

A PLACE I'VE NEVER SEEN

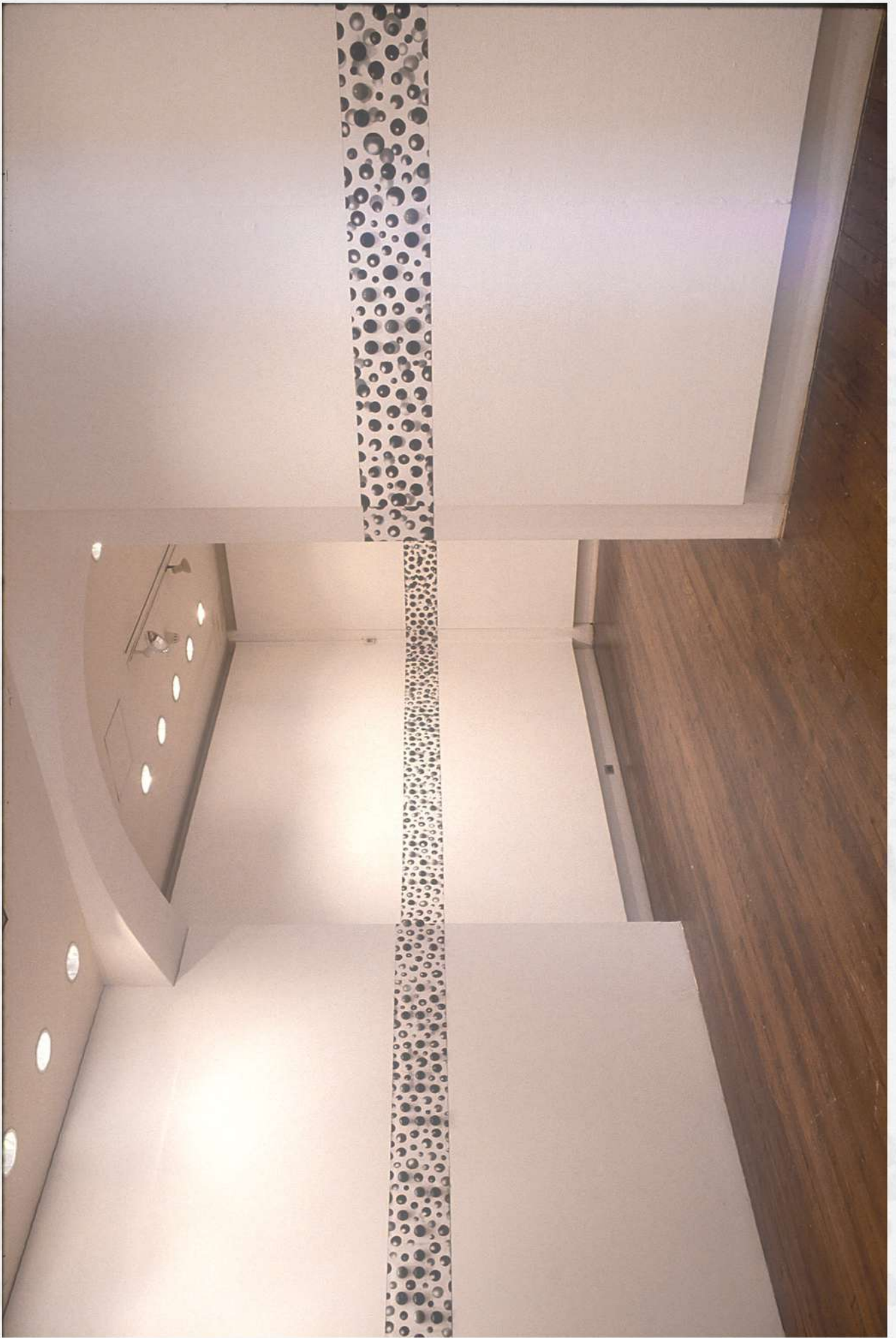
**AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR PHOTOGRAPHY
SYDNEY FEBRUARY 1993**

**MUSEU DE ARTE MODERNA DE SÃO PAULO
BRAZIL OCTOBER 1994**

ACE ART, WINNIPEG FEBRUARY 1995

**TORONTO PHOTOGRAPHERS WORKSHOP
CANADA SEPTEMBER 1995**

**STUDIO 11, THE CLOCKTOWER
NEW YORK NOVEMBER 1995**



**'A Place I've
Never Seen'**

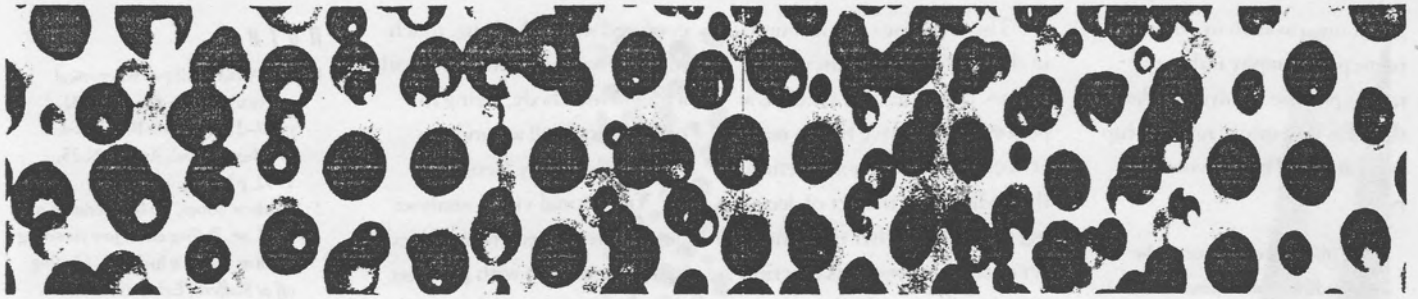
Mathew Jones
February 4 - 27
Australian
Centre for
Photography
257 Oxford St
Paddington
S y d n e y



This exhibition is assisted by the Australian Centre for
Photography and the Sydney Gay and Lesbian Mardi
Gras. Thanks to: Stuart Koop, Daniel Brine, Rohan Storey.

BRaille ALPHABET

A	⠠	F	⠠	K	⠠	P	⠠	U	⠠	Z	⠠
B	⠡	G	⠡	L	⠡	Q	⠡	V	⠡	comma	⠠⠨
C	⠢	H	⠢	M	⠢	R	⠢	W	⠢	colon	⠠⠠
D	⠣	I	⠣	N	⠣	S	⠣	X	⠣	apostrophe	⠠⠨
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A Place I've Never Seen

Mathew Jones

Australian Centre for Photography.

4 February–27 February, 1993

Mathew Jones has a reputation for withdrawing. In the face of activists who call for an audible gay voice he celebrates the elusive silences of homosexuality. At public lectures he retreats from the opportunity to speak, sending someone else to read his paper. And in artist's statements he often distances himself from the work, as if to avoid the role of authorial interpreter. Jones' critics have construed these withdrawals as acts of arrogance or cool indifference¹ but it's much stickier than that. Rather than establishing a safe distance the pull-out creates a turbulence in its wake. Twists and folds of matter – the trace of Jones' presence – are drawn out along the movement of bodies and this instability complicates any clear division between speaker and audience, artist and art work, or active and passive roles. As Jones explains, 'pulling out before cumming is not as safe as it looks'.²

In *A Place I Have Never Seen*, Jones has considered how this disruptive movement might be introduced to photography. The exhibition consists of a 12 centimetre high strip of photographic paper running continuously around the room at eye level. Appearing like the cross-section of a molecular substratum, the band is made up of little spheres floating in a chaotic multiplicity. The sense of depth opened up by the image is partly created by the aerial perspective used to spatialise the photogrammed spheres, but some of the dots are also raised plaster nodules stuck to the surface of the paper. The exhibition catalogue, placed on a small podium at the entrance to the show, introduces this third dimension of the work as the embossed language of the blind. Rather than offering a descriptive publicity essay the catalogue reproduces the braille alphabet, inviting viewers to read the work them-

selves. So with the catalogue in one hand and having a good grope with the other we have to insert ourselves in the midst of the show's various elements. In quite a roundabout fashion, the braille text describes a photograph of something unphotographable,³ passive anal sex:

...this photograph of my lover's cock lost in a place I've never seen this photo of his arse of mine distended by cock wet with cum you can't see...

Jones maintains that this work is pornographic because it is designed to stimulate the body, but it deserves to be portrayed differently given that it avoids the simplicity of most porn. Following Gilles Deleuze we could call it pornography because instead of ordering and describing sexual activity it explores how desire and representation work. It is still porn, it still excites the body, but in such a way that interacting with the image *itself* becomes stimulating. We need to be clear with our definitions here because pornography is defined very differently by liberals, feminists, and the moral right. Deleuze's understanding of pornography is asso-

ciated with the feminist observation that certain forms of representation violently simplify the world and encourage the viewer to act in accordance. As Deleuze explains, pornography exists to be grasped readily; everything is 'reduced to a few imperatives (do this, do that) followed by obscene descriptions'.⁴ Deleuze puts forward the idea of a *pomology* in order to recuperate the images of sex and violence that are found in the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and the Marquis de Sade. He argues that *pomology* produces an internal splitting of language such that it no longer functions to relate the reader to the world in a rudimentary way. It is:

aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits, with what is in a sense a 'non-language' (violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken).⁵

Critics of visual pornography who take their lead from Laura Mulvey's analysis of visual pleasure, rely on the model of a scopophilic-voyeur in command of the woman-objects being represented. The voyeur is said to internalise or conform to this abstract structure and then pro-

ject it onto women in other contexts: pornography is theory, rape is practise. Mulvey explains that this voyeuristic relationship is constructed by disavowing both

the material existence of the recording process [and] the critical reading of the spectator ... in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude.⁶

Jones' installation challenges these pornographic conventions because it refers to its material construction and the movement of readers that cross its surface. In a sense, the recording function of the photographic negative is lost and recreated. Whilst Jones' primitive photographic technique foregrounds the materiality of light hitting chemical emulsion, his stencils and exposures are calculated to create an optically-spatialised, illusionistic world of spheres extrapolated from the literal plaster domes. And the body of the viewer becomes implicated in this confusion.

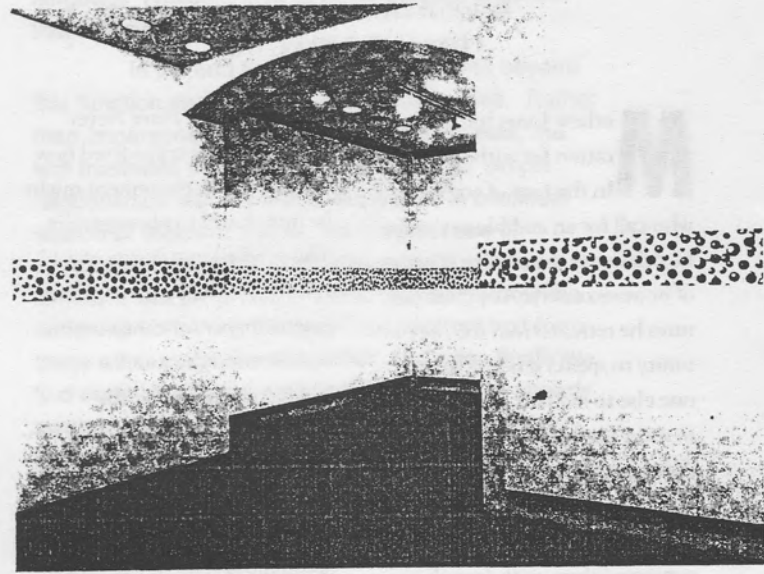
At a formal level Jones' concern with the materiality of representation parallels the work of other contemporary photographers,⁷ but there is more at stake here than simply rehearsing well-worn artspeak about visual objectification or the binary opposition of vision and touch. The materiality in Jones' installation represents an attempt to demarcate a gay subjectivity within a sexual politics transformed by AIDS.

