
AN IDEAL FOR LIVING

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TEXT

Dylan Trigg
Simon Gregg

CURATED BY

Simon Gregg

CURATOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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SG

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The ruin of the objective world, abandonment of true action, flight into a self-contained realm are conditions favouring the illusion of those who have lost a limb in that it too presupposes the erasure of reality. (*Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p.99*)

As a testament to the paradoxical relationship between memory, identity, and material decay, the Greek puzzle regarding the Ship of Theseus remains exemplary. According to Plutarch, we are told the following.

The ship wherein Theseus and the youth of Athens returned had thirty oars, and was preserved by the Athenians down even to the time of Demetrius Phalereus, for they took away the old planks as they decayed, putting in new and stronger timber in their place, insomuch that this ship became a standing example among the philosophers, for the logical question of things that grow; one side holding that the ship remained the same, and the other contending that it was not the same (*Plutarch, 1999*).

Far from an exercise in formal logic and that alone, Plutarch's story of the Ship of Theseus captures the ambiguity inherent in how we attempt to seal ourselves within an imagined memory of the world. Things return from hibernation, having travelled afar, but in a different state to how we remember them being. Thereafter, the line between sameness and difference becomes increasingly amorphous and indeed interchangeable. Yet if the interchangeability of the Ship of Theseus before and after its restoration signifies the persistence of matter, then it also attests to the rupture of memory. Is it enough that the past endures as a simulated replica, held together merely as an imagined world? If so, at which point does a memory cease being a memory, becoming, instead, a mutant hybrid between memory and imagination? Such questions rely on the idea that the decay of memory can be mapped out, as though laid flat in a line of continuity, ready for our inspection. Yet clearly this is inaccurate. It is surely less a question of the measurable status of an object and more an issue with the affective and embodied relationship we have with the past, as we experience it becoming absent.

Aware that our memories of the world fail to reconcile with our experience of the world, the role of the imagination becomes central. Nowhere is this clearer than in our experience and memories of the homes we once inhabited, however briefly. Time and again, Gaston Bachelard, above all, is fond of reminding us of memory's reliance on imagination, so producing an oneiric house, registered below the threshold

of conscious experience, and stored in the house rather than the body (Bachelard, 1996). It is thanks to the imagination that memory survives in the present, constantly readapting itself to the modulations and differences unable to be anticipated in advance. Indeed, without this oneiric security contained within the house, "man," for Bachelard, "would be a dispersed being," scattered in the different places previously occupied (Ibid., p. 7). Bachelard's "felicitous" image of dwelling is both enticing and problematic, hence its ambivalent attraction. Consigning the "dark entity" of the oneiric house to the cellar, Bachelard is able to preserve the unity of memory and dwelling through bordering otherness as a "subterranean force" (Ibid., p. 18). What is omitted in this phenomenological journey through the home, therefore, is the independent growth of decay, absence, and otherness, forever unspoken but entirely present beneath the surface of continuity.

Let us place ourselves outside of Bachelard's house. Further still, let us disrupt the solitude of the dreamer's journey by inserting, not only the memory of other places within this scene, but also the fragmented memory of *other bodies*. Finally, let us admit of the possibility for the imagination to outgrow the scene of memory, rupturing the unity afforded with this interplay. After all, is it not the case that the impermanence of the world breaks asunder our capacity to remember? And is it not with that break that our desire toward the past intensifies? Nostalgia, far from an "excess" in remembering, attests to the desire to *forget* what the present heralds: namely, the decay of identity. The imagination falters, and in that discontinuity, the independent colonies of the past emerge, like the memory of a virus. As with a virus, memory has its own peculiar logic, its own intelligibility that is largely foreign to the cognitive desires of imagination. While the imagination props up what remains of the past, so memory, by its intimate relation to embodiment and spatiality, establishes its own secret – and secreted – network of buried cells. Indeed, the literal other side of Bachelard's faith in the power of place requires that we treat the house as a *host* for buried and decayed memories to feed upon. Where dwelling is concerned, it is the absence of other bodies who once inhabited the house that assume the role of a phantom host, leaving their flesh in the grooves and alcoves so far inconspicuous in their dormancy.

We can, I think, speak here of the memory of other bodies as a *phantom memory*. In the same way that the residue of a severed limb persists precisely in its absence, as a spectral desire toward what has ceased to belong, so the memory of other bodies – of other people – becomes torn from presence, displaying itself as a gift from another time. Merleau-Ponty has written: “The consciousness of the body invades the body, the soul spreads over all its parts, and behaviour overflows its central sectors” (Merleau-Ponty, 2006, p. 87). The gift of body parts spilling into the present signifies a fundamental rupture in the unity between memory, time, and place. A hotel hallway, a domestic bedroom, and a passing ship are all marked by an invisible confluence of forces and affective modulations. With that invisibility, the posting of familiar bodies counters the discontinuous transition from one memory to another. As a result, we see what has ceased to be there, and so clothe the naked anonymity of space with ruins of an undead memory. Merleau-Ponty again:

We do not understand the absence or death of a friend until the time comes when we expect a reply from him and when we realize that we shall never again receive one; so at first we avoid asking in order not to have to notice this silence; we turn aside from those areas of our life in which we might meet this nothingness, but this very fact necessitates that we intuit them (Ibid., p. 93).

Given Merleau-Ponty’s emphasis on the distance of silence, we are faced with a question: if our experience of domestic unity is essentially *ghostly*, relying on the imagination to conjure threads of familiarity where none exist, then how can we be sure that such a dwelling existed in the first instance? Further, are we not displaced to the elsewhere as we concurrently inhabit the here and now, our memories protruding into the present, so easing the inhumanity that exists behind every expression of desire? It is a question that perhaps can only ever be asked when returning to an intimate place after a period of sustained silence, since it is with that return that our faith in the power of place is subjected to radical judgment. Indeed, it is through coming up against the felt experience of silence, rather than projected anticipation of absence, that the disquiet inherent in our memories and projections of domesticity is given space to breathe.

I have seen this place before. What can it mean to articulate this enigmatic statement? In returning to the site of memory, desires, and transition what is "seen" is emblematically an amorphous fusion of different desires and conflicting temporalities. As such, the place is same and different, seen and not seen simultaneously, so returning us to the impasse of the Ship of Theseus: a paradox to be solved not by logic but by through attending to the act of applying an identity on the world. *I have seen this place before.* Is it not rather that I have seen fragments of this place before, seized from the flux of ceaseless change and destruction, and thereafter reconstituted those that are unrecognisable with augmented scenes of the imagination? The ghosts of memory continue to haunt the places we inhabit in the present, surfacing whenever we catch sight not only of unfamiliar and spectral scenes, but also in those moments where familiarity becomes simultaneously infused with its own imminent erasure.

Dylan Trigg
25th December 2007

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Dylan Trigg is a Doctoral student and associate tutor at the University of Sussex, philosophy department, and author of *The Aesthetics of Decay: Nothingness, Nostalgia and the Absence of Reason* (New York: Peter Lang, 2006.)

Rubble is the future. Because everything that is, passes. There is a wonderful chapter in Isaiah that says: grass will grow over your cities. This sentence has always fascinated me, even as a child. This poetry in the fact that you see both things at the same time. Isaiah sees the city and the different layers over it, the grass, and then another city, the grass, and then another city again.
*Anselm Kiefer, 2005*¹

This can't last forever.
The Paradise Motel, *Flight Paths*, 1998²

An Ideal for Living charts the geography of decay. This is a decay manifest not only in concrete objects, but in space, time and conscious memory. The project addresses the disjunction between decay and reason, by extending the critical thesis projected in Dylan Trigg's work *The Aesthetics of Decay* (2006) into the realm of visual art. In his book, Trigg argues for the legitimacy of the ruin, asserting it as complete in its fragmentation, and as a source of cultural insight³. *An Ideal for Living* locates these conceptual forays within a visual arena, whereby critical discourses currently being proliferated on the international stage, including Trigg's, are courted within a programme of localised artistic activity.

