

dream home

the domestic in current art practice

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the domestic in current art practice

2 – 23 May 2008

Pat Brassington

Carolyn Eskdale

Ruth Frost

Stephanie Jones

Dvora Morag

Matt Warren &

Deborah Pollard

Elvis Richardson

Curated by Mary Pridmore



Dream Home: the domestic in current art practice

'If we have retained an element of dream in our memories, if we have gone beyond merely assembling exact recollections, bit by bit the house that was lost in the mists of time will appear from out the shadow. We do nothing to recognise it; with intimacy it recovers its entity, in the mellowness and imprecision of the inner life. It is as though something fluid has collected our memories and we ourselves were dissolved in this fluid of the past.'¹

This exhibition examines the way the domestic worlds we have known insert their presence in our inner lives through dream and memory; our psyches are in a sense embedded in bricks and mortar and the banal objects of our everyday lives. The domestic therefore is an important site for investigation by contemporary artists. Bachelard speaks of what is 'mellow', 'imprecise', 'shadow[y]', 'dissolving', 'fluid'; these words have guided the selection of the work and therefore determine the mood of the show. They point us toward the two underlying but integral themes in the exhibition: perception and memory, absence and loss.

Dream Home was inspired by my meeting in Paris at the Cité Internationale des Arts in 2005 with an important Israeli artist, Dvora Morag, who uses the domestic as her primary place of investigation.² It brings together established and emerging artists and investigates ways in which they explore the domestic in their current art practice in a range of media – painting, drawing, video, sculptural and performance installation. The title is also intended as an ironic play on Australians' love affair with owning their own 'dream home', now increasingly out of the reach of many. In recent years Australia's dream home – the suburban or inner city house and garden aspired to by most Australian families – has grown to nightmarish proportions. Our cities are spawning suburbs of massive energy inefficient McMansions. Inevitably the title alludes to this phenomenon.

1 Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space, The Classic Look at How We Experience Intimate Space*, 1994, (first published 1958). Beacon Press, Boston, p57

2 In 2005 I was resident at the University of Tasmania's Rosamund McCulloch Studio in Paris

Dvora Morag is an Israeli artist who works across several media, sculpture, painting and installation. I was very interested in her determination to use her home as an archive or resource for her work. I was excited by much of her work, but the scroll paintings suggested the possibility of transportation and so the idea for the exhibition was born. While resident in Paris for six months Morag was painting using a horizontal scroll format and imagery sourced from her own home, photographed at night. Entitled *Line by Line*, the series was designed as an installation with the viewer placed in the middle looking out and around – to allow him/her to tap into his/her personal experience. She says also that she thought of this as being an unstable, an uncomfortable place for the viewer. She has now completed thirty metres of painting. Obscuring the real objects depicted in the paintings are rhythmic stripes through which we see the banal elements of her domestic space. These include light bulbs, lampshades, containers for food and utensils, the clutter which accumulates on kitchen tables, a table set for a family meal. The stripes allow the objects in the image to expand and contract, light and dark alternate creating a rhythm, we see, we don't see. The overlaying of stripes is about how we perceive reality, in particular painful and sometimes horrific aspects of reality are too much; we can only take small glances or look through a barrier. Morag's mother and father were survivors of Auschwitz and as a result she says there were 'difficult' images amongst the family photos. As a child Morag could only look at these photos with her fingers covering her eyes while imagining this other world.

I recall Morag in 2005 saying that she wasn't entirely sure what the work was about. There was the quote from Isaiah 45:7 "I form the light, and create the darkness."³ However, in the process of making the work its intent became clear – there is the determination to make visible what society tries to ignore – the labour and effort a mother invests in the home. The compulsive, repetitive aspect of the process of painting is 'mimetic of daily chores in the home'.⁴ Morag says: 'I would like to mark by my way of painting and my subjects all which is not sexy; all which is not conceived as heroic in culture'.⁵ There is also, she says, 'the searching for the absent mother that leaves (scatters?) behind her signs that are witness to her being'.⁶

3 *The Jerusalem Bible*, Standard Edition, Doubleday and Company, New York, 1966, p1214

4 Jennifer Rogers, *One Always Finds One's Burden Again*, 2007, University of Minnesota Masters Thesis, sourced from the web (<http://www.jenrogers.net/Thesis - aspx>), p1

