

LOVE YA WORK

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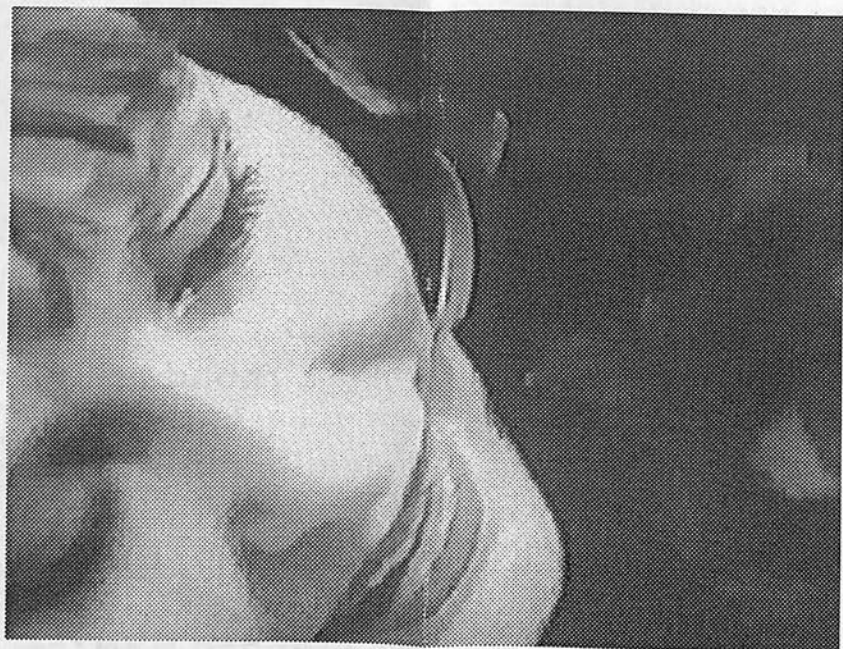
Love Ya Work

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harley IVES
jemima ISBESTER
sari KIVINEN
naomi OLIVER
jess OLIVIERI
brendan PENZER
claire SIMPSON
kami SMITH
jasmine STEVEN
jason TUCKWELL
tanya WHITE**

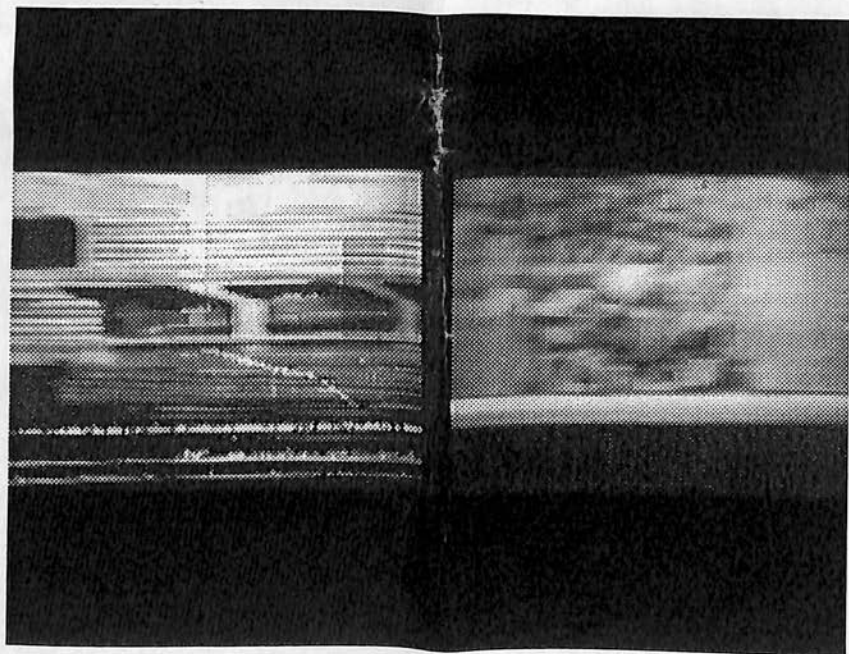
**curator nicholas TSOUTAS
text ann FINNEGAN**

