



Machine

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Machine

VOLUME ONE ISSUE ONE

- Prime? 2
Anonymous
- An Interview with Mike Stubbs 6
Alison Kubler
- In the Grip of a Worldwide War Machine 8
Beth Jackson
- When There's Video There's Love 11
Danni Zuvela
- Of Legend and Murder: James Dodd 14
Nicholas Thompson
- Three Colours: 15
Gordon Bennett and Peter Robinson
Sally Butler
- Hatched and Bound: Daniel Templeman 16
Simone Jones

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Front Cover Image

James Dodd
Study for 'Marty'
2003
Aerosol on board
Courtesy the artist, Blacklab Gallery, Brisbane and HelenGory
Galerie, Melbourne

Back Cover Image

Chris Bennie
The Supernova
2005
Digital still images
DVD, 2 mins 18 secs
Courtesy the artist

Machine is a free bi-monthly critical writing publication
that engages with the ideas and work of contemporary artists
and cultural practitioners. Machine has a focus on emerging
Queensland artists and writers but publishes the work of artists
and writers based outside Queensland.

PRIME?

ANONYMOUS

Should we expect artists to be adversarial in a conservative political climate? Must their task be something more than struggling with self-referentiality? Ought their role be to promote dialogue, scepticism and critique by any means necessary? The point of these questions isn't to advocate for an art only concerned with social agency, or to validate politicised content over an investigation of form and function. Instead it is to enquire why, when confronted with significant world events and domestic social issues, curators and artists aren't interested in more than just design or playful banter.

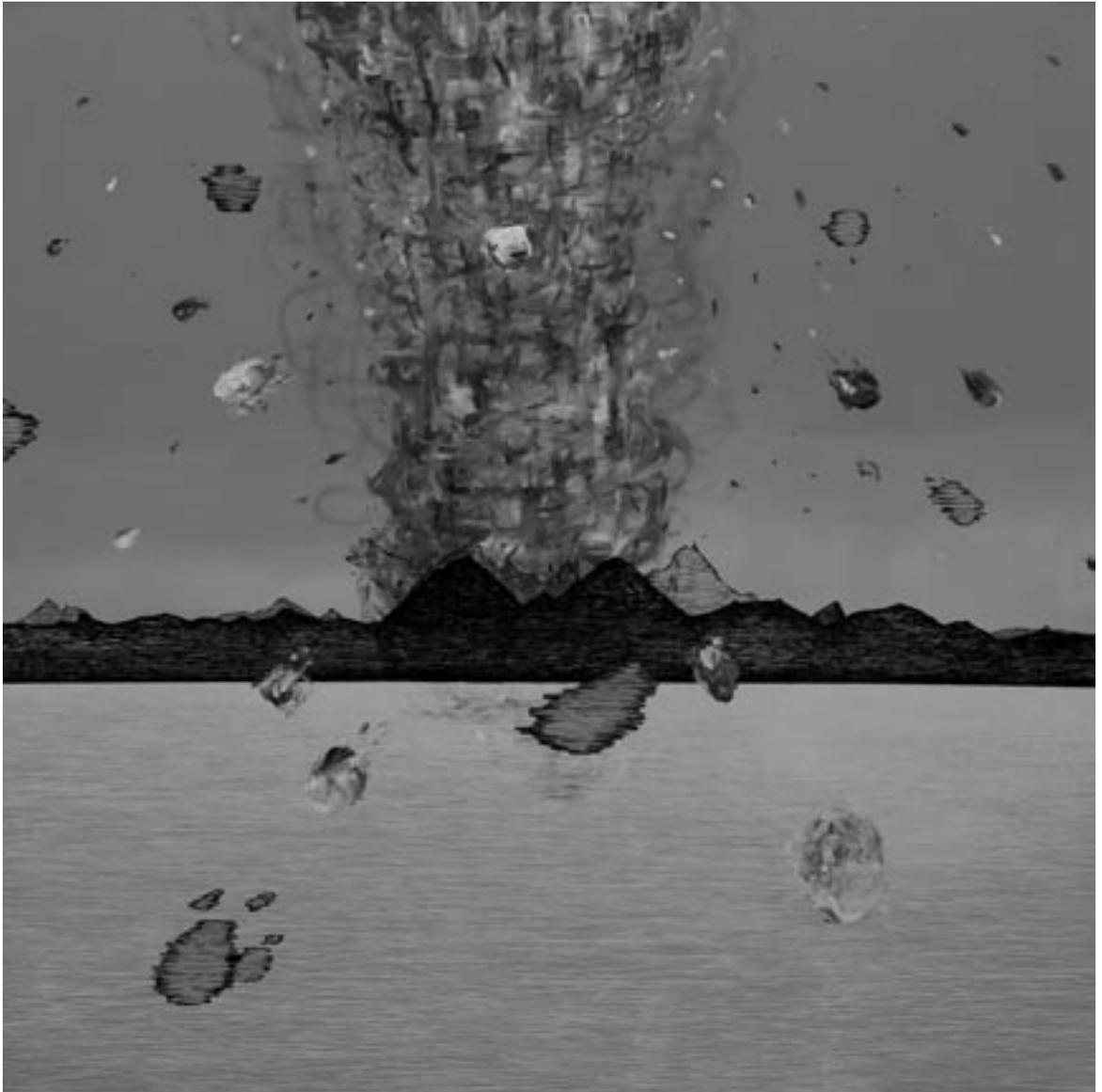
If Prime 2005 demonstrates anything, it is that young artists in Queensland are conceptually self-absorbed, unable to move beyond the particularities of their own medium. This is not to question their calibre as practitioners or to malign the quality of their work, but to criticise the state of contemporary practice and the commercial choice of form over content to which many young artists prescribe.

Such criticisms should also extend to the curatorial decisions of public institutions and galleries, their responsibility in bridging the gap between commercial galleries, universities and artist run spaces, and their role in defining the nature

and context of contemporary art for the general public. It seems that Prime 2005 is devoid of a curatorial rationale and that any effort to contextualise the work within a discourse of contemporary Australian art or broader socio-political context has been abandoned. We are left wondering if the exhibition was put together in an afternoon with an issue of *Australian Art Collector* and a copy of *Local Art*.

