



Sarah Goffman, *Positive Gearing*, 1996. Photograph Ben Goffman. Courtesy the artist.

ELASTIC : PRINTED PROJECT

BY ANN FINEGAN

Elastic: Printed Project is a notable first, an unusual publication to emerge somewhat incongruously from Sydney's famously cash-strapped community of artist-run spaces. Nothing of the kind has been produced by a like collective, and unlike the Xerox and hand-crafted artists' books and journals usually associated with such spaces (highly desirable items in themselves), this is a top-end production of non-mainstream art. In short, it is a coup for the artists (with thanks to the generous support of the Australia Council for having the wisdom to fund it).

Not only does it look great—and this might seem a trivial point to mention—but it has a *spine* thick enough to mark its own place on your bookshelves (which means it will not get lost or be hidden away in those thick brown cardboard sleeves which bury more modest publications in public libraries). *Elastic: Printed Project* achieves its first goal even before you have opened the cover. It signals that the artist-run collective has well and truly arrived as a self-determined entity capable of holding its

own, easily matching any mainstream museum production. And further, it comes without the curatorial baggage of the art establishment.

It demonstrates that artist-run collectives are to be taken seriously in their capacity to organise, show, document, and most importantly, to produce great work. An impressive list of artists is showcased: TV Moore, Deej Fabyc, Sarah Goffman, Andrew Hurlle, Elvis Richardson, Jay Balbi, Anne Kay, Mark Hislop, Elizabeth Pulie, Lisa Andrew, Alex Gawronski, Lisa Kelly, Carla Cescon, Sadie Chandler, Ryszard Dabek, Josie Cavallaro, Robert Pulie, Andy Davey, and many more (forty artists in all), of whom ten were also curators. But it is also about the politics. Lisa Kelly's essay strongly champions the point that artist-run spaces are not to be regarded as training grounds for grown-up galleries. This is not about artists in trainer-pants going through a period of maturation. The notion that the artist-run initiative is a "stepping-stone" on the track to commercial Assumption and success Eternal' (Lisa Kelly, p. 63) is put to rest in

this publication. *Elastic: printed project* is fully arrived, as are its artists.

If it can be likened to anything, it is a scene and a community where ideas and aesthetics are worked through and developed; and it is a scene which has been nurtured with the creative energies of all concerned. To this end a key aspect of the publication is to consolidate and recognise the work of this community, and of other artist-run spaces and communities as ongoing concerns. Indeed, the collection of 'Elastic Stories' (interviews by Elizabeth Pulie), which is part 'how-to guide' and part-history, tells the tale of how the collective came together. It is a good story, told through a multitude of perspectives, out of which a strong *ad hoc* philosophy emerged. Elvis Richardson, together with Leah McLeod and Mark Hislop, had already secured funding from the National Association for Visual Artists for a marketing project, when Richardson chanced upon cheap space at Chippendale in inner Sydney (\$125 a week). Quickly a group assembled, largely through openings at other artist-run spaces

like South and First Draft, and it was decided that rather than a 'few already too busy people' taking on the burden of running the gallery, a group of curators would run a program for just two calendar weeks each. Nearby *Blaugrau*, a now-defunct but highly successful artist-run space set up by Lisa Kelly and Alex Gawronski, had folded after an intense year and a staggering number of exhibitions, for the very good reason that its curators needed a break (Kelly had also published the artists' magazine, *Uniglory*, and Gawronski had kept up with the catalogue essays at approximately one a week). In contrast to this model, the structure of *Elastic* was to remain loose and low pressure (the curators would have no trouble finding the artists for their two weeks, given the large pool of artists already circulating through the artist-run spaces). Another bonus with having so many curators dedicated to attending gallery openings and supporting the artists was that an instant and varied audience and social life was generated.

Thus *Elastic* would not have been possible without the shared community of other artist-run spaces, without the talent and experience which allowed such a laid-back approach to function and to function well. A quick glance through the CVs in the book is testament enough; that something like *Elastic* could appear to emerge spontaneously is the product of years of showing and curating by the artists concerned. This is why Andrew Hurlé's section 'Defunct artist-run galleries' is such a seminal work, serving the purposes of historical documentation but also allowing readers to trace the cross-currents which flow through the book. Readers gain an insight into the extent of the artist-run system (some 55 galleries in Sydney and 22 in Melbourne) which has fostered this particular generation of artists. The scene into which *Elastic* taps is broad and diverse and *Elastic* is but one of its feeders. The back cover three-page fold-out, *Briefcase Opening at the Hollywood Hotel*, is

a line-drawing of one of Simon Barney's Briefcase shows. His art-gallery-in-a-briefcase concept was designed for showing small, mobile works at the local pub, the Hollywood Hotel, or at openings at artist-run spaces. In this depiction of the golden era of Hollywood Hotel you can spot local art celebrities like theorist Alan Cholodenko, or artists Maria Cruz and Steven Birch holding up the bar alongside the *Elastic* curators. (Mention must also be



Portia Munson, *Potpurri*, 2000. Oil on linen. Courtesy the artist.

