

# runway

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# runway

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# Editorial

AMBER MCCULLOCH



**AmberMcCulloch** Amber McCulloch

DAVID COPPERFIELD! I must see him! Who can give me freebies?

03 August 2009



**AmberMcCulloch** Amber McCulloch

Dammit. I throw this out to the group: I need freebies to David Copperfield. Needed.

03 August 2009

Dammit. I throw this out to the group: I need freebies to David Copperfield. Needed.

And such was my frenzy\* upon hearing that master illusionist David Copperfield would be appearing for one night only. Thankfully, my freebies did arrive, and it was with no small amount of curiosity that I joined several thousand punters at Sydney's Acer Arena.

As expected, the world's best paid contemporary magician dragged gormless members of the Aussie public from their seats and onto the stage to take part in a show replete with pyrotechnics, radio mikes, big hair, disappearing and appearing objects, swishing cloths, death defiance and, most importantly, constant patter. For what was most awe-inspiring about Copperfield's show was not the Ford Thunderbird suddenly 'materialising' on the stage (although that was pretty good), it was the illusion of the illusionist himself.

You see, Copperfield's portrayal of a vocational magic man—his self-deprecating, nostalgic, disarmingly genuine style—is where the real magic lay. In his ability to make an audience of reasonable people actually want to be duped, to give over their perception of reality, irrespective of what they know to be true.

With this in mind, I wonder if the role of the artist is all that different to that of the illusionist. Both create something that prompts the beholder to forego reason, to allow the mind to wander, to be receptive to new ideas or new modes of discovery. Art and magic are equally expansive—they make the world larger, while existing in a microcosm of technique and methodology.

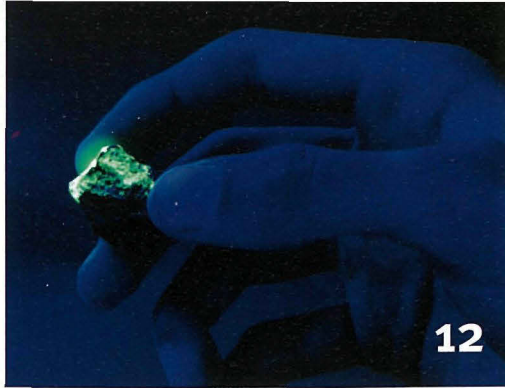
In this issue, we explore magic's myriad forms as exemplified by the diverse practices of a selection of contemporary artists. Simon Yates is a kitchen-table alchemist, one who makes something wonderful from base materials and 'scientific' hoodoo. The esotericism and eccentricity of Jonathan Hochman's work suggests the concept of 'gnosis', in that it appears imbued with secret knowledge. Hossein Ghaemi's performances embrace the mysticism of devotional rituals, while Pia Van Gelder embraces the magic of machines.

We hope that you enjoy this kaleidoscopic view of magic and the magical, and that, like a member of David Copperfield's audience, you come away enriched with just a little sense of wonder. And remember ... Magic Happens.

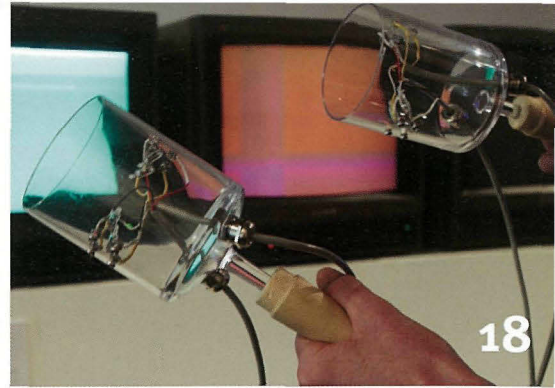
\*Not frenzied enough to actually pay \$118 to see him, mind you.



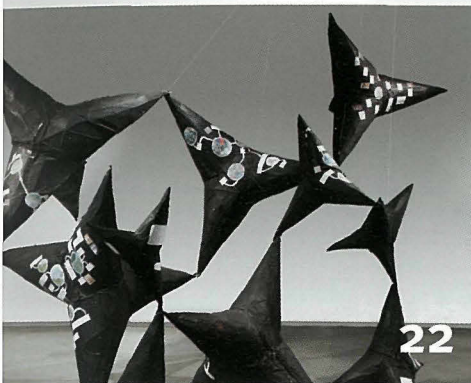
7



12



18



22



44



56

## FEATURES

**7 JONATHAN HOCHMAN: STANDARDS**  
CHRISTOPHER HANRAHAN

**12 GLOW**  
TANYA PETERSON

**18 PIA VAN GELDER: ARE 'FRIENDS' ELECTRIC?**  
ELLA BARCLAY

**22 SIMON YATES: MAGIC OR SYSTEM ERROR?**  
BEC DEAN

## MAGIC

**WALLPAPER (INSIDE FRONT & BACK COVER)**  
**VIOLENT UBU**  
NATALYA HUGHES

**27 WIND NOW (REDUX)**  
ANNA JOHN

**32 THE HEAD**  
ROBIN HUNGERFORD

**38 PLASTIC FANTASTIC & SYNTHETIC MAGIC**  
VALENTINA PALONEN

**44 BIRTHING THINGS IN THE SPIRIT**  
DAVID CAPRA

**50 I WOULD BRING YOU THE STARS  
(101 NIGHTS)**  
MICHAELA GLEAVE

**56 THE OOO IN WHO**  
HOSSEIN GHAEMI

## REVIEWS

**63 INDIAN CHAMBER**  
LISA LERKENFELDT

**66 UNTITLED (12TH INSTANBUL BIENNIAL)  
2011**  
JULIA HOLDERNESS & HENRY KEMBER

**70 OBJECTS ARE SHIT**  
JACK JEWELLER

**72 THE FEELING WILL PASS**  
RACHEL FULLER

**76 DREAM OF PICTURES**  
ALANNA LORENZON

**80 EXHAUST**  
AMBER McCULLOCH

**84 PICNIC AT FANGING ROCK**  
SHERIDAN COLEMAN

## PREVIEWS

**88 FORTHCOMING EXHIBITIONS**  
A LIST OF EXHIBITIONS FOR THE DIARY

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FEATURES





## Jonathan Hochman: Standards

CHRISTOPHER HANRAHAN

I have been thinking endlessly about an astrophysicist named Dan Bauer, a convenient situation in that Bauer too has charted an endless course. He's looking for Dark Matter two miles beneath Minnesota farming land. He's down there because in a normal above-ground laboratory there would simply be too much matter. Bauer's equipment is made from normal matter, his finely calibrated instruments would be overawed in the search for this elusive (and if the prevailing scientific consensus is correct) essential ingredient in the mix of how we came about and continue to exist. There is a problem for Bauer though, if said reckoning is correct then Dark Matter should not only be all around normal matter, but passing through it too. As of 2009 Bauer had been down in the hole for five years on this quest and while he hadn't been successful, seemed hopeful that some recent activity would prove fruitful. Two years have since passed and still no Dark Matter.

I can think of nothing other than scientific standards for keeping Bauer down. The creation of a hypothesis, tested and verified by a majority of experts in the field, has sent an astrophysicist down a hole in the ground for seven years doing what is essentially data entry. The conclusion, that with the addition of Dark Matter and Dark Flow as foils to the inexplicable arising from the agreed understanding of the universe by cosmologists means that someone has to find it. I mean, it's all so neat and perfect if Dark Flow and Dark Matter exist. I think Dan needs to come up for some air, you have to love the guy but, his multimillion dollar research facility is a fine piece of technology and engineering that logic states shouldn't really work. Perhaps it's his ad-hoc ingenuity that led him to hold parts of the apparatus together with little more than a G-clamp that also steals his resolve and petulance in the face of the intangible.



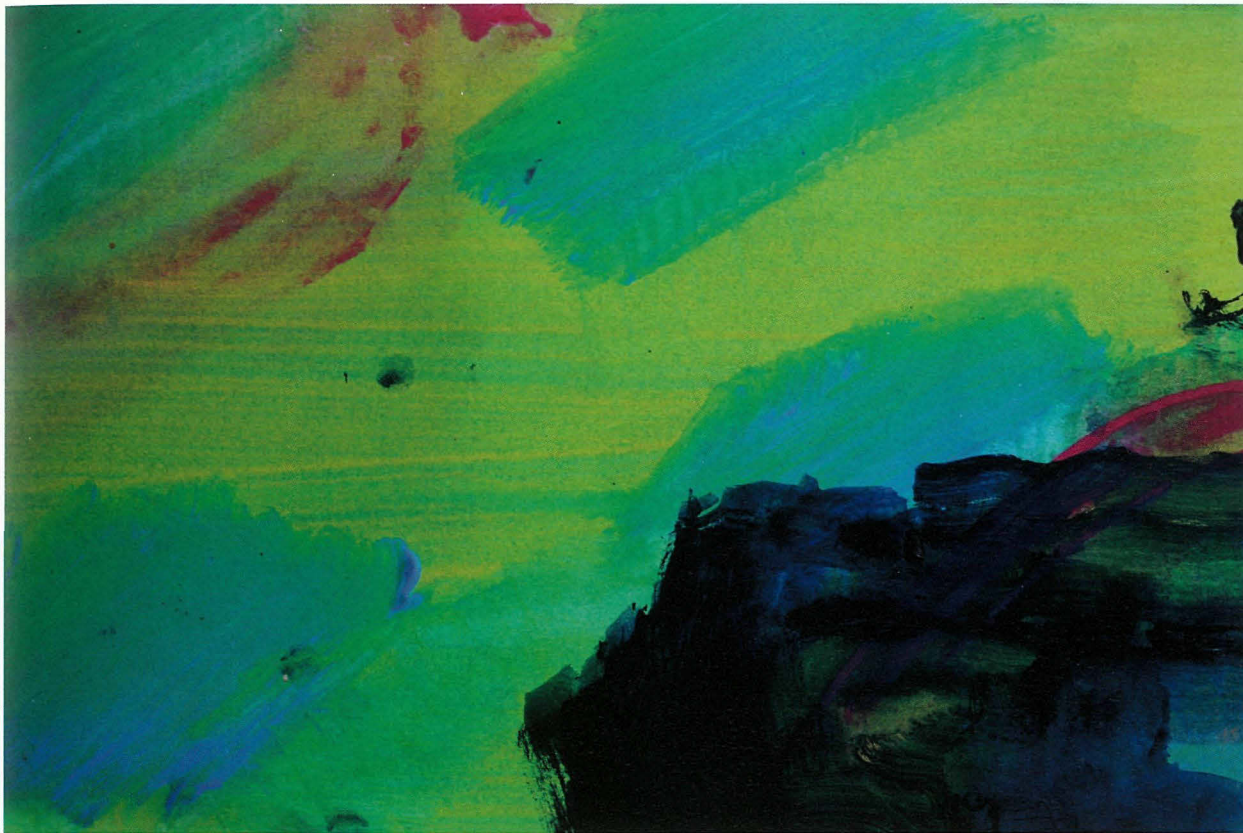
Jonathan Hochman is not a scientist but he is certainly someone who, in his life and work, applies a commitment to standards. Like Bauer, Hochman has a firm belief in his projects and a history of research and experience to draw on when executing them. Unlike Bauer, while working across highly critical fields, Hochman is not constrained by consensus, if anything it's the opposite. Through his many collaborative and solo sound and visual art projects Hochman has managed to conversely be at once innovative, *contraire* and popular. This ability to work in a collaborative framework sees these many strands, bound by self-imposed standards pertaining to quality and separation from a 'middle of the road' standpoint. At once shifting and consistent, the ad-hoc and intuitive steps are taken on firm ground.

The first major project of Hochman's that I encountered was the 2004 collaboration with Justin Miles *Don't Get Too Close (to my fantasy)* exhibited and performed at Firstdraft. The wonderfully wry digital images depicting Hochman and Miles as invisible men or, potentially, as anthropologists going about obtuse field research are short circuited not only via their invisibility, but moreover, their idiosyncratic wardrobe choices. The dry pseudo-scientific research documentation alluding to the concrete pursuit of understanding, being carried out by fanciful characters dressed in charmingly ironic regalia subtly and amusingly poked fun at existing structures of belief and understanding. The virtuous

technical execution and careful selection of once fashionable but now naff clothing from the recent past identifies and calls into question an insistence that all as it seems, is as it should be.

In one of the most compelling opening-night performances I can remember, Hochman and Miles assembled the band Spencer Cock of Dawn to perform in accompaniment to these images. What transpired was alike the invisible men, a throwback to fanciful characters, though these were the ghosts of prog rock styled psychedelia. An amusing and surprisingly well pitched accompaniment to the exhibition, the bands performance reached a crescendo once joined on stage by the Cocks of Dawn, two 'singers' dressed in shredded paper bird suits howling raucous and incoherent squawks. The sheer spectacle was matched by the building intensity of the band until the performers had exhausted themselves. The juxtaposition of no longer fashionable forms and contemporary experimentalism reaffirmed that skill and intuition need not be exclusive.

The success of Spencer Cock of Dawn also signalled Hochman's shifting focus towards music and sound projects. While Hochman has continued producing artwork, his collaborations predominantly with other artist/musicians Matthew Hopkins (Hochman and Hopkins/Fourdoor) Justin Miles (Spencer Cock of Dawn/sometime Pagan Dawn) Shane Haseman and George Pizer



(Stick Stick) and notably Anna John and Emma Ramsey (Holy Balm) have resulted in predominantly sound based projects. In addition, Hochman's prodigious output also includes the solo projects Pagan Dawn and Hair Hochman. The longest continuously running group Holy Balm has morphed through several different incarnations: vague garage ramshackle noise outfit, proggy synth through to the present version, a psychedelic dance jam band. Indeed the present incarnation seems an unlikely synthesis of the previous elements, filtered through each collaborator and combining to create a strangely palatable, danceable whole. Here the obtuse and intangible has been structured (to a certain extent) into an atonal dance party.

What to make of all this? Keeping in mind my inability to forget Dan Bauer. Upon reflection, I realised there is another academic that Hochman shares a kinship with. Even more so than with Bauer, Hochman's structured approach to creating output that is equally confounding as it is compelling could be said to owe something to Kurt Gödel. Gödel, the remarkable logician and mathematician whose incompleteness theorems ensured the suggestion that one could axiomatise mathematics, that is to say the belief that there is always a logical and correct answer to every problem, is untrue. It is here that the comparison bears fruit, Bauer and Gödel approach that which for the benefit of this article be termed 'experimental' or 'hitherto unknown' through a deeply logical set of strictures. Equally, Hochman, individually and with his collaborators exerts a similarly structural approach in creating

an expanded field. Of course these projects have not specifically engaged either of these academics; they are the product of influence and the collective force of the collaborations—as are the outcomes of Bauer and Gödel's research.

A long bow to draw perhaps, but it would be churlish not to acknowledge a debt to those engaged in exploration of intangible ideas. That I have chosen Bauer and Gödel is a convenient conceit—just as academics profit from the research of their peers, each of Hochman's collaborators contribute his or her part to the greater whole. Positioning in this manner seems appropriate as this article is an engagement with Hochman's output rather than a review of his various collaborations.

So here again, what is one to make of all this? In the spirit of this melange, let's take a step away from the musical output that is substantially the core of his project, and move to Hochman's recent drawing that I feel most comfortably confirms this hypothesis. Again, a project derived from formal concerns which deftly evocate another, intangible and unexpected outcome. Only sparingly exhibited, these drawings are made almost compulsively. Generally they feature food as still life and recently food in place of other matter. Executed simply in graphite and only occasionally in ink, marker or acrylic, these drawings, in keeping with much of his musical output, utilise innuendo and humour to achieve unexpected results.





Hochman's main subjects are fruit bowls and, although quickly rendered carry an assured sense of their purpose. Governed by an unusual set of rules, the purpose in question floats. As would be expected of a practitioner apparently betrothed to standards, all aspects of composition such as line weight and general harmony are engaged. Yet again, unsurprisingly, it is the variable elements that Hochman seems most concerned with. Like the intangible and perhaps non-existent Dark Matter, Hochman seeks an imperceptible characteristic within these drawings. It should come as no surprise that Hochman's favoured destination at the Art Gallery of NSW is in front of their small grouping of Giorgio Morandi's still lives. I recall falling in love with Morandi when the AGNSW hosted a survey in 1997, afterwards seeking out all I could about the great painter. Interestingly, and I'm sure this has contributed to Hochman's affection, it was the revelation that Morandi had chosen to primarily work and sleep in secondment. It was in this tiny room—separated from the world (and perhaps for just a little respite from his mother and three sisters with which he lived) Morandi was able to create a standard whereby he could evince emotion from subtle shifts of his prosaic props.

It is the lens of histories, specifically musical, but also visual, technical and academic that Jonathan Hochman has used to pursue a path of resistance. The lion's share of his output has been collaborative and I must stress again that it is not my intention here to diminish this collaborative spirit or each individual contribution, moreover, such an undertaking requires substantially more column space. This remains a singular and separate engagement—an overview of Hochman's wider output as an armature or structure from which he contributes and collaborates. His practice (albeit contrary to traditional modes of cultural production, however not without precedent) is borne of a desire for classicism and form. Importantly this craving of standards must not slip and court banal, populist repetition. It is here, that Morandi, Gödel and Bauer provide the perfect abstract for a practice that is exactly that.

# Glow

TANYA PETERSON

We believed in the magic of proximity back then in the early nineties. We were working weekend jobs at the local mall and our shops were next door to one another. Both stores sold a range of new-age wares. Mine carried plant derived beauty products and eco friendly slogans, while his was stocked with an assortment of crystals, dream catchers and 'goddess' clothing. Customers cruised the aisles looking for middle-class enlightenment. The sound of wind chimes was never far away.

And although we were cynics, we believed in the fate of objects and the prescience of doubles. It seemed to make sense that we were both photographers. We bought a silver moon charm which you snapped down the middle to make two halves—one for each person to wear in memory of the other—and matching crystal pendants on silver chain necklaces. Cosmology and geology became a romance unto themselves for us. And when his mum became ill that same year, we let go of even more of our skepticism and bought her a large, polished rose quartz stone. It was pale pink with a smooth round shape and fitted perfectly against the flat of her palm. She kept it mostly on her bedside table. And at different times of the day, if she wandered past the bedroom she'd go in, pick it up and carry it around with her for a while.

Today the local health food store sells small fluorescent mesh pouches containing a selection of polished crystals. The DayGlo hues offer a spectral grammar for nature's alchemy and spiritual healing. The specific colour of each bag is linked to a curative tag, with labels such as: fear, friendship, anxiety, stress, grief and protection. A woman next to me in line at the cash register wonders aloud if 'grief' is available in gold. It's that kind of suburb.

In his studio, Kenzee Patterson tells me a story about a man who sells 'bush rocks' somewhere on the side of the road along the Camden Valley Way. I look at the stack of large rocks sitting in front of us. They're the type you find in a suburban rockery. I ask

how the price was negotiated. 'By weight, on a palette', he says. We speculate on where the guy sources his supplies and the beauty of the urban bush economy, where chunks of land can be collected and sold by the kilo, like oversized country souvenirs. Two of Kenzee's bush rocks end up as a 'table' structure—domesticated nature for the masses—with two rocks stacked vertically on either side of an upright and rigid gardening glove. It's a literal sleight of hand, a model of two worlds where the balance of gravity is held at the tip of a finger.

During six *Apollo* shuttle missions to the moon, in the late sixties and early seventies, astronauts collected and brought back just under 382 kilograms of lunar geological samples.<sup>1</sup> In 2002, a man tried to steal at least 101.5 grams of moon rocks, valued 'between \$40m and half a billion', from NASA's 'lunar vault' at the Johnson Space Centre (JSC).<sup>2</sup> Apparently, he couldn't crack the safe containing the rocks at the complex, so he had to pack it into the boot of his car. The heaviness of the safe weighed down the boot so much that the car nearly scraped the ground as he was trying to inconspicuously exit the premises. You can buy 'moon rock replicas' and 'simulated lunar samples', from the JSC. Pictures and detailed descriptions are listed on the NASA website. The labour and packing time for each item is listed next to the insurance value estimates.

Kenzee tells me about another rock collector, Albert Chapman, who as a young boy in the late 1920s gathered minerals from the side of the road. Chapman found them in piles of broken stones, left by trucks from the Prospect quarries of Western Sydney, along the roadsides for crushing up and compacting during resurfacing.<sup>3</sup> Like Chapman, much of Kenzee's work seems informed by an interest in the leftover objects of forgotten and discarded histories. I picture a parallel biography, two men travelling—collectors from different eras—scouring the places they move through for readymade geological finds and translating the sediments of localities into signs of cultural geography.





Clockwise from top left:  
Kenzee Patterson, *Analcite with calcite (detail)*, (2010), watercolour on cotton rag paper. Photo: Simon Hewson, Fatografi  
Kenzee Patterson, *Prehnite with analcite (detail)* (2010), watercolour on cotton rag paper. Photo: Simon Hewson, Fatografi  
Kenzee Patterson, *Brown calcite, with colourless calcite & analcite (detail)* (2010), watercolour on cotton rag paper. Photo: Simon Hewson, Fatografi  
Kenzee Patterson, *Table 4* (2011), bush rocks, glove. Photo: Alex Reznick  
Kenzee Patterson, *Prehnite on dolerite (detail)* (2010), watercolour on cotton rag paper. Photo: Simon Hewson, Fatografi

Facing Page: Left: Kenzee Patterson, *Aerial photographs 1998* (2010), pigment print  
Source: © NSW Department of Finance and Services. Panorama Avenue, Bathurst 2795 www.lpi.nsw.gov.au  
Right: Kenzee Patterson *Pyrite in prehnite (detail)* (2010), watercolour on cotton rag paper. Photo: Simon Hewson, Fatografi





One afternoon in late autumn, I visit the Australian Museum to see Chapman's mineral collection. Kenzee had been there previously to borrow some of the specimens, using them as reference models for a series of watercolour paintings in a solo exhibition on and titled *Prospect Hill* (2010). His paintings of minerals from Prospect were shown next to aerial maps of the region. In this context, geology and geography become one another in the form of macro- and micro- worlds, respectively. From a distance, the maps could be read as cross-sections of uncut gems. And the mineral paintings became cartographical, simultaneously showing details of the Earth's geology and distant planets floating in space, only seen from far away.

