

**HUMID  
TACITA DEAN  
CHRISTINE BORLAND  
JUAN CRUZ  
MARIE-ANGE GUILLEMINOT  
JEAN-JACQUES RULLIER  
NARELLE JUBELIN WITH  
MARCOS CORRALES LANTERO  
SONYA HANNEY  
& ADAM DADE**

Published on the occasion of  
**MARIE-ANGE GUILLEMINOT**  
*L'oursin/Sea Urchin and*  
*Le Salon De Transformation Blanc/*  
*The White Transformation Parlour*

Melbourne Festival Australia  
11 October – 3 November 2001



SUPPORTED BY

af



Photo overleaf Robyn Lee.

Marie-Ange Guilleminot:  
L'Oursin et Le Salon de  
Transformation Blanc/  
Sea Urchin and The White  
Transformation Parlour



Marie-Ange Guillemot:  
L'Oursin et Le Salon de  
Transformation Blanc/  
Sea Urchin and The White  
Transformation Parlour

predator — and, in setting up the scenario of a group encounter with the Urchin, she requires her participants to deal with all these symbolic meanings. From this we can extrapolate that Guilleminot's Urchin has a social, biological and environmental dimension that, in being activated by a group of people, becomes an object subjected to the group's collectivity and ethic, as well as performing the function of being personally symbolic.



Guilleminot's Urchin when folded into itself has the appearance and solidity of an Echinoidea's structure. A tight pod. In this shape it is armoured, hardy, impervious to destructive impulses. When it is unfurled however it becomes fragile, susceptible to tears if misused, or treated roughly.

Spread out to reveal its gossamer sheen and fragile membrane, Urchin takes on the mystic form of the circle or sphere, which through centuries, religions, anthropology and social sciences has been understood to be symbolic of and represent the unified 'self'.

When air is pushed into the Urchin, it becomes an anamorphic pod, seemingly potential and perhaps embryonic or infantile, certainly phantasmic. But when it deflates, unless supported it mutates into a formlessness that disrupts a sense of unity or *Gestalt*. Urchin is therefore an object that represents the social self and the emotional self. In this play-scenario established by Guilleminot it operates as a tool for research into both the individual and society.

The concept of play and the use of toys in psychoanalysis were a central concept in the work of Melanie Klein who used observations of her patients as they interacted with small toys as an interpretative event. Of significance was her realisation that the toys must be small and numerous enough to allow the player to express a wide range of fantasies and experiences. In contrast with Klein's

method, Guilleminot requires her group to play with this one symbolic object, therefore limiting its opportunity to narrate a structure or situation. The group must therefore enact a structure, and in essence, become the situation.

As we watch the group interact with this object that has become a kind of fetish representing many things (humanity, environment, politics, and society) we notice certain behaviours. For instance, there is an evident pleasure and exultation when the group work together to uplift the Urchin, thus creating a kind of cathartic canopy. They do this numerous times, beginning tentatively until the first fully exuberant gesture. In this first instance it is the significant event that confirms the unity of the group and their ability to act as one. In being uplifted the Urchin gathers air and makes a satisfying ballooning sound. This adds to the feeling of euphoria experienced by the group. In repeating this gesture however, the group never quite recaptures that first thrilling moment and gradually we observe that the creation of the Urchin canopy is used as a re-grouping device. An action intuitively agreed by the group to reassert their togetherness and common purpose. But the more this cathartic action is repeated, the less the gesture has the impact of its initial reward.

As a consequence we witness the evolution of the group and observe its shifting dynamic. It looks for leadership amongst itself. Various individuals suggest certain actions. One participant cocoons another with the Urchin, another hides underneath Urchin, someone else deciding to fold Urchin, and so forth. Each time the group needs to make a collective decision to follow the suggestion or action, or dissolve the strength of the unit's resolve.



Guilleminot sets up a situation in which we can watch the decision making process of the group performed in real time. We notice, as crowd commentators Canetti and Kracauer did, that groups have much difficulty in staying together for long unless

propelled into action by a collective purpose or by dynamic leadership. Even though Guillemot is a part of the group she takes no more or less initiative than the others, thus forcing the group to define the point of itself in relation to the Urchin: to take responsibility for the 'self' and 'other' it has come to symbolise.

The outcome of this situational play is that more and more we see individualisation occurring. The 'self' of the group collective is gradually broken down by the emergence of actions that are specifically defined by one person or a few, and which gradually take on more ego-based meaning. This dissolution of entity, the break down of the collective self, begins to require the Urchin to become someone's plaything as compared to a commonly cared for entity.

In particular we see the way Urchin is required to perform acts of comfort and nurture as more people wrap themselves in it: a gesture of withdrawal from the group as well as being simultaneously an action of attention seeking. Urchin becomes for some a sexualised object, a seductive form in which eroticism can be performed. In these instances the individual's claim on the Urchin requires those who are excluded to define their position as either oppositional or contributive.

