HYPERactive

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BIANCA BEETSON

CLAUDIA CHASELING

JAY YOUNGER

RICHARD GRAYSON

CATHY LAUDENBACH

JAY KOCHEL

REBECCA SELLECK

CURATED BY DAVID BROKER

HYPERactive

HYPERactive was conceived in a miasma of unreality. Words seemed inadequate to describe works that sounded implausible, if not absurd. Artists imagined the unimaginable; the devil as t.v presenter, a plague of rabbits on the lounge room carpet, a picturesque Austrian tourist attraction in China, a Victorian séance generator, leaping salmon against a paint by numbers waterfall, possum skin cloaks made from Elmo pelts and paintings that reflect a sense of imminent global annihilation. As elements of Ripley's Believe it or Not emerged and took hold, a dark cloud gathered over this hypothetical exhibition. The 'devil' occupies all of these works.

My initial frustration in finding a coherent link among seven diverse works was partially eased by way of revisiting the 1990s and the popular writings of Jean Baudrillard and Umberto Eco on hyperreality; in themselves often not always entirely comprehensible. Relief, however, was found in the convoluted musings on modern life where images and simulations distorted the realities they attempted to represent – ultimately depicting nothing in existence but rather generating a new reality based on their own presence. Perhaps my struggle to understand what I was attempting to unleash came from the inability to distinguish experienced reality from its manufactured simulations. While all of these works are rooted in difficult truths: war, plague, spiritualism, fractured cultures and incongruent simulation, they are neither absurd nor impossible because the artists have given their curious concepts form. Each is saturated with earnest intensity and thus credibility. Hence the problematic space between reality and hyperreality morphed into a zone of hyperactivity where there is too much weird shit happening and so the audience navigates an amusingly bleak path of trickery, contradiction and illusion.

Cathy Laudenbach's project centres on Hallstatt See, a housing development built in Luoyang, Boluo County, Southern China. For all intents and purposes it is an exact replica of Hallsatt, its sublime counterpart nestled in the Austrian Alps, complete with churches, fountains, streets and dwellings. Laudenbach's research project begins at a time when the people of China are set to become the tourists of the future. Her images of Chinese tourists exploring an "alien" playground, essentially conceived by and for themselves bring to mind the ideas of Umberto Eco's "Age of Simulation" where contemporary culture becomes filled with recreations and themed environments.

Hallstatt See is perhaps what Eco would see as an "absolute fake" in which imitations don't just reproduce reality but somehow attempt to improve upon it in the context of the new. Laudenbach explores not only the architecture of imitation but also the social relations that occur as a result of its visitors' engagement with the replicated buildings. As Eco had noted in his study of hyperreality, behind every facade is a business, whereby capitalism lures its potential clients, lost in fantasy, into a shopping spree. And it is clear from Laudenbach's works that the impeccably dressed visitors in (perhaps fake) designer gear, carrying expensive cameras and phones, readily employ the architecture as a backdrop to their display of wealth.

In the Chinese context this project is one of complex multilayered irony. As is the case with Disneyland, Laudenbach reveals a new aspect of China in which Hallstatt stands for everything that is brighter, larger and more entertaining than everyday life. In three large composite works she creates seamless images of the Austrian original and the Chinese fake, calling to question the veracity of photography. The three smaller images of Hallstatt See focus on visitors who dress for the occasion in hired suits and wedding dresses or kitsch representations of Red Guard uniforms whose drab conformity in this context becomes the sign of a new capitalist Cultural Revolution. Hallstatt is a stage upon which both visitors and Laudenbach are able to engage with a succinct characterisation of the world's most powerful economic and military newcomer, acting to a script that all participants are in the process of rewriting.

