MORTALITY

Presented by
Melbourne International
Arts Festival
and Australian Centre for
Contemporary Art

MORTALITY
8 October – 28 November 2010

Published 2010

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art
111 Sturt Street, Southbank
VIC 3006 Australia
Telephone +61 3 9697 9999
Facsimile +61 3 9686 8830
Email info@accaonline.org.au
Website www.accaonline.org.au

MORTALITY

Presented by
Melbourne International
Arts Festival
and Australian Centre for
Contemporary Art

Charles Anderson
George Armfield
Melanie Boreham
Bureau of Inverse Technology
Aleks Danko
Tacita Dean
Gabrielle De Vietri
Sue Ford
Garry Hill
Larry Jenkins
Peter Kennedy
Anastasia Klose
Arthur Lindsay
Dora Meeson
Anna Molska
TV Moore
Tony Oursler
Neil Pardington
Giulio Paolini
Mark Richards
David Rosetzky
Anri Sala
James Shaw
Louise Short
William Strutt
Darren Sylvester
Fiona Tan
Bill Viola
Annika von Hausswolff
Mark Wallinger
Lynette Wallworth
Gillian Wearing

ABOUT MORTALITY

JULIANA ENGBERG

MORTALITY is a story telling exhibition. The story is told in ideas, images and space. And in this little booklet, through words. I have designed the exhibition as a sequence of encounters. The itinerary loosely follows the seven stages of identity development as described by the psychologist, Eric Erikson.

In the first part of the exhibition the visitor will wander in a non linear set of rooms. This resembles the first life when we develop a sense of our identity. The early part of the exhibition starts, like the body, small; then grows and expands, until you enter into larger spaces which represent the time of life when things seem endless and expansive. At this life stage identity shifts quickly at times and moves back and forth. In the middle of life, and as suggested here in the spatial itinerary, we make choices to go one way or another. As we enter into later life things become more linear, seemingly predictable, until the final stage when we may retreat into ourselves in reminiscence, or proceed with confusion but acceptance. Here the space becomes smaller again, more confined, more deliberate in its funnelling; but a little disorienting. The space proceeds from lightness to darkness, moments of hilarity segue from moments of sorrow and back again. Life is both haphazard and constructed, fiction and fact.

And so the story begins...

Visiting my Nana and Pop was a most-Saturdays event. It was, in those days a longish drive. Before the time of highways, the road to Geelong was a single lane, two way system, which

could get clogged by fog, livestock incidents and accidents. Sitting in the back seat you had a lot of time to ponder the sky from the vantage of the large sedan sized windows.

Cloud bursts and rainbows featured frequently on the journey. I was always struck by the rays of light that radiated from behind the thick clouds. And in my mind, those rays represented all the souls travelling to Heaven, which was located, in my imagination, above the cloud system and just beyond sight. To me this was a comforting thought. Such an idea satisfied my pretty simplistic need to account for death and the place called 'the hereafter' - a favourite phrase of people of my parents' generation.

Hollywood, in glorious black and white and courtesy of television and movies, confirmed my idea of Heaven: Billowing mist and a chap in a suit with a British accent who kept a book with names. He either let you in or kept you out of a place guarded by big wrought iron gates; beyond which, if you were one of the chosen, you mingled with ethereal, white clad folk who invariably seemed happy and genteel. I'm sure this is the model for places like the Melbourne Club. My cloud burst idea was less cheesy, and more phenomenological and spiritually inclined, I think. It was interesting to later encounter theories of the sublime.

When you are very young, death does not occur to you. It gradually becomes understood through the mortality of captured or rescued things – birds, lizards, grasshoppers – and animal gifts, such as goldfish. This lesson of loss is the basis for many AA Milne poems, like the lost insect,

Fiona Tan

F.E. Wear

Alexander Beetle as well as Milne's various adults who seem to go missing – like *James James Morrison's Mother*. With small creatures you have to come to grips with death. Backyards are little graveyards of lost causes and unintentional neglects. But when you are very young, grief is quickly forgotten, especially if a Peter's ice-cream is proffered.

The death of people is different, and remains abstract for quite a while. Even though, for as long as I can recall, I was told that my brothers had died, these three absences remained, and in certain ways continue to remain, concepts rather than actualities. This is different for my mother of course, who continues to mark their days. My father never mentioned these brief lives.

My Nana was a great prophet. She could predict all manner of things and read tea leaves. She also had an uncanny knowledge through the agency of magpies. *One for sorrow, two for joy, three for a letter.* I now realise this has some basis in magpie mating and family groups. But as a child I was in awe of my Nana's special information and would wait patiently at the letterbox for what seemed like hours after sighting three magpies. Letters came and were received without much ado, except for the occasional delight at the arrival of an airmail letter from my young uncle Bill who had settled in London.

So it was extraordinarily unusual when the postman came to the door. Not with a letter, but a telegram to be personally delivered. Not an item that I could take myself, but only to be received in her own hands by Nana. This is before the telephone you understand.

My Nana's inconsolable grief at learning that her brother had died had a significant impact on me. For a start I did not know Nana had a brother. In all probability she had rarely seen him since her marriage, when, inevitably, her past life was abandoned as she attached to a new family. But for her his unexpected loss, out of the blue, transferred to a yellow slip of paper, was no less profound because of time, absence and distance. Death seemed cruel that day. All the same cooking and cleaning were required, grieving was done, life moved on. Still, it made me think.

