

Increase Your Uncertainty

A Constructed World

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art,
Melbourne

2 June - 26 July 2007

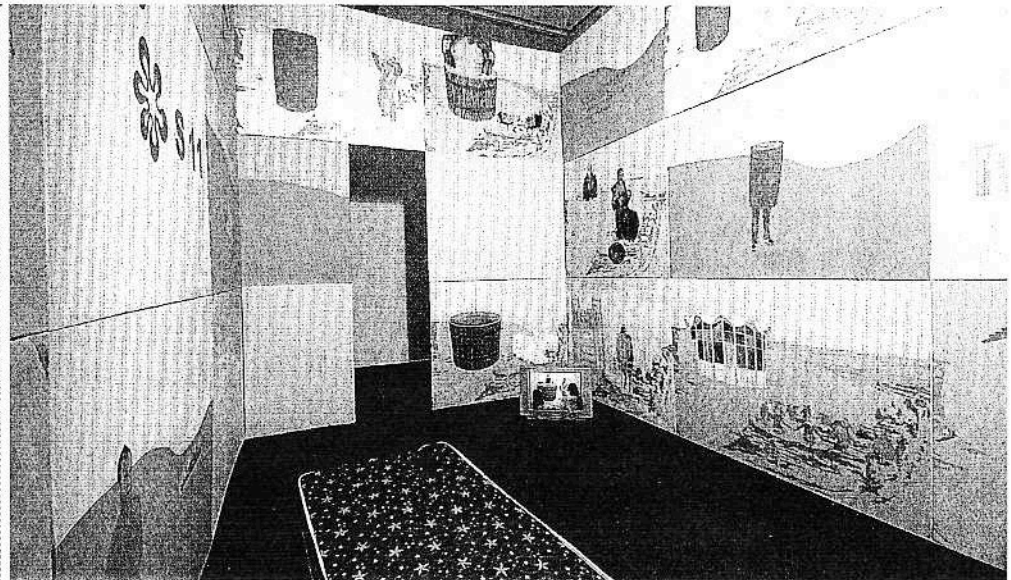
Manifestos abound in this exhibition. Crammed in amongst an array of scribbled lists in one corner is one titled *Ten reasons why A Constructed World love the Isola project*. Referring to an art centre in Milan, it also aptly describes the aspirations of ACW's own project: 'It involves the local community with the local art scene', 'It's an action not a metaphor', 'It mixes politics with pleasure'...

Formed in 1993 by Jacqueline Riva and Geoff Lowe, ACW has vigorously followed an open-ended program of collaboration, encompassing painting, video, installation, performance and workshops. The process starts with Lowe and Riva but brings in other people, sometimes other artists though often not, in an expanded investigation of art-making and its possible outcomes.

This is a riotous exhibition whose title, *Increase Your Uncertainty*, clearly alludes to the highly unscientific methods employed in the work. Curatorial decisions of selection and rejection are downgraded in an exhibition that delights in a squatter aesthetic of all-in ongoing Happening, where everyone's invited and the sacred art product plays second fiddle to the creative dynamism of art-making.

The question remains however; is this an impossible gesture? For all its apparent anarchy, there's an aesthetic consistency to the work suggesting a heavily determined intention by the two people at the heart of ACW. Early in their partnership Lowe and Riva, a painter and a video artist, swapped their roles to see what might come of their informed amateurism. These media continue to pervade their work and set the framework for collaboration across performance, music, dance and community-based workshoping.

The results sprawl through ACCA's galleries in this first major survey of ACW's practice. Gloriously slipshod, the work celebrates democratic quotidian materials; pen and paper, tarpaulin, plywood, bare mattresses, old TVs plonked on the floor, holes smashed



ABOVE: A Constructed World *Fresh History Room* 2007, *Fresh History Paintings*, 24 paintings, acrylic on canvas.

Courtesy the artists, Uplands Gallery, Melbourne and Roslyn Oxleyg, Sydney. Photo: John Brash.

RIGHT: A Constructed World *Ecstatic Torino*, 2004, video still, dimensions variable, courtesy the artists and Uplands Gallery, Melbourne.

through plasterboard, key rings, mirrors, 'bad' Handicam footage.

If art movements like Arte Povera freed art from fine materials like bronze and canvas, they remained tied to mysticism. The artist remained an alchemist, turning shit into gold. ACW on the other hand aren't interested in turning anything into anything. They are ruthlessly literal, and prefer being here now to being perfect later. Their working methods revel in the contingencies and informality of collaboration. An idea or project can always be reworked and reinvigorated as other people come to the table. Here an already porous body of work from roughly the last five years has been recombined and recontextualised to reanimate its meanings and potential. *Ecstatic Torino* (2004), shows Lowe, wearing a trademark black suit and Riva, wearing only Post It notes, dancing around waving large handwritten signs that, again, read as credos: 'Stay in groups' and 'No need to be great'. It's a manifesto handmade to irritate art-making's sacred cows.

This performance is recreated in another video projection in the same room, but staged this time by two actors. In this interpretation a psychedelic rock soundtrack, burning eyeballs and rude computer animation augment the dancing. In other iterations the shambling couple share space with revolving tantric figures in some sort of contemplation of Freudian urges



suggested by the title *Big Dirty Death Drive* (2007).

There's a libidinous zing in the air, a conspiratorial tone that invites the viewer in and asserts the politics of pleasure as it seeks to unpack our own constructed world. Artifice in art and social worlds, sexual taboos (a performance and video piece displays a man's genitals through a 'glory hole') and capitalist modes of production, reception and distribution are all interrogated with droll humour.

As a reformulation of a series of dynamic contingencies *Increase Your Uncertainty* encourages a chain of associative links. Elements, themes and ideas appear, submerge and re-emerge across works. It is a process that doesn't necessarily support a viewer's interpretation or decoding but that promotes an active engagement in *constructing* meaning and the pleasures of uncertainty. In this unending collaborative dance nothing is resolved, begging the viewer to question where it all might lead.

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