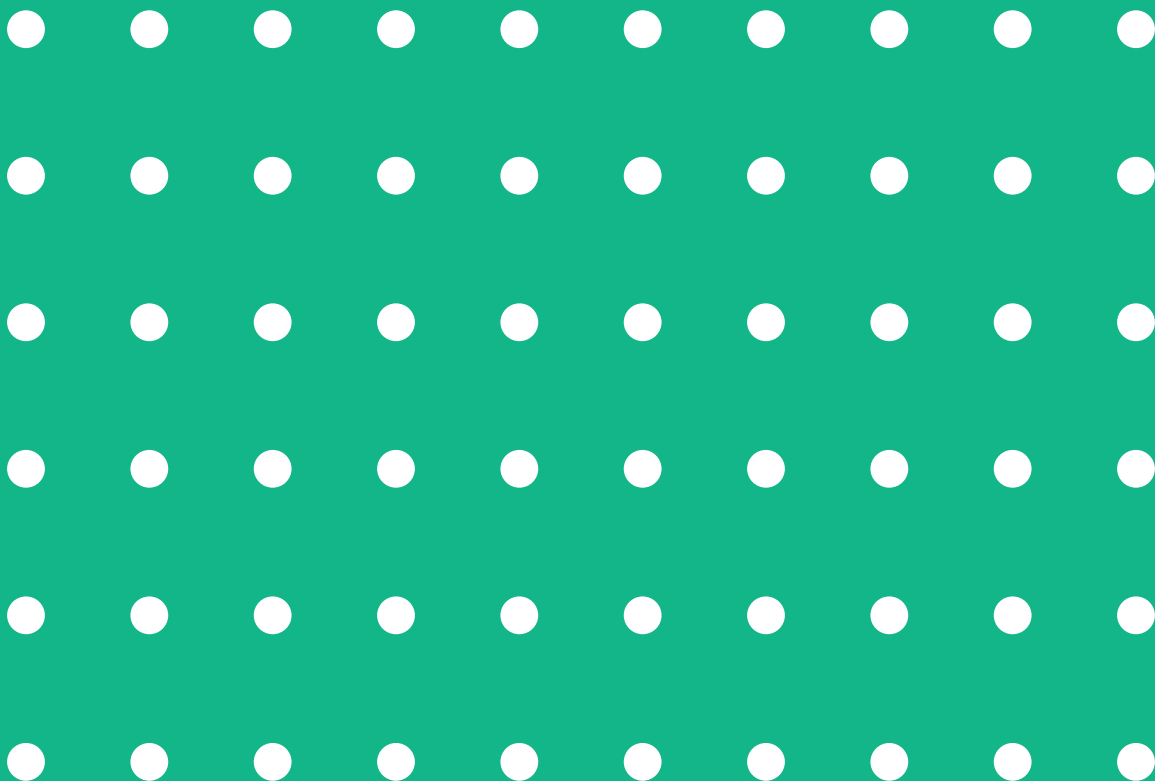


The social life of things.



The social life of things.

Adam Cruickshank

Nathan Gray

Arlo Mountford

Sonia Leber & David Chesworth

Curated by Alicia Renew

The social life of things.

The Social Life of Things brings together five disparate artists who investigate the things (both physical and theoretical) that circulate through our lives. Through objects, imagery and philosophy each artist interprets how things transpire, illuminate and drive human experience. It is through the analysis of these trajectories that the exhibition forms a critical discourse around our relationships with the traditional and conceptual notion of ‘things,’ and asks us to consider the meanings and ideas behind these familiar objects and imagery.

The title of the exhibition derives from the 1986 book of the same name *The Social Life of Things* by Arjun Appadurai. In his introduction Appadurai explains that ‘things’ have social potential and ‘are distinguishable from “products,” “objects,” “goods,” “artifacts,” and other sorts of things,’ it is in this context that things, with their wider social attributes, take on varying forms.¹ From tangible commodified products of labor (biros, bottle caps, post-it notes and extension cords), to the intangible theoretical notions of language, illusion, authority and control, things prevail and are activated by human players having a seamless and dominating presence in our lives. By way of daily interactions they are consumed, demanded and desired having the ability to shape our perception and act as a catalyst for social forms and relations, and ultimately revealing just a little more about the way we live.

