

HERE&NOW18

Besides, it is always the others who die



Fifty years since the death of Marcel Duchamp 1968-2018
Julie Dowling | Alex Spremberg | Perdita Phillips | Bjoern Rainer-Adamson | Carly Lynch | Peter & Molly
Curated by Anna Louise Richardson

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY | 1 SEPTEMBER - 8 DECEMBER 2018







Je touche | *Je touche* (Please touch) | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 29.7 x 21 x 0.5cm
UV varnish

Gallery dust | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 10 x 20 x 20cm
dust

Pearl de la pear | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | provocation
fear, background radiation

Sans colle | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 32 x 23.5 x 2.2cm each
altered books

Fourmi blanche | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | 34 x 26 x 6cm
altered books (special edition *HERE&NOW18* catalogue)



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Perdita Phillips' multiple, individual artworks in *HERE&NOW18*, each refer to the life of 'the work of art'. They point to the presence of the artwork within the flow of time, in history, in public view and away from it. They remind us of its degrading materialities, from the atomic, to the perceived and sensed and felt. They show us the apparatus of exhibition-making around the artwork, its installation, interpretation, labelling, invigilation and documentation. They expose conventional readings of the artwork to the elements, and to other forms of life and intelligence.

The key to reading Phillips' work in this exhibition is a large drawing¹ which maps her thoughts from the name Marcel Duchamp outwards across the paper, where her words are splashed over with sienna and black ink. The large sheet is stuck with other scraps of notepaper and torn pieces of maps. Phillips' notes expand from observations around Duchamp's life, work and influences, into various ideas for how her responsive work will infiltrate the exhibition environment, or not. Some of these lines of enquiry reach dead ends, are disarranged or are refused by the gallery. The drawing allows us access to all these immaterialities. The influence of the immaterial on the material is the vector through which I will reflect on a few of Phillips' works.

Time. A little-known story of the Mary Sisler collection that toured to the Art Gallery of Western Australia in 1968, is that following the close of the show, the majority of the collection including *Bicycle Wheel* (1951) and *Why not Sneeze, Rose Sélavy?* (1921) was stuck in limbo for possibly up to a year at the Grace Brothers warehouse, in Osborne Park. The most likely cause of this logistical stasis was the artist's death, which had occurred in the middle of the exhibition's season, and which stimulated considerable market fluctuation around the value of his work thereafter. But Phillips' investigation of the exhibition archives has proven inconclusive on this front, and so she has constructed a material history around this indecisive moment, this literal non-event, by pointing to things that did happen around the inertia of the artworks from September 1968 to October 1969. Her installation of ephemera from this time includes references to environmental issues including the Meckering earthquake, to moon exploration and popular cultural materials and a photograph of the exterior of the warehouse on Scarborough Beach Road in which the artworks were stored.

Intelligence. Our op-shops, second-hand book stores and dumps are filled with the material histories of the twentieth century, and the once reliable resources used to comprehend the mastery of art. From this sad fate, Phillips rescued four identical copies of *Marcel Duchamp* according to World of Art Books, and introduced two of them to a termite colony. The social systems of such creatures were famously unappealing to Duchamp, as in many recorded interviews he expressed his dislike of collective endeavour: 'I don't agree at all with the anthill that waits for us in a few hundred years. I still believe in the individual and every man for himself, like in a shipwreck².' It appears for the termites, that *Marcel Duchamp* was either useful or tasty, or both.

Radiation. If one can get around the withering misogyny underpinning Duchamp's most famous, most well documented and most theorised work, *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* (1915-1923), it shows the artist's obsession with immaterial forces including electromagnetism and radiation. His interest in science, mathematics and engineering are all captured in the individual mechanistic objects and the precision with which they are rendered in this work, reinforced by his copious notes. The writing of Linda Henderson, situates Duchamp's practice within the emerging scientific knowledge of its time, including his fascination with electricity, Hertzian waves and X-rays³. Phillips' gestures towards these powerfully unseen elements, in her infinitely-thin provocation to plumb the background radiation of the exhibition itself.

You won't see the provocation. But I can assure you, it's there.

1 – P. Phillips, *Problematics*, <http://www.perditaphillips.com/portfolio/problematics/> (accessed 1 August 2018).

2 – M. Duchamp, interviewed by Jean-Marie Drot, 1963, referenced from M. Nesbitt, 'Last words (Rilke, Wittgenstein) (Duchamp)', *Art History*, vol. 21, no. 4, 1998, *Historical Abstracts with Full Text*, Ipswich, MA, (accessed 1 August 2018).

3 – L. Henderson, *Duchamp in Context: Science and Technology in the Large Glass and Related Works*, N.Y., Princeton University Press, 2005.

