

STRIKING CONTRASTS

EDUCATION RESOURCE



www.netsaustralia.org.au/whats-on/striking-contrasts

*Curated by dLux MediaArts in association with Geoffrey Weary, Sydney College of the Arts,
University of Sydney and toured by Museums & Galleries of NSW*



About this resource

This resource has been produced by dLux MediaArts and Museums & Galleries of NSW as an educational guide to accompany the *Striking Contrasts* exhibition. It is intended to assist school students and teachers in the understanding and enjoyment of contemporary video art.

The *Striking Contrasts* Education Resource provides an opportunity for teachers to bring together the Creative Arts, Technology, English, Society and Environment with an emphasis on critical thinking and popular culture, perception, comparative disciplines and professional practice.

This resource can be used for background information prior to an exhibition visit or serve as a guide for discussion while experiencing the work directly. It also includes focus questions designed to be completed during or following a visit to the exhibition. These activities are separated into an intermediate and advanced level suitable for upper secondary students.

Teachers and educators are invited to adapt the information and activities included to meet the needs of their particular student group.

Image: Angelica Mesiti, *Rapture (silent anthem)*, 2009, single-channel High Definition video, colour, silent, 10:10 min. Image courtesy the artist & Anna Schwartz Gallery.
Cover Image: Jess MacNeil, *The Wall*, 2009, High Definition digital video, stereo sound, 7:00 min. Image courtesy the artist.

About dLux MediaArts

[dLux MediaArts](#) is one of Australia's key screen and media arts organisations, committed to supporting the development, engagement and experience of contemporary screen and digital media culture. Stemming from this objective, dLux MediaArts' programs and activities include research into emerging technologies and media arts practices, supporting Australian new media artists in the development of their work, fostering partnerships between the public and private sector, curation and touring of digital media arts exhibitions.



dLux MediaArts is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW

About Museums & Galleries of NSW

[Museums & Galleries of NSW](#) (M&G NSW) is the peak body supporting a dynamic mix of museums, galleries and Aboriginal cultural centres in both metropolitan and regional areas throughout the state.

As part of the National Exhibitions Touring Support Australia network, M&G NSW is committed to the delivery of best practice touring exhibitions of contemporary visual culture to remote and metropolitan communities throughout NSW and Australia.



Museums & Galleries of NSW is assisted by the NSW Government through Arts NSW and by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

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A Brief History of Video Art

Video has become the default medium of the 21st century. ¹ Over the last ten years, video art has found a new popularity and validity in the context of international biennales, private collections, private galleries and public museums.

The production and exhibition of video art works is more widespread and legitimised in the contemporary art world than ever before. In galleries and museums around the world, projection spaces, plasma screens, and sculptural video installations are now common. According to Australian artist and critic, John Conomos,

“video art has shifted, over the last three decades, from being an avant-garde medium of representation located in the margins of our art world to now being at its centre.” ²

The widespread presence of video can be attributed to a number of aesthetic, cultural, historical and technological factors. According to Australian curator and writer Russell Storer these include

“the growing sophistication and economic accessibility of video recording, editing and projection technology; the dominance of the moving image in everyday life and culture; and the art world’s constant desire for the new.” ³

Yet the medium of video is hardly new; it has a history dating back some 40 years. The emergence of video art in the 1960s, while sparked by the availability of new technologies, was also informed by particular social conditions. The launch of television in the 1950s thrust the mass media into most people’s living rooms, providing an unprecedented way for political and commercial messages to be promoted via advertising, news and entertainment. And so, early video art was often a response to this rapid expansion of corporate culture into private space.

The introduction of portable video equipment into the domestic market in 1965, most notably the Sony Corporation’s Portapak, made it possible for individuals to produce their own videos in contrast to the controlled and centralised information of broadcast television.

According to video historian Michael Rush, this meant that people were “no longer bound by the constrictions of Hollywood power brokers and mainstream television producers, [and] those with a vision were able to participate in the visual communication revolution that was rapidly changing social and cultural life throughout the world.” ⁴

Video brought ease, mobility and affordability to the art of the moving image and presented an alternative to traditional studio disciplines. Artists could leave the studio behind and use the camera to instantly record, comment and reflect on events of the time. Or they could simply turn the camera on themselves and explore the artistic process. Artists were able to make use of the spontaneity that video provided to directly critique the processes, content and effects of television. Korean-born Fluxus artist and musician Nam June Paik is regarded as the pioneer of the video art genre. The birth of video art is often cited as the day in 1965 when Paik took his newly purchased Sony Portapak out onto the streets and captured footage of local activity.

Australian Video Art

Unlike international video art, Australian video art does not have a beginning that can be traced to one person. Rather, a variety of creative people from the areas of sculpture, performance, filmmaking and documentary began to produce the first video experiments in the early 1970s. Conomos suggests that

the early developments of Australian video art were centred around a “complex cluster of different artistic personalities, art forms, energies and discourses.” ⁵

As with American and European histories, early video art in Australia developed alongside other forms of conceptual practice that were engaged in critiques of modernist art and ideas, such as performance and experimental film.

