

Ocular Lab

2003/10

LINK: <http://www.ocularlabinc.com/>

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Located in a disused milk bar in West Brunswick and established in 2003, Ocular Lab describes its form of artists' organisation as a 'headless' structure, one that is based on a fluid form of collectivity rather than the traditional model of an artist-run-space in Australia.

The core group of Ocular Lab consists of artists: John Abbate, Damiano Bertoli, Sandra Bridie, Julie Davies, Katherine Huang, Raafat Ishak, Sean Loughrey, Jonathan Luker, Sally Mannall, Tom Nicholson, Elvis Richardson, and Alex Rizkalla.

I see my role as a member of Ocular Lab as one of the defining components of my practice. I have been involved in the artist-led community in Melbourne since 1989: as an exhibitor at Store 5 (1989-1993); as a member of Critical Cities (Melbourne) (1993-4); formulating artists' projects such as Fictional and Actual Artists' Space (1995/6), Talk Artists Initiative (1997-2000) and six conjectural modules (2002/3); and documenting its activities in a range of interview projects, (*Artists/Artist-run Spaces, Conversations with artists from six Melbourne artists' spaces*, 1998 and 2003)

My engagement with Ocular Lab is as a kind of freelance coordinator, rather than the full-time coordinating role I have taken on in my other projects. With Ocular Lab, each member is given the opportunity to 'curate' segments of its annual program, often one or two months in succession, as well as participating in its other in-house and 'off-shore' activities.

Sandra Bridie
July 2009



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spaces/projects: ocular lab

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Cataloguing the Robert Schubert Collection for the Ocular Lab Library
Work for Trinity Nine exhibition by Ocular Lab members
Trinity College, University of Melbourne
April 2006

The Ocular Lab Library began with a gift from Robert Schubert, former art critic, writer, academic and curator, of his extensive collection of titles, which he donated to Julie Davies and Alex Rizkalla of Ocular Lab. I offered to catalogue the collection, as I had previous experience working in libraries. I used a rudimentary Dewey-esque system, as complex as those used in primary school libraries, using manila index cards, Dewey codes in pencil on the inside cover of the books and stick-on spine labels.

Cataloguing Schubert's books and magazines was fascinating work, the collection providing a portrait of its previous owner as a collector and reader. But it also provided an image of a particular place and time, i.e. local artistic writing and reading in the '80s and '90s. Many of the works in Schubert's collection have been actively engaged with: there are numerous pencil-written annotations that do not merely paraphrase the text they sit next to, but add insight into it; and there also yellow sticky notes, now browning and curling with age. As one of the locations chosen by Lab members for the Trinity Nine exhibition was the Trinity College library, I chose to create a work for the site that enabled me to finish off a task that had been hanging over my head for over a year, and call it 'art'.

The Robert Schubert Collection now resides in the office/kitchen of Ocular Lab. I have 'perfect ordered' the books, which now set on a custom-bought set of Ikea shelves there.



Ocular Notes...

George Paton Gallery March 2007

**John Abbate, Sandra Bridie, Julie Davies, Raafat Ishak, Sean Loughrey,
Jonathan Luker, Sally Mannall, Elvis Richardson and Alex Rizkalla**

Ocular Notes... presented informal and notational works by nine members of Melbourne artists' group Ocular Lab. The works on display included: a projection of slides by an American housewife documenting interiors such as dinner settings and exteriors of her husband with his horses, sourced from eBay by Elvis Richardson; a site specific installation of literature collected by Alex Rizkalla as a teenage hanging around political radicals at Melbourne Uni in the late '60s; a chair installation illustrating 'black angels' or sleep paralysis by John Abbate; a gun case with handcrafted interior by Sally Mannall; documentation of artists de-installing their work by Julie Davies; failed/discontinued electrical experiments and notes by Jonathan Luker; preparatory drawings by Raafat Ishak, each one featuring a dolphin; an installation in a cupboard of non-objective constructions by Sean Loughrey; and 'Works for the Bureau' – a collection of interviews, videos, and other tasks I have performed for the collective.

