

24 exhibitions for 25 years



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James Joyce observed in his novel *Ulysses* that twenty-four hours could be a lifetime. As an early twentieth-century ‘psychogeographer’, the novel’s protagonist, Leopold Bloom, a modern day Ulysses, wends his way through Dublin’s urban landscape reflecting upon the hourly events of 16 June, 1904. Apart from traversing Dublin and the states of consciousness of Bloom’s mind, the temporal coordinates of the book’s eighteen chapters begin at 8 am and end sometime after 2am the following morning. If the temporal spatial economy of literary modernism finds one of its ‘ur’ foundations in Joyce’s *Ulysses* and also the blinding *augenblick* speed of modernity in cinema’s 1/24th of a second in the work of art in the age of mechanical reproducibility thesis of Walter Benjamin, then the mathematically inclined process and conceptual art of the 1970s must be its apogee.¹

The curatorial premise for the exhibition 24/25 was straightforward—Blair French, Executive Director of Artspace curated twenty-four one-hour exhibitions by artists who had exhibited at Artspace during the twenty-five years of its existence.² The final programming of artists to this ‘birthday celebration’ represented a diverse range of practice, from artists in early, mid to late careers, including many senior artists in Australia and two from New Zealand with close connections to both Artspace and Australia—Jim Allen, a founding member of Artspace and former head of Sydney College of Art and Julian Dashper, a regular Sydney exhibitor. 24/25 actually took place during a twelve-hour period over Saturday and Sunday, 1-2 November, from 11am to 5.00pm, with simultaneous exhibitions in each of the gallery rooms.³

The wall in Artspace’s Gallery 2 was covered with posters from exhibitions of a quarter-century of work including performances, conferences and special events such as fundraisers, screenings, book launches, catalogues and journals. Gracing purpose-built pine tables, looking rather like an Art and Language survey exhibition circa 1987, were twenty-five red bound volumes with xeroxed pages covering twenty-five years of Artspace programming and all Artspace publications. These two ensembles of artifacts alone represented an amazing treasure trove of documentation for any MA or PhD student in contemporary art history, curatorial and/or critical studies. Given the exigencies and conditions of the curatorial premise and that each artist had a single hour in which to exhibit, they demonstrated diverse approaches to the invitation, with the majority of artists providing DVDs and documents from previous work; some reprising

performances and installations undertaken at Artspace or other ‘theatres of operation’, galleries, museums and public contexts, which essentially acted as an *aide-mémoire* to their practice as artists. Those unable to attend the celebration were represented with documentation from previous work. Artist’s contributions that appeared, for want of a better word—‘fresh’—in this context, and therefore much appreciated by the audience, were those especially conceived for the event. For example, Denis Beaubois’ *Video for Then, Sight through Time* (2008), a work that oddly communicated to this writer a Joycean stream of consciousness. The form of *Video for Then* was elegantly minimal. Beaubois had video-documented Gallery 3, to which his exhibition was assigned, and subsequently sent this video footage to a professional clairvoyant who studied the document and attempted through closed circuit television to forecast and describe the audience present between 1-2 pm on the night of 1 November. In Beaubois’ terms:

*As predictive sight is brought into current time, the spectators, present at the time of the screening, become the focus of the clairvoyant’s vision. The psychic interpretation attempts to function as a closed circuit video where the electronic real time medium (of CCTV) is substituted by the predictive psychic medium, thereby fostering a remote reading of the future audience in space and time.*⁴

This work is somewhat reminiscent of Dan Graham’s minimalist CCTV video performances (*Time Delay Relay*) works of the early 1970s, with the difference that the use of clairvoyance privileges metaphysics—perhaps pataphysics—over phenomenology.