At the museum, all the minerals glow behind spotlight enclosures on tiered glass shelving. I angle my camera and take a photograph of the bismuthinite from above. And when I preview the result, the distance between each transparent shelf has collapsed and disappeared so all that's left are levitating metallic rocks. There are also empty glass vitrines on exhibit. Their utter transparency and redundancy is akin to a postmodern folly in homage to the crystals they normally hold inside. An A4 page of signage adorns each vacant display. Its haphazard layout and lack of punctuation offers an explanation in a strange piece of bureaucratic verse:

Some exhibits have been removed  
due to vibrations  
coming from building work  
level G

We apologise for any  
inconvenience

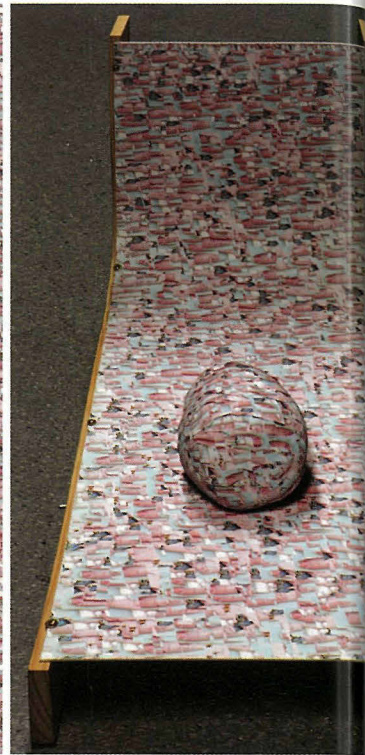
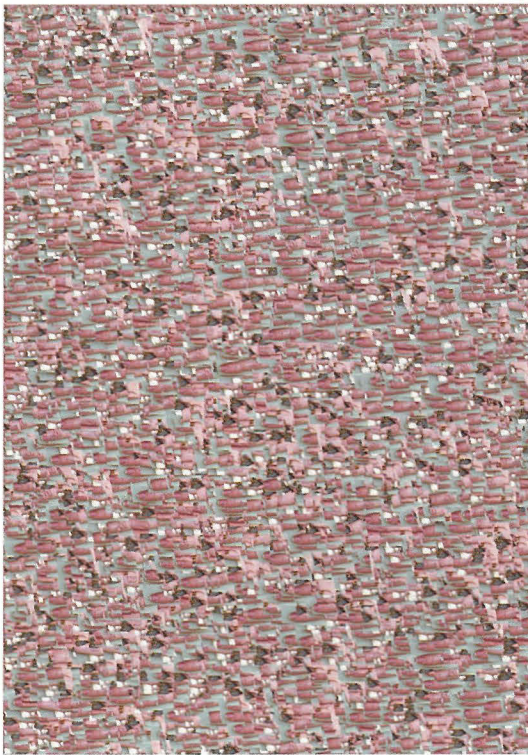
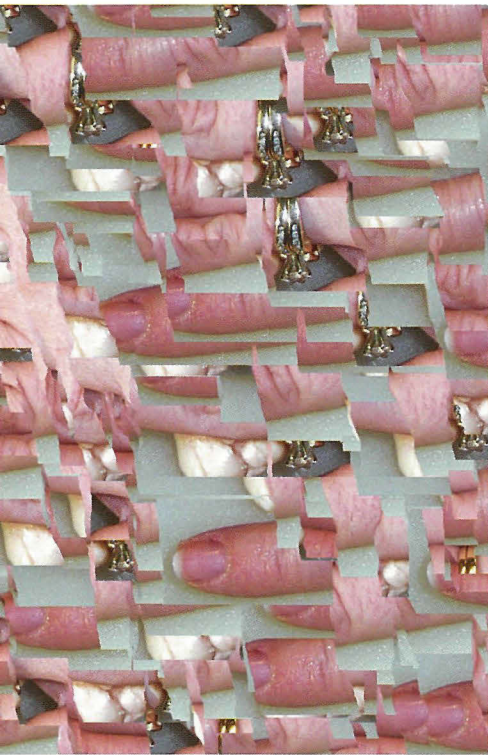
Thank you



For a second I misread it and fancifully imagine that the crystals have caused some sort of resonant vibration in the building structure, which has led to their removal. There's been recent news coverage of the strongest earthquake in nearly a century to hit the East Coast of the United States. The quake's epicentre was in the town of Mineral, Virginia.

I remember a work Megan Hanson made last year called *Movin' Mountains* (2010). She fabricated a rock that spun on its axis against the curved wall of a scaled infinity platform. Both the rock and platform were covered with the same abstracted repeating pattern sampled from an online image of a woman's fingers slicing chicken. The diamond on the woman's perfectly manicured hand glistened like the flesh she'd dissected. The replication of the image's cut-up process resembled a cross-section of meta visceral data. The spinning rock produced a vibrating op-effect whereby the foreground and background patterns echoed one another in a stuttered chorus. And for a brief moment, this strange galaxy of referential fragments seemed to be collapsing in upon itself.

When reflections collide, Neil Leach reminds us that 'the role of camouflage is not disguise, but to offer a medium through which to relate to the other ... It operates as a form of connectivity'.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps it's possible to take this idea of empathic connectivity further, beyond the realm of camouflage towards thinking about the transactions of information and experience that occur across our networks of 'real' and simulated space. It may no longer be useful to perceive the connections between, and manifestations of, these spaces as referential simulations. Maybe there's a different continuum of interconnectivity to be imagined. While the initial impulse might be towards an idea of digital pantheism,



a more useful proposition could potentially lie beyond this in an exploration of perceptual commonality that's affectively shared between these realms.

As I wander over to the Crystallography cabinet the phrase 'arts of kin' keeps running through my mind. It's a description of the alchemical similarities between the 'adulterating of Metals ... [and] the counterfeiting of Jewels' in the Renaissance publication, *The Sixth Book of Natural Magick: Of counterfeiting Precious Stones*, by John Baptista Porta.<sup>5</sup> It's easy to see Adobe's CS5 manual as a 21st-century companion piece. The casting of light across digital and physical objects, to conjure a kinship of materials and utopian spaces was part of Alex H. Mack's recent work too. At his mock shrine, *Fake Rock Meditation (feat. Dogs from Google)* (2011), an array of different rocks, some found, some made with resin, were arranged in totemic clusters near ultraviolet and pink neon tubes of light. A few of the rocks magically glowed from the inside as if already replete with spiritual enlightenment, while their animalistic counterparts, sampled pictures of dogs with photo-flashed eyes, hung above them. And although the installation played with the difference between the natural and supernatural, the blend of synthetic and organic effects went beyond this binary lure. The mingling of analogous objects and states drew attention to the effect and investment of energy between things and their contingency on light—its metaphysics and glow alike. Michael Taussing characterises this quality of luminescence as a 'light lightness' in his book, *What Colour is the Sacred?*.<sup>6</sup> He describes it

as a 'polymorphous magical substance, this quite other medium that floats like the breath of the dying sun, a polymorphous substance that is the act and art of *seeing*'.<sup>7</sup> For him, this is an understanding of light as both cause and effect at the same time.

The 'expanded empiricism' of Alfred North Whitehead's philosophy of nature also seeks to account for the relationality of effects. He has studied experiences that exceed scientific quantification, such as the quality and affect of different types of light.<sup>8</sup> Brian Massumi has drawn on his ideas as a way of thinking about the functions of philosophy. In particular, he cites the effects of complementary colours and the 'coloured shadows and spectral halos' they produce.<sup>9</sup> They can be measured and understood through the science of light and wavelengths, however Whitehead and Massumi argue that at the limits of empiricism we lose the qualitative experience of the 'glow'.<sup>10</sup> And it's the glow that exceeds the accounting of science and offers a model for understanding the affective process of vision (and thinking) beyond the sum of its parts.

Looking into the crystal display, I see the sentence 'the shape of a crystal reflects the geometric arrangement of its atoms' written directly under the main exhibit heading. For Gilles Deleuze, the replicating structure of crystals is a model for thinking through temporality and its perpetuating reciprocity, as it moves in and against the sensations of memory.<sup>11</sup> The internalised expansion of a crystal's kaleidoscopic replication gives him a model to explain

Above: Megan Hanson, *Movin' Mountains (detail)* (2010), pine, inkjet print, perspex, expanding foam, DC motor, 12 amp power outlet, on/off switch, electrical wiring, solder, PVA glue, biscuit joints, nuts and bolts



the affect of images as an encounter with time outside the logic of continuity—a sensation of thought momentarily suspended yet simultaneously interlaced within the dimensions of duration it is displaced from.

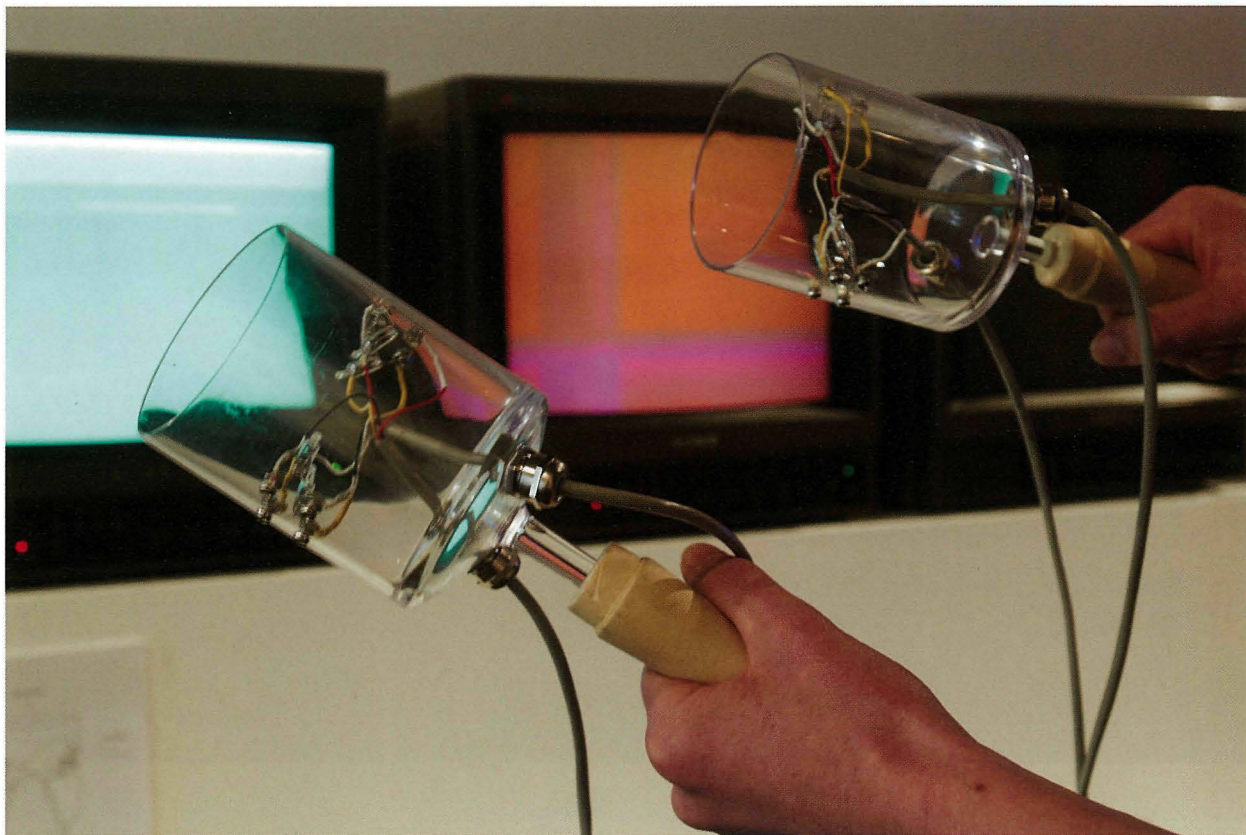
This year the twinning of crystals, their mirroring, interpenetrating or repeating structures, has become more prevalent through works such as Björk's song, *Crystalline* (2011) and its accompanying video directed by Michel Gondry; Thomas Hirschhorn's installation, *Crystal of Resistance* (2011); Semiconductor's series of digital mineral crystal animations, *Crystallised* (2011); and even M.A.C.'s Summer 2011, 'Semi Precious' mineral-based cosmetic collection. There's a renewed interest in a return to origins that's as pure and crystalline as the binary codes of cyberspace, built upon an architecture of zeros and ones and often coupled with a lo-tech mysticism. It suggests a way of considering the concept of emergence as something that begins simultaneously with singularity, autonomy, multiplicity and refraction.

On my way to the museum's exit I walk past one final display. The gift shop has a selection of rocks and crystals for sale in a glass cabinet, similar to the one in the mineral exhibit. The word 'semi-precious' features on the description cards before the price, and some of the crystals are on chains in case you want to have a small piece of world close to your heart. The etymology of the word 'cosmos' comes from the Greek word 'kosmos', meaning

Above: Alex H. Mack, *Fake Rock Meditation (feat. Dogs from Google)* (installation detail) (2011), inkjet print, wooden dowel, spray paint, fluorescent light, UV-light, pine board, resin, wax, coal, building bricks, concrete core, granite, hair extensions, plaster

both order or world and ornament. And as I stand under the shop's neon light, caught amidst the gleam of objects, it's strange to see, here in the museum of all places where time appears so photographically still, how the order and certainty of the world slips away, lost and found in the harmonic glow of nature and industry.

1. NASA, *Lunar Sample Allocation Guide Book*, Houston: Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center, June 2007. Curator.jsc.nasa.gov/lunar/sampreq/LunarAllocHandbook.pdf (accessed September 01, 2011).
2. Ben Mezrich, 'The great Moon-rock heist – extract', *The Guardian*, online edition, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2011/jul/08/great-moon-rock-heist-mezrich> (accessed on July 08, 2011).
3. Sir Howard Smith, 'Memories of Albert Chapman: Australia's Greatest Mineral Collector', <http://www.mineral.org.au/news/chapman.html> (accessed July 21, 2011).
4. Neil Leach, *Camouflage* (Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2006), 240.
5. Giambattista della Porta, *Natural Magick by John Baptista Porta, a Neapolitane: in twenty books ... wherein are set forth all the riches and delights of the natural sciences*. (London: printed for Thomas Young and Samuel Speed, 1658). (Electronic reproduction: Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan, 1999), unpaginated.
6. Michael Taussig, *What Colour is the Sacred?* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 47.
7. *Ibid.* [Italics in original text.]
8. Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual* (Durham/London: Duke University Press, 2002), 238.
9. *Ibid.*, 239.
10. *Ibid.*, 238–239.
11. Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema 2: The Time Image* (trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Robert Galeta) (Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1989). In particular, see Chapter 4, 'Crystals of Time', 68–97.



## Pia van Gelder: Are 'friends' electric?

ELLA BARCLAY

Pia van Gelder performs alongside a growing arsenal of mediated machines where her small, nuanced experiments can have loud and potentially dangerous outcomes. Three recent examples are *Signeaux* (2010), where she strung the guts of four DVD players into a harp and, with white gloves, delicately messed with their A.V signals. When I asked her if the device, which is hooked up the mains and possibly illegal, has ever electrocuted her, she replied 'there is electrocution and then just a little charge every now and then ...'. Also, *AV Bells* (2011), which allowed visitors to mix audio and visual channels on three old monitors by switching assembled plastic and wooden bells from side to side, and, *Synthesizer* (2011), which involved van Gelder meddling with a modular synthesiser by installing both audio and video components then playing with this, at Tin Sheds Gallery, Sydney, to create a series of audio and video sequences, which, while beautiful, prompted the director to question whether an epilepsy sign should be installed at the front of the gallery.

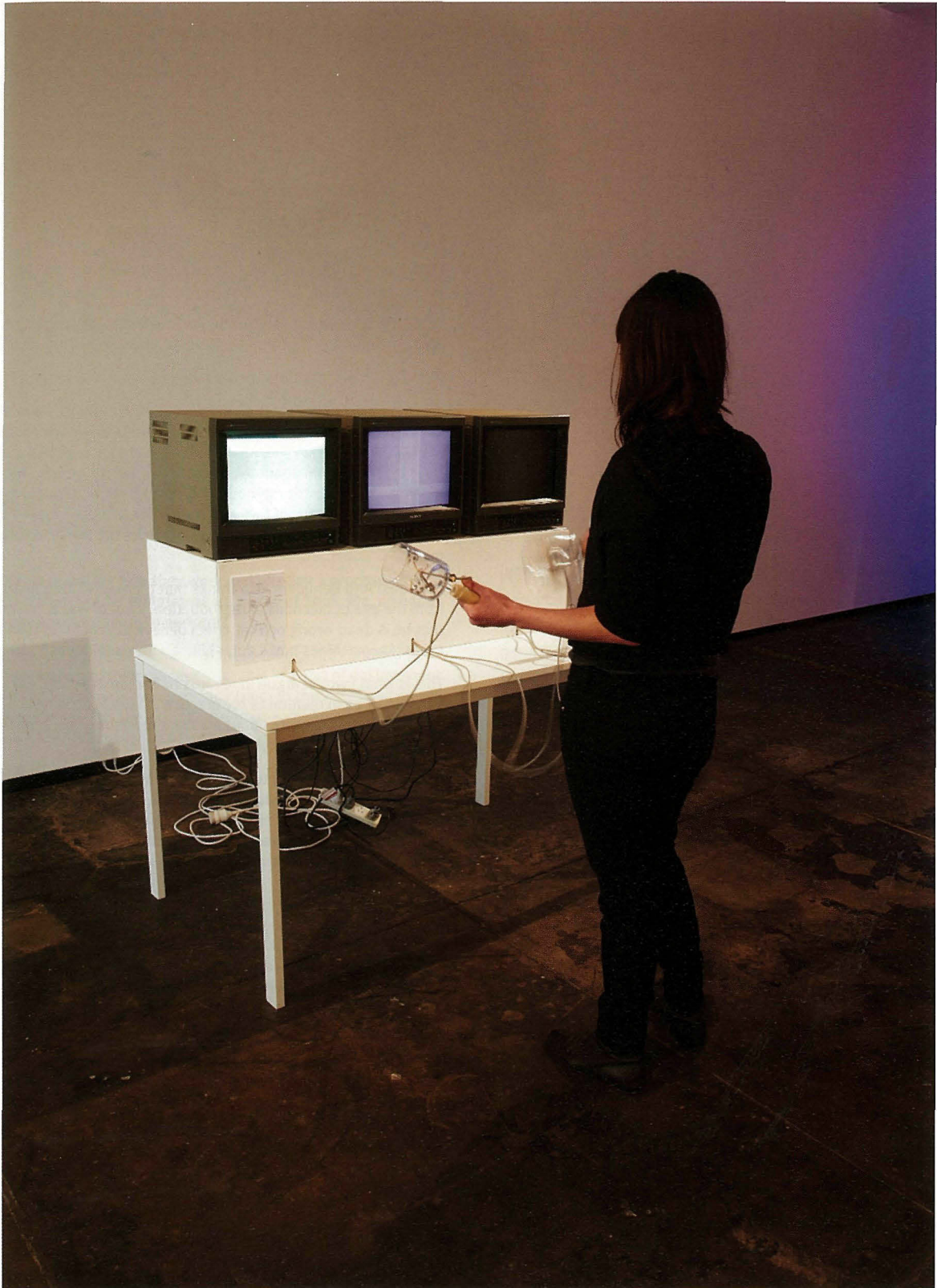
In her studio, over herbal tea and a delicious nut slice, van Gelder showed me her crackle box, which I'm guessing was a skinned and tweaked radio walkman. As she moved her fingers slowly over the circuitry, her body became the conductor of strange sounds

and radio waves, she discussed the notion within circuit-bending culture as 'laying hands' drawing a correlation between this and 'the laying of the hands', a custom in many religions whereby a spiritual leader will move their hands over the head or body part of a constituent for the purposes of healing or embedding and extracting spirits.

**Ella Barclay: In playing around with these objects until something unexpected happens, are you searching for a way of communicating with these machines that is transformative, even transcendental?**

Pia van Gelder: Yes. It's something unfathomable, incomprehensible and amazing. Beyond human explanation. Sublime. The techno-sublime!

But there's this sort of weird family origin. My grandfather was a spiritual healer but he was trained originally as an electrical engineer and was interested in this idea of electricity as a healing force. Not through like full blown electrocution but small charges that could interrupt the electromagnetic field in your body.



Above & facing page: Pia van Gelder, *AV Bells* (2011), Hacked media-machines, found objects, electronics, cathode ray TVs, mercury, dimensions variable. Photos: Sarah Mosca

**EB: And were you ever able to have dialogue with him about this?**

PVG: He's dead now. He died when I was 12. But he's written books. He used to just record himself talking, he was a bit of a crazy dude. And he's made hundreds of tapes. This is his machine, which is essentially illegal to practise with, because it's plugged into the mains. But it's totally safe.

**EB: What does it feel like?**

PVG: It just feels like ... I don't know, like how much have you been exposed to electrocution?

**EB: Only those funny games where someone hits a button and you and you get a zap.**

PVG: Those ones where it's like 'ow!'?

**EB: Yeah.**

PVG: Ok, not like that. But have you ever touched something that's a bit live?

**EB: A leaky coffee machine at Hoyts Broadway.**

PVG: And you're like, 'oooh, there's a weird feeling from that.' A bit buzzy or something. Like you've got pins and needles. And then there's less and less and less, sometimes it's hard to tell. Like sometimes I get it from that harp. And you can even get it from an audio signal, if you hold a live lead.

**EB: Sometimes I lick live phone chords ... I don't really know why I do that.**

PVG: Or batteries?

**EB: Yes.**

PVG: Ok, good. That's good. That's what I'm talking about. So it's just really small and you can feel your circulation wriggle around in a different way. That's what it feels like, with this machine, which also includes a wet glove. My grandfather never hid anything. He was clairvoyant. His family was from Holland and his parents moved to Indonesia, where he was born. They started a sugar plantation in Indonesia. They got really into Eastern philosophy. He and his sister were very much involved in The Theosophical Society, Madame Blavatsky and all that, and then they moved to Australia, the whole family.

**EB: When was this?**

PVG: It would have been in the 1930s. He got married to this English woman and they moved all around the world. He had six children and they were all born in different countries. So my dad's English and his brother's Canadian and his other brother is American. They just kept getting booted out of everywhere.

**EB: Why?**

PVG: For his electrical practice. So he ended up settling in Australia again when he was older.

**EB: Do you feel that you communicate with your grandfather when you engage with your practice?**

PVG: I guess I'm a bit sceptical. I was brought up as a Theosophist so I'm pretty accepting of people's beliefs. I think people can have some amazing power in them, whether it's spiritual or not. Maybe you can explain it with electricity, you know? But I don't think I'm clairvoyant. No. I've been reading a lot of Jeffrey Sconce's *Haunted Media*.