The exhibition presents art objects within states of phenomenological ambiguity. The violence of life tears at their surface fabric; their internal programmes thwarted and infected by the certainty of death. References to human mortality abound but these remnants are no mere pawns of symbolic propaganda: meditations on their gradual process of decay reward us with insight, as Trigg notes, 'Thinking alongside the ruin means recognizing its ability to evaluate progress'⁴. In this renegotiation of the ruin *An Ideal for Living* posits a life-affirming premise, whereby the ruin resolves itself as a form complete in fragmentation. The works speak of the presence of man, but where the literal figure/s is absent; in this way the works are suggestive rather than implicit, and intone a passing, or an absence through the debris that remains.

The central scope of the project is complemented by commensurate concerns, namely, the impermanence of the concrete object, transitional space, memory as a flawed phenomena, the relational influence of trauma on silence and its compounding impact on loss and longing, and the sublime as a phenomena situated within domestic space. The eleven artists comprising *An Ideal for Living* address these concerns within their respective practices to varying extents, but

cumulatively, their works form an engaging, powerful and dynamic essay on the life and death of the empirical object.

Consumed by what German Enlightenment philosopher Immanuel Kant described a 'negative pleasure' (acknowledging the dualistic attraction and repulsion to the sublime), aspects of contemporary Australian art strive towards states of perfection or completion through employment of destruction. A destruction, that is, that may be read as a definition of perfection, for as Trigg reminds us, 'perfection' etymologically derives from the Latin '*perficere*', to bring to an end, thus equating destruction with order and perfection⁵. The task then, is to explore the fascination within contemporary Australian art for the sublime and the transcendental, through the examples of the works comprising the present project, whereby noumena (the realm of ideas) meets phenomena (the realm of nature) through a process of decay, fragmentation and dissolution.

Reflection on the ruin or fragment is especially insightful for the way in which it facilitates the emergence of the sublime. For Kant, writing in 1780, the sublime referred to 'things which appear either formless (a storm at sea; a vast mountain range) or which have form but, for reasons of size, exceed our ability to perceive such form'; the sublime becomes 'an affront or 'outrage' to our powers of comprehension'⁶.

An Ideal for Living pursues the sublime through the burlesque of fragmentation. The sublime in this context is grafted with a post-Kantian inflection analogous with the ambitions of the Romantics, whereby the artist seeks to unite the hitherto divided faculties of reason and imagination. Within a contemporary Australian schema the agenda of the nineteenth century Romantics has been distilled into an enquiry into transcendent states and the condition of the sublime through the fragment, the ephemeral, the impermanent, the absent and the object in decay.

A building or object may achieve the status of ruin through either gradual decline or through an aggressive act, however for contemporary Australian artists the material culture from which to form an exegesis is minimal. In the global community Australia represents a relational paradigm unto itself. It is a society that has never experienced the trauma of urban modification through large scale acts of aggression (with the exception of the Darwin bombing in 1942), and natural decay has had only 200 years in which to exert itself upon the built form (since white settlement). The single most traumatic event

to impact upon Melbourne's urban environment was the radical building programme that anticipated the 1956 Olympic Games, and since then the city has slipped into a kind of architectural plateau. Such a condition is obviously preferable to the hostility of decay, but it also severs society from the extremes of silence and violence, and the phenomenological discourses with which they are entwined.

On a recent trip to Germany I was drawn to the centres most ravaged by recent world events: Hamburg, Berlin and lastly Dresden – a city built up over a thousand years, and completely annihilated during the English bombing campaign in 1945. Artist Gerhard Richter was born in Dresden in 1932. What kind of effect would such a catastrophe have on a 13 year-old boy? In this context the blurring, sense of rushing, of history being sucked into a vortex characteristic of his canvasses suddenly all made sense. The city is still comprehending its destruction, its almost total erasure from existence.

Turning back to Australia we find that artists who engage with the poetics of the ruin require a certain amount of ingenuity. For lack of an actual experience of architectural trauma, in his work *Valhalla* Callum Morton merged public and private space by imagining his own childhood family home ravaged by a middle-eastern war. A bombed-out shell, riddled with bullet holes, the house that sheltered his childhood dreams became subject to violent destruction, an aggressive act that for the artist equated to the reality of the house's demolition years after the family had left.

Where Morton perpetually re-enacts destruction through cinematic sound and light, the artists comprising *An Ideal For Living* enact ruin by embracing the quietude of decay. Characterized by a dearth of activity and an absence of human intervention, their works investigate the reclamation of concrete through natural processes. While acknowledging the contextual void within the Australian condition the artists seek to transcend the spectacle of banality by drawing upon physiological and metaphysical states, cross-pollinating the authentic and the inauthentic. Within the cavities of Linden Mansion, built around 1870 and open as an art space since 1986, they engage the traces of domestic history while proposing a distant, distinct future determined by the silent elemental forces of time and natural decay.

The finitude of the object is thrown into question – the works engage the uncertainty of space and the ambiguity



Callum MORTON

Valhalla, 2007

steel, polystyrene, epoxy resin, silicon, marble, glass, wood, acrylic paint, lights, sound, motor
465 x 1475 x 850cm



Doris SALCEDO

Shibboleth, 2007

Photo: Tate Modern

of time. In suggesting a break down of their composite orders, a transitional, temporal state and the flux of relational aesthetics, the works are able to modulate their concrete appearance. Similarly, they play on the ambiguity of becoming, being and unbecoming; that is, their position on the scale between birth and death becomes a speculative matter.

Doris Salcedo demonstrates the potential for sublime experience when the concept of object is forcibly conjoined with the concept of mortality. In her work *Shibboleth* in the floor of the Tate Modern's Carbine Hall (2007) we see a literal splintering; a slow, monumental shattering that renders uncertain and susceptible the very ground that we walk – a massive section of earthed concrete – made suddenly vulnerable, and subject to the authority of nature. It rouses all previous definitions of the sublime, from the power of a storm to the all-conquering divine.

Decay also rouses the imagination by simultaneously implying the material and immaterial, enticing the viewer to fill the gaps. Ruins suggest the frailty of the mortal condition, they arouse a temporary anxiety, they inspire contemplation and, particularly during the Romantic period, their study was characterized by a yearning for the 'beyond' – all qualities common to the contemporary concern with decay. While the presence of man is constantly inferred but forever absent, the decay within *An Ideal for Living* is suggestive of the mortality and transience of material culture. The built environment is shown to be as prone to demise as the organic life forms that move through it.

In the twenty-first century sustainability has become an aspirational mode – we work to sustain our environment, our heritage and our very lives – while decay, its antithesis, incurs a visceral disdain. To decay is to show weakness, vulnerability and incompleteness.

An Ideal for Living proposes one in which an unattainable past is reconciled with the present. It accepts and finds purpose in decay, the fragment and the transient place. It reclaims domestic space from banality and affirms its sublimity. As the works in the project reveal, to be present is to be contextually dependant on a past falteringly bound by memory, and to be in the present is to submit unflinchingly to decay. As the objects enact their demise, or describe a memory caught in erasure, or encounter a local place reverting to general space, we are reminded of the impossibility of forever and of the sublime poetry in transience. As Kiefer reminds us: *rubble is the future*.

Ruins lead us to a poetry of transitional space, where material culture is subject to decay and impermanence. In relinquishing their bodily form to the cosmos they grant us a window into the fleetingness of existence. To be ruined is to admit not to failure, but to the completion of an earthly cycle. It is a recognition that the sublime of a concept beyond our scope of reason can be found not only in a bodily form, but in a body of time – a defined period whose finiteness is intensified when coupled with the infinite.

The phenomena of transitional space is of concern to us in the present project for its indeterminate slippage between site and non-site, real and unreal, and the way in which it facilitates contemplation of the unknown. Space may be rendered transitional by virtue of its unknowable geography, unknowable chronology, or because of its interstitial existence between two reference points: function and dysfunction.

As an illustration of this fluidity the work of photographer Peter Bialobrzewski is of particular interest. Here, photographs of non-places – urban sites and built environments devoid of figures that traverse time and space – achieve more than documentation: they reveal transition – spaces of becoming and unbecoming. Various sites have become non-functional through being subject to new building works, becoming immersed in interlocking networks of scaffolds and cranes. Other sites are rendered non-functional through abandonment, and their transition derives from their latent rot and disintegration. Subversely, the sites are bathed in a spectral, otherworldly glow that registers what would otherwise be disjointed and banal, as cosmic and sublime.

