12 September to 11 October 2014

Maria Antelman
(New York)

George Egerton-Warburton
(Los Angeles)

Dara Gill
(Sydney)

Sandra Selig
(Brisbane)

Alexandre Singh
(New York)

Charlie Sofo
(Melbourne)

Michael John Whelan
(Berlin)

Nina Yuen
(New York)

Curated by Melissa Keys

Margaret Lawrence Gallery
Victorian College of the Arts
The University of Melbourne
NOTES FROM THE FIELD.
The Margaret Lawrence Gallery is delighted to present Notes from the field, an exhibition that brings together a number of significant contemporary artists, from Australia and abroad, whose work incorporates a kind of artistic fieldwork. Curated by Melissa Keys, Notes from the field considers the rational and scientific impulse to observe, record, collect, measure and catalogue.

A central premise of fieldwork, of course, is that understanding is founded in personal experience, and Notes from the field is very specific in this regard. Not only have many of the works in this exhibition devolved from the daily lives – and day-to-day comings and goings – of the artists, but the curator herself has also embarked on a sort of fieldwork in its development. Artists have been invited, and artworks specifically requested or commissioned through a type of gleaning process; one that has been very intentional, but open and flexible enough to allow for the unsought to enter. Keys has also reflected these strategies in the catalogue essay herein, which performs in the manner of a ledger as much as it reveals the ideas behind the project.

Notes from the field is an ambitious project, both in terms of its conceptual scope and its physical scale, and I would very much like to thank the following people for their involvement: Melissa Keys for developing and realizing this stunning exhibition with such insight and consideration; the artists Maria Antelman, George Egerton-Warburton, Dara Gill, Sandra Selig, Alexandre Singh, Charlie Sofo, Michael John Whelan and Nina Yuen for their remarkable work; Stephen Banham of Letterbox for his wonderful catalogue design; the artists’ galleries for their support; Sylvain Sorgato for his impeccable installation of Alexandre Singh’s work; Kay Abude and Scott Miles for their ongoing commitment to the Margaret Lawrence Gallery.

I am especially pleased to present this exhibition in the context of an art school – more specifically, an art school within a university – where the very notion of research-based art practice is constantly called into question. I would argue that Notes from the field reflects a new attitude towards research-based practice that shifts focus away from particular fixed forms and offers, instead, a series of agile and open-ended modes. As such, I very much look forward to continuing the dialogue in and around this exhibition.

Vikki McInnes
Director, Margaret Lawrence Gallery
NOTES FROM THE FIELD.
It may be one of those pseudo facts or popular scientific mythologies, however there is a figure with some currency that runs something like this: 98% of stimulus and phenomena available to the human mind must be filtered out for us to apprehend and focus at any given moment. Moreover we are only aware of a tiny portion of this filtering activity – almost all of the sifting and assembling, pattern recognition, narration and other sensory and mental shorthand takes place unconsciously, prior to shaping and informing everything one self consciously registers.

Alexandre Singh’s complex interconnected flowchart Assembly Instructions: The Pledge: Leah Kelly (2011) is derived from an interview the artist conducted with neurobiologist Leah Kelly. This conversation between artist and scientist is an evocative starting point for Singh’s installation, which expands in multiple directions through the use of a wide range of references and materials. Images sourced from an array of books, magazines and the internet are assembled to make meticulous collages that suggest a complex web of ideas, themes, associations and sensations. Each collage is scanned by the artist to ensure pictorial cohesion – or a seamless combination of parts. The scanned and framed images are then arranged on the gallery wall and interlinked by small hand drawn dots to form fantastical diagrammatic compositions that illustrate the artist’s inventive interpretation of his conversation with Kelly about the nature of cognition. This pictorial map references aspects of neurological research and theories in somewhat surrealist and absurdist ways. It explores the mechanisms underpinning how we read and sense things, the ways the brain is wired to see and not see, and our cognitive ability to simultaneously observe, apprehend and integrate the visible and abstract dimensions of experience. Singh’s Assembly Instructions: The Pledge: Leah Kelly locates us all as participants in the ongoing creation of narrative fictions that are the very tissue of our lives.

