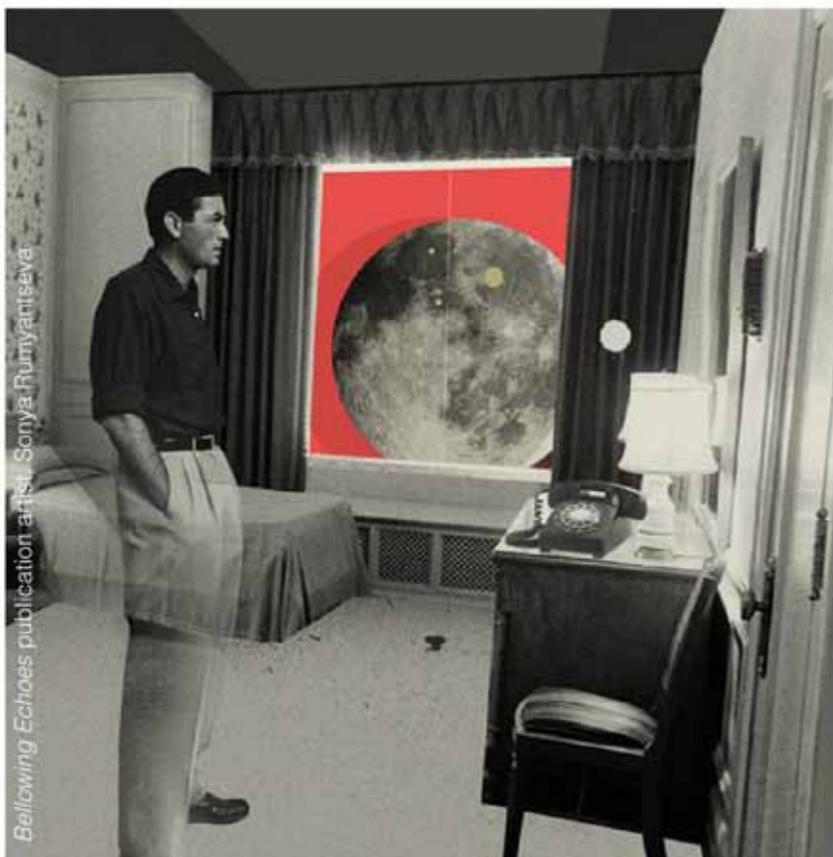


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FRONT COVER

LEFT : Pat Brassington
Bloom, from the series *Anxious Bodies* (2003)
 Pigment print, 78 x 59cm.
 Courtesy of the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney;
 Arc One Gallery, Melbourne; and Bett Gallery, Hobart

RIGHT : Rob McLeish
Lock up your concepts (2011)
 stainless steel 186 x 94 x 5 cm
 Courtesy of the artist and Neon Parc, Melbourne

BACK COVER

LEFT : Max Pam
Yemen (detail) (1993)
 silver gelatin print, 50 x 60 cm.
 Courtesy of the artist

RIGHT : Foster & Berean
The Doing and Undoing of it All (detail) (2009) ,
 steel, glass, enamel,
 Courtesy of the Artists
 and Murray White Room, Melbourne.
 Photo Credit: Christian Cappurro

22

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10 MICHELLE USSHER
PICTORIAL

14 NATASHA BULLOCK
& ALEXIE GLASS-KANTOR
INTERVIEW BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS

16 TOM NICHOLSON
INTERVIEW ANNEKE JASPERS

22 TIM SILVER
PICTORIAL

28 PAT BRASSINGTON
PICTORIAL

32 SUSAN JACOBS
INTERVIEW PIP WALLIS

37 NICHOLAS FOLLAND
INTERVIEW LISA SLADE

42 ROB MCLEASH
PICTORIAL

50 MAX PAM & ROBERT COOK
CONVERSATION

57 MARCO FUSINATO
PICTORIAL

62 ROCOCO
SHORT STORY CHRISTOS TSIOLKIS

67 ROCK MY WORLD
IN-PAPER EXHIBITION
CURATED BY SUPERKALIDESCOPE

77 DIVINING DAVID
DAS500 J.D. REFORMA

78 TINY, AD HOC TECHNOLOGIES
DAS500 ASTRID LORANGE



Parallel Collisions

PARALLEL COLLISIONS: 12th Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art is anchored in the expressive and frustrating conceptualisation of time. The exhibition explores the temporality of the contemporary, how ideas emerge, converge and re-form over time, echoing throughout history to reveal points of similarity (parallel), contact (collision) and encounter (trespass).

Parallel Collisions proposes multiple and paradoxical histories: a burgeoning set of coordinates to map out the multifarious conditions of the contemporary. We invoke Walter Benjamin's idea that moments of the past can be blasted out of the 'continuum of history' and reinterpreted and reinvigorated to build a new future.¹

We also ask ourselves the question: What happens when the artwork leaves the author and gains its own momentum and identity in space and time, traveling with impunity beyond the reach of origin or intention?

Ern Malley is one of Australia's most famous poets yet he is a creation of fiction, or, more accurately, satire. With its roots in Adelaide, it was the Ern Malley fabrication that provided a departure point for the evolution of *Parallel Collisions*. The greatest Australian modernist hoax is Malley's story and the notion of the 'black swan of trespass on alien waters' is richly represented in the collection of the Art Gallery of South Australia. From this initial research we stole the idea of trespass but did away with the black swan. The Ern Malley as prompt is not something we have emphasised publicly, however, for this edition of Das Superpaper we believe it is a rich vein through which the works of the artists and writers included can be contextualised.

In this issue the three conversations facilitated between artists and curators – Tom Nicholson and Anneke Jaspers, Nicholas Folland and Lisa Slade, Susan Jacobs and Pip Wallis – meander through time and place. They riff on the parallels and collisions through which history and the archive and collections dovetail into speculation,

fiction and the unmonumental. Robert Cook vs Max Pam is a collaboration undertaken for the biennial and in this conversation our protagonists are disarmingly candid about the ways in which they negotiate their practices.

The five pictorial features highlight new and existing images from Pat Brassington, Marco Fusinato, Rob McLeish, Tim Silver and Michelle Ussher. These works shiver, disintegrate or amass material to create a rich mosaic of interlocking temporalities that explore our subjective experience of time. Christos Tsiolkas has offered a story that sits ambiguously between fact and fiction, its depth of research and evidence is a decoy, deliberately misleading the viewer into an assumption that fiction is fact.

NATASHA BULLOCK
& ALEXIE GLASS-KANTOR

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the philosophy of history' (1940), in *Walter Benjamin: illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn, Fontana, London, 1992, pp. 245–55.

Michelle Ussher

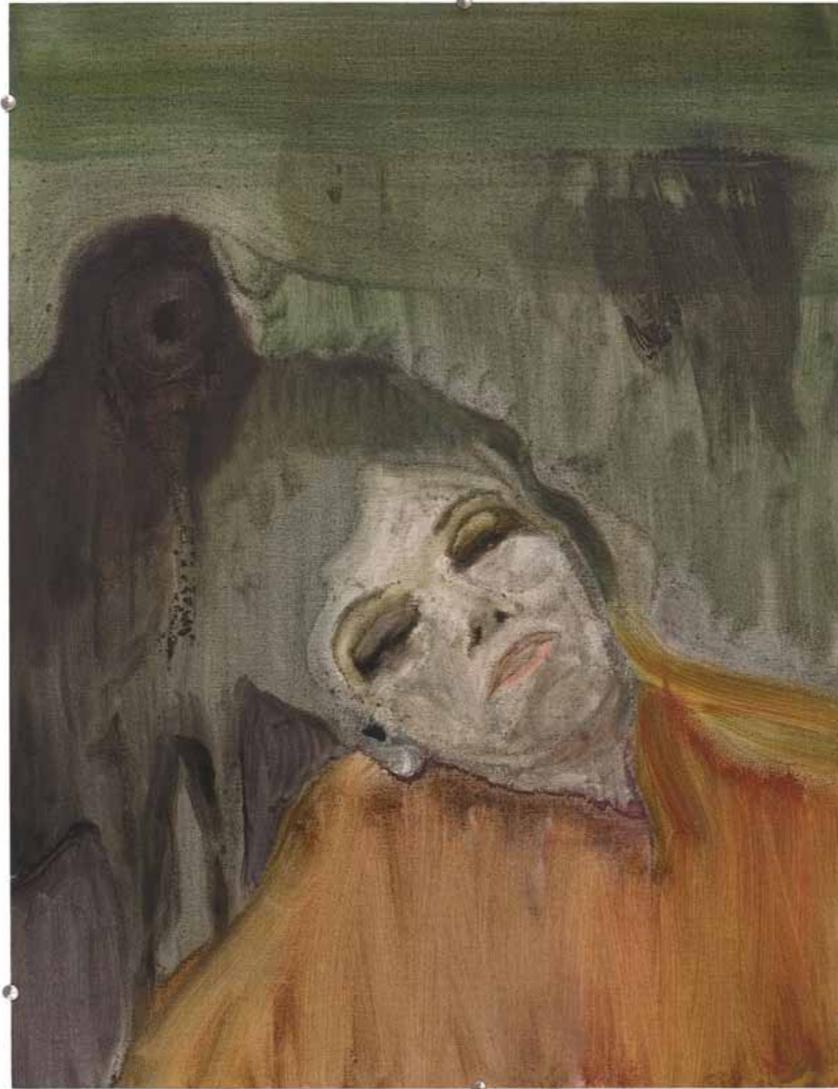
Pictorial

Michelle Ussher currently lives and works in London. A relationship to diverse methodologies enables a peculiar alchemy of imagined forms to combine in her art. The visual space of Ussher's work is one of doublings and illusions that meditate on the impermanence of being. Images, text and objects illuminate the threshold between memory and perception.

•|
Michelle Ussher
Because you are the painting from 1904 (2010)
Oil on Paper
65 x 49 cm

|•
Because you are the painting from 2010 (2010)
Oil on Paper
65 x 49 cm

All images courtesy
of the artist
and Kalimanrawlins,
Melbourne





•|
Michelle Ussher
*A hologram of a mirror
(holding the head)* (2010)
Oil on Paper
52 x 40 cm

|•
*A hologram of a mirror
(blackhole)* (2010)
Oil on Paper
49 x 65 cm

A hologram of a mirror (2010)
Oil on Paper
49 x 65 cm

All images courtesy
of the artist
and Kalimanrawlins,
Melbourne

Alexie & Natasha

INTERVIEW BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS

AN EXPERIENTIAL PROPOSITION INSPIRED BY ART, CINEMA AND LITERATURE, **THE 2012 ADELAIDE BIENNIAL** EXPLORES THE WAYS IN WHICH IDEAS EMERGE, CONVERGE AND RE-FORM THROUGH TIME. FROM A FLOATING ISLAND OF 2000 CUT-GLASS OBJECTS TO AN EXPLOSIVE LIGHT INSTALLATION THAT CLOCKS IN REAL TIME HUMAN BIRTHS, DEATHS, THE EXPANSION OF THE UNIVERSE AND DYING STARS, THIS BIENNIAL CONSIDERS THE TEMPORALITY OF THE PRESENT AS IT PARALLELS AND COLLIDES WITH THE PAST.

Across four physical platforms, *Parallel Collisions* presents 21 commissioned works by some of Australia's leading artists, 21 original texts, a designer, an architect, two curators and an institution, forming a connective tissue that attempts to understand our subjective experience of time.

Natasha Bullock and Alexie Glass-Kantor are the curatorial duo behind this year's Adelaide Biennial, *Parallel Collisions*, and they met with *Das Superpaper's* editor to discuss the show's evolution. The following are some of the highlights of that conversation.

Can you give us some background to the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art?

The Adelaide Biennial is the only biennial dedicated to Australian art and is an important platform in the development and presentation of new work by living artists. The Art Gallery of South Australia established the biennial in 1990 and the exhibition began as the flagship event of the visual arts program of the Adelaide Festival.

How would you describe *Parallel Collisions*?

Parallel Collisions is both the title and the conceptual framework of the biennial. We enjoy the contradictory nature of the title. Parallel lines, after all, cannot meet when considered in purely spatial terms however, with the added dimension of time, collision becomes possible – when something that was once in one place shifts in position, and hence in meaning, over time. Presented across two physical platforms at the Art Gallery of South Australia – the Elder Wing of Australian Art and the temporary exhibitions galleries – the biennial brings the past into dialogue with the present. For this exhibition we decided not to employ a survey format, instead we tried to work more propositionally. We used the words 'parallels, collisions, time and trespass' as kinds of prompts. When we met with artists, we used these words as a way of starting a conversation.

Can you expand upon how the site of the biennial impacted upon your curatorial strategies?

There are two entrances to the Art Gallery of South Australia. The main entrance is through the Elder Wing of Australia Art. The second entrance is to the western side of the building and leads to the temporary exhibition galleries. Regular visitors to the biennial may neglect the main entrance, along with its associated

collection spaces, in seeking out the temporary exhibition galleries. Hence by initiating the biennial in the vestibule we ask people to engage with the collection and the incursions performed in the Elder Wing as their introduction to the exhibition. This provides the opportunity to fold into the experience of the exhibition a textured exploration of contemporary art with the collection, creating a generous and rich set of connections, readings and association.

A good example is the work of Rosemary Laing. In the Elder Wing Laing's *groundspeed (rose petal) #17* (2001) is located across from John Glover's painting *A view of the artist's house and garden* (1835). Laing's laying of patterned floral carpet in the Australian bush is an ode to the painter's colonial imagination. John Glover immigrated to Tasmania in 1830 bringing with him plants from his native country. What Laing's image does is disturb the order of things by reshaping the symbolism embodied in this tradition of colonial landscape painting in Australia. Laing's images do something similar downstairs in the temporary exhibition galleries with two recent photographs from the *leak* series. These images function as a visual collision between the idea of a pastoral idyllic past and present-day urban infection. By positioning Laing's work across the parallel structure of the exhibition, we hope to amplify the currents that flow between the collection and the contemporaneous.

And how does the architecture of the AGSA become involved?

The architecture of the building creates the parallel structure within the exhibition. In this way the architecture of the institution becomes vital to the exhibition, bringing the past into conversation with the present quite physically and materially. In terms of the internal spatial dynamics of the exhibition and its architectural elements, we collaborated from the outset with Jan Van Schaik, from Minifie Van Schaik Architects on the articulation of the temporary exhibition galleries. We call this part of the exhibition the tracking shot. The tracking shot is inspired by the cinematic device of shooting a scene, or an entire film, in a continuous shot. An example of this is Alexander Sokurov's film *Russian Ark* (2002). Walls or partitions are used as edits to situate the viewer in relation to objects and experiences, and to move the viewer through the

gallery in one direction in a process of discovery. This journey seeks to emulate the feel of Sokurov's immersive film.

I see curatorial practice as an evolving balancing act between inspiration, ideation and implementation, what do you both see as the most important principles of good curatorship?

One of the most important principles of good curatorship is an ongoing dialogue with artists. We believe in honest, clear communication and transparency across all levels. This has to be a benchmark. There also needs to be an interest in artists that is equal to an interest in audiences. It can't be too heavily weighted one way or the other, because a curator is at the interface of ideas and audiences, and you have to have a passion for both. You have to be aware of who your audience is and how as a curator you are providing or facilitating ways into the work.

Can you tell us a little more about your choice of artists?

The choice of artists for the biennial was determined by the artist's ideas. An important aspect of both our practices of exhibition-making is the rich potential of cross-disciplinary and intergenerational dialogue. So it's great to have Pat Brassington, Rosemary Laing or Shaun Gladwell in this exhibition alongside a new generation including Susan Jacobs and Rob McLeish. This is something that is quite exciting for us.

There are also some unexpected collaborations in the biennial. Robert Cook is primarily known as a curator from the Art Gallery of Western Australia and writing is his artistic practice. Max Pam is a documentary photographer with an important reputation but maybe one that isn't necessarily synonymous with a younger generation. The opportunity in this show to have collaborations like this, which are unexpected, and to see someone like Robert Cook in a completely different context has been really rewarding.

