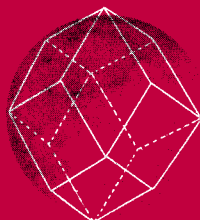
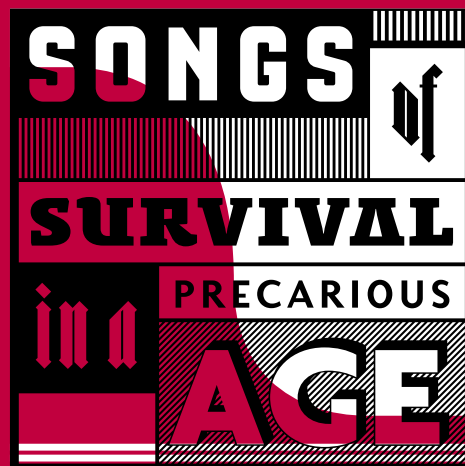
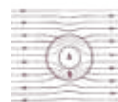


17TH BIENNALE OF SYDNEY



Choi Jeong **Hwa**
 Nandipha **Mntambo**
 Jemima **Wyman**
 Brook **Andrew**
 Brett **Graham**
 Araya **Rasdjarmrearnsook**
 Jake and Dinos **Chapman**
 Yamaguchi **Akira**
 Cai **Guo-Qiang**
 Kent **Monkman**
 Wang **Qingsong**
 Gardar **Eide Einarsson**
 Fiona **Hall**
 Shen **Shaomin**



17th Biennale of Sydney
 Teacher's Kit

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CHOI JEONG HWA



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Choi is presenting Hubble Bubble (2010), an installation of spheres created from plastic bowls nestled amongst the sails of the Opera House.

Choi Jeong Hwa is a Korean artist and designer.

His influences span Korean markets, Asian weddings, Caribbean carnivals, Black Country industrial heritage and charity shops.

He is sometimes referred to as the 'pop artist' of Korea as a result of his use of bright and colourful plastic and consumer objects.

Choi is most famous for his plastic inflatable sculptures and installations of mass-produced plastic items, usually purchased from \$2 stores.

Choi's works are both a celebration of the frivolity and surface of pop culture, and a philosophical enquiry into the relationships between surface and substance. He achieves this by exaggerating the simple elements found in the everyday to sublime extremes.

His work can be interpreted as communicating concerns about waste, consumer society, globalisation and other contemporary issues, however the artist consciously avoids discussing these issues in depth.

I feel strange when I see a real tree or flower. Nature, as such, is so rare in Korea these days, that I'm actually afraid when I encounter it. I'm afraid of the 'real'. Maybe all I can deal with is an idea of nature, immune to destruction, so I make an artificial one to look at and enjoy.

– CHOI JEONG HWA

Interview with James B. Lee, 'Flim-flam and fabrication: an interview with Choi Jeong Hwa', *ArtAsiaPacific*, vol. 3, no. 4, 1996, p.66

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: mass produced items, plastic, installation, pop art, soft-sculpture, cultural references
- Structural frame: pop-art, plastic, found objects
- Cultural frame: globalisation, consumerism, environmental issues, recycling, mass-production, commerce
- Postmodern frame: site-specific installation, hyperbole (exaggeration)
- Subjective frame: uplifting, bright, happy

QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, identify elements of Choi's practice that take inspiration from the work of the pop artists.
- Referring to the text above, describe the key elements of Choi's artist practice.
- Interrogate the artist's material practice. How does his use of mass produced consumer items reflect his conceptual intentions?
- Research other artists who have an interest in 'low culture', for example, German Artist Andreas Gursky's large-scale photographs of the interior of a 99 cent store. What do you think these artists might be communicating about the world?
- Examine the artist's spiritual references to nirvana and enlightenment. How does he aim to recontextualise contemporary spirituality within consumer culture?



Choi Jeong Hwa
Hubble Bubble, 2009
installation view at the Korean Cultural Centre UK, London, UK, 2009
Courtesy the artist

NANDIPHA MNTAMBO



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney Mntambo is presenting two skin cast works entitled Nandikeshvara (2009) and Meditations on Solitude (2009).

Nandipha Mntambo is a South African artist working predominantly in the areas of sculpture, performance and installation.

She draws upon the rich cultural heritage of her home country to create works that address issues of race, gender, cultural and personal identity and femininity.

Mntambo creates body casts using cow hides. These works comment on preconceptions of the female body as well as referencing Mntambo's personal and cultural history.

The use of cow skins can refer to many Swazi cultural practices such as dressing the dead in animal hides for burial. Mntambo utilises the symbolic meaning embedded in her media to engage with the terms that have kept people in subjugated states of embodiment, tapping into the legacy of the 'quasi-scientific' arguments that backed up the discourse of racism and sexism.

The work I create seeks to challenge and subvert preconceptions regarding representation of the female body. The hair-covered but arguably beautiful female figures I create disrupt perceptions of attraction and repulsion.

NANDIPHA MNTABO Tavish McIntosh, 'Nandipha Mntambo', *ArtThrob*, no. 133, September 2008: www.artthrob.co.za

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: sculpture, body casting, performance, media with cultural relevance
- Structural frame: skins – symbolic of tribal use, cultural practices, women's bodies
- Cultural frame: colonialism, feminism, gender
- Postmodern frame: referencing cultural events, drawing on cultural stigmas and norms
- Subjective frame: intense, nostalgic

QUESTIONS

- What do you think is the relevance of Mntambo using her own body to cast her animal skin works?
- Analyse how Mntambo responds to the world around her through her works.
- Think about the ways in which Mntambo's choice of materials reflect her conceptual practice.
- How does Mntambo challenge ideas of gender and race in her works? You might like to also research her video work entitled *Ukungenisa* (2008).



Nandipha Mntambo
Meditations on Solitude, 2009
Courtesy Gordon Schacat collection, South Africa
Cowhide, resin, polyester mesh

Jemima Wyman



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Wyman is presenting the video work *Combat Drag* (2008) as well as several photographic collage works featuring assemblages of balaclavas.

Jemima Wyman is a young Australian artist working predominantly in the areas of performance, video and photography.

Her artist practice focuses on themes of identity, resistance, fear, disguise and liberation.

For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Wyman will present the video work *Combat Drag* (2008) as well as several photographic collage works featuring assemblages of balaclavas.

Wyman uses camouflage to address what she refers to as 'communal skins' – the term she uses to describe the way guerrilla armies dress identically in disguises that hide gender, identity and deflect the gaze of the law.

The use of camouflage also dissects the idea of the 'Other' in its various forms – race, gender and sexuality.

By appealing to the idea of a 'skin', Wyman questions the idea of identity and the body as something that is fixed, emphasising the dependence and obsession we have as a culture on external experience.

Wyman exaggerates colour and dress, and cinematic techniques create a dark and ironic version of guerrilla footage, yet the work is also subversive and threatening. The combination of jarring editing and warped sound is intended to create a disconcerting experience for the viewer.

