

Beautiful Terrors

The artists in this group exhibition are living and dealing with a world engaged in an epic struggle. Overpopulation, rampant consumption, peak oil, global warming, and savvy terrorists, all seem to have a finger on the doomsday button, while we all hold our breath. These artists hopefully break the ice; after all, civilisation may hang in a delicate balance, yet everyone still needs to do the laundry, read about the latest Britney fiasco, and buy more cat food.

Paranoia and a state of terror can hold a fascinating appeal – the spectacle of a culture gripped in the *what if* and *what could* circumstances of a world seemingly at the precipice of self-detonation, places society on a hair-splitting continuum that swings wildly from one extreme to the other. This pedantic and collective urge to find safety and balance has ironically the opposite effect, often archived and disseminated through ludicrous press headlines and politicians passing shoddy legislation. Slowly, but surely, everyday life begins to transform, weighted by the burden of suspicions, fears, and official requests for heightened awareness.

Recent manifestations of this ‘spectacle of terror’ include the New Zealand government’s employment of the Terrorism Suppression Act¹ to investigate and raid the remote Maori community of Tuhoe, under the suspicion of terrorist activities². In Singapore recently, the escape of terrorist suspect Mas Selamat bin Kastari from a maximum security prison prompted the city-state’s largest manhunt in history. An official narrative emerged about the ‘danger of complacency.’ Having put the population on high alert, numerous false leads poured in, with the country’s main newspaper’s headline reading: “I Think I Saw Mas Selamat.”³

In retrospect, one has to find the humour in oxymoronic situations such as this dramatic game of *Where’s Wally*. Yes, the stakes are very real, but in dealing with tragic and frightening events, one goes through the compulsory stages of denial, anger, bargaining, depression, and eventually, acceptance. As a collective society, this process happens much slower, but there are always individuals looking forward and responding to the moment, as if the impact of the present has already passed. Generally speaking, they are the people who crack the first joke at a party.

Theodor Adorno wrote that ‘writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric,’ and the interpretation and application of this statement has been vigorously debated.⁴ The acceptance of this quote as a basic truth leads to other implied statements, which may be harder to swallow. For example, that ‘poetry’ (a metonym for literature and the arts) fails in its functions to convey and transform social reality. It may be argued that a certain kind of poetry may be barbaric or self-indulgent: one that closes an eye to the world, while painting with the other.

Yet, a contradiction lingers in this narrow reading of Adorno’s statement – that art cannot come close to describing the horrors of Auschwitz (here another substitute for genocide, disaster, etc), but isn’t art a tool to speak about the unspeakable? By implying that art as a language fails to adequately transpose reality, we are left culturally voiceless in attempts to remember history and avoid repeating it.

This brings up the issue of how artists and political artworks confront and respond to reality, and the responsibilities and expectations attached to those artists. Many strategies employed by politically and socially motivated artists are stuck in the grieving stage of anger and blame: they highlight an issue and obstinately state what’s wrong with it. The problem with this strategy is bound in the emotional intensity of didactic work, which fades with time. This work can also be guilty of preaching to the choir. Perhaps the character of an artist would be revealed, if faced with the end of the world: would she scream or laugh? The latter option leads to more creative responses. Following the dropping of atomic bombs on Japan during WWII, a culture of Apocalyptic fantasies in anime, manga, film, and pop culture spread like wildfire, its influence still visible in contemporary Japanese art (Takashi Murakami and

Katsuhiro Otomo's feature film, *Akira*, immediately come to mind). Whether the visions of these artists are closer to the realm of screaming or laughing depends on the individual artist, but one thing is certain: the idea of the world's obliteration is at once horrifying and engaging. Terrible and beautiful.

The artists in this group exhibition do not seek to romanticize or indulge in the aesthetics of terror, yet they are also not afraid to point out inconsistencies, revel in the foibles, and have a good time. Their responses come from their own views and biases, offering many particular truths in a personal context, rather than trying to conceive a narrative of one universal Truth. The exhibition does not seek to heal or simply provide pragmatic answers. After all, this is an art exhibition – not a peace conference. As Albert Einstein once said, *The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.*⁵

Young Sun Han

1 This bill was initially introduced as the Terrorism Bill in April, 2001. Following The 11 September, 2001 attacks on the United States, it was re-named and heavily altered before officially going into effect on 22 October, 2007.

