

THE OMAHA MUSEUM OF ART AND THE SUBLINE

GOVETT-BROWSTER ART GALLERY

BLOOM:
MUTATION, TOXICITY
AND THE SUBLIME

ARTISTS: HANY ARMANIOUS CHRISTINE BORLAND
DAVID HATCHER TAMAMI HITSUDA EDUARDO KAC
DENISE KUM JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA SUSAN
NORRIE MOTOHIKO ODANI SASKIA OLDE WOLBERS
PATRICIA PICCININI MAGNUS WALLIN BOYD WEBB

CURATOR: GREGORY BURKE







BLOOM:
MUTATION, TOXICITY
AND THE SUBLIME

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	
Bloom	
<p><i>Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime</i> is the latest in a series of Govett-Brewster Art Gallery exhibitions including <i>Drive: power, progress and desire</i> 2000; <i>Feature: art, life and cinema</i> 2001; <i>Extended Play: art remixing music</i> 2003 and <i>Arcadia: the other life of video games</i> 2003. The exhibitions in this series interpret the response of contemporary artists to prescient and unsettling developments in contemporary culture. <i>Bloom</i> explores the impact of scientific progress and experimentation on both nature and human consciousness and the representation of this theme in relation to changing notions of the sublime.</p>	
Lenders	
<p>Hany Armanious, Christine Borland, Sue Crockford Gallery, Julia Friedman Gallery, David Hatcher, Tamami Hitsuda, Eduardo Kac, Tomio Koyama Gallery, Denise Kum, Lisson Gallery, Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, Robert Miller Gallery, Mizuma Gallery, Stephen Mori Gallery, Susan Norrie, Motohiko Odani, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Saskia Olde Wolbers, Patricia Piccinini, Galerie Diana Stigter, Tolarno Galleries, Yuko Yamamoto Gallery, Magnus Wallin, Boyd Webb.</p>	
General Thanks	
<p>Miriam Amari, Dr. Ian Anderson Massey University, Sharon Bradley, Sue Crockford, Dennis Daniel, Dr Peter Egli, Matthew Fawcner, Dominic Feuchs, Simon Hartas, Peter Hennessy, Claudine Ise, Allan Low, John McCormack, Roger McDonald, Hamish McKay, Lyn McMillan University of Auckland, Bruce Mitchinson, Sara Nakura, Sachie Nishizawa, Spotless Cleaning Services, James O'Connor, Ohma Oxley, Katrina Pym, Lisa Rosendahl, Amanda Rowell, Clare Simpson, Heather Weir, Isha Welsh, Yuko Yamamoto.</p>	
Govett-Brewster Art Gallery	
<p>Principal funder: New Plymouth District Council</p> <p>Director: Gregory Burke</p> <p>Exhibition preparation: Anton Berndt, Danny Blattler, Kevin Castle, David Clegg, Peter Dredge, Jessica Gommers, Ann Holiday, Shane Ives, Bryan James, Lisa Mönchmeyer, Rebecca Mooney, Simon Rees, Kate Roberts, Amanda Ward</p> <p>Publicity and Administration: Joely Ham, Gillian Irving, Angela Parr</p> <p>Information services: Chris Barry, Ellen Comber, Johanne Cuthbert, Rebecca Fawcner-Egli, Kathy Greensides, Trish Kane, Michaela Ngaia, Cathy Parkes, Bronwyn Van't Hof, Rosemary Walkinshaw</p>	
<p>Previous pages: Boyd Webb <i>Botanics (brown)</i> 2003; Magnus Wallin <i>Physical Paradise (detail)</i> 1998</p>	

CONTENTS	
p 6	Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime Gregory Burke
p 14	Our own monsters Jonathan Bywater
p 21	THE EXHIBITION
p 48	STATEMENTS ON WORKS ARTIST'S BIOGRAPHIES Gregory Burke, Simon Rees
p 62	LIST OF WORKS



Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime

Gregory Burke

The Wachowski brothers' recent *Matrix* trilogy of blockbuster films sets a horrific scene. As a result of a war with machines that have acquired artificial intelligence Mother Earth has been rendered sunless and unlivable for humans, who are instead farmed by the machines as their power source. To keep the resource placid human consciousness is diverted into a virtual reality of the world the way it was. The trilogy draws on current anxieties over scientific advances, including anxieties over the environmental effects of advanced warfare, such as nuclear, biological and chemical warfare, and in a more general sense anxieties concerning the toxic outcomes of uncontrolled scientific progress, reflected for example in the GM and ozone depletion debates. However the film also draws on a complex contradiction concerning popular perceptions of scientific progress in that it links environmental destruction to the development of artificial intelligence and virtual reality and the knock on effect of an evolutionary jump in the development of human consciousness. Ultimately, by feeding on linked responses of fear and fascination, a quality essential to an experience of the sublime, the film predicts the emergence of a new and technologically derived condition of the sublime.

Such twin poles, of a fear of the manipulation of the natural world through science and a fascination with its implications for humanity, lie at the heart of the exhibition *Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime*. The exhibition brings together a group of artists who in diverse ways examine the impact of scientific progress and experimentation on both nature and human consciousness and the representation of this theme in popular culture. By grouping works by these artists the exhibition aims to examine contemporary notions of the sublime in an era characterised by increasing political debate surrounding our environmental and ethical responsibilities as the dominant species on the planet. While artists have long broached moral and political concerns over such responsibilities *Bloom* collects responses from artists who approach the issue from a more philosophical perspective.

That is not to say that the artists in the exhibition eschew a moral dimension. At its most straight forward *Bloom* introduces audiences to the compelling and disturbing topic of the relationship of the human condition to the natural world with specific reference to such issues as environmental exploitation, genetic manipulation, mutation, deformity, disease, toxicity, intoxication and the development of artificial

intelligence and virtual reality. Many of these issues have long been of interest to artists and indeed key historical precedents underpin the curatorial analysis. Take for example Mary Shelley's 19th century novel *Frankenstein*, which considered the monstrous effects of science and nature combining. Since it was written, however, we have witnessed the advent of genetic engineering, cybernetics and catastrophic environmental change as characterised by environmental disasters releasing toxins and lethal viruses into the environment and food chain and global warming with its associated fears of dramatically altered eco systems, hurricanes, flash floods and rising sea levels. Against the backdrop of such developments we can interpret many of the works as issuing a warning concerning humanity's environmental, ethical and even political responsibilities.

For example the issue of environmental exploitation and destruction is explored by a number of artists including Japanese/Vietnamese artist Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba. His work *Memorial Project Minamata: Neither Either nor Neither – A Love Story* 2002 refers specifically to industrial dumping in Japan's Minamata Bay of tons of mercury compounds since the 1930s. The Japanese Government officially recognises that 1,435 people have already died as a result of the dumping in the bay in southern Japan. Around 20,000 people have further registered with the Government as victims of mercury poisoning. The video installation also refers to the use of Agent Orange in the Vietnam War. Agent Orange was the code name for a herbicide developed for the military, primarily for use in tropical climates. The purpose of the product was to deny an enemy cover by defoliating trees where the enemy could hide. Health concerns over Agent Orange centre around the fact that it was contaminated with dioxin, which in laboratory tests on animals has caused a wide variety of diseases, many of them fatal. An estimated 19 million gallons of Agent Orange were used in South Vietnam during the war.

Similarly the video installation *Undertow* 2003 by Australian artist Susan Norrie, while more generalised than Nguyen-Hatsushiba's work is nevertheless characterised by a sense of environmental apocalypse. Projections and screens of various sizes juxtapose environmentally ominous images, including landscapes on fire, gas-masked and lab suited figures releasing balloons into the atmosphere, seabirds annihilated by oil slicks, and the city of Melbourne dwarfed and under siege from a dust storm. Collectively these images alert us to both the fragility of the environment and its latent power, and in so doing position humanity as both an environmental threat and as environmentally threatened.

The sense though that the works in the show are principally instruments for moral warnings on scientific experiments and unrestrained developments that potentially threaten the environment and thereby the human condition is countered by a number of factors, not least that many of the works are characterised by their very beauty. Take for example Boyd Webb's enhanced and poignantly beautiful photographs of artificial flowers or Tamami Hitsuda's work *Floating litter* 1999, which, despite the inclusion of garbage in the image, evokes a sense of the idyllic, even other-worldly. This tension between the toxic and the Arcadian is taken one step



Boyd Webb *Botanics (yellow)*

further with Denise Kum's installation *Flocculate Flow* 2003, a work that seems to position a toxic waste dump as synthetically beautiful. Similarly Nguyen-Hatsushiba's installation is hauntingly beautiful, particularly the scenes shot under water, while Norrie's *Undertow* is both dreamlike and graceful, qualities enhanced by the use of slow-motion film and the ambient soundtrack.

Despite their alluring qualities the works in *Bloom* to varying degrees also display an eerie and at times terrifying magnificence and in this sense they are at once attractive and repellent. This tension between an experience that gives aesthetic pleasure and one that inspires feelings of awe and terror is a defining aspect of the sublime. As figured in art and literature from the Enlightenment on, the sublime has been evoked by the fearsome aspect of nature's otherwise calming beauty. We can suggest then that such a notion of the sublime is intentionally referenced in Norrie's installation. Indeed her massive video projection of a dust storm dwarfing a city can be compared to the favoured subjects of the painters of the Romantic Sublime movement, such as scenes of massive craggy peaks and storms at sea. While demonstrating the vastness and power of nature, this feature of Norrie's installation holds us in the grip of fascination, thereby creating an underlying ambiguity as to the intention of the work. It is an ambiguity that gives the work its dramatic tension.

Fascination also defines the experience of a number of works in the exhibition that directly address mutation and genetic manipulation. Patricia Piccinini's two video installations *Plasmid region* and *In bocca al lupo*, both 2003, are the most directly



Bloom installation view, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

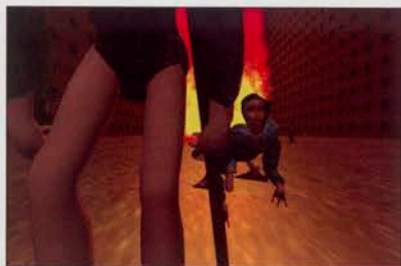
representational in depicting fleshy lumps of excoriated, pustular but also living organic matter; life-forms seemingly in a process of transformation that could be a birth or a death. Her digitally rendered creations appear to depict the results of biogenetic experimentation and even production. In alerting us to what could be a not too distant reality they also engage us in contradictory emotional responses. We are left not knowing exactly what these forms are. On the one hand they engage human fear of the unknown and also a sense of repulsion, which is accentuated by their similarity in appearance to diseased or injured human flesh. On the other, the sense that these forms may be suffering or helpless simultaneously engages the human emotion of empathy. As well, the outwardly human aspects of these forms and their apparent awareness of their condition provoke us to question whether we admire or fear what they represent.

