

# Between Two Deaths<sup>1</sup>

*The world breaks everyone, and afterward, some are strong at the broken places.*<sup>2</sup>

Ernest Hemingway wrote these words as Europe was recovering from the horror and mass brutality of the First World War, and this historical watershed inspired his attempt to find meaning – and even ennoblement – in death. *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway's first bestseller, presents humanity's plight through an indifferent (or, more often, downright hostile) world, and human life is depicted as a perpetual struggle that ends only in death. However, this struggle also represents an interval through which the manner in which one faces the crisis and endures the pain inflicted by the uncaring universe is ultimately of great importance. Although they might not always understand the complex world they inhabit, nor the particular dilemmas of modern life, Hemingway's protagonists invariably find some solace in beauty and order when it does appear, thus leading lives of existential authenticity.

1. The title of this text is borrowed from an exhibition of the same name, curated by Ellen Blumenstein and Felix Ensslin presented at the ZKM (Centre for Art and Media), Karlsruhe, Germany in 2007. *Between Two Deaths* reflected on the curators' observation of a social and cultural trend toward 'melancholic retrospection' and posited a remarkably open-ended proposition that encompassed history, allegory, sexuality and psychoanalysis. My first studio visits with Joel and Lucienne took place immediately following the tragic death of a close friend of the artists and, while much remained unsaid, our meetings were conducted under its dark cloud. This first encounter with the artists and their work, and our discussions – which swirled inevitably around Port Arthur, skeletons (both real and metaphoric), the *corrida*, MONA's iconic themes of sex and death – left me reeling with conflicted imaginings around annihilation and transcendence. I returned to Melbourne to the sad news that a colleague had lost a family member in similarly dreadful circumstances, and this title took on an obvious literal significance.

2. Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms*, 1929.



Indeed, existentialism was the key philosophical doctrine that influenced Hemingway's writing, and significant existential concepts (such as authenticity and dread) are manifest throughout the work of Lucienne Rickard and Joel Crosswell in this third iteration of *Shotgun*.

Lucienne Rickard notes an enduring interest in Hemingway: the simplicity and rhythm of his writing, 'the deliberateness of everything he wrote'.<sup>3</sup> Qualities, of course, that are equally evidenced in her monumental yet pared back drawings, collectively titled *I thought I had paid for everything*; work that shares allegiance with Hemingway's interest in the *corrida* (bullfighting) yet also transcends its literal meaning. Hemingway presented the *corrida* as an idealized drama in which the matador faces death and whereby the existentialist moment of *nada* (nothingness) is broken when he conquers death by killing the bull. Rickard depicts the subjects of her drawings, the bulls themselves, in a state of suspended animation – one that must inevitably lead to destruction, of course, as the *corrida* is literally of life and death. (And there is intrinsic existentialist truth in the notion that those who face death with dignity and courage, therefore, live an authentic life.) However, although she sources imagery from original photographs of the *corrida*, Rickard removes her subjects from their context and presents the bulls, instead, as archetypes (the fierce destroyer is clearly evident, and so is the hero, the martyr...) for the viewer to project their own meanings and desires. With the title of the work, *I thought I had paid for everything*; she offers further layers of ambiguity, and suggests all manner of philosophical uncertainty inherent in the individual's struggle to come to terms with being in a material world: from Faustian contract to existential impasse.

It's significant that Rickard came to Hemingway's writing as she was completing her PhD thesis (the subtitle of which, 'An Exploration of the Interconnectedness of the Body, Space and Time', articulates several of her ongoing concerns), and she unconsciously highlights the critical correlation between Hemingway's spare, existentialist prose and her own process-driven practice when she asserts '... to

3. Lucienne Rickard, email correspondence with the author, July 2012.

me, the stories describe life as wearing, as taking a toll.<sup>4</sup> A central component of Rickard's practice at the time was a series of durational actions by which she slowly (and painfully) imposed her own bodily presence into massive cast plaster blocks; she literally wore away at the blocks, the force of her body creating a ghostly void (and evidence of the act) in the otherwise solid sculptural forms. The intense physical duress she experienced made the process unsustainable in an ongoing way but through this work Rickard was particularly interested in the possibility that the viewer might begin to see (and feel) physical qualities such as weight, pressure, existence inscribed in the actual space inhabited by their own body. These new drawings epitomize a similar bodily experience, both for Rickard (as the labour has resulted in recurring stresses and strains upon the artist's body) and in the viewer for whom the physicality of the bulls provokes a bodily self-awareness.

