

GAME OVER / NEW GAME (2009)

by Ken Bolton

This piece is made from notes begun in the wake of a series of artists' talks held at the EAF in September 2008. The artists did not constitute a cohesive group—the series (entitled *Particle Theory? Wave Motion!*) had been planned so as to produce variety and contrasts—but from it could be deduced something of a picture of contemporary Adelaide art, especially if one knew who else fitted in where and what sized pyramid each practitioner represented the tip of in terms of attitude, allegiance, practice. What for me was initially interesting was the generational divide between the younger and the more established artists. This seemed a major fault-line. But upon reflection divisions and differences also seemed to operate within and across both sides of this divide.

The 'seniors' here were Paul Hoban, John Barbour and Angela Valamanesh. Not people I've been used to think of that way, but then I've grown up with them. I guess they are in middle or late-middle career. (The others were Peter McKay, Bridget Currie, Paul Sloan, Simone Kennedy and Marcin Kobylecki.) Valamanesh figures less in this division, her work sliding regularly between the categories of art and craft/design, and regularly making excursions into public art. In addition, Hoban and Barbour, while showing and producing regularly, both teach at the University of SA's School of Art. So they figure for the younger artists—for many of whom they are some inspiration.

Part of the motivation for this text was a wish to update or extend the survey given in 'Adelaide Installations'. In that sense this might be better titled 'Where Are They Now?'. The notes begin here. They are—as a method—a little overstated and overheated, wishing to discover and magnify differences, contrasts. They are propositions to be tested, to see if they are usefully premonitory or diagnostic. Not much examined, the

text moves on always, after working-up these mini-theses, to other, alternative views or perspectives, to other artists, other mooted binaries.

BELATEDNESS

1. With some of the newer artists there might be an acting out, an enacting... of the inadequacy of the given—the given, available terms and genres—and of the going ‘loci of commitment’ (to use Kuhn’s phrase). The works foreground selfconsciousness about these ‘available’ terms’ inadequacy, or about the artist’s adequacy in relation to them

There is self-consciousness, about: a (consequent) seeming lack of seriousness; about impoverishment after High Culture is rejected, or after it has been (with regrets) lost or consigned to the past.

There is a willingness to risk—even to embrace— failure; and to acknowledge reduced means, reduced circumstance.

Mark Siebert, Peter McKay, Matthew Bradley, Andrew Best, Sarah CrowEST might all be considered instances.

2. The literalism of Ruscha and Acconci and others is much featured. In their methods and attitudes, McKay and Bradley can both be related to Ruscha’s famed ‘road-testing’ of the Royal Typewriter, for example. As could Monte Masi’s recent parodies of Beuys and Acconci: the suburban Aussie artist—explaining to his dog, balls thrown in the air for the dog to catch, and so on. Perhaps these were relaxed tributes as much as they were parodies. But they instance a comparison of the young local artist (in backyard scenario) in amusingly less portentous guise than Beuys (Beuys explains history to a cradled dead hare, confronts a live coyote to enact a meeting of America with Europe’s representative, the shamanistic Beuys himself) and amusingly less rigorous, less ‘pure’, than Acconci’s documented efforts at throwing an equilateral triangle of balls-in-the-air.

Peter McKay’s work seems to retrieve and dust-off relegated optimisms and, ideals and symbols of the past and re-stage them, as if guilelessly. There is irony in their almost certain failure and a kind of naffness. There

is irony about why they should be discarded: can we live without optimism? Should we? There is a more unalloyed thrill as the staging looks as though it might work and a kind of not-very-rueful irony at its failure. The early works were photographs of what looked like beautiful night skies full of myriad stars. In fact this was glitter spread on glue placed on bitumen car park surfaces, driven over, trudged upon, collecting cigarette butts and tyre tracks, then photographed. Eventually one registered the two realities. More recently McKay has staged (and documented) the launching of a home-made rocket (how high will it go, will it fly straight?) and attempted to fly a large, tinny and tinselly rainbow—by attaching it to a small fleet of toy helicopters. How else? Richard Grayson has made not dissimilar moves over the last few years.

