

Managed by the School of Art and School of Creative Media

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OPENING HOURS Mon – Fri – 9.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm

In agreeing to lend support and commitment to this project the participating artists have generously contributed to the strong cross-cultural partnership developing between the Alliance Française, the Embassy of France in Australia and the School of Art at RMIT University. Particular gratitude is expressed to Ms. Laëtitia Bourget for her commitment and involvement in the 2005 International Artist in Residence Program (AIRP) in the School of Art at RMIT University. Thanks are also due to Mr. Edouard Mornaud, Director of the Alliance Française de Melbourne for his support and enthusiasm of the International Artist in Residence Program (AIRP) and of the School of Art at RMIT University. Mr. Edouard Mornaud has made significant contributions to the cultural milieu of Melbourne during his time as Director of the Alliance Française de Melbourne. Grateful thanks to the Embassy of France in Australia for the support they provided to Laëtitia Bourget to visit the School of Art at RMIT University as a 2005 Artist in Residence. Laëtitia Bourget would also like to express her gratitude to Mr. Sidney Peyroles for helping to make her residency in Australia possible. Thanks are also due to Professor Elizabeth Grierson, Head of the School of Art at RMIT University for the varied levels of ongoing support she has provided to the International Artist in Residence Program (AIRP) and to the many annual international exhibition projects occurring in the School of Art Galleries. Gratitude must also be expressed to Mr. Philippe Charles for his support, rich involvement and assistance to myself and to Laëtitia Bourget.

Peter Westwood International Projects

Endnotes

1. Cire- perdue is also known as ‘lost wax’ casting and involves the wax object being burnt out in a ceramic or plaster shell and molten metal being poured into the cavity.
2. Gonzalez-Crussi F. The Day of the Dead and Other Mortal Reflections. New York, U.S.A.: Harcourt Braceand co.; 1993. p.16
3. Barthes Roland. Howard Richard (trans.). A Lover’s Discourse – Fragments. U.S.A.: Farrar, Straus and Giroux; 1978. p.173
4. Munn Geoffrey C. The Triumph of Love. London, U.K.: Thames and Hudson; 1993.
5. Chevalier Jean, Gheerbrant Alain, Buchanon-Brown John (trans.). A Dictionary of Symbols. London, U.K.: Penguin Books; 1996. p. 195
6. Bourget has been sewing on the skin of her hands and the hands of others since 1997. The work *Sewing in one’s own hand, Building one’s own home* was a solo performance work, whilst *Sewing in one another’s hand*, at Instants Chavirés, Montreuil, involved Bourget working with the trusting hands of others.
7. The process of collecting is one that adds gravitas to that which is collected. see – Stewart Susan. On Longing – Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection. London, U.K.: Duke University Press; 1993.

8. Chevalier Jean, Gheerbrant Alain, Buchanon-Brown John (trans.). A Dictionary of Symbols. London: 1996. p. 977
9. Human beings are the only creatures that produce tears as an emotional response. See – Frey,William H., Lanseth, Muriel. Crying, the Mystery of Tears. Minneapolis, U.S.A.: Winston Press; 1985.
10. Laetitia Bourget – Artist Statement – 2005.
11. Burne Charlotte Sophia. The Handbook of Folklore – Traditional Beliefs, Practices, Customs, Stories and Sayings. London, U.K.: Sidgwick & Jackson Ltd; 1914. p. 48
12. Blom Philipp To Have and To Hold – An Intimate History of Collectors and Collecting. London, U.K.: Penguin Books; 2003. p. 62
13. ibid p. 62
14. ibid p. 67
15. Conversation with anthropologist, photographer and collector, Dr Ruth Luchuga, Mexico City, Mexico 2002.
16. Stevens Anthony. Ariadne’s Clue – A Guide to the Symbols of Humankind. New Jersey, U.S.A.: Princeton University Press; 1999. p. 415
17. Olmos Gabriela. Porter Harry (trans.) Agricultural Fiesta – On Seeds and Death. Día de Muertos. Artes de Mexico – Número 62. Mexico City, Mexico: Artes de Mexico; 2002.



Peta Clancy *Floating 2*
lightjet print, 2005

These are magical pictures where the body appears to have dematerialised and become sparkling and effervescent, charged with a lightness and grace previously unknown.

