

transit





transit

Meredith Brice
Stephen Copland
Karee S Dahl
Colin G Reaney

Curated by Meredith Brice, with text contributions
by Jochen Sokoly and Andrew Simpson.

The Gallery | Virginia Commonwealth University in Qatar

21 October – 21 November 2009

ISBN 978-1-934253-14-4



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Acknowledgements

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the four artists Meredith Brice, Stephen Copland, Karee S Dahl and Colin G Reaney for their dedicated work towards their own exhibition and this catalog, which they proposed to the Gallery Committee of VCUQatar over two years ago. Having worked as artists and art educators in the UAE they share much with their colleagues at VCUQatar concerning the life as an expatriate in a foreign country and this exhibition can provide a platform of discourse on the topic. I am also grateful to Macquarie University in Sydney for their willingness to take on the exhibition at a later date and provide a stage for its statements in the artists' home country. I am particularly grateful to Rhonda Davis and Dr. Andrew Simpson at Macquarie University. At VCUQatar I would like to extend my gratitude to Jordan Gushwa and Zainab Al-Sulaiman in the design studio, as well as my colleagues from facilities management, Tyrone Wilkins and Noël H.S. Knille for their input in the exhibition's logistics. Finally, this exhibition would not have been conceived without the support of the Gallery Committee of VCUQatar.

Dr. Jochen Sokoly

Gallery Director and Assistant Professor in Art History
VCUQatar

Migrants

Jochen Sokoly

Transit: a state of flux, motion, uncertainty—of being between places, times, life events—a passage from one to the other. As humans we are in constant transit. Our lives are a great journey, from beginning to end, ever changing, ever transforming—unwillingly. We are migrants by nature, changing appearance, thought, experiences, and attachments—wondering from one age to the next.

As ever changing individuals we live in an age of accelerated technological, economic and environmental changes that bring with them social and political changes that can be hard to comprehend and digest at times. We can feel overwhelmed, run over, disconnected. The changes that surround us demand our constant adaptation, realignment and response.

The exhibition *transit* addresses an important issue from the point of view of four Australian artists formerly resident in the UAE. How do we respond to an environment that is changing so rapidly and where we are only passing through? The contemporary world of the Arabian Gulf has seen more dynamic changes in economy, society and environment of a magnitude so powerful and deep than no other developing country at this time, that landscapes have changed, ways of living have altered, traditions have been lost or are on the brink of being lost, social values have shifted or are shifting and individuals are faced with a degree of cultural alienation that is being addressed on the government level.

Perhaps the single most important effect of the economic power of the countries of the Gulf region is the migration of individuals and families from all over the globe to work here, perhaps comparable to that of the United States at the turn of the 19th to the 20th centuries. The wave of immigrants, first from other Arab countries, but now from just about everywhere, has produced a society so mixed, and in such a short period of time, that that society has hardly had a chance to realign and respond. This creates a situation in which individuals seek what they already know: immigration within—a natural response—the creation of bubbles of cultural activity that only rarely open up to connect and expand. Local traditions are challenged by those of incoming people. Ways of life clash. Classes of people based on national and economic criteria emerge—the world of the Gulf as a microcosm of the world at large. What happens there, happens here as well.

It is the task of artists as the chroniclers of the world, to tell their individual story. Artists provoke, make us think about ourselves, and present us a mirror through their own eyes. They tempt us to discuss, reflect and open conversations with one another—a cultural discourse, in which we should overstep boundaries in order to expand our horizons and those of our neighbors. This is the aim of the current exhibition.

Dr. Jochen Sokoly holds a D.Phil. in Oriental Studies from the University of Oxford. He is Gallery Director and Assistant Professor in Art History at VCUQatar, where he lectures, curates, and creates public programs that address issues of cultural discourse.



transit

Andrew Simpson

Time's arrow propels us through a continuum from one state to another. Each instant rich with an infinity of possibilities. New landscapes, new meanings, new contexts and new understanding.

The Sun punishes the white stone washed walls, fingers of light reach deep into the geometry of human structures before retreating, people congregate under cool archways in response. A dance played out continually and repetitively on a fleeting and impermanent canvas, time's cycle. The universe expands, the universe collapses, every breath deep and new.

The shock of the unknown, the temporary and the transient hold a spectrum of meanings for those who understand where they come from but don't always know where they are going.

Snowflakes fall, each one a tiny ice sculpture, unlike any other, billions of them, like us, born of serendipity buffeted by circumstance. Melted tomorrow, piled high in grey threatening clouds the next day, crashing along through a deep channel in a rain forest the day after.

