

Nick Selenitsch

Studio 12 / Emerging Writers Program

8

Nick Selenitsch  
*Stuck*  
2 March - 31 March 2007

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces  
200 Gertrude Street Fitzroy VIC 3065  
T +61 3 9419 3406 F +61 3 9419 2519  
E info@gertrude.org.au www.gertrude.org.au

This catalogue has been produced as a part of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces' and Express Media's Emerging Writers Program, and is the fifth in the series. The Emerging Writers Program pairs four young writers each with an experienced mentor, and culminates in the production of a catalogue essay for Gertrude's Studio 12 exhibition program, and an independent exhibition review for *Artlink* magazine.

Text: Amy Spiers  
Mentor: Sarah Tutton  
Catalogue Design: Danny Lacy  
Print Production: Econoprint

© artists, author and Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

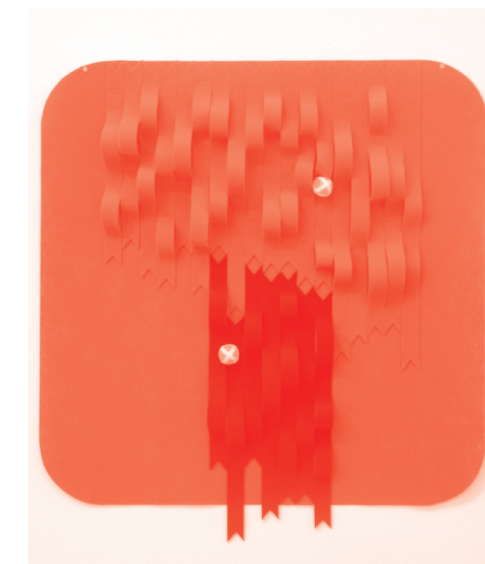
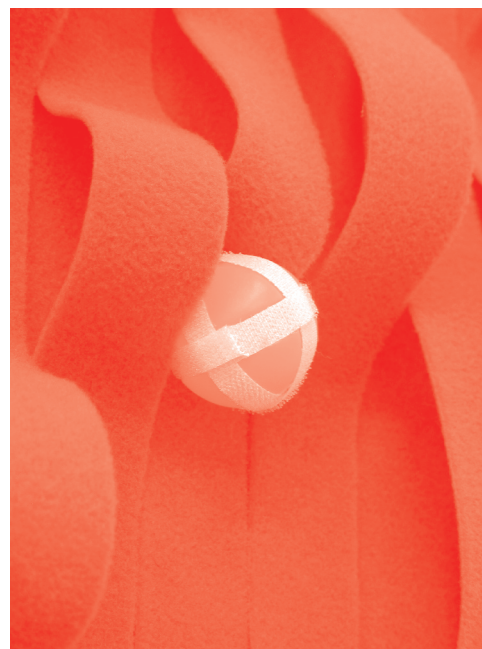
The artist would like to thank Amy Spiers, Sarah Tutton, Emily Cormack, Jacqueline Doughty and Vesna Stanovic.

Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces 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 art spaces

e(x)\_m





## Huh! – The artwork of Nick Selenitsch and the state of not getting it

Boy 1. Sometimes I feel very sorry for the coyote. Sometimes I wish he'd catch him.

Boy 2. If he caught him there wouldn't be any more Road Runner. You wouldn't like that, would you? (off screen: "Beep! Beep!")

Boy 1. No.

In the cartoon *Zip-Zip Hooray* (1965) two boys exchange this dialogue while watching *Road Runner* cartoons on TV. Anyone who recalls watching the Warner Brother's *Road Runner* cartoons may well express similar sentiments. You feel sorry for Wile E Coyote. You want him to get that self-satisfied Road Runner. Yet in episode after episode, though Coyote concocts elaborate schemes involving everything from birdseed to wrecking balls, he only succeeds in humiliating and injuring himself. Regardless of the countless times his machinations backfire - Acme gadgets malfunction, bombs explode prematurely and chasms open up below him - the hapless predator remains committed to his pursuit of the Road Runner. There is more than four hours worth of this tomfoolery, during which it becomes clear that the goal no longer concerns a potential meal. The chase evolves instead into something more absurd and profound, an obsessive struggle for the unattainable.

\*\*\*

"Huh" is a small word, and yet this minor utterance can articulate bewilderment, surprise and curiosity. "Huh?" can be inflected questioningly, indicating a need for answers and a desire for meaning. "Huh" expresses a struggle, a struggle with getting it - the artwork, the question, the point. Under the instructions of Nick Selenitsch, early research for this essay found me downloading *Road Runner* cartoons on YouTube and it was at this moment that I appreciated the direct, expressive quality of "huh!" Why had Nick asked me to watch old cartoons for the purpose of this text? In my attempt to find a clear answer I watched all of the *Road Runner* cartoons available on YouTube.

During a visit to his studio, Nick hands me a ping-pong ball covered in velcro strips. He gestures to a square of brown felt hanging on the studio wall that is decorated with a ruffle of looped strips of red and blue felt. He says "throw the ball at it". I ask "At what particularly? What should I aim for?" Nick tells me it doesn't matter. I throw the ball, and the velcro teeth catch against a blue loop.

Nick's practice represents the search for meaning as a game. His recent work presents "goals" – playful modifications of targets, basketball hoops and cricket stumps along with a quirky projectile to throw at them - in order to play up to the viewer's "goal-oriented" expectations to "get" an artwork. Most recently, in the felt work mentioned above, Nick erases the obvious goal altogether and what remains is a game with no purpose.

\*\*\*

"Soup or Sonic" (1980) is the one cartoon where Coyote catches the Road Runner, but the "catch" is a minor victory. It follows a chase through tunnels which, through some cartoon high-jinks, causes both characters to be miniaturised. At the point where Coyote gets his hands on Road Runner, the smug bird has returned to his normal size whilst Coyote remains minute. Oblivious, Coyote prepares to dine on the gargantuan Road Runner's leg. When the truth of the circumstances finally dawns on him, Coyote addresses his audience with two placards; "Okay, wise guys - you always wanted me to catch him ... now what do I do?"

\*\*\*

Nick resists the desire for closure in order to emphasize the process of striving for meaning that goes on in the essay, the artwork and in life. Consider instead the scenarios above – Coyote's persistent pursuit of Road Runner, a writer's effort to grasp an artist's work, a game that has no specific goal.

Welcome to the world of Nick Selenitsch, where the profound meets the frivolous, the serious meets the silly and the random meets the rational. Regard life as a game that does not offer satisfying, definite resolutions.

"Playing games reminds me of the intense futility of life. You battle hard for something that in the end means nothing – not that I see this as negative, rather the opposite – embrace the ridiculousness and enjoy it."<sup>1</sup>

Amy Spiers

<sup>1</sup>Nick Selenitsch, in conversation with Amy Spiers, January 2007

IMAGE CAPTIONS: Front and Inside: Nick Selenitsch, *Stuck*, synthetic fabric, Velcro balls, glue, 2007