Maria Antelman is interested in how advancing technologies have altered not only the ways that we perceive and engage with the world, but also how we remember, store and process information and experiences. Moonlight Serenade (2009) is comprised of an animated suite of black and white photographs taken by NASA’s lunar orbiters during the 1960s. Sent out into space to photograph the surface of the moon in preparation for an eventual landing, these survey probes captured and mapped close to 99% of the lunar surface. While Antelman’s project alludes to our drive and desire to know and chart things beyond our direct perceptual experience, these images (and many like them since) have come to form the basis of our collective sci-fi imagination, a kind of shared interstellar imaginary. The dark shadowy images are accompanied
by found fragments of sound including bursts of short wave radio transmissions, Morse code, numbers, letters, fragments of music and muffled speech. These combine to generate an unsettling confusion and even a sense of alienation. The amalgam of sounds (sourced from the internet) and the extraordinarily detailed historic images of the surface of the moon are at once familiar and unimaginable, awe inspiring and eerie. On one hand the work alludes to our exponentially increasing access to data and knowledge, and our ability to witness and observe things unfolding from afar – on the other, the complex, barely decipherable clamor evokes a parallel fear of an inaccessible technological, scientific and bureaucratic codified, classified world of power. Through her re-combinations of found images and sounds, the artist stimulates our compulsion to identify patterns and meaning, echoing her view that ‘we are predisposed to create patterns in order to read, to understand, and to keep chaos in order’.¹

Antelman’s sound work Mnemotopia (2011), continues her fascination with the mind and the organisation of information and knowledge. This piece consists of a two-part narrative performed by two speakers, one female the other male. The female voice speaks of her ‘memory palace’ - a repository of memories and images collected over the course of her life. She refers to this palace as if it is failing and falling into a state of disrepair and ruin. In contrast the male speaker utters what appears to be memorised lists of data such as numbers, cards, people and things that suggests a process of mnemonics – techniques used to aid memory recall, which are largely used by people who take part in memory sports where participants compete to memorise large volumes of information.

Structured by the beat of a metronome, Mnemotopia alludes to the mind as a vast fluctuating repository of recollections and information, some meaningful, some incidental or arbitrary. The work poetically explores how our individual worlds are in constant construction and change as memories and impressions dynamically shift and alter over time, in turn re-shaping our experience of self and our environment. Antelman's often-disjunctive combinations of image and sound generate questions about the very systems and processes through which we constitute the world, and what we really 'know'.

Dara Gill’s NOW Counter (current Birthrate/Deathrate) (2011) draws on global population data produced by the Washington DC based Population Reference Bureau (2011), which estimated that every second approximately four people are born and an average of two die. Gill animates this data by presenting it on two screens that sit side by side, each one flashing the word ‘NOW’ at the estimated rate of births on the left screen and deaths on the right. The rhythmically flashing text amplifies the sensation of the passage of time and evokes the transience, at full scale, of humanity’s existence. The impact is mesmerising and unsettling.

Using ubiquitous screen technology, Gill gestures to things we can calculate and comprehend and things we cannot. NOW Counter highlights the steady rise of the human population, which prompts one to reflect on the earth's limited resources and the questions of overcrowding, conflict, health and the survival of other living species.
Rigorous science, data and real concerns about population underpin the work. At the same time, the piece taps into our existential anxiety about death and the fragility of human life by reducing individual experience to faceless quantitative – almost binary – data. Panoramic in scope, the work, nonetheless registers individual lives as a single flash, reducing the relationships, memories, feelings, thoughts and experiences that fill our days and make us who we are into a mere fraction of a second.

*A Perfect Circle* (2012) by Michael John Whelan reflects his longstanding interest in the history of science and ideas, film and photography. It makes use of silent archival footage from scientific and educational films, cut into fragments and inventively re-spliced together. A small circle painstakingly etched near the centre of each individual film cell nervously jumps and quivers as the reel runs, registering each unique mark in the unfolding imagery. These forms suggest the kind of hand drawn circles that one might make around a pertinent piece of information to draw one’s attention and to focus one’s gaze.

Whelan’s wavering forms flicker across an array of images that describe great and sometimes dubious human endeavors and technological achievements – from nuclear power stations and satellite dishes, sites of industry, to poignant footage of a child in an infirmary. These spectral forms are incised into images of scientists at work, looking through telescopes and surrounded by books, deep in thought and conversation. Whelan’s work combines an air of quiet awe, a sense of faith in humanity with a poetic longing and an ominous sense of dread. Throughout, the viewer remains in a curious state of suspension unsure of exactly what it is that we are being shown, and what it is that we are expected to see. While his work seems alive with a sense of human ingenuity and progress we are also confronted by the fact that we cannot forecast the future; our advances and achievements are double edged, uncertainty and mystery prevail.

