

**School of Design and Art
Department of Art**

Challenging Placelessness: Site-Specific Art within the Gallery

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Declaration

To the best of my knowledge and belief this thesis contains no material previously published by any other person except where due acknowledgment has been made.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university.

Signature:

Date: 2 November 2015

Abstract

This practice-led research project investigates ways of challenging contemporary notions of placelessness through the production and installation of site-specific artworks within art gallery spaces. Centred on my own art practice, the project draws on the genealogy of site-specific art practice, selected artworks by contemporary artists working in the field of site-specific art practice and theory relating to notions of place and placelessness to re-examine the contemporary art gallery as a site for the production and exhibition of site-specific artworks.

The term placeless is used in two different ways throughout this exegesis: firstly, in relation to the contemporary art gallery, as a means to describe current uses of the gallery as a 'non-place'; and secondly, in relation to contemporary art practice, as a means to describe the production of artworks that pass through the gallery space intermittently, en route to elsewhere. Placelessness is identified as a characteristic of contemporary discursive site-specific art practice, which has seen understandings of site expand beyond physical location.

The project encompasses a series of separate, but interrelated bodies of artwork that I have made in response to different art gallery contexts. These gallery spaces include a commercial gallery, a government funded institution in a heritage-listed building, a purpose built Artist Run Initiative (ARI) gallery, a non-purpose built ARI gallery, and a major public art gallery.

By focusing on the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional conditions specific to these art gallery spaces, and producing artworks that may reveal, expose and illuminate these conditions, the project aims to explore alternatives to the production of artwork in one place and its exhibition in another, and to the use of the art gallery as a 'non-place'. I present the methods of space auditing, participant observation and the production of both temporary and permanent 'renditions' as new ways of directly engaging with the specificities and particularities of the art gallery as a place within my site-specific art practice.

This exegesis explores the implications of this research project more broadly, in terms of its contribution to the discourse of contemporary site-specific art practice. In addition it assesses the implications of this practice-led research for the continued development of my art practice.

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Introduction // Challenging Placelessness: Site-Specific Art within the Gallery



In mid-2004 I travelled to Como, Italy to participate in the 10th Fondazione Antonio Ratti Corso Superiore di Arti Visive, an intensive visual arts course for international emerging artists. Along with the other twenty-four selected participating artists, I made Como my home for about a month while I engaged in daily activities and workshops under the tutelage of a Visiting Professor, American Cherokee artist Jimmie Durham.¹

At the beginning of each day, I walked from my shared apartment in Como overlooking the Duomo, to the industrial outskirts of town, meeting the other participants inside the cavernous space of the ex-Ticosa building. There, we would drag plastic chairs into the centre of the building's concrete floor to form a large circle (Figure i). Jimmie's arrival would mark the commencement of the day's lectures, discussions and workshops before we dedicated time to developing our own individual projects in the afternoon. After a long lunch one day, towards the end of the first week, Jimmie called for us to form our usual morning chair circle. As I sat slumped in a food induced semi-comatose

1. Jimmie Durham was born in Arkansas in the USA but he frequently moves from one city to the next to live and work. Jimmie's American Cherokee heritage, as well as his nomadic lifestyle, has contributed to his focus on drawing meaning from the place that he is situated in at any given moment.

state, Jimmie began to describe an activity that involved us all sitting in a space, an empty car park, for the afternoon, in the middle of the mid-July summer's day. If we felt like writing or drawing, we were encouraged to do so, but the most important thing for us to do was focus our attention on the small space in front of us and take in everything that it offered up. Jimmie's kind, wrinkled face broke into a huge knowing grin at the end of each sentence, as he informed us of how we were to spend the afternoon.

It sounded to me like some sort of test of endurance or an exercise in mindfulness; a test of my ability to focus on one thing for a long period of time. I remember feeling incredulous as Jimmie assured us that what we were about to do would pay dividends when it came time to put on the exhibition in the run down concrete shell of the ex-Ticosa building at the end of the course. His parting words to us were, 'Remember, anything that you don't notice will conspire to work against you.' That afternoon, which started out with me rolling my eyes, has become a moment in time that marked a significant shift in the way that I view not only my art practice, but also the world. The last remark Jimmie uttered would ring true for me from that moment on.

Inattentively ripping a few sheets of paper from my notebook and slipping a pencil into the back pocket of my cut-off jeans, I shuffled outside and into the glare of the midday Italian summer sun. 'What is Jimmie playing at?' I wondered moodily, collapsing down to the ground. With my bare legs sticking to the bitumen beneath me I began to stare at the seemingly empty space directly in front of me. I continued to stare. An ant scuttled across my field of vision; navigating its tiny way through, what I assumed was for it, rough terrain. I watched it move over terracotta-coloured pea-sized granules of gravel, and around chips and chunks of alabaster quartz jutting out from the grimy road base like the tips of icebergs. With the warm breeze ruffling the corners of the paper nestled in my lap and the constant purr of cars racing along Via Roosevelt behind me, I followed the path of the ant with my eyes...

What must have been hours later, although it felt like just a few minutes, Jimmie called out to us from the corner of the car park (Figure ii). At that moment the spell was broken. As I lifted my gaze, I found the others similarly looking around in a

concentration-induced daze. One by one we stood up and slowly made our way back inside, the sting of the now-setting sun having coloured our cheeks.

Jimmie's exercise taught me the importance of spending time getting to know a place, in order to gain a deep understanding of its particularities and idiosyncrasies, as a way of overcoming first impressions or preconceptions – things that may work against you. The car park became, in a way, just as astounding and captivating as the picturesque Italian Lake District in which it was situated.

The next day, still marvelling at what I had managed to notice in the seemingly empty space of the car park, I undertook a similar activity inside the ex-Ticosa building, where we would be hosting our exhibition. My first impression of this space was that it was empty; a blank slate, devoid of anything that would impact in any way upon the artwork that I would make. But then I began to notice that the ex-Ticosa's walls were nothing like the smooth white painted vertical planes that I was accustomed to seeing in art gallery spaces; they were made of cinderblock bricks, mid-grey and pitted, with the pointing worn away in places. The space designated for my artwork to be shown in was located down one end of the building, in a windowless 'dead end'. Despite the burning heat outside, it was dark and cool inside the building. The light was particularly dim where my artwork would be situated. The bricks were wet to touch and a darker shade of grey in places; it looked a lot like rising damp. I hadn't initially taken any of this into account when I first started thinking about making the artwork for the exhibition that was due to open in a few weeks. Now that I could see what the space actually was, I realised that Jimmie was absolutely right. Everything that I didn't notice about the space would conspire to work against me. I decided to respond to the bricked-up, dimly lit, clammy conditions of the ex-Ticosa; what I now was able to notice about the gallery space would drive and direct the process of making the artwork.

I started making artwork about noticing, and about the particularities of the gallery space.





Figure i. Workshop with Jimmie Durham in the ex-Ticosa, Como, Italy, 2004. Photograph by the artist.



Figure ii. Sitting in the car park, Como, Italy, 2004. Photograph by the artist.

This practice-led research project investigates ways of challenging contemporary notions of placelessness through the production and installation of site-specific artworks within art gallery spaces. The project comprises of a series of separate, but interrelated, bodies of artwork, each made in response to a different art gallery context. Collectively these bodies of artwork constitute the practice-led component of this thesis. I have selected distinct types of art galleries to respond to, as a way of testing the viability of different creative methods developed and employed within my site-specific art practice. These gallery spaces include a commercial gallery (Gallery East), a government funded institution in a heritage-listed building (the Fremantle Arts Centre), a purpose built Artist Run Initiative (ARI) gallery (Moana Project Space), a non-purpose built ARI gallery (Sydney Non Objective) and a major public art gallery (John Curtin Gallery). Drawing from the genealogy of site-specific art practice, examining selected artworks by contemporary artists, and theory relating to notions of place and placelessness, this exegesis functions to analyse the implications of my practice-led research for the development of my creative practice. Moreover, I explore the implications of this research project more broadly, and its contribution to the discourse of contemporary site-specific art practice.

Any built environment in which artworks are exhibited can warrant being called a 'gallery', or 'museum'. While historically distinctions have been made between the art gallery and the art museum,² the various historical, economic and cultural conditions that distinguish galleries from museums are not of concern to this research project. Instead, my attention and activity is directed toward environments that have been purpose built, or pre-existing buildings that are understood and accepted as places in which artworks are exhibited. These spaces are what I refer to as the 'gallery', 'art gallery', 'art gallery space' or the 'contemporary art gallery' throughout this exegesis. Revealing, exposing and illuminating the aesthetic and ideological specificities of these spaces through the production of site-specific artworks is an objective of this research project.

2. Artist Daniel Buren asserts some of these distinctions in his essay "The Function of the Museum" (1973). More recently, art historian Charlotte Klonk has outlined the functional and ideological differences between art galleries and art museums in a publication entitled *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (2009).

Deciphering and examining the many and varied definitions of ‘space’ and ‘place’ has been the focus of numerous studies and publications in the fields of philosophy, geography, anthropology, archaeology, architecture and politics. Extensive discussion concerning the various definitions of these terms in each field is beyond the scope of this project. A definition of my understanding of these terms and how they are being used within this exegesis is as follows: I use the word ‘space’ to refer to the volume enveloped and defined by the presence of a built architectural form. My use of the term ‘place’, and by extension, the terms ‘placeful’, ‘placeless’ and ‘placelessness’, are more complex, and I refer to the writings of Marc Augé, Peter Osborne and Edward Relph throughout the exegesis to further elaborate on how I use these terms. In the following sections I will explain what I mean by the term placelessness in relation to the contemporary art gallery, and how I aim to challenge contemporary notions of placelessness through this research project. Central to this discussion is the writing of Relph, who suggests that “the antithesis of place is placelessness, a sort of non-place quality manifest in uniformity, standardisation and disconnect from context. If a place is somewhere, placelessness could be anywhere” (2008, 312).

The term placeless is used in two different ways throughout this exegesis: firstly in relation to the contemporary art gallery, as a means to describe the perpetuation of the gallery as a ‘non-place’³; and secondly in relation to contemporary art practice, as a means to describe the production of artworks that pass through the gallery space intermittently, en route to elsewhere. I understand artworks of this kind to be placeless. Throughout this research project I develop and use various methods to investigate the potential for creating more placeful artworks within art gallery contexts. My use and understanding of the term placeful to describe my artwork has evolved throughout the project, moving from artworks that are physically bound or irremovable from the gallery space, to artworks that reveal, expose or illuminate a gallery’s architectural and ideological specificities without necessarily being physically tied to the site.

3. My use of the term ‘non-place’ is informed by ideas raised by anthropologist Marc Augé and critic Peter Osborne and will be explained in more detail in Chapter One.

Site-specific art refers to an “artist’s intervention in a specific locale” (Guggenheim Museum 2015). A site-specific artwork “is integrated with its surroundings and [...] explores its relationship to the topography of its locale” whether that locale be an art gallery or elsewhere (Guggenheim Museum 2015, para. 1). According to the Guggenheim Museum website, “site-specific art is meant to become part of its locale, and to restructure the viewer’s conceptual and perceptual experience of that locale through the artist’s intervention” (2015, para. 1). In returning home from Italy in 2004, I continued to make artworks that responded to sites, physical locations or places, and I became increasingly engaged with the materiality, architecture and atmospheric conditions of art gallery spaces. I have identified my art practice as site-specific ever since.

Graduating from Honours in 2008 meant leaving the Plaster Room⁴ of Curtin’s School of Design and Art behind, the place that until that time much of my artwork was informed by and envisaged for (*Figure iii*). I spent the next couple of years developing artwork for various local and national exhibitions. The opportunities that I was afforded to exhibit interstate, meant that making artwork in response to the conditions particular to a given gallery space became difficult. I wasn’t always familiar with the gallery space and in some instances I had not even visited it. My practice became increasingly reliant on fleeting encounters with interstate gallery spaces, images of spaces seen online and floor plans sent via email. Even for the galleries I made work for in Perth, the city in which I was based, my engagement was limited to visiting these spaces sporadically. Through a slow but steady process of erosion, the formerly paramount relationship between my artwork and its site slowly dissipated, and my work became increasingly placeless; made here and shown there.

One afternoon in 2010 I wrote:

I’m balled up on a filthy old couch that my friends and I dragged up the once majestic, now dilapidated jarrah staircase that leads to our shared

4. The Plaster Room is an installation space located in the Sculpture Department of the School of Design and Art at Curtin University.



Figure iii. Shannon Lyons, Honours examination installation, Plaster Room, Curtin University, Perth, 2008. Photograph by the artist.

first floor inner-city studio. My laptop's perched somewhat precariously on my left thigh and I'm typing an email to a curator based in Sydney with one hand. The work I have made for an exhibition in Sydney, for a gallery that I have never been to, is in transit somewhere between here and 'over there'. She's worried the work won't arrive in time for the opening. Stacked up on the pallet construction we use as communal work table are cardboard boxes full of materials and tools; I'm moving out of the studio tomorrow, the landlord's jacked up the rent on us again and I just can't justify paying a quarter of what he seems to think it's worth any longer. The others will be moving out just as soon as they find alternate studio spaces they can afford. Andrew starts packing the bowl of his shisha pipe in the meticulous way that I've come to appreciate since being here. The familiar scent of green apple fills the air as the late afternoon sounds of the city mingle with the soft gurgling noises emitted from the pipe whenever he takes a drag. At this moment in time, I feel like I couldn't be any further away from the experiences I had in the car park and inside the ex-Ticosa, in Como. I am in a studio in a run-down building, in one of the most isolated capital cities in the world, and I've been making artworks for elsewhere for quite some time.

This project is in part a reaction to my dissatisfaction with the position that I found myself in, and the way that my so-called site-specific practice had been disconnected from a meaningful investigation into place and my immediate location and situation. Suddenly being studio-less prompted me to reassess my way of working, and provided an opportunity to resist the production of discrete, self-contained objects for exhibition *elsewhere*. Undertaking this research project has, for me, marked a return to the creation of artwork that is contingent on physical engagement with a site.

Three of the four art galleries that I have chosen to work with, and *in*, for this project are located in Perth, Western Australia.⁵ I was born and continue to live in Perth, so

5. The fifth and final gallery encountered as part of this project is the John Curtin Gallery. The John Curtin Gallery is the venue offered to students by the School of Design and Art for the examination of the creative component of their PhD practice-led research projects.

the selection of art galleries to work with has, to a point, been dictated by pragmatics, shaped by my ability to access the galleries and their proximity to my location. Deciding to focus on art galleries located in Perth also marked a re-direction of my creative practice from places 'over there', to the place of my immediate locale.

My approach to producing artworks in response to specific galleries situated in Perth is, in part, informed by my lived experience of these spaces, and my associated memories of past events, conversations and exhibitions witnessed within them. Writer Lucy Lippard suggests that lived experience is vital when considering "the subject of place" (1997b, 5), and defines place as "the external world mediated through human subjective experience" (1997b, 7). Lippard goes on to describe a place as a "layered location replete with human histories and memories" and acknowledges that it is "local knowledge that distinguishes every place from every other place" (1997b, 7). In this way my production of site-specific artworks as part of this project is informed by the architectural and ideological specificities of selected art gallery spaces, as well as my own local knowledge, memory and lived experiences of these spaces. In addition to my lived experiences of particular art gallery spaces, selected literature on site-specific practice and key artworks made by a number of international site-specific practitioners inform the discussion of artworks produced as part of this project.

Also contributing to the impetus of this project is a personal resistance to what I consider to be a current culture of placelessness, reflected in the pervasiveness of digital technologies and social media that allow and encourage connectivity to multiple locations simultaneously. The effects of this culture on the production, reception and dissemination of contemporary art is exemplified by online platforms such as VernissageTV Art TV, Contemporary Art Daily and Google Art Project. These digital platforms enable the user to view an exhibition from their living room, or on the bus on their way to work; transporting them from any given context to an art gallery somewhere on the other side of the world.

The presentation of artworks in these online contexts often precludes any reference to the specifics of the physical gallery space the artworks were originally exhibited and documented in. The endless number of exhibitions presented on Contemporary

Art Daily, in particular, works to homogenise the exhibition context; all installation shots reveal pristine, perfectly ‘white-balanced’ bright walls that appear to be smudge free, and the lighting is always impossibly even. In this way the artworks may as well be anywhere, or everywhere. In his seminal text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999) writer Brian O’Doherty identifies similar ploys used by what he has coined the ‘white cube’ art gallery space. In summarising O’Doherty’s assertions, Thomas McEvilley explains:

The white cube was a transitional device that attempted to bleach out the past and at the same time control the future by appealing to supposedly transcendental modes of presence and power. But the problem with transcendental principles is that by definition they speak of another world, not this one. It is this other world, or access to it, that the white cube represents. It is like Plato’s vision of a higher metaphysical realm where form, shinningly attenuated and abstract like mathematics, is utterly disconnected from the life of human experience down below.
(1999, 11)

McEvilley continues, stating that O’Doherty’s arguments are “defences of the real life of the world against the sterilised operating room of the white cube – defences of time and change and the myth of the eternality and transcendence of pure form” (1999, 12). I identify with O’Doherty’s sentiments, and see my practice-led research project as an individual resistance to the homogenisation of place, a celebration of the contingent and mutable nature of the ‘real life of the world’ and a return to a physical and mindful connection with place.

A paradox of this project is that my site-specific artworks appear in the exegesis in the form of photographic documentation, meaning that the majority of my works will inevitably be viewed on a screen, or in print form, and thus not physically experienced in the place I had intended; made in one place and seen in another. It follows that the representative photographic documentation of these works is only able to provide an approximation of experiencing the works within the gallery spaces for which they were made. To aid the presentation of these artworks and further elucidate the

conditions that led to their creation, the exegesis includes a selection of personal written reflections about the places they were made in, and the circumstances under which they were created. Finding an alternative to the production of artworks in one place and their exhibition elsewhere, is addressed creatively through the final body of artwork that will be presented at the John Curtin Gallery for examination.

This exegesis is divided into five chapters, which detail the production and installation of site-specific artworks within various gallery spaces, and outline my intentions for these artworks to challenge contemporary notions of placelessness. The first chapter is a review of selected literature pivotal to this research project, and each subsequent chapter analyses separate bodies of artwork made chronologically in response to different art gallery spaces.

In Chapter One I establish that, historically, the art gallery has been considered an environment devoid of any individualised specificity; a generic and therefore placeless environment (Crimp 1993). I address the ways in which the modernist artwork, and later minimalist artworks were placeless due to the perceived interiority of their meaning, and their ability to be moved from one 'white cube' space to another, without context altering content. Finally, I reveal how the dwindling importance of the 'literal' site in current site-specific art practice has led to what I understand to be the perpetuation of placelessness in relation to the art gallery, and the use of the art gallery as a 'non-place'.

In Chapter Two I identify a correlation between the condition of placelessness and O'Doherty's writings on the 'white cube' contemporary gallery space. Using this correlation, I analyse a body of my artwork made in response to a commercial art gallery. These artworks are discussed as a series of preliminary attempts to undermine the placeless nature of the white cube. As a part of this discussion I draw on an exhibition of artwork by New Zealand artist Fiona Connor to identify a set of characteristics particular to the commercial gallery that I argue are uncondusive to the production of placeful site-specific artwork.

Chapter Three is an analysis of two inter-related creative methods that I have used in the production of a body of artwork made in response to a gallery space at the Fremantle Arts Centre. Firstly, I explain that the 'space audit' method is a written, photographic and audio-visual means of rendering all of the acute conditions specific to a gallery space, as well as a record of my subjective thoughts and feelings toward the space. I explain how I have used this method to produce placeful artworks that reveal the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional details of the gallery space. In addition, I consider the potential for these artworks to allude to the multi-layered history of the Fremantle Art Centre building by drawing attention to particular architectural features.

Secondly, I draw on a number of artworks by Connor to examine the use of 'replication' as a method for producing site-specific artworks within gallery spaces. I explain that this method sees the artist replicate architectural features specific to a given gallery space, and is used as a way to draw attention to these features that may be typically overlooked. In an analysis of a number of my artworks, I refer to the notion of a 'rendition' to describe my use of replication as a method for producing site-specific artworks.

The term 'participant observation' refers to an ethnographic method that involves "a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting" (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte 1999, 91). In Chapter Four I explain my use of participant observation as a method for producing artworks, and I contextualise my use of this method by referring to the practices of artists associated with the Artist Placement Group, as well as Mexican artist Raul Ortega Ayala. I suggest that by working within an art gallery as part of an installation team, I have been able to acquire knowledge specific to the architectural features and institutional procedures of that site. I then explain the ways in which I have used this knowledge to produce a body of site-specific artworks in response to the Moana Project Space art gallery.

Chapter Five is an open-ended exploration of a body of artwork made whilst participating in an artist in residence program at Sydney Non Objective (SNO). Furthermore,

this chapter is a conclusion summarising the research project's significant findings through 'revisiting' a selection of my artworks, and reflecting on these in light of the artworks produced at SNO. I also speculate on the nature of the final exhibition that will constitute the examination of this research project, and how this exhibition may address my objective to challenge placelessness.

This exegesis brings together the theoretical underpinnings, artistic influences and personal experiences that have shaped the production of my bodies of artwork that are central to this research project. My artworks are not intended to illustrate the theoretical and art historical discussions within this exegesis. Whilst these discussions have informed their creation, my artworks exist tangentially from them, and each address possibilities for challenging placelessness, without providing definitive answers.

During modernism the art gallery was perceived as an environment devoid of individualised specificity, and considered by many to be a generic, and therefore placeless environment (Crimp 1993).⁶ In this chapter I draw on seminal texts and artistic practices to outline the varied, and at times problematic, relationship of site-specific art practice to the art gallery space. Firstly, I explain that site-specificity emerged through minimalism as a reaction to the idealism of the modernist artwork, and the idea that “the art object *in and of itself* was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning” (Crimp 1993, 17). I then discuss the ways that minimal site-specific artwork ultimately remains placeless in its propensity to be moved from one gallery space to another, without context altering content. Finally, I reveal how the dwindling

6. Charlotte Klonk’s text *Spaces of Experience: Art Gallery Interiors from 1800 to 2000* (2009) provides a comprehensive overview of the shifts that occurred in Western gallery and exhibition design leading to the emergence of the ‘white cube’ gallery as the ideal space in which to exhibit modern artworks. Brian O’Doherty discusses the impact that this kind of idealised space had on artworks in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999). In *On the Museums Ruins* (1993) Douglas Crimp explains the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the minimalist artworks that questioned the idealism of the modernist art gallery. Crimp’s explanations are re-iterated by Miwon Kwon in *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002).

importance afforded to the 'literal' site within the discourse of contemporary site-specific art practice perpetuates the production of placeless artwork and the use of the gallery as a 'non-place'.

The purpose of this chapter is not to simplify, or distil, the complex history of site-specific art, nor is it to provide a comprehensive survey of the genealogy of site-specific practice. Rather, particular historical and contemporary developments pivotal to this discourse are outlined in establishing the key concepts of the gallery as a non-place and the condition of placelessness, both fundamental to this research project, which focuses specifically on how the production and installation of site-specific artworks within art gallery spaces can challenge contemporary notions of placelessness.

The Development of the 'Site-Specific' Work of Art:

From Modernism to Minimalism

The advent of site-specificity in contemporary art challenged the prevailing hermetic or autonomous nature of modern art. In *On the Museum's Ruins* (1993) art historian Douglas Crimp states that when "site specificity was introduced into contemporary art by minimal artists in the mid-1960s, what was at issue was the idealism of modern sculpture, its engagement of the spectators consciousness with sculpture's own internal set of relationships" (1993, 154). In other words, the meaning of the modernist artwork was located *within* the art object allowing the art object to operate entirely independently of context, location or place. According to Crimp:

The idealism of modernist art, in which the art object in and of itself was seen to have a fixed and transhistorical meaning, determined the object's placelessness, its belonging to no particular place, a no-place that was in reality the museum – the actual museum and the museum as a representation of the institutional system of circulation that also comprises the artist's studio, the commercial gallery, the collector's home, the sculpture garden, the public plaza, the corporate headquarters lobby, the bank vault ... Site specificity opposed that idealism – and unveiled the

material system it obscured – by its refusal of circulatory mobility, its belongingness to a specific site. (1993, 17)

Writer Miwon Kwon echoes Crimp's assertion in her seminal text *One Place after Another: Site-Specific Art and Locational Identity* (2002), suggesting:

If modernist sculpture absorbed its pedestal/base to sever its connection to or express its indifference to the site, rendering itself more autonomous and self-referential, thus transportable, placeless and nomadic, then site-specific works, as they first emerged in the wake of minimalism in the late 1960s and early 1970s, forced a dramatic reversal of this modernist paradigm. (2002, 11)

By ensuring the form and material composition of the site-specific artwork was, at least in part, determined and directed by a physical place, the autonomy of modernist art was overcome through a connection to context (Kwon 2002). Notable American artists associated with minimalism such as Robert Morris, Sol Le Witt and Carl Andre began questioning the neutrality of the art gallery and created artworks that, according to Morris, took "relationships out of the work" making the artwork's content "a function of space, light and the viewer's field of vision" (1993, 15). The advent of site-specificity through minimalism, effectively collapsed the artistic content of an artwork with the context of its display, ensuring that "the coordinates of perception were established as existing not only between the spectator and the work but among spectator, artwork, and the place inhabited by both" (Crimp 1993, 154). The effect this had was to 'ground' the perceiving viewer in place, and directly involve them in the production of meaning of the artwork (Crimp 1993).

As the meaning or content of the site-specific artwork was understood to be contingent on the viewer and the artwork sharing the same space, the physical 'presence' of the viewer became paramount in order for any experience of the artwork to occur (Kwon 2002). Site-specificity implied that a work of art was grounded, that it was permanently attached to its site, and that "if its site were to change, so would the interrelationship of object, context and viewer" (Crimp 1993, 154). The site-specific

artwork had to be “experienced in the ‘here and now’ through the bodily presence of each viewing subject in a sensory immediacy of spatial extension and temporal duration” (Kwon 2002, 11). In his essay “The Functional Site: or, The Transformation of Site Specificity” (2000) writer James Meyer suggests that “the premise of site specificity to locate the work in a single place, and only there, bespoke the 1960s call for Presence, the demand for the experience of ‘being there’” (2000, 26). Meyer refers to ‘Presence’, an underlying theme of Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s philosophical discourse on phenomenology, as the condition of being ‘in attendance’ of the work of art (2000). Meyer goes on to speculate that by preferring Presence in early site-specific work, artists were able to create unprecedented experiences of actualness and authenticity for the viewer that (they hoped) would contravene the consumerist tendencies of society and the virtual pleasures of popular culture (2000). However, the incorporation of context into the minimalist site-specific work, in the presence of a perceiving viewer, could not successfully counter the idealism of modernist art, in its entirety.

Minimalism’s ‘Specific’ Failure to be Specific Enough

As Rosalyn Deutsche argues in *Evictions: Art and Spatial Politics* (1996) the preoccupation of site-specific minimal art with the formal and material particularities of the site ultimately only served to signal “an academic fetishization of context” at an aesthetic level (1996, 61). Crimp states that the aestheticisation of place promoted the belief that minimalist site-specific artists worked toward “generic classes of spaces” (1993, 155) rather than the specific characteristics particular to a gallery space.