CATHY LAUDENBACH *Halstatt See China / Halstatt Austria 1*, 2015, Digital print from photographic negatives; 61cm x 95cm

CATHY LAUDENBACH   *Halstatt See China 1*, 2017, Digital print from digital file; 61cm x 88cm

CATHY LAUDENBACH *Halstatt See China / Halstatt Austria 2*, 2016, Digital print from photographic negatives and digital files; 117cm x 131cm

On Sunday 23 April, 2017 Asmodeus, the central figure in Richard Grayson's *Possessions_inc* (2016-2017) was attacked with an axe in the Church of Saint Mary Magdalene at Rennes-le-Château in the Languedoc region of Southern France; and this was not the first time. In a story of blurred reverberations, the statue was first named Asmodeus, protector of Solomon's treasure, by Pierre Plantard, Phillipe de Chérisey and Gérard de Sède as part of a surrealist deceit associated in the 1950s with the fictitious Priory of Sion, a secret cabal created to install the descendants of Jesus, the Merovingian dynasty on the thrones of France and Europe. While books abound on the mysteries of Rennes-le-Château, this dense maze of hoax, conspiracy theory and pseudo-history made a remarkable entry into popular culture with the 1982 best seller *The Holy Blood and the Holy Grail* (Michael Baigent, Richard Leigh, and Henry Lincoln) which laid the groundwork for Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* (2003). These 'fake histories' that continue to defy scepticism, make guest appearances throughout the first thirteen episodes *Possessions_inc*.

Speaking through animated images of Asmodeus, Grayson embarks on an epic series of video works to be posted online each month throughout 2016 and 2017. The project is an editorial stream of consciousness; part bulletin, t.v series, blog and essay providing an ongoing commentary that touches upon ideas of value, the agency of objects, robotics, the operations of the internet, money codes, music, the art market, secret knowledge and mytho-mania, the latter two referencing the broader context of the entire program (so far). Along with visual effects, jokes and the occasional musical interlude Grayson's dispassionate delivery mediated by the many voices of Asmodeus, examine a world increasingly unable to distinguish between fact and fiction – a phenomenon exacerbated by the Internet.

Although Grayson's twilight zone often reflects the sensational formats of 24-hour news cycle, pseudo-documentary and entertainment bulletin he avoids exposé, favouring a personal engagement with the fragments of information presented by the affable satanic spokesperson. This is news on the Internet, about the Internet and the ways it works in contemporary societies.

