

liminal

6 March – 13 April 08
Carnegie Gallery

Ali Sanderson
Andrew Dewhurst
David Martin
Richard Giblett
Richard Wastell
Thomas Bachler
Todd McMillan

Curated by: Dr Colin Langridge

introduction

Dr Colin Langridge
Hobart – February 2008

Liminal is primarily engaged with the intersection of two disparate entities – a popular idea of artistic beauty, the sunrise/sunset, and the practice of contemporary art, which often positions itself in a critical relationship to artistic and cultural traditions. It is this meeting of differences that creates the tension in Liminal.

Very few contemporary artists make artworks using the sunrise/sunset as a theme while, in contrast, the same subject is arguably the most popular one for amateur photographers and painters. Heavily steeped in Romantic suggestions and provoking contemplation of birth, death, beauty, the passage of time and myriad other grand ideas, the difficulty for artists is to find an innovative approach.

The title Liminal refers to the psychological threshold of perception where we just begin to notice a change in sensory awareness, becoming cooler, darker. We are always engaged with the limen but at sunrise and sunset we become more aware of these subtle changes and perhaps even entranced by them.

Thomas Bachler has used a pinhole camera with the aperture cut into a swastika, this causes points of light to assume that shape. The

swastika refers both to recent German history and its original sun-wheel meaning. Andrew Dewhurst has painted references to the setting sun reflected within the geometric interior of a modern domestic building, thus distancing us from the romantic horizon. Richard Giblett draws the graphic silhouette of a New York sunrise into the 3rd dimension using a smaller version of the sun to represent itself.

David Martin challenges our concepts of what a photograph can be in his handmade paper images set by the sun. Todd McMillan has recorded himself bobbing in the water looking towards the darkening horizon as he struggles to stay afloat provoking thoughts of Romantic painters such as Caspar David Friedrich. Ali Sanderson goes to the heart of Western popular cultural ideas about relationships, romance and the setting sun in her video installation that exposes how easily symbols may crumble. Richard Wastell chooses to remain within the landscape tradition and helps us to shift our perception of it by changing the focus and framing of a Hobart sunset.

As our relationship with the sun changes, so will our perception of it.

at the threshold: the edge of liminality

Every threshold is placed at an edge, and yet not merely an edge, for the threshold always carries with it a sense of opening up toward or closing away from. Only that place at the edge that anticipates or remembers can constitute a threshold. The threshold is thus not a place in which one can remain – to do so is for it to cease to be a threshold – but is always a place of movement and transition. Indeed, one might say that the threshold is the coalescence of a time into the form of a place, since the threshold only appears as a threshold in that time of opening-toward or closing-away-from. The being of the threshold as a place is therefore essentially determined by the event of approach or withdrawal, anticipation or remembrance, arrival or departure, coming-to-be or passing-away.

'Liminality' refers to the character of the threshold – whether understood as realized in the event of approach or withdrawal or in the transitory places in which that occurs. Yet whereas the idea of the threshold refers us immediately to something that is both spatial and embodied – the threshold is that across which we step, over which we move, in order to

enter or depart – the idea of the liminal refers us to something more general, and perhaps more abstract, but also more often purely temporal. Indeed, when we consider the experience of liminality rather than the concept alone, then its most familiar manifestation is in the everyday experience of that interval between day and night that is dawn and dusk – the event of sunrise and sunset.

This particular form of the experience of liminality – that which comes with the opening and closing of the day – is especially striking and for a number of reasons. Not the least important are the specific sensory qualities of this experience – not only the visual appearance of the sky, but also, when one is physically present, the shifts in sound and air. But the direct connection with temporality, and also with the circular temporality of day and night, means that the experience of sunrise and sunset has the capacity immediately to invoke in us ideas and images associated with the different aspects of temporality that mark out our own lives. Moreover, the time of the sunrise and sunset – the time of liminality – is also a time that, precisely because it stands between

