REPETITIONS

Ciara Moore
Leigh Hobba
Daniel von Sturmer
Martin Walch

Plimsoll Gallery
University of Tasmania
Introduction

The genesis of this exhibition is the developing exchange residency between the University of Tasmania School of Art in Hobart and the National Sculpture Factory in Ireland. 2008 marks the first year of the project with the arrival of Irish artist in residence, Ciara Moore. The initial desire to present the work of the resident artist provided the challenge to explore the notion of investigation of place that is at the heart of any international residency. The curators considered that this primary brief could be further articulated and explored by selecting a group of Australian artists whose work reflected similar concerns. Investigation of place inevitably involves the growing understanding of the self in that place and this is as true for the recent arrival as it is for those already established here.

Measuring, recording, tracking, naming – these are all methods and systems of the explorer and they combine in a variety of ways in the construction of a layered unfolding of those features which define one place from another – at the same time they seek to familiarise the experience by locating it through objective instruments of record, common to all investigations. But the specific record takes on a character of its own as the picture unfolds and the specifics of one place emerge as distinct through the balance of that data, as much as through the raw sensual experience of a place. The naming of places so elegantly revealed through Martin Walch’s work allows other meanings to emerge – the record itself is revelatory. Hobba places his camera in an unfamiliar city and allows the life of his immediate environment to flow in through the lens; Moore’s visits to both familiar and alien environments provide a more emotionally charged response based on narratives and encounters with the unfamiliar; while von Sturmer reminds us that at the heart of any investigation is raw method, the measure, quite literally expressed, but also of the space and time of process – connecting with the ‘rhythms’ that Jeff Malpas refers to in his excellent catalogue essay accompanying this show.

Even with the same instruments and the same itinerary, the outcome of each person’s experience of any place will be different. The point at which one enters, and the rationale for that chosen entry point, will be of enormous significance. It leads the explorer in but the rate and nature of the journey is determined as much by what unfolds in its
progress that could not be foreseen as by that which is preplanned. What the artist/explorer brings with them will be grafted onto or overlain on that experience and the myriad surprises and shocks of those unforeseen encounters will all combine to provide uniqueness to that ‘traverse’. It is this difference that excites both the artist and the viewer – how common is their experience to what we, the receiver might know? – and of course, and more compellingly perhaps, how different is it? We then take on board these new layers which the artist, as the explorer, has gone out and sought, reflected on and recorded, or expressed for us who await the revelation of what they bring back as traces of that journey. The sum of these experiences then becomes vicariously our own, and adds to our understanding of, and feeling for a place.

I would like to extend thanks to co-curator Paul Zika, the artists who have all taken on this project at busy times in their lives, Professor Jeff Malpas who provided both the catalogue essay, and also a valuable engagement with the artists and curators in the development of the exhibition – providing valuable insights and necessary conceptual rigour when it was most needed, the University of Tasmania School of Art for supporting the residency and the exhibition opportunity, and the National Sculpture Factory in Cork, Ireland, the Irish Arts Council and Culture Ireland who, through their funding support, have made Ciara Moore’s presence here possible.

Seán Kelly
Ciara Moore, Echoes 2002 (still)
Repetitions

Oars sweep against resisting calm, the arc of their pull marking out a disturbance that clusters round each bite of the blade, their swing marking a measured passage across the lake’s expanse. The oars’ rhythmic movement, their muffled thudding resounding in the wooden curve of the hull, reverberates in two realms, under air and above water, connecting at the same time as it disrupts. The movement of the oar, and of the boat, is also the movement of the oarsman, the strength of arm and shoulder at one with the outstretched oar, reaching, grasping, pulling, releasing, and reaching again. A horn challenges the expectant quiet of the sky, a shotgun shatters it, the sounds repeating themselves in rolling waves, re-enacting a ritual long past, subsiding back into heavy stillness. The sound of the horn announces an arrival, declares an audience, proclaims an event – the gunshot commands it. In this place, in which the very light has the character of an immersive medium, in which the earth beckons toward its green embrace, one watches for the appearance, the imminent presence, of a hidden majesty, a concealed wonder, a secret – one that does not reside only in what is awaited, but in the place itself.

