



**MODERN RUIN**



# MODERN RUIN

Curated by Aaron Martin and Michael Brennan

The Substation

21 November – 15 December 2013

A Big West Festival Exhibition



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# MODERN RUIN

There's something awe-inspiring and poetic about a ruin. I guess that's why they called it Romanticism – those images of crumbling monasteries captured by Caspar David Friedrich, or Turner's ships being smashed against rocks by a tumultuous sea. The might of 'Nature' effortlessly undoing the best of what people can create fills the pulmonary cavity with feelings of wonder and respect. But what does it mean when the destruction and carnage is caused by a contractor operating a bobcat? Or how about a local council bound by OH&S over-regulation and a stupefying fear of being taken to court? Perhaps it's development, progress and obsolescence that drive the degeneration, or maybe it's simply poverty and economic stress. These are the associations that more readily come to mind when the image of structural breakdown is a product of recent memory rather than a space consumed and subsumed by time and tradition. They hardly set a flutter in the chest.

The artists brought together for this exhibition each explore, with aspects of their practices, decay and detritus, form and disintegration and historic failures within the context of the modern ruin. The dramatic gesticulation of Romantic era artists is backgrounded against representations of contemporary atrophy, dilapidation and collapse. Questions are raised about what becomes of a structure once it is rendered redundant, once it has been abandoned, retired or deemed past its use-by date, as well as what are the contexts and catalysts for the beginning of these ends.

The interlude between an object's 'useful' and 'useless' existence is central to this exhibition. As ignored and overlooked structures decay, these artists search through the fragments of broken glass, rusting metal, rotting timber, crumbling brickwork and cracked concrete aggregate to reveal narratives and expose historic myths. Some try to rescue something from the ashes – repurpose and reuse. Others lament in

the loss and the waste. But it's the process of change – the transformation from one state and another and the teetering on the edge of this – that draws this multifaceted selection together.

This 'in between' state is a characteristic that is echoed in the structure that houses the exhibition. The industrial edifice of The Substation sits somewhere between the skeletal remains of a redundant modern structure and an epic monument to a time now gone. With physical change comes semantic shift and The Substation stands testament to this, no longer a functioning powerhouse but a generator and conveyor of cultural meaning itself. Likewise, each of the artists in this exhibition exposes new significance and awareness simply by framing the modern ruin as the subject of their work.

**Simon Finn** tracks change across time – rapid change. His work sits across two parallel spaces at The Substation. *Tsunami Warning Towers* occupies the central gallery, tackling three different aspects of a single form by using large-scale charcoal drawings, 3D printed sculpture and animation. These are not ruins themselves, but signifiers that things are about to change. The towers in Simon's work echo with the memory of the 2010 Japanese Tsunami, trumpeting warning of impending destruction and loss. Meanwhile, outside on The Substation's Transit Gallery space, six billboards reveal in sequence the destruction of a timber pier, devastated by an unfathomable force.

Destruction is again captured in the work of **Marcello Guardigli**. His series of black and white digital prints capture a moment of discovery – the covert demolition of a guerrilla-style skate park known as The Bluestone, fashioned from scavenged materials and four truckloads of concrete in an abandoned warehouse in the inner Western suburbs. Conventionally speaking, a ruin must retain a certain amount of intact structure to be classified as such, but the photos that Marcello presents are simply of rubble, depleted of any sense of the original form. From this last vestige, we are challenged to mentally reassemble what no longer exists, a small gesture of help being offered by an adjacent time-lapse video capturing the creation of another DIY skate park.

