

Modes of Practice brings together past and present MOP Projects committee members Ron Adams, Kate Beckingham, Kieran Butler, Lucas Davidson, Daniel Hollier, Richard Kean and Carla Liesch in this allied location and timely exhibition. Our mode of practice is our way of thinking about and through making, a process-driven philosophy that is nurtured through the experimental nature of our artist-run-spaces. These artists have worked together before, their object-based and expanded ideas of art-making engage in an ongoing dialogue with each other, and the space in which they are exhibiting. In collectively discussing this exhibition, the artists have all developed work from significant moments working with MOP Projects as they celebrate the end of an important 14-year Sydney institution.

It has been difficult to write this essay because I have mixed feelings about MOP closing. MOP has been fundamental to my identification and formative years as a practicing artist. And MOP is closing at a very complex time in Australian arts; so how do we celebrate the end of such an important space? *Modes of Practice* is not simply the last MOP Project, but it is taking place in the midst of what has been described as the worst crisis the Australian arts have faced since the Australia council was founded in 1967.

You do not have to be abreast of the entirety of the situation to experience the mood in which we currently find ourselves working—one dominated by anxiety and uncertainty for the future of the arts in Australia. Certainly, when decision-making from the top shuts down avenues for critical and creative thinking, the future that is being nurtured seems a dangerous one.

And we exhibit here in this significant location—significant geographically to MOP, forming part of the Chippendale Creative Precinct that is contributing to a growing sense of artistic community beyond the immediate families of these two galleries; and significant in the midst of the fight over the future of the University's art school. Myself and five of the artists in this exhibition are alumni of Sydney College of the Arts. This exhibition follows *SOS SCA* at Verge Gallery, a chronicle of the struggle to keep SCA open and maintain the current course load and staff capacity. *SOS SCA* co-curator Katie Williams spoke of the complexity of the situation we are dealing with as artists, in some way or another. The exhibition spoke to the strength of critical dialogue in our community. Art is many things, Williams' notes—and many of these aforementioned things merge in this specific location.

And over this space, MOP co-director Ron Adams' large text installation declares:

I am the son and heir of nothing in particular.

Adams' text references The Smiths' 1984 song *How Soon is Now?* In this work Adams' revisits MOP Projects' *Our Lucky Country* series held in partnership with Hazelhurst Regional Gallery in 2005-2007—a work that speaks to the scope of MOP's satellite exhibitions. In 2007 Naomi Evans wrote of this works' 'observation that we are of a time where the past no longer promises a grand inheritance.'¹ The text is reclaimed in this space—these words haunt this uncertain territory of the arts. But they also speak to opportunity, 'the fact that not one thing defines us, that we are

¹ Naomi Evans, 'Five Choices of Death', *Our Lucky Country (still different)*, curated by George + Ron Adams, Edited by Daniel Mudie Cunningham, MOP Projects + Hazelhurst Regional Gallery and Arts Centre, 2007, p34-37.

a composite of parts, not one leading above the others.’² This exhibition indeed comes from community, a composite of many parts, a collection of many voices and modes of practice. This is the message that Adams’ chooses to leave us with, a celebration of this community that will continue to drive artistic creation in Australia.

Kate Beckingham’s work sits in quiet proximity to Adam’s declaration. Drawing from an evolving piece *Hardcore Magic*, Beckingham’s text calls from the opposite end of the gallery: *please be gentle, please be gentle...*

Beckingham’s *Tiny wins* develop from her recent body of work *To those of you who keep going*. In these works we see Beckingham take control over physical elements of an environment that is largely out of her control. Her process, her working time, moves from the invisible to the seen, and is shared in solidarity with her peers. These in-between moments of an artist, recorded through objects and text, recall Kaprow’s vision of what art should be: ‘doing life consciously.’³

Placing these process-based objects in the gallery space then, ‘changes the thing attended to,’⁴ reflecting back on the viewer, as Beckingham writes: Changing what you know yourself to be.⁵

The fragility of these works is a strength, as is the precariousness of the life of the artist—it places us in a position to be critical and creative thinkers. *To those of you who keep going* is a gentle gesture to Beckingham’s peers, from an artist who is processing her own fears by continuing to make work: ‘getting up, moving things around and sitting back down again.’⁶ We see this sentiment of support echoed in the physicality, and the gestures of Kieran Butler’s work through titles such as 🍑 *This is for those who ground me*.

Butler’s work physically addresses the in-between spaces of the gallery, conceptually calling into question the detritus, the stuff, the things that Beckingham has repurposed in her works. Since completing his BFA with honours, Butler’s thinking has progressed from *things* to *stuff*, from ideas and objects to the leftovers, the bits and pieces that make up our practices.

