Bambi Blumberg - Andrew Rogers
Julie Burke - Emma White & Sean Lowry
Melanie Garner - William Kentridge
Micaela Giffney - Kusama
Ali Groves - Young at Art & Kusama
Krista Huebner - Ricky Maynard
Kate Jackson - Yinka Shonibare
Meghan Long - Nest Exhibition
Oonagh McEldowney - Degas
Jackie Milanov - I Walk the Line & Damien Hurst
Amber Naismith - Gordon Bennett and Tracey Moffatt
Sara Richardson - John Wolseley
Anna Scobie - Newcastle Community Organisation & Kelly Ann Lees
Xueting Zheng – Portraiture
Welcome to the 41st edition of Artwrite.

In the features section of this edition, our writers explore a gamut of issues relating to the arts. Topics range from the community driven initiative Renew Newcastle, to the rise in the lure of Blockbuster exhibitions and an examination of the next generation of art collectors. This edition of Artwrite reviews a broad range of recent local exhibitions from I Walk the Line and Yayoi Kusama: Mirrored Years, both shown at the Museum of Contemporary Art, to Blank Media and Gay Bilson’s Nest. This edition also features many profiles of artists, local and international, as well as a contemplative creative response to Yayoi Kusama’s work.

Overwhelmed by the submissions to this edition of Artwrite, we found it was difficult to whittle these down in and yet represent a wide range of relevant contemporary art issues. We are grateful to our classmates, not only for the exceptional calibre of their insightful and knowledgeable submissions, but also for the universal post-final-assessment initiative shown by the contributors. Without this dedication, the publication of this edition of Artwrite would not have been possible.

Special thanks to Margaret Farmer for nurturing our talents and guiding the production of this publication with her vast knowledge and expertise, coupled with her kind mentoring style. Similarly, a special thanks goes out to our publication design coordinator Anna Scobie. She spearheaded the entire creative production and layout of this edition of Artwrite with the help of her talented team of designers. The cohesive assembly of our Artwrite sings because of their combined efforts.

We hope you enjoy “flipping” through our edition of Artwrite. We can only hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed assembling it!

Artwrite is the collective effort of students studying the Master of Art Administration at the College of Fine Arts, UNSW.

Editors-in-chief
Jackie Milanov and Amber Naismith
Bambi Blumberg
Bambi works part time at the Art Gallery of NSW, fundraising for the Contemporary and Indigenous art collections. She is also passionate supporter of the arts.

Julie Burke
Julie is a Sydney-based artist, originally from Frankston; where the opera plays insipidly from loud speakers at the train station’s underpass. She has lived all over the world, yet her favourite place still remains the Hume Highway.

Mariela Brozky
Mariela is passionate about art and is also a practicing artist. She has immersed herself in this world since a young age and has now decided to pursue it as her career. She also draws and sculpts and is a graduate of the National Art School.

Chung Man Chan
Chung Man has a Bachelor of Visual Arts from SCA. She is currently completing her Masters of Teaching from the University of Sydney at the same time she is completing a Masters of Arts Admin at COFA.

Melanie Garner
Continually living for the deadline, Melanie is a graphic designer and currently teaches Visual Art at Tara Anglican School for Girls. Besides responding daily to ‘Ms Garner’, her experience includes designing, print-making and lecturing, but most of all Melanie loves finding and photographing the beautiful details in everyday life.

Micaela Giffney
Micaela works as a Visitor Services Officer at the Museum of Contemporary Art. Micaela graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts from the National Art School. She currently sits on the committee for Accessible Arts, annual exhibition, Art Boxx.

Ali Groves
Ali usually wears two pendants on a chain. There is a copy of Degas’ Little Dancer, chasing a frantic White Rabbit. They’re pretty kitsch. She’s kinda keen on art, communication, and things in general.

Krista Huebner
Krista’s perfect day starts with a long walk, middles with a Bourke Street Bakery ham and cheese croissant and cup of Earl Grey tea while reading the Spectrum section of the SMH, and ends with an exhibition adventure! On her other days, she works for the best contemporary art museum in Sydney and loves making jam.

Kate Jackson
Kate is an art history major and is currently completing her Masters at the College of Fine Arts. After traveling extensively she discovered a passion for photography and Italian sculpture and plans to pursue these interests further.

Yael Kapulsky
After recently graduating from UNSW, Yael is in the process of completing her Masters degree in Art Administration at COFA. Yael has grown up having a passionate appreciation of the art industry, and has a particular interest in museum and gallery management.

Oonagh McEldowney
Oonagh is a corporate lawyer trying to rediscover her creative side by engaging with all the talented, creative people at COFA. In a few years she hopes to be one of the best-known contemporary art critics in the Australian legal world.

Jackie Milanov
Currently on an international adventure and concurrently pursuing her Masters in Art Administration at COFA, Canadian-born Jackie is a photographer that enjoys visiting exhibitions, camping, hiking, travelling and reading. She also misses her cats Spencer and Sasha.

Amber Naismith
Amber is a film producer working in visual effects and animation. She holds a Bachelor of Arts and Fine Arts from the University of Melbourne and is interested in public programming, community arts, industry and cultural development.

Leigh MacRitchie
Leigh is a passionate art lover and a practicing artist. She graduated from the National Art School with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Her particular interests are drawing and photography. Leigh has been involved in various art festivals such as the Sydney Festival, Sculpture by Sea and the Bien-nale of Sydney.

Racheal Samuels
Racheal completed her BFA, with a major in photography at the National Art School in 2001. Since completing her studies Racheal has had numerous group and a few solo shows, and works as a freelance photographer. Her love of travel (constant itchy feet), camping and documentation of nature, people, places and habitat has taken her around the globe and Australia, her latest jaunt of four years was spent in Far North Queensland, basing herself in Port Douglas, home of crocodiles, box jelly fish, and hot weather.

Anna Scobie
Anna is an accomplished artist, working across a variety of mediums including sculptures of wood and fibre and illustration. Anna studied Fine Arts, and graduated from Newcastle University with Honours in 2005. She has a continued interest in art education, public art and the community’s involvement.

Lisha Xu
Lisha is a Chinese girl who excited by everything about the art world. She is especially focused on making profits from the arts. Lisha has an ambition to build a media empire. But for now she is exploring various areas of knowledge and new skills in the field of Art Administration.

Xueting Zheng
Xueting has been a student in other areas: Bachelor in English translation and Master in Marketing. New to the art world, she is exploring the different possibilities in the Master of Art Administration degree: public events, education, marketing, painting (gave up), art writing, with the intention of finding the perfect fit for her.
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“From race relations to jokes about headless aristocrats, Shonibare’s work is both topical and entertaining...”

-Kate Jackson
Yinka Shonibare MBE, who views himself as a ‘post-colonial hybrid’, is an artist of mixed African and British heritage who expresses both aspects of himself throughout his works. This contrast is further enhanced by his diverse use of media, ranging from installation pieces to photography, and from painting to film. Shonibare provides a provocative experience for his audience, questioning their knowledge of both cultural identity and history.

Born in London in 1962 to Nigerian parents, Shonibare MBE was raised in Nigeria. At the age of 17, he returned to London, and then suffered a physical disability from the age of 19. Consequently, he has experienced his fair share of stereotyping. Shonibare’s work questions the very nature of fixed stereotypes and identity (Tate Britain 2004), deconstructing them in order to make a comment on modern behaviour and society. From race relations to jokes about headless aristocrats, Shonibare’s work is both topical and entertaining, and provides a thought-provoking experience that is still a joy to see.

Despite his questioning of authority and the usual order, Shonibare had formal artistic training, studying fine art at Byam Shaw School of Art, London, before gaining his MFA at Goldsmiths College, London. He has also received multiple accolades, including being short-listed for the Turner Prize in 2004, and becoming a Member of the Order of the British Empire in 2005- a title he now insists on using after his name, the irony not lost upon him.

Shonibare MBE occupies a place between African and British culture, allowing their differences to collide within his works. His belief that we are all constructs allows him to collate aspects of the cultures we thought we knew and form new ideas. His use of ‘African’ fabric for example, is not as simple as it first appears. Generally perceived as ‘authentic’, used by Shonibare MBE the material as a way of deconstructing the complex histories that determine the image of ethnicity. The viewer sees the fabric and assumes the characters are African, however, the fabric was actually made in Holland and exported to Africa by the British in the nineteenth century. An example of this distortion is seen in the female figure of The Swing (after Fragonard) (2001). The woman is wearing a dress of ‘African’ fabric, so an assumption is made as to her identity; yet we also know that this work is based on a painting by Jean-Honore Fragonard of a French aristocrat. This work plays on our fixed ideas, commenting on the excesses of the French aristocracy, as well as those of the modern overdeveloped world (Tate Britain 2004); the consequences of which led the French to the guillotine.

Shonibare MBE further questions the boundaries of society in his photographic essay, The Diary of A Victorian Dandy (1998), where he places himself into the character of a white, upper class Victorian, surrounded by his white servants. Shonibare’s work negates the idea of the superior white male. He regularly replaces this figure by inserting himself in their typical...
Yinka Shonibare MBE,
*Diary of a Victorian Dandy: 11.00 hours*, 1998, C-type print, 122 x 183 cm, edition of 5. Courtesy the artist and Stephen Friedman Gallery.
typical location in his images. Similarly, in *The Diary* and *Un Ballo Maschera*, the superior white male is supplanted with a woman.

Shonibare’s recent exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, was on view from 24 September 2008 to 1 February 2009. The exhibition showcased the last twelve years of his work, including: installations of headless mannequins, paintings, and his photographic and film works. This diverse range of pieces demonstrates Shonibare’s capacity to cross the boundaries of race, medium and politics, while at the same time offering amusement at his creative methods.

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DAMIEN HIRST: THE MAN BEHIND THE MYTH

Written by Jackie Milanov
Unlike his impeccably preserved formaldehyde animals, Damien Hirst has little interest in preserving the traditional conventions concerning the process of buying and selling art. This brush-swinging-art-world-vigilante successfully circumvented the gallery system altogether when he sold his works through Sotheby’s auction house.

One such auction - titled Beautiful Inside My Head Forever - included a large assortment of his art works. Over two days in September 2008, 218 pieces of his work were auctioned off for a staggering 111 million British pounds. Hirst’s sales dossier reads as impressively as Woolworth’s annual report last year.

Not surprisingly, his reputation precedes him, and, one could argue, detracts from the work he produces. In June 2007, Hirst’s Lullaby Song, containing 6,136 individually hand-painted pharmaceutical pills, arranged meticulously in a medicine-cabinet display, became better known for its outrageous price tag (£9.65 million) than for its impressive craftsmanship. It seems something of an oxymoron that the piece is named after an iconic Sex Pistols song, a band best known for its anarchistic messages of anti-establishment and working-class ideals. Sid Vicious must be turning over in his grave.

In spite of this, Hirst’s early years paint an entirely different picture of the man behind the controversy. He was born into a working class family in Bristol, to a staunchly Catholic mother and mechanic father. A rebellious teenager, Hirst was initially denied admission into the Leeds College of Art and Design. Despite early struggles, he later attended Goldsmiths Fine Art College at the University of London and was a founding member of the famous Young British Artists (or YBAs).

The YBA collective was comprised of young, audacious, avant-garde, contemporary art students; some but not all of which were Hirst’s classmates at Goldsmiths. With their rough East London flavour and experimental appropriation of found objects, they quickly made their mark on the London art scene. Hirst was a seminal player and this became particularly evident when he spearheaded the Freeze exhibition in 1988. The exhibition’s theme loosely centred around the “freeze” in the purchasing of artwork during the tough economic climate in the late 1980s. Notwithstanding, prominent figures took notice of Hirst, predominantly the well-known North London gallery owner Charles Saatchi.

Saatchi eventually represented Hirst and helped to usher his career into well-respected
circles. The spring-board for Hirst’s career came in 1992, in the form of a work called *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living*, featured in the inaugural YBA exhibition at the Saatchi Gallery. Hirst’s arresting work was of a deceased 14-foot shark suspended in a tank of formaldehyde. To date, his career has included many post-mortem creatures suspended in enormous tanks in life-like positions, including 2008’s mythical *The Dream* unicorn creature.

The Damien Hirst saga continued at the 1993 Venice Biennale, where the positive reception to his *Mother and Child Divided* continued to fan the flames of the artist’s notoriety. The 1990s saw the publishing of his autobiography, countless exhibitions at the Saatchi Gallery and elsewhere, and his success in winning the 1995 Turner Prize. In 2004, a wealthy American art collector purchased *The Physical Impossibility of Death in the Mind of Someone Living* for 6.5 million pounds and later donated it to MOMA in New York. Hirst’s most recent exhibition ‘Beyond Belief’ at the White Cube Gallery in London featured a human skull decadently adorned with millions of dollars worth of real diamonds. Unsurprisingly, this work ultimately sold for an unbelievable sum of money. Hirst has been said to have a fascination with death; well, death and the expensive price tag attached to it, evidently.

