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new06

Laresa Kostoff
Giles Ryder
Natasha Johns-Messenger
Darren Sylvester
Shaun Wilson
Helen Johnson
Makeshift

NEW06

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foreword

The *NEW* series of commissions by the rising stars of the art world has become a much anticipated event on Melbourne's cultural calendar. This year our own Artistic Director, Juliana Engberg returns as curator of *NEW06* and has put together a characteristically fresh and exciting medley of talented young artists. She has selected six individual artists as well as one artist collective, making this our largest *NEW* so far. For the first time *NEW* has also embraced artists from outside Melbourne. Artists from Sydney and Turkey Creek, Western Australia have been invited to be part of this important opportunity.

The *NEW* season is always full of excitement and experimentation as we witness the variety of ways artists meet and respond to the spaces of ACCA within their own artistic processes and projects. The *NEW* exhibition is an important opportunity for artists, in which the ACCA galleries become something like an expanded studio, where artists' big ideas can become a reality. And once again this year's artists have risen to the challenge. Helen Johnson, Makeshift, Laresa Kosloff, Natasha Johns-Messenger, Darren Sylvester, Giles Ryder and Shaun Wilson have each, in their own way, produced wonderful, inventive and thoughtful works.

Literally dozens of people make the *NEW* series what it is, and we want to thank all the artists, their teams of assistants, our vast group of volunteers and ACCA's own crew of builders and installers for once again putting in a massive effort. Thanks also to the writers who have each brought new insights to the works in the exhibition.

Anna MacDonald deserves particular acknowledgement for her management of all the artists' projects, which she has done with great professionalism and enthusiasm, assisted by Danny Lacy working through many of the installation logistics.

ACCA audiences look forward to entering into the evolving environments created by the new commissions. We know you will be beguiled by this latest series of experiments in space. Enjoy!

Kay Campbell
Executive Director

NEW06 delivers seven projects by artists interested in reinvestigating certain aspects of artistic presentation. Arguably they also all seek to extend the parameters of their chosen artistic idiom by infiltrating other influences, methodologies and technologies into the purity of these legacies.

Aspects of modernism, from the geometric experiments of the Bauhaus and Russian constructivism and monochromism, for instance, are revitalised in the projects of Laresa Kosloff and Giles Ryder who each restage, in quite different ways, the vitality of these modern foundations.

Kosloff 'performs' geometry in a series of physical experiments that involve her wearing art costumes designed in the fashion of abstract canvases. Kosloff plays her organic self (represented by her visible, naked legs) off against the rigidly organised world of the modernist line (painted onto her cardboard body) in a sequence of events attempting alignment. Hers is a project that intersects painting with sculpture, architecture with performance, and film with theatre – all key players in the repertoire of early 20th century modernist inventions – particularly as they were pursued by the factory of modernism at the Bauhaus. There is, I suspect, a hint of feminist critique in this work, as well as an interrogation of the assumption that modernism fulfills the physical requirements for all bodies able and otherwise.

Giles Ryder's work extends the artistic exercises in optics, monochromism, and colour field with works that reassert colour and clarity, and effect luminosity. Ryder's works seem to follow on from the experiments of Dan Flavin, whose use of the ordinary, industrial-made, fluorescent tube light was, by virtue of proximity to the white cube of the gallery, and by phenomenological immanence, turned into a sublime colour wash. Ryder's colour-band paintings, made from reflective, automobile paint onto aluminium, share the technical hardness of a Flavin, while they also pursue the softness of the optical blur. Referring also, perhaps to Ian Burn's early reflective colour field surfaces, Ryder's panels recapture the elusive body in minimalism.

Ryder's use of neon off-cuts takes up another one of the modernist dialogues, with the neon sentences of Bruce Nauman, and the

minimal gestures of Fabrizio Plessi and Mario Merz. Even the active painting of Jackson Pollock seems to lurk in these light skirmishes. They seem to expand the taut modernist signs of these artists by loosening the gesture in a reference perhaps to street graffiti. Ryder's neons become gestural, while his painted panels become shifting planes on fixed surfaces.

The minimal constructions of Dan Graham, Bruce Nauman, Robert Morris and Robert Smithson travel through Natasha Johns-Messenger's elaborate, spatial conceits. The modernist mirror is reintroduced in her works to create disorienting segues to blocked alleys and blind corridors. But, whereas the early minimal sculptures tended to be individual, and entity-based structures – primary objects – Johns-Messenger's works are site-related, even site-dependent in certain ways, as they extend, exorcise and problematise the architectural space in which they exist. Through the use of mirrors, lights and transparencies, as well as kinetic events, Johns-Messenger activates both space and the body of the viewer by creating improbable architectural conundrums. Not quite a labyrinth, more a three dimensional mathematical puzzle, akin to Escher's complicated spaces, Johns-Messenger's project is playful and taunting in equal part.

Helen Johnson's wall and paper painting, *The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy: Producing Singularities in a More and More Standardised World*, is more like a social, economic and political labyrinth, and extends the protests and engagements of life and art which emerged to challenge cerebral conceptualism. Johnson pictures the intricate and ever mutually involving exchanges of symbolism, signifiers and consumerist codes that become a part of an individual's complex identity. Fashion and ideology merge in clashing contradictions; the passionate politics of ecology and personal waste co-exist; sexism and advertising are duplicitous dogmas that unfixed feminist resolve; utopia grows in a pot plant while natural idylls are felled. You get the feeling that the optimism of the peace and love generation has been sullied by its own shortsightedness and compromises. Johnson's world is a complicated, implicated social and political space, populated by those whose future is being determined now, and shaped by their own choices and engagements.

Darren Sylvester is also concerned with identities. His projects move between the styles and influences of Pop, Pop-culture, New Wave, Disco, Post Modernism, and the *prêt-à-porter* of DIY and ready-to-assemble lifestyles, and point to the ways in which uniqueness is a construct of desire morphed with packaging. In two video works Sylvester adopts the personas of Pop-stars David Bowie and Kate Bush, miming (but without sound) their songs, *Heroes* and *Wuthering Heights*, respectively. Sylvester's restaged video-clips duplicate, with amazing precision, Bowie's androgynous self-rapture and Bush's extravagant, feminine gesturing. Each seems like a synthetic rendering of the self through Sylvester's stylised reworking: Bowie and Bush become highly developed emotive archetypes.

Sylvester also offers up a soft-serve ice-cream to lucky recipients in his video loop, *If I Only Do One Good Thing In Life, This Is It*. The title itself, like the free IKEA product that he peddles, seems oversweet – a feel good moment – much like the fantasy of shopping, and stopping briefly, in the well planned, life is good, clean and efficient world of the self-assemble décor that is the IKEA utopia. Perhaps most compelling in this project is the opportunity to watch as people self-select to be rewarded or excluded from this little gesture of happiness... suspicion overriding gratification... unless you are a child, for whom this gratuitous gifting seems natural and obvious.

Sylvester's fatuous feel good moments are extended into his heavily constructed and deliberately sentimental photographs, KODAK moments and snow-filled reveries demonstrate the ways in which memories are constructed from the already pre-existing image repertoire made available in colour correct catalogues. The Nestlé logo, now made into a 3D syrupy sculpture, reveals the contrived nurture and nature that promises love and provision.

Shaun Wilson re-enters the world of the child. His *1975* constructs a small space of disorienting size, scaled to require the adult visitor to readjust their body to a cubbyhole adventure. Inside his small viewing room is projected an endless loop of films that have been digitally re-mastered through an animation program. The films, as a result of this technical process, obtain the chimera of painterly abstraction. Figures are blurred, events and people, once

objectified by the camera, are made subjective once again, and open to imaginative interrogation. The child's half grasping mind is reacquainted with the adult's more counter-intuitive apprehension of things, and as a result veracity and fantasy become proactively intermingled. Like memory itself, filtered through time and the slipping narrations of oral histories told and re-told in the familial reiterations, Wilson's films become mercurial and elusive. Even though these are films from Wilson's own family archive, and therefore attached to certain actual circumstances, they become powerful memories for everyone: shared by, and potentially potent for all, by virtue of their permeable status.

The Makeshift collective also creates a space of imaginary force out of those favorite playhouse materials – cardboard, and found things. Makeshift builds a poetic set of spaces full of potential discovery and perhaps some trepidation: part maze, castle, dungeon, labyrinth, hidey-hole, secret passage, hidden garden and dangerous dark place. This is an experimental and organic organised space. Not so much ad hoc, as following the internal opportunities of logical and illogical turns provided by the restriction of available area, the space is all the time being required to enlarge as an experience. In certain ways Makeshift's growing, evolving project resembles the development of memory function and replicates the ways in which knowledge, information structures, networks and webs grow from their own root systems and mutate. A three-dimensional Google experience, you might call it.

Makeshift's investigation space, sends us back to Wilson's *1975*, and Johns-Messenger's conundrum space. Laresa Kosloff's cardboard costumes remind us of the playhouse of the Bauhaus, and IKEA's carry-away-in-cardboard. Giles Ryder turns the modernist icon of neon into sublime squiggles, while, in their standardised units, Johnson's people seek individuality out of the mess of ideology, logos and commerce. That's *NEW06*.

Iaresa Kosloff



BIOGRAPHY

born Melbourne, 1974

Laresa Kosloff is a video artist who makes Super 8 films, hand-drawn animations, choreographed video works, sculptures and installations.