Perhaps the most interesting works in Prime 2005 are those by Peter Alwast. The competing forms of representation in Alwast's *Fast and Slow Painting Project* (2004) slip between gesture and image. It is an evolution that recycles and reinterprets the work's formal elements and those within his broader practice. While the objective may be somewhat difficult to read (the artist perceives it as an 'attempt to define the parameters of the painting process in the context of information technology'), there is something compelling about the composition of these works, the bursts of silicon fireworks and the rendering of digital static from rough pen marks.

Sharing a similar interiority, Jemima Wyman's *Scapeology* series (2005) uses a process of carefully pouring enamel



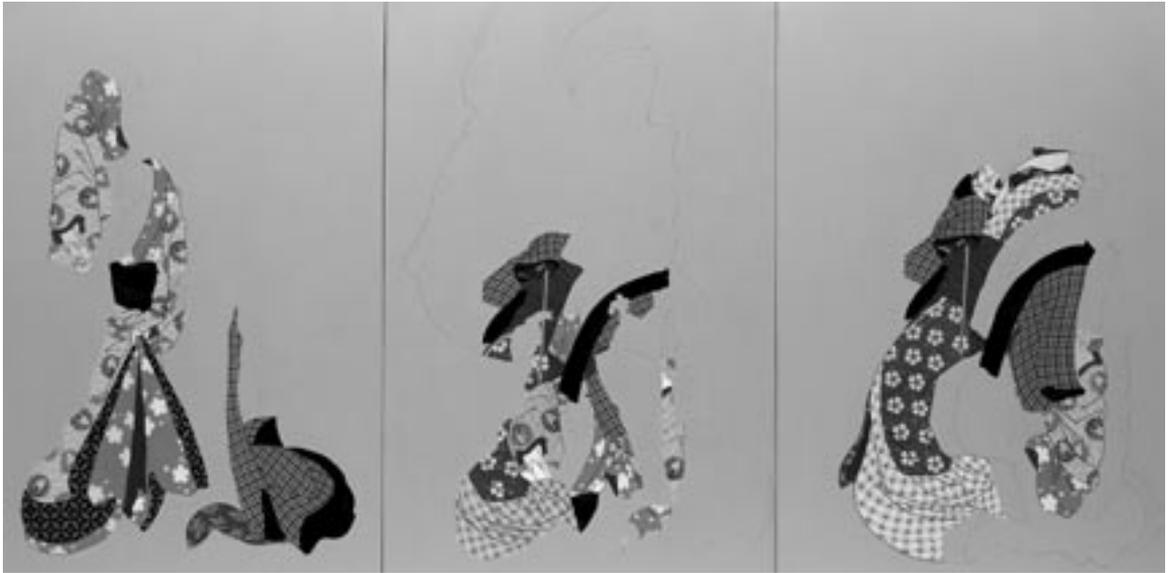
Peter Alvast *Fast and Slow Painting Projects* 2004 Oil and paint marker on canvas Courtesy the artist

paint to reinforce the materiality and performative possibilities of painting. Rendering the subterranean landscape of Los Angeles out of seemingly unstable pools of enamel, Wyman generates startling topographical studies, where the allusion to fluid mimics the body's shifting proximity to space and objects. However, with an accomplished body of video-based performance works, the inclusion of only these paintings is frustrating. The gallery should have selected more challenging examples of the artist's work, like the accompanying videos that examine the volatile formation of subjectivity through the character Earthquake Girl.

The body is also an implied subject in the work of Natalya Hughes. In *Eisen 1* (triptych) (2005) Hughes reduces the female figures of Japanese ukiyo-e woodblock prints to floating fabric. Recognising the racial character and

gendered nature of the appropriated imagery, Hughes is quick to resist the cultural implications of her abstraction. 'I'd like to think of them as ghosts,' she asserts, confessing the intention is nothing more than an investigation of what the bodies leave behind (abstract form) and what expectations viewers brings to the work when confronted with the absence of a body (abstract reception). For an artist who has built a successful commercial presence with similar works, Hughes has a responsibility to understand that the resulting resonances can be interpreted as problematic, and that regardless of how abstracted they become, their origins remain and are entirely coded with gender and cultural specificity.

The complex politics of appropriation are also the foundation of Grant Stevens' video practice, which examines the interplay of text/language and editing/



Natalya Hughes *Eisen I* (triptych) 2005 Oil on canvas Courtesy the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane

cognition. In *Then I Let You* (2005) Stevens recounts through text and sound a seemingly generic love poem posted by a teenage boy on the internet. Single words are edited sequentially and the cognitive process of hearing/seeing is dislodged when spoken words are substituted for similar sounding alternatives. For Stevens this dislocation is intended to disrupt 'the conventional readings of popular language forms,' in this instance the romantic genre. But there is also something fascinating about the choice of subject matter, such that an uncertainty remains in the artist's intent. Is he concealing a certain cynicism to the poem's original author/context or indeed relishing in its starry-eyed headiness?

In comparison, the photographic works of Chris Handran's *Untitled Snapshots Series* (2002–05) dispense with all subtext in favour of technique. Removing the shutter mechanism from a point and shoot camera, the artist employs his own reflexes to manually expose film. The resulting images conjure fleeting moments, blurry scenes that are riddled with saturation and movement. For the artist this is an attempt to 'physically grasp a moment' and in turn relate to the aspirations of memory. But with disparate subject matter and ostensibly random locations it remains unclear whether the work is simply mediating on the effects of accidental photography. Given the exceptional work made by other young photographers in the state, Handran's photographic series are a surprising and ultimately disappointing inclusion in the exhibition.

