MIC | Media and Interdisciplinary Arts Centre
TOI REREHIKO

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Hybrids

29 January - 6 March 2010

MIC | Media and Interdisciplinary Arts Centre
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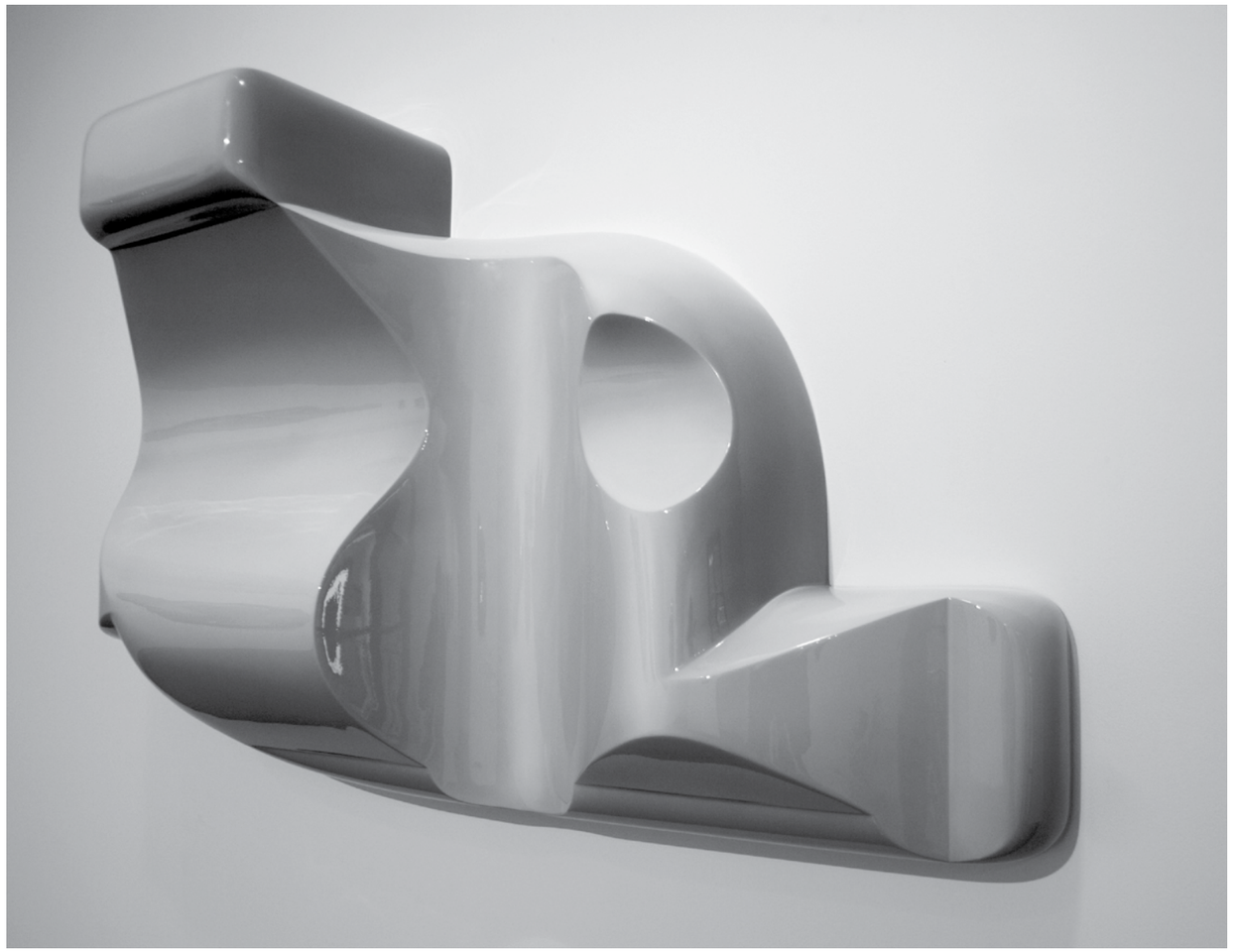
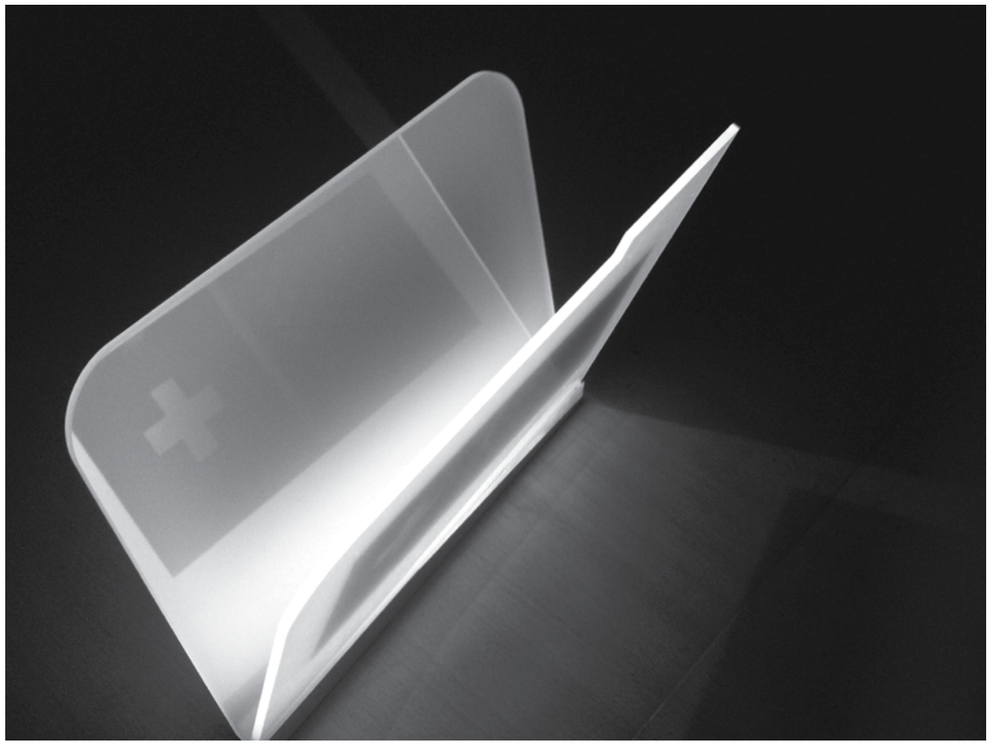
Curated by Brit Bunkley and Ian Gwilt

