

perth cultural centre screen

Suspension

screen exhibition





Suspension

Marcus Canning (WA)
Erin Coates (WA)
Lily Hibberd (VIC)
Loren Holmes (WA/UK)
Jacqui Monks (WA)
Sam Smith (NSW)
Justin Spiers (WA/NZ)
curated by Erin Coates

Referencing the notion of 'suspended disbelief' *Suspension* is an exhibition of video work that revels in the unreality of constructed screen space. The artists employ techniques of green-screening, time re-mapping, rotoscope animation, infra-red vision and video collage to reflect upon the nature of contemporary screen media as non-linear, hyper-visual, layered and pliable.

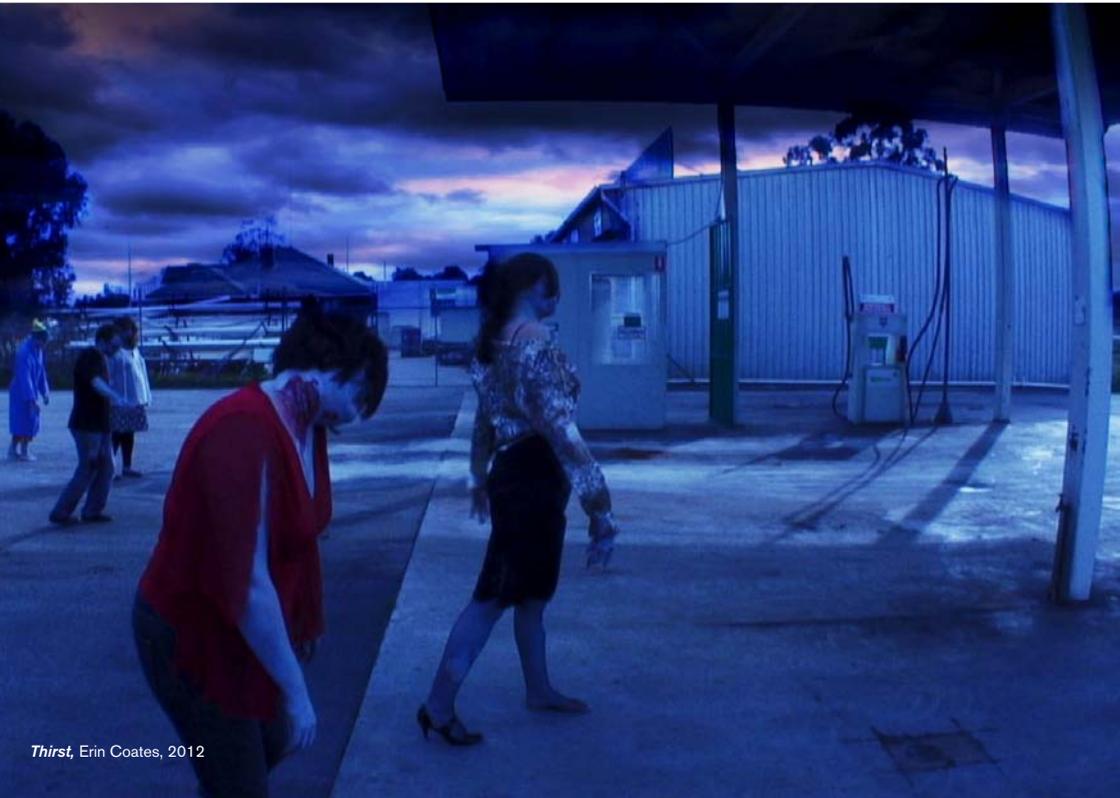
Suspension screens at 12pm + 8pm everyday in March, 2012
Duration of screen loop: 40 minutes