**EB: There's an interesting interview on Vimeo with Tony Oursler, who I think is taking Sconce as a launch-point, when he talks about how the time-space continuum collapsed at the birth of the telegraph in 1848. This was when we could communicate across distance and across time. His idea is that when you engage with an electronic medium, you are not communicating with that medium, rather you are communicating with the dead creators of that medium.**

PVG: I feel a little bit like that sometimes. And then there is, of course, Derrida, who just thinks everything's a ghost. Like, you pick up the telephone and talk to someone on the telephone and that's their ghost coming through. That's what Nick Keys and I have been talking about a lot. How machines are like psychic mediums.

**EB: ... through which we can channel the dead? Or, people just who are not here? That's actually not so crazy sounding.**

PVG: It's not crazy. It's totally true. I don't care what anyone thinks. It's true.

**EB: You have previously spoken about wanting to open up devices, such as a panel on the arm of a robot, and expose the mechanics of how things work. I was reminded of the old analogy offered by Walter Benjamin about the surgeon and the magician: The magician conceals his methods and works from a distance, thus creating a sense of awe and magic, the surgeon reveals his methods and works up close, which depletes the sense of awe and magic.**

PVG: Yes! And Benjamin also thinks that there is no aura in art from the age of mechanical reproduction. I would wager to say that he is dead wrong on that one! I believe all machines have auras! My machines make auras! Big audio visual auras.

This is what I would argue in regards to Benjamin's magician surgeon thing in relation to my practice ... I am in no ways a surgeon. I know nothing about machine medicine. I am a witch doctor, if anything, I'm trying to mix a little of both.

**EB: I think he's alluding to how, as soon as any of us learn how something works—how to bake a soufflé, how to edit a movie, write an essay, build an engine—he magic 'how the fuck did that just happen?' vibe leaves. I think it takes a person with true poetic sensibilities to see beyond these processes and find something unique and/or divine.**

PVG: Definitely ... he is right on that one. And I try to skirt that balance of ignorance and safety to continue that magical relationship all the time.

**EB: Have you created art that's been interactive or is it more performance scenarios?**

PVG: It's always performative. Sometimes through me, sometimes through others, always interacting with machines.

**EB: Why performance?**

PVG: Performing is what a machine has always done, even when it's still bound by its engineered outcomes, we have always measured machines by their 'performance' capabilities.

**EB: So in your performances you create an equal plane?**

PVG: I hope to. Sometimes I don't succeed. Sometimes I create opportunities for the machine to take total control (which I actually enjoy more) and other times I just can't get it out of them.



**EB: So, in revealing how they work and offering a process of collaboration, you're bringing about a kind of 'look, Ma, no hands' magical space for them to perform?**

PVG: Um ... well, sort of. Most of these beings are confined to the parameters of their engineering. This is a sort of enslavement. When I open them up I am exposing them to the world and saying, 'look machine—it's the world!!!! Do whatever.' And they are like, 'WOOOOOAAAAHHHHHH!!!!'

**EB: So, they're alive?**

PVG: YES!

**EB: Do they have feelings?**

PVG: YES!

**EB: So, machines are alive and you're communicating with them, but how do you feel about the fact that you are the only kinetic element in the performance. You say you want to open up a space for your machines to 'drive' the performance, so to speak, but you are the only agent doing anything. It's not like Jean Tinguely's self-destructing sculptures where the artist just walks away. I'm just trying to think about actual autonomy, machine autonomy, in your work.**

PVG: I always imagine myself as being the person who sets up the opportunity for the machine to be listened to. I think they're the doers and I'm the facilitator. But if this facilitating is the only thing that the audience notices, they are responding through a preconceived hierarchy. The performances are never meant to be solos because I am trying to reveal a collaboration between machines and me.

**EB: But say, with this crackle box, for example, if you didn't do anything, nothing would happen.**

PVG: Yes, so, in this instance, I'm the medium. That's a very personal feeling, and when you exhibit to an audience, it isn't necessarily clear.

If I'm not doing anything, things are definitely happening inside the machine and in the atmosphere, but we just can't hear them. When I interact with it, I act as a conduit.

**EB: Just looking at the thick book you have under your computer, is it better as a book or as a laptop stand?**

PVG: Definitely as a laptop stand.

**EB: Ha ha, I though you were going to say 'definitely as a book, I love that book.'**

PVG: I hate that book. *The Art of Electronics* by Horowitz and Hill, go to hell, Hill and Horowitz, you're horrible, and hellish.

**EB: Um, why?**

PVG: Have you ever looked at it? Oh my god it's so full on. This is the first book that electronic engineering students have to learn from. Because I enrolled in electronic engineering when I finished my Bachelor of Fine Arts I bought this book in the summer preceding the degree. It's a lot of maths and physics.

**EB: So you basically just learnt how things work, and how not to kill yourself.**

PVG: Yes, like Ohm's Law, current equals voltage over resistance. In the end I didn't do it (complete the B.Sc Electrical Engineering). I wanted to do it to make better art. And also maybe I couldn't go because I was scared of finding the truth.

**EB: The truth? Like, if you work out how everything works, then it's over?**

PVG: Yes, then it's not magical anymore.





# Simon Yates: Magic or System Error?

BEC DEAN

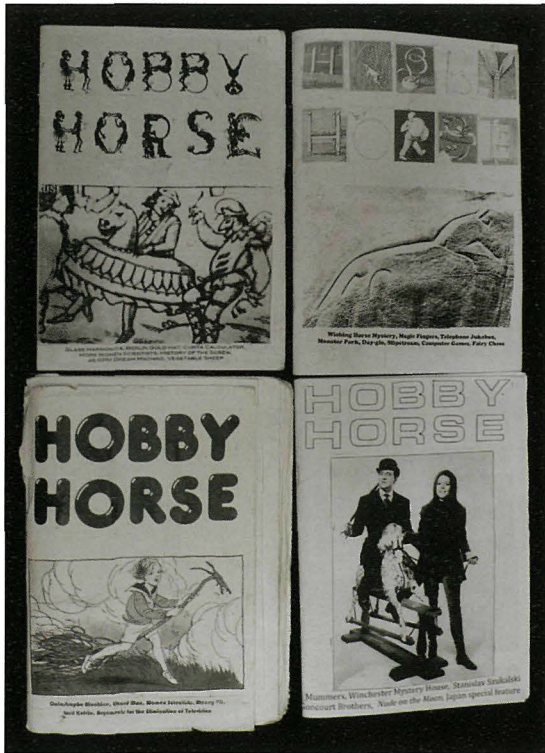
Simon Yates shares his name with the mountaineer who famously plummeted through an icy crevasse and survived. That particular Simon endured a solitary struggle to hold onto life, trailing various broken body parts, and subsequently made quite a bit of money by telling his story through the biopic, *Touching The Void* (2005). It is much harder finding information on Simon Yates *the artist* through the lazy act of Googling, because since making the film the mountaineer is now also a kind of *Auteur*. It doesn't even matter if you limit the search to Australia. There he is, touching the void, page after page. I am not only wasting the word-count in this circuitous approach to Simon Yates *the artist based in Sydney*, as there is something about the results of my search which seem to parallel Yates' approach to information systems, knowledge economies and technologies—a kind of algorithmic, almost deliberate, randomness that proffers a range of results with spindly threads of connectivity, stretching on (perhaps) infinitely. The Void. The Infinite. You catch my drift?

Yates is very much an artist of this technological age, though he works askance of its shiny, digital materiality. Yates questions and answers such complications and contradictions with tissue paper, string, paint, glue, sticky-tape, bamboo, balsa wood, stepper motors, op-shop curiosities, two-dollar shop whiz-bangery and helium. He cuts and pastes from yellowed paperbacks that provide answers to the mysteries of the Earth, the universe and ancient cultures and outdated and debunked theorems and conspiracies, binding them together in papery analogue form. Yates' zine *Hobby Horse* is an ongoing self-made publishing concern that skims the flotsam from popular science and cultural ephemera, connecting

art with (possibly) mountaineering with biochemistry with gaming with astrophysics. Among other things, the zine considers the current of DIY culture embraced by a generation of contemporary artists as stemming from multiple historical precedents and antecedents that include scientists, inventors and lucky people that just happened to stumble upon something significant.

From Yates' collection of VHS tapes has also sprung a zine-based compendium describing his personal favourite scenes in blockbuster movies. Not encyclopaedic but rather rambling, it addresses the kind of social contracts that we make with films, and the meanings, messages and other memories they provoke, which continue to resonate with us as we carry them through our own time. My favourite scene in Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) makes an appearance in *Mysterious Movie Mashup* (2011). It is the forest scene in which Madeleine/Judy played by Kim Novak touches the tree rings of an ancient Redwood addressing it directly, saying, 'Here I was born, and there I died ... It was only a moment for you, you took no notice.' In all of Yates' work there is an inherent frailty made tangible through the impermanence of the materials he works with. Not only does this invoke a sense of personal mortality from the artist's perspective, but, by way of his zine-making, he draws in the wider culture to which we subscribe, as merely the manifestation of a provisional and contingent moment in time.

Most recently in Australian gallery contexts, Yates is well known for his delicate papier-mâché automata; a number of life-sized robots taking the form of himself and his partner, as well as such



recognisable forms as Futura from Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1928), The Golem from Paul Wegener and Carl Boese's film of the same name (1920) and the towering figure of the character Neytiri from James Cameron's *Avatar* (2009). My first encounter with Yates' robots was almost bumping into the likeness of Sir Isaac Newton as it changed course and headed in my direction at the opening of the Biennale of Australian Art, *Before & After Science* curated by Charlotte Day and Sarah Tutton for the Art Gallery of South Australia (2010). It is not the same sort of uncanny experience as the shock of Masahiro Mori's 'uncanny valley' in meeting Yates' robots inasmuch as they are obviously not attempting to pass as human. Rather, they command the attention of a room with a kind of otherworldly and all-seeing grace. The way they move makes it seem as though they occupy another temporal plane. Yates' representation of a bewigged Newton in this exhibition paid a kind of homage to the physicist whose research had made possible the basic function of the artist's automata. Suspended by balloons filled with gas that is lighter than air so that they defy gravity and only just touch the ground, the automata perambulate with energy provided by mechanical means as well as changes in air density and movement.

Last year, the French artist Paul Granjon presented a performance lecture in Sydney about DIY robotics entitled *Lo-Tech Songs and Servo Drive* in which he included footage from the embarrassing appearance of Honda's Asimov Robot in Japan (2006) where the robot was only seconds into its performance of climbing a set of

stairs when it stumbled and fell. Not only did the Asimov robot fail to pick itself up again, it also failed to recognise that it had fallen and continued the presentation on its side (to the horror of its designers). While Yates' automata need replacement air and an occasional battery change to continue moving around, the Asimov robot required millions of research dollars and an entire team of scientists to reset its functionality. Faced with these kinds of fiscal and human-resource limitations as an artist, Yates works with what is able to be achieved—in terms of bringing to life a fantastical or speculative idea through invention—utilising the relatively crude technological provisions of the home or studio.

Yates is an artist who surrounds himself by books and other forms of obsolescing technologies—offering them the potential of an extended life and renewed purpose. One issue of *Hobby Horse* included photocopied letters to the editor of the *Sydney Morning Herald* reacting to news that the University of New South Wales was going to pulp part of its library. When I visited him to talk about this feature, he had recently acquired a microfiche viewer, a former library fixture, for an upcoming exhibition (I had some previous experience of this machine as a medical records filing clerk). Through our discussion I settled on what was so compelling, indeed magical about his reuse of mechanical and pre-digital technologies; they are open systems, able to be modified and repurposed easily by hand. They can literally be opened up and adapted by ordinary people with the most quotidian of tools and materials.

Above left: *Hobby Horse* zine, edited by Yates

Above right: Simon Yates, *Brain Scapes* (2008), paper, cardboard, wire, paint and pen, 10 objects, dimensions variable



My recent experience of working with Yates, and also with Sydney-based collaborative duo Jaki Middleton and David Lawrey, was made fascinating as I witnessed the unabashed wonder of gallery visitors trying to make sense of the analogue tricks and mechanisms such as the Pepper's Ghost<sup>1</sup> employed by Middleton and Lawrey, and in Yates' case, the sneaky use of remote control with his robots. With more research coming to light about the ways in which converged technologies such as the iPhone are, in fact, replacing the function of parts of our brain—for recalling our friends' phone numbers, reading maps or remembering directions—the work of Yates and of Middleton and Lawrey seems all the more pertinent in terms of reinstating a basic understanding of how machines work, of how perception is formed, of how certain strands of knowledge are privileged and revered, and how others are destined for pulp or the local op-shop. The simple example of a friend enquiring at the Apple Store about a dysfunctional iPhone and being presented with a brand new one, no-questions-asked, seems symptomatic of the distance we are creating in our understanding of the functions of the technologies we are dependant upon.

In *Brain Scapes* (2006), which is now housed in the collection of the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney, Yates attempted to elucidate the multiple memories, stimuli and thought processes that take place in his brain at the same moment. Like my description of spindly connections at the start of this text, the objects he has made make contact with one another through fragile points. Painted black and almost monstrous-looking,

like a human virus, the neurological process rendered in three-dimensions by Yates is at once disturbing and bleak, and then, as you move closer to examine the individual drawings, plans and explanatory text pasted across their surfaces, they are infused with the levity and humour that Yates brings to all of his work, a humour and delight in the world and all of its possibilities, tinged with frailty. In his acknowledgement that everything is temporary, Yates seeks to create objects of puzzlement from the scientific and cultural ephemera that time has abandoned, so that we may see them not only as new again, but with curious eyes and ontological enquiry.

1. The Pepper's Ghost is an optical trick using two-way or angled mirrors and lights to introduce ghostly objects into space. This technique was first demonstrated by John Henry Pepper in the mid 19th century.

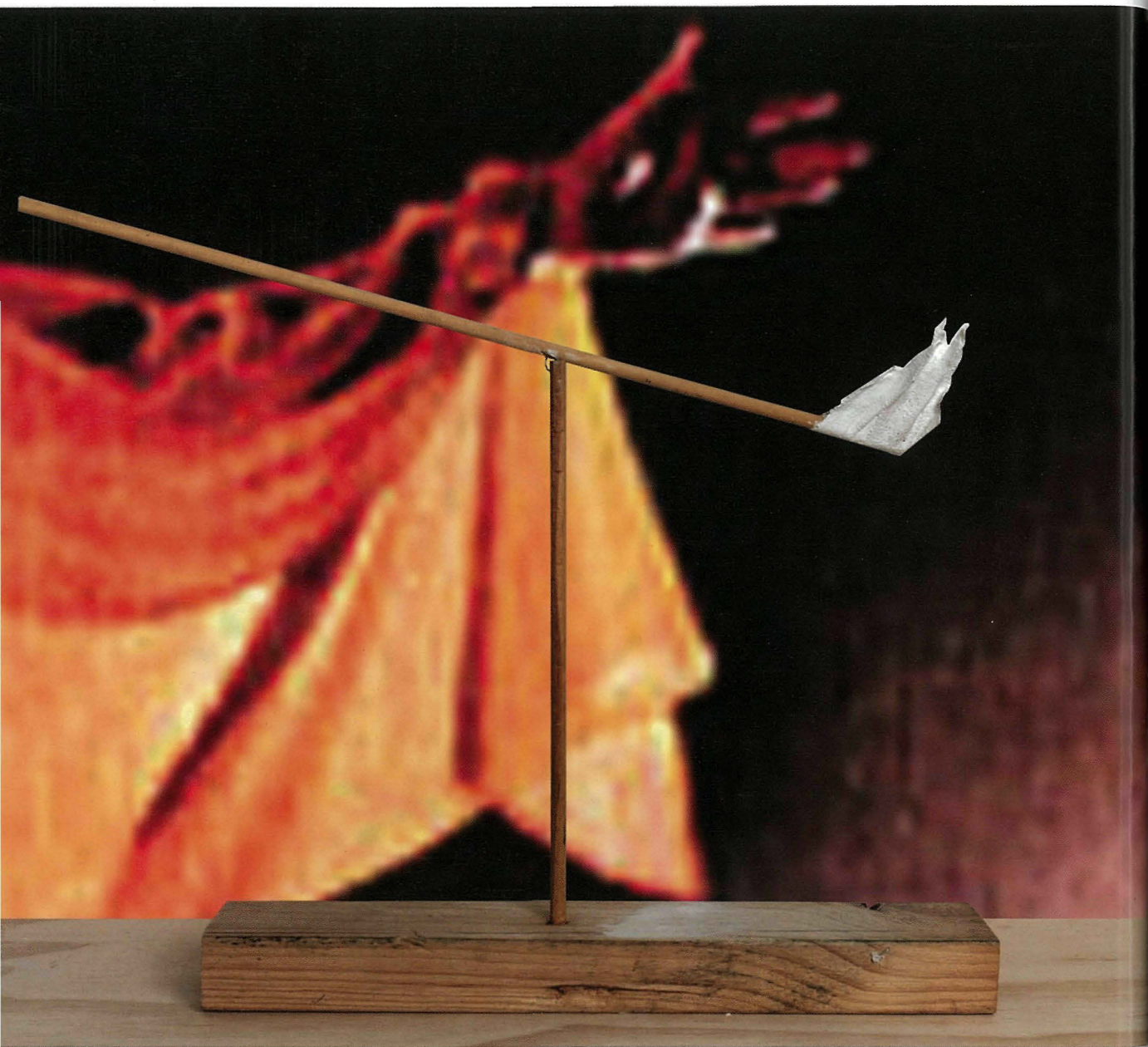
Above: Simon Yates, *The Robot Who Looked Like Me* (2009), installation view

MAGIC

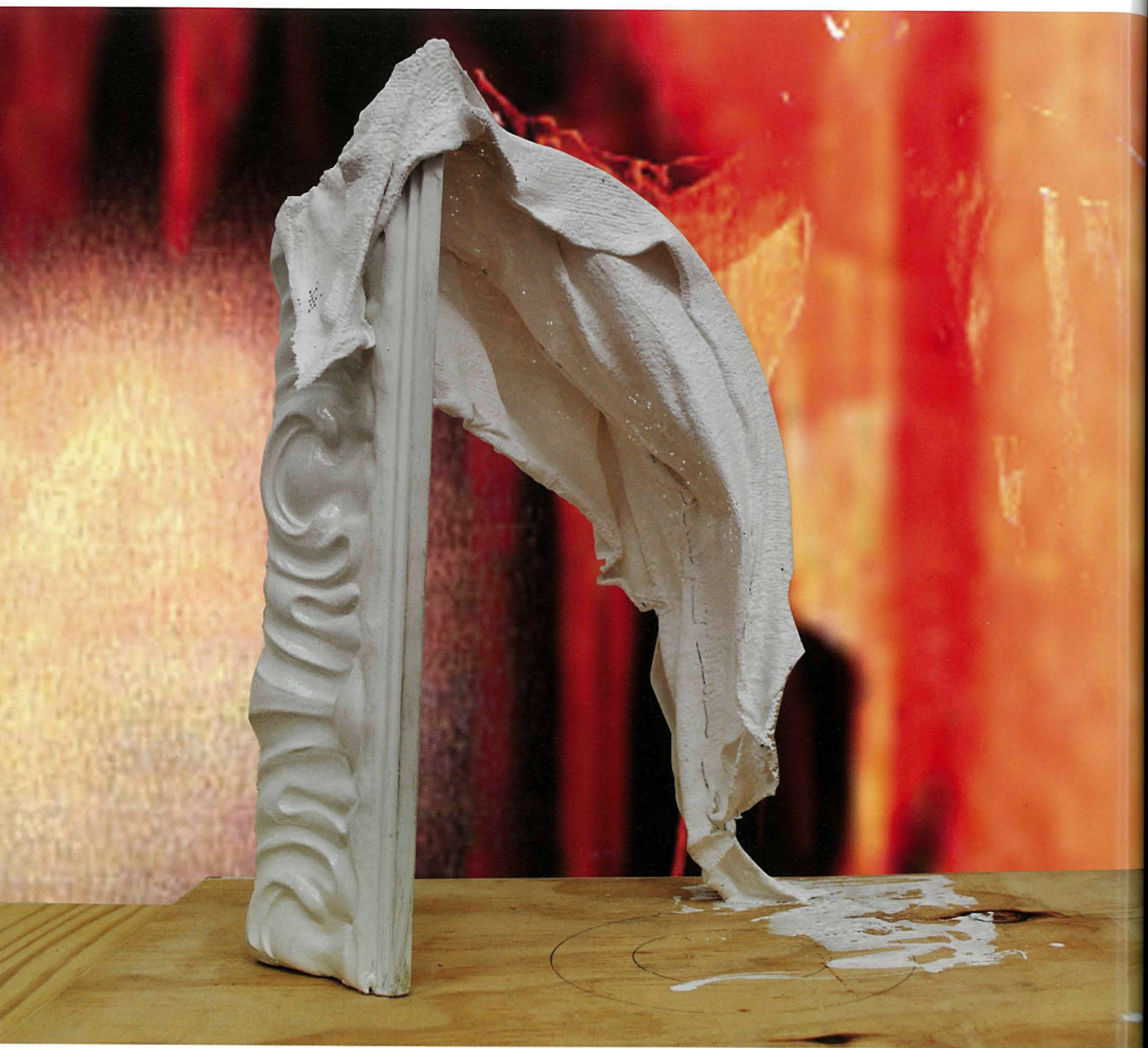
# Wind Now (Redux)

