Cutting up the landscape: the construction and deconstruction of Australia’s physical, cultural and economic identity.

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Many thanks to

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Additional material: On disk

Additional material: In pocket
Summary

This investigation will be a studio-based production of artwork that encompasses and explores the decorative and technical elements of paper cutting, together with ideas about the impact of human interventions on their surrounding environment. Ideas explored will cover the changing characteristics of the Australian landscapes in a physical, cultural and an economic sense.

Brief Description

Background

The research project will be an investigation of how Chinese folk paper-cutting techniques can be applied to depict the way in which people interact with their environment. This will be achieved by looking at historical and contemporary ideas regarding the environment as a shared landscape. This investigation will be a studio-based production of artwork that encompasses and explores the decorative and technical elements of paper cutting, together with ideas about the impact of human interventions on their surrounding environment. Ideas explored will cover the changing characteristics of the Australian landscapes in a physical, cultural and an economic sense.

Objectives

The major objective of the research project is to develop a body of visual art works that investigate the relationship between traditional paper-cutting techniques and the development of imagery that provides social commentary in a contemporary context. Traditionally Chinese paper cutting is used in daily life for purposes that are decorative, ceremonial and documentary. The objective of the project is to consider the possible applications of the paper-cut in a contemporary western context to create artwork that contributes to discussion about the impact economic, cultural and industrial changes have on the way we perceive and interact with our environment. The work will be developed within a conceptual framework that explores the use of decoration in a contemporary context, and the tendency for contemporary artists to use traditional decorative techniques as a means of enticing the viewer in order to broach topics that are more meaningful.
The tendency for artists to make work that is aesthetically appealing while addressing issues that are poignant has been prevalent throughout the history of art. A historic example of this is Goya’s use of fine printmaking techniques to make work that is pleasing to the eye while commenting on issues relevant to his time. Contemporary artist Patricia Piccini uses digital technology to make slick glossy work which explores the rather disturbing possibilities of genetic engineering, and Korean artist Do Ho Suh makes works of monumental scale with many identical components to comment on social and political power structures.

Aims

To investigate the use of decoration and ornament by artists that reference issues relevant to their contemporary climate, particularly the use of traditional craft techniques as a means for artists to discuss ideas that are relevant to the broader community. To investigate historical and contemporary ideas about the landscape as a malleable and ever changing resource, including ideas about shared public space, and the impact economic, cultural and industrial changes have on the way we perceive and interact with and within our environment.

To utilise and expand on techniques used by folk artists in the creation of traditional paper-cuts by applying the basic principals of paper cutting in a contemporary context through the production of object and installation based work.

To create a body of work that entices the viewer through dichotomy between imagery attractive because of its decorative element whilst dealing directly with complex social concerns.

Research questions

How can the contemporary adaptation of traditional Chinese paper cutting create artwork which is able to contribute to dialogue concerning human interaction with their environment?

How can the tensions created by the formal techniques of paper cutting be applied within the conceptual framework of contemporary art?
How can a connection be made between the technical and historical elements of paper-cuts and the current cultural, environmental and social climate?

Rationale

The studio investigation will have a dual focus - on the aesthetics of the paper cut, and on the politics of human interaction with the environment. The inquiry will explore, visually, the relationship between these two elements.

In contemporary art, ornament and decoration are often used to entice the viewer, but at times it can also be used to disguise the more challenging content of the work. Formally, paper cutting encompasses a number of conflicting elements, such as negative and positive space, the use of light and shadow, and creation through a reductive process. Artists such as Kara Walker and Simon Periton are examples of western contemporary artists using paper-cutting techniques to comment on contemporary social issues. The use of the paper cut as the primary technique works in conjunction with the theoretical component of the work in numerous ways. Making many incisions in a piece of paper creates a paper cut. This can be construed as an invasive and destructive, even violent act; yet the creative potential of such actions cannot be over-looked. This method of production draws a parallel with the way many people view the ‘development’ of post-colonial Australia. The selective removal or inclusion of paper in order to create a bigger picture is similar to the way we selectively use spaces in the landscape, dividing it up for development, or reserving parts for ecological and recreational purposes. Like a large paper-cut, the landscape becomes subdivided and shaped into an entity that reflects our economic, cultural and industrial directions.