*Continuing a sense of connectedness between virtual and real worlds,
Wyman's video works escape the frame of the screen to occupy
the physical space inhabited by the audience.*

Emma Myall, 'Jemima Wyman: Earthquake Girl' 2006 *Contemporary Commonwealth*, (exhibition catalogue),
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2006, pp. 126-9

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: video, performance, drag, hyperbole, colour, audiovisual manipulation
- Structural frame: camouflage, re-enactments and performance, self-filmed documentary style
- Cultural frame: Australian society, politics, the 'Other'
- Postmodern frame: drawing on cultural stigmas and norms, re-enactment, appropriation
- Subjective frame: unsettling, disconcerting, visceral reactions

QUESTIONS

- Referring to the structural frame discuss Wyman's references made to guerrilla fighters. What overall affect do these references have on the work?
- Artworks shape the way we understand culture. With reference to this statement, explain Wyman's response to the world.
- What is drag? Examine how Wyman manipulates this loaded term in titling her work *Combat Drag*.



Jemima Wyman
Combat Drag, 2008 (still frame)
video, 8:06 mins
Courtesy the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane

BROOK ANDREW



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney Andrew has created a contemporary war memorial on Cockatoo Island, Jumping Castle War Memorial (2010)

Brook Andrew is a contemporary artist based in Melbourne who works in a diverse range of media including neon, photo-media, installation, mixed-media, performance and video.

Andrew's work uses both text and image to explore issues of race, colonialism, consumerism and history on both a local and global scale.

Jumping Castle War Memorial (2010) will take the form of a seven-metre-wide jumping castle accompanied by circus-style ticket box, which will inform the participant that the castle is testament to the wars waged during colonial invasion. The audience members must choose whether they will jump on the castle, knowing about the dark subtext of the memorial.

In his work, Andrew explores both his Wiradjuri and Euro-Australian heritage, and the conflicting sides of these two identities. His work also frequently challenges audiences to re-imagine and re-consider previous modes of representation and ways of viewing situations.

The jumping castle's design includes a figure in the centre with arms outstretched in victory and blow-up heads of figures who represent the victims of genocide worldwide. The skulls bobble up and down within clear chambers in the turrets of the jumping castle.

Jumping Castle War Memorial plays with the tradition of monuments and memorial sculptures. The spectacle that Andrew creates is simultaneously sacred and blasphemous and presents a quandary that is not dissimilar to the decision made by tourists when assessing whether or not to climb Uluru.

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: performance, mixed media, installation, video
- Structural frame: Aboriginal imagery and symbols,
- Cultural frame: Australian society, politics, post-colonialism
- Postmodern frame: appropriation, re-interpretation
- Subjective frame: unsettling, disconcerting, challenging

QUESTIONS

- Consider Brook Andrew's work through the postmodern frame. What is the purpose of using elements in the past in a contemporary work?
- Explain how Brook Andrew has responded to the world around him in his artworks *Sexy and Dangerous* (1996) and *Jumping Castle War Memorial* (2010).



Brook Andrew
Working image for Jumping Castle War Memorial, 2010
vinyl

400 x 700 x 700 cm
Courtesy the artist and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne
This work has been made possible through the support of DETACHED, Hobart in partnership with the
University of Queensland Art Museum and Urban Art Projects

BRETT GRAHAM



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Brett Graham has created a new work: a near full-scale Russian BRDM-2 scout car carved with traditional Māori patterns. The work reflects on the continued irresponsible linkage of Māori to insurgents in the Middle East.

Brett Graham is a New Zealand sculptor of Māori decent. He is from the Ngati Koroki sub-tribe of Tainui.

Graham has developed a rich background in visual arts practice including a Doctorate of Fine Arts at the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland and training with Japanese sculptor Atsuo Okamoto to further his practice in stone carving.

He explores complex historical, political and cultural ideas through his practice, transforming them into compelling artist statements, often witty and ironic.

Within his work, Graham seeks to explore the nature of Pacific history and identity.

Symbolism is a common conceptual technique in his practice and he uses Māori motif, sometimes comparing them to other ethnic iconography, to critique the actions of government and authority figures with respect to postcolonial, terrorist and separatist fears.

He also commonly uses bird, tree and flower forms to express his anxiety for the natural world with respect to its role in the lives of indigenous people.

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: sculpture, wood and stone carving, public commission
- Structural frame: Māori and other ethnic motif, carvings of western objects of war
- Cultural frame: Prejudice against minorities, racism, terrorism
- Postmodern frame: drawing on cultural stigmas and norms, re-enactment, appropriation
- Subjective frame: unsettling, protest

QUESTIONS

- Consider Graham's work for the Biennale of Sydney. In what ways might it be considered postmodern?
- Imagine you are a critic visiting the 17th Biennale of Sydney; write a brief description and critique of Graham's work.



Brett Graham
Te Hokioi, 2008
MDF, fibreglass, steel, car lacquer, wheels
80 x 290 x 440 cm
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tamaki, gift of the Patrons of the Gallery, 2009
Photograph: Jennifer French

ARAYA RASDJARMREARNSOOK



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Rasdjarmrearnsook is exhibiting the 'The Two Planet Series' (2007–08). This video records Thai farmers' and gardeners' responses to life-size reproductions of iconic works by artists including Manet and Renoir.

Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook is a Thai artist working predominantly in performance, video and installation.

Her works often engage with mortality, women's roles and identity, emotional journeys and the transcendental possibilities of art and performance.

Her video works from the 'Two Planet Series', shown at the Biennale were inspired by her experience of teaching art history to young art students who were too daunted by the works' reputation to offer an unchecked response to the famous works.

Buddhism, the main religion in Thailand, has clearly influenced her attitudes towards myths of modernity, spiritualism and the soul. Much of Rasdjarmrearnsook's work can also be viewed as influenced by her various experiences with death, including the death of her grandmother and mother.

In previous works, Rasdjarmrearnsook reads poetry, sings songs and tells stories to dead bodies as a way of comforting those who died alone. These rituals also confront reality from a state of 'between-ness' – Rasdjarmrearnsook thus

I am currently working with traditional sculpture and painting which will be videoed. I want to make and film a masterpiece; but a masterpiece for Thai farmers. No-one talks about Thai farmer's values. Here I will use video not to register the so-called real but as a vehicle for expressing something like fantasy.

ARAYA RASDJARMREARNSOOK

Brian Curtin, 'Confronting Confrontation: An Interview with Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook', *Art Signal*, Issue 0, May 2007

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: recorded ritual and conversation, video
- Structural frame: use of known rituals and texts, use of real-life corpses
- Cultural frame: religion and spirituality, women's roles and identity
- Postmodern frame: challenging the distinctions between ritual and performance, life and death
- Subjective frame: meditative

QUESTIONS

- In what ways could 'The Two Planet Series' be considered a postmodern work?
- Discuss the relationship between world, artwork and artist with respect to the work of Rasdjarmrearnsook.
- Rasdjarmrearnsook has explored themes of death, loss and deterioration in her earlier body of work. Can you see any similarities between 'The Two Planet Series' and these earlier works?



Araya Rasdjarmrearnsook
Van Gogh's *The Midday Sleep* 1889/90 and the Thai villagers, 2007 [detail]
from 'The Two Planet Series'
Photograph and video
110 x 100 cm; 18 mins
Courtesy the artist and 100 Tonson Gallery, Bangkok

JAKE AND DINOS CHAPMAN

DINOS CHAPMAN:
BORN 1962 IN
LONDON, UK
JAKE CHAPMAN;
BORN 1966 IN
CHELTENHAM, UK
BOTH ARTISTS LIVE
AND WORK IN LONDON



For the 17th Biennale, of Sydney the Chapman brothers are presenting *Shitrospective* (2009), a recreation of their oeuvre to date in miniature.

