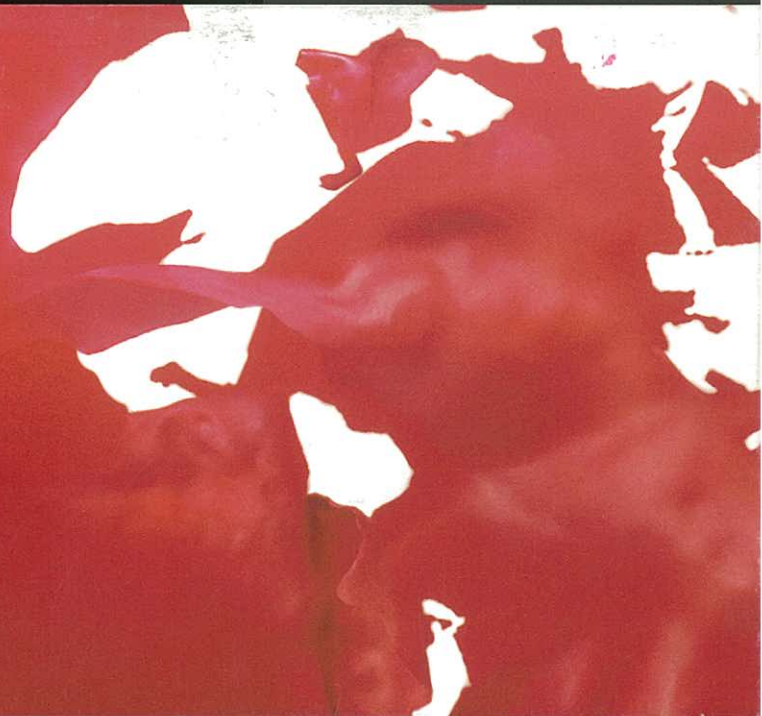


**HUMID
TACITA DEAN
CHRISTINE BORLAND
JUAN CRUZ
MARIE-ANGE GUILLEMINOT
JEAN-JACQUES PULLIER**

**MELBOURNE
FESTIVAL
AUSTRALIA**

**11 OCTOBER –
3 NOVEMBER
2001**



HUMID

TACITA DEAN

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JEAN-JACQUES RULLIER

NARELLE JUBELIN WITH

MARCOS CORRALES LANTERO

SONYA HANNEY

& ADAM DADE

Published on the occasion of
HUMID

Pipilotti Rist
Ann Hamilton
Tacita Dean
Mariele Neudecker
Kate Daw
Christine Borland
AK Dolven
Clara Ursitti
Nina Saunders

Melbourne Festival Australia
11 October – 3 November 2001



HUMID

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HUMID

Juliana Engberg

HUMIDITY IS THAT IN-BETWEEN STATE. It is the storm pending. The bulging part of weather, all moist and dense, and hanging in a kind of limbo state of being. Like a large droplet of water, it suspends, tremulous in the moment before bursting or evaporating off. Lessius thought the condition of Humidity to be the vital for the well-being of life, writing: Humidity, in which life principally consists is consumed together with the inbred Heat. For whilst Humidity or Moisture of the Body keeps wafting, so does its Heat equally abate too; and as soon as its Humidity is once quite gone, or dried up, does its Heat also jointly extinguish along with it, just the same as a lamp, Taper goes out for want of fuel.

Humid is the atmospheric condition in which things are most heightened. The senses: smell, taste, touch, sound and sight are all altered and intensified. Humidity expands all things; moistening, misting, and heaving the earth. And it collects and traps the pungent scents which enter the air once the storm has broken, or dryness squeezes things shut.

Etymologically, *Humid* relates to *Humour* which pertains to fluid. Specifically, according to the alchemists and ancients, any of the four chief fluids (blood, phlegm, choler, melancholy) effect the mental disposition, which is determined by the proportion of these fluids in the body. Mood, temper, inclination are all subject to the humours.

When female characters have the 'vapours', as was common in the literature of the nineteenth century, it is a metaphor for

a life wafting off: sensuality snuffed out, unrequited. On the cusp of the new century and at the end of a passion unspent, the humours can have a melancholy effect: *Desire wears me out*, wrote Virginia Woolf.

But when humidity is at its fullest density, sensuality itself hangs expectantly in the ripeness of things. Fruit becomes swollen and juicy; flowers blush and send forth perfumes; colours become vivid and saturated; the body becomes languid and open.