Methods

Library, museum and gallery resources will be utilised for the initial background research to build up the theoretical framework of the project. The main material used will be coloured paper, which will be cut with a precision knife. This method of production draws from traditional Chinese paper-cutting techniques. The possibilities of paper as a sculptural medium will also be considered. The final works will be objects and installations, which will be an ongoing record of the investigations of historical and contemporary ideas about the landscape as a common space.
The large installations will apply traditional decorative paper-cutting techniques in a contemporary context to figuratively represent scenes which reference the way humans relate to their environment. Where appropriate these works will be accompanied by smaller objects that will take on a more sculptural form. These objects will act as separate contained pieces that encapsulate parts of the larger installation.

Research will be undertaken primarily in the studio in Melbourne through the creation of original artwork, which will contribute to a number of exhibitions throughout the duration of the project.

**Timeframe**

The project was undertaken part time over a period of three years (36 months) during this time work was exhibited at various venues, often work was designed with the exhibition space in mind. The following timeframe is simplified, and at times a number of stages would be in process concurrently. More time was spent on stages one and two at the beginning of the research period. The realisation of each work involved stages one to four.

**Stage one**

Collection of data, library and gallery research.

This stage involved collecting data from libraries, galleries and other research facilities on a number of topics. These topics include: Social themes in contemporary art; Contemporary uses of folk and decorative arts and crafts, such as colour theory; and finally, both literature and techniques referencing paper, and the context in which they come together in a contemporary framework.

**Stage two**

Collating and analysing data.

In this stage time was spent developing more specific concepts of the project through the analysis of data and development of sketches and notes, working towards the final project. Experimentation was also undertaken with various paper types, including means of colouring and cutting, and consideration of differing possibilities of paper. This stage also involved the collection of background information for specific works and the collection and interpretation of suitable imagery from visual library resources.
Stage three  
Evaluation of data and experiments  
In this stage decisions were made about which work to develop completely, and which materials to use.

Stage four  
Studio research  
Stage four involved the production of the work into a finished piece to be exhibited. This stage places the research in a visual context.

Below is a list of the exhibitions in which works forming part of the research were included, and a brief outline of what was considered through the creation and display of the work. On some occasions work was exhibited in more than one context, and have adjusted the configuration of the works accordingly.

*Stack and Topple*  
Exhibited as part of “Papercuts”, Faculty Gallery, Monash University, Caulfield. May 2003.  
Images of ‘ordinary’ people were sourced from National Geographic magazines. This work involved thinking about ideas of how individuals share space, and testing ways of using individual components to make a whole work. A number of elements were used to accentuate the individuality of each piece, such as the use of thick paper to make the works look quite solid, and the use of gold paint on the cut edges of the figures.

*A place for a village (here today gone tomorrow)*  
Exhibited as part of “Boogy Jive and Bop” touring exhibition, Academy Gallery Launceston, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport, Plimsoll Gallery Hobart, Tasmania from September 2003.  
This work involved research in libraries and various green spaces around Melbourne to study indigenous flora around the inner suburbs. This research was collated to make a paper-cut resembling a topographical map, recreating the area’s varying plant habitats as they were before colonisation. Technical research involved testing ways of displaying paper-cuts off the wall and on a horizontal plane, as well as the effects of layering to make a three dimensional work.
**Uninhabitable**
Descriptions of early Melbourne, were used as a basis for the main drawing. The main composition is based on an early 1840’s sketch of upper Collins street, the work also incorporates the same view as it is today in the pattern that makes up the sky. Research was also conducted into indigenous species that have been ‘relocated’ due to postcolonial development. The magpie goose was chosen as a displaced protagonist in the work.
Scale was a major consideration with this work, a computer was used to digitally manipulate images and construct a small-scale design for the final work. The work was constructed from multiple pieces of paper. The use of natural and unnatural lighting was also explored. The window was covered with white paper and the paper-cut placed over the top on the inside of the gallery. The work was only visible from the outside at night; when the lights in the gallery were brighter than those outside. The colour of the work varied subtly, depending on the intensity of light outside the gallery, allowing the pink ground colour of the paper to show through at times.

