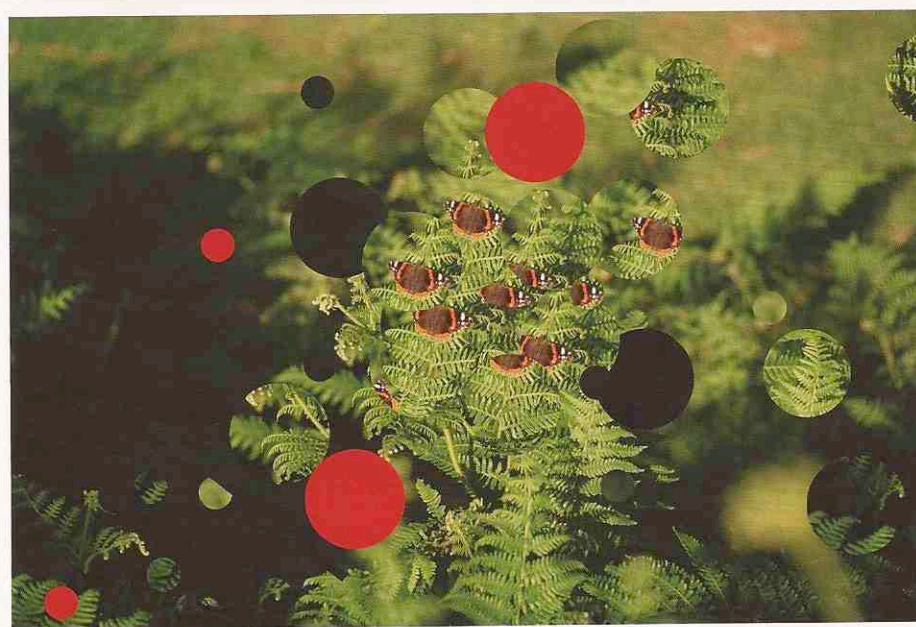




1/ Erin Coates, *Driving to the Centre of the Earth*, 2011-12; screen-shot 2012-09-15 at 11.11.09am

2/ Andy Best, *Butterfly: We See Further*, 2010-12

All images this article of work shown in *Yonder*, PICA, 2012; all images courtesy the artists; photos: Bewely Shaylor



Yonder

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts

NIEN SCHWARZ

'Yonder' – it's not an everyday word. I associate it with American frontier cowboys, in hot pursuit of their quarry. Abruptly, they reign in their sweaty mounts, check for clues. Pointing towards a distant landmark, one shouts over his shoulder, "Over yonder!", And off they gallop.

'Yonder' implies some measure of distance, some form of mobility, and the ability to consider an alternative geographical or temporal position. It entails journeying – on foot, by land, sea or air ... and it beckons through the mutable universe of the alter ego, the avatar, daydreamer.

Whether real or imagined, going 'yonder' often results in new encounters, being influenced, and sharing experiences. It might, as Richard Lewer explores in *The sound of your own breathing*, a video narration of near-death experiences, entail the "ultimate" yonder: dying.¹ This desire to look, think, dream, and act beyond one's immediate position is, according to independent curator Jasmin Stephens, particularly intense for artists.²

Perth: a long, narrow city hugs a coastal strip of undulating dunes and aeolian limestone along the southwest shore of Western Australia. It's off the beaten track, isolated from other cities by hours of air travel. Some consider Perth's location a problem or a condition to address, but Stephens, who moved here from Sydney several years ago, appears continuously enthused. Exhibitions such as *Yellow Vest Syndrome: recent west Australian art* (2009) and *Metallic* (2012), with their attendant contextualising satellite events,³ attest to her fascination with the State's geography, economic machinations, and latent cultural synergies. Working as a Guest Curator for the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA), Stephens's exhibition *Yonder* was no exception.

Stephens invited fourteen artists who reflect different generations, seven cities around the world, and work across various traditional and newer media. Half the artists reside beyond Australia's borders, while each of the local contingent has pursued a residency overseas.



1/ Installation view (detail), *Yonder*, PICA, 2012

2/ Clare Peake, *Prima Meteria*, 2012

3/ Perdita Phillips, *Shy (dissolution + exchange)* (detail), 2012-14



Driving to the Centre of the Earth is Erin Coates's silent, cinema-style video placed at the bottom of a shaft penetrating a wall. We see Coates from behind while she nonchalantly and speciously drives through a corporeal-like tunnel to the core of our planet.⁴ Driving her car through Earth's stratified evolution is a reminder that Perth's commuters are highly reliant on car travel and represent one of the world's biggest per capita energy consumers.⁵ The tunnel also alludes to the way Australians benefit from mining royalties. Coates 'conflates this reality with a Jules Verne style of sci-fi underground travel'⁶ that straddles boundaries between practical everyday needs, car culture, and the call to live sustainably. Is Coates suggesting we are at the mercy of our tunnel vision?