the states that are opened toward and closed away from, also allows for a space that belongs to neither of those states. This 'between-space' or 'between-time', because it belongs wholly to neither day nor night, and because, as a time of transition, it can also be a time of momentary stillness, itself allows a certain brief release from that which comes before and after. The time of liminality thus opens up a space for reflection – a time when action is temporarily held in abeyance (hence it is only fitting that Hegel should claim that only with the coming of dusk does the owl of Minerva, meaning philosophy, take wing). The time of liminality also opens up a space in which things themselves appear in approach and withdrawal – as in so many of J.M.W. Turner's works that capture moments of dusk or dawn, in which things are present and yet not wholly so, often evanescent, fading into or out of appearance. We may say, then, that the time and space of liminality is the time and space of the indeterminate and the opaque, the time and the space of possibility and of the question.

For an artist such as Turner, liminality, as it appears in the form of the dawn or the dusk (or also in the anticipation and withdrawal of things that occurs through mist, reflection, smoke or rain) can be seen as a means to explore the very character and texture of experience, and of things as given in experience. For an artist such as Caspar David Friedrich – an iconic

figure of romanticism in whose work the liminal would appear to be directly thematised – it is the liminal as evocative of the very character of existence, of temporality and mortality, appearance and reality, that is at issue.

One might argue however, that art is always preoccupied with liminality. Not only in the sense that artistic practice might itself be understood as 'at the edge' (and so standing at an uncertain point between the ordinary and something else), nor merely in the sense that the things that it creates may themselves function as liminal points that move us between different forms of appearance, but also in the sense that it explores the very character of liminality including its own liminal status. Taking note of what has already been said about the relation between liminality and questionability or indeterminacy, we may say that the artistic concern with liminality is precisely a concern to open up a space of questionability and indeterminacy – a space that includes the space of art as such.

The liminal might thus be viewed as constituting both the topic and the topos of art – it is that which is the focus of artistic practice and also the place in which such practice is located. In this way, the liminal and the artistic are bound together, and yet, although bound in this way, the liminal can also be seen as presenting a certain problem for art. The experiential and emotional power of the liminal readily directs

our attention away from the experience of liminality as such – away from the questionable and indeterminate – and onto its emotional and experiential effects. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the prevalence within popular art of images of that very experience of liminality that is given in the sunrise and sunset. The appeal of such images is to be found in the immediate experiential meaning and emotional significance that they have for the individual viewer – whether it be the pleasure evoked by the image of natural beauty or spectacle, or the romantic or even nostalgic associations of sunrise and sunset against rural countryside or exotic beach. Here the experience of liminality itself withdraws in favour of the direct experience or emotional response. The artist who attempts to engage with the liminal through the particular form of liminality associated with the sunrise and sunset is thus faced with a particular challenge in terms of how to thematize these events as indeed liminal events in a way that maintains the focus on such liminality, and the indeterminacy and opacity that goes with it, and yet does not abandon itself merely to emotional or psychological affect.

The challenge that appears here is not, however, some accidental feature of the artistic engagement with the liminal, but is directly tied to the essential character of liminality. Just as one cannot remain at the threshold and it remain a threshold, neither can the experience

of liminality be retained without it ceasing to be an experience of liminality – the experience of liminality always recedes from us into other experiences, into other places, into other times. The exploration of liminality, whether in art or elsewhere, can never be anything other than exploration that is characterized by constant anticipation and remembrance, approach and withdrawal, recovery and loss.

Edges are strange places, and the liminal is that which is of the edge, and yet already presages the movement beyond it. To experience liminality is to stand at the threshold, which is to stand at the edge, not yet having entered, nor yet having departed. Yet this experience is itself one that is always already in withdrawal, always already fading. To be at the threshold is always already to be moving across it.

the artists



Study for a Drowning Man 2005 (still from dvd), DVD, duration 4.39 min

todd mcmillan

Todd McMillan lives and works in Sydney, NSW. In 2006 McMillan won The Helen Lempriere Travelling Scholarship.

