

Video art comes of age

Quality works show maturity and evolving focus in the digital age, writes **Donal Fitzpatrick**

Occasionally, either by design, or as a result of an overlap in Perth Festival programming and gallery planning, a city finds itself host to exhibitions of such quality and sufficiency as to transform the viewing experience into a study centre for particular artists or art forms.

This is the case in relation to video art in three exhibitions which give the public the opportunity to gauge its status as a mature discipline with a 50-year history and to measure its future trajectories in the hands of younger artists.

An exhibition of the short films of Danish artist Jesper Just, curated by Chris Malcolm at the John Curtin Gallery, defines the interpretive practice of artists who use video as a cinematic art form. Just's work references the grammar, editing techniques and camera movements of cinema free of the usual narrative expectation and linear time conventions of cinema.

It would be a mistake, however, to see these as merely shorter preparatory films leading to later success with a Hollywood feature film. On the contrary, Just delights in video's space/time freedoms and builds a convincing fictional realm of association driven by a rhythmic sensibility and emotional current that circles through his short-duration works.

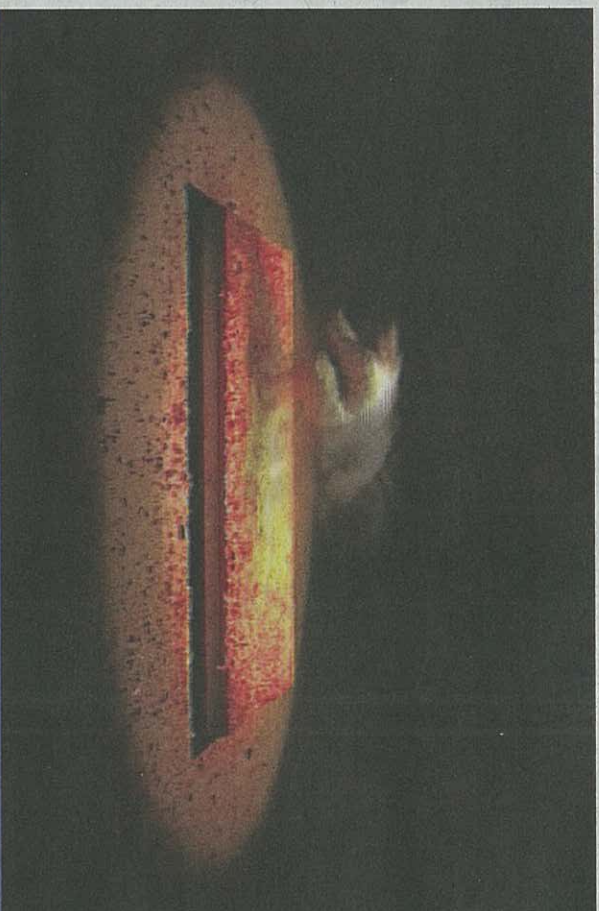
When we follow the circularity of gesture around the room in *A Vicious Undertow* 2007, we surrender to the logic of its cliché and are swept up the spiral stair of the work's conclusion in spite of ourselves. In *Something to Love* 2005, he creates an overwhelming atmosphere of loss as we trace the tears of an older man as he drives his car around an indoor carpark, mirroring in his turns our own inability to define emotional states.

An artist of Just's calibre has the uncanny ability to turn the camera's conceptual gaze in upon itself, opening up its hidden fictive spaces and presenting the viewer with an emotive experience of desire, devoid of carnality.

These are optically lush and beautifully constructed works shot on film and transferred to DVD, which benefit greatly from the museum-like installation they have been afforded here.

The work of Irish artist John Gerrard, curated by Leigh Robb at PICA, represents the maturing of video into the digital era. Gerrard constructs his work from thousands of photographs taken on site and then builds on this information in the computer, realising the seamless time-based experiences we see exhibited at PICA.

These are not photographic images but 3-D models constructed not from light but from data. In this way, his practice affirms Cezanne's dictum that light ceases in the eye and images are made with our brains. In the works of Gerrard we see the apparently familiar — rural landscapes, industrial and farming architecture and dust storms — but there is a constant presence of disquiet and unease about these images and the inescapable sense something is missing.



SKILLFUL Wang Quinsong's 123456 Chops exploits the ability to stretch and dilate time.



SEAMLESS John Gerrard's work is a maturing of video into the digital era.



FREEDOMS Jesper Just's Bliss and Heaven defines the interpretive practice of artists who use video as a cinematic art form.

In John Barrett-Lennard's excellent catalogue essay, he speaks of the absence of the human in these images, but I would have to differ. I think what is missing here is the world itself. There is a total sense of the human, the singular complete vision of one person, a constructed model of the world adjacent to but alien from our own.

Gerrard offers us a radically different conception of the medium of video, beyond and even after the exhaustion of the cinematic. This is video as sculpture, as works that exist as potent challenges to our own convictions and interpretations of existence.

Where to from here? Is there a next generation of video artists?

The results are startling and original works representing a diverse array of approaches which bring other practices from performative art to photography into their works.

Wang Quinsong's piece 123456 Chops, where a butcher wields two meat cleavers to dazzling effect in reducing an animal carcass to a spreading bloody pulp, exploits the medium's ability to stretch and dilate time.

Morgan Wong Wing-fat's work Plus-Minus-Zero explores time through a comical, performative attempt to eradicate the time-zone difference between Hong Kong and Sapporo. To this effect he has snow falling upwards as he walks forward and others pass him skiing backwards.

In Kan Xuan's work Looking, Looking, Looking for... a spider crawls over a naked couple. The camera closely follows its meanderings while a childlike lullaby fills the headphones. Li Ming has an extraordinary work titled Comb where the claw of an industrial digger, after breaking through the wall of a building, approaches the back of a quietly seated figure and gently commences to stroke her hair.

All three exhibitions should not be missed. **1**

Jesper Just is showing at John Curtin Gallery until April 8. **John Gerrard** is showing at PICA until April 3. **The Knife's Edge** opens at Fremantle Arts Centre tonight and runs until May 15.

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