



Left: Naomi Richards. *Buffy*, 2000. Video still. Courtesy Metro Arts, Brisbane.
Above: Christine Comer. *Polispak 2*, 2000. Video still. Courtesy Metro Arts, Brisbane.

This stands like a plastic stem from a cereal packet, once the attachments have been removed. As negative space, it does not make sense, but nonetheless, it defiantly asserts an identity.

Our entrance and exit from the exhibition is marked by the photographic work, *Perpetual Abstraction (7066 A.D.)*. A maroon surfboard inscribed with this date sits like a monument or sepulchre alone in the dunes. In the distance we glimpse the high-rises of Surfers Paradise. The date suggests a time beyond our comprehension. Yet the blown-up image appears old and grainy. There are no gods of surf and sun to be seen, no surf even. Is this the 'Futurist City' in ruins? For Redford, is this Paradise Lost? But paradise lives only in dreams, is a mirage. It is an abstraction, an ideal, which exists in perpetuity.

michele helmrich

invisible empire next gen video

Metro Arts, Brisbane

Art and TV are no longer two different things. They're equally tedious. The geometry of the one's revitalized the other... TV's vibrating field's shaken our arts to pieces. No use to pick them up. Get with it.

John Cage

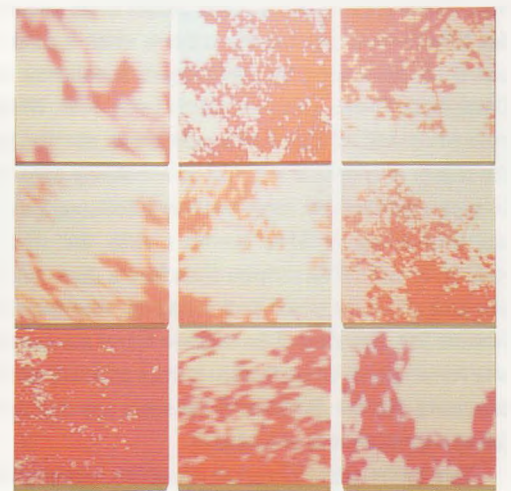
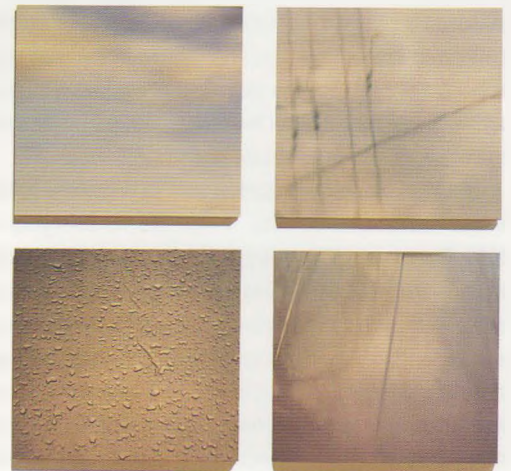
Video so pervades contemporary society as to be rendered almost invisible. Today, the omniscient presence of televisual imagery dominates the home, workplace and public domain alike. The unprecedented efficacy with which electronic imagery may now be accessed world-over is blurring the boundaries between the broadcast and the actual, the innocent and the sinister and the for-sale and the free. For these reasons, writes Don DeLillo in

White Noise, screen culture is at once 'all the more impressive', and yet 'all the more disquieting to deal with'.

For years, art video's proximity to television—a medium whose sole, degraded purpose is to promote capitalism—has proven problematic. Many still experience video's utilisation of TV as a blow to its artistic integrity, and its predilection to mesh disparate communications media as its pitfall. The nineteen artists involved in Next Gen Video, however—by positively celebrating video's capacity to traverse the diverse visual forms of today's multimedia space, that is, of art, design, advertising, computer graphics and entertainment media—help debunk this archaic concern. Their work wears its proximity to television on its sleeve, embracing video's unique chameleon capacity to exploit all kinds of visual technology. It is this eclecticism, this punk-rock-DIY-ethos that makes much of the work included in the exhibition so vital.