A similarity can be drawn between the ambiguous feelings elicited by Piccinini's organic environments and the treatment of the monster in Shelley's novel *Frankenstein*, which also evoked both horror and empathy in the reader. The potentially terrifying and thereby sublime nature of the monster in *Frankenstein* is also echoed by Piccinini's forms, in that their existence could be thought to pose a threat to humanity. Such comparisons are not restricted to the history of art and literature. The work of Piccinini and other artists in the exhibition also echoes

popular culture's fascination with the subject of mutation and genetic manipulation evident in comics such as *Spiderman* and *X Men* and films such as *2001: a space odyssey* and *Matrix*.

Brazilian artist Eduardo Kac traces the roots of such interest, in Western culture at least, back to the Bible. Kac makes works involving genetic manipulation and argues for the potential of genetic engineering to increase biodiversity. Amongst his works he has produced *Alba*, a fluorescent, genetically engineered rabbit. Indeed his book *The Eighth Day* asks problematic questions as to whether we should initiate an eighth day to the biblical account of Genesis, given that we have the means. Such questions highlight the ethical dilemma of control of our environment through scientific applications. *Genesis* 1999-2003, his installation in the exhibition, explores the intricate relationship between biology, belief systems, information technology, ethics, and the Internet. The key element of the work is an "artist's gene", a synthetic gene created by translating a key sentence from the biblical book of Genesis into Morse Code, and converting the Morse Code into DNA base pairs according to a conversion principle specially developed by the artist for this work. The originating sentence reads: "Let man have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." It was chosen for what it implies about the dubious notion of humanity's divinely sanctioned supremacy over nature.

Historical relationships between science, culture and society are also traced by Christine Borland. Much of her work references genetics and in particular options humanity has for influencing or controlling human evolution. Like a forensic scientist or archeologist she links evidence to actual human stories, thereby giving a human dimension to the acquisition and application of scientific knowledge. Following this approach the facts presented are often only partial, which also has the effect of drawing attention to what is missing from the story. In this way her works focus on absence and doubt. For example her work *Spirit collection: Hippocrates* 1999, which refers to the Greek father of medicine, invites speculation about the way his legacy has affected humanity. This legacy is rendered almost palpable in the work by the spectral presence of bleached and preserved leaves from trees descended from the tree under which Hippocrates taught his students. The sense of melancholy and ghostliness in the work is also a trait of *The Aether Sea* 1999 in the exhibition, which features gel samples containing recombinant human and jellyfish DNA positioned between massively enlarged projections of fluorescent jellyfish.



Magnus Wallin *Exit* (still)

Used medicinally to trace the life cycle of diseased human cells Borland references recombinant DNA in order to meditate on the permeability of notions of toxicity, abnormality and otherness. Abnormality is a subject also explored in the work of Magnus Wallin, for example in the video installation *Exit* 1997, where disabled and deformed individuals inspired by the imagery of Hieronymus Bosch flee from a pursuing

wall of fire. The counterpoint of abnormality being the culturally defined notion of superior hereditary traits is also explored in many of his works including *Physical Paradise* 1998, his work in the exhibition, which includes references to the Greco-Olympic tradition as well as Dolly, the world's first cloned sheep. Drawing on the past as it looks towards the future, the work links the cultural and scientific pursuit of physical perfection with pleasure seeking and the human desire to escape the body.

Conveying a sense of the infinite and thereby sublime vastness of the universe the work also recalls psychedelic aesthetics associated with the 1960s, while its high speed journey through a mutating vortex is similar to the kaleidoscopic scenes near the end of Kubrick's 1968 film *2001: a space odyssey*. Like that film it links technological progress to the transformation of consciousness by evoking an indeterminate zone between virtual reality and hallucinatory pleasure. In this sense it reflects a link that is increasingly made between cyber-culture and the enduring human interest in altered states of reality. For example while the nether world depicted in the film *Matrix* predicts a technologically sublime state it is one that specifically references Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*, for instance when a computer message urges the film's hero Neo to follow the white rabbit.

Carroll's topsy-turvy world is echoed in many different ways in the exhibition. For example in *Rompers* 2003 Motohiko Odani depicts an 'Alice' like world replete with toadstools but updates it to include genetically engineered frogs with human ears, a young girl with a lizard's tongue and bees flying in formation to form the symbol for infinity, a Kantian manifestation of the sublime. Borland, Webb and Kac magnify organic forms to many times their actual size, while Armanious, in his installation *Selflok* 1994-2003, references elves and turns forms inside out through the use of 'hotmelt' glue, a petroleum byproduct. His other work in the exhibition *Assorted*

muffins 2003, literally presents gigantic and at times mushroom-like muffins made from toxic expanding foam. One reproduces the Coco Chanel logo on its surface, ringed by the words "Carlos Castaneda", a writer popular in the 1970's, who told of meeting a Yaqui Indian sorcerer who introduced him to esoteric knowledge via the use of hallucinogenic plants.

Armanious's work is one of a number in the exhibition that weave a multifaceted connection between toxicity, intoxication and the alteration of human consciousness, the most overt of these works being David Hatcher's *Dimensions Variable* (Albert Hofmann), 2003, which refers to the inventor of LSD and his first experience of the mind-altering properties of the drug. More oblique in its exploration of the connection between consciousness, physiology and toxicity is the work *Interloper* 2003 by Saskia Olde Wolbers, which depicts an accident victim in a hospital who, through an out of body experience, moves through the corridors to the basement to revisit the place of his childhood, being a top-secret lab involved in genetic experimentation. Like many of the works in the exhibition *Interloper* explores layers of psychological complexity involved in our understanding of interrelationships between science, nature and human consciousness.

While *Bloom* reflects historical concerns over the potential outcome of nature and science combining, the works in the exhibition also raise new questions concerning humanity's environmental responsibilities. Collectively they initiate speculation about who, or what cultural agency, should be arbiter of the ethics surrounding the application of scientific knowledge. However a disconcerting ambiguity also pervades the exhibition. Some tap into a fear that experimental science is being exploited for the purposes of immediate gratification, even entertainment, but do not necessarily repudiate those possibilities. Many works probe the psychological ramifications behind our fascination with the monstrous in nature while questioning humanity's assumptions of longevity and biological superiority. Other works juxtapose incongruous elements in order to tease out intricate psychological connections between the alteration of nature and the alteration of human consciousness. The result provokes new insights into our potential future and effect on the planet, our relationship to both nature and science and our understanding of the history of human consciousness and its relationship to changing notions of otherness and the sublime.



Our Own Monsters

Jon Bywater

As the New Zealand government's moratorium on transgenic organisms approached expiry in October 2003 the local anti-GM cause found a pin up girl. Billboards appeared in Wellington and Auckland depicting a beautiful young white woman, nude and kneeling, who cast a sly-eyed sneer at viewers below. Photo-shopped onto her abdomen was an extra pair of breasts, all four hooked up to a dairy shed milking machine. A hybrid in more ways than one, her image mixed visual strategies of seduction and shock. Her middle class grooming and self-possessed expression had ad-standard aspirational appeal, branding MADGE, *Mothers Against Genetic Engineering in Food and the Environment*, the organization named in the advertisement, as a desirable cause¹. (The model's ability to exert their trademark "purse power" was easy to imagine.) More obviously, and at the same time, she represented the object of the group's protest. Her bodily exploitation and her unnatural anatomy associated a horror story with the potential of GM.

If the campaign's blend of glamour and the grotesque exerted some complex pushes and pulls, like most advertisements its basic aim was simple: to raise the profile of the GM debate. Whether or not the conventional attractiveness of the billboard's clean, white background and of the healthy, youthful subject, clearly visible under the digital effects, heightened or dampened its emotional impact is to some extent an academic question. Any internal tension like this

might have only helped to keep people's attention for a little longer while they were waiting for the lights. If the bottom line was that any interest generated is good interest in a case like this, further analysis would be beside the point. The question remains, though: How might something visual function in relation to an issue like GM, beyond just joining the clamour of competing claims for our attention? Once our gaze is snagged, what is at stake in our responses?

For what it's worth, the double movement I've started to describe in the milked woman image, its pro-MADGE and anti-GM directions, does not directly connect with my own first impressions of the campaign. To start with, a gut reaction to flinch away from being told what to think overwhelmed what was left as the merely notional grossness of the four breasts. Getting past this, the overt assumption that the exploitation of a woman's body (through her being industrially milked) is a bad thing butted awkwardly for me into the design's apparent nonchalance in the face of the obvious feminist critique that an advertisement like this is itself exploitative, milking the appeal of a (idealised) woman's body. Immediately jarred into a critical distance from which to play the commuter game "judge the ad", I was irritated into being dismissive. The irrationality of the shock tactics, I concluded grumpily, was the image's ultimate flaw: no one's going to engineer extra breasts onto humans!

At this point, though, I had to start to rethink. Some obvious precedents make it clear that the plausibility of what is pictured for us is not any straightforward measure of an image's effectiveness in connection to such issues. The MADGE ad steps into a long tradition of perfectly implausible fictions that have been conjured up to comment on the relationship between humanity and the environment. In the activist sphere its immediate antecedents include the influential Frankenfoods campaign in Britain, which casts GM crops as scary mutants². Halloween hybrid animal/vegetables make vivid metaphors for the interspecies use of DNA technologies. Much further back, as this name acknowledges, the *locus classicus* for this kind of crudely stitched horror is Mary Shelley's 1818 novel *Frankenstein*. Its lasting power and appeal are testament to the relative unimportance of its believability or adequacy to scientific fact.

Written once the Industrial Revolution had first gathered steam in Europe, *Frankenstein* depicts a grotesquely unnatural human, made from body parts by an early example of the modern mad scientist, and uses it to raise the

possibility of "science gone too far", then freshly topical. As the story unfolds, Frankenstein's monster turns out to have unforeseen, detrimental effects once unwittingly released into the environment. Although not intended quite as didactically as MADGE's, Shelley's cautionary science fiction expresses a comparable fear of an unpredictable remainder, those unforeseen downstream effects of natural forces perverted by science. Like biotech and Photoshop, the technologies involved in the billboard, electricity harnessed from lightning, pre-anaesthetic surgery and the Gothic novel are of their time, but used to create a provocative metaphor rather than a literal prediction.

Frankenstein's classic status is partly explained by the continued relevance of its symbolically expressed concerns about the relationship between nature and technology. The narrative tension is one of industrial modernity's versions of a much older and more general kind of story, driven by some threat to an established, and so supposedly natural, order. A story might serve to enact and bolster such an order of things at the same time as it encodes ways of responding to it, or even offers encouragements to challenge it. A function of such fictions is to give us space to explore imaginatively transgressions against this status quo, to feel our way through them, before we encounter them for real. So Shelley's book, as might MADGE, allows us to probe our understanding of how far might be too far for meddling with biological life.

Somewhere amongst the trees of this cognitive appeal, though, is the wood of the deeper hook. The thing that makes scary characters so popular, no matter how they are constituted, is crucial to the impact of Frankenstein's monster: People love to be scared. They get a big kick out of being given goose-bumps, that is, when the threat is imaginary, at the safe distance of representation, or even just at a safe distance. This aspect of *Frankenstein*, the way it engages the attractiveness of the repulsive, brings us back to a more specific question about our responses to an image that engages with an issue like GM: how do artists' imaginary horrors relate to possible real ones?