semblance, Loren Holmes, 2012

SCREEN TRICKS

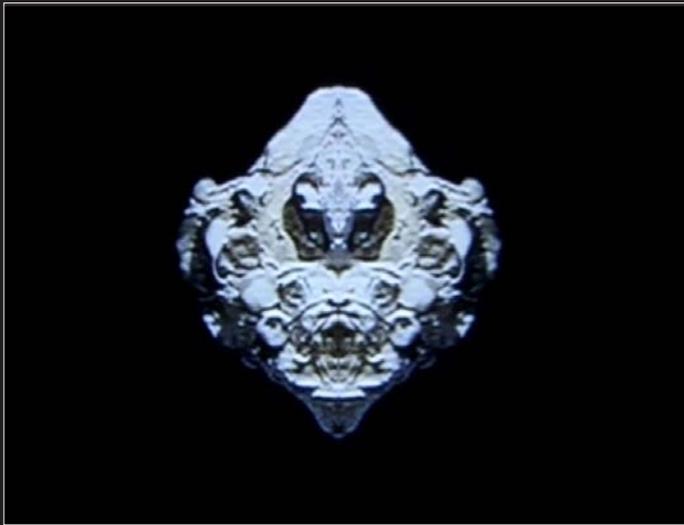
Erin Coates - curator



Thirst, Erin Coates, 2012

The first time I went to the cinema as a kid I remember seeing an animated children's film – something adventure-themed with helicopters and explosions. At one point the animated main character was hanging from a cliff by his cartoon fingers, and I started screaming in the cinema out of concern for his wellbeing. It was probably sometime before I was taken to the movies again. While my suspension of disbelief may have matured and I can now separate myself – for the most part – from screen-death, what I find interesting in remembering this first cinematic experience was that even though the moving images were only animated representations, I was still completely removed from that safe, dark theatre and drawn into a luminous, perilous world.

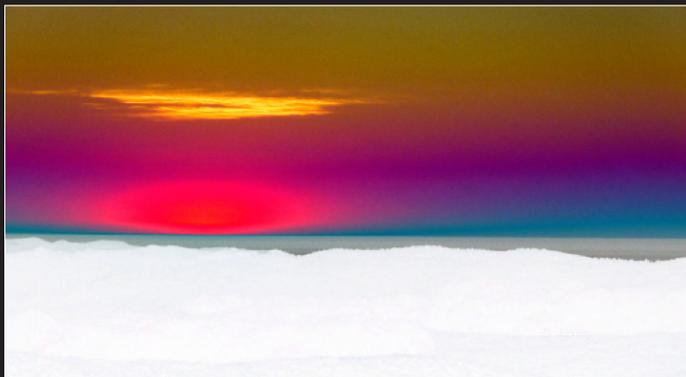
The way we are pulled into the constructed reality of the screen has always intrigued me. We go there as willing participants, taking the camera lens (and nowadays its many mediating digital apparatuses) as our eyes. A focus of this exhibition is our suspension of disbelief in relation to moving imagery that is not structured by linear narrative and that presents a vastly abstracted experience of reality. All of the videos in this exhibition use filmed footage of some form as a starting point. Yet the visions and scenes they present sit far outside of (non-drug induced) human experience. Augmenting human vision and extending normal temporal perception, the nine short video works in *Suspension* utilise a range of screen manipulation techniques to suspend disbelief, holding us in moments that are wondrous, horrifying, hypnotic and magical.



Hamelin, Marcus Canning, 2003

Marcus Canning's silent video *Hamelin* presents an extraordinary image; a white planetoid set against a black void, slowly rotating on its axis and transforming like a moving Rorschach inkblot. Spinning in the inky darkness the white mass mutates into different symmetrical forms, suggesting a skull, a mollusc or the head of the creature out of *Predator*. There is a point of sudden recognition, as we realise that what we are looking at is a colony of ravenous rats, scurrying over an enormous spinning mound of dough; the footage is turned vertically, mirrored and run in reverse. Yet even after this moment of revelation *Hamelin* is not reduced to the sum of its parts, rather it remains a gestalt whole¹, engrossing to watch. There is an undertone of disease and corporeal abjection to the image of a rat-infested planet, hinting at an almost biblical apocalyptic scenario. As I write this I am aware, however that Marcus' video toys with perception and recognition and in fact makes implicit reference to psychological tests². What we see in *Hamelin* points more to the darker impulses of the human psyche than the external world.

