

← Lock-Up Cultural Centre  
 Andrew Toogood, Newcastle 360  
 See inside - Sep 2014

# THE FUTURE'S KNOT



# THE FUTURE'S KNOT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

## **Foreword**

Patrick Kelly,  
Denise Thwaites  
& Eleanor Zeichner

## **The Lock-Up Reimagined**

Jessi England Sideris

## **The Future's Knot, or Vorsprung durch Technik**

Peter H. Johnson

## **Images**

## **List of Works**

## **Artist Biographies**

## **Acknowledgements**

## **End Matters**

# FOREWORD

Patrick Kelly, Denise Thwaites  
and Eleanor Zeichner  
Co-Directors, Critical Animals 2014

For one weekend a year since 1998, Newcastle has opened its doors, bars, cafes and beaches to the best and brightest independent and emerging artists in Australia. This is Not Art (TiNA) is an incubator for unique talent and provides spaces for experimental works, creative conversations and cultural collisions to occur. The founding mission of the festival was to reject the institutional dogma of the arts establishment, embedding a refusal to conform in its very name. Eighteen years later, the festival is part of an ever-expanding calendar of national events dedicated to the emerging arts in Australia—a fixture in the firmament it always sought to challenge.

For the past eleven of those years Critical Animals has been the theoretical and conceptual heart of TiNA—a curious beast that is all at once playful, suspicious, adventurous and a bit feral—a non-institutional symposium where researchers of all stripes share knowledge and ideas. It is, as festival founder Anna Poletti put it in our ten-year anniversary publication *Critical Animalia*, for people ‘working right out on the edges of disciplines’. We present panels, workshops,

readings, performances, interventions, dance jams, installations, debates and for the past three years, as a result of our partnership with The Lock-Up, exhibitions.

Following from *ATLAS* in 2012 and *Desiring Machines* in 2013, *The Future's Knot* responded to the themes and concerns of the symposium, in 2014 titled *Possible Futures*. Curator Peter H. Johnson sought out the fractures and seams in our speculative enquiry, inviting the works of twelve artists to consider how the technologies that both enhance and invade our lives might also contain the means to resist or undermine them. The exhibition overlaid these conceptual concerns on the cells and gallery spaces of the old police lock-up, alluding to the rehabilitation of historic sites of incarceration as cultural institutions by the passage of time (and political will). The works in *The Future's Knot* complicate the notion of an ever-advancing present, and the exhibition continues our work in opening up discussion around cultural capital and multifarious interpretation. We thank Peter for his robust and challenging exhibition.

We're grateful for the support given to our 2014 festival by Principal Partner University

of Newcastle, Major Partner University of Western Sydney and Program Partner and key venue The Lock-Up. The dedication shown by these organisations to the development of emerging and experimental creative practices is admirable and much appreciated. Thank you also to Octapod for producing a memorable and exciting This is Not Art.

# THE LOCK-UP REIMAGINED

Jessi England Sideris  
Director, The Lock-Up

Located in the heart of Newcastle's inner city, The Lock-Up is a contemporary arts centre in a remarkable setting. The original Newcastle Police Station and lock up from 1861 until its closure in 1982, the heritage listed building has operated as a space for cultural activity since 1988.

In September 2014 after an intensive process of community consultation and strategic planning The Lock-Up was relaunched as a multi-disciplinary contemporary art space and creative hub. Through curated artistic and public programming, The Lock-Up aims to stimulate and challenge audiences and to promote current, cross platform, experimental and diverse practice from local, national and international artists.

The new vision builds on the centre's past successes; its nationally recognised Artist in Residence (AIR) Program, its long-standing history of supporting the work of other cultural organisations and the use of its unique spaces for creative activity, discussion and public presentation.

The Lock-Up's setting with its block of original holding cells still marked with graffiti of the time, its old internal exercise yard (now installation and event space) with its caged roof and patina-like peeling walls, alongside the white cube space of

its purpose-built gallery, provides a fascinating departure point for curators, artists and audiences. The intensity of the spaces and their history asks much of those who encounter them. A dynamic is created between the site's specificity and the challenge of pushing the spaces and their audiences into new and unexpected directions.

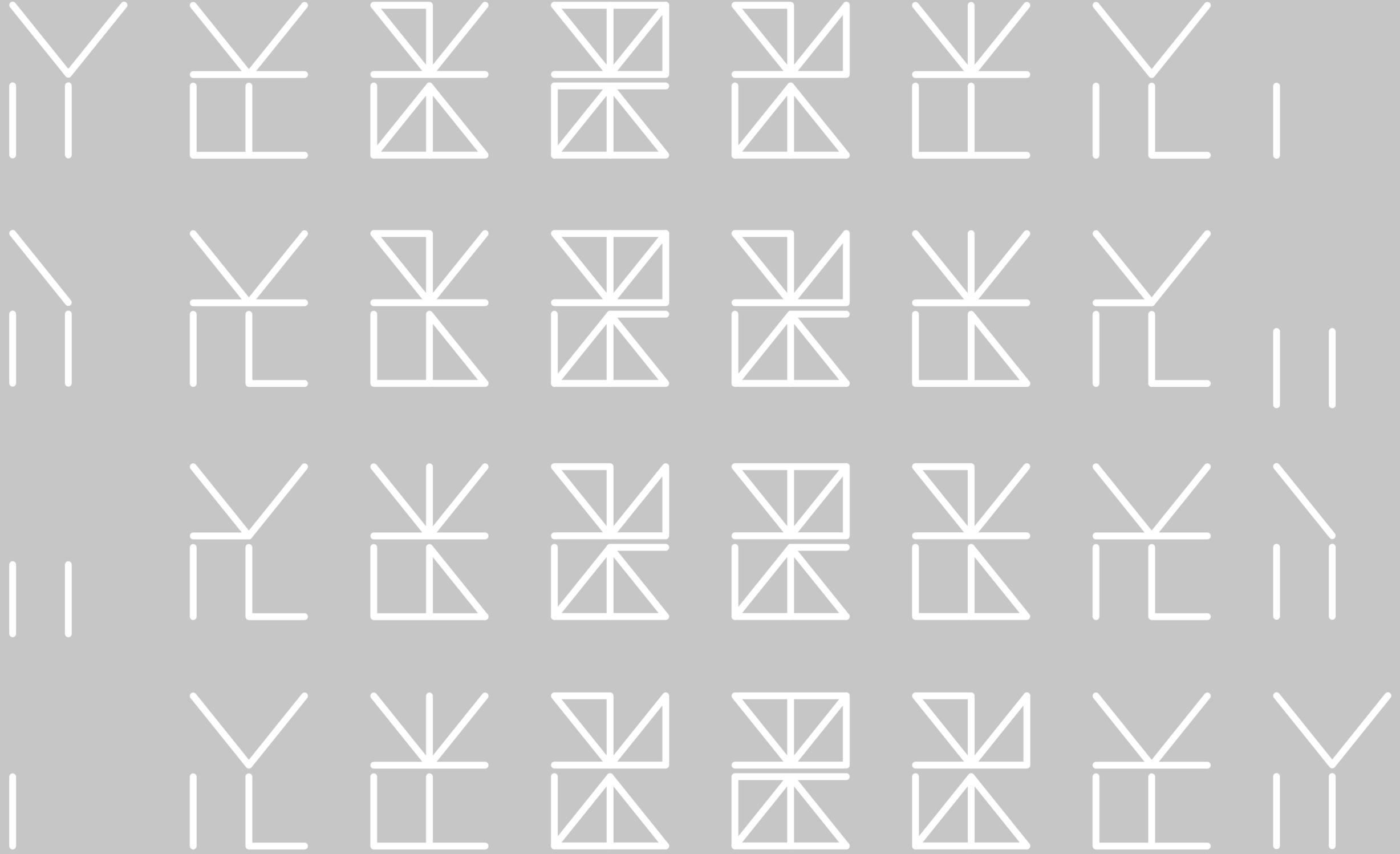
The Lock-Up has been a key This is Not Art (TiNA) venue for many years with both the festival events and associated exhibitions held in the spaces annually. The strength of this relationship and the mutual benefit felt by Octapod, TiNA and its related festivals and The Lock-Up throughout this time, greatly informed the new vision for The Lock-Up and pointed to the possibilities that such cross-organisation collaborations can achieve.

While the building was closed to the public for renovations, curator Peter H. Johnson undertook a curatorial research residency through The Lock-Up's AIR Program, in order to consolidate his vision for the 2014 Critical Animals exhibition, *The Future's Knot*. The residency provided a great opportunity to share with Peter the new direction The Lock-Up was embarking upon and the importance of the exhibition in demonstrating The Lock-Up's commitment to being a space

where artists and curators from around the country could explore ideas and challenge the status quo within the context of an independent public art space.

When TiNA and Critical Animals returned to The Lock-Up in 2014 it was only a month after the relaunch of the centre and the excitement around the reopening was palpable. *The Future's Knot* marked the second exhibition in the re-visioned, repainted and rebranded space.

Seductive, hypnotic and thought provoking works combined with the exhibition's underpinning ideas, created a space for contemplating the often hidden realities that deeply impact the world we live in.



# THE FUTURE'S KNOT

## OR VORSPRUNG DURCH TECHNIK

Peter H. Johnson, Curator

Right now, online retailer Amazon is planning a fleet of aerial drones capable of delivering packages to your doorstep;<sup>1</sup> Facebook and Google are competing to provide global internet using drones, balloons and satellites;<sup>2</sup> and, multiple private companies are preparing space programs for, among other things, asteroid mining.<sup>3</sup> Welcome to the future, we just live in it.

The modern age is marked by the advancement of technologies at an ever more rapid pace. Moore's Law—the historical observation that the number of transistors in comparable circuits doubles every year—is not universally applicable, but it can certainly feel that way. However the systems that produce technologies and regulate their usage are embedded with particular ideologies and models of authority. Drones, whether they are delivering munitions or Manolos, are governed by relationships of capital and power that, among other things, prioritise economic expansion, increase consumption, and shape bodies into productive forms. Even the internet, that virtual Wild West of information, home to n00bs, hackers and trolls,<sup>4</sup> is governed by the logic and syntax of code and the technical protocols that make connections possible.<sup>5</sup>

'The future's not set. There's no fate but what we make for ourselves.'