The unsafe sex scene found in the text communicates Jones' desires, but it can't be taken as a personal imperative by the reader because its complexity returns the audience to the act of decoding the braille rather than the act of conforming to its description. In other words, the material recording process complicates a voyeuristic relationship with gay sex. If the first generation of gay activists could embrace hard-core porn as an act of defiance, Jones belongs to a generation that is more cautious of how gay culture is simplified and objectified by AIDS related imagery. Jones expresses gay desire as something that needs to make its presence felt without offering itself up as a spectacle.

The instrumental form of the catalogue, and the systematic pattern of the braille, suggest the need to interpret and analyse the installation. Jones notes how people move back and forth searching for the dirty bits, as if trying to dissect the bodies in the photograph. In the end though, the work moves beyond this function and becomes sensuous in itself. Rather than impersonally objectifying something else, the text frustrates the pornographic desire for simple relationships with the world. The irregular use of possessive pronouns confuses subject positions, and the text begins and ends at the same place in the installation, leaving us to continually search for clarity. The audience is forced to stumble over their reading process. Orientations are

confused so that looking, touching, and reading correspond with a fragmented body, trying to reconstruct itself around the ambiguities of gay identity.

Traditional visual analyses negate the movement involved in an interaction with porn, so that the meaning of the image can be derived from a pre-constituted subject structure. Jones withdraws from the clarity demanded by this type of porn.



Mathew Jones *A Place I've Never Seen* 1993. Installation view Australian Centre for Photography.

His withdrawal doesn't enact the cum-shot as a climactic moment when everything is visible; the moment when ejaculation measures out one body as active and the other as passive. Jones' withdrawal produces an image which is more like a splotch that lubricates, but is also inseparable from, the fluctuating contours of interacting bodies.

Stephen O'Connell

notes

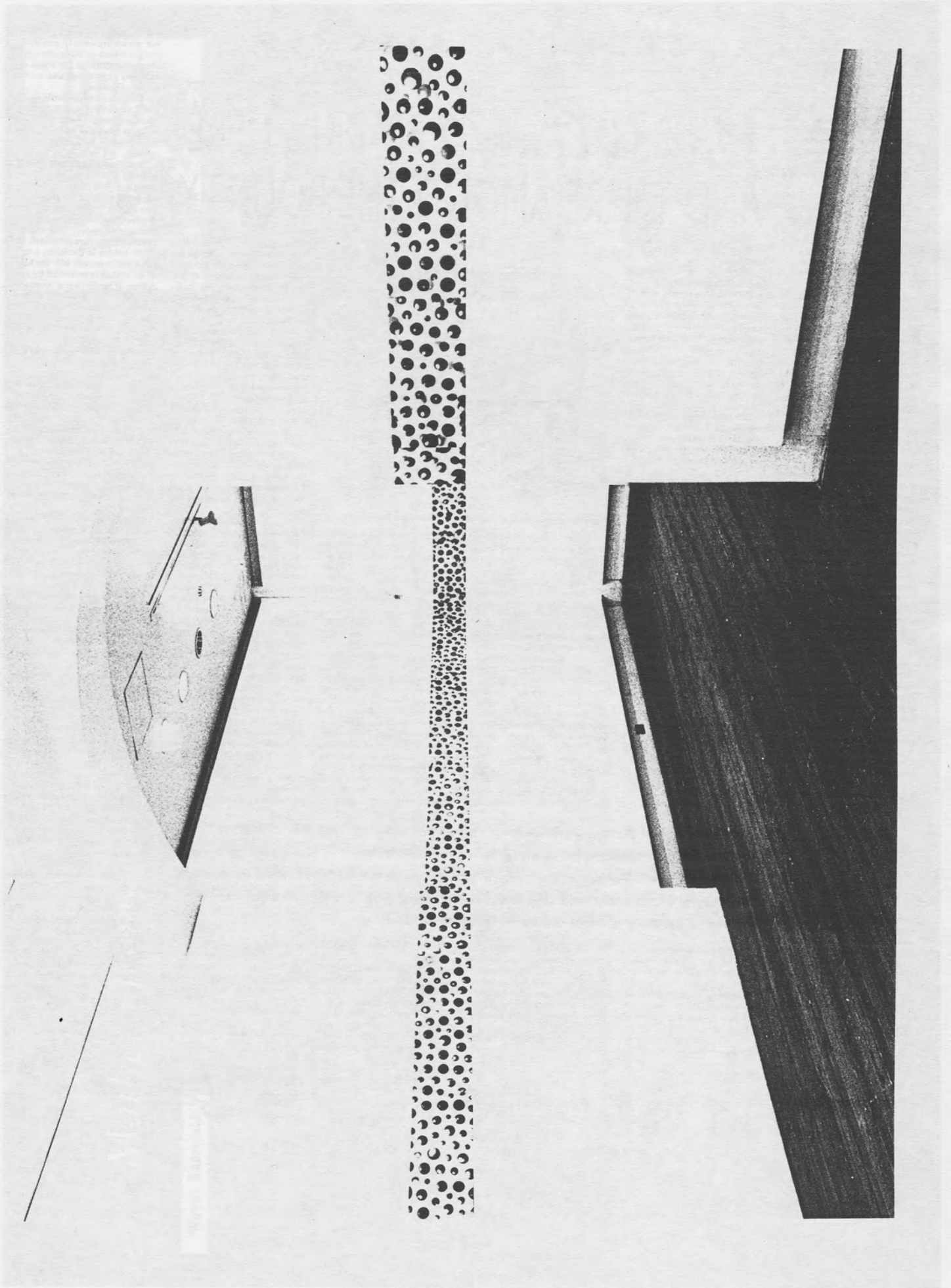
- 1 see David Phillips, 'Rhetorical Silence', *Eyeline* No.18, 1992, pp18-21; Carmela Baranowska, 'Mathew Jones', *Agenda* N.25, 1992, p31.
- 2 Mathew Jones, *To be illiterate is to be blind, or, Pulling out before cumming is not as safe as it looks, or, Getting off at Redfern*, Exhibition Catalogue, Linden Gallery, Melbourne, 1992.
- 3 In the process Jones usurps the feminist notion of the invisibility of women's sexuality.
- 4 Gilles Deleuze, 'Coldness and Cru-

elty' in *Masochism* (with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, 'Venus in Furs') J. McNeil trans., Zone Books, New York, 1989.

5 *ibid.*, p22.

6 Laura Mulvey, 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' (1975), in *Art after Modernism*, B. Wallis ed., The New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p373.

7 Examples include Graeme Hare's scratchy processing and gum bichromate prints, Rosalind Drummond's blurred photographs and the grungy photographs of Bronwyn Clarke-Coolce, Melinda Harper and Rose Nolan.



BRUSH ★ STROKES

With Leigh Raymond

THE RANGE AND DEPTH OF THE visual arts program of this year's Mardi Gras Festival represents a significant new cultural development for the gay and lesbian communities.

There were more exhibitions (depending on exactly what you mean by an exhibition, somewhere around 20) more works and more practising artists shown than ever before.

But with this bounty comes a general failure by the works to address some of the larger issues of art, politics and culture; the somewhat surprising marginalisation of AIDS as a topic of representation; and a sense that many of those who contributed had not made works especially for Mardi Gras but — as it were — took pieces off the shelf.

In some ways this contributed to a lack of excitement about much of the work. Some showed what were small samplings or mini-retrospectives of their work, in principle no bad thing, but in practice it meant the offerings were affirmations of a place in or an acknowledgment of being part of gay and lesbian artistic communities, rather than newly made art which addressed issues in gay and lesbian culture in new and exciting ways.

Undeniably, that affirmation of place and recognition are an important part of what exhibiting in Mardi Gras means — it is one of the ways in which Mardi Gras functions as a community arts movement — but exhibitions which consisted of new work, Playford and Tilden's *A Twist of Lemon* at the Glass Artists Gallery for example, had a sparkle and an interest which some of the other shows lacked.

By way of contrast, the Parade and Party — while they're not actually part of the visual or performing arts programs — need to be acknowledged as the great art objects of Mardi Gras, around which and through whose contested meanings the nature of gayness and lesbianness are most publicly defined today in Sydney. And they always manage to be spellbinding.

Institutionally, the visual arts program had one major weakness, which was the fault not of Mardi Gras, but of Sydney's major public cultural institutions.

The only major public museum or gallery which acknowledged the Mardi Gras (and this year I think for the first time) was the Powerhouse. It showed Brian Ross's 'Chandelier' costume and provided him with a public space to make his costume for this year's parade on two consecutive Sundays.

Now given the popularity of the Mardi Gras it would seem an ideal opportunity for the Powerhouse to capitalise on this promising beginning and to plan a major exhibition on Mardi Gras, not a shoebox sized temporary exhibition, but something on the scale of their current exhibition on the Fifties.

The other major public art galleries and exhibition spaces, the Museum of Contemporary Art, the State Library, the Australian Museum and the Art Gallery of

NSW, continue to ignore the Mardi Gras.

Why? What are they planning for Mardi Gras next year?

Half a million people, including many interstate and overseas tourists, would be keen to know soon; and others in the community are growing increasingly concerned about the lack of representation of gay and lesbian material in major public exhibitions and collections. What are these institutions doing to address this issue?

One of the useful things which such institutions are well placed to take up is international exhibitions. We have not yet had an international touring exhibition for Mardi Gras. But this year, we have had an interstate touring exhibition (I think the first — *You are Here* at Macdonald Street Galleries, an exhibition of 12 gay male artists, curated by Scott Redford and Luke Roberts, and accompanied by a catalogue with a number of substantial essays) as well as work exhibited by a number of interstate artists.

While the large public galleries have not yet addressed Mardi Gras smaller specialised public galleries namely the Australian Centre for Photography and the Performance Space have participated in Mardi Gras.

An interesting group of commercial galleries also took part (including the Macdonald Street Galleries, Ten Taylor Street Galleries, First Draft West, the James Harvey Gallery and Barry Stern) as well as non-gallery spaces — warehouses, bars and cafes.

These non-gallery spaces can sometimes compromise the showing of the works through poor lighting or other distractions; but

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equally, by taking art into community spaces it gives the works an audience and position outside the gallery system which helps to develop community-based art and may mean that the works are in fact seen by many more people than would otherwise be the case.

Putting the community art show in a space where Mardi Gras



From Silence=Death series 1991 by Matthew Jones

tickets were being sold (the Pod Gallery) was a useful way of combining two purposes and creating an audience for the works.

Many of the exhibitions showed work both by lesbians and gay men; some were exclusively one or the other. In one respect men's and women's spaces showed quite different traditions of the meaning of spaces.

At the Warehouse, for example, where *Word of Mouth III* was showing, and at First Draft West, where there was a joint show by five women artists, organisers noted that they were spaces where women's art was being displayed, and places where certain kinds of reading were explicitly encouraged (warm, friendly, women-centred).

Both had showings in what might be called women's and men's spaces (the Bella Bar and

the Stronghold for example). The only useful conclusion to draw from this is that it is important for the visual arts program to use many spaces, to offer a diverse range of work, and to make the most appropriate space available to display work.

