

**CONTEMPORARY**  
**AUSTRALIA** WOMEN



## Agatha Gothe-Snape

### *Aesthetics in motion*

Movement, both in physical and mental spaces, is a recurring theme in Agatha Gothe-Snape's art. While not 'performances' in the strict sense of the term, her works borrow certain qualities from the discipline of performance — for example, an emphasis on the activity of moving, and a nuanced understanding of bodily and spatial awareness — which she uses to consider questions about aesthetic experiences encountered in art and life.

As Gothe-Snape observes in several works, movement is fundamental to our experience of art exhibitions. Where other formats for consuming culture — books, televisions, theatres — ideally require us to remain still, museums and galleries ask us to be in motion. It's a complex kind of motion, too. Motion that invariably involves negotiating not only the physical parameters of art works, but also those pertaining to a building, to elements of exhibition design and to other bodies inhabiting the space. What's more, museums and galleries employ lighting, sound, interpretative materials and other tools to moderate our behaviour and make our physical engagement with an exhibition relatively uniform and predictable. Through works developed for a range of different art environments — from artist-run initiatives, to commercial galleries and public art museums — Gothe-Snape explores the manner in which these mediating structures frame our actions and shift our appreciation for the people and objects we encounter.

In *Text work* 2011, Gothe-Snape painted a yellow stripe on the concrete floor of the Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, at the threshold of the cavernous space. On the wall opposite, she installed a large sign that instructed: 'DO NOT APPROACH THIS END OF THE ROOM DO NOT CROSS THE YELLOW LINE'. Immediately, viewers were made conscious of the most essential actions involved in looking at art — how and when to move around and between art works — and also reminded of unspoken anxieties about how to conduct oneself in the for-profit, privately owned setting of a commercial gallery. In the accompanying finely realised, map-like gouache drawings, Gothe-Snape proposed other possible delineations of the gallery and pathways for moving through the space.

In 2010, Gothe-Snape addressed the subject of movement in public art museums in a collaborative project with Brian Fuata. *Wrong solo: cruising at Primavera* reconfigured the activity of walking through the Museum of Contemporary Art's 'Primavera' exhibition into a quasi-mystical experience. The work involved a twice-weekly 'cruising workshop' conducted by the artists in the exhibition spaces with gallery visitors. Warm-up exercises — some verbal, some physical — served to create a relaxed and trusting atmosphere among the group, before the artists led the participants on a tour of the exhibition. Unlike a conventional curator tour, wherein viewers would experience a heightened sense of differentiation between themselves, other visitors and the art work, 'cruising' created an environment of enhanced awareness and connectedness to the exhibition and to others occupying the space. Hypnotic instructions given by the artists to the 'cruisers' had a knowing, new-age quality. For example:

Notice the colour of the air. Let that colour come into you. Come out to meet that colour. Name it. Take a step. Take another. Walk. What colour are you? Is it different to the colour you were before? How much space is there between you and the wall? How much space is there between you and your friend? Between you and the stranger?<sup>1</sup>

Evoking the atmosphere of a meditation workshop, *Wrong solo: cruising at Primavera* not only moved bodies through the museum, but exacted a shift in the participants' perceptual awareness of the exhibition. Importantly, rather than acting as a distraction to the museum's various structures of mediation, the work drew attention to them, revealing their subtle details and textures.

In other works, Gothe-Snape explores and exposes movement as it occurs in mental space. In *Every artist remembered* 2009, developed for Sydney artist-run initiative First Draft, she revealed the manner in which mobility is inherent in intellectual activity. The exhibition opened with nine blank sheets of paper. The sheets were gradually filled with artists' names during appointments

**Agatha Gothe-Snape**  
Australia b.1980  
*Text Work and Line Work* 2011  
Vinyl letters  
Installed dimensions variable  
Installation view, 'Social Sculpture',  
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney, 2011  
Image courtesy: Paul Green



organised with nine artists from various disciplines and stages in their practice. As described by Gothe-Snape:

the task was to remember every artist. So, for two hours, each artist and myself would recall artists' names in concurrent succession — I would say one name, they would say the next. Each name had to bear some relation to the name said before, in order to build a 'drawing' constructed entirely from written names.<sup>2</sup>