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“The truth is really about an honest interpretation.”
Ricky Maynard, 2007
Reflecting the same quiet power found in his work, Ricky Maynard is considered, both humble and modest, a gifted photographer and honest documenter of stories and culture. A member of the Ben Lomond and Cape Portland people, Maynard documents the history of his people, honours their traditions and affirms local cultural practices. Through his photographs, he offers a journey of alternative perspectives and cultural insights (Munro 2008, p17).

Born in Launceston, Tasmania in 1953, Maynard is of Tasmanian Aboriginal descent. He first came to prominence in the 1980s with a photographic essay about Aboriginal muttonbird farmers. Now living on Flinders Island in the Bass Strait, the largely self-taught photographer continues to document the physical and social landscapes of his people and in doing so focuses his audiences’ attention on Indigenous cultural issues.

Maynard moved to New York in the late 1980s to study at the International Centre of Photography and was influenced by and worked with leading photographers from around the world. This period helped him to refine and distil his ideas and techniques, shaping his practice as a documentary photographer. American photographers such as Dorothea Lange, whose confronting and direct images challenged social attitudes, and Walker Evans and Eugene Smith, whose images possess an element of great storytelling, greatly influenced Maynard’s own practice.

Acutely aware of photography’s role in shaping perceptions, Maynard seeks to be an honest storyteller, representing intensely personal subject matter with deep consideration; he is collaborative in his approach and works with his subjects to reveal their underlying truth. The photographer looks at themes ranging from his people’s cultural legacy to the challenges urban Aboriginals face on the streets of Melbourne or in a South Australian prison. No matter the focus, Maynard portrays his chosen subject matter with a continued emphasis on the broader social and cultural context in which they exist. As he states:

I seek a balance between craftsmanship and social relevance. Photography has the ability to tell stories about the world and... the power to frame a culture.”

Focusing on Aboriginal people who have been, and arguably still are, ignored and denied their cultural heritage, Maynard is conscious of presenting Aboriginal people not as victims, but as part of a living culture deserving social change. His work is significant in the development of Aboriginal photographic practice; he challenges the assumptions of many non-Indigenous Australians and addresses blind-spots in Australia’s collective memory. Importantly, he sees his practice
Maynard is conscious of presenting Aboriginal people not as victims, but as part of a living culture deserving social change.

*Untitled* from the series ‘No More Than What You See’, 1994. 29 x 46 cm, black and white gelatin silver print

Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney

© the artist
Arthur, Wik Elder, from the series ‘Returning to Places that Name Us’, 2000, 45.5 x 56 cm, black and white gelatin silver print
Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney © the artist
The Healing Garden, Wybalenna, Flinders Island, Tasmania from the series 'Portrait of a Distant Land', 2005, 40.5 x 50 cm
black and white gelatin silver print
Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney
© the artist
Vansittart Island, Bass Strait, Tasmania from the series ‘Portrait of a Distant Land’, 2005, 40.5 x 50.5 cm black and white gelatin silver print
Courtesy the artist and Stills Gallery, Sydney
© the artist
as a way to “address issues of identity, site, place and nation” (Maynard 2000). In discussing his portraits of Wik Elders in the 2000 series ‘Returning to Places that Name Us’, Maynard asks his audience to, “identify in these pictures the existence of struggle below the surface, to see things that are not immediately visible and to recognise that what things mean has more to do with the observer” (Maynard 2000).

Sites from Maynard’s country and the importance they carry are the focus of the series “In the Footsteps of Others” (2003) and “Portrait of a Distant Land” (2005). In them, haunting images reference transience and removal, creating a meaningful sense of what is absent as much as of what is present. They form a reminder of cultural practices that have existed for thousands of years and a tragic social history that cannot be forgotten.

Maynard’s work are an affirmation and celebration of an honoured and vibrant culture. Through his work the audience is challenged to view the Australian people’s shared history and culture with greater empathy, understanding and hope.

Ricky Maynard’s retrospective Portrait of a Distant Land is on at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney from 4 June -- 23 August 2009.

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Maynard, R 2000, Returning to Places that Name Us
The visual language used...is highly figurative and Moffatt undermines traditional cinematic convention by exposing the existence of narrative codes in filmmaking.

Amber Naismith
Tracey Moffatt

Written by Amber Naismith

Tracey Moffatt is one of Australia’s most prolific and successful contemporary artists. Since her groundbreaking photographic series ‘Something More’ (1989) was exhibited in Sydney she has had over fifty solo exhibitions in Europe, Australia and the USA (James 2000). Her films were selected for international competition in the 1990 and 1993 Cannes Film Festivals, and she has been invited to present works in both the 1997 Venice Biennale and the 2008 Sydney Biennale.

Moffatt grew up in a white foster family in suburban Brisbane during the 1960s and 1970s, and her work has been heavily shaped by popular culture and television of the time, as well as her Aboriginal heritage. The completion of a degree in Visual Communications at Queensland College of Art helped to consolidate Moffatt’s fascination with mass media and provide her with the techniques used in twentieth-century film, video and photography, which she would subsequently go on to transform, invert and pastiche throughout her career.

Moffatt works primarily with photography, video and film to create images that are heavily stylised, deliberately composed and often confrontational. By fusing references to art and film history with her own memories and fantasies, her works attempt to subvert meanings of cultural identification as well as to question the authenticity of representation through open-ended or ambiguous pictorial narratives.

In her earlier films, Nice Coloured Girls (1987), Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy (1990) and BeDevil (1993), Moffatt set out to challenge historical representations of Aborigines in film and art, and question how identity and race have been constructed by different forms of media. The visual language used in all three films is highly figurative and Moffatt undermines traditional cinematic conventions by exposing the existence of narrative codes in filmmaking. In Nice Colored Girls this is exemplified by the characters’ interaction with symbolic devices used to evoke time and place. In Night Cries the compositional elements of the location are reminiscent of the forms and palate used in the landscape paintings of postwar Australian artists Arthur Boyd and Russell Drysdale (Cooke 1997). This provokes an analytical response from the reader through the disruption of normal reading practices.

Referring to herself as a “director of photo-narratives” Moffatt often approaches her work as a painter would a tableau (Maslen 2002). The photographic series ‘Scarred for Life’ (1994) and ‘Scarred for Life II’ (2000) document suburban life as experienced by Moffatt and her friends. Reconstructed scenes in the style of images from the Time and Life books of the 1960s are accompanied by ironic captions that speak of dysfunction, brutality and the ob-
scure. As Moffatt explains, “the images are just so ordinary, and the artwork itself doesn’t even look like art. It looks like pages in a magazine” (James 2000). This heightens the confronting nature of the image when juxtaposed with the text.

More recently Moffatt has collaborated with film editor Gary Hillberg to create video collages using the ‘mash-up’ methodology of taking images from pre-existing sources and re-editing them. By re-presenting the representations, stereotypical constructs are exposed. Artist (2000) provides a commentary on the clichéd role of the artist in Hollywood cinema while Doomed (2007) is a collection of death and destruction films that address current fears of impending disaster and questions the role of cinema as entertainment (Laster 2008).

Tracey Moffatt continues to destabilise the mainstream narratives and encourages the vital practice of cultural redefinition through her interventionist approach to art. Her works are currently held in the collections of the Tate, London; the Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles; the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; and the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney. In 2007 Moffatt was the recipient of the International Centre for Photography’s Infinity Award for Art.

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“I find political art very boring... well, my work I would like to say is about the human condition”

Tracey Moffatt, 2003
“The subjects chosen represent optimistic symbols of life and metaphors of regeneration, celebrating the tenacity of the human spirit in overcoming adversity.”

Bambi Blumberg
Andrew Rogers
Written by Bambi Blumberg

Andrew Rogers, one of Australia’s eminent and internationally recognised sculptors, specialises in the age-old mediums of bronze and stone to create his signature works, geoglyphs or land sculptures. These commissioned, massive contemporary land art projects form a chain of stone sculptures around the world, and feature in remote, arid deserts of countries as diverse as Bolivia, Chile, China, Iceland, India, Nepal, USA and Israel.

Known as the ‘Rhythms of Life’, these unique forms lie peacefully in their surroundings, the locations of which have been purposely chosen for their historical significance. The subjects chosen represent optimistic symbols of life and metaphors of regeneration, celebrating the tenacity of the human spirit in overcoming adversity. By involving the Indigenous population of such countries in order to assist in the production of his projects, Rogers builds a wonderful rapport with the local population, engaging task forces in excess of one thousand people at a time to implement his artistic vision.

Best appreciated from the air, Rogers’ geoglyphs relate to the contours of the land. They are his way of leaving an indelible impression on future generations, enabling them to contemplate their heritage, and reflect on the timeless ancient symbols that have been respectfully and strategically positioned onto the landscape for posterity.

Gerard Vaughan, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, launched a major new publication in February 2009, Geoglyphs, Rhythms of Life 2009, which features essays by Eleanor Heartney, and reproduces wonderful images of Rogers’ site-specific works. One of the most powerful images highlighted is a geoglyph featured in the ancient country of Israel, Celebration of Life 2006. Fundamental to his practice, is his use of the desert as his canvas, and rocks and clay for his materials. In keeping with this methodology, he used Jerusalem stone quarried in Israel, and tactically positioned this work in the arid landscape of the Arava desert, a place where the Jewish people have wandered and lived for thousands of years.

This work also utilises two prevailing letters from the ancient Hebrew text that are featured in the Old Testament. Meaning “life”, these two letters made from rock, reflect on the sacred tablets of the Ten Commandments, and represent a direct link to god. Although one would normally construe rock as being devoid of life, here it is part of the living faith, as Rogers deliberately photographs heavily pregnant women, shown half naked, standing upright and proud upon these two letters; a reinforcement and reminder to the Jewish people of the cy-
cles of life, their heritage, and unswerving allegiance to their god, and their presence as a nation despite generations of persecution.

Unfailing in his commitment, Rogers’ trajectory continues and in April this year he will begin work to complete a park of nine geoglyphs in Cappadocia, Turkey. This will be the artist’s largest single contemporary art creation to date, and will stretch many kilometres. As Rogers states, “the challenge is always to use materials in a new and different way, and make them convey meaning and portray form in a manner that has not previously been seen.” (www.andrewrogers.org)
Kelly-Ann Lees
Written by Anna Scobie

Large industrial sea urchins graced the Bondi to Tamarama coastal walk last October; the works -- part of Sculpture by the Sea 2008 -- were the work of emerging sculptor Kelly-Ann Lees. She talks railway bolts, Hercules helicopters and the excitement of working on large-scale projects with writer Anna Scobie.

Newcastle-based artist Kelly-Ann Lees artfully manipulates heavy, manmade, scrap metal objects into light, whimsical forms inspired by nature. Lees majored in ceramics at Sydney College of the Arts in the late 1990s, before rediscovering a love of steel, a passion she first discovered in childhood. She recounts a delightful story of standing on her high school sports field, as a Hercules helicopter with an “enormous, angular, metal mass” hanging from its undercarriage, thundered overhead, as the first spark of her love affair with sculpture. Lees later discovered the work at a sculpture park on the Central Coast; the “metal mass” being a piece by Greg Johns, an artist who continues to inspire her to this day.

When asked why she moved the core medium of her artistic practice from ceramics to steel after leaving university, Lees listed three reasons; practicality -- the medium was affordable to an emerging artist; recycling -- scrap being an environmentally sustainable medium; and thirdly, she was intrinsically drawn to the material because of her ability to subvert the original function of the object. An example of this subversion of function can be seen in Lees’s work, Urchins, included in Sculpture by the Sea last year. The work consisted of hundreds of steel railway bolts welded together to create three, furry, organic sea urchins. The visually delicate work weighed literally over a ton, and created challenges for the Sculpture by the Sea installation team. The viewer, however, left simply to marvel at Lees’ transformation of the material, and wonder how she came across so many railway bolts. The sensitivity to their setting highlighted the inspiration Lees draws from nature and alienated the objects’ industrial origins. The Urchins’ were acquired by the Transfield collection, and are currently installed at a private residence in Mosman.

Lees states that her inspiration comes not only from nature, but also from the objects themselves. She contemplates her pile of industrial scrap metal -- cogs, pipes and bolts -- as the seeds of future works, that have been exhibited in art prizes, like Sculpture by the Sea, and more recently, the Mon-
Kelly-Ann Lees, *Urchins*, 2008. Photograph by RIKRAK. Cc

Above: Kelly-Ann Lees *Convolutions*, 2009, 1.5 x 1.5m image courtesy of the artist.
talto Sculpture Prize in Victoria. Each of these venues provided Lees a platform to explore the challenges and excitement of exhibiting larger works in the natural environment. Lees believes that working on a larger scale provides her with the opportunity to utilise the strength and durability of the material, whilst infusing the works with a feminine sensitivity not usually associated with steel work -- a traditionally masculine discipline.

