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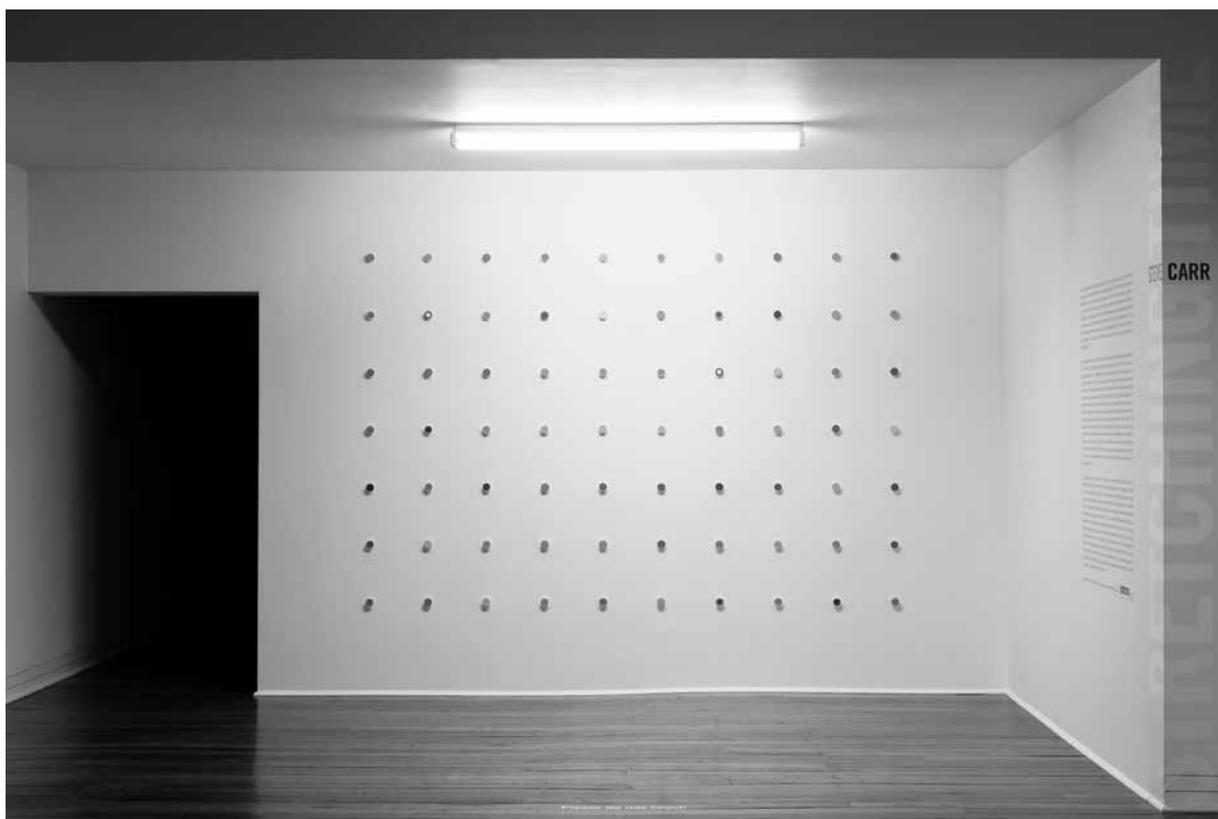
# Revelations: Steve Carr's 'Stretching Time' at Dunedin Public Art Gallery

8 March–20 July 2014

Steve Carr is an Auckland based artist who spent the end of 2013 in Dunedin as the Public Art Gallery's summer resident. Over this time Carr created three works that made up his exhibition 'Stretching Time'. The exhibition reflects Carr's interest in the manipulation of time through photographic and cinematic technologies, exploring how the viewer engages with time and memory within the gallery space. The alluring aesthetic of Carr's work draws the spectator's interest and once experienced packs a thoughtful conceptual punch.

In 'Stretching Time', Carr exploits the interplay between photography, film and sculpture as part of his ongoing interest in combining different media. This approach is evident in Carr's 2008 installation 'A Shot in the Dark' at Michael Lett Gallery. Here Carr presented a similar mix of components, including *Bear Rug*, a sculpture made from wood and a photograph entitled *The Bachelor*, which depicted the torso of a bare-chested man, reminiscent of a moose's head. What results in Carr's mixed media installations is a humorous manipulation of our perception of not only individual media but also his subjects.