Rickard renders these great beasts in pencil, using controlled and repetitive strokes on large sheets of drafting paper. She captures the velvety textures of animal flesh and creates surface highlights through layer on layer of graphite and nuanced directional shifts. And, rough highlights appear in certain areas where she repeatedly wears into sections of the drawings with her fingers. Rickard realizes the work painstakingly, and durationally, with intense physical bursts of reiterated actions that double as she mirrors the bulls – by pressing and rubbing (transferring and essentially erasing) sections of the original forms directly from the drafting film onto sheets of thick black paper. Repetition, as Freud argued in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (1920), is essentially linked to the death drive, and Rickard has placed her subjects in a suspended moment preceding their inevitable propulsion toward annihilation or transcendence (or, possibly both). In making these works, Rickard engages the notion that we seek to manage – through repetition – the primal trauma of our very existence. The intense physical process also reflects Rickard's need to invest bodily in the work, signalling her desire for an authentic mode of practice. The work, from its intent through process towards realization, recalls the wonderfully lean poetry of Charles Bukowski, who shared Hemingway's

4. Ibid.



interest in man's enduring potential for violence – as Rickard herself elegantly notes, they wrote with '... the same simplicity, same ferociousness.'<sup>5</sup>

*It has been a beautiful fight. Still is.*<sup>6</sup>

Where Rickard's practice might represent an ongoing quest for authenticity, Joel Crosswell's work embodies a quite different existential theme – that of angst, or horror. It's not that Crosswell is fixated on death – although the titles of two solo exhibitions from last year, *Ashes to Ashes* and *The Little Show of Existence* might suggest otherwise. Rather, he is a keen observer of both the horror of living, and the possibility of what might come next. Analyzing the Lacanian extrapolation of the death drive, Slovenian philosopher Slavoj Žižek posits a space that might be filled by either manifestations of the monstrous or the beautiful.<sup>7</sup> This fictive and temporal space – which Lacan identified as a juncture 'between the two deaths', that is, between symbolic death and actual death – is Crosswell's fecund terrain.

*Carnival of Souls* presents a series of ad hoc sculptural forms populated with human remnants and mysterious totems. Deriving its title from the 1962 film directed by Herk Harvey – a cult horror classic that relied on atmosphere rather than effects to create its mood of foreboding and dread – Crosswell's work engages a similar psychological space. Using a broad range of raw and found materials (wood, string, woolen balaclavas, human skeletons) and processes (casting, drawing, stitching), Crosswell has created forms that reflect the complexity of everyday existence. Each sculpture holds skulls or skeletons, carefully shrouded and tenderly arranged by the artist – and each contains one life, or more – but presented together, these works speak of a collective spirit. Crosswell conceived *Carnival of Souls* around the notion of what constitutes a human soul and, even more vexingly, what a soul might look like. This inquiry

5. Ibid.

6. Charles Bukowski, *You Get So Alone at Times That it Just Makes Sense* 1986.

7. Slavoj Žižek, 'You Only Die Twice', *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, Verso, 1989, p.135.

signifies, more expansively, a search for a common consciousness and points to a decisive relationship between Crosswell's work and that of Polish artist Pawel Althamer, whose figurative sculptures have been described as 'bodies in wait for souls'.<sup>8</sup> The macabre figures that comprise *Carnival of Souls*, however, seem rather more like spectres waiting to be brought back to life through Crosswell's shamanistic means.

Crosswell's interest in mythology and shamanism has manifest across his practice, with works such as *Let the truth be told* and *The mourner and the magic tree* (both 2007) depicting recognizably shaman-like figures. In *Carnival of Souls*, the forms have been encased in structures that are suggestive of shamanistic ritual – or, certainly those depicted in folk horror films like *The Wicker Man* (1973) – and propose shamanism as a natural human tool for connecting to our inner selves; an alternative to rational interpretation. The shaman – and, by extension, the artist – heals through a process of emotional catharsis, identification, release and subversion of limiting beliefs and, thereby, restores balance to both the community and the individual.