Lees was thrilled to recently exhibit work at Global Gallery in Paddington, alongside helicopter hero Johns, and other well respected Australian and International sculptors.

Information taken from an interview with the artist in March 2009.

To view future sculptural works by Kelly-Ann Lees, visit Willoughby Council’s inaugural sculpture prize in Sydney, beginning in September this year, Sculpture by the Sea 2009 in October or her local gallery in Newcastle, SOAG, at Tighes Hill.
With the assistance of modern technology it is safe to say that most of the world’s landscape can be located on a map. It is no longer necessary to embark on epic adventures in order to discover new lands. What is there left to discover? Despite the popularity of this contemporary attitude, artist John Wolseley remains fascinated by the mysteries of the natural world. Since 1976, Wolseley has relentlessly explored the Australian landscape. The artist is intensely engaged with the natural environment, constantly observing and recording. Throughout his artistic development in Australia, much of Wolseley’s work deals with his fascination with continental drift, flora, fauna, geology and mapping the changing face of the land.

It is difficult to place John Wolseley within an artistic movement (Grishin, 2006). His artistic practice can be compared to the scientific practices and interests of a Nineteenth century naturalist. The artist makes detailed drawings and countless watercolours. The limited colour palette employed by...
Wolseley respects the colours of the Australian landscape. His research journals are consistently the reference point for his mixed media and installation works. Wolseley’s collages incorporate scientific drawing, text, disjointed imagery, labels and natural material. These media help the viewer better understand Wolseley’s thought processes.

Wolseley arrived in Australia in 1976 at the age of 38. While the artist only intended to stay for a short time, he still resides here today. Prior to arriving in Australia Wolseley was already a prominent practicing artist. The landmarks of Australia differ immensely to the European land that Wolseley had depicted in his previous works. His engagement with this fascinating new environment caused a shift in his approach to art production. Similar to early colonists, Wolseley was drawn to the uncharted element that Australia provided. The European landscape has been depicted extensively throughout art history. European landscape painting is steeped in tradition. In response, Wolseley embraced the creative freedom the Australian landscape offered.

In 1991 Wolseley was granted an Australian Council Fellowship. This fellowship enabled Wolseley to spend 8 months in the Simpson Desert. The artist spent the time mapping and recording the variety of sand dunes. He documented the daily surface qualities of the desert. Wolseley had a daunting task ahead of him. The Simpson Desert is an expansive area covering 150,000 square kilometres. A single dune can be up to 35 metres high and 10 kilometres long. Wolseley studied the vegetation and animal life of the area. His depictions of a dynamic land, alive with flora and fauna are contrary to the belief that the Australian landscape is barren and harsh.

In recent works Wolseley has explored the cycle of bushfires and the subsequent regeneration of the affected area. In 2002 he spent six months working in a Royal National Park outside Sydney after bushfires had swept through the area. While Wolseley already incorporated elements of the environment in his art, often using local pigments or including vegetation in collage, his experience at the Royal National Park led to a deeper connection between his work and his surroundings. He allowed the burnt twigs and vegetation to have contact with his paper. This led to chaotic markings that became the catalyst for many of his prints and collages during this time.

Wolseley is collected by galleries all over Australia including Bendigo City Art Gallery, the South West Arts Council, and the Art Gallery of New South Wales. His work is also held in collections worldwide including the Mayor Gallery in London. Most recently he has exhibited at Australian Galleries and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery. Wolseley remains active engaged with his artistic practice, and most significantly with the natural environment, inspiring others to appreciate and explore the natural world.

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"I was fortunate to discover at a theatre school that I was so bad an actor [... that] I was reduced to an artist, and I made my peace with it."

William Kentridge
Illustrator, animator, actor, puppeteer; ‘Jack of all trades, master of none’. This aphorism is untrue when applied to William Kentridge, master of multiple artistic skills. Since 1979, Kentridge has been inspiring artists worldwide with moving optical illusions, predominantly created by employing static media.

Often described as an animator with a penchant for charcoal drawings, Kentridge is easily considered one of the most remarkable, international contemporary artists. However, when asked, he remains simply and steadfastly: “just a drawer”.

As an African artist, Kentridge has received international recognition, receiving numerous awards for his provocative works. Until the mid 1990s, his work was known only in South Africa. To date, he has exhibited on nearly every continent in the world.

Kentridge’s work explores South Africa’s complex history, characterised by tempestuous issues such as apartheid, colonialism, industrialisation, equity and equality, and war. The technique he employs to create animations is somewhat unusual. Kentridge makes successive charcoal drawings on a single sheet of paper, which he then photographs in order to create animations. As a schoolteacher, I had the privilege of meeting Kentridge at one ‘Felix in Exile’ exhibition, and his technique was obvious. Observing his working method first hand is awe-inspiring, and one journeys with him through the process of discovering history, erasing the past, and redrawing and creating a new future.

Kentridge wrote: “In the same way that there is a human act of dismembering the past there is a natural process in the terrain through erosion, growth, dilapidation that also seeks to blot out events. In South Africa this process has other dimensions. The very term ‘new South Africa’ has within it the idea of a painting over the old, the natural process of dismembering, the naturalization of things new.”

By using monochromatic media, such as charcoal, he emphasises the historical frame of his work. Symbolic colours, like red and blue, are introduced to add meaning to the politically charged storyboards he creates, which seems not of the present age, but of a long gone past spoken of often by my parents generation.

Kentridge was born in Johannesburg, South Africa, in 1955, where he continues to live and work. The basis of his conceptual strength lies in his education. He studied politics and African studies followed by Fine Art at the Johannesburg Art Foundation. His work, characterised by dramatic narrative, demonstrates the influence of his own Jewish, German and Lithuanian heritage. It is clear...
Telegrams from the Nose
that he often relies on classic European themes, but applies them to contemporary African issues.

Conceptually, Kentridge works from the starting point of his own life, in Johannesburg, in order to comment on greater political issues faced by a variety of South Africans. Time and change are essential elements of his work; thus, animation is a perfect medium to illustrate the passing of time. Kentridge does not regard his work as entirely politically motivated or as a forum to make mere political statements. However, it is clear from the subject matter employed, that political and social commentary is the main thrust.

Most recently his animated drawings have further been developed into theatrical live opera productions. A stoic character with an indelible playfulness, while addressing serious concepts, he often leaves behind an autobiographical reference: for often he includes himself in his drawings. His works are numerous, as are his exhibitions; certainly, he will continue to provoke audiences for many years to come.

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William Kentridge, drawing for Telegrams from the Nose, 2008

Indian ink, watercolour, coloured pencil, found pages and collage on paper, 25.2 x 23.5 cm.

An artist project by William Kentridge. The cover artwork and a series of inside spreads were specially commissioned by Art & Australia magazine on the occasion of the 16th Biennale of Sydney in 2008. Courtesy the artist and Art & Australia.
CAN A “CROWD-PLEASER” PLEASE A CROWD?

By Oonagh McEldowney
Can a “Crowd-Pleaser”

Please a Crowd?

Written By Oonagh McEldowney

It usually takes more than a little girl in a tutu to attract a crowd, so how did the National Gallery of Australia (NGA) ensure huge numbers at its recent Degas exhibition?

The tried and tested method is to make sure there is something for everyone and the NGA certainly pulled out all the stops. Think of a specific demographic or interest group and the NGA had it covered. Love your art but like to mingle? Then attend a special viewing at the opening party. Enjoy the finer things in life? You can see the paintings and sample a Shiraz at a sunset session. Love to lounge in the afternoon? Why don’t you enjoy a tour of the exhibition followed by a salon de thé in the sculpture garden. Prefer a movie to a monotype? Attend a special screening of Moulin Rouge. Not into composition or colour? You could still be tempted by champagne and cabaret. Regardless of your interests, the NGA wanted you there.

So far, so good. But what about the practical obstacles: the NGA is in Canberra and most of the population of Australia is elsewhere. No problem, with the NGA website including links to flight and accommodation packages. Worried about keeping the kids amused? Not an issue, as the gallery had set up a family room, with lots of activities for younger visitors. What about those of us that are a little less mobile? The NGA had special tours for people with disabilities and for those attending with carers. And, yes, before you ask, an Auslan sign-interpreted tour was also available.

The lures worked; the crowds came. I know, because I went too. I was one of the 9,000 visitors that attended the exhibition’s final weekend on 21–22 March (Streak 2009). And that’s my major problem with a “crowd-pleaser”: it attracts a crowd!

As I neared the exhibition that weekend, I knew what lay ahead. I expected this crowd would bear the unique characteristics of the “blockbuster crowd”. Those attending would adopt the annoying practices familiar to blockbuster attendees worldwide: some viewers would wander, duck and weave; others move only in straight lines. Some would insist on stepping back from the works to get a better view, others press their noses to the paintings in order to see the brushwork more clearly. Several would be unable to read signs prohibiting flash photography, and a few would feel compelled to reach out and touch the works, perhaps to check if the security guards were awake. At least three individuals would find it necessary to share their opinions with all and sundry; two would speak loudly into their mobiles, and one old lady would insist on describing each painting in great detail to her elderly companion (who would trail after her reluctantly, looking as though he really did not have that much time left and had much better things to do with it than attend an exhibition).
So, what makes a gallery choose to stage a blockbuster and subject itself to these periodic invasions? Apart from the worthy goal of attracting lots of new viewers, the reality for most galleries is that these exhibitions provide a significant portion of their funding. The blockbusters provide the means to fund many other culturally significant, but less lucrative, activities, such as conservation and education. When presenting his vision for the National Gallery of Australia, the director Rod Radford stated, “The Gallery should stage at least one fine blockbuster exhibition every year to bring in a large number of visitors and generate income to maintain the exhibition program” (Radford, 2005).

If attendance is the only measure of success for these blockbusters, it seems our major galleries have triumphed with their recent programs. According to a recent report in The Australian, the big names in painting — Picasso, Monet and Degas — helped push attendances at our major galleries to more than 2.5 million visitors in 2008 (Higson, 2008).

Why do so many people go and what attracts viewers that don’t usually frequent art galleries to these exhibitions? What do they get from these shows that they don’t get from other visits to a gallery? For a few, I suspect the attraction is the desire to maintain a certain social status: to see and be seen at these major events. For others, it is that friends or family will attend. Even if they are not particularly interested in art, they like to share the experience with those they care about. For many, these special exhibitions provide access to artworks that would otherwise be beyond their reach, dispersed among numerous far-flung galleries. The exhibition provides a chance to see the treasures without the hunt.

How does the gallery ensure that the experience is a pleasurable one and that their success in attracting a huge number of visitors doesn’t put people off attending similar events in the future? If you are like me, the test of a gallery’s success in this respect lies in whether the pleasure of the experience outweighs the pain. I am very pleased to report that the NGA was victorious.

It’s fair to say that some of the credit for making this exhibition so enjoyable must go to Degas: he is a master artist after all. However, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the amazing work of the curator for this exhibition, Jane Kinsman. Great care has been taken in selecting the works for the exhibition, which ranged from important paintings and sculptures, to drawings, experimental monotypes and photographs. The works were divided into logical sections to assist in displaying the artist’s evolution and to provide possible insights into the inspirations of this elusive artist. Each section of the exhibition was subtly distinguished from others by the use of a different coloured backdrop, ranging from ocean grey to dusky plum, each colour specially chosen to bring out the best in Degas’ works. Wall tags were informative without being condescending, helpfully identifying that the horse depicted in one painting had been painted from a sculpture displayed elsewhere in the exhibition, and playfully describing how Degas would bully his dinner guests into sitting for photographs as soon as the meal had been eaten.

In a recent article, Victoria Lynn, also a curator, gave an interesting insight into the practice of curating an exhibition. She notes that it is a complex process that involves “bringing together a body of works that provide an inspiring experience for the audience”. She goes on to say, “On the one hand, an exhibition aims to be visionary, on the other, it has to be practical. Exhibitions broaden our minds, extend our knowledge, and provide a context” (Lynn 2009). This exhibition achieved every one of those aims. In the words of Christopher Allen, the exhibition “is a welcome opportunity to admire the work of a great master, but also to consider the various facets of his poetic world and the diversity of the media and the genres that he employed” (Allen 2008).