Around this time I started reading the death notices. I became interested in the fact of the ebb and flow of life. I often read these while listening to a particularly harrowing 3UZ radio program which reported, in graphic detail, the car accidents and trauma incidents of the previous Saturday night. It was interesting to me how stoic everyone was in the face of such horrible calamity. I guess this was a forerunner to the reality TV shows that follow emergency cases and rescues.

My fascination with this was inevitably tied to the fact of my father's odd travelling hours due to shift work. My mother's constant fear of his death on the road made me a silent and vigilant listener, in case I had to be the one to break the bad news.

The death notices carried a particular gravity that appealed to me. Little obituaries that kept to a formula:

loving wife, husband, mother, and father. Even though they were abbreviated items, I felt I understood the grief of the 'left behind' and 'ever loving'. On the other side of the page were happy announcements. Arrivals decorated with balloon drawings and hearts. Babies beginning their journey as they emerged into life.

At ages 0-1 year, according to Eric Erikson's theory of the seven stages of psychosocial identity, the infant learns to trust or mistrust based on whether or not its basic needs are met and its emotional environment is affectionate, dependable and comforting. In this stage the infant exists in 'hope'

This is the celebration inherent in Fiona Tan's *Tilt*. But even while we have the joyous lift off of a baby suspended by balloons, attached to little giggles and squeals of delight, we also have the worry. What if the balloons burst? What if the baby comes crashing down? What if the baby floats away from our grasp and is never seen again? Mark Richard's balances his *Snow Boy* babies in a precarious set of toppling falls. The start of life is also the beginning of peril. Freud wrote about flying, falling and floating in his *Interpretation of Dreams*:

We must conclude from the information obtained in psychoanalysis that these dreams also repeat impressions of our childhood -- that is, that they refer to the games involving movement which have such an extraordinary attraction for children. Where is the uncle who has never made a child fly by running with it across the room, with outstretched arms, or has never played at falling with it by rocking it on his knee

Peter Kennedy

Gabrielle De Vietri

and then suddenly straightening his leg, or by lifting it above his head and suddenly pretending to withdraw his supporting hand? At such moments children shout with joy and insatiably demand a repetition of the performance, especially if a little fright and dizziness are involved in it. In after years they repeat their sensations in dreams, but in dreams they omit the hands that held them, so that now they are free to float or fall. We know that all small children have a fondness for such games as rocking and seesawing; and when they see gymnastic performances at the circus their recollection of such games is refreshed. In some boys the hysterical attack consists simply in the reproduction of such performances, which they accomplish with great dexterity. Not infrequently sexual sensations are excited by these games of movement, innocent though they are in themselves. To express the matter in a few words: it is these romping games of childhood which are being repeated in dreams of flying, falling, vertigo, and the like, but the pleasurable sensations are now transformed into anxiety. But, as every mother knows, the romping of children often enough ends in quarrelling and tears.

Funny really, that we start and end on the same page, although there is something comfortingly cyclical in this arrangement. This concept forms the central point of Peter Kennedy's neon work, *People Who Died On The Day I Was Born*. The circularity of this idea made sense to me as I looked out at the clouds. I had an idea that people needed to make space for new arrivals. That the rays of light in the sky went in both directions - despatches and deliveries.

....

Unless you were well to do and could commission a painted portrait, there was little record of the self or others before the event of photography. The ability to snap freeze people in photographic reproduction enabled us to form new narratives of life. In Victorian times the dead were memorialised. Infants, whose lives were sadly short, were posed as 'sleeping' children; peacefully arranged on cushions or cradled in arms.

You had to go to a studio for this kind of mortuary memento. Presumably everything had to be still and stilted to enable the perfect image; an odd extension of the real death itself. Such was the vogue for this memento in Austria, that a public health threat was declared and the practice of taking dead children to be photographed was prohibited. These photos were displayed with others of the still living.

The brownie box, Kodak instamatic, Polaroid, 35mm camera and the domestic film and video cameras revolutionised the way we were able to see ourselves through time. As an adult, when we look back at the little black & white and coloured images of ourselves, can we see the person we have become? Do the photos foretell a future us? Photographer, Susan Andrews, suggests that. *'A photograph reinforces your memory, and makes that particular moment more significant than it would otherwise have been. But it can almost create a memory, too - there may be something in it that you only notice later, an object or person that would have made no impression. Sometimes you go back and look at photographs and you can stare in a way you can't stare at a person. You can re-evaluate what has happened and place different significances on it.*'

In my experience it is rare for anyone to be indifferent to the image of themselves as a small person. Looking back at yourself as an innocent, you in fact marvel at the adult you have become from the little person you see before you, snatched from time, momentarily. You are an alien to yourself. You peer at the little person, looking for physical clues that confirm the you in you – your eyes, chin line, determined stare – already DNA designated. Simultaneously you are sent back in time to remember, or imagine you remember that time of a past, yet future place and person.

'Cameras go with family life', Susan Sontag wrote in her celebrated book *On Photography*. 'Not to take pictures of one's children, particularly when they are small, is [seen as] a sign of parental indifference.' The self as reproduction has become a narrative device.