Likewise, Alasdair Macintyre's fantastical vignettes are well made, but lack the real substance that would make them inspired. Whether recreating the Queensland Art Gallery's bookstore filled with spacemen (*Luminous Beings Are We*, 2004) or staging an elaborate art heist at the gallery (*Homeostasis Alert!*, 2004) the charm is short lived. The relationship set up between figurines and art world commentary is playful but offers nothing insightful. They simply lack the clout that would make them powerful statements about the polemics

of art criticism or the social and political dynamics of the Australian art industry.

Perhaps the worst sited work in the exhibition is Sandra Selig's *mid-air* (2003). Comprising two interlocking circular spans of beaded Styrofoam balls, the work charts an indeterminable void through the gallery space. Unfortunately, the natural light and vista extending beyond the gallery painfully disrupt viewing the scale and subtleties of this work.

In contrast Daniel Templeman's *Strand* (2005) sits as a striking centrepiece in the Watermall. *Strand* is a resolutely well-made sculpture staging a balancing act between two forms. But unlike previous works, the restraint and elegance of *Strand* borders on austerity. It possesses little of the illusionistic qualities of gravity and tension that made Templeman's other works seem to suspend the dramatic movement of objects in space.

For an exhibition that asserts the capacity to represent the 'strength' and 'diversity' of contemporary practice in Queensland (read, Brisbane), Prime 2005 reveals itself as a relatively disengaged and disinterested profile of eight young artists. It suggests that minimal effort is employed to program work that falls outside the interests of the commercial market and more importantly, it implies that for many young artists in Queensland, criticality doesn't extend further than the edges of their canvas.

Prime 2005: New Art From Queensland
 Queensland Art Gallery
 2 April–12 June 2005
<http://www.visualarts.qld.gov.au/prime2005/>



AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE STUBBS

ALISON KUBLER

Artist and curator Mike Stubbs was born in England and now lives in Melbourne. He is currently working as Manager of Exhibitions Programs at the Australian Centre for the Moving Image.

AK: Fuel features work drawn from the last ten years of your practice. Looking at the work in the context of the last ten years, how do you see your work has evolved? Do you see yourself as an artist or a filmmaker or both?

It depends on who I'm talking to. In this case, an arts magazine, I would say I am an artist working with film and installation and from time to time other media such as video or performance. Then again, if I meet someone on the bus, 'filmmaker' or 'artist' is simpler, although that's normally understood as movies or painting. It depends on the context, audience and criteria. I would say that filmmakers tend to stay within their craft a little more. Perhaps they have more to protect, as it's now a given that one can mix and match media, methods and forms as a contemporary artist. This is part of the crisis for those choosing the label 'new media artist' right now in Australia, as funding bodies like the Australia Council change definitions. It will be interesting to see how long publicly funded artists can afford not to follow suit.

AK: Since coming to Australia, what has been your impression of the contemporary art scene in relation to new media practice?

Robert Rauschenberg is quoted as replying 'my cat,' in response to the question, 'If there was a fire in your studio which work would you save?' Art and the art

scene are as unimportant and important as the moment. Therefore to look at any particular 'scene' is impossible in isolation. I can compare it to what I know from England and Scotland and other parts of the world I am most familiar with, or stuff I've seen in festivals or made myself. I've curated a number of international programs that have included Australian artists and appreciate the nation for its abundance of talent because finding good new work can be pretty tough for a moving image curator. This was particularly true in the early 1990s, ironically a period when new media was well-funded through government agencies and before the dotcom bust. Video artists such as Peter Callas were well known and a little later new media artists, particularly female, had good penetration into the European media art festival circuit where, for example, artists such as VNX Matrix demonstrated a (cyber) punk aesthetic as particularly Australian.

Finding good new work from any country of origin can be hard, though I have to note that the traditional relationships between ex-British Empire and related funding schemes have always given countries such as Canada and Australia good representation in the UK. Likewise English artists in Australia have enjoyed reciprocal trading arrangements.

AK: Several of the works featured in Fuel, your first major exhibition in Australia, could be described as particularly British in that they draw heavily on British cultural markers, such as class and social structures, and explore culturally specific attitudes and histories. How do you think some of the key ideas may translate for an Australian audience?



Mike Stubbs *River* 2000 Installation shot The Block (QUT) Brisbane DVD 11 mins Courtesy the artist and The Block (QUT) Brisbane

That depends on the reality of a national stereotype of 'Australians' as laid-back beach bums as they are often portrayed. At times it does seem as though things are just very comfortable...but we are made of diverse communities and individuals. I am suspicious of notions of national norms, and I'm not quite ready for the four wheel drive and shiraz on the veranda. I read recently that a respectable study proved that working hours in Australia are the highest in the western world, figures the Federal Government seem happy to keep quiet about, and that Australians work harder than anyone else. There is a visible awareness and pride in issues associated with the trades and labour movement in Australia, especially in Melbourne where I live. Yet like the UK twenty years after Thatcher and with a modernised labour/socialist party, there is an increasing detachment between languages of protest and environments for dissent and analysis. Our lives are strangely full of compromise and contradiction.

I think these issues relate as much to time as place... Within my own practice I had the opportunity to make work and experiment within broadcast television on a series of films that somehow referenced popular culture, folk art and my own suburban cultural background. I think the best work I've made references local idiosyncrasy, yet resonates universal themes and, I hope, transcends location.

AK: Your work includes video, mixed media installations and performance, and is most often described as new media art. How do you feel about this categorisation of your art production?

I've done different stuff and some has been in the 'new media' camp. I don't do that now because the Australia Council stopped funding it (joke). Ultimately it doesn't matter what I call it unless it's any good...I've picked and mixed genre a little, but not much has really changed and early works follow themes similar to those in my current practice. We often delude ourselves that we have changed, but ultimately I am the same person in an older body repeating the same mistakes and occasionally having the same lucid moments. But fortunately I've forgotten most of it, so it still seems new. That's the beauty. Ultimately what underpins my view is that art and life are process.

Alison Kubler is the Curator of Public Programs for QUT Art Museum and The Block. She is currently on leave.

