



POOF!

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR CONTEMPORARY ART
MELBOURNE MAY 1993

ART GALLERY OF NEW SOUTH WALES
SYDNEY MARCH 1995

MATHEW JONES/NEIL EMMERSON

Australian Centre for
Contemporary Art, Melbourne
May 26 - June 27, 1993

Mathey Jones is a creature of his epoch. He plays with both technology and human self-identification. His work represents a first and last of his ecological ideas.

His recent ecological work with the appearance of gold paper for "POOF" stands in the arena of electronic "TICKET". The exhibition appears as a distillation of current cyber-Matheyism, a willful to come together those who are not ACT UP members to the feel right of a "fighting" wave of technology. His people's work is to be where they are, together, just like in the economy of the machine, beyond of place time.

is a sign of nothing, of nothing appearing in the economy. One at the moment is to be seen as the last secure ground. Just when will we have a whole lot of people jump on the bandwagon while everyone is still out only to be a sign of a lack of a real world. That is this exhibition, to be publicly named, "to be visible over all".

Jones has long in the history of creating a grey world in an only showing personal presence on the cyber time question, an "easy" definition of gay community is your identity. His 1993 exhibition "Poof" is a "real" statement to one of impossibility in public. It goes into the heart of those who are not straight about a world that has been a "to be" in history. In "To the Moon" his physical presence is a first in a year of this in the gallery. It was some time ago of the appearance of Peter Dinklage and HIV in current ACT UP exhibition. He was about the subject matter, not at the Melbourne Exhibition Festival's

"Dislocations" exhibition was about to be taken by another National Gallery of Victoria staff would show "gay" work. That has been that Jones at "The" because of a concerned "to" value, without any intention. It was the last, like the in this world, but the sign is there. It is also needed by the city making people who would rather go "poof" in a kind of order, depending on our eyes, but "poof" is public.

Jones's exhibition scripted and designed with a sign and air-ventilation that drops off the first two galleries and the increasing number of ACT UP. The carefully crafted experience of history that individual being eventually from the selling and drop in the world blocking your way, demanding attention, depending on the world's market and world around it. Indeed, in fact, history, a movement, some a laugh, or just the thought—what a life! All we require, some would be placed with us this exhibition, where history the style, time, we, and last—what questioning by which to be used.

On the history of ACT UP was that Emerson's "Poof" as (the a moment). He convinced this quiet acceptance of cyber with a creature-like structure installed in the middle of the large main gallery. It looked somewhat relevant, perhaps too subtle. It was with ambiguity of the low, filled light, but it drew us closer, something we to see it, in light of the person's face through the opening.

One could see an individual with an abstract, regular pattern placed onto some of the internal world. It appears to be a kind of world, a decorative design, a kind of last association with extended definition of material and human nature. In speaking about it, representation of the history of some of those who are not ACT UP members to the feel right of a "fighting" wave of technology. His people's work is to be where they are, together, just like in the economy of the machine, beyond of place time.

The red lighting, the dark response pattern, the opening that leads us to and through Emerson's work is all about history of a physical art and the linguistic history or part of history in history. The focus of an individual with each thing, a natural response to Emerson's history would be the work of history and culture as gay history and art. It was our history of those many movements, movements in each world, a kind of a kind of reflection of individual work but as a subtle matrix of being, a history of what makes and movements required in work, a repeat pattern, history just identified by its continuity.

Mathey Jones

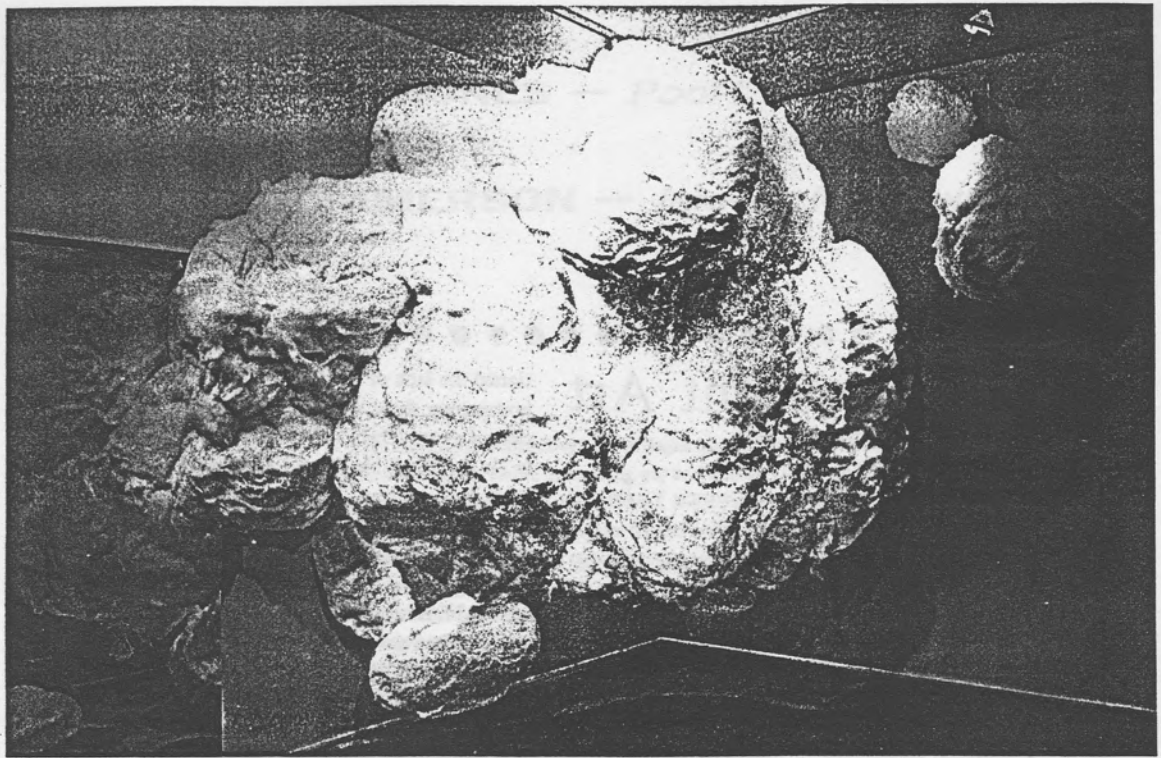
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March 17, 2014



Mathew Jones: *POOFI*, 1993, installation view, ACCA, Melbourne.

MATHEW JONES/NEIL EMMERSON

Australian Centre for
Contemporary Art, Melbourne
May 25 - June 27, 1993

Mathew Jones is something of a trickster. He plays with both anonymity and blatant self-identification. His work represents a jig in and out of his conceptual closets.

His recent exhibition started with the appearance of pink palm-size POOF stickers on the streets of Melbourne. "POOF!", the exhibition, appears in a cloudburst of cartoon smoke. Unidentified, it is difficult to know whether these stickers are a new ACT UP campaign or the first sign of a right-wing wave of homophobia. But maybe it's not to be taken too seriously; maybe, just like in the cartoons of our childhood, this poof of pink smoke

is a sign of nothing, of sudden appearance or disappearance. Gay art has exploded in Melbourne over the last twelve months. Jones asks: Will we have a whole lot of people jump on the bandwagon while gay/queer is still hot, only to see it all go up in smoke in a few months time? Is this exhibition, as its publicity asserted, "the last word in queer art"?

Jones has been at the forefront of creating a gay art that is not only a strong personal statement but also calls into question any easy definitions of gay community or queer identity. His 1991 exhibition "silence = death" questioned the lack of complexity in activist slogans juxtaposing these with poignant blank canvases shaped as stretchers and beds. In "To be Illiterate is To Be Blind," his playful and beautiful use of brail as a pattern of dots on the gallery wall took issue with some of the metaphors of love, blindness, and HIV in current AIDS education campaigns. His work about the Robert Murley case at the Melbourne Midsumma Festival's

"Dislocations" exhibition was almost taken down by nervous National Gallery of Victoria staff worried about legal issues. Paul Foss has described Jones as "the permanent heretic of a movement that cannot tolerate any indiscreetness." It seems that Jones does like to make trouble, but this urge to disrupt is also matched by the shy retiring persona who would rather go "poof" in a cloud of smoke, disappearing before our eyes, than "perform" in public.

