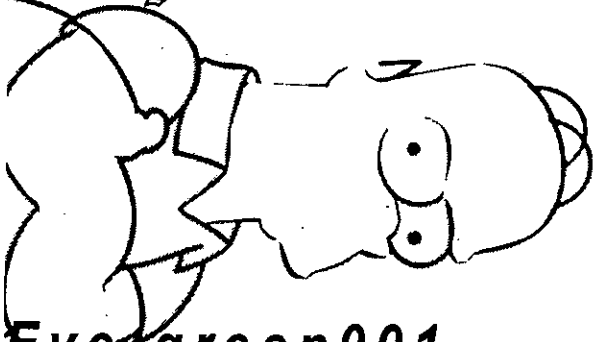


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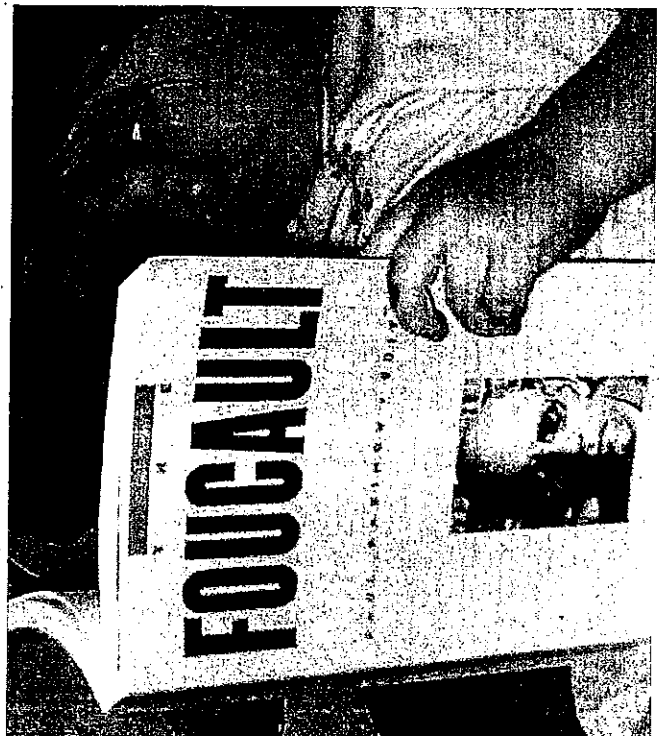
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Inside covers from Ida Ekblad while Liv Barrett is trying to tell a crock from a comfortable shoe, with work by Hany Armanious, Christopher L.G. Hill and James Deutsher. Masato Takasaka's adventures around Prog-rock are focused on through a detail spread and Hao Guo discusses Lust, Caution but not his love life. Pat Foster and Jen Berean rearrange, reflect and interview the people who live-out their spatial arrangements. Two letters that have been sent by Rob McKenzie show up and A Constructed World talk about the absence and presence of their art collection. Lochie Bradfield develops a kind of creation myth and other writing. ffixXed discuss their approach to making clothes in the over-saturated consuming-obsessed life, while the image-based blog collective Jah Jah Sphinx makes its first appearance in print form with two Evergreen spreads laid-out by guest design-star Josh Petherick. Justin Clemens and Anthony Gardner talk about the point of politics and art in an extended interview in collaboration with SPEECH blog and Christopher L.G. Hill works on a self-governed thesis represented in unedited part. James Deutsher reflects on space and some time in Japan, while Bianca Hester's occupation of London space The Showroom is seen here through an image spread. Works and photos from diplomat-turned-artist Jota Castro with words by his Melbourne gallerist, Jarrod Rawlins, about their experiences at the NADA art fair. Alex Vivian's hardcore new age drawing on the back cover and featuring an A3, hands-on, pull-out-poster with a drawing by Chris L.G. Hill and Artmaze from Nick Selentsch.



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The Office Project and Incident at the Museum

Pat Foster and Jen Berean

The two projects, *The Office Project* at the Margaret Lawrence Gallery at the VCA, and *Incident in the Museum* at the Monash University Museum of Art, were undertaken in 2005 and 2006 respectively. Both projects involve the permanent renovation of working spaces within the galleries. The Office Project, as the name suggests, was undertaken in the office, and the Incident in the Museum project was undertaken within the document storage room of the Museum.

The Office Project involved building a new workstation for the Gallery Director, Vikki McInnes, and her staff. The workstation was constructed entirely from the objects and gallery detritus already within the space. Structurally the workstation requires a degree of thought before things are removed or added, as it is reliant on these bits and pieces to remain standing. Over two years have passed now and it's still functioning, which is good.