An individual life, of course, can be seen as span of time between the two non-existences before birth and after death – between two deaths – and *Carnival of Souls* engages a notion of existential horror wherein existence itself is the horror. (And, the classic existential dilemma is that of standing at the edge of the precipice: the anxiety is not the possibility that one might *fall*; it's the possibility that one might *jump*.) However, Crosswell underpins the work with an absurdist view of loss and disappearance, and even allows the sculptures to veer towards satire: with their bright red pop art hearts and angels' wings, their tragi-comic balaclava faces and votive candles, they gesture towards a camp revision of religious art. He uses shadows and lighting (as much as the forms themselves) to allude to death,

8. Monika Szewczyk, 'Pawel Althamer: Inspiration, Incarnation, and the Dream of an Inspired Corporation', [www.db-artmag.de](http://www.db-artmag.de), accessed 10 August 2012.



but conceives a soundtrack (recordings of the artist's domestic meanderings emanate from the work) that introduces an element of the banal. As such, the works oscillate between the beautiful and ugly, the elegant and clumsy, the fluent and flamboyant. Ultimately, though, *Carnival of Souls* proposes a glimmer of light in the dark:

A: *There will be a better world than this one.*

Z: *How can you know that?*

A: *Because it's everyone's wish.*<sup>9</sup>

Philosophers have long noted the emancipatory potential of art – in his lecture 'Fifteen Theses on Contemporary Art' (2003), Alain Badiou called for art to be 'a demonstration, an ambush in the night, and a star.' It's axiomatic that dark and difficult times produce visionaries, and that it's often artists and thinkers who depict light in the darkness and offer alternative ways of looking and thinking in the everyday life of an increasingly violent world. The works of Lucienne Rickard and Joel Crosswell, in their various explorations around death – the unnamable, the ineffable – do not necessarily ambush the viewer but they certainly provoke a meditation on life, its passing and thereafter.