Addressing attention spans shortened by the media he uses, Grayson generates a vertigo inducing journey with stopovers at the Bohemian Grove, smart dildos, Objectohilia, Donald Trump's affect on the art market, haunted artworks and the ever present Priory of Sion. In Episode 8 he cites a telephone conversation between Pierre Plantard and Phillipe de Chérisey where the latter exclaims "I have written all sorts of fiction but none my dear Pierre is going to be a fiction like this …. This is to be a fiction that is going to spread into the real. It will spread slowly, it will be moving invisibly ….". *Possessions_inc* ironically legitimises the suspect work of Plantard and de Chérisey in the highly entertaining, but nonetheless incisive, context of a 21st century "post truth" age of disconnected details, click bait, hackers and trolls.
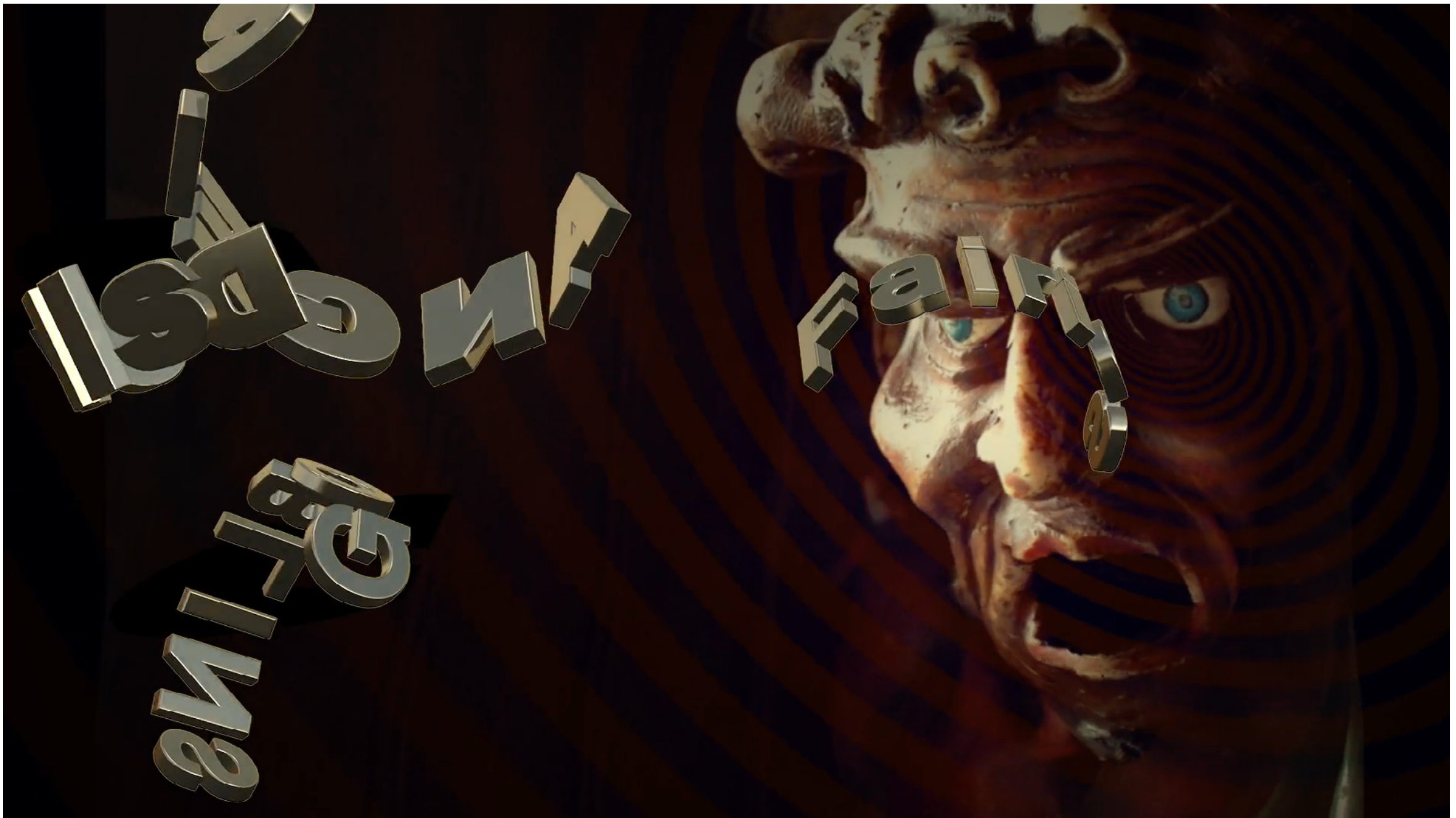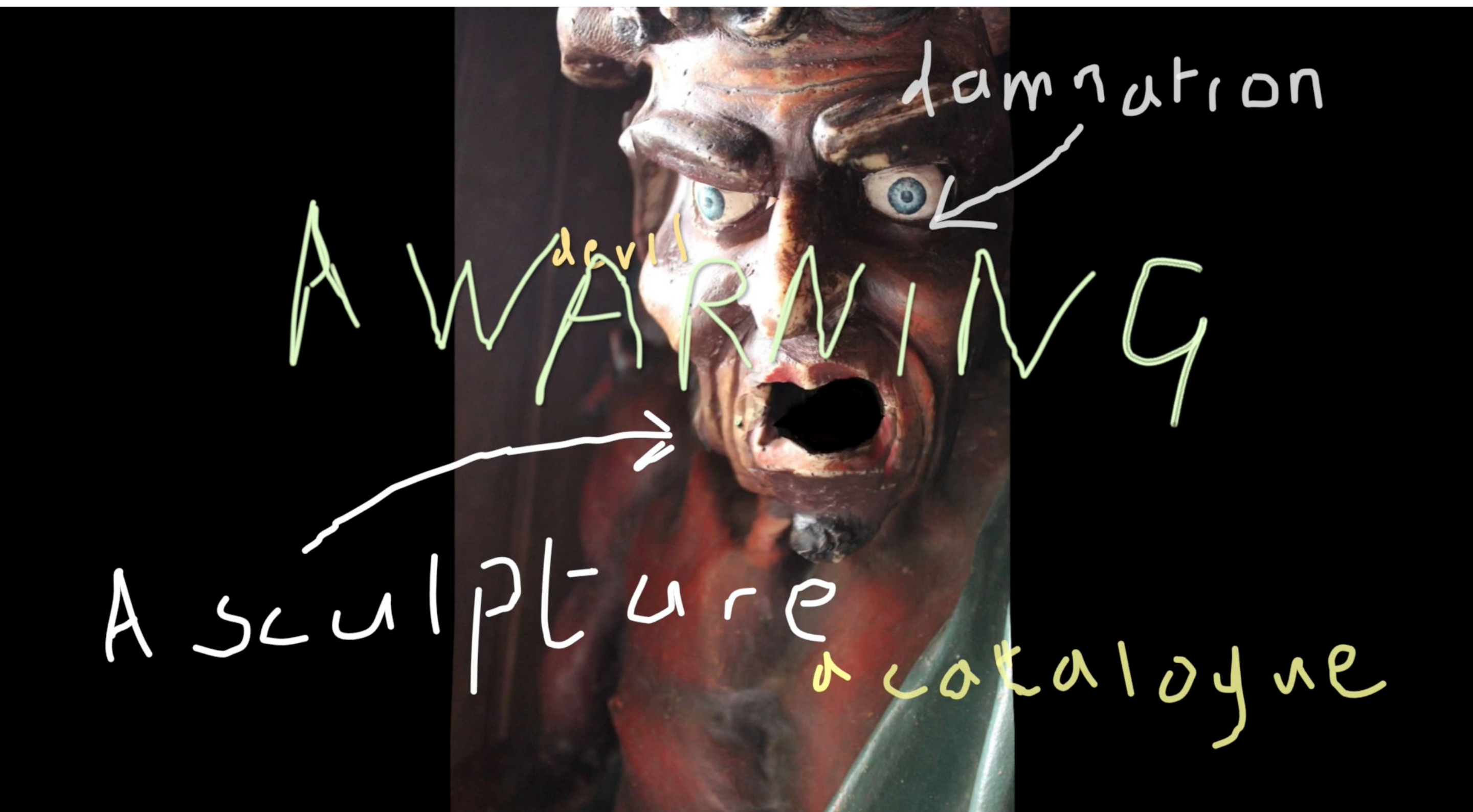