Families narrate and re-narrate through photographs. Time warps the story; although some things are general and formulaic responses: mother's say, mostly wistfully, 'you were a beautiful baby', as if your adult self has strayed from such beauty, or betrayed the unspoken promise of your cherubic beginning. It is, of course, the mother's nostalgia for her own young self also - a Proustian loss. Siblings chide in a game of insults, competitive for the mother's homily to be conferred upon them - 'but I was more beautiful!'; newly acquired girlfriends and boyfriends respond with coos in advance of carnal knowledge, or make secret fleshy observations post the fact.

'To take a photograph is to participate in another person's mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out

Gillian Wearing

this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt.' Susan Sontag wrote. Gillian Wearing registers this, and revisits herself at the age of 3 through the uncanny process of entering her own body. This performance of self, created by the artist putting on a full body prosthetic mask of herself as she was professionally photographed as a child, and peering out at the viewer with her 40-something eyes is a weird sarcophagi of identity. Is Gillian still 3? Is the adult inside the one she has become, or the one who was always there? Is identity pre-determined? Perhaps she would prefer to go back there, and yet this portrait is tinged with a kind of sadness. The eyes betray too much that has passed in the adult life, not yet known by the small child.

....

Kids make up all kinds of things to account for the ineffable. Gabrielle de Vietri's *The I Don't Know Show: Philosophy for Kids* – an interview based dialogue with children aged 8-11, demonstrates the fanciful and deep ideas that live in the young imagination grappling with the unknown. Using a tried and true TV format that unleashes philosophy, as if 'from the mouths of babes', de Vietri encounters invention, play and group dynamics at work. We also witness consensus forming and cooperation in the young people whose stake of claim for an idea may be modified according to the opinion of others. Diligence is a noted behaviour in this work, conforming to Erikson's theory that between the ages of 7 and 11 children become more aware of themselves as individuals, and strive to be responsible and good, and to get things right. According to him, at this age children are now more reasonable; they share and cooperate.

Darren Sylvester

Larry Jenkins

Once we leave our child selves and enter into teenage-hood life becomes more complex. We wonder 'Who am I and where am I going?' As Psychologist and writer, Francis Gross explains: *What is unique about this stage of Identity is that it is a special sort of synthesis of earlier stages and a special sort of anticipation of later ones. Youth has a certain unique quality in a person's life; it is a bridge between childhood and adulthood. Youth is a time of radical change—the great body changes accompanying puberty, the ability of the mind to search one's own intentions and the intentions of others, the suddenly sharpened awareness of the roles society has offered for later life*. At this stage we form tribes, our friendship groups are important to us and their opinion of us is often in conflict with the controls imposed by parents.

Darren Sylvester 'constructs' these moments of between-ness, of coming into being, in a number of works with groups of friends and lone contemplators. His glum school boy, possibly 14 or 15, consoles himself (is he in love, falling out with his girlfriend, gay, failing at school, bored, tired, worried about his parents relationship, worried about the VCE - or just ondigenously forlorn?) with takeaway junk food, sitting in the claustrophobic atmosphere of his parental home.

Perhaps he wants to be a rebel, but his choices are already pre-destined in certain ways. By now he's been pre-selected by the marketing demographers as a certain type. His junk food is slightly healthier than other brands, his school demands a certain look, and his background is comfortably upper middle class. He thinks his choices are vast and unfathomable, but in fact they are already limiting.

The young university students, who populate the library, posture and practice their disaffections and aloofness. They are part of a group who determinedly think of themselves as individuals, even while their individuality is already compromised by their sameness. Surrounded by knowledge, represented symbolically by their surroundings, they are nevertheless self absorbed and impervious to other expansive ideas.

By contrast, the photographs of Larry Jenkins deliver an authentic tribalism. Taken with his instamatic camera, the photos of his sharpie friends, hanging out, posing, wrestling and testing out their manhood, are genuine documents of their time. Belonging to this group is an important and almost primate activity. Surviving the suburbs in the 70s was an 'us and them' kind of universe. These were the kinds of boys you crossed the street to avoid. Their collective power, while internally tumultuous as they each try to discover their own identities, nevertheless conveys externally a tight ball of testosterone. They are one, and if you are not them, you are nothing.

Identity shifts constantly. As Erikson suggests, ego identity is the conscious sense of self that we develop through social interaction; constantly changing with the new experiences and information we acquire in our contact with others. Each stage in Erikson's theory is concerned with becoming competent in an area of life. If the stage is handled well, he asserts, the person will feel a sense of mastery, which is sometimes referred to as ego strength or ego quality. If the stage is managed poorly, the person will emerge with a sense of inadequacy.