A project of Honours Graduate students from the
School of Contemporary Arts, University of Western Sydney

9 - 18 December 2003



Rhonda Hunt



Harley Ives

Emerging Artists: Concerns

Ann Finnegan

Scenario. The final year show is over. You've finished art school on the high note of the big end of year exhibition and party. The work has been a success, product of the journey you've been taken to the cutting edge of contemporary art practice and critical scrutiny. Already you've achieved a lot. Then what comes next? What's the next stage? For the party also signals the crossing of a significant border; you're now no longer a student but have become that transitional figure of the emerging artist.

It's taken for granted that you have talent, energy and developing ideas but where are the significant support structures to integrate emerging artists? You are now entering an extremely competitive arena characterised by closed commercial gallery doors (and chances are that the work which has received high critical praise from examiners doesn't fit many of the commercial categories anyway; these are always in the process of being constantly remade, and there is always a lag), and worse, even tighter government funding and a shrinking pool of government resources. Did I say that competition was fierce? Only a handful of government-funded artist-run spaces (ARI's) have the clout and prestige to show the kind of work that you like and identify with, but how do you put yourself forward against the artists of your textbooks? Up against international and homegrown art stars like Paul McCarthy and Susan Norrie, or 60s icons like Carl Andre? Bridging the gap between emergent and established artist status can take years.

Certainly, in acknowledgement of this significant problem of how to keep emerging artists encouraged and fiscally afloat, the Australia Council does have some limited early career funding. But how serious is this commitment? Is it sufficient to counter the risk of losing our emerging talent? The pressure of competition is intense, and the amount of funding never stretches far enough. The problem compounds when one considers the tight funding of ARIs, and the shortfalls ripple down the line as hard-working gallery directors manage the difficult juggling act of mounting shows which reflect and define the place of Australian artists in international art culture. In this context, every brilliant grad show is an occasion for the celebration of our culture, and cultural renewal, but with every brilliant grad show, new talent enters the pool, and brings the sharp reminder of shrinking government funding, resources and venues.

Love Ya Work, curated by Nicholas Tsoutas at Artspace, Sydney, is a response to this problem of support for the emerging artist. It's a rare and precious

opportunity for a group of graduating honours students to be offered a show at an institution which regularly hosts the Biennale of Sydney and important international shows. This is due, in part, to the strong relationships which have been forged with the University of Western Sydney over the years (owing much to university staff like Julie Rapp, Hinterding and Haines, Maria Cruz and Eugenia Raskopoulos, among others, all significant Australian artists of critical acclaim), but Tsoutas has always made a personal stand for the support of difficult, non-commercial work and he understands the need to nurture its development and provide a platform such as this.

The political importance of this show can't be underestimated, especially in terms of what it represents in terms of resources and opportunity; for every artist who is selected to show at Artspace, there is another artist (or artists) who was not. Each selection represents years of an artist's life and hard work. So, this decision to curate the work of emergent artists reflects a determined stance on the part of Tsoutas. Availing his gallery for a graduating honours show is a serious concern and a political statement which acknowledges that emergent artists have to be accommodated and valued; and it comes with the cost of the show which it replaced.

That said, the work of these artists had to meet the standards of Tsoutas' stringent critical eye. As ever Tsoutas is not one to shirk from making a political stand where he judges it is needed; but, even more so, to justify the political point and the risk, the work has to stand out, to be much more than derivative of the latest trends. In order to qualify as an emergent artist it is not enough to have emerged from an art school, to have completed a degree; being granted the status of an emergent artist carries the connotation of an individual and distinctly developed (or developing) practice that does not double or duplicate any already emerged forms.

