

Issue #45



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Front and back cover: E.L.K,
Jesus H. Chimp,
Aerosol on wood. 1 of 5.
600x1200mm.

Above: **Ross Watson**
Untitled #03-10 (after van de Velde, 1672; featuring Matthew Mitcham)

Contributors

Madeline Winch

A disturbing trend has emerged over the last decade in contemporary art practice.

Elizabeth Geyer

To gain access to the benefits that this 'lucky country' has to offer, it is a great advantage if you are born white.

Emiline Forster

The line between performance art and performing arts is becoming increasingly blurred.

Marina Grasso

The virtual and the real can enhance and complement the entire experience of art and galleries in harmony.

Lucy Ainsworth

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Carey Corbett

Being asked to attend a museum offers a very different experience from being invited to a block party.

Alexander Bellemore

Polo's work addresses and revolutionises the mundanity of daily routine.

Ellin Williams

The term 'site-specific' has been appearing in artists' statements all over the world.

Jess De La Hunty

Can an entity be considered taboo for what it's designed to do rather than what it does?

Kathleen Worboys

What is the difference between a naked body and a nude?

Sophie Venardos

Stevenson throws his audience right in the deep end of his diverse discussions.

Georgina Payne-Loy

The f**k-god, f**k-the-world, fuck-the-art-scene mentality cruises through each of E.L.K's artworks.

Elizabeth Robinson

TextaQueen is able to make compelling comments through her simplistic and naive style.

Rebecca Rossman

What did art ever do to you?

Laura Gamio Raluy

Maybe we have always been but vessels of nature.

Dorothy Lui

Gascoigne's art has a wonderful weathered quality to it.

Charles Heyen

Without realising it I started collecting artists about five years ago.

Julie Kim

Sometimes the best artwork causes controversy and super-real art is no exception.

Phoebe Chan

One day, the bubble just burst and all that was left was disruption, despair and repression.

Vivian Low

Through painting, hopes, fears and ideas are all translated into a personal visual language.

Jack Mochan

The beauty of Ross Watson's paintings and photographs is impossible to sum up in one glib phrase.

Sandy Chien

As a creative industry, art has to keep evolving to pursue its real value.

Catherine Brown

People always want to analyse the rejected.

Catherine Mesenberg

Auctions, it seems, can trigger the fight-or-flight impulse.

Emma Robertson

John Kaldor has pushed the limits of art in Australia for almost forty-two years.

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Editorial

Welcome to *ArtWrite* #45. *ArtWrite* is an online magazine of student writing created by students at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. The feature articles in this edition are about undercurrents. We look at what's bubbling under the surface of the art world and try to spot the artists, trends and ideas that are waiting to burst into the open.

We enquire into how art affects communities, from the development of the arts in Sydney's West to the global impact of the Google Art Project. We unearth the deliciously disturbing trend of taxidermy and examine the well-known and always subversive art of Richard Bell and Vernon Ah Kee.

We also review a broad range of exhibitions, from artists as diverse as Canberra stencil artist E.L.K to Avant-garde multimedia artist Michael Stevenson, from various incarnations of the naked body to... more versions of the naked body. Finally, we look at a number of forces that are shaping the art world of today, including commerce, nature and social media.

ArtWrite could not have come together without the fantastic efforts of this cohort of students. The standard of the articles is testament to the hard work not only of the authors but also of the team of editors that made sure each article was at its peak. In addition the design team have done an incredible job of bringing twenty-five disparate articles together into one cohesive (and very good-looking) whole.

Special thanks must go to Margaret Farmer, who guided us through this complex process. Her knowledge and generosity have been great catalysts in working towards creating this edition.

We hope you enjoy meandering through this collection of articles.

Emiline Forster
Editor-in-Chief
ArtWrite #45

Death and Taxidermy

by Madeline Winch

A disturbing trend has emerged over the last decade in contemporary art practice. Initially it was just a few, lone artists. Today, the somewhat creepy practice of Taxidermy – yes, the stuffing of dead animals - has become mainstream and is a full-blown trend.

Taxidermy is traditionally considered a highly skilled craft rather than an art form. Like craft in general, taxidermy is experiencing a renaissance, particularly in the art world. Is it simply that once Damien Hirst does something, it is only a matter of time before everyone else follows? Or is there something else behind this turn to taxidermy?

The word taxidermy originates from the Greek ‘taxis’ meaning arrangement and ‘derma’ meaning skin. Taxidermy is a skill where the skin of a dead animal is taken and treated (to ‘freeze’ it). The skin is then stretched over an artificial form (like a mannequin), its features arranged to represent a life-like expression. While the Egyptians were perhaps the first to preserve animals after death, the Victorians were the original masters of this art form when the idea of preserving the liveliness of a creature for perpetuity was very popular. This era was all about discovery, scientific study and the natural world. Even Charles Darwin had advanced skills in taxidermy.

Renowned for being a bit over the top, the Victorians went as far as creating furniture from parts of

animals. They used legs for lamps, feet and claws for chairs and even fashioned his and her elephant bed heads. This macabre furniture trend has also been revived with contemporary designers and artists creating strange, grotesque and gothic pieces. Chilean-born, New York-based artist and designer Sebastian Errazuriz is one such creator whose quirky piece *The Duck Lamp* 2002 plays with the dichotomy of life and death. By using common objects (that is, the lamp not the goose) he reminds people of their own mortality with an absurd but humorous approach. Errazuriz is leading the way in taxidermy applied in design.

Many contemporary artists have explored this niche medium in recent years. Mary Frey is an American photographer who studies the relationship between photography and taxidermy. She describes this connection:

Photography invites us to pay attention. It describes with economy, precision and detail. It enables us to stare, scrutinize, and become voyeurs. Taxidermy allows us to do the same. Its complete replication of an animal's stance, gesture and look provides us a way to study and comprehend its existence.”(Frey)

Here, taxidermy is observed as a medium that creates similar references to photography, recalling its original scientific and observational uses. While taxidermy will always have significant connections to the notion

of 'the real', the added elements of fantasy, anthropomorphism, the absurd and the exquisite have pushed this medium beyond science and craft.

Damien Hirst has had a prolific artistic career which centres on the theme of death. Hirst is most famous for the Turner prize winning work *The physical impossibility of death in the mind of someone living*, 1991, where he commissioned a fisherman in Australia to catch a shark "big enough to eat you" (Barber). He then had the shark preserved in a glass tank of formaldehyde and placed the tank in a gallery. When criticized that this was of the 'anybody could do that' school of art, Hirst replied, "But you didn't, did you?"

Making a big, bold statement on the terrifying nature of the inevitability of death, Hirst is also asking us to consider the state of the 'in between' and the precious nature of life. The result is a visually stunning work that is both horrifying and serene.

Other artists who have taxidermic tendencies include Maurizio Cattelan (whose work *The ballad of Trotsky*, 1996 is affectionately known as the 'hanging horse'), Louise Weaver, Polly Morgan, Kohei Nawa, Julia DeVille and Anna Wili Highfield, to name just a few. These artists all work with dead animals, directly and indirectly. While some of the work is frightening, it always provokes a strong reaction in the viewer. For some people it is sickening, whereas for others it is a reminder of the beauty in life. Is this where the power of taxidermy lies? Could it be that artists are turning to this morbid craft because it stirs an emotional response from the viewer?

Julia DeVille certainly actively seeks to evoke an emotional response from her viewers. DeVille creates wearable taxidermy by using road kill to form the base of her highly collectable jewellery and sculpture. Her practice began with an innocent curiosity in beauty and nature. Eager to learn the delicate craft of taxidermy, DeVille would bring her roadkill to Mineur's workshop. Interested in exploring the art as a way of celebrating life, DeVille's practice has grown since and, far from being morbid, DeVille describes the philosophy behind her work as positive. She says "I believe if we can identify with our mortality, we can, in turn appreciate the significance of life." (DeVille in *Habitus*) In this way, her practice is reminiscent of the medieval term 'memento mori', which loosely translates to 'remember you will die.' In *Stillborn angel*, 2009, DeVille captures a peaceful silence, weakness and loss in a delicate and sensitive

way. She respectfully places sparrow wings on a still-born puppy, the creature still tightly curled in a foetal position. It is a powerful work with serious tones, promoting reflection in the viewer. DeVille skillfully exercises the authority of taxidermy; it is, if nothing else, a reminder of our fragility and that is always confronting.

The past is always with us. Only now are there just as many people living as have ever died in history. Jennifer Higgie, co-editor of the magazine *Frieze*, suggests that we are constantly reminded of, and surrounded by, the legacy of our ancestors. We celebrate their achievements and mourn their failure and recognise our own futures through the actions of our predecessors. She says:

Despite our period's obsession with newness, youth and change, most of us spend at least as much time with the dead as with the living. We inhabit their buildings, read their books, look at their art and listen to their music; more recently, of course, their photographs and films have transformed our understanding of the world, and our lives are governed by the legacy of their politics and their religions. (Higgie)

In a world of change and uncertainty, it is natural to look to our past with a glow of affection, a longing for 'the good old days'. Taxidermy is an art that opens these channels and allows viewers to reflect on past, present and future. As a mass culture, the world is responding to climate change and environmental issues by way of preserving our natural history for future generations. We are more than ever challenged by possibilities of destruction, terrorism and violence. Artists like Hirst and DeVille are simply responding to these changes. They are not intending to be macabre. Rather, they are turning to what is worth celebrating – the beauty of life. Taxidermy has gained popularity in the last couple of decades in both the art world and the design world and is an indicator of uncertainty and insecurity. The fragility of human existence is a theme of increasing importance. **a**

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Above: Julia DeVille, *Stillborn Angel*, stillborn puppy, sparrow wings and sterling silver, 2009. Image taken by Terence Bogue



Aust-racism: The art of Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell

by Elizabeth Geyer

Both at home and abroad, Australia is known as the 'lucky country'; a nation that is founded on the values of mateship, egalitarianism and a 'fair go' for all. With a national persona such as this, it is easy to be attracted to the notion that we live in a multicultural society, where there is tolerance, justice and equality. However, for artists Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell, this sentiment is "bullshit" (Bell et al, 2006). There is one element of this national portrait that is missing: to gain access to the benefits that this 'lucky country' has to offer, it is a great advantage if you are born white.

The suggestion that racism or white privilege still exists in Australia in the twenty-first century may come as a surprise to some. However, with our recent his-

tory of violence, exclusion and assimilation, it should not be so surprising that some of these sentiments are still embedded within the minds of many Australians today. In 2005, these sentiments sprawled onto the streets of Cronulla during the Cronulla Riots when chants and slogans such as 'Aussie Pride' and 'we grew here, you flew here' echoed through the angry crowds. However, it is not just new immigrants that are subject to this racist sentiment. In 2004, the suspicious death in custody of Mr Doomadgee, an Aboriginal man who died from massive internal injuries while in police custody on Palm Island, added fuel to the fire for the acknowledgement of past and present injustices facing Indigenous Australians. In 2008 the horrific death of Mr Ward, a well-respected community elder

from Western Australia who died from heatstroke after travelling 400kms in the back of an unventilated prison van, left a burning question inside the minds of many Australians: "How could a society that would like to think of itself as civilised allow a human being to be treated in such a way?" (Hope, 2009) For Vernon Ah Kee, the answer is simple, yet frightfully deplorable: "Australia struggles to acknowledge Aboriginal people as fully human" (Ah Kee, 2010). Just last year, Australians on the east coast had to address this issue as rugby league player Timana Tahu stormed out of the State of Origin team over racist comments made by the assistant coach.

Both Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell are Murri artists (Indigenous Australian artists from Queensland/Northern New South Wales) who have experienced and witnessed racism, injustice and intolerance throughout their lives. Both artists are founding members of the proppaNOW artist collective and create strong, powerful works about culture, identity, politics and resilience. Ah Kee and Bell have created a selection of works throughout their artistic careers that refer explicitly to the racism, injustice and white privilege that exists in Australia today.

This is demonstrated in works such as Vernon Ah Kee's early text-based work *If I was white*, 1999. The work consists of small panels printed with text, which are placed side by side and above each other; each one starting with "if I was white...". Ah Kee has then produced numerous examples of situations where he has been aware of his colour and reverses the situation, so that viewers become aware of their whiteness;

"If I was White I could buy Band-Aids the same colour as my skin...what if all Band-Aids were black?"

"If I was White I could say this land has been in my family for three generations"

The concept of white privilege has been around for decades, though most of the theory has focused on the American social condition. It is essentially a theo-

Left: Richard Bell.
Kamilaroi/Kooma/Gurang Gurang.
Pigeonholed. 1992.
Photographic panels on hardboard
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery
Right: Vernon Ah Kee
Kuku Yalanji/Yidinji/Waanyi/Gugu Yimithirr
If I was White, 1999.
Print, computer generated
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery

ry where whiteness is also seen as a racial and cultural being and that there are advantages and privileges one can gain in a society from being white. Vernon Ah Kee exposes these privileges by using examples where he has been aware of his colour and his 'Aboriginality'.

In later works, Ah Kee has continued to experiment with and manipulate text through various fonts, layouts and kerning techniques to expose the kind of racism he experiences on a daily basis. *Austracism*, 2003 is a monumental text-based work that consists of direct quotes and common racist sentiments surrounding Indigenous Australians. Each line begins with "I'm not racist but..." which both conflicts with the following sentiment and makes one reflect and question issues of race and the power of language to categorise and contain. Printed on top of these lines are the words "aust" in solid black and "racism" in a light grey that allows the lines of the text from the background to emanate through. The light grey text almost appears to be a ghostly backdrop. Racism is something that should not exist within Australia today, and yet the quotes prove that a silenced form of racism still floats in the minds of many Australians. The two words come together to create a new word, "austracism," which, when spoken aloud, sounds a lot like 'ostracism' (Baum, 2003). One of the great powers of Vernon Ah Kee's work is its ability to change the

If I was White
I could go to church
and Jesus Christ would
look like me.

**Imagine Christ images all over the
world being black.**

meaning and context of a word, and reveal an Indigenous Australian perspective. Ah Kee has explained that “a lot of my work is produced in opposition to the general ideas that Australian culture holds for itself.”(Ah Kee, 2010).

While Vernon Ah Kee certainly has a strong and potent message within his work, Richard Bell has a more ‘in your face’ method for expressing his opinions on racism, intolerance and injustice within Australia today. It can be argued that Bell has formed his own persona within the art world where, as Gary Foley explains, “he creates discomfort by his very presence. He represents a loud reminder of historical injustice, present hypocrisy and the reality of an ongoing Indigenous resistance and challenge to the cultural hegemony of white Australia.” Bell also incorporates humour, wit and irony within his work, as sometimes you can get away with saying more if it is done in a humorous tone.

In an early work, *Pigeon holed*, 1992, Bell confronts the viewer’s tendency to typecast and stereotype people based on their appearance and colour. *Pigeon holed* comprises of six reproductions of a photograph of Richard Bell. He stares angrily at something beyond the camera lens and appears to be yelling abuse

at someone. Bell wears a jacket, exposing his chest and baring his toothless mouth. Underneath each image he has placed a single word: drinker, tailor, sold yer, failure, butcher, and baker. Bell’s choice of words can be seen as an appropriation of the English children’s rhyme *Tinker, Tailor*. This rhyme was also used as the title for a 1974 British spy novel titled *Tinker, Tailor, Soldier, Spy*. In Bell’s work, the words ‘drinker, sold yer and failure’ are in white text on a black background, whereas ‘tailor, butcher and baker’ are vice-versa. It appears Bell is emphasising established racial stereotypes, casting himself in the roles of a ‘drinker’ or a ‘failure’ rather than as a ‘butcher’ or ‘baker’.

The final panel in *Pigeon holed* has the text ‘Trouble Maker’. Instead of a seventh photo of Bell, he has placed a mirror. Bell has turned the tables and now the viewer is the one being categorised, contained and stereotyped in a manner that does not feel appropriate. This moment of realisation is obviously uncomfortable, and provokes one to reflect and reconsider the willingness to passively accept the stereotypes that had been placed on Bell. Richard Bell has used the mirror to both incite a feeling of victimisation within the viewer, while also laying bare their innate racist tendencies.

Richard Bell has continued to confront non-Indigenous racist tendencies in video works such as *Uz Vs. Them*, 2006. The setting is a boxing ring and a young angry white man prepares to take on ‘Ritchie’ in a fight. The white man is in shorts and a wife beater tank top and appears flustered and irrational. He states “Bell’s going down” and angrily explains how his taxes are wasted on Indigenous people. “This is war. I’m fighting for Australia...I’m sick of it!” In contrast, Ritchie is calm and collected, wearing a suit and he has a group of young white girls cheering him on. Ritchie exposes how pitiful this angry white man is, and fights back with lines such as “the trouble with white people...is that they’re lazy...I’m not racist. Some of my best friends are white.” Here, Bell uses a snide and ironic humour to get his message across. Whilst the film is humorous, Bell’s words also sting like a bee; “I don’t need a tax cut. I want my country back.” Bell once again reveals the power of words and subverts common racist sentiments found within Australia today.

Another noteworthy work by Bell is his *Devine inspiration*, a mixed media painting with a text panel created in 1993. Bell reproduces and enlarges an article by one of Australia’s esteemed columnists, Frank Devine. The title of the article is ‘White guilt won’t help black cause’ and Devine gives his opinionated response to the 1987 Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Devine questions the Federal government’s response to accept all but one of the 339 recommendations as policy, and questions the need for policies created especially for Indigenous Australians. “Governments should move towards dismantling the whole structure of ‘Aboriginal’ policies, departments and institutions” (Devine, quoted in Bell, 1993).

Devine’s article is based on the argument that to have a true democracy in Australia everyone should be treated equally. However, this notion of democracy does not equate to equality, particularly for Indigenous Australians. Devine’s language is patronising, conceited and inconsiderate. Bell’s response or ‘Devine inspiration’ is his accompanying painting. Bell has re-written the entire alphabet, beginning with racist language in Australia targeted at Indigenous Australians such as “Abos, Blacks, Coons...” However by the end of the alphabet, Richard Bell has attacked the coloniser, calling him a “Very Weak Xenophobic Yobbo Zookeeper”. It is Bell’s attempt at Indigenous decolonisation. Or, as Bell explains “I see myself as the coloniser. I am recolonising these f**kers. I’m us-

ing their language to do it...It’s something familiar yet unfamiliar, you can’t miss it, you go directly to their subconscious.”(Bell, quoted in Moore, 2006)

It is clear that both artists explore the power of words and language within their art. Both Ah Kee and Bell have a tendency to destabilise the meaning of a word, and “instil colour to illuminate whiteness.” (Moreton-Robinson, 2004) While it may be tempting to categorise or pass these works off as merely angry, political art, their work is actually saying a lot more. It is a comment on Australian society today. The art provokes self-reflection and scrutiny within the viewer. Vernon Ah Kee and Richard Bell are just two examples of Murri artists who have grown up with racism, injustice and inequality and are now intolerant of ignorance. Their mission is like a burning fire that will never be smothered or extinguished. **a**

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Left: Vernon Ah Kee Kuku Yalanji/Yidinji/Waanyi/Gugu Yimithirr peoples born 1967 Australia. *Austracism* 2003 ink on polypropylene board, satin laminate 120 x 180 cm. National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Purchased 2004 Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane © Vernon Ah Kee

The Performing Body: Performance Art and Performing Arts

by Emiline Forster



Above: Phillip Adams Balletlab, *Nativity*
Choreographed by Phillip Adams, 2003.
Photo by Jeff Busby

Breath catches in your throat. You can't quite believe what is happening. Your stomach drops to the floor and your palms are sweaty. Welcome to the work of choreographer Phillip Adams and performance/installation artist David Cross.

