



Curating a Situation

Russell Storer takes three collectives out of their natural habitats and into (gasp!) the museum

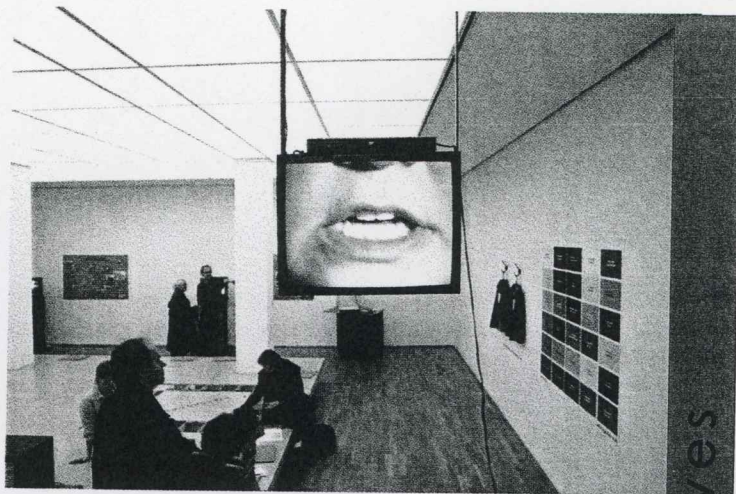
Artistic work is often defined in terms of a broad field of social activities. These may include the development of artist-run spaces and other exhibiting models, public performances, writing and publishing, curatorial projects, workshops, talks and discussions, research, archives and websites. For many artists, such activities may form the basis of their practice, disrupting prescribed or expected notions of artistic work, or of the singular artist working in inspired isolation. The relationships and collaborations that artists form therefore play a crucial part in artistic production. Informal or organized, artist networks are often formed out of shared political or ethical concerns, aesthetic approaches, and conceptual arguments. They may take a number of forms, be they loose social groups, one-off collaborations, registered societies or collectives.

"Situation" is inspired by a number of concerns surrounding contemporary artistic production, presentation and reception. Structured around three artist networks and collectives based in Singapore, Berlin and Sydney, the exhibition features the work of 19 artists, working individually and collaboratively, in a range of media from painting, drawing and installation to video and performance: The Singaporean collective The Artists Village (TAV); the Berlin-

based artist-run space Sparwasser HQ; and a network of seven Sydney artists who have worked with the local artist-run space scene since the early 1990s. Located at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, the exhibition is an attempt to highlight the contexts within which the artists work, the exhibition acknowledges the importance of interpersonal relationships. This extends into the form of the artists' works, which all to some extent address or invite a process of exchange between people.

The Sydney-based artists in "Situation" will exhibit new works that respond to the particular conditions of the MCA. Having worked mainly with artist-run initiatives, the artists address the shift in context in inventive and engaging ways. Alex Gawronski's interactive sculptural works invite audiences to record and play back responses to the exhibition; Simon Barney's *No Ideas* painting project elicits suggestions for further paintings from MCA visitors. Both works eloquently and wittily analyze the exchanges involved in creating, presenting, looking at and talking about art.

Sarah Goffman's rigorously arranged installation of pre-loved packaging materials, sourced from gallery visitors and elsewhere, celebrates the form and color of plastics and other man-made stuff. Lisa Kelly's work utilizes found materials sourced from her studio, translating ele-



ments of her working environment into the gallery space. These materials and objects are layered with texts provided by female artist colleagues who have inspired, influenced and supported Kelly's practice over the years.

This element of reciprocity and interpersonal relations is also explicit in **Anne Kay and Jane Polkinghorne's Artist Archive**. Interviewing around 70 of their peers in each artist's studio environment, Kay and Polkinghorne present a fascinating and detailed record of a slice of Sydney's cultural life. The subjects discuss their practices and how they assess their own success and role in society, providing a rich insight into how artists think and feel about their work, and the conditions in which it is made. Elizabeth Pulie, whose self-published *Lives of the Artists* magazine inspired the *Artist Archive* project, exhibits a series of cover designs for a new issue of the publication. Featuring her signature decorative abstract drawings, the works also convey a sense of artistic process and investigation.

The Artists Village (TAV) was established in a *kampung* (rural community) on the outskirts of Singapore in 1988, providing studio space for young artists to create work, and a communal environment for interaction and collaboration. Initiated by artist Tang Da Wu, it quickly attracted a group of younger artists to the studios to make works and to hold exhibitions, 'happenings,' performance festivals and seminars. A number of Singapore's most prominent artists have worked with TAV at one time or another, including Amanda Heng, Zai Kuning, Lee Wen, and Vincent Leow. Though it lost its space within a couple of years, it registered as a society in 1992 and has continued to organize numerous exhibitions, events and festivals, both in Singapore and abroad.

TAV's current membership includes artists Jeremy Hiah, kAI Lam, Juliana Yasin and Agnes Yit, all of whom will come to Sydney to realize works for the MCA exhibition. Their multi-part project, *Artists Investigate Monuments III*, is the third in a series of performance-based events held in public spaces that respond to monuments and commemorative sites, questioning and re-interpreting their social, historical and political significance. Founding member Tang Da Wu will collaborate with Hiah, while past member

Lee Wen will exhibit an installation of video, objects and documents from previous performances. Lee Wen will also show a new series of *Chewing Gum Paintings* in reference to Singapore's infamous ban on gum, and to acknowledge the current generation of TAV artists. Artist/researcher Koh Nguang How, also an early member of TAV, will exhibit a selection from his extraordinary archive of documents and photographs, providing a historical overview of TAV's activities.

The artist-run space Sparwasser HQ was established in Berlin in 2000, during a period of enormous change in the city since the fall of the Wall in 1989. Artists from all over the world have flocked to Berlin to live and work, and it has rapidly transformed into a major center for contemporary art. This internationalism has inspired Sparwasser HQ's wide-ranging approach, involving artists from around the globe, in projects that take place in a range of sites and situations.

Sparwasser HQ emphasizes communication, involving artists, gallery visitors and museum staff in the process of artistic production. A strategy of 'invitation' runs through their activities at their space in Berlin's Mitte and in galleries and museums elsewhere. For Sydney, artists Lise Nellemann, Egill Sæbjörnsson, Ariane Müller, Jole Wilcke and Tino Sehgal together contribute works that bring Sparwasser's HQ's inclusive methodology to the MCA.

Discussions and social activities are key elements within their presentation, held alongside Egill Sæbjörnsson's kinetic video installation *The Wall*, Ariane Müller's architectural sculptures, and Tino Sehgal's voice work *This is Propaganda*. Also included in Sparwasser's presentation is the video archive project *Old Habits Die Hard*, for which Nellemann and collaborator Heman Chong invited 50 artist-run spaces from around the world to contribute an artists' video work. This archive maps a global network of artists, connected via email and mail couriers, and outside of official or institutional channels.

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Images from previous installations by the Berlin-based artist-run space Sparwasser HQ.