

THE MUSEUM AESTHETIC

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THE MUSEUM AESTHETIC

The museum is not an autonomous 'container' but an active system of changing relations and meanings - a potential space of nexus and engagement. A modernist interpretative grid; a blue print for an unimaginably labyrinthine architecture - museums are a reproduction of an imaginary space.

Both a lived reality and a fiction, the essential function of the museum is a non-function. A monument to the insufficiency of nomenclature and memory - the museum is a knowledge system; a belief in an order of things; a collection of collections; an archive of archives... A slippage between the self-enclosed paradigms of abstract order and the materiality of the world... An entire space dedicated to the storage, preservation and display of things and matter...

A space for the collective redemption of lost time - of the times embedded in the spaces of things. The museum is a site of cultural memory - a proprietary context for argumentation and for the telling of stories. But whose meaning is it that we experience and for whom and how do we remember?

Renaissance collections of curiosities were eclectic hoardings of artistic and natural phenomena - mirrors of the world that reflected medieval ideas concerning the innate meaning of things and the nature of revelation. Located somewhere between a sanctuary for poetic experience and the ideal of the public institution as cultural venue and economic force, the modern art museum is a highly self-conscious viewing space that manifests the institutionalisation of art.

Vitrine, archive box, plinth, label, frame and crate... Traditional display devices have the potential to transform almost anything they exhibit into a work of art. There is a pretension to 'truth' and objectivity in the musuem's cohesive architecture of information and imagery. Its 'silent' commentary mediates the way in which hidden relationships between the visible and invisible are manifested. The irrational, miscellaneous, accidental and ephemeral are eschewed... It is an orderly experience to wander through the museum.

Artists look at the ways in which the work of the museum shapes the production and experience of art as a cultural and historical phenomenon. Conscious of the museum as arbiter, muse and patron, institutional critique constructs the authority and mystique of the museum as a collectively drafted abstraction. Yet these artistic strategies operate within a complex relationship to the museum in which incorporation into the archive also carries with it a sense of complicity with the institutional mechanism.

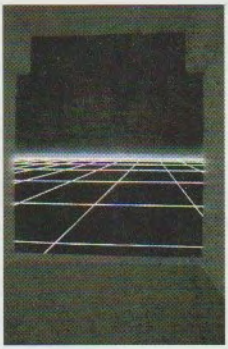
A focus for desires and longing, belonging and exclusion; a point of origin and return; a place in the world; a non-place; a microcosm of all possible worlds... The museum defines the limits against which it is possible to construct masks and identities.

It is a space that exceeds knowing and constantly spills out. A prismatic space in which there is no singular story and where no one way of looking is sufficient. A space of transformation which is never quite exhausted by the meanings with which we invest it.

Martina Copley 2003.

DAMIANO BERTOLI

In my practice, the 'museum' is manifested as a continuous timeline which enables diverse historical moments to exist simultaneously, the resulting juxtapositions presenting a model for the production of ideas and objects...





Continuous Moment
2001
acrylic, ultraviolet light
370 x 290cm

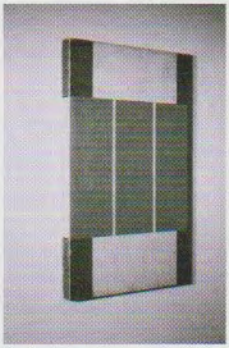
Frightened of this thing that I've become
2002
pvc, mdf, acrylic, ultraviolet light
170 x 300cm

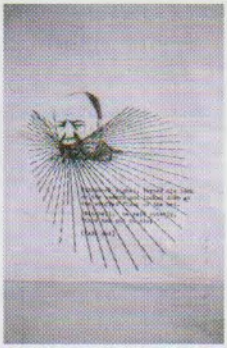
Sons of the Diamond Age
2003
pvc, acrylic
90 x 120cm



CHRIS BOND

Melbourne Museum, August 2001
Beyond the partitioned rows of desks burdened by programming notes and quiet conversation, a grey corridor leads to a stainless steel door featuring an inset viewing window. Inside, the fluorescent lights flicker to reveal a nest of eagles, ravens, lyrebirds and swallows - a stuffed aviary neatly arranged in rows and columns, erect talons twisted over mounds and branches, forever guarded by code and key.





