

## EXHIBITION REVIEWS

her body out of the tapes and paper, the remnants on the canvas like the remains found when a butterfly emerges from a chrysalis.

Christian Thompson's video work, *Desert Slippers* (2006), focuses on his Aboriginal identity and culture and lineage, land and the relationship between a father and son. In the work his father wipes his own shoulders and torso in a symbolic gesture, speaks a few words in his language, and then takes his hands and transfers his symbolic sweat to his son's shoulders. This is an extremely personal moment between father and son and is a gesture of greeting used by their clan, the Bidjara People.

Artist Paul McCarthy uses video to talk about painting as he explores a totally different ritual. McCarthy is holding a large knife that he chops down onto his fake sausage-like fingers. The artist cries as he chops away and hits one finger repeatedly. It is a macabre piece telling a tale of a painter's despair due to living in times where some in the art world have declared that "painting is dead." Vito Acconci in his *Theme Song* (1973) hears a love song; we hear his improvised response as he sings and speaks out words to the singer of the love song. Acconci says things like, "I wouldn't impose my way on you, but just do what you want. I will wait."

A journey through this exhibition is a journey in the art of the poetics of a "verb."

Everyone here is doing something, which surely is the essence of art.

**Sandy Caldwell**

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### Experimenta Recharge: 6th International Biennial of Media Art at RMIT Gallery

In an age of increasing State security and greater citizen insecurity, the 6th International Biennial of Media Art is focused on expanding our understanding of where knowledge changes when it is presented in different cultural contexts and technological forms. It is also concentrated on where the making of unconventional perspectives by experimental artists illuminate existing knowledge and meaning for a new generation and where an artist maybe able to lead us to entirely new modes of consciousness; here, all by way of art that is experienced as instances of subversion, poetry, absence, retrievably, and phenomenology.

Experimenta has been presenting this Biennial as a recurring touring exhibition, which began in 2003 as an attempt to evoke and intrigue a multi-sensory media understanding through significant and ambitious commissioning of Australian and international artworks. Since then, every two years, it has become an exhibition of contemporary media touring Australia and internationally, as a moment

of contemplation on the connection between media art and culture.

*Recharge* is the title given to the 6th Biennial by the artistic director Jonathan Parsons. He has curated the artists in *Recharge*, as he says, to "alert to both the intimate and the broader cultural contexts through which they move and live. By listening, watching, thinking, and making, they recharge knowledge and meaning systems, reinvigorating these systems or radically transforming them."

Parsons presents more than 18 works from 14 Australian artists and groups including Brook Andrew, Cake Industries, Maree Clarke, Christy Dena, Michaela Gleave, Svenja Krantz, Khaled Sabsabi, Leisa Shelton, Garry Stewart, Tele Visions Afterlude, Masha Tupitsyn, Darren Verhagen, Darren & Stuart McFarlane, Billy Atkins Yunkuura & Ariel Sohan Hayes, and Raymond Zada. There are five artists and group such as Maitha Demithan (UAE) Anaisa Franco (Germany/Brazil), Abel Korinsky (Germany), tEAMLAB (Japan), and Ei Wada (Japan).

A challenge for *Recharge* will be to engage with the traditional and the latest technological forms as interconnected temporalities, cultures, and histories through the use of different spaces, and the utilization of multidisciplinary works that draw from photography, installation, electronic sculpture, interactive and immersive media, robotics, bio art,

live art, sound art, 3D printing, animation, film, and video.

By recognizing the new visions for the future are naturally entangled with advanced sciences and traditional knowledge to which all the artists in *Recharge* contribute, Parson's idea is to perhaps offer an alternative reality to the actuality of national security agendas.

Ei Wada's poetic sound installation *Falling Records* attempts to capture and catalogue knowledge from the past. Appearing in Abel Korinsky's sound art collective, *Big Bang* explores what would happen if ancient sounds never disappeared and could be retrieved. Anaisa Franco's interactive robotic sculptures *Psychosomatics* manifest human emotions induced by obsessive game play. *Love Sounds* by Masha Tupitsyn is a sound collage that subverts the traditional movie-viewing experience into a listening one, presenting a 24-hour oral history of love in cinema.

