



Reconstruction Works

PAUL CAPORN

## The Dissembler Dissembles

One of my earliest memories is of the scene of an accident on a building site. I would have been two years old at the time, strapped into the back seat of my parent's car. Seeing the smoke and confusion, my Dad brought our vehicle to an abrupt stop beside the wasteland. I remember him helping workers assist their burly mate, who had broken his arm, to sit beside me in on the back seat while my Mum made arrangements to rush the injured man – quite obviously in pain – to hospital. Outside I could see the yellow excavator he had been operating, writhing like an overturned insect; its neck twisted strangely and the glass windows of the cabin, now resting in the mud and debris, smashed inwardly. I remember that the caterpillar treads were still whirring around against the air, slowly and pathetically. Cut from the glass, the man's head was bleeding and he apologized profusely to my Mum for being bloody and dirty in the back seat of a car with a bewildered toddler. In the end, his self-consciousness (or my unconcealed horror) got the better of him and he opted to wait in the rain for an ambulance.

Part of the allure for children, playing in the mud with their yellow trucks and bulldozers must rest in the perceived strength and infallibility of the wrecking/building machine, with its clear and pure diametrical purpose: to build-up and to tear down with equal and unemotional measure. What happens when the machine itself breaks is a rupture of this sense of certainty - akin to a kind of objectified vertigo, failure on a scale that registers bodily and chemically (not only related to the sight of blood, as possible human by-product). While Paul Caporn's Reconstruction Works appears in no way like the scene of a construction-site accident, the artist plays with the forms of, and with our material expectations of things that make and do: excavators, cranes, wheelbarrows, table vices, spirit levels and even sticks used to stir paint and he transforms them, removing their assured sense of functionality and ascribing them with other properties and problems that have less to do with physical and mechanical labour and more to do with ideas.

In a series of works, Caporn applies different processes to the same group of long, thin objects – industrial paint stirrers with their layers of local-council-inspired colour. While Peel shows the visual and textural effects of hand carving and use of a drop-saw on dried paint, Polyporus expands Caporn's material experiments into a temporal abstraction. The layers of paint revealed by cutting sections of the stirrer expose bands of colour, like synthetic tree-rings indicating time and repetition of use. Incident with Polyethylene, a temporary splat of yellow polyetherline accrued by the use of a drop-saw and water against a wall, depends on humidity and time for its staying power. While one could argue that all art is time based because it is both created and experienced within a flow of time, Caporn's experiments share a resonance with breakthrough conceptual work like Robert Morris' Box with the Sound of It's Own Making (1961), which is materially a simple wooden box and audibly a soundtrack continuously replaying the recording of the artist building the same box, but at 3 hours the work, most presciently, is about time. Considering the fungal-growth-like paint rings of Caporn's Polyporus is to consider a slice of time and to ponder the labour involved in many painting tasks, over and over. Painting what other objects and spaces, and where?





Reconstruction Work is filled with tools and representations of tools and machines used primarily by the construction industry. Collectively they are machines and objects used to process other materials, but they are basic instruments, not scientific or precise. In Golden Age Caporn uses a more exacting skill to replicate an excavator, sculpting from multiple forms of other useful objects – yellow wheelie bins – then perching the finished work, triumphantly on top of its own waste product. Caporn plays quite literally with the visual associations we make every day when seeing objects in our environments: yellow excavator, yellow bin, yellow toy bulldozer and disrupts the scale of our expectation to fall somewhere in the middle of these extremes. Golden Age is simultaneously a Tonka toy of wild imaginings and a shiny monument to its own petroleum-based, plastic materiality. Caporn disassembles the integrity of one object - a bin used for disposing of recyclable product - to give form to another, and in the process, removes its ability to be repurposed or recycled back. The artist creates not only visual conundrums, but reflections on the conditions in which we live.



It is impossible to disassociate the objects in Caporn's exhibition from the context in which they have been made. The artist works in a city whose skyline, at this moment is so filled with cranes and whose urban street facades are so randomly punctuated by temporary structures and billboards displaying architectural renderings of what will be, that they seem to have earned a place of fixity in the landscape of Perth. The title of The Golden Age is sardonically placed by this artist, who has borne witness to at least one other boom-time in Western Australia, and also to its inevitable decline. Returning to Perth this year, I was reminded of Manfred Walther's meditative film 80,000 Shots (1990-2001) of the reconstruction of Potsdamer Platz in Berlin. Cranes flick across the skyline until they are obscured and then disappeared entirely by the rising buildings they assist in constructing. In the exhibition space for Reconstruction Works, Caporn inserts visual obstacles, so that views of his excavator and crane sculptures can only be seen together partially, a mirror of the ways in which working machines intervene physically and visually within urban space.

