

*Natural Digression* brings together seven artists from a variety of disciplines, who all share an interest in the notions, tools and conventions of the rational sciences. The exhibition title plays upon a Eurocentric hierarchy of knowledge and mode of conceiving reality - the 'objective' scientific frame of reference at the front and centre of the Western understanding of the world. This polemic acts as a point of departure for the artists in *Natural Digression* as they make an epistemological migration to alternative interpretations, mock realities or whimsical outposts.

The scientific 'real', as defined in Cartesian rationalistic terms, is held up for re-examination by these artists. However, while it's easy to discern a mutual fascination with observation, metaphor and transposition, as a group, their work also connects through a shared curiosity toward the visual narrative and its seductive ability to describe moments passing between fact and fiction. Collectively, the artists are determined to unpick the primacy of scientific rationality in our contemporary understanding of this world, rather than to illustrate an ideal 'truth'.

While all seven artists have backgrounds in traditional modes of visual art practice, such as painting, print and sculpture, they employ a combination of high and low technologies in the creation of their work. Video, animation, and other digital based media are humanised by their pairing with needlepoint, hot glue and collage constructions, and the artist's hand is made further evident through both drawing and paint. In this way, by ignoring convention, blurring divides and exploring diverse methods, together the works in *Natural Digression* set up a fascinating conversation between technique and idea.

Penelope Cain takes Darwinian notions of evolution, particularly in its applications to human and animal behavioural science, as a starting point to reflect on the contemporary urban condition. Similarly poignant are the intricate paper constructions of Rose Montebello, depicting the timeless and intimate relationship between predator and prey. Ellis Hutch has learnt non-verbal systems of communication, in this instance sign language, to develop video works that explore the intersections between sign form and function. Waratah Lahy reviews notions of perception with a focus on the interpretative experience of looking, through a series of painted cut-outs that hone in on people in the act of looking intently at something. Kirsten Farrell has developed a mathematically based system converting text to dynamic slices of colour while Al Munro renders painstaking 18th and 19th century scientific illustrations of crystal forms with the warmth of needlepoint and 'drawn' stitch. Erica Secombe uses high-tech imaging and video to review the existing primacy of scientific techniques in describing the physical world, and an irony whereby larger, more complex machines and processing techniques are being used to visually access increasingly smaller corners of our natural world.

Yolande Norris, 2011

# NATURAL DIGRESSION

8 MARCH - 8 APRIL

Curated by Yolande Norris, *Natural Digression* debates the primacy of scientific rationality for describing the world. Through diverse materials and techniques the seven artists raise questions about codification and language, the impact of the built environment on human behaviour and gender dynamics in past scientific discoveries.

ISBN: 978-0-9807595-1-8

COVER IMAGE /

Al Munro *Crystallography 2009-2010*, (installation detail) needlepoint embroidery and beadwork on canvas and Aida cloth

All images courtesy the artists

Part of Art Month Sydney 1 - 31 March 2011.



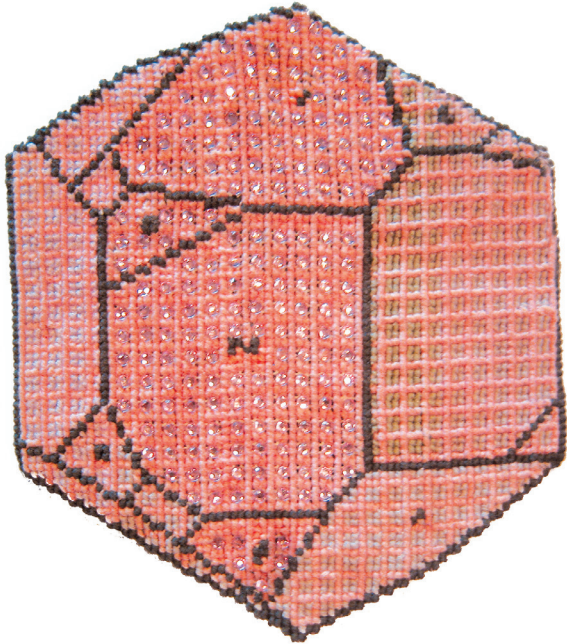
UTS Gallery supported by / Oyster Bay Wines & Coopers. Media Partner: 2ser



Level 4, 702 Harris Street  
Ultimo NSW 2007 Australia  
+61 2 9514 1652

Monday - Friday 12 - 6pm

[www.utsgallery.uts.edu.au](http://www.utsgallery.uts.edu.au)  
[www.facebook.com/utsgallery](http://www.facebook.com/utsgallery)



# NATURAL DIGRESSION

PENELOPE CAIN

KIRSTEN FARRELL

ELLIS HUTCH

WARATAH LAHY

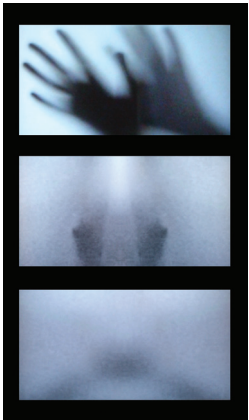
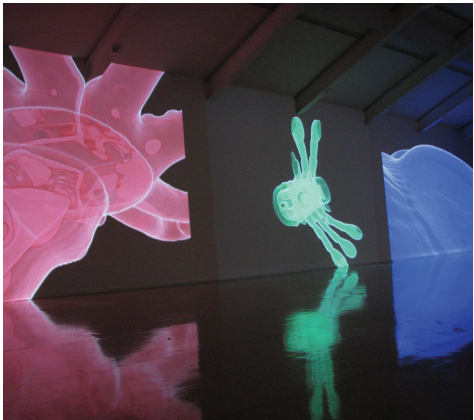
ROSE MONTEBELLO

AL MUNRO

ERICA SECCOMBE

CURATED BY / YOLANDE NORRIS





ARTISTS’ BIOGRAPHIES

WARATAH LAHY

Waratah is fascinated by the act of observation, particularly at that instant where a physical change is wrought through the mediated gaze of the camera; the human body twisting and contorting to capture the perfect shot. Recording these fleeting images through the eye of her own lens she further explores these subjects through drawing and painting. By encapsulating the fluidity of these moments and retaining a photographic influence, she creates in her work a new and clearly altered space.

