



Callum Morton  
**NOW AND THEN**

GOVETT-BREWSTER ART GALLERY  
26 OCTOBER - 8 DECEMBER 1997



## CALLUM MORTON

- 1965 Born Montreal, Canada  
 1983 - 1985 Bachelor of Architecture, RMIT Melbourne  
 1986 - 1988 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Victoria College, Melbourne  
 1995 Monash University Inaugural Art Awards (2nd Prize)  
 1995 - 1996 Tutor, Painting Department, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne.  
 1996 Sessional Lecturer in photography, Media Arts Department, Rusden College.  
 1997 Visiting Lecturer, Art Center, College of Design, Los Angeles  
 Taranaki Artist-in-Residence, New Plymouth  
 Finalist, The Seppelt Contemporary Art Award

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 1991 *A dozen real fictions* Store 5, Melbourne  
*A dozen real fictions no 2* Charles William Gallery, RMIT Architecture Department, Melbourne.  
 1992 *Window*, Prahran Mission Shop, Melbourne  
 Critical City, Adelaide  
 View Post West, Adelaide  
 1993 *Office* Store 5, Melbourne  
 Sanctuary Critical Cities, Melbourne  
 1994 *Door door* Room 32, Regents Court Hotel, Sydney  
*Cul-de-sac* 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne  
 1995 *The heights* Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, Melbourne  
 1996 *been there* Artspace, Sydney  
 1997 *Something more* Teststrip, Auckland  
*Strip* Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, Melbourne

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*Magasin 5* Cannibal Pierce Galerie Australienne, Paris  
 #100 Store 5, Melbourne  
 1994 *The exact moment* A Critical Cities Project, Melbourne  
*Loop: part one* A Critical Cities Project, Longford Cinema, Melbourne  
*Passage: spatial interventions* Monash University Gallery, Melbourne  
 1995 *Videonale #6*, Bonn, Germany  
*Australian Perspecta* Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney  
*Lyndal Walker and Callum Morton* First floor, Melbourne  
*Suddenly* The Building 40 Project, RMIT, Melbourne  
*The object of existence* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne  
*Perspectives: 200 Gertrude Street 1985-1995* 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne  
 1996 *Technology compost* Adelaide Festival, Adelaide  
*ruins in reverse* RMIT Gallery, Melbourne  
*the expanded field* 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne  
*Power corruption and lies/New Order* Factory Records 1981 Plotz Gallery, Brisbane  
 1997 *Art=Advertising* Robert Lindsay Gallery, Melbourne  
*World speak dumb* Karyn Lovegrove Gallery, Melbourne  
*Rough trade* The Tanks, Cairns  
*Power corruption and lies* IMA, Brisbane  
*The Seppelt contemporary art award* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

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 Bridie, Sandra *The exact moment* Critical Cities, Melbourne, 1994  
 Butler, Rex *Slow apocalypse* IMA, Brisbane, 1997  
 Chapman, Christopher "Sculpture snapshots" *Photofile* April 1997  
*Circular* 1 May 1993  
*Circular* 2 October 1993  
*Circular* 3 February 1994  
*Circular* 6 September 1997  
 Coleman, F "Passage: spatial interventions" *Agenda* 38, September 1994  
 Cross, David "the expanded field" *Art and text* 55  
 Delany, Max "Callum Morton: Belvedere" *Australian Perspecta* 95 Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 1995  
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 King, Natalie *Passage: spatial interventions* Monash University Gallery, Melbourne, 1994  
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 Sierra-Hughes, Marie "Cul-de-sac" *Agenda* 38, September 1994  
 Schubert, Robert "Ruins in reverse" *Art and text* 55  
 Smorgan, H. "Loop: part one" *Photofile* 43  
 Williamson, Claire *Object of existence* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1995

The exhibition and publication *Now and then* resulted from the Taranaki Artist-in-Residence programme, a partnership between Taranaki Polytechnic and the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand.

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## Nightmare on C Deck

"It's looking at nothing." Callum Morton is driving around in his car staring at brick walls again. He is describing the act of perceiving flat, mass-produced surfaces which rise out of the ground and spread out to cover the city, surfaces which are so ubiquitous they have become a solid form of nothing. This nothing is the basis for his artwork: it will reappear as sculpture: double nothing, perhaps even "something". In this inorganic system of brightly lit blanks – signs, brick walls, and flat asphalt distances – everything is manufactured, touched by machinery, hammered and glued into place, painted over, varnished, locked behind doors, and stashed away in the walls. Everything in the urban environment is odd: both boring and interesting. Everything has been seen before – a million times over – but it still keeps flashing by.



Cul-de-sac 1994, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne.

Callum Morton

To the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, Morton has bequeathed one of his something/nothings – it is a reconstruction of a window and a ghost of observation, a semblance of a home which is, at first glance, unrecognisable as any kind of work of art despite the fact that it stands in the place where paintings once were, and in some highly ironic manner does resemble three monochrome panels. *Now and then* may also appear to be a functional addition to the gallery, a bright new architectural idea lodged into the Govett-Brewster's C Deck – a lunchroom, perhaps? or a snazzy new den for the curator? But in truth it is, like most installations, a temporary visitor, a hotel guest – as was the artist during his residency in New Plymouth. The piece will soon be cut out and prised away from its home in the wall, just as rapidly as it appeared. It will then die and become trash, or simply dematerialise, vanish into the recycling motor.