RICHARD GRAYSON   *Possesions_inc* (still), 2016–17, Episodes 1–13, video and internet project; 2 hours 48 minutes

the visual brand

RICHARD GRAYSON   *Possesions_inc* (still), 2016–17, Episodes 1–13, video and internet project; 2 hours 48 minutes

damnation

A WARNING
devil

A sculpture
a catalogue

RICHARD GRAYSON   *Possesions_inc* (still), 2016–17, Episodes 1–13, video and internet project; 2 hours 48 minutes

In her catalogue essay for *Exact Fantasies* (2012) Kim Mahood describes Jay Kochel as, " … at once mad scientist and naughty boy … ." A study tour of European Museums in 2010 and in particular the Pitt Rivers Museum in Oxford consolidated Kochel's interest in the exotica of Victorian 'cabinets of curiosities'. His work to date had been uncomfortably visceral treading a fine line between refined conceptualism and hideous. These works focussed on the ways familiar materials take on dark significances when seen in the context of objects or ideas that have quasi-ritualistic, medical or scientific functions. His exhibition *Accursed Gilded Wishes* (2010) at Canberra Contemporary Art Space, for example, brought together large scale faux magical artefacts based on – reliquaries, voodoo dolls, votive objects, folk magic and juju – objects and ideas serving as transducers for the metaphysical side of human nature and body. Sometimes considered to be fetishistic and/or evil Kochel invoked a medieval sense of awe whereby inanimate objects are charged with power to motivate mystical behaviours in the beholder.

Séance (2012) has been adapted for *HYPERactive* and, like the works mentioned above, attempts to create a bridge between physical and spiritual worlds. The séance, where groups of people attempted to communicate with the dead was a fashionable past time in America and Victorian England during the mid 19th century, an era also associated with scientific and technological progress. A highly social activity of the Victorian drawing room, Kochel's mechanical installation reflects the furnishings of the era with a glass vessel containing golden fluid on top of an elegant polished hexagonal table. The cloudy fluid is simulated ectoplasm, a viscous substance that might emanate from the body of a medium during a spiritualistic trance; the material in which spirits are manifest.

Kochel invites the viewer to play medium in a way that is ironically reminiscent of a computer game played on one's own. Stepping up onto an octagonal platform the audience can activate the 'ectoplasm' by holding a lump of black bronze on a plinth that is connected to the glass vessel through a delicate network of pins and hair, the transmitters of energy between medium

and spirit. While the dark wood and elegant hexagonal structure of Kochel's *Séance* produces an air of Victorian austerity and authority, it is also tongue in cheek. There is something of Heath Robinson's whimsy and satire in Kochel's work.

