

One another's otherworld

Curator
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Laetitia Bourget
Philippe Charles
Steve Cox
Sanné Westrom
Dominic Redfern
Philip Samartzis
Ania Walwicz
Louiseann Zahra

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Works

Laetitia Bourget

NON 2002

Lambda print on vinyl
120 X 80 cm

Philippe Charles

Visitors Q3 2002

Visitors Q4 2002

Visitors Q5 2002

Lambda print stills
on aluminium
Each 100 x100 cm

Steve Cox

Pagan 2004

Acrylic on canvas
60 X 60 cm

Sanné Mestrom

*My choice of words comes at a
high price – ma choix de mots
venez á un haute prix* 2005

Watercolour on paper
120 X 75 cm

Dominic Redfern

Ce n'est pas une traduction!
2005

2 x LCD monitor screens,
2 x DVD, wood

Philip Samartzis

Captured Space 2005

Surround sound installation

Ania Walwicz

Palace of Culture 2005

Mixed media on paper
Variable dimensions

Louiseann Zahra

*My name is death, can not you
see, Lords, Dukes and Ladies
kneel down to me, and you
fair maid, and you fair maid
and you fair maid must come
with me* 2004, ongoing

Second hand silk negligees,
cotton, sequins, balsa wood,
shellac, dried marigolds,
glass, bronze, mirrors.
Variable dimensions



Laetitia Bourget *NON* 2002

Individual and the
institution. Self and
others. Cog in works.
What to do? Culture
as a machine. I draw it
and write it. To write a
picture, to draw words
now. I draw it out o me.

Ania Walwicz, 2005

Laetitia Bourget

developed *'NON'* (2002) as the result of an invitation to work with adolescents in a school in France. The residency followed a violent incident within the school. In response Bourget proposed a project intended to discretely help the students extract their personal feelings – their desires, hates, secrets, doubts and reactions. She encouraged the students to place objects, notes, and statements, any thoughts in boxes labelled with specific emotions.

In *'NON'* Bourget takes a primary emotion to introduce the idea of transformation to the students, her collaborators. Her aim is to make her collaborators aware

of the possibility of increasing the complexity of primary or base emotions, to reveal emotions in order to dissipate feelings of isolation and powerlessness, so that in turn the individual, all of us, may reflect through an expansive array of feelings and associations. Bourget co-opts the word 'non', written by one of the students – a single and discrete protest, to consider it in terms of a collective protest for individuals in the public realm. She draws out subtle but ever-present longings in us to overcome societal impotency and to embrace a yearning for shared protest in the face of societal instrumentalities and institutions. She addresses the desire in us to sanction

ourselves as individuals outside of paternalism inherent in our world structures – an invitation to simply say no.

The poster image presented to us in *'NON'*, denotes an 'every person', encouraging us all to consider the possibility of overcoming individual isolation, presenting us with the conception of empowerment by proposing individual protest in a society that often insidiously promotes disenfranchisement. *'NON'*.

‘One another’s otherworld’ broadly reflects the view that within today’s modern society it is difficult and even doubtful that we can explicitly define any boundaries of certainty, and that it’s possible to perceive modern society as an incoherent structure versus an institutional matrix of class, groups and levels. We may even see it as a place that lacks clarity in its own consciousness, and in the world system. We might also perceive modern society as one that stays the same while colliding with its other versions or imagined alternatives, and through this glimpse a confluence of views, visions and powers that help define the societal entity. Despite these mixed perceptions we still clearly identify something of

ourselves as individuals through our various relationships to modern society’s institutions and structures.

While we are aware of these complexities we also live in a time where we rely heavily on societal perspectives formed through reduced realities; where perceptions are often fashioned by public commentary, involving essentialised discourses that reduce and collapse our understanding into single mental constructs for easier consumption. While we generally recognise the inadequacies of narrow commentaries, we often essentialise in order to achieve a perception of clarity and certainty. Barely conscious of our daily experience of ambivalence,

we habitually muse through various conceptions of entities and structures within society, yet reduce and polarise to define viewpoints, or to suit our needs.

