BILLS PC

Simon Denny
Double Canvases

05 April - 05 May 2025.
Phillimore St. 6160. Western Australia.

Bill's PC is honoured to present *Double Canvases,* by Simon Denny. The exhibition consists of two Double Canvas works from Denny's *Introductory Logic Video Tutorial* project, which were initially presented at Artspace, Sydney, in 2010.*

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[*] In 2010, whilst undertaking a residency at Artspace (Sydney), Denny enrolled in an introductory short course in philosophical logic at the nearby university and translated some of the content of the course into a series of "videos". Using a graphic interface borrowed from generic sources such as DVD menus and academic textbooks, Denny created a "video tutorial" that played out across a series of eighteen "monitors" - representing Artspace's entire inventory of equipment capable of presenting video and serving as a record of the display hardware of the institution.

Extending the language of his earlier Video Aquariums and Drunken Videos; Denny employed the same production strategy he had developed the previous year for his 'Multimedia Aquariums', — assembling each "monitor" from two identical canvases printed with a 1:1 scale image of the front of a television or video display, attached with steel rods cut to the depth of the particular piece of equipment depicted.

The "video installation" presented at Artspace included no actual video or moving image. Rather, each "screen" displayed a single teaching point concerning logic, superimposed atop a background photo of the desert in Australia's picturesque Mungo National Park. Despite Denny's considerable effort to travel to the remote desert location to take the photographs himself, in the end they resemble the kind of generic stock photography we associate with your run of the mill click-to-add screen savers or desktop wallpaper.

This tension or oscillation between the universal and the specific was central to the exhibition as a whole. By taking an abstract system of philosophical reasoning that functions irrespective of content and redeploying it *as* content, *Introductory Logic Video Tutorial* creates a display in which form and content collapse into one another.

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Simon Denny (b. 1982 Auckland, New Zealand) lives and works in Berlin, Germany. He makes artworks that unpack stories about technology using a variety of media including painting, web-based media, installation, sculpture, print and video.

Recent solo exhibitions include Petzel Gallery, New York (2024); Dunkunsthalle, New York (2024); Kunstverein Hannover, Hannover (2023); the Gus Fisher Gallery (University of Auckland), Auckland (2022); Outernet, London (2022); Kunstverein in Hamburg, Hamburg (2021); K21–Kunstsammlung Nordrhein-Westfalen, Düsseldorf (2020); the Museum of Old and New Art, Tasmania (2019); MOCA, Cleveland (2018); OCAT, Shenzhen (2017); Hammer Museum, Los Angeles (2017); WIELS Contemporary Art Centre, Brussels (2016); Serpentine Galleries, London (2015); MoMA PS1, New York (2015); Portikus, Frankfurt (2014) MUMOK, Vienna (2013); Kunstverein Munich, Munich (2013).

Denny represented New Zealand at the 56th Venice Biennale in 2015.

He co-founded the artist mentoring program BPA//Berlin Program for Artists and has served as a Professor of Time-Based Media at The Hochschule für bildende Künste Hamburg.

Dan Arps: *The great success of consumer electronics - especially the black or silver box design of hi-fis and TVs - is that they somehow fit in with anything, they can go anywhere and be at home. Perhaps they are a successor to some kind of modernist universality, but rather than transcendent universality, they represent a carefully negotiated middle ground that everyone can more or less agree with?*

Simon Denny — Maybe the consumer electronics black/silver box thing could now stand for great compromise, a relaxed universal in industrial design. The role of TV to 'fit in' or 'stand out' is described in the more-than-classic Vito Acconci video art text that I selectively quoted for Deep Sea Vaudeo. As Acconci charts the change in the TV unit's appearance, from comforting wooden boxes that posed as familiar pieces of furniture attempting to befriend domestic spaces in the 40s and 50s, through to the more science fiction-emulating/high-tech/sleek versions we are now familiar with in later models - one could be forgiven for thinking that they now have sort of slipped into just being stuff. They don't look especially more advanced in an Ikea home than any other appliance. Maybe phones are more the science-fiction posers now, but these black and silver boxes are pleasingly modern looking, just as you suggest. Then again, part of what I especially like about the just-past models, particularly the bigger units, is that they still have the power to wow as objects. I think they kept that consistently - I can't remember a time when I would look at a huge rear-projector unit and not think that it was an exceptional object, but I guess that's not the same thing as state-of-the-art-ness. But yes, the black/silver box seems like an impossibly nice mid-way position for an object, a reasonable balance - a happy medium.