Fuel: Recent work by Mike Stubbs
The Block, QUT Creative Industries Precinct, Brisbane
19 May–18 June 2005

Mike Stubbs *Jump Jet* 2003 Installation shot
The Block (QUT) Brisbane DVD 6 mins
Courtesy the artist and The Block (QUT) Brisbane

IN THE GRIP OF A WORLDWIDE WAR MACHINE

BETH JACKSON

It's 2005 and have we in the West ever been more aware of our position as voyeurs of world politics, especially on these distant and peaceful Australian shores? Yet has the grip of world war ever felt more intense upon this accelerating networked global imagination? Have we ever been more deeply implicated in the intensifying manufacture of weapons of mass destruction? And has this apparency ever been so plain? Recent works by Tim Plaisted and Matt Fletcher address the grip of war on our consciousness and the conditions of paralysis and impotence which it engenders. These works, exhibited in Peer to Peer at vuspace, go to the core of structural, social conflict—what Deleuze and Guattari have called the war machine.

In computer-based artworks there is the potential to grasp a machinic understanding of the image—of image production as work, a manual labour, but also the image as phylum, an archetype, like the tool or the weapon, which requires a certain social assemblage. The coupling of image-machine, through a machinic phylum, reaches back to the pre-modern (as weapon or tool), to the modern (as industrial output), and forward into the contemporary postmodern (as code, informatic). Deleuze and Guattari discuss the relationship between weapon and tool and the machinic phylum which informs the manifestation of both. What is it to bring the image into this equation? Certainly the image bears no use-relationship to the body—it is neither projective/exteriorising weapon nor introceptive/introjective tool. The image stands apart from the body—it presents as a transfer, an output, a transmission (of both work and war, of affect). The image is the affective output—a relational device through which we can measure displacement, an expenditure of force, or even resistance.

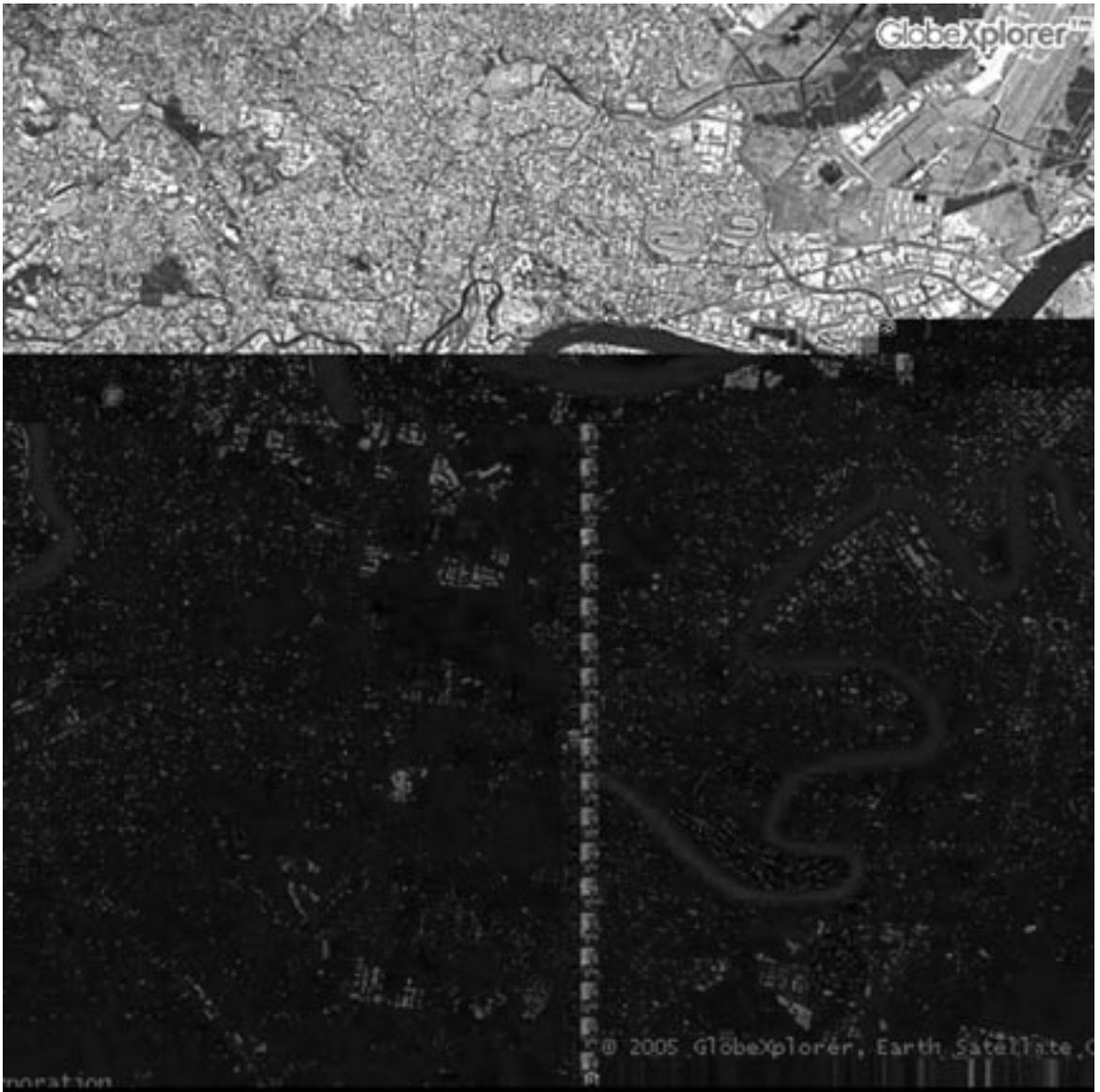
In Fletcher's work *XX* (2005), images are assembled into a computer database—hundreds of scans of abstract images are stored as relational fields within an information architecture.

The original project of visual abstraction is bound within a new layer of abstraction—that of informatics. Fletcher links the project of abstraction in both its aesthetic and its applied/organisational dimensions to the machine.