Similarly in the photographic essays of Shaun O'Boyle we observe the residue of life now absent within abandoned locations. As the imposed order of architectonic structures breaks down and is reclaimed by nature, a rupture of meaning is imposed upon the site. This is especially so in the modern ruin, where the sense of unfamiliarity, uncanniness and bewilderment converges. As Trigg notes in describing the uncanny place: 'Displaced from familiarity and order, in the ruin, we encounter a place of desolation marked by ambiguity and indeterminacy'⁷.



Peter BIALOBRZESKI

Transition 18, 2004-2007

photograph



Shaun O'BOYLE

Clothes, c.1985



Shaun O'BOYLE

Piano 2, Hospital X, c.1985

Sites liberated from functional use and left to decay become ghosts of their former selves. While recalling their past lives and past uses, the ruin 'is the trace of a past, fragmented and unable to be situated in an overarching narrative, fusing with the ruin's decay in the present. Existence has become mediated through the work of decay'⁸. In divorcing the object from function in the present tense the decaying site becomes a cultural artefact; a material memory of itself impregnated with a newly roused poetic resonance. Taking his cue from the photographs of Peter Bialobrzeski, Michael Glasmeier notes that the 'fascination with ruins, in which the veneration for antiquity, the passion for the bizarre, and the *vanitas* theme all played an equally important role, gave rise to images whose artistic strategies were derived from the actual formal repertoire of ruined architecture, but at the same time could be read as allegories of history'⁹. This fascination with ruins reached its pinnacle during the Romantic period when, especially in Germany, the decaying Gothic cathedral became the primary symbolic locus for an architectural model of transcendental nature¹⁰.

Within the present post-industrial scenario a space may be rendered elusive or transitional not merely by virtue of abandonment or decay, but by physical modification or, to use an architectural catchphrase, 'adaptive re-use'. Here, we find factories and warehouses prefigured as residential complexes, train stations transformed into shopping centres, and post offices into museums. Alternatively, a structure may be demolished altogether, marking transition at its most absolute.

Transitional space also occurs in the slippage between remembered place and actual, present place. As the power of recollection recedes the places in our memory become increasingly remote and inaccessible. The vitality of place in lived experience, as Trigg writes, 'risks alteration as our memories fail to reconcile with the erosion and mutability of place'¹¹.

Place moves on, necessarily. Losing sight of that movement, we become entangled with an unreal place, solipsistically preserved by the remembered consciousness, which, in the absence of that place, laments its loss¹².

In suggesting and engaging with the tenets of transitional space, *An Ideal for Living* therefore concerns not only the object in a state of transitional flux, between material and immaterial, but the space that surrounds it and its recedence in memory. In Izabela Pluta's stark, dislocated photographs we are presented with both time and space immaterial. The language of description is corrupted so as to pitch us into an undefinable geography. There is a palpable tension between evolution and ruination and the natural and artificial world. But where history has abhorred the failure of permanence, Pluta elevates its countenance: objects and spaces in states of transition between material and immaterial become heroic and sublime. There is a divinity in disorder that poetically capitulates the frailty of form.

Like Bialobrzeski, Pluta carefully omits clues as to the identity of a site, maintaining an archetypal geography. Describing her practice as an exploration of: 'the function of memory in social, philosophical, and personal realms', Pluta addresses space as a contested realm, charged with memory and constantly slipping between real and remembered.

We as cultures seem ever more transient, moving back and forth between places. As a first generation migrant, I am interested in this state of flux ... The attachment and nostalgia for the past, brought and appropriated through physical, commonly domestic spaces, in the present. There is a transportation of materiality through memory into current contexts, away from its origin, resulting in an inevitable intervention with a new aesthetic.¹³

Registering a space as transitional allows its underlying possibilities – its ghosts and its formal conditions – to become apparent. Only when a space becomes transitional can we immerse ourselves in its atmospheric density. Bricks and mortar, concrete and steel reveal themselves as being prone to unrest, and we learn that as surely as the sun rises and sets, that nothing is immortal.

In observing transitional space we feel privileged for having witnessed a momentary event: a fleeting glimpse of a light, or a quality of atmosphere, in which all the elements seem to work together in harmony. A poetry of the everyday emerges – a kind of theatre to sharpen or awaken our senses – but in passing just as quickly as it arrived, it delivers the impression that it never existed at all.



Izabela PLUTA

Untitled 4
(With a view series)
[detail], 2005

Lambda print
100 x 160cm

Courtesy the artist

Creeping round my house at dawn; I'll keep my curtains closed.
The Delgados, *Pull the Wires from the Wall*, 1998 ¹⁴

The house is a series of containers we inhabit, and once it achieves a descriptive typology of our psychology, it may be considered a home. We can feel our way through it in the night with our eyes closed. We instinctively know the distances between doorways, the minute acreage of open spaces; we navigate through it as surely as we do our inner spaces. To actively measure these spaces, to liken them to psychological space as does Sanné Mestrom for instance, is to quantify their relational properties, to demarcate their limits and engage the void as an active mass. For UK artist Rachel Whiteread, the internal mass of the house has become its *de facto* exoskeleton forming a barrier, a kind of – in the case of her work *House*, 1993 – opaque cage, that excludes penetration and protects the mythical interior ¹⁵.

A phrase I return to again and again, even though it has no real definition and no accredited history of use, is the 'domestic sublime'. It might be understood as a concept of the sublime descended from philosophers Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke, given visual resonance through the Romantics of the nineteenth century, and applied to contemporary spaces in which we inhabit. Spaces in which we not merely live, breathe and exist, but in which we perform domestic choirs, assemble souvenirs of our experiences and cultivate a qualitative identity.

The 'domestic' and the 'sublime' merge in no small part to Gaston Bachelard, who gave himself with considerable zeal to the task of aligning Jung's ideas of the ego, the id, and the unconscious with the spaces in which we grew up. Bachelard asserted that the contents of the house became a psychological map, charting the hopes, aspirations and failures of its inhabitant, and that the internal spaces of the home pointed to the origin of consciousness: 'a topography of our intimate being' ¹⁶.



Rachel WHITEREAD

House, 2003

cast concrete

Photo: Tate Photography

In the opening pages of Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space* he intimates the phenomenological beauty of the home: 'For our house is our corner of the world. As has often been said, it is our first universe, a real cosmos in every sense of the world. If we look at it intimately, the humblest dwelling has beauty'¹⁷. It is only a small step from here to suggest an underlying current of the sublime within the house. Bachelard describes a way this may be achieved in discussing the primitiveness of home, and its relationship with dreams.

It is primarily through the dream and the daydream that Bachelard inadvertently defines the domestic sublime. If the sublime can be briefly described as that which lies beyond the comprehension of man, beyond the empirical senses and beyond the scope of reason, then as surely as does God, infinity and death, does the dream qualify as sublime. In stipulating his philosophical aims Bachelard intones 'I must show that the house is one of greatest powers of integration for the thoughts, memories and dreams of mankind. The binding principle in the integration is the daydream'¹⁸. Here the house gives passage to dreams into the mind of man, and with it, brings the sublime into the domestic realm: 'if I were asked to name the chief benefit of the house, I should say: the house shelters daydreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows one to dream in peace'¹⁹.

Within the context of the sublime the house may be considered to possess properties beyond the rational explanation of the intellect. The mountains, the night sky, the weather may all transport us beyond the scope of our imagination and into the realm of infinite longing (or longing for the infinite), but no less so does the domestic engender the possibility of transient encounters. If the domestic may be considered to entail all that falls within the realm of the house, then it so follows that it may be equally employed to describe intimate space: the qualities of space that surround and intoxicate us within a lived-in site: light, atmosphere and spatial dynamics. Each of these qualities, descriptive of the domestic, are also harbingers of the sublime, and conspire to bring the most otherworldly, unknowable aspects of the universe into our most intimate and private worlds.

By nature the 'domestic' – in describing the home in which we inhabit, contained within time and space – is contradictory to the sublime, as being uncontainable and beyond the scope of reason. Additionally, the domestic is the very embodiment of human reason. However, the case for the sublime being a product of the domestic is strengthened when we observe that the home embodies aspects of memory and imagination that are beyond the scope of reason, in contrast to its subordination to functionality. The domestic extends a powerful grasp over us. Our dwelling spaces mould the foundation of our developing mind; they become the corridors of our unconscious and bleed into daily behavioural habits and rituals.