Marcus' video operates like a time capsule – spinning in a black vacuum there is neither temporal sequence nor linear transformation. *Hamelin*'s form and time are circular, and we can start watching at any point. Whereas time in this video is almost irrelevant, it is a central focus in Lily Hibberd's *Polar time: a year in six minutes, one sunrise*. This work is a part of Lily's ongoing investigation into planetary measurements of temporality, both as physical phenomena and their psychological corollaries.



Polar time: a year in six minutes, one sunrise, Lily Hibberd, 2012

Polar Time compresses 365 days and nights into six minutes of intense, gradually changing colour. While the image of a sunrise forms, its colours are drastically altered. Its timescale has been layered over that of a year and of the six-minute duration of the video. Lily states that the objective of this work “... is to question the adequacy of contemporary regulations of time and how they resemble efforts to organise human desire, which like ice is always on the edge of being in one form or another”³. The relationship between human emotion and states of elemental change is cast against an awareness of our fragility in the face of environmental change; *Polar time* pulses with searing, polar-melting white light and then through an atomic spectrum of colour, like a sun rising over a post-human Earth.

Whereas Lily's video starts and ends with a blinding white-hot light, Jacqui Monks' works *Rooms I* and *Rooms II* shimmer with delicate illumination. These enigmatic short video-animations are made through a painstaking process of extracting each frame of video, generating a hand drawn version from the photocopied stills, and inserting the doppelgangers back into the

original footage. The resulting video has a jittery, mirage-like quality. The lone figure that passes through the spaces of each work hovers between her filmed and reanimated self. In Jacqui's videos the figure is always passing through a space; her encounters in these liminal zones are fleeting and with undetermined purpose. The moving figure is both a filmic body, caught on video, and a 'phantom' figure that emerges from the artist's process of photocopying then drawing the figure back over itself.

Existing in a state of continual flux, the subjects in Jacqui's videos allude to the intangible and abstruse nature of the interior self and to notions of transience: “I am interested in exploring the shifting relationship of the self to an exterior world that concomitantly mediates and reflects our interior landscape”⁴. She refers also to the idea of 'extimacy' and the desire for connection to the 'unknowable real' within ourselves. The figures in *Rooms I* and *Rooms II* appear to be in the act of seeking – it is an intense introspective questioning projected outward into physical, restless movement, which resonates through the wavering light of these delicate animations.

Another moment of passage is captured in my video *Thirst*, consisting of a group of zombies staggering through an empty petrol station. Devoid of existential angst – or indeed any mental faculties – these creatures are drawn by the single impulse that remains in them; their insatiable thirst. Playing off the ample subgenre of zombie horror, *Thirst* is filled with atmospheric



Into The Void, Sam Smith, 2009

dread and the sense of menace that pervades these end-of-humanity scenarios. It deviates sharply though in its lack dramatic action or climax; there are no flesh-eating moments or resilient acts of human survival. The camera moves with the zombies as they stumble through the deserted fuel depot, marooned in eternal suspension between states; neither dead nor alive. Despite their complete lack of superpowers (or even basic coordination) zombies are able to project an extreme anthropomorphic terror. Theorist Kim Paffenroth claims that what makes zombies so horrific is “...their confusing resemblance to normal people: their monstrous state is their human state”⁵. Or as the character from Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) screams “They're us!”

An important element of *Thirst* is its soundtrack. Made collaboratively with sound designer Stuart James, the layered composition is not intended to provide an aural equivalent to what we see. Rather it expands the spatial and associative potential of the scene. Liquid flows

and gurgles as it is depleted from an unseen source; a car engine's low idling sounds comingle with strange growling noises; dense matter is heard being dragged and crushed. Underscored by a critique of car culture and our over-reliance on petroleum, *Thirst* takes our anxieties over the end of petrol and manifests them within the human form through the ultimate body-horror trope, the zombie.⁶

Sam Smith deploys other screen tricks and devices from cinema to construct a space beyond human experience in *Into The Void*. Using montage, multiple exposure and digital compositing his video forms an open-ended and fragmented narrative as his character searches New York for Yves Klein's famous blue paintings. The camera moves flâneur-like through and above the city, taking the speed and vantage point of planes and cars. At moments the camera typifies human sight and movement, pausing and shifting its gaze, and shadowing the character's pathway through the city.