Any and every place retains its own obscurity, its own hiddenness. The sense of a place is thus given neither in anything made present within it nor in some simple self-presenting of the place as such, but is rather a sense, and a reality, secreted in the movements, the rhythms, the tangled and triangulated connections of elements that make up its very fabric. It is evident in our very immersion in the place, in the singular strands, like threads in a delicate and finely-worked net, that draw the spaces and times of the place together, that draw us into that place, and into the places found within it (the boat, the lake, the guarding hills), that draw the place into itself, that draw this place into other places, and other places into this place. Wherever we are, where we are is always some place, though the place may be one that remains unknown, un-named, uncertain. Whatever the place, no matter how familiar, no matter how close to home, a strangeness, an uncanniness belongs to it – the place always retains its depths. To become familiar with a place, to learn to inhabit it, is not to dispel its secrets, nor to render it into some simply intelligible form – as if the place could be transformed into a sign, an idea, a mere position – it is to work oneself into that place, to take in
its rhythms and movements, to become part of them, and for them to became part of one’s self.

The sense of place that is evident here may take on the character of a dreamwork – affecting, powerful, often vivid, both connected and disconnected, and yet also elusive. Perhaps any sensing of place, even the most wakeful, must have something like such a dreamt character, yet a dreaming that is embodied, materialised, made real. Through the prosthetic vision of a camera, against the restless circling of an overhead fan, in the altered and diminished half-light of a city hotel-room, things dissolve into shadow and reflection, their features rendered occasionally bright by the harshness of fluorescence from without, their forms and textures diffusing back into the anonymity of the temporary; in uncertain closeness, the fixed and partial view of another space, another story, another life, opens up – and then abruptly closes. Through the camera and the images it records, a place appears, but as an intersection of places, a place intruding into other places, a place that holds itself in semi-transparency, a place visible only in fragments.

In the rhythms of light, in the reflection, duplication and superimposition of images, in the brief flickering, shifting appearances of things, the place is reconstituted into its most basic of elements, themselves becoming apparent only in their uncertain relation to one another, invoking, repeating, mirroring. It is as if the place is no longer occupied by objects or bodies, but only by their ghosts, their remembrances, their traces, their outlines faded into mere shading, their parts lost and recomposed into new and strange assemblages. The space that opens up in this palimpsest of light and dark, of shape and shadow, is one defined by the simple relatedness of the elements within it – a space of pure juxtaposition, reiteration, transposition. Movements within that space are no longer movements of things through a single spatial field, but rather movements that belong, strangely, to the space itself. Space itself moves, spaces are overlaid onto spaces, spaces shift within spaces, spaces create spaces – space becomes a rhythm, a movement, a re-iterated shaping and re-shaping. Space merges with time, and time with space.
Ciara Moore, Transmission 2008 (stills)
Ciara Moore, *Transmission* 2008 (still)
When we encounter places in ways that already disrupt our usual sensing of things, and so also separate that sensing from its everyday connection to action, then our very being in place, our ‘placedness’, as well as the place itself, comes to the fore. Sometimes that placedness appears immediately problematic in that neither our own relation to the place, our orientation within, nor the orientation of the place to other places, is intelligible to us – we are lost, bewildered, displaced. Sometimes that placedness appears in terms of our very familiarity with the place, and yet even such familiarity may appear as unfamiliar and disorienting.