As pressure mounts the desiring body becomes volcanic, causing Sappho to write: *...for when I look at you even an instant, I can no longer utter a word: my tongue thickens to a lump, and beneath my skin breaks out a subtle fire; my eyes are blind, my ears filled with humming, and sweat streams down my body, I am seized by a sudden shuddering; I turn greener than grass, and in a moment I feel I shall die.*



In the literature written by women sensuality and sexuality are evoked as a ripeness that balances dangerously between readiness and rupturing rot, where juices spill out and fecundity explodes in orgasmic excess. Famously Christina Rossetti's summer fruits, *Apples and quinces/Lemons and oranges/Plump unpecked cherries/Melons and raspberries/Bloom-down-cheeked peaches/Swart-headed mulberries/Wild free-born cranberries/Crab-apples, dewberries/Pine-apples, blackberries/Apricots, strawberries; /All ripe together/In summer weather* – become the metaphors of unquenchable lust, causing Laura to cry out: *eat me, drink me, suck my juices.*

HUMID IN THIS CONTEXT, and as the title of this exhibition is an attitude rather than a weather condition, and refers to the sometimes petulant, sultry, sexual feminine unconscious. Humid is the atmospheric potential that will entice exotic petals into life; that melts and quickens the heart; that can be hot, sweaty, oppressive, uncomfortable; but



also languid, sensual and tropical. It is an unabashedly sensuous point of view, seeking the feminine sublime in visual imagery.

Humidity is captured as a therapeutic, steam-filled bath-house in Tacita Dean's film *Gellért* in which women move somnolently through space; in and out of the curette waters; sitting, talking, absorbed in their

body ritual which enables them to become once more fluid and lithe. These women with their marvelously real bodies – fleshy, mature, mothering, uninhibited – enter undramatically, yet provocatively into the steam-bath genre so long dominated by the titillating, voyeuristic gaze of the male artist. The women waded through the dense liquid atmosphere of the bath-house with a beautiful bulk. Coloured honey, they seem rich, glowing, and almost gelatinous as compared to their fragile alabaster sisters in the fantasy worlds of Alma-Tadema, Bourguereau or Ingres.

Dean's is a mutual eye cast over this scene of intimacy, but an expert artist's vision as well. The images of mythology are evoked in the incidental re-staging of the 'Three Graces' plus one. Rembrandt's sympathetic and all so domestic *Diana, Venus and Susannah* are brought to mind as women glide into view and slowly cavort in the thick water. Dean herself has mentioned the painting by Cranach, *Der Jungbrunnen*, in which old women achieve a magical transformation back into youthful beauty by passing through the miraculous fountain-

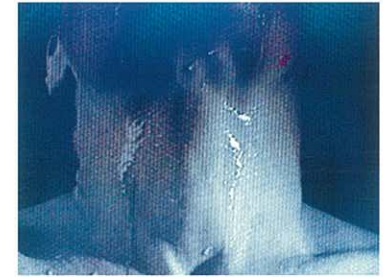
bath. But Dean's companions are not the spied upon, silent Venuses and Susannahs of men's art, nor are these women consigned to a frame. They move, they laugh, they speak, and own this space of immersion and transformation.

Liquidity is everywhere here. Evidently in Dean's *Gellért*, but also in AK Dolven's several works where snow is melted by a warm egg; nipples rise, breathing up through foam; a



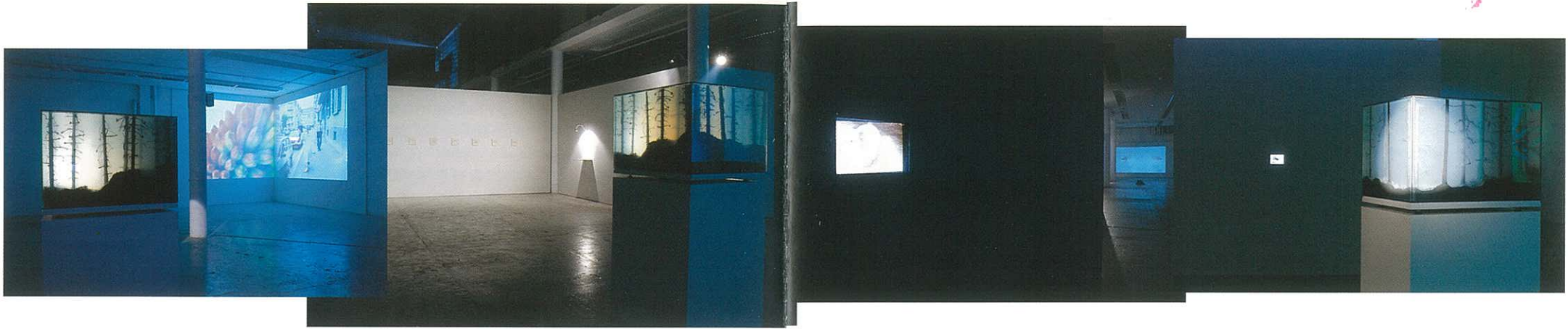
tulip is provoked into colour, bloom and moistness by the sexual play and gentle probing of a brush. Dolven's paintings are watery, limpid and capriciously evaporative. Languidness settles in with these works in which desire exists under the surface; where sex and sensuality rub up against one another and slowness traps the moment. Colour is faint, but present enough to suggest the subtle heat under the skin; the building warmth of passion.

