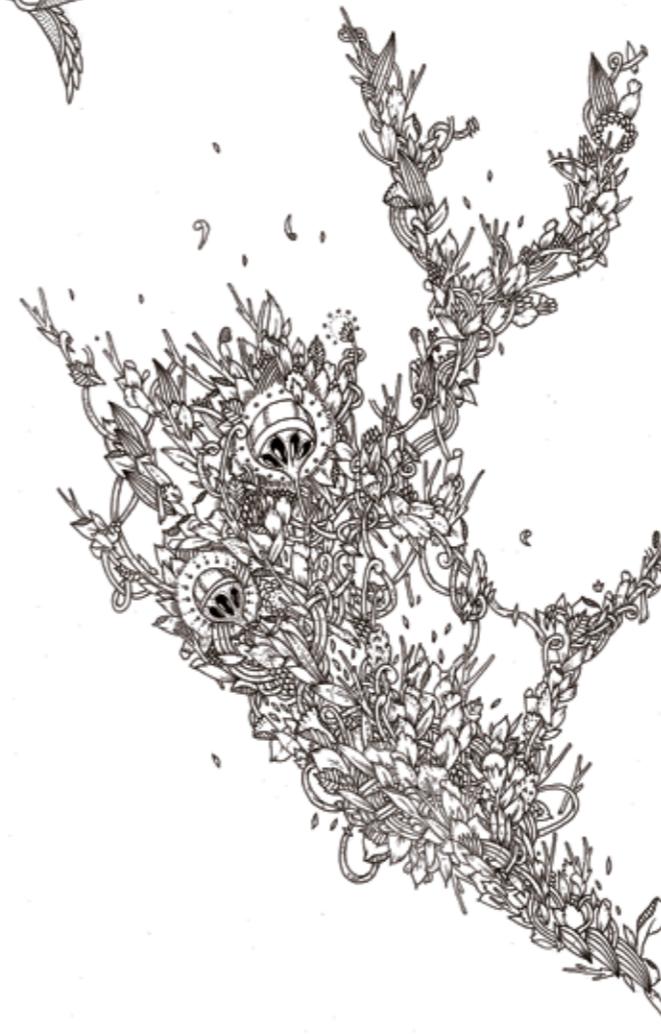
Tell us about the images we are seeing here, what are we looking at?

The images I have been working on most recently, I would describe as highly detailed and poorly planned out. I start each image with the intention of filling space. I draw sticks, flowers, leaves, water, clouds and mountains, all folding and enveloping one another. I work all free handed and with a pen and Indian ink. Drawing this way feels like a more natural and intuitive process of art making. Its like a crafternoon vibe for me, I try not to take the start too seriously, if it works out that's rad, but nine times out of ten I make some major mess-up of a nice piece of paper. But drawing without a pencil really has developed confident line work in my drawings. Now I know I can draw with a certain amount of detail free handed, so procuring a shape to the entanglement seemed like a natural progression. I needed to show balance in my work and not just scrawl over the entire page.

Did you go to art school?

By the time I was expelled from my fifth high school, I had quite the portfolio of scribbles torn out of my note pads, and a handful of very naive paintings. So I piled them all together and moved from one of my many hometowns, Byron Bay, up to Brisbane, and enrolled myself as an independent – I finished year twelve by the skin of my teeth, and somehow got into Queensland University of Technology.

But I am the classic art school drop out, it's sort of an unbearable cliché but I still feel if I were to stay a moment longer I would have choked someone. I like to draw and I like to paint, but I don't feel the need to film my drawings, set them on fire while I do an interpretive dance to winds of change. I don't need to adopt these elements to make a meaningful or relevant piece of contemporary art at this stage of my practice. >>



COLOUR ME
AND THROW ME
AWAY!!



• *Broken Homes* (2009)
Pen and indian ink on cotton paper
≈ 50 x 80cm
Courtesy of the artist

• Sketches for
Colour me in and throw me away (2009)
Pen and indian ink on cotton paper
Various sizes on A5
Courtesy of the artist

What does your art mean to you and where does it fit into your life?

My days are based in routine, I write up a list of things to do. On the top of this list are generally two or three things to do with my artwork. Whether it's just to go out and buy a new pen or finish an important deadline. I try to treat my art like a job, rather than a hobby because if I take it seriously others around me will be compelled to take my art seriously.

What concepts do you find tantalising in your work?