**Making a place**
This work is a contemporary interpretation of the same area that was investigated in “A place for a village”. Rather than library research, images were collected from first hand experience of the area, cycling around and taking photographs which were used in a similar way to the images of plants in the earlier work.
Technical research involved further testing methods of displaying paper-cuts off the wall and on a horizontal plane, making them sculptural objects as well as flat, formal images. The use of colours that are associated with nature, green and blue, but in an iridescent form, conveyed a sense of an unnatural environment.

**An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge**
This work involved the construction of an artificial landscape that mimics the man-made ‘natural’ space of a garden. The work links imagery from two previous works, “A place for a village” and “Making a place. The ephemeral nature of plants is linked with the sustainability of contemporary lifestyle. This has been reflected by using of finer papers and the possibilities of making free standing paper-cuts from tissue paper, and testing the effects time and gravity have on the ‘wilting’ of paper-cut trees. The paper held up surprisingly well.
Colour symbolism was also considered with the gradation of colours from an earthy colour to a synthetic looking ‘colonial’ pink.

_Incessant pruning generates prickly fruit_ (sculptural work)  
Further research was undertaken on the development of Melbourne as a city, collected appropriate historical images, and used these, along with contemporary images, to develop a narrative.  
The work tests the possibilities of large-scale sculpture. It is supported by an internal structure made from Perspex rods. Testing has also been done on the effects of using layers of paper of different weights, textures and colours.

_Prickly fruit_  
The internal structure of these works is made from paper cut to make a sphere, slits in the paper were made and old blades were inserted into many of these slits. The work combines the delicacy of the paper-cuts with the dangerous/destructive nature of the sharp equipment used to produce them.

_Incessant pruning generates prickly fruit_ (wall installation)  
Exhibited as part of “Urban Jam”, RMIT Project Space, Carlton, and Switchback Gallery, Morwell. October 2005.  
This is a re-hang of the work, configuring a three dimensional object onto a two dimensional space. This re-hanging explored the extra layering that occurs when a work is close to the wall - the shadow becomes an extra layer in the work, whereas the object in three dimensional form casts a shadow that is a separate entity and not easily controlled or balanced with the rest of the work.  
The re-hang tests the effects of making the work less ‘formal and constructed’ offering the viewer a greater appreciation of the details, therefore allowing a better understanding of the narrative content.

_An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge_  
The re-installation of this work was to allow the viewer a more intimate experience of the work by suspending it at eye level rather than on the ground, isolated on a floor plinth. This re-installation also aimed to make the work’s vulnerability more apparent by taking advantage of the both galleries’ air conditioning and the gentle
breezes from passing people - both cause the work to sway. The use of weights, such as glass beads, to aid in hanging the work was also tested.

*Untitled community (Stack and Topple)*
This work is a re-hang of “Stack and Topple”. The figures are hung near the ceiling, above the viewers’ head; the shadows they cast appear on the wall at eye level. These shadows are more connected with an implied landscape than the actual objects. The shadows are always a major, though incidental aspect to the work. It is often difficult to find a balance between having interesting shadows and lighting the work in a satisfactory way.

*Just trying to make things pretty*
This body of work experimented with recycled materials (newspaper and house paint). The whitewashing and manipulation of material that is a major influence in the construction of cultural identity and political landscape is key to this work. It also references lace makers who were sent to Australia to start, unsuccessfully, an industry that there was no demand (or time) for. A less formal approach to the installation was also taken.

*Pile up*
Exhibited as part of “paper” at Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth. July 2006
The use of multiple pieces, balanced to make a three dimensional object was tested in this installation. A lighter approach to the work and using many bright colours, simple designs and a limited amount of information in the figurative aspect of the work to convey the same ideas was also taken. The work has also been made by cutting freehand (without a preliminary sketch).

