

FRAMEWORK

#11 | PERCEPTION







EDITORIAL

Content warning!

This issue of Framework contains images that some may find distressing. It contains images of deceased bodies and persons, please proceed with caution.

Critical arts writing aims to challenge the ways in which we see, read and interpret the images around us. In this issue our contributors explore the perception of art.

How we perceive visual cultures determines the cultural value of images. Arts writers push to challenge what is valued, ask why and alter our perceptions of new images, that shape the visual, cultural and political landscapes around us. The perception of images, from news, activism, monuments and performances inform how we can complexly engage with otherwise unfamiliar peoples and their lived experiences.

Perception is a collection of pieces that investigate how we can alter our views and how art is fundamental in engaging with concepts that can be sensitive, offensive, bleak and beautiful.

In this issue our contributors take a look at the perception of arts activism in Western Sydney, engagement and visual documentation in the world press, how CrossFit helps us understand monumentality, exploring Renee Cox's practice and talk to Frances Barrett about the perception of performativity in her practice.

I would like to thank the Arc at UNSW Art & Design team, your support makes this fun and entirely possible. To Kieran, Ella and Ramesh, thank you for always making me look at things differently. Thank you to Paschal Berry and Blacktown Arts Centre, Frances Barrett, Agence VU and all artists involved.

Finally, thank you to the contributors. Your words inspire us to perceive the world around us in new exciting ways.

The final issue of Framework for 2015 is coming up and if you would like to be involved you can contact me: l.davison@arc.unsw.edu.au

Read on, permit your perception to change.

- Lucinda Davison

PERCEP- TION

RENEE COX

Annaliese Alexakis



DON'T LOOK AWAY

World Press Photo review
by Vanessa Low



VOLUME 3, ISSUE 3

EDITOR

Lucinda Davison

CONTRIBUTORS

Annaliese Alexakis
Isabelle Cornell
Ilana Heller
Vanessa Low
Natalie Wadwell

DESIGN

Kieran Butler
Lucinda Davison

THANKS

Arc at UNSW Art & Design

ENQUIRIES

l.davison@arc.unsw.edu.au
arc.unsw.edu.au/framework

Front cover image:

Renée Cox

1994

Yo Mamadonna and Child.

Copyright © 2015 Authors, Artists, Contributors and Arc@
UNSW Art & Design

Q&A

Frances Barrett
by Isabelle Cornell



PERCEPTION: A SENSORY EXPERIENCE

by Natalie Wadwell



A PLAY ON MONUMENTALITY: TO PLAY ON MONUMENTS

by Ilana Heller





01. Renée Cox 2001, BABY BACK (FROM AMERICAN FAMILY) 34 by 44 in. 86.4 by 111.7 cm. Image courtesy of Sotheby's.

Renee Cox

By Annaliese Alexakis





Jamaican-born American photographic artist Renée Cox (1960) is one of the most controversial and important artists working today. Utterly fearless in her approach to making art, Cox often uses her own body to critique our inherently sexist and racist society, while simultaneously creating a space for the empowerment and appreciation of black womanhood. First establishing herself in the male-dominated fashion industry, Cox's background in commercial photography lends her images a seductive quality that deeply engages her audience in her bold racial, political and feminist themes.

Through her celebration of black female subjectivity, Cox opposes disparaged representations of racialised and gendered bodies. Her infamous photographic series *Flipping The Script* sees the artist subverting classical art and historical images, and reinterpreting them with contemporary black figures. One of the photographs entitled, *Yo Mama's Last Supper* is an appropriation of Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper*, one of the most iconic images of Jesus in the Western world. Cox depicts herself as Christ in the iconic self-portrait, nude and surrounded by her black disciples and a Caucasian Judas. The work ignited significant controversy, New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani described the it as "disgusting," "outrageous" and "anti-Catholic" and called for a decency panel to keep such work out of museums that receive public money.

Within her works, Cox is known for creating alter egos that project the persona of black women who are in control of their own gender and racial identity construction. *Raje*, *Yo Mamma* and *Queen Nanny* appear in the form of black, female warriors that call out and combat the injustices of sexism and racism. By using herself as subject matter, Cox demonstrates self-love and empowerment whilst illuminating the link between historical representations

of black women and the impact it has on identity construction and a sense of self worth. She states, "Slavery stripped black men and women of their dignity and identity and that history continues to have an adverse affect on the African American psyche." Through her portrayal of herself as both superheroine and saviour, Cox creates a new, liberating representation of black womanhood that overcomes oppression and stereotype.

She notes an urgency to create images that perpetuate these counter-narratives for black people:

"I believe that [most] people have not really had access to the imagery that we create. However, people get a lot of exposure to images that we have no control over, going back to a *Birth of a Nation*—where we were represented as brutes, criminals and whores. If we don't tell our stories, who will? The time is now to have a more inclusive role in the conceptual production of our images."

