

SUB12



THE SUBSTATION

CENTRE FOR ART & CULTURE

26 JULY–19 AUG
REBECCA AGNEW
JUAN FORD
STEVEN RENDALL
SANNE MESTROM

Presenting Partner



Hobsons Bay
CITY COUNCIL

CURATOR'S FOREWORD

SUB12 is a major annual three-month exhibition program presenting newly commissioned work by twelve leading contemporary Australian artists presented in partnership with Hobson's Bay City Council.

Under brief 'Twelve Artists, Twelve Weeks, Twelve Ambitious New Works' I approached SUB12 as an evolutionary show that tracks current interesting movements in contemporary art practice. Over three months we experience the work of twelve leading contemporary artists in three exhibitions. This second exhibition in the series features major works from artists Rebecca Agnew, Juan Ford, Sanne Mestrom and Steven Rendall. Each artist has created new challenging works for The Substation site with an incredibly diverse range of responses.

Jessica Bridgfoot



REBECCA AGNEW

**CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS
IN MELBOURNE**

New Zealand born Agnew uses the figure as a focus of her artistic practice which encompasses painting, drawing and animation. Rebecca Agnew completed a BFA at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin, NZ and is currently completing a Masters of Visual Art at VCA Melbourne. Agnew has exhibited at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, NZ; Seventh Gallery, Melbourne, John Buckley Gallery, Melbourne, Platform, Melbourne, No No Gallery, Melbourne and Felt Space, Adelaide. In 2011 Agnew was commissioned to create a stop animation for the Bon Scotts. Rebecca Agnew was the recipient of the 2011 Substation Contemporary Art Prize Exhibiton Award.

Image: (Still) *Eve and Eve* 2012, stop animation, 12mins; Installation image: *Untitled (Eve)* 2012, mannequin, roses, fruit cake, clay, mixed media



JUAN FORD

Juan Ford was awarded a Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting) with 1st class honours at RMIT in 1998, Juan Ford then completed a Master of Arts (Fine Art) by Research, again at RMIT and graduated in 2001.

Prizes include the \$25,000 Fisher's Ghost Art Award, grants and prizes include a 2005 Australia Council Studio Residency in Rome, the prestigious \$25,000 Fletcher Jones Art Award, and the Conrad Jupiters Art Prize. He won the People's Choice prizes in 2004 for both the ABN Amro Emerging Artists Art Prize and the Salon des Refuses. Selected exhibitions include *Glacier: Contemporary Painting*, 2001 to 2003; *Juan Ford: The Instant*, Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo, 2011 *Make Nature Better*, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine

Art, Sydney 2012 *Juan Ford: The Instant*, Western Plains Cultural Centre, Dubbo; 2011 *Make Nature Better*, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney; *The Sleep of Reason*, LaTrobe University Visual Arts Centre, Bendigo 2012. Ford is represented by Diane Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne

Image: *Rock n Roll*, 2012, oil on linen, 167.5 x 213.5cm, Installation image: *Untitled (Eternity)*, 2012, wood, plastic, metal, found objects, dimensions variable. Courtesy Diane Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne; Sullivan & Strumpf, Sydney and Jan Manton Art, Brisbane

It's like flicking through all the channels all at once

As **Steven Rendall** notes in his exhibition essay 'Slide to Unlock' Foucault coined the idea of the *every person* as an artist in 1975, when discussing the early 20C collision of photography and painting. At this time image making suddenly became accessible to all and no longer was it the exclusive domain of the artist to record and interpret the world for posterity.

Now, in a new digitised century, Rendall has responded to Foucault's discovery of this egalitarian approach to image making with a call for a *game of images*, where Rendall – the artist – is the host. In Rendall's 'call out' he requested from friends and devotees of The Substation that they send in images for translation onto a painting. Regardless of the size, subject or aesthetic of the images submitted, each image was to be treated equally by the artist in his construction of the work.

Submitted images were printed in colour on identical A4 sheets of paper and dutifully 'gridded up' by Rendall in preparation for their translation then painted onto a series of television screens – a structure from an arbitrary image he had found in a department store catalogue. Executed with Rendall's British impressionistic sleight of brush – frequently erring more towards realism were it not for the somewhat hyper coloured palette – the dogs, cats, sunsets, pictures of paintings, pictures of pictures of artworks, self portraits, photo booth shots, media icons, a cats bum and more dogs were transported into Rendall's painterly television showroom – a contemporary nirvana, or showcase of the collective consciousness, aptly titled *Study for Shifts and Discontinuities*.