Degrees, and kinds, of irony, distance and confidence seem to apply to all the artists and across the spectrum of ages and careers.

Is it belatedness, or confident occupation of newly cleared ground? Is it mere relief, that 'now we can get on with the job'?

3 The women artists are maybe more constructively minded? Less attracted by the comedy of the situation? Less attracted to the main narratives of the (after all, patriarchal) culture—including this issue of belatedness and of responses to it? This 'fact' itself suggests that the belatedness issue ties the affected (male) artists to Modernist and Post-Modern narratives of succession and change. Consider the themes that attract Sarah CrowEST, Bianca Barling, Laura Wills, and others, like Sonia Donnellan, Irmina van Niele, Agnieszka Golda.

Barling and Bridget Currie still hanker after essences: Barling's psychological states and truths; Bridget's epistemology/empiricism fixation. Wills seems to examine, almost matter-of-factly, issues to do with land and environment. Brigid Noone might be frankly focused on sociality and friendship.

4. The popular culture paradigm reigns. The field of popular culture provides all references.

A closed, diminished world, therefore—to adumbrate, to celebrate? Or is it recognition of the dominant condition of the world—that intelligence should be brought to bear on that?

This may not be any index of the artist's culture—but rather of the artist's estimate of the audience?. (The artists themselves are generally 'cultured' enough: they rabbit on about The Greek Anthology, they listen to Brahms, chuckle over Gilbert Sorrentino, and so on. Maybe just a few resemble Joey Ramone or Philip Larkin, but otherwise....)

WAITING FOR GODOT

By contrast, I see Paul Hoban and John Barbour as beach-combers after the endgame of High Modernism, its high tide having receded: Barbour, acting under the exacting and judgemental Eye of the tradition, with its manichean/masochistic demands of (or for) seriousness, originality, authenticity, transgression, absolutism, purism—and its opposing futility, loss, emptiness, impossibility; and Hoban as inheritor of the (Mallarmean) dice-box and maybe the Ou Li Po's formulae and mechanisms for producing variety and strange formal exemplars.

Freedom from self, from the super ego, from anthropomorphism (and from originality, authenticity etc), I suspect set many of the parameters within which Hoban works.

To my mind, Barbour—and his materials, textures, his orientation around post-conceptual, post minimal installation etc—references consistently European (art) history. (Though, admittedly, why not see a reference, here, to Americans like Judd, Morris and Andre?)

Mark Siebert, by handy contrast, refers to a mediatized world, that is 'shallow'. Barbour's work might mourn or regret a world that is impoverished. Siebert's work smiles at it. Central in his last Greenaway exhibition (2008) was the funerary life-size effigy of himself, casually dressed, lying in state, like sleeping beauty under glass, head-phones in

place, 'in heaven', listening to his favoured album, a Velvet Underground number, clutched to his chest.

Where Barbour's 'paintings' exhibit a poverty relative to Painting: the poverty of Siebert's paintings' is that of an inadequacy vis a vis the advertising poster—a differentiation they need to remain 'art'. If they looked as slick as the advertising they mimic they would become invisible, the eye would slide off them. In effect they were rudimentary citations, hardly requesting examination *as painting*.

5 MATERIAL PATHOS

Barbour is attached to 'the material' because his art pursues a mystery behind or within it; he must query whether the material surface 'is all that there is', or whether, deeper—behind or within it—there lurks an 'Other'.

Knowability / unknowability: this is a constant, either to the fore or as a background, in Barbour's work. The answer—the possible answers—offer solace or discomfort.

The pathos of the sign (the human, the communicative), depending as it does on the fragile support of a material base (an impoverished material base) is a regular factor and keys Barbour's work towards tragedy or dark humour.