#### **VIKKI MCINNES**

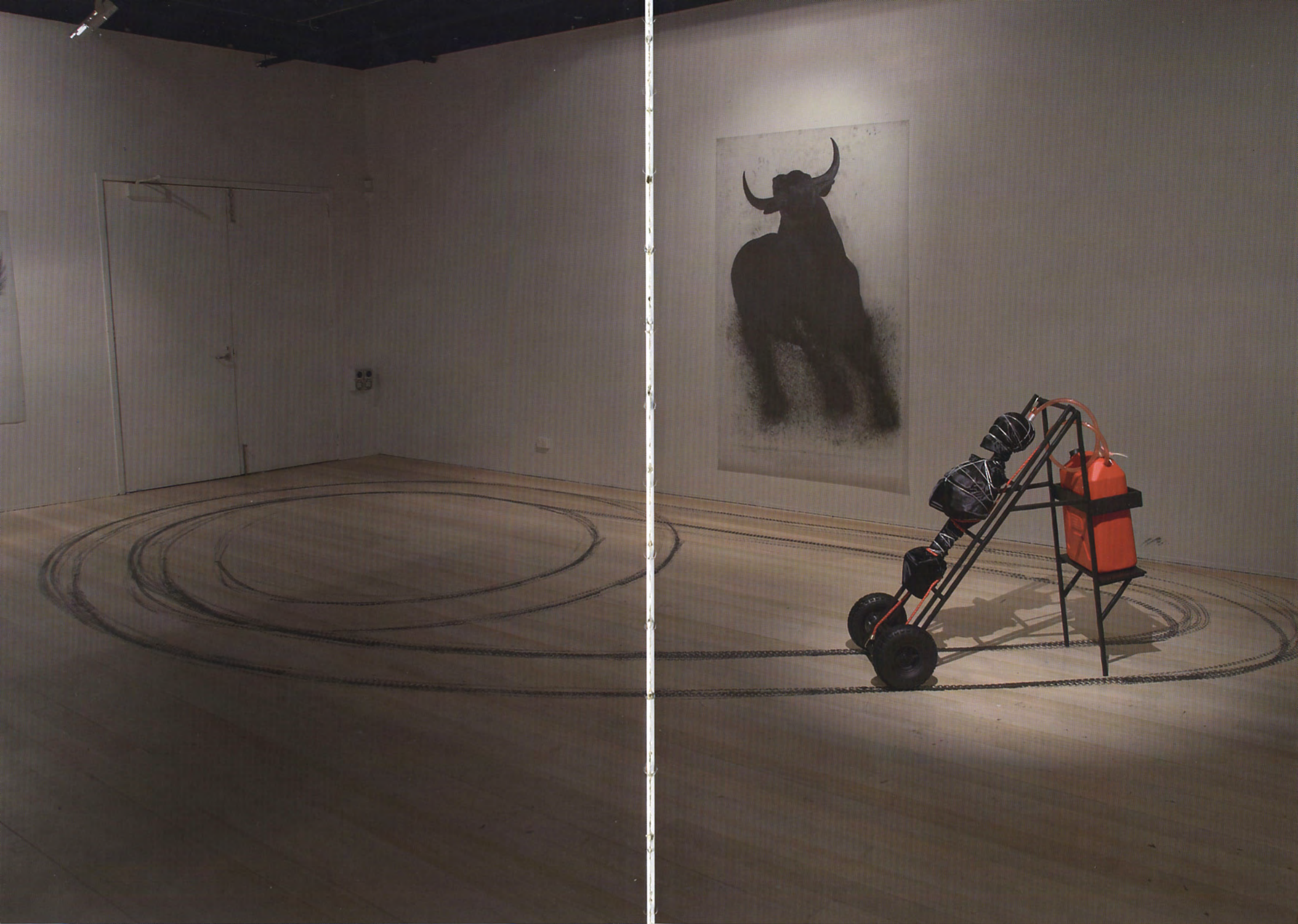
August, 2012

9. Excerpt of interview between Pawel Althamer and Artur Żmijewski, quoted by Alissa Guzman, 'An Obsession with Art's Communicative Power' [www.hyperallergic.com](http://www.hyperallergic.com), accessed 1 August 2012.