Photography has long been considered a way to record history, a valuable means of documenting the past. But, just as visual culture has been used to develop racist perceptions, Cox exploits the same platform to positively reconfigure racial knowledge. She notes, "All of my work has been about empowerment and creating images that uplift our people, who have been misrepresented for the last 300 years."

When considering the vital role representation plays in how history and identity are constructed, her works echo the words of philosopher and cultural critic Walter Benjamin, "History is written by the victors." By linking African-Americans and woman in particular with powerful tropes that inform western mythology, Cox is able to rewrite, reclaim and reframe this history.



DON'T LOOK AWAY: A REVIEW OF THE WORLD PRESS PHOTO 2015 AT THE STATE LIBRARY OF NSW

by Vanessa Low







WHEN THE WORLD PRESS PHOTO CONTEST BEGAN IN 1955, THE FIRST WINNER WAS MOGENS VON HAVEN'S IMAGE OF A MOTORCYCLIST FLUNG FROM HIS BIKE, HIS LEG JERKED-UP IN THE AIR SURROUNDED BY CLOUDS OF BRUSHED-UP DUST.

You will no doubt recall other winners, all icons of tragedy with shock-value: Eddie Adams' image of a man in Saigon, wearing a checkered-shirt with a gun to his head moments before his execution (1968); a monk on fire photographed by Malcolm W. Browne (1963); Nic Ur's image of a running naked girl in a Vietnamese town struck by a Napalm explosion (1972). The unfortunate events of circumstances and the callousness of humankind are exposed through the witnessing, photographic eye.

More than ever, today we are viewing, processing and discarding saturated visual content rapidly, as we receive images from global channels through intertwined digital portals. We access information with the click of a button, and discard images with the swipe of a screen. The challenge for photojournalists today is to create a lasting impression; to effectively bring to life the reality of a news story and to transform the viewer into a witness.

Rather than making an impression through shocking, high-impact images (however, this is applicable in some circumstances), many photographers now approach reportage with a new strategy – of subtlety and detail. As the renowned photojournalist Lynsey Addario states, "I am always trying to figure out how to make people not turn away." This balance of subtlety – of intriguing images with loud messages – is most evident in this year's winner, Mads Nissen's shadowy image of an intimate moment between a gay couple in Russia. Chosen from 97,912 photographs submitted by 5,692

photographers, the full effect of this image is like a candle slowly burning – its impression has a longevity that far outweighs a single explosive sight.

The standout images in the World Press Photo 2015 are subtle and striking in their considered composition and delicate lighting. In regards to news events, the display of Jérôme Sessini's series on the MH17 plane crash treaded lightly – but without hesitation – around sensitive details. Because of the obscured composition of Sessini's photographs, we are required to investigate the scene ourselves and strain to see details. Rather than stark shock, this interaction leaves us with a more lingering contemplation and sadness.

Darcy Padilla's 21-year documentation of Julie Baird – who suffered from HIV/AIDS, sexual abuse and drug abuse – also stands out. Padilla documented Baird's life through her relationships, child rearing and eventual death. The monochromatic series is intimate – uncomfortably so at times – and carves a sensitive portrait of Baird.

Over the past 60 years, the finalists chosen for the World Press Photo contest have represented the most notable occurrences in our world, as well as the most effective visual ways to document them. This year, we see a successful shift in the documentary vernacular to include more delicate images that do not only seek to shock, but rather they seek to engage.









Q&A WITH

FRANCES BARRETT

by Isabelle Cornell



SYDNEY-BASED ARTIST AND FORMER UNSW ART & DESIGN GRADUATE FRANCES BARRETT'S VARIED PRACTICE AS CURATOR, RADIO HOST AND ARTIST HAS FIRMLY ESTABLISHED HER WITHIN AUSTRALIA'S CONTEMPORARY ART SCENE. THIS POSITION CULMINATED IN HER SELECTION AS ONE OF TWELVE AUSTRALIAN ARTISTS TO UNDERTAKE A RESIDENCY UNDER THE MENTORSHIP OF MARINA ABRAMOVIC DURING THE KALDOR PUBLIC ART PROJECT 30 AT PIER 2/3 IN JUNE.