When I draw I tend to be fixated on the concepts of death and the ephemeral. I lean toward melodrama, so I was fixated on the thought of death when I was a little boy. To the point that I would stop myself from sleeping, I wanted to be awake for everything, I hated that yesterday was over and I was a day older. I tried to savor every moment, convinced that I was going to die any day now. So at the age of eight years old I kept a diary of my last days, for almost five years – it was very detailed, nothing was insignificant to me, I wrote it all down, the things I saw, the time of day, the temperature. It was all written down compulsively.

Although I got over my neurosis many years ago, I still find the everyday notions of life and death, and the detail of grieving and nostalgia are strong themes in my drawings.

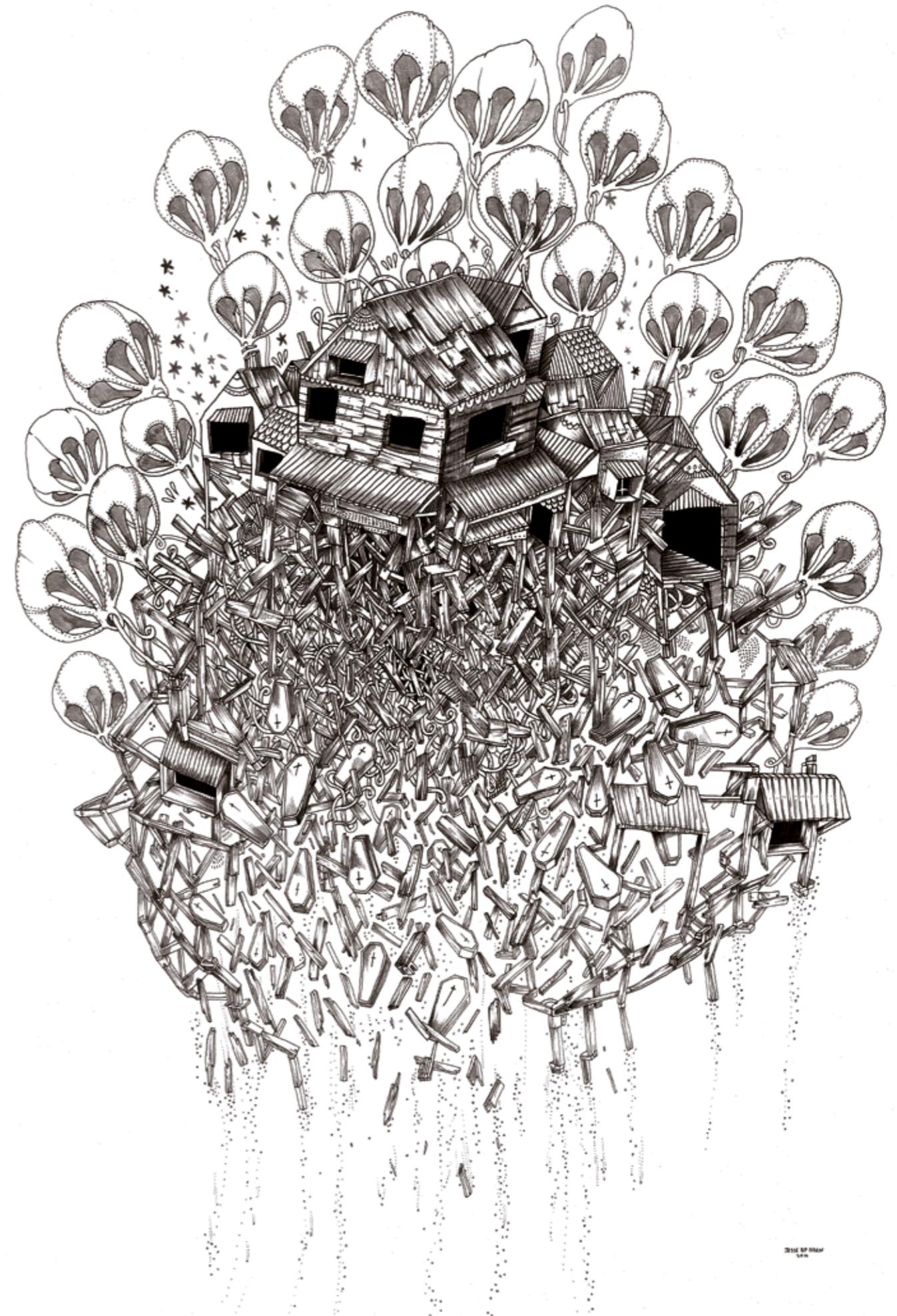
Do you see yourself as an emerging artist and does that term hold any meaning to you? Do you think there will be a moment when you are not emerging?