<http://www.police.govt.nz/operation/national/act-info.html>

2 This story broke nearly 5 years to the date of the passing of the controversial Terrorism Suppression Act: 'Exclusive: Hunters alerted police to alleged terror camps' *The New Zealand Herald*, 15 October, 2005

3 'I think I saw Mas Selamat' *The Straits Times*, 13 March, 2008

'Singapore widens hunt for inmate' *Al Jazeera* 29 February, 2008

4 Actually, this quote is usually taken out of its full context from its original publication in *Prisms*, 1955, MIT Press. (Reprinted London, 1967). Nonetheless, it has offered an interesting point of debate for many artists and philosophers.

The full excerpt reads:

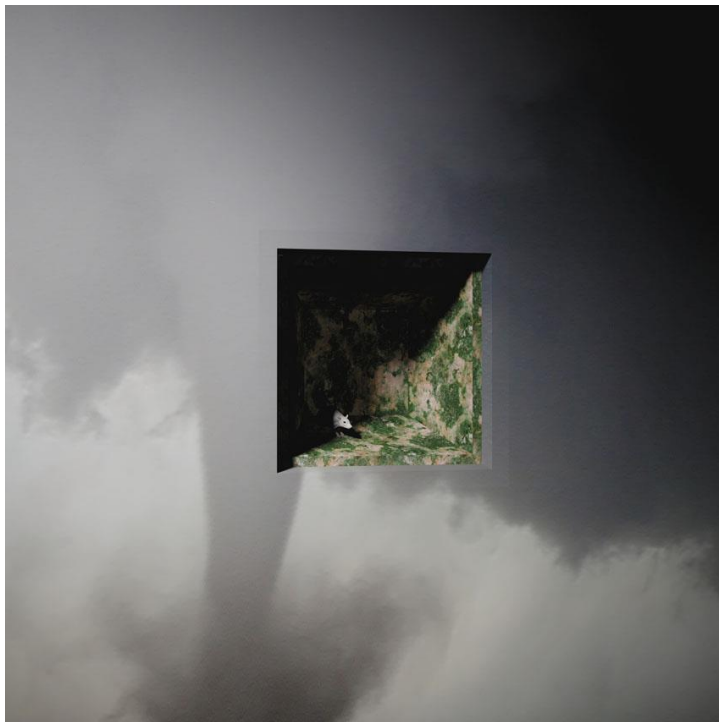
'The critique of culture is confronted with the last stage in the dialectic of culture and barbarism: to write a poem after Auschwitz is barbaric, and that corrodes also the knowledge which expresses why it has become impossible to write poetry today.'