Australian art historian Jacqueline Millner notes that

in the early 1970s there were two broad approaches to video making in Australia, “namely sociopolitical commentary and personal experimentation.”⁶

The first stream consisted of video artists who were interested in documenting communities and social issues. These artists were often connected to grassroots organisations and the free video access centres established under the Whitlam Government in 1974.

The video access centres provided video facilities and encouraged individuals and communities to turn the camera on themselves and tell their stories. The centres became associated with activism, as communities that had been unable to access art or film funding used video to speak out about issues that concerned them. Video artist Peter Callas recalls that “video became part of a brief period of social experimentation in the mid 1970s and the tapes which originated in Australia at that time from a series of government-sponsored community video access centres were mostly documents of, or confrontations with, social problems.”⁷

Other video artists - influenced by American artists such as Vito Acconci and Chris Burden - followed more personal, formal approaches and were often engaged in performance and conceptual art. For many of these artists, video was used as an extension of performance.

This practice was largely based around two Sydney artist-run spaces, Inhibodress Gallery and later at Central Street Gallery. Mike Parr and Peter Kennedy, who established Inhibodress in 1970, were drawn to the real time immediacy of video and used the camera to document their performative experiments, both in the gallery and outside in the landscape. As Australian artist and video historian Stephen Jones observes, these tapes were the first in the country to use a conceptual art framework.⁸

Video art in Australia continued to gain momentum, helped along by a number of exhibitions of video art, the development of the International Video Art Festival (1986-92) in Sydney, and growing institutional and commercial interest. From the late 1970s, video artists such as Nam June Paik, Bill Viola and Les Levine visited Australia and introduced local artists and audiences to new forms of video practice.

The Biennale of Sydney has included video art since the second Biennale in 1976 and video has continued to be a presence in the subsequent Biennales in varying degrees ever since. In 1979, Stephen Jones and Bernice Murphy curated Videotapes in Australia, a diverse selection of Australian video works, which travelled to America and Canada before being presented at the Art Gallery of New South Wales in 1980.

By the 1980s, Australian video art had become an art form rich in diversity and elaborate technological experimentation. Artists became increasingly influenced by the aesthetics of music video clips and ‘sampling’—the practice of taking cultural artefacts such as music or film and combining them into a new creative form.⁹

Video technologies were changing at an ever-expanding rate. Artists were able to use new editing and effects technology to manipulate the image as never before. Australian art historian Daniel Palmer notes that the 1980s



“saw an almost obsessive emphasis on the playful refiguring of preexisting media imagery.”¹⁰ Video artists such as Peter Callas, Ian Haig and Ross Harley were among many that embodied this trend.

The development of ‘new media arts’ in the 1990s meant that video art became quite a different hybrid medium. New media arts encompassed artworks created with other recent technologies, including: film, video, digital art, computer games, animation and internet art. According to Palmer, “many erstwhile video artists had now become video and computer artists, or more broadly ‘media artists.’”¹¹

Video Art Today

In the last decade, the content of the work has become central to video art in Australia and elsewhere, largely due to the prevalence of video in contemporary culture and the need to engage our attention.¹²

This is in marked contrast to the 1970s and 1980s where the technical production was the main focus for artists. This has meant that contemporary video art is marked by diversity—in both the production and display of work. Video has become just one of the many available options for the younger generation of artists in Australia and overseas. Palmer observes,

“video is now a part of the practice of many, if not most, of Australia’s best known contemporary artists.”¹³

Today, Australian artists use video for a diverse range of aesthetic, cultural and conceptual reasons. Some do so to explore the space of the interactive image, others do so to work with popular music forms, and still others do so to work within the broader cinematic, conceptual and performance traditions of visual arts. Artists as diverse as Tracey Moffatt, Destiny Deacon, The Kingpins, John Gillies, Kate Murphy and Shaun Gladwell are now choosing to work with video because of its immediacy, its everyday familiarity, and the increased availability of quality digital video and computer based editing software.

The recent explosion of online video platforms, such as YouTube and Vimeo has meant that artists (and non-artists) are now easily able to upload their videos and disseminate their works to a wide audience with the click of a button.

Video art is no longer the countercultural medium that it once was, critiquing fine arts and television; it has moved from the marginal to the mainstream and to a position where it is an integral part of artists’ spaces, galleries and museums.

Diana Smith, 2009

Image: Nicola Walkerden, *CINAMNESIA*, 2012, 16mm film/digital video, stereo sound, 5:09 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Striking Contrasts Exhibition Overview

Contemporary Australian society reflects two distinctive and often contradictory cultural expressions. One is brought about by the profoundly beautiful emptiness that fills the void at the centre of the country. The other emerges out of the multicultural, highly technical and globalised cities dotting the periphery of the vast, silent landscape, providing striking contrast.

Over the past decade, the availability of relatively inexpensive digital technology has meant that artists whose primary medium of expression maybe painting, sculpture or photography are now equally at ease working creatively with a HD digital camera and a laptop computer.

The result has been a proliferation of moving image works seen in galleries and museums around Australia by artists seeking to expand their expressive concerns into new configurations for the screen. These include works that are often minimalist in design with emphasis placed on the exploration of space, time and screen surface.

