



orbital

Experimenta Media Arts
London / Melbourne 2000

The left side of the page features several vertical lines of varying thicknesses. Some lines are solid green, while others are thin and light green. Small green squares are placed at various points along these lines, creating a rhythmic, orbital pattern.

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Visions of a future Australian landscape

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Cover image detail from Nigel Helyer's interactive sound sculpture installation, Ariel.

EXPERIMENTA MEDIA ARTS

Since its inception as the Modern Image Makers Association in 1986, Experimenta Media Arts has fostered innovation in Australian media arts by providing a creative and interdisciplinary context bringing together artists and audiences in new cultural environments. Experimenta seeks to extend the current parameters of media arts exhibition in Australia and supports the exhibits and works of artists experimenting with digital media, film, video, installation, performance and sound art through a variety of projects. In addition, Experimenta facilitates the production of new artwork and provides a vehicle for discourse on old and new media forms. The organisation receives core funding from the Australian Film Commission, Arts Victoria and Cinemedia.

INTRODUCTION

The Orbital program is curated by Experimenta's Artistic Director, Keely Macarow and has been designed as an interdisciplinary media arts exhibition for the Australian arts and cultural program, 'Heads UP' for Australia Week in London in July 2000. This project is supported by the National Council for the Centenary of Federation.

The Orbital exhibition is to occur simultaneously in London at the Lux Gallery, The Lux Centre for film, video and digital arts in London, UK from 2 - 9 July, 2000 and in Melbourne at The Centre for Contemporary Photography from 6 - 29 July, 2000.

Orbital has been developed to signpost and imagine an Australian landscape of the future to link in with issues related to Federation and in particular, Australia's creative future.

The Orbital exhibition project provides Experimenta with the opportunity to promote the work of Australian media arts practitioners in a major historical and cultural context in Australia and the UK. We are delighted to present such an innovative and diverse range of media based artworks to Australian and British audiences. In addition it is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to be working in collaboration with a number of innovative arts organisations and individuals based in Australian and the UK.

For Orbital, Experimenta has received funding and sponsorship from the Australia Council, Cinemedia, Australia Week In London, the Australian Film Commission, the City of Yarra, the City of Melbourne, Arts Victoria, The Lux Centre for film, video and digital art and the Centre for Contemporary Photography.

WELCOME TO THE FUTURE

Keely Macarow

As a child of the 1970s I dreamt of the future and wondered what the year 2000 would bring. My sociology class of 1982 put a date in their diary to meet out the front of the National Gallery of Victoria in 2000 as an effort to take stock of our collective future and our cultural imaginary. Envisaging what my peers and I would be doing in the year 2000 was cajoled by popular culture's nemesis of the subject with Stanley Kubrick investigating sci-fi narratives of 2001 and Prince going on to dance like it's 1999. I wonder whether any of my tech school peers turned up to the future that they had been longing for. As I fumbled for the date of my secondary school reunion, the western world launched into mass panic about the year 2000 expecting a cacophony of nightmare scenarios due to a computer generated glitch in time.

Never mind that a spate of environmental and moral crises had hit Planet Earth in the form of droughts and wars and that tales of children that had been taken from their families or had been used as political scapegoats were appearing in the media on a daily basis. We had been duped by the omnipotent computer crisis of Y2K to imagine our future as one that is controlled by machines. A future driven by venture capitalists and e-commerce in which environmental and humanitarian concerns have been overwhelmed by global fiscal culture.

However, global warming, ozone depletion, over population, tribalism and the colonisation of Mars have all been forecasted by futurists and soothsayers as major issues into the 21st Century. So amidst all the world wide fracas involving land wars, millennial evangelists and digital bandits, the physical landscape of the planet still warrants global attention to counteract environmental degradation from the residue of 20th Century milestones such as the automobile, nuclear power and plastic.

In the prelude to the Centenary of the Federation of Australia, we would be wise as a nation to explore where we have come from and where we plan to go in the future. I am not just speaking of cultural and political questions here, but I am suggesting that we urgently act to counteract environmental issues such as salinity management, ozone depletion and the like, all of which have had a debilitating affect on the Australian landscape and people since colonisation.