A sense of overwhelmingness attends humidity. Too much moisture, and the throb of pressure, causes the body to swell and feel fit to burst. This is when containment becomes impossible. The opposite of the vapours, when the humidity is extinguished and the life fades off. This excessiveness finds the body drenched, in disarray or catatonic. Ann Hamilton's several works, for instance, show the body at its liquid limit. Water floods down a rope taut neck that can no longer absorb; the ear becomes a resistive vessel into which water is poured but not collected; the mouth is filled to thickness with pebble stones making articulation impossible.



This is the hysterical body; the one stretched to its skin and taken to the edge. This is the state of excess that is so conspicuous in the novels of Marguerite Duras for whom the tropical, lush heat becomes a central character in the mounting drama of sexual abandon. This is the body that gasps: satiate me!, but knows that this is an impossibility.

In the stories of women where tropical heat is not provided, a hothouse will replace it to simulate the effect. Tremulous courting and friendships of deep infatuation are festooned with the flowers of the conservatory. Exotic blooms, whose deep coaxed centres provide the metaphor for the impassioned lover are gathered in the word-bouquets of Kate Daw. Her 'voices' – from writers, Zelda Fitzgerald, Virginia Woolf, Katherine Mansfield, Jean Rhys and Joan Didion – are pungent with bunches of velvet petals, moist buds and candied scents.



There were flowers; del-
shiums, sweet peas, bunches
of lilac; and carnations,
masses of carnations. There
were roses; there were
irises.



Daw demonstrates the perennial links between passion and the flush of hot colour and soft textures that hide in the folds of flowers. In her project these floral sprays, pressed between the sheets of women's writing over the last century, merge with the genre of still-life painting; the landscape of feminine interiority.

Together with Clara Ursitti, Kate Daw brings this quest for the hothouse rarity up to date in the project *Drive* which tells the story of Ursitti's journey to Kew gardens to witness and imbibe the perfume of the Titan Arum *Amorphophallus Titanum* plant. A gigantic suggestively shaped, red-frilled-neck exotic, whose infrequent blooming causes heightened subliminal hysteria in the women who queue for hours to catch a glimpse of its potent splendour.

Clara Ursitti also offers another work. *Eau Claire*, a stoppered-up bottle of her own essence. We remember the other perfumes dispensed in art. In particular Duchamp's bottle of *Eau d'Rrose* - a para-ego scent of questionable veracity - and his nostalgic *50cc air de Paris*. But we also think of his efforts to stopper up the feminine power of scent, particularly in the alarming *Coin de Chasteté* (Wedge of chastity) 1951-52 - a disagreeable bronze form that delineates the vaginal opening - and the closed genitalia of his peep-show piece, *Etant donnes*. Duchamp clearly feared the heady effects associated with what Courbet named 'the origin of the world'. But Ursitti re-opens the issue. *Eau Claire* offers the opportunity to encounter the olfactory

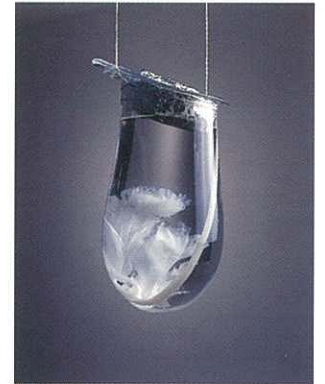
experience of Ursitti's intimate perfume. Visitors may lift the stopper and let flow the pungent vapour. A symbolic gesture of release.



