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# BODY SUITS

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# BODY SUITS

produced and presented by  
ARTS ACCESS

curated by  
JANE TRENGOVE

**ARTS**  
*Access*

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# BODY SUITS

**Produced by** Arts Access  
**Curated by** Jane Trengove  
**Assistant Curator** Angela Jooste

## Acknowledgments

Mae Adams, NETS Victoria, National Gallery of Victoria  
Lauren Bain, Arts Victoria  
Tim Bass, Victorian College of the Arts  
John Brash  
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Libby Wheelahan and Claudia Funder, Performing Arts Museum  
Ruth Whittingham, Artistic Program Manager, Arts Access

Arts Access gratefully acknowledges the assistance of the artists and their dealers, and the directors of the venues included in the "Body Suits" tour.

## The Beatle Effect by Kate Reeves

Dust jacket concept by Jane Trengove and Kate Reeves  
Dust jacket design by Kate Reeves  
Beatle Wig, 1964, courtesy of the Performing Arts Museum, Victorian Arts Centre. Manufactured by Toltoys and retailed by Coles Variety Stores

## Photography

Photography by John Brash  
Cecilia Clarke's and Bronwyn Platten's work photographed by Bronwyn Platten  
Photograph of Jane Trengove as a child by Bob Trengove  
Ross Barber's digital image provided by the artist

## Publicity

Sharon Wells, Pan and Bacchanalia

## Design

a divadata design  
03 9690 5766

This exhibition has been developed and supported by Visions of Australia. Visions of Australia is the Commonwealth Government's national touring exhibitions grant program. It assists with the development or touring of cultural exhibitions across Australia. This project has been assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

Victorian Government's Arts 21 Policy, through Arts Victoria - Department of Premier and Cabinet.

The artists Bronwyn Platten and Cecilia Clarke have been assisted by the South Australian Government through Arts SA, Arts Industry Development.

Arts Access is assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body; Arts Victoria - The Department of Premier and Cabinet; and the Department of Human Services.





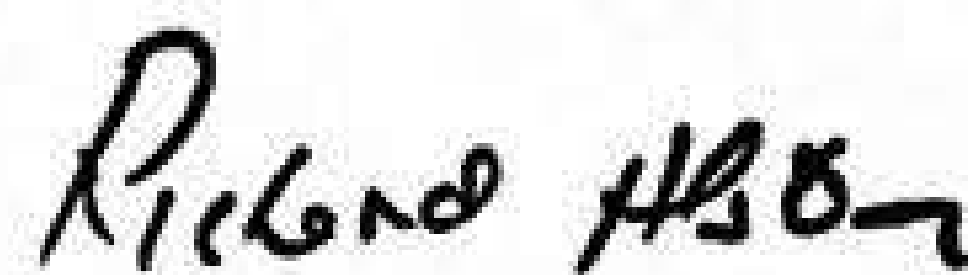
June 1997

The Commonwealth Government, through the Australia Council and Visions of Australia, is proud to be a supporter of **Body Suits**, a unique and exciting national touring art exhibition.

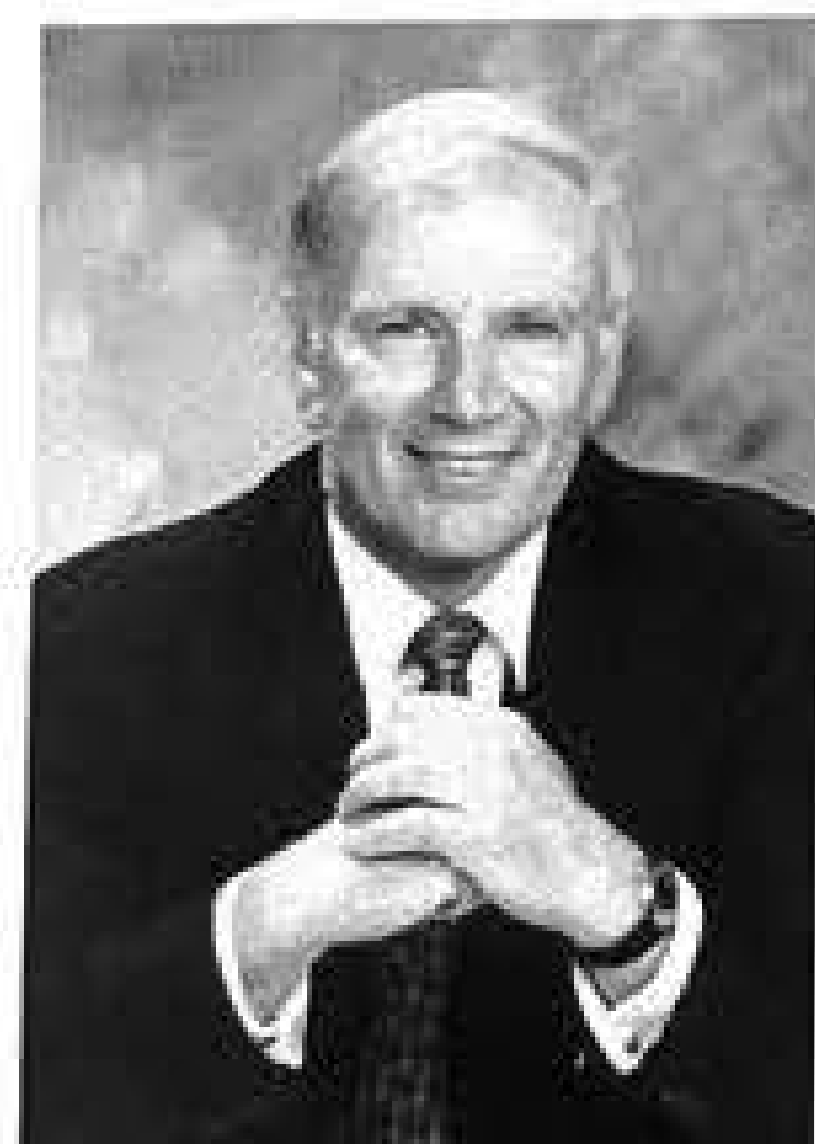
The Australia Council is the Government's primary arts funding body, which aims to promote excellence in the arts, as well as encouraging appreciation, understanding and enjoyment of the arts. Visions of Australia is the Government's touring program, which makes cultural material accessible to more Australians and has provided financial support for the development and touring components of this exhibition.

**Body Suits** will showcase the work of nine contemporary Australian artists and, in addition, will highlight the work of Arts Access, an organisation which promotes the issues of art and accessibility.

**Body Suits** will make a significant contribution to the arts throughout Australia. Congratulations to Arts Access for producing and presenting **Body Suits**.



**Richard Alston**  
Minister for Communications and the Arts



Arts Access is delighted to present **Body Suits**.

**Body Suits** is an important exhibition which investigates and interrogates preconceptions of the 'normal' body in our culture, through the work of nine significant contemporary Australian artists.

**Body Suits** links the work of artists with and without disabilities through the unifying theme of the body.

Through this unique national exhibition, Arts Access continues to be an active leader in creating awareness of the cultural contribution of people with a disability to the arts. Arts Access gratefully acknowledges the substantial assistance received to develop, exhibit and tour **Body Suits**, from Visions of Australia, the Australia Council, Arts Victoria, the Sidney Myer Foundation and the generous in-kind support from Pioneer.

On behalf of the Arts Access Board of Management, I would like to thank the staff at Arts Access who have played an integral role in the development and presentation of **Body Suits**, in particular Jane Trengove (Curator), Angela Jooste (Assistant Curator), Helen Bowman (Executive Director to June 1997) and Ruth Whittingham (Artistic Program Manager).

I have no doubt that the **Body Suits** exhibition will be a tremendous success and that audiences throughout Australia will benefit from this opportunity to view this thought provoking exhibition.



