

f Kindness
ey

ym Ruark Lewis, a variety of arranged on the floor of Surry ury, interspersed with other d tactile curios. They texture at festive air. In a corner is d, reinvented by contrasting s a baseless globe, spanned riped as if in a blur of spin; in a fifteen inch ball of red wool ck and white piece of timber. phorical centrality, hinting at ings hold their shape and at ition and unraveling.

if the show, though, is found from the ceiling and line the clocks of text: black and red binations of aphorisms and horistic writing is from the thalie Sarraute, with whom book *Just for Nothing* (1997). ners, is a significant gesture of this exhibition: flags mark protest, and a portion of the ingapore, where the painting lead to jail. This political edge scription hanging at the entry, an intellectual Ashis Nandy. sively on the evaporation of s in regions of Southern Asia, rrapped in a semantically *NAS A/STRANGE MIX/OF 'MATIONS OF/CONTINUITY TALGIA/AND A SENSE/ TH SIDES*. The enjambment anning, but everything hinges tement is one of polarity, of determinacy.

ng occurs with lines from poet stretched the length of a wall, between mission statement thirty centimetre letters of This repeated fluctuation loose demarcation of ethical oes to the heart of the work: *OF TERRAIN ... DROP CCURACY...* This emphatic polyvalence and deferral, is

in? How do we consider *An* by this curiously suggestive that Lewis has grouped a and performances in Sydney st eight months or so, and it v we might think through any something as amorphous as what we are being asked to do ggest only linguistic play and ard and away from a notional ical 'zone' is suggested, it d deliberately so.

ed with the title that encircles 'An Index of Silence'. Where, gin? Where does it end? What the braveries of speech? And itological level—its limits and between signifier and signified, ct? What is the movement: -idea?

extended by a collaborative and poet/sound artist Amanda



Stewart—An Index of Emotions. This work follows a throaty trajectory of organic noise and vocalisation, skirting in and out of articulation as it plays with pathos, sex, the banal, laughter and much else. This is perhaps the most apparent index in this collection, an emotional spectrum negotiating the boundaries of talk.

Forced to consider each level of the communicative relationship, we find a language that is material in the most basic sense: a word printed on poly-cotton, or a vibration on the air. But in breaking down words to letters and juxtaposing them, in straining vocal cords to emote without resolution, a less concrete linguistic materiality is also emphasised. The flags create associations between sound shapes and concepts, where foot high letters overlay words, ideas: a large black *E* joins smaller white writing, *LIKE AN ECHO*, a speech sound is elongated in stretched articulation; *Q* meets *ONE WORD*—so we find, in some way, a query at the centre of things, twice placed for remaining unuttered. And at the crux of it all a tacit question of action, of language, empathy, generosity of spirit.

In reflecting on the connection between these contrasting forms, language itself becomes a physically interactive space. The two-dimensional colour blocks, hanging in rows, and the bright solidity of the objects, reshaped and reinvented by paint. Although the first impression on entering the gallery is of primary colours and textures from the combination of fabric, word and object, it is when you begin to circulate on the gallery floor that the spatial arrangement makes sense. I find myself treating the floor itself as a kind of canvas, treading softly, turning half circles, lifting and placing my feet with care while I divide my attention



clockwise from top left: Ruark Lewis, *Signals (ix) v) vj*, 2008; *Portrait, Silan*, 2008; Installation view, *An Index of Silence*, 2008 Chalk Horse Gallery, Sydney. Photographs Jennifer Leahy, Silversalt Photography. Courtesy the artist and Chalk Horse Gallery.

between floor and ceiling. My traversal of the gallery is in some respects controlled, corralled. These assorted objects become barber's shop road signs, directing our movements; blood and bandages marking out the 'space of kindness'.

The way in which this exhibition wants to position us spatially corresponds with the way that it positions us ethically: each flag offers a range of possibilities opened between letter and idea, yet there is no didacticism. We can thus view the 'corralling' works as a kind of grammar, offering rules of engagement that might be followed or ignored, just as we ignore grammar in poetic composition. The possibilities of reading become more open, emphasising our way through language as one of pathways, suggestions, hops and skips; both corralled and anarchic, characterised by communication and silence, and all the time engaged with the deeper processes of reading and composition.

Such a grammar is suggested in 'An Index of Horses', a forty-eight minute film showing Sydney Symphony violinist Nicola Lewis 'discovering' her instrument by playing in response to barcodes from Singapore Turf Club betting tickets. Her act of reading, her response, is freed from linguistic grammars, but much of the interest of this work comes from other forms of reading. We read her face, the reactions that mark the act of discovery; we read the moment in which classical form is deconstructed in bow strokes, ricochet and vibrato. Her edging of 'music' is like a demarcation of meaning.

This act of reading and response is without escape. How do we locate ourselves—physically, linguistically, auditorily, socially? And what is this location to the act of reading, to our meaning making? To read, even through lines of indeterminacy, is always to assume a position.

Berndt Sellheim

The Bon Scott Project
Fremantle Arts Centre
17 May – 29 June 2008

Dressed in blue uniforms, we schoolboys would taunt each other with the lyrics of AC/DC's *Jailbreak* (1974). It was the anthem of our single sex nightmare, one of the few songs that spoke back to the world in which we were trapped. Unlike the parents, teachers and priests that hemmed us in, AC/DC's singer and lyricist Bon Scott did not lie to us about life on the outside. Many of my schoolmates ended up working on the railways or at the abattoir and, unlike many other bands, AC/DC was able to speak to their reality.

