

1/ Kirsten Coehlo, foreground: *oil can, cup, funnel, bottle, bowl*, 2012, porcelain objects, dimensions variable (tallest 28cm); background: *Dreams of Leaving*, 2012; four photographs on photographic paper of ceramic shards from new Royal Adelaide Hospital site, North Terrace; SA Museum collection; 80 x 60cm each; image courtesy the artist, Helen Gory Gallery, Melbourne, and BMGArt, Adelaide

2/ Nici Cumpston, background left: *Settlement View*, 2011- 2012, archival ink-jet print on canvas, hand-coloured with synthetic polymer paint, 65 x 175cm each; background right: *Shards*, 2012, archival ink-jet print on canvas, hand-coloured with synthetic polymer paint, 65 x 175 cm each; images courtesy the artist and Gallerysmith, Melbourne; foreground, *in vitrine*: shards from stone tool-making practices, and fragments of rock, from Barkindji Country, NSW; collected and photographed by the artist; images of ancient rock art sites in Mutawintji National Park and a major stone tool-making workshop, Barkindji Country, NSW; photographed by the artist



## Build me a city | Cry me a river

LISA HARMS

The opening of *Build me a city* was crowded; my first view one of surprisingly close proximity: standing in the entrance waiting for a gap to move inside, I literally brushed up against Nicholas Folland's *Threshold (keys)* (2012). This work was displayed – a long, metallic, cluster – held tenuously in place by one single key in an unlocked padlock, dangling poised and weighty in the barrel bolt of the open gallery door. It hangs still, at the back of my mind, summoning multiple, displaced motifs bustling at the edge of recognition: a seething wasp-nest, a foxtail trophy, a bristly shining teardrop. Its cool (wryly hysterical) tone presents, at the threshold, an index of sorts: pointing to the ambiguous affects that may proliferate upon opening an archive.

*Build me a city* was premised upon the creative potential of such an opening. Each of the seven participating artists was invited by curator Vivonne Thwaites to explore the archive of UniSA's Architecture Museum: '... to reflect on place and history ... drawing out particular nuances in items that may otherwise have languished'.<sup>1</sup> Essayist Ruth Fazakerley draws attention to the eclectic mix of material held in this 'growing' archive and frames the artistic responses against disputes concerning art's status and boundaries, and the constructive entanglement of such disputes in broader debates about history and memory. She points to a contemporary desire for both articulation and transformation whereby '... the authority which attaches (or

fails to attach) to particular documents and narratives [ ... works] to appropriate, reveal, contest or reconfigure ... new orders of affective association ... both difficult and absurd'.<sup>2</sup>

Lisa Slade gave the opening speech, grounding the scope, context and tone of associations evident across the project: 'Archives as the repositories of materials, records, memories and much more reflect the imperial processes of invasion and dispossession but they can also reveal narratives of resilience and resistance'.<sup>3</sup> She pointed to the (poignantly) imperious tone of the project title offering another as its echoed double: *Build me a city | Cry me a river*. Like Folland's clustered keys this comment persists in my memory, registering layered contours of feeling both difficult and absurd. *Cry me a river* is a 'torch song'. It articulates the residual (archival) force of both love and betrayal; it mixes refusal, rebuke and remembrance ... unfolds with a certain incendiary – improvised – grandeur. It is beautiful ... blue.

Nici Cumpston's response – a tangential refusal – is drawn from outside the Museum's archive, articulating other collective modes of knowledge, memory, and authority. Her panoramic hand-coloured photographs reflect on the cultural stories and custodial obligations of her Barkindji family to their ancestral country in New South Wales. A solitary female figure stands in *Settlement View* (2011-2012) looking toward station houses, whilst in the foreground of *Shards* (2012) thousands of fragments

are scattered on the ground: the remnants of Indigenous tool-making. Below is a vitrine, containing rock shards and snapshots of country. These works set out to raise awareness of the ancient and ongoing occupation of country by Aboriginal people.<sup>4</sup> Within the framed expanse of the photographs the red earth opens out to a translucent blue sky shot with pink, sun-washed clouds.

There are shards in Kirsten Coehlo's *Dreams of Leaving* (2012), photographed in portrait-format: the earth-stained, broken remains of dinnerware – floating on soft cloud-grey grounds – emblazoned with the blue-and-white patterns of colonial desire. These were installed alongside a row of Coehlo's exquisitely crafted porcelain versions of enamel items bought to '... replace fine china in working class households'. Glazed blooms of iron – material echoes of rusting edges – evoke 'the dislocation and disillusion encountered by some of the first settlers of the inner Adelaide area'.<sup>5</sup> The work also refers – by virtue of its serene style, and the evident dedication required to attain such style – to Asian-inspired British ceramic traditions, demonstrating the care-full folding and re-fashioning of one cultural form into another.

