



AART.BOXX an Accessible Arts initiative presents

FRAMING GRAVITY

SCA Gallery, Sydney College of the Arts, the University of Sydney
21 October - 5 November 2011

FRAMING GRAVITY

Recent works by contemporary Australian artists with disability

21 October - 5 November 2011

Catalogue essay Megan Garrett-Jones

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Cover image Scott Trevelyan *Bee'n a Tough Day Honey!* 2010

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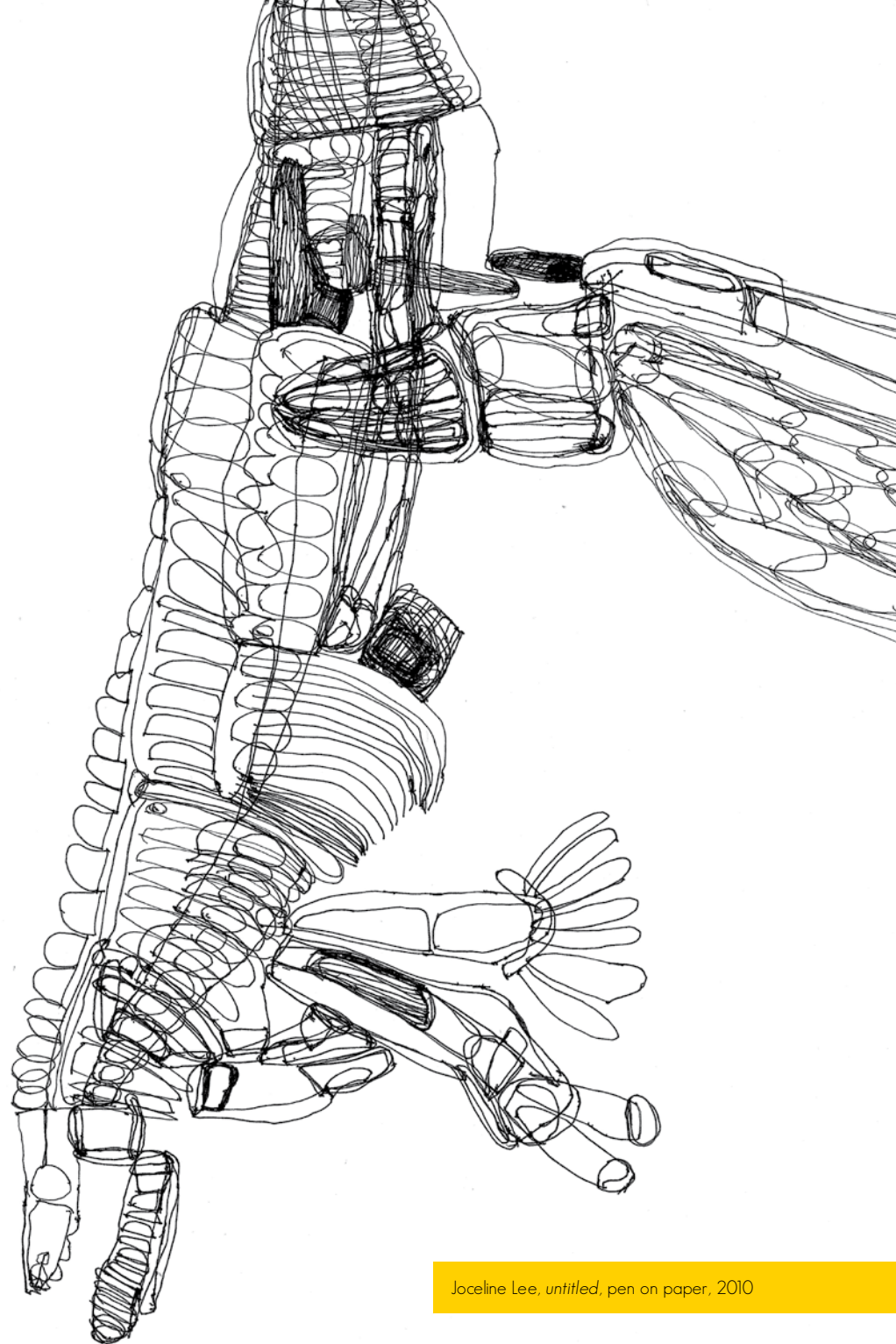


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Accessible Arts is the peak arts and disability organisation across New South Wales. Our mission: To promote full inclusion, access and cultural opportunities in the arts for people with disabilities through advocacy, education and information.

www.aarts.net.au



Joceline Lee, *untitled*, pen on paper, 2010



contributors

Artists

James Ackhurst
Clarrice Collien
Georgia Cranko
John Demos
Joceline Lee
Kevin Meagher
Ana Nguyen
Lisa Reid
Red Day at the Cake Factory
Kristy Sweeney
Scott Trevelyan
Carla Wherby
Steven Worrell
Bowman Yu

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Accessible Arts staff and volunteers

AART.BOXX committee

A collective of advocates and critical thinkers with the aim to learn, contribute and foster inclusion in the arts through the development of this exhibition.

