The Labyrinthine Effect
24 May – 20 July 2003

‘From time to time certain symbols become important in culture. The recent emergence of the labyrinth as a form of sculpture, walk-in environment, and digital world, links to our current cultural quest in search of meaning. The labyrinth, with its strong links to spiritual, literary and bureaucratic systems has been used as a device of both wonder and fear. A hopeful yet disorienting place and space where the body becomes lost while the mind undertakes the puzzling journey in search of conclusion.’ Juliana Engberg, Artistic Director, ACCA and Curator of The Labyrinthine Effect

The Labyrinthine Effect brings together works and structures by international and Australian artists that reference the labyrinth as a cultural symbol. Artists include Francis Alÿs, Colin Duncan, Rodney Graham, Marie-Ange Guillemimot, Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, Ilya and Emilia Kabakov, Bruce Nauman, Anne Ooms, João Penalva, John Pym and Danielle van Zuijlen.

WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?


Mazes and a range of labyrinth designs are found all around the world in many cultures and civilizations. They are found carved in rock, ceramics, clay tablets, mosaics, manuscripts, stone patterns, turf, hedges, and cathedral pavements, with the earliest known labyrinth designs estimated to be around 4,000 years old. Throughout history the symbol of the labyrinth has been used in many ways, including as an ancient sacred meditation tool for reflection and spiritual enlightenment. At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the centre of yourself and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are.

In the 13th century in Europe stone labyrinths were built into the flooring of medieval churches such as Chartres Cathedral, Notre Dame de Riens, and Notre Dame d’Amiens, all in France. In this form the labyrinth was used as a symbolic pilgrimage, the devout following the convoluted path on their knees was a substitution for a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. The Church granted the same privilege for the symbolic pilgrimage as the real one. Many of the labyrinths in churches and cathedrals were later covered up or destroyed, as they came to be seen as a form of nomadic individualism against the authority of the organized church.
THE LABYRINTH FORM IN LITERATURE AND CINEMA

The labyrinth also occurs as a device in numerous literary and cinematic works. Jorge Luis Borges’ *Labyrinths* (1950) and Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) use the metaphor of the library as labyrinthine form. In Franz Kafka’s novels *The Castle* (1930 Eng. trans.) and *The Trial* (1937 Eng. trans.) Prague is imagined as a labyrinthine city where the protagonist encounters a confusing web of government bureaucracy. In cinematic tradition the maze or labyrinth appears frequently as a device, for example in Peter Greenaway’s film *The Draughtsman’s Contract* (1982); Stanley Kubrick’s *The Shining* (1980); Ridley Scott’s *Alien* (1979); and Alain Resnais’ *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). More recently the labyrinth appears as a form in cyberspace. The Internet and the hypertext language it uses, is so constructed that every path can be connected with every other one. It is like an infinite labyrinthine form.

IS A LABYRINTH THE SAME AS A MAZE?

Many people confuse the form of the labyrinth with a maze. When most people hear of a labyrinth they think of a maze. A labyrinth is not a maze. A maze is like a puzzle to be solved. It has twists, turns, and blind alleys. A labyrinth has only one path. It is unicursal. The way in is the way out. There are no blind alleys. The path leads you on a circuitous path to the centre and out again.

THE LABYRINTH IN GREEK MYTHOLOGY

One of the most famous labyrinths in history features in Greek mythology and was written about by Ovid in *Metamorphoses*. During the late Bronze Age King Minos of Crete had the architect Daedalus build a Labyrinth at Knossos, a house of winding passages, to house the Minotaur Asterion, half man and half bull. Every nine years King Minos demanded tribute from Athens in the form of a human sacrifice of young men and women. The Athenian youths were sent into the intricate mazes of the labyrinth, home of the deadly man-eating Minotaur from which there was no escape.