In *tex_assault* (2005), a 3D gaming environment is altered, an engine given a new skin, for artistic ends. Here Fletcher lays bare the war machine for our inspection. This is the battlefield, where (usually) 'players' are given clear directional goals to arm themselves and kill the enemy. However Fletcher has removed the arms and the enemies, leaving the viewer with only an ability to navigate the terrain. Patterns embedded within the virtual surface textures emerge through the viewer's exploration—they hover as artefact and archetype within a territorial maze. Stripped of resources (human/soldier and metal/weapon), the project of war is separated from the war machine.

When participating in virtual war or war games, we become a total subject of the State at the very moment at which the State appropriates the war machine—for we occupy the point at which the State can assimilate the education of the citizen to the training of the worker to the apprenticeship of the soldier. Alone in the empty architecture, alive to the secret signs of an embedded iconography, the viewer/navigator of *tex_assault* cannot take war as an object (subordinated to the State). Rather, through the reading of an image-map, the subject must invent a relational field of interaction. Sponsored by the 'smooth' space of the machinic phylum, the nomadic viewer rhizomatically pursues gaps, detours, stems, openings, traits, holes, etc. The object then is no longer war as primary goal (the pursuer), but war as secondary effect (the pursued). And this is the staving off of the State, of the State's ability to appropriate the war machine.

In Tim Plaisted's three *Progress* (2005) works, a software 'patch' is used to effect an ultimately disabling transfer of



Tim Plaisted Still from *Progress (terra)* 2005 Courtesy of the artist

information. The program runs a simple ‘find and replace’ procedure through a series of files in a seemingly endless and totalising surveillance. The evidence of its running is the progress bar which any computer-user finds an all too familiar visual. The progress bar is that visual symbol for computer paralysis, or for the user’s impotent state of waiting—for a task to be executed, for a file to download, for a program to install, for an image to render, etc. Progress is also of course the maxim of the State, the organisational drive of the modern nation to which we, as its citizens, are called upon to contribute. Plaisted, in these deeply ironic works, gives the viewer/user the task of estimating when the computer’s task will be completed (ie when the progress bar will be full). He makes us address this banal condition of paralysed deferral, and to recognise it as ‘real’ action. More than playing ironically upon the notion of progress, in these works Plaisted exposes progress as not a force driving or even

building the State (making it necessary), but a form of the State itself, a defining condition. Progress is not some ‘thing’ which we work collectively to achieve, but rather progress is the appropriation of collective work. Through controlling or regulating the flows of information, time and space are both distorted and conformed. The *Progress* works generate assimilation and its underlying chaos.

In the contemporary war on terror, the worldwide war machine becomes the affective exteriority of the State. It becomes the constitutive set of relations among States (far beyond anything that may be called ‘foreign policy’). The war on terror can be equated with the war machine proper like no other modern conflict, as it declares an enemy of the State which is at once internal and external. As if with a patching program of its own, the State systematically appropriates the total, where citizen becomes hostage becomes freedom



Matt Fletcher Still from *tex_assault* 2005 Courtesy of the artist

fighter becomes liberator becomes terrorist becomes civilian becomes prisoner and prison guard in a seamless and logical chain of totalising equivalence. As voyeurs in the informational network of this war, we are held to ransom by, we are the hostages of, not the nomad/terrorist but the State, blindfolded in its bidding to appropriate the next metamorphosis. In Plaisted's works, the State's appropriation of the war machine is complete.

In *Progress (Terra)* the patching process is applied to satellite map images tracing the US-led war in Iraq. During the period of the Peer to Peer exhibition, the map images are downloaded from the Internet, beginning with the campaign's first point of incursion to its current location. As the image files are systematically acquired, examined/processed, and re-issued as 'marked' objects, a smooth space flows from this pattern of penetration. Plaisted mimics the act of war—appropriating territory, dismantling social structure, annexing resources, and re-issuing colonised fragments. In the cumulative affectivity of the worldwide war machine, what arises is not only an ever-expanding capacity for (mass) destruction, but also an ability to institute 'an entire economy of violence, in other words, a way of making violence durable, even unlimited.'¹

In *Progress* (2004), additional layers of surveillance are created through the monitoring of the other *Progress* works in the exhibition. Plaisted effects a totalising field of multiplying relations. The project of the State, the progress of its formation, whether it be Iraq post-Saddam Hussein, or

the US and its oil-based economy, is no longer a 'political' aim, but rather the necessary condition for a worldwide war machine. In this final appropriation where peace itself becomes an object, globalised socio-political relations may only be described as post-democratic, where we can see the death of democracy, its theatre, reflection or simulacrum.

These works reveal the computer as tool, as weapon, as image-making device, and as node in global communications networks—in short, a complexity arising from the continuum of the machinic phylum. The technology of art and art's production and reproduction through technology is reissued in the wake of a blind paralysis.

Beth Jackson is a freelance writer and curator living in Brisbane.

This article has been adapted from the catalogue essay for the Peer to Peer exhibition at vuspace.

Peer to Peer: Matt Fletcher and Tim Plaisted
vuspace, Computer Mediated Art at Victoria University,
Melbourne and Online (<http://vuspace.vu.edu.au>)
22 June–17 July 2005

¹ Deleuze, G., & Guattari, F, 1987, *A Thousand Plateaus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, p. 396.

WHEN THERE'S VIDEO THERE'S LOVE

DANNI ZUVELA

Diversity may be a feature of contemporary video practice, but so are definite trends. Present since the medium's heady inception and continuing perforce across its modular and heterogeneous history, is an aesthetic of the banal. These emblems of banality 'speak volumes about the longings and desires of the postmodern subject,' and about the pragmatism of market-oriented video artists defining their artform as distinct from the glossy visual modes of formalist avant-garde film, and the 'frightful parents' television and industrial cinema¹. Recent shows by Chris Bennie and Grant Stevens are united by emphasis on the banal as an aesthetic category.

Bennie's self-described point-and-shoot technique, choice of everyday subjects and use of long takes means that his work has a documentary feel. He explores the places where documentary urge and video art overlap, which in this case is the elevation of the ordinary as subject. In place of documentary's earnest anthropological drive is video art's ambiguous impulse, multivalent responses to 'the real,' and the representative practices deployed in search of it. All of Bennie's works encourage a different perception of the ordinariness of their subject through both long-established film techniques such as montage, and reference to contemporary video art vocabularies.