The topography of the body is important to Clancy whose *she carries it all like a map on her skin* 2005 denotes an intense and intimate study of a woman’s mouth. The mouth is not the artists but the mouth of a relative and as such forms a quasi self-portrait. Clancy has overworked a photograph pricking into its surface with a fine pin. Like Bourget, Clancy’s tool of choice is a needle but Clancy’s needle is left unthreaded as she generates a pricked, undulating surface within the photograph. The slick perfection of the photographic surface is broken to reveal an intense speculation on the nature of this particular skin and mouth. Like the beautician pointing out the wrinkles on one’s skin not as they are but rather as signs of what is to come, Clancy traces out an intimate course for the demise of the skin. Like Parbs, Clancy creates a decorative pattern in the skin. For Parbs this is one that is pressed into the skin and lasts a few hours, for Clancy the patterning is performed on the image of the body in an intimate, solitary process.



Peta Clancy from the series *she carries it all like a map on her skin* type C print, 80 x 55cm, 2005

Barberis is involved in a solitary, exhausting ritual as she breathes air into her effusive and generous *Scripture Spreads* 2002. The fluorescent pink spreads replicate the proportions of contemporary quilts; they are immediately familiar. The inflated plastic reminds one of other inflatables and, in particular, the ubiquitous summer time ‘lilo’ and the inflatable camping mattress. The experience of Barberis’s work is highly sensual with the plastic smell reminding one all too vividly of when one’s own mouth has been glued to the familiar plastic orifices that punctuate the air cushions of the work. The materiality of Barberis’s work is at once both organic and synthetic. Rejoicing as she does in the aesthetic pleasures and kitsch aesthetic of the plastic of *Scripture Spreads* the work contains within its form, life itself within the breath. Breath is the most perfect symbol for life.¹⁶ The text that Barberis includes in *Scripture Spreads* is biblical, and pertains to the Christian Apocalypse – the end of time, when there will be no possibility for breath. The highly refined sensibility of the work and the notion of breath as the source of divine creation, site the work as a cerebral and physical response to notions of time, belief and faith. The large cruciform shape references



Irene Barberis *Sculpture Spreads*
plastic, air, embroidery, breath, 2002

both Christianity’s most potent symbol and also the matter-of-fact shape of a fitted quilt; the sides cut in order for the quilt to fold neatly over the sides of the bed. The breath contained within the inflated squares is a physical reminder of the promise inherent within the symbol of the cross – eternal life.

Perhaps it is in what is dead that a connection to life is offered, the possibility of rejuvenation is revealed?¹⁷ In Steven

Spielberg’s 2001 film *Artificial Intelligence: AI*, a ‘synthetic’ child’s desire for connection with his long dead ‘mother’ is satisfied when she is reanimated through the use of the DNA contained within a fragment of her body – her hair. In *Expiration* there is a sense of desire to circumvent time and mortality through the body itself and the precious materials it produces.

Dr Louiseann Zahra



PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM

EXPIRATION

IRENE BARBERIS
LAËTITIA BOURGET (FRANCE)
PETA CLANCY
CAMERON FRASER
TIFFANY PARBS

CURATOR LOUISEANN ZAHRA

OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION THURSDAY 27 OCTOBER 5–7PM
MONDAY 24 OCTOBER – FRIDAY 11 NOVEMBER 2005

EXPIRATION EXPLORES NOTIONS PERTAINING TO THE FLEETING, IMPOSSIBLE, UN-CAPTURABLE BODY; PRESENT IN ALL ITS HIDEOUS BLEEDING, WEEPING, BREATHING, SHEDDING, FRAILTY. THIS WRETCHED, BEAUTIFUL BODY IS A BODY THAT IS MUCH LOVED AND IT IS FOR THIS THAT TIFFANY PARBS, CAMERON FRASER, LAETITIA BOURGET, IRENE BARBERIS AND PETA CLANCY TAKE ON ITS VULNERABILITIES AND ITS EXQUISITENESS.