In Shelley's time, the concept that was used to classify the pleasurable intensity of things like horror was the sublime. The category had been traditionally associated with poetry and so with representations (the subject of the Classical discussion translated as "On the Sublime", long attributed to Longinus), and in the Romantic era with oil painting, alongside natural phenomena, so that the

sublime is, of course, a recognised genre of landscape. Not far socially removed from Shelley, Edmund Burke gave the concept one of its classic expositions in his *Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* in 1756. In his terms, Burke's interest was to explain the observation that "When danger or pain press too nearly, they are incapable of giving any delight, and are simply terrible; but at certain distances, and with certain modifications, they may be, and they are delightful, as we every day experience."³

The common motifs of the eighteenth century sublime were mountains, deserts, ruins and the forces of nature. According to the way the discourse of the sublime has evolved, *Frankenstein* sits on the cusp of a shift in its predominant sources. Recent theorists including Jeremy Gilbert-Rolfe, for example, have concluded that the primary locale of the sublime is now technology. Shelley's mutant could be described either way: The terror it portrays is due to technology as much as to the natural forces that the technology interferes with.

If we inspect the parade of descendents of Frankenstein's monster, the intensity of emotion Burke associated with the sublime may be hard to imagine as part of our responses. While the mind-boggling power of nuclear energy may qualify for something like Schiller's sub-category of the "theoretical sublime", something that overwhelms us by its very idea, the atomic age monsters produced by nuclear radiation⁴, the giant ants in *Them!* (1954) or *Godzilla* and his ilk, seem, at least from a contemporary adult perspective, campy more than fearful. With the aid of Dolby stereo, the CGI dinosaurs in the DNA technology scenario of *Jurassic Park* (1993) might still make me jump, but as I've already described, to link my experience of the MADGE billboard to the sublime would be ridiculous.

The horror genre certainly exploits this phenomenon Burke investigated, and any fascination with the terrible, from serial killers' biographies to celebrities' monstrous love lives or the I'm-going-to-die rush of a Bungy jump, fits the general shape of his classification. The conditions under which we experience "the sublime" today, however, are very different from those that confronted him. One of the effects of technology (or perhaps of the system of production that sustains its development) is of the steady intensification of our experience due to increased flows of information. At its simplest: because we now see more, oil paintings of waterfalls, for example, no longer thrill many people

with fear. These conditions have been described in many useful ways, but take Guy Debord's pessimistic characterisation of the society of the spectacle⁵: the effect of this flow of visual information is to leave us at the distance of looking. We look on, even at ourselves living. A key aspect of classic expositions of the sublime, then, of being at a remove from the object of fear ("at certain distances, and with certain modifications") is always already satisfied. Even as we pick up the latest best selling paperback about killer diseases, the function of the book is to entertain us without confronting us directly with the experience of the disease (thank goodness!). We can hourly experience the 'sublime' effect of helpless terror, until we change the channel.

Post 9/11, Brian Massumi's diagnosis of anxieties and the ubiquity of fear as the basis of the political economy of advanced capitalism is vividly borne out in the rhetoric of terrorism. The enemy on the home-front, has come to replace the enemy of the outside. Discussing his ideas, Rosi Braidotti puts it that the market economy "predicates forces outside its control as the perpetual threat to its or our survival."⁶ Consumerism renders the very possibility of disaster a commodity. We consume fear, then, and in her words "...in the West we have become our own monsters."⁷

If the gross but gripping, being appalled but absorbed, is terribly familiar, a challenge for artists or image makers today is to look beyond the banality of this unease or habitual fear as their ultimate effect, to hope to produce something more productive than the paralysed and impressive intensity of the sublime. It remains an important achievement just to keep issues in front of us, even if that requires taking on the mediascape on its own spectacular (sexist etc) terms, as the MADGE billboard might be understood to do. However, the conditions that make attention-grabbing a possible bottom line for a campaign like MADGE also demand that we get something more than a traditionally defined sublime in our responses to any image purporting to deal with an important issue.

The challenge is also there for us as the audience, then, to avoid looking to be told something, or for something merely to agree with, or for a nice ambiguous space into which to project the facile sophistication of "seeing both sides". It is up to us to look for ways to describe our responses that go beyond a satisfaction in the potent kick of rattling ambivalence, to push past those

overfamiliar shapes for our experience. Perhaps this is as simple as questioning our easy responses, thinking past slogans. Reinspecting the milked woman image, further detail takes me closer to the what I am undecided on in the GM issue: the model's waxed legs, her dyed hair, her "natural looking" make-up, even her exercise-toned figure, are all signs of humanity's complex shaping of nature (what Andrew Ross has called nature's debt to society⁸). Perhaps the ways in which the rights and wrongs of exploitation are already worked out in my acceptance of this hegemonic image of beauty could start to inform my understanding of the limits at which exploitation emerges. If it is more vivid to me that the woman is hooked up to a machine than that she has extra breasts, the interests that are served by the technology are drawn into question more than its unnaturalness. Here, for example, is a place from which a productive response might begin.

- 1 www.madge.co.nz
- 2 www.frakenfoods.com
- 3 Edmund Burke, "Inquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful" in *The Works of the Right Honourable Edmund Burke*, Volume One, Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press: London, 1906, pp 91-92.
- 4 See Mick Broderick, *Nuclear Movies: a filmography*, Post-Modern: Northcote, 1988.
- 5 Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, Donald Nicholson-Smith trans., Zone: New York, 1995.
- 6 Rosi Braidotti, *Metamorphoses: towards a materialist theory of becoming*, Polity: Cambridge, 2002, p 188.
- 7 Op.cit.
- 8 Andrew Ross, *The Chicago Gangster Theory of Life: Nature's Debt to Society*, Verso: London, 1994.

Opposite page: Hany Armanious *Muffins*

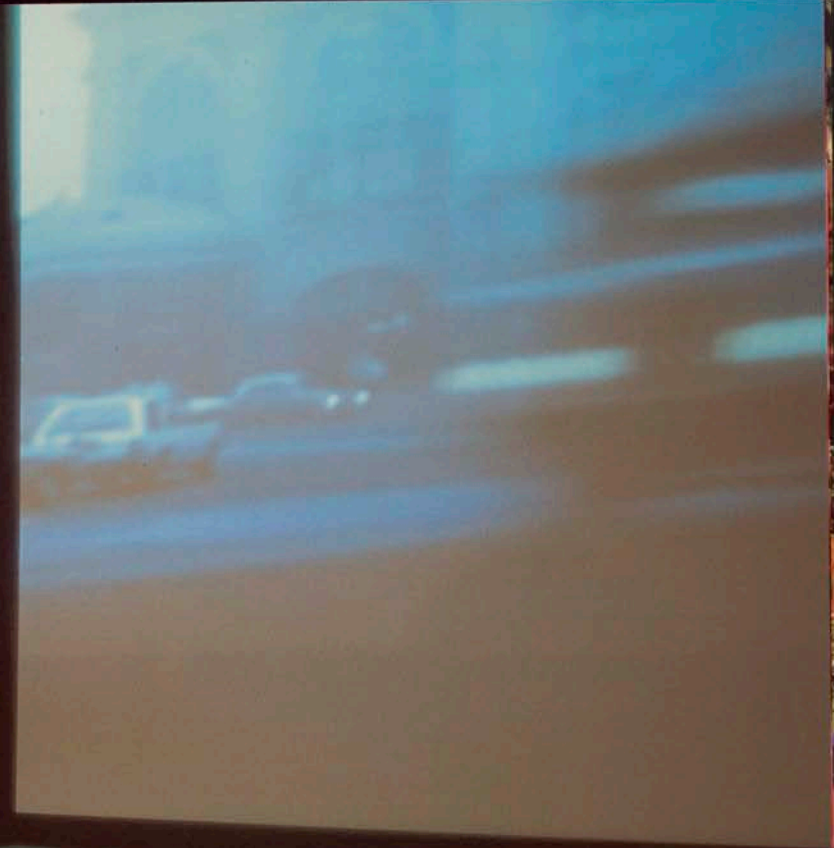
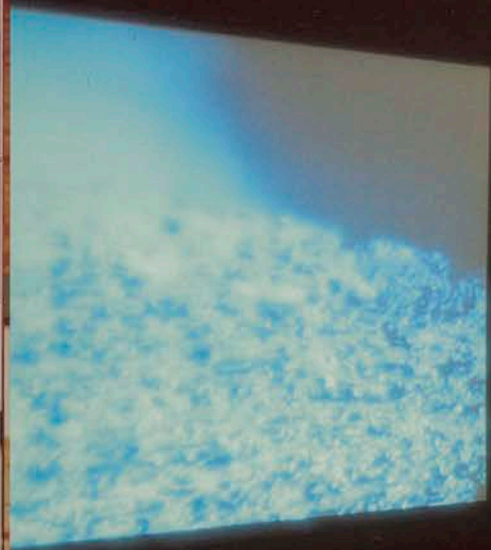




A DEMON INVADED ME, HAD TAKEN
POSSESSION OF MY BODY, MIND, AND
SOUL. I JUD UP AND SCREAMED,
TRYING TO FLY MYSELF FROM HIM, BUT
THEN SANK DOWN AGAIN AND LAY
HELPLESS ON THE SOFA. THE SUBSTANCE,
WITH WHICH I HAD WANTED TO
EXPERIMENT, HAD VANQUISHED ME ... I
WAS SEIZED BY THE DREADFUL FEAR OF
GOING INSANE. I WAS TAKEN TO ANOTHER
WORLD, ANOTHER PLACE, ANOTHER TIME.
MY BODY SEEMED TO BE WITHOUT
SENSATION, LIFELESS, STRANGE. WAS I
DYING? WAS THAT THE TRANSITION?

