POWER STUDIO RECIPIENTS

1967
ARTHUR WICKS

1968
CARL PLATE

1969
PETER PINSON
GEOFFREY DE GROEN
DAVID VOIGT

1970
MATCHAM SKIPPER
MIRIAM STANNAGE

1971
DAVID SMITH

1972
GEORGE HAYNES
MAURICE ALADJEM

1973
GARRY SHEAD
GEOFFREY WAKE

1974
JENNIFER MARSHALL

1975
ARTHUR McINTYRE
PETER DE LORENZO

1976
ALBIE THOMS
ARPAD KINKA

1977
DALE HICKEY
MARR GROUNDS
MOSTYN BRAMLEY-MOORE

1978
ANN THOMSON
ROY JACKSON
SUZANNE ARCHER
BARRY THOMAS

1979
KEN UNSWORTH

1980
IRENE BARBERIS
DAVID VAN NUNEN

1981
HILARY BOSCHOTT-RIGGS
MARGARET MORGAN

1982
JOHN YOUNG
SALVATORE ZOFREA

1983
WALTER BARDA
DANIEL MOYNIHAN

1984
SUZANNE MARSTON
JOHN LETHBRIDGE
MICHELE ALLAN

1985
ROBIN WALLACE-CRABBE
MERILYN FAIRSKYE

1986
JULIE BROWN-RRAP
ANNETTE BEZOR

1987
TONY TREMBATH
ANNE FERRAN

1988
PETER HOEY
NERISSA LEA

1989
GEORGIA WALLACE-CRABBE
BRONWYN OLIVER

1990
BERNHARD SACHS
JOAN GROUNDS

1991
JENNIFER MCCAMELEY
DEBRA PHILLIPS

1992
DEEJ FABYC
ARI PUHRONEN

1993
MATTHYS GERBER
BRENT HARRIS

1994
ROSSLYND PIGGOTT

1995
GAIL HASTINGS

1996
LYNDELL BROWN AND
CHARLES GREEN
SCOTT CHASELING
JACKY REDGATE

1997
DIANE McCARTHY
GREGORY CREEK

1998
JACQUELINE ROSE

1999
ANNE WALLACE
BRUCE ADAMS
JUDITH AHERN

2000
MARGARET WEST
ANN STEPHEN
A.D.S. DONALDSON

2001
MARK THEMANN
JOHN CLARK
EDWARD COLLESS
GOFF LEVITUS

2002
TREVOR SMITH
ELIZABETH PRESA

2003
MICHAEL ZAVROS
NOLA FARMAN
REX BUTLER

2004
LISA TRAHAIR
CHRISTINE NICHOLLS
DAVID SIMPKIN

2005
DAVID PEATORIUS
BARBARA CAMPBELL
ALEX GAWRONSKI

2006
ADAM GECZY
VIVONNE THWAITES
MARK DE VITIS

2007
ALISON ROSS
LINDA DEMENT
LILA AFIOUNI
TONY SCHWENSEN

2008
PHOEBE SCOTT
MICHELLE USSHIER
JACQUELINE
MILLNER
MICHELLE NIKOU

2009
VIRGINIA HILYARD
DAVID PALLISER
MICHELLE ZARRO
CHRISTINE DIXON

2010
JOHN CONOMOS
DAVID FAIRFAX
RACHELLE
JOHNSTON

2011
PENELOPE CAIN
ELEANOR AND JAMES
avery
STEPHEN HOLFORD
ROBERT WELLINGTON

2012
ALEXANDER JAMES
AMELIA GROOM
VALENTINA PALONEN
KATHERINE
SCARDFIELD

2013
PRUDENCE AHRENS
SEPIDEH FARZAM
VIGEN GALSTYAN
GABRIELLA HIRST
ATELIER PARIS: THE POWER STUDIO

BARBARA CAMPBELL, A.D.S. DONALDSON, ALEX GAWRONSKI, MICHELLE NIKOU, TONY SCHWENSEN

CURATED BY ANN STEPHEN

UNIVERSITY ART GALLERY
THE UNIVERSITY OF SYDNEY

THE FOURTH EXHIBITION IN A SERIES CELEBRATING THE 50TH ANNIVERSARY OF THE J.W. POWER BEQUEST
In 1967 when Professor Bernard Smith announced that the University would acquire a studio in Paris for Australian artists, it prompted a demonstration outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales. The Sydney Morning Herald reported: ‘a handbill passed out to guests, arriving for the opening, said a travelling scholarship to Paris was a “waste of money”’. The following day its editorial opined that the idea was ‘a trifle old-fashioned … touchingly naïve,’ and ended on a rhetorical flourish asking, ‘Must our cultural traffic always be one way?’

In fact the decision to purchase a studio in the new Cité Internationale des Arts proved to be one of the most inspired and popular uses of the Power Bequest. Since then, more than a hundred artists and writers have had residencies in the austere third floor studio overlooking the Pont Marie and Île Saint-Louis [see complete list inside front cover]. The Power Studio was the first of the many international residencies offered to Australian artists annually. It was most fitting for the Parisian studio to be named after the artist and great benefactor J.W. Power, as he had been drawn to the ‘city of lights’ in the 1920s and ’30s, initially to study and then to live and exhibit as part of the Parisian avant-garde.