Between a shipwreck and an anthill | 2018 | Perdita Phillips | dimensions variable
mixed media installation
Image courtesy of the artist

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

HERE&NOW18: Besides, it is always the others who die has been made possible through the support of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery and the UWA Cultural Precinct.

This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

A massive thank you to Dr Perdita Phillips, Dr Alex Spremberg, Carly Lynch, Peter & Molly, Julie Dowling, and Bjoern Rainer-Adamson for your generosity, creativity and for saying yes! You have each produced something magical. I am most grateful for the inspirational support of Chief Cultural Officer, Cultural Precinct at the University of Western Australia, Professor Ted Snell, and the dedication and diligence of the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery staff. I would also like to recognise legends Caine Chennatt, Pier Leach, Kate Hamersley, Anthony Kelly and Lyle Branson. Thanks also to Connie Sze, Janice Lally and Sally Quin. Special thank you to Tom Picton-Warlow for his vision, generosity and passion for Marcel Duchamp. Thank you sharing the T.D. Picton-Warlow & J.J. Robson Collection. An extending thank you to all the authors: Megan Hyde, Monique Fong, Marcus Moore, Lara Nicholls, Robert Cook, Clothilde Bullen, Josephine Wilson, Tul Leah Pearce, Bec Dean, Leigh Robb and Ross Rudesch Harley. Thanks also to all of the participants in the artworks and those who worked closely with the artists behind the scenes, the photographers and Abdul-Rahman Abdullah for putting together this catalogue. Thank you to Damien Hassan. Special mention to Jones Day, the State Records Office of Western Australia, the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, The Circulating Film & Video Library – The Museum of Modern Art, The University of Western Australia Art Collection, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Queensland Art Gallery and Francis Naumann.

The artists would like to express their gratitude to the following:

Peter & Molly would like to thank Sam Hopkins for his carpentry in the creation of *Water Closet*.

Julie Dowling would like to add thanks to all Badimaya elders past & present, and to thank her mum Ronnie, sister Carol and nephews James, Curtis & Tyrone.

Carly Lynch would like to thank Josephine Wilson, Matthew McAlpine and Megan Hyde.

Perdita Phillips would like to acknowledge:

Images and research from the collections of the State Library of Western Australia, City of Stirling and Geological Survey of Western Australia. The Tanker (1969 Western Australia Audio Visual Education Branch) copyright Department of Education Western Australia. Between a shipwreck and an anthill contains material from the State Library of Western Australia collection: photographs and video reproduced with the permission of the Library Board of Western Australia. The installation includes images and resources sourced from NASA, Geoscience Australia, the Geological Survey of Western Australia (copyright, used with permission) and Western Australian Newspapers (copyright, used with permission). Photographs by J.S. Beard copyright, reproduced with the permission of the Estate of J.S. Beard. 390 Scarborough Beach Road images copyright and courtesy of the Warwick Family Archive. With thanks to many, including The Termites, Janet Carter, Devon Ward, Harry Searles, ice2art, Western Australian Museum Materials Conservation, Ben Hill and Matt Larke, Geraldton Family History Society, Irwin Districts Historical Society, Bec Dean, the inimitable Anna Louise Richardson and Helen and Peter Green of Waalitj Farm.

Alex Spremberg would like to contribute the following:

I would like to thank the curator Anna Louise Richardson for giving me the opportunity to participate in *HERE&NOW18*. Her support and confidence in my work is greatly appreciated. Also, I would like to thank Professor Ted Snell, Chief Cultural Officer, Cultural Precinct the University of Western Australia, for making it possible for me to realise a project of this scale in the first place. I am indebted to the whole support team at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, especially Anthony Kelly and Lyle Branson for their expert installation of the work. Furthermore I would like to thank Caine Chennatt for contributing his time and competence to the animation project. I am grateful to Leigh Robb, Curator of Contemporary Art at the Art Gallery of South Australia, for her essay and continuing support. My special gratitude goes to Phil Gamblen, without whose enthusiasm and technical ability this project would have never been achieved.

Bjoern Rainer-Adamson would like to thank Ross Rudesch Harley.

We would all like to thank the friends and family who support along every step of the way and are willing to listen until late in the night.

HERE&NOW18: Besides, it is always the others who die was published in conjunction with the exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, 1 September - 8 December 2018.

HERE&NOW is an annual exhibition series initiated in 2012 by the Cultural Precinct at the University of Western Australia, and presented at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery. The exhibition aims to showcase the most exciting and innovative new work being produced by artists in Western Australia.

Book and exhibition by Anna Louise Richardson.

ISBN 978-1-876793-99-9

Printed by Picton Press, Perth.

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This catalogue was published on Whadjuk land, the traditional country of the Noongar people.

We recognise and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationship with the land.

We acknowledge that they are of continuing importance to Noongar people living today.

We pay respect to Elders past, present and future.



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