As a reader you get a sense of involvement, which contextualises the art and the evolution of a shared aesthetic of a non-mainstream scene which has continued to thrive, evolve and sustain itself.

made of Elizabeth Pulie's interview style Xerox zine, *Lives of the Artists*, which also sources much of its content from this crowd.)

This tracing of the trajectories of artists, galleries and personalities makes *Elastic: printed project* much more than the mere documentation of past art events, or the profiling of the work in the publication. The stories which unfold facilitate insight into the various strands of its independently curated parts. As a reader you get a sense of involvement, which contextualises the art and the evolution of a shared aesthetic of a non-mainstream scene which has continued to thrive, evolve and sustain itself.

This book is a must for any artist confronted with the often overwhelming perplexity of how to get shown (and is cheap at the price of \$25). And it provides the rare opportunity of quality documentation, at low cost, of work which could otherwise disappear by falling outside the mainstream loop. How often have you seen a great installation and nothing remains but the souvenir invitation? Or you heard about it too late? *Elastic: printed project* goes some way to acknowledging the significant non-mainstream production of artist-run spaces.

(Important) politics aside, what is the work like? Well, it is a carefully curated show in itself. All ten curators have edited their own segment, with many of the works specially produced for the book rather than consisting of documentary remainders. DeeJ Fabyc, well known for her video and large-scale installation work (like those giant Flinstonesque boulders, in Yves Klein blue, set in a precarious state of balance for one of the Helen Lempriere Sculpture competitions) has produced a series of painterly interior stills worked over with defiant line drawings of nudes. Writer Rachel Bradford's text sits alongside, spilling her hallucinatory and tongue-in-cheek stories of prostitution, alien sex and teenage death wishes over these and works by Portia Munson (erotica, consisting of frilly pink clay labia and dildos), Esther Planas (dirty, sweet collages of porn and teenage texta-coloured stars), and Sadie Chandler (paintings of green aliens having sex with pink bodies).

Media is less obliquely referenced in Elvis Richardson's section. James Dorahy adds captions to stills from 'Judge Judy' (Real Causes, Real People... Real Causes, Real People), 'Jerry Springer' (Only in America! Only in America!) and 'The Days of Our Lives' (Today is the First Day of the Rest of My Life) in a take on Jenny Holzer's *Truisms*. Chitra Ganesh plays at Gothic

voodoo and Hindu inspired comics; Richardson's images of the extraordinarily prosaic framed birds and buildings compete with Sally-Ann Rowland's overblown photo-collages of a dirty child unaware her hair is on fire, and a boy at his school desk surrounded by line-drawn monsters. A cat appears to be purring proudly as it captains a toy boat in the middle of a rolling ocean. In contrast to the truisms, it's all lies. Outrageous lies.

Sarah Goffman has decided to dice with death by inhabiting various dioramas. A cowboy lies dead on the ground while she points to the fleeing figure of a skeleton, 'Death did it'. She lies down in a coffin, with her eyes shut; the tombstone carries the inscription, 'Temporary Memorials'. There is more photo-imagery: Kevin Sheehan's captioned photograph of a naked man trying to charge himself up by holding a wrench to a glowing red battery, 'bodies are non-conductive'. And there is more erotic, angry drawing from Carla Cescon: her super-imposed drawings of male-devils float over women who are carrying out domestic tasks like chopping, fighting, or sitting on the edge of the bed. Ethereal bodies are sucked in and out of copulating devils and skeletons.

It is an amusing exhibition-in-a-book, carrying a lot of emotional intensity, cartoon-style. If this book were a film it would be Tarantino's *Kill Bill*. Luscious visuals combine with comic-book mayhem as serious subjects, like killing, are made light of. And yet a narrative thread of sorts emerges, with more to it than *Kill Bill*'s simple motif of revenge.

Spook show doublings reflect diets of American TV Gothic (again), and patterns of TV Gothic Imperialism (Mishka Borowski). They are included alongside theoretical works of architectural ghosting (Ben Grealy and Stephen Ralph) in Jay Balbi's section. His own work, a photograph of a man in

very poor drag, is captioned 'Love aint nothing but a business going on'. Consumerism, architectural theory (Jennifer Cabraja), pornography and love, in all manner of couplings and conjunctions, sum up the key narrative elements, which, at times, almost begin to add up to a fractured story.

