

# PP / VT

PERFORMANCE.PRESENCE/VIDEO.TIME  
CURATED BY DR ANNE MARSH

31 MARCH –  
16 MAY 2015

Frances Barrett  
(NSW)

Catherine Bell  
(Vic)

boat—people  
(NSW)

Lauren Brincat  
(NSW)

Brown Council  
(NSW)

Clark Beaumont  
(OId)

Kelly Doley  
(NSW)

Ray Harris  
(SA)

Simone Hine  
(Vic)

Deborah Kelly  
(NSW)

Alex Martinis Roe  
(Berlin/Vic)

Fiona McGregor  
(NSW)

Nasim Nasr  
(SA)

Tom Nicholson  
(Vic)

Sarah-Jane Norman  
(NSW/Germany/UK)

Mira Oosterweghel  
(Vic)

Jill Orr  
(Vic)

Jess Olivieri &  
Hayley Forward  
(NSW)

Eugenia Raskopoulos  
(NSW)

Patrick Rees  
(Los Angeles/SA)

Jill Scott  
(Zurich)

senVoodoo  
(NSW)

Diana Smith  
(NSW)

Arthur Wicks  
(NSW)

AñA Wojak  
(NSW)

When performance art emerged in the Australian art world of the 1970s, through spaces such as the Experimental Art Foundation in Adelaide, it was characterised as a live event in which the artist presented an action or process in front of a live audience. It was a heady time for experimentation and, although photographs were often taken and videos recorded, most of this was documentation of the work in 'real time'. In fact some of the artists resisted the idea of documentation believing that such documents played into the hands of the art market. For them, performance art was a genre that was ephemeral and not object-based, it was not for sale and it critiqued the idea of the art museum or the pristine white cube of the gallery space. In short, performance embraced a utopian ideology where art was resistant of the status quo. Ritual, conceptual process, everyday life, mundane actions, and art that assaulted the senses and sometimes the artist's own body was commonplace.

Since the 1970s the performance art document has undergone significant changes and we now encounter performance made exclusively for screen. This work blurs the distinction between performance and video art, especially where the artist is the major figure within the video.

This project brings together performance art created in 'real time', performances that are created specifically for the video camera without a live audience, and documentation from the archive. Performance and video art developed side-by-side and interacted from the late 1960s onwards as video began to operate as a performative agent for the artist. This dynamic, together with a conceptual engagement with 'liveness', propels this exhibition into the present as we see a new genre of performance video developing. Some of this is performance art for screen (Catherine Bell), some is video art in which the artist is the protagonist (Eugenia Raskopoulos), some engages with film history and theory (Simone Hine) and some is the result of careful editing of live footage (Jill Orr, Nasim Nasr, Ray Harris).

The critical history surrounding 'liveness' was prompted by art historian, Amelia Jones, who contested Peggy Phelan's performance studies approach. Phelan famously argued that "performance's only life is in the present"<sup>1</sup> but Jones contested this by insisting that: "the body art event needs the photograph to confirm its having happened"<sup>2</sup>. Later, Philip Auslander weighed in claiming that: "the act of documenting an event as a performance is what constitutes it as such"<sup>3</sup>. The debates between Jones, Phelan, and Auslander sit as the eye in a storm around which a multifarious discourse has developed. This is because the effort to capture the live performance is rendered in a remediated form, video or photography, and this gives rise to an ontological paradox that continues to haunt art history. The debate is whether or not a live action can create a presence in its absence. This question is at the centre of this exhibition and it will hopefully engender debate amongst viewers looking at works that are remediated via video. The videos are accompanied by a series of performances so that the gallery audience can experience both the live and the remediated for themselves.

The issue of the presence of the artist before the audience has given rise to some compelling arguments concerning the philosophies of performance art and live actions. Within the field, the scholarship surrounding the ontology of performance is compelling and this opens out into

much wider issues, demonstrating that performance art actions extend beyond the borders of the 'original' enactment.

There is an interesting conundrum at the heart of the liveness debates: on one hand the viewer sees a video of an artist doing an action and whilst s/he understands that s/he is watching a remediated form, s/he mentally imbues the video with the artist's presence. The video performance encapsulates time and in some cases this is achieved through the use of a dumb witness—a video camera set up to film the proscenium arch—which then produces a would-be real record but in many cases an uninteresting product. More recently, as video recording and editing has become more accessible to the artist, we see performance made exclusively for camera. The product is then a video, single or multiple screened, projected on the gallery wall. This is not exactly an object but it is certainly marketable and it makes performance art more easily managed by the museum because it fits nicely into a clean white room. Even though the video may represent radical and abject scenes it delivers this in a safe way. But it also brings the viewer closer to the artist via the camera.

At its best video performance interrogates its medium to enhance the remote experience for the viewer. Eugenia Raskopoulos' video re-departing (1995) is an excellent example where the camera records the movement of the body but does not represent it, thus creating a phenomenological affect for the viewer.

The installation of videos and the live performance program at AEAFF and the Adelaide Central School of Art showcase the recent renaissance in performance art and the new genre of video performance. Some of the artists respond to the spectacle of object-based practice by making ephemeral, collaborative and participatory works whilst others explore video as a way of expanding performance. The issues that arise take us back to Peggy Phelan's argument about the ontology of performance and the concept of remediation that has been propelled by a younger generation of artists and commentators.

The exhibition is accompanied by a symposium titled *You Had To Be There* that hopes to open a public debate in Adelaide around these issues. My thanks go to each of the artists for their generous contributions and to the magnificent team at AEAFF who have made it possible for me to realise the project.

Dr Anne Marsh

1. Peggy Phelan, 'The Ontology of Performance: Representation without Reproduction' in *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance*, New York and London: Routledge, 1995, p. 146.

2. Amelia Jones, 'Presence' in *Absentia: Experiencing Performance as Documentation*, *Art Journal*, 56.4, Winter, 1997, p. 98.

3. Philip Auslander, 'The Performativity of Performance Documentation', *PAJ: Performing Arts Journal*, no. 84, 2006, p. 1.

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Image: Jill Orr, *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters* — Goye, 2002. Photographers for Melbourne performance: Bruce Parker and Joanne Haslam. © Jill Orr.