Adam Cruickshank subverts everyday objects and their uses in an installation that references and comments on the contemporary trappings of Western lifestyles. A silver gilded lime, two bottle caps and a Buddha branded beer bottle sit on a reclaimed window with marble mount, posing as discarded domestic paraphernalia. A light created from excessive lengths of extension cords illuminates divinely through the cracked, dust caked ghetto-esque window, while a park bench which is a carefully carved, primed and coated replica of the original

tempts the viewer to rest momentarily on it. A small gold Buddha, not unlike the ones found in two dollar shops and Asian markets, sits on a hand carved bowl with incense crudely sticking out of its forehead. These objects are deceptively alluring and have been appropriated, produced and presented more as bespoke collectables rather than as the discarded abandoned pieces they are and refer to. The installation collectively acts as shrine or private pray alter, though clearly references how our culture appropriates religious iconography for consumption and commercial gain and how these objects are inevitably thoughtlessly discarded. Cruickshank’s biro sketch which illustrates where the 6th century Bamyān Buddha’s were located before they were destroyed by the Taliban in 2001, attracts reactions of disbelief and horror, how could these fundamentalists be so callous as to destroy these religious artifacts? Ironically, Cruickshank’s incense Buddha, a mass produced decorative object, in all its inferior glory, draws much the same reaction.

Nathan Gray explores the moiré effect in *A Score for Dance*, a large-scale installation of corresponding and conflicting lines on transparent surfaces. Suspended from the ceiling and drawn on the window, the lines move, dance and distort our vision as one approaches the work, creating an unnerving chimera of movement; the effect is both disorientating and illusionary. The moiré effect as Gray explains is ‘an optical effect produced by overlaying one or more grids, or groups of parallel lines angled slightly differently or of different sizes created a banded pattern.’ With relational possibilities the work deliberately destabilizes the viewer as the effect forces us to physically focus and readdress our perspective while we consider what data and we are consuming. This effect can only be activated by human subjects, Gray’s work relies on our social interaction, participation and reception for the work to succeed, for if there is no viewer, there is no movement, no dance and no performance.

In Truth to Materials, Arlo Mountford has transformed homemade videos from the video-sharing website YouTube into caricatures of contemporary culture. The uncensored and the unsavory are approached with humor and playfulness and if not, a touch of satire. Through a meticulous process of re-animation, these moments caught on personal video recording devices, creates a spectacle of drunken mishaps and cavalier behavior which, with the help of file-sharing websites has become a seemingly valuable source of entertainment available to millions of viewers world-wide. Mountford's focus in particular is discourses in art history and historical visual language. Through the titles of each short video, Mountford aligns these crude and unapologetically hilarious videos to both his own art making process and to seminal moments in 20th century art. This tongue-in-cheek approach is a way to re-think and re-address our contemporary visual language and the history we are creating. Language as a thoroughly socialized thing, is transferred and exchanged daily, it is an inherently human quality which has fundamentally evolved into the expanse of virtually simulated transfers to form a neoteric technological culture.

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth's work *The Way You Move Me* is a two-channel video installation which was created during their IASKA/Spaced residency. Rhythmic and mesmerizing, scenes of rural cattle and sheep herding show iconic imagery of the rural Australian life. As the animals pace, circle and stampede under the direction and control of their human counterparts a visual and visceral language becomes apparent. There is a social language which underlies this work, one of genuine connectedness between the humans and their beasts. This relationship, of habitual care and devotion is paralleled by the reality of economic exchange, as the animals will inevitably be traded for their meat and hides. This demonstration of social

interaction is fundamental to how we relate to and with each other, as through these social constructs there is always a sense of domination at play.

Beyond employing different techniques and aesthetics each artist delights and celebrates in disparate social forms and the individual interpretations of 'things' and how they live and are activated through our joint human experience. For each thing to thrive, it must be engaged with and encoded by human subjects. By the way of the social constructs of language, exchange and consumption we can see through and beyond the abstractions of things. Enabling the consideration of each concept and visualization of contemporary social forms and the ideas that arise from them.