The incident in the Museum project was similar in its purpose. A document storage room, that was particularly overloaded, was refashioned into a more orderly state. Like *The Office Project* a large workstation was created, which houses the catalogues and books. The form that this structure took was determined by its requirements. Again, this project used only what was available within the space when we arrived.

Both projects were intended to continue to change through the interaction of the people using the spaces.

Now that time has passed we thought it would be beneficial to chat with the people using these spaces, to evaluate the successes and the failures.



PAT FOSTER & JEN BEREAN IN
CONVERSATION WITH VIKKI
McINNES

PAT FOSTER & JEN BEREAN I guess to begin with we could talk about the concept of literally working within an art project, with the idea that your interaction with the workspace has a direct sculptural affect. We presume that this is not something that you constantly consider, with the placement of a piece of paper, etc...But how about your addition of a new desk for the new staff member? Were there any concerns?

VIKKI McINNES It's an interesting question, because the office as sculpture actually is something that I constantly consider. Not, as you say, in the conceptual or physical positioning of every single element all of the time and the space certainly looks nothing like an artwork at certain chaotic moments but there is a wall plaque at the entrance to the office stating:

*The Office Project, 2005
Pat Foster and Jen Berean*

It's something I see every morning when I come in to work, and every day it reiterates the fact that I work within an art project. Of course, visitors remind me of it during the day, too.

Nearly two and a half years down the line, and the office has been the subject of so many conversations about art's role in society, and the strange and complex ways we engage with our constructed environment. I guess it's always there somewhere at the back of my mind that I am completing the artwork while I work, or performing in some way and this is reinforced by the fact that the office has a glass wall so that everything we do inside is fully exposed to public view.

When the project was first realised, there were two of us working out of the office, but Kate was only here two days a week, so mostly it was just me negotiating the space. When Meredith joined the team, we very consciously located her workspace within the existing architecture of the office, and we didn't really have to disrupt the space. When Ieuan moved in, however, we had to make a new work station, and we didn't want to bring a piece of

institutional furniture in (though that may have been quite subversive!), so we decided to construct a desk from office detritus to grow the office.

It's great that you say that in the back of your mind you feel like you are completing the artwork while you work. The intentions of the project, after our hands left, was that it was to be completely subject to change, and that this change would manifest in many ways throughout the life of it. In retrospect, we feel that the original form we made out of the waste and excess of the existing office was probably naively optimistic, and that realistically in order to make it completely function, as you require, you would have to make significant changes.

Can you talk about the functional shortcomings and failures of the project, and consequently the changes that have taken place, both things you have noticed and things you have changed yourself. And apart from the physical changes, do you think there has been a change in the way the project is read as an artwork?

I don't think the project was naively optimistic. Certainly not in the way of New Babylon for example (the collective architectural project developed, but never realised, by Dutch Situationist architect Constant), or even the 'Anti-Design' culture of Italian visionaries Superstudio, which proposed a sparse, but functional space for everyone to live in free from any superfluous objects.

The Office Project seems to have more in common with Rem Koolhaas' 'Program', the notion which posits "an act to edit function and human activities" as the basis of architectural design. I think the project has had an impact on the way we now use the office, rather than falling short on a previously existing operational or functional level.

For example, you embedded two of the three filing cabinets within the desk, on their sides; basically inaccessible. Instead of finding alternate storage for files etc, I've almost eliminated hard copy file storage from my life, which has been very liberating. There's also a case of wine that seems to be structurally integral to the desk, which I am afraid to move. I guess we're cellaring it.

On the other hand, we have had to bring in some shelving to house things like tools and publications – things that we need to access readily and often and couldn't accommodate within the desk. And, Kate has pinned up some art works that her children have made, along with some cool found items, so the 'superfluous objects' are creeping back in.

That's interesting that you think of Koolhaas' ideas of editing. I think that is how we were trying to think about the idea of interaction, as a way of editing the form that we made. And it's exciting to hear you talk of how that interaction has 'edited' your activity within the space. Although for you and your staff it seems that the editing has had mostly positive results, this could have gone the other way.

Maybe it is about interaction and adaptation, or, negotiation. In a way you are constantly negotiating with this form that we have left for you to deal with. Without this happening, say if we had created a fully functional space that satisfied all your working needs, then this project wouldn't be much fun to talk about at all. Maybe it would have been more about design. We remember when the project was first realised you spoke to us about an argument you had had with a curator, who perceived the project to be interior design.

There have been a number of instances when the project has been read in that way. Of course the fact that you have engaged some of the strategies and aesthetics of interior design in this project necessarily (and deliberately) problematises the way we read it, and I'm sure the happy plants and the personalised coffee mugs contributed to the perception that you were giving the office a makeover!

