

das SUPER PAPPE

20

AUGUST 2011
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COVER IMAGE

Alice Lang
What we left behind 2 (2009)
Metallic print
37x27x21 cm
Image courtesy of the artist.

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PRINTING SPOTPRESS
DISTRIBUTION STUART'S LOGISTICS

dasSUPERPAPER ISSUE 20
AUGUST 2011. 7500 COPIES.

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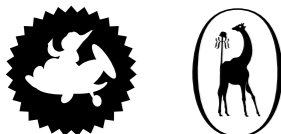
ISSN 1837-0373
PRINT POST APPROVED
PP: 255003/10007

ENQUIRIES

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THANKS

DAS SUPERPAPER WOULD LIKE TO
THANK ALL CONTRIBUTING WRITERS,
ARTISTS & GALLERIES FOR THEIR
GENEROUS SUPPORT.



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ABOUT FACE

A 180 DEGREE TURN.

A renewed place.

They turn to ๑๑๓ us.

We view the artists at work.
A potent stare or a playful glance.

Turning on the spot we see faces
in every window.
Performativity and portraiture
in confetti-lined streets.

Twenty issues in, and the revolution
is still
spinning.

BRONWYN BAILEY-CHARTERIS





A MATERIAL CONCERN THE ART OF ALICE LANG

PROFILE TIM WALSH

“ THIS IS NOT VERY REASSURING. BUT SUPPOSE IT COMES AND ENVELOPES YOUR FACE WHILE YOU ARE QUIETLY ASLEEP...”

”
- Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar, Book XI, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

ALICE LANG is an emerging artist originally from Byron Bay and currently based in Brisbane. Since graduating with Honours in Visual Arts from Queensland University of Technology in 2004, Lang has developed a wide-ranging practice concerned with the emotions and latent memories or meanings imbued in material. Through her process-based work, Lang demonstrates both skill and persistence in creating complex, labour-intensive works rich in detail. The materials Lang creates are then manipulated, stretched, stuffed, hung, draped and propped ad infinitum in support of her concepts and interests.

In Lang’s early practice, these interests lay in “exploring the relationship between wearable objects and the body”. In these works, flesh-like growths sprout legs, wrap with tendril arms and smother faces. Using wet-look vinyl and sewing techniques passed down from her grandmother and mother (including ‘the Suffolk Puff’) Lang’s graduate pieces employ familiar approaches to create foreign objects. These “parasitic wearables”, as Lang describes them, are worn by models and captured primarily through photography, appearing sutured to the subject’s face. Reflective, patent cysts cling to skin like ‘face huggers’ from Ridley Scott’s classic 1979 science fiction film *Alien* (one of Lang’s favourite films). For Lang, her interest in these pieces lies in how:

‘this action of splicing art with the body when documented through photography was able to reinvent sculptural work in a context other than installation, drawing correlations between sculpture and the body through performance.’

The impetus for these pieces was the discovery of wet-look vinyl in a local fabric supplier, “as a wearable fabric it is so extreme and grotesque, but I was also interested in the way that it was presented in an everyday context. They would sell it at Spotlight alongside all the other fabrics as if there was nothing abnormal about it...”. These early pieces highlight interests that still exist in Lang’s current practice – the presence/absence of the body in her art, and how the art object can become something functional in and of itself.

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••
 Alice Lang
Decoy 1 & 2 (2007)
 Wet-look vinyl, liquid foil and wadding,
 Various dimensions

•|
 Alice Lang
We will wait and see 2 (2009)
 Transparency on lightbox
 approx. 33.5 x 25cm

In 2009's *Aura Pod* Lang extends these concerns. She began to collect bed sheets and second hand jumpers, quilting and stitching them together into a growing, thick, swaddling skin pocked with holes. Mixed with different patterns and pastel tones, Lang removes the synthetic colours and sheen of earlier pieces. The body is felt through its absence; the form of the work looks like it was stitched around a human figure. Propped up on dowels, the mass of the work looms above the viewer as if it is about to collapse, suffocating those below. The used sheets and jumpers carry with them the residue of human contact, transformed into a mass of netted polyps and tubes. *Aura Pod* also relates to more child-like anxieties and feelings – smothering, becoming entwined in sheets and asphyxiation from over-layered winter quilts.

In 2010's *Just In Case*, presented in the Museum of Brisbane's new space on Ann Street in the CBD, Lang has shown courage in embracing an even larger, installation-based format. Perched on top of a circular, mirrored plinth stand three teepee-like structures, their planes of fabric stretched taut across bound wooden supports. In the interior, optimistic yet generic phrases (You're Lucky, Lucky, Lucky, It was worth it and Something is going to happen) are hand-painted in a mirrored, abstract manner. Imposed over luminescent colour, they become a net-like, webbed pattern that extends across the entire ceiling. With the help of the mirrored floor, the interior of the installation becomes a cave-like, protective space – its infinite shapes and colours envelop the viewer, offering somewhere to bliss out and recuperate.

On the structures' exterior surfaces, the same phrases are stitched in large letters over common, everyday fabrics. For Lang, the function of these statements lies in their generality, they "move from being personal to become subjective, nondescript and universally understood through the subjects' own memories and experiences". The initial influence for *Just In Case* lay in home-made banners or signs, normally seen at sporting events, hanging outside houses or off overpasses. Lang was interested:

'in the idea of someone feeling so moved or passionate about something that they use whatever materials they have available to them to make [a] banner...[it] provides a way in which art and text are used as a passionate device to communicate with a mass audience.'

The result of this influence is an installation that is a clear departure from Lang's earlier works. *Just In Case* was also spurred on by a repetitive stress injury in Lang's wrist that stopped her from replicating her detailed, stitched fabrics like those in *Aura Pod*. As Lang describes it,

'the change/limitations that [the injury] caused within my everyday life triggered a period of slight neurosis and paranoia as I was now doing daily exercises and wearing a wrist brace to heal the injury and prevent it from getting worse. My life had become about preventative actions.'

The making of this new work, for Lang, became a healing project in itself and opened her practice up into new territory. The work itself is confident – it is a defined, functional and social space. Lang took comfort in creating a piece that is adaptable; in the process of creating *Just In Case* she discovered that a poncho pattern is very similar to a teepee. The fabric can be worn to protect an individual, or stretched to the size of a shelter. For Lang, its purpose is in shielding the viewer from the shared, pervasive anxieties in the world around us.

Since *Just In Case*, Lang has presented *Multiple Visions*, an installation at GRANTPIRRIE Gallery Redfern, Sydney. Referencing the same injury that necessitated a change of direction in *Just In Case*, *Multiple Visions* features small, claw-like hands (titled RSI talismans) made from Fimo, a pliable, outmoded clay product. Other amorphous forms (especially ECF (Entropic colour field) 1) look back to earlier works in their subject matter – a small Alien mouth bursting from a psychedelic Fimo base. Lang's future works promise a new confidence born of adversity, and an appetite for exploring new craft-based materials that will continue to progress her practice into different terrain.