The Victorian world-view owed much to a belief in the authenticity of variously exotic artefacts in museum collections as well as those displayed during the Great Exhibitions. *Séance* is a homage to such objects and artefacts that, were frequently faked like the reliquaries and dolls of Kochel's earlier works. Like the Internet today, a source of known and manufactured information, collections provided a theatre of the world that presented material artefacts to inspire flights of fancy or an escape from the confines of everyday living. *Séance* is an object from the *Wunderkammer,* that invites us through its interactivity, to suspend scepticism and believe in the conceit of its improbability.

In close proximity to Kochel's *Séance*, Jay Younger's upturned dressing table suspended in the gallery might invoke terrifying cinematic memories of the *The Exorcist* (1973), of furniture propelled by the will of a mischievous or malevolent devil. For Younger, however, it represents a sinister spirit of another nature, a devil within. Her inverted furniture suggests that all is not well in the world and addresses the struggle to actualise identity against the grain of contradictory social, cultural and political forces. In its shadowy gallery milieu the dressing table is a woman who finds herself in the absurd situation of being a feminist, advocating for women's rights in an obstinate neoliberal patriarchy. The mirror, being a place of reflection and projection, is a private space where identity can be assessed, maintained and adjusted for public scrutiny.

JAY KOCHEL   *Séance*, 2012, timber, copper, hair, polyurethane, shellac, glass vessel, found and altered table, magnets, brass, steel, electronic components, custom programming, transducer; 170 x 255 x 275cm

JAY KOCHEL *Séance*, 2012, timber, copper, hair, polyurethane, shellac, glass vessel, found and altered table, magnets, brass, steel, electronic components, custom programming, transducer; 170 x 255 x 275cm

If Younger's work has an *amateur* appearance it is in the sense of its Latin derivation 'to love'. Impact has been a powerful force for Younger, as she brings together complex ideas with materials and methods of construction that seem rudimentary and unembellished. The black plastic tub in *Against the stream as always* (2017), for example, is simply there to catch water falling across a mirror attached to the table. The words *Go hard or go home* etched onto the mirror are washed away periodically signifying a script that is continually rewritten. At the centre of Younger's multifaceted installation is the ovular projection of a "paint by numbers" waterfall sourced from the Internet. Introduced in 1950 this amateur activity promised "a beautiful oil painting the first time you try" and it is used in this installation to represent 'fixed' thinking, the static part of the image that is regulated and controlled and predetermined. As such it is conservatism that the fish swim against. Kitsch objects from the 50s and 60s have often reflected Younger's political views through the continual appearance of cheap and disposable objects that decorated the homes of the working classes.

In many respects Younger is a story-teller relating autobiographical experience in the broader context of social and sexual politics. Every element of her installation is an allegorical sentence invested with narrative values. As leaping salmon undertake the gruelling journey upstream of an animated paint by numbers waterfall, we feel the futility, the struggle that ends in death and yet generates a legacy of descendants who will repeat this agony *ad infinitum*. Younger's multifaceted installation blends identity politics with retro nostalgia to express a personal reality that recounts a life of conflict based on the ebb and flow of pointlessness and purpose. The spirits of the dead also exist in *Against the stream as always,* only here they define the future.

JAY YOUNGER *Against the stream as always* (still), 2017, Hydraulic installation; dimensions variable

Bianca Beetson's Elmo skin cloaks appear to be a radical rewriting of the functional garments worn by Aboriginal people, in the cooler climes of South Eastern Australia. Although many groups across the country wore cloaks made from various animals, the most familiar are the possum skins worn in Southern Queensland, New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania. The inside of the cloaks carried important information about the wearer's ancestry and identity with elaborate patterns, incised and painted with ochre, containing stories of clan and Country. In the mid 19th century woollen government-issue blankets were distributed to Aboriginal people in the British colonies and the use of highly prized cloaks of great cultural significance declined to the point that there are very few in existence. Owned by a foreign power the new (borrowed) blankets erased identities while their impracticality offered no protection from the elements causing many deaths from common European diseases. In the late 1990s, however, cloaks began to reappear as Koori artists created a movement to reclaim possum skin cloak making and thus Aboriginal people have been afforded the experience of using cloaks in the way of their ancestors.

