

ART WORLD

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Natasha Frisch

“People don’t believe the work is made from paper and they can’t help themselves – they have to touch it”

NATASHA FRISCH is a young Melbourne-based artist who, after studying photography and media art, began making site-specific installations from fragile materials such as paper, string and tape. These delicate works – constructed through a painstaking process of cutting, folding and sticking – have been exhibited in various artist-run and independent spaces in Melbourne over the past eight years. In *Uncertain Landscapes*, a group exhibition now on show at Dianne Tanzer Gallery in Melbourne, Frisch will install Venetian blinds made from paper – a re-creation of a work from 2004 – in the gallery window, evoking a suburban interior where all is not as it seems. *INTERVIEW: Jane Somerville*



What is the origin of the name Frisch?
Frisch means “fresh” in German. It comes from my great, great, great-grandfather, on my Dad’s side, who came to Australia with his brother by boat in the 1870s. We’re a little uncertain about whether they were “legal” – the theory is that they might’ve jumped ship! We think he was a carpenter, which is funny, because all my family is handy in some way.

How did you become interested in art?
I’ve been making things ever since I was a child. My mother says that she could always find me because I’d be sitting in a corner talking to myself, either making something or reading. It was a natural progression for me to continue making things.

How did you move into making site-specific works?
I used to make work with hundreds and hundreds of photographs, printing the same negative over and over. When I started to use tracing paper, I was interested in the paper itself and its tactile quality, and also the impermanent object that I could create. Photography is about capturing a moment. The image is not the “true” moment, it’s a facsimile of it. I wanted to see if I could make this idea exist in a sculptural form. Also, with my site-specific installations, the good and bad of it is that I don’t know if they’re going to be successful until they’re installed!

And your day job is in art conservation?
The irony is that I work in strategic collections management at Museum Victoria in Melbourne. That’s the duality of my brain – in one sense I help to preserve heritage objects, and in another I work with impermanent sculpture with not a lot of thought about archiving!

Does much damage occur when you work with such fragile materials?
The way I work is very artisan-like. I spend a lot of time trying to remove any evidence of

my hand – I don’t want any dints or imperfections. Because I use such fragile materials I have to be prepared for the possibility of loss in each stage of the process of making the work – in the cutting, the folding, the adhesion, and even when the work is in transit. I have to rely on my ingenuity in terms of construction. But by the time the works are installed they’re pretty solid. During the exhibition itself there’s a fair bit of wear-and-tear that goes on because people don’t believe the work is made from paper and they can’t help themselves – they have to touch it. I’ve learned to accept this as part of the process. But you’ll never find me standing near my work at an opening because it freaks me out too much!

Do the works have a life after the exhibition closes?
They exist for the time of the show and they aren’t easily translated into another space – a lot of them are built in. When they’re de-installed they literally end up in a ball or they come down in a more performative deconstruction. But even when the work is gone I don’t consider it finished – I photograph and film it for my own archive. For me they’re like working pieces, because I can see how they can be made in different scales for other spaces.

What inspires your work?
I spend a lot of time gleaning information from the urban environment. I’m interested in changes in space and even the conversations I hear – I’ve heard so many ridiculous conversations on public transport. It’s a great source for understanding people and the world. People on mobile phones are incredible – they have no idea how much information they’re giving away!

Tell me about the titles of your work. I noticed that they often have a twist.
I’m glad you saw the twist. For a long time I

feared that I was making ephemeral, fluffy work. A lot of my inspiration isn’t that light – it’s the dark side of suburbia. Often [the titles] are a conversation that I have with the work as I’m making it. They’re like film stills. For example, the title *Nothing to See Here* is about the suburban environment and the fact that we never really know exactly what goes on inside other people’s houses.

Have you done many video works?
I’ve done one video with live sound which shows a real weed positioned next to another I’ve made out of tracing paper. There is a certain instant gratification in shooting a video or taking a photograph, but the process of making [sculptural] works – and the challenge of it – still fascinates me.

Where is your studio?
I’ve just moved actually. I used to be right in the middle of the city, but now I’m closer to home in a shared space. It’s interesting because when I moved [to the new studio], people were in utter disbelief about what I make! Having a studio at home would be great, but external spaces are good in that you can focus. And for big works I need to spread out on a couple of trestle tables.

Do you listen to music while you work?
I drive people crazy listening to the radio. I’m in the studio for long stretches – between eight and 12 hours – so if I listen to albums I don’t have a sense of the day. The radio is a good marker of time because the shows change every two hours.