ANNA JOHN













# The Head

ROBIN HUNGERFORD







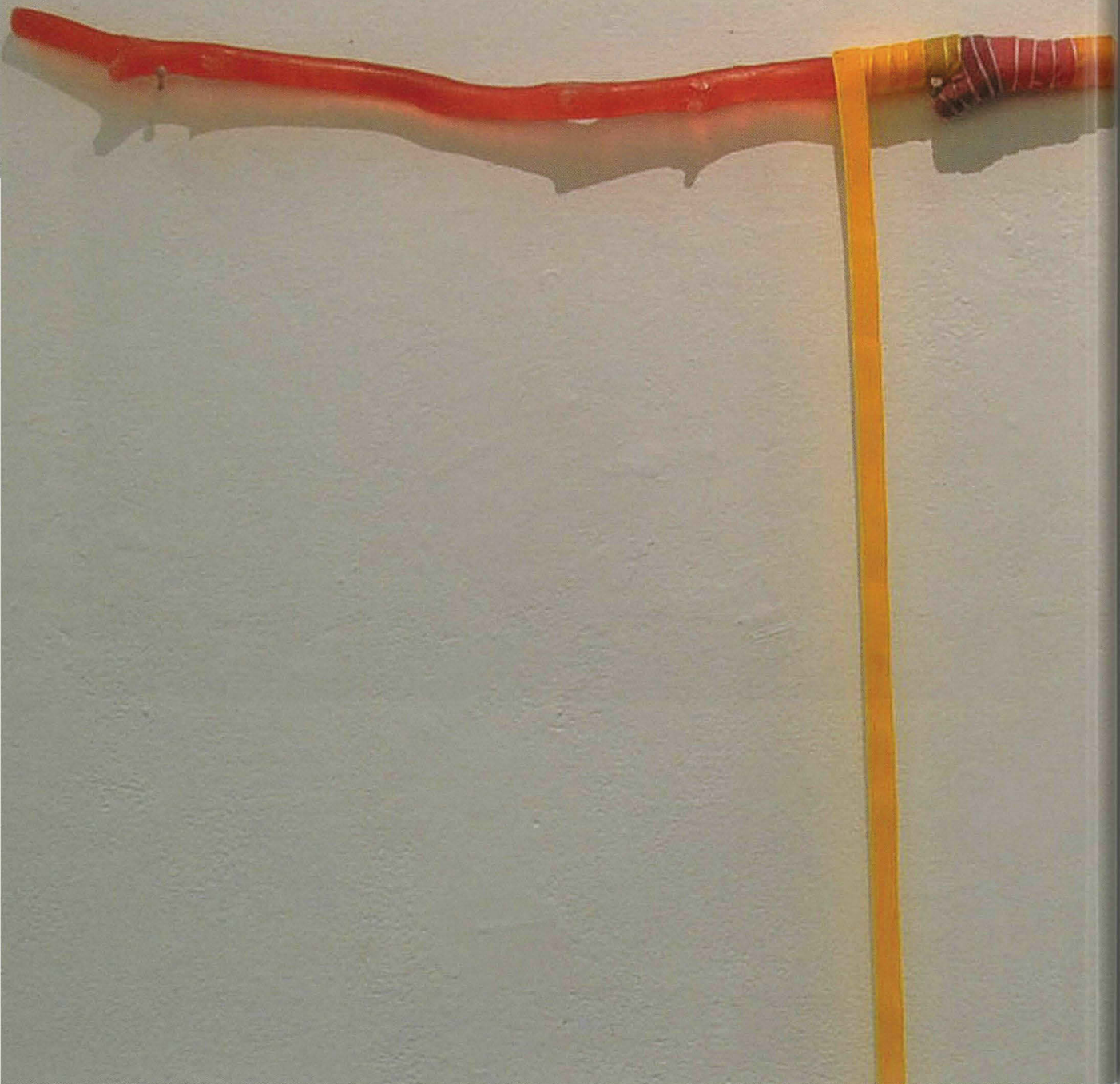






# Plastic Fantastic & Sympathetic Magic

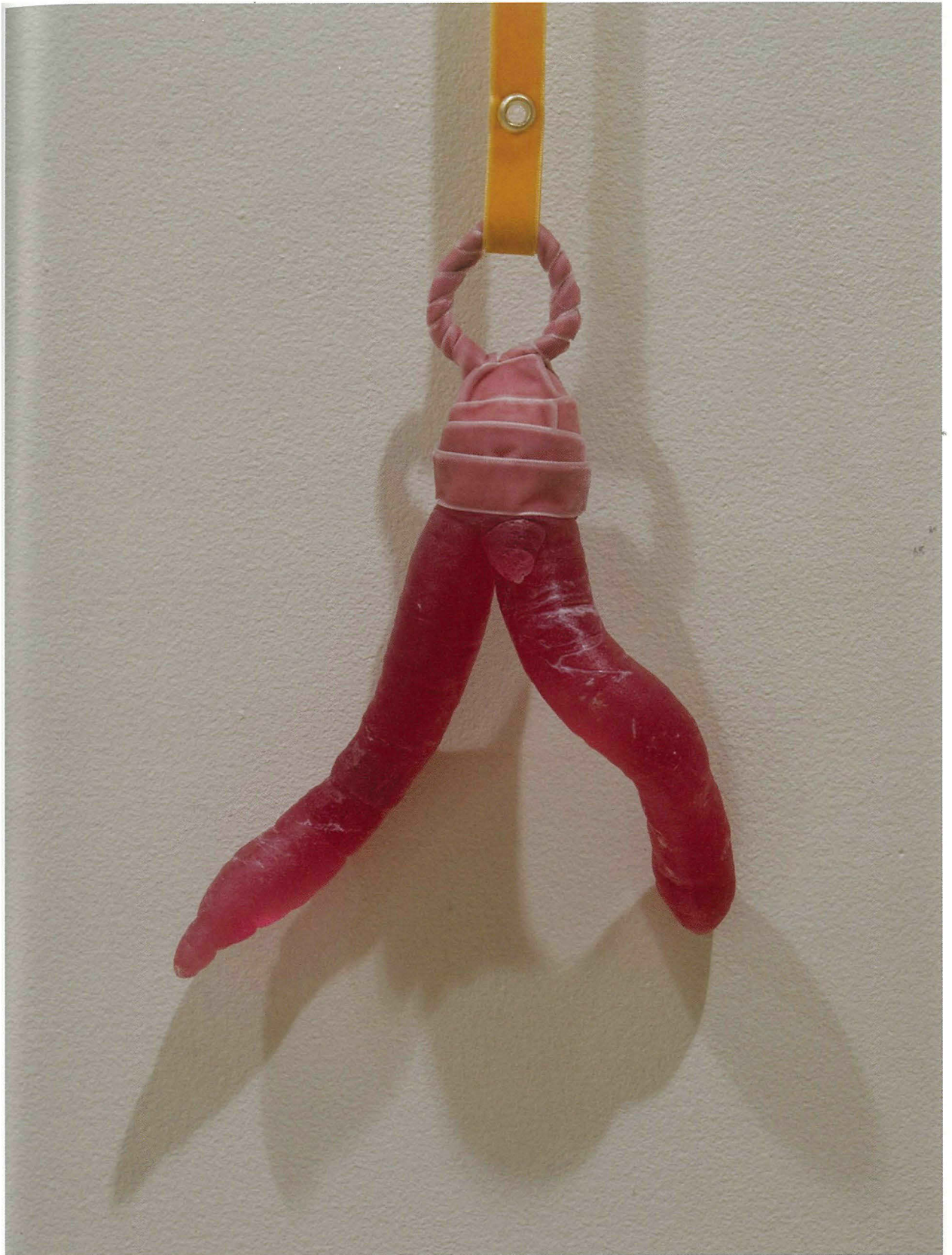
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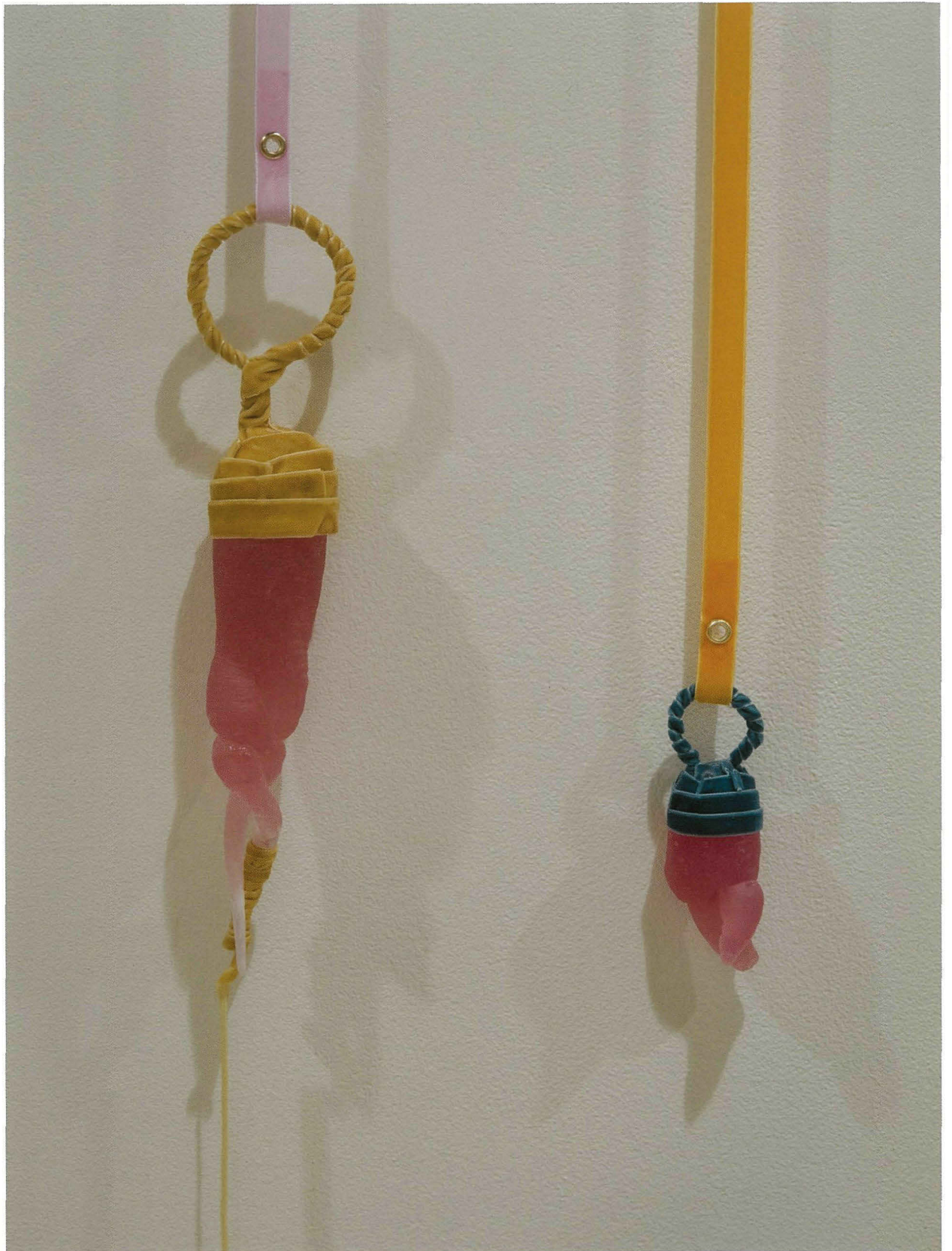














# Birthing Things in the Spirit

DAVID CAPRA















# I would bring you the stars (101 nights)

MICHAELA GLEAVE

03/03/2011

To Whom It May Concern:

**'I would bring you the stars (101 nights)'**

I hereby pledge to deliver 101 stars to my nominated recipient, sending one star each evening at sunset for 101 nights.

The stars sent are to be selected from those present in the night sky each evening (Southern Hemisphere), with sunset calculated as according to Australian Eastern Standard Time.

The stars will be delivered via text message to the mobile telephone number provided by the recipient: 0404768904. The message will contain:

- \* The star's common name.
- \* The astronomical name.
- \* The derivation or meaning of the name.
- \* The constellation in which the star appears.
- \* The rise and set times on the day in question.
- \* The distance from Earth.
- \* The apparent magnitude.

This transmission of information will form the project.

The project will commence at sunset on the 10th of March 2011 and conclude at sunset on the 18th of June 2011.

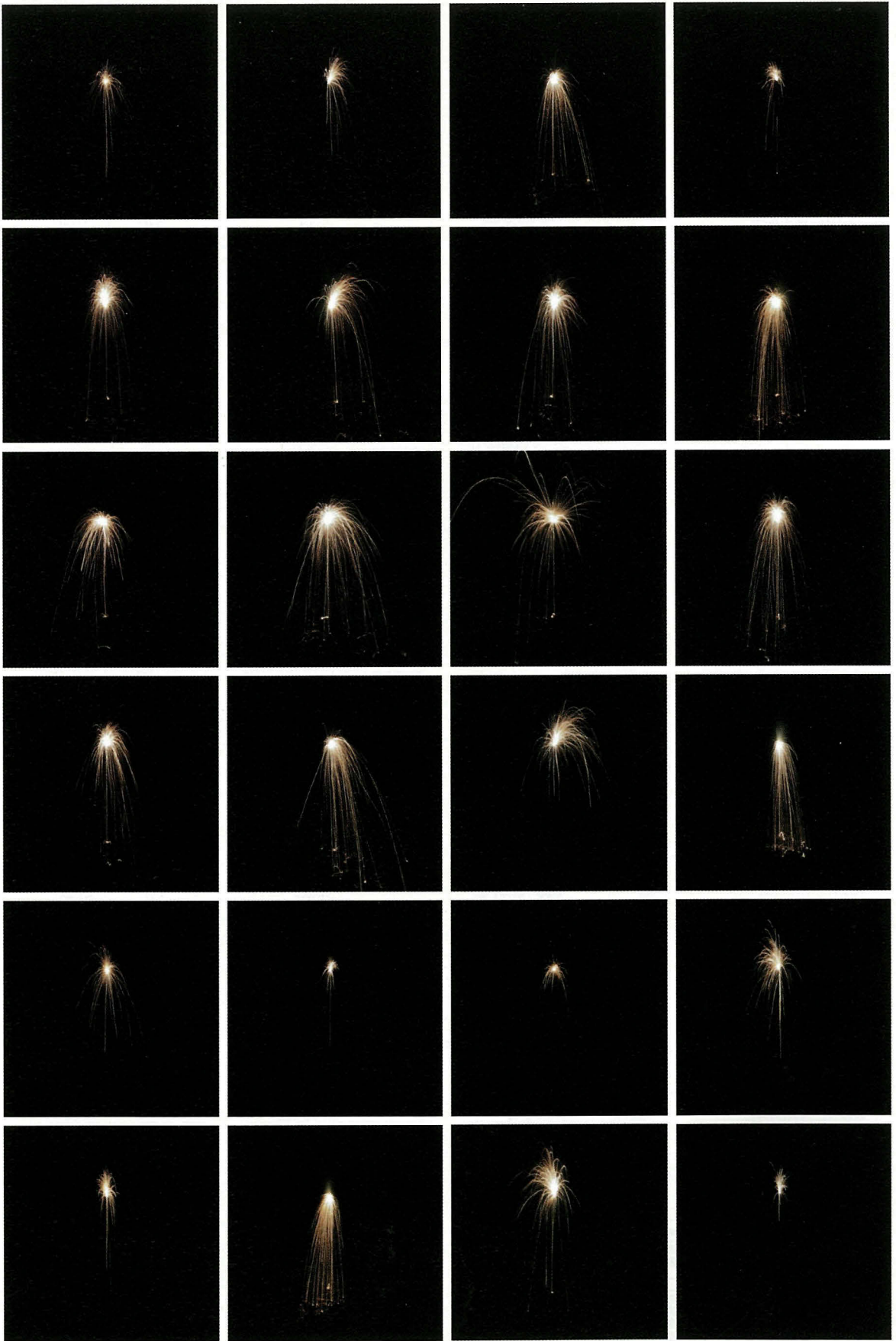
This offer is made as a gesture of time given and love for the universe. I do not wish to know the identity of the recipient and no reciprocation is required.

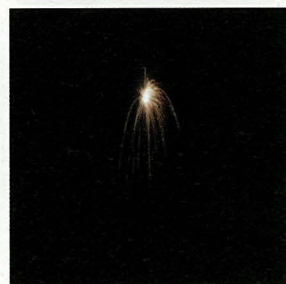
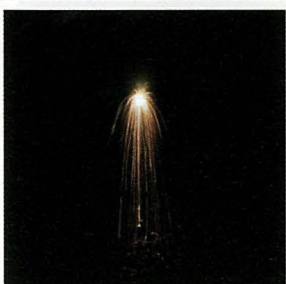
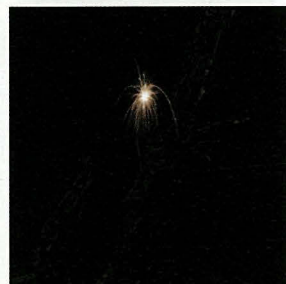
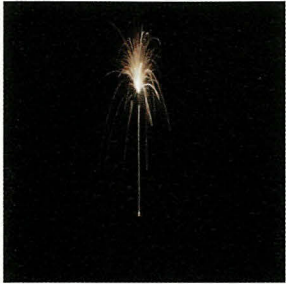
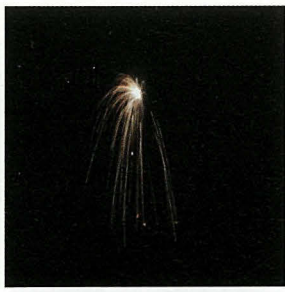
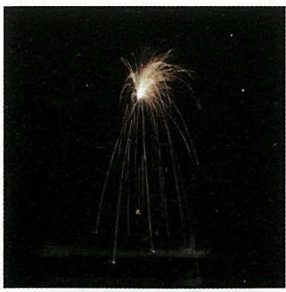
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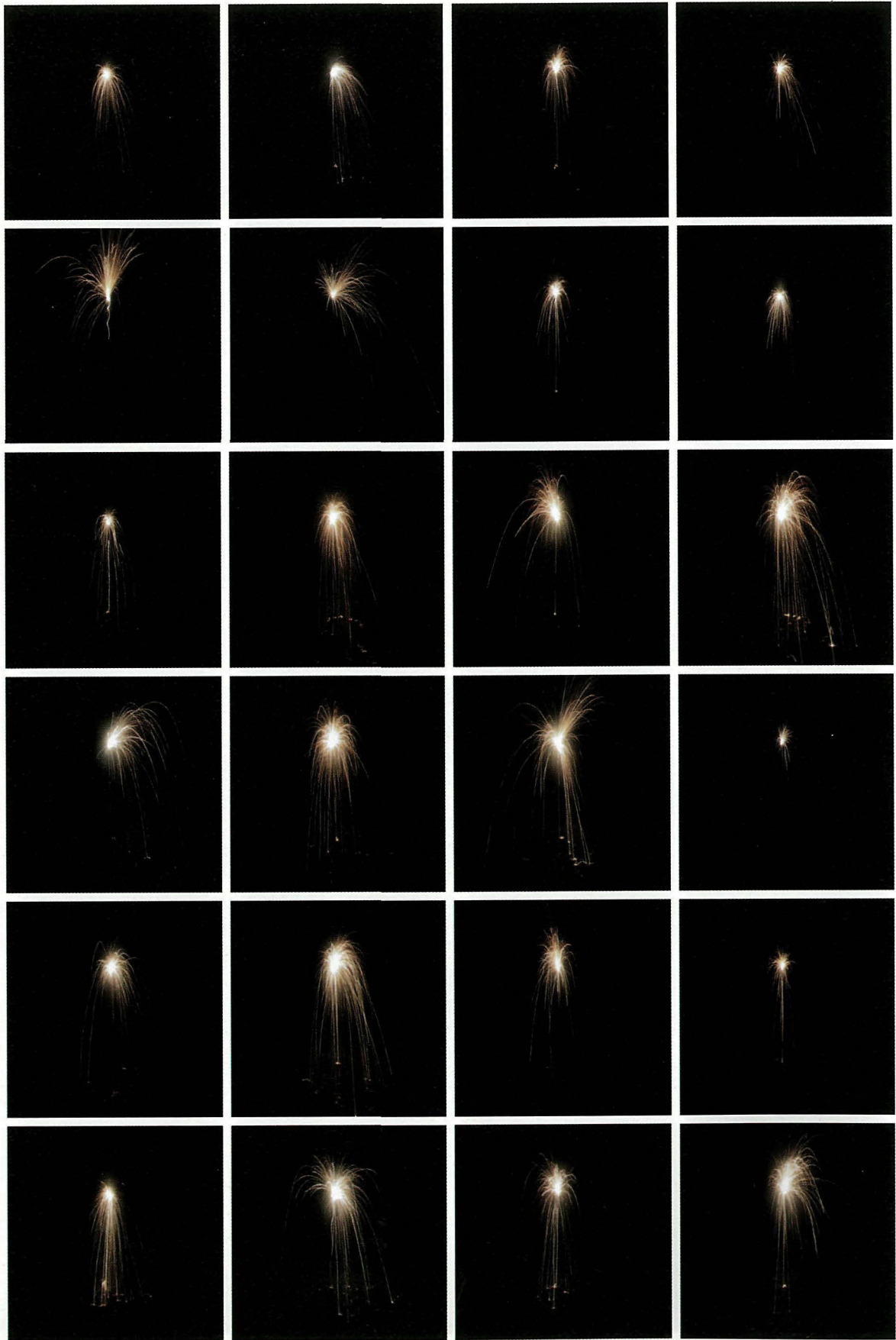