A Kabi Kabi woman from the Sunshine Coast/Buderim area of Queensland Beetson has built an artistic practice that often integrates popular culture with more traditional Aboriginal cultural activities. On route to a residency at Kluge-Ruhe Aboriginal Art Collection, University of Virginia, USA, she carried a suitcase packed with pre-loved Elmos, Sesame Street's falsetto voiced furry red monster. Through childhood exposure to the hysterical laughter and inane chatter of 'Tickle me Elmos', Beetson developed a healthy contempt for the shaggy muppet. She saw Elmo as an icon of American cultural imperialism; a symbol of the ways Australian education had become saturated by American business interests and its associated capitalist values. For an Aboriginal person Elmo represented another invasion, another wave of colonisation, this time from the Americas.

Challenged with making something at Kluge-Ruhe that would respond to the place and introduce the local people to Aboriginal culture, Beetson 'skinned' 22 Elmo's for a cloak that would be outrageous in its fake furry magnificence and politically charged in the context of the 2016

Republican Party presidential primaries. The effort became communal as students, quilters, staff and people from the local community joined Beetson for five sewing circles based on a process of cultural sharing or as she calls it 'stitchin' and bitchin'. The cloak reflects Beetson's Kabi Kabi ancestry, her dark sense of humour and political views, while also encompassing an ambivalent attitude to the host country. A patchwork of American flags is sewn into the inner side of the pelts to create a wildly incongruous yet stately cloak pinned at the top end by a *Donald Trump for President* badge. For Beetson, and perhaps some of her knitting circle, this was a joke that is no longer amusing; in the context of the USA, a 'fake' cloak that with the twists and turns of history became very real.

BIANCA BEETSON *Untitled (Elmo Skin Cloak)*, 2016, Elmo skins, American flags, Donald Trump for president badge, dimensions variable

My first contact with *Lapin Fam* (2016) was during a period of 'rabbit sitting' when an earlier version of this work was stored on the floor of my office between exhibitions. In some ways this was the optimum mode of presentation, situated in a simulated domestic space within an actual domestic space. During its occupancy I came to see the rabbit like creatures as living things, born as Selleck describes, "… of a specific sculptural language that gives communicable presence to the moment …" While Selleck's rabbits are an idea, an almost abstract representation, they capture the essence of civic attitudes to this maligned yet lovable pest. I even felt a certain grief upon their departure. Made from pelts of found rabbit coats stretched over skeletal steel armatures they warm and breath, occasionally frightening visitors to the office as the inanimate objects are animated without warning.

Part of a family of works in which 'rabbits' appear Selleck's work has captured the fevered imagination of audiences across the country in a short time and her invasion may yet reach plague proportions. *Lapin Plague* (2016) for example was recently seen at the Art Gallery of South Australia in the Ramsay Art Prize (2017) and at CCAS Manuka, where near the latter, rabbits have returned to frolic provocatively on the shores of Lake Burley Griffin having survived the myxoma virus unleashed by scientists to control a population out of control. In the gallery, Selleck's paired back salon spaces suggest a domestication that more broadly reflects her concern with what social psychologists call cognitive dissonance or an inconsistency between attitudes and behaviours. Rabbits, however, are one part of a much larger story where she attempts to address the relationship between humans and other animals.

Selleck explains, "Since I was a small child, I've been entranced by the inconsistent relationships humans have with other animals. We can easily empathise with them on the one hand, but disengage on the other: denying them agency and treating them as objects. Representations of non-human animals find their way into our perceptions, but rather than forming a smooth

BIANCA BEETSON   *Untitled (Elmo Skin Cloak)*, 2016, Elmo skins, American flags, Donald Trump for president badge, dimensions variable

whole they exist in separate parts of our mind ready for appropriate contextual usage." Thus her animals come to represent not so much the actual creature but rather an attitude, where in the gallery audiences experience the push and pull of empathy, affection and disengagement. This idea has societal implications, where the real situation is a paradox of lovable pet, Beatrix Potter character and edible vermin that have a devastating impact upon economies and the environment.