FROM HER WORK AS A PERFORMANCE ARTIST, TO HER ROLES AS CURATOR AND PRESENTER OF FBI RADIO'S ARTS PROGRAM 'CANVAS', BARRETT IS CONSISTENTLY CONCERNED WITH CHALLENGING OUR PERCEPTIONS OF ART, PERFORMANCE, AND PROFESSIONAL DISTINCTIONS WITHIN THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD. WORKS SUCH AS BARRETT'S 2008 'SHIP OF FOOLS', AN ENDURANCE BASED WORK EXPLORING THE THRESHOLD BETWEEN PERFORMANCE ART AND COMEDIC PERFORMANCE; AND HER 2014 'MY SAFE WORD IS PERFORMANCE', A LIVE PERFORMANCE BETWEEN BARRETT AND IVAN CROZIER INVESTIGATING THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN PERFORMANCE ART AND BDSM PRACTICES; QUESTION CURRENT IDEOLOGY AND THEORY THROUGH LOOKING AT DIFFERENT KINDS OF PERFORMATIVITY.

OTHER WORKS, SUCH AS BARRETT'S 2015 'THE WRESTLE' IN WHICH HER AND TOBY CHAPMAN, ASSISTANT CURATOR AT 4A CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ASIAN ART, TRAINED AND COMPETED IN A FREESTYLE-WRESTLING MATCH IN THE GALLERY SPACE, RECONSIDER POWER RELATIONSHIPS AND QUESTION IDEAS OF PROFESSIONAL ROLES WITHIN THE ART WORLD, WHILST ADDRESSING THESE VARIOUS FORMS OF PERFORMATIVITY. BARRETT'S INSIGHTS, POTENTIALLY INFORMED BY HER ART THEORY AND THEATRE STUDIES BACKGROUND OFFER A UNIQUE PERSPECTIVE WITHIN AUSTRALIA'S ART SCENE.

FRANCES BARRETT DISCUSSES HER VIEWS ON PERFORMANCE, STUDYING ART THEORY AND THE WORK SHE HAS DEVELOPED DURING HER TIME AT PIER 2/3.

IC: COULD YOU TELL ME A LITTLE BIT ABOUT YOURSELF AND THE VARIOUS ROLES YOU INHABIT, BASICALLY, WHAT DO YOU DO?

FB: Good question! I guess I call myself an artist; I work across collaborative models, independent projects and as part of Brown Council (with Kate Blackmore, Kelly Doley and Diana Smith). Brown Council emerged out of (what was) COFA around 10 years ago, and together we create video and performance work. Brown Council was my first experience of being an artist, so I developed a very strong understanding of collaborative practice with Kate, Kelly and Diana. I then became involved with Serial Space as a Co-Director for 4 years between

2009-2013. Serial Space was an artist-run-initiative and collective in Chippendale dedicated to live and fluid artforms, specifically with sound, performance, and new media work. Serial Space was concerned with exploring process rather than present finished products, programming events like debates, performances, Dorkbot, workshops, and gigs. In late 2008 I started making my own work, which were live body-based actions and endurance performance. My first piece called 'Ship of Fools' was a 24-hour performance work with the comedian Nick Sun that took place at Firstdraft. For the last year I have been working at Campbelltown Arts Centre as the Curator of the Performance and Live Art programs and hosting FBI Radio's weekly arts show, Canvas, working with



02. Frances Barrett, 2014, My safe word is performance. Image courtesy of artist, photographed by Solate Tawale

Kate Blackmore as Executive Producer.

IC: WHAT BROUGHT YOU TO PERFORMANCE AS AN ART FORM?

FB: I have always thought of performance as a tool for political action. Since I was a teenager I was interested in the feminist performance artists of the 70's, Australian practitioners like Mike Parr, and Abramovic and Ulay's collaborative work. I understood them as beautiful symbolic political gestures – it all just made sense to me. When I went to University I studied a double degree of Art History and Theory and Performance Studies. So alongside my study of visual arts, I was learning about Artaud, Brecht, Surrealist theatre practice, The Sydney Front etc. So I guess my practice has always been very much influenced by both visual arts and theatre histories. Currently, I am interested in creating work that is both a symbolic and direct action that enquires into queer notions of time and space, and that uses the audience or a collaborator to realize the work with me.

IC: WHAT I HAVE GATHERED FROM SOME OF YOUR WORKS SUCH AS 'SHIP OF FOOLS', IS THAT YOU'RE QUESTIONING DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN TYPES OF PERFORMANCE SUCH AS COMEDY, COMPARED TO MORE TRADITIONAL PERFORMANCE ART. HOW DO YOU VIEW SUCH DISTINCTIONS, OR DO YOU VIEW A DISTINCTION AT ALL?