- Sarah Connor,  
*Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

1. Krishnamurthy, Krithika, 'India to be launch pad for Amazon's plan to deliver packages using drones; deliveries may start by Diwali', *The Economic Times*, 20 August 2014. Accessed 26/08/2014, available: <[http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-08-20/news/53028827\\_1\\_prime-air-drones-outdoors-amazon](http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2014-08-20/news/53028827_1_prime-air-drones-outdoors-amazon)>.
2. Simonite, Tom. 'Facebook's Drones Will Battle Google's Balloons to Spread Internet Access', *MIT Technology Review*, 27 March 2014. Available: <http://www.technologyreview.com/view/525951/facebook-drones-will-battle-googles-balloons-to-spread-internet-access/>
3. Oremus, Will. 'Why Everyone Is Suddenly Rushing to Mine Asteroids in Outer Space', *Slate*, 22 January 2013. Available: [http://www.slate.com/blogs/future\\_tense/2013/01/22/deep\\_space\\_industries\\_vs\\_planetary\\_resources\\_is\\_outer\\_space\\_asteroid\\_mining.html](http://www.slate.com/blogs/future_tense/2013/01/22/deep_space_industries_vs_planetary_resources_is_outer_space_asteroid_mining.html)
4. Various slang for denizens of the internet, respectively: a derogatory term for someone inexperienced at a game or system; those who gain unauthorised access to networks and computer systems; and, those who post intentionally inflammatory material in online communities.
5. Galloway, Alexander R., *Protocol: how control exists after decentralization*, MIT Press: Cambridge, 2004.

For good reason, it is the internet and associated technologies that have received the lion's share of recent attention in media, academia and the arts. The internet has radically transformed communication, governance, commerce and culture in ways we do not fully understand—and yes, your government is probably still spying on you. In the visual arts, arguments have coalesced around the term 'post-internet art'<sup>6</sup> and, despite ongoing debate about nomenclature, it is undeniable that artistic creation has been especially affected by the condition of living in a networked world.

*The Future's Knot* was an exhibition responding to a world in which power, perception and culture are increasingly mediated by technologies of all kinds. It asked the participating artists if it was possible (or even desirable) to find points of resistance within these systems. The result was a mix of existing and new works, many of which were re/created in response to the site's

history as a police lock-up (a more fitting venue would have been hard to find). An exhibition, of course, is an essay in neither form nor purpose, not least because the power and beauty of art often lies in the potential for multiple, simultaneous interpretations. Even so, the works gathered for this show share a common interest in the technological and provide important insight into how it affects our lives.



Sight is how many of us first make sense of reality, how we come to understand relationships between object and concept, action and result. To see in greater detail, with more clarity, or at a larger scale than another is to more fully comprehend the world and, as such, to have the advantage.<sup>7</sup> If knowledge is power, then sight is the chief faculty by which power is gained. Institutions of power have understood this throughout history, investing heavily in technologies that assist, multiply or bolster their

## 'Who watches the Watchmen?'

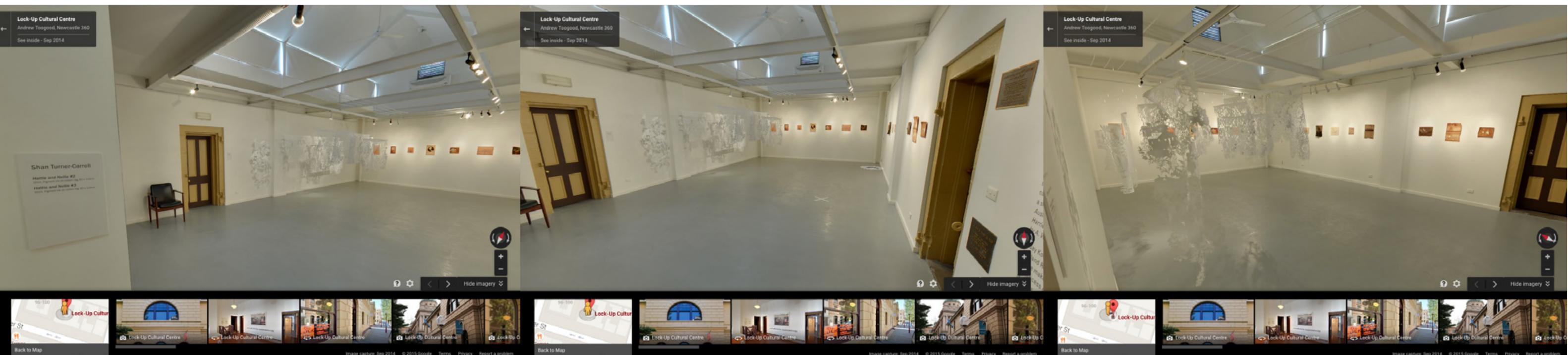
- Juvenal, Roman poet &  
Alan Moore, graphic novelist

6. A term popularised by Rhizome discussion panel 'Post-Net Aesthetics', October 2013 (<http://rhizome.org/editorial/2013/nov/1/postinternet/>) and cemented by the exhibition *Art Post-Internet*, March 2014, Ullens Centre for Contemporary Art, Beijing, curated by Karen Archey and Robin Peckham (<http://ucca.org.cn/en/exhibition/art-post-internet/>)

7. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. British Broadcasting Corporation / Penguin Books: London, 1972.



Documentation of The Lock-Up during *The Future's Knot* exhibition (3-26 October 2014). *Photography by Baden Pailthorpe*



Screenshots taken on 15 June 2015 of The Lock-Up via Google Street View (images originally published in September 2014).

ability to see, preferably without themselves being seen. Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon is perhaps the most famous example of a surveillance technology and has been hugely influential on both thinking about power relations (Michel Foucault,<sup>8</sup> for one) and their enforcement through built design. We live now in a state of heightened surveillance, if not a surveillance state, being seen both literally through technologies such as CCTV and figuratively through the collection of personal data and metadata. We are seen in ways previously unimaginable and known in equal measure, while those who watch often remain obscured entirely. The artworks of Pia van Gelder, Benjamin Forster, Baden Pailthorpe and Tristan Derátz offer points of resistance to this universal vision.

Pia van Gelder's artwork *You or Me* (2011) turns the gaze of state and corporate surveillance back on itself. The work is composed of a screen and two security cameras mounted on tripods. One

of the cameras looks out towards the viewer while the other is pointed back at the screen. The video feed from these cameras is combined, resulting in an image that ghosts and glitches, superimposing multiple viewpoints or switching erratically between them. Sometimes the monitor flickers to black, overloaded by the strain of trying to make sense of its own image.

It is estimated that Australian city-dwellers are captured on film by CCTV cameras more than 15 times a day, despite significant concerns that such technologies have little effect on deterrence or crime solving.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of such surveillance networks then is as much about seeing as normalising the sensation and experience of being seen. This is why CCTV areas are often heavily signposted, or we are shown live security feeds in stores or on buses. Universal surveillance promises to strip away the anonymity of the crowd, rendering each individual trackable and known, while the state remains

8. Foucault, Michel. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage Books, 1979.

9. Burnside, Julian. 'Being watched constantly is too high a price for safety'. *The Age*, 5 July 2010. Available: <http://www.theage.com.au/it-pro/being-watched-constantly-is-too-high-a-price-for-safety-20100704-zvqr.html>

blurry and unknowable. Van Gelder's artwork puts pay to this illusion, disrupting and inverting the state's gaze, its technology turned traitor. The resulting image, sputtering and sparking across the screen, is an image of resistance. The viewer's presence is at times captured, reproduced in fading multiples, or even erased from the room entirely. The surveillance apparatus is corrupted and ultimately collapses under its own scrutiny.

Benjamin Forster similarly engages with technologies of surveillance as a means of resistance, however his work *fxxbxxk (after Dockray)* (2014) constitutes a direct intervention as well as a metaphorical one. The visible part of the work is a small screen on which scuzzy lines of text and pixelated 'thumbs-up' icons appear. 'Benjamin Forster likes KFC' is as likely to materialise as a barb against post-internet art. However, this is only a representation of a performance occurring on servers far away as a bot trawls through

Forster's newsfeed, liking comments, posts, groups and brands at random. The results are displayed alongside sections of the artist's manifesto, which, among other things, calls on us to 'add dust to the circuits'—a reference to the early outsider philosophy of Julian Assange.

Much of Facebook's commercial value and, accordingly, its power come from the vast amount of personal information that it is able to gather from its more than one billion active monthly users.<sup>10</sup> From demographic information, likes and posts, Facebook is able to build a startlingly accurate picture of an individual's current and, through big data analysis, potential desires, should they be exposed to the correct targeted advertisements. Forster's work responds to Sean Dockray's proposal outlined in 'The Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto'.<sup>11</sup> In it, Dockray acknowledges the futility of trying to exist outside of social networks, or attempting to delete one's online presence.<sup>12</sup> Instead he

10. Ross, Monique. 'Facebook turns 10: the world's largest social network in numbers'. *ABC News*, 4 February 2014. Available: <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2014-02-04/facebook-turns-10-the-social-network-in-numbers/5237128>

11. Dockray, Sean. 'The Facebook Suicide Bomb Manifesto'. *Wired*, 31 May 2010. Available: <http://www.wired.com/2010/05/the-facebook-suicide-bomb-manifesto/>

12. Sites such as *Seppukoo* [<http://www.seppukoo.com/>] and *Web 2.0 Suicide Machine* [<http://suicidemachine.org/>] attempt to delete an individual's online presence from social networks altogether.

argues that we should 'like' everything, effectively obfuscating our individual desires and needs from Facebook and its advertisers. Forster's approach is less totalising, attempting to find a way to exist within Facebook while also fighting back against the conditions of use—creating a digital ink cloud that renders his online self invisible to corporate interests.

Surveillance technologies are not only turned inwards on citizens, users and consumers, they are deployed against external subjects, often with greater prejudice. Baden Pailthorpe takes as his subject the MQ-9 Reaper drone, a remotely-piloted aircraft which has become emblematic of the U.S. military's engagement over the last decade. The vast majority of drone operations are covert and operate under complete secrecy, despite more than 1,000 bomb strikes during the 13-year war in Afghanistan and continued strikes across Africa and the Middle East.<sup>13</sup> Drones, however, are only the

visible tip of the U.S. military's atmospheric surveillance and weapons programs, and of a network made up of personnel, ships, aircraft, satellites, bases and monitoring technology that covers the surface of the globe, extends down into our oceans, and reaches out into space.