Transit is a state of mind. It can be an open clearing, a refuge between tumultuous worlds or events. It can be the uncertainty between day and night, the counterbalance between thought and action. It can be both a moment of clarity and a moment of confusion, the moment between life and death. Engagement, enrichment and epiphany, the fabric of existence.

Time's arrow, time's cycle.

Dr. Andrew Simpson is Museums Education Officer, Division of Environmental & Life Sciences, Macquarie University, Sydney Australia

transit

Meredith Brice

The exhibition *transit* brings together the work of four Australian visual artists—**Meredith Brice, Stephen Copland, Karee S Dahl** and **Colin G Reaney**—two artist couples who have recently lived and worked in the United Arab Emirate of Sharjah. The artistic discourses reveal subjective responses to living in and moving around local and global spaces.¹

Transit—an act, process or instance of passing through, over or across, of change, transition, conveyance of persons or things from one place to another, vehicles or a system engaged in such transportation—implies that these artistic discourses have been informed by engagement with crossing over territory, by passing through new contexts and environment(s). These subjective responses and artistic discourses are not shaped in difference but from difference.²

The artists have been actively engaged in experiencing the enriching pluralities³ of different contexts through exposure to cultural shifts and transitional immediacies defined by the current moment.

New contexts offer the opportunity to enter a fertile region. Artistic discourse becomes the platform from which to set out

1 Mosquera, Gerardo. 'Spheres, Cities, Transitions: International Perspectives on Art and Culture', in Boullata, Kamal. [Ed] (2008) *Belonging and Globalisation, Critical Essays in Contemporary Art & Culture*. London: Saqi (2008), p 87.

2 *ibid.*, p 89.

3 *ibid.*, p 88.

and explore new terrain, oases, leading to the discovery of new forms. Introduced to new ideas, creative work takes on the character and shape of the plastic moment. As territory is left behind and new territory is entered, a series of imprints and affirmations about context(s) provide the possibility for exploring the porosity and fluidity of re-contextualization. Art as a transitive genre makes legible these conditions of possibility. From the relative security of known systems, vernaculars and patterns, the process of making is energized, mobilized and accelerated by transposition and transportation; discoveries are made anew.

Unpacking the influence of living as uncertain spectator in unfamiliar territory, observing culture(s) from without or at the margins, transitive re-definitions and interplays between the four artists have been revealed and resonate in relationship to each other. The systems for framing ideas and thought-processes in objects and gestures open a map that ranges across concepts, poetic investigations, associations and classifications—art and making art have become the organizing principle, the hinge on which to open a window with a view to new horizons.

Integral to the exhibition is the artist-partnership relationship, *in transit*. Some affinities and common themes run through the works—the notion of an itinerant art practice built on responses to shifts and movements in moving through and living within different contexts within the global village. Notions of home, homeland and material utopias seek to explain the response to garner a sense of identity and place. Invitations to unpack, assemble, construct, re-make, document, process, reflect, absorb, belong, bond, exchange, narrate, trade,



MEREDITH BRICE
Page from the Persian Album... as lonely as the desert wind (detail), 2009
 Mixed/found papers, graphite, watercolour, acrylic, tea, coffee, powdered
 tumeric, chilli, digital print, 400 x 100 cm

possess, move on and are cross-referenced and framed within the conditions of portability.

From the female perspective, the transitory life or the life in transit is interpreted by Dahl and Brice through the experience of making with a contemporary eye to traditional craft forms: the weaving together of threads within notions of the supposed feminized domestic nurture space. But these affinities with traditional craft forms do not mimic: they blur the boundaries between craft and art object. In their laborious and time-consuming processes, they apply the brakes, slow the pace, and open spaces to reflection. The gesture of the hand is privileged over the mechanical, questioning the traditional categories of art, art object, craft and textile.

Living on the Arabian Peninsula, at the edge of the golden shifting 'roads' and historical trade route superhighways of the ancient Silk Road, evoked for Brice conceptual and historical associations about textiles. Artistic discourse has been concerned with visual explorations of textiles at the horizon of the contemporary high-tech textile moment—nanotechnology. *The Smart Fabric Sampler* series visually describe these new 'intelligent textiles'. The 'samplers' or assemblages (and beadworks) encompass nanoscale space(s), imagined forms, patterns and transitions within molecular fields. Within the symbolic 'active' weave structures, adaptive, communicative exchanges and networks parallel notions of 'transit' at the nanoscale.

