

Depot

James Carey
Campbell Drake
Susan Jacobs
Ben Morieson
Matt Morrow
Cameron Robbins
Robbie Rowlands

An exhibition of site-specific artworks
at the Grenda's decommissioned
bus depot.

6 - 13 April 2008

**Grenda's Bus Depot
9 Foster St Dandenong
Victoria, Australia**

Writer - Geraldine Barlow

Photography - Hilton Stone

© City of Greater Dandenong
www.greaterdandenong.com
Contact Jenny Pemberton-Webb (03) 9239 5100

depot-installation.blogspot.com

Depot

Installations by 7 artists at the
decommissioned Grenda's bus depot.

James Carey

Campbell Drake

Susan Jacobs

Ben Morieson

Matt Morrow

Cameron Robbins

Robbie Rowlands

FORWARD

When it was announced that Grenda's would relocate from its historic home of 62 years to a new location as part of the Revitalisation of Central Dandenong, a unique project was born.

It started with a simple gesture of council commissioning Hilton Stone Photography to officially document the site prior to demolition to add this record of a local, iconic business to council's cultural collection.

Hilton Stone took over 100 images and in doing so revealed a workplace of colourful characters against a backdrop of workshops and offices seemingly frozen in time. The photos depicted a space rich in history; layered in meaning; full of memories; a place where local people worked long and hard.

It was also a space that was immensely inspiring. At every turn there were materials to work with, themes to explore, and spaces to interpret.

Artists Cameron Robbins and Robbie Rowlands were introduced to the idea of the depot being used for a site specific art installation before being demolished. Having just completed a similar project at a beach house in Merricks, Victoria, Cameron and Robbie were very enthusiastic. They then hand-picked a team comprising seven artists, each experienced in creating site specific artworks.

Depot is about seeing value in everyday working spaces and the items left behind; their ability to be arranged, transformed and built upon, into spaces and objects of reflection, inspiration and final contemplation.

Throughout the exhibition vacant spaces provide a vital curatorial component of the Depot experience offering the necessary 'pauses' between each installation. In this environment the feeling of abandonment and eminent demolition dominate the senses.

Making the space to acknowledge change, highlight successful workplaces, record local history and mark an important step in central Dandenong's progress, is of vital importance in this city's revitalisation.

With a contemporary take on a site of historical importance, Depot offers a walk through experience that encourages the community to be part of history - to explore, reminisce, contemplate and farewell the site prior to it being razed.

Jenny Pemberton-Webb, Place Manager
Revitalising Central Dandenong



INTRODUCTION

On our first visit to the depot it was live. Now, still, the lights are on and warm air circulates through the building - even as James and Campbell dismantle the window frames to the north.

Here at the old Grendas bus depot in Dandenong a group of seven artists are making work from something that isn't easy to describe. Ostensibly their subject is a series of buildings, a bus depot vacated just a week ago: bricks, grease, old lockers, asphalt and the veneer clad boardroom. But space is as much their material as matter, and perhaps time also.

For fifty years this site has been the home and hub of the family-run transport company Grendas, on my first visit with the group, one of the workers told me he had been here for twenty years, they're a good company, they look after you. Are you excited about the move? I asked. Ah yes, it won't be the same, it'll be something else.

Grendas now operate out of a new bus depot across the railway line. I understand many of the drivers still stop out the front here on their layover, before continuing on to the station. Change unfolds in fits and starts. This area by the railway line will soon be a measure of blank metres, space and soil, these buildings will be razed and new lines and patterns of inhabitation will be marked out. The brushstrokes of the master-planner will meet the ground, remaking the city, sweeping lines indicating access, flow, aspect and a forward-looking approach to the future.

Depot has come about at the invitation of Jenny Pemberton-Webb and Grissel Walmaggia both working in the Cultural Development unit at the Greater Dandenong City Council. Aware of an earlier project the artists had undertaken in a soon to be demolished beach house, they invited the group to work with the Grendas depot site. Scheduled to be vacated at the time the project was instigated, the depot is now, as I write, and the site of a number of unfolding artistic processes.

Depot. The word is quite self-contained, suggested a pool of resources, perhaps, or a base to return to. We can imagine multiple paths and sets of footprints leading out from the depot, arcs which then turn and track back "home". The routes of so many buses, on their regular journeys out into the community and back again to be lined up side-by-side overnight in their

matching livery. Regularly the buses were moved through the bus-wash over the road and checked out in the mechanical workshops. Damaged buses were repaired and resprayed. The white spray booth with its banks of fluorescent lights and massive extractor fans is an amazing space, sitting as it does immediately alongside the black-grease-licked corner yard with its array of jet grimed cans and tins.

This was one kind of depot and now it is another entirely: a resource, a base and a place for art, for the work of James Carey, Campbell Drake, Susan Jacobs, Ben Morieson, Matt Morrow, Cameron Robbins and Robbie Rowlands. And so this project unfolds under the banner and "protection" of the word Depot with the close support of Jenny Pemberton-Webb and overarching welcome of the City of Greater Dandenong. Artists often work in the gaps between purposes and institutions. There are freedoms and opportunities here, dangers as well. Council have facilitated the artists' work as well as access to documentation such as the site contamination report and processes in relation to job safety analysis and general workplace safety. Not irrelevant concerns when you have James Carey & Campbell Drake preparing to cut a series of ten lines through the building.

Carey and Drake inhabit the world of design as well as being artists, but they were friends first. For the Depot, "Safety comes first", they tell me and smile as they paint. They have marked out a series of 10 stripes, each 55 cm wide in "safety yellow". Moving from the main site entry this work, *10 Lines, East West Trajectory 2008* gestures towards the new Grendas bus depot across the railway line, as well as indicating the position of the bridge that will dissect the site once the depot has been demolished.