**Judy Morton**  
President  
Arts Access



# WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

Jane Trengove

*To gaze, is to look at something intently. To stare, is open eyed curiosity, bewilderment and horror (sometimes admiration).*

In Western culture, vision has been privileged as the primary sense, responsible for the formulation of knowledge as well as language. But what are the implications of sight being placed at the top of the sensory hierarchy? When something is recognised visually, it is named and placed in the order of things that are culturally *familiar*. Does the privileging of sight limit other knowledges?

The individual physical body is perceived visually by the external social body, and much information in "seeing" is loaded with attendant associations and meanings.

The social body constrains the way the physical body is perceived. The physical experience of the body, always modified by the social categories through which it is known, sustains a particular view of society.<sup>1</sup>

However, it can be said that there are two "seeings"; one from the external social body, and another from within the body of the individual - an internal, personal, view/position. The two views are divergent.

As Kate Reeves, in her story **The Beagle Effect** demonstrates, what was viewed as odd on the outside may appear perfectly alright - even desirable - inside Peter's mind.<sup>2</sup> But as the story reveals, Peter's love of his wig was construed as eccentricity, and had to be concealed, normalised, and finally altered forever. Once interfered with, Peter's unique proclivity comes to nothing - what shaped his individuality has been removed.

*Do we gaze or are we staring? It is rude to stare.*

The gaze of others might be troublesome to the individual. If so, then a strategy is necessary to deflect it. Emmanuel Levinas suggests that modesty, as a form of female behaviour, is a way of hiding from the directness of the male gaze.<sup>3</sup> This behaviour has been interpreted as an expression of purity and perfection. Thus modesty serves a dual

## WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

purpose, permitting women to both attract and hide from the male gaze.

*It is rude to stare*

Twentieth century French philosophers have some negative theories about vision and how it is applied in a social context. Sartre's post-war view asserts "the eye is dangerous" and "... hell is other people", referring to an experience of being hunted, held/caught and destroyed by the gaze of another.<sup>4</sup> His ideas have been considered paranoid. Michel Foucault was concerned with societal and institutional surveillance and how it restrains the lives and behaviour of individuals.

Both of these ideas describe the societal view of those individuals who experience bodily "difference". When the "different" body appears in public the outing often becomes a spectacle. People stare because this body is unfamiliar. The spectacle is one-sided as the "difference" is focussed upon. The staring and expressions of the other people betray the position (rejection) of the one who is different.

*You might not believe me.*

The (voluntary) removal of the "different" body may be the only escape from this unpleasant scenario. Absenting this body means that it will not partake in social activity. There is no strategy equivalent to women engaging in modest behaviour. Consequently, there is no admired status in this absence like the connotation of purity/perfection. The scarcity of artistic languages or traditions which describe the lived experiences of those who are not included in the mainstream is also a direct outcome of this absence.<sup>5</sup>

*Will they gaze or are they staring?*

Attention focused on the individual with an altered/disfigured body is frequently the result of unusual body additives. Freud said that people replicate themselves in all sorts of motor devices (cars, aeroplanes, trains, industrial equipment, computers), that these are extensions of the body and as such resemble it. Their purpose is to assist in the processes of the body, transport it, feed it, clean it and produce work for it.<sup>6</sup> Prosthetic devices used for mobility with ill or altered bodies are exactly as Freud describes, and are essentially practical. But they are the cause of fear and anxiety because they imply loss.

*They stare and stare and stare.*

**Body Suits** allows some scope for the "inside" view of an individual body to emerge and be seen by the social body - and for the "different" bodies to describe themselves and not be explained away pathologically. It is the two experiences of seeing and being seen that are central to this exhibition.

*"SUIT": a set of outer clothes, a costume for use in particular circumstances.*

Ed Burton's work **Adam/Eve you make me see my difference** 1997 has drawn the attention of the viewer to the mirror (speculum obscura). A mirror image is reversed and what is reflected will be "back to front". The artist has placed before us the site of his body change - the back of the torso - and inside it the spine. The site of change becomes the sight of change. His back has come to the front of our attention

Why are we surprised by the dismembered bear paws, faces and arms in Mikala Dwyer's **Tubeweight** 1996? Because all the little pieces do not make a whole. The toy bear parts surround us on the floor and the scene is very much like a childhood experiment in amputation techniques. But the bear will not be a body again. Clay-like substance is gunked onto the severed ends and partially covers the sore little heads, a vain attempt to mend the damage. Pastel organza tubes lead up and away from the bear massacre, each of them has been "soothed" with a gob of clay to put a stop to the gaping hole of loss.

Another imagined body is inferred in **Sleeplessness** 1997 by Colin Duncan. Here is a bed. But no body can lie on it, and no sleep will come. This bed resists the heavy body at rest, pristine and brittle, made with paper sheets complete with hospital corners, reminiscent of illness and the clinic. The shape, size and placement - so low to the ground - resembles a slab of a grave. The material thinness and fragility remind us that the corporeal existence of the body is temporary - the sleep implied here might be permanent. Our desire for sleep, sensuality and dreams is not realised, but our consciousness of death and aloneness is alerted.

The absence of an art object in Ross Barber's work is analogous to his personal experience. He has removed a body (art object) and replaced it with only part of a body - aural sense (soundwork). This suggests an altered status within Ross's body - new roles for the senses are now activated. The absent body in **Thinking, Making, Marking**

**BODY SUITS**



## WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING AT?

**Territory**", cannot be gazed upon or stared at. It will not be on view for our curiosity, amusement or rejection. Instead, we are gently asked to listen.

Susan Norrie changes the order of the senses, without providing any replacements. Her **Untitled** 1997, a long black box, sleek, 'moderne', invites us to peer hopefully inside, through a small window-like piece of glass, but there is nothing. The black box is a coffin for the eyes. It repels but also absorbs our gaze, and will not permit other sensual readings through touching, smelling or listening. Lyotard on Duchamp: "...it is necessary to blind the eye that believes in something; it necessary to make a painting of blindness, which plunges the self-sufficiency of the eye into disarray". Norrie rigourously obscures the obvious, she firmly reminds the viewer to be on guard, to be mindful and not to rely on face values.

Cecilia Clarke speaks differently. This means that for her, there cannot be dialogue in the usual way. How will we know her, if verbal communication is not possible? Her two works, both **Untitled** 1996-7, speak though; they tell us something simple and intense - **Cecilia Clarke is a rat** and **I wish I had a comb**. How often do people say these sort of things to themselves - the endless chatter inside our heads. These words reflect Cecilia's personal dialogue.

Bronwyn Platten works with Cecilia and has taken the photographs for Cecilia's work in this show. The relationship between the two women is such that Bronwyn assists the realisation of Cecilia's work. But Cecilia's presence is now found in Bronwyn's practice, it has leaked out and reveals itself in Bronwyn's work **Untitled (10-12)** 1997. There is something mysterious about this process and about the final result. The two dresses imply two feminine personae, and the fact that they are linked together suggests an interaction. There is a flow between them; moving them along, destination unknown.

The body presented in Ruark Lewis's suite of works (**Madonna and Child, Ian Fairweather: transcription drawing** 1991 - **Disguisement: of Corneille, 1845** 1997), is a body shaped by fortune/position. The body designed and occupied by its tenant - the mind. The body as purpose built, taking its form from its uses. Developing mannerisms and foibles as required to "suit" the body. A dash of pomp (perhaps), and some humility to temper it (maybe). The gestures that accessorise this body are socially constructed ideas of a person's worth and profession.

The childhood photo shows us the small recovering body in the 1950s engaged in a corrective "treatment". The leg brace may as well represent Jane Trengove in **Self-Portrait in Bright Blue** 1997, as it is so visibly distinctive. It has been removed from the body and bound in soft, cheery wool, suggestive of homecrafts found at church fetes. Cuddled up in wool ... or trapped and held? The leg brace is the device of movement, but because it symbolises a lack it ensures the wearer will not be welcome to move with the rest of the crowd.