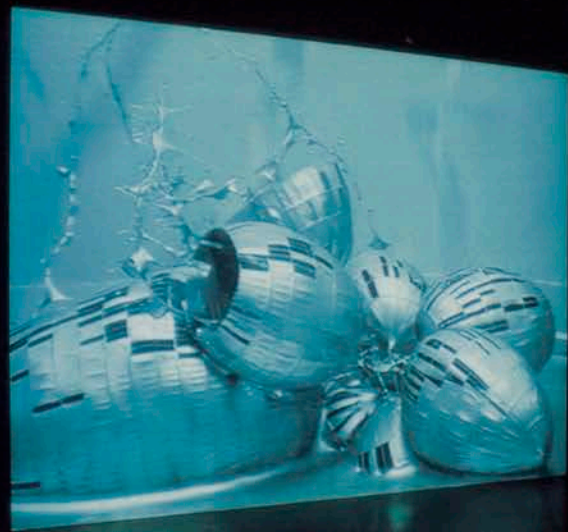
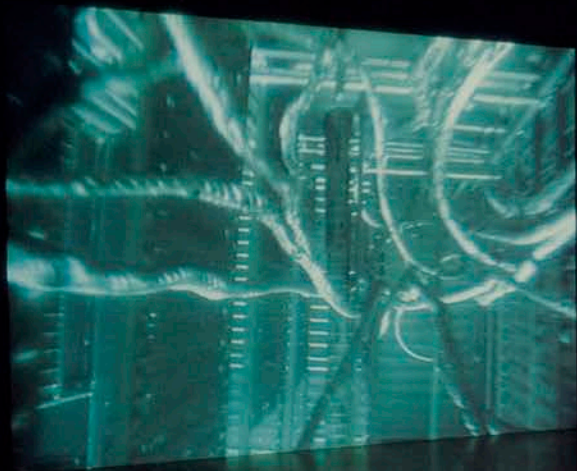


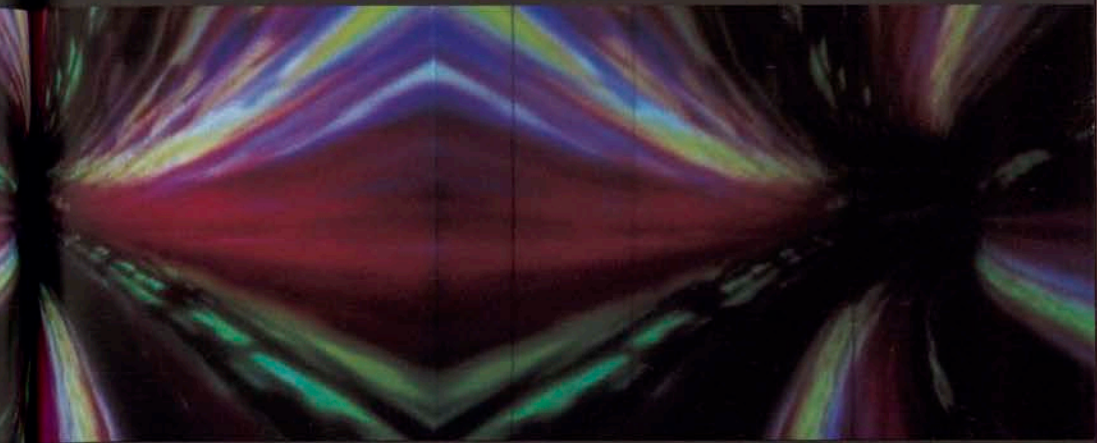
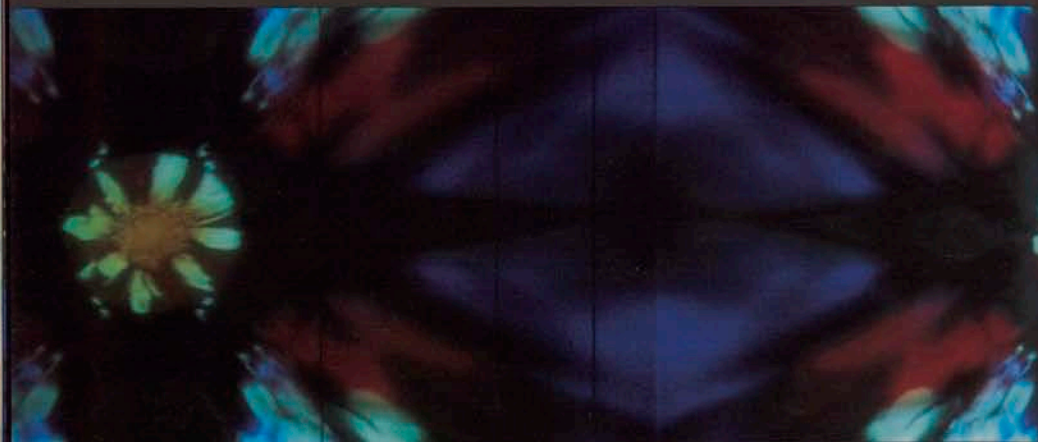
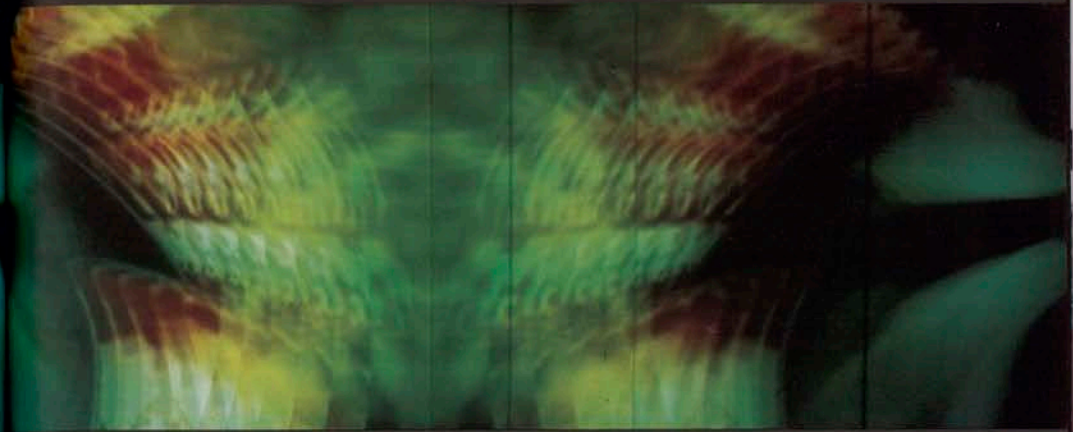
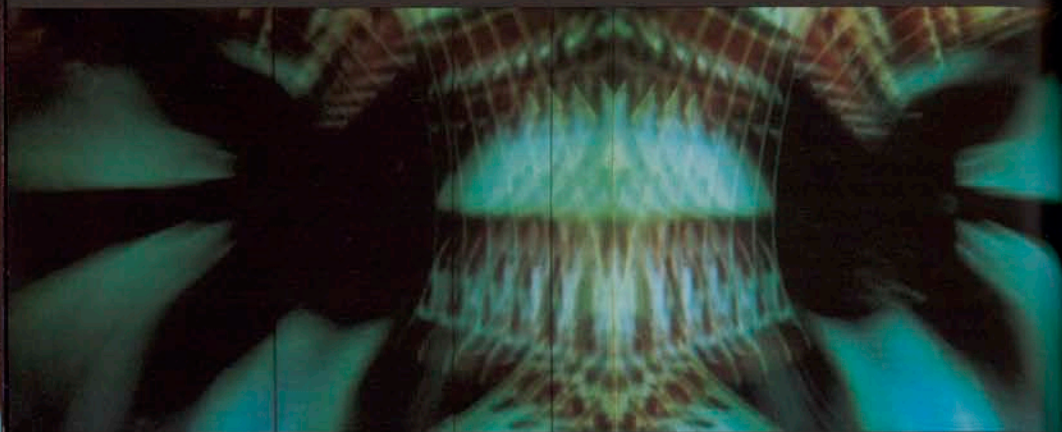