Other artists are drawn to experimenting with the traditional conventions of cinema, narrative form and the exploration of the links between the aesthetics and materiality of the medium of film itself.

The digital film works produced by these artists are characterised by pushing the boundaries of what we might understand to be a 'documentary' or 'narrative' film. Others work with existing or 'found' footage to rework into something completely new.

Striking Contrasts explores these two parallel and distinctive aesthetic tendencies that have emerged out of film and video art practice in the Australian contemporary art scene in recent years.

The video artworks in the exhibition have been divided into two groups, displayed on parallel screens to encourage viewers to compare and move between the works.



Joan Ross, *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*, 2011, digital animation, stereo sound, 6:00 min. Image courtesy the artist and Michael Reid

John Gillies, *Road Movie (part 1)*, 2008, High Definition digital video, stereo sound, 9:00 min. Image courtesy the artist

Nicola Walkerden, *CINAMNESIA*, 2012, 16mm film/digital video, stereo sound, 5:09 min. Image courtesy the artist.

Deborah Kelly, *Beastliness*, 2011, digital animation, stereo sound, 3:17 min. Image courtesy the artist and



John Conomos

John Conomos is an artist, critic and theorist who works across video art, new media, installation, photo-performance and radiophonic art. A recent mixed-media installation entitled *Shipwreck* at the University of Queensland Art Museum embodies Conomos's abiding passion for classical cinema while at the same time, is a cross-disciplinary meditation on art, ageing and mortality. Conomos is a prolific contributor to art, film and media journals, conferences, seminars and symposia and co-editor of an anthology on *Rethinking the Contemporary Art School* (NASCAD University Press, 2010).

Lake George (After Rothko), 2007 digital video, stereo sound, 10:00 min

image courtesy the artist

“As a child during the fifties I would visit my mother's cousins at Goulburn and Canberra by car. Between these two locations I became aware through my parents and relatives talking about this mysterious lake that would ever so often disappear. How is this possible? A lake that would vanish from the face of the earth. Consequently, Lake George has always had a talismanic value for me as a metaphor for creativity.

Landscape as something that emerges from the invisible to the visible. The artist as someone who voyages – irrespective of their art form – between these two essential realms of life and light/vision.

I have always been attracted to a sense of place. Landscape as lifescape, soundscape, tastescape, and memoryscape. As a genre of art, despite certain current views that it is a traditionally conservative genre, it need not be. Far from it. For me landscape has always been critical to my biography, culture and thought. Landscape is, as I see and hear it, something that lies, to evoke Jean-Francois Lyotard, ‘beyond the cultivated zone.’ Beyond the law of genre.”

John Conomos



John Gillies

John Gillies is an artist who works primarily with time-based media and forms such as video, performance, installation and music. The exploration of sound and image relationships, and collaboration with performers has been central to his work. Those collaborators have included The Sydney Front, Clare Grant, Jon Rose, Matt Prest and Tess de Quincey.

Road Movie (part 1), 2008 High Definition digital video, stereo sound, 9:00 min

image courtesy the artist

John Gillies' *Road Movie (part 1)* is about cars: a portrait of a seething mass of steel-cased bubbles and the people inside them who are hurtled along at high speeds only to come to a crashing halt and find themselves stuck in the drawn out nothing time of the traffic jam. It's a collage of the small gestures of driving that flesh out this everyday activity and the collections of objects that fill the world of cars, the worlds we create within cars. It's a video about cultural attachment to the car, the identification of self with cars. It invokes the grand twentieth century dream of taking the exit lane, hitting the open road, escaping, moving, changing, moving on ... And it's about the end of that road.

A world without cars – is it a dream or a nightmare? It is precisely this question that drives the protagonist of Gillies' road movie as he takes the exit lane and, like many travelers before him, heads away from the city and out on to the open road.

Therese Davis

Video Logic catalogue, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2008, pp. 45.



Nicola Walkerden

Nicola Walkerden is a screen-based performance artist and filmmaker whose interdisciplinary practice explores juxtaposing relationships between structures, the body, landscapes and the unknown. Current works can be seen as a series of dream documentaries conjuring up a multiplicity of meanings to engage with. Investigating the liminal connections between mind and body and extreme states of the inner and collective psyche, Walkerden applies performance as a process of actions to test spaces and scan the body.

Walkerden is a graduate of a Master of Film and Digital Image, the Sydney College of the Arts (SCA), has a Bachelor of Fine Arts, the College of Fine Arts and is currently studying for a Master of Fine Arts by research at SCA. Works have been exhibited in Sydney galleries and screened at Revelation Perth International Film Festival, Sydney Underground Film Festival, Brisbane Underground Film Festival and Del Corazon Film Festival.

CINAMNESIA, 2012

**16mm film/digital video, stereo sound,
5:09 min**

image courtesy the artist

CINAMNESIA draws links between the twenty-four vertebrae in the human spine and the twenty-four frames per second in 16mm film whilst exploring the effects of film on the nervous system.