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For 'the younger set' the material, and the codes, do not bear this weight. (Siebert would milk it for a melancholy irony, or—as likely—for a still milder amusement.)

Matthew Bradley might want to break through to such knowledge or authenticity as Barbour courts—to like convictions as to Self and self-realization—and be willing to risk dissolution in order to achieve, possibly, coherence, adequacy, fullness here and now.

OUT THERE

Paul Hoban's heart is, with Barbour's, in The Dada Cafe that is ongoing—in Zurich, Paris, Berlin—with places for Duchamp, Beckett, Bataille,

Queneau, Picabia, Schwitters and Arp, Elias Canetti. (The list goes on: Kippenberger, Guston, Richter, Warhol, and so on.) Yes?

But Hoban's response to the dilemma ("Gentlemen, choose your dilemma!") is to focus—as riposte—on creating an art of the Other, that speaks *of* the Other, that instances kinds of other, by circumventing the human in art production. Sunnier, as an artist, than Barbour, Hoban uses chance and arbitrary system to generate work—arranging a confrontation with the non- or a-human, with the void, even, maybe. Philosophically, I think the artist's position is weak. That is, Hoban typically shows two-dimensional, wall-hung pieces. Painting and collage are the paradigm. These are works chosen for exhibition on aesthetic grounds (certainly appreciated by audiences, I think, on 'aesthetic grounds'). The Other is, here, a fiction, one acceptable to, and recognised by the human. Hoban's strategies provide a great source of effects—but, though human control is deferred to the stage of editing and choice, the Other, the truly alien, is not there. We have instead a new Picturesque, a new Sublime: an 'aesthetic' that is ours, not an other's. This seems not an advance on the 60s: Duchamp, Arp, Rauschenberg, with some Rousellian Ou Li Po for reverb.

One show of Hoban's—by his own amused admission—drew hate mail. Someone did find it 'other' and painful to comprehend. This was a series, as I understand it, derived from a systematic transposition of letters to specific colours—after the phrases had been translated into different languages: uniform ovoid shapes on the canvas, as dictated by the arbitrarily allotted colour values and the spelling of the words for the different colours in various languages: French for the 'French' painting. Look ma, no hands! Certainly no sublime—or picturesque either—on this occasion. Hence the upset. But nor was it very exhilarating—though conceptually...well, there was *the logic of the method*. The decision was to go with what the system produced, no intervention. Pointless principle, but principled pointlessness. Or is my own take on it too rigorously of the sixties?

Hoban's works have on occasion resembled palimpsests, torn and weathered, board-games mugged by the bride's bachelors, even—the aesthetic akin to Dubuffet's and Mino Rotella's but communicating something of the artist's warmth and intelligence. They can look very good and people applaud the work's humour and the artist's attitude, which consists importantly of a curiosity about what can be manoeuvred into the art context and what it does when it gets there.

IDENTITY A LINE-UP

Michelle Nikou's work lives by its materiality and is born of it: modelled and molded in materials that catch the light, drink it, absorb it, and reflect or withhold it. For Nikou the Other is a fact of life, not a mystery, a depth to be plumbed, to be appealed to. Her work's ironies and humour and intelligence are not puzzled. *No metaphors*, her work says, on one level. This, it says, is the situation: life consists of such and such moments, such facts, such events (and, this, I know is already metaphor) such summations. The work is offered, I think, literally—for the objects' facticity, for their being and presence in light and space, as shapes and sizes that please and amuse—and as having, in parallel, a metonymic dimension as well.