Since 1998 she has held solo exhibitions at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, TCB gallery, Westspace gallery, Penthouse & Pavement gallery, and Grey Area Art Space Inc. Kosloff has participated in a number of group exhibitions in Australia, including *Make it Modern* curated by Juliana Engberg, 2005, *Truth Universally Acknowledged* curated by Rebecca Coates, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2005; *Plasticine Park* at ACMI, 2003, and *(the world may be) Fantastic*, part of the 13th Biennale of Sydney, in 2002. International exhibitions include: *The Moon Will Save Our Ass* at Castlefield Gallery, Manchester, 2004, *the sneeze 80 X 80* at Gazon Rouge Gallery in Athens, 2004 and *Multi Media Art Asia Pacific* in Beijing, 2002.

In 2002 Kosloff was awarded an Australia Council New York studio, and is currently completing an MFA at Monash University. Kosloff is a committee member of CLUBSproject Inc., and a sessional lecturer at RMIT University and Monash University.

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Laresa Kosloff

For *NEW06*, Laresa Kosloff directs, performs and hand-makes a series of abstract objects and costumes that communicate feelings about deep and shallow space with references to modern theatrical performance and design. In *Spirit & muscle*, 2006, she executes nine short gestures that intentionally blur the distinctions between modern dance, gymnastics and yoga: movements representative of the balance between strength and vulnerability, poise and awkwardness, masterful control and uncertainty. Her face is masked by a changing display of Suprematist forms and shapes, simplifying the figure into geometric blocks of colour. Her bare legs remain exposed and appear disembodied, throwing the physical symmetry off balance. Throughout her performance, Kosloff's movements are shaky, even clumsy, contradicting the logical formal structures and the innate expressiveness of the prop paintings she wears.

Kosloff's video performances are grounded in the modern movement and Bauhaus tradition, and express her fascination with the shifting contradictions inherent in modernism. *Spirit & muscle* is developed from many sources, including Pablo Picasso's early Cubist experiments in costume and theatre design and Oskar Schlemmer's inventive dance performances developed for the Bauhaus stage. Schlemmer devised a 'workshop' of experimentation premised on a set of intellectual and philosophical approaches towards the challenges and problems of avant-garde dance creation. Many of Schlemmer's Bauhaus performances explored the relationship between the human figure and space, and used geometric costumes to transform natural movement into standardised, artificial gestures.

The articulation of Kosloff's limbs is angular and all lines of direction and composition playfully parody the regularity of the human body's motion in space. Her naked legs animate the inanimate abstract forms of her costumes representing a play of contradictions between imperfection and precision, individualism and standardisation, organic and machine, chance and exactitude. Her performances arise from working through drawings rather than rehearsals, a storyboard of gestures and graphic representations of problems that have not yet been solved, despite accurate preparation. There is nothing definite or 'absolute' here; only amusing and inventive contrasts of form, colour and movement and intuitive improvisation and experimentation.

Spirit & muscle also responds to modernist divisions and gender distinction. As observed by Whitney Chadwick '...modernism celebrates masculine authority, constructed categories predicated on binary oppositions, where women have occupied the negative relation to creativity and high culture.' Kosloff paints her own series of modernist artworks and uses her body as a canvas, literally inserting herself into the modernist canon. Her 'presence' rather than 'absence' within the oppressive forms of high culture challenges the distance modernism espoused between itself and that which it objectified and mastered. Kosloff contrasts masculine, geometric forms and areas of pure colour with the fleshy tones and curvy shapes of the female body, emphasising the tactile properties of the works. Her gestures are expressions of female physical power, blurring distinctions between conventional representations of the female 'passive' body - the 'pose' - and the 'active', masculine body, absorbed in the display of physical perfection.

Kosloff's strong interest in comedic actors from the silent film era is also evident here, particularly Charlie Chaplin and Buster Keaton, and more recently Jacques Tati. Through *Spirit & muscle*, Kosloff uses her non-objective painted costumes as 'characters' to reference real figures; for example, her monochromatic white diamond with the black top hat pays homage to Charlie Chaplin. Chaplin's playful stylisations, namely his role as the 'tramp', altered our perception of ordinary people through costume and gestures, rendering naturalistic representations of actors as 'unreal'.

Kosloff's use of comedy alludes to contradictions intrinsic to modern utopias and utilitarianism. Her work's playful component draws from the comic configurations employed by Jacques Tati and his struggles with the modern city. In *Mon Oncle*, 1958, each scenario demonstrates Tati's inability to adjust to his ultra-modernistic, technology-driven surroundings. Comedy and chaos converge and firmly established utopias are undermined by incompetence and awkward, comedic gestures. This crisis can be traced to the modernist myth of progress and mastery. *Mon Oncle* oscillates between utopian ideas of mobility, liberation and order and emotions of disillusionment and failure. *Spirit & muscle* also speaks of trying to 'fit into' existing frameworks imposed by modernism; situations structured for exclusions and failure. Like Tati, Kosloff adopts humour

and play to destabilise these conventions, contrasting modernity's 'cool' qualities with dissymmetry and disharmony, evoking a desire for connection and meaning that seems destined for failure.

Kosloff also draws from Buster Keaton's use of clownery and his pragmatic narrative structure. Keaton's humorous storytelling acts out playful subversions of the connections that hold the facts of the world together, illustrating the incongruity of quest and resolution, will and action. Likewise, *Spirit & muscle* displays disunity between task and completion. The weight of each costume appears to comically influence the choreography. Kosloff responds to problems in a pragmatic way, attempting to balance abstract concepts with emotional impulses and the physical with the psychological.

Kosloff also alludes to the cinematic inventions of space played out in the antics of Keaton. As David Cairns observes in *The Gag Reflex*, 'By accustoming us to see the world as flat planes, Keaton has prepared us for a joke in which a character is surprised by the presence of depth in a world that appears to him as well as us, as purely two-dimensional.'¹ Kosloff wants us to acknowledge how a sense of self is defined by how we navigate both real and fictive space, a literal and metaphoric collision between states of interiority and exteriority.

As distinct from *Spirit & muscle*, which utilises the studio as her backdrop, *Dizzy pupil* favours a black, formalist setting where Kosloff inhabits an open, unlimited area and wanders aimlessly. Spinning, rotating and limping produce wobbly and unpredictable movements. Like Keaton, she stands in abstract space and appears shocked and disoriented at the discovery of occupying a three-dimensional environment. She is confronted by her own solitude and appears to struggle with form, space and meaning, being surrounded by nothing but emptiness and a black void.

Here, Kosloff uses Kasimir Malevich as a referent, constructing her costume and theatrical design according to his Suprematist paintings; 'Malevich pioneered the black square on the white field as one of the first forms in which non-objective feeling came to be expressed. For Malevich the black square denotes feeling, while the white field expressed the void beyond this feeling.'²

Malevich's negation of tradition, in favour of the 'representation of the unrepresentable', was at the core of his practice.³ His paintings suggest a feeling of nothingness and infinity, elusive qualities that are played out in Kosloff's performance through disorientating effects, addressing the nature of subjectivity as she struggles to position herself in relation to the world.

Modernism espoused a 'utopian dream of a space beyond representation.'⁴ Like Malevich, Kosloff seeks refuge in the 'square' form. Throughout modern art, the square has provided a visual aid to an existentialist quest. It has provided a metaphorical means to transcend reality and produce a portal into another realm: a doorway to nowhere or the threshold to another world. The square has enabled artists to conceptualise and create new realities in an endeavour to find a 'meaningful connection, identification and signification for the inexplicable mysteries of the universe.'⁵ Kosloff inhabits simple cubic structures that provide an opportunity to search for a formal solution to her own existential problems, whilst allowing the spectator to experience the same kind of introverted, self-examination.

Both *Spirit & muscle* and *Dizzy pupil* investigate aspects of modernism, exploring the relationship of opposites that upset ideas of 'stability', 'mastery', and 'absolutes'. It seems that no single narrative can sufficiently account for all aspects of human experience. Kosloff's work disputes modernism's claim for autonomy and the separateness of the aesthetic from the rest of human life.

¹ Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art and Society*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1990, p. 9.

² David Cairns, 'The Gag Reflex', *Senses of Cinema*, (www.sensesofcinema.com/contents/04/33/the_gag_reflex.html), 2004.

³ Herschel Browning Chip, *Theories of Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, p. 343.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 337.

⁵ Hal Foster, *Postmodern Culture*, Bay Press, USA, 1983, p. 8.

⁶ Herschel Browning Chip, *Theories of Modern Art*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1968, p. 345.







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giles ryder



BIOGRAPHY

born Brisbane, 1972

Giles Ryder's practice involves furthering the concepts of reduction (of form, space, line and material), the effect of colour and the experiential qualities of painting. Recently working with neon lights and shaped aluminium 'cavases', he has been exploring the 'ready-made' in contrast to the 'custom-made'.

He has held various solo and group exhibitions in venues such as Sydney's Firstdraft gallery, Peloton gallery and at MOP Projects, in Brisbane at the Soapbox gallery and QUT gallery and at Melbourne's Blindside. In 2005, after studying at the Edinburgh College of Art in Scotland, the Sydney College of the Arts and the Queensland College of Art, Ryder obtained a Master of Visual Arts. Ryder is currently Director of Peloton gallery in Sydney and has curated several exhibitions since 2004.

Giles Ryder is represented by Peloton gallery.