1 Arjun Appadura, *The social life of things*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 6.

A collection of things found, crafted, combined and displaced, *Disappeared Remains* is a continuation of specific aspects of my practice which could be said to coalesce around notions of liminality.

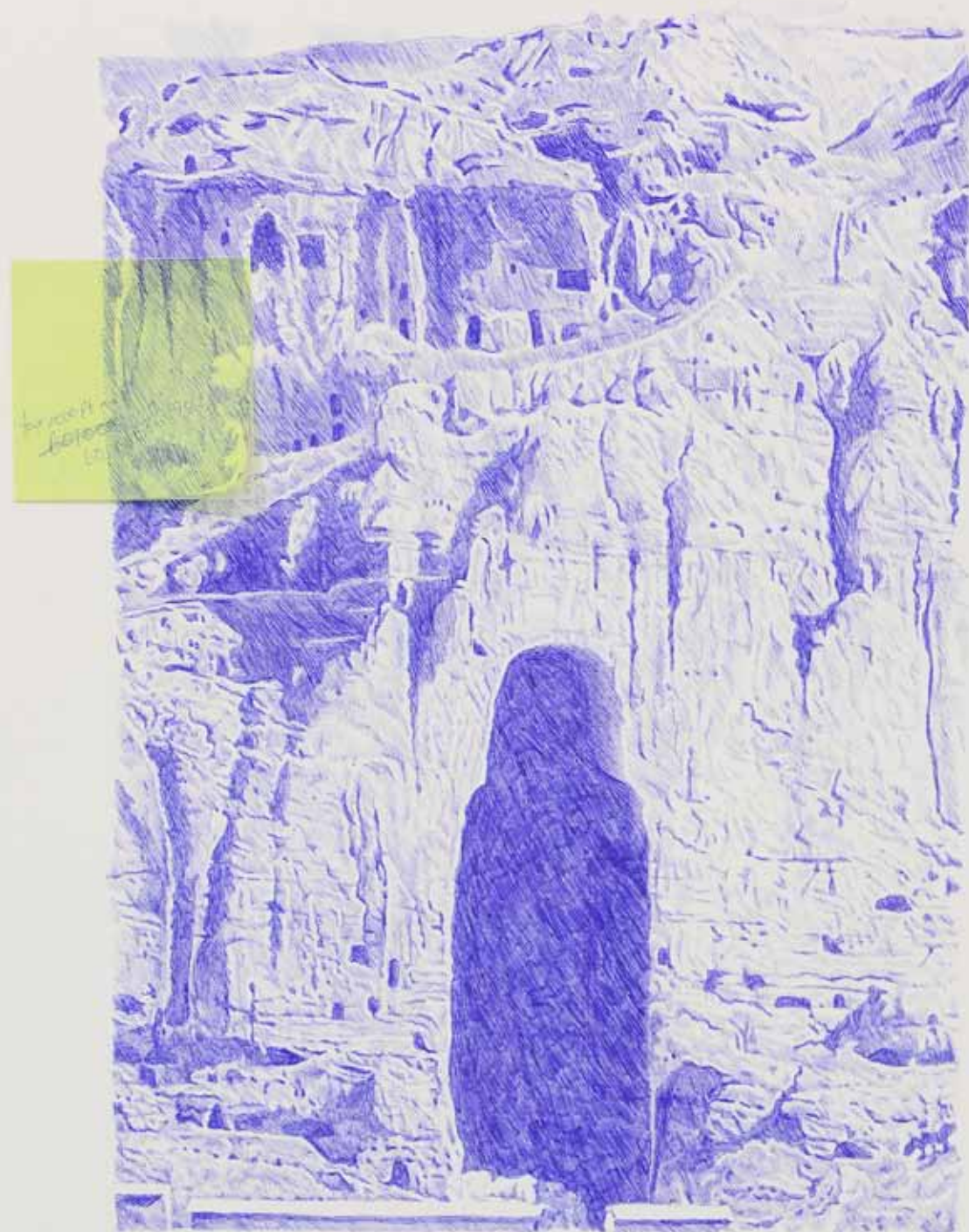
The Buddhas of Bamiyan were two huge statues of Buddha (or rather, variations of Buddha) in the Bamiyan valley in Afghanistan, hewn directly from sandstone cliffs and dating from about the 4th century CE. They were dynamited and utterly destroyed by the Taliban in March 2001, leaving their roughly anthropomorphic empty excavations behind as the only on-site physical evidence that they ever existed. The explosive displacement of the stone was an action that mirrored the removal of the sandstone in order to form the Buddhas in the first place. This seems a material acknowledgement that such acts are at once creative and destructive and that these two operations bare more in common than we might imagine. In fact, it may be that they are one and the same operation and that only through the lens of a particular subjectivity can we define them. Has the undoubtedly significant social history and cultural weight of these statues been diminished? While it seems possible and regrettable that this may come to pass in the future, as long as the niches remain – as memorials – the Buddhas' absence/existence seems as potent as ever.