Nicholas Kelly
Helen Machalias
Jessica Miller
Tony Nicholas
Diana Robson
Rebecca Scrioli
Rhea Shortus
Jennifer Stockins
Carolyn Teo

Carla Wherby, *War on Women* series,
pen and texta on paper, 2011



Right: Bowman Yu, *G.I. Joe the Movie*, video still, 2010
Far right: John Demos, work in progress (detail), 2010

essay

The act of framing is the original impulse for art-making; transforming the forces of nature, the “cosmic material”,¹ through the creative act of selection and elaboration. These abundant forces ask for “demarcation, enframement, containment in order for qualities as such to emerge, to live, and to induce sensation”.²

Framing Gravity addresses ‘the forces that be’ as factors which do not just impact upon us, but through our interaction with them, define who we are. The creative ‘shaping’ of the world by the artists in the exhibition reveal dedicated artistic processes reinforcing the full spectrum of our experience.

The enjoyment that motivates Clarrice Collien’s work is manifest in the joyous sensations of colours, textures and the playful subject matter. For John Demos, ‘framing’ is the perpetual and systematic organisation of everyday material that becomes his work. Other artists in the exhibition draw overtly on how disability shapes their experience of the world, as in the performances of Georgia Cranko and Ana Nguyen.

The concept of *Framing Gravity* lends a curatorial strength to this exhibition, but also refers to a re-framing of disability, particularly redressing the under representation of people with disability within the Arts sector. Accessible Arts, artist mentors, and supported studios navigate and remove social barriers that make it difficult for some artists with disability to access professional opportunities. Consequently, issues surrounding arts and disability are receiving increasing attention from audiences, artists and cultural institutions. Approaching the works in *Framing Gravity* from beyond the lens of disability, considering them for the unique qualities they offer, reveals a deeper ‘enframement’ of collective experience.

Macquarie Hospital Studios is a supported studio, or Other Academy,³ where Kevin Meagher, James Ackhurst and John Demos make work. These artists share a certain intensity in their creative processes. Meagher makes his ceramic gods in one sitting; slopping glaze over wet clay while creating new channels and hollows for it to run down and pool into.



He might start with an inkling, but the gods are not named until they are finished. The invocation of the God is a performative utterance, it calls into being as it is said, and in the act of creation these magical objects enact their role of healer and guardian.

James Ackhurst has been called a neo-classicist.⁴ Rather than mimesis, classic tales and images merge with his experiences of the everyday. One of the unsettling and compelling elements in his painting is that many of the faces appear to be variations on his self-portraits. When asked why Jesus looked so tired in *The Last Judgement*, Ackhurst replied that he was tired when he painted it. If we view these works as manifestations of complex inner worlds we may also appreciate the logic that sees Ackhurst, Australian painter John Olsen, and starlet Mary-Kate Olsen in the same frame in *Jealousy*.

John Demos is a highly resourceful artist. His work transforms any matter of material he can get his hands on and he makes his paint brushes from found material.



“I’m like a termite to wood”, he says.

Demos will produce an installation of symbols and collected materials that transforms over the duration of the exhibition. In a process of ordering, he draws on the aesthetics and codes of algorithm, physics and scientific experiment to develop his works. Hawkesbury Regional Gallery is supporting the artist through a small grant, with the view of bringing these works ‘off the gallery wall’ and encouraging expanded approaches to art making. The gallery will present AART.BOX in 2013 as part of this initiative. Clarrice Collien has received the same funding to develop her ‘window wire’ tapestry practice in a new direction. She has constructed sculptures from kindling and wool that suggest new

...these magical objects
enact their role of
healer and guardian.



Left: Georgia Cranko, *Just Because*, video still, 2010
 Right: James Ackhurst, *Jealously*, acrylic on canvas 2010

possibilities for her continued interest in simple narratives that feature animals, people and place.