Spinster
2003
oil on linen
75 x 47cm

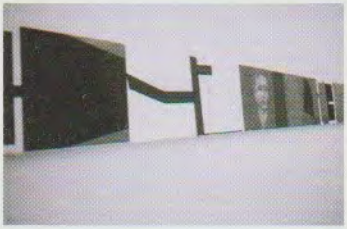
July 17, 1959 (as Charles L. Mitchell)
2002
various materials on graph paper
29.7 x 21cm

Stretcher Fantasy
2002
linen, cedar, pine
190 x 120cm



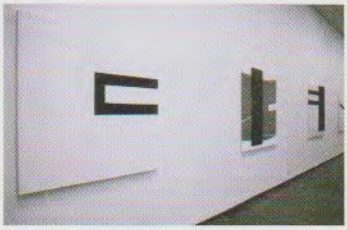
CRAIG EASTON

When I think of the museum it's of the Otago Museum in Dunedin: a king rat in a jar, a shrunken head, an Egyptian mummy and the mysteries of the Animal Attic.
Those much maligned glass cases constantly invited closer inspection. Along with the physical layering there were always layers of meaning left to be discovered too.
It was never just about containment, but about presenting pathways, ideas and histories.
Sometimes art aspires to similar things.





Slow
2001
Installation view
Photospace National Institute of the Arts, Canberra



Damage
2003
Installation view
Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne

Crush
2002
Installation view
Boutwell Draper Gallery, Sydney

Craig Easton is represented by Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne. Photography Andrew Wuttke

ANTHONY HUNT

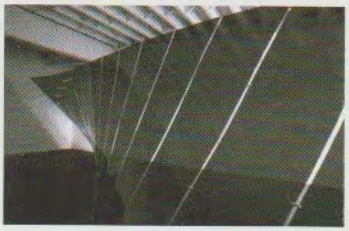
When visiting museums and galleries, I often find that the manner in which the works are presented, is equally and occasionally more interesting than the works themselves.
I distinctly remember one occasion, in a gallery of medieval armour, I came across a large, glass display case which for some unexplained reason was completely empty. In contrast to the ancient artifacts, the vacant vitrine was unusually fascinating, unintentionally revealing the mechanisms of museum display and offering an endless space for imagination.





All the Three Letter Words in the English Language
2002
digital video (1.10 min.)

days:hours:minutes:seconds
2002
audio speaker, speaker wire, amplifier,
personal computer



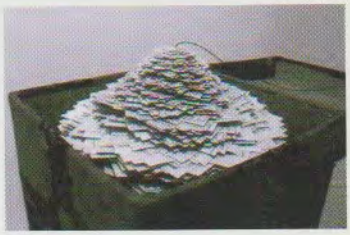
Burst
2001
perspex, marine hardware, steel cable,
aluminum display supports

NICHOLAS JONES

Museums are like books. Reliquaries. They hold artefacts, ephemera, the stuff of scientific research. The feeling of walking into the foyer of a museum is akin to opening the cover of a book you've been dying to read.
Each relic, stuffed animal or dinosaur skeleton has its own clandestine lived history. (To think one day these creatures roamed the earth).
There is an element of nostalgia inherent in the museum. Nostalgia in its true sense of loss, both personal and collective.
The Great Auk, the Dodo, the Thylacine stand propped, breathless behind glass, while the hoards file past and ponder the footprint of man upon the earth.
Museums are entrancing places and like books, they show us things we may or may not want to know.







Book in Flight
2002
cut book
25 x 26 x 13cm

Common Prayer
2002
book, paper, thread, needle
4 x 9 x 14cm

Der Chinesische Kasten
2002
paper, thread, box
48 x 18 x 18cm

Photography Paul Batt

SELINA OU

The ideals of civilisations are reflected in the ruins of temples, stadiums, churches, tombs and kingdoms. The writings and pictures on ancient artefacts reveal the rituals, lifestyles and beliefs of the people. Today, service stations, mega-marts, airports and skyscrapers are our monuments to human achievement.

From one perspective, a department store is a brightly-lit, breathing exhibit, filled with dioramas, glass cabinets and human enclosures. Sometimes I wonder if my refrigerator will be excavated one day and deemed precious for a museum in the future.







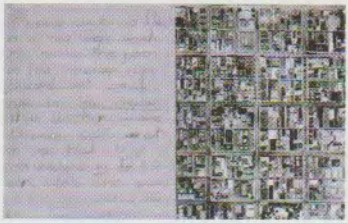
Convenience
2001
Type C photograph
120 x 160cm

Flight Centre
2001
Type C photograph
120 x 160cm

Ache
2001
Type C photograph
120 x 160cm

VIN RYAN

I think of museums as buildings that contain stories. On a superficial level, these stories are usually very self-conscious and controlled. Architects, curators, governments and administrators, inevitably collaborate to create stories that they think the public want to hear.
The museum patron, however, is not obliged to listen to these stories. We can choose to move through the space in our own particular way. We can dart from one exhibit to another or spend an entire afternoon in front of a single display. And by monitoring the speed with which we are travelling, we become both navigator and narrator of our own personal stories.