As a forum for community arts, the visual arts program

seemed to function particularly well. I don't know how many people in total attended the Warehouse (there were half a dozen other visitors when I went one afternoon, a good crowd I thought) but the Pod Gallery also had good audiences for the art both times I visited. And both the Warehouse and the Pod Gallery were crammed with work.

Many of the works there and in the commercial galleries were for sale; it would be interesting to know how successful the exhibitions have been commercially.

While many forms and media were represented — painting, video, photography, installation, sculpture, glass, ceramics among others — perhaps those with the greatest strength and interest are photography, painting and glass. (Although the installation at First Draft West is worthy of note.)

artists, among them Phillipa Playford and John Jenner (at the Inner Circle Gallery) also showed works which dealt with AIDS. The Quilt Project, our communities' other great community art work, it should be noted, held an open day.

It was interesting to see how people read John Jenner's collages as prompts or traces of memory of people who had died of AIDS, in much the same way as the Quilt functions (the making of panels is a different process).

But, unlike the parade which Parents FLAG reported had about half its participants involved in or representing AIDS issues or organisations, or the performing arts program where AIDS features directly or indirectly in many of the works, in the visual arts AIDS was comparatively speaking hardly dealt with at all.

The professional artists generally were more preoccupied, not with social or political questions, but with using art to address notions of gayness or lesbianness and the body (or bodies), and to raise issues about representation. Out of this set of preoccupations came a lot of fairly cool intellectual art, the fragmented post-modern body, some more successful than others.

The community art shows were less concerned with these ideas about art and far more with traditional concerns (portraits, landscapes, variations on abstract expressionism etc).

Against this, the sheer tacky exuberance of for example some of Playford's work, or the tortured zest of Craig Judd's figurative work (at Barry Stern) always pressing against the confines of the frame, had some of the energy and pleasure that other parts of

lesbian mothers. The photographs are unambiguously positive images which provide cheerful observations about the styles of different generations and social groups of women.

The most considerable work that I saw however in the entire visual arts program was Matthew Jones' *A Place I've Never Seen* at the Australian Centre for Photography.

Jones' work consists of a frieze of circles in blacks and greys about two hands high that ran around the larger space in the gallery. At first sight it looked merely like a decorative band of loud minimalist wallpaper. But closer examination revealed text in braille hidden in the frieze, a text you could trace out with the help of an alphabet provided by the gallery, if braille was a language you didn't know — and so you could trace out and follow the language around the room.

It was hard work. I stopped and lost my place. I found the punctuation idiosyncratic and the sentence construction too deliberately rhetorical.

But the work dealt with, in an uncompromisingly serious way, some of the larger questions and issues of representation. It posed the questions of what art — and art institutions — allowed you to see and to represent; it could be happily read platonically (the difference between truth and appearance); or post modernly (there is nothing but language and surface).

Moreover it was interactive and touchable, breaking the dominant ideology of the gallery which insists that the viewer and the object are linked only by looking. And for good measure it took as its subject porn.

If I were nominating one of the seminal works of the nineties for art from the foggy end of culture, it would be this one. Jones had other works on show as well, including some mock-ups of pages of *Our Rage*, criticising the assumptions that that magazine makes about gay culture.

But like much of the work that dealt with the media and representation, it locked itself into the codes and conventions of the media, a position that's always difficult to critique from, particularly in a gallery.

The representation of other cultures also found a place, however small, in these Mardi Gras exhibitions. The works of two artists stand out here: Arone Raymond Meeks at Barry Stern, and Hiram To at the Macdonald Street Galleries.

Meeks work is urban Aboriginal, using traditional techniques and approaches. To's installation positions changing images of Asian men under a regular pile of vanilla sliced white bread which sits above and closes off the upper edge of the images of the men. There are allusions to cariyatids, to imaging in another's shadow. Beside the slide show screen is a partly unpacked mass-produced Asian ceramic foodware collection (cultural and economic exchange, something as yet unused, meals and social life as yet unmade). A resonant work.

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THE VOICE I AM NOT Mathew Jones

Wayne Baerwaldt

A search for the authorial and authorizing voice is a fixture of identity discourses and the political economy of all discourses in contemporary art.¹ It is a concern of special interest to minority groups as well as spokespersons for the otherwise anonymous masses—none is exclusive or without persistent challenges to its claims to empowerment. The American artist Jimmie Durham has fought for decades to rehistoricize Native American cultural struggles in the face of domineering liberal institutions of higher learning such as the Smithsonian Institute. Durham knows that to gain control of individual and group voices is tantamount to normalizing those voices but is no guarantee to maintaining control of the voices. A paper he wrote and published in 1974, "American Indian Culture: Traditionalism and Spiritualism in a Revolutionary Struggle," contained the rhetoric of international Marxist liberation movements, including "the vocabulary in use then-'winning,' 'seizing power,' 'by any means necessary.'"² Just how complicated and volatile is the process of establishing the authorizing voice becomes clear in Durham's notes on the paper's introduction to free America:

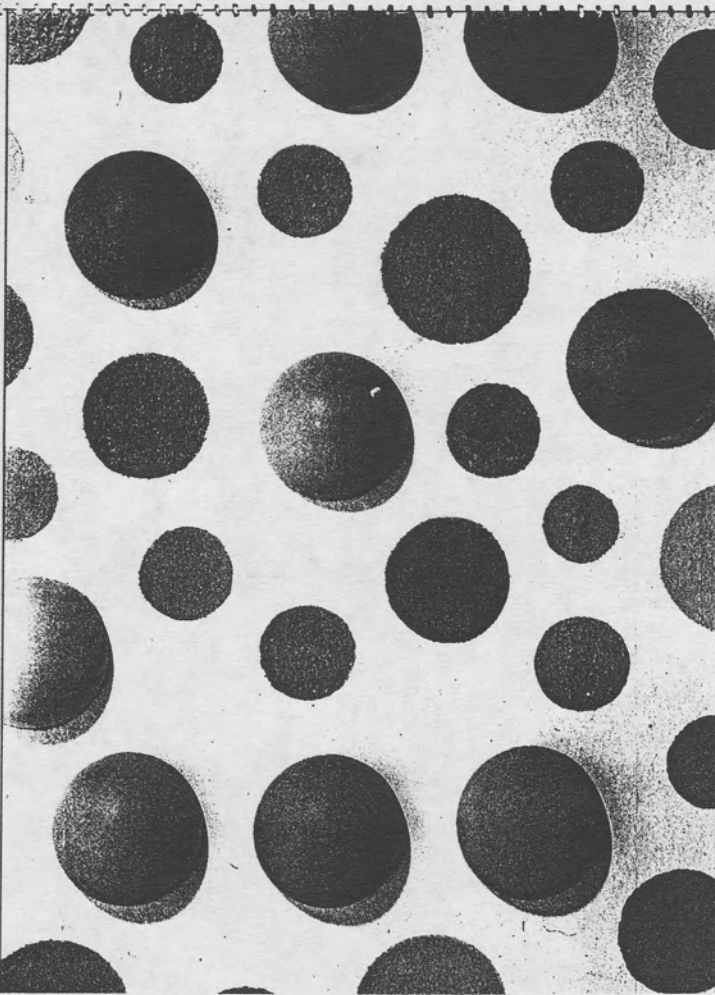
But the paper was a mistake. The FBI took it, doctored it, and distributed it to all the tribal councils to prove that AIM (American Indian Movement) was "infiltrated" by communists! Allen White Lightning and others said to me, "Well, what do you think would happen?" Even without the FBI, the paper would have been divisive. I wrote it for white leftists, taking a strange kind of distance from Indian people.... No one, however, instructed me to write the way I wrote.³

Since that encounter Durham has continued to work independently and in American cultural institutions to collect dissident and largely absent voices of Native Americans and compare their voices to "official" voices (e.g., the majority of voices in the Smithsonian magazine). His task has always been to recognize that in the American "process of self-realization and self-recognition, the nation has had to reconcile its narrative—of religious freedom, liberty and justice for all, success through hard work—with its actuality of intolerance and violent aggression." By necessity the authorizing voice must be masked, and Durham's voice acts to counter disciplinary control.

The Australian artist Mathew Jones has also consistently moved against authorial voices of disciplinary control but by other means—silence, refusal or parody. In a 1991 exhibition Jones confronted and analyzed the hyper-politically-correct and culturally imperialist slogans of the American ACT UP movement as its influence swept into Australia. ACT UP has maintained a vociferous attack on inefficient and malicious government and private interests involved in the AIDS epidemic. ACT UP's graphic slogans such as "Silence = Death" are now commonplace in the United States, Canada and elsewhere (in various languages) but its immutable declaration was problematic for Jones since, as Juan Davila points out, "The campaign has a goal that overdetermines its progress, thus assuming a concept of history that is universal and unified."⁴ The slogans were static and unacceptable outside their New York or American sources in commercial advertising/sloganeering. In response Jones' gallery installation mediated this refusal by presenting the text pieces: DISCOURSE = DEFENCE; DEFENCE = DISEASE; and DISEASE = DISCOURSE. Davila suggests:



From exhibition catalogue, *Silence = death, or the lifetime of the contemporary homosexual*, 1991



To Be Illiterate Is To Be Blind...
Linden, Melbourne, 1992

Jones' quotation moves in a contrary way; it makes the slogan inoperative, weak, hesitant, non-efficient through irony. The epidemic might be the same in New York and Melbourne, but the cultural conditions that the slogan addresses are not. What could be read as a totalizing formula of an interventionist aesthetic is appropriated and transformed into "cultural discussion," a mediation of representation.... For Jones the reality of the object is not a continuum but a montage of signs, as his photos demonstrate. Reality for him already seems to be a semiotic version codified by the symbolic means of art. This opposes the commonplace, ideological, or mythical interpretations which the slogan pleads.⁵

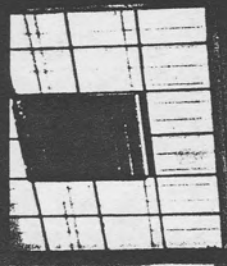
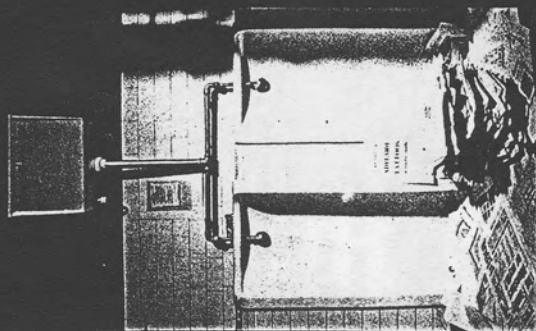
Jones infuses the "SILENCE" of "SILENCE = DEATH" with a more culturally specific mandate. The words "discourse," "defence," "disease," require specificity—a sense of place, subjects, active debate and analysis, degrees of difference—simply to incorporate the hybrid complexities that inform the work.