Bianca Barling's most recent exhibition here in Adelaide (*All the Lonely Things my Hands Have Done*, 2008, Felt Gallery) was a departure from the medium of her film and genre-related work. This consisted of antler-like branch configurations, with some thread or like material stretched or festooned across its various points, and having a dripping, rather viscous, liquid aspect. It read as both sexual (the caramel, vanilla-ized, stretched seminal fluid) and as unnerving or threatening (the main structure suggesting a woods, branches looked up into, and through at a sky, the horns suggesting the danger of an animal, seasonal mating). All of this was more suggestive for being vague, untethered. (My reading here is more than the work verified, though they are meanings it could bare.) The work was not unrelated to her genre-, film-based exhibitions: plainly this sculptural work was intended to evoke neo-Gothic mainstream B-moviedom's scenarios and mise-en-scenes—from *The Night The Hunter* and on to the present.

Barling is much more interested in psychical and social ideas of the subject and its autonomy or constraint within society than with Heidegger and the Other. A case of choose your dilemma. Society's need to control or deny is an irresistible attraction for this artist, who instinctively sets out to scandalize. Beyond being 'interested', though, the art world is never scandalised sufficiently. We are left, not entirely satisfactorily, with what we know already—about repressions, censoriousness, hypocrisy, projection and denial. Meanwhile Barling continues to probe.

Not unrelated is Sam Small's work, at least as I know it. Small has moved from Adelaide in recent years. Her best known work (around 2003) consisted of photographs of poetically empty, romantic, forlorn domestic interiors. Empty room, lounge chair, long curtain billowing inwards, eerily still. On inspection the rooms were seen to be hand-made scale models, made from carpet, cardboard, millinery material. Too sober to recall doll's houses, the viewer finds him/herself identifying them with scenes from, say, languorous Marguerite Duras movies. So, codes of narrative and melodrama, desire and loss and reverie.

BACK AT THE RANCH

To return to the two cast here as avatars: Barbour and Hoban bring a long-maintained commitment to art-making—to their own art-making—to bear on their teaching and to bear on students' work. The glare of this light—the gloom of this seriousness?—cannot be what every student requires, not even every good student. But the two would seem to be touch-stones, important exemplars in terms of attitude, of procedures, of invention. Or so I figure. They are held in high esteem by most younger artists who regard them as 'the real thing', a situation that is probably something of a surprise to both, maybe an embarrassment. They get on with the job.

I have in fact not seen many of Hoban's shows—two, maybe three. I've seen most of Barbour's Adelaide exhibitions—and have had wildly varying responses to the work—sometimes elated by the humour and by

the work's seeming perfect pitch, at other times finding it impassive, inexpressive, or feeling that it asks for too much to be read into it, that the meanings it feels it has cited and which it feels to crowd at its back, are not there, are not properly summoned, do not vouch for it.

NEGATIVITY, THE DIMINISHED

I remember an exhibition of identical, sinking, reeling, foundering ship-wrecked sculptures, listing and sinking into the polished floor: one could almost hear the abandoned battlefield's groans and cries of expiry. Tiny easel-shapes, they seemed to be a jokily tragic portrayal of 'art'—sinking, failing, going under.

Instructively, the rationale for the artist, a large part of it, was that they were all mere off-cuts, the 'negatives' of other things Barbour had been trying to make. So, an art made from futility—or luckily grasped from the jaws of failure.

In a small group show in the mid to late 90s Barbour had a single work—as I remember it, a large vertical rectangle of black—black velvet, possibly—on which were some sadly hopeless words of appeal or of joke, written in the shaky medium of gossamer spider's web or silken thread—not at first decipherable or even registering as words or lettering. This seemed a terrific bit of ventriloquy to me: and it looked beautiful—wonderful aesthetic opportunism. It seemed admirably casual, and conceptually elegant.