The Orbital media arts exhibition was designed in the recognition that British visions of the Australian landscape have not only shaped the physicality of Australia but have also transfixed the imagination and vision of Australian culture in the British psyche. Recognising that landscape in an Australian context is ubiquitous and can be applied to physical and virtual environments such as the beach, the bush, the desert, the cityscape, the suburbs, domestic living spaces and the computer generated environments of technoculture, the artworks presented in Orbital were selected to posit diverse aspirations of the Australian physical and cultural landscape. Afterall, the Australian landscape has been celebrated and mutated in artworks (prior to and) since Federation by artists as diverse as Benjamin Duterreau, Fred McCubbin, Sydney Nolan, Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarra, Emily Kame Kingwarreye, Tracey Moffat and Louise Hearman.

In creating visions of a future Australian landscape, the artists represented in Orbital in turn, explore major environmental and cultural issues facing Australia today.

For instance, issues regarding salinity and land management underpin Megan Jones' multimedia interactive installation, Sites of Interception which was produced in the Murray Darling Basin of the Sunraysia area at the north eastern point of Victoria. Satellite and VRML imagery of the region depict the beauty of an area that is coming to grips with the problem of salinity and sustainable land management practices. Jones' time based media project documents a rural environment, which has been managed in recent times without full understanding of its semi arid ecosystem. Jones' piece aptly documents the growing measures in Australia to curb salinity problems and encourages the convergence of cultural, technological and sustainable land management practices to address this major issue.

In keeping with Jones' interest in the environment, Nigel Helyer's sound sculptures, Ariel, resemble a luminous, ingenious ecosystem which twitter and respond to a human interface. Helyer's installation of gorgeous jellyfish like critters have a skin of sensors, which will tweak at your movements and the physicality of your body. Inspired by the stark geometry and ideals of early 20th Century Constructivism, Helyer's sound installation also acts as a referent for the dreamings and narratives underpinning the Australian landscape and the burgeoning communications industry.

Whilst iconic images of the desert, sun, surf and the bush are often viewed as synonymous with the Australian landscape, the majority of Australians inhabit cityscapes which are derivative of a European cultural legacy. As we move into the 21st Century it is important to probe the future of the modern Australian City. Will urban development escalate in the eastern seaboard cities of Australia? Will Australian cities embrace their position as major centres in the Asia Pacific region? Can we incorporate sustainable land management practices in urban environments? What will the human interface be in information age megacities? And how will reconciliation between the indigenous people of Australia and those born to other cultures shape future Australian cities?

In Margie Medlin's video installation, Estate, a dancer is depicted in a digital configuration of Melbourne based post industrial urban environments. By placing the dancer in a digital environment, Medlin traces the leap from post industrialisation into the information age and questions the impact of the rapid growth of urban development in Australian cities. In the techno estate, Medlin registers both her concern for the sustainability of communities based around local people, and her interest in the role of the individual in a post industrial praxis.

Interestingly, Brook Andrew and Raymond Peer also question the influx of a barbed neo modernist ethos and technoculture in Australian cities by positioning hyperreal narratives in surreal environments. In Andrew's and Peer's projection based installation, BIYT/me/i, a landscape which was previously mutated by colonialism has morphed into a landscape of physical and virtual extremes where people are represented behaving out of sync with their 'natural' environment. BIYT/me/i gives both a Wiradjuri (Aboriginal) and Assyrian perspective of an Australian landscape that is in most cases (through tourism and popular Australian culture and values) seen and perpetuated through the stark eyes of Anglo-colonialism. Andrew's and Peer's installation explores the madness and beauty of Sydney in the year of the Olympics, incorporating digital and nihilistic features of the information economy into kitsch futuristic narratives of a hyperreal epoch.

