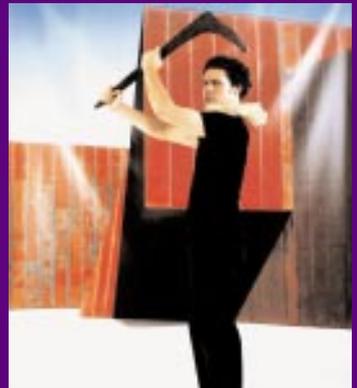




# In Repertoire

A guide to Australian new media art



# Looking for new media art to tour?

[www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma](http://www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma)

## Dear Reader

The essays in this guide introduce you to new media art works created in Australia and the ways in which their creators are encouraged and supported and the works exhibited.

'New media art' in this volume refers to both digital art and hybrid art.

Using significant works as examples, two of the four essays describe the forms that digital and hybrid arts are taking and the themes they explore. The other two provide an overview of the organisations, networks and exhibitors across Australia who have responded to the vision and inventiveness of the artists.

Visit <[www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma](http://www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma)> to find numerous entries introducing works by Australian artists available for international touring and exhibition.

The Editor

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Left	Patricia Piccinini, Natural Selection, Sandman
Right top	Christian Bumburra Thompson, Emotional Striptease
Right bottom	Jon McCormack, Universal Zoologies (detail)

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**RealTime**

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interactive  
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multimedia

**Introduction**

The arts in Australia are enjoying a rich and sustained period of experimentation and innovation. Nowhere is this more evident than in the excitement surrounding new media art as it realises the creative potential of digital technologies and brings together traditionally discrete artforms in new permutations. Digital and cross-artform practices intersect to produce intriguing hybrids, for example when live performers thousands of kilometres apart interact in a virtual space featuring text and animation. The result of this exploration is a body of groundbreaking, mature work and the potential for much more.

As well as bringing together artforms, cultures and media, Australia's new media artists are enjoying fruitful collaborations with industry, science and technology. They also provide some of the most potent commentary on the seductive delights, risks and ambiguities of the new technologies, particularly with regard to identity, surveillance and the environment.

For convenience, this guide treats the two principal dimensions of new media art separately, although there are inevitable overlaps. The term 'new media art' (sometimes called 'electronic' or, as in the essays in this guide, 'digital art') includes work that is often, though not always, screen-based and is experienced via computer, on CD-ROM or online, in galleries on screens and in installations, and is increasingly interactive.

Hybrid art (sometimes called multi-platform) combines artforms, most prominently in installation and in performance. The open-endedness of the visual arts installation has allowed sound art and video to generate new forms in galleries and public spaces. Performance variously brings together theatre, dance and opera, often in an amalgam of movement, installation, sound design and projection. Hybrid art is not contingent on digital technology but its multimedia inclinations have been greatly facilitated by it and some of the most interesting hybrid art in Australia tests and stretches its capacities.

The term 'new media art' thus encompasses digital art and hybrid art, a considerable range of works, forms and experiences. What unites them and keeps the word 'new' curiously current is a sense of adventure, of unfolding possibilities, both for artists and audiences. Art is now more ubiquitous than ever in Australia. There is a growing and pronounced continuum between the home computer and the art gallery, between the hybrids of popular culture and those of the world of art, and, given the accessibility of new media tools, between audience and artist. Australian artists, producers, curators, their supporters and audiences have embraced this shared adventure.

The works described in these pages are only a part of the story—the website address at the top of each page is the door to many more, readily available for international touring, exhibition and collaboration. This guide and the accompanying website entries celebrate the courage and inventiveness of the many Australian artists whose vision is taking them into new worlds. Join them on the journey.

**Jennifer Bott**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Australia Council



Jeffrey Shaw, Web of Life

### Digital art: a rich ecology

Daniel Palmer

#### The power of isolation

Australians are said to be quick to take up new technologies. This has become something of a badge of pride. Of the explanations offered, the one that seems most convincing is isolation. Australia feels itself geographically remote from Europe and the United States, yet communications technologies provide a bizarre proximity to their culture. As if to compound the issue, Australia's population of less than 20 million people is spread over a vast continent. Very comfortable with the reality of mediation, Australian artists wasted no time integrating

digital media into their practice, and during the 1990s the country emerged at the conceptual forefront of 'cyberculture'. The more immaterial forms of digital art—CD-ROM, net.art and so on—are ideally placed to travel easily through the pores of the continent and out into the world, without the expense of freight. Australians have long been recognised participants in the international circuit of digital art festivals and networks of critical exchange.

#### Meta-medium art

Digital art forms part of a hybrid group of practices described as 'new media art' or 'digital art', which over the past decade has moved in from the margins of Australian artistic practice without occupying the centre. Emerging

from various fusions of experimental tendencies in performance, film and video based media, digital art is not an 'art movement' in the traditional sense. Rather, it is a provisional descriptor for a wide range of time-based artistic practices—usually but not necessarily screen-based—in which digital technologies are integrally involved in their production, distribution or presentation. Many have argued, quite rightly perhaps, that once a certain threshold of digital saturation has been crossed, art's 'digital' nature will become irrelevant; we don't speak of analogue art, after all. However, for the moment, digital art remains unique in its meta-relationship to traditional artforms, owing to the computer's status as a meta-medium—its ability to simulate and remediate other media at will.

#### Digital polarities

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the umbrella term digital art includes a diverse range of artists spread over the country with a variety of approaches and preoccupations. Some of the better known artists work exclusively within the digital arena, while others move freely between conventional and new media. Little, aside from the use of computers, links their work. An enormous gap, for example, separates the work of Stelarc and Patricia Piccinini, to name only two of Melbourne's best-known artists working in the field. Stelarc emerged from a performance art background in the 1970s, and has explored various ways of augmenting and extending his biological body. His notorious idea that 'the body is obsolete' has

made him famous among international media theorists. From an electronic third arm to electronically wired avatars, Stelarc's most recent project involves a web-based talking head projected in darkened gallery spaces that interacts by answering questions from users. Piccinini, on the other hand, studied painting and remains a pop-inspired visual artist, producing sculptures and digital photographs of mutant objects and beings in installations with sound and video. She represented Australia to considerable acclaim at the 2003 Venice Biennale with *We are family*. Piccinini is the archetypal global contemporary artist, working with skilled collaborators and using whatever tools are available in a post-media manner. Her preoccupation lies with genetic engineering, and her work makes full use of digital media, with some of her most remarkable works being the digitally generated immersive video installations *Breathing room* (2000) and *Swell* (2000).