- 1 Anthony Synnott "**The Body Social: Symbolism Self and Society**" Routledge, London, 1993, pp.229-230
- 2 Kate Reeves "**The Beatle Effect**", Body Suits, ex.cat. (dust jacket) Arts Access, Melbourne, 1997.
- 3 Martin Jay "**Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought**" University of California Press, Berkeley, 1993, p. 559.
- 4 Anthony Synnott op. cit., pp. 212-213.
- 5 David Lomas "Body languages: Kahlo and medical imagery", in **The Body Imaged** edited by Kathleen Adler and Marcia Pointon, Cambridge University Press, 1993, p. 6.
- 6 Giuliana Bruno "Interiors: Anatomies of the Bride Machine" **Rebecca Horn**, Guggenheim Museum, 1993, p. 87.
- 7 Jaques Lyotard "Les transformateurs Duchamp" 1997, Martin Jay op. cit. pp. 571-572.

The sound that is heard, is in a sense everywhere and nowhere in particular. The rhythmic sounds of a sculpture in the making, followed by the sounds of breathing, then a bird, marking territory are replicated over and over. It is quiet but insistent. Its presence "erupts" as one moves around the space.

*Statement by the artist*

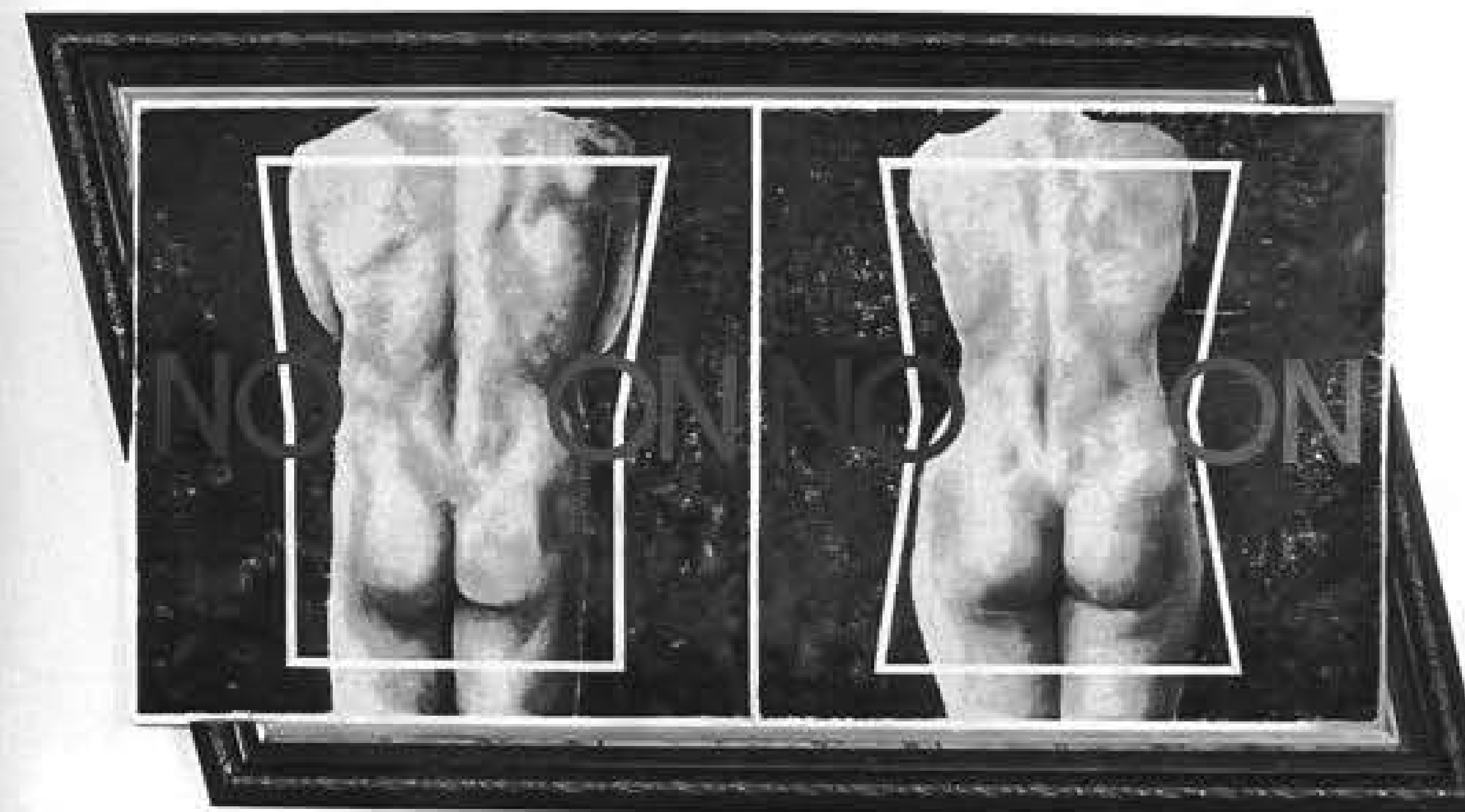


*Column - digital image*

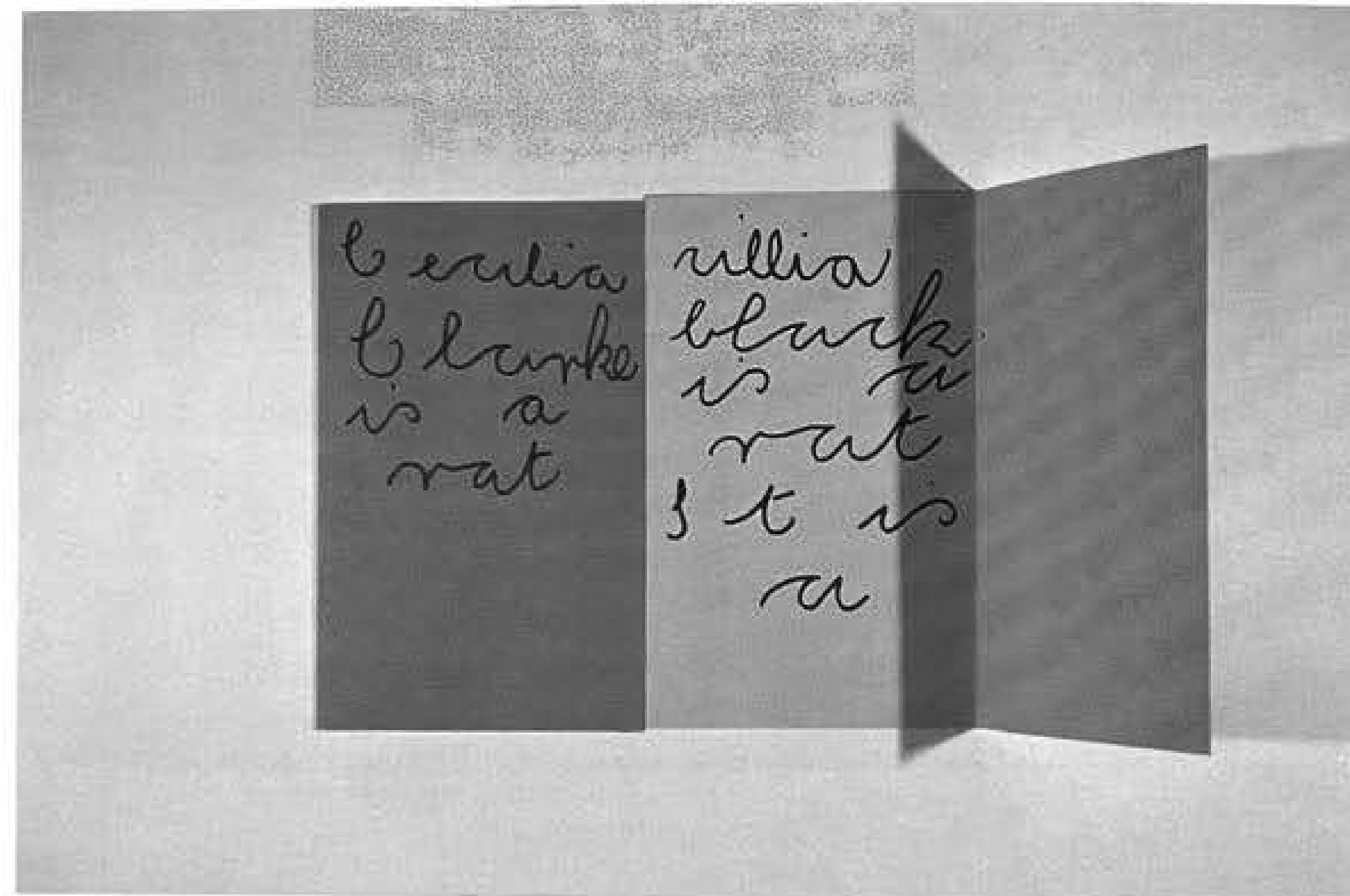
*PLEASE NOTE: The work on view  
in the exhibition is a variation of  
the original (pictured),  
Adam/Eve you make me see my difference*

