

2009 | 2010

2009 | BOXCOPY | 2010

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Founded in 2007, Boxcopy is an Artist-Run Initiative (ARI) dedicated to supporting the experimental and innovative practices of emerging and mid-career Australian artists. Currently located on the first floor of the Watson Brothers Building, 129 Margaret Street, Brisbane, it delivers exhibitions that encourage critical engagement with art that explores a diverse range of media, ideas and approaches to art practice. Boxcopy supports artists who experiment and challenge common expectations of art to provide new perspectives on contemporary themes and subjects. Boxcopy operates on a not-for-profit and volunteer basis, and in 2009–10 was run by Joseph Breikers, Channon Goodwin, Timothy P. Kerr, Daniel McKewen, Raymonda Rajkowski and Tim Woodward, with the help of Intern Anastasia Booth and Volunteers Isabella Pearson and Mel Ryke.

This publication encapsulates the processes and outcomes of Boxcopy's 2009–10 exhibition program, which consisted of seven artist-in-focus exhibitions featuring the new work of local and interstate artists, and a series of auxiliary off-site projects of site-specific installation-based work as part of the Boxcopy: Ensuite program. This publication features the catalogue essays and images from the exhibitions and projects presented in 2009–10. Three additional essays produced by Brisbane writer Danni Zuvela, Melbourne artist and Kings ARI board member Tamsin Green, and (UK based) Boxcopy founding member Marianne Templeton position Boxcopy and its projects in the broader context of artist-run and contemporary art practice.

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Foreward

Grant Stevens

There's a laneway in the Brisbane CBD with a bar on it. But unlike the famed alleys of Melbourne, there's no graffiti, no allusions to New York or Paris, and to be sure, no pretense to harbour any sort of 'creative culture'. This is Brisbane after all: famous for XXXX and the sporting teams it sponsors. I met Joseph Breikers at the Public Service Club in 2006 to talk about the plans that he and his friends and fellow Queensland University of Technology graduates Channon Goodwin, Anita Holtsclaw, Daniel McKewen, Marianne Templeton and Tim Woodward had to start an artist-run space. Under a poster of Ian Healy or Wally Lewis, we talked about different working models for Artist-Run Initiatives (ARIs), places to look for affordable commercial space, ways to cover rent, ways to stay friends with your friends-cum-business-partners, and the numerous other perils, sacrifices and rewards of starting a business based not on making money, but on supporting emerging artists.



With the wrapping paper recently torn off the Gallery of Modern Art, a fresh director at the Institute of Modern Art and changes at various university museums and commercial galleries across town, Boxcopy opened in 2007 as practically the only ARI in Brisbane. They started with the lofty but admirable premise of hosting a tightly curated program of solo and group exhibitions with limited costs to artists — or subject to funding, actually paying them to make shows. Since then, Boxcopy has hosted 33 exhibitions involving 57 artists (and counting). They've also been joined by other artist-run projects like No Frills*, Accidentally Annie Street Space, Level, inbetweenspaces and Independent Exhibitions (IE) in transforming Brisbane into a diverse, dynamic and critically engaging place for emerging artists to make and show work.

It's sometimes easy to forget that these guys with 'Boxcopy Co-Director' on their business cards have other jobs, study commitments, studio practices, bills to pay and private lives to live. That they have survived showing art in sub-tropical heat without air-conditioning, that they have led the way for an impressive network of ARIs, that they don't all hate each other, that they manage to pay their rents, that they continue to exhibit compelling and engaging new art, that they continue to make their own art and that they are doing all this in a city often relabeled BrisVegas and Brisneyland for its supposed lack of cultural sensitivity, is testament to their hard work, intellectual rigour, ambition, good will and nous. The Boxcopy co-directors want this book to represent the exciting artists and exhibitions that they have hosted over 2009–10. I also hope it goes some way to demonstrate the tireless work of its friendly leaders.

ESSAYS

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He knew that this temple was the place required by his inflexible purpose; he knew that the incessant trees had not been able to choke the ruins of another such propitious temple down river, a temple whose gods also were burned and dead; he knew that his immediate obligation was to dream.

– JORGE LUIS BORGES, THE CIRCULAR RUINS

Boxcopy on Margaret Street

Danni Zuvela

Heading down Margaret Street in Brisbane, after crossing George Street, you find the incline flattens out as you near the Albert Street intersection. Standing on the Botanic Gardens side of the street here, its grand pediments framed by the foliage of leopard trees, is the Watson Brothers building. The trees are council street plantings from the 1970s, but the building dates back much earlier. An imposing three-storied warehouse, it was purpose-built in 1887 for the four Watson brothers: important plumbers, gasfitters, sanitary engineers and ironworkers in the modernisation of Victorian Brisbane. Then, as now, impressive buildings marked periods of growth and prosperity; then, as now, ‘spaces receive their being from locations’.¹ For their warehouse, the location the plumbing brothers chose, near the intersection of Albert and Margaret, was right in the muddy heart of a notorious, low-lying region known as Frogs Hollow.

Opposite: Watson Brothers Plumbers and Gasfitters building, Margaret Street, Brisbane, 1902

Photo: John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland

1. Martin Heidegger, ‘Building Dwelling Thinking’ in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, Harper Colophon, New York, 1954 (1971), p. 154.



Watson Brothers Building interior

2. Rod Fisher, 'Old Frog's Hollow: Devoid of Interest, Or Den of Iniquity?', *Brisbane in 1888: The Historical Perspective*, Brisbane History Group, Brisbane, 1988, pp. 16-461.
3. Ross Woodrow, *The Brisbane Line* [exhibition catalogue], The Narrows, Melbourne, 2009.

Though surrounded by the 'circle of excellence' – the commercial clout of Queen Street, the political power of George Street and the mercantile might of Eagle Street – and despite the presence of other prominent industrial outfits, this part of Brisbane was, in more ways than one, a teeming swamp. As a tidal catchment fed by several creeks, including a bubbling outlet on Margaret Street, many properties festered below the levels of drains, streets and 'made ground'; so, despite some piecemeal attempts at drainage, Frogs Hollow was consistently inundated. Unsurprisingly, as Rod Fisher notes, the instability, putrescence and danger of Frogs Hollow extended to its population, with the rotting streetscape furnishing a natural – if mud-filled – home to many of the city's public houses, hostels, gambling joints, brothels and opium dens. Upstanding citizens regarded the area unwholesome in the extreme; assisted, no doubt, by sketches such as the one provided in 1888 by critic William Lane, who invited readers to 'Walk down Albert-street on any night in the week, if you care to venture through its suffocatingly significant aroma of opium and insanitation, and among its prowling gangs of wolf-like larrikins, and its filthy swarms of cursing slatterns'. Despite the efforts of the city's lawmen, a vibrant mixed economy emerged, sustained by the region's constant flow of wayfarers seeking pleasure, oblivion and trouble. These they found, and plenty more, in the Hollow's 'rare clustering of drunkards, prostitutes, larrikins, thieves and assailants who, in one way or other, lived off the visitors, mariners, and new arrivals at the many boarding-houses, lodgings and hotels'.²

This theme, of vivid clusters vying for visitors' attention and expenditure continues in contemporary Queensland, as Ross Woodrow notes, albeit with the more legitimate means of amusement parks, and 'Australia's largest, most impressive and most expensive contemporary art museum'. One effect of this contemporary spectacular culture, Woodrow argues, is polarity, since 'the choice between low and high culture translates to a choice between super crass and hyper arty', leaving 'little chance of a quiet cultural profile being promoted'.³ Local artists have responded to this situation with resistance and resourcefulness, engineering and maintaining meaningful alternative spaces between these poles.

Over its first year in the Watson Brothers building, Boxcopy has staged a series of critical encounters featuring artists whose practices both fits Woodrow's description of a more 'quiet cultural profile', and emphatically asserts a commitment to questioning and expanding the possibilities of contemporary art.

In *Dis-close: Project Another Country*, Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan directly confronted the site by stripping and tearing away the layers of paint and plaster adhering to the underlying brickwall. Reading this suddenly unconcealed history through millimetre-thin time-tunnels, the viewer was invited to reflect on the manner in which memory can variously – even simultaneously – inscribe and efface experience into the patina of time. In an era of accelerated development, *Dis-close's* raw, exposed interior also powerfully codes *expungement*: as a process, as concept, even an ideology. The city's propensity for destroying historic structures, coupled with the current building boom, means that Brisbane is increasingly defined by the architecture associated with newer cities; shining edifices of glass, chrome and dramatic angles. 'Like massive reflectors of two dimensional form,' Sally Breen notes, 'the archetypal buildings of the new city 'appear as sleek flat screens, projecting multiple extremes of light and sign'.⁴

Screens however conceal as much as they reveal, deflecting and redirecting our attention in shifting and multiple ways. The gleaming planes of Brisbane's increasingly neobrutalist skyline mask a near-systematic historical erasure that ranges from the omission of Frogs Hollow's colourful but ignoble past, to the Bjelke-Petersen regime's stealth demolitions to ongoing occlusions of the recent past. As Boxcopy discovered when they moved to Margaret Street, they weren't the first artist-run gallery to feel a rapport for the Watson Brothers building; the space housed another artist-run gallery operating in the interstices of the major institutions and commercial outfits, the Whitebox Gallery, organised by artists Franz Ehmann and Tracey Smith between 1996–1997. Acknowledging this prior occupancy of the building, a rare remaining example of Victorian architecture, is a way to both affirm the lived history of Brisbane's creative culture, and reframe space itself,

4. Sally Breen, *Future Frontier*, Ph.D thesis, Griffith University, Queensland, 2004, p.80.

5. Chris Healy, *From the Ruins of Colonialism: History as Social Memory*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1998, p.2, p.7.

from material fact to mental form. As an artefact, the warehouse offers opportunities for what social historian Chris Healy terms ‘learning to inhabit landscapes of memory which are, in part, landscapes littered with ruins’; a unique space for the performance of the ‘remembering of ruination which is part of our being-in-history: a refusal to accept that “the past has been settled even more effectively than the country”’.⁵

This refusal marks *Office of Australia* by Dirk Yates, who, like the Aquilizans, took the memories of the interior ‘skin’ of the building as his point of departure. In contrast to their deconstructive approach, Yates employed an additive process to critically transform the space, repainting the walls in their original colours, and installing a cohort of charged objects (a flag, a map, an office desk, the newspaper) removed and made strange from their everyday contexts. Situating the viewer in the centre of the work, *Office of Australia* extended an open-ended invitation to reconsider the interplay of mythology, public memory, and representation from the unique – maybe unenviable – position of the ‘seat of power’. Also bodily implicating the viewer in the work was Stephen Russell’s *Super Vanitas*, in which patrons physically negotiated both a bell-rope and the intermittent arcs of swinging pendulums. These rhythmic forms set in motion the work’s ambiguous redrawing of the relations between knowledge and taste, and, in the process, mimicked the ongoing processes of historical revision, recombination and revelation.

Chiromancy also subdivided the space, with the installation of David Spooner’s assemblage of interconnected materials and objects in the form of a sculptural bat. While this work has a lot of resonance, it’s perhaps most potent when allowed to allegorise the practice of artist organisations, such as Boxcopy, which provide key opportunities for artists and curators to engage with innovative and experimental practices; the effect, like Spooner’s suspended bat, is a softening and subtle refashioning of previously hard vectors through material linkages, exchange and processes of association. The utter (inter-) dependency of these networks upon each individual link manifests throughout Spooner’s intricate knots and dropped stitches, and in the work’s delicate

tension between collective strength and ineradicable contingency. Ardi Gunawan’s practice is also activated by a sense of precarity, as shown in *Material formations and body movements*, where the artist and committee members re-assembled normally sturdy building materials and other found objects into carefully balanced, self-supporting forms. The delicate equilibrium of the structures contrasted with the sturdiness of Gunawan’s commitment to the concepts of indeterminacy, improvisation and the relinquishment of authorial control, highlighting the dynamic potential of the relationship between stability and ‘letting go’.