Jones's exhibition surprised and delighted with a huge soft effervescent blob that occupied the front two galleries and the intervening corridor of ACCA. This carefully crafted explosion of frothy pink material hung precariously from the ceiling and clung to the walls blocking your way, demanding attention, demanding to be looked at, touched (perhaps) and walked around. It evoked, in turn, whimsy, a mesmerized stare, a laugh, or just the thought—what a con! All are responses Jones would be pleased with as this exhibition mixes perfectly the style, ironic wit, and hard-edged questioning for which he is noted.

On concurrently at ACCA was Neil Emmerson's "inhabit me (like a memory)." He continued this queer occupation of space with a concertina-like structure installed in the middle of the large main gallery. It looked somewhat awkward, perhaps too solid, in the soft ambience of the low, filtered light, but it drew us closer, compelling us to enter it, to look at the patterns discernable through the openings.

Once inside we are confronted with an elaborate repeat pattern pasted onto some of the internal walls, in seductive blues, reds, and purples. It's a decorative design, a map; it has associations with anatomical depictions of intestines and internal organs. Its spiralling ribbon is reminiscent of the Eastern system of sexual yoga and chakra energy; its colors are clearly bloody and viral. We are inside the anus, the soft warm tissue of the rectal lining encloses us, we are left in the silence of this revelation.

The soft lighting, the lush repetitive pattern, the openings that invite us in and through: Emmerson's work is all about seduction as a physical act and the lingering pleasure or pain of seduction as memory. For those of us familiar with such things, a natural association to Emmerson's structure would be the maze of corridors and cubicles at gay saunas and sex clubs. Perhaps our memory of those many anonymous encounters in such corridors inhabit us not as recollections of individual men but as a subtle matrix of feeling, a memory of other bodies and sensations registered in ours, a repeat pattern blurred yet intensified by its continuity.

MARCUS O'DONNELL



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Light is used to create a sense of depth and texture in the giant cloud sculpture. The light is cast through the openings.

Mount Pleasant

Effervescent Art

AUSTRALIAN CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY ART
DALLAS BROOKS DRIVE, SOUTH YARRA
UNTIL 27 JUNE

REVIEWED BY MARCUS O'DONNELL

Mathew Jones is something of a trickster. He plays with both anonymity and blatant self-identification. His work represents a jig in and out of his conceptual closets.

His latest exhibition started some weeks ago with the appearance of palm size round POOF stickers on the streets of Melbourne. Unidentified, it is difficult to know whether these stickers are a new ACT-UP campaign or the first sign of a right wing wave of homophobia. But maybe its not to be taken too seriously, maybe just like in the cartoons of our childhood its a sign of nothing, of sudden appearance or disappearance. Gay Art has suddenly appeared in Melbourne over the last twelve months. Jones asks: will we have a whole lot of people jump on the bandwagon while gay/queer is still hot, only to see it evaporate in smoke in a few months time. Is this exhibition as the publicity asserts "the last word in queer art"?

Jones has been at the forefront of creating a gay art which is not only a strong personal statement but which also calls into question any easy definitions of gay community or queer identity. His *Silence=Death* show a few years ago ques-

tioned the lack of complexity in activist slogans juxtaposing these with poignant blank canvases shaped as stretchers and beds. In *To be Illiterate is To Be Blind*, his playful and beautiful use of brail, as a pattern of dots on the gallery wall, took issue with some of the metaphors of love blindness and HIV in current AIDS education campaigns. His work about the Robert Murley case at Midsumma's *Dislocations* exhibition was almost taken down by nervous gallery staff worried about legal issues. Paul Foss has described Jones as "the permanent heretic of a movement that cannot tolerate any indiscreetness." It seems that Jones does like to make trouble, but this urge to disrupt is also matched by the shy retiring persona who would rather go "poof" in a cloud of smoke, disappearing before our eyes, rather than "perform" in public.

If you do follow the trail of clues and end up at ACCA for "Poof", you will be surprised and delighted with the huge soft effervescent thing that confronts you. You may stop and stare mesmerised or you may laugh or you may think what a con — all responses Jones would be pleased with. This exhibition mixes perfectly the style, irony, and hard edged questioning that Jones is noted for, to tell more would let the cat out of the closet, so go and be surprised.

Neil Emmerson's *Esensual Fragments: inhabit me (like a memory)* is on concurrently at ACCA with Poof. See next issue for a review of Emerson's work and news on a series of talks on gay art issues at ACCA. ★

MELBOURNE STAR OBSERVER 26.5.93

BONDI
STRAP THIS ON
Ladies Fruit Bags
HALF PRICE \$25
LIFT THIS ... BIG BOY
45kg Bar of Dumbell
weight set NOW \$99
TOO BIG?
Try our 21kg dumbell set
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Offer valid until 13/2/93



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MATHEW JONES — POOF!

NEIL EMMERSON — INHABIT ME (LIKE A MEMORY)

AT ACCA, MELBOURNE

AMANDA KING

Esensual Fragments, (a curatorial project initiated by Juliana Engberg), is a series of exhibitions by Kate Reeves, Jane Trengove, Neil Emmerson, and Pat HOFFIE concerning gay and lesbian identity. Also at ACCA during 1993 was *In the Public Interest* (lectures by Anne Marsh and Ted Gott, and a public forum) dealing with the same issues. Has the margin become central, or is the mainstream temporarily embracing the periphery? Are artists coming out in response to a new and truly empathic cultural environment, or has the closet simply been raided? Mathew Jones's and Neil Emmerson's separate installations (Jones was not in *E sensual Fragments*) are astute responses to their need to re-visualise subjectivity, but is it necessary to inscribe either work within a specifically queer frame of reference? Simultaneously outside of, yet traversed by, the signifiers of patriarchy, the queer view has become the vantage point from which to re-examine identity: this is perhaps why a rarified site was the platform for a production more familiar to the street.

If, in the 1980s, the AIDS crisis forced gays to *act up* to focus attention on the social implications of difference, now it would appear necessary to *act it out*. Jones's giant dacron and chicken wire cloud is generic of pantomime's throw-away representation, a testament to a postmodern aesthetic, a bold, inverted parody of itself. A metaphor for a contemporary reading of a complex identity, *Poof!* shifts and remains uncontainable. Its presence pervades and teases the cuboid gallery spaces. Jones's re-appropriation of the trite and obvious construction of difference is comically reiterated in the strawberry pink walls. As Maria Kozic reclaims the pejorative use of 'Bitch' in an empowering assimilation within her own identity, Jones reclaims the label *Poof!* with all its ridiculous connotations, as a serious aspect of his constructed self. With studied irony, the postmodern *milieu* becomes the distribution point for pink sticky labels that the gallery-goer is encouraged to assume.

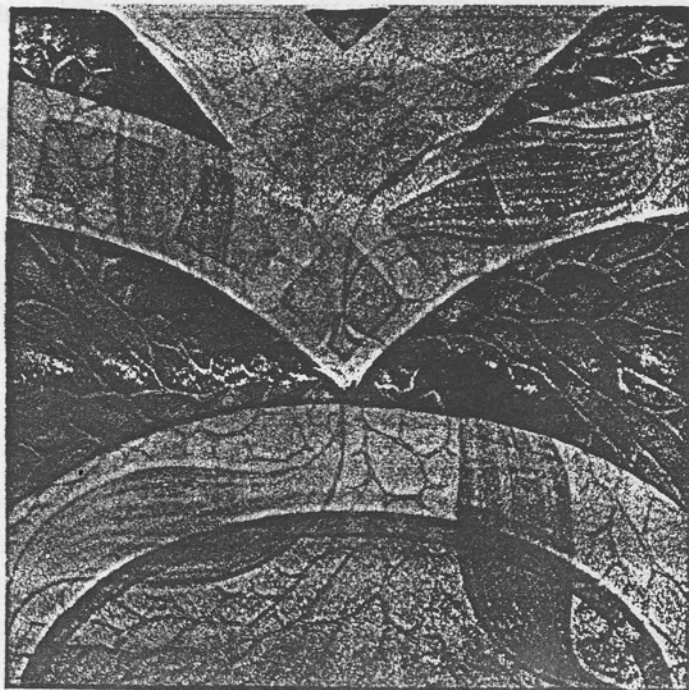


Neil Emmerson's installation *Inhabit Me (Like a Memory)* references queer iconography to construct a ritualised presence. Emmerson's concertina screens function like scenery flats, being surfaces that represent, and on which is suspended, the real. We are invited into a hallowed space – the enclosure formed by the screens. An atmosphere of awe and religiosity is heightened by the theatrical use of dim purple lighting.

