

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art

# JILL SCOTT

## The Body Remembers

8 NOVEMBER – 1 DECEMBER 1996

experimenta media arts festival 1996

Our mental processes are closer to a maze than a motor way, every turning yields yet another turning, not symmetrical, not obvious. Not Chaos either. A sophisticated mathematical equation made harder to unravel because  $X \neq Y$  equal different values on different days.

JEANNETTE WINTERSON *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit*. 1991

**The maze** Jill Scott creates for us is both physical and mental. In this exhibition we are invited to take part in an interactive experience which questions ideas about gender, the body and multi-media. **The Body Remembers** presents recent work by the artist in the context of twenty-two years of practice, including performance, video and interactive installations using digital technologies. Made while working in Australia and overseas, Scott's work explores relationships between the body, physical space and time, and the impact of technology on our social and cultural environment. Her practice draws on our culture – design, architecture, television and advertising – and the dreams, myths and stereotypes that inform personal experience.

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Throughout her career, Scott has often involved the viewer in her installations, encouraging the audience to take on an interactive role that highlights the impact of environment on movements, decisions and memories. The method of display in **The Body Remembers** refers to both the personal, subconscious manipulation of information through memory and the logical, invisible processing of data.

Viewers are invited to navigate through Scott's previous work in this exhibition by moving along a walkway, which resembles a maze or computer circuit board. The evidence and memories of past works are grouped at different points that indicate the artist's interests and concerns at various moments in time. Viewers experience the exhibition, as if walking through Scott's mind, whilst they are also recorded, and therefore performing, on camera, a reminder of our relationship to the environment and to the ever present electronic monitoring of society. While emphasising that the body and memory are central to her work, the artist has suggested that this installation also illustrates her "development of interactivity from surveillance to multiple choice."

Early works address the body and **Dimension**. In performances such as *Taped* (1975), where Scott was fixed to the side of a San Francisco building with masking tape, *Boxed and Tied* (1975) and *Strung* (1976) where she was bound to the Golden Gate Bridge, Scott's bodily confinement refers to natural forces and fears. Traces of the body exist in the remaining materials. These emotional performances broke with the two dimensional nature of painting and film. They also commented on the body as commodity and object.

In the late 1970s, Scott integrated ideas of memory with surveillance in architectural space. Moving away from using her own body, the focus of her work now became

the viewer's body which was controlled through physical constriction and ritual. A series of performances, *Accidents*, analysed processes of learning, recollection and spontaneity, by examining participants' responses to given instructions.

The use of video in Scott's work dates back to her collaboration with The Cockpit Theatre, London in 1974, and subsequently the notion of the watched body became an important focus between 1977 and 1979. The group of works using **Space** were a type of social experiment, documenting patterns of behaviour. This was an attempt to test the flexibility of normal patterns of decision making. Visitors were confronted with decisions and rewards in *Choice* (1977), saw themselves documented in *Inside-Out* (1978) and their movements filmed, categorised and re-presented publicly in *Extremities* (1979). Scott used video technology as an instrument of revelation, exposing the frameworks through which events occur and are witnessed.<sup>1</sup>

In a third series of works from the early 1980s, grouped as **Primal Coding**, Scott's practice moved from video installation to the search for 'primal' construction and performance. The nostalgic *Homecoming* (1979) focused on autobiographical and family rituals through metaphor. *Persist, the Memory* (1980), one of many performances which used animals as metaphors for human/ecological relationships, involved a horse and revived romantic pony club dreams of girlhood. In these and later works, such as *Life Flight* (1988) and *Continental Drift* (1990/91) eastern philosophical and spiritual references indicate the dualism of mind and body or nature and human.

During the 1980s and 1990s, the formation of archetypes and collective memory in rapidly changing environments was integral to many of Scott's works. The landscape in her work gradually took on feminine, timeless characteristics, water and sand being common elements

in performances such as *Choice* (1977), *Out the Back* (1981), *Sand, the Stimulant* (1980) and *Desire, the Code* (1982). The destruction of the natural landscape figured strongly in *Out the Back*, where sand poured from Scott's wounded chest. In *Constriction* (1982), the idea of savagery and delicate balance between animal and human behaviour was overlaid with a notion of discipline suggested by surveillance videos of the audience and surrounding city. The inclusion of video commented on the distancing and codification of the body in our culture.

**Myths and Media** encompasses works from 1982 – 1988, a period when Scott attempted to rewrite mythologies about the female body. Inspired by medieval and classical mythology and fairy tales (and influenced by writers Angela Carter and Marshall McLuhan), Scott proposed woman as an idealised goddess, temptress or siren, as an alternative to female stereotypes in the mass media in the work *Double Dream* (1985). Deeper relationships with the deteriorating natural environment are visualised in *Double Space* (1985) and the fantasy realm of the feminine was disrupted deliberately in the video installation *Double Time* (1985). Women are also presented controlling the forces of technology for their own enjoyment in *Media Massage* (1988).