With black and white performance and documentary footage misplacing experiences of time and movement, there is an examination of the spine and the materiality of film from both scientific and surrealist perspectives. Illusion is questioned through the portrayal of anaesthesia as an induced experiential state similar to that of choosing to sit in a cinema. It examines the process of watching film, questioning how present an experience it is, along with the nature of recording.

Structurally the film is considered as a backbone holding images that are re-recorded by the audience every time it's played. The cave as a primal root of cinema is referenced, hand-drawn as if to be a reminder of how histories are recorded through movement, distorted by perceptions.



Paul Winkler

Paul Winkler is a German-born Australian filmmaker who lives and works in Sydney. He was associated with Corinne and Arthur Cantrill, Albie Thoms and David Perry in pioneering local experimental film production in the 1960s.

In 1995, the Museum of Contemporary Art and Sydney Intermedia Network mounted a retrospective screening of 30 of his films. The following year, the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts, Harvard University, USA screened 30 films in a three-day retrospective. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, USA holds 15 of his films in their collection.

Drums and Trains, 2009

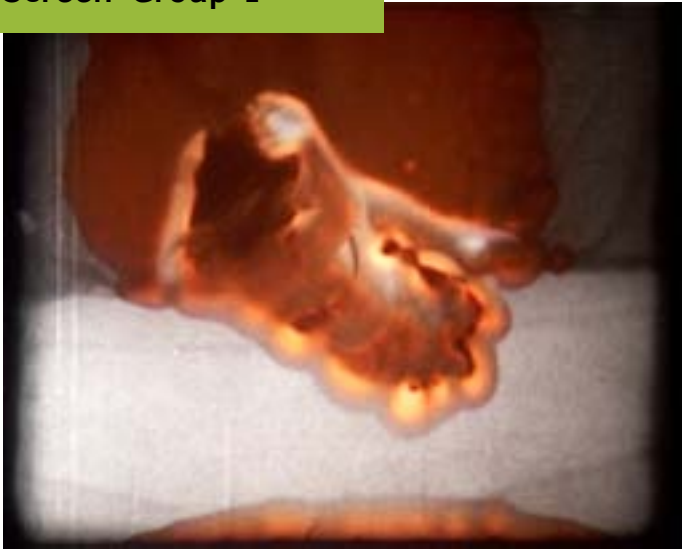
16mm film/digital video, stereo sound, 12:00 min

image courtesy the artist

In Paul Winkler's highly personal 16mm film, *Drums and Trains*, a seemingly innocent child's toy train and the ominous sounds drawn from archival footage of a boy-soldier striking a drum are looped, masked and reprinted across the screen surface of the work. These techniques have been perfected by Winkler over a span of forty years of experimental filmmaking and reflect a fine balance struck between technical virtuosity and emotional resonance.

Drums and Trains is also marked by the repetition of the sound of the boy striking the drum as the emphatic forward movement of the toy train intensifies and becomes increasingly abstracted and disturbed as the film surface begins to blister and burn. The sounds of gunshots are heard through the clickity-clack of the train tracks as the final destination of the toy train is revealed: The Auschwitz extermination camp. The boy-soldier's fateful drum beats echo from Leni Reifenstahl's 1934 film, *Triumph of the Will*.

Screen Group 1



Tony Lawrence

For the past eight years Australian filmmaker Tony Lawrence has been working almost exclusively with 8mm and 16mm found footage and home movies. He now has a collection over 300 films which bare the physical effects of time, chemical decay, and even rot and mould which he further manipulates to create new works that draw attention to the materiality of the medium. His work has won many Underground Film Festival awards.

Tony says “the affect of decay, grit and damage on these films often forms the context of how I piece together these works.” He goes on to compose strangely haunting electronic soundtracks and use various transfer techniques to convey different moods and create these dreamlike explorations of memory and time.

