

# Revealing the Human



**3 September - 17 October 2009**

A significant exhibition of international and local artists exploring the human figure

**Curator** Professor Colin Rhodes, Dean of Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney

# Revealing the Human

Revealing the Human brings together a global selection of artists working with the human figure, either as direct representation or in less literal ways. Being human is something we all share in common. Our self-image, our relationships, our ways of negotiating the world are all wrapped up in the experience and inhabiting of a particular body that is uniquely constructed. Most of the time we don't think about it. We take it for granted. In fact, we are probably most aware when it won't do something we want it to, or when we hurt. But also, perhaps, when we achieve something that was tough, or feel something deeply. Artists, of course, distil these experiences. They present us with a mirror, processed through creativity born as much of emotion as technical process. The best art is never dry and purely theoretical.

The overwhelming project of the artists in this show is to assimilate, translate and communicate the experience of being human. At times mundane, extraordinary and surreal, the work collectively invites viewers to make empathic contact with the rollercoaster of lived and intersecting lives. On the whole, the artists brought together here, from Australia, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, The Netherlands, Sweden and the USA, do not know each other - except where they work in the same studio - but they do have certain things in common. All work out of specialist ateliers that provide a professional environment of continuing artistic development, in contexts in which the needs for individual care and support mix significantly with the facilitation of the artistic imperative. All of the artists represented in Revealing the Human possess special psychologies that make it impossible for them to attend mainstream art schools,

or to train as artists in conventional ways. Yet, all are clearly artists. They possess that intrinsic will to artmaking that is found among the same relatively small percentage of people in all other groups in society. Another thing these artists share that is rarely, if ever, a product of the mainstream art school, is an untrammelled expressive practice, unhindered by concerns about peers, the contemporary art scene, or theory. This is very direct art.

Revealing the Human consists of work by 22 highly individual practitioners from ten ateliers, working in a range of media, and dealing with a wide variety of aspects of the human condition. Sometimes the focus is on the individual figure, as in work by Matthias Johansson, Dwight Mackintosh, Samuel Cariaux, Aurie Ramirez, Tina-Elena Nurminen, Jodie Noble, Kimmo Tolvanen, Anny Servais and Adrian Lazzaro. Mostly, the art here deals with human interactions, often in social groupings, as in works by Lorna Corrigan, Thomas Barron, Jouni Solmi and Leon Sørensen. But there are also more surreal images, as pieces by José Nunez, Sinéad Fahey and Donald Mitchell. At times the artists tackle big subjects: religion - Hans Hartman; politics - Kenneth Rasmussen; sexuality - Paulus de Groot. At others, they embrace the cults of fame and personality - Elna Niemelä, Heidi Brinch Hansen and Leo Cussen. The totality announces a discreet vision of the world, modulated by cultural specificity and personal mores.

The emergence of the specialist atelier for artists with special psychologies was in no small part a result of the separation of intellectual disability from psychiatry in the second half of the twentieth century. Approaches vary, from those based on therapeutic models and modified

art education, through to facilitated support and complete non-intervention. This is partly a factor of the various public health and social welfare systems from which they have arisen, and from which they draw funding (it is worth pointing out that at times ateliers have to appear to espouse a particular institutional culture to guarantee continued funding whilst gently subverting it on the studio floor). The appearance of ateliers in particular places is also invariably a factor of the strong, driven individuals who invariably lie behind the foundation of each studio in the first place.

Despite variations of methodology, all share a belief in the aesthetic value of the product, not only as personally relevant to the maker, but also as being of intrinsic artistic merit. 'Clients' are regarded as artists first and foremost. The fact that they are differently abled is merely the impetus for providing appropriate support for the nurturing and realisation of artistic ambition, rather than their defining characteristic. The oldest is probably the Creative Growth Art Center, in Oakland, California. Founded in 1973, it is dedicated to the idea that people with disabilities can gain strength, enjoyment and fulfilment through the visual arts. Typically, its stated mission is 'to provide a safe environment that fosters and nurtures the creative process, and to promote and market the art of people with physical, developmental, and emotional disabilities.' Créahm, in Liège, Belgium followed in 1979 (Créativité et Handicap Mental; an acronym whose descriptive terms belie its origin in Europe in the 1970s), with others emerging in the 1980s and '90s, including those represented here: Arts Project Australia, Creativity Explored (USA), Inuti (Sweden), Kettuki and Turku (Finland), Bifrost (Denmark), KCAT (Ireland) and Herenplaats (The Netherlands).