The apparent weight of bodies is also at the heart of Tim Plaisted’s work in *Extra Fins*. A suspended model aircraft, perfect but for impossible sets of additional wings, and a video of the artist immersed in water, referred the viewer to the sensations of weightlessness possible in air and water, as well as the eternal dream of flight. The prospect of liberation from quotidian reality, however circumscribed, also concerned Courtney Coombs, who, in *Patronise Me*, re-imagined the Boxcopy white cube in a series of playfully exorbitant incarnations. Though small in scale, Coombs’ models engaged the viewer’s perception of the space in its immediate present, wryly probing the dimensions of its immutable physics, and offering quaquaversal conjecture on its potential. Coombs’ work suggested what all the works, in differing ways, seemed to suggest: that the real potential of this building itself is its portal-like capacity to transport us into deeper questioning of the very issue of dwelling, questions that can enable us to ‘bring dwelling to the fullness of its nature’.⁶

As the enclave of Frogs Hollow provided for ‘the *uprooted*, the *deprived* and the *outcast*’⁷ in rapidly-growing late nineteenth century Brisbane, in contemporary cities dominated by commercial interests and large institutions, the necessity of ‘quieter’ spaces for the practice and dissemination of experimental and innovative art becomes increasingly evident.⁸ Boxcopy have summoned important questions about art’s power to discover new truths and revisit old ones, and have provided, in place of answers, the enlargement of experience and the creative renewal of possibilities.

6. Heidegger, p.161.
7. Fisher, p.21.
8. Jackson, M.R., Kabwasa-Green, E., Swenson, D., Herranz, J., Ferryman, K., Atlas, C., Wallner, E., and Rosenstein, C., *Investing in Creativity: A Study of the Support Structure of U.S. Artists*, The Urban Institute, Washington, D.C, 2003 and McCarthy, K.F., Ondaatje, E.H., Zakaras, L., and Brooks, A. *Gifts of the Muse: Reframing the Debate about the Benefits of the Arts*, Rand Research in the Arts, Santa Monica, 2004.



Run Run Run Run Run

Tamsin Green

Fun Run

Recently I went to an apartment show; a group of 2nd year students pushed all their furniture into a bedroom and filled the rest of their living space with work that had earlier that day been in the studio. The result was energising.

Bringing your work out of the studio and putting it in a space, or on a wall, has an immediate affect on the way you perceive that work. This act is an occasion for pause; you can walk around the other side of the work and see what it is actually doing. Space is important in the function of work. The other important function of the exhibition is celebration; we all do this good thing, and it's something we have in common.

Run like a professional

Kings Artist-Run Initiative (ARI) is a professional artist-run initiative.¹ It could be one of the most bureaucratic ARIs in Melbourne. We all get along, but Kings runs along because it's structured. In addition to our committee and we have numerous sub-committees. The Kings ARI sub-committees include: Installation and Maintenance, Studio, PR and Media (with IT), Education, Finance, Volunteer, Publication, Flash Night (that's one night shows), and International Relations (really).² We have these divisions because we are optimistic about the services and resources that we can provide. For example, the education sub-committee 'strives to promote Kings ARI as an educational resource, and facilitate relationships with schools and universities'.³ The education sub-committee run tours and artists' talks for the public and for educational institutions.

Opposite: Boxcopy donations survive a break in at the Watson Brothers building.

1. I've been on the Kings ARI committee for the past two and a half years.
2. In 2009 we ran an exchange and exhibition with the Edinburgh Sculpture Workshop, and we are planning to run future international exchanges.
3. From one of our grant applications.

4. Or Centrelink's office.
5. My interest in art and capital has been enormously encouraged by a recent talk by the Croatian based What How and for Whom (WHW) a curatorial collective responsible for the 2009 11th Istanbul Biennial.
6. For example: there are currently 45 works by Richard Long (the artist most famous for taking walks) listed for sale through ArtNet www.artnet.com accessed 11-07-10. POA
7. I am being paid \$823.64 to write this piece in accordance with the National Association of Visual Artists (NAVA) recommended schedule of fees. See 'Fees and Wages' Chapter 5 of the NAVA Code of Practice 2004 available via their website: www.visualart.net.au. This is uncommon.
8. Not to be confused with the traditional owners.
9. And \$2,500 is the profit we made from what you spent on beer.
10. These amounts vary; when Kings gets funding we pay about half the rent on the artists' behalf.
11. ARIs can temporarily occupy disused sites. For example, in Scotland ARIs are run out of rent-free council properties, and in Canada they receive ongoing funding. In Melbourne the council supplies some sites for artists' studios (The Boyd School www.creativespaces.net.au/case-studies/boyd-school-studios), however, the Arts and Culture branch of the City of Melbourne has to lease these sites from the council at a comparable commercial rate, passing this cost onto the artists.
12. This could get you about 100 square meters of new office/warehouse space in inner Melbourne. Kings ARI's total floor space is around 120 square meters.

We act professional, but we don't get paid, so our resources are limited to what we can fit in around everything else we do. When I speak to teachers on the phone I'm in my imaginary office.⁴ That's the whole point of an initiative; you can put yourself into a position of responsibility without waiting.

Run for your money⁵

I'm not a commercial artist, but that doesn't mean that I can afford be naive about capital and value. Even the most ephemeral art actions can be turned into commodities.⁶

How much cash should I hand over in order to show my work? If there is one area in which the ARIs need more self-reflection it is in their reliance on a 'cash for show' model. This is the most common model in Melbourne, with average rent for a three-week show heading up towards the \$1,000 mark. I've accepted this model in the past, now I'm in debt.⁷ This is not profiteering on the part of the ARIs; the cash always flows past them and ultimately to the owners of the land.⁸ Everyone bemoans the rent rises, but we still want to use the property. So what are we really paying for? ARIs assume that they operate outside the market because they show non-commercial work. They also assume that they have a shoestring budget, but for Kings that shoestring weighs in at about \$60,000 pa (not counting in-kind support and labour) and about \$40,000 of this is cash from artists — that's your money.⁹ That's not including the material cost of your work, or your hours of labour.¹⁰

Out of Kings' total cash operating costs \$45,000 goes directly to an oddball lycra clad investor who occasionally prowls around the building ominously taping the walls. He takes that money and invests it in his portfolio, making a healthy percentage on top of his capital, which will be also invested. I have a feeling that he's not planning on sharing it with us later. As rent continues to rise ARIs will have to start thinking about other kinds relationships to property.¹¹ Given that we now pay around \$3,750 pcm in rent we could be servicing a loan of \$370,000 (according

to the CBA interest calculator).¹² The idea of actually owning property is a hypothetical proposition that would require a deposit, a lawyer and a long-term vision, but given the amount of cash that passes through our hands maybe we should think about being better capitalists.¹³

Run in a direction

ARIs are not generally thought of as long term organisations. Arts funding bodies privilege project funding over programming funding and ongoing funding for spaces. This funding encourages spending on time-limited projects with discreet measurable outcomes. Arts organisations have realised the important role ARIs play in growing early careers; so that's where they're putting their money. That's all well and good for now, but what happens when were done emerging?¹⁴

Australian ARIs were initiated in the 1970s and 80s in order to bypass the commercial gallery systems. They made available spaces for emerging, experimental and conceptual works that did not necessarily have a commercial aim. This is still how ARIs function but some things have changed. These days ARIs last longer than they used to, the founding members hand over the organisation to new generations of members. ARIs today don't generally have a specific stated formal or conceptual direction. Kings ARI, for example, seeks to exhibit works that are 'conceptually and technically ambitious'.¹⁵ Many of the artists who initiated Store 5, First Floor, and Art Project, for example, made careers out of these initiatives.¹⁶ They got the attention of more conceptual commercial spaces.¹⁷ These 'original' ARIs were more likely to have formal and conceptual directive. Art Projects, for example, had a focus on contemporary abstract and formal practices. Now the general goal of 'good art' combined with a need to fill space in order to service rent can lead to circularity. To discriminate is not necessarily a negative.¹⁸ As ARIs start to last they will need to consider and also state their position.

13. This is over a twenty-year term, I don't know about you but I'm still planning on making art at fifty.
14. The Australia council handed out \$269,184 in funding specifically for ARI/Emerging artist projects earlier this year. The recipients were: Boxcopy: \$18,400, Conical Contemporary Art Space Inc: \$14,000, FELTspace: \$17,945, Firstdraft Incorporated: \$20,000, Half Dozen Ltd: \$20,000, Inflight Inc: \$18,239, Kings Artist-Run Initiative: \$12,100, MOP Projects (t/u G Adams & RL Adams): \$12,500, Platform Artists Group Inc: \$21,000, SafARI Initiatives Incorporated: \$20,000, Six_a Inc: \$20,000, Sticky Institute Inc: \$25,000, Un Projects Inc (t/a Un Magazine): \$25,000, West Space Incorporated: \$25,000.
15. SNO in Sydney is an example of a space with a particular objective: non-objective art. Level ARI in Brisbane only exhibits work by female artist and curators, there are others.
16. These three spaces were celebrated in a retrospective exhibition 'Pitch Your Own Tent' at The Monash University Museum of Art, 2005. Other differences are that there are now more ARIs, around 25 in Melbourne, and that the rent has gone up.
17. Anna Swartz Gallery in particular.
18. Recently I have been working with a free space, this has made me more aware of the effects of rent. Light Projects in Melbourne also has a conceptual theme: projects informed by psychoanalytic or phenomenological research. Light Projects is generously supported by Dr Patrick Johnson (Psychotherapist), Monash University, and Arts Victoria: www.light-projects.com



So many things have been produced and accumulated that they can never possibly all be put to use... So many messages and signals are produced and disseminated that they can never possibly all be read.

– JEAN BAUDRILLARD, *THE TRANSPARENCY OF EVIL: ESSAYS ON EXTREME PHENOMENA*

So I spent the day walking; churning strides. A sequence of repetitive thoughts each defined by a sequence of repetitive images ran through my head. My mind felt like a living blotting paper, picking up stuff but never quite managing to process it fully and draw conclusions as to its value. So all I was left with was a mass of images stuttering towards articulation.

– KATIE CUDDON, PRESS RELEASE FOR 'I NO LONGER KNOW WHAT THE MONEY IS', ALMA ENTERPRISES, 2010

Disparate Times...

Marianne Templeton

London is a place of constant entry and exit: outwardly stable, yet harbouring a deep sense of displacement and uncertainty. Disoriented by the global financial crisis, rising unemployment, numerous social issues and its own unwieldy size, the city nevertheless maintains an ungainly momentum. The art recently surfacing in London's artist-run initiatives — skewed, dislocated, and slightly misshapen art — has come to mirror the strange form of its surroundings. This art isn't perfect, and deliberately so. Frustrations, set-backs, innumerable false starts and failures are all valued. These are not the conditions for smooth, self-possessed technique, but a breeding ground for the fragmented, messy and transitory.

Opposite: Jo Addison, *Rocks*, 2008. Installation view from 'Amuse Bouche' at the two Jonnys'

This does not mean to say there is uniformity among all artists currently exhibiting in London. Yet several conspicuous trends point towards a general shift. Boxcopy's own overarching curatorial sensibilities — an emphasis on playfulness, humour and experimentation; a penchant for DIY and hybrid works; and a preference for art that physically and critically interrogates the limits of the space itself — are not out of place here. These traits characterise Boxcopy's unique curatorial vision, but also situate its conceptual strengths in close relation to the current field of London-based ARI practice.

And the field itself is marvellously diverse. The label of 'artist-led' covers a vast range of spaces, from industry stalwarts Cubitt and Matt's Gallery, to smaller projects such as Supplement and the two Jonnys'. There are also the shades of grey: the sharp-minded, minor commercial spaces that display more than a little ARI spirit (Seventeen; Sutton Lane; Ancient & Modern), and the lively larger galleries that subsist largely on Arts Council grants (Camden Arts Centre) or charitable patronage (Parasol Unit).

Such a bulky and heterogeneous art scene is fated to be as uneven as it is energetic. Sifting out the good and the wonderful from amongst the rotten, poor and dull cultivates headaches, blisters and a take-no-prisoners critical approach. Additionally, it is not always easy (or productive) to isolate the practices of non-profit art spaces from those of high-end commercial and public galleries, as a symbiotic relationship has long existed between the two ends of the spectrum.

Two recent large-scale surveys illustrate this connection: Nicolas Bourriaud's *Altermodern*, the 2009 Tate Triennial; and *Newspeak: British Art Now*, a two-part exhibition at The Saatchi Gallery in 2010–11. Both exhibitions attempted to define the artistic present, with questionable success; the one conclusive outcome was to confirm the continuing reign of the super-curator. *Newspeak* distanced itself from YBA shock-and-awe by presenting a subtler and more reflective generation of work, while *Altermodern*, as the first Tate Triennial to incorporate non-British participants, emphasised the statelessness of contemporary art.