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giles ryder

Today abstraction has moved far from its modernist origins, which saw aesthetic truth and cultural resistance as intrinsic to abstract art rather than values bestowed upon it. Many artists have also bypassed the deconstructionist approaches of postmodernism, where abstraction was strongly implicated in the crisis of representation, and in which the status of abstraction as a history-maker, synonymous with modernity itself, was broadly challenged. Post-deconstruction artists have cast aside textual analysis of art that has the capacity to address experience in ways that are synaesthetic and intuitive. This is certainly the case for Giles Ryder, who uses aesthetic and perceptual effects, and forms of display to explore certain qualities of feeling and value in the nature and relationship of things.

In its materials and processes Ryder's work acknowledges the links between abstraction and modernisation, where industrialisation generated a new, serialised mass culture that both inspired and challenged abstract art. The texture of daily life, being produced by economic forces, challenges Ryder to reappropriate its artefacts and transform them for his own purpose, to suggest dimensions of individuation in our cultural choices, in contrast to the flatness postmodernism attributed to art and life.

Simultaneous allusions to commodity culture and vanguard art open his work to multiple audiences, evoking diverse memories, experiences and bodies of knowledge. The stylised seductions of design objects, for example, inhabit the pure forms and surfaces of his work. References to the car recognise the attractions of commodity culture while challenging the contemporary taste for anti-contemplative, 'drive-by' art.

Ryder's concrete reflections on the world start from the readymade and the monochrome while drawing on abstract expressionism, 1960s colour field and hard-edged abstraction, pop art and minimalist sculpture. His use of these sources, however, is more concerned with open affinities than with a unilinear, evolutionary art history, and we come to understand his work through its competing tendencies.

The original role of the readymade, for example, was to reflect on art practice and the discourse of aesthetics, showing how cultural assumptions could be easily broken. The monochrome established a form of painting that was rigorously objective and free of meaning. Abstract expressionism believed in the immediacy of subjective experience. Minimalism sought to eliminate aesthetic values to focus on the physical interplay of forms, materials and context. Pop art challenged the divisions between high art and everyday experience in consumer society.

Ensnared in the trap of formalism, 1960s abstraction came to look like corporate graphics. Although representing different art historical moments and positions, the convergence of these exemplars in Ryder's work suggests how cultural forms are caught between their own pasts and other futures: our vantage point in time inverting the sense of before and after, of origins and effects.¹

Conversely, there are clear points of departure between Ryder's work and earlier art. The readymade shifted the basis of art from production to selection, making the artist a manager of ideas. Ryder's repeated, modular forms can appear as if they are ordered custom-made, and most use technical knowledge from outside art. But Ryder makes them himself through complex, labour-intensive processes. For instance, he prepares the aluminium bases of his paintings to achieve a balance between dullness and brightness. The layers of clear and opalescent auto enamel that cover the aluminium vary from area to area to produce subtle optical focal points, and create the impression that light is coming out of the work.

Ryder's work revolves around visual and phenomenological experience rather than the strategic use of art practices to make a point. This is especially evident in his 'neon' works. Seen from the side they are wooden panels painted in epoxy resin, raised on wooden beams and scattered with irregular items in neon tube, suggesting their ordinariness. From above, however, the shiny resin causes the veritable liquefaction of the surface, visually capturing the viewer, the gallery architecture, the squiggly, gestural reflections of the neon tube and their more delicate

radiances. While they recall Jackson Pollock's relocation of the canvas from the wall to the floor in opposition to formalism's thesis of pure 'opticality', they also celebrate perception and sensations as vital dimensions of art.

In presenting multiple, overlapping and intersecting cultural tendencies, Ryder's works are inventories of an increasingly pervasive culture in which experience is driven by the production and manipulation of affects, highlighting a process Mike Featherstone calls 'the aestheticisation of everyday life'.²

Lately affect has become the subject of fervent theoretical inquiry and a principal framework through which to comprehend our experience of the world.³ The turn to affect reinstates the idea that there are sides to art beyond its social and institutional roles. The British writer Simon O'Sullivan argues, 'There is no denying, or deferring, affects. They are what make up life, and art ... Affects are ... the stuff that goes on beneath, beyond, even parallel to signification. But what can one say about affects? Indeed, what needs to be said about them? ... You cannot read affects, you can only experience them.'⁴ The renewed emphasis on sensation and emotion in art is an important shift from the overwhelming focus on social meaning and its critique in postmodernism. Ryder's work, moreover, shows that perceptions are not a bundle of indefinable responses. His attention to visual detail, materiality and form has an explanatory power, suggesting, as Michael Polanyi once argued, that we know more than we can say.⁵

Yet Ryder's practice is not independent of social influences. He gained his knowledge of the effects of paint on metal during six years spent painting Brisbane's Story Bridge, a set of daily routines and practices that were absorbed into his work. His broader art activity also establishes points of self-reference for his work. In 2004 Ryder and Matthys Gerber established Peloton gallery in Sydney to present their own work and that of other artists. Such artist initiatives extend back to the late 1960s in Australia; a primary aspect of human activity in the information society is the growth of what Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri call the 'affective labour' of human contact, interaction, social networks and forms of community.⁶

For Hardt and Negri 'affective labour' can be actual or virtual. Art, in fact, suggests how 'the instrumental action of ... production' can be 'united with the communicative action of human relations.'⁷ In Ryder's work communication occurs through a process that is embodied, grounded in forms and materials and charged with resonances from art and the world.

¹ This idea is explored in Howard Singer, 'Sherie Levine's Art History', *October* 101, Summer 2002, pp. 96-121.

² Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism*, London, Sage, 1991, pp. 65-82.

³ See Clare Hemmings, 'Invoking Affect: Cultural theory and the ontological turn', *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 19 No. 5, September 2005, pp. 548-567.

⁴ Simon O'Sullivan, 'The Aesthetics of Affect: (R)inking art beyond representation', *Angelaki Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Vol. 6 No. 2, December 2001, p. 126.

⁵ Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1974.

⁶ Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2000, pp. 292-293.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 293.

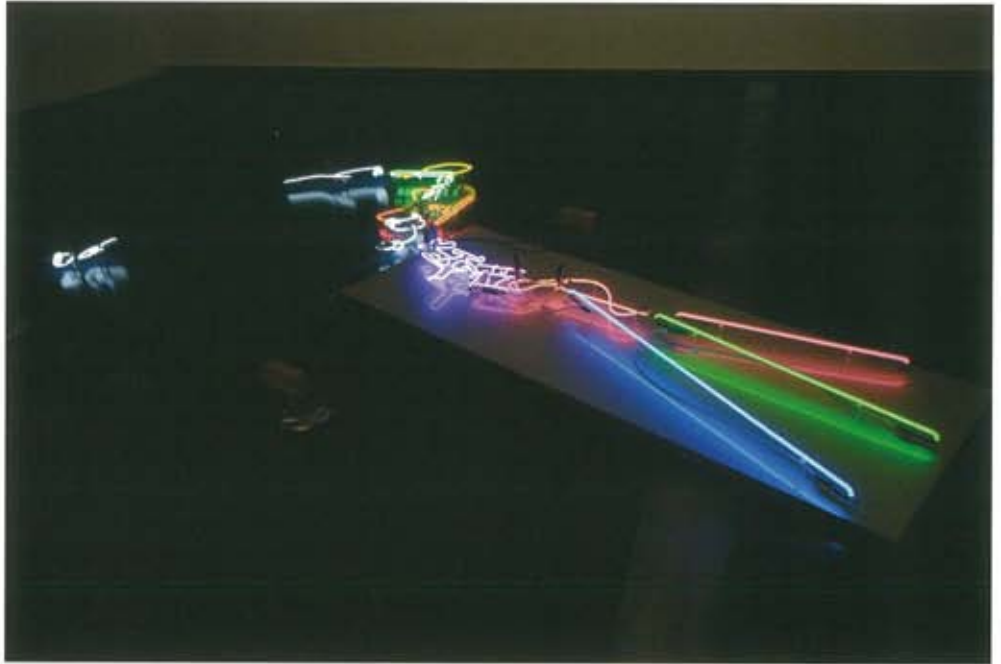


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natasha johns - messenger



BIOGRAPHY

born Melbourne, 1970

Natasha Johns-Messenger developed her site-specific spatial installation practice during a Masters by Research in Fine Art at RMIT University, completed in 2000. From 2001 to 2003 she was a studio resident at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Australian exhibitions include *Primavera* 2004, at the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney curated by Vivienne Webb, *Drift* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art curated by Bec Dean, *Skinned* at Birrarung Marr curated by Rose Lang, as well as other exhibitions at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia and the Canberra Contemporary Art Space. Johns-Messenger's international exhibitions have been held in New York, Tokyo, Bogota, and Taiwan.

Johns-Messenger continues her individual practice alongside ongoing collaborations with Leslie Eastman (including *Pointform* at Conical gallery, 2004) and the Open Spatial Workshop OSW with Terri Byrd, Bianca Hester and Scott Mitchell, recent winners of the inaugural *Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture*, 2005.

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natasha johns - messenger

'Reality is not always probable, or likely'

Jorge Luis Borges

Early in the course of her practice, Natasha Johns-Messenger completed a degree in painting at RMIT University, and despite the monumental scale, and the visual and material expansiveness of her current work, this background is evidenced in her ongoing proclivity to investigate, stretch and tear at the limits of real and representational space. Her works are often grounded in the formal and pictorial concerns of minimalism, but explode the picture plane – and the viewer/participant's sense of self and place – in transformations that are as spectacular and thought-provoking as they are disorienting and uncanny. Monochrome surfaces, architecturally scaled construction that mimics its surrounding environs, mirrored panels, live-feed video projection and photography have all been employed in various configurations by Johns-Messenger to present visual conundrums rich with paradox and intrigue; conundrums which highlight alternative configurations and narrative fragments that run parallel to the perceived present moment.