A subsequent project for Melbourne's Room 4, Linden in 1992 entitled, "To Be Illiterate Is To Be Blind, or, Pulling Out Before Cumming Is Not As Safe As It Looks, or Getting Off At Redfern," focused on the representation of an AIDS awareness campaign in Australia and constructed, in response, a private language of dissent. In 1990 ACON (AIDS Council of New South Wales) launched a summer AIDS program poster featuring an appropriated 1920s woodcut graphic depiction of a stocky, blindfolded worker/peasant walking off a cliff. The original Russian subtitle, "To be illiterate is to be blind" had been replaced with, "Pulling out before cumming is not as safe as it looks." The avant-garde political aspirations of the Australian government clearly backfired. The Russian literacy

campaign image may have suited the Russian *politburo* 70 years ago by suggesting that borders (cliffs) can be "read" as mere topographical barriers and effectively surmounted. A man walking off a cliff in relation to AIDS is more than an aesthetic shock to attention. The metaphorical barrier is deadly, a serious image that elicits more than a swift recoil. For Jones it acted as an index for recourse. On one wall he mounted a copy of the original Russian poster alongside the ACON graphic. On the opposite wall Jones introduced for the first time his tactile braille, a 12-centimetre wide strip composed of coloured spheres and painted, halved tennis balls fixed to the wall. A braille message read, "To be illiterate is to be blind (like love)" while the yellow-orange and purple-grey coloured dots were associated with charts for colour blindness. Again Jones adopted a strategy of encoded silence and presented an introspective political statement that hybridized his formalist aspirations with concerns for propaganda/politics. The artist was criticized at the time for producing "a reading camouflaged in the traditional guise of an earlier, modernist avant-garde, concerned as it is with the tenuous relationship between aesthetics and politics.... Skeptical of grander theoretical and practical claims, Jones' skepticism could, however, become ensnared in opposition for opposition's sake."⁶

It is precisely this grey area sensibility occupied by the mythical modernist avant-garde that Jones continues to mine and recontextualize. The artist maintains:

As with my previous work [*SILENCE = DEATH, To Be Illiterate...*] the proposed installation (*A Place I've Never Seen*) intervenes in these debates by means of opening and occupying a space inbetween the terms of its debate. Whether the proposed work is photographic or literary,



Adelaide Tattoos,
Installation Views,
1994

whether the invisible is *or* is not made explicit, whether the "photo" is to be read with the eye or the body all remain unresolvable questions.

What appears to be emerging as a strategy or methodology is the abandonment of a logical syntactical sequence of meaning, a straight causal line. There is an alchemical reference that suggests meaning (ideology) and representational form (aesthetics) proceed in circular motions instead of straight lines. Both alchemy and *To Be Illiterate*... are concerned with becoming aware of a wholeness which is presented in and through analogies along a subliminal current, at least to the point of purification and, ideally, restitution.

As a participant in the 1994 Adelaide Festival of Arts (Adelaide Installations section), Jones occupied a broken-down men's toilet on the first floor of a disused old warehouse. The dirty urinals and sinks of the dimly lit, out of the way space completed an ideal fantasy room for men with an interest in public and semi-public sex. (Whatever Jones produces, he begins with with a sex-positive forum for subjects considered taboo by mainstream Australian society.) Again he transformed and magnified an authorial voice by underscoring the innocent silence of the toilet. A parallel silence (of guilt) had infested the Adelaide Police Department, as it was known nationally as a safe zone for queer bashers on the force.⁷

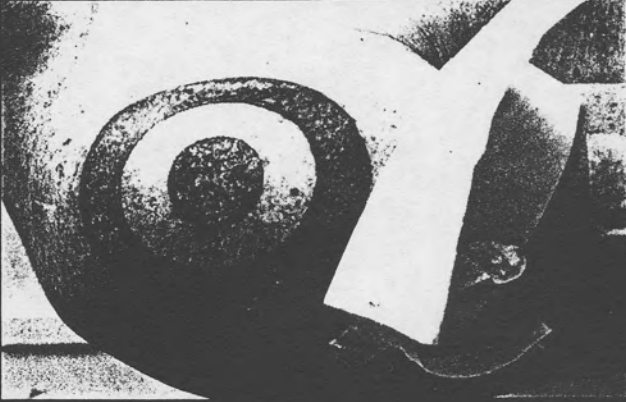
A string of grisly murders of adolescents and young men in public parks had taken place over the last 23 years and shoddy clandestine investigations had proved fruitless. Usually young men were brutalized, which somehow led police to believe it was the work of a pederast. By the press's twisted logic all queers were suspect as part of a "family." Public debates did not take place. Independent investigations were never launched, adding to Adelaide's reputation as the queer-bashing capital of Australia.

To enter Jones' installation (entitled *Adelaide Tattoos*), the viewer was forced to follow large black letters of A-D-E-L-A-I-D-E T-A-T-T-O-O-S applied to a zig-zagging paneled hoarding immediately outside and leading into the men's room. The allusion to dark labyrinthine corners of the unknown was unmistakable. Inside Jones had assembled piles of photocopies, including maps of downtown Adelaide, fake newspaper articles on gay bashing, personal ads for men to be tattooed and a roughly drawn cartoon of three footballers engaged in oral/anal sex (parody of a scrum?) which was found posted to a wall on the building's third floor. Thousands of copies were distributed in the toilet, encouraging viewers to participate in mouthing the words of the newspaper articles, fingering the map to locate a popular bar or alley where one of the advertised "tattooed men" might be found. Jones had collaborated with four men (who remain anonymous) to compose and produce tattoos commemorating the years of gay anxiety, police ineptitude and media hysteria. Official reactions in Adelaide were predictable—Adelaide Festival committee officers got libel chill since the footballers in the comic were recognized locals, while the media maintained a homophobic blanket of silence.

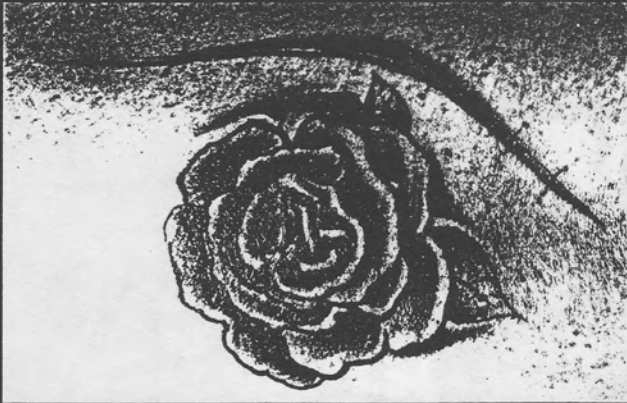
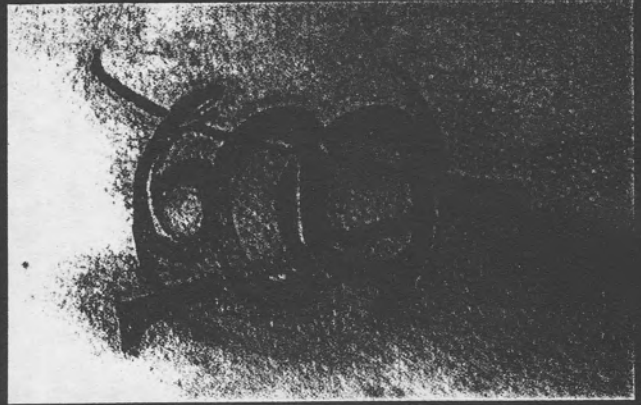
While Jones could have reduced the important social relations of *Adelaide Tattoos* to power relations—by analyzing imposed orders, hierarchies and lines of force—the results would have been too mechanical, too one-dimensional as an account of complex social phenomena. Instead, what he offered by his insistence to commemorate (not investigate) was a quest for signs of authenticity and inauthenticity in expressing gay identity that empowered a compelling aesthetic signature and replaced overwrought ideological posturing.

A Place I've Never Seen II for Dark O'Clock is a 4.5 metre bromide with a circular pattern, first presented at the Australian

Design: D. McDiarmid



Design: M. Jones



*Acetate Tattoos (details), all
1994. Design: D. Warner & M. Jones,
1994*



Design: D. Warner & M. Jones

Centre for Photography, Sydney, in 1992. Photocopied in 1.5 metre lengths (modular, suggesting infinity) the 12 centimetre wide strips are pasted directly on the wall. Painted polystyrene braille of varying diameters are glued to the wallpaper. The circular Portuguese (for Brazil only) braille text translates to English as:

THIS PHOTOGRAPH OF MY LOVER COCK LOST IN A PLACE I'VE NEVER SEEN THIS PHOTO OF HIS ARSE OF MINE DISTENDED BY COCK WET WITH CUM YOU CAN'T SEE

Jones claims its ungrammatical confusion of possessive pronouns avoids the gender-surrogate of passive/active yet identifies itself as pornographic. The work is pornographic in nature but self-consciously it spirals away from a volatile position on pornography and voyeurism since ideology cannot affix meaning without consensus. What develops is a circular *exposé* of expert knowledge and institutionalized power by unauthorized social practice, further defended in Jones' conceptual statement:

The installation relies on the context of contemporary photographic theory for an informed reading, in particular, debates centered around pornography. It introduces to this discourse's imaging of male sexuality the very perspective of the self-identifying gay male subject.... A central argument for feminist attacks on pornography is that of voyeurism—the spectator being positioned outside the image and controlling it. In this installation both identities within the "photo" and between the "photo" and the viewer are confused and subverted by the pleasure of the game and the participation of the viewer's body in constructing meaning from this "photograph."

Mathew Jones promotes an alternative, strategic approach to commenting on and assuming the author's voice and the shifting values of that voice. He prefers silence, refusal or parody and what Juan Davila has cited as the "refusal against the orthodoxies of the gay pictorial discourse" that are already fossilized as the ideology of dissent. What Jones provides is a strategy of personal, intuitive motives and new forms of representation to address an elusive reality, attempting to pinpoint an unstable field of sexual politics.

ENDNOTES:

- 1 Michel Foucault, *The Archeology of Knowledge* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1982).
- 2 Jimmie Durham, *A Certain Lack of Coherence - Writing on Art and Cultural Politics* (London: Kala Press, 1993): vii.
- 3 *Ibid.*, vii, viii.
- 4 Juan Davila, "Deathwatch - AIDS and Silence." in *Art & Text*, #40 (1991): 33.
- 5 *Ibid.*: 33,34.
- 6 Carmela Baranowska, "Mathew Jones - To Be Illiterate..." (unpublished essay, 1992).
- 7 The Torrens River murder of a Dr. George Duncan in Adelaide in 1972 is commonly attributed to vindictive policemen who beat the doctor on a river bank before dragging him into the river to die.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- Helen Back. "The Last Word in Queer Art." catalogue essays for *Poof*, curated by Clare Williamson. Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1993.
- Paul Foss. "The Nimbus of the Sexual." catalogue essay for *POOF*, curated by Clare Williamson. Melbourne: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 1993.
- David M. Halperin. *The Describable Life of Michel Foucault*. Unpublished manuscript, 1994.
- Stuart Koop. "Adelaide Tattoos." Unpublished essay, 1994.
- Stephen O'Connell. "Mathew Jones." *Art & Text* #43 (1992): 76.

268,029: BIGGEST SELLING PAPER IN SA

Sunday Mail

ADELAIDE: September 17, 1994

MIDNIGHT



WHO'S NEXT?

another
rest
far
net
ses
'The
lily'

Adelaide Tattoos:

Legal person	Courier	Medical practitioner	Taxi driver	Gay community spokesperson

art event or myth?

The Adelaide Tattoos project is a multi-faceted initiative that aims to raise awareness of the gay and lesbian community in Adelaide. The project is a collaboration between the Adelaide Festival Centre and the Adelaide Community Centre. It is a project that is both educational and artistic. It is a project that is both a challenge and an opportunity. It is a project that is both a dream and a reality. It is a project that is both a goal and a journey. It is a project that is both a vision and a mission. It is a project that is both a hope and a promise. It is a project that is both a dream and a reality. It is a project that is both a goal and a journey. It is a project that is both a vision and a mission. It is a project that is both a hope and a promise.