The convergence of *Altermodern* and *Newspeak* with current ARI trajectories occurs on the level of the language of strategy. Skimming through Bourriaud's catalogue manifesto, familiar words stand out: fragmentation; displacement; re-enactment; mixing. This same language recurs within the discourse of both emerging and established artists, indicating a tendency towards perpetually roaming, open-ended work. Though his efforts to promote the term 'altermodern' are laboured at times, Bourriaud's central point is sound: the notion of today's artist as cultural nomad, a re-invented flâneur whose works reinterpret existing histories and signs.¹ These surveys may seem a long way from the ARI scene, but the key traits they identify — a resourceful eclecticism, a starting-point based in global culture, and a nomadic transportation and transformation of signs — are certainly familiar to many emerging artists in the UK, Australia, and elsewhere.

This same enterprising spirit has led to an inventive sourcing of premises. In Brisbane, a number of ARI's are born in suburbia; in London, they are often intimately connected with buildings of industry and commerce. The clusters of papered-over windows and empty shop-fronts that accompanied the first wave of the recession in 2008 reflected the general atmosphere of uncertainty, but also served as a reminder that artist-led initiatives thrive in such abandoned spaces, and continue to do so. In addition to the usual converted shops and warehouses, London ARI's have made use of an eclectic range of sites: an old ice-cream factory (Utrophia); an empty police station (Do-It-Yourself Art Centre); rooftops (Shed & A Half); shipping containers (Squid & Tabernacle); and the back room of a pub (Another Roadside Attraction), to list a few.

Equally resourceful are artists favoured by Supplement and Waterside Project Space, two initiatives with a curatorial focus on work that playfully interrogates the language systems and codified structures of daily life. These artists have multidimensional practices and will use whatever is at hand to make their point. Eclectic recent work by Supplement's Luke McCreadie have ranged from *Review*, a video of two conflicting music reviews written simultaneously with two pens held in

1. Nicolas Bourriaud, *Altermodern: Tate Triennial*, Tate Publishing, London, 2009, p.13.

one hand; to *Secret*, an illegibly jumbled pile of white wooden letters and punctuation marks; and *Richard & Chris*, thinly sliced and interlaced magazine portraits that seem to vibrate and melt before the eye. Waterside Project Space exemplifies a DIY aesthetic through lo-fi group exhibitions whose titles — *Unfinished Business*; *Phoney Language*; *Traveling Alone*; *Empty Sets* — emphasise the gaps that exist between meaning and understanding, use and potential, cause and effect.

Other initiatives provide platforms for work exploring institutional conventions. Artists managing their own gallery are often acutely aware of the function and structure of the space itself, and both Vulpes Vulpes and Alma Enterprises invite artists with rigorously critical practices to engage directly with the gallery structure. Over time, Alma Enterprises has morphed from an ARI into a curatorial project, which hosts installations, screenings and performances in a dynamic and visceral vein. *I no longer know what the money is*, a recent exhibition by Katie Cuddon, enacts the artist's frustrated struggle to express herself. Her too-rapidly projected drawings and their awkwardly positioned sculptural accompaniment force the visitor into a self-conscious navigation, of both the gallery space and Cuddon's visualised linguistic stumblings.

Hoxton's Standpoint Gallery delivers intelligent and often wryly funny exhibitions showcasing the 'artist's artists': Daniel Pasteniner, with his delightfully geeky pseudo-science assemblages; Jeanine Woollard, photographed heroically (and nakedly) braving the fearsome panthers and stallions printed on kitsch novelty blankets; and most recently, Indiana Audunsdottir, who captures on video her own awkward yet oddly charismatic reworkings of cave-woman myths, complete with ridiculous prosthetics, fake fur loincloths and liberal lashings of spray-tan. These works are rich with signification, ritual and stylistic references, yet not weighed down by them: Standpoint's artists are marked by their ability to edit, and edit well.

Most spaces take advantage of social media sites for publicity, documentation and debate. Some initiatives further blur medium and



message: the two Jonnys' commission artists to redesign their webpage on a rolling basis, while Furtherfield — an online platform which also hosts its own real-world site, HTTP Gallery — presents innovative digital and collaborative net-art projects. *How To Talk To Images*, Richard Wright's 2008 project for Furtherfield, used a database to compile 50,000 images from the internet as a comment on the increasing tendency 'to search rather than to see'.² The question at the heart of Wright's project — how do we cope with the awareness of the vast and incomprehensible mass that surrounds us? — is a classic philosophical concern that still resonates strongly within ARI discourse.

Above: Luke McCreadie, *Richard & Chris*, 2008

Photo: Courtesy of Supplement Gallery

2. Richard Wright, *How To Talk To Images*, HTTP Gallery, <http://www.http.uk.net/exhibitions/HTTTI/index.shtml>, 2008.

3. Jean Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil: Essays on Extreme Phenomena*, Verso, London, 1993, p.4.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 35–36.

In *The Transparency of Evil*, Baudrillard claimed that ‘Nothing (not even God) now disappears by coming to an end, by dying. Instead, things disappear through proliferation or contamination, by becoming saturated or transparent... Rather than a mortal mode of disappearance, then, a fractal mode of dispersal’.³ This ‘fractal mode of dispersal’ has a keen relevance to those increasing numbers of artists who rework and renovate pre-existing signs. Matter is never truly created or destroyed, only endlessly broken down and reformed. Rather than catapulting towards extremes in the manner of the *Sensation!* brood, these artists travel in circuits: they remain in orbit, scouring the globe for unusual perspectives, curious signs, and strange alignments of phenomena. The resulting art is, perhaps, a little tamer; but surely subtlety is not a bad thing.

With characteristic literary arm-flailing, Baudrillard also warned against the inertia that threatens a society sunk in surplus signs.⁴ The difference between the theory and the way emerging artists are approaching this overload is that artists seem less concerned with dystopian outlooks and more focused on direct human responses: the ‘stuttering towards articulation’ that Cudden describes. Immensity is to be accepted, rather than competed with or tamed. In reaction to an excess of signification, these artists no longer seek new languages, but instead rake through the junkyard, rescuing the useful and interesting bits and bending them to their own purposes.



Above: Indiana Audunsdottir,
Untitled, 2010

Photo: Courtesy of
Hoxton's Standpoint Gallery

P R O J E C T S

PR
OJ
EC
TS



David's painting [Death of Marat 1793] is the 'ground zero' from which a 'fall out' of sorts occurs, a distortion that is effected on the original material through a process of association and an idiosyncratic aggregation of elements.

—STEPHEN RUSSELL

Super Vanitas

Stephen Russell

26 September – 17 October 2009

Curated by Joseph Breikers

Essay by Charles Robb

I remember the first time I saw a reproduction of Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat*, 1793: it was in *Webster's Unabridged Universal Dictionary*, a massive hardback volume that dwarfed all other books on my family's bookshelf to both fascinate and intimidate me in equal measure. There was Marat under 'Q', slumped in his bath all pale and ethereal, with a single red arrow pointing out the *quill* in his hand. Like a photograph of a crime scene, this image troubled me for some time. On the one hand, the illustration imbued the quill with a menace that completely eclipsed that of the blood-stained knife beside it. But the arrow itself was also a cause of concern, irrationally incriminated into the drama of the scene by its proximity to the bloody incision in Marat's chest. I also worried about the oddly sensual figure in the diagram and the way in which his death was so effortlessly overshadowed by a slender bevelled feather.

Opposite: *Super Vanitas*, 2009, installation view

Photo: Carl Warner



SUPER VANITAS

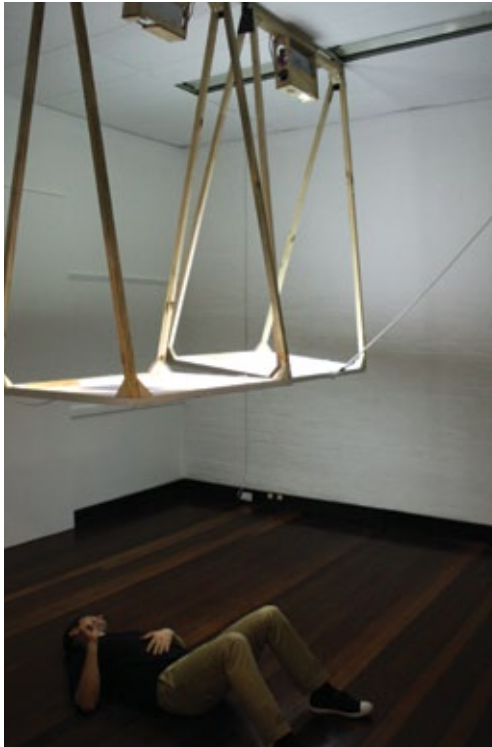
Thirty years later David's image still resonates. But I have come to see that, even without the Webster's arrow, *Death of Marat* retains all specificity of a diagram. The severe frontality of the painting, its compressed sense of depth, the rigidity of its rectilinear forms, the expanse of almost undifferentiated space that presses down from above, the starkness of its inscription; all these elements combine to produce a statement of *specificity*. Here, commemoration plays out not through an impassioned call to arms or outpouring of grief but through the meticulous display of mathematical proportion. As Hugh Honour notes, *Death of Marat* is 'a secular *Pietà*', a depiction of 'the absolute solitude and stark finality of death'.¹ As the Webster's editors apparently noticed, it is precisely forensic clarity that makes the work such an apt didactic instrument.

Stephen Russell also uses the *Death of Marat* as diagrammatic framework in his video installation *Super Vanitas*, 2009. For Russell though, the self-assembling precision of David's forms and the clarity of his didactic purpose become provocations to more open-ended and ambiguous distortions. If David's painting proclaimed the triumph of secular values and the new political order through which to enact them, Russell uses the painting as his own 'ground zero': a field of forms, equivalents, prompts and digressions that comprise a dynamic experimental system. Through a process of refraction in which the incidental subjective aspects of the painting are given form, the *ne plus ultra* finality of the painting is systematically broken down into a series of elliptical associations: David's famous facial tumour and Marat's hunched physique evoke the image of Quasimodo, the disfigured bellringer of Hugo's novel; the sweeping arc of Marat's arm recalls the swinging bells of Notre Dame and by extension the movement of Foucault's Pendulum in the Panthéon (where Marat was briefly interred following his death); this pendulum, which converts that building into a monumental timepiece, evokes a radial movement of a very different kind in the form of the gallows trapdoor upon which the fate of Quasimodo and Esmeralda hinges; and so on. Russell's chain of associations, necessarily incomplete and amorphous, mirrors the fragmentary and endlessly digressive nature of the online technologies so fundamental to the distribution of images in our world.

Opposite: *Super Vanitas*, 2009, installation view

Photo: Carl Warner

1. Hugh Honour, *Neo-Classicism*, Penguin, London, 1991, pp.155-6.



Above and opposite:
Super Vanitas, 2009,
 exhibition opening
 Photo: Timothy P Kerr

Russell's project, it seems, is to create a portrait of the Marat that incorporates the intertextual patina that the work acquires through history.