5 Einstein, Albert. *The World as I See It*, Secaucus, New Jersey: The Citadel Press, 1999, p. 5.

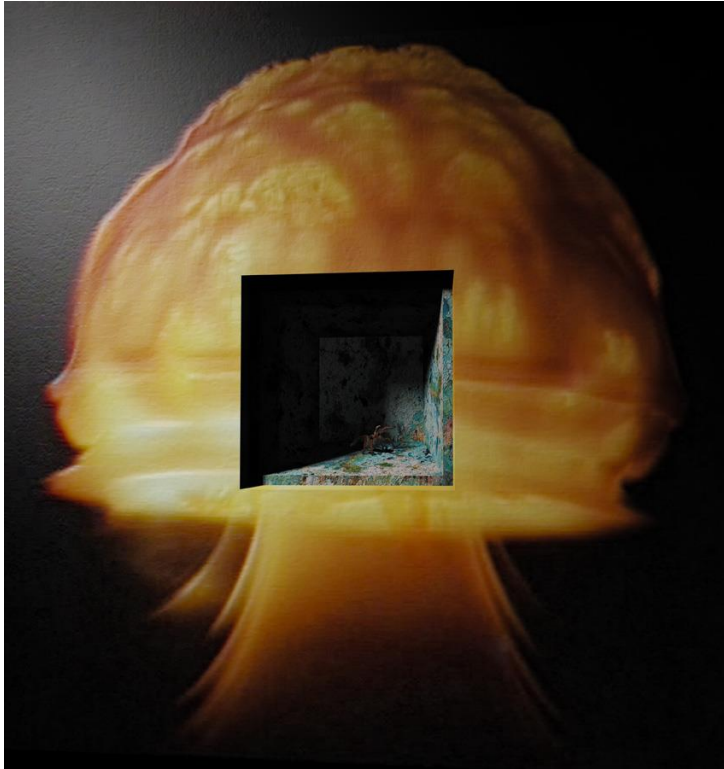
BRITT BUNKLEY



Britt Bunkley, *Mushroom Cloud*, polished granite, 400 x 450 x 400mm, \$6,800



Untitled (Tornado), Light jet print mounted to di-bond, 1200 x 1100mm, \$2,200



Untitled (Mushroom Cloud), Light jet print mounted to di-bond, 1200 x 1100mm, \$2,200



Spite, DVD disc; run-time approx 4 minutes; Edition of 6, \$900

SCOTT EADY



Boy, Fibreglass, acrylic, fabric, DVD disc 400 X 1200 X 400MM, \$7,000



Installation shot of *Boy*
LYNN HURST



Dark Times, Lambda print, edition of 3, 870 x 870mm, \$1,750 framed (\$1,400 unframed)



Domestic Sciences (Mururoa), Lambda print, edition of 3, 870 x 870mm, \$1,750 framed (\$1,400 unframed)



Domestic Sciences (Bikini), Lambda print, edition of 3, 870 x 870mm, \$1,750 framed (\$1,400 unframed)



Domestic Sciences, Lambda print, 1270 x 1000 x 35mm, \$2,150

MICHELE BEEVORS



How the West was Won, Fiberglass, steel, paint, approx. 1700 x 2400 x 2000mm (dimensions variable), POA

CHRISTIAN KEINSTAR



Churches, DVD presentation from a slide archive of 80 images (run time approx. 11 mins), POA



See above



See above

BIOGRAPHY

Michele Beevors Born 1964, Sydney
Lives and works Dunedin, New Zealand
Currently the Academic Leader of the sculpture department at Otago Polytechnic, Beevors received her MFA from Columbia University, New York, USA in 1994 through the Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. Her Masters of Arts (1993) is from the Australian National University, Canberra, Australia. Recent selected solo and group exhibitions include NZ Sculpture OnShore, Auckland (2008); *Drawn*, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, NZ (2007); *Bells and Whistles*, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, (2005); *Psycho Killer and Friends* Helen Lempriere Sculpture Exhibition Werribee Park, Australia (2004); *Hardy BY Nature*, Hocken Library Gallery, Dunedin, NZ

Trust, Tin Sheds Gallery, University of Sydney, Australia (2001). "My work is driven by two distinct theoretical concerns. An ongoing interest in developments in general cultural politics related to commodities and value, and feminist interventions in art. 'Debbie Does Disney' follows up on ideas of cultural imperialism in commodity form and enacts the debate: value over aesthetics."

Lynn Hurst Born 1955, Denver, Colorado, USA
Lives and works Wanganui, New Zealand
Lecturer at the Quay School of the Arts, Wanganui, UCOL. She received her MFA from the University

(2002); *In Kmart we*

Brit Bunkley Born 1955, NYC, New York
Lives and works: Wanganui, New Zealand
He is the Head of Sculpture at the Quay School of the Arts, Wanganui UCOL in New Zealand. His educational history includes: MFA, Hunter College, New York, USA (1980-1984); BFA, Minneapolis College of Art and Design, USA (1975-1977); Macalester College, St Paul, USA (1973-1975) Recent selected solo exhibitions include: Mary Newton Gallery, Wellington, NZ (2007); *Rural Vignettes*, video installation, Auckland NZ Film Archive Gallery (2006); *Toto, I have a Feeling We Are Not in Kansas Anymore*, Lopdell House, Auckland, 2005; *3D Works: Signs ("and other similar entities")*, Te Tuhi - The Mark, Pakuranga, Auckland (2002); *Digital Reflections*, Manawatu Gallery, Palmerston North, NZ (2000); *Monuments and Icons*, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ (1998). Brit Bunkley is a multimedia artist, who has shown his work across the Americas, China, Europe, and Austral-Asia as part of screenings, festivals, commissions, and major institutional exhibitions. As a leading artist utilising 3d digital techniques to create computer-generated rapid prototypes, he has been the recipient of numerous grants. His work is held in public and private collections across New Zealand and the USA. Bunkley has also curated numerous exhibitions related to the use of cutting edge digital technology.
(www.britbunkley.com)