We are adept at glossing over inherent tensions.

‘One another’s otherworld’ involves a range of artists whose works are relatively disparate, but who each respond with work that reflects views related to uncertainty, complexity, even exclusion within modern society. In some cases the works have been developed to subtly reflect and engage with the physical space of the Alliance Française, reflecting on its role as a social and cultural institution, and in turn on the role of sanctioned cultural entities.



Sanné Mestrom

My choice of words comes at a high price – ma choix de mots venez á un haute prix 2005



‘One another’s otherworld’ considers and develops some of the concerns we face about our individual relations to our various modern societal entities, reflecting how some things in our world are reliant on others for their existence, to act or to be. Some works centre on thoughts of the paranoiac in relation to the individual within society, while others imply suggestions of things subtly hidden, of a surreptitious blending with our perception – from certain perspectives this type of element may even define the very nature of our society. Many of the works relate to points of opposition – oppositional positions that rely, complement and comment on each other, creating perspectives defined by counterpoints.

Most of us have firm associations with French culture in its actual sense, or through exposure to perceptions of the French through popular culture – demonstrating its vitality and verve. Les Alliances

Françaises around the world define, promote and develop intersections between French and local cultures through actual and a perceived cultural milieu.

Because of contemporary perceptions of French language and culture, many English speakers approach French culture tentatively, demonstrating a degree of deference, and a concern to avoid misunderstanding, misinterpretation, or more horrifyingly, overt displays of cultural ignorance.

Historically, cultural tensions and at best miscommunication have formed a basis of the relations between French and English speaking cultures. Miscommunication through the inadequacy of language often informed relations between different cultures. ‘As a concept is translated through not only languages but also contexts, disciplines, genders, ideologies, through people over time, it’s meaning has a tendency to

slip. Translation occurs at the expense of clarity and accuracy; translation creates a conceptual vacuum for meaning to drift’ (Sanné Mestrom).

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‘My choice of words comes at a high price – ma choix de mots venez á un haute prix’ (2005), a careful and seemingly elusive watercolour by **Sanné Mestrom** is ‘... a literal translation word-for-word from English to French ... ignoring all French grammar, with words selected subjectively.’ Mestrom’s ‘text self-consciously positions itself in the context of the French Cultural Centre – a place where it finds itself most misunderstood ... where it’s meaning doesn’t quite belong anywhere’ (Sanné Mestrom).

Mestrom’s work relies on illusion in execution and allusion in content to imply its elusive qualities. The use of illusion defines it as beyond our grasp and

as an impossibility, while conceptually Mestrom alludes to confusion, incompatibility or dysfunctional translations, and mistaken meanings. Mestrom’s French is incorrect, and literal in terms of how the language should read from an English speaker’s perception. It might have read ‘j’ai payé cher mon choix de mots’.

Although Mestrom reflects the uncertain perceptions of our world, of reality, the central concern in ‘My choice of words comes at a high price – ma choix de mots venez á un haute prix’ encourages us to move beyond limiting perceptions, to overcome conceptions of barriers, and to consider the literal inert. Mestrom implies the need to take chances and for fluidity and openness in thinking, free of perceived constraints. She projects language as having the potential to contribute to uncertainty in interpretation, while defining uncertainty as the possibility rather than the impediment.

Jules Verne's *Vingt Mille Lieues sous les mers (20,000 Leagues Under the Sea)*, published in 1869, is a journey to the underworld that subtly echoes a Danté-esque rite of passage, confronting something that may be at the heart of things.

Dominic Redfern places his protagonist, to echo Captain Nemo, 'outside' and relegated to another world, suggesting the modern plight of alienation in society. Redfern presents reverberating connections and contextual perceptions and associations that remind us, perhaps didactically, of our uncertain existence and perceptions.

Redfern's work 'Ce n'est pas une traduction!' (2005) presents the Alliance as a submarine inside, built for long journeys, self contained and wood-lined, where the only view of the outside is inside, in the heart of things. Although Redfern's submariner is in distress there is potential here to be detached and to watch him from one view to another.