Like any travel, the residency involves all kinds of exchanges – from negotiating the metro, museums, markets and libraries to foreign currency and language – but unlike the ordinary tourist the extended studio-time makes it possible for artists to reflect upon their encounters and put them to work. The University Art Gallery exhibition, the finale to our program celebrating the 50th anniversary of the Power Bequest, brings together five major mid-career artists who have held the Power Studio in the last decade — Barbara Campbell, A.D.S. Donaldson, Alex Gawronski, Michelle Nikou and Tony Schwensen.

The ‘Paris’ works selected for exhibition in part reveal how these artists have worked in the midst of metropolitan culture sometimes estranged from, at other times embracing, its cosmopolitan possibilities. Barbara Campbell’s 1001 nights cast, which she launched in Paris, creates an electronic circuit of international currents. Campbell reprised a major text of Orientalism as the springboard for her remarkable performance that links daily watercolour ‘posts’ to a vast network of webcast stories. ‘Courting’, as the art historian Mary Roberts cautions, ‘its generative potential and its risks, Campbell’s performance is 1001 nights cast in the digital age.’

Power’s own work inspired A.D.S. Donaldson’s research and an extended series of paintings that pay homage to this Francophile expatriate. Donaldson transforms the cover of Power’s book Éléménts de la Construction Picturale, (1932) into a flat-coloured abstraction, re-imagining our art history mediated through abstraction. He also takes Power’s lost mathematical models as the basis for a series of ‘Plaster of Paris’ un-geometric objects.

Tony Schwensen channels various bohemian identities from Power, Brett Whiteley and D.H. Lawrence, in a series of videoed actions that satirise sacred cows and sacred sites, including an incursion into the river Seine. Alex Gawronski constructs a series of photographic studies, one of moody studio interiors within the space of the Cité. Outside he adopts the role of a latter day flâneur, tracing a photographic passage through
the boulevards and cul-de-sacs of Paris, in the footsteps of acclaimed photographer Eugène Atget. These allusions are buried in tourist views, as Gawronski notes, 'it is only the haunting spectre of Atget’s compositions when recognised by the viewer that grants the photographs an additional significance.'

Michelle Nikou makes the ordinary into strangely flattened visual word-plays, deliberately confusing hard and soft materials. Fried eggs cast as lead plaques that spell-out the vowels œìou. Like the Surrealists she dips into Arthur Rimbaud and 'toys with concepts and analogies that connect the source of language to an embryonic source of life, their destination to be mouthed, chewed and changed forever.'