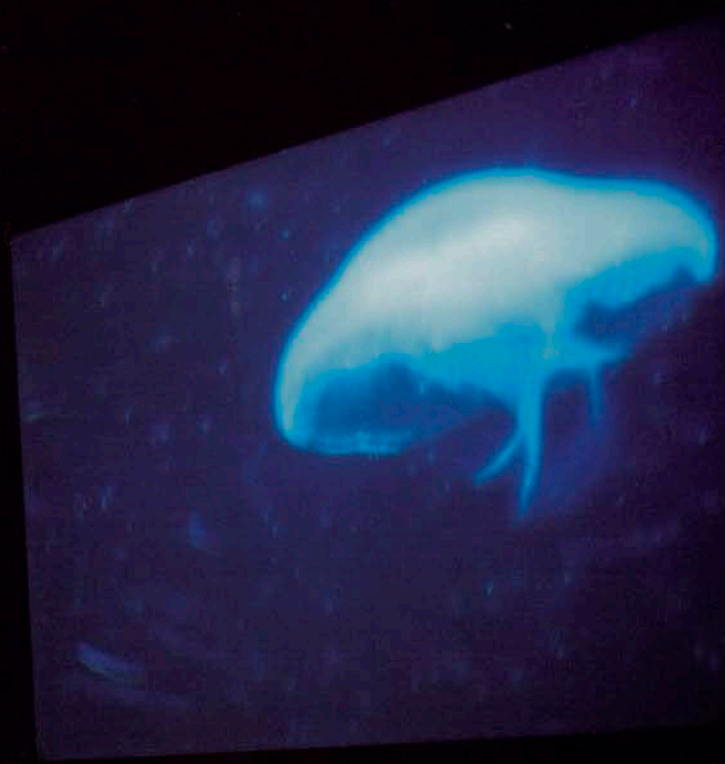










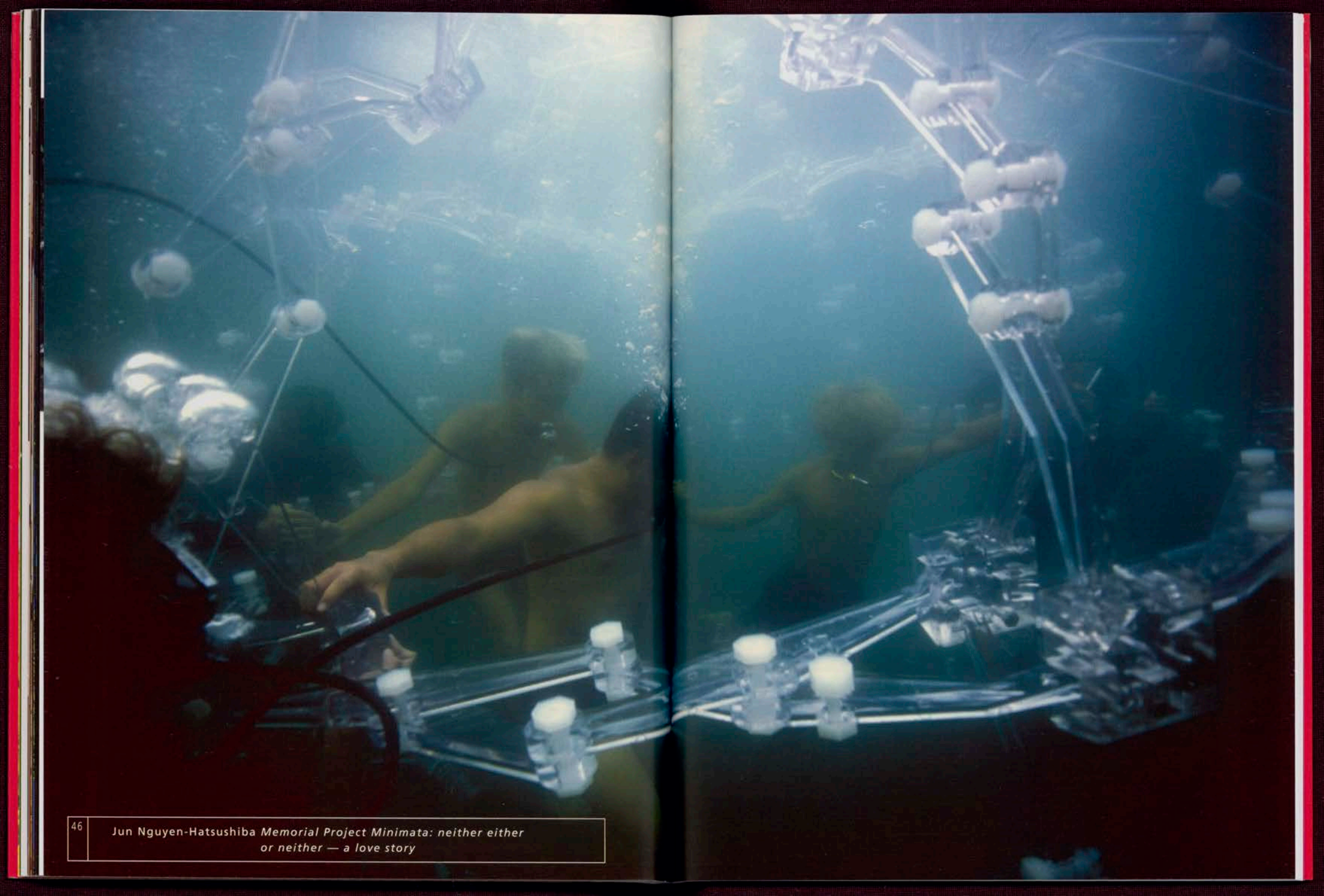


Let man have dominion over
fish of the sea, and over the
the air, and over every living
that moves upon the



```
CTGGGATATTCGTGAGCC  
ATGAGGAGGAGGATTTGATTTG  
GACTTACCGGCGGCGGCGAT  
AGGACTGTGTGTGCATTTGG  
CGGATTTGCTTGTGATTTG  
ATGCGTGTGTGTGATTTGGC  
TGTGCTGCTGCGGCGGCGTGTG  
GCGTGTATGCGGCGGCGTGTG  
GCTGATTTGTGATTTGCGCC
```





HANY ARMANIOUS

Hany Armanious messes with realism by revealing what shouldn't be there. Realism is a conventional representation [of the world]. Armanious lets *life* into the realm of his work in the form of everyday objects, which, when gathered together *en masse* in his major installation *Selflok* 1994-2003, seem to represent an *ur-reality*. Armanious leads us down the garden path and back again. He shows us the true nature of realism, plays style-guide, even seer: an individual responsible for revelation.

Armanious has cast himself in this mythic role for some time, though clues to this particular identity have been hidden to the casual viewer. Recently, Armanious declared his hand when he branded one of his *Assorted muffins* 2003 with the signature Carlos Castaneda. Castaneda, author of *The teachings of Don Juan: a Yaqui way of knowledge* 1968, introduced peyote-inspired quest philosophy and shamanism to popular culture. This invites a psychotropic as well as art-historical reading of Armanious' work. His *untitled* 1997 made for *Contemporaria 5* in Melbourne springs to mind; a low table surrounded by mats and cushions was placed in the gallery, while during the opening (and once a day thereafter) the audience was invited to sit down and listen to 'magic party candles' play a tinny version of "Happy Birthday." As the candles burned down, the tune got increasingly demented and came to a climax much like a séance or shamanistic ritual.

In this context, *Selflok* is a sub-cultural *wunderkammer* in as much as it is a scatter-installation. Objects that may have been skipped over in earlier readings come into focus. We notice a model of a Central American Indian pyramid within the work. The bunny rabbit refers to Lewis Carroll rather than Beatrix Potter or Albrecht Dürer. The various pipes refer to recreational drugs rather than tobacco. *Selflok* is transformed from fairy-tale fantasyland to pharmacological paradise.

BIOGRAPHY

1962 born in Ismalia, Egypt. Lives and works in Sydney, Australia

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Art Nouveau barbecue* Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 *Selflok* Ian Potter Museum, Melbourne, Australia
- 2001 *Selflok* UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles, United States

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Half the world away* Hallwalls Contemporary Art Centre, Buffalo, United States
- Line Up* The Happy Lion Gallery, Los Angeles, United States
- 2000 *Drive: power> progress> desire* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand
- 1993 *Aperto 45th* Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy

FURTHER READING

- 2002 Fergus Armstrong and Amanda Rowell *Selflok* UCLA Hammer Museum, Los Angeles
- 2001 Eve Sullivan 'Hany Armanious: prostrated offerings from a 20th century alchemist', *Art & Australia*, vol. 39, #2, pp. 230-231
- 2000 Rex Butler 'Hany Armanious' *artext* #68, pp. 66-71

Opposite page: Hany Armanious *Woman with mushrooms*

The hero of the popular comic book, and motion picture, *Spiderman* gained his superpowers as the result of a scientific accident. The catalytic agent responsible for his transformation was a modified animal: an irradiated spider. In 1962 when Stan Lee created the cartoon he could hardly have predicted the extent to which man and beast were to be entwined in medical research.

Although since the 1920s animals have been used as lab-specimens to research human diseases, the merging of animal cells with human cells for positive benefit sounds like weird science. Yet, since 1994 Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP), isolated from the *Aequorea victoria* jellyfish, has been used as a signal carrier in gene research. The protein makes the jellyfish glow, and when isolated can be injected into DNA to make it visible under ultra violet light to the naked eye. In effect, the process produces a recombinant human and jellyfish DNA.

That a jellyfish has become important to human cell research reverses the usual psychology of similitude that typifies attitudes towards bio-medical research. Generally, we think in an 'order-of-species' way about the animals that important testing is done on, that is, we would expect chimpanzees to be the key to breakthroughs in science; as they are most like man. (Animals are also at the top of the order of conservationist efforts). Jellyfish are almost primeval and belong at the bottom of the order of species. They are invertebrates and have no brain or nervous system yet this humble life form is making an invaluable contribution to advanced research.

Christine Borland's installation *The Aether sea* 1999 which includes a recombinant DNA sample and video projection of the jellyfish floating ethereally through 'space' demythologises the science and calls attention to the entire range of species. The galactic quality of the video projection is suggestive of cell research representing a 'final frontier.'

BIOGRAPHY

1965 born in Darvel, Scotland. Lives and works in Kilcraggan, Scotland

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 *Christine Borland* York University Art Gallery, Toronto, Canada; Contemporary Art Museum, Houston; United States; Miami Art Museum, Miami, United States
Nephila mania Fabric Workshop & Museum, Philadelphia, United States
- 1998 *Christine Borland* De Appel, Amsterdam, Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Mirroring evil* The Jewish Museum, New York, United States
- 2001 *Here + Now: Scottish art 1990-2001* Aberdeen City Art Gallery & Museum, Scotland, United Kingdom
- 2000 *Partage d'Exotismes* Biennale de Lyon, Lyon, France
Paradise now: 39 artists explore how genetic research is changing our lives Exit Art, New York, United States

FURTHER READING

- 2002 Norman Kleeblatt (ed.) *Mirroring evil: Nazi imagery/recent art* The Jewish Museum, New York
Christine Borland and Michael Tarantino (eds.) *Christine Borland: bullet-proof breath* DAP, New York
- 2001 Ele Carpenter and Graham Gussin (ed.) *Nothing* August Media, London
Katrina M. Brown *Christine Borland: progressive disorder* Dundee Contemporary Arts and Bookworks, London

The text in David Hatcher's wall painting is taken from Professor Albert Hofmann's log of his first controlled ingestion of LSD in Basel in 1943. The log reads with equal parts insight and befuddlement, elation and terror, vigour and nausea. By the conclusion of the log Hofmann was in no doubt that he had discovered a psychoactive agent with potential to profoundly alter human consciousness.

Hatcher is interested in the comparative contingency of production in the fields of art, science and industry. His work often addresses 'market forces' and the way in which they determine the dominant cultural form; whether it is a commodity, doctrine or style. Little wonder therefore that Hatcher has quoted from one of the terrifying passages of Hofmann's log, as since the experiment, LSD has been demonised in official culture, and the specifics of Hofmann's original research have been sublimated. The "bad trip" experience relating to the 1960s has become the drug's dominant association.

The compound was an accidental outcome of Hofmann's experiments with ergot fungi, commenced in 1929. Ergot, a fungus that blooms on rye bread, was a common cause of mass poisonings. Yet, Ergot had been used by midwives since the 18th century as a successful palliative and was being prescribed by doctors from the early 19th century (though often fatally). Hofmann was in search of a medicine.

This genesis has been largely expunged from the record as a result of the research migrating from Switzerland to the United States in the post-War period and getting caught in the maelstrom of effects connected with the birth of the 'American century'. Because US military agencies were involved with the licensing of laboratory research (with hope of harnessing the outcomes) 'radical scientists' such as Dr Timothy Leary took an opposite approach promoting the drug as a pharmaceutical conduit to self-determination. The net result was the cancellation of controlled LSD experimentation and the permanent suspension of medical discourse surrounding the drug. To this end, Hatcher's painting looks like seventies conceptualism or a correlative of the *Star Wars* title sequence, also borne of that decade. It suggests that LSD culture needs to be updated before it can become retroactive.

BIOGRAPHY

1973 born in Auckland, New Zealand. Lives and works in Berlin, Germany and Los Angeles, United States

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *I don't must* Rooseum, Malmö, Sweden
Was this the transition? Starkwhite, Auckland, New Zealand
- 2002 *Black fluffy clouds* ABEL Raum für Neue Kunst, Berlin, Germany

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *The sky's the limit* Kunstverein Langenhagen, Langenhagen, Germany
Dasein: positionen zeitgenössischer Kunst aus der Sammlung Reinking Ernst-Barlach Museum, Ratzeburg and Wedel, Germany
- 2002 *Break* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

FURTHER READING

- 2003 Jon Bywater 'Break' *Broadsheet*; vol. 32, #1 January-March, p. ##
Jon Bywater 'The art world and the business world meet at a private gallery in Auckland' *The Listener*; 17-23 August, pp. ##-##
Tobias Hering 'Inseln in der Schwärze', *tageszeitung*, 18 April

The Third World and developing world have been used since the early 19th century as a testing ground for war technologies, with brute colonial implications. Western agents served as advisers, and arms sellers to armies in the Sino-Japanese, Sino-Russian and Opium Wars, sometimes with the added purpose of testing equipment for their home nations. The categorical example of this effect was the dropping of the Atom Bomb on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945 by the United States Air Force. Many historians have read dropping the bomb as the logical conclusion of the Manhattan Project, rather than necessary force, as Japan was going to capitulate in any case.

The human toll of the event has extended through two generations and is thought of as the principal Japanese environmental crisis. Consequently, a number of other domestic ecological disasters remain relatively hidden from view. In his new work, *Memorial Project Minimata 2002* Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba sheds light on a Japanese catastrophe resulting from the unchecked dumping of Mercury, as an industrial by-product, in Minimata Bay in Southern Japan. It also refers to the use of Agent Orange in Vietnam. Mercury and the toxic effects of Agent Orange are most harmful to babies in the womb. Like the effects of nuclear fallout, the impact spans generations.