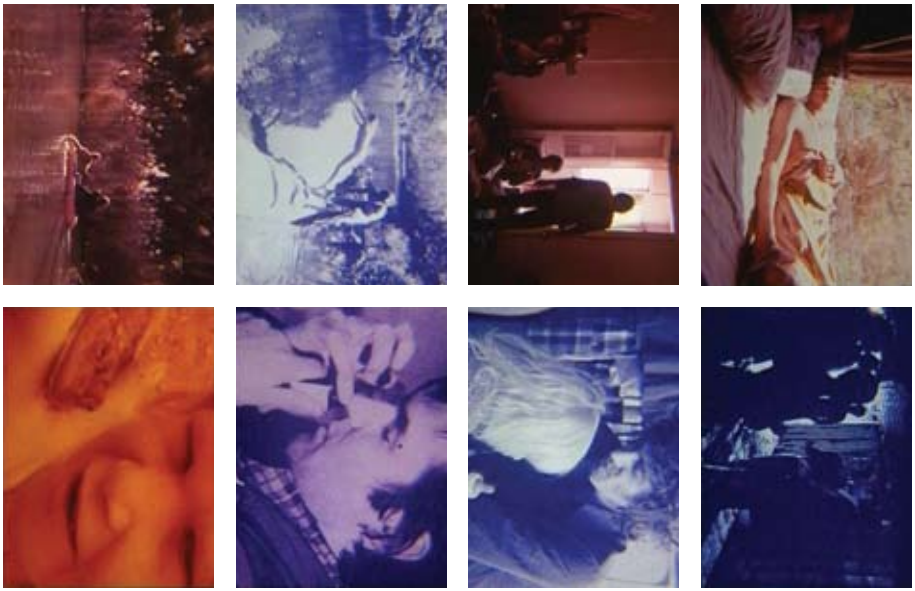
Sue Ford

In each stage, Erikson believed, people experience conflict that serves as a turning point in development. These conflicts are centred on either developing a psychological quality or failing to develop that quality. During these times the potential for personal growth is high, but so is the potential for failure.

These ideas form the basis of many experiments and several longitudinal film studies including the British documentary series, Michael Apted's *7-Up* and, film-maker Gillian Armstrong's sequence of documentaries *Smokes and Lollies*, 1976; *Fourteen's Good: Eighteen's Better*, 1980; *Bingo, Bridesmaids & Braces*, 1988; *Not Fourteen Again*, 1995; and most recently *LOVE, LUST & LIES* in which she has followed the lives of three Adelaide girls from the ages of 14 until their late 40s.

Photographer, Sue Ford, in her iconic work *Faces* uses the camera as a kind of mirror to register the changes that occur as we grow older. Without the sometimes pompous commentary of the filmic anthropological voice-over which narrates an imposed, meta-story, Ford allowed her straightforward, black and white, close-up images to suggest the accumulation of experience and the evolution of identity silently. In this version of the work, a video projection which brings old and newer faces together in a rolling sequence, we are able to register the passage of time in a number of ways. The face becomes a terrain of time travelled.

Also included in the exhibition is another of Ford's videos, which, like her photographs is real and free of trickery.



Sue Ford

David Rosetzky

Like Larry Jenkin's neighbourhood boys, Ford's tribe, who are artistic and alternative in their pursuits, bask in the utopia of a life still unfolding – they co-habit, live in share houses, drink, smoke, argue, jump naked into rivers over the long hot summer – no doubt a reference to the earlier artist camps of the 'Bohemians of the Bush' of Australian art history. They argue about foreign films and content - Godard is a point of reference - and talk about sex, expectations, group dynamics and existentialism.
....

Bohemians love the beach. Not in a sun bronzed way, but in a resistive, languid way that designates them apart from the fun and frivolous frolics of ordinary folk. They are not there to surf in the sun-bleached and glinting atmosphere, but for quiet, pensive suffering, angst and ennui. Art history documents abound with images of poets, writers and artists at the beach, lolling, lying, picnicking, reading, snoozing, sometimes snogging ... mostly peering out beyond the photographer at something vaguely transfixing.

Post the invention of leisure, Modernists grouped in flannels and sunnies in and out of season. Clusters of Bloomsburys and Surrealists, Picasso, the Impressionists of course, and our own bohos - the Heide set, each established their claim on sensitivity on the windswept dunes.

David Rosetzky's two videos *Weekender* and *Nothing Like This*, hyper-construct the languor of these rites of passage for introspective types. One video uses the faded colours of the 1970s Levi's, Lee's and Wrangler's where-do-you-go-to-my-lovely era, through a smudgy David Hamilton Bilitis-like lens. In the other, with a postmodern crispness, Rosetzky establishes scenarios of inner intensity in which the participants narrate their disaffections and doubts. As compared to Ford's messy, shabby and experimental aesthetic, everything in Rosetzky's plot is sanitary. This is the synthetic age.

Rosetzky's videos reference films like *The Big Chill* which pushes a group together to explore identity. In the instance of Rosetzky's works however, action is limited and the conventional narrative eliminated in order to zero in on the heightened meditations. Devices such as mirrors refer to a kind of twenty-something narcissism; the beach is presented as a dynamic character of identity flux; time is compressed and delivered in mediated bites.
....

Things happen on beaches. In Australian culture, as elsewhere they are places of fun, but also menace. When I was a child, the news of the disappearance of children and adults at beaches inflicted a fear into the cultural psyche; children's freedom was forever altered after the Beaumont Children case.

Annika von Hausswolff's arresting photograph, *Hey Buster! What do you know about desire?* offers an ambiguous narrative. We are looking at a young woman's body under a lime yellow blanket lying on the beach. We can tell its a woman from her feet and legs, and from the smoothness of her skin, that its a young person. From the way her head is

Annika von Hausswolff

covered, we know she is dead. Does she lie there by her own decision or is she the victim of someone's heinousness? By accidental drowning perhaps? Is the dog a loyal mourner or a police cadet? He looks out and beyond our gaze. Is he the pet of a murderer or the bewildered beach fossicker who has come upon something raw and unexpected? Someone knows what's going on - someone has put the blanket on her.

