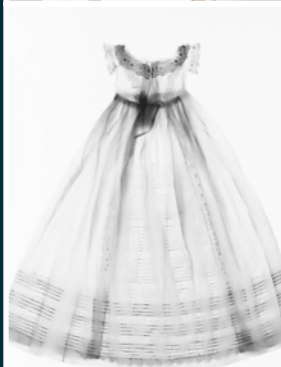


Constructed Worlds

23 May to 4 July

ZAHALKA
STACEY
RRAP
FERRAN
FAHD



Sway

How do we build our lives amongst the echoes and reflections of forgotten histories? How do we recollect and reshape a shared sense of the past and its distant gestures as they unfold within everyday moments? And how can we uncover and weave new stories from those narratives that dwell beyond the margins of our current ideologies?

Constructed Worlds draws together a series of photographic works which evoke possible answers to these questions. In turn, the show also raises further questions around the very nature of photography and its relationship to the world. Within this framework, photography operates as a site of instability – a shifting ground of temporal collisions, performative rituals and material uncertainty. Themes of labour and gender are also interwoven amongst the images. More specifically, there is the double narrative of work by women – represented in various incarnations and defined by the artworks' female authorship – which lends itself to the exhibition theme. Through a series of discursive and often intimate exchanges, the works bring forth resonant economies of time and labour undertaken by women in a multitude of ways.

Across the works of Anne Ferran, Julie Rrap and Cherine Fahd, representations of female subjectivity and identity are visibly questioned through explorations of the body's actions and poses. Rrap and Fahd use their own bodies to test the limits of its expression and representation against those of photography's. Contorted within visual fields of abstraction, their bodies seem caught somewhere between shifting figure/ground and subject/object distinctions. Here the body becomes its own double, literally staging itself as both artistic gesture and the ground upon which it is registered.

Ferran's work explores similar spaces of perceptual interplay, but through an elliptical and misaligned staging of time. In her images, it's an absence, an inexplicable gap (rather than collapse) in the visual field, through which she draws our attention to overlooked histories of women and children from Australia's colonial past. Through her reimagining and tracing of clothing and places linked to their lives, we become witnesses to spectral legacies which can never be made whole. Her portraits remind us that our recollections of the past are always bound to an imprecise repetition.

In these three artists' works, the relaying and reiterating of the body's gestures and form operates as a dual form of

embodiment and critique. It's a strategy that suggests a way of sensing and seeing double – like a photograph held up to its referent – a way of being inside and outside simultaneously. But inside and outside what? Perhaps it depends on how we move in and out of time with photographic images, where we stand in relation to images that bear our likeness and mirror the world we think we know.

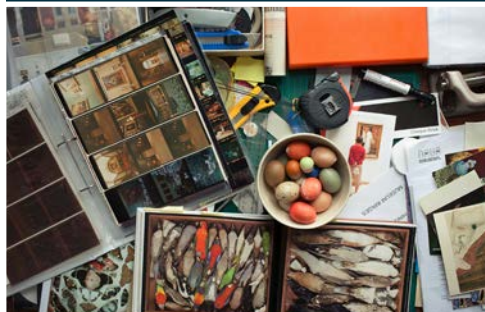
Robyn Stacey's dioramic views offer another perspective on these considerations. Shot from hotel rooms turned camera obscuras, conventional thresholds of space are inverted and collapsed within the images. Walls become reflections of outside worlds, which have been brought inside and turned on their heads. In some ways these fantastical backdrops remind us that the economy of the hotel room is like a rehearsal space. It's a stage we temporarily inhabit on our travels, transposing and performing rituals of domesticity in generic and anonymous surroundings. In Stacey's imagery the promise of adventure is measured against a practised intimacy, with each setting blurring the line between private and public, imagination and reality.

It's a topsy-turvy experience that also resides in the space of the artist's studio. This too could be described as another kind of rehearsal space, a site of creative potential

that plays host to imminent successes and failures. In Anne Zahalka's images of female artists' studios, strange and intimate arrays of objects appear as something akin to a museological collection. Half Wunderkammer and half enlightenment project, they present a mingling of exotic and esoteric objects, seemingly laid out to encourage haptic encounters amidst the suggestion of an empirical logic. More importantly, these are worktables, places where the latent potential of things are (re) discovered and built anew.