Sandra Selig’s ongoing series of ‘cut poems’ take shape from old illustrated scientific texts and magazines. Selig uses a scalpel to whittle away at the words until only brief sequences remain, and only a fragment is left of the page. After this subtractive process, the remaining paper has a sculptural quality and the words take the character of brief poetry or meaningful allusions. For this exhibition Selig turns her hand to pages from *The Comet is Coming* (1980) a black and white publication by the late British science writer Nigel Calder. A narrative about the science history and folklore of comets and visible atmospheres, the book was produced in the lead up to the appearance of Halley’s comet in our night sky. As one views the ‘cut poems’ we are encouraged to contemplate the difference between what is visible and what has been excised, between what can be seen and what is absent and lost.

Like her cut poems, Selig’s folded collages are made with pages from magazines in this case with images of the cosmos including: galaxies, stars and planets along with vivid blue fields of ocean and sky. However, instead of using a scalpel, Selig folds these pages into origami-like configurations interwoven with geometric patterns. These modest beautifully folded forms suggest the complexities of the very architecture of time and
space – and act as meditations on the poetics and abstract nature of thought. Displayed in the gallery both these exquisite sculptural forms and the cut poems sit a few millimetres out from the wall. The slight relief creates intriguing shadows, evoking the gaps and space that exist between knowledge and experience and, perhaps, the thinker and their thoughts.

George Egerton-Warburton’s absurdist video Boredom is a desk with human legs in a fish spa (2012) features an actor (David Wells) performing as a series of highly theatrical roles while skipping, jumping and spinning around a field. Seamlessly shifting from one character to the next, Wells performs a disjointed series of monologues told from the perspectives of a farmer, a king, a woman concerned with the preservation of her youth, a baby being born and an individual concerned with a crash on Wall Street. Combining remembrances and observances, these characters speak on subjects as diverse as the ice age, electronic transfers and rainforests of noodles. The nonsensical spoken word is accompanied by an intense, fragmented musical score and visual effects that move between colour and black and white, with subtitles abruptly appearing and disappearing in a range of languages also communicating little of sense. Yet the work is strangely moving and deliberately disorienting, emerging from the artist’s interest in synesthesia. Tracking the actor, a soundman moves in and out of frame, like a paparazzo, a documentary maker or an anthropologist recording a bizarre, never before seen cultural phenomena in motion.

Emerging from daily walks and localised ‘field trips’, Charlie Sofo’s practice explores the world of his inner urban neighborhood with a gentle curiosity and playful humour. Primarily process driven, his practice can be seen as a series of ongoing investigations that encompass the methods of collecting, measuring, gathering, recording, sensing and observing. Engaged mostly in what the artist refers to as the act of ‘noticing’, Sofo’s close looking attends to unexpected and easily overlooked detail, in his surroundings, finding enchantment and meaningful significance in the minutiae of daily routine and everyday unremarkable things.

In 20 Public Notice-boards (2014) Sofo presents an array of 20 thumbtacks, scattered in a constellation, pinning a piece of industrial felt to the gallery wall. As its name indicates, the work is sourced from 20 different notice boards, which he found across Melbourne. It reads like an abstracted blank map, possibly referencing the locations from which the pins may have been sourced. As an old-fashioned form of collective information-sharing, public notice boards are often used to promote local services and community events and, as such, the precisely placed pins suggest a structure or web of networks – a kind of communal cartography. The work can also be seen to reflect the exploratory ethos and condition of the artist, engaged in the method and habit of roaming, searching, sensing and ‘noticing’, including a process of gathering and taking samples along the way.

In 10 Gaps (2014) Sofo attends to the dark narrow spaces that he observes between inner urban buildings and terrace house type dwellings. Often climbing over fences to enter private front yards, the artist measures each cavity before returning to his studio
to cut polystyrene blocks to precisely recreate the dimensions of the gaps. Returning to each site, he then tests the accuracy of his measurements by sliding and pressing the polystyrene into the voids, then removing them to present in the gallery, abraded and soiled with traces and material evidence of these interstitial spaces. It’s a kind of archaeology of absence, where the spaces or gaps are made tangible. The process – part sculptural, part performative – explores the spatiality of daily life in a highly eccentric and irreverent way.

In Nina Yuen’s vignette Raymond (2014), shot in the lush surrounds of Hawaii, we are drawn into an intimate tale of a life measured and recounted through reflections, fleeting memories, observations, mathematical calculations and the gentle play of the imagination. During the course of the film, Raymond, the narrator (who is also the artist’s father), calculates the number of miles that he has travelled during the years of Yuen’s education, driving her between their home and her school. While climbing a tree, Raymond estimates the volume of fruit that he has collected over the course of seventeen years of harvests; he then contrasts this with the number of calories that he has consumed throughout his life. These calculable, measurable facts of Raymond’s existence are interspersed with memories of Yuen’s childhood – observations on nature, mortality and the passage of time. Images of curious book titles from self-help and philosophy publications flash before our eyes, including The Web that has no Weaver, The Wisdom of Insecurity and Thoughts are Things: the things in your life and the thoughts behind them, along with pictures of the cosmos and theories about the origins of the universe. Yuen’s film is tinged with a tenderness and yearning. It presents a personal world of wonder where everything has its measure and is part of the mysterious beauty and cycle of all things.