Michaela Gleave

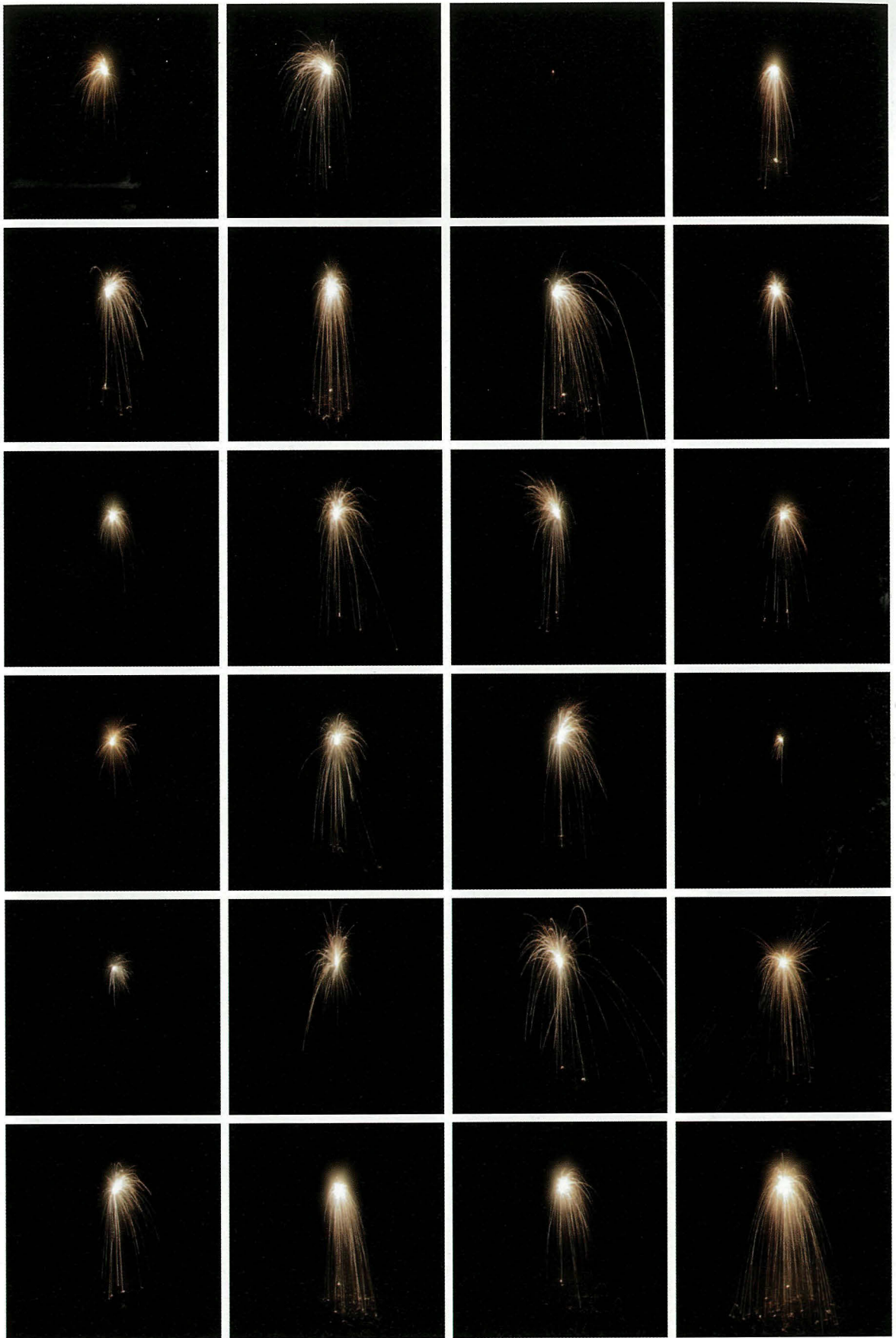






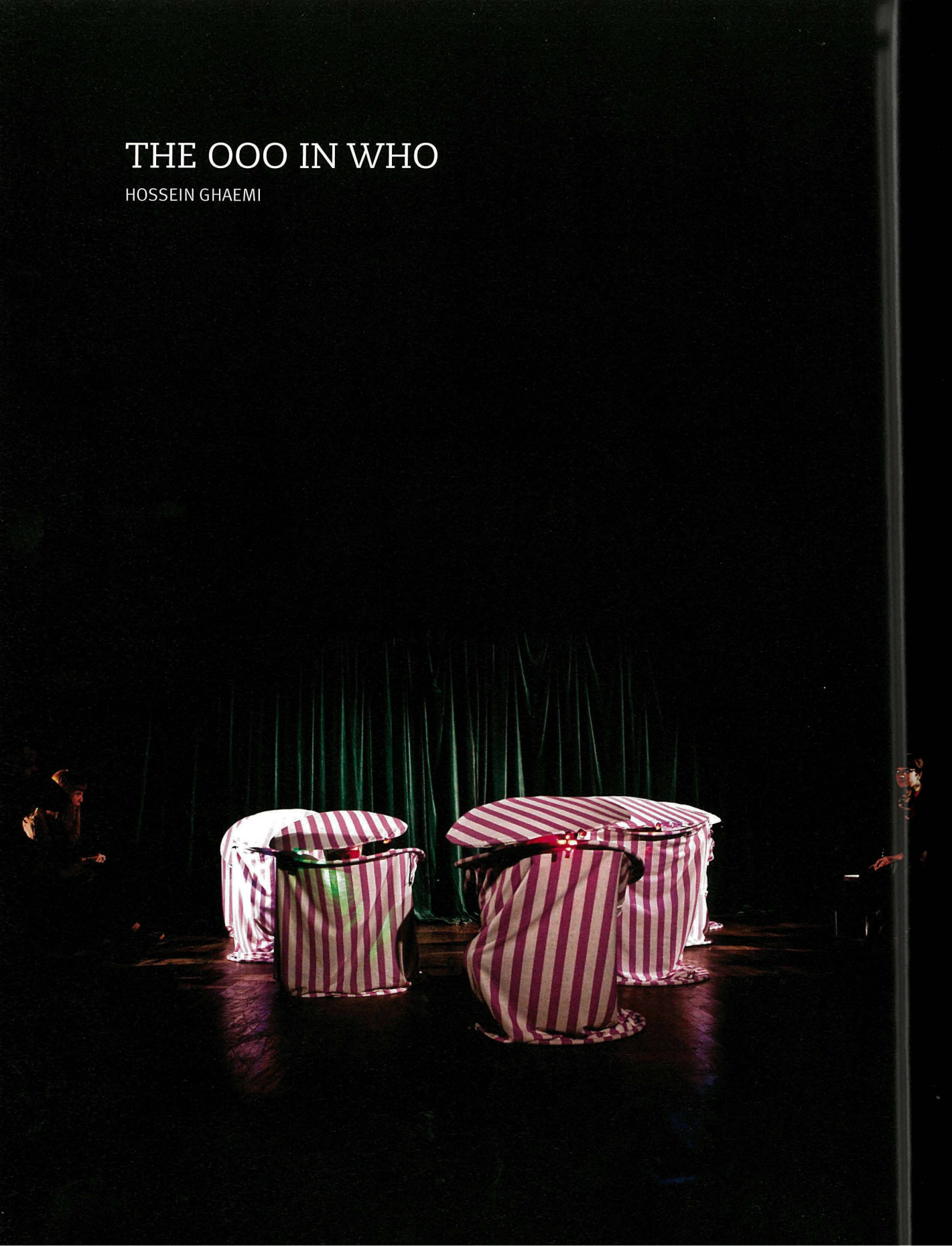


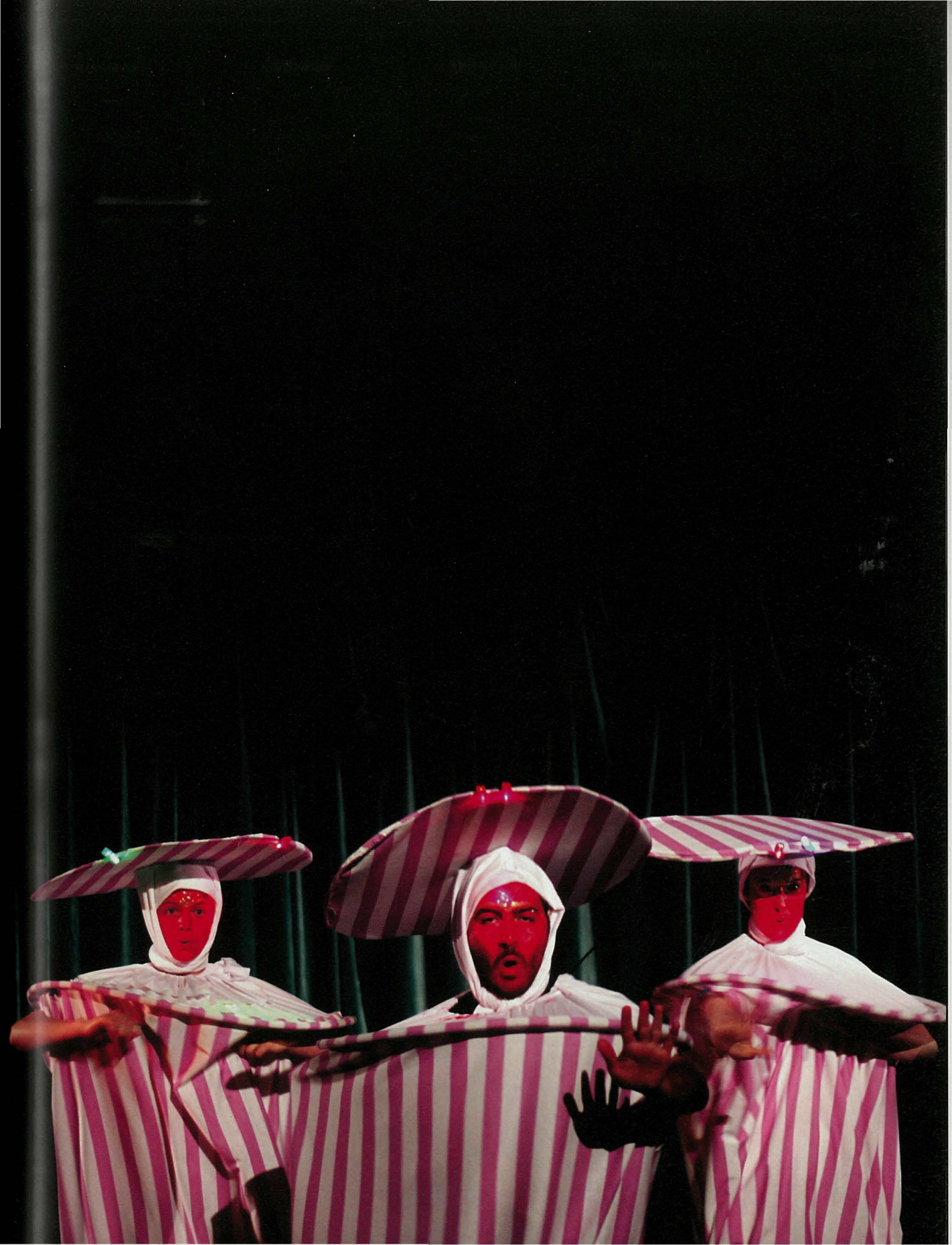




# THE OOO IN WHO

HOSSEIN GHAEMI

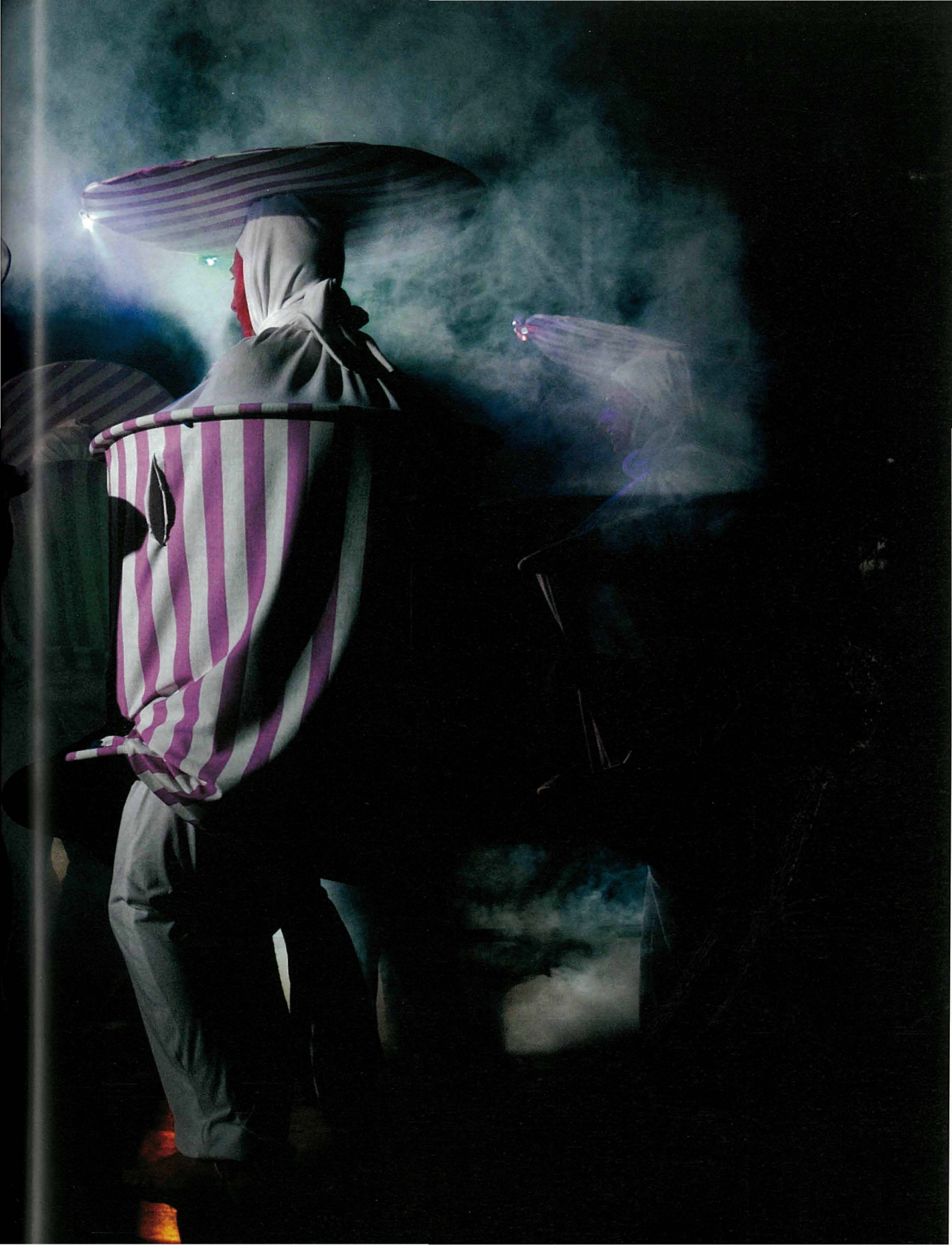






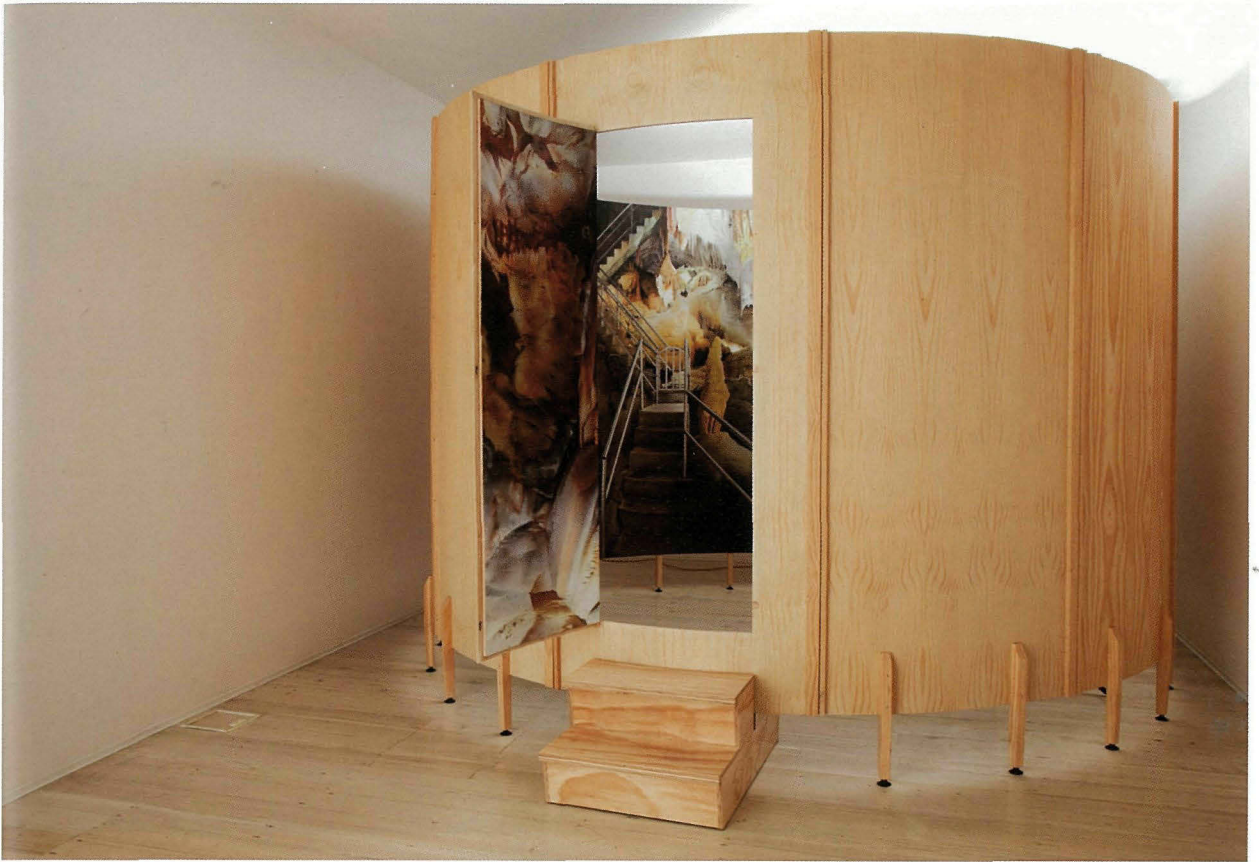






REVIEWS





## Indian Chamber

LISA LERKENFELDT

As I stood inside a cylinder, around me, eleven, one-metre plywood panels composed a 360-degree panoramic oil painting of the Jenolan Caves' Indian Chamber. The rock room was densely decorated with throwbacks to the immersive panoramas and wallpapers of the 1800s, I was unable to absorb the complete vista at once. The artist, Anna Kristensen's, play on the subject matter and genesis of painting in caves was immediate.

Direct allusions to myths of departing lovers tracing silhouettes on cave walls to immortalise a presence<sup>1</sup> was absent, instead human interaction in this grotto was first seen by way of a handrail in the foreground. Brush strokes served to simultaneously preserve the artificially lit and relatively new fencing and the stalagmites that formed layer by layer somewhere within the last 340 million years. My eye began chasing the mysteries of peripheral vision. As I circumnavigated the work, the human desire to control, imitate and preserve nature boomed.

Recalling advice on how to navigate labyrinths and guided by an inclining staircase, I pivoted to the left, and was drawn up to a dark zone. Attracted to the shadows, in blackness I looked for

evidence of Jenolan's micro-bat colonies or the prehistoric cave mushrooms discovered in Jules Verne's *A Journey to the Centre of the Earth* (1874). Inside this cylinder and metaphorically outside the square, I felt a connection with stair, tunnel and cave-dwelling communities. With the cylinder being intimate, indeterminate and shadowy I felt comfortable in actively appropriating the built environment by assigning it with my own meaning, renovating it according to my own needs and questions.<sup>2</sup> I wondered if our social attraction to indeterminate areas and nomadic ideas is actually forced temporarily by our inability to afford anything permanent?

I arrived at a basin, extra brilliant tones of colour recharged my retina. Hyped apricot detailing on white flowstone revealed the trickery of depth and light as it was happening. It's as if with *Indian Chamber* (2010) Kristensen is dealing in the oldest mode of illusion in the arts as a way to discuss the increasingly invisible technology behind the immersive and illusive environments of Olafur Eliasson, or Werner Herzog's 3D film, *Cave of Forgotten Dreams* (2010). As her painting failed to achieve the exact similitude of a photograph, it shifted the work into a territory



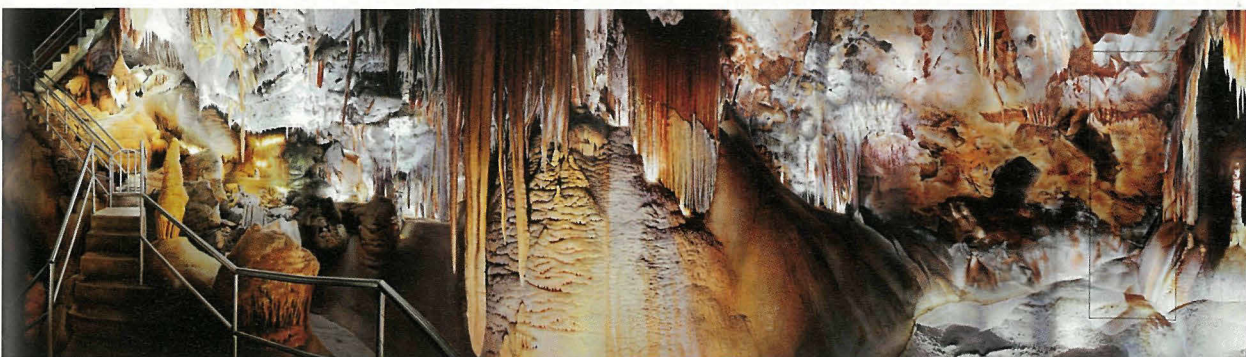
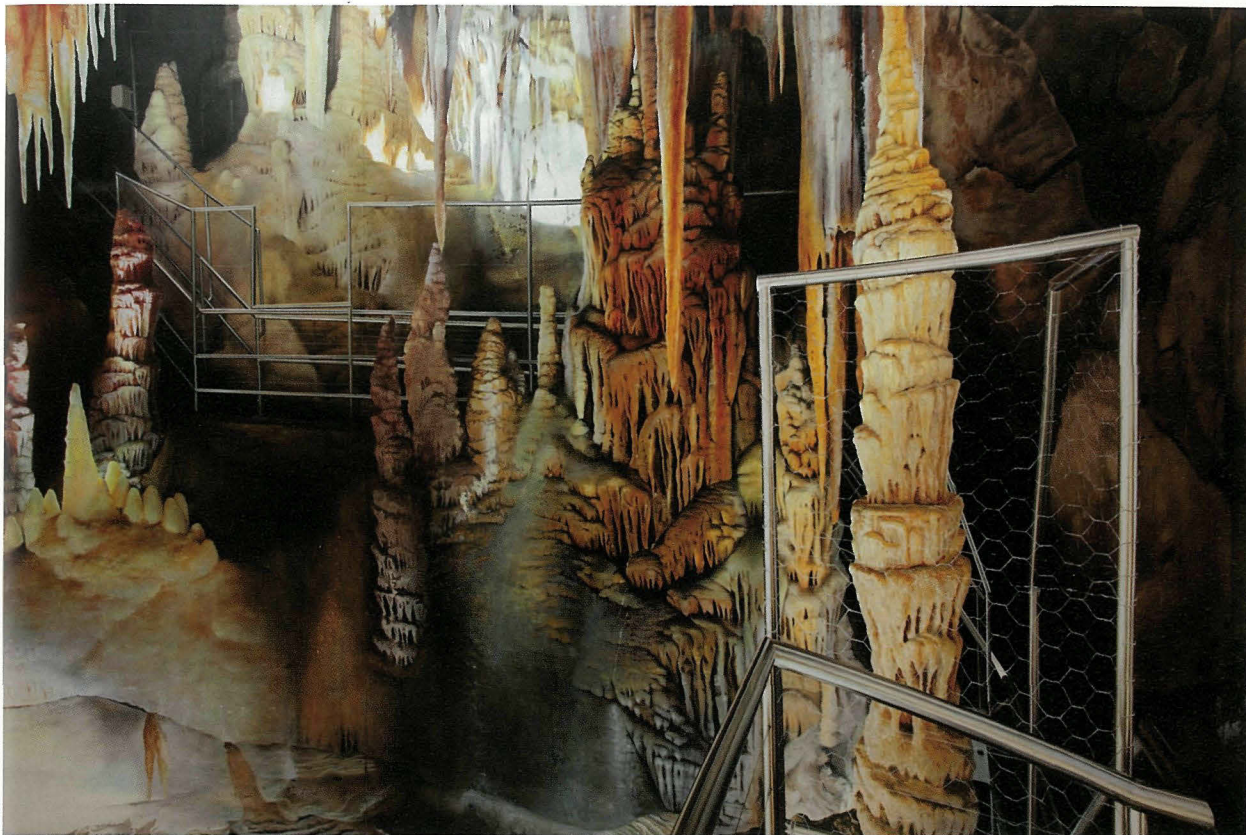
beyond the definitive, absolute detail or purported truth of the photograph. This imbued the work with a nostalgia and generosity that is inherent in explicitly exhibiting the dualism of illusion and materiality. The optical tricks that suggested a larger room, than that which was before me, also celebrated painting as ‘no other enigma but that of visibility’.<sup>3</sup>

Almost coming full circle, a drapery deposit entered via my eyes and was filtered through the scenery of my mind. I continued to be impressed by its gummy nature (a geological reference or perhaps incidental to oil paint?) and its symbolic relevance to the veil of ‘Maya’—a Sanskrit term translating to ‘not that’ or ‘illusion’. In Hinduism, Maya is to be seen through like a veil, or an epiphany to reveal a transcendental truth, that physical reality is an illusion. It’s the idea of liberating the soul through perception of duality—no distinction between what we perceive, what we are and the universe. Twisted attempts at perceiving perception and reality returned me to the cave before what looked like a subterranean evolution of the sweet potato, where I was forced to accept what I perceived for practical purposes.