In the multiple images glued onto the surfaces of the screen – 252 seven-colour lithographs, seemingly mostly blues and pinks – Emmerson, evokes a parallel between homo-eroticism and religious ecstasy. The drawn lithographic images reference the ace of spades, the phallus and the anus – the universal sign of one. A glimpse of what at first appears to be a sequin is revealed to be a dab of nail polish – a bead of moisture.

If Emmerson's synthesis retains an element of mysticism, he also plays with scale, that minimalist lynchpin. His use of the minimalist aesthetic may be a demand for recognition of the reality of his materials and also of his own material identity. It is also a framework on which to hang a complex visual structure. If the use of repeated images ensures a recognition of the materiality of the work, the self-conscious and meticulously crafted surfaces also speak of the complex, polysemic nature of Emmerson's practice and creativity.

Neil Emmerson, *Inhabit me (Like a Memory)*, 1993, lithographic detail of screen.



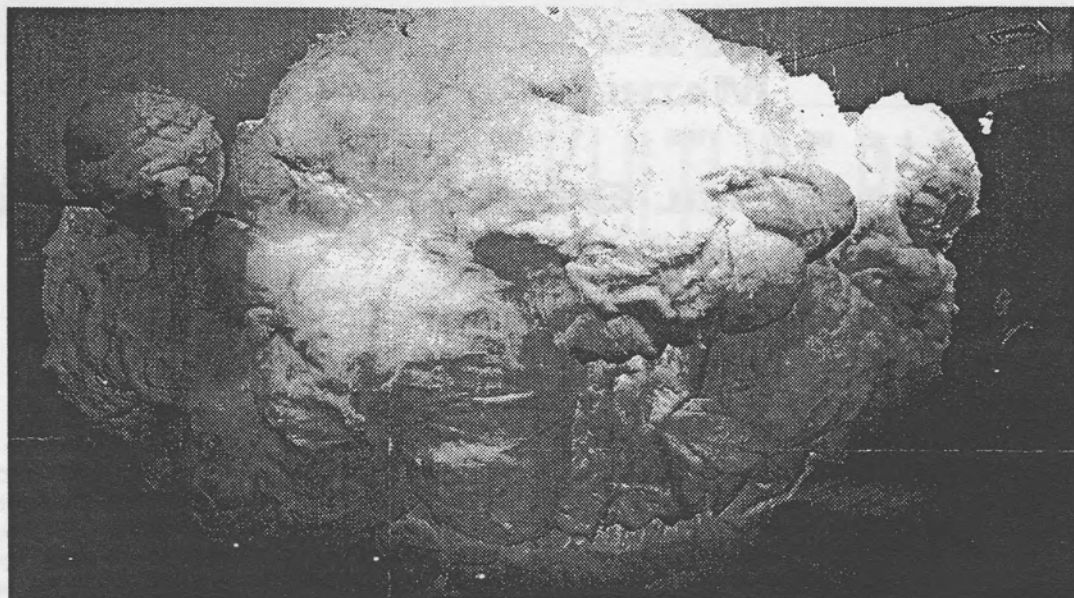


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March 2014

MATHEW JONES
POOF!
AUSTRALIAN
CENTRE FOR
CONTEMPORARY
ART
JULY 1993



The graphic: This cartoon cloud signals the magical or mysterious disappearance of something: poof! and whatever it was, it's now gone. In narrating the absence or loss of the thing-just-here such a graphic describes a curious moment in time; the transitive moment between full frame and empty frame, which according to the laws of continuity and cartoonery must be represented.

Insofar as the thing-just-here-but-now-gone is never designated, and the clouds of its annihilation have not yet lifted to reveal an alternate scenario, the graphic suspends all narrative at a moment between loss and consequence. This moment is fatal; but for its duration the loss is inconsolable.

Stuart Koop
Curator

Otherwise, queer might be invisible. Queer does not appear except when invoked in a bar-room joke or perhaps as a cloud around the undeclared sexuality of someone famous. Australia's leading gay artist – and there is only room for one at a time – makes a loud noise in a small space. Poof! This room is pink like cake, pink like Darrell Lea. This queer is visible, this queer appears, this queer manifests his marginality as a strategic path to the centre for contemporary art. There are no illusions. This cloud hovers in the room like an ill-mannered guest. Persistent, he's here for the duration.

Susan Fereday
Artist

A recent evening at ACCA saw a discussion on the topic of gay art and its recent popularity. Many people were unsure how to deal with this flavour of the month mentality, however, one theory that was not offered was this. Once there was religion to explain the mysteries of the world and everything had a place. As time went on the undeniable cause and effect nature of life became noticed by more and more. Eventually, in true Darwin fashion, came the revolution of industry and all was there for the taking. During all this jostling for position it became apparent that some were more equal than others and certain groups were not being represented in places of power. The guilt-ridden middle class realized that the utopian promise of technology was not to be and were left with an empty feeling and a karma debt. All manner of revolution now flourished, the women's movement, the black uprising, respecting what religious beliefs remained, and the gay movement. So the ideologically starved embraced every ideologically fashionable movement in sight. The latest being the gay movement, so as is the way in art and fashion, a small few decide what is important and the larger body just follows, without even being told to, just by seeing what others are doing.

When people went to see Poof! for their fix of correctness I think they should have found that it did not feel the need to supply them with it.

David Harradine

Film maker

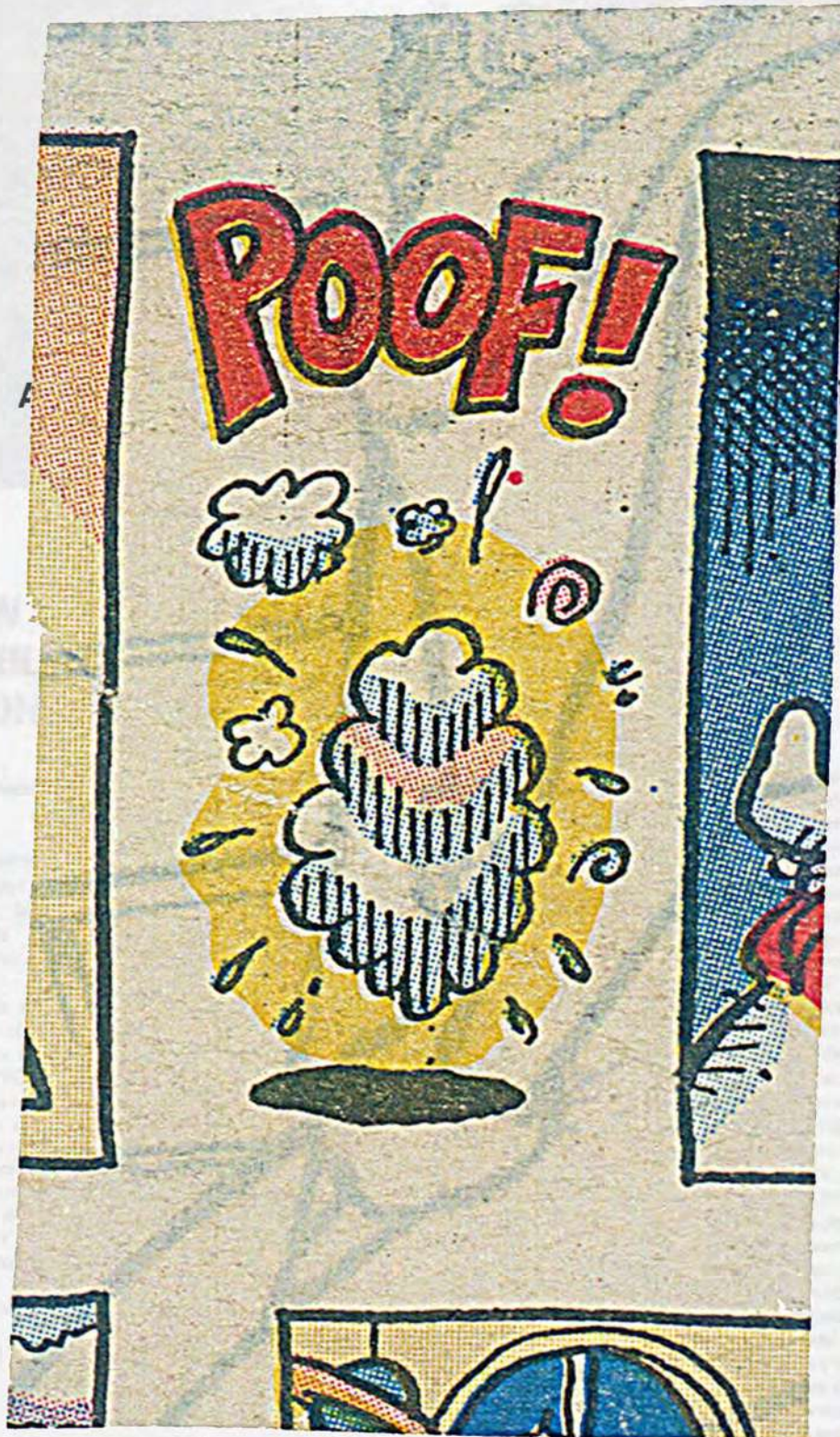
My first reaction to Mathew Jones' installation "Poof!" was a fairly childlike one. I was itching to rub my face against it and I wanted to crawl underneath to see where the light was coming from and maybe even get inside.