Crimp refers to an interview with minimalist artist Carl Andre conducted in 1970 to further illustrate this point. When asked about the implications arising from moving his artworks from one gallery space to another, and presumably diminishing their specificity, Andre stated that:

I don’t feel myself obsessed with the singularity of places. I don’t think spaces are that singular. I think there are generic classes of spaces which

you work for and toward. So it's not really a problem where a work is going to be in particular. (1970, quoted in Crimp 1993, 155)

It follows from Andre's statement that the minimalist artwork was susceptible to relocation into alternate spaces that were similar, both formally and materially, to the ones in which the works were originally envisioned (Crimp 1993).

According to Crimp, the failure of site-specific minimal art to produce a comprehensive critique of modernist idealism, in part, was its failure to recognise and critically examine the role of the gallery "within the system of commerce," that it had come to represent (1993, 155). In accepting the art gallery context as a given, as one of the "'spaces' of art's institutionalised commodity circulation", minimalist site-specific art could not expose, resist or overcome one of the real conditions of modern art that contributed to its autonomy – the condition of commodity object, subject to circulation (Crimp 1993, 155). In the following section I outline various ways that American artist Michael Asher and French artist Daniel Buren have worked to resist the commodification of the art object and its circulation from gallery to gallery, or place to place.

In Situ Contributions of Michael Asher and Daniel Buren

Working in situ directly within an art gallery space is a fundamental method for creative practice in my research project. My use of this method is informed by the discourse surrounding institutional critique, and specifically the practices of artists Asher and Buren. Asher and Buren were amongst the first artists to fracture the circulatory condition of minimal site-specific art in the late 1960s. Both Asher and Buren began to combine conceptualist strategies of dematerialisation⁷ with art institution based site-specificity (Peltomäki 2010). Although their projects appear visually divergent, Asher and Buren both rejected the minimalist tendency to produce objects for "generic classes of [gallery] spaces" (Crimp 1993, 155), and concentrated instead on

7. See Lucy Lippard's book *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972* (1997) for a comprehensive account of these conceptualist strategies of dematerialisation that emerged in the 1960s.

addressing the art institutional context directly and exclusively, in ways that rejected the production of any discernable art object that could be “reexhibited, preserved, circulated, or commodified” (Peltomäki 2010, 5).

Asher and Buren’s work has been closely associated with what poststructuralist critics such as Benjamin H. D. Buchloh, Craig Owens, Douglas Crimp and Hal Foster define as the “critique of institutions” (Peltomäki 2010, 8). The term ‘institutional critique’ pertains to the “investigation into the material and sociopolitical conditions” that surround, or *frame*, artistic practice (Peltomäki 2007, 38). Asher and Buren’s particular working methods came to epitomise a shift in focus from the production of artwork for exhibition within the gallery, to the gallery itself, where the artist’s intervention in this space would constitute the artwork.⁸ This shift foregrounded one of the conceptual underpinnings of institutional critique, the position that “context is not given but produced” (MacLachlan and Reid 1994, 7).

In drawing on the art gallery space for both the content and context for my practice-led research I have adopted a strategy central to the practices of Asher and Buren; working in situ. Fundamental to the work of Asher and Buren is the process of working in situ within the art gallery. Working in situ allowed Asher to engage directly with the contextual framework of the gallery and to question the logic of its specific organisational structures, systems and utilities (Rondeau 2008). Central to Asher’s practice and process of working in situ is his focus on the aspects of the art gallery’s institutional framework that were often immaterial, hidden or ill considered (Gintz 1993).

In order to define a new aesthetic system that drew from and commented on the art institutional context, Asher’s work took the form of “subtle yet deliberate interventions – additions, subtractions or alterations – in particular environments” (Rondeau 2008, 164). Asher’s renowned architectural intervention at Claire Copley Gallery in Los Angeles in 1974 (*Figures 1.1 and 1.2*) most eloquently evidences the artist’s interest

8. The ‘frame’ in this instance is the art gallery including its constitutive physical and ideological elements and systems.



Figure 1.1 Michael Asher, *Installation at Claire Copley Gallery*, view through gallery toward office and storage areas, Los Angeles, California, 1974.

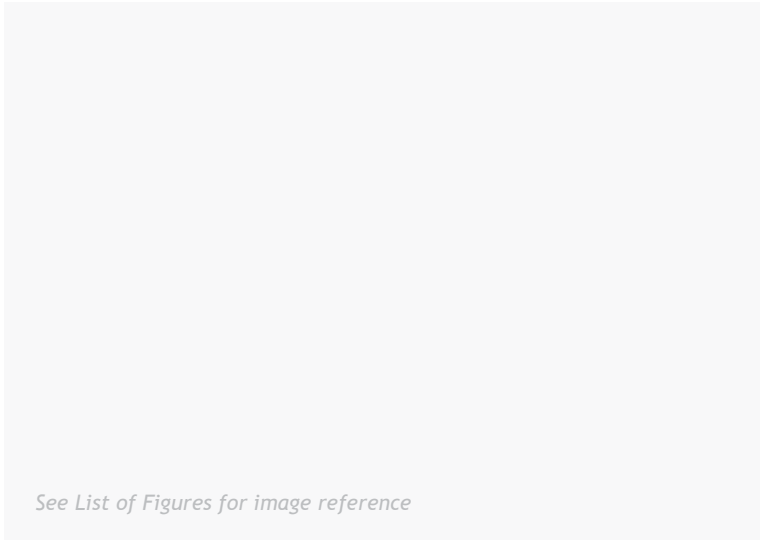


Figure 1.2 Michael Asher, *Installation at Claire Copley Gallery*, view through gallery toward entry/exit and street, Los Angeles, California, 1974.

in the active modification of a gallery space, via an architecturally subtractive process (Rondeau 2008). Asher removed the partition wall that separated the ‘showing’ space of the Claire Copley Gallery from the office and storage spaces hidden behind, exposing the gallery’s physical materiality and directing attention to the way the social relations between the viewing public and the gallery personnel were institutionally framed, and defined (Peltomäki 2007). In effect, this seemingly innocuous gesture implicitly extended the spectator’s reach beyond the public space of the gallery to the normally private space of the office and storeroom, making public the gallery’s usually invisible inner administrative and organisational procedures (Peltomäki 2007). The intervention ultimately served to highlight the “ideological division of social space” by exposing the architectural constraints that established the social expectations to do with gallery spectatorship (Peltomäki 2007, 37). Illuminating certain processes normally hidden from view within art gallery spaces is a strategy that I have employed in this research project and discuss further in Chapter Four.

The institutional constraints Asher considered to be inseparable from the conditions of the artwork’s reception and display are similarly interrogated in the work of Daniel Buren (Peltomäki 2007). Buren’s systematic use of 8.7 centimetre wide, vertical stripes became a ‘visual tool’ that, whilst making no authorial assertions regarding inner relations, was site-specifically variable in terms of spatial extension, configuration and application within institutional and architectural frameworks (Gintz 1993). Exposing the material conditions of the work and its modes of production, presentation and reception required Buren to work on site, or in situ, as a means to exploit the “voluntary bond between the site of reception and the ‘work’ that is produced presented and exhibited there” (Davidts and Paice 2009, 66).

In his 1971 essay “The Function of the Studio”, Daniel Buren states, “the essence of the work gets lost somewhere between the place where it is produced (the studio) and the place where it is consumed (the exhibition)” (2004, 22). Preoccupied with painting prior to the 1960s, Buren observed that in the gallery context “the painting’s surroundings [...] always seem richer and more important than the painting itself” (Monumenta 2012b, para. 2). Buren posited that the gallery context at this time was being widely overlooked or silently accepted due to the fact that artworks were thought

of as having “intrinsic content which behaves in the same way under all circumstances” (Monumenta 2012b, para. 2). In this way Buren perceived the gallery as being used as a kind of non-place, a space *through* which the artwork “passes – in order to exist” (2004, 17). To counter the disjuncture between where art was made and where it was exhibited, and to potentially preserve what he described as the ‘essence’ of the artwork, Buren proposed to work in situ, within, and in response to, the confines of the art institution.

In the Introduction I explained how my previous work was made in a studio situation, then later exhibited in an art gallery elsewhere, and that this process perpetuated the production of placeless artwork within my art practice. My research project is a reaction to this tendency; working in situ within a gallery space is a method that I have used throughout the project with the aim to produce more placeful artworks. By working in situ within selected art gallery spaces and making work specific to those places, I am attempting to challenge the use of the contemporary art gallery as a non-place, or what has historically been referred to as a ‘non-site’. In the following sections I outline the ways that since the 1960s the gallery has been used as a non-place in relation to site-specific art practice.

The Gallery as ‘Non-site’: Land Art

The advent of Land Art in the 1960s and early 1970s introduced new definitions of ‘site’ to the discourse of site-specific art practice (Rendell 2006). For Robert Smithson and other international artists associated with the Land Art movement such as Michael Heizer, Nancy Holt and Walter de Maria, ‘site’ was defined as the ‘non-gallery’ exterior or outdoor situation of an artwork, and ‘non-site’ was understood to be the interior situation of an art gallery (Rendell 2006). The real situation, or the site, that the artwork was produced in, outside of the confines of the art gallery, was assigned a “privileged position” (Rendell 2006, 25). Smithson confirms this in a discussion with fellow American artists Michael Heizer and Dennis Oppenheim in 1970, stating:

The site is the place where the piece should be but isn't. The piece that should be there is now somewhere else, usually in a room. Actually, everything that's of any importance takes place outside the room. (1996, 250)⁹

Nick Kaye, author of *Site-Specific Art: Performance, Place and Documentation* (2000) summates, "the approach to specific sites which emerged [...] around land art [...] frequently played on the gallery as a vantage point from which the viewer might look *out* toward designated, mapped locations" (2000, 91) (*Figure 1.3*).

By producing artworks that were either physically inseparable from their contexts or were ephemeral, artists associated with Land Art intended to resist and critique the gallery system and the role of art as commodity object (Rendell 2006). However,

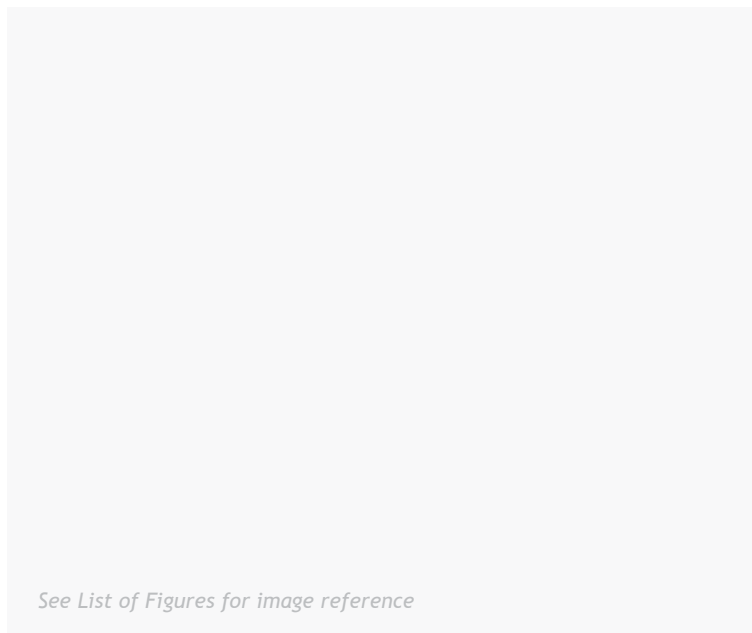


Figure 1.3 Robert Smithson, *Nonsite 'Line of Wreckage'*, Bayonne, New Jersey, 1968.

9. The 'room' Robert Smithson refers to here is the interior architectural space of the art gallery.

despite these intentions it was in actuality the so-called 'non-site' of the art gallery with its "closed limits, inner coordinates and 'contained information'" that became the most logical place for the documentation of the Land Art artworks to be witnessed, disseminated and circulated (Rendell 2006, 25). Despite their efforts to circumvent the gallery space, the artists associated with Land Art still required the gallery for its associated historical and cultural authority to legitimise their activities as art.

This sentiment is evidenced in a critical review of more recent site-specific art practice entitled "Installation, Performance, or What?" (2001) by writer and critic Peter Osborne. Osborne insists that any artwork that is said to exist outside of the physical confines of the art gallery "nonetheless still requires staged presentations of its material markers [...] in order to achieve actuality as art" (2001a, 153). In another article titled "Non-Places and the Spaces of Art" (2001) Osborne again asserts that artists are sorely mistaken if they feel they can 'do away' with the art gallery or operate entirely independently of the institution, either economically or culturally, as "art cannot live in the everyday as the everyday" (2001b, 192).

In their use of the art gallery to simply circulate and disseminate the documentation of artwork made elsewhere, Land Art artists would perpetuate the use and perception of the art gallery as a non-site, or what I will establish as a non-place in this chapter. I argue that this use of the art gallery space as a non-site, a non-place, persists in current modes of functional or discursive site-specificity.

The 'Functional' or 'Discursive' Site

An increasing demand for artists to create site-specific works in various locations throughout the world, is a phenomenon that has been accelerated by the 21st century global increase of circulatory modes of capital-driven art biennales, art fairs, public commissions and travelling exhibitions (Davidts and Paice 2009). The notion of the artist as "nomadic and networking interventionist" (Davidts and Paice 2009, 79) has emerged in parallel with the recent development of a 'discursive' mode of site-orientated art practice that has seen the mobilisation of the artwork's site (Kwon 2002). With this

development in site-specific art practice “the site of art begins to diverge from the literal space of art, and the physical condition of a specific location recedes as the primary element in the conception of a site” (Kwon 2002, 19).

In her PhD thesis entitled “The Museum as Art: Site-specific Art in Australia’s Public Museums” (2013), Lucy Hawthorne points out that for advocates of contemporary discursive site-specificity, such as Kwon, “a key distinguishing feature” is the “decoupling of art and art museum” (2013, 172). Kwon’s view that contemporary site-specific practice is characterised by an emphasis on mobility and nomadism, essentially leaves the interior, art gallery space largely overlooked. Kwon claims a “dominant drive of site-oriented practices today is the pursuit of a more intense engagement with the outside world and everyday life – a critique of culture that is inclusive of nonart spaces, nonart institutions and nonart issues” (2002, 24).

James Meyer’s definition of the ‘functional site’ goes some way to explain how this recent phenomenon has come to exist. Meyer makes a distinction between the physical ‘literal site’ and the new, more mobile ‘functional site’, defining the literal site as “an actual location, a singular place” in which “the artist’s intervention conforms to the physical constraints of this situation, even if (or precisely when) it would subject this to critique” (2000, 24). By contrast, the definition of the functional site positions site as a “free floating signifier” (Burns 1991, 148) existing as a “process, an operation occurring between sites, a mapping of institutional and textual filiations and the bodies that move between them [...] an informational site, a [...] vectored and discursive notion of ‘place’” (Meyer 2000, 25).

Kwon reiterates Meyer’s description of the site for site-specific art practice as transitioning from a physical or literal site to a functional site, and describes current occupations with site as discursive:

The distinguishing characteristic of today’s site-oriented art is the way in which the art work’s relationship to the actuality of a location (as site) and the social conditions of the institutional frame (as site) are both subordinate to a discursively determined site that is delineated as a field of knowledge, intellectual exchange, or cultural debate. (2002, 26)

The emergence of discursive or functional site-specificity has seen artists adopt alternate cultural and social roles, and through doing so becoming the sole progenitor of meaning for their works (Kwon 2002). Kwon explains that it “is now the *performative* aspect of an artist’s characteristic mode of operation [...] that is repeated and circulated” (2002, 47). As a result of the dissipation of the site into cultural and social spaces, artists’ specific ways of working have today become transferable and, to some extent, stylistic, and their ability and willingness to flit from one place to another is culturally and economically rewarded (Kwon 2002). Predominantly, the current discourse surrounding site-specific art practice internationally privileges functional or discursive site-specific artwork, and it is widely considered artistically retrograde to maintain an interest in any one literal site, let alone the notion of the gallery-as-site.

Osborne’s sentiments regarding the production of site-orientated artwork *outside* of the art gallery, and the subsequent exhibition of these artworks *within* the art gallery, is worth re-iterating here. Osborne argues that a new discursive site-specific project “nonetheless still requires staged presentations of its material markers [...] in order to achieve actuality as art” (2001a, 153). Osborne identifies that in these instances, the art gallery, a literal site, becomes a place where information, documentation, ephemera and other materials pertaining to functional site based work can be witnessed and disseminated (2001a). As was the case with the exhibition of documentation and artefacts pertaining to Land Art, these instances see the gallery used as a place from which to look out of, and from which to direct the viewers’ attention toward occurrences, locations and activities operating *outside of* that space (Kaye 2000). I argue that this tendency sees the art gallery become a kind of non-place, a place through which work from elsewhere itinerantly passes on its way to somewhere else, employed purely for its accepted legitimising function. This practice-led research project seeks to re-examine and reappraise the art gallery as a literal, physical site in which to produce and exhibit site-specific artworks. In differing from current modes of site-specificity that understand site to be a set of discursive factors, the project is focused on the literal and physical details of the gallery space, as well as their institutional conditions, and draws on these things in the production of site-specific artwork.

Gallery as Non-place

In relation to contemporary site-orientated art practice, I argue that the information, documentation and ephemera pertaining to functional site-based work, transiently passing *through* the art gallery, contributes to the current use of the gallery as a non-place. I understand the use of the art gallery space as a non-place to be problematic, as it precludes the individualised specificity of the art gallery, and by extension promotes the production of placeless artwork. In challenging contemporary notions of placelessness, this project investigates ways that the production of site-specific artwork may instead highlight, emphasise or incorporate these aspects of the gallery – the features that make it a place.

French anthropologist Marc Augé suggests, “if a place can be defined as relational, historical and concerned with identity, then a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity will be a non-place” (Augé 1995, 63). For Augé, the key-defining factor for non-places is that they are transitory; “they are spaces we flow through” (Gregory 2009, 2). In his book *Non-Places: An Introduction to Supermodernity* (1995), Augé refers to places that are most often encountered while travelling, such as airport lounges, motorways and hotels, as non-places (1995). Ultimately, a non-place is conceptualised as an in-between place, a space that individuals move *through* on their journey from point A, to destination point B.

Augé’s definition of non-place is applied to the art gallery in Osborne’s article “Non-Places and the Spaces of Art” (2001). Osborne suggests that “as a self-enclosed and specialised place” the art gallery “appears as an exemplary or ‘pure’ non-place: constituted as a non-place by its dual negation of place-based social functions by itinerary and textuality” (2001b, 190). For Osborne, the gallery becomes a non-place when it is used as a neutral, non-descript space *through* which work from elsewhere itinerantly passes on its way to somewhere else (2001b).

I refer to a recent exhibition at the Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC) as exemplifying the use of the art gallery as a non-place. The *Spaced: Art Out of Place* (2012) exhibition featured the works of twenty-one artists or artist groups, all of whom had participated

Figure 1.4 Exhibition *Spaced: Art Out of Place*, installation view, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle, 2012. Photograph by Robert Frith.

in artist in residence programs in sixteen regional communities of Western Australia and Indonesia. Whilst diverse in their approaches, typically these artists each produced a body of artwork that was in some way specific to the location they were living and working in. I view such activities as pertaining to a functional or discursive site-specificity, by their engagement with a number of socially, politically and historically oriented sites, rather than a singular, physically designated site. The artworks, or in most cases documentation of the works, was then relocated to Fremantle to be exhibited within the gallery spaces at FAC. On this occasion the FAC art gallery – a site in and of itself, was used as a non-place for the artist’s activities which had occurred elsewhere, to be legitimised and disseminated as art (*Figure 1.4*). *Spaced: Art Out of Place* is an example of an exhibition that perpetuates the production of placeless artworks and perpetuates the notion of the art gallery as non-place. In the following sections I outline my understanding of the term placelessness in relation to contemporary art practice and the art gallery, and my use of this concept within this project.

Place and Placelessness

In his essay “A Pragmatic Sense of Place” (2008) Edward Relph discusses the notions of place and placelessness in relation to contemporary culture, through the fields of geography and urban planning. I apply Relph’s analysis of place and placelessness to what I identify as the placelessness of the contemporary art gallery. Relph suggests that to “assume that place is good and placelessness is somehow deficient” is too simplistic a view and that his understanding “is that place and placelessness are bound together in a sort of [...] embrace, and that everywhere contains aspects of both” (2008, 312). Moreover, Relph states that:

Place is an expression of what is specific and local, while placelessness corresponds to what is general and shared. The standardized uniformity of placelessness always has some unique characteristic [...]. And no matter how distinctly different somewhere may appear, it always shares some of its features with other places – for example, red tile roofs and white walls are a common feature of small Mediterranean towns. It is, in fact, precisely these sorts of similarities that make exceptional qualities and meanings comprehensible to outsiders. (2008, 312)

In response to Relph’s discussion, I posit that the elements, features and aspects common to most contemporary art galleries are used as signifiers that allow the viewer to recognise that they are located in an environment for viewing artworks. If there were no commonalities shared by art gallery spaces, no common tropes to signify ‘art gallery space’, no bare, flat, white walls, even-fluorescent lighting, smooth polished floors – if each gallery was instead entirely *unique*, then there would be nothing apart from nomenclature and the presence of the artwork to indicate that a space was indeed a place for art.¹⁰ Not only do these architectural features and common tropes work to

10. Whilst I acknowledge that there are a number of buildings utilised as contemporary art gallery spaces that do not possess any tropes commonly associated with the contemporary art gallery, these kinds of spaces are outside of the scope of this practice-led research project and will not be discussed in my exegesis. For a detailed account of how artists have responded to ‘raw’, undeveloped industrial

homogenise gallery spaces globally in their ‘generic-ness’, they are in fact designed to do so, allowing for the easy movement of artworks from place to place – or rather art gallery space to art gallery space, without context altering content.

Some of the art galleries that I have used as part of this research project are indicative of a current global trend of gallery spaces housed in buildings that were “designed for one function but have been reclaimed by different people and adapted for alternative uses” (Papastergiadis 2006, 130). In their adaptation to reflect the tropes and conventions of the contemporary art gallery, these buildings experience a diminution in the condition of place and a rise in the condition of placelessness.¹¹ In his essay “The Order of the Ordinary: Architecture without Qualities” (2006), writer Éric Lapierre recounts his experience of walking through the altered interior architecture of the Villa Tamaris in France:

Going upstairs to the different floors of the exhibition involves using public staircases and corridors which also have the generic details common to those ‘establishments designed to receive the general public’. As you go up the flecked beige ceramic tiled steps, each step front fitted with the regulation dark brown anti-skid strip, you tend to forget that you’re in an imposing 19th century building [...]. On the ceiling, the ramps of fluorescent tubes and their square, mirror like deflectors recall thousands

or heritage-listed buildings that temporarily house artworks see Chapter Two (“Semiotics and Spatial Politics: The Art Museum”) in Lucy Hawthorne’s PhD thesis published in 2013 titled “The Museum as Art: Site-specific Art in Australia’s Public Museums”.

11. The same can be said for some purpose-built art galleries such as the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (LWAG) and the John Curtin Gallery (JCG) (to cite a few local examples). The interior spaces of these art galleries are often remodeled or renovated to further reflect the ideal of the contemporary ‘white cube’. Entry to the galleries at JCG, for example, is currently via two ‘tunnels’ that function as baffles to reduce the amount of light and noise from the atrium and outside that reaches the gallery rooms. Perth-based curator and writer Andrew Purvis has commented that the “distinctive cruciform of Gus Ferguson’s original design” for LWAG, “with expansive, floor-to-ceiling windows situated at each axis, has given way to new exhibition spaces; panes of glass have been walled up as extra galleries have sprouted” (2015, 46).

of others seen in places where the aesthetics of the surroundings have not played any significant role, and where, as is the case here, red fire extinguishers with their red and blue 'RIA' plaque fixed awry on the wall, and the green luminous blocks for evacuating people in the case of fire are major factors in creating [the] prevailing atmosphere. (2006, 162)

The situation of the Villa Tamaris described by Lapierre is echoed by the current use of many heritage listed buildings across Perth as contemporary art galleries, such as FAC (formerly a lunatic asylum, a women's home and a technical school, amongst other things), the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (originally the Perth Central School) and Moana Project Space (suspected to have once been a ballroom and supper club). The original fragile or 'unalterable' walls of some of these spaces are covered over or clad with more durable materials and new structures are erected to make these spaces more 'useable' for art exhibition purposes. These alterations undoubtedly change the plan and layout of the interior spaces of these buildings, but more significantly they mask the distinctive qualities of the original architecture, obscuring architectural specificities and features from view. Writer Nikos Papastergiadis suggests that in these instances "the remnants of different kinds of history coexisting and decaying within the present [...] all contribute to what we pathetically call the character of a place, but more importantly, they serve as opportunities to discover wonder, and contemplate the weird patterns of history" (2006, 131).

I see the coexistence of different histories within art gallery spaces as reflecting what Relph describes as a "state of tension" between place and placelessness (2008, 313). According to Relph, place and placelessness are inextricably linked; at the point where there is a very high degree of uniqueness, similarity is reduced and almost disappears completely, whilst "at the other extreme, uniformity dominates and distinctiveness is suppressed" (2008, 313). Put more simply, "where qualities of distinctiveness are strong, place is dominant, and where standardisation prevails placelessness is dominant, but in some combination they occur everywhere" (Relph 2008, 313). In working within selected art galleries where the layered histories of the building's uses have been masked or hidden by their current function, I have investigated ways of producing artworks that may excavate features that may allude to these uses. An objective of

this research project is to produce artworks that reveal the particularities of a gallery space, in an effort to subvert the relationship, or ‘tip the scale’, between specificity and ubiquity, between place and placelessness.

This chapter has outlined the emergence of site-specificity within art practice as a reaction to the perceived autonomy of the modernist artwork. I describe how the intention to overcome the commodification and mobility of the art object was addressed through the work of Asher and Buren, and I identify working in situ as an important method for producing placeful artworks. I have also provided a short historical account of how the concept of ‘site’ within site-specific practice has diverged from a physically designated location, to a less tangible intersection of discursive information. I establish that this divergence has resulted in the perpetuation of the use of the art gallery as a non-place. I have drawn on the writing of Augé, Relph and Osborne to outline my understanding of the term placelessness and how I may work to challenge contemporary notions of placelessness through the production of site-specific artworks within art gallery spaces. In the following chapter I present my initial attempts to produce site-specific artworks in response to a commercial art gallery.

The development and presentation of a solo exhibition titled *Install*, at Gallery East in late 2011, marked the commencement of my initial investigations into producing new site-specific artworks for this research project. The artworks exhibited in *Install* formed a series of preliminary attempts to produce site-specific artworks in response to a commercial art gallery context. Within this chapter select artworks are analysed in terms of their specificity to the Gallery East gallery space as a site. In considering the commercial art gallery more generally, as a distinct category amongst other art institutional ‘models’, I identify a set of characteristics particular to the commercial gallery as being problematic and uncondusive to the production of site-specific artwork. These characteristics are symptomatic of both the pragmatic and ideological nature of the commercial art gallery model. Ultimately I establish that the contemporary commercial art gallery perpetuates the myth of the gallery as a ‘white cube’ through which artworks circulate.