I see the ateliers positively as a kind of academy - which is probably a better description than 'art school', because the term academy has a sense of open-endedness and even, to no small degree, a sense of self-determination that is more problematic in the pedagogic function of art schools. I have no doubt that the atelier structure not only supports but also produces artists. Even if one believes that the artistic vocation is innate, its sharpening and development is rarely a spontaneous, unconnected affair. And the work that comes out of studios like these, however non-interventionist their intentions, is unimaginable without the studio environment, and especially the presence of artworkers to facilitate personal artistic practice and growth. I want to argue, simply, that in last 30 years or so, a new kind of academy has grown. One that has nurtured and unleashed already a couple of generations of artists among a loosely defined group where before there really were none. This is a marvelous thing. Perhaps, as the culture catches up, these artists and their work will come in more emphatically from the margins and take their place within the mainstream artworld, included unproblematically and without pseudo-sociological apology by critics and curators.

Colin Rhodes

The University of Sydney  
September 2009

Images left, clockwise

Donald Mitchell *Untitled* 2006 ink on etching paper 57 x 76cm Creative Growth, Oakland, CA, USA

José Nunez *Siete hombres* ink & watercolour on paper 81 x 67cm Creativity Explored, USA

Samuel Cariaux *Baiser froid bleu* nd, watercolour and pencil on paper 40 x 57cm Créahm, Liège, Belgium

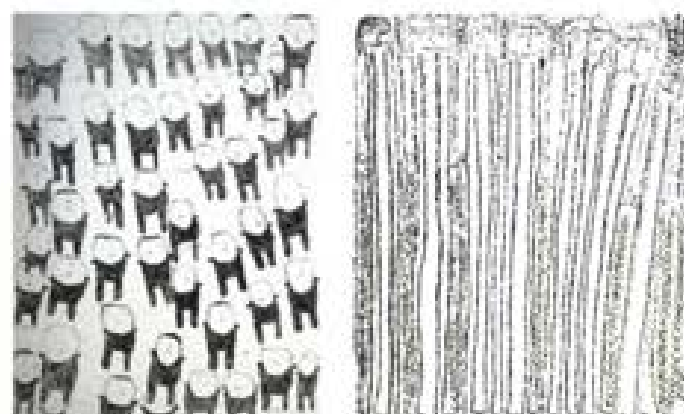
Leon Sørensen *Summerhappiness* nd, ink and watercolour on paper 29.7 x 21cm Art School Bifrost, Denmark



Matthias Johansson *Untitled* April 2005 ink on cartridge paper 29.6 x 41cm Inuti, Stockholm, Sweden

Paulus de Groot *Rode Schuimen nesters van Nanneke* 2005 acrylic on paper 50 x 65cm Atelier Herenplaats, The Netherlands

Elna Niemelä *Ajuntalo* 2007 oil on canvas 54 x 65cm Kettuki Art Centre, Hämeenlinna, Finland



## Studios & Artists

Heidi Brinch Hansen, Kenneth Rasmussen, Leon Sørensen, Bifrost, Denmark; Dwight Mackintosh, Donald Mitchell, Aurie Ramirez, Creative Growth, USA; José Nunez, Creativity Explored, USA; Anny Servais, Samuel Cariaux, Créahm, Belgium; Hans Hartman, Paulus de Groot, Herenplaats, Holland; Mattias Johansson, Inuti, Sweden; Kimmo Tolvanen, Elina Niemelä, Tuula Rantanen, Kettuki, Finland; Sinéad Fahey, Lorna Corrigan, Thomas Barron, KCAT, Ireland; Jouni Soinis, Tiina-Elina Nurminen, Turku, Finland; and Leo Cussen, Jodie Noble, Adrian Lazzaro, Arts Project Australia, Melbourne.

This publication coincides with the significant exhibition and symposium *Revealing the Human* at Arts Project Australia.

We would like to particularly acknowledge the generous contribution of exhibition curator Professor Colin Rhodes without whom this exhibition, symposium and publication would not have been possible. Many of the pieces Professor Rhodes selected for the exhibition were sent from overseas, and we are grateful to these major studios and the artists for making the work available.

We would also like to thank Tom di Maria, Director Creative Growth Arts Center, USA for his extended visit and involvement in the symposium panel, as well as Dr Cheryl Daye, Founding Director, Arts Project Australia; Alex Baker, Senior Curator Contemporary Art, National Gallery of Victoria; Rob McHaffie, Artist, Melbourne; and James McDonald, Artsworker, Arts Project Australia for their voluntary involvement on the symposium panel.

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Lastly, we recognize the ongoing contribution of Arts Project Australia artists, family, carers, staff, artsworkers, volunteers, members and Board.



Images right:

Tiina-Elina Nurminen *Portrait from a Model* 2005 acrylic on paper 90 x 50cm  
Turku Adult Education Centre, Turku, Finland

Sinéad Fahey *Paul walking in the forest with David and Aron* 2008 acrylic and texta  
70 x 56cm KCAT Studio, Ireland

Jodie Noble *Sad Van Gogh (Van Gogh did this picture when he was sad. I did it cause I was happy)* 2008 pastel on paper 76 x 56.5cm Arts Project Australia

Cover image: Anny Servais *Yellow Eyes, Red Teeth, Black and Blue Lines* 2009  
acrylic and oil pastel, photocopy on paper Créahm, Liège, Belgium



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