



Above: *Charlotte*, 1996, Suzuki Sierra, 165mm CHS mild steel welded A-frame, 20mm mild steel plates, M20 bolts, chemical anchors, lifting chain, 500 x 350 x 350 cm, photo: Chris Fox

Front: *1 Kilo Block, Feeds the Whole Family*, 2005, stainless steel, mild steel, aluminium, hydraulic press, dairy industry fittings pipes and tubes, perspex, fluorescent lights, acrylic labels, audio equipment, 210 x 70 x 70 cm, photo: Ian Hill

Inside top: *28 Potatoes: All-in-one Potato-Peeling Soup Maker*, 2005, melamine, aluminium, high pressure plumbing fittings pipes and tubes, electrical cable, acrylic labels, soup bowl, 90 x 500 x 150 cm, photo: Alex Kershaw

Inside bottom: *Garlic Fish Man*, 2006, timber clinker, melamine, marine navigation lights, solar panel, maritime marker buoy, observation caps, pneumatic tubes + fittings, aluminium, acrylic label, waste tap, 12V batteries, FM radio, 180 x 310 x 150 cm, photo: Alex Kershaw



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Chris Fox

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Here's one I prepared earlier

The various projects devised by Chris Fox physically manifest as sculptures and installations, directly confronting the viewer with an experience of art that is challenging to its own position, environment and context. There is a "poetry of alchemy" that displaces the materials of the built environment - cables, plasters, wood beams, entire vehicles - into compositions that question the materials' relationships; problematising yet liberating the materials from their banal position within the everyday world.¹

Fox's formal training as an architect is acutely visible in projects that uniquely intertwine the processes of music, sculpture and installation to construct autobiographical and biographical vignettes. Privileging universal concerns of family, belonging, love and sexuality over structural concerns of form and function, Fox's artistic practice enables dialogue across time, place and space.

In Fox's most recent work, *Garlic Fish Man* (2006), an old timber boat holds an array of objects intersected by kitchen grade melamine surfaces. This solid vessel has carried people through time and space, and now holds the story of a young Portuguese man's intimate journey of self-discovery. Told through the lyrical metaphor of garlic fish preparation, the interlacing of the private domestic space of the kitchen with the public space of the boat sheds tender light onto the young man's journey. Aesthetically the work is beautiful - its materiality and composition have been carefully thought through and the *Garlic Fish Man* song whispers from the vessel of culinary delights. The clinker, once used to catch fish now rests in a zone of conceptual paradise, folding and collapsing the passages of time into a reservoir of complex and competing sensibilities. The fishing vessel - feminine in form, yet masculine in its function - has outgrown tradition, augmented with domestic surfaces of white melamine.

1 Kilo Block, Feeds the Whole Family (2005), supplements the readymade with imagination. The domestic space of the kitchen becomes a manufacturing zone for feeding the family. The traditional role of the mother stuck in the kitchen, slaving over a hot stove, has now become a place of automation and democratisation. Maintaining the family as a connected entity runs parallel with the isolation and loneliness of suburbia, where outings to the supermarket are oriented on pre-existing parameters - roads and isles, cash registers and the killing me softly drone of elevator music. Yet *1 Kilo*

Block, Feeds the Whole Family is an enabling machine, metaphorically whisking away suburban isolation and liberating 'her' from the home.

Autobiography folds into Fox's practice in works such as *Charlotte* (1996) and *28 Potatoes: All-in-one Potato-peeling Soup Maker* (2005). These works reflect upon points in the artist's life - his 21st and 28th birthdays. *Charlotte* could be simply a Duchampian readymade - a Suzuki Sierra is suspended nose to ceiling by four steel beams, striping it not only of its function but also its advertised macho. The vehicle, lifted from its purpose, resonates as sculptural form, inanimate and isolated. However, the conceptual premise of *Charlotte* runs deeper than mere modernist quotation. Fox mollifies his background through this interventionist act, exposing to the world his 21st birthday present from his parents. The displacement of the weight of the vehicle is consistent with the weight lifted from his shoulders - the pressures of family expectations. *Charlotte* provides a cathartic release, painting a portrait of self for all to scrutinise.

Years on from the monumental *Charlotte*, Fox passes through his 'Saturn return' (astrologically a period of inward reflection) finding his individuality in a metaphor of soup production. The notional machine of *28 Potatoes: All-in-one Potato-peeling Soup Maker*, 'manufactures' a personal soup concocted of peeled potatoes crushed by the weight of expectation, and life spices, each flavour marking a discrete year in the life of the artist. The journeying of self across his twenty-eight years is filled with adolescent aloofness, familial and institutional guidance, and the slapstick of young adulthood. Constructed from melamine, aluminium, piping and plumbing, the machine resonates with the artist's paid work on building sites and in kitchen construction.

Fox's practice situates the artist as his strongest critic. It carries transference of use-value into places where time operates through the punctuation of ideas. Fox quite coolly extends and distorts architectural surroundings via sculptural interventions, testing the limits and thresholds that bind us universally.

Sally Breen
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1. Shaun Gladwell, 'Alchemy + Perception', unpublished paper on the work of Chris Fox, Sydney, 2003

