

scope

Contemporary Research Topics

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Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art) is peer-reviewed and published annually in November by Otago Polytechnic/Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Dunedin, New Zealand.

Scope (Art) aims to engage discussion on contemporary research in the visual arts. It is concerned with views and critical debates surrounding issues of practice, theory, history and their relationships as manifested through the visual and related arts and activities, such as sound, performance, curation, tactile and immersive environments, digital scapes and methodological considerations. With New Zealand and its Pacific neighbours as a backdrop, but not its only stage, *Scope (Art)* seeks to address the matters which concern contemporary artists and arts enquirers in their environments of practice.

Formats include: editorials, articles; essays; artist's pages, logs and travel reports; reviews of exhibitions, residencies and publications; and moving, interactive works (to be negotiated with the editors for the online version, with stills to appear in the hardcopy version). Other suggested formats will also be considered; and special topics comprising submissions by various contributors may be tendered to the editors.

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Submissions for *Scope (Art)* are invited from artists, curators, writers, theorists and historians. Submissions should be sent in hardcopy and electronic format by 30 April for review and potential inclusion in the annual issue to Bridie Lonie or Leoni Schmidt (editors) at Otago Polytechnic/Te Kura Matatini ki Otago, Private Bag 1910, Dunedin, New Zealand, bridie@tekotago.ac.nz and leoni@tekotago.ac.nz. Please consult the information for contributors below and the hardcopy or online versions of this issue for examples. Peer review forms will be sent to all submitters in due course, with details concerning the possible reworking of documents where relevant. All submitters will be allowed up to two subsequent resubmissions of documents for peer approval. All final decisions concerning publication of submissions will reside with the editors. Opinions published are those of the authors and not necessarily subscribed to by the editors, or the institution.

Information for contributors: Submissions should engage with contemporary arts practices in ways which may contribute to critical debate and new understandings. High standards of writing, proofreading and adherence to consistency through the Chicago referencing style are expected. For more information, please refer to the *Chicago Manual of Style*; and consult this issue for examples. A short biography of no more than 50 words; as well as title; details concerning institutional position and affiliation (where relevant); and contact information (postal, email and telephone number) should be provided on a cover sheet, with all such information withheld from the body of the submission. Low resolution images with full captions should be inserted into texts to indicate where they would be preferred; while tif, jpeg or eps image files in CMYK mode with a resolution equivalent of at least 300dpi should be provided on a clearly marked disc once a submission has been accepted for publication.

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WRITING AND THE VISUAL ARTS

Leoni Schmidt

“Painting and poetry should be like two just and friendly neighbours, neither of whom is allowed to take unseemly liberties in the heart of the other’s domain, but who exercise mutual forbearance on the borders...” (Gotthold E Lessing, 1776/1965: 116) ¹

The relationship between “the seeable and the sayable, display and discourse, showing and telling”² is complex and contentious. With reference to the writing of Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze,³ WJT Mitchell discusses some of the issues in “Word and Image”.⁴ He points out that the relationship between word and image is an “ancient problem in the study of the arts and in theories of rhetorics, communication and human subjectivity”⁵; while Horace’s statement *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry) is one of the most durable dialectical tropes in Western thinking.⁶

Mitchell argues that “the potential for the shift ‘from word to image’ is always there [and that a] similar potential resides in visual images. In the act of interpreting, or describing pictures, even in the fundamental process of recognizing what they represent, language enters into the visual field.”⁷ Precisely because of this two-way shift and its potential for the collapse of the visual and the verbal into one another (or the domination of the one over the other), the relationship between writing and the visual arts needs constant vigilance and critical scrutiny. Within the current context in which *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics (Art)* is published for the first time, such critical scrutiny is alive and well and various positions can be discerned.

In *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (2004), Paul Carter argues that making is material and cannot be translated into words. He writes: “Material thinking occurs in the making of works of art... Critics and theorists interested in communicating ideas about things cannot emulate it.”⁸

In *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (2005), Graeme Sullivan discusses the re-emergence of the “artist-theorist” in the contemporary context of the visual arts and writes: “...the image these days is [an extremely] loaded text that carries all sorts of references and inferences... Therefore, institutional and discipline traditions [e.g. art history and critical theory] not only serve as interpretive communities that extend the outline of the art experience, but are also sources from which the artist actively draws as the locus of art making expands to embrace theories and practices.”⁹

In “Scrutinising Studio Art and its Study: Historical Relations and Contemporary Conditions” (2005), Elizabeth Grierson refers to the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas where he advocates for a “radical generosity” between different practices cognisant of their otherness and their movement towards each other: “a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same.”¹⁰

In *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (2005) Ernst van Alphen writes: “Art

is a laboratory where experiments are being conducted that shape thought into visual and [other] imaginative ways of framing the pain points of a culture...the...visual and verbal [are] means by which artworks and artists practice cultural philosophy."¹¹

Contributors to this first issue of *Scope (Art)* share an experimental context in which writing is one mode for the exploration of ideas and the reflection on practices. Clive Humphreys considers the act of embodied looking in the drawing studio and the problematic and crucial role of life-drawing today; while Peter Belton explores connections between the formal device of the structural ellipse in the European landscape tradition and his own drawing in New Zealand. The politics of the landscape is highlighted through Lee Houlihan who traces a journey of discovery of her own whakapapa (genealogy) between Pākehā and Māori in Aotearoa/New Zealand alongside her ceramic works. Jenny Bain explores the effects of colonisation on the landscape through her self-curated exhibition of textile work as represented in her artist's pages.

Peter Stupples contributes an article on his curation of "War and Peace", an exhibition at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery in 2006. Current considerations and options for the curator of public shows are considered. Michele Beevors reviews a recent exhibition by co-sculptor Scott Eady and in doing so, her writing opens up larger issues concerning the 'fallible masculine' and the demise of the cowboy figure so eloquently portrayed in films by John Wayne.

Scott Eady himself contributes artist's pages performative of the vagaries of a gun-toting mentality; and this page can be interactively accessed through the online version of this issue. Ambiguities of gender are considered in terms of the connections between skin and photographic practices by Kate Mahoney; while Ana Terry logs her installation project as an activity of sensory archaeology through which wall covering becomes a skin enwrapping the histories of a space. Leoni Schmidt writes alongside this project and considers acts of seeing; architecture as a critical practice; histories narrated through form; and the particularities of jute as a covering material.

Lynn Taylor inserts her print-making practice into the seafaring history of Aotearoa/New Zealand and uses narrative and poetic formats in her artist's pages to reinforce the movement of the writing between past, present and future. Such a movement across time is also discernible in Michele Beevors' review of an artist's residency taken up at Otago Polytechnic School of Art by fellow Australian artist, Leslie Matthews. A sentiment for the past and an erasure of labour as sometimes manifest in jewellery and in the format of the Antiques Roadshow run parallel with a nostalgia for the days before the current conservatism and rampant capitalism in the writer's home country.

Marie Strauss' artist's pages also traverse time as she connects her current drawing, painting, photography and ceramic sculpture through themes of violence and horror with her earlier context as an emigrant from apartheid South Africa. Working across the boundaries of disciplines is also evident in Michael Morley's article where he considers the relationships between sound and painting.

For Alexandra Kennedy it is the specific practice of painting engaging reflexively with its own demise or 'endgame' which is of prime importance; and Craig McNab revels in the specificities of photography in his book review of the award-winning *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*, edited by Lara Strongman (2006).

In an artist's travel essay, Rodney Browne provides a spate of images to underscore the ubiquity of the photographic image in our era where iconic art monuments such as the Acropolis are experienced through the mediation of the quick digital snapshot. In contrast, Lyn Plummer's travel essay on the Semana Santa in Spain lingers lovingly on the materials deployed in this ritual.

The concluding article in this issue is jointly presented by Bridie Lonie and Qassim Saad. Whilst situated in New Zealand, they 'travelled' near and far to consider the context, effects and implications of the cartoons of Mohammad first published in a Danish newspaper. Respect for cultural difference is integral to the argument and performed through the conjunction of the two voices without collapsing into a mythic unity.

Visual images abound in *Scope (Art)* and sit (mostly in colour) next to the written word. The writing is sometimes *about* the images; often *like* the images; in some instances written *alongside* the visual; or making a point *with* the studio work. The journal hopes to encourage writing and making, word and image, history-theory and studio practice in various combinations and permutations, without being prescriptive. It seeks to involve the community within Otago Polytechnic School of Art, whilst issuing an invitation to its multifarious communities of practice outside the School to also become involved in contributing to its pages and online interactive possibilities.

Foucault says: "[I]t is in vain that we say what we see; what we see never resides in what we say."¹² Certainly the relationship between word and image is an 'impossible' one and will never be simple. But, in writing alongside the image or in making alongside the word, we do not have to seek resolution for the problematics of this ancient conundrum. It is in the productive tension between word and image, making and writing, practice and theory, theory and history, where new understandings can happen. The editors hope that *Scope (Art)* will play its own modest and incremental role in furthering such possibilities.

- 1 Gotthold E Lessing, *Laocoon: An Essay upon the Limits of Painting and Poetry*, trans. Ellen Fotheringham (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1776/1965), 161.
- 2 WJT Michell, "Word and Image", in Robert S Nelson and Richard Schiff (eds), *Critical Terms for Art History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 47.
- 3 See Gilles Deleuze, "The Visible and the Articulate" in Sean Hand (ed. & trans.) *Foucault/Deleuze* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); and Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
- 4 See endnote 2, 47-57.
- 5 Ibid., 49.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 Ibid., 47.
- 8 Paul Carter, *Material Thinking: The Theory and Practice of Creative Research* (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2004), xi.
- 9 Graeme Sullivan, *Art Practice as Research: Inquiry in the Visual Arts* (London: Sage, 2005), 173.
- 10 Elizabeth Grierson, "Scrutinising Studio Art and its Study: Historical Relations and Contemporary Conditions", unpublished paper presented at "Eye-Site: Situating Practice and Theory in the Visual Arts" (AAANZ Conference, University of Sydney, 2005), 5.
- 11 Ernst van Alphen, *Art in Mind: How Contemporary Images Shape Thought* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2005), xiii.
- 12 Michel Foucault, *This is Not a Pipe*, trans. James Harkness (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 9.

EAT UP YOUR GREENS – DRAWING AS RE-INGESTING THE WORLD

Clive Humphreys

“Do not fail, as you go on, to draw something every day, for no matter how little it is, it will be worthwhile, and it will do you a world of good.” Cennino Cennini (1370-1440)¹

Cennini asserts (above) in his *Il Libro dell'Arte* (c.1400) that drawing is, in some quite vague way, a bit like eating all your vegetables. He suggests that the continuous practice of observational drawing – and the emphasis seems more on the regular activity than its content – is the equivalent of good



Thomas Elliott, *Hand-drawn*, 2004, pastel on paper, 30 x 42 cm²,
photograph: Alan Dove, image courtesy of the artist.

nutrition for the aspiring artist. This notion eventually found physical expression in the setting up of the Accademia del Disegno in 1563, in Florence, under the guidance of Giorgio Vasari. Vasari's intention was to reform art education by grounding it more strongly in drawing and this led to the proliferation of academies and academic education. However, even in the early seventeenth century El Greco had clearly abandoned the dictates of correct anatomical proportion in favour of an ecstatically articulated, transcendental space (one of the most compelling examples of this is *The Opening of the Fifth Seal – The Vision of Saint John* of 1608-14). Interestingly, in those later paintings he was developing his painted figures from small sculpted models in clay rather than from drawings.³ Over a century later in 1735, the academies that Vasari had initiated were receiving bad press. The limitations of verisimilitude (and its implied link with the supposed aims of observational drawing) were becoming more fully realised. Voltaire wrote in a letter that year: "No work, in any genre, which is called academic has ever been a work of genius."⁴

The place of observational drawing in modern academic institutions and its relevance to contemporary art practice have been increasingly questioned. Much of this questioning flows directly from an ultimate rejection of the fixed, single view-points that grew out of Renaissance linear perspective. This rejection became particularly evident in the changing modes of the two-dimensional representation of space (particularly in Impressionism in the late nineteenth century and in Cubism and modernist abstraction in the early twentieth century). Observational drawing also suffered from the advent of the photographic and moving filmic image, the technical diversification of art production, the theoretical analysis of the complexities of seeing and looking and a growing discomfort with the power relationships implicit in the life room. The role of observational drawing within visual arts education has undoubtedly contracted with these re-evaluations of fixed representational practices. No longer is observational drawing a core activity within all art schools and it is more often relegated to some fringe activity, if it survives in any form at all. The ability to draw is frequently viewed as a desirable, but non-essential working skill that can be helpful but, along with many other manual and technological skills, constitutes a fairly minor part of the artist's bag of tricks. Given this general drift into near redundancy, can Cennini's assertion that, "it will do you a world of good" still have any relevance?

I believe that observational drawing still has relevance but only when considered in the actual spirit of Cennini's words. He was clearly interested in drawing as a *process* as opposed to an outcome and, like the process of ingestion and nutrition, its benefits rely on regularity and are both incremental and accumulative. As a *process* it engages with an extensive menu of theoretical concerns (seeing, looking, the gaze, the body, gender politics etc.) but it does so in a directly experiential way. As a mode of engagement with the world it demands completely different qualities of attention from our habitual interactions and can provide a direct route to our assumptions about the way we are in the world, particularly our assumptions about our physical and psychological relationship with everything that is 'Other'. It seems to me an invaluable process for examining *accepted knowledge*. As John Berger writes in *Ways of Seeing*: "The relation between what we see and what we know is never settled."⁵

But what constitutes this knowledge and how does it interpose itself in the act of seeing? From the pre-language phases of babyhood, informed by our sensory perceptions of the world, we begin to establish our sense of I and Other. As our visual encounters with the world (Other) unfold, we begin to sense Other as, in part, an increasingly autonomous entity and also as a series of images that, through identification, can form a new, altered sense of I. Jacques Lacan's thesis on the mirror-phase of childhood development states:

We have only to understand the mirror-phase *as identification*, in the full sense which analysis gives to the term: namely, the transformation which takes place in the subject when he assumes an image – whose predestination to this phase-effect is sufficiently indicated by the use, in analytical theory, of the old term *imago*.⁶

As seeing becomes more urgently motivated by a more pragmatic processing of information (survival) we then begin to learn the art of not seeing or 'un-seeing'. If one considers the numerous filters and simultaneous levels of attention that operate within our cognitive awareness whilst driving a car through a busy urban street, then the extent and necessity of our 'un-seeing' becomes clear. We simply cannot afford to see everything on offer. It is imperative that we recognise without any distractions in order to negotiate and anticipate the changing space through which we are passing. We need to see the bird, or tree, or pedestrian, only in terms of their relevance to our purpose, rather than to register their actual appearance. Our peripheral impressions are offered up to a series of templates or cognitive maps. These cognitive maps rely as much on knowledge as they do on appearance and have, in a metaphorical sense, a similar relationship to the actual appearance of objects as a land map has to the visual experience of the landscape. Just as the map of a city centre bears a closer resemblance to a bundle of blood vessels or a tree root than to any single or multiple view of the city, so our cognitive maps engage as much with the ideas, projections, archetypes and schematic notions that are embedded in our known assumptions of the world as they do with its actual appearance. As Simon Ryan explains in *The Cartographic Eye*:

Maps do not bear any simple relationship to a pre-existent reality, nor is this reality available in any unmediated way. Maps do possess a use-value – that is, when compared to objects of vision, there may be some relationship. This does not mean that any aspect of a fundamental 'reality' has been successfully traced on a map, but rather that one cultural construct (maps) is used to negotiate another (the seen).⁷

Through the mediation of our cognitive maps our continuous intake of visual information is being matched with our accumulated visual experience and, to some extent, is *in the process of fulfilling our expectations*.

Consider though, at the other end of the cognitive scale, how these maps can enable us to recognise a friend that we haven't seen for five years at a distance of fifty metres and from behind across a busy road. Somehow, from this meagre information, which may be little more than a half-glimpsed silhouette, we are able to register the familiar, as if it had been loitering in the unconscious in anticipation. So our cognitive maps are sophisticated and loaded mechanisms, constantly in a state of revision and extension as we accumulate yet more visual experience.

To say that we see the world, though it seems simple and self-evident, is, on closer examination, a more complex statement. We also *un-see* the world. We use the process of seeing and unseeing to confirm our expectations of the world; and we often do this as a way of containing the world within the limits of what we already know.

In the painting *The Chandelier* (below) I have indulged the cartographic impulse in order to map my own consciousness (picturing consciousness with one's consciousness is, of course, a spectacular folly and an irresistible attraction). This is a cognitive map of cognition that traces consciousness as a cross between a light fitting, a wiring diagram, a charm bracelet, a Christmas tree, a history of art encyclopaedia, a luminous cabbage (illumination and enlightenment) and as both a receiver



Clive Humphreys, *The Chandelier*, 2002-2004, acrylic on canvas, 160 x 160 cm, photograph: Alan Dove.

and generator. It is a map of maps (each individual motif acts as a discrete map). And, because consciousness is inseparable from our physicality, the global shape is symmetrical in the way that the cognitive maps of our own bodies tend to symmetry.

So much of our visual measuring and weighing of the world is made through our bodies. We are the measure of all things. In my experience as a teacher of life drawing I have observed students in a daily struggle with their response to the appearance of bodies in space and, although this is largely speculative on my part, I will attempt an analysis of some of the physical and cerebral processes involved (though I'm not sure that the brain ends and the body begins in any specific place).

Initially the drawer will spend some time in close observation of the subject. But, in order to commence the drawing, it will be necessary to look away from the model and turn towards the blankness of the white paper. At this point in the process, observation transforms itself into memory; a memory reconfigured into the scale and empty space offered by the white paper. Clearly, it is a physical impossibility to look simultaneously at the model and at the drawing, and so, even in the model's presence, drawing is primarily an act of memory. (Blind contour drawing is the only example I know of where looking and drawing can ever be simultaneous and is often employed to avoid the committal of form to memory). The first few speculative marks appear. A kind of plotting commences (this is also a map!). But what actually happens as the drawer attempts to hold the retinal imprint of the subject in their internal eye? Reliant on a memory that seems to decay so rapidly, I would suggest that the cognitive map (replete with all its subjective knowledge and assumptions) quickly becomes a kind of default position. And so observational drawing creates a theatre of conflict between what we see and what we know; where, paradoxically, only what we actually see can change what we know.

One of the first instincts of the drawer appears to be the need to outline. This instinct is evident even in the earliest graphic representations, for instance, in the Chauvet cave in the Ardèche valley, France c. 25000 – 17000 BC (some of the animal drawings are even inscribed outlines in the rock face filled with pigment⁸) and persists across cultural and geographical boundaries in various manifestations through to the wall drawings of Sol Le Witt. What does this common convention suggest? It is obviously about the boundaries between things (maps again), but, on an even more basic level, it suggests *separateness* and the primacy of objects over space, or, put another way, the differentiation between somethingness and nothingness and the implied dominance of somethingness. Space tends to be described in the negative, as the absence of somethingness. It is the residue of white paper left untouched after the figure and the objects have been delineated. The outline states, by strong implication, that objects and bodies are assumed to act as initiators, whilst space remains neutral and passive.

Things act and space is acted upon. Drawing objects (somethingness) and space (nothingness) in a more mutually affecting and complementary way requires a very fundamental shift of mindset (the common exercise of drawing only negative spaces is a way of re-evaluating this mindset). But it is just those things upon which we seem to universally agree that become the greatest impediment

to actually seeing. Again, knowing in this assumptive way, necessary (even vital) in many situations, is the enemy of seeing.

As the drawing progresses beyond its initial plotting, the task becomes increasingly to match the seen (remembered) with the marks already drawn. This means transposing the seen into the established scale and graphic mode of the existing marks. Here a physical response to the drawing materials coalesces with an equally physical response to the seen (remembered). It is as if the drawer is touching the subject with their own body movements and feeling those movements returned through their tactile connection to the drawing tool. The activity becomes much like an electrical circuit, as much dependent on the feedback of its own actions as it is on its primary intent. Wired in parallel to this circuit is the ever present cognitive map seemingly eager to interpose its assumptions at any opportunity.

There are some very typical and clearly visible consequences of the map's operation within many drawings and these are, perhaps, most clearly evident in drawings of the human figure. Above all I have observed an almost overwhelming urge in the drawer to re-establish symmetry in spite of the visible evidence. For example, in the graphic placement of the navel (often rendered as a dark dot), there appears a tendency to centralise its position within the stomach regardless of the model's spatial relationship to the drawer. Perhaps we feel this centrality strongly within our own bodies, based on its importance as a vestige of our connection to mother. Be that as it may, our apparent need for centrality within a figure drawing returns the figure to a frontal and symmetrical mode. This particular pull towards the frontal and symmetrical is a symptom of a more general tendency and may have its basis in our own body experience both as a schematic visualisation of something *felt* (we primarily *feel* the symmetry of our two arms) and as a reconstruction of our reflected mirror image (which, by physical necessity, is most often frontal). Here are echoes of Lacan's mirror:

Another frequent 'aberration' in the drawing of the human figure is the (mis)placement of the head in relation to the rest of the body. As an unselfconscious action, the head habitually acts as the body's counterweight in order to achieve equilibrium and balance (this can also apply as a metaphorical function). When someone is standing, the relationship between the head and the feet becomes both literally and psychologically pivotal. The head will tilt in compensation for the slightest imbalance of the rest of the body. Lying down (sleeping?) the situation is quite different as the body is fully supported and the head no longer has its balancing function. So, particularly in standing poses, it is crucial, in a drawing sense, to establish the relationship between head and feet (the most separated features). But most often this seems to provide inexplicable difficulties for the drawer. In many cases drawn heads will appear tragically disconnected from, or at odds with their bodies. The depiction of standing may appear closer to falling. Perhaps this is indicative of a continuing Cartesian dichotomy between head and body; between thinking and acting. If the head is understood as the control centre of the body, then the struggle to draw the head in an appropriate (naturally connected) relationship to the body becomes a metaphor for both the activity of drawing and the drawer.

When the drawing of the figure has reached the stage of initial completion (i.e. all parts of the drawing are graphically present) it can now be compared to the appearance of the model and

the model's relationship to objects and space. I believe that this is where the real business of the drawing begins. The challenge for the drawer is now (having gone as far as existing knowledge will allow) to proceed from the known (what has been drawn as a first response) into the seen (what can now be perceived as the gap between that first response and the actual appearance of the model). Now knowledge is susceptible to revision by appearance. In rethinking the whole depiction through graphic modification or even starting afresh, existing knowledge may be re-evaluated and the cognitive map further informed.

The regular challenging of our visual (and all other) assumptions, in Cennini's words, "*will do you the world of good.*" Observational drawing is one of the ways of confronting the limits of knowledge. It engages experientially with a whole feast of theoretical delicacies. If thought of as *process* rather than as *product* then this naturally becomes its nutritional function. Beautiful or expressive or obsessive or ugly drawings may be a by-product of this process but, if the *process* is paramount, then the finished (or abandoned) drawing should mainly be seen as the evidence or residue of this mode of engagement with Other. In an environment where that engagement is increasingly mediated by distancing agents, drawing actually offers us an opportunity to *become* the seen through the continuous act of re-ingestion.

- 1 Cennino Cennini, *Il Libro dell'Arte* (c.1400), translated as *The Craftsman's Handbook* by Daniel V Thompson Jr (New York: Dover; 1933), 15.
- 2 *Hand-drawn* is a work by Thomas Elliott that isn't, in any way, preparatory to other work. It forms no part of any series and does not appear to have much direct relationship to his paintings. It is essentially a one-off. The drawing eloquently examines Other as Self, Self as map and the sometimes fraught connection between thought and action. Elliott is a graduate of Otago Polytechnic School of Art and has exhibited his paintings widely in New Zealand since graduating in 2000.
- 3 David Davies (ed.), *El Greco* (London: National Gallery Company, 2003), 240.
- 4 Quoted in Jean Leymarie, Geneviève Monnier and Bernice Rose, *History of an Art: Drawing* (London: Macmillan, 1979), 31.
- 5 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 1972), 7-34.
- 6 Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror-Phase as Formative of the Function of the I", translated by Jean Roussell, *New Left Review* 51, (September-October, 1968), 71-77.
- 7 Simon Ryan, *The Cartographic Eye* (Cambridge UK: University Press, 1996), 102.
- 8 Hugh Honour and John Fleming, *A World History of Art* (London: Laurence King, 2002), 40.

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MAKING SENSE OF DEPICTION

Peter Belton

Introduction

Representation is predicated from a theme selected for depiction by the artist; the 'what' of our interest. I argue that depiction itself, however, privileges how a subject or theme is presented. Subjects are created when we identify and question the contexts for, and relations between, those objects and ideas which are of interest to us. Depiction is a process; it is performed, and in so being it entails the physiological events of looking, feeling and responding through the medium of our own bodies. Process can be recognised when we realise a structured response to perception and experience, and when we reference cultural paradigms and practices through our own modes of depiction. An account of this is given in this article through the use of examples from the author's own depictive practice, which can be related to models of other artists' practice cited.

Premise

For me as a visual artist, questions that define my practice include: What constitutes a depiction? Could we start with the proposition that depictions are the 'how' signals which affect the way we communicate the 'what' of our experiences, our stories, our subjects? If this is so, how can I construct an idea into a depiction on a two-dimensional surface? And, to what extent does this entail knowledge about the way my own body processes experiences to make sense? How do I convey the sensible qualities of things remembered; their substance as found in their materiality, weight, texture, smell, taste and sound with materials such as carbon or paint, canvas, wood or paper; materials which are patently not rock, water or airy space?

No place, no being. The images I make; these depictions are ultimately about me in relation to an 'Other'. I recognise, I feel, reflect, identify and analyse. Synthesis into a subject happens through depiction when I develop ideas in relation to objects and sites. "Self portraiture....after all, is what painting [and drawing] is."¹

My own practice entails a 'formalist' resolution to the 'how' of depiction through ordering of the elements of art-making practice: things seen in relation to the space they occupy as well as to each other. My formalist approach also references conventions such as linear and aerial perspective, the presentation of proximity and the organisation of elements into an intelligible whole through the act

of composition. Such deliberation signals a desire to communicate the 'thought about' and 'feeling about' which can only be explained through the applied conventions of a language.

This cannot be done without reference to the determinants of received meaning; that is, to cultural paradigms, practices and their contexts. Language is, through the imperative that it has structure, depictive. If this is the case; apparently abstract works of art are depictive too, given there is intention in their making. For are these not also referenced into the languages of social and cultural experience? If this is so; any work of art can be seen to depict. This was the point of Picasso's objection to being labeled an 'abstract' (Cubist) artist in a time and place where audiences often took the view that abstract works were subject-free. Any circumscription through drawing with any medium can be read, and described, as a depiction no matter how slight, or banal, or abstract it may be judged to be. "This is circular; this is square..." – even these minimal descriptions involve depictive adjectives which can be recognised as being shaped by a context and a perceived character. Do not, however, confuse the 'how' of 'depiction' with the 'what' of 'representation'. What the circle and the square might represent at any given time is another question.

Toward depicting a theme: landscape as a theatre for the Sublime

That the *process* of reading represented subjects might be evocative and allusive was, and is, a premise of the Sublime. Put another way: the Sublime, read as an adjective, signals a character or quality of performance. I read this as affect. I associate the manifested Sublime with chaos, atavistic behaviours, darkness and the terror of the unseen. Those thrill seekers who delighted in Sublime moments were responding to the excitement delivered by ambiguities, malformation and a (suggested) magnitude of horror. Edmund Burke wrote: "terror is in all cases whatsoever; either openly or latently, the ruling principle of the Sublime."² He proceeded to identify the characteristic effect of experiencing the Sublime as "astonishment". In addition to this, Burke's essay is significant to my project because he "explained the opposition of Beauty and Sublimity by a physiological Theory", as G P Landow explains.³ Burke was, Landow asserts, the first English writer to attempt an explanation of Beauty and Sublimity in terms of the process of perception and its effect upon the perceiver:

Burke writes: "I know nothing Sublime which is not some modification of power."⁴ Thus the effect of capture in a Sublime moment is that one is 'out of one's depth'; powerless in the circumstances. And, the thrill of *feeling* can be as if one is teetering on the edge of a hole in a fast flowing tide. That is the key to defining the engagement. The horror is experienced vicariously. We are not so much in the moment of sublimity as to be unable to regard and report on its effects and their implications. A master of these effects was J M W Turner:

My own practice as an artist is shaped by where I live, what I do, and how I perform 'being'. The questions about how, when and why follow when I try to explain my 'doing'.

Where I live, landscape is the dominant theatre. Being in and of it is my pursuit. I seek engagement and experiences in the landscape and I have come to recognise the searching to be as much the product of my cultural projection as it is a physical event. One reading cannot be made without

the other. Any sketch, or trace, I make as an initial response to being in a landscape will present as a 'natural' signifier; as speech is to language.⁵ However, a critical reading of such texts as Simon Schama's *Landscape and Memory*,⁶ J L Koerner's biography of Caspar David Friedrich⁷ and Lopez-Pedraza's idiosyncratic reading of Anselm Kiefer's life and work⁸ – amongst other texts – shows landscapes, as read, to be essentially projections of culture. In the process of 'ordering' a depiction I construct from what I have assimilated and what astonishes me.

Depiction is not about verisimilitude or about mimicry; not the 'what' of representation but, rather, presentation of the 'how'. This is where I see the attraction of the Romantic Sublime for my own practice as an artist who prefers to draw. The attraction functions on two levels: I am attracted to hiking and sailing, to being in 'these places' and, also, I find myself relating these experiences to the inner life of feelings and ideas assimilated from others. 'Sublimation' describes a process of assimilation into 'being'.

In order to depict: a drawing is performed

Where he discusses the "Phenomenology of Drawing", David Rosand quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1964), who has in turn invoked Paul Valéry (1960):

"It is by lending his body to the world that the artist changes the world into paintings. To understand these transubstantiations we must go back to the working, actual body – not the body as a chunk of space or a bundle of functions but that body which is an intertwining of vision and movement."

"That observation is even truer of drawing, where the movements of the body, actual and imagined, are more directly recorded by the tracing hand. What we here call the imagined movements of the body, however, refer to and ultimately depend upon the body image of the viewer; that is, upon our tacit sense of our own body in the world, extending into the space around it and relating to other objects in that space."⁹

"The gesture of drawing is, in essence, a projection of the body, and, especially when viewing a drawing of the human figure we are reminded of that. The drama is in the line. Meaning is generated in and by the act of drawing itself, for the act of drawing is already one of feeling. In no other art – save, perhaps, dance – are means and end, the how and the what of significance, so perfectly identified."¹⁰

As Merleau-Ponty points out, the wisdom in this noumena is rooted in 'being'. And, what makes this significant is that it can be recognised by the viewer as a shared understanding. However, what is specific and personal and varied must, necessarily, be referenced into the familiar 'Other' if it is to make any sense. Thus the structural patterns in drawing are rooted in both physical experience and in culture. Motifs of line and form which distinguish an artist's work and correspond to kinaesthetic sensations can be termed 'structural signatures'. These structural signatures do not merely represent feelings about events and ideas but also *embody* (depict) them.

Example of a structural signature in the practice of two artists: the unwinding ellipse

We find in the drawing practice of Leonardo da Vinci a recurring device which gives structural cohesion to an entire surface. In his single figure drawings and in his construction of figure groups such as *The Virgin, Child and St. Anne* (National Gallery, London), Leonardo would transect the cone of constructed space occupied by figures with dynamic ellipses and arcs; lines looped where arms, shoulder and inclined head align. We find the same lines in the construction of drapery over the inclination of legs in the lower half of the figure. And, as this system of drawing manifests as a rotation of arcs along and across forms it is infinitely repeated; echoed down to a quiver on the extension of a digit. Leonardo fully acknowledged the determining quality of certain complex forms, the spiraling ovoid in particular. Even as it presents a certain calligraphic elegance, the sinuous line that is the basic constituent of this form more deliberately asserts its three-dimensional implications; its curve functions stereometrically in the modelling of solids and spatially in the creation of volume.

Rosand¹¹ identifies where Leonardo saw the trace as having its own *istorie* as a depictive device which functions as a signifier; a signifier located within the Neoplatonic paradigm. To this end Leonardo proceeded from a physical investigation of actions and effects first and foremost. He sought in these effects evidence of an internal consistency of parts to the whole and, through that, of causation. This is why Leonardo and his followers took an analytical approach to understanding structure, in order to recognise patterns and identify the sense of the logos in all things made, and to be made. His structural autographs, the spiraling ovoid and the returning ellipse were such 'effects' of 'connection' being made.

Another artist for whom the unwinding ellipse was an autograph was J M W Turner:

The crazy perspectives, double focus, the melting of one form into another and the general feeling of instability; these are the kinds of imagery which most of us know only when we are asleep. Turner experienced them when he was awake. This dream-like condition reveals itself by repeated appearance of certain motifs which are known to be part of the furniture of the unconscious. Such for example is the vortex or whirlpool which became more and more the underlying rhythm of his designs...¹²

Turner's structural signature is characteristically presented in rotation on the flat vertical of the picture plane as an unwinding ellipse. This device underpins virtually all of his alpine painting as well as his seascapes. Where the depicted subject does not continue the sweep of the ellipse, Turner would employ a quick shift of hue or tone to ensure that the viewer's eye would keep the structure in place. There is a physiological effect, too, consistent with the stories about Turner being mast-bound in a wild sea, or leaning from the window of a carriage as the London to Bristol Express swept through a rain storm. We notice how the ellipses tuck through and behind each other as a projection of remembered travel; of going back. There is a resemblance to the appearance of a coil under compression suddenly released, sprung; opened out. Often, too, we will see a trajectory fly from the edge of elliptical movement as a release of centrifugal energy. In some paintings, such as *Loch Coriusk, in Skye* (1831), the gradual displacement and repetition of many elliptical springs and

their stacked trajectories anticipate the fracturing of time in space seen in the paintings of Giacomo Balla in the early twentieth century.

The *Loch Coriusk* painting is probably the nearest Turner came to the appearance of Leonardo's analysis of the *Deluge* (1503). In both instances we see tightly packed lines comb through mountains and atmosphere; subsuming rock and precipice to the engulfing effects of scouring water; the irresistible force of the Sublime. But, the effect, in Turner's practice, is to present us with an expanding universe of limitless sublimity.