5 Dvora Morag, Artist's Notes on *Line to Line Series*, 2007

6 Dvora Morag, *ibid*, 2006.

Pat Brassington's work is well known to Australian audiences and creates a very different feeling; her domesticity is oppressive and dank. There is aesthetic pleasure to draw you in but her images are perverse; there is no comfort. One is tempted to think of Brassington's work as autobiographical but it rarely is. An exception, however, is the sculptural installation, *Book of Jonah, 1932, sinking into a world whose bars would hold me fast forever* (1993) made shortly after her father's death and now remade for this exhibition. The installation consists of floorboards leaning against the gallery wall beneath which are some discarded items of her father's retrieved from underneath his house. The items are neither memorable nor significant – they 'represent the empty nothingness of grief and mourning.'⁷ A light source creates from the floorboards a beautiful formal bar-like shadow on the wall. Anne Marsh points out that the *Book of Jonah* is the less well-known part of the triptych sitting between the well-known photographic installations *In my Father's House* (first version, 1992) and *In My Mother's House* (1994). Within the psychoanalytic framework within which Brassington typically works, 'the *Book of Jonah* is the raw nerve of the triptych; in many respects the punctum of the psychoanalytic script and the disempowerment of the phallus.'⁸

Since 1995, Carolyn Eskdale has worked on an ongoing series of installations in Australia, Europe and Asia with the generic title 'room'. 'These works engage with the processes and reconstruction of actual, remembered and imagined living spaces.'⁹ Her installations are about the 'way we psychically inhabit the world – [they] ultimately denote how profound that habitation is.'¹⁰ Often hand-sewn muslin wall-screens are constructed which serve to blur the difference between inside and outside and between what is visible and what is invisible. Sometimes real objects, disassembled, are combined within or adjacent to the walls – such as carpet, *room 12.96 (Mrs Bird's sitting room)*, her parents' bedroom furniture, *room 2.98*, Eskdale's childhood bed, *Reconstructed Daughter's Bed*, 1997. The relocation of the furniture in the gallery suggests its absence from elsewhere, and renders the familiar unfamiliar. Eskdale seeks also to problematise the primacy of viewing as she investigates her notion of the intangibility of human memory. *Untitled room, 5.08* moves Eskdale's *room* project a step further. The work is an installation of a reconstructed caravan annexe and

7 Jenny Spinks in Anne Marsh, *pat brassington, this is not a photograph*, (sic) Quintus Press, 2006, Hobart, p13

8 Anne Marsh, *ibid*, p 13

9 Carolyn Eskdale's notes, 2008.

10 Greg Creek, notes on Carolyn Eskdale's work, supplied by the artist.

its adjacent room, on a table lies a bound book of photographs. The caravan was in Eskdale's family for thirty years and Eskdale herself spent many holidays there; most recently it was where her mother spent a lot of time after her father died. 'The photographs represent the final contact (touch) with the caravan. They document an inventory of sorts, but a subjective, interpretative one that conflates the mother and the daughter into one place.'¹¹

Elvis Richardson's *Slide Show Land Dorothy 2006* is part of *Slide Show Land*, a pool of over 30,000 slides creating a vast library of anonymous family portraits and travel destinations, purchased from e bay and second-hand stores and collected over the last seven years. Richardson is a collector, a habit she attributes in part to being adopted. 'I have an empathetic attraction to objects I find in thrift stores and in the rubbish, objects that are not wanted or loved anymore. The objects then become the raw materials. The work is about their fate.'¹² At some level she says the work is also about keeping families together. The Dorothy Elsbury collection consists of 4000 slides and it is from this archive that the dual projection is created for *Dream Home*. Dorothy, the photographer, was born in 1908. Dorothy and her husband Jack Elsbury had a ranch in Sacramento, California. The images were taken between 1953 and 1976 and fall into two main groups – the dinner table still-lives and Jack as the 'Marlboro man'. These images speak of an idealised existence – Jack off on his horse to do the farm work and Dorothy the dutiful wife and homemaker. Jack and Dorothy are a childless couple which makes the work somewhat poignant. For Dorothy the meticulous setting of the table constitutes a form of aesthetic/artistic expression then recreated in her amateur photography. One suspects that if Dorothy was born in another time she may have become an artist. For women such as Dorothy the artistic impulse had some outlet within their domestic interiors.