The images of the muscle bound freaks, aged and thin wretches, young athletic and voluptuous bodies, have all been called into service under the heading of Adam/Eve. The back view denies identity and knowing. Ingres employed this in his Bather pictures although he used this as seduction rather than an act of defiance.

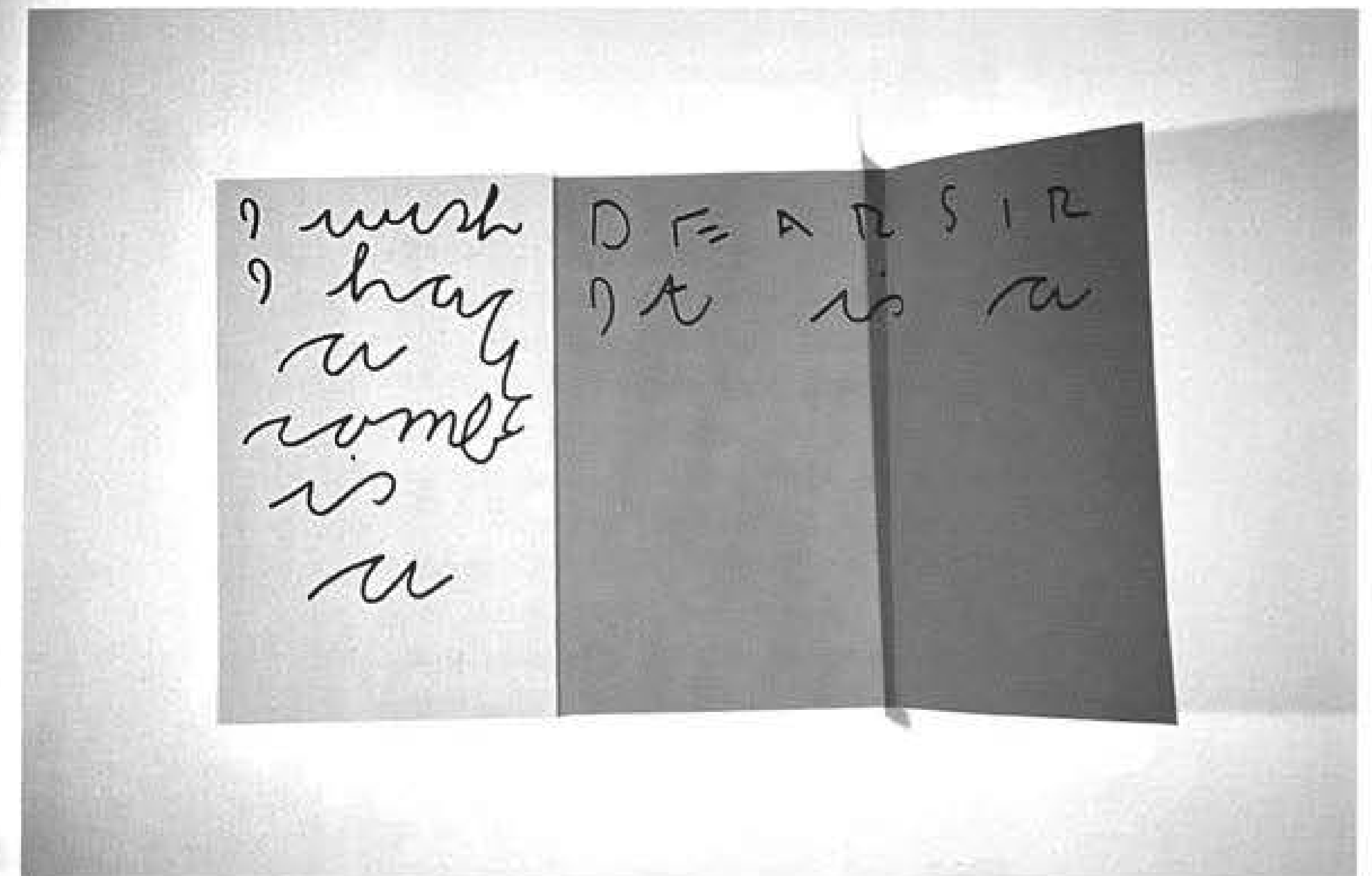
*Statement by the Artist*



*ADAM/EVE you make me see my difference, 1997  
113 x 206 x 20cm  
gouache, acrylic paint, mirror*



