



# What keeps us this side of that Dark Line?

Exhibition essay for Counterpoint by Kirsten Rann, 2006

Independent curator and writer; Director, counterpoint (projects)

Mestrom's new work has emerged in response to a series of recent phenomena that could be seen as highlighting a darker side of the artworld - namely, suicide. In the last ten months a number of attempts have been made, some more 'successful' than others, the more obvious cases being our loss of Mutlu Cerkez, Blair Trethowan and, most recently, Bronwyn Oliver.

Normally her wall-works or works-on-paper consist of meticulously hand-painted text (comprising questions such as: take away a man's name and what is left?) or psycho-spatial maps that investigate the politics of language and perception through representational and spatial shifts. If this trajectory continued, her observations of the workings of the artworld and of those whose lives are spent trying to survive, and succeed, within it, would have been a painting of the statement: 'I am working on the bleeding edge/ I am bleeding on the working edge'.

Instead, however, Mestrom's exploration of how we manage to avoid crossing the often difficult and fine line of identity/life/death is expressed in an immediate and visceral manner: she actually 'draws' the line - and walks the edge - with her body.

The three components of this work together make a whole greater than the sum of its parts: a mordant critique of the drives in the artworld that can lead to extremes. The act of drawing the 'dark line' and the line itself becomes a site of memory, an indexical expression of trauma or perhaps a form of resistance, the occasional drips a reminder of life 'spilling' over, as in times of love or joy or deep tragedy. From this is a series of documentary photographs, where both body and dark line become texts framed in self-conscious, post-modern acknowledgement of the framing devices used in photography. Finally is an experimental video: both private and public, it is reminiscent of some of Man Ray's early experiments in film, hinting at (rather than

directly recording) the artist in the process of drawing the dark line until it stalls in a poetic space at the end, when the inner psyche is revealed observing its' own trace, and meaning, on the wall.

The sense of a historical tide seems to sweep through this project through its references to both human tragedy and body art. Not only are there artistic precedents such as Dada - whose absurdist performances critiqued the horror and stupidity of war; Yves Klein's monochromatic body paintings; Japanese Gutai - extending Pollock's abstract expressionism into a performative use of material; the psychologism and trauma of the Viennese Actionists; Kaprow's 'happenings' of the 70s. And darkness is always present; it is expressed in life in general, and in the arts in particular, the act of suicide often sited as one of its' outcomes.

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## Wall painting

Counterpoint (projects)  
Hardware Lane,  
Melbourne, Australia

## Mounted photocopies on board

Spacement Gallery,  
Flinders Lane,  
Melbourne, Australia

## Video screening

Horse Bazaar,  
Lonsdale Street,  
Melbourne, Australia