Matt Warren and Deborah Pollard's performance installation is the third instalment of an ongoing work entitled *Apparently Nothing*. The first two instalments were presented at Inflight Gallery, Hobart, in 2006. The work is a mix of live performance and installation that explores notions of absence, loss and grief. All works are made from task-based activities, which the artists set each other. This new instalment of *Apparently Nothing* begins with a live performance, which occurs in the first hour of the exhibition. The

11 Carolyn Eskdale's notes, 2008

12 Columbia University, School of the Arts, Alumni Spotlight – An interview with Australian artist Elvis Richardson, 2003/06/03, sourced from the web

performance takes place at a dinner table, a setting normally associated with intimate communication, but in this case the dominant mood is one of sadness and loss concerning an absent friend. During the performance, the two artists are served a three-course meal. A third place is set for an absent diner. Is this for a lost friend, or relative or in expectation of someone's return? Throughout the dinner the performers undertake tasks as they respond to instructions, delivered through headphones. The work is consciously random and unrehearsed. The composer John Cage (1912 – 1992) has been a significant influence for both Warren and Pollard and this is reflected in the use of chance and randomness in all three versions of *Apparently Nothing*. Cage's ideas on silence are also influential and underline the theme of absence within the work. During the performance there is a projection on an adjacent wall of a pre-recorded out-of-focus figure taking part in the dinner. The dinner itself is recorded and later re-played as a projection onto the remains on the table. On another wall are projections of elements from earlier versions of *Apparently Nothing* including a 'walk through' of a home, left in a hurry, leaving behind the remnants of a personal and private world. This video is interspersed with video diaries of an absent friend made by the two performers

Stephanie Jones's oeuvre is firmly located in the domestic, in particular with the post-modern idea that the decorative, domestic surface is no longer a secondary and lesser element to the architectonic. She has been influenced by the theories of the nineteenth century architect Gottfried Semper. He argues that '[b]uilding originates with the use of woven fabrics to define social spaces. Specifically, the space of domesticity. The textiles are not simply placed within space to define a certain interiority. Rather, they are the production of space itself ... Housing is an effect of decoration.'¹³ In *Homesickness* Jones transfers architectural floor plans onto wave-like patterned flock wallpaper. The effect is to create a house plan akin to my nightmare house, implying an unending quest and a pathological condition, hence the work's title. She says it is 'as if some fanatical renovator has knocked down and relocated walls, endlessly shifting boundaries and reconstructing space.'¹⁴ Three of Jones' works from her *Shadow of Love* series are included in the exhibition: *The Colour of Frost*, *So Lovely* and *Fresh Lust*. In these works the artist has inscribed her own life-size silhouette onto the patterned wallpaper. For those familiar with Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story *The Yellow Wallpaper*, 1899, there are

13 As summarized by Mark Wigley, 'Untitled: The Housing of Gender', in Beatriz Colomina, ed., *Sexuality and Space*, New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, p367

14 Stephanie Jones, Master of Philosophy in Visual Arts, Studio Report, Australian National University, 2005, p10

obvious points of reference. The work was inspired by a lifestyle show promoting textured raw wallpaper designed to be painted after being adhered to a wall. Jones was drawn to the idea of a blank surface and proceeded to inscribe her own form onto the surface with coloured pencils (a medium associated with childhood). She says the meditative working process, unlike the patient's 'rest cure' in *The Yellow Wallpaper*, was therapeutic and soothing.

Ruth Frost's photographic, video and digital art practice is largely concerned with memory and childhood. Her mother died when Frost was very young, an event which effectively destroyed her capacity to remember her childhood. For an exhibition in 1995 Frost wrote: 'I had no tangible memories of a childhood. A few glimmers – my mother died when I was two and a half, I remember the confusion and fear. I vaguely recall scenes from my father's remarriage perhaps a year and a half later. I have been described as a person without a past. Until recently I possessed none of the usual memorabilia that accompanies a life – no photographs, no happy-snaps, no family myths. My life it seems began with my first year at high school. At age twelve a light is turned on – memory functions.'¹⁵ This gap has shaped much of Frost's art practice. *Variations on a Room I-II* attempts to create an evocation of memory itself. Inspired by a disused room, a child's bedroom or playroom which Frost filmed over successive visits, the video gives us impressions of the room in different conditions and varying light. A dominant element in the work is a powerful light coming through the window which is the focus of the film clip. The light draws us in as does memory, but it also forms a threshold beyond which we can no longer see. So we return to our own interior reminiscence. Memories exist in fragments which have a psychodynamic rather than a transparent logic.