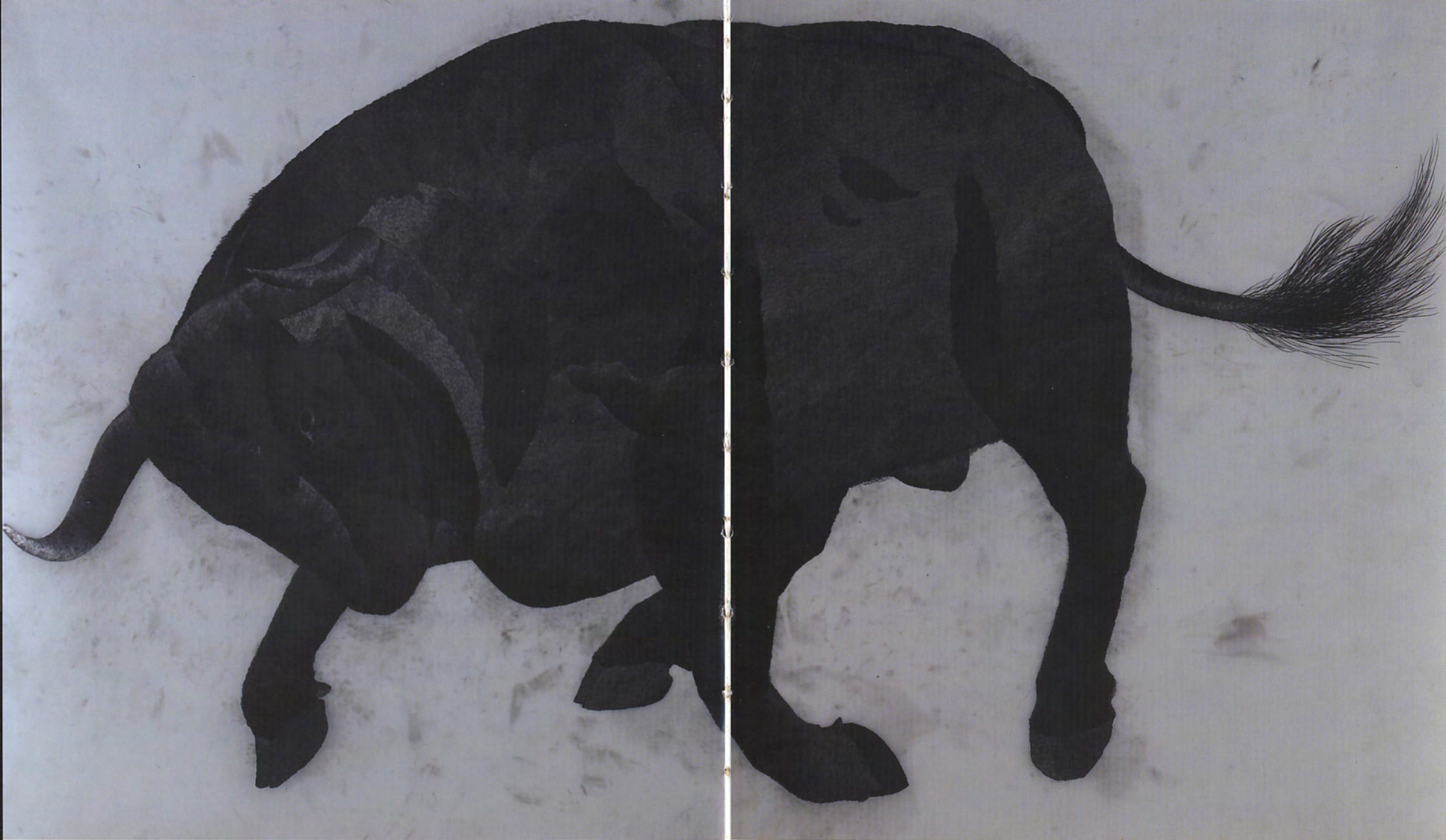


**LUCIENNE RICKKARD**

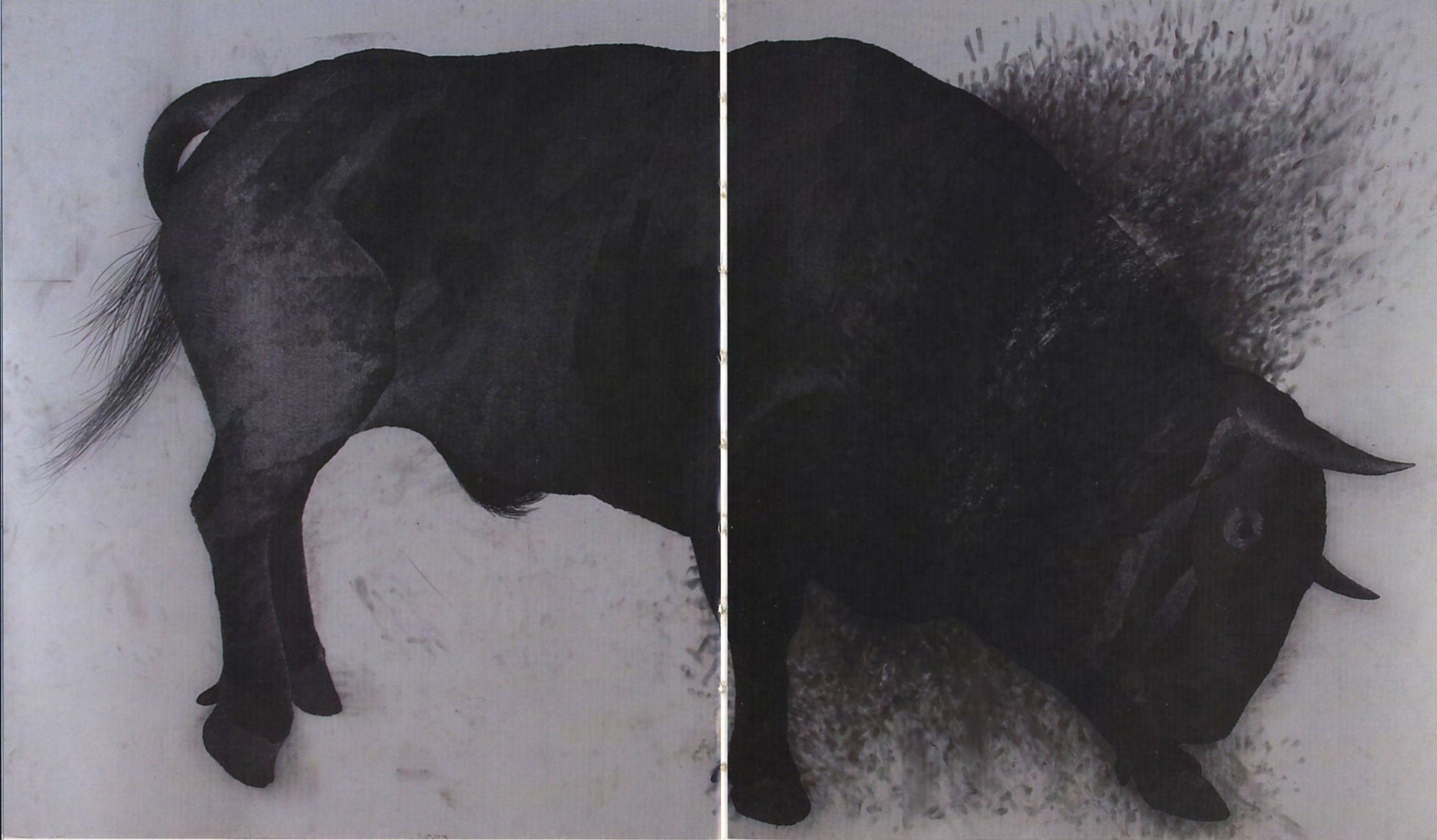
I thought I had paid for everything



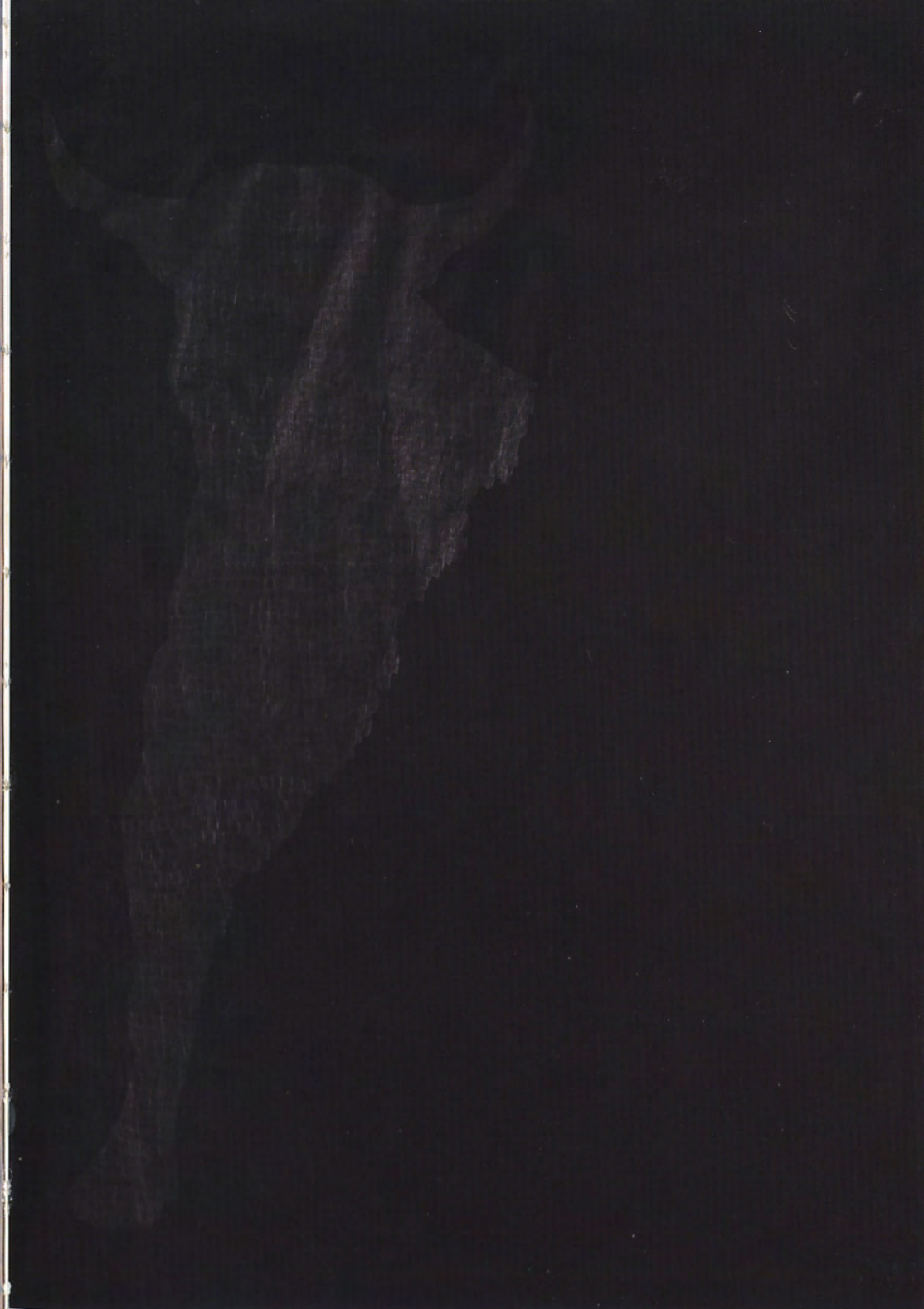


















## LIST OF WORKS

### LUCIENNE RICKARD

#### I thought I had paid for everything

*Untitled*, 2012. 148 x 248 cm, graphite on drafting film

*Untitled*, 2012. 148 x 227 cm, graphite on drafting film

*Untitled*, 2012. 148 x 253 cm, graphite on drafting film

*Untitled*, 2012. 218 x 292 cm, graphite on drafting film and paper

*Untitled*, 2012. 148 x 580 cm, graphite on drafting film and paper

*Untitled*, 2012. 148 x 245 cm, graphite on drafting film

*Untitled*, 2012. 121 x 78 cm, graphite on drafting film

### JOEL CROSSWELL

#### Carnival of Souls

*See-Saw*, 2012. Mixed media, 180 x 85 x 107 cm

*It's Alive*, 2012. Mixed media, 184 x 63 x 181 cm

*Cybernetic organism living tissue over metal endoskeleton. Would it be a sin to live forever?* 2012. Mixed media, 115 x 52 x 115 cm

*Meet your maker*, 2012. Mixed media, dimensions variable, 2 parts