With the milieu of digital pictures one could easily downplay the value of images as objects as many never make it to material form – i.e. print. So what does it mean to take something so transient, so *disposable* and immortalise it in paint – to monumentalise the ephemeral on such a scale of Rendall's 3 x 5m canvas? The Television Project turns on its head the role of the artist and his audience by demystifying not only the distance, but

the process of creation – who is making work for whom – and furthermore, who can claim authorship of the work? Within the Television Project it could be proposed that everyone's the artist in the sense that everyone can contribute and leave a trace. Images (no matter how seemingly trivial) have a resonance after the next technology arrives or the paint has dried. Perhaps long after the next technological revolution, when holograms usurp JPEG's, the significance of Rendall's painting will be clearer than ever.

In **Rebecca Agnew's** stop animation *Eve and Eve* Agnew portrays the cycle of modern consumption – exposing a seedy underbelly of 'generation me' who willingly and repetitively consume, unaware and disconnected from the sources of their desires.

Eve and Eve blends ancient and modern archetypes – the biblical characters of Eve and, her contemporary love, also Eve, live in a paradise, desperately in love. The two beauties frolic and groom one another, living off the red fruits of their apple tree while a minstrel-like servant routinely brings them diamonds. Not far away are the diamond pits of Sierra Leone (constructed from fruit cake and plasticine) the couple seem oblivious to this parallel world that affords them their carefree lifestyle. Lowly diamond workers grovel and crouch in the pits, day in and out toiling away looking for diamonds. A worker is found stashing a diamond in her pants and is violently beaten and disposed of in a pit of bodies by the authorities. In the meantime, the contemporary motifs of a Suicide bomber (whose bomb is disconcertingly concealed with a fake pregnancy bump) and a Paparazzo, skulk between the dearth of the mine and the beauty of paradise, ready to Tweet or explode at any moment.

The workers continue their dirty business under the guise of an underlying violence until Eve finally presents Eve with a perfect diamond. Evidently the diamond is cursed and the dormant demons of narcissism, greed and possessiveness overcome the couple, plummeting their paradise into desolation.

Agnew provides no satisfying resolution to the sordid narrative, as the Suicide Bomber – who has been hovering around Eve and Eve undecidedly – pulls the pin and blows the

micro world and its inhabitants into oblivion. There are many subtexts within Agnew's work, the role of the corporation, industry, and exploitation, and the various portrayal of her subjects from feminist standpoints. Eve and Eve – absent Adam – buck the biblical trend discarding gender stereotypes as Eve dominates Eve. All characters are shown in uniformity, scantily clad – in knickers and white suspenders and topless. Eve and Eve's nakedness is celebrated – shown in beauty on account of their luxurious actions. The workers are depicted in the mud and filth of the mine, their nakedness serves more to strip them of their dignity – to humiliate and expose their vulnerability. Agnew imbues her audience with a nagging sense of guilt, the sickly syrupy Eden, the sludge and drear of the diamond pit leaves us with an unsettled stomach – like one who has gorged on fruit cake.

In his painting *Rock 'n Roll*, **Juan Ford's** shrouded protagonist similarly toils into oblivion. The figure in the work is based on the Greek mythological character Sisyphus – who was punished by the gods to carry out his days endlessly rolling a rock up a mountain, only to have it reappear at the beginning. Opposite the painting looms a motley assemblage of detritus and ephemera – a stark and dirty contrast to the controlled clean lines, smooth surface and sparkling palette of the painting. The 'junk' on first glance looks like a modern constructivist piece – nails and all on display as the work sprawls the length of the gallery wall. The crudeness of its materials (rusty iron, damp wood, discarded plastic packaging) is on par with the refinery of the painting and the contrast is remarkable. If one were to stand at a certain point in the gallery you can just – in a still moment – catch the gist of Ford's point. The word 'Eternity' appears from the detritus, the typography articulated by the negative spaces between the junk – the white walls of the gallery.