Could you describe further your process and relationships with the artists and collaborators in the lead up to the exhibition?

From the beginning we both felt strongly that we should work with an expanded curatorium model, bringing collaborators from design, architecture, and the curatorial departments at

the AGSA into the process of developing and realising the exhibition. We also knew that we wanted the artists' work and ideas to guide the shape of the show—we did not want to take an illustrative stance and we aimed to encourage a generative approach. We tried as much as possible to put any preconceptions or personal bias aside and to let our shared conversations with artists define the texture and timbre of the show. We were fortunate to be able to bring fourteen of the artists to Adelaide in June 2011 for a site visit and this enabled a depth of engagement with the collection and the gallery spaces and for a more unpredictable set of responses to evolve. The architect Jan van Schaik and the graphic designer Daniel Peterson from Fabio Ongarato Design also joined us on this visit. Our objective in having them participate in this was so that they could contribute to the conversation, becoming complicit in the process and bringing into play observations drawn from their areas of expertise. Insights offered by our curatorial collaborators, Lisa Slade and Nici Cumpston, have also supported an even greater level of ambition in the approaches taken by the artists.

From a personal perspective and putting aside the theoretical or critical interests that we share, we are both inspired by our relationships with the artists, our collaborators and our friendship with each other. We always wanted to curate an exhibition together that neither of us could achieve on our own. This show has forced us to be honest and transparent with each other and we have tried to keep that tone with all our collaborators. Someone recently observed that we rarely compromise but always try to work through options to seek the best outcome and achieve a shared vision.

Tom Nicholson

Interview

ANNEKE JASPERS

NUMEROUS MATERIAL FORMS CONVERGE WITHIN TOM NICHOLSON'S PRACTICE, AMONG THEM DRAWINGS, PHOTOGRAPHS AND PRINTS, VIDEOS, PUBLICATIONS, BANNERS AND SCRIPTS. IN THEIR DIFFERENT CONFIGURATIONS ACROSS PROJECTS, THE FUNCTION OF THESE MATERIALS AS VESTIGES IN RELATION TO SOME FORM OF ACTION OR EVENT IS CONSISTENTLY UNDERSCORED. NEVERTHELESS, NICHOLSON'S WORKS TYPICALLY CONFOUND THE NOTION OF THE DOCUMENT AS PURELY AN AFTERMATH BY EMPHASISING ITS GENERATIVE POTENTIAL, AND FRAMING SCENARIOS WHERE THE RETROSPECTIVE AND PROSPECTIVE COINCIDE.

[ANNEKE JASPERS] Your practice is informed by a strong interest in social history and a commitment to intensive research. Often this manifests in the invocation of forgotten or invisible aspects of the past through your works. Is the archive a point of departure for you?

[TOM NICHOLSON] I feel ambivalent towards the archive. It always risks being an evasion of the problems of the present, and a retreat from living. I am also skeptical towards its authority (and towards its beauty). Nonetheless I am consistently drawn to the archive, and specifically to the archival image, to the difficult relationship between the muteness of certain archival images and the narratives they can yield.

To answer your question through a concrete example, the video work *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* (2008) began with a site, the vast open spaces of Royal Park, in Melbourne's inner north. I had long been fascinated by it as a space and also knew something of its history, as the place of Burke and Wills' departure and the location of the huge WW2 military encampment, Camp Pell. It was with the site as the primary impulse that I began to work with archival material, and specifically with archival images. The archival images generated a kind of imaginary space in which the work began to take shape: the idea of nardoo sporocarps [aquatic fern] being disseminated throughout the Park so that when the Park floods, its wide open spaces are covered in nardoo, which, as the floodwaters recede, becomes a vast red field overlooking the city's skyline. The archive became a catalyst for forming something into that site, in this case an imaginary form, a kind of mental image of a horizontal red monochrome that you might bear as you walk around that space.

Monument for the flooding of Royal Park is prospective. It describes a form that is yet to come. I have often found myself dealing with the archive as a prospective

space. Whether it is the future bloom of nardoo in Royal Park or the form of the political poster, with its character as an announcement toward the future, I am attracted to the archive as a way to address the future, the notion that the possibilities contained within our past are yet to be.

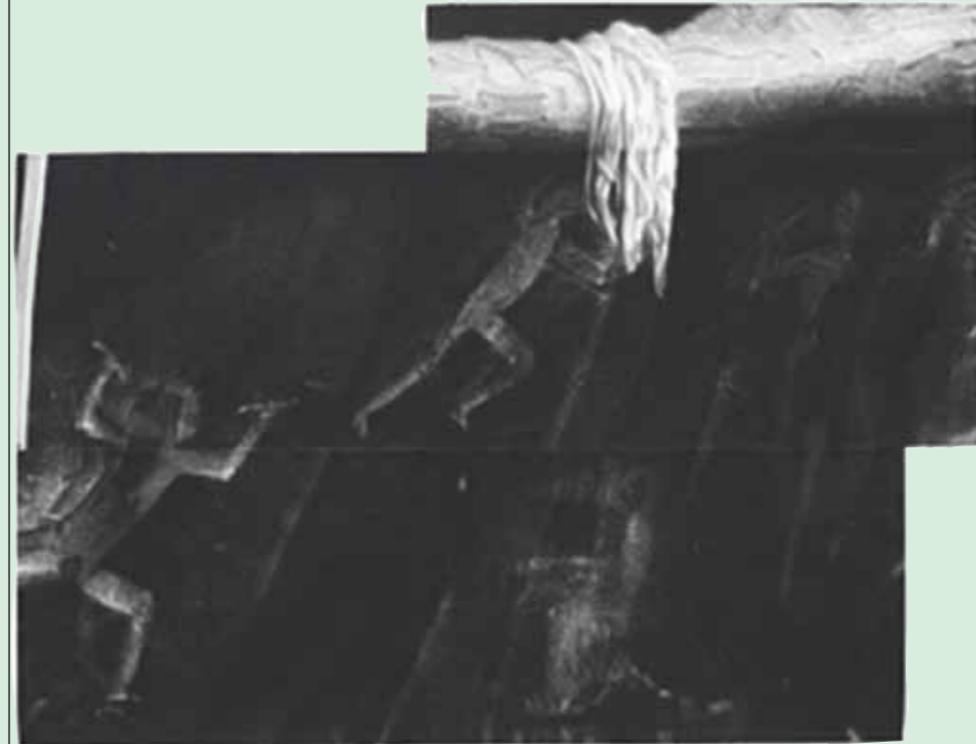
[AJ] You mentioned being drawn to how the archive frames (or obscures) the relationship between image and narrative. The conjunction of image and language – written or performed – is a recurring feature in many of your works. What is it specifically about the point of contact between these two forms of expression that interests you?

[TN] Partly it is about pictures, the way that an interesting picture discloses itself. Though there are many great narrative pictures in the history of art, I am mostly attracted to images for their refusal to tell straightforwardly. The histories I am interested in always seem to come into some kind of conflict with this character of images, their refusal to tell, their muteness.

My relationship to images is conflicted, characterised on the one hand by a love of what complex images do, and on the other, by a resistance to the way images function in our public realm – the saturation of images, the barrenness of an image culture in which images simply show what they mean. My constant desire to make images rubs against a consistent impulse to banish showing.

In the context of Australian history, this complex takes on a particular charge. The recent project, *Drawings and correspondence* (2011), evolved into a confrontation with a question that is often present in my work with archival forms: how to make a representation of the history of our violence and dispossession towards Aboriginal people in the place where I live, a historical experience which resists picturing, an experience

Tom Nicholson
Drawing and correspondence
(2008-2011)
Charcoal drawing on paper,
two sheets,
140 x 100cm and 120 x 100cm.
Photograph: Christian Capurro
Courtesy of the artist
and Anna Schwartz Gallery



Tom Nicholson
Double page from
Monument for the flooding of Royal Park (2008-9)
Off-set printed artist's book,
245 x 170mm, 96pp
Design: Brad Haylock Published
by Schwartz City, 2009.
Photograph: Christian Capurro
Courtesy of the artist
and Anna Schwartz



whose central trajectory is the attempt at effacement, 'finality' as the Board for the Protection of Aborigines (BPA) put it in the late 19th century. The ways I have used images and language have been, variously, attempts to respond to that problem through forms.

In *Drawings and correspondence* – and in the forthcoming project for the Adelaide Biennial – I have worked with specific images from nineteenth-century colonialism, images that manifest a strange blindness to the world, that become assertions of colonial sovereignty. In both cases I have found myself inhabiting these images through very slow and prolonged processes of re-drawing, attempting to open out a space which I would describe as somehow behind that image, or beyond that screen. It's an attempt to make a picture whose subject is not shown, to make figurative images where the narrative lies beyond the figuration. That attempt relies heavily on how other languages – text but also the language of actions – animate our relationship to the image, to its latent or spectral meanings.

[AJ] Within your practice more broadly, re-drawing is situated alongside other methods of appropriation and remediation – transcription, for instance, and re-photography. I'm interested in how this relates back to your earlier description of *Monument for the flooding of Royal Park* as propositional or speculative. What does the process of translating and re-animating extant materials enable in this regard?

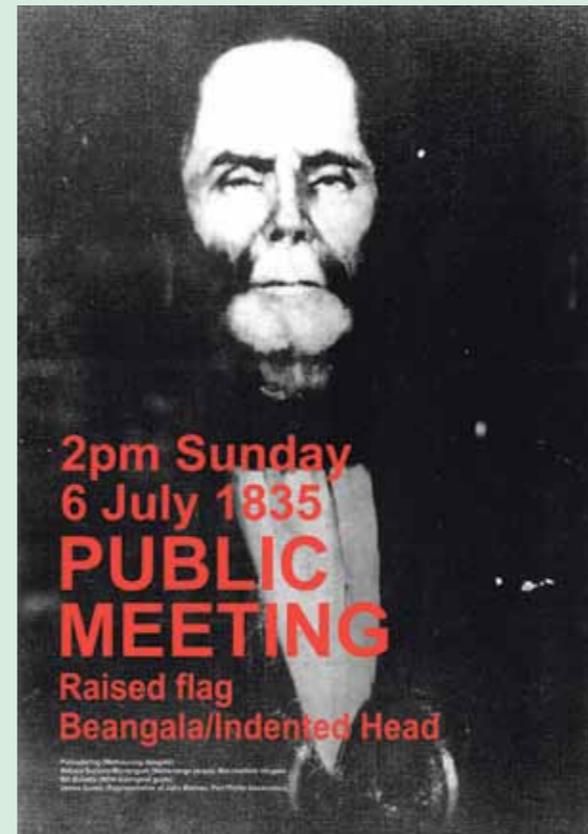
[TN] During the long process of making the drawings for *Drawings and correspondence*, I became aware that I was 'inhabiting' the images of falsified Aboriginal art originally created by Caroline Le Souef (some-time artist and the wife of Albert Le Souef, director of the nineteenth-century Melbourne Zoo and long-time member of the BPA). I was very painstakingly re-drawing her images, as captured in a single anonymous archival photograph. In other words, though the project was conceived as a kind of critical engagement with the image-making of the Le Souefs (and Albert's parallel involvement in the BPA and the violence of its 1886 Aborigines Protection Act), that process of drawing placed me in her shoes. It implicated me in their project. I liked that about that drawing process – and I think the same is true of my re-drawing of H J Johnstone's *Evening Shadows backwater of the Murray, South Australia* (1880), which is part of the project for the Adelaide Biennial. I tend to trust processes around the archive that complicate my position, processes without exonerations, where a found image cloaks me at the same time that I attempt to re-animate it. I am interested in what happens when critical work begins from being implicated. I like the way that certain images – and re-working those images – bear these kinds of complications.

In a more general sense, images are interesting for many reasons, but one of them is their out-of-timeness. Goya's series *The Disasters of War* (1810–1820) feels like it has the directness of the most immediate press image, the kind of image we might see from Cairo, posted on the web the same day it was taken. But Goya's images were first published more than five decades after the events they so powerfully describe. And, of course, we encounter them many decades after that, in a context where his images feed our thinking about Iraq as much as they do about the Peninsular War in Spain. Part of the out-of-timeness of images is that they continuously precipitate our actions, and in this sense they are involved in the invisible chains of actions and their consequences that is the language of actions and activism. I find myself regularly setting this language of actions against the address of an image. In some cases there is a simple physicality in this relationship – the encumbrance of an image that is carried, or a flag being waved which effaces or engulfs the person who waves it. More specifically, though, this way of working is also a way to animate an image by a slow process of rendering it invisible, by dissolving it into the world. This is part of my longstanding attraction to the process of public distribution or leafleting, to postering and, in relation to text, to the act of reading aloud. The poster dissolves into the city. The image becomes subject to the same invisibility that marks the way our most potent actions in turn generate chains of actions or transformations we can only ever apprehend through imagination.

[AJ] In a sense, the out-of-timeness of images finds a correlation in the structure of your projects – in the way they tend to fragment the singular, self-contained art object into a series of provisional and sometimes radically dispersed formations. Gestures of public distribution, like the ones you described, might be framed in relation to a number of other 'parts' or activities within a single presentation context; one work might also evolve over several years and iterations. Beyond figuring a certain relationship to images, why do you choose to practice in this way?

[TN] It's a good question. With my Maoist self-criticism hat on, I would say the multiple iterations are necessary because I rarely find a way to resolve a project that satisfies me the first time round! In a pragmatic sense, I also try to use each time I am invited to exhibit a work to generate a new form and/or a new understanding of the work by trying a different configuration. This is partly an attempt to prevent my relationship to a set of forms from ever closing over.

But your question is asking something deeper than this, something I must say I have spent a couple of days trying to respond to in my head. You're right that very often the work resolves into multiple parts and processes, setting up delays between elements which cannot be encountered together in a single moment or in a single field of vision. If I were to trace this



Tom Nicholson,
Action for 2pm Sunday 6 July 1835. (2005)
Left poster from a postering action
over 10 consecutive nights,
2,000 pairs of off-set posters,
each 59.6 x 84cm.
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz

Tom Nicholson
Video still from
Monument for the flooding of Royal Park (2008/2011)
8mins 30 seconds. Silent. SD.
Courtesy of the artist and Anna Schwartz





characteristic back to a particular moment it would be seeing Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah* (1985) in my final year at art school. I watched the film in a single nine-and-a-half hour sitting. As a film it is self-evidently a sequence of figurative images. But it is words that bear the film's subject, as Lanzmann relentlessly asks his interviewees to describe their experiences of the holocaust. The imaginative effort to visualise what the interviewees describe becomes an extraordinary accumulation into the body of the film's beholder. That accumulation is immensely powerful, filling up the body with the horror of that history, but also emptying, creating an absence within the figurative images of the film. It is an absence that never allows the image to work straightforwardly, which always has the image in relation to a presence somewhere else that cannot be shown or recovered.

I am not so vain that I would compare anything I have made to that great film! But I do think that the persistent characteristic you have described in the work – and I have never really identified this before – comes from the sheer force of that experience, and from Lanzmann's way of making figurative images that do the important work of recounting historical experiences while simultaneously insisting, through a principle of slow accumulation, on the incompleteness of those images. Looking at the image is always interlaced with imagining something that is not there.

[AJ] Although we arrived at this point by way of the structural character of your works, would it be fair to suggest – as a note to end on – that some of these ideas relate conceptually to your project for the Adelaide Biennial? Accumulation in tension with incompleteness; the indexing of an image's meaning to another time or place; the question of how we relate history to our present through memorialising gestures ...

[TN] Yes, there are certainly echoes of those structures. *Evening shadows* (2011-2012), the project for the Adelaide Biennial, responds to a painting in the AGSA collection, H J Johnstone's *Evening shadows*, actually the first painting the Gallery acquired. The project responds to the strange life of this painting – which is not only the Gallery's most reproduced painting and most popular postcard but also, arguably, Australia's most copied painting. For many years art students in Adelaide were made to copy the painting, usually from memory following visits to the Gallery.