Theseus (the son of The King of Athens) volunteered to be amongst a group offered in sacrifice to the Minotaur. In Crete he fell in love with Ariadne (the daughter of King Minos). Ariadne consulted Daedalus, the constructor of the Labyrinth, for the necessary instructions for finding the way out. At Daedalus’ suggestion, she gave Theseus a ball of thread which he let unwind through the Labyrinth so that he was able to kill the Minotaur and find his way back out again.

artist backgrounds

FRANCIS ALÝS

Francis Alýs was born in 1959 in Antwerp, Belgium and currently lives in Mexico City. Alýs has worked with a variety of different media (performance, painting, photography) and strategies (including the basic human activity of walking) to generate works that are remarkably diverse, including instructional performances, photo documentations, videos, slide projections, animations, and paintings. Displacement, ambiguity, metaphor and paradox are among the recurring motifs of Alýs' art.

His work has been featured in solo exhibitions in England, the US, Switzerland, Mexico and Canada. He has also exhibited in group exhibitions at P.S.1 Contemporary Art Center in New York (2002); the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis; the Witte de With center for contemporary art in Rotterdam; the Whitechapel Art Gallery in London (all 2001); the Hayward Gallery in London (1999) and Signs of Life, Melbourne International Biennial, Melbourne (1999).
Many of Francis Alÿs' previous works have incorporated ideas associated with the labyrinth, in particular his art works involving 'walking'. At ACCA Alÿs' work CIRCLE, (2003) is an interactive telephone system in which visitors to the gallery can dial a 1800 number and connect to an automated system of the artist's own devising. The caller soon becomes trapped in an endless menu of options and dead ends, directed on a seemingly never-ending path of possible outcomes to their call. The work was made in direct response to an experience the artist had trying to call a leading museum. Failing to make contact with a human being at the other end of the telephone he experienced: ‘that feeling of loss and slight humiliation of talking only to a machine’. The artist realised that the digital technology of automated interactive telephone systems, such as the Commander system he has used at ACCA, could provide him with the means to create ‘a virtual walk into virtual space’. What he had been investigating in physical space could now have a virtual counterpoint.

Telephone technology has been transformed by the digital age; the touch-tone phone has opened a new world of interactive possibilities. Who has not dialed a bank or government agency to ask a simple question, and slammed down the telephone in sheer frustration after encountering a series of automated options? While the 1800 toll free number is most familiar to us as a marketing ploy used by companies to sell a product, Alÿs' 1800 number is all about giving something away in the art gallery. Numerous visitors can simultaneously dial the number and experience the work, either from ACCA or from a landline anywhere in Australia.

There is a level of interactivity in the work. The caller has the freedom to make choices and to lead the narrative, moving through the given options at will. However it is the artist, via the technology, who is ultimately in control of the possibilities and outcome.

The work is accompanied by framed artist drawings and plans for the construction of the ‘telephone tree’ for the 1800 CIRCLE automated interactive telephone system.

For further information about the artist see ‘Francis Alÿs in conversation with Nicholas Baume’, August 2001 <http://www.postmedia.net/alys/freematrix.htm>

COLIN DUNCAN

Colin Duncan was born in Numerkah, Victoria in 1958. He lives and works in Melbourne Australia. He works across a variety of mediums including works on paper, photography, installation and video. His main interests are ideas and how visual media can communicate these as narrative, he is also interested in perception and language. Colin Duncan has participated in a number of solo and group exhibitions, both nationally and internationally.


In previous works Duncan has explored the conditions of blindness and sleep, and the nature of the unseen; exploring an obsession with the low light half-world, and how, depending on visibility the familiar can appear strange. His works at ACCA explore the process of perception and narrative.

A VISUAL AND SENSORY EXPERIENCE

Displayed in the gallery at ACCA Colin Duncan's large-scale subtle paper works challenge the type of behaviour normally enforced in galleries, ‘look, but don’t touch!’ His works are designed to allow the visitor to have both a visual and sensory experience. The works have been embossed using a Braille machine, and visitors are encouraged to feel the raised surface of the work. The embossing cannot be ‘read’ by Braille readers, rather Duncan uses the Braille embossing as patterning to build areas of the work. The embossed paper is white, and against the white gallery walls, it is difficult to see the embossed surface and read the image without the use of shadow. So the artist has lit the works variously from the side, below and above with coloured fluorescent lights.