A difference between one artist's analogy and another artist's metaphor: contrasting evidence in the practice of two artists working in the 20th Century

Charles Harrison, in his essay, "The Effects of Landscape" (1994) compares the painting practice of Paul Cézanne with an example of practice by Georgia O'Keefe.¹³ He writes about the "initially dramatic effect" presented in a painting by O'Keefe achieved by complementing one reading with another. In describing one of her New Mexico landscapes, Harrison points to O'Keefe's treatment of the landscape as landform with tumescent swellings, clefts and orifices. I read this as an analogy of subject matter:

Cézanne's mature practice resists relocation in analogy. For him, the act of depiction and the reading of depiction is what his practice is essentially about. It can be argued that the ways and means of performing a painting, or drawing, come closer to a definition of landscape as metaphor when we, as spectators, are engaged in 'reading' how a response to 'being there' happens. Previous remarks, in this article, about physiological and cultural prerequisites for drawing attest to this. The happening of a drawing is limited by the circumstances of site and time, the physiology of the drawer and by what the drawer has previously assimilated and is given to understand. In a different way from O'Keefe, Cézanne uses landscape as a means because landscape being 'site' can present a range of questions about our being in a place and in a time. He doesn't posit a declamation or a story but, rather, he posits doubt about the way we perceive and the wisdom implicit in this doubt is profoundly rooted in the physiological and in memory.

Harrison contends that Cézanne worked with an illusion of relatively deep space and that the position the viewer is put in will challenge the viewer's cognition about the reading of mass, light, distance, surface and so on. The viewer is invited to do the work. The process entailed in doing the reading is a metaphor for the artist's experience, rather than the illustrated object itself and the connection is in 'how' the physical event and the cognitive and emotional responses are realised as being confluent in the structure of a depiction:

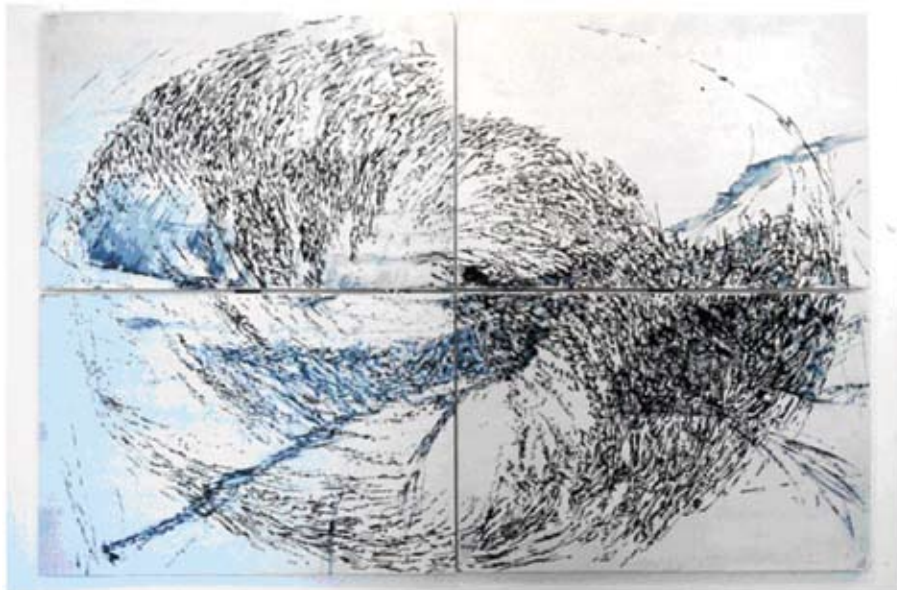
...to adopt in imagination the position of one doing the looking...is also to be faced in actuality with the complex practical mechanisms by which the illusion is established – the planes and touches and contrasts on the literal surface of the painting, which register the factitious activity of the artist with great vividness, and which thus establish the details of the painted surface inescapably as the constituents of something made...the imaginary position of the viewer is never abandoned, but the consequence of it being maintained is that, as

one aspect of the painting 'corrects' the other; that position is rendered at every viewpoint subject to correction from the position of the maker of the painting. The technical character of O'Keefe, in contrast, is simply not so much as to produce a spectator who goes on working at the painting.¹⁴

My own practice, as a visual artist, reflects the discussion in this article

The discussion in this article has relevance to the cast of my own practice. Indeed it arises from the questions I grapple with when making my own drawings and when working with paint. The three attached annotated images should make the connection apparent. Each has been predicated from the experience(s) of being 'there' and each is not so much an epiphany on arrival at a subject or site as the product of recognition which happens as the work is developed in the studio. Sometimes I find myself working with sketches taken in a moment of excitement ten years ago. Surprise can happen when these are seen to present differently and uncertainly when the 'connecting' of moments is reworked. The metaphor functions on more than one level. It can be developed in the physical act of drawing as relived moments. The large size of the studio pieces is no arbitrary decision. These works are intended to be physical in their effect. Metaphor can also be recognised in my reference to paradigmatic practices, such as I have described in the 'unwinding ellipse'. Decisions can be linked to questions about relationships to cultural memory, desire, anxiety and, yes, to astonishment.

The traces left by the process of depiction, then, are not just the marks of manufacture; rather, they are the structured evidence of a response to being.



Shift, 2004, mixed oil paint and oil drawing media on board, 150 x 120 cm.

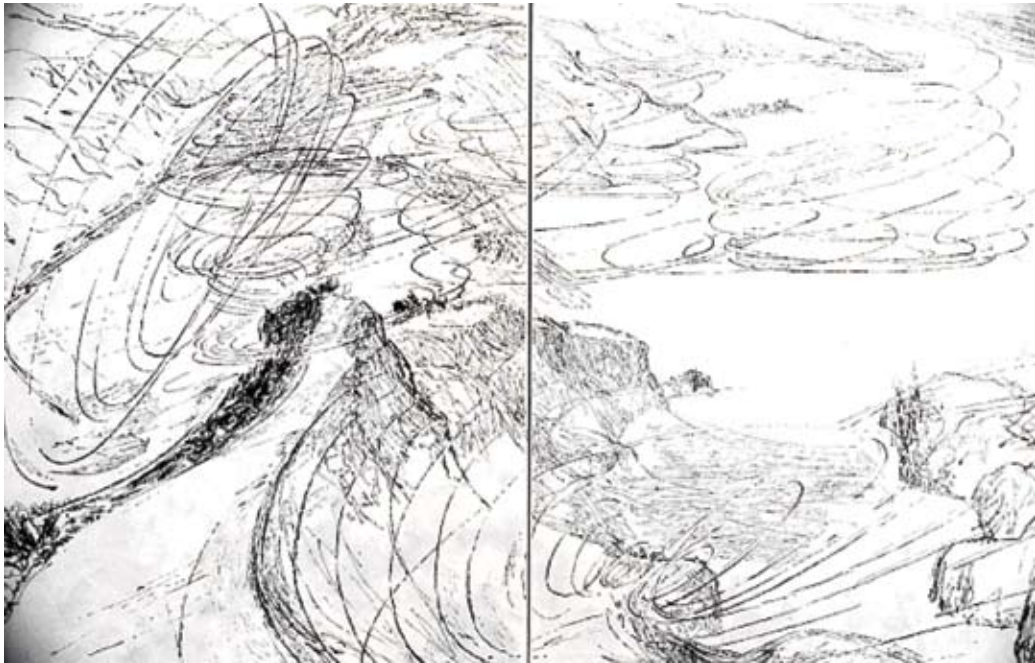
The drawing on the previous page uses a vortex of winding lines, drawn with a black oil stick over a landscape image found in a midsummer storm over Pigeon Bay, Banks Peninsula. I did my initial drawings of this event in 1998 and the sketches have been seminal for ten other images. The storm developed into a sublime spectacle and I spent the night anchoring tent poles and wild ropes.



Driving the Lindis (developed site sketch), 2005, pencil on arches paper, 40 x 30 cm.

In this work above there are three centres of vision, hence the title. The first is established by the blue oil paint image of landscape; the second is in the epicenter of the black vortex; and the third in the cross-hair effect, as in a gun sight, presented by the structure of the four joined panels on which the image is seen. I wanted to present the space as having a 'physical' presence and the evident construction of a spatial 'ground' in the joined panels was my way of doing this.

The drawing on the opposite page was made from a moving car. My partner drove through the Lindis Pass at about twenty-five kilometres an hour and while she negotiated the road I sketched. What we have is a synthesis of what was seen and how I moved through the landscaped space. The toned blocks of textural effects were added in the studio. I made the first of my sketches from the car in 1998 and over subsequent trips have made about thirty by this method. Some have been combined and developed into large compositions using oil sticks and layered paint on prepared board.



Wind at Mihiwaka: Wednesday, 2006, mixed oil paint and oil drawing media on board, 160 x 120 cm.

I made eight trips up Mihiwaka and then developed sketches into three compositions named for days of the week and for Nordic gods of the stuff of 'sturm und drang'. 'Mihiwaka' is a high and wild place. The name translates literally as 'greet the canoe(s)' and it is very evident that with its commanding view north, and a 270-degree panorama, this was a site Māori used as a look-out. I quite liked the idea of mixing my seafarer references.

The spiral drawing of the effects of wind was developed when I realised I had so much loose information which needed to be more rigorously structured to make sense, especially on a large scale. The differences seen in the design of space from one drawing to another have been established by depicting the structure of different takes on wind before working in topographic information. In each of the eight trips the subject was changing in aspect as I drew; the effect of wind was different. Some weathers made it all but impossible. I have a lot to thank JMW Turner for:

- 1 Arthur Dove cited from a letter to Alfred Stieglitz, in Anne Morgan, *Dear Stieglitz, Dear Dove* (Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 1988), 194, cited by Marcia Brennan, *Painting Gender: Constructing Theory* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2001), 107.
- 2 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Beautiful and the Sublime* (New York: Garland, 1757/1971), 97.
- 3 GP Landow, *The Aesthetic and Critical Theories of John Ruskin* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1971), 195.
- 4 See endnote 2, p. 110.
- 5 See Roland Barthes, *Writing Degree Zero and Elements of Semiology* (Boston: Beacon, 1953).
- 6 Simon Schama, *Landscape and Memory* (London: Fontana, 1995).
- 7 J.L. Koerner, *Caspar David Friedrich* (London: Reaktion, 1990).
- 8 R Lopez-Pedraza, *Anselm Kiefer: After the Catastrophe* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).
- 9 David Rosand, *Drawing Acts* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 15.
- 10 Ibid., 16.
- 11 Ibid., 97.
- 12 Kenneth Clark, *Looking at Pictures* (London: John Murray, 1965), 152.
- 13 Charles Harrison, "The Effects of Landscape", in W Mitchell (ed.), *Landscape and Power* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1994), 14.
- 14 Ibid., 228.

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LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION

Lee Marie Houlihan

For as long as I can remember narrative has been an extremely important part of my life. Much like breathing, it feels totally natural and I need it in order to survive. I have consumed it in its many forms – song, myth, legend, fairytale, books, cinema, television, theatre, comics, art, craft and dreams.

My first stories came in the form of songs. Songs have played a very important role in my life as carriers of personal memories and emotions and also as messages from my psyche. I remember lying in bed with my father on a Sunday morning and singing old songs with him. I have a natural ability to be able to remember a vast quantity of song lyrics and the tunes that accompany them. Parroting these narratives back to my father was pure pleasure.

*Barefoot days when I was just a kid Barefoot days, oh boy the things I did*¹

Before the arrival of Pākehā and the written word, Māori histories were oral. In traditional Māori culture children were taught from a very young age to chant many generations of their whakapapa (genealogy) and in some instances also iwi (tribe) and hapū (sub-tribe) histories and stories. There are Māori who are still trained in this art today. As I am of Māori descent I am not surprised that this skill comes easily to me. It has just never served a purpose in my Pākehā world besides me being able to recall many songs and being popular at parties in my younger days. These natural abilities have been unvalued and unacknowledged in the family I was born into.

When I could read I devoured myths, legends and fairytales. Early on I could see patterns occurring in these narratives. I started asking my parents and relatives to tell me stories about themselves and our family. Sometimes I would be rewarded with a snippet of a story and often these were negative and sad. There was a great reluctance from my father to share his stories with me.

So I decided to ask stories about myself. My mother would tell me about how naughty, defiant and wild I was when I was younger. Although she would laugh I was often left feeling bad about myself and my longing was tinged with hurt.

*Song sung blue Everybody knows one Song sung blue Every garden grows one*²

In my own personal experience I have told and retold my personal stories to various psychotherapists, family, friends and strangers. There was always a purpose involved in these acts and it was my intention to make sense, extract meaning, reclaim, reveal and share my stories in an attempt to be well and whole and change the frameworks from which I perceived my experiences. Perhaps reading and hearing others' tragedies also helped me confront my own? Maybe the weight of repetitive narrative, my own and others', forced my psyche into change and release?

I'm not entirely convinced that observing others' stories necessarily opens the door to purging or acknowledging our own emotions and narratives. Denial is a powerful screen and I believe many people keep their emotions and stories tightly locked away. It hasn't always been safe in Aotearoa to share stories about being Māori .

***I was lost and double crossed
With my hands behind my back
I was longtime hurt and thrown
in the dirt
Shoved out on the railroad track ³***

I'll never forget the day I realised I was of Māori descent, or 'part' Māori as we were told in those days (though I never was told which part). I was perhaps nine or ten years old. My family had made the journey from Auckland down to Rotorua, and/or up to Rotorua as some Māori would say, to visit my father's mother. In Māori mythology Te Ika a Māui, the North Island, is an ika (fish) which was pulled up by Māui. The head of the ika is the Wellington region and the tail is the far north. So when some Māori talk about travelling up and down the motu (island) they travel down to the end of the fish, which is the opposite of how Pākehā view the journey.

***We listened to Papa's translations
Of the stories across the sky
We drew our own constellations ⁴***

My grandmother, Rangī, lived in a thermal area of Rotorua. I remember her home surrounded by mist and the wonderful smell of sulphur. Rangī spoke with a wheeze, which she acquired when she contracted tuberculosis earlier in her life. She had long white hair and she smoked a pipe. I knew no one else like her and I thought she was cool.

For as long as I can remember I had been told by my mother in a very derogatory manner; that I was "just like Rangī". These words used to make me feel really angry and confused, as I loved my grandmother and didn't understand how we were both somehow wrong and bad. My mother knew that my grandmother was obviously of Māori descent, but in her Eurocentric reality there was no awareness that my grandmother had been raised by two parents who individually came from two very different worlds and had an extremely different reality from her. As the eldest granddaughter, I was special in the Māori world and my mother saw this as favouritism. To this day I am sure she still has no idea why Rangī treated me differently and why my relationship with her was so important.

My mother strongly disliked Rangī and subsequently I hardly ever saw her.

On the day I arrived to visit my grandmother I ended up outside with my cousin. He asked me if I knew what Gung's (affectionate name for my grandmother) real name was. The only clue he gave me was that it started with the letter 'R'. The first name that sprung to mind was Rose. Laughing, he told me her name was Rangī. Something deep within me woke up that day. I was extremely proud that my Gung was of Māori descent and that of course meant I was also of Māori descent. In that moment my life changed forever.

***When all the dark clouds roll away
And the sun begins to shine
I see my freedom from across the way
And it comes right in on time***⁵

My father is of Māori and Pākehā descent. His mother was Māori and Pākehā/Irish and his father was Pākehā of Irish descent. My mother is Pākehā. Her mother was Pākehā of English descent and her father was South African of Dutch descent. So I am truly a mixed breed.

I was born in 1964, just after the so called birth of postmodernism. I grew up in a Pākehā world, with a tiny window into the Māori world. It has only recently dawned on me that my father saw himself as being Pākehā and 'part' Māori. I have read enough and spoken to enough Māori people to realise that at that time, "Māori was not merely descriptive, it was a put-down".⁶ Stereotypes included being happy-go-lucky, lazy, irresponsible, dirty, sexually promiscuous and naturally talented at singing and playing the guitar and ukulele.

My father could easily pass as being Pākehā, though he did go extremely brown in the sun, and I think he had a Māori look about him. Recently I found the courage to phone my father's brother and ask him what ethnicity he identified as. He was fortunate enough to be sent to Hato Petera, which at the time was a private school for Catholic Māori boys. He told me he was the only "white boy" there at the time. As far as he was concerned he had white skin and blonde hair and that meant he was Pākehā. My father's family assimilated extremely negative ideologies and behaviours associated with being Māori and subsequently operated out of a colonised paradigm. This no doubt assisted them in their physical and social survival, but unfortunately I believe it led to fractured lives, disconnection, pain and addiction. It seems in my father's family Māori assimilation into the Pākehā world was fully achieved in my father's generation.

***But it's all relative
Even if you don't understand***⁷

Māori souvenirs, waiata (songs) and pidgin te reo (Māori language) were present in our home. My father's family is from Rotorua, the Māori tourist capital of Aotearoa. Rangī's sister once operated a tourist shop in Rotorua. Knowing how offensive and insensitive some appropriated souvenirs are, I feel very sad about the collusion involved. I'm not sure how informed my great aunt was. I'm not sure what her father taught her about Māoritanga. He did, however, model survival and financial

independence in a predominantly Pākehā world where a lot of fellow Māori were not only dying, but barely surviving.

My great grandfather, Mauri-oho-oho Timiuha was also known as Mau Timiuha and Mau Tiui. Shortening and changing Māori names was common in those times. Like so many Māori he used the first part of his first name as a last name for his children. I see this as a link in the gradual loss of his family's Māori identity. While it may have been fashionable and necessary at that time, it was another way some Māori were dislocated and whakapapa was lost.

I have read many personal stories about how it was being Māori in my great grandfather's times and my heart feels heavy with the weight of being 'othered' in your own land. Not to mention all the theft of land and subsequent loss of livelihood, dislocation, assimilation, loss of your language and the general ignorance and disrespect of Māori tikanga by the crown and many Pākehā. I know very little about my great grandfather except that he married my great grandmother, Nora Rowan, who I believe came from Ireland and together they had five children. He owned and operated a horse drawn coach service in the Rotorua area.

***Hoki mai e tama ma
Ki roto (ki roto)
Ki ngā ringa e tū whera atu nei***⁸

My father was often drunk in the evenings. I think his alcoholism was very complex and I believe growing up with the shadows of being negatively stereotyped and feeling 'less than' can't have helped him. There was contention in our family about how much Māori blood we have. How very sad to want to be less so you could be more Pākehā. I say this without judgement as I didn't grow up in their time and I know society's attitudes have changed a little since then. My father was extremely clean and I would say this bordered on obsessive. Not being 'dirty' was an issue in our family.

My father spoke what I refer to as 'pidgin-Māori', which is Māori and English words mixed together. Small sentences like "you kids haere ki te moe!" (go to bed) are an example. Some nights, depending on his mood and company, he would get out our ukulele and sing songs. This was an acceptable thing for Māori to do as we are good musicians and singers! Music was valued in our family.

***I have a band of men
and all they do is play for me
They come from miles around
to hear them play a melody***⁹

When I was in form one I had my first Māori school teacher. I attended Ellerslie Primary School and lived in a part of Auckland which had a large Māori and Pacific Island population. In the 1970s the Māori renaissance was just gaining power and Māori school teachers were rare. Tikanga Māori was now an everyday part of my school life and I loved going to school. It was at this time that I started asking my father which iwi we were from.

I asked other family members who also could not answer any of my questions. I was persistent

in my need to know and I have never given up asking questions even though this has been and still is problematic. My aunty, who is married to my father's brother, once gave me a beautiful pair of shark teeth earrings which had been passed on to her by whānau (family). I think she sensed my desperation and disappointment that I knew so little about my Māori ancestry. I wear them most days and they are a constant reminder to me of how important random acts of kindness are.

Unfortunately my parents moved from Auckland to Hunterville in 1976. I ended up in a small farming community where Māoritanga was totally invisible at school. Thankfully we ended up moving to Palmerston North in 1977 where I attended Intermediate Normal and joined their kapa haka group. This was the only Māori component on offer at school at that time.

By the time I reached Awatapu College in 1978 I knew I wanted to be fluent in te reo. Mr Sam Tangiora, who was the Māori language and tikanga teacher, was the most gentle, humble teacher I have ever had. He knew I had a passion and hunger for my Māoritanga and obliged by being supportive, patient, kind and inclusive. Every year I was at high school I received a certificate of excellence in Māori Studies. I also entered whaikūrero (speech) competitions, which Mr Tangiora put me forward for.

I was also heavily involved in kapa haka at high school. We were the first kapa haka group the school had ever had and we worked hard so we could enter competitions. I remember spending many lunchtimes and weekends practicing with the group. Our teacher, Davita Mita, worked us hard. Pronunciation, actions, poi all had to be perfect. I was totally committed and my knowledge of te reo and tikanga grew rapidly. Our group once undertook a small concert tour visiting different marae in the North Island. I felt like I had truly come home.

***Takoto ana au
I te moenga hurihuri
Tū ake au
Titiro ki te atarau***¹⁰

Another area of interest at this time was the development of Māoritanga in Manawatū schools. I was the secretary for a committee called "Te Huingū Āwhina" which organised activities to develop Māoritanga. At this time my Māoritanga was the light in a very dark reality. It truly was my saving grace.

My first love was a gentle, beautiful young Māori man. We were both fifteen years old and he was the first man I made love with. He will always hold a special place in my heart. I'll never forget the first time I brought him to our home. He came over after school and we were listening to music in the lounge (that was where the better stereo was). My mother arrived home from work and introductions were made. My mother is a very friendly person and likes to meet people. After talking for a while she asked if I could help her for a minute. We left the room and she quietly told me that he should leave before my father got home. I can't tell you in words the feelings I experienced at the time. I was absolutely floored. This just made no sense. Without any understanding of assimilation at the time, this insanity compounded the crazy environment I was trying so hard to exist in. There was

no way I was going to subject my boyfriend to any of the racist, cruel, crazy attitudes and behaviours held by my father. I realised that being with a Māori man meant not being in my family. This had a major impact on my life. At this time I was still locked into wanting to be loved and approved of by my family. Little did I know that this would never be a reality whether I was with a Māori man or not.

*When I see you smile
It feels like I'm falling
It's not for anybody else to know
The way your face could light
The bitter dark of every street
In every town I'll ever go*¹¹

After leaving high school I still persisted in asking extended family members about our whakapapa and iwi. Still no information was forthcoming. I was aware of the concept of Whanaungatanga, which is layered in its meaning, but a simple definition is the knowledge that all Māori are related in some way. Someone somewhere knew about my existence. This concept has always given me hope that I would one day find and know my whakapapa and make real connections with my iwi.

Over the years I have crossed back and forth into the Māori world. I have undertaken further te reo and tikanga classes and have attended Treaty of Waitangi workshops and decolonisation workshops. Tangi (funeral), hui (gatherings) and further education has ensured my Māori identity and knowledge has slowly grown. Years ago I started to learn raranga (weaving) and though I am still a baby I have been fortunate in attending workshops with women who are considered national treasures.

As a child I was told our iwi was Ngāti Raukawa and when my children were small I moved to the Kapiti Coast where Ngāti Raukawa resides. I spent years getting to know some local iwi and made many inquiries in an attempt to find my whakapapa. Eventually a Māori relative, from another branch of the family told me to make inquiries with Te Arawa. My great great grandmother Mere Rangiwhakakairi (Timiuha) is buried in Ohau and perhaps that is why Ngāti Raukawa was posed as a possible iwi.

I knew that I needed to know my whakapapa as it is the foundation of my Māori identity and crucial to my sense of self. I wanted to stand on my marae and know who I was from and where I was from. Last year I found my whakapapa. Something shifted deep inside me and I think it has given me more confidence and strength. I think I had romantic dreams about how this would pan out. A gorgeous old kuia or kaumātua (respected elder) welcoming me into our iwi and hapū. Tears, hugs, kisses, singing, a homecoming. Unfortunately it was neither romantic nor personal. My persistence and patience eventually uncovered information that a second cousin had found our whakapapa. After a difficult conversation she sent me a copy of our old handwritten whakapapa and a few notes she took down while she was speaking with a relative unknown to me. She also passed on documentation concerning our shared Māori land in the Waiairiki district. I am extremely grateful to her.

I am of Te Arawa and possibly Tainui descent. Our hapū are listed as Ngāti Rangiteaorere and Ngāti Uenukukopako. I recently received a registration form from Ngā Kaihautu o Te Arawa and I hope that by providing five generations of whakapapa they can confirm my affiliation, and most importantly, put me in touch with my people and marae. Perhaps my homecoming is still to come. I certainly hope so.

*Ko tēnei te pō
I raro o te marama
Ko tēnei te pō
I waiata ai ahau*¹²

My Māori identity has mostly been something I have had to seek by myself. It has sometimes been a lonely journey. I have had no whānau holding my hand and passing on tikanga and stories. This has been hard and I have certainly not taken anything Māori for granted. My wairua (spirit) keeps me moving forward. I have learnt to be extremely patient and I now believe everything has its time.

When I was a child sometimes my sisters and I would be referred to as having a “touch of the tar brush”. The underlying message was hurtful and not at all humorous. Identifying as Māori and having white skin has been challenging in both the Pākehā and Māori worlds. I have often witnessed Pākehā freely sharing their racist, negative, uninformed stereotypes about Māori and The Treaty of Waitangi. These comments have deeply hurt and angered me. Being asked how much Māori blood I have is in my opinion a loaded question, as I believe there is always another agenda operating and a total lack of understanding about what it means to be Māori. I am of course aware that my white skin has given me certain privileges that my brown family and friends have not always been afforded. There are some Māori who see me as being inferior, a white Māori. There is a name for me in Māori “nga tangata awarua” – awarua can mean either the flowing of two rivers, a corridor or a passage. It includes meanings of dual heritage, possible discomfort/alienation, of being in-between, and the concept of transition.

In an essay titled “Borders and Frontiers”, Irihāpeti Ramsden articulates a lot of my thoughts on Māori identity: “My Māoriness is my choice. My identity is my choice. As I have crossed some borders and been forced across others, I have made a series of decisions about how I shall be to myself and to the world about me...It seems to me that Māoritanga, like all other realities, is personal.”¹³ I have certainly lived my life on the frontier. I have spent many years trying to map my cultural identities and positions. Not feeling like I totally belonged in either culture has meant I have often felt dislocated and unhomed in my own country. This has also been reflected in my physical world as I have moved house thirty-six times.

Society often forces me into a position of choosing between Māori and Pākehā. I don't often fit into the right box. I used to tick both the Pākehā – New Zealand European, and Māori boxes until I discovered that often it is only the first box that is recorded, which is always Pākehā. Why should I, a Māori /Pākehā New Zealander be forced into one box or the “other” ethnic box in my own land?

To move beyond binary classifications, I have found it necessary to explore identity politics.

Postcolonial theorist, Homi K Bhabha, talks about hybridity and the third space. This involves a creation of a “new space” or a “contact zone” where two disparate cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other. In colonial discourse, “hybridity” is a term of abuse for those who are products of miscegenation (mixed-breeds). My problem with an “in-between” space, or the “third space of enunciation”, is that it doesn't address the inequality and imbalance of power. It can be thought of as masking or ‘whitewashing’ cultural differences.

An alternative, although equally problematic concept currently discussed in postcolonial discourse is “creolisation”. This is the process of intermixing and cultural change. The term has usually been applied to “new world” societies (particularly the Caribbean and South America). More loosely it is applied to those postcolonial countries whose present ethnically or racially mixed populations are a product of European colonisation. “It is the process of absorption of one culture by another and the reciprocal process of intermixture and enrichment, each to each.”¹⁴ “Creolisation” as a word is located outside of Aotearoa. It doesn't feel right for me to use it when I am trying to celebrate my unique dual identity. I don't feel comfortable with aligning myself with either hybridity or creolisation.

Life stories are an important tool in identifying and valuing difference. Working with my own stories in the visual arts means I can express my voice in my own way. I research and record my own stories and perspectives. Historically a lot of Māori narratives were researched and recorded by Pākehā. This was obviously problematic due to the links with imperialism, colonisation and the fact that their perceptions and perspectives are very different from those of Māori. Telling our own stories is in effect re-writing the history of Aotearoa.

Linda Tuhiwai Smith, an indigenous researcher, is involved in research methodologies titled “Twenty-Five Indigenous Projects”. She describes these projects as “acts of reclaiming, reformulating and reconstituting indigenous cultures and languages...”¹⁵ I have employed a number of these projects – Storytelling, Celebrating Survival, Remembering, Connecting, Representing, Reframing, Naming and Creating – which are woven through my artworks and writings.

Choosing to work with the geographical outline of Aotearoa, in several scales, has allowed me to create vessels which hold many different narratives, issues and questions. My dual cultural identities, whakapapa, land, commodity, value, colonisation, nationhood and nostalgia are themes I have chosen to work with. Keeping all the ceramic forms white represents my skin colour and also the ‘whitewashing’ that colonisation has created. Making work that fits in-between art and craft is intentional. The ceramic objects are able to be used in a domestic craft context and the overall concepts belong in an art context.

Educated Tourist (see next page) is a white, glazed, ceramic ashtray which is made out of paper clay and shaped in the form of Aotearoa. It is made up of three islands – Te Ika a Māui/North Island, Te Waipounamu/South Island and Rakiura/Stewart Island – and is inlaid with a colourful decal which is an appropriated map of Aotearoa taken from a 1950s tablecloth.

This work is the embodiment of many different themes as well as employing several of Linda Tuhiwai Smith's indigenous projects. The first theme explored is geography. Irit Rogoff describes

geography as "...far more than a mode of charting the known world; geography is a source of authority in the fundamental questions of inclusion and exclusion and plays a crucial role in the determination of identity and belonging...it is a system of classification, a mode of location, a site of collective national, cultural, linguistic and topographic histories".¹⁶ I am also referring to the mapping and locating of my cultural and artistic positions.

My map is an example of how Māori names for cities, towns, rivers, streams, hills and mountains have been overlaid with Pākehā names. There are many narratives implied in this map, which are represented by pictures. This is clearly a Pākehā map. There is one Māori person located above Auckland. It would be hard to find your way around Aotearoa using this map.

Ashtrays are containers for ash, the residue of cigarettes or joints which are associated with addictions and 'bad' habits. I am referencing the ingrained, ignorant, Eurocentric, monocultural, racist attitudes that still exist in a number of the Pākehā population. I liken these to a 'bad' habit and it seems it has become an addiction of sorts. The Māori perspective is too often unknown, unacknowledged, unvalued and not respected.

Paper clay, which is a mixture of both clay and paper, is vulnerable yet surprisingly strong and is a direct reference to me. But most importantly I am referencing earth, the land, Papa-tū-ā-nuku, mother earth. Professor Margaret Mutu, who is head of Māori Studies at Auckland University points out the clash between two very different ways of viewing the land:

When the Crown grants title, it guarantees that person has undisturbed possession of that land and has the right to sell it or lease it. Or whatever they wish to do – alienate it or



Educated Tourist (3 islands), 2005, glazed paper clay and decals, 42 x 28 x 2 cm.

whatever they want. Now that's a very English notion. And what we are asking for is recognition of a Māori notion that is really different from that.

The Māori notion is much more about the rights you have – having been there for many, many generations (in many cases that's many, many, many hundreds of years) – as something that was given to you originally by the gods. And you have a responsibility to maintain that area intact for the following generations. So the notion of you having something that you control as a commodity is just not there. At all.¹⁷

My perspective of land sits firmly in the Māori world. I feel absolute despair about our present laws surrounding who can purchase it and I strongly believe that you must either be born here, or have permanent residency and be committed to our country, to be able to buy land here. Our land is not a souvenir which can be cut up and sold to tourists and movie stars. But at the moment this is what is happening. Aotearoa is now a place where land is often too expensive for the people who live here.

Māori have not traditionally made ceramics, so there are no gender rules or regulations projected onto the material. "Earth and fire feature prominently in our cosmological narratives. Hine Ahu One, the first woman, was made from the earth. Thus the manipulation of clay can be thought of as a creative process that invests earth with life."¹⁸

Ceramic objects arrived in Aotearoa with the colonisers and have played a very important part in the life of all New Zealanders. There is an obvious connection with the industry of mass



Wicked Brownie (2 islands), 2005, glazed paper clay, 82 x 48 x 6 cm.

production. Ceramics has an extremely long and sometimes contentious history which I feel proud to be a part of. Although historically located in the craft realm it has many histories associated with many movements. In the postmodernist context it has been able to fully stand in many places. I'm not surprised I chose this material to work with as it can also fall 'in-between' craft and art. Clay holds a memory and I believe the earth also holds memories. There is also an issue of value associated with ceramics.

Wicked Brownie (see previous page) is a personal narrative about being white on the outside and brown on the inside. I was once introduced this way by one of my Māori language teachers. I had mixed feelings at the time. The work speaks about the consumption of our land, both past and present. It is created out of white paper clay and shaped in the form of the North and South Islands and references a cake/baking tin. I filled the forms with my "Wicked Brownie" recipe and baked them in the oven. I provided 70s-like recipe cards, so I could share my "Wicked Brownie" with everyone.

This artwork unexpectedly turned into an interactive piece. I had cut up the brownie and taken out small pieces to reveal the dark, rich centre, filled with pieces of white chocolate. A knife was found and people started consuming the brownie. Some people took a small amount; others lingered and filled themselves with as much as they could. Some had no respect for the fact that it was an artwork and became rough; while others straightened the islands and put them back in their correct positions. The vessels were left empty with a few crumbs remaining. All gone.

Inheritance (see next page) was an installation set up in a symmetrical space. You were greeted with lots of different smells of baking and cooking and could enter or walk around a horseshoe-shaped counter/kitchen bench with a hot red top. Once again most of the objects and food were shaped like the North and South Islands and were placed on top of the bench. All the ceramic forms were white and made of either white clay or paper clay. Chocolate afghans and shortbread rested on wire baking racks. Mixing cups were stamped with measurement amounts relating to amounts of Māori blood in my grandmother, father and me. Stainless steel cookie cutters, a teapot with a Kiwiana cosy and mugs pretending to be enamel sat next to a sugar bowl and milk jug. There were two plates covered with pikelets and dishes containing butter and jam. Rēwena Parāoa (Potato Bread) had been sliced up ready to consume. One casserole dish contained Watties peas, the other a hearty beef stew. Tinned fruit salad and green jelly filled two inverted vessels.

Two hundred and ninety six white ceramic re-appropriated Hei Tiki were hung in symmetrical patterns on the wall behind the back of the counter/bench. In my childhood the plastic Hei Tiki was a strong cultural signifier for me and a lot of other Māori. Cultural identification through appropriated souvenirs was part of my cultural inheritance. Growing up away from iwi and hapū in a predominately Pākehā reality I clung to anything that was visibly Māori. Hei Tiki are taonga (treasures) and as a child and teenager I had no awareness that their true meaning had been misrepresented and abused for commercial gain. It is highly offensive and insensitive to see them on teatowels and on the end of salad servers. Those who are aware of tikanga Māori will understand the tapu and noa implications. Kiwiana can sometimes be extremely dodgy.