¹ Gestalt – meaning 'essence of an entity's complete form' – is a theory developed by German psychologists in the early twentieth century that focuses on the form-generating capability of our senses and the human brain's innate nature to organise shapes into patterns and wholes.

² I am referring of course to Rorschach's much-criticised inkblot test. I'd like to state that I reject any psychological analyses made of me based on my interpretations of the images in *Hamelin*.

³ Quoted from recent correspondence with the artist.

⁴ Quoted from recent correspondence with the artist.

⁵ From Paffenroth's book *Gospel of the Living Dead: George Romero's Vision of Hell on Earth*, Baylor Press, Texas, 2006.

⁶ I would also like to be honest here and reveal that part of the impetus to make this work came from the conviction that everyone should be involved in a zombie film at some point in his or her life.



transfer, Loren Holmes, 2012

Much of Sam's artwork is concerned with the nature of human vision and its relationship to film and video, and *Into The Void* presents us with a kind of hybridized experience of seeing. Refracted light effects, strange colours casts and multiple exposures form an almost spectral layer over the city. As the character encounters Klein's paintings and reaches his arm into the canvases, the intense blue of the artwork permeates his body, rendering it partly translucent. Perhaps alluding to the transformative capacity of art, Sam is more certainly referring here to the 'blue screen' technique used in video post production to remove the background of a scene. The final shot in the video is a recreation of Klein's famous photograph from 1960, showing the artist leaping 'into the void'. The photographic image is re-enacted as a time-based 'freeze-frame' in which the figure hangs in the air, escaping the "spatial and temporal limitations of this world" (Da Silva)⁸.

Loren Holmes' video *transfer* occupies some of the same visual terrain as Sam's work in terms of the layered and fragmented aesthetic, urban imagery and the use of planes and cars as 'ready-made' camera tracking. However it is formed around a much more process-driven and low-fi mode of video making, and evokes experimental and avant-garde cinema from the West Coast of America. I am reminded specifically of Harry Smith's synaesthetic animations from the 1940s and 50s, which he fused with live beat-bop jazz performances. Both of Loren's videos *transfer* and *semblance* are scored to audio tracks provided by sound artist Kynan Tan, and the videos' rhythm and atmosphere have formed in subjective response to Kynan's pieces.

The grainy, textured qualities in *transfer* and *semblance* occur from Loren's methods of multiple filming-projecting-refilming, and from the projection surfaces she appropriates from found fabrics. This creates "elements of error, disruption and loss of clarity ... which play with the sense of implied depth of screen space"⁹. There is a lulling effect in *semblance*'s hypnotic rhythm and blown-out fields of colour, which is countered when the crumpled projection fabric becomes more visible – pulling us back to the surface of the screen. The masked figure in Loren's video moves from side to side, swaying in a trance-like ritual. It is a ceremony generated from laptop editing and remixing, illuminated by data projector glare.

A strange ritual also occurs in *Erasing the White Castle*, a video I made collaboratively with Justin Spiers. This work was filmed in complete darkness in an abandoned and over-grown theme park in the outskirts of Perth. Infrared lights illuminate a scaled down version of Walt Disney's 'Sleeping Beauty' castle, which is based on the iconic Neuschwanstein castle of Bavaria. The grainy, night-vision footage shows the castle against the dark background, and from the side appears a figure – barely recognisable as a suited Mickey Mouse. Over a period compressed by time-lapse editing he uses a roller and brush to paint the entire façade black, at one point mysteriously appearing on the roof to paint out the watchtower.

Antithetical to the colourful spectacle of Disney's castle and devoid of the decadence and scale of the iconic Neuschwanstein, this castle shifts even further into a dark inversion of the other celebrated structures. Camouflaging the castle against the backdrop of night, the Mickey Mouse character performing the painting ritual is ambiguously cast somewhere between a vandal, vigilante and guardian. The quality of the green-tinted infrared footage that captures this act carries associations of military night-ops and security footage, rendering the viewer of this video an inert witness to a strange and sinister rite.