Overall, the exhibition was a fine achievement, and one that managed to elevate the blockbuster experience above the numerous annoyances of exhibitions of this size. For the first time at a blockbuster, I was so engaged that I wasn’t irritated by the crowd and was able to savour the artworks. Two months on, I can still remember all the details of the works (the composition, the colours, the lines and brushwork) but very little
Above:

Edgar Degas
France, 1834–1917
The dance class  c. 1873
oil on canvas
47.6 x 62.2 cm
The Corcoran Gallery of Art, Washington, DC
William A Clark Collection, 1926
Image Courtesy of National Gallery of Australia

Image Page 36-37:

Dega Gift Shop at the National Gallery of Australia 2009
Image Courtesy of National Gallery of Australia
about the queues. No one seemed to back into me; no-one seemed particularly driven to test the patience of the security guards. Only one thing hadn’t changed: the old lady was there, describing every painting in great detail to her companion. But even he appeared more sprightly than usual. He seemed to be playing with his hearing aid – perhaps he too had finally managed to tune her out.

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Image from the Archibald prize, Art Gallery of NSW, Courtesy of the gallery, Cc
Portraiture

Written by Xueting Zheng

Portraiture exhibition has proven to be a very popular exhibition genre in Australia. The 2008 Archibald Portrait Prize at the Art Gallery of New South Wales reached a record attendance of 151,900 in less than three months. It is expected that this year’s Archibald Portrait Prize will break this record. This article analyses the different aspects of the portrait exhibition and explores some reasons for its popularity. It explores the definition of the portrait and changing notion of what qualifies as a portrait amongst the public. It introduces a few experimental approaches that contemporary artists have taken on the portrait. It then turns to the themes that portrait exhibitions are commonly focused on. Finally, the article offers two reasons that may contribute to the popularity of portrait exhibitions in Australia.

Australia has three important on-going portrait prize exhibitions. The Archibald Portrait Prize is Australia’s longest running annual art prize. Held at the Art Gallery of New South Wales for the past eighty years, it has been one of the most popular art exhibitions in the nation. The Art Newspaper in London named The Archibald Portraiture Prize among the top ten contemporary art exhibitions around the globe (Archibald Education Kit 2009, p.7). The Doug Moran Portrait Prize is a bi-annual prize. Its prestige has developed as a result of the large prize money and the involvement of judges of international standing. Another long running prize, The Portia Geach Portrait Prize, is dedicated to women artists in Australia. All three prizes are important in the development of portraiture works in Australia.

Aside from the portraiture prize exhibitions that are organised by the major art galleries, the Australia National Portrait Gallery organises portraiture shows all year round. Australia is one of the few countries in the world to have a publicly funded gallery devoted to portrait works. The National Portrait Gallery in Canberra just opened in December 2008. According to The Canberra Times (Diana Streak, 2009), it is likely to achieve a milestone quarter of a million visitors in three months. Many of these were first time visitors and will go back there again.

The Merriam-Webster online dictionary defines the portrait as “a pictorial representation of a person, usually showing the face”. However, the question of whether the face’s features have to be realistically captured, or can be distorted to express the artist’s interpretation of the subject, has been debated for a long time. A court case even resulted from the different understandings of a portrait by artists. One of the most established Australian artists William Dobell created a portrait of fellow artist Joshua Smith and won the Archibald Portraiture Prize in 1943. Mary Edwards and Joseph Wolinski, two Royal Art Society members, did not regard the unconventional drawing style as portrait. They considered Joshua Smith’s portrait a “distorted and caricature form” which did not present the “facts as they were” and therefore not qualified to win the prize. The two members took the case to court. The justice took a more liberal understanding on this matter.
Craig Waddell, *Portrait of JC*, 2006,
oil on canvas, 160 x 140 cm.
Photograph Diana Panuccio,
Courtesy of AGNSW.
He upheld Dobell’s award as “undoubtedly a pictorial representation of Joshua Smith” because it bore a strong degree of likeness to the subject (Archibald Education Kit 2009, p6). The case was ruled in favor of William Dobell. Nowadays the modern art movement challenges the traditional definition of a portrait. Bearing a resemblance to the facial features of the sitters is not the dominant characteristic of what constitutes a good portrait anymore. The current Archibald Portrait Prize exhibition displays a wall text that attempts to define portraiture as “revealing the inner self of the sitter, rather than being simply a faithful rendering of facial features”.

Many portraits works still include people’s faces. This is evident in the current Archibald Prize. Thirty-eight out of thirty-nine artists include the sitter’s faces in the portraits. Nevertheless, some contemporary artists are using bold and experimental approaches to create portrait works that bear little resemblance to the sitter. Craig Waddell’s portraiture, Portrait of JC, was in the 2006 Archibald Portraiture Prize. Robert Nelson described the painting in this way: “the disfiguration is taken to the edges of chaos, with lashings of brutal paint, brutal paint, out of which a bug-eyed person stares in uncertain direction with dubious expression” (Robert Nelson, 2006). It is quite difficult to believe that the portrait is actually of a very elegant looking lady, the artist’s wife Ms Jessie Cacchillo. She is apparently the face model for the big skin-care corporation Olay. Craig Waddell is an artist who likes to paint inanimate objects such as machines. His bold and vibrant portrait of Jessie Cacchillo possibly shows another side of the sitter.

Some contemporary portraiture does not include the person’s face at all. The aboriginal artist Weaver Jack painted her country land her self-portrait: Weaver Jack in Lungara. The painting is a typical Western Desert landscape painting. Because of Weaver’s close relationship with the land, she chose the land to represent herself. “This is me”, says Weaver. “I have been walking around. I know him (my country) the proper way. He is always here (in my heart). We are same one. My country is me” (Archibald Prize 2006). This portrait caused debate over whether it is a qualified entrant to the Archibald Portraiture Prize at the time.

This year’s Archibald prize was also struck with controversy with the inclusion of Michael Zavos’ self-portrait Ars longa, vita brevis. With sunglasses for eyes, shoes for the nose and a few cologne bottles for the teeth, Zavros tries to explore how material things evoke one’s personality (Archibald Prize 2009). Zavros possesses all the objects in the painting. Each object is realistically illustrated with clear branding information. Can we tell what kind of person Zavros is from the things he possesses? It is a question for the audience. Both Weaver and Zavos are finalists in the Archibald. It shows artists are broadening the definition for portraiture.

According to the Art Gallery of New South Wales, a portrait can be made for a number of reasons, “as an historical record, a personal tribute, remembrance or token of friendship, a glorification of person’s status or position, or a simple gratification of vanity and indicator of fashion” (Archibald Education Kit 2009, p10).

Through the genre of portraiture, artists are able to explore an infinite number of themes. One consistent theme for portraiture exhibitions is to explore “both the face and the mind” of the people (Anne Loxley, 1994). By putting on a show of Australian people, portrait exhibitions work very well in presenting the national identity to the public. That is why the big portrait exhibitions are often organised by the government or curators working at public galleries.

The Embassy of Australia at Washington organized “The Macquarie International Portrait Artists Australia Exhibition” in May 2005. The exhibition aimed to introduce to the American audiences “a group of interesting characters who are part of the “face” of contemporary Australia” (Andrew Sayers, 2005). “It is a compelling and vivid history and tells the story of nation building as no words can” (Paul Delprat, 2005).

Portrait exhibitions can also be curated to explore a social theme, where the people in the portraits are viewed in order to study the living conditions
Paintings ready to be sent on a regional tour, 2008,

Photographs by tiglugs. Cc.

Image Page 48:

The Art Gallery of New South Wales, The Archibald Prize, 2008 Photograph by Leigh MacRitchie. Courtesy of Leigh MacRitchie.
and the general environment of a particular time. The two-year traveling exhibition “Up Front: faces of Australia at War” organized by the Australian War Memorial is “a portrait exhibition that looks at the unique relationship between the portraiture and war, from colonial times to the present, with an emphasis on the two world wars” (Australian War Memorial 2009). What people looked like in the war and why artists painted people in this way were the questions the exhibition explored.

“Half Light: portraits from black Australia” organized by the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 2009 looked at what it is like to be an indigenous artist in Australia from different portrait works indigenous artists have done. The portrait works are telling stories on what indigenous artists are experiencing in Australia.

Portraiture exhibitions attract all sorts of audiences including people who have never been to any art exhibitions and who only go to a gallery once a year. There are a number of reasons that one can account for the popularity of this genre.

Edmund Capon, the Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, believes that people have a natural urge to see what other people’s circumstances and situations look like. It is the driving force behind the popularity of portraiture exhibitions. “Portraiture is one of the most revealing and satisfying ways of exercising voyeurism” (Archibald Education Kit 2009, p11). Take the 2009 Archibald Portraiture exhibition for example. The audience can see the physical appearance of thirty-nine distinguished Australians. More importantly, the audience can get a glimpse at the sitter’s psychological state. For example, in the large and expressive oil painting of Ray Hughes, Sydney’s famous contemporary gallery owner, the audience are looking at Ray Hughes in different moods: fretting, thinking, and wondering. Another artist, Megan Roodnernys gave viewers a pictorial report of AFL player Ben Cousins as he spent a sleepless night the day that the media reported on his illegal drug use to the public. He was anxiously lying on the bed, waiting for the day to come.

Another reason that portrait works are so popular is because it is easy for the audiences to connect to them. Most of the portraiture is very straightforward. The subject matter is very easy to understand.

Bearing a resemblance to the facial features of the sitters is not the dominant characteristic of what is a good portrait any more. Contemporary artists are using experimental approaches to the practice of portraiture, capturing not only the physical appearance, but also the personality of the sitters as well. The portraiture exhibitions usually explore a group of people’s identity or study a social environment or a particular time in the history. Wanting to find out how other people look is always within human nature. The portraiture exhibition offers the audiences a revealing way of viewing other people’s lives. The straightforward subject matter connects with the audiences easily. These are the two reasons that portraiture exhibitions are so popular in Australia.

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The Young at Art

By Ali Groves
W}ith young artists at such an influential place in the art world, under-thirty-five societies in major institutions, and eleven-year olds successfully bidding on Jeff Koons at auction, Generation Y is emerging as a new and demanding face on the art market. In accordance, the market for young collectors is diverse and thriving in the auction houses, online, and at a more grassroots level. In the current economic climate, where the effects on auction-houses and large commercial galleries have already been described as ‘disastrous’ (Plagens, 2009), the modest practices of young collectors and art-traders may emerge as a more focal site of the art market.

J}ust as the broader capitalist system is increasingly scrutinised in the media, the motivations of the US$6 billion-plus global art market may also be subject to criticism. It is in this context that responses from young art collectors could reveal refreshing and practical ideas about art collecting. From the animal-loving pre-teen collectors to the most frugally budgeted art allowances of university students, the young collectors are a dynamic group keen to share their motivations for hanging pictures on their bedroom walls.

W}ith flashy budgets fuelled by their art-loving parents’ pockets, the pre-teen demographic of young art collectors in London and New York has recently attracted media attention as well as a noteworthy voice of scepticism from art industry employees (Crow, 2007).

More than a few eyebrows were raised at a New York Sotheby’s auction in 2006, when eleven-year old Charlie Rosen successfully bid US$352,000 for a Jeff Koons sculpture of a silver gnome.

Or in 2003, when at the age of thirteen, Brahm Wachter spent his bar mitzvah money (US$5000) on a small Rembrandt etching at an art fair. He reportedly failed to mention it to his friends since they were “more interested in skateboarding."

W}hile their pocket money may now be a few zero’s shorter than in previous years, the rich-kid art collectors have amassed sizeable private collections in the 2000s and show genuine enthusiasm for the hobby. The use of the term ‘hobby’ here is not intended to bear condescension, but rather describe the playful attitude described by these collectors in interviews; while their parents may consider the financial agenda of art investments worthwhile, the children appear to find the process like an entertaining shopping game of picking the artwork which ‘looks best’ to them – in a playfully arbitrary aesthetic judgement.

I}n 2007, Kelly Crow (reporting for the Wall Street Journal), interviewed the then nine year-old Dakota King, a collector of contemporary art with a collection of over forty pieces. Dakota expressed her preference for choosing artworks with animal subjects and “happy colours” like pink and yellow, saying,
Baby Art Collector. 2009
Photograph Blue Monkey. Creative Commons
Above:
My Little Brother Thom with his Mark Alsweiler Drawing, 2009
Photograph Ali Groves. Copyright Ali Groves.
“when I see a painting with colour, it makes me feel good.” Dakota went on to describe her personal favourite, a Warhol print of a panda from 1983: “Panda is darling and chubby and cute, and at night he protects me”.

While Dakota may have little art-historical grasp of the ‘significance’ of her collected artworks to the rest of the world, the sincerity of her affection for her pieces, and the comfort they give her, is by no means an illegitimate or naïve reason to purchase them. Rather, the account of her intensely personal relationship with these works is refreshingly honest, emotional and without monetary concern, in contrast to the comparatively dry motivations of the innumerable investment purchases of the art market.

While few art enthusiasts could support such a hobby, the young art-collecting trend is by no means restricted to the sons and daughters of New York real estate developers. Art school students, young practising artists and collectors are thriving on a more modestly priced, practical, and yet often unmentioned, art trade. With a decade’s more experience on the pre-teen collectors, and a far smaller disposable income, the motivations for this demographic are practical, informed, and at times, quixotic.