Scott Eady Born 1972, Auckland
Lives and works Dunedin, New Zealand
Lecturer at Otago Polytechnic. Eady received his BFA and MFA from the Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland (1994, 1999 respectively). Recent selected solo exhibitions include: *Dickkopf*, Roger Williams Contemporary (formerly Auckland, 2006); *Rear Window* (2004) and *Honeymoon on the Pigroot* (2003) both at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery, NZ; *Signs*, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin (2002); *Posie Pony*, Ivan Anthony, Auckland (2001). Followers of Eady's work will recognise his play on tropes of masculinity in pop culture, through highly polished sculptures. His work has been featured in leading NZ arts institutions such as the Auckland Art Gallery Toi O Tamaki, Physics Room, Govett-Brewster, and Wellington City Art Gallery. Eady was Frances Hodgkins Fellow, University of Otago in 2002 and was the winner of the Wallace Award Development prize in 2003. Several works are held in the Wallace Trust, Chartwell Trust, Hocken Library Collection, and Te Papa Tongarewa.

of California, Santa Barbara (1982) with previous graduate study at Pratt Institute, NY, USA. BFA from Eastern Kentucky University, USA (1977)
Recent selected solo and group exhibitions:
Whanganui Alternatives 2008, WHMilbank Gallery, Whanganui, NZ; *Alternatives*, Hartwick College, Oneonta, New York, USA (2007); *Quay to Quay*, Aaron Laurence Gallery, Wellington, NZ (2006); *Readings from Scientific America*, Quay Gallery, Quay School of the Arts, UCOL, Wanganui, NZ (2005); *Lynn Hurst*, Oedipus Rex Gallery, Auckland, NZ (1999); *Domestic Disasters*, E.L. Myers & The Deconstructed Self, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, NZ (1998 & 1999). Awards include an National Endowment for the Arts, Visual Artist Fellowship, USA (1989) Cultural arts Council of Houston Fellowship, NEA, 1989) and a Ford Foundation Artists Grant, USA (1981). *The works are composites, not what they seem at first glance. The serviette series are miniature history paintings, gouache on rag paper, often employing single-hair brushes. They are replications, imitations and altered versions of images from mass media by way of a time consuming archaic craft. The images are then preserved and recorded by digital scanning, capturing information at such high resolution we are able to see what the naked eye can't. Layers are made, shadows and glows fabricated, backgrounds constructed and the final image comes together, linked, merged and flattened.*

Christian Keinstar Born 1975, Dirschau, Poland.
Lives and works in Cologne, Germany
After moving to Germany in 1989, Keinstar or "nostar" studied design at the Fachhochschule Aachen. He was guest student at the Kunstakademie Munich in 2003, and completed his diploma at the Academy of Media Arts in Cologne (2005). Selected exhibitions include: *Cover Me*, Lukas Feichtner Galerie, Vienna (2008); *New Talents*, the young biennale, Cologne (2008) & Foerderkoje Art Cologne (2008); Wallraf-Richartz Museum & Foundation Corboud, Cologne (2006); *The White Tape*, Melkweg, Amsterdam (2006); *The ABC, semiotics of resistance*, Neurotitan Galerie, Berlin (2005); The Spiridon Neven DuMont Prize exhibition, Art Cologne (2005); *Drunk Sculptures*, Rheinschau Art Cologne Projects (2004); *Bad Boys Can Wait*, W.S. Burroughs-CutUp, Kunsthaus Rhenania Cologne (2004). In addition to his numerous commissioned projects and on-site public installations, Keinstar is the recipient of the Villa Aurora Los Angeles Residency Scholarship (2008), Sylt Quelle Residency (2006), and winner of the Spiridon Neven DuMont Preis and Sony Wega Motion Art Artist (both 2005). Keinstar has presented works regularly at art fairs around the world through his gallery, Lukas Feichtner, Vienna. Working in video, performance, photography, and live sculpture, the artist is known for his postpunk attitude and references to gothic and abject states of being. (www.keinstar.de)