The diffuse edges of these early lines are not nearly as solid as the older yellow lines on the asphalt, which mark out pedestrian access paths from the gates to various entry points. Nor as solid as the bold yellow stripes that Carey and Drake are painting vertically up the building, over brick, glass and aluminium. The building is being dressed and "cut" by the yellow stripes, sometimes they run over surfaces at other times they seem to dissolve or dissect them, in the first floor offices it is as if a wayward bus has cut a swathe through the partitions and desks.

In urban planning and architecture there is much drawing upon notional landscapes here, lines are drawn and painted directly onto, and into, the landscape. There is a fascinating feedback loop between the artist's interests, working-history, plans and approach on the one hand and the site itself on the other. It seems to me that Carey and Drake are not so interested in inscribing their views, or one reading, upon the work, but in allowing for multiplicities. A rich and ambiguous complication of meaning is set in specific tension, and relation, to an apparently simple gesture.

Together and separately each of the artists involved in the Depot have carefully "read" the site. We've visited the site whilst it was in use and spoke with those who worked here, sometimes over the course of their entire careers. We're aware that these buildings are fondly regarded, but this project is not an elegy, it is more about looking and seeing.

Working with the depot allows this group of artists to work with material that already carries multiple layers of meaning. It may be made of bricks and concrete, old benches and broken office chairs, empty tins and grease, but in its concrete actuality and straightforwardness offers artists much to work with.

Susan Jacobs is working in the adjacent areas of the old bus re-spraying booth, a glowing tunnel of white in this otherwise grimly grey landscape, and a kind of grease bay beyond the end of the building. Her work *Peripheral Static (Space Re-drawing Itself) 2008* began to find its form through her appreciation of the irony of a sign in the black zone, - "This area must be cleaned after use". As we are often warned, bad habits can begin with just a tiny crack in the skin of proper process.

Jacobs' transformation and transmutation of these spaces begins beneath this sign, from a small drain in the blackened retaining wall, which she begins by cleaning. Layers of carbonised goo are scrubbed and brushed away, the clean-zone appears to spill and spread from this open pipe, across the concrete and into the ground. The concrete surface first becomes clean and then is broken into, the cleanliness seems to shatter and fragment the surface.

A further transformation then occurs, these fragments of rubble are joined by other debris from the site, metal spans, rags and tins twist together and are funnelled through a vent in the blackened wall, then emerged into the white zone of the spray booth. This gathered debris twists as if in the spell of a strange cyclonic poltergeist, arcing across and through the space and twisting back upon itself.

Jacobs' talks of moving through something as she considers how the work will develop in relation to the space. She moves through one idea to another, through one space to another. Working only with materials from the depot: with cleaning products, a jackhammer and debris, Jacobs draws us from the underground to the celestial.

Likewise, Robbie Rowlands is committed to working through, and with, what he finds on the Depot site. At the far north end of the complex he takes the old "house" where the Grendas upholsters once worked as a found object, which he can cut and mould to a new design.

When we first visited this place there was a room of the long old bus seats, covered in red vinyl from the back of long defunct buses. There were sets of patterns hanging from the walls as well as a special angled rack for reading the newspaper, which intrigued us. I was pleased to see the plaque in the kitchen embossed "El Toro" was still there, even after the grand, and tough, old singer machine was removed.

Rowlands began to cut the pattern of his project *The Upholsterer Will Fix It 2008* even as he cleared the space, to better see what was there. After deciding that he wouldn't use the rough shelves in one of the front rooms he began to rip them out. He tells me he suddenly stood back and realised that the composition he wanted to work with was there, before him, a lower conglomeration of debris crowned by a series of strong diagonal members thrusting out into the room. Like a preliminary sketch for the work, this was enough for a first step, a "sketch in space" from which the decision was then made to cut into the floor and remove the floorboards from the joists. Artist-carpenter-sculptor, when Rowlands has finished it is as if the carpet has been pulled back like a banana-skin, a curl of carpet with its inner lining of floorboards is flicked back, reshaping our sense of the solidity of the surfaces

around us. From this near demolition site a fragment seems to spring and twang like a broken piano wire - releasing a long held tension, speaking with it's own voice or logic.

What do the voices, or echoes of the spaces and materials around us have to say? Matthew Morrow takes the skin, and bones, and form of his work from that which we discard. Upstairs, in the vacated offices of the Grendas bus depot Morrow's sculptures blend into their environment almost too well. Filing cabinets, an old fridge and a vacuum cleaner, we might almost pass them by. Yet the formality of their arrangement slows us down, suggesting a deliberate, perhaps ritual, connection; these objects are just beyond the "beyond" of their decrepitude, they have become something else.

This pair of four draw filing cabinets are 1:1 scale replicas, crafted from sheets of second hand and salvaged veneer. The texture of one found fragment timber is contrasted with another, within the reproduction of the real a material abstraction is played out.

Lying on it's back; the 60's style fridge with its rounded corners, icebox and missing door has the solemn aspect of an Egyptian sarcophagus. Looking closely we can see the loose edges of the simulacra, they have the quality of a sketch. Given the declarative and material solidity of the work, it is as if we are able to see the traces of the pencil lines of the preparatory sketch at the same time as viewing the finished painting. This work does not conceal the process of its making.

The curves of the thin veneer on parts of the fridge and vacuum cleaner are remarkably expressive, they remind me of the material character of a doll sewn from left over fragments of fabric and seem to animate what might otherwise be a cool and formal study of the everyday. It is as if these were soft-sculptures, about to inhale and exhale, lightly touched by the uncanny.