With much attention given to a humanity spiralling into e-culture, e-commerce and e-ecological crises, it is little wonder that Nicola Loder's monitor based digital video installation desires a common humanity for future generations of Australia. By placing sets of strangers that have never met before in intimate social settings for an hour in real time, Loder's mission focuses our attention on the authenticity of what is said and revealed in intimate social situations. Continuing her ongoing fascination for peopledscapes, Loder has brought together a diverse range of non actors with the intention of capturing the negotiation of social spaces, the bridging of cultural barriers and the disintegration of social prejudices. Watch the video screens that harness these intimate social interactions and listen closely. Loder's installation speaks volumes about multicultural Australia and her dream for a nation based on equality and compassion.

The artworks exhibited in Orbital eclipse current trends in Australian media art practice to harness digital, spatial and sculptural environments. Further, these engaging time based media installations examine contemporary Australia and its social, political, geological and topographic landscape in a bid to reconcile a more humane and sustainable landscape for future generations of Australians.

By casting our eye to the future we inevitably assess the past to examine our present narratives. By imagining the future of Australia we cannot forget the past. It is by no accident that the legacy of colonisation gnaws at the core of the Australian psyche and is played out in the major debates of our times regarding the ownership and management of the land, reconciliation, immigration, multiculturalism and mandatory sentencing. Australians must make amends and apologise for injustices played out against the indigenous people of Australia in the name of colonisation. Without doing so, the ethos of post colonisation in an Australian context will be a misnomer. Australians will risk economic, cultural and social advancement as a nation if we fail to reconcile historical and contemporary injustices against the indigenous owners of this land. We must examine the historical and contemporary contexts of the political, cultural, ecological, socio-economic landscape of Australia to progress as a creative, wiser nation.

Only then can we collectively imagine, plan for and enter the future of Australia.

Keely Macarow is the Artistic Director of Experimenta Media Arts and Curator of Orbital.

Keely Macarow has worked professionally as a curator, lecturer, administrator, producer and artist in many aspects of film, video and media arts practice and has had her own video work screened extensively in Australia, UK and Europe. Keely has a Bachelor of Arts (Media Studies) from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and a Master of Arts (Independent Film and Video) from the London College of Printing, The London Institute.

Brook Andrew and Raymond Peer

Directed by Brook Andrew and choreographed by Raymond Peer, BIYT/me/i imagines a Sydney of the future where a landscape previously mutated by colonialism has morphed into a landscape of physical and virtual possibilities - here the three characters reflect three disclosures of strong Australian identities: An Aboriginal surveyor re-mapping a city landscape re-placing Aboriginal countries, an Assyrian business man locked in a twilight zone of a train station trying to scale the capitalist terrain; a displaced German women living out of a trolley filled with both European and Australian objects, displaced from her usual grubby city scape, placed in a beautiful Australian landscape.

In BIYT/me/i, Sydney is presented through the investigation of one identity that changes culturally and spiritually. This gives you different viewpoints on the subject and the landscape which are both underpinned by advances in communication technologies, global media and a lingering ignorance of Sydney's (and Australia's) indigenous identity, as well as displacement of other Australian identities.

Andrew's and Peer's installation speculates how people will navigate and traverse the cityscape and seaside of the future by probing the shifting and swapping of physical, psychological and virtual spaces and identities of Sydney and its surrounding landscape and inhabitants. BIYT/me/i gives both a Wiradjuri (Aboriginal) and Assyrian perspective of an Australian landscape which is in most other cases, through tourism and popular Australian culture and values, seen and perpetuated through the stark eyes of Anglo-colonialism.

Brook Andrew incorporates neon light, digital video, photography and sound into an installation practice which interrogates global culture from a Wiradjuri position (Western NSW). Brook also works with museum collections to create installations commenting on museum culture and the display of Aboriginal cultural objects. Brook has a Masters Fine Art from the College of Fine Arts, University of NSW and a Bachelor of Visual Arts from the University of Western Sydney. He has exhibited at Perspecta, Sydney, (1999), the Venice Biennale, (1999), the Royal Albert Memorial Museum, Exeter, UK (1996) and at the Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art (1996). Brook was the 1998 recipient of The Kate Challis RAKA Art Award and has had work shown on ABC TV in the Artrage: artworks for television project (1998).