All these artists, stranded temporarily in the capital of the 19th century, reactivate the still powerful attraction exerted by its modernist and literary histories. It is as if Paris becomes the promise that Rimbaud mouthed, 'I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins.'

Barbara Campbell, prompt XLIII, *1001 nights cast* (preface series), 2005, watercolour on Sennelier paper, 10.5 x 24.5cm
En route

The Thousand and One Nights has not died. The infinite time of the thousand and one nights continues its course. Jorge Luis Borges

Barbara Campbell’s epic durational performance, 1001 nights cast, commenced in the Power Institute’s Cité Studio on the northern summer solstice of June 21, 2005. With the utterance of the first story that night via live web stream, the project joined a complex entangled history of storytelling that has stretched across the Middle East, into Europe and well beyond. The inspiration for this work, Al Layla wa-Layla, The Arabian Nights Entertainments, The Thousand and One Nights were at first oral tales of unknown origin and authorship. The earliest surviving Arabic compilation is the 14th century Syrian manuscript in the Bibliothèque nationale de France in Paris. It too is a copy from a prior edition. Europeans were latecomers to these tales embedded in a long history within the region of their performative iteration, re-edition and selective revision. Galland’s translation of the Syrian manuscript into French, commenced in 1704, was the first of many adaptations and translations into European languages. Through these myriad iterations stories have been added and the Tales have come to stand for a labyrinthine world of magic, danger, hidden treasures, embedded stories and infinite narrative possibilities. Courting its generative potential and its risks Campbell’s performance is 1001 nights cast in the digital age.

Like Shahrazad’s famed predicament in the Tales, Campbell’s project has its own frame story. In both, storytelling is an act of survival, of communion, but in Campbell’s project writing is also the sustaining gift of a stranger. What you see in this exhibition are prompts: catalysts and invocations to act without delay. Garnered from that day’s newspaper reports on events in the Middle East during the Second Gulf War, each morning Campbell uploaded a prompt to inspire writers to create a story of 1001 words by the end of the day. This was not writing that had the luxury of gestation time, the rhythm of the project required quick prose. This turnaround time invokes the urgency of the news reports from which they were derived. Often in the present tense, these words were regularly taken from interviews conducted by journalists on the ground, that were translations from oral to written form. The choice of words, the turns of phrase are often poetic and provocative, underscoring procedures of journalistic mediation, they nonetheless float loose from that context in order to become something else. Each evening for a thousand and one nights they were performed according to a ritual regulated by the time of the setting sun wherever Campbell was located. They were dispersed via a webcast performance to her community of listeners in whichever timezone they occupied. The project created temporary affinities between writer and writer, teller and listener.

On these walls we encounter 99 plus one. By the time of prompt 100 the work was in Singapore, the first of many transitions during the life of the project for its peripatetic narrator. The project was, as it always had been, en route.

Mary Roberts

Mary Roberts is the John Schaeffer Associate Professor of British Art, the University of Sydney.

Barbara Campbell at the Cité studio, Paris 2005, photograph by Mary Roberts.
Felix del Marle and Australian art history