Looking across the empty bus yards and parking bays from the main offices and workshops of the depot is Ben Morieson's "office", it is only about a metre wide and two metres long, but it has a very large shed attached, as well as the bus wash.

Here, Morieson has been responsible for a major public manifestation of the uncanny. In clear view of the many passing, and possibly bemused train commuters, he has constructed a white-cube replica of a bus. Determinedly squatting on the g-spot of the bus wash his monolith is now ready to be painted.

In advance of this spectacular and ceremonial event, I have been privy only to the first caress of the cube by the rollers, but this, in itself, was an exciting event to behold. Late in the afternoon, and only hours after Kevin Kent and Jack Lowe had finished painting the "bus" Morieson pressed the button, which set the rollers in motion.

With a hum and whirr the once static and forlorn lengths of synthetic "swoosh" came to life, the dance began. On either side of the cube they spin their first steps and then move formally to the north-facing head of the bush-wash. The rollers touch each other gently and playfully at the centre-front of the bus-cube moving across the front windscreen, as it were, and then playing with the corners, moving to and fro upon them as if not wanting to continue further. After this apparent hesitation the rollers proceed along the sides of the bus and mirror their teasing steps at its rear before the mechanism slowly returns to rest.

The works of Cameron Robbins are rarely at rest, he prefers to harness the energy of prevailing elements such as the wind and waves as well as the forces of gravity and magnetism. For the Depot Robbins has taken to the boardroom, creating *Binary Opposites IV 2008*, a multi-storey, multi-dimensional artwork which cuts through the building quite literally.

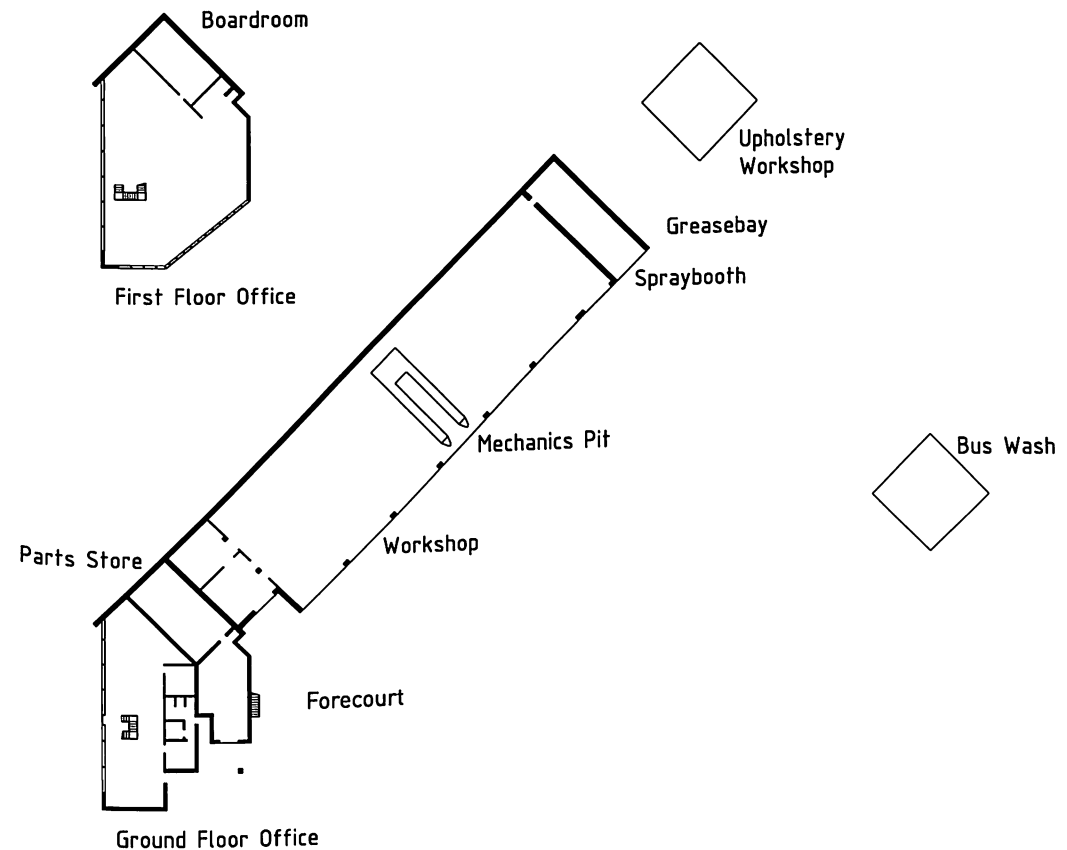
Like a Kafka-esque instrument of metaphor, Robbins "device" requires study and exploration to apprehend. When approaching the work from the boardroom level, we enter a kind of witness-box apparatus - the old reception desk has been reconfigured as a barrier to keep visitors slightly apart. On the roof of the depot wind vanes catch and transfer the motion of the wind down through the boardroom skylights, along aluminium relays and into large holes penetrating the floor into the old mechanical parts store below. The energy of the wind is relayed into an agitated and mobilised whiteboard as well as a lightly dancing white-board marker.

This is perhaps one of the most epic and ambitious of Robbins' drawing machines. Like Morieson, he involves himself with imagining, designing and then creating the conditions through which the artwork will then be made. He sets himself at one remove from the immediate making of the work, like a divine driver, he is always somewhere behind, or within, the controls of the machine he has created. Yet, the works of both Morieson and Robbins playfully emphasise the role of chance, the limitations of design and the importance of rolling with the punches as the process unfolds.