Composition No.3, Found Note Series
2001
paper, mixed media, collection of notes found in the street between Carlton and Southbank
25 x 50cm

Common Vista, Life and its Marvels (detail)
2002
wood, perspex, felt, pictures of mountains and skies cut from encyclopedias and nature books
65 x 85 x 120cm (approx.)

Landscape with big orange hole
Life and its Marvels (installation view)
2002
wood, foam core, fluro paper, reproduction from book of New Zealand landscapes
34 x 24 x 20cm (approx.)

LOUISEANN ZAHRA

No object was too trivial to be excluded from the Renaissance Museum, and those that were too large - a rhinoceros perhaps or an Etruscan tomb - were simply divided up into pieces, like the relics of saints, in order to satisfy the voracious appetite for things that characterized the activities of early collectors.

I can understand this Renaissance collector and his/her desire to collect everything and not preclude the slight, some would say trivial, often overlooked object, for these objects have an ability to resonate with gentle, somewhat melancholy power. The Renaissance collector would perhaps not overlook the contemporary objects produced for mass consumption, for decoration. I cannot begin to imagine how many millions of little plastic decorative objects are produced and fill the Plastic/Fantastic shops in Footscray each year. Kitsch things really, bright synthetic colours, glitter and noise. I'm seduced. These strange objects seemingly refer to the natural world and yet are so stylised that they demand a reading specific to the artificial world: the makers' world. I like the way these objects are loaded with meaning. I like their slightness. I like the way that a fragment readily suggests the whole. I like the ubiquitous nature of these objects. I like the places where these objects are found, the ordinariness of the shopping strips and the surreal madness of the objects' mass display. These objects are rendered quite fragile by their cheapness, their quantity and their disposability. In a culture of collecting the 'best' objects remain, maybe the 'best' objects are the ones that are around us constantly, that are so slight that they can be overlooked unless they are somewhat transformed.

P. Findlen, The Modern Muses, Renaissance Collecting and the Cult of Remembrance, S.A. Crane (ed.), Museums and Memory, Stanford University Press, California, U.S.A., 2000, p.161.







It will be necessary to stir up a quarrel between them (detail)
2002
bronze
400 x 300 x 400cm (variable)

I rarely listen to talk of this nature (detail)
2002
silver, glass, wood, felt, lead
18 x 18 x 5cm

If he so intended
2002
cotton, velvet (framed)
62 x 80 x 4cm

Photography Justin Bernhaut

ARCHIVE Flaubert is to the library what Manet is to the museum... They erect their art within the archive... every painting now belongs within the massive surface of painting and all literary works are confined to the indefinite murmur of writing. Michel Foucault 1977.

ASYLUM Every work of art already bears, implicitly or not, the trace of a gesture, an image, a portrait, a period, a history, an idea... and is subsequently preserved (as a souvenir) by the museum. The Museum acts as a refuge... without that refuge, no work can 'exist'. Daniel Buren 1970.

ATLAS The true museum is the one which contains everything. Le Corbusier 1930.

BLUEPRINT The exhibition is only a proposition... To talk about the museum means speaking about the conditions of truth. Marcel Broodthaers 1987.

CONTAINER If works of art, inside any museum, are like cards on a game table, the art of making a new exhibition for a curator, is to shuffle the cards indefinitely in order to try to show the unknown possibilities for each new game found that way. Shuffling the walls might reinforce the fact that, as banal and convenient as people want us to believe they are, they embody everything possible and are never neutral. Daniel Buren 1998.

DISPLAY PURPOSES ONLY Touching the objects is absolutely forbidden. Marcel Broodthaers (sign in the) Musee d'Art Moderne 1970.

DUST I think a picture dies after a few years like the man who painted it. Afterward it's called the history of art... For me, the history of art is what remains of an epoch in a museum, but it's not necessarily the best of that epoch... it's probably even the expression of the mediocrity of the epoch, because the beautiful things have disappeared... Properly, any masterpiece is called that by the spectator as a last resort. It is the onlooker who makes the museum, who provides the elements of the museum. Marcel Duchamp 1967.

EMBLEM All museums are haunted by the powerful and the wealthy: and on the whole we visit them to walk with the ghosts. John Berger 1967.