Jake and Dinos Chapman collaborate in creating iconoclastic sculptures, paintings and large-scale installation works.

They are renowned for creating shocking and gruesome works that often make witty and ironic statements about ideas of global politics and vandalism.

The Chapman brothers frequently allude to historical art in their work. In *Disasters of War* (1991) the Chapman's constructed a diorama with plastic figurines re-enacting scenes from Goya's 'Disaster of War' etchings. These etchings reflected on the Napoleonic occupation of Spain from 1808 to 1814, and which formed one of the most severe depictions of barbarian cruelty in graphic arts.

Made out of paint, glue and cardboard, these 'crap versions' of previous works are represented as a kind of 'primitive' branding that echoes the reflexive machinery of both the art market and consumerist capitalism.

One of these works is a mini version of 'The Chapman Family Collection' (2002) – trophies gleaned from exotic locations and destroyed paradises that also bear the infamous stamp of globalisation – McDonald's branding.

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: installation, sculpture, performance
- Structural frame: traditions of sculpture, cultural institutions
- Cultural frame: globalisation, war, politics, violence, colonialism, power
- Postmodern frame: self-referencing, appropriation, satire, parody, hyperbole
- Subjective frame: shocking, disconcerting

QUESTIONS

- What do you think the artists are trying to achieve by re-creating their own work?
- What does the *Shitrospective* series say about the way artists value their own work?
- Research three other artists who use 'poor materials' in their work. Contrast and compare the reasons why these artists use such materials.
- Consider the work of Jake and Dinos Chapman through the postmodern frame. In what ways might their work be considered postmodern?



Jake & Dinos Chapman
Migraine, 2009
cardboard, paste board, newspaper, glue, polystyrene, poster paint
20 x 24 x 24 cm
Copyright © the artist
Courtesy White Cube, London and Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin
Photograph: Jochen Littkeman

YAMAGUCHI AKIRA



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Yamaguchi is presenting three works, Tokei (Tokyo): Hiroo and Roppongi (2002), Construction of Shiba Tower (2005) and Tokei (Tokyo): Shiba Tower (2005). The works will be presented at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Yamaguchi Akira is a Japanese painter who combines the techniques of *Yamato-e* – a classical Japanese style, with the subject matter and presentation of pop-cultural phenomenon such as comics and anime.

He works in acrylic and oils on canvas as well as fine ink on paper.

Yamaguchi's work draws together history, time and space, West and East, as well as hybridisations of humans and machines to create works, which are a testament to an increasingly globalised world.

Traditional *Yamato-e* works often tell a narrative accompanied by text; they are intended to show the beauty of nature, famous places and the four seasons. In Yamaguchi's twist on the style, his paintings depict busy and spectacular collisions of technology, high-density urban areas, nature, the city, and militaristic and automotive technology.

His works contain political undertones, communicated in a humorous and subtle way, through his reference to modern weaponry – alluding to the damaging influence of western ideas on traditional Japanese culture.

Yamaguchi creates mythical worlds, which highlight the influence of older Japanese painting as well as modern virtual imagery.

I bring the element of entertainment into my work in order to draw people in an attempt to lead them to what I mean to represent ... This is not necessarily a mechanism I invented or anything but the embodiment of myself and my being.

— YAMAGUCHI Akira

Junichi Yamashiro, "'Mitate' in Oyamazaki", *Now, Oyamazaki*, Mitsumura Suiko Shoin Publishing, Japan, 2009, p. 78

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: planes, accented, *Yamato-e*, perspective
- Structural frame: urban, appropriation, detail, spectacle
- Cultural frame: tradition, ceremony, craft, narrative
- Postmodern frame: appropriation, irony, pastiche, popular culture
- Subjective frame: viewpoint, contemporary, technique, development

QUESTIONS

- Identify two ways in which Yamaguchi's work is traditional and two ways in which it is contemporary.
- Describe how Yamaguchi has used space in this work to give a sense of an aerial perspective.
- What comment do you think the artist is making about daily experience in large cities in Japan?



Yamaguchi Akira
Construction of Shiba Tower, 2005 (detail)
oil and watercolour on canvas
100 x 380 cm
Courtesy Mizuma Art Gallery, Tokyo
Copyright © YAMAGUCHI Akira

CAI GUO-QIANG

BORN 1957 IN
QUANZHOU CITY, FUJIAN
PROVINCE, CHINA
LIVES AND WORKS IN
NEW YORK, USA



For the 17TH Biennale of Sydney, Cai's Inopportune: Stage One (2004) has been installed in the Turbine Hall on Cockatoo Island. The installation consists of nine cars arrested in an animated sequence of explosion; each identical white vehicle frozen in an arc of detonation, blast, launch, tumbling, gravitational return, and rest. The cars are pierced with pulsing rods of light.

Cai Guo-Qiang is a Chinese artist, most renowned for using gunpowder, fireworks and explosions in his works.

Cai is also well known for his explosion and firework events that began in the late 1980s and have been seen in Tokyo, Hiroshima, Johannesburg, Taipei, New York, Valencia, Edinburgh and Warsaw among other places.

The artist has been commissioned on several occasions to create spectacular firework displays, including his celebrated projects for the Opening and Closing Ceremonies of the 2008 Beijing Olympic Games.

Cai often creates works that take in the aesthetic traditions and myths of Chinese culture, positioned in a nexus of technology, science and art.

Cai's non-art materials are often exhibited in unique, non-art spaces – in 1993 the artist used explosives to increase the length of the Great Wall of China, and his ongoing series Everything is Museum has used sites such as military bunkers and pottery kilns for the presentation of art.

My starting point was not 9/11, but the cultural chaos and thinking that took place after the event. Before it happened attitudes toward other religions – especially the views of Western countries toward Islam – were more open. Afterwards, nearly universal changes came as a result of a never-ending show of suicide bombs performed by young Arab men.