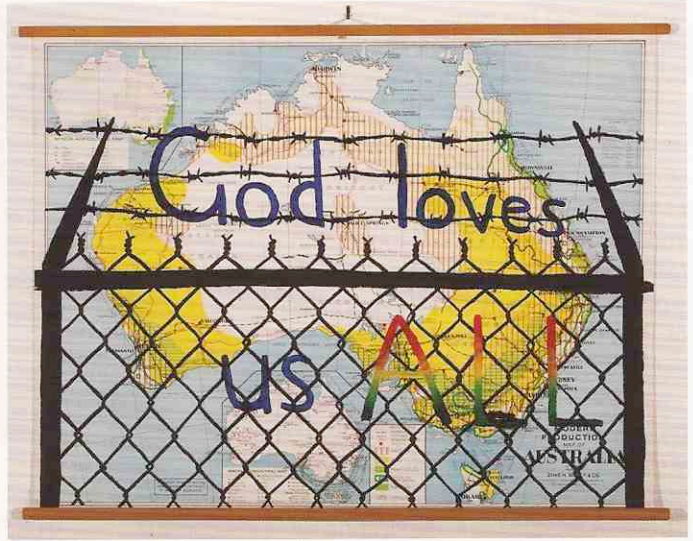
We see further, an inkjet print by Melbourne's Andy Best, invites us into the imaginative, secret realm of enchanted, iconic forests where legendary acts of wizardry create fluctuations in energy, time, matter and space. The photographic images of ferns is permeated with small circular transpositions, in which colours jar and imagery is reversed or rotated.

Clare Peake excavated clay from the vicinity of her childhood home in Geraldton. The visit stirred memories about growing up there. *Prima Materia* (first matter), an installation of intimately scaled, unfired clay vessels conceptually refers to the earth from which all things originate.⁷ Peake's process of gathering the raw earth, manipulating it, and transporting it to the big city (Perth) symbolises the personal journeys in all our lives and our eventual return to the earth.

The Shy Albatross, endemic to Australia, and listed under the *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999)* as vulnerable⁸, circumnavigates the southern hemisphere. The bird's migratory pattern inspired Perdita Phillips to create a project 'that could overcome but also be enriched by the remoteness of the southern latitudes'. *Shy (Dissolution + exchange)* evokes the albatross' migration via a participatory mail art project. Recipients receive a photocopied image of an albatross and are instructed to make two copies. One copy is posted to the next recipient on the list (all have postal addresses in the southern hemisphere) and the second copy is mailed to Phillips in Perth. Viewed in sequence the copies fade and chart the species' demise over distance and time away from home. An animation of the copies reveals a rapid dissolution of the bird's form – a sort of death by black ink. Phillips's poignant eco-systemic thinking suggests each cycle of migration is risky, and that for each albatross chick born there are fewer resources available to support its life cycle.

Unlike Phillips's snail mail project Benjamin Forster explores instant messaging and the electronic gadgetry required to connect communication devices to data. Mobile phone art is not new, but Forster's *Short Message Service* is a hub that connects viewers' phones with a microcontroller on display that distributes codes into digitised text.

Singapore-based Hemon Chong writes about walking in distant cities. In *Walking Long and Hard* he describes an iconic geographical feature that we can immediately picture, and his cryptic wall texts (printed in gills san font, with red titles and black text) echo the trademark aesthetics of British artist Richard Long. Long



1/ Kai Syng Tan, *Nondon A-Z: Kaidie the Transrunner's Final Expedition* (detail), 2012

2/ Richard Lewer & Tony Garifalakis, *God loves us all*, 2012

3/ left: Charles Lim Yi Yong, *SEA STATE 2: Drift (Rope Sketch 1)*, 2012;
right: Warren Vance, *Escargot*, 2009



makes walking and text central to his work but his walks are majestic communions with nature and his texts record facts (route, speed, and distance) that read like tests of endurance. In contrast, Chong's walking stories are subjective, self-deprecating, highly emotional, and fun to read. He gets lost, cries, and has a romantic fallout. Furthermore, his walks are fantasies, about cities he hasn't visited at the time of writing about them.

Singapore's marathon runner Kai Syng Tan relentlessly pounds the tarmac with her own feet and those of her avatar. Tan's running is ubiquitous in cities around the world, but through her 'digital nomad' alter ego Kaidie, she states: 'the runner can parody the ever raging gait of the technological revolution.'⁹ Tan's digital collages *Nondon A-Z: Kaidie the Transrunner's Final Expeditions* incorporate a riot of gaudy colours, signs, text, and images all sourced from Kaidie's virtual world of running online and Tan's own recent experience during the London Olympics. The collages are slick yet have a pastiche, scrapbook plasticity. Tan is highly active online and, unlike the formally printed texts of Chong, her accounts are more mobile, organic, and adaptable, exemplifying a common trend in digital practice.

Warren Vance's video *Escargot*, of a snail drawing circles on a 19th century map of Western Europe, possibly alludes to the quest for a German nation. The archetypal snail with its home on its back is also a reminder of Germany's subsequent domination, the redrawing of national boundaries, and the millions of displaced and persecuted Europeans left homeless.