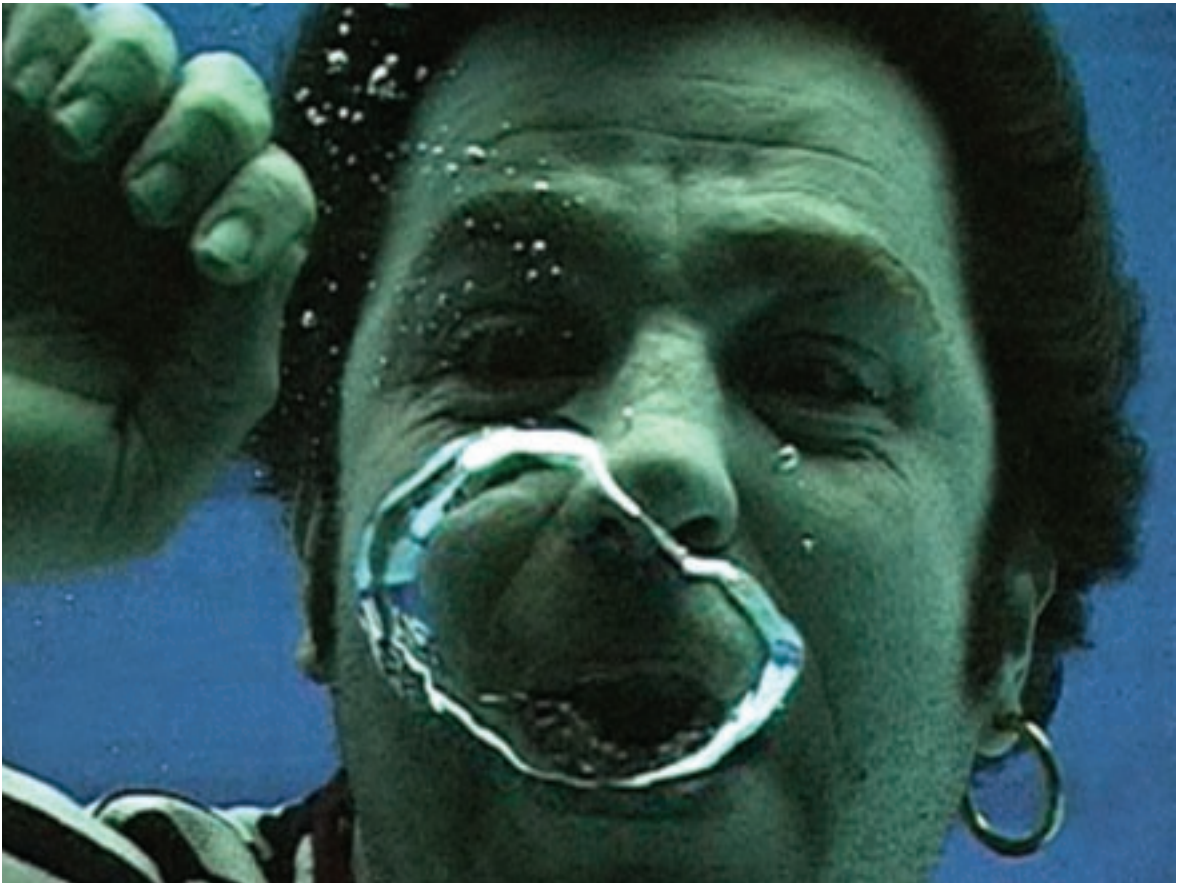
The experience through monitors sited in the dado woodlined café of the Alliance is in many ways familiar territory – something we experience on a daily basis – inert as passive, secure and bemused on-lookers, wondering about the plight of this particular submariner; in this case the metaphysical concern of connection beyond alienation. Redfern portrays himself within his works, playing with the dilemma of coming to terms with his, and our reality.

In Redfern's work 'Ce n'est pas une traduction!' mirrors Magritte.