Figure 2.1 Shannon Lyons, Exhibition *Install*, installation view, Gallery East, North Fremantle, 2011.
Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 2.2 Shannon Lyons, Exhibition *Install*, installation view, Gallery East, North Fremantle, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

Install at Gallery East

Before closing in 2012, Gallery East was a commercial art gallery situated in North Fremantle, Western Australia.¹² The gallery's interior exhibition space consisted of unrendered masonry walls painted white, a dark grey painted concrete floor, a north-facing wall comprised entirely of glass panelled French doors and a curious thirty centimetre gap between the ceiling and the top of the wall that the exhibition space shared with the adjoining gallery office and storeroom. A light-well channelled sunlight down into the gallery through three, square skylights. Track lighting formed a larger rectangle, tracing the shape made by the skylights on the ceiling. At the southern end of the gallery the ceiling angled sharply upward to meet the top of the back wall. This created irregular five-sided shaped east and west walls and a large rectangular back wall that ran parallel to the glazed entrance (*Figures 2.1 and 2.2*).

As a frequent visitor to Gallery East I was often distracted by the architectural context in which the gallery's exhibitions took place. Consequently, I became acutely aware of the characteristics of the space that surrounded the artworks on show. Finding the gallery environs more interesting than the artwork being exhibited inevitably diverted my gaze to things that are not intended to be focused on or noticed – things that were meant to recede.¹³ I was especially drawn to the gallery's painted brick walls; walls that contrasted with the flat, perfect finishes of other art galleries throughout Perth and Fremantle. Painted brick was a substrate that I associated with a number of artist studios that I had previously inhabited, including the installation and studio spaces throughout the School of Design and Art at Curtin University. It wasn't the kind

12. The directors of Gallery East closed their 'bricks and mortar' North Fremantle operation in December 2012. Hence, I refer to the gallery and what transpired there in the past tense.

13. This reflects the sentiment held by artist Daniel Buren at the time he started to experiment with making artworks in situ where he found the artwork's surrounds to be more interesting than the artworks themselves (Davidts and Paice 2009). This is not intended as a critique of the standard of the artworks exhibited at Gallery East on the occasions that I visited; rather it reveals my long-standing preoccupation and preference for focusing on things that are periphery to the artwork on show.

of surface that I expected to see in an art gallery¹⁴ and I found this intriguing and difficult to reconcile. Despite the gallery walls being uniformly white, the concave mortar joints between each brick made the running bond brickwork pattern clearly visible and it appeared, to me at least, to be very ‘loud’.

Contributing to the visual noise of Gallery East were the marks and traces of past exhibitions that peppered the gallery walls. Gallery East was literally littered with the detritus of every exhibition that had even been held there; faded graphite pencil marks formed nonsensical scores on the gallery walls which were also pockmarked with countless numbers of wall plugs and dotted with the gummy grey-blue remnants of pieces of Blu-Tack. Some of the wall plugs looked like they’d been painted over time and time again, their central voids filled in with chalky white acrylic (*Figure 2.3*). Others appeared as orange, blue, green and red rings of plastic, surrounded by a haze of pencil marks – all having been overlooked in the haste to install the next exhibition. Every encounter with a wall plug or faint pencil mark would lead me to discover more



Figure 2.3 Green wall plug filled with paint on the gallery wall, Gallery East, North Fremantle, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

14. Most masonry walls that I had encountered in gallery spaces had been clad over with plasterboard or MDF.

and more of these kinds of surprising material incongruities throughout the gallery space. Adding to the visual cacophony of the gallery were raised drips of dried white paint that had collected infinitesimal amounts of dust rendering them visible to the eye, the tacky residue from a Velcro dot that appeared yellowed with age against the white of the wall, tiny forgotten blobs of Blu-Tack and a constellation of cup hooks and eyelet screws. It was evident that, even between exhibitions, the gallery was anything but empty.

The 'Empty' White Cube

In his seminal text *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999) Brian O'Doherty critiques the notion that the contemporary art gallery is an empty, blank, neutral environment for the artwork to exist independently of the specificities of time and place. While acknowledging that the essays compiled in this text were originally published over forty years ago,¹⁵ I argue that the contemporary art gallery still predominantly reflects many of the conventions of so-called 'neutrality' that O'Doherty describes.¹⁶ O'Doherty suggests that the 'white cube' gallery possesses a number of generic conventions that give the *impression* of neutrality, emptiness and blankness:

The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically, or carpeted so that you pad around soundlessly... The art is free, as the saying used to go, 'to take on its own life'. The discreet desk may be the only piece of

15. Essays in *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space* (1999) were first published in three issues of *Artforum* magazine in 1976.

16. Lucy Hawthorne identifies that many Australian art museums still "use many of the aesthetic devices described by O'Doherty – a lack of shadows, white walls, [and] specific hanging systems" (2013, 69). In the afterword of his expanded edition of *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, published in 1999, Brian O'Doherty critically observes, "the gallery space has again become the unchallenged area of discourse" (1999, 113).

furniture. In this context the standing ashtray becomes almost a sacred object, just as the firehose in the modern museum looks not like a firehose but an esthetic conundrum. (1999, 15)

It follows that within the “white cube gallery the work is isolated from everything that would detract from its own evaluation of itself” (O’Doherty 1999, 14). The cloistered interior architectural environment that O’Doherty describes is an extreme example of the modernist art gallery, in its physical sense (Hawthorne 2013), and persists as an ideological construct that critic Simon Sheikh deems to be the “favoured modus operandi for exhibition making” contemporaneously – the “dominant model for the showing of art” (2009, para. 6). Commercial art galleries such as Gallery East are modelled on the white cube, both physically and ideologically as the generic nature of the gallery space allows for the artwork on show (and for sale), to remain detached from any place in particular. This in turn perpetuates the idea that the art gallery is empty and blank – and ultimately a non-place.

In her Masters dissertation “Flexible Spaces for Happy People (almost, almost)” (2014) New Zealand artist Charlotte Drayton uses American experimental composer John Cage’s pivotal work *4’33”* as an analogy to address the *supposed* blankness and emptiness of the white cube art gallery. Composed in 1952, the work is a musical score written by Cage and accompanied by a set of instructions that sees an orchestra of musicians sitting in silence for a total of four minutes and thirty-three seconds. The experience of the work is then determined by the aural landscape of the locale in which it is performed; the incidental, peripheral sounds of the clearing of throats, chairs scraping and the noise of passing traffic become discernible in the absence of any actual music. Far from being silent, *4’33”* works to highlight – or expose – the impossibility of silence, instead operating “as a catalyst to make an audience *notice* aspects of a given situation, which have been ignored through daily habit and practicality” (Drayton 2014, 8). Drayton suggests and I concur that; “similarly [...] the gallery space often attempts to act as a kind of visual silence, a kind of supposed blankness and emptiness” (2014, 8) that is also exposed through *noticing*.



Figure 2.4 Shannon Lyons, Exhibition *Install*, installation view, blank centre of back gallery wall is clearly visible, Gallery East, North Fremantle, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

The cacophony created by the pattern of the bricks in combination with the traces of past exhibitions at Gallery East set the exhibition context apart from the ideal of the art gallery as a blank slate; a quiet and contemplative space, neutral, free from history and free of any extraneous detail that might distract the viewer's attention away from the artworks on show. I felt that, in the Gallery East context, an artwork would be in direct competition with the visual intensity of the substrate upon which it was installed. An artwork would also be read in relation to the other architectural and ephemeral particularities of the gallery space. I aimed to highlight these qualities in the creation of a body of site-specific artworks, as a way of exposing the placelessness of the white cube.

I wanted to use the gallery walls in some way to produce a series of artworks that would 'point' towards and potentially emphasise the material specificities of the gallery space; an undertaking never consciously attempted before by any other artist who had exhibited at Gallery East. The porous, history-laden walls of the gallery space would become the focus of my investigation for some of the site-specific artworks produced for my planned exhibition.

Influenced by the pervasive constellation of wall plugs and the visual cacophony generated by the other incidental marks and traces of use that marked the gallery space, I devised a number of artworks that would bring these things that were already present, into sharper focus. My intention was to illuminate the imperfect reality of the gallery space by producing artworks that would encourage a cognisance of its incongruences; the textured walls and the incidental marks and traces left behind by each and every past exhibition. I wanted to challenge the notion that Gallery East was a neutral, blank, white cube gallery.

The centre of the large back wall of the Gallery East gallery space, typically reserved for the largest artwork or the exhibition's central focus, was intentionally left blank for my planned exhibition, *Install*. In choosing to situate my artworks on the polygon shaped parallel walls and leaving the central expanse of the back wall unadorned I intended to challenge one of the commercially driven conventions of the Gallery East gallery space (*Figure 2.4*). The absence of an artwork in this location would allow for an expanse of



Figure 2.5 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (For_A_Moment _I_11)*, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

white wall to exist, a surface that although initially perceived to be blank on closer inspection was riddled with the very installation detritus that was the impetus for the content of the artworks in my exhibition. In this way, despite appearances, the back wall of the gallery space was anything but 'blank'; rather by leaving this space empty the wall itself would operate as a signpost for the white cube's lack of 'blankness'. The open expanse of white wall would reveal the layers of the art gallery's material history, and by extension its status as an environment that artwork's continually move through on their way to somewhere else.

Of the body of site-specific artworks produced as part of *Install*, one series titled *Untitled (For_A_Moment _I_11)* (2011) (Figures 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7) consisted of three white painted panels installed in an evenly spaced row along the east wall of Gallery East. The panels boasted flat, evenly painted monochromatic surfaces that materially appeared in stark contrast to the uneven brick of the surrounding gallery walls. The panels punctuated the otherwise roughly textured environment with discreet moments of smooth stillness. By simply juxtaposing smooth and rough textures on the same vertical plane, attention would be directed to the gallery walls which could be seen for what they actually were; surfaces densely layered with the detritus from the past installation of hundreds (thousands?) of artworks.

Leaving the panels blank would work to reveal the structural and material composition of the walls by way of contrast and would heighten the perception of the imperfections present within the Gallery East gallery space. However, in an attempt to encourage recognition of the coloured wall plugs that dotted the space, I adorned the panels with faithful replications of some of the fixings, installation materials and marks that had a similar visual appearance to the ones evident on the gallery walls. This catalogue of incidental material phenomena became a set of motifs for me to work with; my replications of these items appearing as considered and aestheticised versions thereof. By having the panels and the walls share a likeness by way of the visual appearance of the wall plugs and pencil marks, I intended to break down the clear distinction between the artwork and its gallery context, allowing the eye to move freely from one surface to the other, all the time recognising elements that are common to both.



Figure 2.6 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (For_A_Moment _I_11)* (detail), 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 2.7 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (For_A_Moment _I_11)* (detail), 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 2.8 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (Blu-tack)*, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

Upon each of the panels of *Untitled (For_A_Moment_I_11)* appeared a horizontal pencil line, intersected at either end by a short perpendicular pencil line. At the point where each of the lines met was, what looked like, the end of a single green wall plug. These wall plugs were in fact painted fabrications of the real things, made by loading the end of a real wall plug with paint and stamping it onto the white surfaces of the prepared panels. The perfect amount of carefully mixed green paint had to be applied to the end of the wall plug so that its identifiable star shape could be maintained during its transferral onto the smooth, honed surface of the panel. A short sharp blast of air was blown down the wall plug's length to clear the distinctively shaped void of any paint before each wall plug 'print' could be made. The pencil lines that intersected these fake wall plugs were also replications of sorts; each line was created by 'colouring in' a taped up section of the panel, the width of a bricklayer's pencil line, with a soft graphite pencil. The slow, meticulous and labour intensive processes that I had employed to produce the marks and traces that appeared on the panels were at odds with the pace that the original trace or mark present in the space had evidently been made with. This shift in speed or pace of production evidenced by my artworks would work in contrast to the haphazard, ad-hoc nature of the original marks and fixings that covered the gallery walls, and was designed to bring these things into visibility.

Another series of artworks produced as part of *Install* were what looked like small blobs of Blu-Tack dotted around the exhibition space. These clumps, collectively titled *Untitled (Blu-tack) (2011) (Figure 2.8)*, were actually cast pieces of Blu-Tack made from polymer plaster and ink. The casts were informed by a solitary blob of Blu-Tack that I had noticed during one of my visits to Gallery East in between exhibition periods. Once used to securely fasten the corner of a painting to the gallery wall, this piece of Blu-Tack had remained in place following the conclusion of the exhibition, forgotten and no longer noticed. The cast pieces of Blu-Tack I made were installed throughout the gallery space in locations not typically used to display artworks in this setting; too low to the ground, well above eye level or too close to the corner of the room.

The installation of *Untitled (Blu-tack)* as part of *Install* would see this work almost completely blend into the gallery space, and become virtually indiscernible from the gallery surrounds. This work operates at the intersection of assimilative and



Figure 2.9 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (Blu-tack)* (installation view), 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

interruptive models of site-specificity, two types of site-specific artworks put forward by critic Rosalyn Deutsche. As summarised by Kwon, Deutsche makes “an important distinction between an assimilative model of site specificity – in which the art work is geared toward *integration* into the existing environment, producing a unified, ‘harmonious’ space of wholeness and cohesion – and an interruptive model in which the art work functions as a critical *intervention* in the existing order of a site through some sort of disruption” (Kwon 2002, 170). The distinct characteristics that Deutsche defines as typifying these two different models of site-specific art are evidenced in the work *Untitled (Blu-tack)*. The work was assimilative in its visual likeness to pre-existing gallery detritus, and at the same time was interruptive in its disruption of the prevailing conventions of display; where artworks are hung at eye height, in the centre of the wall, away from light switches and power points.

The ability for an artwork to become less immediately discernible from the pre-existing art gallery detritus was an important discovery within the context of this research project, and as a concept was used in the production of subsequent site-specific artworks. The near indiscernibility of the work *Untitled (Blu-tack)* was achieved through the placement of the cast Blu-Tack pieces in locations around the gallery space that would not typically be used for the installation of artworks. Positioned down low or too close to the edge of a wall, the blobs were located in places on the periphery (*Figure 2.9*). In their ability to ‘hide’ in plain sight, and potentially be mistaken for actual discarded blobs of real Blu-Tack, this site-specific artwork could potentially be *left* installed in the art gallery, and remain in the space long after the exhibition had concluded. This was a compelling discovery that led to a number of questions: If an artwork could be left in situ beyond the set duration of the exhibition, and be inconspicuous enough to evade removal by the gallery directors, would this be a measure of the artwork’s specificity to the site? Could this mean that something I made was only site-specific if it nearly disappeared? Would an artwork that was a more obvious intervention in the site be as ‘placeful’ as an artwork that would go almost unnoticed? Some of these questions are addressed in a subsequent body of artwork that is discussed in Chapter Three.

Whilst I saw value in these interventions and their potential to be specific to the site by way of becoming nearly invisible, I had deduced that their relation to the physical reality of the Gallery East gallery space was altogether too vague. *Untitled (Blu-tack)* did not offer any direct reflection of anything that characterised Gallery East from other gallery spaces. Instead the cast blobs presented as relatively ubiquitous versions of forgotten fixings that are common to almost all art galleries.¹⁷ The presence of the cast pieces of Blu-Tack throughout the gallery space didn't disclose anything specific about Gallery East as a site, unlike the way in which the smoothness of the fabricated panels of *Untitled (For_A_Moment_I_11)* would reveal and expose the rough masonry texture of the walls specific to *this* gallery.

The Commercial Gallery Context

In analysing the commercial art gallery more generally, as a distinct category amongst other art institutional 'models', I identify a set of characteristics particular to the commercial gallery as being problematic and uncondusive to the production of site-specific artwork. Typically, artworks exhibited within commercial gallery contexts are intended to be sold, and so a prerequisite for the exhibited work is that it must be easily transportable and transposable to other settings. Generally artworks exhibited within commercial galleries are materially and conceptually autonomous, which allows them to be easily relocated once sold, or moved on after the exhibition concludes. I posit that this typically results in the production and exhibition of what I refer to as placeless artworks, and in turn promotes the use of the commercial gallery space as a non-place.

Before further analysing the body of artwork produced for the exhibition *Install*, I will first outline the constraints that the commercial nature of Gallery East had on my

17. I have witnessed Blu-Tack being used for art installation or purposes in many smaller contemporary art galleries, such as commercial galleries, and in ARI galleries. I acknowledge that Blu-Tack is not a preferred installation material in many larger art institutions as it is non-archival. In these kinds of galleries I have often seen Blu-Tack being used to secure didactic panels to the wall, but have not seen it used for the installation of artwork.

ability to produce new site-specific artworks. Initially, I wanted to make the artworks for *Install* in situ at Gallery East, producing all of the artworks on site. By working with what I had at hand, including the tools and materials that I would find in the gallery storeroom and surrounds, I had intended for these parameters to induce a certain specificity, where the artworks I produced would be the result of my time spent in the gallery space. It was envisaged that this would be an effective method for challenging the production of placeless artworks. Due to the commercial focus of Gallery East, this approach to producing site-specific artwork was untenable.

The installation period between exhibitions at Gallery East – where the concluding exhibition would be de-installed and the commencing exhibition would be installed – was one week. This was a shorter installation period than some other art galleries that I had worked with previously, and I presume it allowed the commercial gallery to fit more exhibitions into the calendar year. Whilst I was free to access the gallery space during the one week installation periods between exhibitions leading up to my exhibition, this short amount of time would not allow for an uninterrupted, extensive period in which I could research and respond to the specificities of the gallery space on site. This meant that it would not be possible to work in situ to produce the artworks for *Install*, and I would instead have to produce the artworks off-site, and later transport them to the gallery space for installation. Inevitably this produced a disjunction between where an artwork was made and where it was exhibited, and impacted upon my ability to evade the production of placeless artworks.

As I could no longer use the gallery as a site of source material I began to look elsewhere for referential material that would provide the content for my artworks. A personal archive of images and past installation drawings,¹⁸ recorded whilst installing some of my previous artworks in other gallery spaces became the subject matter for the majority of the artworks produced for exhibition at Gallery East. These artworks took the form

18. An installation drawing is the preparatory ‘marking up’ of a gallery wall using tape and pencil, outlining how and where an artwork will be installed. Typically an installation drawing is done using blue painter’s tape, which is applied to the wall and hosts the measurements and pencil marks that dictate where fixings need to be placed.



Figure 2.10 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (NA_SL_TC_10)*, 2010. Photograph by Traianos Pakiufakis.

of fabricated panels that hung on the gallery walls like paintings. The dimensions of a selection of my previous artworks determined the dimensions of these panels. Each panel was painted with the same paint used in the respective gallery situation that the artwork was originally exhibited in. In addition, the initial configuration and placement of the original artworks in their various gallery settings dictated how the panels were arranged on the walls of Gallery East. For example, the overall installation dimensions of an artwork titled *Untitled (NA_SL_TC_10)* (Figure 2.10), first shown as part of the exhibition *Rounds* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts (PICA) in 2010, became the starting point for deriving the dimensions and configuration for the artwork *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)* (2011) (Figure 2.11), exhibited at Gallery East.

Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11) consisted of two panels painted in Taubmans 'Sienna Frost', the off-white paint colour of PICA's gallery walls, and were installed at perpendicular angles to one another on adjoining walls in the southeast corner of Gallery East. On each of the two panels forming *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)* appeared two long horizontal parallel lines of blue tape. The installation drawing for the work *Untitled (NA_SL_TC_10)* was used as the subject matter of the work *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)*, with the blue tape motif pointing to how the work is installed. The strips of blue tape across the fabricated panels of *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)*, were in fact painted renditions of blue tape; this element of mimicry would become a motif that I would return to in the production of other artworks made as part of this research project, and will be discussed in other sections of this exegesis (Figure 2.12).

The work *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)* is indicative of most of the artworks produced for *Install*, in evidencing a disjuncture between where the work was made, and where it was exhibited. Instead of being produced in direct response to Gallery East, the artwork's content, materials, dimension and configurations were informed by other places – previous artworks, installations and gallery spaces. Ultimately, I felt that the works produced for exhibition at Gallery East could exist in any gallery space; each panel operated like a snapshot of an event witnessed somewhere else. The work was, in this way, a window to a past experience of installing other artworks in other gallery spaces. The very thing I was trying to avoid had come to fruition; the



Figure 2.11 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_L_11)*, 2011. Photograph by Bo Wong.

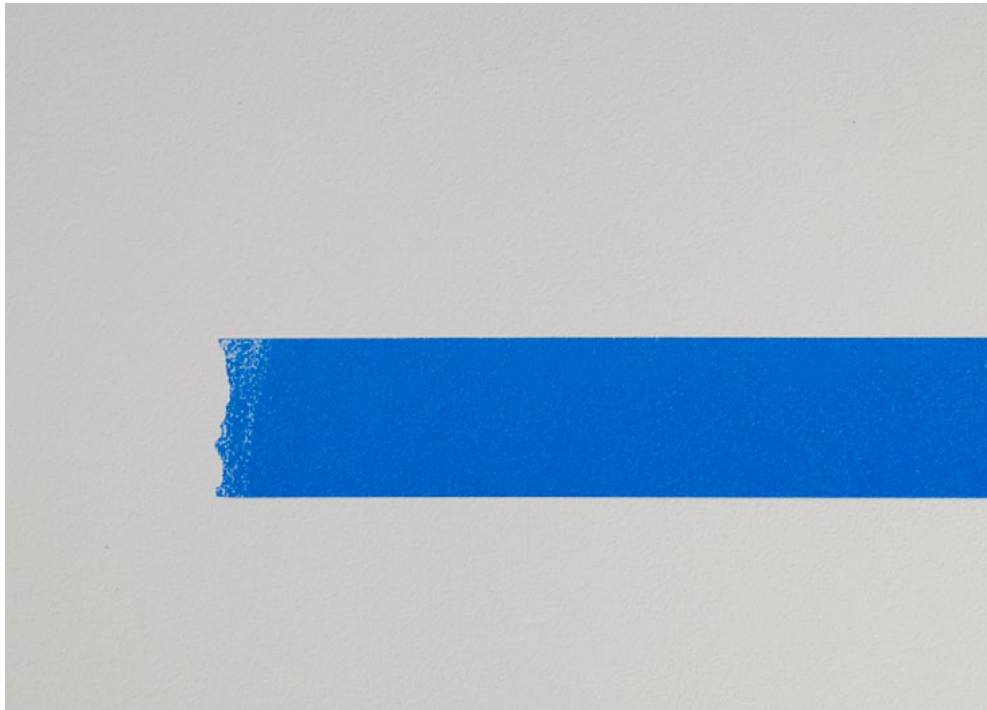


Figure 2.12 Shannon Lyons, *Untitled (PICA_Before_NA_SL_TC_I_11)* (detail), 2011.
Photograph by Bo Wong.

artworks had become altogether self-contained, autonomous and ultimately physically placeless. I found that the conventions and restraints of the commercial gallery model impacted directly on my ability to produce placeful artworks. As was the case for my exhibition *Install*, the conventions and restraints of the commercial gallery have also impacted on the practice of Fiona Connor, and in particular how she has approached the production of site-specific artworks for Hopkinson Mossman, a commercial gallery in Auckland.

Fiona Connor's *Can Do Academy*

Fiona Connor is a New Zealand-born, Los Angeles-based artist for whom the architecture, display mechanisms and spatial eccentricities of art gallery spaces provide source material for her artistic practice. Connor's site-specific art practice is influential to this research project as Connor is a leading practitioner in the field of contemporary site-specific art practice.¹⁹ Typically her artworks resonate strongly with the site of their exhibition, however when exhibiting her artwork within commercial gallery contexts the nature of Connor's work and its relationship to site becomes more problematic.

Figure 2.13 Fiona Connor, Exhibition *Can Do Academy*, installation view, Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland, New Zealand, 2014.

19. I analyse Connor's site-specific artistic practice in greater detail in other sections of this exegesis.

Figure 2.14 Fiona Connor, Exhibition *Can Do Academy*, pre-installation view, Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland, New Zealand, 2014.

A solo exhibition titled *Can Do Academy* (2014) (*Figure 2.13*) held at Hopkinson Mossman in Auckland, New Zealand, saw Connor present a series of large, pre-fabricated panels that were later inserted, or retrofitted, into openings cut into the gallery's plasterboard walls. These panels were fabricated to resemble sections of wall that looked to be 'lifted' from other places, including but not limited to artist studios, workshops and art storage facilities (*Figure 2.14*). Unlike many of Connor's previous projects, the artworks in *Can Do Academy* were not the product of the artist's direct engagement and investigation into the specificities of the Hopkinson Mossman gallery space. Instead, for this exhibition the commercial gallery passively operated as a non-place for Connor's artworks to be exhibited in (and ideally moved-on from). Ultimately the artworks that Connor had produced for *Can Do Academy* were based on, and were *about* other places. Despite relating to the site by way of dimension, configuration and material, Connor's works exhibited as part of *Can Do Academy* were relatively autonomous – they could just as easily exist in any other commercial gallery space around the world, as they were not specifically aligned to the particularities of Hopkinson Mossman.

Similarly, my artworks produced for the commercial gallery context of Gallery East were essentially *waiting*; momentarily lingering in the gallery before moving on to

someone's living room, or into the darkness of a storeroom elsewhere. All of the artworks exhibited as part of *Install* were discreet, transportable objects that could be moved, sold, held in consignment, or removed. Instead of working to challenge placelessness, I had reverted to producing artworks that were in fact placeless, reaffirming the use of the gallery space as a non-place.

There are two factors related to the commercial nature of Gallery East that directly impacted my ability to make site-specific artworks that challenge placelessness. Firstly, the pragmatics of the gallery as a commercial enterprise limited my ability to spend time in the gallery space working in situ to produce artworks. This would lead to a disjuncture between where artworks were made and where they were exhibited. Secondly, the ideology of the commercial gallery space as a place to sell artwork meant that the artwork had to be self-contained, easily transportable and transposable, and therefore both physically and conceptually detached from the Gallery East gallery space.

In succumbing to the ideology and agenda of the commercial art gallery, my artworks had in effect become complicit in this process; just a few more artworks amongst the hundreds upon thousands that are currently being circulated, bought, sold or only temporarily held on to. In their participation in this process, my artworks did *reveal* the placeless nature of the Gallery East gallery space, but they did not necessarily challenge it in any way. The way in which I produced artworks for *Install* failed to resonate with the problem of making artwork in one place (in this case a workshop) and exhibiting it in another (Gallery East). In subsequent chapters I discuss ways of producing artworks directly within the places that they are exhibited in, as a strategy for challenging placelessness.

My experience of exhibiting at Gallery East highlighted the need for this research project to involve the use of alternative art spaces and institutions, spaces that would allow for the in situ production and development of new artworks on site. It also underscored the importance of spending time in and increasing my direct involvement with the art gallery as a site. Would the ability to occupy an art gallery that was unencumbered

by commercial agenda provide the conditions to produce more emplaced site-specific artworks? Would a studio residency mode of art gallery occupation lend itself to the development of more placeful works? In the following chapter I present and analyse a body of artwork made whilst I was an artist in residence at the Fremantle Arts Centre, in Fremantle, Western Australia.

This chapter focuses on the ‘space audit’ method, a creative approach that I use to gather information about a site. Through the analysis of a body of artwork produced as part of an artist in residence program at the Fremantle Arts Centre (FAC), I explain how the method of space auditing can reveal the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional details of the gallery space, and in turn inform the production of placeful artworks. In addition, I consider the potential for these artworks to allude to the multi-layered history of the FAC building by drawing attention to particular architectural features.

Within this chapter I also examine the use of replication as a method for producing site-specific artworks within gallery spaces. A number of artworks by Fiona Connor are analysed to describe the role of replication within her artistic practice. I then draw on Walter Benjamin’s seminal essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” (1969) to explain how I understand ‘replication’ to be different from ‘reproduction’, and how a replication may attain a sense of ‘aura’. Finally, I refer to the notion of a ‘rendition’ as a means to differentiate the ways that Connor and I produce site-specific artworks in our respective art practices.