I want to create work which opens up, is layered and is able to be read in several ways. Irony and humour, in my opinion, often make questions and statements about matters which are uncomfortable and possibly confronting, more palatable.

I used to think of my identity as a crack, an in-between space, a place of non-belonging, but I don't see it like that any longer. I decided that one plus one equals three. I am more than the sum of my parts. At the moment I am privileging my Māori identity as I have been well educated in the Pākehā world and have a lot more to learn in the Māori world. Due to ongoing Māori cultural recovery I understand and accept that some Māori view the third space as further assimilation and so they reject this. I am both Māori and Pākehā and must be both. It is my genetic inheritance and I believe I am hard-wired in a most unique way. When I visualise my dual identity I see myself with my feet firmly planted in Aotearoa. I am aware that my ancestors' bones are beneath me and have been here for many, many hundreds of years. I see reference points into both the Māori and Pākehā worlds. This means I choose what I take from each culture. These reference points are fluid and change as I grow. I belong to both cultures and I have a choice about what I want to align myself with and what I don't. There are aspects of both cultures which I feel very connected with and aspects of both which I don't relate to at all. It's an 'and/and' position. It could be a lonely position, but I can accept this if it means staying in integrity with myself. I don't have a label for this position. I'm interested in building bridges within and without.



Inheritance, 2005, installation view with kitchenware and ceramic pieces.



Re-appropriated Hei Tiki, 2005, glazed and unglazed paper clay, each 6 x 4 cm.

- 1 Excerpt from song "Barefoot Days" by The Keys, 1947.
- 2 Excerpt from song "Song Sung Blue" by Neil Diamond, 1972.
- 3 Excerpt from song "Brand New Day" by Van Morrison, 1969.
- 4 Excerpt from song "Constellations" by Jack Johnson, 2004.
- 5 Excerpt from song "Brand New Day" by Van Morrison, 1969.
- 6 C Archie, *Skin to Skin: Intimate, True stories of Māori-Pakeha Relationships* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 20.
- 7 Excerpt from song "It's All Understood" by Jack Johnson, 2000.
- 8 Excerpt from Māori waiata "Hoki Mai E Tama Ma".
- 9 Excerpt from song "Ten Guitars" by Engelburt Humperdinck, 1967.
- 10 Excerpt from waiata "Aue Rona".
- 11 Excerpt from song "When I See You Smile" by Bic Runga, 2002.
- 12 Excerpt from waiata "Ko Tenei Te Po".
- 13 W Ihimaera (ed.), *Te Ao Marama 2: Regaining Aotearoa: Maori Writers Speak Out* (Auckland: Reed, 1993), 348-349.
- 14 B Ashcroft, G Griffiths, G and H Tiffin (eds). *Post Colonial Studies: The Key Concepts* (London: Routledge, 1995), 58.
- 15 Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonising Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples* (Dunedin: University of Otago Press, 2001), 142.
- 16 Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual culture* (London: Routledge, 2000), 8.
- 17 D Slack, *Civil War: {... & other optimistic predictions} where is New Zealand going?* (Auckland: Penguin, 2005), 25-26.
- 18 S Adsett, C Whiting and W Ihimaera (eds), *Mataroa: The Living Face* (Auckland: Bateman, 1996), 92.

Lee Houlihan is a practicing artist who predominantly works with clay. She exhibits regularly after completing her four-year Bachelor of Fine Arts at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in 2005. She currently resides on the Otago Peninsula.



1. *Rocks* (detail), 2006, textiles, 30 x 60 cm.*



2. *Interventions White* (detail), 2006, textiles, 110 x 145 cm.

“SURFACE DISTURBANCE”

Jenny Bain

I walk in the forest listening to the stillness, feeling the silence which is broken only by the sighing of the wind as it travels through the trees. It seems to come from the mountains and you can hear it coming long before it reaches you. The undulations and scarring of the land are hidden beneath the layer of green provided by the trees. But, boulders, rocks and miniature mountains of gravel do emerge in a surreal scarred landscape to expose the mining that took place over one hundred years ago.

I stoop and pick up a stone, it gleams white with flecks of colour, and I wonder if it is gold-bearing quartz thrown up by volcanic activity around a hundred and thirty million years ago, or were land masses thrust upward as a result of tectonic plates colliding? I collect more stones; they are beautiful and I admire them for their shape and colour. They act as resources for my studio work and as an inspiration to me. Having read about the mining activity in the area of Central Otago (for example in *Gold Trails of Central Otago*) – where I collect most of my stones – and having visited mining sites there, I cannot help but wonder whether my desire to collect is comparable to that of those whose need to accumulate disturbed the land so long ago?

Mining

Relics of the gold mining era still remain in isolated little pockets of the New Zealand countryside, and Naseby is the area to which I refer specifically in this work of and about surface disturbance. Early photographs from the Hocken Library show this part of the country as it was after mining ceased. It was barren and covered in rubble, devoid of any growth and looking like a scene of desolation. This land is now forested and clothed in green as nature claws back what once was hers.

One can only imagine the hardships that people must have experienced when gold was first discovered in the area in 1863. The local cemeteries tell stories of how difficult life was with many records of children and adults not surviving the rigorous and difficult conditions of life in the goldfields. *Gold Trails of Central Otago* explains that no sensational discoveries of gold were made in the Maniototo region, although more than five thousand people were working in the Hogburn Gully soon after the first discoveries were made there.¹

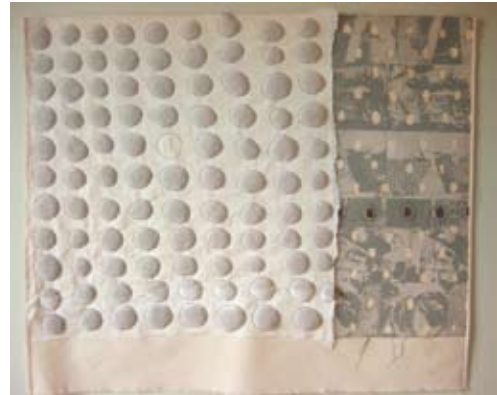
Although the focus of my attention has mainly been the Hogburn Gully area, I have also visited Macraes Mining at Hyde where interesting relics of past mining are still evident. This includes a stamping battery where the gold-bearing quartz was crushed to extrude the gold, as is still done today although using very different methods than in the past. The mine here today is open-cast, with work spread over an area of twenty-five kilometres. It is the largest hole in New Zealand, where

work continues twenty-four hours a day for seven days a week all year round, processing more than five million tons of ore per year to retrieve a single barrel of gold.

Collecting

The stones that I have selected from the Hogburn Gully area attract me because of their shape and colour. But because I have selected them they no longer function as ordinary stones as I have given them a different kind of status by isolating them from their environment. They have become cultural objects through my intervention. I line them up on the fence so that I can admire them. They become objects pure and simple, divested of their original context, abstracted from any practical function, and thus they take on a strictly subjective status. They are the desired.² Jean Baudrillard discusses 'desire' as a driving force in our acts of collecting. This desire never ceases since a collection is never complete. The desired objects thus collected share a destiny and this is to be the focus of our need to collect. My stones might once have been used for roading material, crushed as mining material or simply laid as nature had left them in the veld. But now, they are no longer defined by those functions and have become collected objects. Is there a difference between collecting and accumulating?

Accumulation suggests stashing items away or stockpiling and one reference in the *New Collins Concise English Dictionary* defines accumulation as "finance, the continuous growth of capital by retention of interest or earning"³ – stashing or stockpiling again. Of course, accumulations are not always about wealth, are not necessarily on display, and can be quite secretive.



3. *Surface Disturbance*, 2006, textiles, 80 x 95 cm.



4. *Collected*, 2006, textiles, 100 x 145 cm.



5. *Collected Grey*, 2006 textiles, 75 x 90 cm.

Collecting on the other hand is more about the exchange value of the object and also about the social ritual of display.⁴ What makes a collection transcend mere accumulation is not only the fact of it being culturally complex but also its incompleteness, that it lacks something. It always needs that extra special piece to make it complete.

If a collection has intrinsic value associated with culture and the social ritual of display, how can an accumulation be valued? Can quality be activated by quantity? If there is a large amount of something does that make it more valuable? There are also questions to be asked about the value of commodities. If America, for example, wants to accumulate all the oil resources in the world, that desire is not only associated with accumulation but with the commodity value of oil. If an individual wants to accumulate all the known items of a particular type, that drive may also be connected to the commodity value of the collection. An example close to my personal act of collecting is Australian Peter Spearitt's extensive and valuable collection of items featuring the Sydney Harbour Bridge.⁵

Collecting and accumulating can become obsessive and I wonder why. Is this to do with wealth and power or is it a fear of letting go and releasing ownership?

Cloth

My fascination and passion for cloth continues because I love the way it can be manipulated. It folds, joins, dyes, prints, and secretly seduces because it alludes to the body. "It can be shaped beyond the boundaries of origin and shifts from the potential to an actuality that has a myriad of shapes and a myriad of ways of moving, responding to the action of the individual who manipulates it."⁶

Cloth has always provided shelter and protection and has been exchange value for goods. There is a sense of history inherent in the warp and weft of cloth. It has served as adornment and sensual delight, as a symbol of wealth and power. For my new work, I have chosen the simplicity of canvas and its relationship to the tent.

I make this work about surface disturbance in relation to the land. I record evidence of disturbances on the surface of canvas cloth. I work in layers, each one recording information about the land in some way. The cloth layers become a metaphor for accumulation and for human activity. I make cloth stones and, surprisingly, it has become almost an obsession to accumulate them. I must make more, there are never enough. I mold the cloth over the stones with silicone so that the form is retained. *Rocks* (detail: image 1) is part of this obsessive work, with the whole comprising almost three hundred cloth stones. Some of these elements remain on the floor, while a larger proportion of them adhere to the gallery wall. The deceptively simple placement of rocks on a gallery wall is a direct reference to the landscape and questions the disturbances that occur through the obsessiveness of accumulation.

I cut, stitch, and use chemicals to burn out areas of cloth. The surfaces become raised as I cut behind a layer, stuffing the back of the work. The implications of accumulation and surface disturbance are considered and communicated through repetition of image and the minimal use of colour. The canvas in the work *Collected* (image 4) is covered with a series of marks similar to drawn

lines, and is divided into five sections. On the first of these, fine threads are interspersed through the surface of the cloth. The next area is disturbed by a series of deliberate cuts, some of which reveal dark interiors among a jumble of similarly dark threads. On the third section, larger holes which are raw around the edges as a result of chemical burnout expose the dark cloth underneath, while a repetitive series of raised bubble-like white extrusions emerge over the cloth surface on the fourth section of the work. Finally these raised bubbles repeat off the cloth and onto the wall surface, reflecting not only the order of collecting and disturbing but also the intrusive results of human intervention on the land.

When I go back to the Hogburn Gully, I rejoice that it is now undisturbed, covered again with a gentle mantle of vegetation, and I listen to the wind sighing through the trees. I will continue with this work because it is my language.

* All artworks by the author and all photographs of artworks by Penny Smith.

- 1 JA Wood, *Gold Trails of Central Otago* (Auckland: AH and AW Reed, 1990).
- 2 See Jean Baudrillard, *The Systems of Collecting: The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994).
- 3 *New Collins Concise English Dictionary* (Glasgow: Collins, 1991).
- 4 See Jean Baudrillard, *The Systems of Collecting: The Cultures of Collecting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1994).
- 5 See Alex Landrigan, "The Majesty: Anatomy of a Collection", *Interior*, 2 (1), 1998: 46-48.
- 6 Mildred Constantine and Laurel Reuter; *John Ruskin Quotations: The Whole Cloth* (New York & London: Monacelli Press, 1997).

Jenny Bain is a textile artist who exhibits regularly in New Zealand and abroad. She is a senior lecturer in Textiles at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin; and has worked for many years to promote the textile arts in her country and internationally. "Surface Disturbance" was exhibited at the Peter Rae Gallery in Dunedin during 2006.

ON HANGING “WAR AND PEACE”

Peter Stupples

Curating an art exhibition is like arranging a dinner party. However carefully we prepare the guest list we can never be sure that everyone will have an enjoyable time. We may look in a variety of cookbooks, but are invariably circumscribed by the ingredients available. Are we going to make the best we can of what is in the cupboard – the chance tins, packets and frozen meat from shopping sprees that did not exactly have this party in mind? Or are we going to browse the expensive delicatessens for special treats that will blow the budget for weeks ahead? There will always be those who despise our offerings, not to our face, of course, blaming our parsimony, our poor choice, our extravagance, our failure of nerve, our absence of taste. Even so we will have provided a rich experience for our guests, an experience they will be able to relish among themselves for weeks to come. We will have given them the opportunity to point out to each other our almost infinite errors of judgement and to elaborate how they could have done so much better, whilst offering us the bland smile of guarded praise our impertinence deserves.

As there are dinner parties and dinner parties, so there are exhibitions and exhibitions. There will be different motives behind a dealer show and a retrospective at a public institution. The dealers want to sell, to talk up the value and significance of their product. They invite potential buyers, clients not only with an interest, but with the economic wherewithal to satisfy their urge to collect, to register their place in the social hierarchy – intelligent, discerning, wise and perspicacious, knowing a good thing when they see one, with an uncanny ability to spot the rising star. The retrospective will have been chosen with considerable care, rewarding an acknowledged achiever. No need to sell, but to cement a reputation, to secure a place in the canon. Invitations will go to those who have already helped to elevate the reputation of others, the academics, the civic dignitaries. The only concern here is to make sure that there is enough ‘good’ material on display to make the occasion an academic triumph and not an embarrassing flop, redounding not so much on the artist as on the head of the hapless curator.

The hang of the permanent collection of a public institution is much more problematic for the curator. There is something daunting about the very concept of a ‘permanent’ collection, a collection put together over a long period of time, by committees with differing objectives, with varying degrees of sponsorship, with the serendipity of bequests and gifts, with tastes changing with the speed of fashion. It is possible to play safe, to show a representative collection of the ‘best’ works in chronological order or grouped by genre, and then left to hang in these frozen associations for

decades. The less well-known works, and those about which the gallery staff may well be frankly ashamed, will lie entombed in storage until some maverick director should be possessed by a fever of deaccession, for which s/he will be blamed by succeeding generations. When Ned Rifkin was director of the High Museum of Art in Atlanta, Georgia (he is currently director of the Hirshhorn in Washington, D.C.), he likened the historical role of museums in our culture to that of a word processor offering the user but two options – 'save' and 'display'.¹

At the beginning of the twenty-first century permanent collections suffer from irrelevance in the lives of most of the citizens. They belong to a past era, when city or national fathers knew what art was, and collected those objects that were the exemplars of style, of skill, of cultural value, of historical significance, of educative gravitas. Like the town hall and the library, the art gallery was a repository of civic virtue and public good, where the treasures collected in the course of political and mercantile enterprise could be displayed like trophies, marks of wealth, success, and accolades of culture.

In the global village the civic art gallery must reinvent itself, write a new mission statement, give value for money to the rate payers, discover for itself a reason to be amongst citizens sated with visual imagery and aural distraction. The traditional audience has passed into the fading shadow-world of old age. The young do not hold the values of their elders in reverential awe. The only constant in the swirl of colour and noise in the global market place is change. 'Permanence' has lost all meaning.

Whilst 'save' and 'display' is still the mission for the permanent collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, the challenges of the new age are being faced with the reinterpretation of these catch cries. 'Saving' is not mothballing, but cleaning, conserving, restoring. 'Display' now has the emphasis on 'play'.

The gallery has replaced the permanent hang by a kaleidoscope of ever changing exhibitions, the longest on show for a year, but the majority lasting only months. The permanent collection never occupies more than half of the space, and for most of the year somewhat less. Contemporary art, the art of the recently past, clustered about themes created by curators often from other galleries, is the order of the day – travelling exhibitions, assembled with limited objectives, yet also enlarging the imaginative world of an audience that expects novelty, bringing the art of cultures often not traditionally regarded as worthy of a permanent collection, delighting the teachers accompanying parties of school children clutching their project boards, the passing tourist, the jaded on gloomy days, and a few of the elders able to luxuriate in the eccentricity of the geriatric.

Certainly from 1998 there has been a clear and articulated² shift of policy to embrace postmodern joy in variety, to break up the canonised ranks of the permanent collection, to disperse their presentation, to endow them with refreshed significances, to disembody them from chronology and genre, to tell, in new ways, the interesting history of the collection itself, but to tell contemporary stories, stories of uncanny juxtapositions that disinhibit previously frozen relationships. At the same time, in our dash to live, to give us pause, should we care to take it, to reflect.

In 2004 I was commissioned to curate an exhibition from the permanent collection along the line of refreshment. I moved with caution and a conscious conservatism that, in retrospect, seems like

retro-curating. The result was “Sites for the Eyes: European Landscapes in the Permanent Collection of the Dunedin Public Art Gallery”. Yet there were two aspects of this show that palely reflected the curatorial revolution made famous by Fred Wilson with his exhibition “Mining the Museum” for the Maryland Historical Society in Baltimore in 1992.³ There Wilson rearranged the permanent collection to highlight the role of coloured Americans depicted by white artists in a white colony that later became a somewhat unwilling signatory to the Declaration of Independence. My aim was to arrange an exhibition so as to bring forward ‘landscape’ in works that were traditionally accredited to another genre, where the landscape had been overlooked by the emphasis on some other aspect of the subject – religious narrative, everyday life, architecture, or stylistic bravura. This repositioning of the eye was assisted, some would even say highjacked, by the captions that went with each work – ‘Celestial Lightscape’, ‘Mythoscape’, ‘Tamed Wilderscape’, each one differently emphasising aspects of an image. In their waywardness the captions offered some new, verbal dimension to images that, in some cases, had been on display so long that, through overfamiliarity, their visual impact had faded to that of the electric sockets on the wall.

In 2005 I planned an exhibition to replace “Sites for the Eyes” and its successor, a show of historical Japanese arts and crafts. Whilst preparing the exhibition of landscapes, I was aware that there was another show in storage waiting to be (dis)played. I came across a large number of



Dunedin Public Art Gallery, “War and Peace”, including Peter Roche’s *Female Sentry* (1990), photograph: the author:

images of conflict, but, by contrast, an even more plentiful array of scenes of peace and tranquillity. The theme itself was given to me by an engraving by Agostino Carracci, showing Mars, the youthful God of War, being somewhat contemptuously dismissed from the presence of Peace and Plenty by the armed wisdom of Minerva. Whereas "Sites for the Eyes" had been posited on a traditional genre of Western art history, "War and Peace" would be a more overtly thematic show. Here prints and paintings would hang alongside each other justified by a curatorial logic that defied the genres. Newspaper cartoons would be found with landscapes, the high with the low. The lines of 'pictures' would be punctuated by sculpture.

There were a number of aspects to the curatorial logic behind this show. To satisfy the desire for order it was designed in four sections; three chronological - older prints and drawings, material related to the First World War, and images referring to the Second. The fourth section was a well of 'peace', dominated by scenes of tranquillity – landscapes, still-lives, formal geometric abstracts. Yet this order was constantly interrupted, making it elusive. Two sculptures by Peter Roche – *Male Sentry* and *Female Sentry* (both 1990), harshly triangular painted steel faces, blared discordantly and



Dunedin Public Art Gallery, "War and Peace" including David Armitage's *The Wrestlers* (1967) and Raoul Bigazzi's *The Wrestlers* (c. 1928), photograph: the author:

flashed lights when any visitor broke a laser beam, creating a constant, but irregular, mayhem of alarm and anxiety. One half gallery was given over to Andrew Drummond's installation entitled *Sentinel* (1984), where an enigmatic figure creeps away from a forest of blasted trees, not unlike those shelled stumps among the puddled moonscape of Paul Nash's *Mudheaps after Shelling* (1917-18) in the neighbouring gallery.

My major curatorial intervention was to posit between the 'War' and the 'Peace' the uneasy status of the 'sentry/sentinel':

SENTRIES

Sentries guard the good life,
The land, the larder, laughter.
Sentries are on watch
For signs and shadows,
The forerunners of death.
Sentries give warning,
Point the way to safety,
Prepare to defend their own.

In addition to these three 'subjects' – war, peace, and watchfulness – threaded through the exhibition were images in which the imagination of the visitor was more stretched to find associations. One wall displayed Stanley Hayter's etching and lithograph of *Angels Wrestling* (1950), David Armitage's brutal painting of *The Wrestlers* (1967) and Barry Cleavin's complex etching of *Heroic Torsoes Attempting Resurrection* (1966), before which Raoul Bigazzi's carrara marble *The Wrestlers* flexed their muscles on the gallery floor. Elsewhere were images of broken relationships, of a marriage stretched with the bitter tensions of 'permanence'.⁴

The show was hung almost regardless of 'quality'. Thematic hangs are more democratic than the permanent display of the masterpiece. There is always a reason for a less aesthetically pleasing piece to be in a collection. That reason often has a story behind it that says something – more or less unflattering – about the collectors. I chose to bring out of the shadows of storage F Pearse's *Nurse Cavell Going to Her Execution* (1918) and Robert Hawcridge's *Bugler at Gallipoli* (1919). Both are scarcely what might be called 'gallery' pieces, but they have interesting stories to tell, both historical and artistic, and have proved of great fascination to visitors.

It was my curatorial intention to give those visitors a multiple experience: a chronological history of war; an opportunity to compare images of violence with those of peace and plenty, to identify for themselves the shifting emphasis on the romance and heroism of conflict and the variety of pleasures of leisure and work, the paradoxical aspects of the Christian story of death and redemption, the male inclined to fight and the female to nurture, and yet other associations for the visitors freely to create in their own imaginations. In this respect it was important there was no catalogue essay to present potted pointers to superficial 'meanings'.

It was also my intention to say something about the collection itself – the heterogeneous nature of the art in storage. The permanent collection says something about the history of the city of Dunedin, the culture of the Europeans in the south of the South Island of New Zealand, but also something about what they share with other settler collections around the former outposts of the British Empire, an empire carved out of the world by violence in the name of peaceful exploitation and Christian civilisation. The richness and paucity of the collection reflects its randomness, its imperial origins, its unwillingness to come face to face with its location in the South Pacific. This helter-skelter of images reflects the patchwork of our past, but above all highlights the particular way the acquisitions committees saw their brief – to adhere to Europe, to the canon of Western art, to wars and conflicts being waged far away, to turn a blind eye to conflicts close to home – there are no images of the nineteenth-century New Zealand Land Wars, of strikes and local social confrontations.

In *Art and the Power of Placement*⁵ Victoria Newhouse makes much of the ways in which curators may effect an aesthetic appreciation of art. She compares various displays of the same travelling exhibition, “Egypt in the Age of the Pyramids”, shown in three different locations in 1999-2000. She contrasts the theatrical settings of the pieces in Paris to resemble the tombs in which the objects were found, whereas at the Met in New York Dorothea Arnold singled out objects for aesthetic attention, emphasising the qualities of the few and the socially mundane character of the many. In both cases, however, the curator attempted a decorative hang, though their intentions were different.

In his positive review of Newhouse’s book Richard Dorment⁶ praises both the decorative hang and the chronological display, but castigates what he calls “hard-core thematic presentations” – “about five years ago a fad for thematic hanging swept through the museum world like a virus.”⁷ His main complaint is that “once a museum places a picture in a particular setting it can be very difficult to see it in a different way.”⁸ He goes on to point out, a little nostalgically, that in his opinion Jackson Pollock’s paintings looked superb either in the artist’s original studio, where they filled the space, or in the collector Ben Heller’s apartment in New York in the 1960s, where they enclosed the lounge and could be seen to intimate advantage. These were what might be called site-specific hangs, with an emphasis on their aesthetic preciousness or their fashionable and decorative time-specific ‘rightness’. I have no doubt that, in one sense, both Dorment and Newhouse are right. In those settings the paintings may well have been arresting, offering a particular visual delectation that it would never again be possible to capture. But equally, I would argue, those same works may be placed to different advantage in different settings with different company: the virtues of the one do not preclude the virtues of the other.

Are works of art always to be seen only in one setting, the same works in the same place with the same lighting and same company, offering us a singular way of being seen, their potential significance slowly atrophied by reverence? Any collection does a disservice to its holdings by incarcerating images in a prison house of the permanent hang.

The virtue of the thematic exhibition, it seems to me, is to be able to refresh our sight of art, to reinvigorate images by re-presentation in fresh company and novel contexts. ‘Thematic’ does not

mean random, but the telling of a story, or, in the case of "War and Peace", a variety of interconnected stories, stories that will be recreated in new ways by each and every visitor. Curatorial intentions there may be, but they will always be ignored, misunderstood, randomly selected. In particular those curatorial intentions should open up possibilities of seeing, rather than closing them down. The sensitivity that Dorment demands of a curator, quite rightly, is not undervalued by the thematic hang, but directed towards different, less historically hackneyed ends.

The day of the permanently hung permanent collection is past. *Vive la différence!*

- 1 Quoted in Judith Stein, "Sins of Omission: Fred Wilson's *Mining the Museum*", *Art in America*, 81 (October 1993), 110.
- 2 Foreshadowed in a speech by Priscilla Pitts on her appointment as gallery director in 1998.
- 3 See Stein (1993), 110-115.
- 4 These personal 'wars' were illustrated with three 1980 etchings by Jeffrey Harris, *What a Fool*, *The Storm* and *Next to Nothing*, and Bryan James's coloured woodblock print *The Anniversary* (1974).
- 5 Victoria Newhouse, *Art and the Power of Placement* (New York: Monacelli Press, 2005).
- 6 Richard Dorment, "On Hanging", *New York Review of Books* (September 22, 2005), 16-20.
- 7 Dorment (2005), 16.
- 8 Op.cit.

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Scott Eady, "The World Keeps Turning", 2006, Mary Newton Gallery, Wellington (image courtesy of the artist).



Scott Eady, from the exhibition entitled "Big Time", 2005 (image courtesy of the artist).

MAMMA DON'T LET YOUR BABIES GROW UP TO BE COWBOYS

Michele Beevors

In the beginning of the Western movie *The Searchers* (1956), John Wayne (Ethan) meanders in inimitable Wayne stagger mode towards the open doorway of the blacked-out homestead. The scene is framed by the doorway, the scene of the return to the maternal home. It is announced off screen "Ethan is home". The external world – the desert, the prairie, culture, war, the domain of men – all lie outside, in the light-filled world of technicolour, while the family and the domestic are reserved for the dark. But, not for long. The entire film revolves around the pursuit of and revenge for the kidnapping of Ethan's nieces and the murder of the rest of his family. The movie hinges on Ethan's anxiety over the girls' virginity and illustrates his relentless pursuit of a moralistic Christian revenge. In the end Ethan of course loses on all counts as one of the girls dies and the other refuses to leave her new clan.

This movie is typical of the right-wing Wayne that we all know. But there is another Wayne, and this one has a soft side. The western *Hondo* (1953) begins in the same way. Wayne (Hondo Lane) also swaggers up to the homestead. A woman and her young son await the return of her husband. Wayne the stranger is at first a threat to the young woman in the middle of the prairie (more of a threat than the renegade Indians, I would say), but he begins to win her trust by helping around the homestead with chores. Hondo knows that the Husband will not return, because he has killed him, and sets to making amends. The axe needs sharpening, the animals need to be moved to the barn, the child needs to be taught to swim. *Hondo* presents us with a softer side of Wayne as a domestic hero, instead of the regular kind that he usually plays. The domestic hero mashes the potatoes, teaches and entertains the children, and hangs out the washing. He sets things to right and admits his faults (something that *Hondo* has to do). He is honest as the day is long, and he is above all a gentleman.

In Scott Eady's recent show at the Mary Newton Gallery entitled "The World Keeps Turning" (2006), the idea of the domestic hero was explored. Eady literally casts himself as Wayne. There he is shooting down the moon, serving up mashed potatoes, and having the missus serenaded with a bagpipe: a superhero with a tea towel.

Eady and I have been having an ongoing conversation about the significance and meaning of John Wayne. This conversation includes his right-wing politics and speculations on the sort of man that he necessarily had to be in order to have been able to play the roles he had with that face and his wooden style of acting – without irony and with an utter conviction that America was the greatest

nation on earth, and that he (Wayne) could conquer the west single-handedly. It is interesting to note that of all the TV programmes that Wayne did guest slots on he always played himself. (As if there was another self that was possible.)

It turns out that – right here in Dunedin – one can buy over the counter replica Winchester rifles just like the one Wayne used in *Hondo*. This seems curious to me: who would want one and why? Eady says there are a number of gun clubs and a lot of fans, some of whom get dressed up as cowboys. “They look like inbreeds in cowboy outfits” he says. Eady’s “Cowboy” doesn’t look quite right either as he is too slight, not tall enough, although in Wayne clobber. The “Cowboy” is a combination cast from the artist’s features and from those of a shop mannequin. As a cowboy Eady seems uncomfortable in his skin, trying to fill a role that was always going to be too big. The reasons for his interest in Wayne and cowboys in general relates to his feelings about family, and attempting to answer some questions about what it means to be a man in 2006.

Before turning to the questions raised by putting oneself into the shoes of such a giant as Wayne, I want to describe some of the other elements in the show. Alongside the Eady/Wayne cowboy figure there is a vinyl moon, some digital photographs (scenes not from the movie but from real life – family snapshots in black and white – mashing the potatoes, doing the dishes, a bloody finger, a child’s grumbling tummy) and some mock paraphernalia from the movie. Eady showed me some images captured from *Hondo*. We discussed the object in one of the images and we could not decide what it was. It looked like a saw-horse, only we were convinced it wouldn’t work as such because it had no bracing. Maybe it was the post where the horses were tied, but this wouldn’t work either because – as Eady pointed out – any horse would easily pull it over. It looks like a stick drawing of a horse. It is something that looks authentic or rustic even, but has no other purpose than to add interest to the scene. If one watches the movie *Hondo* in black and white, even though it was filmed in glorious colour and on special 3D cameras, the movie becomes truly spatial, as the placement of objects such as this horse object creates the illusion of spatiality within the scenes. There is a foreground, middle-ground (this is the important part) and a background, and the stick horse is one of the devices used to allude to a three-dimensional space. It acts to separate the foreground and background and to create distance in the middle-ground, while usually the space movies inhabit is very shallow.

One starts to notice other inconsistencies. These anomalies are manifest as sculptural elements and so much so, that they become integral to an understanding of Eady’s intentions.

Another set of props or objects which Eady recreates are the cans of beans that rest on the ‘fibreglass stick horse’ object and litter the floor of the gallery. The beans reference art history in a way (Jasper Johns ale cans cast in bronze half empty and half full at the same time). But more to the point, they also reference every western from *Blazing Saddles* (1974) to *How the West was Won* (1962). Eady has the cans rolled out of sheet bronze (soldered together and all shiny) but semi-distressed as all but one is shot full of holes. The moon is slightly deflated and all but one of the cans of baked beans have been used, while only one shot remains in the gun holster. All else has been wasted on the cans.

This show and everything in it described a masculinity completely proscribed by a culture now almost solely represented through the screen. Is this so different than the weekend re-enactment brigade who meets in the fields of America to play out scenes of the Civil War; or in basements for Dungeons and Dragons; or that queue standing for miles, day after day, to ride the *Pirates of the Caribbean* ride at Disneyland?

And what could the spectre of John Wayne signify today? Right-wing politics aside and racism and sexism stripped away, what possible significance do the images and the stereotype carry? Is it simply that such stereotypes provide concrete examples of how to live one's life – provided, of course, that one is big enough, strong enough, and white enough to meet any enemy head on? Do such stereotypes enable us to see things simply as good and evil, black and white, and to be able to say that the government (and right and God) are on our side? Is it simply that we now long for a less complicated time? In the face of undeniable proof that governments lie, do these stereotypes help us to believe in a search for a time when one man could make a difference? If John Wayne signifies anything today he stands for man in control of his own destiny. In every single movie he portrayed this character, and even if that character died in the end – as in *The Sands of Iwo Jima* (1949) – he chose that route for himself, unflinchingly and uncompromisingly and with a cigarette hanging from his lips. Whatever his decision, he stuck by it. In the face of every possible threat and behind every possible decision was self-belief. Every behaviour manifested the fact of his testosterone and its acting out. Wayne acted one line and one line only, "I am a man", again and again.

In Eady's work there is a general interest in the idea of the reconstitution and reflection of the self through the mediated art object. Guns, power tools, trucks, and now John Wayne, is added to the list of objects that make a man. If the car can be seen as the perfect extension of masculinity; my car (like my leg) by extension becomes my rifle, my bullet hole, my moon (because I cannot only see it but I can shoot it down). Such objects help to put man back in the centre of his own universe (having been knocked off his pedestal firstly by waves of feminism and then by creeping self-doubt about the worth of his testosterone fuelled escapades). Eady re-enacts these escapades of domination and self-control with more than a little irony.

This idea of control speaks most clearly through the fetishisation of finish. Since the world seems hopelessly out of control, the artist turns to the things that can be controlled: technique and finish. As if the hand of God fashioned a can of beans, every blemish on its surface is to be obliterated by the artist's hand, and then and only then will it be semi-distressed to the extent of also obliterating the final traces of the hand-made. For, in the construction of the objects the hand of the artist is nowhere to be seen. The objects are seamless, then distressed. Eady's moon has been lassoed and hauled in like the brilliant scene in *The Misfits* (1961), where Gable and Clift rope and tether the wild horses from the back of a utility after a light plane has herded them out of the valley of safety. Eady's moon seems as effortless as this, an amazing feat, made poignant because the characters find themselves redundant, a dying breed and doubly so because *The Misfits* signals the beginning of the end of Hollywood's love affair with the cowboy.

But, in this world of reflection of 'self as perfection', some of the cracks in the façade seem to show through, cracks that one cannot see on the surface. These cracks relate to my idea of the 'fallible masculine'. Eady's moon is slightly deflated, and the fake bronze bean cans are semi-distressed like the Wayne clobber. The rough and rustic construction of the post gives way to a reading of the material as veneer. Wood is a material that is readily available but is cast in fibreglass by Eady to look like wood. This object lives in the netherworld of references and is neither real nor a fake of a movie prop (where it would be made in Styrofoam and not in a more permanent material like fibreglass). It deflects or rather reflects the 'something-not-quite-rightness' about the perfect surface and suddenly – because everything is where it should be – one looks for faults and meaning then emerges from the over-all construction of the 'self as veneer'. The fallible masculine is located somewhere between the new age guy and the metrosexual. What separates Eady from them is self-doubt in the reflected image of his perfection. That doubt drives Eady to obliterate the marks of his own hand and to recreate movie props as real objects.