Subsequent exhibitions of like works (among them his exhibition *Human Need*, at the EAF in 2003)—series of plaintive, restlessly futile, defeated runes sewn into stained, abraded and partially veiled squares of material—seemed to me much less good. Maudlin, sentimental. Maybe it was more a feeling that the artist was not entitled to this invocation or impersonation of poverty and distress, or to its repetition. Nevertheless, punters seemed to respond well to the show, which surprised many in being 'beautiful', 'pretty', 'tender'. The works were a series of silken, gauzy hangings pinned to the wall as rectangles of, mostly, pale white, stained irregularly with colour. The material redoubled on itself so that it

formed two curtains, covering, transparently and perhaps invitingly, the square of material underneath. Curtains to be drawn apart, though the transparency/translucency of the material did not make this strictly necessary. The curtain-effect served to hide, disclose, invite—and to protect, shield or bar. On each work were embroidered pieces of graffiti—maxims, utterances, at any rate: aspirations of bravado or despair, grim estimations of the difficulty of the world. These were appliquéd in a deliberately inept, untutored manner—a fact mirrored in their misspellings and occasional incompleteness. The stained colour—roses, blues, but also the dull yellows, oranges and browns of waste and discolouration—read as both ‘pretty’ and grim, a kind of picturesque or mini-sublime, maybe. The assertions the works carried seemed to falter, run out of steam, lose heart—beginning boldly or assertively, turning on themselves, undercutting themselves, as sarcasm, disavowal, failure, sentimentality, prayer. A productive uncertainty about the work was its indeterminate status—as representation, statement, or quotation, and as pity, irony, empathy or detachment. Its manufacture could seem deliberate, considered, or heartfelt.

The following, from a 2008 interview, gives some idea of Barbour’s position, though of course he is, to a degree, being railroaded by my critical agenda.—

KB: Your work always seems to me more ‘European’ than much Australian art. (Of course Europeans mightn't see it that way.)

You know I have a theory about your art: that your work is divided into two bodies that stand in an interesting relation to each other. There is a puritan, Beckett-like, minimalist/*arte povera*-styled group of works. They seem preoccupied with loss, abjection, the futility of statement. The other group deals with the same themes but is ‘hysterical’: it *acts out* the themes, bodies them forth, blurts them out. Expelled, objectified. The same themes—but here they are offered with irony or even a disowning sarcasm. Often these works have been attributed to another persona—John de Silencio and other such names.

The hysteria—a word I know you know is related to the word for acting—is deliberate, calculated. But then maybe, I think, on the other hand, the 'puritan minimalist' work is (paradoxically) the more genuinely hysterical—only that it is more quietly so.

The distinction—"genuine" or "calculated and theatrical"—is a problem though. It is a very teasing manner.

JB: Yes, but I have to say that I'm not very interested in the abject—perhaps I'm even opposed. I certainly don't go out of my way to work with repellent or repugnant materials—or to create such effects—maybe rarely anyway.

Some critics see this in the work but I think they're missing out on a lot else. I'm more drawn to materials and processes that are fragile, delicate and subtle—reflecting states of mind and mood that are ephemeral and transient. But then again I also work a lot with metal, precisely because it's hard and resistant and unforgiving... (and) with fragments and leftovers: perhaps the idea of conservation is involved in this—though I sometimes go out of my way to waste and destroy—as in the silk thread works—where I buy expensive lengths of high quality silk simply to destroy them in stripping out the threads.

But I think you're correct in pointing to loss as an important link between these aspects of my practice—frailty, rejection, waste; brutality, toxicity, care, reparation. You can exhaust something through wasting it but loss has no limit.

It's true, too, that I also court the histrionic.

You and me three metres above the sky. Paul Hoban remarks—in his essay for your show of that name—on the work's intimation of escape, or 'heaven', as being near or possible. But he also notes the suggestion of a claustrophobic proximity of the ceiling or sky. He wonders, If we are 'beneath' heaven are we *therefore*, possibly, in hell?

There seems to be ambivalence and irony: sympathy for the wished attainment—and a dispassionate estimate of its unlikelihood.

These processes of shredding and abrading—are they coldly procedural, following a determination? Or are they more emotionally dictated? Do they plumb a sort of neurosis so as to objectify it, analyse it? (They might be a bit like the fragments of text that sometimes appear in your work, letters formed with "a deliberate, awkward difficulty," as Hoban has it, "but also an intense concentration which defies the literal meaning". Mantras, prayers, or curses, Hoban calls them.)