But to take Russell's work as a purely intellectual exercise is to miss something of the point. For his work is as much about *distilling* the image as it is about disrupting it. Despite the elliptical nature of its processes, Russell's work nonetheless preserves something of the quiet melancholy of his source. Like Marat, Russell's forms are suspended forlornly in space – *mementos mori* that literally mark time. Russell's pendular projections address the temporal and spatial concerns normally masked by digital media – the viewer has to physically negotiate swinging motions in order to access the work. But, by requiring the viewer to set this action in motion through the use of a rope pull, Russell casts the viewer in the role of Quasimodo. Like the hero of Hugo's novel,

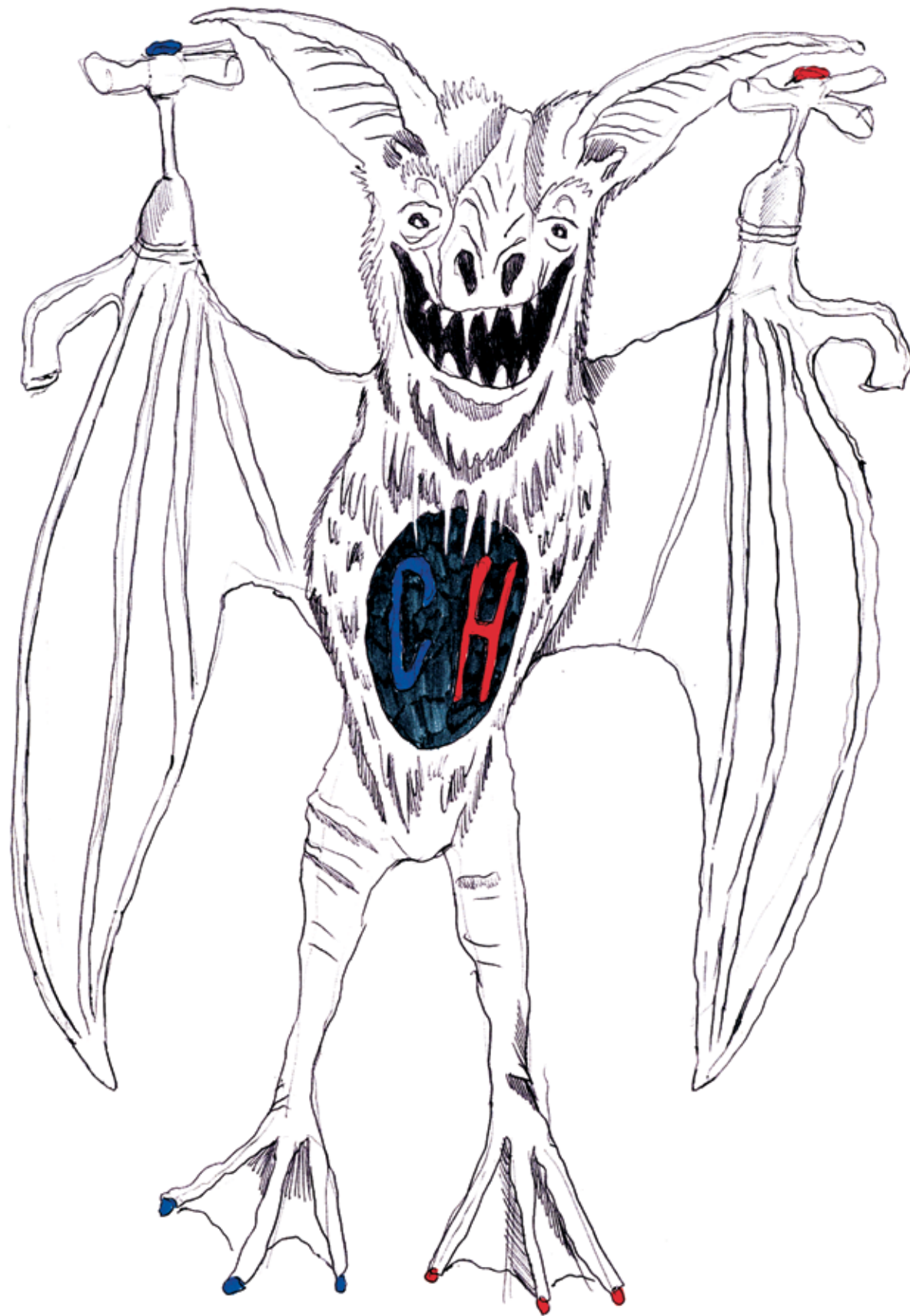
the viewer's interaction with the work is framed by a sense of melancholic desire that plays wryly on the strange parcel of expectations that each of us brings to the work of art.

Ultimately then, Russell faces off against both canon and viewer: the twin perils that haunt the artist's studio. Just as Russell's act of dissective *détournement* disrupts the integrity of the Marat, his use of viewer-participation makes the audience a surreptitious accomplice in this process. For Russell, the distortion that the viewing process performs upon the work of art is a phenomenon that unites both the viewer and artist. Russell recognises that, like his own strategy of fragmentation, the motion set forth by the pull of the bell-rope transforms the work into a complex of rhythmical gestures that fundamentally tempers the authoritative impression of the artwork. Russell makes visible the motion

that the frozen solemnity of Marat's corpse tends to obscure: its dependence on highly dynamic systems of distribution.

By giving form to the field of interference that exerts itself upon the work of art, Russell's work occupies a compelling zone between familiarity and strangeness. In so doing, he provides a view into the shifting constellation of influences that permeates our relationship with culture more broadly. In effect, Russell's primary subject matter is precisely that incongruity with which a quill and an arrow can become forever linked: the uncanniness that accrues to all artworks over time.





Chiromancy

David Spooner

31 October – 21 November 2009

Curated by Raymonda Rajkowski

Essay by Danielle Clej

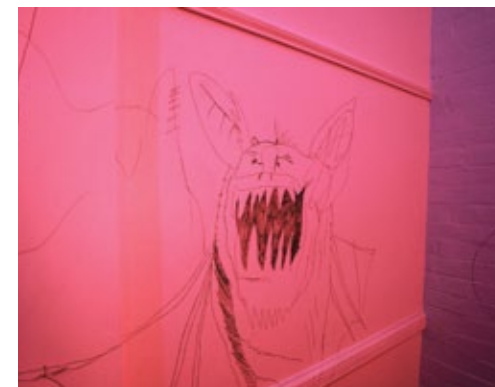
institches **bat** *right off the bat- at the very beginning*. While the universe is limited in extent and contains a finite amount of matter, time is infinite with no starting or ending point. As the heaviest conceivable weight, the thought of eternal recurrence is horrifying and paralysing. To comprehend it, requires *amor fati* (“love of fate”), an acceptance that everything in life has purposes within larger networks of occurrences. Hume describes it as the “eternal return”; Bergson discusses the “*élan vital*”; Deleuze explores the “non organic vitality”; and Bernard Shaw focuses upon “life force”. **wood bat** *vulgar slang -wood, bat off- masturbate- wank or to be a wanker: an egotistical person or self-indulgent focus*. To embrace the ontological anxiety of eternal recurrence, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi promotes an operation of “flow”. “Flow” is a state where the individual is fully immersed in the material-physical-processual aspects of creation. During the creative process, emotions are simultaneously contained and channeled, (energised, and aligned with the creativeness of a task) whilst remaining open to spontaneous feelings of joy (receptive, and appreciative of the randomness of chance occurrences). **robotic bat** *a robot built by North Carolina State University Researchers to conduct surveillance*. Moulded from ‘soft’ metals, the bats are powered by shape memory alloy spokes programmed to process webs of information gathered via echolocation. Bats store series of complex auditory maps, networked by characteristics of sound. Recent experiments published by the Royal Society of Biological Sciences revealed that bats continually adjust the width of echolocating beams by drawing upon their network of knowledge to predict changing elements within the geographical field of unfamiliar environments.

Opposite: Drawing
by David Spooner



CHIROMANCY

The robotic bat built by the University researchers weighs less than 6 grams and easily fits inside the palm of the hand. **metallic paint** *paint of, relating to or resembling metal*. David Spooner recalls a period during his childhood when he thought his friend's father could build robots; eventually David realised he could not. **lead** *a soft, malleable, heavy metal, to have caused a person or animal to go with an idea or with one by holding them by the hand or rope, to have initiated action particularly in a game*. In childhood development, there is a stage of play in which the imagination leads the creation of rules. Such play eventually gives way to games where the imagination becomes subservient to rules. This transition is often read as a development of cognitive-semiotic functions, as the object of play is understood to represent another thing. Consequently, Piaget located imaginary play at the assimilative end of the learning spectrum. This view dismisses play as an infantile stage of development that is replaced by more logical and rational ways of thinking/behaving. Ultimately, it undervalues the significance of imaginative play in human experience. Brian Sutton-Smith conceptualizes imaginative play as a unique type of expressive form that is neither solely a cognitive nor an affective function.¹ Not subservient to adaptive thought, this play is understood as a process that creates layers of expressive personal meanings. **plumb** *measure, to explore fully, to a very high degree, completely*. David Spooner stitches intricate networks that explore the connections between materials through words, forms, places and experiences. Everything is sewn into larger webs of occurrences as his imagination continually shifts the rules that govern structural transformations. This continuously evolving imaginary play is childlike but not childish. When conducted by adults, play is not normally a process that encourages an individual to imagine something as being other than what it is commonly understood to be. David's works do not just play with unfamiliar ways of understanding the material qualities of things. They imaginatively reconfigure different ways in which we can understand the connections between things. **plumbism** *technical term for lead poisoning, also known as painter's colic, colica pictonium, saturnism, poisoning due to the*



Above: *Chiromancy*, 2009, detail

Photo: Carl Warner

Opposite: *Chiromancy*, 2009, exhibition opening

Photo: Timothy P Kerr

1. Robin E. Herron & Brian Sutton-Smith (Eds), *Child's play*, New York: Wiley, 1971, p 341.

absorption of lead into the body. The Watsons Brothers Building is registered on Brisbane's Cultural Heritage List. The building is significant due to its connection with local plumbing company Watsons Brothers; a company that played an instrumental role in Queensland's building history. The origins of international records of childhood plumbism can be traced to reports of lead poisoning in Brisbane in 1897. In Queensland, the majority of poisoning arose from domestic exposure to lead-based paint because few lead water pipes were seeded. Lead Poisoning is an example of a neurosis. It is a lesion of the nervous function unconnected with any known pathological alteration. Children are most susceptible to the toxicity of lead as it affects physical growth and the ability for the brain to build connections between different areas of cognition. Symptoms and effects include delayed neurodevelopment, linguistic deficits and hyperactive, inappropriate and uncontrolled behaviours. **batty crazy, insane.** In the first instance, David's artworks appear to play with layers of non-sequiturs. Seemingly illogical and strangely disconnected, the juxtapositions of materials, words, objects and forms are actually intricately connected segments of complex, absurd networks of logic. The absurd is a state of confrontation between the desire for rationality for systems of logic and order, and the reality of the illogical and random nature of the world. Humour emerges from this threshold of the absurd. **Chiromancy origin** *Chiro- of the hand or hands, also known as Palmistry or Palm Reading, in the palm of one's hand, to have someone wrapped around one's finger.* Chiromancy is the practice of evaluating a person's character or future by "reading" the palm of the hand. Various "lines" and "mounts" suggest interpretations by their relative sizes, connections and intersections. The line of fate (line of destiny, Saturnian) is the center upright line on the palm. Possessors of philosophic, conic, and psychic hands with heavily marked fate lines tend to be strong believers in fate, whereas possessors of square and spatulate shaped hands rarely believe in fate. David Spooner talks, draws, sculpts and stitches networks of logics with his hands. This sophisticated imaginary play forms an ordered nonsense that converts the anxiety of the eternal recurrence into eternalised absurdity.



Above and left:
Chiromancy, 2009,
installation view
Photo: Carl Warner

Patronise Me

Courtney Coombs

28 November – 19 December 2009

Curated by Timothy P Kerr

Essay by Nikolaus Baylart

'I need your help to realise my dream', Courtney Coombs asks visitors to her *Patronise Me* exhibition, conveniently providing them with her personal bank account numbers should they so graciously wish to oblige. The archetype of the starving artist scrounging for grants and working three mindless jobs has evolved, stopping just short of charging an admission fee. But to explain away Coombs' gesture as merely an audacious fundraising scheme would be to ignore her growing body of work and her incisive exploration of the role of the institution, and its relationship with the artist/curator.

Nine scale models of the exhibition space, not unlike those found in the curatorial offices of most art museums and galleries, are placed in the space itself. Within each a different object, or exhibition, is 'installed', from models of decadent fixtures such as racquetball courts and aviaries, to the artist's own staple material, the humble foam block.

Background image:
Patronise Me, 2009
Photo: Carl Warner



Above: *Patronise Me*, 2009,
exhibition opening
Photo: Timothy P Kerr

To display a model in a gallery space immediately draws one into the realm of unfulfilled potential, where the artist straddles the boundary between artist and curator and must ultimately accept their reality. Coombs' models admit to her hesitation as both an artist and a curator: is she accepting the reality of being an artist whose financial situation limits her creativity, or is she accepting the reality of being a curator, where greater impediments to achieving her vision come to the fore? Would *Patronise Me* remain the same had one or more of these obstacles been removed?