*268,029: BIGGEST SELLING PAPER IN SA

Sunday Mail

ADELAIDE: August 20, 1993

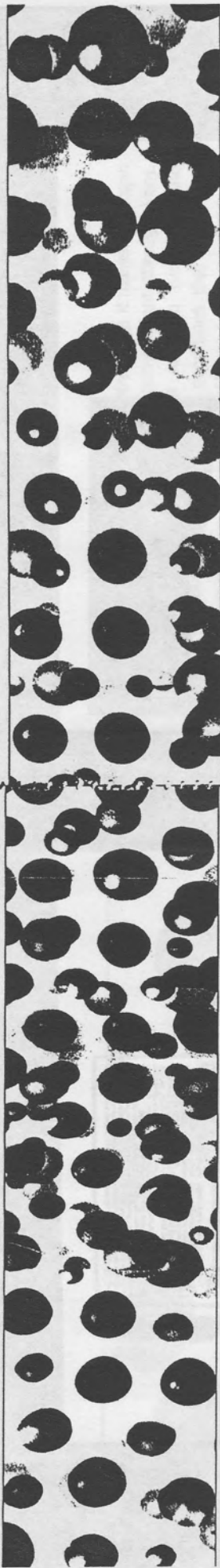
CITY-STATE



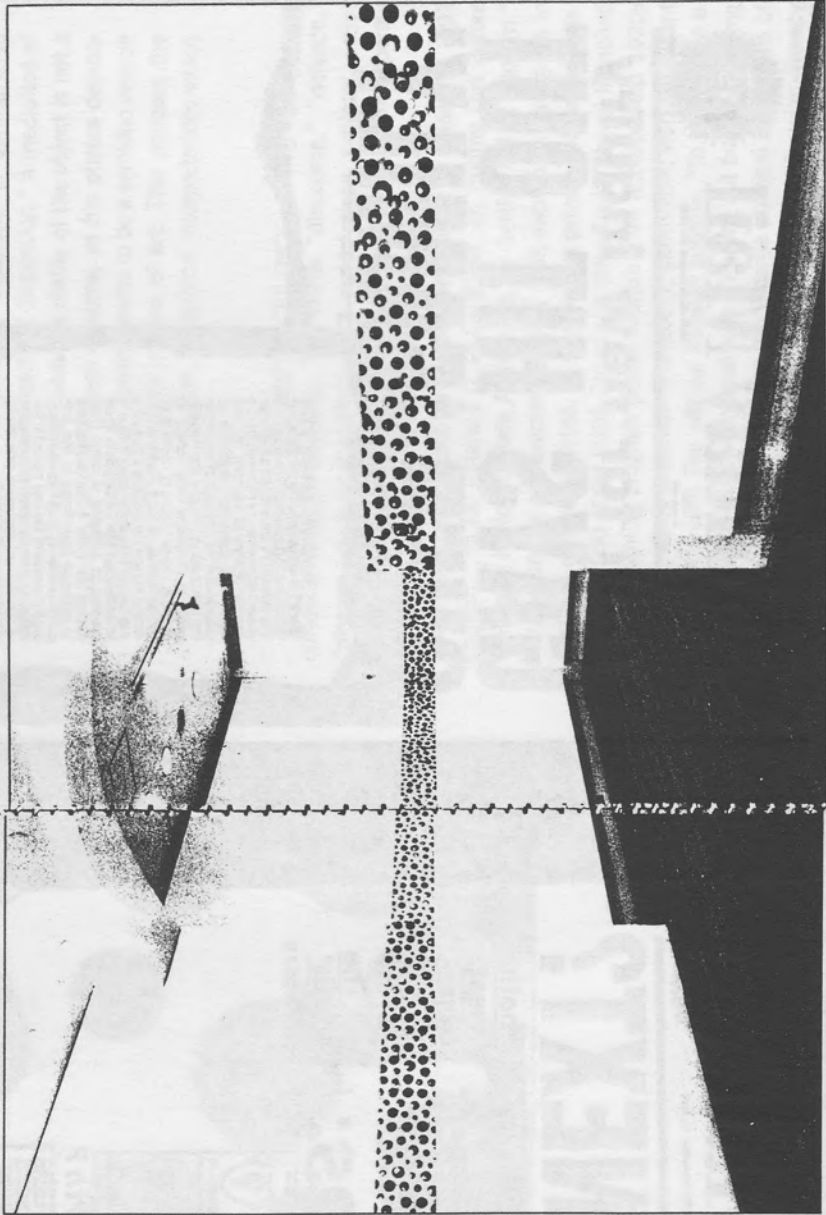
Call for new inquiry GAYS HIT OUT OVER 'FAMILY'

Adelaide Tattoos ('The Work') is defined as the Artist's undertaking to find up to five men (the participants) to design and receive a tattoo design relevant to the social history of violence by and against gay men in the Adelaide area, to assist the Participants in researching this history, to assist the Participants in designing their tattoo, to assist in the provision of the cost of the execution of each Participant's tattoo, to assist the Participants to obtain a tattoo, and to assist the Participants to present in Adelaide at some time during the 1994 Adelaide Festival, to generate knowledge in the Adelaide community of this undertaking by means of textual material installed in the venue and photographs of the tattoos' execution printed in the catalogue Volume 2.

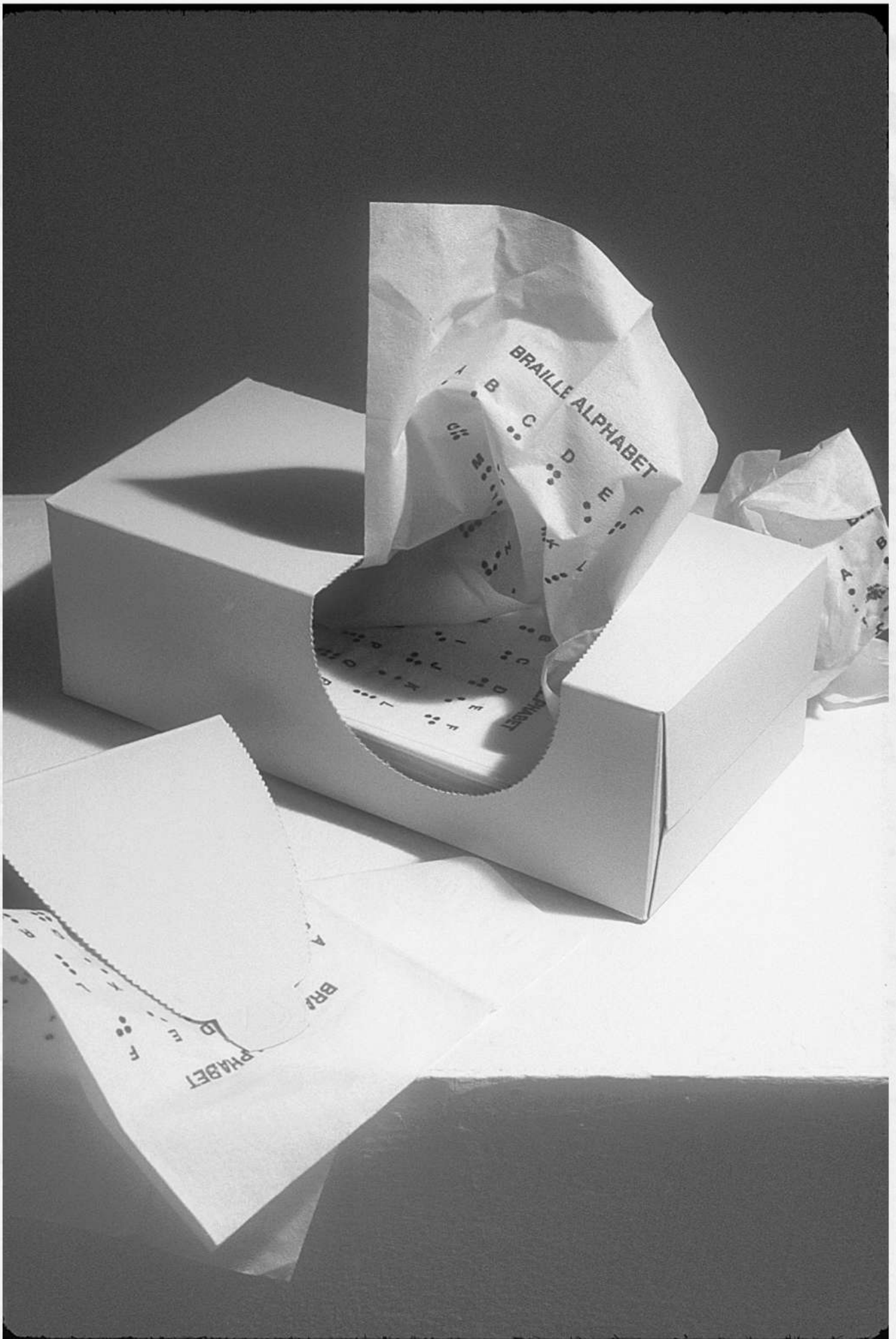
Adelaide Tattoos, xeroxed handbills, 20 x 31cm, 1994



A Place I've Never Seen
(detail), 1992



A Place I've Never Seen,
installation view, 1992



BRAILLE ALPHABET

A B C D E F

BRAILLE ALPHABET

BRAILLE ALPHABET

BRAILLE

Segunda-feira, 10-10-94

A partir de hoje o Museu de Arte Moderna de São Paulo será invadido por trabalhos de artistas emergentes, quatro canadenses e um australiano, que se inserem na atual pesquisa artística relacionada a questões do corpo. A exposição, **Dark O'Clock**, será inaugurada juntamente com a coletiva **Espelhos e Sombras**, com 23 artistas brasileiros que trabalham as mesmas questões.

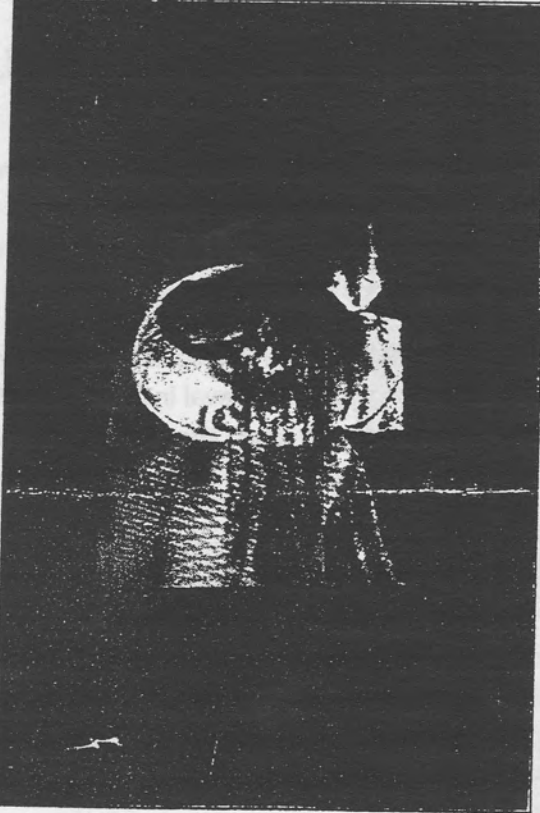
Os artistas de **Dark O'Clock** não estão interessados em criar uma arte política. Muito mais ligados em pesquisas estéticas, utilizam referências diversas da vida contemporânea como base para as obras. É bastante sutil o modo como o grupo trabalha as questões do corpo. De forma indireta, os artistas desequilibram estruturas rígidas de valores culturais e sociais, e desenvolvem um questionamento sobre o corpo. Prazer, sexo, culpa e estranheza formam as bases desse discurso.

