

## Four New Melbourne Art Spaces You Should Know About

Daniel Palmer

Everyone knows that artist run spaces are essential to the networks that make up the Australian visual arts infrastructure. Yet, for a variety of familiar reasons, they're usually short-lived enterprises. Even the funding lexicon – artist run initiative – reflects this sense of a beginning. Artists disperse, rents go up, ARI's come and go. Yet a commitment to collaboration sustains pockets of Melbourne's art community, and around the more established spaces such as Platform and 1st Floor, once impatient young artists have become prominent figures. While this has forced some reflection over the viability of the model as a subsidising 'feeder' for the commercial sector, new generations of artists seem continually eager to make their own opportunities, along a classic self-service ethos. With three new artist run spaces opening in only a month, it feels like a new wave has just hit Melbourne's contemporary scene. Together with the new gallery at the VCA, Conical, Bus, and the TCB/Uplands assemblage represent significant new additions to the artscape.

Anything can happen at an art opening today. So the fact that 'Conical' opened its doors with a boxing match staged between two artists – Richard (the Rash) Lewer and Luke Sinclair – shouldn't surprise. Billed as "an arts/sporting event never before seen", in the context of the group exhibition, *Adrift: Nomadic New Zealand Art*, curated by Emily Cormack and Lewer, it suggested the difficulties faced by landless New Zealanders moving into Melbourne's art scene (one-eighth of NZ's population apparently live in Australia). *Fight Club* it wasn't, but with the help of trainers and a professional MC it made a pretty good simulation – a kind of performance art for our times, neither about self-expression nor the politics of the body but simply about mimicking the spectacle on its own terms (with live feed piped to a TV with street-frontage below, and making it onto ABC TV's Sunday morning *Coast to Coast*). Just off Brunswick Street in Fitzroy, Conical is the brainchild of Adrien Allen, an emerging artist and Masters student at VCA. The space came out about fortuitously, and – although it has been dubbed a grand sounding 'Contemporary Art Space' – he sees it functioning as a project space. Allen's interest in the ideology of the white cube has also extended to the gallery fit-out: one half is modern white, the other consists of peeling green painted brick walls. Allen speaks of it in terms of the white cube's entropic process, complemented at the launch with these bricks dotted with live moss landscapes (a work by Anoushka Akel). Conical's future is a matter for negotiation and probable collaboration; in the meantime, Louise Hubbard and Chris Köller show in October.

'Bus', another artist run space, opened in late August on the wettest of Melbourne's winter nights – which didn't stop a crowd filling the place. Located opposite Troika Bar in the CBD, Bus occupies the first floor level of a 1940s industrial building. Comprised of three spaces defined by white walls and high gable trusses, it offers a dedicated 'sound space' "for the emerging sound artist... to push the discipline". They've already staged a weekend event of sound performances, adding to the growing literacy of sound art in Melbourne (radiating from the hub of Samartzis-Brophy at RMIT). The opening show of emerging artists, *Departure*, included an

installation by Renee So, sculpture by Nick Mangan, photographs by Selina Ou, as well as a digital installation by Chad Chatterton and Julian Oliver. Bus aims to promote cross disciplinary collaborative art practice, a philosophy which may have something to do with its board members stemming from fields as diverse as architecture, graphic design, animation and sound. Bus is the offspring of a design firm of the same name, located in the front of the building.

Down the road in China Town, up an alley and next to a sex shop, 'TCB Inc. Art' (Taking Care Of Business) reopened at the start of September in a joint project with a new commercial space called 'Uplands'. TCB began in the former Grey Area window-gallery space in Port Philip Arcade for eighteen months before it was squeezed out last September. TCB is composed of a committee of nine artists, with an average age of about 26 – mostly graduates of VCA. Uplands runs independently. Gallerists Blair Trethowan (an emerging artist included in Primavera this year) and Jarrod Rawlins (a fellow member of Damp) decided to start up a business, and earlier this year found a space to house the two separate organisations. The gallery then held a substantial fundraiser to completely renovate the compact spaces. In their minds, Uplands and TCB are independent and yet inseparable; one could not exist without the other. Here, the subsidy mentioned above between the artist runs space and the commercial sector is transparent – TCB subleases from Uplands – but the dealer's eagle-like position is somewhat short-circuited. Accordingly, the artists represented by Uplands are a mix of emerging and established (many with international links): A Constructed World (Jacqueline Riva and Geoff Lowe), Jon Campbell, Nadine Christensen, DAMP, Sharon Goodwin, James Lynch, David Noonan and Blair Trethowan. Exhibitions change fortnightly at TCB and monthly at Uplands, and the 2001 TCB program includes shows by Brendan Lee (the first part of which has just shown at Westspace, another artist run space in the city, tucked away near the Queen Victoria Markets), Amanda Marburg and Selina Ou. An interesting experiment in a new model, everyone in the visual arts will be watching closely.

Rent prices have raised Melbourne's artist run spaces to the first floor. The ground floor Victorian College of the Arts Gallery also opened in August, under the supervision of Head of the School of Art, Su Baker. Essentially two white cubes, well situated between the St Kilda Rd NGV site and the soon-to-be new ACCA, its first show was the Besen Foundation's Roger Kemp Memorial Prize – with David Rozetsky's *Custom Made* reconstructed for the occasion [see *Real Time* # 38, p.35]. It's not a student gallery. Exhibitions will include local, national and international artists curated in-house and by guest curators, including a forthcoming collaboration with CCP and a show curated by Elizabeth Gower.

Conical: Contemporary Art Space  
182 Johnston St  
Fitzroy 3065  
T (03) 9528-1567  
Wed - Sat 11-5

Bus

117 Little Lonsdale St  
Melbourne 3000  
T (03) 9662-2442  
Tues - Fri 11-6, Sat 11-4

TCB Inc. Art/Uplands  
Level 1, 12 Waratah Place  
Melbourne 3000  
uplandsgallery@mail.com  
tcbincart@yahoo.com  
T (03) 9747-8203  
Tues - Thu 12-6, Fri 12-8, Sat 12-6

Victorian College of the Arts Gallery  
Corner Grant & Dodd Sts  
South Bank 3006  
T (03) 9685-9468  
Wed - Sat 12-5