– Cai Guo-Qiang

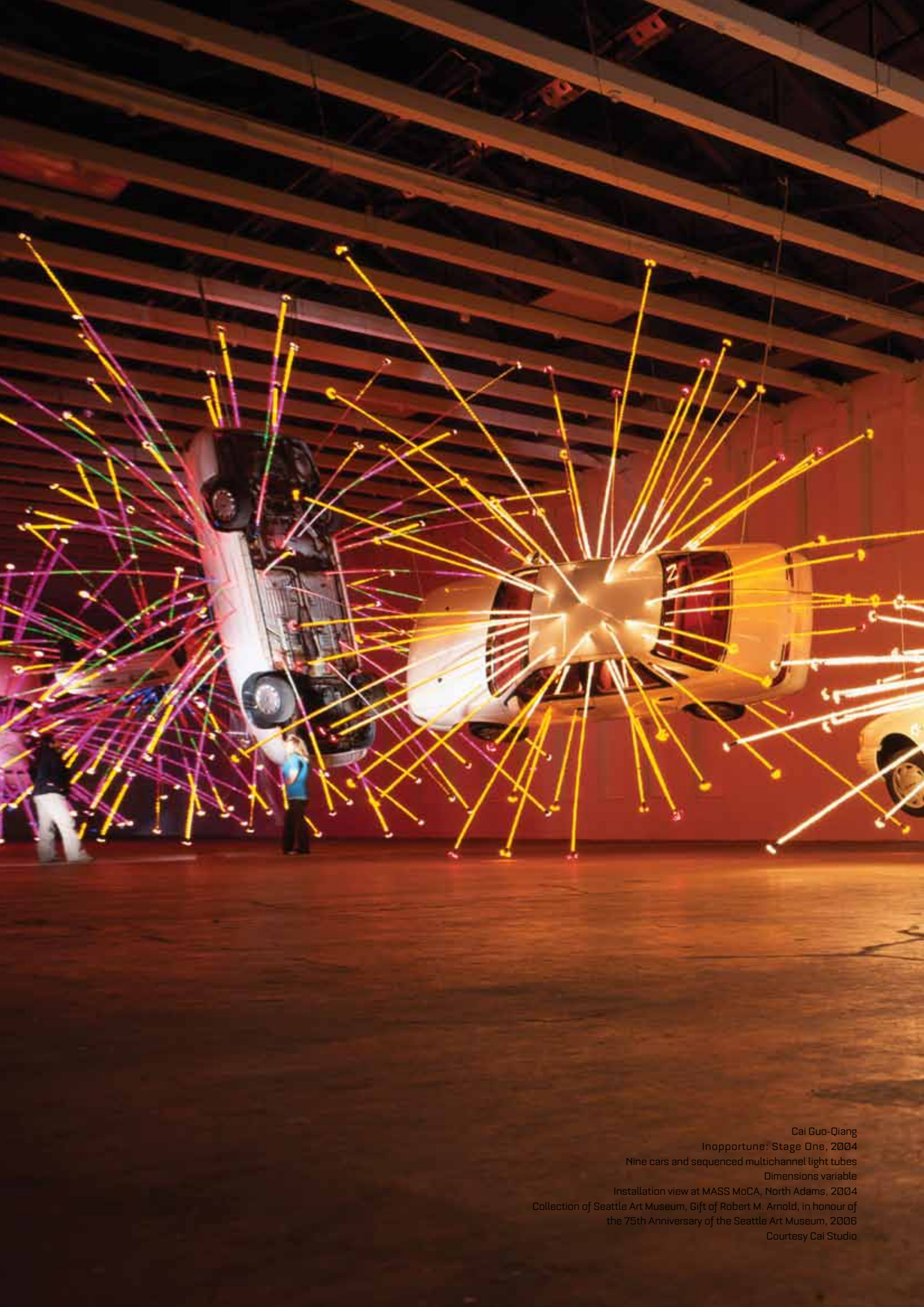
Eddy Soetrijono, 'Cai Guo-Qiang: The Big Bang', C-Arts, vol. 2, 2008

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: explosion events, installation, gunpowder drawings, interventions
- Structural frame: rich symbolism, terrorism, Chinese history and culture, polarities of beauty and terror
- Cultural frame: Taoist philosophy, terrorism, world events, Chinese history
- Postmodern frame: cultural references, re-appropriating traditional practices
- Subjective frame: exciting, awe-inspiring

QUESTIONS

- Investigate Cai's practice and uncover further polarities in his practice such as capitalism/socialism, contemporary art/ academic art, East/West, seen/unseen, local/global.
- Cai uses gunpowder, one of China's most famous inventions to create his 'explosion events'. Gunpowder, meaning 'fire medicine' was originally discovered by Taoist alchemists who were exploring the possibilities of an elixir for immortality. How does the artist's choice of materials add layers to the conceptual strength of his work?



Cai Guo-Qiang
Inopportune: Stage One, 2004
Nine cars and sequenced multichannel light tubes
Dimensions variable
Installation view at MASS MoCA, North Adams, 2004
Collection of Seattle Art Museum, Gift of Robert M. Arnold, in honour of
the 75th Anniversary of the Seattle Art Museum, 2006
Courtesy Cai Studio

KENT monkman



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Monkman will be presenting a suite of four new paintings. One of these, *The Death of Adonis* (2009), depicts a buffalo hunting scene. Miss Chief cradles in her arms the figure of a white man who has apparently been killed in pursuit, while a cowboy on a horse, butted by a survivor from a massacre of buffalos, shoots an accidental bullet into a fellow horsemen riding hot on his heels.

Kent Monkman is a painter, photographer, performance and video installation artist who transforms the homogenising histories of Euro-American descendants, opening up the past for re-examination.

Using his flamboyant alter-ego Miss Chief Eagle Testickle – a glamorous, high-heeled transvestite incarnation of the *berdashe* (effeminate dandy) of North American indigenous cultures – he subtly turns colonial and pioneering myths of the American West into homoerotic playgrounds in orgiastic revisions of nineteenth-century pastoral scenes.

Of Cree and English/Irish ancestry, Monkman is well-placed to take on the complex history of contact between the ‘native’ North American people and European colonisers.

Monkman addresses the imbalance of Eurocentric narratives by including previously excluded ‘Others’ – women and aboriginal people – and by presenting history as a fluid and subjective interplay between fact and fiction, recuperates aboriginal power and customs.

The result is rather a mixed metaphor but one that nonetheless explores the notion of Aboriginal identity, particularly the imposition of a belief system on a culture. It's a re-imagining of the past that questions the basis for many of our beliefs today.

– Kent Monkman

‘Kent Monkman: Re-Imaging History’, interview with Kelvin Browne, ROM, winter 2007

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: painting, photography, performance, video installation
- Structural frame: drag, camp imagery, colonial paintings
- Cultural frame: First Nations, colonialism
- Postmodern frame: re-appropriation, performance, self-reference, satire
- Subjective frame: witty, contemplative

QUESTIONS

- Investigate the elements of performance in Kent Monkman’s paintings, especially his interest in drag and colonial history.
- Analyse Monkman’s paintings through the cultural frame. In what ways does Monkman engage with cultural histories?



Kent Monkman
Sunday in the Park, 2010
acrylic on canvas
182.9 x 274.3 cm unframed
Courtesy Stephen Friedman Gallery, London and TrépanierBaer Gallery,

WANG QINGSONG



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, two large photographs will be displayed: *Debate* (2009) and *Competition* (2004). Both works take the visual noise of advertising as their subject, amplifying it on a gigantic scale.

Wang Qingsong is a photographic artist who stages elaborate *tableau vivant* for the camera.

He uses both digital composite techniques and live theatrical constructions, often involving masses of people, in order to produce large photographic panels. He stages the characters in his scenes in such a way, that they are represented like the heroes from epic historical battles, set against the backdrop of McDonald's and Coca-Cola advertisements.

Qingsong's works involve artistic simulations, as well as interpretations of reality; he often injects himself into his photographic scenes.

The precariousness of rapid economic and social modernisation is a reoccurring theme in his practice.

