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Linked

connectivity and exchange

10 DECEMBER 2005 - 5 MARCH 2006
Curated by Charlotte Huddleston

LINKED: CONNECTIVITY AND EXCHANGE

We live in a world of networks, an epoch of simultaneity, juxtaposition and dispersal where "our experience of the world is less that of a long life developing through time than that of a network that connects points and intersects with its own skin."¹ Networks are complex, interconnected systems made up of components that can be referred to in terms of their place, or site, within a particular system. In turn, place, which can be defined by proximity of elements to each other, is a set of changing relations. If we take as a foundation Michel Foucault's view that we live within a set of relations that delineate sites, then any attempt to describe these different sites through a set of relations, leads to a definition of a particular state.² *Linked: connectivity and exchange* is concerned with interactions made via the established systems and practices that make up the sphere of inter-human relations.

Within this sphere an individual's place in a network is determined by their power and agency (and vice versa). The artists in this exhibition are engaging with particular realities of interconnectivity through direct use of and reference to the devices and practices of current social, political and economic actualities – the internet, information technology, commodity exchange, organisational structures and the media. Raqs Media Collective describe their work as an attempt to be present and attentive to the world and to the histories that preface and prepare their encounters. This observant attitude is shared by all of the artists in the exhibition; their work, and even their manner of practice, highlights the weave of the social fabric within which everyday transactions are enmeshed.

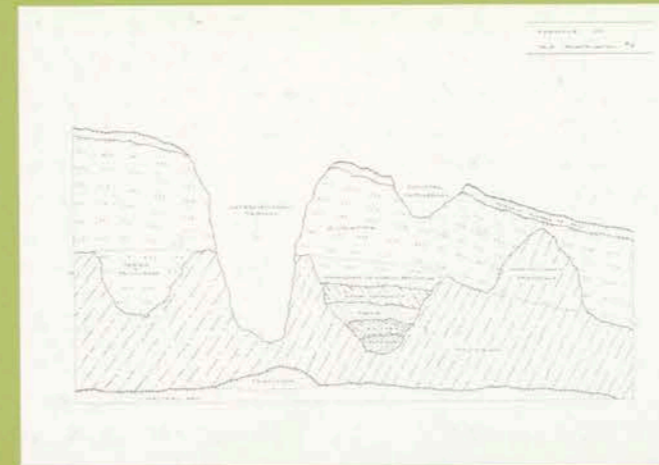
In *Self portrait of the artist as a café worker* 2005 **Liz Allan** makes a conscious engagement with the framework of both artist and service worker. Allan uses the stylised interaction between service worker and customer to investigate social exchange from within a commodified environment. As part of her self portrait, Allan is working in Cafe Govett-Brewster, reframing the daily gestures of the café worker, examining social codes and values surrounding the roles of service worker, customer and artist. She is tapping into the artistic histories of realism and of everyday actions as

performance, similar to artists Christine Hill and Bonnie Sherk, through an expansion of "the concept of art to include, and even be life."³ Allan's self portrait is modelled on the Édouard Manet painting *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* 1882. Late 19th century Paris witnessed the dawn of mass consumption and along with it changes to the established system of art by commission. The vulgarity of displaying wares bazaar-like in department stores and the Salon was hotly debated in art and literature and Manet played a vital part. The direct gaze of the bar worker and the display of saleable goods in *A bar at the Folies-Bergère* "parallels the situation of the modern artist who, lacking government patronage, had to sell art on the open market. ... [revealing] Manet's identification of his art with products for sale."⁴

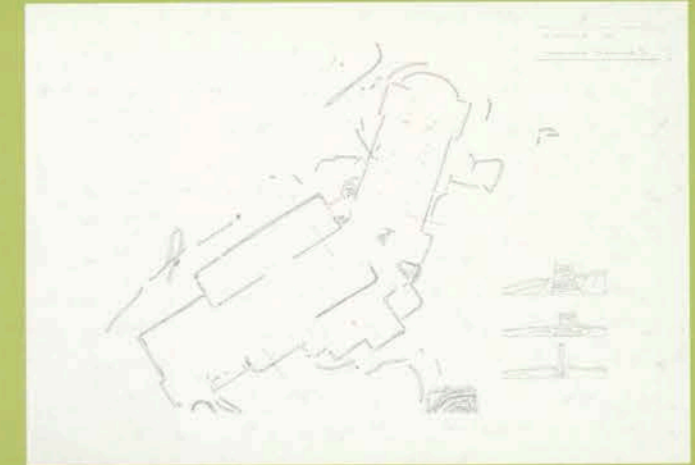
Allan contemporises the roles, and thereby the numerous subtleties of debate surrounding Manet's painting, reflecting the changes that these roles and the framework they are situated within have undergone.⁵ Like many artists Allan works part-time in the hospitality industry, and is familiar with the codes and practices she is addressing in the work. *Self portrait of the artist as a café worker* is a critical reframing of what Allan does in her daily life both as an artist and a worker. Allan's activity not only reveals subtleties between the roles of artist and worker, it also calls into question audience expectations of interaction with the artist as Allan plays the dual role of the artist and waitress.