**Michael Brennan** is interested in grey areas – the space between things – and how this space is typically overlooked in favour of easy opposites, divisive dichotomies and the narrowly defined. This 'in-between space' is where intersubjectivity resides – where slippage occurs between plural perspectives and different points of view. To tease out these ideas Michael has built a bridge. *Either Side* has been fashioned from the remnants of an old suburban back fence (itself a delineator of 'us and them'). Michael has repurposed this material to construct a passage between – a swing bridge, suspended mid-air, without firm footing at either beginning or end. Unable to escape the idea, however, that at some point you're either on one side or the other, this structure disappears into the gallery wall, emerging in replica on the other side. Michael's bridge is juxtaposed with a series of paintings that take their starting point from a now defunct treated pine staircase that once provided access down a rugged cliff face to a sandy beach below. Only in Michael's rendering, the idyllic landscape has been removed, leaving only the passage through and its prescribed vantage points, weighed upon by the negative space of the surrounding sky.



**Richard Giblett's** photographic installation, *Ceylon Hut* series, is at once monumental and intimate. The artist shot the pictures of the dwellings during a residency in Sri Lanka in 2012. These makeshift abodes are pitted against white voids, each being hand paint by the artist with considered brush strokes. The work reflects the artist's fascination in human ingenuity in its ability to devise architectural constructs driven by the desperate need for shelter. One might call this the aesthetics of necessity. Richard's architectural interests find further embodiment in an adjacent gallery. *Fluorescent Pyre* recreates a pile of light fittings and their tubes, accurately crafted from timber, resulting in a to-scale, to-colour replica of the original version. Wittily, as the title suggests, these timber objects have been roughly stacked in what appears to be a bonfire awaiting ignition.

**Aaron Martin's** work brings attention to the blown-out and disregarded tyres we often see dotted along our highways and thoroughfares. Aaron has retrieved them, relocating them to his studio to become the subject of his drawings. These large format charcoal works are clearly recognisable as tyres but are at the same time oddly unfamiliar; the sudden thrust of the blowout causing the tyre to become inverted or coiled into a convoluted knot. These unusual shapes are presented formidably against the large negative space of the white paper. Furthering the examination, Aaron has also sourced videos of tyres being tested. His 2.34 mins of video shows a robotic arm spinning a tyre at maximum rotation, moving up, down and side-to-side, subjecting it to immense force. As one expects, the squealing tyre becomes a shredded mess in a matter of seconds – an intersection of function of failure. The shredded mess is also evident in a scattering of tyres on the gallery floor. Stacked in piles, they stand like monuments or totems to some dark industrial past. In Aaron's work the circular motion inherent in the mechanical, and the manner in which it underpins society, is revealed.

**Cyrus Tang's** video work *Body Ruins*, presents the body in various stages of disintegration and decay. Fashioned from clay, a replica of the artist's own body is immersed in water, its slow transformation from recognisable human form to a crumbling eroded shell poetically captured with an, at times, imperceptible moving image. Sited in a crypt-like basement space, Cyrus' work explores the false dichotomy of appearance and disappearance, and ephemerality and permanence. Her work also draws an analogy between the way water acts on her clay form and the eroding function of time, exposing the fallacy of memory and meaning as it gradually yet steadily wastes away.

Posited in an adjacent basement space, an installation by **ACAB Collective** creates a theatre where black light and neon collaborate with salt-encrusted objects engendering dreamlike and mystical qualities. In this space forms subtly dissolve into an array of disorienting phosphorescent glows. When one chooses to focus, recognisable technological objects appear. *New Pyramids* is the collective's latest work constructed using 'ewaste' salvaged from hard rubbish collection dumps. The work reflects ACAB Collective's deep and continuous concern of a false privation that has been instilled in the technological consumer, creating wave upon wave of the perpetual 'New'.

**Paul White** explores objects and images that are part of the popular culture that one navigates daily in the urban environment. Spanning two mezzanine floors, Paul's large-scale, finely detailed drawings of aircraft fuselage and automobile wrecks are indicators of fractures in society. They are eerily devoid of human form, although it is obvious that people have ultimately been the cause of these objects' redundancy. Paul's exquisite drawings examine elements of the everyday, stripping them of context against empty white grounds, foregrounding their decay and signification of passing time.