1. All quotes by the artist from Francis Alÿs in conversation with Nicholas Baume’, August 2001 <http://www.postmedia.net/alys/freematrix.htm>
Producing the works is an intricate and time-consuming process. Duncan uses his own photographs as his starting point. These are scanned into a computer and using Photoshop saved as a bitmap image. The image is then scaled up and put into picture imaging software. The works are printed using Braille embossing machines owned by the RVIB (Royal Victorian institute of the Blind). They can only print 20 x 20cm squares at a time, so these are painstakingly pieced together to make up the overall image. He refers to the technology he uses as ‘soft-technology’ and enjoys the results he can get ‘pushing’ the software programs.

Consulting Suite, Footfall, Forest

Consulting Suite, (2003) depicts a psychologists’ counseling room. The work references the internal dialogue of self-doubt, combined with the anticipation of resolution.

Footfall, (2003) shows an escalator and staircase. These can both be seen as metaphors for the transportation of the body/mind. Some of the ideas the artist was thinking of when making the work were concerned with the binary system, descent, the underworld and the circularity of nature.

Forest, (2003) depicts a clearing in a forest; for the artist this is a loaded, psychological space. He sees the work as conjuring the idea of a 19th century European Romantic landscape. Forests can evoke many powerful psychological associations. Sigmund Freud suggested that the wood symbolised female genitalia. According to folklore and the tales of the Brothers Grimm the forest represents ‘the dangerous place into which the young girl is sent in order to become awakened to her sexual potential…in art it is a place of perennial psychological drama.’

FURTHER RESEARCH

Caspar David Friedrich (1774-1840) was a leading German Romantic landscape painter. Frequent subject matter included Gothic ruins, stark contorted trees, and bleak land and seascapes seen under mysterious and unnatural lighting effects. The human figure was either absent or seen as insignificant compared to the overwhelming grandeur of the natural environment. Compare Duncan’s Forest with the landscapes of Caspar David Friedrich and Peter Booth’s (b.1940) paintings of snow-filled landscapes.

For more information about Colin Duncan’s work visit the artists’ website <http://www.colinduncan.com/home.html>

MARIE-ANGE GUILLEMINOT

Marie-Ange Guilleminot was born 1960 in Saint Germain-en-Laye, France and lives and works in Paris. Her practice is poetic and strongly focused upon the role and ethics of the individual. In 2001 she was shown as part of the visual arts program of the Melbourne Festival at the CCP, Melbourne, with an exhibition entitled L’Oursin et Le Salon de Transformation Blanc/ Sea Urchin and The White Transformation Parlour.

The Labyrinth, 2003

Marie-Ange Guilleminot’s work The Labyrinth continues her exploration into the resurrection of the ancient circular form of the labyrinth. From around the 1500s the Church attempted to cover or destroy the early medieval mazes that decorated the floors of their cathedrals. The Reims Labyrinth, which was created during the height of the medieval labyrinth-building period in the thirteenth century, was destroyed in 1788 at the instruction of a Canon of Reims Cathedral who was disturbed by people walking the pattern. The Amiens Cathedral labyrinth was destroyed during floor renovations in 1827-29, and restored in 1894-97. The Chartres Labyrinth; one of the few remaining in Gothic Cathedrals, was covered over until recently.

In a previous work Guilleminot filmed herself walking the path of the Chartres Labyrinth; plotting her way with a rope. At each turn in the path Guilleminot knotted the rope so as to create another labyrinth: one that may be taken up and re-established by re-enactment on any ground. In the work on show at ACCA the artist occupies an interior space with an inflatable silver polyurethane ‘urchin’ form: a creature whose spiraled shell mimics the labyrinthine form. The work inflates and fills the space. The artist controls and directs the movement of the inflated work with guide ropes. The work shows the continuing appeal and fulfillment to be found in walking and contemplating the labyrinth form.