The performative signs and spaces depicted by the artists in *Constructed Worlds* generate critical dialogues that examine the dominant modes of expression and representation from which they are drawn. Photography, within this context, is a contradictory medium, holding the world still just for a moment, only to reveal the uncertainties of things we thought we knew. Collectively the works point towards photography as an underlying condition of our day-to-day lives and the worlds we make – transporting us through multiple spaces and time zones – stretching, collapsing, countering and prompting the ways we move through events and the shadows they cast.

Tanya Peterson
Lecturer in photography at UNSW Art & Design
and the National Art School, Sydney.



Above: *Worktable of Anne Zahalka, 2010*

Top right: *Worktable of Janet Laurence, 2012*

Right: *Worktable of Caroline Rothwell, 2012*



ANNE ZAHALKA

The direct transcription of what lies before the lens onto the photographic surface recording a place, person or object is what interests me. It is the detail and the clarity with which the photograph conveys its subject and its immediacy and directness that I like. The idea of being able to look at something closely in order to interpret and understand, is why the early seventeenth century northern European painters painted their objects and scenes so precisely.

They appeared real to the eye and could be studied and shown as evidence of their knowledge and wealth. It is what the photograph reveals as evidence of the world that I find so compelling. (Anne Zahalka in conversation with Curator Karra Rees, Hall of Mirrors: Anne Zahalka Portraits 1987 – 2007 catalogue published by Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne).

These photographs present an array of materials with which the artist works. Sketches, notebooks, diagrams and specimens lie as evidence of their endeavours, providing insight into the artists' areas of enquiry and the research that informs their practice. Amidst this abundance of information lie their tools, waiting patiently to be put to use. The display of multiple texts and images within the photograph allude to the influences and interests that shape their art. It is an accumulation of the artists' accoutrements and the assembling of these within the pictures' planes that provides differing perspectives to their work.

I began documenting these worktables as a way of understanding how artists work and how a work is brought into being. Given permission to photograph their collections enabled a forensic way of considering what lay before the lens. These assembled views of selected worktables of women artists provide a window into their practice and reflect on the ephemera with which they cleverly craft, mould and construct their unique forms. Bathed in natural light, these still lives offer an encounter with the privileged and private domain of the artist's worktable. From this point on, the artwork takes on a life of its own as it leaves the studio and travels to new surroundings to be closely scrutinized by many eyes.

While the artist may control how the artwork is placed within this context, they cannot (always) determine its future home. (AZ)

Anne Zahalka has exhibited extensively in Australia and internationally. She has accomplished important public art commissions and her works are held in most major public collections in Australia as well as numerous private and corporate collections here and overseas.

Her multi layered photographic practice explores both documentary photography and constructed theatrical artifice. Many of her earlier works utilise staged studio tableaux and examine myths and stereotypes, such as issues of national and personal identity and gender and representation. Portraiture has provided a constant thread in Zahalka's work and for more than 30 years she has revealed and explored the artist as a subject. In recent works, Zahalka has removed the physical presence of the human subject and contextualised the artist through the artefacts and spaces that occupy the working realm.

Zahalka is represented by Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne.



Worktable of Iris Häussler, 2012



Worktable of Maria Fernanda Cardoso, 2012



Worktable of Veronica Kent, 2012



Room 14 Cartwright, Harbour, 2013



Room 14 Cartwright, Ocean, 2013

ROBYN STACEY

I have practiced photography for a long time and I have always loved everything photography allows you to do, it is really vast. ... When you say you are a photographer people ask – do you do portraits, do you do landscape? But the technology behind photography is enormous and you can use it in the

way you want. So it is more like problem solving, you consider what you want to speak about and can dip in to photography's arsenal of tools and techniques.
(From an interview with Maisy Stapleton for Eastside Radio.)