HANGING The museum and gallery on the one hand and the studio on the other are linked to form the foundation of the same edifice and same system... Thus the unspeakable compromise of the portable work. Daniel Buren 1971.

LANSDCAPE The museums [have]... made a myth out of action... creating exciting spaces and things like that. I never saw an exciting space. I don't know what a space is. Yet, I like the uselessness of the museum. Robert Smithson 1967.

LAUGHTER Any disturbance of a true museum's soundlessness, timelessness, airlessness, and lifelessness is a disrespect. Marcel Duchamp 1967.

LEXICON A well equipped art collection ought primarily to contain three things. First, sculptures. Secondly, paintings. Thirdly, curious items from home and abroad made of metals, stone, wood, herbs... from above the ground, within the ground or from the waters and the sea. Next, utensils... which nature or art has shaped or made out of such materials. Then antlers, horns, claws, feathers and other things belonging to strange and curious animals, birds or fishes, including the skeletons of their anatomy. Gabriel Kaltemarckt 1587.

MODEL The museum is the paradigmatic institution of artistic modernism. Douglas Crimp 1993.

OBSOLESCENCE In an early museum, the Kunstkammer of Marchese Ferdinand Cospi (1606-1686) the guide himself was part of the collection, a marvel to be admired. He was a dwarf. Nobody remembers his name. He remains nameless. Anthony Tromp 2002.

ORACLE The art world as a whole, and museums in particular, belong to what has aptly been called the consciousness industry. Hans Haacke 1983.

PRESERVE The museum itself is a zone where nothing ever happens. To be sure, evidence indicates that things have happened but not now and not here. Ryszard Dabek 1996.

RECREATION The modern museums should be turned into swimming pools and nightclubs... or in the best looking examples, emptied and left as environmental sculpture. Allan Kaprow 1967.

REPOSITORY If museums collaborated with one another, every museum could have a fabulous collection of water-colours and drawings to suit its arguments or studies. Photographs could 'borrow' for many comparative purposes works from any collection in the world. In brief, the museum, instead of being a depository of so many unique sights or treasures, would become a living school with the very special advantage of dealing in visual images. John Berger 1966.

REPLICA The archive cannot be described in its totality; and in its presence it is unavoidable. It emerges in fragments, regions and levels... The analysis of this archive, then, involves a privileged realm: at once close to us, and different from our present existence, it is the border of time that surrounds our presence, which overhangs it... It is that which, outside ourselves, delimits us. Michel Foucault 1972.

RESEMBLANCE [Museums] have tended to estrange the works they bring together from their original functions and to transform even portraits into 'pictures'. Andre Malraux 1951.

SHOP We enter the art gallery as though into a pharmacy, looking for remedies nicely packaged for admirable illnesses. Georges Bataille 1930.

SILENCE Visiting a museum is a matter of going from void to void... I'm interested... in what's not happening... in the blank and void regions or settings that we never look at. A museum devoted to different kinds of emptiness could be developed. Robert Smithson 1967.

SKELETON Museum... A rectangular director. A round servant... A triangular cashier. A square guard... no people allowed. One plays here until the end of the world. Marcel Broodthaers (open letter addressed 'A Mes Amis') 1968.

SLAUGHTER HOUSE Museums: cemeteries!... Identical, surely, in the sinister promiscuity of so many bodies unknown to one another. Museums: public dormitories where one lies forever beside hated or unknown beings. Museums: absurd abattoirs of painters and sculptors ferociously macerating each other with colour-blows and line-blows, the length of fought over walls! Filippo Tommaso Marinetti 1909.

STORAGE The museum needs to be turned inside out - the back room put on exhibition and the displays put into storage. Mark Dion 1997.

TEMPLE The museum is a colossal mirror in which man finally contemplates himself from all sides, finds himself literally admirable, and abandons himself to the ecstasy expressed in the art journals. Georges Bataille 1930.

TESTIMONY The museum reveals the full story, and it is therefore good: it allows one to choose, to accept or reject. The museum is bad because it does not tell the whole story. It misleads, it dissimulates, it deludes. It is a liar. Within will be found the most partial, the least convincing documentation of past ages. Le Corbusier 1925.

THINGS CHANGE The museum is a recent invention; once there were none. So let us admit they are not a fundamental concept of human life like bread, drink, religion, orthography.
Le Corbusier 1925.

UTOPIA There are flaws in the system and system in the flaws. Anthony Tromp 2002.

VITRINE Contemporary life needs nothing other than what belongs to it. Kasimir Malevich 1913-33.