**Craig Cole's** objects work with the stuff of construction itself. Discarded aggregate concrete blocks and cores function as the ground onto which Craig directly applies his fine paintwork. In these works, there is slippage between the constructed image and the exposed aggregate in the cold hard concrete surface. What has been imposed and what was already there? Using concrete instead of canvas, this repeated motif explores the everyday existence of urban and suburban Australia. Craig attempts to deconstruct the relationship between the concrete city and its inhabitants, presenting both symbiosis and dislocation.

**Troy Innocent** is a world builder, iconographer and reality newbie. His artificial worlds explore the dynamic between the iconic ideal and the personal specific, the real and the simulated, and the way in which our identity is shaped by language and communication. For Modern Ruin Troy installs some 100 discrete signs carefully placed throughout the cavernous building. Playfully responding to and interacting with the works of the other artist's, Troy layers another reality across The Substation's ever-evolving skin.

Aaron Martin and Michael Brennan  
November, 2013



# AARON MARTIN

Born in Bridgetown, WA. Based in Melbourne.

Aaron Martin's work is primarily concerned with physical space; how we perceive and experience it. Architecture and physical structure, time and function all come into play. Through his analysis and depiction of space Aaron forms a cultural and historical narrative.

Aaron has been consistently exhibiting his work since 1998. He has held numerous solo and group exhibitions across Australia. He has been a finalist in a number of art prizes and held residencies at St Vincents Hospital; Ballilla House, Brighton; Poh Chang University, Bangkok and Naresuan University, Phitsanulok, Thailand.

Aaron is active as an educator, curator and gallerist. He has lectured at Melbourne School of Art and Swinburne University, contributed to online journal ArtInfo.com.au, and sat on the board of Trocadero Art Space where he is currently Vice President. He is the founding director of Five Walls Projects an artist run initiative formed in 2012 in Footscray. Aaron is co-curator of Modern Ruin.

## IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
Radial, 2013 (detail)  
Found Tyres

OVERLEAF:  
Firestone, 2013  
Charcoal on Paper

Dunlop Sport, 2013  
Charcoal on Paper

Images courtesy of the artist







# ACAB COLLECTIVE

Based in Melbourne. (Zinzi Kennedy and Ben Johanson)

ACAB was founded in 2010 after graduating with Honours in Fine Art at Monash University. The collective has since exhibited through artist run initiatives and visual art festivals nationally, primarily producing large-scale multimedia installations which reinvent locally sourced materials through accumulation, manipulation and transformation. ACAB's work engages in an ecological dialogue surrounding ideologically and socially formed perceptions of nature and technology.

In 2012 ACAB was awarded the Substation Contemporary Art Prize People's Choice Award and in 2013 was selected to be a showcased artist in SafARI Festival. ACAB Collective's work in 2013 continues to explore the inherent dichotomies in prolific modern production, consumption and waste of household electronics.

## IMAGES

### OPPOSITE:

New Pyramids (home-entertainment isle), 2013  
Multi Media Installation  
(sound produced in collaboration with Joseph Cunliffe)

### OVERLEAF:

New Pyramids (cord mountain), 2013  
Multi Media Installation  
(sound produced in collaboration with Joseph Cunliffe)

Images courtesy of the artist









# CRAIG COLE

Based in Melbourne.

Craig Cole's practice employs both painting and sculpture in an exploration of the contemporary urban environment. In his most recent works, Craig uses polished aggregate as his canvas, a surface that parallels his exploration of the material aesthetic of a population. These concrete pieces have been cut and removed, making way for development. Like the urban archeological samples, the inhabitants that populate his works will also relocate as part of inevitable gentrification. These works can be seen as an ode to or questioning of our accelerated existence and insistence on progress. The raw and complicated paintings give the image solid ground on which to exist and be depicted within a current context.

Craig has been involved with a number of art spaces and was co-founding Director of Shifted in 2007.

## IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
Archie, 2013  
Oil on Concrete

OVERLEAF:  
DIY Market Footscray 2, 2013  
Oil on Concrete

Stumpy, 2013  
Oil on Concrete

Images courtesy of the artist









# CYRUS TANG

Born in Hong Kong. Based in Melbourne.