Raymond Peer was born in Tehran, Iran and has a MA (Performance Studies), University of Sydney and a Bachelor of Applied Science, University of Western Sydney - Nepean. Raymond has extensive experience working as a Theatre Director and as a Performance and Installation artist who has exhibited at Performance Space, Sydney (1998), Monash University Gallery, Melbourne - with Brook Andrew (1997), Artspace, Sydney (1997), Casula Powerhouse, Sydney (1997) and Midsumma Festival, Melbourne (1996).

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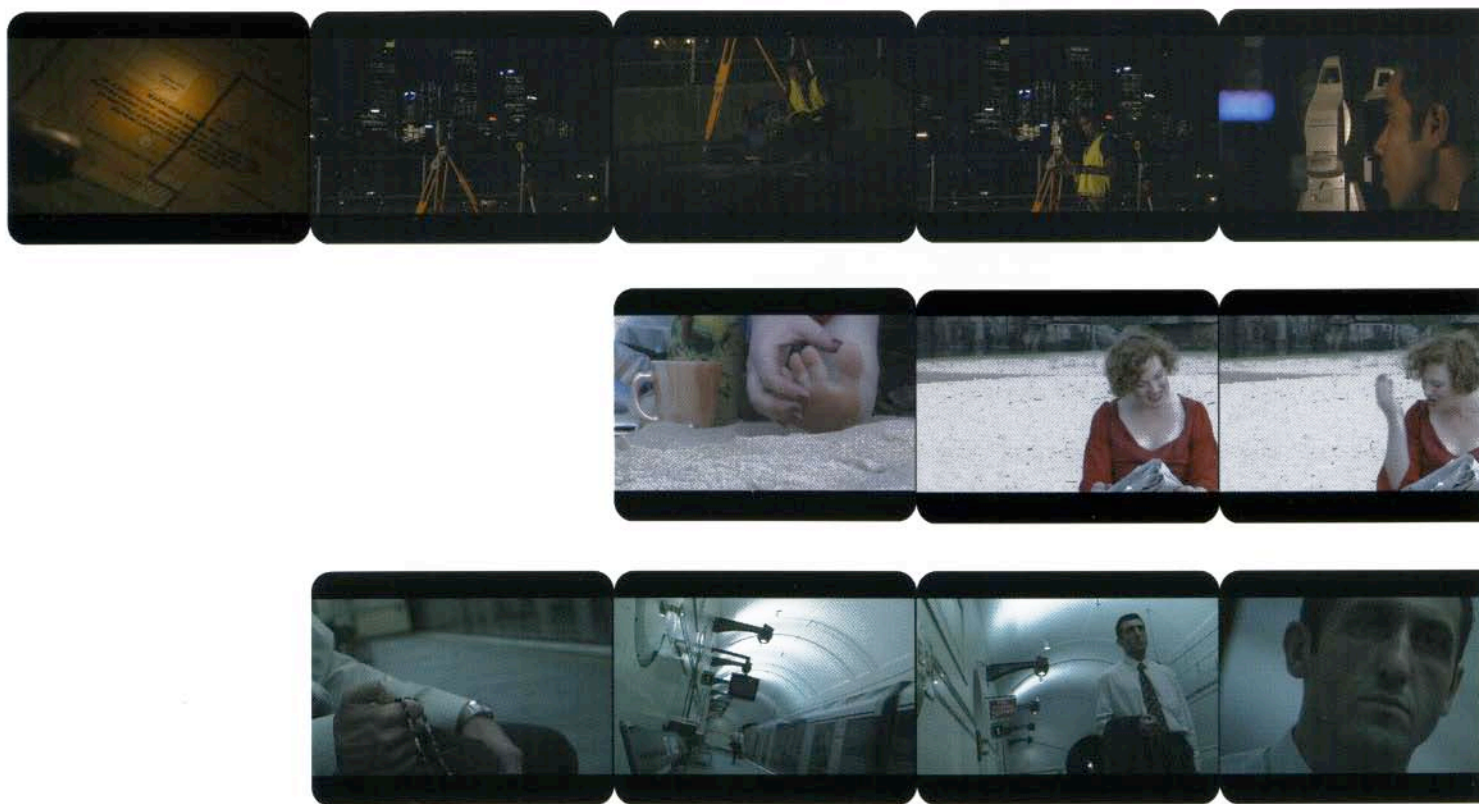
BIYT/me/i