The Three Graces, *Aglaia, Thalia, Euphrosyne* (*Brilliant, Flowering, Joy*) are the exuberant trio who promise jouissance, but they can

also allegorise the extravagance that overpowers with its plump readiness, spilling over into excess. Nina Saunders' *Tet-a-Tet*, a domestic setting of three chairs is of course the three sisters. But in this instance they are also the Chorus, the gossips, the witches in Macbeth, the sirens, and the neighbours. They are the feared judges and the 'the girls'. Saunders' characters have their personalities. The little red chair with its sexy, bulging, ripe raspberry outgrowth... too juicy for its own good. Another with its gaudy, gilt vaginal tissue slit seat, exposing its hysteria. The third, more restrained, but powdered chair - a pert sibling: the listener. These three confer in whispers, 'i didn't know that' they repeat like a conspiring mantra. Their talk is saucy, salacious, overheated. The kind of secretive stuff men feel excluded from. They are over excited these little chair women. Their laugh is the heckle above the steamy cauldron and the chuckle of the Fates.

DELIQUESCENCE IS OCCURRING IN Christine Borland's *Winter garden: mentha australis, mentha satuireioides, mentha diemenica*. Silvery, plant and leaf membranes of indigenous mint float in liquid filled glass vessels: diaphaneous wombs. Extending Borland's investigations into medicinal botany, these bodies of plant life and water represent both pregnant potential and the melancholic humors formed in excess. The plants are Australian indigenous mints, known to have particular properties that induce abortion. They were used for this medicinal purpose, concocted as tea or eaten, by pioneering women who had to contemplate the prospect of giving birth in the harsh dry bush of the Australian outback. In this sombre mucus of Borland's project it seems the fragile body is poised to burst and flood. The pregnant body appears precariously bloated, yet tragically beautiful.



Another watery vessel, Mariele Neudecker's excursion into the prickly, leafless forest takes us to a humicrib of sexual awakening. Her *Things Can Change in a Day*, a dense enclave of forest, is deeply mysterious and submerged in the thick impenetrable atmosphere of

liquid confusion. Shafts of light pierce through the thick fluid, illuminating small patches of trees whose vertical mass continue like a hall of mirrors.

The wood is genitalia suggests Freud; it is the dangerous place into which the young girl is sent in order to become awakened to her sexual potential according to folklore; the metamorphosing site where chivalrous men become bestial and demented, and the zone of Oedipal desire for the forbidden mother and the death of the father rehearsed endlessly by the Brothers Grimm. In art it is a perennial place of psychological drama.

Neudecker's tank offers a prismic effect. Viewed from all sides the space is disorienting and weird; deep and shallow simultaneously. This dream-like space is fable, myth, memory, and culture: it is the symbolic space of an unconscious theatre of sexuality. Like the ubiquitous aquarium in the analyst's waiting room, it lures us into the deep hypnotic space of the subliminal. As the title *Things Can Change In A Day* suggests, here humidity makes the ears hum with a certain sense of premonition, expectation, indeed anticipation of perhaps peril, but also of the potential pleasure of the secret sexual awakening the forest represents.



"As the storm draws near my nostrils dilate, the better to receive the flood of earth odors which seems to multiply and extend, until I feel the splash of rain on my cheek. As the tempest departs, receding farther and farther, the odors fade, become fainter and fainter, and die away beyond the bar of space", wrote Helen Keller. And so into this drama of humidity, liquidity and passion must come catharsis. The final release of exuberance.

If Mariele Neudecker's forest makes our heart race with unspecified anxiety and expectation, then Pipilotti Rist's hypnotic tune lures us unexpectedly towards a marvellous conclusion. Rist's *Ever Is*

Overall takes up the soft petaled, hothouse flower and uses it as a red hot poker in a game of unbridled defiance and pleasure. Here the glistening, free spirited female body finds its moment of jouissance and breaks away from the polite domesticated drama of the still-life. Noisy, rambunctious, and outside the law, *Ever Is Overall* is a hyper-saturated play of femininity with flouncy frocks swirling, don't give a damn attitude, Bakhtinian laughter, Dorothy's red shoes and a welcome downpour ... Yes!