The works comprising *An Ideal for Living* pursue the domestic as an entry point into the sublime. They negotiate time, space and memory by describing the domestic object (as a rational, contained subject) in terms of the fleeting and transient. As the everyday object decays and disappears from apprehension, drawing from us a yearning in the wake of its absence, we become aware of an aperture into limitlessness, nothingness and unreason, and so encounter the sublime. Sanné Mestrom's shattered glass shelf, Milne's concrete food processors and Anna-Maria O'Keeffe's dislocated sections of earth – all totems to dysfunction – exchange utility with decline, and so usher in the world of dreams. Our awareness of the life and death of the object is heightened, and with it, our awareness of the limitless capacity of the domestic object, within a domestic space, to speak of transience, of a state beyond being, of a beyond. While on one level accountable to Bachelard's irrefutable logic of the home as a psychological portrait, the object also achieves sublimity through its intimation of death.

Key to unlocking the sublime within the domestic is the effect of light. The revelry of light, with its all consuming, all penetrating pervasiveness, is simultaneously that most impermanent and fleeting of materials. Within an artwork we might discuss the depiction of light as readily as we might the actual, present light that illuminates its surfaces. Alternately we might consider light as one of its central composites, as within a video projection or lightbox. Light within a domestic environment has the capacity to transport us instantly into the world of nostalgia, memory and dreams, and thus, into the

sublime. Its immateriality or ephemeral nature might lead us to speculate on transience, just as a certain artificial glow, or the penetration of gentle daylight through fluttering window blinds might reconnect us with memories of another time, another place – places on the brink of consciousness.

Annie Hogan articulates these qualities of light in her sensitive photographs of domestic interiors that, while materially empty, are rich in the scars of living: stained carpet, scratched, soiled walls, an atmospheric light sodden with the sediment of recollection. The room as a whole is still helplessly attuned to the memory of its contents, now absent; and with it, the heart sighs in longing. Her treatment of light is free of the saturated hue typical of traditional depictions of the Australian landscape – especially during the 'Impressionism' period of the late nineteenth century – and shares its affinity instead with European Romanticism from earlier that century. The Romantic light, as we can discern in the work of Caspar David Friedrich (1774–1840), is subdued, reflected, tempered, even, indirect, gentle and fleeting. It might be found in the middle of the night, in an early-morning fog, or deep in the shadows made fugitive by daylight. The Romantic uses light to create an otherworldly space.

Implanted within an inhabited space this light calls forth the domestic sublime. It is present in the play of light on dust in Hannah Bertram's work, the gentle radiance of actual light in Louiseann Zahra-King and Briele Hansen's works, the light as atmosphere in Sanné Mestrom and Iris Fischer's works, light as reflection captured in Julia Silvester's glass works, light absorbed and muted by Susan Milne and Izabela Pluta's concrete works, light giving life and mass to Anna-Maria O'Keeffe and Jessica Page's works, and light as intrusive menace in Camilla Tadic's works. This Romantic light is indicative of an inward-looking engagement with the unconscious. With it, we become attuned to the nuances in everyday life, amplifying the minute and rendering the subtle monumental.



Annie HOGAN

Comfort, 2000

type-C prints
each 96 x 120cm



Caspar David FRIEDRICH

Abbey in the Oak Forest,
1809-10

oil on canvas
110 x 171.5cm

Nationalgalerie,
Staaliche Museen, Berlin

To be conscious of Being is to be conscious of finitude. ²⁰

Nostalgia remains a powerful force in the way we think about the home, as noted by Akiko Busch: 'any definition of home today must consider how new attitudes and values come up against the familiar; how our needs are served by what we know, as well as what we remember' ²¹. A survey conducted in 1994 found that a library was the room most home-owners wanted to add; a private, intimate place to linger over pages of a book. When asked to name their favourite household objects, people cited nostalgic and traditional artefacts: a Shaker table, a wicker rocker, a collection of old tin cans from France, an Arts and Crafts table, and old enamel kitchen top ²². Memory and association are not merely negligible, natural attributes of home – they are conditions we actively aspire to, and seek to surround ourselves with.

An 'ideal for living' may be considered to be one that shares a concise equilibrium with its past – but this is a phenomenological impossibility. This impossible, unfulfillable yearning is central to the current exhibition. In *An Ideal for Living* we are presented with objects and sensations in the present tense that represent objects and sensations from the past, but fragmented, spectral, and undergoing decay, as they are in memory. Here, the artists are implicated within an exchange of ideas between writers Rainer Maria Rilke, Gaston Bachelard and Dylan Trigg. Rilke, quoted by Bachelard, writes of the fusion of being with the lost house of memory: 'as I see it now, the way it appeared to my child's eye, it is not a building, but is quite dissolved and distributed inside me: here one room, there another, and here a bit of corridor which, however, does not connect the two rooms, but is conserved in me in fragmentary form. Thus the whole thing is scattered about inside me' ²³. Rilke likens the recollection of memory to a fragment; a series of broken down and fleeting series of images that conspire to arouse an impossible nostalgia.

For Rilke, the clarity of space by which we might gauge ourselves in the present is undermined by the unbinding of memory. Bachelard enlists Rilke to support his own argument that the past is irreparably detached from the present, and so becomes dreamlike: 'Indeed, at times dreams go back so far into an undefined, dateless past that clear memories of our childhood home appear to be detached from us' ²⁴. This disorder

results in the conclusion that 'the entire reality of memory becomes spectral'²⁵. For Trigg, writing after the decline of Post-Modernism, Rilke's scattering of space and fragmentary form 'coincides with the dissociation of memory, and so enforces the sense that the past is gradually becoming externalised to the present as an estranged entity'²⁶. Trigg goes further to describe the interstice in which visual artists dwell, 'As nostalgia submits to its desires by invoking a return homewards, so it discloses the void between past and present in spatial terms'²⁷.

Visual motifs that demonstrate the failure of memory are being taken up and embraced by artists practicing in Australia today. In the absence of an adequate cultural memory to draw upon, we submerge into our own unconscious abyss – the residue of memory and the fragments by which we recall it. Here, the Romantic sublime becomes a potent medium in which to express the antipodean cultural condition where the artwork, as noted by Schelling in 1800, is to be regarded 'not as a thing but as the medium through which the sensible is reunited with the transcendental'²⁸. The embrace of the memory in ruin and the rupture between past and present has the potential to yield the most transcendental of harvests; a pronounced disclosure of unconscious space that conforms to Friedrich's dictum that 'a painter should not merely paint what he sees in front of him, he ought to paint what he sees within himself'²⁹.

The works in *An Ideal for Living* address memory by engaging the space they inhabit: Real Space. Linden is a post-inhabited space, a container of memories, a vital, virulent space full of echoes of the past. It represents the antithesis of neutral gallery spaces –temples to sterility encompassing an architecture of the unseen and neutered of post-inhabited charisma. Galleries seek to remove the distractions and competing voices from the art they contain. Ironically many gallerists engage celebrated architects to create their neutered spaces. The gallery facilitates a dialogue of object and space without participating in it. It seeks to be free of context; all things to all artists. Linden, contrarily, invests art with meaning and nuance, history and memory. Its elegant, noble fireplaces, bay windows and internal archways are as much artworks as the objects they contain, dancing within their interiors. Theirs is a spatial inhabitation to be rejoiced, not negated.

Fragments of memory, for all their distortions of an actual historic consciousness, may be regarded as an aggregate of loss; a perpetual reminder of that which is missing, lapsed and expired. Memory is absence; an acknowledgement of finitude, a manifestation of the missing. In this context the constructed and collected objects act as traces of reality, whereby their art is self-consciously artificial, it is poetry, it is sublime; it is everything but that which it actually seeks to represent. Art is a grieving process; a longing ache to supply that which is absent. Object making is a memorial to memory; an objectification of object, intended to replace the displaced.

In the work of German artist Mariele Neudecker we find ideas of time, memory and space manifest within a contemporary visual practice. Enclaves of forestry are contained within sealed glass vessels; a monumental glacial landscape is ravaged by scale and reduced to fit a human space. The references to snow domes and souvenirs are unavoidable³⁰; the phenomenological collapse between the present and a past, and an authentic site and a remote non-site are all too seductive to ignore. Here, we encounter a world suggesting seemingly infinite space, but in purposefully shattering these illusions through fragmentation, miniaturization and containment, Neudecker induces the melancholic tone of the Post-Modern sublime.

