

runway

an australian contemporary art magazine

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runway

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Cover and facing page: Anastasia Zaravinos, *Christina Superstar Re-enacts Her Death*, 2008, photograph.



Editorial

DANIEL MUDIE CUNNINGHAM

In *High Art* (Lisa Cholodenko, 1998) career driven Syd (Rhada Mitchell) works as an assistant editor for *Frame*, a highbrow New York art magazine. Fate brings her together with Lucy Berliner (Ally Sheedy), a Nan Goldin-esque photographer whose practice long ago lost out to a co-dependent relationship with Greta (Patricia Clarkson) and their shared heroin addiction. Syd brings Lucy to *Frame* with a pitch to revive Lucy's career. It works and Syd is promoted to 'editor', allowing her to work closely with Lucy on the cover feature. In the process they fall in love. When they go away for the weekend, Lucy sets the camera on auto-timer and takes intimate photographs of them snuggling in bed, the morning light streaming through the room. The photos make the cover, Lucy dies from an overdose and Syd's career is assured, however momentarily compromised by the blurring of that invisible thread separating life and art.

While editing issue 13 of *runway*, I kept thinking about this film even though I hadn't seen it in a decade. Perhaps it had something to do with being assigned 'editor' of an art magazine. Should I have an affair with Anastasia Zaravinos, the artist I commissioned for *runway's* cover? Well it couldn't hurt—it might make us both art stars. Surely no one will die because, well for starters no heroin was involved, and by theming this issue around death, I figured the 'real' experience of death was safely quarantined within the realm of representation, where the image's reproducibility distances us even further from the real.

I've long suspected that we make art to understand our own death, no matter how unconscious the impulse might be. Representation rehearses death, framing us—captured, still and forever memorialised, however betrayed by the finite flesh, blood and bone transporting us through life. This idea is no better illustrated than through photos, where according to Roland Barthes, 'there is always a defeat of Time in them: *that* is dead and *that* is going to die'. Elvis Richardson and Ron & George Adams have contributed vernacular photographic images that depict scenes or people from a past inevitably eclipsed by death. Conversely, the dead comes alive in Cherine Fahd's meditative photo series *Spirit Sticks*, where a kicked, otherwise inanimate stick is imbued with a paranormal life force. The mixed media paintings and installations of Matthew Hopkins reek of paranormal forces that, according to Ella Barclay, are an existential verification that life yields 'no master plan'.

In her essay on *memento mori*—the reminder of death, often articulated through the image—Marise Williams refers directly to Barthes's conception of the photo, along with other scholars, literary figures, and contemporary artists like Julia deVille, as examples of how death in visual culture is represented along rhetorical lines. Like photography, collage speaks to death. The reconstitution and recycling of existing images, otherwise destined for the trash, makes collage particularly transformative. The deliberate strategies of selection and placement are often at odds with the fierce immediacy of collage, indicated by the trace of the artist's hand. From roadside grave tributes to the integration of cut-up images in the AIDS quilt as far-flung examples, collage has an urgent memorialising quality evident in the work of Michael Butler, Carla Cescon and Pete Volich.

The associated horror, fear and terror of death is pervasive in contemporary art, as seen in the work of Jelena Telecki, Drew Bickford, Cash Brown, Clinton Garofano and Leo Coyte. The superstitious links between death and the number 13 are brilliantly articulated in the creative writing of Ross Murray, commissioned to commemorate issue '13' of *runway*, and a perfect fit with the politically charged paranoia of Locust Jones's drawings. Violence and brutality is implied in Luke Thurgate's charcoal drawings of men's faces caught in various states of orgasm—proof that a 'little death' never hurt anyone.

While the 'dead' theme makes this edition of *runway* more literal than past issues, the approaches to death are anything but homogenous. Ranging from the spiritual to the macabre, the contributions herein breathe new life into how we comprehend the inscrutability of death.



Above: Daniel Mudie Cunningham, *High Art Stars*, 2009, photograph.



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FEATURES



Matthew Hopkins: Sick Shaman

ELLA BARCLAY

So I was thinking about doing all this stuff about minds and brains and what makes bad thoughts and where they come from ... I was thinking about your brain within your mind and your mind within your brain and it's like this kind of infinity, an infinite brain:mind resource.¹

Elephant Man death masks. Elephant Man death masks with penis features. Elephant Man death masks with penis features in the style of a 1930s Surrealist Men's health magazine. Elephant Man death masks with penis features pictorially representing the keen rationalism of the Elephant Man intellect while also speculating that the keen rationalism of the Elephant Man intellect is in fact just another mental mask and beneath this, the Elephant Man hidden intellect is really just as deformed mentally as the Elephant Man physique. Let's have more of this. Seriously.

Matthew Hopkins's multi-disciplined art practice has a series of running themes: deformity, perversion, shrines, tombs, death masks, big noses, dreams, Mickey Mouse, all of which is presented through sculpture, painting, video, sound, text and drawing. Endearing, chortle-stirring and approachable in tone, his

work is lurid, funny, delightful, fundamentally disconcerting and sometimes a bit scary.

Take the first exhibition I saw of his: *Dinner with Hop* at Firstdraft Gallery in 2005. There was a series of drawings, one I wish I had bought of a woman with uneven tits, and some dinner plates fitted out with food—bangers and mash with peas and a roast chicken, all made with chewed chewing gum. 'Some of your mates are real sickos, Ella', was the only remark my dad made when viewing the exhibition.

Flash-forward to my second encounter with the artist's work, in 2007, also at Firstdraft: *The Future Pt.2: Getting Used to the Future. Version 2.2—A Bogus Infinity*.² I'll let the artist explain it himself:

Placed in the gallery were painted clay socks and a sign explaining that the socks were in fact psychic bull terriers, psychic guards of all the work in the gallery. The idea with that work is that you can place them in any gallery around anyone's work, not just mine, and sort of create this attack on the viewer for having bad thoughts about any of the work.

Above: Matthew Hopkins, *Rebellion 2*, 2005, chewing gum, bubblegum, ceramic plate, Glad Wrap. Photo: the artist.



I remember going to the artist talk. Hopkins instructed us to turn our backs to him and face the socks. Then he said we were about to hear the sound of bull terriers attacking us for thinking bad thoughts about any of the art in the gallery. As the sound began, I turned around to see what he was doing, and I saw him, on the floor, hunched over his laptop, the microphone close to his face, swinging a tennis ball inside a sock, back and forth, like a pendulum.

I've done sound things with the voice and some effects/processors that have been exercises in gurgling and moaning. Like what you have in a lot of ritualistic chanting, using your voice as a summoning, but also, like a death rattle.

This sound was a drone of choking, confusing cackling grey noise, seemingly pulsating from the clumsily painted terracotta socks scattered across the gallery floor. It was a heavy, debilitating, charged sound, like screaming across all frequencies. The sparse concrete floor and white walls seemed to seep doom and dissent with all the fury of a David Lynch freak-out scene. The sound stirred a response consistent with my response to all of his work: I chuckled nervously under my breath, and worried whether anyone around might hear me and think I was on acid. French Economist Jacques Attali speaks about the consuming powers of noise, about its ability to cause physical pain, to command authority, its role in

ritual sacrifice and its symbolic power in representing death and the unknown:

Since it is a threat of death, noise is a concern of power; when power finds its legitimacy on the fear it inspires, on its capacity to create social order, on its univocal monopoly of violence, it monopolises noise ... before the world there was chaos, the void and background noise. In the Old Testament, man does not hear noise until after the original sin, and the first noises he hears are the footsteps of God.³

When Hopkins fills the space between the viewer and the clay socks with sound, he charges them with authority, which is interpreted as the bad energy outlined in his instructional sign. He lets in chaos, the void and background noise to transform a potentially silly work into something daunting, like joy to anxiety, like harmony to dissonance.

Flash-forward again to Hopkins's show, *Know Brainer* at Gallery 9 in Darlinghurst (December 2008). A strong theme in the show is deformity, perversity and the Elephant Man. Deformity, Hopkins says, is also an interest in 'de-forming', which explains the Elephant Man portraits executed in various styles that reference Surrealism, Cubism, German Expressionism and *Ren and Stimpy*.

Above: Matthew Hopkins, *Painted Clay Socks (as Bull Terriers)*, *Psychic Physical Pups* (detail), 2007, acrylic, air drying clay, wood. Photo: the artist.



Matthew Hopkins, *Death Mask for Joseph Merrick #4*, 2008, acrylic on board.



What draws me in is a work not unlike his bull terrier-sock installation: a huge spider-sock installation, its legs spanning over a metre each. Fabricated from unfinished pine and simply nailed together at the joints, its body is an amorphous coiled conglomeration of expander-foam with two beady little eyes. On each leg is an old gunky sock. Humorous and terrifying, it's accompanied by another sign—a set of assembly instructions that are casual and jokey, until step four, where the viewer is warned of a web of 'bad vibes', invisible, and spun from all the hate, deceit and lies a person may encounter and experience in their lifetime.

Signs are a recurring motif in Hopkins's practice and instruct the viewer to imagine something existing between you and what you encounter; something else in the room with you that cannot be seen; something to accompany the playful, naïve forms you behold; something not necessarily good.

In a weird way, it's making fun of conceptual art, 'cos conceptual art is kinda making fun of everyone, so it's like a double attack ... [But] the thing with this work is, it's more than just a conceptual joke, it's more than like 'oh, ha-ha, imagine this is this', you know? I think, with using text like that, in telling you to imagine something, you can't avoid [imagining] some sort of image, it's like, 'this is not what this is, but is it?'

These instructions are a kind of forced aura. It charges the work, a mental-mind trap. The viewer cannot help but imagine bull terriers or a web. It's an invasion. Menacing. This taps into a shamanistic approach to art, one that sees art as the accumulation and presentation of symbolic objects that are transformative and magical. This is something that Hopkins has always been interested in representing—shrines, tombstones, death masks—but it's not necessarily about these powers existing within the work to convey something righteous or absolute: 'I definitely adopt this kinda clumsy Shaman, a sick Shaman, a worn-out Shaman', he notes.

Know I depicts a large web. It has a face with eyes that resemble droopy D-cups with west-looking nipples, Mickey Mouse ears, and a big, clownish frowny face made out of black and white plasticine. The web, true to the warning expressed in the giant spider assembly instructions, is filled with words like NO.

I thought it could be interesting to measure how many times in someone's life they'd have to deal with the word 'no'. Like do a really concentrated effort on no, know, know way, no hope.

This is a web of bad vibes, a pictorial representation of all the conflict we will experience—all the bullshit, the cheating, the crap. While Hopkins says we can't see it, we'll inevitably get caught up

Above: Matthew Hopkins, *Dying and Being Tickled to Heaven by God*, 2008, acrylic on board. Photo: the artist.
Facing page: Matthew Hopkins, *The spider*, 2008, mixed media. Photo: the artist.



in it, and that inevitability, like the chaos, the void, the background noise and death, brings on a sinking feeling. We are reminded of our own decline. In his essay *The Case Against Art*, noted anarchist writer John Zerzan asserts, similarly, that the birth of the symbolic world was the beginning of the end:

Art turns the subject into object, into symbol. The Shaman's role was to objectify reality—Art's ability to symbolize direct human emotion accomplished both ends. What we were led to accept as necessity, in order to keep ourselves oriented in nature and society, was at base the invention of the symbolic world, the fall of man.⁴

Bleak truths symbolically relayed by a sick, tired shaman, as could be the case in the art of Matthew Hopkins, demonstrate an awareness of this above observation. With overpowering noise, bad gags, plasticine faces, instructional notes and a deft-clumsy sensibility, Hopkins presents us with the most daunting truth one could possibly be presented with—there's no master plan, no great teleology, we're all axolotls nosing our way over the slippery cold stones of life at no particularly interesting point in the time-space continuum.

I'm reminded of my 21st Birthday. My parents took me to the French restaurant Tabou on Crown Street in Surry Hills for dinner. I ordered the brains. I still remember the sensation of them in my

mouth, the crunchy breadcrumbs enrobing this kind of grey, soft, amorphous, mush. As it dissolved on my tongue, I thought, 'I'm eating thinking'. The infinite, unquantifiable mind:brain resource.

You think there's like a moment or something when you go 'Oh, THIS is the thing that's going to drive me forever'. And for me, that thing is just this kind of confused logic.

-
1. All quotations from the artist are from an interview conducted by the author at Artspace studios, Woolloomooloo, 24 November 2008.
 2. This exhibition was reconfigured for the Helen Lemprière Travelling Art Scholarship exhibition at Artspace in 2008.
 3. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1977), 27.
 4. John Zerzan, 'The Case Against Art', in Adam Parfrey (ed.) *Apocalypse Culture* (Port Townsend, Washington: Feral House, 1978), 120–121.

Mourning Half Begun

MARISE WILLIAMS

If the plastic arts were put under psychoanalysis, the practice of embalming the dead might turn out to be a fundamental factor in their creation.¹

I'm thinking of having my cat stuffed when she dies. It's just a thought, a way of preparing for the inevitable, unbearable as it is. At the moment she is a *memento vivere*, a reminder of life and the pleasure of living. I show a painterly, posed photograph of her in lectures to explain visual semiotics and the difference between denotation and connotation as defined by Roland Barthes in his essay 'Rhetoric of the Image'. Will I continue to use the photograph when she is dead? I doubt it. The personal connotations of future grief and loss already fill me with dread. I know I will be completely, bewilderingly bereft when she is gone. Students always want to know my cat's name and how old she is. Can you imagine? Present: Mitzy. 12 years. Future: Mitzy. Deceased. Although, a posthumous showing might prove useful in illustrating how the context of viewing affects connotation and that meaning is determined by how we contextualise images. It would also elucidate the present and past, death and life, temporal collapse that occurs when we gaze upon images of those who are no longer living that Barthes writes of in his landmark book *Camera Lucida*: she is dead and she is going to die.²

If I were to take a photograph of her when she is taxidermised, same pose and location, would you be able to visually distinguish the difference between life (*memento vivere*) and death (*memento mori*)? Here lies the trick of photographic truth. A photograph is a still image; a moment in which time and movement is eternally suspended. Is there something akin to death in this, the capture of a scene of life? Barthes certainly thought so. To be exact, my cat when taxidermised won't appear to be dead because she will have been preserved in a life-like appearance and attitude; like a natural history exhibit. Her skin, soft, silky fur and sharp claws will remain though her flesh and dear self will be gone. This physical, tangible presence of her will be enough of a consolation. I will still be able to see her and touch her. There could be some phenomenological shortcomings. She won't be warm and purry. My selfish desire is disturbing, gruesome and terribly sentimental. It is also an act of love.

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines *memento mori* as 'A warning or reminder of the inevitability of death, esp. a skull or other symbolic object'; a Latin phrase, literally "remember to die", i.e. "remember death" or "remember that you must die", appears to be recorded earliest in English sources' in the mid sixteenth century. A *memento mori* is a noun, a thing, an object. It's tangible and real; a sign with a rhetorical gesture that asks us to contemplate our own mortality, to remember we are mortal. The idea of my cat stuffed is not this kind of *memento mori*—my own mortality does not concern me. It is the mortality of the one I love that guides my intentions to remember her, to preserve the memory of her tangible, living, breathing presence. A *memento* has a use relating to memory, the present and the past, yet *memento mori* is a reminder and a warning of what is to come which connects the past and the present to not only future events but a future state of being, or non-being.

Even though my cat is now very much alive and purring, her photographic representation is at all times a *memento mori*. Susan Sontag wrote: 'All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability'.³ Barthes's *Camera Lucida* is one long melancholic riff on photographs as *memento mori*, as ritualistic objects of remembrance and the terrible truth of our own mortality. The elegiac motif of the photograph in Barthes's hands is death and mourning, sadness and longing. Photographs have the power to haunt us, in a ghostly and irrational, otherworldly way in that they document the past in the present and articulate the future. In 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', André Bazin wrote that photography has an embalming, preserving ability: 'it embalms time'.⁴ Photography then, is a kind of visual, indexical taxidermy that prepares and preserves the skin of reality and the present.

The Tate Collection Glossary online entry for *memento mori* states:

A *memento mori* painting or sculpture is one designed to remind the viewer of their mortality and of the brevity and fragility of human life in the face of God and nature. A basic *memento mori* painting would be a portrait with a skull but other symbols commonly found are hour glasses or clocks, extinguished or guttering candles, fruit, and flowers. Closely related to the *memento mori* picture is the *vanitas* still life. In addition to the symbols of mortality these may include other symbols such as musical instruments, wine and books to remind us explicitly of the vanity (in the sense of worthlessness) of worldly pleasures and goods. ... The *vanitas* and *memento mori* picture became popular in the seventeenth century, in a religious age when almost everyone believed that life on earth was merely a preparation for an afterlife.⁵

All *memento mori* are Romantic artefacts with a gothic sensibility. Their leitmotif is horror and melancholia; their aesthetic experience, the sublime. They work on our imagination and our emotions. In their imagery of death and decay, the natural order of life, *mementos mori* invoke terror and express the deep sorrow attending loss; darkness and the infinite. Death is vast and terrible because it is mysterious and unknown. Black is the hue of *memento mori* and mourning, the remains of the dead body its signifier *par excellence*. After the death of her beloved Prince Albert in 1861, Queen Victoria instigated an official period of national and personal mourning. Hers lasted forty years, until her own death in 1901. Black crepe dress and jet mourning jewellery became fashionable, the appropriate expression of deep grief. Queen Victoria's adherence to a *memento mori* stylishness was her way of keeping love alive in her own heart and mind, and in the public's memory; a sign of devotion. Victorian mourning jewellery not only represented the dead but often included physical traces of the deceased such as a lock of hair contained in a locket, ring, pendant or brooch; or the hair of the dead, dried and woven into elaborate mourning scenes and symbols for jewellery. Post-mortem photographs as personal portraiture keepsakes also became popular in the 19th Century despite their expense; with bodies posed as if sleeping or alive. This seems a grisly practice





to us today, one we relegate to the realms of forensics and war photography.