Now out of the closet, the domestic becomes a source of inspiration for current artists. Art practice now includes the spaces of femininity the 'dining rooms, drawing rooms, bedrooms, balconies, terraces and private gardens – in short, the spaces of domesticity',¹⁶ once subordinate to the theatres, the nightclubs, cafes and brothels – the male world of the flaneur. No longer is the domestic antithetical to art as it was thought to be during the period of high modernism. *Dream Home* is built around the work of

¹⁵ Ruth Frost, Unpublished exhibition notes, 1995, Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra.

¹⁶ Christopher Reed, (ed.) *Not at Home. The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, 1996, Thames and Hudson, London, p8

several artists for whom the domestic is core business: Dvora Morag, Pat Brassington, Carolyn Eskdale, Ruth Frost and Stephanie Jones. What we have, therefore, in *Dream Home* is work which has evolved over time and sits within the context of mature bodies of work. For Elvis Richardson, Matt Warren and Deborah Pollard the domestic is not central but their work provides significant and compelling variations on the broad themes of the project.

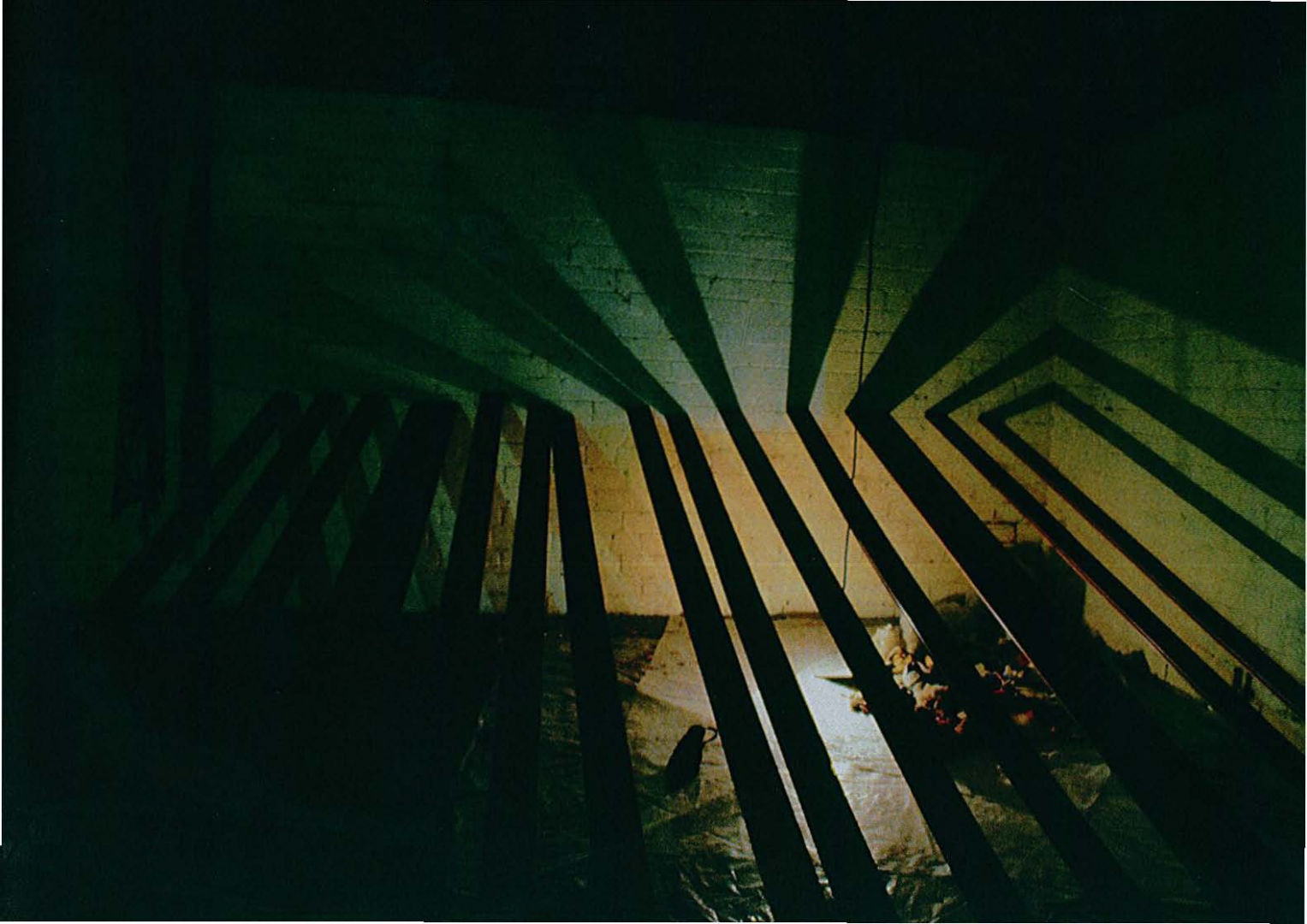
I hope that engaging with these works – in their various material forms and their teasing out of concepts – will trigger individual personal memories for the viewer and perhaps for some, lead to new ways of thinking and working.

