THE 5TH ASIA-PACIFIC TRIENNIAL OF CONTEMPORARY ART

2 DECEMBER 2006 – 27 MAY 2007
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Queensland Art Gallery / Gallery of Modern Art

QUESTIONING PERFORMANCE
APT5 TOUR

TEACHERS' NOTES

SUBJECT AREAS

SOSE; The Arts — Dance & Music; Film, Television and New Media

STUDENTS ATTENDING THIS TOUR SHOULD COME AWAY WITH AN UNDERSTANDING OF:

- the importance of ideas of the 'performative' in art, as well as the relationship between 'performance' and art
- why some artists engage with or enact the 'physical' in their works and explore how this is done in a variety of ways through physical and symbolic gestures, relationships between artists and audiences, art works and ceremonial objects.

INTRODUCTION

Performative practices play a major role in many cultures, and are now key aspects of contemporary art.

PERFORMANCE ART:

- involves the performer/s, a site and an audience, and can combine music, dance, poetry, theatre, visual art and video
- artists present their own bodies as singular, specific, gendered spaces.

PERFORMATIVE ART:

- artists explore the processes and actions of their bodies (and those of others) to create art. These bodily acts are often more important to the artists' practice than the finished art objects.

SOME PERFORMATIVE STATEMENTS:

- 'I now pronounce you man and wife'
- 'I apologise'
- 'I declare war'.

Michael Stevenson New Zealand b.1964 / ***The gift*** 2004–06 / Aluminium, wood, rope, bamboo, synthetic polymer paint, World War Two parachute and National Geographic magazines / 400 x 600 x 300cm (installed, approx.) / Collection: The artist / Courtesy: Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney

Michael Stevenson / 'Argonauts of the Timor Sea' (detail) 2004 / Purchased 2004. The Queensland Government's Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

QAG GALLERY 4
MICHAEL **STEVENSON**

NEW ZEALAND B.1964

With a combination of acerbic wit, technical skill and critical perspective, Michael Stevenson's projects conflate particular events, objects and histories into a strange yet convincing amalgam of truth and fiction. Detailed research and verifiable truths merge with fraud and fakery to produce works that are both 'reconstruction' and fanciful scenario. His projects often have the lunatic logic of conspiracy theories, with all of their paranoiac appeal. Unexpectedly, however, they draw parallels with the gossip, intrigues and self-serving machinations of the art world rather than usual suspects such as the Vatican or the CIA (although they too, find their way into his work on occasions). For example, previous work has included the implication that Walter de Maria's 1977 land art work *Lightning field* in New Mexico is linked to a secret space research program.

Stevenson has been described as an 'anthropologist of the Avant-garde'. His archival research of particular situations is scientific in its rigour while the art projects that derive from it leave viewers uncertain of their veracity. His choice of drawing as a means of obsessively reproducing documents or images from contemporary media such as magazines and video further obscures and confounds Stevenson's relationship to contemporary art and its audiences.

Michael Stevenson, 'Argonauts of the Timor Sea' 2004
Michael Stevenson's 'Argonauts of the Timor Sea' is a multifaceted project that employs the artist Ian Fairweather's infamous raft journey (from Darwin to Timor) to frame ideas about migration, exchange and value. The installation traces connections between a disparate but strangely related group of events and theories — from Thor Heyerdahl's book *Kon-Tiki: Across the Pacific by Raft* 1950, which espoused the spurious theory that Polynesia was first settled by South Americans, to sociologist Marcel Mauss's influential text on gift economies, *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* 1950.

Central to Stevenson's installation is the treacherous raft journey undertaken by Fairweather, who is widely regarded as one of Australia's most significant twentieth-century painters. In 1952, Fairweather set out from Darwin on a raft constructed from planks of timber, discarded aircraft fuel tanks and a sail fashioned from a silk parachute. He is reported to have planned for the journey by reading Thor Heyerdahl's account of his 1947 voyage in *Kon-Tiki*. Fairweather's trip was to last 18 perilous days before he ran aground on a reef off the coast of the small West Timorese island of Roti. He was nursed by a local village family while curious locals cannibalised the raft as if in return for their kindness.

The display in APT5 brings together an eclectic array of objects, meticulously realised by Stevenson, each of which relates to a particular facet of Fairweather's adventure and connects it to a complex web of references that the viewer is left to negotiate. *Das gift*, which replicates Mauss's book as an empty wooden shell, is a particularly significant object in the installation. It makes reference to Mauss's theories concerning gift-giving, value and reciprocity. As suggested by the two maps, migration is also an underlying theme. *Rute migrasi lama* overlays Fairweather's journey with the migration routes taken by Australia's Indigenous people. Importantly, the works allude to the movement of people to and from Australia both historically and in present times.

Ian Fairweather's work is on display in Gallery 11 at the Queensland Art Gallery.