Melbourne-based artist, jeweller and taxidermist, Julia deVille keeps the *memento mori* motif alive. Her *disce mori* motto, 'learn to die', inspires her fascination with the dead, the skulls, bones and skin of once living animals and birds, as ornamental keepsakes, mourning jewellery and fashion accessories. Her leatherwork in gloves, spats and boots reminds us that our everyday shoes and handbags are also treated animal carcasses, no different to a skunk stole or fox tail belt. While this preoccupation with animal pelts as decorative pieces, taxidermy as art materials and jewellery, may seem a paradox for a committed vegetarian, there is an ethical confluence in her practice. DeVille's work honours the animal and its death no matter how insignificant. On her website she states:

I consider my taxidermy to be a celebration of life, a preservation of something beautiful. I feel strongly about the fair and just treatment of animals and to accentuate this point I use only animals that have died of natural causes.⁶

An exquisite fragility informs deVille's treatment of small domestic animals as precious objects. She restores to the broken a quiet, strange gothic dignity - a beautiful iridescent blue kingfisher wing brooch, a flattened black bird worn on a black ribbon necklace, a sparrow brooch, mouse cufflinks, a featherless baby bird pin. The familiar and everyday is estranged and fetishised—a still born kitten, a partly-feathered bird skull with a jewelled eye. The

cat skin rug, rat skin rug with skeletal tail, and mouse mounted as a hunting trophy brooch are a wry inverse of the barbaric 'sport' of big game hunting practices. *Sympathy* (2008), in which a taxidermised yellow bird gazes upon the skeleton of a bird like itself, is a self-reflexive contemplation of mortality. As this ornithological taxidermy exhibit restages the message of *memento mori* for human viewers, we are reminded that humans are the only species with a sense of their own mortality and a fascination with the dead. The most disturbing and unsettling of deVille's works is *The Anatomy of a Rabbit* (2008). Its life-like preserved appearance is undone by its silver skeleton chest section and front paws; making apparent the fact that a taxidermised animal is eviscerated in the act of its preservation. Amidst deVille's morbid and macabre natural history reliquary, the human skulls and cross bones, which are the traditional symbols of *memento mori* seem less frightening, less grotesque, in their expression of the brevity and fragility of life.

Passion, imagination and love entwine in deVille's expression of honouring the inevitability of what comes to all living creatures. My intention to have my cat stuffed is underpinned by the same sentiments. And sorrow, a sense of mourning half begun.

The taxidermy dilemma for me is the pose. Curled up asleep? Sleeping was a typical pose for post-mortem photographic portraiture. Sitting up nicely all Egyptian-cat statuesque? Or comfortably Sphinx-like? In John Irving's novel *The Hotel New Hampshire* (1981), the eldest brother Frank experiences the same quandary when the family's old black Labrador retriever, aptly

Above: Julia deVille, *Dragon Mouse*, 2007, mouse, sterling silver. Photo: Terence Bogue.



named Sorrow is taken to the vet and ‘put to sleep’. As a budding taxidermist, Frank experiments with a number of statuesque attitudes in an attempt to capture the living essence of Sorrow, to ‘fix him’. It’s grisly but an act of love, a Christmas gift for his sister, Franny who loved Sorrow the most. The fierce attack pose is a complete disaster—Grandad drops dead of fright when Sorrow falls out of the closet. Sitting up, grinning is the dead dog’s final pose. When the family fly to Vienna, split across two separate flights, the youngest brother, Egg carries Sorrow with him, on his lap on the plane. This Sorrow is a precursor to mourning, a warning and a reminder. Sorrow floats and his already dead body directs rescuers when the flight carrying Egg and his mother goes down over the Atlantic. In Irving’s tale, the beloved family pet becomes a fetish for grief, loss and love; he bears the burden of *memento mori*. My first experience of death and its deep *tristesse* is inextricably bound up with the loss of a budgie and a guinea pig.

As I write, I realise that I am a collector of *memento mori* moments from books and films and real life. In Evelyn Waugh’s *Brideshead Revisited* (1945), and the Granada Television adaptation (1981), it is the very small and fleeting mention of Sebastian Flyte’s elephant’s-foot waste-paper basket that signals the beginning of his decline. The epigraph for Book One, *Et in Arcadia Ego* identifies the novel as a religious *memento mori*. Guernico’s seventeenth century painting of the same name, which translates as ‘I exist even in Arcadia’, features a young man gazing upon the *memento mori* motif of a human skull.

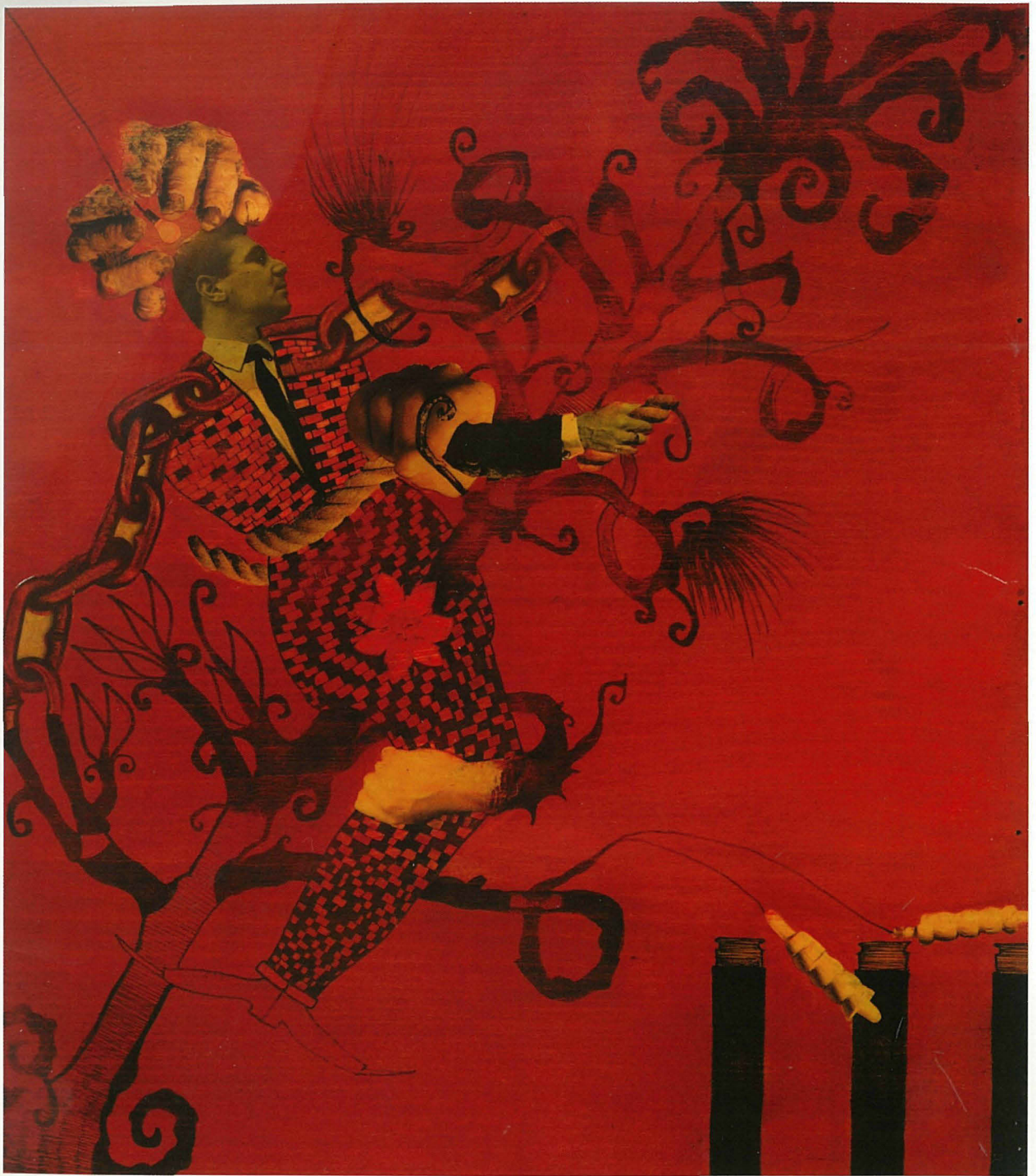
In the Canadian film *Margaret’s Museum* (1995), Margaret (Helena Bonham Carter) opens a gruesome *memento mori* museum dedicated to the memory of her brother, grandfather and husband who are killed in a coal mining accident. Her memorial exhibits are their body parts in jars—the lungs of her husband and grandfather, her brother’s penis.

The most memorable and thrilling of all literary *memento mori* is what lies behind the black silk veil in Ann Radcliffe’s gothic novel, *The Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794). Driven by her curiosity, the heroine Emily faints in terror on her first encounter with the sublime and dreadful spectacle of what she perceives to be the decaying body of the late mistress of the castle Udolpho, murdered by the evil Montoni. By the end of the novel, the mystery is dispelled as nothing more than a wax effigy, a *memento mori* designed as a penance to reprove excessive pride.

As it reminds us of the one truth, the one guarantee of life, *memento mori* restores to us a sense of humility and our own vulnerability, which is why it is distasteful for some and fascinatingly beautiful for others. I am one of the others.

1. André Bazin, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image’, in *What is Cinema?* Vol. I. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967), 9.
2. Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Cape, 1982), 95.
3. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), 15.
4. Bazin, 14.
5. The Tate Museum, <http://www.tate.org.uk/collections/glossary/definition.jsp?entryId=162>.
6. Julia DeVille, <http://www.juliadeville.com>.

Above: Julia deVille, *Trophy Mouse*, 2006, mouse, jet, gold. Photo: Terence Bogue.



Michael Butler: Beyond the Bold and the Beautiful

CHRISTOPHER DEAN



One of the great things about being an artist these days is that you don't have to be a disciple of any particular style or theory. The battle lines that divided artists into distinct camps throughout much of the 20th Century were often associated with the obligation that required individuals to sign up as either conceptualists or formalists. In this way the position underpinning an individual artist's work as well as the structure of their career was determined by the false choice of being classified as either theoretically bold or aesthetically beautiful.

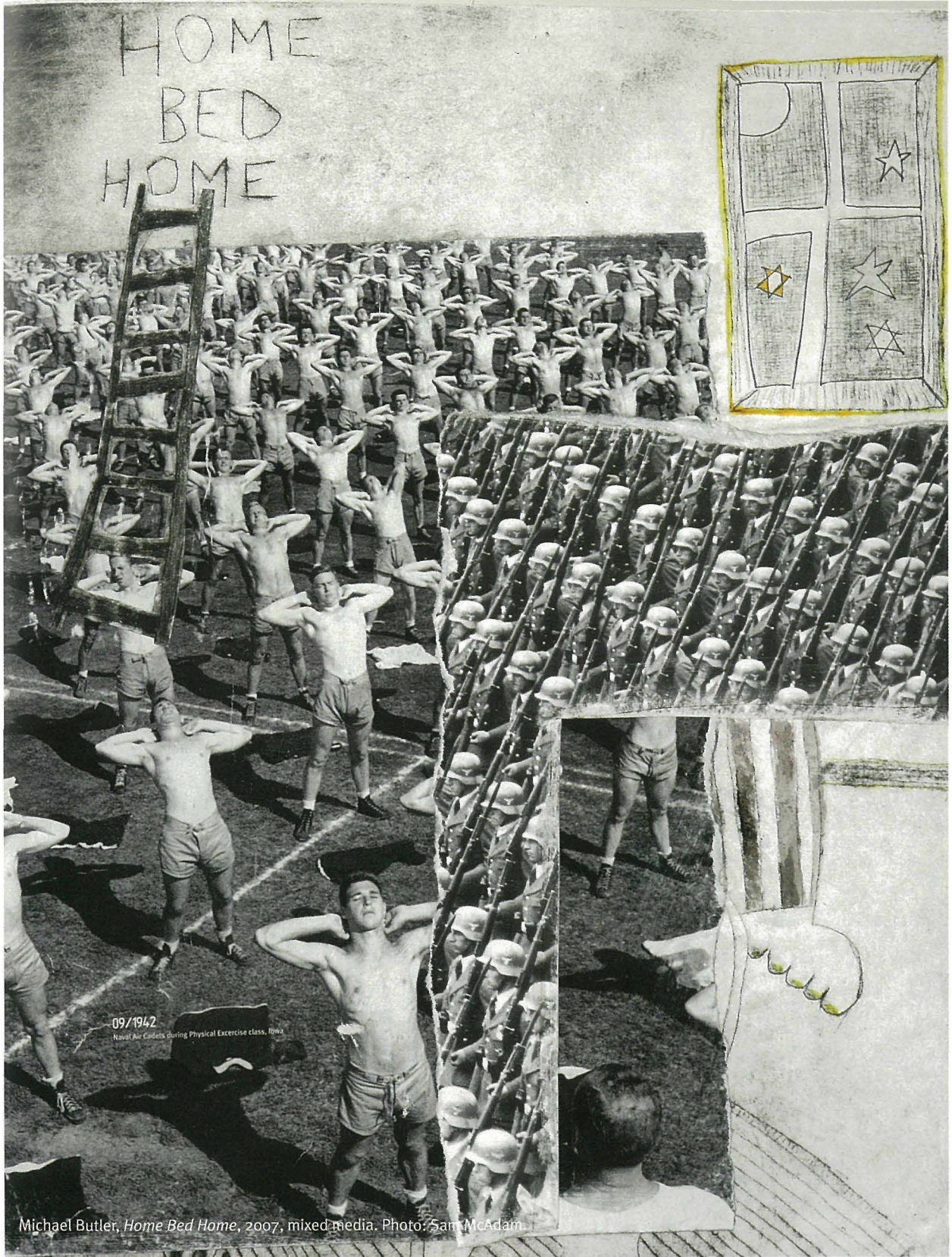
Michael Butler's work is as bold as it is beautiful. By simultaneously drawing upon an aspect of social and political commentary that is often associated with the most sophisticated examples of Conceptual Art and by combining it with the fetishistic emphasis that Formalism placed on style and finish Butler has produced a large body of work that exists outside of the accepted spectrum of mainstream contemporary Australian art.

Some of the broader issues that Butler has explored include a multitude of interrelated variations on the themes of death, sex and religion. Individual works such as *Death's Head* (2007) depicts the silhouette of a Nazi soldier's profile penetrating the cranium of a yellow skull. This Janus-like image floats on a sea of decorative biomorphic shapes that resemble the microbes and bacteria that Kandinsky fastidiously studied as inspiration for his late works. The complex layers and conflicting meanings of *Death's Head* set it apart from the predictable

Above: Michael Butler, *Death Bed*, 1996, mixed media. Photo: Sam McAdam.
Facing page: Michael Butler, *George*, 1999, mixed media. Photo: Sam McAdam.



Michael Butler, *Blade*, 2006, mixed media. Photo: Sam McAdam.



explorations of whimsy and faux adolescent angst that has set the local art market ablaze over the past decade. The true horror contained within this work is that it was inspired by the artist's journey to Auschwitz-Birkenau death camps. The power of this image is that it communicates this experience through the creation of an emblem of carnage.

For many years Butler's medium of choice has been collage. Unlike any other medium, collage enables artists to appropriate and recycle a wide range of material with a sense of urgency and immediacy. The type of artist who has been historically attracted to collage usually works within the parameters of strict social and economic limitations, for example during a recession. At times the formal character of collage can appear to be visually claustrophobic, interestingly this physical property frequently reveals a parallel form of social and cultural claustrophobia that is commonly expressed through the issues explored by artists using this medium. In this way Butler's work reveals a direct connection between the medium of collage as a form and its relationship to the cultural messages that characterise the content of the work.

The history of collage contains the work of many artists who could be considered as being Butler's fellow travellers. On one level it is apparent that Butler's compositions have been inspired by the work of earlier collage artists including Hannah Höch. Within the context of Australian art, Butler's images also relate to the political work of more recent collage artists such as Arthur McIntyre. Although separated by both time and place Höch and McIntyre used the medium of collage for similar conceptual and formal purposes. In Höch's case, the medium was employed to develop a spontaneous analysis and critique of the rise of Fascism in Europe during the 1930s. In McIntyre's case, this medium was used as a device to piece together an unstable and fractured subjectivity during the age of AIDS.