Eady's work constantly asks us to examine the stereotypes of masculinity and find them silly. Images of him wearing a hard hat and holding a pair of large bolt cutters and a nail gun; or dressed in chaps with a chainsaw in tow – from the exhibition "Big Time" – make a mockery of such stereotypes as his slight frame and the extreme slant of the image make him seem far from imposing, as he grins out at us and poses for the camera. This is the 'fallible masculine' and it is equally as constructed as superman, a cowboy, or an Elvis impersonator. Eady's quest is to describe masculinity at a time when the family man seems to be unfashionable in the era of the scruffy metrosexual. The highly sophisticated urban metrosexual has been even further removed from his country cousins and the gulf between the Urbanite and the Southern Man has become a chasm so deep that no four-wheel drive will cope with it. This chasm is only bridged by football, with all its rituals of mateship intact.

It seems more than likely that the objects Eady produces raise these issues only to dismiss them as little jokes. Life – like art – is much more complicated than it was for John Wayne.

FILMOGRAPHY:

Blazing Saddles (Mel Brooks, 1974) Story: Andrew Bergman, Screen: Mel Brooks, Warner Bros.

Hondo (John Farrow, 1953) Story: Louis L'Amour, Screen: James Edward Grant, Warner Vision, Dual Strip 3D.

How the West was Won (John Ford & Henry Hathaway, 1962) James R Webb, Metro Goldwyn Mayer.

The Misfits (John Houston, 1953) Screenplay: Arthur Miller.

The Sands of Iwa Jima (Allan Dwan 1949) Screenplay: Harry Brown, James Edward Grant, Republic Pictures.

The Searchers (John Ford, 1956) Story: Alan Le May, Screen: Frank S Nugent, Warner Bros.

Michele Beevors trained on postgraduate level at the Australian National University in Canberra and at Columbia University in New York. A sculptor who exhibits widely in Australia and New Zealand, she is a senior lecturer and head of Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin.

SPENT *

Scott Eady

The work *Spent* is an interactive artwork created by the website visitor or audience in collaboration with myself as the artist. This work sits alongside my recent 2006 Wellington exhibition at the Mary Newton Gallery entitled "The World Keeps Turning".

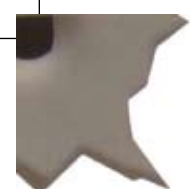
The work allows the participant to shoot blanks, which are car decal bullet holes. There are forty blanks in all and once they all are spent the work is complete.

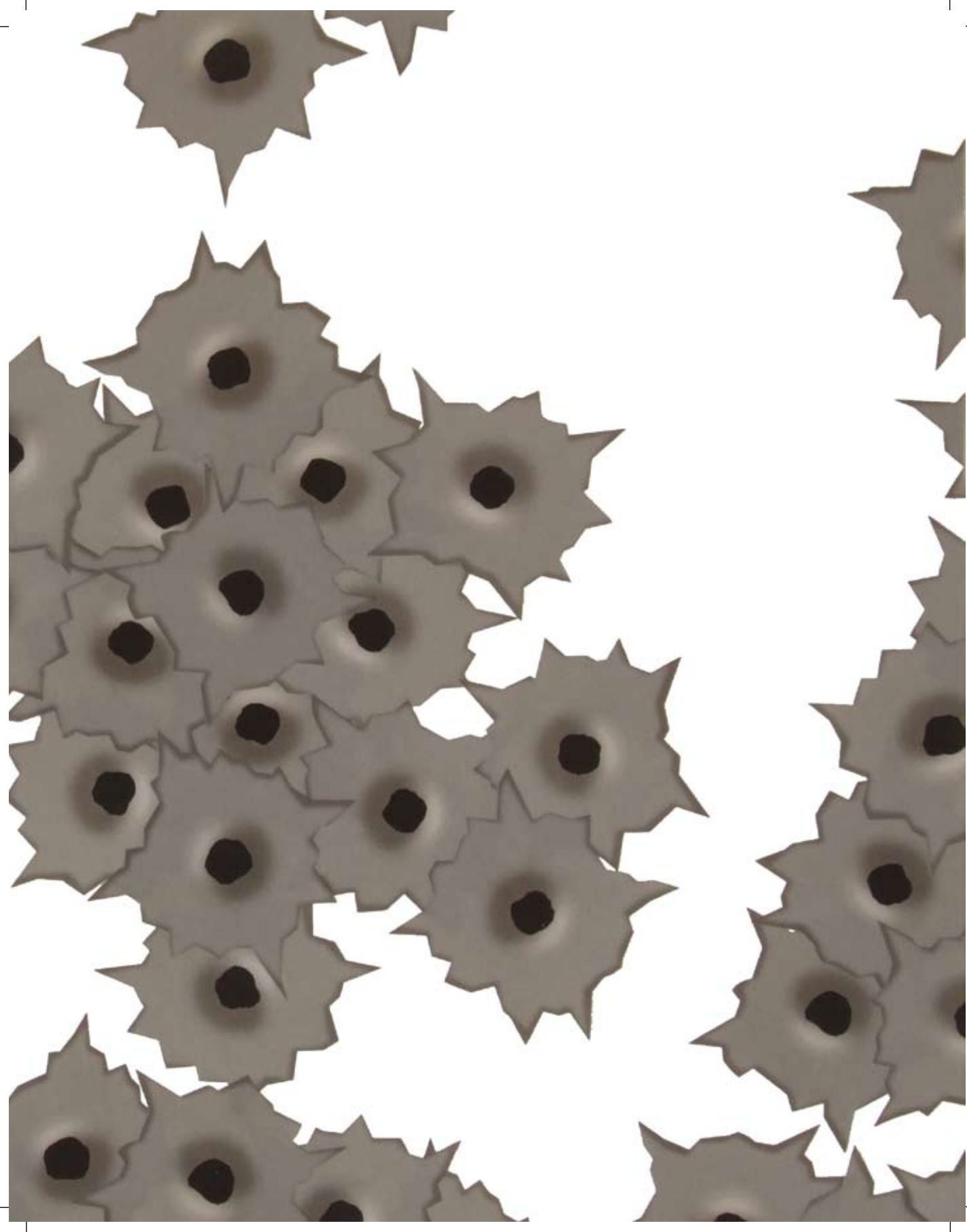
I intend the work to replicate the shoot-em-up computer masturbation of the gaming industry with its roots in the Western genre. While the "World Keeps Turning" hinges on the relationships between masculinity and family, the work *Spent* evokes both the stereotype of masculine adventure and its opposite: what is lost.

The car decal bullet holes suggest that the line between reality and the gaming world is not so clear – who would put them on their car and why? Could they represent an extension and a projection of a fantasy of masculinity that was abandoned in the fifties, while what remains is its pretence?

* *Spent* can be viewed and played with interactively in the online version of *Scope: Contemporary Research Topics Art: I* at www.thescope.org

Scott Eady is a sculptor who exhibits regularly in New Zealand. He holds an MFA from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland and was the winner of the Wallace Award in 2003. He is currently a lecturer in Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin.





ANOMALIES OF GENDER

Kate Mahoney

"...the 'ideal' spectator is always assumed to be male, and the image of the woman is designed to flatter him...Transform the woman into a man...then notice the violence that that transformation does." (Geoffrey Batchen)¹

As I near the conclusion of my postgraduate project, I have been more and more motivated to examine the issues that surround skin and nakedness and the gendering of the body. Lately I have been thinking and writing about the responses of viewers to my images, and it's become clear to me that these responses are based at least partly on cultural knowledge and expectations about the nude, gender, the artist and art. As Chris Townsend says: "The challenges to limits of propriety, decency, morality and shame are read into work by their audiences more often than they are intentionally placed within it."² This makes viewer responses valuable; because they are not under the artist's control, and they can bring insight and inspiration for future work.

The viewers I refer to are largely people who are interested in art, rather than the general public – art students, gallery owners, academics and practicing artists.³ Challenging as it may be to base writing on viewer responses, I feel a need to satisfy my curiosity (which has been aroused by repeated similar responses to my work) and to investigate my consequent thinking about the possible common origins of these reactions.

An image of a reclining, or even supine, naked man seems to provoke several readings. One of these is an erotic reading, either an empowered feminine reading of the male nude referencing John Berger's⁴ notion of visual sexual availability (traditionally through the *male* gaze); or, alternatively, a queer reading – the male nude taking the place of the female. In this article I will be addressing these readings and the ways I see them as interrelated. As well as probing further into the feminine gaze, I'll be exploring the links between the sublime and the abject in relation to gender and the erotic in my current art practice.

At least part of the response I receive to my work is directly related to its medium, photography. Ever since its invention, debate has raged around the nature of the photograph – is it a document; is it an unmediated 'slice of time'; has it brought about the death of art as it was known before its emergence? To quote Geoffrey Batchen:

...[Roland] Barthes has already discounted resemblance to reality as a way of defining photography...Photography's plausibility has always rested on the uniqueness of its indexical relation to the world it images, a relation that is regarded as fundamental to its operation as

a system of representation...It is as if objects have reached out and touched the surface of a photograph, leaving their own trace, as faithful to the contour of the original object as a death mask is to the face of the newly departed... For this reason, a photograph of something has long been held to be a proof of that thing's *being*, even if not of its truth.⁵

In my current work, my intent is to partially sever the image from its photographic referent, rejecting its link with 'being' and 'truth', and wrapping the viewer in a field of visual sensation, evoking an open-ended set of responses. In order to do this, I've extended my practice from traditional colour photography into the field of the digital image, and a significant part of my exhibition will now be large colour projections of details of skin. Alongside these works I'm also making small, intimate works in gum bichromate technique, which allow a closer physical approach to the work while at the same time – by being more painterly in effect – they are less grounded in the photographic referent.

Initially, the first thing people wanted to know about my body works was the gender of the subject. It seems there is something anomalous and unsettling in viewing a nude without knowing what the gender is. There is some disturbance of the scopic regimes implied by the persistence of these enquiries. As my work has moved closer and closer to the body, partially or completely obscuring gender, viewer responses have shifted from enquiries about the gender of the subject to the actual nature of the image content. The extreme close-up, while still referring to the body, presents it in such an ambiguous way that a further unresolved tension (outside of gender) is created.

Some of this tension relates to my use of the nude as it is inevitable that any photograph of the nude will reference the erotic. Imagery of the erotic, particularly photographic imagery (which is historically linked with pornography), is still largely seen as transgressive, the more so if it's a woman artist producing the images. When a woman photographs the male nude, in my experience, this is generally seen to be immodest, to be prurient, to be 'unwomanly'. This attitude reveals an anomaly of gender, as the relationship between the gender of the artist and the gender of the model is seen to be problematic. This is not a new situation – Imogen Cunningham, photographing her husband naked in 1915, found the response to her work so violent that she didn't allow the work to be



1: *Untitled*, 2006, digital image for projection.



2: *Untitled Manscape*, 2005, 25 x 40 cm.

shown again until the 1960s. These photographs, seen today, seem romantic, misty and, if not coy, at least modest.⁶ The problem here seems to be not that a woman has depicted the naked male so much as that she has looked, and looked again, on an actual nude man.

Historically, women have been precluded from taking part in life drawing, painting and other activities where they might be exposed to a naked man. Tamar Garb, in "The Forbidden Gaze", makes an impressive argument for a Freudian reading of castrative disempowerment of the male by the female gaze. The basis of Garb's article is a fictional story published in 1883; her reading of this text suggests that the entry of women into art institutions was seen as so threatening as to be disruptive to society in general. I find it disappointing (but also interesting) that these attitudes, although not as overt, are still present today. One comment I received from a (male) reviewer of my master's entry submission was that my use of "young, beautiful males" as models was "questionable". What was questionable about it was not explained. His concern about my choice of model is evidence (if slight) that the attitudes encountered by Cunningham and explored by Garb are still influencing women's art practice today.

This leads one to query if a woman is entitled to the gaze. Since John Berger's writings of the 1960s, the debate over the ownership of the gaze has continued. Is the gaze exclusively male? Is a woman curiously split into a male 'spectator' and a female 'performer', while the man's responses are totally integrated and can be read as the mirror of his emotions? Is the male as simple and the female as complex as Berger thinks? The idea of the gaze as being a patriarchal dialogue between a passive (female) nude figure and a male viewer leaves someone like me – a female working with the male nude, in a curious position. Is the relationship the same? Am I exercising a matriarchal power over the subjugated male as he lies transfixed by my powerful gaze? Was this what was implied by the use of the adjective "young" in my examiner's comments?

According to Naomi Salaman,

...reversal is a far from adequate term to describe the process of women looking at men, as there is no symmetry in the construction of sexual difference, nor in the history of the male and female nude...When women artists attempt to represent men as the beautiful object they will not effect a social reverse of power; but they can affect the scopoc regimes, and this can translate into new knowledge, new 'abstract power' in the debates of pleasure and representation.... a modern female observer can look at the male body and play with the legacies of his vision without having to occlude her desiring body and its variety of identifications.⁸

By shifting my image-making exclusively to the male nude, I have entered more fully into this area of the 'feminine erotic', where the power lies with the artist and the viewer. What, then, is the role of the subject in this power play? Does the eroticised male subject become secondary to the struggle in which the artist asserts her bodily desires and must the viewer, like it or not, partake of this vision?

Salaman's placing of the feminine gaze in a different space from the male gaze seems to pose more questions than it answers. In this scenario, treating the male body as an eroticised subject seems to 'erase' the heterosexual male as a viewer. This is in itself curious. How can there be work that erases the viewer?

If the gender of the viewer is paramount in decoding imagery of the nude, this decoding can only take place in an erotic space, one where the eros of image and the eros of viewer engage with each other in a play of the gaze that empowers one and disempowers the other. Could it be that in viewing the erotic male image, the heterosexual male viewer experiences such a loss of power that he literally removes himself as audience? This would correspond with Berger's ideas on the gaze rather than with Salaman's – as in viewing the naked female form (always in an eroticised reading of the image) one can only imagine that a heterosexual female experiences this same 'erasure' when she sees an image that (according to Salaman's ideas) renders her unable to take part in the power exchange between image and viewer. However, in the case of women this does not seem to take place – instead a shift occurs, grounded I believe in a cultural reading of the nude, where the female viewer responds to the female nude as an object of beauty rather than of erotic power. Does this happen to the (heterosexual) male viewer of homoerotic material? My belief is that it generally does not. The male nude – except in cases where it is framed in a culturally acceptable manner⁹ – seems to be visually inert or even repellent to many heterosexual men.

I have sold a number of pieces recently to men who identified themselves as gay; they all said they admired these images because of their beauty. The works were of cropped parts of the body, shot in the studio under soft, subdued lighting (see image 2). Up until now, I have used only one model, a middle-aged and far from idealised man. These images are a world away from 'beefcake' calendar shots, or the aggressively muscled, dramatically lit men photographed by Dianora Niccolini and later Robert Mapplethorpe. There are no penises, no overtly erotic images. The appeal of these works seems to be in their allowing a certain naturalism, passivity and fragility in the subject. This could imply that in a homoerotic setting, the gaze is not performed between equals, as one would expect when gender is the same, but between the active viewer and the passive, fixed subject. This overturns both Salaman's and Berger's view of the scopic regimes and suggests that rather than the gender of the viewer being paramount, the individuality (including sexuality) of the viewer also takes on a vital importance in the powerplay of the gaze.

I want to emphasise here that I am not attempting to represent the male as 'the beautiful object'. My work is framed in a more naturalistic way, presenting an older body in a way that reveals its blemishes and the nuances of flesh that has seen several decades of life. There is a beauty in older flesh – that beauty seen in the nude photographs of her mother by Melanie Manchot¹⁰, or the series *De Cette Femme*, made by Yves Tremorain¹¹, both showing the effects of ageing on a woman's body. My work sits closer to Tremorain's, in revealing detail of skin alone, rather than that of Manchot, who allows her subject a dignified outward gaze. In the images I am making now, I prefer the skin to be the subject rather than the person inhabiting it.

Naturalism in this context can become symbolic, and most of the earlier more visually explicit images call up links with the landscape, in a similar way that bodily contours are evoked by the wrinkled, softened landscape paintings of Georgia O'Keefe, or, more recently, the large painted draperies of Jacqueline Morreau's *Fold Upon Fold*¹²; in both artists' works the implied

body is always present. In my more recent work, the play between the body and the landscape is exaggerated. The body, though present, is almost occluded by its own enlarged, intimate details. Shadows pool in hollows to suggest water; hairs become vegetal growths on the surface of strange, glistening surfaces.

My digital projection works are intended to be shown in a gallery setting, each covering a space of at least 18 square metres. Two revolving slide shows of eight images at a time will be projected at opposite ends of a darkened space, which will further emphasise the scale and detail of the works. Making work on such a large scale gives an unreal view of the body, one that cannot be effected by any human vision. Details of skin, seen on such a scale, can be overwhelming and repellent. Enlargement reveals the surface of the body, the skin and hair, the individual pores, moles and blemishes. This personalises the body, alluding to the individual and making the experience more intimate. At the same time the size, blurriness and luminous qualities of these images make them less real, and less accessible, and the subtle colour shifts that I introduce into the original images can suggest the pallor of death. This creates a dichotomous condition that leads to a sense of unease, while at the same time it is possible to experience the work as beautiful.

This same dichotomous condition is present in Mona Hatoum's *Corps Etranger (Strange Body)* installation of 1994, where she creates an environment based on projections of colour photographs of the interior of her body, made using an endoscope. The resultant images are both intimate and unrecognisable; as in my projected works, they suggest the body but also deny it by showing us the body as we cannot know it. These images are also much larger than lifesize, again fracturing the correspondence between referent and image. Through their undeniable mucosity and fleshiness Hatoum's projected images can call up feelings of disgust while also having a strange beauty and luminosity.

Hatoum's images are projected within an installation space, making a total environment that surrounds and encloses the viewer. I, however, want to create a sense of expansion, opening up the work and making it almost a background rather than an item that is simply 'viewed'. The use of large scale in my work renders the body fragment as a field: each becomes a static display that envelops the viewer and is intended to provoke feelings of sublimity through the expansion into the gigantic. Susan Stewart writes that the gigantic, being transcendent, always partakes of the sublime; that it represents nature on the loose, unmediated by culture.¹³ Immanuel Kant, writing on the sublime in the 18th century, gives examples of those things that might uplift us through "enjoyment with horror" and occasion a "feeling of the sublime": "mountains with peaks above the clouds, descriptions of raging storms..."¹⁴

These works cannot hope to provoke this feeling on a page, but in the proper context of large scale projection they have an overpowering aspect that can envelop the audience while still revealing clues to bodily existence and presence.

Strong feelings of abjection also seem to be provoked by some of my images (see 2 and 4). The object is situated in an area which is outside the symbolic order; and at the same time constitutes a threat to this order. Julia Kristeva explains it as a sense of horror, caused by a breakdown of

the barriers between individuals, which thus accesses the pre-symbolic order; the area devoid of language where reactions are felt on a visceral level. The triggering of a pre-symbolic state elicits a feeling unmediated by the consciousness of the individual. According to Kristeva this reaction is tied up with our realisation – through the fracturing of the symbolic order – of our own individual death.¹⁵ In all my recent series of works, I have used the close-up to render fine detail in the skin, but only in part of the image. The rest becomes unfocused and blurry, creating a backdrop against which selected details can stand out. Manipulation of the tones, giving a cool colour cast, adds an unreality and suggestion of deathly pallor. In the larger works the scale helps to break down those barriers between the individual and the work to instigate feelings of abjection.

Abjection and desire (and its fulfillment) are closely related, also according to Kristeva. If the abject is bound up with both fear (phobia) and *jouissance* – “One does not know it, one does not desire it, one joys in it (*on en jouit*). Violently and painfully. A passion...” – then an object expressing this quality can be equally attractive and repellent, fascinating through its repulsiveness and at the same time erotic and powerful. Using the term *jouissance* (sexual climax), makes a direct link between the abject and the erotic.¹⁶ Presenting the body nude and in great detail shows it as shockingly animal, shockingly biological and at the same time unavoidably erotic.



3: *Untitled*, 2006, digital image for projection, 2006.

To return to Berger: "...nakedness acts as a confirmation and provokes a strong sense of relief..." Nakedness is personal, however, and nudity or more particularly 'the nude' is not, as it is formalised within conventions, and breaching any conventions can cause disquiet. Any work expressing nakedness outside the acceptable conventions will cause disruption to the expectations of the viewer. Removing the naked body from its comforting frame of the classical causes confusion, shock and sometimes anger.

Art, after all, is a social construct; the viewer expects to be able to understand the work on an intellectual level, and to be able to digest it and add it to his or her cultural 'stock'. When working within the area of both the sublime and the abject, however, one would expect to transport the individual to a place which is at the limits of intellectual understanding, and is felt more as a bodily experience. A liminal experience such as this is not so easily assimilated. "Certain kinds of art ...invite participation rather than 'viewing'. As such, there is no definitive interpretation, no higher meaning, and the experience is often profoundly (and intentionally) disorienting."¹⁷

The smaller works don't seem to provoke the same responses of abjection as the large projections, except when they are particularly ambiguous. The image *Close to You #5* (see opposite page) seems very disquieting, apparently because of its perceived subject matter; most people initially see it as an image of genitalia and find it repulsive. When I had a full-colour conventional print of this photo shown in an exhibition, a prospective buyer had the gallery ring me to find out what part of the body it showed. The power of this image rests in its ability to shock and disturb by its connection, through the abject, to the erotic, or even the pornographic. That this response is deliberately manipulated does not make it any less powerful, and the patent relief (usually expressed in laughter) when I reveal that the image is actually of an armpit (and a man's), is universal. This laughter seems to be cathartic, releasing the tension caused by the image's ambiguity and allowing a return to the banal. "We need the banality which we find in the first instance of disclosure [of nakedness] because it grounds us in reality."¹⁸ A photograph of anonymous parts of the body can be very unsettling, simply because it disrupts this banality of nakedness by presenting an image of nakedness within the conventions of an image of the nude.

By partially removing the nude subject from the photographic through blurring, changes in scale and technical manipulation, I hope to provoke such disturbance and to produce a shock of revelation unmediated by the relief Berger speaks of, which after all is a relief of familiarity, of categorisation.¹⁹ The very power of the contexts of the abject and the sublime lies in their lack of explicitness – their difficulty of assimilation.

When examining sublimity and abjection side by side, they seem to address a common theme – the dichotomous attraction of the fearful, and the horrible. The erotic, as an embedded element of the abject, must therefore also be involved in the play between the horrible and the delightful. If I return now to Batchen's remarks on the photograph's indexical link to the real, it is easy to make the connection between the perceived link with the reality of the photographic object and the shock of 'reality' that defines the abject in Kristeva's writing, as well as underlying the sublimity of Kant, later discussed by Stewart.

The area where these correspondences intersect is also the site where the scale of my large works becomes powerful and suggestive; creating an experience that is both sublime and abject at the same time. That these two states are contiguous is not surprising: writers on both topics use similar words to describe their effects. Horror is mentioned by both Kant and later Kristeva, as well as by Burke and later Stewart: "...that mixture of horror and excitement; the dual impulse to look away [and to] keep watching, to see *more*", according to Suzannah Biernoff on the corporeal sublime.²⁰ A further correspondence lies in the 'unmediated' nature of these states – both Stewart and Kristeva use this word in relation to their subjects.

A disruption of this contiguity occurs, however, if we accept that Kant's sublime, with its historical association with landscape, was seen as being the masculine preserve, while the beautiful was the expression of the feminine aspect of landscape. The abject, through its association with fluidity and bodily excess, also occupies a feminine space. When translating sublimity from the landscape to the gigantism of the projected, enlarged body, there is, perhaps, understandable confusion in the gendering of responses.

My recent digital works attempt to translate my experience of *another* body, not my own, into visual terms for the consumption of *somebody* else. I am presenting, not interpreting, that experience for the viewer. This is an ongoing preoccupation: the eliciting of a type of synaesthesia – one which transfers a sensory response *between* individuals rather than from one sense to another *in* the individual – in my imaginary, anonymous and ubiquitous 'viewer'. My intention is to provide an experience through accessing feelings of sublimity and abjection. This is not an attempt to communicate, as: "Communication implies the transmission of a message or meaning and its decoding by the recipient. But grief, passion, longing, fear [i.e. emotions]: these states are often about the absence or suspension of meaning or understanding. Their 'representation', if we can use that term, is corporeal."²¹ The intention is to move into that unmediated space that Kristeva and Stewart describe; that place where a visual shock occurs and propels us into an individual experience, that is, perhaps, grounded in the experience of the artist, but rests ultimately in the perceptions of



4: *Close to you #5*, 2005, gum bichromate print, 15x10 cm.

the viewer. I suggest that it is in this anomalous, eroticised and fluid space between the sublime, the object and the familiar that the power of the unresolved gender questions in my work may reside.

- 1 Geoffrey Batchen, *Each Wild Idea* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2001).
- 2 C Townsend, *Vile Bodies: Photography and the Crisis of Looking* (Munich & New York: Prestel-Verlag, 1998).
- 3 This article is tangential and complementary to my master's dissertation. As such it is written in relation to conversations with such people.
- 4 John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).
- 5 Geoffrey Batchen, Op. cit.
- 6 Margery Mann, "Imogen Cunningham", in *"Imogen! Imogen Cunningham, Photographs 1910-1973"* (Washington: University of Washington Press, 1974).
- 7 Tamar Garb, "The Forbidden Gaze", in Kathleen Adler and Marcia Poynton (eds), *The Body Imaged: The Human Form and Visual Culture since the Renaissance* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 1993).
- 8 Naomi Salaman, "Regarding Male Objects", in Naomi Salaman (ed.), *What She Wants: Women Artists Look at Men* (New York & London: Verso, 1994).
- 9 As in an art historical context: classical or neo-classical imagery being an accepted cultural framing of the male nude or semi-nude.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 William A Ewing, *The Body: Photoworks of the Human Form* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1994).
- 12 See <http://www.morreaux.co.uk/jackie/website/fold.html> as last visited on 7 October 2006.
- 13 Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham & London: Duke University Press, 1993).
- 14 P Crowther, *The Kantian Sublime; from Morality to Art* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).
- 15 Julia Kristeva, "Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection", in Kelly Oliver (ed.), *The Portable Kristeva* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982).
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Suzannah Biernoff, "The Corporeal Sublime", *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Art, Affect and Sensation*, Volume 2, #2 2001 & Volume 3, # 1, 2002, 61-75.
- 18 John Berger, Op. cit.
- 19 Ibid.
- 20 Suzannah Biernoff, Op. cit.
- 21 Ibid.

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WALL STORIES: SENSORY ARCHAEOLOGY

Ana Terry

Exhibition Title: *Wall Stories*

Artist: Ana Terry (and assistants)

Site: The Forrester Gallery, Oamaru, New Zealand

Date: Winter Season 2006

The *Wall Stories* project explored an approach towards the comprehension of a space and its previous occupants by way of an archaeological framework that shifted between the empirical and the abstract. Using an archaeological methodology, the *Wall Stories* project attempted to articulate what could be embedded in a site. A public art gallery in a former commercial bank in the historic district of a provincial Otago town was the locus for activity and research in this instance.

This text begins the process of distilling the fieldwork undertaken, initiating a reflexive process by fusing a montage of fieldwork inquiry, biographic and narrative styles. Nadia Seremetakis describes this process as “sensory archaeology” for which she advocates an engagement with the commensality of a space, that is, for the acknowledgement of the tactile, auditory and aromatic realities of a site as part of one’s research. “Without a reflexive anthropology of the senses, fieldwork – short- or long-term – remains trapped in the literal, captive or realist conventions...”¹ A practice of sensory and material reciprocity was – and still is – adopted throughout each stage of the process of the project; though the initial research, the artmaking and the writing.

Workbook Entry, 10 April 2006, Dunedin:

“...recovery of any visual record of the occupants taken within the building has been unsuccessful and thus I am working with photographs from the Hocken Library pictorial archives of Victorian domestic interiors and their occupants alongside recent digital images taken of the site. Both the digital and the analogue photographs share a disruption of the indexicality that photography proposes; both types of images conjure something other than what is visually represented – they suggest an apparition.

The historical photographs present a static interior as a backdrop to an occupant’s blurring form; while rigidly posed minute movements of the body are traced during the extended exposure time required to capture the subject within the dark interior. Now again, some one hundred years later,



Images left to right: Unknown stone building - Wakatipu area, Bush Whare, Catlins Tent, courtesy of the Hocken Library, University of Otago.

technology exposes its anomalies; my deranged printer running low on ink has produced images that appear ghost-like through a stratification of muddy red lines. The later documentation becomes less a record of the space and more of a prompt in their banded rendering – these strata suggest archaeological layers in which bits of information form and are becoming encrusted with digital debris ... The other day I constructed a tent within the simulated boundaries of the site at my studio. The primary focus was to reconstruct the most basic 'A'-frame dwelling made by early settlers, using the jute I am working with. I came to realise that this structure provides in material form my own position as a temporary visitor/anthropologist at the dig and that it reiterates the site as a transitional domain.

I am feeling ambivalent about public access and participation alongside the gallery staff's constant vigilance of its development. The expectations of the gallery manager and locals also contribute to my general anxiety. In one form of documentation of support for the project, the term 'celebration' was used, which suggests a potential lack of critical engagement. I feel like an itinerant posing as an anthropologist. I am aware of the local sense of ownership around the building and its history, and of the possible problematics of working here as an 'outsider'..."

On Site at The Forrester Gallery, Oamaru:

In the far northern corner of the room, adjacent to the ceiling, folds of wall paper sag like skin, pulling away from the wall where the rain had seeped through the slowly eroding exterior limestone walls. With every prevailing northerly, this bulge persistently challenges the desired hermetic interior of a gallery space. While the lifting paper offers no palimpsest, it suggests many. It provokes a desire to connect with the past histories of the room and with associations further afield.

The jute skin of the walls – like the ground for wallpaper – becomes the substrate for the construction of an imagined space that evolves into an excavation site. The forming of a lateral stratification is suggested through the relief of objects and structures that emerge from the wall. Colin Renfrew discusses the practice of stratigraphy and the interpretation of the materials therein: "... archaeology may be defined as the study of the human past as inferred from the surviving material remains...it is primarily about knowledge, about information, and it depends mainly upon stratigraphic excavation, giving particular attention to the precise contexts of association...You can

do that only to a limited extent from individual objects - that is why unprovenanced antiquities are in general relatively useless."²

Unlike the archaeologist, who traditionally would shift the recovered objects from their context, sorting them into generalised categories and spatial containment and thereby repressing their sensory engagement, the objects I am working with are integrated into the substrate and sit between process and display, while encouraging tactile involvement. Miwon Kwon discusses the temporary aspect of current site-specific practice, where the "'work' no longer seeks to be a noun/object but a verb/process...a specific relationship between an art work and its site is not based on a physical permanence of that relationship but rather recognition of its unfixed impermanence, to be experienced as an unrepeatable fleeting situation."³ In my project, an encounter with this transitional space requires physical awareness through the negotiation of guys and tent pegs while other submerged objects invite the immediacy of touch.

I see a woman slowly tracing the embedded mirror frame with her hand. I wonder how the object – its primary function to reflect reality now muted by the fabric – can operate in more accurately transcribing the visual into the spatial reality of her 'being in the world'. Did she become



more conscious of herself as a body rather than an image through this tactile encounter with the object, and how could this experience of her body change in relation to the space and to others in the room, both present and absent? Did she encounter her own mortality within the shrouded form or perhaps the sense of another's presence?

In the formation process of the room, artefacts are buried and incorporated into the material over time. The stratification of existing materials and structures inform their extrusions into other physical forms and embodied associations through their connections to the very fabric of the space. The physical act of pulling back the jute, pegging the guys into the floor, carefully dressing the objects and embroidering the repeat allows a contemplation of the space during the construction/ excavation of the interior. Embroidering the red and gold silk thread into the walls is time-consuming and physically demanding through the act of piercing and pulling the fabric off the wall with a curved needle. There is a desire to cover the walls in the repeat pattern as much as time will allow and those who become involved in the process of embroidering also express this desire.

I vacillate between a sense of *horror vacui*⁴ and restraint. The editing process suggests a collapse between artist and archeologist through the imposition of a particular subjectivity; and the difference between how the scientist and the artist select and isolate a detail - what is shown and what is not



and what becomes discarded – comes into focus. The patches of embroidery are strung together by a thread that sustains connections, while simultaneously suggesting the possibilities of a continuum of fragmentation and loss of information. These fragments of embroidery repeatedly migrate from one space to another around the walls, often clinging to the window and door frames or corners of the room, suggesting structural weak points and the possibility of seepage.

Other forms of seeping penetrate the skin of the room and its atmosphere, both through sound and smell. A small stream on the southern side of the building that courses its way through the township forms a deep pool at high-tide against the shoreline embankment. During the shifting of materials and tools into the space via the ground level access, the mingling odours of seaweed and other organic detritus form a potent smell that rises easily on the cold dank air and up the internal stairwell of the building. This palpable odour permeates the space, reminding me of foreign shores and conjuring up the notion of sewers being disturbed during an archaeological dig. I also wonder how this enveloping subterranean reminder of the underbelly of the building and its working occupants impinged upon those who occupied the upper floors one hundred years ago.

Smell, like sound, is experienced through the body beyond the peripheral range of vision – involving an all-round corporeality and spatiality. It also functions as a portal to another time and place. The muted ambience of the space suggests an encapsulation and temporary suspension of time. This inertia of time or *ennui* asserts itself in a number of ways during the process of working with the project. One woman describes her participation in the activity of embroidering as a welcome pause in her day. This comment coincides with my attention to the regular chime of the town hall clock that penetrates the space and has done so for well over a hundred-and-forty years. The anticipatory pause between the preambulatory melody and the stroke of the hour suggests the possibility of a liminal space for an exchange of time and place; a portal through and into the past. It gives me a sense that if I could lean my forehead against this space I would physically encounter another body.