Similarly, as we shall see in the works comprising *An Ideal for Living*, the disunity of time and space is an adjunct stimulating nostalgic sensations. The return to a space described by memory is predicated on a rupture in time. However, if memories reach a point where their clarity and reality give way to unfamiliarity and detachment, then, as Trigg points out, 'past and present evade reconciliation by dint of this void'³¹.

What emerges in this void is a fragmentation of personal identity and of our experience of space and place. If lived places contain memory, then by returning to them, the likely result is estrangement and not affirmation. As the reality of the original memory becomes an object external to us, so the spectral quality of past experience becomes lucid. This realization that space and place fall from certainty coincides with the experience of nostalgia.³²

Mariele NEUDECKER

*Much was decided before
you were born*, 2001

Photoprint on Aludibond
151 x 122cm
Edition 5 + 2AP

Courtesy Galerie Barbara
Thumm, Berlin

This lucidity of the past's 'spectral quality' is where the artistic muse resides. As we have seen, the space rendered transitional by virtue of ruin or redefinition, or dwelling in the interstice between lived and recalled memory, is prone to estrangement and fragmentation. And as we shall discover, it is the fragment that, above all, illuminates the condition of being and its characteristic of impermanence.

The works in *An Ideal for Living* represent a nomenclature, or typology of memorable objects; that is, works that achieve a connection between an historic consciousness and a lived reality. They address the inhospitable marriage between memory and imagination, and the material and immaterial. They are composed wholly from the poetic imagination and in order to address the failure of the memory-object they embody Maurice Blanchot's assertion that 'the boundless must be bound, the qualitative must become quantitative, and the abstract rendered concrete' ³³.

To quote a passage written on the work of Rachel Whiteread: 'Each of the works can be regarded as *memento moris*, but are free of any of the morbid fixations with loss and death so frequently associated with the genre. Instead we are presented with a series of elegiac distillations of life'.³⁴

Each of the artists in *An Ideal for Living* create sculptural interventions in space. Their works renegotiate the accepted definitions of Modernist sculpture within a Post-Modernist framework, while inhabiting and responding to the traces of life within the former domestic environs of Linden. It is worth returning to Rosalind Krauss' watershed essay 'Sculpture in the Expanded Field' to appreciate the context with which these works engage:

I would submit that we know very well what sculpture is. And one of the things we know is that it is a historically bounded category and not a universal one. As is true of any other convention, sculpture has its own internal logic, its own set of rules, which, though they can be applied to a variety of situations, are not themselves open to very much change. The logic of sculpture is a commemorative representation. It sits in a particular place and speaks in a symbolic tongue about the meaning or use of that place. [...] Because they thus function in relation to the logic of representation and marking, sculptures are normally figurative and vertical, their pedestals an important part of the structure since they mediate between actual site and representational sign³⁵.

Similarly, the present works conspire to transform the entire space into a representational sign: an immersive and sensate environment. The void between the works bristles with a visceral tension; Sanné Mestrom's ongoing, critical engagement with space as an active, political and contested realm ricochets against Anna-Maria O'Keeffe's invocations of real world space, rendered in a cacophony of dystopian fantasy and apocalyptic entropy. This shared context affects numerous shifts within the space. As another example, the menace of the everyday becomes heightened in drawing together Camilla Tadich's painterly depictions of nocturnal bush settings and Susan Milne's concrete relics of domestic life.

Returning to the disparate practices of Sanné Mestrom and Anna-Maria O'Keeffe we witness a shared concern with rupture and fracture. Through her installations Mestrom explores spatial disintegration and the tension between site and non-site. By explicitly referencing the anti-space beyond the actual confines of the gallery (by engaging with the revealed foundations of Linden through a trapdoor) Mestrom breaks down the artspace idiom and subverts the church of the gallery. Within her object-based practice there is an even greater concern with fracture. A glass shelf – a utilitarian object designed specifically for supporting material objects – is shattered by the artist but, paradoxically, remains inert save for an inevitable sagging.



Sanné MESTROM

Slump [detail], 2007-2008

Glass, liquid nails, silicone, brackets, 45 x 18cm

Courtesy the artist



Sanné MESTROM

Pressure, 2007

Balloon, concrete

Courtesy the artist

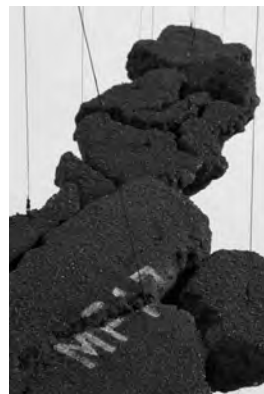
The shattered shelf becomes an extrapolation of Trigg's intensified silence, lingering in the aftermath of violence. Here, we experience the emergence of nothingness, actualised by a space that signifies the desertion of trauma, allowing the possibility of decline to emerge and with it, completion.

Anna-Maria O'Keeffe overtly engages with rupture within a practice defined by fragmentation, namely, sections of earth violently torn from the ground and suspended in space. The installations transcend the manifest beauty of their form, defiance of gravity and sheer bewilderment by tarrying with the sublime. Intimately and intricately observed, the earth-pieces make heady overtures to the infinite by proposing an alternate reality devoid of reason, fully immersed within the faculty of imagination. Here we at once float amongst the clouds, while satisfying our innate thirst for ground and for being grounded. As with Mestrom's narrative of fracture, the residue of violence extends an ontological implication of decay within O'Keeffe's practice. The physical manifestation of decline, as noted by Trigg in observing the classical ruin, 'creates a unity between space and the idea dormant in that space. In the gaze of decayed place, decline individuates itself. What we see in the place rouses the imagination'³⁶.

O'Keeffe recalls Kiefer's assertion 'The future is rubble', while also engaging with the nineteenth century aesthetic treatment of the ruin correlating mortality with nature and human existence, borne out in the writings of traveller William Gilpin: 'a ruin is a sacred thing, rooted for ages in soil; assimilated to it; and becoming, as it were, part of it; we consider it as a work of nature, rather than of art'³⁷.

Similarly Izabela Pluta recalls ideas that achieved prominence with the nineteenth century Romantics, namely, with F.W.J. von Schelling who, in his *System of Transcendental Idealism* (1800) regarded the artwork not as a thing but as the medium through which the sensible is reunited with the transcendental:

When a great painting comes into being it is as though the invisible curtain that separates the real from the ideal world is raised; it is merely the opening through which the characters and places of the world of fantasy, which shimmers only imperfectly through the real world, fully come upon the stage. Nature [to the artist] ... is merely the imperfect reflection of a world that exists not outside but within him'³⁸.



Anna-Maria O'KEEFFE

Freeway, 2005

Foam, paint, wire,
dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist



Izabela PLUTA

Untitled 5
(With a view series), 2005

Lambda print
100 x 160cm

Courtesy the artist

Pluta achieves a visual clarity where irrelevances are stripped away to reveal a divine order; a bleached out visual poetry of sterile pathos. Through her photographs of familiar yet unrecalable places, in which symmetry comes to suggest a divinity, Pluta achieves a sublime state of infinite longing. Monochromatic and geographically unidentifiable, these monumental works reveal the tension between constructed and natural, and revel in disorder, entropy, chaos, timelessness, contemplation, the ethereal, and the transitional space. These aspects are manifest even more starkly in her cerebral concrete installations. The quiet, unpeopled spaces of the photographs are recast within the stillness of these fallen domestic relics.

Recalling Susan Stewart's comment: 'Each material thing contains within its future, the inevitable narrative of the loss of the past'³⁹, both Pluta and O'Keeffe show manmade, constructed spaces being ravaged, reclaimed by nature, subject to rot, decay and distortion as they submit to the infection of roots, grass, mould, and fungus. Their works represent the unconditional surrender of the abandoned manmade edifice to elemental forces. Theirs are works of reflective contemplation on limitation and containment, in the context of the limitlessness of the divine, of nature, of the sublime while emphatically recalling the passage: *this can't last forever*.

Within the works of Susan Milne and Hannah Bertram we observe the enduring tension between materiality and immateriality, where form becomes a relic or a residue respectively. Here things that have been, and things that have passed, reveal time as an artistic medium as potent as colour, line and depth. The works do not just say 'this is here, now', but suggest 'this was here, at some point'. In this they speak of a life within the object: a beginning, and an end; they characterise the shadow and replica that marks a presence once occupied.