The resulting drawings build a compelling picture of how a local artistic community maps itself onto broader artistic discourses — in one rather comedic sequence, for example, we read: 'Janet Burchill, Fridah Kahlo [sic], Carla Cescon, Louise Bourgeois, Michelle Hanlin, Archille Gorky [sic]'. The key to these works, however, is not the particular form taken by each list, but the manner in which they describe an erratic and extraordinarily agile series of connections. The overall image conjured by the drawings is of an idea set in motion — each invokes the liveliness of the conversation and portrays a mental exercise urgently redefining its system of reasoning from one moment to the next.

In her commission for 'Contemporary Australia: Women', the text 'we all walk out in the end' is written at a monumental scale on the 15-metre high GOMA entrance wall. With the directness of a pop lyric, Gothe-Snape provides a pithy commentary on the motion of people passing through the Gallery foyer, while also employing the metaphor of movement to describe emotional life.

We regularly use expressions that link our feelings with movement, and the melancholic inevitability of 'walking out in the end' resonates because it's more than just a metaphor. As the idea of embodied cognition proposes, there is a causal link between motion and emotion whereby bodily movements promote the recollection of emotional memories. Walking out of the Gallery is thus brought into sharp relief by Gothe-Snape: she mischievously reveals the connection between this ordinary, unavoidable act and intense moments of change in our emotional lives.

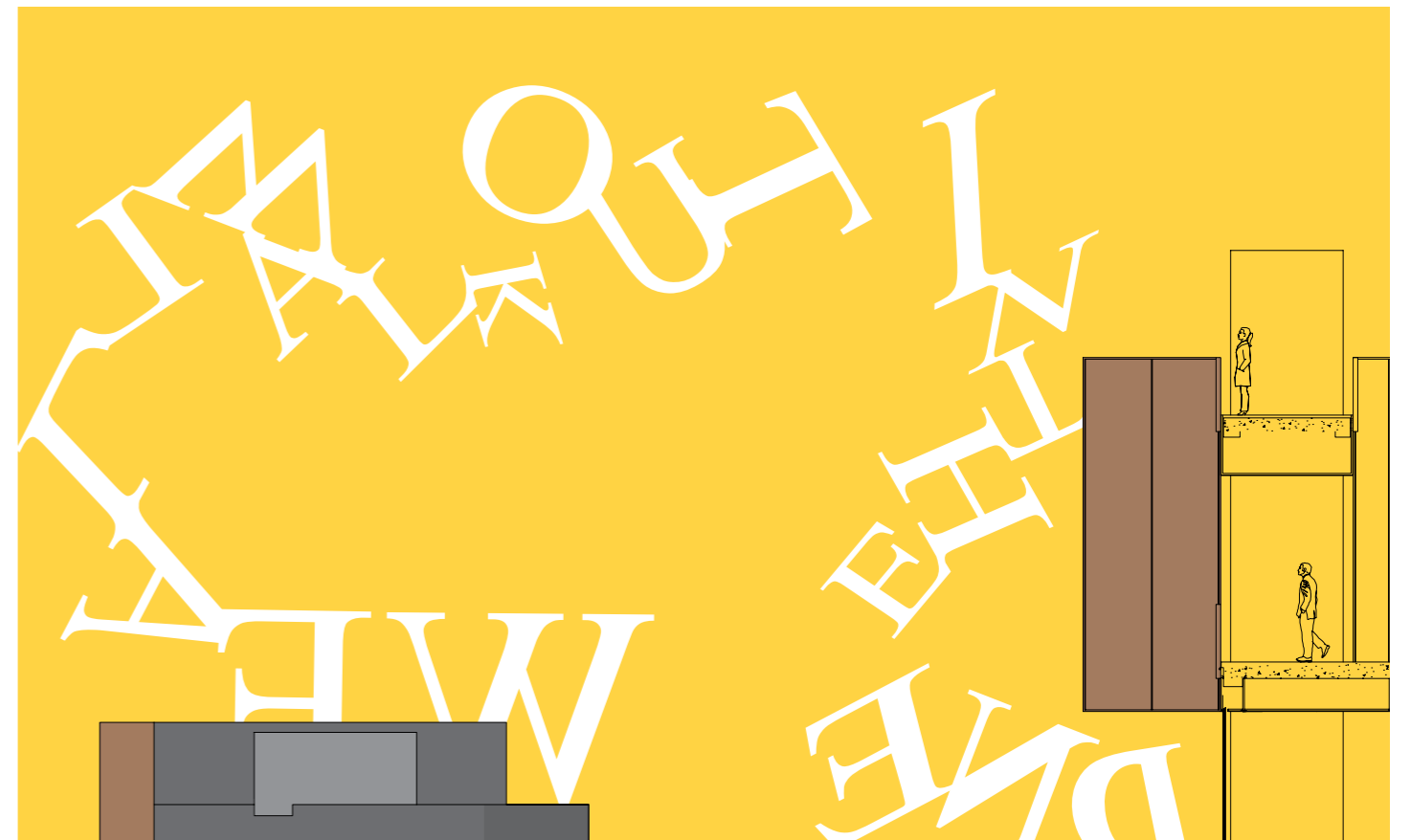
If motion underpins Agatha Gothe-Snape's various individual projects, we might think of her overall oeuvre as a psycho-geographical map that traces connections between spaces, bodies, emotions and ideas. In an interview published on Susan Gibb's blog, *Society*, Gothe-Snape describes the activity of making art as akin to attempting to navigate through a series of fogs, each representing different areas of knowledge and experience.<sup>3</sup> As she explains, 'I guess it's about trying to navigate the crisis of being human.'<sup>4</sup>