The forty-odd experiments included in Next Gen Video are indicative of contemporary society's obsession with technologies of vision, with how they are used, and the concomitant concern of how we are used by them. According to guest curator Mark Webb, these works imaginatively link the worlds of art, media, technology, pop and counterculture in a way that 'confront(s) the contiguity between commerce and art, education and entertainment, production and consumption, fiction and fact and between the virtual and the actual'. This exhibition, he says, 'signals the increasingly complex role developing between the artist and audience via new technologies, as well as the expanding commodification of the art market'. The works' intimacy, imaginative improvisation and floating-ear-and-eye representations of the present-day mediascape, through their sheer scope and powers of synthesis, do indeed shed light on contemporary artistic, social and sub-cultural visual trends. Their installation turns the gallery into an arcade-style shrine to the moving image, into a site for the unfettered fetishisation of today's wide gamut of visual imagery.

Next Gen Video consists of three television sets, each beaming the same spliced-together sequence of short video pieces, albeit a-synchronously. Scattering the sets throughout the gallery helps downplay their physicality against a sense of the videospace. As the soundtracks accompanying the pieces bleed into each other, echoing eerily from one set to another, the gallery is filled with drones and pips, all out of time and out of tune. Like Oedipa Maas in Thomas Pynchon's surrealist satire of



Top: Troy Ruffles, detail *Hood* series, 2000. Ink jet prints on canvas. 9 panels, 58 x 58 cm. Courtesy the artist.
Above: Troy Ruffles, *Bonnet 1*, 2000. Ink jet prints on canvas. 28 panels, 78 x 83 cm. Courtesy the artist.

1966, *The Crying of Lot 49*, once in front of one of the three telemonitors, I find myself paralysed before its gaze, a strange sense of alienation taking hold of me as I am 'stared at by the greenish dead eye of a TV tube'. Viewed collectively, one-after-another, the works included in Next Gen Video mount a direct assault on TV time. Constantly changing images fleet across the screens in a manner analogous to the choppy editing of mainstream television. By appropriating and accelerating the 'microtime' of commercials, this edited sequence of short pieces pushes the implosion of time to its logical conclusion, creating an array of images dazzling enough to compete with TV.

Of all the short pieces included in the exhibition, few could surpass the biting political sensibility of Christine Comer's Holzer-esque 'Polspeak 2 and Polspak 3', a text-based piece with an insidiously clever edge. Simone Hine's beautifully shot, sci-fi 'Stills' is another standout, as is Clare Chippindale's 'Better Info', which pictures a number of mute faces nonsensically chewing the cud to a brilliantly disturbing soundtrack. Repeated viewing evinces the generosity of the looped tape's repetition. Unsurprisingly (considering their short duration), many of the pieces offer neither climax nor conclusion, but when viewed repeatedly, prove strangely consuming.

Since the 1960s, when the Portapak first became available to consumers, the ubiquitous assimilation of video into contemporary life has proceeded at breakneck speed. For many, video is the quintessential new art. Consequently, there is a tendency to look at it with the slightly patronizing gaze reserved for the forever young. But whereas most of the artists represented in Next Gen Video are young, each displays an advanced visual vocabulary and polished production technique. The newness here is in the event, in the slick assemblage of over forty works from more than a dozen artists. Webb's Next Gen, 'a group of artists... not necessarily defined by any particular subculture', invokes a vast variety of aesthetic influences, drawing on everything from *film noir* eroticism to arcade-style comic violence. Only an exploration sensitive to the diversity of contemporary visual discourse can begin to fix their import.

mark gomes

hood: troy ruffels

CAST Gallery, Hobart

Winter in Tasmania has many facades. In less than fifteen minutes the weather can reveal the tumultuous clouds of an icy southern storm and mimic the brilliant sunshine of an Edenic paradise. Five minutes later, the air threatens to snap into a swirling white symphony of frosty jewels. Fleeting moments of every season filter through each day as winter dances an unpredictable tango of rain, sleet and sunshine. Silvery grey smoke from a multitude of roaring wood fires settles over Hobart when the air is still, while

the city's silent sentinel, Mt Wellington, endures another onslaught of snow. A lonely wind whistles its lament through the bare branches of trees that flank the shores of the white capped Derwent River and twilight is bathed in a faint pink light, heralding the advance of a bitter darkness waiting to embrace the city with needle-like fingers that slip through every street and crack in the pavement. Merciless and tempestuous, the forceful changeability of winter in Tasmania possesses a haunting beauty and luminous reverence unique to the isolated island.