Despite their markedly contrasting approaches to performance making, there are striking similarities between the works of Adams and Cross. Both make challenging, electrifying works that perch on the boundaries of their respective forms. Both incite genuinely visceral reactions in their audiences through the construction of sometimes confronting situations. Both are obsessed with the human body and the myriad of possibilities it offers. Above all, a comparison of both artists suggests that the line between performance art and performing arts is becoming increasingly blurred.

Cross draws on historical expectations and structures of performance art, reframing them by questioning the audience's perception of the performing body. In his work *Viscous*, 1999, he uses concealment to great effect, allowing the audience to stumble unexpectedly upon real human engagement in a gallery space. *Eye to eye*, 2002, juxtaposes his live flesh with a square of video over his left eye, revealing alternative physical possibilities and undermining our sense of the live body (David Cross website <http://www.davidcrossartist.com/>).

Adams returned to Australia with a broad view of dance following ten years in New York working with post-modern dance artists such as Trisha Brown. His first work, *Amplification*, 1999, was a furiously physi-

cal investigation of the fragility of human existence. The work uses the body's sculptural properties in tandem with inanimate objects to portray these ideas in ways that at times come very close to performance art. In one scene, the hundreds of thin black tape-strands that link two seated individuals are slowly cut by the other performers, subtly recalling Marina Abramovic's 1974 performance *Rhythm 0*.

Working with objects is demonstrably central to both makers. In a paper entitled 'Partial bodies, partial objects', (CoLab Misperforming Symposium, 2009) Cross states that "the partial use of objects in tandem with the partial manipulation/ representation of the body offers a litany of possibilities for drawing audiences into new understandings of liveness". He explores this throughout his practice by working simultaneously with performance and installation. Adams too goes beyond the expected use of props in dance, utilising inanimate objects to engage the audience with the physical bodies that are animating them.

Adams' *Nativity*, 2003, and Cross' *Pump*, 2009, are striking examples of the elegant meeting of human and object in both artists' practices. *Nativity* takes place in the intimate setting of Adams' idealised 1950's home, resplendent with taxidermied animals, awful carpet and hills hoist. The environment is rife with subversion – this house is in fact a set situated within a traditional theatre space, resulting in an unexpectedly interactive audience experience. Audience members are welcomed and allocated a seat by the choreographer himself, whose reflections on a 50's childhood throughout the piece lead into danced segments both within the living room and in



Above: Phillip Adams Balletlab, *Amplification*.
Choreographed by Phillip Adams, 1999/ 2011.
Photo by Jeff Busby

other rooms or outside the house. There is a touch of Matthew Barney in the frightening creatures that flit beneath the shiny Laminexed surface, and the visitation of God in the unearthly nativity towards the end where a stuffed echidna floats skyward.

Objects are central because they allow Adams to establish a set of expectations that are then theatrically undermined, not unlike Cross playing on traditional notions of performance art. They are also an integral part of Adams' own artistic realisation. "I am a frustrated visual artist," says Adams, "and I am also a frustrated performance artist." (Adams, interview with author, 2011) He notes that tangible objects are integral in cuing his ideas and catalysing the intangible choreographic process. In another work, *Origami*, this is taken to an extreme as movement arises simply from the meditative sculpting and re-sculpting of a giant piece of origami.

In *Pump*, Cross uses the object to enlist the audience as co-performers. The work consists of a bright yellow inflatable with two 'head holes', one for the performer and one for the audience member. It is linked to two

foot-pumps and only remains inflated by the action of these pumps. Here the object is a gateway to the intangible physical experience, enabling a particular relationship where it otherwise may not have occurred.

Often in Cross' work the realisation of a human relationship through a human/object relationship occurs even more unexpectedly. *Bounce*, 2006, took the form of a giant rounded installation that could be climbed and played on. At the top of the installation were two eyeholes from which the artist, hidden underneath the dome, could observe those above him. Anyone curious enough made the startling discovery of living flesh below, shifting the meaning of the sculpture. Where once there stood a child's playground there now squatted a prison. In the same way, Adams' *Nativity* turns childhood nostalgia into a religious nightmare.

Both artists clearly hone in on the potential of both the performing and viewing body to identify with and physically decipher themes of fear and vulnerability. *Pause*, 2011, is one of Cross' latest works and plays

upon the body's involuntary physical reactions to stimuli. It involves climbing to the top of an inflatable structure, then lowering oneself about halfway down until your feet come to rest on a pair of hands. These hands are all that suspend you in the space and prevent you from falling to the bottom of the structure.

The end of the performance occurs as a result of the choice to disengage made by either the performer or the audience member/ participant. The risk and uncertainty involved in such an endeavour is paramount to the power of the performance, bringing to the fore natural human fear reactions through a simulated experience. Such an experience demonstrates the power of participatory performance to transform us from one state to another and incite a specific set of reactions that in essence become the artwork, with the installation simply a vehicle through which to achieve these responses.

Adams' choreography, though generally not directly participatory, can incite similar responses. The theatrical potential of suspending reality is used to engage the audience in surreal circumstances that can then be related back to their personal lives. For instance, in order to communicate the traumatic subject matter of a car crash, *Amplification* must manufacture this engagement not only intellectually but also emotionally and physically.

Amplification draws upon intense physicality and sound to do this. Two duets in which one dancer violently manipulates the other evoke shock and the

sensation of loss of control that is experienced in a car crash. Shock is often utilised by Adams in this way to encourage realisation in the audience of the horror they are observing and to incite a visceral reaction of fear and pity for the performers that they then transpose onto their own lives.

It is ludicrous to argue that the whole of Adams' and Cross' practices adhere to this remarkable synergy. Cross' work is very much reliant on the presence of an audience participant willing to enable its performance. His works are generally durational to some extent in order to allow one-on-one participation. Each work takes the form of a structured improvisation, allowing unexpected circumstances to be dealt with as they arise. He also diversifies into other forms occasionally in order to serve his concept, for instance in the *Embellishment* series, 2005, where portraiture and video documentation enable an interrogation of creative processes of representation, or video art piece *Receding plane*, 2008, which challenges our expectations of aesthetics.

Conversely, Adams is very much committed to dance, using it as his chosen form to "leverage the body into a more performative domain". "I am somebody that is preoccupied with taking the language of dance – my first language – and unearthing that in ways that are performative, visual, cinematic, and other. So [while I am committed to dance] I call myself an artist." (Adams, 2011) His works are generally self contained and could physically occur without an audience present. There is a more or less fixed duration for the work,



Right: David Cross, *Hold*.
Inflatable sculpture/ performance, Performance Space, Sydney, 2010.
Photo by Alex Davies.

and the choreography remains relatively similar from performance to performance. Yet although the audience is watching a performance from the outside they remain highly emotionally and viscerally involved.

Two works illustrate this point beautifully. Both are works that I have personally seen and participated in – *Hold* (Performance Space, 2010) by Cross and *Miracle* (Arts House, 2009) by Adams. Both are eerily similar in their investigation of concepts of truth and trust, and their at times confronting exploration of fear and death.

In *Hold* you enter a dark inflatable world, presented with a treacherous route across a long, slim, shelf high above the ground. The only offer of help is a disembodied hand that presents itself through a slot in the wall, offering fragile salvation. The work is predicated on the ability of the participant to trust a stranger, the only person who can keep you from falling into the abyss. More disturbing is that you can never know of the truth of the performance. The tactile grip of this mystery hand suggests that the person on the other side of the wall is undergoing a similar trust-based experience, but you can never be sure.

This work provokes powerful visceral reactions. My feet prickled, my stomach tightened and my hands

were sweaty. I see poorly in the dark and found this incredibly confronting, relying intensely on the floating hand to steer my course. In many ways the work is about belief in an external power, not only the person on the other side of the wall but also in the integrity of the structure itself – that it won't collapse around you and that it would cushion you should you fall. It brings to mind the vulnerability of the human condition and our fear of abandonment, triggering a voyeuristic journey into our own psyche.

Miracle uses religion as a springboard to explore similar themes of trust in an external force. There is a section in which the dancers run forward and back on the diagonal, wailing with adoration and appealing to a higher power for salvation. The work is based on extensive research into religious cults, particularly the Jonestown tragedy, resulting in an exploration of blind trust not dissimilar to that in *Hold*. The obvious helplessness of these human beings, the blindness of their faith and their unrestrained mania inflame in the audience a myriad of simultaneous reactions including not only revulsion and fear but also pity. Interestingly this occurs through the committed performance of a relatively simple choreographic device, running on the diagonal and yelling, something not typically associated with 'dance' but more common in the domain of 'live art'.



Left: David Cross, *Pump*
Inflatable sculpture/ performance, Performance Space, Sydney, 2010.

Photo by Bec Dean

Above: Phillip Adams Balletlab, *Miracle*, choreographed by Phillip Adams, 2009. Photo by Jeff Busby.



In another section, two dancers levitate as modern day monks. The amazing theatrical miracle is akin to *Hold* in its identification with the void, playing with what is not seen and questioning the integrity of mechanised structures. We know that the truth of what we are seeing belies our vision, but that similarly the performers are relying on a fragile structure that could bring them crashing to the ground. It is this exciting uncertainty that makes their meditative stillness more impressive and offers a complex route into a physical identification with, and understanding of, the structure of the bodies perched in mid air in front of you. Again, reactions are a juxtaposition of muscular calmness from the beauty of the image with a quickening pulse from fear for the performers.

The domain of performance is incredibly broad yet is inextricably defined by the involvement of a human body. The body brings with it a unique set of signs and symbols, pathways to identification and meaning simply

because there is a living, breathing person present within the space with whom an audience can relate. Regardless of the performance methodologies employed by either Cross or Adams, or indeed any other artist whether from a dance or visual arts background, the broad result is the same – we engage in experiences that challenge us and resonate with us because the common factor is that we are all human. **a**

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See David Cross' website for more information on his works, <http://www.davidcrossartist.com/>

For more information on Phillip Adams and his work, visit the Balletlab website <http://www.balletlab.com/>

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All quotes from Phillip Adams in this article come from an interview conducted by Emiline Forster on 20th April 2011

Is the Virtual Gallery robbing us of our real experiences or simply bringing the real closer to us?

An Analysis of Google Art Project's impact on the Art Classroom and Art Museum excursion.

by Marina Grasso

In February of this year Google launched a new platform in digital mapping called Google Art Project that utilises technology previously used in Google Street View within seventeen museums and galleries across the globe. Google executives explained this move to open up the galleries of some of the most prestigious collections in the world as a means for “provid[ing] encouragement and inspiration for people to travel to the galleries and see the paintings up close in person” (Brown, 2011, p.1). Whilst the digital gallery is not new news - most museums and galleries have a digital collection available to the public to search through on their websites - the zooming features Google Art Project boasts are, according to Google convert and director of the Tate Britain Nicholas Serota, “a revelation in the way we see and understand artworks” (Serota quoted in Brown, 2011, p.1). This “revelation” caused me to pause and think about the value of this technology within the context of my experiences as a high school art teacher and question whether the virtual galleries of today might give credence to Walter Benjamin’s theories about the importance of the original and the reproduction within film.

I mentioned the Google Art Project launch date with my teaching colleagues and most were ignorant of the site but very interested to explore it. We discussed the value of being able to take our students

on virtual journeys of the galleries of the world. The Louvre already has its own very sophisticated three-dimensional renderings of galleries that you can access like a video game, rotating on a 360° axis. As often is the case when discussing how we should present information to our students, the question of generational difference and expectation came up. Most of my colleagues grew up in the 1970’s and 1980’s; virtual reality was on the periphery of their childhood, still in the development stages. I on the other hand, being just young enough to slip into the trendy Gen Y clique, have experienced firsthand the development of the Internet and with it, the multi-realities of time and place existing in multiple places at once. The Internet is a difficult landscape for some of my colleagues, still holding on to their principles of the private experience. Even more difficult to grasp is the notion of simulated realities that are so realistic that it is hard to distinguish the simulated from the real. This simulated reality is the issue at play within Google Art Project. What it offers is both a simulation of the reality of the places and artworks it represents but also, by exploring the virtual galleries via the program, you are having a kind of ‘real’ experience. The acceptance of this simulated experience as reality is often at odds with our sensibilities.

Let us return to my initial point on Google Art Project. I too was seduced by the notion of taking my

students to New York or Berlin without the headache of twenty-four hour flights, the dreaded risk assessments, and most conveniently of all, not having to collect money and notes for an excursion that would never be as good as planned. With my year ten art class in tow, we took off on the web of discovery; we powered up the interactive whiteboard, loaded the site, and (with the capabilities of our touch screen) we were able to literally touch the brushstrokes of the Great Masters of Western Art. It was one of the most amazing moments of my teaching career; the twenty-five of us, totally immersed in the paintings of Botticelli and Van Gogh for the entire fifty minutes, all clamouring around the 2m x 2.5m touch screen for our chance to touch greatness. At no point did any of us think about our geographic separation from these works - us in South-Western Sydney and them in Florence and New York. We did not contemplate the notion of who the intended audiences for these works were in terms of the time separating the periods these works were produced compared with the exact moment we loaded them onto the screen. It was the pure excitement of being able to look at something so intimately that we would otherwise never get to see - let alone touch. We took a virtual walk through The Hall of Mirrors in Versailles, then straight into the throne room at The State Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, and turned to leave via the bookshop at the Gemäldegalerie in Berlin, stopping to see what was stocking the shelves, of course. All in all it was a very powerful lesson but exactly what it was a lesson in, I would not discover until I took that same group of students on an actual excursion to a physical gallery.

Growing up visiting galleries myself, the unspoken rites and rituals of the museum space that Carol Duncan so elegantly describes in her book *Civilising Rituals: Inside Public Art Museums*, 1995, are like a second language to me. I know the appropriate distance to stand from the hallowed objects of art, I know the appropriate volume with which to speak in the presence of great art, and I know the rules regarding never touching the gods we come to worship through their immortal creations, the artworks themselves. My students, who are all, as Duncan would put it, clearly of a different ‘religious’ persuasion to me, were ignorant of any such rules and burst forth into the recent First Emperor of China exhibition like Spanish bulls in the streets of Pamplona. Reading didactics was a no-no because they were too busy on their phones and mp3 players. Instead of waiting their turn to get a better view they simply barged people out of the way, jockeying for position. Speaking in hushed tones was

the only thing they seemed to pick up but I think that had more to do with teenage self-consciousness than reverence or respect. Their behaviour was shocking to me. That was, until I put their behaviour into context. This group of students started kindergarten in the year 2000. They have always known the world through the lens of the Internet, mobile phones and computers. In our own classroom we had explored the galleries and museums of the world at such a fast pace and hadn’t hesitated in pushing each other out of the way or tapping our fingers on artworks to zoom into the surface of the canvas. I had set them up to believe that experiencing art was a hands-on, immersive, physical experience. Everything they have ever done in the classroom in the creation of their own work only reinforced that message. But I did not want to accept their behaviour as ‘normal’; after all, we are talking about the largest collection of terracotta warriors ever to be exhibited outside of China.

What I was unaware of was that all of my students had downloaded the free iPod application from the Art Gallery of New South Wales’ website. They all had their phones or mp3 players out in the exhibition because they were exploring the space via the app. Some were making notes about the space and one girl who had her own iPad was even drawing the layout of the galleries for her visual diary using an app designed to help architects. All the students expressed that they wanted to take home a memento of the exhibition from the gift shop - most of them purchased the exhibition catalogue to do further reading at home (something I was pleasantly surprised to hear) and the rest bought postcards of the warriors. In terms of the gallery experience I had planned there was no question about it - they had all had a personal experience with a real art object in a real, physical gallery. They had also enjoyed the tandem experience of the virtual realm via the iPod app. This was the real and the virtual worlds collapsing. I could not say for sure that one was more powerful than the other but rather that the partnership of the two had created a new aesthetic experience that I myself struggled to explain or define.

When Walter Benjamin wrote *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction* in 1936, I doubt he could have guessed how his predictions of the power of film and cinema in the reproduction of real things could be so relevant to a discussion of virtual reality. Where I believe Benjamin would argue that Google Art Project is robbing the work of “its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place

where it happens to be”, I would argue that Google Art Project provides a simulated time and space that is as eternal as the works of art themselves. What is captured in the galleries and rooms within the virtual museum that makes up the enormous simulated space of Google Art Project provides the audience with a very different experience of the real galleries. Exhibitions and hangings change, seasonal differences affect the way we interact within the galleries on a physical comfort level, factors such as whether you are hungry or not will determine how you experience a space. What Google Art Project offers the viewer is akin to a time capsule and yet the level of interaction one can enjoy from the zooming features and jumping from city to city is unique to each participant.

At the beginning of this article, I may have given the impression that I was suggesting that Google Art Project is the anti-experience, somehow inferior to the lived physical experience. I believe by illustrating the actions of my students, using both the virtual and the real to enhance their own understanding, I have clearly outlined that it is not a simple dichotomy of virtual reality versus the lived physical experience. The virtual and the real can enhance and complement the entire experience of art and galleries in harmony. I admit I am still struggling with the notion of Google as artistic creator; the academic in me wants to simply write it off like Benjamin would, as a forgery of the original. For now I can allow myself to at least enjoy the inspiration it has given my students to want to explore art in both our local museums and galleries and online. [a](#)

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Commute and Take Notice

by Lucy Ainsworth

As Sydney develops so does our culture. Or is it, as our culture develops so does Sydney?

Greater Western Sydney has rapidly developed into one of Sydney's largest residential areas, housing over forty-two percent of the city's population. It has been identified that one third of the area's population are migrants from over half of the world's nations, creating a large multicultural precinct, but also disparity and isolation within community groups. (NSW Government, 2011). Although Sydney's population and geographical size has expanded, the inner city remains the hub of cultural activity, making it inaccessible for many who live on the periphery.