The Fremantle Arts Centre as Site: the Organisation, the Room and the Residency

I approached FAC to be a host gallery site for this research project as the centre offers opportunities for artists to take part in an established artist in residence program. Of the art galleries examined in my research project, FAC is the only one of its kind – a heritage-listed building with a rich and chequered history of prior use. Before it became a dedicated arts centre in 1973, with rooms for art galleries, artist studios and workshops, the FAC building had been, among other things, a lunatic asylum, a women's home, Western Australia's first maternity training facility, a temporary home for American Naval servicemen during World War II, and a technical school. A number of exhibitions and creative projects presented at FAC have attempted to communicate ideas related to the varied uses of this historic building to the public. An objective of my residency was to produce artworks that would attempt to illuminate specific architectural features of the gallery space, which would in turn reveal the stratigraphic layers of history embedded within the arts centre site.

Examples of recent exhibitions and creative projects that have alluded to some of the historical uses of the current FAC building include the Link Dance Company's *Diversify* performance season in late 2012 and Perth-based artist Marzena Topka's solo exhibition *Boundaries of Beige* in 2014. Whilst Perth-based artist Paul Caporn's solo exhibition entitled *Homely* (2010) referred to some of the historical uses of the building and did address the function of the building as a museum, gallery and shop, it did so without directly dealing with the architectural or material specificities of the site (P. Caporn, personal communication May 24, 2015). In addition to these exhibitions and creative projects, an exhibition co-curated by City Of Fremantle Art Collection curator Andre Lipscombe and FAC director Jim Cathcart was held in 2013 to mark the Fremantle Arts Centre's 40th anniversary. This exhibition, called *Mad About You*, featured artworks, objects, photographs, personal reflections and multimedia installations that represented the affinity that people (the local public and artists alike) feel toward the iconic FAC building. The *Mad About You* exhibition included artworks that depicted the exterior of the building in part or in its entirety. In this way the artworks in *Mad About You* were different from the kind of artworks I aimed to create over the course of my FAC residency; I wanted to focus on the specifics of a particular room within the

building, as opposed to the position of the building relative to the City of Fremantle and the wider community. During my time as an artist in residence at FAC I was principally concerned with investigating the building's current use as an arts centre, whilst also tangentially referring to its former uses, through an analysis of, and creative in situ response to, the architectural and material reality that is present day FAC.

Whilst FAC has dedicated studios that the participating artists in residence would occupy, I instead wanted to work within and in response to a *gallery* space. During my residency I was allocated a room to work in on the second story of the building. This room had until recently been a dedicated gallery space for curated exhibitions of artworks from the City of Fremantle Art Collection. FAC had decided to repurpose this room as a printmaking studio, and exhibitions of the collection would be relocated to a gallery space downstairs. In the interim, whilst the space was undergoing transition from a gallery to a studio, I would use the room as a site within which to work.

A key point of difference between the experience I had at Gallery East, where access was limited and the potential to create new artwork on site was near impossible, and the one I had at FAC was that I was able to make site-specific artworks *within* the gallery space as an artist in residence at FAC. Having unrestricted access to the gallery space at FAC afforded me the opportunity to test the feasibility of making site-specific artworks in situ. My intention was to produce artworks that would assimilate into the room, such that they might remain in the space long after it ceased to be a gallery. I thought that if I could produce artworks that were enmeshed, or in some way inseparable from the space in which they were made, then they would surely be more placeful than artworks made in one place and exhibited elsewhere.

My mode of operation within the room that I had been allocated differed from the other artists in residence at FAC insofar as it was my prerogative to make artwork *about* the space that I was working in. During my time as an artist in residence, I developed friendships with other artists who occupied other studios in the building. We often visited each other's studio spaces to view and discuss each other's work. During these studio visits I observed that the other artists were working on artworks that were going to be exhibited in *other* gallery spaces. Many of the artists had solo and group

shows organised that they were producing artwork for.²⁰ Instead of using the space as a perfunctory environment in which to produce artworks that would be exhibited elsewhere, I was working in the gallery space to produce works that would relate directly to that environment, and that would only ever be physically experienced there. I knew that I would not be re-siting the works elsewhere at the conclusion of my residency, and that whatever was produced during my time at FAC would remain in situ, be destroyed or exist only as photographic documentation. In contrast to my approach to making artworks for exhibition at Gallery East, at FAC I aimed to test the viability of working in situ to produce site-specific artworks that would directly refer to the specific place they had been produced in. A creative method pivotal to this objective is what I refer to as a space audit; an observation based activity where the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional details of a given space are recorded over time.

Space Audit

A space audit is a written, photographic and audio-visual means of rendering all of the acute conditions specific to a gallery space, as well as my subjective thoughts and feelings toward the space. Pivotal to my use of the space audit is an extended amount of time spent in the space, actively looking, taking notes, photographs and video or sound recordings – experiencing the space using all of my senses. Although I do record particular aromas smelt, sounds heard and what things feel like, above all, I privilege my sense of sight when engaged in the practice of space auditing.²¹ I carry out multiple space audits within the gallery space in order to collect as much information about the space as I possibly can over time. I understand the gallery to be in a constant

20. For a large proportion of artists who work in studios in artist in residence programs offered by different art galleries, the focus is on producing artworks that can be moved from the studio situation to a gallery space for public exhibition. This approach to artistic practice is an example of my understanding of the perpetuation of the production of placeless artworks. In contrast to this tendency, my project investigates strategies for producing artworks that challenge placelessness.

21. Generally, I refrain from using my sense of taste when space auditing.

state of flux, as a result of changing atmospheric conditions, exhibition installation and de-installation, the movement of people as well as other contingent factors, and so carrying out numerous space audits allows me to become conscious of change as it occurs.

With my notebook and camera in hand, and with the intent to spend time recording as much information as possible, I set about exploring the gallery space that I had been allocated to work in for the duration of my residency at FAC. The information that I recorded during this initial space audit provided a repository of material that I could draw from to produce artworks in response to the gallery space. Each space audit thereafter would reveal additional information about the room, as things that I had immediately noticed receded and other subtle or more deeply embedded features of the room came to the fore. Conducting space audits at different times of the day often allowed for less obvious aspects of the space to surface. A change in light and shadow recorded during the second space audit of FAC revealed one of the doorway architraves to be skewed due to the unevenness of the wall that it was recessed into:

Sitting on the gallery floor in the afternoon with my back against the northern end wall, I watch as the sunlight that's streaming in through the windows moves across the wall opposite me. On the left hand side of the wall is a doorway, recessed, or set back into the wall, giving me some indication of how thick the wall might actually be. Toward the right hand side of the wall is a boarded-up dumb waiter and to the right of this, the wooden door that I installed just last week. As the light in the space changes my attention is drawn to the doorway recessed into the wall. A shadow that's cast by the moulding surrounding the recess initially appears soft grey in colour with an edge that seems to effervesce and dissolve into the white wall. This shadow becomes markedly darker, its edge more defined, as day slowly turns to night and the light in the space begins to fade. Now that it is darker and sharper I can see that this shadow has an undulating edge making it appear 'thicker' and 'thinner' in places. I move closer to the wall and stand side on to the doorway's architrave. The wall appears to be bowed. The architrave is well adhered to the wall

and bends with it; this looks to be the reason for the strange shadow that the doorway casts. (Lyons 2012, unpublished notes from space audit)

The time I spent examining the seemingly empty space of the gallery using a multi-sensory approach resulted in the site becoming increasingly and beguilingly complex and multi-layered. Materials and features that were initially passed over as constituent later became suggestive of deeper or more multivalent histories. The more time that I spent actively engaging the senses was proportionate to how much I learnt about the gallery space as a site. My use of the space audit within the context of this research project has been informed by two central ideas: Eyal Weizman's notion of forensic architecture, and Leon van Schaik's notion of spatial intelligence. The writings of both Weizman and van Schaik are analysed further in the following sections, as a means to further elucidate my use of the space audit as a method for producing site-specific artworks.

Forensic Architecture

Eyal Weizman's ideas on forensic architecture, and in particular his notion of 'the translator' helps describe the role I adopt when undertaking a space audit within the gallery space. Weizman defines forensic architecture as the "forensic analysis of built structures" (2010, 9) and uses this term to describe a field of architectural research focused on buildings and structures that have been reduced to ruins or rubble – the so called 'silent' victims of contemporary warfare (2010). Weizman suggests "forensic practices have gradually started to replace the (human) witness in international law investigations" (2010, 10). Within this field the built environment is understood to bear witness to natural and political events that shape, deform and alter the structural integrity and the material constitution of buildings and structures (Weizman et al. 2010). In this way the field of forensic architecture transforms "the built environment from an illustration of alleged violations to a source of knowledge about historical events" (Weizman et al. 2010, 59). Researchers in the field of forensic architecture act as interpreters of what is left of the inanimate buildings that form a part of the investigation into contemporary wartime atrocities (Weizman 2010).

Whereas Weizman describes the ways that forensic architecture is used in crime or conflict investigations, I relate his ideas to the way that an art gallery space can be seen as subject to a combination of political, institutional and phenomenological forces that shape its appearance and directly impact upon the artwork exhibited within it. My interest in forensic architecture is centred on Weizman's analysis of the meaning of the word *forensics*. In his article "Forensic Architecture: Only the Criminal can Solve the Crime" (2010) Weizman explains:

Derived from the Latin *forensis*, the word 'forensics' refers to the 'forum' and designates the practice and skill of making an argument by using objects before a professional, political or legal gathering. Forensics is a part of rhetoric. However, forensics does not refer to the speech of humans but to that of objects. In forensic rhetorics, it is objects that address the forum. This speech of objects needs, of course, 'translation' or 'interpretation', and Roman orators referred to such speech on behalf of inanimate objects as *prosopopoeia*. [...] Because the thing speaks through, or is 'ventriloquized' by, its translator, the object and its translator constitute a necessary and interdependent unit. (2010, 10–11)

In applying these terms to my use of the space audit method, I adopt the role of translator when I occupy the art gallery space and conduct the audit. In the process of space auditing I am able to actively 'read' all of the surfaces, objects, materials and architectural elements that constitute a specific gallery space. According to Weizman, no building is immune to change and every building or structure directly responds to forces of all kinds and "are said to 'perform' (or mis-perform) in relation to program" (2012, 389). Despite their static appearance, all buildings – galleries included, "are in constant movement, they expand and contract with temperature and with the slow degenerating of materials" (Weizman 2010, 13). Weizman offers insight into some of the ways that buildings register change in his essay "Forensic Architecture: Notes from Fields and Forums" (2012):

It takes years for trapped air bubbles to make their way between paint layers and structure; the path and rate of their crawl depending on larger

environmental conditions and their constant fluctuations; walls gradually bend and ceilings sag. Deterioration and erosion continue the builders' processes of form making. Cracks make their way from geological formations across the city surfaces to buildings and architectural details ... The structural pathology of a building is a diagram that records the influence of an entangled and potentially infinite political/natural environment, registering year-on-year temperature changes, almost imperceptible fluctuations in humidity and pollution which are themselves indicators of political transformations, patterns and tendencies. (2012, 389)

By actively taking on the role of the translator, and having at my disposal a set of methods that allow me to conjure, conceptualise and realise artworks in situ, I effectively become the mediator between the built form of the art gallery and the 'forum', which in this case is the viewer of my artwork in the gallery space. In adopting the role of a translator, I provide a voice to those things that may typically go unnoticed within the gallery space. These features are then able to "speak" (Weizman 2010, 11) as I attempt to understand what they are and speculate on how they may have come to be.

The forensic approach I take to investigating a site through a space audit allows for something similar to what Weizman et al. describe as an "archaeology of the present" (2010, 63) to emerge. Weizman et al. suggest that forensic architecture is often "inclined towards complex, sometimes unstable and even contradictory accounts of events as it navigates the murky ground of a 'fuzzy' forensics of probabilities, possibilities and interpretations" (2010, 63). It is the speculative nature of this forensics that allows for an unpacking of "present histories" (Weizman et al. 2010, 63). In a similar way, I view particular material and architectural features of the room at FAC as indicators of past histories, clues to the room's possible former uses. In speculating on these constitutive features, their former uses and how they might have come to be the way they are, the space audit takes on the form of a subjective historical record of the gallery space.

Weizman suggests that each individual's understanding or analysis of a building is informed in part by their prior experiences in the built environment. In this way, my use of the space audit within the room at FAC could be thought of as being informed and influenced by my previous experiences of other gallery spaces throughout my lifetime. This is a point that Weizman raises when referring to experts who are called upon to 'speak' for the ruin or building at the centre of a case, where forensic architectural analysis is required (2010). Despite the expertise of the translator, who is equipped with specialist skills to give voice to the building, for Weizman an entirely objective analysis of the building or structure is impossible (2010); any analysis of a building will be coloured to some degree by the subjectivity of the translator. I identify a correlation between Weizman's hypothesis and the notion of 'spatial intelligence' as outlined by van Schaik in his publication, *Spatial Intelligence: New Futures for Architecture* (2008).

Spatial Intelligence and the Art Gallery

Architect and researcher Leon van Schaik suggests that every one of us possesses 'spatial intelligence', but that it is "an underrated human capability mainly because people use it unconsciously all the time as they navigate their way through their daily lives" (2008, 8). Spatial intelligence, according to van Schaik, is "a capability which has evolved over millennia and which unfolds in particular places and creates particular mental spaces which we also carry around with us and through which we see the world" (2007, 2). van Schaik insists that there is a need for each of us to acknowledge the position from which we are observing the world around us if our "observation is to be more than an unconscious projection of internalised assumptions" (2008, 50), arguing that:

We build up a spatial history for ourselves composed of memories of room upon room, garden upon garden, street upon street, farm upon farm, field upon field. From the same capabilities we slowly construct diverging assumptions about the nature of the spatiality of the world, and differing preferences for how to inhabit it and move through it. Through our history in space we establish an individual 'mental space' of assumptions about

space such that as adults we usually accommodate to new experiences of space by saying out loud: ‘That’s just like “X”!’ – or, when with companions: ‘Isn’t that just like “Y”?’’. (2008, 40)

In applying van Schaik’s ideas to my use of the space audit, it follows that all of the experiences that I have had whilst working, visiting or exhibiting in different art gallery spaces over the course of my lifetime will subconsciously shape the way that I see the FAC gallery space. All of the past experiences and memories of gallery spaces visited previously form something of an ideal in my mind, something akin to the impossible, perfect white cube. When conducting the space audits within the gallery at FAC, I was aware and mindful of my own “preferences and assumptions” (van Schaik 2008, 52), as a way to avoid focusing on those aspects of the gallery space that I *thought* may be there – smooth white walls and an even, level floor. The space audit then became a method for collecting specific information unique to the gallery space, and overcoming my own “unconscious projection of internalised assumptions” (van Schaik 2008, 50). Within this research project I have used the space audit as means to uncover and illuminate those things that make the FAC gallery space different from any other gallery space. Information recorded using the space audits were harnessed and ‘funnelled’ into the production of site-specific artworks that aim to challenge placelessness. Select artworks will be analysed further in the following sections.

The Fremantle Arts Centre: From Space Audit to Site-Specific Artwork

On the first day of my residency at FAC, the empty room had visible vestiges of art gallery space tropes; namely white walls, a polished wooden floor and what I would describe as ubiquitous gallery ‘furniture’ (for example a white-painted shelf similar to those I’ve seen in other galleries supporting data projectors). A number of different features were immediately apparent as I entered the space through one of the two doorways: a dumbwaiter that would have previously connected this room to the one next-door had been boarded-up, and two small rectangular windows (too high to see out from) flanked an open fireplace. A peculiar missing length of jarrah skirting in the centre of the west wall was suggestive of a doorway having been there, but, curiously,

the wall backed onto a stairwell; a doorway in this wall would have served no purpose. The following excerpt from a space audit that I conducted in response to this room at FAC revealed the gallery to be far from empty, and provided me with a starting point from which to make artworks in the space.

As I walk through the doorway I notice a pine-coloured wooden door leaning on the left hand side wall. The door looks very much like the French doors in the downstairs galleries, although it looks to be a door that would fit into the standard sized doorway I just passed through. It's lying landscape; a strip of grubby looking blue tape running along the bottom edge that rests against the floor. There are faint traces of duck-egg blue coloured paint on the door's rough wooden surface and small depressions here and there from wear and tear. There are pieces of wood and dowel plugging up what looks like a misplaced or re-cut hole for the doorknob. My conclusion is that this is not a new door. Directly to the right hand side of the doorway, on the floor, under the dumbwaiter, is an A4 plastic document folder. There's nothing in the folder but it's scuffed. It almost looks like it has been taken to with a bit of sandpaper. The clear plastic partially obscures the view of the polished dark wood substrate beneath. The floorboards have been laid in a regular pattern and run from the side of the room where the doorways are toward the side with the fireplace. The windowsill under the window to the left of the fireplace appears truncated; the top plank of the sill has been cut off approximately three centimetres shy of the left hand side wall and the scotia beneath butts right up to the wall but it too, is shortened. Beneath the other window, directly to the right of the fireplace, leans a rectangular piece of laminated plywood and next to it, lay two sawhorses. I count two live power points, three 'blind' ones, two light switches and a single motion sensor – all of these utilities, bar the light switches, are in, what appear to me to be strange places, half way up walls in the case of the power points, or seemingly too low to capture much movement, in the case of the motion sensor. There's a picture rail, up high, close to the



Figure 3.1 Shannon Lyons, An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window, 2012. Photograph by Bo Wong.

ceiling and a series of large holes in the ceiling, evenly spaced out in a rectangular arrangement, which look like they might be from the recent removal of gallery track lighting. The only light in the space now filters in from outside. The walls have taken on the texture of orange peel in places and the corners of all of the architraves, the dado rail and window frames are rounded off from so many layers of white paint. (Lyons 2012, unpublished notes from space audit)

An artwork that emerged as a direct result of this space audit is titled *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window* (2012) (Figure 3.1). This work consisted of three components: a rectangular board made of ply sandwiched between two pieces of Masonite, a small white box made to resemble a ‘blind’²² electrical power point and a tin of white paint. The ply and Masonite component was an aestheticised version of the wooden board that I found leaning against the wall on the day I arrived in the gallery. I was unsure as to whether this board had been left in the space to become my makeshift desk, or whether its function was instead to board-up the nearby window. I became interested in the way that the board simultaneously worked to draw attention to the window above as an architectural feature of the gallery, and at the same time pointed towards the transition of the space from a gallery to a studio environment (in its evocation of a desk). It was my intention for the artwork *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window* to echo the ambiguity and multifaceted nature of the situation that I had first witnessed and recorded using the space audit method.

With the other two components of the work (the tin of paint and the ‘blind’ power point), I also attempted to allude to and highlight various aspects of the gallery space. I chose to include a tin of white paint as part of the work to suggest that the board could be, or was going to be, painted white, and would therefore seamlessly recede into the

22. The term ‘blind’ is used to describe to the non-functional nature of some of the power points in the gallery space, power points that did not have any holes for electrical appliances to be plugged into. I also refer to a boarded-up doorway that I created as a ‘blind’ doorway. This artwork will be discussed later in this chapter.



Figure 3.2 Shannon Lyons, An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window (detail), 2012. Photograph by Bo Wong.

fabric of the gallery space when used to board-up the window above. I had thought that the presence of the tin of paint might draw attention to other architectural features of the space that had also been painted white. During the process of space auditing, I had become acutely aware of the space's idiosyncratic features, such as the projector shelf, the boarded-up dumbwaiter, and the various architraves that had all been painted white. As signifiers for the room's multi-layered history and past functions, these features had been homogenised through the application of white paint. Where the conventional art gallery trope of white paint had been used to cloak or mask the gallery space's former uses and histories, the tin of white paint in *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window* was employed to expose them through its presence.

The third component of *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window* was a fabricated 'blind' power point (Figure 3.2). I wanted to draw attention to the many power points I had become aware of whilst space auditing, and the unusual positions that they were located in throughout the gallery space. I constructed a small box out of MDF and sanded it, rounding off its sharp edges, to resemble a blind power point, painted it white, and installed this fabrication in an equally odd position – halfway up the wall, above the dado rail but under the small rectangular window. The blind power point was installed just under eye level on the wall, in the position usually reserved for artworks. The intervention wasn't a perfect replication of any of the blind power points already in the room, and so its facture and function as a purely aesthetic object would become apparent at this height. The intention of the peculiarity or the 'not quite right' appearance of this object was to operate as an invitation to reconsider and refocus on the other seemingly insignificant features of the space (such as a fabricated air vent and a blind doorway), which would in fact also reveal themselves as artworks over time.

Following my response to van Schaik's notion of spatial intelligence and the need to be conscious of my own assumptions when entering a gallery space, the method of space auditing allowed me to look past the apparent blankness of the room turned white cube, and see the gallery space as having a unique set of qualities and characteristics. As evidenced through *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to*

board up the window, I was able to use these characteristics to inform the production of site-specific artworks that in turn, allow for the specificity of the place to come to the fore. The fabrication of objects drawing on pre-existing architectural features of the gallery became a consistent method used in the production of site-specific artworks as part of this research project, and will be discussed further in the following section.

Replication and Reproduction in the Work of Fiona Connor

As part of this research project I have employed replication as a method for producing site-specific artworks. I have replicated and re-sited specific architectural features and objects particular to a chosen gallery space. My intention for the re-siting of the replication has been to encourage a reappraisal of the existing architectural features of the gallery space, resulting in more placeful artworks. I align this way of working with that of Connor who has employed replication in her practice to produce site-specific artworks.

In an effort to direct the viewer's attention to the particularities of an exhibition space, Connor faithfully replicates architectural features that are typically overlooked. At first glance, the "sculptural 'echoes'" (Wilson 2009, 148) that Connor creates are almost indistinguishable from the industrially manufactured doors, windows, staircases and structural supports that have come to constitute her formal vocabulary. Connor pulls what is initially unseen or unnoticed into view by situating the replicated feature in an unexpected or unconventional location or position, within the same space as the pre-existing feature. For the artwork *Something Transparent (please go round the back) II* (2010) (Figure 3.3), Connor replicated the steel triangular ceiling trusses and the distinctive skyward-facing lights in the gallery space of the Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand. These fabricated ceiling trusses were installed on the concrete floor of the gallery, directly underneath the pre-existing ceiling trusses. The installation of the replications in this way effectively divided the otherwise uninterrupted expanse of gallery floor and dramatically altered the way that the viewer moved through the space. The viewer was forced to consciously navigate their way from one side of the gallery to the other, taking care not to trip over Connor's artwork. In turn, this interruption

Figure 3.3 Fiona Connor, *Something Transparent (please go round the back) II*, installation view, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand, 2010.

to the space drew the pre-existing ceiling trusses of the Auckland Art Gallery into visibility. Exhibiting replications of things that the viewer is not typically encouraged to see within the gallery space enables Connor to highlight the existence of these functional, yet frequently ignored features. As Wilson writes, “through the surprise of unexpected repetition” and by meticulously translating the most minute of details with a high degree of studied care, Connor’s replications highlight “the incidental quirks of otherwise functional objects and spaces, effectively returning them from function to form” (2009, 148).

Writer Andrew Berardini has referred to Connor’s artistic process of replication as “architectural quoting” (2013, 203). I understand the act of quoting to mean repeating or copying, as one would copy out words from a text, and so the term ‘architectural quoting’ might describe the act of making a copy of an architectural element, such as

a ceiling truss or a staircase.²³ Following this, if the purpose of including a quote in a text is to provide evidence to support or illustrate an argument, Connor's artworks then act as architectural quotes that support the *specificity* of the art gallery context. After identifying the architectural features that make each gallery space unique, Connor's efforts to replicate these features bring about an awareness of the individualised architectural character of each gallery space that her artworks are situated in.

However, comparing Connor's method of replication to the process of directly copying a written text, word for word, would deny her artwork a quality that can't be overlooked. There is a desire to be accurate, precise and exacting when quoting from a text. Whilst I identify a similar desire to be exacting in the way that Connor goes to great lengths to achieve a likeness to the pre-existing features of a gallery space, there are frequently subtle yet deliberate differences between these features, and the fabricated replications. In constructing and finishing the artwork by hand, each of Connor's replications is unique, varying slightly from one form to the next.

The lengths that Connor goes to in order to achieve exactitude in her artworks and at the same time imbue each replication with individuality is best evidenced by the work *Something Transparent (please go round the back)* (2009) (*Figure 3.4*), exhibited at Michael Lett Gallery in Auckland, New Zealand.²⁴ For this artwork Connor made fifteen replications of the street-front façade of the gallery space. These replications were exhibited "in an evenly spaced row that receded into the exhibition space" (Wilson 2009, 148). An extended quote from Michael Wilson's review of *Something Transparent*

23. The practice of 'architectural quoting' is well documented in late 20th century architecture. 'Quoting' different architectural elements and forms from history that had been abandoned during modernism became a stylistic device of postmodern architecture, as practiced by architects such as Robert Venturi. See Kenneth Frampton's "Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance", in Hal Foster's *The Anti-aesthetic: Essays on Postmodern Culture* (1983) for discussion surrounding the implications this postmodern practice has had for architecture.

24. Fiona Connor was nominated for the prestigious Walters Prize for *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*. The artist decided to make a new site-specific artwork, *Something Transparent (please go round the back) II*, for the Walters Prize exhibition in 2010 at the Auckland Art Gallery in Auckland, New Zealand.

Figure 3.4 Fiona Connor, *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*, installation view, Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand, 2009.

(please go round the back) provides a clear account of how Connor was able to replicate the façade of the gallery, by combining ready-made objects with hand-made and hand-painted elements:

At times Connor approached perfection in reproducing the material details of her source, at others she veered away into rough approximation. For example, while the black vinyl lettering announcing the show's title and the gallery's hours applied to the original door was repeated again and again without discernible variation, the scuffs on its white-painted wooden frame suggested portrait drawings of the real thing rather than photographic copies. A sticker bearing the gallery's street number appeared 15 times unchanged above 15 indistinguishable doorbells, but a smudge of green paint on the door handle varied subtly from version to version. The juxtaposition of mechanical and manual production amplified the signifiers of each and admitted both the seductiveness and the impossibility of convincing illusion. (2009, 148)

Where Wilson uses the term ‘reproducing’ to describe Connor’s process, I understand her process of fabricating existing architectural features to in fact be ‘replicating’. I use the term replication when referring to Connor’s artwork in two different ways; to describe the act of manually or physically replicating a specific architectural feature of a gallery space, and to describe the resulting artwork that eventuates from this process. Furthermore, in contrast to a reproduction, in the Benjaminian sense of the term, I argue that it is the inherent hand-made nature of Connor’s replications that afford her artworks a certain individuality, or sense of ‘aura’.

In his essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”, Walter Benjamin’s discussion of the mechanical reproduction of a work of art directly refers to the use of a technical process, either a print media or photographic-based rendering of an original artwork. Benjamin states that “in principle a work of art has always been reproducible” and that manmade things have been reproduced “by pupils in practice of their craft, by masters for diffusing their works, and, finally, by third parties in the pursuit of gain” (1969, 218). Benjamin asserts that the reproduction of an artwork diminishes the ‘essence’ of that work, and supposes that the original or ‘authentic’ artwork is thought to possess an ‘aura’ of authenticity that cannot be reproduced or present in a copy (1969). The aura of the original artwork, for Benjamin, is detached from everyday reality, devoid of social and political influences and unable to be transposed on to the reproduction (Larson 2010). Applying these terms to the practice of Connor, I understand her artworks to be unique replications, rather than reproductions of existing architectural features, that in turn reflect an individuality and uniqueness akin to Benjamin’s notion of the original artwork’s aura.