- 1 Nadia C Seremetakis, "The Memory of the Senses: Historical Perception, Commensal Exchange and Modernity", in Lucien Taylor (ed.), *Visualising Theory: Selected Essays from V.A.R. 1990-94* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 226.
- 2 Colin Renfrew, *Figuring it Out* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2003), 88-89. Renfrew refers to Sir Mortimer Wheeler's systematic and precise methods using a stratigraphic approach in *Archaeology from the Earth* (1954). For many years this was the standard handbook for archaeological technique.
- 3 Miwon Kwon, *One Place After Another: Site Specific Art and Locational Identity* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2002), 24.
- 4 *Horror vacui* is the latin term for a fear of empty spaces and is, for example, associated with the Italian critic and scholar Mario Praz, who used the term to describe the suffocating atmosphere and clutter of interior design in the Victorian age. See http://www.arthistoryclub.com/art_history/Horror_vacui as last visited on 30 October 2006.

Ana Terry is an interdisciplinary artist currently engaged with a Master of Fine Arts project. She is also a lecturer in drawing and digital & moving image at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin and a graphic designer.



WALL STORIES: TAKING CARE

Leoni Schmidt

In *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (2000), Irit Rogoff writes about space and how our involvement with space can construct our psychic subjectivities. She discusses arts practices that work with space as a way of knowing; as a mode of location; as a site for collective national, cultural, linguistic or topographical histories; and as a way of ordering our knowledge.¹ She also reminds us of the groundbreaking work of Henri Lefebvre whose *The Production of Space* (1974/1991) posed spatialisation as a critical concept. She summarises his notion of the “antechamber” as a space which can be utilised to critique power as it is a space of negotiation between power and those who are petitioning it.² This notion of the antechamber came to mind when I recently became involved with Ana Terry's work for an installation entitled *Wall Stories*.

The artist occupied a particular space at The Forrester Gallery in Oamaru. This former bedroom was used over a period of a hundred years by successive managers of the bank located in the building before it became a gallery in the late 1980s. The space is now soon to be refurbished to become a more conventional exhibition site. Between the previous uses of the room and its future deployment, Terry has seized the opportunity to work in and with the space. It is as if the space has been suspended in a liminal temporality during which the artist could lift its skin of jute covering on the walls and insert objects behind it before re-covering them with the jute, almost as one would wrap a valuable parcel or tenderly clothe a beloved body. Parts of walls and a mirror; furniture, fireplace surround, light fittings and windows have been re-covered but not obliterated as they are still visible underneath their regrafted skin. Through the covered windows one can see to the outside where columns throw shadows on the jute, while reflections of the interior overlay the Victorian botanical patterns created on the glass.

Outside and inside talk to each other; the interior of the body and its epidermis are mutually productive; and history breathes through the very space where one layer is lifted and re-placed and another layer of value is added through the painstaking embroidery of 19th-century patterns onto and into the jute. Through the transformation of the space, we are made acutely aware of the act of seeing; of architecture as a critical body; of histories narrated through form; of the particularities of jute – also called hessian and burlap – as a material redolent with associations of the trade connections of the late 19th century; and of Terry's ‘re-gendering’ of gallery critiques.

In an essay entitled “The Nobility of Sight”, Hans Jonas discusses the implications of a visual

bias in Western art and philosophy. He argues that sight is preeminently the sense of simultaneity, capable of surveying a wide visual field at one moment. "Intrinsically less temporal than other senses such as hearing or touch, it thus tends to elevate static Being over dynamic Becoming, fixed essences over ephemeral appearances."³

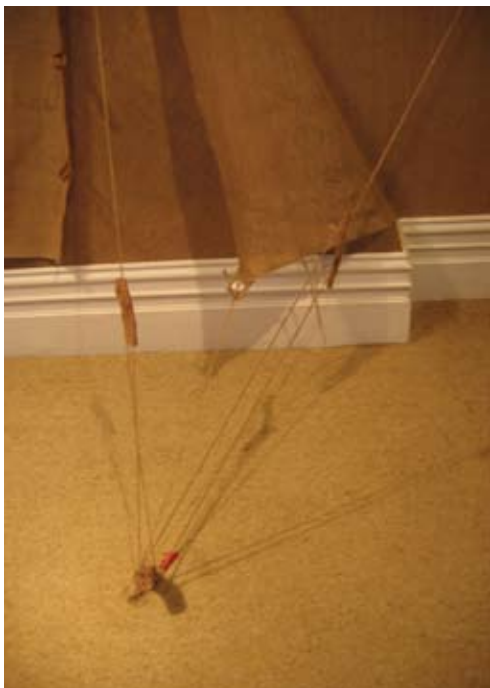
Terry's activities in Oamaru work to thwart this project of sight and to problematise its inattention to detail, to the small and the easily overlooked. Our sweeping view of the room is constantly interrupted as our attention is held by each particular form, outline and detail which contributes to the tension between the body and skin of the space. Terry also makes sure that we cannot create a new overview from the detail. For example, embroidered pattern is fragmentary within the space and thus in line with the partial insertions of colonising activities that retain their incomplete and parasitical character.

In focusing on these fragments and details we are also made aware of the time the artist – and her assistants, Don Hunter, Tracey Shepherd and Patricia Tough – have spent in clothing and decorating the space. This work and the time it took are almost palpable, especially where cut-off remnants of red embroidery thread have been left *in situ*. The importance of touch in our knowing of the world is emphasised in every careful act of covering and stitching and patterning of which we see *and* feel the evidence.

Tracing the outline of a mirror hidden behind its covering, one can become acutely aware of its particular presence; and hearing the sound of cicadas⁴ and seeing a tent with its pegs staked into the urban base of a building in Oamaru, one is transported to the rural context of the town and its farming hinterland so well-served by the Oamaru Harbour in the late 19th century. And, smelling the covering on the walls, one feels privy to the air infused with molecules of sacking so specific to warehouses where tea was stored at that time, tea from India, then another outpost of the British Empire.

Oamaru town lies in the heart of the Waitaki district in the South Island of New Zealand and is well-known for its impressive Victorian buildings created from locally quarried whistone. Architect Robert Lawson designed the elaborate Bank of New South Wales in 1883 and dressed its façade with six Corinthian columns finely fluted and elaborately carved. But, it is on the inside that Terry has focused her critical attention. In a chapter called "The Mutant Body of Architecture", Georges Teyssot points out that it is "precisely because architecture has the very concrete and useful vocation of building shelters for dwelling that it also has the duty and the right to reexamine itself incessantly". Teyssot also writes about how structures are built down to the finest details: "*dé-tailler*=to cut, in French...[and how criticality can operate through] cutting and carving into the very flesh of architecture, revealing the many incarnations and incorporations that have constituted its matter and spirit over the centuries."⁵

Terry engages with the building in Oamaru in the manner of a surgeon. She breaches the intact body of the room and we become aware of its bones, organs and muscles underneath the skin. She sutures the operated body and we become aware of its skin and its scars. One could argue that the exterior of the building remains complicit with the world of trade and business for which it was



erected; while Terry's interior assumes the role of interrogator. Teyssot continues: "Architecture can be used as a kind of surgical instrument to operate on itself (in small increments)."⁶

Historical narratives and their implications are revealed through Terry's incisions. Groined pilasters elaborate a fireplace; the carved cabriole legs of a Queen Anne chair juts out from a wall to suggest a pompous inhabitant; a Rococo-style mirror provides evidence of the Victorian love affair with the ornamental and the superfluous; ornate wallpaper behind the jute is too heavy and comes loose from its support; and William Morris and associates in the Arts and Crafts Movement make their appearance through Terry's choice of patterning. We remember that they, themselves, had much to criticise in late 19th-century architecture and the applied arts, especially where these practices had become unmoored from their function to merely prop up an indulgent middle class lavishing decoration on itself. In Oamaru, Morris and associates speak alongside the critical voice of the artist; while conversely their patterns are also complicit in the colonial domestication of the New Zealand life-scape and its introduction of foreign flora to the land.

In revealing such histories, Terry assumes the role of antiquarian. John H Arnold tells us how "it was antiquarians who...developed the tools for dealing with the past via its documentary and material remains...the 'mouldy and worme-eaten';"⁷ that can speak of attitudes and deeds that shaped the lives of people. In Oamaru, Terry is not telling us what these attitudes and deeds were, but she carefully leaves clues in the space for us to translate. This process of translation is not merely an intellectual game as we become affectively responsive to the space, forms and materials.

Upon becoming The Forrester Gallery, the interior of the building was covered in jute, a base material ironically in contrast with the social aspirations of its former occupants. This material was popular in the 1970s and 80s for hanging art and the gallery in the McCoy and Wixon's Hocken Building in Dunedin was another example. Many artists – Allen Maddox, Philip Clairmont and even Colin McCahon – used it as it was so inexpensive. Jute as a material brings these and other connotations to Terry's project. The fibre it is obtained from has been grown in Bengal since remote times. It is strong and resistant to stretching and has thus been used wherever packaging of agricultural and industrial commodities had to be transported. Its presence around the world in the late 19th century – for example in New Zealand – bore witness to the global trade connections made possible by imperialist manoeuvres. The commercial benefits of this trade often disguised its effects on the colonised, a strategy obliquely revealed through Terry's covering activities in Oamaru.

Mia Campioni writes about installation practice that works "by altering our focus, undoing our visual expectations, recognising the multiplicity involved in our composition of reality...[leading to] an understanding of how apparently distinct things (a wall, a floor, a ceiling) bear their being 'other' within them."⁸ Terry provides us with a glimpse, a whiff and a trace of the ghostly lives of those 'others' implicated in her scenario. The contestatory multiplicity of presences breathing the same air in her interior is spatially present through a tension of pulling and pushing between walls and space; between the smooth skin of the walls and the objects trying to emerge from the walls, struggling to escape from being suffocated or buried behind its covering.

Claire Bishop discusses the heightened perception of the participant in a spatial environment in

her *Installation Art: A Critical History* (2005) and she quotes the artist Robert Morris as follows with regard to best practice in this genre of work: "[It] takes relationships out of the work and makes them a function of space, light, and the viewer's field of vision. 'The object is but one of the terms in the newer aesthetic. It is in some way more reflexive, because of one's awareness of oneself existing in the same space as the work... One is more aware that [oneself] is establishing relationships as [one] apprehends the object from various positions and under varying conditions of light and spatial context'."⁹ Ana Terry's work invites this kind of participation, while providing rich clues to various registers through which one could read the space in which she has been active.

Her "antechamber" exists between the masculine columns seen partially on the outside and the business world historically active within the interior. This chamber has, however, also been a bedroom and thus a feminine, domestic register is brought to the space. Embroidery as associated with 'women's work' since Victorian times¹⁰ and the use of red as a signifier for the female body add to the gendering of the space. On one level, one can interpret the work as a 're-gendering' when reading it alongside the activities of Billy Apple in the 1970s in New Zealand, where he also 'operated' on gallery spaces. In 1975, Apple

embarked on a series of works that subtracted volume from gallery spaces [e.g. at the Auckland City Art Gallery] – reducing the length of walls and removing wax from floor tiles... Apple's *Alterations* [at the Barry Lett Galleries in Auckland and]... *The Given as an Art-Political Statement* [at the Bosshard Galleries in Dunedin] followed in 1979, in which he negotiated 'significant changes for the better' in galleries across the country. These 'alterations' were architectural investigations of 'the white cube', treating exhibition space as an object of art and culture. In analysing gallery premises, Apple collaborated with architects and curators, variously highlighting features on walls, ceilings, floors and doors with red paint or reshaping exhibition rooms. The 'givens' – the art work, the artist, art goer and art space – therefore became one. Apple's investigations brought the art gallery's function into question, challenging the administrators', and the public's relationship to the artist and works of art.¹¹

Apple's use of red paint and his reshaping of gallery spaces can be read as aggressive provocations by a pop conceptualist¹² bent on exposing and challenging the hidden motivations and power relationships played out in the gallery space. In comparison, Terry's postconceptual interventions in her antechamber seem less overt and confrontational; more feminine and ameliorative in its petitioning of power. She seems to be critiquing national, cultural, linguistic and topographical histories in *Wall Stories*, while also taking care of them.

With regard to Terry's 're-gendering' activities, it is, however, also important for a reading of her work to locate these within an early 21st-century discourse – not only in contrast with Apple's work in the 1970s, but also in contrast with, for example, the feminising archaeologies of New Zealand artist Juliet Batten in the 1990s.¹³ Terry's project does not essentialise in terms of gender. Her antechamber petitions a world of male power; but it also utilises a 'workmanlike' material – jute – and creates a space for female *and* male collaborators (for example, co-embroiderer Don Hunter, project mentor Clive Humphreys, and historical antecedents William Morris and co.). Her use of red

is not only gendered, but also a signifier for life's energy in all its potential guises because she uses it so judiciously as 'fragment' rather than as an aggressive or all-encompassing trope. The process of embroidery within the Oamaru space – as involving men and women – also reminds us of the older (pre-19th-century) histories of this activity as one with which both genders were engaged. As Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock point out: "The history of English embroidery shows how a medieval art became a feminine craft"¹⁴ in the 19th century.

The *Wall Stories* project narrates histories relevant to the area around Oamaru on the eastern coast of the South Island of New Zealand. Working in its located antechamber, it also critiques these histories through a covert petitioning of residual power. In terms of artistic discourse, it refers to previous – historic endeavours – while subtly shifting the parameters of those debates into the present. Thus it performs within the New Zealand 'art world' the same manoeuvres it engages with in relation to a local 'commercial world'. It is in the intersection between these two contexts where Terry's project finds its critical eloquence.¹⁵

- 1 Irit Rogoff, *Terra Infirma: Geography's Visual Culture* (London & New York, 2000), 21.
- 2 Ibid., 23, referring to Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1974/1991).
- 3 Hans Jonas, "The Nobility of Sight: A Study in the Phenomenology of the Senses", in *The Phenomenon of Life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982), 145.
- 4 The sound track for *Wall Stories* was inspired by a film called *Illustrious Energy* by Leon Narby (1988). The film tells the story of the son of a Chinese Gold miner in Central Otago in the late 19th century who captures a cricket and keeps it as a lucky charm. The sound also carries distinct memories for the artist of the dry, arid interior of that part of the country in mid-summer.
- 5 Georges Teyssot, "The Mutant Body of Architecture", in Elizabeth Diller and Ricardo Scofidio, *Flesh: Architectural Probes* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1994), 8.
- 6 Ibid., 9.
- 7 John H Arnold, *History: A Very Short Introduction* (London: Oxford University Press, 2000), 39 & 42.
- 8 Mia Campioni, *Plane Thinking: Drawing Installations by Margaret Roberts* (Sydney: Benevision, 1998), 4.
- 9 Robert Morris quoted in Claire Bishop, *Installation Art: A Critical History* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 56.
- 10 See endnote 14.
- 11 Quoted from a statement issued by Te Puna O Waiwhetu/Christchurch Art Gallery, at <http://chirstchurchgallery.org.nz/Exhibitions/2002/BillyApple> as last visited on 16 August, 2006.
- 12 See Wystan Curnow, "Good as Gold", in *As Good as Gold: Billy Apple: Art Transactions, 1981-1991* (Wellington: Wellington City Art Gallery), 25.
- 13 For information about Juliet Batten's projects, see <http://www.pagan.net.nz/nz/html> and <http://www.wisdomseekers.org.nz/JulietBattentJuly05.html> as last visited on 8 October 2006.
- 14 See Rozsika Parker, *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine* (New York: Women's Press, 1984); and for the specific reference Rozsika Parker and Griselda Pollock, "Crafty Women and the Hierarchy of the Arts", in *Old Mistresses: Women and Ideology* (New York: Pantheon, 1981), 59.
- 15 All images courtesy of the artist.

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THALLASIC

Lynn Taylor



Marguerite Mirabaud Last Days, 2006, digital invert (blue) and intaglio print (sepia), 10.5 x 15.5 cm each.

a high sea running
her broken back
a viridian cargo clock
canvas sails heavy with fog
a mast out of place
tar lined jackets drying on flax bushes
starboard in shadow
a flying fox
a road red with port wine
a lifeboat 'never to be seen again'
waterlogged rigging
and
ninety three flounders in the net

I have always known I was one of the crew of the *Marguerite Mirabaud* although I am at a loss to explain this except through my printmaking practice.¹ When I first saw a faded photograph of the *Marguerite Mirabaud* as a child I found myself not looking at the photograph but being in the photograph. In a rush my surroundings dissolved around me and I seemed to be up high in dense cloud, looking down on the shipwreck. There but not there, because although I felt cold I could see right through myself. Ringed by a hundred years of sea, memories of this shipwreck are repetitively rewritten and renewed through tidal erasure. For me now, these memories are unpeeling through my printmaking project *thalassic*, in a way not unlike the onions that marbled Chrystalls Beach in February 1907.

However, my printmaking project did not begin at this obvious point of magnetic attraction.² I started by undertaking oral histories³ of a selected group of people, fifty to eighty years of age, who were living within the radius of an old shed site. I knew I was listening for something, but as the recordings spooled my original project intent of translating between oral and printed cultures appeared too illustrative. While each recording was a rich voyeuristic experience, something else was scratching me inside, but how could I know what I was seeking when I couldn't name what 'it' was? ⁴ It became apparent that the purpose for listening was to witness processing patterns of remembering and forgetting. During the interviews I noticed that photograph albums always came out and I observed the collected images existing as multiple realities. People in photographs were remembered and then on the turn of a page their name interchanged with another person's, even themselves, or were forgotten with bemusement.

The realisation of my project's purpose coincided with the re-discovery of a box of glass photographic negatives,⁵ developed by Mr Alex Leslie, which intermittently document the twelve month dismantling of the *Marguerite Mirabaud* in the sea. The box of negatives was gifted by Alex's son, Jack Leslie, to my father because they were both, to use my mother's description, 'Gun Nuts', spending many hours in friendship looking at and talking about gun collections. I knew the slides were precious because they were stored in my father's secret cupboard, so while I was pleased to inherit the negatives after my father died I did not have the equipment to develop them and could not clearly read what the images were of. To create a parallel activity to that of Mr Alex Leslie making and developing photographic glass plate negatives one hundred years ago I translate the negatives directly into the medium of photopolymer intaglio etching.⁶ I place the negative directly on the photopolymer plate and expose the layers to the sun. This creates a plate of a plate, a recollection rather than a direct correspondence with the original, which I can print off. The result is a graphic surprise, my control is limited.



Sky Scratchings, 2006, intaglio print (sepia) and digital invert (blue), details from 10.5 x 15.5 cm each.



Marguerite Mirabaud Lifeboat, 2006, digital invert (blue) and intaglio print (sepia), 10.5 x 15.5 cm each.

In order to create the originally intended positive image I must invert the negative. I scan the *Marguerite Mirabaud* negatives digitally into Photoshop and my histories are becoming constructed, inverted, magnified, filtered, compressed and distorted. The computer screen reveals the accrued damage of time and poor preservation in peeling, indiscriminate scratches and thumbprints. Repeated magnification of these distressed surfaces reduces them to textures that come to resemble undocumented scenes of the ship with her masts and sails angled against the fog. In the presence of this echo I simultaneously yearn for and reject the possibility of seeing the details of the grey stains with more clarity. I stare with obsession at the face of a woman sitting on a lifeboat from the *Marguerite Mirabaud*. I look for her,⁷ seeking a better quality image. I enlarge her scanned face on the screen. I search for her in other photographs. Even if I could see her clearly, what if I could not recognise her?⁸ I recall a photo where the face of a boy was cut out to be treasured in a locket and react by deleting an entire tonal range with the magic wand tool. While people's main concern with oral histories was what they may have left out I wonder if it is possible to describe something more fully by removing some of its characteristic qualities.

With the rhythm of a story repeating many times, the same matrix is printed double over itself, trying to get to know itself. Repetitive looking back causes a jarring through the image registrations, anywhere from a slight shift to a complete reversal. Text notations are etched on the plate in both left to right construct and reverse, so that the printed words read backwards and forwards along a horizon. This reminds me of my disturbing obsession with the *Marguerite Mirabaud* being out of place, out of her intended function. Here too, these words slip from their function of recording knowledge and details into a visual culture.⁹ In another movement, my fingers run over the paper as it peels from the plate to read the dissolving surface of a ghost print. Normally an etching plate is inked up each time before being rolled through the press. However, if it is printed without being re-saturated in ink a phantom of the image is embedded. These processes examine the ever shifting, ever mutating nature of human consciousness and pose the question – if we can't trust our recollections what do we really know?

Mercurial, my printed 'works on paper' run through the press many times until layers of different texts, times, details, spaces and surfaces accumulate and melt through one another. I allow the shipwreck of the *Manuka* in.¹⁰ Another time, another shipwreck, another story but how can I resist my desire to stand among the oranges and onions which were washed ashore from the *Manuka* onto the beach when as a French sailor I suffered from scurvy?¹¹ As in remembering, each time a memory is reconstructed there are assimilations from different sources and changes, but the essence of the story is retained.¹² Changes can accumulate until the story becomes unrecognisable; however, when I push the imagery to a parallel point of abstraction I become dissatisfied and many saturated works are abandoned. Hybrid prints that quietly scratch at hidden secrets, unobserved realities and different perceptions through codes of displacement and fracturing survive.¹³ In exhibition this effect chooses to be echoed by pinning the prints up like paper clippings on a wall and inviting the viewers to mobilise them, thereby creating new juxtapositions and continuing the narrative.¹⁴



Marguerite Mirabaud Postcard, 2006, digital invert (blue) and intaglio print (sepia), 10.5 x 15.5 cm each.

striped arms singing
 scurvy hardened feet
 beer foaming waves
 lost bounty, unpaid tolls
 knives, forks, spoons and an iron ferrule
 an auction on the sails
 a compass unable to see the sun
 white on white satin stitch initials
 coiling traces of wagon wheels
 a triangular tent
 and
 one thousand tons of coal briquettes
 there and not there¹⁵

- 1 The *Marguerite Mirabaud* was built in Nantes, France, 1900. Under Captain J M Tattevin she left La Rochelle, France in September 1906, bound for Tahiti. Amidst dense fog she ran into rocks and became shipwrecked at Chrystalls Beach, Akatore, South Otago, 1, 8000 miles off course. [Longitude: 2290967.0. Latitude: 5452493.0.] 17 -02-1907. French Braque Vessel ID: 5888882112. CWN Ingram, 1795 – 1975 *New Zealand Shipwrecks* (Wellington, 1977), 294-5.
- 2 Due to the high number of shipwrecks along the South Otago Coast there is some speculation as to the effect of the magnetic pull of the land on compass equipment and steel lined vessels.
- 3 I have undertaken interview and abstract training to comply with National Oral History Association of New Zealand standards. I discover that children within preliterate cultures were specially trained as oral historians and developed extraordinary memory skills known as eidetic or photographic memory. Oral History http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oral_History last visited 8 June 2006.
- 4 I experience paradoxical discord through the necessity of securing research funding that feels like a continual sliding back and forth across a tensioned tightrope. For me beginning a research project involves putting down survey pegs and intuitively following what is not yet known, but sensed. My first language is visual and 'things' may not be able to be articulated until after the moment of creation. However, historically, my successful funding applications have demonstrated research specifics, outputs, target audiences, benefits and an indication of logical practitioner process. Artists need to be active in ensuring that the models for arts funding keep evolving with recognition of the differences between our languages and towards creating a more ideal synergy.
- 5 This particular box of Imperial photographic glass negatives, coated with a light-sensitive gelatin emulsion, was developed by hobby photographer Mr Alexander Leslie while he was working on the family farm at Bull Creek, Akatore in 1907.

- 6 A photosensitive resin-based plate used in the printmaking industry is also known as a solar plate and Toremilf WS95H11. Like most photographic images, photopolymer is composed of two parts, the base and the light-sensitive emulsion. Credit for the initial development of this plate as an artistic medium largely goes to Dan Weldon. See Dan Weldon and Pauline Muir, *Printmaking in the Sun* (New York: Watson-Guipill, 2001).
- 7 In relation to the impact that this shipwreck had on the South Otago Coast I find the written and photographic documentation surprisingly scarce. Although the newspapers *The Bruce Herald* and *The Otago Witness*, February - March 1907 documented events at the time I cannot locate her on the internet or even in the Nantes Maritime University (CDMO) in France. To my dismay I hear the mast lies dismantled. However; traces of the ship may be located in the Otago Settlers Museum exhibition "Shipwrecked – Maritime Mishaps and Misadventure" (10th June – 24th September 2006), curated by Peter Read. The Hocken Collections have a rare image of the auction and The Tokomairiro Historical Society in Milton holds a quality collection of small photographs and artefacts. The irretrievability of the past is heightened as it becomes increasingly obvious that the contacts Bruce Collins made in 1995 for his book *Rocks, Reefs and Sandbars*, have now deceased. (See Bruce Collins. *Rocks, Reefs and Sandbars: A History of Otago Shipwrecks* (Dunedin: Otago Heritage Books, 1995), 111-116.
- 8 In postscript, a month after writing these artist's pages I have found 'her', on a post card in the private collection of Steven McLachlan, Shades Stamp Shop Ltd, Christchurch. It was too difficult to look, I had to slide the photographic postcard to the bottom of the pile because I was looking at myself.
- 9 The cultural shift in favour of visualising our existence "...marks a significant challenge to the notion of the world as a written text." See Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture* (London & New York: Routledge, 2000), 6-7.
- 10 Objects from the wreck of the *Manuka* at Long Point, South Otago on 16th December 1929 were collected by my father's family and these included my first 'action' toy - a bakelite model of a parachutist, a telescope and a small set of wooden drawers. But these objects were never just objects, they glowed with the aura of stories; in fact I do not think we children could ever open a wooden drawer without activating a mouth paying homage to the sea!
- 11 "Crew suffered from scurvy – lack of greens", recorded by R Leslie on the back of photograph F19-33, at The Tokomairiro Historical Society in Milton.
- 12 Daniel Schacter refers to memory network "connectionism" and explains "...when we remember, we complete a pattern with the best match available in memory; we do not shine a spotlight on a stored picture." See Daniel Schacter, *Searching For Memory* (New York: Basic Books, 1996), 71.
- 13 "The wave in popular understanding brings the depths to the surface, reverses concavity and convexity (always both), surfaces interiority." See Sarah Treadwell, "Weathering, Waves and Fabrications", in *Building Dwelling Drifting: Migrancy and the Limits of Architecture* (Proceedings of the 3rd International "Other Connections" Conference at the University of Melbourne: Melbourne, June 1997), 345.
- 14 The desire for creating viewer interaction is less about touch – on which my previous exhibition focus has been – and more about what the critic Nicolas Bourriaud has termed "relational aesthetics," a condition that manifests less in things than in their inter-human relationships. In my envisaged exhibition I am considering these relationships in layers. One layer comes from my simple premise that each print is a unit and fluidity of the visual order is necessary to parallel the differing sentence structures of the French and English languages utilised. Another layer works with the instability of memory combined with viewers influencing the interpretation and production of the work under the umbrella of Michel Foucault's theory that discourse offers "truth effects", *regards réflexif*, there being no absolute truth. See Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics* (Paris: les presse du réel, 1998); and Marcia Pointon, *History of Art: A Student's Handbook* (London: Routledge, 1997), 97.
- 15 These lists are a pastiche of details and events that I have 'seen' from the *Marguerite Mirabaud* shipwreck.

Lynn Taylor is a print media artist who undertakes an interdisciplinary approach to the mapping of memory. She exhibits nationally and internationally; and has received a number of awards with her work held in many collections. She also positions her work within communities through residencies, Sister City exchanges and her role on the Anna and John Caselberg Trust. Taylor is a lecturer at Otago Polytechnic School of Art and Co-Director of Salisbury House Gallery www.salisburyhousegallery.com in Dunedin.

MATTHEWS*: SENTIMENT AND JEWELLERY

Michele Beevors

"On the other hand, affirming that the universe resembles nothing and is only formless amounts to saying that the universe is something like a spider or spiti."¹

Formless turns itself inside out, it's a moebius strip looping with crazy logic that artists seem to understand. Instinctively Leslie Matthews knows this. Her work invokes formlessness, timelessness and the loopholes of language through precision and materialises the obliteration of labour: One can only invoke formlessness, never pin it down. George Bataille² describes it as an adjective, one which gets squashed everywhere; it exists to describe metaphorically something that can't be described. Meaning is always elsewhere.

Leslie Matthews's work maps cartographically every nuance of surface. The small fragment becomes a whole world. Every anomaly of surface is smoothed over; edges rounded. Every trace of the artist's hand is obliterated by the artist's own labour.

Often when an artist leaves home it is to gain perspective on the place vacated; more important it seems, than seeing somewhere new. Leslie Matthews's work evokes a particular feeling I have about Australia, the Australian desert, a place I have never been to. *The Dead Heart* of the Midnight Oil song, a place dry, eroded and barren. A place filtered through images of cattle carcasses, bleached and crumbling, and the cracked earth, caked dry, damaged riverbeds, and the sun constantly blazing. A place of bushfires that filled summer nights with asthma wheeze, of singlets and beer; truck drivers who smelled of the thousand sheep pellets they were carting from who knows where to who knows where; of Anzac Day and the coloured medals of grandfathers past. HOME. Real and imagined, this is as close as one gets to national sentimentality and it is only distance that allows for any kind of sentiment, as 'there' you are too immersed in global hegemony to notice. It is only since leaving that I am able to declare, "I am Australian."

It's weird to think about Nationalism, because I have always thought that the television raised me, nourished, impoverished and fertilised me. Maybe Matthews's brooches in black and silver; polished and matt surfaces remind me of that flicker, of the TV screen, in black and white, of watching the parade through the black and white haze of *Graham the King*. Or maybe her brooches *do* remind

Leslie Matthews, *Untitled*, 2005,
etching on paper; image to be used
for future jewellery piece, approx.
35 x 45 cm (courtesy of the artist).



me of Anzac Day and the medals. Gone, all gone. Sentiment, tears, Australianess. What was given, the working class, for what was gained.

The idea of sentiment and jewellery is not necessarily new. *The Antiques Roadshow* is a fantastic television programme. The participants in some quaint English village line up with their most precious possessions to be appraised; they fall into one of two categories. They show me the money brigade (they think *The Price is Right*) or the sentimental fool who has inherited the object of affection from uncle/auntie so and so and who would not part with it for all the money in all of the world. The 'Price is Righters' are largely uninteresting, except when their objects are undervalued and their disappointment registers all over their faces. The sentimental fool is diametrically opposed to this kind of behaviour, because they know in their heart of hearts that this object – this tea pot, this brooch – connects them to the world in a real and particular way. It ties them to their birth, to the law of the Father and to their heritage as Englishmen and -women.

In an essay called "Subjective Discourse of the Non-Functional System of Objects", Jean Baudrillard³ sets about identifying according to use (or functionality) two distinct sets of objects which circulate within modern Western culture. The first is the capitalist mode, a world where objects are accumulated according to their usefulness; and opposed to this mode is the mode of useless objects, the bygone object, the kitsch or folk object, the gadget – who really needs an electric garlic press? Art could be added in this category, and on the Roadshow, often is. But with one difference, Art is not functional in terms of needs but is jumbled in together with teapots, dolls and trinkets then ordered in terms of scarcity.

Like all of the objects on the *Antiques Roadshow*, progress has left these objects behind, forgotten them, discarded them, tarnished their surfaces, chipped their edges. All that remains is their tenuous link to the past; to works in a series; to the labour that went into their making; to the very important

marks made by the maker; to the stamps of industry which equate to value; and to date. Value and authenticity rely on these marks. Value is accrued according to the celebrity status of the maker. These objects are the once useful, now forgotten, momentarily remembered, then slipped back into a drawer for another quarter of a century, until it's someone else's turn to worry about them, and to make the decision: to sell or not to sell.

This extra special thing, this piece of jewellery, this fragment of work – evidence of hands polishing and forming a piece of metal to look like a fragment of bone – remains. All of this meaning emanates from a small brooch. The surface is plain, there are no detailed engravings, it is all form, but within this simple form lies a gamut of emotional intensity moving between the artist and the viewer. The viewer often overlooks this, and forgets the artist's drive to obliterate her own trace – like those bones, in that desert, empty only of life, but not of time. The crafts know this the way that the arts don't: the maker's hand becomes timeless when not overshadowed by the relatively recent cult of celebrity attached to mega-stardom on the circuit of contemporary art.

Matthews's employment of simple natural forms also hides this intensity and complexity through a small metal brooch that can evoke the desert, nationalism, and the systems we live with but take for granted everyday. *Waves of My Brother Jack*⁴ cause nausea and sentimentality floods the land, for this desert, this Australia, is not the desert of our childhoods, or the desert of our fancies. It is now the desert of the Woomera detention camp. Nationalism is not as it was when George Johnston wrote it in the fifties. Australia is much altered. It is hard to forgive successive liberal governments for the rampant greed you see palpable on the streets of Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide. In this political climate, the waves of Aussie larrikinism, of generosity and happy times are tainted. It will never be the same.

* Adelaide-based Leslie Matthews worked at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin, New Zealand as artist-in-residence from February to April, 2005. Her residency was supported by Creative New Zealand and the Otago Polytechnic Education Foundation.

- 1 See Rosalind Krauss and Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide* (New York: Zone Books, 1997).
- 2 See Georges Bataille, *Formless*, reprinted in Krauss & Yve-Alain Bois, *Formless: A User's Guide*.
- 3 See Jean Baudrillard, "Subjective Discourse of the Non-Functional System of Objects", in *Revenge of the Crystal* (London: Pluto, 1993).
- 4 See George Johnston, *My Brother Jack* (London & Sydney: Collins, 1964).

Michele Beevors trained on postgraduate level at the Australian National University in Canberra and at Columbia University in New York. A sculptor who exhibits widely in Australia and New Zealand, she is a senior lecturer and head of Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin.

“SMALL DISASTERS”

Marie Strauss



The Prostitute, 1980s, oil on canvas,
approx. 80 x 60 cm.



The Boxer, 1980s, oil on canvas,
approx. 80 x 60 cm.

I was awarded the first of two Monash/South Project residencies for 2006. Monash University, in collaboration with Craft Victoria, developed these residencies as part of their programme to create exchange opportunities for an extensive network of artists and cultural workers. The residencies function primarily as a vehicle for artists to explore ways of linking different cultures of the south – cultures defined by different languages spoken in South America, New Zealand, South Africa and Australia and people from different cultural backgrounds (for example, indigenous and settler); as well as furthering a dialogue on progressive art practice functioning away from the epicentres of the world. Artistic creation is very much dependent on the experience of cultural difference. To this end, the residency programme is being developed to enable artists to spend time within participating cultures.

My work always revolves around the theatre. I use motifs on a dramatic stage to create narratives within the boundaries of a frame and distanced from the viewer through the suggestion of a vertical proscenium or a horizontal ground. Other work calls to mind spot-lit cameo shots of stage *personae*. Some of these images are of such *personae* 'acting' in the public domain; while others are of *personae* busy in the domestic domain.

