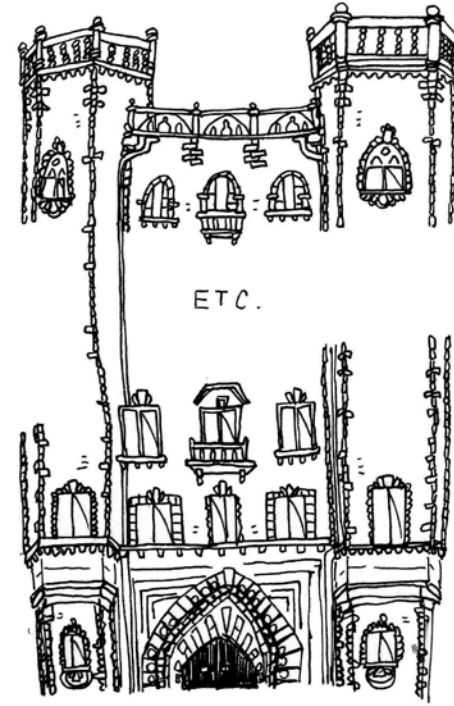




(top) Kate Woodcroft *A place you can figure out*, 2008
(bottom) Courtney Coombs *Neon Flux*, 2008



(above left) Grant Stevens *General Manager*, 2008
(above right) Marianne Templeton *E.T.C.*, 2008
(cover) Timothy P. Kerr *It doesn't have one*, 2008



Lean Towards Indifference!

Curated by No Frills*



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(top) **Tim Woodward** *Stealing Victory*, 2009
 (above) **Catherine Sagin** *Store Copy*, 2009

Lean Towards Indifference!

The role of the contemporary artist is a complicated one. No longer fascinated by myths of deprivation, isolation and divine inspiration, and with the cultural terrain she once occupied now annexed by managers and policymakers under the banner of ‘creativity’, the contemporary artist must these days cope with a world without yardstick or yard arm. To further exacerbate this anxiety, the Post Medium age and the open-ended field of possibilities it appears to offer makes an awkward bedfellow with an industry whose operations are as opaque as they have ever been. And then there’s all that history. The misadventures of the modernists, the wit of the post minimalists, the hi-jinks of the postmoderns: these tales may help make sensible the openness of contemporary art, but they also cast a long parental shadow over the whole enterprise. A lot to contend with even for Williamsburgers, but from a city on the periphery of the periphery such as Brisbane ...

In light of the inertia such factors impose upon the production of art, it should not be surprising to observe the rise of a tendency in recent practice towards the irreverent, foolish and parodic.

So, while the works in *Lean Towards Indifference!* can be understood firstly as a coping mechanism, they are also a celebration of play in its own right — and not simply as a social metaphor but as a critical experimental strategy. The process of de-intellectualisation of practice has been one of the most important developments of contemporary art — and a feature which strongly differentiates contemporary practice from the theory-laden practices of the 1970s and 80s.

Allowing ‘brainlessness’ into the experimental process is a way of recouping the advantage that visual art maintains over other forms of expression: its capacity to de-communicate, to interfere with the clear operations of meaning, medium, artist, viewer and context and thus draw attention to the instabilities that underpin all forms of human activity. Drawing nourishment from Dada and the Conceptual tactics of Nauman, Baldessari, Acconci, et al, contemporary artists understand that ‘stuffing around’ is one of the best forms of studio experimentation, worth defending all the more for the fact that, in our overly outcomes-driven society, it has been chased out of most other fields of human endeavour. This irreverence towards the materials, tools and forms of the studio can be observed with differing valency in each of the works of *Lean Towards Indifference!*.

Eve Roleston and **Antoinette J. Citizen** both assume exaggerated postures in their work that can be read as over-compensation for their own lack of instrumental mastery. Roleston’s mock heroics make a wryly saccharin parody of both the psychedelic utopianism of 1960s counter-culture and the text-based neutrality of conceptual art. Citizen, on the other hand, plays with scientific and technological paradigms of science by approximating the processes and products of the laboratory. Intentionally ham-fisted, her works emphasise the illusionary nature of our liquid relationship with technology.

The language of cinema, also forms the central ingredient for both **Chris Bennie** and **Grant Stevens**. In his meticulously crafted

video works, Stevens uses the deliberate deregistration of cinematic tropes as a strategy to interrupt and deflect the impressions of desire, glamour and narrative that pervade mainstream film. Conversely, in his deliberately lo-fi attempt at recreating a scene of space-travel with torch and cardboard assemblage, Bennie adroitly balances the sublime and the farcical.

This process of comic détournement is also observable in the work of **Timothy P. Kerr**, **Marianne Templeton** and **Tim Woodward**. Their videos, drawings and object-based works use a deliberate strategy of misassociation and literalism to produce an open-ended (and seemingly self-generating) network of perceptual puns that undermine any impression of a single coherent artistic voice.

Courtney Coombs and **Kate Woodcroft** both take the ‘problem’ of venue literally in their installation works, by incorporating obstacles directly into the gallery space. For Woodcroft, a rope bridge demarcates space in the best Minimalist tradition, but also provides the viewer with a physical ‘dare’. In her scale model of an unrealised installation work,



Coombs addresses performance anxiety, thus imbuing her ostensibly neutral Minimalist interventions with a wry dose of bathos.

Catherine Sagin applies a similar logic to her performance works — her act of stacking IKEA catalogues acts as a meditation on ‘efficiency’: the streamlined logic of the production process also provoking larger questions about authority and the ‘use value’ of art. This interest in the body also carries the work of **Fiona Mail**, Sagin and Woodcroft’s collaborative pseudonym. Through a remake of an interview with UK-based collaborative team Paul Harrison and John Wood, Fiona Mail addresses the Oedipal ambivalence that mediates the artist’s relationship with influence. That Harrison and Wood frequently use farce and folly in their highly staged works makes them highly apt subjects for a study of the awkwardness that surrounds the practice of contemporary art.

Far from sophisticated wit or droll irony, each of the artists in this exhibition use self-deprecating humour as both an active experimental strategy and a means of relaxing the usually highly structured relationship between viewer and work. In their awkwardness, self-consciousness and general resistance to any claims of mastery, these works open up a space for revelling in that art too often endeavours to obscure — its own wonderful puerility.

Charles Robb

(left)
Antoinette J. Citizen
In Space no one can Hear you Scream, 2007