The single person who has really hated the project is the ex-Administrator of the Art School, but her concerns were more about occupational health and safety than an art/design dialectic, and she was convinced that the reconfigured lighting system was going to crash to the floor at any moment and kill someone. The way we have interacted with the space has been mainly positive but, equally, it hasn't been without its frustrations. Several times I've found myself on hands

and knees in the desk's tiny crawlspace, trying to reach an object embedded in its recesses. We're used to getting dirty in our work and to approaching things creatively, I guess.

As you say, if you had delivered an idealised office space that simply streamlined our working lives, it wouldn't be such an interesting project and a rather meaningless intervention. I think the project has broken down some of the hierarchies that previously existed, both structural and operational ones.

When we launched the project, it was great to have the audience moving between the office and the gallery spaces and, since then, we have had a couple of requests from artists to do small projects in the office space. People seem to feel that they can more freely walk into the office... It's interesting, though, that one of the commissions directly resulting out of *The Office Project* was for a designer who wanted you to develop a project in his new store. Clearly, the design aspect of the work is inevitable, and I wonder how the work was approached not just within a design context but also in a strictly commercial environment.

*That's a good point. We don't really consider that particular commission to function conceptually in the same way as *The Office Project*. We have done other design and architecture projects where elements of our art practice are apparent and this always raises some questions between the two of us. We tend to try and separate the two practices, but considering much of our art refers to architecture and design then clearly there is an odd contradiction here. Perhaps though this contradiction is what keeps us interested in making the type of work that we make.*

A visiting curator from Japan just left the gallery. The office is a total mess today as we're in the middle of grant writing hell, but the desk was the first thing she noted and we spent a good part of her visit discussing *The Office Project*.

As ever, the project foregrounds what we do... even when we're neck high in administration and bureaucracy, art remains at the centre of it all.

PAT FOSTER & JEN BEREAN IN CONVERSATION WITH MAX DELANY

PAT FOSTER & JEN BEREAN Max, previously you have mentioned that you see this as a failed utopian project, this is an interesting reflection, that both of us are inclined to agree with. We feel it's worth discussing a little more.

The project began with a series of meetings with you and your staff in order to consider the functional requirements. In a rather back to front manner though we approached you with this project. When a client hires a designer to solve a functional issue within a given space, it is typically considered a failure if these requirements aren't met.

MAX DELANY I was attracted to the way in which your work seemed to operate at the threshold of aesthetics and utility, and in your use of the museum and its materials as the medium of your work. Also, in a general sense, I am keen to welcome artistic intervention within the fabric our operations.

We have a space – previously a theatrette – which became an over-flow storage space dedicated to a library, books, journals, archives and artists' files, works-on-paper drawers, and storage for other works of art. The space had become over-encumbered, and we jumped at the chance that an artistic intervention – or aesthetics of administration – might solve our problems... This in itself was perhaps a utopian aspiration. The material in the theatrette – primary and secondary sources – is the raw material of art history, so it was also of interest to see how a new approach to this matter might be achieved. Finally, the potential to focus attention upon an area usually private or accessible only to staff, researchers and volunteers – by making it open and available to the public – was also of interest.

However, in this circumstance it was understood that this was an art project. If the requirements have not been met does this render the project a failure? How does this alter the reading of the project as an artwork?

It's a good question. Failure has to be measured against motivations and objectives. Ours, as well as yours.

I guess the objective of the project was to attempt to create a sculptural form that was determined by the needs of the given space and the people using it.

From the perspective of sculpture the project was a magnificent achievement... Turning something that is protean, unwieldy, uncontainable, into something even more so, but shaped according to formal and aesthetic imperatives.

It also happily accorded with the objectives of the *Incident in the Museum* series, which is an occasional program of site-specific works, which engage with the museum, its spaces and publics in different ways. By its nature, the so-called 'incident' is usually a temporary or ephemeral event, so to expect an enduring, static or controlled outcome would be misplaced.

The thinking was that by creating an organisational system for the catalogues etc. a sculptural form would emerge, albeit one in constant flux. With both the project at Monash and Vikki's office, both obviously within art institutions, it was of particular interest that these forms would be physically made from and determined by the workings of the gallery, and, in a broader sense art. The objective being that something would take shape, as an artwork, that did not bring anything new per se but rather reorganised itself into being.

As far as the project's status as a work of art, we were intrigued and delighted with the outcome formally, and for the engagement it afforded, as the outcome of your research, and of discussions between you and MUMA staff.