This act was so significant to so many that it's easy to falsely (yet non-deliberately) imagine we (in distant western societies) had always known of their existence. The site was only named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2003, two years after they had ceased to exist. The Buddhas remain as ghosts, as liminal beings floating between the fully manifest and the completely disappeared.

This attempt at cultural obliteration is the catalyst for an installation which references various actions of material displacement and aggregation, of vandalism and functional

interruption. These manipulative actions and adaptive everyday practices highlight the different ways that we generate a sense of things and how these senses morph and fluctuate at such accelerated and diversifying rates that the truth of any given matter seems impossible to fathom – even when these things are not materially present.

Adam Cruickshank
Disappeared Remains 2012
Biro drawing of sandstone
cliffs in Bamiyan,
Afghanistan, with post-it
notes. Originally blank
plywood plank left at
All Nations Skate Park,
Northcote (retrieved
five weeks later), on milk
crate stool. Graffiti carved
silver-gilded bench seat
with skateboard. Video
of skateboard arriving to
transport tree up driveway,
hole-digging, tree-planting.
Salvaged window with
custom-made marble
shelf, bottle tops, coins,
metcard, silver-gilded
lemon, biro, candle in
bottle. Carved sandstone
incense-catching bowl on
plinth with 'wealth' Buddha
incense holder. Knitted
extension cable lamp
with stand. Stitched rug
comprising eight different
floor coverings.
Courtesy of the artist.
Installation image
Faculty Gallery 2012
Photo: John Brash







NATHAN GRAY

The Moiré Effect

The moiré pattern is an optical effect produced by overlaying one or more grids, or groups of parallel lines angled slightly differently or of different sizes, creating a banded pattern. It is common in digital media where fine grids mesh with grids of pixels or printing dots. In this instance the moiré is an unintended product that points to the limits of the medium in question. It results from the attempt to produce more detail than the medium can support. The inherent grain of any visual system becomes apparent.

Outside the realm of image reproduction, man-made structures often feature grids or parallel lines that overlap. When the viewer moves, the effect strobos and ripples – giving the disorientating impression that inert parts of the city are shimmering fictions.

The moiré works this way because human perception is about pattern perception. The amount of perceptual data we take in is minimal by comparison to the amount we infer. We transcend our limited ability to take in information by our strong powers of inference. Human perception has no grain resolution; instead it has small areas of intense focus and large parts that gather information which we are barely aware of. Our vision is almost all peripheral, sensitive to changes and movement which demand more intense focus, but only dimly perceived.

We are alerted to the moiré effect because of an illusion of animation, as we move in front of the layered grids or lines we perceive that it is in fact them that are moving. My exploration of the Moiré is an attempt to engage the audience's senses not as goal in itself but as an inducement to movement. My hope is that whilst examining their perceptions (or inability to perceive) their inward focus will create a type of movement which is un-self-conscious, a seduction into dance. So, *A Score for Dance* is a structure to induce an unintentional performance from performers whose focus is inward.

Nathan Gray
A Score for Dance
Installation image
Faculty Gallery 2012
Photo: John Brash







ARLO MOUNTFORD

Truth to Materials

Arlo Mountford uses digital animation to dive into the myths, spectacles, icons and farces of art history. Veering from parody to reverence, he playfully critiques and celebrates the art world.