Folland's *Cats Cradle* (2012) bridges high corners: a quiet memorial to the imaginative play of re-construction, and to the complexities of both structure and intent that ubiquitously frame: the efforts of architecture, the child's game, and the spiders web. These works were echoed spatially by Sandra Selig's projection *Continuous Corner* (2012) which casts bright, white, geometric shapes: re-plays the movement of the sun across a folded surface. Selig paired the projections with two, low-hung, photographed domestic interiors from the archive. Framed in dull silver, shot in black-and-white, the images hover dark, alchemical; their furnished empty spaces a blank façade against which the bright lights slide shifting.

Sera Waters and Lily Hibberd both presented works executed with a moving mix of energy: cool critical distance layered with shades of (hysterical) merger and undertones – soft and sharp, light and dark – of irony. Waters used a text on gothic architecture from the archive's library to fuel an escalating series of embroidered 'knotty' sculptures referring to an imagined gothic 'spire' as iconic index for all manner of 'aspirations'. *Spire for one (listening to the light)* (2012) is a shade fabricated from transparent film, cut and stitched in a manner that recalls '70s macramé, suburban lounge rooms, and 'rose-stained' glass windows; out of which sound softly spills. Standing on the wood-grain lino circle below it, the viewer/listener may bathe in cast light. Steps must be mounted to view the portal/centre of *The sun connection* (2011-2012), a video montage shining amidst a (sun-burst) circle of blinding, tirelessly complex stitching. Adjacent, *Ectoplasmic ancestors* (2012) suggestively positioned the viewer, in front of a curved black mirror, to witness their own countenance complete with spewing fabricated ectoplasm. The illusion is replicated in portraits of herself and her grandfather, each with its own ghostly, collaged, ectoplasmic trail.

*Coup de Soleil* (2012) presents a performative process in which Hibberd's own (doubled) subjectivity merges with that of a certain (missing) individual whose scantily documented, nominal presence leads her trailing through the darker spaces of Adelaide's past, mapping the 'cosmic logic' of the city's early institutions. The placement of these revolved, she suggests, around an Antipodean fear of the sun. Hibberd installs a series of posters, sculptural light/sun-shades, and three volumes detailing a trajectory, traced – as movement from sunrise to sunset – that recalls a woman by virtue of her public record: incarcerated in a lunatic cell to remedy a case of sunstroke at the age of



Lily Hibberd, *Coup de Soleil*, 2012, paper sun-hoods, olive oil extracted from olive trees at Adelaide Gaol site, bound books, poster prints and video; dimensions variable; image courtesy the artist and Galerie de Roussan, Paris

eighteen and later conscripted to labour in the olive groves that flanked its grounds.<sup>6</sup> A video loop rhythmically sweeps the ground, marking time, its cast globe – rimmed in brilliant blue – periodically eclipsing, and eclipsed by, the circular rim of a standing font. This vessel is filled with a pool of oil, pressed from olives Hibberd has harvested from the still-standing groves, in a collective re-enactment of un-remarked ‘convict’ labour. On opening night, visitors were invited to sample the oil using tasting strips. I left the gallery with the pungent flavor – acrid, golden, mellow – infusing my senses.

I returned, another day, to listen to Jacobus Capone’s *DIVERTIMENTI (momentary memoriam for an unknown house)* (2012) in the solitary quiet of the empty gallery. Capone has made line drawings based on a set of architectural blueprints, *Sketches for an unknown house, at an unknown location*, from the Benko collection, held in the archive. His abstractions, offered to composer Tiffany Alison Ha, are in turn translated into a sound piece: a joint attempt to embody the works’ archival title by ‘making them disappear’. The sound piece plays (by turns distinct and barely audible) under a table on which the ‘censored’ score is laid out.<sup>7</sup> This ensemble work was paired with a blown-up version of a tiny, un-named snapshot, also from the Benko collection: a fun fair at night. ‘PARCO DIVERTIMENTI’ is spelt out in the star-strung globes that illuminate the fair’s lifting, liting, edges. ‘Divertimenti’ (Italian for ‘diversions’) also denotes a style of music used in theatre to shift the mood in the interval between acts ... the notes: bright, escaping from the confines and censures of the known, floating – evanescent – a light.

1. Vivonne Thwaites, ‘Introduction’, exhibition catalogue, *Build me a city*, Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide: The Architecture Museum, School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia, 2012.
2. Ruth Fazakerley, ‘Technologies of the Future: memory, history, and the archive’; *ibid*, p. 4-5.
3. Email communication with the curator.
4. Nici Cumpston, *ibid*, p. 15.
5. Kirsten Coehlo, *ibid*, p. 12.
6. Lily Hibberd, *ibid*, p. 18.
7. Jacobus Capone, *ibid*, p. 10.



Jacobus Capone, *DIVERTIMENTI (momentary memoriam for an unknown house)*, 2012, mixed media installation incorporating sound composed by Tiffany Alison Ha; dimensions variable, soundtrack 6:06min; image courtesy the artist

All images this article are installation views of *Build me a city*, AEAf, 2012; photos: Grant Hancock

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Image: Carsten Höller, *Giant Triple Mushrooms*, 2010. Polyester paint, synthetic resin, acrylic paint, wire, putty, polyurethane, rigid foam, and stainless steel, dimensions variable. Courtesy New Museum, New York and Gagosian Gallery, New York. Photograph Benoit Palley.

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