

## Monet Microwave Berlin Burghers 2010

While primarily photographic, my practise exists between notions of abstraction and figuration. In recent years it has expanded to include video, which uses sound and lighting, movement and costume, photographs and temporary sculptural elements often built specifically for the camera to bring together the physiognomies of abstraction and figuration. I am interested in examining ideas relating to perception, representation and how to make an image in a world saturated with them, and also in looking back through history, examining how it is remembered, or forgotten through the photographic document. Using wastefulness left in the world as a tool in my creative work, I try to respond to the symbiotic relationship that exists between humanity and its material environment. I try to confront the time and reality we live in and find a position from emotion and energy and then try to give form to this position.

### *APPROPRIATION AND MEMORY*

In *Monet Microwave Berlin Burghers*, meta-appropriation abounds and everything is dumbed and watered down and ultimately flimsy. Original sources are barely recognisable; they are transformed into new things. In this exhibition, each video is based on personal photographs. They are mainly of me whilst travelling overseas. Some were photographs that I've lived with for a long time and even though I spent many years hoarding, making taking, collecting photographs, I never really had many of me in them. So the ones I did have, I know very well.

Most of them were taken whilst travelling overseas like one taken around 2008 standing in front of Monet's *Waterlilies* in the Orangerie in Paris. Others are of me in my favourite puffer coat in Berlin standing next to a three-wheeled car and another in the Rodin Sculpture garden. The resultant videos really don't resemble at all the photographs but are catalysts for memories which trigger emotions which bring other images and ideas to life. It is the process of looking back to understand and make sense of the now.

I only have one of these photographs still in my possession and the rest are gone, thrown out, who knows. You will never see these photos but that is probably a good thing, because they were really pretty ordinary. So why should you care about my holiday snaps? You shouldn't but it is the idea that a history is twisted, covered, clouded, forgotten, sweetened or made up.

### *THE ISLAND*

As you physically experience the work, each video acts like an island existing alone, but in close proximity to the others, which are then read and experienced together as one cacophony of images and sound. Each video is disparate from each other but also interconnected. This concept of the videos as a group of islands represents a dislocation. This decentring was experienced in post modernism and is still evident in practises today, or is it? Is there a new position or location? Where is there evidence of this exhaustion of postmodernism's traits? Is there any future for art? What is an avant- garde practise today?

Nicholas Bourriaud, the curator of a recent exhibition at the Tate Modern titled *Altermodern*, describes this present state of post-postmodernity as being like a "polyglot", and the being "stripped of a centre".<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Altermodern*, Tate Britain, 3 February – 26 April 2009

This idea of decentring and being centred with relation to an emotional state or particular type of energy being used in art practise, is also witnessed in some of my peers work such as Adam Cullen who uses pain and mourning as energy within his practise. Famously Bas Jan Ader's *I am too sad to tell you*, (1971) openly displayed his feelings of melancholy to create his work.

#### *JETLAG, NEW TECHNOLOGIES AND BODY ART*

The ease of plane travel today means we have the opportunity to access and experience things at around the same time – I am interested in this sense of jetlag and its relation on some level to an art practise based in the body, such as performance. Each video possesses a sense of travel, such as the suitcase in *Pulp Action and Swing*, as well as the aeroplane arm gestures in *Rings and Shake and Bake-Aeroplane Humping Machine*. In *house /boat problem* it is the notion of making a nest at home or travelling in the boat. (Although I was born and raised on the Georges River so the house/boat is also my home).

Advancements in computer and travel technologies mean we are becoming a monoculture. And as we experience the world via the World Wide Web, viewers and searchers of information have access to the same knowledge. What we would have found previously difficult to access, we can now retrieve within minutes. We have increasingly shorter attention spans, and a more superficial grasp of what we see and come to understand due to the smaller 'trailer' like examples of what we watch and read on the net. My work and all of us are influenced by new technologies, such as twitter, facebook and email. It is as if the central figure of our world and my videos – whether they be man or woman - endures an unstable life, always in a state of shifting circumstances in our post MTV world. Due to the fact that everything is either hit, tapped, downloaded, uploaded, clicked, and flashed up on screen, we experience a shift in the way we encounter ourselves and therefore our bodies.

And so too the video *Shake and Bake- Aeroplane Humping Machine* exists or can be experienced from the knowledge of *Master Chef*, or Martha Rosler's seminal feminist performance *Semiotics of the Kitchen* (1975). This also goes for *Pulp Action* which can be read as a nod to Impressionism's painterly dots, Paul McCarthy's *Bossy Burger* (1991), or a messy reality TV show where the contestants are forced to carry out painful or stupid endurance tests to win the game.

#### *TRANCE-LIKE STATE*

The British scholar Alan Kirby says in his 2006 essay, 'The Death of Post Modernism and Beyond', it produced a "trance-like state" for those participating in it, all this being a result of a "media-induced shallowness" from instantaneous participation in trivial events is a "silent autism" superseding "the neurosis of modernism and the narcissism of postmodernism".<sup>2</sup>As described by Kirby I feel I experience a trance like state when performing in these mock up constructions for camera. They are not film sets.

#### *THE FUTURE IS IN THE PAST*

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<sup>2</sup> Alan Kirby, 'The Death of Postmodernism and Beyond', *Philosophy Now*, No 58. 2006

This work references early Avant Garde such as Oskar Schlemmer's Triadic Ballet (1927) and DADA's Cabaret Voltaire (1917). Futurism's films, costumes, sound works and performances remain a source of inspiration. For example an artist can emulate aesthetics used by the futurists of 1913 utilising digital post-production techniques, mashed with direct quotation from animation series Futurism to create multiple levels of reference and meaning. So the audience can enter and experience the work on many levels allowing for multiple readings and experiences of the same work.

The use of costume in my work is both gestalt abstraction - like camouflage - and is a sort of role-playing. There are similarities to kiddie dress up, everything from characters *In the Night Garden* to Walt Disney, to my childhood training as a dancer, singer.<sup>3</sup> Dressed in these costumes I can play out ironically and seriously any history I choose.

#### *TREADMILL LIKE ACTION*

Has the futurist construction of man as machine just been replaced with the Cyborg? The futurist's man as machine involved repetition which is also a post-modern trait. If we are exhausted with post modernism, how do we escape repetition particularly witnessed in performance and action for camera? Repetition in movement and in gesture can be the folding of t-shirts every day at work or the homeless person in Pitt Street who circles the bollards before continuing his walk.

#### *POOR AESTHETIC*

I employ a poor aesthetic similar to Arte Povera and to Grunge. I use what is available and free; it is a matter of re-using and remaking what already exists. I cut up my own photographs. Several years ago my art dealer closed and a lot of my work was returned to me. I realised I had brought all this stuff in the world, here I was commenting on consumerism and I was implicit in this.

#### *CRAZY, SUPERNATURAL, ABSURD*

Just like the television series *Fantasy Island* where all guests experience the supernatural and magical, in my practise I want to go with Ricardo Montalban and the little dude to experience the absurd in the world.<sup>4</sup> How is the absurd observed within our super saturated stupid world?

Justene Williams

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<sup>3</sup> *In the Night Garden* is an ABC television series for small children.

<sup>4</sup> Ricardo Montalban was the star of the American television series *Fantasy Island* (1977-1984). His character was Mr Roarke and his side kick was Tattoo.