(BODILY INSTINCT YEARNING TECHNOLOGY/ multiplying emptiness/ identity)

Digital video projection based installation

New South Wales, Australia

2000



Brook and Raymond would also like to acknowledge the following individuals for their work on the project:

Producer: Gill Moody **Associate Producer:** David Optiz **Executive Producer:** Lester Bostock **Cinematographer:** Carolyn Constantine **Editor:** Tinzar Lwyn **Assistant Director:** Katie Inglis **Actors:** Chris Booney, Karen Young, Raymond Peers
Sound Artist: Paul Goodard **Designer:** Lea Lennon **Make-up:** Belinda Balding



Nigel Helyer

Inspired by influences as diverse as Bruce Chatwin's "Songlines" and 20th Century Constructivism, Nigel Helyer's sound installation consists of a sensor based ecosystem of mutant jellyfish like radio objects which respond to the physical presence of a human interface. Helyer's multi channel sound sculpture installation contains an immersive ecosphere of messages and demonstrates the artist's interest in exploring the creative, cultural, and technological potential of the sonic domain in environmental science. Ariel refers to a past and present Australian landscape which is laced with a plethora of communication systems and is described by Helyer as "a sonic-mapping of voices lost in the ether, of song long settled in the dust".

Nigel Helyer is an Australian sculptor and sound artist who has a BA (Hons) in Sculpture from the Liverpool College of Art, UK, a MARCA in Environmental Media from the Royal College of Art, London, UK and a PhD from the University of Technology, Sydney. Nigel has participated in numerous Australian and international exhibitions at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Sydney (1999), ISEA, Liverpool, England (1998), Muu Media Festival, Helsinki, Finland (1996), the Biennale of Sydney (1992/93) and has been the recipient of a number of art residencies including the Green St Studio, New York (1988), Daewoo Heavy Industries, Korea (1988) and the Exploratorium Museum, San Francisco (1988). Nigel Helyer is a co-founder and commissioner of The International SoundCulture Committee and consultant to ReSonance 2001 International Sound-Art festival to be held in Seoul, Korea 2001. Nigel is currently the Artist in Residence with Lake Technology, Sydney and has been a Visiting Artist to the University of Lapland (1997) and the Hanoi Institute of Fine Arts (1994).

