

# eyeline

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pointer to what has been going on lately, specifically among South Australian artists. It might have seemed a show of recent Gallery acquisitions of South Australian work, or of Faulding Bequest purchases.

Chemistry could be seen as the Gallery's take on the 'truth' of recent history, or the bet it was placing—which one could accept, persuaded or otherwise—or judge against one's own conception of these years.

The exact status of the works was not clear. Some were neither Faulding, nor even Art Gallery of South Australia (AGSA) pieces. A number, in fact, were loaned by the artists. The catalogue had it that the Faulding Bequest purchases provided the exhibition 'core'. Worrying about who had 'made it' served to make the art community a little nervous and querulous but was pretty much a distraction. As a survey show it was interesting and probably more generous in point of numbers than it could have been if limited to recent gallery acquisitions. Still curator Sarah Thomas was able to avoid at least some gallery purchases.

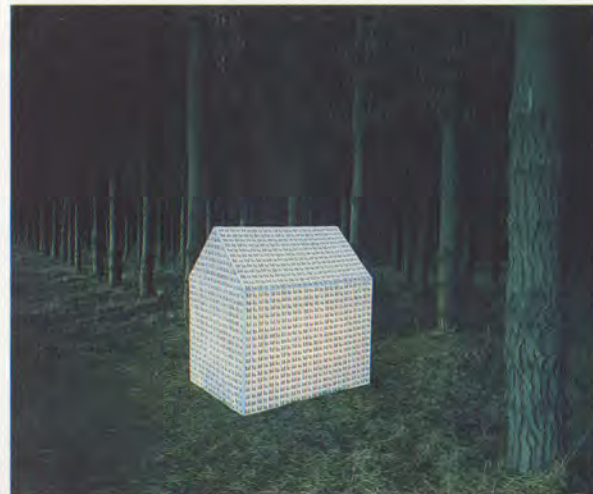
In having collected work by artists who were arousing interest over this last decade, Chemistry—and by extension the Gallery—was pretty much on the money. It registered accurately the character of South Australian—read largely Adelaide—art.

Chemistry was dominated by installation and a fairly high degree of abstraction in its thought: the legacies and dicta of conceptualism being grafted on to the neo-minimalism and kinds of postmodernism that have since come and gone. Indeed Chemistry threw the art into sufficient relief against the rest of Australian art to indicate a number of differences—of degree if not of kind. Adelaide art has a generally thoughtful air; its humour often is rather dark; it is rarely brash and instantaneous the way some Queensland art seems to be (Lyell Bary, Dale Frank, Rod Bunter for example); it has not had much truck with the grunge phenomenon (work like that of, say, Tracy Emin, Hany Armanious or Adam Cullen—and while Shaun Kirby has something of that aesthetic it is rarely central to his purposes or ever its point, merely the most economic, 'functionalist' means or route); there is less focus on popular culture (compared with Scott Redford for example); the aesthetic and habits of thought associated with a *povera* installation practice (by turns grave, literalist or ironical) reign; and Adelaide art has registered less fascination with new media or even with the conditioning effects of *the Media*. Of course the mostly single pieces collected here reveal only fractions of each artist's practice. Hewson/Walker, Alan Cruickshank, of those represented in Chemistry, have been concerned with the thematics of mediated and specular experience, but not as evidenced in this show.

Finally, there was very little of the handsomely or dashing commercial. (The small size of the market here cannot provide much temptation to stray from the purities of the disinterested pursuit of ... well, the thrilling, critical, satirical, mordant, analytical or witty. Some very good artists have shown with the Greenaway Gallery—as they had, to a degree, with Bob Steele's Anima Gallery a

**Right: Shaun Kirby, *German Tailor Scissors*, 1995.** Baby's jumpsuit with embroidery, aluminium. 72.0 x 30.0 cm. Faulding 150 Anniversary Fund for South Australian Contemporary Art 1995. Courtesy Art Gallery of South Australia.

**Far right: Bronwyn Platten, *A Monument to Wolf Children*, 2000.** Photographed by Brenton McGeachie. Back-lit colour transparency on polycarbonate sheet, aluminium light box. 133.0 x 106.0 x 20.0 cm. Faulding Fund for South Australian Contemporary Art 2000. Courtesy Art Gallery of South Australia.



decade earlier—but these will not generally have been artists from which Greenaway has made much money.)

Taking up so much room, installation seemed to dominate the character of Chemistry. It was also more difficult to show to advantage. The two-dimensional works, living within their own discrete frames, fared well in this respect, though I liked few of them—memorably, Anna Platten's painting of children in a mysterious tableau; Richard Grayson's painting, of decontextualised orthography and cynically beautiful colour; Pablo Byas; Anton Hart's amazingly compelling enactments of sight as non-passive, almost incriminating observation.