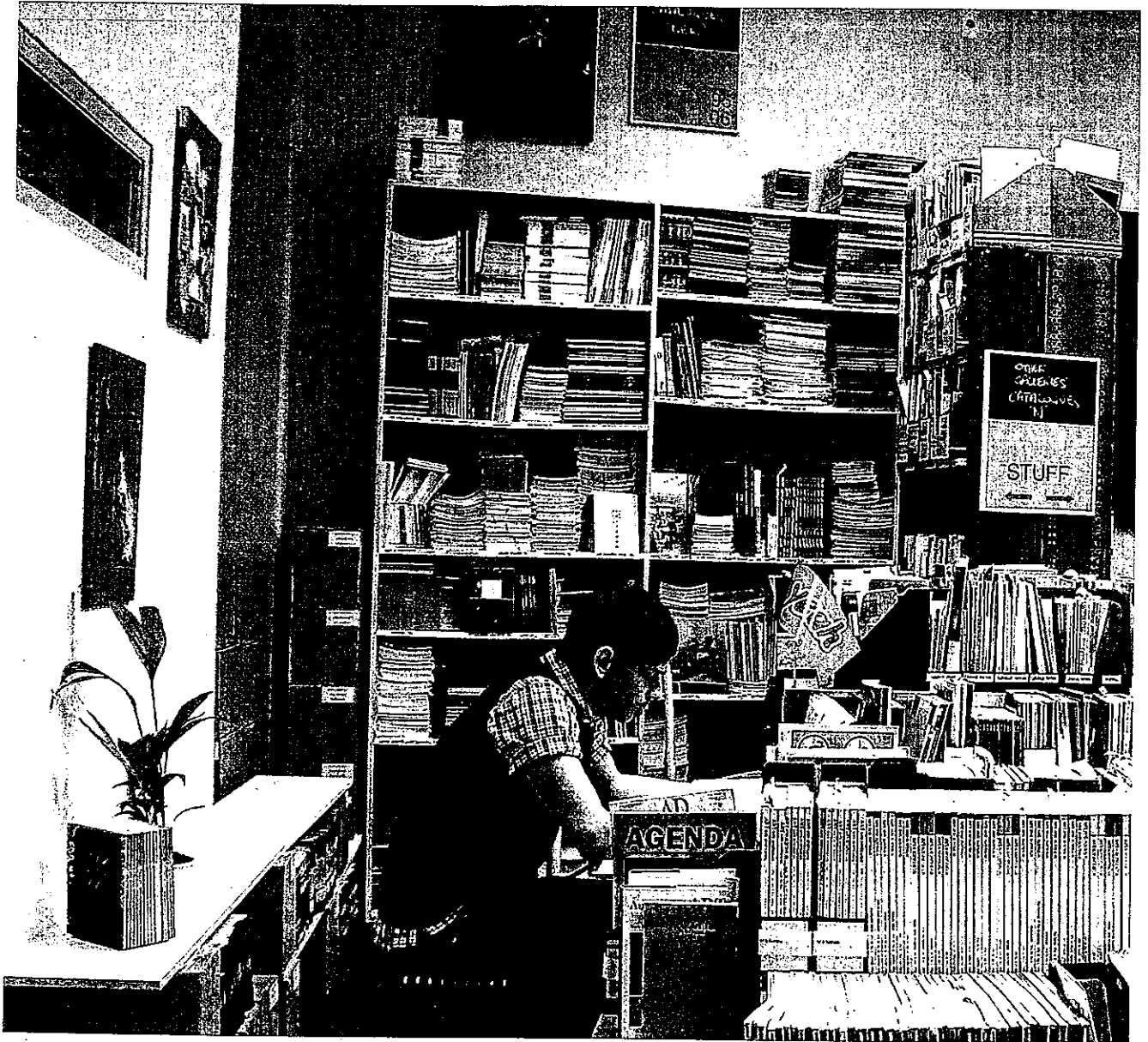
The project allowed us to reflect upon a space in the museum that might otherwise

go unquestioned, or become ordinary. Whilst the utilitarian character of the project may not have endured, this in itself is not a bad thing...

If we privately hoped for an ideal space, which transformed the information and documentation stored in the theatrette into a more functional and pleasant space for staff, volunteers and guests, this has not been the case, and in this sense, might be likened to a utopian aspiration unfulfilled. Then again, some of the most vital, critical artistic developments might be seen in retrospect as a series of heroic failures. The project continues to remind us of the impossibility of imposing order, containment or classification on artistic processes (which inevitably underpin the museological enterprise).

We imagine the space is piled high with boxes full of catalogues, unable to be contained within the already bloated system that we left you with.

What's interesting is that it is in the nature of the museum to continue to create information and the storage of this within the space alters the form, it becomes something else. Even if it is a total mess and the system doesn't work perhaps it is still operating as some kind of sculpture, possibly it depends upon when we stop considering it as an artwork. Maybe that doesn't stop at the same time as the intended function.



P16 'The Office Project', Pat Foster and Jen Berean, 2005

P19 P21 'Incident at The Museum', Pat Foster and Jen Berean, 2006