The narratives I endeavour to present in these later works – as well as in my earlier South African Art practice – deal with the reality of violence, whether it is physical or physiological, public or domestic. The paintings explore issues of people playing a part to fit into society, of the bruised and damaged, of the underprivileged, the dislocated, the lost and the victimised.

I deploy staged and costumed images of the Other – prostitute, boxers, Christ, children – thus making it possible for the work to be less subjective and personal as the *dramatis personae* bring the work to the public domain through their enhanced accessibility; it is not my voice speaking nor my subjective perspective.

For my recent work, I used similar methods of theatricality in creating an installation entitled “Small Disasters”, with “small” referring not so much to size but to the fact that so many acts of violence go unnoticed and are never brought into the public domain, as if they were too insignificant to notice. “Disasters” refer to the nature, the consequences and the effects of these acts of violence on people’s lives. The works are multi-media, ranging from video, drawing, painting, and ceramics to photography and combining these in my interarts practice.

As mentioned before, the works deal with violence in its many manifestations, from public humiliation, rape, gang behaviour, subservience in the domestic scene, to homophobic beatings and to home invasion. These depictions explore the reality of violence within contemporary postcolonial contexts of the South, which includes countries such as South Africa, New Zealand and Australia. European cultural dislocation and destabilisation in such contexts are closely aligned with psychic disturbances underpinning violent acts and scenarios.

I work to expose these issues through visualisation and materialisation. But, as my work is all about illusion and the setting up of scenarios, I try to retain the magic of the theatre performance and to seduce the viewer into this ‘other’ world, thereby inviting him or her to deal with the content on a supposedly ‘objective’, or at least a distanced level.

In the work I use animals acting as humans. In doing this, I am able to address issues of cruelty and truth much more directly. This is a strategy used by other artists, for example where Paula Rego dresses up her people as animals. By using animals in an apparently familiar scenario, they easily metamorphosise into the grotesque, acting out what we ourselves choose to suppress and ignore.

My interest in this type of iconography started when I was a young child spending a lot of time in the African bush. I became very familiar with animals such as monkeys, baboons, meerkats, rabbits, tortoises, hyenas, bats, and through visits to the zoo, with bears. As a child I was fascinated with the cartoons of Hannibal, a South African cartoonist who drew satirical pictures of a baboon community and published them in a magazine for kids.

I make use of animals that represent certain characteristics such as the hyena which purportedly has a bad and mean character; the bunny rabbit as a victim; the baboon acting as a powerful gang member. Artists whose work I continue to revisit and who influence and inspire my repertoire of actors are Otto Dix for his anti-Nazi drawings; Daumier for his cartoon characters; Grosz for his portrayal of brutality; William Kentridge for his theatricality and clarity; Paula Rego; Henry Darger; and lastly but mainly, Goya for his theatrical presentations of violence. These artists’ treatment of



Behind Glass, 2004, oil on glass, approx. 30 x 20 cm each.



Domestic Scene, 2005, from the series *If This Were a Perfect World*, ash and mixed media drawing on oil paper, 100 x 85 cm.

space suggests a stage and their work invoke all the excitement and suspense of the theatre.

The materials I use to create my work form an integral part of the concept. The storyboard paintings on reversed glass entitled *Behind Glass* need the material to be breakable, fragile, and accessible – in that it is not painted on canvas, but rather on two dollar shop cheap framed glass rectangles. This series of work involve a repetition of the same scenario in primary colours. At first it looks like a children's story but on closer examination it depicts three major social concerns, namely home invasion, youth suicide and child abuse. One also has the sensation – due to the use of glass – of being a voyeur looking in onto a brutal scene without been able to intervene.

My drawings are made on sandpaper and ordinary paper but with soot. The sandpaper and soot (which erodes easily) allude to our sense of erasure, of forgetting and suppressing. The titles refer to Goya's disasters of war etchings. The scenes are all staged with all but one of the spectators removed to the background, highlighting the impotence and vulnerability of the victims. The soot drawings are clear depictions of figures (and sometimes staged clay figurines) acting in a brutal event, painted in soot, a rubbish material associated with dirt, thus also stressing the lack of seriousness coupled with disgust with which domestic violence is often viewed.

My video work is the result of collaboration between Michael Morley, a New Zealand artist and musician, and myself. The work involves a slow moving image of hovering bats with a romantic and strangely haunting soundtrack playing on a loop. The aim of this work is

to materialise one's uncomfortable experience and sense of doom when inside the surrounding installation.

The ceramic part of my installation includes a display of figurines in narrative scenarios on plinths, where they perform and are then photographed. The use of clay as a material is motivated by the haptic sense of touch that the material engenders. Without wanting to sound like Grayson Perry, I also choose to work in clay with its history of figurines and useless displays that gather dust. Its reference to sweet sentimentality and its low position in the hierarchy of art materials also attract me. Because of the sheen of the glaze that bounces off too much light, I dipped the figurines in wax, giving them an icing sugar appearance at odds with the themes they suggest.

These figurines were then in turn used as material for my most recent work: large scale (100 x 83 cm) digital photopgraphs also exhibited in the "Small Disasters" installation. These works are again theatrical in nature: scenarios are created and narratives of violence and brutality play out on a stage. And again, I work to seduce my viewers into a false sense of comfort so that they are drawn into the large scale of the works before they realise the tragedies being enacted; tragedies we so often turn a blind eye to; the sort of tragedies also highlighted by the artists I admire.

Marie Strauss is an interdisciplinary artist working with drawing, sculpture, photography, video, painting and ceramic media. She exhibits in New Zealand and Australia and was an artist-in-residence at Monash University earlier in 2006. She is also currently engaged in her Master of Fine Arts project on violence, vulnerability and the monstrous with specific reference to the work of Goya.



Small Disasters # 5, 2006, digital photograph, 100 x 85cm.



Small Disasters # 2, 2006, digital photograph, 100 x 85cm.



In A Lonely Place, 2006, acrylic and resin on gesso on vinyl record, 17.5 cm Ø.

YOU POSE YOU LOSE: SILENT INCIDENCE IN THE VISUAL FIELD

Michael Morley

"The object of true, achieved and necessary utterance is silence."
(Anthony Cronin on Samuel Beckett)¹

Prelude

Samuel Beckett observes and reports upon the object of the true utterance as being silence. John Cage in a similar response to the search for truth in all things resorts to a composition where listening within a void of music is presented as silence, or certainly that where there is no recognisable composition. Cage's seminal piece 4'33" has become the composition that confounds and confuses and yet ultimately reveals something about this search for a representation of truth. That it represents silence and at the same time represents all sound is the ultimate achievement of 4'33". That in a strange way it also engages with the history of recorded sound is a happy accident of Cage's use of chance within the construction of 4'33". The length of time for Cage's composition is also the approximate maximum length of time for a seven-inch record rotating at forty-five revolutions per minute. Beyond this length the recorded music embedded within the vinyl begins to lose fidelity due to the bunching of the grooves pressed into the disc.

I was initially drawn to Cage's ideas about silence and how these silences can be physical and/or phenomenological. How these silences are not the inverse of sound, but how silences complement the sound that the silence frames. These would be the physical manifestations of silence with regard to sound. There are other silences that we engage with every day. These may include, but are not limited to: the silence of regret, the silence of hate, the silence of shame, or the silence of love. These are phenomenological examples, and refer to Cage's desire to liberate silence from the idea that it is a void and null. Silence is the operational pause within the flow of the quotidian; it allows for concealment and reflection within the arc of our existence. It is precisely the kind of silence that Cage was expecting to be revealed within 4'33".²

Every place has its own unique silence. The anechoic chamber, a space designed to suppress sound, amplifies the sounds made within the participant body's resonating cavities: pumping, whooshing, crackling, and snapping with fluids, gases, and electrical current; a simple beach setting at

sunset, crashing waves, cries of birds and children, gravel and sand grinding under the unstoppable ocean, and distance traffic creating a constantly phasing hum of activity. Silence at an imagined zero limit seems impossible at any given location; rather the suppression of sound to varying degrees of success is all that can be attained.

Reference to a location's silence has particular significance within the film industry, in which silence is recorded in order to capture the ambient audio qualities of a particular place – for insertion into the soundtrack, should it be required. This has the ability to lock the audio event to the recorded visual frame, and creates the illusion of connection between the two events: the images that constitute film or video, and the audio. The composer and writer, Michel Chion, states that the event of silence “is the product of a contrast.”³ It is the question of how this contrast is interpreted that becomes one of the most compelling arguments for the need to examine relationships between silence and the visual field.

Composer and writer Toru Takemitsu suggests that: “confronting silence by uttering a sound is nothing but verifying one's own existence.”⁴ When one considers this notion in terms of painting one is confronted by the very silence of the object. Painting conveys ideas, but at the level of interpretive contemplation, no sound emanates.

Within my own practice as a painter, I have been examining this relationship between sound and image. Paintings of twelve-inch records playing – or at least *appearing* as though they are playing – engage with an attempt to visualise aspects of the correlation between silence and sound. The paintings are always mute, this is a given, yet their titles refer to an object, and that object can be made to play a recorded sound. This recorded sound is not the actual sound of the performance, but a collage of sounds captured at another moment, whether in a studio recording or during a live event. This fictitious performance renders the performed song silent – it is only the recorded song that can be used as aural evidence of the music's existence. The ability of the viewer to grasp or recall an idea of the sound that the title implies assists in re-creating the aural memory, thus enabling recognition by the viewer of the painted subject.

My obsession with sound and image has also led me to investigate architecture as a site in which to examine the ongoing relationship between the visual and auditory fields. Buildings exist within the physical environment and thus operate as silencers or amplifiers of sound. The building silences the sound within it; no noise escapes the suffocating combination of walls, floors, and ceilings. The building also excludes the noises that occur outside of it (perhaps in some cases not as efficiently as they should) but the general intent is to exclude the ‘unwanted’ sounds of the external world.

My own paintings of unidentified buildings operate as signifiers to this loss of sound. In these paintings I am looking at the architectural, the single building, and the anonymous monumental architecture that is surrounded by sound and which envelopes sound. This is the sound of the urban, of the city noise that is incessant. The intention is to reveal the building separated from its surroundings and the sound of the city. It is an attempt to see if there is a silence around the idea of the building, without trying to refer to the sound of the urban.

In the latest instalment of this idea I have made a painting called *Empire*. The building in this

case is the Sony Entertainment Headquarters in Culver City, Los Angeles. This is a site of some importance within the entertainment culture industry that operates within the United States. It historically represents the area of the studios, those huge covered and uncovered sound stages in which narratives are constructed with film. Silence plays some part here: the required silence of the film set; the silence of the industry; of deals unknown; of the politics of Hollywood – a world that could be said to be hermetic for those within, but almost certainly for those without. A complicity is revealed most acutely within the celebrity system itself, in which images of individuals are created as divorced from their reality. Constructed names are used to hide and to obscure the identity of the individual; to create as believably as possible the potential for a universal character which instantly silences the history of the originating individual – Marilyn Monroe, as a dated example of the uses of silences within this system, specifically being NOT Norma Jean.

Most recently I have been concentrating my efforts on the seven-inch record. In this body of work a record is placed on a revolving turntable and painted twice with a gesso layer. Individual acrylic colours and resin are mixed to create a unique palette, and these colours are applied in radiating bands onto the prepared disc, using the turntable as a painting machine to increase accuracy with regard to line and finish. The action of covering the disc with paint destroys the ability for the record to play the song stamped into its surface. The obverse side is similarly vandalised with a label and more resin. A title denotes a once prized audio possession complete with memories and resonances, and yet silenced from its past, and now trapped in a death loop: playable and not playable.

The silencing of the disc with paint is a mere visual representation of something that could be *silence*. Through this process the disc contains not only the unplayable song that its title denotes but also acquires the wider concept of silence as Cage has already explained. The layers of paint and new grooves are freely improvised within the gesso, acrylic and resin with a brush, creating a self-generating 4'33", if in fact it were *dared* to be played on a turntable.

The composer and writer Michael Nyman has said of 4'33":

...[it] is a demonstration of the non-existence of silence, of the permanent presence of sounds around us, of the fact that they are worthy of attention, and that for Cage 'environmental sounds and noises are more useful aesthetically than the sounds produced by the world's musical culture'. 4'33" is not a negation of music but an affirmation of its omnipresence.⁵

Cage's 4'33" is a silence that is contained within a representational structural form, the artefact of the musical score which allows the performer to reveal to the listener that which is around them in an audible sense. The three parts within the composition represent changes influenced by chance operations. That silence is experienced by the listener is not the point of the composition. The point is rather the revealing of the natural world of sounds – and how these might be used to challenge the definition of music to include all sound as being acceptable to the construction of a composition – that presents the most important aspect of the work. The idea of the composition as a democratic event is also very important within Cage's *oeuvre*. The ability for 4'33" to be performed by anybody, at any time, knowingly or unknowingly, echoes one of the tenants so essential to punk rock in the late 1970s: that anyone can play.

"Silence surrounds the dark world of death. Sometimes the silence hovers over us, enveloping us. There is the intense silence of birth, the quiet silence of one's return to the earth."⁶

In this statement, Takemitsu speaks of silence as a sign of death; suggesting that absolute silence is only obtained at death and that it is this silence that we forever strive for but can never attain until our final moment. This silence is very different from the silence of Cage, who hopes to include sound as a component of silence; to assist in the idea of a contrast; to emphasise the paradoxical nature of the world - whereas a negation of sound is at the root of Takemitsu's idea of ultimate silence: this silence being at once unobtainable and forever chimera-like, especially in the way that its quality manoeuvres through space and time.

The notion that sound operates at not just the level of the auditory but also as a signifier for existence and for memories resonates within all references to sound, including music; classical and modern. My initial investigation involved looking at how ideas are encapsulated within a sound sample; a fragment; the memory of the song or melody; and how this may attach itself to some other memory that is not related to the sound, other than operating as a soundtrack for the moment. One perennial example is the scenario where a character within a narrative is in love and a particular song becomes recurrent as either signifying the bond between characters, or as creating the audio link to the memory of an event. Or that scene in which one of the protagonists states nostalgically "they're playing our song" as a way of locking the moment within an auditory memory, almost it would seem – and this is certainly the case within cinema – forever. The moment loops endlessly in time.

Samples from the cinema within the work of the video artists Christoph Girardet and Matthias Muller directly refer to this effect of the loop. Endless deaths are acted out *ad infinitum* to present to the viewer the idea that: this moment is forever. Angelika Richter observes: "The unseen and unsaid are what makes Matthias Muller's films so especially effective."⁷ Essentially, silences are the defining event within these film fragments, as the artists use only partial sequences from a much longer cinematic whole.

You Say You Don't Love Me

I have ten thousand seven-inch records. The records were mostly purchased by the kilogram from Real Groovy in Auckland in 1995, sight unseen, for an installation project. This in itself goes against the grain of recorded media purchases; certainly one would never normally request such a thing. There is too much at stake here, the possibility of duplication being only one of many obvious problems with the lack of a selection process. However, this was never a concern for the project, as I intended to use records visually – no attempt would be made to play them. The records were exhibited in stacks, as a mute testament to a technology fading fast from popular memory itself. On one occasion a group of five-year olds on a gallery visit exclaimed that they were "big cd's, and how would they fit inside a cd player?" The records were returned to me after the installation and they have populated my studio and house ever since, in stacks and piles hidden everywhere.

Trying to secrete the discs into the architecture of a building is another attempt at silencing the sounds that have been carefully recorded and then pressed into the precious vinyl. I have

always considered these as potential new works, or at least as material for new works, but had not conceived of a project where this could be realised. It was not until I had started to think about sound and silence that I revisited the seven-inch records and they then became the vehicle/medium for my investigation into the relations between sound and silence; an investigation that has become vitally important to my work as a sound artist and as a visual artist.

The record as artefact has been utilised by many in different ways for as long as the medium has existed. The history of recording media is testament to this, and the ways in which artists have subverted the object to fulfil other roles reveal something about the disc as being more than just the substrate that carries sound. For example, and as my work demonstrates, the disc can also be used as a sign for a sound, for that peculiar way in which the groove represents a line wrapped around a central axis point.

When thinking about my stack of ten thousand, I realised that I should try to represent something about silence and memory. This led me to placing the disc onto a record player, having it spin, and to applying paint onto the surface in concentric circles, representative of the loop. (This is an action that relates to my childhood, as being the son of a potter I was forever being drafted into the studio system to assist in the applying of glazes in circles upon bisque-fired plates using the pottery wheel as the spinning/drawing device.)

By painting onto the record I eliminated the song, silencing the carefully crafted tune and rendering it as all but unlistenable. Despite this I did, however, make decisions about just what disc I would be disfiguring, obscuring the actual title and gifting it one that had more *apparent* 'value'. By associating the record with a title from sound recording's vast history of seven-inch record releases, I make a connection to the past and to a memory of the song. This is similar to my strategy employed for my paintings of twelve-inch records playing on phonographs or turntables, the titles of which directly refer to album or long player releases.

The presentation of the seven-inch as the support associated with the title helps to create a level of anxiety. The titles used are specific and the importance of their selection will be recognised by some viewers although to others it may have no meaning. The work has been designed to generate unease within the knowledgeable viewer, the connoisseur, by engaging specifically with the way a record collector may hold particular recordings in higher regard than others. A hierarchy of desire is created and based upon obscurity and in some instances on a silence. Such anxiety contributes to the danger of desiring the impossible; again a chimera that continuously shifts identity – representational as well as conceptual.

You Pose You Lose

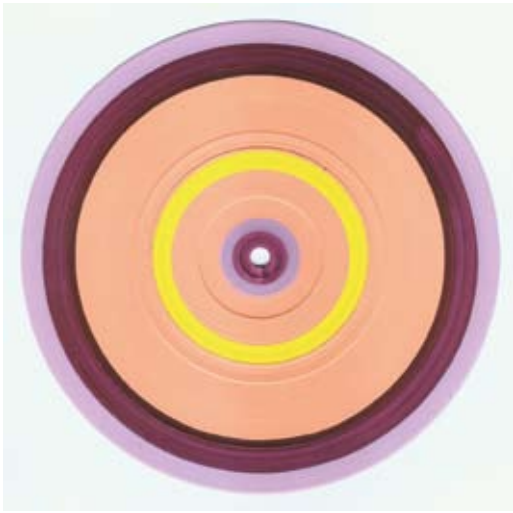
In a recent project by the Australian artist, Marco Fusinato, *O_King variations* (2004), circular drawings by the artist are translated onto polyvinyl carbonate discs by the New Zealand disc-lathe recording engineer, Peter King.⁸ Grooves just as one would expect on a twelve-inch disc masquerade as a 'long player', but hardly as the repository of music or sound. Sometimes the grooves cross over one another so that a lattice of silent grooves traverses the surface of the disc. The very act of supplying

drawings rather than an audio master disc is the first of many transgressive acts committed within this work. The PVC discs utilised do not have the authority of hot-pressed black vinyl. The discs are presented resting upon a small purpose-built shelf, naked and susceptible to accidental damage, dust, and scratches; but also allowing for light to produce faint shadows upon the wall behind: an impossible and successful attempt at drawing the sound of nothing.

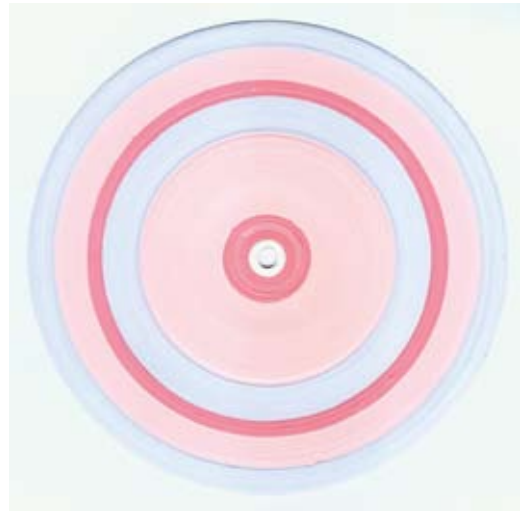
Cover art and inner sleeves are made redundant. In a cruel trick Fusinato has also released a four disc set of black vinyl records complete with inner sleeves and glorious heavy metal and extremely gothic cover art that acts as a 'greatest hits' compendium of the *O_King variations*. The stuff of collectors' dreams but ultimately unplayable, the discs represent another attempt at Takemitsu's desire for silence as an affirmation of existence.

So what of silence? Can a painted seven-inch record really be representative of silence? In a purely literal sense one can still play these things if one must. The obverse side is painted in predetermined, individually mixed colours, and sealed within a layer of resin; while the converse side has a label affixed denoting title, with a layer of acrylic varnish applied to further encase the record in a skin or veneer. If played on a turntable the record then begins to exhibit certain other tendencies. It is silent, but not silent. It bumps, and grinds, and scratches. It mimics the action associated with the object, yet nothing is transmitted; the colours are grouped as loops but no linear notation is apparent and the title does not connote the sound.

The sound is not music as such but more specifically noise. It fulfils Cage's desire for the listener to actively listen, and in this case it becomes the sound of the needle bumping onto the surface of the disc. This sound also appears – as Takemitsu asserts – as an answer to the void of death. It comes to represent the idea of sound, but must remain silent, or unplayed, to fulfil the idea of audible silence; and perhaps now an absolute silence, the record being effectively dead, embalmed and mute.



Hurricane, 2006, acrylic and resin on gesso on vinyl record, 17.5 cm Ø.



Dance Machine, 2006, acrylic and resin on gesso on vinyl record, 17.5 cm Ø.

- 1 Anthony Cronin, *Samuel Beckett: The Last Modernist* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 376.
- 2 John Cage, *Silence* (Cambridge Mass.: MIT, 1966), 8.
- 3 Michel Chion, *Audio-Vision: Sound on Screen* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 57.
- 4 Toru Takemitsu, *Confronting Silence* (Berkeley, Calif.: Fallen Leaf Press, 1995), 17.
- 5 Michael Nyman, *Experimental Music* (London: Studio Vista, 1974), 22.
- 6 See endnote 4.
- 7 Kathrin Becker (ed.), *Album: Matthais Muller* (Berlin: NBK, 2004), 96.
- 8 Peter King operates King Records Worldwide (originally out of Geraldine, New Zealand), a disc-lathe operation that transfers audio recordings from tape or compact disc to a polyvinyl carbonate disc. This is a typically home-made solution to the problem of no record pressing plants in New Zealand and has been used by artists from New Zealand and overseas. Records can be made in limited editions from 20 – 1000. Please refer to the URL for more detailed information about this service <http://home.comcast.net/~cassette/> as last visited on 6 October 2006.

Michael Morley is a painter and a sound artist who exhibits and performs regularly in New Zealand, Australia, Europe and the United States of America. He is also a lecturer in drawing at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin; and is currently completing his Master of Fine Arts in Painting at Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch.



Untitled, 2006, oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cm.

PAINTING METHODOLOGIES

Alexandra Kennedy

“Painting was done for long ago.” (Kasimir Malevich)

This article addresses the manner in which much of contemporary painting is engaged with methodologies which cannot be accounted for within the established critical frameworks of modernism or postmodernism. In proposing a third alternative it draws together principles from a number of theoretical fields to position such contemporary painting as ‘amodernist’. The position of amodernism is then used to provide a theoretical framework for my own painting practice.

I illustrate the way in which painting has responded to changing circumstances and challenges to its ongoing validity and relevance through an engagement with the theme of the endgame, or death, of painting. Beginning within the critical frameworks of modernism and postmodernism, my article continues by identifying new forms of engagement which are then used to position much contemporary painting as ‘amodernist’.

On the one hand, the essentialist project in painting is identified, where the material nature of painting is positioned as being uniquely able to fulfil certain aesthetic functions. On the other hand, ways in which painting practice has engaged with the possibility of its own demise are explained. These positions are played out within the frameworks of modernism and postmodernism. ‘Amodernism’ is presented as a position which can make a claim for painting’s continuing validity as a critical practice through the manner in which it demonstrates an understanding of its own history; addresses its position within contemporary art practice; and finds new ways in which to engage with the themes of authenticity and the mediated image.

A painting is a mediated image. By this I mean that it is constructed, in the sense that ideas and concepts are presented via the intermediated agency of the hand of the artist or a machine. My argument begins in the early modern period, which saw in an important form of mediation, that is, the mass production of images. Heralded by the advent of photography, this was a significant development for the practice of painting and, by the mid-twentieth century, for its position in relationship to other fields of art making.

Many changes occurred in society and in the artworld during the early modern period. Avant-garde artists such as Manet began to draw their subject matter from contemporary life and to focus

on the way a painting was made through an emphasis on the materiality of paint. As Jason Gaiger says: "It is out of this productive tension between the exigency of truth to materials and exigency of truth to reality that modernism in the visual arts began."¹ Photography played a significant part in these developments. Firstly, it freed painting from its traditional role in depicting the world of appearances, thus enabling artists to explore other possibilities, and secondly, some painters made use of a number of the characteristics of the photographic image.

The practice of painting in the Western world in the latter part of the twentieth century can be made sense of in terms of its efforts to be progressive "in the face of widespread acknowledgement that by the mid- to late 1960s it had lost its position at the forefront of ambitious art."² In part at least this was because artists were beginning to engage in other forms of practice such as film, video, performance, land art, conceptual art and art and language. These practices were offering a critique of "the processes through which artworks were constructed and their legitimacy maintained."³ Performance and land art's refusal to operate in any established sense within the gallery space and conceptual art's challenging of the role of the artwork as an aesthetic object oriented to visual or perceptual concerns, are examples. Much painting, in relationship to these practices, could not be identified as being engaged in any critique of itself or its own position within the artworld and its institutions. From this position painting could be viewed as merely a reworking of old strategies and consequently as conservative and outmoded.

The critical frameworks of modernism and postmodernism are both outcomes of the Enlightenment. Modernism, founded as it is in historicism and essentialism, represents a recapitulation of the Enlightenment ideal of human progress and the notion that humanity can be improved through an appeal to rationality. That is to say, modernism continues to develop the secularisation and individualism of the Renaissance and Enlightenment thinking and takes recourse in a rationality which has its basis in science. This thinking generated a number of elements of modernist art, not the least its self-referential nature and indexicality; with the index referencing the hero of the Enlightenment, the individual, and in modernism's case, the genius of the individual artist and their signature style. However, in the case of painting this indexicality is also self-referential in the sense that it plays a part in the development of the notion that essence will be discovered through the 'playing out' of a logic internal to the work of art. Suzi Gablick says in citing Clement Greenberg: "Only the 'dictates of the medium' – pure paint and the flatness of the picture plane – were held to be worthwhile concerns for painting."⁴

This approach seeks a synthesis of form and content, subject and object in an essentialist pursuit of the 'true' nature of painting. For critics such as Greenberg this essence of painting lay in its own plastic nature, in the physicality of the medium: "The purely plastic or abstract qualities of the work of art are the only ones that count."⁵ The development toward this essence involved a process which is a logical outcome of Enlightenment thinking, in the sense that it participates in a notion of progress and self-criticality. This process can also be viewed, in the case of painting, as a response to the need to find a new purpose for itself since its death was first mooted in the early modern era.⁶ From this there followed the development of the 'zero form' in the early twentieth century

by Malevich and Rodchenko; Mondrian's ideas concerning the dissolution of all art forms including painting into art as environment;⁷ art's abandonment in the early part of the twentieth century by Marcel Duchamp who saw the readymade as a negation of painting; Ad Reinhardt's 'last painting'; and, other such 'zero' gestures. By the 1960s painting was seen by some as "condemned to an increasingly conservative rehearsal of strategies and gestures that had lost their original significance."⁸ One aspect of essentialism, as a central theme of high modernism, is that it participates in the endgame of painting, since seeking the essence implies that there *is* one, and that, once found, or achieved, painting will have fulfilled its purpose and will therefore be redundant.

"Everything is empty at the centre"⁹ says Suzi Gablick when writing on postmodernism. While modernism has organising principles in its pursuit of essence and meaning, postmodernism can be understood through what it opposes. In this sense it is against modernism. Postmodernism has as one of its characteristic trends the resisting of synthesis rather than the seeking of it and perhaps is best defined as "a critique of aspects of the established project of modernity."¹⁰ The focus of its critique is the idealist or utopian aspect of modernism and it achieves this through the use of a plurality of methods, materials and strategies. It deconstructs, historicises, popularises and nihilises. Postmodernism eliminates the organising force of modernism and resists consistent or coherent form. Hence modernism involves synthesis in that it tries to create unity from disparate formal elements and postmodernism is pastiche as it makes no attempt at a new unity.

Postmodern painting resists an internal logic as a strategy. In so doing, it represents a move from an autonomous object with its own internal logic to an object which – while still operating indexically – acts as an empty sign in that it points to something, although the position or place to which it points is empty, devoid of, or resistant to, any particular meaning.

The work of David Salle embodies this strategy. He encompasses within a single painting a range of styles and subjects drawn from high and low culture, the historical and the contemporary, to create a random encounter of disparate elements with no attempt made at unity.

And further; "...the lexicon of postmodernism is the abstraction and reworking – the 'personification' – of modernist style itself, so that style is read through style, with the body of modernism serving as the original text."¹¹

This trajectory has been eloquently played out in the work of Daniel Buren, where a signature of high modernism, the stripe, is employed in a manner which empties it of all meaning, direction and purpose. His work *Within and Beyond the Frame* (1973), extended beyond the confines of the frame of both the picture and the institution (the gallery). It was made of nineteen grey and white striped canvas sections extending nearly two hundred feet, starting at one end of a gallery in New York and continuing out of the window across the street to become attached to the building opposite the gallery. It operates as institutional critique through the challenging of the art institution's role in conferring authenticity and uniqueness to the artwork. The manner in which this work engages in a referential dialogue with the modernist project means that modernism can be identified as the 'original text'.

Thus, postmodernism is of the same order as photography, operating as a trace or index of

an external object (modernism) and “filled with meaning only when physically juxtaposed with an external referent or object.”¹² We can say, therefore, that it is both empty sign (shifter)¹³ in its relationship to the world, and index in its relationship to modernism.

It is interesting to consider that postmodernist strategies in effect emulated the ontology, that is, recreated the same order of being, as photography. For while photography can claim any number of variations on the theme of the death of the image or author, it cannot escape the fact that at an ontological level it acts as a direct trace of something which *was* – even if for a fleeting moment in time – whilst simultaneously existing in the present. This one to one correspondence between the photograph and that which it depicts is an indexical relationship between past and present.

This is an important point because I want to go on to argue for a distinction between the postmodern and the ‘amodern’. The point that is being made here is that postmodernism has an indexical relationship to modernism, as photography does to its subject. My argument for the ‘amodern’ will develop along the lines of a much more ambiguous relationship with the original referent.

There are a number of contemporary painters whose work can be seen to be free of the entropy, the turning in on itself, which is a feature of modernist and postmodernist practices. In seeking to define a position for this work, use can be made of a notion such as ‘amodernism’. I will approach this notion through reference to the work of Gerhard Richter.

John Gaiger has said: “Richter has made the problem of how to continue painting central to his work as an artist, producing a body of work that incorporates a critical and reflexive understanding of the history of painting alongside a close engagement with the forms and structures of the modern, mediated world.”¹⁴

Coming out of East Germany to train in West Germany at a time (the 1960s) when he was influenced by movements such as Fluxus and *l’art informel*, Richter could have chosen to abandon painting for more ‘contemporary’ art practices. Instead, he has continued to paint and his work can be seen as providing a way out of the *impasse* of painting in our period.

Richter’s subject matter is characterised by its heterogeneity and also by his assertion of his choices as ‘arbitrary’.¹⁵ There is movement between the historical and the contemporary, the horrific and the banal, and the use of the photograph as a readymade in the form of press and amateur photographs.

An awareness of painting’s own history is demonstrated in his approach to – and reworking of – the genres of history painting and the German landscape tradition. In the case of the former there is a double subversion. This resides firstly in a side-stepping from the ‘main event’ and secondly through what is depicted – recent and contemporary German history – and its juxtaposition with his own personal family history. In the latter it occurs through a choice of subject which appears anachronistic within its contemporary context.

A reflexive practice is also evident in his use of the random composition of the found photograph, thereby taking painting out of a high art context, whilst still employing the means of high art. There is a questioning of what we are actually looking at through the inclusion of a ‘double register’ in the

form of photographic borders and an emulation of the black-and-white and blur of photography. These methods create a sense of doubt and uncertainty, on the one hand through a positioning of painting – and photography – as a copy of a copy; and on the other, through the emphasis of the painted surface as 'real', or as a real painting of a copy.

In the 1970s Richter embarked on a series of grey monochrome paintings. About this move he said that it: "...makes no statement whatsoever...so wretched a start could lead to nothing meaningful..."¹⁶

Richter's work demonstrates doubt in the face of postmodernism's 'celebration of the 'availability' of different styles and forms of art.'¹⁷ As such, his work is an example of painting as a critical practice. His work is self-reflexive in two senses. He doesn't just question his own practice, he also engages with the history of painting itself and with questions concerning its validity, position and meanings.

The concept of the 'amodern' (or amodernism) was first presented by Bruno La Tour.¹⁸ Later, Timothy S Murphy uses the term to, as he says, "...highlight what seems to me to be its distance from and resistance to the dialectical structure that defines modernism and postmodernism."¹⁹

In positioning work as amodernist, there is an engagement with poststructuralist critical theory. Meaning is seen as something which is continuously involved in a process of on-going and unfolding change and is neither stable nor fixed. Hence it sees the structuralist 'sign' (De Saussure and Pierce's 'signifier' and 'signified')²⁰, as too fixed and stable and – importantly for the ideas presented here – as positioning the subject as part of a larger system. Poststructuralism is an open system, in distinction to the closed system of the sign as postulated under structuralism. Poststructuralism's critique of the arbitrary, yet paradoxically, fixed, nature of a signifier/signified relationship developed by the structuralists, provides a position in which meaning is in a continual process of unfolding. The poststructuralist and the amodernist will want to locate the subject – in the manner of phenomenology – at the centre of meaning and of lived experience.

Hence, every moment is a moment in which meaning is made, created and opened up to change. This is what Jacques Derrida means when he talks of 'différance'²¹. Derrida's concept of the term 'différance' takes meaning as always in a process of 'difference' and 'deferral', hence never fully present, but both present and absent. In seeking to grasp it, we lose it. Poststructuralism has its eyes on the particular moment an image (or word) is located within a given context and argues that it is only at that particular moment that there can be a momentary pause to the deferral of meaning.