Love Ya Work: the Show

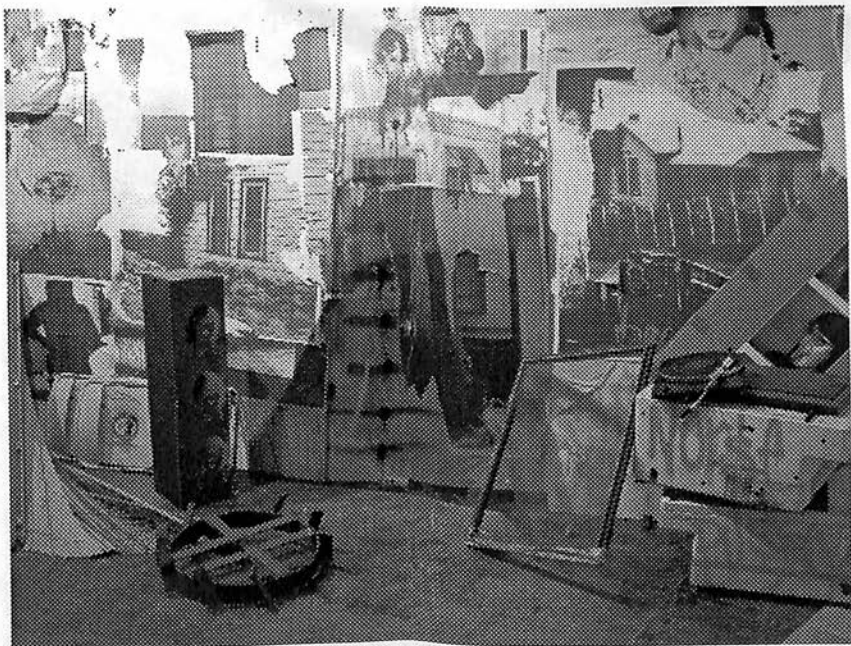
The tone of riot grrl punk sensibility which exudes from the cd EXIT-US sets the mood for the the show. Through their edgy lyricism, artist duo Jemima Isbester and George Tillianakis, two of the group of this year's fine and electronic arts graduates from the University of Western Sydney, combine the themes of protest, neuroses, trauma, queer and sexual angst which ripples through the work of this year's honours crop. But this signals no mere repeat of punk. Punk provides an energy platform and a stylistic wedge which drives into deeper concerns. Like the music, the flavour is often grunge but the substance exhibits a sophisticated and nuanced complexity, with a hefty dose of compassion. The rawness of Jasmine Steven's seemingly crude installation of inner city graffiti and street garbage, including a smashed aspirational Swedish designer retro chair, doesn't miss a beat (or a cultural reference point). The photocopier with the words Nurse Pussy roughly painted in punk pink is an index signing contemporary issues of representation and personal identity. Nurse "I'm Gonna Piss On Your Face" Pussy aka Jasmine Steven is a hardcore rapper (fresh from battling at Electrofringe), her tough persona cross-referencing emotional pain and the emergence of zine and graffiti culture into contemporary art's representational systems.

Love Ya Work. Tsoutas' title affectionately plays with the ocker quality that has been picked in recent showings of work 'out west', and the vernacular of place, but is deadly serious in his appreciation. His title also picks up on the camaraderie and generosity of spirit which flows on into the works which range in theme from punk politics to multicultural and ecological concerns, particularly in the installations. Claire Simpson's hyperbolic pile of over and undersised Thai temple cushions perilously balances alongside an exquisite model of the temple crafted from a pack of ordinary playing cards, and pays homage to a spiritual culture in which cultivation of the self (typi-