In Slump Caporn transforms the crane as a structural, purposeful object into a deflated and useless armature that collapses under its own weight. This collapse, while an amusing reference to the soft sculptures of pop artist Claes Oldenberg, hitting out at the hierarchies of artistic expression, also registers on an emotional level, partly due to its large scale against the gallery wall, and the sense of failure conveyed by the pathos of the foam object, softening its own fall - both preempting and causing its own demise. I imagine feeling the same kind of compulsion to nausea as when I see images of massive ships capsizing, audibly keening and displacing great spurts of water, to when I am riding in a lift that suddenly stops silently between floors of a tower block, or witness a building from the corner of my eye, shift and suddenly fall. Caporn relishes these moments of tension.

Through this collection and spatial arrangement of works, the artist cleverly shifts between visual play: a two dimensional work made only of spirit levels; a wheelbarrow ocky-strapped to the wall, and more serious material and performative interventions that explore failure, economies of scale, time, labour and the compulsion that exists within artists and within all of us to work, build and create. Reconstruction Works is an exhibition that plays with the contradictions and complexities that exist within the nature of all things, even the most simple and purposeful - creating a physical and visual encounter with sculptures and transformed objects that is both whimsical and deeply unsettling.

Bec Dean 2009



















PAUL CAPORN  
CURRICULUM VITAE

Personal Details

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Address: 14 Latham St, Ashfield WA 6054  
Education: Curtin University of Technology: Bachelor of Fine Arts, 1992  
Bachelor of Fine Arts, Honours First Class, 2004

SOLO EXHIBITIONS:

2009 Reconstructions Works, Turner Galleries, Perth  
2005 Modified, Touring Exhibition 2006 - 2010  
2004 Translate, Taipei Artist Village, Taiwan  
2001 Blur, Video Installation Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth  
2000 Homely, Fremantle Arts Centre  
1998 OUT OF ORDER, Arts House Gallery, Perth  
1996 By Light, Arts House Gallery, Perth

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS:

2000 – 2008  
Silver. PICA 25 years of Artrage  
Sens-ation. TAFE Gallery for PIAF  
Memory Essence, Taipei Artist Village, Taiwan  
Intermix04, Leeds International Film Festival, UK.  
Cyberdeco, Piccadilly Cinemas, Perth.  
Gameplay, The Bakery Gallery  
Outside Tokyo, John Curtin Gallery  
Screen, John Curtin Gallery, BEAP.  
Double Take – Recycling in Contemporary Craft.  
Toured Regional WA, Queensland and Sydney, NSW  
Stuff, Moores Building Fremantle  
Gravitate, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, UWA

1995 - 1999

Gift, Craftwest Gallery, Perth  
Mine Own Executioner, Mundaring Arts Centre  
Anemone, Regional Touring Exhibition (IMAGO)  
Glow, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth  
City of Perth Craft Award, CRAFTWEST Gallery,  
Bleep Bleep, exhibition and performance, Melbourne  
Convergence, City Farm, Perth (curated & exhibited)  
Pirate Icons, Arts House Gallery, Northbridge  
Performince, Performances Lab Art Studios, Jolimont  
Vane Heart Artery, Boans Warehouse, East Perth

AWARDS & GRANTS:

DCA Visual Art and Craft Mid Career Fellowship 2008  
ArtsWA New Works Grant for Homely 1999;  
Modified 2005  
Australia Council New Works Grant for Modified 2005; Blur 2000  
Art On The Move Touring subsidy for Modified  
2006 - 2008; tour extended Queensland 2009 - 2010  
Asialink Visual Arts Residency at Taipei Artists Village Taipei Taiwan 2004  
PICA Research & Development Grants 2000, 2004  
Joondalup Festival: Float Commissions in 2001-2002  
Artbridge: 3rd Prize & People's Choice Awards Northbridge 1998  
Artrage Subsidy: Picture Show 1996; Climbing Ladders 1998  
Craftwest Centre for Contemporary Craft: Detail product commission 2000  
Awesome Festival: Residency Artist, Nullingine 2005; Artshed and Festival Artist 2002;  
Regional Tableaux Kalgoorlie 2001

SELECTED PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE:

Curtin School of Art Sessional Lecturer & Technician 2003 - 2007  
City of Perth Public Art Conservation & Maintenance Provider 2007  
- 2009  
Fremantle Prison Exhibition Designer & Installation 2006 - 2009  
Art On The Move Workshop Presenter 2003 - 2009  
John Curtin Gallery - Installation 2000 - 2008  
Scotch College - Art Technician 2002 - 2003; Artist In Residence 2001  
WA Museum – Exhibition Design Installation 1998 - 2000

PUBLICATIONS:

2008 Silver Artrage 25 Oct catalogue essay by  
Marcus Canning & Andrew Gaynor  
2006 Sensation catalogue essay (Feb)  
Gail Cameron  
2005 Modified review, The West Australian (Oct),  
Rick Spencer  
'Some of Paul Caporn's work around the home'  
Robert Cook catalogue essay for Modified Annette Seeman, 'The  
Domestic Muse &  
The Unheroic Object', UWA Masters Thesis.  
2004 Taipei Artist Village, Taiwan Memory Essence exhibition  
catalogue  
2002 Perth Matters, 27 September edition in Profile  
2001 Blur catalogue essay Bec Dean (Nov)  
2000 The West Australian, 24 June, 'Bright Ideas all  
the Glow' review of Homely by David Bromfield  
CRAFTWEST Magazine review of Homely by Paul Hinchliffe  
Homely catalogue essay Mat Trinca (June)  
1999 BroadSheet, Vol 28 winter 1999, From a Western  
Summit Robert Cook

