

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART

4 MAY — 16 JUNE 1996

Serial

Kids

EMIL GOH
PATRICK HOBBS
HELEN KUNDICEVIC
HELEN LIM

CURATOR: NEIL EMMERSON

A NEXT WAVE FESTIVAL EXHIBITION

Serial Kids

This exhibition consists of the work of four artists who are recent graduates from Sydney College of the Arts. It explores the evidence of a subjective relation to the Portraiture genre that runs parallel to an awareness of contemporary conditions relating to the body and how it is identified through its interactions with art, culture and society. Attendant upon that awareness is an intelligent and imaginative use by these artists of so-called low-tech media and materials which in part responds to the current concentration on 'state of the art' electronic technologies pervading the visual arts.

Perhaps more than any of the traditional fields of art practice, photography and print media both share strong historical and contemporary links with popular culture through the mass media. The inherently multiple and reproductive nature of photography and print media is underscored by a dual activity: firstly, the dissemination and circulation of material that potentially creates culture, followed by the inevitable dissipation and dispersal, or collapse, that repetition and serial syntactical forms demonstrate. This paradigm acts as a metaphor for the more subjective experience of the assertion followed by the dissipation of a unified form of identity construction. Each of these works mirrors this theoretical model, reflecting directly on the relations between the artists' projection of themselves, that is their subjective conditions, and the possibility of an infinite number of sites for positive identification, or identity expenditure, through the guise of the portrait.



Patrick Hobbs references the serial, self portrait etching projects of Mike Parr through his repetitious drawings of the face of Michael Jackson, eventually confusing the autographic with the reprographic. The activity of drawing, reflecting and projecting through a vicarious relationship with the subject(s) focuses on ideas concerning constructions of masculinity. The shift from Parr to Jackson engages a witty and critically knowing displacement from high art to popular culture, conflating the difference between the assertively masculine formal values and representational modes of Parr with the very publicly questionable sexual identity of Jackson. It also juxtaposes opposing marketing strategies for printed material from the limited edition, master printed works of Parr to the mass media images of 'Wacko Jacko' and his ever changing, by now almost 'virtual' features. Unlike Parr who likes to stab, scar and scratch the reflective surface of copper, Hobbs

prefers to apply his make-up directly to paper, delicately sketching its form and its parts over and again in a physical state of meditative projection.

Helen Lim's immediate, rough and tumble screen prints float somewhere between the fetishism of a school-girl's exercise book cover and a psycho-killer's collaged collection of potential victims. There is a type of physical schizophrenia represented in these works that collage together the features of a bevy of Eastern and Western magazine beauties. The struggle inherent in straddling cultural borders between a traditional Eastern family life and a Western glam fashion culture is explored in a black and white, cut, shuffle and paste process. Like slap-stick plastic surgery gone

horribly wrong the violence here is tongue-in-cheek. A critical response to the pervasive beauty myth, this black humour turns glamour into the grotesque and high fashion models into side-show freaks.



Helen Kundicevic's hand manipulated photo works develop a more literal use of the portrait as a site for subjective projection and objective critique. As pictures they negotiate a recognition and absorption of historical data but act out a confessional counterfeit. Like a pirate, Kundicevic sails through an ocean of master portraits plundering the picture gallery of photographically reproduced personages into which she superimposes her own features, a takeover, affirmation of her own vicarious engagement with the sitter. Like the portrait of the Japanese writer Mishima in the guise of St. Sebastian, the artist projects her own physical form into the plastic, formal conventions of another time, another place, another body and another history. She accrues the riches of semiotic reference like jewels, adorning her own body with a bounty of wealth, both material and psychological, real and mythic. The terms of this relationship are more than formal – they are also visceral.

On first sight Emil Goh's interactive installation may not seem to fit the model I'm proposing, and yet it's possible to witness the materialization of a portrait figured within the spare formal setting of a virtually empty room. The figure assumes at once the role of the stand-in, an understudy acting out the object of the gaze. Head between the two suspended transistor radios, listening about face, this literal turn around inverts the aim of the traditional portrait that seeks to inform about the features and other identification details of the sitter. The coded identity serial numbers being voiced, first one side then the other, feminine then masculine, become links in a chain of seemingly endless codes of personal reference. Reiteration becomes the serial form of the aural syntax, collapsing identity codes into an hypnotic drone where the capacity for personal sovereignty disintegrates similarly to the construction of the subject in the other two-dimensional works in this exhibition. The vicarious investment on behalf of the artist here is rendered mute by the striking anonymity of the piece whilst paradoxically containing extremely private coded information. There is a conflation here of the public and the private, of the privileges of consumer potency and the penitential possibilities of institutional disenfranchisement.



facing page top
Patrick Hobbs **HIStory** 1995 (detail)
charcoal on paper
facing page bottom
Helen Lim **Keeping Face / Losing Face**
1995 screen print on paper
left
Helen Kundicevic **Untitled** 1994 (detail)
photocopy and photo-emulsion on paper
below
Emil Goh **tap** 1995 (detail)
two transistor radios,
FM transmitter, CD player

Whilst describing a range of critically subjective responses to ideas disseminated through those blood brothers, art and popular culture, these portraits act as metaphors for cultural identity which attempt to expose the effect of social paradigms in their serial and repetitious nature. These are self portraits in as much as they operate like projected amalgams of a variety of possible sites for actual and imaginary investments. At once methodical, assertive, and full of intention they demonstrate the fundamental paradox of repetition—that through an accumulation of facsimiles and reiterations the dissipation of reality is directly proportionate to the accumulation of its simulation.