FB: I think that's a really astute observation. I am really interested in reframing different types of performance within the gallery to see how that context elevates the symbolic impact of a gesture. So whether it is wrestling, BDSM practice or comedy, how do those forms of performance become larger or speak of something else when taken out of their usual context and into the gallery. I ask myself 'What does it mean for an artist to perform this?' 'What does it mean for an audience to watch this?' 'How does this action of wrestling or hitting or laughing speak politically of my situation?' 'What conventions or roles of wrestling, BDSM and comedy am I interested in exploring and challenging my own role as an artist or the role of an audience member?' I am very interested in entertainment and spectacle in performance – I love it! I like my performances to have some notion of familiarity and 'fun' for audiences to at first access the

work, then through endurance or repetition I distort that familiar action to shift its signification.

IC: AS YOU SAID, A LOT OF YOUR PERFORMANCES DO LOOK AT THE IDEA OF TIME, I'VE NOTICED THAT A LOT TEND TO BE ENDURANCE-BASED PERFORMANCES, AND SOME IN MANY WAYS ARE QUITE TAXING ON YOU PHYSICALLY OR EMOTIONALLY. HOW DO YOU SEE YOUR BODY AND AS FACILITATING THIS EXPRESSION, THROUGH PUSHING THOSE EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL LIMITS?

FB: Every performance will incorporate the time structure into the concept of the piece – so there is always a reason why my work will be a 20-minute, 12-hour or 24-hour performance. I also am very concerned with when the audience can enter into the work at a particular time. For example in my work 'The 12-Hour Revolution', I performed between 8am and 8pm. People could enter any time throughout the day, but we specifically advertised the last two hours as the 'opening event'. So between 6pm-8pm, in the final two hours of the endurance work, hundreds of people came in to drink, chat, and spectate my broken body. With this work I was very interested in the psychological build up of action in a space, how endurance and physical hardship can affect a space and what it means to situate an audience in that space. In regards to pushing my body physically and emotionally, I think I'm always trying to create a work that distances the audience to me. There needs to be a tension between an audiences sadistic compulsion and their self awareness as a spectator. I would ultimately want to create a work that offers both self-reflection and blood. Perhaps a work of mine that really created a tension within the audience was 'My Safe Word is Performance'. In this piece I worked with Ivan, who topped me for 20-minutes. I gave over the entire structure of the performance and my body. In this work physical and emotional endurance was tested through BDSM practice. Some audiences found it too confronting – considering it direct violence – while other people were wanting to see us go further, go harder. It's still a division that I am contemplating.

IC: SO I SUPPOSE THE AUDIENCE BROUGHT THEIR OWN CONTEXT TO THE WORK, WHICH WAS CRUCIAL TO ITS RESOLUTION?

FB: Yes, an audience always brings their own history and experiences with them, meaning that you can never anticipate how they will read the work.

IC: I'VE NOTICED A LOT OF YOUR WORKS, SUCH AS 'THE WRESTLE,' ARE CONCERNED WITH THE ROLE OF THE CURATOR AND CURATORIAL VISION. HOW DO YOU SEE THE ROLE OF THE CURATOR IN THE CONTEMPORARY ART WORLD?

FB: I am both an artist and a curator, which is an interesting dyad in my life. I understand the Curator as someone who should support and advocate for an artist, who should provide dynamic and challenging propositions and contexts to present work, and who should ward off institutional conventions to enable an artist to achieve ambitious projects. 'The Wrestle' was the first of my works to really consider the Curator within the performance itself. I am currently developing a work called 'Curator' for Liquid Architecture Festival (Melbourne) which also incorporates the two Curators

of the festival, Danni Zuvela and Joel Stern into the performance. 'Curator' will be a 24-hour performance where I will be blinded and so have set particular roles which means that they need to care for me over that period of time. So from 'The Wrestle' which was a form of combat, I am now interested in processes of intimacy, attending to, and care. The 24-hour period is crucial as a way to escape institutional time, to slip between private and public routines/roles. Toby's commitment to 'The Wrestle' astounded me (he was a natural wrestler!) and it made me interested in how far a Curator would go to realize a work with an artist, which in turn, realizes their own curatorial proposition. My interest in the Curator comes out of an enquiry into the power dynamics at play between Artist and Curator, the capitalist underpinnings of the art industry within that relationship, the notion of labour that the two roles undertake to achieve a work, and the forms of communication required to achieve a work. How do all of these shift when you begin to introduce feminist strategies of collaboration, intimacy, listening and embodied action into this relationship?



03. Frances Barrett, 2015, The Wrestle. Image courtesy of artist, photographed by Susannah Wimberley



IC: DO YOU THINK HAVING A BACKGROUND IN ART THEORY, AS OPPOSED TO MORE CONVENTIONALLY THE MAJORITY OF PEOPLE THAT COME THROUGH FINE ARTS, DO YOU THINK THAT HAS INFORMED YOUR PRACTICE OR INFLUENCED IT IN A SIGNIFICANT WAY?