In the 2008 Biennale of Sydney, Gordon Bennett's famous proposal to literally turn the historic collection of the Art Gallery of New South Wales upside-down was rejected, and instead the artist constructed scale models of the gallery as it could have been. There are greater obstructions to creative expression than merely finance. Conservation, logistics, structural integrity, workplace health and safety, public opinion, and the attitudes of a gallery's executive branch all play their parts in influencing the outcome of so-called institutional critique, with the seemingly dictatorial conditions inherent in a gallery ultimately guiding what, precisely, an artist can in fact critique. Coombs' *Patronise Me* exposes the institutional pragmatism that so necessarily leads both artistic and curatorial creativity. The inability of the artist to construct a functioning swimming pool in the gallery space, for instance, is not for a lack of financing. One need not ponder for long the ramifications of attempting to display tens of thousands of litres on the first floor of a primarily wooden building — one of the few remaining vestiges of now 'ancient' architecture in the CBD of a city defined by Bjelke-Petersen and Newman's monumental modernisation regimes.

The great question is, does Coombs' pragmatic admission of defeat in fact leave us with a greater work of art? Or better yet, would a successful



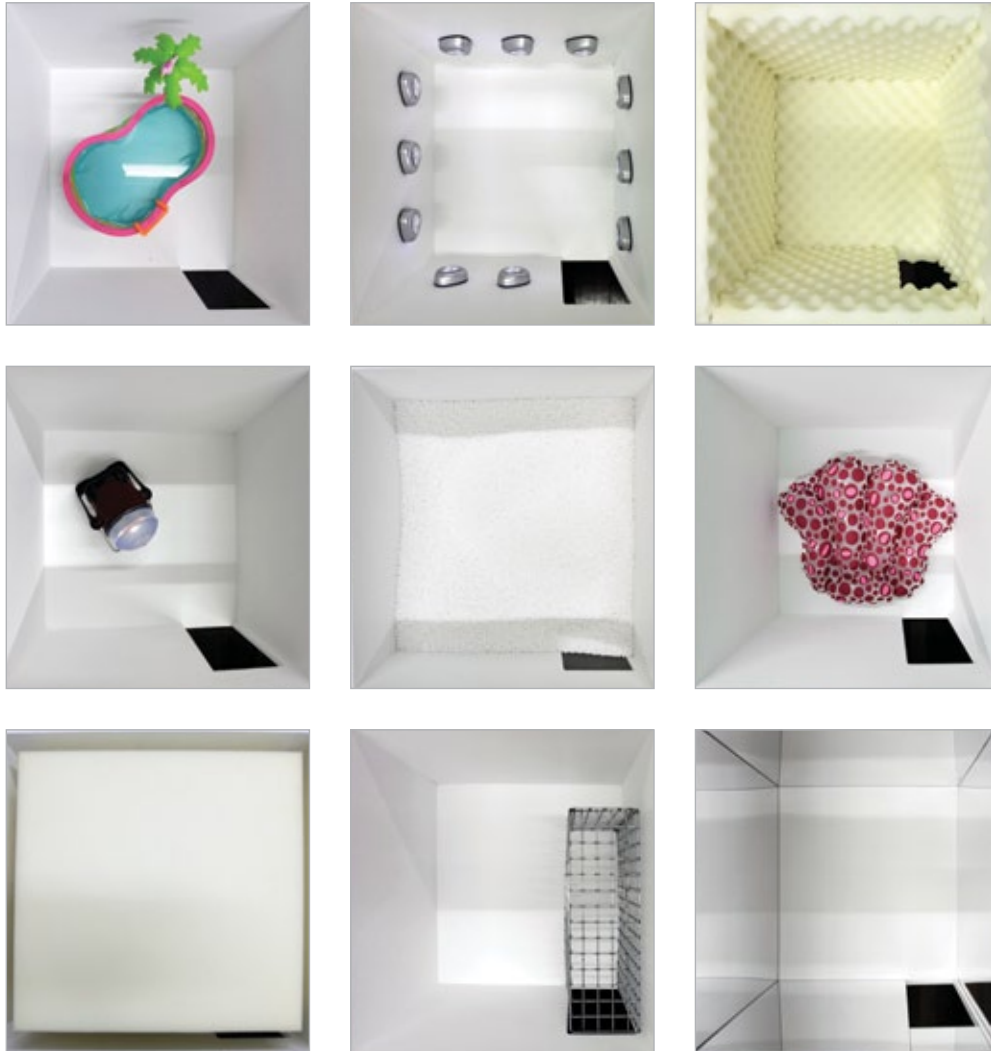
project have stripped her work of the surgical attention towards that which is necessary for the successful display of art?

Like Bennett's proposal, Coombs' work succeeds as a direct result of its failure. Her models allow us to appreciate her critique of the space and her understanding of it as an artist/curator, while also facilitating an objective interpretation of her project. To look down at her models and interact with them physically, to be caught in that plane between the greater space that exists and the lesser model that has been constructed, gives the spectator an omnipotence that reveals her conceptual approach. The spectator is privy to the underlying mechanics of the gallery space, and is able to explore and interact with it from within, above, and between. The spectator, in fact, now occupies the same position as the curator.

Above: *Patronise Me*, 2009,
installation view
Photo: Carl Warner

PROJECTS

PATRONISE ME



Engagement and interactivity, on all levels, is a prominent focus for Coombs, and echoes her own approach to the space. Dominating the area within one of the models is a foam block that, had it been constructed in the gallery, would only allow for a small space for guests to awkwardly manoeuvre themselves. Although the element of free interactivity remains, Coombs surreptitiously controls the spectator's actions through influencing their sense of spatial relations. An imposing foam block that dominates a room both physically and psychologically is bound to draw attention to the space itself, especially to an audience that ordinarily approaches a space as an irrelevant location in which art happens to exist. Constructing models not only enhances this awareness of the space, but it reflects the similar approach an artist must take when creating an installation artwork.

Patronise Me serves almost as a narrative to Coombs' own engagement with the space, prior to any installation of artwork or assault by the spectator. Any artist would bring conceptual ideas to the gallery as a physical location, but must view it with a curatorial hat. What concepts will work? What will fail? What must be adjusted? What is possible? How can I compensate? These are the questions a critiquing artist-cum-curator must ask themselves when engaging with a space. Hesitating between the two roles is crucial to as thoughtful an incisive investigation as *Patronise Me*.

In understanding the relationships between artwork and space, curator and artist, and concept and reality, do we as the spectator in fact become patrons, and play our role in helping this particular dream come true?

Opposite: *Patronise Me*, 2009, details

Photo: Carl Warner

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Part of the action is looking at what was latent and what was here before the room was painted white. Another part is suggesting that maybe the existing condition wasn't so problematic, or that it would have sufficed: that, in fact, painting the room white is symptomatic of, or perpetuates other strategies for colonising space.

—DIRK YATES, INTERVIEW BY DAVID M. THOMAS,
UN MAGAZINE, ISSUE 4.1, 2010

Office of Australia

Dirk Yates

23 January – 20 February 2010

Curated by Tim Woodward

Essay by Kate Woodcroft

Whilst in discussion with Dirk Yates about this essay he mentioned questioning his father about the appropriateness of the current Australian flag. He described how an initial expression of approval gave way to uncertainty upon the event of his articulation. This moment of contingency exposes the significance of the social encounter in revealing the fluidity of our engagement with representations of culture. It is this possibility that Yates looks for in *Office of Australia*.

Opposite: *Office of Australia*, 2009, installation view.
Photo: Carl Warner.



Above:
Office of Australia,
2010, detail

Opposite:
Office of Australia,
2010, installation view
Photo: Carl Warner

In returning the walls of this colonised workplace to their previous colours Yates exchanges the customary shroud of white for an awareness and actualization of the specific history of the space. He also positions the gallery sitter in the centre of the space and implicates them in a relationship with the work. Thus the experience of reading is actively opened to include the space itself, its geographical and historical context and the possibility of other bodies (the gallery sitter or other visitors). This move away from the closed value system of the white cube suggests the seamlessness of real and representational space. This gallery is opened to the processes of the direct encounter.

This situation also works in reverse. Images that are applied in everyday contexts as utilitarian representations of place (eg. a map) are subject to the analytical rigour of the art space. Yates uses the art space to test out the possibilities and shortcomings of existing representations — in this case, most potently, the Australian flag. What are the possibilities of this image? How has it been constructed? What histories does it connote? What histories does it exclude? How do we characterise the meaning of iconic abstractions? *Office of Australia* provides a space for dialogical encounters that address these questions.

The use of principally diagrammatic images seems to establish an engagement with representation that evades the mythology that is attached to cultural icon. It refuses the implicit meaning that is authorized by the experience of artefacts through time and reintroduces the possibility of direct identification and the prospect of transformation. This approach demonstrates the essential pragmatism of Yates' practice.





His precise analytics work upon the assumption of an epistemology based in discursive practice. Upon such terms this exhibition is less a political assertion than a series of markers that subtly proffer the value of the social encounter in addressing disagreement. In this scenario Yates evokes the interdependence of representation and social exchange as modes for apprehension of communal knowledge. He proposes the 'space of art as one that is isomorphic but reflexive with the space of the real'.¹

A similar methodology is discussed by the French scholar Jacques Rancière. Rancière's model expresses a desire to re-introduce indeterminacy into the problem of art and politics in order to create a space in which the subject is not answerable to pre-emptive configurations of the relationships between things. He suggests a 'multiplicity of small ruptures, of small shifts, that refuse the blackmail of radical subversion'.²

Above and opposite:
Office of Australia,
2010, detail

Photo: Carl Warner

1. David Pestorius, 'Dada in the post-colonial field: Dave Hullfish Bailey's CityCat Project for Brisbane', *Column 4: Spaces of Art* ed. Reuben Keehan, Artspace Visual Arts Centre, Sydney, 2009.
2. Jacques Rancière, 'Art of the Possible: Fulvia Carnevale and John Kelsey in Conservation with Jacques Rancière', *Artforum*, March 2007, pp.256-269.

This remark refers to the impossibility of fixed identification with or against particular agendas and advocates an explicit examination of the field of dissensus. In this exhibition and in his recent architectural practice Yates brings this logic to bear on post-colonial identity in Australia.

This issue seems to exemplify the complexity and consequence of cultural representation. Yates explores what is at stake in the disagreements that dominate informed discussions of Australian history and works to essentialise the notion that representation is subject to social and historical specificities and cannot ever be wholly transcended by metaphysical analysis. Accordingly, the act of re-articulation must become central to the development of an egalitarian mode of knowledge;

'the self must be willing to abandon its previous make-up if it is to expand substantially its palette of meaning-enhancing ways of interacting with its environment'.³

The discursive formations that circulate in *Office of Australia* identify fissures in the existing structures of identification and call for a mutable comprehension of meaning. This mutability relies on an attitude to cultural inheritance that is necessarily curious but also irreverential; 'the moving present includes the past on condition that it uses the past to direct its own movement'.⁴ Through architectural and iconographic intervention, *Office of Australia* rejects the canonization of our history and asks us to actively reassess the processes that formulate our understanding of identification and difference.



Left: *Office of Australia*,
2010, exhibition opening
Photo: Timothy P Kerr

3. David Granger, 'Recovering the Everyday: John Dewey as Emersonian Pragmatist' *Educational Theory*, 48 (3), 1998, pp. 331-349.
4. Dewey, J. *Human Nature and Conduct: An Introduction to Social Psychology*, Modern Library, New York, 1930.