Jennifer Tan, a recent art school graduate, describes the benefits of small-scale operations as “easy, personal and mutually beneficial. You get an artwork for nothing, your work is hanging on a wall somewhere, and you’ll often promote each other’s work via your website or blog.”

While art trading is certainly not a new idea, it has transformed into a considerably dynamic and large-scale mechanism for art collecting over the past few years. Online galleries, blogs and networking sites for artists, designers, and illustrators have enabled international trades and sales for many young creators. Leading websites in this field, such as Behance, Illustrophile, Red Bubble, Deviant Art and Concrete-canvas, provide online galleries, biographies and networking between members. These free-to-join and free-access websites have broadened the prospective market for emerging artists to no end.

Mitchell Spider, a nineteen-year old artist and student from Sydney, has had a dramatic rise in his online following over the past year. His online networking brought him into contact with internationally renowned Melbourne street-artist and illustrator known as GhostPatrol. Through an initial agreement to swap two small-scale drawings, the artists established an art-trading relationship that has benefited both parties with modest art collections and valuable contacts in another Australian city. The art swapping agreement here demonstrates the two possible motivations in this style of art collecting practice; on one hand, the pleasure of collecting the art object, on the other, the practical benefits of marketing through another artist’s network. Mitchell also describes his initial foray into trading as “at first a test to see who would be interested (in his work)” and a “mea...
Sure of achievement” as well as a mechanism to gain valuable feedback from artists whom he admired. “It’s more personal and more gratifying if you can get artworks in that way, rather than buying them,” he reasons.

While it appears common that the nominal values of the pieces are rarely mentioned in the trade, the works of interest would be typically priced below 300 dollars. A further benefit of collecting pieces by emerging artists is the huge potential for their market value to increase. In the case of GhostPatrol, his small works have dramatically increased in gallery sale prices over the past year, from 150 dollars to a grand. One young collector who considers this in his purchases is Thom Groves, an eighteen-year old student living in the Blue Mountains. He recently spent three week’s pay (500 dollars) on a detailed aerosol painting by Melbourne graffiti artist Phibs at Newtown’s Oh Really gallery. “Phibs is an iconic Australian graffiti artist; I’m lucky to have been able to afford one of his works before the prices got too high,” Thom describes. “It’s a good investment; I’m supporting an artist whose work I appreciate, and I can share it with my friends. But I’d never buy it to sell it later on -- if I wanted to do that I would’ve bought shares.”

With four purchases, two pieces given as gifts and one traded work (with a young American artist) in his collection, Thom’s next piece will be by commission to Sydney artist Max Berry -- co-founder of Oh Really. Max describes the clients of the gallery as “roughly fifty-fifty divide of purchasers in their late teens and twenties, and the thirty-plus age group”, where the younger half “tend to appear more enthusiastic” about their purchases.

While the idea of a long-term investment purchases or collections may be appealing, art-trading practices have been considered a creative method in combatting the monetary agenda of the art industry. The last decade has seen a huge transformation in street-art and graffiti practices and their relationship to the formal art industry. Consistent with the general anti-establishment, anti-art institution philosophy behind street art genres, many artists working with stickers, stencils, paste-ups (posters) and sketches for wall pieces have taken to internet initiated trade agreements. Collecting these pieces has become common practice, as well as assembling them into a catalogue of sorts. Sketchbooks are often the sites for the globally sourced collections to be pasted and stickered into, making for a rather unique and prized object.

Through his social network of street-artists, Max Berry has accumulated a rather enviable collection, entirely through trading. Rather wistfully, Max describes his motivations as “largely sentimental and personal, they mark the time you spent with that person.” “Often I trade a small piece with someone after I’ve collaborated on a piece with them,” Max says, which appears to be a situation quite common with practising graffiti and street artists. The emphasis on the collection is the personal relationship with the other artist, as well as documenting the active network of artists and their work, which may otherwise appear ephemerally.

The honest sentimentality and emotional responses of these young collectors to their acquisitions is refreshing in the context of the current economic recession. While the major figures in the art market may be re-assessing their numbers, rest assured the art market is re-inventing itself with some of the ingenuity and optimism of its young collectors.

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IDENTITIES COME FROM SOMEWHERE, HAVE HISTORIES, AND LIKE EVERYTHING WHICH IS HISTORICAL, THEY UNDERGO CONSTANT TRANSFORMATION

Gordon Bennett, 1996.
Gordon Bennett

Written by Amber Naismith

At the heart of Gordon Bennett’s practice is a personal struggle to find the self. Of Aboriginal and Anglo-Celtic descent, Bennett has spent the last twenty years of his career reckoning with the cultural and historical legacies of European settlement in Australia.

While Bennett’s art practice has been marked by significant stylistic shifts, his provocative paintings, installations and performances have continued to explore the construction of cultural and personal identity both within Australia’s colonial past and its postcolonial present, as well as to reflect on the role of the artist in the contemporary art industry.

Bennett’s Indigenous ancestry has been central to his practice, not only in foregrounding issues addressed in his art, but also in how he has distinguished his own identity as distinct from the recognition of his work in the art world (Stanhope 2005). Bennett only became aware of his Aboriginality at the age of eleven (Bennett 1989). The repression and denial of his Aboriginality was reinforced by an education system dominated by a history built on the belief of Australia in terra nullius, and common narratives based on exploration, colonisation and settlement. “All the education and socialisation upon which my identity and self worth as a person, indeed my sense of Australian-ess, and that of my peers, had as its foundation the narratives of colonialism” (Bennett 1996).

Bennett’s art practice has been grounded in the critical and aesthetic strategies associated with post-modernism and post-colonialism. With no Indigenous culture to draw on, Bennett has had to express his Aboriginality through non-traditional means. As Bennett explains: “My mind and body had been effectively colonised by Western culture, and yet my Aboriginality, which had been historically, socially and personally repressed, was still part of me...there were very real demands to be either one or the other. There was simply no space for me to simply “be”. I decided that I would attempt to create a space by adopting a strategy of intervention and disturbance in the field of representation and through my art” (Bennett 1996).

Throughout his career Bennett has consistently attempted to deconstruct the discomforts of his early social conditioning and the hegemonic view of Aboriginal culture as structured by colonial discourse. In many of his early works, Bennett questions the source of this Euro-centric education by re-appropriating images associated with voyages of discovery, historic moments such as declarations of possession, and figures such as that of the heroic pioneer. In Untitled (1989) these scenes are juxtaposed with the words “displaced” and “disperse” to subvert the values and meaning traditionally associated with these images, and expose the val-
ue-laden nature of language and history (Gellately 2007). Many of Bennett’s paintings during this time included perspective, optical grids and black voids. In Untitled (1989), the final panel in the sequence is a black square, which is the context of the other figurative panels, could be read as representing the absence of Indigenous voices in history. As Bennett explains, “I see much of my current work as History Painting, not as documentary history painting, but rather it is painting that investigates the way history is constructed after the event, always mediated by someone’s point of view, a teleological one point perspective that reflects Eurocentric bias” (Bennett 1992).

By combining the concerns of self-portraiture within a wider social context, Bennett implicates himself in the history of Australia and presents a wry commentary on the contemporary manufacture of identity. As Ian McLean points out, his self-portraiture is an inquiry into the social psychology and semiotic mechanisms of identity, rather than the usual ego-texts of the genre. “The question of who am I is not answered through an inner psychic journey, but by the study of place and geology, therefore dissolving accepted boundaries of identity and individuality” (McLean, 2001). In Self Portrait (But I Always Wanted to Be One of the Good Guys) (1990), Bennett investigates the way that stereotypes are constructed by exploring words, images and opposites. The portrait of Bennett as a four-year old dressed as a cowboy as the “I” is juxtaposed with images of Aborigines as the “AM”. The Indigenous Australians are generically depicted as noble savages, underlining the political construction of the identity and racist assumptions of authenticity. “I feel that by deconstructing false notions about myself and my Aboriginality then, in some way, I am also reflecting how that is being falsely reflected within Australian culture. So, there’s this connection between my deconstructing this image in myself and deconstructing Australian culture” (Bennett 1990).

While Australian history has remained an enduring reference point in Bennett’s work, he has also shown the ways in which the paradigms of twentieth-century Western art are ever-present in the cultural and political structuring of Australian identity and its Aboriginal other (McLean 2003). In Home Décor (Preston + De Stijl) = Citizen, A Dingo Took My Baby (1997), Bennett addresses issues of Aboriginal identity, custody and ownership. To frame these concerns, Bennett has appropriated the grid systems of Mondrian and the De Stijl movement, and with the aid of computer technology, used them to contain the central figure that relates to custodial issues and the Stolen Generation. The reference to Margaret Preston’s style, which itself appropriated Aboriginal motifs and colours, reinforces the concept of Aboriginal art as viewed through a western historical framework, as yet another Eurocentric interpretation of Aboriginal culture. Yet, the ‘Home Décor’ series can also be read as an extension of Bennett’s exploration of self-portraiture. As McLean points out, in mid-twentieth Australia, the modernisms of De Stijl and Preston’s Aboriginalism produced a popular modern hybrid Australian as home décor of its citizens. The title equation ‘Preston + De Stijl = Citizen’ describes this period in Australian culture, and the time when Bennett was born (McLean 1998).

During this time, Bennett became concerned that his identity and work could be seen as coming from a narrow framework (Gellately 2008). As an artist whose practice is concerned with how labels and systems define and confine knowledge and perception, the categorisation of his work as “Aboriginal” in exhibitions, books and commentaries presented practical and philosophical issues. In an effort to distance himself from a growing reputation, and possibly even his own manner of appropriation, Bennett invented a persona, an artist named John Citizen, under whose name he painted and exhibited work. As McLean points out, Bennett’s refusal to participate in this game of representation by rejecting the label of “Aboriginal” is not due to an antipathy towards Indigenous issues, but to focus on the very language systems that deny Aborigines a place in the constitution of Australian identity. (McLean 2003).

Gordon Bennett’s body of work represents the artist’s long struggle with and exploration of the boundaries of his own Aboriginality.
Gordon Bennett, *Untitled*, 1989, Copyright of the artist, Courtesy of Barry Keldoulis Gallery
Always complex and constantly being framed by personal history, his art continues to engage with the politics concerning the manufacture of identity and the production and consumption of art. As the artist himself explains: “When Gordon Bennett is labeled an “Aboriginal Artist” he is othered as an Aborigine and all the preconceptions that entails. John Citizen’s identity must remain fluid...He can be anything the viewer wants him to be: white, black or any shade in between” (Bennett 2007). Perhaps as John Citizen, Bennett is finally able to simply “be”, a position he felt unable to inhabit at the start of this journey. Just as John Citizen is the euphemism for everyman, Bennett reminds us that every individual must transcend him or herself in order to be truly free.

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“The arts can assist in economic recovery and renewal and build a more resilient society.”

Arts Victoria 2003
Renewing Newcastle

Written By Anna Scobie
Renewing Newcastle

Written by Anna Scobie

There is currently much public discussion about the enrichment of community health and wellbeing through cultural engagement. Increasingly, councils are trying to assess and benefit the spiritual wellbeing, and social and emotional health of their constituents through urban regeneration strategies and cultural development. Newcastle is one such city where the council’s hand is evident, with a CBD Taskforce set in place to discuss revitalising the town centre. One grass-roots organisation has hit upon a concept that marries these three agendas. Renew Newcastle is not just discussing an initiative to rejuvenate the CBD but is already actively renewing an interest in the town centre, and Newcastle itself, by finding creative short to medium term uses for vacant shops and offices.

The de-centralisation of Newcastle’s inner city began over a decade ago with the creation of mammoth shopping malls in the outer suburbs. The CBD now consists of many sites that are boarded up, falling apart, vandalised, or decaying because there is no use for them. The difficulty of parking in the historic town centre literally drove the consumers and businesses out to the suburbs. Renew Newcastle enables community groups and cultural projects with creative intentions to move into the otherwise vacant, wasted spaces of Hunter Street, Hunter Street Mall, and King Street with the specific intent of renewing interest and activity in the CBD. This vacancy and the subsequent rejuvenation has serious human, social and economic consequences for the City of Newcastle.

Newcastle council’s CBD Taskforce identified that Hunter Street was lacking a “sense of place”. The image of the city is shifting by confronting its post-industrial reality. No longer simply the city of steel, Newcastle is undertaking a cultural metamorphosis. Renew Newcastle pro
Image Pages 62-63:

Image Page 64:

Above:
vides the opportunity to build a different identity, a sense of what this place is and could be. Leading American urban thinker, and long time advocate of creative urban renewal programs, Richard Florida, has recently been asking the question, “Who’s your city?”. Embodying cities with a multitude of different personalities, he defines the personality of a city by the unique traits of the population who live there and by those who are attracted to move to that city. Given this, we could imagine Renew Newcastle guiding Newcastle into art-therapy to enhance its creative traits and redefine its less attractive personality traits. Thus according to Florida’s logic, by attracting new artistic citizens to move to Newcastle, the social landscape and personality of the city are being changed.