RODNEY GRAHAM

Born in Vancouver in 1949, Rodney Graham began showing his work there in the early 1970s. Since then he has had solo shows across Canada, the USA and Europe and has exhibited in numerous international group shows.

Rodney Graham’s art practice ranges from photography, popular art film, video and pop-music to sculpture, painting and books, he has said that influences as diverse as Lewis Carroll, Kurt Cobain, Ian Fleming, and Sigmund Freud have all provided inspiration for his work. He often takes events from popular culture as his starting point. For example in Photokinetoskope, (2001) the artist re-enacts Albert Hoffman’s (the inventor of LSD) hallucinatory bike-ride, as well as referencing the Pink Floyd song Bike (1967) and Thomas Edison’s invention of a device to synchronize film-sound.

Rodney Graham    How I Became a Ramblin’ Man, 1999  (video still, detail)  35mm film transferred to DVD 9 minute loop  edition of four and two proofs courtesy of the artist and Donald Young Gallery, Chicago
Graham has held a life-long preoccupation with rock music culture, producing a number of music works including his video work How I became a Ramblin’ Man (1999); a slide and music piece entitled Aberdeen, (2000) after the birthplace of Kurt Cobain; a sound installation entitled Listening Lounge II, (1999-2000); A Little thought, (2000), a video clip for one of his own songs. He has also released two CDs and an EP to accompany solo exhibitions.

Rodney Graham’s interest in cyclical narratives is evident in his recent trilogy of looped ‘costume dramas’ in which the artist plays familiar cinematic archetypes. The trilogy includes Vexation Island (1997) in which he plays a castaway on a deserted island, City Self/Country Self, (2000) where he plays the dual roles of a French urban dandy and a provincial rustic. And How I became a Ramblin’ Man (1999) in which he plays a lonesome cowboy, destined to a life of roaming. The trilogy was filmed in idealized settings, with the characters programmed by convention to replay their roles eternally.

How I became a Ramblin’ Man, 1999

At ACCA the 9-minute large screen video projection of Graham’s How I became a Ramblin’ Man begins with views of an unspoiled Western landscape: mountains, streams, and wide-open spaces. The artist, dressed up as a lone cowboy, rides into view on a horse with his guitar slung over his shoulder. He makes his way across the plains, pauses to sing a plaintive cowboy ballad, before rambling on. The work is both epic and anticlimactic. As the video loops Graham is destined to ramble endlessly, repeating his song, through the hills and valleys of North America.

The artist comments on his use of the circular narrative as a device: ‘while it’s true that circular works invoke inescapable cycles of life and death, there is a practical aspect to my use of cycles and loops as well. When you show time-based works like video projections in a gallery, it makes sense to create short loops to ‘ensnare’ the viewer. The great thing about museums is that you don’t have to show up on time (to see the work). It is also an interesting formal problem to construct narratives with a view to create a seamless join at the loop point rather than a climax and denouement.’

For further information about Rodney Graham read an interview with the artist at <http://www.whitechapel.org>.

J UTEMPUS

Gediminas and Nomeda Urbonas have been collaborating on projects since 1997. In 1993, they established the Jutempus exhibition space in Vilnius, Lithuania as a site for exhibitions and cultural events. Since establishing Jutempus they have worked on a number of collaborative projects that question the relative nature of freedom, and analyse the ongoing transformation of Lithuanian society.

Transaction, 2002

In 2000 they developed the project Transaction. At ACCA Transaction, (2002) is displayed as a website that the viewer navigates their way around. In Transaction the archive, encyclopedia, library and web combine to release out into the world the history of women, psychoanalysis, and film culture, political and social networks that remained hidden within the communist labyrinth of the Lithuanian government structure. Jutempus’ Transaction reasserts a history kept intact, yet underground, as proof of the resilience of the human spirit and the need for ‘a voice’. Using a number of interlinking archives of interviews, film clips, and stories the work reveals a country lived by codes and delivered through propaganda, but which, all the while, is pulled through the mystifying governmental labyrinth by the thread of their own culture.