To the sound of my own breath within the acoustics of the cylinder I exited as I entered, via a pyramid of stairs on either side of a door. From the outside, *Indian Chamber* looked like a space vessel, citing the honest, modernist designs of her father’s architectural practice. Kristensen failed to consider using native timber for a work that is locally associated yet plywood’s

natural grain has links to Jenolan’s Karst (limestone) geological formations. Inside Gallery 9, the chamber transported me elsewhere while I physically remained in the room. My experience was someplace between the oldest known open caves in the world, the gallery walls and myself. By literally reconfiguring the walls with curved ply, Kristensen continued her exploration of 2D images that play on illusion relative to 3D architectural space. I wondered if she was actively furthering the land art movement’s protests of the austerity of the gallery and commercialisation of art by bringing the work outside?

Kristensen stays interested in art by presenting ambiguous and suggestive images in a photorealistic vernacular to ensure the possibility of infinite questioning and conceptual locomotion. While her work is a means of translation and a kind of preservation, it’s also a forum for what your senses or mind may notice—in essence about mind travel. Experiencing her work activated a process within me. Only a part of what is perceived comes from the object through the senses, the surplus comes from within. As an indeterminate site, a temporary installation thematically linked to enigmatic phenomena, *Indian Chamber* was present on no absolute terms. It courted something beyond painting, beyond vision, beyond reality—something that escapes definition. Without limiting the means or destination, Kristensen acts as agent to set up key variables, through which we can choose to travel.



Gallery 9 and KALIMANRAWLINS represent Kristensen. Indian Chamber is part of the 2011 Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship Exhibition in October, 2011 at Artspace.

All images: Anna Kristensen, *Indian Chamber* (2011), oil on curved ply, 2.6m height, 11m circumference, 3.66m diameter, Photo: Silversalt photography. Images courtesy of the artist and Gallery 9.

1. Pliny, *Naturalis Historia*, A.D 77-792
2. Deborah Jund, 'Transient Spaces: Habitat of the Outcast', accessed 10 September, 2011, <http://www.shef.ac.uk/architecture/main/gallery/gal/diploma/theoryforum07/transientSpaces.html>
- 3 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, James M. Edie, *The primacy of perception: and other essays on phenomenological psychology, the philosophy of art, history and politics* (Northwestern University Press, 1964), 166..



## Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial) 2011

JULIA HOLDERNESS & HENRY KEMBER

Any biennial with the name 'Untitled' set in Times New Roman is clearly bent on neutrality. However, neutrality doesn't necessarily equal ambivalence. If anything, the 12th Istanbul Biennial has a more pointed sense of a curatorial idea than many similar large events in the global art calendar.

This year the Biennial has been curated by Adriano Pedrosa (born in Rio de Janeiro, now based in Sao Paulo) and Jens Hoffman (born in Costa Rica, now based in San Francisco). Theirs is a unique approach to the research and presentation of this biennial, and ultimately to the whole biennale form. It's also a response to recent claims that biennials have long since completed their mission, are now in decline and are in need of an overhaul. In his potted history of the Istanbul Biennial, Osman Erden writes 'Freeing itself from the traditional characteristics of biennials that are turning into tourist tools around the whole world, the 12th International Istanbul Biennial ... is going to prove itself in success or in failure with its interpretation of Felix Gonzales-Torres' unique artistic approach.' Pedrosa and Hoffman have chosen an innovative curatorial thought, that brings to our attention the importance of the exhibition as a formal tool; proving how full and complex the conversations can be when diverse works are overlapped and related.

Their curatorial framework is based on five artworks by Cuban artist Felix Gonzales-Torres, whose practice confronted political and personal issues. But the artworks themselves aren't present. Instead, they lend their titles and provide a jumping-off point for five large group exhibitions: 'Untitled' (Abstraction), 'Untitled' (Ross), 'Untitled' (Passport), 'Untitled' (History), and 'Untitled' (Death by Gun). These allow Hoffmann and Pedrosa to examine themes as varied as the modernist grid, relationships and loss, migration and modern borders, the telling of history, and the ubiquity of violence. Among the more than 50 solo exhibitions, these 'cabinet' exhibitions constitute the central focus of the Biennial. In turn, the five themes in themselves provide centres of gravity for the works to orbit around, and something for viewers to latch onto as they make their way through over 200 artworks.

Pointedly avoiding the usual hype and name-dropping associated with international biennials, very little information was released in the lead up to its opening. Only one list of eight artists was publicised, and this list happened to be all women. This was followed by the announcement that there would be no further unveiling—so as to discourage the usual rush to make judgements before the biennial was even open.

Above: *The built environment* was designed by architect Ryue Nishizawa. Photo: Mahmmut Ceylan

Facing page: Tammy Rae Carland, *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #3)* (2002) / *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #5)* (2002) / *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #6)* (2002) / *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #10)* (2002) / *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #11)* (2002) / *Lesbian Beds (Untitled #13)* (2002). All color photographs, each 972 x 737 mm. Courtesy the artist and Silverman Gallery, San Francisco, USA



The biennial title suggests there is no grand overarching curatorial concept in use. But really it's a rejection of 'title as theme' trend established by recent comparable events. Think of other biennial titles, or even better, make up your own. Take one adjective or verb and put it next to either 'Worlds' or 'Futures' and it instantly fits the bill. These concepts are often so loose that virtually any artist can be slotted into the frame. But this is a secondary interpretation; and the primary meaning of the Biennial title is actually as apt and relevant as any. Gonzales-Torres's naming conventions—always 'untitled' followed by words in parentheses—have inspired the whole concept for this biennial. The way he named (or didn't name) his artworks left room for the viewers' reading and acknowledged that meaning is constantly shifting in time and place. The sculptor, known for using everyday items such as piles of wrapped candy, doesn't appear in the form of his work. However, his practice informs the entire exhibition, and pays homage in its themes and presentation to the poetic and abstract ways he represented ideas and language.

Past Istanbul Biennials have made use of the extraordinary 'set' the city provides, siting works in historical venues such as mosques, Ottoman palaces and Byzantine churches. We heard people talking about Jennifer Steinkamp's computer animated trees which were projected in the cavernous 6th-century underground reservoir, known in English as the 'Basilica Cisterns' in the 2003 biennial. However this year the curators have chosen

to focus the biennale in one place: the banks of the Bosphorus, in two of the Antrepo warehouses, a pair of abject monoliths in a city of architectural treasures. This simplifies it all, intentionally making us concentrate on the exhibitions alone, and builds a singular environment. The curators also say it was to 'avoid competition with other visual stimulation (sic) or unintended contextualisations.'<sup>22</sup> The maze of shipping containers, which provides the built environment, was designed by Japanese architect Ryue Nishizawa. His design creates a tension between orderliness and confusion, at once echoing the taxonomical thread of the exhibition and disrupting it.

Gonzales-Torres's artwork *'Untitled' (Ross)* (1991) constituted a 175kg pile of candy that visitors could help themselves to. He made it in 1991 as a memorial to his partner Ross, who died of AIDS that same year. This exhibition explores themes of sexuality, desire, fulfillment and love, through the prism of gay politics. Artists Elmgreen and Dragset's passageway, filled with domestic-sized photographs of their friends at parties all framed in white vinyl, explores the notion of 'family' and suggests that for the gay community this is much wider than the nuclear unit. This show also features several works which pay homage to another poignant work Gonzales-Torres made after Ross died—a large billboard photograph of a double bed with indentations from two heads. Beds as a metaphor for relationships appear throughout the exhibition; one example being Tammy Rae Carland's *Lesbian*



*Beds* (2011), luscious oversized images of unmade double beds which act as portraits of relationships. Jonathan de Andrade's *2 em 1 (2 in 1)* (2011) is a series of photographs of two young, toned Brazilian men demonstrating the assembly of one large double bed out of two single beds. The bland instructions seem incongruous or even ludic in the context, and suggest a repression of sexual tension.

The exhibition '*Untitled*' (*Death by Gun*) is titled after one of Gonzales-Torres's stack pieces from 1990, a sheet of 460 identity pictures of people known to have died from gunshot wounds in a single week in America. Here the curators look at violence in society through a combination of historical and contemporary artworks. The inclusion of Matthew Brady's (born in 1882) reportage photographs of dead soldiers in the American Civil War provides an illuminating starting point, his photographs from right in the battlefields were some of the first visual documentation of deaths in war to be made public. The curators note that it is '... impossible to overestimate how shocking these pictures ... must have been to viewers at the time.'<sup>3</sup> Even now in this desensitised age, these images still provoke a visceral reaction. There is also a selection of crime scene photographs by the famous New York photojournalist Weegee who would get to the scene at the same time as the emergency services in the 1930s and 1940s. A contemporary work commenting on the prevalence of graphic violence in our media is *Juego Vivo (Live Game)* (2008), a short film by Jazmin Lopez, where a group of children play a game of war in a forest, with deadly consequences.

As immediate and poignant as '*Untitled*' (*Death by Gun*) was, we found the most compelling exhibition theme to be '*Untitled*' (*History*). This is a rich collection of works that explores history and its relationship to narrative, with many of the artists examining the use of documents by governments and states. Vluspa Jarpa's *Library of No History*, compiled official documents on the Chilean dictatorship recently declassified by the US government that will be distributed freely throughout the exhibition. Ali Kazma's multi-screened video installation of official hands stamping documents at incredible speed comments on the bureaucratic machine that exists to varying degrees all over the world. The dizzying effect and sound is both captivating and sinister. The theme of history resonates greatly with the Turkish experience and the omnipresent love for Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, founder of the modern Turkish Republic. By putting the notion of history under the microscope, it obliquely questions the history of the host country itself, with all its narratives of expropriated and excluded minorities that lie outside the official cant. A piece from Aydan Murtezaoglu's *Blackboard* series 1992-(2009-2011) questions Ataturk's processes, commenting on the loss of language when he introduced a Latin alphabet in the late 1920s as a way to westernise society.

It is obvious that Pedrosa and Hoffman's research was active and multifaceted; archives, libraries and other repositories have been scoured to bring new material to light. Biennials often put the next hot young artists on the map, but this biennial presents a discovery of overlooked (and often older) unknown practitioners. There's a solo presentation by Geta Bratescu, an 85-year-old



Romanian artist who makes geometric collages from fabric off-cuts. Also included are photographs by YÁldÁz Moran Arun who travelled across Turkey in the 1960s documenting local women and village life at a time when few Turkish women journeyed on their own. Pedrosa uncovered her images in the archives of a local Istanbul University. There is also a notable lack of a reliance on big name artists. The Ardmore Ceramic Art Studio, a commercial collective run by a family of artists in South Africa has a solo presentation of their vessels and plates. Drawing on Zulu storytelling devices, each one is a pictorial lesson in HIV prevention.

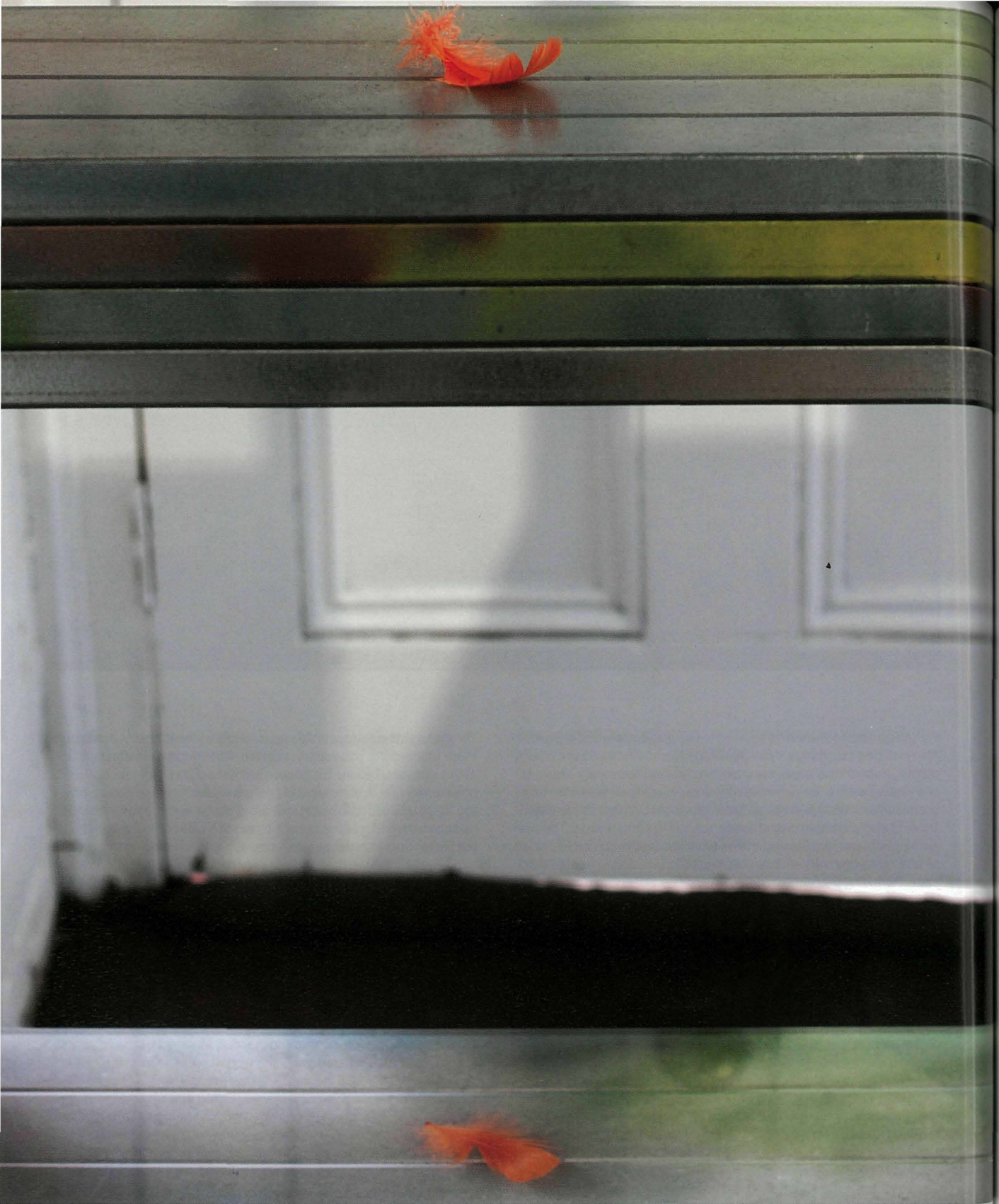
But for all the belated discoveries of older artists, there's still a palpable sense of youth and the leading edge in contemporary art practice. A work by 25-year-old Palestinian artist Bisan Abu-Eisheh was in fact first shown at his Art Academy graduate show three years prior. *Playing House* exhibits items he collected from Palestinian houses that were demolished in Jerusalem by decree of the Israeli municipality. Each object has a label describing where it comes from, the date of the demolition, and the number of people who lived in the house. This solo presentation straddles the *'Untitled' (Death By Gun)* and *'Untitled' (History)* exhibitions, and relates to both of them in that position. It also reflects a particular focus on Middle Eastern and South American artists in the biennial.

Throughout the disparate spaces and experiences of this biennial, there is one thing you will always find. Questions. Questions about our moral code, the tension between establishment and private individual, and our attitudes to each other. The nature of the Biennial itself also questions what we have come to expect from an international art event such as this. And so we crossed the Bosphorus into deeper, less cosmopolitan Turkey feeling we had seen something that had not only moved us, but also done something to push the modern idea of a biennial into to a more enriching, mature and sophisticated place.

*Untitled (12th Istanbul Biennial)* was staged 17 September - 13 November 2011.

Facing page: Ali Kazma *O.K.*, (2010). Seven-channel video installation with sound. Courtesy Vehbi Koç Foundation, Istanbul, Turkey. Photography: Selen Korkut  
Above: Jasmin Lopez *Live Game [Juego vivo]*, 2008. Video, 2 min. Courtesy the artist

1. Osman Erden, 'The Biennial History of Istanbul', *Istanbul Contemporary Etc*, Issue 4 (2011) 85.
2. Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffman, Introduction, *The Companion*, Istanbul Biennial (2011) 25.
3. Adriano Pedrosa and Jens Hoffman, *The Companion*, Istanbul Biennial (2011) 76.



Marian Tubbs, Install view Installation: *Objects are shit* (On the way to a studio a plane was coming into land. I was on a bus on a curving bridge, the way we were travelling made the plane stand heavy and still, so I was like ok 'you will be a sky object'.) 2011. Photo: Marian Tubbs



# Follow the Circle

JACK JEWELLER

Where stands the shelves  
stacked again too high,  
With too much room to fill

the same there shelf with different things  
without which would remain another shelf

but on which what's stacked, the same things said,  
in another voice its spoken

and in this sense the madness reels  
and becomes all the more less token<sup>1</sup>

I met Marian Tubbs at the opening of her solo show at Eastern Bloc. Her work titled, *Installation / Objects are shit / (On the way to the studio, a plane was coming in to land. I was on a bus on a curving bridge, the direction we were travelling made the plane appear heavy and still, so I was like ok, 'you will be a sky object')* (2011). It was the gallery's first opening and she was in the other room blowing some froth with other mild mannered patrons of the arts. When I was first introduced to Tubbs, I made a comment about how I liked her art and another comment about how a friend, Melbourne artist Gian Manik, had recently used the same self-erected shelves that she had, stacked equally high and in a similar re-configuration for his joint solo show, *Heinous Armani* at Melbourne's TCB gallery. It didn't occur to me until writing this piece how relevant this parallel between the two bodies of work would become.

The challenge that Tubbs sets for herself as an artist, as distinct from her philosophical investigations and research, revolves around the question of seeing things for their 'is-ness'. That is, she sees things as they exist outside art making trends and institutional practice, she gives herself the chance of experiencing what Heidegger calls the 'untouched actuality' of how they are before becoming art. Heidegger raves, 'Art works of the most diverse periods and peoples are housed in collections and exhibitions. If we consider the works in their untouched actuality and do not deceive ourselves, the result is that the works are as naturally present as things are.'<sup>2</sup>

In *Installation: Objects are shit [...]* Tubbs explores the appearance of objects by rebuilding, and re-presenting them in both a humorous and serious way, exploring what the spectator could interpret as an attempt to exhaust the potential banality of both the art object and the objects we see everyday. In her assemblage-installation a set of self-erecting galvanised steel-shelves were arranged in a straight line across the space. The totemic arrangement had a double-purpose: being both the equipment used to present art objects, but itself also as material for creative cud chewing.

Parts of the work were loosely painted with a pallet of rainbow enamel spray, the shelves were stacked high, housing the entirety of the assemblage. Diagonal forces were at play between the art-objects and non-art objects, mutating under the influence of one another. Effectively eviscerating them of any presumed function within the assemblage and widening our perception of them into an 'affective' register.

This slippery notion is best understood with the philosopher Gilles Deleuze, who put to work Spinoza's concept of affect (*affectus*): the marks of the passage from one state to another as an increase

or decrease in the body's power as a function of its affectations.<sup>3</sup> It is this 'passage' between the objects, which Tubbs activates within her installation; ornately draped Chinese lanterns do not invoke the wake of the sleeping dragon in the international art market. Instead our minds relax in this passage, wandering through the kitsch gift shops of Chinatown, amid the mire of consumer commodities and the carbon-saturated luxury goods we use to furnish our everyday environments.

The shelves, which these lanterns were hung from, are defunct, their use, visibly effaced, contorted and re-valued. One support was visibly part of an absent shelf; one that was evidently not part of the originally conceived installation. Instead it was tossed into the assemblage as if to serve as a subtle reminder that these objects were not the shelves from Bunnings. By understanding them as both everyday objects and a work of art we get closer to the essence of the thing that the artist drives at, as Heidegger would say, we 'follow the circle'<sup>4</sup>.

It could be said that these encounters with an essence of a truth in Tubbs' work are hermeneutical, a bit earnest, even. The suggestion that each sign is a clue or symptom of some vaster reality and ultimate truth, which replaces the objective reality of the installation, is a difficult pill to swallow for a predominantly secular audience. However, a playfulness cuts through the seriousness in *Installation: Objects are shit [...]*, a trompe l'oeil reminds us of the falsity of truth which Nietzsche turned on its head, 'The true world we abolished: which world was left? The apparent one perhaps? ... But no! along with the true world we have also abolished the apparent one!'<sup>5</sup>

In this vacant lot of appearance left by Nietzsche the artist's sleight of hand created a paroxysm of laughter. Staring into the myriad of passages between objects and art our eyes stumbled upon a feather print filled with acrylic, fitted and placed on top of the shelf. Above it another feather, only this time an apparently 'real' feather. That's the rub; Tubbs is exploring the real world as a gag, a trick.