Renew Newcastle is the brainchild of Marcus Westbury, presenter of the ABC TV series Not Quite Art. Born and bred in steel city, Newcastle, he has travelled to other industrial cities all over the world and explored the way they are using cultural activity to create urban renewal. In a 2007 episode of Not Quite Art, Westbury compared the cities of Newcastle (Australia) and Glasgow and it was this episode that planted the seeds of motivation that led to the establishment of Renew Newcastle. Westbury looked at the two post-industrial cities and presented the bones of Glasgow’s cultural renaissance, highlighting the on-the-street dynamic arts culture that had taken residence in emp-

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rts Victoria released a major policy in 2003, which supports the belief that “the arts can assist in economic recovery and renewal and build a more resilient society”. Simply by participating in cultural activities, individuals and communities can address issues of wellbeing and social connectivity. While on the surface this sounds quite Edwardian -- shackling the arts to improve the uncouth masses -- rather, it is at its core, partnering with the arts to improve the quality of the public domain. One cannot dispute that Melbourne, the capital of Victoria, is a hive of creativity and leading the way in social connectivity via arts programs. Newcastle council
The arts as a tool for community connectivity with its L!vesites initiative providing free music and visual arts events including outdoor performances, installations, concerts, open air cinema and mass public dance classes. The L!vesites “place activation program” was conceived in 2003 as part of the Newcastle City Council’s Cultural Master Plan. Although not part of this strategy, Renew Newcastle partners with the initiative’s objectives to enliven the city, to provide a sustainable sense of place, and to provide a post-industrial image.

Renew Newcastle has been running since January 2008. It has already placed fifteen projects and converted eight formerly empty buildings in the Newcastle CBD into galleries, craft shops, publishing houses, design studios and offices.

These include a photography gallery, a sound, digital and media gallery, an animation studio/production house, a shop-front for children’s art and craft classes, an architecture based installation exhibition, an online magazine and design hub, and a shop that will supply custom made origami and craft.

Renew Newcastle has survived its first six months operating -- according to their website -- “on the smell of an oily rag and without any major sources of funding”. Renew Newcastle has succeeded by creating incentives for the business and creative community by simply making life easier and not harder for property owners, and by using the energy of the local creative community in what they describe as “sweat equity” to clean up and fix up the run down parts of Newcastle’s CBD. The population of the Hunter region is about half a million people so there is a large local community to support creative projects. Indeed, within three months, the organisation has received more than 100 submissions from local and interstate artists and groups, who want to become involved with its initiatives.

The Room Project is an architectural exhibition space created by Newcastle architecture students and one of the first spaces to be “activated” by Renew Newcastle. The inaugural show at The Room Project was Hunting Grounds which consists of over 10,000 pieces of timber used to create a mountainous three-dimensional floor. Hunting Grounds, is an interactive, multi-sensory installation. The viewer clanks their way over the built landscape accompanied by the sound created with the tap dancing timber stilts as their weight moves over them. This experimental architectural installation blends art and architecture principals, the space will allow for large-scale projects where artist and architects can blur these hazy boundaries.

Before the architects and artists could move into the empty shop fronts, they had to repair and refurbish the traditional retail space into the white cube gallery space required. Renew Newcastle finds a balance that benefits both artists and property owners with tokenistic rent for filled spaces, while lease agreements allow for a 30-day notice period should there be an interested commercial tenant.

Joining The Room Project is a recently unlocked artists’ collective called Make Space, which produces “all individual stuff, all handmade, with a big recycling re-use aesthetic”. The shop, at the corner of Hunter and Morgan St in the Hunter Street Mall, is the most recent launch by Renew Newcastle, “to find short to medium term uses for buildings currently vacant, disused or awaiting redevelopment”. The front half of the retail space is filled with sculpture, recycled home wares and handmade vintage clothing. In the rear half of the store is a shared studio space for the artists, the hive of creative activity. With the problem of more than 100 vacant shop fronts in
the main street of Newcastle’s central business district, property owners, business leaders and city residents have been paying a special levy to fund the Newcastle City Centre committee.

The committee’s chairman, architect Ed Duc, says the Renew Newcastle initiative “will contribute to improving the look and feel of the of the city centre while providing benefits to existing businesses”. To that end the committee recently committed $20,000 to Renew Newcastle to “assist with some of the management costs for the initiative, and the costs of repair, upkeep and maintenance of properties... participating in Renew Newcastle”. Their belief is that allowing shops such as Make Space and The Project Room to neighbour commercial stores, will promote a point of difference to the Hunter Street retail experience, and distinguish it from the suburban mega shopping centres. In an interview with ABC 1233 earlier this year, local businessman Ramesh Thakur, a property owner who has offered his premises to Renew Newcastle said: “I have struggled to find people who want to lease the premises, and it has been exhausting to keep cleaning off the graffiti...I will be happy that an artist can make good use of the space and maybe make a successful business out of it, which will have a positive impact on other businesses in the city.”

The next initiative to encourage Novocastrians into the town centre is free wireless-internet-access with more long-term redevelopment plans in Newcastle to increase pedestrian movement and create better access to public transport. One must question what will happen to the on-the-street arts culture that Renew Newcastle is building when major redevelopment hits the centre? Can the objectives of the Council’s City Centre Plan, Newcastle City Centre committee, Newcastle City Council’s Cultural Master Plan, CBD Taskforce and development companies all overlap to establish an identity, a “personality”, a true sense of place that will engage with our society? It is too early to tell. Yet we do know in the short term, Renew Newcastle will revitalise the town centre, encouraging community health while contributing to the building of a post-industrial identity: a cultural life after steel with a return to an active civic life. Time will tell whether Newcastle is set to become a regional cultural hub, and if indeed Australia is ready for its culture to be de-centralised from the nation’s capital cities. Whatever the distant future, Newcastle’s residents and tourists can look forward to seeing what else Renew Newcastle has to offer them with many more projects set to open during 2009.


All information about the project from: www.renewnewcastle.org.au
There is interplay between those things found by birds and made into places of rest those things humans collect. There is a homecoming, a memory, an importance, a structure to the things we keep and cherish just as importance and structure are inherent to the building of a nest.
Review of Gay Bilson’s exhibition

*Nest* at Object Gallery in Surry Hills, Sydney

Written by Meghan Long

As humans we collect. We collect things, we horde, we treasure, we keep. Mementos of loves lost, keepsakes from years gone by. We save so we may savour again. Come back to; revisit. Centre ourselves on who we are, where we come from, and our present direction. Whereas birds create: from our scrap, from our keepsakes, from our mementos. From the waste of our modern lifestyles, the garbage we leave behind, birds create a home, a nest, a birthplace, for their young using bits they find and treasure.

These ideas of homecoming, and the importance of identity through collected objects, in both humans and birds, are the central themes represented in Gay Bilson’s temporary exhibition titled *Nest*, which showed at Object Gallery from the 8th of November 2008 to the 5th of April 2009.

Gay Bilson is celebrated as one of Australia’s most renowned and talented chefs. The former owner and operator of the Berowra Waters Inn, Bilson’s career has been characterised by a deep passion for all things food, and creativity in presentation.

More recently, Bilson has written several best-selling cookbooks, filled with suggestions for creating edible masterpieces at home. While her efforts in the world of fine dining need no introduction, Bilson possesses a lesser-known devotion: she is also a unique curator of “natural” fine art.

She has collected many of the pieces herself, but as her interests in natural art, specifically bird nests, became more widely known, other collectors have sent her a variety of nests via post. She said that when the packages arrive, they are so light they often seem empty.

Bilson’s obsession with nests does not stem from their inherent value, as they are worth nothing in the general fine art market, and cannot be found at any auctions; rather, her interest in nests is almost a kind of reverence for what each little piece embodies (the perseverance and dedication of the nest-
maker, forced to use whatever tiny thing she finds to create her home). Bilson sees each nest as a testament to the character and determination of the bird.

Since beginning her exercise in the preservation and admiration of natural objects over ten years ago, Bilson’s curiosity surrounding the relationship of humans to the natural world has heightened. It is obvious that she has drawn on some of the similarities she has found between humans and birds in the curation of the Nest exhibition.

Bilson sees, “Each of these messily woven baskets of twigs, leaves, garbage, and small shiny objects, as a creative display of the harshness and magnificence of nature. They symbolise something that I can understand. When you are passionate about something, whether it is food, objects, or your home, you persevere, you endure, and you construct out of those trials the best creation you can, so others might enjoy its beauty”.

There is an importance in the juxtaposition of something natural to an unnatural space, such as an art gallery. While many would see Bilson’s exhibition as a collection rather than her body of artistic works, there is something to be said for the process she goes through in collecting the pieces, and subsequently designing the space in which to show them. This validates the nests as works of art, curatorial art really, rather than just natural “found” objects, or a personal collection. Each nest in the exhibition at Object gallery was carefully chosen for its colour, size, design and structure, in order to best complement the other pieces surrounding it. By looking at the elements used in the formation of the nest, the viewer is able to create or assume a story regarding the original location of the nest, or the materials used to construct it.

Nest offers a unique conversation between the “found art” of nests, and the obvious art displayed in the curation of the exhibition. Despite reservations regarding the authenticity of “found art,” it is in the curation and design of Nest that the true art lays. It is impossible to visit the exhibition, and not appreciate the beauty and craftsmanship inherent in these ephemeral pieces, and the creativity involved in its presentation.

Object was originally started as a cooperative space for artists to showcase their works, in revolving exhibitions, in order to increase exposure for emerging Australian ceramicists and sculptors, but as it grew it became obvious that a new structure was needed to house larger exhibitions.

The new building Object now occupies is part of the recently renovated St. Margaret’s Hospital, an area that was once the hospital’s chapel. The second level of the gallery is devoted solely to temporary exhibitions, while the lower level is designated as a small retail space that features commercial works, by artists that are members at Object.

There are winding minimalist hardwood stairs, and eggshell white walls that lead from the store, to an egg shaped main gallery on the upper level. A second set of stairs on the right of the main exhibition space leads to a third level loft gallery that features a view overlooking the main exhibition hall.

The third level is small and narrow, giving a feeling of privacy and solitude. In a lofty coincidence, during Nest, the view from the third level gives the visitor a sense of being up high in a tree, looking down on the world below; just as a small bird would do.

Bilson’s choice in space for this first exhibition of her collected works was a very conscious one. The third level at Object lends itself to a definite feel of nature, with pale green leaf-coloured walls, and brown plinths to hold the nests on display.

Sections of the walls are a soft cream colour, not unlike the soft lining of a little cup nest. Juxtaposed against the natural green undertone of the walls, which is symbolic of leaves, it is a cohesive match. There are four quotes from Bilson encouraging the importance of human understanding with respect to their natural surroundings. These quotes are scrawled along the two long walls in the exhibition, in a dark blue cursive font. These small, almost cryptic quotes, offer the
Images:
Kelly-Ann Lees, Nest, 2009, recycled steel, 30 x 40 cm (NOT part of the Gay Bisbon Collection).

Image courtesy of the Artist. Copyright the artist. For more information on Kelly-Ann Lees see the artist profile section of this edition of Artwrite.
Only written commentary on the exhibition. The most poignant of which is, “The beauty I find in the nests is often connected to the throwing of a pot or the weaving of a basket. These nests are small lessons in craft which are non-human, entirely useful and more often than not beautiful”.

The focal point of the exhibition is a single bird’s nest on a pedestal in the centre of the space. Moreover, forty-one smaller nests are arranged in a vertical line on either side, under the protection of a plexiglas covering. With no additional commentary on the structure of each nest -- bar the quotes on the wall -- the visitor is left to wonder and interpret each nest personally. One of the more rewarding aspects of this process is identifying the materials used in each nest, and the structural importance it plays in the formation of the nest.

There is a connection between humans and the natural environment beyond co-existence. There is interplay between those things found by birds, and made into places of rest by things humans collect. There is a homecoming, a memory, an importance, a structure to the things we keep and cherish, just as importance and structure are inherent to the building of a nest.

Creative in content and exhibition design, Bilson’s Nest at Object Gallery touches on humanity’s innate sense of sentimentality, and cycles of self-retrospection as represented by forty-one nests of different shapes and sizes.

Nest at Object Gallery closed on the 5th of April 2009, but Bilson has said that she will show the nests again in the future, perhaps as a travelling exhibition both to major cities and rural areas around Australia.