Principally shot under water Hatsushiba's videos are choreographically enthralling, and quietly dislocating. Under the sea is portrayed as another dimension and equated with outer-space, a metaphor emphasised by the seascapes in which Hatsushiba's videos are set. As much as they are living eco-systems, they are presented as toxic to humans. Indeed the actors in the films are often on the verge of drowning. We understand that in Minimata the Mercury dumping is associated with death. Despite this deathliness Hatsushiba's videos are incredibly beautiful highlighting that even the most toxic aspects of nature can incite wonderment.

BIOGRAPHY

1968 born in Tokyo, Japan. Lives and works in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba* The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, United States
Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba Austin Museum of Art, Texas, United States
 2002 *Memorial project: towards the complex* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Moderns* Castello di Rivoli Museo d'Arte Contemporanea, Torino, Italy
 2002 *(The world may be) fantastic* 13th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
 25th São Paulo Biennale, São Paulo, Brazil
 2001 1st Yokohama Triennial of Contemporary Art Yokohama, Japan

FURTHER READING

- 2002 Roger McDonald 'Towards the complex' (*the world may be) fantastic*, Ewen McDonald (ed.), Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, pp. 134-136
 2001 Daniel Birnbaum 'Best of 2001' *Artforum*, December, p. 98
 Massimiliano Gioni 'Speaking in tongues' *Flash Art*, November-December, pp. 74-77

Ever since Ridley Scott's film *Blade runner* 1982 popularised concepts of cyber-punk and future-cities Tokyo has been touted as the most likely location of an emergent metropolitan form. This prediction is based on readings of the suburbs of Roppongi and Shinjuku with their 24-hour a day neon and L.E.D. advertising billboards, and labyrinthine streets squeezed between multi-story buildings.

The metaphor has been fed by the rise and rise of Japanese technology industries selling the world its vision of the future. Moreover, the Japanese life-style has been collapsing under its own weight: for instance the country's fishing stocks are depleted, threatening the national diet. Western media coverage has concentrated on these effects and the Japanese techno-nightmare has become a pop-cultural trope. A trope perpetuated by Manga that places a dystopian future-vision at the centre of its aesthetic.

This technological representation elides traditional Japanese architectural aesthetics, and contemporary work by architects such as Tadao Ando, which incorporates nature as an essential element of building. It also overlooks natural interior arts such as *Ikebana* and *Bonsai* that can be enacted even within confined urban dwelling, commensurate nature in living space. (This said *Origami* was used as subtext in *Blade runner*). Furthermore, the trope runs roughshod over the popularity with Japanese and Western tourists and media alike.

Meanwhile, Tamami Hitsuda's works juxtapose natural and technological representations, suggesting that each has a role to play in contemporary art. In the large photographic triptych *Floating litter* 1999, flora and detritus are equally as dreamy looking — one is as beautiful as the other. Though the litter is clearly having a negative ecological impact on its surrounds, it is made of colours brighter and hues more varied than those that can be easily found in nature. It's as if Hitsuda is telling us that, at least in winter, the yellow of a McDonalds' burger wrapper is potentially beautiful on a day when there are no daffodils to view. Litter is a rose by another name.

BIOGRAPHY

1958 born in Kagawa Prefecture, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *The place without name* Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
 1999 *What you want is not so far* Tomio Koyama Gallery, Tokyo, Japan
 1998 *I am in here* Gallery APA, Nagoya, Japan

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Henshin Ganbou* Fukui City Art Museum, Fukui, Japan
 1997 Joint Exhibition with Yeu-Lai Mo, Hockney Gallery RCA, London, United Kingdom
 1995 *Absolute secret* Royal College of Art, London, United Kingdom

Transgenics is a field of biomedical research transforming the use of test animals. It involves the genetic modification, cloning, and breeding of animals for specific use in testing. It can involve the production of specific cell matter via breeding and DNA recombination, so future tests can be conducted on cells alone without a living host. Transgenecists often computer clone the cells and conduct their research via electronic simulation, so that researchers in labs around the world can be involved in team experiments taking place in real-time.

Eduardo Kac is an artist whose work crosses boundaries between transgenic biological research and interactive art. Kac is one of the pioneers of artwork produced specifically for the Internet. It is a zone of art practice that made contemporaneous theory, about the dialogical nature of art works, subjectivity shifting from author to audience, concrete. The art object underwent a transformation in this process. It became temporal, and outcomes (the final 'object') depended on multiple plug-ins and users. Cells, being experimented with via the Internet, undergo related transformations.

Kac has also bred a transgenic animal as an artwork. Alba the rabbit has had Green Fluorescent Protein (GFP) derived from jellyfish spliced into its DNA: so that the white rabbit fluoresces green under ultra-violet light. The work tests ethical boundaries, viewers of the work who condone genetic experimentation for science abhor the concept of it being used for art: yet science is implicated in a long history of inhumanity and exploitation of which art is innocent. In *Genesis* 1999-2003 the biblical text, about man's dominion over all creatures, provides a philosophical basis for genetic experimentation, while its transformation into bacteria makes the literal genetic transformation repellant. Kac's work provokes ethical debate, while science tends to elide it, marking the philosophical divergence of the disciplines of art and science.

BIOGRAPHY

1962 born in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Lives and works in Chicago, United States

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Genesis* Berkeley Art Museum, Berkeley, United States
- 2002 *Free Alba!* Julia Friedman Gallery, Chicago, United States
- 2000 *GFP bunny* Greniera à Sel, Avignon, France

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *American dream: a survey* Ronald Feldman Fine Arts, New York, United States
- 2080 *Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo*, São Paulo, Brazil
- 2001 *1st Yokohama Triennial of Contemporary Art* Yokohama, Japan
- 1999 *Ars Electronica* Linz, Austria

FURTHER READING

- 2001 Lisa Lynch 'Trans-Genesis: an interview with Eduardo Kac' *New Formations*, London
- 1999 David Pescovitz 'Be there now: telepresence art online' *Flash Art*, March-April, pp. 51-52
- 1996 Eduardo Kac (ed.) *Visible Language*, vol. 30, #2, Rhode Island
- 1995 Eduardo Kac *Holo-poetry: essays, manifestoes, critical and theoretical writings*, New Media Editions, Lexington

"The future is in plastics" or so said a character in Mike Nichol's breakthrough film *The Graduate* 1967. The comment typified a 1960s vision of a design world dominated by the material; further lampooned in the Woody Allen film *Sleeper* 1973 set in a future jam packed with pod chairs and low slung coffee tables. Both Woody Allen's character and Benjamin, the hero of *The Graduate* are terrified at the prospect of all that plastic.

Plastics are stable polymers and therefore unusually resistant to rot and, in some cases, too toxic to dispose of by burning. While they can be recycled or in some cases melted down and extruded into other forms, once they have been produced they are here to stay. So all that plastic furniture of the 1960s and 1970s is still with us, just buried in landfills.

A number of digestible greases used in food manufacture are also derived from petrochemicals as are some gels, used in medicine, cosmetics and cleaning products. These too can be difficult to dispose of and, in some cases, even more toxic to destroy.

Denise Kum employs all these plastics, gels and greases as the material comprising her installations. She creates apparently stable but potentially toxic sculptural environments or brings unexpected readings to seemingly benign sculptural work (such as a series of sculptures from the 1990s made from lubricant gels, used in gynaecological examination, that she baked and coloured. For *Bloom* Kum has worked with industrial scientists to utilise recycled materials to produce an environment looking like a toxic waste dump. While synthetic, it conveys a beauty to equal that found in nature, thereby disturbing any easy reading of the work as simply critique of environmental management policies.

BIOGRAPHY

1968 born in Auckland, New Zealand. Lives and works in London, United Kingdom

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Denise Kum* Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
- Denise Kum* The Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, Australia
- 1993 *White light Wet heat - window works* Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Cuckoo* Rooseum, Malmö, Sweden
- Creek Cell* Project Space, London, United Kingdom
- 1998 *Every Day* 11th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

FURTHER READING

- 2003 Matthew Arnatt (ed.) *100 Reviews*, #4, Alberta Press, London, p.15
- 2002 Chris Chapman *Denise Kum*, Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide, Katrina Simmons 'Slippery when wet' *Broadsheet*, vol. 31, #2, June-August, p. 20
- 1999 Richard Dale 'Going East: post-orientalism in contemporary New Zealand art', *Art Asia Pacific*, #23, pp. 60-65

An undertow is a fast moving current running opposite to the tide and is invisible on the surface of the water. Undertows can pull bathers under and drown them. Prevalent at beaches affected by erosion, usually resulting from over-development or sand depletion from mining, undertows kill hundreds of people every year in Australia, Susan Norrie's home country. In fact, drowning is the primary cause of accidental death there. While Australian's are the world's most able swimmers, they just haven't been able to tame nature and they have added to its deadliness by increasing rates of erosion.

Norrie's multi-part video installation *Undertow 2002* presents collisions between man and his environment. In each clash man is loser, if only tacitly, and is often signaled as cause of [his] demise. One video is of Greenpeace workers cleaning wildlife after an oil-spill off the coast of Spain. Even though it is animals that suffer, in the context of the work it reads like human tragedy; man loses out as every species dies.

In many of Norrie's recent videos man is dressed in the protective uniform (plastic jumpsuits, rubber gloves, and masks) associated with environmental disaster. Within her *mis en scene* it seems to have become standard issue garb, as if man can no longer breathe or have the air contact his skin. Because this isn't yet the case it reads like transference, an admission that [we] have become unsuited to our environment. Lab coats also proliferate, implicating science as concomitant in this metamorphosis.

A dust storm engulfing the city of Melbourne in February 1983 is the central component of *Undertow*. A capital of modernity at the end of the 19th century, Melbourne developed a town plan, civic infrastructure and transport system to rival Hausmann's Paris. It was also home of the Heidelberg School, the artist group that founded Australian landscape painting and the imposition of the European landscape tradition over the indigenous unconscious. The dust storm represents the land biting back, proving the contingency of representation in the face of environmental reality.

BIOGRAPHY

1953 born in Sydney, Australia. Lives and works in Sydney

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Susan Norrie: projects* Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, Australia
- 2002 *Undertow* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia
- 2001 *Thermostat* KIASMA Museum of Contemporary Art, Helsinki, Finland

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Future cinema: the cinematic imaginary after film* ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
- 1999 *Signs of life* Melbourne International Biennial, Melbourne, Australia
- 1999 *Trace* Liverpool Biennial of Contemporary Art, Liverpool, United Kingdom

FURTHER READING

- 2003 Juliana Engberg 'Loop-back: new Australian art to Berlin' *Artlink*, vol. 23, # 3, September, pp. 24-29
- 2000 Bernice Murphy 'Susan Norrie' *Zeitgenössische Fotokunst aus Australien*, Neuer Berliner Kunstverein, Berlin
- 1998 Garry Dufour and Trevor Smith (eds.) *Susan Norrie* Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth

A first encounter with Motohiko Odani's work *Berenice*, 2003 in the Japanese Pavilion at this year's Venice Biennale suggested nothing particularly Japanese. The 2 metre in diameter metallic pod was initially reminiscent of retro space junk. Yet the series of severed wires and cords that splayed from it read like arteries, allowing it to be read as the 'heart' of some nuclear device from the beginnings of the atomic age. Through this reference we might recall Japan's disquieting notoriety in the history of the age as the recipient of the first atomic 'payload'.