Pictorial, physical and virtual space are thus substituted, reconfigured and displaced, and the distinction between these various levels of representation become increasingly blurred and difficult to distinguish. In this way Johns-Messenger's installations both emphasise and problematise the inextricable relationship between the myriad modes of visual information via which we structure and define the world. In this process of optical unravelling, the viewer/participant's own presence necessarily completes each work; and in this tightly-bound triumvirate of self/environment/image, the more radical concerns of her project become evident.

Equally at home in the refined architecture of the gallery as in heavily-trafficked public arenas, Johns-Messenger's work engages the representational problems of art history whilst firmly focusing on the here and now, selectively modifying the visual fabric of the everyday. *Birrarung Look-box*, her work in the City of Melbourne's 2004 public sculpture exhibition *Skinny*, involved the construction of a riverside 'viewing box'. This device offered

four reconfigured and altered views of the surrounding landscape and the passers-by at Melbourne's Birrarung Marr inner city park. These alterations in the 'real' utilised the basic technology of the mirror to mimic the representational properties of photography and video. *Birrarung Look-box* manipulated and reframed the postcard-style views framed by the park's picturesque landscaping, whilst also suggesting the coexistence of surveillance and more intrusive visual technologies: a complex melange of the various ways-of-looking that underscore contemporary civic life. The site-specificity of Johns-Messenger's work lends it a democratic edge and suggests a commitment to accessibility beyond an art-world audience, whilst also communicating something of both the complexities and potential alternatives to our present situation.

By contrast, *Pointform*, Johns-Messenger's recent collaboration with Leslie Eastman, spectacularly modified Melbourne's Conical gallery through a succession of mirrored panels arranged in strips, which diagonally bisected the space. The seamless installation of these structures cast the interior architecture of Conical off in disorienting directions, extending and realigning familiar walls, windows and floors, whilst other viewer/participants could be seen in fragments - a floating head or a pair of legs here, a disembodied torso there - according to the mirrors' visual vivisections. The resultant spectacle transfigured Conical's self-conscious architecture, pitched by the gallery as a challenging context for site-specific installation work, into a giddy and vertiginous space with ambiguous boundaries. In effect, *Pointform* turned the visual logic of the gallery in on itself; splitting the visually-focused arena into a spectrum of possible worlds and thus hinting at the multiple potentialities beyond a seemingly fixed set of spatial parameters.

The collection of installations which Johns-Messenger has devised for *NEW06* combines the various elements of her practice, exploring and reconfiguring ACCA's monumental architectural space – with an intervening pendulum-form suspended from the ceiling – as well as the viewer/participant's own perceived image. On one hand, *AutomatedLogic* underscores Johns-Messenger's ongoing appropriation and reinvention of modernist visual language. But the installation also engages her more radical inclination to disrupt the easy flow of everyday visual

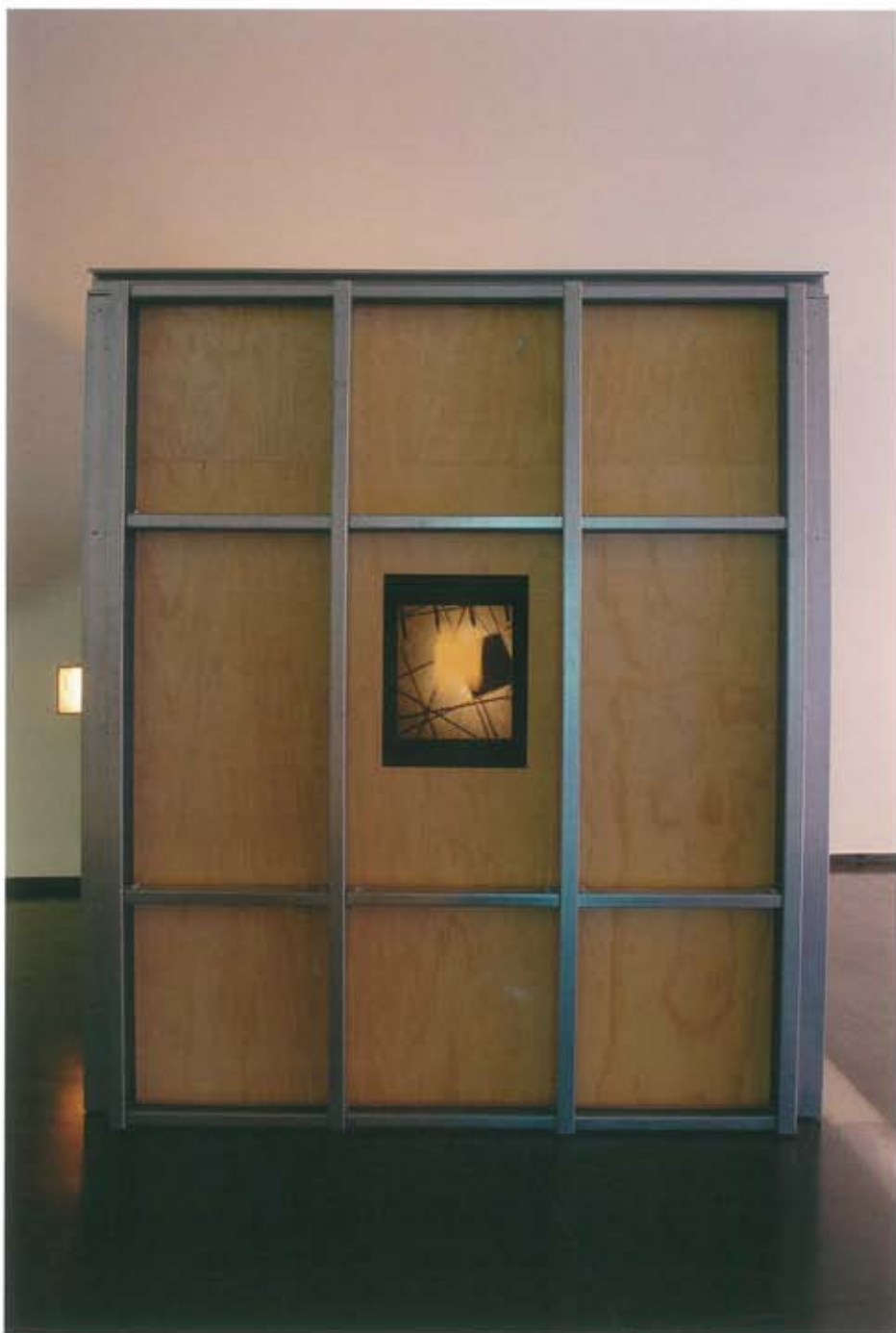
semiotics and empower the viewer/participant to imagine new and transgressive possibilities.

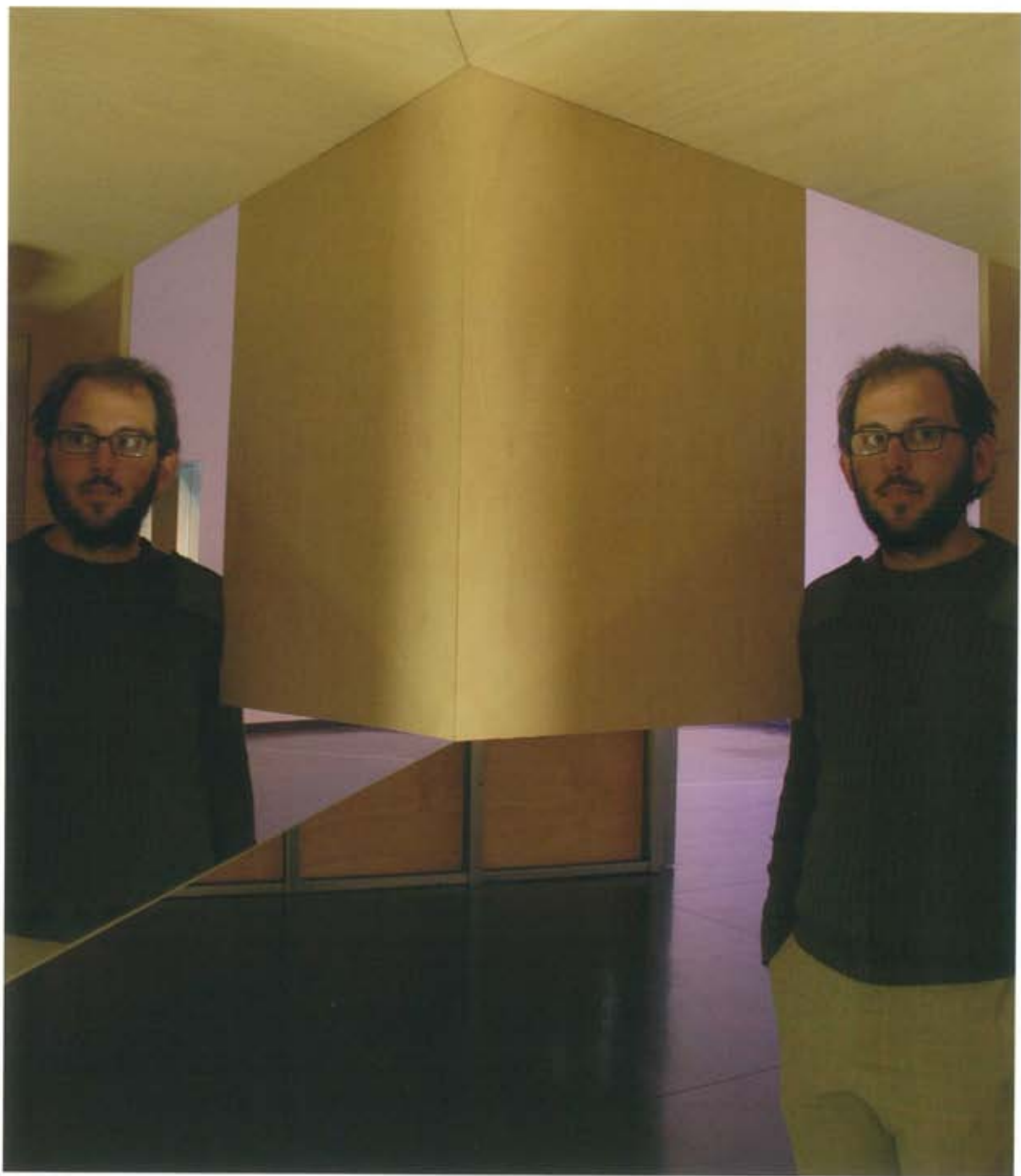
Some sections of AQCA's walls have been removed, excavated and rearranged to reveal the geometric, painterly grid of materials that form the supportive framework of the building itself – perhaps playfully referencing the kind of art one might expect to find in such a place, and then revealing itself as something which, although seemingly more mundane, provides a new insight into the conditions in which we are being invited to look. Elsewhere, a mirrored viewing device offers a view of the back of the viewer/participant's own head; whilst another provides an upside-down reflection, with eyes perpetually obscured. The careful linking of the viewer/participant's own physical and visual presence with the (literally) deconstructed gallery underscores the art museum's role as a kind of frame – no more or less than the irregular architectural field of Conical or the landscaped expanse of Birrarung Marr – which can be negotiated and approached in numerous ways, from the complicit to the contradictory.