Historically the greatest cause of death and genocide can be attributed to the rise of ideologies and the production of totalitarian organisations and regimes that follow in the footsteps of these misguided theories. By inclination and design artists such as Butler who specialise in the medium of collage have developed a tradition of art making that operates most effectively when intercepting the fatal strategies of fundamentalism. This is what might be called the social function of collage.

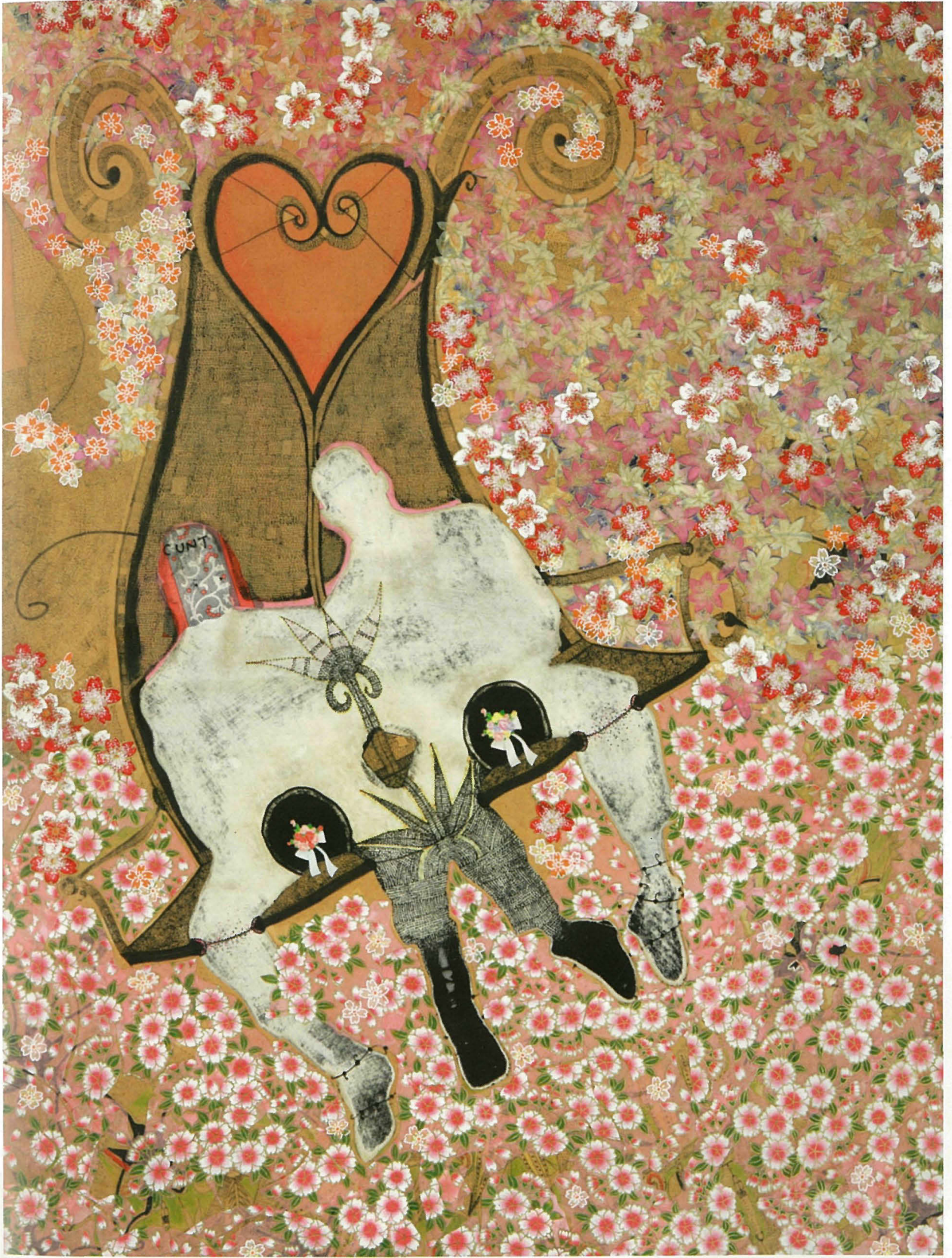
An example of this approach is to be found in Butler's work titled *Home Bed Home* (2007). This work depicts two superficially conflicting elements. The left-hand side of the composition contains rows of shirtless, exercising American GI's that have been arranged in a horizontal format. In contrast the right-hand side contains vertical columns of Nazi soldiers photographed during a military parade and this formation of men has been constructed in a pattern resembling a geometric abstract painting, emphasising their depersonalised machine-like precision. It could be suggested that this image is a pictorial representation of what is now commonly referred to as the clash of fundamentalisms. An optimistic reading of this dark image might suggest that the implicit homoeroticism contained within the subject matter of the collage is its only redeeming quality. However even this optimistic interpretation is short lived in that it could also be suggested that its homoerotic content in itself reveals yet another ideological layer. Butler's final solution is a ladder that holds the potential for the viewer to escape this scene or alternatively come to the realisation as suggested by the title of the work that maybe it's all just a bad dream.

Other works such as *Blade* (2006) focus on the most enduring form of ideology, namely Christianity. This strangely haptic image makes explicit references to the tradition of Dada by juxtaposing the crucified figure of Christ alongside two apparently life-sized disposable razors. These vertically positioned razors complete the formation of Calvary. To enhance the agony of this image psychedelic colours and a lone floral Jesus provide an additional sense of drama. This work forms a bridge connecting Butler's more reductive images to his more decorative ones. However even in his more decorative works the articulation of social and political themes continue to simmer beneath the surface.

A work such as *Swing* (2007) is less panoramic in its examination of historical ideologies; yet, although this work places a greater emphasis on traditional aesthetics it is anything but nice. Looks can be deceiving and apart from the two male figures sitting side by side on a floating love seat, crowned with a large heart shape amidst a field of pink and white flowers, the foreground contains a used hypodermic syringe. Perhaps this is the point where love and death intersect. The explicit homoeroticism contained within this image can be linked to Butler's earlier works that focussed on the relationship between homosexuality and death. *Death Bed* (1996) depicts what can be best described as a bunch of emasculated erect penises grouped together on a single bed. The exquisite formal rendering of this image belies its political content. As its title suggests, this work acts as a memorial to the thousands of virile young men who died of AIDS. The photographic representations of penises contained within this collage come from what is commonly referred to as 'vintage porn'. These appropriated images date from the 1970s through to the nineties, and sadly many of the individuals contained within this collage would have been part of the generation of gay men who died from AIDS.

Throughout his career as an artist Butler has obsessively refined his use of the medium of collage. By connecting an ongoing study of social and political issues to traditional aesthetics he has managed to sugar-coat a very bitter pill. This position is most evident in his biographical works that discuss the life and death of individuals from history. Butler produced a work in 1999 titled *George*, which is an example of this genre. *George* refers to Francis Bacon's long-term boyfriend George Dyer who committed suicide on the eve of Bacon's Paris retrospective. Through this earlier work Butler has not only seized upon a moment from art history but has also entered into a dialogue with his own empathy for Dyer.

Over the past decade the exploration of themes connected to cultural theory including violence, sexuality and death has gone into remission, replaced instead by a series of stylistic melodramas that have taken the form of market driven aesthetics. In a rapidly changing cultural and economic climate Butler's collages hold the potential of being a prediction of things to come.





The Number Made Flesh

ROSS MURRAY

[T]he reality of death has also been diluted for modern man by the very machine that brings death and violence into his homes every night—television.¹

I now fear death and have lost all my courage.²

The Death Channel—Channel 13—is really a laugh-riot. Logo so completely clichéd with stylised coffin used as the number ‘1’, the ‘3’ comprising curving bones all laid over a watermark fanged skull. Yawn.

On screen: A guy in a dark purple pinstripe suit, straight as a board, coldly shaped nouveau hairstyle, clutching a steaming corporate brand coffee, a vox pop microphone stuck under his chin. He smirks before answering the question asked—‘No. I don’t believe in superstition’. Looks down the camera, points a finger still holding the coffee. ‘But if you do, for godfuck’s sake, don’t be standing next to me when the next half-witted sociopath with a need to purge his repressed mummy-dearest childhood traumas decides to go on a spree killing day of carnage at the local Westfield. That would really fuck up my day’.

I quickly flick channels as my daughter comes running in, curling pigtailed bouncing in the way they should. She’s gaunt, pale-faced, doesn’t like going out in the sun. I didn’t much either at her age. I don’t let her watch Channel 13. Not yet.

‘Dad. What’s a c-c- ...’

I’m really worried about her stutter. ‘Slowly honey’. It seems to be getting worse, though I’m finding it hard to tell without a definitive survey on the actual consonant sounds and the amount of times she’s what you’d call ‘sticking’, coupled with the length of time of those so-named ‘sticking’ events before the word deigns itself ready to enter the world. Simply, I am commenting on it only by my own intuition and anecdotal evidence. Knowing this, I sometimes wonder whether it isn’t her at all but a hearing deficiency on my part where my reception faculties have a kind of hesitation response to her words.

‘C-c-c ...’ She’s trying so hard, face frozen, brain stuck, like she’s choking on the letter itself. ‘C-c- corpse’. Finally sneezed out, fast and violent.

‘A corpse?’

‘Yeah’.

‘It’s a dead body, honey’.

Eyebrows come together thinking, perplexed. ‘Oh. Is that all?’

‘Yes. But you don’t have to worry about things like that for a while yet’.

‘Hmm’. Nothing fazes my little girl. She trots away, back to her room, which is strangely devoid of normal girls-her-age related paraphernalia, being filled with only what would be described by most as the ‘bare essentials’, that being: bed, chest of drawers, wardrobe, etc., etc. They’re all white. She painted everything white. It’s, quote—glaring—unquote, in there.

I wonder where she got that from anyway, that being, the interest in identifying corpses. Hmm ...

I flick back to Channel 13. There’s no actual programs on the Death Channel. Just a succession of images, jump cuts, flashbacks, memory hits.

On screen: the cracked bodies of 13 defeated rebel angels, spiked, sliding slowly down barbed ebony stakes outside the gates to the underworld as a warning against failure.

It was 13.13pm on June 30, Day of Altered Forms, the 13th day of the secret month, Triskaidecember, embedded within the 'perfect' 12. I was watching television like I've been doing since it was invented, and she just *appeared*. There she was. I don't mean she turned up, like, orphaned on my doorstep like a Christmas puppy or something. No, she actually just faded into reality *right before my very own eyes*. I mean, even though I haven't moved from this chair for decades now, even though I've grown so fat I can hardly recognise myself, (quite simply, I'm *massive*. I'd be regarded by almost 100% of accredited medical practitioners as 'clinically' morbidly obese. This makes me laugh. More of a chuckle if I preferred to be precise. I could never be *morbidly obese*), there was never any doubt in my mind that she was mine. Omens and symbols like that, vis-à-vis dates and times, state their case very precisely.

On screen: Judas, betrayer, joins the Last Supper, the 13th man to the table of plenty. Jesus sips from the chipped clay goblet that becomes the fabled Holy Grail. Days later he hangs near naked on a leaning hardwood cross, his skin, muscle, sinews slowly ripping around the coarse iron spikes hammered through his hands and feet. And the blood, the blood ... It is a Friday. He is the image of death that in the 2000 plus years hence, millions will wear proudly around their neck, hang over fireplaces, dinner tables, and marriage beds.

When eternity ended, I was given form, first as a whisper, a vague collection of swirling molecules. Hard to remember it was so long ago. I'm outdated. I'm being replaced. She'll become me. It's inevitable. Not how I am now. A bloated, excessive cliché, full of overused symbols. Like the Death Channel. I never wanted to be like this. Totally enslaved. It's not my fault. I'm trying to keep up, but I'm obsolete.

On screen: Some woman surrounded by reams of paper filled with manic scribbings, equations pages long. Along every wall are ready-to-fall towers of yellowing newspapers stacked to the roof. She paces, paces, paces the floorboards showing through the worn carpet, a track walked many times, the only part of the apartment not covered in the effluvia and trivial detritus of a common life. 'Prime numbers ... prime movers ... primitive ... ' Chews her fingernails which are already stubs, drawing blood. Scratches her forehead. 'Reality warping mind-tricks? Mine tricks? Nine tricks? Nine ticks? No, no, no ... what kind of LSD infused vodka voodoo is this?' Stops, slaps herself in the face. Again. Again. 'Am I the reincarnation of 13 itself? A herald for the new coming age of number theory?' She scrounges through the papers, grabs a long sheet, brings it up to touching her nose. Myopic vision. 'Everything points to it. 13. Sixth prime number. Six. The number of man. Atomic number of aluminium. Atomic. Our number's up ... ' Then with a look of sudden enlightenment, eyes widening, softly, breathily. 'Ka-boooooom ... '

On screen: the well-worn atomic mushroom cloud footage followed by Oppenheimer mouthing his famous string of words, recalled from the Bhagavad Gita: 'I am become death, the shatterer of worlds'.

It's all too fast for me I can't follow the barrage of scenes smashed together. I can't tell which is fiction, ficto-reality, docudrama or some other cobbled or repackaged attempt at genre creation. My little girl can though. She stares for hours at the television, wide unblinking eyes, sometimes drooling. I can't help but find it a disturbing spectacle in itself, the way she just ... absorbs ...

On screen: spectacular pre-dawn scene, all across France members of the Knights Templar are dragged dead and dying, 'arrested', from their homes, taken to shit and corpse stinking dungeons, flesh sliced from their faces and fingers, eyes burned with iron poker, until they confess to pissing on the holy cross, denying Christ, and finally worshipping the devil, accepting his black, viscous, corrupting seed. It is Friday 13 October 1307.

Numbers. Days. Dates. They mean nothing. Superstition and hearsay. Meaning invested into arbitrary items. Sure, they were symbols and dates etc. that indicated she was mine, but that wasn't my idea. I had *nothing* to do with it. Every day is Friday the 13th for me. And her. The symbols of language, writing making thought into form gave me something to cling to. Gave me substance, form, flesh. Fed and bloated on the symbols of society. The association creates a bond, like atoms grabbing together.

I think I'd much rather have kept my svelte figure. I yearn for that primitive life when I was nothing but a feeling, comforting blanket, no fear, a presence. There was an intimacy with me, a connection. I wasn't a friend, but I wasn't feared. It was a journey. Now ... look at this ... shit ...

On screen: Zombie-toothed preacher holding up the tarot death card, XIII, right into the camera. Wielding the wide-hook scythe, the black hole eyes stare out of the skeleton's skull on the card, somewhat sardonic grin. 'Death! He is coming! Do you want to be here when he comes? He takes no prisoners! He holds no-one's hand! He is swift and terrible! Be prepared!'

Swift and terrible? Not anymore, at least, not most of the time. So much rhetoric and spin.

'Behold the 13 evils in the heart of man!'

This guy is whipping himself into the proverbial 'frenzy', pivoting on one shiny-shoed heel, he pulls out a telescopic pointer and camera pulling back to reveal a whiteboard, he points to a list.

'Evil thoughts! Adultery! Fornication! Murder! Theft! Covetousness!'

He pronounces each with lascivious relish.





'Wickedness! Deceit! Lasciviousness! The evil eye! Blasphemy! Pride! Foolishness!'

'Only 13?'

She snuck up on me, standing right in my blind spot. 'I'm pretty sure there's a lot more than that'.

Who am I to argue?

There's something undeniably creepy about her. Sometimes she just watches me, her eyes like remote control buttons. I catch her standing in the doorway of her room, half in, half out, gazing at ... something, a one-eyed horizon stare like a machete wielding child soldier. There's a glint of metal up her arm. Zeitgeist structure. She is Death version 2.0. Sleek and streamlined. Faster, brand new uptake, off the charts, 'out the wazoo'. No bugs. She'll grind the old symbols into dust. Society recreates its own images, projects its own images of death.

She will continue and I'll pass back into the tribal collective. There's one thing that I hadn't counted on though, which is so supremely stupid, and at the same time so outrageously arrogant of me, that it's undeniably infuriating. Something which hadn't even crossed my mind, because I thought I'd 'live' forever.

I'm afraid.

I don't want to die.

Now I wonder how human symbolic consciousness that engendered my fleshy existence has archaically, hideously, managed to seep into and infect my being? Where am I going to go? Where will I be? How is it that death is afraid of his own demise? Am I afraid of me? This is *doing my fucking head in!*

When I turn the TV off the only grinning skull I'll see is the one reflected on the dark, blank glass of the screen. The illusion of sovereignty, of control, that I've entertained all these long, simple years, has been ripped right fuckin' out from under me. And I don't like it. Why her? *Why her? This sour, pale-faced bitch. It's not fair!* What does she know about *anything?*

'Dad?'

'Yes, honey'.

Mouth breathing noisily, she walks over and climbs up my fat rolls, kneeling on the area that is now a squishy combination of chest and gut.

'W-w-w ...'

'Easy, now ...'

She rocks side to side on my ample gut, trying to get comfortable and balanced. 'W-wh-wh ...'