The whole arrangement could read as a metaphor for the duplicity in Ford's artistic practice, with Ford as Sisyphus, depicted in the super slick, awe-inspiring high realist style Ford is known for – and that which affords him a living. Like Sisyphus perpetually pushing the rock, could Ford feel he has become a slave to his own creation? While a painting such as *Rock 'n Roll* takes a long

time to make (months of eight hour days in the studio) the assemblage 'Eternity' was constructed in a day – using found objects gleefully collected from the grounds around the building and then assembled on the wall without vanity or preciousness. Albert Camus has hypothesised that – in the case of Sisyphus – acceptance of his fate to push the rock could lead him to happiness. In the case of Ford, his work presents us with an idea spurred by the myth of Sisyphus; do we find happiness in toil, in the fruits of our labour? Or, is happiness in the spaces in between, the spaces which have no overt purpose, no expectation – the absurd oxymoron of finding happiness within the negative spaces.

This meandering through the negative spaces leads me to rest in the perfectly balanced, hazy calm of **Sanne Mestrom's** installation *New Fillings*. Mestrom indeed seeks out the quite intimate spaces in between and furnishes them with a measured and subtle poignancy. Within the bare white square of the gallery room, Mestrom has drawn our attention to the imperfections and the asides of the architecture, the polyps in the walls, the cracks in the floor, and the portholes in the walls have all undergone gentle interventions. Shiny bronze castings glint from within the holes in floor like scattered treasure; perfectly formed concrete rendered forms protrude from the old portholes like stoppers. Rather than conceal the wear and remnants of the building, Mestrom has – almost tenderly – enhanced them, imbuing these arbitrary markings and defunct armature with a new significance. Two relief concrete ellipses sit in a pair on the floor, perfectly balanced, their shadow highlights the weight of their form and their charming composition defies the brutality of their material. Mestrom's work is underpinned by a formality which hails the practice of early modernist sculptors – Brancusi, Miro and Calder all who strove to find balance in form, line, weight. As the title suggests – *New Fillings* – perhaps instead of our relentless searching we should take Mestrom's advice, stop, be still and sit in the silences with a solid reason rather than flitting eternally from one screen to the next.

Jessica Bridgfoot 2012



STEVEN RENDALL
CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS IN MELBOURNE

Steven Rendall has an MA from the Royal Academy, London, and is currently undertaking a PHD at Monash University. Born in Salisbury, England in 1969 and moved to Australia in 2000 (where he is now based in Melbourne.) Rendall has held numerous exhibitions in Australia and the UK, most recently at John Buckley Gallery, (Melbourne 2011) *How the Dead Live*, Conical Gallery (Melbourne 2009) *Hell Gallery*, (Melbourne, 2008), and in *Reconstructing the Old House* at The Ruskin Gallery (Cambridge, UK, 2009) – he was also a finalist in the 2009 Arthur Guy Memorial Painting Prize. Rendall is a lecturer in the Faculty of Art and Design, Monash University.

Installation image right: *Study for Shifts and Discontinuities*, 2012, acrylic on canvas, eyelets
Image left: *Source materials/useful works*, 2012, non – archival printouts, A4 certificate frames. Courtesy John Buckley Gallery, Melbourne





SANNE MESTROM
CURRENTLY LIVES AND WORKS IN
GIPPSLAND, VICTORIA

Mestrom has a PhD in Fine art from RMIT (2008). Born in the Netherlands in 1979, Mestrom moved to New Zealand in 1983 and currently lives and works in Victoria. Mestrom works across mediums of sculpture and installation and recently completed a postgraduate certificate in Public Art at RMIT (2009) Mestrom is a current Gertrude Contemporary studio artist and her work has been curated into many important exhibitions on sculpture including Social Sculpture, curated by Charlotte Day, Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney (2011); Shaker Peg, Chalk Horse, Sydney (2010), Things I wish I'd known, Westspace (2010) A history of space is the history of wars, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, New Zealand. Mestrom has been awarded numerous grants and awards and in 2010 was an artist in residence at SOMA, Mexico City.

Installation images: *New Fillings* 2012, Bronze, cast concrete, wood, found objects. Courtesy Chalk Horse Gallery, Sydney



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VICTORIA**



Exhibition installation
photography by Andrew Curtis

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