Redfern states that *Vingt Mille Lieues sous les mers* was only translated correctly into English in 1963, 93 years after it was written. In previous translations Verne's novel was edited

and abridged because the content had been considered unsavoury and critical towards British culture, and this perception permeated through to today. Captain Nemo's political activism and some of the more carefully researched scientific elements employing metric measurement became incomprehensible after translation displaced the metric in favour of imperial measurement, slighting Verne's capacity, and making it difficult to see him in his true light. Redfern's submariner is also difficult to locate - adrift. He suffers a perpetual and cyclic incapacity to connect with actuality. Redfern sites his estranged, perhaps heroic, 'lamentable' identity within the day-to-day world of a transient and banal space.

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Dominic Redfern *Ce n'est pas une traduction!* 2005



Philip Samartzis *Captured Space* 2005

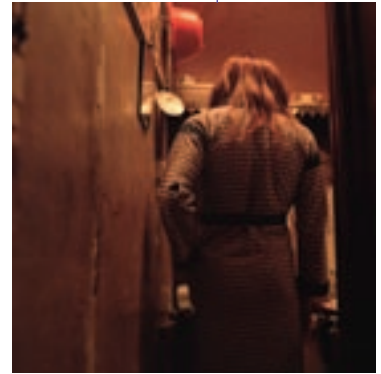
Philip Samartzis' surround sound installation '*Captured Space*' (2005) was developed to change '... the acoustic dimension of Alliance Française through an imperceptible soundtrack that (unheard or even forgotten) forms densities of space and newly developed aural zones through latent sounds. '*Captured Space*' interacts with the sounds of the location to render new and complex readings ... ' subtly subverting any perception of a seamless aural experience. Samartzis commingles the actual and daily sounds of the Alliance with introduced layers of recorded aural elements that ... permeate through acoustic spaces like perfume: refrigerator noises; fluorescent lights, computer hum, air conditioning; vibrating pipes; vending

machines; footsteps; traffic rumble ... ' (Philip Samartzis).

Samartzis relies on our perceptions of his 'source' and our inclination to subliminally generalise, in order to affect, change and possibly transform our awareness.

In defining new amalgams of sound between the actual and the recorded, Samartzis redirects attention to the incidental and peripheral. '*Captured Space*' sits inside the culture, inside the institution, aurally projecting the generic nature of modern society and our bland acceptance of things. Samartzis interrupts any perceived sense of an immaculate reality to imply an understated daily layer of uncertainty.

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Phillipe Charles alludes to altered perspectives to determine understanding within society. Charles' work developed from the story of two women who loved each other and lived in a little Parisian attic from 1941. When one died, the other became mad, abandoning the apartment and leaving everything behind.

Charles places a young male and female in this same environment, wearing the clothes of the women, sleeping in their bed and eating their tinned foods.' 'at the border of social norms' (since 2002) '... blurs reality and fiction to present us with a vision of transgressive lifestyles and behaviors'. Laetitia Bourget writes that

Charles' photographs '... are driven by the desire for transformation, or even by a necessity to place individuals in circumstances where they are able to create and define their own limits – the limits of their body, as much as the limits of a society'. Charles rejects ideas of flawless and incompatible realities; here there is no certainty and ' ...

transgression operates in recesses that have escaped social control: in private places, urban enclaves and old people's homes ...'. These works force us to question our desire to reduce reality merely to locate clarity. Charles' works fray perceptually.

Although it may be difficult to countenance, the possibility of a clear certainty without qualification or a more complete understanding of things may be one of our contemporary desires, particularly because warming to diversity on its own has inherent pitfalls.

12 Within diversity all things are in danger of merely being reduced to one thing reflecting another and to corridors of contexts. Deep at the centre of this must lay a sad lament or malaise, because within our world an actual and singular sense of something can be difficult to encounter. All things are perceived through 'knitted' relations to something else – multifarious but always tied to contextual views. This melancholy is underlined in modern society by subtle

paranoias that develop from being perpetually, but vaguely conscious of our uncertain perspectives.