Kami Smith

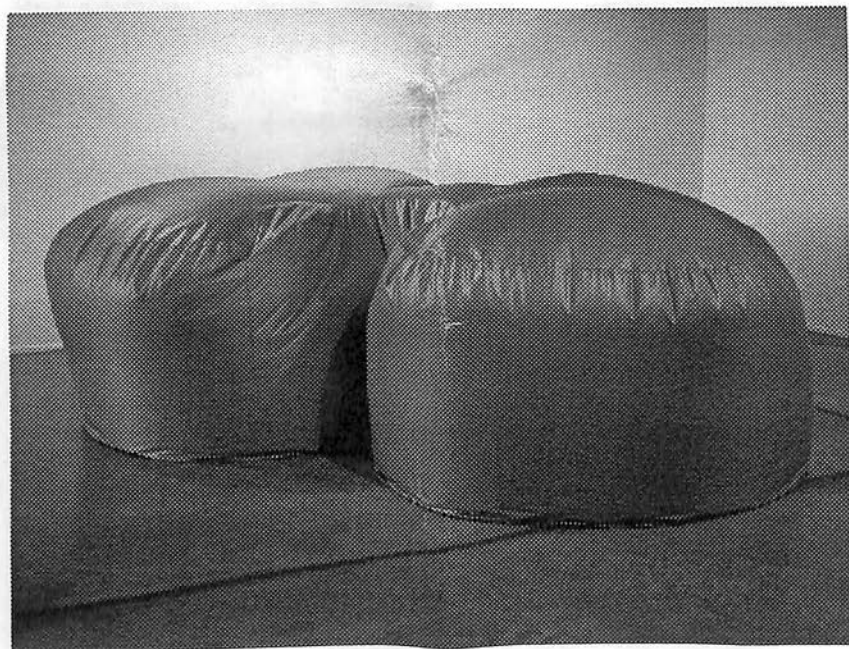


Jasmine Steven





Naomi Oliver



Jess Olivieri

Jemima Isbester

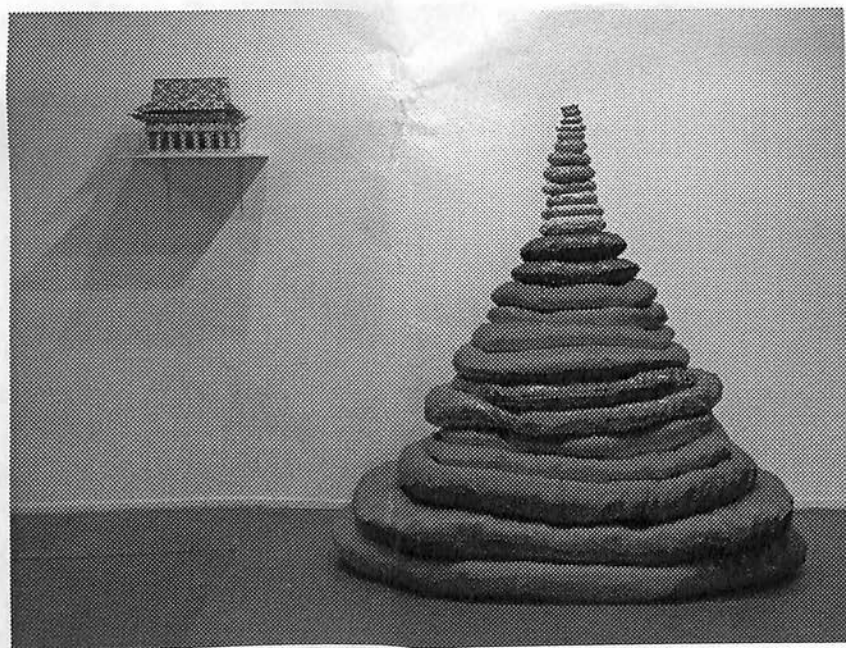


Sari Kivinen





Brendan Penzer



Claire Simpson

fied through small acts of making and humble materials) is more important than money and materialism. Brendan Penzer's installation has a discrete diorama of living nature positioned face to face with a video of Nature portrayed as lush, green and somewhat ambivalently eroticised by the pouring / spurting of a stream in the early morning light. But, inside the apparent softness, both Simpson and Penzer's works exhibit a steely core of ethical values and reverence.