Segundo o curador da mostra, o canadense Wayne Baerwaldt, os artistas, com idades que variam entre 33 e 45, representam um novo pensamento nas artes plásticas. "A arte política se esgotou. Os artistas hoje buscam novas abordagens".

O australiano Mathew Jones, 33 anos, trabalha com aspectos da sexualidade e da raça. Criando obras interativas, o artista sempre requisita a participação do espectador. Na exposição, Jones mostra o trabalho "A Place I've Never Seen" (Um Lugar que Nunca Vi Antes). Utilizando-se de frases como esta,

SEXO, PRAZER E CULPA NA ARTE DE DUAS COLETIVAS.

Nas mostras "Dark O'Clock", com artistas canadenses e um australiano, e "Espelhos e Sombras", com brasileiros, ambas no MAM.



"Orderly", vídeo de Doug Ischar na mostra "Dark O'Clock", no MAM.

Jones convida o espectador a pensar sobre temas pouco abordados, como a homossexualidade. Este é o assunto de seu trabalho na exposição. Ao entrar na sala, o público se depara com uma faixa de papel colada hori-

zontalmente na parede. O papel contém milhares de bolas pretas desenhadas, que cobrem a superfície branca do papel. Em cima de alguns desses desenhos o artista colou bolas tridimensionais, posicionadas de forma a

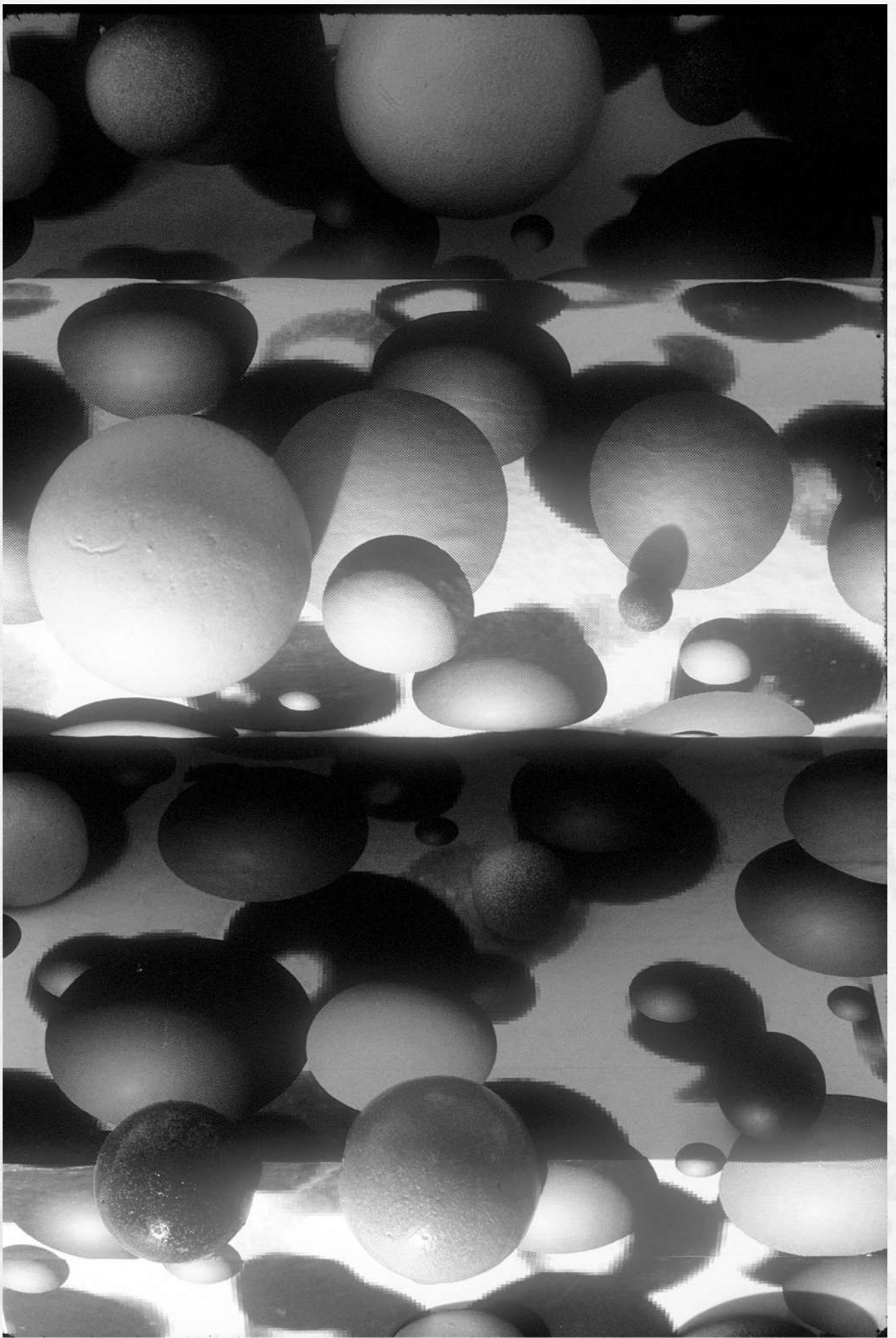
representarem letras em braille. "O espectador pode apanhar um mapinha na entrada da sala e, ao tocar a seqüência das bolas, ler o que escrevi", conta.

Wanda Koop é conhecida por suas pinturas de grandes dimensões. Os trabalhos demonstram seu interesse pelo fluxo contínuo de imagens que a mídia nos impõe. Depois de apropriadas as imagens, a artista cria uma nova visão, reorganizando as informações coletadas. Na exposição ela mostra uma seleção editada de "Video Scroll Poems" (Poemas Contínuos em Vídeo), uma apresentação vertical de quatro imagens de vídeo impressas em papel termo-sensitivo. As imagens foram retiradas de sua coleção de documentários em vídeo.

Glenn Ligon faz pinturas de textos contínuos que investigam como os contatos homossexuais e heterossexuais convivem em um mesmo ambiente. O artista preparou para a exposição uma série de fotografias feitas em áreas de concentração gay em São Paulo. Doug Ischar faz uso de filme e projeções de vídeo, fotografias e outros objetos para analisar criticamente aspectos da família americana dos anos 50 ou encenações militares. Stephen Andrews trabalha com formas corporais abstratas e cópias alteradas de sonetos de amor de Shakespeare.

Geórgia Lobacheff

Dark O'Clock - Abertura hoje às 19h no MAM. End: Parque do Ibirapuera, entrada pelo portão 3. Tel: 549-9688. De 3ª a 6ª das 13h às 19h. Sábados e domingos das 11h às 18h. Entrada: R\$ 1.



MEDIA RELEASE: August 21, 1995

MATHEW JONES
A Place I've Never Seen

Gallery TPW

September 9 - October 14

Opening reception with the artist: Saturday, September 9, 2-5 pm

This Image Must Be Read In The Flesh!

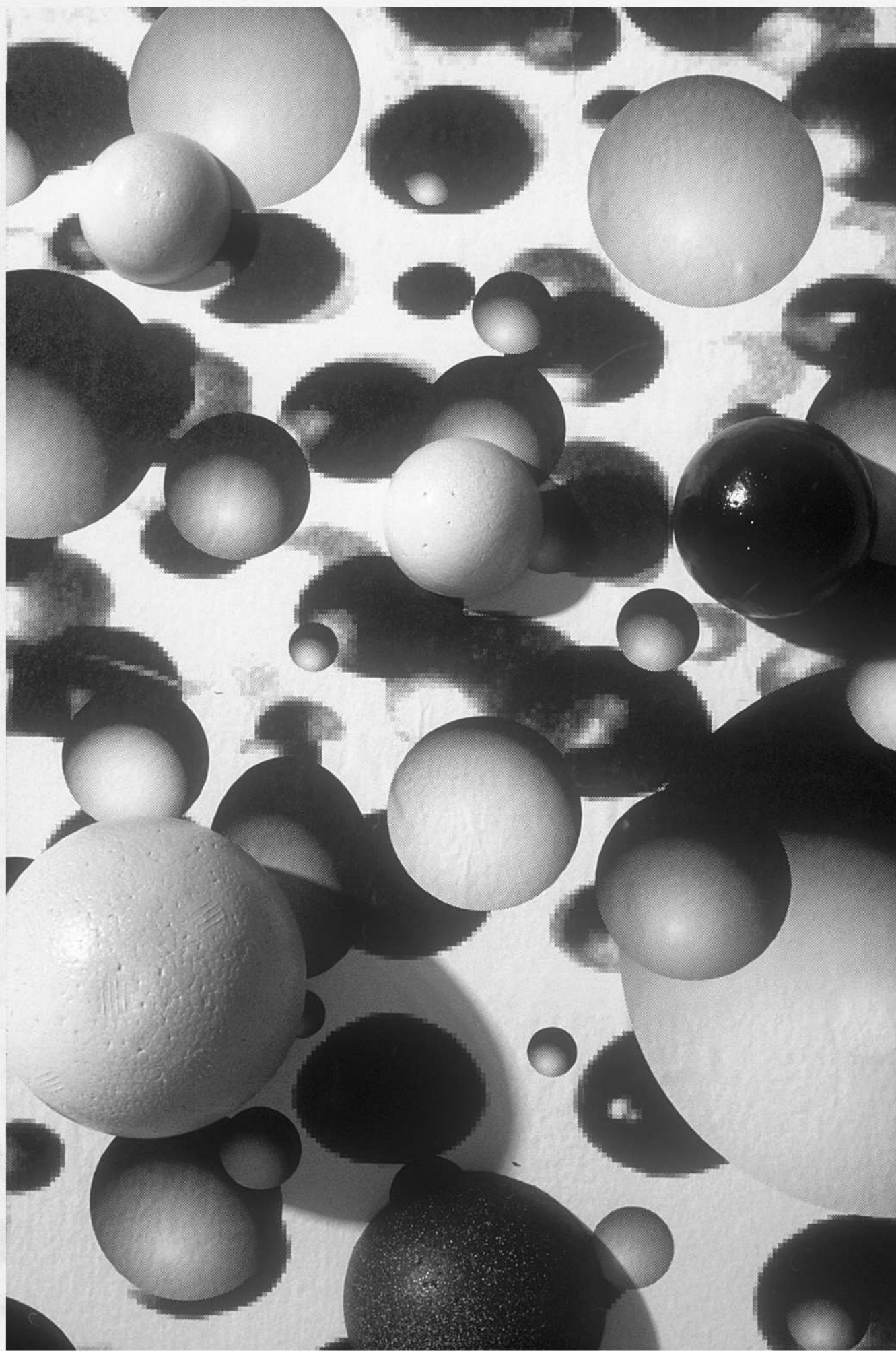
In his first solo exhibition in Canada, Mathew Jones presents *A Place I've Never Seen*, a work which describes in braille a photograph of two men having sex. 120 feet of large three-dimensional dots around the gallery walls invite touch and must be read with both hands, if not the whole body, in order to be deciphered.

By using braille, Jones challenges prohibitions on the public display of pornography and raises questions about the privileging of the visual in the construction of social identities, desire and sexual pleasure. By incorporating touch into reading an image of men having sex, Jones expresses gay desire as something that needs to make its presence felt without offering itself up as spectacle.