This is evidenced by Connor’s work *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*. The traces of use and history that are embedded on the surface of the original façade of the Michael Lett gallery space are transposed onto each repeated, replicated façade (fifteen times over) with each showing a distinct trace of the artist’s hand. Aspects of the original façade that were manually replicated through painted details (such as the similar but distinct smudges on each door handle) make each replication individual, a one-off, or what might be described as a new original (*Figure 3.5*). In producing an artwork that is equally as unique as the pre-existing architectural feature, a replication

Figure 3.5 Fiona Connor, *Something Transparent (please go round the back)* (detail), 2009.

as opposed to a reproduction – the process of replication becomes a strategy for highlighting the individualised character of the gallery space.

The Rendition as a Method for Making

Whereas Connor selects pre-existing architectural features particular to a gallery space, (such as ceiling trusses in the case of *Something Transparent (please go round the back II)* or a gallery's entire façade (for *Something Transparent (please go round the back)*) and replicates them, I instead take the sum of a selection of architectural features in a gallery, and produce artworks that operate as an amalgam of these features. This process is directly informed by the method of space auditing, whereby I record details of the gallery space's idiosyncrasies through observation. I then synthesise this information to produce artworks that appropriate various aspects of the space, without producing a direct replication of any one thing. I refer to these artworks as renditions.



Figure 3.6 Shannon Lyons, *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.





Figure 3.7 Shannon Lyons, *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* (detail), 2013. Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 3.8 Shannon Lyons, *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* (detail), 2013. Photograph by Bo Wong.

An artwork titled *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* (2013) (Figure 3.6) produced as part of my residency at FAC consisted of a blind doorway made from MDF installed on the gallery wall between a pre-existing recessed doorway and the dumbwaiter. This artwork was made by drawing from the characteristics of the existing architectural features of the gallery, including the specific mouldings of the recessed doorway, the dado rail and the boarded-up defunct nature of the dumbwaiter. For this work I closely matched the profiles of the architrave moulding and the bases of the pilasters of the original recessed doorway before constructing a scale version of the doorframe from MDF. Not wishing to alter the pre-existing features on the wall and taking account of the fact that my fabricated blind doorway would be taller than the existing doorway, I cut a section off of the bottom of the fabricated doorway and positioned it alongside the existing doorway so that the truncated base of the pilasters sat on top of the skirting board, aligning the tops of all of the bases of the pilasters and the tops of the architraves. The fabricated blind doorway existed as a rendition; an amalgam of the pre-existing architectural features of the gallery, and not a replication of any one element. In its close affinity with its surrounds, the blind doorway was not instantly recognisable, but instead simply looked like it might have always been there. Having the door sit atop the skirting board and 'float' in front of the dado rail (in a way that a pre-existing door definitely did not do), provided a clue that the blind doorway was in fact a site-specific artwork (Figures 3.7 and 3.8).

Another work titled *It was all I could do to stop the air from moving* (2013) (Figures 3.9 and 3.10) consisted of a fabricated air vent installed high up on the eastern end wall of the gallery space. In contrast to the existing air vent with its perforated front face, the fabricated air vent that I made from MDF was covered in black plastic, tethered at the edges by black gaffer tape. The crispness of this object, its smooth, pure whiteness and hard-edged appearance coupled with the dark, impermeable plastic shroud, made it stand out against the rest of the room. The sharpness of the form was in stark contrast to the softened edges of the other architectural features of the room: the rounded dado, the curved, worn fireplace surround, the bull-nosed jarrah skirting boards and the slightly rounded-off edges and corners of every other thing painted white in the room, including the pre-existing solitary air vent. The fabricated air vent was slightly



Figure 3.9 Shannon Lyons, *It was all I could do to stop the air from moving*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 3.10 Shannon Lyons, *It was all I could do to stop the air from moving* (installation view), 2013. Photograph by Bo Wong.

different in ratio and shorter in length. Instead of measuring the original air vent and using this to produce a replication, I had instead modelled the fabricated air vent on a modern extruded terracotta vent brick commonly found in new builds. It was an amalgam – a rendition generated out of a response to gallery’s existing features.

The work *It was all I could do to stop the air from moving*, and ultimately all of the artworks produced as part of my residency at FAC, were intended to be read in relation to one another, *and* in relation to what already existed in the room. This would reveal or aid to illuminate the different stratigraphic layers of the gallery’s accumulated histories. In his article “Notes on Copying” (2015), writer Nick Currie discusses the effects of the cover²⁵ within the music industry, and how what might be described as “wrong details” can work to refresh the over-familiar originals, “helping to make them visible once more” (2015, 109). Currie explains that “things get more interesting the more they accumulate the rich patina of context, reference, heritage, interpretation, backstory” (2015, 106). In light of Currie’s sentiments, I identify the ‘wrong details’ of works such as *It was all I could do to stop the air from moving* as indeed helping to make the pre-existing features of the gallery space ‘more visible’.

At the conclusion of my residency at FAC, and in leaving the gallery for the last time, I wondered what would happen to the artworks that I had left behind. Enmeshed into the architectural fabric of the room, it was as if my works had become anomalous features of the space, similar to those that had inspired and informed their production. Would the artworks remain there? Would they be absorbed as part of the room’s architectural fabric? I wondered whether the wooden board of the work *An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window* would be moved by the gallery staff, relocated to a storeroom elsewhere, only to be dusted off later and used as a desk by a future resident artist. I could only postulate on the details, but what I hoped for was that the works would be subsumed and enveloped by the art institution – forever in their place.

25. Currie’s article is about the cover within the music industry in a general sense, and includes a discussion of musicians producing cover versions or renditions of original songs, as well as artists producing visual artworks as variations of famous album sleeves.

The conclusion of my residency marked the end of the room's function as a gallery space, and its beginning as a printmaking studio. Given that the room no longer functioned as a gallery space, would my site-specific renditions continue to operate as artworks? Are the works ultimately any different to the sinks and shelves that now populate the studio? For some, the works may go unnoticed. Perhaps it will be those intimately familiar with the place (those who know that the covered air vent, the blind power point and doorway have not always been there) who will offer a story of their creation should the questions ever arise: What is that? Why is that? I know that my blind doorway, *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them*, remains on the wall of what is now FAC's printmaking studio. An image that appeared on my Facebook feed, posted by FAC, featured the doorway in the background of a photograph of a print class, its blank face now peppered with screws from which hang the class' print rollers. Not only was my artwork *still there*, but it had evidently been absorbed, re-appropriated and emplaced by the room's current function and usage (Figure 3.11).

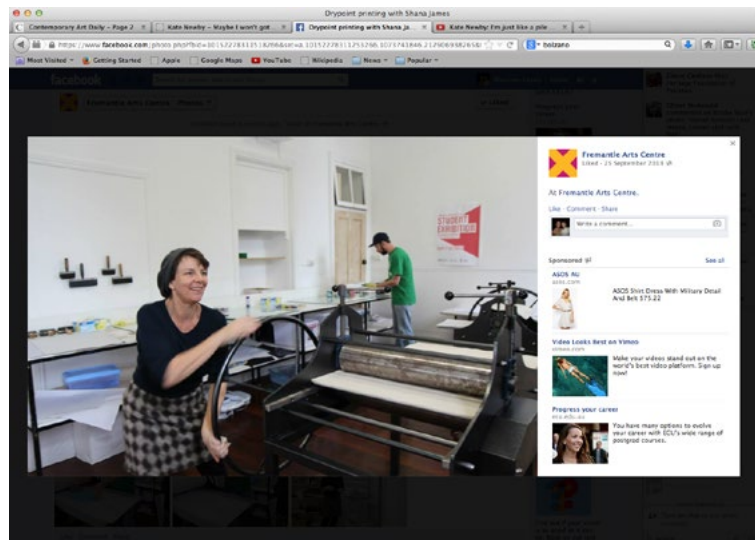


Figure 3.11 Screen capture of the Fremantle Arts Centre Facebook page, the artwork *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* is clearly visible in the background of the image displayed, 25th of September 2013.

I posit that in the absorption of my site-specific artworks into the architectural framework of the room, such as in the case of *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them*, and in the potential for others to enter a circulation of usage (*An object that could have been my desk but might be used to board up the window*), the works produced as part of my residency at FAC challenge the production of placeless artworks. Where typically the artist in residence occupies the studio space to produce artworks for exhibition elsewhere, my artworks are more placeful in their inherent bonds to the place of their making.

This chapter addresses how I have employed and adapted the method of participant observation to produce a body of site-specific artwork made in response to Moana Project Space (Moana), an ARI located in the Perth central business district. Before analysing a selection of these artworks, I firstly consider the ways that artists associated with the Artist Placement Group as well as Mexican artist Raul Ortega Ayala employ the method of participant observation and apply it to their activities in non-art contexts. I have used participant observation whilst working in the installation team of art galleries, and I draw upon these artists' practices to contextualise my use of this method in the production of site-specific artworks.

I propose that the implementation of participant observation is an effective method when used to fuel the production of site-specific artworks that emphasise the specificity and individualised character of an art gallery context. I suggest that by working within an art gallery, becoming complicit in the site, and channelling what is learnt and understood about this context into the production of site-specific artworks assists in challenging placelessness.

Working within the Art Gallery Space

As I have discussed in previous chapters, I have acquired knowledge about particular art galleries through conducting space audits and by working in situ as an artist in residence. What has emerged from my practice-led research is that being able to spend time in a space is pivotal to my production of placeful site-specific artworks within art galleries. Spending time digging around, uncovering, and *really looking* helps to avoid the trappings of superficiality and a purely knee-jerk response to what is immediately obvious about a gallery space. Pivotal to my methodology is being physically situated in a gallery for an extended period of time.

While spending time making artworks directly within an art gallery space is possible on occasion, for the most part, to be situated in a gallery space for any lengthy period of time is highly improbable. The rationale for this varies from one art institution to the next but the following factors play a part in limiting the amount of time that can be spent in an art gallery space making artworks. Firstly, not every art gallery offers an artist in residence program. Secondly, artist residencies in art institutions usually take place in dedicated studio spaces, not in the art gallery rooms themselves. Finally, most art galleries have tight schedules and as a consequence there are only ever one or two weeks (at most) between exhibitions during which time the gallery is closed to the public for the de-installation of one show and the installation of the next. While I could potentially gain access to an art gallery to produce new site-specific artworks in situ during this time of exhibition changeover, the likelihood of this eventuating is remote. Opportunities to occupy art gallery spaces are few and far between and finding ways to negotiate and overcome these restrictions has been imperative for this research project. As discussed in Chapter Two, when challenged with limited access to the Gallery East site I deferred to habitual methods of making artworks in one place (a workshop) and then re-locating them to the gallery space for exhibition. Not being able to work in situ within the art gallery resulted in the production of what I describe as placeless artworks. In investigating ways of challenging the production of placeless artworks, I have used the method of participant observation as a way to work within art gallery spaces when more conventional modes of occupation are not possible. Actively working within a gallery space as a volunteer, and becoming privy to the gallery's

internal rhythms and processes has allowed me to navigate and negotiate the means by which I approach making site-specific artworks within art galleries.

Participant Observation

In the following sections of this chapter, I outline how contemporary artists have employed participant observation as a method for exploring non-art contexts. Described as “a hallmark of both anthropological and sociological studies” (Kawulich 2005, para. 1), participant observation refers to an ethnographic method that involves “a process of learning through exposure to or involvement in the day-to-day or routine activities of participants in the research setting” (Schensul, Schensul and LeCompte 1999, 91). A key component of participant observation is direct observation, a process that involves an individual using their senses to ascertain their “thoughts, feelings and ideas on what is happening” (Kawulich 2005, para. 78) within a given context. Direct observation is akin to my use of space auditing, where I collect information on what I notice about the specific conditions of a gallery space through a process of looking and recording. Enveloping direct observation, participant observation is a more active mode of acquiring knowledge where an individual learns about a place through *doing* rather than by simply looking or observing. Participant observation involves the individual carrying out context specific tasks and processes within the research setting as well as engaging in dialogue with the intimates of that place (the people who live and/or work there) (Kawulich 2005).

Within my research project I draw on participant observation as a method to investigate art contexts and selected art galleries and institutions, as a way to gain a deeper understanding of art institutional practices, including the installation and de-installation of artwork and exhibition design. The knowledge I glean from my experiences of physically working in art galleries enables me to comprehend the differences (or similarities) in the ways that architectural spaces are used in different galleries and identify practices or processes that allow for these differences or similarities to become apparent. This knowledge, in turn, informs the way I work in response to different art galleries to produce site-specific artworks that illuminate the particularities of the gallery space in question.

When utilised as a method within contemporary art practice, participant observation allows an artist to understand and learn about a specific context through direct physical involvement with that context and with the people it envelopes. Instead of working in a studio environment making artwork *about* a particular context at arms-length from it, participant observation allows for a physical and emplaced experience of that context. It is this emplaced experience of the gallery context, gleaned through working in this context and my use of participatory observation, that I explain has been effectual in producing more placeful artworks within the art gallery context.

Harnessing the Ethnographic Method of Participant Observation: Artist Placement Group and Raul Ortega Ayala

Informing my use of participant observation within this research project is the Artist Placement Group and contemporary artist Raul Ortega Ayala. Founded in London in 1966 by British artists John Latham and Barbara Steveni, the Artist Placement Group (APG) aimed to establish “new kinds of collaborative relationships between art and industry” (Eleey 2007, 156). Latham and Steveni organised opportunities for artists to be invited into “real world” (Lippard 1997a, xiv) corporate or industrial environments, not as subservient menial workers but as inventive individuals who “could have a positive effect on industry through both their inherent creativity and their relative ignorance of its conventions” (Eleey 2007, 156). Ultimately, the artists undertaking these placements would invariably “develop new ways of working as a result of their experiences” (James 2013, 158) within each specific context.²⁶

26. The widespread “established model of the artist-in-residence” (Fisher and Fortnum 2013, 11) programs run outside of art institutions, can, in part, be attributed to various artist groups active in the 1960s and 1970s such as the APG. In her review “Artist Placement Group” (2013), Sarah James states that artists associated with APG were not placed in specific organisations as “artists in residence” (2013, 158). However, Peter Eleey as well as Elizabeth Fisher and Rebecca Fortnum cite APG’s activities as important precursors to the development of contemporary artist in residence programs outside of art institutions. For a comprehensive outline of the development of contemporary artist in residence programs, in both art and non-art contexts, see “Artist-in-Residence History” on the TransArtist website, (<http://www.transartists.org/residency-history>).

In his article “Context is Half the Work” (2007), Peter Eeley describes the foundation upon which APG was developed and attributes the moment of the group’s inception to Steveni who realised that instead of “scouring London factories for some materials [...] instead of picking up industrial residue, artists ought to be inside the factories working within the systems of production” (Eeley 2007, 156). This new way of thinking about industry, this “radical approach to the ‘applied arts’” (Eeley 2007, 156) envisioned by Steveni, meant that the material products and by-products of systems of production constituting the artists’ material vocabularies in the past, became just one thing that they had at their disposal to work with. The greater context of an organisation that each artist was exposed to while working within a specific company, became the primary raw material to be explored, mined and manipulated. With this, the emphasis shifted away from a manual manipulation of specific materials and toward a more dematerialised way of working, where ideas were relayed via varied means that didn’t necessarily lead to definitive art objects (James 2013).

The goal for many of the artists associated with APG was not to make any art objects at all for the duration of their placement within specific organisations (James 2013). However, many of the artists associated with APG documented the time they spent working in a particular field by producing photographs, videos and sound recordings as well as writing detailed notes and reports on what they observed (James 2013). These observations in essence became the artistic outcomes of the artist’s involvement in the selected industries of which they became a part, and ultimately the ephemera pertaining to these observations were later exhibited within art gallery contexts (*Figures 4.1 and 4.2*).²⁷

27. Exhibitions such as APG’s *Inno70* survey exhibition, also was referred to as *Art & Economics*, at the Hayward Gallery in London, in 1971 (Bishop 2012) and the groups retrospective *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79* at Raven Row in London in 2012 (James 2013) illustrate this point. Without these kinds of staged exhibitions, much of the research and activities that the APG artists were conducting in non-art contexts wouldn’t be considered to be art. Again, this practice points to the use of the art gallery or institution as a purely legitimising structure, a kind of non-place.

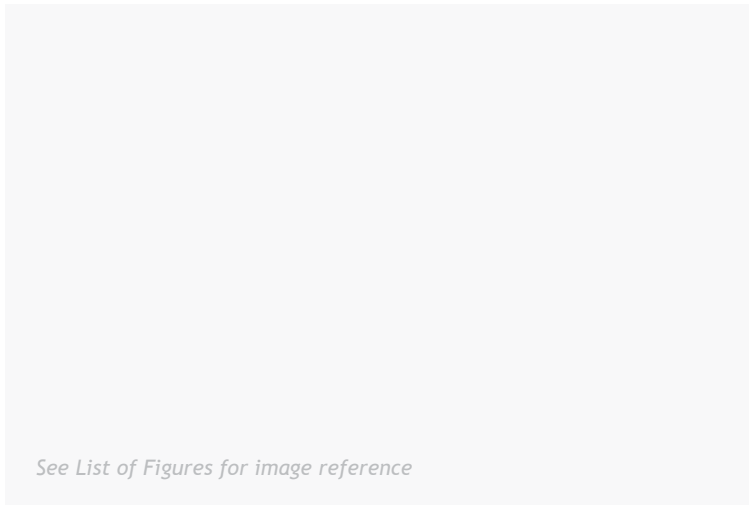


Figure 4.1 Artist Placement Group, Exhibition *Inno70*, installation view, Hayward Gallery, London, 1971.

Figure 4.2 Artist Placement Group, Exhibition *The Individual and the Organisation: Artist Placement Group 1966-79*, installation view, Raven Row, London, 2012.

While not explicitly stated in the literature, from my understanding of the processes that they undertook while situated in their specific fields, the individuals associated with APG were amongst the first contemporary artists to harness the method of participant observation in their art practices.²⁸ The APG, and other groups established around the same time,²⁹ paved the way for contemporary artists to seek out opportunities to become participant observers in a variety of different fields seemingly unrelated to that of art. Raul Ortega Ayala is one example of a contemporary artist who uses the method of participant observation within his practice.

Ortega Ayala's practice involves the artist observing, researching and exploring specialised information in fields that he is unfamiliar with. While the artists associated with APG were placed into specific fields that were predominantly technological, industrial or corporate, Ortega Ayala personally selects the fields that he wishes to immerse himself in, in locations around the world, those that range anywhere from cookery and butchery in Mexico City and New York, to horticulture in London (Rokeby

28. In my research of the scholarly material related to APG, one writer, Claire Bishop, refers to the experience of artists placed in industrial workplaces as "first-hand immersion" (2012, 166) but the method of participant observation is not directly addressed.

29. Experiments in Art and Technology (EAT) and the Los Angeles County Museum of Art's Art & Technology Program, instigated by curator Maurice Tuchman, are another two examples of initiatives established in the 1960s, besides APG, that addressed how new relationships could form between artists and industry (Bishop 2012). For a comprehensive survey of other precursors to APG see Chapter Six ("Incidental People: APG and Community Arts") in Claire Bishop's *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (2012). In Australia in the 1980s discussions revolving around art, labour and work became prevalent. In 1982 the Australia Council introduced its Art and Working Life Incentive Program, which was "designed to foster arts activities within the trade union movement" (Watt 1990, para. 1). An in-depth analysis of the program and the results it fetched is outside the scope of this research project. See Sandy Kirby's publication entitled *Artists and Unions: A Critical Tradition: a Report on the Art & Working Life Program* (1992) and Australian artist Ian Burn's publication *Art: Critical, Political* (1996) for discussion related to this initiative.

Gallery 2010).³⁰ Central to Ortega Ayala's artistic practice is what he describes as an ethnographic approach to context, stating "at a practical level I've been influenced by the ethnographic method of participant observation" (Schneider and Wright 2013, 97). With no previous experience of a chosen field, Ortega Ayala takes up active employment or training within this field in order to gain a deep understanding and knowledge of its 'craft' (AKINCI 2011). Once the period of immersion in the field concludes, Ortega Ayala funnels the materials and experiences that he has gathered into the production of a group of artworks that he calls "souvenirs" (Schneider and Wright 2013, 98). Ortega Ayala uses the term 'souvenir' to describe his artworks as a way "to emphasise that they are intrinsically linked to an experience or sourced from a specific context" (Schneider and Wright 2013, 98). In an interview with Christopher Wright in *Anthropology and Art Practice* (2013), Ortega Ayala explains that:

In making work responding to these immersions, I did several things: I tried to speak about the new embodied knowledge I had gained using material and techniques I had taken from each world. I wrote my own field notes, took photographs and produced what I call 'intervened field notes,' and then used these three sources to make something else – an artwork. All of these function as a kind of souvenir linked to each immersion – and they have strong relationships between them. (Schneider and Wright 2013, 99)

The artworks that Ortega Ayala makes "operate as a kind of cumulative record of testimonies or sets of reactions to each immersion" (Schneider and Wright 2013, 98). What becomes evident in Ortega Ayala's practice is that he doesn't limit himself to any one material or a particular means of making artwork (Schneider and Wright 2013). Instead, he remains open to what he learns and allows his embodied understanding of context to directly inform the way that he works (Schneider and Wright 2013). As what Ortega Ayala learns is constantly evolving, so to are his ways of making.

30. The first context that Raul Ortega Ayala first worked in (an office) was not a free choice, but one made due to the economic circumstance he found himself in at the time after he graduated from art school (Schneider and Wright 2013).

Figure 4.3 Raul Ortega Ayala (in collaboration with Carlos Ortega), *A tree turned into wood, charcoal and paper to represent itself* (from the series *An Ethnography on Gardening*), 2006–2008.

Figure 4.4 Raul Ortega Ayala (in collaboration with Carlos Ortega), *A tree turned into wood, charcoal and paper to represent itself* (from the series *An Ethnography on Gardening*), 2006–2008.

For example, when working in London as a horticulturalist, Ortega Ayala cut down a tree that he then turned into three different materials: paper, charcoal and wood (Rokeby Gallery 2010) (*Figure 4.3*). Later, for a series called *An Ethnography on Gardening* (2006–2008), these three materials were used to create a framed drawing of the original tree, as a way to quite literally comment on the continual cycles of growth and decay, use and reuse, that he witnessed on a daily basis whilst ‘on the job’ as a gardener (Rokeby Gallery 2010) (*Figure 4.4*). Other artworks in *An Ethnography on Gardening* evidence Ortega Ayala’s ability to use and adapt his knowledge of grafting and propagating techniques to fuel actions in public green spaces, which are then captured through photography and drawing (*Figures 4.5 and 4.6*).

Common to the practice of Ortega Ayala and to those of the artists associated with APG is the continual questioning of the artist’s dedication to any one particular way of making artwork, and the importance placed upon complete immersion within the given context. Ortega Ayala’s practice, in particular, demonstrates how familiarity with materials, processes and rhythms of activity specific to each context build over time spent actively participating in the day-to-day goings on of a chosen context. My approach to working in art gallery spaces as part of this research project has completely

Figure 4.5 Raul Ortega Ayala, *A tree grafted into another* (from the series *An Ethnography on Gardening*), 2006–2008.

changed as a result of understanding the way Ortega Ayala uses participant observation as a method to permit him an embodied and emplaced experience within a specific context.

Figure 4.6 Raul Ortega Ayala, Field Note 02-24-08-4 (from the series An Ethnography on Gardening), 2006–2008.

Participant Observation used as a Method to ‘Get to Know’ a Gallery Space

In 2011 I started working as an art exhibition technician at FAC and the John Curtin Gallery (JCG). My volunteer position at both of these art institutions involved working alongside staff in an installation team to de-install art exhibitions, prepare the galleries and install the artworks for the next exhibition scheduled to open. Inserting myself within these workplaces as a participant observer, provided me with opportunities to better understand the inner workings of art galleries in general: installing, de-installing and occasionally re-installing artworks, condition reporting artworks, painting walls, building temporary structures and cleaning floors. The behind-the-scenes nature of this role provided me an insight into particular materials, processes and procedures that are normally hidden, intended to remain out of sight, or typically considered

subordinate to the exhibition on display. This is similar to the way that Ortega Ayala describes his approach to the making of his series *An Ethnography on Gardening*:

I explicitly wanted to be a part of the context to make my work – I wanted to do the same job as others. So I got a job with a gardening company and started to learn, as I wanted to really get to know this context in an embodied way, rather than just using all the new materials I was encountering as aesthetic supports for my work. [...] I then made use of my subsequent learning – what I had embodied from doing the work myself. During that process I learned new techniques, techniques that I could then think about using artistically in making my own work. (Schneider and Wright 2013, 97–98)

The rhythms of de-installing artwork and preparing the gallery space for the upcoming exhibition provided me with a set of particular context-specific technical gestures (filling, sanding, painting) and materials (masking tape, screws, nails, drill bits, dust, drop sheets) that I would refer to and utilise when producing subsequent bodies of artwork.

Making Work for Moana Project Space

In 2013 I was invited to exhibit a project at Moana Project Space (Moana).³¹ The project involved working in the gallery space for a month long period, over which time the gallery would remain open to the public. Prior to my project there was a group exhibition of artworks that were arranged in a ‘salon hang.’³² The artworks had

31. Moana Project Space is an ARI that opened to the public in the latter part of 2012. The gallery is an architectural ‘insertion’ – a discrete space, constructed within a larger, pre-existing, heritage listed building.

32. A ‘salon hang’ refers to a particular style of display favoured in art galleries and museums from the 18th century until the early 20th century where artworks were placed in “relatively dense, tiered installations” (Staniszewski 1998, 8). For discussion of some of the shortcomings associated with this art historical mode of display see Brian O’Doherty’s essay “I. Notes on the Gallery Space” in *Inside*

been hung on every wall of the gallery and in unconventional locations, such as on a backward sloping section of wall.³³ Where conventionally the gallery staff would de-install this exhibition and prepare the space so that it was blank, clean and white, ready for my arrival, instead I offered to de-install this exhibition, as if I was a member of the gallery staff. After removing the artworks from the gallery walls, what was left was a constellation of the nails, screws and bits of tape that demarcated where the artworks had been positioned. It was at this point that the work I had been doing as an installation technician while volunteering at FAC, JCG and, finally, at Moana began to inform the artworks that I would make in response to the Moana gallery space.



Figure 4.7 Photographic documentation from time spent as a participant observer during installation period, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space (1999) and Chapter One (“Framing Installation Design: The International Avant-Gardes”) in Mary Anne Staniszewski’s *The Power of Display: A History of Exhibition Installations at the Museum of Modern Art* (1998).

33. Artworks hung on a backward sloping wall would be more prone to deterioration from light, water, dust and dirt (National Gallery of Australia 2015).



Figure 4.8 Photographic documentation from time spent as a participant observer during installation period, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle, 2012. Photograph by the artist.