In 1999, the New South Wales government recognised the lack of cultural development and support in the greater Western Sydney area, and launched the Strategy for the Arts in Western Sydney. Working alongside local governments, the Strategy identified a need in the area for development of community identity, pride and participation, regional sense of place, and opportunities for local employment within the arts. (Debus. 2006. p.3.) The hub/periphery relationship needed to be altered to allow an outlet of expression by different community groups and greater access to high quality cultural events and exhibitions.

Although there were existing local galleries in many of the communities outlined by the strategy, most centres only had limited facilities to perform a local provider role and residents were either looking

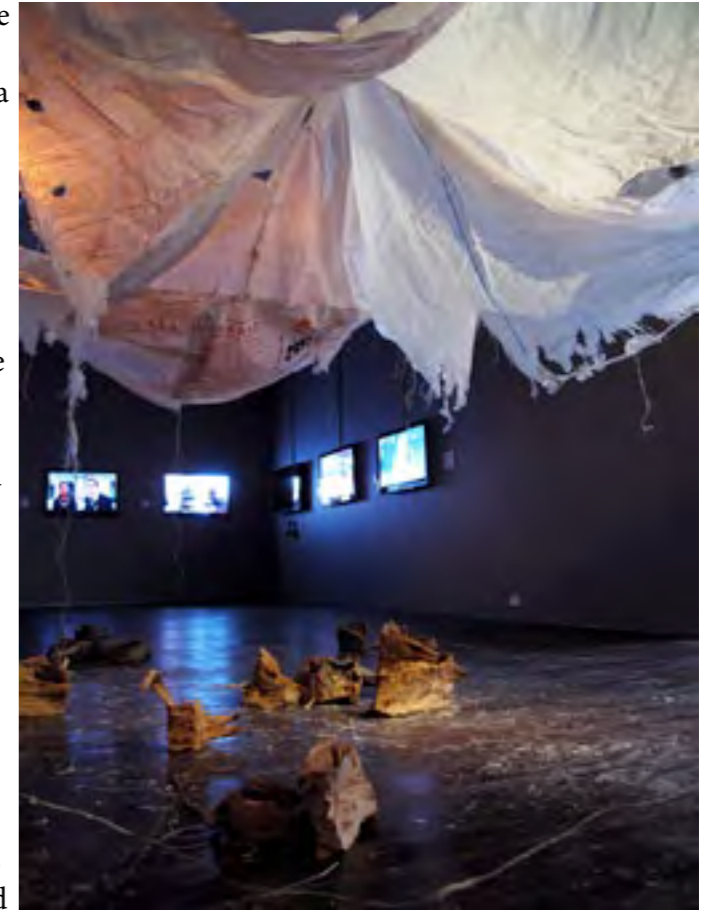
towards Sydney's centre for cultural activities, or not engaging at all. With a large part of Sydney's population living in Greater Western Sydney, it was astonishing that the residents did not have access to suitable arts facilities and were not being given an adequate voice in the arts community. To improve local facilities, involvement and promotion, a dollar-for-dollar matched funding scheme was implemented by the Ministry for the Arts through the Western Sydney Local Government Arts Incentive Fund. (Debus. 2006. p.9.). The Fund observed development of the Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, Campbelltown Arts Centre, Parramatta Artist Studios, Joan Sutherland Performing Arts Centre in Penrith, Blacktown Arts Centre, Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest, and Fairfield School of Arts.

These developments have greatly impacted upon the contemporary art scene in Sydney. The revitalised centres have produced creative outlets and support networks for local residents. No longer are the galleries in Sydney's centre the main focus on the weekly exhibition trail. Instead, the new spaces have created a strong counter hub for arts production within Sydney. In addition the arts, in a broad sense, across greater Sydney have been transformed into a more representational expression of what informs the Sydney artist. Regional galleries in Western Sydney are drawing attention from the art world and converging local residents with inner city dwellers creating a sense of connectedness.

One of the larger spaces created is Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, housing a theatre, gallery spaces, and artist studios. Located in the City of Liverpool, Casula Powerhouse has become a major regional gallery, increasing accessibility to the arts for local residents through a diverse calendar of events. The 2011 program includes multifaceted exhibition *No.1 fan*, which celebrates the trials and tribulations of being a dedicated Rugby League fan. (Waller, 2011). The exhibition takes place in multiple galleries including the Kids Gallery, which in conjunction with the Penrith Prowl Community Program displays artworks made by the children of their favourite NRL players. Casula Powerhouse creates a platform for varied exhibitions to take place that reflect local interests, and due to popular demand *No.1 fan* was extended.

Regional galleries in Western Sydney are able to create exhibitions and events of specific interest to their residents. The Casula Powerhouse aims to connect with the City of Liverpool's large Islamic population through another project scheduled for August 2011, the *Muslim Women's Project*. The project invites female Islamic curators, artists, craft practitioners and writers from the area to collaborate and create artworks that reflect their personal stories of living in the Liverpool region. This project enables audiences to learn about a different part of the community and allows the contributors an opportunity to express their practice in a large institution.

Situated thirty-five kilometres from the centre of Sydney, Blacktown is the home of Australia's largest urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. For the past two years Blacktown Arts Centre, in collaboration with the Sydney Opera House, has accommodated the *Message Sticks Indigenous Film Festival*. All the films shown in the festival are produced by Indigenous peoples from Australia and overseas, making it the only festival of its kind. Australians produce most of the films, but this year there were submissions by Canadian, Mexican and American filmmakers. The films deal with contemporary issues faced by Indigenous cultures living in urban and rural areas. By screening the festival at Blacktown Arts Centre greater access is given to people living in Western Sydney. One film directed by Elizabeth Wymarra, *Biggest port*, depicts the daily lives of a group of women living in an urban area. The women share gossip with one another about people living in their community. Steven McGregor's film *Tales from the Daly: 'Nauiyu Manbiyu'* explores the stories told by the traditional owners of the region.



Above: Installation view of *PB565* (2009) Daachi Dang, *Edge of Elsewhere* 2010
Courtesy of the artist and 4A Centre for Contemporary Asian Art. Photo: Garry Trinh

Under the leadership of former Director Lisa Havilah, The Campbelltown Arts Centre (CAC) has not only provided an outlet for local artists and residents, but also connected with broader audiences from all around Sydney. During her five-year tenure, Havilah presented exhibitions by local Western Sydney artists in addition to national and international artists, transforming the space into one of the most visited art galleries in Sydney. Devising triumphant strategies to diversify CAC, Havilah expertly facilitated collaborations with inner city galleries. Rather than having two segregated districts, the city and the regional areas, Havilah created connections between the two, strengthening the arts community within Sydney as a whole.

In partnership with the Sydney Festival and the 4A Centre for Contemporary Art in Haymarket, CAC created a three-year project (2010-12) *The edge of elsewhere*. The project establishes collaborations between contemporary artists from Australia and the Asia Pacific to work closely with community groups to create new artworks. Through working with Sydney Festival and Gallery 4A, CAC has been able to illustrate the

traditions of the diverse cultural groups living within local communities and also attract wider audiences to the exhibitions. This project has allowed community groups to express their individual cultures and experiences of living in Sydney's West, whilst developing their practice in a contemporary art context. The 2011 exhibition witnessed a collaboration between Brook Andrew and Japanese anime studio TOKYOPOP, who presented a series of stills from a short animation film (to be presented in 2012) about a young boy's life growing up in the local area. Another project saw Vietnamese artist Dacchi Dang working with Cabramatta's Vietnamese community creating a new video work exploring issues of migration, identity and memory.

In a 2010 interview with ABC television Lisa Havilah discussed the aims of the *Edge of elsewhere*.

Not only will we have a whole new series of contemporary art that is reflective of and engaged with contemporary suburban Sydney, but there will be a whole range of relationships that have developed, and a whole lot of opportunities for young people to move into contemporary art, and a new profile for people living in suburban Sydney.

Lisa Havilah in interview with Ross Bray, 2010

Accessibility through multiple locations forms a bridge between communities in Western Sydney and the inner city. More people around Sydney are exposed to the project and able to learn about life in another part of the city.

Compared to some of the established inner city institutions, the structure of many regional galleries in Western Sydney has allowed for more innovative and critically conscious exhibitions. One of the aims embedded in the Strategy for the Arts in Western Sydney is for regional galleries to "...not simply attempt to duplicate models from elsewhere, but align with the region's distinctive mix of cultural diversity, industrious energy and extraordinary growth." (Debus, 2006. p.7). Through endeavouring to engage with and attract broader audiences, these galleries have created more than just cultural development in Western Sydney; they have offered beneficial alternatives to their inner city counterparts. Western Sydney galleries are engaging with cultural groups to create a new vision in contemporary art.

As a regular visitor to Western Sydney galleries, Museum of Contemporary Art curator Glenn Barkley

believes these spaces have influenced contemporary art practice through creating some of the most progressive exhibitions in Sydney in recent times. He explains, "Western Sydney has far more to offer its inner city counterparts, including, most importantly, culturally diverse audiences and practitioners, and innovative ways of working with contemporary art." (G. Barkley. Personal communication, 6 May 2011) Western Sydney galleries have the freedom to explore different avenues for cultural expression and are not restricted by the same policies as the large cultural institutions in the inner city. In his opinion "Western Sydney cultural institutions have the ability to be more flexible and innovative in their programming, as they are not the large bureaucracies that some other institutions have become. Inner city institutions should be envious of the programming they develop in these areas." (G. Barkley. Personal communication, 6 May 2011).

The Strategy for the Arts in Western Sydney has not only improved accessibility to the arts in Western Sydney, but for the whole of Sydney. Many artists and curators are taking advantage of the opportunities that the new centres present. The refurbishments and renovations have created government subsidised, state of the art facilities, allowing emerging and young practitioners to gain experience and build careers.



Far Left: David Capra, *A Guide to Intercersory and Prophetic Dance*. 2010 graphite, watercolour on paper, 31 x 34cm, Left: David Capra, *Intercersory Artmaking*, digital image, 2011

Regional galleries offer more opportunities for emerging and young artists than their inner city counterparts (excluding Artspace, Queen Street Studios and Firstdraft); having access to government funded studios and exhibition spaces in Western Sydney has created greater support for artists and curators to develop their practice. In addition to non-residential studios for emerging artists, Parramatta Artists Studios offers two two-year residencies for established Parramatta or Western Sydney artists. Artists are expected to assume a leadership role within the studio complex through public workshops and collaborative projects with other artists. Parramatta Artists Studios have regular exhibitions featuring the resident artists, creating opportunities to promote their own work and operate within a community environment.

Emerging Western Sydney artist David Capra has taken full advantage of the growth in Western Sydney regional galleries. Being assigned a studio space at Parramatta Artists Studios has provided Capra with the opportunity to build upon his practice and gain exposure to a greater audience through Studio open days and in-house exhibitions. In conjunction with the Studios, Capra will curate a project later this year, working with artists to create a banner exhibition in local churches. Capra has been included in exhibitions at Penrith Regional Gallery and the Lewers Bequest, Blacktown Arts Centre and Campbelltown Arts Centre in addition to inner city galleries in recent years. Reflecting on his experiences exhibiting in regional galleries, Capra states, "projects in Western Sydney are less likely to operate out of commercial

models and [are] more engaged with asking questions, making the whole experience more authentic and satisfying" (personal communication, 20 April 2011). He has found the experience of exhibiting in regional galleries as an emerging artist "nurturing" and has been awarded experiences that otherwise might not have occurred (D. Capra, personal communication, 20 April 2011).

Regional galleries in Western Sydney play an important role in diversifying the arts within Sydney. The ever growing success of these spaces is having a ripple effect on the arts overall and is creating bountiful experiences for artists working within both Western and Metropolitan Sydney. **a**

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Museum Mile

by Carey Corbett

Welcome to the neighbourhood: 5th Avenue,
New York.

Museum Mile Festival

6pm - 9pm Tuesday, 14 June 2011.

Rain or Shine.

New York City is the mother of the block party, with most neighborhoods hosting them at some point. There are websites dedicated to tracking what's on and where, while other sites offer advice on how to do it right; it seems everyone's doing it. Block parties grew out of the back streets of the New York boroughs in the heady days of the 1970's. These celebrations began as a 'meet the neighborhood' style of gathering, with young people hanging about on the streets, out on their stoops making music and socialising. This developed into more organised parties where streets were closed off and the sound systems increased in size and volume. The block party concept was propelled into the mainstream by comedian Dave Chappelle, who organized a block party in Brooklyn featuring high profile musicians such as Kanye West, Erykah Badu and The Fugees. *Dave Chappelle's Block Party* was filmed and released as a music documentary in 2006 to huge acclaim.

"New York's biggest block party" is the Museum Mile Festival (MMF), according to a claim made on the festival's website. This festival is a significant part of the spring season's celebrations in New York City and

undoubtedly takes the biggest block party title with ease. The event is hosted by some of the most significant and influential museums in the world - those that reside along the prestigious Uptown section of 5th Avenue from 82nd to 105th streets, known officially as the Museum Mile. The initial concept of MMF, aside from stimulating interest in the arts and patronage of the museums, was to buoy the spirits of a recession beset city. Through social engagement the festival aimed to mesh the increasingly incongruent communities of the Manhattan of the day.

Museums can attract the stigma of being stuffy and culturally irrelevant, particularly for a younger generation. Typically, being asked to attend a museum offers a very different experience from being invited to a block party. However, at the beginning of spring in New York City the two concepts have been brought together in this significant cultural event that is part block party, part museum day.

As a public relations exercise MMF has been a success from its inception. New Yorkers tend to be very city centric people, so a large celebration of the arts in

one of the most prominent arts precincts in the city is a welcomed annual event. The concept of marrying a block party with the experience of visiting nine museums is a huge leap from the original idea of a neighborhood street party but a wildly successful one in terms of breaking down negative stereotypes of 'the museum'. Figures quoted widely on the Internet estimate attendance of MMF to be at around 50,000 people this year with over a million visitors since the first festival back in 1978.

The MMF is produced by Urban Arts Productions, an independent organisation, with experienced arts administrator and producer Robin Schatell providing the expertise required to pull together such a huge event. Schatell's skills have been forged from over two

decades in the performing arts sector in New York at such places as the Women's Interart Center, the City Center of Music and Drama at Lincoln Center, The Harold Clurman Theatre on Theatre Row, Performance Space 122 and the Cross Performance/Ralph Lemon Company.

The 33rd Museum Mile Festival kicks off with a formal opening at the Neue Galerie at 86th Street. During the festival the museum mile section of 5th Avenue becomes a pedestrian only party strip. The block party will be in full swing with chalk artists scribing work along the mile, curated performance artists, visual artists and musicians complementing the architecture and exhibitions of the museums. The MMF is a celebration of the vibrant and diverse cultural fabric



of New York. The museums on the mile are open to the public for free for the duration of the festival with many of the galleries and museums programming new shows to commence with the festival, as well as exhibiting their permanent collections. “Our goal is that once they experience the museum, they realize that our programming extends beyond the visual art and that they return for not only the exhibitions, but other public programs such as film screenings, panel discussions, or Super Sabado events.” (Oliveras interview, 2011).

From the formation of the Museum Mile Consortium in the 1970s there have always been nine participating museums, though this year a new museum, The Museum for African Art, has joined the ranks. Two museums usually involved in the festival are currently closed, the first for renovation and the other as it is relocating. Therefore the 2011 Museum Mile has eight participating members. These museums are:

- The Museum for African Art at 110th Street
- El Museo del Barrio at 104th Street
- Museum of the City of New York at 103rd Street
- Jewish Museum at 92nd Street
- Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design at 91st Street
- Solomon R. Guggenheim Museum at 88th Street
- Neue Galerie New York at 86th Street
- Metropolitan Museum of Art from 82nd – 86th Street

The line up is of course exceptional. It is questionable though as to how much art can really be experienced in a mere three hours whilst negotiating entertainers and queues along the way. To avoid spending the afternoon in a shuffle it might be advisable to forego the serious pursuit of art and discover the museums in the context of the block party spirit. For the serious art seeker it’s probably an idea to visit on a different day entirely. Of course it is possible to map out a circuit ahead of time and take in a lot of art, so long as you’re diligent enough to avoid being seduced by the party spirit along the way. The concept allows punters to connect with all nine museums at some level, even if only by taking in some of the street entertainment or architecture and moving on.

When I first began researching the MMF I found the same regurgitated blurb repeated across many New York museum, tourism and cultural websites. It seems to me to be very unusual that the one piece of limited promotional writing is largely the extent of the

publicity for the festival – albeit broadly distributed. My initial conclusion veered towards the view that there isn’t a strong sense of importance placed on the festival as far as the individual museums’ and galleries’ promotion of it. To demonstrate this, a search of one of the most famous of the nine MMF museums, the iconic Frank Lloyd Wright designed Guggenheim Museum, doesn’t return a mention of the 2011 MMF. Furthermore, a Google search attempting to link the Festival with the Guggenheim doesn’t return a current, independent 2011 posting with reference to MMF, deviating from the content that I have previously referred to. Added to the lack of direct advertising of the MMF by the Guggenheim is that none of the three major exhibitions that will be showing on 14 June seem particularly geared towards the festival, nor to open specifically for it as other museums do. I surmise this is either due to the festival being so huge it now virtually self propels or that it is not such an important feature on an already busy schedule for the Guggenheim. Given this lackluster promotional attitude from some of the museums on the mile I began to form the opinion that perhaps the MMF had, over thirty-three years, lost some of its momentum. But this assumption was dispelled by the enthusiasm demonstrated by the majority of museums that responded to my email interviews.

In contrast to the Guggenheim is a museum with perhaps a lesser celebrity profile, though a dynamic and vigorous exhibition program. El Museo del Barrio at 104th Street fully embraces the MMF. The museum has *El Museo’s Bienal: The (S) files 2011*, the sixth biennial, timed to open on the day of the festival. This museum states that the exhibition explores “the visual energy, events, and aesthetics of the street”. This definition reflects a vision and intent of exploration of the fervor and eclecticism of the block party spirit. In addition to the on-site works, this exhibition includes the work of seventy-five emerging artists whose work will be shown at various sites around New York. It certainly feels like this rich and informative museum, dedicated to Puerto Rican, Caribbean and Latin American art, is getting into the block party groove. The museum is no less highbrow by any account than others on the mile; it offers extensive historical and contemporary collections and provides all of its written material and educational programs in Spanish and English, yet it is notably more involved in this street wide celebration than some of its neighbours.

Also planning its programming with the MMF in mind is The Museum of the City of New York with

The American style: colonial revival and the modern metropolis opening on the day of the festival. The museum is large, with over five floors dedicated to collecting and archiving materials related to the history, culture and people of New York City. The collection focus is broad and all encompassing – the museum maintains a huge resource and offers extensive public programming.