Material formations and body movements

Ardi Gunawan

6 March – 3 April 2010

Curated by Raymonda Rajkowski

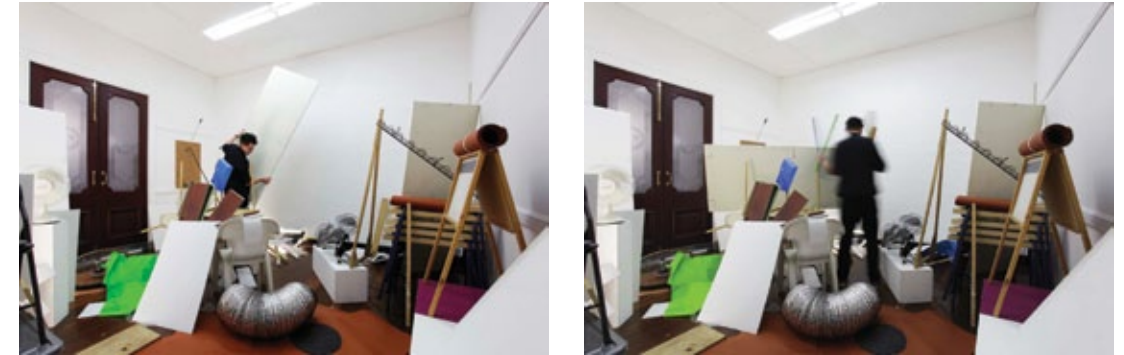
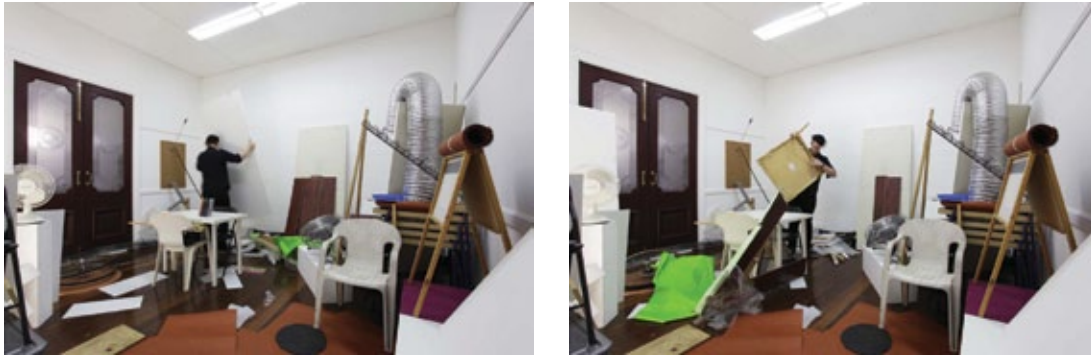
Essay by Laura Mudge

Ardi Gunawan's latest exhibition *Material formations and body movements* explores the possibilities of action and energy when applied to material form. To throw, rearrange, move, lift, break, pile and push — this collection of verbs indicate Gunawan's basic instructions to be acted out by the committee members of Boxcopy using materials sourced by them, including doors, light bulbs and discarded furniture. While Gunawan establishes a rudimentary framework for the project he encourages chance and entropy to take hold at every opportunity by relinquishing absolute artistic control.

Gunawan's previous work has typically involved the use of found objects that are not materially changed but rather reconfigured. The absence of methods used to bind or connect these objects through force or manipulation, necessitates the finding of a point of equilibrium whereby the materials self-support. This balancing act is aided by the use of slender pieces of wood to stabilise the precarious arrangements. Like stop-motion film Gunawan's previous work appears to capture a moment in time, as though the act of gravity has been paused indefinitely.

Background image:
*Material formations and
body movements*, 2010,
installation view

Photo: Channon Goodwin



Above and opposite:
*Material formations and
body movements*, 2010,
installation view
Photo: Carl Warner

For *Material formations and body movements* action is not paused but rather put into motion, with Gunawan's intention to make his processes of art as transparent as possible. Traditionally the finished product takes precedence; with sketches, preparations and previous experiments rarely exhibited. Rather than presenting a final product, the raw materials or 'stuff' as termed by Gunawan, are not altered in any way by the artist. These objects are arranged by Gunawan before the opening of the exhibition and are then subject to reconfiguration by the committee members. The viewer can witness this process as the actions invoked by Gunawan's instructions are performed randomly over the course of the exhibition during opening hours. Successive visits would be required to grasp the changing nature of the material formations and to perhaps catch a glimpse of the action in play.

Gunawan's performative installation is influenced by Allan Kaprow and his seminal Happenings of the 1960s. These site-specific impermanent works were the forerunner to installation and performance art. Kaprow acknowledged that his work would be reinvented, as has been the case with his Environment Yard first produced in 1961. This work involving a mass of black rubber tires and tarpaper wrapped forms was recreated by Kaprow on several occasions and reinvented by numerous artists, most recently in 2009 for the opening of Hauser and Wirth in New York at the site of the original installation.

Rather than a reinvention, Gunawan considers his installation to be a reusing of Kaprow's ideas to explore the matrix created by experimentation with form and matter as it encounters movements of the body and factors of energy, chance and entropy. Starting with Kaprow's instructions 'rearrange the tires' for *Yard*, Gunawan created a list of related verbs and allowed chance to narrow it down to seven instructions. These verbs are non-determinate, as they do not specify the where, why or how. The resulting configuration of raw materials is therefore an unknown factor as the prescribed actions in no way dictate the outcome. This approach challenges the understanding of the immutable art object, as a continual evolution of material form is propelled by the provisional gestures of the body.

Unlike Kaprow's installation of *Yard*, where visitors were able to walk over and sit amongst the tyres, Gunawan does not invite viewers to have any physical contact with the materials. The role of the viewer as spectator is clearly demarcated from that of the artist/actors. While this is a mechanism of control, Gunawan's structure does provide flexibility for those entrusted with performing his instructions.

The committee members are afforded the freedom to decide which instructions they will act out, the day and time they will take place and the objects to be used. Gunawan relishes this process of collaborating



Above: *Material formations and body movements*, 2010, exhibition opening
Photo: Timothy P Kerr

as he considers ‘ideas are formed collectively and thus it takes the production of art into the social sphere.’ His instructions further encourage the agency of his actors as they provide the capacity for multiple interpretations and possibilities. Gunawan even accepts that anarchy may take hold, whereby his instructions are discarded in favour of improvisation. This collaborative approach defies the notion of the artist as the sole creator, and brings chance once again into play, as Gunawan ultimately relinquishes control over compositional and aesthetic factors. Engaging others to manipulate the objects demonstrates Gunawan’s focus is on the process itself rather than the success or failure of the resultant formations.

The foregrounding of process apparent in *Material formations and body movements* both facilitates the work and is the work. This approach ties Gunawan’s practice to the sculptural and installation-based practices of Process art in the late 1960s and 70s. For artists such as Robert Smithson and Richard Serra, the process was of greater prominence to the completed work with improvisation and the use of ephemeral materials common. Gunawan’s focus on process is reflected by the unpredictable and transitory nature of the assemblages. Like Kaprow’s impermanent works which defied commoditization, value is not invested in the final product of Gunawan’s project, as the materials will be dismantled at the end of the exhibition and returned to their status as discarded junk.

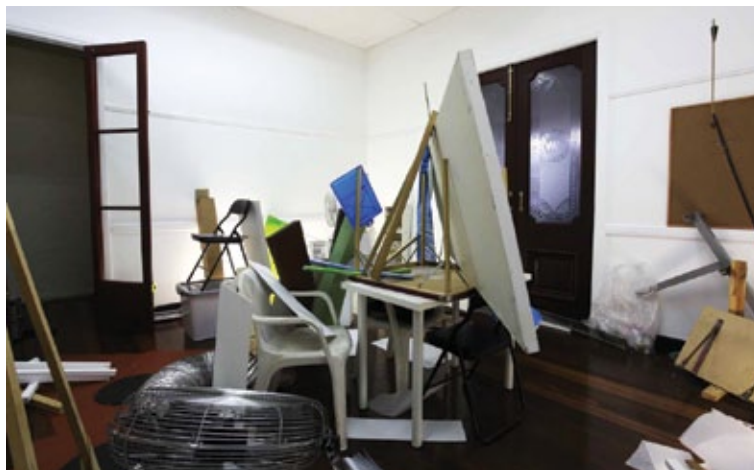
It is therefore not so much an art object that Gunawan is interested in generating through the processes of *Material formations and body movements*, as the installation both *creates* and is *formed* by an experience. Kaprow’s work was seminal in challenging the traditional understanding of art as representational, by presenting experience as art. Gunawan’s project for Boxcopy continues this objective, as it brings real time and space to the fore, both in the collision between material form and body movement, but also in the viewer’s immediacy to this process. This exhibition highlights the complex relationship between the temporal, spatial and social aspects of Gunawan’s mode of production; and the potentiality of experimentation and chance in achieving sculptural form.



Above: *Material formations and body movements*, 2010, installation view
Photo: Channon Goodwin



Above and right:
*Material formations and
 body movements*, 2010,
 installation view
 Photo: Carl Warner



Instructions

The gallery directors are asked to choose one or several activities written below. It is up to them how many activities to choose from. Once decided, they must allocate their chosen activities to one or several days of the exhibition, for example:

- One activity in one day
- One activity over several days
- Several activities in one day

They can perform their task/s, either when there's an audience in the room, or at any time between the operative hours of the gallery. The participants can do their task alone or with a group.

Activities

- Throw the stuff
- Rearrange the stuff
- Move the stuff across the floor
- Lift and drop the stuff
- Break the stuff
- Pile stuff
- Push the stuff



It's only a little bit about death.

—TIM PLAISTED

Extra Fins

Tim Plaisted

17 April – 16 May 2010

Curated by Daniel McKewen

Essay by Vivian Ziherl

Extra Fins presents a pair of new works by Tim Plaisted that together exhibit a typically inconsistent approach to materials by an artist often tagged under the 'new media' catch-all. The works, Cast 1 and Cast 2 operate together as variations on a theme. Cast 1 is a blue and gold model plane realized in meticulous detail yet with a surfeit of wings radiating about the fuselage. Cast 2 displays dreamy underwater footage of the artist swimming towards and through the top of the shot, his lagging right leg encased in a knee-to-foot cast which is embellished with occasionally perceptible computer-generated golden wings.

Although obviously dealing heavily in its tropes, 'flight' itself is a red-herring, a wrapper for broader themes such as the threshold to realms of deam/imagination an evocation of buoyancy/suspension/support and a mercurial relation to interpretation. In actuality what lies at the beating heart of the works is hope in lieu of any concrete grounds for hope. Plaisted likens the winged excess of Cast 1 to a wide-eyed

Opposite: *Extra Fins*,
2010, installation view
Photo: Timothy P Kerr



Above: *Extra Fins*, 2010, installation view

Opposite: *Extra Fins*, 2010, detail

Photo: Carl Warner

1. Hal Foster, 'An Archival Impulse', *October*, 110 Fall, pp.3-22.

child's enthusiasm; 'it was like a kid's view of what would make a great plane shortly after getting the idea that planes need wings to fly'. In this way the works emanate a deeply ambivalent sensibility registering not so much flight but the gap between flight and the attempt of flight. Such an equivocal stance is one of few sentiments currently available to artists, keenly flanked by the cynicism of hyper self-aware smarty pants and what Hal Foster acknowledges as the 'sometimes strained in effects' tendency of the artist as archivist.¹

There is however, a fine line between the intriguingly elusive and the non-instructive vague. Cast 1 and 2 maintain a certain gravity in their phenomenological relation to the viewer, the two metre wing-span of

Cast 1 operates at a human scale, placing its off-kilter gesture unavoidably at the feet of the one who encounters it. The viewer is similarly implicated in the spatiality of Cast 2, first in its near 1:1 scale and second in the direct bearing of the sunlight that is very specifically captured in all three separate takes of footage. Readable also as indicators of a dreamy, romantic quality, the stark rays of sub-tropical sunlight pierce the membrane of the water's surface, and then again pierce the membrane of the screen, entering the exhibitions space and providing a quality of the room's ambient light.

The latter effect was first encountered by Plaisted during the exhibition of one of his screen-based works within the Multimedia Art Asia Pacific exhibition 'Gravity', hosted by the Singapore Art Museum in 2004. The large, dominantly blue projection created a halo of coloured light in the space, unintentionally echoing MAAP director Kim Machan's curatorial/conceptual gesture in which the opening three weeks of the exhibition featured blank/blue projections accompanied by an original newspaper edition of Yves Klein's *Le Peintre de l'Espace se Jette Dans le Vide* (Leap into the Void), 1961. Both 'blue' and 'void' are strongly present in the works of *Extra Fins* and *Yves Klein* is incidentally an early favourite artist of Plaisted's; 'first for the colour, and then for the concepts'.