Whilst the depot, as a site, is a solid and prosaic entity destined for demolition, the Depot as a project has offered this group of artists a series of discoveries set within the frame of their own artistic process. Likewise the Depot offers those of us who visit, wander and wonder opportunities to step through our own expectations and anticipations - to walk between the cracks of the everyday.

Geraldne Barlow

SITE MAP



ARTISTS'

1 James Carey & Campbell Drake

10 Lines East West Trajectory

FORECOURT AND OFFICE

Carey and Drake have marked out a series of 10 stripes in safety yellow. Moving from the main site entry this work gestures towards the new Grendas bus depot across the railway line, as well as indicating the position of the bridge that will dissect the site once the depot has been demolished. The stripes run over brick, glass and aluminium, sometimes they colour the surfaces they touch, at other times they seem to dissolve or dissect them. In the first floor offices, it is as if a wayward bus has cut a swathe through the partitions and desks.

2 Susan Jacobs

Peripheral Static (Space Re-drawing Itself)

GREASE BAY AND SPRAY BOOTH

Jacobs work begins beneath the sign, "this area must be cleaned after use", an area of cleanliness spills from the open pipe, across the concrete and into the ground, churning rubble which is joined by other debris from the site metal spans, rags and tins which weave together and funnel through a vent in the blackened wall. This gathered debris turns and spins, as if in the spell of a strange cyclonic poltergeist, arcing across the space and twisting back upon itself.

3 Ben Morieson

White Wash

BUS WASH AND MECHANIC'S PIT

Ben Morieson has constructed a white-cube replica of a bus, determinedly squatting on the bus wash his monolith is ready to be painted. For the opening of the Depot Morieson will turn the bus wash into a massive painting machine, a dance in which the spinning rollers caress and transform the white cube at their centre.

4 Matt Morrow

Left

FIRST FLOOR OFFICE

Morrow uses discarded timber and veneer to make sculptural versions of the everyday objects of our familiar world. Lying on its' back; the 60's style fridge, with its rounded corners, icebox and missing door has the solemn aspect of an Egyptian sarcophagus. Looking closely we can see the loose edges of the copy - they have the fluid quality of a sketch. This work does not conceal the process of its making.

5 Cameron Robbins

Binary Opposites IV

BOARD ROOM AND PARTS STORE

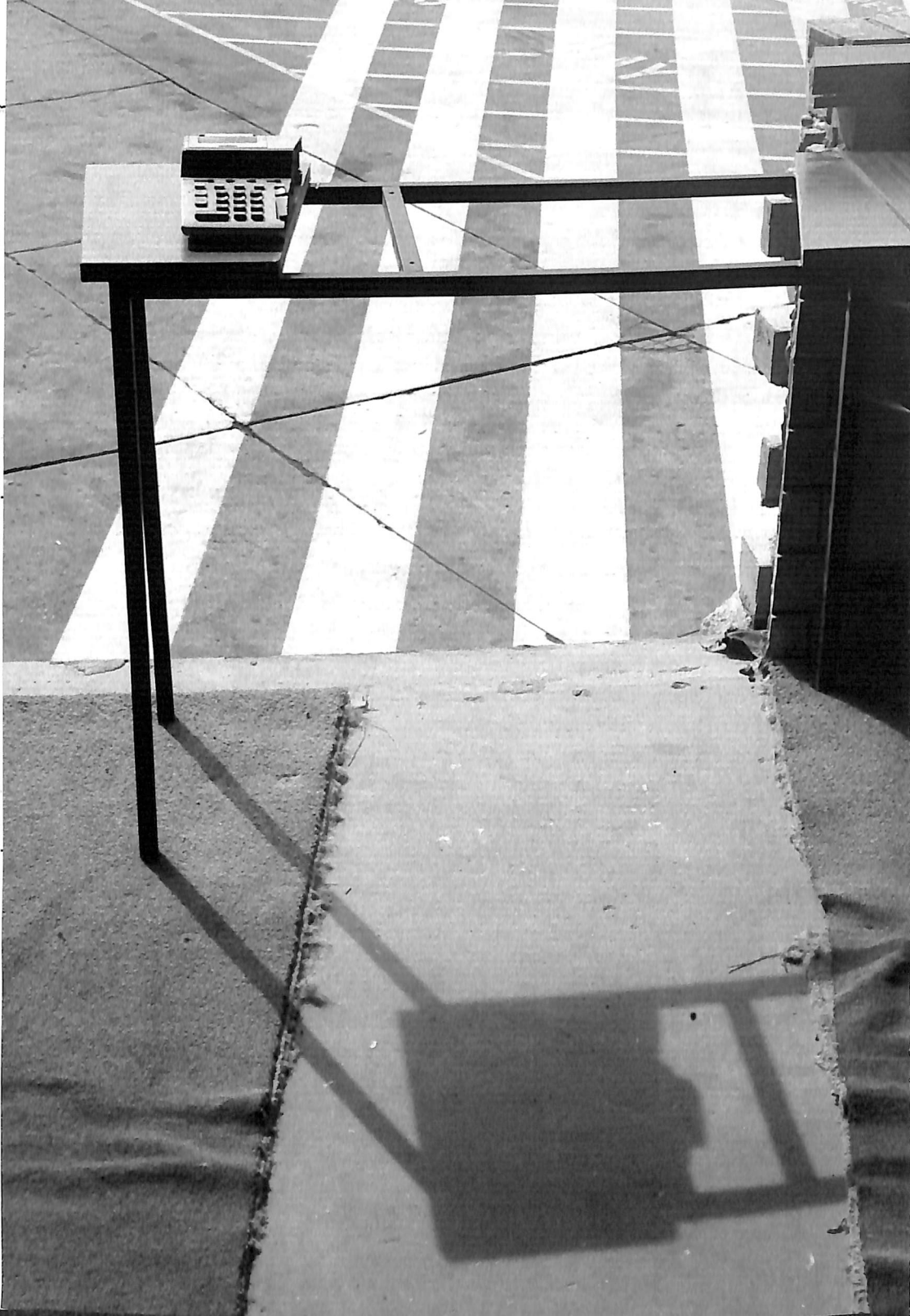
Robbins has created an artwork which cuts through the building quite literally. Approaching his massive device from the boardroom level, we enter a kind of witness-box apparatus, the old reception desk. On the roof wind vanes transfer the motion of the wind down through the skylights, along aluminium relays, through the large holes penetrating the floor and into the old mechanical parts store below where a whiteboard and marker translate the motion of the wind into a drawing.