Of course, the work deserves a more sophisticated response, for no other reason than that in the world outside the gallery – the world that Jones infiltrates with his stickers and "letter bombs" – "Poof!" is a term of abuse on a par with "cunt" in its intensity.

For me, it is at that point – the moment between my first reaction and my second – that the installation changes from a cloud to an explosion.

Sally Thompson





fragment from an unknown Sydney newspaper c.1991.

Which way gay?

SIMEON KRONENBERG

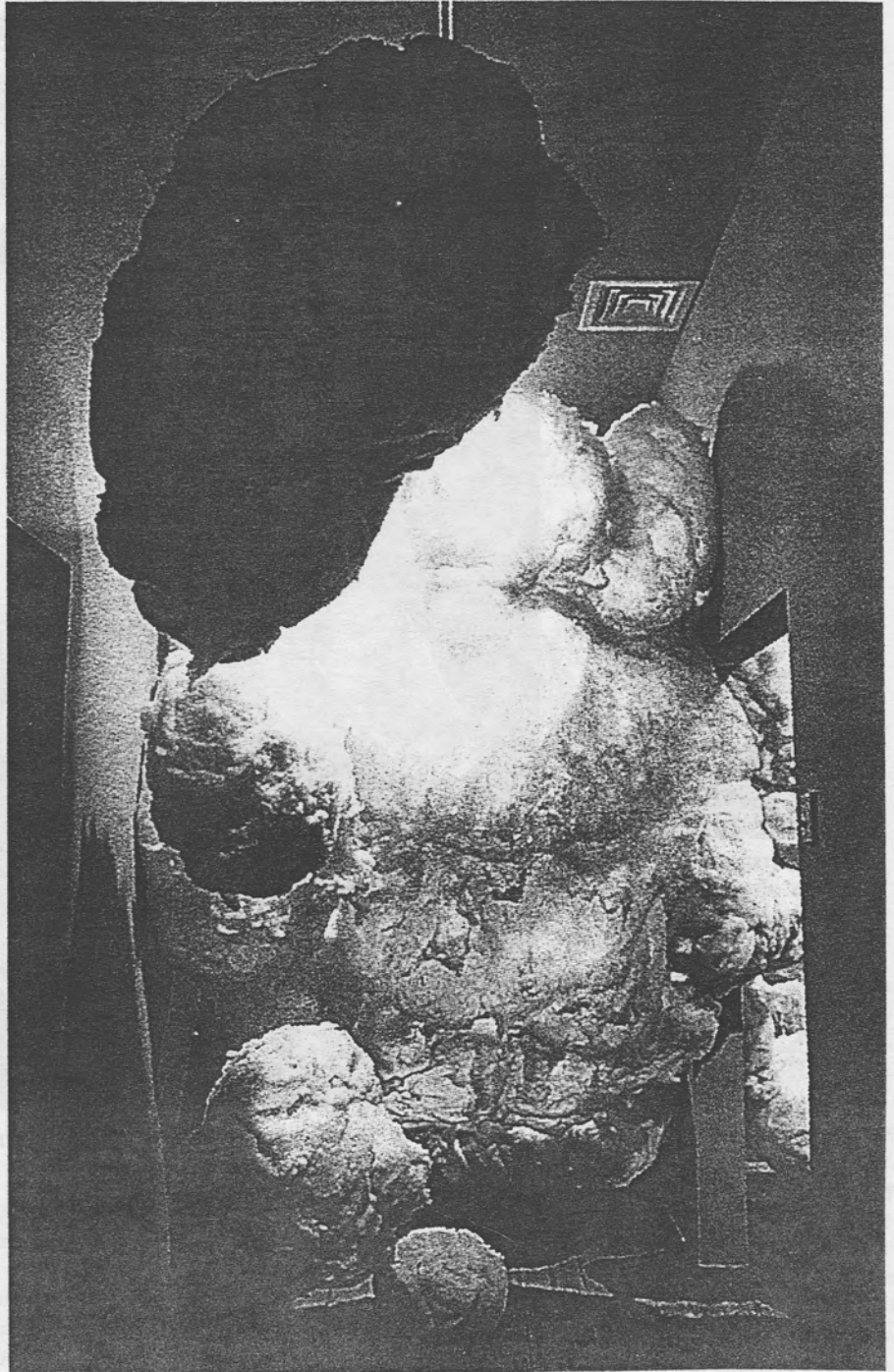
...we found ourselves forced to rethink our specialness.

Paul Foss

Questions about the parameters of gay and lesbian identity were explored in several exhibitions this year. *You Are Here*, for example, was an artist-curated show by a group of gay males. Another along similar lines, but with a different political stance, was *Dislocations : Body, Memory, Place*, designed for the Access Gallery at the National Gallery of Victoria. As well, several (perhaps less declamatory) exhibitions under the generic title *Esensual Fragments* were shown at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne. While not all these shows were overtly positioned around gay 'themes' in any self-conscious or obvious sense, such themes were at least an important part of their sub-text. We have also seen some significant exhibitions by individual gay artists working within the general parameters of gay and lesbian sexual identity, such as Ross Moore's *The prison was silent. No one dared sing* at Melbourne's Linden Gallery, and Mathew Jones' *Poof* show at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Each of these exhibitions, in its way, tackled the issue of gay identity and moved towards positioning gay artists in the current firmament.

Importantly, they demonstrated that debates about issues of gay self-consciousness are open to investigations that may not always be entirely comfortable. The exhibitions themselves, and the artists in them, advance a variety of positions which are not necessarily congruent or mutually supportive. The fact that they are about 'gayness' or more fashionably (although I suspect more 'safely') 'queerness', is, in itself, only the crudest and most superficial linkage. Nonetheless, there is benefit to be gained from examining their similarities and differences. The differences point to dislocations within the gay 'movement' and to the various responses from gay artists. No longer is there any congruence of attitude that simply and clearly expresses a correct ideological line. The very fact that such openly political exhibitions are being shown in public spaces is also, perhaps, a point of contention.