In disrupting and redistributing the stuff of everyday life, Johns-Messenger's work reveals new insights into the environmental, artistic and social conditions that envelop us, and whose less obvious characteristics, internal contradictions and latent potentialities so often evade our notice. We are thus invited to look differently, in both a literal and conceptual sense; maybe just for the few moments in which we are immersed in the installations, but perhaps beyond, into a freshly re-imag(in)ed future.









darren sylvester



BIOGRAPHY

born Sydney, 1974

Sylvester works in a number of media, and likens his work to that of a Pop-song; detailing universal narratives of emotional life. Sylvester's Pop-song moments, simple and true, bring about nostalgia, self-evaluation and, like a Karen Carpenter song on the right occasion, can break your heart.

A Melbourne-based artist, Darren Sylvester has exhibited extensively throughout Australia and overseas including *Remote Control* at the National Gallery of Victoria in 2005-06, *Supernatural Artificial* at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography in 2004, *Photographica Australis* in the Asia Tour in 2003, and *Bittersweet* at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2002. His work has been acquired into several major private and institutional collections including that of Sir Elton John, the Art Gallery of NSW, the National Gallery of Victoria, and the National Gallery of Australia.

Darren Sylvester is represented by William Mora Galleries, Melbourne and Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney.

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darren sylvester

Identity and mimicry: the terms seem like relics from the post-colonial 1990s, a decade when your cultural identity marked you as a voice to be listened to when previously you'd been silenced. Critical engagement was still possible: when you mimicked another's language, identity or social ritual, you knew full well that you weren't quite 'right' enough, not quite white enough, to pull it off 'properly'. Mimicry made a mockery of assimilation, while keeping your identity intact.

There was a lot of optimism in that thinking: the hope that society would undergo an ethical change; the expectation that art and culture would be at the forefront of that process. In retrospect, we can also detect a certain wishful-thinking that this renewed belief in identity would be embraced with open arms rather than corrupted in the form of coiled fists and flags donned as capes. There was a certain naivety as well, for identity had another name in the 1990s, familiar to those fluent in market-speak: 'target demographic'. If postcolonial identity was something to be treasured, then the market saw it as a treasure waiting to be tapped with new readymade desires and cosmetic colour-schemes, or a fresh boy-band Pop-song to which you could thrash out all your angst in formation dancing repertoires.

This may seem like an odd introduction to the work of Darren Sylvester, but it's not. A 'return to identity' underpins much contemporary art practice in Australia, from Ricky Swallow to David Rossetzky and Selina Ou to Sylvester. Yet it is a return made in full awareness of one of art's 'post-postcolonial' predicaments: the intersection of market-driven notions of identity and a cultural assumption that art would become more 'socially relevant' after postcolonial politics. For Sylvester, those expectations now serve as readymades themselves, mix-n-matchable at will. You want artists to provide a societal benefit? That's fine; he'll top off IKEA patrons' bargain-hunting bonanzas with an even cheaper item, a free soft-serve ice-cream for their delectation. As the title of this videoed action claims, *If I Only Do One Good Thing In Life, This Is It*. Not only is that expectation satisfied so that he can move on to his next project, but he's managed to raise his identity to a corporate level by collaborating with IKEA on the project. It's a case of two birds, one stone and all the perks as well.

This sense of duality (or hybridity, to use another postcolonial trademark) pervades Sylvester's practice. High-key colour photographs, seemingly ripped from *Wallpaper**, accompany titles at once aphoristic and profound: *Don't Worry, I'm Just Temporary*; *If You Fall in Love Again, You're A Little Older, A Little Less Trusting*. These may appear to be the diary entries of an ad sloganeer, but Sylvester has actually snipped them from the short stories that he writes for his own personal interest, as though they were indexes of his sense of self. Yet as any celebrity-aspirant should know, momentary emergences of the self into the public arena should always be filtered in some way. Establish a community vibe: use the all-inclusive 'we', 'you' and 'I' of best-selling self-help guides. And if you are going to be seen in public, you might as well be more beautiful, fit, perky and young than you really are.

But if this is art at the intersection of management and self-management, then it is art that is also self-consciously disjunctive. The moments captured are less still than mummified (though always in haute-couture wraps). The mother's embrace of her son in *The Explanation is Boring. It's Simple. I Don't Care* bears all the warmth of Freddy Kruger, despite her gorgeous grin. And while the Nestlé logo – sculpted into actuality after years of 2D entrapment – echoes Pinocchio's transformation into the little boy he always wanted to be, it sits drained of colour and context. One's investment in an avatar, or mimicry of the 'ideal', is – as postcolonialism told us – always bound to fail. But that doesn't mean that identity remains intact. Today's account of failed mimicry is more like the fable of the Carpenters to which Sylvester frequently refers: Karen's sadness could never be surmounted by the pop appeal of Richard's songs, nor by the profits they ultimately reaped.

That doesn't mean, though, that utopias are dead and all aspirations are bound to shatter. Ideals and heroes may be fascinating and fun to mimic, but striving to match them on your own terms takes more work than simple seduction provides. This is the unexpected realisation that emerges from *You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship*.

On first viewing, this video installation repeats the surface gestures of what Sylvester calls 'popular nihilism'. His remakes of two

tales of doomed love – David Bowie's *Heroes* and Kate Bush's *Wuthering Heights* – face each other in what would be a dialogue, were the songs not muted. The dances (or rather, Sylvester's pantomime enactment of them) fall short of fully translating the lyrics' tragedies. What they provide is gendered clichés: 'Bowie' swaying stoically on the spot, 'Bush' dancing hysterically across the screen. And while Sylvester's mimicry of their gestures is similar, it's not quite exact. The initial moral: the fantasy of being your favourite Pop-star as seen on television can't hide the reality that, when the music stops, you're the same as you were before, just a little sweatier and holding a hairbrush to your mouth. As David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* reveals: *no hay banda*, there is no band. It's all just an illusion.

But that is to ignore another, even more pressing reality: this is not just a nihilistic portrait of contemporary 'identity', but a Darren Sylvester self-portrait (one of the first he's made). By locating himself explicitly in the work, Sylvester realises that the terms of reference change slightly, from being a mere copy to something more complex. It gives pride of place to the artist's labour, to the hours spent crafting the body of work that also gives body to an artist's identity. This is not the clichéd 'spark' of either artistic creation or creative consumption, but the months-long process of work involved: from researching and determining songs and dance steps, costumes and lighting, to garnering funds and selecting a crew, recording the performance and processing it ready for our own gallery-bound imitation of Sylvester. In other words, it takes much longer than the three minutes and thirty-one seconds of the songs to create one's own work, to create the work of the self. Identity can never be taken as a given today; it needs to be worked through and against the seduction of spectacle. And while Sylvester provides an important reminder that aspirations are still possible, he also knows that they cannot be naïve: mimicry alone is no longer enough.



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shaun wilson



BIOGRAPHY

born Warrigal, 1972

Shaun Wilson is an artist, writer and curator exploring themes of memory, place, and scale through video, painting and miniatures. He holds undergraduate degrees in Fine Art from RMIT University and Monash University and a PhD from the University of Tasmania.