In a recent conversation, it was Tubbs who reminded me of her guffawing at my remark that her art looked a bit like Manik's, and almost too readily responded with 'I know.' This palpable remark lingered in the space between us, stripped of any general character; I was left to my own to devices to decide the semantics of this statement. Overlooking it at the time, it is only now that the cryptic comment makes sense.

1. Martin Heidegger, 'Basic Writings, On the Origin of the Work of Art' in *Philosophers on Art: From Kant to the Postmodernists*, ed. Christopher Kul-Want (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.) 130.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Gilles Deleuze and Feliz Guattari. 'A Thousand Plateaus.' *Vol. 2: Capitalism and Schizophrenia. (1972-1980)* Trans. Brian Massumi. (London and New York: Continuum, 2004) xvii.

'In Spinoza, an 'affectation' (*affectio*) indicates the state of a body insofar as it is affected by another body, while an 'affect' (*affectus*) marks the passage from one state to another as an increase or decrease in the body's power as a function of its affectations.

4. Martin Heidegger, "Basic Writings, On the Origin of the Work of Art" in *Philosophers on Art: From Kant to the Postmodernists*, ed. Christopher Kul-Want (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.) 130.

5. *Ibid.*



## The feeling will pass ...

RACHEL FULLER

*The feeling will pass ...* was the keynote exhibition of the recently held We Are Here Artist Run Initiative (ARI) symposium organised by Sydney-based arts institutions, National Association for the Visual Arts (NAVA) and Firstdraft. The exhibition itself was held at Firstdraft and co-curated by the co-conveners of the symposium, Brianna Munting, the Projects and Strategy Manager at NAVA and Georgie Meagher, a co-director of Firstdraft. The curators introduced the exhibition in this way;

When activism can seem a historical notion, how do artists intervene, disrupt and destabilise the structures they are working within? Beyond the paralysis of anxiety, 'The feeling will pass ...' seeks to explore the capacity of ephemeral, site specific and live works to respond dynamically to contemporary social, cultural and political binds.<sup>1</sup>

Yes, a little unnecessarily wordy. Yes, not entirely excellent English. And perhaps the curators mistook the word activism for some long lost -ism of art history? Activism is not in fact a historical notion. Political art perhaps? The kind of didactic, mystery-less, bra burning political art of the 1970s that we all learnt about in art school? Yes, well, that is history.

So the question needs to be asked. Why attach a political exhibition to an ARI symposium? Having been a director of an artist-run initiative I can safely claim that that role does come complete with feelings of fighting the good fight. One can feel overwhelmed by the constant appeal to funding bodies, the wider non-art community and basically, all and sundry. We. Are. Here. Goddamn. You.

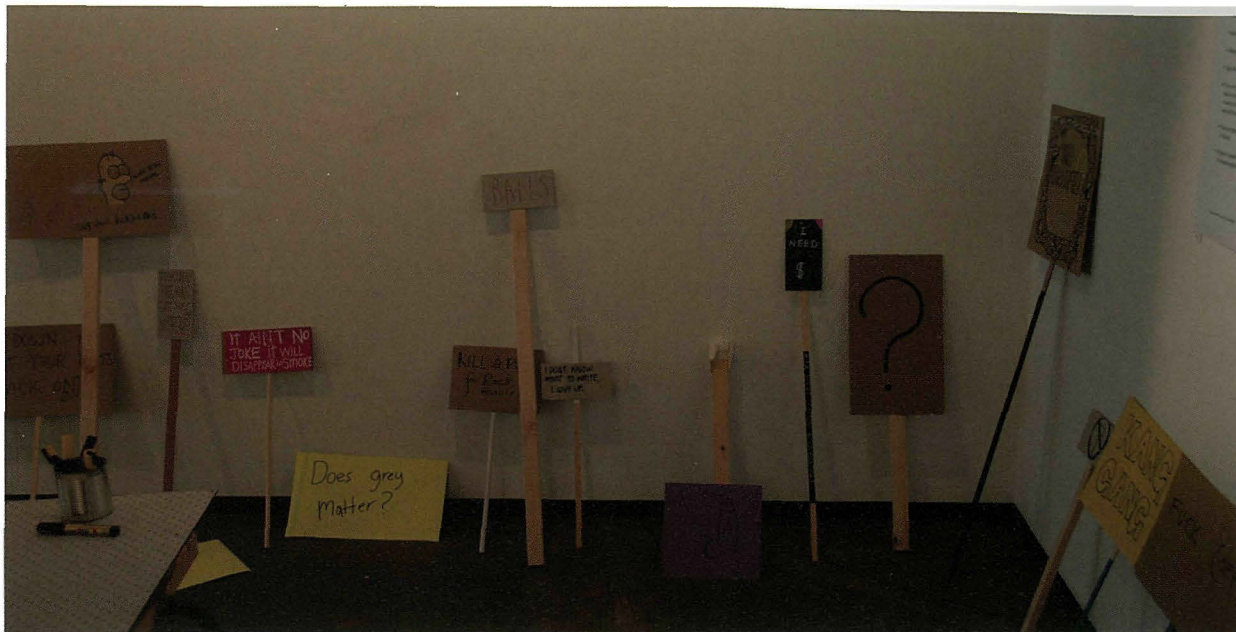
Yet, unfortunately on the whole, this particular exhibition appears to have fallen somewhat flat. I think perhaps the paralysis of anxiety never enabled the artists to move beyond their own lack of opinions on the subject. This is, nonetheless an interesting exploration. In the wake of an art school education filled with the notion that political art is naff, literal and icky, how does one navigate art making that negotiates change?

Due to the limited space available here, I will attempt to deconstruct this issue through two of the works in the exhibition. The first, a work which illustrates this so-called paralysis and the second, a work where the artist capably moved beyond this state of seizure to produce a poetic and informed piece.

*Unworkable Action* (2011), a make your own protest placard installation by Nervous Systems, the collaborative work of Brisbane-based artists, Rachel Haynes and Alice Lang is by no means the only guilty party in this exhibition but unfortunately this work is a prime example of exactly the problems inherent in audience participatory work where the artist remains visually and emotionally absent.

*Unworkable Action* consisted of a set of instructions printed out from wikiHow.com on how to best create a protest board. These instructions were particularly convoluted which I guess could be construed as humorous. Audience members were then invited to take a seat at the workstation in the gallery and get busy. The day I visited the gallery, a number of placards were leaning against the gallery wall, statically spitting their causes with slogans like 'Rich parents for everyone!' and 'Don't know what to write, I give up.'

Above: Nervous Systems (Alice Lang and Rachael Haynes), *Unworkable Action* (2011), mixed media installation, dimensions variable



Of course, all of the placards were remnants from the opening night and unfortunately mostly gave proof to the stereotype of the drunken, apathetic art school kid. Quite frankly, the television program *A Current Affair* could have taken a vox-pop at a mid-week Sydney art opening and garnered the same responses.

So what is the problem here? Namely, it is literally an unworkable action. By including the community-edited instructions from wikiHow and prompting the gallery audience to have their say Nervous Systems only present us with a notion of one niche community's nonchalance and tortuous civilian directions. When you put it to the people, what do you get? In essence, a shrug, and an inefficient shrug at that. And although this work is based in reality, I don't think it effectively mirrors the Australian socio-political landscape. Australians are not the apathetic, non-political people of the long-held archetype of history. You only have to tune your television in to Q&A once a week to know that. *Unworkable Action* unfortunately comes across as incredibly lazy work and indicative of an insular perspective born out of an immature and short-lived thought process. Can we safely blame bad work on a paralysis of anxiety? In part, yes. It would appear that the artists behind this work have been so frozen by their own attempts to create non-dogmatic political work they have, in fact, said nothing. They have not subverted the protest march or the tool of the protest, the placard. In their failure, they have only blatantly revealed their own failings as artists, namely that they are scared of getting it wrong.

At the other end of the spectrum we see the result of an artist who competently resolved her own anxieties by honestly reflecting upon her own experiences. Michaela Gleave's work, *It was never meant to last (BIG TIME LOVE)* (2011), was a four-metre pine structure that dynamically bridged the divide between ephemeral

performance and detritus sculpture post-performance. On opening night the piece was located in Prince Alfred Park opposite the gallery where Gleave performed a pyrotechnics show that fizzed and fizzled over a one-minute period to reveal three words. Big. Time. Love. As a work produced in conjunction with an ARI symposium, I think Gleave has successfully nailed that great emotion radiating from the emerging arts community. And anyone who has ever spent time as an ARI director knows that with all that toil comes big time love. Otherwise, who would be so stupid to work long hours, for free, for years?

Gleave's work is deceptively simple. It is not just a neon embrace, plugged into the wall pulsing for the duration of the exhibition. Rather, it is a temporal performance that works equally as a performance in the present as it does as burnt-out debris post-performance, where the charred edifice appears as the ghost of all ARIs past. And further, the work expands ad infinitum, the light of BIG TIME LOVE forever swelling through time and space. One small mark on history. It was never meant to last.

In a world of endless, accessible information, it can be overwhelming to process all sides of an argument in a bid to create work that challenges the status quo. At the end of the day, artists are the remaining creatures with the luxury to spend *time*. To research, to process, to form opinions that aren't based purely on twitter grabs or news headlines. *Our time is not monetised* — we don't make any money. And that is actually an incredible gift in the 21st century. Spend it wisely.

1. Munting, B. & Meagher, G., 'Day 1: 1 September, 2011. The feeling will pass...' in *We Are Here*, symposium program, (Sydney: NAVA and Firstdraft, 2011), 7.



Fitts & Holderness, *The Watchmen of Oklawaha Bay* (2007, 2008), [www.fittsandholderness.com](http://www.fittsandholderness.com)

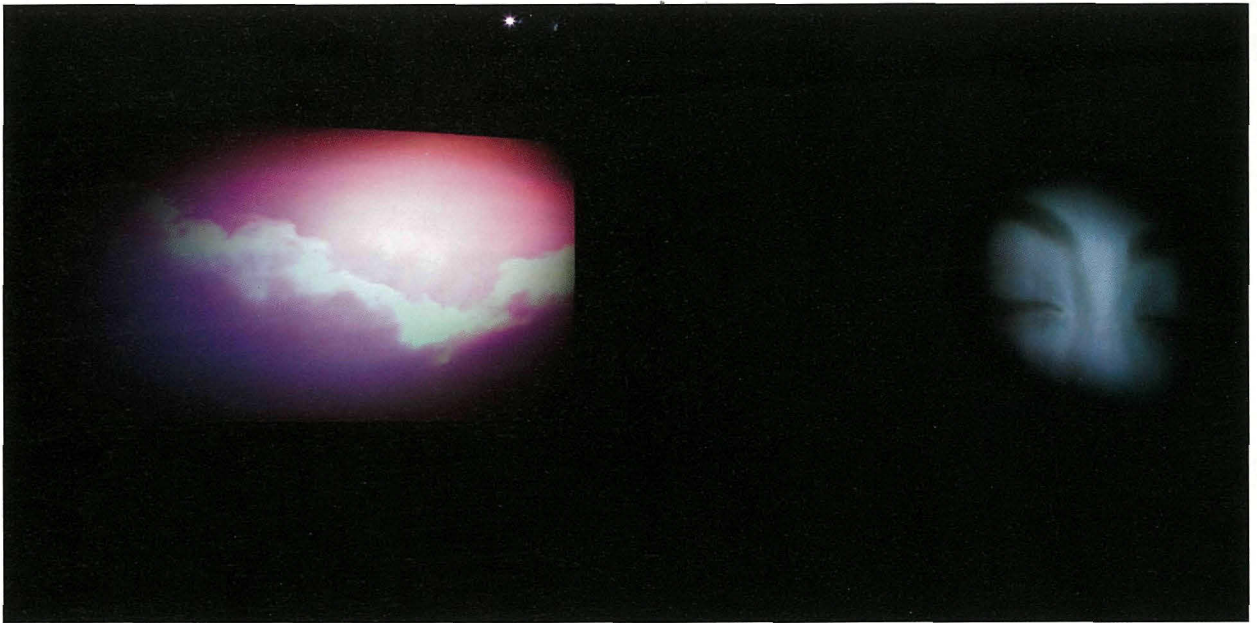


EXHIBITION AUDIENCE SURVEY

- Employment
- Housing
- Education
- Agency
- Criminality



Above & left: Michaela Gleave, *It was never meant to last* (2011), one-minute event, 4 x 3 x 2m, pyrotechnic flares, pine.



## Dream Of Pictures

ALANNA LORENZON

'Art can be a magic that excites the magical propensities of those who enjoy it.'<sup>1</sup> In that the fantasy world of the artist can communicate and inspire the fantasy world of the viewer. Some artists can also use their practice as a sort of 'personal magic', by using the activity and outcome of art making to console or transport them. In the recent video installation *Dream of Pictures* by Rachel Feery at Blindsight Gallery, this concept is present both in the illusionary play used in constructing the work and the idealised form of the final piece. Beyond a simple aesthetic delight in creating an attractive artwork, the question must be asked: why is there this compulsion for the artist to absorb herself, and in turn her audience, in these beautiful illusions, and why might the audience be tempted to submit to the spells that she weaves?

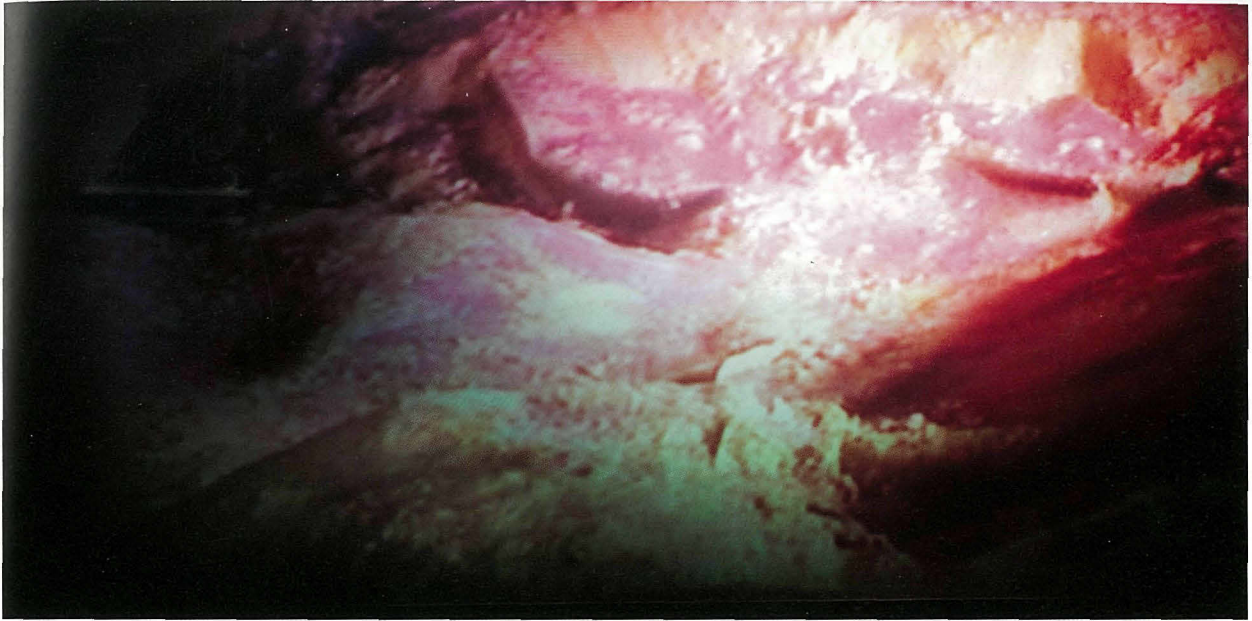
Inside the darkened space of the gallery the only light is emitted by a dual-screen projection, as two oval surfaces float seemingly unassisted. On one screen there is projected the face of a young woman possessing a classical beauty. This woman is in an apparent state of somnambulistic rapture, languidly moving her face from side to side as if caught in a beautiful dream. She is reclining on a pillow and the textures of the fabric she rests upon blend back and forth through the adjacent scenery. The opposing screen leads the viewer through a journey of morphing landscape imagery, mountains that fade in and out of a haze of shimmering colour. The beauty of the young woman and the complementary landscape creates a feeling of a surreal utopia and the constant bleeding and shifting of the video works well to imitate a state of mind that we might discover in the liminal moments between sleeping and waking.

A complementary soundtrack of distorted relaxation music,

composed by musician Ed Gould accompanies the visuals. The music is reminiscent of the sort you might hear while on the massage table or yoga mat, a wash of new-age pseudo-esoteric sounds. Yet noticeably, as you spend time experiencing the installation, the music builds in a climactic sweep that is not always present in the soupy soundtracks it mimics. Importantly the video presents itself as a loop, with no clear beginning or end, creating a false continuous moment.

An array of cinematic sleights of hand has been deployed in the creation of this imagery. Found footage has been mixed with the filming of satin and sequined fabric then processed through camera filters to create this filmic fantasy and it is this element of deception that brings tension to the euphoric states this work seeks to represent. Whilst this installation calls forth a transcendental beauty and with the floating transitions of landscape to abstracted colour suggests weightlessness. It manages to undermine these messages with its use of illusory tricks and its exploitation of image-culture clichés. Jean Baudrillard's definition of the first order of 'Simulacra'<sup>2</sup> works well to describe Feery's choice of imagery: The aesthetic is based on, 'imitation, and counterfeiting'. In that its image references have been stolen from commodity culture. Yet its sentiment is utopic in that it is 'harmonious, optimistic, and aim(s) at the reconstitution or the ideal institution, of a nature in God's image.'<sup>3</sup>

The trancelike performance of the video subject can't help but bring to mind a website I was once shown consisting solely of peoples faces, shot from above, as they masturbate. These videos permitted the viewer into this very personal moment, as the subject, eyes usually closed, is lost in their own orgasmic journey.



The compelling aspect of this type of video is the way you are able to bypass the potential crudeness of full-frontal pornography and cut straight to the most enigmatic aspect of sexual pleasure. The mystery of someone as they separate themselves by their immersion in solitary ecstasy. The subject of *Dream of Pictures* is immersed in a like headspace of 'oceanic feeling', that André Breton has described as, 'Rhythmic unity ... the absence of contradiction, the relaxation, of emotional tensions due to repression, a lack of the sense of time, and the replacement of external reality by a psychic reality obeying the pleasure principle alone.'<sup>24</sup> In other words, an experience of swampy consciousness, or a diffused and boundless pleasurable emotion.

By dimming the lights and making the viewer less obviously present in the space the artist has encouraged us to let go of our bodily reality and instead mentally merge with the character of her film. She is most easily identifiable as one of the 'swoning women' of pre-Raphaelite paintings, whose present incarnation can be seen in contemporary culture in perfume advertising, where the model appears to be carried along to some sort of indefinable ecstasy by amorphous wafts of scent.

The pairing of this subject with ideally shaped mountain peaks expresses a wistful yearning for an environment that is not yet lost, but already mourned. It could be emblematic of a growing feeling of inadequacy existing in contemporary society towards the real world. Perhaps an acceptance that much of the world's sublime imagery is now most commonly accessed

through technology—mobile phone and computer screens—and that because of this we must appreciate beautiful scenery predominantly through our eyes and mind. If we are at home gazing at the flickering light of a computer screen that displays a sublime mountainscape, we are inclined to transport ourselves a little, as it can feel much more desirable to neglect the reality of our body, sitting in our bedroom, and in turn privilege our mind and imagination that can more successfully take us to these hyperreal locations.

This is what is being asked of Feery's audience. Although the visual elements themselves are 'constructed', the work feels in no way disingenuous, the sense of play and pleasure in its construct and the pleasantness of the installation itself sincerely and effectively encourages a dreaming space for the viewer, a small pocket of relaxation and timelessness in a busy and confused world. The only disappointment being that if the audience is to engage fully with this artist's projection of her inner fantasy and in turn maybe dream a bit on their own, then there is an element of sadness when one has to inevitably leave this particular idyll.

1. I. Murdoch, *Metaphysics as a Guide to Morals* (New York, Penguin, 1993) 110.
  2. Jean Baudrillard, Trans. Arthur B. Evans, *Simulacra and Science Fiction (Simulacres et science-fiction)*, *Science Fiction Studies*, Vol. 18, No. 3, *Science Fiction and Postmodernism* (Nov., 1991), 309-313
  3. *Ibid.*
- 3094 André Breton, 'Oceanic' reprinted in *Breton, La Cle des Champs* (Paris, Sagittaire, 1953; 1973 edition) 278.







# Leo Coyte Exhaust

AMBER MCCULLOCH

Encountering Leo Coyte's *Exhaust* (fittingly staged at db project, a residential space in Sydney's inner-east) was like walking into the final hours of a messed-up house party. Among the balloons and streamers, bright colours and polka dots, a few worse-for-wear stragglers flanked the walls, eyeing off the beer in my hand ... who invited those guys anyway?

With lumpy heads and distorted features, the 'figures' in Coyte's paintings are born from the artist's sub-conscious, brought to life in a Frankensteinian project of construction, featuring 'two-dollar shop' party favours, cheap Halloween costumes and other bits of junk found in the artist's home. Once completed, the resulting objects become the subjects for Coyte's unconventional portraits, but they never quite make it to sculpture status. Like so many of the good Doctor F's prototypes, they're thrown in the trash soon after creation.

It's this singularity of purpose that exemplifies Coyte's practice—it's about painting, primarily, the process, action and history of putting paint to canvas. An accomplished formal painter, Coyte draws various stylistic references into his work, hat-tipping the looseness of contemporaries Richard Dawkins and George Condo, while at the same time observing the restraint and rigour of the Dutch Masters.