Mathew Jones is a Sydney, Australia based artist. He has exhibited extensively in Australia including the Roslyn Oxley Gallery, Sydney, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne and Canberra Contemporary Artspace, Canberra. *A Place I've Never Seen* has also been exhibited at the Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo, Sao Paulo, Brazil, Ace Art, Winnipeg and the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney. Jones received his BFA at Victorian College of the Arts in Melbourne and is represented by Tolarno Gallery, Melbourne and Roslyn Oxley Gallery, Sydney.

The Toronto Photographers Workshop is a non-profit artist run centre dedicated to promoting and supporting artistic practice that critically engages the medium of photography through exhibitions, publications, lectures and special events. Gallery TPW is located at 80 Spadina Avenue, Suite 310 and is open Tuesday through Saturday from noon to 5 pm.

Mathew Jones will be in Toronto and available for interviews September 1 - 9. For more information please contact Kim Fullerton, Program Coordinator or Robyn Rogers, Program Assistant at (416) 504-4242.



A PLACE I'VE NEVER SEEN

This will be the fifth time I have worked through this installation - the fifth time in five years, five cities and three countries - you would think I'd have it down pat. But every time it comes out different. Largely due to circumstance, partly by design; not so much testament to the infinite richness of my imagination as it is proof that I just can't seem to get it right. Because despite its clean neat minimal aesthetic, this work is more or less a total mess. The ideas that shaped its construction, ideas now illegible and lost save for traces of tension or awkwardness in the tangled product, were always far more irresolvable than any of my calculations.

Whilst, nowadays, people analyse the second wave of the AIDS epidemic, back in 1990 the reasons for that second wave were just an undercurrent, a vague turbulence reacting to the first. Back then, nothing pissed me off more than the way semi governmental 'gay community' AIDS organisations hand in hand with the media were reshaping my self image, surveying and proscribing the nature of gay identity - sanitising and homogenising the image of the gay man under the moral imperative of health care - until eventually I felt quite estranged from that identity.

In the preceding year, in Melbourne, I had participated in one of those endless surveys that gay men have grown used to. This time it was "examining the thought processes that enable gay men to decide to have unsafe sex in a given sexual encounter".¹ This one truly was endless, at least the questions seemed to go on forever, but when finally all the questions had been asked of all the men, and all the statistics had been collated, four specific causes were identified and the advertising boys got to work. As part of its Education and Awareness Summer 1990 Campaign, the AIDS Council of NSW (ACON) produced four images distributed as posters, postcards, on T- Shirts, and as a wrap-around on the Sydney Star Observer (a fortnightly free community newspaper). One of these images was of a blindfolded man walking off a cliff and was captioned, '*Pulling Out Before Cumming Is Not As Safe As It Looks.*' It was intended to clarify misconceptions about anal intercourse.

Any clarity eluded me. I couldn't work out why it said 'Not as safe as it looks' rather than 'Not as safe as you think' and I had no idea what a blindfolded man walking off a cliff had to do with anal intercourse. This choice of image didn't seem to be explicit in either an educative nor an attention grabbing way. What prompted this strange parallel? What did it achieve? Then one day, by complete accident, I stumbled across what must have been the origin for this image in particular, and in its graphic woodcut style, the primary source for the whole campaign. It

was an obscure USSR literacy poster of the early 1920's designed by A Radakov. This original poster was captioned - '*To Be Illiterate Is To Be Blind : on all sides lurk failure and unhappiness.*'

The appropriation was beautifully complete save for minor charming changes - crude sandals had become Doc Martens, leggings transformed into 501's, the beard and long hair gave way to a clean shave and crew cut, whilst the tunic had shrunk to a tight white T-shirt with sleeves ever so slightly rolled.

My discovery just made things worse, because I didn't understand the literacy poster either. I didn't understand what a blindfolded man walking off a cliff had to do with literacy; nor why someone couldn't be fully sighted and illiterate; nor what sense this poster was meant to make to the illiterate anyway! And what's so illiterate about being blind - there's braille - besides which there's all kinds of blindness, there's colour blind and form blind and degrees of both. And above all, I didn't understand what literacy had to do with anal sex.

Except perhaps that just as the ACON poster is about cumming and precum and when someone's cock is inside or outside you, the USSR poster with its strange conflation of illiteracy with blindness, of the linguistic and the scopic, is also about the function of language in fabricating boundaries or borders - dangerous cliffs and corrals of supposed safety - inside/outside, safe/unsafe, I've cum/not yet. It seemed a conspiracy between descriptive systems against which I immediately rebelled - if these borders have to be imposed, I thought, well then put me on the other side of safe.

Throughout the 80's there was much debate about the gay porn industry and whether its video and photographic forms contributed to, or undermined, efforts to encourage safe sex practises. At the time it was often noted with some relief by right minded people that gay porn always did and always had, long before anyone talked about AIDS, rely on the cum shot as the only possible narrative climax. No matter how staged it was, no matter how many takes it took, your star stud had to appear to pull out before cumming. There is simply no other visual notation for (gay) masculine orgasmic pleasure than that projectile suppuration splattering down the outside of some other (man's) body. There is no way of visually telling the pleasure of getting fucked up the arse, or of another guy's climax inside you - the average video or 35mm camera just won't fit, at least not whilst you've got company.

The well worn idea of photography as an inadequate descriptive system should be no more shocking than the suggestion that text sometimes fails us, or that slow dawning realisation in each queen's life that porn just isn't the real world. But that discrepancy between one gay man's experience of his own (and another's) body and the means he has to

denote that experience offers a challenge - it opens up a space within that strange conflation of literacy, blindness and arse fucking, a territory which 'A Place I've Never Seen' attempts to occupy. Its title refers not so much to moral prohibition of what may be seen as it does to the definitional limits of what can be seen.

The borders of that territory are shifty. Indeed, whether or not this work remains within the definitional limits either of photography or of pornography is necessarily moot.

Its visual effect, at first a seduction and then a frustrating camouflage, is non-referential.² Or rather it is completely self-referential. Each little sphere in this chaotic multiplicity is merely a two-dimensional imaging of the physical nodules which comprise the language of braille. Altogether the jostling swarm evokes an exploded close up of the photochemical grain or the bromide's screen which, secretly, compose photographesis, the writing of light. Someone told me Blanchot spoke somewhere of a depthless depth which we experience with a certain proximity but no measurable distance, and in a sense it's true that this work acts as an horizon line opening up an illusionistic space beyond the room's existential coordinates. It's a trick of varying contrast on neighbouring forms, sometimes called aerial perspective, which they teach you in first year drawing class.

Perhaps it is enough to say that this work remains within the definitional boundaries of the photographic simply because the text itself says as much.

Similarly, I'd maintain that this work is pornographic simply because it fits the definition of porn which I like the best - an image or text designed to excite the body. Certainly, unless any given viewer feels that stimulus to engage with the braille, groping slowly round the room, physically implicated in the text's completion, the work remains something else altogether.

A very Deleuzian critic wrote at length about an earlier version of the work calling it 'pornologic' rather than 'pornographic' because instead of ordering and describing sexual activity it explores how desire and representation work.³ As Deleuze explains pornography it exists to be grasped readily; everything is "reduced to a few imperatives (do this, do that) followed by obscene descriptions."⁴ His understanding of pornography is associated with the feminist observation that certain forms of representation violently simplify the world and encourage the viewer to act in accordance. Critics of visual pornography who take their lead from Laura Mulvey's analysis of visual pleasure rely on the model of a scopophilic-voyeur in command of the woman-objects being represented. The voyeur is said to internalise this abstract structure and then project it

onto women in other contexts: Pornography is theory, rape is practise. Mulvey explains that this voyeuristic relationship is constructed by disavowing both "the material existence of the recording process [and] the critical reading of the spectator . . . in order to create a convincing world in which the spectator's surrogate can perform with verisimilitude."⁵

In distinction to this, Deleuze put forward the idea of a 'pornology' in order to recuperate the images of sex and violence that are found in the writings of Leopold von Sacher-Masoch and the Marquis de Sade. He argues that pornology produces an internal splitting of language such that it no longer functions to relate the reader to the world in any rudimentary way. It is "aimed above all at confronting language with its own limits, with what is in a sense a 'non-language' (violence that does not speak, eroticism that remains unspoken)."⁶

In the end though, the work moves beyond this function and becomes sensuous in itself. Rather than impersonally objectifying something else, the text frustrates the pornographic desire for simple relationships with the world, leaving us in continual search of linguistic clarity. Its irregular use of possessive pronouns confuses subject positions; it mimics those jump cuts in cheap printed porn where suddenly on turning the page you confront text from some other magazine altogether; and when finally we find ourselves where we began, if we haven't already lost our way, it reveals itself to be circular. The audience is forced to stumble over their reading process. Orientations are confused so that looking, touching, and reading correspond with a fragmented body, trying to reconstruct itself around the paradoxes of gay identity.

Mathew Jones, Sydney July '95

1. Ron Gold, 'Places, Times, Reasons revisited: Report on the Sydney study.', in *National AIDS Bulletin* Vol 5 #9 Oct 1991.

2. Over the years the work has changed. In the current version a panorama of the original installation (which was drawn with photograms on photographic paper) exists as a photographic view pixilated 'beneath' the computer generated forms.

3. Stephen O'Connell, 'A Place I've Never Seen.', in *Photofile* #39 1993. Large sections of the following quote and paraphrase directly from this article against the original author's intentions but with his happy consent - those Deleuzians!

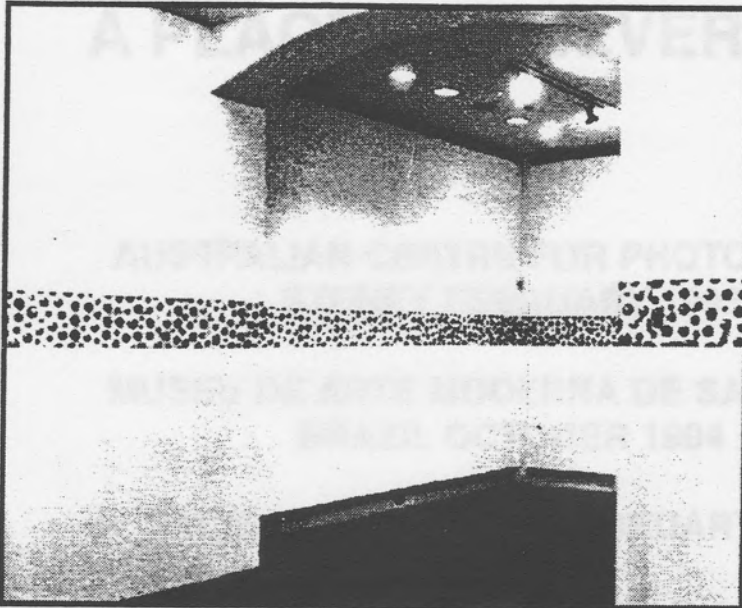
4. Gilles Deleuze, "Coldness and Cruelty" in *Masochism* (with Leopold von Sacher-Masoch, "Venus in Furs") trans. Jean McNeil. Zone Books, New York, 1989, p. 17.

5. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975), in *Art after Modernism*, Brian Wallis ed., the New Museum of Contemporary Art, New York, 1984, p.373.

6. Deleuze, op cit., p22.

Rectum raised to an artform

A Place I've Never Seen features a cum shot from the inside



SEEING IS BELIEVING. Mathew Jones's work is an exercise in touch and eroticism.

Review by David Mazerolle

Photo by Mathew Jones

you could say it's very cheeky of Australian visual artist Mathew Jones to name his latest exhibit *A Place I've Never Seen*. It refers to the inside of his ass.

The work is on photographic paper, yet is not photography. It describes a pornographic image, yet it's not pornographic. Indeed, Jones has stylized visual erotica into a process to be discovered through touch and not sight.