Found and site-specific materials are assembled together in Modernist formats. Akin to traditional craft forms—quilts and samplers—they become forms of (social) documentation



KAREE S DAHL
The Dependent #3 //landfall// (packing), 2009
 Poly-cotton thread & washable fabric glue
 Suite of 7 works, 40 x 60 cm each

and cultural production to mark an era. As the Modernist movement turned to abstraction as a way of responding to social, technological and scientific changes, these 'samplers' also abstractly reference the interests of the artist—science, new technology, environmental sustainability, philosophy, history and art anthropology.

Absorbing information and bridging worlds, the paperwork *Page from the Persian Album... as lonely as the desert wind*, an assemblage of mixed, found papers inspired by a compilation of 'surface' impressions—intense sunlight, crisp white dishdashas, Indian fabric printing blocks, Islamic representational art (arabesques and nature forms) as collected in the manuscripts *The Persian Albums*, Topkapi Palace Collection, Istanbul—represent the flow of environmental, social, cultural, historic and poetic associations embedded and spread over a broad geography of the region.

For Dahl, *the process and material relationships between drawing, painting, sculpture and installation practice*¹ within the context of textiles define her artistic discourse where a *holistic view is structured around systems and ideas that speculate on the human condition*.² The works are seen as a *delicate vision of life mapped out within a labyrinth of policies, laws and control*. The relationship of *art practice, business, law, economics and trade—the mutual benefits (of which) could be put into play by bridging the terms aesthetics, culture, economics and trade*³—are explored in the exhibition within the logistics of relocation. Networks of ideas and

¹ Dahl, Karee S, unpublished artist's statement (2007)

² *ibid.*

³ *ibid.*

interconnected pathways describe the process and response to new context; they traverse the practicalities—packing, unpacking, removal, arrival and the repetition of processes. Textile constructions describe a rhizoid web of multi-layered interconnection. Installation combines manufactured and hand-made. Dahl works within the logic of the multiple, utilizes seriality, combines ready-made and hand-made; the work echoes Duchampian ideas.

The installation, *The Dependent*, invites the viewer to visually unpack the content of concepts, discover relationships and circumnavigate the complex interwoven structures and meanderings of what appear to be kilometers of thread. Glue is used to stabilize or 'fix' these threads. This provides the anchoring bond to make solid the network. Interplays of tactility, surface texture and connectivity, resonate amidst the conditions of portability, materiality, commerce, commodity, stabilizing and destabilizing forces to engage and challenge pre-conceived notions and definitions.

The interdisciplinary and intermedia approach to artistic discourse in *transit* for Copland creates new kinds of understandings about place. Copland's works traverse geographies, time and space to visually 'map' and narrate, describe contexts and record moments, unfolding them to the viewer like a screen of memory, a story board, or sequential narrative. Referring to this approach, the *Longitude—Latitude* project allows the artist the raw material to explore and document new territory. In the exhibition Copland records across media—painting, drawing, collage and artist book - a poetic response to a new domain. Integral to the



STEPHEN COPLAND
Jassim and the Al Faya Cafe (series), 2007
 Acrylic on canvas
 Suite of 10 works, 40 x 30 cm

work are themes of cultural, social or political significance. Often the works are an iconic distillation of observations from the outside. Like 'sight' or site fragments, overheard conversations or diarized visual excerpts, they narrate these observations to the viewer. The suite of paintings, *Jassim and the Al Faya Café*, describes a venture into the desert—a three hour journey and visual narrative where the artist seeks to develop new symbols to portray the nexus between identity and art. For the artist, *renewing oneself by seeing the desert as a stranger on a new stage—a moment in time absorbed into the timelessness of the desert landscape—the physical appearance of paint assists to make the story at once tactile, present, ambiguous and mysterious*.¹

The activities of living and moving in and about local and global spaces is described by Reaney through drawing and sculptural form(s). Artistic discourse references the *movement* of the human condition addressing such concepts as Reaney identifies—*portability, in transience, accountability, and property; abstract and material realities experienced as affirmations or commodities of existence*² and identity amid the in-betweens and *slippages of social connection within specific cultural contexts*.³

In the series, *Fabrication according to measured drawings* (2008 – 2009), Reaney has utilized cement, wood, canvas, paper and castors to form constructs; structures and frames of reference that imply solid and shifting meanings,

1 Copland, Stephen T., unpublished artist's statement (2009)

2 Reaney, Colin, G, unpublished artist's statement (2007)

3 *ibid.*

embodiments of occupied and transient spaces, and relationships. The trolley forms—models of mobility—are prototypes to carry, propel and contain the shapes of material existence and possession; they are portable structures upon which to occupy, traverse the edges and rotate the outlines of meaning. They fix, collapse and transition known contexts, shelter, attach, possess, arrive, depart, accommodate and transit as they traverse space(s) and cross over the gaps between them.