H J Johnstone painted the work in London, after he had moved back to the mother country. Although it is a very crisply naturalistic image, it is finally a kind of projection, a fantasy image painted from the imperial capital to be sent back to the colonies. That is part of its generic quality, and also part of its hackneyed allegory (or fantasy) of a quiet, inevitable disappearance of Aboriginal people, conveyed through the female who crosses the Murray at the centre of the image, and

through the metaphor of light (the painting shows that short twilight moment before light fades into dark, but also has that female figure walking towards a *mia mia*, situated in the painting's darkness next to the embers of a dying fire).

The project for the Biennial attempts to re-animate this image through a subsequent historical event, the 1939 Cummeragunja Walk-Off, in which 200 Aboriginal men and women crossed the Murray River to protest against the conditions at the Cummeragunja Mission, situated on the NSW side of the River. As a project it shares something with *Drawings and correspondence*, in that it re-works a 19th century image which is deeply involved with the project of dispossession, a pictorial fantasising and rehearsed mourning that is the imaginary counterpart to dispossession. The project attempts to create a confrontation between this imaginary and the reality of resistance, both figured through the same basic act (crossing the River), but which otherwise operate as a kind of disjunction.

The final component of the project is a poster 'advertising' the walk off, which people in Adelaide are invited to take to display at the front of their houses – in their front yards or in their front windows. In this sense, the project attempts to work across the spaces of the home and the museum. The home is both the domain of *Evening shadows* (all those painted copies in people's living rooms, all those posters sold at the Gallery shop) but also the domain of the most intense non-Aboriginal anxieties about the injustices buried within our imaginary ('your back yards will not be safe'). I hope the poster works both as an improbable memorial form to that courageous and important act of 1939, but also as an ambiguous and unsettling exhortation towards the future.

•|
Tom Nicholson,
*Stills from Documents from
a banner marching project
2004-2007
(2004-2007)*
Video stills from an installation
of traces from dawn banner
marches held in Melbourne, Sydney,
and Kellerberrin: three channel
sd digital video and Super 8
transferred to digital video, silent;
banner marching frames; one
unfolded digitally printed banner
on synthetic canvas, 520 x 310cm;
three banners rolled up,
320cm x 20 cm diameter.
Collection National Gallery
of Victoria, Melbourne.
Courtesy of the artist
and Anna Schwartz Gallery

●

Tim Silver

Pictorial

For Sydney based artist Tim Silver, time is the conceptual and material kernel of his practice. Made from entropic ingredients, Silver's sculptures usually begin dying the moment they are born. They denounce the striving towards permanence that sculpture has historically embodied and in their degradation Silver's sculptures embody the human condition. Photographs bear witness to this material and metaphysical process.



•|
Tim Silver
Untitled (bust)
(Mahogany Timbermate Woodfiller) #1 (2011)
460 x 580 mm each (image and paper size)
Archival inks on archival paper

|•
Tim Silver
Untitled (trauma 4) (2011)
cast pigmented polyurethane
43 x 35 x 18 cm



•|•
 Tim Silver
Untitled (bust)
 (Mahogany Timbermate Woodfiller) #2 (2011)
 460 x 580 mm each (image and paper size)
 Archival inks on archival paper

|•
 Tim Silver
Untitled (bust)
 (Mahogany Timbermate Woodfiller) #3 (2011)
 460 x 580 mm each (image and paper size)
 Archival inks on archival paper





•|
 Tim Silver
Untitled (trauma 6) (2011)
 cast pigmented polyurethane
 96 x 65 x 27 cm

|•
 Tim Silver
Untitled (bust)
(Mahogany Timbermate Woodfiller) #2 (2011)
 460 x 580 mm each (image and paper size)
 Archival inks on archival paper





Pat Brassington

Pictorial

Pat Brassington's images are at once charming and menacing. They rouse a sense of disquiet as they subtly and humorously scratch at the underbelly of the human condition. In her unique way, Brassington blurs the boundaries of the real and imagined, stripping photography of its authority, bestowing it instead with the logic of dream or fantasy.

•|•
 Pat Brassington
The pressings (2011)
 Pigment prints
 85 x 115 cm each
 Courtesy of the artist and
 Stills Gallery, Sydney;
 Arc One Gallery, Melbourne;
 and Bett Gallery, Hobart





The Serpent's Story

Susan Jacobs

Interview

PIP WALLIS



•|•
Susan Jacobs
Snake Drawing (production still)
(2011)
Photo: Scott Miles

[PIP WALLIS] The work you are planning for the Adelaide Biennial, *Snake Drawing*, responds to works in Art Gallery of South Australia's collection.

[SUSAN JACOBS] The idea for the work is to make a drawing with a live snake (within an expanded notion of drawing) so the work itself will involve a video and a sculpture. The video will be shown amongst some of the paintings in the collection, in the Elder Wing, and the sculpture will be positioned close by. The video will document various attempts to draw with the snake, or hopefully see it make marks on a bed of sand, which has a silicone catalyst in it. The sand will then set and a bronze cast will be made from it.

One of the main drivers behind the work was to set up a parameter, a philosophical one as much as a physical thing; it's a parameter for something to happen. Rather than a chance event being framed, it's a frame for a chance to happen within, so it's a bit of a conundrum, a bit of a contradiction in a way. At one stage I wanted to hold the snake in one hand and the camera in another, to try to merge subjective and objective points of view... but that didn't happen on the day because I lost self-consciousness of what the drawing was looking like or what I wanted it to do and I just became so conscious of what it (the snake) was doing to me.

[PW] The balance of control and chance within parameters plays out often in your practice but then there's something else in *Snake Drawing* that's quite apart, which is the performativity and the actual presence of the body whereas often it's an implied body in your work.

[SJ] Yes it's definitely gestural. That's really interesting to me. I guess the only time there's been a body in another work was when I filmed an inversion of Yves Klein's *Leap into the void*. I jumped from a trampoline on a scaffold, into my house (which is an old stable similar to the space in the Klein image) (*Security. Illusion*. 2009). I tend to struggle with being visible in

the video in a way. In this case, I just wanted it to be hands and snake, but I want it to be my hands, because I want to make the work. And the same applied for the Klein work – who else is going to do it? It would seem like an arbitrary decision to get someone else to do it, so it is just more direct to deal with it myself.

[PW] The serpent is heavily laden symbolically.

[SJ] I think that's something that is quite different for me to be working with and that has been a new struggle in a way. I don't want to lock it down too much but I am interested in how the symbolic associations with the serpent have shifted through time. The sculptures I am working amongst in the Australian collection at AGSA are female mythological figures; Bertram MacKenna's maquette for Circe, and one in marble, I think it's Daphne.

The main one is Circe. She's got snakes around her head, ankles and feet. Daphne is being bitten on the ankle by a snake behind her. They are very vertical – the women are standing, they're robust and they're bronze and marble. The snake in the video 'Emerald' was a pregnant Olive Python – she was definitely a potent force to work with.

I looked at the sand when she crawled over it and it was a landscape. It was like the idea of a reclining body in the landscape and all these little things start coming out that weren't necessarily intended. It'll be interesting to see how it is read. I've had people in the past, with a couple of works, say 'your work looks very masculine' or 'it looks very feminine'. I find that fascinating.

[PW] Because of the material associations?

[SJ] Maybe it is about size (laughs), maybe it is about brutal or resistant materials. Amita [Kirpalani] once said 'stubborn materials', I really like that because it is so true. I really like working with things that you have to push; that are sort of dumb, but then when you push them they become rich but are often still mute. Maybe it's the architectural or more destructive elements, or works that come about through intervening, cutting into walls and making holes. Maybe it's brutalism that people think of as very masculine. I think things can be brutal and subtle at once.

[PW] Just thinking about that psychology of the materials, do you ever find a narrative playing out in your work?

[SJ] Sometimes, but I don't like it to become overly narrative. Sometimes if I see it developing I will try and cut it off and reshape it a little bit.

[PW] I suppose I am thinking particularly about the work developed for the Biennial, because it is responding to narrative driven works and it is dealing with something that is so heavily symbolic. I know that you talked before about circumnavigating that.

[SJ] It's not something that I seek out, but if it is something that is occurring as a part of this work then I guess I feel like I have to let that be what it is. In the same way as

Working in a site/context-specific way, like I did for *New10* at ACCA or at Gertrude Contemporary in for the *Opening Lines* exhibition, the form of the work will respond to its context, beyond the physical characteristics of a space. I could never have imagined making a work in the context of the Art Gallery of South Australia, with a collection, but the idea also fascinates me because I have worked behind the scenes with museum collections a lot in the past. I can imagine looking at the room and thinking 'it doesn't really look like my work', but there's no reason why should it look like anything I've previously made because it's a new context for me. I'll be curious to see it.

[PW] Material explorations and the properties of materials are so central to your practice; do the materials often come first in the work?

[SJ] Sometimes, if they are readily available, like things that I carry around for a long time. Sometimes things will stay around for years and they will come to light with a new mindset and you see it again and it has a new potential. One of my lecturers at art school said a really valuable thing; she said 'everything you need for your whole practice is in your studio right now'. Some of those materials have changed but I still have some of that stuff from back then and she was so right. You're always going to pick up new things and bring them into the mix, but the principle of what she said I really held on to because you don't really need that much, you just need to be open to being resourceful. Materials often come first, but with some ideas they come later. This is often the case with larger scale installations, like *Ubiquitous Slopes*, 2008 at Utopian Slumps, where it was a really crystallized image, an instantaneous thing - like when you have moments when you just line something up, like a sight line in a room or a landscape and you can see elements having a conversation.

[PW] I was thinking about that observation in terms of what might be read as a scientific interest in your work. I think of physics as perhaps the most poetic of the sciences because it deals with unseen forces that almost have a transcendental quality.

[SJ] I was never really good at science; I was ok at biology because I'm interested in animals and natural things. I never really understood physics but I've learnt it through a heuristic way of working with materials and structures and thinking about the act of making as being an embodied philosophy or drawing; an acquiring of a palpable understanding of physics and the dynamics of spaces. Sometimes it feels like an analogy. Particularly when I started researching into magnetic fields for *Being Under No Illusion*, shown in *New10* at ACCA, there were metaphors in the operation of materials, in the scale relationship to the dynamic of the architecture and how this apparently levitating room was held up by a dynamic that was concealed. It was about creating an illusion whereas the magnets have an inherent illusionary quality that is absolutely practical. I was thinking about the practicality of physics as being something that we trust is there. I



was drawing relationships between the dynamics of the space and the context of the show. When I was reading about the material qualities of bismuth (one of the metals used) I came across a new age idea of bismuth as an agent for aiding group relationships which was an uncanny find considering that project was dealing with collaborations.

[PW] ...the psychology of materials?

[SJ] Yeah. I take things like that on, but with a grain of salt because I don't want to go down the new age path. I like to embrace happy accidents even if they seem like loose tangents. If you look hard enough you can make associations between disparate things and materials can come to embody sensations and ideas. Particularly with that project, there were parallels and analogies that were forming in how to respond to that working context. The work in Studio 12 at Gertrude Contemporary was really about energy, different forms of energy that might be in the body, or in a space. The slow release of those ball bearings (into the small space built in the threshold of the studio) was about potential energy (when the balls were static) converting to kinetic energy (when they moving through a magnetically powered trigger device). I was thinking of the sporadic nature of it as a parallel to the way the studio practice often needs to be.

[PW] We might think about analogy as something that infers the potential body in the space, yet often your works are relying on unseen forces that exist independently of our interactions with the work.

[SJ] Sometimes I think it more about eyes and about looking than body. Maybe more so recently, really sharpening how we look at things and how that is brought about through a physical sense of encounter; walking to have to discover something, or missing it completely, and then having to change the scale or distance so that your sightline captures a tiny little moment. I want to sharpen the way things can be found, I want it to be a positive engagement with being resourceful and looking and finding something more than what's easily accessible.

[PW] Are there texts or even artworks that you continue to revisit?

[SJ] There's a book called *Drawing Through Process*, which is an exhibition catalogue from a show in LA in the late 90's. There are two texts, one by Pamela Lee that talks about drawing through process and 60's and 70's process driven practices; Smithson, Matta-Clark, Nancy Holt and Mel Bochner. I've been looking at Eva Rothschild lately because of her snake work. I only just discovered one of her works that she did where she photographed people holding a snake.

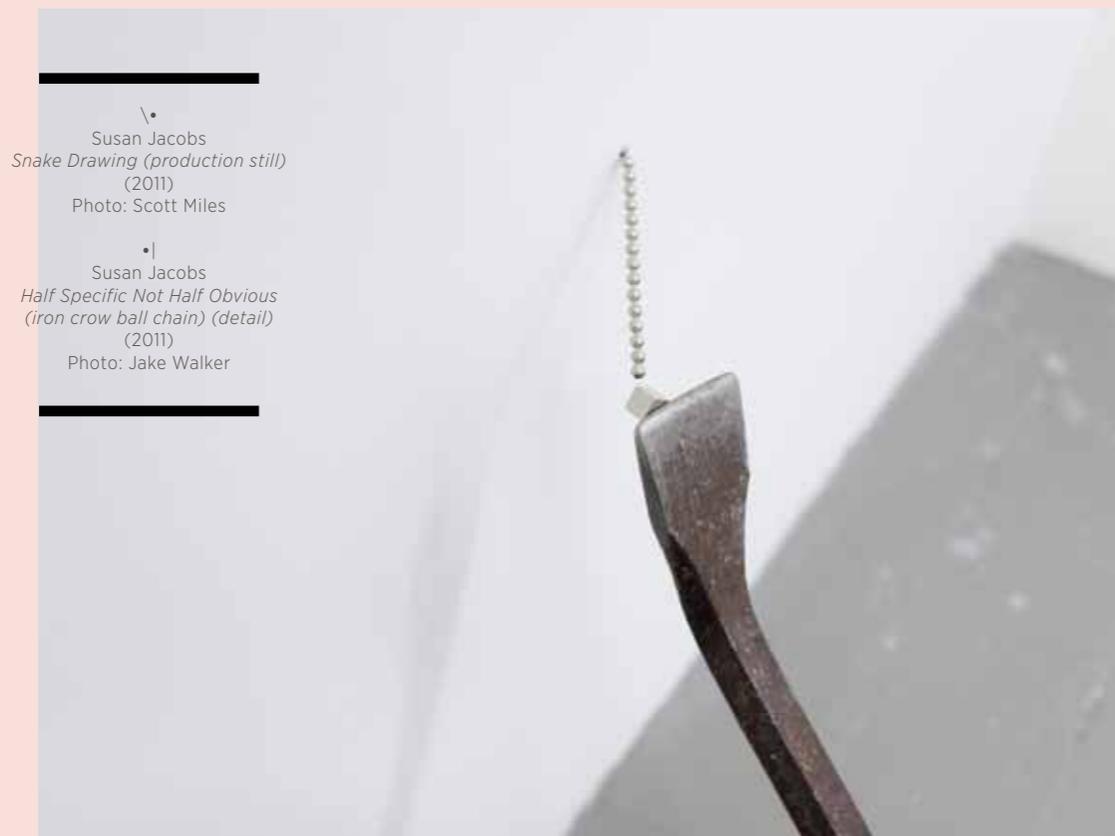
[PW] You mentioned that a lot of works in the Art Gallery of South Australia's collection involving the serpent are of women...

[SJ] ...by men...