Jones has generated digitized images of circles on photo paper about the same size as regular writ-

ing paper. Each sheet is arranged into a continuous band all the way around the gallery walls, much like one of those groovy wall graphics in a swingin' 1970s bachelor pad.

By attaching small, black, plaster hemispheres to the band of circles, Jones has spelled out in Braille the phrase "... this photograph of my lover cock lost in a place I've never seen this photo of his arse of mine distended by cock wet with cum you can't see...." It repeats endlessly.

The gallery goer, encouraged to touch the work and decipher the phrase, is given a card with a key to the Braille alphabet.

While this show is not a puzzle — there is no secret prize for the

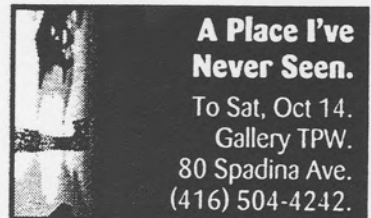
review

cleverest viewer — it appears that the artist's intention is for people to experience their eroticism, not through simply sight, but through touch and imagination. By physically touching the smooth, raised spheres, the viewer becomes another participant in the orgiastic coupling.

What is described is actually hotter than most porn: Unlike porn, with its pull-out-and-cum-all-over-the-other-guy shot, this photograph is a condom-free cum shot inside a man's ass. Transgressive stuff.

Because we never even see the photograph in question, this show becomes some kind of meta-porn. You're part of it, yet not viewing it. You have to work at it to understand it and feel it.

If this all sounds tiresomely intellectual, please don't let yourself be put off. Although it seems odd to over-analyze something as visceral as porn and its sexual response in people, *A Place I've Never Seen* is a fascinating exercise in touch and eroticism. As anyone who goes to dark backrooms knows, it's not just who you see, but what you feel.



A Place I've Never Seen.

To Sat, Oct 14.

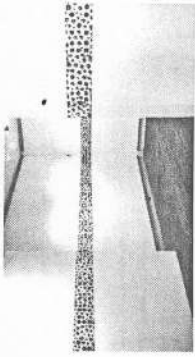
Gallery TPW.

80 Spadina Ave.

(416) 504-4242.



tion of the piece, the text read: "...this photograph of my lover cock lost in a place I've never seen this photo of his arse of mine distended by cock wet with cum you can't see..."



This circular text, with its shifting subject positions, suggests a sexuality that alternates between active and passive. Moreover, as Stephen O'Connell has written, "[t]he unsafe sex scene found in the text communicates Jones' desires, but it can't be taken as a personal imperative by the reader because its complexity returns the audience to the act of reading the Braille rather than the act of conforming to its description. In other words, the material recording process complicates a voyeuristic relationship with gay sex. If the first generation of gay activists could embrace hard-core porn as an act of defiance, Jones belongs to a generation that is more cautious of how gay culture is simplified and objectified by AIDS-related imagery. Jones expresses gay desire as something that needs to make its presence felt without offering itself up as spectacle."⁵

Similar concerns are equally relevant here in Toronto, and relate to everything from the sexual spectacle of the Pride Day parade, to the pectoral fetish among gay men, to the straight world's lionization of "lesbian chic." Yet the problems of visibility and of the right to see remain, and overt censorship of gay imagery is at least as much of a threat to both the dissemination of safer sex information and the evolution of new gay identities as are the stereotyping forces of the marketplace and certain community activists. While the Australian Centre for Photography could claim, in 1993, that "[b]y using Braille Jones escapes prohibitions on the public display of poring where Canada Customs maintained its prohibition on any depiction of anal sex, whether visual or literary, until just before the Little Sisters bookstore case appeared before the Supreme Court in 1994 (and it is not too cynical to speculate that the ban will be re-introduced should the court rule against Little Sisters).

In this, as in many other projects, Mathew Jones adopts the role of

the devil's advocate, or *agent provocateur*. Thus: "...even if the guys who are on my team and doing their best for my benefit can't help but just reinforce these borders, or at least these anxieties about borders... if we can't do without language, and if the borders have to be there, well then, put me on the other side of safe, dancing the chocolate cha-cha in the places that don't get a look-in, call me blind like love, and give me the literacy of the blind... which is Braille... which is touch."⁷ It is, perhaps, a thankless role to play, but one that the experienced will recognize as necessary.

Notes

1. Juan Davila, "Deathwatch: AIDS & Silence," *Art + Text*, #40, 1991, page 33.
2. Mathew Jones, unpublished artist's statement, July 1995.
3. *ibid.*
4. Stephen O'Connell, "Mathew Jones," *Art + Text*, #43, 1992, page 76.
5. Stephen O'Connell, "A Place I've Never Seen," *Photofile*, #39, 1993, page 46-7.
6. Press Release for *A Place I've Never Seen*, Australian Centre for Photography, 1993.
7. Mathew Jones, artist's statement for the exhibition *To be illiterate is to be blind, or Pulling out before cumming is not as safe as it looks, or Getting off at Redfern*, Artist Run Space, Linden Gallery, St. Kilda, Australia, 1992.

Hamish Buchanan is a Toronto artist and writer.

Mathew Jones is an Australian artist whose work has been exhibited internationally, most recently at the Museu de Arte Moderna de Sao Paulo, Brazil, Ace Art, Winnipeg, the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, and the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney.

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MATHEW JONES

A Place I've Never Seen

Opening reception with the artist

Saturday, September 9, 2-5 pm

TORONTO PHOTOGRAPHERS WORKSHOP

Gallery TPW

80 Spadina Avenue, Suite 310

Toronto, Ontario, Canada M5V 2J3

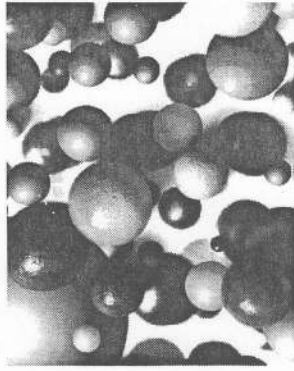
Phone 416-504-4242 Fax 504-6510

Gallery hours: 12-5 pm Tuesday - Saturday

Presented by the Toronto Photographers Workshop, a non-profit, artist run gallery dedicated to promoting and supporting artistic practice that critically engages the medium of photography through exhibitions, publications, lectures and special events. Gallery TPW is supported by The Canada Council, the Ontario Arts Council, the Municipality of Metropolitan Toronto-Cultural Affairs Division, the City of Toronto through the Toronto Arts Council, and our members and donors.

MATHEW JONES

A Place I've Never Seen



GALLERY TPW
September 9 - October 14, 1995



See Me, Feel Me... or, Groping Towards Ecstasy

by Hamish Buchanan

Taking any cultural material from one context to another — whether the crossed boundary be historical, political, or of race, class, gender or sexual orientation — inevitably produces shifts in meaning and value, but it is particularly useful to keep this in mind when considering the exhibition in Toronto of Australian artist Mathew Jones' installation *A Place I've Never Seen*. The work itself is specifically concerned with the questioning or refusal of borders and the authorities that would define them; and, although there is much here of keen relevance to Toronto audiences, certain aspects will no doubt get lost in the transition from Australia to Canada, and other aspects will acquire significance not intended by the artist. Moreover, even in its original context *A Place I've Never Seen* steadfastly resisted being reduced to an unambiguous point or linear message, let alone one that could be unproblematically reconstructed in another context.

In earlier work Jones questioned the way that the slogans and imagery of the New York-based AIDS action group ACT UP oversimplified not only the issues around AIDS, but also the communities most affected by it. As well, he critiqued the wholesale adoption of ACT UP materials by AIDS activists in Australia, where the political situation was quite different from that in the U.S. As Juan Davila has described it, "Jones works in terms of silence or refusal against the orthodoxies of the gay pictorial discourse. He does so by using ambiguity and subtle shifts of language rather than the militant voice he parodies, thus incurring the wrath of both the right and the left." The same could be said to apply to the current exhibition.

A Place I've Never Seen takes as its starting point a 1990 safer sex campaign by the AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON). Part of it consisted of a simple graphic image depicting a stereotypical gay man blindfolded and about to step off a cliff. This "clone" im-

age became symbolic of Jones' complaint: "Back then, nothing pissed me off more than the way semi-governmental 'gay community' AIDS organizations hand in hand with the media were reshaping my self image, surveying and proscribing the nature of gay identity — sanitizing and homogenizing the image of the gay man under the moral imperative of health care — until eventually I felt quite estranged from that identity."²

Captioned "Pulling out before cumming is not as safe as it looks," and providing basic information on the risks of using withdrawal as a safer sex strategy, the ACON image was widely distributed on posters, postcards, T-shirts and in a free bi-weekly community paper. While the frankness of the text may seem commendable — and indeed would be envied by those whose efforts to disseminate safer sex information have been hindered by conservative moralists who oppose publication of anything that appears to condone (let alone celebrate) gay sex or involves "explicit" language — Jones found the whole thing confusing. "I couldn't work out why it said 'Not as safe as it looks' rather than 'Not as safe as you think'..."³ This confusion was compounded when he came across the source for ACON's smartly up-dated image, a 1920s USSR literacy poster, originally captioned "To Be Illiterate Is To Be Blind: on all sides lurk failure and unhappiness." As Stephen O'Connell has pointed out, both



posters could be said to "call for scopic certitude concerning the limits of safety... [and to suggest that] to feel your way is to fail."⁴ But what did being blindfolded have to do with being blind, or blindness have to do with literacy (when there is braille)? And why appropriate an old Soviet literacy graphic for an AIDS awareness campaign targeted to 1990s gay Australians? (In any

event, it appears that Jones was not the only one either confused or unconvinced by the campaign; it was, at least according to research statistics, ineffective in altering misconceptions.)

Jones connects this emphasis on the visual as the basis for knowledge with a larger concern with the relationships between representation and identity, desire and, most specifically, sexual pleasure. The old boast of (or complaint about) pornography, the most obvious form of representation of sexual pleasure, was that it "left nothing to the imagination." This was never really true. Even in the most "explicit" material there was always so much missing: all the things that can only be suggested or implied, the little awkwardness of actual human bodies together, the subjective complexities, and (most pernicious of all) the possibility of occupying a different subject position (or positions) than the one assumed by the conventional gaze — the (male) voyeur as controller of the scene, the active eye that possesses the passive "other." Thus, what is perhaps most obscene about pornography is not so much in what it depicts, but in the assertion that everything else is "nothing."

To "leave nothing to the imagination" is to fall into the problematics of proof: how do you prove the experience of pleasure? Conventional pornography, both gay and straight, appeals to a model of male sexuality as functional or productive (as opposed to the reproductiveness of female sexuality): the proof of pleasure is that the man has done his job. Hence, the convention of the cum shot, the visible ejaculation, which has become the standard conclusion of pornographic narratives. To show this, however, requires "pulling out before cumming," interrupting the act itself — in a sense not doing it — in the name of a visual logic.

Refusing both the certainty of the ACON image and the visual logic of conventional pornography, Mathew Jones' *A Place I've Never Seen* offers a description of gay sex experienced through touch. In a neat echo of the way gay content has often been carefully encoded in seemingly "normal" materials, the raised nodules of a braille text are hidden among the jumble of photogrammed and computer-generated images of spheres on the 12-inch-high strip of paper that runs continuously around the room. "Viewers" can decipher the image by feeling their way around the gallery. For the Toronto showing of *A Place I've Never Seen*, Jones has devised a new text — one viewers will have to decipher for themselves — but in a previous installa-