Meredith Brice is an artist, art educator and independent curator



COLIN G REANEY
Fabrication according to measured drawings (series), 2008 – 2009
Installation
Paper, acrylic paint, vinyl cut text, wood, steel castors, fake grass, string.

MEREDITH BRICE

Meredith Brice is interested in exploring sustainable ideas and interdisciplinary visual dialogues informed by science and new technology (specifically nanotechnology in relation to textiles), and that reference ecology, history, philosophy, anthropology at the confluence and in the context of social, political, environmental and cultural realities in the local/global context.

Studio Diary, entry February 10, 2007

Lost in translation, known certainties have evaporated; stretching, unfolding is a desert landscape seen through shifts and erasures of patching, moving veils of light—dazzling whites through gauze—fine particles of grey-tan sand—sparse vegetation, changed reinforcers, new patterns, thirst for oasis and spiritual connection. Patching together found fragments of paper—notions of past and present—undersea coral gardens, Bedouin tents, dishdashas—timeworn fabrics, bleached, exposed to glare, heat, wind and time, embedded memories fade as urban development encroaches, dislocates eco-systems... Looking at the layered graphic systems—The Persian Albums, Topkapi Palace Collection, Istanbul.



Page from the Persian Album ... as lonely as the desert wind (detail), 2009
 Digital print
 Mixed/found papers, graphite, watercolour, acrylic, tea, coffee, powdered tumeric, chilli.
 400 x 100 cm



Smart Fabric Sampler *Another world* (detail), 2009
Glass beads, monofilament
50 x 70 cm, extended