Before I even realise I've opened my mouth, it's gone. *'For fuck's sake! Just speak!'*

Shit. You shouldn't talk to kids like that.

Her head pitches down, question immediately erased from her mind, eyes darken, granite frown, a look that could spontaneously combust a wet cat. Then—*WHACK!*

The tiny brute *slapped* me.

Her head, like a statue, never flinched. Gazing hard at me still, deliberately and slowly, she enunciates each word clearly. 'Fuck. You. You *fat shit*'.

I forget she's not a kid. She's not even human. Flesh, yes. Human, no. She is death come again, the continuation of the human fracture in consciousness. The old symbols mean nothing to her. She puts her hand over my eyes, and it's suddenly very, very dark in here. Her thumbs knead my eyeballs with a certain deadly pressure. I'm so fat I can't even get my arms to my chest to stop her. I'm not prepared. 'No, please, honey ... not yet ...'

Suddenly she pulls her hands away, and smiling innocently, displays open palms. 'Not yet what, Daddy?'

Swift and terrible ...

She kisses and hugs me. She's absorbing everything all too fast, all too well.

Mean. She's gonna be mean.

Dedicated to the memory of David Foster Wallace, 1962–2008.

1. Darryl Reaney, *The Death of Forever: A New Future for Human Consciousness* (South Melbourne: Longman Cheshire, 1991), 17.
2. *Epic of Gilgamesh*, cited Reaney, 92.

Facing page: Locust Jones, *Oblivious to Oblivion* detail from *Peak Oil Babies*, 2008, ink on paper. Photo: Vicky Browne.



Wake Up, You're Dead!

SCOTT DONOVAN interviews CARLA CESCONE

Scott Donovan: You've said the world is full of people who don't realise they're dead. Are you talking about actual zombies or someone you might encounter at IKEA or an MCA fundraiser? How can you tell the difference?

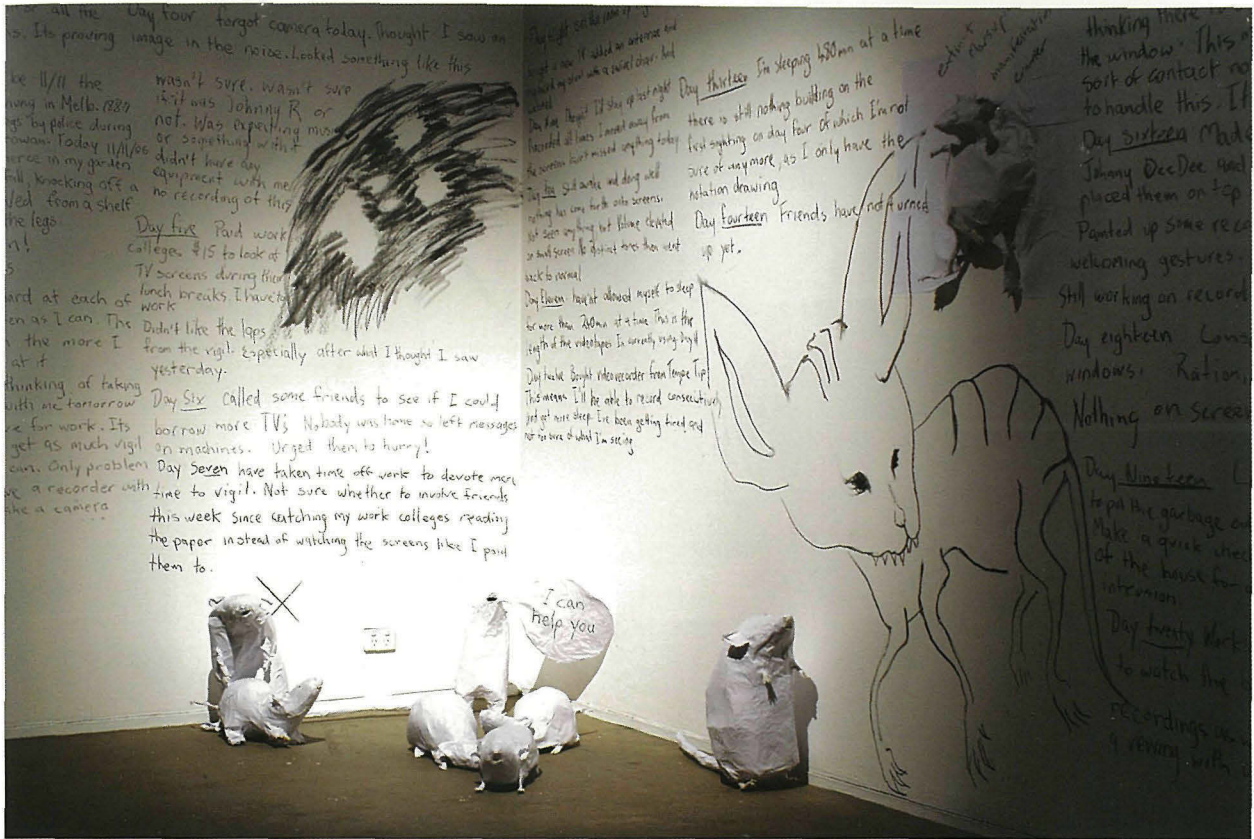
Carla Cescone: It all started five years ago, when I had to do some work through the community facilities section at a local council. I had a conversation with a man who worked there (and it was the first of many, unfortunately) that was totally one-sided due to his lack of exchange. It wasn't that he was dominating the conversation but it was painfully obvious that he wasn't listening, and he was repeating the same things pretty much over and over. A frozen expression stuck to his face the whole time, only his eyes slowly moved here and there. He never smiled or laughed. I felt a little overwhelmed and zapped of energy after that first meeting with him. I never knew that someone with absolutely no communication or people skills could manage to hold on to a responsible position in a work place that dealt with the public. So he became my prototype for this theory of a type of death people have while they are still breathing, a death of feelings or something like that. And it was in the same work place, and I wonder if it's by sheer coincidence, that I met the caretaker who

was a self-proclaimed 'ghostbuster'. I ended up spending most of my working days going down to the basement listening to the caretaker's latest ghostbusting escapades, and marvelling at how someone so alive seeks out the dead while upstairs there was someone so dead seeking out the living. So I believe in zombies, just not strictly adhering to George A. Romero's manifestation. Thinking more along the lines of the traditional mind/state altering Voodoo trance making its way into a contemporary, capitalist and overmedicated consumerist society. Making themselves at home inhabiting a world where money and power is the god. And where souls are sold to an ideal of accessibility and convenience.

SD: I had a similar neo-zombie experience with an ex-flatmate's mother – listening to her was like falling into quicksand and wishing you could sink faster. The ghostbusting caretaker sounds a lot more interesting. What did he get up to and was he operating in an official council capacity?

CC: No, his true skills were ignored, there were too many lights, locks and chairs that needed repairing. He was quite often placed in the role of afternoon tea man where he would have to go get the milk and cakes. But in the basement he told me about this really difficult job in the Blue Mountains. A house filled with really angry spirits. There was one that would sit in the car with the lady who resided at the house. She didn't know it, but when her friends happened to see her driving down the street they would ask her questions about the gentleman in the passenger seat. Anyway, he reckoned that he needed a team for this one. I asked him if I

Above left: Scott Donovan, *Dead Composer Mask*, 2008, digital collage. Above right: Scott Donovan, *Dead Conductor Mask*, 2008, digital collage.



could be a member of the team but he said I didn't have enough experience. I knew I had none, so I didn't push it. After that I went home and started work on a film called *Witness*.¹ I started thinking of the power of energy, in particular the body's energy – how it can make you feel you could do anything. In the film I thought about ideas associated with reanimation. You know, not letting go of something's potential just because it's dead. Bringing it back to life, infusing it with energy in some way. I had footage of an extremely large rat that died in the parking lot next door. So I decided to use that, I used basic visual effects to make it look like you could see its life force energy.

SD: As you know I live above a psychic, an elderly Scotsman who makes a living communicating with the dead and predicting the future. He doesn't seem very prescient in his own life, such as knowing when my water heater was about to explode and flood his place downstairs or when he is going to lose his front door keys for the millionth time, but clearly must have some special powers because he's always busy and has quite a few regular clients. I mention him because you have also tried to contact the dead – most notably the Ramones – using various means such as drug-fuelled trances, hunting for subliminal messages in television static, and even by Australia Post.² The exchange, as with your zombie council worker, has always been one-sided – a deafening silence from beyond the grave. I was wondering if you think this kind of metaphysical inquiry is worth pursuing or if we are doomed to grope around in the dark forever while Scotsmen get rich on our insecurities?

CC: Anything is possible, isn't it? I think I get caught up in everything to do with the rituals or special skills people may have, ways of getting information you may never get otherwise. There is so much conflicting stuff said and written about what happens when we die. Scanning electronic visual phenomena in the work about the Ramones was an accessible way to look for signs of life after death. I thought of it as an experiment, you know, get a sense of what it feels like to be a devoted fan and try the experiment while sleep deprived and also with the aid of stimulants. My friend used to like reminding me that I was looking and listening to the sound of the beginning of everything. He'd say, 'Carla, you know white noise is the sound of the Big Bang'. My reply would be that it's a good place to look for dead musicians. So I'm not sure what the outcome of these experiments will be, there is a lot of work to do, but I think we should make a pact, if one of us dies the other should be given a sign.

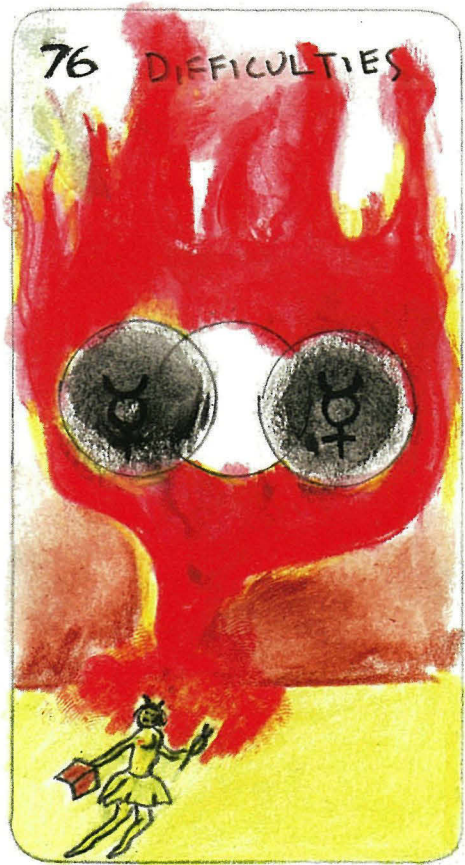
SD: Well, I do like the sound of the Blue Mountains ghost so maybe I'll come back as a phantom back-seat driver. What's your rego number?

1. *Witness* is hosted at <http://www.5219093.com.au>
 2. This installation was called *Night Crawlers & Shape-shifters: 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones* (Artspace, 16 March - 14 April 2007).

Above: Carla Cescon, *Night Crawlers & Shape-shifters: 100 days and nights in search of the Ramones*, 2007, various media. Photo: Heidrun Lohr.



Above: Carla Cescon, *criticism*, 2008, watercolour and collage.



Above: Carla Cescon, *difficulties*, 2008, watercolour and collage.

DEAD

Bad News

JELENA TELECKI











ЛОШЕ ВЕСТИ



untitled: (brain dead)

CLINTON GAROFANO





Spirit Sticks

CHERINE FAHD













Dead Mothers Club

RON & GEORGE ADAMS



EVERY and All

I

HAVE

KEED

IN MY

whole Entire

LIFE

Every animal I have killed in my whole entire life

PETE VOLICH



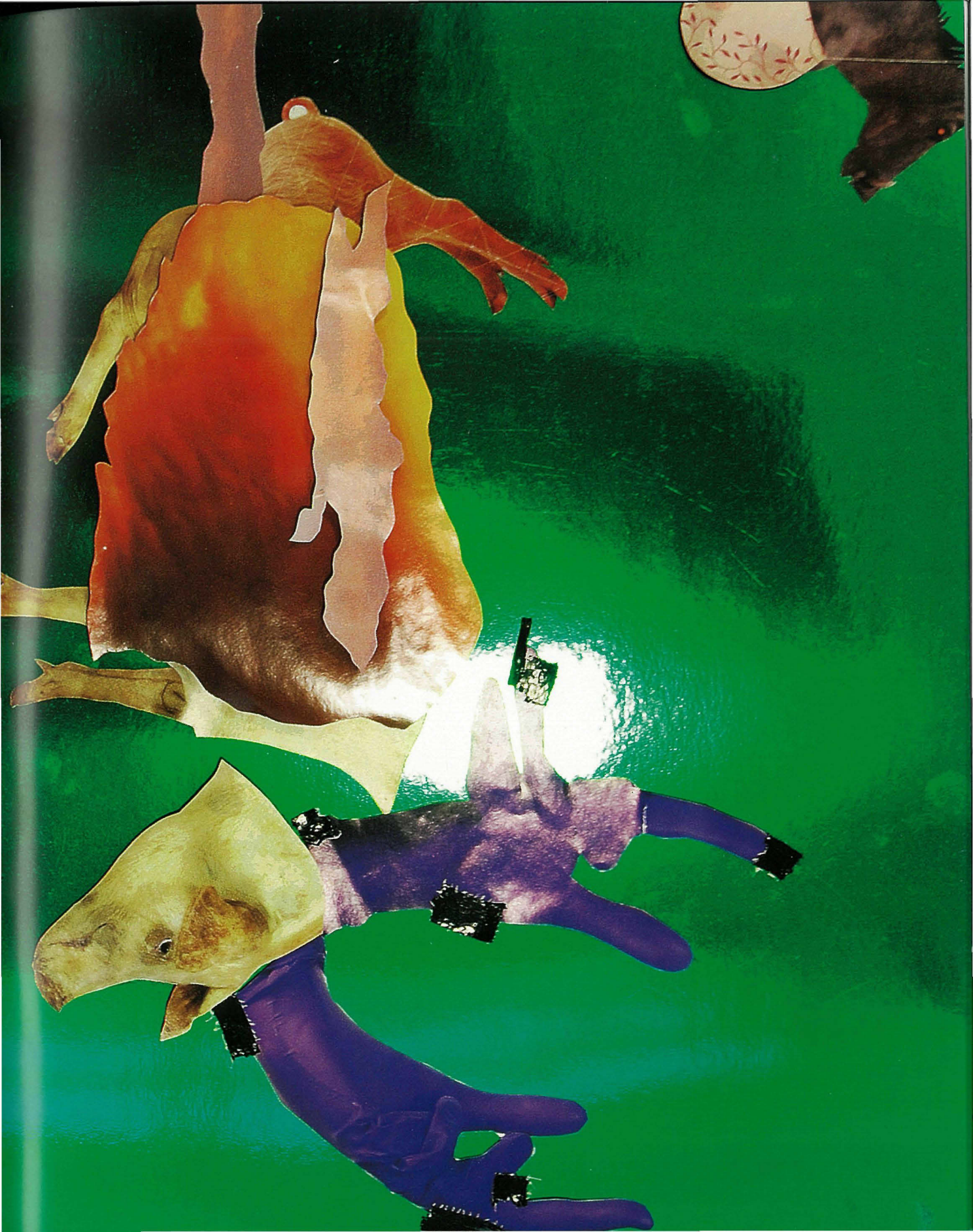














Slide Show Land

ELVIS RICHARDSON



5/24/64
WEDDING ANNIVERSARY
SUPPER, of Mr. H.B. ELSBERG'S



(OUR HOME SERIES) 6
MADE IN U.S.A.

C-44 20 3/17/68
THE ENTREE: LOBSTER
THERMIDOR, WITH



STUFFED BAKED POTATOES
& FRESH ASPARAGUS.
1/50 of 22 25B FLASK

C-44 2/14/69
GEM-MOUNT #48
VALENTINES DAY DESSERT,



for Mr. H.B. ELSBERG'S

17 1/21/68
H.B. ELSBERG'S BIRTHDAY
ANNIVERSARY DINNER,



(PREPARED BY DOROTHY E. ELSBERRY
WHILE HE WAS TRAIL RIDING)
C-44 1/25 of 22 25B FLASK

1 1/21/70
JACK'S
69th BIRTHDAY DINNER



C-44 MADE IN U.S.A.

17 3/17/70
DOROTHY'S BIRTHDAY DINNER
AND CAKE - 64 YRS. OLD,



1/50 of 16-22 25B FLASK
C-44 MADE IN U.S.A.

C-44 3/17/73
OUR 1973 ST. PATRICK'S
DAY DINNER, ON



DOROTHY'S BIRTHDAY
JUN 73

C-44 1/21/73
JACK'S BIRTHDAY DINNER




(DOROTHY COOKED THIS ONE)
JAN 73 20

15 4/14/74
OUR EASTER DINNER,
(2 CORNISH GAME HEN + DRESSING)



THIS YEAR. (SIMPLE,
BUT NICE - JACK
C-44 COULDN'T EAT MUCH)


7. **MADE IN U.S.A. 9-3-55**
 JACK & SHOSHONE



SQUAW VALLEY, CALIFORNIA
 "LET'S GET GOING, BOY"

MADE IN U.S.A. 2


9/27/58
 H. B. ELSBERG, & STORMY WEATHER.
 STORMY'S FIRST MOUNTAIN TRAIL RIDE
 TRMARBAC PINES, CALIFORNIA



K135; NO FILTER
 1/2 c f 2.8 - F4


MADE IN U.S.A. 2

9/16/63
 JACK & SHONEY, IN
 THE PASTURE.