He has had several solo exhibitions in Sydney since 2002, including *Let Down* 2007 and *Alone, Alone* 2006 at Grantpirrie Gallery. He has exhibited in several group exhibitions since 2003, including *New Acquisitions* at the Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney 2007, *Masquerade*

at the MCA, Sydney, in 2006 and *Fantastical* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, in 2005. He took part in the *Next Wave Festival*, Federation Square, Melbourne, in 2004 with a performance titled *Anxiety*. His work is held in the MCA, John Kaldor Collection and other private collections.

Todd McMillan is represented by Grantpirrie Gallery.



The Blue Hour 2003 (detail), oil on canvas, triptych 100 x 100 cm

andrew dewhurst

Andrew Dewhurst is a Melbourne-based artist who completed a Master of Fine Arts at the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania in 2003 and taught for three years in the Painting and E-media studios at the same institution. His art practice crosses the boundaries of several media. He is currently undertaking a Master of Cultural Material Conservation at the University of Melbourne.

Dewhurst has previously participated in numerous group and solo exhibitions in Hobart and interstate. He was awarded an international Elizabeth Greenshields Foundation

Scholarship (Canada 2001) and was resident at the Cité Internationale des Arts, Paris, in 2004 as well as winning the University Medal for academic excellence in 2000 and an Australian Postgraduate award in 2001.

In his painting, Dewhurst is concerned with spatial conundrums, the orchestration of light and reflection within both interior and exterior spaces. The rendering of light and ambience provide a vehicle for exploring the representation space and time; night and day, past and present.



From the series: Sunrises and Sunsets 2007 (detail), color print, 50 x 70 cm

thomas bachler

Thomas Bachler lives and works in Dresden, Germany. He studied Visual Communication at the Art Academy in Kassel and has taught photography, art and design since 1990. Since 1985 Bachler has exhibited his photographic artwork in numerous exhibitions internationally and has also won several awards. He is renowned for his extensive research into pinhole photography and his innovative experimentation with the technique. He has employed such diverse things as travelling suitcases and moving vans as camera bodies. Bachler has also worked extensively in collaboration with other

photographic artists and, in 1985, he organised the first pinhole-camera congress in Germany. Many workshops, published writings and works regarding the camera obscura have followed. He visited Australia in 2005 to show work in *The Borderline of Photography* exhibition at the Queensland Centre for Photography and also gave a lecture and a pinhole photography workshop at the Tasmanian School of Art in Hobart.

www.thomasbachler.de



Shift Work 2007 (detail), plywood, fluorescent light, 235 x 51 x 30 cm

richard giblett

Richard Giblett lives and works in Melbourne. He completed a Bachelor of Fine Arts (Honours) at Curtin University in 1999, and in 2001 was awarded an Asialink residency at Sszamie Space in Seoul, South Korea. Recent solo exhibitions include *New Dystopias* at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, 2006, *Cluster* at Conical Inc, Melbourne, 2005, *Plant/Room* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne, 2004, *DIY Disco* at TCB Gallery, Melbourne, 2003, *Ghost Town*, Loop Gallery, Seoul, South Korea, 2001 and *Pallarup Reflections*, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, 1993. Selected group exhibitions include *Preview07*, Murray White Room, *Uncanny Nature*, Australian Centre

for Contemporary Art (2006), *Mixed Tape*, Art Gallery of WA (2006), *Drawn Out*, PICA (2005), *Gulliver's Travels*, [National touring exhibition, 2003], *Analogue Technologies*, Canberra Contemporary Art Space (2002), *Octopus 2*, Gertrude CAS (2002) and *do it*, Lawrence Wilson Gallery (2001). In 2005 he undertook a three month Australia Council residency at the Greene Street studio, New York.

Giblett's work features in numerous public and private collections including Artbank, Art Gallery of Western Australia, Curtin University and the Sszamie Collection, Seoul. He is represented by Murray White Room, Melbourne and Galerie Dusseldorf, Perth.