Svenja Krantz's *Contamination of Alice Instance #8* uses the DNA of Alice, a young girl who died in 1973 and donated her body to science, to reveal the strangeness of having living fragments of an absent human body present. Christy Dena's *Magister Ludi* mischievously investigates the recent cultural phenomena of both computer and live 'escape room' puzzles through an interactive game installed in a vintage school desk. Cake Industries invites 15 subjects to have their portraits taken for *Simulacrum* using 3-D print-

ing technology to reinstate the sense of occasion and significance of portraiture. Brook Andrew's *De Amina* is an immersive work that creates an environment through which to ponder time, historical truths, and fictions.

Photographer Maitha Demithan has painstakingly knitted together digitally flat-bed scans of body sections to produce luminous images of her Emirati community. tEAMLAB's animation *100 Years Sea* draws on traditional Japanese art and logic to animate predicted sea-level rises.

Not to be missed is the extraordinary work by Khaled Sabsabi's *70,000 Veils*, which took more than three years to make and was the first time he used 3-D technology in his work. This is Sabsabi's most ambitious expression of the infinite. The work is articulated as an autobiographical 3-D media landscape. *70,000 Veils* is a 100 digital HD monitor installation measuring 13.2 x 2.4 meters with an irregular right-angle-shaped structure supporting the monitors.

As Hicham Khalidi explains the title *70,000 Veils* originates from the Prophet Mohammed's teaching: "There are 70,000 veils of light and darkness separating the individual from the divine." Sabsabi's interpretation of the Prophet is a transgressive view. It falls somewhere between being a respectful witness and an outsider to Islamic teaching. His is a continuum between these positions, a notion of the infinite bringing centuries of Sufism spirituality into the now. Like Colin McCahon, Sabsabi's spirituality is not about religion. Most monotheistic religions tend to set rules to contain infinite spirituality. Sadly, most artistic expressions of religious content are didactic and creatively limiting. On this point, Sabsabi, McCahon, Bill Viola, and Yayoi Kusama are exceptions. These artists tend to share Viola's view "that everything one does has a meaning in eternity."

Sabsabi has exploited the physical evidence of his



**Khaled Sabsabi, 70,000 Veil**, 2014, 100 channel digital video, 100 LCD monitors, 100 USB drives, 3D glasses, 190 x 1,240 cm. Image: Courtesy of the Artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane. Photography by Carl Warner. © the Artist.

memory to experience the spiritual essences within the teaching of *70,000 Veils*. The sounds and animated images are both separate and united but fittingly reflect the total compression of the work. This sets up a meditative hum with

the interchanging animated 3-D images. They change every second, 70,000 seconds of sound and equivalent animated images. They have been collected through Sabsabi's day-to-day experiences of local and international places,

people, buildings, family and friends. All of the sound and images has been sourced from video, audio, and photography recorded over ten years.

*70,000 Veils* highlights the awakening relationship contemporary orthodox Islam has with traditional Islam: how polarized these views are and how desensitized we have become to their difference. Then there is the ease to disconnect, then connect to a living human being. Ironically from the very discipline that Sabsabi uses.

All the art in *Recharge* explore questions we are sometimes afraid to ask. This inspiring exhibition will humble us to experience art that is resisting fear for openness, hatred for love; violence for peace, and greed for generosity.

**Kon Gouriotis**

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**Anaisa Franco, Paranoia**, 2010, reactive sculpture, dental porcelain, metal, perspex, approx. 15 x 11 x 20 cm. Edition 1/3. © the Artist. Photograph: Anaisa Franco: Courtesy of the Artist.



**Maitha Demithan, To the Moon**, 2009, Scanography, 180 x 122 cm. Image: Courtesy of Maitha Demithan and Tashkeel O.



**Christy Dena** in collaboration with **Marigold Barlett, Trevor Dikes, and Cameron Owen, Magister Ludi**, 2014, variable installation. Image: Courtesy of the Artists.