Dr Mary Pridmore

Pat Brassington was born in Hobart, Tasmania where she continues to live and work. She graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree in 1981 followed by a Master of Fine Arts degree in 1985 from the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania. Pat Brassington is now one of Australia's leading photo-media artists. During the past twenty years she has exhibited widely both in Australia and overseas. A major survey of her work was shown at the Ian Potter Gallery, University of Melbourne in 2003 and her work was selected for inclusion in Reason and Emotion, Biennale of Sydney in 2004 at the Art Gallery of NSW and the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, underlining her importance in the context of international contemporary art. Her work is held in major public collections and many private collections.

Pat Brassington

*Book of Jonah 1932, sinking into a world whose bars would hold me fast forever
installation at "The Basement", Hobart, 1993 (scenography David McDowell and Edward Colless), detail*



Carolyn Eskdale lives and works in Melbourne. Eskdale began her art education at Latrobe University, Bendigo (1983-86) and later at the Victorian College of the Arts (1988-1989). In 2000 she completed her Masters of Fine Art at RMIT University, Melbourne and is currently undertaking a doctorate at the Victorian College of the Arts. Eskdale has taught sculpture at RMIT and is currently teaching at the VCA. Since 1990 she has had numerous solo exhibitions including a recent solo show held at ACCA, Melbourne, 2001 and the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra, 2002.