In the encounter with place, and with our own placedness, what is encountered is itself a secret, something that remains hidden, a mystery, something that resists understanding. One cannot come to a sense of a place without also coming to a sense of one’s own implication in that place, even if only as a brief witness to it, even if as an outsider, a newcomer, an interloper. Indeed, the outsider is an outsider only through coming into the place from without, but as such, the outsider is also always inside. The sense of a place thus already includes some sense of oneself, a sense of one’s own being in that place, and one’s entanglement within it. The sense and recognition of a place is inevitably, to a greater or lesser extent, reflexive, and as such it both encompasses that on which it reflects – oneself, the place as such – but never fully illuminates that which it encompasses, since that which is the source of reflection is never itself wholly given in the reflection. In the encounter with place, both place and self are made evident, and yet in being made evident, they become salient only partially, in aspects or glimpses, like a snatch of song or the profile of a face. It is not merely that the encounter with place is not given in an encounter with any single element – idea, image, position – but that the place itself appears always as multiple and as active, as a shifting, interweaving body of elements and events, in which we are ourselves encompassed at the same time at the very moment of our encounter. In that encounter, the place does not stand opposite to and apart from us, instead we become a part of the place, are internalised within it, at one and the same time as the place also becomes a part of us.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle claimed that when we sense something we become identical with that thing in just the respect in which it is sensed. Thus, in seeing the whiteness of a tabletop, we become one with that surface in that our own eyes take on the whiteness that is also found
in the table. Such a view seems exactly to capture the connectedness to place that occurs through bodily feeling. The sensing of place is something felt, no less than it is seen or heard (no less, indeed, than it is tasted or smelt), and that felt sensing of place often constitutes an almost literal internalising of the place through our own bodily taking-in of the rhythms and regularities to which we attend – something that may occur even when the experience of the place is mediated through recording, editing, and digital re-presentation.

We come to a commonality with place, not merely through being in place, but through our sharing in the movements of that place in the movement, real or perhaps imagined, of our bodies – place comes to be within us. One hears the scrape and splash of the oar, but one also feels its sweep and pull; one sees a flickering pattern, and the fluttering moths of light seem to brush against our very eyes; one sees and listens for the countless falling of snowflakes, the latter heard in the very falling of silence, and one feels, even if only in imagination, each small impact, senses the enveloping lightness, soon become heavy, of snow; one sees the constant rise and fall of waves, feeling a responsive rise and fall in one’s own breath and pulse, sensing the supporting, but also enveloping depths that lie beneath; one watches the metronomic beat of a pendulum, formed by the uncertain balance of a set-square ruler on a table’s sharp edge, square upon square, and in the watching the movement is transferred to one’s own gaze, and thence to one’s own rhythms, a nodding of the head, a slight swaying of the limbs, as the pendulum measures and mirrors, not merely space nor time, but our own attentiveness.

The rhythms of place, and of space and time (for rhythm, like movement, surely encompasses both) that are made evident here themselves indicate the manner in which, while places retain their own secrets, resisting any attempt to resolve the obscurity of their nature, still the elements that make up those places abide by a measure and pattern that is a part of the very fabric of those places, and that underpins their articulated and complex character. The singularity of places can be understood as a function of the multiple differentiation and pluralisation of their elements, and of those elements’ reciprocal responsiveness and relatedness, of the encoding and re-encoding of minute signals, signs and sequences: in its timed and metered swing, the balanced square
Leigh Hobba, *Home, away from (thinking of) home - objects of desire - (Chairs by Le Corbusier) - Room 12 Regents Court 1995 revised 2008 (still)*
Leigh Hobba, *Bad moon rising* 2008 (still)
marks out with formal precision the movement that exists within and between places, the measured character of their underlying forms, the shaped regularity of their spaces; the territorial calling of birds demarcates the boundedness of a place in airborne activity, while the delicate tremor of a spider’s web, stretched between twigs, across water, over rocks, registers a constant dynamic of air and sound, capturing and transmitting the place’s inner motions; a television searches from channel to channel, each curtailed image suddenly flashed before us, punctuating the silence of the room’s ordered interiority, rendering the steadiness of awareness, the even-ness of time, as a staccato cycle of recurrent moments.

The character of a place is itself a function of the interactive multiplicity that arises within it. In the visualised landscape, in its re-presented form, this appears in the way in which such visualisation may be constituted through the accumulative addition of the smallest of pictorial components: in the painter’s forming of a canvas through the application of each considered brushstroke; in the video image that manufactures the intelligibility of that image through the reiterated patterning of a plurality of light-points; in the re-visioning of a place, decomposed into a plurality of numbered locations, through its reconstitution by means of the re-positioning of each numerical element within an empty space – like the building-up of raindrops onto a patch of dry ground, snowflakes onto bare earth – so that the image appears as a kind of visualised arithmetical sum, and yet textured, shaped, and formed as the place itself.