The work involved the artists in a complex process of research, similar to the interdisciplinary methods of anthropologists. To present the correlations between their collected materials J utempus used a methodology from ‘transactional psychoanalysis’, which suggests that over the course of our lives, we move between the roles of the prosecutor, the rescuer and the victim. Transaction raises many questions, which the viewer can approach from a range of viewpoints, moving between the different levels. How does it influence the individual, if society lives the role of the victim? What is the connection between the image generated of women and the roles that women live in reality? How should we discern the reality that is transmitted via moving images?

To view the Transaction project online visit <http://www.transaction.lt>.

ILYA AND EMILIA KABAKOV

Ilya Kabakov was born in Dniepropetrovsk, Ukraine in 1933. Since moving to the West he has become a leading figure in installation and public art. Since 1998 he and his wife Emilia have worked collaboratively, their almost documentary-like projects (combining drawings, works on paper, paintings and found objects in complex installations) reflect the social, historical and political forces that have shaped their lives and work. These include Ilya’s boyhood during Stalin’s regime, his obligatory career as a children’s book illustrator in the official Artists' Union, his involvement in Moscow’s active underground Russian Art movement. Their conceptual installations explore Eastern European art, art and democracy, individual and collective memory, Gulag-Glasnost, art created in exile and Soviet and post-Soviet art.


Visit the Kabakov’s website to find out more <http://www.ilya-emilia-kabakov.com/>

BRUCE NAUMAN

Bruce Nauman was born in 1941 in Fort Wayne, Indiana, US and currently lives and works in New Mexico. Since the early 1970s Bruce Nauman has been recognized as one of the most innovative and provocative of America’s contemporary artists. Nauman finds inspiration in the activities, speech, and materials of everyday life. Working in the diverse mediums of sculpture, video, film, printmaking, performance, and installation, Nauman concentrates less on the development of a characteristic style and more on the way in which a process or activity can transform or become a work of art. The text from an early neon work proclaims: ‘The true artist helps the world by revealing mystic truths.’ Whether or not we — or even Nauman — agree with this statement, the underlying subtext of the piece emphasizes the way in which the audience, artist, and culture at large are involved in the resonance a work of art will ultimately have.
Like John Pym's Loaded Bruce Nauman's Four Corner Piece, (1971) performs an equally orienting/disorienting relationship to the self and the minimalist white box the body walks through. Nauman places his viewer/participant in an endless journey between white cube and white wall, with TV monitors reporting the appearance and disappearance of the self to the self. The self is an ever-fleeting thing — constantly eluding its own destination and its own sense of completion.

In this work Nauman has been influenced by the critical practices of Conceptual Art, in which the idea behind a work of art held as much importance as the art object itself, and demonstrates one of the many styles and techniques Conceptual Artists explored during the 1960s and early 1970s.

**ANNE OOMS**

Anne Ooms is an Australian artist and writer currently living in Darwin, where she lectures at the School of Art and Design. She worked in theatre and as an art critic in Sydney before beginning to exhibit her own work in the early 1990's and attended the Glasgow School of Art in 1995 on a Samstag scholarship. She has been included in numerous national survey exhibitions, including Sydney Perspecta (1995), Signs of Life, Melbourne International Biennial (1999) and Terra Mirabilis, Cardiff (2000). She has worked as a curator, most recently taking Undone, an exhibition of contemporary art from the Northern Territory to Indonesia, and in 1997 curated Nerve, the Glasgow Projects, in Sydney, with Nick Tsoutas and Deb Ely. The Ladies of Nairn, first shown in 1997 at the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, is the first in an ongoing series of Oom’s book works that bring the reverie of reading into the art gallery.