REBECCA SELLECK   *Lapin Fam* 2016, Found rabbit skin coats, found rug, planetary motors, heat conductive wiring electrics, steel, stainless steel, polyester, synthetic stuffing; 135 x 300 x 200cm

REBECCA SELLECK   *Lapin Plague* 2016, Found rabbit skin coats, found carpet and underlay, found chairs, electrics, heat conductive wiring, steel, polyester, synthetic stuffing, enamel paint, plywood; 120 x 800 x 500cm

A common thread running throughout *HYPERactive* is that works are the result of ambitious projects that produce 'larger than life results'. My initial interest in Claudia Chaseling's work developed as the result of her 'spatial paintings. These extravagant endeavours are sometimes reminiscent of the flamboyant design of comic-strips, literally bursting from the walls and into the gallery. Smaller paintings on canvas might be integrated into vast zones of flat pigment that occupy the architecture of the space including floor, walls and ceiling; an intense explosion of hard edged colour and form. From the series *Infiltration*, the three works in *HYPERactive* possess a similar vitality and graphically envisage a current global malaise that anticipates the ever-increasing power of the military industrial complex and its inextricable association with capitalism and politics. With occasional figurative elements, Chaseling abstracts a bleak future for humanity, which she sees as being detached from the perils of its own misguided progress.

The title *Akimbo* (2015) comes from the phrase "Army arms akimbo" and refers to the position of standing astride with hands on hips and elbows pointing outwards – a pose sometimes associated with the military who might be dressed in fatigues and/or captured in the act of shouting orders. There is nothing quite so explicit in Chaseling's painting, however, its sombre colours and potent forms containing smoke and explosions convey a sense of relentless aggression. Within its agitated imagery lies a critique of governments' deluded military aspirations as a path to glory rather than destruction. Darth Vader's almost discernible space-craft backgrounds imminent catastrophe symbolised through a dark Hollywood legend that implicates the United States of America as a major player on the irrevocable course towards annihilation. In similar vein, the golden silhouette of a Fairchild Republic A-10 Thunderbolt II war-plane carrying a depleted uranium rocket is underlined by an extensive dark shadow in *Dog* (2014). Beyond the development of military hardware lies an abstract view of the aftermath, a mutated dog and rubble. Mutation is also central to *Beetle* (2014) where a beetle of unrecognisable taxonomy seems to struggle through an abstracted landscape that is merely a ghost of its former self.

2017 and every day we are confronted with images of cities in Iraq and Syria laid waste by the bombs of so many armies it is almost impossible to pinpoint blame. Even conflict has lost the clarity of defined warring factions and is justified by lies (such as Iraq's possession of WMDs). In the dynamic abstracted form of Chaseling's paintings there is a censorious tone suggesting that more than ever, understanding global events is complicated by the dubious and yet seductive idea of 'fake news', where truth and objectivity become redundant concepts - undermined by an unholy alliance of political self interest and corrupt media. *HYPERactive* addresses an intensifying global anxiety through artworks that reflect the on-going decline of certainty that has generated the malaise articulated in Chaseling's paintings.

CLAUDIA CHASELING   *Beetle*, 2014, Egg tempera and oil on canvas; 138 x 138cm

CLAUDIA CHASELING *Akimbo,* 2014, Egg tempera and oil on canvas; 148 x 148cm

CLAUDIA CHASELING *Dog.* 2015, Egg tempera and oil on canvas; 148 x 148cm

It is as if the 'devil' is laughing at us, having removed our tenuous grip on reality once and for all. This is most clearly and comprehensively expressed in Richard Grayson's *Possessions_inc* but also exists in Cathy Laudenbach's work where its is impossible to believe in the ostensible transparency of photographs. Jay Younger's exploration of gender politics through a mirror of memory and meaning associated with familiar objects in unfamiliar arrangement destabilizes the security of reliable experience. Jay Kochel further questions the authenticity of artefacts that generate responses way beyond their material capacity. Rebecca Selleck seduces the audience by way of a conflict that arises from the idea that loveable furry creatures possess the capacity for widespread environmental destruction. Similarly Bianca Beetson's Elmo skin cloak is designed to undermine the shelter of childhood recall with an abject artwork that highlights continual waves of colonisation for Aboriginal cultures. More than a quarter of a century after Baudrillard and Eco captured the imagination of artists through their theories on hyperreality, they perhaps could not have imagined the extent to which fact and fiction have become one mercurial field of knowledge that defies rational interpretation.

David Broker,
July 2017

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Curated by David Broker

Catalogue by Alexander Boynes

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