## BIOGRAPHIES

### LUCIENNE RICKARD

Rickard is known for her obsessive and physically demanding methods of art production realised previously in sculpture and painting, and now in drawing. Evidence of the making process is central to the reading of her work, a means she uses to explore and convey ideas of accumulation, exhaustion and transience.

In 2006 she received her PhD from the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania and took-up a residency at the Rosamond McCulloch Studio, Paris in the same year. Rickard has co-hosted the Hobart arts radio program *...But I know what I like*, Edge Radio, is a Board member of Inflight ARI and Sessional Lecturer at the School of Art, University of Tasmania. Rickard's exhibition history includes *Home Shown*, Lorraine Pilgrim Gallery, Southport, QLD (2012), *All the bright company of Heaven*, Beaver Galleries, Canberra (2011), *Unnatural*, Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart (2011), and *In graveyards*, Inflight Gallery, Hobart (2009).

Lucienne Rickard is represented by Beaver Galleries, Canberra.

### JOEL CROSSWELL

Crosswell questions ideas of faith and existence within a practice that employs a variety of mediums ranging from the organic - straw, wood, cloth and linen, to the artificial and synthetic - modelling clay and resins.

*"The act of making something in the moment and the use of organic and synthetic materials is a way of reflecting the nature of my inner self as well as channelling a more primitive act of creating on a subconscious level. The works become a mishmash of organic chaos that incorporate weird, comic, eerie and dark, fetish characters and/or objects."* Joel Crosswell

Crosswell attained a BFA from the Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania in 2008. Since then he has exhibited in numerous exhibitions including; *Realm*, Michael Reid, Sydney (2012), *The Little Show of Existence*, Bett Gallery Hobart (2011), *I am Satan*, Hell Gallery, Melbourne (2011) and *Lust for Life*, CAST, Hobart (2009). In 2011 he was awarded the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) Prize for his work *Godson*, comprising 30 individual drawings.