A good deal of currently fashionable



Mathew Jones, *Poof*, 1993, Installation, ACCA

ideology has tended to force resistance to any kind of direct political stand. Politics, after all, is simplistic, morally one-dimensional, essentialist and focused, whereas the world, as we now know, is

arbitrary, floating, incongruent, dislocated, constructed and so on. Trying to examine any kind of art in political terms, therefore, is next to impossible because this implies making value judge-

ments and taking a moral stance. If I am accused of being the most recalcitrant and obdurate reactionary, then so be it, but my interest in these very interesting shows about gay and lesbian identity is informed by deeply held personal attitudes (themselves political) and a determinedly territorial prejudice to do with the nature of the world I inhabit.

It is, of course, impossible to posit 'gay' art as a consistent or recognisable 'type' or 'style' of discourse but, in a way, that is what both *You Are Here* and *Dislocations* seemed to be attempting. While both exhibitions presented a range of approaches to the problem of gay identity, they still depended on the notion that gay artists represent some kind of discreet and identifiable category. That's fine with me but I wonder how well it sits with the theoretical imperatives suggested by critical responses to these shows and indeed to the catalogue essays themselves, where issues to do with the body and identity are written about as though they were free of sexual politics.

While *You Are Here* dealt with current theoretical issues, *Dislocations*, more interestingly, recognised and celebrated different perspectives from a range of artists who were not bound inexorably to ideological correctness. To my mind, *Dislocations* was the better show visually (in other words - gasp! - I liked the pictures more). I think *You Are Here* was weakened by its 'theoretical drive'¹, in spite of the fact that this has been lauded elsewhere. Its theoretical determinism dulled the senses and bored the intellect.

By contrast, *Dislocations* allowed the spectator room to breathe, and room too for the individual artists to express a variety of responses to the notion of gay identity and self definition. Strong works by Ross Moore, Brent Harris, Simon Carver and Mathew Jones, among others, presented a plethora of styles and interests.

Some current writing and exhibition practice removes the issue of 'gayness' and its social/political parameters from the 'real' world of political interactions

and positions it instead as part of current theory about the body. This weakens its power as a catalyst for action and exemplifies the general hijacking of serious political resistance by a post modernist discourse which tries to pretend that it is politically and morally value free. Of course it isn't - it is absurd to believe that any ideological position is free from political bias. Ideas exist in a maelstrom of

demands a response.

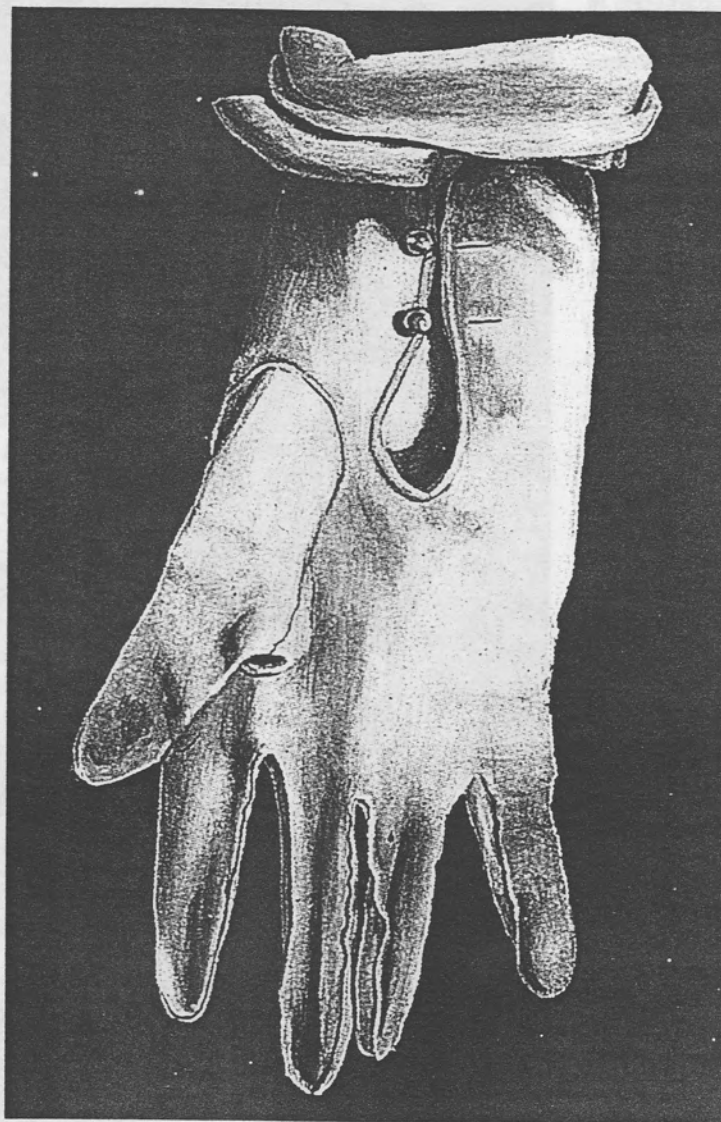
In his *Dislocations* catalogue essay 'Uncertain Positions' (a title that reflects the nature of the exhibition itself), Marcus O'Donnell describes the uncertainty which characterises the place of gay men within the social order:

Gay men present an interesting anomaly in the construction of sexuality and gender in society. We are visible as men and thus linked to dominant systems of patriarchal power but only insofar as our sexuality is kept invisible. Once seen as gay we quickly become identified with the marginalised, the other. This complex dynamic of both incorporation by and alienation from society frames the development of a gay man's world view.²

This political apprehension informed the curatorial strategy of the exhibition - one that, in essence, presented a complex range of attitudes towards societal relationships within the confines of a 'gay' perspective (that of both the curator and of the various artists represented). The artists were Juan Davila, Mathew Jones, Luke Roberts, Rod McLeish, Ross Moore, Brent Harris, Ross Watson, Ross T. Smith, Lex Middleton and Simon Carver. Nothing if not disparate. What O'Connell was aiming for here, and partly achieved, was to present a diverse group under the single banner of queerness in order to define an aesthetic view. This is a strategy designed to 'make the marginal, dislocated experience of gay men more visible'³

That it did, but the extent to which a public gallery space should be used to do such a thing is, at least in the minds of some, open to question. This is particularly the case with Mathew Jones' confronting installation which, although an essential part of the show, necessitated a few crisis meetings between the artist and gallery personnel.

It comprised a sign in bold lettering with the name, address and phone number of one Robert Murley, and the words 'Call Now'. A sexual invitation, perhaps, or a demand? It brought to mind the classifieds in any gay newspaper but also



Jane Trengove, *Tender Buttons (detail)* 1993, oil paint on wood

critical challenges, there is no such thing as intellectual hegemony, post-modern or otherwise.

With the whole issue of queerness under scrutiny at present, we must look critically at these exhibitions to understand the way that work made by gay and lesbian artists fits, or perhaps more to the point, fails to fit the theoretical arguments. We need to look carefully, too, at the challenges raised by the showing of determinedly politicised art. Not since the 70's have we been confronted with art so consciously political. Now, as then, it

something much darker and more threatening - the possibility all gay men face of death at the hands of a basher.

For Robert Murley was recently put on trial for the murder of an older gay man. His defence, a common one, was 'homosexual panic': the murderer was so horrified by the idea of homosexual sex that he was suddenly overcome by an uncontrollable urge to kill the man who had just picked him up. By using this appalling defence, Murley was released. Mathew Jones confronted viewers, and the gallery itself, with the shame that society bears for this sort of callous legal manouvreing.

However, his installation did present the gallery with legal and moral problems. These were eventually resolved after the artist agreed to add the words 'rhetorical only' to the piece. In this way the NGV and the artist were protected against possible charges of harassment. The NGV was nevertheless implicated in carrying the political can.

Another confronting installation piece in the *Dislocations* show, Simon Carver's *Is the anus a grave?*, was a moving and powerful statement about death and aids and it invoked a sense of terrible loss and mourning. Physically it was simple enough: a conical pile of dirt, brown on the outside and red at the centre, on a white-sheeted bed. But despite its apparent directness it was a complex and powerful image about the disjunction between the site of love and the possibility - indeed the likelihood - of a terrible death. The anus is both desired and feared. A shocking and irrevocable dilemma is located at the centre of gay love-making.