In '*Pagan*' (2005) **Steve Cox** intentionally works to 'shift' our perceptions about the way we categorise various strata of society. He works against societal definition portraying subjects that '... are either divided inside themselves or divided from others', mindful of the inherent contradictions of '... such absolute states as the mad, the sane, the sick, the healthy, the criminal and the good boy' (Steve Cox). These careful and deliberate works echo an anxiety within the modern world about our paranoiac relations to our other entities and like Philippe Charles' work, imply the need for perceptual shifts.



Steve Cox *Pagan* 2004

Ania Walwicz suggests our uncertain, uneasy and bemused, perhaps even grateful relationship to our cultural institutions in *'Palace of Culture'* (2005). Walwicz remembers and reflects upon a building in Warsaw, The Palace of Culture and Science, *Palac Kultury*. This building had been a gift from Soviet leader Joseph Stalin to the Polish people and came to be known as *'Stalin's Palace'* until it was renamed in the late 1950's. The Soviet government was one of the first in the world to fund and support the arts through Agitprop. In many ways the love/hate relationship the local people of Warsaw have with this building galvanises and reflects our ambivalence to societal patriarchies.

In her series of text drawings Walwicz reminds us of what

we may have forgotten, or what we take for granted, as we busily sift through our various contemporary perceptions – that of society as machine with its own dynamism generating socially sanctioned institutional and cultural entities.

Walwicz' societal institutions are seen through observations of peculiar machinations, coupled with personal remarks and possibly 'tensed' perceptions. Maybe it's paranoiac; maybe visceral, could be cathartic. These text drawings and drawings of text are notational and fragmentary; considered, careful, at times intimate and fragile. They describe the relations between one thing to another and of individuals to systems.



Ania Walwicz *Palace of Culture* 2005

Louiseann Zahra's gathering suggests an environment where we look at the result of something passed, having missed the event, from a contemporary perspective in Australia, inside the Alliance, with associations to Hispanic culture. Zahra scatters materials and objects to imply connotations of a theatrical, perhaps intense metaphysical event using 'tacky' and aesthetic detritus that consist of fairy lights, second hand silk negligees, flowers, birds and skeletons.

The work establishes an apparent and obvious 'beauty', echoing romantic sensibilities. *'My name is death, can not you see, Lords, Dukes and Ladies kneel down to me, and you fair maid, and you fair maid and you fair maid must come with me'* (2004, ongoing) implies a lamentation centred on

the human condition and the inevitabilities we must all face. It's not difficult to simply reflect that this work is beautiful, metaphysical, possibly sad, and perhaps merely 'tacky'.

A sense of lament coupled with the awkward perspective of us as individuals having been excluded from the central event – the making of the work or some event outside our understanding – places emphasis on our personal alienation, while tempting us with a visually enticing residue; after the fact.

The witnesses to this residue often stand in small groups talking quietly as though left over from something, not really knowing what to do or how to respond. Zahra has developed a work that reflects on many things central to the



Louiseann Zahra

My name is death, can not you see, Lords, Dukes and Ladies kneel down to me, and you fair maid, and you fair maid and you fair maid must come with me 2004, ongoing

human condition during and after life. In 'One another's otherworld' she defines a central contemporary social phenomena – one of being left outside and never really being part of something, of being left behind, a sad and confused reality of uncertainty, and possibly mistaken perceptions.



In their diversity the works in ‘One another’s otherworld’ are not deliberately linked. However, in their in-coherent relationship to one another the works co-exist through their individual capacity to reflect and respond to the reverberating relational perceptions of our modern world – our structures, institutions and societal entities, interrupting the myopia of our day-to-day existence. All of the works in ‘One another’s otherworld’ imply that relations between most things rely on subtle threads that we develop through constant and multiple shifts in perspective and that in our world we rely almost entirely on the uncertain complexities of our relations to other entities to mirror our reality; that our reality inevitably involves one another’s otherworld.

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Peter Westwood

School of Art
RMIT University

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