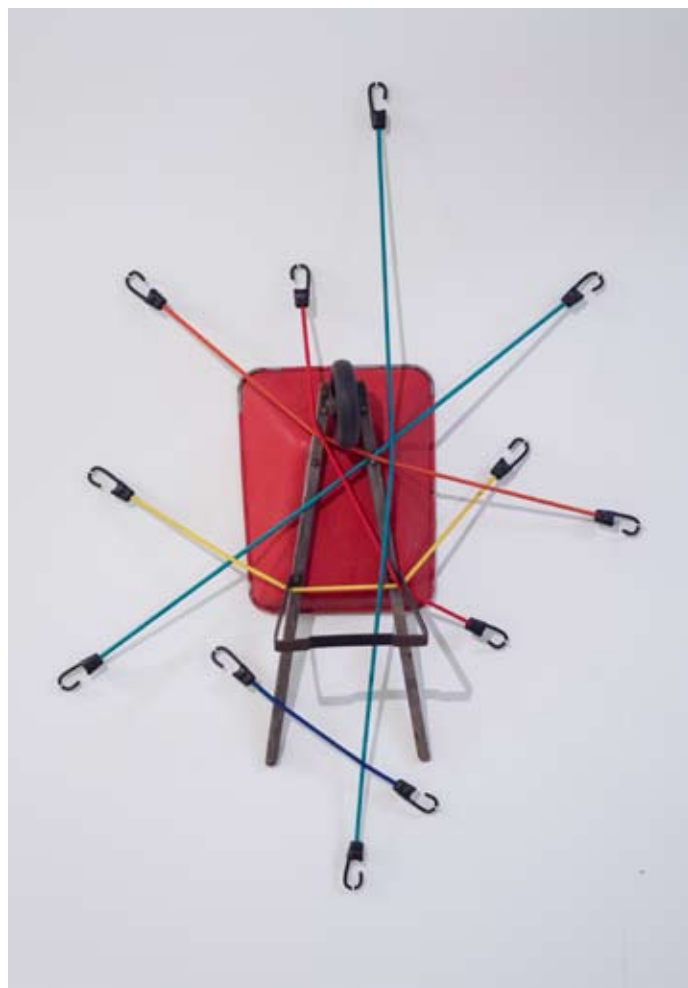
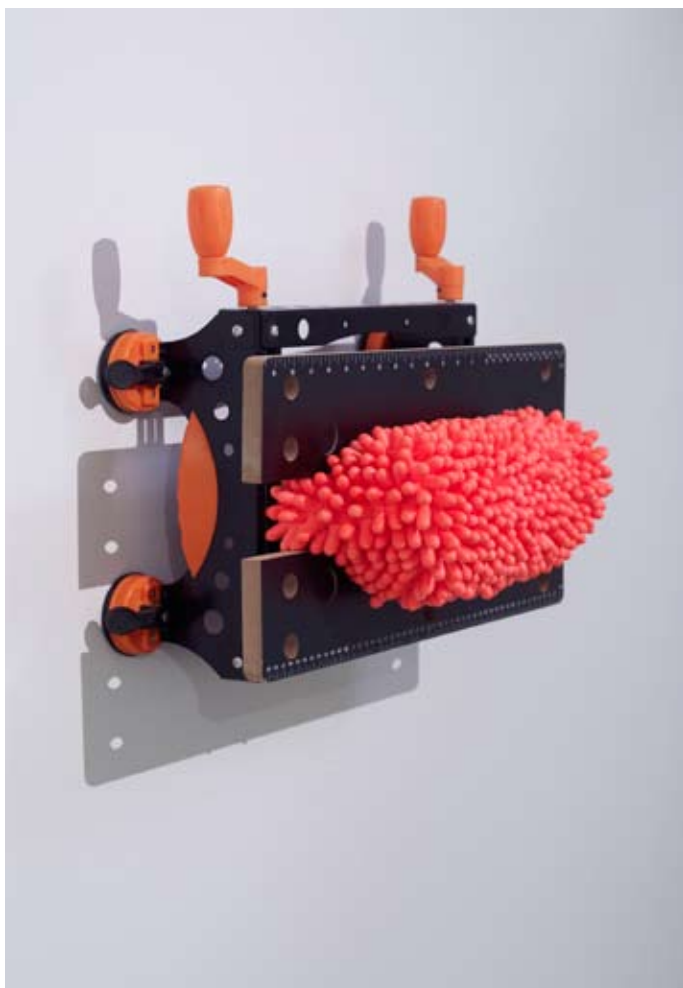
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