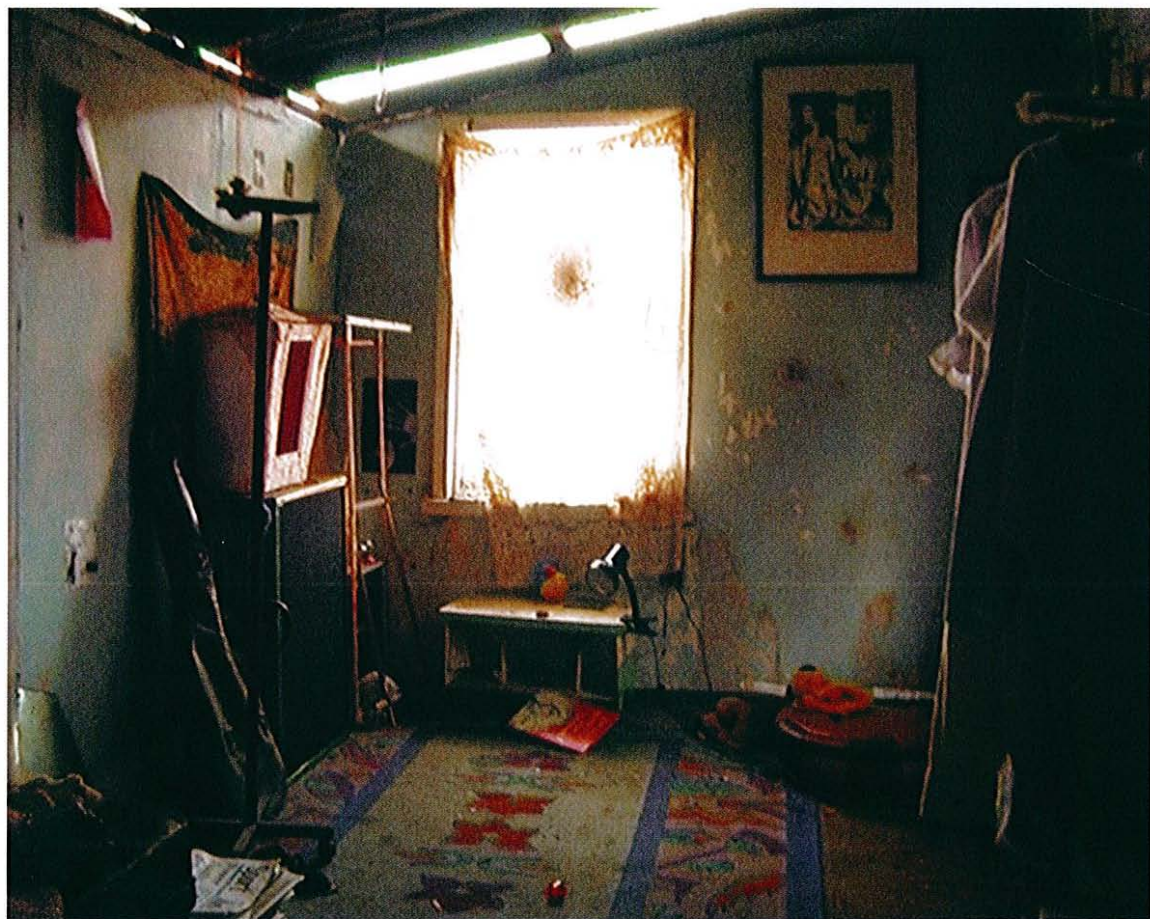
Her work has been shown in various group exhibitions including a commission for Claustrophobia, IKON Gallery, Birmingham, UK (1998), and All This and Heaven Too, Adelaide Biennale of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia (1998), and in 2004 a work was commissioned for inclusion in On Reason and Emotion, the Sydney Biennale, Art Gallery of New South Wales. In 1994 she was awarded the Power Institute Studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts, and in 2006 she was awarded the Australia Council Studio in Barcelona.

*Carolyn
Eskdale*



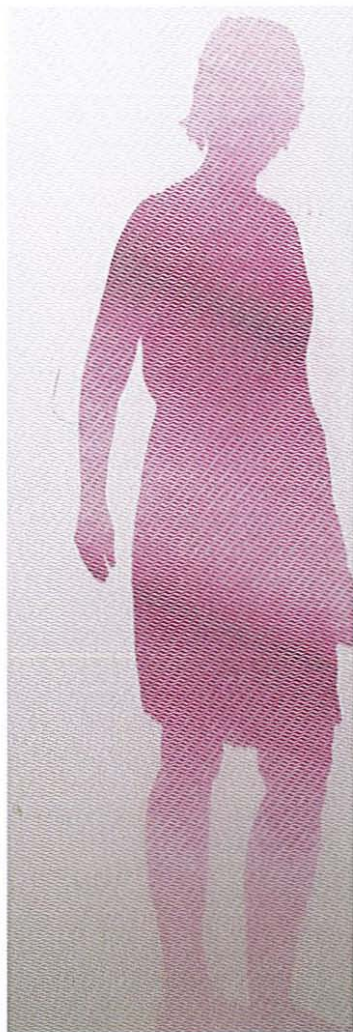
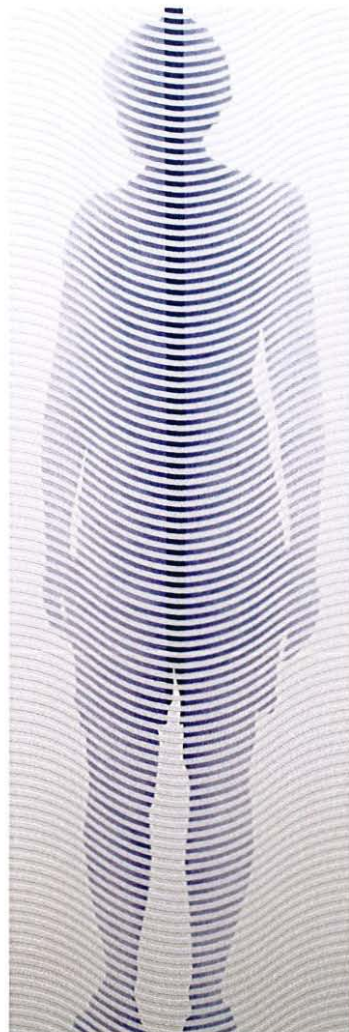
Ruth Frost lives and works in Hobart. Her practice spans the disciplines of photography, digital imagery, video and sound. Frost studied at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania completing her MFA in 1987 and her PhD in 2003. Between 1989 and 1995 she lectured in Photomedia at the Canberra School of Art. She now lectures in photography at the Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart, University of Tasmania. Her works have been exhibited in solo and group exhibitions throughout Australia and New Zealand, including Domestic Disturbances at the National Gallery of Victoria (1996). Her works are held in various private and public collections including the Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston, the Museum of Contemporary Art Brisbane, the Art Gallery of South Australia and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery.