Mountford's most recent piece, *Truth to Materials*, is a series of YouTube clips re-animated by the artist. The original clips depict ridiculous drunken mishaps filmed by bystanders: a woman is unable to pull up her pants and stand after publicly urinating behind a crowded stadium; a drunken man staggers, unable to walk backwards or forwards, let alone in a straight line. In each clip gravity becomes a force to be reckoned with.

Mountford faithfully digitally re-animates these videos in a slow and painstaking process that seems unbecoming to their lowbrow subject matter. Rendered in two-dimensions, there is tension between the imagined grainy original and the now crisp and cartoonish animation. Using his trademark black stick figures, reminiscent of road or toilet signage, the drunken characters in the films are rendered anonymous. Mountford maintains the shakiness of each clip so that the frame tilts back and forth like the drunken person that we see on screen. This jerkiness feels exaggerated when animated, acting as a reminder that it is the artist who is in control and shapes the way that we view the artwork.

This is not the first time that Mountford has worked with YouTube clips. In previous animations, such as *We Wanted Something More* (2007) they have appeared as pop-up frames-within-frames that disrupt the narrative, exemplifying the bombardment of diversions and desire for instant gratification in daily life. In *Truth to Materials* Mountford structures the clips into a deliberate chronology more reminiscent of the artist's showreel than the YouTube labyrinth. Viewed in sequence they form a humorous – if dire – indication of contemporary life within the content of the videos while also

pointing to issues of voyeurism and consumption that arise from how and why these clips are typically accessed.

Mountford takes this line of thought a step further so that the videos become metaphors for contemporary art. Each clip is given a title referring to key points in 20th century art history. Their slapstick nature is then reframed within this context as absurd illustrations of these concepts. In *The Inevitability of Materials* Carl Andre, a man crawls on all fours across a freeway while cars miraculously drive around him. The road becomes a reference to Andre's bricks as the horizontal protagonist unwittingly fulfills Andre's aim to really experience the physical reality of his surroundings.

The series culminates in a final gag about the futility of art with police footage of a man attempting to pull his wallet from his pocket. He instead falls forward, headfirst into the opposite wall. Mountford likens this to the process of art making as banging your head against a wall, in this case, literally.

By using lowbrow subjects as a metaphor for 'serious' highbrow art, the inevitable question of difference is raised: are they one and the same? Perhaps seen through the eyes of the innocent bystander, the art world is merely a series of humiliating accidents and obnoxious jokes.

Lauren Reid

Lauren Reid (AUS) is an independent curator and Coordinator at Node Center for Curatorial Studies currently based in Berlin, Germany. www.laurenkreid.com





Arlo Mountford
Truth to Materials 2011-12
HD digital animation (still)
stereo sound
Courtesy of the artist
and Sutton Gallery



SONIA LEBER & DAVID CHESWORTH

The Way You Move Me

The mass movement of sheep, cattle and horses can be at times highly unpredictable and chaotic, or surprisingly ordered, with periods of intensification and periods of slowness.

The Way You Move Me is a two-channel video installation created by Sonia Leber and David Chesworth during their recent IASKA/Spaced residency. It follows the movements of sheep and cattle across the Western Australian wheatbelt, capturing the internal dynamics and rhythmic ebbs and flows of herds. These shifting lines and shapes are accompanied by a wordless soundscape that both mimics and enhances this sense of motion. At this juncture of chaos and order is an examination of the forces and connections that exist between humans and animals.

‘Leber & Chesworth created the work through a series of removals, honing and refinement. The sound design in particular creates a composed environment, with human calls largely removed. We are witnessing the actions not through a human lens, but a constructed, synthesised viewpoint. In the absence of fencing and human physical constructs we are drawn to the pattern, logic and language of crowd behaviour. When we think of containment, we might be inclined to think of additions, physical structures built to contain. It is not insignificant then, that in looking to observe the way crowds of species are truly controlled, Leber & Chesworth found it constructive to look and listen beyond the fences and physical structures of the farm.’

‘A pivotal point of the piece is the moment in which we view a cyclical relationship between a horse, a human, and their environment. We observe a “lunging” exercise (or “circle work” as it is sometimes referred to), a technique for horse training in which a horse circles around her human trainer, who holds a rope to guide her movements. The lunging exercise takes place within a circular enclosure, and in what could appear to be an infinite loop we witness a cycle of control between master, trainee and physical containment.’