Joel Crosswell is represented by Bett Gallery, Hobart.



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

*Shotgun* is an annual program that awards supported opportunity for early-career Tasmanian artists to extend their practice. Detached Cultural Organisation and Contemporary Art Spaces Tasmania make significant resources available that assist the selected artists to achieve their goals. The format of the project is flexible and responsive to the needs of artists. This year's *Shotgun* artists, Joel Crosswell and Lucienne Rickard have participated in an intense program of professional development, culminating with the presentation of new work in the CAST gallery. CAST and Detached acknowledge the commitment that each artist has made to the project and thank the numerous people who have contributed to the project along the way.

The *Shotgun* 2012 selection committee was made-up of Jane Deeth (northern Tasmanian representative), Michael Edwards (CAST Director), Kylie Johnson (CAST Shotgun Coordinator), Craig Judd (Detached Coordinating Curator) and Ben Kluss (CAST Program Committee representative).

During the project Joel Crosswell and Lucienne Rickard had opportunity for regular dialogue with Melbourne curator, writer, director and 2012 *Shotgun* essayist, **VIKKI MCINNES**. This proximity to the development of the work enabled McInnes to provide significant insight within the essay. McInnes has worked in the contemporary arts sector in Melbourne for over fifteen years including from 1996 to 2003 at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), where she was Program Manager. From 2003-2004 she was Curator at the TarraWarra Museum of Art and since November 2004 has worked at the Victorian College of the Arts where she is Director of the Margaret Lawrence Gallery. In 2009, with Kate Barber, she launched Sarah Scout, a private gallery established to develop opportunities for a number of outstanding early to mid-career artists with critically engaged conceptual practices.

Joel Crosswell, Lucienne Rickard and many of the *Shotgun* 2012 finalists also met with arts professionals; Ron and George Adams, Damien Minton and Joan Ross as part of the program of professional development.

**RON AND GEORGE ADAMS** are the founding Directors of Sydney's MOP ARI begun in 2003, and behind the recently launched commercial enterprise Galerie pompom, also in Sydney. MOP's key programming rationale has been to act as a career springboard for young and emerging artists while in recent years enabling mid-career artists to present work within an ARI context. Through Galerie pompom they aim to continue to work creatively to develop and nurture artists but via a dedicated commercial venture. Both Ron and George have curated extensively as individuals and in collaboration.

**DAMIEN MINTON** has a long involvement with contemporary art in Australia including as Manager of Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney (1993 – 95) and as Director of the Australian Art Print Network, Sydney (1997 – 2000). Minton's current role is as Director of The Damien Minton Gallery, originally established in Newcastle, NSW in 2001 and relocated to Redfern, Sydney in 2005. The gallery exhibits artists who engage with the Australian cultural landscape.

**JOAN ROSS** is an artist and art educator based in NSW. Ross has exhibited work nationally and internationally, most recently in *BBQ THIS SUNDAY, BYO*, Bett Gallery Hobart (2012) and Gallery Barry Keldoulis, Sydney (2011) and *Wonderland: New Contemporary Art from Australia*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Taipei (2012).

We extend our appreciation to Jacinta Jacobson at Focal (printing), Tim Paternmann at Tavern 42 Degrees South (opening event) and Cath Robinson (catalogue design) for their contributions to *Shotgun* 2012.

Joel Crosswell would like to thank Detached and CAST for providing opportunity to further extend his art practice. Thanks also to the mentors involved in the program of professional development, particularly Vikki McInnes and Joan Ross for taking the time to listen, question and discuss the artists concerns in depth. To Crosswell's family, friends and supporters - thank you and cheers.

Lucienne Rickard would like to acknowledge the support of Detached and CAST, in particular Kylie Johnson, Craig Judd and also the *Shotgun* selection panel. Appreciation is extended to those involved in the *Shotgun* Professional Development Program. Rickard dedicates her *Shotgun* work to Christopher Jackman.