**Installation, interaction, immersion**

As computers have become integrated in every level of society, in both personal and public life, more and more artists have been attracted to using them but not necessarily in ways first imagined. Few artists today retain the optimism of early experiments with art and technology in the 1960s and 70s. The situation now is also quite distinct from 1996 when Mike Leggett curated a pioneering CD-ROM exhibition 'Burning the interface' at Sydney's Museum of Contemporary Art. While the CD-ROM has remained an

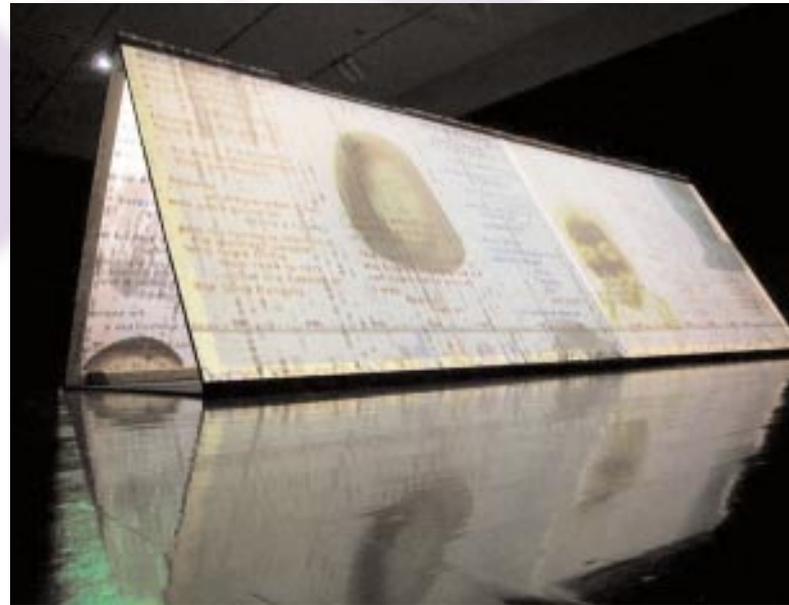
important distribution medium, its aesthetic promise failed to materialise. Artists have become more acutely aware of the possibilities for exhibition beyond the computer monitor, with a focus on the aesthetic immersion of the spectator. The field of Australian digital art includes a number of spine-tingling projects whose basis lies in sound art, Iain Mott's *Close* (2001) being a celebrated recent example, or works by Norie Neumark, Sophiea Lerner, Garth Paine and others. However, the past few years have seen a repatriation of digital art within the visual arts and the art of the moving image, symbolised most spectacularly by the opening in 2002 of the new Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) at Federation Square in Melbourne.

Indeed, video is the basic material for many digital artists. Pioneers in this field include Peter Callas and his extraordinary allegorical works, but a younger generation appears more interested in formal issues and everyday content. Meanwhile, the digital video installation has become the preeminent mode through which to engage an audience. David Haines and Joyce Hinterding have perfected this means, incorporating video projections with synthetic elements, surround sound and multiple screens in their explorations of the hidden forms of the natural world. In collaborative and independent practices, their works often engage with a technological sublime (most notably *The levitation grounds*, 2000-02). At the very high end of the scale lie virtual reality research collaborations such as Melbourne's 'Metraform'; their recent work, *Ecstasis*, invites multiple

participants to navigate a three dimensional synthetic environment using ribbon-like avatars whose perspectives are controlled in real time by the direction of the user's gaze.

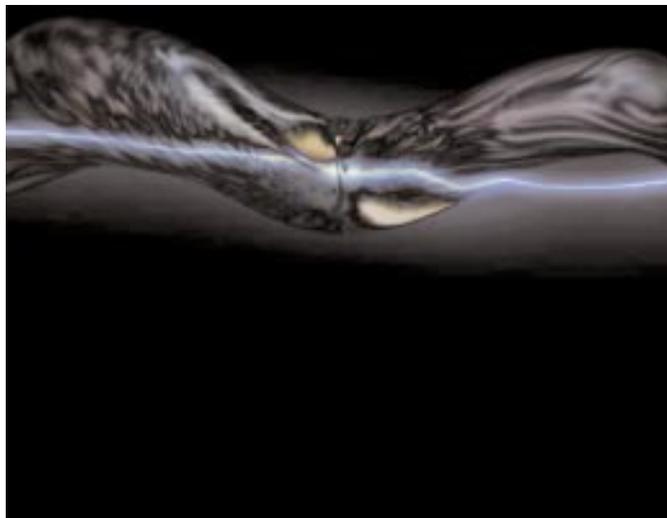
A few artists have aspired to producing large-scale interactive digital installations. An international leader here is Jeffrey Shaw, a recently repatriated Australian artist who has been living and working in Europe as director of visual media at the ZKM Centre for Art and Media in Karlsruhe, Germany. Best known for his work *Legible city* (1988-91), Shaw's recent interactive installations allow viewers to explore a 360-degree panorama, rotating the projected image within a

also explored digital culture as a thematic concern. This can be seen as a response to the futuristic hype around new technologies, increasingly intimate symbiotic relationships between humans and machines and the development of new artificial life forms and environments. For many years, Jon McCormack has produced an interconnected series of autonomous, self-generating, poetic spaces that are navigated by people experiencing the work. The lush 3D aesthetic of works such as *Turbulence* (1994-5) or the more diagrammatic *Eden* (2003) are entirely digitally generated environments as well as complex artificial ecosystems. McCormack's ongoing concern lies in artificial



Justine Cooper, Transformers

Joyce Hinterding, The plasma wave instrument: Carrier



surrounding projection screen while they navigate virtual space. Dennis Del Favero also works on a large scale, with work such as *Cross currents* (1997) and *Sottovoce* (2002) dealing with masculinity, war, trauma and sexuality. On a more intimate scale, Linda Erceg's ambitious digital installation *Skin club* (2002) explores the technofetish fantasy of the computer-generated human through photorealistic life-size nude models who perform as interactive storytellers. Van Sowerine also uses voyeurism and the surprise element in highly original interactive works such as *Play with me* (2000) that combine childhood play with horror scenarios.

**Growing digital environments**

Some of the most interesting work in Australian digital art in the 1990s

gardens and paradises, and his colourful work, like Piccinini's *Plasticology* (1997) and Troy Innocent's *Iconica* (1997) and *Artefact* (2001), belies a playful sophistication. Piccinini and Innocent have pioneered an original digital pop aesthetic of self-contained worlds, which is also part of Martine Corompt's quirky animation practice around the 'cute' theme.

**Games and spaces**

Computer games have become a source of inspiration for digital artists. Leon Cmielewski and Josephine Starr's CD-ROM work *Dream kitchen* (2000) uses the format of a computer game in order to subvert its territory. A burgeoning field of practice, the computer game offers a popular way to explore ideas about interactivity and



Daniel Crooks, video still: train, Time Slice

virtual space. Various game-art projects are collected on Julian Oliver's *Select parks* website (<http://selectparks.net>). Anthony Hunt and Stephen Honegger have employed game software to develop virtual spaces which they combine with physical sculptural elements; their extraordinary *Container* (2002) literally inverted the space of the gallery.