Girl on Fire, 2009

**Super 8 film/digital video, stereo
sound, 2:00 min**

image courtesy the artist

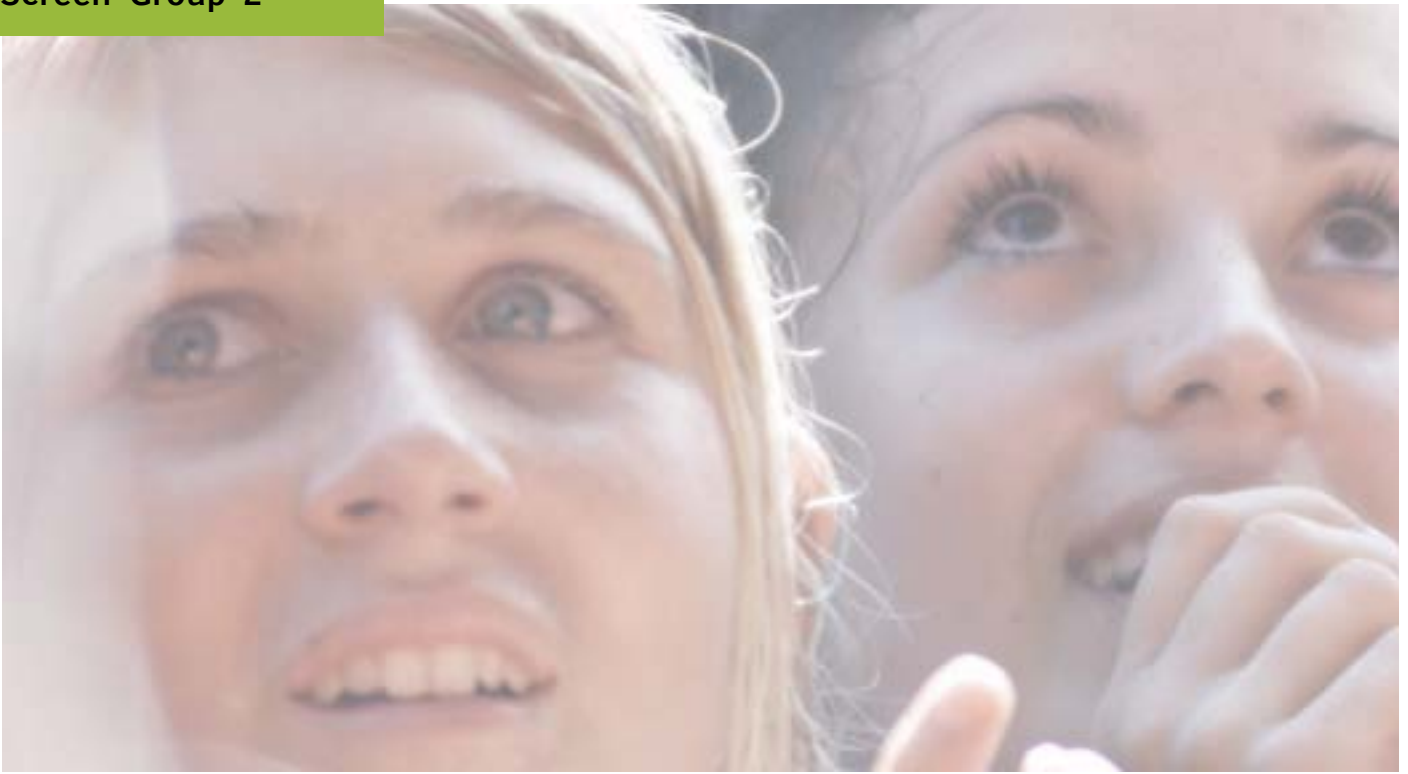
This found footage 8mm news reel film of underwater ballet has a red rust effect flowing through it. Known as oxidation reduction reaction or Redox – it is usually caused by peroxides emanating from aging wood found in film cardboard storage boxes. A sparse piano and electronic soundtrack adds to the languid pace.

White Sands, 2010

**Super 8 film/digital video, stereo
sound, 6:55 min**

image courtesy the artist

This found footage film is a home movie dated 1948. A young family plays in the gypsum dunes of White Sands. A haunting electronica soundtrack and an opaque sky add to the dream-like landscape as figures wistfully play.



Angelica Mesiti

Angelica Mesiti is a video, performance and installation artist based in Sydney and Paris. Angelica's video works use cinematic frameworks and performance to re-tell histories and reconfigure conventional truths. Central to her approach is an interest in responding to the particularities of a given location, its history, environment and communities.

Angelica Mesiti is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery.

***Rapture (silent anthem)*, 2009** **single-channel High Definition video,** **colour, silent, 10:10 min**

image courtesy the artist & Anna Schwartz Gallery

“Angelica Mesiti’s work *Rapture (silent anthem)* reflects on the spirituality and presence of ritual experiences in contemporary life. It’s a slow-motion video of young people at an open-air concert. The work transmits the quasi-religious atmosphere with various close-ups, capturing the worshipping eyes, ecstatic expressions and hysterical gestures of the teenagers, emphasising their pure and primal emotions. Mesiti manages to transmit the feeling of the collective state of the crowd, people ‘becoming one’ without capturing all of them in one frame. On the contrary, it shows their individual experiences, rhythmically and emotionally synchronized.

Rapture is a silent video that takes an experience of a musical event out of its basic context, making the viewer focus on the visual content of the work, and understanding its emotional and aesthetic intensity. The viewer, pulled in and fascinated, unintentionally becomes part of this collective moment, which turns into an endless rapture.”

Elena Vasileva
Videonale 13 catalogue



Deborah Kelly

Deborah Kelly is a Melbourne-born, Sydney-based artist whose works have been shown in streets, skies and galleries around Australia, the Singapore and Venice Biennales, and elsewhere. She began making socially engaged artwork in 1983. Her collaborative projects include *boat-people.org* and the prize-winning public artwork series *Hey, hetero!*, created with Tina Fiveash. Her work *Beware of the God* - commissioned by the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and first shown in 2005 - was reiterated for the 2008 Singapore Biennale.

Deborah Kelly is represented by Gallery Barry Keldoulis.

Beastliness, 2011

digital animation, stereo sound, 3:17 min

image courtesy the artist & Gallery Barry Keldoulis

Collage as a medium has always been a vehicle by which to explore political and social concerns.

Kelly, in this series of work, is re-contextualising the militant strategies of early feminism. The message is as much in the history of the medium itself, the awkward ancestries that it just can't shake. In one series squawking birds prick the smooth and hairless veneer of raunch culture. In another, furry girls stare out through waves and a field of follicles.

