

## It's A New Day

Artspace, Sydney

Project: October – December 2006

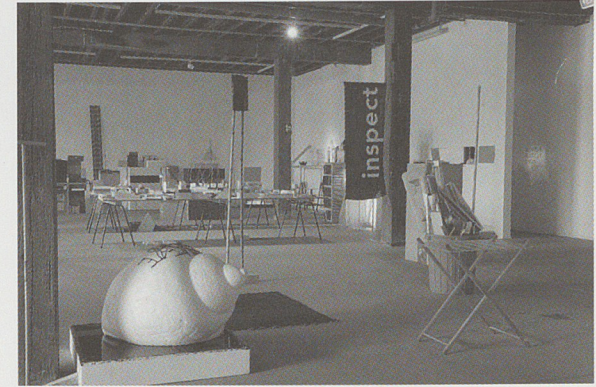
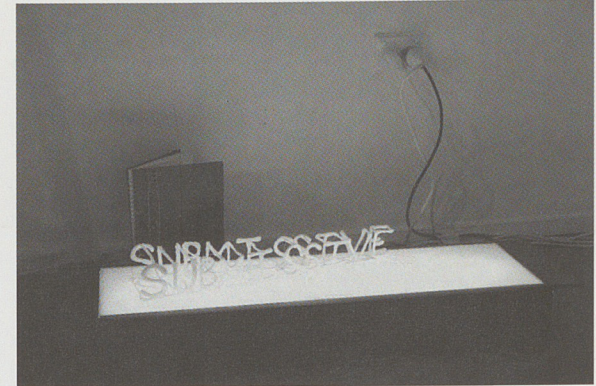
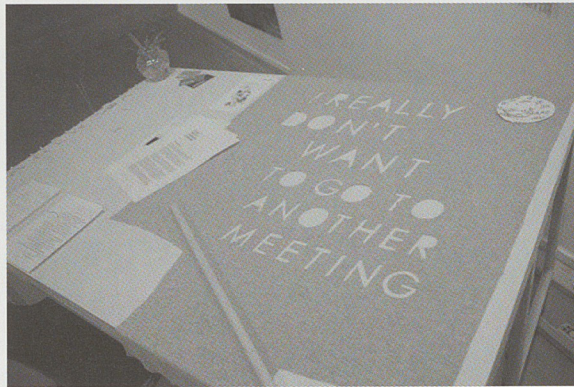
Exhibition: 24 November – 16 December 2006

Described as an 'expanded neighbourhood of process-driven practice', 'It's A New Day' was an extensive project, made up of an exhibition at Artspace as well as a series of dynamic activities involving the surrounding community. The show was the outcome of a three month residency at Artspace by a collective of artists, including Josie Cavallaro and Anne Kay, Sarah Goffman, Lisa Kelly, 'The Wild Boys' (Trevor Fry, Richard Gurney, Tim Hilton), along with many collaborators.

All of these artists sought, in varying ways, to connect with the inhabitants of Woolloomooloo. As curator Sally Breen commented, 'Woolloomooloo holds a diversity of often competing clusters of cultural, social and economic groups'. There are tourists, cashed-up socialites, homeless people, residents of welfare housing, school children and workers regularly frequenting the area. Four studios located within the Gunnery complex were opened up as spaces for artistic activity. Audiences were encouraged to engage with the artists during a series of workshops, symposia, meetings, artist talks, performances and open studios. The emphasis was on reaching out to groups who would not normally visit an art gallery.

Sarah Goffman's *And Now* installation expanded outwards from the gallery space on the left-hand side into the foyer area. Rubbish collected from around the neighbourhood was meticulously arranged into myriad constellations. Whether lined up on trestle tables, stacked against the wall or shelved in an orderly manner, pieces of detritus formed beautiful patterns, following the artist's idiosyncratic logic. As resident Japanese artist Nobuhiro Ishihara observed, Goffman's practice is comparable to ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, because it looks easy, but it is not. Goffman transformed pieces of junk into witty and thought-provoking formations, like the silver platter with 'social capital' written on it in large letters made of glue, or the photo albums with intriguing found photos scattered nearby. In Goffman's hands, the refuse of Woolloomooloo became complex, interconnecting systems reminiscent of the architecture of the busy city outside.