Using satire, his scenes animate the proliferation of consumerism, waste and excess in contemporary Chinese society. In so doing, Qingsong underscores the inherent challenges, imbalances and ironies in the urban Chinese experience, as China battles to maintain a prominent position in the world economy

[In reference to his work *Competition* (2004)]

The struggle for ad placement in public space in China is not unlike a battlefield strewn with casualties after a pitched battle for power. Today one brand wins. The next day, its competitor will replace it with better positioning on public spaces. Every day, new ads go up, and old ones fall down, scattered in pieces, and discarded on the ground under newly erected billboard advertisements.

– Wang Qingsong
Artist statement, 2004

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: *tableau vivant*, photographic, digital composite techniques, mural, political, economic and social references
- Structural frame: photography, actors/models, large scale photographs, repetition, elaborate scene construction
- Cultural frame: post-modernism, globalisation, consumerism, modernisation, waste, excess, economics, consumer culture
- Postmodern frame: appropriation of recognisable corporate symbols (e.g. McDonald's, Coca-Cola, Nike, Puma) in the context of contemporary Chinese society, ironic social commentary
- Subjective frame: intense, overwhelming, confronting, viral

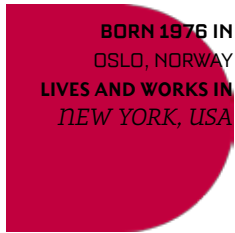
QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, identify how Wang Qingsong uses various techniques in his *tableau vivant* constructions for emphasis (e.g. repetition, deliberate placement of actors, output size, chosen poster materials).
- Describe the key elements of Wang Qingsong's artist practice.
- Research other artists who create constructed photographic scenes, for example Jeff Wall who visually references famous paintings by Édouard Manet and Paul Cezanne in his *tableau* photographs. Are there similarities between their practices (formally, ideologically)?
- Examine Wang Qingsong's meditation on contemporary culture. What commentary is Wang Qingsong making about the world?



Wang Dingsong
Competition, 2004 (detail)
c-type print
170 x 300cm
Courtesy the artist

GARDAR EIDE EINARSSON



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Einarsson has produced a new series of flags based on the Romanian revolutionary flag of 1989. He has cut out the traditional coat of arms featured on this flag and named it Black Flag With Hole [2010]. The flags create a visual embodiment for revolutionary action; a symbolic coup d'état that symbolically removes the state [Romanian Socialist Republic] from the nation [Romania].

Gardar Eide Einarsson is a multi-media artist who uses painting, graffiti, graphics, flyers, videos, photography, sculpture and most notably text, as a means to critique hegemonic power structures.

His practice involves the borrowing of iconic imagery from underground subcultures (namely American counterculture) and combining it with bold font.

He appropriates and devises these snippets of slogans, logos and speech and features them in aluminium speech bubbles, on flags and in bold fonts on light boxes.

Einarsson often employs graphic design techniques formally restricting his work to a black-and-white chromatic palette that references pop-art techniques.

The restriction of Einarsson's colour palette gives his work a confronting, almost clinical aesthetic. This relates to his interest in social transgression and political subversion as a subject matter.

I grew up with a lot of American culture. I was interested in stuff like skateboarding and hardcore music. But growing up in Norway, the whole relationship between the individual and society is very different from what it is in America.

– Gardar Eide Einarsson

'Gardar Eide Einarsson', interview with Christopher Bollen, *Interview*, September 2008

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: black-and-white chromatic aesthetic, slogans, logos, speech bubbles, flags, bold fonts, American counterculture and subculture references, graphic design
- Structural frame: black and white, graphic fonts, layering of text on imagery, recognisable appropriated symbols from subculture (e.g. flags, slogans, logos, speech), stylish, punk
- Cultural frame: American underground subcultures and counterculture, hegemony, power, control, authority, people on the periphery, 70s conceptual art, *coup d'état* (sudden overthrow of a government by small group of existing state establishment), nationalism, hypocrisy, revolt
- Postmodern frame: appropriation of recognisable symbols or text (e.g. flags, text from iconic American films), recontextualisation of meaning
- Subjective frame: looks like advertising, clean and clinical aesthetic, tension between text and image, uncomfortable, aggressive, implicit meaning, social and political action, urgency

QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, what are the key characteristics of Gardar Eide Einarsson's practice?
- A true 'postmodernist', Einarsson favours the incorporation of recognizable symbols in his work. What do his flags highlight about the artist's political comment of the once Romanian Socialist Republic?
- Research other artists interested in social injustice, with a similar graphic design aesthetic to Einarsson – like American Artist Barbara Kruger. What are the similarities and differences in their works?
- Discuss Einarsson's use of text. How does it make you feel? Is the artist being overtly controversial and negative? Do you think he is spelling out for the viewer his personal convictions or is he leaving some of it up to the viewer's own interpretation?

LIBERTY

OR

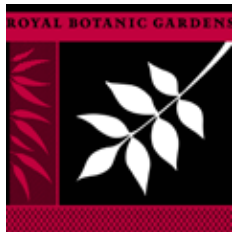
DEATH

Gardar EIDE Einarsson
Liberty or Death, 2006
Cotton and grommet
150 x 250 cm

Private collection, Denmark
Courtesy the artist and Nils Staark, Copenhagen

FIONA HALL

BORN 1953
IN SYDNEY,
AUSTRALIA
LIVES AND
WORKS IN
ADELAIDE,
AUSTRALIA



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Hall has created a new work entitled *The Barbarians at the Gate* [2010]. This work will appear in the Royal Botanic Gardens and will consist of a group of beehives, painted in military camouflage patterns associated with different countries introduced into the gardens.

Fiona Hall is an eclectic artist who works across a wide range of media, ranging from sculpture and painting, to installation, garden design and video.

She transforms a wide range of quotidian materials such as soap, currency, packaging and soft drink cans into objects modelled after natural forms. These works resonate with issues of globalisation, colonisation, ecology and natural history.

By examining the boundaries between the natural and the man-made, Hall reflects on issues of taxonomy, collection, endangerment and extinction.

One hive will contain a live colony of *Trigona carbonaria*, (or Sugarbag Bee) – Hall chose bees because they are considered ‘social insects’, who order themselves into colonies that can be likened to rigorous societal structures.

Each hive will feature the camouflage design of a particular country, with a corresponding rooftop that is traditional to the architecture of the same country. She will also plant grains in the garden adjacent to the hives.

Hall’s actions in this work create a microcosm of the colonial-era nation-building processes of introducing people, plants and animals into foreign habitats, forever changing the ecology of a particular place.

I think I subscribe to the idea that all art is political, in the broader sense, it's part of its time, even if it's an abstract painting. I wouldn't classify myself as a political artist because that's a very narrow area, protest art. But a lot of my recent work touches on environmental politics although I try to get beyond the purely political.

– Fiona Hall

Rosalie Higson, ‘Magic under the surface’, *The Australian*, March 2007

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: every-day materials, organic forms, mixed media - sculpture, painting, installation, garden design, video
- Structural frame: rich symbolism, environmental references, politically charged objects, delicate construction
- Cultural frame: taxonomy, collection, extinction, trade, environment, vulnerability of living things, colonisation, ecology, natural history
- Postmodern frame: natural forms, re-appropriation and re-use of materials
- Subjective frame: poetic, aesthetically pleasing, compelling, provocative, thoughtful, non-aggressive, contemplative

QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, describe the materials Hall has chosen for her beehives. Do you notice any similarities between them? Can you identify the distinctions? Is the location, in the Royal Botanic Gardens, significant to the work?
- Why do you think Hall often parallels man’s parasitic relationship with the natural world with that of the coloniser and the colonised?
- Describe the signs and symbols Hall uses in her work to identify key themes in her practice.
- Discuss the key elements of Fiona Hall’s artist practice with reference to the work *The Barbarians at the Gate*.
- Hall uses camouflage, a politically loaded symbol of invasion. In what ways is she challenging accepted notions of history or patterns of authority?