The juxtapositions of captured conversations of backpacker hostel habitués with silent images of the natural environment in *I no longer love you like I did yesterday (the run to paradise remix)* (2005) creates, as is montage's way, a synthesis that invites reflection. The commodification of the natural environment; its reduction to postcard images for pimping in profit-making experiences; the inescapable paradoxes of tourism are just some of the thoughts *I no longer...* evokes. The grainy, low-light video footage offers no respite from the ineluctable awfulness of sodden fools' talk, as the lurching, shouting backpackers, framed by tacky hostel palm trees and intercut with breathtaking panoramas, punctuate oafish comments with beer bottle gesticulations.

Contemplating a more commonplace theatre of the banal is *The Supernova* (2005). Amusement parks and funfairs have long held fascination for film and video artists as prime sites of spectacle. Unlike video artist Charlemagne Palestine's subjective point-of-view film, *Four Motion Studies* (1974), also shot at an amusement park, Bennie's *Supernova* is a distanced observation of the rolling terrain of a funfair ride. All gleaming chrome and plastic bathed in glowing red and yellow carnival lights, the work is unexpectedly beautiful, with the fluid rolling of the carriages and the attendant's futile attempts to stride forward on the moving surface



Chris Bennie *Mothership* 2005 DVD 23 mins and *The Supernova* 2005 DVD 2 mins 18 sec
 Installation shot White Space (QCA) Brisbane Courtesy the artist

creating an undulating visual poem. It's difficult not to respond to the metaphor of toil without progress; I was mesmerised by this hypnotic, gently observed work, my favourite of Bennie's by far.

In contrast, *Mothership* (2004) is all about spectacle—the 'making a spectacle of oneself' that constitutes a hugely popular mode in current video art. Joining in conversation with other works featuring male bodies approximating dance moves, like Tony Schwensen's *High School Shuffle* (2003) and Spike Jonze's seminal clip for Fat Boy Slim's *Praise You*, *Mothership* is a study of physicality; a 23-minute single take of a self-conscious young man contorting himself wildly in a grandmotherly living room. We realise he is dancing, though without the immediate benefit of the soundtrack, the rhythmic heaving gestures are momentarily baffling. Closer to Schwensen's daggy suburban stoicism than Jonze's joyful insouciance, *Mothership* plays out the idea of corporeality as performativity; all at once an act of imitation, identification and subjection to social norms.

Grant Stevens' video work is firmly rooted in similarly fashionable notions of the suburban, but foregoes exploration of the body in favour of more conceptual work. Stevens' latest installation, *When There's Love* (2005), marries the

artist's twin obsessions with 80s/90s Hollywood film and text-based artwork derived from the language of popular culture. Partly illuminated by sweeping sprays of mirror ball light, the walls feature white-on-black text sliding rapidly from right to left while The Righteous Brothers' *Unchained Melody* plays loudly on an endless loop.

When There's Love repeats the simultaneous presentation of audio voices reading video text in Stevens' *Dazed and Praised* (2004), though in this case the audible words, available via headphones, are tunelessly sung or recited by a bored male voice. Unlike other video artists who work with text, such as Young Hae Chang, Stevens' work seems less concerned with probing the act of reading, wry comments on art and industry, or the various problematics of knowledge, than it is about ironic observations of language. Here he mounts a critique of the discourse of romance in pop music lyrics through the ages.

The text (various familiar phrases about love, loss, longing etc), drawn from a variety of sources from Cliff Richard to N'Sync, enact dialogues across generation gaps (like *Dazed and Praised*). This 'critique by quotation' establishes, via accretion, the grinding banality of love song clichés. Proving that pop-language is unoriginal and pedestrian by

WHEN THERE'S LOVE INSIDE
YOU JUST CAN'T HIDE IT
WHEN YOU NEED ME
HERE I COME BABY
IT'S GOTTA BE RIGHT
I'VE BEEN DREAMING
I DREAM THE SWEETEST DREAMS
HOLD ME IN YOUR ARMS
BABY PLEASE, I'M ON MY KNEES
MY LOVE IS ALL I HAVE TO GIVE
YOU'RE THE REASON THAT I LIVE

Grant Stevens *When There's Love* 2005 Publicity image Courtesy the artist and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney

abstracting romantic song lyrics from their emotive musical arrangements is a bit like shooting fish in a barrel. These drivelling absurdities are hardly unexamined; as Cathy Elwes notes, the cynical postmodern play with signs and deconstructive play with the verbal codes we use to draw our internal maps of the world has typified much recent video art.² The aestheticising of popmuzak here, underscored by the endless soaring strains of the *Ghost* theme, seems to be more about making the (rather obvious) argument that love songs are utterly dependent on context for their evocative power as 'soundtracks to our lives.'

Though Stevens' original plan to fringe the space with the standard issue brown plastic chairs was thwarted, the school dance atmosphere survives, helped in no small part—at least for those of us who survived adolescence in the 90s—by the torturous *Unchained Melody*. Stevens' continued mining of his love of the Hollywood films of his pre-pubescence underlines a key shift in international video art: where early video art initially critiqued television, it is increasingly concerned with the appropriation of iconic feature films. Film-as-found-object is definitely fertile ground for video artists and opens up many possibilities about the collusion between the cultural industries, something Stevens is approaching here with his implicit indictments of popular music and film.

Stevens' and Bennie's projects share a similarity of purpose that is critical to their appeal and intelligibility. Rather than seeking to produce 'the impression of violating ordinary vision' by creating 'extraordinary visions,' their work moves

with the prevailing trade winds in video art of aestheticising the mundane, fetishising the everyday and making art from 'ordinary' visions.³

Danni Zuvela researches, teaches, writes on and occasionally makes experimental films and new media art.