[PW] yes, I wonder how gendered space is playing into the work that you are making for the Biennial and more generally in your practice

[SJ] I don't think of my work as being particularly gendered, but it is important for me to deal with strong or physically challenging materials and processes. Certain aspects of sculpture, the heavy, hard workshop stuff was daunting to me when I was at art school and the culture around it was always very blokey, not that it is like that now at all. But in terms of learning how to build and even doing installation work in galleries, there are not really that many women doing it. That's been important for me to learn, for myself. I was never really that conscious of it early on, but it's important for me to have that knowledge and experience. It's self-affirming in a way and probably irrespective of my gender. With *Snake Drawing* in the context of the AGSA collection works (by male artists depicting women with serpents,) there will be a shift in the dynamic of artist/subject, which I guess considers representation of women in art and marks several aspects of an historical trajectory.

[PW] I've recently read a book by Matrix, the feminist architecture group in the UK, and a lot of essays in it simply point to the way space controls movement particularly for women and the activities that women do. Spatial practice like yours or Katie Lee's, perhaps do this 'pointing' at means of control.



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Susan Jacobs
Snake Drawing (production still)
(2011)
Photo: Scott Miles

•|
Susan Jacobs
*Half Specific Not Half Obvious
(iron crow ball chain) (detail)*
(2011)
Photo: Jake Walker

[SJ] It's a really reciprocal dynamic; we control space but it controls us. In terms of the practice, it's more than an overtly feminist statement, although I don't feel like I need to drive it particularly, because it's enough that these concerns are inherently present in the work. Within that there are obviously going to be different layers that speak in different volumes depending on the audience. If you want to look at it in a simplistic way you could miss it completely but if you want to engage with things on a more complex level you can find it and extrapolate it. I like things to be strong but open.

Nicholas Folland

Interview

LISA SLADE

NICHOLAS FOLLAND'S FLOATING ISLAND OF 2000 CUT-GLASS OBJECTS INSTALLED IN THE ELDER WING OF AUSTRALIAN ART APPEARS, AT FIRST GLANCE, TO BE THE PARAGON OF A PARALLEL COLLISION. IN THIS INTERVIEW WITH LISA SLADE, PROJECT CURATOR FROM THE ART GALLERY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA, FOLLAND EXPLORES HIS FIT WITHIN THE CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK OF THE 12TH ADELAIDE BIENNIAL OF AUSTRALIAN ART.

[LISA SLADE] The work you have made for the Adelaide Biennial and several of the works that precede it, perform a type of trespass. This occurs both materially, in the way the works assault the traditional form and function of domestic objects, and spatially through architectural incursion. Trespass is a key theme in the Biennial, one that has informed the conceptual development of the exhibition. In fact during the preliminary exhibition planning, 'the black swan of trespass' was part of the exhibition title. Can you elaborate on what trespass means for you in your practice?

[NICHOLAS FOLLAND] There are a number of terms surrounding the exhibition, such as trespass and collision that could imply some type of assault or invasion, but for me they also suggest temptation, anticipation, or even an anxiety of sorts. The line of demarcation that nominates a rule of trespass, or the point of contact that signals collision, tell us little of how close we regularly venture to these limitations. We like to go close to the line, perhaps even to touch, and we understand the implication of going further, but we can't know for sure until we do.

I think there are two notions that draw me to the idea of trespass. Firstly I'm interested in that line, and constantly frustrated by attempts to locate the work on it. Trying to find a point between two worlds or two realities where something can exist precariously, with the surface of both, acknowledging each other, reliant on each other even; a point where two potentially discreet and opposing notions support one another, but also where they must make way. But I'm also interested in what happens when something passes over the line. What can one world reveal about another? What do I do with that thing that crosses into my world, and what do I do with myself when I cross over?

A point on the line might in fact be impossible, but a location just on the edge can be enough to alert our expectations and assumptions, creating an anxiety or anticipation that we can't quite grasp. Like a ghost, or

a mirage of sorts, a thing whose presence is allusive. The title of my work for the Adelaide Biennial is *Untitled (Jump-Up)*, with jump-up being a term used to describe a small rise in an otherwise flat landscape. An unnamed anomaly, out of place within the expectation of geography, it could be seen as an imposter, or at the very least that its existence is questionable.

[LS] The 'black swan of trespass' is a phrase taken from the final line of an Ern Malley poem titled *Durer: Innsbruck, 1495* (and later used by Humphrey McQueen in the title of his treatise on Australian Modernism). Malley was the fictive Surrealist poet and love child of conservative Australian poets James McAuley and Harold Stewart, who invented Malley as a type of creative protest to avant garde writing. The spectre of Malley as both hero and hoax leads me to consider the theme of heroic failure, a recurring subject in your work, seen in sculptural installations like *Mount Hopeless*, a eulogy to explorer Edward John Eyre and his efforts to reach Central Australia. Furthermore, your works seem to physically flirt with failure. Is this idea/reality played out in your installation for the Biennial?

[NF] I don't know anything about modernist poetry, but I know a little about Ern Malley. And I suspect that much of the general fascination with Malley is precisely because he sits close to that line of fact and fiction, success and failure, hero or hoax. He apparently does not exist because he is the creation of James McAuley and Harold Stewart, but I know even less about them. This is history, prone to slippery and selective translation, and this same allusive reality gives me permission to select and distort the versions of history that I come across in my research.

Historically (will you trust me if I say that now?) we have immortalised those who try but fail as much as we do those who succeed, because in some strange way those who suffer the most in their quest have tried the hardest, and have put up the true challenge. One of the



•|•
 Nicholas Folland
Floe
 (installation view, Samstag Museum) (2009)
 Domestic crystal glassware,
 woven nylon thread
 410 x 450 x 180cm

most revealing passages that I've come across in explorer's journals is in the last notes penned by Robert Falcon Scott before he perished in the Antarctic. He writes: "Have decided it shall be natural – we shall march for the depot with or without our effects and die in our tracks". Unfortunately the march never took place and they were consumed by the ice where they lay, but they made a conscious decision not to take the poison that they had ready for such miserable circumstances, but to be taken by the landscape that had already defeated them time and time again. They had hoped to endure suffering through a romantic notion, and to be found still determined in death.

I try to create images that hint toward a world just beyond that horizon, perhaps a world that risks failure, creating speculative landscapes of desire and uncertainty. I can't take everyone along to the South Pole, but with balanced gesture I might create a place where your own conflict with fact and fiction, heroes and hoaxers takes you close to that line.

Black swans on the other hand speak much more to me of the fantastic, understood as nothing more than mythological creatures prior to the discovery of Australia; their existence must have inspired the possibility of the fantastic in the minds of logical and sensible people. I think that what attracts me to the narratives of exploration is that they document a searching desire for the next black swan.

[LS] Despite its contemporary, international appearance, your work is often underpinned by distinctly Australian cares and concerns. By installing the work for the biennial in the Elder Wing you are performing a parallel collision with Australian art history and thereby embodying the exhibition's central tenet. What does this mean for you and your work, particularly given that the Art Gallery of South Australia is the gallery that you have grown up with?

[NF] The Elder Wing houses amazing documents of colonial concerns, with images of costumed figures pinned onto impossible landscapes, slowly adapting the new world in the image of the old world, and searching for a vocabulary to describe their experience. I find it hard not to look for where I fit into all of this, as my English ancestors, Charles and Charlotte, sailed into Holdfast Bay on the Resource in 1839 (and my middle name is Charles).

Nicholas Folland
Mt Hopeless (hotrocks) (2001-05)
 Granite boulders, hot-rod heating system
 Dimensions variable

Floe (detail) (2009)
 Domestic crystal glassware,
 woven nylon thread
 410 x 450 x 180cm

This is a fascinating and frightening gallery. However, it is not simply a white cube housing historical works, but a significant heritage building, salon hung and relatively unchanged from the day it opened. This is not to dismiss the most recent renovations that spectacularly illuminate the interior and reveal previously undetected frowns on the foreheads of the colonial elite! But while it represents a distant past it also depicts those who imagined the future of the place that we occupy, who dreamed of a 'civilised' and perfect utopia, reflected in the decadence of the building itself.

So it could be argued that this gallery is a shrine to dreamers and those with imaginations. Those who, along with early explorers, saw that black swan and believed it to be a sign that the new world could be whatever they wished it to be. The world outside these walls might not conform exactly to their visions, but within its confines there is a suggestion that anything might yet be possible, beyond imagination. I'm not so interested in the individual narratives as I am in the collective determination that is presented here in time-frozen form. It sets a scene with a very specific tone, and provides an audience expectant of the unexpected.

[LS] Despite your engagement with figures and to a lesser extent locations that represent what can be described as transcendent failure, your work is nevertheless seductively speculative and romantic. The 'what if' in the Biennial installation draws its inspiration from the trope of Atlantis, that mythical underwater paradise. As you point out in your artist statement, the Antipodes and Atlantis have quite a bit in common. Both were mortgaged to the European imagination as repositories of dreams and desires...places full of possibility.

[NF] If I were to depict Australia within this gallery it would struggle to escape a feeling of a known place, familiar to the majority of us as the tangible location of home. However, my work is an abstraction of the Mediterranean island of Santorini, or Ancient Thera, one of many small islands scattered across the oceans that have been suggested as possible sites for ancient Atlantis. The chance that this is Atlantis is slim, and

although it appears to have once been the location of an advanced and successful civilization that has since vanished into the sea without trace, it is not located in the Atlantic Ocean where we might expect to find an island with such a name. It is, however, literally on the other side of the earth from Australia, the opposite side of the world, where we might presume the world to be different from our own Antipodean shores.

The narrative of Atlantis must have been well known to many of the early travellers who ventured to Australia's shores. Depictions of factual and fictive journeys were popular reading that would have merged in the minds of the reader, as they apparently did in the minds of the authors. So like the speculation of Atlantis, the promise of Australia, whether true or not, was as you say, full of possibility.

The difference for us a couple of hundred years later is that we assume to have discovered most of what is to be found on the earth, and in our informed perspective Atlantis remains a myth. As a basic notion it partners the height of success with total failure, and paradise with inevitable demise, but as a location of desire it still relies on our imagination to take form, and is open to a variety of diverse interpretations.

Santorini offers a framework layered with enough association and speculation to bring with it a sense of mystery and wonder. It is ultimately a footnote to the work, unstated in the title and hopefully unnecessary to an appreciation of the piece, but with the potential to further obscure the line between what we know to be true and what we dream to be possible.



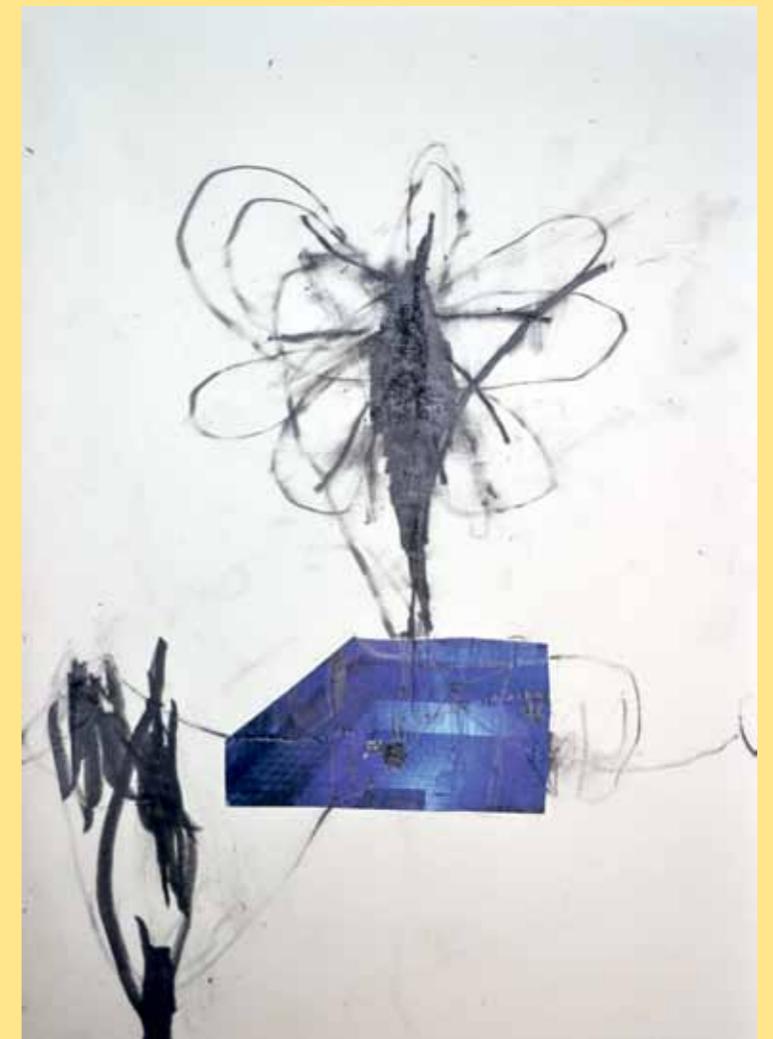
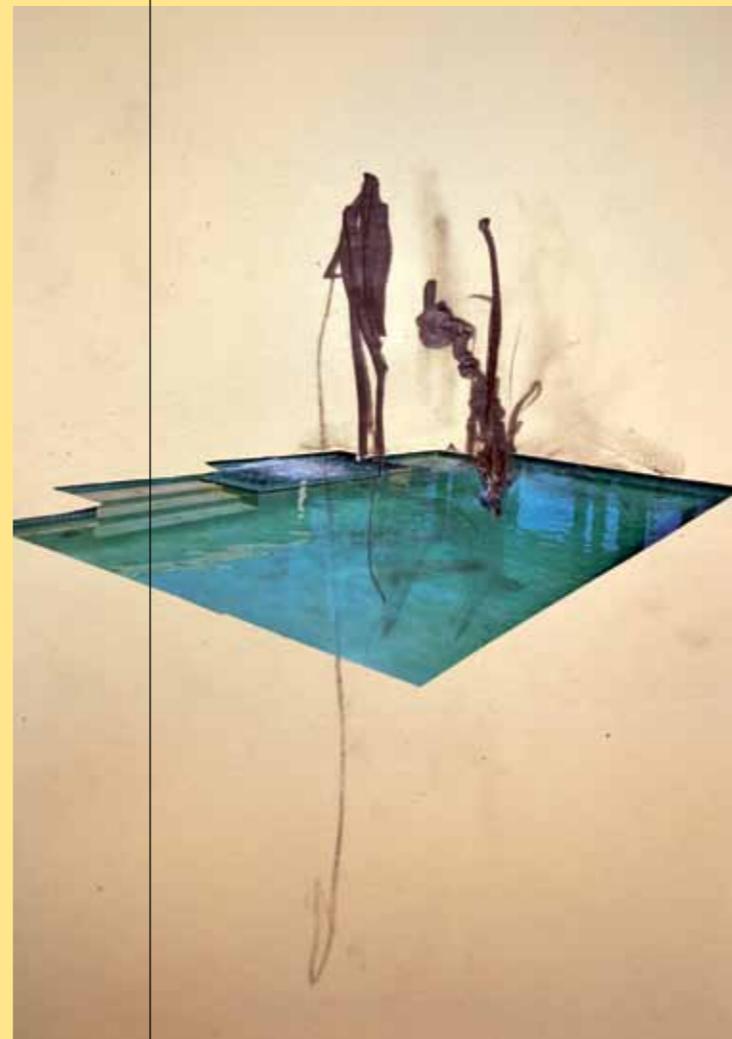
Rob McLeish

Pictorial

Based in Melbourne, Rob McLeish has exhibited widely in the last five years. In *I've Been Looking For Forever, Do You Ever Think I'll See?* he works with a pristine image of the swimming pool, which he then debases using gestural mark making. Humour and irony are central to McLeish's visual language, one which draws upon the imagery of popular, consumer culture to perform a type of nihilist idealism.