The exhibitions of Saturday morning provided an opportunity to view videotapes presented by two of the most seasoned exhibitors, Jim Allen and Mike Parr—both strong supporters of Artspace. Neither artist could attend the exhibition, so they sent work that could be presented in the allotted time. Allen’s *Hanging By A Thread* consisted of a video documentation of a performance first staged in 1976 under the title *Newspaper* at the Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, and later restaged at the Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth in New Zealand, 2006. This re-enactment was documented by two cameras. The first filmed the artist as he repeatedly read and screwed up a daily newspaper until it entirely disintegrated, while the second as a self-reflexive exercise documented the first cameraman, accompanied by a soundtrack of crumpling paper. According to the artist the structure of the work is essentially polyphonic dealing with several superimposed strands at once, alternating between differentiated and undifferentiated modes of perception. The film is his response to Lydia Clark’s fantasy that sees the world as a great animal. “Within its breast inhabits a bird-food for a lion which inhabits its belly. Ritual, feast, with the bird being reborn each day in order to be devoured by the lion.”

Mike Parr’s *House of Cards*,⁵ a 16mm film transferred to DVD for projection, also provided a document from an earlier work, in this case performed in closed session at Artspace in 2004.⁶ It consisted of the artist building a house of cards using a self-portrait work from a decade earlier titled *[ALPHABET/HAEMORRHAGE]*, which employed the artist’s *Black Box of 100 Self Portrait Etchings 2*. The cards were placed on the floor as the camera documents Parr slowly, and what appears to be painfully, building a fragile house of cards, the autographic signature stump of his left arm assisting his right in undertaking this task. Parr described this poetically as: “A delicate bathetic transcendence, an open attenuated impression of the ‘House of Being’ adrift on the ocean of time.” The “House of Cards” action was completed when the final self-portrait was in place, without the fragile structure succumbing to the weight of auto architecture.

Kathy Cavaliere presented a new work titled *Loved*, consisting of a video of the artist dressed up as a colourful rag doll discarded onto a city garbage dump. But like an inanimate mannequin kissed by her lover the doll came to life as the artist in Gallery 1, who dressed in the same costume tap-danced and sung, somewhat self consciously, in front of the projection. Apart from the political references to environmental degradation and the power of recycling, this performance also invoked George Bernard Shaw’s version of *Pygmalion*. His play was based upon Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* and the story of Pygmalion—the melancholic sculptor of Greek mythology from the town of Amathus on the island of Cyprus—who although passionately devoted to his art, found pleasure and happiness only in the silent company of the statues of the deities that he sculpted from



Page 69: Kathy Cavaliere and Edmund Iffland, *Loved*, 2008 Photo courtesy the artists

Page 70: Joan Grounds, *El Sueño Rojo (The Red Dream)*, 2008 Photo courtesy the artist

Page 71: The Kingpins Photo courtesy the artists and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

Page 72 left: Julie Rrap, *Ice Pick* (from the series *Not A-Muse*), 2008 Photo courtesy the artist, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

Page 72 right: Artspace historical publications



ivory and marble. The artist's melancholy was attributed to his disgust at the wanton sexuality of the Propoetides, girls from his city-state, who had denied the divinity of Aphrodite (Venus). To punish them the Goddess inspired in them such immodesty that losing all shame, they would prostitute themselves to all comers. As a result of their lasciviousness, they were punished yet again by being transformed into rocks. Pygmalion, who shunned women but fervently venerated Aphrodite, one day found a perfect piece of ivory and decided to create a sculptured likeness of her that he named Galatea (Sleeping Love). In a short time he became enamoured with his sculpture and although he caressed and kissed her, the cold artifact did not respond to his passionate advances. Recognising Pygmalion's devotion to her through this fetishistic attention to her likeness, Aphrodite took pity on him and while one day embracing the cold statue the sculptor felt the inert figure move and his kisses were soon returned by his object of desire. It takes some time for Pygmalion (like Narcissus) to recognise that the object of desire that he has lost, is actually himself. Cavaliere deftly places the viewer in the place of Pygmalion.