An architectural interest in public space is evident in Queensland-based intermedia artist Craig Walsh's site-specific installations and sculptures. In Walsh's *Urban tide* (2003), a trio of commercial banking buildings in Sydney appear to slowly fill with water and huge fish. In *Retarded Eye's Drive by* (2000), Vikki Wilson and Erin Hefferon curated a series of seven projection installations by various artists, inviting the pedestrian and the driver ('the flaneur with wheels') to newly experience the streetscape of Perth. Moving away from the screen as a means of exhibition, Horst Kiechle generates unlikely, 'amorphous' sculptural forms on the computer

before they can be architecturally realised in galleries, performance and as restaurant decor.

#### Science and society

Many digital artists are committed to investigating social and political themes. The fragile body and scientific ideology emerged as a key theme early on. Today, artists explore scientific narratives in a spirit of wonder rather than critique. Justine Cooper's interests lie in how medical technologies, in particular, mediate our conceptions of time, space and identity and more recently in systems of translation, pattern and randomness. Her dynamic video and installation work uses the latest full-body magnetic resonance imaging technology (*Rapt*, 1998) or magnified bodily fluids (*Moist*, 2002). John Tonkin's *Personal eugenics*, part of his *Meniscus* trilogy, explores the face as a site of identity, and critiques nineteenth century physiognomic photography as well as modern genetic research. A net.art work, it can also stand alone as an installation.



rea, gins\_leap/dubb\_speak

in several different versions, to suit various exhibition formats and budgets. For instance, Anita Kocsis' *Neonverte* (1999) is 'grown' on the web in a Flash environment and then displayed as an immersive gallery installation. CD-ROMs such as Debra Petrovitch's *Uncle Bill* (2000) or Ross Gibson and Kate Richard's *Darkness loiters* (2000), both of which deal with archival lens-based black and white imagery and its concomitant residues of longing and loss, can be reconfigured for installation or live performance. A large number of artists use the Web as a primary component of their work. Melinda Rackham's *Carrier* (1999) explores the intimate world of our own bodies and the microbiological beings that inhabit them, via the directness of the interactive online experience. Ian Haig's *Web devolution* (2000)—like his sculptural installations of high-tech toilets and microwave-inducing helmets—is a refreshingly irreverent exploration of the hype and evangelism of digital culture.

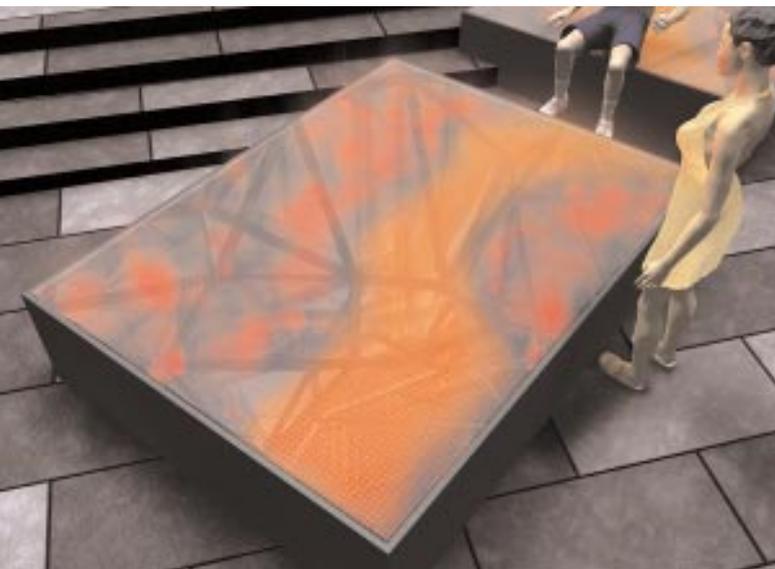
In Australian digital art there are many Web-based art projects (or net.art). They are often minority cultural practices, less about great works than ongoing everyday interventions. That a significant amount of activity goes on below or indifferent to the curatorial gaze augurs well for the future ecology of digital art in Australia. That there is so much digital art that is increasingly visible, singularly Australian—in its focus on the body, space and the technology itself—and is easily exportable augurs well for international audiences and their growing curiosity about the preoccupations and innovations from this part of the world. □

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Australian artists were at the forefront of cyberfeminism in the 1990s with the VNS Matrix group and artists such as Francesca da Rimini and Linda Dement. Meanwhile digital media has proved the ideal means for Indigenous artists such as Jenny Fraser (curator of 'Blackout Indigenous New Media Arts Collective', [www.anat.org.au/nisnma/blackout](http://www.anat.org.au/nisnma/blackout)), rea and Christian Bumburra Thompson to rewrite the archives of colonial Australia, its stereotypes and omissions, with a particular reliance on the dynamic field of photo-media. Other artists, like Martin Walch, are preoccupied with our 'objective' measurement of the natural landscape and pursue an alternative mode of visual perception, in his case using stereoscopic imaging.

#### A flexible, fecund art

One of the flexibilities of digital media is that artworks can sometimes be reconfigured, or exist



Jon McCormack, Future Garden (computer visualisation)



Company in Space, The Light Room

### Hybrid art: hybrid nation

Keith Gallasch

Dr. Thomas Wohlfahrt, director of Berlin's *literaturWERKstatt*, is impressed by Australian work, 'its up-front nature, the sheer freshness and physicality. Australia is a highly modern society that takes pleasure in new technology. The way text, spoken word and media presentation accompany each other there is astonishing' (The *Sydney Morning Herald*, 7 July, 2003). Maria Magdalena Schwaegermann, artistic director of the Zürcher Theater Spektakel is another key supporter of Australian art, admiring the hybridity embodied in Australian performance—a merging of artforms, media and cultures. She is one of a number of international festival directors and producers taking Australian work to Europe, America and Asia. What kind of works are these? But first, why Australia?

### Hybrid Australia

Australia is a hybrid nation—an island the size of a continent comprising tropical rainforests, deserts, bushlands and icy mountains. It is home to unique fauna, including one of nature's own apparent hybrids, a duck-billed, web-footed, egg-laying mammal, the platypus. Australia is an ancient landscape shared between an Indigenous people and the offspring of a mere 200 years of Anglo-Celtic, European and recent Asian immigration. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders constitute almost 2 per cent of the Australian population and excel in traditional and contemporary art for which they are internationally recognised. These people and their art have a growing influence on the way all Australians see themselves and the land. Through art, principally hybrid art, a space has been opened for successful intercultural collaboration.

As with that other great natural-cum-cultural artefact, language, the history of the arts has been a narrative of unpredictable transformation and hybridisation. The opera and the novel are well-known examples, but from the beginning of the twentieth century the heavily guarded borders of traditional artforms have been consistently and increasingly breached until we have arrived in open territory in the twenty-first century. Here high culture and low meet, hitherto discrete artforms merge, the screen becomes integral to live performance and performers interact with their virtual selves. Digital media allow the fusion of text, film and sound art into new interactive experiences and audiences become 'players' and performers at their computers or in public spaces.