FB: I totally do. Art History and Theory trains you to analyse an artist's practice and process and see how it contributes to the historical lineage of it's form. It trains you to interrogate the conceptual intention of the artist and to read that work within it's historical, political context. Art History Theory provided me with a foundational knowledge of art, but it wasn't until I began practicing as an artist that I understood the processes of making work. This is a whole other training! I found this very hard at first, especially when I started making my own solo work. But ultimately, I think everyone should be study Art History at some point! I just think it gives people

a wonderful perspective on their practice and the lineage of their practice.

IC: AS WELL AS YOUR ARTISTIC PRACTICE, YOU HOST THE CANVAS PROGRAM ON FBI RADIO AND ARE A CURATOR. DO YOU FIND THAT EACH OF THESE DIFFERENT ROLES INFORM ONE ANOTHER?

FB: Yes, entirely. I am in a constant conversation with people in both of these roles. Working on Canvas means that I am constantly reading about what is happening locally and internationally in my research for content. I want to know what are people doing, what conversations should we be having on air, are their reappearing thematic or concerns of artists at this point in time. I consider the work I do on Canvas is a form of research, a crucial way to support local projects and local artists, and a way to build a strong community. I'm still learning how to interview people

well, which is such an incredible skill to have. I think that if you learn how to interview people in a very open and direct way, you can initiate a really good relationship with someone. Artists love being given an opportunity to talk about their practice and are always fascinating people, so if you can ask questions that get to the heart of their practice, then it then perhaps it will reveal something to the artists themselves and in turn, to the audiences about contemporary arts practice. I also think its really important for women to learn how to ask direct questions. When I first started at FBI, I found this really difficult, I asked very passive and veiled questions. In my first couple of shows, my voice would clog in my throat because I wasn't used to publically being vocal. I was used to performing, but not being verbal. I then reflected on this incredible fear and realized its because as a female I wasn't not socialized to ask direct questions that demand answers of people. So I am actively trying to change that about myself and be confident to ask 'what do you mean by that?' and not being afraid to put an opinion out there.

IC: ITS INTERESTING THAT YOU COMPARE THAT TO YOUR PERFORMANCE WORK, HOW DO YOU SEE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN YOUR PERFORMANCE WORK AND ACTIONS SUCH AS INTERVIEWING?

FB: I think most of my performances have been non-verbal and they're often symbolic gestures, so I will rarely talk to audiences. But I guess, I understand the relationship between my performance work and interviewing is to be direct, be fearless, always consider the audience, be aware of timing, and be open to chance and new directions.

IC: HOW HAS YOUR RESIDENCY HERE INFORMED YOUR PRACTICE?

FB: I don't know yet. I think with any residency you go through a process of feeling despondent, frustrated, elated, energized, exhausted and terrified. I think it isn't until much later that the affect of the residency emerges in your practice. Ideas sit for a long time then bubble up in unexpected ways. In this residency I have felt the most important thing has been the conversations with the other artists and creating relationships with the others. I have learnt a lot from seeing other people's

processes. Being part of such a large project has made me consider the role of Emma and Sophie (the two residency Co-Curators) and the extent to which they have committed to the project. Perhaps this residency experience has really informed my Liquid Architecture work. This commitment goes beyond their usual role to thinking about how we are sleeping and eating. This residency also confuses private and public spaces and routines, so I think that aspect has also informed my upcoming work with L.A.

IC: WHAT ARE YOUR GOALS FOR THE FUTURE PROFESSIONALLY?

FB: I think that is something that is being constantly being re-evaluated. I have 10 years of practice behind me, I'm also working as a Curator and Broadcaster, so I feel like I've got all of my fingers in a whole lot of different pies. But each of those things have a momentum and interest behind them so I'm just looking forward to seeing where all of that goes. I mainly want to keep contributing to the community here.

IC: IS THERE ANYTHING YOU HAVE COMING UP?

FB: I'm curating a show called 'Haunting' that opens on September 2nd at Firstdraft. It is a project that looks at how artists are using materials and narratives of the past to create temporal shifts in their work. I am interested in how these shifts open up radical future possibilities - feminist, queer futures. I will be presenting the work of Pauline Boudry/Renate Lorenz, Brian Fuata, Geo Wyeth and Latoria Cubonicks. I will also be performing 'Curator' as part of Liquid Architecture in Melbourne, which is an experimental sound festival in Melbourne.