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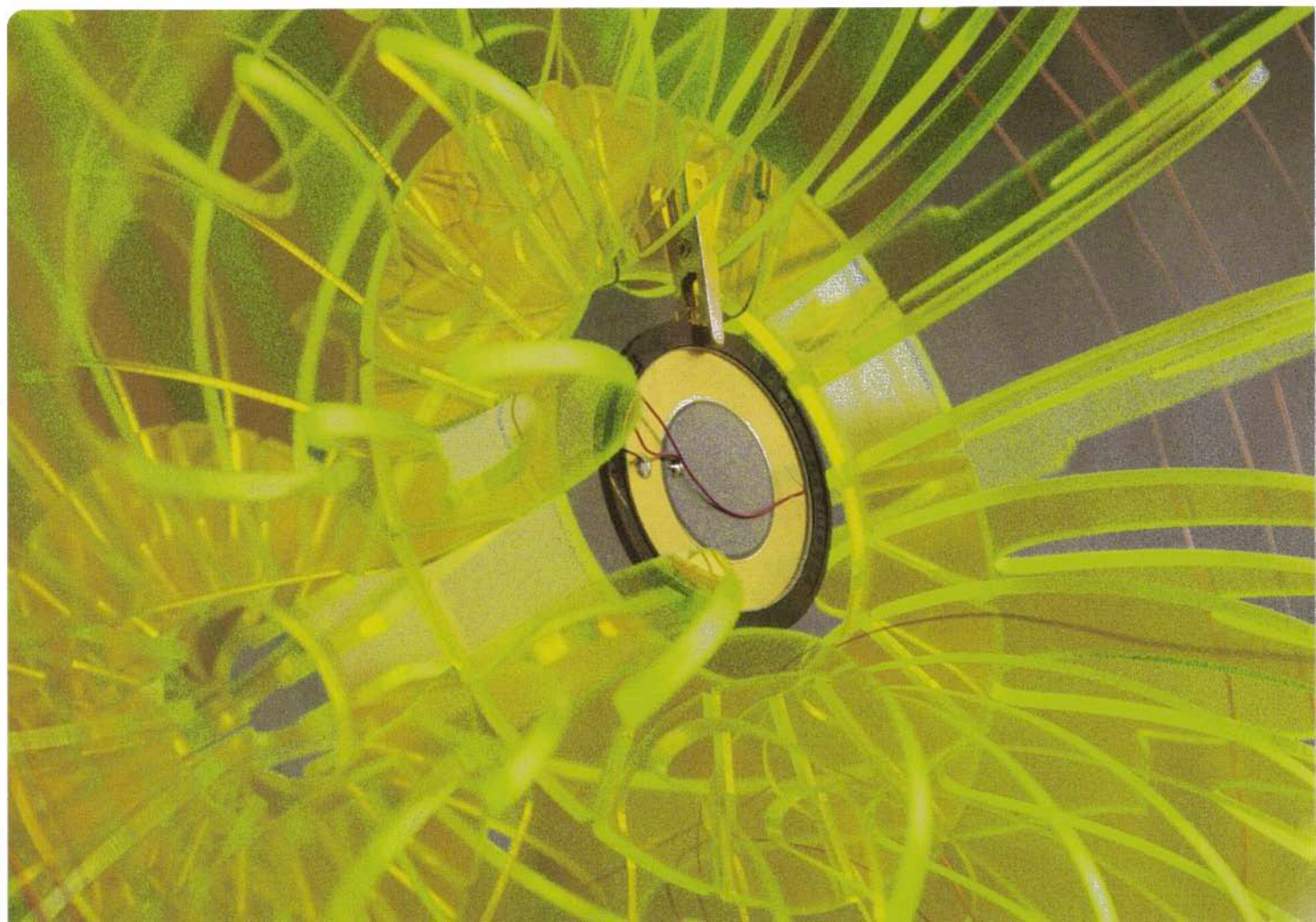
Nigel Helyer gratefully acknowledges the support of Lake Technology.

Ariel

Interactive sound sculpture installation

New South Wales, Australia

2000



Megan Jones

Megan Jones' interactive, Sites of Interception, encourages viewers to traverse through satellite imagery of the Murray Darling Basin in the Sunraysia region of Victoria to reach and explore Quicktime VR 360 degree panoramic environments of the region. Megan's' CD ROM was created in consultation with the Salinity Management Consortium as a SunRISE 21 Artist in Industry project and explores the sustainability of the Sunraysia region in the 21st Century. Cultural, ecological and industrial themes related to salinity management penetrate Megan's engaging work which captures the diversity of the landscape, water quality, vegetation and agricultural practices of the region and provides glimpses of critical environmental and social issues that underpin contemporary Australian culture.

Megan Jones is a photographer and digital imaging artist who recently completed the SunRISE 21 Artist-in-Industry project, producing the multimedia interactive and 360 degree panoramas of Sites of Interception which was exhibited during March 2000 at the Mildura Arts Festival. Megan has received grants and commissions from Arts Victoria, Arts ACT, LOUD Youth Media Festival and AIATSIIS Pictorial Archive for photographic and interactive digital media projects and has exhibited at the Mildura Arts Centre, Victoria [2000], the Canberra School of Art [1998], the Canberra Museum and Art Gallery Theatre [1998], the LOUD Youth Media Festival online program [1998] and the Canberra Contemporary Art Space [1997].