A focus on redressing misconceptions about disability shapes the works of Georgia Cranko and Ana Nguyen. Cranko collaborated with video artist Michelle Dennis and performer Georgie Read to create pieces that frame everyday tasks, including the act of communication. She reclaims her agency in controlling the way she is looked at, effectively subverting the gaze. Uncompromisingly she dispels myths regarding being non-verbal. Nguyen uses the genre of hip-hop in a poignant form to express her anger and frustration. Hip-hop's convention of self-aggrandisement becomes useful for empowerment. Nguyen makes claim to the list of people she has trained with as "all the other big names in the world", and talks about herself as the face of the 2010 Don't DIS my ABILITY campaign as:

"earning the deepest respect due to the fact the public loved her so much [...] and she wants to prove that there were no restrictions, no limits in doing so despite the challenges that she has faced all of her life".⁵

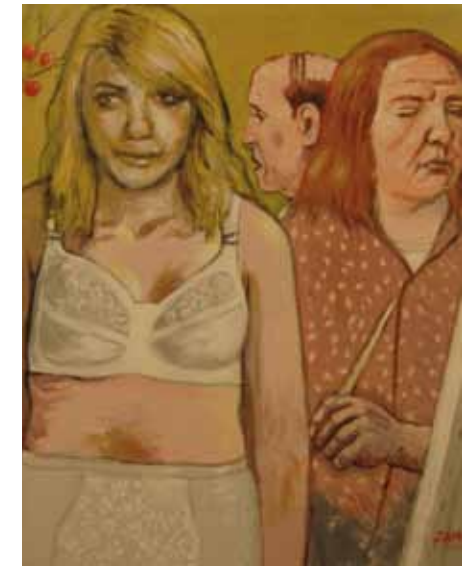
An engagement with pop-culture, history and politics informs many of the works in *Framing Gravity*. Bowman Yu's *G.I. Joe the Movie* invokes the creative world of fandom and DIY recreation. It speaks more about the creator than the original text, reminiscent of the recreations that charmed everyone in Michel Gondry's film *Be Kind Rewind*, except the holders of copyright. In the dedicated video room, we also see the collaborative work *Red Day at the Cake Factory*. This silent short film frames the unravelling of a factory line as the impetus for playful acting out.⁶

Images evoking the weight of history and contemporary culture appear in pen and text in Carla Wherby's *The War on Women* series. These intricate drawings suggest a multitude of narratives that resist easy representations of victimhood, while revealing the artist's concern with social and political inequality. Scott Trevelyan's innovative technique of incorporating the systems of beehives into printmaking explores the increasing politicisation of nature. Discourse around the worrying decline in bee populations has largely focused on what bees offer human populations: product (honey), service (pollination) and now as a litmus test for the state of the environment. Trevelyan repositions this relationship by calling on the bees as co-creators and revealing the value and beauty in their autonomous systems.

Bodies can be seen as highly politicised sites, especially in regard to disability. In exploration of this idea, many contemporary artists have sought to undo the notion of a 'normative body'. Anatomy is rearranged and mixed with poetry to become a site for storytelling in Kristy Sweeney's drawings. Joceline Lee's hyperbolic drawings of skeletons, informed by her recent residency at the Melbourne Museum's Palaeontology Collection, gives the animals an abundance of bones to make up for the flesh they lack, creating patterns and a logic unto themselves.

Lisa Reid and Steven Worrell take up Eadweard Muybridge's fascination with movement in their work, developed through Arts Project Australia's animation

program. *Bird Walking* by Reid offers a more subjective experience of movement than Muybridge's scientific and anatomical studies which led to the development of a cinematographic time, presenting motion as a series of still frames. In Reid and Worrell's work, the impression of movement happens alongside a transformation of the subject from one frame to the next, betraying the illusion of cinema, animation, and even traditional notions of linear time.



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AART.BOXX establishes itself as a pathway for the artists represented to achieve further professional opportunities. It also works as a stepping-stone to an ideal world in which a wealth of cultural organisations work alongside disability networks to ensure widespread inclusion in the Arts. Looking beyond the mainstream trajectories of emerging and professional artists in curatorial, critical and viewing practices holds a promise to enrich our cultural landscape. This is evident in the calibre of works showcased by *Framing Gravity*. The framing of these artists' experiences through the processes of art making and exhibiting reveals artists with disability as a vibrant cultural and political force.

Megan Garrett-Jones is a Sydney based performance maker and writer.

Below: Lisa Reid, *Bird Walking*, animation still, 2010

Right: Kristy Sweeney, *Internal Organ* series, pencil on paper, 2010

Back cover: Clarrice Collien, untitled, kindling, wool, 2011

¹ Elizabeth Grosz, 'Chaos, Territory, Art: Deleuze and the Framing of the Earth', Columbia University Press, 2008.