Composing their work using everyday found objects, images and routine simple gestures, the artists featured in Notes from the field create humorous, poignant and haunting works that confound and rewire the habitual and commonsensical ways we establish meaning and make sense of the world.

Melissa Keys
September 2014
All Images
Alexandre Singh
Assembly Instructions
(The Pledge - Leah Kelly), 2011
37 framed inkjet ultrachrome archival prints and dotted pencil lines, 2011 installation view Drawing Center New York (January 2013)
Photo: Genevieve Hanson
Courtesy Spruth Magers, Art:Concept, Metro Pictures, Monitor
Assembly Instructions
(The Pledge-Leah Kelly)

37, framed inkjet ultrachrome archival prints and dotted pencil lines, 2011

installation view
Nassauischer Kunstverein Wiesbaden (November 2012)

Photo Credit
Thorsten Jansen

Courtesy Spruth Magers, Art: Concept, Metro Pictures, Monitor
Maria Antelman

Stills from Moonlight Serenade, 2009

HD video,
duration 6:03 mins

Courtesy of the artist and THE APARTMENT, Athens
Dara Gill
NOW Counter
(Current Birthrate/Deathrate: Four Births Per Second, Two Deaths Per Second), 2011
Video, modified LCD televisions
48.0 x 33.0 cm (each)
Endless loop
Courtesy of the artist
Michael John Whelan
Still from
*A Perfect Circle, 2012*

hand scratched 16mm
film transferred to DVD
colour, silent,
duration 5:00 mins

Courtesy of the artist
and Grey Noise, Dubai
Sandra Selig
interleaves
(from ongoing suite)
2013-14
book pages, enamel paint, adhesive
dimensions variable
Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney
Sandra Selig

*would arrive*, 2014

book page

15 x 23cm unframed

Courtesy of the artist and Milani Gallery, Brisbane and Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney
George Egerton-Warburton
Still from Boredom is a desk with human legs in a fish spa, 2012
Video, duration: 7:20 mins
Courtesy of the artist
Charlie Sofo
20 Public Notice-boards, 2014
Map pins, industrial felt
200.0 cm x 100.0 cm
Courtesy of the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Australia
Charlie Sofo

10 Gaps, 2014

Polystyrene forms with accretions

Dimensions variable

Courtesy of the artist and Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Australia
THOUGHTS are THINGS
THE THINGS IN YOUR LIFE AND
THE THOUGHTS BEHIND THEM
Nina Yuen
Still from Raymond,
2014
video projection
Duration 11:30 mins
Courtesy of the artist
and Lombard-Freid
Projects, New York,
USA


**George Egerton-Warburton** was born in 1988 in Kojunup, Western Australia and lives and works in Los Angeles, USA.

Egerton-Warburton holds a BA (Honours) from Curtin University, Perth, 2009 and is currently undertaking a MFA at USC Roski School of Fine Arts, Los Angeles. He was a studio resident at Gertrude Contemporary, in Melbourne, Victoria from 2012-2014 and completed a residency at the British School in Rome funded by the Australia Council for the Arts in 2012.


**Dara Gill** was born in 1986 in Sydney, Australia where he currently lives and works. Gill holds a BCA in Visual Art & Design from the University of Wollongong, 2007 and a BA (Honours) in Fine Art (Sculpture) from the University of New South Wales, Art and Design, Sydney, 2009.


www.daragill.com
Sandra Selig was born in 1972 in Sydney, New South Wales and lives and works in Brisbane Australia.

Sandra Selig holds a Bachelor of Arts, Visual Arts, (Honours), Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane Australia, 1995; and a Master of Arts (Research) Visual Arts, Queensland University of Technology, Australia, 1999. She completed a residency in Japan Tokyo funded by the Australia Council for the Arts in 2008 and participated in the International Artist in Residence Program, Guernsey College of Further Education, Art and Design, St Peter Port, Guernsey, Great Britain in 2004.