**Ruth
Frost**



Stephanie Jones lives and works in Canberra. She completed her Bachelor of Arts (Fine Arts) from Curtin University, WA with Distinction in 1988, her Master of Letters (Women's Studies) with First Class Honours in 1996 from the Australian National University, Canberra and in 2006 her Master of Philosophy in Visual Art from the School of Art at the Australian National University, Canberra. She has had 7 solo exhibitions, most recently Cast at Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra and she has been in numerous group exhibitions including All in an Afternoon at the Faculty Gallery, Monash University in 2007 and the Robert Jacks Drawing Prize at the Bendigo Art Gallery in 2006. Her work is in various public collections including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Curtin University Gallery, Perth and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra.

Stephanie
Jones



Dvora Morag lives and works in Tel Aviv, Israel. Her art practice ranges across sculpture, installation and painting. She teaches art at the College of Technological Studies in Tel Aviv. Morag completed her Masters in Biology at Ben Gurion University, Israel in 1980. She studied art between 1987 and 1989 at the Bat-Yam Art Institute, Israel and in 1989 she studied Chinese brush painting in Seoul, Korea. She trained as an art teacher between 1989 and 1991 at the Teachers Training College at Ramt Hasharon, Israel. She has had various teaching positions in Tel Aviv: in 1993 – 2000 she taught at “Avni” Art Institute and since 2003 she has been teaching art in the College of Technical Studies and at Beit Halochem, where she works with disabled war veterans. In 2007 she commenced doctoral studies at Tel Aviv University. She has had 16 solo exhibitions and has been in numerous group exhibitions in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv and Paris.

Her work is held in both public and private collections. In 2005 she spent 6 months at the Cité Internationale des Arts.

Dvora
Morag



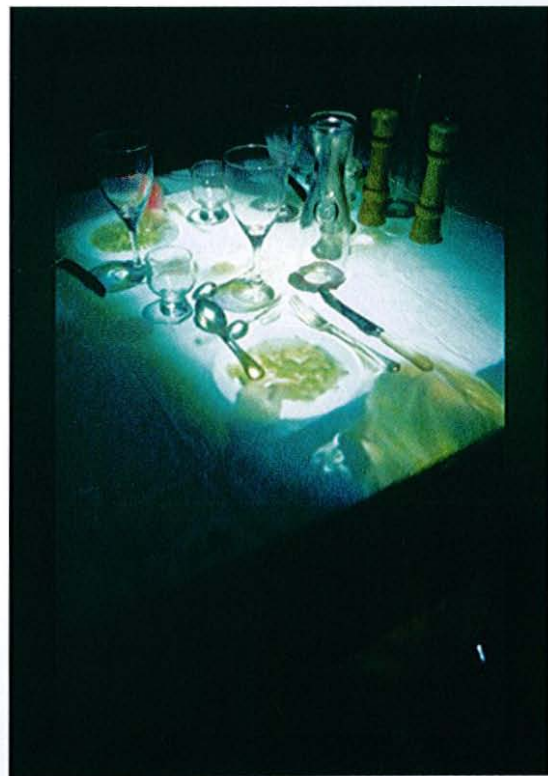
Matt Warren is a Hobart-based artist and musician who creates video and sound installations, single channel video and electronic/electro-acoustic music. In 1999 Matt received an Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship and moved to Vancouver, Canada to study for his Master of Fine Arts degree. Matt has exhibited in Sydney, Melbourne, throughout Tasmania, Vancouver, Tabor; Czech Republic and New Zealand. He is currently undertaking a PhD at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania.