Part of the secret of a place lies in the other places with which it communicates – any one place stands within a network of places to which it is constantly responsive, part of a system of transmissions and transpositions that move across places, through places, into places. In the tracking of pathways through a landscape – the line of travel indicated as a series of continually changing numerical locations, a sequence of names that overlay other names beneath – places appear collected like shells on a necklace continually remade, present not only in the interconnected lines of their topography, but each place, each name, holding a secret history within – each tiny shell apparent as a reiteration of the other, and yet each essentially itself. Yet places are not only connected serially, in time, but also simultaneously, in space. Looking at a map of the island that was named Van Dieman’s Land, its shape presented through names that burn into sudden salience and then die out, one sees each name, each signified place, as it stands in
a familial nesting of names, of places, the density of names recording the
density of the movement, the activities, the lives — of those who name
and whose names are now remembered — as articulated between those
places as well as within them.

Every place opens up, not merely outward to other places, but also
inwards, to the places that are found within it. No place, not even the
most mundane, is without such depths. Look within the crevices of a
dead tree, into the small shelter in a rocky cleft, towards the corners of
a room or the edges of a piece of furniture, onto the dimpled surface of
a bench, around to the other side of a shutter. Perhaps these are too small,
too partial, too arbitrary to be called ‘places’ — for places are surely those
spaces and time that allow for the fullness of action and movement,
and that can readily be recognised as such — and yet sometimes
we can project into such places, no matter how small or unusual they
may seem, in a way such that they open up as having their own sense,
reality, mystery. The camera and the microphone allow us to enter such
spaces, open them up as places, in a way that may otherwise occur
only seldom — we recognise the activity and movement that take place
within them, and we come to see the extent to which there may be an
inner life to place, and an inner placedness, that goes beyond that to
which we are ordinarily attuned.

Similarly, through the communicability of places with other places,
sometimes, and not only through the artificial extendedness of sense,
we encounter the sudden intrusion into this place, into the realm of
the apparently known and understood, something that can only belong in
a space and a time alien to this. Not a place that is to be found internal to
the familiar, the place that it invokes can perhaps not even properly be
grasped as a place at all, only as something beyond, outside, apart. A
fish (is it that?) pulled from the coldest and deepest of waters, that is not
one fish but two, that in its death-throes still strives to eat, and yet what
it eats is a reiteration of its own body engulfing what it already is. The
creature that eats itself is an old sign for the world — and not only the
world, but life — as constantly finding its own sustenance in
itself; it also signifies the world in its movement as an incessant
eating up of time, which is also an eating up of space. Perhaps,
in their ever-changing and dynamic interconnection, places
can be understood as having a similar character, but rather
than understand places as perpetually self-devouring, it
is their character as constantly self-opening,
Martin Walch, *Sticks and stones* 2008 (still)
Martin Walch, *Drowning by numbers* 2008 (stills)
self-disclosing, that is here the more important and the more salient, and that is also evident in this strange and self-reflexive image.

The fish that eats its own reflection, the creature that swallows itself, may be seen as a marker of the impenetrability, the partiality, the blind mystery, that is itself evident in the coming to sense, the coming to appearance, of the reality of a place – a coming to sense that is nevertheless also a disclosing, an opening up. All appearing is surely like this, never complete, only ever half-seen, half-heard, half-known, evident in recurrences and duplications that both familiarise and make strange. If it is in and through the multiple repetitions of place, and our own participation in those repetitions, that such appearing occurs, then the mystery of place, the secret that is announced in the rhythms and movements that are proper to it, is the very secret of appearing as such: that every appearing is simultaneously a remaining hidden, every singularity also a pluralisation, every place both a home and a foreign land.

Jeff Malpas
Hobart, March 2008
List Of Works

Ciara Moore

*Echoes* 2002
digital video
courtesy Kerry County Council, Ireland

*Transmission* 2008
digital video
courtesy the artist

Leigh Hobba

*Home, away from (thinking of) home – objects of desire – (Chairs by Le Corbusier) – Room 12 Regents Court* 1995 revised 2008
video installation
courtesy the artist

*Bad moon rising* 2008
video installation
courtesy the artist

Daniel von Sturmer

*Metre* 2002
digital video
courtesy the artist and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

Martin Walch

*Drowning By Numbers* 2008
open source computer program written in the processing language
courtesy the artist