The collection of images in Hood evoked the essence of winter. In this exhibition of recent work, Troy Ruffels offered a graceful insight into the majestic splendour of the sublime Tasmanian landscape. Observing and photographing the patterns and reflections of the surrounding environment as it was mirrored in the glossy surface of a car bonnet, Ruffels utilised this technique to illuminate the fine details of nature. From the ghostly silhouettes of spiny trees to the pastel brilliance of a sunrise, the photographs were reproduced as a series of large scale ink jet prints on canvas. The result was a sophisticated blend of natural beauty and digital artistry.

Separated into four groups of prints, Hood wound round the gallery walls like a fragmented tale of four seasons in one day. Wrapped seductively around its wooden backing, each canvas in the works *Untitled 1-12* seemed to shiver with expectation and vibrancy. Mysterious and infused with shadows, the images were blurred and out of focus, implying only a subtle suggestion of form. Trees, fence posts, clouds and dewy puddles assumed the smudged eeriness of a backdrop for the X-Files when tinged with mossy green, violet and a slick of tangerine. The rich warmth and lustrous depth of the unnerving colours was at once both elegant and overwhelming in intensity.

Bonnet 1, a sequence of nine panels, was an arresting arrangement of tree branches washed in a vivid hot pink rinse. Sparkling like fool's gold in the strong light of the gallery, the twisting branches resembled rosy tufts of fairy-floss and the ticklish spikes of a feather boa. As Hood's most innovative work, *bonnet 1* transformed a familiar sight into a disturbing collage of dappled sunburnt prints, successfully producing a fresh vision of nature through representation in a digital medium.

Similar to the dusky prints of *Untitled 1-12*, the *Hood* series embodied the magnified, impressionistic scenes of upended trees, drifting sunsets and wavering powerlines that echoed the tall reeds found in still lilac waters. Hints of pale blue, fuzzy peach and pearlescent creams rippled over the surface of the canvas in an appealing palette of mellow hues as the images emerged like the view before our eyes as we wake from dreamy slumber.

Location III, was an intriguing shift away from the previous introspective reflections of land and sky. More like a barren moonscape than the patterns made by rain pounding into the undulating swell of harbour waters, *Location III* was spread over an entire wall in a mass of 160 small pan-

els. Disjointed yet orderly, the compact prints disclosed the differing movements of water sprinkled with desolate greys and pin pricks of deep blood red. The enormity of the engulfing work jarringly contrasted with the smooth subtly of works like the *Hood* series, leaving *Location III* to appear as an unknown territory; a terrestrial terrain of watery dimples and pointed peaks.

An aesthetically pleasing stroll through the highs and lows of the Tasmanian winter landscape, *Hood* was a poignant homage to the intricacy, beauty and simplicity of an unpredictable natural environment rendered through the digital lens.

briony rhodes

target practice the beverly hills gun club: michael parekowhai

Gow Langsford Gallery, Auckland

After a recent alarm over snakes in shipping containers arriving in Aotearoa, last month the Ministry of Agriculture and Fisheries was looking for scorpions, rumoured to be breeding happily somewhere on a Hawkes Bay vineyard. Since the detection of the honey bee mite *Varroa jacobsoni* in the North Island, our Minister for Biosecurity has shown up in the news: the unruly globalisation-of-everything, we are reminded, is an issue of *security*. The bee mite may not look as vividly alien as snakes, here in a country paradisiacally free of poisonous beasties, but it represents a threat to the economy estimated in the hundreds of millions of dollars.

Marian Hobbs, current Minister for Biosecurity, is also New Zealand's Minister for Broadcasting (including responsibility for TVNZ, Radio NZ and NZ on Air), and is responsible for the National Library and Archives—recognition perhaps, that what is 'native' and what is 'exotic' is just as much an economically entangled issue in 'culture' as it is in 'nature'. Michael Parekowhai achieves the conceptual charge of his latest show with a deft invocation of the thrashed opposition 'indigenous/introduced', alongside that other battered chestnut, 'natural/cultural'.

The snappy installation had an iconic quality, bold, visually neat, well finished and conceptually (a)cute. As ever, Parekowhai's work is visually and spatially graphic, hence photogenic, as well as showing up well in words. The three main ingredients of *The Beverly Hills Gun Club* are building material-scaled tube segments sprayed 'air/sea rescue orange', on and under which stiffly perch or cower taxidermied sparrows and rabbits, bearing on the price list Americana titles—the blokey names of guns and hunters—apparently drawn from old copies of *American Handgunner Magazine*. Two other key elements are nine large photographic prints, closeups of the stuffed fauna hung like trophies in the clubhouse, which is, in this installation, Parekowhai's dealer, Gow Langsford.