Erasing the white castle, Justin Spiers and Erin Coates, 2010

The videos in *Suspension* use diverse screen techniques; from low-fi, analogue and makeshift methods to cutting-edge digital manipulation techniques. They do not draw a line between old and new media but gleefully exploit the tools of both and draw on a variety of cinematic tropes and screen references. Exploring ideas of liminality, perception, consciousness, temporality and human vision, these works are less concerned with recording external reality than generating new visual and psychological realms. *Suspension* reflects on the nature of the screen today as an ever-present, mobile and ubiquitous medium; the works in this collection challenge the conventions of mainstream screen culture in their explorative and experimental nature; they assert that moving image can do more than suspend our disbelief, it may offer ways to extend, augment and alter the way we experience reality.

⁷ *Le Saut dans le Vide* (The Leap into the Void, 1960)
⁸ Quoted from the text *Into The Void* by José Da Silva, 2009
⁹ Quoted from recent correspondence with the artist.

SUSPENSION



Hamelin

by Marcus Canning
digital video, silent
5:55 minute excerpt from
45 minute loop
2003



Thirst

by Erin Coates
sound design by Stuart
James
HD video with sound
5:09 minutes
2012

Crew:

Red blouse zombie
- Kate Abon
Cougar zombie
- Jacqui Monks
Pregnant zombie
- Laetitia Wilson
Office zombie
- Aman Braich
Judo zombie
- Shevaun Cooley
Black t-shirt zombie
- Tod Jones
Sleepwalker zombie
- Caabal Abon
White dress zombie
- Yvonne Doherty
Dolly Operation
- Sohan Ariel Hayes
Additional Post Production
- Sam Price



Polar time: a year in six minutes, one sunrise

by Lily Hibberd
digital video with sound
soundtrack © The Knife
'This is now' 2004
6:26 minutes
2012



transfer

by Loren Holmes
digital video with sound
soundtrack composed by
Kynan Tan 'senn' 2010
4:19 minutes
2012

Thanks to :
Miloš Murin - equipment



Rooms I

by Jacqui Monks
0:35 seconds
photocopied video, soft
pastel, coloured pencil,
graphite pencil, silent
performer – Prita Greal
2011-2012



Rooms II

by Jacqui Monks
1:29 minutes
photocopied video, soft
pastel, coloured pencil,
graphite pencil, silent
performer – Prita Greal
2011-2012



Into The Void

by Sam Smith
single channel HD video,
stereo, colour, 1080p,
16:9
5:50 minutes
courtesy the artist
2009

Erasing the White Castle

by Justin Spiers and Erin
Coates
infrared video with sound
soundtrack © Aidan Baker
'Sunn' 2002
4:30 minutes
2010



ARTISTS

suspension.

Marcus Canning



Marcus is an artist and also Director / CEO of ARTRAGE Inc, Perth. Since completing a BFA (Hons) from the University of Western Australia in the late 90s, Marcus has initiated and exhibited in a number of significant art and performance projects.

He was involved in establishing the Perth artist-run-initiative Jacksue Gallery (1996-2000) and has contributed to the programs of *This Is Not Art*, *Electrofringe*, *Next Wave*, *Adelaide* and *Perth International Arts Festivals*. His creative practice has spanned video, projection, sculpture, installation, photography and design for performance.

He most recently co-created the public sculpture *Ascalon* with Christian de Vietri for St. Georges Cathedral in Perth (2011). Marcus has exhibited in the USA, Spain and the Philippines, including in *Vida Telefonica*, Arco, Madrid (2008). He is represented by Goddard de Fiddes Gallery, Perth.

Erin Coates



Erin is a Perth-based curator, artist and also Exhibitions Coordinator for Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC).

In 2010 she spent 6 months in China undertaking an artist's residency at Red Gate Gallery and researching Chinese video art. The following year she curated *The Knife's Edge: video recently seen in Beijing* at FAC.

In 2009 she exhibited in and curated *Transmission*, a one-night screen gallery in a disused car yard in Mount Lawley.

Currently she is working on a major exhibition for 2012 for FAC, called *We don't need a map: a Martu experience of the Western Desert*.

Erin holds an MFA from the University of British Columbia, Canada, and her artwork has been exhibited in shows in China, Canada, Serbia and Australia, including exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery of Australia, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.