Another work to question our relationship to Nature is Kami Smith's *Table of contents: eating through the umbilical cord*. The legs of her immaculate and massive 'table' delicately balance on small heaps of bush rock and sand; a row of porcelain picture frames arranged on its surface like the erudite backbone of a giant imaginary fossil. The table of culture is set with a discourse which reflects back into nature and asks us to contemplate our origins. Simon Scharma, David Suzuki, commerce. Thematically, the work is also laterally about TV and the glossy tableau on which our cultural history is served.

At the other end of the nature / culture divide Harley Ives' now trademark glitch videos (this time in digital colour) explore the formal aesthetic qualities of white noise and electrostaticity. Were there ever such a word, Ives' practice is located there in a series of finely-tuned works which compose the 'out-of-tunedness' of electrostatic disturbances. His nature-technology interface is the magnetosphere and already Ives has notched up some impressive group shows, including Arcanum at First Draft (where he and Olivieri are directors). Ives has customised ancient 60s miniature TV sets to display his glitchscapes in delicious classic tones of black and white, and is now exploring colour and DVD.

Overall, video, the current darling of the major gallery and international exhibition circuit, makes a strong showing with fiercely independent works that owe nothing to the recent style of cinematic displays of Douglas Gordon, Doug Aitken, Rindone or more recently Australia's Susan Norrie. The heritage of smaller scale, more intimate works, owe more to Bruce Nauman's neurotic 'No' and "Bounce" and display a complexity that is lost in the block-buster shows cutting into cinema's narrative to extract measured slices of affect. Where the blockbuster tendency is to extract, package and serve emotion as slabs of pure surface (with the painterly qualities of a chiaroscuro of light, or abstract expressionism's painterliness), the substance of social issues and meaningful contact is subsumed to experiences of emotional tone. By contrast, Jemima Isbester's work explores the intense territory of relationships, sexuality, identity, consumerism and extreme psychological states. Interactions with foodstuffs (like hamburgers, or sugar) become the metaphor for the anxieties around sexual relationships, consumer culture and issues of self. In *Shelter* Isbester has sewn yellow plastic (yes, American food-bomb-parcel yellow) into a tent-like retreat around a TV-armchair installation, evocative of the sheltering effect of curling up to vicariously enjoy a daily hit of packaged relationship neuroses. On Isbester's channel a male head is on its side while a steady stream of juice and crushed berries pours over the contours of his face, seemingly emblematic of his emotional state. (Maria Cruz curated another work from this series, and another from Jasmine Steven, for The Shangri-La Collective at Artspace earlier this year.)

Also working with video, Rhonda Hunt uses twin screens to blow up simulated streaming text and image based on her experience of an online affair. Like Isbester, Hunt crosses technology and relationships. She virtually teases her internet lover with an innocent and erotic dance of the seven veils which shows nothing but her face and fingers through her hair, while a suggestive text screen rolls through excerpts of their exchange. Further, in line with the group's fascination with video, installation and per-