Though the Jewish Museum has no exhibitions specifically opening on the day of the festival as some other museums do, this enormous museum has numerous exhibitiv draw cards on the day in addition to its permanent exhibitions dedicated to the culture, identity and history of the Jewish people. The Jewish Museum actively promotes their involvement in the MMF and responded to my email questions with more thought and enthusiasm than any of the numerous other contacts I made in my research. “The Jewish Museum see the Museum Mile Festival as a wonderful opportunity to share its programming with a larger public.”(Wittenberg interview, 2011). This ‘larger public’ or audience, extending beyond their general attendee demographic, is the key to the MMF’s success. Everyone wins in this exchange. The public has the opportunity to discover places that they may not usually attend and the museums have access to a public far broader than they usually might. When asked if the MMF is a valuable addition to the museums’ calendar Cassandra Oliveras from El Museo del Barrio responded: “Yes - it is of great value in terms of reinforcing the collaborative spirit of Museum Mile and the wealth of art and culture on this stretch of NYC. We consider it a great opportunity to increase awareness about the museum and showcase the very best of what we do.”(Oliveras interview, 2011).

The three museums I have mentioned are in my opinion the most dedicated to the MMF. Perhaps this is due to the fact that all three – El Museo, The Jewish Museum and The Museum of the City of New York are museums ‘of the people’ ahead of their collections per se. For example the Cooper-Hewitt National Museum of Design is very solidly devoted to historic and contemporary design and may exist as such, audience aside.

The free entry offered on the Museum Mile on the day of the festival means the crowd swell at venues is intense, none more so than at The Metropolitan Museum of Art. The Met is by all accounts colossal - in size, importance, collections and exhibits. The introduction to one of the museum’s promotional

films states that “the museum is really a collection of collections” which helps to put perspective on the scale and complexity of the museum. There is so much on display in this museum at any one time that it necessitates return visits to even begin to view or absorb a portion of it. The extensive exhibition and educational programming the Met develops and engages in includes wide promotion of the MMF. In addition to the permanent shows on display there will be approximately thirty new exhibitions open at the time of the festival.

Applying a block party context to what is essentially a museum open day can be seen as an innovative and entertaining way to engage a demographic that otherwise may not attend a museum. Though the party atmosphere may not allow for specific and detailed museum exploration on the day of the festival, the fact that the MMF is in its thirty-third year and continues to be such a well attended and popular event demonstrates the success of seeking audiences beyond the obvious. There is little wonder about the success of the Museum Mile Festival as it offers the opportunity of a block party atmosphere and fun for the day, followed up by a year’s supply of return visits with friends and family. [a](#)

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HIT and MISS: Tom Polo

by Alexander Bellemore



To say I follow Tom Polo's work with a fanaticism and loyalty reminiscent of a pre-pubescent girl to Justin Bieber is a fair comment. So it was with great expectation that I took my giddy self to Polo's new exhibition *Hit and Miss* at the Parramatta Artist's Studio Gallery. The exhibition is designed to be a retrospective look at Polo's work from the last two years.

The exhibition was divided into four 'galleries' (for those who haven't been to this space it is basically two rooms). The first gallery was new work by Polo. The

words 'Self sabotage' immediately engaged the viewer with Polo's signature text-dominated work after stepping into the gallery from a busy Parramatta midday. In stark black-and-white, melting and whimsical font, this work is nicely balanced by the thoughtfully placed smaller work *Maybe one day*. Similarly in this room is a small acrylic work *Hit and Miss* with the colourful and playfully spotted *No idea*; which sits inconspicuously in the corner. The area is punchy and clean and gives a nice visual introduction into Polo's practice.



Left: Tom Polo, *More Better*, 2009.
Acrylic on MDF.
Right: Tom Polo, *Sore Winner*, 2010.
Acrylic on canvas.

After controlling the urge to saunter into the adjoining offices to see if Polo was about, in order to attest my devotion to him personally, I came upon gallery two; *Continuous one liners*. The room was an assortment of slogans, self help mantras and ironic gems. Polo is best known for this work and has been exploring this practice through out the two years the exhibition covers. The placement of over sixteen strongly worded statements in such a small space generally detracted from the works as singular pieces. This was only compounded by the garish blue hued wall the works were hung on; I couldn't help but feel a few choice combinations as seen in the previous room would have been more effective.

Gallery three and four contained some more recent works by Polo; *The peak of human excellence* and *The new science of personal achievement (Tony)*. These further explored the idea of contemporary self help culture through a subtle homage to Anthony (Tony) Robbins. The works on offer show a nice progression from the text in the previous rooms and possess a style recognisable as Polo's, re-contextualised.

For those who are familiar with Polo's work, there is a subtle flow in theme and content. For those new to Polo's work this may all seem like one giant paint-based installation rather than a two year retrospective. Any small amount of signage or introductory

text to the exhibition would have helped this immensely, indeed it would make this exhibition more accessible to the bustling square outside the gallery. This being said, sometimes massive warehouse spaces to show works uncluttered, with limitless budgets to create overwhelming press hype is simply unavailable. The location of the exhibition was actually wonderful. Polo's work addresses and revolutionises the mundanity of daily routine. No location would be better than the sprawl of suburbia which is Parramatta and its surrounding suburbs.

Yes, there are some operational flaws within this exhibition but Polo's irresistibly appealing retrospective of work is undeniable. [a](#)

Hit and Miss
Parramatta Artist's Studio Gallery, Sydney
4 March to 1 April 2011

Bringing Art Into the Open

by Ellin Williams

The term 'site-specific' has been appearing in artists' statements all over the art world. An artist's relationship with the landscape is as intimate as it is subjective, and land art is a deliberate withdrawal from traditional art institutions and a push into open space. The work displayed in the current Art Gallery of New South Wales exhibition *Photography & place: Australian landscape photography 1970s until now* depicts individual journeys through the national landscape using an indoor medium and space (www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au). In contrast, the site-specific works of Robert Smithson and Andy Goldsworthy are made outside using the landscape as material. However, both forms are a modern attempt to reconnect with nature in an increasingly technological society.

The current exhibition at the Art Gallery of New South Wales *Photography & place: Australian landscape photography 1970s until now* presents over ninety works that explore concepts of place and the role of the photographer as storyteller and recorder of information (www.artgallery.nsw.gov.au). The exhibition demonstrates the evolution of the camera in Australia from a quiet observer of the natural landscape to a method of combining nature, culture and mankind. All throughout history, human beings have struggled to forge a bond with the powers of nature; shaping

their tools from stone, cave paintings, megaliths and stone circles to the more modern concerns of sustainability (Adams, 2002, para 1). Artists, like journalists at a newspaper, gather information and discover new methods with which to present it. As a result, personal narrative and symbols can be traced within the work as a powerful reminder of how closely human nature and the environment are linked. Land artists and photographers have been profoundly influenced by the structures and systems of nature around them, and more recently, the methods with which to sustain them (<http://www.environmentalart.org/>). Whether it be through art developed in the environment or photography that examines it, artists are responding by forging individual perceptions of the role nature plays in contemporary culture.

When examining the boundaries dividing art inside and outside, it is impossible not to draw on the earth works of Robert Smithson. The artist created *Dead tree* (1969) as a site/non-site piece by displacing a dead tree into the gallery space (Greene, 1997, para. 1). While the work received some criticism, many land artists' works are often expensive to create and situated in remote locations, a backlash that meant the messages they fought to deliver were never reached by their target city-dwelling audiences.



Above: Simryn Gill
from *Rampant*, 1999
gelatin silver photograph 25.4 x 23.9cm
Gift of the artist 2005
Collection: Art Gallery of New South
Wales
© Simryn Gill

Smithson's choice to exhibit work indoors created an unsettling atmosphere in the gallery space and provided a peek into an apocalyptic future where nature could only be experienced within the controlled walls of a museum. This was an invigorating method used to encourage gallery visitors to reflect on how they took advantage of the earth and for how long they expected to do so. When critics accused Smithson of symbolically raping mother earth, Smithson's answer was that rape was not the only form of sex (Shapiro, 1995, 24).

Rape is also a theme in Simryn Gill's photography in *Photography & place: Australian landscape photography 1970s until now*. Gill's black-and-white series *Rampant* (1999) reveals abandoned clothes carefully arranged in a rank landscape of tropical plants (Miller, 2011, para. 12). Reviewer Alan Miller maintains the images recall the feeling of a journey into a landscape altered by the sudden awareness of human debris — "litter, weeds, maybe a little toilet paper" (ibid). The work questions the benefits of hu-

man interaction with the environment and highlights an undercurrent of environmental disrespect that pulses in Australian culture. As a nation, Australia is renowned for its stunning landscapes and complex ecosystems, although cultural idiom dictates Australian people as the wild, rugged descendants of convict ancestors. In Australian legend it is man conquering the bush, not man the environmentalist. Although Gill's work does not construct the image in nature like site-specific artists, the work does have specific intentions to conceptualise the landscape (www.headon.com.au). Both Gill and Smithson grasp the creepiness that proliferates where the landscape meets humanity (<http://berkshirereview.net>).

Whether presented outdoors or indoors looking out, these artists encourage a new way of thinking about the parameters that define how art is made and where art should happen (Kanatani, 2007, para. 1).

In complete contrast to the depressing photographs of Simryn Gill, Andy Goldsworthy transforms the

landscape into a canvas, demonstrating the nurturing impact human interaction can also have on the environment. *Rivers and tides* (2003) is a stunning documentary focused on the energy that flows through Goldsworthy's work that cannot be put in a museum, purchased by wealthy collectors, or displayed in corporate boardrooms (Loftus, 2003, para. 1).

As consumers, the idea that an object deliberately constructed to be temporary is an inconvenience but there is something magical about capturing the moment of an object that will soon disappear. *Rivers and tides* shows a shockingly bright red liquid trickling down a rock face, splashing into a river and slowly drifting downstream and the audience cannot help but associate the process with blood.

Contrary to the viewer's immediate assumption that the artist has cheated and used paint, Goldsworthy has painstakingly collected red iron ore stones from the river bottom and ground them to a powder, commenting that iron is what makes our blood red as well (Loftus, 2003, para. 5). Goldsworthy's tranquil harmonies that resulted from his pure embrace of the earth - and his popularity in the contemporary art world - demonstrate an appreciation of beauty in the natural landscape that is deeply embedded in even the most sceptical of audiences.

Michael Riley's photographs from *flyblown* presented in *Photography & place: Australian landscape photography 1970s until now* contrast with Andy Goldsworthy's work in the tampering of the natural landscape by introducing human objects and symbols. "Riley articulates in the series *flyblown* (1998), Indigenous spirituality's connections to country and widens his examination beyond to comment on the sustained environmental damage" (www.headon.com.au). The landscape seems almost unnatural with the crude introduction of human objects that have no obvious relevance to their surroundings. His work is presented on photo canvas and unlike Goldsworthy's ephemeral work, Riley's pieces can be collected and exhibited in galleries. This brings to mind peaceful rainforest and shoreline screen savers in corporate

offices all over the world. Human beings are obsessed with owning nature, with controlling nature, with bringing the natural inside. The use of religious iconography in Riley's photos leaves room for ambiguity but similarities can be drawn between his and Goldsworthy's work through their sensitivity to natural surroundings. Both artists struggle with their beliefs and spirituality when they attempt to reconnect modern audiences with the outdoors.

Land artists Andy Goldsworthy and Robert Smithson are at the forefront of global paradigms concerning the sustainability of the natural world. Both artists question the value of nature in an ever expanding technological society. The current exhibition *Photography & place: Australian landscape photography 1970s until now* highlights the important role the landscape plays in the contemporary art world and emphasises the personal narrative within its reproduction. While site-specific work is exhibited outdoors, and photography indoors, both forms express the human desire to interact with the land, respond to it and bring art into the open. **a**

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Left: Michael Riley
Untitled from the series *Flyblown* 1998,
printed 2004. Pigment print, 81.7 x 107.8cm
Anonymous gift to the Aboriginal & Torres
Strait Islander and Photography collections
2010. Donated through the Australian Gov-
ernment's Cultural Gifts Program
Collection: Art Gallery of New South Wales

Bedknobs & Broomsticks

by Jess De La Hunty

Monika Behrens and Rochelle Haley's collaborative show *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* is a cheeky, clever, erotic, and unassuming exhibition at Sydney's MOP gallery that makes up for its small size with a great amount of charm.

Comprised of twelve works, the watercolour pieces depict vibrant and delicate botanical scenes as if from a fairy tale, complete with frolicking bunny rabbits and toads perched on red and white mushrooms. Woven throughout these dream-like nature scenes are phallic objects including dildos – some subtle and others not – behaving as though they too are a naturally occurring element of nature. In some pieces, the 'rabbit' dildos frolic amongst the foliage like their animal counterparts (see *Stinking Nightshade*, 2010, watercolour on paper) where in others, the phallic shapes assume a more demure role, blending in with the plants and creating a "That looks like a...? Wait? Is that a...?" moment for viewers (for example *In search of Long Life*, 2011).

Inspired by Behrens and Haley's interest in witchcraft throughout the ages, each work incorporates various aspects of the theme. Plants like hemlock, fox-glove, monks-wood, mandrake, belladonna, and nightshade are included throughout as they are said to have strong hallucinatory and aphrodisiacal powers and are constantly drawn upon in witchcraft, while symbols of sex pay homage to the strong sense of female power and sexual control witches are said to possess.

All the images cleverly assume a dichotomous nature: what's man-made appears organic; what's erotic appears innocent; and what's innocent implies secret evils.

Dealing with the first of these dichotomies, the organic nature of the dildos like those seen in the piece *Henbane*, 2011, where the phallic object's colour and shape mimics that of the flowering plant it faces, creates a sense of beauty and pleasure all at once. It seems as though the artists are commenting on the ridiculousness of the taboo nature sex toys seem to generally assume in mainstream society, given that the pursuit of pleasure and sex is such a natural human process.

In keeping with this theme and moving toward the second dichotomy, the ease with which the dildos are incorporated into the whimsical woodland scenes is surprising. Their pastel colours and non-invasive positioning help them to assume innocence in the same way a pretty flower or butterfly might. In this way the dildos challenge notions of creation and perception – can an entity be considered taboo for what it's designed to do rather than what it does? This aspect comments on the stereotypes associated with witches and witchcraft.

The third dichotomy throughout the series is the implication that mysticism and potential evil exist in the exquisitely illustrated plants due to their use in

witchcraft to induce inebriation and hallucinations. Painted in the style of the great botanical drawings, the plants' scientific presentation is juxtaposed against their implied meaning to create a wonderful sense of spirituality and science coming together.

Behrens and Haley's collaboration on the series is an extraordinary one. Working in a medium that is not

typical of either's individual artistic repertoire, the watercolour works are seamlessly executed with no indication of where one artist's input ends and the other's begins. Technically the series is an amazing feat, mimicking the vibrancy and detail of the great botanical painters whilst incorporating the added element of the man-made objects of eroticism.

Below: Monika Behrens & Rochelle Haley
Henbane, 2011, watercolour on paper,
36x32cm



In terms of the exhibition as a whole, the inclusion of the single channel video *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* – a scene on loop from the 1971 Angela Lansbury film about being a witch – provided some contextual information that a viewer who had not read the catalogue may otherwise not have acquired. However it wasn't a particularly necessary addition in terms of its ability to enhance the show in any way, and the show's reception would not have suffered had it not been included.

The accompanying five page catalogue is a brilliantly coloured matte publication in which the artworks are faithfully reproduced. While only including five of the twelve works in the exhibition, the catalogue offers an excellent cross section of the pieces, supporting the included text by Prue Gibson. The text itself perhaps includes too much witch history, making it appear less about Behrens and Haley's art and more about the subject itself. Anecdotes of books discovered by the artists detailing "flying ointments...applied vaginally using a special dildo or broomstick" do little to

enhance the show's wit and general appeal. Instead of delving into witchcraft specifics, perhaps the author would have done better to quote one or both of the artists concerning their collaborative process, or their opinions on the principles of witchcraft as they see them in a modern context. One very clever aspect of the catalogue that is sure to leave a lasting impression is the inclusion of a small sachet of Sylk natural personal lubricant on the back page alongside the thanks and grant information. The fact that it is an aid wholly intended to enhance sexual experience does a lot to provide some light relief from the heavy text and amuse the viewer/reader with the artists' charming cheekiness.

Monika Behrens and Rochelle Haley's delightful *Bedknobs and Broomsticks* exhibition is at the MOP artist's cooperative gallery in Sydney's Chippendale from the 24th March 2011 – 10th April 2011. Entry is free, with all works for sale. I highly recommended the show to anyone looking to appreciate beauty, charm, and wit all at once. [a](#)



Above: Monika Behrens & Rochelle Haley
In Search of Long Life, 2011,
watercolour on paper, 71x132cm

Art and the Naked Body

by Kathleen Worboys

They adorn some of the most iconic artwork in history: Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*, Michelangelo's *David* and Picasso's *Les Femmes d'Alger (O. J. R. M. V.)*. Indeed, from classical sculpture through to controversial contemporary photography, representations of the naked human body feature heavily in visual art history.

Tracking this representation of the naked body throughout history however is not the intent of *Exposed: Art and the Naked Body*, currently on display at Sydney's University Art Gallery. Instead, curator Michael Turner attempts to address the question 'What is the difference between a naked body and a nude?' by exploring their at times stark, but more often subtle differences.

Relying heavily on art historian Kenneth Clark's understanding of these differences, Turner proposes that the distinction lies in whether the figure carries with it a sense of embarrassment or vulnerability (rendering it naked) or whether it projects an image of a balanced, prosperous and confident body (rendering it nude). Turner has not explicitly labelled the works one way or another, instead leaving the audience to judge for itself into which category each piece fits. This is an excellent decision on his part as it hangs the same question, 'Naked or nude?' above each work and gives the viewer a point of reference when interacting with them.

The exhibition itself is bound by the size of the gallery's singular room and consequently brings fifty-seven works originating from the sixth century BC to the present into close proximity with each other. The lack of space has forced some works to be hung lower than is comfortable for the eye and at times it is difficult to give each work individual attention, however having multiple works in one's line of sight

does lend itself to the task of comparing and contrasting. The works include paintings, sculpture, works on paper and pottery and are for the most part grouped together by medium. This approach to the ordering of the exhibition works well considering the objective here is to compare and contrast various expressions of a central theme and to that end Turner's selection is quite successful in its diversity.

'What is the difference between a naked body and a nude?'