Colour is, of course, one of the classic aesthetics 'supports', and the notional of support recurs throughout *Extra Fins*. Plaisted refers enigmatically to the works as 'aids and props to flying', and the leg cast is itself a literal support to the bone in healing. In her recent publication 'Support Structures', Celine Condorelli identifies four key qualities of support as; 'proximity, against, supplementary and temporary', going on to provide a 'bibliography of support structures' including documentation and original text from El Lissitzky's *Abstract Cabinet*,





Above and opposite:
Extra Fins, 2010,
exhibition opening
Photo: Timothy P Kerr

2. Celine Condorelli,
Support Structures,
Sternberg Press,
Berlin, 2010.

an essay on 'How to Care' by Jan Verwoert and a facsimile poster of motivational slogans taped to the wall of Ryan Gander's studio.² Among the gamut of possible imputations of the notion of support, 'against' stands out as counter-intuitive.

However within the etymology of a word such as 'prop' with its roots in the Middle Dutch 'proppe' or 'stopper', and within the specific support labour of the medical cast in providing a mechanical force against, a latent antagonism is present. Cast 1 and 2 dramatise and poeticise the opposed forces of support or prop, emphasizing not flight by the exaggerated attempt to fly; the gap between the intention for flight and the dream of elegant, aquiline momentum through air.

In all their ambivalence and aversion to finality, Cast 1 and 2 still quixotically court an analysis of de-coded symbology. The golden wings are an unmistakable referent of Hermes, messenger across the threshold of mortal and immortal realms of the Ancient Hellenic world as well as the etymological root of 'hermeneutics'. In a paranoid reading the web of associations from this analytic key could proliferate semi-coherently; Herme – patron of boundaries and travelers who cross them (flight), the athlete and the injured athlete (the cast), a bringer of dreams (mental flight), messenger of the gods (communication/interpretation), a trickster (red-herrings, false-interpretations), patron of invention (the plane, the invented support for flight). In the final instance the works of *Extra Fins* are aware of, yet side-step an pseudo-psychoanalytic dream-key resolution. Far too much is withheld for this, the artist's investment in collaborative production process as an example. Plaisted is comfortable to operate with a devolved/distributed authorship and references a tactic of 'sub-contracting' in situations where he seeks his process and ideas to be challenged. When discussing the codes of an artwork Plaisted speaks of 'the games that artists play'.

Humorous, mesmeric, equivocal and finally modest; *Extra Fins* presents reality as elusive and contingent, yet somehow graspable in the common human (possibly transcultural?) dream of flight.





Dis-close: Project Another Country

Alfredo & Isabel Aquilizan

5 – 26 June 2010

Curated by Channon Goodwin

Essay by Tim Walsh

Dis-close: Project Another Country sees Alfredo and Isabel Aquilizan end Boxcopy's first series of artist projects in their Margaret Street space by tearing and hacking the paint from the brick wall. There is no other way to describe this other than to put it bluntly: this is a destructive act. And it is a departure from an aesthetic that is normally defined by a community-driven, collective approach. Yet, *Dis-close* highlights an increasingly prevalent theme in the work of the Aquilizans — an interest in the ways we can see history or think historically in the present. To consider this we must, perhaps appropriately, begin with some historical context.

The Aquilizans' medium is almost religiously refuse — unwanted, discarded and redundant materials turned into often transcendent forms. Past works have included the recent installation *In-flight (Project: Another Country)* for 'The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art' at the Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, which saw their favoured recycled mediums turned into thousands of small, handmade aeroplanes that rose from a giant mound reminiscent of a garbage heap. Over 6500 planes were made as part of a school-based, state-wide aeroplane-making drive and incorporated into the monumental work. As a symbol, the aeroplane can be one of fear,

Opposite: *Dis-close: Project Another Country*, 2010, install documentation
Photo: Courtesy of artists



Above: *Dis-close:*
Project Another Country,
2010, installation view

Opposite: *Dis-close:*
Project Another Country,
2010, details

Photo: Carl Warner

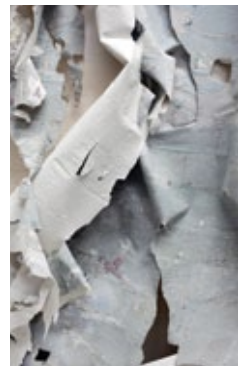
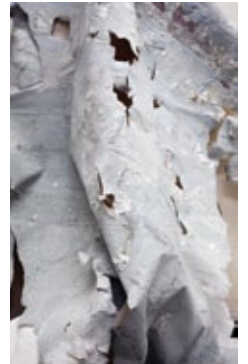
of travel and migration — even functioning as religious iconography. Participants were able to make their own aircraft with the same materials used to form the works on display. This personal, almost socialist presentation of art differentiates the Aquilizans' practice from the recent anarchic sculptural trend, profiled in the 2007 opening exhibition of New York's New Museum entitled *Unmonumental*. Though the forms are often presented as transcendent, they never escape the viewer — they are relatable, personal objects that tell us about the artists and the community involved.

For the 2008 Singapore Biennale over 4000 used thongs were collected from a Singaporean correctional facility and speared onto bamboo poles, hoisted many metres above the ground, away from the viewer.

Entitled *Flight*, this installation was re-fashioned into a set of angelic wings for a 2009 exhibition at the University of the Philippines Vargas Museum in Quezon City. Brought back to the ground, the wings were scaled back to relatively human-size. Besides obviously connecting with the transcendental themes already touched upon, the wings evoke one of the foundational tenets of the Aquilizans' practice — a constant reinvention of previous forms into new works. Components or parts of previous works are returned to the artists and stored under their house only to return months down the track in a new iteration. What was once rubbish attains a profound position as art object. At the end of the exhibition, the work does not return to refuse — for the Aquilizans, art is able to initiate an irreversible, transformative experience that turns what was unwanted excess into a medium.

Here we can begin to approach the key theme of *Dis-close*. Perhaps the closest connection to previous works would be *Lucid*, a selection of strange ocular pieces installed in Fort Lytton, a series of 19th century concrete bunkers built to defend the port of Brisbane from potential naval attack. Situated at the mouth of the Brisbane River, Fort Lytton was used as part of 2009's ARC Biennale for temporary installations by a number of contemporary artists. Presented as temporary works, *Lucid* featured large magnifying glasses that focussed the eye upon indelible marks and gouges that peppered the heritage-listed structures. The magnifying glasses re-emerged for *Looking through the Glassland*, (as part of the Woodford Folk Festival) here used to focus upon the rusting body of a 1954 Holden, and then again in a solo exhibition *In God We Trust* presented at Jan Manton Art in Brisbane earlier this year. Art's power here was to bring the viewer's attention to signs of history normally overlooked.

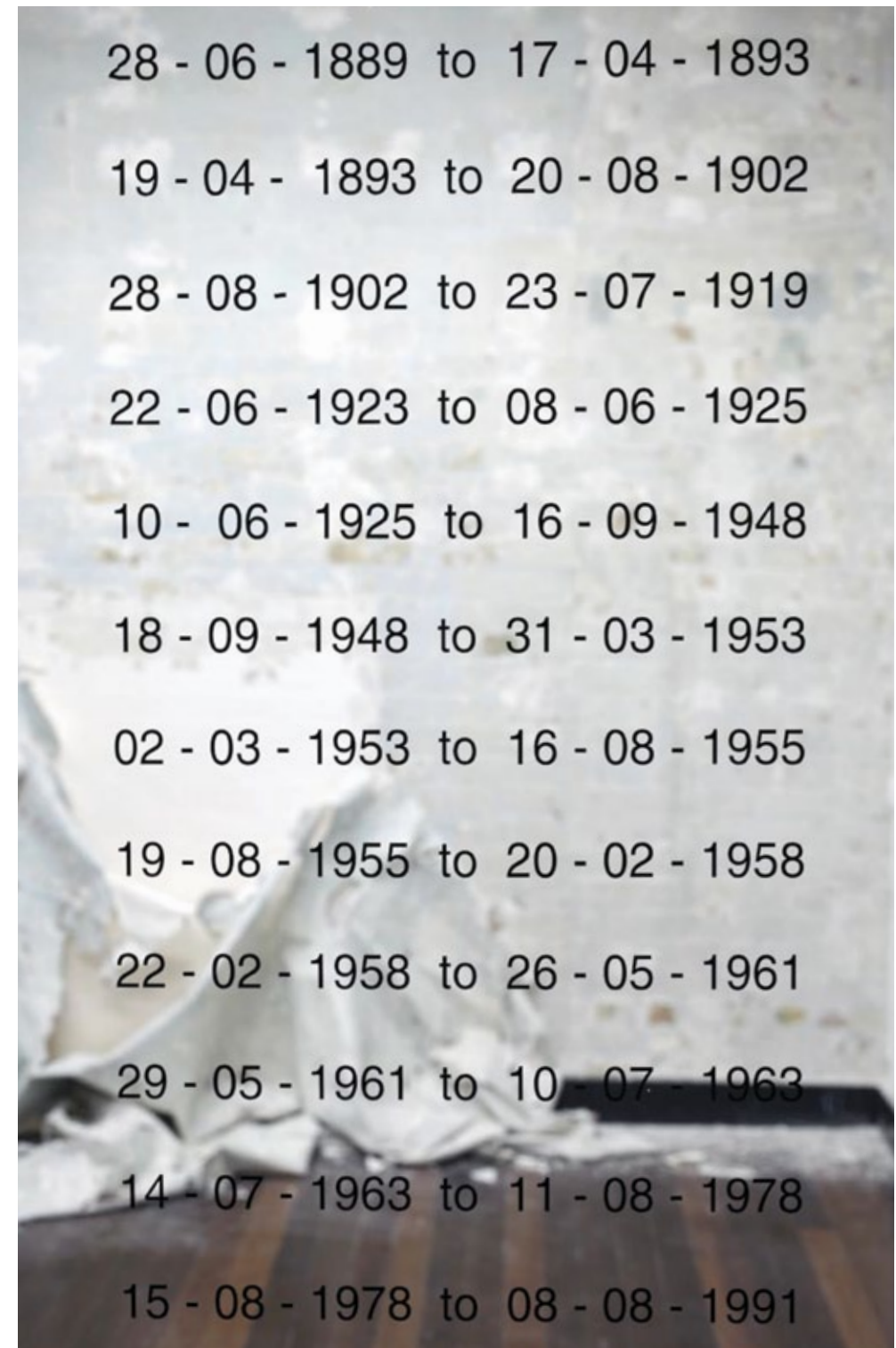
Dis-close sees the layers of paint and plaster peeled from the wall on one side of the Boxcopy gallery space to reveal the underlying brickwork. The space informs the work first and foremost — upon viewing the space for the first time the Aquilizans were drawn to the original brick wall. Prior to *Dis-close*, the wall was covered with a white, irregular plaster



Opposite: *Dis-close:*
Project Another Country,
 2010, detail
 Photo: Carl Warner

— in patches the outline of the rectangular bricks emerged, the lines of mortar visible. The effect was the structural focus of the room dipping in and out of visibility — showing itself partially in some areas, and in others entirely obscured. Allegorically the very process of stripping layers of paint works to describe the intention of the piece — a search for an original, underlying foundation buried beneath layers of time and experience. The artists see this process as painting — an important distinction given the rarefied position painting holds in art history and its invariably self-reflective nature. Painting tends to always consider itself in relation to its past. Perhaps we can even draw a connection with the stroke of the brush and the cut of the scalpel — both wish to disclose or reveal something. Whether we consider this something as already present, simply waiting beneath the surface or being created through the very act highlights the distinction being considered here.

Through this process the layers that are excavated reveal a history of the space made visible. By cutting into and through this strata the Aquilizans' work uncovers previous versions of the exhibition space; the pristine gallery standard white, the burgundy of Dirk Yates' *Office of Australia* (presented at Boxcopy earlier this year — where Yates replicated the original colonial colours in the space) the white beneath that and further back towards the brick. What is most surprising is how thin the layer of paint revealed is, the differentiation in colours only partially visible. Each era is only barely tangible — which is original, which a copy is too hard, perhaps impossible to say. The Aquilizans' work reveals history as extremely tenuous. It is thin and hard to grasp. It is here we reconnect to the redemptive quality of the Aquilizans' practice. The history of this space is only a millimetre deep. Never has the potential for greater experiences and ideas appeared so visible, ironically on the smallest scale.