Yes I am definitely an emerging artist – I am hardly a household name. But this feels like an exciting time, I'm in control of my work, and I can experiment with a whole bunch of different ideas and really grow within my medium. I feel I can definitely improve on my detail and style. And there are days when I am not emerging or even an artist – there are days when I'm just a dude without a job.

What are your plans for the future?

At the moment I have a few projects down the line. I am working on drawing a colouring-in book called *Colour me in and throw me away*. A rad little book maker in Brisbane called Small Books is helping with the publication. I am also doing a bit of mural work on Flinders Lane in the next month or so, but my major concern is an exhibition in Osaka and Tokyo hopefully for January next year. I have been corresponding with some galleries over there that seem pretty keen to get something happening. ●

Jesse Olsen's work can be found at Tony and Zoë's place of 239 Flinders Lane. Some of his design work is online with skateboard company Pass Port at passportal.com.au



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MAY-JUNE 2010

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6th ReelDance International
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reeldance.org.au
Thur 13-Sun 16 May

Hole In The Wall
Mogo Zoo
Wed 26-Sat 29 May 6 & 8pm

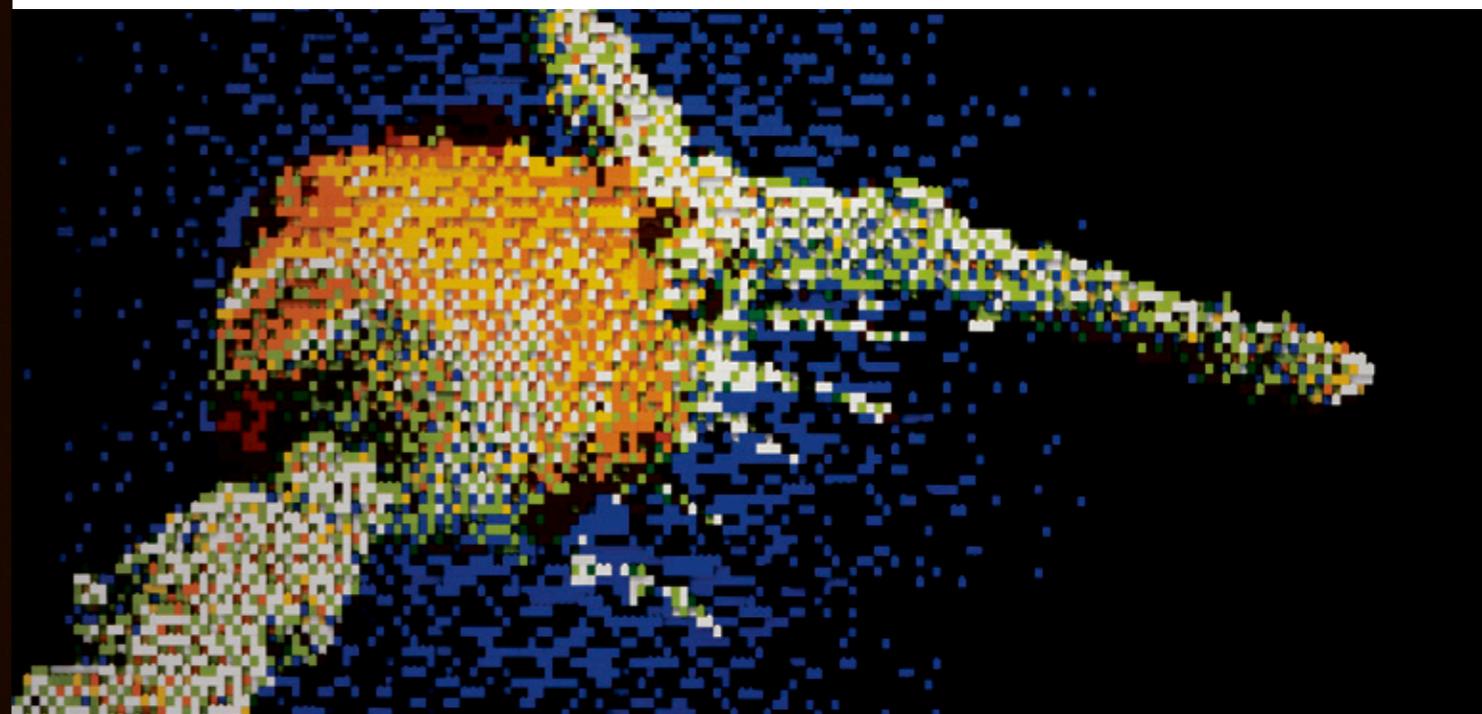
The Folding Wife
Paschal Daantos Berry
An Urban Theatre Projects Production
Wed 19-Sat 22 May 8pm