Untitled, 1996-1997  
cibachrome on aluminium  
50 x 75cm



Untitled, 1996-1997  
cibachrome on aluminium  
50 x 75cm

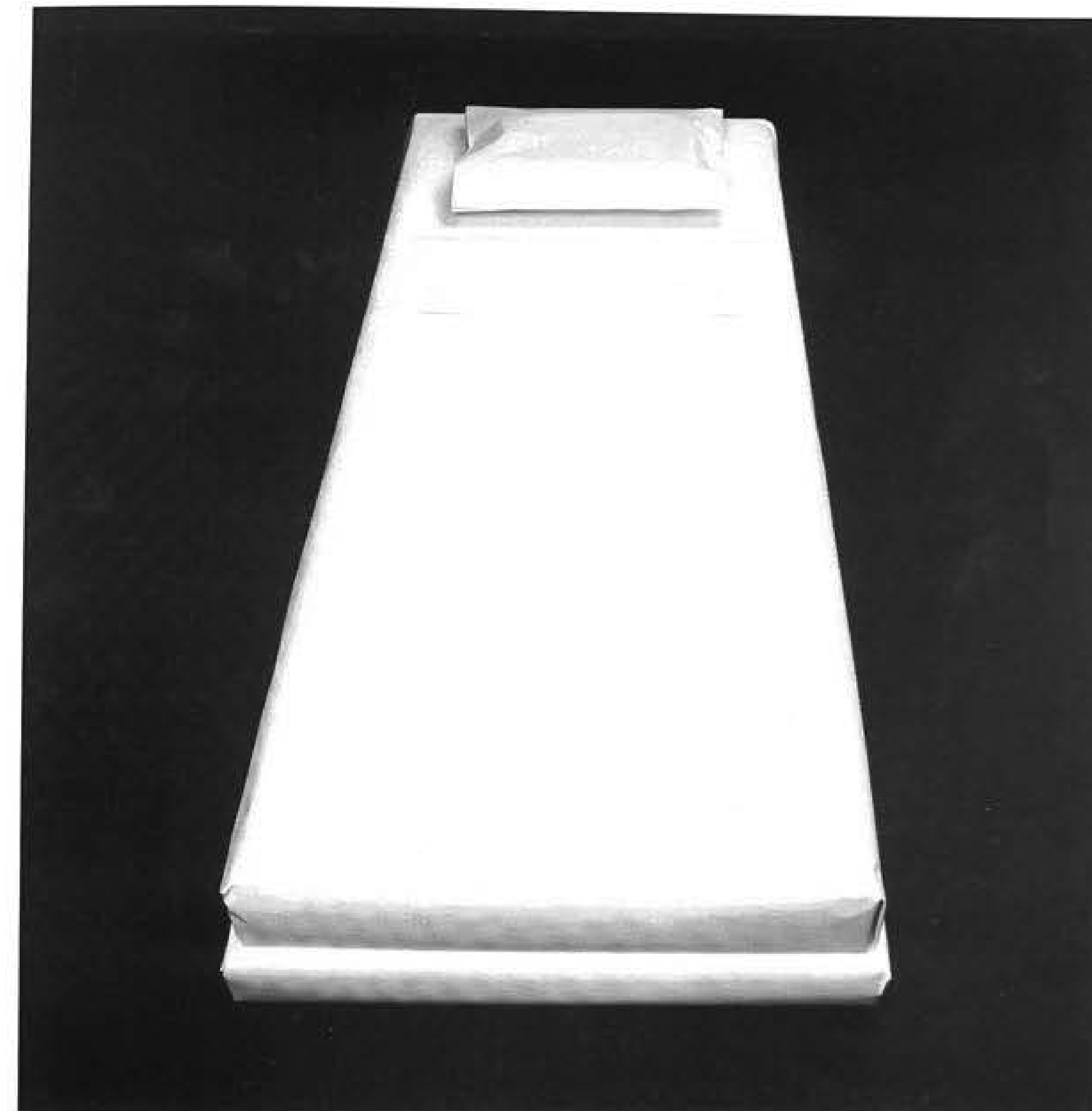


*What did you experience during the state of sleeplessness?*

There was no difference between 8 in the morning and 8 in the evening. Then I felt how sleep is something extraordinary in that a new life begins with each day. The tragedy of sleeplessness involves the impossibility of forgetting time. Everything is conscious. Consciousness turns out to be a disaster - hell. Only its disruption by sleep makes life possible...Even love is impossible without sleep since it is an unconscious illusion. For someone who does not sleep everything is different. Like an exile from daily life, he lives through the feeling of not being part of humanity. I never completely surmounted sleeplessness - except as an illness. In the Boulevard Saint German at Paris in 1938 I encountered an acquaintance from Romania who sold me his bicycle since he wanted to leave France. In the months that followed I criss-crossed the country. At first for a month, and later for two months - around 100 km a day. Travelling around saved me where none of the world's medicine had helped.

*Heinz Norbert Jocks*

"On the Death of E.M Cioran" from an interview with Heinz Norbert Jocks, **Kulturchronik**, no.5., 1995, p.15.



*Sleeplessness, 1997*  
polystyrene, paper  
23 x 800 x 200cm



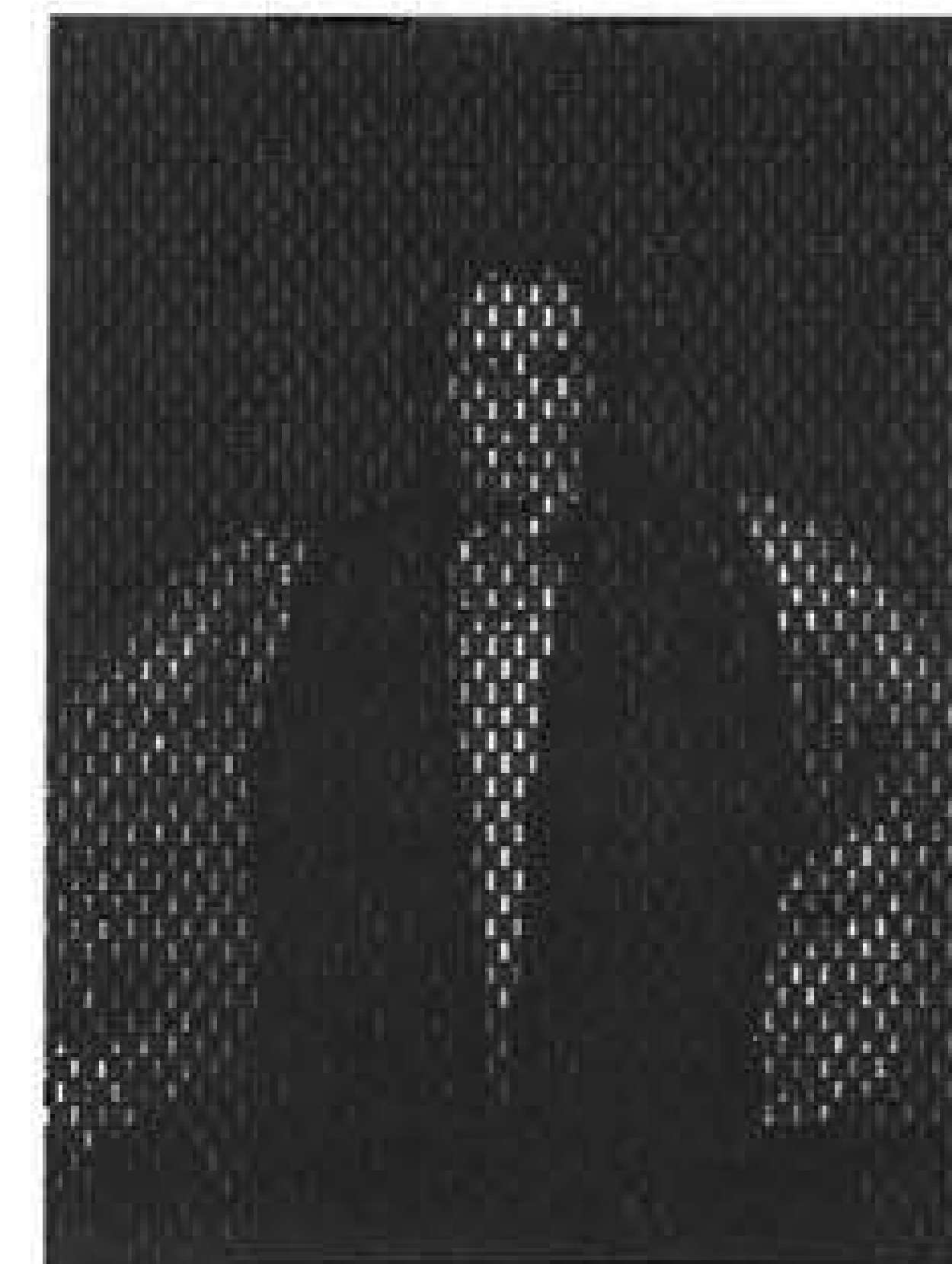
*Tubeweight, 1996*  
*organza, silicone glue and Das*  
*Dimensions variable*



THE POETS

1. Our photographers adopt ancient poses that to the viewer appear as a sign of each sitter's chosen way in life.
2. We entertain our own true character as part of the mask of one's signature.
3. Tasso holds the book like a shelf extending from his heart.
4. There is no degree of disguise that will remove the inherent character or movement from the body. It's hard to say exactly where it comes from, as difficult as to know where the pose will lead to. Like a caste, or a shadow, or a mirror, it's that edge that we forget in the accounting. Both its beginning and its end are trapped within this gaze of his eyes.
5. Mute is their image long after they are dead.
6. These two things tug against one another: the corporeal, and the quote.
7. His life and his death. His face and his hands.
8. And whose pose was it in the first place and what did it mean?
9. Poor yellow cow on a cobalt ground, are you dumb or what!
10. Even the digits. . . even the digits of type conduct a gestural equivalence that we understand in immediate terms as characters.
11. People pose like poets. . . who do poets think they are?