Selig’s solo exhibitions include; Be Some Other Material, Artspace, Sydney, 2011; waves depend on us (light from Tokyo), Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2009; invisible surround, Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2008; surface change, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2007; ground, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2006; circuit, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2006; one is to one, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2005, Light from Elsewhere, the Gallery, Guernsey, UK, 2004; Grafts and clusters, Bellas Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 2003; span, Museum of Brisbane, Brisbane, 2003; frequency, Artspace, Sydney, 2002; Surface Tension, Gertrude, Melbourne, 2001.


Alexandre Singh was born in 1980 in Bordeaux, France and lives and works in New York City, USA.

Singh holds a BFA from Ruskin School of Drawing and Fine Art, Oxford University, United Kingdom, 2001 and an MFA from the School of Visual Arts, New York, 2005. He has also undertaken studies at the Skowhegan School of Painting and Sculpture in Madison Maine, 2006.


Alexandre Singh’s work is held in various collections including: Centre National des Arts Plastiques, Paris; Solomon R Guggenheim Museum, New York; Frac des Pays de la Loire, Carquefou, France; The Museum of Modern Art, New York.

www.metropicturesgallery.com | www.spruethmagers.com
Charlie Sofo was born in 1983 in Melbourne, Victoria where he currently lives and works.

Sofo holds a BA (Honours) from the Australian National University School of Art, Canberra, 2005 and an MFA from the Victorian College of the Arts, The University of Melbourne. He is currently a studio resident at Gertrude Contemporary, in Melbourne, (2013–2015).


Michael John Whelan was born in 1977 in Dublin, Ireland and lives and works in Berlin, Germany.


Michael John Whelan's work is held in the following collections; University of the Arts, London Collection; MLP Collection, London; Institute of Art, Design and Technology Dun Laoghaire Collection as well as numerous private collections.

[www.greynoise.org](http://www.greynoise.org)

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**Nina Yuen was born in 1981 in Hawaii and lives and works in New Jersey, USA.**

Yuen holds a BA from Harvard University, Boston, Massachusetts. She completed a residency at the Rijksakademie, Amsterdam in 2010 and is currently completing her MFA at Bard College, New York, USA.

Yuen's recent solo exhibitions include; *Nina Yuen*, De Appel Arts Centre, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2014; *Nina Yuen*, Chinese Arts Centre, Manchester, United Kingdom, 2013; *The School*, Lombard Freid Projects, New York, 2012; *Lucid Dreaming*, Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2011; *White Blindness*, Kunstverein, Wiesbaden, Germany, 2011; *Good Morning*, Kunsthuis SYB, Beesterzwaag, Netherlands; *An Imaginary Relationship with Ourselves*, Portland Institute of Contemporary Art, Oregon, USA.

Yuen has participated in the following group exhibitions; *The Eye*, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2013; *Home WHERE?*, Lombard Fried Projects, New York, 2012; *The Storytellers: Narratives in International Contemporary Art*, Stenersen Museet, Oslo, Norway, 2012; *Genius without Talent*, De Appel, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2011; *The Talent Show*, Paradiso, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2011; *Feminist Media Activist*, New Media Festival, Seoul, South Korea, 2010; *Performance Palais*, Paradiso, Amsterdam,
Netherlands, 2010; P for Performance, Performance, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2010; Knotty Thoughts, NIMK, Amsterdam, Netherlands, 2010; Children’s Biennale, Kaap, Utrecht, Netherlands, 2010; Junk, International Biennale for Young Art, Moscow, Russia, 2010; The Girl Effect, Lombard Freid Projects, New York, 2009; Performance, Manifestacao Internacional, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2009; De-narrations, PanAmerican Art Projects, Miami, Florida, 2009; L’evento, Fies Factory One, Trentino, Italy, 2008; Grand Opening, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 2006; A Night with Louise Borque, Institute of Contemporary Art, Boston, 2005.

Yuen has also presented work at numerous film festivals including the Rotterdam Film Festival, Rotterdam, Netherlands, 2013; Kino Lab, Warsaw, Poland, 2012; Kassel Documentary Festival, Kassel, Germany, 2011; OK Video Festival, Jakarta, Indonesia, 2011; Sequences Festival, Reykjavík, Iceland, 2011 and at the Images Film Festival, Toronto, Canada, 2008, amongst many others. www.lombardfreid.com
ARTISTS
Maria Antelman
George Egerton-Warburton
Dara Gill
Sandra Selig
Alexandre Singh
Charlie Sofo
Michael John Whelan
Nina Yuen

CURATOR
Melissa Keys
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Gallery Hours:
Tuesday to Saturday 12-5pm

COVER
Michael John Whelan
Still from A Perfect Circle, 2012
hand scratched 16mm film
transferred to DVD, colour, silent,
duration 5:00 mins

Courtesy of the artist and Grey Noise,
Dubai