There is some real, if unexpected, star power featured here in *Exposed*. Works by iconic Australian artists such as Arthur Boyd, James Gleeson and Brett Whiteley hang opposite works by even bigger names like Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse and Auguste Rodin and this melting pot of accomplished artists is the exhibition's lifeblood. A highlight is William Dobell's *Study for Margaret Olley portrait*, instantly recognisable as the study for his Archibald prize winning painting and fascinating to consider as a 'nude' in and of itself. Also notable is Picasso's 1963 etching *L'Étreinte (The Embrace)*, a delicate study of a couple entwined in an intimate embrace and one of those occasions where the distinction between nude and naked is most definitely stark. [a](#)

Exposed: Art and the Naked Body
University Art Gallery, University of Sydney
4 January to 2 March 2011

Michael Stevenson: Innovation of a Tired Space.

by Sophie Vernardos

If you haven't been down to Sydney's Circular Quay recently it's possible you haven't noticed the depressing black veil enveloping the entire north side of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA). This shroud disguises the dramatic facelift of one of Sydney's most notable artistic hubs. The renovation is expected to bring a great vision to fruition, effectively developing what those on the MCA board refer to as a "centre of creative learning of national significance." (Knowles, 2011, p. 2) Whilst my personal disdain for the unfamiliar pushes me away from the popular space during its time of disorganisation and upheaval, I found myself drawn back by the magnetic curiosity of the final exhibition to be held in this space. Before its walls come crashing down it seems poetic justice that the site finds its conclusion in the potent work of the modern day storyteller, Michael Stevenson.

Entering this space with such personal nostalgia lends itself to preconceived expectations; Stevenson's self-titled exhibition aptly silenced mine. The New Zealand born artist working out of Berlin, apparently fluent in a myriad of mediums, delves into both a reflection of his practice and the re-imagining of it. The collection includes recent installations and video-based projects complemented with drawings, paintings and sculptures from his last twenty years of practice. What could be considered a perplexing grouping of work

can be justly appreciated upon delving into Stevenson's equally intricate mind. Layers of context and symbolism can be peeled back and decoded to expose contemplative criticism of economic, political and cultural norms.

Stevenson throws his audience right in the deep end of his diverse discussions, as an uncommitted sharp right turn into the exhibition produces *The gift* 2004-06. Stevenson seems to draw much of his practice from consideration of historical events that are significant to the art world, as well as from applied economic and political reasoning. This subject matter can be considered confrontational through his innovative use of the tired MCA space.

The gift 2004-06 stands proud before you, an artefact from a forgotten time cocooned by white walls. Formally the raft, pulled together by wood, aeroplane fuel tanks, bamboo, string and parachute fabric seems majestically steeped in history, much better suited to a collection of some dusty archive. Stevenson drags the relic back from its extinct dwellings, as the boat sits quite comfortably suspended on a bed of National Geographic issues. The vessel's origins form a memorial to the Australian artist Ian Fairweather's voyage from Australia to London in 1952. Equipped only with this most unlikely fashioned mode of transport

and a powerful devotion to his artistic mission, this fringe dweller found himself stranded in Indonesia. Fairweather's creative quest to seek an unconventional existence free from the heavy burden of traditional expectations saw him exchange the pieces of his raft for food and shelter with members of an Indonesian tribe.

Stevenson's precise reconstruction of Fairweather's raft acts not only as a monument but a symbolic signpost to a more intrinsic societal construct. It is Fairweather's anti financial trade through a non-monetary exchange of ideas and practice with a self-sufficient

culture that truly resonates with Stevenson. The work seems to draw personal parallels for the artist, as the replica pays a tangible form of tribute whilst exposing our disillusioned society. The connection lies, as Stevenson identifies, between "the emergence of a gift economy in the arts and its long association with destitution and poverty." (Taussing, 2011, p. 5). The clever relationships he both develops and questions begin far out at sea with Fairweather's voyage and carry throughout the exhibited work into common understandings of artistic worth and economic evolution.



Above: Michael Stevenson
The Gift, 2004-2005.
Aluminium, wood, bamboo, rope, natural fibres, tar, parachute, cotton fabric, National Geographics
6m x 2m x 3m
installation view, Herbert Read Gallery, KIAD, Canterbury
Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney



Above: Michael Stevenson
The Smiles are not Smiles, 2005.
 Wood, paint, ceramic, gold, paper,
 glass, metal. 8m x 5m x 2.3m
 Collection: Museum Abteiberg,
 Mönchengladbach / Depositum der
 Kunstsiftung im Museum Abteiberg,
 Mönchengladbach, Germany
 Courtesy the artist and Darren Knight
 Gallery, Sydney.

Equally, Stevenson plays with basic imagery in an effort to denounce the complexities associated with the prediction of economic sustainability. His skill in doing so is evident when this problematic issue is addressed through a counting machine linked to a small monitor, *Contadora*, 2011. Meaning becomes apparent when contemplating the distinctive application of a De La Rue 2300 counting machine, sifting nothing but the words of a fable but producing useless numbers regardless. Although a bleak reading of the circular and repetitious logic of a modern wealth based society, it is one that cannot be ignored.

Blending the skills of economist, anthropologist and artist for cross over commentary can be considered as difficult as mixing oil and water, but Stevenson not only unites these opposed entities, he blurs their definitions. Leading from graphite and pastel studies, the consideration of the artist's role in society is open for reflection, as a hands-on display of his methodical research is laid out for those participating to peruse and dissect at leisure. This willingness to not only study, but be studied, lends itself to an honest interpretation of aesthetics and the reasoning that lies beneath it.

The publicity surrounding the show seems to centre

around the notion that Stevenson treated the MCA exhibition as an installation in itself, inclusive of the space in which he had been given free reign. In utilising not only the traditional white walls, but also the bare bones of the MCA's structure and its inner workings, this was achieved. Personal affiliation and the feeling of individual inclusion are elements actualised in the viewer by pushing the down button on the once concealed service elevator. Both anticipation and the nagging discomfort of being shut in such an industrial cage further enhances laying eyes on Stevenson's 2005 installation *The smiles are not smiles*. The work is based around a 1978 exhibition that took place at the Tony Shafrazi gallery in Tehran, Iran, called *Gold bricks*. It was the only exhibition for the gallery as it coincided with rioting and revolution, effectively silencing Tony Shafrazi's vision of an expanding western art market in Iran.

Ordinary cinder bricks are smattered in gold leaf, neatly stacked in order until they dissolve into a river of rubble and metal. The remnants of Shafrazi's dream, complete with the exhibition's invitation, lay forgotten in the destruction. Stevenson draws interesting parallels between the failure of a western model in an eastern society and the magnetic connection that art practice and uprising share in history. Although this work was first exhibited in Berlin in 2005, it is Stevenson's treatment of it in the MCA's basement space that attributes to the work a profound sense of personal experience. The gilt framed double doors that leak an eerie light on the constructed scene provide an intensive unsettling air. The service lift drops the audience into this forgotten and unknown place, leaving the individual somewhere between a lost artistic vision and the realisation of it. It seems a place to be silent and reflective as the installation in this environment provides a distinctive quality enhanced as people pass the glass doors, revealing only their silhouettes.

Stevenson further displays his insightful and clever use of symbolism and story with the dark archaic science experiment that is *The fountain of prosperity*, 2006. Stevenson states "my ambition is to put something in the space that I would call an "object of intrigue." The viewer, hopefully, is intrigued to the degree that they would perhaps like to find out more." (Stevenson, 2011, p. 1) This notion resonates particularly well with *The fountain of prosperity*. This ancient machine stands surrounded by exposed pipes and broken walls, lit only from overhead by two tube fluorescents. Taking the form of an inventor's work

left forgotten in the dark, the water that trickles from rusted funnels and trays begs for a closer look. This stand-alone puzzle is nothing without its context, which requires the viewer to take initiative to pursue a deeper understanding. The open backlit book to the left of the structure explains that the machine was the brainchild of the 1950's economist Bill Phillip and is described as a hydro mechanical computer, called the MONIAC.

What can be observed through viewing Stevenson's replica is the scary notion of economic productivity being calculated through the use of liquid and the lack of human involvement the machine requires. Disturbing and inefficient mechanisms are explored as water flows through income, filtered through taxation, as little is left to trickle through domestic expenditure.

This collection of work forces the viewer to question those uncomfortable subjects that lend themselves to conformity. Stevenson's multifaceted ability to code his subject matter through his "objects of intrigue" (Stevenson, 2011, p. 1) is truly ambitious and overwhelmingly coherent. If not for his obvious intelligence and ability to expose cultural confines, Stevenson's MCA collection should be viewed for what it represents. It seems that informative artistic expression is fuelled by the artist's ability to manipulate the space to facilitate change and Stevenson's collection is testament to this. The show embraces this notion of change and awareness, forcing lovers of creature comforts, like myself, to bite their tongue and embrace the unknown and unfamiliar. **a**

Michael Stevenson
 Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
 6 April to 19 June 2011

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E.L.K

by Georgina Payne-Loy



Above:
E.L.K
Probably no god
Aerosol on wood
1400x700
Photo: Georgina Payne-Loy by permission of the artist.

The Oh Really Gallery sits snugly on Newtown's Enmore Road, just down from the big Oporto and the most amazing hummus and Turkish bread in Sydney. It's an unassuming place, just one room and a paper sign that warns of explicit material inside. Parental guidance is recommended for the one pornographic piece, but like the disclaimer notes, "if you are offended by this image I recommend taking a look at the world around us... and keeping your mouth shut."

The f**k-god, f**k-the-world, f**k-the-art scene mentality cruises through each of E.L.K's artworks quite casually. He doesn't take his general dislike for the universe and its inhabitants too seriously, but he does use it to inspire his message. It's not a particularly coherent message, but it doesn't need to be. The point lies within the pointlessness of any assertion carried by religion, authority, critics, or otherwise.

As soon as you walk through the door it is apparent the room is full of an abundance of different energies; the Saul Williams portrait (winner of the 2010 Australian Stencil Art Prize) fills the canvas with an all-consuming positive intensity. This sits next to *Probably no god*, a work dominated with negative space and a nihilistic attitude, but it works. *Probably no god* portrays Michelangelo's man lying casually next to an expanse of empty sky stretching into the background with no god in sight. E.L.K (also known as Luke Cornish) uses aerosols over cut stencils to express his disdain for religious belief, and - in a more generalised manner - human beings. Yet he portrays himself quite differently. On the adjacent wall to an absent god sits his self-portrait in which only his bottom half is shown as he climbs his way up a ladder.

In the past week E.L.K has experienced a flourish of success stemming from this travelling exhibition. His self-confessed inspiration of revenge, arising from all the people in his life who told him he wouldn't make anything of himself, is represented in distinct ways through each work. In the artist's statement he notes, "it's more of a celebration of having enough work in the same place, at the same time, to actually have an exhibition."

As much as it is evident E.L.K has persevered to stay far from the sometimes vapid and narcissistic tendencies of the contemporary art world, he has unconsciously let slip a few indulgent cultural references; it is difficult not to make comparisons to the infamous graffiti artist, Banksy, whose political statements took over the scene. Although E.L.K's practice is accomplished enough not to be dwarfed in comparison, claiming independence from those artists who have used the world's machinations to their advantage seems unfair.

The fifteen or so pieces that adorn the walls are at home in the little gallery. There is no attempt at a falsified grandeur, nor did they even clean the room terribly well before the installation.

This approach has suited the work of E.L.K perfectly; it shows why Luke Cornish doesn't need nice things. [a](#)

This is why we can't have nice things
Oh Really Gallery, Sydney
3 - 13 March 2011

Arlene TextaQueen

by Elizabeth Robinson

When one thinks of textas (Australian colloquialism for colourful felt tip pens) the term fine art does not come to mind; however, Arlene TextaQueen, a Melbourne born artist, has found a way to take the texta out of kindergarten and into contemporary fine art.

For the last decade TextaQueen has been exploring the controversial through her beautiful Manet-esque portraits, which challenge the idea of the voyeur by discussing contemporary issues through soft porn and her own personal manga style. TextaQueen is able to make compelling comments through her simplistic and naïve style, and explores political themes such as queer and feminist lifestyle, Australian identity and nature. Her artwork is more than just the finished product - it is also embedded in the process of creation. Each piece is truly contemporary as TextaQueen invites women and queer performers to dress down to their flesh to immortalise them in the now. They are decorated with and surrounded by possessions that represent each subject's personality and lifestyle. The results vary dramatically from laid back soulful images to overt and action packed scenes of imagined landscapes and Australian history retold. Accompanying the figures in each artwork is a small phrase that embodies the mood and motivation of the day the artwork was created and the persona of the subjects within it. Though her nudes

are predominantly female, the ideas expressed are not bound to gender.

Her current exhibition of nine nudes is a breakaway from her former work. These nudes are more romantic, and are placed within a natural environment. Each woman in this series is depicted as a goddess (including a portrait of herself) and approaches aspects of Manet's *Olympia*. Each woman looks back at you with sincerity and conveys their own perception of the contemporary world.

“TextaQueen has found a way to take the texta out of kindergarten and into contemporary fine art”

The most powerful piece of the exhibition, *Ain't nothing in this world belongs to nobody* (Kat Marie Yoas), 2011, exudes more than just Kat Marie Yoas' persona as a feminist zine author and performance artist. She is drawn surrounded by animals and nature, including water, ferns, giraffes and owls with the caption

“Ain't nothing in this world belongs to nobody”. TextaQueen uses this juxtaposition of nature and womanhood as a reminder that humans are not in control of nature, or each other, a notion which is often forgotten in contemporary society. This piece also strategically comments on the voyeuristic nature of male artists throughout history. It evokes *The birth of Venus* as Yoas' skin is pure white and she has long flowing red hair, however unlike Venus she is not coy or subtle, but confronts the audience with her glaring eyes and dominance over her surroundings. This is a technique that TextaQueen often uses in her portraits to reverse the role of the voyeur by letting the women stare directly at the audience.

The works *Better than flowers* (Tave), 2011, and *Sold my soul to satan for thirty dollars* (Jen Jen), 2011, are personal depictions of their subjects. *Better than flowers* (Tave) portrays Tave surrounded by several My Little Pony toys including one in front of her vagina. She is suggesting that the way into her bed is through personal tokens rather than generic gifts. This piece is very spontaneous compared to the other artworks in the exhibition, as the scene is not particularly choreographed. *Sold my soul to satan for thirty dollars* (Jen Jen) depicts a woman reclined wearing sunglasses with the flames of hell reflected in them. This is the only piece in the series where the woman's eyes are completely obstructed, however this does not make her any less powerful in terms of subverting the convention of the voyeur from her position of looking down on the audience while reclining.

“Unlike Venus she is not coy or subtle, but confronts the audience with her glaring eyes”

Like other portraits *Self portrait in Texas* (Rainbow), 2011, is a nude, surrounded by a tie-dye rainbow of textas. The idea of a self-portrait amongst these other pieces is interesting as TextaQueen is not making a comment on herself or her life, other than that it is full of texta pens. It seems out of place in this exhibition, except for the god like radiance exuded in her face.

I like it when you use it self consciously (Kevin Blechdom), 2011 is a portrait of Kevin Blechdom, formerly Kristin Erickson, a performance artist from San Francisco. TextaQueen plays with ideas of gender in this piece, as Kevin by name and by appearance does not seem to be a woman. The first hint at her gender is an overt and confronting view of Kevin holding her vagina open as a reflection in a mirror, and then her large breasts become visible on closer inspection. Kevin holds an electric drill as a symbol of masculinity but wears a flower head band on her head suggesting a struggle between her masculine and feminine identities.

“The struggle between norms, gender and sexuality recurs in her artwork”

This series is more of an installment in an ongoing project than a stand-alone exhibition and TextaQueen's practice will continue to evolve with her perceptions. The struggle between norms, gender and sexuality recurs in her artwork but as a female artist she is very sensitive to the lifestyles and cultures of those she portrays, reinforcing the fact that she is less of a voyeur and more of an advocate for the alternative lifestyles she portrays in great sensitivity through her roar of colour. [a](#)

Arlene TextaQueen
Sullivan + Strumpf, Sydney
3 - 27 March 2011

ART CRIMES

by Rebecca Rossmann

What did art ever do to you?

This question might be asked of the two individuals who, within a few months of each other, perpetrated crimes against art in the United States. Sadly, in one incident the assailant was successful in destroying the artwork, however in the other case a sheet of plexiglass saved the piece.

On 6 October 2010, a woman by the name of Kathleen Folden walked into the Loveland Museum and Gallery in Loveland Colorado to accomplish more than just see the show. With the help of the crowbar she purchased for the occasion, Ms Folden attacked and destroyed a lithograph on display by Enrique Chagoya entitled *The misadventure of romantic cannibals*. This was a twelve-panelled lithograph, which portrayed Jesus in an explicit sexual act (ARTINFO, 2010). According to an article published by foxnews.com on 4 October 2010, two days before the attack, many people were opposed to the artwork being exhibited at the museum (Macedo, 2011). Since the show was funded by taxpayers' money, it appears that some of those taxpayers opposed the decision by the museum to exhibit a work whose subject matter tied Christ and sex together. Nevertheless, an agreement between the museum and community was never realised because Ms Folden took the matter into her own hands when she shredded the lithograph with her crowbar.

The second reported attack occurred on 1 April 2011 on Paul Gauguin's masterpiece, *Two Tahitian women*. On loan from the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the work was exhibited at the National Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. as part of the exhibit titled *Gauguin: Maker of myth*. A 4 April 2011 report by The Washington Post stated that Susan Burn "...grabbed the painting by its frame and attempted to pull it off the wall. She then hit the painting, which was protected by a plexiglass shield, with her right fist...". The article continues to explain that the woman was restrained before any permanent damage was done to the work (Trescott, 2011). What provoked Ms Burn to try and wreck the masterpiece? The Washington Post quoted her motive for the attack in that she felt "It was too homosexual." The painting could be described as two women, one of whom is bare-breasted while the other's breasts are partially covered. Fortunately, this time the only harm done was to the wall hangings and frame, and not the artwork itself.

Unfortunately, art crimes are not only isolated to the United States and happen all over the world. In 1997 at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia the now world famous work by Andres Serrano entitled *Piss Christ* was attacked on two separate occasions, the second attack doing more damage than the first. A painting by Pablo Picasso entitled *Femme nue devant le jardin* (*Woman nude before a garden*) was attacked with a knife in 2000 at the Stedelijk



Museum of Modern Art in Amsterdam, Netherlands. Another major art crime happened in 2001 when the Taliban blew up the Bamiyan statues in Afghanistan. Regrettably, there are many more examples and because art crimes happen often enough there is a website dedicated to reporting on them (Frost, 2009). The question is: what should those of us in the visual arts do to keep attacks on art from happening?