An artist residency at the Sofitel on Collins in Melbourne provided the opportunity for Robyn Stacey to take her work in a new direction. The resulting work, *Guest Relations*, continues her exploration of the fabricated aspects of the photographic medium; in this case using the veracity of the image to confound us, but it brought Stacey in touch with a very old form of image viewing. Using the centuries old device of camera obscura she explored the transitory spaces of hotel rooms. The camera obscura, the earliest form of the pinhole camera, allows light through a tiny hole into a darkened room, projecting the outside image upside down and in reverse. Stacey had never previously worked with camera obscura but experienced one in Florence set up in the alleyway near the Uffizi. In *Guest Relations* she blacked out the hotel room, created a lens in a 20c sized hole and also lit the subject with a torch. The photograph only worked according to the available sunlight, in this case the maximum exposure time was two hours, the average 40 minutes. Stacey shot the resulting transitory merging of the private interior with the public exterior on a digital Hasselblad with 40 megapixels that provided incredible detail and infinite sharpness.

Robyn Stacey has exhibited nationally and internationally since the mid 1980s when she produced staged photographs drawing on the visual language of cinema and television. In the 1990s she experimented extensively with new media, including digital photography and lenticular prints. In 2000 Stacey began working with natural history collections in Australia and overseas, using photography to present the eighteenth and nineteenth century specimens, artefacts, and scientific models to a contemporary audience. She assembled the groups of objects based on visual strategies drawn from the Dutch still life tradition inviting an alternate view to the traditional museum display.

Her work is held in numerous public, corporate and private collections. She is a senior lecturer in the School of Communication Arts at the University of Western Sydney, a member of the Visual Arts Board of the Australia Council (2006-2008), and photographer/author with Ashley Hay of *Herbarium*, 2004; *Museum*, 2007, both published by Cambridge University Press and *House* with Peter Timms, published by Historic Houses Trust of NSW (now Sydney Living Museums), 2011.

Stacey is represented by Stills Gallery.



*Room 13 Cartwright,
Michael and Katherine, 2013*



Outerspace No. 9, 2010

JULIE RRAP



Loaded: Green #1, 2012

I see myself as talking from the third person, not as a self-portrait ... I use my self-image in a more disembodied way. I am having a conversation with the female body: I am in two positions at once as

model and author. The use of the self is almost like a ruse. (From an interview with Victoria Lynn, 2006.)

A central focus in Julie Rrap's work has been the investigation of performative art and how her body is used as a tool in art making. The three works in this exhibition evidence her dialogue with the broader concerns about the body. The video *Castaway* is a cross-pollination between two different images and scenarios; that of the figures in Gericault's painting *The Raft of the Medusa* and the figure of Marilyn Monroe in her famous dress and high heels standing over a wind vent in the street. *OuterSpace #9* is a construction of black lines using black elastic that creates a space for the body to inhabit, resulting in the artist's body appearing in a state of suspension. Images from this series were selected for the La Trobe University Visual Arts Centre (VAC) façade, exhibited from 2013-15.

Loaded involved casting a series of shoes in frozen coloured inks. The shoes, worn by Rrap, became painting instruments as they melted, leaving their mark on a large canvas. In this work Rrap was privileging the foot over the hand in creating gestural marks and using the residue colour of a readymade form as an accessory in painting. The *Loaded* series of photographs provides elements of the artist's presence and absence within the

work and suggests that all images are loaded, never innocent, there is a 'loadedness' of interpretation, context and meaning.

Julie Rrap has consistently worked with photography, painting, sculpture, installation, performance and video to challenge the conventions of content and form. She maintains a long engagement with issues of gendered identity and with the codifications of the feminine subject in art history, popular culture and social convention. Her works are held in public, corporate and private collections in Australia and overseas and her work has been selected for numerous national and international exhibitions. Rrap has also been the beneficiary of numerous grants including a two year Creative Fellowship from the VACE, Australia Council. In 2007, a publication and 25-year survey exhibition, *Body Double*, was curated at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney by Victoria Lynn. Rrap exhibits with Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney and Arc One Gallery, Melbourne.