In 1948 the Lille artist Felix del Marle completed his remarkable diagram outlining the history of abstract art. Published in Réalites Nouvelles, the second annual cahier of the Salon des Réalites Nouvelles, it presented a prehistory to the abstract artists then regathering on the streets and boulevards of Paris after the war. Abstract art held sway in these years and Réalites Nouvelles, as the group became known, was both the vehicle for the display of their work and the central driver of debates around abstraction, especially that between the so-called hot and cold, until the mid-1950s. Del Marle’s diagram offered a kind of correction to Alfred H. Barr’s well known 1936 chart outlining the development of abstract art published as the cover for the catalogue to his Abstract and Cubist Art exhibition in 1936. Unlike Barr, del Marle proposed three crucial stages in abstraction. The first is Impressionism, the next Abstraction-Création, and the last Réalites Nouvelles. Remarkably, there is a Sydney artist working beside his and her international colleagues at each of these crucial moments. John Peter Russell painted beside Claude Monet on the French coast in 1886, the same year Russell painted his portrait of Vincent van Gogh. In 1934 J.W. Power held one of only two solo exhibitions during the brief series of exhibitions held by Abstraction-Création in Paris (the other was by Laszlo Moholy-Nagy). In 1955, on the occasion of his 85th birthday, Auguste Herbin invited Mary Webb to show beside him in his salle d’honneur at Réalites Nouvelles annual exhibition. Webb already showed with the group as sociétaire and would later be awarded the Medaille d’argent de la Ville de Paris. Each of these Sydney artists has received belated, even begrudging attention, but in advance of their reception in their own country, the Futurist, Néoplasticist, Musicalist, Surrealist and Réalites Nouvelles artist Felix del Marle was able to place them in the history of art.
Plaster of Paris and steel, 40 x 30 x 30cm
The basis of this project came out of a reconsideration of the urban photography of Eugene Atget (1857-1927). Atget was an obsessive archivist of the urban geography of Paris as a city poised on the brink, and later at the heart, of modernity. Regardless of their sepia-tonality, those expecting from Atget’s street photographs a nostalgic and conventionally picturesque tour of the sights of Paris, although they feature, would be sorely disappointed. In fact, it could be argued that the most interesting feature of Atget’s larger project was its quotidian aspect: Atget often repeatedly photographed locations that no commercial photographer would have deemed worthy of representation.

Alongside the curiously ‘un-photographic’ quality of Atget’s pictures however, came a sense of strangeness. The very banality of some of the street scenes Atget photographed was offset by an undeniable feel for the uncanny. Part of this sense of strangeness emerged from the fact that Atget often preferred to take street pictures as devoid of humans as possible. Thus, the ever expanding, modernising metropolis was rendered adversely like a ghost town where only the traces of human activity were left. At the same time, streets began to function like stage sets, betraying Atget’s training in the theatre, where even the voracity of what was real was questioned. Paris started to look almost like a backdrop for action either about to occur or most commonly, that had already occurred. Naturally, these latter characteristics are what made Atget’s urban scenographies so attractive to the Surrealists who had already staged among themselves nocturnal walking parties through some of the least spectacular and most seedy Paris arrondissements.

While at the Cité I undertook the process of revisiting some of the specific sites Atget had photographed in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Using a moderately comprehensive book of his photographs as (anti-) tourist map, I aimed to confront exactly how much had changed in locations Atget had captured. The point of this was not to comment stupidly on the inevitable vicissitudes of ‘progress’ but to attempt to indicate the altered mood of these sites. Likewise, I was particularly curious to note how some of the more prosaic locations would re-photograph: how ‘uninteresting’ and therefore camouflaged from their original sources in Atget’s work, would the results be? In these instances, the photographs fulfilled part of a conceptual brief questioning how images eventually preserved by history as indicative of a significant time and place, become when remade – even though the originals have been imitated as accurately as possible with contemporary technology – seemingly lost and insignificant. In this way, it is only the haunting spectre of Atget’s compositions when recognised by the viewer that grants the photographs an additional significance beyond their functioning as fairly inconspicuous representations of the urban climate of Paris today.

A complimentary aspect of the work I undertook at the Cité involved photographing the Power Studio at various stages of my inhabitation of it. These similarly unspectacular images rendered strange, I collectively titled ‘Studio Portraits’.

ALEX GAWRONSKI
Alex Gawronski, *Studio Portrait no. 8*, 2006/2013
digital print on cotton rag, 84.1 x 59.4cm
The sculpture I make has long been influenced by European traditions, especially Surrealism, and my interest in going to Paris was to further explore the links between my own processes in art making and those practiced by French artists I have admired.