Paralleling the thrill of these new possibilities is the surge of interest in Australian Aboriginal ritual, which

appears to Western artists and audiences as consummate hybridity in its integration of visual art, music, dance, narrative and site. Not surprisingly then Indigenous artists have taken traditional Western forms and juxtaposed and merged them with their own. The plays of Western Australian Indigenous playwright Jack Davis in the 1980s influentially combined a laid-back naturalism with ritual. In the 1990s director Wesley Enoch and performer Deborah Mailman co-created the internationally performed *7 stages of grieving*. This lament for the losses of the Aboriginal people is told in a set of informally delivered stories and performed in an installation of earth, fire, ice, text projections and real tears.

The Sydney-based Stalker Theatre Company, white performers expert in stilt walking, acrobatics and working particular sites, have collaborated with a Northern Territory Indigenous community and



Back to Back Theatre, Soft

professional Indigenous artists to form the Marrugeku Company. After a long period of complex cultural negotiation, the company has made the multimedia performances *Mimi* and *Crying baby*. Combining dance, music, film and storytelling in an installation of earth, screens and sculptures, the internationally toured *Crying baby* explored an Indigenous community's and a white missionary's different readings of the very same land. This is a hybrid performance that operates across cultures, media and artforms.

#### Hybrid performance

The formal origins of this kind of integrative work are to be found in the 1980s with the emergence of what was simply called performance, a hybrid appearing in many shapes that departed radically from conventional theatre, dance and opera models. It cross-bred these forms and drew (and continues to do so) on performance art, Japanese performance methodologies (Suzuki, Body Weather), architecture and installation, growing multimedia possibilities, sound art, new attitudes to text, and ideas about sharing the performing space with audiences. Key companies experimenting in this area in the 1980s and 90s included All Out Ensemble, The Sydney Front, Entr'acte Theatre and Open City, mostly working at Sydney's influential Performance Space, an organisation and venue committed to the development and staging of hybrid work. As those

companies disappeared in the 90s new groups like Gravity Feed and The opera Project emerged along with numerous individual practitioners. Established companies like PACT Youth Theatre and Urban Theatre Projects now embraced hybrid performance.

In Melbourne in the 1980s hybrid performance was to be found in works by Going Through Stages, Theatre Works and Lyndal Jones. Writer-director Jenny Kemp and writer Richard Murphet have continued to produce new works from the 80s to the present alongside more recent Melbourne performance makers including NYID (Not Yet It's Difficult), desoxy theatre, Linda Sproul, Yumi Umiumare, Tony Yap and Company in Space. Performance, dance theatre and physical theatre developed in all of Australia's capital cities and beyond, encouraged by the support of organisations such as Performance Space and Perth's PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts).

The proliferation of hybrid performance has been considerable, with the practice pervading dance and opera and reaching out into youth and community theatre. Early on community arts companies, like the long-established Sidetrack Performance Group and para//elo, saw the potential of hybrid forms to express the tensions and aspirations of multiculturalism. Gay, lesbian and queer cultures have

also played a significant role in adopting and developing practices responsive to the complexities of sexual politics and furthering the concept of hybridity.

The solo works of Chinese-Australian photographer William Yang embody these hybridities of form, culture and sexuality. Yang narrates his own slide projection shows in a hybrid show-and-tell developed from the model of everyday practice using his own life and the history of his family and friends. He opens out to Australian and international audiences the lives of Chinese-Australians going back into the nineteenth century,

Force Majeure, Same, same But Different



the joys and sorrows of the gay community, and his encounters with Aboriginal people.

A number of performers have also revived the monologue by hybridising it with other artforms and performance modes. These include actress and writer Margaret Cameron, sound artist and performer Margaret Trail, visual artist and poet Ania Walwicz and Indigenous artists—the actress Ningali Lawford (effectively deploying Aboriginal English, now recognised as a dialect), actor-writer Leah Purcell and opera singer Deborah Cheetham.

The space opened by intercultural, cross-artform and multimedia practices exceeds Australia's borders. *The theft of Sita* was created by director-writer Nigel Jamieson and composer and jazz musician Paul Grabowsky in collaboration with Balinese composer I Wayan Gde Yudane, leading Australian puppeteer Peter Wilson, Javanese Wayan Kulit master I Made Sidia and musicians and puppeteers from both nations. Seen in America and Europe, *The theft of Sita* is a remarkably effective, large-scale hybrid in its synthesis of musical forms, puppetry and animation and its telling of the Ramayana myth as a contemporary political fable.

What fuels hybridity in these works is exchange—between forms and cultures—and the openness to change and possibilities on which it is predicated. The Brisbane-based new music ensemble, Elision, commissions Australian and overseas artists to work with them. *Dark matter*, a massive installation in which the performers play and the audience join them, is the outcome of a collaboration with a



Craig Walsh, Humanature

Norwegian architect and musicians and a British composer and has been performed in Brisbane and Berlin. Aphids, a Melbourne-based music and installation group has collaborated with Danish artists to create *Maps*, a work seen in both Australia and Denmark.

**Installation impact**

With its three dimensional and sculptural possibilities and its easy adaptability to video, sound and digital media, the visual arts installation is a hybrid form that has had a significant impact on sound art and performance. Traditional stage design has long been usurped by the collaboration of visual artists in performance works where their creations stand as works of art in their own right. Gravity Feed's *Host* is a powerful example of installation as performance. The work foregrounds huge cardboard sculptures created from computer design by new media artist Horst Kiechle. The performance centres as much on the changing architecture of the moveable sculptures and the mobile audience as on the performers who manipulate them. The Chunky Move dance company's *Closer* (interactive and visual design by Peter Hennessey) is an installation whose audience pushes into padded stands in order to choreograph the movements of an onscreen dancer, at the same time triggering their own soundtrack. Visual artist Craig Walsh eerily transforms public spaces, using projections to insert nature into built environments, or faces onto trees, as in *Humanature*.

**Digital space**

As projections are more easily facilitated by computer, the screen becomes integral to performance, with sometimes outstanding results as in Mary Moore's *Exile* (videomaker Richard Back, video

animator Paul Jennings), Kate Champion's *Same same but different* (filmmaker Brigid Kitchen) and Company in Space's *The light room* (filmmaker Margie Medlin). As in the work of John McCormick for Company in Space, considerable experimentation and innovation with interactivity design can be required to effectively bring together film, VR environments, sound, light and live performance. McCormick, Margie Medlin, Tim Gruchy, Keith Armstrong, Samuel James and others have consistently worked to develop effective visual material and frameworks for performers. Arena Theatre, Back to Back and NYID (Not Yet It's Difficult) are just a few of the performance companies engaging with digital media while maintaining a vigorous theatricality and critiquing the increasing power of science and new technology over everyday life.