PERCEPTION: A SENSORY EXPERIENCE

by Natalie Wadwell



'ART ACTIVISTS DO WANT TO BE USEFUL, TO CHANGE THE WORLD, TO MAKE THE WORLD A BETTER PLACE—BUT AT THE SAME TIME, THEY DO NOT WANT TO CEASE BEING ARTISTS' – BORIS GROYS, 'ON ARTS ACTIVISM' (EFLUX, JUNE 2014)

Arts activism is a turn to arts social responsibility. After decades of being referred to as elitist and exclusionary, art has been taken off its pedestal and used as a medium for political protest. As Boris Groys states, arts activism is more than just political art, it is an attempt to address unequal social, cultural and economic conditions in practical ways. Western Sydney has a long history of arts activism which continues today. This activism is concerned with the distribution of resources and infrastructure to service a growing population of over two million people.

When I sat down to write this article the hype surrounding the SBS's controversial documentary *Struggle Street* had been forgotten. *Struggle Street* is a three part series that needs no introduction, but writing etiquette requires me to. Airing on the SBS in May 2015, this series was produced after six months of engaging with residents in Bidwill, Mount Druitt. Who can forget the garbage truck blockade outside the SBS's head office led by Blacktown Mayor Stephen Bali, before the show even went to air? The SBS declined to take back their rubbish, standing by what they considered to be a fair reflection of the six months they spent with residents. The response to the show's premier divided audiences and the SBS fast tracked the last two episodes. Where some argued that it was an opportunity to talk about controversial social issues, others called it for what it was, a disservice to an already disenfranchised community.

If the media insists on producing shows like *Struggle Street* or the ABC's *Growing Up Poor* (September 2012), only 10% of the production needs to focus on adversity. This provides context to a situation. The remaining 90% needs to focus on positive dimensions of the community in order avoid further disenfranchisement. The disregard for this balance in the name of "good television" or "showing how the other half lives" is slack that the arts sector attempts to carry.

FUNPARK was developed in Bidwill in partnership with community organisations, western Sydney based artists and local residents. It was about reimagining Bidwill by activating disused spaces and the body. Directed by Karen Therese, FUNPARK reflected her creative practice which is concerned with the psychology of places and social justice. She grew up in Bidwill and knew the





ZULLINATION..



MERCOONE

common truth – the media has gotten it terribly wrong too many times. That is why she created FUNPARK.

First staged in January 2014 as a part of the Sydney Festival, FUNPARK was a dynamic mix of music, art experiences and projects, walking tours and performances. The year-long lead in period saw a series of professional development workshops and community liaisons take place to shape the event. A large portion of these workshops focused on upskilling youth in dance, performance and theatre. A highlight of the program was ‘The Mount Druitt Press Conference,’ a mock press conference by the Social Revolutionaries. This group was comprised of seven teenagers living in Mount Druitt. They were interested in telling their own stories rather than reading those constructed by the media.

The pilot event was large in scale, involving over 100 locals and attracting a diverse audience. Therese values audience diversity to ensure that residents aren’t continuously having conversations amongst themselves. In order for social change to occur, you have to target those outside of the immediate community. Whilst the arts may not have the immediacy of media, its strength lies in creating opportunities for individuals to experience things for themselves. This sensory engagement is crucial to shaping perceptions.

When I arrived in Bidwill on Sunday 19th July, FUNPARK returned in direct response to Struggle Street. It was obvious that rather than being disempowered by the series, residents were treating it as an opportunity to display their resilience. As it was returning earlier than the organisers anticipated, FUNPARK was made possible with the support of 86 Pozible campaign donors. Settling back into a modest (and rare) display of community ownership, FUNPARK didn’t need to mimic the large scale pilot event. Instead it was a reminder to local residents, particularly young people of their skills and creativity. The event opened with the Indigenous Children’s Choir. When their voices began to dwindle, the Samoan Methodist Choir stood in to support them through their final song, ‘Lean on Me.’

This ‘get in and help’ spirit was reiterated at ‘Cuppa Tea with Therese.’ This Q&A opportunity was held in the lounge room of resident, Therese. She has lived in government housing since she was

thirteen. She spoke of FUNPARK as an opportunity to unpack skills which disadvantaged situations often don’t allow individuals to explore.

Therese spoke about the ‘get in and help’ spirit that runs through the community, which obviously the producers of Struggle Street forgot to include. The elephant in the room was quickly addressed. Therese reinforced that volunteers were rebuilding the community’s spirit. It is a long process, but they were on their way. Through this experience, visitors were exposed to a more honest representation of Bidwill.

Most reflective Groys idea of art activists wanting to be useful was spelt out on the flyer as the inclusion of social actions. SHOP HERE! encouraged visitors to support the local economy by purchasing their groceries at the newly opened Foodworks. The closure of the grocery store contributed to Therese initially staging FUNPARK in the disused carpark. In 2015, the carpark had to be partially roped off to accommodate the program. In addition to this, Bike Club restored and raffled off a dozen second-hand bikes to local youth. When Therese wrapped up FUNPARK 2014, young kids asked if next time she could bring bikes. So she did. The kids could be seen testing their new wheels for the remainder of the evening.