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Rob McLeish
Lock Up Your Concepts (2011)
Stainless steel,
186 x 94 x 5 cm

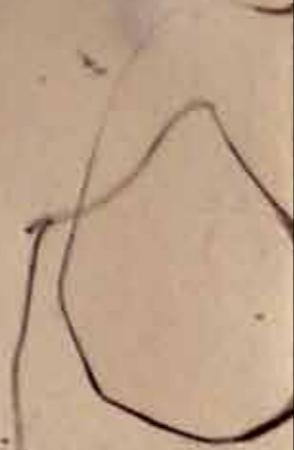


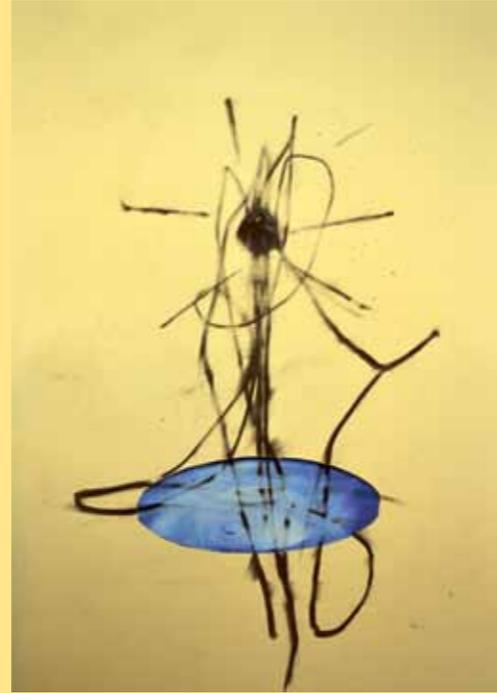
••
Rob McLeish
*I've Been Looking Forever,
Do You Ever Think I'll See?* (2011)
Pencil and Collage on Paper
Dimensions Vary



•|•
 Rob McLeish
*'I've Been Looking Forever,
 Do You Ever Think I'll See?'* (2011)
 Pencil and Collage on Paper
 Dimensions Vary







•\•|
 Rob McLeish
*'I've Been Looking Forever,
 Do You Ever Think I'll See?'* (2011)
 Pencil and Collage on Paper
 Dimensions Vary

|•
 Rob McLeish
Automatic Faggot For The People (2010)
 Stainless steel, 120 x 25 x 16 cm



Afterburner was not just an album by ZZ Top

Max Pam & Robert Cook Conversation

[ROBERT COOK] Hey Max, we've done a few projects together now and we've got a cool, easy and respectful working synergy. To start this interview though, let's deal with what seems to me a key difference between us and our approaches to the world. Fundamentally, it's that you've lived an active life roaming over the planet and I've lived an active life roaming around inside my head. You flipped this country the bird when Melbourne suffocated you, and when life suffocates me I just go deeper inside. It's not something we've discussed before, but how was this sense of adventure or impulse to really change your circumstances instilled in you? It's key because it is what drove your practice for so long. I mean your work is a product of a kind of extroversion in a way, a will to immerse yourself in other places and lives.

[MAX PAM] My work is an extroversion, but more importantly my work is sort of validation of the questing fantasist that I truly am. Did that really just happen to me, that moment when life hijacked the script, snatched it away and gave me something completely real with both barrels? It used to happen often enough when I was the young fantasist, surfing Bells Beach, or Bulko Bay. All of a sudden the skinny and mediocre boy surfer would cease following the plodding script of the eternal wannabe surfer hero. I'm in the correct spot, the swell comes at me out of the Bass Strait, big, cold, green and blue, backlit by a setting sun, reduced by deep water and converting to perfection the moment it hits the shallows on the point. It's Bulko Bay at its best and I'm slightly on the wrong side of the peak, which means if you make it through the take-off you become another surfer, the one you ought to be, the person who can do no wrong on a wave: the fast carving turns, the slashing cut-backs, the slo-mo flying saucer disco drainpipe moment deep back in the greenroom. It just happened like that some days. But who bore witness to it? Did my friends in the water or on the beach see it...no! So by the time I was independent enough to flee north of the equator I made damn sure someone would bear witness to my own private big

Wednesdays; the world's most effortlessly beautiful girl holding me, the crazed hadji pointing the Russki machine gun at me, the defective bong which has just set the beard of Abdullah alight. You own a camera, you have it with you, you report on the moment life hits the afterburners and takes you with it. Well, most of the time I fantasise about it but then all of a sudden it does happen and I have a photo to prove it.

[ROBERT COOK] I love it that you've brought up the idea of fantasy in relation to your work. I mean, given how your practice comes out of the worlds of Arbus, Sander, Frank and co. I've never really thought of in that way. Yet, as you pitch it here, I can see the process of constructing the possibility for experiences coming from a place of (exactly as you say) questing fantasy, and then the 'locking in' those moments before life swamps them as being quintessentially fantastic. I wonder, then, does that connection of the collision of fantasy and reality need to be present for you to shoot in the first place? As well as being genuinely interested, I ask this to also to defer my own relation to fantasy as apparent in our *Narcolepsy* project.

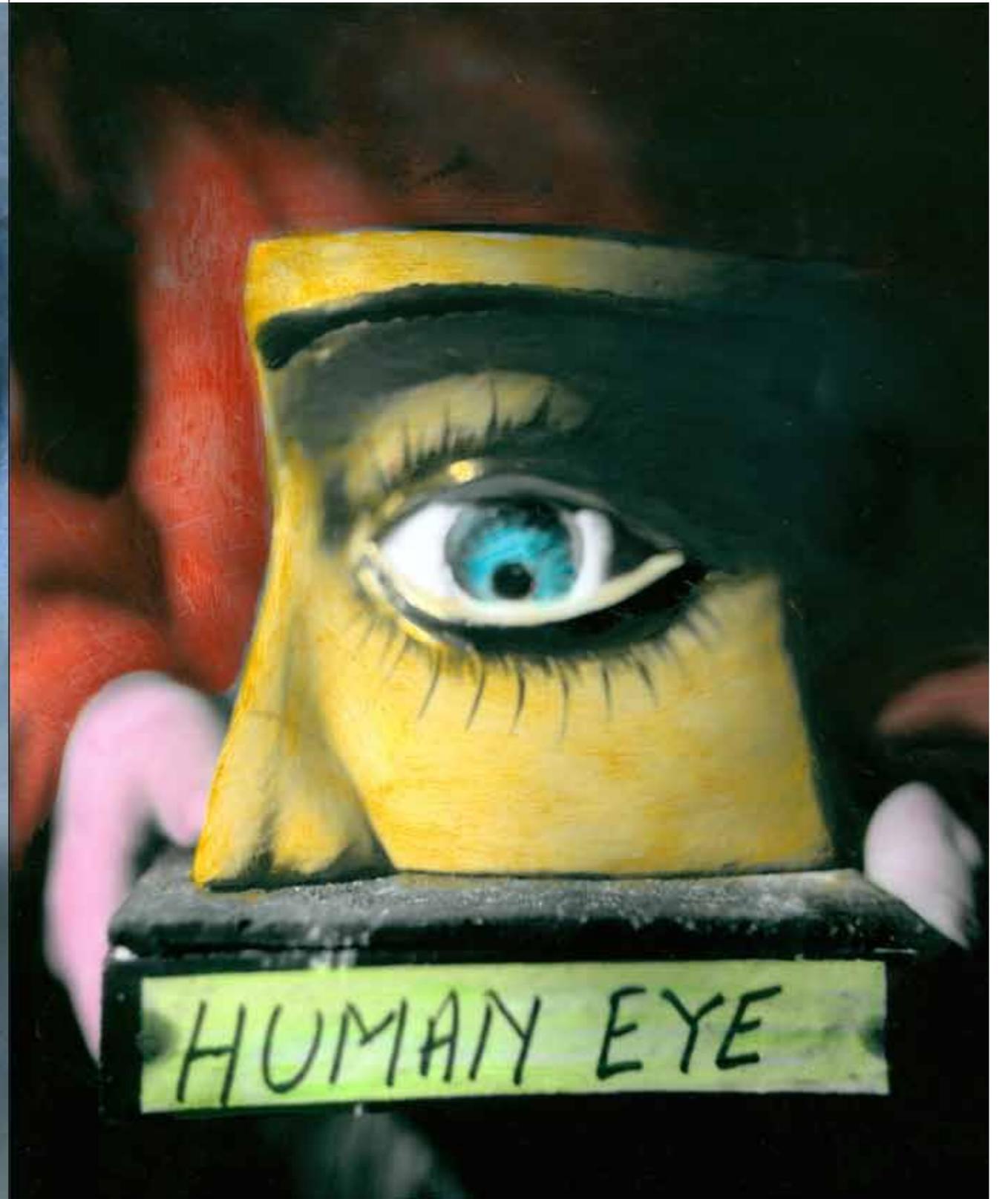
[MAX PAM] It's not just about me or you. It is as much about the ubiquity of fantasy, the shared human condition we all acquire from an early age. We derive pleasure consuming the fantasies of others and inviting others into ours. Playtime with other kids. That, pretty much, is what I've been looking at for years now, as a voyeur with a camera. The methodology begins as an escapist process for me. It is part of a longitudinal study called living, something we all share to the point of death. I'm photographing my life when the mood takes me. How photography functions in my life is as a catalysing medium. An important element that both invites and confirms the enduring power of fantasy in the moment. Fantasy can blow up in your face; even better material for the act of photography. But, there's the question - do we take fantasy too far? Of course we do. What is too far? We don't know till we get there.

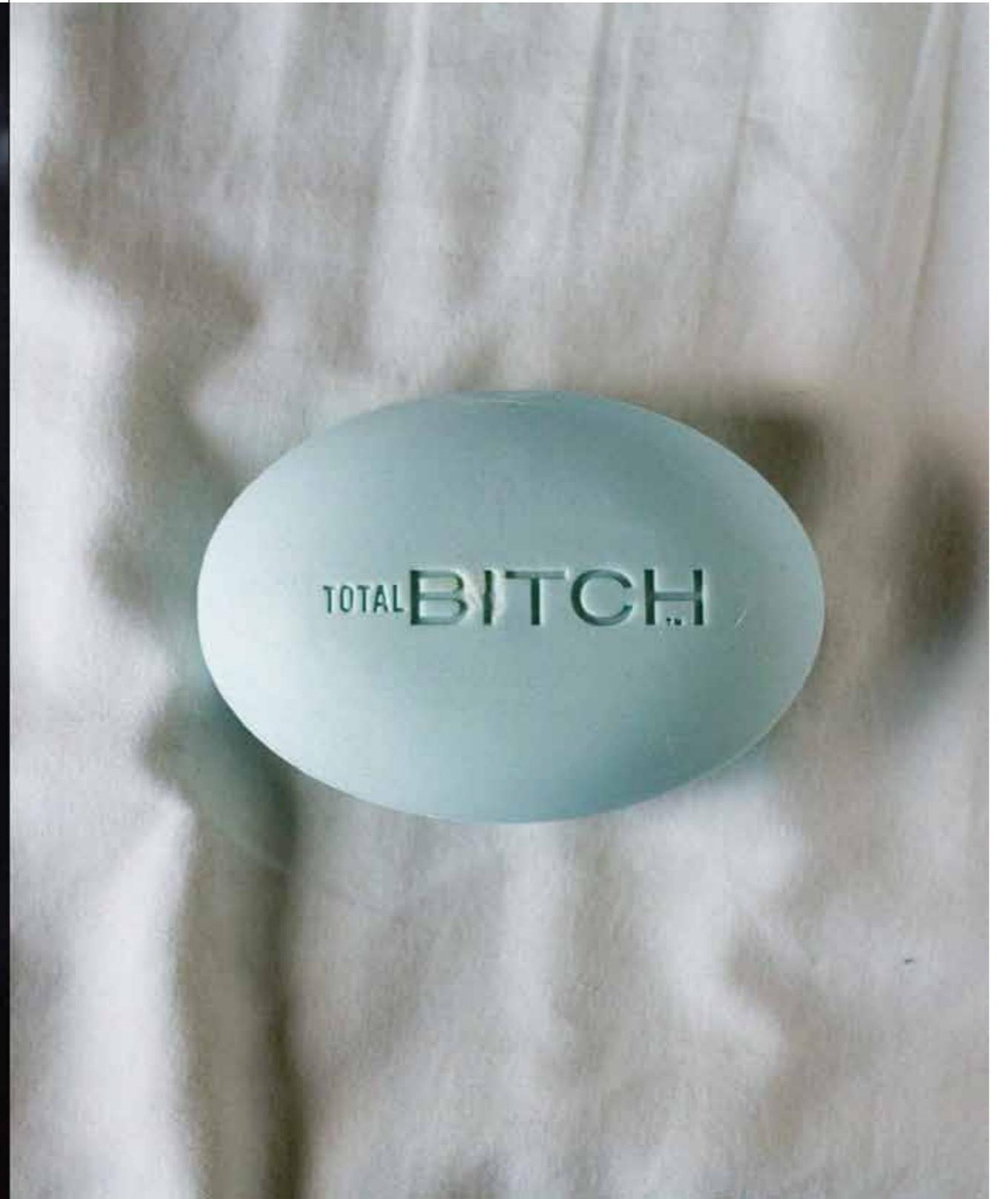
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L *Eko* (2000)
R *Jasmine* (2007)

•/
L *Nia* (1995)
R *Eko And The Human Eye* (1990)

•//•
L *Pills New York* (2010)
R *Bitch* (2006)







[ROBERT COOK] Okay, so we're at that place. You and I. Maybe. Of pushing it too far. We've made a book about a guy who asks people to bury him. Well, that's a segment, a key one. It's a place where fantasy takes our banal, complicated 'hero' way too far! And being in this space of production, from my angle, has been making me tense for almost too long. The energy of the fantasy has been painful. Then the fractured nature of the writing, the way it never closes or settles, is continually jarring to me. The fantastic transformation of aspects from my life haunts me, and has possessed and amplified parts that already were challenging. It is a zone I should have left well alone, or closed up good and tight in a kind of narrative Realism. That is interesting to me, how this project has taken us both from the real to the fantastic and kept the latter element so uncomfortably alive almost as a force, a current, a destructive monsoon!

[MAX PAM] It's so perversely compelling to follow the self-destructive trajectory of your un-named hero in the novella. For me he is the Nicola Six of 2011. Nicola, the creation of Martin Amis in his novel *London Fields*, plots her own murder for the 5th of November 1999 (her birthday) and grooms a pork vindaloo eating, dart playing, rapist lager lout to carry it out. Your hero recruits a bunch of mullet head homophobic refugees from a beer commercial for his live burial. Whilst the entire cast of *London Fields* is freakishly loathsome, many of the players who populate *Narcolepsy* are weirdly attractive. What I take away from reading your work is the performative energy suggested in the writing. Like imagining a Butoh theatre performance. Like Yukio Mishima starring in his collaborative work with the photographer Eikoh Hosoe. Like the last chapter of the book they created: *Barakei (Ordeal By Roses)*. In the second edition of the book Mishima asked for the closing chapter to be titled DEATH. Shortly after the completion of the book model for this edition Mishima disembowled himself and arranged to have his head cut off by a samurai sword wielding accomplice. Hosoe, his style, his content, was heavily influenced by Tatsumi Hijikata, one of the originators of Butoh performance. I know that Butoh has had an enduring impact on your creative practise and I get a strong signal of interpretation from this interest and the way you unfold that interpretation into your writing.

[ROBERT COOK] I think what I like about the Japanese stuff, especially Butoh, is the formal control that structures intense emotional states and the way this holds opposites (man-female, body-mind, obedience-revolution) painfully together in a single state. It really is super exciting tense energy to me, and a big shift from my previous love of more sweeping and traditional romantic positions. And, personally, those J-models suit my more aesthetically uptight and (wilfully) bland character. However, I haven't read much Amis, but will track that one down. He was always a tad too sneery for me to enjoy spending reading time with. So, yes, I like likability! And I guess, everyone in *Narcolepsy* is an imaginative version of myself so I am kinda on their side! Even when they are treated with frustration, I get them. What I don't see, though, is a journey. Stuff happens, actions lead to other actions, but I don't see it as a journey. I see it as a set of

stupid meaningless life things happening and that will continue to happen, an awful procession of self-defeating behaviours. In fact, I embrace that and celebrate it even. Maybe, though, I felt I had to make some at least hint of an arc to bring people along with us on this non-journey. And, in that I feel there we have the exact right synergy with your photos as relics of fantasy that carry with them the trace of yearning for something more than flesh can contain. Which is why I think, aside from the tonality uniting them, this weird project works on a really unusual and unexpected level. Say you?