**Site work**

With the emergence of the installation came site-specific works determined by an artist's reaction to a particular space, a concept that spread to performance and also expanded the opportunities for sound art. In performance, Elision's *Opening of the mouth*, set in a railway yard, Angharad Wynne Jones' *Hydrofictions*, an adventure on Sydney Harbour, and Gravity Feed's *Tabernacle*, a vast mutating structure set on the roof of a suburban carpark, are just a few of many striking examples. Brisbane-based Arterial worked in collaboration with US artist Barry Schwarz to create a large-scale multimedia performance installation, *Elektrosonic interference*, a site-specific response to the history of the Brisbane Powerhouse (a venue for hybrid performance and other contemporary work). Bonemap from Far North Queensland creates site works about the delicate line

between urban and wild space. And in a different take on site, BAMBUco build and deconstruct bamboo structures up to 30 metres high over a week or two on-site in international locations. Urban Dream Capsule lives two weeks at a time in department store windows around the world, and the Museum of Modern Oddities inhabits everything from an aged hardware store in Melbourne to garden allotments in Zurich.

**Site and sound**

In recent years there have been some significant site-specific sound installations created by Australian artists with international reputations. Nigel Helyer's *Meta-diva*, a solar-powered installation, comprising 30 tall aluminium stems equipped with digital audio chips and timers standing like tree trunks in water, is installed both in an artificial lake in



Nigel Helyer, Meta-Diva

Korea and also in the grounds of Werribee Park, Victoria. In each location it provides an aural environment responsive to the site. David Chesworth is an established composer who also creates site-specific sound works with his partner Sonia Leber. Their *5000 calls*, installed at the 2000 Olympic Games site, displays the couple's ongoing interest in the human voice and the creation of 'crowd systems' through which listeners move and hear; in this case, the voices and the efforts of sporting bodies. Ros Bandt, a leading sound artist, continues to demonstrate her commitment to Australian sound ecology in the 60-minute electroacoustic work, *Stack*, which draws on sounds taken from and created in a 55-metre structure built to extract fumes from a city tunnel—in effect Bandt plays the structure.

**The sound-music nexus**

Sound art and new music events are proliferating across the country—impermanent.audio, Small Black Box, Make It Up Club, Club Zho—as are festivals like *Liquid Architecture*, *What is Music?*, *Electrofringe*, *Totally Huge*, *The Now now* and *REV*. The growing interplay of sound art, electronica, musique concrete, contemporary classical, jazz, sound poetry and improvised music has been accelerated by inexpensive digital media and by the passion of a growing number of young performers not fixated on screen media. From a parallel development in popular culture, the influence of the dance club DJ has been palpable in contemporary dance works (replete with onstage DJs). The possibilities of the dynamic relationship of sound and image (with the VJ) has also emerged from the same culture and been taken on by new media artists like Wade Marynowsky.

**The hybrid body**

If there is one subject which Australian contemporary art addresses with fervour, and especially in hybrid art, it is the body. Emerging from the performance art scene of the 60s and 70s, Stelarc has created internationally acclaimed endurance works and speculative pieces about the future of the body. In many ways Stelarc epitomises hybrid art in his fusion of science and art, serious intent and visually exciting performances—big screen, big soundtrack, images and sound fuelled by a body manipulated by machinery and, recently, online users.

Stelarc's fantasies of up-loaded disembodiment find their antidote in the work of artists with disabilities like Back to Back Theatre from Geelong in regional Victoria. In *Soft* (touring internationally from 2003), the company envelops the audience in a huge white bubble, each observer with their own headset watching and listening into a near-future tale of the cruel elimination of human difference told with spare wit and wisdom. Images of DNA form and dissolve around the audience. In Patricia Piccinini's *Sandman*, at the National Gallery of Victoria, gallery-goers are transfixed in a darkened room by a sculpted mutant motor car, a large projection of a girl swimming, and a series of backlit stills in which the girl appears to be going through the usual adolescent dramas ... until you notice she has gills (see cover image). This hybrid of mediums, of art form expectations, hybridises its audience's aesthetic sensibilities in a new viewing experience where the attraction and repulsion of new technology are played out.



Elision, Dark Matter

A simpler but significant hybridity focused on the body emerged in the mid-1980s. Drawing on a long circus tradition in Australia, Legs on the Wall took circus and acrobatic skills into the theatre, cross-breeding physical routines with narrative in powerfully intimate works like *All of me*. The same company produced *Homeland*, a work about migration performed as a dizzying journey across the surface of a huge building and against projections of images and text. These hybrid creations played to great success in many countries in the 1990s. Numerous companies have brought their own slant to the possibilities of physical theatre—among them, desoxy theatre, acrobat, Co. Theatre Physical, The Umbilical Brothers, 5 Angry Men, Party Line, Club Swing, Rock'n'Roll Circus, Slack Taxi and Kage Physical Theatre.

#### Dance's digital body

It is intriguing that the most potent performative exploration of the relationship between the body and new media has emerged from dance, yielding some highly effective developments in hybrid art. 'Intriguing' because dance's preoccupation with the integrity of the body would seem to gravitate against its now widespread engagement with virtual bodies. The leader has been Melbourne's Company in Space (directors Hellen Sky and John McCormick), experimenting with transmission so that one dancer can perform with another thousands of kilometres away. The company also works with motion capture suits and animation and, in their latest work, performs with computer and film

images and texts layered through walls of glass shaped by an architect, creating multiple virtual spaces. In Brisbane, dancer Lisa O'Neill has collaborated with new media artist Keith Armstrong, as transmute collective, in the transmission and transformation of movement and spaces—with room for online audience interaction. Dancer and new media artist Cazerine Barry performs against pre-recorded fantasy images of herself, flattening perspectives in acts of magical transformation.

Choreographer and dancer Kate Champion directs her company, Force Majeure, in *Same same But Different* in which performers join their ghostly selves in fantasies of

love and rejection. A black stage wall constantly opens and closes, yielding frames in permutations large and small, some of live performance, some filmed, some both, immaculately synthesising live and virtual performance. In the installation *Nightshift*, George P. Khut has filmed dancer Wendy McPhee and multiplied her onto nine transparent screens in short flickering bursts of enigmatic, sometimes erotic, sometimes frightening images from which we, the ambulatory audience, construct narratives that evaporate almost as soon as we've invented them.