Several works explored Australian politics in ways that encouraged a desire to experience the original context for their production and exhibition, and to engage in conversation with the artists and their collaborators. The presentation in Artspace lacked the presence of texts that would enable a confrontation with the original context for the work in a satisfactory manner to provide intellectual stimulation and hopefully edification. Derek Kreckler's *Flash in the Pan* (2006) provided a powerful image of a gas well flaring but with the artist dancing in a smaller screen inside the larger accompanied by country and western music. The viewer could not be sure whether the gas well was a cause for celebration or critique. It would have been helpful to know whether political or libidinal economy was being privileged here. Walter Benjamin's direction in his 1934 lecture *Author as Producer*, for the photographer to add the text to the image that will "wrench it from modish commerce and provide it with some revolutionary value" is a necessary consideration for this work.

Elizabeth Day's contribution was *Garden for Forgotten Peoples*, a relational work that was developed in collaboration with prison inmates from the Dillwynia Correctional Centre.⁷ Here again a complex and multi-dimensional work from two years earlier did not fare well in this one-hour format; rather like viewing the theatrical residue of a performance work when the event is long over. The artist's *Thistle Painting* (2008) employing handmade thistles, two dollar shop flowers and plastic buckets, diminished the critical and operative power of the artist's collaborative project with the prisoners at the correctional centre. This work was information heavy, that perhaps for her colleagues and Artspace insiders was probably received information, but for outsiders it remained a somewhat distant and problematic work.

Mark Titmarsh's *Chromophiliac* (2008) took as its theme the artist's fascination with colour. The primary questions appeared to be whether performance could be a vehicle for understanding and experiencing colour and whether the act of pouring, dribbling and throwing paint, as well as paint swatches, coloured paper and coloured plastic objects could be nominated as an abstract painting. Well yes, with the historical evidence in colour theory from Goethe and Chevreuil to Albers and beyond, and the examples of painting performance by Yves Klein, George Mathieu (*Mondo Cane*), Jackson Pollock and many others. The seriousness of Titmarsh's phenomenological observations and

questions about colour, deriving from his reading of Martin Heidegger and Maurice Merleau-Ponty, seemed lost in the performance, which in its delivery was more like a hybrid of an Allan Kaprow happening and a slapstick performance by the Kipper Kids. However, the candour with which the artist performed his work provided some of the most humorous moments of the two days.

Another inquisition into the nature of colour was provided by Julian Dashper's *Untitled (I'm Afraid of Red, Yellow and Blue #3)*, one of the most minimal, historically exacting and eloquent painted works performed 24/25.⁸ This 'painting' consisted of three tiny acrylic dots painted on the three walls of Gallery 1, stylishly executed in a few minutes with a 1mm pointed brush by an assistant. Dashper's riposte to Barnett Newman's *Who's afraid of red yellow and blue?* is a minor *détournement* (like Duchamp's drawn moustache on the Mona Lisa) with intellectual, if not visual power, that almost matches the Newman original.

Julie Rrap's *Ice Pick*, from the series bearing the punning title *Not-A-Muse* (2008), consisted of twenty cast ice stiletto heeled shoes fixed to the wall that were left to melt slowly through the one hour of her exhibition. Unfortunately the gallery was not warm enough to expedite the thorough melting process, another instance of more time being necessary for the completion of a time-based artwork. The conceptual schema however was intact and this writer ruminated on the use of melting ice in works by Alan Sonfist, Laurie Anderson and Hans Haacke among others, as well as the use of femme fatale stilettos in noir and neo-noir and of course, the use of ice picks as murderous weapons in western literature and films.

With the dominating presence of time-based work, video and performance, one would have anticipated painting and sculptural installation to be diminished in this exhibition, but upon reflection each work probably obtained as much attention as any painting hung in a museum or commercial gallery. But the decision to place a painting on a wall for one hour and then take it down must have presented a conundrum to artists whose exhibitions were usually up for several weeks and when purchased, could perhaps remain in place, accruing value for a life-time.