Bromance
Alisdair Macindoe
Wed 2-Sat 5 June 8pm

Check the website for details about Nigel Helyer's *GhosTrain*, free events in the *ClubHouse* and *NightTime: Everyday Hero*.

performancespace.com.au

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Book at Ticketmaster.com.au or call 1300 723 038



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• *Tessa Zettel & Karl Khoe*
• *Eric Bridgeman*
• *Aris Prabawa*

GALLERY 4A

181-187 Hay Street, Haymarket NSW

01 Apr to 01 May

• *Robbie Harmsworth*
• *Simone Eisler*

GALLERY SMITH

170-174 Abbotsford St
North Melbourne VIC

08 Apr to 20 Apr

• *Five Eight Five: Volume Two*
• *Anna Zarasyan*
• *Jonathan James*

GAFFA

281 Clarence Street, Sydney, NSW

08 Apr to 24 Apr

Pippa Sanderson and Kirsty Lillico

BLINDSIDE

Level 7, 37 Swanston Street
Melbourne VIC

08 Apr to 08 May

Robert Rooney

TOLARNO GALLERIES

Level 4, 104 Exhibition Street
Melbourne VIC

09 Apr to 01 May

A Quarter Turn On Every Screw

KINGS A.R.I.

Level 1, 171 King Street, Melbourne VIC

09 Apr to 08 May

*Joyce Hinterding, Susan Jacobs,
Katie Lee, Alex Martinis Roe,
Phil Samartzis.*

Curator: Emily Cormack

GERTRUDE CONTEMPORARY ART SPACES

200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy Vic

14 April to 02 May

• *Alice Williams*
• *Justin Cooper*
• *Emma Ramsay*
• *Ash Cooper + Vinessa Trikeriotis*

FIRSTDRAFT

116-118 Chalmers Street
Surry Hills NSW

15 Apr to 01 May

Fiona Lowry

GALLERY BARRY KELDOULIS

285 Young Street, Waterloo NSW

15 Apr to 02 May

• *Lesser Abstraction*
• *Texting Pigeons*

MOP

2/39 Abercrombie Street
Chippendale NSW

15 Apr to 15 May

• *Michael Waite*

• *Wayde Owen + Shayle Flessler*

HORUS AND DELORIS

CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

102 Pyrmont Street, Pyrmont NSW
www.horusanddeloris.com.au

17 Apr to 15 May

Tim Plaisted

BOX COPY

Level 1, Watson Brothers Building
129 Margaret Street, Brisbane QLD

28 Apr to 15 May

*Rob McLeish, Andrew Liversidge,
Christopher Hanrahan*

TCB ART INC.

Level 1/12 Waratah Place
Melbourne VIC

29 Apr - 16 May

Arlene Textaqueen

SULLIVAN + STRUMPF FINE ART

44 Gurner Street, Paddington NSW

29 Apr to 05 Jun

Nike Savvas

BREENSPACE

289 Young Street, Waterloo NSW

30 Apr to 05 Jun

• *My Favourite Australian*
• *The Mirror Effect*
• *Head On Portrait Prize*

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE

FOR PHOTOGRAPHY

257 Oxford Street, Paddington NSW

01 May to 26 May

Cash Brown, Chico Monks

ROBIN GIBSON GALLERY

278 Liverpool Street, Darlinghurst NSW

05 May to 29 May

Peter Brötzmann

THE NARROWS

2/141 Flinders Lane, Melbourne VIC

05 May to 29 May

Beth Kennedy

GILLIGAN GRANT GALLERY

1B Stanley Street, Collingwood VIC

13 May to 06 Jun

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*incl. 6th Reeldance International
Dance on Screen Festival, Bromance,
Ghost Train...*

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www.performancespace.com.au

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Dreamweavers

CAST

27 Tasma Street, North Hobart TAS

03 Jun to 03 Jul

Isaac Julien

ROSLYN OXLEY9

8 Soudan Lane, Paddington NSW