Shaun has participated in group and solo exhibitions and screenings both nationally and internationally including at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, Melbourne, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Kunstmuseum in Norway, 24hrArt in Darwin, the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Icon Museum of Art, Melbourne, Gallery 101, Melbourne, CAST, Hobart, Centre on Contemporary Art, Seattle, the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra and in the Thailand New Media Arts Festival MAF05 in Bangkok.

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shaun wilson

In Shaun Wilson's *1975* we see a powerful extension of the artist's fascination with the concept of the 'Memory Palace'; a place that physically no longer exists, where time blurs recollection in a deconstructed sensibility, a filmic remembrance, nostalgia and a yearning to understand.

Wilson has structured *1975* around three inter-related contentions. Firstly, that film can be used as a mode of articulating memory and place. Secondly, that film can play a central role in reminding us of past memory. And, thirdly, that the death of someone close can impact on a personal sense of place and identity. In *1975* Wilson investigates both memories and places by manipulating scale and film as modes to express, and through this come to terms with loss and experience. Wilson is fascinated by the concepts behind *Ad Herennium*, the Roman book of rhetoric that describes the process by which memories are committed to physical forms and placed within the interior of buildings and other darkened places which were later termed 'Memory Palaces'.

Wilson has constructed a scaled-down viewing room for the visitor to enter into and experience, in which a video projection of reconfigured home movies centring on the recent loss of his grandmother, Madge Barbone, is playing. For Wilson his grandmother symbolises a treasured time of summer school holidays, watching the midday movie, special trips hand-in-hand to the local milk bar for ice-cream, and, most importantly, trusted conversations. Wilson's relationship with his grandmother is integral to entering the conceptual world of *1975*.

The archived footage, drawn from the artist's family's home movie collection filmed by his grandfather Tony, is complimented by a miniaturised copy of Madge Barbone's 1975 living room couch as recalled by Wilson. In fact, the entire space that is the artist's 'Memory Palace' is scaled down in proportion to his body height as it was in 1975 when Madge Barbone would babysit the three-year-old Wilson two days a week. Wilson would watch fascinated as his grandfather and grandmother ran their collection of old home movies, through this process passing to him the family's oral history. Wilson can remember Madge cooking spaghetti and other Italian foods while telling him travel stories of Germany,

Guam and the USA. His grandfather, Tony, an ex-United States Air Force serviceman would regularly screen these home movies in the living room at night – a scene evoked in the darkness of the 1975 memory room – while Wilson sat on the couch entranced, dreaming of exotic other worlds far away from his 1970s Melbourne suburbia. It was here sitting on Madge Barbone's couch that Wilson was first exposed to the family archive, its visual presentation and oral storytelling.

In *1975* Wilson's intention is for the world to appear as understood through the eyes of a three-year-old. The viewer has to adapt their own personal scale in order to experience Wilson's account of his filmic and spatial memories. When we change our scale, perhaps we change our memories too? We are not used to being forced into a half-crouching position to enter a gallery space. To add to our discomfort the walls of the room are deliberately askew and the ceiling seems almost too low to be comfortable. Wilson has deliberately scaled down the door, walls, roof, couch and the video projection of *1975* to create an intimacy between the viewer and the artwork. It is almost as if we are three years old again, as we view Madge Barbone's treasured home movies. For Shaun Wilson the house is 'one of the greatest powers of integration for thoughts, memories, and dreams of mankind'.¹ With this in mind there is a strangely uncomfortable feel to Wilson's interpretation of *Ad Herennium*.

The majority of the film footage used in *1975* is specific to the central role that Madge Barbone played within Wilson's family as matriarch and much loved grandmother. Wilson possesses what appears to be an endless supply of family archival Standard and Super 8 film, some from as early as 1954: 'Completely undermining the structure inherent in their celluloid origins, Wilson manages to produce the illusion that individual sequences are enfolded into themselves, allowing the viewer to perceive the smallest detail, the most subtle of changes within the image.'²

One scene in *1975* depicts a cashmere-sweatered woman turning seductively, and holding what may be a 1950s Coca Cola soda drink bottle. The scene could be a long forgotten party. Wilson gives no hint as to his character's identity. The 'dame'

with the drink bottle may be his grandmother or a family friend. The woman appears in a slow motion, dream-like sequence. The scene's forbidding and dominant horizontal line of deep fluorescent blood red adds weight to the feeling that all is not quite right in this 'experience of deep time'.³ The unusual vintage soundtrack of this sequence adds to the eerie sense of a history lost forever.

Wilson is fascinated with the transference of time and the re-interpretation of memory, as can be evidenced through his extensive use of home movie footage: 'Through projections in living rooms and bedrooms all over the world, these abundant quotidian moments are harvested, processed and preserved only when they are stored away in the dark, enclosed places – pantries, garages, wardrobes – for eventual retrieval and remembering in a distant future.'⁴ Wilson engages the highways and by-ways of his family's filmic stockpile as if he is a time traveller wanting to be reunited with his memories.

The hook of the enquiry that is *1975* is that the viewer is seeing the inherently personal (the home movie) displayed publicly (as art). Wilson draws our attention to the fact that 'an outsider can easily miss the hidden stories and secret resonances buried in the visual traces left by the people who capture their lives on film'.⁵ There is in *1975* a sense of the family secret, hidden, forgotten, but about to be revealed. As Wilson observes, 'Because a home movie can be a personal reflection, watching one can be like reading someone else's diary. The intent of this is obvious – they were never intended for cinematic release, only destined for the living rooms, hallways and other home spaces of family and friends.'⁶

The images in *1975* are second hand and the majority are out of focus, as family snaps and movies often are. One is left with a disturbing voyeuristic feeling of viewing that which we should not, an almost vulgar joyous delight in the revelation of another's private home life. Wilson has commented that as, '[p]art spectator, the audience can experience a sociological and philosophical premise that is expressed through a series of narrative connections.'⁷ In his own revisiting of Madge Barbone's living room, Wilson invites us into his story.

Wilson has used *1975* as a means of coming to terms with his grandmother's death. He was travelling to see Madge when he was informed that she had died. In the process of reconciling himself to this sudden separation, Wilson reminds us all that the home movies, DVD and video footage that we so treasure as records of special family occasions provide us all with an inroad into the spaces created when people die. Film connects memories to time, past time, lost time, future time. Film enables us to revisit other times as if in some kind of other space, transporting us 'back to the future' to bid farewell; an unfinished moment to be revisited and re-experienced through the imperfections of memory.

For Wilson, *1975* has enabled him to go back to childhood by adapting scale to memory and to representation - to say goodbye - articulating this moment through home movies; reinventing Madge Barbone's persona today, through captured moments of the past. This process gives rise to other personal memories and allows the viewer to refresh their own memories while viewing the work.

³ Edward S. Casey, *The Fate of Place: a Philosophical History*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1998, p. 292.

⁴ Leon Marvel, 'Brendan Lee, Shaun Wilson, Alexandra Gillespie', *Photofiles*, 76 Summer, 2006, p. 77.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Emma Cirmmings, 'Traces: Naomi Bishop and Richard Raber' in *Remembrance and the Moving Image*, ACMI, 2003, p. 37

⁷ Fiona Trigg, 'Bourgeois Dictionaries & Meanwhile Somewhere...1940-43' in *Remembrance and the Moving Image*, ACMI, 2003, p. 37

⁸ Shaun Wilson, *The Memory Palace: Scale, Mnemonics and the Moving Image*, PhD exegesis, University of Tasmania, 2005, p. 4

⁹ Shaun Wilson, *Artist's Statement*, Melbourne, 2005.







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helen johnson



BIOGRAPHY

born Melbourne, 1979

Helen Johnson graduated from a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) majoring in painting at RMIT in 2002. Since graduating Johnson has presented solo exhibitions at Galleri Schnauzer in Oslo, Studio 12 at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, CLUBSproject Inc. (with Kyle Forbes), Westspace gallery and Bus gallery, as well as contributing to a number of group exhibitions and film screenings. She has undertaken a number of curatorial projects, most recently curating the annual *Slide* program at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Johnson completed a studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces in 2005, and recently returned to Melbourne from a four-month residency at the Nordisk Kunstsenter Dalsåsen in Norway. Johnson has also contributed writings to *Natural Selection* and *UN Magazine*, and has authored a number of catalogue essays.

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helen johnson

When is something contradictory, but not a contradiction? A Nike jumper and an Israeli military headscarf lie casually together on a young man's unmade bed; a pornographic image of a voluptuous woman dominates the cover of an extreme leftist magazine that proclaims 'sex is dead'; and a young man with car keys sits at a desk taking comfort from an electric heater whilst supporting the campaign for preserving environmental biodiversity.

In *The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy: Producing Singularities in a More and More Standardised World*, Helen Johnson invites the viewer to observe a series of everyday moments as they occur in an organisation without hierarchies, and in which all individuals and their actions contribute equally to the collective state of things. Windows frame rooms cut into a roughly hewn rock-face beneath a lush, verdant garden. Connections are drawn between these interior and external spaces in ways that interrogate the complex relationship between natural and acculturated landscapes. The painted paper panels of Johnson's interiors are here literally superimposed over the natural landscape, which has been applied directly onto the surface of the gallery's walls. But the natural landscape is not innocently so; exotics exist alongside native flora, areas of wilderness give way to neatly tended plots and a lemon tree thrives on the urine of a diligent young gardener.