Undaunted by the prospect of showing his painting for thus one hour, Matthys Gerber chose to exhibit *rala rala* (2007), an oil on canvas, two-colour painting folded along its vertical centre like a Rorschach blot. With its references to 1960s abstract painting, pop art and indigenous Australian painting, this work revealed its status both as postmodern pastiche and Deleuzian excess. Nuha Saad's *Pegasus Ace Annex* (2001-07), was very low-key, mixed media with faux nineteenth-century MDF skirting boards painted blue, orange and yellow green. The work determined by the architectural space of the gallery, was installed, dismantled and then stored for recycling into its next iteration in a new space. This humble work reinforced the quotidian characteristics of the exhibition and resisted the valorisation and commoditisation of the event.

Eugenia Raskopoulos' *Utterances* (2008), a DVD projection 3'34 seconds in length (in homage to John Cage's iconic work) was an image/sound/text montage of stochastic utterances that underpin affective language. "Repetition is a constant in the work and is used to fragment and interrupt" a refining and redefining of the substrates of language."⁹

Domenico de Clario's *A Tertiary World* (2008) was an extraordinary self-portrait/document of the artist's life within a grid of seven suburban streets in Melbourne, bordered by Carlton's Lygon Street, Victoria Street, Brunswick's Park Street and Collingwood's Smith Street. De Clario wandered through these streets recording his journey with a video camera attached to the end of a purpose-built aluminium frame strapped to his chest. The resulting footage forms a video that shows de Clario's face and the receding streetscape as he navigates the memory of a life lived within this grid.

Joan Grounds' *The Red Dream* (2008) was a powerfully meditative work. The artist wore a smock and sat stoically for an hour on a chair in the middle of Gallery 1, her hands, coated with cochineal powder, resting on her lap. Blindfolded by blue cord wound around her head, the string trailed out of the gallery into the public space of Woolloomooloo to a lamp-post just past the traffic lights adjacent to the gallery. The blue cord led up to and was wrapped around a small tree that was tied to the pole about three meters above the ground. Grounds' work was infused with mourning and melancholy, evident in her still and silent presence. Although somewhat opaque in meaning, the artist's *Trauerarbeit* (mourning work) did not require communication to her itinerant viewers for an instant empathetic appreciation to occur.

For this writer the most intellectually satisfying performance work was Wade Marynowsky's extraordinary *Olympia: the sneezing automaton* (2008), a robotic performance with sound and dresses courtesy of Susan Marynowsky, the artist's mother. This genesis of this work was in the artist's (and Freud's) reading of E.T.A. Hoffman's 1917 essay 'The Sandman', exploring the uncanny (*unheimlich*) and human relationships to the automaton. Brilliantly uncanny, this performance was spectacular even without the computer intelligence and the artist directing their movements, these robots would not have seemed out of place at the Bauhaus in an Oskar Schlemmer gesture dance.



This work engaged the spectators' attention and provided some light relief to some of the campier performances in the roster, such as expatriate Deej Fabyc's *Cat House Camp* (2008), a video of a performance event that was recorded at Toynbee studios in London. Specially produced for presentation at 24/25, Fabyc's video depicts the artist dressed convincingly as Andy Warhol "voguing and then channelling" Valerie Solanos, the woman who shot Warhol, and Niki de Saint Phalle, the eccentric French sculptor.

Mark Brown's *Detritical ReVibration* (2002-08) also took as its impetus a prior installation at Artspace in 2002. In the original presentation industrial paint fragments found in the vicinity of the Kurnell Oil Refinery were placed in a shallow metal tray and sound recordings from the originating site were transmitted through the metal tray. A live feed of this vibrating detritus was then projected onto a wall in the gallery. For 24/25, Brown extended the work by manipulating the footage, adding new sounds and projecting it back onto the gallery wall. For regular Artspace constituents this work was a satisfying continuation of Brown's interdisciplinary practice.