*The Ladies of Nairn, 1997-2003*

‘Table, chair, lamp and book. A setting of domesticity and private musing. These are the tableaux that Anne Ooms’ has created in a sequence of recent installations in which she gently pushes against the formality of the museum and the gallery and its strict, impassive structure of space. Using second hand furniture: worn, covered chairs; domestic side tables; standard lamps, Ooms’ arrangements offer a comfy homeliness and a place to relax and send your mind wandering.’

Ooms creates a relaxing and restful landscape that encourages the visitor to move from one seating arrangement to the next. There are clues and threads of narrative to pick up along the way, connections and coincidences that connect the characters that people Ooms’ books. As each narrative unfolds we gain a clearer picture of the landscape that Ooms has created. As visitors to the space amongst Oom’s installation they become participants in an unplanned performance.

Anne Ooms  
The Ladies of Nairn, 1997-2003  
installation of 5 chairs, side-taables, standard lights, books  
courtesy of the artist  
installation view, ACCA Melbourne 2003

JOÃO PENALVA

João Penalva was born in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1949. Since 1976 he has lived and worked in London, where from 1976 to 1981 he studied at the Chelsea School of Art. Penalva displays a deep interest in how culture is mediated, categorised, presented and even translated in all his work. João Penalva has held numerous solo exhibitions in Austria, Brazil, England, France, Italy, Lithuania, Portugal, Sweden, Scotland, and the United States. His work has been included in the group exhibitions INFALLIBLE, In Search of the Real George Eliot, The Gallery at APT, London, England (2003); the Biennale of Sydney, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia (2002); This side and beyond the dream, Sigmund Freud-Museum, Vienna, Austria; the Berlin Biennale 2, Germany (2001); and Signs of Life, Melbourne International Biennial, Melbourne (1999). He represented Portugal in the Venice Biennale, 2001.

His video Kitsune (2001) mesmerizes the viewer with a hypnotic conversation about remembered ghost stories, immersing us in the haunting beauty of an ancient forest landscape that is forever re-emerging through shrouds of creeping mist. This installation received critical acclaim at the recent 2001 Berlin Biennale. The work is of fifty-seven minutes duration. Cinema seating is provided to encourage the visitor to stay and spend some time with the work.

DANIELLE VAN ZUIJLEN

Danielle van Zuijlen was born in 1974, and currently resides in The Netherlands. She undertook studies in sculpture and monumental design at the Academy of Art St. Joost, Breda, in The Netherlands before completing a Master of Fine Art, Glasgow School of Art, Scotland in 2002. Recent exhibitions include Hoorn koop kunst/Art bought by the city, De Boterhal, Hoorn, The Netherlands (2003), MFA Glasgow, Tramway, Glasgow, Scotland (2002). She shows, Mama Cash exhibition, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, and Haiku Installation, Guildhall University, London and Podium Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland.

In 2002 she co-initiated the Hotel Mariakapel, an artist initiative with exhibition space and artist hotel in Hoorn, North of Amsterdam <http://www.hotelmariakapel.nl>

At ACCA Danielle van Zuijlen’s work Encyclopedia for a public building is installed throughout the foyer and main gallery space; a number of metal dispensers, containing a sequence of different printed index cards, are affixed to the glass, metal and plaster walls of the interior spaces. The index cards have information on one side and hieroglyph on the other. On collection of all cards the segments of the hieroglyph match up and the viewer is rewarded with a completed picture.

The Internet and World Wide Web is a contemporary example of the labyrinthine form: a net-like, complex and convoluted system of inter-connected information. Danielle van Zuijlen’s work Encyclopedia for a public building mimics the rhizome-like structure of the Internet; a place where there is no beginning and end and all information is infinitely interconnected in a non-hierarchical way. The work refers also to the library. Picking up any of Danielle van Zuijlen’s index cards at random can send the visitor on a delightful mental journey, not unlike the random patterns and connections we create when surfing the Internet.