Fiona Hall
Breeding Ground, 2007
11 painted beehives and planted garden bed
Installation view, Trentham Cottage garden, Port Arthur
Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

SHEN SHAOMIN



Shen Shaomin will be including some new Bonsai's in the 17th Biennale of Sydney as well as a video work entitled Summit [2010]. Summit is a life-size installation depicting a hypothetical meeting of the most significant communist leaders throughout history. The work picks up on discussions about the apparent failure of capitalism and predictions of a return to communist or socialist thought.

Born in Northern China, Shaomin moved to Australia in 1990 where he worked and exhibited in both Sydney and Melbourne, returning to China (Beijing) in 2002 where he now works and lives.

Shaomin's work uses anthropological reference and traditional ancient Chinese culture to comment on contemporary ecological issues, politics and technology.

In the early 2000's, Shaomin created a series of imaginary 'extinct' monstrous creatures; using animal bones and bone meal, he created fictitious creatures, their manipulated form antagonising the modern pre-occupation with genetic modification.

His 2007 work 'Kowtow Pump', combines the ancient Chinese custom of bowing lowly to show deference or submission with the reality of the diminishing resource of oil. The sculpture is a bowing and convulsing – but still operating – version of the oil pumps found throughout China.

Shaomin started his 'Bonsai' series in 2007, appropriating the contrived and controlled nature of this traditional art form to comment on painful aspects of beauty and control in society.

[Bonsai's and foot-binding are]

artificial forms that distort the natural order of growth. Both result in the abuse of the body...both are processes in which deformity is violently imposed in order to fulfil the desire of personal taste.

– Shen Shaomin

DeWitt Cheng, 'Shen Shaomin: Experimental Studio', *Shotgun Review*, 2008

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: anthropological, traditional ancient Chinese culture, sculpture, installation
- Structural frame: anthropological reference, traditional art form
- Cultural frame: ecological issues, traditional ancient Chinese culture, politics, technology, beauty, oil mines
- Postmodern frame: appropriate, anthropological reference, antagonising
- Subjective frame: deference, submission, painful, failure, predictions

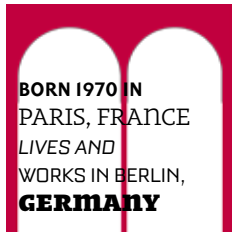
QUESTIONS

- How does the artist's choice of material support the themes within his practice?
- Using the cultural frame, discuss two systems of authority Shaomin is questioning in his works with Bosai.
- What role can you see the audience having in a living work such as the *Bonsai* series, and what significance do you think this has to the work's themes of control?
- Consider the creatures made of bone and bone meal exhibited in the museum context. What role does the museum context have in enhancing Shaomin's comment on assumed authority within biotechnology?
- Compare Shaomin's work to other artists you have seen at the 17th Biennale of Sydney. In what ways do these artists interrogate materials in similar ways? Discuss similar themes you have seen and the significance of the materials used.



Shen Shaomin
Bonsai No. 4, 2007 (detail)
Plant, iron tools
60 x 160 x 50 cm
Courtesy the artist and Osage Gallery

KADER ATTIA



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Attia will show an interactive work titled *Kasbah 2009*. The work fills a space in Cockatoo Island's industrial precinct with rooftop materials collected from improvised dwellings and shantytowns found on the fringes of cities across the world. The viewers will be invited to walk across the roofs in the space, the literal gesture is symbolic of first world western cultures walking over the third world.

Kader Attia was born to Algerian parents in the Paris suburb of Dugny in 1970.

His upbringing in a North African immigrant community, studies in Paris and Barcelona, and three years spent in Congo-Brazzaville and Kinshasa have informed a practice that explores geography, history, gender, politics and philosophy.

His sculptures, installations, videos and photographs focus on discrepancies between how people actually live and how contemporary politicians present the world.

His works engage with important world issues through a poetic negotiation of the experiences and juxtapositions of living within and between different cultures.

In one of his best known works, *Flying Rats* 2005, figures of children moulded from birdseed are slowly eaten away by pigeons – an allegorical scenario conjuring a fear of the powers and predators that shadow every day.

As far as I am concerned, I think that an artwork is more an experience than an object. The shape is only necessary as a reference to its 'history', its historical content, as Michel Foucault would say.

– Kader Attia

Kader Attia email correspondence with Regina Hackett, Seattle PI, 2008

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: sculptures, installations, videos and photographs, geography, history, gender, politics and philosophy
- Structural frame: allegorical scenario, aesthetic references
- Cultural frame: North African immigrant community, geography, history, gender, politics and philosophy, living within and between different cultures
- Postmodern frame: juxtapositions, discrepancies between how people actually live and how contemporary politicians present the world, Michel Foucault
- Subjective frame: They have built my aesthetic references and my way of thinking.

QUESTIONS

- How does Attia antagonize the audience's sense of comfort and contentment in his works?
- How does the interactive element to his works support this?
- What relevance does the artist's cultural background have to his practice?
- Attia explores the themes of power and vulnerability throughout his works, discuss how this is seen in his work *Flying Rats* (2005), and also *Kasbah* showing at the 17th Biennale of Sydney.
- Attia stresses the importance to experiencing his works in person, why do you think this necessary to his works? What is not communicated in image?



Kader Attia

Kasbah, 2009 (detail)

Wood, corrugated iron, tv antennas, satellite dishes, found materials

Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist; Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City; Galerie

Christian Nagel, Cologne/Berlin; and Galerie Krinzinger, Vienna

Photograph: Sala de Arte Público Siqueiros, Mexico City

NEWELL HARRY



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, Newell Harry will present a selection of eight gift mat works in the Museum of Contemporary Art as well as a new neon installation at Pier 2/3 entitled Reverse Missionary (Nerveless Rats Hesitate/As Venereal Theists Rest,], 2010.

Newell Harry's work stems from the experiences and observances of travelling between Australia, Vanuatu and South Africa, and is caught up in the vernacular words, phrases and textures of these distinct places.

His family is originally from South Africa, migrating to Australia to protect Newell from life under the apartheid.

Harry's work carries themes of cultural identity, dislocation, colonialism and nomadic life.

Absorbed from his surroundings, whether seen on rustic Port Vila street signs or snatched as souvenirs from conversations while visiting friends and 'aunties' in various places, foreign words, place names and slang have become the animating material of Harry's works.

Harry re-appropriate phrases such as 'the natives are restless' rearranging the anagram to play with the slippage of different cultural contexts.

In his gift mat series, Harry combines his appropriation of language with woven mats made from pandanus plants, traditionally made by women in Vanuatu. The mats display his chosen phrases adding an additional layer of meaning to his theme of the translation of cultural meanings.