Cyrus (Wai--kuen) Tang moved to Australia in 2003. She finished her Degree (Hons) in Fine Arts at Victoria College of the Arts, Melbourne in 2004, and her Master of Fine Arts (Research) at Monash University, Melbourne in 2009. Cyrus has also undertaken a number of residency programmes, including Helsinki International Artist Program 2013, The National Art Studio in South Korea in 2012, Cite International de Arts, Paris in 2009 and The Banff Centre, Canada in 2008. Her work has been shown throughout Australia and in various countries around the world including Helsinki, South Korea, Singapore, Japan, France, Shanghai and Sweden. She was the recipient of the Skills and Arts Development Grant in 2011 and New Work (Emerging) Grant 2009 from the Australian Council for the Arts, the George Mora Foundation Fellowship 2008, Theodor Urback Encouragement Award 2004, and the National Gallery of Victoria – Trustee Award 2003.

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
Body Ruins, 2009  
Video Still

OVERLEAF:  
Body Ruins, 2009  
Video Still

Body Ruins, 2009  
Video Still

Images courtesy of the artist and Anna Pappas Gallery









# MARCELLO GUARDIGLI

Born in Italy. Based in Melbourne.

Marcello Guardigli has been documenting skateboarding since 1998. He started out filming and directing skateboard videos in Europe, expanding his method of working to include still photography as recently as eight years ago.

Marcello works with both digital media and film, still developing his own black and white rolls in his home dark room. His work is equally at home in art galleries and skate mags. He has exhibited his work across Australia as well as in Italy, New Zealand and Spain while his photographs are regularly published in magazines in both Europe and Australia, which he now calls home.

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
The Remains of Bluestone 01, 2013  
Digital Print

OVERLEAF:  
The Remains of Bluestone 02, 2013  
Digital Print

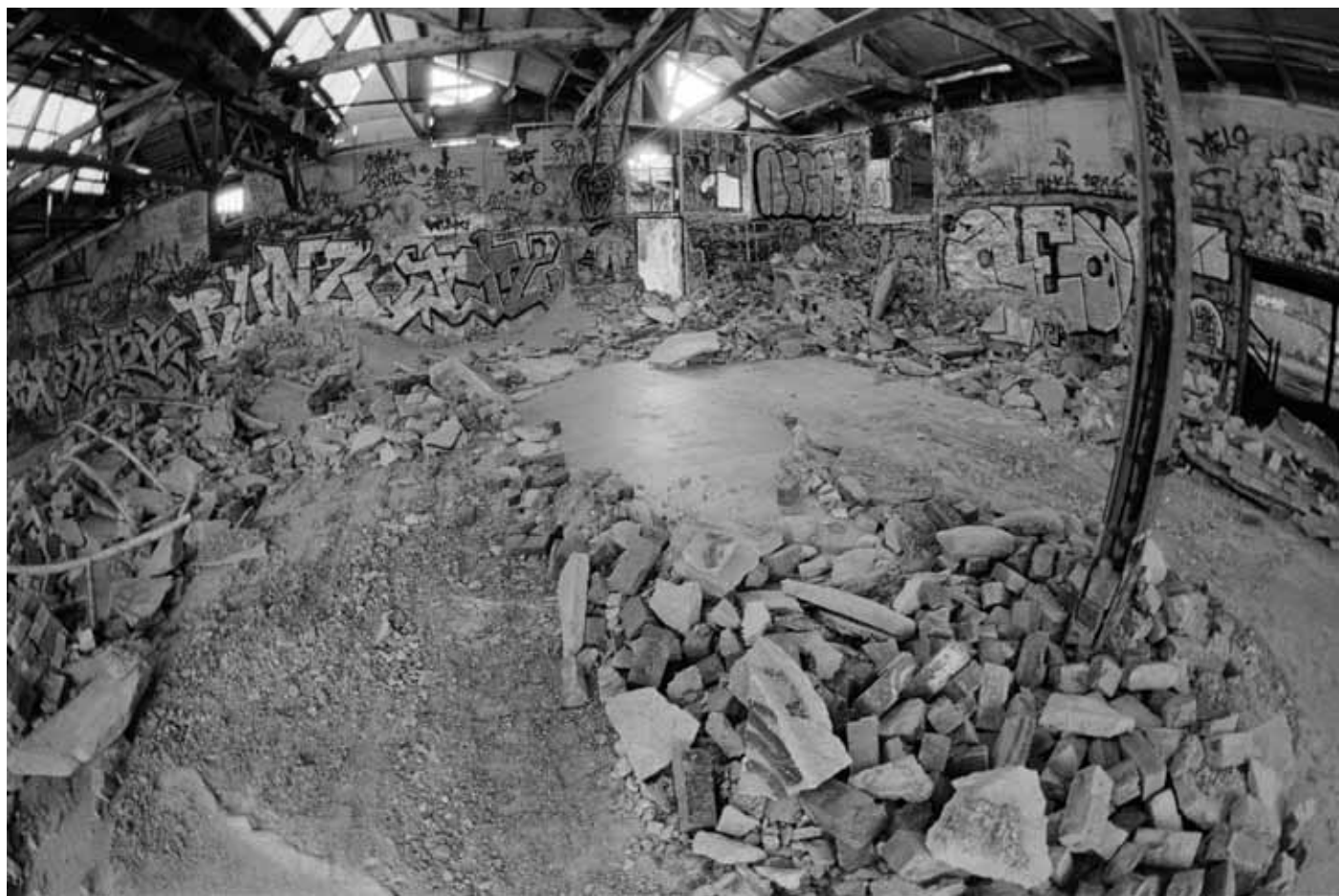
The Remains of Bluestone 03, 2013  
Digital Print