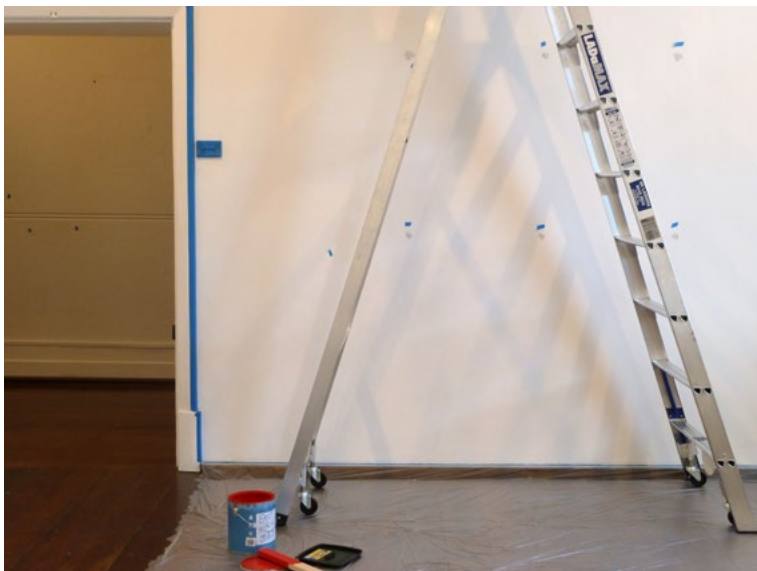


Figure 4.9 Photographic documentation from time spent as a participant observer during installation period, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle, 2012. Photograph by the artist.

I first noticed blue painter's tape used throughout the gallery space during de-install periods when I worked at FAC.³⁴ Small torn off pieces of blue tape would be placed on the walls where there was damage or detritus left behind from the previous exhibition (*Figures 4.7, 4.8 and 4.9*). The blue tape was used as a sign to remind gallery staff to 'come back later' and repair, fix up, paint over, or amend the area of wall that was damaged or marred in some way. As a result, the constellation of marks that the pieces of blue tape created on gallery walls operated as a kind of unspoken visual language for the installation team to tacitly communicate with one another, letting each other know the status of a walls reparation and preparation.

I employed this technical process when I arrived at Moana to de-install the previous exhibition. Scouring the wall for fixings and traces of drill holes, wall plugs, marks and blemishes (*Figures 4.10 and 4.11*), I covered the gallery space in small torn pieces of blue tape. While conventionally this process is only used between exhibitions and is usually invisible to the viewer, for my exhibition this constellation of blue tape became the starting point for a site-specific artwork. I decided to create versions of all of the small pieces of blue tape I had applied to the gallery walls in blue paint. The artwork that eventuated from this process was titled *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)* (2013) (*Figures 4.12, 4.13 and 4.14*).

Before I commenced repairing the gallery walls at Moana (*Figure 4.15*), I recorded and logged the precise location and orientation of the pieces of blue tape that I had placed on the walls on schematic drawings of each individual wall (*Figures 4.16, 4.17 and 4.18*). After I had filled, sanded and painted (undercoated and top-coated) the areas of the gallery walls that required reparation (*Figure 4.19*), I removed each piece of blue tape, reserving it on a large sheet of acetate. I took a roll of blue painter's tape to a paint shop and had it custom colour matched. I painted the gallery walls blue before

34. At John Curtin Gallery green painter's tape was used instead of blue. Green painter's tape has a lower 'tack' rating than blue painter's tape (there is less chance of any tape residue being left behind on the walls) which I suggest is why JCG staff prefer this tape to blue tape. Another reason why green tape is used at JCG is because the galleries are often painted out in very dark colours and the light green of the tape is more visible on dark colours than blue tape is.

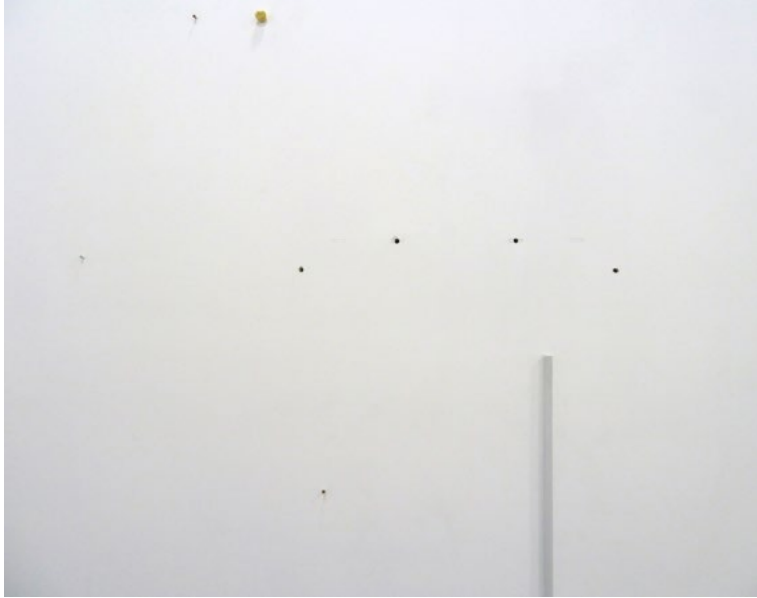


Figure 4.10 Fixings, traces, marks and blemishes on the gallery wall from prior exhibition, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

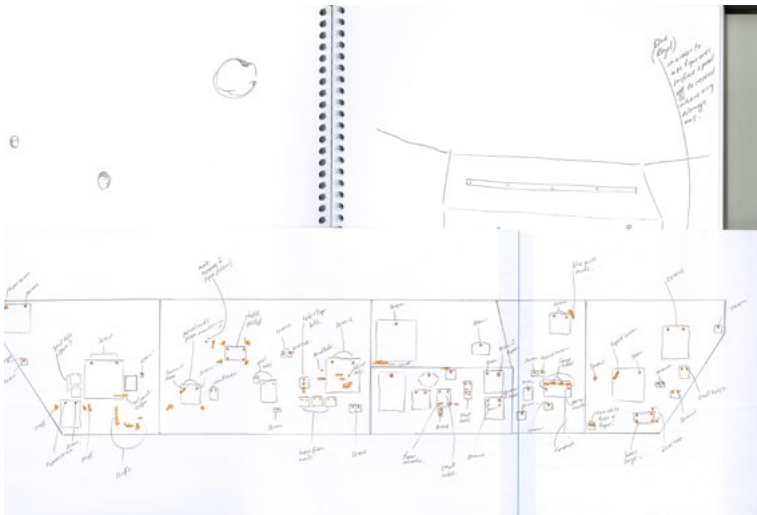


Figure 4.11 Drawn 'map' recording the locations of the fixings, traces, marks and blemishes on the gallery walls, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Scan from visual diary of the artist.



Figure 4.12 Shannon Lyons, *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 4.13 Shannon Lyons, *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.

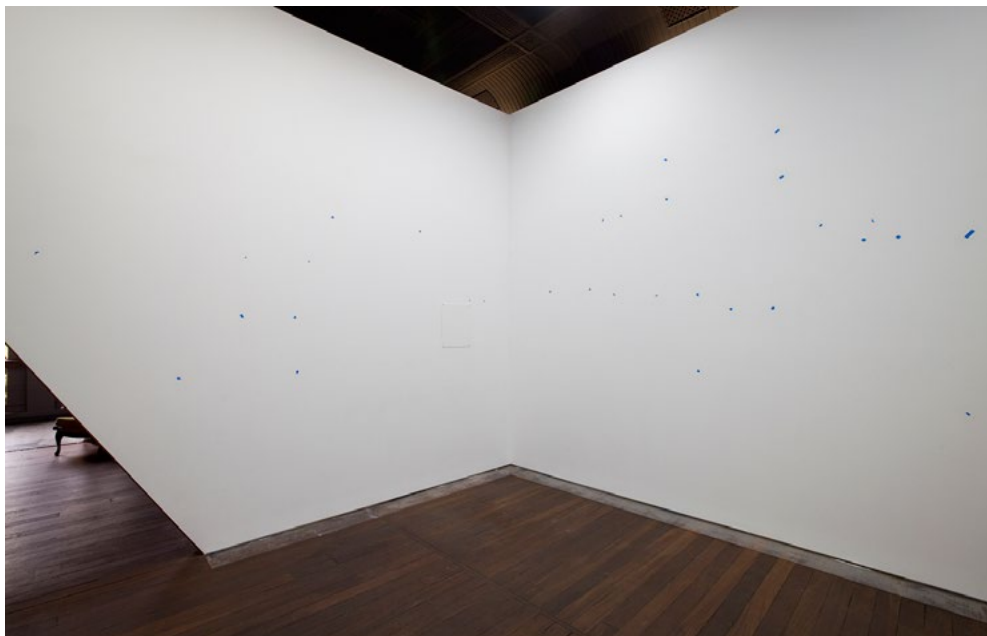


Figure 4.14 Shannon Lyons, *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 4.15 Photographic documentation of repairing the gallery walls, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

placing the small pieces of blue tape back in the exact location and position that they originally appeared in (Figure 4.20). Two coats of undercoat and three coats of top-coat were required to completely mask the blue paint on the gallery walls. The small pieces of tape were then removed, one by one, from the now pristine white gallery space, revealing the blue paint that lay underneath (Figure 4.21). The painted versions of pieces of blue tape appeared *underneath* the top layers of paint; embedded in the walls' surface. The artwork operated as a clue to recognise the painting processes that had been required to generate the artwork. Visitors to Moana may or may not have been privy to the processes I undertook while developing *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)* depending on when they called in to the gallery during the month I was working there. However, it was intended that witnessing the completed artwork would evoke an imagining of the processes I undertook to produce the artwork to form in the mind of the viewer.

23/03/2013. - DAY 2 - MOANA.

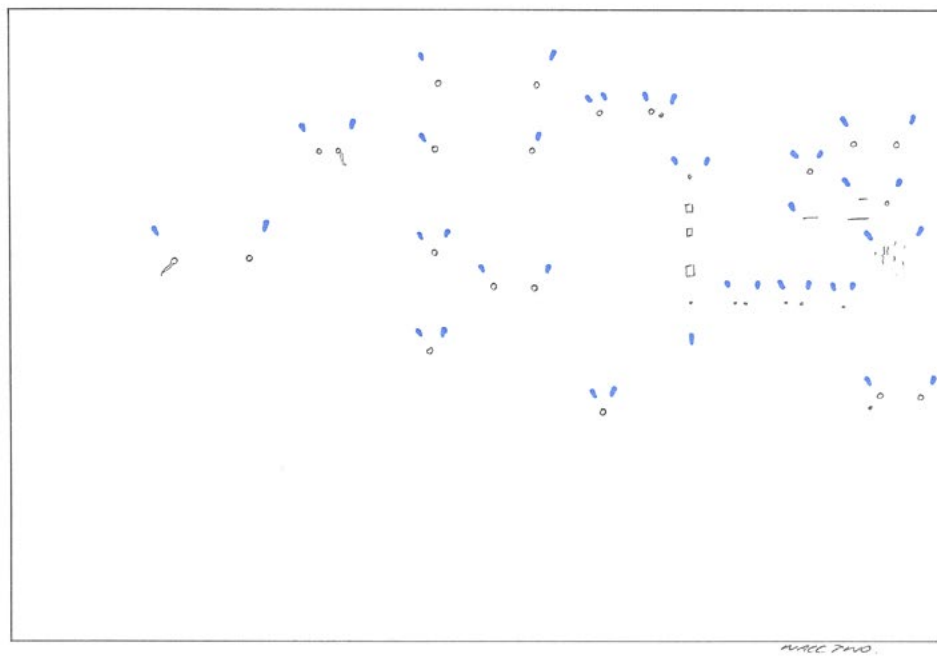
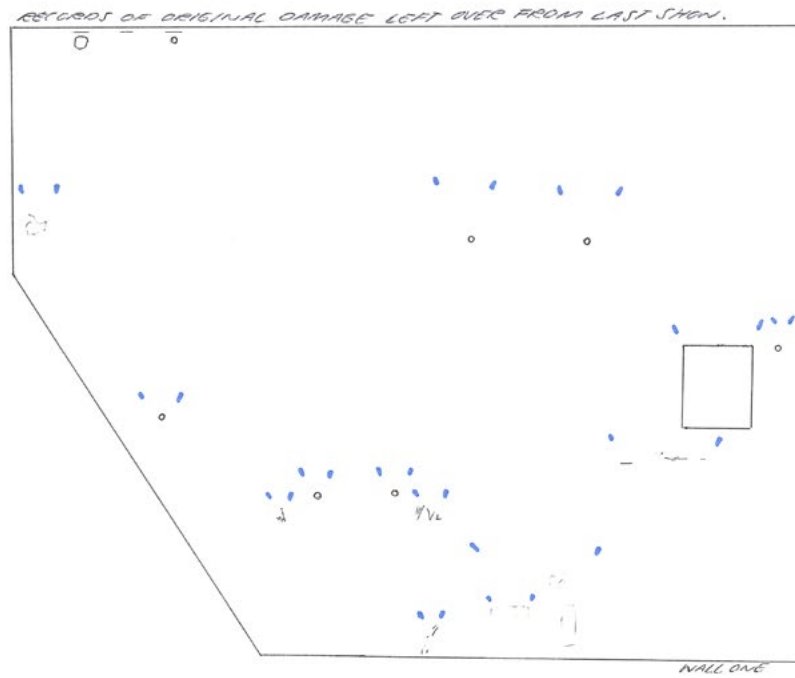


Figure 4.16 Drawing logging the precise location and orientation of the pieces of blue tape placed on walls one and two, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Scan from visual diary of the artist.

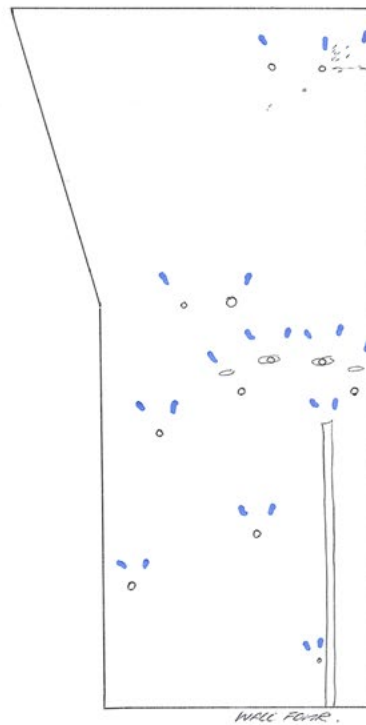
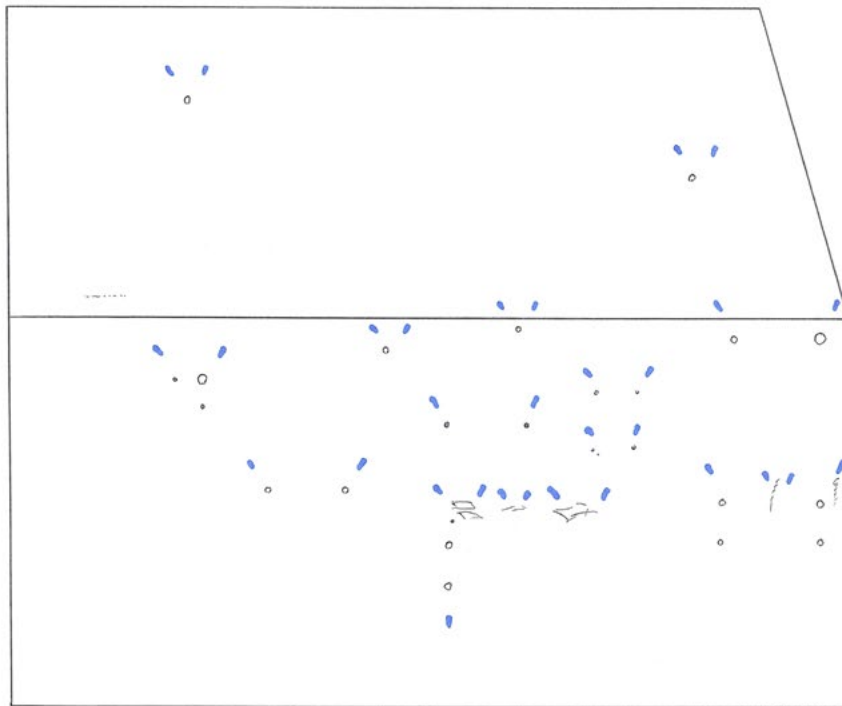
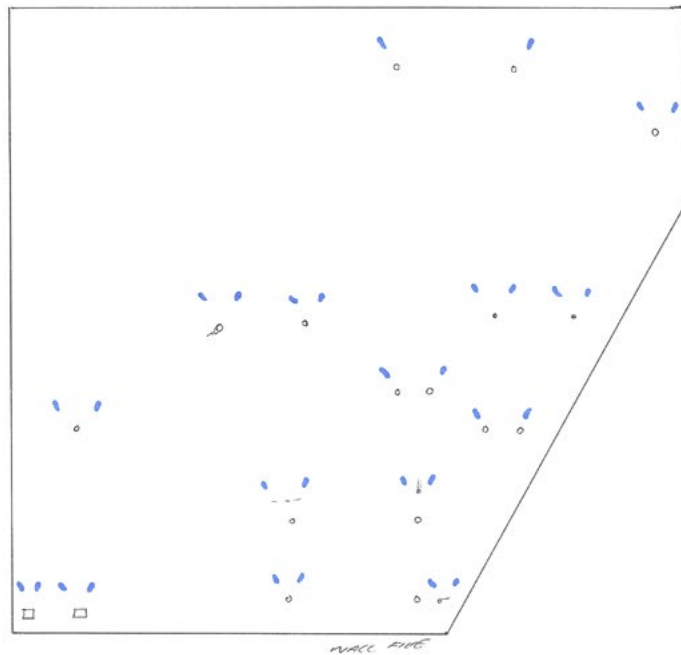


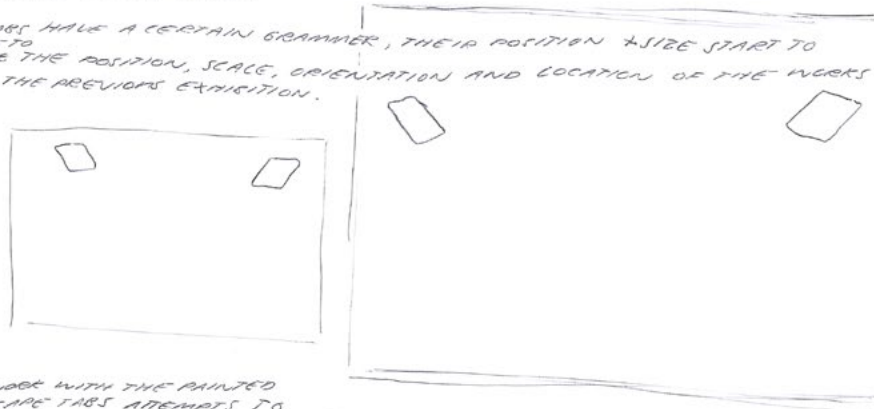
Figure 4.17 Drawing logging the precise location and orientation of the pieces of blue tape placed on walls three and four, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Scan from visual diary of the artist.



FROM THIS POINT I REMOVED ALL OF THE SCREENS + NAILS FROM THE WALL AND PLACED THEM IN A COFFEE CUP THAT I NABBED FROM NEXT DOOR.

01 THEN PLACED SMALL TABS OF BLUE TAPE EITHER SIDE OF THE DAMAGE LEFT BY THE FIXINGS TO INDICATE THOSE AREAS THAT NEEDED ATTENTION. THESE TABS OF BLUE TAPE WILL FORM THE STARTING POINT FOR ANY WORK IN THE SPACE AS THEY ARE THE FIRST ELEMENTS THAT I HAVE ADDED TO THE SPACE.

0 THE TABS HAVE A CERTAIN GRAMMAR, THEIR POSITION + SIZE START TO ^{ALUDE TO} ~~RECREATE~~ THE POSITION, SCALE, ORIENTATION AND LOCATION OF THE WORKS FROM THE PREVIOUS EXHIBITION.



0 THE WORK WITH THE PAINTED BLUE TAPE TABS ATTEMPTS TO MAP THE HISTORY OF THE PREVIOUS SHOW AS WELL AS BEGIN TO CRITIQUE THE NON-STATIC NATURE OF THE GALLERY SPACE.



Figure 4.18 Drawing logging the precise location and orientation of the pieces of blue tape placed on wall five, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Scan from visual diary of the artist.



Figure 4.19 Photographic documentation of undercoating the gallery walls, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Photograph by the artist.



Figure 4.20 Photographic documentation of painting the gallery walls blue, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

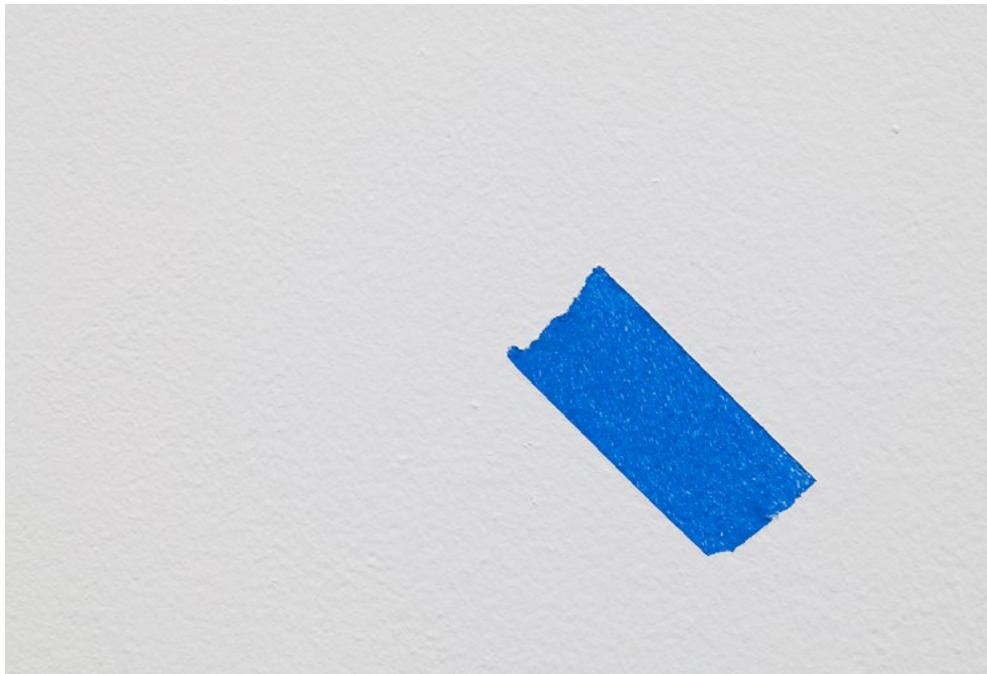


Figure 4.21 Shannon Lyons, *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)* (detail), 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.

It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang) operated as a suggestive map of the previous exhibition, with the painted versions of pieces of blue tape designating where artworks would have been hung just a few weeks prior. The artwork rendered visible a process usually invisible (the de-installation of artwork and the repairing of the gallery space). This process of making the inner workings of the gallery space visible combats the idea of the gallery being in any way neutral or static. The non-static and non-neutral status of the gallery became increasingly evident through the production of another artwork made in response to Moana titled *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust* (2013) (Figures 4.22 and 4.23).

During my time working at FAC and JCG I noticed how the dust created when I sanded and drilled into the walls and the paint splatters and spills from painting the walls would accumulate on the drop sheets that had been placed on the floor to protect it. At the end of the installation period the drop sheets would disappear back into the storerooms and with them any residual evidence of any work having taken place in the galleries. Similar to the application of painter's tape throughout the gallery space during exhibition turnover periods, this process is ordinarily hidden from the viewer. Observing the use of drop sheets throughout FAC and JCG informed the production of the work *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust* at Moana.

The artwork *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust* was made by applying a transparent matte vinyl film to the wooden floor of the gallery space (Figure 4.24). The vinyl became a kind of drop sheet, masking off and protecting a twenty centimetre wide strip of floor around the perimeter of the room. Over time, the vinyl became covered with dirt, fine white dust from sanding the walls, as well as drips and overspray from the process of painting the space a number of times. In effect, the vinyl held a record of everything that had happened while I worked in the gallery space, operating as a visual clue that assisted the recognition of the activities that I had undertaken.

In recording what transpired in the Moana gallery on its surface, the vinyl on the floor of the gallery space also highlighted the unusual floor plan of the space and the absence of skirting boards. The dust and paint splatters, which would normally collect



Figure 4.22 Shannon Lyons, *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.



Figure 4.23 Shannon Lyons, *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.





Figure 4.24 Photographic documentation of applying the clear matte vinyl film to the gallery floor, Moana Project Space, Perth, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

on the tops of skirtings, now formed a hard-edged line around the room on the vinyl film. The effect of this was to reveal a shadow-line detail, where the walls appeared to ‘float’ approximately one centimetre from the floor. An artwork entitled *The sloping wall collects dust on its surface and there is no skirting* (2013) (Figure 4.25) further emphasised these things and other particular architectural specificities of the Moana gallery space.

The artwork entitled *The sloping wall collects dust on its surface and there is no skirting* was comprised of two fragments of sentences that I had jotted down in a notebook while I was working in the gallery making the works *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)* and *A sheet for protection against spills, dripping and dust*. These fragments were conjoined to form a simple sentence that pointed out the presence and apparent absence of specific architectural elements of the space. The first half of the text referred to a very peculiar section of the northern end gallery wall that sloped up and out of the gallery space at a pronounced angle. I noticed that this section of sloped wall was covered in a fine layer of dust while I was repairing

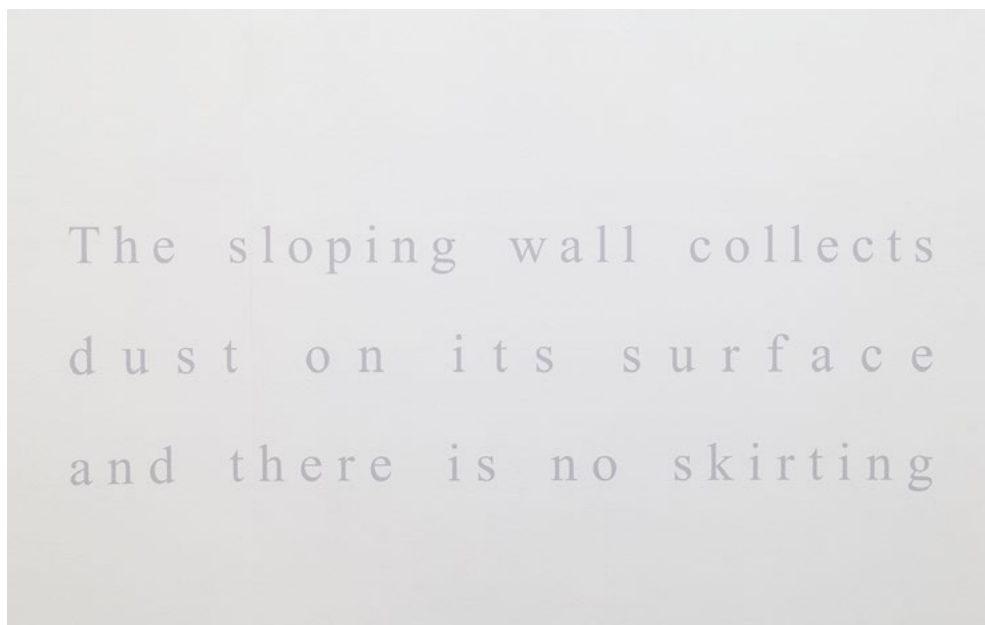


Figure 4.25 Shannon Lyons, *The sloping wall collects dust on its surface and there is no skirting*, 2013.
Photograph by Bo Wong.