Violence against art may never fully be eliminated because there will always be people who do not agree with all types of artistic subject matter. With this in mind, arts professionals ought to find solutions to help discourage people against art crimes. One such resolution is to fully understand the exhibiting art's subject matter, the audience, and how the two will interact when combined. This solution could be obtained by taking a strong educational approach to the work, for example providing special explanations of the work and why the gallery perceives it as worthy of display. Also, if more focus is given to potential negative viewer reactions before exhibiting a controversial work of art, museums and galleries could possibly prevent attacks by enacting heightened security, like protective barriers or cases and even alarm systems. Solutions to overcome this problem could entail additional security guards with the artwork, or introducing new methods of displaying art to protect the gallery's pieces without detracting from the museum or gallery experience. At the very least, galleries and museums should review their security protocols periodically to ensure employees know the procedures for defacement. Hopefully these possible solutions will deter visitors from attempting a crime but in the event there is an attempted art crime, these individuals will have the minimal amount of time to inflict damage on the piece.

Crimes against art continue to be a sad reality and individuals outside the art world may not fully comprehend the resulting implications. When art is destroyed the reality is that the piece is gone forever, never to be enjoyed again. When this happens the time, work, and creativity that went into producing the artwork can no longer be appreciated. It is understandable that not everyone will enjoy every piece of art that has ever been created, but why should some people feel they have a right to take something away from those who may enjoy that particular artistic expression? Who is it that gets to decide what art is and who should see it? Why do people like Karen Folden or Susan Burns feel they have a right to destroy it if they do not like it? The lesson here should be to those working in the arts; they need to learn from attacks such as these to better protect art. Hopefully the events experienced in the United States will spark continued discussion for those in the art industry with the intent to learn from the past and provide better solutions for museums and galleries. a

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Below and above: Enrique Chagoya, *The misadventure of Romantic Cannibals*, 2003, Courtesy of Shark's Ink., Lyons, CO, USA



Vessels of Nature

by Laura Gamio Raluy

Lately I have been noticing that a considerable percentage of both designers and visual artists include nature and its metaphors in their professional practice – something that is probably linked to their personal interest. This makes me think of nature as a subconscious trigger of our interests and reactions. If this is so, why? And how do we acknowledge this and encourage it in a technology driven society that seems to be forgetting that the earth is really where we come from? The practice of Lisa Sammut may provide some answers.

Lisa Sammut is a Sydney-based artist who recently graduated from COFA BFA Printmaking. She mainly works with printmaking, watercolours and charcoal drawings. Sammut draws us closer to these feelings of innate direction towards nature by creating an eternal comparison and metaphor through the human body and its similarities to nature. These images present us with human stories told through the imagery of a surreal herbarium that grows its way into your dreams. They are made of never-ending symbols that can be represented in tools and maybe even as vessels; human bodies encapsulating many stories that will remain unknown. The artist has said, “Through the use of metaphor and contrast, the human form, both fragile and defiant, exists locked in an eternal struggle between life’s natural progression and the innate human nature that tries to defy and alter it.”

In her etching *What lies beneath*, the succulent in the vase is floating on what seems to be its roots that are squashed inside, but as the spectator looks closer they resemble a sea of human limbs struggling to escape the trap they find themselves in. The succulent is keeping them underwater, yet this is the only way the plant has to survive. Sammut

comments on her choice of the succulent plant, saying that “the texture of this plant is beautiful - when you touch the leaves it feels like human skin, I’m in love with them.” (Interview with the artist, 2011) This work is a perfect example of a vessel that holds human leftovers in order to allow nature to grow and evolve; it’s almost as if each were not able to survive without the other. This brings up the notion that the body and nature are inextricably linked, that regardless of what we might think in terms of progress we are more in touch with nature than we think – it’s just a question of looking around us and realising what actually drives us.

The artwork is an investigation of the human body and how nature plays an important role. Sammut’s work makes me speculate that these facts will innately affect and condition our reactions, subconsciously creating surreal realities that are constructed of dreams. This is her starting point. At the time of creating, rather than drafting she will sit down and sketch up almost as an unconscious reaction, so it this really what it’s about. We are unconsciously trying to recover our raw instincts in which the first men felt that they were connected to the earth and nature. We come from nature and instinctively we are drawn towards it, the symbolism and metaphors that we carry around with us and we see around us are sometimes directly related to nature and its components. Despite the evolution of mankind and the many technologies we have developed, it still feels as if we are driven by nature.

Ultimately, Lisa Sammut’s work reminds me that no matter how modern we are, there are things that will never change. They might adapt but they stay the same. Maybe we have always been but vessels of nature. [a](#)



Above:
Lisa Sammut, *What lies beneath*, 2010
Etching, aquatint.
By permission of the artist

A collage of the Australian landscape - Rosalie Gascoigne and Lorraine Connelly-Northey

by Dorothy Lui

What surprised and thrilled me about the artists Rosalie Gascoigne (25 January 1917 – 25 October 1999) and Lorraine Connelly-Northey (born in 1962) was that their art includes such great sculptural work. One of the commonalities between them is that Gascoigne and Connelly-Northey both experiment with different types of techniques and materials. In search of 'treasure', each artist recycles discarded everyday items into works of art to create something new of value. Objects that could be considered junk are used to represent various images, which the viewer is able to interpret in many different ways.

However, looking at the works of both Gascoigne and Connelly-Northey, it is evident that these artists can reflect the spirit of a time and place by using curves, symbols and text found around them to create a message. Both artists are also environmentalists. Gascoigne collected weathered materials that she incorporated into her sculptures. Known as an "artistic hunter and gatherer", she preferred rustic materials as she believed them to have an "essence of life" (AGNSW, 1997 pp.7-9). She based her selection of materials on the surface, shape and colour of the objects (AGNSW, 1997, pp.7-9). Gascoigne believed that each object used in her sculpture has its own history that adds meaning to the piece (Stone, 2003) She examined the surface of materials and tried to imagine their past (Tacey, 1995, pp.6-7). The materials Gascoigne used were personally associated with her and gave life and meaning to her artworks.

Connelly-Northey's personal interest in the protection of the environment is represented in her art by the use of recycled materials. (Gough, 2006, p.86) Connelly-Northey interweaves grasses, sedges and birds' feathers with rustic metal mesh, wire and corrugated iron into works of art. Where Connelly-Northey's work displays a sense of movement, Gascoigne made still lifes from old enamel jugs and plates, dolls, wooden boxes, sheep's heads and most famously, retro-reflective road signs. Gascoigne's art has a wonderful weathered quality to it and the items are often quite quaint and old fashioned, where Connelly-Northey's work is more contemporary in style. Both artists' work is made up of ordinary materials

that they found in the environment in order to bring out the beauty of the Australian landscape.

The experience of displacement from her land provided Connelly-Northey with the impetus for the strong personal significance in the materials she chooses. As a Waradgerie woman, she is not comfortable using local Cumbungi grasses (a reed that stands eight to ten feet tall on dam banks and lake shores) for her weaving, out of respect for the traditional owners of the country she now lives in (Kent, 2010, p.36). It is amongst this debris that she has found a resonance to times past.

Both artists' practices reveal aspects of the Australian experience through earthy colours and materials. Gascoigne cut, grouped and arranged materials into 'poetic' assemblages of a minimal and abstract nature to capture the essence of the Australian landscape, exemplified by *Inland sea*, 1995. Contrastingly, Connelly-Northey's sculptural work *O'Possum skin cloak*, 2007 does not calm the viewer into reflection but instead tries to induce disquiet. The title of the work conjures up images of soft, revered clothing, however the stunning work is constructed from rusty barbed wire that juts out from the wall in an aggressive tangle. This is a challenging and compelling work.

Gascoigne had and Connelly-Northey has her own unique practice that is concerned at least in part with environmental issues; all of their works are environmentally friendly to the extent that they were naturally sourced. Their works challenge the viewer's imagination and are aesthetically engaging. **a**

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Artists and Social Media

by Charles Heyen

Without realising it, I started collecting artists about five years ago. Yes, I said 'artists' not 'art.' Like most people, my budget for artwork is limited to a few inexpensive things that I can hang on a wall. But that does not mean I would not like to acquire more items of merit. Until such time as I inherit millions from some unknown aunt or uncle or I win the lotto, I collect artists who show their work in galleries, online through social media and their own websites or blogs to keep track of their successes. In the past, interested parties discovered artworks in much more traditional ways, like a visit to a museum or gallery exhibition or even a newspaper article or magazine. However, these established familiar ways are limited because you might miss someone or something by skipping a month or two. Even when you work in the visual arts field, the changing nature of art and international culture, the sheer number of artists and rapid growth in social media, there are some things you will never see. We now have many more options to discover and start to follow the worldwide artistic expressions of thousands of artists, good or bad. In this article I examine the impact, which is an amazing trend, of just two social media web applications: flickr.com and facebook.com, both growing in use for the online art world.

According to the 'About flickr' link from their home page this web application has two main goals: first they "want to help people make their photos available to the people who matter to them" and second they "want to enable new ways of organising photos and video" (flickr.com, 2011). In addition to photographers there are thousands of artists who post images of their artworks, so it is for anyone with visual images to share. Besides the personal use of Flickr, this website has a great many social and artistic practical uses. Accounts are linked with family, friends, companies and students so anyone with Internet access can see the posted photographs, depending on your account settings, virtually instantaneously.

What flickr.com and many similar sites lack is the social interaction beyond the occasional friend posting a comment or marking an image as a favourite. There is also a much higher degree of anonymity among members due to the high number of members willing to post controversial or adult natured imagery or photography which means you do not often get a sense of an account holder's full personality as they tend to hide behind their profile. This problem of anonymity is one reason that it is not as easy to get into a conversation about more than just a single image or album.

So Flickr is great for display but not as good for creating dialogue among its members and, until this is corrected by the site designers, it will continue to be only of partial value to artists and audiences wanting to connect.

According to the photographer Trevor Brown, however, his photography being posted on flickr.com brought about his first 'big break' with a gallery outside of New York. He says "being on Flickr led to my international debut this year. My presence on Facebook only cemented this. I maintain that I think Facebook, Twitter et. al. are internet crack. Artists need to learn how to leverage these tools to their benefit" (Brown, 2011).

In my opinion, full social media websites like Facebook give you the chance to discover not only the art but also the artist's personality behind the artworks, an ability that Flickr currently lacks. Yet it seems to me that Facebook is taking over as a social media

leader due to a common trait that they both share. Facebook has a similar uniform design structure that allows its users to focus on content and not on the layout and design of the content. According to the 'About' link available on the Facebook information page they are "giving people the power to share and make the world more open and connected" (facebook.com, 2011). Their company overview says "millions of people use Facebook everyday [sic] to keep up with friends, upload an unlimited number of photos, share links and videos, and learn more about the people they meet" (facebook.com, 2011). The personal connection is what Facebook is all about even if the connection is with a gallery or a museum or visual artist. It is also what makes it a great way for artists and their potential audience to meet each other outside of a gallery in a safe and convenient environment. This is what I feel will be the next step toward a new kind of 'patronage' where an art owner will 'know' an artist and support that relationship potentially with purchases.

Below:
Trevor Brown, *Dirty Puerto Rican Son*,
January 2011, San Juan Puerto Rico,
www.trevorbrownonline.com



This fundamental difference between social media websites, art sharing websites, blogs and artist and gallery produced websites is a huge benefit to the layperson who has avoided learning HTML or website design due to its sheer complexity, cost and upkeep. I believe having a user controlled uniform template upon which everyone has equal standing and status makes for a more diplomatic and unobtrusive way to show art, images and photography than a brick-and-mortar gallery would be able to achieve on their own. Currently, there may not be a truly successful or fulfilling way of experiencing artwork virtually through the Internet or software programs, but until there is, I cannot think of a better way for artists and gallery professionals to use web applications like Facebook to tote, promote, and show off their art, and at least Facebook is completely free.

Some other issues that arise with the use of both Flickr and Facebook are that few people seem to use both. For example, I can sometimes get friends on Flickr to 'befriend' me on Facebook but I can almost never get Facebook friends to access my photography on Flickr unless they already use it. Therefore, like Trevor Brown, I sometimes end up posting things twice, with the full size images available on Flickr and smaller images uploaded to my Facebook account. Also, I almost never read a personal blog any more by intentionally navigating to artist's website but I will read individual articles if they are advertised in a 'Wall' post. This personal habit may seem annoying to my blog-posting friends but I now feel that if something is important then my friends need to let me know directly and not just assume that I will find it on my own. I feel this more and more about many gallery and museum websites as well.

This is a good point to focus on for a moment because it lies at the heart of this article. If finding out about art is easier via the Internet, then the new networks we create between artists and ourselves, while enjoying social media sites, will only make it that much easier to find art that you love. You no longer have to do so much searching all on your own and using a common starting point application will take a smaller fraction of time. I do not know if there is an updated term for the Facebook equivalent of word-of-mouth but that is what this idea all comes down to, friends telling friends. And we should not kid ourselves because networking is all about finding and keeping relationships that will improve our lives, if not financially, then socially.

Like the social media sites or not, you have to admit that they are a lot of work. The most successful and entertaining contributors to these websites, in my opinion, are the ones that post on a daily or at the very least weekly basis. Even though I doubt the success of most pointed advertising on Facebook I have to admit that sometimes I do follow these ads for artists and galleries and art related news. The only obviously successful means of getting free 'public relations' used to be by doing something newsworthy and getting a mention in a newspaper. With the decline in readership of newspapers and magazines I cannot see how an artist or gallery would choose to rely on what is left of traditional media or only on their own websites. To be a little realistic, we should also not forget that there is nothing completely free. Facebook and Flickr are very restrictive on what kinds of images they allow and what can be posted. Therefore, social media sites should also not be the only 'public relations' methods that galleries or individual artists rely on. Remember Facebook has a right to these restrictions because it is not a public institution but a private company.

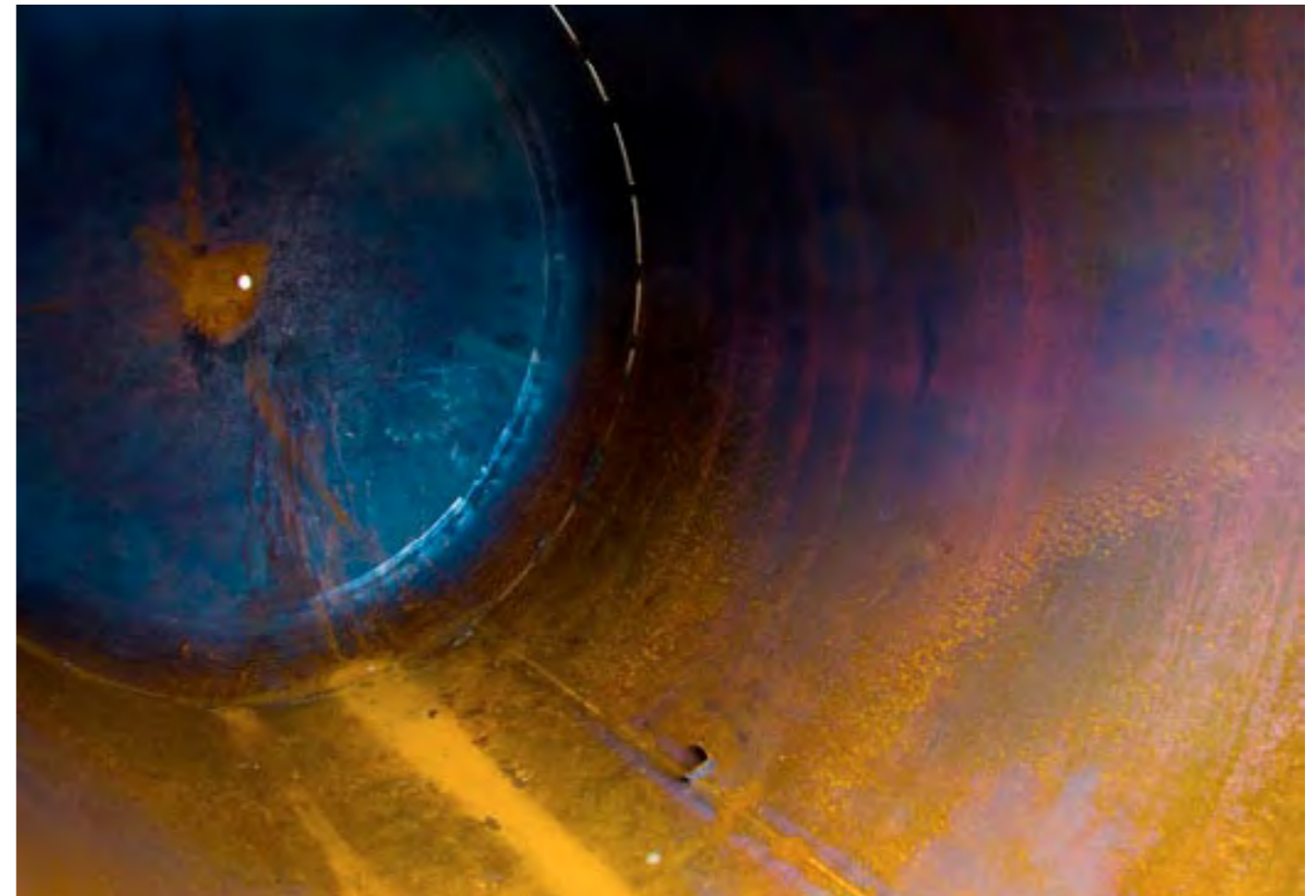
In examining the growing trend of artists using Flickr and Facebook as social connections to their patrons, I hoped to expose some benefits and drawbacks of the phenomenon. I have only begun to examine this issue here but I believe an awareness of social media and its growing importance and use is something no visual artist should ignore. [a](#)

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Above:
Trevor Brown, *Exploding Planets*,
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Realistic Art

by Julie Kim

Going back to the Renaissance period, we can find many masterpieces like the *David* (1500-1504), which symbolises the strength and beauty of the human body through sculpture. Considered a 'perfect' work of art by many, it was sculpted by the great Italian artist Michelangelo Buonarroti (6 March 1475 – 18 February 1564), and took many years to create. But if Michelangelo were working today, would 21st century audiences be intrigued by a perfectly formed sculpture like the *David*?