Images

Ann Hamilton, *Untitled (mouth/stones)*, 1993
detail, laser video disc, courtesy the artist and
Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Tacita Dean, *Gellért* 1998, colour photograph, courtesy
the artist, Frith Street Gallery, London and Marian
Goodman Gallery, New York

A K Dolven, *Still Life* 1998 video still, courtesy of the
Philadelphia Museum of Art

Ann Hamilton, *Untitled (water/neck)*, 1993, video still,
courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery, New York

Installation of HUMID in Spike Island, Bristol, UK,
courtesy Spike Island Photographs: Woodley and Quick

Kate Daw, *Voice* 2000-1, detail, courtesy the artist and
William Mora Gallery, Melbourne

Kate Daw with Clara Ursitti, *Drive* 2001-1, detail,
courtesy the artists

Nina Saunders, *Tête-a-tête* 2001, courtesy the artist

Pipolitti Rist, *Ever Is Overall* 1997, video still, laser
video disk, sound, courtesy of the Ydessa Hendeles Art
Foundation, Toronto

Works

Christine Borland
*Winter garden: mentha australis, mentha
satureioides, mentha diemenica* 2001
bleached leaves preserved in alcohol
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist and Lisson Gallery,
London

Kate Daw
Drive 2001-1
installation incorporating 9 ink on canvas
works,
publication, glass and scent
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist and
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

Kate Daw
Voice, (Katherine Mansfield, 1906) 2000-1
Voice, (Katherine Mansfield, 1920) 2000-1
Voice, (Katherine Mansfield, 1920) 2000-1
Voice, (Virginia Woolf, 1925) 2000-1
Voice, (Zelda Fitzgerald, 1932) 2000-1
Voice, (Zelda Fitzgerald, 1932) 2000-1
Voice, (Jean Rhys, 1934) 2000-1
Voice, (Joan Didion, 1976-1978) 2000-1
ink on canvas
each 20 x 15cm
courtesy of the artist and
William Mora Galleries, Melbourne

Kate Daw with Clara Ursitti
Drive 2001-1
Publication and scent
courtesy of the artists and William Mora
Galleries,
Melbourne

Tacita Dean
Gellért 1998
16mm colour projection, optical sound, 7
minutes
courtesy the artist and Frith Street Gallery,
London

AK Dolven
Warmth 1999
DVD, plasma monitor and shelf, 3 minutes
courtesy Anthony Wilkinson, London
and Galerie Gebauer, Berlin

Still Life 1998
DVD, monitor and plinth, 9 minutes
courtesy of the Philadelphia Museum of Art

Januar 1997
DVD, sound and projection, 12 minutes
dimensions variable
courtesy private collection and Galerie
Gebauer, Berlin

It's all about slowing down and love 2000
oil on aluminium
4 works, each 250 x 125 cm
courtesy of Anthony Wilkinson, London

Ann Hamilton
Untitled (mouth/stones), 1993
laser video disc
duration: 30 mins
courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery,
New York

Untitled (water/neck), 1993
laser video disc
duration: 30 mins
courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery,
New York

Untitled (water/ear), 1992
laser video disc
duration 30 mins
courtesy the artist and Sean Kelly Gallery,
New York

Mariele Neudecker
Things Can Change in a Day 2001
fibreglass landscape, glass, water, acrylic
medium
Courtesy of Barbara Thumm Gallery, Berlin

Pipolitti Rist
Ever Is Overall 1997
laser video disk, sound
duration 30 mins
dimensions variable
courtesy of the Ydessa Hendeles Art
Foundation, Toronto

Nina Saunders
Tête-a-tête 2001
Chairs, motor, synthetic fur, tissues,
speakers and cd players
Courtesy of andréhn-schiptjenko, Stockholm

Clara Ursitti
Eau claire 2001
artist's vaginal scent, menstrual blood,
alcohol, coconut oil, perfume bottle and
glass shelf
Courtesy the artist

Christine Borland

lives and works in Scotland where she was also born. She is currently developing a public work for the University of Glasgow. Christine has had many solo exhibitions and exhibited recently at the Hayward Gallery and Lisson Gallery, London; Sean Kelly Gallery and Exit Art in New York, and was a participant in the recent Lyon Biennale, France. Her forthcoming projects include: The Constant Moment, in Orkney, Scotland; a one-person show at the University of York in Toronto and another at the Fabric Workshop in Philadelphia.

Kate Daw

is an artist based in Melbourne. She has exhibited widely in Australia and has received a number of major grants and residencies. In 1995 she was awarded a Samstag Scholarship to live and work in Glasgow for a year and she continues to maintain a strong relationship with artists in the city. Her recent work is concerned with concepts of fact and fiction, narrative and biography.

