

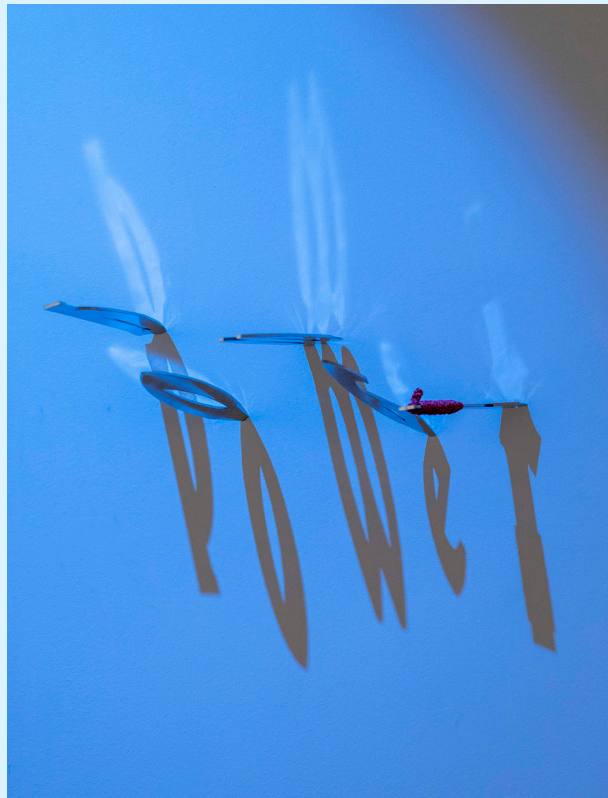
OBLIQUE POLITICS

Bridget Chappell
DIS

Pascale Giorgi
Loren Kronemyer
Curtis Taylor

Goolugatup Heathcote

3 June - 16 July 2023



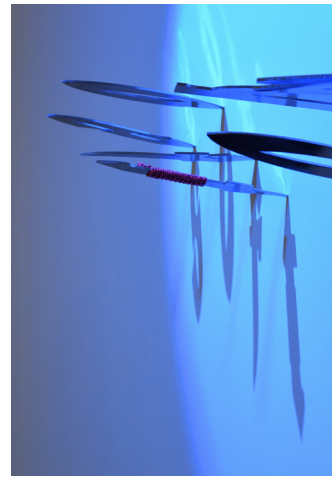
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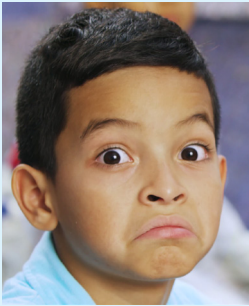
Welcome!

How can artists picture their hopes for our future, from inside a society that struggles to imagine change? This exhibition features politically-focussed Australian and international artists responding to this challenge. Through installation, sculpture, video, and painting, they render their politics in oblique ways - via irony, humour, provocation, deception, and negation. In doing so, they undertake the small but vital work of making change conceivable, so as to one day make it concrete.

Image L: Pascale Giorgi, *Crenellated vessel with loopholes*
(defensive earthen-ware for sourdough mother), 2021.

Image R and cover: DIS, *Circle Time: Money with Babak Radboy*, 2018.

OBLIQUE



POLITICS

Things are not going well.

The world's few billionaires own more than the poorest sixty percent. Half of humanity subsists on less than \$5.50 per day, while wealth taxes are at historic lows. Ten thousand people die unnecessarily every day from causes related to poverty. Twenty percent of all children cannot attend school. This is a time of accelerating climate catastrophe and mass extinction, of soaring anxiety, of a slide into political toxicity and sadism.

By and large we nihilistically accept this situation, because in the last several decades, our sense of what is politically possible has lowered dramatically. Things are the way they are, nothing will ever change – there is no alternative.

It is the mandate of art to figure such alternatives. To call the new into being, to imagine how things could be different. But for a certain sort of political artist, one who views our dire situation soberly, this imagination is tempered with a pragmatism. These artists must picture the things as they could or should be, while minding the oppressively low expectations that confine the world as it is today.

So what course is open to them? These artists approach obliquely – they use irony, humour, provocation, deception, negation. Sideways, slippery methods allow expression where a frontal approach would draw rejection. They make the glimpse of alternatives possible, a glimmer of something different and better.

Pascale Giorgi's art expresses its politics by filtering history through irony and humour. Giorgi's glazed terracotta sculpture is loosely modelled on the English mediaeval Rochester Castle, once captured by rebels in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381, an event symbolically important to socialist history. In Giorgi's version, the castle contains a living sourdough starter, or 'mother', celebrating the tradition and enduring potential of folk politics. At the same time, the work contains an

ironic double meaning – sourdough suggests modern home baking, a trend among today's well-meaning yuppies. The work becomes a sarcastic take on the poverty of 'political' action today, its aims, prospects, and its delusions of grandeur.

Loren Kronemyer's art adopts a politics of deception – it appears to say one thing, but really says something quite different. This allows Kronemyer to advance challenging ideas indirectly, making them more approachable. In *Autonomous Armory*, a set of artist-made throwing knives are embedded into the gallery wall; when lit from above, they cast shadows that read 'soft power'. On a surface level, its message is clear – the world of culture and force are overlapping and inextricable, soft power = hard power. Deceptively, the work also advances a second, more difficult, meaning. These knives reference an existing consumer culture, but they were labouriously handmade by Kronemyer while living off-grid in rural Tasmania. This is the autonomy of the artwork's title – the weapons are made consciously outside of the capitalist system of objects. In this light, their meaning flips – they are the artist's tools, charged with their intent, and their potential violence.