Like the art of Rachel Whiteread, Milne's fossilised totems are 'distillations of life'⁴⁰... 'Not only is she after defamiliarizing the familiar, she heightens the materiality of the thing, making it seem to be more than what it is in its physical form. More yet never more physically; that is, never more than its original mass'⁴¹.

Whiteread's objects and monuments are consistently sited within the historical field of art and their familiar forms quickly move the viewer from this touchstone, the luring and particular purview of art, on to new experiences of confounding confrontation; both monumental intimacy as with *House*, 1992, and alienating



Hannah BERTRAM

Untitled, 2006

Dust, powder, paint
dimensions variable

Courtesy Diane Tanzer
Gallery, Melbourne

familiarity as with her casts of household objects ... what consistently stands out about her oeuvre is its assertion of positive form made from immaterial spaces.⁴²

Susan Milne makes caustic reliquaries of domestic household objects cast in concrete, that lead us to recall Bachelard's dilemma: 'But it would seem that this element of unreality [whereby the entire reality of memory becomes spectral] in the dreams of memory affects the dreamer when he is faced with the most concrete things, as with the stone house to which he returns at night, his thoughts on mundane things'⁴³. For Bachelard, reality infects memory in such a way that we are made to question whether or not events actually occurred: 'We ask ourselves if what has been, was. Have facts really the *value* that memory gives them?'⁴⁴. Milne's concrete works accentuate this questioning through distortion of form, as if they are literally melting away before our eyes. The past becomes iconicised through the casting process but the past becomes distorted in the present reality: a metaphor for the distortion of memory.

The process of recreating a domestic, everyday appliance such as a toaster or food processor through concrete casting leads us to imagine that we are already immersed in an imagined memory from the future. Like a museum to our time presented generations from now, the objects become moving specimens of our daily detritus. The impact of memory and memorialisation becomes crystallized with the shock of realization, that these mass-produced consumer products have become absurdly canonised by dint of their removal from the everyday realm of activity.

Hannah Bertram similarly memorialises the lost object but where Susan Milne employs materiality, Bertram engages its antithesis: immateriality. Bertram suggests nothingness in her work by referring to a missing object. As Trigg notes, 'What will lead us toward nothingness if, by dint of its essence, the Nothing eludes us? A fortuitous opening would have to emerge in which we were led by the traces of what had already been in contact with nothingness'⁴⁵. Bertram fathoms such an opening, allowing us to imagine the lives of the former occupants and objects of domestic spaces.



Susan MILNE

Toaster, 2006

Cast concrete
30 x 28 x 20cm

Courtesy the artist



Julia SILVESTER

"Words lead one to expect sensation" [detail],
1999-2008

Approximately 500 recycled
glass jars with sand blasted
text, dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

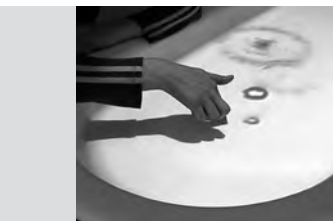
In questioning the value of permanence, the physical nature of Bertram's work 'is in the fluid process of becoming and disappearing'. The impermanent nature of her work (which is 'swept away' at the conclusion of each exhibition) is a way of emphasising the value of time and labour, as Bertram writes of her practice: 'These works reposition the value attributed to labour and time by stressing the importance of unquantifiable experience over a material product' ⁴⁶.

A similar emphasis on domestic labour is evident in the sandblasted glass vessels of Julia Silvester. In manipulating the effects of light as it passes through glass jars (typically used for storing homemade jams) we are made to admire the transience of an activity typically associated with long, indefinite periods; an activity that spans generations. Storing food in jars is an activity we associate with our mother's or grandmother's pantry. Remembering it we recall nostalgic sensations of home, but in Silvester's pantry the jars are empty, the shelves are glass and the light filtering through Linden's bay window casts a spectral luminosity over the transparent surfaces. The jars are now ghosts memorialising a time now lost; the shells remain vivid but the contents are absent, and we forget now why we stored them in the first place. Loss is evoked by the sense that our comportment is misaligned, shaped by a world that was a particular way and is no longer ⁴⁷.

Briele Hansen's practice is the formative opposite to the concrete fossils we have seen, and the evocations of nothingness suggested through trace and echo. Hansen's work is centred on sound, light and absence of form; a shimmering of consciousness residual in the most miniscule of phenomena. Her work evokes memory of object by transcending materiality altogether. In this she recalls Rachel Whiteread's statement of intent of her work *Ghost*, 1990 – a cast of a parlour room in a Victorian house – that she 'wanted to mummify the air in a room' ⁴⁸.

All my room pieces – or any architectural pieces I've made – really have to do with observing. There's a sense of puzzlement in just looking at them and thinking: We live in that kind of place. How do we function physically within a place like that? This is definitely what I do when I look at my works. I think about how they affect me physically ⁴⁹.

What he or she physically encounters is an object that remains slightly out of reach of cognitive definition ⁵⁰. In Hansen's videocentric installations we witness the disparity



Briele HANSEN

Fluid Connection
[video still], 2001

DVD projection and sound
installation, bath tub, water
Dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist



Briele HANSEN

Fluid Connection
[video still – detail], 2001

DVD projection and sound
installation, bath tub, water,
dimensions variable

Courtesy the artist

between real events and recreations of those events through visceral intonations, relayed palpably and poetically so as to suggest memory and nostalgia. The sensate experience of the 'real' becomes subordinated by a desire for the unreal, and we are left wilfully deprived and cast into an ocean of intactile remembrances. It is as through we are experiencing life through death, as we are unable to engage, or participate in these evocatively real domestic environments. The viewer is left lusting for the real amid a theatre of memory and suggestion.

Forever unbound, Hansen negotiates the disparity between subject and object. As Trigg has written:

Aesthetic experience only completes itself when the object of aesthetic contemplation is discovered by the self: that is, when the reciprocity between subject and object is established. Otherwise, space is reduced to a thing. A correspondence is required which binds the deserted space that nothingness occupies with the mind observing that space ⁵¹.

Louiseann Zahra-King achieves this 'bind' within her intricate and fossilised universe of death. Zahra-King is concerned with penetrating the veil of spatial time; with severing the traditional structure of poetic narrative in order to subvert the linearity time-flow – the relationship between the myth of memory and the reality of the real. We are presented with a typology of objects that describe lived experience, cumulatively articulating what the artist herself has described as 'the carcass of romance'.

Expanding on Bachelard's assertion that 'there is ground for taking the house as a *tool for analysis* of the human soul' ⁵², Zahra-King applies this doctrine to the contents of that house. Laid out as though a dinner setting, we are presented with objects that contain the residue of life, but stripped and achingly bare of animation. Even the blinking Christmas lights that weave through the objects – etched glass vessels, domestic ribbon cast in copper, mummified birds – fail to excite a glimmer of consciousness.

In Jessica Page's similarly intricate work we witness nature reclaiming the man-made. We recall Flaubert: 'I love it all', he wrote, 'the sight of vegetation resting upon old ruins; this embrace of nature, coming swiftly to bury the work of man the moment his hand is no longer there to defend, fills me with deep and ample joy' ⁵³. Harnessing the residual potency of the Linden environs, Page coerces a poetic countenance between



Louiseann ZAHRA-KING

My name is death, cannot you see [detail], 2005

Mixed media
Dimensions variable

Courtesy [MARS] Melbourne
Art Rooms, Melbourne

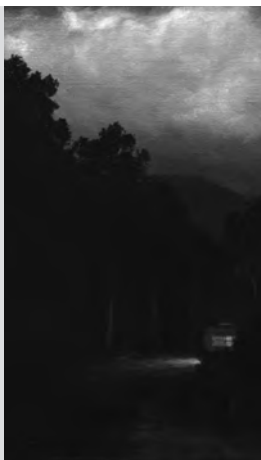


Jessica PAGE

Flower, 2005

Silk and cardboard,
30 x 30cm

Courtesy the artist



Camilla TADICH

9:38pm [detail], 2006

Oil on canvas, 26 x 20cm

Courtesy Flinders Lane
Gallery, Melbourne

the expansive, sublime wilderness of nature and the quietude of Linden's domestic scars; whereby the traces of living become manifest in the untamable traces of nature.