Whilst the discourse might argue a romanticisation of art’s role in communities, I would argue that FUNPARK played the role of ‘art(ist) as trickster’. Elaine Lally used this term to characterise practices in western Sydney which subvert the system that commissions them. In the case of FUNPARK, it took the will of one woman and her lateral thinking to inject activity and encourage greater investment of services in an under resourced community.

Western Sydney was known for its fun parks throughout the 1960s, 70s and 80s. From Wonderland at Eastern Creek, O’Neill’s Adventure Land in Edmondson Park, Waterworks in Mount Druitt, the African Lion Safari at Warragamba, El Caballo Blanco in Catherine Fields and Wild Waters in Macarthur. Now it can add FUNPARK in Bidwill to the list. FUNPARK is not your typical amusement park. If you went expecting rides, water slides or carnival food, you would have been disappointed. But this community arts event would have pleasantly surprised you.



01. Lichtgrenze, 2014, 15 kilometer long light installation along the former Berlin Wall

A PLAY ON MONUMENTALITY: TO PLAY ON MONUMENTS

by Ilana Heller



RECENTLY A CROSSFIT ENTHUSIAST, WITH A 70,000-STRONG INSTAGRAM FOLLOWING IN TOW, CAME UNDER FIRE BY HIS FOLLOWERS AND MEMBERS OF THE CYBER WORLD FOR A POST OF HIMSELF PERFORMING A HANDSTAND ATOP THE CONCRETE STELAE OF THE MEMORIAL TO THE MURDERED JEWS OF EUROPE IN BERLIN. WHILST IT WOULD BE A MISINFORMED OBSERVATION TO ASSUME THE SURGE OF COMMENTS ON THE PUBLISHED ARTICLE BY HUFFINGTON POST AS THE BROADEST OPINION BASE, THE OUTRAGE THAT THE SOCIAL MEDIA POST SUMMONED BROUGHT INTO QUESTION LESS WHAT A MEMORIAL IS MEANT TO DO, BUT WHAT WE ARE MEANT TO DO AT A MEMORIAL, OR DARE I SUGGEST, TO A MEMORIAL.

It is precisely this semantic shift that has demanded more work from the public, whose subsequent dialogue consistently returns to the autonomy of the object: a conditioning of comfort through appropriate distance.

This warrants the visitation of the pivotal shifts that have occurred within memorial practice, which occupy a significant field of study, and the open consideration that old responses to new forms—or, perhaps, apprehension to the proposition of new forms—are merely part of the dialogue that is critical to the new memorial's ever-evolving significance.

The shift away from the statuesque heroic figure or vertical cenotaph as monument has, in the second half of the last decade, been challenged conceptually, and materially. If the image of the perfected man and of pure race were the critical manoeuvres of fascist dictatorships in the twentieth century—embodied in public sculpture—then the modern monument is bound up with myths of progress and grandeur. A distrust of official documented narrative has emerged out of a history of dictatorships, and with it, the figurations and monuments of those leaderships for their didactic associations. Invisibility, Austrian writer Robert Musil warns, is caused by an enduring familiarity with a long unchanged, even exploited, mode of representing memory through a loaded monumental rhetoric. Furthermore, to emplace memory behind a sculpted veneer, to enshrine it in material form, shirks the responsibility to remember from the individual, and promotes a relationship of access on the basis of the convenience of the remembering individual. It is thus the most official symbols of memory—the largest and most prominent edifices—that threaten the integrity of memory.

Essentially, James Young, American Professor in English and Judaic Studies, asserts, to challenge qualities of immutability, didacticism, redemption and valourisation, the monument required a complete inversion following the Holocaust: monumentality against itself. Within a laterally shifting memorial landscape since the implementation of alternative histories of the 1980s, Young identifies the trend of counter-monuments. The counter-monument often employs tropes of negative space or absence in the bid to reproduce an historical void in the most viscerally affective way. Such techniques demand something of the visitor, often an act of peering, of seeing one's reflection, or of navigating oneself: the non-passivity of the viewer is pivotal. The object of the counter-monument is as elusive as memory itself: it cannot be simply sensed and cognized, as it is conceptual, ungraspable and intangible.