The Wild Boys' space, to the far right of the gallery derived its inspiration from the 'pink mile' of Oxford Street, William Street's working girls, and Kings Cross's vaudeville/burlesque events which are all within striking distance of Woolloomooloo. They transformed their zone into a garish, gaudy, spangly environment, full of audiovisual stimulation. A videoscreen of The Wild Boys dressed as drag queens provided the centrepiece for this riot of colour and movement. Wigs hung from the ceiling, record covers papered the walls and blow-up toys littered the floor. Connected to the rest of the gallery by a person-sized rat hole, the Wild Boys' queer zone celebrated its notoriety. Like the other participants, The Wild Boys chose to complement their built environment with social events, including photo shoots, the production of pop videos, live DJ theatrics, zine-making, hula-hoop classes and the bestowal of gay Buddhist blessings.



clockwise from top left: Josie Cavallaro and Anne Kay, 2006; Sarah Goffman, detail *And Now*, 2006; Sarah Goffman, detail *And Now*, 2006; Lisa Kelly, detail *From Scratch*, 2006. Installation views, Artspace, Sydney. Courtesy Artspace and the artists.

Lisa Kelly's *From Scratch* installation, positioned close to the front desk, was preoccupied with the role of the artist within the space of the urban gallery. Her current practice is largely concerned with the institutional dimension of art practice, or as Robert Smithson put it: 'the apparatus the artist is threaded through'. Two photocopies provide clues to Kelly's approach. One was a list of the artists who were upstairs in the Gunnery. The other is an account of the various steps in the renovation and the ongoing corporatisation of Artspace. Pieces of wood with stencilled lettering with phrases such as 'the work & the money' and 'yeah, you've got some of us/them talking' were lying around and propped against the wall nearby. A desk with a piece of grey felt with lettering cut out, read 'I really don't want to go to another meeting', reflecting a less positive view of collaborative endeavours. Tacked to the side of the desk, there was another stencilled sign which read 'Feel it's important that we recognise this isn't a truly democratic process'. This sign expresses the dilemma at the heart of a collective exercise like 'It's A New Day'. Kelly's signs raise the question of whether art-making can ever be a truly democratic process, even in the most ideal circumstances.

Arguably, **Josie Cavallaro and Anne Kay** made the most effort to give the public what they wanted after distributing a survey to Woolloomooloo residents that asked 'if you had two artists coming into your neighbourhood for six weeks, what would you want them to do?' This resulted in the 'Cake as Art' workshop with children from the Juanita Nielsen Centre after-school care program, a speed-dating evening involv-

ing curators and artists as well as a tour of the John Passmore museum. Given the interactive nature of Cavallaro and Kay's work, it did not have much of a presence in the final show. The Wild Boys' flamboyant antics next door inevitably upstaged the modest display representing Cavallaro and Kay's community-building exercises.

Feedback sessions were a crucial part of the 'It's A New Day' project. They involved the facilitation of structured critical responses by small groups of interested participants. In this way, the artists could gauge the effectiveness of their efforts to communicate with exhibition visitors and the wider Woolloomooloo community. The resulting feedback was documented and posted on the associated weblog: <http://www.its-a-newday.net/>. This blog was updated regularly during the course of the residency, providing participants and interested parties with opportunities for online interaction.

The 'Grotesque Dinner', staged in the gallery on the night before the show was due to be dismantled, was a rowdy affair attended by the artists and their friends. Prepared by Sarah Goffman, Carla Cescon and Lisa Andrew, the dinner featured foodstuffs designed primarily for their aesthetic impact. The pièce de résistance was the 'Ile Flottante', a huge mound of beaten egg white served on a bed of custard in a plastic baby bath. A quirky menu with comic flair, to round off an impressive program of experimentation at Artspace.

**B.L. Magner**

## Gordon Hookey

Contempt Free Hart/Contemporary Art

Umbrella Studio, Townsville

6 July – 5 August 2007

Umbrella Studio's walls shout out with images and phrases in this exhibition of paintings by Gordon Hookey.

The colours are bright, loud—like advertising—and the phrases are rude, crude and funny.

Looking at Gordon Hookey's work one could gain the impression that he is an angry young man, but on closer acquaintance he appears to be friendly and mild-mannered. His childhood in Cloncurry imbued him with both the resourcefulness and the friendliness of the

western Queensland lifestyle. I spoke to him at length when he was artist in residence in the month preceding this exhibition. So where do those rude/crude phrases originate, words that remain taboo in polite society? Of Waanyi ancestry, Hookey sees Waanyi is his first language although he was denied the opportunity to learn it extensively. So English is his second language and it