

Situation

Curated by Russell Storer
Levels 1 and 2 of MCA Galleries
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (MCA)
6 June – 21 August 2005
by Bec Dean

Several times over the last month I've visited the *Situation* exhibition at the Museum of Contemporary Art and on each occasion I've walked away feeling frustrated with my efforts as a viewer, vowing to return and try harder. The exhibition, connecting individual artists and artist networks from Sydney, Berlin and Singapore was so varied and abundant in the stuff of art that it was easy to get absorbed by a single work or publication to the detriment of everything else, especially when the biggest time-trap of them all was directly opposite the gallery's entrance.

Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorne's collaborative *Artists Archive* was a series of 20 minute talking-head, video interviews with 100 Sydney based practitioners looping over six TV monitors (you do the maths). I like to watch passively as people yap about their life and work, confessional-style, so I was doomed from the beginning. Excuses, excuses but in order to give any sense of the diverse content of *Situation* within this limited word-count, I have resorted to listing some generic forms that appeared throughout the spaces.

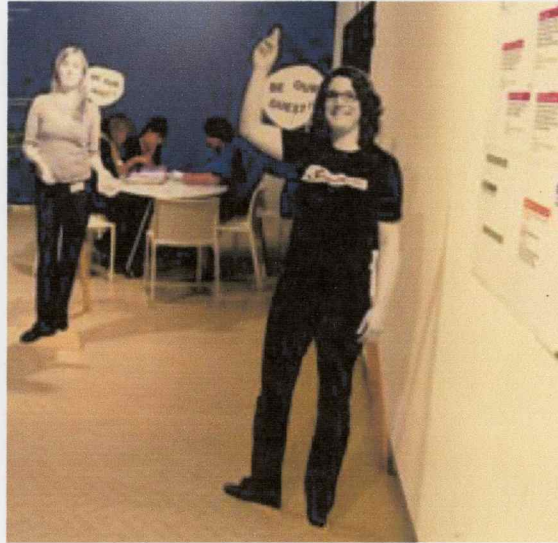
Articles and archive material

The cities of Berlin and Singapore were represented by artist groups Sparwasser HQ (SHQ) and The Artists Village (TAV) respectively. In contrast to the Sydney component of the exhibition both these groups presented a coherent timeline of activity from their inception. While TAV installed magazine articles, photographs, press releases, flyers and newspaper items, SHQ produced a colour-coded diagram that stretched across their main wall.

Books and magazines

Publications from artist run initiatives including exhibition catalogues, zines and flyers were arranged in reading areas. Elizabeth Pulie exhibited a number of finely detailed ink drawings as potential covers for her self-photocopied and refreshingly design-platform-free *Lives of the Artists*. SHQ included publications produced by the various artist-run organisations involved in the selection of video work for *Old Habits Die Hard*, featuring 50 artists from around the world.

Below: Lise Nelleman & Jole Wilcke
THE INVITATION PIECE: BE OUR GUEST! BE OUR HOST!
Installation view, *Situation 2005*
Museum Contemporary Art, Sydney
Courtesy and © the artist
Photo credit: Greg Weight



Display cases

Perhaps it was this item behind glass that connected the seven primary artists in Sydney. *The Briefcase Gallery*, brainchild of Simon Barney, ran a continuous loop of 'dud' slide documentation provided by other practitioners. Installed as a lonely museum piece, this still active, alternative 'space' was far removed from its usual context – a crowded pub in Surry Hills.

Documentation

See the MCA website (<http://www.mca.com.au>) and situation blog (<http://www.squatspace.com/situation>) for information on the forum, performances and *Discursive Picnic*.

Installation

Sarah Goffman's *Refuse* was the only stand-alone installation that didn't require a set of instructions to view. Her delightful collections of disposable plastic objects – craftily constructed to form miniature sculptures – were arranged on shelving alongside a heraldic arrangement of plastic bags with their logos excised. Singaporean artists Jeremy Hiah and Tang Da Wu devised a booth where visitors could photograph themselves as the statues of founding fathers in front of projections of the Sydney and Singaporean skylines. Back downstairs, Sydney artist Lisa Kelly created a delicate dis-semblage of text and objects in space, referencing the past work of her peers. Including light fittings, scraps of timber, vinyl lettering,