MADE IN U.S.A. 17

C-3 6/8/68
 H. B. E. & SHONEY, IN
 THE RIFFLES,




FORDING THE AMERICAN
 RIVER,

C-3 7/18/71
 2 JACK & SUNNY,




AFTER A SUNDAY
 MORNING RIDE

C-44 12/13/72
 JACK, LEADING SHONEY
 TO WATER, THIS



BITERLY COLD MORNING,
 RIME FROST OVER SNOW,
 JAN 73
 1/10 c f 2.8

11/12/72
 JACK AND SUNNY, JUST



PRIOR TO THE AUBURN LAKES
 TRAIL RIDE
 NOV 73

C-44 1/23/73
 SUNNY AND JACK



GOETHE PARK
 JAN 73

Carrion

DREW BICKFORD



KILLING FOR COMPANY

THE MAN WITH THE CANDY





BROAD ARROW WASPS

THE BLACK MAGIC BAR





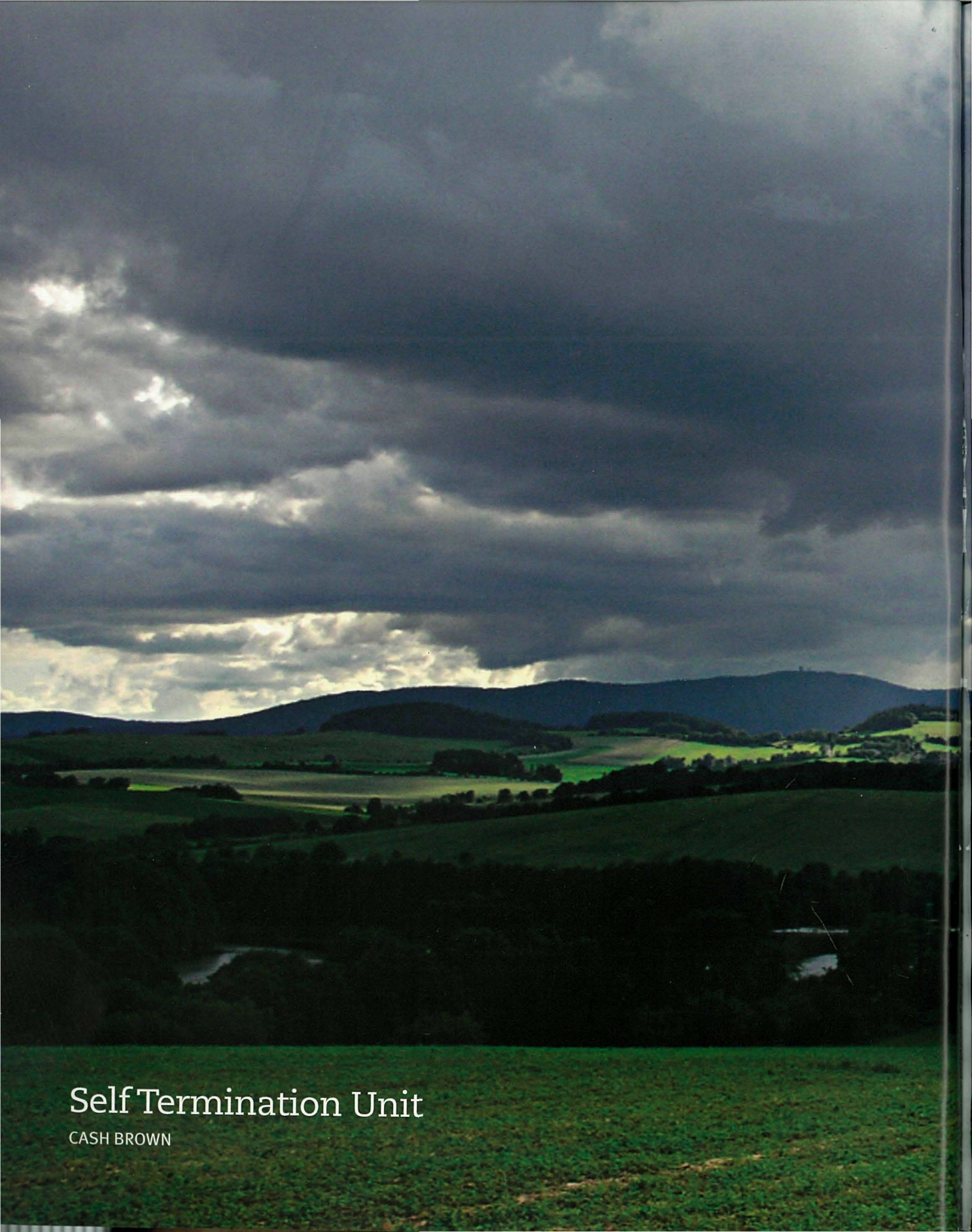


Little Death

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Are you looking for a painless method to end your life? **Put yourself out to greener pastures.** The choice is yours, and your choice should be STU, the efficient alternative. STU provides discrete, affordable and effective Self Termination Units for your comfort and convenience.

Introduction

When dedicated to the task, suicide will not be a difficult task. At STU, we aim to make your decision as comforting and natural as possible. Other than deciding on the method of self termination, the practical preparation for suicide includes accepting one's demise and how it will be effected. At STU, we believe it is very important that the person is taken into consideration, because any 'sure-fire' plan to self terminate can be disrupted by fear, uncertainty and self-deception.

We have devised scenarios for the typical experiences of people who:

- are sick and dying and want an easy way out
- are depressed and can't find the motivation to go great distances
- are disgusted with life and want a way out that isn't too painful, messy or likely to fail
- want to die for any reason and are afraid of being seen as a coward or judged as evil
- want to use their suicide as a means of achieving revenge on some society, group or person

STU is the safe, effective, painless and convenient solution to your existential dilemma. Each unit is fitted with a sensor that automatically detects when the termination is complete and sends a message to our mobile pick-up units who will discretely move the unit to your nominated venue.

There is no need to pre-arrange a casket for your funeral as the STU is a readymade coffin and available in a variety of options from biodegradable eco-pods and traditional hardwoods to custom finished chrome units.



We have a range of units to suit every budget and taste.

Making an Informed Decision

If you have a psychological imbalance that is causing your suicidal impulses, we recommend you seek medical help. At STU, we counsel people about the most efficient means to terminate life. However, we are strongly opposed to preying on the weak-minded or disabled who haven't a grasp on their personal will sufficient to make an informed and mature decision on their own.

I continuously want to kill myself. I have tried but have never been successful. I do not know what to do ...

Our trained consultants help you evaluate the following questions:

1. How capable are you of making an informed decision that will affect the quality of your life?
2. How reliable is your emotional resolve?
3. Are you being *driven* to certain actions, or are you definitely *choosing* them with careful deliberation and resolved composure?
4. How much deliberation time is reasonable for you?

Fear of pain is an important reason to hesitate when contemplating self termination. We don't want to become centres of pain—we want to terminate the pain. Experimenting with pain-play and overcoming dread and fear can be valuable. We begin to understand that it is a temporary response to intense change. Eventually it stops being the obstacle it was and together we can decide on suicide with a clear will. The main elements to consider when making an informed decision are access, efficacy, speed and painlessness.



Our luxury unit, ideal for the larger client.

How does STU work?

Our Self Termination Units are fully self contained gas chambers combined with an already made, customisable funerary casket. Simply choose your preferred model online after discussing your needs with our compassionate staff. The unit is conveniently delivered to a location of your choice in one of our discrete unmarked vans. When you are ready, you simply lie down comfortably, pull the lid closed and press the 'start' button. Our patented oxygen deprivation, inert gas system painlessly takes care of the rest while you rest.

The principle behind the effectiveness of STU is oxygen deprivation that leads to hypoxia, anoxia and death within minutes. Deprivation of oxygen resulting from carbon dioxide creates panic and a sense of suffocation (the hypercapnic alarm response), and struggling even when unconscious, whereas anoxia in the presence of an inert gas, like nitrogen, helium or argon, does not. Close contact with an enclosed inert gas is lethal because it flushes oxygen from the body, but released into the open air, it quickly disperses, and is safe for others. It is neither flammable nor explosive.

STU automatically reduces oxygen levels inside the unit to below 6%, and keep it down long enough for brain death to occur. At atmospheric oxygen levels of 4-6%, coma occurs in 40 seconds. Its patented pressure regulator controls the rate of gas flow into the unit. Should you change your mind, simply push the lid open.

The basic principle of auto-euthanasia by anoxia was first described in the book *Final Exit* by Derek Humphry in 1991 (although the newer technique using inert gases to reduce the time taken to die to about five minutes was first discussed in the third edition of his book). The original methodology using helium was devised by NuTech, a small group of engineers, physicians and divers assembled in 1998 under the leadership of John Hofsess, Philip Nitschke, and Derek Humphry. Their methods involve clumsy plastic bags, gas cylinders and velcro straps and complicated instructions.

Dr Nitschke says a suicide device can prolong the lives of the terminally ill by making them feel in control of their future. 'Giving people access to a feeling that they're back in control of this issue is actually a way of prolonging life. It may seem paradoxical, but what we find is when people feel that they're back in control, they're less likely to do desperate things in desperate ways and people are always doing desperate things in desperate ways and ending their life.

At STU, we have taken all the guesswork out of your exit.



Buddhist style funerals can be arranged.

Does it hurt?

Nitrogen asphyxiation has been recommended as the ultimate humane method for criminal executions. 'Killing with Kindness' by Stuart A. Creque (*National Review*, Sept. 11, 1995) describes accidental nitrogen asphyxiations where victims never realised what was happening. Our units have undergone a rigorous testing process using porcine subjects and human volunteers with 100% success.

Legality

The STU is legal because none of the pieces of equipment used in its construction are restricted from sale.

'It's hard to see how the Government could possibly restrict access to common cylinders, and certainly there's no way they could restrict access to (the gas)'.

'But really it's the knowledge of how to do it that's so important, it's a technique-dependent method and people have to know what they're doing'.

'Here at STU, we are providing a public service – by empowering the sick and elderly with knowledge'.

'It's consistent with good medical practice to allow people to know exactly what their options are'.

When you are ready, dial our confidential toll free number **1800 SELF TERM** or check out our website www.selfterminationunits.com.au for more information on unit styles and our pre-paid funeral plan services.

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Self Termination Units Pty Ltd
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Evil Happens

LEO COYTE





REVIEWS



Live Lanes—By George!

MARK BROWN & SOPHIA KOUYOUMDJIAN

Tanks, Tetris and formation dancing hit the streets of Sydney in a collective public manoeuvre to shake up the CBD grid for *Live Lanes—By George!* One element of the annual 'Art and About' event showcasing contemporary art and culture in Sydney's CBD, *Live Lanes* attempts to reinvigorate pedestrian level activity with ephemeral works in the city's 'forgotten' laneways. Inaugurated in 2007, *Live Lanes* 2008 invited metropolitan-based Artist-run initiatives Reef Knot, Peloton, Firstdraft Gallery and Gaffa Gallery to curate and develop a series of works in public spaces.

The overall 'Art and About' 2008 program was a seemingly loose assemblage of newly commissioned projects as well as existing exhibitions and events throughout the City of Sydney region. Its mission articulated as 'bringing art to our streets and public spaces' possibly suffers from this amalgamation, which creates a homogenisation of agitprop arts activity and blockbuster arts events. Additionally, this barrage minimises actual impact (you cannot see everything) and heightens mythic perceptions of an abundance of cultural activity.

In isolation, *Live Lanes* was so chock-a-block with happenings that we were a little confused by its scope. However, *Live Lanes* did attempt to raise awareness and consumption of alternative arts practice by engaging the investigative methodologies of ARIs. *Live Lanes* deservedly acknowledged that ARIs patrol and explore the boundary lines between alternative and mainstream culture by creating innovative fringe activity. There were varying degrees of success and failure in this methodology, so we have focused on three projects and located them within a meditation on their relationship to site, in an attempt to provide conceptual cohesion to the project's myriad elements.

Walter Benjamin, in his seminal and unfinished literary work *The Arcades Project* (written between 1927 and 1940), attributes the allure of smaller street-level spaces within a city matrix to the unfolding elements of chance and discovery. From these dense intimate spaces—repetitive shopfronts, people and signage—emerges a dream-like montage of unending narratives. In these spaces of intimacy, artist Adam Norton strategically deployed

Above: Adam Norton, *Tank Project*, 2008, three armoured personnel carriers, drivers and Sydney City CBD. Photo: the artist.

three 11-tonne Saracen armoured personnel carriers for the *Tank Project*, under the auspices of Peloton. This was a deliberate attempt to confront and confound CBD goers on their own turf. The city's laneways became waypoints of a Situationist patrol taking advantage of the daily timing of pedestrian movements and city events. Rounding a laneway corner, rushing to a meeting or deadline, the viewer's personal security was confronted by the discovery of Norton's camouflaged heavy metal objects.

The tanks operated as reminders that, besides the bombing of Darwin and the submarine attack on Sydney Harbour during WW2, we have not experienced urban warfare on our streets and the domination of an invading political or military force in modern Australia. Whilst some viewers admitted to having initially suspected a clever marketing ploy, their scepticism quickly gave way to unease as they attempted to confront the possibility of military intervention.

Norton's tanks were, however, displaced aliens amidst polished buildings (not shattered bullet and shell peppered facades), discovered by office workers and tourists (not casualties or armed personnel in conflict). In this tactical arena, the 'tanks' were no longer offensive or defensive and unlikely to fall victim to roadside bombs or enemy armour. Instead they became dormant characters in a confronting narrative of area control. 'I felt one tank would be a novelty', said Norton, 'two would be a pair, but three would be a military event'.

There is an immediacy to Norton's project that indicates an understanding of the necessity to simplify an idea when expressed in public space and evacuate the work of subjective idiosyncrasy in order to challenge the social and spatial dynamic of a place. Norton's project, born of a Ballardian interest in the core meaning and fallibility of technological machines, reminds us of the pure function of weapons of war. Norton's tanks were compressed into small laneways creating a claustrophobic placement of something that didn't quite fit.

Compression was an effect also utilised by the Gaffa Gallery artists Kelly Robson, Ella Barclay, Adrienne Tasker and Ben Backhouse for *One More Go One More Go*. A series of large luminous cubic shapes—adapted from the retro computer game Tetris—were embedded above pedestrian height in Abercrombie Lane. Their smooth Perspex surfaces mimicked the city's grids of reflective windows and designer signage. Though visible attachment systems undermined the illusion of the Tetris blocks literally 'dropping' into the laneway, the haphazard flickering cubes transformed the laneway into a space invaded.

The simulated attempt to fill Abercrombie Lane with Tetris cubes seemed to have failed due to its verticality and chasm-like spatial compression. Removed from their native 2D digital dimension and thrown into the CBD 'playing field' they simply did not fit, like remnants from a failed abandoned game. The Tetris bricks became wedged like large chunks of rubble dislodged by a wrecking ball from above.

Unlike the meticulously planned Melbourne CBD grid with its interconnected laneways, Sydney's CBD grid developed in a haphazard manner. The minimal laneways that once existed were merged, severed and erased in a twenty-year pattern of site consolidation that emerged in the late 1960s. This was epitomised

by modernist high-rise developments such as the Australia Square building, which was simply built over small street networks. Many mourned the loss of these intimate spaces, in particular the Rowe Street arcadé of specialty retail shops and fine-dining cafes that were demolished to make way for the MLC Centre. This transformation created an incongruity of scale between street-level pedestrian experience and the growing vertical CBD grid.

One More Go One More Go also critiques the construct of repetitive nine-to-five gridlocked existence. As workers log out of their office networks and head for home, they enter a new level of the daily grind game that starts again the following day. Even downtime can be spent gaming in a 'solitaire' moment in one's cubicle.

Reminiscent of a high school talent quest, *Step by Step*, choreographed by Jessica Olivieri and Hayley Forward, transported amateur dance from the bedroom and local community hall to the Curtin Place steps of Australia Square, as part of Firstdraft Gallery's contribution to *Live Lanes*. Deliberately under-rehearsed and performed by an all-girl dance troop called The Parachutes for Ladies, the moves of *Step by Step* mimicked the city's syncopation and its office workers in contrast to the terminal velocity of a Tetris game gone wrong.

Occurring on opening night after Mayor Clover Moore's public address, *Step by Step* seduced onlookers with our secret affection for pop cultural flashbacks of chart topping boy band beats and formation dance. Set to New Kids on the Block's 1990 hit-song *Step by Step*, the gold Lycra-clad dancers moved through a series of synchronised sequences as they symbolically ascended and descended the steps of success and failure.