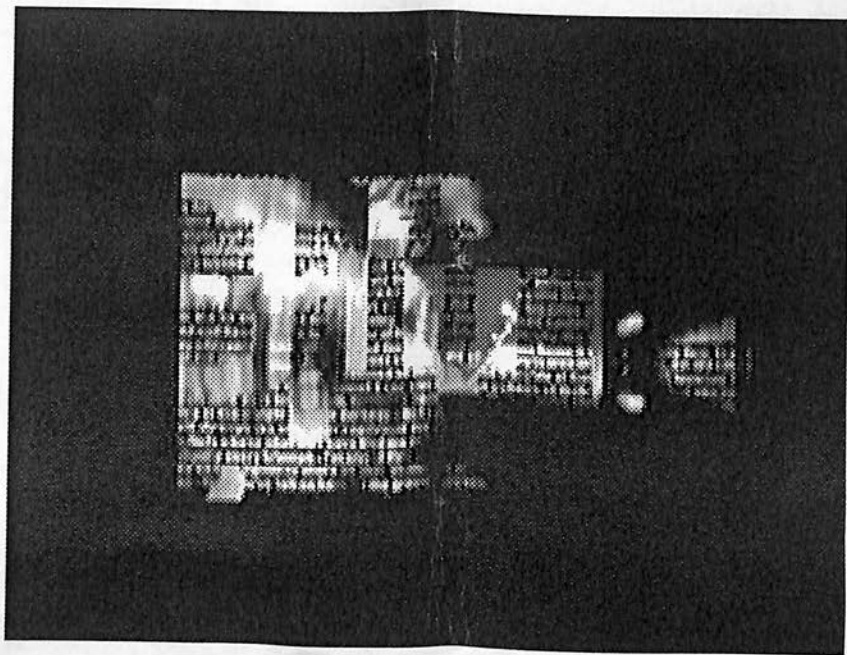
formance as a mediums for exploring personal fetishism and obsession Sari Kivinen explores alcoholism and cleaning rituals to touch on the deeper underlying psychoanalytical connections between satisfaction and masochism. Naomi Oliver also explores the stranger aspects of familiar domesticity in a video work about repression, in which a suburban couple resolutely drink their cups of tea, whilst sitting down on their sofa, oblivious to a figure spinning horizontally in mid air. Tanya White works across various media of video, performance and installation, always involving her familiar neurotic and sometimes nasty clowns. This time she presents a complex installation of a game in which gallery goers participate at a table monitored by video cameras on surrounding screens. The technological interface, a common subtext in this show, hasn't facilitated increased personal happiness, but rather further complicated the manifestations of life's psychic disturbances.

The neurotic element which frequently seems to surface in the work of this group is never nastily nasty but delivers the more unpleasant undercurrents of life with humorous relish. The underlying toughness and resilient rawness of these works never quite goes away. If the majority of video works set out to expose emotions and psychic disturbance, Jason Tuckwell's more elusive video installation works on energetic psychic planes, in which the viewer's body is caught in a cross-zone between bodily affects (subject to dromsocopy and intense bands of sound) and the disappearing horizon of thought. Scrolling text pages dissolve out of reach into graphic effect leaving no messages but the after-effect of an energetic pulse which falls somewhere between body and mind. It's Castenda-like in affect; you realise that you've been stepped through a series of energetic planes when the piece finally comes to land on a soft sandy stretch of Italian Neo-realism. It's like coming down from a trip, or from surfing sub-astral planes which only a sorcerer, like Castaneda's shaman, Don Juan, could unlock. But, again, this is no flaky style event, blending into popular dance / trance culture. Tuckwell, too, delves into deeper states.

Jess Olivieri, who took out the Casula Powerhouse and Creative Enterprise Prize this year, unashamedly goes for fun. She presents a giant inflatable hover-sculpture which blows up around you, and which can then be 'walked' or hovered across the room before it periodically deflates. Witty in the pop tradition of Oldenberg and Koons, the pneumatic sculpture nevertheless exhibits a non-precious throwaway quality, which stays close to grunge and tied to popular culture roots like the other works in this show which never gets arty-pretentious, nor self-important and overbearing in the use of technology. The show stays close to the familiar and the domestic, and finds them weird and exciting enough. In combination with an affection for the rave and the zine, it stays close to the street. None of it is too clean.

Of course, it's always interesting with a group of emerging artists to look for influences and tendencies. The contemporary art tradition, including grunge, is evident as thoroughly mined with lessons well learned, but there's also a willful independent streak that's drawing its own subject matter from the emotional grit. (Dad and the boyfriend are into porn but the pinks are nice - to paraphrase Nurse Pussy aka Jasmine Steven in colloquium mode.) These artists are not afraid to dig deep, and to develop a subject, and keep going and going. May their works multiply and may they prosper.

Jason Tuckwell



Tanya White



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