Nicholas Chambers

*Every artist remembered with Mike Parr 2009*  
Installation view, First Draft Gallery, Sydney, 2009  
Image courtesy: The artist

Opposite  
*Cruising with Wrongsalo (preparation) 2010*  
Workshop documentation, Campbelltown Arts Centre, 2010.  
Image courtesy: Kathryn Gray

Working drawing for *We all walk out in the end 2012*



## Endnotes

### Here and now Julie Ewington

- See, among other sources, Terry Smith, *Contemporary Art: World Currents*, Lawrence King publishing, London, UK, 2011, especially pp.39–43.
- Lucy Lippard, *From the Center: Feminist essays on women's art*, EP Dutton, New York, 1976, especially chapter 7; Lippard is particularly interesting as she was knowledgeable about Australian art, having made a lecture tour in 1975. See her 'Out of control: Australian art on the Left', in *Get the Message, A Decade of Art for Social Change*, EP Dutton, 1984, pp. 286–94; see also her *The Pink Glass Swan: Selected Essays on Feminist Art*, The New Press, New York, 1995.
- Richard Bell has been the most important Indigenous voice taking issue with aspects of contemporary Indigenous arts practice: see his 'Aboriginal art is a white thing – 2002' in Ian McLean (ed), *How Aborigines Invented the Idea of Contemporary Art*, IMA, Brisbane/Power Publications, Sydney, 2011, pp.308–11.
- With Kirsty Bruce, we might reconsider Laura Mulvey's canonical 1975 text 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema'. See her *Visual and Other Pleasures*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1989. In the case of Louise Weaver, multiple texts in feminist theory about viewing and concealments are clearly sources, together with works by artists such as the late Louise Bourgeois. For the contemporary emergence of Aboriginal women artists, see McLean, cited above, for the section entitled 'Gender', pp.189–204, with texts by various authors, including Marcia Langton.
- This early research includes, among many important texts, Linda Nochlin's pioneering work, especially her essay 'Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?', *ARTnews* January 1971, pp.22–39, 67; Germaine Greer's *The Obstacle Race: The Fortunes of Women Painters and Their Work*, London, Secker and Warburg, 1979; Griselda Pollock with Rozsika Parker, *Old Mistresses: Women, Art and Ideology*, Routledge & Kegan, London, 1981; and Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1985. In Australia, numerous studies and anthologies have been published, the earliest being Janine Burke's *Australian Women Artists, 1840–1940*, Collingwood, Greenhouse Publications, 1980, and the most substantial Joan Kerr's massive *Heritage: The National Women's Art Book: 500 works by 500 Australian Women Artists From Colonial Times to 1955*, Art and Australia, Roseville East, NSW, 1995.
- See, for example, 1995 Catherine De Zegher (ed.) *Inside the Visible: An Elliptical Traverse of Twentieth Century Art in, of, and from the Feminine*, MIT Press, Boston, 1996; Cornelia Butler et al., *WACK: Art and the Feminist Revolution* [exhibition catalogue], The Museum of Contemporary Art and MIT Press, Los Angeles; Maura Reilly and Linda Nochlin (eds) *Global Feminisms: New Directions in Contemporary Art* [exhibition catalogue] Brooklyn Museum, Merrell, London and New York, 2007; elles@pompidou: women artists in the collections of the National Modern Art Museum [exhibition catalogue], Centre Pompidou, Paris, 2009; and in 2010, at Brisbane's Institute of Modern Art, *Feminism Never Happened*.