Even though this is a contemporary photograph it has Victorian melodramatic qualities. And like Victorian images, it is a construct utilising realism. The woman is a victim of love, as the title suggests. Suicide or murder: either way, it is love that has entrapped her and lured her to death. Because it is contemporary, we can consider that she alone may not be at fault as would once have been the implication in Victorian pictures – such as the triptych of Augustus Egg, *Past and Present* 1, 2 and 3, 1858; or George Frederick Watts', *Found Drowned* 1849-50 – where women, allegedly, were the authors of their own demise through recklessness and unfaithfulness. And yet, in these post feminist times it does seem women who allege sexual assault are still presumed guilty of their own fate, particularly if they are the victim of a famous person. *Hey Buster!...* is a disturbing picture and leaves much open to conjecture.

When you are young and looking for love and adventure you put yourself in peril, and sometimes that can have calamitous outcomes. The seductions of strangers on the net, the one night fling, the resort tryst, the being-in-the-wrong-place-at-the-wrong-time of life is fraught with danger.

Von Hausswolff's photograph, which I originally saw years ago, has stayed with me ever since. It has haunted me, perhaps because it reminds me of friends lost in a number of horrible ways - murder, suicide, accidents and disease. Probably it is also because the dog delivers a kind of sentinel pathos to remind us that we are all witnesses.
....

If we go by Erikson's seven stages of identity, then life follows a kind of formula. Louise Short's collection of 80 found slides, assembled into a life-span, plot this predictable pattern from birth through early years, to mid-life and then on to finality. Her project emphasises the ways in which photography has asserted the story of life through a kind of silent, yet collective consciousness agreement.

When cameras, film and processing were expensive, photographs and slides were taken at key moments. Typically new born babies, toddlers first steps, first days at school, birthdays, the purchase of house, car, tricycle, adult bicycle and other major assets; embarkations, arrivals, departures, reunions, and so forth held the family narrative in place. Many second and third children will notice fewer photos of themselves compared to an earlier sibling, as the novelty of the first born almost always dominates the later.

Less is photographically celebrated of the child whose path has strayed from the formula. When a divorce occurs the photo album is edited and certain images are discontinued. Single aunts and bachelor uncles make occasional appearances, always slightly out of place, wearing odd

Louise Short

things and not quite joined to the group. Childless couples show themselves travelling, without the restrictions of children, in exotic locations – sipping martinis and other concoctions. Albums become disjointed and aesthetically at odds with themselves as photos sent from offspring of their own families join the narrative, and compete with those of others. Still the narrative goes 'round and around'.

When the box brownie and instamatic were invented, fathers mostly took the pictures, but mothers mostly created the archive in the form of the family album. Now everyone takes photos with cameras, phones, and other gadgets. Life is stored on a computer, sometimes shared willy nilly on social sites like flikr, Facebook and Myspace, expanding the narrative to include friends and strangers, and yet still the same patterns emerge. The digital revolution has exploded the number of images taken, and home printing has shifted the economy of prints to the domestic realm, but more often than not, photos are now not printed but stored. It will be interesting to see what happens to the family photo album, once ruled by the mother, now that everyone linked through technology and photographic apparatus are the keepers of computer images. Will the narrative fracture and segment? Possibly.

....

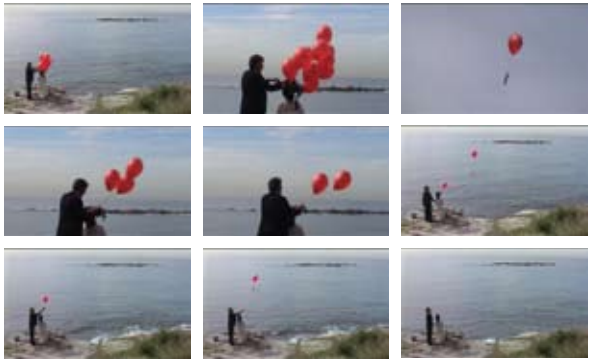
At the midway point of life you have made choices and have reached a certain destination, or not. If, as Aleks Danko's project suggests, you have settled on the great dream of house ownership and a regular, conformist life, you bask in the predictable glow of day following day... *Day In Day Out*

as the title of the work suggests. This can be comforting or a form of intolerable conventionality. Danko's particular vision is a suburban nightmare of sameness. Little houses, like the *Little boxes made of ticky-tacky, Little boxes, little boxes, Little boxes, all the same* – which Pete Seeger sang about, deriding suburbia, in 1963.

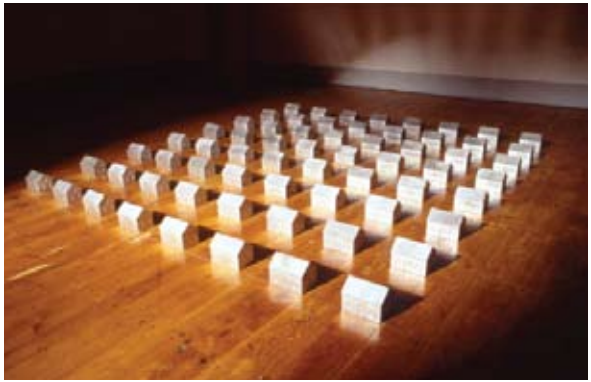
Melanie Boreham's work suggests an alternative chosen by her parents, whose divorce prompted her to film their ritual of detachment on a cliff's edge. Boreham shows her parents with their backs to the camera. Her mother is seated in a chair while her father cuts his wife's long tufts of hair, which are then carried into the air by the red balloons attached to them. In the exhibition we recall the balloons lifting the laughing child. Now they offer a release, and a way to begin again; their waywardness and unpredictability restoring freedom of choice.

