

TELECOM PROSPECT

11 FEBRUARY > 29 APRIL

2007 NEW ART > NEW ZEALAND

Gallery Two: Pip Culbert, David Hatcher, Rachael Rakena & Brett Graham, Rachael Rakena, Fez Fa'anana & Brian Fuata, The Association of Collaboration, et al.

Many of the works in this gallery challenge the relationship between visual perception and understanding; mining the complex links between signs, short-hand codes, diagrams, instructions and the ways we interpret them.

In David Hatcher's work *Ludwig and Hugh* two giant fluorescent shapes are painted onto the wall, one is a diagram illustrating a philosophical observation (by the Austrian philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein), one a company logo (for Hugh Hefner's Playboy empire). Here separated from their usual trappings (philosophy journals and textbooks on one hand, saucy magazines and affiliated products on the other) their meanings become unstable. The left hand shape dates from the early 1890s and can be perceived as either a duck or a rabbit (it tends to be comprehended as one shape first and then, often as a result of prompting, the alternative shape becomes apparent).¹ Wittgenstein used this form in conjunction with his observation that interpretation is an action: our initial interpretation may be proved false or overtaken, but each action draws upon what we are familiar with, what we can embellish and imagine. The Playboy bunny (which in its 'rabbitness' is similar to one part of the 'duck-rabbit') has a raft of very different associations.

Classic Hits (excerpts from the Oedipal Manoeuvres in the Dark project) also uses diagrams from philosophical texts (by Freud, Lacan, Hegel etc.), dislocated from their original context which creates a new ambiguity. The paper they are printed on is perforated into sections aping the way the hallucinogen lysergic acid (also known as LSD) is prepared for consumption. Is philosophy the new acid? Does insight into the relationship between sense and perception rely on mind-altering substances? Note the pun on the wall label: the artist produces the work on 100% acid free recycled paper.

The collective et al. has set up what looks like a space for instruction. Light boxes perch on easels, a ring of metal stools are ready for some kind of gathering. Audio tracks are available to give us guidance, yet the layering of sounds is dense and the diverse pieces of information bleed discordantly; electronic scores merge with a computer-generated voice chanting hypotheses of evolutionary development. Within the audio, sculptural and text-based components are recognisable elements (a style of aged and brutal institutional furniture, specialist scientific language, statistical and empirical findings), but the different elements resist conveying any uniform message. We are left with disjointed fragments: order and chaos are in close proximity. The impossibility and futility of 'making sense of the world' may be highlighted within this work, yet it seems at the core of human nature that still we persist.

The Association of Collaboration (Liz Allan, Andrea Bell, Alex Bishop, Paula Booker, Melanie Oliver, Thomasin Sleigh and Sian Torrington) follow a different trajectory to aiding experience and understanding. Formed in late 2006 The Association have devised the *Contemporary Art Mobile Response Unit* for this exhibition to 'provide an open, interactive alternative to the curatorial voice'. The mobile trolley and satellite stations are tool kits to aid the understanding of contemporary art and enable a forum for engagement and response. The language and visual styling of the flow charts housed within the unit may strike a familiar chord with visitors who have attended professional or personal development training.

1. While commonly attributed to a Ludwig Wittgenstein text published after his death in the mid 1950s, the form first appeared in a German humour magazine *Fliegende Blätter* in 1892, as was noted by American psychologist Joseph Jastrow in 1899, who Wittgenstein acknowledges in his text.

Pip Culbert's 9 *Pinnies* have been pared back to their most skeletal—the passages of structural sewing required to enable their form and function. In doing so the artist draws our attention to their construction and their linear make-up. These 'pinny' aprons are familiar domestic apparel charged with nostalgia. Their utility is somewhat restricted by their delicacy (they don't cover a great deal of skirt or trouser and often have ruffles or a special piece of appliqué or embroidery), yet is reinforced by special features such as the little pocket for a hanky, a clothes peg or a shopping list. Their new life dissected and pinned to the wall presents us with the opportunity for a more abstract reading, yet their shape and fabric still elicits our thoughts as to the 'personality' of the apron and its possible history.

Rachael Rakena and Brett Graham's installation *U.F.O.B.*, first seen at the 2006 Sydney Biennial, combines sculpture and video to produce a work that is both haunting and humorous. A 'fleet' of flying pods skim just below the ceiling, from which figures peer down at the viewer (via digital video loops rendered on flat-screen monitors). The work's title merges two acronyms: U.F.O. (unidentified flying object) and F.O.B. (fresh off the boat, used as an insult to recent arrivals, 'you FOB')—aligning the suspicion and the perceived 'exoticism' of both the extra-terrestrial and the 'stranger'. The work draws on different migrant 'arrival' stories, and comically proposes a new sci-fi infused legend. The space craft include one based on the form of the ship *Temuera Morrison* piloted in the *Star Wars* pre-trilogy. The black forms' surface texture is reminiscent of organic matter; a shell worn by water or the undulations of the exterior of a brain. The sound track mixes the dulcet tones of the ukulele with spooky underwater echoes and peals. The work specifically addresses migration and displacement, pointing towards the historical resistance to Pacific migration among some sections of the population in New Zealand (and Australia where this work was first seen) and the increasingly mobile populations of the Pacific, resulting in a more complex and expanded-sense of cultural identity.

The video footage stems from a collaborative performance work *Pacific Washup* by Rachael Rakena and Australian-based artists Fez Fa'anana and Brian Fuata where figures waded out of the sea, encased in ubiquitous plaid-plastic bags (used to carry luggage the world over and commonly spotted at airports where flights run between Pacific Islands and New Zealand or Australia), they make landfall (on Sydney's Bondi Beach) and slowly emerge from the bags, greeted by quizzical looks from joggers and beach-walkers.

The three objects in this gallery by Darren Glass are all cameras, not the point-and-shoot digital camera we have become used to wielding, but handcrafted pinhole cameras. *Log Cam 14 aperture pinhole camera* could be camouflaged in any bush setting or log pile, *Coastline Cam 34 aperture pinhole camera* charts the outline of where land meets sea and the giant *Lemniscate 24 aperture pinhole camera* takes the form of a wood veneer infinity symbol with apertures pointing both outwards and back onto the interior of the form—the ultimate in self-reflexive cameras. Darren Glass has been making pinhole cameras since the early 1990s and has made photographs with an incredible array of materials. Recently he has extended his investigation of how we see through a lens to encompass the camera object itself and the act of photographing in different environments.

For more information on these artists and to find out about events during 'Telecom Prospect 2007' go to: www.telecomprospect2007.org.nz

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