Tacita Dean

Tacita Dean's work seeks connections - between history and the present, fact and fiction. Her starting point can be a chance encounter or discovery. Dean pursues her investigation like a detective, piecing together evidence, which is then presented in a loosely woven, inconclusive narrative. Born in Canterbury in 1965. She studied at Falmouth School of Art and the Slade School of Fine Art, London. Her work has been exhibited widely both nationally and internationally including ICA Philadelphia and tour (1998); Dundee Contemporary Arts, Newlyn Art Gallery, Cornwall (1999); Museum für Gegenwartskunst, Basel (2000); Sala Montcada de la Fundació "la Caixa", Barcelona; Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelona, Tate Britain; Elusive Paradise - The Millennium Prize, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa .

AK Dolven

was born in Oslo Norway 1953. She lives and works in Lofoten and London and studied at Ecole des Beaux Arts Aix-en-Provence; the Ecole National Supérieur des Beaux Arts (sculpture) Paris and Statens Kunstakademi Oslo (painting, mixed media). She was awarded the DAAD/ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs grant Künstlerhaus Bethanien, Berlin 1987-1988. AK Dolven has exhibited widely and internationally including major solo exhibitions at Bern Art Hall; Kunsthalle Nürnberg; Sadler's

Wells, London; Kunstnerhus Oslo; Anthony Wilkinson Gallery, London; Galerie Gebauer, Berlin; 13 Quai Voltaire, Caisse Des Depots Paris; Fred-Thieler Prize in painting, Berlinische Galerie Berlin; Galleri 18, Island; Video Gallery, Philadelphia Museum of Art. She has participated in numerous group exhibitions.

Ann Hamilton

Ann Hamilton's projects have been described as being 'intimate in gesture and awesome in scale'. Hamilton's works are lush and densely material based, often even excessively accumulated. Yet, even while this is true, her projects, which often relate to literature and performance, have a single purity about them. Hamilton has exhibited widely and internationally including major installations at DIA Art Foundation, New York; Musee d'art Contemporaine Lyon and the Sydney Biennale 1997. She represented the USA at the Venice Biennale in 1999.

Mariele Neudecker

explores the physical and psychological spaces we inhabit as viewers, predominantly using imagery taken from landscape, re-presented, memorised or imagined. She is German born and has worked in Britain since 1987. Her work was exhibited at the I-Space, Krannert Art Museum, Chicago (1999), Signs of Life, The Melbourne International Biennial (1999), Waterfront in Helsingør (Denmark) and she recently held a solo-exhibition at the Ikon Gallery, Birmingham. Upcoming projects for 2001 are the Auckland Triennale (New Zealand), the Skulptur-Biennale in Münsterland (Germany), and the Yokohama International Triennale (Japan). She is currently the Senior Research Fellow at Cardiff School of Art and Design.

Pipilotti Rist

lives and works in Zurich. Her work which involves video, music and installation has been widely exhibited around the world. Born in 1962 in Switzerland she studied at the Institute of Applied Arts in Vienna and the School of Design in Basel. Her works have been shown at international festivals, in museums around the world, including numerous Biennials, and have been aired on television. Rist has said of her work, 'I make poems in movement', these blend humour, melancholy, desire, exaltation of the senses and the premonition of a catastrophe, from which emerges a new image of love.

Nina Saunders

Nina Saunders works in sculptural form with domestic objects such as chairs and sofas which she makes distorted and dysfunctional in evocative and disturbing interventions. In doing this she hopes to provoke the viewer to confront their comfortable association to such objects and scrutinise their darker meanings. A social and political subtext runs through Saunders' work in which questions are raised about contemporary society, the British class system and the domestic and institutional spaces we occupy. Saunders has exhibited widely since graduating from Central St Martins College of Art and Design, including the major exhibitions Claustrophobia at IKON, Birmingham and CVA, Cardiff; Young British Artists, touring nationally and After the Storm, Copenhagen, Denmark and Umedalen Skulptur, Sweden.

Clara Ursitti

is literally led by the nose as her work is predominantly scent based. She is Canadian/Italian, but has lived in Scotland since 1993. She has exhibited at the ICA London, CCA Glasgow; Living Art Museum Iceland; Turku Museum Finland and has a solo show in Toronto at YYZ this spring. She was recently awarded a Wellcome Sci-Art Grant and has been invited to participate in the Göteborg Biennale 2001.

Juliana Engberg

is a curator and writer, and is curator of the Visual Arts Program of the Melbourne Festival 2001 - 2003

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