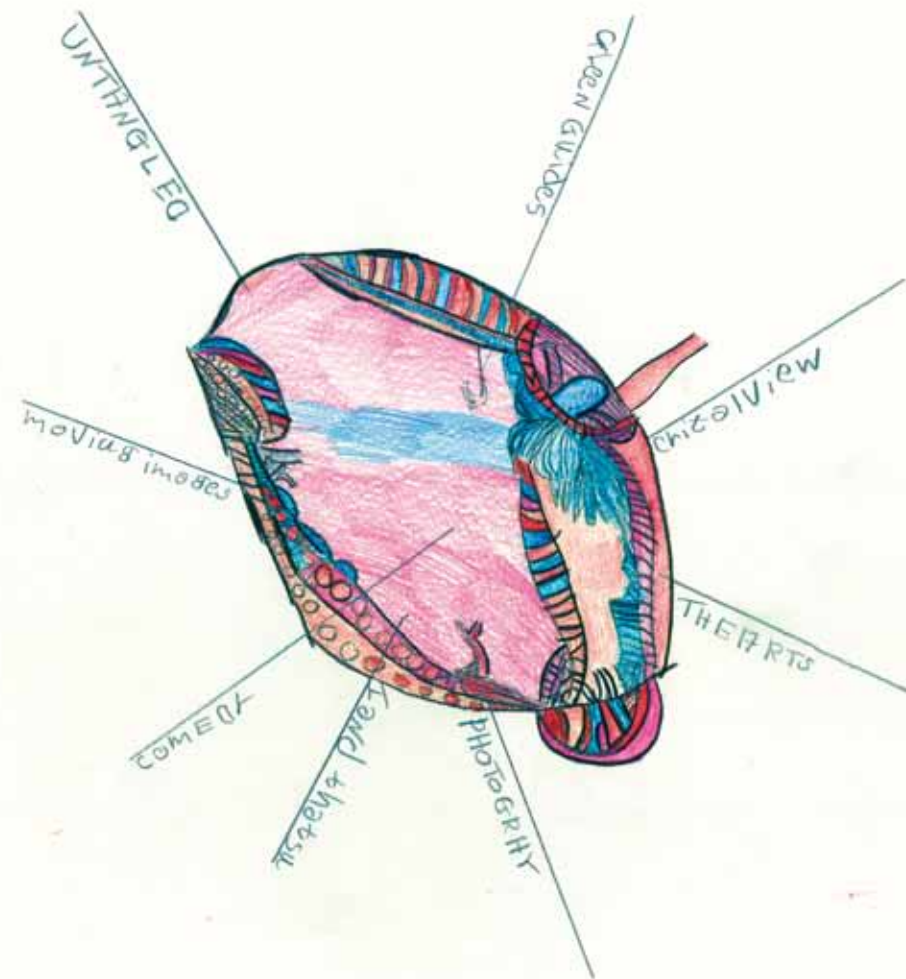
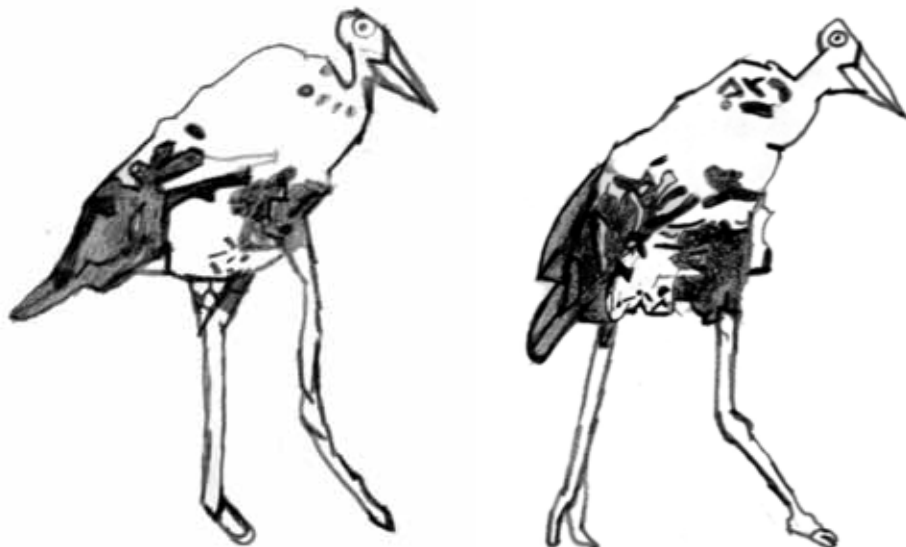
² Ibid.

³ Hugh Nichols borrows this term from the essay 'An other academy: Creative workshops for artists with intellectual disabilities' (Colin Rhodes, 2008) as the title of his online specialised studio research project. www.otheracademies.com

⁴ Hugh Nichols, 'James Ackhurst: A Modern Neoclassicist', catalogue essay for Inside Out Gallery, 2010.

⁵ www.scorcherfest.com.au/band/profile/318-0679-GRW (accessed 15/08/11)

⁶ Red Day at the Cake Factory differs from other works as it is largely driven by the facilitators, but nonetheless gives young people with a disability a chance to take on roles as actors and collaborators.



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