Chopped-up, constructed beauties from the valley of the hirsute. In a world obsessed with luxury, outfits, the right haircuts, shoes and the aspiration to live the right type of life, Kelly creates not just something new but forces us to understand through the hyperreal and the hard core, that satire is always hard to swallow.

Glenn Barkley

'The rough and the smooth', *Deborah Kelly catalogue*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis, May 2011.



Grant Stevens

Grant Stevens explores how we understand, construct and communicate our subjectivities and interpersonal relationships, especially how the 'languages' of our screen realities shape our constructions of self and disseminations of meaning.

Since graduating from Brisbane's Queensland University of Technology in 2002, the predominantly video artist has referenced footage, sound and text from Hollywood's entertainment industries to question the effect of popular culture on our beliefs, sense of identity and decision making processes.

Grant Stevens is represented by Gallery Barry Keldoulis.

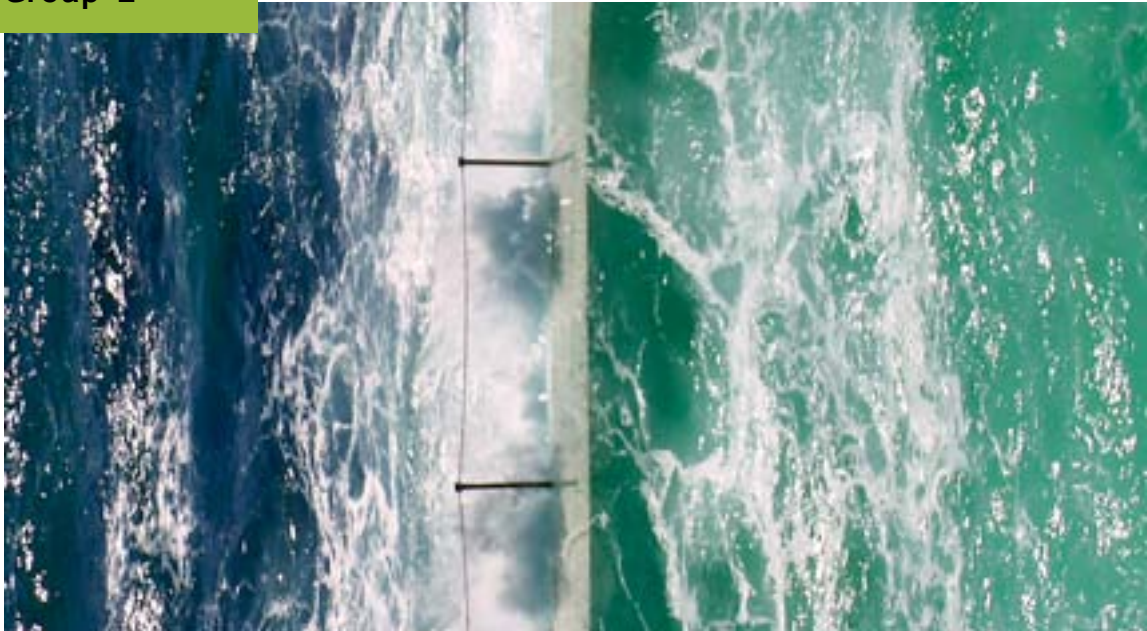
Baby Please Don't Go, 2004

digital video, stereo sound, 4:22 min

image courtesy the artist & Gallery Barry Keldoulis

Baby Please Don't Go casts a small fragment of a scene from the film 'Apocalypse Now' into a seemingly endless loop. It shows Martin Sheen's character moving backwards and forwards in a methodical, trance-like dance to a Led Zeppelin song.

At first his movements seem to match the rhythm of the music. However, through its incessant repetition and internal looping, the dance becomes increasingly at odds with the uninhibited ideological and formal characteristics of the song.



Jess MacNeil

Jess MacNeil works at the points of intersection between painting, installation, video and photography, often taking as her subject matter the dynamics of the human/environment relationship. Her paintings and video works explore the visible and invisible influences that govern the way we perceive and inhabit the world, presenting an emphatically subjective visual translation of the amorphous 'shape' of our relationship to our surroundings and to one another.

MacNeil has exhibited widely internationally and within Australia. Her work was included in *Primavera* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney and the Samstag Museum of Art in 2008 and was presented at the Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, the Museum of Contemporary Art, San Diego, and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, in 2009.

The Wall, 2009

High Definition digital video, stereo sound, 7:00 min

image courtesy the artist

The Wall is an abstraction of an everyday scene, an ocean pool against an ocean backdrop at high tide, under the onslaught of a set of waves. The rotation of the picture plane, organic motion of the water, and underlying geometry of the pool allow this scene to slip unhinged into abstraction; a volatile picture plane, akin to a continually oscillating, collapsing, disintegrating colour field painting.

Both compositionally and conceptually the contest in the work is between and within chaos and order, separation and disintegration, segregation and exuberant collapse. The wall itself is built to demarcate the Bondi Icebergs ocean pool from the ocean, providing comparative shelter and a conceptual separation of a body of water. The work pitches that which we can control against, and within, that which ultimately we cannot.