THE WORKING PROCESS

Encyclopedia for a public building is a revised version of Knowledge (Local) originally shown at Tramways Gallery in Glasgow, Scotland in 2002. The work has been purchased by a library in The Netherlands, and will be permanently installed there later this year. The basis for van Zuijlen’s work is a research into the process of how we navigate through this world, linking experiences into a certain understanding of what is around us. This research, in which curiosity, chance and the use of existing structures like the city, maps and the encyclopedia are important influences; leads to installations, books, and reconstructed objects.

Over a four-month period the artist compiled the collection of entries included on the index cards: ‘as a process of research into what it means to be looking for knowledge’. The work relates to the idea that: ‘fragments are part of a larger whole’, and is ‘not a complete collection, rather it is part of an endless puzzle.’ For van Zuijlen: ‘knowledge is like a library, what fascinates me with the labyrinthine form is that you have to find a reason to go in.’

The artist is influenced and inspired by the work of Sophie Calle (b. 1963, France), Mark Dion (b.1961, USA), Andreas Gursky (b.1955, Germany) and Renee Green (b.1959, USA); many of whom are referenced on the index cards at ACCA.

Danielle Van Zuijlen
printed cards, metal dispensers, various locations
courtesy of the artist

5. The rhizome serves as a metaphor for the multiplicity and infinite interconnectedness of all thought, life, culture, and language. Developed by French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the rhizome has emerged as a dominant image within postmodernism and poststructuralism. See Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia (University of Minnesota Press: 1987)
6. All quotes by the artist are from an interview conducted with the author, Melbourne May 2003
JOHN PYM

John Pym was born in Melbourne, Australia, in 1964 and emigrated to the UK in 1970. After completing a Foundation Course at Ipswich College of Art in 1984, he undertook further studies in Fine Art/Sculpture at Winchester School of Art, from 1984-87. Recent solo exhibitions include Core, Installation, Spike Island, Bristol, UK (Feb 2003); Sheer, Installation, Spike Island, Bristol, UK (2002), and Dubious Trophies, installation, Prema Arts Centre, Dursley, Gloucestershire, UK (2002). Forthcoming exhibitions include DIALOGUE, Bristol Docks, Bristol, UK (2003) and Station, Bristol Docks, Bristol, UK (2003).

John Pym was extensively involved in the development of the Spike Island Studios, Bristol in the UK where he currently has a studio. Later this year Pym will install works in the docks area at Bristol, UK.

Loaded, 2003

Loaded, Pym's installational architecture is a clinical, white, and alarming space. The viewer enters the minimalist space and soon becomes disoriented as they pass through Pym's maze which squeezes, tilts and turns. Blind alleys lead to bureaucratic doors which frustratingly will not open. Pym's spaces extend the minimalist projects commenced in the 1960s by artists such as Donald Judd, Frank Stella and Robert Morris who used objects and space to surround the viewer.

Entering the exhibition through Pym's work Loaded gets the viewer in the ideal mindset for experiencing the other works in The Labyrinthine Effect. The title of the work refers to the fact that we all (in a psychological sense) carry baggage with us how we respond to being in the space perhaps reflects our present psychological state.
ART INDUSTRY AND PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE ISSUES

How does the name/title of the exhibition relate to the theme or concept? You may need to read the promotional material, catalogue or brochures on display in the gallery, or ask one of the gallery staff to find out.

> What is the purpose of The Labyrinthine Effect, e.g. to sell work; to explore a particular theme or idea; to showcase recent work by the artists; or to introduce a medium or style of work?

> Who was involved developing and organising this exhibition, for example, curator(s), the artist(s), gallery staff?

> What types of things were involved in organising this exhibition, for example, researching the idea for the exhibition, selecting work, dealing with artists and/or owners of artworks to organise loans and transportation of artwork, writing funding applications, preparing venues, installing work for exhibition, organising tour details and printed materials etc?

> What requirements (technical, resources, etc) do you think the gallery might have had to consider when planning and installing this exhibition?