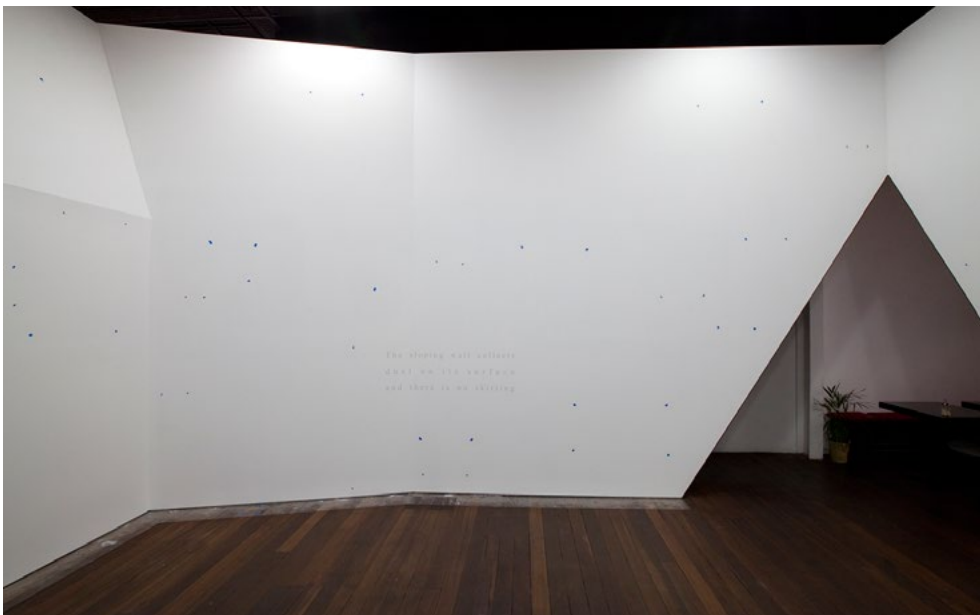


Figure 4.26 Shannon Lyons, *The sloping wall collects dust on its surface and there is no skirting* (installation view), 2013. Photograph by Bo Wong.

and painting the wall's surface to make *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)*. The second half of the text referred to how there was something missing from the area where the gallery walls met the floor: skirting boards. It was through physically working in the space, de-installing the previous exhibition, that I acquired an acute understanding of the specificity of the gallery's architecture and channelled this understanding into the production of site-specific artworks.

The text that comprised *The sloping wall collects dust on its surface and there is no skirting* mimicked the visual appearance of conventional didactic vinyl wall texts that I had applied and removed from walls while working at FAC and JCG on numerous occasions, but deviated from the norm in regards to its installation and positioning in the space, as well as its literal content. Conventionally, didactic wall texts are located on walls that are immediately visible upon entry to a gallery and at a height that is easily read by the viewer. My text was installed well below eye level and it spanned two adjacent walls that formed a pronounced concave 'kink' in the room directly to the left hand side of the triangular entry to the gallery, somewhat hidden from immediate view. The text could not be seen until the viewer was deep inside the space. Having entered the space and walked around it, before finally coming to stand in front of the text, the viewer had to move backwards into the centre of the space in order to read it comfortably. This meant that the text was read in plain sight of both the dust-covered sloped wall and the absent skirting that it announced (*Figure 4.26*). The positioning of the text over two walls also allowed for a cognisance of the anomalous shape of the gallery space that the 'kink' created, which revealed the space to be enclosed by five walls, rather than the conventional four. The unconventional position of the text in the space revealed it to be something *more* than superfluous didactic explanatory material and instead served to illuminate aspects of the physical gallery space.

The second half of the text, reading 'and there is no skirting', functioned as a double entendre for the particularities of the space. In the first instance, as mentioned previously, 'no skirting', referred to the actual absence of a skirting board around the edge of the gallery space. But, at the same time, if to 'skirt around' something means to evade or avoid it, then 'no skirting' can be thought of as implying a state of straightforwardness. Skirting and other architectural 'trimmings' are usually used to

'hide' messy joins and shoddy workmanship (B. George, personal communication April 22, 2013), and so in the case of Moana, 'straightforwardness' is attendant to the notion of having 'nothing to hide'. The lack of skirting in the space operated as a signifier for the precise and refined architectural finish of the gallery's build, something that became increasingly apparent to me while working in the space.

Participant Observation for Emplaced Site-Specificity

Adopting the role of a participant observer in this research project has allowed me to take a hands on, labour oriented approach to familiarising myself with various gallery spaces, as places. Working at FAC, JCG and, finally, at Moana enabled me to become familiar with the composition and form of these galleries, the art institutional processes and the 'behind the scenes' goings on in a way that I had not been able to previously. In both witnessing and participating in a number of processes central to the installation of artwork and exhibition design I became familiar with the specifics of the walls, the floors and the ceilings and the various procedures associated with their maintenance, repair and use; I slowly became one of the intimates of the place (Relph 2008). What I learnt about Moana while working so intently within its five walls was filtered into the production of new site-specific artworks. These artworks were intended to relay the specificities and particularities of Moana as a gallery space, pointing to particular architectural features (the floor, the sloped wall, the absent skirting boards and the unusual arrangement of the walls) and to institutional processes carried out within it (the de-installation of artwork and the repairing and maintenance of the gallery). These architectural, material, institutional and atmospheric features are what make a gallery space a specific place, as opposed to an ideal white cube, a non-place.

As a method for site-specific art practice, participatory observation has allowed me to develop a physical and emplaced engagement with various art gallery spaces. This is evidenced in the artwork that I have made in response to Moana, where from volunteering to de-install and repair the gallery space I became acutely aware of the gallery's architectural characteristics as well as the day-to-day procedures of the space as an institution for art. This knowledge, which could have not been acquired

through any other means, was then used to produce a body of site-specific artwork. Whereas previously I would rely on site visits to a gallery space (Gallery East) or a residency (FAC) as means to produce site-specific work, using participant observation as a strategy has permitted me to go beyond developing an immediate rapport with a gallery and become complicit in the site itself, become a part of it, rather than remaining a visitor or outsider. Employing the method of participatory observation provides a means to be mobile, and travel from place to place, or gallery-to-gallery, in a mindful manner that acknowledges that each gallery has its own set of architectural and process-oriented idiosyncrasies. In the following chapter I discuss other strategies for approaching mobility within my site-specific art practice.

Prior to beginning this research project my practice involved the production of so-called site-specific artworks in my studio for exhibition in gallery spaces elsewhere. In the Introduction I explained that the artworks I was producing were ultimately placeless, and were made to reflect the generic conventions of *the* contemporary white cube gallery space, rather than being made in direct response to the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional conditions specific to *a* gallery space. Through this research project I have developed a number of ways of challenging contemporary notions of placelessness in my art practice.

I have worked within four distinctly different art gallery spaces over the course of this project, and have developed a series of methods that have allowed me to produce placeful site-specific artworks. Preferring to work in situ within these art gallery spaces means that I have become somewhat of a “nomadic and networking interventionist” (Davidts and Paice 2009, 79) travelling from gallery to gallery in order to make site-specific work. The project has been critical of the nomadic tendencies of discursive



Figure 5.1 View of the 'Arts and Crafts' style Sydney Non Objective building from Marrickville Road, Marrickville, NSW, 2013. Photograph by the artist.

site-specific art practices and has argued that such practice promotes the production of artwork in one place and its exhibition in another, perpetuating the use of the art gallery space as a non-place. I argue that what separates the role of nomadism within my project from that of discursive site-specific practices, is a close investigation and engagement with the material, architectural, atmospheric and institutional specificities of the art gallery space as a site.

The final body of artwork produced as part of this research project was made whilst I was an artist in residence at the ARI Sydney Non Objective (SNO) in Sydney, New South Wales (*Figure 5.1*).³⁵ I used this residency to test the project's ability to address what I have described as a symptom of contemporary placelessness; the production of artwork in one place and its exhibition in another. In this concluding chapter, I reflect on certain aspects of a body of artwork made in response to the gallery space of SNO, which I produced with the intention of later exhibiting at the John Curtin Gallery (JCG). I consider the notion of mobile site-specific artworks, and speculate on how the exhibition of my artworks as part of the examination of this research project may challenge contemporary notions of placelessness. In this conclusion I also summarise a number of this project's significant discoveries, and the implications they have for my creative practice.

In approaching the production of new work within the SNO gallery space I was particularly conscious of a problem inherent to site-specific art practice, and one that I have endeavoured to address throughout this project. In an effort to challenge placelessness in this project I have tried to develop ways to circumvent the production of artwork in one place and its exhibition somewhere else.

In Chapter One I established the conditions of what I identify as placelessness and placeless artwork, and the perpetuation of the contemporary art gallery as a non-place brought about by the exhibition of artworks that pass through the gallery space

35. At the time of my residency in 2013, this ARI went by the name Sydney Non Objective. Sydney Non Objective is now called SNO Contemporary Art Projects but in this exegesis I will refer to it by its former moniker.

intermittently, en route to elsewhere. I explained that contemporary discursive site-specificity is distinguished by mobility and nomadism, and increasingly looks to locations outside of the art gallery for both the content and context for site-based projects (Kwon 2002). In investigating ways of challenging contemporary notions of placelessness as evidenced by emergent modes of discursive site-specificity, this research project has instead looked inwards, towards the interior space of the art gallery as a place for the production and exhibition of site-specific artwork.

As discussed in Chapter Two, the first body of artwork made as part of this research project didn't achieve this aim. The commercial nature of Gallery East meant that there were certain restrictions to do with being able to actually work within the gallery space to produce new site-specific artworks. Unable to work in situ at Gallery East meant I was required to make the artworks I would exhibit in my exhibition *Install* in another place. This resulted in the artworks produced and exhibited being more generically aligned with the tropes of the ideal white cube gallery space I held in my mind, instead of being more reflective of the specificities and the particularities of Gallery East as a *place*. Despite my efforts to avoid producing artworks in one place and exhibiting them in another, time and access restrictions resulted in me defaulting to producing placeless artworks. It was at that time that I realised that working in situ was going to be paramount to challenging placelessness, and sought opportunities to work *within* other gallery spaces.

Through subsequent bodies of work I have developed a number of ways of making placeful artworks that resist exhibition elsewhere. Firstly, I have produced artworks that are physically bound to the gallery space and therefore unable to be re-exhibited elsewhere, as discussed in Chapter Three. An example of a physically bound artwork is *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* (see Figure 3.6) that I produced while an artist in residence at FAC. This work featured a fabricated, boarded-up blind doorway that was made to resemble its surrounding architectural features, as a way of drawing attention to them and to the other constituent elements of the room. Permanently fixed to the wall, this artwork was subsumed into the room's architectural fabric at the conclusion of my residency, forever in place.

The second manner in which I have addressed the problem of making artworks in one place only to exhibit them in another is by producing artworks that are intended to completely disappear at the conclusion of their exhibition. These artworks are rendered immobile through their disappearance and impermanence. This was demonstrated by the work *It takes a small team of workers (after the Salon Hang)* (see Figures 4.12, 4.13, 4.14) made in response to Moana and discussed in Chapter Four. This artwork involved painting the gallery space to create renditions of pieces of blue tape charting the placement of artworks shown in the previous exhibition, revealing the conditions of installation and de-installation normally imperceivable within the white cube. By resisting the production of any enduring form that would have physical permanence, this work was inherently temporary, only lasting as long as my exhibition at Moana. The artwork was soon painted over, and the gallery returned to a white cube.

As either permanent interventions in art gallery spaces, or temporary, ephemeral alterations, the site-specific artworks made as part of this research project now exist in the form of photographic documentation. This is the case for many seminal site-specific projects produced from the 1960s to the present day, and the photographic documentation of these works has often attained artwork status through its exhibition within art gallery spaces.³⁶ Daniel Buren counters this tendency by referring to the photographic documentation of his artwork as “souvenir photos” that are in no way equivalent to “the work itself” (Monumenta 2012a, para. 2). The photograph “irremediably eliminates crucial features of the work: it imposes a single viewpoint – chosen by the photographer – flattens depth and makes it impossible to walk around the work” (Monumenta 2012a, para. 3). For Buren “nothing can replace the visual, plastic experience of an art work” (Monumenta 2012a, para. 6).

36. Emblematic of this tendency is Robert Smithson’s iconic site-specific Land Art work *Spiral Jetty* (1970), an immense coil of black basalt rock and earth that extends and spirals in an anticlockwise direction into the water of the Great Salt Lake in Utah (Crow 2004). Photographic documentation and a film of this artwork have been shown in various exhibitions in different gallery spaces including a retrospective at Hallwalls Contemporary Arts Centre in Buffalo, New York, in 1977.

Like Buren, Michael Asher also acknowledged that the “documentation of each individual work (or those aspects of it that can be represented in one form or another)” would “at best approximate certain aspects of the actual work” he produced (Asher and Buchloh 1983, x). The artist’s “systematic abstention” from producing any enduring artifacts has set his artwork apart “from most other work of the conceptual period that objectified itself after all in the photo-document, the written definition or the archive (as art object)” (Asher and Buchloh 1983, vii). I align my position regarding the documentation of my site-specific artwork with that of Asher and Buren, and value the importance of the viewer’s first hand encounter with my work, in place.

I have sought to explore an alternative to the presentation of photographic documentation of my site-specific artworks as part of the exhibition and examination of this research project. I used my time as an artist in residence at SNO to investigate the possibility of producing mobile site-specific artworks that would circumvent the need for documentation. The works I made in response to SNO maintained a specificity to the gallery space as a site, without being permanent interventions in, nor temporary alterations to, that gallery space.

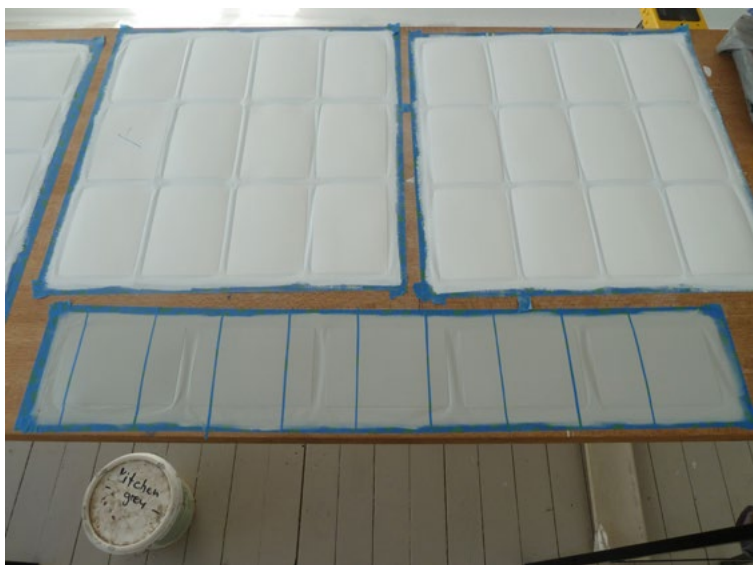


Figure 5.2 Postcard works in progress at Sydney Non Objective, Marrickville, NSW, 2013. Photograph by the artist.



I'm standing on a footpath on Marrickville Road. It's a bustling wet Wednesday afternoon and I am drenched after walking here from the train station. The pervasive smell of 'Marrickville Pork Rolls' hangs in the air, despite the recent downpour. The entrance to Sydney Non Objective must be somewhere. A clear glass and brushed aluminium door set in a faux-marble tiled crack between a deli and a Mitre 10 store sports the street number that I've been looking for in small black vinyl numbers. On the wall to the left-hand side of the door is a poster inside an 'anti-theft' style clip frame advertising an exhibition set to open this Saturday. I guess that this must be the place. Pulling the door toward me reveals a tiny landing and a steep set of stairs covered in the kind of nondescript flecked grey/brown carpet you'd expect to see in high traffic areas in retail or office spaces. The carpet is nearly threadbare in the centre of each step creating a kind of Richard Long-esque path for me to follow up to the top. As I make my way up the stairs, the wooden treads beneath the carpet creak and give a little, sending my right hand shooting for the handrail. The stairwell opens up to the light filled foyer that's typical of 'Arts and Crafts' style buildings. This kind of first-floor space is largely forgotten when you're inside one of the relatively anonymous and commercialised ground floor spaces. You wouldn't even know a space like this exists from the street unless you look up above the awning.



Space Auditing and the Rendition at Sydney Non Objective

Housed in an 'Arts and Crafts' style building in Marrickville, SNO encompasses dedicated exhibition spaces, a projection space and two artist residency studios that are available to local, interstate or international artists. The room that I was allocated for my residency is usually used for exhibitions, but unlike all of the other SNO gallery spaces that overlook Marrickville Road, this room is located at the back of the first floor, adjacent to the office-cum-store room.

In consciously trying to avoid the production of artwork that would later only exist as photographic documentation, I developed a series of artworks that took the form of hand-produced postcards (*Figure 5.2*). These postcards effectively performed a function similar to a photograph; they were of a comparable ten by fifteen centimetre

size and contained a certain amount of information that, when viewed, would offer a 'snap-shot' of a place and experience had *elsewhere*. My postcards contained painted renditions of things that I noticed within the SNO gallery space by conducting a series of space audits. A black smudge on the wall, a paint-flaked windowsill, a painted over pencil mark, a constellation of pinholes and pieces of masking tape, folded roughly into thirds with the tacky side facing outwards, were revealed during the process of space auditing at SNO:

Beyond the semi-gloss salmon pink door is a room that looks almost perfectly square in configuration, punctuated only by the doorway and a single north-facing window. Unlike the wooden windows in the other gallery spaces with their distinctive triangular panes of glass, this window is made from aluminium; one pane of glass is fixed in place in the centre of the window while the other two panels are able to slide towards each other and meet in the middle. The dirty white plastic latch on the right-hand-side sliding window is inscribed with the word 'RAINBOW' in slightly raised letters; the latch on the other window is curiously blank. Surrounding the window is a simple square edged trim, painted white. There's a large crack that has opened up the bottom left-hand mitred corner joint of the surround and above it, two tiny pinholes approximately four centimetres apart from one another appear on a diagonal. On the windowsill, the white paint is flaky and fragments have chipped away revealing a light pink colour beneath, a similar colour to the door. Through the window is a view of the city but the view is obscured, cut up, by vertical bars attached to the masonry walls outside that form a kind of security screen and cast shadows onto the wall opposite the door. On this wall a strange geometric shape appears as the light in the space begins to fade. It looks like a shadow but when I run my hand over it the shape reveals itself to be some kind of wall painting. It looks like the hard-edged outline of this wall painting was never sanded back properly before the whole wall was painted white. The only object in the space is a café style chair, its cream coloured wooden surface scuffed and worn and its chrome legs reflect

the painted grey floorboards upon which it stands. Gaps between the floorboards seem to be ‘filled’ with paint in places and a patch of lighter grey paint bears the traces of a half-hearted attempt to paint over it in the darker grey that the rest of the floor is painted. The floor sags in the middle of the room leaving a visible gap between the floorboards and the plain skirting that runs around the perimeter of the room. (Lyons 2013, unpublished notes from space audit)

The front of each postcard presents painted renditions of material markers that I noticed through the process of space auditing. Excerpts extracted from notes jotted down during the numerous space audits I conducted function as each artwork’s title and appear as hand-written anecdotes inscribed on the back of each postcard. The front and back of the postcards work together to narrate the gallery space.

One particular postcard, titled *All that was in the space was a café style chair, its wooden surface scuffed and worn and its chrome legs reflecting the floor* (2013) (Figure 5.3) is an example of an artwork that I developed at SNO through the use of the space audit method. On the front of the postcard appears a small black ‘smudgy’ mark. I noticed a mark on the gallery wall underneath the window, during one of the space audits. At the time that I saw the mark on the wall, I was sitting on the café style chair. I imagined that the chair had made the smudge; perhaps one of the black rubber stoppers that capped the end of the chrome chair legs had been scraped along the wall, as someone hastily stood up. It might have even been me who inadvertently made the mark as I moved the chair around the room. Contrary to the artworks produced for the exhibition *Install* at the beginning of this project and discussed in Chapter Two, where generic gallery detritus became motifs for my artwork, the use of the space audit method at SNO allowed me to see the specificities of this gallery space, and produce work that would reflect this gallery’s more particular, and less generic, idiosyncratic features.

My use of rendition as a creative method also informed the production of the postcards. Each postcard was made in response to a particular detail of the SNO gallery space, and I envisioned the series to collectively function as a rendition of the gallery space in its entirety. These artworks form a series of fragments that allow for a ‘picturing’ of the



Figure 5.3 Shannon Lyons, All that was in the space was a café style chair, its wooden surface scuffed and worn and its chrome legs reflecting the floor, 2013. Photograph by Tony Nathan.

space, without the viewer having been there. This was distinct from my previous use of rendition at FAC, discussed in Chapter Three, where I drew from the gallery spaces various pre-existing architectural features to produce a new amalgam object, as in the work *There are many ways to escape but this isn't one of them* (see Figure 3.6). For these works produced at SNO, not any one of the postcards operates as an amalgam of the whole space; instead the postcards, together, present a composite view of the gallery's material, architectural and atmospheric specificities.

Reflecting on the Thesis

In this exegesis I have explained how I have challenged the production of placeless artwork by creating artworks that are physically bound to their place of production, or that are inherently finite. The artworks that I made at SNO were not physically bound to the exhibition space, and were not intended to disappear at the conclusion of my time spent there. Instead they were intrinsically mobile, and continue to exist in a tangible form beyond the conclusion of my residency. Rather than mobility being a symptom of the placeless artwork, for these artworks mobility was instead built into both the conceptual and material content of the work. Producing this series of postcards was a strategy for making an artwork that was both specific to the site, and that also lent itself to mobility.

Sending Sydney Non Objective to the John Curtin Gallery

In an effort to reveal my experiences of the Sydney Non Objective gallery space, and my creative responses to this place as they unfolded over time, I periodically posted the postcards back home to Perth, and more specifically, to the front desk of the John Curtin Gallery (JCG). I posted the postcards to JCG with the intention of including them as part of the examination of this research project. Having worked on the installation team at JCG as a participant observer since 2011, I knew that the short installation period of the JCG gallery would not allow me to spend an extended amount of time working in situ within the gallery space to produce new work in the lead up to the final exhibition for the examination of my project. Making artwork elsewhere and

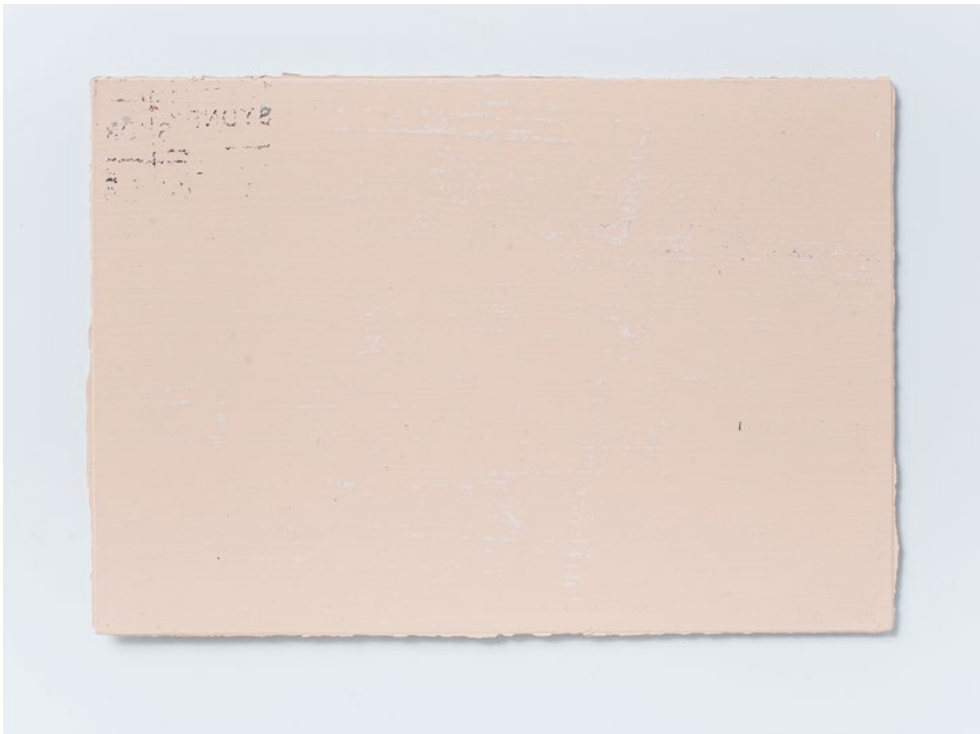


Figure 5.4 Shannon Lyons, The door has a bog standard round handle. Someone told me that the space might have been a 'massage parlour' at one point, 2013. Photograph by Tony Nathan.

posting it to JCG became a strategy for negotiating these parameters, and at the same time allowed for the project to test the possibility of producing a mobile site-specific artwork.

Sending my postcards through the mail meant that their surfaces were prone to the accumulation of various marks and traces of their journey from a post-box on Marrickville Road to JCG in Bentley (*Figure 5.4*). The movement of the works from the place that they were made, to the place that I intended to exhibit them, was contrary to the way that an artwork might typically be sent from one place to the next – carefully wrapped, packed, crated and freighted across the country. Usually every effort is made to protect an artwork from being damaged in transit from its place of production to its place of exhibition, preserving the artwork’s in-built material and conceptual integrity. In other words, transit is often a necessary practicality of exhibition, and usually unrelated to an artwork’s material or conceptual content. Posting my artworks completely unprotected was a deliberate way to acknowledge the artwork’s mobility and have this process contribute to the artwork’s material and conceptual content.

A number of key contemporary artworks taking the form of postcards, such as Japanese artist On Kawara’s *I GOT UP* (1970) (*Figure 5.5*) and Welsh artist Tim Davies’ *Bridges* (2009–present) (*Figure 5.6*), informed the production of my postcard artworks, as did ideas to do with alternate methods for disseminating and dispersing artworks associated with the Mail Art phenomenon that first emerged in the 1960s.³⁷ However, the decision to post my artworks and involve the traces of their travel as part of the work was most significantly shaped by an ongoing series of artworks by German artist Karin Sander. Sander’s series entitled *Mailed Paintings* (2004–present) (*Figure 5.7*) is comprised of individual white canvases that are sent all over the world “unpacked and unprotected” (Butin 2011, n.p.). The “numerous traces of transport” that accumulate on the surfaces of the forms “can be understood in their sign character as indices,

37. An online exhibition site for an exhibition called *Analog Network: Mail Art 1960–1999* held in late 2014 at the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York provides a comprehensive overview of the development of the Mail Art phenomenon. See “Analog Network: Mail Art 1960–1999” on the MoMA website, (<https://www.moma.org/interactives/exhibitions/2014/analognetwork/>).

Figure 5.5 On Kawara, *I GOT UP*, 1970.

referring both to the handling of the painting by the postal service and to the distances covered” (Butin 2011, n.p.). Similar to Sander’s series *Mailed Paintings*, the processes involved with the relocation of my series of postcards from this place to that place were not precluded, but embraced.