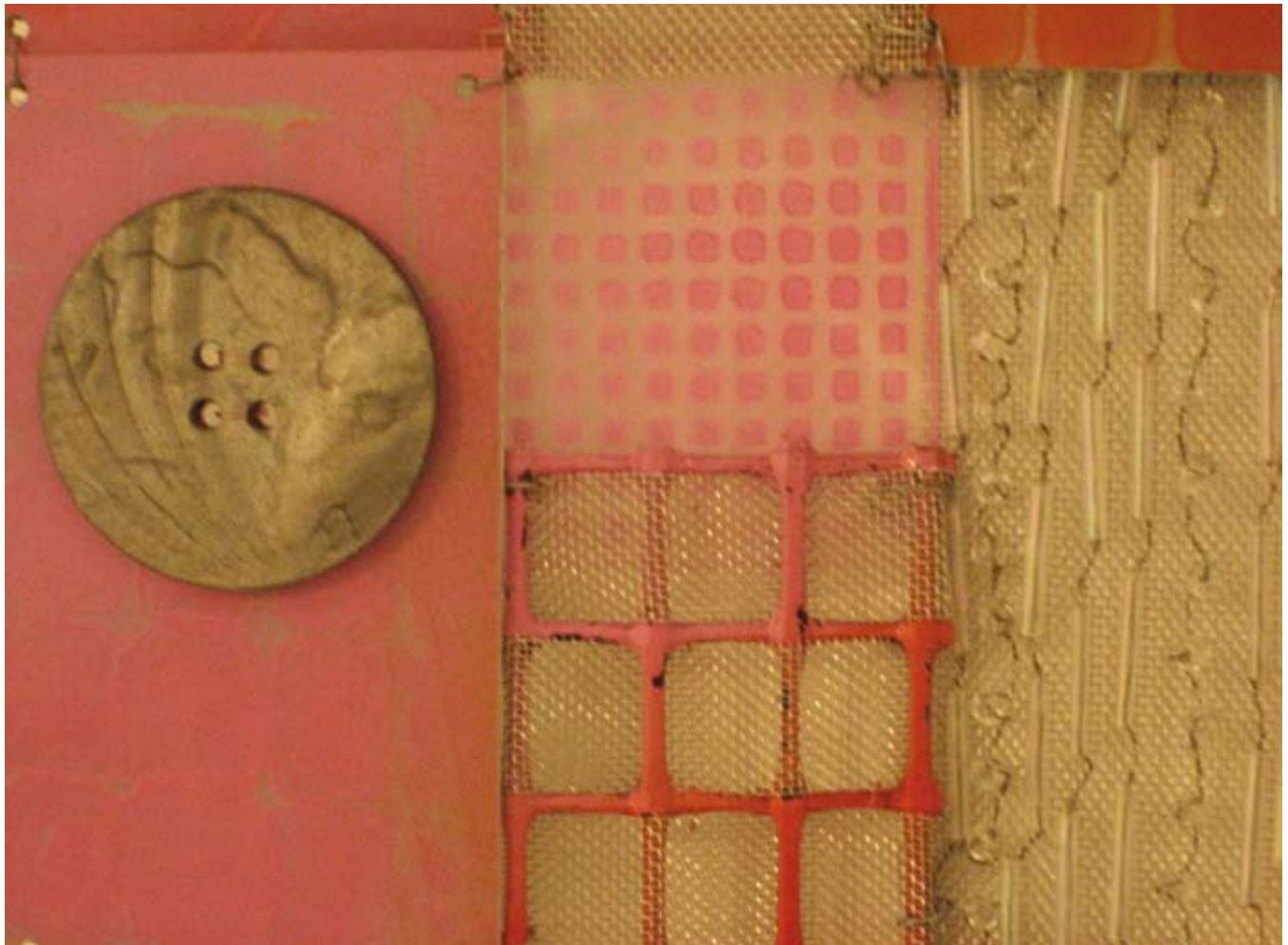


Smart Fabric Sampler *Molecular – bloom 1* (detail), 2009
Glass beads, monofilament
30 x 30 cm

Meredith Brice holds a Diploma of Fine Arts, Sydney Gallery School (1997), Bachelor of Fine Art, Newcastle University (2001), and a Graduate Diploma of Education—Secondary Visual Arts, Charles Stuart University (2004). She has been selected to exhibit in various national, international, group and solo exhibitions including *Jardin Virtual / Virtual Garden*, *Studio XX Montreal*, and *Thread*, Brisbane Powerhouse (2002), the *Blake Prize for Religious Art* (2003), the *Ninth International Environmental Art Symposium: Beautiful Garbage*, South Korea (2004), *Artist Grant*, Vermont Studio Centre USA, the *Macquarie University World Year of Physics Art Prize* (2005), the *First Sharjah International Conference on Nanotechnology and its Applications*, American University of Sharjah (2007), *Sensibility of Light and Fabric*, University of Sharjah (2007), *The Sense of Touch*, Macquarie University Art Gallery (2009).

Brice is the curator of a number of exhibitions and has initiated projects that bridge and connect worlds through art including the traveling *Peace on a postcard exhibition* (2007, 2008, 2009) Australia, Palestine, United Arab Emirates.

As an interdisciplinary artist, she conducts art workshops for adults and young people at universities, art museums and public venues.



Smart Fabric Sampler *Embedded* (detail), 2007 – 2008
Plastics, stainless steel mesh, glass beads, oil paint
Suite of 6 works, 30 x 30 cm each

STEPHEN COPLAND

The suite of paintings, *Jassim and the Al Faya Café*, describes a journey into the desert that provoked a sequential visual narrative about time, identity and place.

Travel breaks down the inner structure. Transitory artists reinterpret the “newness” of transitory places—there is no refuge except in the familiar, we are completely on the surface of ourselves. –Albert Camus, Lyrical and Critical Essays.

Stephen Copland studied at the National Art School, Sydney (ASTC Diploma in Painting, 1969 –1972). He was awarded a Graduate Diploma in Education, University of Technology Sydney (1988) and a Masters of Fine Art, University of New South Wales (1995). He has been visiting lecturer at Northern Territory University, Darwin (1993) and Assistant Professor at College of Fine Arts and Design, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates (2007 – 2008). He has conducted workshops/ lectures at Vermont State College, Burlington USA, Université Saint Esprit de Kaslik, Lebanon, and International Kongress Fur Kunstlerische Bildung Kirchliche Padagogische Hochschule, Graz, Austria.



Jassim and the Al Faya Cafe (series), 2009
Oil on canvas
Suite of 10 works, 40 x 30 cm each





Copland's artistic research has been interdisciplinary with a strong basis in drawing and the identity of a book and its cultural, social, poetic or aesthetic functions. His art has focused on the themes of cultural identity, heritage, diaspora and human rights.

Since 1986 he has had thirty solo exhibitions, including exhibitions in art museums in Cuba, New Zealand, Slovakia, Lebanon and Australia. The Migration Series 1992 – 2002, a project of international exhibitions, earned him a Commendation Award from the Consulate General of Lebanon (1999). He is the recipient of a number of awards and cultural grants including a Migration Heritage Grant, an International Programs Grant (NSW Ministry for the Arts), four NAVA (National Association of the Visual Arts) Grants and a Vermont Studio Center Artist Grant. In 2009 his work was selected for the touring *5th International Artists' Book Triennial* in Vilnius, *Leipzig Book Fair* in Germany (April), including Galerija Arla Vilnius, Lietuva (May), Art Centre Silkeborg Bad, Denmark (September), Gallery Hubner Bokform, Halmstad, Sweden (Spring 2010), the Seoul International Book Arts Fair, Korea (Spring 2010), and in *Dog-Eared: Revealing the contents of artists' books*, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana USA. The recent solo exhibition, *Raft—the drifting border*, Macquarie University Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia, reflects Copland's interest in utilizing art as voice for human rights and social justice.