JB: I don't know how to answer that. Can I say 'yes and no'? I can't stop myself from thinking, anymore than I can completely anaesthetise my feelings (though I often try). Is it a question of degree?

I can't see the point of the division though. You do develop procedures and processes—and follow established lines of enquiry—though I also try hard to stay open to the unexpected. Chance is an important part of my work.

But to go back to the earlier question about 'European-ness'—I'm not sure if I'm Australian or European.

KB: I have my theories. But go on.

JB: Imants Tillers once described his own practice—along with that of some of his peers—using the provocative phrase 'the art of white aborigines'. Well, leaving aside the provocation, I think it's probably pretty obvious that there's little in my works by way of direct reference to place—European or otherwise. But it's true, my references are Euro-centric—and literary and philosophical as much as artistic. Having said that, my brief visit to Brazil in 2002 opened up something really important for me—for which I can't find a word other than 'intensity'.

I'm aiming for intense visual sensation *and* emotional affect—as well as new thinking. I want everything! But I want you to work for it.

KB: The viewer—'work'? I've enjoyed working for it, believe me. That last Barbour exhibition here did really have the effect of creating an enormous vortex of intellectual energy: it was hard to say what was being proposed, but it

felt very powerful, as if you'd hit upon some pataphysical spell or combination, each room at CACSA was a component in the equation. It's pretty rare to sense embodied ideas through skin tension and the dilating of eyes and nostrils. But there you go. (Is that a bit much? I never did figure out that show.)

JB: No, glad you liked it.

HOBAN'S ALIBI

For me, too often Paul Hoban's works resemble nature, not made things. I assume that intentionality has to be defeated (part of their mission)—but works made without the involvement of the artist (who escapes, thereby, expression, self revelation, repetition of others' formulas or gambits) I think are more or less accidental: like interestingly weathered corrugated tin fencing: visually interesting, beautiful maybe, but judgement is idle. Paul Hoban invents methods for arriving at work that resembles artwork (mostly of the inchoate, expressive-but-abstract, 'formal', anarchic persuasion—painting and collage of the late 50s and the 60s), that effectively remove his hand from the process. But only his literal hand. The artist is reduced to setting up these accidents and choosing from them the ones he likes best. If he is an artist on the basis of inventing these systems (actual 'machines', sometimes), then fine. If the works are to be judged as just one more species of non-figurative painting—as decorative, or sublime, or as akin to 'outsider' art—their case is less strong. They had better be pretty terrific. There is a consensus that, regularly, they are.

THE IDENTITY PARADE continued

Bridget Currie's work seems to me to be concerned with explorations of, inquiries into, the nature of experience—how we feel it, recall it, what we can know from it. So it is partly empirical. At other times it examines empiricism's claim to epistemological truth, and it will question the categories attributed.

In *Scivias* (EAF, 2003) Bridget Currie set up an ambiguous relationship between two posited classes of thing. One was evidentiary: the video of

a small group of people around a rug in a park, talking, laughing, relaxing. This was 'real'—that is, a filmic image of the (idealized) everyday. But as it transparently wasn't happening now its immediacy was poignantly passed. And its character as a moment of past time, past experience, was further underlined by the treatment of the film and its projection: colours were heightened (and also resembled deteriorating footage of the 70s era) and forms a little blurred; the picture was softly and irregularly rounded. not a rectangle—both things coding it as memory and as perhaps the idealization effected *by* memory.

The second class of object stood in relation to this film or experience as memento: the objects being present, but bringing with them the memory of that experience: these were looped and folded lengths of bunting and, in another part of the gallery, a folded mat. Bunting possibly from that park; a mat used possibly by the group. Evidence, facts, souvenirs? And was their folded state a metaphor for the conscious archiving of memory? Potentially available, but possibly never to be recalled. The different presence of the exhibition's elements set up this interrogatory shuttle—between the lively past of the filmic moment and the inert, deathly white present of mat and bunting.