6 Robbie Rowlands

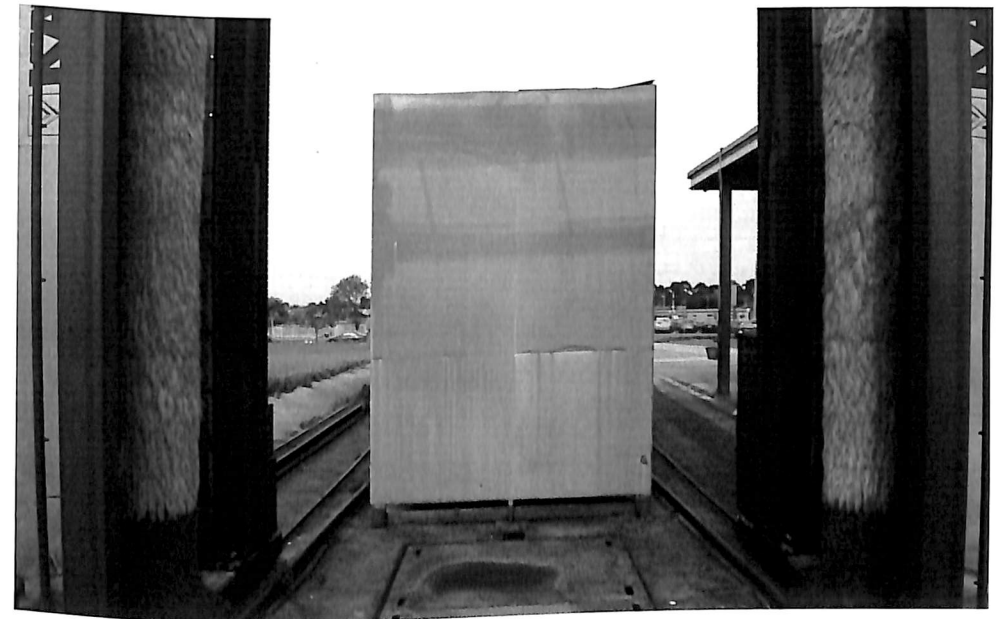
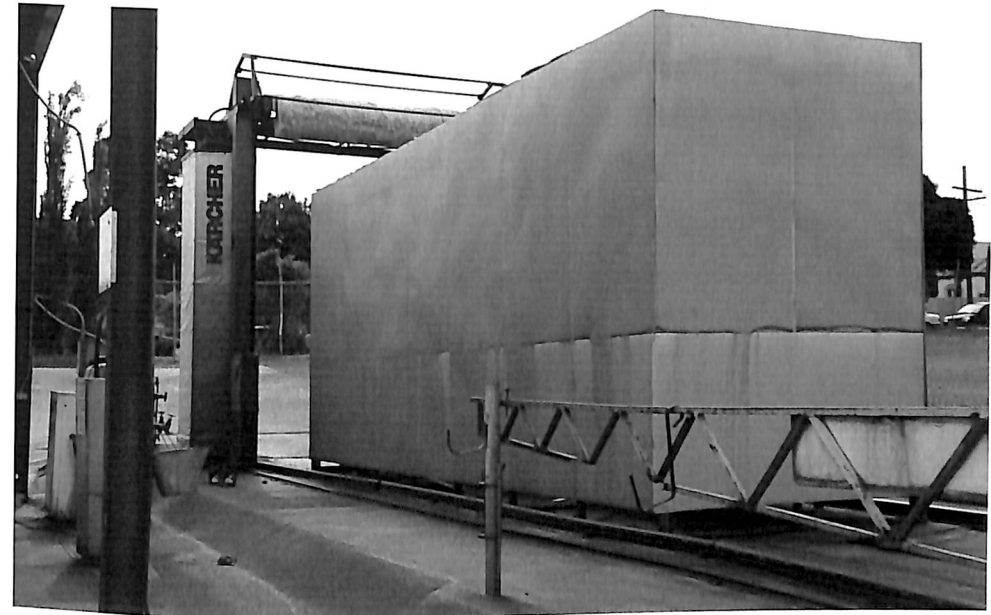
The Upholsterer Will Fix It