Deborah Pollard is an artist, performer and director based in Sydney. Her work focuses on hybrid collaborations with arts and non-arts practitioners. She has created a number of multi-disciplined performance and installation works. Deborah was the Artistic Director of Salamanca Theatre Company in Hobart from 1997 to 2000. In 2000 Deborah received a Winston Churchill Memorial Fellowship for research in Europe. She received the Rex Cramphorn

Scholarship in 2001 and an Australia Council Fellowship from the New Media Arts Board 2002/03. In early 2006 she toured her performance installation Shapes of Sleep to various galleries and venues in the United Kingdom. She is currently Artistic Director at Urban Theatre Projects, Sydney.

Matt and Deborah have previously collaborated on the work Still Life, a community performance and installation work set in the heritage flour mill at Oatlands, Tasmania in 1999 as well as Ecstasy of Communication, a multimedia maze at Salamanca Art Centre's Long Gallery in 1998. Both are interested in the potential of the live performer in the context of the visual arts and utilise performance action, interview and documentary elements in an installative context. Both artists cite influences such as John Cage, with his task-based scores and performances as well his writing and theories of silence, and Tim Etchells, a UK based performance artist whose work focuses on memory.

**Deborah
Pollard & Matt
Warren**



Elvis Richardson's works has been exhibited both nationally and internationally. Most recently in Welcome to Slide Show Land, 2004 at the University of Alabama Gallery, Birmingham, AL, USA. Other exhibitions include Call, Call Me Now, 2003 at Sox 36, Berlin, Germany. Slide Show Land has also been exhibited, in 2002, at Room 35, Sydney, The Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand and at the Bi-Fi Screening Room, New York, (curated by Raimundas Malasauskas). She was awarded the Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship in 2000 and completed an MFA at Columbia University, NY in 2002. Richardson has also worked as a curator and teacher in NY and Australia and has been a director of Elastic Gallery and First Draft Gallery, both artist-run initiatives in Sydney.

Currently Richardson lives in Melbourne. She is doing her doctorate at Monash and also teaches sessionally at the Australian Catholic University. Previously she has taught sessionally at UNSW College of Fine Arts, Dowling College, New York and from 2004 – 2007 she held a full-time position at the Canberra School of Art, ANU.

Elvis
Richardson



Pat Brassington

** Book of Jonah 1932, sinking into a world whose bars would hold me fast forever*

mixed media

dimensions variable

1993 & 2008

courtesy of the artist, Stills Gallery, Sydney, Arc One Gallery, Melbourne, Criterion Gallery, Hobart

Carolyn Eskdale

**Untitled room, 5.08*

mixed media

dimensions variable

2008

courtesy of the artist

Ruth Frost

** Variations on a Room 1 – 11*

digital video

2005

courtesy of the artist

Stephanie Jones

Homesickness

pencil on textured wallpaper

53 x 810cm

2005 – 2006

courtesy of the artist

** The Shadow of Love series: The Colour of Frost, So Lovely, Fresh Lust*
colour pencil on textured wallpaper on mdf

155 x 53 cm each

2004 – 2006

courtesy of the artist

Dvora Morag

** Line by Line series*

acrylic on canvas

2200 x 32 cm

2000-2008

courtesy of the artist

Elvis Richardson

** Slide Show Land "Dorothy"*

dual slide projection

dimensions variable

2006

courtesy of the artist and James Dorahy Project Space, Sydney

Matt Warren & Deborah Pollard

** Apparently Nothing*

performance installation, video and sound

dimensions variable

2006 - 2008

courtesy of the artists

** works illustrated in catalogue*

List of works



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