Spewtiful 2006 (still from DVD), DVD, duration 3.28 min

ali sanderson

Ali Sanderson lives and works between Phnom Penh Cambodia and Melbourne Australia. She completed a BFA [Sculpture] at the VCA, Melbourne in 1999. In 2004 she received the Australia Council's studio residency in Milan, Italy and the IASKA International Artspace residency at Kelleberrin in Western Australia.

Recent solo exhibitions include: *Spewtiful*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces (Melbourne 2006), and presented in collaboration with Nat Thomas as part of the nat&ali project were, *not only but also*, IMA (Brisbane 2005); *nat&ali present the Artbar*, CCP (Melbourne 2003) and *Friendship is...*, First Floor Artist and Writers Space (Melbourne, 2000).

Selected group exhibitions include: *Mean Rup Mean Tuk*, Ministry of Culture (Phnom Penh 2007), *Lines and Lost Lines*, Hotel De La Paix (Cambodia 2007), *The Air Between Us*, Gertrude Contemporary Artspace (Melbourne 2005), *Feminist Actions*, Spacement (Melbourne 2006), *Place and Space*, IASKA (PICA touring exhibition, 2005-2007); *2004: Australian Culture Now*, NGV (Melbourne 2004) and *Primavera*, MCA (Sydney 2002).

Publications include *Photofile*, *FREIZE*, *Australian Art Collector*, *McCulloch's Encyclopedia of Australian Art*, *New Edition*, *CHARLIE*, Issue No.1, [ed] Maurizio Cattelan.



Sheoaks, bushfires, dusk on the river 2008 (detail), pastel on paper, triptych 56 x 76 cm each

richard wastell

Richard Wastell, born and resides in Hobart, Tasmania. Honours degree in painting from The Tasmanian School of Art at Hobart in 1996. First Solo Exhibition at Dick Bett Gallery, Hobart in 1998. Seven further solo shows in Hobart, Sydney and Melbourne. Included in numerous group exhibitions since 1997 including

Contemporary Aspects of Tasmanian Art, QVM&AG, Launceston, Tasmania 2006 and *From an Island South*, Devonport Regional Gallery and *asialink touring* 2007. His work is collected by Macquarie Bank, BHP Billiton, Artbank and the Tasmanian Museum and art Gallery amongst others. Represented by Bett Gallery Hobart.



Memento El Grande, from the series *Memento* 2007 (detail), gum dichromate print, 64 x 55 cm

david martin

David Martin has worked extensively in the photographic industry and has experimented widely with photographic techniques and visual discourse. Martin has long been fascinated with 'how photographs work' - the way they are perceived and the powerful influence they have on us. Following his first public foray – a winning entry in the Brennan Park Colouring-in Competition – Martin pursued his interest in the arts, completing a diploma of art and design at the Bendigo College of Advance Education in 1979. Subsequently he gained a Bachelor of Art with First Class Honours

and was awarded the University Medal at the Australian National University, Institute of the Arts, Canberra School of Art, 1995. He was awarded a PhD from the University of Tasmania, School of Art in 2004. Martin's work has been exhibited nationally, most recently in *About Photography* at the Stephen McLaughlin Gallery in 2007. In 2006 and 2007 Martin conducted curatorial research projects at the Devonport Regional Gallery. Martin is included in the recent Monash survey publication by Dr Anne Marsh of 200 Australian Contemporary Photographers 1980 – 2006.

acknowledgements

ISBN 978-0-9750909-9-2

Liminal, published by Hobart City Council, February 2008

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Artists: Ali Sanderson (Vic), Andrew Dewhurst (Vic)

David Martin (Tas), Richard Giblett (Vic), Richard Wastell (Tas)

Thomas Bachler (Germany) and Todd McMillan (NSW)

Thanks to:

Fiona Lee – CAST Touring Officer

Ben Booth – Acting Visual Art Coordinator, Carnegie Gallery 2008

Sahn Cramer – Visual Art Coordinator, Carnegie Gallery 2007

Essay – Jeff Malpas

Catalogue Design – Sarah Owen

Printing and Pre-Press – Focal Printing & Crystal Graphics

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