Despite its difficult subject for her, Boreham's vision of her parents 'letting go' has buoyancy, which is affirming rather than damning. For Boreham, as for many others, hair cutting is symbolic of women's struggle for independence, and in this instance may well refer to the Women's Haircutting Movement in modern China which involved the pursuit of women's rights, and political power.

For others, the idea of settling down and falling into a pattern of life is irreconcilable with their desire and need to keep on running. Running to keep up, away from responsibility, from danger, or simply on the treadmill of working life - running running running. Or as Janis Ian sang, *run too fast, fly to high*.



Melanie Boreham



Aleks Danko

TV Moore's man runs and runs. Like the characters in Hollywood action movies who run in front of trains (Harrison Ford, *The Fugitive*), planes (Cary Grant, *North by Northwest*), boulders (Ford, again, Indiana Jones) and almost everything else (Tom Cruise, *Mission Impossible* etc.), Moore's protagonist can never rest. He is the modernist man, the salary man, the corporate raider, the stocks dealer… his is an adrenalin charged life. He is stuck in momentum, attempting to generate, but in fact remaining isolated in his frenzied forward movement, which gets him nowhere. Hyper ventilating, staggering, exhausted, you see him on Friday nights, solitary and bewildered in the transition between each weekly race to an imaginary finish.

Sometimes we stagger into dangerous territory. In life, some of us find ourselves on the wrong side of the track. Anri Sala's *Time After Time* provides a metaphor for the unfortunate ones who have lost their way or who are marginalized or discarded. A horse has maneuvered itself, or worse, been abandoned on the wrong side of the highway divider and is now trapped in an endless and shuddering encounter with heavy traffic. The horse visibly flinches and as viewers we are helpless to do anything to assist. It is past its prime and appears malnourished, injured and unwanted. Sala's horse is symbolic of the scapegoat… the one sent away, or outcast in order for social cohesion to seem reinforced by its exclusion.
….

Still we strive. We rail against the encroachment of time. The mid way point of life, sometimes characterized as the

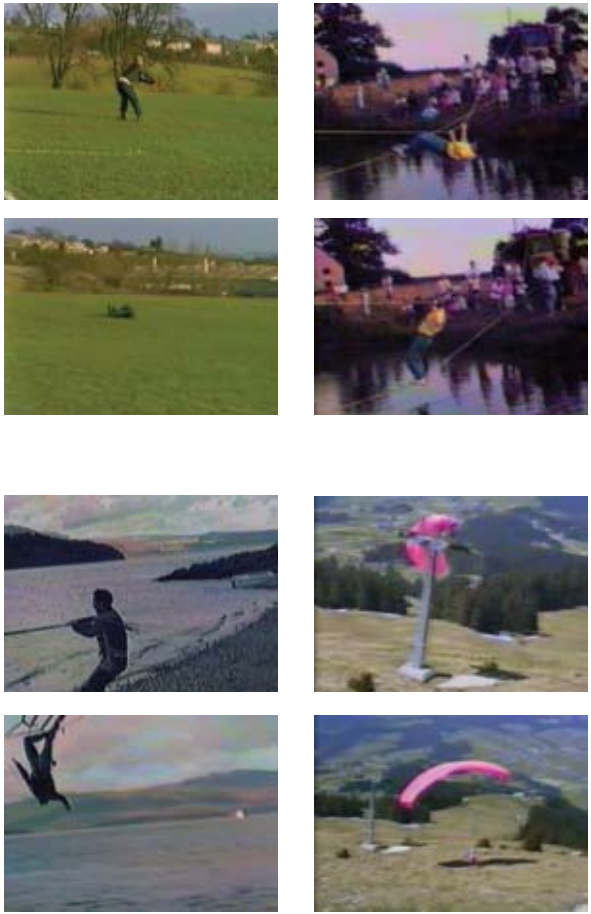
TV Moore

Anri Sala

mid-life crisis, encourages us along different encounters. For some that will be a re-engagement, or new engagement with ideas of spiritual connection – religion or other philosophies of life - that offers compensations and contemplation. Others will go for a crash and burn approach: take lovers, buy a sports car, quit the job and go journeying, try to sail around the world in a hot air balloon. Some call this hubris – an extravagant sense of one's own power and abilities - others might call it the 'Icarus syndrome'. You see a way out of the labyrinth and you go for it. You fly towards the sun, forgetting the wax wings and Newton's law. Still, while you are up there it's a beautiful thing. It's the coming back down to earth that provides the thud.

You might have, by now, noticed that flight of some sort or another appears periodically in the exhibition. In Mark Wallinger's 5-part video work, *Icarus* flights of fancy are attempted with predictable outcomes. All the same, like witnessing the Birdman event of Moomba, you watch just in case, by some miracle, a flimsy apparatus might actually keep their pilots aloft. Secretly we love the idea that someone tries, even if they fail, and these flights of fancy bring us back to our earlier selves when we were held aloft by parents, launched kites and made paper airplanes only to discover our limitations. At the mid-life crisis stage, sometimes you have to re-learn earlier lessons. And you also have to dare to dream.

Sadly some people stop dreaming and can see no way forward. Like Sala's horse, they reach a point of no return. The Bureau of Inverse Technology established a clinical



Mark Wallinger

account of suicide by recording, via motion sensor technology, the number of vertical 'falls' from the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco. Over a 100 day period, some 17 activations are monitored. On the video in which they produce cold data and interviews, news footage and other video recordings, the bodies falling from the bridge appear like small black or incandescent smudges. They make observations and try to find better ways to achieve prevention. But still the suicides occur.