The act of Stevenson remaking this boat is a kind of performance. Discuss this gesture, and what it might mean to the story of Ian Fairweather.

Discuss the DVD *Making for Sheppey* 2004. Is this a performance? Talk about its relationship to the objects you see in the room — most importantly, the raft itself.

Discuss/compare the idea of 'the gift' in both Stevenson and the Pacific Textile Project works.

Susana Kaafi Tonga/Australia b.1920 / ***Fala pati*** 1988 / Mat: woven lau'akau (pandanus) and commercial wool / 237 x 178.5cm (irreg., including fringes of 17.5cm and 9cm) / Purchased 2004 / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

QAG GALLERY 4
PACIFIC TEXTILES PROJECT

The Pacific Textiles Project celebrates the continuing vitality and importance of woven mats and textiles in the South Pacific, created by artists from across the region, including Fiji, the Cook Islands, Tonga, Samoa, Tahiti and Hawai'i. These contemporary works engage with ideas and art practices that are ubiquitous throughout the region.

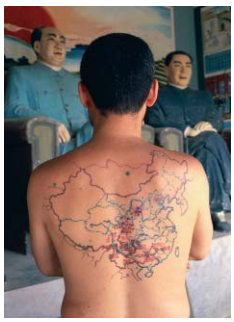
Mats have always held an important role in the life cycle ceremonies of Pacific Islanders. The most prestigious of these, the *'ie toga* and the *kie hingoa*, are the ultimate symbols of status in Samoa and Tonga respectively and can trace a family's genealogy and are sometimes given individual names. These properties are evoked by orators during ceremonies. The use of synthetic wool on pandanus mats has enabled the women of Fiji, Tonga and Samoa to create new types of mats that incorporate their narratives using colour, images and text, as opposed to relying solely on oral expression. The mats often visualise strong nationalistic sentiments through the replication of emblems as well as demonstrating their makers' devotion to Christianity. The use of text naming family members in both Filiti Leya Ledua's and Susana Kaafi's mats also clearly indicates the intimate use of these precious objects.

Discuss the family ceremonial objects you might use at certain times of the year.

Can you recognise some of the images used on the maps, and what they might symbolise?

Gifts are important gestures in many cultures. Discuss the times in your own family that it is appropriate to give gifts as a cultural gesture.

With its personal and cultural meanings, Susana Kaafi's *Fala pati*, becomes a powerful medium for the expression of identity. The motif mapping the artist's territory connects it to a lifetime of experience, which is itself inflected by specific geographic, cultural, familial and economic histories. The artists in the Pacific Textiles Project reveal hidden histories, confront stereotypical images and present new perspectives.



Qin Ga China b.1971 / ***The miniature long march*** (detail) 2002–05 / Type C photographs / 23 sheets: 75.5 x 55cm (each) / Collection: The artist / Courtesy: Long March Project, Beijing

Qin Ga / ***The miniature long march site 1 – site 14*** 2002 / Mini DV, 14:50 minutes, colour, sound / Collection: The artist / Courtesy: Long March Project, Beijing

GoMA GALLERY 1.1
LONG MARCH PROJECT
QIN GA

CHINA B.1971

Qin Ga's back was used as canvas to make *The miniature long march*. From his base in Beijing, Qin tattooed on his back the progress of the group of artists journeying along the historical Long March route. Although the Long March Project artists halted their expedition at Luding Bridge in 2002, Qin Ga later completed the march from the bridge to Yan'an province (and his tattoo in the process) in 2005. His body became a performative art work as well as a piece of performance documentation. Qin Ga's work comments on how individual bodies are affected by larger political motivations and experiences, as well as demonstrating the collective memory of the positive and utopian aspects of Maoist China.

Tattooing is a well-recognised means of performing identity and has been explored by many artists, including Qin Ga and eX de Medici. In Pacific cultures tattoos are deeply spiritual performative markers of identity, conveying information about genealogy, and are increasingly considered to be contemporary signs of cultural affirmation. Greg Semu's self-portraits of his Samoan full-body tattooing, called *pe'a*, also refer to colonial representations of Pacific people, by mimicking the ethnographic poses of historical photographs.

What does the phrase 'collective memory' mean to you?

Discuss how the DVD's augment your viewing of the photographs.

The young performers who will feature in ***Kin***. Clockwise from left: Curtis Walsh-Jarden, Sean Page, Ryan Jarden, Hunter Page-Lochard, Samson Page, Isileli Jarden, Josiah Page / Photograph: Natasha Harth

GoMA GALLERY 1.1
STEPHEN **PAGE**

AUSTRALIA B.1965

Brisbane-born Stephen Page descends from the Nunukul, Munaldjali and Yugambeh people of south-east Queensland, and has an international reputation as a choreographer. A former dancer for Sydney Dance Company, Page was appointed Artistic Director of Bangarra Dance Theatre in 1991. Bangarra's unique productions merge Indigenous dance, oral traditions and social history.