ENSUITE

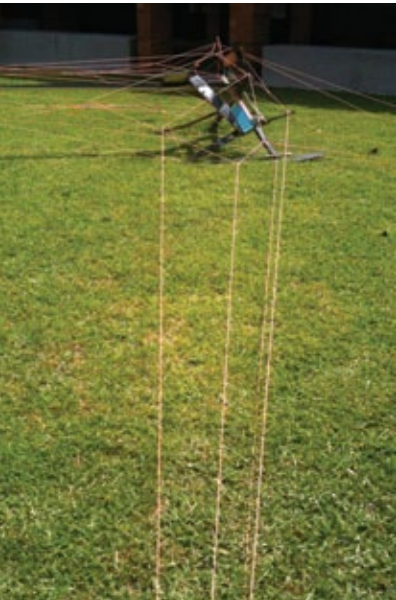
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FOR THOSE WHO APPRECIATE THAT NOTHING IS SOLID (5 – 13 December 2009) featured the new work of Melbourne artist Kiera Brew Kurec at Studio 4.2, Level 4, Metro Arts, Brisbane. For her work, Brew Kurec drew inspiration from 17th century still lifes, using cement as a tool to highlight the temporary nature of day to day life, to engage with the idea of preservation and decay.

Photo: Timothy P Kerr





Left and below: Outdoor installation
by Christian Flynn
Opposite: Installation
by Rebecca Ross



BOXCOPY AT HASSELL ARCHITECTS (December 2009 – February 2010) featured the new work of Brisbane artists Christian Flynn, Luke Jaaniste and Rebecca Ross.

Photo: Tim Woodward





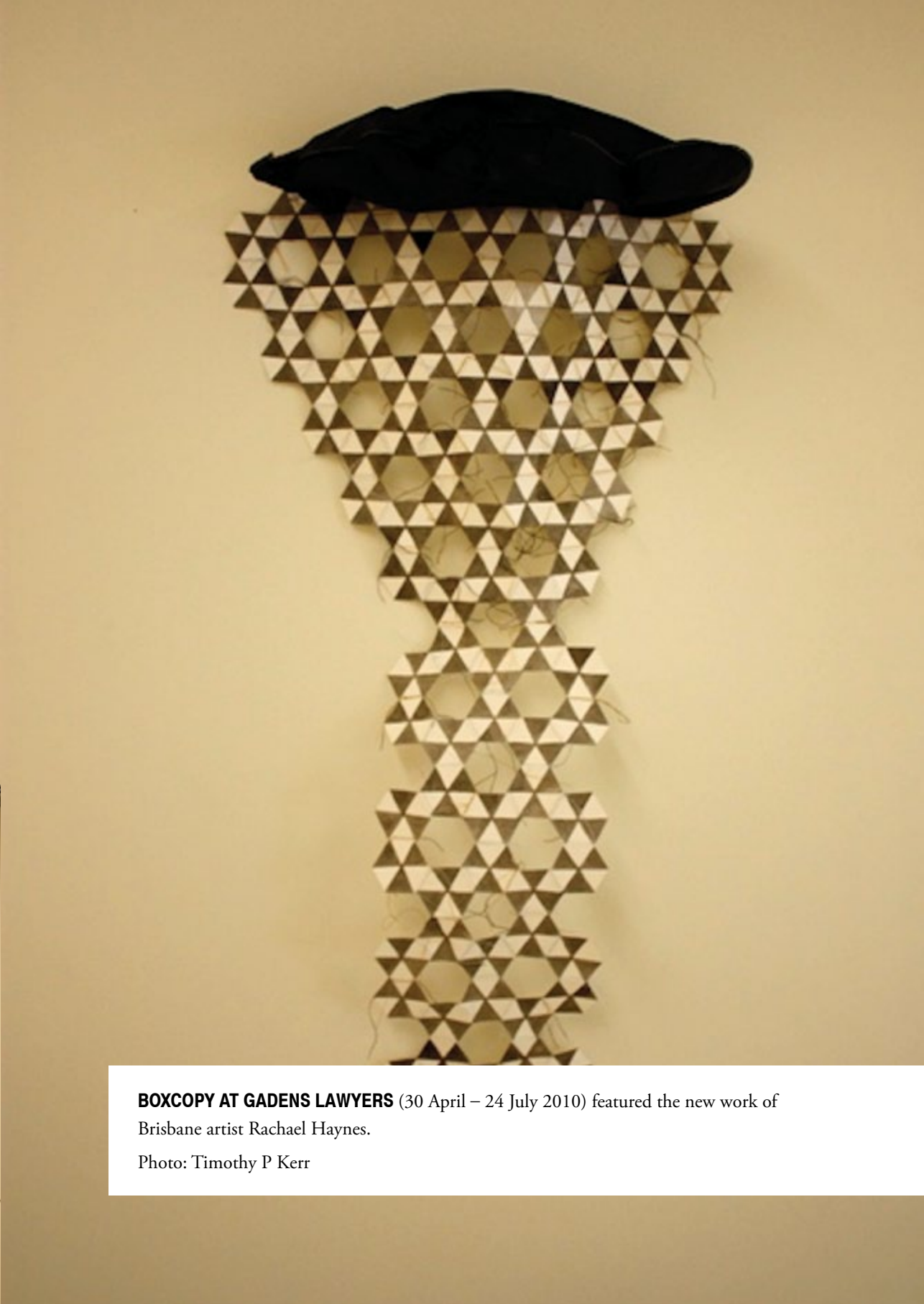
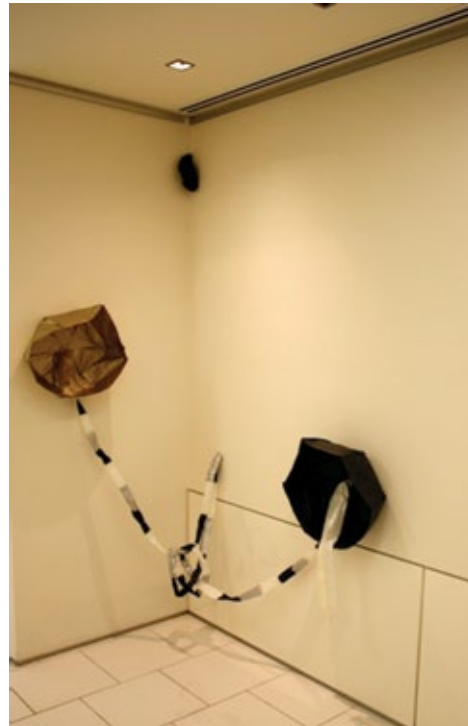
NOT APT TO DISCLOSE SECRETS (15 January – 10 February 2010) was a collaborative project between Boxcopy Co-Directors. It featured an über arrow-through-the-head prop on display at the Raw Space window boxes, as part of a project by The Wandering Room.

Photo: Channon Goodwin



SOME ABSOLUTE BEAUTIES (7 – 24 April 2010) was an exchange project with Melbourne Artist-Run Initiative, Seventh.

Photo: Timothy P Kerr



BOXCOPY AT GADENS LAWYERS (30 April – 24 July 2010) featured the new work of Brisbane artist Rachael Haynes.
Photo: Timothy P Kerr



STILL RUNNING (21 May – 4 June 2010) featured a site-specific installation of recent collage and sculptural works by Melbourne artist Angela Leech.

Photo: Simon Wearne

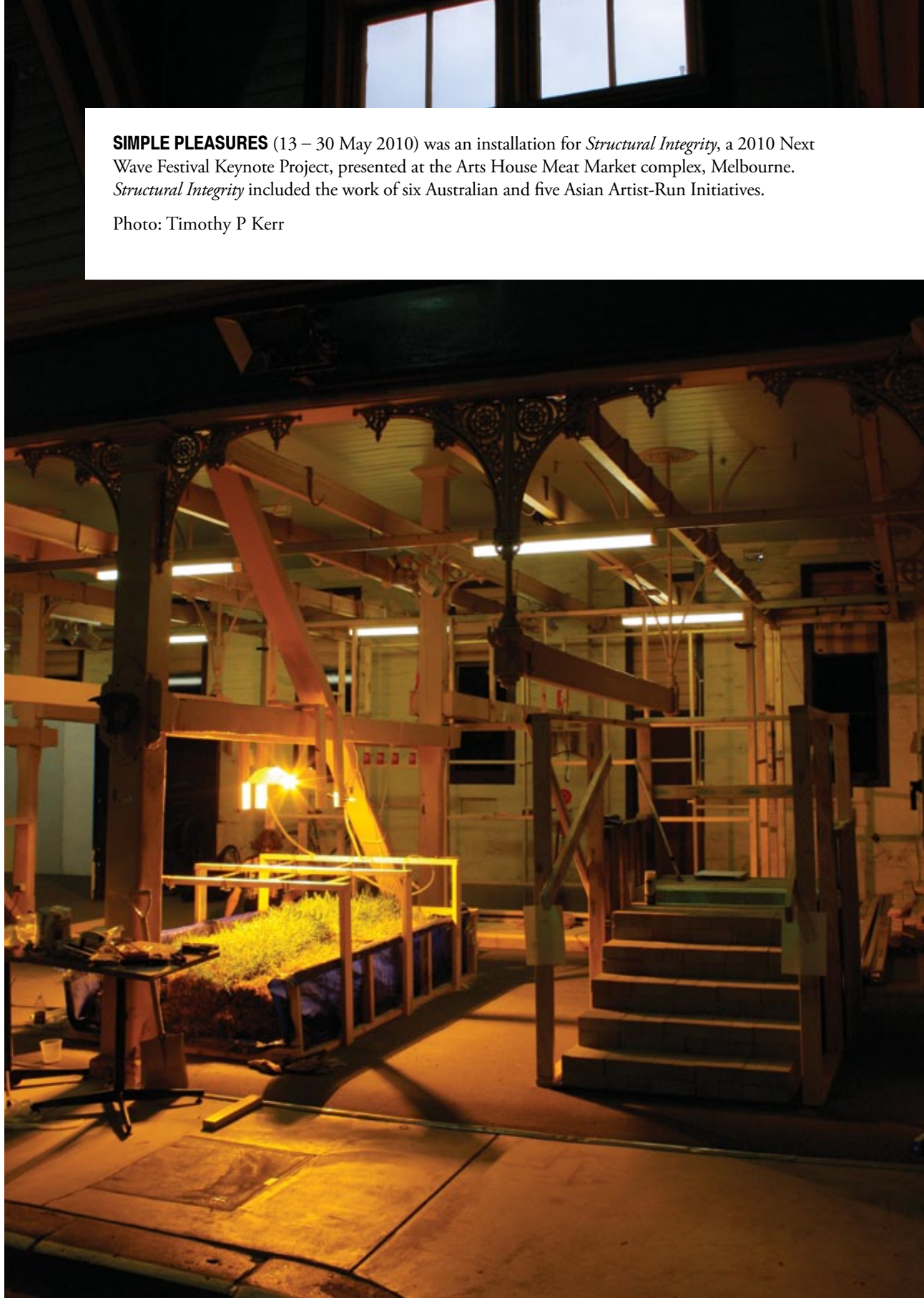




Above center: Boxcopy co-directors installing *Simple Pleasures* for the 2010 Next Wave Festival

SIMPLE PLEASURES (13 – 30 May 2010) was an installation for *Structural Integrity*, a 2010 Next Wave Festival Keynote Project, presented at the Arts House Meat Market complex, Melbourne. *Structural Integrity* included the work of six Australian and five Asian Artist-Run Initiatives.

Photo: Timothy P Kerr





The 2nd Inaugural Yulia Felbermayr Challenge Cup, Photo: Timothy P Kerr

The 1st Inaugural Yulia Felbermayr Challenge Cup, Photo: Timothy P Kerr



THE 2ND INAUGURAL YULIA FELBERMAYR CHALLENGE CUP was a free annual open entry art prize, held on 25 July 2010 at the Spring Hill Hall. This prestigious art prize was established in 2009 for the purpose of recognising and supporting underground, niche and specialist art practices. The 2nd Challenge Cup focussed on the recent resurgence of artists who practice and practise the oft neglected art form of darts.





WATSON BROTHERS
QUEENSLAND GALVANIZERS
LICENSED PLUMBER
MANUFACTURERS
SPOUTING, RIFING

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Previous page: Flooding along Margaret Street in Brisbane, 1890. Photo: John Oxley Library, State Library of Queensland.

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