A short time after my residency at the Cité des Arts – when I returned to Europe for an extended stay – I made two new works, one being aeiou and the other OH.

aeiou is a series of five cast bronze works of eggs that vaguely resemble vowel forms. This work toys with concepts and analogies that connect the source of language to an embryonic source of life, their destination to be mouthed, chewed and changed forever. Whilst it stands alone in its attempt to make comment on the significance and deliberation of vowels and language, it has a keen symmetry with Arthur Rimbaud’s famous work Voyelles.

Voyelles (Vowels)
by Arthur Rimbaud (1872)
translated by Oliver Bernard

A Black, E white, I red, U green, O blue: vowels, I shall tell, one day, of your mysterious origins:
A, black velvety jacket of brilliant flies
Which buzz around cruel smells,
Gulfs of shadow;
E, whiteness of vapours and of tents,
Lances of proud glaciers, white kings, shivers of cow-parsley;
I, purples, spat blood, smile of beautiful lips
In anger or in the raptures of penitence;
U, waves, divine shudderings of viridian seas,
The peace of pastures dotted with animals, the peace of the furrows
Which alchemy prints on broad studious foreheads;
O, sublime Trumpet full of strange piercing sounds,
Silences crossed by Worlds and by Angels:
O the Omega, the violet ray of Her Eyes!
Michelle Nikou, æiou, 2012
bronze, 5 pieces approx 100 x 14 x 3.5 cm
dition 1 of 3 with variations
private collection, Sydney
courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney
The last three months of 2007 I spent in Paris, at the Power Studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts. My original intention for this residency had been to have a European vacation, eat a lot of quality bread, drink a lot of low quality wine and look at Millets at the Musée D’Orsay. Before leaving Sydney though, I became somewhat obsessed with John Power’s paintings, which always struck me as a poor mélange of early 20th century avant-garde practice. For me the most revealing of all of his works is a self-portrait in a beret, where he looks a bit like James Joyce, which reeked of Francophilia. The work functioned as a portal to a time when Paris was the centre of global artistic endeavours and is indicative of the romanticism that absorbed Power.

I was listening to the remastered Iggy and The Stooges’ Raw Power and began to think of remaking Power’s work as Iggy and remaking Raw Power as John Power as my project in Paris.

However on arriving in Paris, this all slipped away somewhat. Walking around it became apparent how right Walter Benjamin had been. Paris is a city of the nineteenth century, frozen into a vitrine like existence, hawking its past as its present sits in precarious balance between the future Sarkozy was attempting to drive and the realities of life in the suburbs.

A colleague from Wales had completed a residency in Sydney and had commented to me about Brett Whiteley as being a perfect example of the Australian condition, vaunted for his overseas odysseys, which in reality do not amount to much, and descending into deluded mediocrity in his later years. This forced me to reconsider Whiteley, whom I had ignored since turning 15, apart from nursing a desire to take a chainsaw to his matchstick sculptures outside the Art Gallery of New South Wales (AGNSW). I returned to the Whiteley studio, looked at the works at the AGNSW and watched a documentary on him, produced by the ABC, which is titled Difficult Pleasures, and it is indeed a difficult pleasure to sit through. I also bought and wore a wig to try to understand what it meant to be Whiteley a bit better.

Walking along the Seine’s banks I began to understand that ultimately there is not much separating Power and Whiteley. An unbridled romanticism drips from both of them, redolent of a vague desire for something and somewhere else.

I then proceeded to make a series of actions over the next eight months, some of which are represented in this exhibition.