In the meantime it sits and waits, an improbable architecture which has been transplanted into the contextual environment of art, like a monkey's heart dropped into a human's body.

On first glance, Morton's work appears to be camouflaged, hidden in the walls of the Gallery. In its unwillingness to explain itself straight away, it sheds an eerie and curious light upon the strategically dull phenomena which constitute much of the "built environment," including, of course, the generic white-wall cast of the art gallery itself. *Now and then* is a photorealist sculpture, a snapshot of Built-Boring and pre-fabricated things such as suburbs, malls, curtains, endless pointless babbles of language, nails, screws, panes of glass and wallpapers – the things in the world which fascinate the artist. *Now and then* is a work made from industrially produced materials and precise thoughts but, in its conception, it has left space for other, less structured brainwaves, the kind which come to us while moving through the urban environment at speed. It has stopped here for a moment before going on its way.

In his work, Morton is struck by the supernatural, arbitrary stupidity of the wall and the window, architectural conceits which do not beckon to be "read". Of course he does read, or tries to study, these things, things which are apparently not in the least bit interesting to look at. He is also curious about how, driving through a suburb, one can look at a window, a wall, a home, and think completely nothing; and, alternately, how that nothing can flip into becoming a completely new thing – not just a window but a strange and vital something, a membrane between the inside and the outside of someone's privacy; the wall, cage or super-thin lining which officially separates this from that person's world.

A city is simultaneously crazy and highly organised. There is, perhaps, some breed of logic in sprawl, a measurable principle of urban permutation and growth – but I very much doubt it. Cities are unexplained phenomena. By accident or miracle it seems, minerals, geometries, idealism and fears have come together to form cosmologies called cities, about which we know virtually nothing. Living in them, there's a chance you will forget what you're doing and crash into the wall you're staring at. Buildings which were there last week have now disappeared – same goes for you.

Belvedere 1994



Callum Morton

Morton's works examine specific features of the growing and decaying city and its ultra-banal satellites with a scientific clarity. He brings architectural core-samples of the outdoors indoors for further scrutiny. His architectural installations, sculptures, and text installations look normal enough, until one remembers that they have been mercilessly plucked from their natural environments and sacrificed to the world of art. They had no choice in the matter.

The installations look normal enough. But they're not. Vernacular architecture from the outside of the gallery has been domesticated by art, trained and ordered to become a different order of visual spectacle. Morton's sculptures are optical devices which throw up fake brick walls, empty, horribly functionless sheets of building materials and viewless picture windows. The device, instead of ENLARGING, shrinks the object. It throws suspicion upon all pre-fab architectural surfaces and their repetitive familiarities. At this point the "regular" becomes irregular and the ignored becomes fascinating. The boring is now in the position to take its revenge upon those who thought it dull. Revenge of the nerds.

The city is nothing if not an enigmatic sifter. Morton's works are like portraits of contemporary urban space, an environment which, by definition, attains a kind of invisibility because of its enormous scale. The big city is defined as that which is beyond the perceptual horizon of its citizens. In a city, there is no overview, no complete picture offered to anyone because there will always be a something which escapes detection, a something that remains private, even if that private thing is ridiculous and not worthy of attention.

The suburb is a smaller thing – a subset of the greater conspiracy. But the suburb, too, is premised on small private elusive spaces. Again, there might not be anything worth looking at inside these putative suburban estates, but they're private anyway. There are locks on the door; there are curtains over the windows. The contraptions which cover, divide, conceal, disguise and isolate one family from the next are miracles and we can be thankful for them because if we were to see everything at once, our eyes and brains would blow apart under the stress. I will never find out what goes on behind most walls and I am glad.

However Morton's work is curious and revelatory. *Now and then's* function is to place

a stethoscope on the chest of this banality, on to the very banality of privacy. In this piece Morton plays the cinematic game of slow revelation and narration. His installation, like Marcel Duchamp's *Black Widow* – a sick ready-made sculpture of a window which has black leather in the place of glass – plays up to privacy's secret, namely that there is "something" going on behind those doors, something unnatural, something horrible and criminal which should not see the light of day.

But what is there, behind the glass? With its CD-ROM soundtrack, Morton's film-set suburb lets out the sounds of its own making: one liners of suburban chitter-chatter which have been built into and seep out of his glass wall of noises. These fragmented utterances are sound bites for people and things, actors in the paranoid kitsch theatre of the suburb. The soundtrack? There is a sample taken from a Formula One video game while it is idle. Dogs bark and howl in the near distance. A woman is



Now and then 1996

heard saying, "I am such a bad girl I think you should spank me". There is a tapping on the window which starts off very loud ... a pause for silence ... the tapping returns but is fainter. These and other sounds echo off into their own false night.

This tap-dripping suspense is as close as sculpture gets to cinematic horror – to the cinema's ongoing nightmares of X-Street and Y-Street. Morton's haunted sculpture offers an epiphany and it's the same one which parents offer their children when they think that their bedroom is possessed by demons: "Don't worry ... there's nothing there."

Giovanni Intra

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