At the time of writing this conclusion I can only speculate on the nature of the relationships that may be forged between the artworks I made at SNO and the JCG gallery space. The considered placement and installation of the artworks within the gallery will be informed by my experience of working at JCG as a participant observer. While working at JCG on the installation team, I have witnessed and participated in the fastidious and rigorous approach to the up-keep of the JCG gallery spaces. Much of my time working at JCG has been spent with a piece of sandpaper or a paint-laden paintbrush in hand, removing or covering up any extraneous details from the gallery walls that may impinge on the reading of the artworks about to be shown to the public. In this way, I’ve come to understand that the material history of use within JCG is less immediately discernible than that of SNO; JCG adheres more firmly to an ideal of the perfect white cube. Perhaps the installation of the postcards throughout the gallery will bring the incongruences of the JCG gallery space (the miscellaneous marks, traces and cracks – if in fact there are any) into sharper focus. Or alternatively, perhaps the architectural, aesthetic and ideological differences that distinguish the SNO gallery space from that of JCG will be emphasised by the presence of the postcards, encouraging a more emplaced engagement with the JCG gallery space, by way of contrast.

Figure 5.6 Tim Davies, *Bridges*, 2009–present.

Figure 5.7 Karin Sander, Exhibition Karin Sander, installation view of *Space 3: Mailed Paintings*, Galerie Nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Vienna, Austria. 2014.



As I walk toward JCG a gust of wind gathers pollen from a nearby gum and sends it swirling all around me. Almost instantly, I begin to sneeze. I sneeze so many times in a row that I lose count and by the time I reach the gallery I'm a sniffling, watery-eyed mess. Spring. Passing through the rectangular shaped MDF entryway I notice that for this show, the front face of the entryway has been painted dark grey, almost black, but curiously, the reveal remains fire engine red. Now that I'm standing in the space between the entryway and the glass doors, out of the sun, I can see people milling around in the gallery atrium. It's early, too early for the gallery to be open to the public. I will probably have to press the intercom button and ask to be let in but just as I'm about to veer right the glass doors slide open soundlessly. I walk on through. I'm admitted into the atrium with the gentle hiss of the doors closing behind me. I drop my backpack behind the front desk. They know me now. I can just dump it next to the hat stand and keep walking. I raise a hand and wave to Liz (who's on the phone), pointing toward the gallery. She nods and smiles, mouths 'Hello.' I half expected to see Tarryn at reception, I know she's back from New York but perhaps she only works weekends. My shoes squeak as I walk across the terrazzo floor. It feels odd to be wearing anything other than my steel caps in here. Today there are two neat rows of chairs flanking each of the atrium walls and staff from the café outside are busy covering trestle tables with black tablecloths. It's obvious from their swift movements that there is going to be some kind of function taking place in here soon. The echo-y mumble of voices drops away as I make my way toward the tunnel that leads to the Southern gallery. The carpet on the floor of the tunnel silences the squeak of my shoes and the sound of my footfalls. This tunnel is a light and sound baffle that I helped construct a couple of years ago and, out of habit, I run my hand along the soundproofing material that the tunnel is clad in as I walk its entire length. I reach the entrance to the gallery. There is a distinct change in temperature; the air is suddenly cold, much cooler than in the atrium and much, much colder than the outside temperature. It's very dark. I stand still, waiting for my eyes to adjust.



Slowly, steadily, over the course of this project I've developed a set of methods that have their roots in Jimmie Durham's 'Anything that you don't notice will conspire to work against you' exercise that I undertook in the car park in Como all those years ago. Through practice-led research I have attempted to illuminate the art gallery as a place and challenge contemporary notions of placelessness. The methods of space auditing, participant observation and the production of both temporary and permanent renditions have collectively allowed me to cultivate new ways of directly engaging with the specificities and particularities of the art gallery as a place, within my site-specific art practice.

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Figure 5.2 Postcard works in progress. 2013. Sydney Non Objective, Marrickville, NSW. Photograph by the artist.

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Figure 5.4 Lyons, Shannon. *The door has a bog standard round handle. Someone told me that the space might have been a 'massage parlour' at one point.* 2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm. Photograph by Tony Nathan.

Figure 5.5 Kawara, On. *I GOT UP.* 1970. 47 photomechanical reproductions (postcards), 8.3 x 14 cm (each). Accessed June 30, 2013. <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/2001.228a-uu/>

Figure 5.6 Davies, Tim. *Bridges.* 2009–present. Sanded postcards, 9 x 15 cm (each). Accessed June 30, 2013. <http://www.timdaviesartist.com/page4.htm>

Figure 5.7 Sander, Karin. Karin Sander. 2014. Installation view of exhibition (Space 3: *Mailed Paintings*), Galerie Nächst St. Stephan Rosemarie Schwarzwälder, Vienna, Austria. Accessed August 3, 2014. <http://www.schwarzwaelder.at/galerieng/mainaus.htm>

APPENDIX: *All that was in the space was a café style chair.*



This appendix contains professional photographic documentation of the final artworks exhibited at the John Curtin Gallery in *SoDA15*. This photographic documentation and a video walk through of my contribution to the *SoDA15* exhibition forms the durable visual record of my thesis.

All works by Shannon Lyons.

All photography by Bo Wong.

Link to Video of *All that was in the space was a café style chair*

A video walk through of my contribution to the *SoDA15* exhibition can be found here:

<https://vimeo.com/157890448>

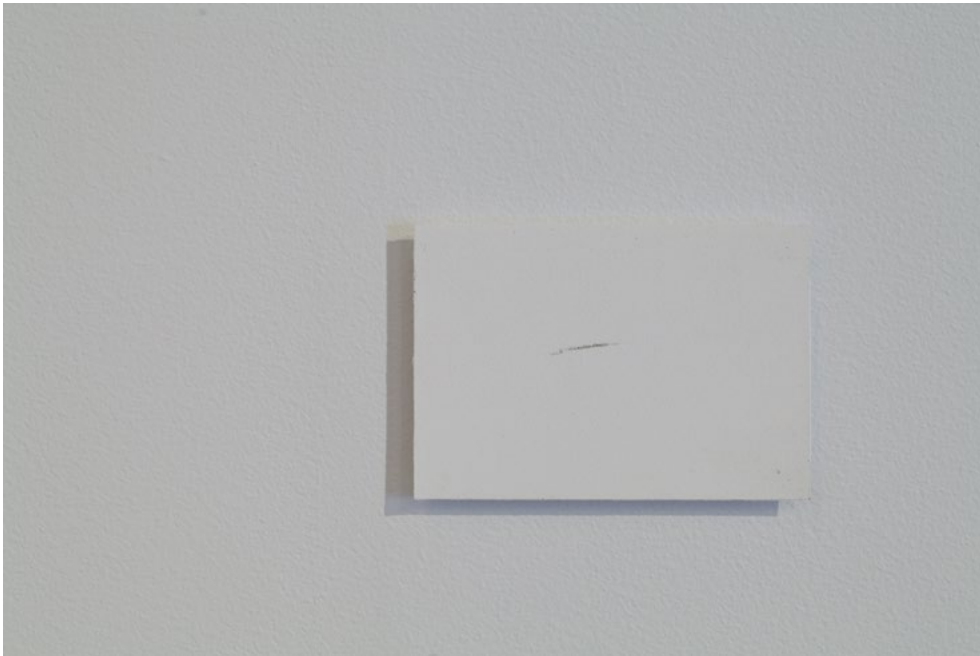


Figure A.1

All that was in the space was a café style chair, its wooden surface scuffed and worn and its chrome legs reflecting the floor. 2013. Paint, rubber, and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.



Figure A.2

On the wall, directly opposite the door, there is a line, a shape that only appears as the light in the space begins to fade. 2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

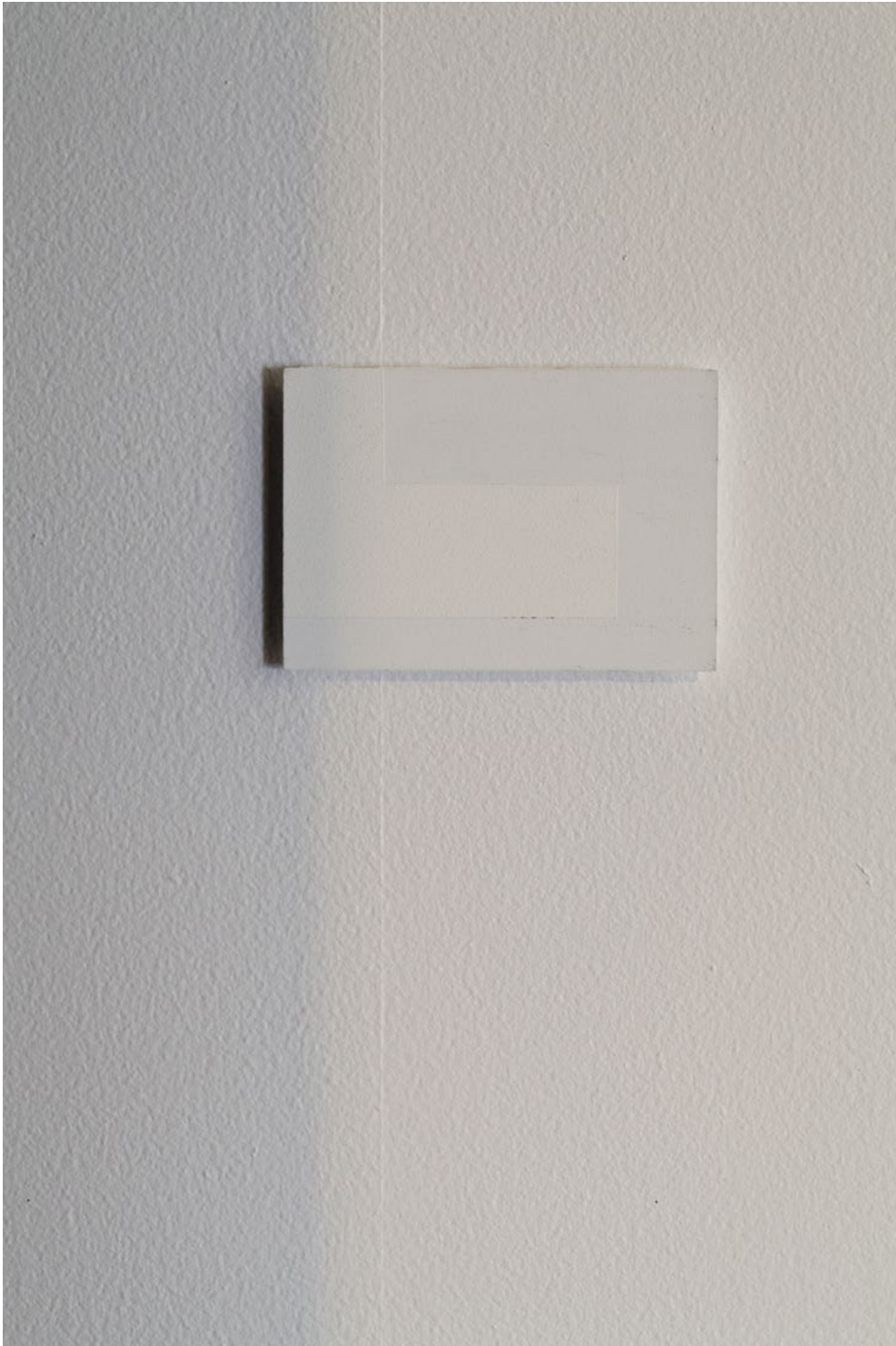


Figure A.3

It's almost like a shadow but when I run my hand over it the shape reveals itself to be some kind of wall painting. 2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

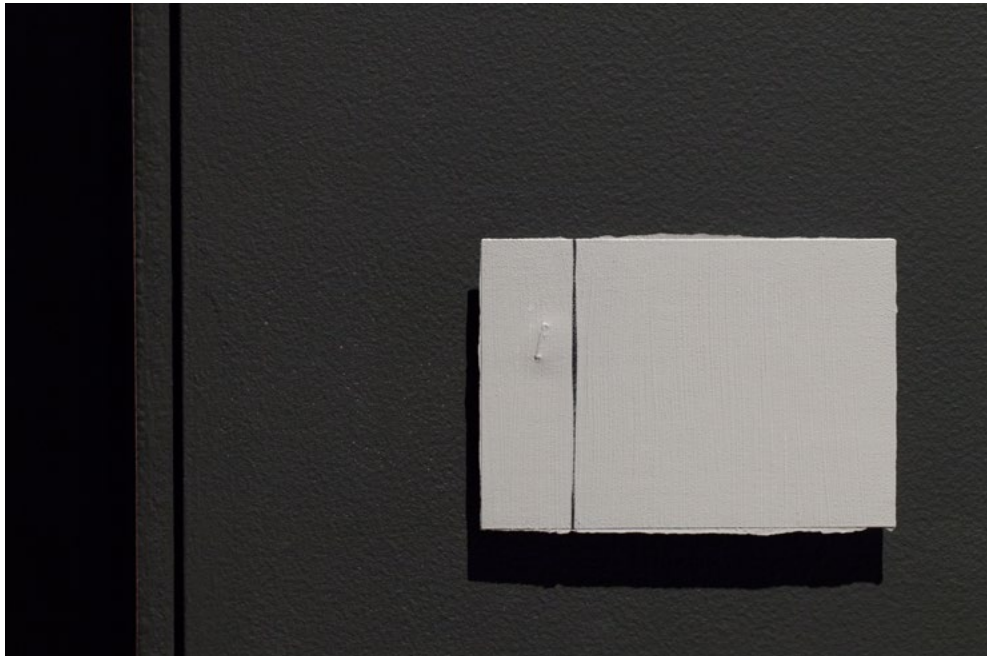


Figure A.4

Thick paint covers a single staple on the floor, rendering it near invisible.
2013. Paint, ink and staple on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

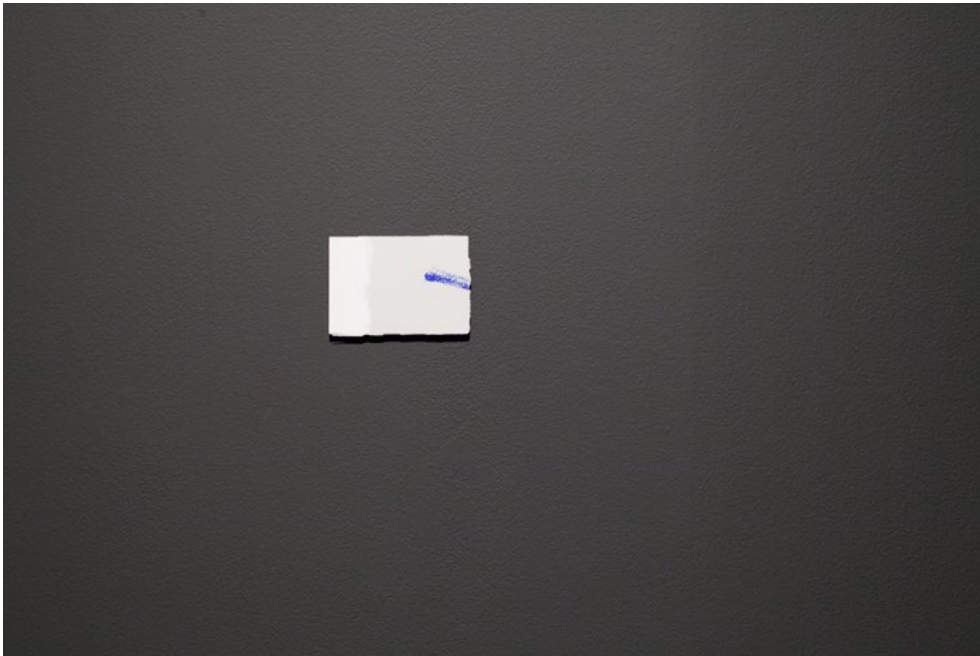


Figure A.5

"I'll clean it up." DA- 19.06.2013, *"No, it's ok. Leave it."* SL- 19.06.2013.
2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

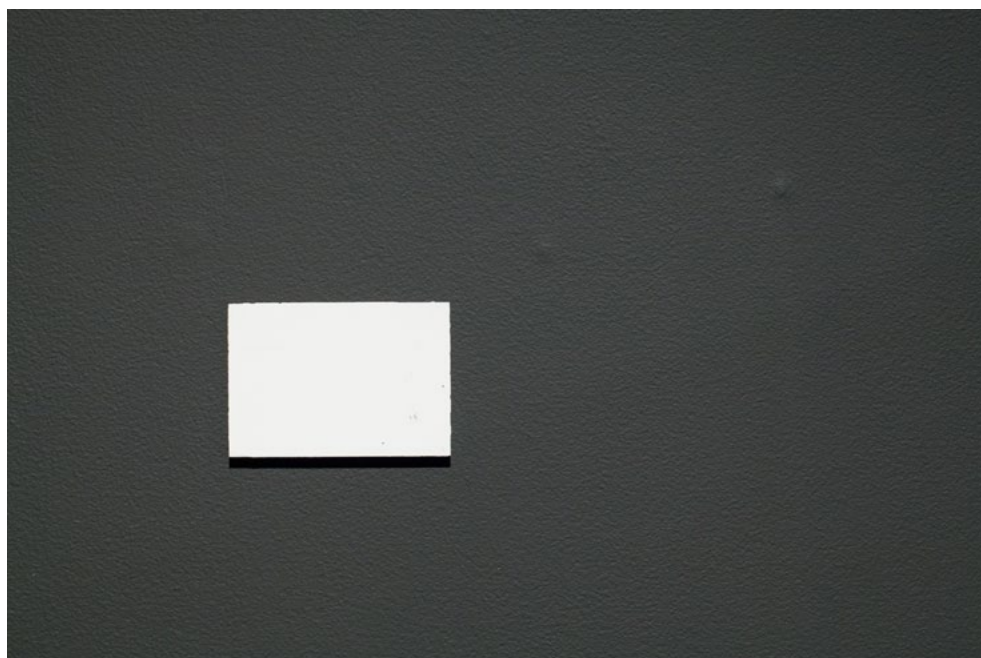


Figure A.6

Scattered across the length of the window ledge is a handful of clear drawing pins. Maybe these made the constellation of pinholes in the walls. 2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

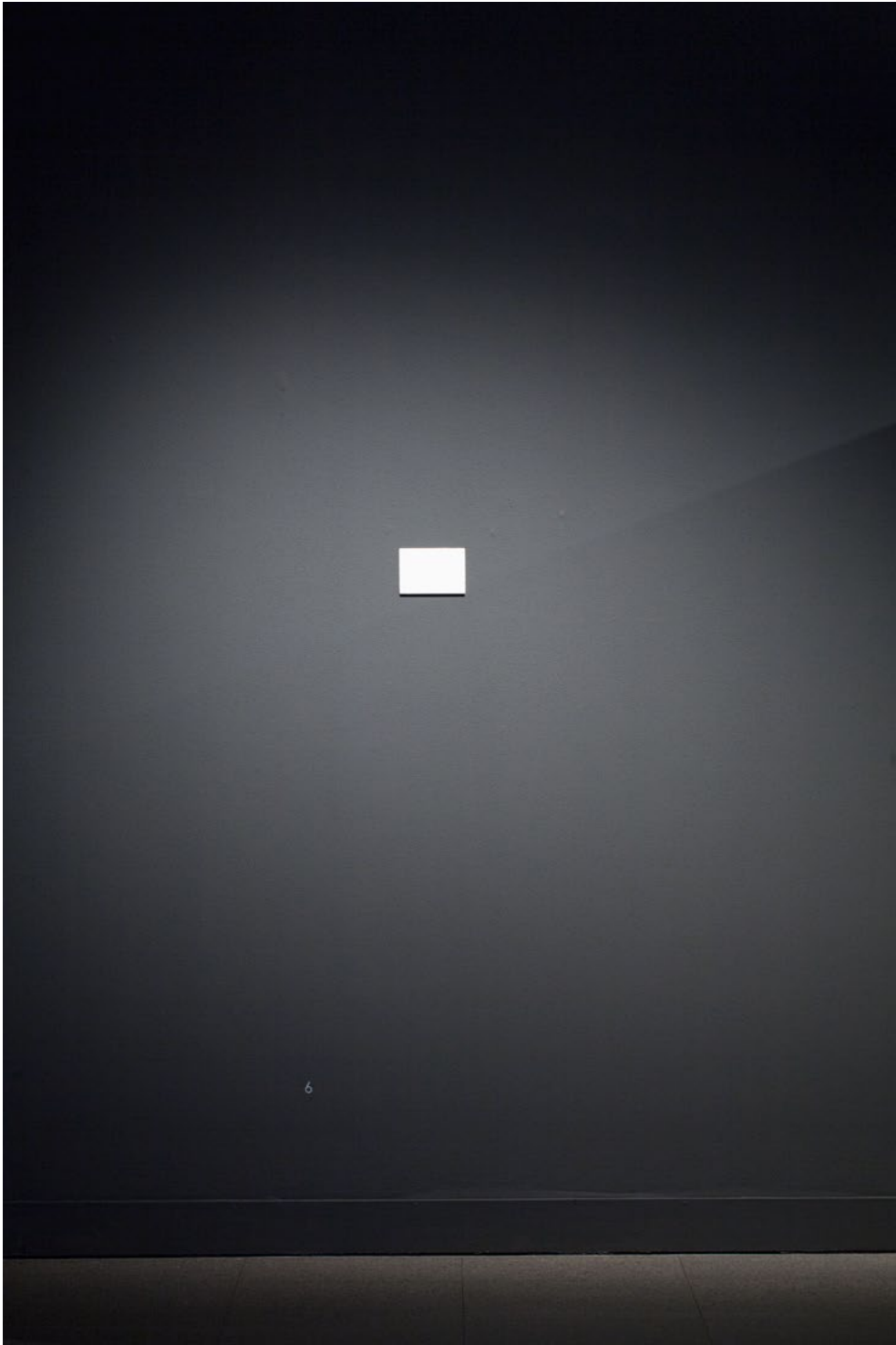


Figure A.7

Scattered across the length of the window ledge is a handful of clear drawing pins. Maybe these made the constellation of pinholes in the walls (installation view). 2013.



Figure A.8

The door has a bog standard round handle. Someone told me that the space might have been a 'massage parlour' at one point (installation view). 2013.



Figure A.9

Some of the white paint on the windowsill has flaked off.

2013. Paint and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

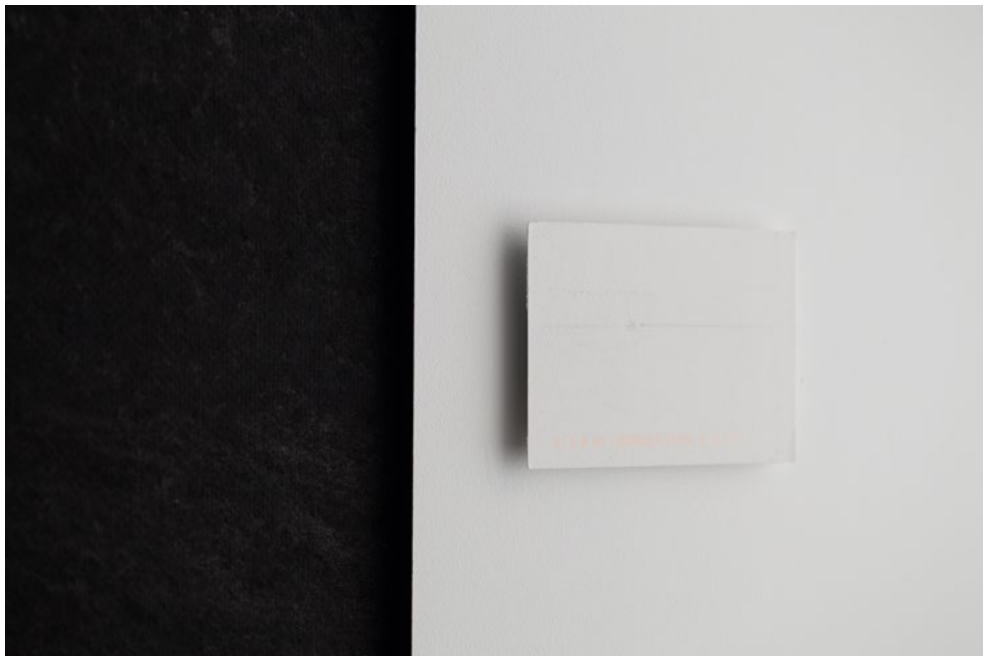


Figure A.10

Just to the right of the door, at about eye level, is a faint horizontal pencil line. Along the line are a number of holes that don't look like they were filled or sanded before they were painted over.

2013. Paint, pencil and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.

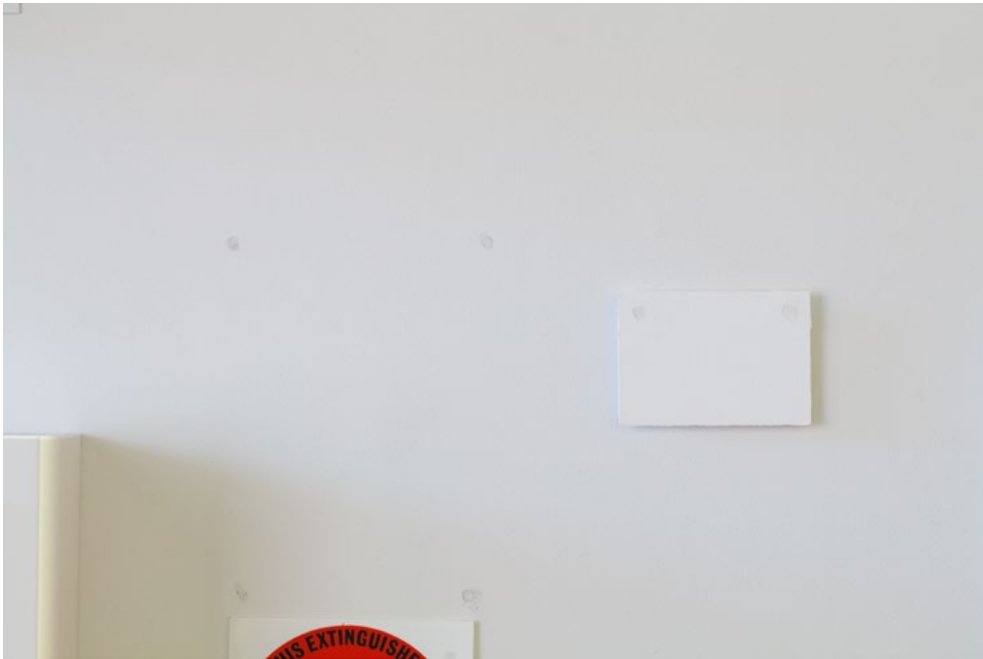


Figure A.11

Or Blu-Tack. 2013. Paint, polyfiller and ink on paper, 10.3 x 14.7 cm.



Figure A.12

Or Blu-Tack (installation view). 2013.



Figure A. 13

SoDA15. 2015. Installation view of exhibition, John Curtin Gallery, Perth.



Figure A.14

All that was in the space was a café style chair. 2015. Structural pine, plasterboard, paint, reclaimed jarrah floorboards, MDF, metal fixings, glass, steel and existing gallery architecture and finishings, installation dimensions variable.



Figure A. 15

All that was in the space was a café style chair (installation view). 2015.



Figure A.16

All that was in the space was a café style chair (installation view). 2015.



Figure A.17

All that was in the space was a café style chair (detail). 2015.



Figure A.18

All that was in the space was a café style chair (installation view). 2015.