The best of the pieces at the Fremantle Arts Centre in this exhibition to commemorate Bon Scott have something in them of working a shit job, living in the suburbs, and making the best of it. Ian Haig's *Eastland's Shopping Centre, September 1975* (2008) recalls seeing AC/DC at the local shops before they were shut down for being too loud. This video piece is not projected, like so many, but sits below eye level on an ordinary television. Its blaring strobe of yellow, black, red and white recalls posters seen from a passing car window, or an early morning cartoon after a night out tripping. So it is with Cecilia Fogelberg's collages of Bon and the band, drawn carefully like a girl's scrapbook, and populated with flowers and mutant animals. Such fan-like images are the kind of thing we have been seeing pasted to Bon's grave in Fremantle for many years.

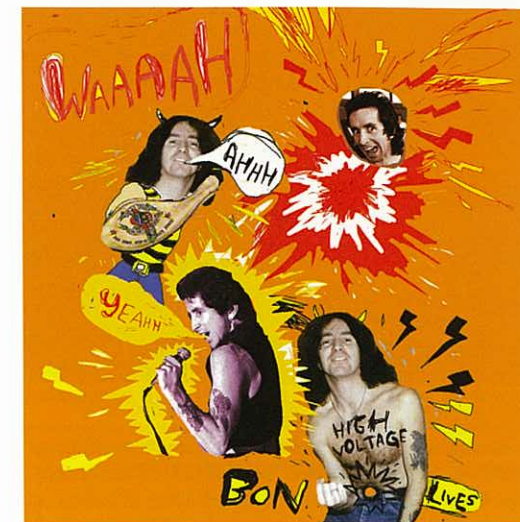
More conceptual are three imaginary record covers by Alex Gawronski who plays with the designs of 1980's Heavy Metal to evoke the genre's authentic criticality. These are not ironic pieces. They play hard with the pretences of contemporary art. *Der Kurators—Parasite Island—courtesy of Bad Luck Records* (2008) features a nuclear explosion on its cover. *Pieces of Hate—Blue Blood* courtesy of *Bad Opening Productions* (2008) gives the finger to European art history as it reproduces a cracked Renaissance surface of painted stone, but inverts its aura with an image of arses shitting gold coins. It may well be that contemporary art could learn something from rock-and-roll. While rock music often complains loudly about its own place in the commercial world, contemporary art rarely protests its own place in institutions.

There is no more touching part of this exhibition than a show of letters written by Bon to friends and family while on tour in Europe. They are brief and innocent, bragging about women and drugs, promising to return money loaned and apologising for lapses of concentration. It is easy to read them as relics of good times gone. But Rebecca Dagnall's photographs of Bon Scott fans shows how much rock-and-roll, like good art, lives on in time. Her photograph *Ava and the Boys at Billy Weston Pool Hall* (2008) formally poses a group of fans in T-Shirts and jeans, the photograph honouring those who honour the music. Other pieces were more obscurely related to AC/DC, but emulated its spirit. Ryan Nazzari's paintings of clownish faces splattered like blood stains on a black background resonate powerfully with Bon's lyrics. Martin Smith's large photographs are also ghostly, as they are cut into with words, revealing a stark white sheet behind. Smith cuts the confessions of uncertain youth into haunting images of trees and blue sea. The photograph that reads with the lyrics of AC/DC's *Hells' Bells* (2007) is, ironically in this context, the least successful of these interesting works. Instead, the insecure confessions of *I then went up and told my ridiculous stories* (2008) are more troubling, and perhaps more in Bon's spirit, as their tale of woe comes straight from the heart.

Thus it was that, like rock-and-roll itself, the works that spoke loudest in this show were those that were true. Some painted portraits of Bon, one hung far above



clockwise from top: Cecilia Fogelberg, *She's Got Balls*, 2008. Acrylic paint, texta, instant coffee on paper, 70 x 84cm. Photograph: Andrew Curtis. Courtesy and © the artist; Ian Haig, still from *Eastland Shopping Centre, September 1975*, 2008. Digital animation, duration 1:20 minutes. Courtesy and © the artist; Ryan Nazzari, *Instructions for Lost Boys*, 2008. Acrylic and paper on canvas with paper overlay, 41 x 41cm. Photograph Bewley Shaylor. Courtesy and © the artist; Rebecca Dagnall, *Ava and the boys at Billy Weston's pool hall*. Digital photograph, 100 x 148cm. Courtesy and © the artist.



eye level, were less interesting for turning Bon into a sort of icon. Generally, though, the artists avoided such problems of commemoration that could have plagued the exhibition. The respectful air of AC/DC fans who were streaming through the Fremantle Arts Centre testifies to a show that endeared itself to the spirit and not the surfaces of rock-and-roll. This was also Bon's distinctive contribution to the 1970s, to produce something real in the face of disco and glam, to 'give the public what they want', in his own words. Such a real and lived quality is not so far from the best of visual art, which also speaks with heart. This show's interest lies in the correspondences that it creates between music, culture and art, raising questions about what it is that speaks to us through all of them.

Darren Jorgensen