[MAX PAM] You are right about Amis, he does take sneering to a whole new level of toxicity, but then sneering is a bit of a blood sport in the green and pleasant land of Shakespeare.

When we work together we work fast, ideas find traction, it's a bit savage how quick the ideas come through text and drawings and photo-collage. With us the result must always be reduced to 2 pages, 2 pages, 2 pages. The rhythm of 2 pages clashing with each other or trading off each other or value adding each other. We are only ever as good as our next 2 pages. Do they work or not? It's brutal. When the sum total of all the double pages in *Narcolepsy* are rendered as a sort of epic ballad with a cover wrapped around it, we have our result. Functionally it is all about the double page experience. They must work together like stanzas in an epic poem.

As we got it together, I found a lot of inspiration in looking at the Fagazine BUTT MAGAZINE. How the designers play with bodycentric issues of imagining them in text and image. They play it beautifully, seducing the reader with pink paper, uncoated paper stock, coarse screens, monochrome tints, foiling work.

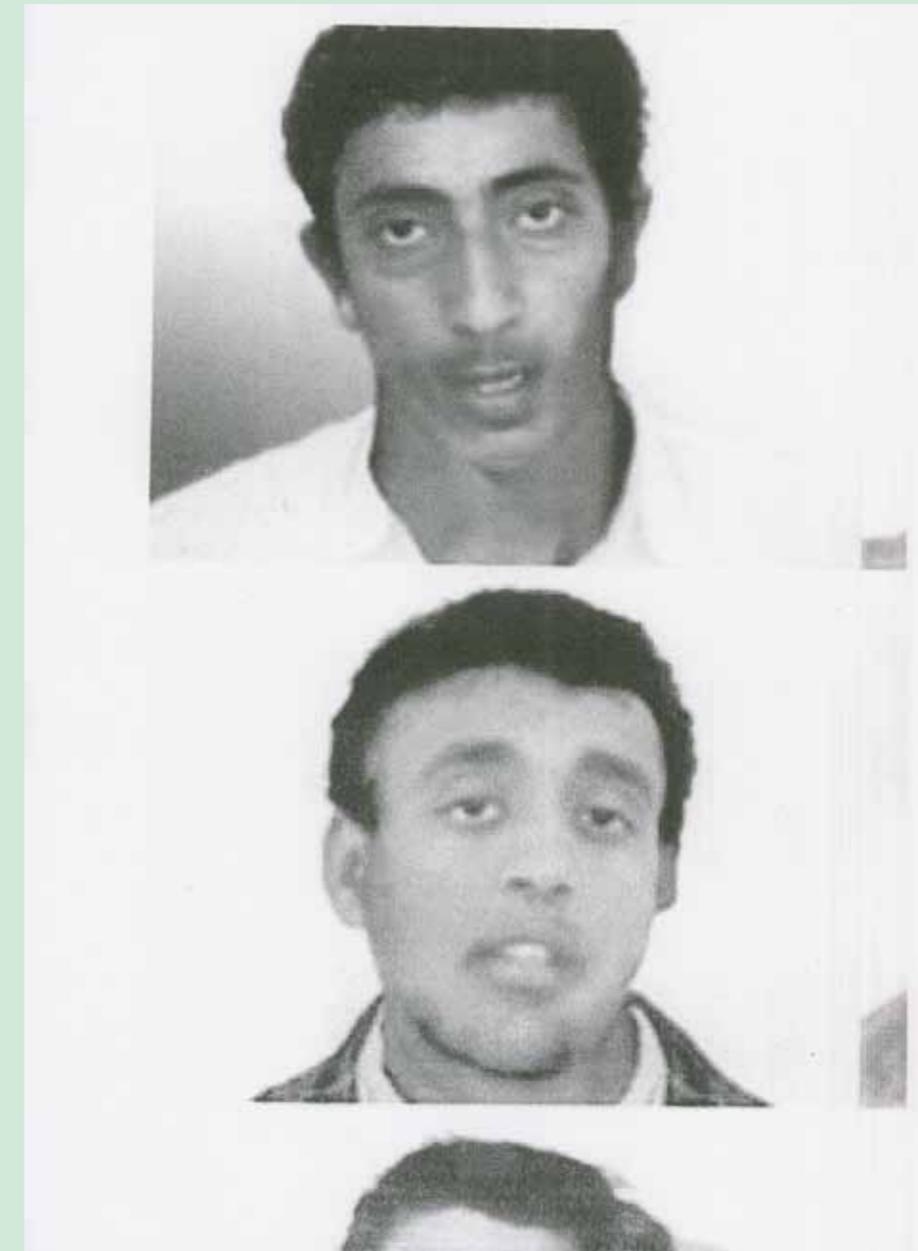
Another thing joining us is that we both love mass print media, so cheap it walks off the shelves. People read it but more likely they consume its design and images to store away in the universe between their ears. We do that with *Narcolepsy*: we offer it to visitors to the Adelaide Biennial so cheap it's free. In absolute terms I feel we are not necessarily artists and really not media people. For sure I know we are both sworn BIBLIORATS.

[ROBERT COOK] Yes, you're right. Ever since I was a kid magazines have been the most significant art form (combining design with photography in one glossy form). To me, they are the space of fetish, the fetish of the everyday. I would spend weeks going over every detail of *Runner's World* as a kid, just soaking up the pages, the lifestyles, the tacit political Habitus! And now I am all over issue 11 of *Go Out*, a Japanese camping gear magazine. I hate camping but I love the mag because of how it visually treats 'gear' as an artform. Love it. And yes, I think that is where the fury and the poetry of our weird collaboration works, where it draws its heat. It is in the zone of the fetish, both in terms of content and in terms of product. It throbs. I am happy with that. Pained, but happy with how this fantasy has become so real and so much a presence in our lives and production.

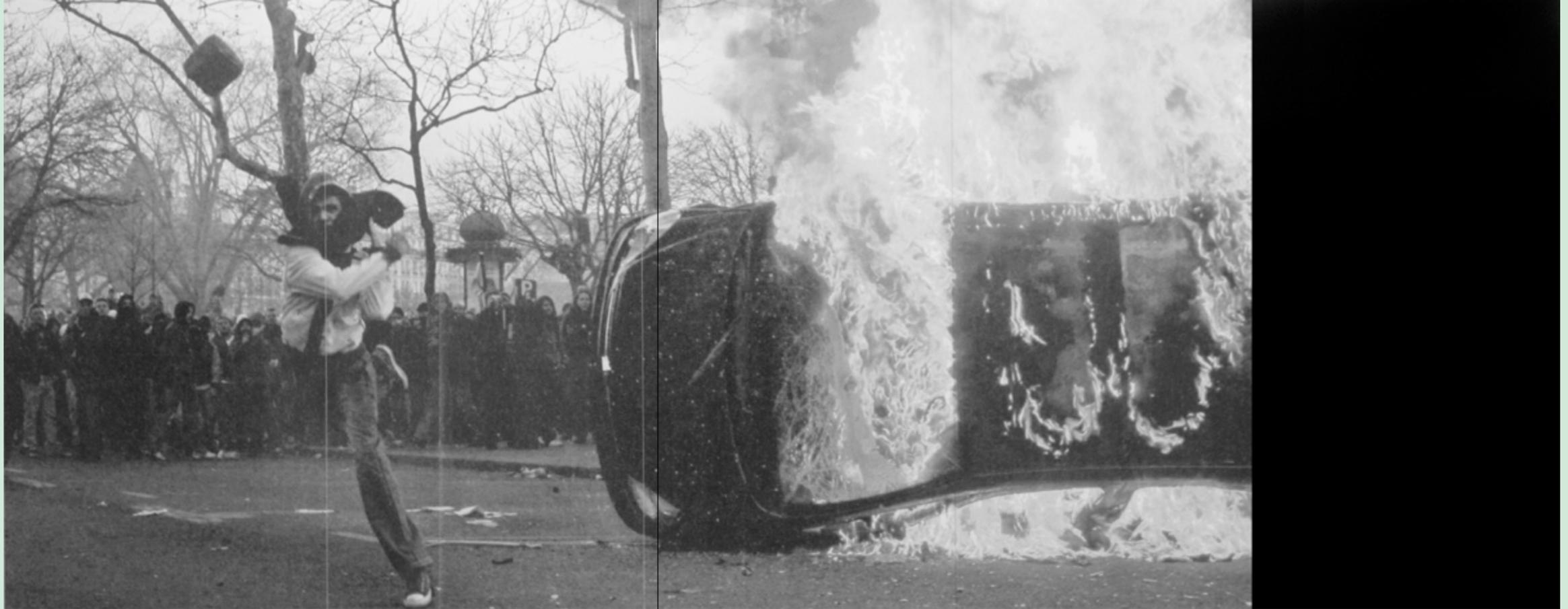
Marco Fusinato

Pictorial

Marco Fusinato is a multidisciplinary artist and musician based in Melbourne. He has exhibited extensively within Australia and internationally. Fusinato often contemplates the nature of revolt by recontextualising materials from a vast range of contexts. The result is a contemporary form of agitprop using performance, photography and light and sound installation.



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Marco Fusinato
Parallel Collisions (detail) (2008)
mixed media on paper
24 page score, 42 x 29.7 cm each
Courtesy the artist
and Anna Schwartz Gallery



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Double Infinite 2 (2009)
White UV halftone ink
on black aluminium
250 x 625 cm
Private Collection

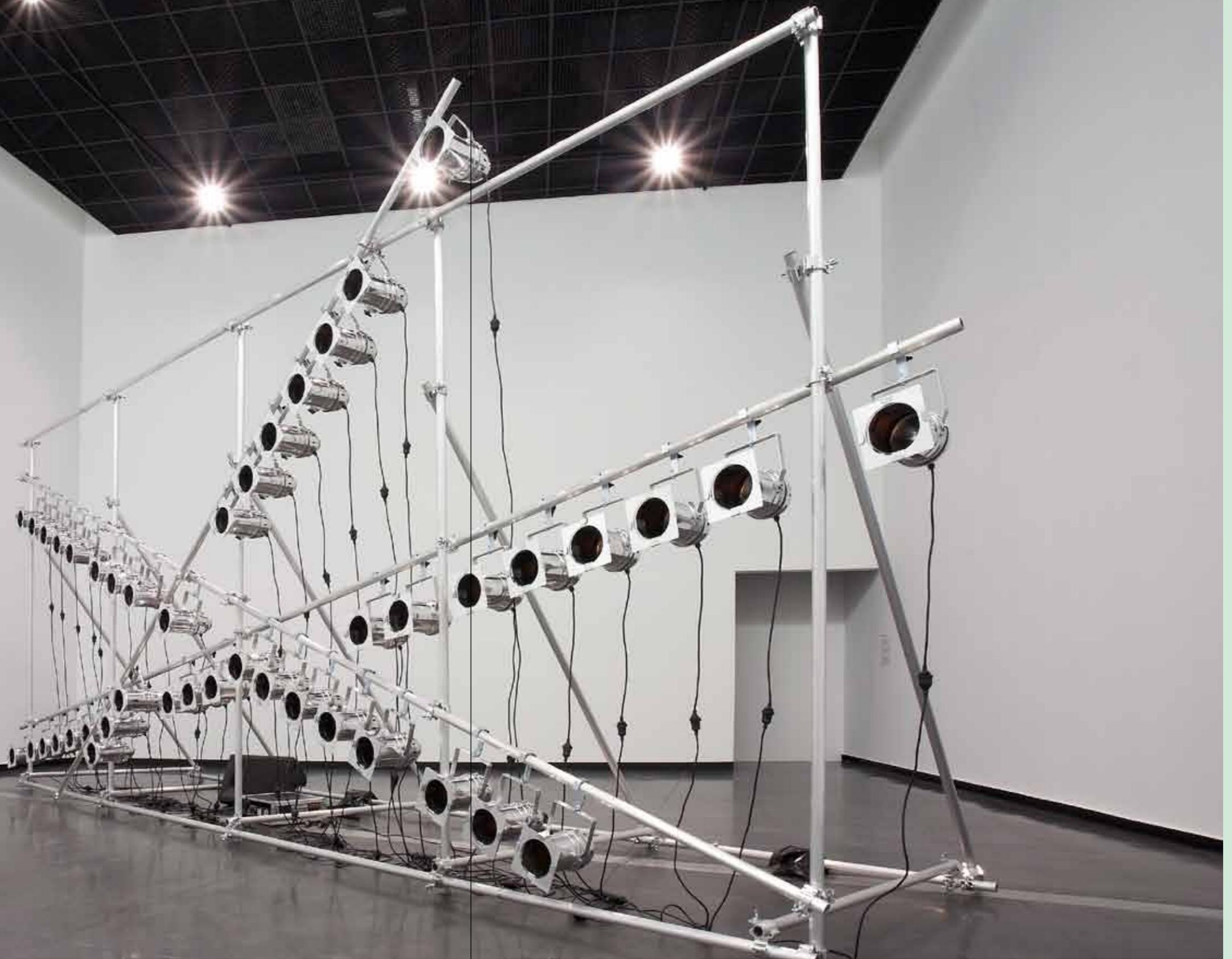
Double Infinite 5 (2009)
White UV halftone ink
on black aluminium
250 x 500 cm

All images Courtesy the artist
and Anna Schwartz Gallery



••
Aetheric Plexus (2009)
 13200 watts white light, 105db
 white noise, alloy tubing, Par
 can 56 lights, double couplers,
 Lanbox LCM DMX controller,
 dimmer rack, DMX mp3 player,
 powered speaker, sensor,
 extension leads, shot bags
 880 x 410 x 230 cm

All images Courtesy the artist
 and Anna Schwartz Gallery



Rococo

by

Christos Tsiolkas

The auction of the painting *A Lady Escorted into the Garden* by the minor eighteenth-century Portuguese artist Alfonso Rigas de la Guerra created a significant stir in art circles when it was recently sold for €3.2 million (see 'Unknown Work Sets Art World Hearts Racing', *Guardian*, 17 May 2006). Though the price itself was relatively insignificant when compared to the astronomical sums fetched by more famous works, it nevertheless was an astonishing sum for a painting that has little, if any, international profile. It is not my intention here to comment on the workings of the international art industry. But I do believe it is necessary to make the one following observation before I begin: since the 1980s, any belief in the 'revolutionary' potential imbued in the traditional high arts can no longer be a tenable critical position, if for no other reason than the more democratic digital media technologies allow for a dispersal of message and image that would have been unimaginable to an artist of even a half-century before. But it is not only the internet that has exposed the elitism of art practice. Artists are neither a 'proletariat' nor a 'vanguard', and they do not make successful 'revolutionaries'. If they have been, it has only been for a moment before the firing squad or the gulag or the concentration camp has seen to their ignoble demise. Some of the more fortunate are taken up as a permanent class of bohemian émigrés by whatever cities happen to be the cultural centres of their moment. In the end, all are forced to rely on the kindness of the haute-bourgeois stranger. We can only but wish them luck. The sword, we well know now, post the twentieth century, is indeed much mightier than the pen.

It is by necessity that I make this observation because if there was anything known at all about de la Guerra, it was his pathetic end by the guillotine on the Jacobin scaffolds of Paris. That biographical endnote was, until the recent auction, the only knowledge of de la Guerra that had come down to us through history. We owe his work, let alone the man himself, more than that. Let us rescue him from politics and return him to art.