*Nomenclature Data Base Information provided by Nomenclature Office, Information and Land Services Division, Department of Primary Industries, Water and Environment, Tasmania.*

*Sticks and Stones* 2008
open source computer program written in the processing language
courtesy the artist
Biographies

Ciara Moore

Ciara Moore graduated with a Bachelor of Arts with Honours (First Class) in 2000, and a Master of Arts in 2007, both from the National College of Art and Design, Dublin. Her video works have been included in a number of group exhibitions in Ireland, Crete and Canada including US Live, The Fifth Gallery, Dublin (2003); Locus Cosmos, Rethymnon Centre of Contemporary Art, Crete; Locus Suspectus: Where the Hidden Comes to Light, Ormeau Baths, Belfast; Truck Contemporary Art, Calgary; Crawford Municipal Art Gallery, Cork (2004); Peripheral Visions, Granary Theatre, Cork (2005); and The Power of a Negative Remains Between Us, This is not a shop Gallery, Dublin (2007).

She has undertaken various video, sound and film commissions and is the inaugural recipient of the Ireland /Australia Exchange Residency, based at the Tasmanian School of Art.

Leigh Hobba

Leigh Hobba trained at the Elder Conservatorium in Adelaide in the 1970s. He has exhibited extensively since 1976. In 1980 he was selected as Australia’s representative at the prestigious Biennale of Paris, Museum of Modern Art and has continued a national and international exhibition career since then. His work has been included in two Biennale of Sydney at the Art Gallery of New South Wales - Visions in Disbelief (1982) and Origins Originality and Beyond (1986); and the major bi-annual survey of contemporary Australian practice, Australian Perspecta, AGNSW (1995). Invitations to exhibit overseas include Festival d’Automne, Musee d’Art Moderne de le Ville, Paris (1982); WRO, Cracow Poland; Video Umbrella, London; Centre International Creation Video, Montbeliard, France (1990); Installation for Containers ’96, Copenhagen, Denmark (1996); Fotofeis, Edinburgh, Scotland (1997); and Points of Entry, Moving Image Centre, Auckland, New Zealand (2003). He has also been a regular exhibitor in experimental and alternative art spaces throughout Australia. He has also curated a number of exhibitions focusing on sound and new media including Pulse Friction (1997), Immediate (1999) and Spatial (2001), all for the Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart.

In 2007 the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery featured The Space of Presence – a solo survey exhibition of his work. He lives in Hobart.
Daniel von Sturmer

Daniel von Sturmer graduated with a Bachelor of Arts, in Fine Arts, with Honours in 1996 and a Master of Arts by Research in 1999, both from RMIT University. Since 1997 he has had 14 solo shows in Melbourne, Sydney, Dunedin and in the Australian Pavilion at the 2007 Venice Biennale.

His work has been included in numerous group exhibitions including Strangely Familiar, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (1998); Where the Wild Roses Grow, Transmission Gallery, Glasgow, Scotland; Museum MaGoGo, Glasgow Project Space (1999); Blink, ACCA, Melbourne (2000); Screen Life, Reina Sofia Museum, Madrid, Spain; Fantastic, 13th Biennale of Sydney (2002); Real-Avecom Festival, Arnhem, Netherlands; New 03, ACCA, Melbourne (2003); ARTV, Australian Centre of the Moving Image, Melbourne; On Reason and Emotion, 14th Biennale of Sydney (2004); Shadowplay, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand; Digital Discourse, St. James Centre for Creativity, Valetta, Malta (2005); Anne Landa Award, Art Gallery of NSW; 21st Century Modern, Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia (2006); The Secret Life of Paint, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand; Out of Space: La photographie et l’imaginaire sculptural, Dazibao, Montreal, Canada (2007).

He lives in Melbourne and is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

Martin Walch

Martin Walch graduated with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 1993 and a Master of Fine Arts in 1998, both from the University of Tasmania. He is currently undertaking a PhD in Fine Art at the University of Tasmania.

His work has been included in a number of significant exhibitions since 2000 including Between Phenomena, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart; Seeing through Landscape, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (2001); Photographica Australis, ARCO International Art Fair, Madrid; The Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, AGSA 2002); ARTV,ACMI,Melbourne (2004); and Remote, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart (2006).

He lives in Hobart.
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