He does this through critically questioning his medium, a kind of material philosophy that works with the fluidity of the photographic medium to reflect the artist, the colour, the space, the society in which he is working. In these new works Butler’s photographic installations create the illusion of support, responding to the suspended walls at Verge. These works are heavily layered and built-up, there is both a philosophical and physical grasping or reaching out by the artist to comprehend the materiality of his own thoughts and things. These gestures are disembodied and obscured by a collaging into a beautiful collection of *stuff*. The bits and pieces, thoughts and ideas of Butler’s practice are assembled to bring together ‘nothing and everything’ in these works.

Similarly to Butler, Davidson’s works emerge through a rigorous and ongoing investigation of his materials. *A Mind of it’s Own* is a component of an earlier work, realised here as a new video work and exhibited on a corporeal scale. Something in

² Ibid.

³ Allan Kaprow, *Essays on the blurring of Art and Life*, edited by Jeff Kelley, University of California Press, 1993, p195.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Kate Beckingham, *Hardcore Magic*, 2016-Ongoing, <https://goo.gl/ZHOOWs>

⁶ Artist statement, *To those of you who keep going*, 55 Sydenham Road, <http://www.55sydenhamrd.com>

this work called out for further engagement: the way his fingers seem to momentarily blur the distinction between the real and the virtual environment. The materiality of the mylar mirror, reflecting and distorting Davidson's body, is recorded on the iPhone; and through this action considers the screen as a filter through which we perceive ourselves and others.

Davidson exhibits a new, experimental piece, as he questions what more there is to learn from this work. This reminds us of the role of artist-run-spaces in giving artists the freedom to extend their studio experimentation into the gallery. The experience of learning through exhibiting further allows us to consider our work in the context of our peers. As I mentioned earlier, many of these artists have shown together before, and in-between the making and exhibiting, they critically engage in each other's practices. The reflections of Davidson's work are echoed in the painterly sculptures of Carla Liesch: both are works that reflect out from the artists' studio, into the space, and onto the viewer.

Liesch is a place-maker. When Liesch and I shared a studio at Parramatta Artist Studios in 2015, her first act was to unleash a confetti canon in the space. That gesture is in these works. The reflective qualities of her materials spill out from their perspex frame, casting brilliant shadows in the gallery space, tracing the movement of light, of passers-by. Liesch's work embodies the forms and materials of painting—without the paint—to affect the way we see the space around them. These works bring us into the space we are in.

There is also a sense of celebration in Liesch's works: a freedom and confidence in working with her favourite materials: vibrant perspex colours, exposed supports, and glitter. It's almost a ready-made art party in a box, lighting up the gallery, waiting for us to complete the work by simply being in this space. Richard Kean's work calls for a similar presence, his installation piece *Apodidae* requiring participation to co-create the aural component of the work.

In *Apodidae* Kean presents three realisations of a glider developed according to the golden ratio. The measurements that make up the hand-carved glider are abstracted as aural strings and a diagram in a large blueprint installation. This blueprint speaks to an applied knowledge of flight obtained through theoretical study and practical experience. The participatory element of the work is key here, knowledge is gained through creating the sound, a practical understanding of the aural relationships. Kean's work brings together his current passions, and in this combination, the work becomes not about the individual pursuits, but about Kean's process of learning—of trying to understand the space he is in through art-making, through mathematics, through flying.

Again Kean's work grounds us in this space, through the sounds reverberating in the air around us—through all of these works Verge gallery has its own presence in this show. Even before we enter the gallery, Daniel Hollier's painterly obscuring of the front windows creates a narrative, drawing us inside.

As MOP shuts up shop, Hollier's work not only conceals the rest of the exhibition from the outside; it speaks to the future. This is one of MOP's final exhibitions, but our activities continue as we will channel our energies in 2017 into an archival publication of the 14-years of MOP Projects. The space of MOP itself transitions into a project space run by Galerie pompom, maintaining the experimental ethos of its artist-run roots. But this work poses the question of the space that opens up as MOP closes. This is an exciting proposition.

Hollier's *Now You See Me Now You Don't, Gestural Painting* realises a new exploration in his practice of the painterly and performative expression and narrative meaning found in whited-out windows. This work is exhibited alongside an older work *Painters Green Edition of Four* from Hollier's curated show *Lesser Abstraction* at MOP in 2010. A nod back to his MOP years and a poetic placement of the past, the present and the future—Hollier sees a strong material relationship between the works: the painters tape, the everyday building materials, the repeated gesture of the painted-out windows. Placing these two works together also gives us pause to reflect on what we have learnt from MOP: how we have progressed in our own practices; and as an artist-run-space.

So how then do we celebrate the end of an institution like MOP Projects? I think it is by acknowledging what it is that we have learnt from MOP: a very strong sense of community, communication, experimentation, mentorship and collaboration that we can see coming through strongly in this exhibition. We can celebrate by continuing to build this community, to take up opportunities, to celebrate our wins, share our support—to shape the future we want for art and culture in Australia.

Hayley Megan French, 2016