#### The audience performs

As hybrid forms develop, opportunities like these for new

Arena Theatre Company, Play Dirty



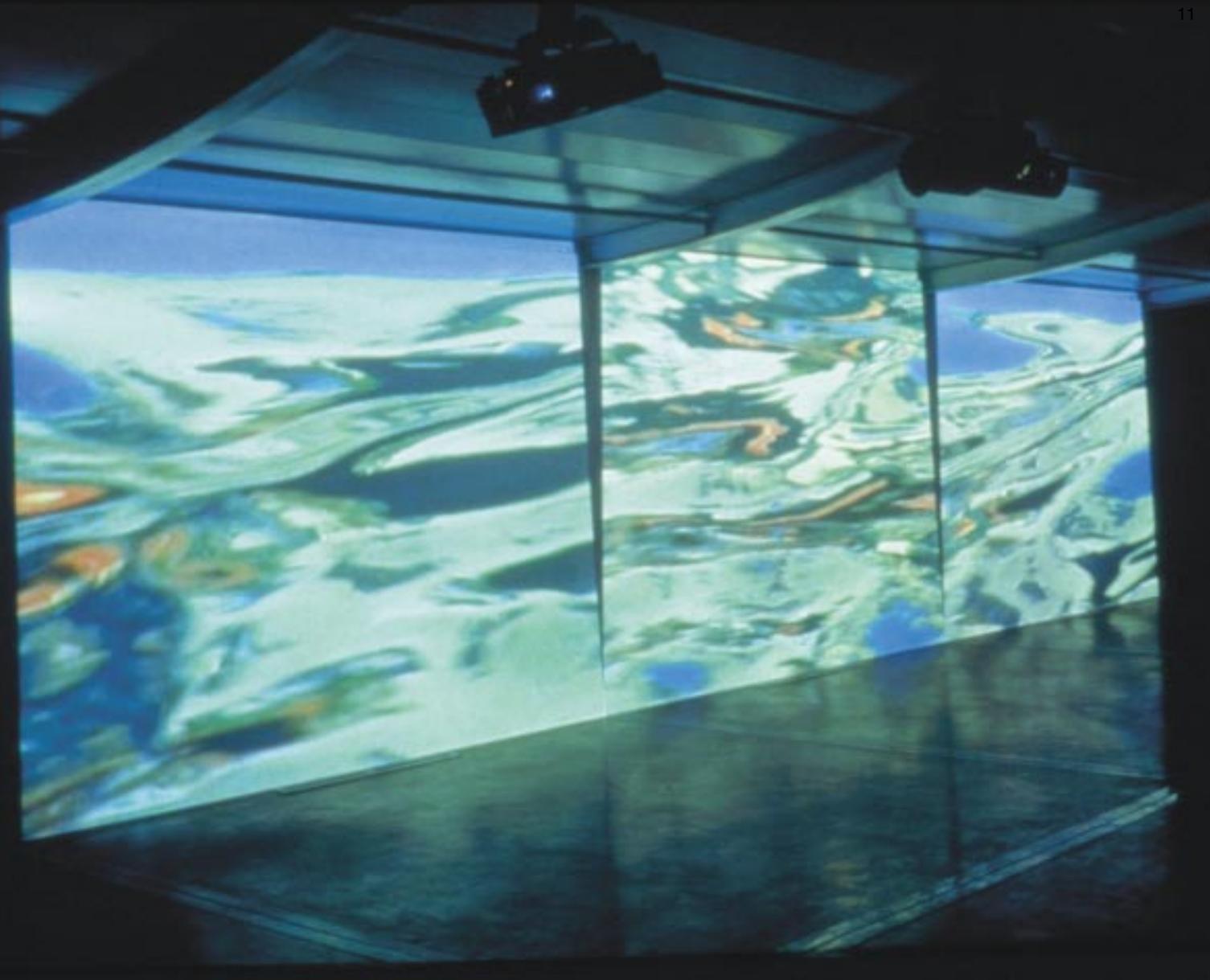
kinds of audience experience—and behaviour—multiply. In Salamanca Theatre's *Panopticron* an early 19th century Tasmanian prison chapel was replicated, each audience member isolated and monitored in director Deborah Pollard's collaboration with video artist Denis Beaubois. Beaubois has made the politics, technology and impact of surveillance central to his work, as have the Perth-based PVI collective. At the same time, new media art works by the likes of Mari Velonaki and Linda Erceg require an active audience, ready to throw things at or engage in conversation with virtual characters, or as with Chunky Move's *Closer*, to physically engage with a virtual dancer.

#### The value of hybrids

In Australia, hybrid arts are where new ideas about the body, culture, history and technology are most strongly expressed, explored and critiqued. It is an area of intense research and development into the possibilities of cross-artform, intercultural and multimedia practices. When resisting insularity, Australians display an admirable tendency to openness that encourages collaboration and invention, and that's what the hybrid arts are all about. □

For a detailed account of the companies working in hybrid performance from the 1980s to the present see *In Repertoire: A Guide to Australian Contemporary Performance*.

Keith Gallasch is Managing Editor of RealTime arts magazine, a writer-performer and dramaturg.



Lyndal Jones, Deep Water/Aqua Profunda

**Digital art: sources and resources**

Kathy Cleland

**Going global**

Stelarc, Jill Scott, Peter Callas, Jon McCormack and the cyberfeminist group VNS Matrix are among Australian artists at the forefront of the international digital art scene since the late 1980s, exploring the creative and aesthetic possibilities of new technologies.

From these promising beginnings and with the coming of a new generation, Australian digital art has continued to develop and mature.

Its acceptance and prominence in the visual arts world is nowhere more evident than in the choice of artists to represent Australia in the Venice Biennale. In 2001, Lyndal Jones' installation, *Aqua profunda*, juxtaposed video images of Venice, Sydney Harbour and a performer across a series of plasma screens in a reverie about waiting, place and culture. In 2003, Patricia Piccinini's installation, *We are family*, explored cloning, stem-cell research and cross-species genetic engineering with a grim whimsicality. These artists from different generations represent the diversity of creative and conceptual possibilities that digital art encompasses.

**Financial support**

Funding for digital art in Australia is small compared with other artforms and corporate sponsorship, although on the increase, is rare. Digital artists rely on the financial support of the New Media Arts Board of the Australia Council along with gradually increasing funding from state governments and their film bodies. Over recent years, Film Victoria, South Australian Film Corporation, QPIX (Queensland), FTO (New South Wales Film and Television Office) and others have begun to offer specific funding programs for digital art projects.

Established in the mid-90s the Australia Council's New Media Arts Board fosters the development of

digital art as well as its presentation and promotion. It provides fellowships, funds international residencies and its initiatives include 'RUN\_WAY', a program for young and emerging artists and curators, and 'Synapse', a program designed to encourage collaboration between artists and scientists. The Synapse online database (<www.synapse.net.au>) was launched mid-2003 offering accounts of artists' engagements with science and technology, links to their sites and information on projects, organisations and events.

**Training, research and resources**

Screen culture organisations, like Metro Screen in Sydney and the Media Resource Centre (MRC) in



Dennis Del Favero, *Pentimento*

Adelaide, provide training initiatives and resources for digital artists. The tertiary education sector has also been quick to integrate digital technologies into their arts, media, communications and design courses and to undertake strategic research projects. Of particular note are the Centre for Interaction Design at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and the Centre for Interactive Cinema Research (iCINEMA) at the University of New South Wales. The iCINEMA project focuses on the development of a digitally expanded cinema, including research into immersive environments and new narrative structures. The centre is undertaking this research in collaboration with a number of international and national partners including ZKM, Centre for Art and Media, Karlsruhe, National Institute for Dramatic Art (NIDA), Sydney and the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI) in Melbourne.