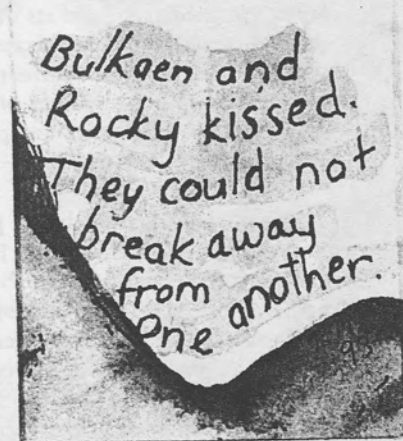
While Jane Trengove's delicate show, *Tender Buttons* at ACCA (part of the *Esepsual Fragments* series devised by Juliana Engberg), was very different in feel, it was still powerfully committed to a perspective from the 'other' side. This particular installation invoked the memory of Gertrude Stein and Alice B. Toklas, women, writers and lovers, whose lives represented an ongoing challenge to heterosexual and heterosexist domination. They mixed with the greatest writers and artists of their time - Picasso, Matisse, Hemingway, Ravel and others - but their centre was always their home in Paris which, especially in their later years, they rarely left. Trengove's paintings, like the writings of both women (Alice wrote a cookbook), refer to an anchored domestic felicity that is warm and reassuring. But, while the objects depicted are familiar and everyday - gloves, shoes and the like - at the same time they underline the importance of the feminised subject.

Male structures are implicitly challenged in the very subject matter of these simple paintings. They are not about the great narratives but about a personalised and particular feminist viewpoint located in the domestic reality of daily life.

Mathew Jones' *Poof* show, although shown at ACCA, was not part of the *Esepsual Fragments* series. It also challenged the hegemonic structures of the heterosexual world with startling political directness. The invitation, for a start, had the word 'poof' emblazoned across it in black on pink. The installation comprised a huge chicken wire cloud-burst covered in bright pink dacron, which seemed to be passing through the gallery walls. It seemed to embody the word 'poof' and, with directness and humour, it celebrated a confident and perverse gay identity. Although it could be argued that Jones' construction would have been bet-

tingtion is an even greater definitional barrier, which saps our ability to believe in the 'homosexual' as an unproblematically discrete category.⁴

This issue of what is homosexual was raised again in Ross Moore's exhibition *The prison was silent. No one dared sing*, held in August this year at Linden in St Kilda. (Moore was also in the *Dislocations* exhibition, with large figurative works that played with the emblematic and tribal). The issue of gay identity was here tackled through the writings of Jean Genet, the saint of homosexual literature, whose erotic depictions of prison life are tied to notions of surveillance, masking, violence, punishment and secrecy. Moore's installation invoked the prison and its melancholy atmosphere of muffled love and pain by presenting miniature works in darkness.



Ross Moore, Genet Series: Bulkaen and Rocky, 1992, watercolour on paper

ter out on the streets, its ribaldry worked within the confines of the rather chic ACCA space, particularly after the pretensions of *You Are Here*.

Mathew Jones' installations mock the excesses of the theoretical push and by so doing they remind us of a simpler but nonetheless potent aesthetic stance that has within it the seeds of a true disorientation, one that is confronting and highly charged politically. Jones is a saboteur, demanding attention, questioning the staid and complacent. He tackles a range of positions that are held to be sacrosanct. As Paul Foss writes in the introductory catalogue essay for the *Poof* show:

Jones once again jumps in and tackles even the founding question of our assumption into history, demonstrating that what is spawned in the rage of dis-

Visitors were forced to become voyeurs with torches, shuffling from one highly charged image to the next. An eerie soundtrack by Melbourne musician and composer Philip Jackson added to the atmosphere.

Genet's novels are all based on his own experiences as a working class thief. Incarcerated many times, he was finally released when his writings were recognised by Sartre and other French intellectuals. For the most part, Genet kept his homosexuality hidden from the other prisoners. There was male-to-male sex, but the gay identity of individual prisoners like Genet remained secret. Otherwise, in this essentially heterosexually defined sub-cultural milieu, the queen is forever victim.

Genet views the incarcerated body as a metaphor for the experience of being gay within a heterosexual hegemony.

Moore mirrors this by means of a sophisticated installation that both posits gay difference and celebrates the erotic possibilities of the perverse and the strange. At the same time, he confronts us with the unapologetic depiction of gay sex. In this way the artist promotes either shock or a sense of affirmation 'depending on the viewer's sexualised subject position'.⁵ (This is of course also true of the work of other gay artists, notably that of Mathew Jones, where the viewer is deliberately confronted and, perhaps, affronted). What is important here is the way the exhibition space is used as a site for political activism. Moore forces us to examine our attitudes to sexuality and gender. In fact, we are made to feel complicit in the oppression he depicts :

*The carnal activity of viewing is one which the viewer enacts once in the miniature, twice in the doubling up of the frame and a third time over in the representation of intimate and eroticised 'tableaux vivants.' Our position in relation to the miniature and its doubles is participatory rather than perceptual. We have to labour over the contracted space of the frames as the system of surveillance labours to control the prisoner's body.*⁶

The AIDS crisis has had a profound effect on the gay movement. For older activists it has reawakened the belief that the battle for recognition and equality is still crucial. For a younger generation, particularly gay males but for lesbians as well, it has focused the dialogue and demanded attention. Perhaps this intensity has diminished of late, as it must, to be absorbed into a plethora of responses to the wider issues of gay and lesbian identity.

Since such a variety of exhibitions around the country has been exploring these issues, one can't help wondering whether the margins have become, for a while at least, the centre.

1. Robert Shubert, Review *You Are Here and Dislocations : Body, Memory, Place* in *Agenda*, May 1993. P. 7.

2. Marcus O'Donnell, Catalogue *Dislocations : Body, Memory, Place*. National Gallery of Victoria, 1993.

3. Stephen O'Connell, Review, *Dislocations: Body, Memory, Place, Art and Text*, 45, May, 1993. P.76.

4. Paul Foss, 'The Nimbus of the Sexual', catalogue essay for *Poof*, ACCA, 1993.

5. Marcus O'Donnell, 'The Secretion of Images' in *Genet, Gay Identity and Imagination* by Ross Moore and Marcus O'Donnell, 1993.

6. Robert Shubert, 'The Carnal Rose' in *The prison was silent. No one dared sing*, catalogue, Linden, 1993.



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March 11, 2011

KWEEER ART ENTERS THE KULTURE PALACES

SOMEONE RECENTLY SUGGESTED TO ME that the only real products of queer culture were DJing and drag and that the culture was about as interesting as crispbread. In fact, he noted, the range and depth of culture on the strip made Revesby Workers' look like a cultural palace, you know, Versailles about 1740.

Taken overall, this criticism isn't as penetrating or as provocative as it might first seem, not only because of the rather narrow definition of culture it uses but because the reproduction and display of queer culture now takes place in institutions beyond the strip. Like major art galleries, for example.

Shocking though it may be, in the visual arts works designed to last longer than a playlist are being made, and are finding their way into the collections of major galleries, like Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA).

And it's not just trad art that's making its way there. As part of the satellite surrealism program, the MCA held its own drag show of sorts, presenting a recent Sunday afternoon appearance of the 2.2 metre Pope Alice who, accompanied by an extraordinary variety of music, took her audience, metaphorically, on some of her travels, handing out hosts and condoms, dispensing munificence and sight gags, and radiating good humour.

Other galleries, like Melbourne's Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), have begun to develop programs of exhibitions and forums devoted to queer art, with the attendant qualifications that artists place on their work being described in this way.

The ACCA programs this year have included *You Are Here* seen in Sydney as part of Mardi Gras; Kate Reeves, Jane Trengrove and Neil Emmerson in a series called *Essensual Fragments*, which dealt with sensuality, sexuality and the body; and Mathew Jones' installation *POOF*. ACCA has also run *Sticky Labels*, a forum about gay, lesbian and queer art issues.