In life there is death and there are many ways of dealing with it. In some cultures there are professional mourners who formalize grieving. Anna Molska's video *The Mourners* introduces a group of women who sing at funerals. Sitting in an empty sculpture hall in Poland, they talk about people who have died and then unexpectedly launch into songs and dance – a kind of bacchanalia for the lost; sometimes a requiem. Here reactions to death swing between the somber and the slapstick, and between the personal and the public: everything has its place, and life regenerates. Death is part of the community.

Grief has been described as one's own personal experience of loss, whereas mourning is understood to be grief 'gone public'. Molska's work reminds me that funerals have become a kind of institutionalized entertainment on the regular news service these days. Almost nightly, after the local, international and political news, and before the sports coverage, we attend the funerals of strangers, who are dead by accident, war, murder, gang warfare, and sometimes, if they are famous, old age. We must listen to hastily written

Bureau of Inverse Technology

Anna Molska

poems, favorite pop songs and watch angst ridden family and communities. There is a nasty voyeurism in all this, cynically plumped by the media.
….

Some people find solace in religion. And in this exhibition Tacita Dean's superb film *The Presentation Sisters* offers a quiet reflection space. Dean emphasizes the aspects of quiet devotion, internal contemplation and external dedication that define the Sisters' spiritual and earthly existence.

In the same way Vermeer suggested spiritualism through domesticity and by using the uplift of light through windows, Dean enlists the ethereal light that travels through the lives and rooms of this small order of nuns who go about their routines and mundane tasks. Dean's film studies light as a part of metaphysical and theological transformation. However, Dean's film is also about a kind of Newtonian light: scientific and alchemical.

Her interest in the transformations that occur when light passes through celluloid, and when light passes through glass is a study of the beautiful refractions discovered by scientific observation and written into philosophical enquiries by writers such as Goethe and Burke. As always with Dean's work, there are layers of encounter in the seemingly simple.

As we enter into the second to last stage of life, certain things become inevitable. Roles of care and nurture are reversed as we become responsible for ailing parents. We try to use leisure creatively and seek deeper understanding

Anastasia Klose

George Armfield

William Strutt

Gary Hill

Neil Pardington

Tacita Dean

through metaphoric encounters with art, poetry, music. Classical music, which when we were teenagers seemed the listening choice of older people, becomes part of our own pleasure, as if the brain seeks out more complex harmonies. Longer musical narratives; poetry, painting or gardening become pastimes. The wunderkama room including works by Anastasia Klose, Gary Hill, Neil Pardington and others, represents an accumulation of such vanitas.

The death of a parent leads us on our own acknowledged path of mortality. Since we share their DNA, the passing of a parent links us to our own mortal time clock. The tidying up after a life is a forlorn event: picking through personal effects feels like an invasion of privacy. The trace of a parent in the things left behind is a ghostly lingering. We become more Epicurean in our approach. The care of self, is linked to the care of others. Parents live a temperate life so as not to be a burden to grown children who now have other duties themselves.

Charles Anderson's work seems to be from the place of medical repatriation. It reminds me of my Grandfather who, in his final days became engulfed by horrible memories of Gallipoli and the Somme. Anderson's room filled by illuminated poltergeists and filled with furniture and chattels, bandaged and seeping, indicates a kind of post-life force.

Bill Viola's two anguished faces, *Unspoken*, projected onto silver and gold leaf panels, silently grieve. Grief, psychologists suggest, involves five stages: denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and acceptance. But Viola seems

Charles Anderson

to have unlocked a different emotion in this hyper-slow glimpse of emotional sorrow. One which is unspecific, but completely recognisable.

Viola is interested in transformation. His works frequently involve bodies in conversion from the corporeal to a liquefied and insubstantial state. There is a sense of baptismal conversion in many of his pieces; he takes his characters through trials and tribulations. For me one of his most effecting works is *The Passing*, which investigates, through non linear narrative and symbolic imagery, the womb and drowning; birth and death transformation. Water is used metaphorically as the substance of deliverance. The footage is surreal and intangible. In between these hallucinatory images Viola has inserted film footage of his mother, himself as a child, their home movies of joyful occasions, strange journeys by night, snow fall and landscapes.

In our late life memories tumble in – like dreams, not all the pieces make sense, but each is symbolic of our accumulated experience. We reminisce and return again to themes and occurrences. The death of a parent, alluded to in Viola's passing of his mother, and our own imminent finality bring life and death together, as it was from the beginning. In the exhibition, Viola's *The Passing* is installed so that it pushes back into the early childhood space and is situated in a womb-like viewing box, asserting the link between the smaller, claustrophobic spaces of birth and death.

Bill Viola

You have to learn how to do everything, even how to die, wrote Gertrude Stein. Giulio Paolini's *L' altra figura,* comprising two Greco-Roman busts, contemplating a smashed third one which lies between them on the floor, depicts the self regarding the self, in a kind of out of body acceptance of the *corps morceau* – the body in bits and pieces. Here is the moment of ego collapse: the final disintegration of our conscious self.

What happens after is open to speculation. Is the other side, as is suggested by Lynette Wallworth's *Invisible by Night,* a place where the departed linger and interact with the living? Or is the finale a last gasp, a flicking light, a fading out, a turn to blackness? Is this, in the words of Tony Ousler's little light globe, the moment to turn up the intensity, or a last feeble spluttering?