*Photo-field*
Photographs taken as research for ‘Making a place’ were the only materials used for this work, which was cut freehand and makes use of all of the photographs (nothing was thrown away). Consideration of perspective and balance was made, when the work is seen from one side (with the back of the photographs in view) it appears as a tranquil field, when seen from the other side (with the emulsion side of the photographs in view), the work is overly busy and quite confusing.
Sometimes, I wish things were different
Balance, and recycled materials was also a concern for this work, The larger pieces are off-cuts from previous works and a lot of paper was left virtually untouched, the paper is still curled up from being stored in a cylinder.
paper of varying qualities was also combined.

Unfinished / Experimental works
Throughout the project I tried a number of different ways of using paper, and some other materials, to produce my work. Various experiments include:
The use of refuse in the form of 'wall drawings', created with my old, blunted blades.
Testing the potential of using a torn edge to the paper, instead of a cut one.
Testing ways to use one sheet cut it in such a way that the finished piece is larger than the original.
The possibility of knotting / crocheting paper together to make an object, and the use of folding (crumpling) techniques to make objects.

Stage Five
Conclusion
The selection of a resolved body of work for the final assessment.
Bibliography

Adam-Smith, P. 1979 *Victorian and Edwardian Melbourne from old photographs*, John Ferguson, Sydney.


Casey, E. 1939, *Fate of Place: a philosophical history*, University of California press, Berleley.


McPhee, A. 1911, *The first chapter in the history of Victoria: comprising an account of Collins's temporary settlement at Sorrento in 1803: and sketches of the lives of Buckley, Fawkner, and Batman: also including an account of Batman’s treaty with the natives of Port Phillip: and the founding of Melbourne*, E.W.Cole, Melbourne.


**Selected Visual Material**

Noyce, E. Date unknown, *Collins Street: Town of Melbourne port Philip*, original lithograph by Elisha Noyce after W. Knight drawing.

Sleap, F. A. 1887, *Collins Street Melbourne in 1839 From an old sketch*, wood engraving, Melbourne.

Burtt, John Wesley, 1875 *Batman signing the treaty with the aboriginals* painting oil on canvas.


**Places visited**

Koorie Cultural Centre, 295 King Street, Melbourne

Aboriginal Heritage Walk, The Royal Botanic Gardens, Melbourne

Bunjilaka Aboriginal Centre, Melbourne Museum, Melbourne
List of Illustrations

Stack & Topple
2003
Hand cut paper, ink, gold edging
Dimensions variable (height of individual pieces 10 - 20 cm)

Satellite image of Melbourne

A place for a village - Here today gone tomorrow
2003
Hand cut paper, ink, suspended with thread and wire
Height variable, width 225 cm, depth 205 cm

Digital sketch for sky section in Uninhabitable
Digital sketch based on early sketches of collins street, used as a basis for Uninhabitable

Uninhabitable
2003
Hand cut paper, ink
Height 228 cm, width 705 cm

Digital Sketch for Uninhabitable

Magpie Geese
2003
Hand cut paper, ink
Height 29 cm, width 60 cm

Pile of study sketches for Making a place
Pencil and ink on tracing paper
**Making a place**
2004
Hand cut Paper, ink, acetate
Height 32 cm, width 225 cm, depth 205 cm

*Work in progress*
*An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge*

**An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge** (Floor installation)
2004
Hand cut paper, ink, perspex rods, acetate
Height 90 cm, width and depth variable

**Incessant pruning bears prickly fruit** (floor installation)
2004
Hand cut paper, ink, perspex rods
Dimensions variable

**Prickly Fruit**
2004
Hand cut paper, ink and blades
Purple Fruit, Height 13 cm, Width 13 cm, Depth 13 cm
Red Fruit, Height 6 cm, Width 11 cm, Depth 11 cm

**Incessant pruning bears prickly fruit** (wall installation)
2005
Hand cut paper, ink
Dimensions variable

**Sketches for An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge**
Pencil and pen on tracing paper
An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge (Hanging installation)
2005
Hand cut paper, ink, thread and glass beads
Height of paper cut 90 cm, width and depth variable

Just trying to make things pretty
2006
Newspaper, house paint
17 pieces, dimensions variable

Untitled Community (Stack & Topple)
2006
Hand cut paper, ink, gold edging
Dimensions variable (height of individual pieces 10-20 cm)

Photo-field
2006
Cut-out photographs
13 x 40 x 40 cm

Pile-up
2006
Paper and ink
22 x 22 x 22 cm

Sometimes, I wish things were different
2006
Paper & ink
50 x 90 x 80 cm (approx)
Untitled
experimental work using torn paper and gold ink.