The period from 1988 – 1995 was one of questioning technological **Idealism**. Moving away from bodily experience and mythological narratives, Scott critiqued western notions of a genderless technological future, by examining the impact of science, mass media and commercial desire. *Machine Dreams* (1993) and *Paradise Tossed* (1992) continued the artist's consideration of contemporary definitions of utopia and western separation from a lost paradise. The lure of domestic and workplace appliances are considered for their effects on women's lives. *Paradise Tossed* (a play on Milton's "Paradise Lost") installed here connects the changing social

environments of the 1900s, 1930s, 1960s and 1990s with the timelessness of desire for material objects as containers of ideal values. "Does design lead to desire or vice versa, or are they inseparable? This work demonstrates the ways by which women have been manipulated to desire certain appliances, fashion and environments and to stay inside their domestic environments and their bodies."<sup>2</sup>

Included in this exhibition, Scott's culminating work on this theme, *Frontiers of Utopia* (1995-6) combines video, still and graphic images. A development of *Machine Dreams* and *Paradise Tossed*, *Frontiers* provides glimpses into the life and times of eight twentieth century women through conversations, diaries, personal belongings or surroundings. Users delve into history through personal memory, able to collate their own collage of the forces that shaped women's lives. As an archive, it illustrates various attitudes towards ideal society, both eastern and western. Memory is found in both bodies and objects.

The sixth group of works documented in the network of Scott's practice promise **Transformation**. These interactive works in progress; *A Figurative History* (1996), *Immortal Duality* (1997) and *Interskin* (1997) explore the transformation of the body through primitive and contemporary notions of technology. Relating the anatomical body to automata and the virtual data body, Scott questions the potential and ethics of a post-human future. In the continual quest to understand technological relations and their ramifications, Scott conceives of and uses technology not as a neutral tool, but as a material object, historical agent, and embodiment of commercial and cultural forces.

#### **Claire Doherty and Zara Stanhope**

1. Heidegger, M., *The Question Concerning Technology*, Harper & Row, New York, 1977.
2. Scott, J., in interview with Josephine Grieve, 6 October 1996.



## WORKS IN THE EXHIBITION

**DIMENSION:** *Taped* 1975; *Boxed* 1975; *Tied* 1975; *Strung* 1976; *Accidents for one*; *Accidents for four* 1976

**SPACE:** *Choice*, 1977; *Inside-out* 1978; *Moved up, moved down* 1978; *Extremities* 1979

**PRIMAL CODING:** *The Homecoming* 1979; *Out the Back* 1981; *Persist, the Memory* 1980; *Desire, the Code* 1982; *Order, the Underfire* 1981; *Constriction* 1982

**MYTHS AND MEDIA:** *The Magnetic Tapes* 1982; *Double Dream* 1985; *Double Space* 1985; *Double Time* 1985; *Media Massage* 1988

**IDEALISM:** *Life Flight* 1988; *Wishful Thinking* 1989; *Continental Drift* 1990/1991; *Machine Dreams* 1993; *Frontiers of Utopia* 1995-96

**TRANSFORMATION:** *A Figurative History* 1996; *Immoral Duality* 1997; *Interskin* 1997

*Paradise Tossed* 1992  
Laser disc installation  
Courtesy of 235 Media, Cologne  
Assisted by the Australian Film Commission

*Frontiers of Utopia* 1995-6  
Computer interactive  
Assisted by the Australian Film Commission, Medienmuseum, ZKM and the Australian Film, Television and Radio School in Sydney.

## BIOGRAPHY

Born 1952 Australia. Lives and works Germany.

### STUDIES

1994- PhD in Media Philosophy, University of Wales, CAIA, Gwent

1976-77 Masters of Fine Art, San Francisco State University

1974 Diploma of Education, Melbourne Teachers College

1970-73 Degree in Film, Art and Design, Prahran College of Advanced Education

Between 1975 - 1982 Scott lived in San Francisco, created video and performance works in the United States and was Director of Site Inc., an experimental gallery funded by The National Endowment for the Arts. In 1982 she returned to Australia to teach at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Throughout the 1980s she exhibited video installations in the United States, Europe and Japan. Scott initiated the First Australian Video Festival in 1985. In the mid 1980s she began to experiment with computers, 3-D animation and interactive programs and left Australia in 1992 to take the post of Guest Professor in Computer Animation and Interactive Art at the Kunste Hochschule in Saarbrucken, Germany. Currently she works on commissions for the ZKM, Medienmuseum in Karlsruhe, Germany.

Scott is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and 235 Media, Cologne, Germany.



AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

Jill Scott

The Body Remembers

GUEST CURATOR: Zara Stanhope



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Dallas Brooks Drive, South Yarra 3141

Telephone +61 3 9654 6422

Fax +61 3 9650 3438



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DIRECTOR: Jenepher Duncan

VISITING CURATOR: Claire Doherty

ADMINISTRATOR: Jennifer Colbert

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