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Nangiloc Colignan Waterway Management Committee
Lower Murray Darling Catchment Management Committee
Lower Murray Darling Water Management Action Plan Steering Committee
Sunraysia Rural Water Authority
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Sites of Interception

Multimedia interactive based installation
Australian Capitol Territory/Victoria, Australia
1999

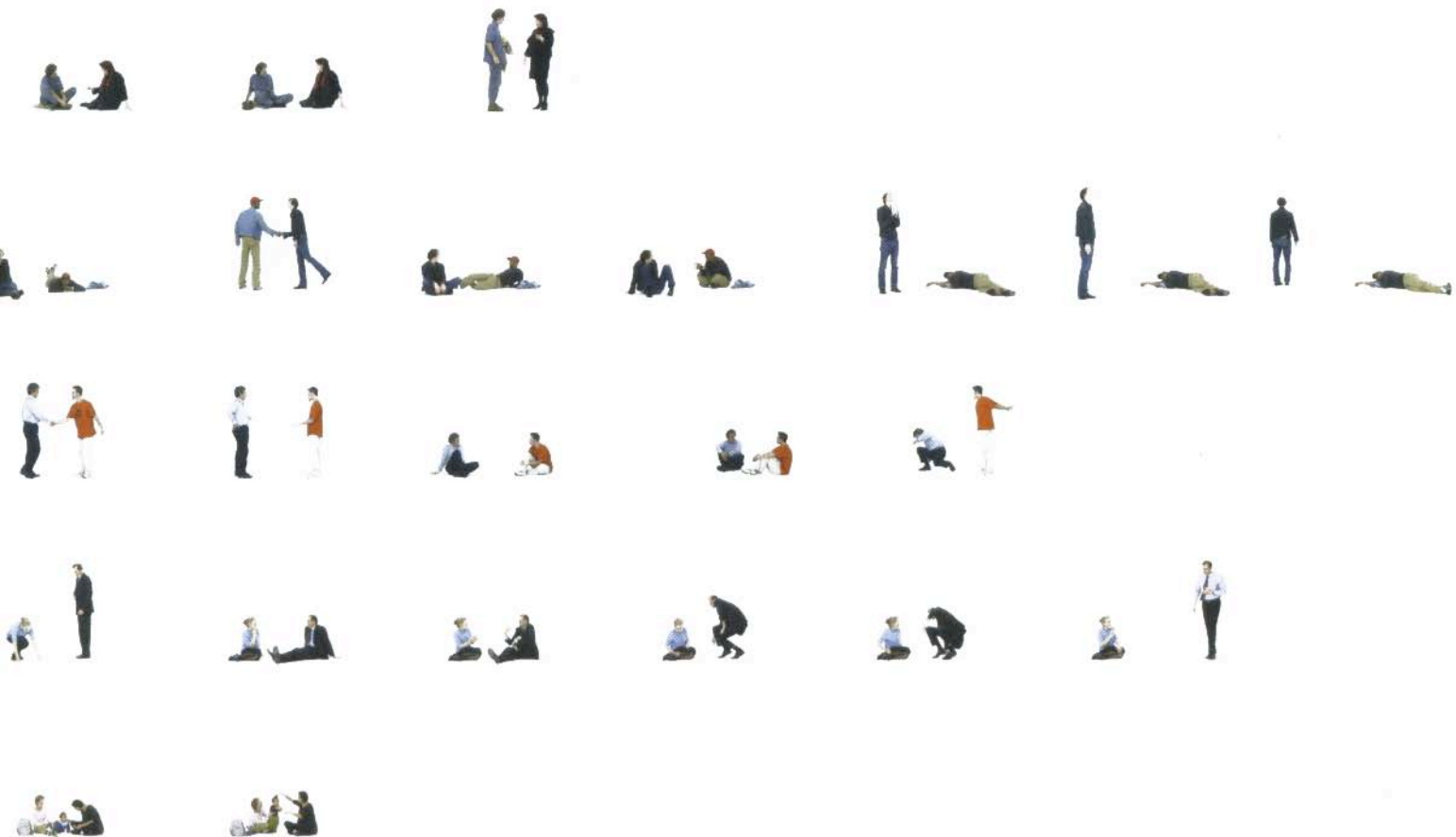


Untitled

Monitor based digital video installation

Victoria/Australia

2000



Nicola Loder's digital video installation continues Nicola's ongoing fascination with peplescapes and the theatre of the everyday by exploring an intimate dialogue between 5 sets of strangers. In the spontaneous interactions that comprise her work a space is created for the details of the people's personal histories to emerge, histories that belie Australia's forever mutating cultural identity.

Loder's minimalist installation is humanist in its scope; articulating the artist's preoccupation with not only domestic spaces and psychic and internal landscapes but also suggesting her concern for the reconciliation of people in Australia's cultural future.

Nicola Loder has a Master of Arts from the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, a Post Graduate Diploma of Film from the Victorian College of Arts and a Bachelor of Fine Art in Photography from the Victorian College of the Arts. Nicola has lectured at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology, Monash University and Swinburne University and has exhibited internationally in the Philippines, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand and South Korea and throughout Australia at the Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney [1998], the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (1998), the Canberra Contemporary Art Space, the Institute for Modern Art, Brisbane and Monash University, Melbourne (1997). Nicola Loder was selected for the 1997 Australian Moet and Chandon Touring Exhibition and has work in collections at Monash University Gallery (Melbourne), the National Gallery of Victoria and the Victorian College of Arts.