- Australians Marie McMahon and Frances Phoenix (then Budden) worked on Judy Chicago's *The dinner party* in Los Angeles in 1978. See Frances Budden, *Our story/ herstory? Working on Judy Chicago's 'Dinner party'*, Phoenix Artwork, Balmain, NSW, 1982.
- See (ed. Barbara Caine) *Australian Feminism: A Companion*, Melbourne, Oxford University Press, 1998, especially pp.344–55 and, more recently, the *Australian Feminist Art Timeline*, was initiated by *The View from Here: 19 Perspectives on Feminism*, at Westspace as part of the 2010 Next Wave Festival. See also my 'Past the post: postmodernism and postfeminism', in *Dissonance: Feminism and the Arts 1970–90*, Catriona Moore (ed), Artspace, Sydney, pp. 109–121, originally published in 1985. Associated with a major exhibition staged by Artspace, Sydney in August 1991, entitled *Frames of reference: Aspects of Feminism and Art*, this anthology is a valuable source for the period.
- Numerous projects focussed on women working as artists: Lucy Lippard's influential lecture tour in 1975 for International Women's Year; the 1977 'The Women's Show, Adelaide', mounted by the recently-established Women's Art Movement; the campaign over 1977/8 for greater representation by women and Australians in general in the 1979 Biennale of Sydney; the NSW Women and Arts Festival in 1982 and the subsequent publication of the Australia Council's *Women in the Arts* report in 1984, to name only the most significant Australian projects of this kind.
- Women's Art Movements were established in the mid-1970s in various Australian cities: in Sydney in 1973, in Melbourne with practical expression through the Women's Art Register (founded in 1975 and still housed at Richmond Library – see www.womensartregister.org) and the publication of *Lip* magazine between 1976 and 1984; and in 1976 in Adelaide, with its original home at the Experimental Art Foundation and from 1978 in its own premises in the city. Artists involved included Vivienne Binns and Joan Grounds, together with Jude Adams and Toni Robertson in Sydney; Erica McGilchrist, Lesley Dumbrell and Elizabeth Gower in Melbourne; and Margaret Dodd and Olive Bishop in Adelaide.
- See, among other recent projects, the CoUNTess blog, which analyses women's appearances in major Australian exhibitions; work by scholars such as Kyla McFarlane, *A Different Temporality: Aspects of Australian Feminist Art Practice 1975–1985* [exhibition catalogue], Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2011, and Melissa Miles, 'Whose Art Counts?', *Art Monthly Australia*, Number 224, October 2009, pp.5–8; and the efflorescence of artist-run initiatives and exhibitions investigating art by women, such as Rebecca Coates, *Neo-neo Feminisms*, catalogue essay, Neon Parc, Melbourne, 2008; Clare Rae and Victoria Bennett's *The View From Here: 19 Perspectives on Feminism: A 2010 Next Wave Festival project*, Westspace, East Melbourne, 2010 and Brisbane's LEVEL (opened 2010). Longstanding curators

such as Judy Annear in Sydney and Juliana Engberg and Natalie King in Melbourne are also notable contributors to discourses around women's work as artist.