'Stretching Time' is perhaps a more poetic sensory experience for the viewer with the incorporation of filmic devices. The first work of the show is situated on the outside wall before entering the main space. Titled *Range*, it consists of a selection of golf balls that have been sliced in half and placed in grid-like pattern on the white wall. These particular golf balls are designed and produced for the top



Steve Carr, *Range*, 2013–14, 35 bisected golf balls, installation view, Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett.

tier of professional international golf players. Carr sourced the balls whilst on a residency in San Francisco, taking interest in the way they are made and their unexpected colourfully patterned interior. Every ball is unique in its psychedelic colour and pattern, revealing a tantalisingly rich production process. By opening up this seemingly mundane object, Carr explores the hidden poetic beauty of the everyday. An object grounded in action and movement, the golf balls are suspended and frozen in time for the viewer's inspection. The delightful surprise that begins Carr's exhibition eases the viewer into a state of curiosity when entering the main space.

*Transpiration* is the first work witnessed in the secluded gallery, a video installation depicting a row of carnations, which wraps around and completely covers two of the gallery walls. Carr put different coloured dyes in the water of multiple vases that fed the flowers, slowly transforming them from their original state of white into the pastel coloured hues of yellow, pink and blue. In this process of transpiration, the dyed water is pulled up through the stem of the flower in turn slowly dyeing the petals. We do not see the stems however, only the ephemerally suspended flowers slowly painting themselves.

In the installation, the carnations have been enlarged to theatrical proportions. Thirty meters long and projected on the walls from six evenly spaced projectors, the work is all encompassing and visually stunning. Yet *Transpiration* also has a calming effect that overcomes any mood trudged in from the outside world. In the work, traditional concepts of time are stripped away creating an immersive experience for the viewer. Projected floor to ceiling, the work becomes inadvertently mesmerising, hypnotising the viewer's optical sensors. Carr uses filmic repetitive sequencing to establish a fabricated narrative of time. The only way the viewer can know that it is in fact a moving image rather than a still is the slow changing of colour as well as the odd slight movement of a petal seen out of the corner of the eye. The crispness of the carnations denotes a plastic quality that is only eradicated when noticing the slight movement of the petals that intermittently shake the viewer out of the feeling of stasis. Their thinly delicate quality denotes a sense of artificiality. They appear as though made out of origami paper, delicate but robust, suspended not only

in the filmic loop but also in the now, even though their material counterparts are long gone. Carr's utilisation of the carnation cannot be overlooked. Alluding to funerary symbols, the choice of flower can be seen as a kind of memento mori, reminding the viewer of their own mortality and situation in space and time.

In a hidden corner of the gallery a third work is installed, a single channel HD film, easily overlooked if not paying attention. A chirp can be heard every 15 minutes that ruptures the viewer's hypnosis created by *Transpiration*. In this work named *American Night* we see a small bird sitting frozen on a branch surrounded by glittering light and a projection of foliage whose tone and colour emulate that of the carnations in *Transpiration*. The scene is both kitsch and slightly unsettling as we realise the bird is in fact a model.

In *American Night* Carr condenses the timespan of a day into a 15 minute film while skipping the periods of dawn, twilight and dusk, drawing attention to the artificiality of the piece. Mixing time with a sense of artifice, Carr creates an illusionary field of transient light. Anyone that has seen David Lynch's sadomasochistic and most infamous film *Blue Velvet* (1986) will see the frame of reference, not that it is particularly crucial in gaining a positive response from the work. The framing is in fact exactly the same as a frame from the ending sequence of the film in which the protagonist settles into an idyllic suburban life. In the film, the bird, a robin, represents love; here the scene is reinvented and recoded. This pop culture reference adds a sense of playfulness in contrast with *Transpiration's* more contemplative atmosphere.

*Stretching Time* is an eloquent comment on cinematic ideals of time, memory and the place of the spectator. It evokes the plasticity of time and the physical experience is reminiscent of a cinema, or a simulation of one perhaps. When entering the space and viewing what is on offer, time is stretched and somehow stripped away. Viewers lose themselves in the cinematic sequence through the totally immersive effect of narrative. The idea of shedding light on everyday overlooked objects that are subject to Carr's practice is present in this series. In *Range* we witness a frozen revelation of the interior of a mundane object revealing its complexity, in *Transpiration*

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Steve Carr, *Transpiration*, 2014, six channel video installation, silent, 15:00 (looped), installation view, Dunedin Public Art Gallery. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett.

and *American Night* we succumb to the breakdown of temporal conventions through cinematic experience and pop or socio-cultural artifice. *Stretching Time* is a show about revelations, not only of the objects and subjects represented, but also of the media utilised. Like Carr's other work, we cannot help but notice that narrative, artifice and an edge of humour and pop culture drive his practice. Perhaps the order in which the exhibition has been presented is intentional in terms of setting up the viewer's perception of time and then rupturing it as they walk around the space coming across each consecutive work. On greater contemplation the works become alive with these dynamics and we come to realise that time has slipped by without our noticing.