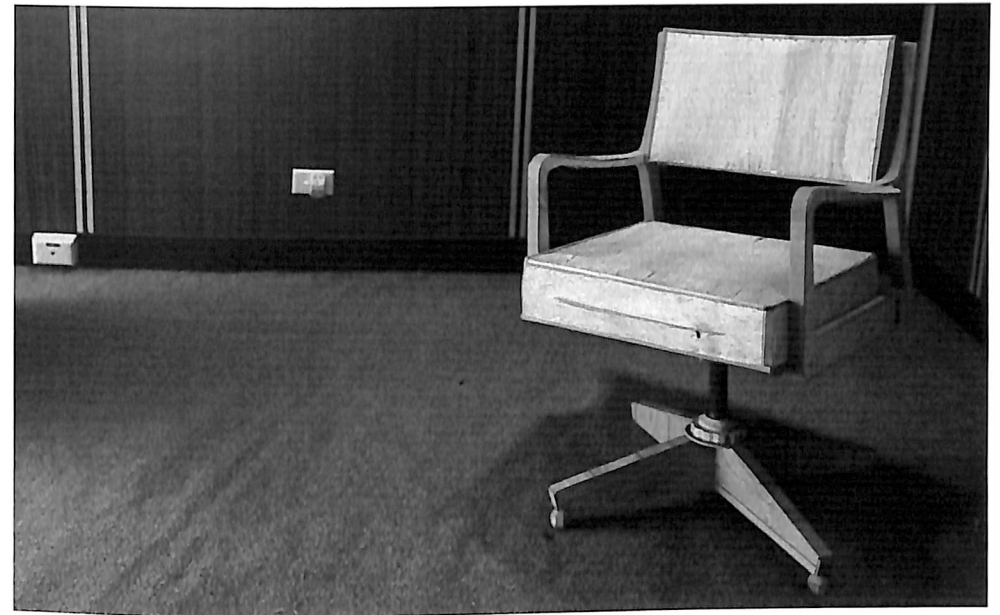
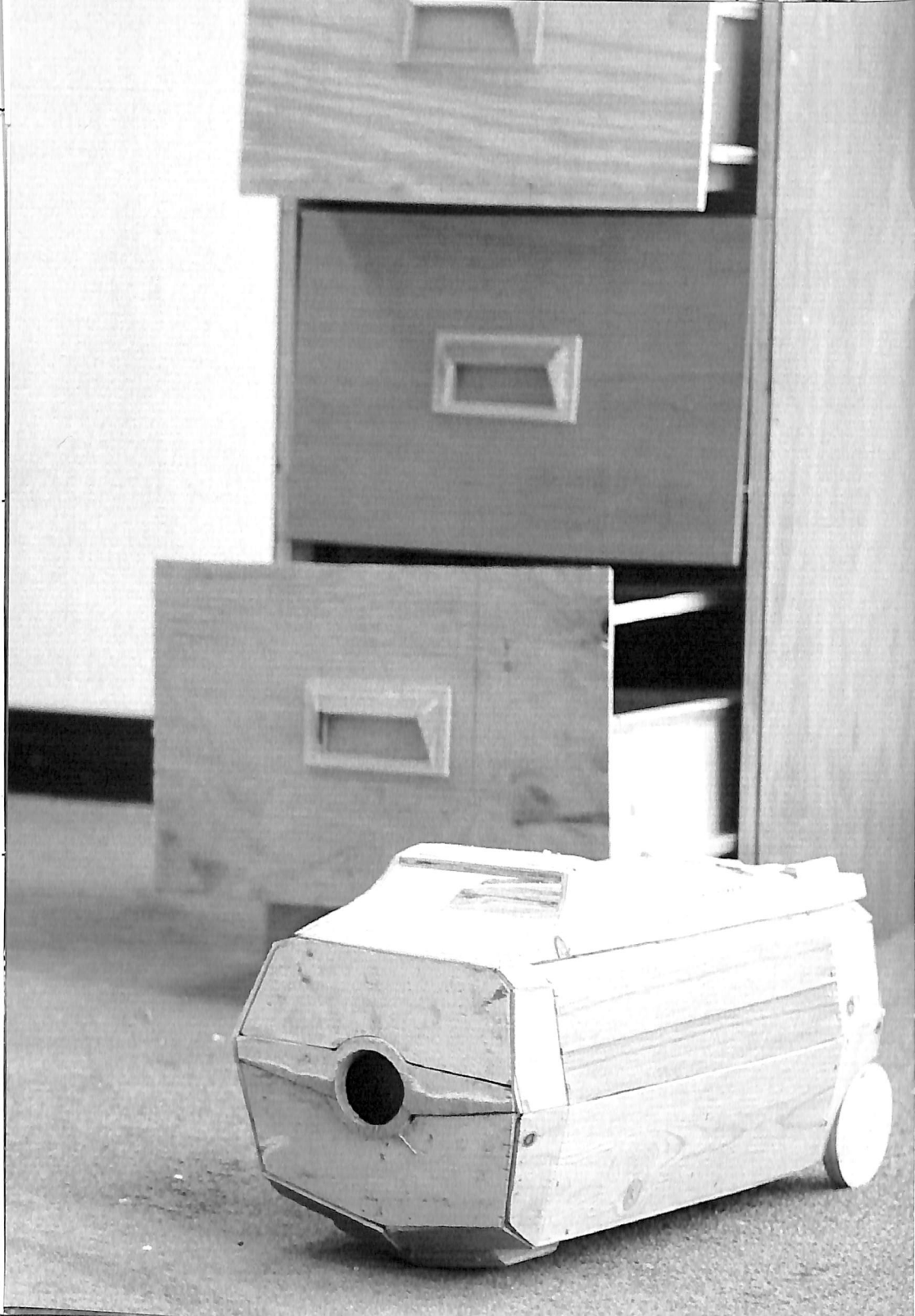
UPHOLSTERY WORKSHOP