Escape Artist: Castaway, 2009
Digital video



Untitled One, 2015



Untitled Two, 2015

ANNE FERRAN

Untitled One and Two are a return to some photograms of christening robes I made in New Zealand in the early 1990s, in a changed form that has been enabled by digital technology. While all that's required to make a photogram are an object, photosensitive paper and the presence of light, to make new these images, I also needed a sophisticated digital camera and digital printer.

The characteristic tones of the photogram (shades of grey and white against a black ground) have been digitally reversed; logically, the resulting images should closely resemble the real piece of clothing. However, these images seem even more spectral than their photogram antecedents.

There are a number of degrees of separation at work in the photographs from the *Twice Removed* series. The river landscapes were shot in the vicinity of Maitland NSW, and the young women, all strangers to Ferran, were photographed in a studio. The elaborate headdress is a copy of one traditionally worn in Calais, a city in northern France from where impoverished lace workers emigrated to Maitland in the nineteenth century. Like most inhabitants of Maitland these young women know nothing of this episode in their town's history.



Amy at Veterans Creek, from series Twice Removed, 2004

Anne Ferran has been exhibiting since the 1980s. In the mid 1990s she began working with the residues of Australian colonial past, probing them for gaps and silences. Her process is one of careful study, often working with museum collections and with government records. She has been especially drawn to the lives of anonymous women and children, seeking to shed light on their traces in museum collections, photographic archives and historic sites. It is characteristic of her imagery that the subject is not what is seen but rather what haunts it, something only partially visible.



Alana at Tenambit from series Twice Removed, 2004

In recent years her research interests have broadened to include the histories of animals, in particular birds, and of changes to their habitats. In addition to digital and analogue photography she works in video, installation and textiles and she has a particular interest in the photobook. Ferran has been the recipient of numerous awards, fellowships and grants and her work is held in major public collections in Australia and internationally. She is Honorary Associate Professor at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney and Senior Honorary Fellow at the University of Wollongong. Ferran is represented by Stills Gallery, Sydney and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.



Above: Plinth Piece, Kouros study

Top right: Plinth Piece, *shadow study* 2014

Bottom right: Plinth Piece, *study for reclining nude* 2014



CHERINE FAHD

In Plinth Piece I have portrayed myself as figurative sculptures. Using photomontage techniques with brightly coloured children's play

dough, I have created a façade to reimagine the body as overwhelming flesh. The plinth acts as an objectifying tool – as soon as I stand on it I pose, performing the self as artwork.

This series reflects my ongoing interest in the relationship between photography, performance and sculpture. Surrealism too, provides a historical platform from which to exploit photography's connection to reality – to create works that overtly merge the 'real' with invention by adopting the Surrealist methods of photo-montage and 'doubling' to both represent and fabricate reality and the body. It is interesting to consider the relationship between the subject and the photographer when you are both.

When a photographer points the camera at a subject other than him or herself, a series of subtle exchanges is activated. The act of looking, being looked at and posing initiates my interest in well-known notions of power, disclosure and self-presentation that characterise the interchange between photographer and subject. However, I argue that while such notions offer a theoretical framework for analysing the complexity of photographer-subject relations in photographic portraiture, they seldom account for the dynamics of photographer and subject in self-portraiture. In the practice of self-portraiture, the photographer-subject nexus is rarely scrutinised

in terms of power – since the voluntary act of pointing a camera at oneself implies the photographer's readiness to 'play' subject. (CF)

Cherine Fahd has a painting background and her works often reflect her earlier training and understanding of art history. She is an artist and lecturer at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney and currently undertaking PhD research at Monash University, Melbourne. The current focus of her research is the dynamics between photographer and subject in portraiture and self-portraiture. She is interested in the ways we present to the camera and the ways the body is transformed in the process. Fahd uses photography, sculpture and performance as methods to explore such things as concealment, posing and hyperawareness in self-presentation. Fahd's photographs are represented in major public collections in Australia and she is the recipient of numerous New Work Grants from the Australia Council for the Arts along with art awards and residencies. Fahd is represented by Galerie Pompom.



*Plinth Piece, woman bitten
by a snake 2014*