When the exhibition does begin touring, Nest is worth the visit. These artistic works of nature are in fact, real pieces of art, with unique stories and styles. Masterfully created by each small bird, they serve a purpose, but in their purpose are inherently beautiful.
Review

In his iconic song I Walk The Line, Johnny Cash expresses his obsessive desire to remain faithful to one woman. Like him, the exhibition I Walk The Line: New Australian Drawing is constrained by its faithful devotion to drawing for drawing’s sake. That is, not drawing as a preemptive activity to other art forms. Thus, the title of the exhibition is an intelligent play-on-words by curator Christine Morrow, both literally and figuratively speaking.

The exhibition hinges on several broad themes, which help to bring the varied works in the exhibition together. These themes include childhood, portraiture, the dialogue between writing and drawing, domesticity, and time. Furthermore, the exhibition does not only focus on drawing in the traditional sense, where the hand leaves a mark on a two-dimensional surface, but delves into the arena of performance works and animations, in order to expose the methodology of drawing itself.

Upon entering the main hall of the exhibition, one is immediately confronted with the work of Richard Lewer. The enormous charcoal drawing covers the entire main wall, and is titled 03/03/09. The work took eight days to execute and was produced specifically for the exhibition. Two staff members assisted Lewer, so that the work was completed in time for the opening of the exhibition. According to staffers at the MCA, while Lewer was sitting at lunch on the last day of working on the piece, he was experiencing phantom sensations in his hand from the disciplined, repetitive motions he had endured completing the work. The mammoth sized piece captivates interest immediately and draws the viewer into the exhibition. It features a street scene that looks like it was plucked from the pages of Lewer’s sketchbook.

Opposite the Lewer piece, unfortunately carrying far less weight, is an interesting interactive piece by Sebastian Moody. Moody’s Coffee Intervention (2009) invites gallery visitors to purchase a milk-based coffee at David Campese’s Goosestep Café, Shop 2.2, then a running tally is penciled on the wall above a glass encased coffee cup. The didactic reads: “Purchasing a milk coffee allows you to support the project, and consume a drawing by Sebastian Moody”. Interestingly, the café inside The Museum of Contemporary Art did not support the project.

Just up the stairs from the Moody piece, on the second level, is John Turner’s drawing machine. Demonstrations are held daily, and the piece encourages many questions and temptations to touch. The unusual looking mechanism produces penciled images by cranking a lever in a circular motion. The work is captivating whether in use or not, because...
ink on paper, 200 x 150 cm

Collection Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne.
Image courtesy the artist and Helen Gory Galerie, Melbourne.
Copyright the artist.
Dorata Mytych, *Establishment* (detail), 2007, charcoal on paper, 120 x 80 cm. Collection RMIT University, Melbourne. Image courtesy MCA and © the artist
Gabriela and Silvana Mangano, 
*If... so... then* (still), 2006, digital video, sound 7:36 minutes
Image courtesy MCA and copyright the artists.
Off its interesting construction. Adjacent, one finds Cassandra Laing’s haunting last works before her untimely death in 2007. Her memorable three-dimensional graphite drawings, of origami-like paper constructions that have images on their surfaces, have titles like No time to waste. The images are both touching and enigmatic. A stark contrast to the playful work with which it is situated, Laing’s work inspires a quiet and contemplative consideration.

Off the main hall on the second level, then down a dark, black, velvet corridor, a video work by John Vella captures a group of elderly people taking a life drawing class. Keenly, the pupils sketch their subject, while you as viewer sit and watch them from the vantage point of their model. It is almost as if they are sketching you. The work is even more arresting because of the environment within which it is installed. The ambience is appropriate, and allows for viewer to become participant in the drawing process.

This darker theme carries over on the lower level, in the first room that extends from the main hall of the exhibition. Here the walls go from white to a dark grey. The lighting is dimmed and the didactics lit only by spotlights. Undeniably, the focal point in this room is Sharon Goodwin’s sculptural piece Afterworld (2007). Using acrylic and watercolour on acid-free foam core, the artist creates an apocalyptic scene where decapitated humans and animals are reassembled into a gruesome sculptural piece. Here the artist uses two-dimensional drawings in order to create a three-dimensional sculpture. In another ironic twist, the artist’s style of drawing is almost cartoon-like. Afterworld is a must see in the exhibition.

In the same space, Dorota Mytych’s work Mutatis Mutandis (2005) stands out as well. Appropriately titled, the artist restricts meaning by limiting the variables as the image changes in the video. In this case, one image shows a soldier hunting a man and a child, and the next shows the soldier marching forward and presumably protecting the man and child. This tantalizing work visually illustrates the inherent contradiction in representative lexicon.

Kitty-corner from Mytych’s work, and maintaining curatorial integrity by carrying-over the apocalyptic theme from Goodwin’s work, is Locust Jones’ Everyday Atrocities mural. In what appears to be a hodgepodge, Jones, as Tracey Clement from the Sydney Morning Herald once put it “tackles the big picture head on; his epic drawing is a tortured condensation of everything that is wrong with the world”. A mixture of text, frenzied ink blobs, and drawings convey Jones’ disdain with current foreign policy. His mural reads like a discombobulated and impassioned drunken conversation with the artist, where nothing was held back. The work is installed on a ledge, around the perimeter of an isolated space, at eye level, such that it can be considered in parts or as a whole.

The two rooms, which flank the central grey space, are brightly lit, and provide the visitor an escape from the melancholic trappings of the grey space. Enroute to one room, three large canvases by Dorota Mytych, upon close evaluation, depict tiny human figures that comprise larger images. In Establishment (2007) a mob is lead toward a nucleus, in the direction of the next room.

At the centre of this room, is Tim Silver’s good-humoured Untitled (What if I Drive?) (2001-2002). Here, the artist uses powder blue miniature cars made from crayon and “drives” them on their miniature “road.” They leave incidental markings where they have travelled. These cars also appear on the railing leading up to the second level of the exhibition. This work comments not only on the carbon footprint real cars leave behind, but also on the mark the hand of the artist leaves behind. Jess Johnson’s work Artvader (2007) is a large comic strip with take-away copies for a nominal gold coin donation. In this work, Johnson comments on the rampant ironies entrenched in the art world “scene”. In the narrative, Johnson’s protagonist is a comic artist that is stereotyped as cute and fun, but in actuality she is overworked and under-appreciated. Comic drawing is depicted as too lowbrow for drunken art ‘scensters’, while performance art is depicted as brave, sexy and conceptual. The story is brazen and the dark humour is powerful. The take-away copies are a lovely remembrance for the visitor. Oddly, Vernon Ah
Kee’s brilliant charcoal portraits are placed perpendicular to the large comic strip in the space.

The opposite wing, and final space in the exhibition is likewise brightly lit and cheery. In this space there is a wide assortment of works. Most notably, Sadie Chandler’s repetitive wallpaper, titled *Crying Wallpaper* (2006). On it, a monotonous pattern of crying mannequin-like faces and flowers cover an entire wall. Opposite this, in a narrow, constructed hallway, Gabriella and Silvana Magano’s digital video *If… so… then* (2006) audibly cuts into the otherwise serene space. The video shows the artists -- who are incidentally identical twins -- standing opposite one another drawing on the walls behind them. Sometimes they move in unison and mirror one another’s movements and other times it seems as though they anticipate one another’s movements, and move out of the way. In any event, the final result is something of a drawing ballet – a dual act of simultaneous portraiture. The video is projected at the end of a short, dark hallway, which mimics the actual distance they are standing from one another in the video – a nice touch that helps amplify the effectiveness of the work.

Tucked away unassumingly on the back wall of this final room is Maria Kontis’ powerful and stunning work. With obvious affection, Kontis flawlessly replicates family photographs into drawings. In so doing, she thoughtfully addresses issues of memory and the narratives that people assign to photographs. Sometimes, the representation becomes the memory. Kontis illustrates this magnificently in her drawing *She Wondered What Kissing Him Would Be Like* (2002). Personal histories carry over into Vin Ryan’s *Eleven Transactions* (2008). His compellation features a selection of hand drawn notes, purchased at negotiated rates, from disenfranchised people. Each sign tells a different story. One reads “Please can you spare some change, I’m in a pickle”, while another states “Hi I am still homeless if you can please help cause I need some time off cause this is really getting to me, Please Help.” These drawings leave a noteworthy mark on the viewer’s consciousness that extends beyond the formal qualities of drawing, and positions drawing in the cultural context of utility and humility.

*I Walk The Line: New Australian Drawing* draws the viewer in, and inspires an entirely new appreciation for drawing for drawing’s sake. The exhibition is free and is available for viewing from March 17 to May 24 at *The Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney.*

Curated by Christine Morrow.
There is a cold dystopian element when entering the small gallery space at MOP. A bleak indifference permeates the monochromatic installation that delivers Sean Lowry’s video work, Lapdancer2: a desk, laptop and speaker set-up. Even a child-sized chair moping before the desk does not invite.

Lapdancer2 takes popular songs and reinterprets them through sound and vision. Lowry indicates that such an installation is a modest and unheroic response to the usual imposing and theatrical video installations frequently found in gallery spaces. While true that the laptop computer has at this point become a common ground for the dissemination and transfer of cultural information, the setup initially creates a lonely unwelcoming space.

The screen stammers and suddenly the familiar impedes upon the barren; colourful visual information cuts through the desolate set-up and raises you-tube awareness in the form of a pop video clip.

The disconnected ‘pop clip’ that intermittently disrupts the quite black screen along with twisted electronic sounds, depicts an ant trapped in a spider web, a scene that becomes a domestic kitchen corner version of a Jacobs Ladder monstrosity. As the struggle beats in time to the unsympathetic soundtrack and the words ‘there is nothing fair in this world’, Lowry twists the culturally familiar to a distorted haptic struggle to place it into a new context. Enter the vicious shards of legs that flash and hover briefly over the ant before its desperate silk wrapped death and we recognise the red back upon the spider that owns the web.

Is it true? Is there is nothing fair in this world? ‘Hey little sister, shotgun, oh yeah.’ With the music Lowry presents bears little resemblance to the original tune it is based on. The visual in each clip is different from the original but the lyrics are enough to evoke a small sense of the familiar. I know well enough the video clip to Nirvana’s Smells Like Teen Spirit as to recognise it immediately, although this is Lowry’s version and it is not apparent until I hear the words ‘with the lights out, it’s less dangerous’. This provides a small enough comfort to wait in MTV style anticipation for the next song.

Within each clip resides something familiar to metaphorically lean on. The bass line used in Vanilla Ice’s Ice Ice Baby, appropriated from David Bowie and Queen’s collaboration Under Pressure, is itself so familiar. However, in hearing the spoken lyrics out of context, lacking the bass line, the rolling 5.0 in the video or Vanilla’s zigzag engraved head, there is still enough there to exert familiarity while at once reforming the culturally familiar.
The slow recognition of the lyrics, the context changes again. The horror on the screen becomes a desolate, perhaps unwanted romantic intervention: a shotgun wedding, yet nonetheless a white wedding. The ant now wrapped in a red back spider’s hand-woven wedding dress, the struggle preceding becomes evident as an entirely different struggle. It is indeed a nice day to start again.

Lowry’s monochromatic installation also reveals an inherent iPod-ness. The laptop is already so inherently familiar as a transfer object for music and pop video clips. Connected, connectable and recognisable. Instead of the ice-white of Apple’s version, insert an indifferent grey, slightly dirty white version, like the clunky and alienating translation of the future and computer game interior world of Tron. The keys of the laptop eerily lack the QWERTY face, yet two jack sockets stand out like sordid porn and beg for you to insert yourself somehow into the installation.

Piled in a corner are DVD copies of the pop clips featured in the exhibition, with an invitation to take one free. I half expected to be able to jack my own iPod into the installation and transfer the artwork to my own portable electronic ‘me’. I could walk around with the music, podcasts, pictures, videos and other snaps of media information I collect along my way. Could I not collect an art installation along the way too? Disappointed in my still over-confident faith in the little click-wheel faced device I carry, I pick up and bag one of the DVDs and I am confronted with the idea that even this technology is becoming obsolete.

From a place where the alienating and the identifiable clash, I can take the work away with me to view in a more familiar and intimate setting. On my own laptop, plugged into my head, at my desktop, on my TV from the comfort of my couch surrounded by my own trinkets and CD/DVD collection framing the artwork. Making the gallery environment my own space, my lived experience of the artwork now crosses and questions so overtly the boundaries between art and entertainment.

Out of the gallery context and in the comfort and familiarity of my own home I am able to re-engage with the artwork that was a short time ago within white walls. Now it is a DVD of video clips that I can skip, pause, and rewind while I simultaneously check my emails and talk to the cat. The interpretation itself has skewed giving the work entirely new meaning. Is it no longer art without its QWERTY-less laptop setting? Is it simply re-aligned as entertainment framed by my walls, and my desktop wallpaper of a sunset over a Thai beach? I resent the ambiguity. I resent taking on the choice of venue. We have become more familiar with each other than I would have liked; like a misplaced pop culture vampire I inadvertently invited into my home. I knew where I stood before, now I am not so sure.

