

**Above:** Pandarosa  
*Shadows in a Diamond Cave* 2005  
Vinyl, acrylic paint, ink, silkscreen  
Dimensions variable  
Image courtesy of artist

# Translation

Elizabeth Boyce, Anna Finlayson, Natasha Frisch, Jess MacNeil,  
Rob McHaffie, Claire Mooney, Pandarosa & Alex Pittendrigh  
Curated by Martina Copley  
Gallery 101  
1 – 19 November 2005  
Reviewed by Olivia Poloni

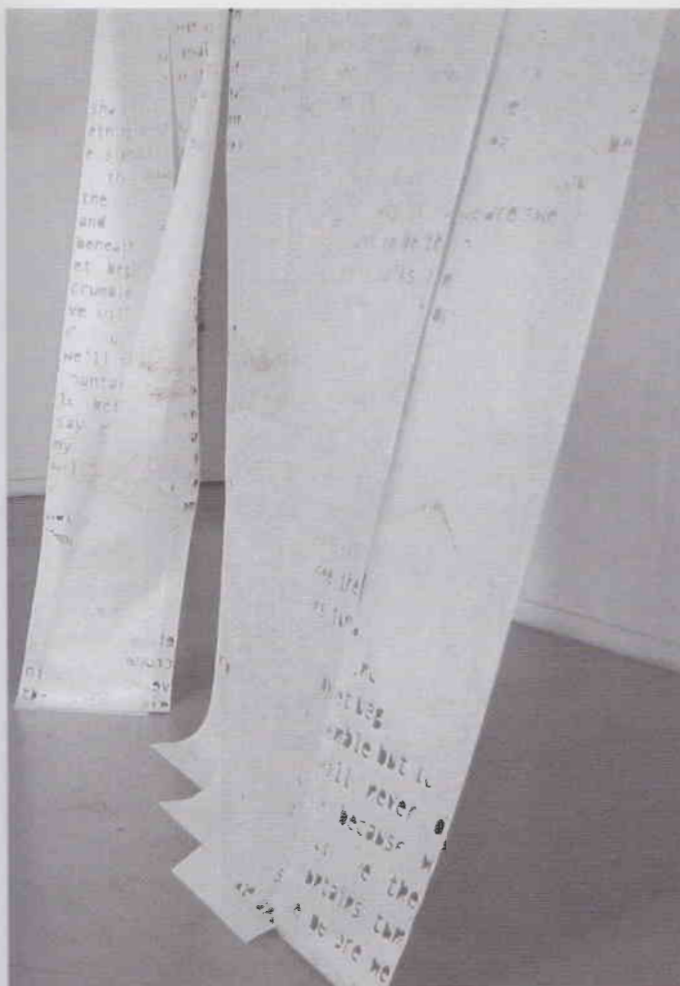
Since completing her Honours thesis in 1998, curator Martina Copley has organised three group exhibitions loosely based on her dissertation: *The Museum Aesthetic* in 2003, *Architecture of Hope* from 2004 and *Translation* late 2005.<sup>1</sup> All three exhibitions were held at Gallery 101, however *Translation*, like the other exhibitions in the series, was an independent curatorial project largely separate from Copley's responsibilities as the gallery manager.

Copley's latest exhibition investigated the distorted and multifaceted elements of translation in visual art, with viewers' individual interpretations propelling 'infinite webs of meaning' between works.<sup>2</sup> These webs resembled a game of 'Chinese whispers', where the first message was contorted and re-interpreted in such a way that the last whisper only slightly resembled the original.

Elizabeth Boyce's *Bird House* presented floating panels of paper that draped from the ceiling to the floor. Hanging long and white, and with the gallery's air-conditioning slowly

blowing the panels back and forth, *Bird House* was bestowed with an overarching sense of purity and innocence. A series of lyrics taken from a children's song called *Concrete and Clay* had been cut out of the scrolls, yet due to their random arrangement they were incomprehensible. The lyrics of the song declared the endurance of a love beyond the spoil of the natural and the built world. Yet in Boyce's work the jumbling and distortion of the words produced an underlying cynicism.

Boyce has revealed that while she made the work she was surrounded by busy bird activity. One bird in particular, the mynah, would imitate the sounds of other birds and noises within its territory, emitting a changeable and inconsistent representation of the surrounding fauna. A connection between vocal and visual mimicry was evident in *Bird House*, as Boyce distorted and reinterpreted the appearance and meaning of the words of the song, just as the mynah reinvented the unique sounds surrounding Boyce while she worked in her studio.



**Above:** Elizabeth Boyce  
*Bird House* (installation view), 2005  
 Paper  
 Six panels, each 275 x 45.7cm  
 Image courtesy of artist

*Shadows in a Diamond Cave*, by the collective known as Pandarosa, created a direct visual dialogue with Boyce's work. Where *Bird House* hung from the ceiling and extended onto the floor, *Shadows in a Diamond Cave* was a painting that stretched beyond the wall and onto a nearby window. The incorporation of the gallery space made *Shadows* physically dominating and blurred our sense of 'inside' and 'outside' by turning the gallery itself into part of the work. The Pandarosa collective's engagement with both Gallery 101 and other works in *Translation* ultimately invited the viewer to explore the possibilities of collaboration between artists and with space.

Rob McHaffie's three works each comprised two panels, one presenting a collection of manipulated found objects and the other a close-up study of a person's face as they concentrated on the materials to be used for the construction of their portrait. In *On a Date Without A Lot to Talk About*, McHaffie manipulated Japanese iconography and re-presented it through his own idiosyncratic translation. According to

McHaffie, the panels were 'formed from a quick play using raw plywood to make a face.... The character that emerged was a confused looking block head, so I set about placing a tie made from Japanese paper under his head and placing him in a relationship with some objects collected to evoke thoughts of a situation taking place at a cheap Japanese restaurant'.<sup>3</sup>

In *Engine Noise (Filter One)* and *Engine Noise (Filter Two)*, Claire Mooney presented layers of words laid out in grid formations. Lines of brightly coloured acrylic blocked out certain words, giving the initial impression that key terms had been systematically obliterated. Yet further investigation made it clear that Mooney's choices of which colours to use and which words to deface were predominantly random. Any literal reading of the text thus gave way to more formal concerns with colour and the visual appearance of words and lines.

Jess MacNeil similarly distorted the subjects of her streetscape paintings, to expose the voids and invisible forces that make up and interrupt our daily lives. Images of people strolling down a street were broken up by exposed swatches of the linen support or blocked out with opaque colour. MacNeil's mix of figuration and abstraction effectively altered the appearance (and our understanding) of everyday activities.

*Translation* was aesthetically striking and theoretically intriguing, with the artists deftly taking up the challenge of Copley's premise. The works were challenging on both an individual level, and in the dialogues they created with each other and the surrounding gallery space. Copley's curatorial insight was robust and this brought together a great show of artists who are producing thought-provoking and visually stimulating works.

<notes>

<sup>1</sup> Copley's thesis explored three tropes of roundness, the colour red and glass; examining the works of Australian contemporary artists Lindy Lee, Aleks Danko, Peter Tyndall and Roslynd Piggott.

<sup>2</sup> Martina Copley, *Translation* catalogue essay, Melbourne, 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Correspondence between the author and Rob McHaffie, 15 December 2005.

**Olivia Poloni works at Nellie Castan Gallery.**