Images courtesy of the artist









# MICHAEL BRENNAN

Based in Melbourne.

Michael Brennan works across a range of media and activities. While painting constitutes the core of his practice, his work often spills into sculpture, installation and curatorial projects.

Michael's practice investigates grey areas – the space between things – and how this space is typically overlooked in favour of divisive dichotomies and the narrowly defined. Architectural structures figure prominently in Michael's work to reveal an 'in-between space' where slippage occurs between plural perspectives and different points of view.

Michael has exhibited widely and been included in numerous art prizes. In 2007 he was awarded an Australia Council studio residency in Tokyo and in 2010 completed a Master of Fine Art at Monash University.

Michael was also a founding Director of Trocadero Art Space and Shifted. He currently works as a Curator at LUMA | La Trobe University Museum of Art.

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
Stairs, Sky (Across), 2013  
Oil on Linen

OVERLEAF:  
Either Side, 2013  
Timber, Rope and Steel

Images courtesy of the artist









# PAUL WHITE

Born in Sydney. Based in Melbourne.

Paul White completed his undergraduate degree at the University of Western Sydney with a Bachelor of Arts – Fine Arts with 1st Class Honours in 1997. He was awarded an Anne & Gordon Samstag Visual Arts Scholarship in 2001, which enabled him to live and study in Los Angeles from 2001 to 2003. He graduated from a Master of Fine Arts in 2003 from California Institute of the Arts.

Paul was awarded the 2010 Metro Art Award and has since then been a finalist in a number of awards. He has had numerous solo exhibitions and has been involved in group shows both internationally and nationally in spaces such as Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Metro Gallery, Mornington Regional Gallery, Bendigo Gallery, Casula Powerhouse, Artspace, Penrith Regional Gallery, PICA, NGA, Winslow Garage (LA), Armory Center for the Arts (LA), Track 16 (LA) and Instituto de Cultura de Baja California (Mexico).

## IMAGES

OPPOSITE:  
Evolutionary Extinction (Commodore Heights), 2011  
(detail)  
Pencil on Paper

OVERLEAF:  
Phantom Horizon Blockage, 2012  
Pencil on Paper

Images courtesy of the artist and Scott Livesey Galleries







# RICHARD GIBLETT

Born in Hong Kong. Based in Melbourne.