In Pailthorpe's animation *MQ-9 Reaper I* (2014), a pair of shipping containers is suspended above a desert landscape, which could equally be located in Afghanistan or America. In one of them, a middle class white man shadowboxes in a display home living room; in the other, drone operators attend a bank of screens. The titular drone hovers above this landscape too, meeting its own reflection in impossibly large mirrors and in its doppelgänger made from glass. Doubling and spatio-temporal collapse permeate the work, resulting in a dream-logic that at once mimics and destabilises the invisibility and omniscience sought by the U.S. military. The action-at-a-distance required for

13. Ross, Alice K. 'Who is dying in Afghanistan's 1000-plus drone strikes?'. *The Bureau of Investigative Journalism*, 24 July 2014. Available: <http://www.thebureauinvestigates.com/2014/07/24/who-is-dying-in-afghanistans-1000-plus-drone-strikes/>

the tactical and political use of drone strikes is collapsed as Reaper, operator, and consumer are brought into direct relation through surreal narrative and object relations.

Where van Gelder, Forster and Pailthorpe examine possible disruptions to systems of surveillance, Tristan Derátz considers what happens when you are made invisible against your will. The experience of his sound installation *First Born* (2014) for the visitor was disorienting, even unpleasant. Created specifically for the smallest of the old gaol cells at The Lock-Up, the artwork was triggered upon entry into the dark, cramped space. Pulses of static rose up to meet the visitor; the sound deafening, crushing in from all sides. A small red light blinked rhythmically on the floor, which, eyes having adjusted to the gloom, was seen to be submerged in a bowl of water, electrical wires leading precariously out towards the silhouette of a car battery. *First Born* draws on the story of the artist's

great uncle, who was imprisoned by the Communist regime in Hungary after the 1956 Revolution. For Derátz the artwork is not meant to replicate the experience of incarceration, rather to articulate the ongoing invisible impacts of torture and cruelty long after imprisonment has ended. The bowl refers specifically to the repeated flooding of his great uncle's cell with freezing water for day-length periods of time. In discussing the ability of technology to make its subjects more visible, it is easy to forget that the state's power often lies in the exact opposite—the ability to make its subjects disappear. As evocative and affecting as Derátz's work may be, it also offers a thread of hope: the work itself, created in collaboration with the artist's father and grandfather, is an expression of his family's continued legacy in the face of oppression.



If power is derived from sight, then conversely it can be exercised by shaping or limiting the way in which people see. Visual systems for representing knowledge are embedded in technologies, enabling us to operate them, use them to communicate information to others, and to discern relationships between people, objects, places and concepts. However, the particular visual ordering devices used to represent that knowledge can shape our perceptions, thoughts and beliefs as much as the information itself—‘the medium is the message’<sup>15</sup> among other concerns. For example, the gridded Mercator projection, used widely in online mapping services such as Google Maps, famously distorts the relative sizes of nations so that countries nearer the poles are made to appear significantly larger in comparison to those at the equator. The problem arises when this map projection, and others like it, are presented as objective representations of reality. Developed nations in North

America and Europe falsely seem to dwarf developing nations in Africa, Central America and South East Asia, re-inscribing inequitable power dynamics and figuratively orienting the globe towards poles of capital. Even for those who are aware of the projection’s distortion, the cumulative effect of repeated exposure results in an inaccurate and ideologically motivated image of the world. The visual technologies we use to structure space, time and knowledge, may give the impression of a rational, ordered reality, however they inevitably privilege certain types of knowledge over others, or simply misrepresent information for the sake of ‘simplicity’. Artists Jonny Niesche, Kylie Banyard, Vicky Browne and Darren Seltmann, deploy aesthetic strategies that disrupt this objective surface, creating spaces for irrational or liminal knowledges to emerge.

In art, the picture plane itself is a contested site of representation. Artists have variously punctured, torn up, re-made, destabilised or fortified this

## ‘Simplicity is not the absence of clutter’

- Jonathan Ive,  
Senior Vice President  
of Design at Apple<sup>14</sup>

14. Richmond, Shane. ‘Jonathan Ive interview: simplicity isn’t simple’. *The Telegraph*, 23 May 2012. Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/apple/9283706/Jonathan-Ive-interview-simplicity-isnt-simple.html>

15. McLuhan, Marshall. *The Medium Is the Message: An Inventory of Effects*. Penguin Books: London, 1967.

theoretical two-dimensional space. Art critic Clement Greenberg famously pilloried attempts to create the illusion of depth and instead championed the efforts of abstract artists, medium specificity and an emphasis on flatness from the 1950s onwards. On first glance, Jonny Niesche's work *Cosmos and cosmetics* (2014), seems to fall in line with a tradition of post-painterly abstraction and colour field painting. Niesche's work, however, is more self-aware than that—both of the art historical tradition in which it operates and of the changed importance of the picture plane as a result of screen-based technology.

More than television alone ever could, the ubiquity of screens through smartphones, laptops, desktops, tablets, and watches, in malls, museums, and train stations, means that our understanding of the world is not only mediated by picture planes, but often derived directly from them. These picture planes seem infinitely adaptable (even though they are not), one moment creating an illusion of space in a 3D game and returning the next to the relative calm of a flat design user interface. Niesche's work responds to this, echoing the colour scheme of Apple's OSX, at once pastel and neon, reassuring and thrillingly filled with

possibility. Whereas modernist abstraction sought to reduce representation to the 'purity' of flatness, Niesche's subject is the surface plane itself. Printed from a Photoshop file on voile, a gauzy, stocking-like material, the visual effect is to create a plane that shimmers in and out of existence, distorts perception of depth and reveals the steel structure which gives it form. The virtual is made material and its contrivance laid bare.

Kylie Banyard similarly seeks to destabilise flat space and the appearance of rationality, however her interest lies in the possibility for utopian and psychedelic dreaming.

*Domescope Haze 2* (2014) appears as a scrying pool, its soft colours pulsing in the darkened cell, a portal to knowledge of other times and spaces. It is hypnotic, calming. It recalls the childhood fascination with kaleidoscopes borne of the knowledge that, while the device is not a telescope, there is nonetheless a cryptic relationship between what is seen and where you have chosen to point it—a metaphor, perhaps, for the obfuscation of knowledge required by technological mediation.

*Domescope Haze 2* is an abstraction of an impossibility. The video is not digital animation, but instead a film derived from

*Domescope II* (2013), part of a series of earlier works in which Banyard variously constructed and painted geodesic domes and other utopian architectures. Andrew Frost writes of Banyard's more recent work (which took as its subject the studio of radical architect and founder of Arcosanti, Paolo Soleri) that the images have a 'photographic flatness to their perspectives... that enhances colour and contrast to create a psychedelic dream-scape'.<sup>16</sup> That observation applies just as acutely to *Domescope Haze 2*, which transforms utopian architecture into a blossoming acid visualisation. Utopia, by its nature a 'no-place', can never exist and yet the intellectual exercise of its imagining is vital to the development of critical ideas about current and possible societies. Banyard's work at once reaches for utopia and, through abstraction, collapse, and repetition, articulates its impossibility.

The psychedelic, irrational and trippy are central to the collaborative work of visual artist Vicky Browne and composer Darren Seltmann.

*Entering the Cloud* (2014) appears as a polygonal scale model of a mountain on the gallery floor, a poorly rendered graphic thrust into the real before its time. The silhouette of a body sprawls out from the mouth of a cave, at once a shadow self and an invitation to enter. Having shimmied your head inside the sculpture and put on the red-and-blue 3D glasses provided, the visitor is cut off from the rest of gallery, surrounded instead by competing visual planes at seemingly non-Euclidian angles, which pulse and project into space. Strange sounds rise up from beneath, somewhere between the intestinal grindings of a machine and wind whipping a lonely beach. The experience is, to say the least, disorienting.

The title of the work alludes to the 'cloud', that magical-seeming data repository on which we increasingly rely. The information it holds however is in a state of entropy, so overwhelming and vast that sense simply cannot be made.

16. Frost, Andrew. 'Dreaming of Another World' in *Mono Nuovo: Kylie Banyard* [cat.]. Galerie pompom: Sydney, 2014.

- 17. Connolly, Katie. 'Can 'digital drugs' get you high?', *BBC News, Washington*, 22 July 2010. Available: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-10668480>
- 18. Bordieu, Pierre. *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste*. Routledge: London, 1986.
- 19. Toffler, Alvin. *The Third Wave*. Bantam Books: New York, 1980.

Seltmann's audio is inspired by 'binaural beats', downloadable tracks purportedly capable of inducing a range of drug-like highs. These sounds were the subject of a momentary moral panic in the early 2010s, a fascinating combination of our cultural anxieties around youth and technology.<sup>17</sup> Another potent symbol operates in the work—that of Plato's Cave, where education, liberty and enlightenment are synonymous. Browne and Seltmann invite us to willingly re-enter the cave, this time not blinded by the dark but by the light, creating an affective model for the experience of information overload.



'Your dead will live;  
Their corpses will rise.'

- Isaiah 26:19,  
New American Standard Bible

Technologies have changed the way in which we see ourselves just as much as the ways in which we are seen. Pierre Bordieu argues that communities are formed, strengthened and defined from one another through the accumulation and circulation of cultural capital as expressed and negotiated through taste

in cultural products.<sup>18</sup> Our shared like or dislike of particular things simultaneously defines and is defined by the communities we belong to, class, gender and other markers of identity. Participatory structures such as Facebook, YouTube and Tumblr have allowed for the exchange, policing and debate of taste on an unprecedented scale. The rise of fandoms and fan culture in recent years speaks to this change. However, people are not merely sharing pre-existing material, they are actively creating new and re-mixed cultural products in the forms of stories, images, video and music. We are no longer passive consumers of content such as TV and radio, instead we are 'prosumers',<sup>19</sup> actively producing and consuming one another's content. In doing so, we create value for the social media and web platforms through which we communicate—an exploitation of labour with no return for the creator. While technologies can and do engender community, and allow for novel and meaningful forms of self-expression, the

logic of post-internet capitalism is such that even these efforts can be co-opted by the hegemony of profit-making and productivity. The works of artists Josephine Skinner, Giselle Stanborough, Philjames, and Marian Tubbs engage variously with the ethics, effects and economics of contemporary cultural production.

Josephine Skinner transforms the work of amateur and everyday content producers to explore the complex relationships between people, popular culture and technology in a networked world. In *The end* (2013), a row of flat screens each display images of CRT televisions in varying states of disrepair. Glass fronts are smashed in violently on some, while others emit smoke from dead screens. The footage is drawn from any number of YouTube videos in which owners have smashed, dropped, bashed, exploded or otherwise destroyed their old TVs. There is a real violence in this, an ecstasy in excess, in a form of destruction only possible in late capitalism.

