

STUART SHERMAN
Organized by Matt Hinkley
Exhibition Dates: 12 November – 11 December 2010

Gertrude Contemporary and Art & Australia
Emerging Writers Program
STUART SHERMAN

Stuart Sherman was a prolific performance artist, sculptor, filmmaker and writer working in New York from the mid '70s until the turn of the century and is most famous for *Spectacles*, his series of 18 performances, which took place between 1975 and 1994. These numbered performances were usually solo, contained little dialogue, and were enacted around a portable card table in a variety of public and private locations to both passersby and dedicated audiences. Taking everyday objects from a suitcase (toys, cups, pens etc.), he would place them on the card table, then move them around in a seemingly odd but captivating sequence.

This catalogue has been produced as part of the Gertrude Contemporary and Art & Australia Emerging Writers Program. The Emerging Writers Program pairs four young writers with an experienced mentor each, culminating in the production of a catalogue essay for Gertrude Contemporary's Studio 12 exhibition program and a review to be published in Art & Australia magazine.

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This program is made possible with support from the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust.

Text: Kelly Fliedner
Mentor: Sue Cramer

Image Captions:
Stuart Sherman
Selections from the Eighth Spectacle (People's Faces)
and the Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)
20 min, colour, sound, New York, c. 1979

Gertrude Contemporary is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments, and is assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.



**GERTRUDE
CONTEMPORARY**

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Although Sherman was shaking and appeared nervous whilst manipulating his props, there was a detailed choreography and meticulous system guiding his actions. Each *Spectacle* was therefore performed at several locations in exactly the same way, with the exact same sequence of movements, often in front of confused witnesses trying to decipher the events taking place. According to Sherman, each *Spectacle* had infinite possibilities for interpretation – he was wary of attributing strict meaning to his work, believing that all interpretation had its merits. In a 1983 interview he commented, “Some people say some pretty strange things but there is always some validity to it”.¹

From the small amount of video footage documenting these performances, excerpts from the *Eighth Spectacle (People’s Faces)*, 1979 and the *Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*, 1979² have been chosen by Gertrude Contemporary studio artist Matt Hinkley to be screened at Studio 12 in lieu of his own work. Hinkley’s appreciation of the history of art and design is diverse and thorough; his practice constantly references other art forms and movements, particularly Modern or Conceptual movements, and others inspired by digital graphics and design aesthetics. When I asked him why he gave over the exhibition space to another artist, he merely explained his interest in Sherman’s practice, told me all he knew about him and proceeded to point me in the direction of further information – Hinkley was interested in viewing the original footage of the *Spectacles* and wanted others to share in the mesmerising performances.

Sherman’s slightly autistic and fragmented approach to each performance is analogous to the obsessive style of Hinkley’s drawings and recent sculptures. Hinkley’s delicate network of lines, and attention to minute detail bear an affinity with the small, compulsive and contained nature of Sherman’s “miniature” performances.³ Using the most basic objects and movements, both Sherman and Hinkley’s work pay tribute to the seemingly insignificant and inconsequential items that surround us in our everyday lives. They encourage and motivate further investigation into objects that might otherwise be overlooked.

This is not the first time Hinkley has “selected” artists for exhibition; he has played this role before, in projects at Neon Parc and The Narrows galleries in Melbourne⁴, though he denies that this process of choosing artists and works has any “curatorial” authority and instead likens his role to “facilitating”. The 2009 publication *Matt Hinkley*, a concertina booklet featuring small reproductions of Hinkley’s drawings, is accompanied by a 1972 text by Tom Johnson. Johnson’s text reflects on the relationship between minimalist musical composition and minimal painting. Hinkley’s borrowing of the text for inclusion in a book of his own drawings is another example of the artist placing his work alongside that of another he admires.

Hinkley’s decision to present original footage of the *Spectacles* in Studio 12 suggests an impulse to share Sherman’s work with others and to enact a quiet honouring the artist. Hinkley evidently has a strong sense of rapport with Sherman, whose performances have been described as hovering on the ‘border of comprehension’.⁵ By choosing to exhibit Sherman’s work, Hinkley also offers the audience an insight into his own practice whilst diversifying their approach to his work – nurturing, as Sherman did, a rich (and sometimes bemusing) cross fertilisation of meaning.

¹ Stuart Sherman interviewed by Kestutis Nakas on *Your Program of Programs*, New York, 1983. Sourced at “http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPeeW_5lkQ” http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DnPeeW_5lkQ

² Stuart Sherman, *Selections from the Eighth Spectacle (People’s Faces) and the Eleventh Spectacle (The Erotic)*, 20 min, colour, sound, New York, c.1979.

³ New York Times, Sept 20 2001 “Stuart Sherman, Performance artist and playwright dies at 55”. Sourced at “<http://jclarkmedia.com/gaybooks/sherman.html>” “t”_blank” jclarkmedia.com/gaybooks/sherman.html

⁴ A group show curated by Matt Hinkley for Neon Parc, Melbourne, 2007 which included work by Fiona Abicare, James Deutsher, Christopher L G Hill, Katherine Huang and Nick Selenitsch, and *Roma Publications 1998 – 2007* co-curated with Warren Taylor, including various publications from Roma Publications the independent editorial project and collaboration of Roger Willems and Mark Manders for The Narrows, Melbourne, 2007.

⁵ Stephen Stern, *Stuart Sherman*, Frieze, March 2010. Sourced at “http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/stuart_sherman/” http://www.frieze.com/issue/review/stuart_sherman/