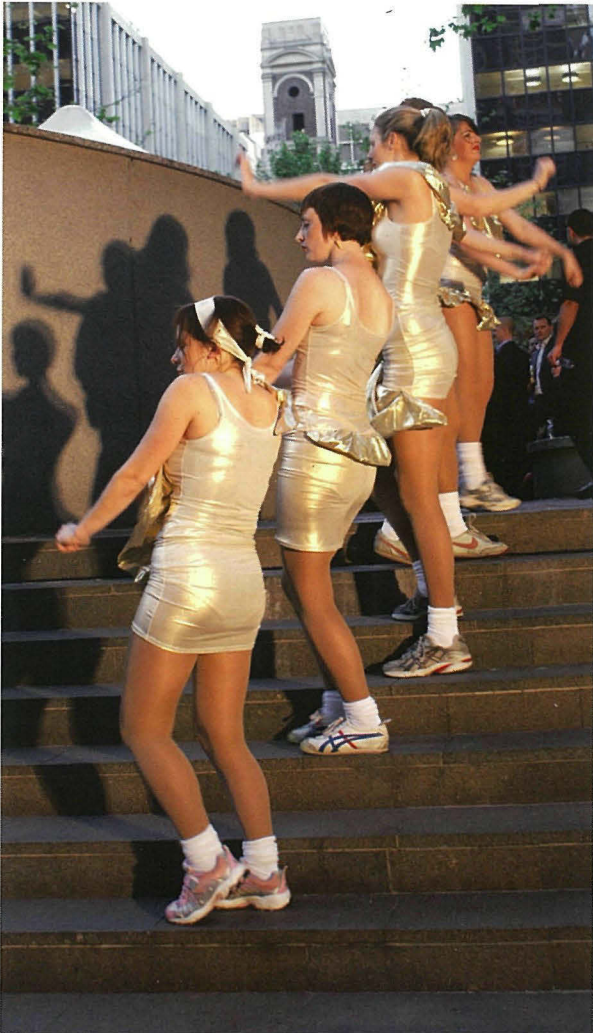
Imitating the construct of the ladder-climbing power-dressing office worker protagonist, the performers seeming disinterest in exacting synchronicity and timing playfully interpreted competitive corporate power and ascension. Should we relinquish living for a career or get 'footloose'? Inspired by the kaleidoscopic choreography of Busby Berkley's musicals, *Step by Step* appealed to our latent amateur aspirations to perform in public—a secret desire for young girls experiencing the joy and horror of tap, ballet or Jazzercise formation dance classes. Syncopation, repetition and movement paralleled the rhythm of the city's grid. This singular choreographed moment mimicked the larger composition of the city's choreography—traffic lights, cars, pedestrians—and was ultimately subsumed by it.

Live Lanes attempted to reignite the public's engagement with the laneway as a space of discovery and interaction. Occupying the metaphorical ruins of a labyrinth lost, *Live Lanes* began to rekindle a nostalgic return to these intimate laneway spaces.

Live Lanes—By George! was exhibited in various Sydney laneways from 4 October 2008–31 January 2009. The exhibition featured artists from Sydney Artist-run initiatives Reef Knot, Peloton, Firstdraft Gallery and Gaffa Gallery.

Facing page left (above and below): Jessica Olivieri & Hayley Forward with The Parachutes for Ladies, *Step by Step*, 2008, performance. Photo: Jessica Olivieri.

Facing page right: Kelly Robson, Ella Barclay, Adrienne Tasker, Benjamin Backhouse, *One More Go One More Go*, 2008, coloured acrylic, aluminium framing, am radios, Christmas lights. Photo: Takeaki Totsuka.





Dream Merchant

JOSEPHINE SKINNER

Slicked white hair, dapper shirt and slacks, arm languorously draped with cigarette dangling between fingertips. His look says casual yet confident. It also says that the nude striking an erotic pose beside him is not the first and won't be the last. Framed against the backdrop of beautifully manicured gardens she seductively clutches her breasts as if pointing them at the camera, and you note that he is probably old enough to be her Grandfather.¹

Is it wrong to draw a parallel between Australia's self-proclaimed 'genius' artist Norman Lindsay (1879-1969) and Playboy founder Hugh Hefner? Either way the connection was in print long before this review. In 1967 Playboy featured Norman Lindsay's images in an article on 'Art Nouveau Erotica' describing his work as reacting to the uptight anti-sexual values of Victorianism and 'the most outstanding and erotic of this hothouse genre'.² With turbans, tweaking nipples and sexual positions, this exotica erotica is more akin to the Karma Sutra than traditional fine art. No wonder in the 1940s, US officials mistook sixteen crates of his work as pornography and burned them all.³

Walking the line between Art Nouveau and fantasy fiction Lindsay's etchings and watercolours depict men to be ugly at best, grotesque at worst, and mostly short, angry and literally horny. The women—harlots, nymphs and amazons—are naked, beautiful and sumptuous with jewelled and feathered head-dresses and heavy handed make-up.

Above: Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson, Naomi Oliver, *Dream Merchant* opening night performance 6 November 2008. Photo: Wolter Peeters



Lindsay's debauched dream world caused outrage and scandal at the time and his gender politics in modern-day standards are sexist to the point of cliché. Yet a bit like the elderly uncle figure with mischievous glint in the eye, occasional wandering hands and cringe worthy sexist jokes, taken with a pinch of salt you can't help but be fond of him. It's a generational thing, right?

I suspect this is the reason why the Blacktown Arts Centre exhibition *Dream Merchant* included a selection of Lindsay's work alongside a new collaborative series inspired by his oeuvre by Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson and Naomi Oliver. Involving the now-generation was a clever move. Re-contextualising Lindsay's work makes it more accessible to a broader crowd and less, well, un-PC.

Explicitly referencing another artist's practice or literally re-staging it presents a fascinating prospect that continues to be revisited. For instance, Maria Abramovic's *Seven Easy Pieces* (2005) re-staged seven seminal performances including those by Joseph Beuys and Valie Export. More recently and closer to home was *Becos I'm Worf It!* at MOP (2008) and Linden Contemporary Arts Centre (2007) which featured 27 artists' work inspired by Sydney performance duo The Motel Sisters (which is also a collaboration between two of the *Dream Merchant* artists Liam Benson and Naomi Oliver). Demonstrating the postmodern tendency for sampling, these practices de-stabilise notions of authorship, raising interesting questions around the assertion of creative influence and how new meaning is constructed.

Dream Merchant (2005-2007) translates Lindsay's colourful characters into performances for the camera, documenting the embodied harlots, nymphs and amazons on 'a walk through the streets and environs of present-day Western Sydney'. Like an over-flowing fancy dress party on one of those rare occasions when everyone bothers to hire clichéd costumes like Tarzan's Jane and Busty-Buxom-Barmaid spill out onto urban edgelands. The literal translation of Lindsay's characters, over-dressed and over-acted, pays homage to the cabaret-esque crude humour and theatricality of his dramatic scenes. Subtlety and seriousness are out the window and in true Lindsay fashion the new work is best consumed with a not-so healthily portioned pinch of salt.

Above: Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson, Naomi Oliver, *Dream Merchant* opening night performance 6 November, 2008. Photo: Wolter Peeters



The performance on the opening night for instance required seasoning, as Benson transformed from macho security guard to hairy pole dancer transvestite and Kivinen free-styled a dance interpretation of Nymph-Clubber-Slut. The Benson-Kivinen dance lift, cue *Dirty Dancing* (1987) finale moment, would have looked more at home in *Blades of Glory* (2007).

Adding a 'gender bender' twist to Lindsay's outdated gender politics would have benefited, however, from a more subtle deconstruction of identity. From Shakespeare's *Much Ado About Nothing* to *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* cross-dressing is a staple ingredient of historical theatre and does not inherently invest postmodern conceptual rigour. As Benson's successful solo aesthetic marries the dream-like and romantic with the sinister and surreal—qualities abundant in Lindsay's fantastical works—this presented a missed opportunity.

An other-worldliness is captured in the photographs resembling set-shots from surreal theatre productions. *Playground's* diffused light and slightly blurry quality observes a mysterious moment mid-choreography, while *A Courtly Game* glimpses a scene unfolding in a multi-storey car park. Witnessing performances made to an ambiguous audience has an eerie, voyeuristic feel and introduces the viewer into an interesting performer-audience dynamic. Photographically the images are beautifully taken—crisp, clean, and technically accomplished. Yet overall this clarity seems to sacrifice a magical or mysterious quality. In the cold light of Sydney's sunshine and street lamps it is artist-in-fancy-dress that is highlighted, making *Intrigue*, for example, quite self-explanatory.

Also taken perhaps too literally is Lindsay's love for the female nude. While Lindsay was being rebellious we are no longer rebounding from uptight Victorian values. Instead we are used to nudity in entertainment and the media whilst well aware of feminist critiques on the representation of women. So in this present-day condition is the straight reproduction of Lindsay's nudity either productive or critical?

Above: Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson, Naomi Oliver, *Playground* from the *Dream Merchant* series, 2005–2007, c-type print.



The playful and parodic nature of the *Dream Merchant* series, however, belies harsh critique. After all, shining a headlight up Liam Benson's arse can surely only be read as droll rather than dramatic. Nevertheless in the literal translation and crisp photography some of the magic of Lindsay's oeuvre is lost; albeit erotic and crass his work is also sensitive and surreal.

Dream Merchant undoubtedly breathed new life into Lindsay's contribution to the 'hothouse genre'. Certainly for the elderly audience members in the front row practically dodging dancing breasts, the generational gap was for a moment bridged. But the extent to which the exhibition reinvested new meaning is questionable. A local man, both fiercely proud of his area but bemused by why I would want to visit, offered to take me on a tour of the main strip to view the multicultural groups of kids, and if it got lively later on, the riot vans and police horses. I can't help but feel this invitation offered perhaps a more insightful, multi-faceted 'walk through the streets and environs of present-day cultural Western Sydney'.

Dream Merchant was exhibited at Blacktown Arts Centre from 7 November 2008 to 31 January 2009. The show featured: Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson and Naomi Oliver.

1. Norman Lindsay with one of his sculptures in the grounds of Springwood, photographed by Douglas Glass, 1949.

2. 'Art Nouveau Erotica', *Playboy* (US ed) V14, N12, 1967.

3. The reason this occurred is that Lindsay's artworks were being transported across America in a freight train that caught fire. When the charred remains of his watercolours and pen drawings were off-loaded onto the platform at Scranton, outraged onlookers 'made a pile of the pathetic survivors and relit the fire'. From Jane Lindsay, 'The Fire in America,' in Lin Bloomfield (ed.) *The World of Norman Lindsay* (Sun Books, 1983), 75.

Above: Liam Benson, Sari TM Kivinen, Victoria Lawson, Naomi Oliver, *Under Lights* from the *Dream Merchant* series, 2005–2007, c-type print.

LINDEN1968

EMMA CRIMMINGS

As years go, you would be hard pressed to beat 1968. With a smattering of globe-shaking assassinations, evaporations of prime ministers, simultaneous riots, revolutions and war, 1968 had it all. Often quoted as the year that changed the world, it is one of history's great modern chapters and as a result presents as a spectacularly ripe and bountiful wellspring for artists. So why, when faced with an exhibition of exactly this, was I reminded of an all but forgotten 80s pop song? (More on this later).

The exhibition, *Linden1968* represents the latest offering from the Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts Innovators Series. Running since 2005 the Innovators Series is a program designed to support the creation of new work. As an exhibition, *Linden1968* is literally bursting at the seams with new work from a range of over 30 emerging and established artists from Western Australia. This selection of west coast artists were chosen by curators Hannah Mathews and Ben Riding and asked to consider the significant events that marked 1968—the disappearance of Harold Holt, the assassination of Bobby Kennedy, the earthquake in Meckering, the Paris riots and the opening of the National Gallery of Victoria—in their creative response to the site. Given the calibre and breadth of this tumultuous period one might imagine that it would have sufficed as an exciting and fertile curatorial premise.

However, in addition to tackling momentous global change Mathews and Riding also asked the participating artists to respond to a 'tight' curatorial brief which was 'to devise works and strategies within Linden's interior and exterior spaces that will reshape, transform and comment on its previous function as a private guest house in the year 1968'. Again, for me this would have been a sufficiently evocative theme to explore. But meshed with the events of 1968 it felt a little lost.

Needless to say, I didn't imagine for an instant walking into *Linden1968* that I would be reminded of yesteryears' Ray-Ban Wayfarer piano man—Billy Joel. But I was. And the song that wedged itself into the folds of my mind, as I meandered around the gallery, was none other than his chart topping baby-boomer lament of 1989, *We Didn't Start the Fire!*

According to Wikipedia—that highly reliable fountain of 'faks'—*We Didn't Start the Fire* was scribed after a conversation Billy had with John Lennon's son, Sean, who was apparently complaining (and let's face it he had good reason) that he was growing up in troubled times. Fast-forward to the release of his album *Storm Front* and Billy belts out a nonsensical, but nonetheless rhyming list of historical events. As I walked around tyre-kicking works from the *Linden1968* exhibition, I couldn't help thinking that it too was a bit of a nonsensical but nonetheless worthy list of historical events that, in short, didn't really combine to start a fire.

It is important however, to clarify that many of the works, as stand-alone exhibits were original, clever and engaging. Moreover, it was the experience of the works en masse that detracted from



Laura Adel Johnson, *Sandy loves Ringo and Ringo loves Sandy*, 2008, fairylights, tape. Photo: Dean McCartney.

their power to impact more effectively. Crammed into Linden's various rooms, it was difficult to identify whose work was whose and where one work would begin and end. So, struggling to draw sufficient relationships between the individual works, I began to substitute my own *We Didn't Start the Fire* lyrics for *Linden1968*:

*Harold Holt, Earthquakes, Beatle-mania, Bike Race.
Charles Manson, Vietnam, revolutions spread their arms ...*

*Duchamp, NGV, Boarding House, help me ... ?
Op art, beach boys, colour theory, zebra car
Bobby K blown away what else do I have to say.*

*We didn't start the fire. It was always burning
since the world's been turning etc, etc ...*

Bad song references aside, if you take the time to go beyond the headline (unlike Billy Joel) it is possible to gain more insight into the actual event. Regardless of the show's overcrowding, the same can be said for many of the works in *Linden1968*. Aidan Broderick's piece for instance, which references the first ever Dutch man to win the Tour de France in 1968 was one such work. With its rear wheel eternally trapped inside a block of bricks and mortar, Broderick's old-school road cycle, divested of its pedals, is a simple and searing symbol that points to the inability to move forward and thereby sustain the momentum needed for significant change. In short, the simplicity of Broderick's inert visual message is both arresting and depressing.

Annabel Dixon's re-presentation of the canvas work included in the NGV's inaugural 1968 exhibition, *Field Work* by Perth based painter Trevor Vickers, was also memorable. Dixon's *Portrait of a Painting* cleverly unites geographic, artistic and personal elements with that of the overarching curatorial theme; the result of which gives rise to a considered and layered work.

Another work that stood out was Marcus Canning's unsettling sound piece exhuming creepy connections that existed in the late 1960s between a disparate group of west coast personalities including Charles Manson, Brian Wilson, Kenneth Anger and Bobby Beausoleil. Dark and deliciously claustrophobic, Canning's work was housed in the tiny ante-room at the rear of one of the larger exhibition spaces. Hungry for light, my pupils dilated as I entered the work; once inside, the cultish soundscape leaked from small speakers, the experience of which was both disquieting and moody.

By their very nature group shows are difficult to unify as what makes them interesting—i.e. their unique interpretation of a theme—is often what works against them. Nonetheless, accompanied by an impressive if somewhat confounding catalogue, *Linden1968* may not start a fire but it was above all ambitious and full of promise.

Linden1968 was curated by Hannah Mathews and Ben Riding and held at Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts from 8 November to 14 December 2008. The show featured over thirty artists from Western Australia.



Simon Perichich, *Everybody Cares and Everyone's Fine*, 2008, automobile, paint, wood, banners, bunting. Photo: Dean McCartney.

New Victorians

ELLA MUDIE

Like an issue of *Vogue* defining the new 'it' look for the season, there was an air of fashionability to the recent Sydney University Art Gallery exhibition, *New Victorians*. But unlike in fashion, where most references pass unexplained, curator Louise Tegart was quick to contextualise her muse. In her introductory essay she reminds us the Victorians were those who lived through the period of Queen Victoria's rule, which spanned 1837 to 1901, then maps the more complex defining characteristics of the period. All the same, the title still seemed surprising. For why should the seven relatively young and fresh-faced antipodean artists selected for the exhibition be concerned with an era that for so long was considered not only prudish and stuffy but also the locus of a colonial legacy to be done away with?

