

# I THOUGHT I KNEW BUT I WAS WRONG

THIS TEXT IS AN EDITED VERSION OF THE CATALOGUE ESSAY FOR THE EXHIBITION *I THOUGHT I KNEW BUT I WAS WRONG*, WHICH WAS FIRST HELD AT THE JAMJUREE GALLERY, CHULALONGKORN UNIVERSITY, BANGKOK [23 JULY – 12 AUGUST, 2004], PRIOR TO ITS PRESENTATION AT THE NANYANG ACADEMY FOR FINE ARTS AS A MAJOR PARTICIPANT IN *MAAPSINGAPORE*. THE FOLLOWING TEXT BY DANIEL PALMER, IS ALSO FROM THE *I THOUGHT I KNEW BUT I WAS WRONG* CATALOGUE AND IS REPRODUCED HERE IN FULL – TOGETHER THEY ENCAPSULATE THE EXHIBITION'S CHARTING OF A COMPLEX SET OF ISSUES THAT RESONATE WITHIN AUSTRALIA'S DIVERSE AND MULTIFACETED CULTURAL FRAMEWORK.

## ALEXIE GLASS & SARAH TUTTON

*With the increasing confusion between fact and fiction in contemporary life and contemporary art, life is moving closer to art and art is moving closer to life. The aesthetic and philosophical issues raised by the contemporary experience are intersecting with the central issues in contemporary art... A new generation of artists is developing a model of contemporary reality that is as fictional as it is real.*

Jeffrey Deitch, *Form Follows Fiction*, 2002

Since the introduction of the Sony Portapak in 1965, much has been written about the accessibility, affordability and mobility of video, and its pivotal role in the development of contemporary arts practice. The emergence of video as an important creative tool has been seen by many as an important factor in the development of hybrid arts practice and, as art critic Rosalind Krauss has referred to it,

the 'post-medium-condition'.<sup>1</sup> Many artists, increasingly impatient with the boundaries that separate traditional art practices, have been drawn to video for its capacity to bring together previously disparate media and to foster collaboration between practitioners from across the creative spectrum. Immediate and intimate, video has provided many artists with a tool with which to communicate ideas that engage audiences in a critical and often self-reflexive dialogue about the body, technology, identity and representation. In many ways the emergence of video art as a significant creative tool has engendered a quiet revolution. Seeping seamlessly into the melting pot of ideas and media from which today's artist can pick and choose, video continues to challenge many of the institutional, economic and curatorial prerogatives that dominate contemporary art.

As Daniel Palmer's essay *Medium Without a Memory: Australian Video Art* details, video has been an influential and significant media in Australia and has become a common tool for some of the country's more thoughtful artists. Like many of the myriad forms of

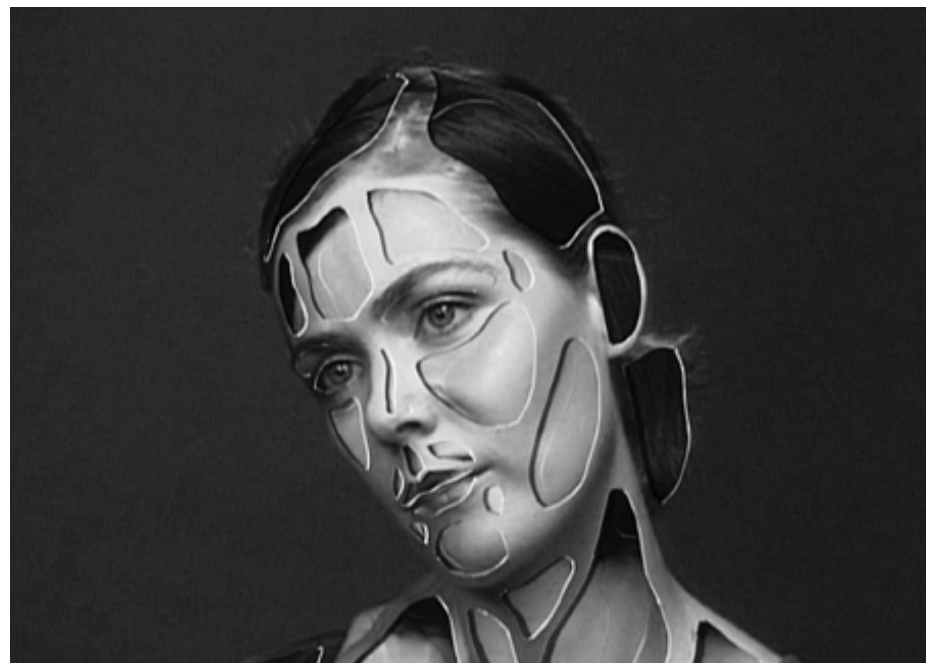
moving image and media art, video is a form of contemporary practice that is at once a global language and a language that invariably finds a unique local expression. While the increased affordability and accessibility of digital and editing technology has seen an explosion of video art in Australia, as in other Asia Pacific countries, it is important to view Australian video art both in the framework of the international scene and within the context of its own particular history.