Here, we are presented with a decorative wall motif unlike any other: aluminium vine leaves surge upward from the fissure of the living-room fireplace. This innocuous aperture has germinated a ravenous growth; a thicket of twined and curled metal. Page's laboriously hand-crafted practice has always exploited the menace in the everyday, and here reaches its crescendo.

At this point we exit Bachelard's shelter of dreams – the house – and enter the beyond: the terror of imagination. For Camilla Tadich, painter of the Australian bush nocturne, the ideal light is twilight or moonlight: an otherworldly glow that relishes in the realm of the transitory and in-between. As Michael Glasmeier has noted, 'twilight restores the power of self-assertion to artificial lighting and an inner reality to objects ... In this way the apparition becomes concrete, earthly, and human. In the daylight, things are illuminated and robbed of their own radiant power; in the dark of night, they are disembodied as indistinct shadows contrasting with the more obvious demonstrations of light'⁵⁴.



Camilla TADICH

Eerie Park [detail], 2007

Oil on canvas, 101 x 137cm

Courtesy Flinders Lane
Gallery, Melbourne

Here we are shown what Edmund Burke meant when he wrote in 1757: 'the source of the sublime [is] whatever is in any sort terrible, or is conversant about terrible objects, or operates in a manner analogous to terror'⁵⁵. Pitched into a hostile, stygian darkness with no promise of respite, Tadich places us in a scene where our senses become heightened, where the sublime is a phenomena not merely imagined but cast into the very apex of. Burke maintained that our knowledge of the world is derived entirely from the evidence of the senses – what we can see, taste, touch, and smell – but Tadich unites this grounding in sensory reason with the faculty of imagination, where our knowledge of the world derives just as potently from what is unseen.

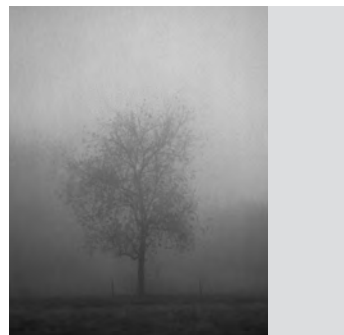
In Iris Fischer's work we observe the opposite of domestic containers – massive photographic panoramas of unknown landscapes that, ironically, are contained within a domestic environment. We are reminded again of Izabela Pluta's words about her own photography: 'The moment is frozen and taken at departure from the homeland [source]; time, place, feeling and sensual experience are encapsulated and re-enacted through the embodiment of spaces in new home(land)'⁵⁶.

Severed from their point of origin and enclosed within an ornate living space, the otherworldly landscapes demarcate the abyss between the present and a past that endures through memory.

Coupled with the Romantic observance of the transcendental properties of nature, Fischer presents us with a serene, majestic and monumental vision of a mountain range. Contained within a photographic panorama, and self-consciously recalling aspects of postcard-kitsch, the works encompass the Kantian transcendence of physical experience; of fugitive visions and passing sensations. Fischer harmonizes the problems of photography as a descriptive language with the thrill of content; we become helplessly entranced by the nuances of the mountainous typography, feeling its insurgent and divine force, simultaneously relishing naively in our ability to capture it: no longer immeasurably sublime, the mountain range is reproduced and commodified on a domestic scale.

Arguing by way of Kant, Jean-Francois Lyotard observed that to be beautiful is to produce a 'data that can be grasped by sensibility and that are intelligible to understanding', while in the experience of the sublime, by contrast, matter is invoked in a way 'that is not finalized, not destined'⁵⁷. In reviewing Lyotard, Philip Shaw summarized that 'sublime matter is therefore "immaterial" in so far as an object or thing becomes material only when subjected to the operation of the mind'⁵⁸. To confirm this, Iris Fischer's photography reveals that art can be beautiful, but only in its idea can it be sublime. Art as a material form can only seek to represent the sublime; it cannot in itself achieve sublimity.

Through each of the artists and reaching its natural conclusion with Iris Fischer's Post-Modern epilogue, *An Ideal for Living* expounds the virtue of the domestic as an entry into the sublime. Habitually oppositional, if not outright combative, the two achieve reconciliation through a systematic consideration of impermanence, absence, transience and decay. What this project teaches us is the value of the fragment. Within the arena of contemporary Australian art, beauty and nostalgia are more than kitsch keepsakes and, indeed, help to align the oppositional faculties of reason and imagination. The fragment and the transient, by virtue of their incompleteness, become ideal instruments for accessing the sublime: absolutes among ideals for living.



Iris FISCHER

Trees in fog, 2006

Photographic print on canvas,
56 x 41cm

Courtesy Catherine Asquith
Gallery, Melbourne

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- 4 Ibid
- 5 Ibid, p. 95
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- 7 Trigg, op.cit., p. 131
- 8 Ibid, p.133
- 9 Glasmeier, Michael, *The Presentness of the Unpredetermined*, in Peter Bialobrzeski, *Lost in Transition*, Hatje Cantz, Ostfildern, 2007, p.4
- 10 Ibid
- 11 Trigg, op.cit., p.122
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- 13 Pluta, Izabela, in conversation with Steven Rendall, October 2007, <http://www.westspace.org.au/discursive/izabela-pluta-artist-interview.html>
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- 15 Hornstein, Shelley, *Matters Immaterial: On the Meaning of Houses and Things Inside Them*, printed in Chris Townsend (ed.), *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2004, p.55
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- 19 Ibid
- 20 Trigg, op.cit., p.7
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- 24 Ibid, p.57
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- 26 Trigg, op.cit., p.57
- 27 Ibid, p.56
- 28 Quoted in Shaw, op.cit., p.91

- 29 Quoted in Janson, J.W., *Sources & Documents in the History of Art Series: Neoclassicism and Romanticism*, Vol II, Prentice-Hall, New Jersey, 1970, p.55
- 30 Engberg, Juliana, *Mariele Neudecker: Until Now* (ex.cat.), Galerie Barbara Thumm, Berlin, 2001
- 31 Trigg, op.cit., p.55
- 32 Ibid, p.55
- 33 Blanchot, quoted in Trigg, *ibid*, p.26
- 34 Gross, Jennifer R., *Remembrance of Things Present*, printed in Chris Townsend (ed.), *The Art of Rachel Whiteread*, Thames & Hudson, London, 2004, p.35
- 35 Rosalind Krauss, cited in Gross, *ibid*, p.42-3
- 36 Trigg, op.cit., p.97
- 37 Quoted in Trigg, *ibid*, p.106
- 38 Quoted in Shaw, op.cit., p.91-2
- 39 Stewart, Susan, *LIKE Magazine*, 1999
- 40 Gross, op.cit.
- 41 Hornstein, op.cit., p.51
- 42 Gross, op.cit., p.41;46
- 43 Bachelard, op.cit., p.59
- 44 Ibid, p.58
- 45 Trigg, op.cit., p.11
- 46 Bertram, Hannah, *Preciousness, the poetry of transformation through ornamentation* (ex.cat.), Flinders Lane Gallery Upstairs, Melbourne, 2006
- 47 DylanTrigg.com/blog
- 48 Gross, op.cit., p.38
- 49 Ibid, p.41
- 50 Ibid, p.46
- 51 Trigg, op.cit., p.21
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Hannah BERTRAM

Hannah Bertram completed a Master of Arts in Fine Art at RMIT in 2005, having previously earned a Bachelor of Arts from RMIT in 2003 and a Diploma of Visual Art at Frankston TAFE in 1996. Hannah's solo exhibitions include *Ordinary Relics* at Dianne Tanzer Gallery, *An Ordinary Kind of Ornament* at Westspace, *Preciousness, the poetry of transformation through ornamentation* at Flinders Lane Gallery Upstairs, *Visible/Invisible* at RMIT First Site Gallery, and *False Principles of Decoration* at *Intrude 2*. Recent group exhibitions include *Mesh* at Span Galleries, *Debris* at Manningham Gallery, *Phenomena* at Conical and *How long is a short while?* at Area Contemporary Art Space. In June 2007 Hannah completed a studio residency at *Laughing Waters, Birrarung Artist Residency, Eltham*. In 2005 Hannah won the RMIT School of Fine Art MFA Award and in 2003 won the Siemens Travel Scholarship. Hannah Bertram is represented by Dianne Tanzer Gallery Melbourne.