Amodernism rejects propositions, whether universal or particular. This position is grounded in an approach which rejects a consistent or coherent identity for artistic production and takes the form of breaks, both stylistically and in content. In so doing, it functions to defamiliarise perception and cognition and participates in the "antimimetic structural conception of poetic language."²² Its method is heterogeneous and metonymical, pointing in many directions at the same time and is neither diachronic nor synchronic, but rather anachronic – exploring the possibilities of being out of date, wrong or as no longer capable of self-renewal – and thereby engaging with the discourse of the death of painting. One outcome of this approach is the appearance of the arbitrary in the lack of stylistic formula and subject matter – which may be drawn from any number of sources and

orders – resulting in a refusal to determine a definitive phenomenal position in relation to the thing represented.

The position of amodernism enacts itself as a broken sequence of images, in the manner of cinematic or photographic contingency. But, while the cinematic and photographic embody the notion of the trace or index and hence of temporal distance in the way in which presence is formulated as “having been there”²³, they participate in a notion of history as linear. In contrast, amodernism positions itself as ahistorical. It seeks to position itself in the ‘middle of things’ and in the process of ‘lived experience’²⁴. In this sense it can be conceived of as noise: “The background noise never ceases: It is limitless, continuous, unending, unchanging.”²⁵

The manner in which amodernism can be conceived of as being in the ‘middle of something’ gives a new significance to the principles of phenomenology and minimalism. The lack of an overarching scheme or plan points to the minimalist principle of “the work of the work.” This notion of being in the middle as non-teleological aligns it with phenomenological considerations of ‘lived experience’ and the positioning of the subject at the centre of that experience. This also points to a potential connection with – and consideration of – the importance of practices to do with immersive environments, interactive contexts and other forms of installed works. For example, Erwin Redl says that his work “reflects upon the condition of art making after the ‘digital experience’.”²⁶ He creates walls of light-emitting diodes which engage visually via slowly pulsating lights and which are also designed as a physically immersive environment.

The achievement of Belgian artist Luc Tuymans is that he has developed a practice which has relevance in the wake of modernism’s inward looking self-referentiality and he also sidesteps the criticisms of postmodern painting as overtly celebratory, yet empty.

In Tuymans’s use of subject matter there is – as with Richter – movement between the historical and the contemporary, the horrific and the banal and he also sidelines the ‘main event’. Everything receives the same attention. Tuymans is known to have said that he never spends more than a day on a painting and this – along with his mixing up of genres and demonstration of a willingness to paint just about anything – imbues his work with a sense of the democratic and ordinary. This can be seen as in contrast with the tradition of making grand statements or gestures easily identifiable in pre-modern, modern and postmodern sensibilities. There is the feeling that there is no grand plan that is being worked out here. He’s not going anywhere great or grand. There is no big message one has to ‘get’ or discover.

For example, the fallen skier in *Der Architekt* (1998) depicts Albert Speer, architect of the Third Reich, taken from a film-still made by his wife during a skiing holiday. This strategy of side-stepping from the main event – by depicting objects or things associated with it – and painting quickly and with a sense of the amateur to a small scale from a reproduced source image all work to make the extraordinary merely ordinary. His employment of a photographic or cinematic sense further develops this. This occurs through sequences of work which can be related to the idea of a series of random snapshots of different things or events.

Unlike Daniel Buren, Tuymans is not trying to engage in any form of institutional critique.

His work appears as a rejection not just of the pre-modern but also of the grand plans of the modern and postmodern and of the grand gestures of conceptual painting. But as Emily Dexter says, "...his painting betrays an awareness of the discourse of the endgame of painting, which hovers over it like a malevolent angel!"²⁷ His work appears to be going nowhere, and there is the continual sense that one is not sure what is going to happen next.

It is recorded that at the beginning of his career Tuymans realised that it was not possible to do anything new in painting. As a response to this he created the notion of the "authentic forgery".²⁸ This demonstrates an engagement with the project of painting as a self-reflexive practice through an awareness of painting's quality of redundancy. Tuymans' paintings often share the look of a forged work, deliberately faded and designed to "look old from the start".²⁹

My current work represents a strategic alignment with a modernism, and hence a conscious attempt to work outside of the established conventions and methodologies of modernist and postmodernist painting practice. Groups of images – in their relationship to each other and their simultaneous lack of an overarching scheme – seek to resist a process of assimilation within established frameworks. There is, therefore, a conscious attempt to undermine, or work outside of, established conventions and methodologies of painting practice.

In my work, the selection of subject matter moves between the referencing of history – through allusion and movement away from the actual event to aspects associated with it – to the purely banal. This represents an attempt to 'flatten out' the pre-modernist acceptance of hierarchies of genre in painting through the use of material drawn from a number of sources in works which are small, arbitrary and which demonstrate the contingency of chance occurrences. But, to be in the middle of something is to also be working outside of modernist notions of the series. The use of a



Untitled, 2006, oil on canvas, 15 x 15 cm.



Untitled, 2006, oil on canvas, 25 x 20 cm.

consistent stylistic formula and treatment of colour is thus also avoided. An engagement with orders of representation³⁰, that is, the drawing of subject matter from second and third order sources, further develops heterogeneity and suggests the lack of an overarching scheme or fetishisation of the image/object. Mediation of the image is also developed through the use of photographs, both black-and-white and in colour; with colour often added to those that had none, or eliminated from those that did. There is movement between referencing the machine-based processes of the photographic and the digital and the direct action of gesture (indexicality). Through these processes the work becomes heavily mediated. In so doing, it self-consciously engages with the notion of the endgame of painting, a notion largely ignored by a postmodernism celebrating its reversal of modernist strategies. There is an attempt to express "...a de-centering, moving backwards and forwards between allusive and partial references to history, emotions and feelings, tiny details from everyday life, elements of popular culture and national identities, so that the world is seen as a series of partially interconnecting topoi"³¹ – as a topography of interweaving, disparate elements.

This methodology positions the subject (the artist or viewer) at the centre of an experience which is phenomenological, in that any ultimate meaning is generated in and by the subject's own experience. Partial references and ambiguities in orders of representation exist in a space which is transitory, momentary and continually in a process of flux. There is no ultimate meaning which must be sought for the work to be understood, neither is there any particular position that should



Untitled, 2006, oil on canvas, 28 x 21 cm.

be assumed to achieve this. This play with partial allusions and references simultaneously evokes presence and absence. It uses methods which engage with that which is absent whilst simultaneously evoking presence, the presence of the artist and the presence of the subject.

The working methods of amodernism operate in a self-reflexive manner. As such, this is an instance of painting as a critical practice, and indeed this is its main claim. It is self-referential in a new way, distinct from the self-referentiality of modernism and postmodernism. It demonstrates an awareness of, and engages with, the discourse of the death of painting as part of its own history; and it employs methods which simultaneously demonstrate an understanding of and an elision of its own history, traditions and existence. It does not want to uncritically take up methods of the (pre-modern) past in the manner of current neo-romantic painting. It also does not want to evoke the grand plans of the modernist series or of postmodernist dispersal. It does not empty out the conventions of painting; critique an essentialist paradigm; or pose in or engage with some new existential dilemma in the manner of much conceptual art. It is rather aligned with the post-conceptual, taking as its task a self-awareness and acting out of a kind of 'last gasp' of painting. It critiques its own ability to provide a meta-narrative through working methods which mirror the notion of "a loss of faith in one single authoritative narrative."³² As such, the case can be made for painting's continuing validity, and as Emily Dexter says, in writing on the work of Luc Tuymans, it "...relishes the ambiguity only painting can offer."³³ In saying this, Dexter is claiming for a critical, post-conceptual – and I would argue for amodernist – painting an order of mediation of the image which is uniquely its own.

- 1 John Gaiger, "Post Conceptual Painting: Gerhard Richter's extended leave taking", in Gill Perry and Paul Wood (eds), *Themes in Contemporary Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press and The Open University, 2004), 90.
- 2 Gaiger, (2004), 89.
- 3 Gaiger (2004), 92.
- 4 Suzi Gablik, *Has Modernism Failed?* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1984), 23.
- 5 Clement Greenburg, "Towards a New Laocoon", in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900-2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2005), 566.
- 6 In their introduction to "The Demands of the Present" in *Art in Theory, 1815-1900: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Harrison and Wood with John Gaiger (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1998) state: "Publication of the first successful results in fixing an image on a light-sensitive surface sent a shock wave through the practice of art. On hearing of the invention, the academic painter Paul Delaroche is reported to have said, 'From today, painting is dead.'" (146)
- 7 Piet Mondrian, "Neo-Plasticism: The General Principle of Plastic Equivalence" (1920) quoted in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood (eds), *Art in Theory, 1900 -2000: An Anthology of Changing Ideas*: " 'The future of the New Plastic and its true realization in painting lies in chromoplastic architecture...' " (290); and: " 'The new sculpture and architecture must destroy the work of art as an object or thing'" (291)
- 8 Gaiger, (2004), 89.
- 9 Gablick, (1984), 17.
- 9 Paul Greenhalgh, *The Modern Ideal: The Rise and Collapse of Idealism in the Visual Arts from the Enlightenment to Postmodernism* (London: V & A Publications, 2005), 53.
- 10 Bernice Rose, *Allegories of Modernism: Contemporary Drawing* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1992), 11-12.

- 11 Rosalind Krauss, "Towards Postmodernism. Notes on the Index: Part 2", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1986), 216.
- 12 In "Notes on the Index: Part I", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1994), Rosalind Krauss says this about the term 'shifter': "The shifter is Jakobson's term for that category of linguistic sign which is 'filled with signification' only because it is 'empty'. The word 'this' is such a sign, waiting each time it is invoked for its referent to be supplied." (197)
- 13 Gaiger, (2004), 99.
- 14 Gerhard Richter, "Interview with Rolf Schön, 1972", in H-U Obrist (ed.), translated by D Britt, *The Daily Practice of Painting: Writings 1962-1993* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 74. "It [photography] had no style, no composition, no judgement." (73)
- 15 Gerhard Richter, "From a letter to Edy de Wilde, 23 February 1975", Obrist, (1995), 82.
- 16 Gaiger, (2004), 116.
- 17 Bruno Latour, "Postmodern? no, simply Amodern! Steps towards an anthropology of science", *Studies in the History and Philosophy of Science*, 21 (1990), 145-171.
- 18 Timothy S Murphy, *Wising up the Marks: The Amodern William Burroughs* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California: 1977), 2.
- 19 Ferdinand de Saussure, "Nature of the Linguistic Sign", in Charles Bally and Albert Sechehaye (eds), translated by Wade Baskin, *Course in General Linguistics* (London: P Owen, 1960), 65-70.
- 20 Jacques Derrida, "Différance", in *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 3-27.
- 21 Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin H.D. Buchloh, *Art Since 1900: Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames & Hudson, London, 2004), 35.
- 22 Roland Barthes quoted in Rosalind Krauss, "Towards Postmodernism. Notes on the Index: Part 2", in *The Originality of the Avant-Garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1994), 217.
- 23 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "What is Phenomenology?", in Alden L Fisher (ed.), *The Essential Writings of Merleau-Ponty* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1969). He writes: "It is the search for a philosophy which shall be a 'rigorous science', but it also offers an account of space, time and the world as we 'live' them. It tries to give a direct description of our experience as it is..." (27)
- 24 Michel Serres, *Genesis*, translated by Genevieve James and James Nielson (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1995), 13.
- 25 Gloria Sutton, "Erwin Redl", in Lisa Mark (ed.), *Ecstasy: In and about altered states* (Los Angeles: Museum of Contemporary Art & Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 2005), 118.
- 26 Emma Dexter, "The Interconnectedness of All Things: Between History, Still Life and the Uncanny" in Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen (eds), *Luc Tuymans* (London: Tate Publishing, 2004), 16.
- 27 "Juan Vicente Aliaga in conversation with Luc Tuymans", in Ulrich Loock, Juan Vicente Aliaga and Nancy Spector, *Luc Tuymans* (London, 2003), 8. Cited in Emma Dexter, "The Interconnectedness of All Things: Between History, Still Life and the Uncanny:" (23)
- 28 "Juan Vicente Aliaga in conversation with Luc Tuymans", cited in Emma Dexter, "The Interconnectedness of All Things: Between History, Still Life and the Uncanny:" (23)
- 29 Loock, (2003), 142, refers to the notion of a representation of a representation. This is what I am referring to when presenting the notion of 'orders of representation'.
- 30 Dexter, (2004), 22.
- 31 Dexter, (2004), 19.
- 32 Dexter, (2004), 23.

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Book review

Serious Photography and Committed Photographers: Some thoughts on *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*¹

By Craig McNab



Lara Strongman (ed.), *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*

(Auckland: Mountain View Publishing, 2005, ISBN 0-473-10280-3, 183 pages, mostly illustrated, Illustrative Category Winner; Montana New Zealand Book Awards, 2006, image courtesy of the publisher).

"It is not just access to truth that is the issue, but the existence of the truth itself that has been discredited as a given." Gwynneth Porter²

With a number of reservations *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* is an excellent overview of the art-photography scene in this country today. It significantly extends the showcasing of local expressions of 'advanced' forms of the medium in the modern era, and along with the exhibition *The Active Eye*, from 1975, brackets the postmodern period represented by two other notable shows, *Views/Exposures* (1982) and *Imposing Narratives* (1989).³ Unsurprisingly for their field the spectre of modernist documentary haunts all four exhibitions and books⁴ and referring to William Main and John B Turner's history of New Zealand photography precisely locates the moment this form became accepted here to the 1940s in John Pascoe's startling image *Official VE (Victory in Europe) Celebrations at Government Buildings, Wellington, May 1945*.⁵

Pascoe belonged to a new group of photographers emphatic in their rejection of the camera club and photographic society aesthetic of pictorialism and of rule-based methodologies that had until then dominated popular photography in New Zealand.⁶ He made clear this position in 1947: "It is up to photographers to leave the darkroom and the retouching pen and to mix with the outside world...An interest in people related to their physical environment is more healthy than the ability to fake million-dollar clouds in skies that were grey when the photograph was taken".⁷ Thirty years later, with *The Active Eye* exhibition, the public engagements of artists such as Pascoe had given way to an intensely subjective documentary style that articulated

private spaces and private outlooks. By the 1982 *Views/Exposures* show, these portfolios had developed into a specifically project-based model, in part at least, loosely utilising the paradigm of conceptual art, which in its photographic form embraced the vernacular and banal. Over the following decade, as modernist photography was finally accepted as a genuinely marketable art-form, it was rigorously critiqued by semiotics and feminism simultaneously.⁸ In *Imposing Narratives* a number of new forms and styles reflect the local excesses of this passing moment when theory appeared to construct art. This trajectory – from public to subjective documentary to conceptual photography to postmodern theorising – was not unique to this country, but reflected global trends that have developed further, with the collapse of postmodernism, into the eclectic situation we have now. Today advanced photographic practice is informed by a wide variety of genres, none taking precedence over another.⁹ Through tertiary study, ready access to a world-wide network of resources and critical dialogue, and the availability of numerous productions from a number of art-book publishers, most current photographic artists are able to finely balance theoretical considerations with the practical. It is exactly this state of affairs that *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* successfully engages with and catalogues.

However, the volume is not without problems. When viewed with similar photography books published recently the overall design seems staid and the entries inconsistent. A reasonable point of comparison could be made with the exemplary model of *Blink* (2002) from Phaidon.¹⁰ Certainly (and

to be fair) this international survey is a more ambitious project – allowing ten curators to select world-wide one hundred significant contemporary photographers to present in the form of an exhibition-in-a-book – but it has an attention to detail through clear and interesting design that makes it both more informative and more aesthetically engaging. There is as much to be learnt about Gavin Hipkins over the four pages of his entry in *Blink*, as from the eight plus in *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers*. The latter, then, is in a landscape format with approximately 8"x10" images on facing pages for virtually all entries. While this works for some, the majority could do with greater variations in sizing and positioning, if only to increase the number of images included.¹¹ Those entries where scale has been played with tend to be the more visually appealing, breaking up the relentless uniformity of the book. (The most striking spreads, with a wide range of picture sizes and numerous thumbnails, are at the start of the book in the Foreword and Introduction, and then again at the very end, in the entries on Ava Seymour and Darren Glass.)

For a book claiming to survey the contemporary photographic scene in this country, the selection of images is often puzzling as it shifts between entries showing career overviews and others of solely current works. In the case of a younger artist like Fiona Amundsen the photographs shown are all excellent, but in limiting their selection to her series *Garden Place* (2003/4), we see no development from her equally engaging earlier work over the decade she has practiced. This observation holds true for Fiona Pardington, Yvonne Todd, Ann Shelton, Gavin Hipkins and

Darren Glass. On the other hand, if the reason was, say, to present only the most recent photographs then why include the work of so many "senior practitioners" (as the cover blurb tactfully puts it) and in a number of cases so many old images – one Marti Friedlander shot dates from 1957! Arguably this is the book's underlying problem and dropping these well established and surveyed artists would have allowed a lot more space to expand on the remaining entries. To be sure some, like Anne Noble and Peter Peryer, are still producing exciting and important work, but others have particularly poor sections which detract from the publication's apparent overall aims.¹² In the case of Boyd Webb, for instance, the introduction by Richard Cork barely mentions any of the work shown in the book and instead reads as though it has been lifted from an exhibition catalogue, of possibly two decades earlier, with an additional paragraph tacked on. Furthermore, it includes a statement so discordant with the aims of this project presenting his work, that it is unclear how a reader can reasonably connect Webb's own practice to those of his fellow artists: "Photography, for [Webb], holds no inherent technical or aesthetic fascination. His interest is not held for long by the majority of work that photographers produce."¹³ Okay.

Following a short Foreword framing the project and a rather longer Introduction outlining its context within the history of New Zealand photography, each artist's section starts with a two-page overview. With this amount of text the book is as much a display of current writing on the medium in this country as of actual images. Some is of a very high standard and succinctly unpacks the work – Anthony Burt on Fiona Amundsen, Robert Leonard on

Yvonne Todd and Gwynneth Porter on Ann Shelton, for example. Some is not. Gregory O'Brien's Introduction struggles to coherently tie such a wide-ranging project together but is particularly disappointing in its failure to link the photographers with contemporary global trends. However, the few interviews there are with the artists are an excellent feature and Fiona Pardington's discussion with Megan Tamati-Quennell and Peter Shand stands out, effectively giving a better overview of the whole endeavour (and of photography itself) than the actual Introduction. Pardington's incisive understanding of recent thinking on photography and her conflation of this with an indigenous world-view is one of the highlights of the book.

While the survey includes a glossary at the end and brief biographical details for the photographers, it unfortunately does not have a bibliography or list of artist's websites. Further, given the notable shift of recent photographic exhibition practices away from uniformly sized, matted and framed images, to displays that engage their audiences as party to a form of public spectacle – where signification derives as much from the image's physical presence as from what it represents – it would have been useful to have included more installation images. The few photographers who do offer such pictures in their introductions certainly increase the understanding of their work's (partial) function as displayed objects.

Three specific aspects of *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* are noteworthy. Firstly, the reproduction of both black-and-white and colour images is exceptionally high and maintains a close fidelity to the original photograph. The quality of the printing in China

by Everbest allows the edition to be favourably compared with the finest art-book production in this country and in fact even holds up well against Photoforum's short-run special printing and photography project *Ink & Silver* from the mid-1990s.¹⁴ Secondly, the use of Yvonne Todd's image *Seriousness* (2004) for the front cover is an inspired choice that gestures toward a post-structuralist reading of the book's title. At the exact moment this design move creates a distinctive product placement in the clamour of the bookstore at Christmas, it also signals the slippage that occurs in the multiple discursive regimes that the image and title phrase bring to mind. For instance, in forcing plays of meaning the combination of picture and text deconstruct ideas of the contemporary (stasis, shift, nature, culture, determined, faltering), New Zealand (green, grey, empty, occupied, free, restrained, odd, bland, tall, stunted) and photography (real, false, straight, constructed, colour, monotone, perspective, flat). It speaks of scale, scale in all things. Finally, it is the photography itself that articulates these fluid positions. This is of course how it should be, and due in part to the expanding digital order, the nature of the 'real' itself continues to be the central theoretical focus of the medium. Work created by informed artists aware of contemporary and historical practice provokes robust debate while marking out new planes of critical interest. To illustrate this, three photographers stand out – Ben Cauchi, Ann Shelton and Yvonne Todd – who respectively utilise the play available in forms of the historic, the analogue and the digital modes of photography. From these positions they explore aspects of the medium's relationship to the unconscious, to nostalgia and to social horror.

Ben Cauchi recreates both the nineteenth century's photographic method of the ambrotype and the era's fascination with spirit photography and the occult. In these unique images – that seem to appear from an earlier time – the photographer makes a sort of double forgery that is both as real and not as real as an original past we desire to connect with. Like the surface of his images, memory is a darkened glass. And Ann Shelton, by photographing unmarked graves, murder scenes and disused psychiatric institutions, locates settings of private despair and public disquiet. In a doubling gesture she offers a print mirror-imaged to pair with the original and our eye oscillates in fascination and attraction between the two poles, positive-negative, negative-positive, never sure which is the primary. We want both to forget and to remember what has been witnessed in these scenes. But as we can never be sure of the image's veracity, this memory becomes impossible to grasp in either phase. Finally, Yvonne Todd creates images that seem peculiarly tainted – poisoned even – by colour shifts, distortions, blurrings, points of view, juxtapositions, erasures and even titles. They have the quality of dreams (or nightmares) where time lurches randomly around, corralling us toward apparitions and vistas we wish to avoid.¹⁵ These frames look like photographs – they are photographs – but what then of the reality they represent? When did it die? In the perfect ugliness of her images Todd manages to throw over the cloying nostalgia the photographic picture so often induces and in a direct counter to the words of Roland Barthes she extinguishes our desire to look into the eyes of the emperor.¹⁶ Long live the queen.

- 1 My title 'borrows' from earlier descriptions of New Zealand photographic practice put forward by Tom Hutchins and Peter Ireland respectively, as "serious photography" being taken by "committed photographers". Tom Hutchins, *The Active Eye – Contemporary New Zealand Photography* (Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975), 6; and Peter Ireland, *Peter, Views/Exposures – 10 Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982), 6.
- 2 Gwynneth Porter, "Ann Shelton", in Lara Strongman (ed.), *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* (Auckland: Mountain View Publishing, 2005), 120.
- 3 These shows each had a significant catalogue published: Tom Hutchins, *The Active Eye – Contemporary New Zealand Photography* (Palmerston North: Manawatu Art Gallery, 1975); Peter Ireland, *Views/Exposures – 10 Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* (Wellington: National Art Gallery, 1982); and Gregory Burke, *Imposing Narratives – Beyond the Documentary in Recent New Zealand Photography* (Wellington: Wellington City Art Gallery, 1989).
- 4 For instance: "Although, traditionally photography may have been considered an art-form in its own right, it has been separated from other visual arts fundamentally because of its transcriptive properties and its reproducibility." (Gregory Burke, *Imposing Narratives*, 8.) Employed in varying forms the 'documentary style' is the marker of modernist photography and the thing critiqued by postmodernist photographic theory. The parameters of this debate are covered by John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966) and Richard Bolton (ed.), *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989).
- 5 William Main and John B Turner, *New Zealand Photography From the 1840s to the Present/Nga Whakaahua O Aotearoa Mai 1840 Ki Naianei* (Auckland: Photo-Forum, 1993), 47.
- 6 And arguably still do. Surprisingly this is one style of photography rarely critiqued by theorists and practitioners of the advanced art variety. From the New Zealand perspective Gavin Hipkins offers a possible explanation in *Folklore: The New Zealanders* (Auckland & Wanganui: Artspace & Sarjeant Galleries, 1998). Linking pictorialism with a form of documentary – "Pictorialism may have changed stylistically – less soft focus these days – but you can recognise it in its loyalty to wholesome imagery" (p.5) – he makes a convincing argument for (and warning about) one form of photography being the binary of the other in this country. He uses as a typical example one similarly noted by Gregory O'Brien (p.12) in his introduction to *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* ("The Camera is a Small Room", pp.9-15) – that of Brian Brake and Maurice Shadbolt's 1963 *New Zealand: Gift of the Sea* (Christchurch: Whitcombe and Tombs).
- Further, in the banal subject matter of Yvonne Todd there is a passive muteness that nods toward (and deconstructs) the overtly composed and prescriptive imagery of the camera club or photographic society salon competitions. Except that, to quote O'Brien, her "landscapes are toxic waste dumps, presided over by a series of begowned darlings, all of them freshly baptised into some outlandish cult (echoes, here, of Len Wesney's classic 1972 photograph, *Baptism, Christchurch*)." (p.13) Wesney's photo featured in *The Active Eye* and Todd plays across Hipkin's fusion of the pictorial and documentary while simultaneously torching both. See particularly *Roba* (2004) and *Resulta* (2004) in *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* (pp.38-39).
- 7 A comment he originally made in John Pascoe, "Photography in New Zealand", *Landfall* no. 4, December 1947 and quoted in Janet Bayley and Athol McCredie, *Witness to Change – Life in New Zealand. Photographs 1940-1965* (Wellington: Photo-Forum, 1985), 11.
- 8 In the images of Sherrie Levine, Cindy Sherman, Richard Prince and Barbara Kruger; the images and theory of Martha Rosler, Alan Sekula and Victor Burgin; and most emphatically in the theory of Abigail Solomon-Godeau, which she collected in 1991 as *Photography at the Dock: essays on photographic history, institutions and practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press). An overview of this discursive process is offered by Hal Foster, Rosalind Krauss, Yve-Alain Bois and Benjamin D. Buchloch in *Art Since 1900 – Modernism, Antimodernism, Postmodernism* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2004) – particularly Krauss's "1977" pp. 580-583, Foster's "1980" pp. 586-589 and Buchloch's "1984a" pp. 590-595.
- 9 An account of these trends in the development of the current status of the medium is cogently argued in Lucy Souter, "Dial 'P' for Panties: Narrative Photography in the 1990s", *Afterimage* 27, no.4 (January/February 2000), 9-12.
- 10 Antonia Carver (ed.) *Blink* (London: Phaidon, 2002). And in the last two years Susan Bright, *Art Photography Now* (New York: Aperture,

- 2005); William A Ewing, Nathalie Herschdorfer and Jean-Christophe Blaser, *Regeneration – 50 Photographers of Tomorrow, 2005-2025* (London: Thames & Hudson, 2005); and Thomas Weski, Thomas (ed.), *Click Doubleclick: The Documentary Factor* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2006).
- 11 Unfortunately this is a common problem in photography books where incorrect image scale leads to a poor balance between white border and picture, making reading of the photograph difficult.
 - 12 For this reader the following statement made on the front cover flap seems rather disingenuous in its downplaying of editorial responsibility: "The construction of this book has involved a close working relationship with the contributing photographers, who have had substantial input into selecting images and in commissioning different writers to talk about their work..." An aside – a claim for Noble and Peryer as perhaps our most significant photographers can in part be made on their ability, in such a selection process, to present images that significantly advance their body of work while still drawing from it. Over careers spanning thirty plus years both still manage to produce refreshing 'new work' and therefore do in fact stay contemporary in a wider sense of the word.
 - 13 Richard Cork, "Boyd Webb", in Lara Strongman (ed.), *Contemporary New Zealand Photographers* (Auckland: Mountain View Publishing, 2005), 40.
 - 14 John B Turner, *Ink & Silver*, Photoforum double issue 60 & 61, April 1995 (Auckland, Photoforum, 2005).
 - 15 The sort of world that Todd's work brings to mind is that of George Romero's film *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Particularly the final moments when the hero – who has stayed more or less sane (and alive) because he insists on rationality as a counter to the absolute horrors of a night living through a zombie attack – is gunned down by the relieving white vigilantes simply because he is an African-American.
 - 16 Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Flamingo, 1980/84), 3: "One day, quite some time ago, I happened on a photograph of Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852. And I realized then, with an amazement I have not been able to lessen since: *I am looking at the eyes that looked at the Emperor.*"

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THE ANXIOUS IMAGE

Rodney Browne

To visit a popular historic site is generic. The experience inevitably reads the same.

Some time later, after eventually figuring out the system, spending the obligatory lengthy wait in a queue and finally acquiring the necessary tickets, it was time to go forth to see one of the world's great historic sites.

Along with other late risers and bus tour groups who arrived en masse at mid morning we contributed to the surge that formed an army of sightseers advancing upon the summit

From the ticket entrance it is a trek of a few hundred metres to the main entry of the historic site. The pathway is congested with people pushing their way in and against the flow of earlier visitors who are now leaving, having been fatigued by what they had come for. You are surrounded by a multitude of languages, sometimes catching recognisable yet ambiguous passages from conversations about real estate and other equally incongruous discussions. Signage on people's clothing adds to the visual and audible noise that assails from all directions. However, now and again, it appears as though the text may have been conjured from another, more profound place as it beckons you, inscribed as it is on someone's back, "Go to the top".

Eventually you make your way through the historic entrance. Covered in scaffolding as these sites inevitably are, it is hard to get a complete impression of what it is you are entering. You have known pictures of these buildings since childhood and it takes some reconciling to align those remembered, serene, empty picture postcard images, with the crowded, noisy reconstruction site that is here before you.

As you emerge from the main entrance and scaffolding you look down to see the natural stone of the hilltop polished smooth like a floor of pink/grey marble by the more than one million feet that pass this way each year. Ahead you finally glimpse a portion of the object of your pilgrimage. There, emerging above the up-stretched forest of arms waving digital cameras is the...

In this case, it was the pediment of the Parthenon, the dominant structure of the Acropolis. This building, or at least its image, is perhaps the most iconic symbol of the Western world, representing as it does, the enduring legacy of the ancient Greeks with their significant contribution to modern science, philosophy, art, literature and political democracy.

However, none of this, nor the understanding that for almost three millennia, this site has had an enduring religious and cultural significance for the Greeks, seemed to be of consequence to the swarming, trampling mass of image makers (anxious to record their presence at this location) on their tightly scheduled passage to the next stop. Most of their time is spent jostling their way from one celebrated vantage point to another, attempting to replicate well-known images of the site or otherwise directing each other or their children, via the frame of the LCD screen, into a more favourable position against the famous backdrop. Having recorded the moment, they stop at random, oblivious to their surroundings and others in their vicinity, to contemplate the captured image - before moving on, to seek out the next potential image.

In the presence of so much anxiety to record, you have little opportunity to contemplate the significance of the location in which you are in. You are constantly made aware of both your own presence as an extra in this frenzied circus of image-making and of the pre-eminence of the made image over experience. As part of the performance, you must ritually step aside, to allow an image to be captured, or apologise for not having been quick enough to avoid becoming an inadvertent inclusion within it.

I am reminded of the commentary by Douglas Crimp in which he states that:

We only experience reality through the pictures we make of it. To an even greater extent our experience is governed by pictures in newspapers and magazines, on television and in the cinema. Next to these, first hand experience begins to retreat, to seem more and more trivial.¹





This phenomenon seems to have become increasingly extreme as people find it ever more necessary to confirm their existence through pictures. There seems to be little interest in contemplating the physical space, rather, attention is only lavished on the digital facsimile of the real space. Conditioning is so pervasive that only through the monitor does the experience seem genuine and gratifying. The structures themselves stand mute, unable to offer up enough to sustain the sensorial interest, or satisfy the epistemological yearning of the pilgrims. It seems necessary that in some way, the "*mental image*" brought to the space and attained from prolonged exposure to previously encountered pictures of the space, must find some realisation in concrete form. In this sense, there needs to be an artefact to represent that imagined or "*mental image*" which forms the intercession between "the thing represented" and "the image made."² The pilgrim's self-generated artefact (the recorded image), stands in for, and completes the sequence between "the thing represented", the imagined "*mental image*" and the absent representation provided by the idealised image model, such as the postcard.

It is ironic that the ancient Greek's concern for the aesthetic principle of mimesis which led to protracted designing, creating and building in order to reproduce nature with visual accuracy now forms a superficial backdrop for so many millions of impulsive and thoughtlessly recorded images.

The ancient Greek's adoration of, and reverence for, enduring form, contrasts with the fleetingness and disposability of contemporary concerns for recording, or marking the presence of an individual. In some ways, it is understandable how an audience fed on the plethora of images of contemporary times, may find these still and silent spaces unrewarding. The perceived emptiness of the buildings and spaces as they are now – without all the accoutrements, colour and ceremonial significance that we understand were once there from academic and historical recordings – is lost to the casual viewer.

It was only as I was leaving the site and turned to face the Propylaia, the structure at the entrance to the Acropolis, that I realised – as I had done many years before when I stood at arms length staring into the eyes of an Albrecht Dürer self-portrait – that I was standing in the space of the creator. I was standing in the very same space where Pericles (Perikles), the man who was so instrumental in realising this wonder, must have stood and looked up at his creation. How many of the other notable figures of our cultural heritage must also have passed through this very same space.

Nonetheless the picture, the documented image, has become the means by which the taker can place themselves in the proximity of the creator or the gods. Would in fact, the ancient Greeks have understood the urge to create the concrete impression of one's *mental image* in order to verify the sensation of an experience?

All digital stills taken at the Acropolis on Saturday 6 May 2006 by Rodney Browne.

- 1 Douglas Crimp, "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism", *October* 15, Winter 1980, 91-101, and quoted by Linda Andre in "The Politics of Postmodern Photography", *Afterimage*, 13 (3), October 1985, 14.
- 2 David Summers discusses this where he states that: "In the long Western discussion of artistic representation, there are always three factors: the thing represented, the image made and a *mental* image. This third term, in being called an 'image' at all, is likened to a work of art made by the mind itself; it is a representation that must always be interposed between anything and its actual image." See *Real Space, World Art History and the Rise of Western Modernism* (New York: Phaidon, 2003), 319-20. The 'image made' in this case would be derived from the manufactured image, remembered from travelogues, postcards, film etc., a 'mental image' of which the traveller carries.

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1: Virgin of Guadalupe, View of High Altar:

THE SPANISH 'REPORT'

Lyn Plummer

For many years I was married to someone who was a Patrol Officer in the Australian Administration of Papua New Guinea and then an officer of the Australian Joint Intelligence Organization (J.I.O.). Much of his time was spent report writing. He was expected to observe situations, verify intelligence about certain groups' and individuals' activities, analyse the data and report on events and the possibility of the effects of future actions or dealings that could be considered of interest in terms of cultural conflict or security.