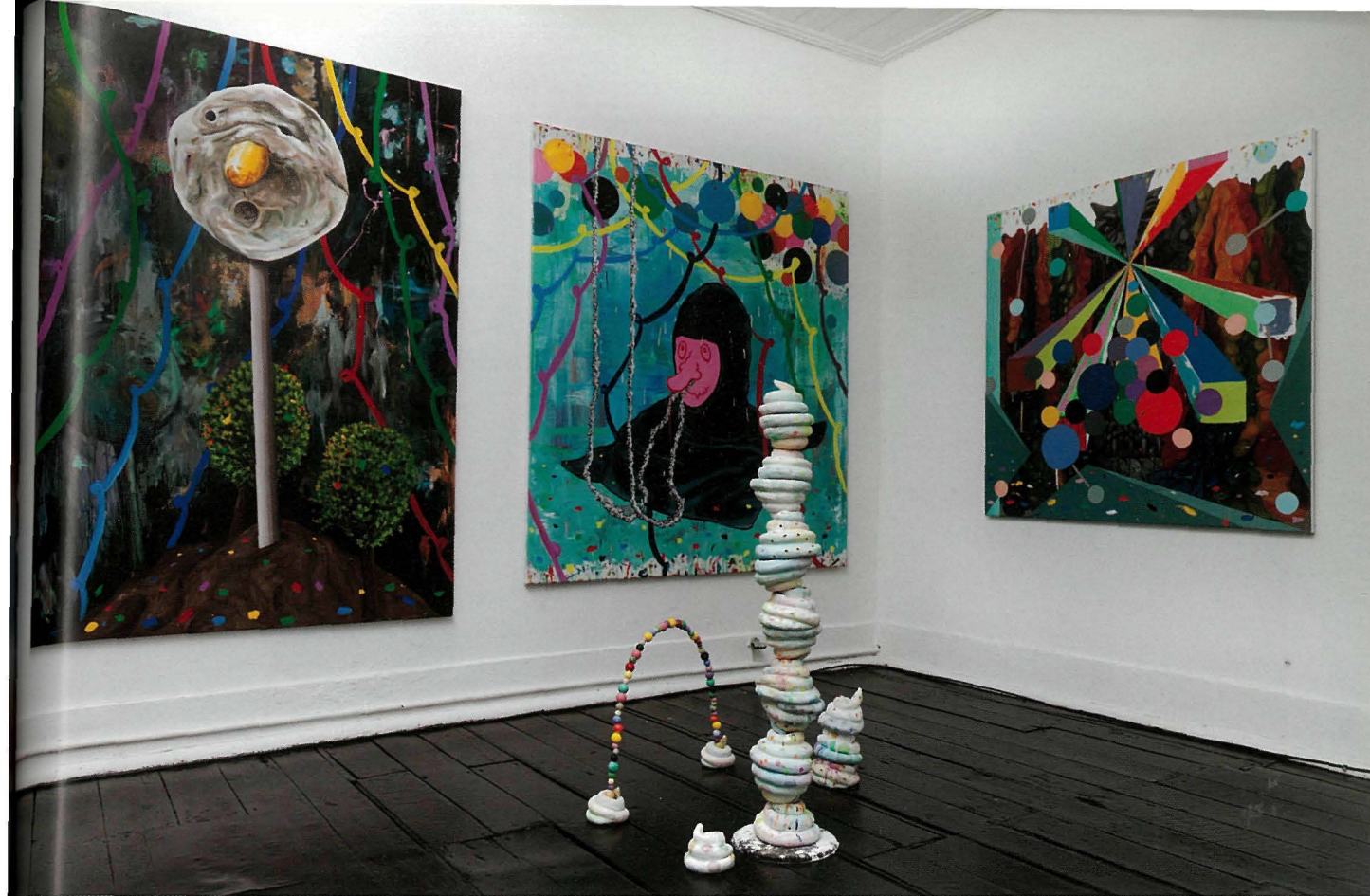
Thematically, Coyte's art practice is inextricably linked to his experience as a gigging musician. Coyte—who has played and toured in bands for the past two decades—allows the lines between his music and art to bleed so that his works become album covers, merchandise and sets for his band; conversely, the physical trappings of rock (leads, guitar amps and earplugs) become subject matter for his creations. Coyte admits to always 'thinking of the next album cover' when making work, which ensures that his aesthetic stays firmly anchored to his musical style.

Ever the reluctant 'rock star', Coyte prefers to share the dubious role of front man in his established outfit, Further. It's this role he lampoons with his awkward constructed figures, posing them as the would-be stars of his paintings, as compelling as they are ridiculous.

Furthering the metaphor, Coyte's painting technique displays the virtuosity of a James Hetfield guitar solo and the stylistic mimicry and playful insouciance of psychedelic prog-rockers Ween. Like the band members Gene and Dean, Coyte displays a nonchalant, self-effacement that belies the skill, effort and critical intent embedded in his output. Indeed, the works that made up *Exhaust* ARE exhaustive—multi-layered, cross-referential and HUGE. It comes as no surprise that, for all their swagger, these pieces have been in the making for some time.







*Cosmic Sneeze* (2011) is the most arresting of the three paintings exhibited, its thickly layered background fighting for precedence against the ghoulish figure in the foreground (goofily grinning and coincidentally trailing some kind of gravity-defying mystical booger). This painting constitutes the most successful example of Coyte's recent foray into Abstract Expressionism-as-wallpaper. What's most telling is the artist's treatment of what could be described as the most 'rock'n'roll of all painting styles. Unlike his macho, alcho-artistic forebears, Coyte isn't happy to let his gestures speak—he continually over-paints them so that his expressionism takes on a neurotic bill-poster-effect.

*Insomnia* (2011) and *Toxic Spectrum* (2011) continue on in slightly giddy party mode. The garish balloon-shapes and chaotic bright colours bust out from the frames, in the latter, joined by a cluster of geometric shapes that parallel the current 'youth' fashion seen on t-shirts and fliers and all over General Pants Co. stock. It's a cynical take on the assimilation of rock music culture into the mainstream, again taking swings at the clichéd posturing that surrounds the genre. Indeed, the integrity with which Coyte presents these tropes heightens the schism between the authentic and the slavishly posed.

The centrepiece of the exhibition, the eponymous *Exhaust* (2011), is a lumpy clay conglomeration, piled unceremoniously on the floor. What appears to be a stack of sweet meringues is, on closer inspection, a number of lovingly-crafted turds, heaped on top of each other, white-washed and decorated with festive dots. A rainbow of coloured blobs is anchored in said poop. Unlike the elusive pot of gold at the end of the rainbow, in Coyte's world all things inevitably turn to shit.

It's all a little bit Paul McCarthy in terms of its celebration of mess and the detritus of fun, but again, this is no haphazard fall-out. This is carefully wrought crap. For all of its incongruous elements, its weirdness and complexities, *Exhaust* constituted Coyte's most cohesive exhibition to date.

*Leo Coyte Exhaust* was held at db project, 29 August - 4 September, 2011.

# Picnic at Fanging Rock

SHERIDAN COLEMAN

Seduction and automotive wanderlust are at the heart of *Picnic at Fanging Rock*, the debut solo exhibition by Perth-based artist Casey Ayres.

The modern automobile is a markedly humanlike device. It falls apart if you neglect it, and is likewise wrecked if it collides with anything. It is the car's ability to respond to care and personify desire that influences Ayres' immersion in the world of Australian car culture. In 2010, when Ayres had to choose between a new gearbox for his beloved 1980 Ford Escort and funding for his next body of artwork, he combined his artistic and automotive pursuits into a hybrid obsession. The resulting *Picnic at Fanging Rock* powerfully documents the spectacle of auto culture and the potential for romance, mystery and the splendour of the automobile.

In the show the video work *Requiem: Iron Maiden* (2011) shows an exhausted, shirtless Ayres (under grease-monkey pseudonym Chris Ford Walken) lugging his entire four-speed gearbox across a deserted parking lot. Motor oil trickling down his chest, Ayres appears to be in shock, or perhaps rapture, over the object. We can't see the ordeal he's come from and there's no gesture of destination. The soundtrack, Chopin's piano lament *Tristesse*, creates a hymnal atmosphere, immediately evoking Christianity's most idolised artworks. Ayres genuflects to his gearbox as though

recreating *La Pietà* or playing out the cross-carrying ordeal of Christ's Passion.

In Chuck Palahniuk's 2007 novel, *Rant: An Oral Biography of Buster Casey*, young hedonists respond to the increased artificiality of the future by 'party crashing', the sport of deliberate car collision. Unbeknownst to its participants, the game's inventor Green Taylor Simms is trying to produce the perfect crash, which will launch him back in time into his own past. While Ayres never crashes, we see signs that he, like Simms, is some kind of time traveller always driving, always dedicated to his transitory vehicle. In his photograph *Untitled (Blow Me)* (2011), a half-naked youth lies amid Super Lube and oil rags, lost in a hedonistic reverie with head firmly planted under an auto mag and hand sliding under unbelted jeans. The youth is lost, daydreaming of future vehicles, future drag races and futures spent driving to anywhere but back to the carport. The title *Blow Me* is borrowed from a pun on the magazine's cover.

There's a palpable link between the show *Picnic at Fanging Rock* and the well-loved Australian book and film, *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. They're both about instantaneity, about interruptions to time. The film follows six innocent schoolgirls whose picnic nudges the edge of a mysterious vacuum, a kind of non-place where it's perpetually noon. Three of these girls are drawn into



the void, never to return. Ayres' drivers approach a similar schism. *Picnic at Fanging Rock* (2011) is a triptych showing aerial views of deserted rural roads, winding and covered with scribbled tyre marks, as though the motorists have disappeared into thin air, transported into the future or past (or both) just before the photos were taken. Such is the force of this absence that having just missed the action seems tantamount to recovering its trace in an archaeological dig thousands of years later.

In inert photographs and always-looping video, Ayres suspends both youth and desire, but also turns in dazed circles; nonstop burnouts, spinning fan belts, roundabouts and circular puns that tick over again, and again. The work pulls us like moths toward the car. After all, the faster you drive, the more time you save and yet after a drive it will always be 'later'. In photo *Untitled (VK)* (2011), we see a car emerge from a wall of smoke (who knows where), a contraption mounted on its bonnet with angry red lights and wires. I'm unsure what it's for but it looks like a cavalier home-customization and is probably super-powered. It's no surprise Ayres is a fan of *Back to the Future's* DeLorean DMC-12 time machine and has spoken elatedly of his lust for a Flux Capacitor going cheap online.

Ayres' tone of retrospection isn't simply stylistic; it's a genuine reflection of the modern car industry. Take Detroit, the former car manufacturing capital of the world. Several crises including the diabolic US recession and the collapse of General Motors caused

the city to 'doughnut': a morbid pun describing the exodus of Detroit's citizens. Now its CBD is a crumbling mess of toppled skyscrapers, looters and litter, a ghost town full of actual ruins. Alongside Ayres' work, the story of Detroit is yet another example of how the motorcar has prematurely transported a thriving community into their dystopian future, where the apocalypse has come and gone already. Though if *Mad Max* is anything to go by, Australians will keep drag racing after civilisation implodes.

The vehicle in the photograph *Untitled* (2011) disappears into a dense cloud of smoke, devil horns thrust out the window in a hell-for-leather gesture that indicates the car might never return from the fog. Like in the 1971 film *Vanishing Point* Barry Newman's car is a means of disappearance, a device for avoiding worldly troubles and consequences by simply obliterating oneself in the smoke, the noise, the speed so there is no room for anything else.

Strikingly absent is any discussion of mortality. This is unexpected because as a thing of sensuality, the show might attract a vanitas reading, but more urgently, because cars are just so very dangerous. What's absent is the un-erotic commentary of government seatbelt campaigns, roadside death tolls and rising fuel prices. Ayres is not ignorant of these worries but has denied them voice in his work. And why not? Ayres is youthful, handsome and a skilled machinist. His work speaks only of the now, when there is no crash, no fine, just the glory of the ride.

Above: Casey Ayres *'Requiem (Iron Maiden)'* (installation view) (2011), single channel video (2:03mins), dimensions variable. Photo- Sheridan Coleman



## PICNIC AT FANGING ROCK



*That Glory* (2011) is a wall-mounted sculpture slicked with black automotive paint. Its anthropomorphic form is ambiguous: at first it's phallic, a codpiece. Front-on it's a Daft Punk-style motorcycle helmet. Actually, it's a bonnet scoop, headlight socket pointed modestly downward, a reprieve from the bygone era of the FJ Holden and classic Morris, when women, cola bottles and cars were all curvier.

The show marked the opening of Perth's newest commercial space, OK Gallery, a venture that brings Western Australia's finest early career artists to the public. The mediocre timbre of the word 'OK' is certainly a misnomer—its selection is a fascinating story. In 1993 Coca Cola™ launched a fruity soda, named 'OK' after market researchers discovered Coke was the second most understood word in the world after 'OK'. Deadpan slogans, like 'There is no real secret to being OK', targeted Gen-X. The soda was a total flop, but its obscure, tragi-comedic myth fascinated Gemma Weston, Jamie Macchiusi and Andrew Varano. Perhaps the directors have written their names on a bullet, so to speak: the 'OK' soda story resembles rumours of so many cult-status ARIs that have faded away, whispered about only around state gallery water coolers. But 'OK' is also emblematic of the directors' goal of simultaneous originality and ubiquity. The expression

thrives despite constant shifts in meaning according to context, intonation and local etymology. It is this rare combination of conceptual clarity, universality and optimism that characterises the great significance of its launch.

OK is located in a yellow five-shop building resembling a 10-stud Lego™ brick, deep in Perth's densest hub of art galleries and Asian restaurants. White door-beads screen a modest storeroom and cauliflower blossoms top a tasteful custom-built pine desk. Good lighting and a glass wall ensured the entire show is discernable from outside (lucky, as its opening attracted over 300 patrons). OK practically defenestrates itself onto the bustling pavement to let you know 'we are open': to the city's talent-boom, to ideas, to business, to discussion, to newcomers, and especially to being part of Perth's gallery history.

*Fanging Rock* was a canny selection for OK Gallery's launch. The show transcends exclusivity: no alienating in-jokes, no jargon. Instead, the work expressed universal themes of time, desire and beauty with global relevance, despite its quintessential Australian aspects. The use of unique local culture to communicate grandiose themes is something OK's directors hold dear.





*Picnic at Fanging Rock* was held at OK gallery, Perth, from 26 August - 25 September 2011

Facing page: Casey Ayres *'Picnic at Fanging Rock'* (2011), inkjet print on found paper, , aluminium mount, triptych of 58.5 x 42cm. Photo- Sheridan Coleman  
Above L-R: Casey Ayres *'Untitled'* (2011), inkjet print on archival paper, aluminium mount, 78 x 118cm; *'Untitled (VK)'* (2011), inkjet print on archival paper, aluminium mount, 78 x 118cm. Photo- Sheridan Coleman



# Forthcoming Exhibitions

## NSW

**GROUP SHOW** | AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE, DEBRA PHILLIPS, CHRISTIAN CAPURRO  
17 November - 24 December  
BREENSPACE  
Level 3, 17-19 Alberta Street, Sydney  
www.breenspace.com

**INTERCOURSE** | SARAH GOFFMAN WITH CAKE BY MISHKA BOROWSKI  
25 November - 17 December  
Peloton  
25 Meagher Street, Chippendale  
www.peloton.net.au

**ROBIN HUNGERFORD**  
30 November - 23 December  
Gallery 9  
9 Darley Street, Darlinghurst  
www.gallery9.com.au

**WATERFALL** | TOKUJIN YOSHIOKA  
7 October - 17 December  
Sherman Contemporary Art Foundation  
16-20 Goodhope Street, Paddington  
www.sherman-scaf.org.au

**SNO 77, SNO CHRISTMAS SHOW** | INCLUDING ARTISTS FROM SYDNEY, NEW YORK AND PARIS  
December 3 - January 29  
SNO Centre  
Level 1, 175 Marrickville Road, Marrickville, Sydney  
www.sno.org.au

**NOTHING LIKE PERFORMANCE** | MATTHEW BRADLEY, LAUREN BRINGAT, BROWN COUNCIL, PAUL DONALD, WILL FRENCH, YIORGOS ZAFIRIOU  
Curated by Blair French  
25 November - 22 December  
Artspace  
43-51 Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo  
www.artspace.org.au

**GROUP WORK** | BROWN COUNCIL  
1 - 18 December  
MOP Projects  
2/39 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale  
www.mop.org.au

## ACT

**ERROR MACHINE** | ELENA PAPANIKOLAKIS  
24 November - 4 December  
CCAS Manuka  
19 Furneaux Street, Manuka  
www.ccas.com.au

**WALL WORK** | BYRD, HANNA HOYNE, TESS HORWITZ, NICCI HAYNES, PAUL SUMMERFIELD, MARIANA DEL CASTILLO  
Curated by Narelle Phillips  
14 December - 22 December

## MOP Projects

1st December - 17th December 2011

GALLERY 1 DARA GILL - GALLERY 2 BROWN COUNCIL - GALLERY 3 ALEX WISSER

Image: Brown Council, Group Work: blackboard paint on MDF, chalk

## MOP Projects

2/39 Abercrombie St Chippendale Sydney NSW 2008  
Ph: 02 9699 3955 Email: mop@mop.org.au www.mop.org.au  
Thursday - Sunday 1 - 6 pm

MOP Projects is assisted by the NSW government through Arts NSW.



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Visual Arts and Craft Strategy  
New South Wales

ANCA Gallery (Australian National Capital Artists Inc)  
1 Rosevear Place, Dickson  
www.anca.net.au

## TAS

### WIM DELVOYE

Curated by David Walsh, Olivier Varenne and the MONA Team  
10 December – 2 April  
MONA  
665 Main Road Berriedale, Hobart  
www.mona.net.au

## VIC

### CAVES OF REQUIREMENT | LISA STEWART

12 November - 11 December  
Linden Centre for Contemporary Art  
26 Acland Street, St Kilda  
www.lindenarts.org

### OASIS | EUGENIA LIM

6 December - 23 December  
dianne tanzer gallery + projects  
108-110 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy  
www.diannetanzergallery.net.au

### POWER TO THE PEOPLE, CONTEMPORARY CONCEPTUALISM AND THE OBJECT IN ART | PETER FRIEDL, OLAF NICOLAI, DORA GARCIA, ROMAN ONDAK, FIONA MACDONALD, JONATHAN MONK, KIRSTEN PIEROTH, STUART RINGHOLT, JÁN MAN CUSKA, NATHASHA JOHNS- MESSENGER, SETH PRICE, MARIO GARCIA TORRES, GOLDIN + SENNEBY, LUCAS IHLEIN & IAN MILLISS, DEREK SULLIVAN AND THE POST PROJECT, AGATHA GOTHE-SNAPE, MATTHEW SHANNON

6 OCTOBER – 20 NOVEMBER  
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art.  
111 Sturt Street, Southbank.  
www.accaonline.org.au

### HOMING IN | MARIANNE DIAZ, NICK ILTON, NINA SISKA, CHARLOTTE ST CLAIR WILSON

Curated by Roger Nelson  
24 November - 17 December  
NO NO Gallery  
14 Raglan Street, North Melbourne

### GEO SOUND HELMETS | CARA-ANN SIMPSON WITH JAMES LAIRD, BEN LANDAU & EVA CHENG

25 November – 17 December  
Kings Artist Run Initiative  
Level 1, 1/171 King Street, Melbourne

### VIRTUAL VOYAGER / THE GAMING EFFECT | JUSTIN COOPER

17 November – 23 December  
Anna Papas Gallery  
2-4 Carlton St, Prahran  
www.annapapasgallery.com

### DEEP SKIN | TIM HANDFIELD

22 October – 22 January  
Monash Gallery of Art  
860 Ferntree Gully Road, Wheelers Hill  
www.mga.org.au

### PORTAL | Rachel Feery

8 - 26 November  
BUS Projects  
Basement Level, Donkey Wheel House, 673 Bourke Street, Melbourne  
www.busprojects.com.au

## SA

### HOLLYWOOD FOREVER | TONY GARIFALAKIS, JAMES L MARSHALL, TAKESHI MURATA, CHRISTIAN TEDESCHI

Curated by James I Marshall  
2 - 28 November  
FELTspace  
12 Compton Street, Adelaide  
www.feltspace.org

# ARIpedia.org.au

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**SPACED: ART OUT OF PLACE** | ART ORIENTE OBJET, BENNETT MILLER JAKUB SZCZESNY & KAJA PAWELEK, JULIA DAVIS, KATE MCMILLAN, MIMI TONG, NIGEL HELYER, OSTERHOLT & UITENTUIS, PHILIP SAMARTZIS, RODERICK SPRIGG, RITCHIE NED HANSEL, SOHAN ARIEL HAYES & MICHAEL WOODLEY, SONIA LEBER & DAVID CHESWORTH, TAKAHIKO SUZUKI, TESSA ZETTEL & KARL KHOE (MAKESHIFT), THE M12 COLLECTIVE

4 February – 11 March 2012  
Freemantle Arts Centre  
1 Finnerty Street, Fremantle  
[www.fac.org.au](http://www.fac.org.au)

**PARCHED** | RHIANNON NEWTON

27 October – 21 November  
Perth Centre for Photography  
91 Brisbane Street, Perth  
[www.pcp.org.au](http://www.pcp.org.au)

## QLD

**NICHOLAS FOLLAND**

16 November – 10 December  
Ryan Renshaw  
137 Warry Street, Fortitude Valley  
[www.ryanrenshaw.com.au](http://www.ryanrenshaw.com.au)

**GOD, QUEEN AND COUNTRY** | KRISTIN TENNYSON

18 November – 2 January  
KickArts Contemporary Arts  
96 Abbott Street, Cairns  
[www.kickarts.org.au](http://www.kickarts.org.au)

## NEW ZEALAND

**GENUS MORPHED** | NICOLA HANSBY

15 November – 23 December  
Blue Oyster Gallery  
24 Moray Place, Dunedin  
[www.blueoyster.org.nz](http://www.blueoyster.org.nz)

**100 BIKES PROJECT: PART 1** | SCOTT EADY

8 October - 5 February  
The Dowse Art Museum  
45 Laings Rd, Lower Hutt  
[www.dowse.org.nz](http://www.dowse.org.nz)

**IN/FORMAL** | REBEKAH BURT, ANDREA GASKIN, LINDA ROCHE AND KATHRYN TSUI

6 October - 22 October  
RM  
295 Karangahape Road, Auckland  
[www.rm103.org](http://www.rm103.org)

**PLAY OFF** | EDITH AMITUANAI, SCOTT EADY, JAMES ORAM

23 August - 1 October  
The Blue Oyster Art Project Space  
24b Moray Place, Dunedin  
[www.blueoyster.org.nz](http://www.blueoyster.org.nz)

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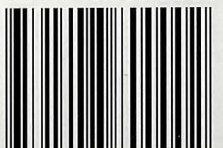
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