Excerpts from Jared Davis, ‘Circle Work’ in Spaced: Art Out of Place catalogue, published by IASKA, Perth
The artists gratefully acknowledge the support of IASKA, Pennie Aitken, Moora Fine Arts Society and the participants from Moora and environs who agreed to be videotaped while working with their animals.





Sonia Leber
& David Chesworth
The Way You Move Me 2011
2 channel video, 5.1 channel
audio, 10.5 minutes
Photo: Sonia Leber
Courtesy the artists and
Fehily Contemporary

ADAM CRUICKSHANK

Adam Cruickshank is an artist currently living and working in Melbourne. He has also lived and worked in Brisbane, Sydney, London, Berlin, Port Moresby, Malaysia and The Netherlands. He has exhibited internationally and nationally, particularly in Melbourne. He is a current post-graduate candidate and sessional lecturer at Monash University. For material and conceptual contributions to this work, Adam would like to thank: Dell Stewart, Donald Russell, Simon MacEwan, Kate Matthews, Rock Martin.

ARLO MOUNTFORD

Arlo Mountford is a Melbourne based Artist, who has exhibited regularly since finishing a Bachelor of Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts in 2002. In 2003 he took up a studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces. Arlo has been included in numerous group exhibitions including *Unguided Tours*, Anne Landa Award, Art Gallery of NSW (2011), *21st Century: Art in the First Decade*, QAG (2011), *New Acquisitions in Context*, MCA (2011), *NEW010 ACCA* (2010), *ShContemporary: Best of Discovery Asia Pacific Contemporary Art Fair*, Shanghai (2008), *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, Queensland Gallery of Modern Art (2008), Heide Museum of Modern Art (2008) and Adelaide Biennial (2006).

Arlo's most recent solo exhibitions have been at La Trobe University Museum of Art, Melbourne (2011), Shepparton Regional Gallery (2010), Centre of Contemporary Photography (2009), The Art Centre Chulalongkorn University Bangkok, Thailand (2009), Conical (2008) and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (2007). In 2007 Arlo was awarded the ABN AMRO Emerging Artist Award and completed a residency at the Frank Mohr Institute, Groningen, Netherlands.

In 2012 Arlo travelled to Tokyo, Japan as a participant of the Australia Council for the Arts Studio Residency program.

NATHAN GRAY

Gray completed a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) at Curtin University, Perth in 1994 and a Postgraduate Diploma in Electronic Design and Interactive Media at RMIT, Melbourne in 2002. Selected solo exhibitions include *In the year 2525*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2011; *Not a dance*, Incu, Melbourne, 2010; *What they brought back*, Ryan Renshaw Gallery, Brisbane, 2010; *What they brought back*, Gertrude Contemporary Project Space, Melbourne Art Fair, 2010; *Attack Decay Sustain Release*, Craft Victoria, Melbourne 2009; *An Infinity of Traces*, Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, 2009; *Secretion Erosion Conjunction* (with Alex Vivian), Rear View, Melbourne, 2009; *Tudo Que Achor Everything I Think*, The Narrows, Melbourne, 2008; *Quem Ao Viu O Vento*, Escola Dos Belos Artes, Salvador, Brazil; 2008; *The Fruiting Body, Black and Blue*, Sydney, 2008. Group exhibitions include *The five obstructions*, curated by Martina Copely, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne, 2011; *New Psychedelia*, curated by Sebastian Moody, University of Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2011; *ART2*, ACCA Regional Tour, Horsham Regional Art Gallery, 2011; *Zero Dollar*, The West Wing, Melbourne, 2011; *ART1*, ACCA Regional Tour, Shepparton Regional Gallery, 2010; *Territorial Pissings*, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2010; *Grow Wild*, curated by Sleep Club, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 2008; *Fire Fire*, The Narrows, Melbourne, 2007; *Otherworld*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne 2005; and *Slave*, VCA Gallery, Melbourne, 2005.

Gray completed a studio residency at Gertrude Contemporary from 2008 to 2010 and a residency at the Sacatar Foundation in Bahia, Brazil in 2008. He has recently returned from an Asialink-funded residency at Cemeti Art House, Yogyakarta, Indonesia where he produced several outcomes for his community performance project Theorist Training Camp/ Practice Piece. Gray is a member of the improvised electro acoustic group Snawklor and band The French. His work is held in the Artbank and Stonnington Council collections.