Given the resurgence of interest in Victorianism in recent decades—from the sponge-like absorption of aesthetic influences in the copycat world of fashion to the deliberate iconoclastic referencing in high art in the work of YBAs like Damien Hirst—the period has not only assumed a new relevance in popular culture but also become a credible well of inspiration to contemporary visual artists. It is within this complex rubric of anachronisms and appropriations that *New Victorians* was situated. Presenting work from artists Ben Cauchi, Liyen Chong, Julia deVille, Sharon Goodwin, Emma van Leest, Starlie Geikie and Pete Volich, the exhibition's premise was to explore 'the ways in which the Victorian legacy has both inspired and haunted succeeding generations'.¹

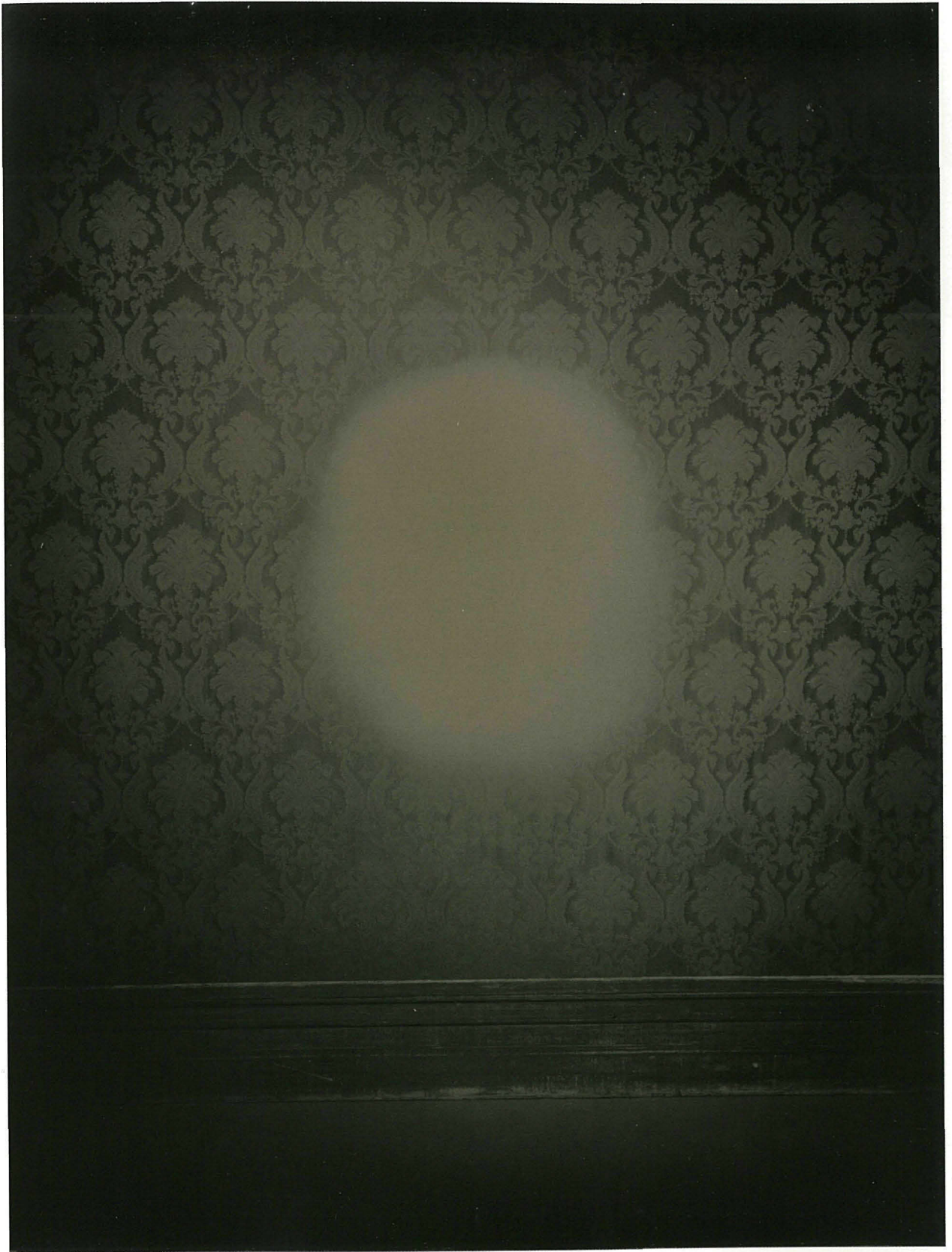
There was certainly no shortage of evidence to support this claim. In the ambrotype photographs of Ben Cauchi, for example, we were presented with an example of what critic Lyle Rexer describes as photography's 'antiquarian avant-garde'—a new breed of progressive contemporary photographers who paradoxically push the medium forward through their revival of antique methods like the ambrotype, the tintype, the daguerreotype and photograms. For *New Victorians*, Cauchi presented five ambrotypes from his *Dead Time* series, including an intriguing photograph of a luminous white stain or light emanating from ornately patterned Victorian wallpaper. This particular image, also titled *Dead Time*, stood out for its playful tension between physical and psychological notions of interiority and the role of the deliberate versus the accidental in the making of photographs.

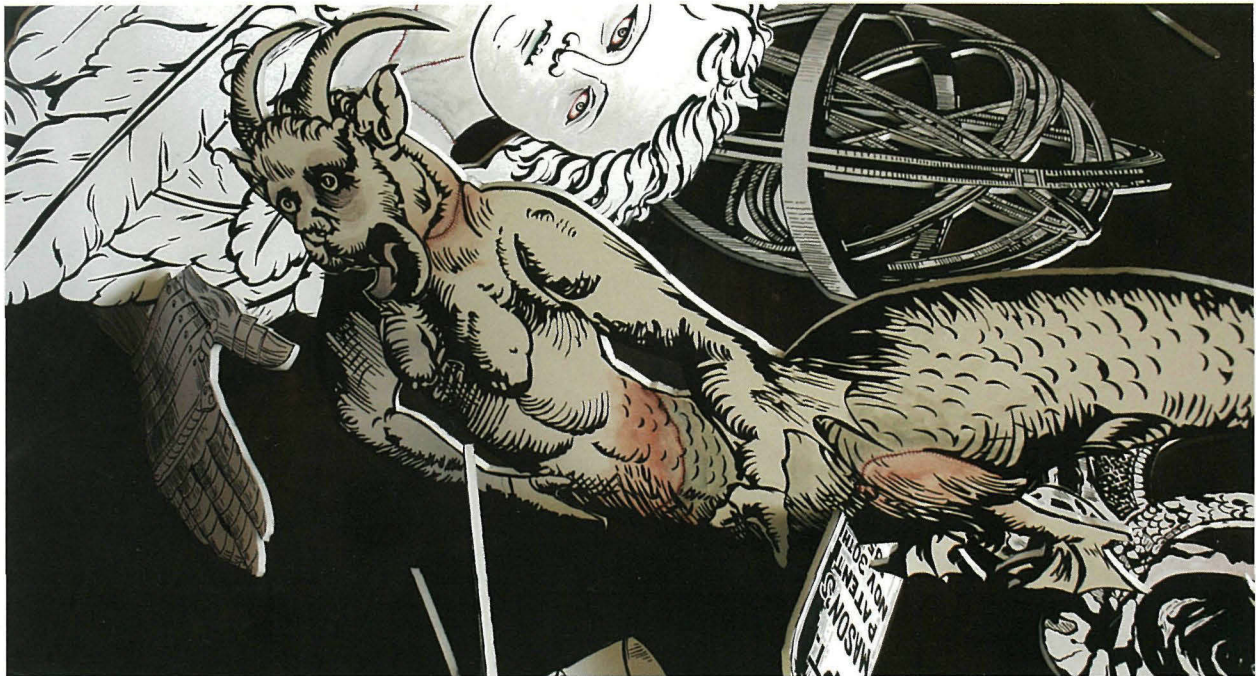
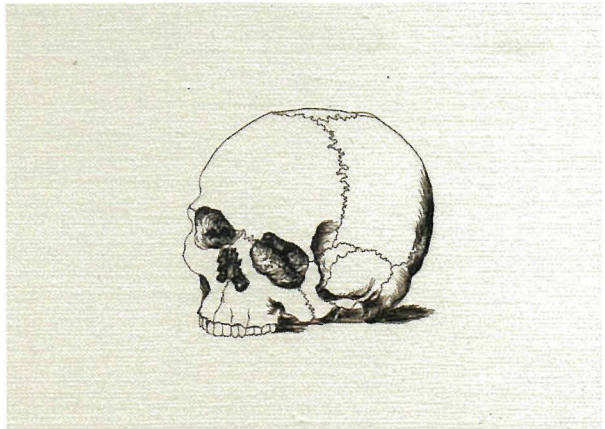
Cauchi's fascination with the laborious processes of Victorian photographic techniques, which runs against the instant gratification of today's digital technologies, points to a vital element of the Victorian revival. Here, past modes function as a locus for exploring *something missing* in contemporary society, in this way casting the present in relief. This principle was apparent in the work of artist and jeweller Julia deVille who has become something of a spokesperson for death with her frequent use of the Latin phrase *disce mori*—learn to die. Presenting several examples of intricate Victorian mourning jewellery alongside a selection of taxidermy pieces, the work was consistent with the artist's usual style but effective all the same in conveying the subversive idea that references to death can act as an invocation to live more fully in the present. Mourning jewellery was likewise referenced in Liyen Chong's finely detailed anatomical sketches of skeletons and Victorian patterns created from human hair although her work more broadly reflected an interest in embroidery traditions in eastern and western cultures.

In Pete Volich's photographs the notion of the *memento mori* was present in less recognisable ways. Taken from the series *2012: Eg E10*, these images were part of a 'pre-mourning' staged by Volich for the Hackney Marsh in London, which is to be redeveloped as a primary venue for the 2012 London Olympics. By showing the aftermath of an event that has not yet taken place while simultaneously invoking the construction process that will make it happen, Volich challenged the memorialising process that is taken for granted as 'natural' in photographic records.

At the other end of the room, the gothic made a resurgence in Starlie Geikie's uncanny sculpture of intertwined black polyurethane arms arranged in a spider like pattern to create an uneasy sense of longing and torment. The sculpture was accompanied by a series of framed pencil sketches of typography hung on the wall nearby, however their relationship to the arms was difficult to ascertain. It was only by consulting the catalogue that I found a neat, although somewhat unconvincing, argument about their relationship to Victorian sensation novels as a commentary on stereotypes of female sexuality.

Facing page: Ben Cauchi, *Dead time*, 2007, ambrotype.





In *Eyes of Others I and II*, Emma van Leest brought together the 19th Century world of the female British traveller with the exotic Indian other within the confines of two display cases, presenting silhouettes delicately cut from orange paper flecked with luminescent gold that were indeed stunningly beautiful. However, the monochrome palette did seem to deflate any tension in the work, resulting in a pretty spectacle that blunted the sharpness of any intended critique on colonialism. This was in contrast to the grotesquerie of Sharon Goodwin's foam board sculptural installation *Enlightenment now*. Here, a whirlpool of hybrid mythological figures including cherubs, angels, beasts, snakes and reptilian creatures met a clash of swords and domestic objects like chairs, windows and picture frames revealing angst over scientific experimentation gone awry.

As the sculptural objects of van Leest and Goodwin, and indeed nearly all the artworks in *New Victorians* demonstrated, one of the outcomes of working within antiquarian artistic modes is that the subject matter is almost invariably symbolic. Such oblique imagery sits more comfortably with the backwards looking gaze and as a result much of the work had a meditative and reflective quality that invited the viewer to ruminate on possible stories and reference points and to reconsider our relationship to these distant relatives who in so many

Above left: Starlie Geikie, *So Wicked My Scandalous Desire*, 2008, pencil on paper.
Above right: Liyen Chong, *I know not who I am but I know who I might be*, 2007, hair and cotton.
Below: Sharon Goodwin, *Enlightenment now* (detail), 2008, acrylic and watercolour on foam board.

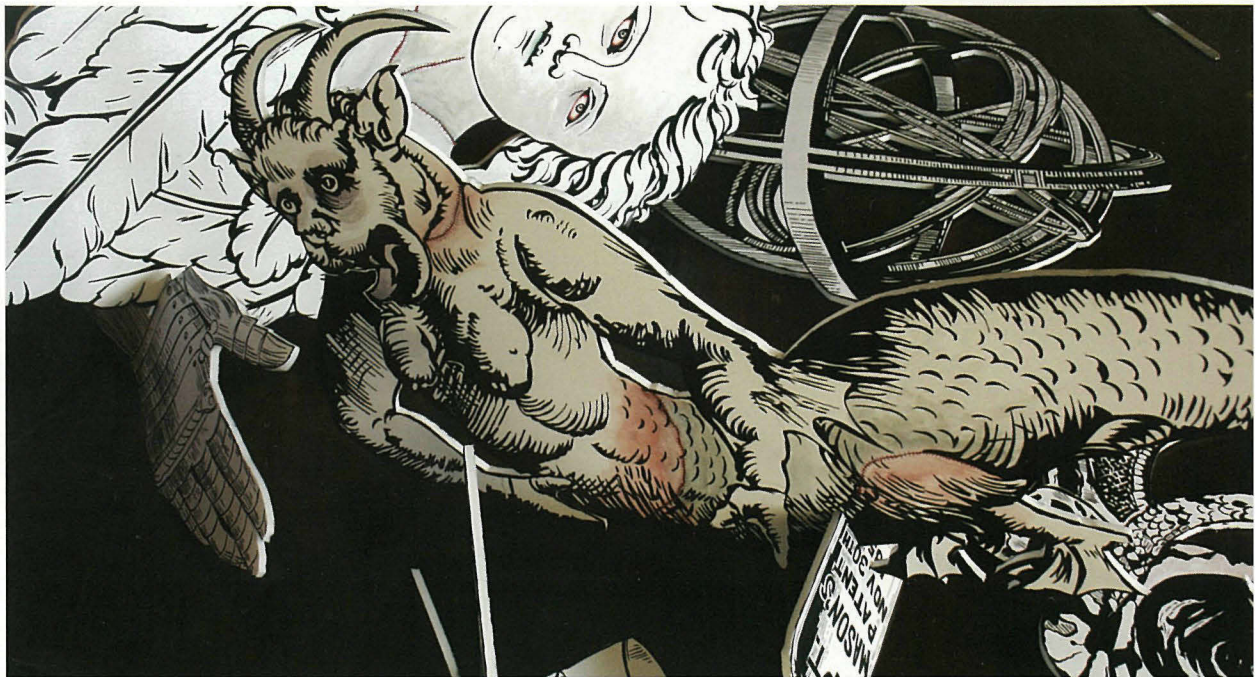
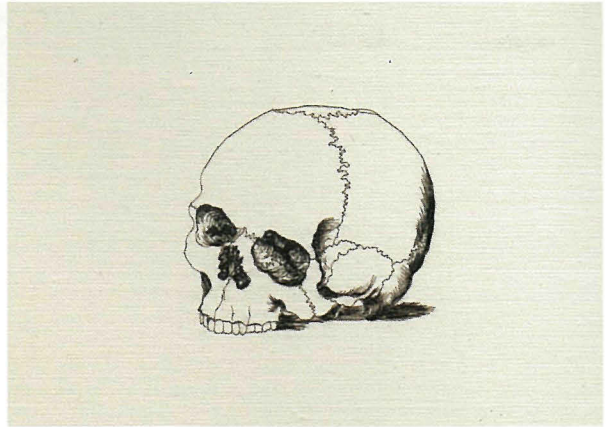


ways shaped society as we know it today. Still, few works exhibited strong convictions about their subjects, suggesting artists working with past modes and archaic styles walk a fine line between progression and retrogression. For what one looks to as a source of liberation from the present can all too easily become a heavy burden of its own.

New Victorians was curated by Louise Tegart and held at the Sydney University Art Gallery from 17 August to 12 October 2008. The show featured: Ben Cauchi, Liyen Chong, Julia deVille, Sharon Goodwin, Starlie Geikie, Emma van Leest and Pete Volich.

1. Louise Tegart, *New Victorians*, exhibition catalogue. (Sydney: University of Sydney, 2008), 1.

Above: Pete Volich, 2012: *Eg E10 - waiting for symbiosis at a north borne gathering the celebratory party decided it best to go their separate ways ... in the light of day*, 2007, lightjet print.



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Jon Wah: A Retrospective

ALEX GAWRONSKI

The exact extent of the biographical content of an artist's work always raises difficult and potentially awkward questions. This is especially the case when it is less than apparent where an artist's work ends and life starts. The situation is further complicated when an artist dies young, 'at the beginning of a promising career' as they say, or in the case of the artist in question Jon Wah (1980-2008), at the paradoxical beginning of their 'anti-career'.

The retrospective of Jon Wah's work held in December 2008 at Serial Space, Sydney, certainly raised many of the above issues. Here, via a series of videos, viewers were exposed to the numerous sides of an artist who was obviously determined to pursue the dual limits of autobiographical suggestion and in-your-face showmanship while testing the socially and culturally acceptable. The excesses of many of Wah's performances and confessional videos certainly made it extremely difficult to gauge whether or not we were witnessing in these—à la reality television—confronting even embarrassing moments of genuine self-exposure or the calculated gestures of a confrontational performer in 'quasi-dadaist' mode.