I don't know.

Giulio Paolini

Acknowledgements
Our thanks to all lender and supporters of MORTALITY. In particular we thank Brett Sheehy, Artistic Director of the Melbourne International Arts Festival, and his great team, led by Vivia Hickman. We are grateful to the Board of the MIAF for continuing this exciting institutional partnership which brings the arts together. Our thanks also to Edmund Capon, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales for permitting the loan of his favourite Paolini; and to Tony Ellwood, Director, Queensland Art Gallery; Nick Mitzevich, Director of the Gallery of South Australia; Gordon Morrison, Director of Ballarat Art Gallery and Peter Perry, Director, Castlemaine Art Gallery, Lars Nittve, Director of Moderna Museet, Stockholm for special loans. We are grateful also to the private lenders who have permitted us to exhibit their precious works; and to all the artists who have enthusiastically participated.

Our thanks to our colleagues at the following galleries, Sullivan+Strumpf Fine Art, Sydney, GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, Frith Street Gallery, London, Hauser & Wirth, London, Forma Arts and Media Limited, London, Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London, Video Data Bank, Chicago, Electronic Arts Intermix, New York, and Parkett Publishers, Zurich.

Curator
Juliana Engberg

Exhibition Manager
Jane Rhodes

Installation Crew
Ross Coulter
Nick Devlin
Nathan Gray
Jess Johnson
Ra Macrae
Nick Mangan
Jordan Mariani
Dan Moynihan
Darren Munce
Ned Needham
Johan Oevergard
Luke Pither
Brian Scales

Catalogue Design
Matt Hinkley

Specialist assistance:
Ken Graham
Jesse Stevens
Peter Bundle

Lynette Wallworth

ACCA BOARD

Naomi Milgrom AO
Chair

Peter Jopling QC
Deputy Chair

Peter Doyle
Honorary Treasurer

Louise Adler AM
Lesley Alway
Andrew Cameron
John Denton
David Payes
Sharon Segal

ACCA STAFF

Kay Campbell
Executive Director

Juliana Engberg
Artistic Director

Amber Stuart
Administration and Finance Manager

Lucy McNamara
Administration Assistant

Melanie Upton
Visitor Services and Volunteer Program Manager

Lauren Supple
Philanthropy Manager

David Harris
Corporate Partnerships Coordinator

Rebecca Frawley
Events and Venue Hire Coordinator

Jane Rhodes
Assistant Exhibitions Coordinator

Associate Curators
Rebecca Coates
Charlotte Day
Anna MacDonald
Hannah Mathews

Caitlin Malcolm
Public & Education Program Manager

Beth Cleary
Schools Education Coordinator

Matt Hinkley
Designer

Emma Sullivan
Online Communications Coordinator

Katrina Hall
Publicist

Weekend Gallery Coordinators
Jeremy Bakker
Anthony Hansen
Olivia Barrett
Leah Crossman
Jessica Price

Invigilators
Danae Valenza
Eva Birch
Olivia Barrett
Leah Crossman
Dominic Kavanagh
Biatta Kelly
Zoe Drysdale
Hanna Chetwin
Cyrus Tang
Jessie Bullivant
Jemma Woolmore
Tom Fraser
Laura Cashman
Georgina Glanville

Front of House Volunteers
Laura Cashman
Laura Bailey
Emma Humphrey
Dawn Tan
Georgina Glanville
Nick Rebstadt
Steph Pirrie
Biatta Kelly
Aneta Trajkoski
Tegan Chard
Tristan Da Roza
Monica Bognar
Emily Schilg

Café Staff
Jen Moore
Lillian O'Neil
Enrique Tochez
Anderson
Amy Turton

Project Partner

MELBOURNE INTERNATIONAL ARTS FESTIVAL

Public Partners

ARTS VICTORIA

Major Partners

Helen Macpherson Smith Trust

scanlon foundation

Partners

CROWN

Dulux

King & Wilson

NEXUS DESIGNS

SOFITEL

MOORILLA

HERSCHEL

Besen Family Foundation

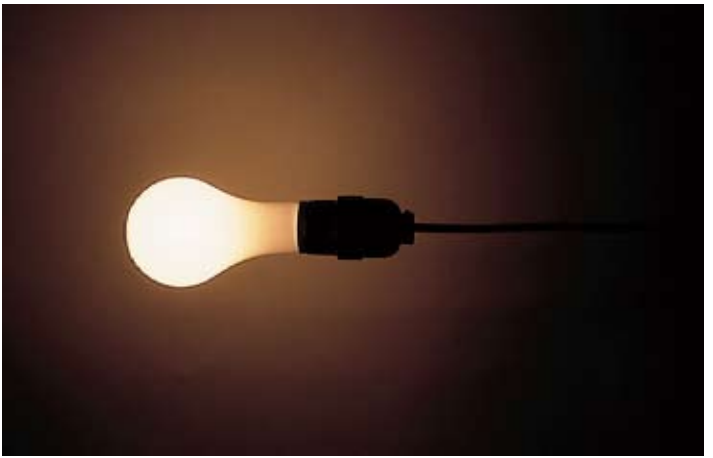
Supporters

CLAYTON UTZ

GROSSI

Roy Morgan Research

GORDON DARLING FOUNDATION



Tony Oursler