- See *Art and Australia*, 'Women', March 2012, vol.49, no.3, for my 'Think big, and be loud: Three generations of Australian female artists', pp.448–55; the journal also published a special issue on women in 1995, see *Art and Australia*, vol.32, no.3, Autumn, 1995.
- The dinner party* is now permanently housed at the Elizabeth A Sackler, Center for Feminist Art at the Brooklyn Museum, New York.
- The key recent text is Judith Butler *Gender Trouble*, Routledge, UK, originally published in 1990; and, in the visual arts, see Amelia Jones and Andrew Stephenson (eds.) *Performing the Body: Performing the Text*, London/ New York: Routledge, 1999; Tracey Warr, and Amelia Jones, *The Artist's Body*, London: Phaidon, 2000; and Helena Reckitt and Peggy Phelan, *Art and Feminism*, Phaidon, 2001, reprinted 2006.
- See Donna Haraway's influential Simians, *Cyborgs and Women: The Reinvention of Nature*, Routledge, New York, 1991.
- Feminism is not entirely a dirty word today: see *Granta*, issue number 115: *The F Word* published in the European summer of 2011; see also *The F-Word: A Day of Global Feminist Debate*, a forum at the Sydney Opera House on 4 March 2012 with feminist icons Germaine Greer and Naomi Wolf, journalist and poet Eliza Griswold, and journalist, blogger and SlutWalk champion Clem Bastow, chaired by journalist Jenny Brockie.

### I can hear her breathing Emily Maguire

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- Carmen Calilil, 'The Stories of Our Lives', *The Guardian*, 26 April 2008, www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/apr/26/featuresreviews.guardianreview2, viewed February 2012.
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### Rebecca Baumann

- Smoke fields* will be presented as part of the Embodied Acts performative program, which includes a variety of works performed a number of times over the opening weekend of 'Contemporary Australia: Women', 2012.
- See Yoshihiro Tanabe and Kunihiko Kaneko, 'Behavior of a falling paper', *Physical Review Letters*, vol.73, no.10, September 1994.
- Rebecca Baumann, telephone conversation with the author, January 2012.

### Kirsty Bruce

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- Kirsty Bruce interviewed by Bree Richards, Assistant Curator, Contemporary Australian Art, Queensland Art Gallery, 12 December 2011.
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### Bindi Cole

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### Deborah Kelly

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### Justine Khamara

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### Anastasia Klose

- Throughout history, artists have transgressed social norms, and performance and media artists are no exception. In 1974, American sculptor Lynda Benglis (b.1941) photographed herself with a large phallus between her legs. The following year American performance artist Carolee Schneemann (b.1939) made *Interior scroll*, in which she stood naked on a table painted in mud while pulling a scroll from her vagina.
- Anastasia Klose, 'GOMA talks young minds: What is in store for our creative future?' hosted by Richard Aedy, uploaded by QAG 29 September 2011, www.youtube.com, viewed 19 November 2011.
- Anastasia Klose, email to author, 27 November 2011.
- For this work, Klose also found inspiration in Sydney-based four-piece collective The Kingpins and the work of the Guerrilla Girls; Anastasia Klose, email to author.

## PUBLISHER

Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art  
Stanley Place, South Bank, Brisbane  
PO Box 3686, South Brisbane  
Queensland 4101 Australia  
www.qagoma.qld.gov.au

Published for 'Contemporary Australia: Women', an exhibition organised by the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, and held at GOMA, Brisbane, Australia, 21 April – 22 July 2012.

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National Library of Australia  
Cataloguing-in-Publication entry

Author: Ewington, Julie.  
Title: Contemporary Australia: women / Julie Ewington.  
ISBN: 9781921503382 (pbk.)  
Subjects: Women artists--Australia--20th century.  
Women artists--Australia--21st century.  
Art, Australian--20th century.  
Art, Australian--21st century.  
Other Authors/Contributors: Queensland Art Gallery.  
Dewey Number: 709.94

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Typeset in Flama. Image colour adjustment by Colour Chiefs and printing by Screen Offset Printing, Brisbane. Printed on Silk Matt from BJ Ball.

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