Primarily working in sculpture, installation and light, Richard Giblett's recent practice has been to use objects commonplace to the built environment and subvert, or invert them in such a way that re-contextualises the object, which ultimately allows the viewer to regard the object in a new way. By using an economy of materials including paper, glass, wood, cardboard and fluorescent light, his aim has been to reduce and replicate such objects by focusing purely on the form of the structure. Richard's work has strong ties to design elements, particularly of the industrial and architectural kind, yet as a visual artist he has a propensity toward making detailed and time consuming works by hand. This adds an overall sense of illusion and what he regards as a complex simplicity to the work.

Richard completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Hons) at Curtin University, Perth, in 1999. He has been awarded residencies in Seoul (Asialink 2001), New York (Australia Council 2005) and London (Australia Council 2012).

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:

Fluorescent Pyre, 2011  
MDF, Hardwood and Acrylic Paint

OVERLEAF:

Ceylon Hut 1, 2012  
Acrylic Paint on Photograph

Ceylon Hut 3, 2012  
Acrylic Paint on Photograph

Images courtesy of the artist and Murray White Room









# SIMON FINN

Based in Melbourne.

Simon Finn's artworks are an exploration of temporal representations and the variable syntheses between artist, environment and technology. The works investigate the boundaries of sight and scientific visualisation as a way of de-centring the human in networks of artistic production.

Simon is completing Masters of Fine Art by research at the Victorian College of the Arts and studied Electronic Design and Interactive Media at Swinburne University. He has also studied at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology where he received First Class Honors in Fine Art. His recent solo exhibitions include Vertex Vortex, Fehily Contemporary (2013), Warning MOANA Project Space (2013), Synthetic Surge Beam Contemporary Art Space (2012), and Synthetic Animated Realities George Paton Gallery (2012).

Simon is also a Lecturer in Animation and Games Design within a Bachelor of Interactive Entertainment.

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:

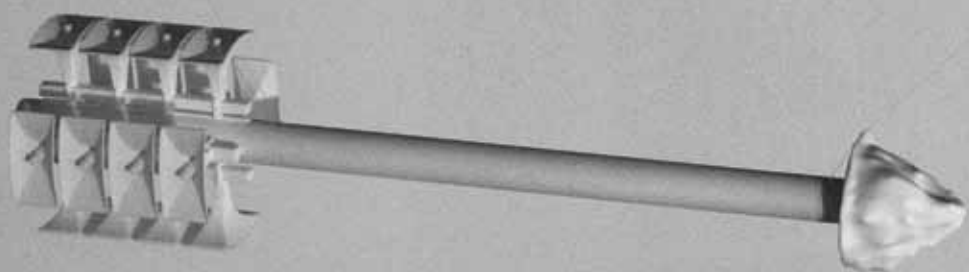
Warning Tower Sculpt, 2013  
Synthetic Polymer 3D Print

OVERLEAF:

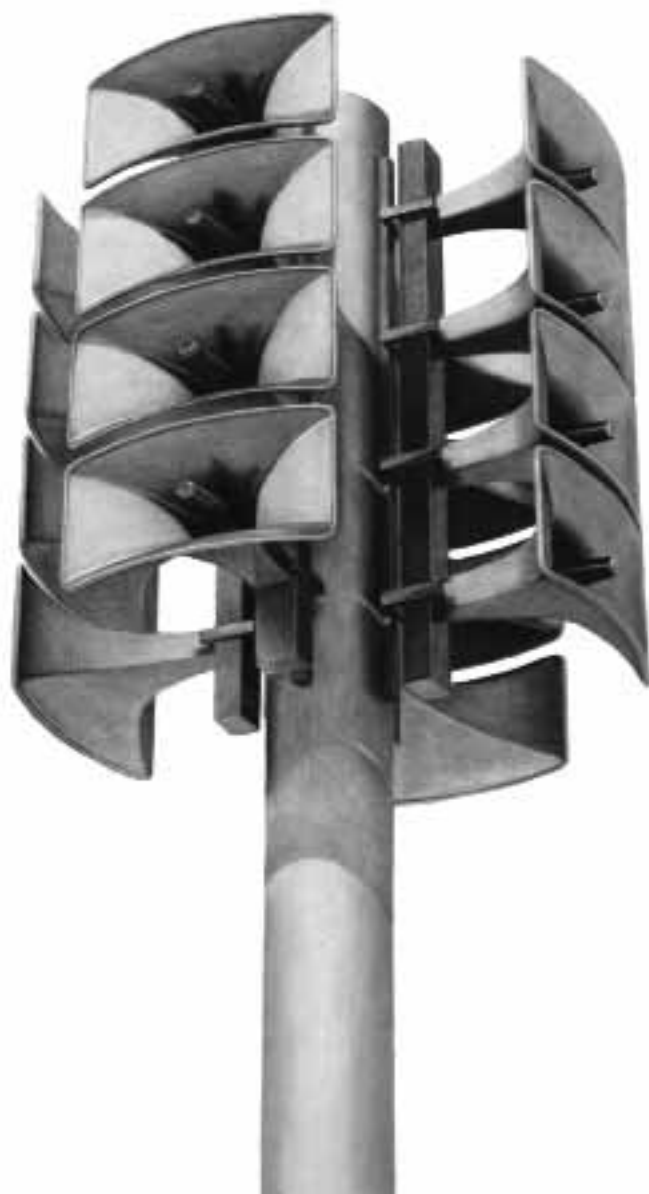
Warning Tower Angle 1, 2013  
Charcoal on Paper

Warning Tower Angle 2, 2013  
Charcoal on Paper

Images courtesy of the artist and Fehily Contemporary







# TROY INNOCENT

Based in Melbourne.

Dr Troy Innocent is a world builder, iconographer and reality newbie. His artificial worlds – Iconica (SIGGRAPH 98, USA), and Semiomorph (ISEA02, Japan) – explore the dynamic between the iconic ideal and the personal specific, the real and the simulated, and the way in which our identity is shaped by language and communication. He has received numerous awards, including Honorary Mention, LIFE 2.0: Artificial Life, Spain (1999); Foreign Title Award, MMCA Multimedia Grand Prix, Japan (1998); First Prize, National Digital Art Awards, Australia (1995); and Honorary Mention, Prix Ars Electronica (1992). Troy co-founded the digital arts collective cyber dada and through pioneering works such as Idea-ON>! contributed to the Australian new media arts practice during the 90s. His most recent works are urban art environments: an interactive sculpture garden entitled Colony in the Melbourne Docklands and Urban Codemakers, an Alternate Reality Game that reinvents the history of Melbourne.

IMAGES

OPPOSITE:

LUD10002:PS: Harujuku (detail), 2011  
Digital C Type Photograph with Object

OVERLEAF:

LUD10003:PH: Aoyama (detail), 2011  
Digital C Type Photograph with Object

Neo Material Industries, 2010  
Digital C Type Photograph

Images courtesy of the artist and Hugo Michell Gallery











COVER:  
Marcello Guardigli  
The Remains of Bluestone 04 (detail), 2013  
Digital Print

Courtesy of the artist

OVERLEAF:  
Paul White  
Aloha Mojave, 2012  
Pencil on Paper

Courtesy of the artist and Scott Livesey Gallery

## **MODERN RUIN**

**Curated by Aaron Martin and Michael Brennan**

Aaron Martin, ACAB Collective, Craig Cole, Cyrus Tang, Marcello Guardigli, Michael Brennan, Paul White, Richard Giblett, Simon Finn and Troy Innocent.

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The Substation

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## MODERN RUIN

AARON MARTIN | ACAB COLLECTIVE | CRAIG COLE | CYRUS TANG | MARCELLO GUARDIGLI  
MICHAEL BRENNAN | PAUL WHITE | RICHARD GIBLETT | SIMON FINN | TROY INNOCENT

Curated by AARON MARTIN and MICHAEL BRENNAN



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