Simon Faithfull lives in Berlin and works in London, his *Limbo: An Expanding Atlas of Subjectivity* comprising black-and-white observational drawings of European cities that echo 19th century grand tour traditions of sketching everyday scenes to send back home.¹⁰ But Faithfull's process also maps technological changes and over the span of twelve years his tools have migrated from using a Palm Pilot to an iPhone. Advances in technology also change his distribution channels and the form of his work. Audiences can follow Faithfull's multi-city sojourns online or as the images are printed and posted in the gallery.

Stephens is interested in the role of overseas residencies and the need to be strategic. In Australia, Helen Smith is celebrated for her large-scale, bold, ambitious, abstract paintings. When approached by Stephens, she had just returned from a three-month residency in Berlin in 2011, where she was unable to paint large-scale. In Berlin she became attached to flea market stalls that sold black-and-white photographs. Using an assortment of photographs in various states of condition she cut and reassembled the images. Smith's media and process



Sam Leney, *The Bimp 2013*, acrylic on canvas, Skills Options Kurrajong Waratah Learning.



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ruptures and fractures, creating divisions across time, place, and body. Back in Perth, Smith's Berlin experience inspired the *Reunification Series* of paintings. This diptych, with wavering, clouded distortions, appears compositionally cut, blocked, and angular. The scored surface exposes a darker-coloured underbelly. Through a painterly language, Smith expresses Berlin's segregation and reassembly. I am reminded of Anna Funder's book, *All that I am*, which oscillates in time and place between an old woman living out her last days in Sydney and her memories of WWII, fleeing Germany as a young woman and surviving the war in London whilst under observation.

Artist Charles Lim Yi Yong from Singapore is a former professional sailor. Filming from his boat, he is well aware that water, like air, is elusive. The matrix of water between Malaysia, Indonesia, and Singapore has different associations depending on the meanings bestowed on it. Yong's video *SEA STATE 5: drift* of a rope on water changing in tension from taught to slack is, on the one hand, a poetic metaphor for the futility of lines on the map as all water is shared and, on the other hand, suggests tensions between nations.

An old school wall map of Australia identifying major mining centres and transport arteries inspired collaboration between Tony Garifalakis and Richard Lewer. Garifalakis's instinct was to slash the continent in the middle from east to west with a black painted line, a conceptual echo of Charles' Lim's rope on water.¹¹ The simple black line materialised, as it might in a William Kentridge animation, to become a barbed wire fence that quintessentially alludes to the Federal government's anxieties about this island's border security and the in-your-face 'fuck off, we're full' mentality too often encountered on rear bumpers at red traffic lights. Furthermore, the government's policy to imprison all asylum-seekers, including children, and television shows like *Border Security*, instill a fear of foreign engagement on home soil. Painted over the top of the fence are big black letters that spell 'God' loves us ALL'. The imposing isolationist fence and absence of any Indigenous Australian signifiers on the map challenges the equanimity of this 'love'.

Jurek Wybianiec's light work, audibly triggered by sensors when the threshold between two rooms of the gallery was crossed, was also redolent of border security, electronic surveillance and movement tracking mechanisms used to stalk people near restricted boundaries.

In *Yonder* the universal human desire to know what is 'over there' was critically negotiated in multifarious material and virtual perspectives that stride across boundaries. The dialectical encounters between works was intriguing, attesting to Stephens's acute focus and consummate curatorship.

1. Richard Lewer, *Yonder* artist statement, 2012.
2. Jasmin Stephens, personal communication, 5 September 2012.
3. Held in association with the *Yonder* exhibition, the Off the Map Panel Discussion (20 September) reflected on mobility and visibility for artists living beyond the major art markets and institutions, and included talks by Isabel Ching, Susanna Castleden, Dr John Mateer and Jasmin Stephens with Chair Dr Thea Constantino.
4. Erin Coates, *Yonder* artist statement, 2012.
5. Richard Weller, *Boomtown 2050: scenarios for a rapidly growing city*, UWA Publishing, Crawley, Perth, p. 79.
6. Jasmin Stephens, personal communication, 5 September 2012.
7. Clare Peake, *Yonder* artist statement, 2012.
8. Perdy Phillips, *Yonder*, artist statement, 2012.
9. Kai Syng Tan, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rVj7cUTxAa4>. Retrieved 12/12/12.
10. John Mateer, Off the Map Panel Discussion, unpublished talk, PICA, 20 September 2012.
11. Jasmin Stephens, personal communication, 5 September 2012.

Yonder was curated by Jasmin Stephens and exhibited in the Westend Gallery, Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, 8 September to 21 October 2012; participating artists included: Andy Best, Erin Coates, Heman Chong, Simon Faithfull, Benjamin Forster, Tony Garifalakis and Richard Lewer, Charles Lim Yi Yong, Clare Peake, Perdita Phillips, Helen Smith, Kai Syng Tan, Warren Vance and Jurek Wybianiec: pica.org.au

Novel Ecologies, also curated by Stephens, opens at Cross Art Projects, Sydney, this month (28 Sept) with work by George Egerton-Warburton (VIC), Tori Benz (WA), and videos/performances from the Institute of Critical Zoologists (Singapore) in tune with the exhibition's eco-systemic focus: crossart.com.au

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