Maddie Leach activates a different space through her work *Lawson Cypress stack (or how to enjoy working with wood)* 2005. In continuation of her examination of the spaces and activities that facilitate interaction, Leach employs the mechanism of trade to involve the audience in a project of interpersonal and economic exchange. The work consists of a cube of milled timber in the form of 40, three metre long planks of Lawson Cypress, stacked to dry in preparation for a small building project. The timber is accompanied by the complete back catalogue of *The smallfarmer* journal, published by the Taranaki based organisation Small Farming. The organisation was established in the late 1970s to cater to the business and lifestyle of small landholders. Due to decreasing membership the

Below: PATRICK POUND: *With outstretched arms* 2000 – ongoing



DANE MITCHELL *Example of true stratification* #5 2004



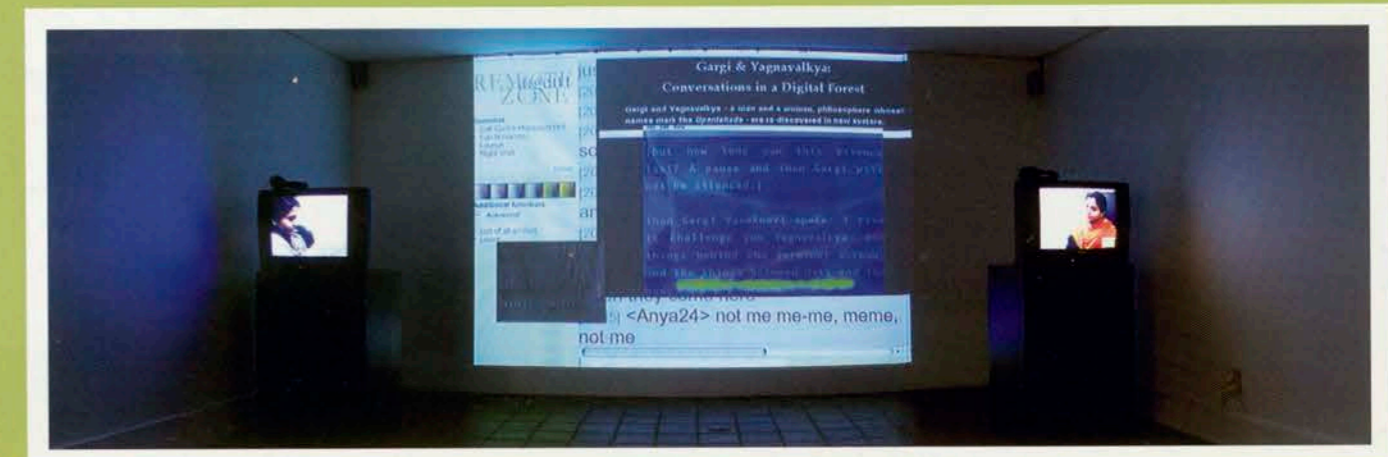
DANE MITCHELL *Example of mnemonic structure* #2 2004



MADDIE LEACH *Lawson Cypress stack (or how to enjoy working with wood)* 2005



Lawson Cypress stack (or how to enjoy working with wood) (detail) 2005



RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)* 2003

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organisation will close down in early 2006.⁶ The journals are a link to a community archive that is a valuable resource for sustainable living and, in the light of the demise of the organisation, to changing patterns of living. Leach is interested in the fact that for many people "a cube of lumber, a simple, primary material, represents something difficult – about labour, making, building, planning, mathematics and effort..."⁷ In this sense Leach marks the changing social and political aspects of the local community.

Further extending the work, Leach is offering the cube of timber for sale on the online auction site Trade Me, using the service as a mechanism for interaction which extends beyond the gallery as far as the final destination and use of the timber. Formally the timber stack has all the austerity of minimalist sculpture, a deliberate move to unequivocally acknowledge an artistic history. Yet just as deliberately Leach keeps it as commodity; it is for sale as a cube of milled timber not as an artwork. As a result the work remains an open ended piece, the timber holding potential as a raw material ready for construction.