Over the past few years Ocular Lab has made an annual excursion to present off-site projects engaging with the peculiarities of specific locations. Past projects have included: ACMI, Spacement Gallery, and Trinity College University of Melbourne. *Ocular Notes...* continued this engagement with other spaces and their particular environments.



OCULAR LAB RETROSPECTIVE PROJECTS 2007/8

Coordinated by Raafat Ishak and Sandra Bridie

In 2007 Ocular Lab commenced an occasional series of informal retrospectives of members' work, as an opportunity for us to see and discuss each other's output. These exhibitions were an occasion for review and disclosure. In each of the three retrospectives presented so far, work that was previously unknown to members of the Lab and the public was brought to light. The curatorial process was largely one of dialogue and reflection. Here the 'retrospective artist' would meet the writer/curators in their studio or home and present a selection of works from their archives, from student days up to the present. Certain 'pivotal' works were unearthed: in my case, works from my 1991 exhibition, *Susan Fielder: A Fictional Retrospective* works; in Raafat's, painting done during Foundation Year (TOP) at Prahran in 1986 'after *Isle of the Dead*', based on the famous painting by Swiss artist Arnold Böcklin; and in Sally's case, (...), an important series of video works she produced at Goldsmith's College in 1994 that impacted on the subsequent direction of her practice.

My contribution to both Raafat and Sally's catalogue was a lengthy, in-depth interview with each artist discussing the process undergone towards the retrospective.

Ocular Lab Retrospective #1: Sandra Bridie May 19-27 2007

Curation and textual response by Raafat Ishak and Sandra Bridie

Ocular Lab Retrospective #2: Raafat Ishak December 2007

ISLE OF THE DEAD AND PAINTINGS FROM 1985 TO 1995

Interview by Sandra Bridie

Link:

Ocular Lab Retrospective #3: Sally Mannall September/October 2008

Texts by Raafat Ishak and Sandra Bridie

Link: http://www.ocularlabinc.com/08sm_rex.html



Ocular Lab Retrospective #1: Sandra Bridie

OCULAR LAB, HOSTED MONTH-LONG RESIDENCIES 2003-2010

1 *Doppler Effect #2* Ruth Claxton & Kelly Large March/April 2005

Ruth Claxton & Kelly Large resident at Ocular Lab Inc 22nd March - 3rd April 2005

Link: http://www.ocularlabinc.com/05ruthkelly_ex.html

From Media Release:

Doppler Effect is an ongoing international collaborative exchange project between artists in Birmingham and London (UK) and Melbourne. The project aims to explore the transmission of ideas and artistic behaviours over geographical, cultural and conceptual proximities. In order to develop and curate stage three of the project - which will involve UK and Melbourne based artists and will take place in the UK in 2006 we will be using our research residency to meet as many different cultural producers, visit as many spaces/projects and experience as much work as possible whilst in Melbourne. To map this research while in Ocular Lab we will temporarily become archivists and question scouts for The Question Archive*. We would like to solicit, record and archive (at least one) question from every cultural producer we are able to meet during our time in Melbourne. Individually each question reflects the pre-occupations of the asker but held in The Question Archive the collection of questions also forms a larger picture of the contexts and discussions from which they were generated. The archive reflects and at times, amplifies the social, cultural and political environments in which they were uttered. As both a record of individual encounters and the collective networks of

Melbourne The Questions Archive preserves both fleeting thoughts as well as longstanding behaviours and is simultaneously local, national and international. The Melbourne Question Archive will be on display to listen to, read and contribute to at Ocular Lab on: Sat 26th, Sun 27 March & Sat 2nd, Sun 3rd April Alongside this we will be visiting cultural producers and collecting questions throughout the residency so if you are interested in participating please contact the artists to arrange a meeting on: dopplereffect@hotmail.com

The Doppler Effect Open: Sat 26th March, Sun 27 March & Sat 2nd April

Artists' Talks: Sunday 3rd April @ 2pm with drinks/closing afterwards

Ocular Lab Inc, 31 Pearson Street, Brunswick West, 3055, Melbourne, Australia

** The Question Archive was initiated by artists Chris Bird, Alec Steadman Chris Nelson and Nick Willats. The project invites individuals to become temporary custodians of the archive in order to collect and archive questions from the communities in which they operate. The Question Archive can be experienced simply as an audio archive of questions or it can be used as 'raw material' for the generation of new work and projects.