The wall is presented at its bare functional essentials, splitting the image vertically down the centre while it demarcates the pool from the ocean. It at once fulfils this function and fails to do so. Interspersed with periods of calm resolution, the force of the waves repeatedly breaches and transgresses the wall's authority and wipes out the notion of separation, collapsing the screen into homogenous heaving whiteout.



Joan Ross

Joan Ross combines an eclectic mix of visual styles, from traditional landscape sceneries collaged against cartoon-like figures. Through these 'uncomfortable' settings, she navigates the viewer through unsettling themes, encouraging us to rethink the impact of colonisation, imperialism, racism, consumerism and our 'disposable' culture. Ross is interested in the retelling of history and the consequential lies and bias that ensue. Through her work, she aims to enlighten people to the prejudices that she sees in contemporary Australia.

Joan Ross is represented by Michael Reid.

BBQ this Sunday, BYO, 2011 **digital animation, stereo sound, 6:00 min**

image courtesy the artist & Michael Reid

Joan Ross is an artist with a long history of dissecting Australia's colonial past. Her works include sculpture and installation, painting, drawing and video. In her recent series, *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*, Ross returns to this theme with a series of colonialist adaptations of the paintings of Joseph Lycett, an English convict transported for the crime of forgery.

There are many strange contradictions in Ross' work: the contrast between the acronymic title and the traditional appearance of the work, the juxtaposition of the serenity of the picnic scene with the lurid hi-vis worn

by the subjects, even the idea that Australia's violent colonial past could be brokered through the friendly cultural ritual of an Australian barbeque. It is ironic that through the forgery of paintings by a forger, Ross analyses the clash of traditional landscape, colonial politics and contemporary landscapes.

In this video piece Ross examines the harsh realities and effects of colonisation on the Aboriginal people, which developed amongst the blind prospering of their colonial counterparts. The hi-vis yellow symbolises modernisation, development and European expansion, something initially glaringly out of place that expands to dominate the landscape. Ross utilises this 'hi-vis symbol' as something that originally signifies danger but then is transformed into the commonplace and ordinary.

As the film progresses hi-vis expands in the ancient landscape as more guests appear, bringing their own artefacts of civilisation. As the crowd around the BBQ grows, the fluorescence that at first seemed out of place becomes almost natural. Important figures from Australian colonial history arrive, yellow-clad but empty handed. As the BBQ progresses the fluorescent colours turn into spirographs that hide a small pox molecule that will cause devastation amongst the Aboriginal people. However, the spirographs then turn into fireworks and the sound of celebration can be heard.

List of Works

Screen Group One

John Conomos
Lake George (After Rothko)
2007
digital video, stereo sound, 10:00 min

John Gillies
Road Movie (part 1)
2008
High Definition digital video, stereo sound, 9:00 min

Nicola Walkerden
CINAMNESIA
2012
16mm film/digital video, stereo sound, 5:09 min

Paul Winkler
Drums and Trains
2009
16mm film/digital video, stereo sound, 12:00 min

Tony Lawrence
White Sands
2010
Super 8 film/digital video, stereo sound, 6:55 min

Tony Lawrence
Girl on Fire
2009
Super 8 film/digital video, stereo sound, 2:00 min

Screen Group Two

Angelica Mesiti
Rapture (silent anthem)
2009
single-channel High Definition video, colour, silent, 10:10 min
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Questions & Activities

Intermediate Focus Questions

1. Compare *Striking Contrasts* to another exhibition you have recently seen that includes artworks of traditional media such as painting, drawing, or craft objects. What makes video art different to other art?
2. Some of the videos include music and sounds. How does this affect the way you feel when you watch the videos?
3. Choose one video work from *Striking Contrasts* and compare it with your favourite movie or television show. What are some of the differences?
4. John Conomos and Jess McNeil's videos are both of landscapes. What have they done to make the landscape appear different?
5. Tony Lawrence's *White Sands* is an old home video of a family playing together on sand dunes. Imagine that you are going to make your own home video and film your family or friends. What would you film them doing? Where would they be? What equipment would you use to record them?
6. Many of the artists in this exhibition use old videos and photographs in their work. How do cameras and video cameras help us capture our lives and create memories? How is this different to painting, drawing or writing about a memory?

Advanced Focus Questions

1. Jess MacNeil's work uses a mix of styles including painting, installation, video and photography. In many ways the term 'video art' could be considered misleading. Why do you think that this might be?
2. Today video screens and projections are everywhere from mobile phones to the sides of buildings. To quote artist and critic Catherine Elwes, "video is the default medium of the 21st Century." Do you agree and if so, how have technological advancements influenced this?
3. As video has become more easily accessible on devices such as our mobile phones, laptops and tablets, how do you think this affects the way we value video art? Do you consider video art any more or less valuable when compared to traditional artforms such as painting or drawing, and why?
4. When you go to the cinema to see a film, it has a start or 'session' time. This differs from videos shown in galleries. Why do you think that is? Does the screening environment make you view or consider the video in a different way?
5. Australian arts writer, Daniel Palmer has noted the 'immediacy' and 'intimacy' of the medium of video for both artists and viewers. What do you think he means by this? Consider how technology can be immediate and intimate.
6. Some artists upload their video art to YouTube, while others create a limited number of editions for people to buy and own. What might be the advantages and disadvantages of each of these methods of distribution?