Leach's use of Trade Me accentuates the popularity of Internet based trade, a mechanism which defies location. During the online auction (operating during the last week of the exhibition) the installation includes a computer connected to the listing on the Trade Me site, complete with an image of the wood in situ. In this context the audience can potentially experience the work in two different ways: in the gallery as an installation, and as a commercial experience via a search on Trade Me. These experiences intersect when the work is viewed at both sites simultaneously.

The late capitalist trade in intangible assets such as the service industry and intellectual property frequently features in the practice and writing of Raqs Media Collective. In their essay *X notes on practice: stubborn structures and insistent seepage in a networked world*, Raqs reference the traditional figure of the artisan as a precursor to worker and artist, identifying it as the nexus of both. The new economy of intangible commodities blurs the distinction between worker and artist, refreshing the figure of artisan and the daily performances of workers.

A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location) 2003 reflects on the performance of the role of the call centre worker in the new economy. India is a major player in the global call centre industry due to the rapid uptake of information technology, a large population of proficient English speakers and low cost labour. Using the global network of electronic communications and the players in the industry as a metaphor for the web that connects us across time and space, the three screen installation *A/S/L* addresses the shifting parameters of centre and periphery. While the call centre worker is central to the current global economy he/she has little agency; "to be marginal is not necessary to be 'far from the action' or to be 'remote' or in any way distant from the very hub of the world as we find it today."⁸ In spite of the call centre industry and other information technology based industries redefining locational centre and periphery, geographical proximity still holds currency. Raqs recognise the power of proximity, a state of community that is often faked by Indian call centre workers as they 'perform' other accents in an attempt to claim an authority that is enhanced by the signifiers of 'likeness' and 'nearness'.⁹

Dane Mitchell's ongoing exploration of the deployment of knowledge and power, directly addresses the networked system of museums and galleries that as an artist he is working within. Recognising that culture is a shifting system of exchange, Mitchell's series of drawings *Example of true stratification* and *Example of mnemonic structure* apply archaeological models of stratification and site plans to interpret the system of the museum.

Mitchell introduces the mechanisms of archaeology as an interpretative discipline to frame the similarly interpretative, culture defining practice of museology. As a cultural practice archaeology has been defined as a politics and a morality whereby "interpretation of the past does not transport a truth or property of the past into the present; it transforms or translates."¹⁰ Similarly museums translate culture via their own changeable hierarchies and systems of interpretation. In Mitchell's words "strata are not stable, nor are the meanings of our museum collections [...]. What does seem certain, and here pushes its way to the surface, is that what the museum exhibits above all else is its own significance."¹¹

Systemic diagrams themselves present an abstract and static reality by simplifying, or removing altogether, extra-systemic pressures impacting on behaviour and structure. In a reflection of the geological process of folding, Mitchell's drawings take the fixed nature of systemic diagrams and deliberately turn the system of cultural interpretation back on itself. This process also acknowledges Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's reference to the territories and codes of social hierarchies as strata¹². Deleuze and Guattari identify the problem of social and political liberation as a problem of destratification and deterritorialisation where the flow from centre to periphery is recognised as a constant movement, disrupting the hierarchy of centre and periphery itself. By representing culture as strata within an archaeological and geological model/timeframe, Mitchell acknowledges that this process of deterritorialisation, while constant, is at its foundations an evolution tied to political and institutional time.

Patrick Pound also imposes one system onto another in his work *With outstretched arms* 2000 - ongoing. Pound has created a number of arbitrary categories under which he conducts his daily activity of clipping from newspapers. *With outstretched arms* is a small part of one category among many 'model worlds' that Pound has created under headings such as people holding things, outlines of land for sale, photographers and jumpers, to name only a few. Pound speaks of his avid collecting as the dedicated attempts of "someone who on trying to explain the world and having failed, has been reduced to collecting and arranging it into arbitrary categories of 'likeness'."¹³ The work conveys a tangible sense of the solitary and compulsive collector, creating a feeling of introspection almost at odds with ideas of connectivity. However, Pound forms a network of connections that converge with collector as nexus; the collector is a node in a network of his own making.

Pound's typologies cross boundaries of more conventional modes of relatedness, often creating unlikely juxtapositions of subject. *With outstretched arms* is a selection from a loose array

of clippings that make up the larger collection, pinned in a long line around the gallery walls to form a chain. The chain creates a pattern of links and associations based on likeness between people and situations as Pound connects actors, dancers, victims, survivors, sportspeople, politicians and even, stretching his own typology, animals.