EXHIBITION DESIGN AND DISPLAY AND PRESENTATION OF WORKS IN The Labyrinthine Effect

Consider the different ways in which works have been displayed and presented at ACCA for this exhibition. John Pym’s Loaded and Bruce Nauman’s Four Corner Piece have been built directly into the gallery. They look as if they could be part of the building. Danielle van Zuijlen’s work Encyclopedia for a Public Building has been installed in metal dispensers in the foyer, bathrooms and gallery spaces. Colin Duncan’s works are displayed on the gallery walls, but are without protective glass or frames. Computer-based and digital film works are displayed on monitors, or projected directly onto the walls. The Kabakov’s works are displayed in plastic sleeves in acid-free solander storage boxes; protective white gloves are provided for visitors to wear.

> In what different ways have works been displayed and presented? Look at the following: the gallery environment, i.e. the layout and design of the gallery spaces, the colour of the walls, the use of lighting, the use of sound etc; the placement of works in relation to each other and the physical features of the venue; the display and presentation of individual works, for example, mounting, framing and the use of display furniture such as display cases and plinths etc, use of headsets for sound works.

> What effect do the different display and presentation methods have on the ways in which you engage with the works?

> Chose a work and discuss the way the work has been presented and how this might relate to the ideas in the work. How does the work relate to the theme of the exhibition? What did you like most about the way this work was presented in the gallery?

> Until recently most digitally based artworks were displayed in galleries on computer monitors. The monitor acts in a similar way to a picture frame to give a boundary or frame to the work. However there are artists who are experimenting with new ways of displaying and presenting digital media artworks and how gallery visitors engage with them. Would viewing Rodney Graham or João Penalva’s work on a monitor make any difference to the way you have engaged with the work at ACCA?
INTERACTIVITY AND THE CONTEMPORARY ARTWORK

Interactivity is often used as a ‘buzz’ word by government funding agencies, or galleries promoting digital media arts as providing a greater level of equity and access for audiences. Interactivity is most often associated with digital media arts, but can also apply to the way we engage with many other art forms.

> Many of the works in The Labyrinthine Effect allow the audience to actively participate in the artwork. Visitors to ACCA can view Nomeda and Gediminas Urbinas’ work Transaction and navigate their own path around the computer-based work. They can also call the 1800 number of Francis Alÿs’ work CIRCLE in the gallery, and can dial the number from a landline in Australia. The placement of Alÿs’ work in the gallery raises many questions about the commodification of art and objects. His work CIRCLE challenges the uniqueness and preciousness of the artwork. The work is accessible to anyone with a telephone and the 1800 number. If the work does not exist as a single artwork can it be bought and sold, is the gallery or collector buying a work or an idea?

> If multiple copies of a work are made is there an original? If works are sold how many copies should be made? Who should make these decisions? Does this make you consider works where multiples exist differently to work where only one exists?

> Investigate how conceptual artists and those working with new media display and sell their work. Who might collect these works — both institutional (galleries and museums) and private collectors? How might a collector display these works? How might you price such works?

> If galleries acquire electronic works by digital media artists how might these be displayed and stored? What happens if the technology that was used to make and display the work becomes obsolete? Is it ethical to transfer a work created on one format to another for the purposes of storage and display? Who should be involved in making these decisions?

> In relation to artists making digital media work consider the possibility that in the future their works may not be able to be viewed using existing software applications. This may be due to compatibility problems or built-in obsolescence. What happens to the works then?

> You are also invited to participate directly in the work of the Ilya and Emelia Kabakov, Anne Ooms, Colin Duncan, Danielle van Zuijlen, Nomeda and Gediminas Urbonas, Bruce Nauman and John Pym. Does this make a difference to how you respond to these works? Do you feel that you have engaged with some works more than others? Why?

> Are there any instructions near the works advising the visitor to interact with the work? Why do you think this is? Could a gallery or museum keep a work like this on permanent display? What issues might there be as a result?