Within *The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy*, individuals put consumable objects to unexpected uses while they seek to align themselves with a collective identity through idiosyncratic appropriations of shared symbols. Johnson draws our attention to the artificiality of simplistic distinctions—between nature and culture, producer and consumer, individual and collective—and the fluidity of such concepts as they exist in the 'real world'. She positions everyday practice in between accepted expressions of cultural identity and dissent. In so doing, the artist invites the viewer to identify (and identify with) the many, micro day-to-day appropriations that allow individuals to exist comfortably within imposed social systems and in the context of grand historical narratives. Johnson's work reveals the extent to which we live in translation at the level of the everyday.

Walter Benjamin recognised in translation a 'removal of one language into another through a continuum of transformations'.¹ Johnson gives shape to such continua within the loaded context of personalised interiors. At *The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy* everyday translations find expression in the ways in which things are put to use. Here, seemingly irreconcilable objects coalesce in otherwise unremarkable spaces. In their combination, the viewer becomes aware of the subtle, although significant and continuing changes to the meanings of things. Set alongside a poster for the RAF or Red Army Faction, Swiss No Wave and UK punk album covers proclaim social values and political affiliations, as well as musical taste. A military headscarf, owned by someone who is neither Israeli nor in the Israeli army, is combined with a Nike jumper and becomes an edgy fashion item. And on the body of a pre-pubescent boy, anarchist badges and punk insignia from the 1980s reveal a desire, tinged with nostalgia, to belong to social movements that have changed significantly in order to retain their currency.

Like French social and cultural anthropologist, Michel de Certeau, Johnson finds an element of freedom in the variety of ways individuals use, and in so doing, subvert the intended meanings of, consumable objects.² In their idiosyncratic consumption 'users make ... innumerable and infinitesimal transformations of and within the dominant cultural economy in order to adapt it to their own interests and their own rules.'³ For Johnson, it is the artist's role to reveal these subversions—or, as de Certeau would have it, these 'manipulations'—as they emerge in the minutiae of everyday life.⁴ She draws her material from a range of sources including the Internet, chance personal observations, happened-upon images and staged photographs to capture isolated moments furnished with the clues to reveal, upon interrogation, the everyday and sometimes thoughtless actions that set these scenes. Johnson establishes an uneasy visual relationship between objects—a diagram describing the response to a mass outbreak of disease and a poster of a human pyramid, modern monochrome geometric alongside decorative Victorian furnishings, or a portrait of an artist completing the representation before the viewer. She asks us to question the

relationship between things, and in so doing to interrogate our own ways of being in the world.

This playful exploration of everyday details is performed on a grand scale. The artist's wall-painting might echo panoramic representations of urban and natural landscapes, but her subject and the material of her work belie the possibility of an 'all-embracing view'. In the same way as Johnson's figures tend more towards life-size than to the monumental, her arrangement of material objects deliberately confuses the meaning of things, rather than removing potential impediments to an undisturbed aspect. While panoramists sought to conceal the artifice of their representation, Johnson's view is self-consciously constructed. Indeed, she goes so far as to integrate its construction into her subject. The paint, utensils and portraits of members of the team who assisted Johnson in the installation function as a reminder of its artifice as well as a description of the collective, creative process involved in realising this work.

No longer a means of making palatable the confusions of an everyday life radically altered by industrialisation, the twenty-first century panorama, in Johnson's hands reveals the chaotic reality of life in a post-industrial age. This is not an anxious chaos, however, nor does it subside into relativism. Johnson's work may be indebted to postmodernism's legacy, but her use of pastiche and her subversion of dominant structures should not be confused with a blanket proclamation that 'anything goes'. Instead what we find in *The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy* is a complex and changeable narrative optimistic of resolution. Individuals find hope and comfort in the ad hoc relationships that develop (between things as well as between people) through everyday exchanges. It is these small daily transformations and their impromptu particularities, not the imposed structures and systems from which they are drawn, that constitute the real world of Johnson's imaginary landscape.

¹ Walter Benjamin, 'On Language as such and on the language of man', *Selected Writings: Volume 1, 1913-1926*, ed. Bullock, M & Jennings, M. W., The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, England, 1996, p. 70. See also Walter Benjamin, 'The task of the translator', *op.cit.*, pp. 253-263.

² This freedom is not given (at least not in equal measure), nor is it absolute. Just as not everyone has access to the same consumable objects, there are real differences in the modes of translation and levels of everyday comfort open to people of different socio-economic and cultural backgrounds.

³ Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendal, University of California Press, Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1984, pp. xiii-xv.

⁴ Helen Johnson, *Artist's Statement*, 2005.









makeshift



BIOGRAPHY

formed December 2004, based in Sydney

Makeshift's collaborative projects incorporate elements of video, sound, graffiti, shadows, theatrics and sculpture. The group has explored large-scale installation in order to manipulate architectural space and create experiences that are disorienting and strange.

In 2005 Makeshift exhibited *Terrain Vague* at the Mori gallery, Sydney, in collaboration with Emma Davidson and Anwyn Crawford. A walk-through maze of cardboard tunnels, corridors, hidey-holes and chambers, *Terrain Vague* navigated ideas of mythology, memory, play and their relationship to space. Exhibiting in *NEW06* are members Ned Sevil, Pep Prodromou, Marley Dawson and Anna Crane.

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makeshift

After what can only be described as loose destination announcements, the tram conductor, perhaps by way of apology, broke into song: 'I'm just a boy whose intentions are good, oh Lord please don't let me be misunderstood'. Just the one line, performed with gusto, then alas, my journey was over; 'if you're looking for Federation Square or Flinders Street - you've come to the end of the line...'

Merrylands in Sydney's west is a pretty drab suburb - funny name though. It's drab for a lot of reasons, not least its abundance of the architectural phenomenon termed 'Terrain Vague'. This describes the unused or fallow areas created as a result of poor urban development - in a way, sites that are both there and not there.

The first project embarked upon by the Sydney collective, Makeshift, was appropriately titled, *Terrain Vague*. Ironically this interrogation of one form of 'bad architecture' led directly to another. Their creation, a dark and haphazard network of tunnels punctuated by 'rooms' of various sizes, engulfed the gallery space. The viewer was left to traverse a structure constructed entirely from recycled cardboard, occasionally happening upon artworks; other works were revealed only after negotiating crawl spaces and other equally unlikely and uncomfortable routes.

Ostensibly born of necessity, the Makeshift collective began simply as a means of producing installations untenable for a lone artist. It had no real *raison d'être*, but a fluid roster of contributors, with each member able to continue their own practice within the armature that the group devised. As that armature, *Terrain Vague* was incredibly impressive, but it also exposed the teething problems for such collaboration. This was evidenced by inconsistencies in the quality of some of the artworks housed within. The approach allowed individual artists a curious lack of accountability - just as the installation was based upon an empty centre, so too it seemed was the group.

For *NEW06*, Makeshift has developed another similar cardboard behemoth, this time placed with the moniker - *Welcome to Merrylands*. However the 'Merrylands' in this situation (while the locality pun is intended) is a reference to the artists' desire to

create a site of play. In *Merrylands*, Makeshift presents a somewhat refined project, no less freewheeling, but the artists are certainly more aware of their ability to manipulate the dichotomies implicit within the work. Furthermore, the group has developed a greater understanding of itself. Here the empty centre has a cumulative effect, enabling a lessening of strictures and a broadening of possibility. To be even more explicit, it is a project immersed in the idea of potentiality, a network of 'what ifs' and sliding doors. Just as the viewer is forced to navigate the work, the artists are making explicit the navigation of their practice.

The comedy duo Hale and Pace once did a sketch where you see a man walking along a row of shops before stopping at a trick store and going through the door. It's funny because the trick store was exactly that - a set existing only as a façade. So anyway, the guy walks through this door and straight into the Thames...

This process of moving through the artwork both physically and mentally, seeking that which may be revelatory, is potentially the only genuine core to Makeshift's project. There is no guarantee or even commitment to an eventual end; the audience is left with the basic materiality of the installation as their only logical coherent sign. It certainly is a tender situation - both artists and audience together on the path to discovery. However, *Welcome to Merrylands*, as a progression from Makeshift's initial project, escapes many of the pitfalls that can be associated with process-based installations. The scale of the project, and the clearly labour-intensive processes involved in producing individual works manages to alleviate the feeling that this could be a flippant gesture. Even more appealing is the honesty of the gesture - this artwork may seem confusing, and in many ways it's meant to be, but as an interactive artwork, it certainly gives you something to take away with you.

In reaffirming the intuitive nature of the project, it is impossible to ignore the materiality of both the structure and the works housed within. As viewers push through the network, they are repeatedly asked to negotiate and comprehend artworks in which the form is confounded by its make up. Trees made of plastic and an enormous, precariously placed plywood wrecking ball define the spaces in which they are housed. Here the apparent respite of the

Christopher Hanrahan

Welcome to Merrylands!

It's a tender situation – taste the waste.

rooms is usurped and the viewer is left to marvel at the invention of these installations. Conversely, another route may lead to an intimate and poetic video installation followed by a room aglow with lanterns. That these may be encountered via crawl spaces, or a hitherto unforeseen staircase only continues the game. The complexity of the network dictates that these artworks may in fact be discovered with greater ease; how you find them is based on your instinctive reaction to the tunnels that face you.