Looking at the work by contemporary artists such as Australian sculptor Ron Mueck (b. 1958), it can be argued that people in today's society are attracted to art that is realistically perfect, but that artists themselves are pushing the genre beyond perfect representation. Mueck is renowned for his uncanny sculptures, which are utterly lifelike but often altered in scale. His incredible skill is demonstrated in one of his best-known works, the 2.5 metre-high *Pregnant woman*, 2002. This particular work powerfully impacted audiences around the world with its emotional subject matter and hauntingly realistic detail. The subject in the *Pregnant woman* displays every detail of a real life pregnancy including her swollen feet and hands, an enormous belly and her exhausted facial expression and is all the more compelling for being larger than life. As 'real' as this artwork looks, it has been stated, "This is a very emotional work to someone who has lived through challenging pregnancy, never been pregnant or failed to be pregnant" (National Gallery of Australia, Director's talk, Brian Kennedy 2004). This statement encapsulates the way in which Mueck has employed realism to challenge audiences – the work would not have been as successful without the realistic, almost 'too real' features. It is possible though that for some, Mueck's super-sized realism is intimidating.

Sometimes the best artwork causes controversy and super-real art is no exception. Paul Trefry's (b. 1967) sculpture *Little boy lost*, 2009 was installed in the 2009 edition of Australia's largest outdoor exhibi-

tion, *Sculpture by the Sea*. Originally, the sculpture of the little boy was submitted naked. However, Waverley Council, which governs the area in which *Sculpture by the Sea* takes place, decided that the boy's nakedness displayed 'too much detail' and the council ordered that a blue swimming suit be added to the figure. An even more recent example is Shen Shaomin's (b. 1956) *Summit series*, 2010, exhibited in the 17th Biennale of Sydney (2010), which is a sculpture of five dead communist leaders in crystal coffins. The life-sized models astonished audiences, particularly because the sound of gentle breathing accompanied the slight movement of their supposedly lifeless chests. It is evident that Shen Shaomin intends for his art to do things that no one would ever expect from a 'beautifully' real sculpture.

Thus, even though artists like Ron Mueck and Paul Trefry are sometimes criticized, realistic sculptures are successfully capturing the attention of audiences around the world as contemporary artists experiment with how realism can generate meaning. **a**

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Cynical Realism

by Phoebe Chan

Imagine being nurtured in a world of optimism, flooded with information and captivating promises, your values and aesthetics built upon the free flow of ideas and a promising future. Then, one day, the bubble just burst and all that was left was disruption, despair and repression. The vicious needle that burst the dreams of all Chinese was the tragic incident of 1989 in which groups of students protesting in Tiananmen Square were killed in a government crackdown. The sudden death of all idealism in turn gave rise to a new kind of art form in China— Cynical Realism. This popular art movement sprung from the aftermath of the Tiananmen Square protest to focus on socio-political issues. Two of the most prominent artists of the genre, Fang Lijun and Yue Minjun, depict a cynical detachment from the growth of society in their paintings. Their humorous satire of modern society and distorted images that challenge government conformity placed them a cut above the rest in contemporary Chinese art society.

When you see a painting by either Fang or Yue, you most likely will immediately recognise the painter. This is not only owing to the individual artistic style, but because both artists use their own face as the protagonist in their artworks to show the lack of individuality and hope in society. Their artworks voice their thoughts and emotions, however Fang's paintings are even more cynical than Yue's, which have more of a satirical note.

Fang Lijun is one of the foremost proponents of Cynical Realism. His paintings are filled with vibrant colours, yet they are only masking the artist's discontentment with society - the shadow from the early

1990s still lingers, struggling to press through. Fang began to use multiple-figure compositions along with his intense colour scheme in the nineties as a result of these feelings. His 1998 work, *Untitled*, is covered by a crowd of indistinguishable young reddish faces, gazing upwards with eyes closed. Their skin is coloured vibrantly red as the mass is arguably under the influence of Socialism and Maoism. The propaganda of these ideologies falsely duped the people into a vision of Utopia, portrayed in this work by the manner in which the people look up with their eyes closed. The vibrancy of colour also suggests a time of prosperity, contrasting the vacant dreams of the youth across the picture plane. Fang Lijun is blatantly cynical about the people's anticipation of joy.

Among the same batch of arts students as Fang who went through the Tiananmen protest, Yue also creates work that is deeply influenced by the tragic incident. He developed his symbols to show the hypocrisy of the current prosperity. He also uses bright colours to draw parallels to Socialist propaganda posters in early communism, playing with the illusion of prosperity the government promised.

In artwork such as *The execution*, Yue Minjun openly mocks the result of the Tiananmen protest. Reminiscent of *The execution of Emperor Maximilian* by Manet, *The execution* is a satirical take on political violence. Cramming the entire protest into the frame, Yue chose to depict the workers and the executors with the same vacuous grin. This mindless yet ridiculous smile is deeply revealing because, as he reminds us, a smile does not always imply happiness. The superficial smile here draws a direct comparison to

the early Socialist propaganda posters where people are happily laughing. It is interesting to note that what is depicted in those types of posters is often the direct opposite of reality. The grin is masking the helplessness of people throughout the country. Yue's iconic grin and Fang's symbolic colour scheme both make cynical comments on the absurdity of the cheerful dream of Socialism, where the illusion of prosperity and happiness is inevitably heading to a dead end.

When compared to Fang Lijun, Yue Minjun's art is more extroverted in a sense. Fang's creations tend to highlight the internal struggle of the people and to strike the audiences with the voluminous layers of bare heads and intensive colour.

His works are much more cynical, albeit with a hint of forlornness. Yue's self-expression, on the other hand, is less despondent. He uses laughter to mock life's frivolity; his icons are depicted with an aloof attitude. Among the early Chinese avant-garde both Fang and Yue hold a very cynical view of their own country's future, indelibly shaped by their living through the 1989 incident. Perhaps living through this incident was too much to endure, as the two artists now obviously still hold subconscious negative views of Chinese society.

Many regard the works of these two artists to be highly political; nonetheless I believe they are primarily working from a strong personal motivation—that of trying to make sense of the world through art—and it is this motivation that will ensure their work endures. Political regimes fade along with time, yet the humanity and emotions captured in their paintings can definitely transcend time. Cynical Realism is the formal art movement in which the artists operate; however they prove that there is meaning deeper than mere political irony in their artworks. [a](#)

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Art Jam Therapy

By Vivian Low

Increasingly, many Hong Kong city dwellers are suffering from stress in their daily routines and many are seeking different methods to release this. In recent years, a trend has emerged as a way of 'self-therapy' - Art Jam.

'Artjamming' takes its name from jazz jam sessions and was first launched in Hong Kong's Soho district by founder Betty Cheung in early 2000. This new therapy takes place between the participant, a bunch of paints, a couple of paint brushes, an empty canvas and music, followed by a lot of experimenting within the room. Through this experience the participant can release their emotions, escape from worries and freshen their mind.

Art Jam is a current phenomenon in which people are inspired to search for their creative interests and pursuits through a process of 'feeling the flow'. It aims to enhance the participants' experiences of joy and pleasure. With the advances in psychotherapy and neurobiology in recent years, art therapy has increasingly been applied when verbal psychotherapy has failed to prove effective. "Numerous therapists have reported the benefits of creative arts therapies in their settings" (Henley, 1997, pp.15-22).

So, what is Art therapy? And why might it work?

According to Eliza Muldoon, a sessional lecturer in art therapy at the University of New South Wales, it is a form of expression that is channeled through a variety of artistic materials. "Art making is seen as an opportunity to express oneself imaginatively, authentically, and spontaneously; it is an experience that, over time, can lead to personal fulfillment, emotional reparation, and recovery." (Muldoon, personal communication, 2011). However, Muldoon has doubts whether Art Jam falls under a traditional form of art therapy. As stated by Muldoon in an interview, "it somewhat depends on the definition of art therapy that you subscribe to. If you subscribe to the idea that art therapy is the form of art making used in clinical settings by clinically trained therapists, then obviously not. If you are more lenient in your definition and consider the act of art making as having potential health benefits, then you could consider it therapeutic." (Muldoon, personal communication, 2011).

The studio setting is a very important factor as it creates a specialised atmosphere that transports participants away from stress and negative thought. According to Denny Lui, a tutor of Art Jam classes in Hong Kong, "as the Artjammers draw from their own experience and understanding, confidence is developed and he or she becomes less self-conscious. Eventually they find their own styles and then they know their work belongs to them - and that becomes the motiva-

tion for further work. They will be full of energy and power when they return to work in reality." (Denny Lui, personal communication, 2010).

Muldoon does not believe that Art Jam impacts on the recovery process of those who are suffering from mental illness, but it could be useful for those who lead a particularly stress-filled lifestyle. "Creativity can have significant health and wellbeing benefits and I am certainly an advocate for increasing participation in art-making and creativity activities. But with a diagnosable condition, such as depression, I believe the involvement of a trained therapist would be preferable." (Muldoon, personal communication, 2011).

Does painting prove useful in the crowded and fast paced central business districts? It would seem that for 'artjammers' who independently participate in their own healing process, the sessions help to build on what is intact rather than to remediate what is lost. Art Jam encourages participants to 'self-organise'

rather than depend on external organisations or individual therapy. Art Jam offers the opportunity to release the daily pressures of life. Through painting, hopes, fears, and ideas are all translated into a personal visual language (Hannemann, 2006). Art Jam is so appealing because it touches the soul of those stressful and unhealthy generations who are confined to work in a congested area such as Hong Kong. [a](#)

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Above:
Paintings by 'Artjammers'

Ross Watson

by Jack Mochan

From the very first glance, it's clear why Ross Watson's work is admired by gay men; however, its striking realism and preoccupation with the male form transcends boundaries of sexual preference, stunning viewers with its combination of fantasy, reality and sensuality.

Many of Watson's paintings make homage to classic artists such as Vermeer, Caravaggio, Giorgione, Sebastian, as seen in his series *Classic De Novo*. Elsewhere, he takes elements of the everyday and transforms them into the sublime, for example, by inserting hooded figures and utes into classical Australian landscapes in *Introduced Species*, a series on the isolation faced by gay youth in rural areas.

His latest work, *Untitled 06-10* (after Caravaggio, 1603; Featuring Louie Larrinaga), is one of the larger works the artist has created. Professor Martin Comte described this "as for me, this work is up there with the strongest, most challenging, of Watson's paintings. In addition to its brilliance, this is one of Watson's most confronting works". Here, the religious imagery chosen by the Vatican to best promote its message of love and forgiveness, especially to the poor and illiterate, is re-contextualised by Watson. The original Caravaggio depiction of rapture is juxtaposed with a muscular bloke hunched over his iPhone, to raise questions of the nature of modern worship and dependence on technology.

Watson's subjects have included role models of the gay community; former Manly and Australian international rugby league player Ian Roberts, diver and Olympic Gold medal winner and gay sweetheart Matthew Mitcham, celebrated porn star and enigmatic style icon François Sagat and singer Jake Shears

from the Scissor Sisters. But straight sports-stars such as Collingwood football players Brodie Holland and Paul Licuria have also posed nude for Watson. For his own self portrait however, the artist is more modest, fully clothed in suit and tie in *Untitled #16/06* (after Reni, 1619, *Self Portrait*).

In the *Myth and Reality* series, Watson focuses on the appropriation of works by Caravaggio and van de Velde using Matthew Mitcham and François Sagat as willing subjects. Two paintings feature each model posing nude and holding fast onto a white sheet. The painting of Mitcham using Willem van der Velde's flotillas as a background captures the moment of suspense and vulnerability seen before Mitcham's first dive that won him that Olympic gold medal. The images of Sagat illustrate his ultra-masculine yet playful and enigmatic persona.

His photography series *Catalogue XXVIII* features the bodies of sportsmen alongside famous Roman torsos and iconic Roman and Venetian streetscapes. The works consist of three separate images which blend into a triptych; the landscape, the body and the image of the sculpture. Each of these parts blend into each other despite the contrast in colour, making it a hybrid composition of the modern image of the male torso, the ancient depiction of the torso in sculpture and the timeless, yet still modern streetscape of Rome or Venice.

Often erotic, and specifically homoerotic, Watson's work portrays the male nude at its most beautiful. Watson pays attention to detail in terms of lighting, contrast and texture as he pays homage to the European masterpieces that showcase the male form. His



Above:
Ross Watson, *Untitled #02-10* (after Caravaggio, 1600; featuring Matthew Mitcham), 2010, oil on board 78x61cm. By permission of the artist.

palette is true to realism, the fashions modern and subtle, and the scale enormous.

Born in Brisbane in 1962, Watson first came to the fore in 1990, appearing in the Moët & Chandon Touring Exhibition curated by Frances Lindsay. He later focused on fashion photography and worked for influential publications including Blue magazine, Elle and Outrage, before developing his niche as a highly trained painter. His works have frequently appeared in shows that document the era of HIV/AIDS including Imaging AIDS and Don't Leave Me This Way: Art in the Age of AIDS. Watson's appreciation for eclectic models and subject matter and sense of style and rhythm has evolved over the years, and he has developed a substantial following. His work has been collected by people as diverse as singer Elton John, swimmer Grant Hackett, High Court judge Justice Michael Kirby and former Liberal MP Petro Georgiou, and on permanent display in the National Gallery of Canberra, the National Portrait Gallery,

and the National Gallery of Victoria. His first 20 years is documented in his book *Untitled#*, released four years after his first book *OVERVIEW*. Ross Watson still lives in a relatively quiet life in Melbourne with his partner despite the extent of his international fame. **a**

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An inevitable flow – creative industry. Art cannot live without commerce

by Sandy Chien



Above:
Ross Watson, *Untitled #04-10* (after Caravaggio, 1602; featuring Francois Sagat), 2010, oil on board 85x76cm. By permission of the artist.

Nowadays, the creative arts and crafts usually involve some kind of business savvy, whether through print reproduction, mainstream products or well-executed publicity. The best-known exponent of this is Andy Warhol, who was able to balance his creativity equally between art and commerce. Historically, artists have been supported by the nobility or other wealthy patrons and as a result of this art became a status symbol of the upper classes. However, art markets have changed since they started servicing the wider public rather than just a select few. Through a series of revolutions throughout Europe in the 19th and 20th centuries, the power of the aristocracy was destroyed, which consequently ruined the patronage system for artists. This situation forced artists to pursue other means of support, especially within the commercial aspect of the arts industry. This article will highlight two successful artists, Andy Warhol and Japanese artist Takashi Murakami; both artists were able to find symmetry between creating and selling their art.

The main reason that art now puts more emphasis on its commercial side than ever before is because art investors and collectors have changed from a clientele

of the elite to one of the masses. However, after experiencing 'art booms' where the price of paintings in Britain steadily increased by 870% since 1975, including several inflationary periods, art has been regarded as a high-profit investment for clients (Watson, 1992, p.427). In addition, the art world continues to possess a stronger presence in mass culture. For these reasons, the style of artworks has changed as well as the profitability of traditionally poor investment art genres. There are now two main ways for contemporary artists to develop their careers in modern society. One method is to concentrate on public programs and funding from the government. The other is to produce popular art works to satisfy commercial demand.

Andy Warhol created his own idiosyncratic style and extended his creations from fine art to other visual art related aspects, such as fashion, design, music and film (Unruh, A & Green, SU 2010). These correlated visual experiments helped build support for Warhol to combine his creative output with his business skills. For example, Warhol gained abundant experience from illustrations that he learned to quickly recreate

(Thames & Hudson, 2004, p.57). With this industrial experience, Warhol attracted a much wider range of art clients and customers. He attained his high reputation for time management and work efficiency through being a reliable and well-experienced producer of creative goods. In addition, Warhol transformed these commercial products, such as graphic design, into fine art, which provided the basic income to support his lifestyle (Unruh & Green, SU 2010, p.11). In this situation artists can survive without the need for rich patrons since they can earn money by selling the art they produce. Hence, art could be seen as being fundamentally involved in commercial aspects given that this could provide a broad financial opportunity for artists' future careers and producing stable personal incomes.

Another artist who successfully merges art and business is Takashi Murakami. Murakami is a Japanese artist who is well known for approaching art as a business. Intriguingly, the idea of art as business for Murakami originated from Andy Warhol, although their operating systems are quite different. Murakami extends Warhol's idea of art as a business and strengthens its commercial aspect to improve on his industrial model. There are three differences between these two art businesses. Firstly, Murakami manages his art business much more like a modern digital-production company. According to the book *Murakami*, Warhol operated his art career as a social event, while Murakami conducts his art enterprises as a traditional business model (Murakami, 2007, p.20). Murakami creates a variety of commercial creative productions then organises their promotion and advertisement. In this case, employees or assistants who work in his 'company' receive regular income just like employees working in other commercial industries.

Murakami retains control of both the concept and production of art within his company and also promotes his artists who follow the principle of "Kaikai Kiki's spirit" (Murakami, 2007, p.20). Instead of an artist or an artistic style, Murakami promotes a spirit or concept in his work. In contrast to Murakami, Warhol's studio only produced artworks related to the brand of Warhol. For example, Warhol worked his art business under arbitrary manipulation, just like an empire. Other artists in Warhol's 'factory' were little more than his assistants who only produced artworks that fitted into the Warhol brand. In comparison Murakami draws more attention to promoting the specific Japanese culture associated with his other collaborating artists.

Art cannot live without creative financial support. Throughout history, wealthy patrons provided the main income for artists. A series of revolutions in modern society have had a huge impact on artists, their lives and their careers. Andy Warhol has created a modern and workable pattern for other artists to base their own art business upon. As a contemporary artist, Murakami has improved this basic idea of art as a business and embellished it with far greater detail. Murakami operates his art company as a commercial business, a factory and a cultural institution. Both Warhol and Murakami integrated commerciality and creativity and promoted the final products as works of fine art. The rewards of this process should not be ignored. In the future, art and artists may continue to hone and improve the balancing act of art and its financing. As a creative industry, art has to keep evolving to pursue its real value. **a**

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An Analysis of the Salon des Refusés

by Catherine Brown

Every year since 1992 the S.H. Ervin Gallery has been holding the *Salon des Refusés*, the alternative to the *Archibald* and *Wynne* prizes. The *Archibald Prize*, established in 1921, is Australia's prominent portrait prize. The *Wynne* is one of Australia's longest running prizes for landscape painting or figurative sculpture. Both are held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). Every year many world-renowned artists submit works for both of these prizes, yet their works are not selected for display. This prompted the Director of the S.H. Ervin Gallery to hold an exhibition dedicated to rejected works of these major art prizes, and thus the *Salon des Refusés* was reborn. The original *Salon des Refusés* was held in Paris in 1863 when Napoleon demanded the official exhibition panel rethink their selection. When they refused, he ordered an alternative Salon to be opened for the public's appraisal.