TOUCHÉ, TUSSAUD!

Andrew Best's 2003 (EAF) installation *Paradise* was a simulacrum—of a notional non-site somewhere in Adelaide: an alley, an abandoned industrial space, 'furnished' with wrecked and overturned photocopiers, some bits of chipped masonry, weeds, Nitrous Oxide capsules, a pot-plant. The weeds (all hand-made but successfully illusionistic) grew in the interstices of the cement grid of the gallery floor and along the walled edge and, by this highlighting of geometry and the reproducible units of urban space, suggested the 'in-principle' extension of the space beyond the gallery. It was an everyday Adelaide, alright, of drugs and dereliction, euphoria and fear and boredom. Spot lighting created a nocturnal feel. A ghoulish head appeared beneath the intermittently flashing workings of one photocopier—an allusion to Adelaide's reputation for gruesome

murders but also to the junk ethos favoured by many of the young users one supposed the space implied.

Paradise was an extension of Best's forays into notions and modes of narrative:. Earlier exhibitions had made a straightforward simulacrum of one specific event and urban myth. Another work had been an allegorized depiction of schematic romance (beer barrels perpetually rolling down a chute, the whole structure 'emulating' Donkey Kong, proposing it as metaphor for human desire). Best's has been work that partook of both generalising allegorical treatment and an uncertain literalism and simulation. More recently he has been painting—but again it is a complicated 'world' that is alluded to: the mythical land of the Ooms. The paintings—some, in their own right, very amusing—are somehow tokens within, or 'of', this game. The most reproduced shows a sawn off tree stump with a hole in its side where Disney would place a mouth and two void black eyeholes appropriately above. On top of the stump is balanced a tell-tale burning cigarette, and from the stump's mouth we see a blown smoke ring rising, scorched earth all around.

BEAUX ARTS

Yoko Kajio, showing overseas perhaps more than at home, has made some riveting film work—watchful, slow, beautiful—of fire. She also works in performance.

Those operating strictly as painters include Paul Sloan, Brigid Noone, Laura Wills. Marcin Kobylecki. I've discussed Sloan elsewhere. The work is both sardonic and gleeful, with a fabulously acute visual intelligence (in terms of imagery, the aspirational cool or glamour of the various styles that he quotes, the currency or otherwise of the imagery, the emotional and cultural allegiances it calls up). Everything is Retro, it shouts, and 'everything must go'!—and its 'going' is the now, the immediacy the paintings briefly but timelessly suspend for us. I think it's clear where he might fit on the map this article draws. At least his

attitudes are maybe clear. In other ways he is—like Hoban?—something of a bricoleur, but retro in adhering so strictly to the ‘fine-art’ field of painting.

Laura Wills makes paintings that seem determinedly focused on particular themes—content that she deals with and works through, probably to drop and move on. The most significant sequences of work that I know have dealt with ecological issues and look interestingly at people co-operating on projected building and construction efforts. Their style is in some cases comfortably illustratory. On these grounds they might be compared, for purposes of contrast, with Chinese Mao-era posters. Of course they are not like them: not exhortatory, the activities undertaken are not made seem heroic, merely human, the paintings look lyrical. Another sequence are landscapes of the Australian interior and landscape-and-building scenes: the horizons are low and the sky area above them it is often unpainted, revealing the picture to be painted upon gridded surveying paper or maps, whose lines (boundaries, creek lines, etc) show through. It is interesting work.