*Prose by Ruark Lewis*



*Disguisements, 1997  
installation detail  
Dimensions variable*

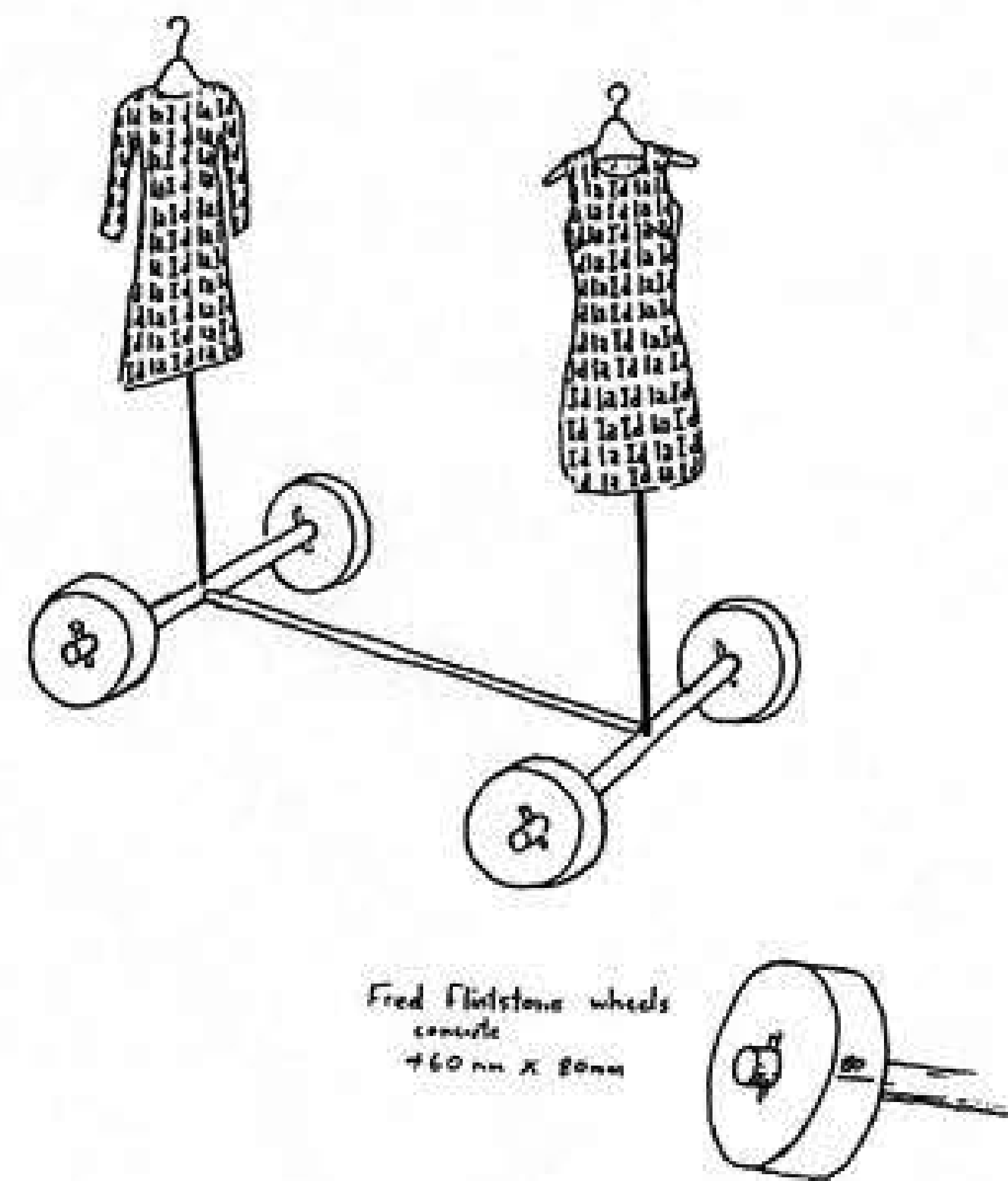
Bataille invites the body to reassert itself into the structural law by which modernism masquerades painting as the experience for itself of the contentless contents of vision. The paradigm vision/blindness returns sight to its seat in the affective, erotic ground of the body, the body convulsed in either autoappropriation or automutilation.

*Essay by Rosalind Krauss "Antivision" October, no.36., Spring 1986  
p.153.*



*Untitled, 1997  
glass, wood, lacquer  
15.2 x 136 x 28cm*

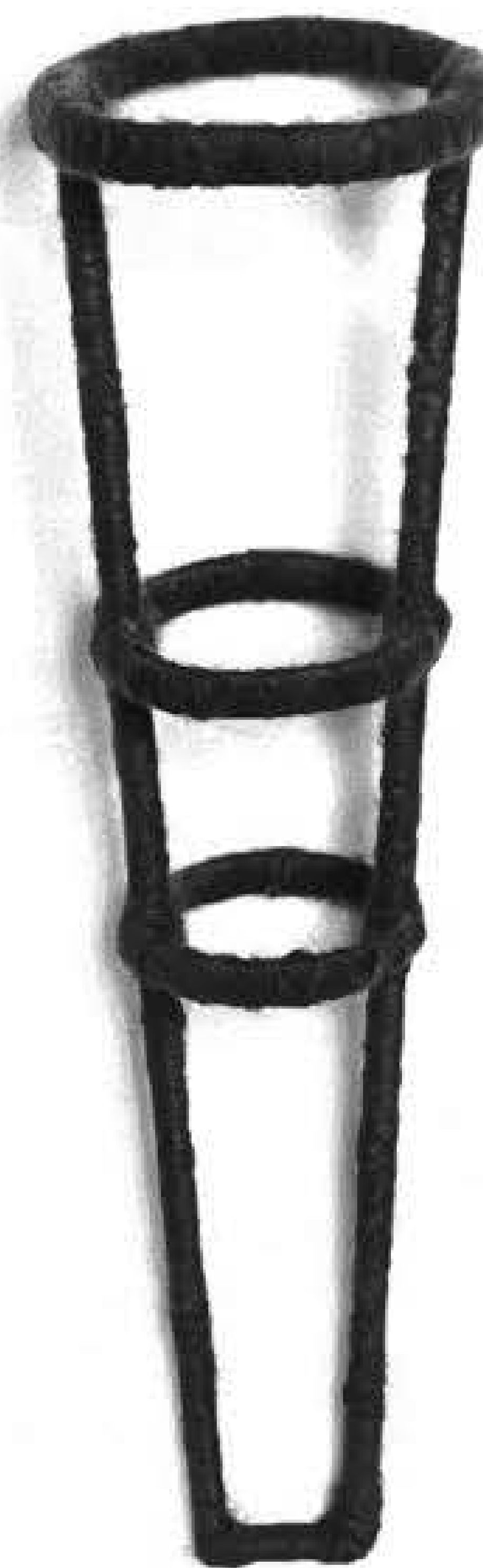




*Untitled (10-12), 1997  
silkscreen ink on cotton drill,  
concrete, wood, metal and paint  
Dimensions variable*



*Self Portrait in Bright Blue, 1994 - 1996*  
installation detail  
Dimensions variable



*Self Portrait in Bright Blue, 1994 - 1996*  
installation detail  
Dimensions variable

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Ross Barber** is a visual artist who has shown in group and individual exhibitions within Australia. Ross lives and works in Queensland, and he has been experimenting with new technologies, sound and light works. Ross is travelling in late 1997 to take up a residency at CO OPERATIONS Luxembourg.

**Ed Burton** has exhibited in Europe, Asia, as well as in Australia. He lives and works in Victoria. Recently he has been developing work in new technologies. Ed Burton would like to thank Artifacts-Framing Specialists Ballarat, Lina Rushworth, Alison Watson and Jamie Hines for their assistance.

**Cecilia Clarke** is a visual artist who has spent most of her life in institutions. Artist Bronwyn Platten has worked with Cecilia on previous projects such as the exhibition **Possible Clouds** in 1993 at the Experimental Art Foundation. She lives and works in Adelaide.

**Colin Duncan** is a Melbourne-based visual artist. He has exhibited in both group and individual exhibitions in New Zealand and Australia. Colin works in both 3D and 2D mediums and is teaching at Swinburne Institute of Technology.

**Mikala Dwyer** is a visual artist who lives and works in Sydney. She has exhibited in Australia, Europe, Great Britain, Istanbul and New Zealand. She is represented by Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney.