#### Critical discourse

Lively critical discourse through print and electronic publications as well as conferences and symposia has also been an important factor in supporting emerging digital artforms. The bi-monthly, free print and online magazine *RealTime* provides a widely accessible and consistent forum in Australia for reviewing and critiquing new media art. Online journals focusing on art and technology include *Fine Art Forum* based at the Queensland University of Technology (QUT) and Experimenta Media Art's annual publication *MESH*. Internet lists such as [:fibreculture:](#) and [\[-empyre-\]](#) facilitate on-going debate about Australian new media art and Internet culture.

Australian visual art journals *Artlink*, *Art AsiaPacific* and *Photofile* have also published special issues on digital media. Books covering some of the work and related issues include *Prefiguring cyberspace: An intellectual history* edited by Darren Tofts, Annemarie Jonson and Alessio Cavallaro, and *Culture and technology* by Andrew Murphie and John Potts.

#### New media art organisations

The Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT), established in 1985 in Adelaide, has been instrumental in bringing artists together from across Australia as well as providing international connections and training initiatives

including an on-going series of National Schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists.

In Melbourne, Experimenta Media Arts showcases a variety of experimental screen-based and media arts in a major annual exhibition and publishes the screen culture journal *MESH*. Each year Sydney-based dLux media arts presents a program of national and international experimental film, video, animations, CD-ROM, sound and Internet art, as well as a symposium exploring artistic, cultural and social issues surrounding new technological developments. Contemporary art spaces, particularly those which are part of CAOS (Contemporary Arts Organisations of Australia), increasingly see digital art as integral to their programming.

The most significant recent national development is ACMI, the Australian Centre for the Moving Image, which opened in Melbourne in late 2002.

Funded by Film Victoria, ACMI is the first major Australian centre dedicated solely to all forms of the moving image, including film, television and digital media. In an interesting development, the State Library of Victoria has established Experimedia, a program of digital art residencies, projects and exhibitions. The Queensland Gallery of Modern Art, scheduled to open in late 2005, will provide facilities to support the exhibition of screen-based and digital work including a cinematheque.

#### Festivals

Since 1999, the Brisbane-based Multimedia Art Asia Pacific (MAAP) has hosted an annual festival with a

focus on online art from the Asia Pacific region accompanied by screenings, exhibitions and forums. In 2002 MAAP travelled off-shore and was co-hosted by the Chinese government in Beijing. Festivals are scheduled for Seoul and Singapore. The 'Electrofringe' festival is held annually in the regional city of Newcastle as part of the 'This is Not Art' festival and brings together young and emerging artists in digital media. The most recently established digital arts festival in Australia is the 'Biennale of Electronic Arts Perth' (BEAP). The inaugural event, held in Perth, Western Australia in 2002, incorporated conferences and exhibitions of the works of international and Australian digital artists. The *noise* festival, a national on-line event, encourages young people to engage with new media practice. International film festivals in Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney are incorporating new media screenings, exhibitions and symposia into their programs, as are some smaller regional festivals.

#### The future

The future looks bright for digital art in Australia. This is evident in the adoption of digital media by artists across all artforms, the emergence of purpose-built venues and the proliferation of dedicated festivals. Other signs of success include high levels of enrolment in new media courses, growing acceptance of digital art in the worlds of visual arts and film, and, importantly, increasing public interest. The sheer volume of creative output, the high level of innovation and the idiosyncratic content of Australian digital art invites international attention. □



Kathy Cleland is an independent writer and curator specialising in new media art. She lectures in arts informatics at Sydney University and is the curator of the Cyber Cultures exhibition series ([www.casulapowerhouse.com/cybercultures](http://www.casulapowerhouse.com/cybercultures)).

Iain Mott & Marc Raszewski, *Close*



Ian Haig, Excelsior 3000

### Hybrid art: cultural biodiversity

Sarah Miller

#### A new paradigm

Drawing on a multiplicity of media and disciplines, hybrid art practices are the unforeseeable offspring of all the misalliances that make up contemporary experience from popular culture to nanotechnology, from the lived experience of a multicultural society to conceptual art. With no set of signature skills or specific media by which we can identify them, definitions of 'hybrid practice' rarely satisfy those who ask exactly what it is. Yet, if the hybrid arts cannot be described in terms of their 'thingness', they may well be understood as an unruly paradigm for art making, a means of finding new ways to go on, of chancing the fortunes of the moment.

Twenty years ago, such practices might have been described as *avant-garde* and there is no doubt that there is still a strong connection to experimentation and to questioning assumptions about the nature of art itself. Today, a more potent metaphor might be drawn from environmental discourse. After all, the term hybrid refers to the cross-breeding or intermingling of different animal or plant species towards the creation of unique and vigorous new species. Similarly, we understand the importance of biodiversity not simply within a given species but between bodies, species, media, disciplines and diverse communities. The infrastructure underpinning hybrid practice is essential to the health of the whole.

#### Infrastructure

In this context there is no doubting the impact of the Australia Council's New Media Arts Board (initially the

Hybrid Arts Committee) for almost a decade. With its financial and infrastructure support alongside assistance from state governments, those artists committed to working with notions of hybridity were encouraged to grow. Furthermore, the possibilities, frameworks and contexts through which such practices are produced, mediated, disseminated and taught have continued to proliferate.

Among the contemporary art spaces across Australia are two organisations that have consistently supported the development of hybrid arts, testing not only the parameters of art itself but engaging with audiences in new ways. With their flexible spaces, Sydney's Performance Space and the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) have an ongoing commitment to artists working at the performative end of the hybrid

arts spectrum. In many aspects of their operations they may be understood as incubators, providing resources, mentoring and support for emerging and mature artists whilst promoting new ideas, new forms and new practices to the broader community.

#### Touring and exchange

Performance Space and PICA are working collaboratively to ensure that hybrid performance and live art have the opportunity to travel more broadly not only within Australia but internationally. They work closely together on touring projects such as *Mobile States* and *Breathing Space Australia* and the 'time\_place\_space' workshop, a project also involving the Australian Network for Art & Technology (ANAT). Unlike, say, the UK, commissioning funds are not available to smaller producer/presenters in Australia.



Cazerine Barry, Sprung

Consequently, for programming tours the curating organisations draw on extant initiatives including *time\_place\_space*, Performance Space's artist-in-residence program and artists funded through PICA's R&D Fund. A degree of international exchange is already in place with presentation of the British project, *32,000 points of light*, at Performance Space in 2002 while *Nightshift*, a video installation by George P. Khut and Wendy McPhee, was presented in 2003 at Arnolfini, Bristol's contemporary arts centre.