There is a seeming abundance of photographs of consumerism gone mad in Lisa Andrew's section.

stem the tide of what flows from this abyss. Murky, part-formed shadow images evoke a sense of inner disturbance. Luis Luna makes installations of logs or wood blocks on which he leaves text-messages for the living (song-lyrics to be activated) and builds stone cairns for the dead. His contribution is pure documentation of his earlier works, and incidentally a record of places he has travelled, and people he

has met. Yet, by contrast, his interventions into the world of the spirit are life-affirming, an anti-consumerist message of simple materials coming from the world of the Other (South America). Stephen Eastaugh rounds off Andrew's section with a blood-red and bleeding comic-strip 'Travailogue', emphasising the *travail* or hard work of travel. He projects the image of a reluctantly restless soul caught in the strange loop of consumerism of foreign places. Together these four works form a dialogue around consumerism's obsessive-compulsive patternings, void of spiritual sustenance, and an anti-consumerism in which the social fabric is held together by Luna's simple texts.

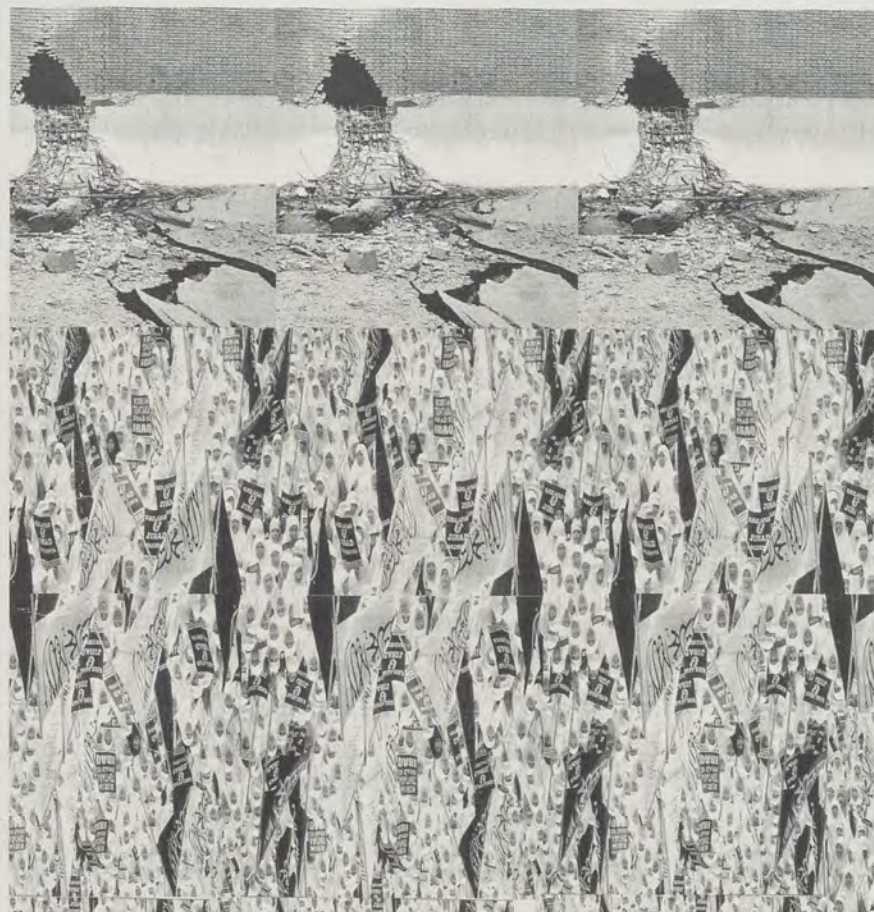
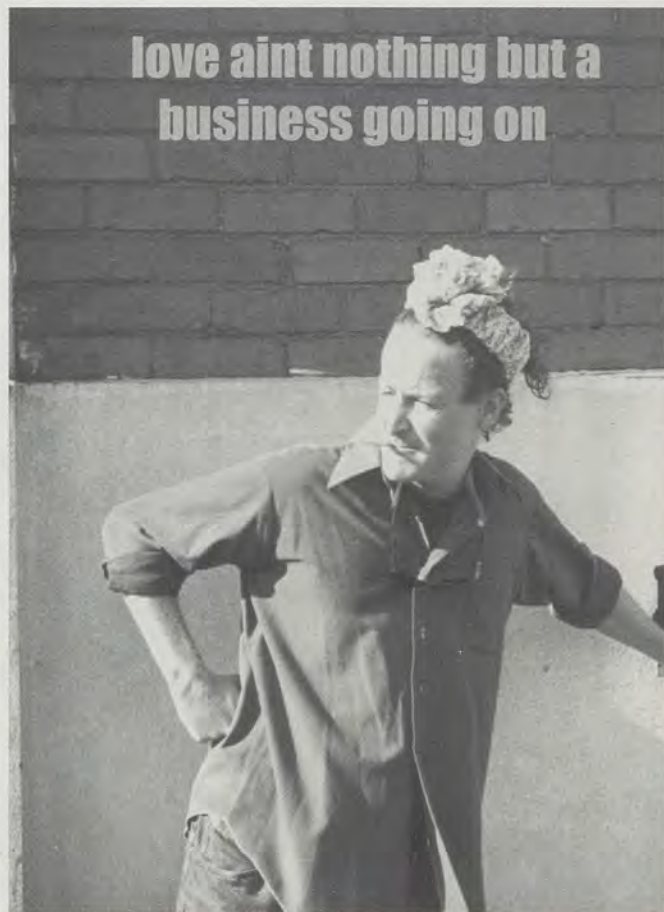
The comic strip motif is literally picked up again in Andrew Hurle's section. Sandra Bridie opens her 'archives of a fictional space' to take us to 'apartment eleven' which she has sketched in comic book sequence: front door, toilet, bath, cupboard, etcetera. Accompanying the drawings is the list of works which apparently were shown in the 'progressive exhibition' which took place in the real-world apartment eleven, and of which we have no trace outside of the names of works which we have to imagine.