Such disjunction is not unusual in Odani's work, which draws on a multiplicity of cultural references from Japanese Anime and Hollywood film to European classicist, religious and literary signifiers. We may read in *Berenice* references to early science fiction or even to the Edgar Allen Poe grotesque gothic tale of the same name. His video installation *Ninth room* was more specific in its reference to Dante's *Inferno*, which describes a descent into Hell, while biblical references also dominate the photographic series *Phantom Limb*, which depicts a young girl manifesting stigmata as if in a quasi numinous space. Such precedents reinforce the Lewis Carroll overtones of the work *Rompers*, which like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* depicts a young girl as the central protagonist in a bizarre setting featuring mutant and mutating creatures; a depiction perhaps of the possibility of wonder in a post apocalyptic landscape.

In Victorian literature a young girl represented innocence. However any sense that Odani's girl is an innocent in a grotesque world is broken when she unfurls a lizard like tongue to snag a passing insect. While referencing the past Odani proffers an ambiguous vision of the future.

BIOGRAPHY

1972 born in Kyoto, Japan. Lives and works in Tokyo, Japan

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *9th Room* Gallery RAKU, Kyoto University of Art and Design, Kyoto, Japan
- 2001 *En melody* Marella Arte Contemporanea, Milan, Italy
- 1997 *Phantom limb* P-House, Tokyo, Japan

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Heterotopias* 50th Venice Biennale, Japanese Pavilion, Venice, Italy
- 2001 *7th Istanbul Biennale* Istanbul, Turkey
- 2000 *5th Biennales de Lyon d'Art Contemporain* Lyon, France

FURTHER READING

- 2003 Yuko Hasegawa 'Motohiko Odani' *Cream 3*, Gilda Williams (ed.), Phaidon Press Ltd, London, pp. 256 - 259
- Yuko Hasegawa 'Heterotopias' *50th International Art Exhibition*, Francesco Bonami and Maria Luisa Frisa (eds.), La Biennale di Venezia and Marsilio Publishing, Venice, pp. 534-535
- 2000 Noi Sawaragi 'Motohiko Odani' *Ground Zero* Japan, Art Tower Mito Contemporary Art Gallery, Ibaragi

Early in the film *Interloper* 2003 the unseen protagonist and narrator announces that "nothing is a more powerful placebo than the word . . . as the organisms of diseases are naked to the human eye anyway". These words evoke much of the prevailing sensibility of the recent series of films made by Saskia Olde Wolbers. Generally in these films a voiceover functions as an interior monologue and a personal account of a central character whose recourse to imaginary worlds has led to bizarre results in actual life. As the character recounts their tale as a fluid movement between fact and fiction a sense of derangement pervades, enabling Olde Wolbers to explore story telling as a form of social disease.

In the case of *Interloper* the entire history and identity of the protagonist appears to be self created, with nevertheless tragic consequences involving an attempted murder and suicide. Like most of Olde Wolbers' films it is based on an actual life, in this case the story of a man who successfully pretended to be a doctor of the World Health Organization in Geneva for 18 years. Olde Wolbers embellishes the tale with the help of mesmerising visual elements, evoking a hybrid space that resembles popular depictions of virtual reality. Indeed emerging developments in science and information technology are often referenced in her work, such as the biotechnology lab where the fake doctor begins his life, or *Day-Glo* 1999, where a farmer believes he has lost his wife into the realm of virtual reality.

If Olde Wolbers seeks to map a collective psychosis, a disease that feeds on language itself, works such as *Interloper* and *Day-Glo* also suggest that the disease could become endemic in the brave new world predicted by biotechnology, cybernetics and virtual reality.

BIOGRAPHY

1972 born in Breda, Netherlands. Lives and works in London, United Kingdom and Los Angeles, United States

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2003 *Saskia Olde Wolbers* Galerie Diana Stigter, Amsterdam, Netherlands
Saskia Olde Wolbers Museum Het Domein, Sittard, Netherlands
 2000 *Mindset* Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2003 *Fast forward: media art* Sammlung Goetz ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany
Wonderland Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand
ANTI PURE Ursula Blickle Stiftung, Kraichtal-Unteröwisheim, Germany;
 Kunsthalle St. Gallen, St. Gallen, Switzerland

FURTHER READING

2002 Kate Bush 'First take: Saskia Olde Wolbers' *Artforum*, January, p. 122

The title of Patricia Piccinini's new video work *In bocca al lupo* 2003 translates as: "in the mouth of the wolf." In Italy, where Piccinini's family hails from, it is used as a lucky parting phrase between friends. The usual response roughly translated is "in the arse of the whale". Piccinini uses the title to signal the long history of man's connection with beast played out in Biblical tales, Jean de La Fontaine's *Aesop's fables* written in the 1700s, and writing by founding American modernists Herman Melville and Jack London. It is a history that has been drawn on and updated by Walt Disney and later by George Lucas who made cult heroes out of strange animals and introduced phrases like 'creature shop' and 'cloning' to a mass audience, all in big budget Hollywood style for the purpose of entertainment.

Piccinini produces a range of 'creatures' in digital photography, sculpture, and digital video. The works unfold in three interrelated series including: *Atmosphere* to do with landscapes and breathing; *Autosphere*, relating to mechanics; and *Biosphere* presenting the creatures. Many of Piccinini's creations have skin that looks very human because she casts or renders it from human subjects, so they look 'real' in comparison to movie creatures. Moreover, works in her *Mutant genome project* (part of the *Biosphere* series) are often set in laboratories or reference actual exemplars (a human ear grown on a lab rat for instance). This combination often produces discomfort and existential anxiety that makes us question where entertainment and science are headed.

The NASA space programme was inspired by predictive science fiction, by the likes of Clarke and Asimov, as American politicians and researchers were driven to realise fantasy. Piccinini asks if genetic science is taking us down a similar path to a fantasy destination.

BIOGRAPHY

1965 born in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Lives and works in Melbourne, Australia

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2003 *We are family* 50th Venice Biennale, Australian Pavilion, Venice, Italy
 2002 *Retrospectology: the world according to Patricia Piccinini* Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, Australia
 2001 *The breathing room* Tokyo Metropolitan Museum of Photography, Images and Technology, Tokyo, Japan

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2003 *8th Bienal de la Habana*, Havana, Cuba
Face up: contemporary art from Australia Nationalgalerie am Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin, Germany
 2002 *(The world may be) fantastic* 13th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia

FURTHER READING

2003 Linda Michael (ed.) *Patricia Piccinini: we are family*, Australia Council for the Arts, Sydney
 Stephen Naylor 'Getting into the Giardini di Castello: Australia's representation at the Venice Biennale', *Art & Australia*, vol. 40, #4, pp. 594-601
 2002 Juliana Engberg *Retrospectology: the world according to Patricia Piccinini*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

From the mid 1990s Magnus Wallin has made a series of computer animated films resembling depictions of virtual reality that seem predictive of a not too distant future, but are nevertheless crammed with references to the history of Western Civilisation. By creating links and associations between medieval painting, computer games, eugenics, cloning, science fiction, and Hollywood film, he creates a nether world that mixes the mystical with the mundane and the triumphal with the terrifying. In all these films the focus is the human body as both a subject and object and a form both exalted and feared.

The computer game reference, with its link to archetypes of good and evil, particularly characterises *Exit* 1997. Disabled and infirm human forms are hunted in gladiatorial style while applause resounds each time one is slain. At the apparent finish line an ominous black helicopter swoops up the survivors, but it is unclear as to whether they are being rescued or taken for some further grotesque entertainment. The plot continues in *Limbo* 1999 where the helicopter attempts to descend into the Nazi Olympic stadium, lit up by the Albert Speer light show, only to be attacked by angels. The works complicate classical notions of evil and abnormality as personified by the disabled, who appear both as victim and victor. The same blurred distinction is the pivot for *Skyline* 2000, where idealised human forms, evoking sporting supremacy, trapeze into the air only to crash into a monolithic tower and disintegrate into pieces.

In *Physical Paradise* 1998 the body disappears in favour of a metaphorical journey evoking a change of consciousness, only to return at the end as a flashback along with images of genetic manipulation. As with all his installations the film is endlessly repeated, adding to the sense of a dizzying technological world where history and the infinite collapse in on themselves.

BIOGRAPHY

1965 born in Malmö, Sweden. Lives and works in Malmö

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 *Exit & limbo* Galerie Nordenhake, Berlin, Germany
 2001 *Physical sightseeing* Borås Konstmuseum, Borås, Sweden
 1999 *Nordiska klassiker* Bergens Kunstforening, Bergen, Norway

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2001 *7th International Istanbul Biennial* Istanbul, Turkey
Plateau of humankind 49th Venice Biennale, Venice, Italy
 2000 *7th Bienal de la Habana* Havana, Cuba

FURTHER READING

- 2001 Sara Arrhenius, *Magnus Wallin: plateau of humankind* 49th Venice Biennale, Venice
 Mats Stjernstedt, 'Magnus Wallin', *Artforum*, May, p. 188
 Sara Arrhenius, 'Magnus Wallin', *NU the Nordic art review* vol. 3, #3-4, pp. 56-61

Photosynthesis describes the conversion of light and carbon dioxide, by plants, into energy. Carbon dioxide is a byproduct of human respiration, and the burning of fossil fuels, so to some extent plants and man are co-dependent.

Since the early 1970s Boyd Webb has created work that reminds viewers about the ecological bond between man and the environment. The action within Boyd Webb's early tableaux photographs was often derived from unlikely collisions of nature and culture, of plants or animals invading social space. In *The mandatory second opinion* 1978, for example, two elephants (or at least drawings of elephants) secret themselves in an office, to the alarm of two workers. The images test the rationale of society's ambivalence towards nature and seem to suggest that man has developed social ritual to escape nature's embrace (or natural impulses towards group interaction): there are often two actors in the frame going to ridiculous lengths to ignore each other.

Webb's pictures also hint at the role art has played in this turn. In *River crossing* 1979 a man dressed in outdoor adventure costume shimmies across a river on a rope bridge: when the river is actually a studio photographer's portrait backdrop. Webb is suggesting that twentieth century man is content with a pictorial representation of the great outdoors rather than its natural corollary.

Since the 1990s Boyd Webb has been making particularly toxic looking work that carries the allegory to the point of exhaustion. That is, nature has been exhausted and artificial depictions are all that remain. A number of his works are of magnified microscopic forms, such as spermatozoa (sex) and zygotes (death), that suggest man has had to look entirely inward to locate the remaining natural universe, which also implicates man as cause of the catastrophe. The blooms in the series *Botanics* 2003 look deadly beautiful, as if the digital technology used in their production is blighted and can only produce *la fleur du mal*. Yet, like the protagonist of Baudelaire's poem we are drawn to them all the same.

BIOGRAPHY

1947 born in Christchurch, New Zealand. Lives and works in Brighton, United Kingdom.

SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

- 2002 *Horse & dog* Milton Keynes Gallery, Milton Keynes, United Kingdom
 1997 *Boyd Webb* (monographic touring exhibition) Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand
 1983 *Images fabriquées* Centres Georges Pompidou, Paris, France

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

- 2003 *Break* Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand
 1996 *Spellbound: art and film* Hayward Gallery, London, United Kingdom
 1990 *The readymade boomerang: certain relations in 20th century art* 8th Biennale of Sydney, Sydney, Australia
 1982 *Documenta 7* Museum Fredericianum, Kassel, Germany

FURTHER READING

- 2002 Emily Perkins 'Noble Beasts' *Visit #5*, Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth, p. 9
 1997 Jenny Harper and Christina Barton (eds.) *Boyd Webb* Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland
 1993 Charles Green 'A constructed reality: aspects of contemporary photography' *Art & Text* #42, pp. 107-108

LIST OF WORKS

HANY ARMANIOUS

Assorted muffins 2003

expanding foam, pigment, and paper
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist, Michael Lett,
Auckland and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,
Sydney

Selflok 1993-2001

mixed media installation
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9
Gallery, Sydney

Woman with mushrooms 2003

duraclear print on perspex
955 x 755 mm

courtesy the artist, Michael Lett,
Auckland and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery,
Sydney

CHRISTINE BORLAND

The Aether sea 1999

mixed media installation with twin
channel video projection
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Lisson Gallery,
London

DAVID HATCHER

Dimensions Variable (Albert Hofmann)
2003

wall painting
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Starkwhite,
Auckland

TAMAMI HITSUDA

Floating litter 1999

triptych, ektachrome prints on aluminium
750 x 3150 mm

courtesy the artist and Tomio Koyama
Gallery, Tokyo

EDUARDO KAC

Genesis 1999-2003

mixed media installation with single
channel video projection and soundtrack
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Julia Friedman
Gallery, Chicago

DENISE KUM

Flocculate flow 2003

detergent, digestible grease, liquid soap,
pallets, plastic, recycled petrolatum
dimensions variable

Flow 2003

triptych, digital prints mounted on
dybond and alcotex

2000 x 3000 mm

courtesy the artist and Sue Crockford
Gallery, Auckland and Hamish McKay
Gallery, Wellington

JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA

*Memorial Project Minimata: neither
either or neither—a love story* 2002

DVD single channel projection

13' looped

courtesy the artist and Mizuma Art
Gallery, Tokyo

SUSAN NORRIE

Undertow 2002

mixed media installation with multiple
video projection
dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Mori Gallery,
Sydney

MOTOHIKO ODANI

Rompers 2003

DVD single channel projection

3' looped

courtesy the artist and Yumi Umemura
Gallery, Tokyo

SASKIA OLDE WOLBERS

Interloper 2003

DVD single channel projection

9' looped

courtesy the artist and Galerie Diana
Stigter, Amsterdam

PATRICIA PICCININI

In bocca al lupo 2003

DVD single channel projection

2'08" looped

courtesy the artist, Robert Miller Gallery,
New York, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

Plasmid region 2003

DVD single channel projection

3' looped

courtesy the artist, Robert Miller Gallery,
New York, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
and Tolarno Galleries, Melbourne

MAGNUS WALLIN

Physical Paradise 1998

DVD twin channel projection, in mirror
chamber, with exterior light box
3' looped

dimensions variable

courtesy the artist and Galerie
Nordenhake, Berlin

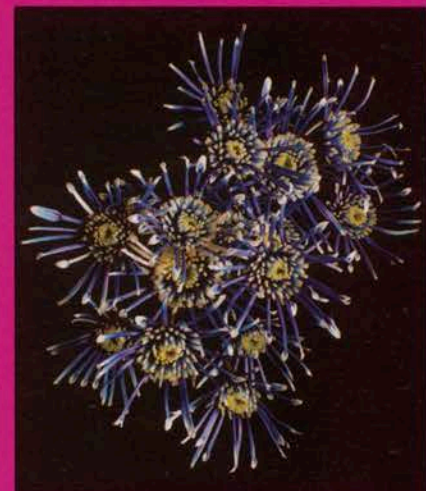
BOYD WEBB

Botanics (blue, brown, iris, purple, yellow)
2003

five panels, digital prints mounted on
dybond and alcotex

1500 x 1200 mm

courtesy the artist, and Sue Crockford
Gallery, Auckland



Boyd Webb *Botanics (blue)*

Published in 2004 by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in association with the exhibition *Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime* 13 December 2003 – 26 February 2004 at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

Copyright © 2004 Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, the writers and artists.
Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Queen Street, Private Bag 2025,
New Plymouth, New Zealand
www.govettbrewster.com

ISBN 0-908848-67-6

Curator: Gregory Burke
Editor: Gregory Burke
Copy editing: Simon Rees / Kate Roberts
Researcher: Lisa Mönchmeyer
Designer: Jessica Gommers
Photographer: Bryan James
Printer: Printlink, Wellington

PUBLICATIONS **GOVETT-BREWSTER** ART GALLERY

CONTRIBUTORS:

GREGORY BURKE

Curator of *Bloom* Gregory Burke is Director of the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery. Burke is responsible for initiating this acclaimed series of thematic exhibitions and catalogues including: *Drive: power, progress, desire*; *Feature: art, life and cinema* and *Extended Play: art remixing music*. In 2004 Burke is presenting *Mediarena: contemporary art from Japan* at the Govett-Brewster in collaboration with curators Roger McDonald and Fumio Nanjo.

JON BYWATER

Jon Bywater is an Auckland based writer and a member of the curatorial collective *Cuckoo*. He was a co-organiser of the international conference *Cultural Provocation: art, activism and social change* in August 2003. He teaches as Head of Theory at the School of Design, UNITEC, writes columns for the *New Zealand Listener* and *Art New Zealand*, and is a regular freelance contributor to other publications.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery

The Govett-Brewster Art Gallery is a museum that fosters the development and interpretation of contemporary art.



NEW PLYMOUTH
DISTRICT COUNCIL
newplymouthnz.com

cover image: Motohiko Odani *Rompers* (video still) 2003

cover flaps: Denise Kum *Flow* (detail) 2003

Inside cover Susan Norrie *Undertow* (video stills) 2003

VIDCOM
NEW ZEALAND

Published in 2004 by the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery in association with the exhibition *Bloom: mutation, toxicity and the sublime* 13 December 2003 – 26 February 2004 at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery.

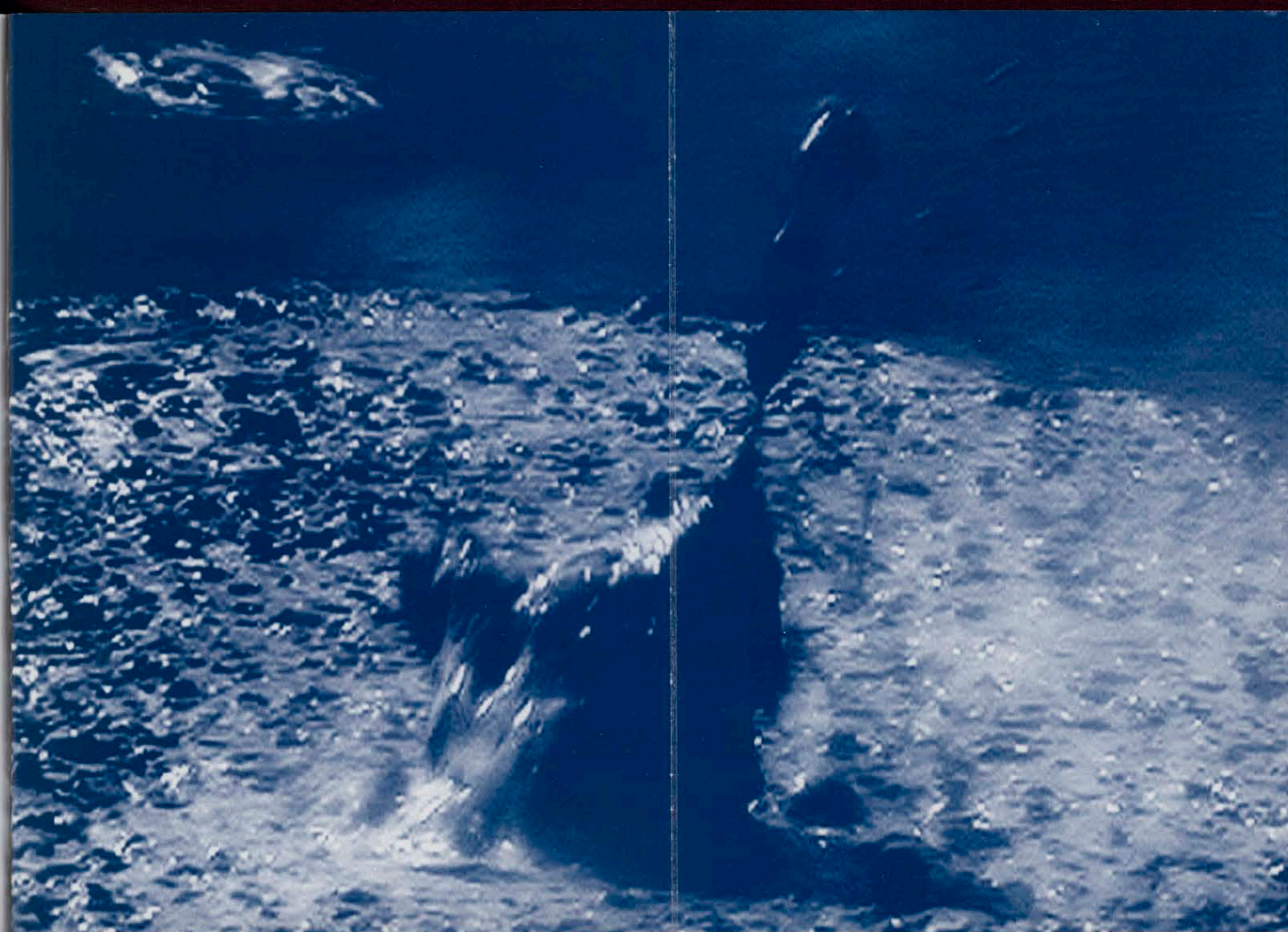
Copyright © 2004 Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, the writers and artists.
Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study, research, criticism or review as permitted under the Copyright Act, no part may be reproduced without prior permission of the publisher.

Govett-Brewster Art Gallery
Queen Street, Private Bag 2025,
New Plymouth, New Zealand
www.govettbrewster.com

ISBN 0-908848-67-6

Curator:	Gregory Burke
Editor:	Gregory Burke
Copy editing:	Simon Rees / Kate Roberts
Researcher:	Lisa Mönchmeyer
Designer:	Jessica Gommers
Photographer:	Bryan James
Printer:	Printlink, Wellington

PUBLICATIONS **GOVETT-BREWSTER** ART GALLERY





PUBLICATIONS

GOVETT-
ART GALLERY
BREWSTER

ISBN 0-908848-63-3



9 780908 848638