

Chris Bond  
 Sarah Lynch  
 Garrett Hughes  
 Christian Thompson  
 Melanie Katsalidis

# SELF MADE MAN

opening thursday 3rd february 6pm

curated by kerrie-dee johns  
 01/02/05 - 26/02/05

*It was a strange, sly face, with pale, drawn features; the cheekbones were punctuated with cosmetic commas of rouge, the hair was plastered down and bound with a string of pearls and the thin, painted neck emerged from the starched pleats of a ruff.*

(J. Huysmans, 'Against Nature')



The exhibition, titled Self-Made Man, presents an ironic interpretation of the self-portrait to which the sly-faced figure of the dandy is chosen motif. This emblem represents the first example in history to acknowledge identity as strictly constructed. The cut of his cloth and an affected manner in which he carried himself were part of this character's charm. Modelled on real life eccentrics such as Oscar Wilde and fictional characters as Huysmans' 'Des Esseintes', this figure evolved from a mixture both of reality and myth. His origin was turn of the century Paris, as an expression of reactionary individualism in times of urban gentrification. The forces at play in the making of this man were socio-historical and the means of this libertine's rebellion, aesthetic. As both self-invented and a mirror of society, he participated in creating how people perceived him and celebrated in its artifice.

Garrett Hughes' photographs are a revival of those sentiments. Made up by fragments, they display the fissures in presenting oneself as whole and unique. Hughes presents the irony inherent in being a self-made man. Under his magnifying glass he performs a delicate operation transfusing historical romantic refuge, reminding us that we are copies of an original, products of our own cultural inheritance. Surrounded by an array of objects that appear to be taken from an English hunting cottage, an obvious hierarchy is displayed between

civilized and savage. Like the vanitas of seventeenth century Dutch still-life painting, displays of marvels, flora, fowl and timepieces are arranged to contain a secret symbolic meaning. The display of fineries in this artist's private collection can be seen to act as a portrait in itself, in addition to questioning the very representational qualities they allude to.

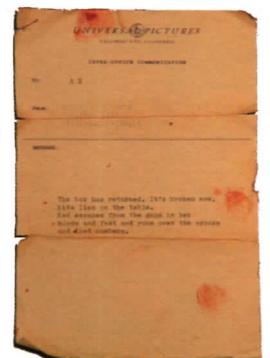
Just as the dandy is representative of social relations in the early 1900s, celebrity has become somewhat exemplary for the social relations of our time, shown through the cultural institution of fame. Warhol understood this well. Celebrity is examined as a myth-making process in the photography of Christian Thompson. In his series of poses and guises, he shows portraiture as a performance. In this series of self-portraits, Thompson demonstrates that the myth-making structures of fame share similarities with Renaissance paintings of iconic worship.

The artist Chris Bond uses cultural myth to support evidence of a pseudo crime. His artefacts act as a series of clues. In the Feldman Affair, Bond fashions a fictional account around the celebrity of Alfred Hitchcock. Just as ordinary objects can acquire symbolic status, they can also act as a rhetorical device. Hence, in the work of Bond, a string of memos become the basis for allegation.

Melanie Katsalidis' sculpture works in relation to the exhibition's theme as metaphorical of the self. In Katsalidis's sculptures, the tree as a visual motif symbolizes the self, whilst marks made on the surface of the tree allude to the traces of time and produce a concept of the self that is constructed by the active forces in its life. Her work asserts that the self is never autonomous but is dependent on the climate and context that surrounds it.

Cultural inheritance can be both a curse and a gift. The work of Sarah Lynch reacts to the conventions of gender, performing a parody of machismo seen in the film, Rumble Fish (1983) and celebrity figures such as Elvis. Lynch examines our compulsion to conform to popular stereotypes and calls attention to the visual signs that are part of establishing one's own identity. Using the maverick medium of video art and motif of the dandy, Lynch's work rebels against the cultural authority of mainstream filmmaking and advertising. With original intentions intact, the dandy is re-animated to stand in for those, who by force of personal principle, go against the grain.

Kerrie-Dee Johns 2005



Front: Christian Thompson, *The Gates of Tambo*, 2004, image courtesy of the artist  
 Top: Garrett Hughes, *My Vestige*, 2004, image courtesy of the artist  
 Bottom: Chris Bond, *The Hitchcock Feldmar Affair*, 2003, image courtesy of the artist



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