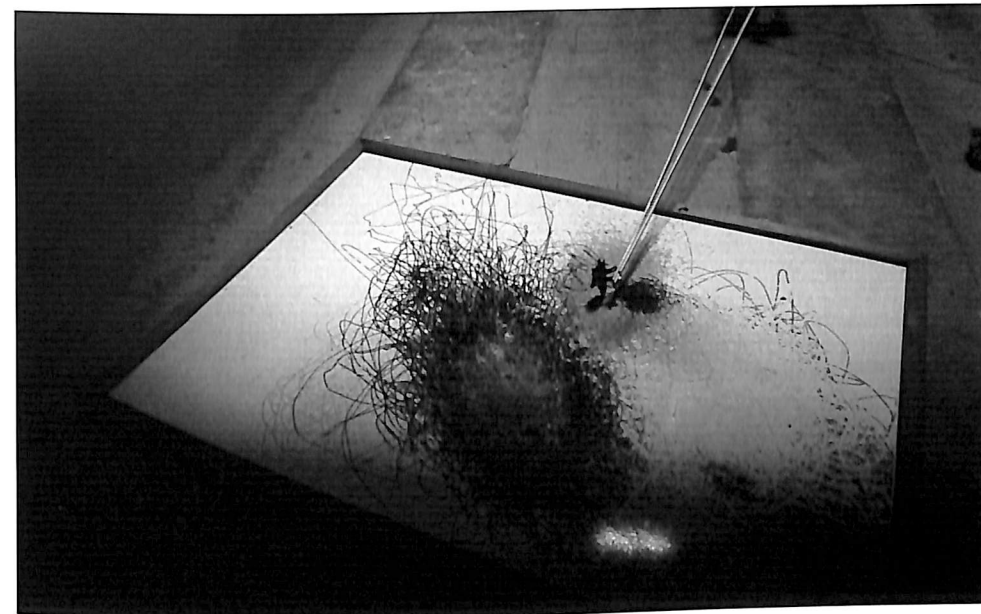
To make his sketch in space, Rowlands cuts into the floor and removes a section of floorboards from the joists. Artist-carpenter-sculptor, when he has finished the carpet has been pulled back like a banana-skin, a curl of carpet with its inner lining of floorboards is flicked back. From this near demolition site a fragment seems to spring and twang like a broken piano wire - releasing a long held tension.

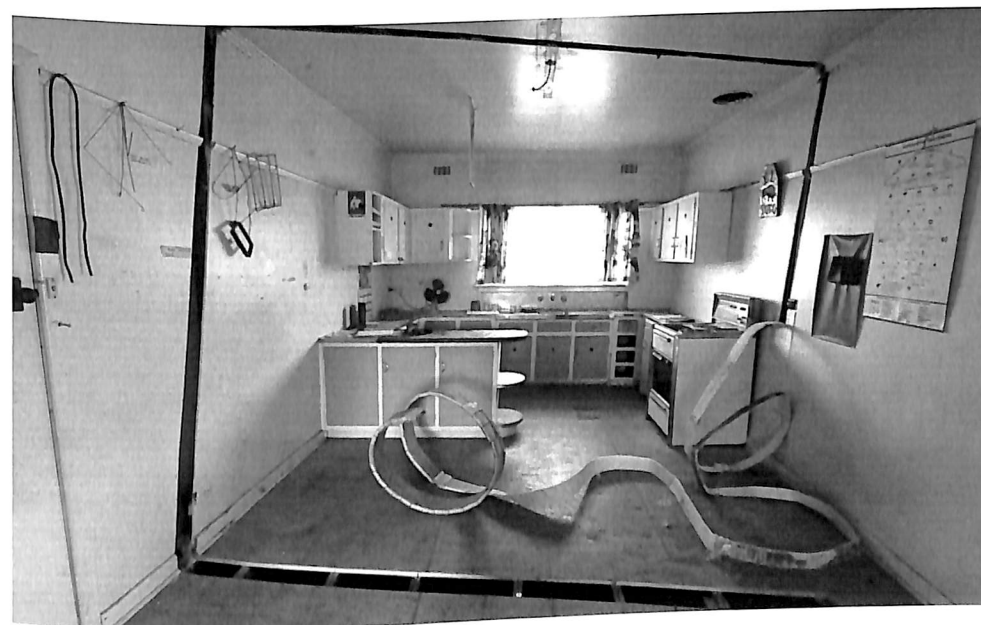












ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

James Carey is interested in the nature of our lived experience. Carey focuses on the blurring of boundaries between architecture, design and art; he constructs multi-layered, textured environments in both his paintings and his design.

James Carey was born in Melbourne in 1977. He first undertook an Arts Degree at Monash University before studying Interior Design at The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in Melbourne. Carey's paintings have been shown worldwide and are held in private and public collections. Working together with Campbell Drake, Carey has been responsible for the following projects: *Stanley St Data Landscape 2008*; *The Final Curtain, 26 Surf St, Merricks, 2007* and *The Blundell House 2005* which won an award at the Shanghai Biennale 2007. Carey is also contributing to the project 2020? which will take place at the North Melbourne Meat Market as part of the Next Wave Festival in May 2008.

Campbell Drake works between interior and exterior, art and architecture, the familiar and the unfamiliar, the plans we make and glitches that surprise us. Drake is interested in attending to vernacular forms and spaces, asking us to focus on the familiar and then creating a disquieting slippage between the expected and its underside.

Campbell Drake was born in 1978 in Melbourne. He currently lives and works in Melbourne as an architect, artist and lecturer. He often works in collaboration with James Carey, their recent projects include; *Stanley St Data Landscape 2008*; *The Final Curtain, 26 Surf St, Merricks, 2007* and *The Blundell House 2005*. Drake was awarded the Interior Designer Award for Excellence 2007. He practises under the name of Chameleon Architecture and teaches in Architecture and Design at RMIT University.

Susan Jacobs has a strongly material and spatial practice, and yet her work is also profoundly connected to the exploratory process of drawing. Both her more speculative constructions and her meticulously aggregated works draw from these concerns with space and material. Combining the organic and the manufactured, working in natural as well as built environments, Jacobs work is characterised by an exploration - and subversion - of her chosen materials and sites.