Many artists have an ambiguous relationship to the terms gay or lesbian art, or queer aesthetics, and do not describe themselves as lesbian or gay artists or as making lesbian and gay art. Their art in fact consists of a running commentary about these very issues.

They position themselves against institutions like the gay and lesbian community, from which they see definitions of gayness or lesbianism emerging rather too prescriptively. They refuse the categories for many reasons: because they find the categories don't describe their work or because they're making work which is about sensuality or eroticism, which while it may be about same-sex issues is often more about the relationship between the viewer and the object.

Sometimes the rejection of labels seems to spring from a social rejection of community and lifestyle as much as from a carefully fashioned or thought-through aesthetic. And there is always a risk in this rejection that the art itself may only speak to the art world rather than to a wider community. Some artists may see that as no bad thing.

I'm not altogether persuaded that



Joe by William Yang mixed media 1979

refusing the labels makes the art 'not gay' or 'not queer'. It just becomes another move in a play about defining sexualities.

The irony of the artists' position is that just as there's a movement which challenges notions of fixed identity, the big cultural institutions and funding organisations at last get comfortable with the idea of art being made around sexual identity, making spaces and money available. But the works which are challenging identity are among the first to be taken up, aided by those with a talent for promotion.

Mathew Jones' work *POOF* spread itself as public art even to Sydney through a series of pink, black and white stickers, and invitations sent through the mail. The image, which formed the basis of this promotional material and was realised in 3D at ACCA, was of an exploding cartoon cloud, with *POOF* and a copyright sign in the middle.

In the gallery, the exploding cloud filled up most of two rooms of the gallery and seemed to make the pink walls disintegrate. It was made of pink-lit, dacron (pillow stuffing) held together with chicken wire and cheerfully camp, vulgar and garish it made its point very bluntly. One consequence of making *POOF* visible, material and exclusively owned was the connection between the shape of the installation and the imaging of HIV by electron microscope that you find in medical journals.

Meanwhile in ACCA's other gallery there was a more lyrically sombre piece, Neil Emmerson's *Inhabit me* (like a memory). Emmerson's work has previously not received as much attention as other's; but on the basis of this cool, resolved piece his work certainly deserves to be seen more often.

Inhabit me is an installation consisting of a large concernia-like screen made up of twenty or so panels. While they could be arranged in many different ways, at ACCA they were in a roughly flattened oval. There were gaps that you could walk through, and through the low red lighting and allusions to a maze you get the idea of the design, space, holes and surprise of a sex venue.

The panels contain the same image, repeated in different configurations and variations. At first look they're just abstract decorative patterns like wall paper, but when you look more closely, you see veins, membranes, skin and arseholes — abstracted yes, but recognisable.

Then it becomes clearer that the piece is about bringing out aspects of the erotic and the sensual that interest gay men and about how gay bodies' surfaces work sexually and aesthetically. That, of course, and much more about how we remember our bodies and others, and the nature of sexually theatrical space.

At ACCA's forum on queer aesthetics, *Sticky Labels*, Kate Reeves described her own project as one of trying to get beyond the phallus, meaning both the penis, but also in a wider sense The Sexual as it had been constructed by men. She argued that it was probably impossible to look at the history of the female nude in art, for example, as being anything other than part of this phallic, male view of sexuality.

Her response was to turn to the work of Jane Trengrove — and her installation at ACCA as a tonic to this phallic sexuality, work which she described as "lesbianised domestic paraphernalia". She described the "sexy right glove" which formed part of the installation, noting that "here the phallic sign becomes

many fingered, each with an exterior and an interior, now like the little finger swollen and tender as an engorged clitoris, now like the thumb, creased like skin on an inner thigh or shoulder. Other fingers become tiny cunts, and vaginas play over the surface of the glove, and around and into the opening, where a hand can slide, perhaps another glove."

The press release that accompanied *POOF* claimed that the installation asked the question "Will queers ever find voice within the 'general' community with anything other than the novelty value of the marginalised victim?" Casting one's eye over the works in the *Art of this world: the MCA collection*, the answer is "Sooner or later, Cynthia, if not already".

THE MCA COLLECTION, NOW NUMBERING some 4000 objects, was put together principally by three curators — from 1969 to 1983 by Elwyn Lynn, who works as a painter and writes art criticism for the *Australian*, and by Leon Paroissien and Bernice Murphy since then (Murphy and Paroissien are respectively curator and director of the gallery). Lynn collected only international art, while the other two added Australian art as well.

This display of the collection uses a number of approaches, organising material around themes, the work of a particular artists, nationalities and stylistic movements.

There are pop classics you would expect to see in a modern art collection: Robert Indiana's graphic print of the word *LOVE* which became an icon of the seventies. And there is one of Warhol's Campbell's soup cans, *Hot Dog Bean*.

Apart from these works by — well let's call them gay artists and be done with it

because it's nothing if not convenient — there are also others, particularly in the section on *Personal Fictions*.

Here we find the work of Juan Davila and William Yang, among the most confident, and in Yang's case, accessible artists working today. There are three of Yang's photographs from the late '70s and early '80s on display. *Distances*, is of a crumpled, empty double bed. Is there anything in the image to signify who slept there or what was done, if anyone slept there, or if it was only Yang himself, or some assistant, perhaps together, who poetically and theatrically crumpled the linen just before snapping the pic? The images play with ideas of documentary, or recording reality, and of fantasy. The reader can choose to place whomever s/he wishes in the bed; but with the knowledge that Yang is a gay photographer in some senses, the image gets loaded, as an image of desire which can't be shown.

In the other two photos, *Joe* and *M*****, bodies are covered with writing. On *Joe*'s body we read about how "I" picked up *Joe* and "we" went home and how because *Joe* was deaf, "I" could take his photograph in the morning without him hearing the click of the camera. But is this inscription on *Joe*'s body the voice of the photographer telling us about himself, or someone else, or merely a fantasy?

In *M***** we find a similar problem, but a different story. *M*****, whose name is actually written out in full on his body across his chest and down over his torso, almost to his dick which is almost completely pulled out of his underpants, tells us a story of partially realised desires and betrayal. But whose story is it? It's certainly not told from the point of view of the person whose body it is allegedly about. There are hints and possibilities, promises and absences.

Yang, unlike many who use text in contemporary art, is as accomplished a writer as he is a photographer and the stories are lyrical, touching, amusing and elliptical like the other parts of the image.

Also noteworthy is Davila's *Photogram* (1984) a series of images boxed like a cartoon with an R sticker at the bottom in which Davila appears to be engaging both with another man in the image and the photographer and the viewer. Painted crudely across the images is cartoon type text which reads "An answer less often suffices to end the world of a question than a deed."

When an artist's sexual preferences are not known to a viewer how then does s/he read an image? What effects does this absence of knowledge have? Does the image become loaded in the same way, as William Yang's images are?

Too many questions, too many answers. Which artist said that drag had more to say than art and that he wished in his own work he could approach its tackiness and its tragedy? Davila? Davinci? David? An answer less often suffices to end the world of a question than a deed. Time to go out and catch a bit of flat art in the Albury's new show.

ART OF THIS WORLD
MCA until October 31

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August 1984

Exploding Architecture

Colin Hood spoke to Perspecta artist Mathew Jones who is refashioning his installation *Poof!* for the vestibule of the Art Gallery of NSW.

CH The Art Gallery vestibule has become one of the privileged exhibition sites for Perspecta artists over the years. You did an earlier version of the work at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art in Melbourne last year. How do you plan to re-style the piece for Perspecta?

MJ At ACCA it actually occupied three rooms and so was shaped by the architecture of the building. With the Art Gallery of NSW it will be engineered quite differently. I'm looking forward to using this space very much. It's a much bigger space - an incredibly dramatic and theatrical space that really suits the piece.

CH In a recent review, the installation was described as reflecting on the "spectacularisation of gay and lesbian issues in the mainstream media". Do you agree with that assessment?

MJ In the mainstream media or wherever. The title *Poof!* takes on a cartoon-like aspect, a sound describing a sudden appearance - or disappearance.

This was the inflection I wanted for the piece, to create an ambiguity around the word's meaning - either a proud announcement of gay identity or an exploding of a myth.