— Neil Emmerson April 1996



List of Works

Patrick Hobbs

HIStory 1995

25 pieces, each A2, charcoal on paper
total dimensions variable

Helen Lim

Keeping Face / Losing Face 1995

screenprint on paper
dimensions variable

Emil Goh

tap 1995

two transistor radios, FM transmitter, CD
player
dimensions variable

Helen Kundicevic

Untitled 1994

photocopy and photo-emulsion
on paper
5 pieces, each 33cm x 44 cm

Biographies

Patrick Hobbs

Born Sydney, 1969

Education

1995 Bachelor of Visual Arts Sydney
College of the Arts 1990 Foundation
Studies, St. Martin's College of Art, London

Selected Group Exhibitions

1995 *Limbo*, Graduate Exhibition, Sydney
College of the Arts; *Window Dressing*,
Student Gallery, Print Media, S.C.A.;
Collaboration with Tom Burless, Jam
Factory, Adelaide; CBD Gallery benefit
exhibition, Sydney; Side On Gallery benefit
exhibition, Sydney.

Artist's statement

The endlessly proliferating face of Michael
Jackson seems paradoxical in its relation to
the singular recognition of person as
portrait, as Vanitas. What interests me
about the poster print that I have copied is
that it is a reconstituted image. Its faultless
seriality subverts the aura of the portrait
more successfully than my graffiti.
The difference between the reprographic
process and drawing is that the former

splits the image into a negative and a
positive and the latter freezes the image as
a negative. I have borrowed the 'rhetoric' of
drawing for the purposes of mimicry rather
than sincerity. It is not a pretty sight, when
the image fails and sticks like a broken
record.

Helen Lim

Born South Korea, 1971

Education

1995 Bachelor of Visual Arts, Sydney
College of the Arts; 1992 Julian Ashton Art
School; 1990-91 Associate Diploma of
Visual Art, Hornsby TAFE, NSW

Group Exhibitions

1995 *Limbo*, Graduate Exhibition, Sydney
College of the Arts; *Window Dressing*,
Student Gallery, Print Media, SCA;
1992 Julian Ashton Graduation Exhibition,
Sydney; 1990 Kodak Gallery, Sydney.

Artist's Statement

Screenprinting is my ideal media as it is a
simple and direct technique for the transfer
of images. Using the photocopier as a
drawing tool, I have used found images
from newspapers, magazines and posters to
construct and manipulate images that
celebrate the visual and textural qualities
particular to that process.

Emil Goh

Born Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, 1966

Individual Exhibitions

1995 *tap*, The Performance Space, Sydney;
1994 *362436*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne;
Conversation, First Draft, Sydney; 1993
Relative Perception, Newcastle Regional
Art Gallery.

Group Exhibitions

1995 *Anonymous/Rediscovered*, Linden
Gallery, Melbourne; *Fear Inc.*, First Draft,
Sydney; 1994 *Experimenta*, Centre for
Contemporary Photography, Melbourne.

Artist's Statement

Within urban society our everyday activity is
recorded as we leave an electronic trail in
our wake. PINs and passwords are our new
keys, mainframes discuss our business and
tap listens in on electronic conversations

between data banks. As technology
becomes more 'user friendly' things seem
easier to use but the processes behind the
interface become more dense and complex.
Every day I feel I know less about this
technology that surrounds me. Expertise is
falling into the hands of fewer and fewer
individuals.

I chose to use the simple, everyday
technology of radios and CD player, the
lower end of the technology spectrum that
represents for me reliability, economy and
accessability. This work needed to be
constructed from materials that I felt were
familiar and relatively unsophisticated.

Helen Kundicevic

Born Port Macquarie, NSW, 1961

Education

1995-96 Master of Visual Art, Sydney
College of the Arts; 1994 Graduate Diploma
in Visual Arts, Sydney College of the Arts;
1983 Bachelor of Arts, Visual Arts, Hunter
Institute of Higher Education, Newcastle,
NSW.

Individual Exhibitions

1996 *Sitters*, Centre for Contemporary
Photography, Melbourne;
1995 *Horseplay*, Selenium, Sydney;
1992 *Tempting Fates*, James Harvey
Gallery, Sydney.

Group Exhibitions

1995 *On Holiday*, James Harvey Gallery,
Sydney; 1994 Honours and Postgraduate
Exhibition, Sydney College of the Arts.

Artist's Statement

The image is formed through a conspiracy
between photocopied reproductions of
randomly selected Van Dyke portraits and
the photographic image. The reproductions
are recopied and then manipulated by
erasure. The arbitrary leaving of traces of
detail act as unhealing wounds, left to
disturb the imposition of the photographic
image that shares it's site. This is digital
manipulation of a physical kind. Hand
processes of marking erasure and
duplication make for slippery images that
confuse subject/object relations leaving our
perception disturbed.

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