Lily Hibberd



Lily Hibberd is a Melbourne-based visual artist and writer working across live performance, painting, photography, lighting, video and sound installation. Her practice is concerned with questions of time, memory, desire and encounters with history in contemporary life.

Since 2006 the production of writing has been central to her work, taking the form of performance texts and accompanying publications. Other recent work emanates from engagement with specific communities. Lily is actively involved in producing, supporting and promoting art writing, and is founding editor of the independent contemporary Australian art journal *un Magazine*.

Projects include; the performance installation *Benevolent Asylum*, shown at Fremantle Arts Centre (2011); the solo exhibition in *Seeking a Meridian*, at Galerie de Roussan, Paris (2011); *Bordertown*, exhibited at Artspace Sydney (2008). Lily holds a PhD in Fine Art and is represented by Galerie de Roussan, Paris.

Jacqui Monks



Jacqui is an artist and writer and is currently undertaking a PhD in Visual Arts at Edith Cowan University, Perth.

Her practice deals with the notion of the 'transient self' as a relentlessly shifting, ambiguous inter-relationship between memory, body, and external world, and the repercussions such a definition has on the individual's interior landscape. She explores these ideas predominantly through drawing, video and animation.

Her educational background is in psychology, cultural history, theory, literature and fine arts and she has contributed to several academic journals and texts on art theory.

Jacqui's artwork has been shown in exhibitions in Perth and Darwin. In 2010 she undertook the Third Space Project artist residency in China through the University of Shanghai and engaged in research in Beijing. She is working towards a solo exhibition in 2012 at Spectrum Project Space, Perth.

Loren Holmes



Loren is an Australian designer, based in London. She trained and works in architecture and also creates artworks in a variety of media, including drawing, photography and sculpture and increasingly, film.

Fixed camera positions and long takes that capture fleeting natural light or wind movements are characteristic of her films, set against fast-paced footage of 'things beyond vehicular windows.'

Loren has lectured at the University of Western Australia and RMIT University, participated in group exhibitions in Australia, the UK and Spain and worked on urban regeneration projects. In 2009 she participated in the *Transmission* screen gallery, Perth.

Sam Smith



Sam Smith is a video and installation artist from Sydney, currently based in Berlin. His works exploit the non-linear and reality-stretching capacities of new media to examine the language of cinema. As his artworks distort time and space they also often expose the technology behind video imagery and reflect upon both old and new screen apparatuses.

Sam has held solo exhibitions at Momentum, in Berlin and the Art Gallery of New South Wales in Sydney. He has participated in numerous group exhibitions in Australia and abroad in the UK, Portugal, Japan, Indonesia and New Zealand. His video work has featured film festivals, including *19th documentART film festival* in Szczecin, Poland (2010), and *16th Video Brasil Festival* in Mexico City (2008) and São Paulo (2007).

In 2008 Sam was awarded the Churchie National Emerging Art Prize and the previous year received the Helen Lempriere Travelling Scholarship. He holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) from the College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales, Sydney. He is represented by GRANTPIRRIE Gallery, Sydney.

Justin Spiers



Justin is a photo and video artist practicing in Perth, Australia and in Dunedin, New Zealand. His video work emanates a wry sense of humour and often extends concepts explored in his photography. One of his subjects has been fantasy and theme park architecture and the appropriation of medieval structures in the contemporary built environment.

The Art Gallery of Western Australia recently included Justin's photographs in a survey exhibition of Western Australian artists *Remix* (2011), and he is featured in the publication and exhibition *Hijacked III*, at the Perth Institution of Contemporary Arts and Quad Gallery in England (2012). He has participated in group exhibitions at the National Portrait Gallery, Canberra, Fremantle Arts Centre, Perth and Platform China Contemporary Art Institute, Beijing.

Justin has undertaken artist residencies at Red Gate Gallery in Beijing, 24Hr Art in Darwin, Powerhouse Museum in Brisbane and the Australian Centre for Photography in Sydney. He holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts from Dunedin School of Art, New Zealand.



Rooms II, Jacqui Monks, 2011-2012

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for post-production assistance
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- > Loren Holmes
for graphic design
- > Justin Spiers
for screen advice

This catalogue can be downloaded from:
www.erincoates.net/suspension/