**Ruark Lewis** is a Sydney-based visual artist and writer involved in audio arts and performance events. He has exhibited in Europe and Australia. He has published **Just for Nothing** a book of poems by Nathalie Serraut, and drawings by Ruark Lewis, translated from the French by Kaye Mortely - published by BARBERism (an imprint of Librex Press Pty Ltd. and Monograph Press).

**Susan Norrie** is a visual artist who lives and works in Sydney. She has exhibited in Europe, New York and San Francisco. In Melbourne, a retrospective of her work was featured at the Museum of Modern Art (Heide, Park), **Susan Norrie Projects 1990 to 1995** (1995). She is represented by Mori Gallery, Sydney.

**Bronwyn Platten** is a visual artist who has exhibited extensively in both individual and group exhibitions throughout Australia. Bronwyn has lectured at a number of colleges and universities. She is currently co-ordinating **The Building Art Project** with artist John Foubister and twenty two artists with an intellectual disability. She lives and works in Adelaide.

**Kate Reeves** is a Melbourne-based writer and visual artist. She has exhibited within Australia, and has published a number of articles and essays. In 1995 she wrote and published the photonovel **The True World**, (Star Press). Kate Reeves would like to thank Georgia Dacakis, Melissa Reeves and Juliana Engberg for their assistance.

**Jane Trengove** has exhibited within Australia. She has worked at Arts Access since curating **Stormy Weather** with Juliana Engberg in 1992. Jane is currently studying for a Masters by Research in Fine Arts at the Victorian College of the Arts. She lives and works in Melbourne and is represented by Sutton Gallery in Melbourne.

## LIST OF WORKS

### Ross Barber

*Thinking, Making, Marking, Territory*  
1997  
sound piece  
Courtesy of the artist

### Ed Burton

*ADAM/EVE you make me see my difference*  
1997  
gouache, acrylic paint, mirror  
113 x 206 x 20 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Cecilia Clarke

*Untitled*  
1996-1997  
cibachrome on aluminium  
50 x 75 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Untitled*  
1996-1997  
cibachrome on aluminium  
50 x 75 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Colin Duncan

*Sleeplessness*  
1997  
polystyrene, paper  
23 x 800 x 200 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Mikala Dwyer

*Tubeweight*  
1996  
organza, silicone glue and Das  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist and Sarah Cottier Gallery

### Ruark Lewis

*Madonna and Child, Ian Fairweather:*  
*Transcription Drawing*  
1991  
Dimensions variable  
printed invitation card, typewriter, pen and ink  
Courtesy of the artist

*The Poets, Tasso: Transcription Drawing*  
1997  
typewriter, pen and ink engraving  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

*The Poets, Daniel Wilson: Transcription Drawing*  
1997  
typewriter, pen and ink engraving  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

*Madame Sophie de France, after J.M. Nattier:*  
*Transcription Drawing*  
1997  
graphite on lithographic poster  
51 x 40.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Madame Victoire de France, after J.M. Nattier:*  
*Transcription Drawing*  
1997  
graphite on lithographic poster  
51 x 40.5 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*M, from a lexicon of, 'Polynesian Mythology, by Sir George Grey', and an 'elbat xym ta legna':*  
*Transcription Drawing*  
1994  
graphite on photo-lithographic poster  
46 x 35.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*A, from a lexicon of, 'Polynesian Mythology, by Sir George Grey', and an 'elbat xym ta legna':*  
*Transcription Drawing*  
1994  
graphite on photo-lithographic poster  
46 x 35.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Dot Matrix of: 'Madonna and Child', after Ian Fairweather'*  
1994  
typewriter, Stephen's writing fluid and invitation card  
11.8 x 9.4 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Dot Matrix of: 'Madonna and Child', after Ian Fairweather'*  
1994  
typewriter, Stephen's writing fluid and invitation card  
11.8 x 35.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Disguisement: of Daniel Wilson, 1845*  
1997  
typewriter, pen and ink, over antique engraving  
13 x 9.1 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Disguisement: of Tasso, 1845*  
1997  
typewriter, pen and ink, over antique engraving  
13 x 10.1 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

*Disguisement: of Corneille, 1845*  
1997  
typewriter, pen and ink, over antique engraving  
13 x 10.2 cm  
Courtesy of the artist

### Susan Norrie

*Untitled*  
1997  
glass, wood, lacquer  
15.2 x 136 x 28 cm  
Collection of the artist and courtesy of Mori Gallery

### Bronwyn Platten

*Untitled (10-12)*  
1997  
silkscreen ink on cotton drill, concrete, wood, metal and paint  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of the artist

### Jane Trengove

*Self Portrait in Bright Blue*  
1994-1996  
silkscreen, fabric, wool, metal  
Dimensions variable  
Courtesy of Irene Sutton Gallery



## MISSION STATEMENT

Arts Access is an independent arts organisation which has as its mission the creation of opportunities for all people to fully participate in the cultural and artistic life of the community.

This vision of equal access, choice and active participation is being achieved in partnership with people who are disadvantaged, or who have a disability, and through leadership in the broader arts community.

Arts Access achieves its mission through programs that both deliver a service and work towards structural change.

**The Artistic Program** provides opportunities for people to explore their artistic/creative potential through:

- collaborative model and pilot arts projects in diverse community settings using all art forms;
- major events;
- an artists development program;
- a cultural exchange program; and
- major programs, such as **Art & Health**, which combine research and model projects and training.

**The Entertainment Access Service (EASE)** aims to create equal access to cultural events through:

**The EASE Ticket Service** providing subscribers with low cost tickets and a specialised seating service covering a broad range of art, entertainment and cultural events;

**The Venue Access Program** promoting the best in access through producing and distributing information about access features of cultural venues.

**The Industry Development Program** promoting excellence in access and customer service at cultural venues through training and consulting directly with the arts industry on improving access and facilities at individual venues. The role of the **Information and Training Service** is to support the mission of Arts Access and the work of the EASE and the Artistic Program through the provision of specialised information and training to a wide range of individuals and organisation within the arts, health, community services and disability sectors.

### For further information:

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Fax: (03) 9699 8868  
Email: artsacc@vicnet.net.au  
Homepage: <http://vicnet.net.au/~artsacc>

