





Image credits: (front) *Setting 1*, 2007. Photo: Jas Hugonnet; (this page top to bottom) **Megan Bottari**, *Terra Nullius*, not, 2007, lost wax cast crystal. Photo: courtesy of the artist; **Lisa Owen Burke**, *Sluggo1* (work in progress), 2007. Photo: courtesy of the artist; **Chris Fortescue**, *resettings*, 2007, digital composite courtesy of the artist; **Paull McKee**, work in progress, 2007, cardboard. Photo: Jas Hugonnet.

Settings began with a fascination of how objects can implicate the presence or absence of the human body. In particular I was interested in objects found in the public realm especially articles of clothing left by a body that had long since gone. Empty chairs, abandoned table settings, eroded tracks and worn handles are things that come to mind, as is the idea that presence can exist without us actually being present. Four artists were given a set amount of space in the gallery, namely 2.4 x 2.4 meters and within this space were asked to address how objects can imply the presence or absence of the human body. The variety of responses that the artists have brought to the project illustrates a depth of response and interpretation.

Objects implicate the body in a number of ways; firstly there is evidence of the maker's hand in the production of objects such as the hand formed wall of a cup or the assembled parts of a chair. Secondly the body is implicated in the way that objects usually act as an interface with our bodies; a chair accommodates the whole body, while the cup is made with the hand and mouth in mind. When placed in combination objects can suggest a narrative/dialogue between themselves implicating a bodily presence or absence that can be felt through the physical space that separates them. Combinations of objects that create environments are encountered on a daily basis both in the public and domestic realms. When placed in a gallery context, seemingly ordinary object arrangements are highlighted through the contrast with a neutral space and in *Settings* we are given ideas to interact with at a scale of 1:1.

Chris Fortescue brings to the project the concept of the absent artist as an absence and comments on the randomness of associations and chance groupings with other artists that takes place in group exhibitions. Fortescue has chosen to bring two of his experiences with other artist's work together with his own for this exhibition, the work of Edward Krasinski and Michael Heizer. In short Krasinski's work utilises a specific blue insulation tape applied horizontally to connect objects while Heizer's monumental earth work, *Double Negative* in the Nevada desert, USA, is the result of an action of taking away a massive amount of earth creating a 450 meter long trench, 9 meters wide and 15 meters deep. Fortescue has visited *Double Negative* and has a connection with Krasinski's work as an art handler employed

during Krasinski's retrospective in Vienna. By combining rocks collected from *Double Negative* with the specified tape used by Krasinski, it has enabled Fortescue to create objects for a new installation that incorporates not only himself but two absent presences that may have never met. This concept is carried further by the fact that the other artists in *Settings* who were previously unknown to Fortescue now have a connection via the curated process.

Let us forget is an emotionally charged phrase from ANZAC Day ceremonies, used by Paull McKee to accompany his reconstruction of a homeless man's cardboard shelter. The title suggests to the viewer that it is at our own peril that we place individual aspiration above our concerns of a fair and equitable society, a concept that was supposed to be pivotal to the two World Wars. By creating a habitable structure McKee immediately suggests the potential for occupation as well as creating tension in terms of not knowing when the inhabitant has left or is due to arrive back. The installation continues his fascination with 'make do' culture and the long history it has had with resisting economic changes and persisting in the face of oppression. The furnishings of blankets, ropes and straps implies wrapping and unwrapping, an action performed by the human body. Positioned to the side of the gallery and unlit the work highlights displacement while its form is generated as a composite of remembered and imagined camps that McKee has momentarily seen out of the corner of his eye.

There is probably nothing more likely to implicate presence and/or absence of the human body than excreta, which of course carries additional complex social customs all of its own. Megan Bottari's faeces in *Settings* is the hand crafted, lost wax cast crystal variety which sets the stage for a classic precious/object dichotomy. The parallels she sets up between the concept and material are endless, a favourite being an excerpt on crystals from Wikipedia: *which crystal structure the fluid will form depends on the chemistry of the fluid, the conditions under which it is being solidified, and also on the ambient pressure.* To which Bottari replies: *well, precisely.* While her work is often a manipulation of the literal, one cannot dismiss the humour generated by first impressions. Bottari habitually employs language to set a scene, so to speak - to create a mood, here the work is titled *Terra Nullius*,

not. She enjoys the nuance of veiled ambiguity, the invitation to ponder the myriad possibilities that lurk beyond the obvious. As an installation it engages the viewer firstly with curiosity as an object lurking in the darkness of the gallery and I am sure for some it will repel and in doing so on a secondary level the viewer becomes a participant; a presence then an absence.

Lisa Owen Burke's hand-made hybrid forms combine materials we usually associate as being worn on the body, with structural forms such as tents. Her works implicate the body through material association and the fact she creates habitable spaces and at other times objects that act as an interface with the body. By combining two ready made products she creates ambiguity by introducing a material language with forms that have a practical application. Often the material is one that is worn close to the body such as lycra, nylon and lace suggesting an intimate association with the body. When this material is applied to a habitable structure such as a tent the work takes on a degree of surrealism.

Human idiosyncrasies and vernacular culture, especially Australian popular culture acts as a source of reference for her work with the title often adding an element of humour. Our pre-established thoughts relating to material and recognisable structures act to position her hybrid objects within our culture. Having initially studied in an object design studio, Owen Burke has orientated her art practice around the human body, its functions and its failings. What develops from her hybrid objects is an art of suggestion where function is abstracted and the viewer is presented with conflicting points of view.

The key to the suggestive power of objects ultimately lies with the viewer of this exhibition and how one will perceive each work sensually. What it shows is how objects exist at a range of scales and within this range there is evidence of the human being both in the making and the space surrounding these works. The presence and absence of the human body is suggested by our associations and experience; by the scale of the spaces that we inhabit; through suggestion and language as well as our cultural attachment to materials and structures.

Jas Hugonnet
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