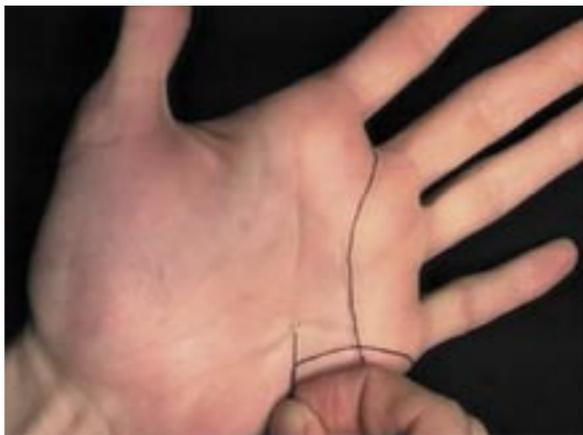
Cameron Fraser
Life Rings 2005



In Cameron Fraser's *Life Rings* 2005, the lover's body is rendered into an object to be worn against one's own. The lover's hands, and the destiny implicit in the lines that mark them, are the foundation for the ring. Fraser takes a wax impression of the lines on the hand; the lover fervently seeking out the heart and life lines, and generates from the wax ribbon, using the *cire perdue* process, a silver or gold band inscribed with the landscape of the line¹. The process employed by Fraser is identical to that used in the past to generate death masks, where wax was placed directly onto the

face. Because there is no space, no discontinuity between the wax and the flesh, the wax can be seen to become a physical extension of the flesh itself.² It can then be seen that, like the lover's gift of a lock of hair, one holds in actuality rather than merely symbolically part of the beloved's body. The overt, sensual desire for continued contact with the lover's flesh is satisfied in the *Life Rings* because they are no facsimile, but rather the body itself transformed into metal that when worn warms with one's own heat. Roland Barthes suggests that, 'Every object touched by the loved being's body becomes part of the body, and the subject eagerly attaches himself to it.'³ The *Life Rings* made by Fraser continue the tradition of sentimental jewellery where the lover is memorialised and a connection with the loved one is maintained through maintaining a bond with the object.⁴ The rings are destined to be worn rather than to be looked at, and as such they evoke a powerful and ongoing relationship with the absent lover's body. The metal becomes a catalyst for connection. The rings serve a metonymic function in that they stand in for the desired body of the lover. The lover gives his/her life, heart in the offering of the impression. The potential for the line to describe a history and/or pre-empt a life is re-ascribed as the line is re-worked from the relatively flat plan of the hand into a three dimensional object. The lifeline loops back onto it self, and what was once a finite line with a definite beginning and an ending becomes a circle – a powerful symbol of perfection and completeness.⁵ In *Life Rings* Fraser negates the linearity of time; the rings are complete, the band with its flesh pressing has circumvented time itself.

Laëtitia Bourget, like Fraser works with the lines of the hand. *La couture sous la peau* (*Sewing under the skin*) develops Bourget's performative practice where she enters into an intimate relationship of trust and companionship.⁶ *Give me your hands; I will take care of you* *I will quietly sew a drawing in each palm depending on its topography.* *Then we will take a photograph of your open hands.* *The drawing is very temporary as the skin on the hands is*



Laëtitia Bourget
construire sa maison (*building one's own home*) video 4, 1998

continually renewed.
The thread can't stay and the marks disappear quickly often during the course of the day.

Bourget holds your hand. You trust her. She takes out a needle. You trust her. She threads it. You trust her. She gently pricks into the skin of your hand. You trust her. She sews into your hand. You trust her.

Bourget's identity as an artist is one of a hybrid entity as she takes on both the persona of the demure embroiderer alongside that of the infamous tattooist. She marks the body gently. The stitches fall/rub out of their own accord, and are not the doctor's healing sutures but rather an embellishment, an adornment recording, generating an encounter where ones' body, and the parameters that constitute the relationship, are tested. Bourget overwrites the lines on the hands, 'drawing' in fine stitches and black thread. She augments and interferes with the lines present on the hand, contributing her own pathways and routes. If the lines on the hand hold the key to one's destiny Bourget's line-making subverts the notion of



Tiffany Parbs
Blister Ring photo: Terence Bogue

destiny through being determinedly in the present.

Tiffany Parbs makes objects for the body and of the body. Her objects are not 'worn' but rather they are experienced. Spikes press into the body, producing pretty, bruising patterns in red and purple whilst, in other works, metal letters are strapped onto tender flesh; their release revealing brutal words including 'cut', 'choke' and 'pulse'. In 2005 Parbs produced a *Blister Ring* on the third finger of her left hand by pouring hot wax onto the flesh – the skin swelled and blistered producing a swollen, plasma filled 'ring' resplendent with notions of sacrifice and desire. Parbs' interest in the fluids made by the body is not restricted to the watery fluid contained in this frightfully beautiful blister and includes other kinds of liquids likewise produced under painful circumstances. *Tear Sac* 2005 is a small object that is placed under the eye. It's the blind man's patch re-located to beneath the eye where, in lieu of blindness and the unseeing eye, *Tear Sac* covers and contains the watery, salty expulsions of the seeing, hurting heart. *Tear Sac* is a tender object. It