## EXHIBITION DATES



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State Library of Victoria

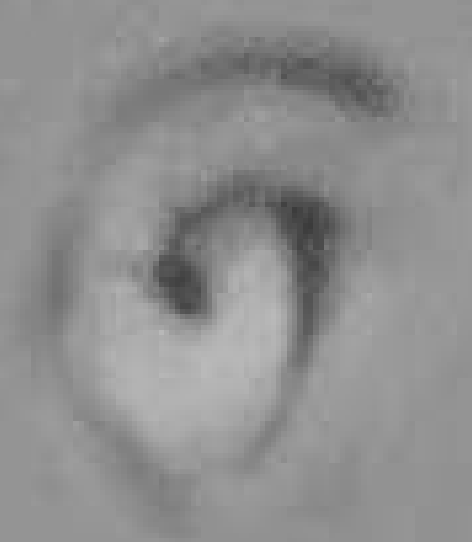


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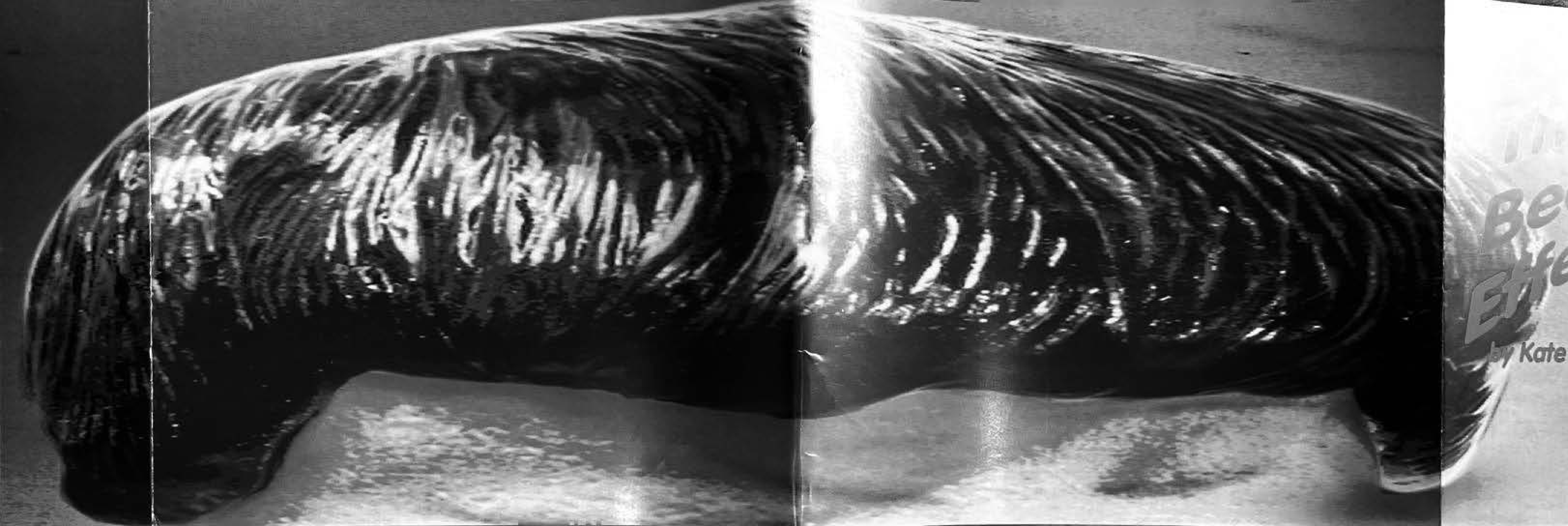
|                       |  |                               |
|-----------------------|--|-------------------------------|
| Victoria Metropolitan | 200 Gertrude St Gallery, Melbourne<br>03 9419 3406   | 5 July - 2 August 1997        |
| New South Wales       | Casula Powerhouse<br>02 9824 1121                    | 1 - 21 December 1997          |
| Victoria Regional     | Ararat Regional Gallery<br>053 22856                 | 23 January - 1 March 1998     |
|                       | Swan Hill Regional Gallery<br>050 329744             | 10 April - 15 May 1998        |
| South Australia       | Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide<br>08 82117505 | 28 May - 22 June 1998         |
| Tasmania              | Tour by CAST<br>Michael Edwards 03 62243637          |                               |
|                       | Plimsoll, Hobart and University Gallery, Launceston  | July - September 1998         |
| Western Australia     | Perth Institute of Contemporary Art<br>089 227 6144  | 28 October - 22 November 1998 |
| Victoria Regional     | Gippsland Regional Gallery, Sale<br>03 514233        | February 13 - March 21 1999   |











Beetle  
by Kate

# The Beatle Effect

by Kate Reeves

**August 1967:** the Summer of Love. The Beatles were in Bangor, Wales infatuated with a maharishi. Dressed in either Indian gear or velvets, everyone wore bells around their necks. In Melbourne, it was mid-winter, with ash-blonde skies and freezing winds blowing straight off Bass Strait. It was almost three years since the Fab Four in polyester suits and mod hairdos had appeared on the balcony of Melbourne Town Hall, yet Beatle memorabilia from the '64 tour still lingered in the city. For instance, you could buy an original Beatle wig - black and glossy as a patent-leather shoe - for around \$1.50 in some of the smaller toyshops. A man purchased one of these wigs from a store in Bridge Rd. as a present for his young cousin, Peter.

Peter's mother and father were curious, even amused by their son's extraordinary attachment to the Beatle wig. He wore it all day, every day, refusing to take it off even to sleep. They would sometimes find him gazing at himself in the mirror upstairs, practising laughing, quietly then loudly, leering obscenely, or lounging, hands in pockets, eyebrows raised in sardonic innocence. The magical power of the Beatle wig over their son captivated both his parents. Their apparent lack of concern appeared to friends as troublesome.

When Peter's teacher banned the Beatle wig, saying it made the boy deaf, Peter cut two holes for his ears in the sides of the wig, which

shocked his father who couldn't believe his son would deliberately mutilate something he loved. He said the wig looked ugly and became disenchanted. Peter's mother, however, secretly admired her son's ingenuity. But he no longer felt like her son. The Beatle wig, so new, so plastic, so oversized, *belonged* so emphatically. When the child climbed into bed with them in the middle of the night, the mother hated the cold plastic inertness of his head. It was like some kind of alien thing, ant-like and impassive. She worried it may cause him permanent damage, and wondered if, maybe, by some weird osmosis, the Beatle wig was beginning to take him over. "He may as well wear it on his face," she remarked to her husband.

Peter refused to grow out of the Beatle wig. His parents were reluctant to remove the wig violently - *scalping* they called it - and decided to try and conceal it instead. They thought Peter would resist disguising himself with a 'real' wig, but he seemed nonchalant, and much to everyone's surprise - they were expecting him to choose a soft version of the Beatle wig - he chose a red one made of smooth, shiny synthetic hair. Dismayed at his son in a red wig, yet relieved that the plastic one was hidden, Peter's father was comforted by his wife's remark that it looked a lot like the Beatle's new hairdos.

They went into the city every month for Peter to have his head shaved and the plastic wig stretched. In 1975, when he was fourteen years old, Peter had his natural hair permanently removed by electrolysis. In 1976, his mother died and his father remarried. From then on,

Peter left his wigs pretty much to their own devices, so that after a while, when his head began taking up too much room, the Beatle wig clamped down, tightening itself around his head with an airtight embrace, moulding itself around his skull.

About four years later, a regular at the Richmond Baths found herself becoming increasingly fascinated by the changing appearance of the red-headed man who swam, like herself, in the pool every morning. She observed the way he had taken to lounging in the shallows and the way his formerly gleaming hair had matted into rusty clumps stained green by the chlorine. She struck up a conversation which, within days, demanded an intimacy so intense that the young man, in a rare moment, confessed about the wigs. Enthralled by the confession, she told the young man that she wanted to know all about him. "I think I may be able to understand you", she said. Attracted by the idea that he wanted someone like her to love him, Peter placed himself in her hands. He submitted to the un-knotting and combing and re-hennaing of the red wig, but, despite the pain in his temples, resisted her attempts to make him remove the wigs. In the end, her constant urging and a fear that something had gone very wrong got the better of him. One evening, he opened a bottle of wine, laid the kitchen table with a scalpel, a small spoon and a saucer of lubricant, and announced the removal of the Beatle wig.

"Should I really take it off?", he asked sitting down, sensing a sudden reluctance on her part which disconcerted him. "I mean do you really

want it off", he asked, but she had already begun prising off the wig. She worked slowly, methodically, overwhelmed by a paralysis of spirit, a dreadful feeling that she had failed him in some way she couldn't quite put her finger on, a slow leak of thought that she had created a suicidal situation which may disrupt their lives. What if, after all, she removed the wig only to reveal a shapeless lump of flesh or, worse still, a strange demonic form in its place. Eventually she pried the wig free, without, despite her fears, seeing his eyes pop out of their sockets, or tearing the flesh off his scalp. No gluey and unctuous brain-matter plopped down into her hands, just the tears of sweat which ran unceasingly down his face and blood which welled in the scalpel's wake where she had circled the rim of the wig.

Peter's head was pale and shrunken, a perfect replica of the Beatle wig. Squeezed into the coiffured hills and valleys on the inside of the casing, mimicking the movements of the corrugated bowl, his head remained true to every ripple, every curve, every long, fringed, tapering strand. Peter sat perfectly still and watched as she stepped back, away from him. He assumed she recoiled in horror and guilty shame. But, in truth, she was having trouble hiding her disappointment at the heartbreaking ordinariness, the shocking mundane mortality of it all. She had made him take off his wig and reveal his head, and it was half what she had expected, even wanted to see.