Evidenced in both Germany and the United States, New York Times critic and columnist Michael Kimmelman, in the year after the September 11 attacks, elucidates the implementation of the Minimalist abstracted form by memorial designers to reflect upon modern history. The pinnacle of the Minimalist form urges awareness of the individual's existence within its occupied space, rather than of the materiality or objecthood of the memorial form. Its pertinence to individual memory-work and commemorative aesthetics derive from its phenomenological aspect: from the preoccupation with the access to meaning through the understanding of the self and the body in relation to the surrounding ambient space and occupying objects. This process is individual, as each perceiver brings varying preconceived experiences to the neutral surface, but is entirely inclusive of multiple engagements and responses. More recently, understood mechanisms of memories as being disparate yet complementary

paralleled the establishment of a form that could absorb and repel, marry and repudiate, individual discordant memories. This became more critically necessary due to the complex, even irresolvable, histories at stake in the memorial project of the postmodern era.

Consideration of the immersive memorial brings to mind the collaborative installation of 8,000 internally lit balloons that traced the central footprint of the former Berlin Wall for the commemoration

of the twenty-fifth anniversary of its fall last November. Christopher Bauder, Creative Director of WHITEvoid, and his brother Marc, founder of bauerfilm, were commissioned by the City of Berlin to create *Lichtgrenze*—or *Border of Light*. The perfectly spherical orbs suspended on delicate, slightly flexible vertical supports were regimentally spaced, equidistant from one another, punctuated only by major motor thoroughfares. An LED

light illuminated each white latex balloon, powered by a rechargeable battery that was housed within the foot of each structure. The hardware was integrated into a thin carbon fibre rod pole. Weighted down by water ballasts, the structures were able to remain in place for the three-day duration. The balloons retained the brilliance of their neutral white glow for the entirety of the installation, and shone with the same intensity. The air-filled latex spheres were replaced with helium-filled balloons in the hours approaching their scheduled ascent, on the evening of November 9th. After 72 hours of immobility, the temporary permeable wall was ceremoniously dematerialized. Over the course of 25 minutes, the luminous balloons were released from their supports into the Berlin

evening sky. The Bauders turned the very concept of wall-ness on its head. Pointing to a lack of wall by challenging the physical qualities of the Wall itself brought to visibility the conditions of physical separation. Light, unlike stone, cannot be sculpted. It can be manipulated: its electromagnetic waves reflected and refracted. Light waves dissipate into mere waste product, and so electric light requires constant generation to maintain its brilliance. The Bauders themselves disclosed their intention to invoke precisely the concrete barrier's opposite: the penetrable material of light.



The experienter became both an observer of autonomous objects of perception, of the lit orbs, and a participant within a sculpted environment, defined by the diffusion of light. Whilst not strictly a delineated space, *Lichtgrenze*'s anchoring upon a site of significance and its disruption of common functional space constructed a liminal zone within which the body was momentarily

perceptually altered.

As the balloons floated overhead—3.4 metres high—visitors and passersby were forced to negotiate their movement between the individual pylons, spaced 2.5 metres from one another. Regular journeys taken in everyday commutes were momentarily intercepted, but not to the commuter's hindrance. This foreign glowing body fleetingly mediated the city worker's routine journey: momentary enough in its obstruction, however, to quietly remind, but not impede. Whilst the height of the *Lichtgrenze* mimicked the towering scale of the concrete wall that once stood in its place, the light wall was porous: it was open to penetration and zigzagged meandering in and out of the illuminat-

ed space with a freedom unknown to the previous impermeable concrete barrier. The envelopment of the individual at any point within the seemingly continuous space of the installation enacted a subversion of existing associations between the sensation of physical dwarfing and experiences of social or political oppression. The commemorative installation still, however, functioned as a point of passage, of mundane daily activity: of activities not appropriate to the memorial in the traditional sense, incompatible with reverence and the like. It was precisely its un-imposing nature, the silence of symbolism that allowed for interactions of both meaning and of disinterest, even of ignorance.

The collection of memories, not the projection of collective memory, occurs ad infinitum, with memories readable only by the self, and irretrievable in their original form within the phenomenological space. For Professor of Experimental Arts, Jill Bennett, these bodily mediations can be neither objective nor subjective, and thus evade the application of moral 'inside' or 'outside' delineations. Movements of commute, of passage, of mindless journey, through the commemorative space of Lichtgrenze are thus as integral to cumulative meaning as a prolonged contemplative dwelling.

This brings us back to the Crossfit 'guru' whose actions were framed as exhibitionist, and his actions, regardless of his non-malicious intentions. Whilst eluding moral 'outsides' altogether is a dangerous task in the realm of Holocaust discourse, the memorial fashioned for the collection of discordant, disparate, and multifarious experiences—with low-lying areas that invite interaction via implication—is not denigrated by any such agitations within its space. Its discourse, I argue, is strengthened, not by one man's actions, as they are not necessarily agreeable, but by the prompts to defend, to correct, and to evaluate the meaning of history and memory at this very point in time: a process of continual renewal.



FRAMEWORK