The artworks not chosen for the *Archibald* and *Wynne* prizes are up for selection by a panel for the *Salon des Refusés*. To find out what the AGNSW staff thought of this annual intrusion into their domain, I interviewed Jane Watters, Director of the S.H. Ervin Gallery. She stated, "The Art Gallery of New South Wales & S.H. Ervin Gallery have a long-standing relationship dating back to the gallery's inception. A member of staff from the AGNSW is on the S.H. Ervin's advisory committee. The 2011 *Salon des Refusés* is in its 20th year which is testament to the support that we receive from the management & staff at the AGNSW." (Watters, interviewed by author, 2011) The selectors for the *Salon* are invited behind the scenes of the AGNSW to choose works of quality that are engaging, innovative and amusing. This mantra falls in line with the S.H. Ervin Gallery's schedule of exhibitions

which is designed to explore the diversity and wealth of Australian art by presenting it in new and thought provoking contexts, thus encouraging research and promotion of artists from all periods of Australian art history.

As a volunteer at the S.H. Ervin Gallery, I often hear remarks from guests who state the *Salon* is much better than the *Archibald Prize*. Jane Watters says "It's a compliment of course and we do strive to present 'the best of the rest'... We feel we have an advantage as the members of our selection panel are dedicated arts professionals who view many exhibitions, possess a high level of discernment and are familiar with contemporary art practices and artists. In contrast the trustee panel is comprised predominantly of high profile businessmen and women." (Watters, interviewed by author, 2011) This year Ms Watters asked Stella Downer, Director of Stella Downer Fine Art and Brett Stone, Director of Rex Irwin Art Dealer to join her on the selection panel. They came up with an exhibition that is exciting, diverse and controversial in its conventionality.

In my opinion the Robert Hannaford portrait of actor and musician Trevor Jamieson is engaging because his expression is one of anticipation. He's ready to pounce and perform. The Michael Peck portrait of Ha-Ha (Regan Tamanni aka Ha-Ha street artist) is innovative as Ha-Ha's face is covered by a mask. Being a street artist he is prone to illegal activities, so his appearance is cautiously guarded. The Scott Marr portrait of Senator Bob Brown titled Our Saint Bob is amusing because the artist incorporates issues close to Brown's heart – he is no longer perceived as a person but as the issues for which he advocates.

The logistics of holding such an exhibition are complicated with many aspects needing consideration, not least timing, installation and transport. As Watters states "The exhibition operates on a very tight time frame of around ten days, although in past years it was only five days, which was extremely challenging. The *Wynne Prize* is selected on the Saturday after entries close, the *Archibald* on the Sunday. The works are transported to S.H. Ervin Gallery early the following week and stored in readiness for the installation. During this period we contact the artists selected to obtain their permission and get further information..." (Watters, interviewed by author, 2011) The S.H. Ervin Gallery organises their yearly program around the dates of the *Archibald* and *Wynne* prizes as it is a highlight for not only the gallery but the viewing public as well. The *Salon* is considered an essential part of the Sydney art scene because people always want to analyse the rejected, try to assess why they weren't selected and see if the Trustees of the AGNSW got it right. The panel for the *Salon* has the luxury of knowing that the works they reject will never be compared to the works they select. The works rejected by both the *Archibald* and *Salon* panels are not exhibited anywhere else.

"They came up with an exhibition that is exciting, diverse and controversial..."

The exhibition space of the S.H. Ervin Gallery is quite intimate because the building was originally constructed in 1856 as a school classroom, not as a dedicated exhibition space. Although the entrance is narrow, there is a logical flow making the transition from outside to inside manageable and relatively quick. Once inside people are drawn to the volunteer's desk on the right wall where they access information on the artists and the *Salon* in general. This means there is no build up of people at the gallery entrance. The smaller scale of the gallery means it is less intimidating than the AGNSW. It's a familiar space for people to appreciate the works in their own time.

The artists selected for both the *Archibald* and *Salon des Refusés* also have the chance to win the People's Choice Award, a democratic selection of the most

popular work as determined by the viewing public. This award reinforces an artist's ego as well as their pocket. The awards are very important to both galleries because they bring a number of people into the exhibitions that otherwise wouldn't see them. At the S.H. Ervin Gallery, many people ask specifically about the award and how to vote – and this is before they have even seen the show.

Both the *Archibald People's Choice Award* and the *Salon People's Choice Award* are announced on 16 June 2011. The excitement ends with the *Salon* closing just three days later, the *Archibald* ten. The works are then returned to their owners, the galleries get onto their next exhibition and we wait for next year when the whole process starts again. [a](#)

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Auction Anxiety

by Catherine Mesenberg

What do thoroughbred racehorses and fine art have in common? Arguably both possess the undeniable allure and emotive power of beauty and at face value they both fall within the domain of collectables of the rich and famous. However, a recent experience has led me to explore the synergy of these two parallels further in relation to one matter in particular: the phenomenon of the auction.

“Auctions, it seems, can trigger the flight-or-flight impulse.”

I recently attended the 2011 Inglis Australian Easter Yearling Sales at Newmarket in Sydney. Held every April, it is Australia's most prestigious yearling thoroughbred auction and an annual off-track highlight for Australia's racing community. I was fortunate enough to accompany a racing aficionado to one session of the event and have come away with an impression of 'the auction' – whether you are collecting art

or racehorses – as a highly seductive, emotional and therefore potentially dangerous experience.

In the past I have blithely enjoyed attending the previews of fine art auctions held by houses such as Deutscher-Menzies. I have consumed the free champagne and hors d'oeuvres, indulged in the voyeurism of glimpsing works of art normally tightly held in private collections and of course enjoyed dressing up like I can afford to be there; but I have never dared venture to the auction itself despite my extreme curiosity. What is this sense of reverence that prevents me from attending? Obviously I'm not in a position to buy. Would the staff from the auction house – or other patrons for that matter – be scornfully sneering at each other about me, huddled behind their catalogues? I'm probably over-thinking it, you never can judge a millionaire by his outfit; I knew one who favoured stubbies and those two-tone thongs that you find sometimes hanging from the end of the aisle in the supermarket. Perhaps it is my instinct for self-preservation kicking in unconsciously. Auctions, it seems, can trigger the fight-or-flight impulse.

As I recently strolled about Inglis' immaculately manicured Newmarket complex in what I thought of as my most appropriate racehorse-buying outfit and patting the velveteen noses of animals that might one

day win the Melbourne Cup, the similarities between the two worlds began to dawn on me. I had so far enjoyed coffee and pastries, an à la carte lunch and a Coolmore baseball cap. In addition I was carting around a weighty tome of British racing green bearing embossed gold lettering, posing as the auction catalogue. None of which I had paid for. I felt pretty special. These environments are designed to seduce you, to make you feel like one of the chosen few, to entice you into feeling like it is your right to take part in the auction. Not to take flight, but to fight.

Whilst many who dabble in these spheres approach both the fine art and thoroughbred markets as an opportunity for investment, there is a faction of enthusiasts for these highly covetable assets that is in it for passion alone. These are the ones who will always be willing to become caught in the moment. Let one take the auction itself, the purpose of which, for the vendor, is to achieve the highest possible price for an item. It is a highly charged environment; auctioneers are great dramatic actors. There are weighty pockets around the room just aching to be discharged of their burden and a selection of precious items displayed or paraded tantalisingly before you. The auctioneer does his best to whip his bidders into a time-pressured frenzy. If into this mix of money, desire, urgency and spectacle you add the element of competition, suddenly things heat up, and for me, this is where the real anxiety begins.

It has been well documented that Prime Minister of the United Arab Emirates, Sheik Mohammed bin Rashid Al-Maktoum, having spent over one billion dollars on horses, often pays too much at yearling auctions. But the Sheik doesn't mind – he isn't exactly short on funds and views his interest in thoroughbreds and horse racing as a hobby – it brings him pleasure. Additionally, there is the small matter of what probably amounts to a multi-million dollar rivalry between the Sheik and one of the biggest horsing outfits in the world, Irish stud Coolmore (yes, the free cap). Competition between the two is one of the major reasons that sale prices of individual yearlings have reached record numbers of late. Here again we uncover another elemental part of human nature and the basic premise of an auction – nothing makes you want something more than if someone else really wants it. I wonder how many artworks have sold at a premium simply due to this fundamental of human nature: competition.

Let's face it; none of us are immune to flattery. If, after

having been wined and dined into a state of relaxed enthusiasm you find yourself entering into a bidding war, you might end up paying \$50,000 more than necessary for your Easter yearling purchase. Therefore, you've not only paid for your own lunch but also fed and bedecked the head of every other punter who has passed through the gates during the three day long event.

“Let's face it; none of us are immune to flattery.”

So let this be a warning to all: there is a reason that fine art and thoroughbreds are the dominion of the rich and famous. Go to auction if you must, partake of the free booze and baseball caps but know that if you step into the ring you may end up paying more than the item's worth. If it's any consolation, it won't be your fault but that of our collective human nature. The worlds of fine art and racehorses possess an aura of elitism that makes me simultaneously want to deride them and be a part of them; this holds the key to why, despite the potentially costly pitfalls, we like to buy art (or pretend to) at auction – for the experience, the drama, to be part of the club, and to be close to objects that we might never otherwise have the opportunity to be close to. [a](#)

Recognising John Kaldor

by Emma Robertson

Ships sail in and out of Circular Quay just as they did hundreds of years ago, yet now steel sky scrapers crowd the foreshore and horizon. Landmark buildings like the white shells of the Sydney Opera House and the sandstone pillars of the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA) dominate. Yet one unusual day, towering over it all and stealing everyone's focus, appeared a three-storey tall West Highland Terrier made from plant pots.

The 60,000 plants that formed this sculpture were alive, flowering and growing. Passers-by looked puzzled. No doubt people arriving on Sydney ferries were either highly amused or very perplexed. Was it an animal? Was it just a strange configuration of plants? Or was it art? The work's creator and artist, Jeff Koons, would argue it was the latter. But how did it get there?

The year was 1995 and the figure who stood in the shadows of Jeff Koons' *Puppy* was an unassuming, grey-bearded man. Nothing about his appearance screamed 'art connoisseur' - no beret, tweed jacket, or crazy colourful patchwork pants. However, sixteen years after bringing Koons' *Puppy* to life, this man's presence is to be felt and recognised within the Australian contemporary art scene more than ever. A powerful and influential figure, John Kaldor has pushed the limits of art in Australia for almost forty-two years.

When given the chance, Kaldor is indeed a highly memorable character, able to engage audiences with his polite yet frank speaking style. With his Hungar-

ian accent still distinguishable, his tales are enough to engage even the most cynical or artistically uninformed. He is also always able to elicit laughter when describing himself as that long-haired thirty-three year old scaling the cliffs of Sydney and answering to the authorities in a heavy accent that he was "just looking to wrap the cliffs." With this anecdote he is self-deprecatingly referring to his monumental and defining art project whereby he brought international contemporary artists Christo & Jeanne-Claude to Australia to undertake their first successful major landscape work within the public domain, *Wrapped coast - one million square feet*, 1969. Under Kaldor's watch (and funds) they wrapped the cliffs in some 90,000 square metres of fabric and 56.3 kilometres of rope, creating a contemporary art installation the likes of which Australia and the world had never seen.

Immigrating to Australia in 1948, John Kaldor established himself as an entrepreneur, a successful businessman and above all, an avid patron and collector of contemporary art. Kaldor's contemporary art projects in Australia turned into a full time lifelong career and gained legitimacy under the not-for-profit organisation known as the Kaldor Public Art Projects. His latest project is a gift to the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). To say it is 'simply a gift' would be a significant understatement. In reality, it is the largest gift the AGNSW has ever received. With 260 works collected over the last five decades, it is valued at approximately AUD\$35 million and it is the largest visual arts gift ever received by a cultural institution in Australia.

The collection includes the works of internationally renowned contemporary artists including Christo & Jeanne-Claude, Jeff Koons, Sol LeWitt, Robert Rauschenberg, Nam June Paik, Bill Viola and Andreas Gursky. Kaldor began collecting these works in the 1960s when these artists were still classified as 'emerging,' and when he realised that "Australia was very isolated" (CoFA Talks: John Kaldor and Anthony Bell in conversation, 2009) as it was limited in terms of its access to, and acquisition of, contemporary art. Until now, the works were in pride of place within the Kaldor family home. But in May 2011, Kaldor's "very personal and private" (CoFA Talks: John Kaldor and Anthony Bell in conversation, 2009) collection entered the public arena, just like his large-scale projects.

Since announcing this donation in 2008, the Gallery scrambled to provide an adequate and reverent display space fit for such a collection. Finding its current spatial configuration lacking, the AGNSW spent the last three years creating off-site storage facilities, shifting works and renovating Lower Level 2 to create its new Contemporary Galleries that now feature the John W Kaldor Family Collection. Naturally, this major undertaking of physically facilitating the works needed funding. AUD\$25.7 million came from the NSW Government (under the leadership of Premier Morris Iemma) and AUD\$4 million was donated by the wealthy Belgiorno-Nettis family who, like the Kaldor family, are also active patrons of the arts in NSW (most famously their founding of the Biennale of Sydney).

However, this reactionary government funding and the generosity of Kaldor's gift raise poignant questions in terms of the acquisition of works by the AGNSW and the funding framework upon which major cultural institutions in Australia rely. The notoriety and need for such a figure as Kaldor within the art world is largely thanks to governmental shortcomings. On a normal day, the AGNSW receives forty per cent of its funding from Arts NSW, leaving the institution to make up its funding majority from private benefactors. In the case of the John W Kaldor Family Collection, it was only once the donation of the collection was announced that the NSW state government responded by offering funding to build an appropriate display space. It is easy to conclude that this reactionary move and influx of funding to better the existing contemporary art space within the Gallery would not have eventuated had it not been for the significant and generous input of the individual, John Kaldor.

Until this time, the contemporary exhibits within the Gallery were limited. However, this had gone unchanged, perhaps even unnoticed, due to the fact that the focus on contemporary art has traditionally resided with AGNSW's funding rival, the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Subsequently, Kaldor's selection of the AGNSW over its rival and Sydney's home of contemporary art, the MCA, to house his works created significant controversy despite his best protestations that the decision was not personal or calculated. Further, the timing of the May 2011 opening of the collection created ripples due to its coinciding with the large-scale renovations and subsequent closure of the MCA. But as a clearly business-savvy individual, I'm sure Kaldor realised that like everything in this world, art is a business too. In the end, is it not the very nature of contemporary art that with it comes controversy more often than not? Some would argue it is this very controversy that makes it 'contemporary' by definition.

The AGNSW also cannot be held liable. A donation such as this had to be gratefully received within the current economic environment whereby Arts NSW cannot compete with a wealthy private collector when it comes to the acquisition of works. Perhaps it is the prohibitive price of acquiring art that prevents the government from doing this on a scale comparable to Kaldor. AGNSW's Director Edmund Capon has stated that "it is now close to two decades since this gallery received one cent of Government funding to buy works of art." ("Art Gallery of NSW hangs Nolan painting", 2009). I feel that until government-based acquisitions become possible through increased or perhaps specifically acquisition-dedicated funding, the foresight of collectors and their artistic integrity will continue to be heavily relied upon by the galleries of this country. Kaldor's 200 plus works will function to supplement and essentially validate the AGNSW's current, limited and somewhat lacklustre contemporary collection. This influx of crucial works from the last five decades creates a collection now worthy of international standing.

It was in Kaldor's foresight outside the societal and structural confines in which contemporary art existed (or more truthfully, failed to exist) in Australia in the 1960s that led to his privately funding nineteen large-scale public projects (between 1969 and 2009). With no formal national infrastructure for acquisitions, these projects helped develop our display and

recognition of contemporary art. During a time of no official contemporary art galleries (like the MCA), no biennales or festivals (like the Biennale of Sydney) and no specialist contemporary curators, Kaldor facilitated the importation of international contemporary art to Australia. The three most famous projects were Christo & Jeanne-Claude's *Wrapped coast*, 1969, Gilbert & George's *The singing sculpture*, 1973 and Jeff Koons' *Puppy*, 1995. These projects certainly fulfilled Kaldor's initial and ongoing goal: "I want to open the eyes of the young to the wonders of contemporary art." (Kaldor Public Art Projects website, 2011). It seems that without a formal, national infrastructure only a wealthy individual could achieve such a goal through creating and utilising a public platform for contemporary art.

Perhaps Kaldor has unknowingly and inadvertently created a trend of wealthy art patrons filling any acquisition void when government funding fails to come to the party. This trend was seen in January 2011, with the opening of Australia's latest gallery in Hobart, the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). Entirely funded from its infrastructure to its collection by professional gambler David Walsh, this museum displays a unique selection of contemporary art (the new) infused with ancient artefacts (the old). Although fascinating and diverse, this collection was not selected with the benefit and the cultural enrichment of the wider public in mind. Rather, Walsh displays works that he likes, hates or simply appreciates in their elicitation of a reaction. Somehow his display or 'gift' of an even more overtly personal private collection has a greater egotistical undertone.

Compared to Kaldor, Walsh's collection seems to have a less legitimate feel. Both patrons have raised eyebrows for their lack of formal qualifications or artistic training (which historically was significantly upheld within the art world) as well as for their ability to dictate the nation's art due to their substantial economic standing. Despite this, Kaldor's involvement within the art industry both nationally and internationally grants him and his selected works much more credibility. While we may be witnessing an encouraging trend emerging (in the absence of government funding for new art acquisitions and displays), as a knowledgeable and involved patron, John Kaldor is unequivocally the founding father in Australia. In 1993, Kaldor was awarded the Order of Australia recognising his contribution to the development of contemporary art. He has held the position of Chair for the MCA, participated on the board for the Biennale of

Sydney, been Australian Commissioner for the Venice Biennales in 2005 and 2007, and internationally is on advisory bodies for both the Tate Modern in London and the Museum of Modern Art in New York.

Interestingly, Kaldor sees his fortune generated from his textile business and the successes of his initial artistic projects as interchangeable; informing one another. His company, John Kaldor Fabricmaker Pty Ltd, was founded in Sydney in 1970 following his successful sourcing and use of fabric for Christo & Jeanne-Claude's artistic coast-wrapping undertaking. It was Kaldor's entrepreneurial skills in envisaging and facilitating such an event that gave him the confidence to open his own company. With formal training and experience in the textile industry, Kaldor's company was highly successful and soon expanded overseas. From 2004 its success allowed Kaldor to leave his business behind in Australia and pursue his lifelong passion full-time. Was it ironic or fated in the way that his collection of art informed his business and now vice versa?

Once the unassuming figure standing in a suit is formally introduced and art audiences realise just who this man is, they cling to his every word. He has a commanding presence and fascinating tales to tell. At the opening of his new John W Kaldor Family Collection at the AGNSW that happened across the 21-22 May 2011 weekend, we all have the chance to see ingenuity and generosity personified by John Kaldor. We can hope that in coming years, there are other individuals with similar artistic foresight and that Kaldor Public Art Projects will continue its work long after its Director has passed. The past forty-two years have shown that contemporary art in Australia relies upon such an individual. [a](#)

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