The young Alfonso was a grandson of *conversos* in the Inquisition and he was never allowed to forget the Hebraic strain that 'sullied' his blood. His father was a highly placed administrator in the royal court, but the young de la Guerra's life was punctuated by moments of exile when the bishops were aroused to further purges of those whose ancestry screamed heresy and infidelity. In the end, we can discern in some correspondence between the elder de la Guerra and his son, the father's life ended in near poverty and complete banishment from society. It was no surprise then that the young de la Guerra, who had already at the Universidade de

Coimbra shown remarkable aptitude in philology and philosophy, as well as mastery of the techniques of fine art, found it appropriate for his adventurous spirit to head out for the so-called New World. In 1761, at the age of twenty-seven, after five years plying his trade as a portrait painter in the courts of France, Spain and Westphalia, he sailed for Rio de Janeiro.

It was de la Guerra's good fortune to have been a youth at the university when it came under the control and tutelage of that most remarkable of Enlightenment figures, Sebastião José de Carvalho e Melo, the first Marquis de Pombal, whose administration of the rebuilding of Lisbon after the great earthquake made his name famous throughout Europe. Most important for the young de la Guerra was the Marquis de Pombal's fierce anticlericalism that culminated in the removal of the Jesuits from the Portuguese court and from their stranglehold on the universities. For de la Guerra, forced to watch his father humiliated by the dogmatic anti-Semitism of that breed of Catholic brethren, it must have been an intoxicating moment. Early letters back to his parents in Lisbon show him beginning to tackle the religious challenge of Protestantism and concurrently struggling to read Plato in the original Greek (his work evidences that he mistranslated quite promiscuously). More importantly, in the dozen or so drawings and canvases of his that survive from this student period, we see him rejecting officially sanctioned religious art for his first forays into portraiture and landscape. Of these, the only one of any importance is a lovely miniature of the Marquesa de Cabanas, by all reports one of the loveliest of noble women in Europe at that time. That a young student like de la Guerra was granted the favour of having such an aristocratic woman as the Marquesa pose for him says much about the waves of change initiated by the European Enlightenment. Nevertheless, Portugal's power was beginning to wane in the world, the loss of territories and prestige had hurt the nobility, and de la Guerra was not alone in choosing to abandon what must have seemed the decadent exhaustion of old Europe for the excitement of the New. Let us remember, he was a young man, adventurous, fired up by the abandoning of centuries of dogma and hatred.

Knowing the above about de la Guerra, we may be, on first viewing, surprised by the conservatism of *A Lady Escorted into the Garden*. The two figures in the painting are instantly recognisable as an aristocratic trope: a nobleman and a noblewoman. They are dressed in the most flamboyant of mid-eighteenth-century European fashion. She sports a ridiculous ghostly grey pompadour, her gown is all satin, beads and lace. His skin is painted white and his pantaloons are shiny and silken. The most incongruous element of their dress might be that, though they are set in a typically Rococo Arcadian locale, she wears thin elegant pale-pink dancing slippers and he has on calf-high dress boots, the leather strapped through ebony buttons. They are also both wearing gloves, though that may be because de la Guerra has the gentleman lead his lady by the hand into the garden.

The protection of cloth refutes any charge of licentiousness that may have attached to the subject. Though the man and the woman look as if they may have stepped out of a tableau created for the French Sun King, the painting itself was executed in Brazil. The more we contemplate it, the more we become aware that the Arcadia the man and woman have stepped into is not one recognisably European. What initially appears to be innocuous and derivative shows itself under a more acute gaze to be something else entirely, something that I believe gives the painting a vitality that reaches across the centuries. In *A Lady Escorted into the Garden* we see the Europeans literally entering the New World.

The dense green undergrowth, the gnarled deformed giant limbs of the trees, the reddish glare of the sun. The tepid couple do not belong to this untamed beauty. I was a student in Buenos Aires in the late eighties when I first encountered the painting. It was hanging in a small alcove in the Museo de Bellas Artes, part of an exhibition on the Latin American landscape, not even

part of the permanent collection. I remember responding to the vivid sensuality of the colours, the bold greens, the bloody blues and reds, but I was affronted by the insipid faces of the couple. There seemed to have been no care, no attention paid to giving them life or vividness. I had studied the period and knew of de la Guerra's execution at the Terror, but the painting gave no sense of the tumultuous revolutionary history that formed the artist. I dismissed it instantly as an embarrassing and naive work, derivative, just another reactionary and scarred attempt to make over the new American landscape in Old Europa's image. I recognise now the poverty of my reaction, how unforgivable my accusation of myopia was to de la Guerra, precisely because I was unaware of my own short-sightedness. *A Lady Escorted into the Garden* demands we trust our initial first reaction to the work, to ignore the human subjects and to focus our eyes on the world they are entering. This strange, unknown, disquieting and sublime garden is both novel and at the same time a return. The garden of the painting is not some blandly theatrical rendering of the Elysian Fields for the delectation of the First Estate. It is no mere backdrop. It is something ancient. It is the first Garden.

It is possible that I did not spot the serpent on that first, dismissive glance at the painting. What I did notice, what I expect every first-time viewer of the landscape observes, was the rush of lavender of the young buds on the forest floor, the bruised lemon colouring of the canopy of leaves that close to a savage aura around the couple. These leaves, the brandy-hued trunks and limbs of the rainforest trees, they are still shocking even after the passing of centuries. De la Guerra is a child of the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, so the veins and textures of the leaves, the solidity and glimmering strength of the trees are depicted in faithful realistic detail. But how the colours shine, how they dance, how they mock the sedateness of European light. How can our eyes pay any attention to the pale ridiculous couple ostensibly at the centre of the canvas? It is the world – the natural New World around them – that is only truly alive. Even as I write this, as I recall my first encounter with the work, I also remember the jolt of anger, the desire to scrape the couple from the calico, to make the oils crumble away till they disappear and only Brazil – a naked but unsoiled Brazil – is left. I would not be the first critic to be reminded of Van Gogh's use of colour as we contemplate *A Lady Escorted into the Garden*. Close to a century and a half separates the Baroque Renaissance execution of de la Guerra and the abandonment to an equally Baroque impressionism by the Dutch master, but they both share an ecstatic delight in the natural order. Their pigment is fire on the canvas.

But the more one returns to *A Lady Escorted into the Garden* the more one's attention is drawn to the serpent and the monkey. The serpent, black, its skin glistening in a blade of sun penetrating through the thick trees, is coiled around the bronzed gnarled limb of a jacaranda tree. It is, of course, on an obvious, immediate level, a symbol of the first garden, of Eden. It is a hint that the fragile aristocratic idyll of the couple is about to be shattered through the Fall of revolution. It is my intention to argue that in de la Guerra we find an astonishing foresight. It is as if his early years spent painting portraits of the gentlemen and ladies of Western Europe have given him a precise insight into the twilight of the noble era. In a more modern parlance we might surmise that his dual outsider status – a *converso*, a child of a pauper – gave him the ability to stand outside of his class and grasp the subterranean tremors and writhings of social change and upheaval. I confess I look upon such an argument with much favour, as it does tally with the few biographical details we have of the artist's life. What is important, however, is the work and how the work speaks to us.

The serpent's head lies still, asleep in its tree. The reptile's head faces away from the couple, towards that which lies outside the frame. This snake, in this garden, is not interested in the human subjects at the centre of the painting. The sleeping serpent, looped over the tree limb, occupies the top-right corner of the painting. At the bottom-left corner, there is a small monkey, alert, on its haunches, staring straight at us, but seemingly ready to leap away in flight

at any moment. We recognise it now as a uakari monkey, evident from the spindly grey short hairs on its red raw bald head, from de la Guerra's expert rendering of its long, fine, gold-orange fur. Its eyes are wary, penetrating and suspicious. In our anthropomorphic gaze we might understand these eyes as 'human'. Here again we are also struck by de la Guerra's incredible prescience. A century before Darwin sailed on the Beagle into the New World, it is as if de la Guerra is exhibiting for us the truth of the Garden. The serpent and the ape were there before us, and as our eyes shift back to the lazy smiles and bland features of the human couple, we sense that the serpent and the ape will be there once we are gone. It is no wonder that the painting disappeared for such a long time. It is startlingly blasphemous, almost modern in its audacity. It is no wonder, as well, that it still has such resonance for us contemporary viewers. What de la Guerra could not foresee, could not guess, was that the trees and shrubs he painted so lovingly would all eventually disappear in the insane lust of humans to strip the earth of its ore, that the uakari monkey was right to look upon us with misgiving. It too now faces extinction. That silly, superficial, dull couple will not be vanquished without bringing everything else down with them.

€3.2 million would have made the radical sans-culotte de la Guerra furious. It is a madness – but given that madness, it is also a bargain.

If nothing else, the notoriety around the sale of *A Lady Escorted into the Garden* will hopefully encourage greater attention to be given to de la Guerra's other work. For the most part, there is nothing interesting to be found in his early European portraiture. There is a distinct, almost malicious, truthfulness in some of the work – no wart, no scar, no meanness in the eye or thinness of lip is allowed to go unrepresented – but overall the work is derivative and indicative of a young artist attempting to shake himself free of slavish adherence to the generation before. Unfortunately, many of the Brazilian works have been lost or destroyed. Of those that do remain, the Centro des Cedoes Artes Brasileioes in Sao Paulo has an intelligently curated permanent exhibition with truly engaging and interesting curatorial notes supplied in Portuguese, Spanish and English. There are also some very beautiful sketches and small canvases of working men, slaves and colonial administrators in the National Gallery of Kingston in Jamaica. The debts owed to the Renaissance are again evident but the majority of these works eschew a reliance on Biblical or Classical *mise en scène* to instead open up an authentic rendering of early colonial townships. I await future critical and biographical work on the life and oeuvre of de la Guerra, in particular his uniqueness amongst colonial artists in not wishing to subjugate the New World by the aesthetic conventions of the Old.

I cannot end without mentioning, with some sadness, a work of the artist that was never completed. As soon as news of the revolution in France reached Brazil, de la Guerra abandoned his new home and sailed immediately for Europe. It is said that he jumped on board a French vessel that had been taken over by mutinous revolutionary French sailors and that it was with them that he arrived back in the Old World. In Paris, de la Guerra began painting murals celebrating the new dawn and quickly became an associate of the Jacobins. He had become deeply antagonistic to the slave trade while in the Portuguese colonial territories and immediately on arriving in Paris, in fevered excitement and revolutionary passion, wrote his highly influential tract against slavery, *Contre l'humanité*. He also began working on a series of charcoal sketches, which were to share the same title. Those that still exist, largely in the collection of the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam are some of the most confronting and profoundly affecting testaments to the inhumanity of the international slave trade. Rendered all from memory, from what he witnessed at the slave auctions in the Americas, the sketches portray wretched men, women, children, shackled, lying in their own sick and excrement, awaiting to be taken to market. De la Guerra planned a canvas that would take up one whole wall of the main ballroom in the Versailles Palace (this was still when there were plans to have the palace

converted into a gallery dedicated to the people's history). Unfortunately, as the revolution entered its most authoritarian stage, de la Guerra increasingly fell out with the Jacobins. Never having forgotten the anti-Semitism suffered by his parents, he was fiercely anti-religious and scornful of Robespierre's attempts to reconcile Christianity with forms of spiritual worship gleaned from the ancients. Recklessly, de la Guerra's atheistic pronouncements became increasingly vehement and he was arrested and sentenced to the guillotine.¹ After his execution, any of his artwork that remained was quickly destroyed except for those few sketches for *Contre l'humanité*.

I have in front of me a reproduction of de la Guerra's *Em Escravo*. It is composed of black charcoal marks on white paper. The title is simple and brutally honest: a slave. The young man has the marks of the lash across his chest and shoulders. His head hangs low, he is stripped to nakedness and he clumsily attempts to protect his genitals from our mercenary gaze. His body is emaciated, his feet bloated, covered with erupting sores. Is it that we are still under the sway of imperialist racist memory that his wary, frightened eyes remind us of the ape in *A Lady Escorted into the Garden*? Or is it that this is exactly what the institution of slavery did, reduce the human body and human spirit to the animal world?

I prefer another understanding.

De la Guerra's work is a reminder that the natural world is of equal to that of human society. The tragic helplessness in the African's eyes is mirrored in the devastation that was to come to the Amazonian rainforests in wake of the Europeans' arrival. The serpent in the Garden is, then, not the sleeping innocent reptile, but the cavorting foolish couple. De la Guerra's painting asks us to reflect on the possibility that we are no worse and no better than the animal life in the Garden. No better, no worse. We still find this almost impossible to believe. The €3.2 million suggests how little we understand of what de la Guerra is still trying to say to us.

¹ Most recently the French art critic and academic Angelique Circa has suggested that part of the increasing Jacobin antagonism to de la Guerra came from the radical conclusions of his fierce anti-slavery and anti-racist views. His advocacy of miscegenation, the liberation of colonial subjects and restitution for African and American slaves was possibly a bridge too far for even the most egalitarian of the revolutionaries. There is certainly evidence that after the Napoleonic putsch de la Guerra's work was extensively destroyed. We owe the survival of his treatise, *Contre l'humanité*, to its popularity amongst abolitionists in Holland, Britain and the United States. See 'Citoyen noir?': Une histoire d'une non-histoire' in *Art et Couleur: Études en Subjectivité*.



ROCK MY WORLD



CURATED BY
SUPERKALEIDOSCOPE



TIME WILL TELL AND CANNOT BE ARGUED WITH.

By now we know certain truths about our world and the popular culture we inherit. We know that video seriously injured the radio star, that hypercolour wasn't proof of magic, that Y2K simply was not, and that the internet would in fact permanently alter the way we communicate and interact.

Rock My World, curated by SuperKaleidoscope, presents a group of artists whose work responds to pop culture of the 20th and 21st centuries. Artists included comment on ideas such as fandom, desire, communication, isolation and connectivity. Using witty, poetic and unsettling imagery, and often weaving new fictions from that previously presented as fact, each artist offers a sense of creative resistance, reflecting their engagement with the times in which we live.

The works in *Rock My World* reveal a distinct transition in the way that popular culture is propagated; from nostalgic television screen paintings reminding us of late night Rage sessions, to screensavers that investigate the virtual space one occupies when interacting within online environments.

To look at pop culture now, so affected by the speed and fluidity of modern technology, is to look upon it in its most democratic and yet trivial state. The constant addition, destruction and reinvention of popular ideas and their dissemination on a global scale, means that the opportunity for comment, criticism and just plain silliness is larger than ever. In response to this pop chimera, artists such as those presented in *Rock My World*, face the complex task of responding in an environment that is shifting constantly against a background noise of hyper-interactivity.