KAREE S DAHL

The Dependant # 1, 2, 3 & 4 are works that attempt to mimic the resonance [*the effect of an event or work of art beyond its immediate or surface meaning*] of shifting ones family to another country, people, politics and society.

/inspection/ is a mass of threads covering or sinking into packing boxes laden with words that reveal both personal and political waves of responsibility one is exposed and ultimately immersed into through the simple act of moving.

/departures/ manipulates blue and yellow color threads, in an attempt to render psychological thoughts and physical movement associated with leaving one place so one can arrive in another place. To arrive one must first depart. Yet one anticipates and plans the arrival before departing.

/landfall/ uses brown and green color threads to render psychological thoughts and physical movement associated with arriving in a place. To arrive, means the departure is over. Yet one continues to see the arrival place through the experience of the departure place.

/travel/ acts as a balance, a familiar taste of the build up of expectations, the good, the bad, the easy and the hard of moving through spaces for short periods and experiences. A taste, but a very different act to long-term shifts from one's place of belonging and/or citizenship to a place of residency with assigned custody.

touch



The Dependent #4 /travel/ (detail), 2009
Poly-cotton thread & washable fabric glue
Suite of 12 works, 40 x 60 cm each



Karee S Dahl's career is diverse. She has run an extensive practice as an artist and arts profiler in Australia, and of late, eight years invested offshore in Southeast Asia and three in the United Arab Emirates. Heralding from Crows Nest, Queensland, she studied in the Northern Territory, majoring in Arts [Fine Arts—Drawing], and completed a Masters and a Postgraduate degree in Business [Arts and Cultural Management] in South Australia, generating an interest in both the practice and the management of art. Balancing these elements allow for a more rounded fulfillment of interest in the application of art across issues dealing with culture, economy and the social—sometimes referred to as the 'human condition.'

Dahl's residency at Robert Black College—University of Hong Kong in 2003 under a grant from the Australia-China Council DFAT looked at the trade negotiation, the conditions, influences, and environment of art in the context of culture, economy and civil constructs. These interests grew from an artist studio residency in Beijing at Red Gate Gallery the previous year. Dahl's commitment to her arts practice is reflected in her extensive exhibitions profile: group and solo exhibitions and participation in events like the *CP Open Biennale* Jakarta, *Gwanju Biennale* Korea 2000 and many festivals, working a diversity of environments, cultures, politics and art contexts in Asia, Europe and the Americas.