DA: *Speaking of mediums, your work often seems concern with its own medium or format - does this have something to do with a perceived insensibility in contemporary art?*

SD — Maybe this is in part a reflection of how some areas of art can be hyper-aware of medium differences, even if it's negotiating a shift away from emphasising them. In any case art is a place where medium conversations have taken place in the foreground at certain times. What I am interested in is how we deal with formats more on a day-to-day level, especially when the hardware we use is changing form and function drastically every six months. With TV this is obviously the case, as less and less people watch TV on TV now, so these forms always change. For me, thinking about this is also to do with the practice of viewing exhibitions on a screen, on the internet, or in digital photos, which happens a lot. I found I was doing this and lots of other people were seeing my exhibitions in this form. In a way you can't really say that you have seen these things (when you have seen them on a screen), but at the same time you haven't seen nothing. A few years ago I watched a snippet from the DVD extras of Inland Empire, with David Lynch bitterly complaining about people seeing films on phones. He was saying that you delude and rob yourself (that strongly, too) if you think you've seen a film when you have watched it on your phone - that you think you've seen it when you really haven't seen anything. This insistence on format, on the one hand, made sense to me. Clearly it is a compromise of the detail, scale, audio and colour (among other things) to watch a film in this format. But on the other hand, if you haven't seen the film, what exactly have you seen? So this problem can stand for a more general problem of trying to figure out what you are looking at. I started to wonder what it would be like to make exhibitions that played with this problem, and to foreground one medium pretending to be another seemed to nicely focus that problem into an object (and I was mostly making sculpture at this point), that would also confuse viewers in documentation imagery. To make a sculpture that posed as a video seemed to point at this somehow banal, but also not-banal problem. And then, a canvas that was photographically printed

depicting this sculpture that was posing as a video is an even more exaggerated version of this idea. I feel like these objects could carry that same sense of being cheated, that same sense of not being quite sure what you were looking at - this quite universal sense of wondering whether you were seeing something or not (and how) that is brought into focus by the normalisation of a general slew of multimedia options - the fact that it is very commonplace now to be able to find the 'same' content in a variety of formats. Kindle? iPad? What are they? Do we care? Is significant material change a big thing, or not? Part of what I want to do is romanticise this topic, to dramatise it, but also to keep it as banal as it is.

DA: *You have mentioned your enthusiasm for the convoluted, and in your work ideas, forms, and images seem to both progress and recede. What are the benefits of such complicated delivery for someone who is clearly also a fan of the 'user-friendly' feel-goodism of television?*

SD — I think that convoluted delivery is rarely a good thing, but, if it keeps an equilibrium with other elements, it can provide a more satisfying package - a package with more scope, more depth. Part of what I am trying to describe is a certain alienation from real knowledge, and convolution helps describe this feeling. I think the type of seduction television uses (be it sensationalism, spectacularisation, beautification, trivia, emotionally loaded material etc.) is obviously affecting. Seduction can be a fun game to play, and a convoluted seduction can be so much more involving if it's played right, and just as convincing and attractive. If the work can come across as progressing and receding, even regressing, at the same time; it's good to be able to confuse those qualities as a viewer. I think there will be a moment in the future when it is harder to tell if something is old or new, and that is an exciting thing because that will take away one of the easiest ways to classify objects.

DA: *I heard you were studying logic as part of an upcoming project. Can you give me a tautology that you're particularly fond of?*

SD — Here's one I'm playing with: a rear-projection television can be seen as an object of contradiction, or cannot be seen as an object of contradiction.