For the gift mat works, Harry commissions weavers from Mataso Island to make these mats with the phrases he chooses, and from a defined palette of five colours.

The castaway is an apt metaphor for the artist, or at least I see it that way in terms of my own sense of narrative, place and family history. Like the castaway, dislocation, exile and exclusion signify a removal, not by choice, but by sheer coincidence and in the case of my family, an escape from the political oppressions of Apartheid.

– Newell Harry
Artist statement, 2009

SYLLABUS KEY WORDS/PHRASES

- Artist practice: phrases and textures, souvenirs, woven, anagrams
- Structural frame: street signs, foreign words, souvenirs
- Cultural frame: Australia, Vanuatu, South Africa, distant places, place names, apartheid, migrating, traditionally, cultural context, colonialism
- Postmodern frame: anagrams, slang, juxtaposing, sharp relief, appropriation of language and meaning
- Subjective frame: absorbed, family

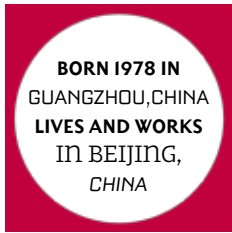
QUESTIONS

- Taking into consideration the text above including the quotes, discuss the key elements to Harry's practice.
- How does the material's used in Harry's work support the artists themes?
- The artist commissions the making of sections of his work, what relevance can you see in this and how does this support the artist's themes?
- Using the postmodern frame, discuss the way in which Harry uses language to antagonize meaning and definition.
- Harry is interested in the last cargo cult, a South Pacific religious group that worship a spirit messiah known as John Frum. Research the last cargo cult and the significance of textiles in their religious custom. How does this add meaning to Harry's gift mat work?



Newell Harry
Untitled (The Drummie / Mummies), 2007
Hand-woven pandanus and dye
118 x 210 cm (irregular)
Courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
Photograph: Ivan Buljan

CAO FEI



Cao Fei's work for the 17th Biennale of Sydney is a video piece shot from within RMB city depicting one of the Lehmann Brothers, Karl Marx and Lao Tsu, discussing ideology, power and money. The work is representative of Fei's generations' skepticism towards weighty topics in an era of economic and ideological uncertainty.

Cao Fei is a young photographer and new media artist from the Pearl River Delta in southern China.

Her work reflects the influence of her upbringing in a media-saturated environment– from early MTV to consumer advertising to Japanese anime.

Cao Fei's work engages China's rapidly developing technological economy as well as new practical possibilities for artmaking.

She utilises a range of cutting-edge interdisciplinary and often collaborative projects to document and negotiate the new social realities of daily life.

One of her most notable series is based on the cultural fad of Cos Players (costume players) – stemming from Anime and Manga culture. In a series of photographs, Cao Fei and other models dress up as different characters. Cao Fei captures their 'magical' powers played out in nondescript post-industrial spaces.

Although rooted in daily life, Cao Fei's work evokes countless possibilities for social transformation in what is one of the most pressured of Chinese urban environments.

For a number of years she has been working on a large chaotic project called RMB City (in reference to the Chinese unit of currency) that exists entirely in Second Life.

I think that animation has a huge cultural influence on the whole world, and there's an influence from the Japanese animation I watched as a child... I wanted to focus on how global youth culture has captured China's younger generations, creating an entirely new urban lifestyle. The project is really a witnessing of urbanization.

– Cao Fei
Cao Fei interview with Artkrush, 2008

SYLLABUS KEYWORDS AND PHRASES

- Artists practice: virtual reality, consumerism, pop culture, photography, installation, multimedia, dance and movement, video
- Subjective frame: daily life, heroes, fantasy, self-image
- Structural frame: costume, photography and composition, colour, 3d, virtual reality, narrative
- Cultural frame: manga, anime, contemporary eastern and western dance, western consumerism in an eastern context, everyday realities for workers in china, urbanization
- Postmodern frame: pop culture, second life – virtual reality versus lived reality, avatars

QUESTIONS

- Using the cultural frame, discuss Cao's primary concerns throughout her works. What sorts of ideas flow through her work? What are the recurrent themes and motifs?
- Cao's practice involves many media (ie: Photography, Video, VR). Why do you think she has chosen these art forms over traditional chinese methods of creation?
- What is the overall impact of RMB City, and China Tracy (Cao's Avatar)? Can you pick out the culturally significant motifs? Why would she choose these?



Cao Fei
Untitled (People's Limbo), 2009 (detail)
Second Life
Courtesy of RMB City © 2009
RMB City Project is developed by Cao Fei (SL: China Tracy) and Vitamin
Creative Space
Facilitator: Uli Sigg (SL: UliSigg Cisse)

PETER HENNESSEY



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney Hennessey will show a new sculptural work, *My Hubble* (2010), in the Turbine Hall at Cockatoo Island. The work is an actual-size 're-enactment' of the Hubble Space Telescope – a space-based observatory that has revolutionised astronomy by providing deep and clear views of the universe – aims to give the viewer a unique, physical experience of the object.

Peter Hennessey is an Australian artist who originally studied architecture, and has worked in interactive design and technical consultation.

His sculptural works are often constructed on a large scale and refer to his fascination with scientific phenomena and highly popularised events. These events and objects are often things we would only be able to view in two-dimensional images – they are completely mediated experiences.

My Hubble is constructed from plywood and other easily accessible materials, his use of the commonplace relates to his attempt to bring the mediated object back into the known and physically accessible.

Balanced on a huge scaffolding tower, *My Hubble* focuses on a small platform covered with multicoloured plasticine and sand. Visitors are free to play with this, to modify it to create their own universes – or to do it for others – for the people looking through the other end at that moment. *My Hubble* then 'beams' back images of these strange environments to the rear (top) of the object via a series of lenses and mirrors.

I choose to work with a limited palette of materials - plywood, galvanised steel, canvas – to make obvious the process of transformation that has taken place. This DIY aesthetic is important to the work. The fact and process of making them myself is part of the project. This is my moon landing, not NASA's. It is not the moon landing but a moon landing; a particular instance of the idea of the moon landing made real by me.