Welcome to Merrylands confidently straddles various modes of artistic practice. The labyrinth is home to both ideas and form, each jostling for attention. As in a *Choose Your Own Adventure* novel, there are a variety of paths from which a narrative can be evinced. It's a happy result, and a welcome one if only for its lack of didacticism. In many cases the germinal theory for the project has been developed; in some cases it has been washed away by straightforward artistic enthusiasm. It is an enthusiasm that is addictive. The simple pleasure of encountering artworks within an artwork that, by force of materiality, challenge and compliment each other, is impetus enough to counter the claustrophobia inherent in entering the work.









LIST OF WORKS & ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Laresa Kosloff

Spirit & muscle 2006
digital video
7 minutes 52 seconds

Dizzy pupil 2006
digital video
1 minute

Visy products were used in the construction of this work.

Laresa Kosloff would like to thank the following people for their generous support and assistance: Judy, Kirill and Julian Kosloff, Eyvonne Carfora, Juliana Engberg, Anna MacDonald, Gabriele de Vietri, Liza Vasilou, Matt Hinkley, Andy Thomson, Cate Consandine, Michelle Ussher, Stuart Ringholt, staff and volunteers at ACCA, Visy recycling, and Monash Fine Arts Department.

Helen Johnson

The Centre for the Study of Adhocracy: Producing Singularities in a More and More Standardised World 2005-2006
acrylic and pencil
on paper and wall
dimensions variable

Helen Johnson would like to thank The Ian Potter Cultural Trust, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Nordisk Kunstnarsenter Dalsåsen, Matthew Brown, Kylie Forbes, Bianca Hester, Christopher Hill, Matt Hinkley, Nick Mangan, Josh Petherick, Michelle Ussher and everyone who is in the drawing.

Darren Sylvester

If I Only Do One Good Thing In Life, This Is It 2006
two channel DVD, sound
34 minutes
edition of 6

You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship 2006
two channel DVD
3 minutes 31 seconds
edition of 6

Don't Worry, I'm Just Temporary 2006
lightjet print
90 x 120 cm
edition of 6

If You Fall In Love Again, You're A Little Older, A Little Less Trusting 2006
lightjet print
90 x 120cm
edition of 6

The Explanation is Boring. It's Simple. I Don't Care 2006
lightjet print
90 x 120cm
edition of 6

Children, Don't Be A Burden To Your Parents 2006
painted ABS plastic
52 x 29 x 15 cm
edition of 6

Darren Sylvester needs to say thanks to the following people who help make it happen. The calm assistance of second-in-charge, Bruce McKenzie for long discussions over whether things should be matte or gloss and PA extraordinaire, Gillian Tucker. Anthony Gardner for the essay and the drinks, Paul Greenow for handling the smoke machine. Carolina Grigoriu and Fiona from China Arts Model Management, Donna and Oliver Leigh from Team Agency as well as the constant support of William Mora, Ursula

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You Should Let Go Of A Dying Relationship
On camera was Bruce McKenzie; Brenton Venables dimmed the lights; Gillian Tucker ran around; Chantelle Baker and Dalal Mansour applied makeup; Kimlee Cheung did the hair; Steve Jennings added more smoke and glow afterwards. Special thanks to 'The' Hannah Brooks for David's jacket and dress shopping and Jan and Nevada Duffy for making it fit. Adam Green for the singlet; Teresa Lane for making the jewellery; Matthew Perkins and Monash University for the space to film and much respect to David Bowie and Kate Bush.

If I Only Do One Good Thing In Life, This Is It
Thanks to the support of Sally Truscott from IKEA and Anna MacDonald from ACCA who handled all the paperwork involved, as well as the busy IKEA kiosk staff on Saturday 14 January 2006, and to everyone who accepted a free ice-cream.

Children, Don't Be A Burden To Your Parents
The original armature construction was by Alex Lynne, I made the clay model and Jeromie Frumar did the 3D modelling and CAM file preparation. Thanks to Rory Hyde for the phone numbers.

Natasha Johns-Messenger

AutomatedLogic 2006
site materials

Natasha Johns-Messenger would like to thank Anna Bardas, Dave Coxell, Julia Messenger, Scott Mitchell and Peta Clancy.

Makeshift

(Anna Crane, Marley Dawson, Ned Sevil, Pep Prodrômou)

Welcome to Merrylands, 2006
mixed media
dimensions variable

Visy products were used in the construction of this work.

Makeshift would like to thank Kathleen Hartigan, Christopher Haurahan, the Prodrômous, Visy, Danny, Brian and the install crew, all our volunteers – Theo, Adam, Olivia, Ned, Beth, Danica, Katya, Adele, Angela D, Angela P, Liz, Eleanora, Caterina, Salote, Camille, Sary – St Vincent de Paul, Stephen Mori, Mary Crane, Tom Sevil, Lou Smith, Christine Mason, Tony Sevil, Bucky Toller, Christian Glynn all the mob at Turkey Creek, Arwyn and Emma, Col and Tory Grigsby, Danny Lacy and Seth Seiderman

Giles Ryder

(Yellow) for the sun 2006
polyurethane on board, neon,
transformers, polished table legs
102 x 802 cm

All colours fade into the night 2004
epoxy enamel on panel, neon,
transformers, timber, vinyl lettering
200 x 200 cm

Silver Strutter (daze of disco) 2006
polyurethane on panel, neon,
transformers
77 x 200 cm

Dazed and Glazed 2006
polyurethane on board, neon,
transformers, polished table legs
102 x 802 cm

Spectra 05 [phaser] 2005
hand-rolled aluminium, metallic
and pearlescent lacquer, on
aluminium
120 x 120 x 14 cm

Spectragraph [galaxy 5000] 2006
hand-rolled aluminium, metallic
and pearlescent lacquer, glow/
glitter pigments on aluminium
120 x 650 x 17 cm

*Fluorochrome/mirrorchrome
[transparent radiation] M.I.R.H. 06
Portrait* 2006
coloured and mirrored Perspex
and aluminium
202 x 124.5 cm

Giles Ryder would like to thank
Juliana Engberg, Anna, Danny,
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Mark and Pete from Auto Colour

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Hayes, Karen Chicott and all the
Library Staff at SCA and Fisher,
Sebastian Laurenzi at Capral.

Shaun Wilson

1975 2005
8mm as DV on single channel
DVD, sound
60 minutes
sofa, mixed media
93 x 37 x 40 cm

Shaun Wilson would like to
thank Juliana Engberg, Anna
MacDonald, Tony Barbone,
Malcolm Bywaters and Brendan
Lee for their assistance with this
project and also Tammy Honey,
Pearl Wilson and staff and
students in the School of Creative
Media, RMIT University.

In memory of Madge Barbone,
1922-2005.

CATALOGUE IMAGES

Laresa Kosloff

1. *Spirit & muscle* 2006
digital video
7 minutes 52 seconds
production still
photo: Christian Capurro
2. *Spirit & muscle* 2006
production stills
3. *Spirit & muscle* 2006
production stills
4. *Dizzy pupil* 2006
1 minute
digital video
dimensions variable
video still
5. Installation view

Giles Ryder

6. *Fluorochrome/mirrorchrome*
[transparent radiation] *M.I.R.H. 06*
Portrait 2006
coloured and mirrored Perspex
and aluminium
202 x 124.5 cm
7. Installation view
8. Installation view
9. *Silver Strutter (daze of disco)*
2006
polyurethane on panel, neon,
transformers
77 x 200 cm
10. Installation view

Natasha Johns-Messenger

11. *AutomatedLogic* 2006
site materials
(detail)
12. *AutomatedLogic* 2006
(detail)
13. *AutomatedLogic* 2006
(detail)

14. *AutomatedLogic* 2006
(detail)

Darren Sylvester

15. *You Should Let Go Of A Dying*
Relationship 2006
two channel DVD
3 minutes 31 seconds
edition of 6
video still (detail)
16. *You Should Let Go Of A Dying*
Relationship 2006
video stills
17. *If I Only Do One Good Thing In*
Life, This Is It 2006
two channel DVD, sound
34 minutes
edition of 6
video still

18. *If You Fall In Love Again, You're A*
Little Older, A Little Less Trusting
2006
lightjet print
90 x 120cm
edition of 6
19. *The Explanation is Boring. It's*
Simple. I Don't Care 2006
lightjet print
90 x 120cm
edition of 6

20. *Children, Don't Be A Burden To*
Your Parents 2006
painted ABS plastic
52 x 29 x 15 cm
edition of 6

21. installation view

Shaun Wilson

22. 1975 2005
8mm as DV on single channel
DVD, sound
60 minutes
sofa, mixed media
93 x 37 x 40 cm
video still

23. 1975 2005
video stills

24. 1975 2005
video stills

25. Installation view

26. Installation view

27. 1975 2005
video still

Helen Johnson

28. *The Centre for the Study*
of Adhocracy: Producing
Singularities in a More and More
Standardised World 2005-2006
acrylic and pencil
on paper and wall
dimensions variable
(detail)
29. *The Centre for the Study*
of Adhocracy: Producing
Singularities in a More and More
Standardised World 2005-2006
(detail)

30. *The Centre for the Study*
of Adhocracy: Producing
Singularities in a More and More
Standardised World 2005-2006
(detail)

Makeshift

31. *Welcome to Merrylands*, 2006
mixed media
dimensions variable
(detail)

32. *Welcome to Merrylands*, 2006
(details)

33. *Welcome to Merrylands*, 2006
(details)

34. *Welcome to Merrylands*, 2006
(details)

35. *Welcome to Merrylands*, 2006
(detail)

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