7. Some artists display their work on small screens while others create large projection-based installations. How does the style of presentation affect the way you feel about the work?
8. A number of artists in the *Striking Contrasts* exhibition use analogue film and found footage, including Paul Winkler, Tony Lawrence and Nicola Walkerden. Compare this approach with those shot with digital video, such as Angelica Mesiti or John Gillies. Comment on the differences.
9. Deborah Kelly's video works have been collected and she is represented by the art dealer Gallery Barry Keldoulis. Consider what is different about the process of collecting and acquiring video artwork and what new requirements need to be considered by collectors or institutions.
10. Consider the work by Grant Stevens, *Baby Please Don't Go*. How is this different from a music video?
11. John Conomos says that his video is inspired by childhood memories of Lake George. Consider the composition and style of *Lake George (After Rothko)*. How does this relate to landscape as "lifescape, soundscape, tastescape and memoryscape"? Research the artist Mark Rothko and identify the similarities and differences between his painting style and that of John Conomos.
12. Digital media crosses the boundaries of technology and art. Examine the work of Joan Ross, *BBQ this Sunday, BYO*. Do you see the technology or the art? Do the methods of production obscure the message?
13. Think of your favourite movie, music video or documentary film. How does it compare to the videos included in this exhibition? Consider factors such as content, characters, style of filming and presentation of the video.

Additional Resources

Striking Contrasts website:

<http://netsaustralia.org.au/whats-on/striking-contrasts/>

Katherine Berger, 'Direct-On-Found Footage Filmmaking: Mining the debris of image consumption & co-directing with nature', *Journal of Media Arts Culture*, Volume 10 No.1, 2013:

<http://scan.net.au/scn/journal/vol10number1/Katherine-Berger.html>

Text and reviews on John Gillies:

<http://johngillies.com/texts>

Glenn Barkley, 'The rough and the smooth', *Deborah Kelly catalogue*, Gallery Barry Keldoulis:

http://www.gbk.com.au/files/dk_gbk_cat_webSM.pdf

Artist Interview with Grant Stevens, *Artists Voice*, Museum of Contemporary Art, 2012:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btbUCtx4z6o>

Grant Stevens in Conversation with Paul Young, *L.A. Louver*, 19 January 2013:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4aG2ncVfCM>

Angelica Mesiti, *Videonale 13*,

<http://archiv.videonale.org/1/videothek/m/mesiti/>

Writers Biographies

Diana Smith

Diana Smith studied Fine Arts (Time Based Art) and Arts (Film Studies) and completed Media, Film & Theatre Honours (Class 1) at the University of New South Wales. She has worked at Performance Space, Sydney, sat on the board of various artist-run initiatives and has curated several video and performance based exhibitions.

Therese Davis

Senior Lecturer in Film and Television Studies at Monash University. Teresa is the author of *The Face on the Screen: Death Recognition and Spectatorship* (Intellect, 2004) and co-author with Felicity Collins of *Australian Cinema After Mabo* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

Glenn Barkley

Glenn Barkley is Curator at Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, and was previously curator of the University of Wollongong Art collection from 1996 - 2007. Barkley has written extensively on Australian contemporary art and has a particular interest in prints, multiples and ephemera.

'A Brief History of Video Art' - References

1. Catherine Elwes, *Video Art: a Guided Tour*, I.B. Taurus, London/New York, 2005, p.1
2. John Conomos, *Mutant Media: Essays on Cinema, Video Art and New Media*, Artspace & Power Publications, Sydney, 2007, p. 97
3. Russell Storer, 'Video Logic', *Video Logic (Catalogue)*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 2008, p.9
4. Michael Rush, *Video Art*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2003, p.7
5. John Conomos, *Ibid*, p. 101
6. Jacqueline Millner, 'Home Movie: Australian Pioneers and their Contemporary Legacy', *Art & Australia*, Vol. 45, No.2, 2007, p. 254
7. Peter Callas, 'Australian Video Art & Australian Identity – A Personal View,' *Continuum '83: The 1st Exhibition of Australian Contemporary Art in Japan (Catalogue)*, Tokyo: Japan-Australia Cultural & Arts Exchange Committee, 1983, unpaginated
8. Stephen Jones, 'Some Notes on the Early History of the Independent Video Scene in Australia,' *The First Australian Video Festival (Catalogue)*, Sydney, 1988, p.23
9. Colin Lankshear and Michele Knobel, 'Digital Remix: The Art and Craft of Endless Hybridization', *Keynote presented to the International Reading Association Pre-Conference Institute, Using Technology to Develop and Extend the Boundaries of Literacy*, Toronto, 13 May 2007
10. Daniel Palmer, 'Medium without a memory: Australian Video art,' *Broadsheet*, 33, 2004, p.21
11. Palmer, p.21
12. Stuart Koop and Max Delany, in Palmer, p.21
13. Palmer, p.20