Featuring: ajaykumar & *8*-technology (UK), Keith Brown (UK), Brit Bunkley (NZ), Annie Cattrell (UK), James Charlton (NZ), F4 (Marcus Williams & Sue Jowsey) (NZ), Ian Gwilt (Aus) and Sarah Munro (NZ).



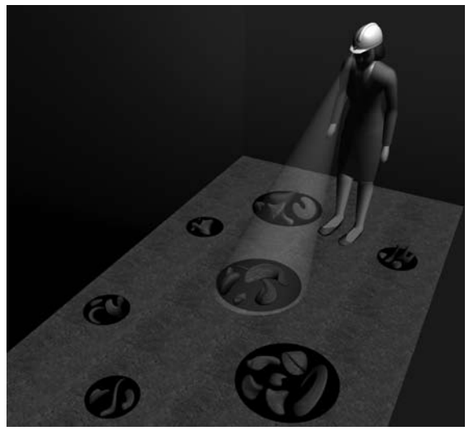


Images (clockwise from top): Annie Cattrell *Pleasure/Pain*, 2009; Sarah Munro *Prototype #2*, 2007; Ian Gwilt *Folder Culture*, 2009

Hybrids

Written by Brit Bunkley and Ian Gwilt

We are in the era of the Post-Medium Condition; a phrase coined by art theorist Rosalind Krauss as a logical step beyond her notion of the 'Expanded Field' of sculpture - where in both instances, the power of the discrete object has been replaced by the hybrid object and environment. As Joanna Slotkin of the University of Chicago explains, "Krauss expands Clement Greenberg's description of the modernist desire for 'pure' art forms in order to encompass the forms and issues of art today, the art of the "post-medium" age"; where Joseph Kosuth's idea that as painting and sculpture begin to come together, i.e. as different media become indistinct, the project of art will become more general, and modernist art must locate the 'essence of Art itself''. Digital technologies have expanded the field further than Rosalind Krauss initially could have imagined. For example, in an update of Kosuth's play on the ontological properties of an object in *One and Three Chairs*, a digital 3D model can be output as a 2D photorealistic image, a 3D object created by CNC (computer directed machining) or rapid prototype (layered 3D print) technology, and also simultaneously as a seemingly real component of a moving image.



Keith Brown *Cyber-Mine* (CAD render of installation), 2010

Christiane Paul, a curator of New Media Arts at the Whitney Museum of American Art makes a distinction between digital media as a tool for art and digital art as a medium in itself- in which "the work exclusively uses the digital platform from production to presentation, and that it explores that platform's inherent possibilities". For her digital art has unique features which encompass "interactive, participatory; dynamic, and customize able" elements. The medium is not simply an adjunct to 'traditional' media but a harbinger of a new entity. In this exhibition all varieties of 3D digital, hybrid art are explored without suggesting a hierarchy between 3D digital software as a tool for 'traditional' art forms, and participatory 'pure' digital art that uses a digital platform from the creation of the artwork to the final digital output.

Hybrids brings together nine local and international artists who have produced work using 3D media and digital media as hybrid with other related art media. The artworks are grounded in both digital and material culture- a fusion of creative acts which combine computer based modeling with material fabrication and terrestrial objects. These hybrids are realised in a number of forms including installation with 3D integral projections, video animation composites and a CNC 3D print, cell phone locations recreated as 3D prints, and digital projections of bubbles onto disintegrating biodegradable sheets. The content ranges from social-political to relational, blurring the interface between manufactured truth and objective reality.

The notion of inherent mutability or hybridism within digital technologies is often revealed through the capacity in the digital computer to migrate content across media types and representational modalities, and to create dynamic systems that evolve through time or interaction. This mutability is part of a new arts practice, which is often used to explore issues of space, reality and representation. Furthermore, we increasingly see an artistic desire to combine these digital traits with physical elements, in the formation of creative hybrid spaces. These hybrid experiences are becoming recognised as belonging to an associated group of works, which sit loosely under the term of 'mixed-reality' art and include works which address how wecan perceptually move between digital/physical constructs and create, define and re-define complex spaces in technologically aware environs. This extended definition of a set of contemporary arts practices allows for the inclusion of conceptual works, which use the interaction between the digital-virtual and the physical-real to explore associated languages and produce social commentary.

Pierre Lévy calls the interaction between the physical-real and digital-virtual the Mobius effect (1998: 33). In the Mobius effect, evolving transitions from one state to another– interior to exterior; public to private; local to remote, author to reader and so on– prefigure the dialectic interplay between notions of the physical-real and the digitally virtual. The Mobius effect is facilitated through our increasing engagement with ubiquitous and distributed technologies, and suggests that we need to be continually rethinking the exchange between the physical and the digital and the way we perceive and differentiate between these states. In this context social structures based on the notion of spatial connectivity and fixed distances become increasingly destabilised through our engagement with digital technologies and the increasingly pervasive nature of digital networks. However, this shift from a belief in binary opposites to the notion of referential feedback loop is far from clear-cut. Established positions around the physical-real and the digitally virtual are well formed, and the mixing of these paradigms is at best loosely intertwined. Hence we have a condition where there is continual referencing and looping between states- a depositing and removal of traits from and between each space takes place in the forming and mixing of cultural realities.