Sean Lowry’s Lapdancer2, MOP Gallery, Sydney, 19 March - 5 April 2009.
At the ripe old age of ten years, Yayoi Kusama experienced the first of many hallucinations, or self-obliteration, as she would come to describe them (Roche & Kusama 2001). Having been diagnosed with obsessive-compulsive disorder, Kusama is a willing captive of her condition, prescribing herself a life of art as a form of therapy. Kusama’s obsessive nature gives rise to work characterised by a repetition of her continually reinvented concepts. Central to Kusama’s work is the polka dot, which is inspired by the dots she frequently sees during episodes of hallucination (Roche & Kusama 2001).

Having recently read in great detail about Kusama’s hallucinations, I asked a friend, also a doctor, to explain the etiology of visual hallucination. His explanation was simple: the occipital lobe, located at the back of the brain, is the area that controls vision and interpretation of visual sensory input. Thus, if this area is affected, it may cause visual hallucinations or visual misinterpretation. The reasons this may occur, include the consumption of drugs, withdrawal from drugs, psychosis, and an acute disoriented state of delirium, caused by a medical illness.

It was a pragmatic explanation, but I wanted more specific information, so I enquired as to why a ten-year-old girl might suddenly have the onset of hallucinations. He was unwilling to draw any definitive conclusion or decisive diagnosis, but rather bluntly suggested the possibility that she is making it up. He explained that visual hallucinations are very rare in psychosis, which is characterised rather by auditory hallucinations. Certainly I have heard whispers to this effect before but if this is indeed true, then Kusama’s capacity to market and manipulate her ‘medical condition’ is more advanced and effective than any viral campaign on the infamous video-website Youtube. One can postulate that Kusama has an inherent understanding of her condition; and as such, may exploit her illness in order to receive recognition, not allowing it to hinder her success.

It is intriguing to explore the intrinsic relationship between her biography and her practice; where one can never be considered without the other. Her biography has made her the celluloid starlet of the contemporary art world, and her longevity as an artist has made her one of only five living female artists who have had their work sell at auction for over one million dollars (Thornton 2008). The art world is au fait with artists who suffer from mental illness; artists are naturally outsiders who seek alternative experiences, and choose to forego the certainty that may come with other career choices. Art is a vo
Image Page 86:

Above:
Yayoi Kusama, The Earth in Late Summer, 2004, Styrol, wood, cloth, paint, set of 50, 225 x 450 x 18 cm overall. Courtesy the artist, Victoria Miro Gallery, London and Ota Fine Arts, Tokyo. Copyright the artist.
vation; a calling of sorts, and according to Sarah Thornton, contemporary art is the new religion of atheists. (Thornton 2008) Certainly if you have ever read an interview with Kusama or heard her speak about her art, you could be forgiven for drawing parallels between Papal infallibility, and Kusama’s inert self-belief.

Curiously, Kusama is an oxymoron. On one hand, she shamelessly promotes herself with unequivocal self-belief, driven by her ego and the burning desire to succeed and be recognised as a brilliant artist. Conversely, certain facets of her life history suggest that she has not led a charmed existence, and that she struggles with many internal demons that have lead to several suicide attempts (Roche & Kusama 2001). It is apparent that some of her work is in reaction to these events in her life. For example, in Walking on the Sea of Death (1981) the protrusions that occupy the boat are phalluses, a motif that regularly appears in her works. These phalluses represent and express Kusama’s frustration at the male dominated New York art scene in the 1960s. During this time, Kusama is reported to have become vulnerable, paranoid and driven to the brink of despair by the growing fame of male counterparts such as Andy Warhol. She claims to have influenced Warhol, but her work had achieved relatively little attention in comparison. Kusama insists on being the original architect of repetition, soft sculpture and mirrored rooms; she continues to insist that no one influences her own practice.

Kusama has pioneered environments, where the space is constructed to house her art, as opposed to installations that respond to a prescribed space. Her most famous environments are the Infinity Mirror Room – Phalli’s Field (1966) and more recently Infinity Mirror Room – Fireflies on the Water (2000). The works’ concerns are with space, infinity and time. They reference the moment that many of us come to, when we are suddenly and unexpectedly confronted with the realization of our own insignificance compared with the vast infinity of the universe. The existential crisis, the spiraling loss of control, and the morbid reality that eventually we all die. Her works are experiential, they ironically offer the viewer a form of escapism juxtaposed with a raw reality.

When thinking of Kusama, I am always reminded of the strange reality of Oliver Sacks’ patient Mr. P, a gentleman who -- following a stroke affecting his brain -- mistook his wife for a hat. (Sacks 1985) This is initially because of the way Oliver Sacks poignantly describes Mr. P’s condition as the faulty processing of visual information. Like Kusama, Mr. P also had a problem with the brain’s processing of visual information, and while he did not have any trouble with simple, schematic objects, recognition of more complex objects such as a face posed a greater concern. Oliver Sacks was unable to treat or cure Mr. P, who was to live the remainder of his life with this disability, but what was apparent was that it was of no great loss, but rather a gain. Using creative means to overcome their disabilities, the distinguishable link between Kusama and Mr. P is that they were both able to find meaning and success in their lives.

The consistent theme that runs within much of her work, namely Narcissism, is very closely linked to her persona. A comment I once heard from a lecturer while at Art School comes to mind, that ‘a great artist was one that produced art which was greater than them.’ It is a comment that has haunted me for many years since, and I tend to apply its theory willingly or unwillingly to most artists I encounter. It would be an obvious conclusion to say Kusama is not a great artist, but art and art practice is surely not that unambiguous. Kusama’s life in art is like a Chris Burden endurance piece, at times cringing, at times exhilarating, and always full of fortitude.

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Meditations on Yayoi Kusama

LOVEFOREVER

Love forever
Feel forever
Sigh,
   inside
   of you
   forever.
Send something else away, forever.
Dissolve, then saturate, yourself, forever.
Awake with some stranger’s sight and around you see forever.
Look there the light trims the cracking thing about your hatchling;
   dizzy, blinding, beckoning.
This is electric love and it’s elegantly trembling every quark of every atom in-
sideofyourrightnow.
Forever.
Now.

Written and Illustrated by Ali Groves
Image copyright of Ali Groves
I am bored.

So, so bored as I watch the photocopier move backwards and forwards, clunkily spewing out blank sheets of paper one after the other. Its performance is meaningless and vacant. The toner is clearly empty, if it were ever there, and I am so technologically inept that I am barely able to operate a photocopier. I am certainly not skilled at stopping a machine so determined on repetitive futility. If I skulk away now, will someone else take responsibility and sort this shit out?

Thankfully this is Emma White and this is Blank Media. This is just Reproduction, a video projection of a polymer clay photocopier churning out polymer clay paper: a copy of a copy of a copy. This is working too hard to be depressingly banal.

Emma White is laughing at me, I am sure. I can see it in the work Staedtler fluorescent highlighter that presents a yellow Stabilo Boss: lid off. White has put in front of me a relic of my own time. The Eighties may be remembered as material and cocaine-addled with an overt stench of Taft hairspray that is surely single handedly responsible for today’s climate crisis, but I remember the Eighties for the yellow Stabilo Boss: rarely new; always dead and empty, always already a work place relic.

The Stabilo Boss is inherently useless. It is mass-produced and more disposable than intended. It is like a Coles bought lettuce: good for one day only, presuming there is something to actually use it for. The highlighter serves the ultimate purpose of highlighting physical text. However, the humble highlighter has stood the test of time, remaining in the mysterious realm along with coat hangers. Does anyone actually buy them? They are always just there.

White’s objects are always just there. At first glance everything seems normal. Each object works so damn hard at appearing to function. The textas and crayons look as if they have been used, some within the space, judging by the marks on the walls and on some of the installations. Bic pens are half full, pen caps chewed and Staedtler pencils left blunt. Yet on closer inspection, all the objects are made from plastic clay and all function has been banished. A light globe hangs between two works. Epiphany (burn out) leaves me now with the memory that the light globe hanging at face level DOES in fact light up, yet function ceases at burn out. Function never exists when a light globe is made out of plastic and an old Venetian blind cord.

So how many Emma White’s does it take to screw in a plastic fimo light globe?
White meticulously recreates objects of textual mark making, forming artefacts sourced from a beige existence. She injects them with evidence of labour, redundancy and repetition creating her own still life and museums of workspaces. She pulls objects from their classroom desk drawers, from their mission brown veneer encrusted desktop graveyards and from their monotonous office spaces.

Barry Humphries once described the Peninsula Building in Frankston as one of the ugliest buildings in Melbourne. It is a windowless barren ogre rising as a dank representation of the town itself. I never imagined people within that office building; a barren functionless place where Emma White’s objects lived, along with discarded half solved crossword puzzles, typewriters, tip-ex and Dymo label makers. She places these objects in MOP gallery as it cowers just far enough from the shadow of the UTS building and across from the now defunct Kent Brewery that is being demolished, re-formulated and eradicated from its original working occupation. The UTS building in Sydney is a bigger, more imposing brother of the Peninsula Building. With a few more windows and with a downward glare it holds a wayward eye on Mop Gallery and reminds me of where I came from, just as sure as the Stabilo Boss is being reminded where it came from.

Many artists are obsessed. Obsessed with labour, objects and exercises in futility. Obsessed with obsessing. “All these hours of making art are surplus machinations circulating on the surface of the globe” (Moore 2004). They are, and they have to go somewhere. Vehemently latching on to this energy, Keith Wong works so meticulously to create something that barely displays the hours of labour involved. A bar of soap with the inside hollowed out, the paper-thin outer layer put back together to look as though it were just a once used soap bar. Christian Capurro laboriously erased 246 pages of one Vogue Magazine. It is 267 hours 49 minutes and five seconds of labour valued by the participating artists at AUD$11,349.18. (Capurro 2004). White’s screaming tautology sits itself down to become obsession and labour, to replicate, duplicate, repeat and waver between object, art and function. A Stabilo Boss can be $1.10 at K-mart or $385 from Emma White.

Words cannot survive in White’s workplace replications. They labour themselves out of existence and White steps in to scrupulously reconstruct the text as object. Blank Media is an explicitly tautological example of work; even the exhibition label at the entrance to the gallery is a plastic reproduction of the original. White redefines an incidental and often featureless label as an art object valued, according to the artist, at $440. Then again, perhaps it was reproduced economically using White’s own plastic photocopier and it is just a cheap and incidental label after all.

It appears that people are meant to work in some of the spaces White creates, using the objects that she replicates. It is like entering an office version of the toy section in a doctor’s office; something to occupy yourself with while waiting for the real exhibition to arrive. White makes the objects look used while process and labour emanates from each item. The space looks as though work has been happening here at some point, but no one is working here anymore. Everyone has vacated including the artist, leaving artefacts of work. The photocopier diligently click-clacks on to the beat of the brewery’s cranes, workers’ wolf-whistles and dominating impact drill, and no one is left to shut it down. Reproduction simply continues with its machinations, until the gallery projector is turned off, exiling once more, the banal function of the copied plastic copy machine. It does not break down, it does not suffer a paper jam, it does not grind to a halt; it simply ceases to exist. The workers are banished, yet the work is abundant and blatant. Blank Media chatters inanely and incessantly as if there were a water cooler in the middle of the room.

White quite subtly encourages more work to take place, yet it is a redundant effort. The photographic installation Marker, another copy of a copy, displays a tempting Artline texta hanging by string from a framed photograph of itself: the same Artline texta. The green text scrawled across the surface of the glass says ‘marker’. The glass frame
...a copy of a copy of a copy...

tempts the use of the marker in the same way a whiteboard attracts the use of excessive arrows and diagrams, a very tactile enticement. The text is once again made of plastic and completely disallows any addition to the existing scribblings on the glass.

At the departure point of the exhibition a Bic biro hanging off an old wooden clipboard invites you to ‘Have Your Say’; two objects of linguistic mark making that again in their construction, prohibit their very ability to make marks. Have your say (please do not write on sheet) is framed by a dominating window view of the ongoing reconstruction occurring at the Kent Brewery development site. The local impact of the work is evident and tangible as the ground trembles beneath my feet and provides an inadvertent working industry soundtrack to Blank Media. Evidence of work is all around and can now be felt and heard. The soundtrack and vibrations through the ground will follow me back home so I can have the same work-a-day inane tremblings and impact drills to match my own collection of dead and mummified Stabilo Boss highlighters and chewed up Bic pen caps.

Above: Emma White, Template (alphabet), 2009, Staedtler fluorescent highlighter, Polymer clay, Image courtesy of MOP Gallery. Copyright of the artist

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