2 *Architectonic traces* Melanie Irwin April 2008

Third year painting student, VCA

Link: <http://melanieirwin.com/architectonic-traces>

Installation and video documentation of performance in space

3 Mia Salsjo Installation/performance event May/June 2007
Honours student, VCA

From Mia's Media Release:

Mia will spend a week in the confines of Ocular Lab where she will install a performance based multi media work. This time will include explorations of her own musical compositions, that attempt to question the meeting ground between paradoxical partners, such as presence and absence, hysteria and control, concrete and intangible. At Ocular Lab Mia will further investigate ongoing experiments dealing with the language of materiality and process.

4 A SLOW FADE. TO BLACK Ian Whittlesea December 2008

Link: http://www.ianwhittlesea.net/exhibitions_pages/ex_oc_lab/ex_oc_lab_001.html

Month-long residency for British artist Ian Whittlesea, including artist's talk and dinner event where Ian projected film footage of Yves Klein's judo work.

From Ian's media release:

For his show at Ocular Lab Ian Whittlesea will be presenting a very slow movie.

The film's title, *A SLOW FADE. TO BLACK* will be displayed on a poster outside the gallery, continuing the artist's twenty-year engagement with the relationship between text and space.

On each of the 15 days that he is in Melbourne Whittlesea will repaint an area of the wall of the Lab. Each day this square will be painted a darker shade of grey, until with the 15th coat of paint it finally becomes black.

Inevitably the progress towards a black square references Malevich and Reinhardt, yet the shape might simply be an enormously enlarged full stop, the end of an unseen sentence.

The process will be visible from the street, so if you were to walk past each morning you would be able to sense rather than see the change in colour from day to day. Each afternoon a photo will be taken from the same place in the gallery. At the end of the show these photos will be animated to make a movie that shows a quicker (but still slow) fade to black.

This piece for Ocular Lab continues Whittlesea's interest in radically changing the duration of an experience. His work over the last few years has ranged from projecting lists of everyone an individual met in their lifetime

(compressing 70 years of relationships into a few hours) to showing the first chapter of Thoreau's *Walden* one word at a time over 25 hours (slowing the act of reading to breaking point).

Born in 1967 Ian Whittlesea lives and works in London, UK. This is his first exhibition in Australia since 2003, when he showed as part of *Six Conjectural Modules* curated by Sandra Bridie and at CNR, Melbourne. He has recently completed a five-year project to gain his black belt at judo and then translate (for the first time into English) Yves Klein's 1954 book 'Les Fondements du Judo', to be published by The Everyday Press, London.

5 THE LAB Lisa Kelly October 2009

Link: <http://www.studiononstop.net/?p=68>

From Lisa's Media Release:

For the month of October Lisa Kelly will be developing an open residency project at Ocular Lab. Less an exhibition than a set of actions, processes, reading and renewal, THE LAB will draw on the Lab's past use as a private artists studio and observe its shift to a public gallery. Combining the dual purposes of work and presentation space while being attentive to the specific conditions of the site, Kelly will engage in simple process cycles that annex the basic functions of a public venue. Areas of exploration will include onsite waste, street front visibility and natural lighting.

This project for Ocular Lab continues Kelly's practice of using critical frameworks to investigate the institutions her work is hosted by. In 2008 her project THE__HALL explored the re-purposing of a community hall into an art gallery by a local council.

Lisa Kelly lives and works in Sydney. She has recently participated in the exhibitions 'There Goes the Neighbourhood' at The Performance Space, Sydney, and the West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne. She has been active in artist-organising, critical writing and dialogue, is a member of the peer feedback initiative The Free Association and a keen permaculture practitioner.

Dates to view work: Open Wednesday to Sunday 1pm-5pm

10 October to 1 November

Closing event Saturday 31 October 3/5pm