References to historical precedents in the case of Wah's often deliberately roughly produced performance videos may seem superfluous or unnecessary. However, Wah's overt antagonism towards his audience, evident in numerous of these, certainly makes such possible comparisons meaningful. For example, Wah's band The Bloodied Cunts self-consciously conjured an

instantly recognisable and by-now thoroughly historicised punk idiom at the same time as it turned the punk ethos inward against itself. Punk, at least in its formative period, often pretended somewhat naively to despise music and culture, yet it simultaneously managed to be a highly 'musical' repository for sophisticated and knowing cultural references. Alternatively, Wah and The Bloodied Cunts seemingly aimed to reverse this outcome by deliberately taking the initial culture hating, 'fuck you' claims of punk at face value. Thus, rather than sounding 'accidentally' sophisticated, The Bloodied Cunts' 'music' was base, childish and aggressive, exaggeratedly so, while the band's deployment of stage imagery was both eclectically opaque and deeply ludicrous. Wah's repeated, audience-directed invective ('You're all a bunch of fucking cunts!' etc.) could therefore be seen as superficially 'authentic', autobiographically 'real' and self-exposing as well as extremely contrived and tongue-in-cheek; the rebel artist/musician playing rebel artist/musician making a mockery of both viewer/listener and of the artist's over inflated, self-important declamatory role. The latter sense of concentrated internalised aggression and self-questioning was to have profound consequences for both Wah's art and life.

Watching the videos presented at Serial Space it became obvious that inwardly directed aggression was a central aspect of Wah's performance persona. It was certainly central to one of Wah's last performances in which the artist proceeded to bind himself tightly in pristine barbed wire fresh off the roll. Again, the intention of

Above: Jon Wah, *Dressing*, 2008, video still, photographed from television. Photo: Tameka Carter
Facing page: Jon Wah, *King of the loungeroom*, 2006, video still.



such a performance remains problematic in that it posed multiple questions about the artist/performer's imagined position as well as their responsibility to their audience (if indeed they had one). At the same time, the personally damaging consequences of this performance could not help but raise further 'extra-artistic' concerns about its author's state of mind. Of course, questioning an artist's sanity is generally a reactionary impulse and one usually intimately connected with conservative suspicions of the worth of contemporary art as a whole. Besides, and as Wah's practice further attested, there is already a long-established tradition within contemporary art of bodily mutilation involving acts of endurance: Viennese Actionism and the high-profile performance career of Australia's Mike Parr are two well-known examples of such work. However, and unlike most of the art produced by such artists, what was confronting in the documentation of Wah's barbed wire action was the artist's obvious loss of control over the parameters he established for the action. In 'behind-the-scenes' footage, Wah was caught on video profusely sweating and in considerable pain while colleagues attempted to extricate him from the wire now forcibly gripping his body.

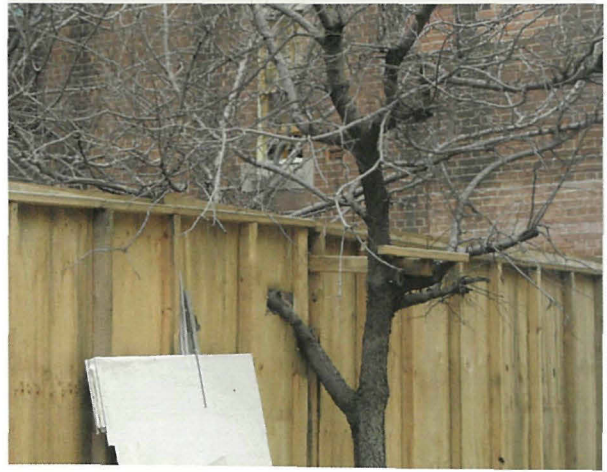
Whilst this loss of control may have made certain performances by Mike Parr's, for example, look overly controlled to the point of extreme politeness, it also cast doubts on the intentionality of the gesture itself. Was such a gesture, for instance, intended to basically record the artist's stoic capacity to manage physical pain in a live performance environment or was it designed essentially to provoke assembled viewers in a different though allied manner to the audience-aggressive performances of *The Bloodied Cunts*? Was Wah's aim to implicate viewer passivity as the audience willingly watched him hurt himself on stage thus questioning the assumingly assured separation of performer from audience? Or was the artist aiming to physicalise an internal state of mind for which there are few words, a state of mind which incidentally has

innumerable external counterparts in the ongoing suffering of those silently subjected by others to torture everywhere around the world?

Considerations of this kind made Wah's performance orientated practice more arresting than the mere diaristic record of a 'troubled soul', that term itself a hackneyed cliché. The strong sense of nihilism that ran through Wah's work and highly visible in the collection of videos shown at *Serial Space* make them largely undecidable in the end. Therefore, viewers are inevitably left with a number of insoluble questions such as, was the video connected to the aforementioned performance called *Dressing* (2008) that documents paramedics literally dressing Wah's self-inflicted barbed wire wounds an intentional extension of the artist's performance—except now incorporating 'non-professional' performers—or was it more simply a record of negative self-obsession? Furthermore, was Wah's performative video installation *King of the Loungeroom* (2006) a critique of Australian suburban parochialism that seemed uncannily to suggest a number of key local pop cultural references—from Auntie Jack to Norman Gunston—or was it rather an exorcism of more private demons albeit at the audience's expense and despite its stagey absurdism? The fact that such issues will continue to remain unanswerable will also simultaneously mean that there will be more questions to mine from Wah's posthumous opus. And this is especially the case as the artist's naturally formative body of work seemed to stand—for better or worse—in discomfiting diametric opposition to the polite career-building of the majority of his peers, an overall scenario to which the contemporary art world has become so uniformly accustomed.

Jon Wah: A Retrospective was held at *Serial Space* from 4 to 18 December 2008.

PREVIEWS



Forthcoming Exhibitions

NSW

NO IDENTIFIABLE CULTURE | PETER ALWAST, LIAM BENSON, ADAM CULLEN, CHRISTOPHER DEAN, CHERINE FAHD, MATTHEW GRIFFIN, ALAN JONES, TOM POLO, JUSTENE WILLIAMS, JAMIL YAMANI, SIMON YATES

7 February – 15 March
Campbelltown Arts Centre
cnr Camden & Appin roads, Campbelltown
www.campbelltown.nsw.gov.au

TIME TRAP | DAVID LAWREY & JAKI MIDDLETON

25 February – 14 March
Firstdraft
116-118 Chalmers Street, Surry Hills
www.firstdraftgallery.com

EMERALD CITY | ANDREW LAVERY

4 March – 21 March
Artereal Gallery
747 Darling Street, Rozelle 2039
www.artereal.com.au

TRICK SHOP | MARLEY DAWSON

5 March – 21 March
Locksmith
6 Botany Road, Alexandria
www.locksmithprojectspace.com

PLATEAU CONSTRUCTIONS | MIMI TONG

10 March – 9 April
UTS Gallery
Level 4, 702 Harris Street, Ultimo
www.utsgallery.uts.edu.au

BETWEEN SITE & SPACE | EXONEMO, ALEX GAWRONSKI, PARAMODEL, GAIL PRIEST, TIM SILVER and HIRAKU SUZUKI
curated by REUBEN KEEHAN and HISAKO HARA
Artspace

13 March – 18 June
43 – 51 Cowper Wharf Road, Woolloomooloo
www.artspace.org.au

Above left: Kathy Cavaliere, *Hawkins Hill*, 2008, black & white negative from camera obscura. Above right: Bianca Hester, *research*, 2009, digital image.



LAPDANCER II: 14 ICONIC SONGS TRANSPOSED INTO THE LANGUAGE OF CONCEPTUAL VIDEO ART (& BACK AGAIN)

SEAN LOWRY

19 March – 5 April

MOP

2/27-39 Abercrombie Street, Chippendale

www.mop.org.au

EXPANDEX | MARK TITMARSH, DAMIANO BERTOLI and JUSTIN TRENDALL

22 May - 13 June

Tin Sheds

148 City Road, The University of Sydney NSW

www.faculty.arch.usyd.edu.au/art_workshop

THERE GOES THE NEIGHBORHOOD | DANIEL BOYD, BRENDA CROFT, LISA KELLY, SQUATSPACE, NED SEVIL, 2016: ARCHIVE PROJECT, 16BEAVER, TEMPORARY SERVICES, MICHAEL RAKOWITZ, CLAIRE HEALY & SEAN CORDEIRO

curated by ZANNY BEGG and KEG DE SOUZA

23 May – 27 June

Performance Space

245 Wilson Street, Eveleigh

www.performancespace.com.au

I THINK I SHALL NEVER SEE A BILLBOARD AS LOVELY AS A TREE LEAHY + WATSON, KATHY CAVALIERE, ALISON LANGLEY, BEVERLY VEASEY

28 March – 21 June

Billboard project in the gardens at Hazelhurst Regional Gallery & Arts Centre

782 Kingsway, Gympie

www.hazelhurst.com.au

VERTIGO | MS & MR, REBECCA ANN HOBBS, HOLLY WILLIAMS, ELEANOR AVERY, SIMON YATES, CHRISTOPHER HANRAHAN and DAVID LAWREY & JAKI MIDDLETON

5 June – 19 July

Gosford Regional Gallery & Arts Centre

36 Webb Street, East Gosford

www.gosfordregionalgallery.com

ASH KEATING

19 June – 18 July

Breenspace

289 Young Street, Waterloo

www.breenspace.com

WILL FRENCH

25 June - 25 July 2009

GRANTPIRRIE WINDOW

86 George Street, Redfern

www.grantpirrie.com

ACT

IN (AND AGAINST) TIME | IZABELA PLUTA

7 February – 14 March

Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Gorman House Arts Centre, Ainslie Avenue, Braddon

www.ccas.com.au

TASMANIA

COLLIDING ISLANDS | JILLIAN CONRAD, OLIVIER DOLLINGER, DAVID HAMILL, ARCHIE MOORE and HEESOP YOON

curated by LOUISE ROLLMAN

14 February – 15 March

CAST

27 Tasma Street, North Hobart

www.castgallery.org

IN GRAVEYARDS I HAVE BEEN | LUCIENNE RICKARD

DATES

7 March – 28 MARCH

Inflight Art

237 Elizabeth Street, Hobart

www.inflightart.com.au

Above left: Sean Lowry, *LAPDANCER II*, 2009, Video still. Above right: Zanny Beggs and Keg deSouza, *2016: Archive Project*, 2007. Photo: the artists.

firstdraft 09

Upcoming:

1 | 25 FEB - 14 MARCH

- Dane Lovett
- David Lawrey & Jaki Middleton
- Safari Team

5 | 20 MAY - 6 JUNE

- Sam Villalobos
- Kevin Platt
- Kenzee Patterson

2 | 18 MAR - 4 APRIL

- Jessica Maurer
- Madeline Donovan
- Vicky Papageorgopoulos

6 | 10 JUNE - 27 JUNE

- Zöe Coombs-Marr
- Ella Barclay
- James Harney

3 | 8 APRIL - 25 APRIL

- "Visage" curated by Felix Ratcliffe as part of the Emerging Curators Program

7 | 1 JULY - 18 JULY

- "Tupperware Party" with Agatha Gothe-Snape, Sean Rafferty, Penelope Benton, Camille Serisier & Michaela Gleave

4 | 29 APRIL - 16 MAY

- Lisa Stewart & Rachel Feery
- Jordana Maisie
- Jessica Tyrrell

AND! NEXT DEADLINE:

- 15 May, see website for more details.
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109 Edward Street, Brisbane

www.boxcopy.org

THE SAME RIVER TWICE: PART 2 | EMMA KAY, MIKE KELLEY & PAUL McCARTHY and OMER FAST

7 March – 25 April

Institute of Modern Art

420 Brunswick Street, Fortitude Valley

www.ima.org.au

LEAN TOWARDS INDIFFERENCE! | KATHERINE SAGIN, COURTNEY COOMBS, ANTOINETTE J. CITIZEN and KATE WOODCROFT

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Metro Arts

Level 1, 109 Edward Street, Brisbane

www.metroarts.com.au

DISCE MORI | JULIA devILLE

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Shop 1, Emporium, 1000 Ann St

Fortitude Valley, QLD 4006

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31 Jan – 29 Mar 2009

Fremantle Arts Centre

1 Finnerty Street, Fremantle

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SONG OF SIRENS | STEPHEN BRAM, GUNTER CHRISTMANN, MS & MR, KATE MURPHY and PAUL OGIER

24 February – 3 May

curated by BALA STARR

The Ian Potter Museum of Art

The University of Melbourne, Victoria

www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au

NEWog

JUSTINE KHAMARA, BRODIE ELLIS, MARCO FUSINATO, SIMON YATES, MATTHEW GRIFFIN, BENJAMIN ARMSTRONG and PAT

FOSTER AND JEN BEREAN.

curated by CHARLOTTE DAY

17 March 2009 - 17 May 2009

ACCA

111 Sturt Street, Southbank

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Gian Manik, *Stay Strong* (detail), 2008, pine, steel, high-vis builders line, glass, twine and kangaroo skin. Photo: Justin Spiers.

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Mimi Tong, *Plateau Constructions*(detail), 2008, digital print.

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The Narrows
2/141 Flinders Lane, Melbourne VIC
www.thenarrows.org

ZEN JUBES | SOPHIE KNEZIC

10 April – 2 May
Kings ARI
Level 11/171 King Street, Melbourne
www.kingsartistrun.com.au

MY OWN PRIVATE IDEALOGUE | JOANNA LANGFORD, PETER MADDEN and ROHAN WEALLEANS

curated by EMILY CORMACK
17 April – 16 May
Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces
200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy
www.gertrude.org.au

THE BODY ELECTRIC | ROSS COULTER & MEREDITH TURNBULL

18 April – 9 May
Conical Inc.
Upstairs, 3 Rochester St, Fitzroy
www.conical.org.au

TO BOLDLY GO WHERE EVERYONE HAS GONE BEFORE

RACHEL ANG and MISCHA BAKA
30 April – 16 May
Blindside
Nicholas Building, Room 14, 37 Swanston Street, Melbourne
www.blindside.org.au

JUST CAN'T GET ENOUGH | CLINTON NAIN, BINDI COLE and DUNCAN ROBINSON

curated by BEN MCKEOWN
27 June – 2 August
Linden
26 Acland Street, St Kilda
www.lindenarts.org

RECONSTRUCTING THE FUTURE | JELENA TELECKI

30 June – 18 July
Bus Gallery
117 Lt Lonsdale St, Melbourne
www.bus117.com

SA

ANNE KAY

4 March – 21 March
Artroom5
5 Kent Street, Henley Beach
www.artroom5.com.au

FOREVER 27 | MARK SIEBERT

15 May – 13 June
White Cube, Experimental Art Foundation
The Lion Arts Centre, North Terrace (West End) Adelaide
www.eaf.asn.au

NT

ALLARD PARK | GABRIELLE BAKER

27 March – 2 May
24HR Art: Northern Territory Centre for Contemporary Art
Vimy Lane, Parap Shopping Village, Darwin
www.24hrart.org.au

New Zealand

MEDIA JUNKIES | LOCUST JONES

10 March – 10 April
Whitespace
Ponsonby, Auckland, NZ
www.whitespace.co.nz

ARTICLE 27: SUBJECTIVE LIBERTIES

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The Physics Room
209 Tuam Street, Christchurch
www.physicsroom.org.nz

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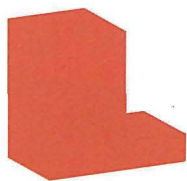
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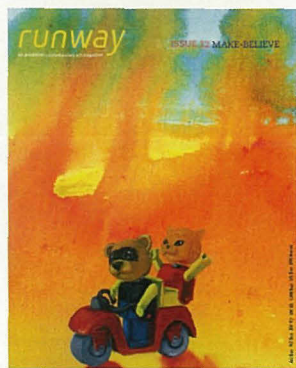
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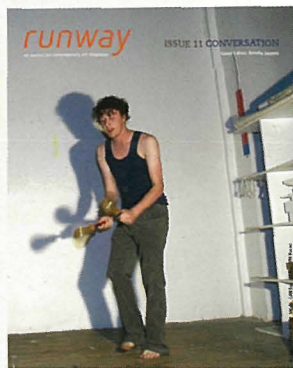
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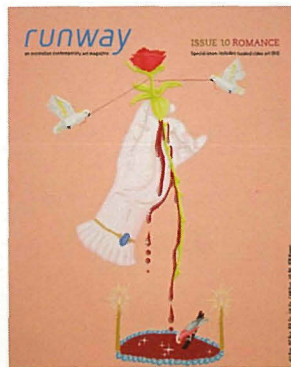
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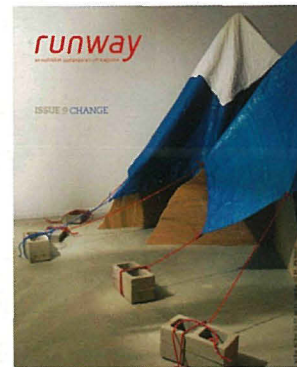
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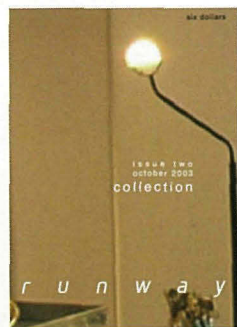
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