Marcin Kobylecki has worked so far with watercolour. The work I know best was shown at Felt Gallery in 2008. These were small scenes taken from photographs documenting the area around Chernobyl: run-down, abandoned suburban streets and houses, office interiors, an indoor swimming pool, details—of, say, a roof with aerials, chimney, a bird perched nearby. One terrific picture was of a seatless toilet bowl: pearlescent and bright, sterile and beautiful. All the pictures had this terrible Eastern-European *Last Picture Show* quality to them, poetic but also somehow capturing a very unsentimental reality that seemed extraordinarily contemporary, not suckered into sentimentalism or corn by the pull of the medium’s tradition and available rhetoric. An earlier picture of Kobylecki’s had a similar acuteness: a depiction of the palm of a hand, lit as though bled of detail, paled by, perhaps, a polaroid’s flash. The picture seemed to interrogate the hand: is this really my hand? is this what a hand really looks like, like that? do I really want to live? It would

be possible to argue that these works all interrogate photography itself, or memory. And it might be clearer what to propose about them as more of Kobylecki's work is shown.

And here we might note Ian North drifting in from his position on the conceptualist team's wing—to make a foray into painting: a suite of pictures meditating upon an imagery that Peter McKay might applaud: galleons and traders of the 17th and 18th centuries, entering tranquil and exotic sunset harbours or imperilled at sea. North's work has nostalgia and irony as well as, maybe, affection for the genre's one-time appeal.

An artist like Akira Akira is hard to place. In fact his oeuvre seems to 'keep its own counsel' to a degree that is almost challenging to the art-world around him. It is resolutely counter-intuitive in some respects: beautiful and intriguing sculptures—of blobs, spills—huge and seemingly viscous, but made laboriously of carved and polished material rather than anything poured—as if the discipline might throw something up. The attitude to materials (as with Nikou) is traditional: the look of the work is designery, minimalist, uncanny. His contribution to CACSA's recent short-road-movie show traced the path between his EAF studio and his parents in Japan, using a google mapping program. It consists of a sequence on instructions of the "Turn left: drive 3 .2 kilometres Main North Rd: time 3 mins 15 seconds" kind, gets him to Darwin and has the artist kayak from Northern Australia to Japan where the instructions again become the motoring kind: literalist, yes, but unlike most contributors, at some distance from the road-movie genre's pull towards either 'road' (cars and the American highway) or 'movie' (Monte Masi's film had him—inarticulate with emotion—speaking over a presumed grave, for the murdered other, or buddy, that a movie plot would supply). Weirdly, though, as we 'read' the Akira film mentally we picture roads of our own knowing or imagining, maybe more affecting because so personal.

Matthew Bradley, I have discussed in 'Adelaide Installations'.

Subsequent exhibitions—of work in CACSA's *Mentor/Mentored* 2007 and

a solo show at Greenaway's in 2008—confirm his energy and imagination: filmed performance work that was anarchic, insurrectionary and vitalizing and, at Greenaway Gallery, a suite of paintings and on-screen imagery that dealt interestingly with the past's idea of the future (scientists in lab-coats, and Cape Canaveral settings, the 'look' of British post-war movies about test-pilots and brave advance being made) and dealing, by implication, with our own time's expectations. An enormous 'revenant-mechanistic' looking sculpture also stood in the room, monstrous, a mammoth of early mid-century industrial age determination. Who else would do that in Adelaide and to such effect, an aesthetic controlled explosion that nudged the whole exhibition in another direction?

The answer to that rhetorical question might be, currently, Aldo Iacobelli, George Popperwell, Nick Folland. All can operate by such moves, but Bradley's instance was such a thunder-clap. Folland continues to be interesting. His last Greenaway exhibition seemed an extrapolation from his EAF show. There was the same play with disorientation of space, with the suggestion of vertiginous calamity, indeed, a continuation of the same *Titanic* metaphors: chandeliers hanging at unsettling angles, abandoned.

Uncertain times? This is a map only. Some of the art looks promising. Some of the optimism seems dubious, some of the doubt routine. The attachment to genre-reference I find boring as a generality, though not in every instance. The field looks interestingly varied.