Through his collections Pound highlights the packaging and presentation of current affairs in the media. Media bias is familiar territory and Pound's categories, driven by his own interests, play up to this. The media is a mechanism of conveyance through which a version of events is presented. Pound acknowledges this with his collecting and views newspapers themselves as systematically reductive of the world as a result of their status as mediated information. Furthermore, the organisation of the clippings into linear form around the gallery walls, their arrangement and relationship to each other, questions the subjectivity of the artist, reframes media agendas and creates other narratives influenced by proximity and the viewer's own response to the images. Through the convergence of possible readings under his arbitrary taxonomies, Pound emphasises the idea that information is always mediated by bias and idiosyncrasy.

The artists in *Linked* critically examine paths of connection in daily interactions, engaging with positions of proximity, power and social transaction. The thematic framework of the exhibition gathers a distinct group of artists addressing aspects of transaction from differing perspectives. Extending this, the connections to be made between the works are many and varied. The works draw axes referencing the local and the quotidian, whilst simultaneously holding a wider validity. The links established here reinforce the similarity of experience that, although influenced by local symptoms of economics and environment, retains connections that cut across geography, politics and ideology.

Charlotte Huddleston

Below: PATRICK POUND *With outstretched arms* 2000 - ongoing



NOTES

1. Michel Foucault *Of other spaces* (1967)
<http://www.foucault.info/documents/heteroTopia/foucault.heteroTopia.en.html> 04/11/05.
2. *ibid.* Foucault.
3. Bonnie Sherk cited by Will Bradley in 'Let it grow' *Frieze*, issue 94, October 2005 p.189.
4. Ruth E. Iskin 'Selling, seduction and soliciting the eye: Manet's 'Bar at the Folies-Bergère'.' *The art bulletin* March 1995.
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0422/is_n1_v77/ai_17011386_20/12/05.
5. For an extensive discussion of Manet's 1882 painting and its context see the above Iskin essay.
6. <http://www.smallfarming.org.nz>.
7. Correspondence with the artist.
8. Raqs Media Collective *X notes on practice: stubborn structures and insistent seepages in a networked world*
<http://www.raqsmediacollective.net/texts1.html> 8/07/05.
9. Raqs Media Collective have written a text *Call centre calling: technology network and location* to accompany the work *A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location)* this text, which first appeared in the *Sarai reader 03* can be found at <http://www.sarai.net/journal/reader3.html> and through the Raqs website <http://www.raqsmediacollective.net>.
10. Michael Shanks and Christopher Tilley *Social theory and archaeology* Polity Press Cambridge, England, 1987 p.211.
11. Artist's statement.
12. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari '10,000 B.C.: the geology of morals (who does the earth think it is?)' in *A thousand plateaus: capitalism and schizophrenia* trans. Brian Massumi, University of Minnesota Press, 1987.
13. Artist's statement.

Published in 2006 by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in association with the exhibition *Linked: connectivity and exchange* 10 December 2005 - 5 March 2006 at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth

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LIST OF WORKS

LIZ ALLAN

1978 born Whangarei, lives and works in Wellington

Self portrait of the artist as a café worker 2005

Lambda print, documentation, work
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist

MADDIE LEACH

1970 born Auckland, lives and works in Wellington

Lawson Cypress stack (or how to enjoy working with wood) 2005

Lawson Cypress, macrocarpa sleepers, cedar illets, *The smallfarmer journals*
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist

DANE MITCHELL

1976 born Auckland, lives and works in Auckland

Example of true stratification # 4 2004

Example of true stratification # 5 2004

Example of true stratification # 6 2004

Example of true stratification # 7 2004

Example of mnemonic structure # 1 2004

Example of mnemonic structure # 2 2004

Pigment Liner on acid free paper

750x910mm each

courtesy of the artist and Starkwhite, Auckland

PATRICK POUND

1962 born Hamilton, lives and works in Ivelbourne

With outstretched arms (detail) 2001 - ongoing

Newspaper, pins
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artist and Hamish McKay Galley, Wellington

RAQS MEDIA COLLECTIVE

Jeebesh Bagchi 1965 born Delhi, lives and works in Delhi

Monica Narula 1969 born Delhi, lives and works in Delhi

Shuddhabrata Sengupta 1968 born Delhi lives and works in Delhi

A/S/L (Age/Sex/Location) 2003

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T.Meyariyan, Ashish Mahajan; Acknowledgements: Amanda McDonald Crowley,
Shveta Sarda, Tripta Chandola, Rachel Magnuson.
Produced at: Sarai Media Lab, Sarai, CSDS, Delhi.

DVD, audioscape
dimensions variable
courtesy of the artists

GOVETT BREWSTER ART GALLERY



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Cover Image: LIZ ALLAN *Self portrait*