Nathan would like to thank Open Archive for assisting develop the work. Nathan Gray is represented by Utopian Slumps: www.utopianslumps.com

SONIA LEBER AND DAVID CHESWORTH

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth are a Melbourne-based collaborative duo that work across sound, video and installation art. Their sound-based installations transform public sites into zones of exploration and discovery, with visitors left to navigate their way through the physical space and the dense compositions of sonic elements. These are immersive works that envelop the viewer and blur the distinctions between observing and being observed. At times confronting and disorientating, Leber and Chesworth's work uncovers a portal to the phantasmagorical, hidden amongst the everyday.

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth's recent solo exhibitions include *The Way You Move Me* (Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne 2012), *Space-Shifter* (Detached / MONA FOMA, Hobart, 2012), *Richter/Meinhof-Opera* (Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney 2012), *Space-Shifter* (Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 2011), *Richter/Meinhof-Opera* (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne 2010) and *Space-Shifter* (Conical, Melbourne 2009). Recent group exhibitions include *Spaced: Art Out of Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre, 2012), *Animal/Human* (UQ Art Museum, Brisbane 2012), *Stealing the Senses* (Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth, New Zealand 2011) and *In camera and in public* (Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne 2011). Their large sound and structure project, *Almost Always Everywhere Apparent*, was a major solo exhibition at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne in 2007.

They are regularly commissioned for their site-specific works such as *We, The Masters* (2011) at City Square, Melbourne and *Proximities* (2006, with Simeon Nelson) a Melbourne Commonwealth Games public art commission as well as projects in New Zealand, Wales and Slovenia. Leber and Chesworth were finalists in the 2011 Melbourne Prize for Urban Sculpture.

A full exhibition history and biography can be found at: www.waxsm.com.au

Sonia Leber and David Chesworth are represented by Fehily Contemporary, Melbourne:

www.fehilycontemporary.com.au

25 JULY - 1 SEPTEMBER 2012

The social life of things.



FACULTY GALLERY

Art Design & Architecture
Monash University
900 Dandenong Road
Caulfield East, Victoria
Australia

T: +61 3 9903 2882

E: Faculty.Gallery@monash.edu

W: <https://blogs.monash.edu/facultygallery/>

Gallery Hours

Monday - Friday 10am - 5pm

Saturday 12-5pm

Closed public holidays

Entry free

© 2012 Faculty Gallery, Monash University, the authors and artists.

The views and opinions expressed in this catalogue are those of the authors and artists. No material whether written, electronic or photographic, may be reproduced without permission of the Faculty Gallery, Monash University the authors of the artists.

Catalogue design by Sarah Ng, 3rd year Visual Communication student and gallery intern

ISBN: 978-1-921994-11-1

The Faculty Gallery is the public face of the Faculty of Art Design & Architecture and is dedicated to exhibiting excellence and achievement. Emphasizing excellence as a result of research, the Faculty Gallery facilitates and acts as a teaching aid for the benefit of the students and staff from the Faculty. Addressing the local, national and international visual arts and design scene, through a wide range of media including tapestry, print-media, ceramics, jewellery, photo-media, industrial design, digital media and installation, the Faculty Gallery program reflects art design & architecture of the highest standard and therefore reflects the university's strengths in research and cultural production.

Thank you to the artists involved in this exhibition, Adam Cruickshank, Nathan Gray, Arlo Mountford, Sonia Leber and David Chesworth along with contributing writers Lauren Reid and Jared Davis. To the technical team who helped fabricate all or part of the exhibition, Michael Bullock, Alex Lyne, Chris Bold, Brian Scales and Mario Millici. Sarah Ng for designing this publication. Interns and volunteers, Vivien Hollingsworth, Adriana Dujela, Melinda Raj Morna, Adelle Gresle and Sarah Lyons for assisting with installation. To Lisa Fehily at Fehily Contemporary for her generous loan of equipment and artwork for Sonia and David's work and aslo to Jason Lehane from the Monash Academy of Performing Arts for loaning materials.