The exhibition's unavoidable shortcoming was that so much work is created in series and makes most complete sense, or only makes sense, seen that way. Grayson's paintings profit by being seen in number, Hart's even more so. This was true of many others in the show: Bronwyn Platten—though she was well represented, and, indeed, her work looked very good here—Shaun Kirby, John Barbour, Warren Vance, Aldo Iacobelli's record paintings. George Popperwell's installation was whole and singular, and so fared well. It was as if most artists working at all similarly were simply quoted. They work in the discursive space and with the syntax of solo exhibition and the trophy-room mentality of State Galleries misunderstands them, or protects audiences from dreaded 'ideology'.



**Julia Gorman, *A Piece of the Action*, 2000.** Adhesive vinyl on wall. Installation view Octopus 1, Gertrude Street, Melbourne. Courtesy the artist.

It was this that gave Chemistry something of its march-past effect: the gallery saluting, by 'sampling', great shows of the past—the great Kirby Sym Choon gallery show, the Platten *Aire de la Noche* exhibition. And so on. In contrast the paintings of, say, Ian Abdullah, Anna Platten were less handicapped in their isolation.

Chemistry was too big for the space (and the three weeks) the AGSA gave it: some works were a little hidden (under stairwells *etcetera*) or hard to locate (being elsewhere in the building), and very many were cramped. Some, such as Aleks Danko's solid, look-no-orifices house, a public sculpture, was *in situ* somewhere else. But this pointed to the show's real significance—an award ceremony nominating those deemed achievers, long-serving art-world footsoldiers, stars even.

**ken bolton**

*Ken Bolton's most recent book is August 6th; major collections (of poems) have been published by Penguin and Wakefield Press.*

## **octopus 1: michael graeve, a.d.s. donaldson, sandra selig, julia gorman**

200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy

Octopus 1 attempts to present the deterritorialisation of painting as an experimental site in contemporary life. The works of Michael Graeve, A.D.S. Donaldson, Sandra Selig and Julia Gorman *err* toward mutation amid the aftermath of post-modernity. There is a sense of entropy. Boundary conditions break up where limits touch; figure and ground, body and technology, time and space, culture and nature, identities and their milieu. These works slide toward nauseating optics. Operating through the interplay of light, colour, sound, digital imaging, architecture and pharmacology, they situate contemporary painting practice through a convulsive sense of space.

Michael Graeve's installation, *Frequency, rhythm and otherwise painted*, 2000, continues the artist's consistent

exploration of sound art and monochrome painting. Occupying the corner margin of the front gallery space is a suite of twelve meticulously prepared oil-on-linen paintings. They are tall and serialised with flat areas of plastic colour and painterly gestures deployed on the white gesso. Two speakers emit a sinewave recorded from an analogue synthesiser, approaching a stretched, pure sound without surface. Graeve's sound-art forms a synaesthetic murmur that intensifies the viewer's consciousness of the other works. *Untitled 2000*, A.D.S Donaldson's horizontal canvas of strobing, red and yellow enamel, spray-paint flashes seems to approximate the pitch of Graeve's sound emissions. The five unbroken, stretched lines simultaneously join and separate, divide and gather the measure of the boundary condition where painting approximates a sound.

Sandra Selig's horizontal weave of cotton thread, *Deep Time*, 2000, hovers like a 'virtual' presence between the main gallery's architectural supports. The work conveys a sense of hyperspace where surface effects are mediated by technology. This fold has neither subject nor object, only determinations, magnitudes and dimensions that multiply illusion and the void of perception.

Julia Gorman's static pink and orange, insectoid-robotic, wall collage, *A Piece of the Action*, 2000, may approach the spatial dispossession described by Surrealist, Roger Caillos. By cutting and adhering sections of contact, Gorman maps a frontier where attraction is devouring and convulsive. Approaching figuration and abstraction, the work cleaves perception and representation, viewer and work. Like the process of mimicry in insects, the viewer's perception of the work alters with every movement. The work intimates that desireless drive toward indistinction of synthetic subjectivities. It is regression beyond the infantile toward the inorganic.

The works included in *Octopus 1* express the extremities of a 'high modernist' visual drive to cancel the figure from its surrounding space and background. It is a drive to form a continuous field that is unimaginable for the body to traverse, but into which the viewer's eye might easily slide—in an effortless, soaring, optical movement—toward a purified space that may dispense with the body and its lamentable drives. The viewer slips into the folded dimensions, depths and distances of this simulacral field – and risks disappearing into formlessness.