For Skinner, there is a sympathy between this act and the tragic end of a romantic relationship. Very occasionally, one of the smouldering and wrecked TVs will come back to life. Through digital intervention, Skinner is able to turn back time and resurrect what was lost, to undo the violence, even if only for a moment. The artwork then makes sense as an intercession, an act of healing and coming together.

This miracle of new life, however, is expressed through the genre trappings of the soap opera. *The end's* soundtrack, also sourced from YouTube, is sampled from classic soap opera scores. Piano and strings swell dramatically, a cue for heightened emotional states, before fading back to static. The visual treatment of the CRT TVs, including the use of close-up and slow-motion, renders the TVs themselves as soap stars, figures of collective desire and identification. They become the central players in a melodrama, doomed to repeat a cycle of

seeming death and last-minute resurrection by the authorial grace of *deus ex machina*. In doing so, Skinner questions our uncomfortable relationship with obsolescence of all kinds and the possibility for authentic emotional experience through technological mediation.

Giselle Stanborough draws on witchcraft, consumer technology and web aesthetics in an attempt to contact the other side. *Wiccan Wifi* (2014) was created specifically for The Lock-Up, which is haunted,<sup>20</sup> as a 'participatory work for the spirit world'.<sup>21</sup> Reasoning that, if disembodied spirits exist, they should be able to manipulate electronic equipment as evidenced widely in movies and books about hauntings, Stanborough created a room-sized Ouija board with a robotic vacuum cleaner acting as planchette.<sup>22</sup> The work commenced with the casting of a ritual spell found on a witchcraft website and incorporated traditional Wiccan elements, such as a wand and knife (electric carver). Among

these was a cauldron (fish bowl) atop the robot vacuum containing spell ingredients in which a looping video of the artist's invocation played on a crystal ball (smartphone).

Through this recombination of spirituality and technology, Stanborough interrogates our relationship with each and the mystical properties attributed to new technologies. Early web fantasies, as articulated in the work of futurists like Hans Morevac and science fiction authors such as William Gibson, saw the internet as having transcendental potential. Seemingly free of physical limitations, the internet could be understood as a psycho-spiritual realm, or even a virtual heaven, where the mind could eventually be set free from the body. Alternative belief systems such as Wicca flourished on the early web, benefitting both from the ability to connect disparate practitioners and a consciousness spawned by the global reach of the network. Our relationship with technology today is no

20. 'Ghosts and hauntings in Newcastle and the Hunter Valley: Civic Theatre, Miss Porter's House, Newcastle Police Station', *Newcastle Herald*, 5 September 2014. Available: <http://www.theherald.com.au/story/2536411/newcastles-5-most-haunted-places-photos/>

21. Artist statement, sent to author 21 January 2015.

22. A planchette is the small heart-shaped piece of wood or plastic used as a movable indicator to spell out the spirit's message.

23. Clarke, Arthur C. 'Hazards of Prophecy: The Failure of Imagination' in *Profiles of the Future: An Enquiry into the Limits of the Possible*. Pan Books: London, 1962, rev. 1973.

less magical, as devices become ever more interconnected and operate well beyond the average person's understanding, bringing to mind Arthur C. Clarke's Third Law: 'Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic'.<sup>23</sup> And through multifarious social media platforms, we create crude approximations of self in cyberspace that operate autonomously, one step closer to virtual immortality. The stated intention of *Wiccan Wifi* to contact non-corporeal consciousness is perhaps not so absurd.

In Philjames' paintings, robots are sent back in time not to kill, but to serve drinks. The artist re-appropriates mass-produced prints, popular in the mid-twentieth century, seamlessly inserting fantastical and science fictional elements into the frame. The painting reproductions are familiar and comforting, not specifically, but precisely because they are of a type—pastoral landscapes, cozy inns, devotional images, and soft-focus portraits. People in these images are well-to-do and

happy, standing in for the aspirations of a larger, emerging middle class. They are copies without a referent—simulacra that one can easily imagine above a mantelpiece, clustered next to photos of smiling children, as mother serves dinner in front of the television. In the democracy of their mass production and dissemination, they become a collective vision both of the historical scenes that they purport to represent and the values and beliefs of their owners.

By infiltrating these scenes with robots, droids and cyborgs, Philjames at once destabilises the neat domestic fantasies of the print and questions our imaginings of the future. Science fiction, at its best, is a genre that uses speculation as a mode of cultural criticism. By projecting possible futures and considering the implications of technological progress, science fiction holds a mirror up to the present, with many of its greatest works operating through the dual lens of utopia and dystopia. If on the

24. Hughes, Robert. 'Spirit of the age', *The Guardian*, 26 January 2006. Available: <http://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2006/jan/26/art1>

surface Philjames' paintings seem to assuage our anxiety about technology by showing humans and robots co-existing peacefully, we must remember how the parties came to meet. These machines have travelled back in time not from reality, but from one fiction to another and in doing so reveal the artifice of a worldview based on the myth of happiness through endless growth, production and consumption.

Marian Tubbs is similarly interested in the value and effect of mass-produced images, but turns her attention to the endless pixels of the internet. The way in which Tubbs combines junk images with her interest in the intersection of materiality and value is in many ways reminiscent of Robert Rauschenberg's 'Combines'. These works brought together found items, including trash, with paint, drawing, stuffed animals, newspapers and any number of other materials. For critic Robert

Hughes they were 'about the perilous and bizarre adventure of being in a world that encloses us, nourishes us and, like a huge and somewhat crazy mother, will not leave us alone'.<sup>24</sup> Where Rauschenberg fossicked through trash cans and dumpsters, Tubbs' junk-made-art is sourced from the internet, a realm that, in its virtuality, is both infinitely larger and smaller than any dumping ground to provide material for Rauschenberg.

Commercial imagery, low-resolution user-generated content, literary passages, and readymade illustrations are combined in Tubbs' digital collages. The boundaries of single images are distorted and smeared with tablet-based 'finger-painting'. Erotic associations are encouraged through the proximity of flowers, or steamed glass, or even the revealed layers of an artichoke heart. There is a poetry to them that speaks to the frenetic surfaceness and

voraciousness of image production and consumption online. Printed on silk, they are cast out of the truly two-dimensional and mutable realm of the digital and rendered as luxury goods, draped from the gallery wall in elegant and seductive folds. If Rauschenberg's Combines speak to a world that will not leave us alone, Tubbs' silks articulate a reality in which it is impossible to be alone, in which cultural and financial capital are interdependent, and in which value is ascribed through abstract and mysterious processes.



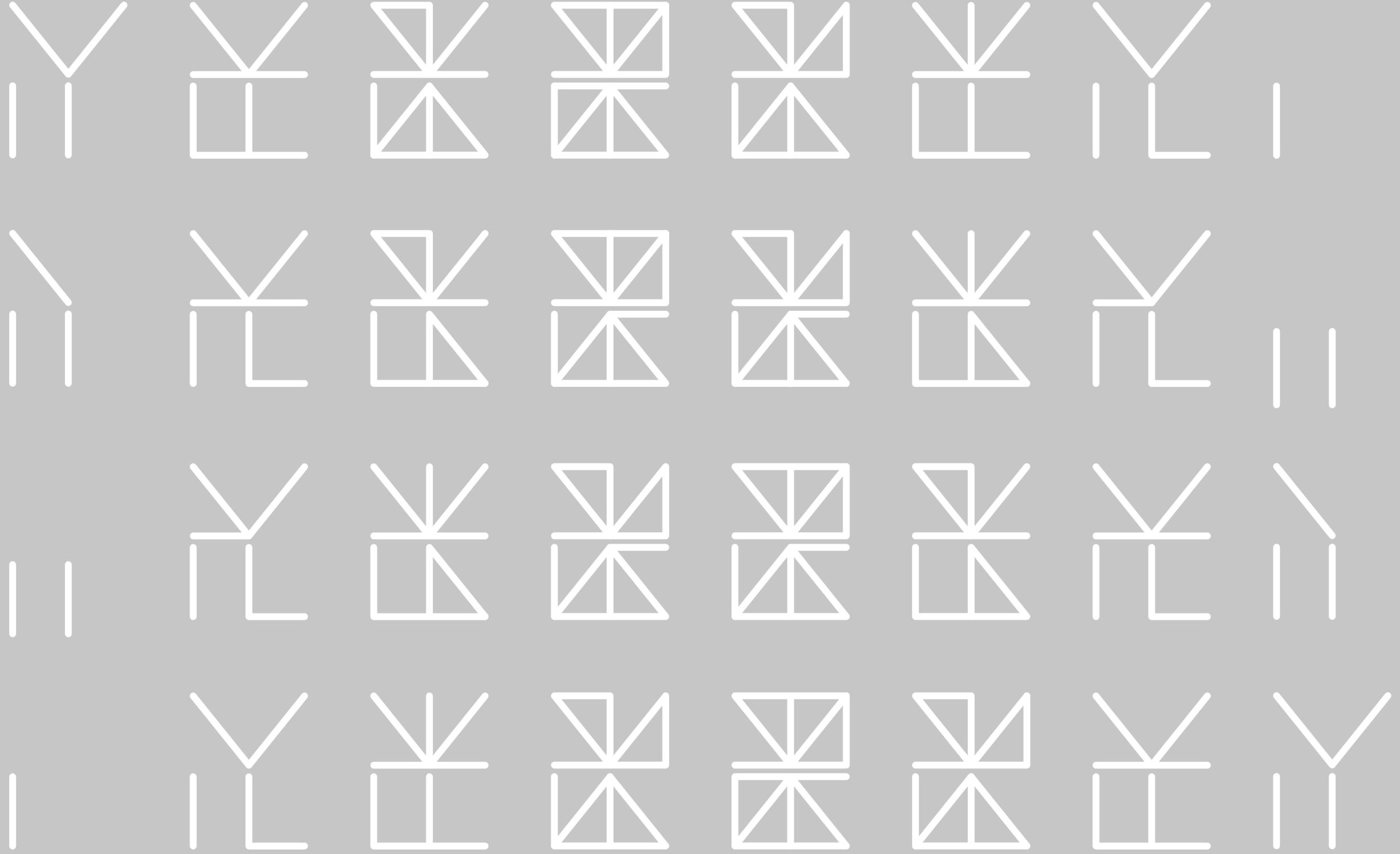
## 'Exit, pursued by a bear'