KIM FASHER & SARAH MOSCA

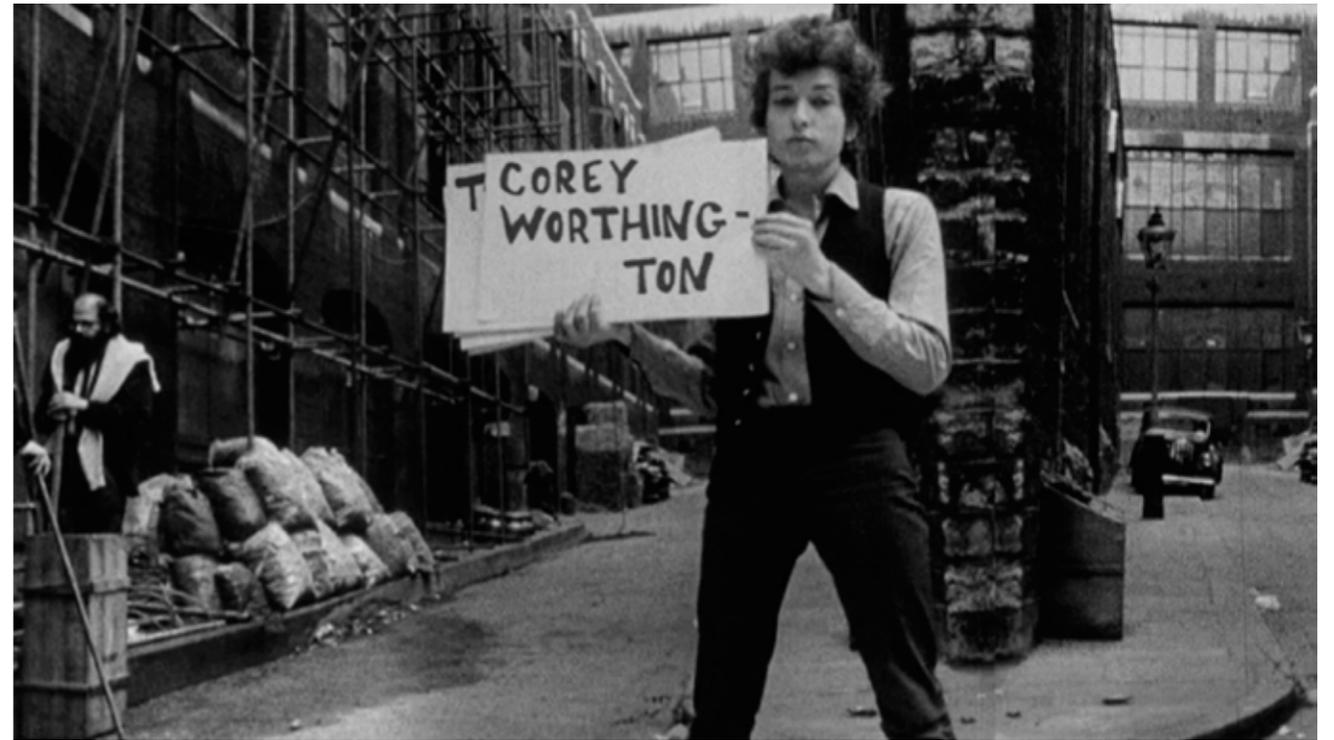
SODA_JERK



★★★★★★★★

The Popular Front (2011)
 Digital video, black & white, sound, 16:9 (Stills)
 Dur: 2.24 mins
 Commissioned by Artbank
 Image courtesy of the artists

★★★★★★★★





KEN UNSWORTH

★★★★★★★★

*Keep on trucking -
Joseph Beuys and Henning Christiansen in concert (1985/6)*
Mixed media
Photograph: Paul Green, Images courtesy of the artist

★★★★★★★★

KONRAD SMOLEŃSKI

★★★★★★★★

Guard (2009)
Installation with HD video, sound, ed 1/1 + AP (Still)
Video Dur: 4:30 mins
Image courtesy of the artist and Galeria Leto, Warsaw.

★★★★★★★★



HEATH FRANCO



Bottom Right

★★★★★★★★

FUN HOUSE (2010)
Multi-channel video installation, surround sound.
High Definition Digital Video, 16:9, infinite loop.
Image courtesy of the artist and Galerie Pompom, Sydney
and Tristian Koenig, Melbourne

★★★★★★★★



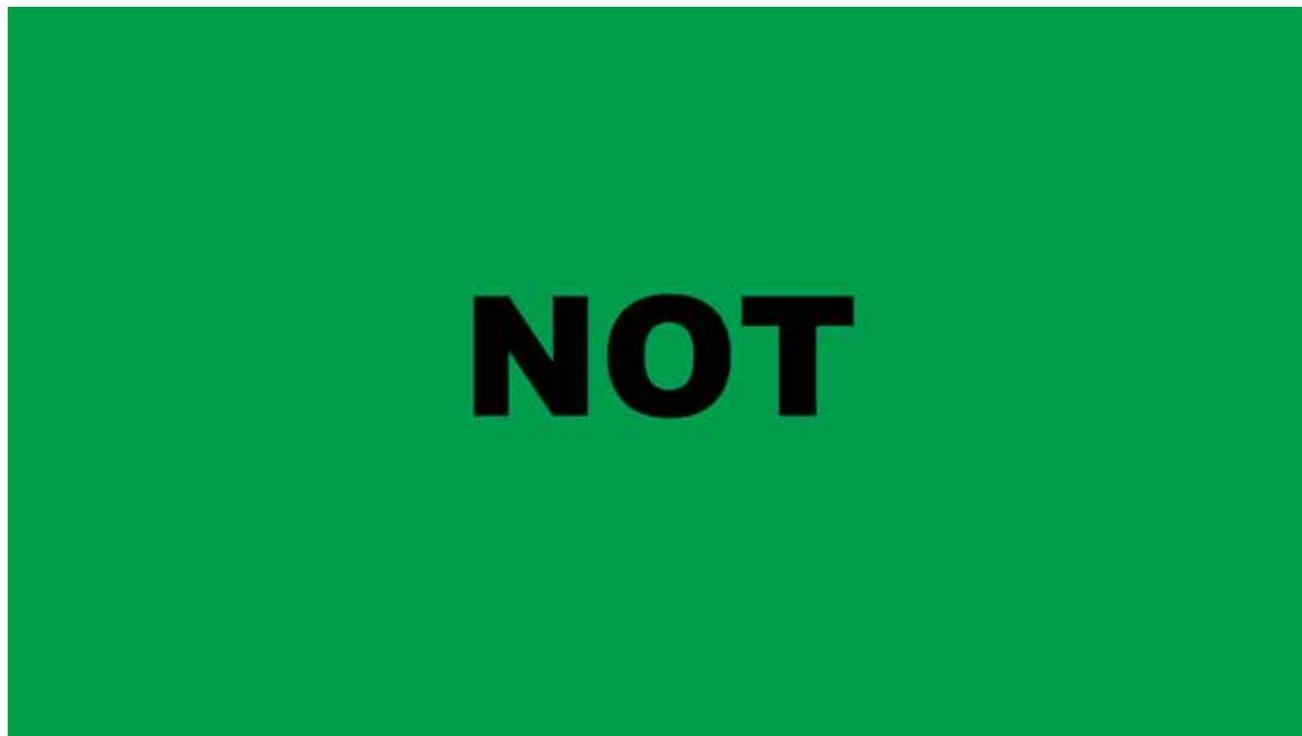
★★★★★★★★

_TV (2011)
Single-screen multi-channel (switchable) video, stereo sound.
High Definition Digital Video, 16:9, HDMI switching unit, remote control.
Images courtesy of the artist. Galerie Pompom, Sydney
and Tristian Koenig, Melbourne

★★★★★★★★



JUSTIN BALMAIN



★★★★★★★★

You (2010)
Screen saver, dimensions variable (Still)
Dur: 0:06 mins
Image courtesy of the artist.

★★★★★★★★

★ To view video works and to download Justin Balmain's
screensaver *You* please visit www.superkaleidoscope.com.



Clockwise from Top



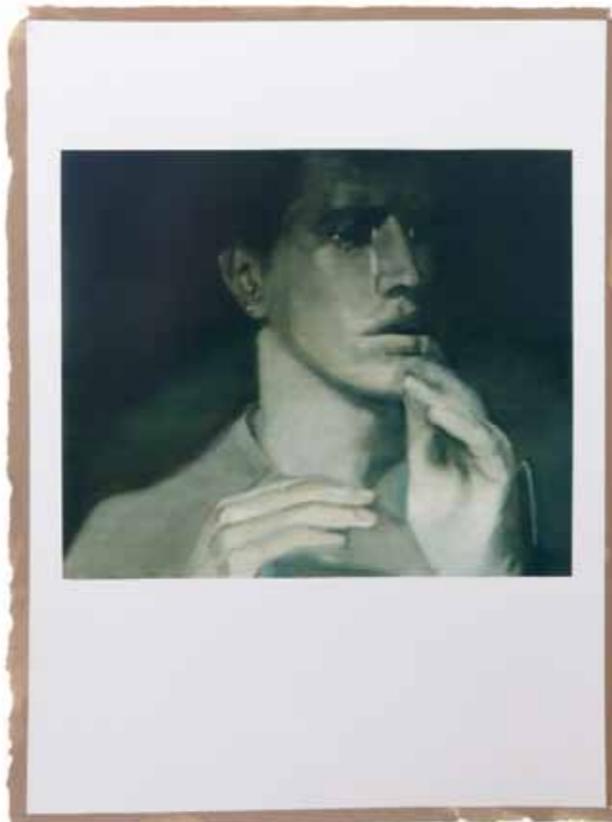
Colleen Ahern
Do You Believe In Rapture (2010)
from *Of Skins and Heart*
Oil on paper, 760 x 560 mm

Louder Than Love (2010)
from *Of Skins and Heart*
Oil on paper, 760 x 560 mm

Transporting (2010)
from *Of Skins and Heart*
Oil on paper, 760 x 560 mm



**COLLEEN
AHERN**



DAS500

- David Capra
The Ecclesiastical Banner Project (2011)
Image courtesy the artist.

DIVINING DAVID

DAS500 J.D. REFORMA

WHEN IN DOUBT: GIVE.

That's what Björk says, and I'm inclined to agree with her. Unlike suspicion or cynicism – degenerative pastimes – the state of doubt can induce the peculiarly wonderful side effect of generosity. The thirsty field of the emerging arts – itself an act of determined agnosticism – is almost entirely irrigated by the generosity of doubt-filled artists. And David Capra, in a manner of speaking, is a significant benefactor.

Over the past three years, he has consistently produced a series of works called “gemstone manifestations”: roughly crafted, multicoloured pieces of plasticine that closely resemble our national gemstone, the opal. These are often set within Baroque brooch or pendant settings, and appear regularly and apparently randomly within the evolving context of his exhibitivite works: most memorably amidst the trays of tea and biscuits at the artist talk for his exhibition, *Shundaba* at Depot II Gallery in Sydney.

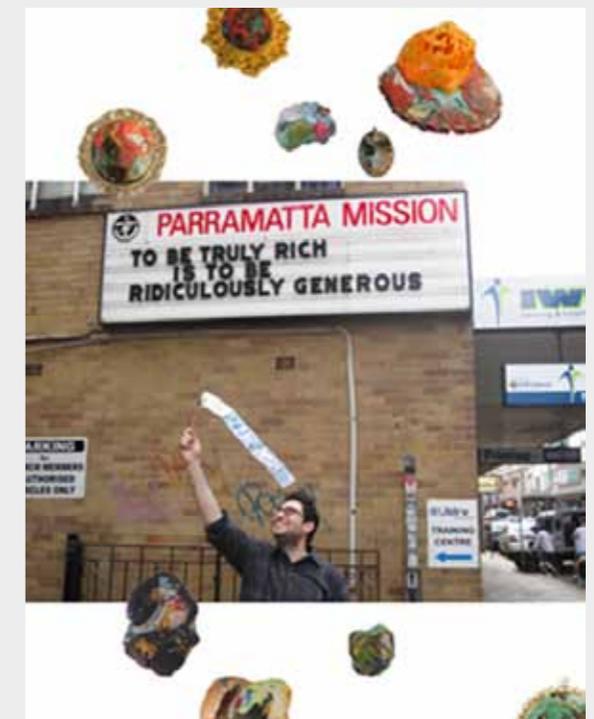
Their conceptual origins lie in reported instances of spontaneous manifestations of gemstones and gold dust from the sky, as documented by members of the Charismatic Movement in Christian churches. Thanks to the divine medium of the Internet, many of these occurrences have been documented in various, albeit unverifiable, sources e.g. personal blogs, YouTube videos, and Christian chat forums. Art has long been associated with the language of faith, both in practice and depiction, so I find this greyness strangely appropriate.

Incidentally, Capra's favourite film, *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), opens upon Dorothy's grey and sepia-toned homestead in Kansas. Before being whisked away to Technicolor wonderland, she encounters the eccentric Professor Marvel who professes to “never do anything without consulting my crystal first”. Contrary to the occultist imagery that the word conjures, divination is somewhat intrinsic to everyday life. Our temperate climate means that most Australians will simply never experience the spontaneous manifestations of tornadoes or gemstones that our distant American neighbours must daily endure. But artists, even Australian ones, are not immune to doubt – even less so to drought.

Perhaps that's why I find David Capra's gemstones so appealing. Making art cheaply with what is most available – in this case, plasticine – is not a new idea. Nor is the predictable aesthetic trajectory to which so many artists seemingly aspire, dictating that as careers shine, so too must one's materials. In their soft and unfired state, unpolished save for a few of the artist's fingerprints, these works represents the antithesis of the way that value is conventionally constructed in art. Capra himself has described them as ugly – like a tax-free opal, I might add.

At the end of the film, in a scene entitled “Heroic Rewards”, the oracular wizard informs each of the protagonists, more sagely than divinely, that they always possessed the ability to overcome their self-doubt, and that all that was needed to remind them of this was their faith (and some red shoes). Of course, in the nature of narrative storytelling, this revelation comes after their long and arduous journey to the Emerald City.

Maybe one day Dorothy will also yearn for a pair of opal, diamond, sapphire and emerald shoes, to go with her ruby ones – in which case I might suggest that she needn't travel any further than Parramatta.



DAS500

TINY, AD HOC TECHNOLOGIES

DAS500 ASTRID LORANGE

A GRAMMAR HAS BEEN CALLED A LIST OF WHAT IS TO BE DONE WITH IT.¹

In the twentieth-century, much philosophical thinking came to read language as the critical concern of metaphysics. Epistemological and ontological questions were questions of syntax: how propositions are made through and by language, and how these language'd objects constitute lived reality – reality of the subject, reality of the object and reality of the world. Analysis of language attempted to locate the way that these propositions account for a world that is lived-in.

The linguistic turn in philosophical, psychoanalytical and critical thinking has sometimes meant that 'consciousness' has replaced a more ambiguous category of 'experience' to describe a specifically human world, and language has been so thoroughly attached to this notion of consciousness, that it seems, in fact, to be synonymous with consciousness. And so, language is seen as the primary condition for being a conscious human subject. Accordingly, speculative thinking snags and loops back to this first and most deeply-rooted paradox: how can we use language to speak about things that are conditioned by language? Such feedbacking makes for wonderfully seductive and utterly revealing thinking-writing, but the risk is that language is imagined as being embedded somewhere deep in our humanity, acting as a little mirror that catches and reflects shared desire for essential meaning. A way to avoid this risk is to think language not at the level of a total symbolic system, but at the very moment of symbolic interface, where one thing evokes another, one thing is present alongside another, two incommensurate things co-exist. This thinking argues that language is infinite, heterogeneous and antiessentialist.

One, two and one, two, nine, second and five and that.²

Language is an ad hoc technology, where ad hoc refers to its circumstantial, occasional use, and technology refers to its modular, recombinatory and reiterative capabilities. There is no 'language,' in an abstract sense, only ever languages-in-use. Because language actively produces meaning, a process we might call signification, language is not merely the container or medium for signification but is signification itself. Meanings that have endured and have naturalised as facts can only be interrogated by looking to the ways that language habits are enforced at the level of social, cultural and legal process. Even the notion of meaning must be recognised as a habit: we often assume that meaning (or the meaningfulness of a meaningful life) is intrinsic, but meaning must be made, and one such way is through language. If language is an ad hoc technology there are circumstantial reasons why language is naturalised in certain significations. Language lends itself to such campaigns by being suggestive, but it also lends itself to opposing or resisting such campaigns by being generative.

My interest in poetics is not so much a reification of the aesthetic object known as the 'poem,' but the commitment to a method for reading language at the level of the smallest shifts in signification. Attention to how language is made, and for what reasons, is of course, an entirely political act. And attention to how language can be re-arranged and re-signified is an entirely philosophical act: against any call for an essential or singular meaning.

A letter which can wither, a learning which can suffer and an outrage which is simultaneous is principal.³

Astrid Lorange is a PhD candidate, researcher, teacher, poet and book indexer from Sydney.

¹ Gertrude Stein, "Arthur a Grammar," *How to Write*

² Gertrude Stein, "SUGAR," *Tender Buttons*

³ Gertrude Stein, "MUTTON," *Tender Buttons*

• Gertrude Stein