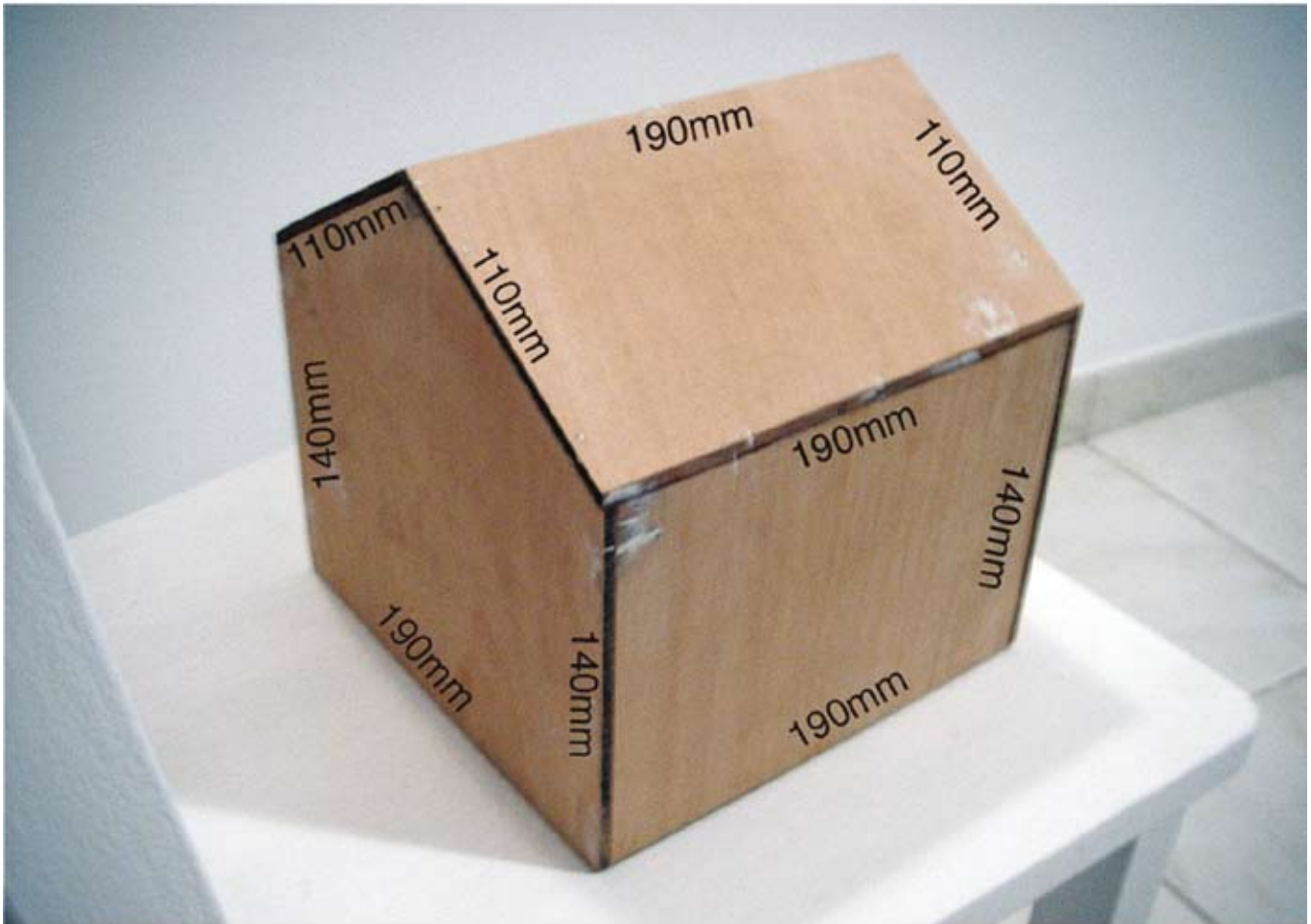
The Dependent #1 /inspection/(detail), 2009
Installation
Poly-cotton thread & washable fabric glue & packing boxes

COLIN G REANEY

In this series of works */fabrication according to measured drawings/* Colin Reaney has used measured shapes that fashion themselves into the house object. While the size/scale of these objects may vary, from work to work, all measurements are based on the small wooden house objects that occur throughout much of his work.

The scale of these large paper house cut-outs was determined by the paper he worked with, an industrial brown colored packing paper that is commercially available as a 30-metre long roll, four feet in width. It is “primed” (a painting reference Reaney likes to use) on both sides with a paint roller and white acrylic interior house paint. This process allows for an interesting surface texture to work on and gives the paper a weight that when installing the work, each piece behaves like a wall. It is as if the walls were rolling up or peeling away from the architecturally built frame of the gallery.

Reaney is also keen on the connection or similarity to writing—writing on paper. Marking out the lines, he cuts into and shapes the paper surface much like handwriting, allowing for the light to give an edge to these cuts. Reaney likes using the lead pencil, as it reminds him of the first tool for marking one gets to use in primary school. “In school you got this feeling that all you needed to communicate ideas was a sheet of white paper and a lead pencil. Later one discovers the ‘edge’ of the paper (the way it curls) and the fact that the pencil cuts into the paper as it marks.” In this work the cutting out of the shaped pieces gives authority to these cut spaces defining the space confined within the marked outlines. According to the French Philosopher Gilles Deleuze “the fold is forgetful, the crease (and the cut) has



I pointed out that it is reasonable to say we read a house or read a room since both room and house are psychological diagrams that...