F4 *The Ordnance* (detail), 2009

The controversial argument that the potential powers of the virtual might begin to supersede the qualities of the physical is raised by Umberto Eco in his collection of essays, *Faith In Fakes: Travels in Hyperreality*, where Eco ponders, with some irony, whether or not technology can provide more reality than nature (1995). In this respect many still find dissatisfaction in digital fabrication and the ability of the digital to successfully transmit the aura that we associated with the 'original' physical artifact. Furthermore, perhaps the concerns raised by Mark Slouka regarding the virtualisation of the real are representative of the current backlash against immersive Virtual Reality (VR), and the growing interest in digital-virtual/real mediated spaces fashioned through hybrid mixed-reality practices. In respect to VR, Slouka comments that "there was something vaguely nightmarish about this hunger for transcendence, this lust for dissolution, this utter lack of loyalty to the earth, the body, the human community" (1995: 33). Moreover, it appears that this polemic is reflected in a move away from VR as a means of creative output, towards a trend in which artists are increasingly working in a hybrid space, referencing aspects of the real or tangible world in conjunction with the utilisation of computer-driven technologies. This fusion of modalities often leads to the creation of works that are interdependent on an experience or a clear understanding of the two environments. In these mixed-reality constructs the work goes beyond the attempted replacement of one space with the other, and is only fully realisable by the augmented combination of both. Adventurous exponents of mixed-reality art may also attempt to configure spaces and experiences that place the viewer in both the real-physical world and the digital-virtual environment at the same time, as well as encouraging a fluid movement between these spaces.

3D modelling softwares and Rapid Prototype or CNC techniques have quickly found their way into the entertainment industries for the expedient production and testing of animations, character models, computer-generated effects (in movies) and the design of computer games. Using a variety of modelling tools these software packages allow a skilled user to create complex forms (and imagery) out of simple geometric polygons. However, this ease can cause problems. Technically the facility to create complex forms is not an issue for movie special effects and 3D animators, although the pragmatics of computational memory requirements for rendering and real-time playback speeds needs to be considered. The issue of complexity really becomes a determining factor when exporting computer-generated forms through to a physical fabrication process. This is an interesting conundrum, which not only describes the tension between material and computer-generated forms but also highlights major differences between these two states. Digital forms and physical forms have their own distinct modalities, with inherent qualities drawn from their respective environments. On the physical side this includes the tangible materiality of weight, texture and form, and on the digital, the qualities of mutability and replication. The ability of the digital to iterate a form or number of forms over time by the manipulation of code and algorithmic calculations is also an important capability, but this potential is also often the culprit in the creation of overly complex 3D models intended for material fabrication. However this temporal variable is routinely exploited in computer-generated animated sequences, where objects can be morphed from one state to another, easily manageable as long as the elements remain in the digital domain.

Brit Bunkley *Floral* (installation shot), 2008

A successful interplay between material and digital spaces can be facilitated, then, through the control and use of fabrication technologies, such as Rapid Prototype techniques, which facilitate a move from the digital to the physical. Alternately, other technologies such as 3D scanning enable a translation of the material into the digital. Part of the work for the mixed-reality practitioner is to understand the traits of the material and the digital in the exchange of content and ideas between the two environments. This fusion is ideally accomplished without impoverishing the attributes of either space through the technological cipher.

To summarise, the notion of mixed-realty art within the context of the Post-Medium Condition of art making, then, allows us to have a shared experience in both a physical and digital space at the same time. Mixed-reality works as an antidote for Slouka's negativity towards technologically facilitated VR mediations, in which we can hold onto the physicality of our corporeal bodies and associated sense of time, space and consciousness, without the prescriptive outer-body sensations often implicit in immersive VR experiences especially as they were designed during the 1990s. And yet, at the same time, we can experience the layered potentials of digital media- warping time, scale, narrative and other metaphysical experiences difficult to visualise or dangerous to explore within our mortal bodies (Morse 1998: 141-2). The notion of mixed-reality allows us to incorporate both the mediated and empirical experience in a hybrid combination, moving between and synthesising the two to facilitate an augmented experience that is not offered by the digital-virtual or material-real alone. In a creative context Grau (2003: 17) states that "in addition to copying it [reality], the transformation of reality is the central domain and essence of art: the creation of reality, individual reality, collective reality".

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