**charlotte hallows**

## **rod moss: once upon a time in the centre**

Fire-Works Gallery, Brisbane  
4 August–2 September

The drawings and paintings on paper in this exhibition are the continuation of a body of work begun by Rod Moss in the early 1980s, precipitated by his move to the Northern Territory from Victoria. Moss originally began producing landscape drawings as a means of coming to grips with

the alien terrain of Alice Springs. However, an encounter with the children of a group of eastern Arrernte people living in camps at Whitegate, outside town, led to Moss's gradual engagement with these families, and their inclusion in his imagery of the Centre. It is these people who populate his large-scale figurative works. Dubbed 'realist documentary' paintings, Moss's works in fact play on the notion of truth-value inherent in realist painting. Drawing on his large collection of snapshot photographs, Moss creates both tableaux depicting real scenes and events, and enigmatically allegorical compositions.

Advocates of Moss's work argue that it has not received the exposure it deserves. It is perhaps not impossible for us to understand why this might be so. These works are hard to look at, almost everything about them inducing in the viewer a sense of unease. Moss has developed an unusual technique in which the bodies of Aboriginal figures are subtly rendered in graphite pencil, with the remainder of the image, including any non-Aboriginal figures, painted loudly in acrylic paint using a neo-pointillist style and intensely high-key chroma. Moss's choice of media produces a collision between modalities perceived as oppositions — draughtsmanship versus painterliness, objectivity versus subjectivity, realism versus expressivity — that does not sit neatly within conventional notions of high art, but strays dangerously close to kitsch.

Even more problematic is Moss's subject matter. How are we to react to these black figures depicted by a white man? We can almost feel the panic welling up inside. There is something about these black faces that brings with them uncomfortable reminders of images on 1950s transfer-printed plates. Perhaps it is our own angst that has been displaced from these figures onto the paint itself, producing this frantic, overwrought chaos of unbearable colour. Undoubtedly, there remains in the Australian consciousness an uncertainty towards figuring the black body. Those artists who have been successful in doing so, of whom Tracey Moffatt and Gordon Bennett are spectacular examples, produce work that is very self-conscious of its engagement with post-colonial discourse. They are also black. While Moss's use of graphite references the works' origins in photographs and hints at the long history of anthropological depictions of Aborigines, his project is one of genuine striving for an understanding of Eastern Arrernte culture at a personal level.



Rod Moss, *Ted & Raphael—Games Played*, 1992. Acrylic and graphite on paper. 96 x 160 cm. Courtesy Fire-Works Gallery, Brisbane.

Despite the odds against it, the relationship Moss has developed with these people is a close one, the community elders seizing upon his work as a vehicle with which to record and reinforce their culture. Moss writes, 'References are made to me about being their painter. I'm given photos to draw up...I've been "commissioned" to interpret ceremonies and these efforts have been regarded as a way of keeping Arrernte culture going; in the public eye, if you like'.<sup>1</sup> With their dual function of educating both Aboriginal youngsters and white society about Aboriginal beliefs and traditions, the Papunya school mural and Yuendumu doors might serve as better precedents for Moss's art than any contemporary art in the usual understanding of the term. Fire-Works gallery director Michael Eather has long been interested in the possibility of contemporary Australian art based on 'shared influences'.<sup>2</sup> Rod Moss's work attests to this vision.

**alison lee**

## **notes**

1. Rod Moss, *Where do you come from, Brother boy? (Territorial Bodies)*, ex. cat., The Araluen Centre, Alice Springs, 1998, p. 4.
2. Michael Eather and Marlene Hall, *Balance 1990: views, visions, influences*, ex. cat., Queensland Art Gallery, South Brisbane, 1990, p. 8.

## **Vinyl**

Blaugrau, Sydney  
14–24 September 2000

It says something about technological development that a material as artificial as vinyl has attained the status of being almost organic. The vinyl record, admired for its warmth and versatility yet derided for its sensitivity and tendency to age quite badly, had no chance against the glamorous if brittle consistency of the compact disc. However, the CD has since proved to be not quite the durable format it was initially promoted to be (I remember first seeing them on TV being used as drinks' coasters to demonstrate their toughness), and looks like being overtaken by the superior DVD. Meanwhile, the vinyl record has steadily regained its profile. While it will never return as the format of choice for the average punter, it is still the primary medium for club-based dance music, a global phenomenon that shows no signs of abating. It has become specialist rather than mainstream, but this has only added to its allure.

Vinyl was always a format that encouraged display, with gatefold sleeves, endless inserts, coloured and shaped records, even cryptic messages etched into the runoff grooves. The physicality of vinyl records, and the performative nature of their interaction with the record-playing equipment and the listener, means that vinyl has also come into its own as a raw material for artists. Marco Fusinato's various experiments with record making and playing, Mutlu Çerkez's turntables and imaginary bootlegs