Artist’s statement from the exhibition Difficult Pleasures, Uplands Gallery, Melbourne, June 2008
Tony Schwensen, Difficult Pleasures: Seine DIP, 2007
still from digital video documentation of performance
courtesy of the artist and KalimanRawlins, Melbourne
LIST OF WORKS

Barbara Campbell
prompts for nights 1–100 of 1001 nights cast, 2005
watercolour on Sennelier paper, each 10.5 x 24.5cm
Nights 1–99 were webcast from the Power Studio at the Cité Internationale des Arts. Night 100 was webcast from Changi Airport, Singapore, en route to Sydney
courtesy of the artist

A.D.S. Donaldson
Untitled (for J.W. Power), 2002-12
oil on linen, 134 x 98cm

Untitled (for J.W. Power), 2012
Plaster of Paris and steel, 40 x 30 x 30cm
courtesy of the artist

Alex Gawronski
Studio Portrait no. 5, 2006/2013
digital print on cotton rag, 84.1 x 59.4cm
Rue des Ursins (4 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1900,
Impasse de Bourdonnaigs (1 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1908,
Rue Grenier-sur-l’Eau (4 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1900,
Passy, passage des Eaux (16 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1901,
Passy, passage des Eaux (16 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1901,
all 2006/2013
digital prints on cotton rag, 42 x 59.4 cm
courtesy of the artist

Michelle Nikou
aeiou, 2012
bronze, 5 pieces approx 100 x 14 x 3.5 cm
edition 1 of 3 (with variations)
private collection, Sydney

OH, 2012
tapestry and coins
71 x 101 cm (framed size), 37 x 33 cm (each panel)
courtesy the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Tony Schwensen
Difficult Pleasures: Thirroul, 2008
digital video documentation of performance, shelf, perfect bound copy of D.H. Lawrence’s Kangaroo

Difficult Pleasures: Seine DIP, 2007
digital video documentation of performance

courtesy of the artist and KalimanRawlins, Melbourne

Alex Gawronski, Eglise Saint-Sulpice #2 (6 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1926, 2006/2013
Alex Gawronski, Boulevard Saint-Denis (6 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1926, 2006/2013
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My special thanks to the artists of Atelier Paris for their works and accompanying texts that reveal how international residencies enrich our art, thickening and energising networks of cultural exchange. Thanks also to the gallerists, Darren Knight and Jarrod Rawlins for all their assistance with loans.

Thanks to Jean-Yves, Langlais, Directeur Général, Cité Internationale des Arts, for all his assistance.

I am also most grateful to the art historians, Mary Roberts and Power Director, Professor Mark Ledbury for their enthusiastic engagement and to the Power Institute for its continuing support for the program of artist talks accompanying the exhibition.

Finally the fabulous team that makes the University Art Gallery run so apparently effortlessly, from our Director David Ellis to Curatorial and Collection Management, particularly Luke Parker for wise counsel and editorial and Nicole Kluk for curatorial assistance. Peter Thorn has once again produced an elegant design for our catalogue, invitation and posters. Lastly a special thanks to our wonderful volunteers, who are mainly students, whose daily watch in the gallery makes it all possible.

PUBLIC PROGRAM

ATELIER PARIS ARTIST TALKS
sponsored by the Power Institute
Saturday 2 March, 2.00-3.00pm
Wednesday 13 March, 12.30-1.30pm
Saturday 6 April, 2-3.00pm
Check our website for details: www.sydney.edu.au/museums

Published in conjunction with the exhibition
Atelier Paris: The Power Studio
University Art Gallery
The University of Sydney
2 February–26 April 2013
Exhibition curator: Ann Stephen
Editors: Luke Parker and Ann Stephen
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Design and print production: Peter Thorn
Printed using Forestry Stewardship Council approved paper
Published by University Art Gallery, The University of Sydney

National Library of Australia Cataloguing-in-Publication entry
Author: Stephen, Ann.
ISBN: 9781742103037 (pbk.)
Subjects: University of Sydney University Art Gallery–Exhibitions.
Art, Modern–21st century–Exhibitions.
Art, Australian–Exhibitions.
Dewey Number: 709.94

Front cover: A.D.S. Donaldson, Untitled (for J.W. Power), 2002-12
Title page: Alex Gawronski, Eglise Saint-Sulpice (6 arr.) after Eugene Atget 1926, 2006/2013