Nicola Loder

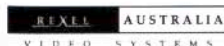
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Experimenta Media Arts
Cinemedia

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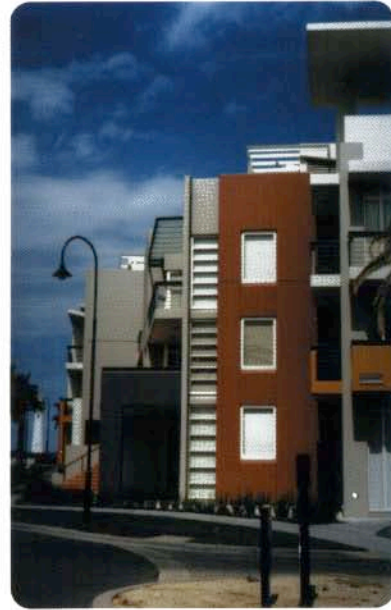


Estate

Monitor based digital media installation

Victoria, Australia

2000



Margie Medlin's long term exploration of the nexus between dance, film and digital media is realised in Estate, the latest Medlin project to probe the relationship between people and cities. Situating a sole dancer in a digital environment which references Melbourne and Australian cities to broach issues related to rapid urban development, Medlin's installation explores the role of the individual in a post industrial information age environment.

Margie Medlin is a freelance lighting designer, projection designer and film maker.

Medlin is an artist in residence at ZKM, the Centre for Art and Media, the Institute for Visual Media in Karlsruhe, Germany during the 1999-2001 period. In 1997, Margie was awarded a Bessie by the New York Dance and Performance Awards, for her lighting of Lucy Guerin's "Two Lies". Her own work, "Mobility in an Artificial City", a dance/computer animation/projection work has toured New York, Munich, Perth, Sydney (1997), Paris (1998) and was screened by Experimenta Media Arts in the cinema program, "The Witching Hour" at Cinemedia @ Treasury Cinema in Melbourne (1999).

Margie Medlin

In 1998 Margie produced a group film installation, "Elasticity and Volume" which was exhibited at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (1998) and the Performance Space, Sydney (1999). Margie's projection and lighting designs have included "Hung Li Poh", which was presented at the Commonwealth Games Cultural Festival in Kuala Lumpur and Club Swing's "Razor Baby" which was presented at the Midsumma Festival Melbourne (1999) and the MardiGras Festival, Sydney (1999). Most recently, Margie has worked with the Melbourne based companies Danceworks and Company In Space.

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