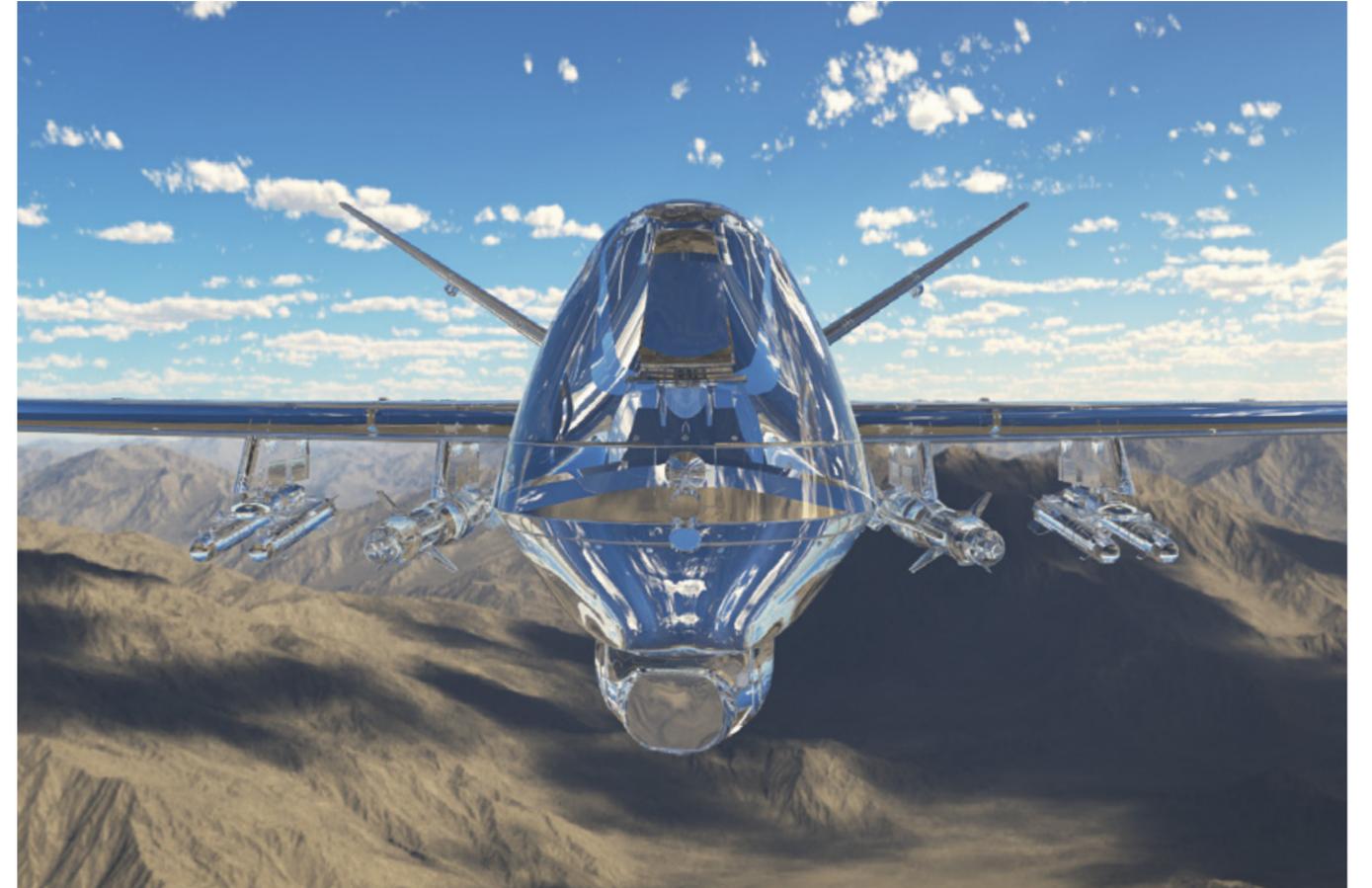
- William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*,

It is certainly neither the intention of this essay nor of the artists in the exhibition to appear anti-technology. Indeed, many of the greatest contributions to quality of life have been and continue to be technological—from agriculture, through industrialisation, computer science, and most certainly the internet. We are implicated in intense and intimate relationships

with technology every day. To be human as opposed to any other animal is, in many ways, to live technologically. It is precisely for this reason that it is vital to consider the implications of the technologies we use.

The artworks in *The Future's Knot* respond to, directly or indirectly, the impacts of technologies as we live now and will live into the future—how they mediate power relations, our perception of reality, and our shared culture. Through conceptual and aesthetic strategies and forms, each offers a moment of pause to consider or even agitate against hegemonies of capital, surveillance, and cultural production. If we cannot stop technological progress and would not want to anyway, then art with its capacity for contemplation, criticism and poetry plays an ever more important role by which to navigate our changing world.





## Baden Pailthorpe

*MQ-9 Reaper I* 2014

high definition 3D animation (1920 x 1080),

colour, sound

duration: 4 mins 39 sec. ed. 5 + 2AP

Collection of the UQ Art Museum, Brisbane,  
the Australian Parliament House Art Collec-  
tion, Canberra and private collections.



**Philjames**

[left to right ]

*Algebra and Fire* 2014

oil on vintage offset lithograph

*Caravan* 2014

oil on vintage offset lithograph

*Dream of Electric Sheep* 2014

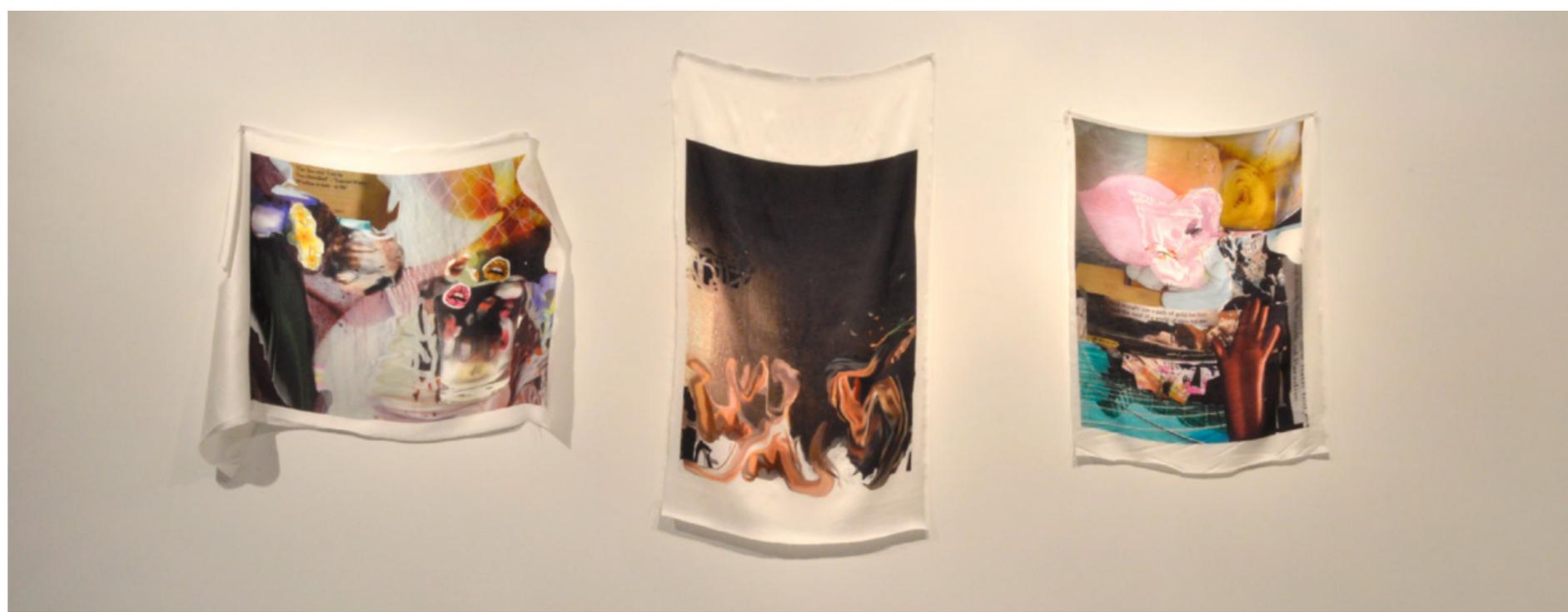
oil on vintage hand coloured photograph

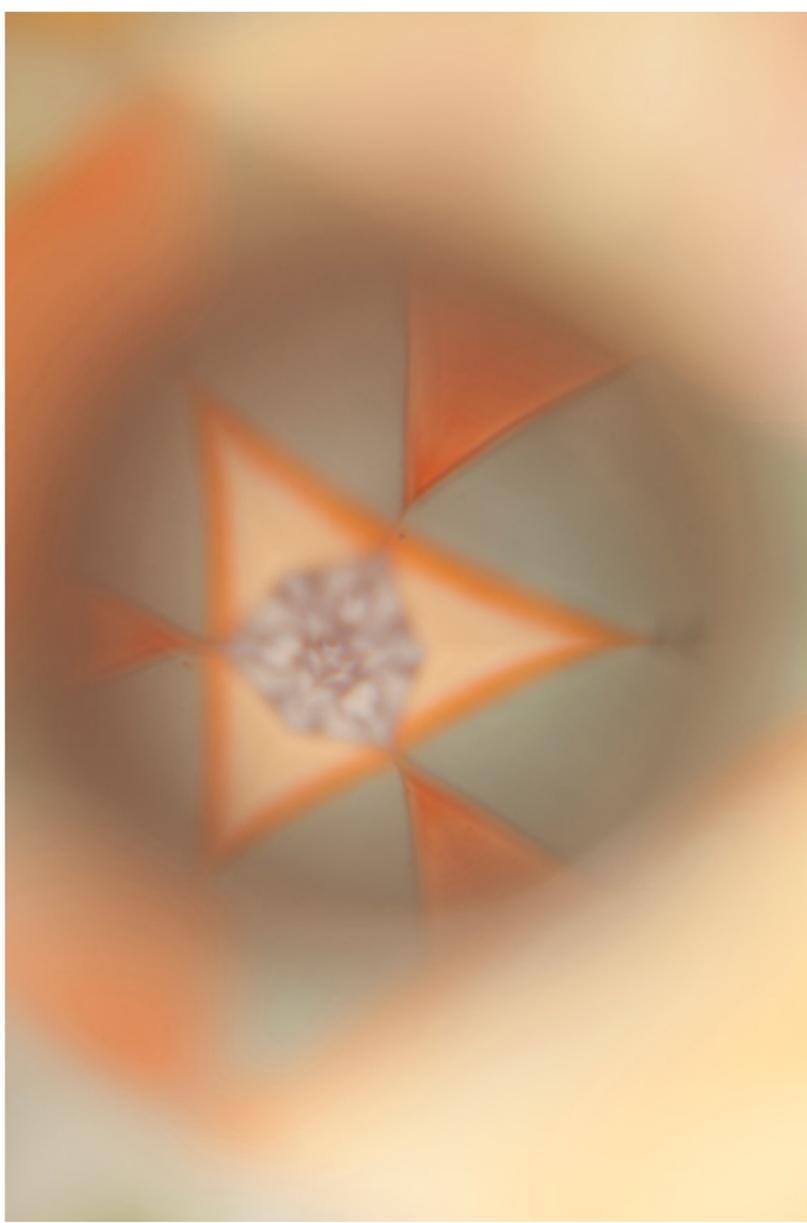


### Marian Tubbs

[left]  
*Touched* 2013  
digital print on silk

[below:left to right]  
*stale to me*, 2014, digital print on silk  
*typical quasi coy*, 2014, digital print on silk  
*another world*, 2014, digital print on silk