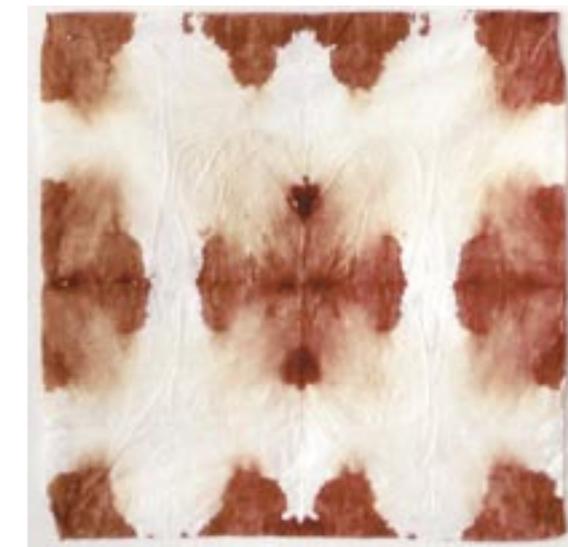
compassionately collects the wearer's tears and, in the act of collection, they are rendered even more precious.⁷ In evaporating, the teardrop 'dies' having born witness to grief.⁸ What happens to these collected tears? Body fluids can be both precious and abject but perhaps none hold more power than tears, as they are a uniquely human phenomenon⁹. To weep is to be human. To collect tears seems to evoke a particular humility and sympathy. *Tear Sac* suggests a way of thinking about crying and about being comforted. Band-Aid-like it contains and collects tears, protecting the delicate skin from their salty sting and producing a sign for those who weep. How comforting to apply, or have applied to oneself, *Tear Sac*.

Tears are not regarded in any way as abject, their clarity and the grief from which they are produced rendering them benign. Blood, conversely is rarely considered anything but abject. Blood is associated with death and also with birth. It is from blood that we are born. In *Les mouchoirs menstruels* (The menstrual tissues) Laetitia Bourget has taken impressions from her own, bleeding, female body. She has recorded in an immediate and uncomplicated way her changing body. At times there is a lot of blood whilst at others there is hardly any. Sometimes the blood is mixed with urine and sometimes semen *mouchoirs amoureux* (The Love Tissues). 'Transformation occurs here on an aesthetic and psychic level (from the abject to the sublime, from a loss to a creation).'¹⁰

The superstition that things that have formed part of a whole continue in sympathy even when separated is a powerful notion.¹¹ When considered in relation to the body and that which is produced of the body, this idea offers the potential for an infinite body unfettered by time and place. The living body is continually dying; shedding that which has been grown and is now dead. In 17th Century Amsterdam anatomists shifted the body from being the subject of collecting to the object.¹² The body, dismembered and preserved, was put on display and seen for what it will be – dead matter.¹³ The divide between the material world



Tiffany Parbs *tear sac* skin, lambda print, 60 x 40 x 4cm, 2004. photo: Greg Harris



Laëtitia Bourget *Les mouchoirs menstruels* (*The menstrual tissues*) blood, handkerchiefs

and the human condition was overcome in the collecting and display of the body as an object. The dismembered, displayed body sought a place in eternity, with its subject of the fleeting nature of existence perhaps no more apparent in the works of anatomist Dr Frederik Ruysch (1638-1731) and his painter daughter Rachel Ruysch. (1664-1750). Dr Frederik Ruysch, well known for his anatomical human preparations, rendered human corpses into a 'state of timeless peacefulness', his special interest being the preservation and display of the bodies of infants – no greater metaphor for the fragile nature of life.¹⁴ The still-life painter Rachel Ruysch likewise rendered that which is fleeting – fixing in time exquisite blooms destined to fade and rot. The notion of the dead body somehow stilling time is a powerful one. In Mexico death is

not considered the worst thing that can happen, rather it is life that is perceived as a temporary and unstable state whilst death is permanent and eternal.¹⁵ If death is the fixed state than it is the corpse, rather than the body, that holds power and it's the death within the living body that suggest the infinite within the finite.

The temporality of the body is perhaps most evident in the living/dying body that is continually shedding its skin. Bourget relies on this process to ensure that her *Sewing under the skin* works are both painless and transient. Likewise Peta Clancy relies on the shedding skin to produce *Settled*, *Floating 2* and *Floating 3* (all works 2000-5), the dust forming exquisite topographies of absent bodies. Clancy photographs dust floating in beams of light.