Selected images unfinished experimental pieces, all works are paper and ink
with the exception of the work in the top right which is used scalpel blades
pressed into the wall.

Additional material

A collection of small, low resolution Movies of finished works.
Selected publicity material for exhibitions
Selected Reviews of exhibitions I have been involved in.

Hard copies of invitations, catalogues and reviews of exhibitions.
A place for a village - Here today gone tomorrow
A place for a village - Here today gone tomorrow
A place for a village - Here today gone tomorrow
Uninhabitable
Uninhabitable
Magpie Geese
Making a place
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An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge (Floor installation)
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Prickly Fruit
Incessant pruning bears prickly fruit (wall installation)
Incessant pruning bears prickly fruit (wall installation)
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An establishment for the diffusion of knowledge (Hanging installation)
Just trying to make things pretty
Untitled Community (Stack & Topple)
Untitled Community (Stack & Topple)
Photo-field
Sometimes, I wish things were different
Sometimes, I wish things were different
experimental work
Curriculum Vitae - Kate Cotching

Born 1976, Mildura, Victoria, Australia.

Education
2003 Candidate for Master of Art (Fine Art) by research, RMIT University, Melbourne.
1996 Bachelor of Arts in Fine Art (painting), RMIT University, Melbourne.
1997 Bachelor of Arts, Honours in painting, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Individual Exhibitions
2004 Making a place, West Space Gallery, Melbourne.
    Incessant pruning generates prickly fruit, Melbourne International Art Fair, Melbourne.
2003 Uninhabitable, Gertrude Street Contemporary Art Spaces, Fitzroy.
2002 Over the horizon, Platform 2, Melbourne.
    You are here, (with Natasha Frisch), Bus, Melbourne.
2001 Double look, Glass Street Gallery, North Melbourne.
    Searching for the golden egg, Gallery 4A, Sydney, and Penthouse & Pavement, Carlton.
2000 Cutting out the bad bits, TCB, Melbourne.
    Great Re-Decorating Ideas (The Beginning), West Space Gallery, Melbourne.
1999 One way to skin a cat, Linden Art Centre, Melbourne.
    SLIDE, 200 Gertrude Street Fitzroy, Melbourne.
    Designs for an unobstructed airway, Platform 1, Spencer Street Station Melbourne.
1998 How to save a severed body member, Studio 12, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne.
    Suzie Runs Off, West Space Gallery, Footscray.
1997 Vulnerable Points, First Site Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne.

Selected Group Exhibitions
2006 The Presence of things… sense, veneer guise, touring exhibition to regional galleries in Melbourne, Morwell, Castlemaine, Wangaratta, Ararat and Mildura.
    Float, RMIT Project Space, and Spare Room, Melbourne.
2005 Paperchase, Nellie Castan Gallery, Melbourne.
    The Siemens awards, RMIT Gallery, Melbourne.
Brainstorms, Grantpirrie, Sydney.

Plural2, The British School at Rome, Rome, Italy.

Urban Jam, RMIT Project Space, Carlton, and Switchback Gallery, Morwell.

Awkward Balance, Blindside Gallery, Melbourne.

A4 art, West Space Gallery, Melbourne

2004

Re-generation, The Response Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria Australia.

Evren, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura.

Floranova, Nellie Castan gallery, Melbourne.

A4 art, West Space Gallery, Melbourne.

2003

Boogy Jive and Bop, touring exhibition: Academy Gallery, Launceston, Devonport Regional Gallery, Devonport, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart, Tasmania.

Compendium, Platform 1, Spencer Street Station, Melbourne.