As this real-time event is prolonged both participant and viewer drift in their attention and interest. Again, Guillemot's play replicates the research that suggests the fickleness of groups and the need for spectacularisation in order to sustain the fascination of an audience. Guillemot deliberately frustrates this sense of cathartic 'explosive' spectacle by eschewing any predestined aim, but in so doing leaves Urchin vulnerable to a lack of sustained attention and care.

It takes only a little leap of thought to realise that Guillemot's work is a critique of the spectacle that demonstrates awesome, destructive power as a means of control, and a means of social division. Her experiment is to speculate on the role of the participant in a non pre-determined set of outcomes that continually oscillate between collective responsibility and self interest, to see if shared goals can ever be realised.



Play and participation are hallmarks of Guillemot's approach, and as an extension, they become episodes of interaction and often faith or trust between participants. The notion that individuals are responsible for the well being of others in a symbiotic relationship is experienced in Urchin.

COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY IS SOMETHING that has occupied Guillemot in many projects, notably those that have occurred as a result of her time in Japan, which have become preoccupied with the perpetual after-shocks of the Hiroshima atrocity.

Guillemot has made several memorial projects. Her 8.15 Hiroshima Watch, The Hiroshima Collection comprising White Clothing, Pattern and Book and The White Transformation Parlour.

The White Transformation Parlour extends Guillemot's memorial to the victims of Hiroshima in a project that once more requires participation and play. Guillemot invites visitors to her round, white parlour, designated by a felt floor mat, and asks them to prepare an origami Tsuru (Crane) from pages torn from her specially printed artist's book *To Dance or to Die*. The origami Tsuru represents the concept of hope and longevity in Japanese culture.

Guillemot first became interested in the Tsuru after seeing a little paper crane in the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. The crane had been made by a young girl suffering severe injuries as a result of the bomb attack. A memorial to her now stands outside the Museum and each year on the 6th of August garlands of paper cranes made by school children and adults are delivered to the monument to commemorate both the little girl's life and death.



Guilleminot's Transformation Parlour seeks to add to this memorial, of course, but more than this her project uses the concept of origami and commemoration as a means of bringing cultures together: literally enfolding them in a gesture of beauty. Visitors asked to make their cranes become involved in a tangible, embodied process of memory and care: and learning. The action of folding which uses time, dexterity and patience, and is evolved through instruction, conveys, or transforms the participant for a brief moment into a zone of contemplation and mutuality.

Once more, as she does in Sea Urchin, Guilleminot distances herself from being the originator or director of this project, asking others to take responsibility for assisting the making of cranes and telling stories and interacting with those who visit the Parlour. In this instance in Melbourne, she is assisted by Australian artist Rosslynd Piggott who has also spent time in Japan. Others will take over as instructors and assistants during the time The White Transformation Parlour is shown.

Both *Sea Urchin* and *The White Transformation Parlour* perform the function of collective endeavour, learning, sharing and exchanging. They also share certain aesthetic elements, which bare comment. Roundness of shape. Whiteness. Formlessness and structure. They are societal models, but first and foremost they are symbolic selves. Guilleminot's projects show that the self and society are enfolding in a perpetual project of collective responsibility. By extension, and by making her projects about participatory gestures and team based cooperation, Guilleminot makes clear that we make and have choices about what social actions we will take, and how we will become agents in this social network that can only be sustained by empathy and care.



## Marie-Ange Guilleminot

has shown in Venice, Philadelphia, Munster, Jerusalem, as well as throughout France. In Munster she created a small pavilion where visitors were invited to sit down, take off their shoes and insert their feet inside the pavilion. This trust was then rewarded with a foot-massage by one of a team of reflexologists working inside the pavilion, the sensory experience of the viewer becoming an unexpectedly tactile experience. In another project Guilleminot created a small and poignant memorial to those killed at Hiroshima. Upon a watch with white hands, face and band she marked with two lines the time 8:15, that moment of the morning when the Atomic bomb exploded. As the hands of the watch pass directly over these black lines, the face of the watch is completely white, a commemoration of that other brilliant flash of white.

## Rossllynd Piggott

is a Melbourne based artist who has shown extensively in Australia, Japan, France, Belgium, and New York. She exhibits with Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

## Juliana Engberg

is a curator and writer and is curator of the Visual Arts Programmes of the Melbourne Festival 2001

published by the Melbourne Festival to coincide with the exhibition of

Marie-Ange Guilleminot:  
*Urchin: The White Transformation Parlour*

at the Centre for Contemporary Photography  
12 October - 3 November 2001

curator: Juliana Engberg  
project manager: Geraldine Bariow  
participant: Rossllynd Piggott  
photography: the artist

with thanks to Tessa Dwyer, director, Rebecca Chew, Daniel Palmer, Laura Cornhill of the CCP; Alain Monteil, Attaché Culturel Ambassade de France en Australie; Jean-Philippe Bottin, Director, Alliance Française de Melbourne; Olivia Meehan; Kay Campbell