Susan Jacobs was born in Sydney in 1977 and completed her postgraduate studies at the Victorian College of The Arts in 1999. Jacobs work has been exhibited at Ocular Lab, The Narrows, Conical, Monash University Faculty Gallery, Seventh Gallery, West Space and in several pre-demolition sites. Jacobs participated in the exhibitions *Structure, Space and Place*, at the Tower

Hill Memorial, Kangaroo Ground, 2007 and *26 Surf St, Merricks, 2007*. Jacobs is also contributing to the project 2020, which will take place at the North Melbourne Meat Market as part of the Next Wave Festival in May 2008.

Ben Morieson creates art from the unexpected. From a disused bus wash he creates a mechanical action painting that is also a monumental sculpture, from illicit burnouts he creates poetic drawings on asphalt, he draws the edges of the urban into our close consideration as art.

Ben Morieson completed a Bachelor of Fine Art at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology in 1988, he then travelled through South America, Africa and Western Europe over the course of two years. He has since held numerous solo exhibitions and group shows. Morieson has been awarded the Australia Council residency in Barcelona and participated in the Echigo Tsumari Triennial in Japan with the support of Asialink. Morieson has been the recipient of grants from Arts Victoria and the Australia Council for the Arts. His work has been exhibited in China, Japan, Germany, Britain and New Zealand.

Matt Morrow recreates the discarded - from the discarded. Drawing from the extensive bank of materials he collects as a part of his "day job" he creates 1:1 replicas of the "junk" we might see in hard rubbish collections or evacuated offices.

Matthew Morrow was born in 1970. He lives and works in Melbourne and completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts - Sculpture at Victoria College, Prahran in 1990. His solo exhibitions have included Sculpture & Prints, at The George Gallery, Melbourne in 1997 and Paintings, at Sui Generis Gallery, Melbourne in 1999. Morrow's work is held in public and private collections around Australia and his group exhibitions include: *26 Surf St, Merricks, 2007*; *Unsigned Artists*, Niagara Galleries, 2002; *Sculpture Survey*, Gomboc Gallery, Perth, 2005; *Exchanging Places*, Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney, 1999 and *Past its Shelf Life*, Meridian Gallery, Melbourne, 1995.

Cameron Robbins work is based on the interaction of natural forces and the elements. Over the last twenty years he has produced site-specific installations for a wide range of locations around Australia, utilising a variety of media and natural forces including kinetic sculpture, wind and solar powered mechanical systems, sound and ocean waves.

Cameron Robbins was born in Melbourne in 1963. He studied at The Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology and completed his post-graduate studies at The Victorian College of the Arts. Recent and forthcoming projects include:

ARTISTS' BIOGRAPHIES

Double Vortex, a permanent installation in the foyer of CH2, the Melbourne City Council's new Green building, 2006; *Sea Shanties Wave Organ*, a sound installation on Lorne Pier, 2007; *Solar System*, a permanent 1:1 billion scale model of the solar system, at locations around Port Philip Bay, October 2008; *Rescueboat Shed*, installations examining the tides and weather, Queenscliff Pier, May 2008 and *Indoor/Outdoor*, a permanent kinetic wind installation at Place Gallery, Richmond, Sept 2008.

Robbie Rowlands looks closely at the everyday objects around us, he questions their nature, their stability. Working both familiar and found materials, Rowlands cuts into and manipulates the recognisable, peeling back one form to reveal another, reflecting upon the passage of time and what lies beneath the surface of our familiar world.

Robbie Rowlands was born in 1968 and lives and works in Melbourne. He graduated from The Victorian College of the Arts in 1999. Rowlands studied at Pratt Institute, New York after, his first solo exhibition FOUND came out of this work. Rowlands participated in the exhibitions *Structure, Space and Place*, at the Tower Hill Memorial, Kangaroo Ground, 2007 and *26 Surf St, Merricks*, 2007. He is currently working toward a solo show at Place Gallery in 22 October 2008.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was undertaken and funded by Grenda's Bus Services, Vic Urban and the City of Greater Dandenong.

Writer	Geraldine Barlow
Photographs	Hilton Stone Hilton Stone Photography
Artists	James Carey Campbell Drake Susan Jacobs Ben Morrison Matt Morrow Cameron Robbins Robbie Rowlands
Trade &	Kevin Kent, Jack Lowen & Justin Evangelista, Kent Maintenance
Electrical Support	John Beamont & Ben Barcham, Anstis Electrics
Project Co-ordination	Jenny Pemberton-Webb, City of Greater Dandenong Place Manager Revitalising Central Dandenong
Project Team	Sarah Saunders, Grenda's Grissel Walmaggia, City of Greater Dandenong Cameron Robbins, Artist Robbie Rowlands, Artist
Filming	ABC Sunday Arts Program

Sincere thanks to the many people who helped undertake this project. With behind the scene support. City of Greater Dandenong - Media and Communications, Accounts Payable, the Building Department, Risk Management and Library, Arts and Heritage Services and at the Grenda Corporation - Geoff and Scott Grenda, Sarah Saunders, Frank Bowden, Michael Thorn, David Willersdorf, Joe Zammit and Hermant Singh

CONTACTS

depot-installation.blogspot.com
www.greaterdandenong.com

Further information contact Jenny Pemberton-Webb
City of Greater Dandenong
P O Box 200
Dandenong Vic 3175 Australia
(03) 9239 5100
jpembe@cgd.vic.gov.au

Published by the City of Greater Dandenong April 2008. This work is copyright. Reproduction of any stories or photographs for purposes other than for research or promotional purposes will be viewed as a breach of copyright. For purposes other than those stated, written permission from the City of Greater Dandenong must be obtained.