Waratah is based in the ACT and holds a Doctor of Philosophy from ANU School of Art. Recently exhibiting at Brenda May Gallery, Sydney and at the Canberra Museum and Gallery, her work was short listed in and acquired by the 2010 Stan and Maureen Duke Gold Coast Art Prize.

PENELOPE CAIN

Penelope Cain’s work explores Darwinian notions of evolution and its applications to human and animal behavioural science to reflect on the contemporary urban condition. By subtly overlaying drawings and photographic images, she posits a co-determinism between human

social behaviour and the built urban architecture that surrounds us.

Penelope is based in Sydney and most recently exhibited at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne. Penelope is currently undertaking the 2010-11 Power Institute residency at the Cite Internationale des Arts, Paris.

ERICA SECCOMBE

*Nanoplastica* describes the physical world, where larger, more complex machines and processing techniques are used to visually access increasingly smaller realities. Erica utilises high-tech contemporary scientific imaging techniques to explore the existing primacy of scientific techniques, creating digital animations to represent the rendered 3D data in shape, movement and colour.

Erica is based in ACT and was recently awarded the 2010 Synapse Residency as a Visiting Fellow in the Department of Applied Maths, Physics, ANU. She is now continuing this project as a PhD candidate at the ANU School of Art.

ELLIS HUTCH

*Touching Space* explores the intersections between sign and language, between codified

sign systems and the unconscious physical gestures we all make; interpretation and meaning is abstracted in the silence. Ellis Hutch studied Australian Sign Language and her video installation incorporates images of her hands signing the poetry of Emily Dickinson.

Ellis’ current art practice spans between Queanbeyan and Thailand; in between indulging her alter ego, Bullseye Betty, on the Roller Derby circuit. She is currently undertaking a PhD at ANU School of Art.

ROSE MONTEBELLO

Capturing a moment of sublime drama and monumental wonder in the animal kingdom, Rose’s work explores the extremes of life; procreation, survival and inevitably death. Using found images collected from a range of second hand nature books and children’s encyclopaedias from the 1960s, 70s and 80s, she chooses images that capture decisive moments in the animal kingdom. Through detailed cutting, reconstruction and application of paint to an image’s surface, she embellishes and recreates these moments of heightened intensity.

Rose was recently artist in residence at Megalo Print Studio, exhibited at Canberra Contemporary Artspace and is an active member of BEAM.

AL MUNRO

Al’s practice spans textile, print and drawing-based media to examine processes of mathematical inscription and translation in relation to scientific representations of the natural world. Through this work, she examines the various codes and patterns used to represent and ‘construct’ our contemporary understanding of and interactions with the natural world.

Al is based in regional NSW and exhibits with Brenda May Gallery in Sydney. Her work is held in collections in Sydney and Canberra. She is currently undertaking a PhD at ANU School of Art.

KIRSTEN FARRELL

*Exploded View* work is both the construction of a fictional landscape and an inquiry into the boundary between painting and sculpture. By randomly reconfiguring cadastral (relating to the measurement and ownership of land), maps and road maps, Kirsten has reviewed the way the story of the land is made.

Kirsten has been short-listed twice for the Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Scholarship and most recently exhibited at the Canberra Museum and Gallery. She is currently undertaking a PhD at ANU School of Art.

LIST OF WORKS

WARATAH LAHY

*Photographing a Work of Art series (No 1 - 6)*, 2009 - 2011, charcoal, pastel pencil, conte on paper, 84 x 59 cm each  
*Looking at a work of Art II*, 2009, acrylic on perspex, 40 x 50cm  
*Looking at the Mona Lisa II*, 2010, acrylic on perspex, 25 x 34.5cm  
*Looking at the Mona Lisa*, 2009, acrylic on perspex, 40 x 50cm

PENELOPE CAIN

*Stage one plan for rain factory*, 2010, inkjet print & drawing on paper 90 x115 cm  
*Concept plan for air factory*, 2010, inkjet print and drawing on paper, 190 x 84 cm  
*Location drawing for rain factory*, 2011, graphite on paper, 76 x106 cm

ERICA SECCOMBE

*Nanoplastica* 2008, digital projection triptych, looped duration, dimensions variable, Edition as 5 box sets.  
Created with Drishti and assisted by Professor Tim Senden, Dr Ajay Limaye, Stuart Ramsden and Drew Whitehouse. Made at Vislab, the ANU Supercomputer Centre 2008

ELLIS HUTCH

*Touching Space*, 2008, video installation triptych, loop duration, dimensions variable

ROSE MONTEBELLO

*Night watch*, 2010  
*Circle hold*, 2010  
*Meeting space*, 2010  
*Outside in*, 2011  
paper, mountboard, 41 cm diameter each

AL MUNRO

*Crystallography*, 2009 - 2010, needlepoint embroidery and beadwork on canvas and Aida cloth, dimensions variable  
*Thinking about Science and Drawing II series, (No 1-6)*, pigment ink on paper, each 76 x 56cm

KIRSTEN FARRELL

*Exploded View*, 2010, synthetic polymer paint, enamel spray paint and oil paint on acrylic sheet, dimensions variable.