Finally, if you could live with any work of art ever made, what would it be?
There aren’t many that I could live with! I’ve decided on Felix Gonzalez-Torres’s *Untitled (March 5)* (1991).

Exhibition: Uncertain Landscapes, group exhibition, Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne, 22 Nov – 21 Dec



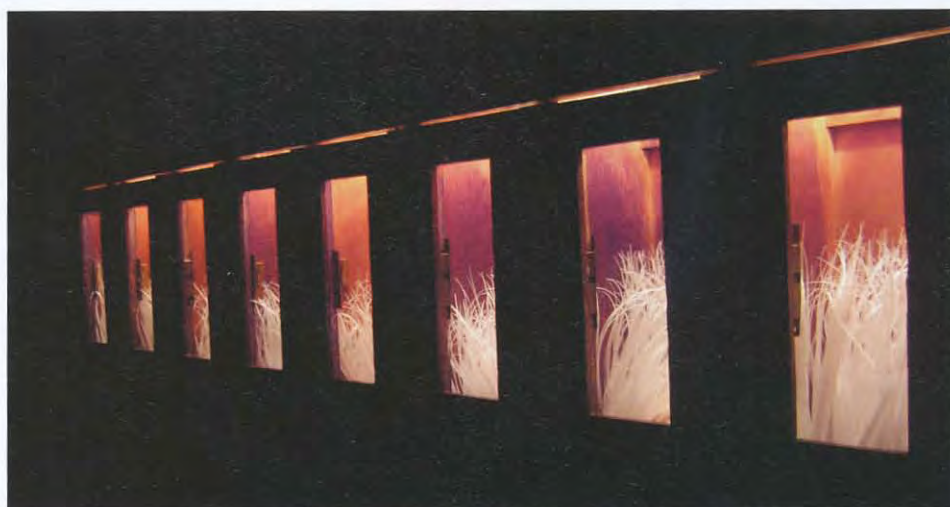
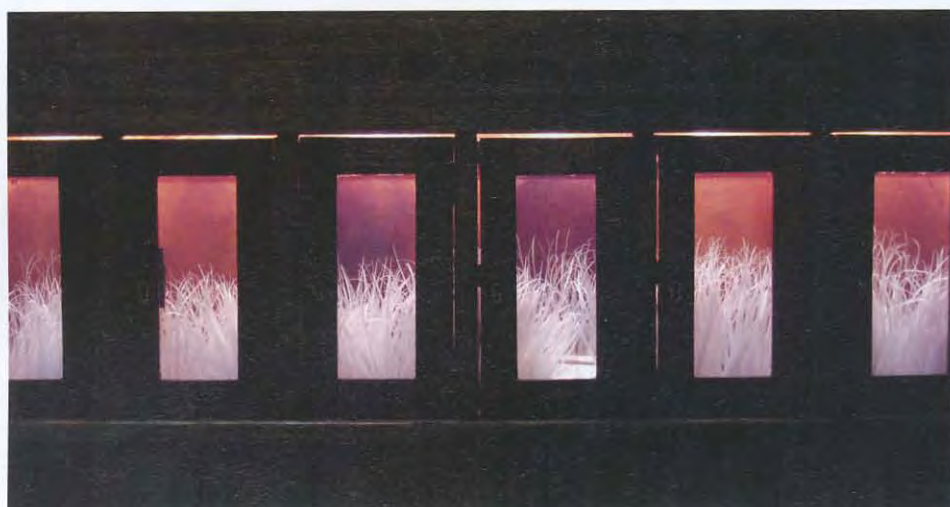
- 1 **Don’t Fuck’n Touch My Stuff** (2003), tracing paper, 2cm wide, variable length
- 2 **Nasty Little Piece of Work** (2004), tracing paper, LED lights, dumpster, 18 x 13.9 x 12.5cm
- 3 **Don’t Make Me Hurt You...** (2005), tracing paper, double-sided tape, monofilament line, 208 x 65 x 260cm



Born: 1974, Melbourne, Australia Studied: RMIT University, Melbourne; Deakin University, Melbourne Lives and works: Melbourne Represented: Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Melbourne



It's Nothing... Really (2006), single-channel video projection



Above: **Somewhere in the Middle of Nowhere** (2007), tracing paper, glue dots, balsa wood, mobile phone, dimensions variable

Opposite: **Nothin' to See Here** (2004–08), tracing paper, double-sided tape, string, electrical tape, 900 x 1 x 260cm