*I thought I knew but I was wrong: New Video Art from Australia* explores the impact of video art on Australian contemporary art over the past five years. Showcasing a diverse selection of video works, the exhibition introduces audiences to the ways in which Australian artists are using video to explore ideas of identity, lifestyle and society within the context of a diverse and multifaceted arts culture. Disparate in subject matter and style, the works in this exhibition share a common urge to communicate something immediate and relevant to their audience. *I thought I knew but I was wrong* is a snapshot of the range and breadth of Australian contemporary visual culture – from the slick to the lo-fi, the luxurious to the raw, and the comic to the confessional. *I thought I knew but I was wrong* presents the work of nineteen artists in three interconnected screening programs: *Persona*, *Play* and *Space*.

*Persona* brings together a series of video works that explore key concepts and ideas around identity and subjectivity. At turns playful, critical, camp and satirical, *Persona* investigates the ways in which identity is constructed and mediated through social stereotyping, our relationships with others and our environment.

The concept of *Play* in this program is not one simply defined by notions of game, child-like flashbacks, or even a reference to eclectic clutter salvaged from under the banner of 'grunge'. More than these visual tropes, *Play* is a de-mythologising of behaviour and a salute to mis-behaviour and the artist's ability to adapt the medium of video to expand the parameters for perception.

The notion of space is endlessly cited as one of the most important factors shaping Australian identity and culture. In *I thought I knew but I was wrong*, *Space* takes on a slightly different, yet no less influential, character. There are no vast expanses of wilderness here, no desert vistas or fields of wildflowers. Instead, we see Kings Cross, Sydney, at night, fantastic images of amorphous and mutated flesh, disjunctions and interventions into urbane and personal space.



Opposite: Monika Tichacek, *The shadows* [video still], 2004  
Photo courtesy the artist and Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne

Above: The Kingpins, *Versus* [video still], 2002  
Photo courtesy the artists

Below: David Rosetzky, *Without You* [video still], 2003–4  
Photo courtesy the artist, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

These programs are intended as fluid groupings through which the viewer is able to engage with the works and the broad themes of identity, representation and the constructed environment. The exhibition includes work by both internationally renowned artists such as Tracey Moffatt, Patricia Piccinini and Destiny Deacon, as well as younger artists such as David Rosetzky and Shaun Gladwell, who have only begun to exhibit internationally over the past few years. The exhibition also includes works by Ivan Sen, Amiel Courtin-Wilson and Marcus Lyall, artists who are known primarily for their work in the film and television sector. Sen won considerable international acclaim for his film *Beneath Clouds*, while Lyall's multi-screen works have been used as part of stadium concert tours by U2, Oasis and the Rolling Stones. Courtin-Wilson has worked extensively in documentary film with the Australian multicultural network, SBS.

The exhibition's title, *I thought I knew but I was wrong*, is a rather ambiguous statement that does not lend itself well to translation into other languages. In choosing this title, we wanted to underscore the importance of context to contemporary arts practice, to highlight the multifaceted and reflexive nature of the exhibition's content. As an ongoing process of discovery and learning, contemporary art asks us to rethink and question our assumptions – about what constitutes contemporary art, and Australian culture and identity. The moving image, through the ubiquitous television, has infiltrated the global psychological landscape in a way that no other media or form of mass communication has before. The rules of engagement, while not universal, are common and largely unchallenged. As viewers, we are seldom asked to take a closer look, to study the minutiae of what we are seeing. *I thought I knew but I was wrong* asks viewers to take this second look, to explore beyond initial assumptions and to experience some of the more transformative aspects of contemporary visual arts.

*Persona* is fluid, *Play* is disturbed, *Space* is disjointed. Interconnected and complex, the twenty-two works that comprise *I thought I knew but I was wrong* draw on both the international language of contemporary art and the local vernacular of Australian contemporary culture. Providing a snap shot into the multiplicity of contemporary Australian art, this exhibition seeks to communicate some of the vitality and invention that artists are expressing through the moving image.

Note

<sup>1</sup> Rosalind Krauss, *A Voyage on the North Sea: Art in the Age of the Post-Medium Condition*, New York: Thames and Hudson, 1999