Chris Bennie:
White Gallery, Queensland College of Art, Brisbane
20–22 May 2005

When There's Love: Grant Stevens
Metro Arts, Brisbane
8–24 June 2005

¹ Shinkle, Eugenie, 2004, 'Boredom, Repetition, Inertia: Contemporary Photography and the Aesthetics of the Banal' *Mosaic*, vol. 37, no. 4, p. 183.

² Elwes, Cathy, 2005, *Video Art: A Guided Tour*, I.B. Tauris, London, New York, p. 162; 82.

³ Sontag, Susan 1977, *On Photography*, Penguin, Middlesex, UK, p. 31.

OF LEGEND AND MURDER: JAMES DODD

*Blacklab Gallery, Brisbane
6 May–9 June 2005*

NICHOLAS THOMPSON



While controversial in its content, James Dodd's exhibition *Of Legend and Murder*, is arguably more ominous in the implications of its medium. The exhibition consists of a series of stencil artworks and hanging three-dimensional logos, their subjects specific to the Australian psyche. The icons depicted on Blacklab's longer walls lead the viewer to the pinnacle of Dodd's exhibition, a series of reproductions of the image of Martin Bryant labeled almost affectionately *Marty #1* (2005).

Dodd's initial challenge to the viewer is easily recognised. After being saturated with appropriated images of distanced global villains, from Hitler to Osama, we are asked to acknowledge one of our own. Enabling iconic status to a figure so recently contentious is uncomfortable. Dodd's dingoes stare out, as if to ask whether we are prepared to absorb Bryant into popular consciousness as readily as the Chamberlains.

The appropriation of controversial, provincial villains into contemporary art isn't new. As part of the 1997 Sensation exhibition in London, YBA artist Marcus Harvey submitted an image of child murderer Myra Hindley, *Myra* (1995), constructed from the handprints of children. A primary imperative of the exhibition was outrage. For Dodd however, it is the nature of his chosen medium which extends his work's discourse beyond mere shock.

The shared ownership of our national villains is reiterated through Dodd's use of a distinctively public medium. Stencil art has, in recent discourse, been heralded as a successor to pop art through its potential for swift completion and easy reproduction. However, from its origins as a voice of urban dissent, it has been gradually co-opted by advertisers, inundating popular media as a marketing tool.

Is Dodd's controversial mascot an attempt to reinstate the original subversive power of the medium, a final front against

the ruthless expansion of youth savvy advertising and global neo-imperialism? The very positioning of a traditionally public art form within the confines of a gallery suggests refuge and recuperation in a neutral space. The medium, like its depiction of confronted, territorial dingoes, appears to be in a process of negotiating its new environment, removed from the former freedoms of its original habitat.

Where does Dodd sit in this arrangement? He exists as both critic and creator within the medium. Stencil art, by the disobedient nature of its origin, disengages the author from identifiable contribution. Unlike the notoriously 'retouched' photographs of Bryant submitted to *The Australian* in 1997, Dodd's *Marty #1* is in no such way manipulated. The dingoes could be images from national park pamphlets; the hanging logos reflect none of the popular sentiment for Azaria Chamberlain. For the viewer, Dodd is absent, or at least ambivalent. It is this ambiguous approach which aligns stencil art with pop art. What is produced is superseded by the modes of production and consumption. The work suggests, through its potential for mass reproduction and public saturation, that the image of Bryant could be stripped of any layered connotation, becoming a mere aesthetic tool, thus ultimately meaningless. As images of Che Guevara sell cherry flavoured ice cream, the Azaria logo could appear on baseball caps or Bryant on a fashionable t-shirt. As opposed to merely presenting an icon of terror from the past, Dodd instead suggests a more terrifying future, and indeed present, of corporate fueled ambivalence.

Nicholas Thompson is an Art History student at the University of Queensland.

James Dodd *Dingo* 2005 Aerosol and acrylic on plywood
Courtesy the artist, Blacklab Gallery, Brisbane and
HelenGory Galerie, Melbourne

THREE COLOURS: GORDON BENNETT AND PETER ROBINSON

*A Heide Museum of Modern Art Travelling Exhibition,
Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
28 May–4 June 2005*

SALLY BUTLER



Three Colours: Gordon Bennett and Peter Robinson is an exhibition that takes us beneath the veneer of everyday communication, revealing a traffic in prejudice and injustice. The trans-Tasman union between Australia's Gordon Bennett (b.1955) and New Zealand's Peter Robinson (b.1966) presents two artists motivated by how their indigenous ancestry is mobilised by 'conventional thinking.' The exhibition is an outstanding and powerful portrait of the insidious systems of thought and behaviour that determine our values, portioning privilege to some and violence to 'others.'

Violence may seem an extreme term for abstract considerations of identity, however the artworks in this exhibition are most graphic where they expose conventional assumptions and habits as silent atrocity. The rhetoric of the work is intellectually incisive, unashamedly aggressive, and is reminiscent in tone of Francisco Goya (1746–1828), the Spanish artist whose aggressive resistance to convention transfixes audiences to this day.

The exhibition features many of Bennett's iconic works including *Self Portrait (But I Always Wanted to be One of the Good Guys)* (1990). This painting characterises the exhibition's assault on the insidious origins of racism and bigotry, and in this work the origins are located in childhood. With the words 'I AM' running full height of the diptych, we are presented with the enormous impact of childhood's world of make believe. These monumental words act as frames of identity, with the 'I' looking into the world of a small boy dressed as a cowboy. He is flanked either side by the words 'I AM LIGHT' 'I AM DARK'. The 'AM' letters look onto a scene where Cowboy 'good guys' are shooting at Indian 'bad guys.' This world of make believe is disturbingly familiar and reverberates with an exposé of the prejudice embedded in these apparently innocent 'identity' games.



Robinson's corollary to this work is a painting titled *Boy am I scared, Eh!* (1997). It is interesting that there is a typo in the catalogue essay where this work is referred to as *Boy am I scared, Eh!*. In the painting the second 'R' is smaller than the other letters, deliberately giving a first impression that the word reads 'scared'. It takes some moments before your perception determines that the work is about being scared, rather than scared. You move from considering a source of fear to a source of violence, and then realise that there is little distance between them.