In contrast, in Curtis Taylor's painting, politics is expressed through provocation. Taylor presents an anti-colonial revenge fantasy, in which an ancestor spirit serves Martu justice against a settler. In the settler's hand is a stolen sacred item, and in the ancestor's is a jerrycan of petrol, used to set the white man ablaze. Taylor's work provokes through its rude frankness in style, its glee in imagining violence. Politically, it is a refusal to be subtle towards the complexity of history, to play nice, to be sensitive. In this way it mocks the moderate viewer and their apparently reasonable attitudes. Taylor's approach allows him to circumvent normal politics – which considers its subjects with either placid reason or 'constructive' optimism. But to face a situation with too much optimism is to express too much confidence in the status quo. Taylor's political approach is more effective because it is equal to its subject – that is, the situation of



Image: Curtis Taylor, *Man on Fire*, 2019, oil on canvas, 250 x 125 cm.

colonisation continues to be intolerable, and this work renders that veiled reality plain. Bridget Chappell's artwork features a DIY noise-cancellation device, a technology the artist proposes to 'phase cancel the cops': to neutralise police communications and sonic weapons. In this installation, this device is arranged opposite such a weapon – an LRAD, or sound cannon, now used by police against public demonstrators. Chappell's installation creates a zone of audio phase-cancellation against the LRAD, conceptually liberating a space from political control. Unlike more conventional political art that tends to suggest a particular political program, Chappell is not directing how this liberated space be used, rather it is an assertion of the potential for freedom. The artwork is pragmatic on this front – beyond its conceptual artistic purpose, the noise-cancellation device is a working prototype of a practical protest tool. In both its practical and theoretical modes, Chappell's artwork proposes negation as a productive political method, and a possible germ of our liberation.

In DIS' video artwork, an artist tries to explain the concept of money to children. The work uses self-critical humour to express its politics, drawing the viewer inside a deceptively sophisticated and radical conversation. Slowly, through simple language, the artist describes to the children the absurdity of money, the injustice of work, the concept of surplus value, and even suggests an abolition of the capitalist order. Because children can accept ideas without preconceived notions, the ideas cut through – the viewer sees through the children's eyes, and the spell of capitalist ideology starts to break. The work offers a chance of escape from the 'realism' of neoliberalism, a worldview that forgets the future is contingent, and sees only the present, rolling terribly on and on. At the same time, DIS' art maintains a strain of self-critical humour that implicates their would-be comrades. They reflects a problem at the heart of radical politics today: the struggle to pronounce an alternative. DIS understands they must take an oblique path to picturing a better world – but that this path may resolve to be the shortest route.

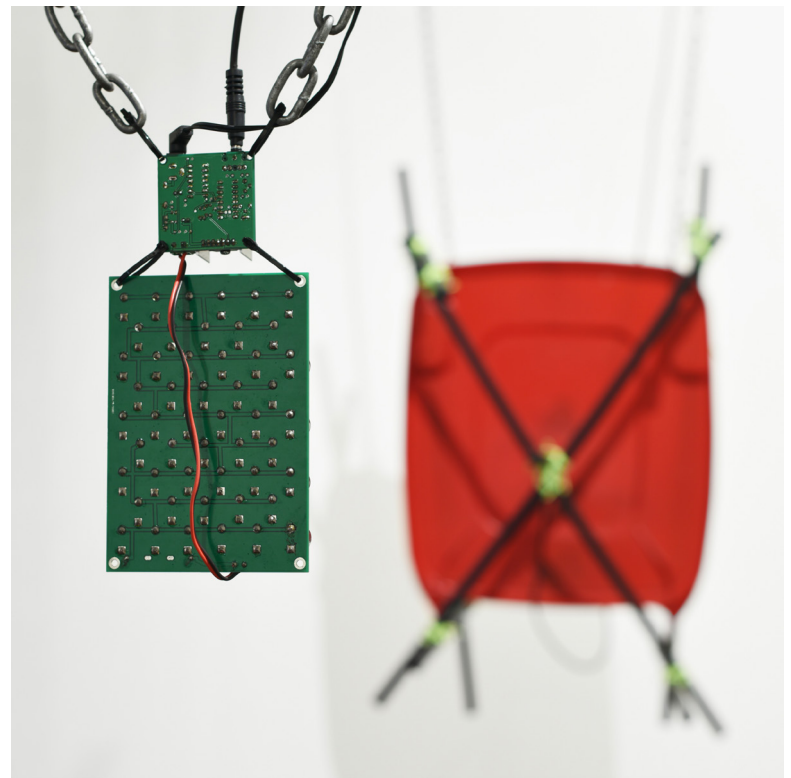


Image: Bridget Chappell, *Offensive Opacity*, 2021/23

List of Works:

DIS, *Circle Time: Money with Babak Radboy*, 2018, 7:14, single channel video, stereo audio, installation 2023.

Loren Kronemyer, *Autonomous Armory*, 2021/23, sharpened stainless steel, paracord, 9 pieces.

Pascale Giorgi, *Crenellated vessel with loopholes (defensive earthen-ware for sourdough mother)*, 2021, glazed terracotta, sourdough mother made from the recipe of Pliny the Elder.

Pascale Giorgi, *Monument to the Vanquished Peasant in red (after Dürer after Peyo)*, 2021/23, soy wax, wax dye.

Bridget Chappell, *Offensive Opacity*, 2021/23, long range acoustic device, active noise cancelling shield.

Curtis Taylor, *Man on Fire*, 2019, oil on canvas, 250 x 125 cm.

Staff:

Curator: Guy Loudon
Install coordinator: Jack Wansbrough
Photographer: Dan McCabe

Additional thanks:

Luisa Hansal, Leigh Craft, Tim Meakins,
Jana Braddock, Lyndon Blue.

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