Like many of the works in *Elastic: Print Project* Bridie's is cleverly textually-specific in addressing the medium of print as a site for reading as well as looking, a factor which holds this exhibition-in-print together and makes it such an enjoyable space to visit (if you buy the book, you can go as many times as you like), and it stands up to many repeat



clockwise from top: Leah McLeod, detail *John Howard/Misguided Ambition*. Courtesy the artist; Andy Davey, *Golden Rough Edition*, 2000. 24 carat gold electroplate over chocolate, engraved disc, velvet case. 10 x 9 x 9 cm each (series of 3). Courtesy the artist; James Dorahy, *As Seen on TV: Real Cases Real People*. Courtesy the artist.

A baby's playpen is stuffed and mounted with all manner of cheerfully coloured plastic guns; a Kylie poster is plastered with tacky logos, stickers and beer coasters; more plastics (knobby sculptures) are plonked alongside line-drawn consumerables, like hi-fi's (Tobias Richardson). Andrew's own mix of black and white silk-screened repeats and line-drawings, by contrast, is like poking at a scabby Gothic sore. Again, consumerism's spooky underside is tapped, as Andrew's fragile line drawings attempt to



left: Jay Balbi, *Love Aint Nothing But a Business Going On*. Courtesy the artist.
right: Lisa Andrew, *Pattern of Misbehaviour*. Courtesy the artist.

viewings. And, like Maria Cruz's *Shangri-La Collective* which addressed video specifically, under the express condition that the artist perform a song on tape or DVD, a major strength of this project is that it is a medium-specific, rather than themed. The 'truth-to-materials' aspect gives the exhibition a coherence and consistency without any of that shutting down to sameness and repetition which often happens when artists are constrained by a theme. Instead the medium of print lends an underlying coherence to the content, exploding on the plane of expression.

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In sum, much of the content stacks up as a reflection on consumerism and consumption. Desire. Want. Buy. Try Out. The rest is all filler, blips of psychic weirdness which will not lie down and go to sleep under the commercial barrage of TV, porn, supermarkets and selling. What we have left is the remainder of our messy, leaky, spooked-out, unassimilable, resistant, and often funny, subjectivity, squashed around image planes bristling with consumables. Perhaps this is an indirect effect of the medium of print which has the tendency to reduce

all images to the function of exchange. As Baudrillard suggested, all images *qua* sign, as reiterable and repeatable, tend to replace one another in a sliding of equivalences between possible satisfactions. If you cannot have one thing, you can always substitute another.

In his work Andy Davey flirts with the commodity-exchange of the image, setting up two trade-offs: the improbable luxury item, a gold-plated brain set against an entire page of *Fortune Cookie Scratchies* with their perforations intact; and a gold medal modelled on the form of the brand

Whichever way you look at it, *Elastic: Print Project* gives you enough dialogue for your money. As an exhibition-in-print it is a very fine show. It is a must-have on the politics of artist-run spaces and an excellent how-to guide. Or you might just buy it on the strength of its celebs. A selection of Elizabeth Pulie's 'Interviews with the Artists' is also included. ■

Elastic: Printed Project, 2002-2003. Rrp: \$25. Ann Finegan is a free lance writer based in Sydney. She currently teaches in the School of Contemporary Arts at the University of Western Sydney.

name chocolate with tactile appeal, *Golden Rough*, for a wall of *Who* magazine posters of *Golden Boy*, Thorpie. Of course, trade worthy cyphers, like luxury materials, money and celebrities, can be presupposed, but a good bit of porn, or even a joke, can do the trick when it is a question of the circulation of cyphers of desire. Mark Hislop, who curated this section, contributed a work which sums up our role: 'USER', carefully modelled in 3-D. Leah McLeod counter-curated by spelling with lights, PISS WEAK.