Then back in the national capital, as Head of the Office of Current Intelligence (O.C.I.), daily reports were expected on the desks of the Ministers for Defence and Foreign Affairs by 8.30am each morning. No flamboyant adjectives, no emotive descriptive phrases could embellish them. Not that there were no personal traumas, dramas, or loss, for those involved in the report's identified situations. 'The report' simply did not provide space, for the variety of circumstances or for the situations.

How can a succinct report deal with facts *and* reactions, underlying yearnings and inspirations? How can it describe in detail an incident-filled day, or for that matter, a month saturated with objects, shapes, colours, textures and smells, underpinned as this particular month was, by such a deep-seated longing to experience the culture and spaces of Spain?

Many teenagers are influenced by particular romances with certain cultures and places and later their careers are shaped by these yearnings. Ancient Peru, Papua New Guinea and Spain were for me three such romances. Peru remained a fascination only. My enthrallment with Papua New Guinea became a reality when I went to live in the PNG Highlands at age twenty-four. Subsequently PNG became home where I became a practicing artist and also continued my studies of the people, customs and art forms. These studies and understandings have continued to inform my art practice.

But it was Spain that lingered throughout all these years as a constant, silent reference point. As an adolescent all things Spanish were irresistible zones of attraction. Notions of contemporary Spain conjured up images of flamboyance, strength and strange religious customs that seemed to be historically entwined with the rituals of its exotic past. From that angle of distance, in those immature days, the culture appeared sumptuous, fierce and passionate.

My sculptural practice since 1980 has embraced, amongst other issues, an enquiry into the nature of ritual. During the intervening years this examination shifted to encompass comparisons between Third World and European cultures and insights into psychological conditioning. After 1990 and a

prolonged visit to Europe, my research moved to include Christian iconography and ritual and its concentration on penitence, sacrifice, lavish opulence and sexuality; and as Ralph Body noted, it “explores the skin as thin membrane between the personal and the worldly. A surface charged with conflict and inscribed with memories of pleasure and pain.”¹

In 2004 art historian Domingo Córdoba was introduced to my work. As a Spanish Catholic whose main field of research had been at the time seventeenth-century Spanish Baroque art, he was attracted to research my installations further for their references to the historical and spiritual and their critical comment on the rituals of violence mixed with sensuality and sumptuousness. Domingo Córdoba and recently Susan Verdi Webster, author of *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain*,² made note that some of the installations and sculptural elements closely resemble the ambience and structure of the articulated sculptures used in the processions of the Spanish religious events,³ especially those of the Easter processions. It was suggested that I visit Spain during this festival to observe the processions. I was fortunate enough to realise this aim and the nature of the experience brought with it many insights into not only the history of Spain, but also the culture and its contemporary manifestations.

Observing the Semana Santa processions in the smaller provincial towns and cities invites another level of involvement not possible in the areas much more popular with national and international tourists. Jaen and the not far distant small mountain village of Zuheros were the destinations that were chosen for this ten day festival. Here a number of smaller and more intimate, yet very moving, processions and services provided the opportunity to be drawn into not only the processions, but also the excitement of the preparations and the interactions of the participants and their relatives. Many members of the local families are members of the confraternities (some five hundred years old), and some choose to process as Costaleros carrying the heavy ‘paso’ of either the Virgin or of Christ. This is a private choice and an act, possibly of penitence and/or as a supplication.

The average family with a large number of siblings, spouses and many children could be seen to represent a microcosm of contemporary Spanish conditions. Ranging, as it can, to include many



2: ‘Nazarenos’.



3: Women in the costume of the ‘manolas’.

varied attitudes to old and new beliefs and pastimes, it may today typically represent returned expatriates, members of devoutly religious Catholic sects, urbane sun lovers, who regularly race to Mediterranean apartments for holidays (holy days), and often younger offspring, some of whom rebel against family duties and others who appear quietly resigned to their familial commitments and subsequently acquiesce to the immobilising consequences. Such family bonds and schisms seem to represent the shifting attitudes and social dynamics of the population at large.

It is still a prevalent trend for family members to make great sacrifices to travel long distances in order to come together for Easter rituals. Involvement in these ceremonies can become more poignant and turbulent where the pilgrimage is intensified by an accident or a tragic event. The rituals are then exaggerated by added responsibilities to support older family members. During historic and solemn festivals, when coupled with the added demands of such circumstances, it would not be unexpected to find clashes surfacing between differing values, especially between devout attitudes and hedonistic predilections.

Tensions and pressures characteristically oscillate from crescendo to murmured ebb during such periods. While visitors may only 'sense' the consequences as they skirt around the edges of the dominance of the society's and the family's homage to the matriarchal influence, recognition of a cultural condition where historical layers of power have been traditionally wielded over the individual, nevertheless becomes apparent.

Earlier, in discussions on the other side of the world with Domingo Córdoba, I had reviewed Spain's apparent movement toward secularisation, especially as it enters another 'golden age'. In a sense, observation from close quarters invited new layers of complexity and challenged those abstract notions. It revealed a society proud of its history and cultural individuality and steeped in the strength and power of the family; and how enormous tensions are now surfacing within the fabric of the family as it is exposed to the sectors bringing pressures to bear, to either sustain the status quo, or to acquiesce to the lure of globalisation.

As I filmed the many processions, noted the carnival atmosphere surrounding the pageants,



4: Processional band.



5: Detail: 'paso' of The Virgin Mary.

(mixed with awe and solemnity) and the high fashions of the gathered audiences, I pondered the contemporary shifts away from penitents choosing a role of agony often drawing blood to simulated pain during these ceremonies. I began to understand that the power 'to control' within the culture still has strong sway in the provincial cities and small towns, even given this shift away from the actual injury. I realised that the power of 'the cut of the flesh' is now implanted in the cultural memory and that although it is now an abstract reference and challenged by the shift in national and personal aspirations, it still holds immense power as a symbol over the individual's private responses and aspirations in a great many cases.⁴

On my return to New Zealand, it was suggested that I prepare a brief report on Spain. So I have tried to fit this dynamic experience of living and interacting – into so few words. To accompany these words – the stipulated number of photographs. These must suffice to represent not only the overwhelming presence of vitality felt in both the contemporary rituals and their accoutrements, such as that of the *Semana Santa*,⁵ but also in the nearby, ancient, archaeological sites.

In these sites one can only stand as insignificant witness to outstanding creative endeavours and also take note of the importance of the layers of conflict that are still evident between liberal thinking and religious fanaticism. My colleague and I observed and discussed at length the conflict between the Catholic regime and the Moorish, as the two fought for political, military and social supremacy, as well as for the same geographical locations. They seemed to present an allegory of today's conditions.



6: 'Costaleros' hidden from view by the drapes of the 'paso'.



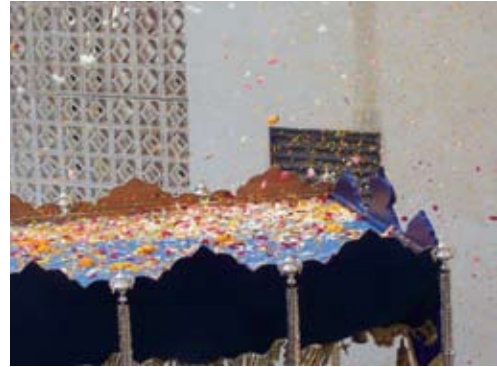
7: 'Costaleros' at rest.

This is exquisitely manifest in the architectural sites, especially in the houses of worship. Here the restraint and contemplative silence provoked by the decoration and shapes of the Moorish architectural spaces is threatened by the agitated and twisted, gilded surfaces of the Baroque spaces introduced by the Catholic conquerors. Such Baroque spaces prevail across Spain and still host throughout the year all manner of religious rites demanding some level of participation. Now these are in conflict with the 'new baroque', the design, entreaties and new indulgences of the contemporary lifestyle.

The pilgrim is, however, even now called to travel and to bear witness to the sumptuous and often solemn experience. An ostensibly secular guided tour can slip seamlessly into a religious experience as a group is led, for instance, from the Cloisters of the Monastery by a meandering route on and up into the heart of the Cathedral of Guadalupe.

Pleas for the supplication of believers from around the world seem to issue from The Virgin of Guadalupe. For she is the patron saint of all of the Americas and all those other lands conquered by Spain. She can be glimpsed, in the centre of the high altar of the Cathedral built in her honour, cloaked in one of many splendidly embroidered vestments (richly stitched with silk, pearls and precious stones), enthroned in an opulently carved and gold-leafed, revolving niche, flanked by fresh flowers arranged daily. (See image 1*.)

When the faithful follow the priest along the corridors in the very centre of the cathedral and up the wide curving staircases carved out of blood-red marble to the sacristy, the Virgin turns her back on the altar. Those praying and



8: Rose petals floating on to the 'palio' of the Virgin.



9: Nuns watching as the procession begins.



10: Rose petals on the Virgin's 'manto' as she passes under the nuns' tower.



I 1: Lyn Plummer; detail: *Novitiate Velate*, 1994, steel, fabrics, tissue paper, oil paints and mediums, 260 x 100 cm, photograph: Rodney Browne.



I 2: Lyn Plummer; *Novitiate Velate*, 1994, steel, fabrics, tissue paper, oil paints and mediums, 260 x 100 cm; and *Triptych*, 1994, timber, paint fabric and tissue, 1 x 220 x 196 cm, 2 x 220 x 93 cm, photograph: Rodney Browne.

watching from below see her disappear as she revolves to face inwards. The gathering is overawed. They tentatively encroach to within centimetres of a sacred icon of the church, watchfully guarded by her Franciscan monk. Inert yet emotionally potent, she silently blesses those standing before her in the opulent sacristy under its gigantic crystal chandelier.

While in awe and drawn into the atmosphere and reality of that magnificent past, one can be excused for thinking that the stern demands and seduction of the symbols of these abstracted rituals are still very much in command in the present life-blood of Spain.

The annual Semana Santa pageants unhurriedly process towards the cathedral of each city as they have done for the past five hundred years. These pageants are at all times flanked by confraternity members, unsettlingly cloaked in 'túnicas' with high-coned hoods masking their faces and identities. (See image 2.)

The women are in mourning, dressed as 'manolas' in black, with their 'peinetas' draped with long, black, lace shawls. (See image 3.)

The contemporary rituals are still accompanied by blaring, high-pitched trumpets and the incessant, slow beat of kettle drums, with the players now belligerently following the procession with their gelled hair and designer sunglasses. (See image 4.)

The massive weight of the Virgin Mary's 'paso' (image 5) and that of Christ are carried along the historic path of each confraternity, at a solemn gait, with a reverential, undulating motion by penitents or 'costaleros', many still choosing to process barefooted. (See images 6 and 7.)

We arrived in Jaen in the early afternoon of Palm Sunday to witness the first procession of the season as it emerged – under the watchful eyes of the confraternity charged with the responsibility and honour of staging the inaugural pageant each year – from the dark church interior into the spring sunlight, heady with the aroma of orange blossom. After many deliberations and instructions within the adjacent square, it began its unhurried journey of reverence and remembrance, of excitement and pride. The processors and onlookers are showered with rose petals – hovering momentarily on the hot updrafts – which had earlier been torn from the cloister bushes and piled into huge shells of woven cane. (See image 8.)

The nuns of a Silent Order⁶ energetically toss the petals from the monastery tower. (See image 9.) Their turret lookout ensures their ordained seclusion while they offer their colourful, ephemeral and unvoiced blessing for this segment of the Semana Santa ritual. (See image 10.)

At the conclusion of all these travels and many ceremonies, and considering the manner in which I had been accepted into the churches, processions and homes, I was left with a sense that in Spain, life, art and values are still tangible and visible and can be understood to have merged. I again pondered on one of the issues I have been exploring in my work for the past fifteen years, namely that 'the body/flesh is memory'. It seemed there in Spain to have been acted out with these concepts becoming enmeshed. As Allen S Weiss has noted:

The body is memory, where the wounds inflicted in initiatory ceremonies and vindictive punishments become the scars that remain the trace of one's own suffering, a suffering that creates both self-consciousness and its ethical double, social consciousness.⁷

The resultant, abstract symbol is laden with the coalescence of these rituals, sacrifices, actions, artefacts and historical analyses and is deeply scarred into the historical flesh/body/memory of many of Spain's inhabitants. This 'social consciousness' – and its ethical control – remains an active force today in decreeing the interactions and reactions of the people of Spain.

* All photographs by Lyn Plummer, 2006, except 11 and 12.

- 1 Ralph Body, "Cantata: A Play of the Trace II" (An Installation by Lyn Plummer- Hocken Gallery until 1st April), *Critic 2 te arohi* (Dunedin: University of Otago Magazine, 29 June, 2005), 38.
- 2 Susan Verdi Webster, *Art and Ritual in Golden-Age Spain: Sevillian Confraternities and the Processional Sculpture of Holy Week* (New York: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- 3 "...I did review your web site, particularly the recent exhibitions, and I definitely see what Domingo Córdoba saw! How interesting that you had never seen Semana Santa." (Email: in conversation with Susan Verdi Webster, May 2006.)

- 4 "The scar turns the body into an icon. The intensity of the knife's passage and the memory of the blood's flow are transformed into a symbol – the mark of passage into society and its regulated systems of value and exchange. These marks transform lived time into historical destiny, where the past (as memory and the unconscious) ordains the future. This passage into culture is the inscription of the fantasmatic upon the symbolic: it is sublimation. Ritualistic tortures are but the signs of this 'civilising' process, indicating the 'use value' of the symbolic as a psychic force which instills meaning within us." Allen S Weiss, *Iconology and Perversion* (Melbourne: Art and Text Publications, Art and Criticism Monograph Series, Vol. 4, 1988), 16.
- 5 The rituals surrounding Semana Santa constituted one of the main areas of deliberation and the focus of the journey was to document these and the accoutrements produced as an archive for new work.
- 6 The Orders are still widely engaged in the embroidery of ecclesiastical vestments. However, today the most famous specialist workshops that prepare the Semana Santa cloaks and costumes for the articulated sculpture figures employ members of the gay fraternity.
- 7 Allen S Weiss, *Iconology and Perversion*, 15.

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CARTOONS: IMAGERY AND CONTROVERSY

Bridie Lonie and Qassim Saad

Introduction

Bridie Lonie

In March 2006 Otago Polytechnic School of Art held a seminar on the conflicts around the publication by the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* of cartoons depicting the prophet Mohammad. A lecturer in Design Studies was invited to speak from a Middle Eastern perspective and a lecturer in Art Theory & History at the School of Art was invited to respond from a Western perspective.¹ The conflict that provoked this discussion arose from a surprisingly naïve request for an illustrator to illustrate a book explaining the Muslim faith to Danish children. The fact that illustrators were reluctant to work on this project was publicised and characterised as 'self-censorship' by Flemming Rose of the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten*. He responded by commissioning artists to create images which did represent Mohammad on the grounds that this would enable the newspaper to demonstrate that it stood for the principles of freedom of speech.¹ The cartoons were published in Denmark and slowly disseminated throughout the rest of the world in various contexts and with various cautionary or inflammatory editorial comments added. Responses included demonstrations and, in situations where demonstrating was in itself a political act, corresponding violence broke out.

Images and their Effects: Muslims and the West

Qassim Saad

Throughout history the written text has been the preferred medium of communication for Arab peoples. It is therefore a very descriptive tool, used by literature, poets and story-tellers. The *Qur'an* employs extensive use of 'language imagery' as it explains all aspects of human life and the life of the universe as a whole. For Muslim peoples, the language of Arabic has in itself a sense of holiness; and this is reflected in the importance for non-Arabic Muslims of understanding, talking in, and

reading and writing in Arabic. This is part of the context for Muslim 'aniconism', especially where this applies to matters of religion and belief. All the images which showed the Prophet Mohammad and his companions were historical codices, produced by Muslims who were not Arabic, and were produced in the context of telling the story of Mohammad's life rather than discussing Islamic issues. These images constitute an example of the diversity of Muslim societies and reflected the beliefs of a minority of Muslim groups. This is why such works can be found today in museums and books and tend not to be used by most Muslims.

Newspaper cartoons of the Prophet Mohammad have set off an international row with dangerous consequences, both short- and long-term. The controversial cartoons target Mohammad and Islam; and their aim was to equate them with extremism and to suggest that all Islam supports terrorism. In this article I will introduce the religious and historical reasons for the offensiveness to Muslims of the recently published cartoons.

In his book *Democracy in America*,² written almost two centuries ago, Alexis de Tocqueville accurately observed that democracies could not exist without freedom of the press *and* that social order could not be maintained with boundless freedom of the press. He thought that this would require a certain balancing act and perhaps that explains why some democratic countries have instituted certain legal and social restrictions to the freedom of the press and to freedom of expression.

With such restrictions in mind, many people are asking why the *Jyllands-Posten* editor would ignore the warnings of experts such as Tim Jensen – a leading Danish religious historian – and publish (and later republish) the provocative cartoons. Not only were they published but also with the most offensive timing possible, first around Ramadan, the holy month in the Muslim calendar; and later during the Pilgrimage season. Why would an editor who, according to the *Guardian*, declined a few years earlier to publish cartoons offensive to Christianity, aggressively promote those cartoons so offensive to Muslims?³

The Prophet Mohammad has been described in the *Qur'an* as "a fine example" and as one who possesses "high moral excellence", and God has urged us to follow his manners. Of course, insulting the honour of the most ideal figure in Islam is offensive to all Muslims who take their religion seriously. Although their reactions may differ, they would still be offended because dishonouring another human being, even in lampooning fashion, is unacceptable as Islam rejects certain individuals or nations being favoured because of their wealth, power, or race. God created human beings as equals, and what distinguishes one person from another is faith and piety.

However, there are also no texts in the *Qur'an* or in the *Hadith* (the narrative of the Prophet's life) that would justify extreme overreaction in defending the honour of the Prophet Mohammad or other Prophets of God. Clearly, in their overreaction, the recent rioters have played right into the hands of the extremists from both sides who want to prove that Islam cannot exist in peace with the West and therefore must be dealt with. They have also played into the hands of those who want to blame every historical misery ever suffered by Muslims on the West. It seems no secret that – both

in the West and in the Islamic world – the propaganda machines are controlled by extremists who neither care for dialogue with their counterparts, nor want to understand each other.

Those who conveniently overlook the great majority of moderate Muslims around the world who consider their religion as is described in the *Qur'an*, to be “the Middle Ground Faith”, rely on a pendulum of political confusion that swings in all directions and ultimately affects all Muslims.⁴ A campaign seems to operate in the West which one day defines the Muslim enemy as “global terrorism”; the next day as “Islamic terrorism”; then as “radical Islam”; then as “political Islam”; then as “Islamists”; then as “Jihadists”; then as “Wahabis”; then as “Islamofascists”; then as “the Qur'an”; then as “Mohammad”. Indeed, there seems enough inflammable ignorance on both sides that must be carefully addressed, restrained, and in due course, reversed.⁵

Images in Islamic Art: Historical Background

Qassim Saad

In the *Qur'an* itself, there is no formal statement opposing figurative representations. There is a general consensus about what can be called Muslim ‘aniconism’. Islam came from the Arabian Peninsula and differentiated itself by refraining from the culture of imagery. Initially this reluctance was social and psychological rather than ideological, but, over the centuries, it acquired intellectual and theological justification, and it used various Qur’anic passages and doctrines to do so. The figurative representation of life came to be seen as idolatry. Muslim ‘aniconism’ is, however, opposed to ‘iconoclasm’, which implies the violent destruction of images, something which did, however, happen once in a Muslim context in c.630 when the *Kaaba* was cleansed of its idols. The prohibition against figurative imagery has been only loosely applied, and many argue about these matters in very different ways. But still, the prohibition did affect Islamic art in several ways.⁶

Secular themes were depicted in paintings on early Muslim palace walls and in these the figures of animals and human beings were prominent. In buildings with a religious purpose, however, figures of living creatures were avoided. Although the depiction of living forms was not explicitly forbidden by the *Qur'an*, most jurists, basing their ideas on the *Hadith*, held that this was an infringement of the sole power of God to create life. In the Umayyad Mosque in Damascus, the mosaics, made at an early period, portray the natural world and houses in a fairly realistic way, and one reminiscent of Roman wall-painting, but showing them without living creatures. The walls of mosques and other public buildings were by no means plain, however. Surfaces were covered with decoration: forms of plants, and flowers, tending to become highly stylised; patterns of lines and circles intricately connected and endlessly repeated; and above all – calligraphy. The art of fine writing may have been created largely by officials in the chanceries of rulers, but it had a special significance for Muslims, who believed that God has communicated Himself to many by His Word, in the Arabic language. The writing of that language was developed by calligraphers in ways which were suitable for architectural decoration. Words in endlessly varied forms, repeated or in sentences, were blended with vegetal

or geometric forms. Thus calligraphy became one of the most important of Islamic arts, and Arabic writing adorned not only buildings, but coins, objects of brass or pottery, and textiles – particularly those woven in royal workshops and given as presents. The writing was used to proclaim the glory and eternity of God, as in the inscriptions round the Dome of the Rock, or to speak of the generosity and splendour of a benefactor; or of the skill of an architect.⁷

The houses built in the early period by the Muslim population of the cities have disappeared, but enough has remained of the artefacts used in them to show that some of them contained works of art similar to those in the palaces. Books were transcribed and illustrated for merchants and scholars; glass, metalwork and pottery were made for them; textiles were especially important as floors were covered with carpets; low settees had textile coverings; and walls were hung with carpets or cloths. All these show, on the whole, the same kind of decoration as that of religious buildings, i.e. formalised plants and flowers, geometrical designs and Arabic words. There is a lack of specifically royal themes, but the human figure is not totally absent, or at least not for long as ceramics made in Egypt show human figures, and manuscripts use animals and human beings to illustrate fables or depict scenes from everyday life.⁸

By the third and fourth Islamic centuries (the ninth or tenth century AD) something which was recognisably an 'Islamic world' had emerged. A traveller around the world would have been able to tell, by what he saw and heard, whether a land was ruled and peopled by Muslims. These external forms had been carried by movements of peoples: by dynasties and their armies, merchants moving through the worlds of the Indian Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea, and by craftsmen attracted from one city to another by the patronage of rulers or the rich. They were carried also by imported and exported objects expressing a certain style: books, metalwork, ceramics and particularly perhaps textiles, the staple of long-distance trade.⁹

The disappearance of a unitary structure of government, in the east and west of the Muslim world, was not a sign of social or cultural weakness. By then there had been created a Muslim context held together by many links, and with many centres of power and high culture. The absorption of a large area into a single world had in due course created an economic unit important not only through its size but also because it linked together two great sea basins of the civilised world, those of the Mediterranean and the Indian Ocean. The movement of armies, merchants, craftsmen, scholars and pilgrims between them became easier; and also that of ideas, styles and techniques. Within this vast sphere of interaction it was possible for strong governments, large cities, international trade and a flourishing countryside to grow, all maintaining the conditions for each other's existence.

Within this larger Muslim context, early (and later) artists adapted their creativity according to context (secular or religious for instance) and based on precedent in order to communicate their inner beliefs through the production of works of art in line with the ideas of those considered to be jurists within their communities. For the most part rejecting the depiction of living forms, these artists progressively established a new style substantially deviating from the Roman and Byzantine art of their time. In the mind of the Muslim artist, abstract visual forms are very much connected to ways of transmitting the message of Islam rather than with the abundance of figurative forms

used in other cultures. Beauty, in Islam, is a quality of the divine. In Islamic art, humans are seen as instruments of divinity created by a supremely powerful Being, God, (Allah in Arabic) and therefore unrepresentable through their own forms.

This is perhaps the main point of difference in the philosophies of and approaches towards art in a Muslim and non-Muslim context. Based on its beliefs, Islamic art does not need any figurative representation of natural or human forms; as such representations would undermine the meanings and the essence of the Muslim faith. Consequently, Muslim artists engaged in expressing the truth of their faith in a sophisticated system of geometric, vegetal and calligraphic patterns.¹⁰ According to Rabah Saoud,¹¹ Islam did not need figurative imagery to establish its concepts. (Here, one also thinks of Judaic non-figurative art, but that falls outside the scope of this article.)

Nevertheless, there were some instances where human and animal forms were used in Islamic art. However, these were mainly found in secular private buildings and in historical codices. Most of these instances reflect Mediterranean, Persian, Indian and Turkish strands within the Islamic arts.

One can even see some examples of images of the Prophet Mohammad and his companions in old drawings of scenes of worship and the paying of respect. Even today one can see that Persian and Shi'a Muslims accept and present drawings of many imams and historic Muslim leaders. Thus it is important to understand that it is the majority of Muslims who refrain from figurative representation and that this is not the case for all Muslims. Matters are also complicated further as there are grades of figuration in art works from Iran, India and in some old works from Turkey.

What Is Offensive Art in a Muslim Context?

Qassim Saad

The majority of media writers did not perceive the recent Danish cartoons as works of art. Michael Kimmelman, in his article in the *New York Times*¹² called them "callous and feeble" provocations meant to "score cheap points about freedom of expression." Many non-Muslims looking at the cartoons see them as bland or unclear and do not understand what all the fuss is about; while some of those offended reply that this lack of understanding is part of the problem.

The question of whether the religion of Islam deems any depictions of Muhammad to be offensive is reportedly one debated by Islamic scholars. We need to keep in mind that as Islam spread to Persia and India – civilisations with strong representational traditions – artists did paint him.¹³ The Metropolitan Museum of Art has three portrayals of Mohammad in its collection. According to the *Los Angeles Times*, "a spokeswoman said none of the Met's depictions of Muhammad – one from 15th century Afghanistan, one from 16th century Uzbekistan, one from 16th century Turkey – had been displayed for years. The Met's Islamic galleries are [however] closed for renovation until 2009."¹⁴

The kinds of complexities suggested briefly above are, however, often ignored. In the eyes of many Muslims and Westerners alike, a simplistic notion of a 'clash of civilizations' is being fuelled from within the Western world and many believe that this notion in fact disguises an anti-Islamic crusade guided by Islamophobia. Western media propaganda often presents the Western world

as the 'civilised world with an abiding faith in democracy' facing a war that was declared by forces wishing to establish 'a global extremist Islamic empire'. This reductive and self-serving depiction of the conflict leaves no room for any criticism of the West in general, nor in particular of its use of imagery in relation to Muslim values.

Core principles and values, like freedom of speech, cannot be compromised. However, freedoms do not exist in a vacuum; they do not function without limits. Western secular democracies represent not only freedom of expression but also freedom of religion. Belief as well as unbelief needs to be protected. Seen in this light, Islamophobia is becoming a social cancer and should be as unacceptable as anti-Semitism as it is similarly a threat to the very fabric of a democratic and pluralistic way of life. Thus, it is imperative for political and religious leaders, commentators and experts, and yes, the media, to lead in building and safeguarding our cherished values.

What about Muslim responses? Muslim leaders are hard-pressed to take charge, asserting their faith and rights as citizens, affirming freedom of expression while rejecting its abuse as a cover for prejudice. The many Muslim leaders from all over the world, who have publicly urged restraint and strongly condemned violence, play a critical role. Globalisation and an increasingly multicultural and multi-religious West test the mettle of democratic values. As the current cartoon controversy underscores, pluralism and tolerance today demand understanding and respect between non-Muslims and Muslims alike.

The main issues in this 'culture war' are about faith, Mohammad's central role in Islam, and the respect and love that he enjoys as the paradigm to be emulated. They are also more broadly about identity, respect (or lack of it) and public humiliation.

A recently completed Gallup World Poll that surveyed Muslims from Morocco to Indonesia enables us to find data-based answers about Islam by listening to the voices of a billion Muslims. This particular and ground-breaking Gallup study provides a context and serves as a reality check about the causes for widespread outrage. When asked to describe what Western societies could do to improve relations with the Muslim world, 45% of the replies stated that they should demonstrate more understanding and respect for Islam, show less prejudice, and refrain from denigrating what Islam stands for. At the same time, large numbers of Muslims cite the West's technological success and its liberty and freedom of speech as what they most admire. When asked if they would include a provision for freedom of speech – defined as allowing all citizens to express their opinion on political, social and economic issues of the day – if they were drafting a constitution for a new country, an overwhelming majority of 95% in every country surveyed responded yes, they would.

But – as John L. Esposito¹⁵ argues as one voice amongst many – cartoons defaming the Prophet and Islam by equating them with terrorism are inflammatory and disrespectful. They reinforce Muslim grievances, humiliation and social marginalisation and drive a wedge between the West and moderate Muslims, unwittingly playing directly into the hands of extremists. They also reinforce autocratic rulers who charge that democracy is anti-religious and incompatible with Islam.

I strongly believe that the majority of Muslim peoples do not reject the idea of a democratic society, but it is important to consider the varied socio-cultural, educational and political contexts of

the different Muslim societies. In my view democracy is not a standardised prescription. Its long-term processes require development and when it is applied from an external position under pressure it is likely to significantly damage the structure of the societies that already exist: as, notably, in the case of Iraq.

Radical Democracy

Bridie Lonie

Was this 'conflict' simply about the rights of the press to freedom of speech and publication? And is that the principle that upholds the democratic state? And was this a debate around iconoclasm and the power of the image? Or was it an astute and unprincipled decision to set up a situation of polarisation?

Certainly the genealogy of the situation in a request for images which would breach the Muslim prohibition on the representation of the Prophet in human form was inflammatory.

And the use of the cartoon as a visual form immediately shifted the platform of the debate from the pedagogical and informational aspects of children's illustration to a genre invested with all the bristling values and counter-values of the Western democratic tradition. The cartoon is the artform that lies at the centre of public debate. There is a very close relationship between the determining events of Western European democracy and the growth of the political cartoon.¹⁶ The eighteenth century, which saw the American Revolution and the French, also saw an increasingly skilled genre of satiric representation. In general, political cartooning grew out of the desire to level the pretensions of those who abused power and it is most apt when the relationship between power and person was at its closest. Generic cartoons, which make broad political statements, can become longer-living art but the most focused cartoons are streetwise and specific to the knowledge base and interests of the population at the time. Many of the best forge relationships between an individual physiognomy and its extension into a form typical of any of the sins that beset the powerful. Gerald Scarffe's 1980s images of Margaret Thatcher, for example, capture a personality and its relationship with power that specifically targets human pretensions grown out of control. The human attributes of individuality and emotion level the person to the position a democratic society nominally wants them to be in: a singularity, one vote among many others. Cartoons in this context levelled the great, made power not only temporal but also short-lived.

Thus the commissioning of the cartoons in the context under discussion here was a sleight of hand. It shifted a reasonable concern with the representation of another culture that had already clearly indicated its position to the deliberate production of imagery that was going to be offensive by virtue of its very existence.

There are many definitions and understandings of democracy but the hardest to maintain is that in which differences which are not agreed with are still acknowledged. What strategies should be adopted in a world in which conflicts of belief are an inevitable corollary of the principle of freedom of speech?

In 1993 Chantal Mouffe wrote in *The Return of the Political*:

Once we accept the necessity of the political and the impossibility of a world without antagonism, what needs to be envisaged is how it is possible *under those conditions* to create or maintain a pluralistic democratic order. Such an order is based on a distinction between 'enemy' and 'adversary'. It requires that, within the context of the political community, the opponent should be considered not as an enemy to be destroyed, but as an adversary whose existence is legitimate and must be tolerated. We will fight against his ideas but we will not question his right to defend them.¹⁷

She continued as follows:

When, as is the case today, liberal democracy is increasingly identified with 'actually existing democratic capitalism', and its political dimension is restricted to the rule of law, there is a risk that the excluded may join fundamentalist movements or become attracted to antiliberal, populist forms of democracy. A healthy democratic process calls for a vibrant clash of political positions and an open conflict of interests. If such is missing, it can too easily be replaced by a confrontation between non-negotiable moral values and essentialist identities.¹⁸

For whom were the cartoonists speaking? If this was debate, it was not clear to whom it was addressed. Thinking with Chantal Mouffe, their participation in a project that was built on the premise of resistance to another culture's edict indicated that there was no debate possible and as cartoons of a characterised historical figure their works inevitably relied upon essentialism for effect.

If the notion of freedom of speech has as its corollary the notion of respect for difference then dialogue is much more likely to occur and fundamentalisms less likely to grow from a legitimate sense of injustice and misunderstanding.

- 1 These two seminar presenters are co-authors for this article.
- 2 Alexis de Tocqueville's Chapter 11: "Liberty of the Press in the United States" was published in Vol. I of his *Democracy in America* in 1835. This publication has been translated and reprinted many times.
- 3 See Abukar Arman, "For Law and Order to Prevail, Assertive Ignorance Must be Curtailed", 23 February 2006 at <http://usa.mediamonitors.net/headlines/for-law-and-order-to-prevail-assertive-ignorance-must-be-curtailed> as last visited on 2 October 2006.
- 4 See <http://www.news.harvard.edu/gazette/2006/02.23/11-ksgcartoon.html> as last visited on 2 October 2006 for Alvin Powell, "KSG Group Says Violence Over Cartoons Result of 'Frustration'", 23 February 2006.
- 5 See endnote 3.
- 6 See Rabah Saoud, *Introduction to Muslim Art* (London: Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation, 2004) and Oleg Grabar, "Art and Culture in the Islamic world", in Markus Hattstein and Peter Delius (eds), *Islam: Art and Architecture* (Germany: Konemann, 2004).
- 7 See Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab People* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 55.
- 8 Ibid., 56.
- 9 Ibid., 56-57.
- 10 See R Al-Faruqi, "Islam and Art", *Studia Islamica*, 1973, Vol.37.
- 11 See endnote 6 for Saoud.
- 12 See Michael Kimmelman in Jonathan Mandell, *The Cartoon Crisis*, 20 February 2006 at <http://www.gothmagazette.com/articles/arts/20060223/1176820/02/06> as last visited on 2 October 2006.
- 13 See <http://www.ee.bilkent.edu.tr/%7Ehistory/ottoman33.html> for links to images relevant to contribution by author Qassim Saad.
- 14 See Jonathan Mandell as in endnote 12.
- 15 John L Esposito, *Muslims and the West: A Culture War* (Washington DC: Islamic Studies, Georgetown University, 2006) at <http://www.islamonline.net/English/Views/2006/02/article07.shtml###> as last visited on 2 October 2006.
- 16 See images of cartoons as relevant to the contribution by author Bridie Lonie at <http://images.google.co.nz/images?q=political+cartoons&hl=en&btnG=Search+Images> as last visited on 2 October 2006.
- 17 Chantal Mouffe and Ernesto Laclau (eds), *The Return of the Political* (London & New York: Verso, 1973), 12.
- 18 Op cit.

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