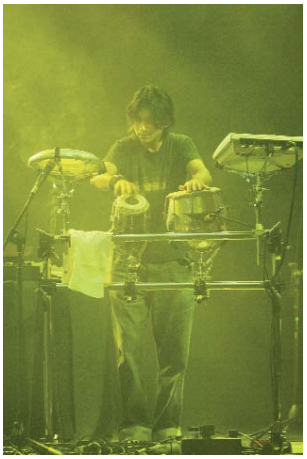
Page especially developed a new work, *Kin*, for APT5. Featuring Page's son and six of his nephews, *Kin* brings together three generations of family in a local Brisbane yarn of youth, culture and social history.

Kin takes shape through the eyes of seven young Indigenous Australian boys aged nine to thirteen. The story explores their urban upbringing and the connections they have with their own community, family and history. Immersed in popular culture and a love for hip-hop and football, these boys are at an age when they are starting to form their own identities and beliefs. Their ideas of Indigenous culture and understanding of their spirit as Indigenous Australian men are becoming increasingly important.

Kinship and family values, which were central to Page's upbringing, were integral to the training and preparation his nephews and family undertook for *Kin*. During a trip to his traditional country of Beaudesert, Page's father engaged with his grandsons, taking them though ceremonies and passing on knowledge of the land. Page's brother, the renowned composer, musician and performer David Page, created the score for *Kin*.

Performance and dance are very important in Indigenous Australian culture. Page is not working within boundaries set by traditional ideas about art should be; instead, he combines art with dance, music and cultural expression.

Is Stephen Page an artist? Debate.



Talvin Singh United Kingdom/India b.1970 / Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts, 2006 / Photograph: Shane Reid / Image courtesy: Adelaide Bank Festival of Arts

GoMA PARK GALLERY
TALVIN **SINGH**

UNITED KINGDOM/INDIA B.1970

Music and performance are often about creating a mood or feeling in the audience — how does watching this DVD make you feel?

Discuss the recording of the performance, and how 'being there' affects your relationship to a performance.

If you were asked to describe the performance in words to a friend, how close would you get to making your friend understand the feeling?

Djambawa Marawili Australia b.1953 Maḏarrpa people / ***Baraltja*** 2005 / Natural pigments on bark / 196.5 x 74.5cm / Purchased 2005. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

GoMA GALLERY 1.1
DJAMBAWA **MARAWILI**

AUSTRALIA B.1953
MAḎARRPA PEOPLE

Baraltja is an important site that has special qualities pertaining to fertility and the seasonal mixing of salt and fresh waters, which Marawili has depicted using a complex interplay of patterns. Burrut'tji or Mundukul, the lightning snake, resides there and is shown here coiled at the base of the painting.

In ceremonial song cycles, the clouds are sung as femininity and fecundity, pregnant with life-giving fresh water. This natural cycle of events reminds Yolngu people of ancestral kinship ties linking them over land and sea.

Works such as *Baraltja* depict some of the events that are sung about in ceremonies, which are essential for Yolgnu people to maintain their responsibilities to the land.

To perform these songs is to maintain culture. The art works are also connections to these responsibilities. For Marawili, white represents the water (which is also part of the land), red stands for blood and black for the Yolngu people on the land.

In 1997, he inspired the making of the 'Saltwater Collection: Yirrkala Bark Paintings of Sea Country' — a group of 80 works which form part of the ongoing Yolngu legal case for recognition of their rights to sea country. These used sacred designs embodying their inherited knowledge of creation stories and clan boundaries. They are law as well as art works.

Compare the embodiment of law within Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems, and the ways that they are combined within the Yolngu legal case.

In ceremonial song cycles the clouds are sung as femininity and fecundity, pregnant with life-giving freshwater. Think about how the act of performing a song can maintain culture.

Djambawa Marawili *Dhanbarr (hollow log memorial pole)* 2004
The generic name for Maḏarrpa clan memorial poles is dhanbarr and dhakandjali is the specific name for this type of burial pole. The remains of Djambawa Marawili's grandfathers are buried in a similar pole at Yilpara, where the artist lives and works. This pole is painted with a complex interplay of miny'tji (clan designs) which represent Baraltja, an area of Maḏarrpa clan lands behind Blue Mud Bay, and Mundukul, the lightning serpent that resides there.

Lightning is a powerful cyclical phenomenon which has long been celebrated in sacred songs that narrate the actions of ancestral creators. Yolngu beliefs have chronicled lightning as an energy burst arising from the land, a theory only recently discovered by Western science as the precursor to downward lightning strikes.

Acts of mourning or memorial through the making of these burial poles are very important to Marawili's people, the Maḏarrpa clan. Discuss how these purposes are changed when the works enter the art museum.

Discuss how these different knowledge systems came to the same conclusion about the origin of lightning.