

New coat of paint through media mix

VISUAL ARTS DANIEL VON STURMER

Anna Schwartz Gallery,
185 Flinders Lane, until May 11
annaschwartzgallery.com

NEW 08

Australian Centre for Contemporary Art,
111 Sturt Street, Southbank, until May 11
accaonline.org.au

MY DOUBTFUL MIND

Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts,
26 Acland Street, St Kilda, until May 25
lindenarts.org

PENELOPE DAVIS, FICTION—NON-FICTION

Nellie Castan Gallery,
12 River Street, South Yarra, until May 3
nelliecastangallery.com

Robert Nelson reviewer

PAINTING is pursued so incomparably well by Aboriginal artists that I understand why so many white Australian painters have thrown down their brushes. The works of Purlta Maryanne Downs at Alcaston Gallery radiate with lyrical chromatic contrasts and express the rich episodes of the Western Australian landscape.

And the paintings of Eunice Napanangka and Alice Nampitjinpa at Gabrielle Pizzi Gallery are high voltage, as are the sublime paintings by Makinti Napanangka and Yukultji Napangati.

You can't compete with that stuff; they're in another league. But fortunately, contemporary art makes provision for a different kind of painting, one that you don't do with a brush: art that is about painting. So

many installations and videos take up where the brush leaves off, investigating the processes and conventions embedded in painting.

Daniel von Sturmer, for example, creates videos about the behaviour of pictorial elements, especially paint itself. His exhibition at Anna Schwartz lets paint run in vertical stripes, in goopy dollops, in slithery spreading concentric patterns.

Each video is like an extrapolation of a kind of painting — like New York abstraction and action dab painting — that fetishises paint itself.

As the paint slowly pushes itself out in successive viscous layers, you feel there's some psychopathology in our attraction, as if we return to primeval amniotic slime via these cerebral and meticulous matrices.

The normally bounteous exhibition of new art at ACCA this year (called *New 08*) contains a superb example of installation art that is all about the pictorial.

It's a heap of junk by Chris Bond. Ingeniously, Bond has found assorted objects in pairs. Whatever random object is placed on the floor, an identical one is placed on the other side of the corner.

No matter how much it mounts up and looks random, it's perfectly matched with a counterpart on the other side of an imaginary line that runs at 45 degrees to the nearby walls.

First, there's the horror of seeing more piles of garbage in a gallery. Then there's the marvel of realising that the chaotic stacks are assiduously matched in pairs: a reflection without a

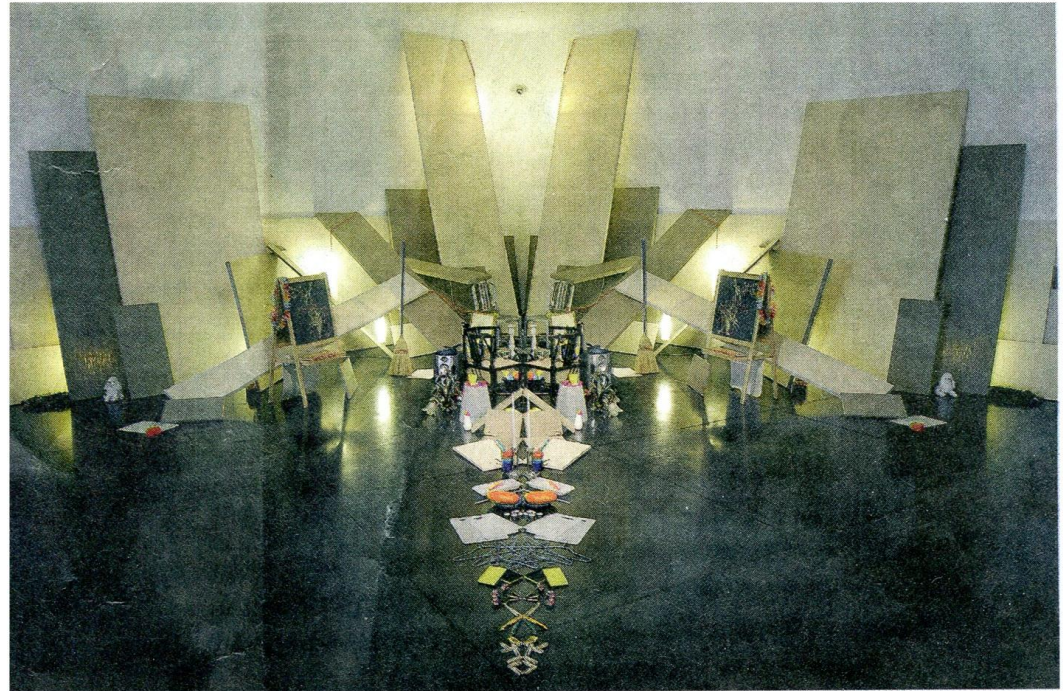
mirror. You have to walk around to reassure yourself that there's no optical basis for the replication. The installation extrapolates the genius of symmetry counterpointing nature. It seems to deconstruct symmetry, that ancient pictorial device that has reached epidemic scale thanks to the ease of flipping an image on a computer.

Images are also flipped by Natasha Johns-Messenger and Lesley Eastman in a group show called *My Doubtful Mind*. Their installation at Linden involves two armatures on the one axis, but spinning in opposite directions. They cause two large semi-reflective panels to revolve in contrary motion, presenting the architecture of the old mansion as a counterpoint of panning shots, always penetrated by the stable, real building that is seen from behind.

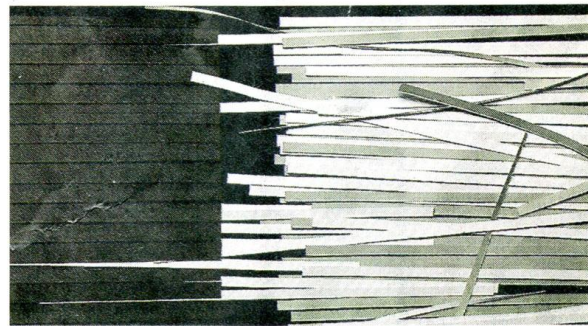
You can then witness this mechanical spectacle in a purely pictorial form in the next room, where the artists have created a camera obscura, casting the spinning each form and shines light through them to create a luminous photogram.

Photography can also be used as if it were painting. Penelope Davis has a clever technique of taking moulds of old books and casting them in resin. She then colours each form and shines light through them to create a luminous photogram.

Titled *Fiction—Non-Fiction*, Davis' exhibition at Nellie Castan uses books as a motif. But it is less about books than about painting. As the ancient tomes are transformed into toffees of magenta, red and green, they



ABOVE: Chris Bond's *Mirrorworld* (2008) at ACCA. BELOW LEFT: Daniel von Sturmer's *Tableaux Plastique Sequence 10* (2008) at the Anna Schwartz Gallery. BELOW RIGHT: Penelope Davis' *Fiction—Non-Fiction* at the Nellie Castan Gallery.



lose their association with the dusty shelf. Instead, the glowing bars function like thick brush strokes in the grand manner of Soulages and, when oriented horizontally, Rothko.

The display of the lolly-bright photograms emphasises this transformation into the language of painting. In the small gallery, the installation presents the

works as a frieze, so that the synthetic ghost of old books hovers spookily on a new shelf: the informality of contemporary painting on paper. As with Sturmer, Bond, Eastman and Johns-Messenger, Davis is celebrating the afterlife of European painting.

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