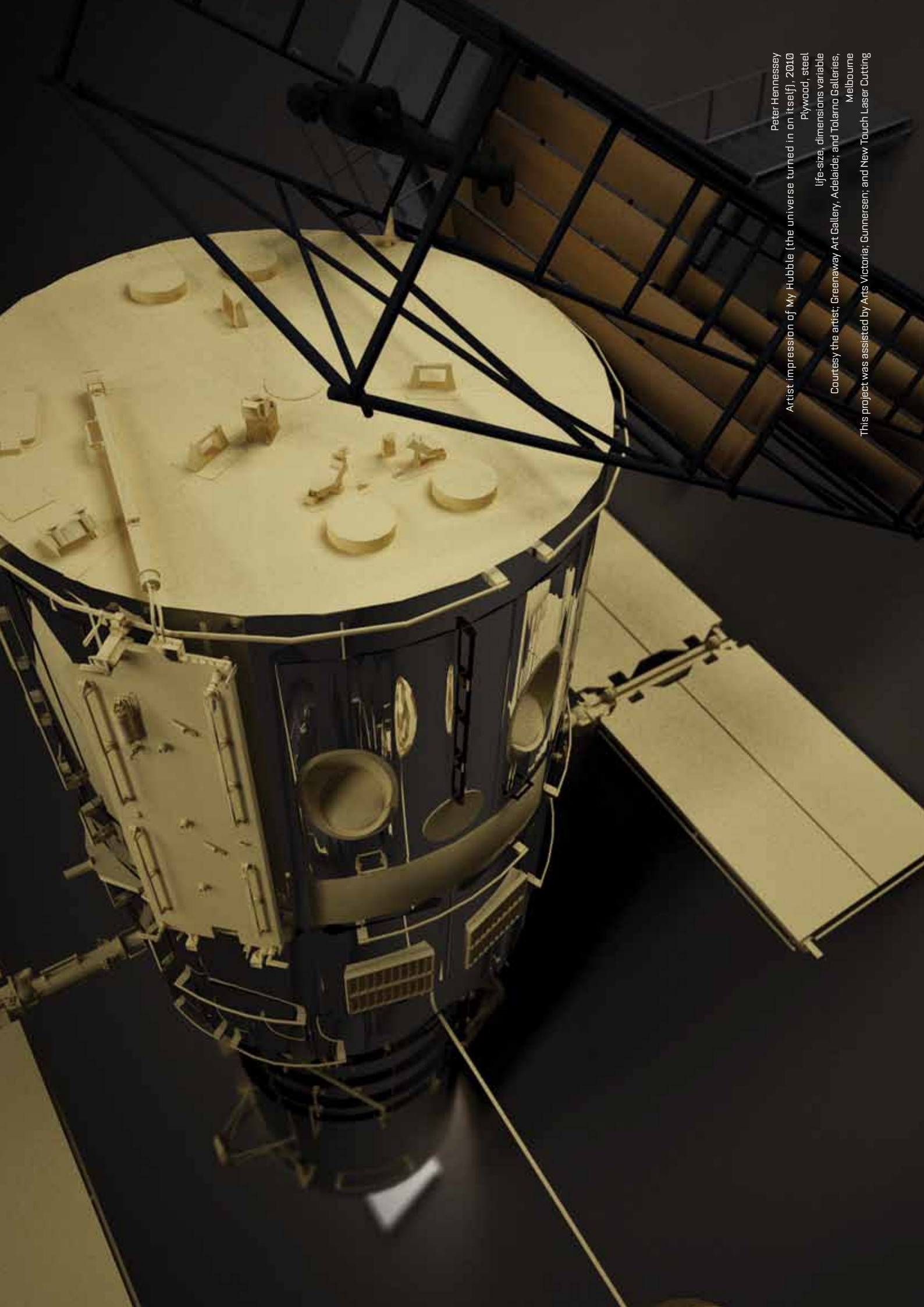
– Peter Hennessey
Artist statement, 2005

SYLLABUS KEYWORDS AND PHRASES

- Artists practice: construction, DIY aesthetic, sculpture, physicality versus imagery, critique on media saturated society, scientific, space programs
- Structural frame: scale, construction, DIY aesthetic, physical size, interactive art objects
- Cultural frame: media saturation, news images, American politics and society, NASA and its role in American society, space race
- Postmodern frame: pop art, consumerism, critiquing society's susceptibility to media transmitted imagery, 'restaging'
- Subjective frame: impressive, engaging, personal

QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, consider the materials which Hennessey uses, and the complex concepts which he is trying to present. Why is he juxtaposing such opposing ideas? What is he trying to convey?
- In what ways do you think Hennessey's architectural practice informs his artistic practice?
- Hennessey comments on the nature of institutions and governments through his work, what is he trying to raise an awareness of?
- Using the above information, what is Hennessey trying to say about our 'experience' of what happens in the world?
- Discuss the significance of the title of Hennessey's work, *My Hubble*, with respect to his artist practice.



Peter Hennessey
Artist impression of My Hubble (the universe turned in on itself), 2010

Plywood, steel
life-size, dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist, Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide; and Tolarno Galleries,
Melbourne
This project was assisted by Arts Victoria, Gunnersen, and New Touch Laser Cutting

ROBERT MACPHERSON

BORN 1937 IN

BRISBANE,
AUSTRALIA
LIVES AND WORKS
IN BRISBANE,
AUSTRALIA



For the 17th Biennale of Sydney, MacPherson will present the work "Chitters: A Wheelbarrow for Richard, 156 Paintings, 156 Signs." (1999–2000). This work contains 156 paintings of roadside advertisements typical to rural areas that are installed in three rows. Some of the language on the signs reads: 'pebbles all sizes', 'mossy bush rocks', 'fishing bait' and 'roast chickens'.

Robert MacPherson is an Australian artist who uses language and text, repetition and references to the history of painting to draw an intimate and nostalgic recollection of his upbringing in rural Australia.

His art investigates the quality, imagery and character of the landscape and colloquial language.

MacPherson's artistic practice involves combining materials and information from everyday life such as blankets, shovels, cars, paint brushes, road signs, frogs, eggs, and chickens – with a greater conceptual framework relating to minimalist art and art of the 1960's.

He is interested in the extinction of indigenous culture and nature and his work is heavily coded with components of indigenous culture and historical references to dissipating cultural practices such as cattle droving.

MacPherson promotes the ordinary vernacular of the everyday, by using a direct painting style (often black & white) and referencing minimalist art historical practices

My interest in painting is refreshed by frequent experimentation with new techniques, compositions, and subject-matter. These experiments keep me excited and curious about the process of making art.

– Robert MacPherson
Artist statement, www.robertmacpherson.com

SYLLABUS KEYWORDS AND PHRASES

- Artists practice: repetition, local vernacular, minimalism, signs, permutation, seriality, black & white, coded, large-scale installation, personal work referencing his upbringing in rural Australia
- Structural frame: masonite boards, black and white, local vernacular, large-scale installation, personal titles for works (e.g. *Mayfair: Summer Farm, forty five signs* for Micky Monsour named after his favourite sandwich shop in Brisbane), simple and straight-forward constructions
- Cultural frame: use of colloquial rural language, descriptions of rural landscape, imagery, environmentalism, sentimentality, humour, evocative word-play
- Postmodern frame: appropriation of rural roadside signs, minimalist re-constructions
- Subjective frame: elegant, poetic, provocative, humorous, legible, conceptual

QUESTIONS

- Using the structural frame, consider the materials MacPherson uses. How is his use of rudimentary materials significant to the work?
- MacPherson restricts the text within each masonite panel. Why do you think he does this?
- The artist selects each word deliberately based on his personal connections to the rural landscape where he grew up. Create your own visual poetry by selecting language that reminds you of your neighbourhood and arrange it like MacPherson. How does it make you feel? Can you visualize your neighbourhood without literally seeing it?
- Look at Macpherson's work carefully. Try and find as many different combinations as you can. Can you find any interesting or funny combinations of words? How do the combinations differ from the words when they stand alone?
- What do you think MacPherson is trying to say about our culture by showing us signs we might find on the side of the road? What is he saying about nostalgia, memory and times that have passed?



Robert MacPherson
"Chitters: A Wheelbarrow for Richard, 156 Paintings, 156 Signs."
1999-2000
Acrylic on masonite
156 panels, 122 x 91.5 cm each