Papercuts, Faculty Gallery, Monash University, Caulfield.

The sustainable living festival, Federation Square, Melbourne.

The future in every direction, The Ian Potter Centre: National Gallery of Victoria, Australia.

West Space goes Downtown, Downtown Art Space, Adelaide.

A4 art, West Space, Melbourne.

2002

Fold, Craft Victoria, Melbourne.

National Works on Paper, Mornington Peninsular Regional Gallery, Mornington.

Aestheticform, Idspace, Melbourne.

Unloading, Krasnapolsky Gallery, St Kilda.

2001

Something for the ladies, Penthouse & Pavement, Carlton.

A4 art, West Space Gallery, Melbourne.

2000


14GO - Emerging Artists Make Their Mark, Bendigo Art Gallery, Bendigo.

A Brush With Death, Latrobe Street Gallery, Melbourne.

Geelong Contemporary Art Prize, Geelong Gallery, Geelong.

Docklands, Glass Street Gallery, North Melbourne.

Play Thing, Span Gallery, Melbourne.

A4 art, West Space Gallery, Melbourne.
1999  *Make It Yourself*, 200 Gertrude Street Fitzroy, Melbourne.

*Cultivated Sphere of Events*, Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura.

*BILLPOSTERS will not be prosecuted*, Federation Square Hoardings Project, Melbourne.

*ARTZINE*, Spencer Street Gallery, Melbourne.

*Play Thing*, Shelf Project, Craft Victoria, Fitzroy.

*The image reflected*, Platform 1, Melbourne.

*A4 art*, West Space Gallery, Melbourne.

*Taking Care Of Business*, TCB, Melbourne.


*Gertrude Street Discreet Project*, Arts Victoria, Melbourne.

*It's a girl's world*, Temple Studios, Prahran.

*Silent Fall*, Linden Arts Centre, St Kilda.

1997  *Naked*, Strip, Fitzroy.

*Girls in Melbourne*, Platform 1, Melbourne.

*Honours Exhibition*, Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne.

1996  *Graduate Exhibition*, Faculty of Art and Design, Melbourne.

1994  *Jungai*, Faculty Gallery, RMIT University, Melbourne.

**Residencies**

2005  Australia Council for the Arts - Skills and Arts Development, Studio, The British School at Rome, Italy

2000  Beijing Arts Academy / Red Gate Gallery, Beijing, China.

1998  Studio Artist, 200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Melbourne.

**Awards & Grants**

2005  Siemens RMIT Fine Art Scholarship.

2004  Myer Foundation.


1999  Pat Corrigan Artists’ Grant.
**Professional Appointments**

2003 - 2006 Committee Member at West Space Gallery.
2004 - 2005 Program Manager, West Space Gallery.
2004 Art Cart workshop, National Gallery of Victoria Australia.
2000 Curator, Docklands, Glass Street Gallery, North Melbourne.

Various artist talks.

**Collections**

National Gallery of Victoria, Mornington Peninsular Regional Gallery, Private collections.

**Selected Bibliography**

Snell, Ted *Barking up a wonderful tree*, The Australian 7/7/06.
Nelson, Robert *With the city in their sights*, review, The Age 29/10/03.
Backhouse, Megan *Around the galleries*, The Age 1/11/03.
Bywaters, Malcom *Boogy, Jive and Bop*, exhibition catalogue 2003.
Gurvich, Victoria *Work of the week*, The Age 07/06/03.
National Gallery of Victoria Promotional Postcard Pack.
Selenitsch, Alex *Craft Culture*, review, Craft Victoria, January 2002.
Murray, Kevin *Craft*, Volume 33, 2002.
Bullock, Natasha *Cutting out the bad bits*, review, Like Art Magazine, Spring 2000.
Matthews, Hannah *Great re-decorating ideas*, review, Art Monthly Australia Online, October 2000.
BILL POSTERS will not be prosecuted, Federation square hoardings project, Melbourne 1999.
Wall, Brendan *Silent Fall*, exhibition catalogue, Linden Arts Centre, Melbourne 1998.
Graduate Publication, RMIT painting students 1996.