Iris FISCHER

Born in Cologne, Germany, Iris Fischer arrived in Australia in 1985 and in 1990 completed a Bachelor of Arts (Photography) at Prahran College. Iris' solo exhibitions include *Ethereality* at Catherine Asquith Gallery in 2006, *A Secret Garden* which showed at Mass Gallery and the Band Hall Gallery, Kyneton in 2003, and *In Bloom* at the Melbourne Town Hall in 1993. In 2007 Iris featured in City Museum's exhibition *Spooks* and in *The Light of My Life*, the Centenary Religious Art Award at the Churches of Christ Theological College. Iris' work is held in the State Library of Victoria, as well as private collections throughout Australia and Germany. Iris currently divides her time between Melbourne and central northern Victoria, and is represented by Catherine Asquith Gallery Melbourne.

Briele HANSEN

Briele Hansen received a Master of Art by research in 2004 after completing a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art – Painting) in 2001, both at RMIT Melbourne. Briele has also participated in cultural exchanges, workshops and other courses in South Africa, Italy and New Zealand since 1991. In 2007 Briele was selected for Primavera at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Other recent exhibitions include Untitled at Westspace, the 2007 McClelland Sculpture Award, A Lane Away for the City of Melbourne Laneway Commissions, Sensing Experience at RMIT Project Space, Extension at Bus Gallery and Adrift at Conical. In 2004 Briele was the recipient of an Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant, and is currently represented in private collections throughout Australia, New Zealand, Italy, the United Kingdom and France.

Sanné MESTROM

Sanné Mestrom completed a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) Honours at RMIT in 2001, and is currently a PhD candidate in Fine Art. Sanné has enjoyed many solo exhibitions including three in New Zealand in 2007, A history of space is the history of wars at Spacement and What keeps us this side of that dark line? At Counter Point Project Space, both in 2006, A man's name at TCB Inc. (2005), and The Myth of a Political Vision at Spacement and At the Foot of Justice at Conical, both in 2004. Group exhibitions include Life is Sweet at the Gippsland Regional Gallery, the Robert Jacks Drawing Prize at Bendigo Regional Gallery, Text Me at Spacement and Selectka at Westspace. In 2006 Sanné was awarded the Siemens Post Graduate Fine Art Scholarship Award and in 2001 participated in an artist residency in Seoul, South Korea.

Susan MILNE

Susan Milne was awarded a Master of Arts by research in 2000 at RMIT University, after completing a Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art (Honours) in 1997, also at RMIT. Susan's solo exhibitions include *Decoration and Necessity* at Bus Gallery, *Picture This* at Conical, *Reading a Wave* at Linden Gallery, *Fake Landscapes* at Platform 2, *Forming Plains* at Mass Gallery and *Plan(e)* at the Yarra Sculpture Gallery. In 2001 Susan featured in the inaugural Helen Lempriere National Sculpture Award. Other group exhibitions have included *Plastic Fantastic Lover* at the Yarra Sculpture Gallery, *10 Years Underground* at RMIT First Site Gallery, and *Artefact* at City Museum. In 2000 Susan received an Australia Council Grant (New Work), and was awarded in 1998/99 an RMIT Postgraduate Research Award.

Anna-Maria O'KEEFFE

Anna-Maria O'Keeffe was born in Grafton, NSW, and received her Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2004 from Monash University, after spending a semester in Italy in 2003. Anna-Maria's most recent solo exhibition *Arterial Embolism* showed at Westspace in 2007. Other recent exhibitions include *Artefact* at City Museum, *Mesh* at Span Galleries, *Shine on you Crazy Diamond* at Platform, *Small World* and *The B Side* at Blindside A.R.I., *Behind the Scenes* at the Museum at Yarra Sculpture Gallery, and *Postscript* at RMIT Project Space. In 2006 Anna-Maria received a grant from the Australia Council to produce a new work and in that year won the 'People's Choice Award' at the Linden Postcard Show.

Jessica PAGE

Jessica Page received her Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art through RMIT in 1998, after first completing an Associate Diploma of Visual Art at NMIT in 1995. In 2005 Jessica participated in *Neue Romantics* at [MARS] Melbourne Art Rooms, and has also exhibited at *Fortyfivedownstairs*, *Mahoneys Gallery*, the *Nillumbik Shire Offices*, the *Eltham Library* and *City Museum* at *Old Treasury*. In 2002 Jessica organised and participated in *Fold* at *Collingwood Gallery*, and in 2001 *The Autumn Collection* at *Fitzroy Gallery*. In 1998 Jessica was awarded the *National Gallery of Victoria Trustees Award*.

Izabela PLUTA

Izabela Pluta was born in Warsaw, Poland and emigrated to Australia in 1987. Izabela completed a Bachelor of Fine Art Honours in 2002 at the University of Newcastle, and since 2000 has been awarded artist residencies in Barcelona, Beijing, and Paris, and Rawspace Galleries, Brisbane and the Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery. Izabela has had numerous solo exhibitions including Home[land] and Here (later) at Westspace in 2007 and 2005 respectively, Making Mirrors at Artspace, Sydney (2006), Restore at Wagga Wagga Art Gallery (2005) and Credenza at Francis Baker-Smith Gallery, Sydney (2004). She was recently a recipient of an Ian Potter Cultural Trust Grant and the Freedman Travelling Scholarship to undertake her upcoming project at the Cite International des Arts. Izabela was a co-director of Rocketart artist run space in Newcastle, and is currently a lecturer in photography at the National Art School and The College of Fire Art, UNSW in Sydney.

Julia SILVESTER

Julia Silvester gained her Bachelor of Arts (Honours) at RMIT in 2000, after first studying visual art in Perth and printmaking in London. Her most recent exhibitions include Memory, Remnant, Reflection, Trace at the Eltham Leisure Centre, the Inaugural Group show at Jenny Port Gallery, Proof: Contemporary Australian Printmaking at NGV Australia, Beasties at the Port Jackson Print Room, Lexicon at the City Library, EX LEBRIS at RMIT Project Space, Still at Linden Gallery, and Gardens of Desire at Red Gallery. A sessional lecturer at RMIT University since 2001, Julia was commended for the Illawarra Acquisitive Print Award and was acquired through the Geelong Acquisitive Print Prize, both in 1999. Julia is represented in collections nationally including the National Gallery of Victoria.

Camilla TADICH

Camilla Tadich earned a Bachelor of Arts (Fine Art) Painting at the VCA in 2006, after completing a Diploma of Arts (Visual Arts) at the Northern Metropolitan Institute of TAFE in 2002. In addition to her solo exhibitions at Flinders Lane Gallery in 2007 and Silent Space at Alliance Francaise de Melbourne in 2006, Camilla has participated in numerous group exhibitions, including The View from Here II, Treasures and Exploration 6, all at Flinders Lane Gallery, Dialogue at La Trobe Street Gallery and Proud at the VCA Gallery. In 2007 Camilla was an artist in residence at Bundanon, NSW and her awards include the Fiona Myer Award and the [MARS] Melbourne Art Rooms Award, both in 2005. Camilla's work has been acquired by Artbank, and she is currently represented by Flinders Lane Gallery, Melbourne.

Louiseann ZAHRA-KING

Born in Traralgon, Victoria, Dr Louiseann Zahra-King was awarded a Doctor of Philosophy by Monash University (Faculty of Art and Design) in 2005. Louiseann's recent solo exhibitions include The dead are never lonely, which toured to Object Gallery NSW, Craft Victoria and Sale Regional Gallery, Amaranthus Caudatus, which toured to Gasworks Theatre and Latrobe Regional Gallery, and My name is Death... at [MARS] Melbourne Art Rooms. Louiseann has also participated in Neue Romantics at [MARS] Melbourne Art Rooms, Make the Common Precious at Craft Victoria, The Museum Aesthetic at Gallery 101, Re-Generation at the National Gallery of Victoria and Celebrating the Exquisite Corpse, which toured to Victorian regional galleries. In 2005 Louiseann was awarded an Asialink Residency in India, and has received New Work grants through the Australia Council and Arts Victoria. Represented in collections nationally, Louiseann Zahra-King is represented by [MARS] Melbourne Art Rooms.

 AN IDEAL FOR LIVING

13 March– 13 April 2008

Linden – Centre for
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26 Acland Street
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