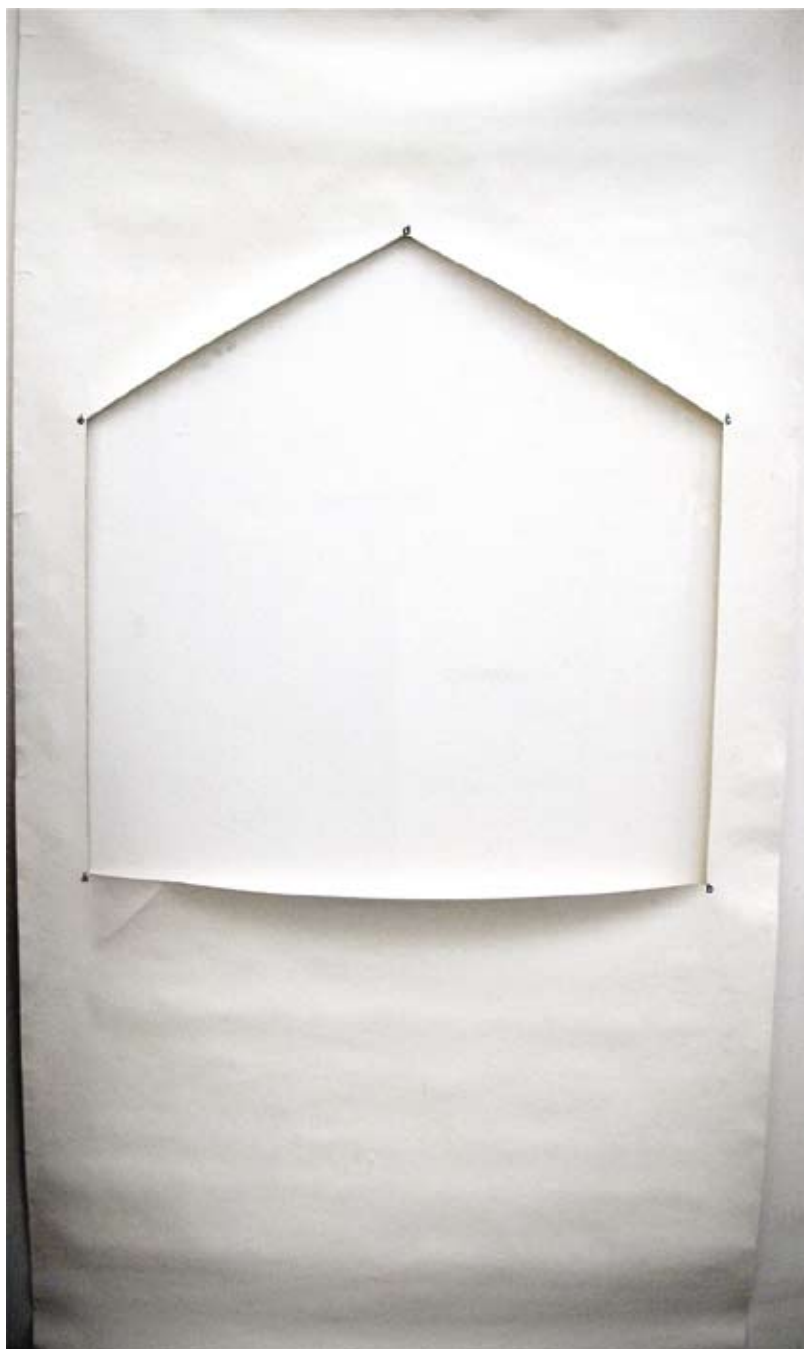
[Bachelard p38]

Fabrication according to measured drawings (series), 2008 – 2009

Installation

Paper, acrylic paint, vinyl cut text, wood, steel castors, fake grass, string





memory” and home or notions of home are creased and folded into much of what Reaney knows and understands.¹

Colin Reaney uses text in much of his work. These texts are there not so much to explain the work, but more to “sight” his references—these are the materials he “draws on” when creating work. He believes there is nothing more enjoyable or memorable than to meet someone in a text.

Colin G Reaney was lecturer in charge of sculpture/3D studio in the Visual & Performing Arts program at Nanyang Technological University, Singapore for over eight years, before taking up a position in 2008 as Assistant Professor and Head of the Fine Arts Program at the College of Fine Arts & Design, University of Sharjah, United Arab Emirates. Previously, Reaney had taught sculpture at the University of Southern Queensland (1989-1995), the Academy of the Arts at the Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane (1996-1999). He also worked in the Creative and Visual Arts programs at Griffith University in Brisbane and Gold Coast, Australia. He has been a guest lecturer in universities across Australia, the USA, Europe and the Asia/Pacific region. Over the last two decades, Reaney has exhibited widely and been involved in many art collaborative projects across Australia and the South East Asia region in particular, with artist-residencies in France, Italy, China, England and the USA.

¹ Deleuze, Gilles. *The fold: Leibniz and the baroque*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press (1993).

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Curated by
Meredith Brice

21 October – 21 November, 2009
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Contributors

Dr. Jochen Sokoly
Dr. Andrew Simpson
Meredith Brice
Stephen Copland
Karee S Dahl
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The artists thank the VCUQatar Gallery Committee for their generous support in organizing this exhibition.

The exhibition is scheduled to be shown at the art gallery of Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia in 2011.

Virginia Commonwealth University
in Qatar
Doha, Qatar
www.qatar.vcu.edu



Macquarie University
Division of Environmental & Life Sciences
Sydney, NSW, Australia
www.mq.edu.au



ISBN 978-1-934253-14-4



VCUQatar

V i r g i n i a C o m m o n w e a l t h U n i v e r s i t y

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