**Kylie Banyard**

[above: left to right]  
*Domescope Four1* 2014  
C-type print  
*Domescope Four2* 2014  
C-type print

[right]  
*Domescope Four1* 2014  
C-type print

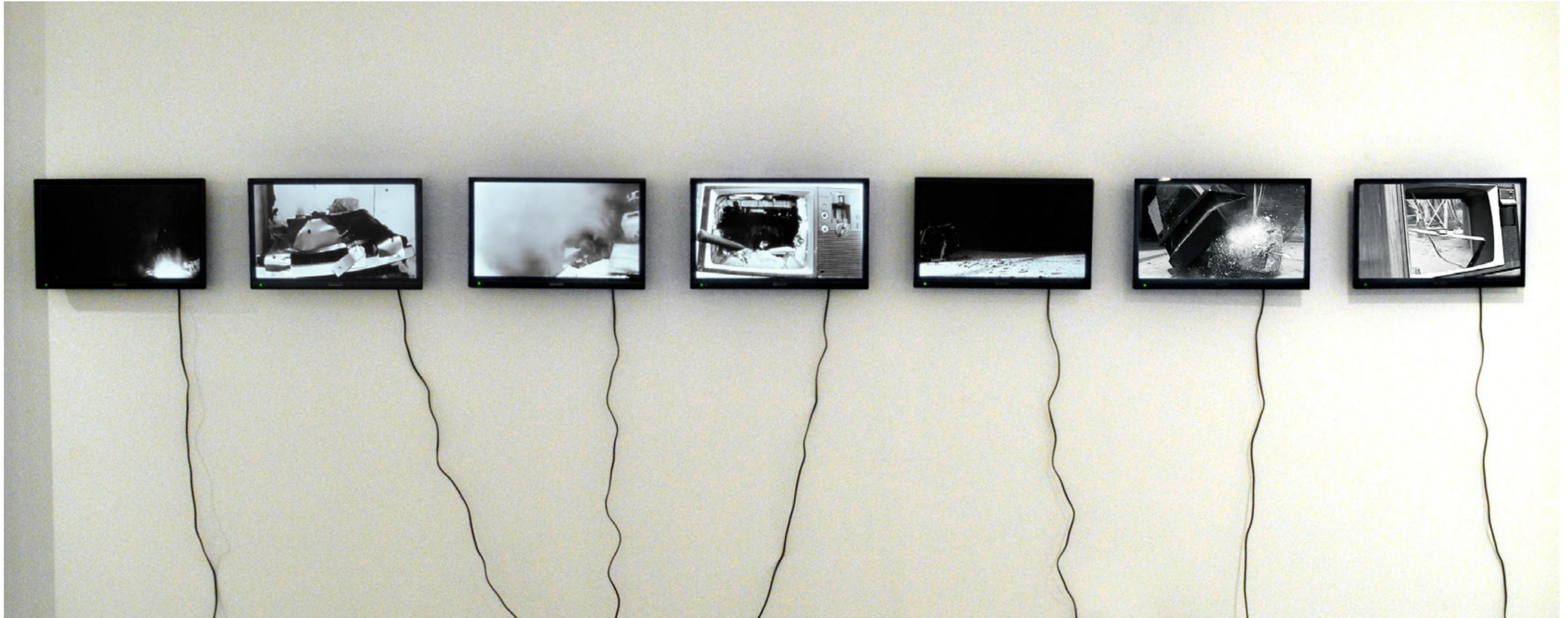


**Vicky Browne & Darren Seltmann**

*Entering the Cloud* 2014  
mixed media

[above] Installation view, *FLEET*, Metro Arts, Brisbane, 2014. Photograph: Kate Beckingham.





## Josephine Skinner

*The end* 2013  
multi-channel HD TV installation, reused  
YouTube content



**Josephine Skinner**

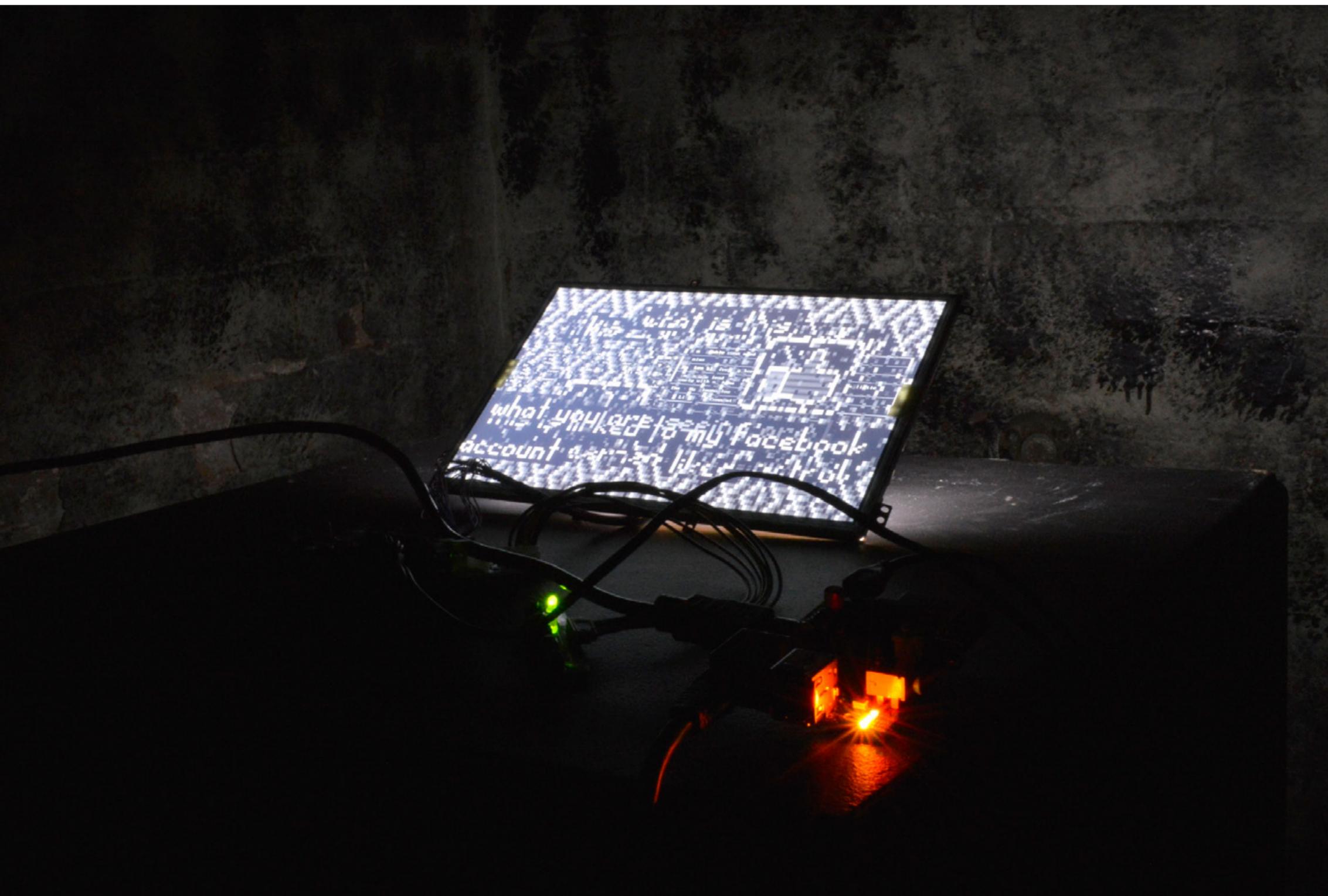
*The end* (stills) 2013  
multi-channel HD TV installation, reused  
YouTube content

Photograph: Zan Wimberley

### Benjamin Forster

*fxxxbxxx ( after Dockray ) 2014*

an lcd screen, a computer, a network, a rock  
found in a cemetary, Facebook, an old jail cell





**Kylie Banyard**

*Domescope Haze 2* 2014

HD video, formply

duration: 20 mins



**Pia van Gelder**

*You or Me?* 2011

closed-circuit video set-up: two CCTV cameras,  
RCA splitter, LCD monitor



**Tristan Derátz**

*First Born* 2014

motion sensor, speakers, water, LED Lights

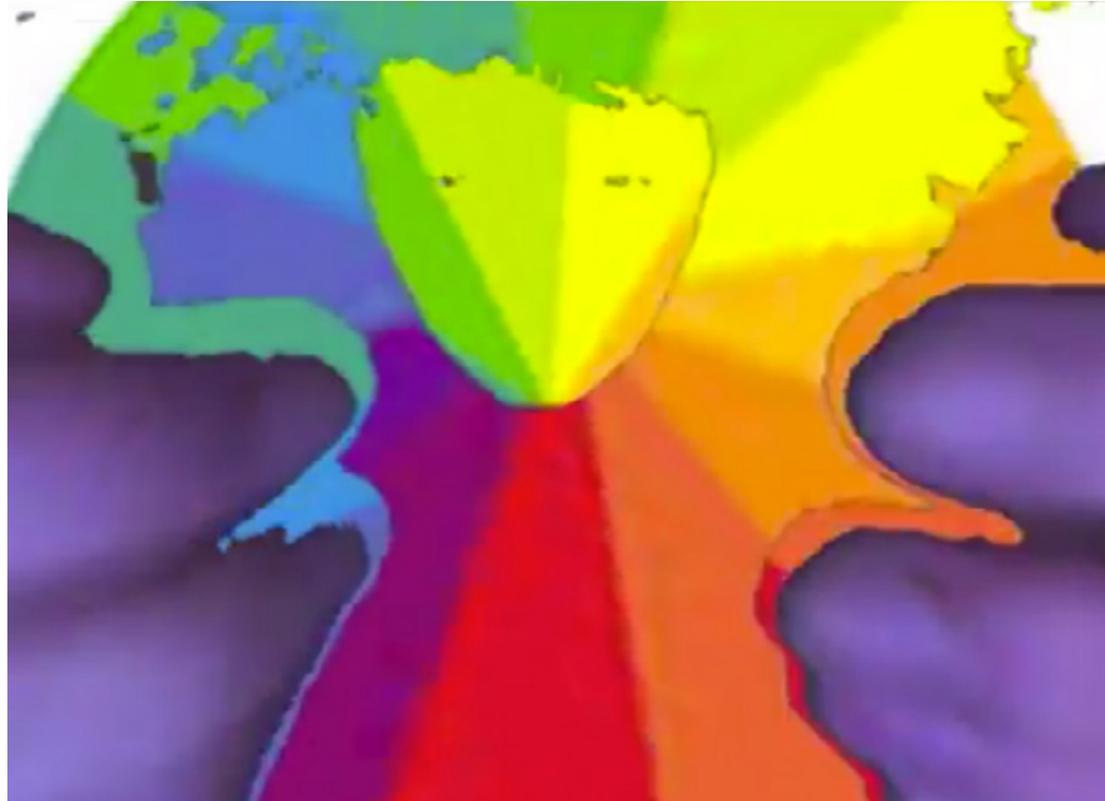
Technical work by Marcus and Stephen Deratz