George Tillianakis' DVD *Liturgia: A Performer in Rehearsals* (2008) explored the artist's obsession with heroin for almost five years even though he had never taken the drug, or had a desire to take it. The video explores how Tillianakis confronted problematic elements in his life and sought control through an identification with the lifestyle of a heroin user, and the way the drug affects the equilibrium of life.

The Kingpins provided a similar satirical familiar performance to women's performance groups The Guerilla Girls and the Canadian-based Hummer Sisters. Their hour long *Starbucks Requiem*, 2008 and *Jingle Requiem* started somewhat late for the large assembled audience but soon proved to be worthy of the wait. Described as a "bookend action" to their 2003 public performance intervention *Welcome to the Jingle*, the Kingpins' performance consisted of a video projection—"a guerrilla interventionist performance piece drag show with dance routines"—directed at the demise of Starbucks stores in Sydney.

In *Jingle Requiem*, the Kingpins, dressed as the lost souls of Starbucks, completed their aesthetic gesture to the corporation by returning to the Starbucks' sites to perform the stores' last death rites. The Kingpins revisited the *Starbucks Requiem* for 24/25 as both performance documentations of the public action and as a live mock mass for the coffee crew. Four costumed female drummers performed a live Starbucks' requiem, while the Kingpins' track team 'played dead and buried' in the gallery. Although the timing of the event seemed a little late, the loud drumming provided by four masked drummers dressed in black provided a suitable closure to the Sunday evening exhibitions.

The final party on the Sunday night in the Tilbury Hotel offered the opportunity for the artists and their invited guests to celebrate 24/25 in style. It is fitting that Artspace is less worthy of a requiem than Starbucks and hopefully its next twenty-five years will be just as outstanding.

Notes

¹ The participating artists were: Jim Allen, Brook Andrew, Denis Beaubois, Mark Brown, Kathy Cavaliere, Domenico de Clario, Julian Dashper, Elizabeth Day, Richard Dunn, Mikala Dwyer, Deej Fabyc, Matthys Gerber, Joan Grounds, The Kingpins, Derek Kreckler, Wade Marynowsky, Mike Parr, Eugenia Raskopoulos, r e a, Julie Rrap, Nuha Saad, Jill Scott, George Tillianakis, and Mark Titmarsh

² The two-day celebration was preceded by a performance of The Loop Orchestra

³ Denis Beaubois, notes for the exhibition

⁴ *House of Cards* was performed in closed session in the side gallery at Artspace at 1pm on Sunday 2 May 2004. Mark Bliss filmed the performance in 16mm and Tiegun Kollosche recorded sync sound. Felizitas Parr, Dobrila Stamenovic, Garry Manson, Adam Geczy, Todd McMillan and Mark's assistant Michael, were all in attendance

⁵ This was a closed session performance that took place at 1.00pm Sunday 2 May

⁶ Giorgio Agamben, Ronald L. Martinez trans, 'Stanzas: Word and Phantasm in Western Culture', *Theory and History of Literature*, Vol 69, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. Agamben includes a number of Pygmalion images from manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and Bibliotheque Nationale

⁷ "The idea for a contemporary and symbolic garden began in 1997 when Elizabeth Day, a creative arts teacher based at Long Bay had an idea for a garden at the Industrial Training Centre (ITC). The idea for a garden at Long Bay had to be placed on hold as the original site was targeted for redevelopment. Luckily, some years later, Luke Grant, Senior Assistant Commissioner Inmate Services, approved the commencement of another garden project at the Dillwynia Correctional Centre." <http://www.elizabethday.com.au/collaborative.html>

⁸ *Untitled (I'm afraid of red, yellow and blue #3)*, 2008 is from a series of five works made by Julian Dashper in response to the five paintings of Barnett Newman each entitled *Who's afraid of red, yellow and blue*. To date, the four other works of Dashper's have been shown in Sydney (#1 and #3), Chicago and Amsterdam. #5 still awaits production

⁹ Walter Benjamin, in paper presented at the Institute for the Study of Fascism, Paris, 27 April 1934