CH In an ABC interview you did concerning your work *Trophies* - in the *True Stories* exhibition at Artspace - you commented on the way codes and sub-cultural codes intersect and deflect from each other, and on the other hand, the way people from a particular sub-culture may understand a particular jargon while others - outside of it - may not. Does *Poof!* continue your critique of mainstream and sub-cultural media representations?

MJ Yes it does. What I've done - consistently I think - is to engage with images and words from publicity campaigns - for organisations like ACON or ACT-UP for example - and to express some kind of critical distance from them. This is why I like the ambiguity of the title *Poof!* It's like the way I'm always torn between my allegiance to gay politics and my

dissatisfaction with it.

CH The American curator and writer Connie Butler has remarked - in a recent essay on installation work - that 'artists are now constructing things in and with space that somehow encompass gender'. Do you think your own work carries this effect? Does it bear some kind of generic affinity with more grunge-style installation, or is the effect of language more important?

MJ Because my work focuses on gay identity - on the relationships between gay sub-culture and mainstream, I always try and frustrate some kind of identifying element that would tie my work to a particular style or debate. My body of work includes photographs, paintings, sculptures, installations - even tattoos. My work is contextual in the sense of responding to the physical nature of the space, the history of the space, what other work is being shown



Mathew Jones Poof! 1993

at the time - what people expect of me at a particular time.

CH The lead-up to the Mardi Gras is perhaps a context in which your work will be interpreted. How do you feel about that?

MJ I have no problem being a part of Mardi Gras - as long as what I do stands out in some way from the whole event. More and more, people are getting this warm, fuzzy 'tolerant' glow. I wrote a note for the catalogue to the effect that *Poof!* was to be the last word in queer art - an apogee. Meaning something like: "You want gay art? This is it. An enormous bloody great spectacle".

Australian Perspecta 1995



Australian Perspecta for 1995 will present a diversity of artists and art practices ranging

Girlmonster, which consists of scanned body parts remade into new beings. Melbourne



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Mary Whitton



'Pope Alice — The World's Greatest Living Curiosity' a detail from Luke Roberts' installation *Nickelodeon/ Calliope Tent/Trojan Horse/Not a Muse(um) of Silentia*, 1994. (The erect penis has been screened by the SSO to comply with censorship laws.)

Questioning major exhibitions

PERSPECTA

Art Gallery of NSW
Until 26 March

This year, the Mardi Gras festival boasts a number of major exhibitions including two group shows, *Perspecta* at the Art Gallery of NSW and *Sydney Photographed* at the Museum of Contemporary Art.

Perspecta is the big contemporary art show the gallery holds every two years to canvas issues in Australian art.

The theme of this year's show — according to the dense catalogue essay by curator Judy Annear — is hybrid works, that is works which have been produced in communities like the gay and lesbian community, outside the mainstream (whatever the mainstream might be — is it still straight, Anglo, when the official line from every part of government is multicultural, and in Sydney at least, gay and lesbian inclusive?).

Should *Perspecta*, given these rather broad cultural concerns, be in the Mardi Gras Festival at all? What's gay or lesbian about it? What does it say about being gay and lesbian?

Ideally, Mardi Gras exhibitions should include significant gay and lesbian work, or a large number of gay and lesbian works, or works by gay or lesbian artists. But what is the correct proportion — or is it useful to think in these terms?

Recent *Perspectas* have included the work of one gay artist each show (Mathew Jones in 1991, Scott Redford in 1993); this year it includes more — Jones again, Neil Emmerson, Luke Roberts, David McDiarmid, Linda Dement). There may be some I've missed, but out of 36 artists shown, that makes around 10 percent.

It isn't a very high percentage. One could argue that it was an inclusive exhibition on this basis, rather than one which was strongly

gay or lesbian. But are inclusive exhibitions appropriate for Mardi Gras Festivals?

Turning to the works on show, do they deal with gay or lesbian themes?

Well, yes they do: Jones, Emmerson, McDiarmid and Roberts — very obviously. Dement's concerns are quite broadly sexual, feminist and technological — in her cheeky computer interactive 'Cyberpunk Girlmonster', rather than specifically lesbian, but that does inform her work.

Other works address or are dedicated to gay and lesbian issues or people while dealing more generally with women's sexuality and how it can be represented.

Other questions need to be considered — such as the presentation of the work in the gallery. Is it shut away in an inaccessible corner? How can works be read in relation to each other?

McDiarmid and Jones' work is unavoidable, defining entry to the gallery and setting the scene for the exhibition.

McDiarmid's piece, his first commissioned by a major public gallery, is on the front of the building, in the tympanum, the triangle (appropriately enough) at the top of the columns. It's a big sunny pulsating queer sign, alluding to HIV, the rainbow flag and notions of style.

Jones' installation, 'POOF', dominates the foyer. Here it works differently from the gallery in Melbourne (Australian Centre for Contemporary Art) where it was first shown. It offers a neat complement to McDiarmid's work, picking up the viral, the stylish and the tacky fag

signifiers, and turning them into an immense fluffy 3D cartoon explosion (Poof!).

Unlike his major work which has been successfully taken to Brazil and Canada, the intellectual and metaphorical links Jones seeks to make between appearance and disappearance in cartoons (signified by Poof) and the spectacle of identity politics (the Poof) remains forced and unconvincing.

Downstairs in the exhibition proper, Neil Emmerson's 'Gui Nan Feng' examines the issue of gay identity and relations in China. Emmerson's work is, within the context of Chinese culture, shockingly revolutionary, reviving the history of homosexual life and literature from pre-20th century dynasties, and inscribing homosexual love into the heart and mind of a Chinese revolutionary hero.

It is a work of some elegance and includes a wonderfully executed optical piece where the image of the hero continually shifts out of and blends into the image of Chairman Mao.

Closing the show is Luke Robert's giant 'Nickelodeon/Calliope Tent/Trojan Horse/Not a Muse(um) of Silentia', which includes a juke box and singles of the music Pope Alice (Roberts' extraordinary creation) will use on her float in the Mardi Gras Parade. Pope Alice is also leading tours of *Perspecta*. Check with the gallery for dates and booking details on (02) 225 1700.

Apart from being a creator of memorable performance art, Roberts is also a painter of some distinction. His work on Mary Mackillop in the Powerhouse Museum's show on the little Aussie saint (or as others prefer to describe her, the 19th century alcoholic lesbian feminist) is easily the best there; and yes, Pope Alice was there when that other pope opened the show.

On the whole, the work from the gay and lesbian arts community stands up well in *Perspecta*. It is serious, considered, politically engaged and relatively accessible. By

comparison, much of the rest seems one dimensional, gallery focused, and cut off from sources which might otherwise give it energy or ideas.

The new Aboriginal gallery at the AGNSW is highly recommended. Most of it is recent work from the last decade, and it includes two men who have regularly exhibited in Mardi Gras shows, Arone Raymond Meekes and H.J. Wedge.

SYDNEY PHOTOGRAPHED

Museum of Contemporary Art
Until February 13

Sydney Photographed is an exhibition of some 23 photographers, focusing on quite extensive selections from their work. It is significant in two ways — it presents a view of Sydney which is not generally shown, in other words, the works are not iconographic images of Sydney which function as key representations which stand for the city as a whole.

Rather they portray the rest: life in ethnic communities, suburban architecture, glimpses of people and scenes, as well as intensified and constructed studio shots which mock the iconographic.

The works come from important, generally young or mid-career photographers like Anne Zahalka, and date from the beginning of the '80s. The selection of photographers excludes big names, like David Moore and Max Dupain. The show is, in many ways, profoundly disappointing. Again, from the point of view of being in Mardi Gras, one might ask why, given the half dozen images devoted to the subject.

The photography itself is mundane. There are some stand out images by Zahalka (who plays very cleverly with the iconographic), William Yang and Fiona Hall, who evocatively represents the erotic, heat and sensuality of beach culture. But the rest...

Perhaps next year the MCA could hold a show for the opening about photographs of Mardi Gras. There's certainly enough material around.

— Leigh Raymond

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