## Giselle Stanborough

*Wiccan wifi* 2014

single-channel video, artist mobile phone, artist hair, glass beacon, nanocheck strips, artist toenail clippings, robotic vacuum cleaner, tape, Mickey Mouse wizard badge from artist childhood holiday to Disneyland with her now deceased father



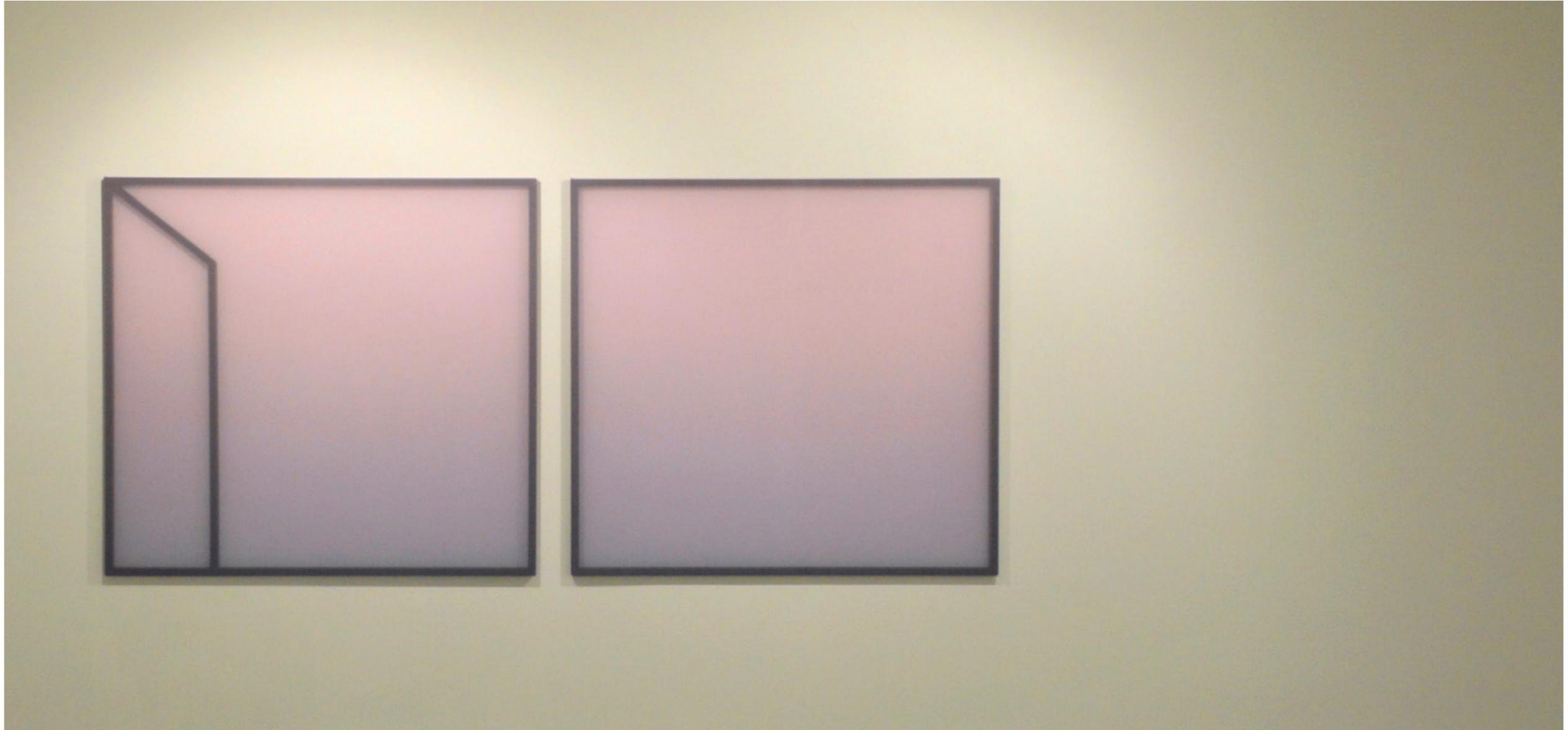


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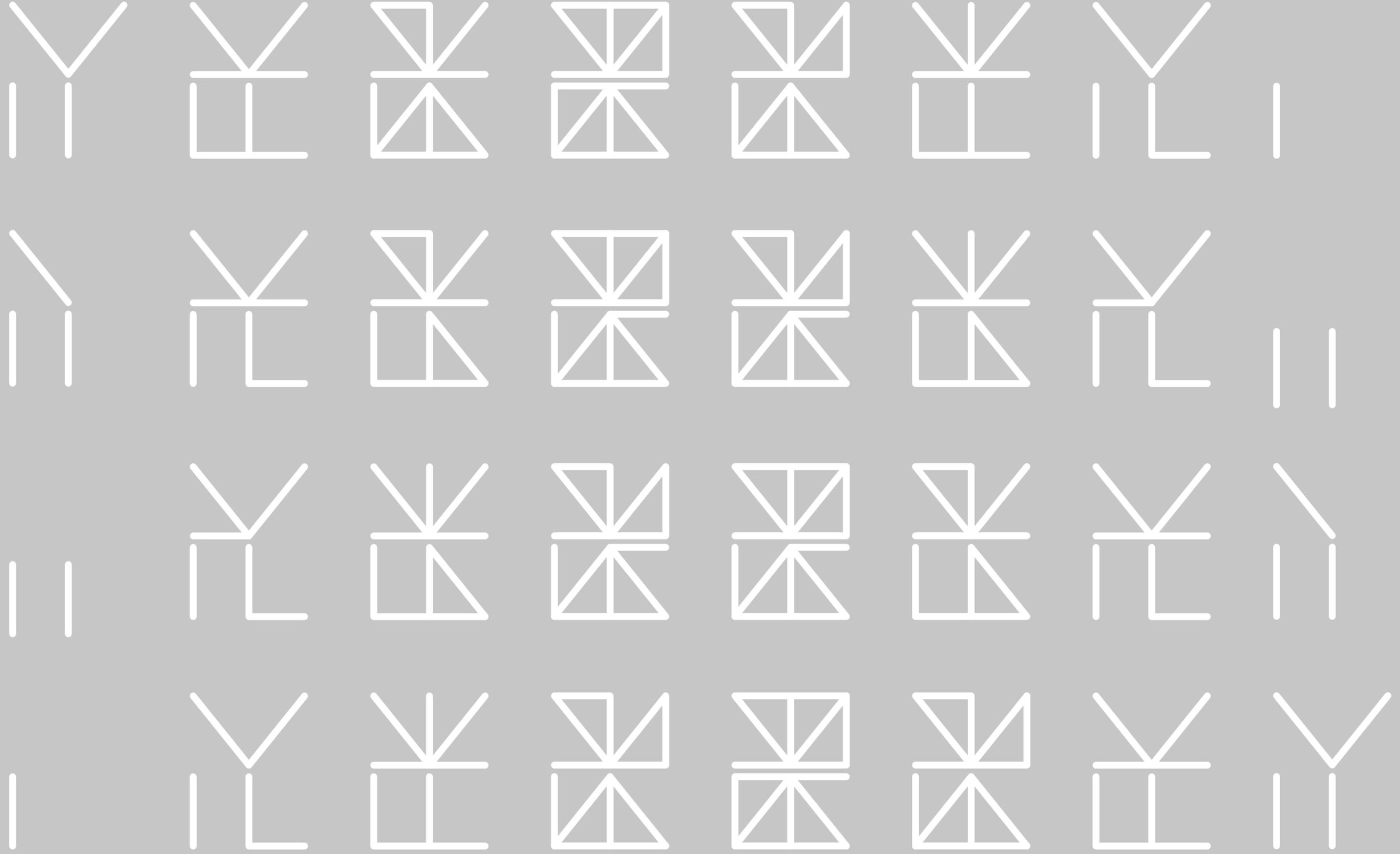
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**Jonny Niesche**  
*Cosmos and cosmetics* 2014  
Voile and steel



# LIST OF WORKS

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HD video, formply  
duration: 20 mins

*Domescope Four1* 2014  
C-type print

*Domescope Four2* 2014  
C-type print

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie pompom, Sydney

## Vicky Browne & Darren Seltmann

*Entering the Cloud* 2014  
mixed media

Courtesy of the artist and Galerie pompom, Sydney

## Tristan Derátz

*First Born* 2014  
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Technical work by Marcus and Stephen Deratz

Courtesy of the artist

## Benjamin Forster

*fxxxbxxk (after Dockray)* 2014  
an lcd screen, a computer, a network, a rock found  
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*stale to me* 2014  
digital print on silk

*typical quasi coy* 2014  
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*Touched* 2013  
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Courtesy of the artist and Minerva, Sydney

## Pia van Gelder

*You or Me?* 2011  
closed-circuit video set-up: two CCTV cameras,  
RCA splitter, LCD monitor

Courtesy of the artist

# ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

## Kylie Banyard

Banyard works across a range of media, incorporating painting, sculpture, photography and optical devices such as kaleidoscopes and stereoscopes. The outmoded objects and ideas given new life in her art hark back to times in the past when it seemed easier to imagine a space and a thinking outside the dominant socio-economic system of modern Western culture; when faith in inventing alternative visions of the world via utopian imagination seemed more vital. Recent projects include, solo exhibitions at Broken Hill Regional Gallery (*Imagining Alternatives*, 2014) and Galerie pompom, Sydney (*Mono Nuovo*, 2014), *The Future's Knot* curated by Peter Johnson, at The Lock-Up, Newcastle for TiNA & Critical Animals 2014, and FLEET at Metro Arts, Brisbane. Past exhibitions include: *Magic Mountain*, curated by Debbie Pryor, at Craft Victoria, Melbourne and *Imagining Alternatives* at Firstdraft Galley, Sydney. Banyard holds a PhD in Fine Arts and lectures at both UNSW Art and Design and Sydney College of the Arts. Her work is held in numerous public and private collections including Artbank.