The success of the National Review of Live Art (NRLA) tour to Australia in 2002 is indicative of the importance of international exchange and touring both into and out of Australia. Originating in Glasgow under the artistic directorship of Nikki Milican, the NRLA was presented in 2002 at the Brisbane Powerhouse and in Midland, Western Australia. The NRLA saw a curated program of performances, workshops and

discussions taking place between Australian and British artists leading to an invitation to Perth based artist Sarah-Jane Pell to present her work at the NRLA in Glasgow. A second NRLA event was proposed for Western Australia in 2003.

#### Festivals

Beyond these initiatives, festivals such as 'This is not Art' in Newcastle, 'antistatic' in Sydney, the 'Next Wave Festival' in Melbourne and 'Artrage' and 'Dancers are space eaters' in Perth provide an important context for the promotion of a wide range of hybrid arts activities. Major international arts festivals in Adelaide, Melbourne, Sydney and Perth have long provided commissioning monies towards the generation of larger scale work. *Stalker* and *Marrugeku*, the *Elision* new music ensemble, *Company in Space*, *Gravity Feed*, *para/elo* and *skadada* are just some of the companies working in aesthetically

and culturally hybrid areas that have achieved popular and critical acclaim both nationally and internationally. Appearing in many European festivals and programs, Neil Thomas and Katie Bowman's *Museum of modern oddities* has demonstrated the international appeal of work that is idiosyncratic and yet expansive, constantly renegotiating traditional artform categories.

The presence of such work in national and international arenas relies heavily on the work of individual producers such as Wendy Blacklock (Performing Lines Ltd), Henry Boston (Cultural Pursuits Ltd), Marguerite Pepper (Marguerite Pepper Productions) and, until recently, Justin MacDonell and Barry Plews. Their willingness to support an array of contemporary practices has been crucial in getting the work of Australian artists into national and international touring circuits and festivals.

#### Education and development

Opportunities to address the sustainability of practice and the professional needs of hybrid practitioners to hone their conceptual, technological, practical and dramaturgical skills have been lacking until recently. In 2002 the first *time\_place\_space* workshop was held in the rural city of Wagga Wagga. The success of this potent, laboratory style artists' retreat means that the event looks set to become one of the primary testing and breeding grounds for the arts in Australia.

If sustainability is a key issue for hybrid practitioners, then the silver lining must be the number of highly skilled artists teaching within Australia's tertiary institutions. In the Faculty of Human Development at Victoria University, actor, dramaturg and lecturer Mark Minchinton and his colleagues work hard to protect 'a wild space' essential for 'thinking performance beyond traditional forms'. Extraordinary artists are also to be found teaching at the University of Western Sydney's Theatre Making degree, in the Performance-Making Animateureing Course at the Victorian College of the Arts, and in the University of New South Wales' Theatre, Film and Dance Department. Hybrid practice is also sustained by the discussion and documentation widely disseminated by *RealTime*, a national bi-monthly magazine connecting artists and ideas and encouraging the growth of new audiences.

#### The yield of biodiversity

Across Australia it is possible to discern the growth and maturation not just of artists and companies but also the essential infrastructure that supports, facilitates and enables artists to make work. In turn hybrid practitioners work on the field itself, the art domain, constantly making decisions affecting its definition for they are not only experienced in specific disciplines, they are concerned with the imbrication of art and life, in actively fostering Australia's cultural biodiversity. From this rich pool of activities and ideas emerge innovations in performance, circus and physical theatre, puppetry, dance, music theatre, digital media, installation and remarkable hybrids of these that are engaging international audiences with a distinctively Australian directness, intelligence, humour and physicality. □

Sarah Miller is artistic director of the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts.



Chunky Move, Closer



**Web directory**

Australia Council for the Arts	<a href="http://www.ozco.gov.au">www.ozco.gov.au</a>
Australian Film Commission (AFC)	<a href="http://www.afc.gov.au">www.afc.gov.au</a>
Australian Centre for the Moving Image (ACMI)	<a href="http://www.acmi.net.au">www.acmi.net.au</a>
iCinema, Centre for Interactive Cinema Research	<a href="http://www.icinema.unsw.edu.au">www.icinema.unsw.edu.au</a>
Film Victoria	<a href="http://www.film.vic.gov.au">www.film.vic.gov.au</a>
South Australian Film Corporation	<a href="http://www.safilm.com.au">www.safilm.com.au</a>
FTO (New South Wales Film and Television Office)	<a href="http://www.fto.nsw.gov.au">www.fto.nsw.gov.au</a>
QPIX	<a href="http://www.qpix.org.au">www.qpix.org.au</a>
Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT)	<a href="http://www.anat.org.au">www.anat.org.au</a>
dLux media arts	<a href="http://www.dlux.org.au">www.dlux.org.au</a>
Experimenta Media Arts	<a href="http://www.experimenta.org">www.experimenta.org</a>
Blackout Indigenous New Media Arts Collective	<a href="http://www.anat.org.au/nisma/blackout">www.anat.org.au/nisma/blackout</a>
Media Resource Centre	<a href="http://www.mrc.org.au">www.mrc.org.au</a>
Metro Screen	<a href="http://www.metro.org.au">www.metro.org.au</a>
Performance Space	<a href="http://www.performancespace.com.au">www.performancespace.com.au</a>
PICA (Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts)	<a href="http://www.pica.org.au">www.pica.org.au</a>
MAAP (Multimedia Art Asia Pacific)	<a href="http://www.maap.org.au">www.maap.org.au</a>
BEAP (Biennale of Electronic Art Perth)	<a href="http://www.beap.org">www.beap.org</a>
Electrofringe	<a href="http://www.electrofringe.org">www.electrofringe.org</a>
MESH	<a href="http://www.experimenta.org/mesh">www.experimenta.org/mesh</a>
Fine Art Forum	<a href="http://www.fineartforum.org">www.fineartforum.org</a>
RealTime	<a href="http://www.realttimearts.net">www.realttimearts.net</a>
::fibreculture::	<a href="http://lists.myspinach.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/fibreculture">http://lists.myspinach.org/cgi-bin/mailman/listinfo/fibreculture</a>
[-empyre-]	<a href="http://www.subtle.net/empyre">www.subtle.net/empyre</a>

**Photography credits**

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	Universal Zoologies (detail)	Jon McCormack	10	Dark matter	Andrea Higgins
4	Web of Life	Jeffrey Shaw		Play Dirty	Jeff Busby
5	Transformers	Justine Cooper	11	Aqua Profunda	Lyndal Jones
	The plasma wave instrument: Carrier	Joyce Hinterding	12	Pentimento	Dennis Del Favero
6	Video still: train, Time Slice	Daniel Crooks		Close	Iain Mott
	gins_leap/dubb_speak	rea	13	Excelsior 3000	Andrew Curtis
	Future Garden	Jon McCormack	14	Sprung	Cazerine Barry
7	The Light Room	Jeff Busby	15	Closer	Any Van Lit
8	Soft	Jeff Busby			
	Humanature	Courtney Pedersen			

Looking for new media art to tour?  
[www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma](http://www.ozco.gov.au/inrepertoire/nma)



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