That moment of misconception, followed by a shift in understanding and an inexpressible moment of revelation, is what this entire exhibition is about. Both artists show how words, forms and images are loaded weapons that cause violence in their apparently innocent activity of everyday communication. This dark history of innocent activity advances another perspective on the continuing 'sorry' debate in Australia. Those who claim they will not apologise for a past that they did not perpetrate, are forced to see the past still present in this work. The endnote of the exhibition includes a recent painting by Bennett titled *Camouflage #1* (2003). Its imagery of a camouflaged soldier is new, but the theme of camouflaged aggression motivates the entire exhibition. Both artists seek to disable the camouflage and disarm the violence in a battleground devoid of 'neutral territory.'

Dr Sally Butler is a Lecturer in Art History at the University of Queensland.

Gordon Bennett *Self Portrait (But I Always Wanted to be One of the Good Guys)* 1990 Oil on canvas Courtesy the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Peter Robinson *Boy am I scared, Eh!* 1997 Oilstick on paper Courtesy Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen

HATCHED AND BOUND: DANIEL TEMPLEMAN

Jan Manton Art, Brisbane
3 June–8 July 2005

SIMONE JONES



The title of Templeman's latest solo exhibition of sculptures and wall-based works has a number of connotations, notably conception and constriction. 'Hatched' refers both to the process Templeman employs to inscribe the surface of the wall-based works, and to the material realisation of form. To be 'bound' is to be tied up or drawn together, and appears literally translated in one work that depicts a knot. However, being 'bound' can also refer to being united, another thread that runs through the exhibition.

Templeman's wall pieces read as paintings but are actually formed from incisions in painted fibreboard and are suggestive of extremely low relief sculpture. *Halt* (2005) is perhaps the most illusory work, at first appearing to be a white monochrome, until shifting light reveals a circle in one corner. The repetitive lines scored from the centre of the circle outwards alternatively expand towards the viewer, and suggest infinite recession, creating a tension that contradicts the flatness of the surround. *Halt* stands out from the rest of the exhibition as the only work that features an overtly circular form. Templeman suggests the circle can be read in grammatical terms as a full stop, which stands as a sign of definition and completion.

Two other wall works, *Spacing* (2005) and *Harness* (2005), explore the concept of being bound, literally, and yet both transgress the boundaries of their support. *Harness* alludes to a knot through the illusion created by darker, scored lines running behind white, painted lines. Tension is suggested as the knot is not bound to its tightest, yet the form both constricts itself and suggests an inability to be confined, for its two ends imply extension beyond the frame. Similarly in *Spacing*, a strip travels from one corner, continually being rebounded by edges until escaping at another corner. The language of form that

arises in both of these works is figured by the continual folding and unfolding performed by strips of lines.

Like *Halt*, *Witness Box* (2005) alludes to the English language, but literal attempts to read the sculpture continually fail. The work's numerous planes can be seen as a three-dimensional permutation of the folding embodied in *Harness* and *Spacing*, whereas *Witness Box* simultaneously contracts, folding down on itself but also expanding as if unbound. Unlike *Witness Box*, *Press* (2005) does not fold upon itself and is more subtle in its exploration of the variations of form. Its intrigue is created from the illusion of having been formed from a vertical stack of pressed MDF that has warped. Given the sharp turns and folds of Templeman's wall-based works, the tension of *Press* lies in its seeming depiction of the twisted stage that occurs the moment just before a form is bent into a right angle. By comparison, *Shadow Box* (2005) is all angles and appears to ricochet against invisible confines.

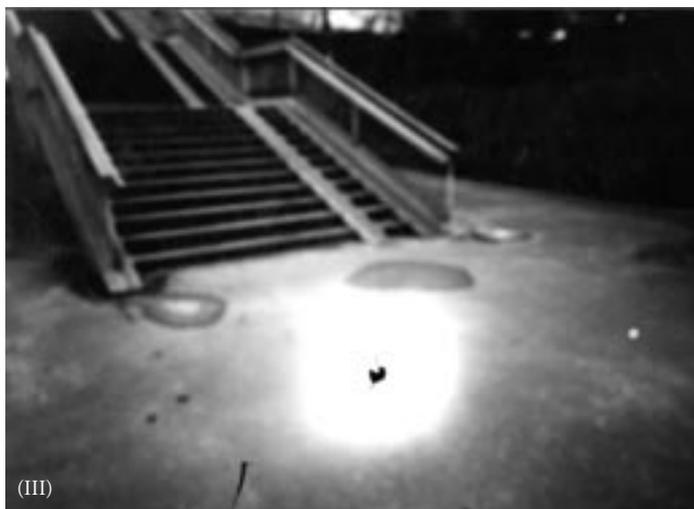
Hatched and Bound demonstrates Templeman's concern for the permutations of form, through the exploration of illusion and its interaction with boundaries.

Simone Jones is Curatorial Officer, Public Programs at QUT Art Museum and a freelance writer and curator.

Daniel Templeman *Shadow Box* 2005 Synthetic polymer paint on MDF Courtesy the artist and Jan Manton Art, Brisbane



(I)



(III)



(IV)



(II)

Images sited below are from the upcoming exhibition and publication Perception: the Daryl Hewson Photographic Collection.

JULY 23 - AUGUST 14, 2005.

(I) Artist: Andrea Higgins
Title: Untitled from the Cocktail Cabinet series
Year: 2003

(II) Artist: Olive Cotton
Title: Teacup Ballet
Year: 1935
Courtesy of Josef Lebovic Gallery

Images sited below are from the up-coming exhibition at the QCP: The Borderline of Photography featuring the works by renowned German photographers Thomas Bachler, Sabine Große and Karl-Hermann Möller.

AUGUST 20 - SEPTEMBER 11, 2005.

(III) Artist: Thomas Bachler
Title: Treppe zum Bahnhof
Year: 1995

(IV) Artist: Thomas Bachler
Title: Am Fenster
Year: 1999-2000



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