## Vicky Browne & Darren Seltmann

In 2012 Seltmann and Browne were first curated together for the group exhibition *Transmission* at the Campbelltown Arts Centre. This exhibition

paired musicians (Seltmann) with visual artists (Browne). The exhibition not only produced the interactive installation *Synchronic Lines*, but was also the beginning of a fruitful partnership of collaboration between Browne and Seltmann. The pair quickly realised that as practitioners they worked across disciplines incorporating interests in music, architecture, sculpture, sound and the spiritual into elaborate interactive installations. Since *Synchronic Lines*, they have produced *The Crystal Healing Room* for the 2013 MOMA FOMA festival, The Black Mountain for the new Blue Mountains Cultural Centre (2013), and works for group exhibitions including the Futures Knot in New Castle NSW (2014). They have also completed an Artspace (Sydney) residency where *The Black Mountain* was produced. In December 2014 Browne travelled to Los Angeles (Funded by the 2013 Fauvette Loureiro Memorial Artists Travel Scholarship) where Seltmann resides to do a residency in Santa Monica at the 18<sup>th</sup> Street Art Center. During this residency they exhibited a new work, which they are hoping to bring back to Australia in 2015.

## Tristan Derátz

Tristan Derátz is an emerging artist based in Sydney. His practice has two distinct areas: installation, photography and conceptual writing focused on political and social critiques, and as the live visual performance duo La Petite Mort,

where he collaborates with Ty Wilson to create spatial design installations.

## Benjamin Forster

Benjamin Forster is . ( Primavera, MCA 12 ) sure . ( NEW13, ACCA 13 ) was perhaps. ( co-editing with rc, un magazine, 14 ) o I am . ( , , Firstdraft, 13 ) ACT, WA, NSW based . ( Bachelor of Visual Arts Honours, ANU, 08 ) or ( Kynic, CCAS, 13 ) he will . ( Residencies: MCA 13, SymbioticA 09, PICA 09, CIA 12-13, FAC 11, Helsinki 14, etc ) no. I assure you. you may ( My Brain Is in My Inkstand, Cranbrook Art Museum, 13 ) be unsure. ( SafARI, around SYD, 14 ) of acronym . of number .

## Jonny Niesche

Jonny Niesche is interested in teasing and stretching the spatial limitations of traditional painting, speculating upon various ways in which painting might transcend and articulate space. His practice is concerned with the cultivation and manipulation of aesthetic 'experiences', bisecting the relationships between object and illusion, reduction and excess, the digital and the handmade. He depends on an aesthetic vocabulary that perverts the lineage of art history combining a classical modernist language with the noise and viscera of consumer culture.

# ARTIST BIOGRAPHIES

## Baden Pailthorpe

Baden Pailthorpe is an Australian contemporary artist. Working predominantly within the field of new media, his work increasingly exposes the growing reach and the subtle operations of contemporary militarism, institutions and power.

He has participated in over sixty solo and group exhibitions, including the Centre Pompidou, Paris, NIMk, Amsterdam, la Gaîté Lyrique, Paris, the Palais de Tokyo, Paris, ARTSPACE, Sydney, the UQ Art Museum, Brisbane and the Australian War Memorial, Canberra. In 2013, Baden Pailthorpe was the inaugural Australia Council artist in residence at the Australian War Memorial.

Baden Pailthorpe is undertaking a Ph.D in New Media Aesthetics at UNSW, Sydney. He holds an MFA in new media from l'Université Paris VIII and an MA from the College of Fine Arts, UNSW. His work is held in private and public collections.

## Philjames

Philjames' practice involves the reinterpretation of the narrative of time and place through reworking familiar images ranging from old masters to religious iconography. Delicate and detailed paintings are subtly applied onto vintage prints challenging the viewer to look beyond the surface image and into the depth of the artists imagination. Through this process the artist creates a world for his audience which is familiar yet also bizarre. Toying with images and concepts

from popular culture these interventions are at once accessible yet demanding of contemplation.

## Josephine Skinner

Working primarily with video installation, Skinner explores the way network culture affects our social and psychological lives and makes visible our collectively shared desires and failures. Fascinated by the convergence of private realities and social fictions, she transforms content found online into spectacles that are as emotive and immersive as they are banal and flawed.

Skinner holds a practice-based PhD from UNSW Art & Design. Her work has featured in solo and group exhibitions and screenings, including *Love and Fear*, ARTBAR, MCA, Australia (2015); *Transgressing Media*, The New School, NY, USA (2014); *The Future's Knot*, This is Not Art Festival, NSW (2014); *The end*, Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney (2013); *Tele Visions*, Carriageworks, Sydney (2013); *The Social*, Campbelltown Arts Centre (2012); *With Open Arms*, Blindside Gallery, Melbourne (2013); *Pixilerations V.8*, USA (2011); and *Sydney Underground Film Festival* (2011). In 2013, she was awarded the Firstdraft Emerging Studio Residency Program, NSW, and in 2015 is a recipient of the Eastside International Artist-in-Residence Program, Los Angeles.

## Giselle Stanborough

Giselle Stanborough is an intermedia artist whose

practice often addresses online user generated media and the way in which such technologies encourage us to identify and perform notions of self. She graduated from COFA in 2010 with the University Medal and since then has exhibited in solo and group exhibitions in galleries around NSW and in Melbourne. Her work has been shown online in The Washington Post's 'Pictures of The Day' and in Hennessy Youngman's 'Art Thoughtz'.

## Marian Tubbs

Manifesting across Internet, video and assemblage-based installations, Marian Tubbs' art conflates material binaries between body and object, physical and virtual, and high and low culture.

Her precarious and pleasurable assemblage-based installations act to slow down accelerated modes of looking at aesthetics of powerlessness, and to critique cultural ascriptions of value. Recent exhibitions include *Forever in Print*, National Gallery of Australia, 2015; *Hairy Plotter and the Polygrapher's Tones*, Toves, Copenhagen, 2015; *Primavera 2014: Young Australian Artists*, MCA, Sydney, 2014; *Quake 2*, Arcadia Missa, London, 2014. In 2015 she is the inaugural recipient of Sydney's, Museum of Contemporary Art digital commission. Marian's work is held at the National Gallery of Australia, and in local and international collections. She is in on-going collaborations with SLUSH and Holly Childs. Tubbs has published and presented art and

philosophy research at international and local conferences, in 2014 she was a contributing author to the philosophy volume *Intensities & Lines of Flight*, published by Rowman & Littlefield International. Tubbs holds a BFA (Hons) from RMIT, a MFA from UNSW Art & Design, is completing a PhD at UNSW Art & Design, and is a casual academic at UTS, PSM.

## Pia van Gelder

Pia van Gelder is an interdisciplinary artist, curator and teacher. She develops performances and installations often by working with media machines, both custom built heirloom technologies like the audio-video modular synthesizer, and common electronic devices. Using hacking methodologies, these machines are often opened up to perform in ways that negate their use or assumed design. Van Gelder's practice-led research examines media archaeology, science, counter-culture histories and DIY pedagogy.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my deepest thanks to the Directors of Critical Animals 2014 for the opportunity to develop and present this exhibition. It was a rare pleasure to work with such erudite colleagues and to curate in the context of an intellectually and critically engaged festival. Thank you as well to Octopod and This is Not Art for bringing these festivals to Newcastle for so many years.

Sincere thanks to must go to The Lock-Up, its staff, and its volunteers. Special thanks to Jessi, Courtney and Lance for their professionalism and enthusiasm. The Artist in Residence Program provided much-needed space to research, write and organise the exhibition and I encourage anyone to take up the opportunity.

None of this would have been possible, of course, without the artists. I am constantly humbled by your generosity of ideas, time and creativity. Your work makes the world a better, more considered, and more beautiful place to be.

Thank you in particular to Baden Pailthorpe for his help installing and photographing the show; housemates Lucy and Vyvyan for beers and board games; Lydia, always; Clancy and Carolyn for their close edits and fine minds; and, my colleagues at the MCA for their support, especially Anne Loxley.

Thanks to Devon Ward for designing such a beautiful and clever publication for much more love than money.

Finally, thank you to the city of Newcastle. I fell more than a little in love with your people, your beaches and your big blue skies.

# END MATTERS

First published in 2015 in association with the exhibition *The Future's Knot*  
The official exhibition of Critical Animals 2014, a sub-festival of This Is Not Art  
The Lock-Up, 90 Hunter St Newcastle, NSW, Australia  
3 - 26 October 2014

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry  
Creator: Johnson, Peter H., author, editor.

Title: The future's knot / Peter H. Johnson, Jessi England Sideris ; Patrick Kelly,  
Denise Thwaites, Eleanor Zeichner.

ISBN: 9780992309831 (ebook)

Subjects: Lock-Up Cultural Centre (Newcastle, N.S.W.)--Exhibitions.  
Art, Modern--21st century--Exhibitions.  
Art festivals--New South Wales--Newcastle.

Other Creators/Contributors:

England Sideris, Jessi, author.

Kelly, Patrick M., writer of supplementary textual content.

Thwaites, Denise, writer of supplementary textual content.

Zeichner, Eleanor, writer of supplementary textual content.

Dewey Number: 709.944

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Published by  
Critical Animals  
c/o Octapod  
401 Hunter St  
Newcastle, NSW 2300  
www.criticalanimals.com

Critical Animals and Partners:



The Lock-Up Artist in Residence Partners:



The development and subsequent presentation of the exhibition *The Future's Knot* was made possible through the generous support of The Lock-Up, Newcastle, Australia through their Artistic and Artist in Residence Programs.

Octapod and The Lock-Up present Critical Animals as part of This is Not Art.

← Lock-Up Cultural Centre  
 Andrew Toogood, Newcastle 360  
 See inside - Sep 2014

# THE FUTURE'S KNOT

