READING SPACES
Caren Florance (etc)
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Caren Florance (etc: ANGELA GARDNER MELINDA SMITH
OWEN BULLOCK SARAH RICE
MONICA CARROLL LOUISE CURHAM
TANIA DE ROZARIO PHILIP GROSS
NICCI HAYNES JACQUI MALINS
PAUL MUNDEN SHAGS
SHANE STRANGE JEN WEBB)
Visual and language artists have long maintained the legend of the solitary genius, and in fact sole practitioners are far more typical than are teams, in both these fields. But scratch the surface of the creative community, and you can find many examples of individuals and groups working together to make their art.

This is where Caren Florance comes in: much of the work she presents in her graduation exhibition is the product of true collaborations – which is to say, it could not have been made without the input of Angela, Melinda, Owen and Sarah. Her intervention in their poems inaugurates new ways of making poetry, that extend its graphic potential and its capacity to capture, and move, its readers. It is characteristic of Caren and her warmth and generosity that she included others in the research, enriching their practice even as she enriched her own, and co-labouring on this knowledge-making art-making project.

The doctoral project extends Caren’s many years of practice in material poetics, letterpress, the artist book and its affordances, and her thesis exhibition draws on all this background, along with three-plus years of solid research, experiment, analysis, interpretation, theory-making and art-making. This sustained practice of making and of thinking has resulted in a deeply informed, embodied and theorised study of the artist book in Australia, of the affordances of print culture for art and material culture for poetry, and of the value of creative collaboration.

The works in the exhibition, along with her scholarly essay, together comprise Caren’s PhD thesis – one that is an admixture of academic and artistic work. Creative doctorates have been offered in Australia for some time now, and the approaches being taken, and the outcomes from such research, are only getting better. What is particularly valuable about creative doctorates is that the research findnings are so widely disseminated. Conventional doctorates are likely to be read by only a handful of people (the supervisors, the examiners); creative doctorates are likely to reach large audiences, in the form of exhibition visitors, audiences for performing arts doctorates, and readers of research through the literary arts. Caren has exhibited, published, and presented her work to audiences in Australia, China, New Zealand and the USA, and been able to give and take advice, suggestions and knowledge right
across the community of artists and artist-researchers. An important contribution is her explorations into materiality: though material culture is becoming more widely considered in the scholarly domain, most research has focused on materiality as abstraction (eg linguistics). Caren has brought it back to material form, and produced matter that we can access through our own material selves, as well as our intellectual/conceptual selves. And we don't only access it: thanks to Caren's approach to production and exhibition, her material products are presented in a homely, a domestic setting – not behind glass or on gallery plinths, but generously available to be handled.

Don't just look at, don't just handle these books and objects: read them. Caren always speaks truth to power, even when she is at her most sublime, artistically. And she always incorporates tenderness, humour, technical precision, openness to potential, and the wealth of human properties. It is time well spent to connect with her voice, as well as with the voices of the poets who are her collaborators.

5 April 2017

T his project started as a simple desire: to activate my relationship to printing poetry and the reader’s interaction with the outcomes. Each of these works represents sustained collaborative creative time spent with poets: together we write, read, design, make and publish. There are moments when each role is clearly separated, and others where the lines are blurred. Once the poets and I finish playing with the wording/workings, we need readers to take them onwards again, and Reading Spaces offers the opportunity to engage directly with the work.

Artist books are often displayed as art-objects: isolated on plinths, or coffined behind glass, a selected double-spread laid out in one static tableau. The reader becomes viewer, and the qualities particular to the book as a medium – the transition from 2D (page) to 3D (object) through 4D (time) – is lost. Reading Spaces wants to re-establish the intimacy of reader and book, to allow a natural engagement with turning and reading pages.

Each book is a space that holds a folding of time and place: I was here/we were here – and now, so are you.

The physical concept of the exhibition is to allow the furniture to ‘introduce’ the reader/audience to particular kinds of making and reading. Each iteration of the exhibition will have different configurations, but this catalogue documents the first presentation, serendipitously positioned at an almost forgotten gallery space in the ‘Parliamentary triangle’ of Canberra. The venue completed several institutional links: one of the major works, 1962: Be Spoken To, is devoted to a year in the life of Old Parliament House, and the furniture it
sits upon was purpose-built for the National Library of Australia’s newspaper reading room. *Tracer*: you are here holds haiku about Canberra, and the poem about Lake Burley Griffin can be read facing the lake. It is an exhibition opportunity that cannot be repeated, but it can be captured.

Many different books are laid out, representing various levels of formality that are reflected by their particular reading spaces. They have threads of commonality, such as engaging with the past and the future of the material book. Old and new production methods are used, like hand-set letterpress, typewriters, photocopiers, digital printing and screen animation. Most of these are labour-intensive and time-hungry, and have been superseded by more commercially viable options, but even work that uses ‘time-saving’ devices such as computers demands hours of labour. The time it has taken had to be the time that it took.

With the hand-made work, the marks of production have been foregrounded: if a piece of paper has moved through a press multiple times, incidental marks have not been hidden; a deliberate action in the face of the ubiquitous perfection of contemporary print production. Ideas have been affected by the affordances of each process; for example, the print-on-demand poetry books (*The Future, Unimaginable* and *Members Only*) had technical issues that shaped the outcome of the respective page designs. Re-photocopying a zine (*Swipe*) to add new ideas leads to an interesting visual disintegration that adds another new idea, and so it goes.

Writers, specifically poets, have been a vital component of this project. I have long been trying to explore ways of working with poetry as a print maker and designer. The earliest book on display, *Shared Rooms*, dates from 2002, and the most recent one was sent back to me by the poet only weeks before the exhibition. If the poet has not been directly involved with the making, they have given permission for me to use their work actively, which includes displacing their words from their carefully composed and constructed forms. I thank them all for their generosity.

The two main projects took a core idea and actively moved it through, around and back via iteration, experimentation and story-telling. *Working Papers* started with Angela Gardner hand-setting lead type without her glasses on, and using words from a number of sources: from her notebook, the radio, our conversations. I saw a few ways to play with her ‘key blocks’ and followed two of them.

*Be Spoken To* was an exhibition outcome from a short shared residency at the Museum of Australian Democracy. Melinda Smith and I kept going afterwards, finding connections between past and present using re-voiced institutional and public records. We built a book, *1962: Be Spoken To*, constructing rooms (Italian: stanza) from themes like national security, commemoration, immigration, indigenous affairs and feminism, all with wry humour and a touch of subversion.

Another project, *Tracer*, started with a simple piece of transparent paper (*Redex*), and grew to interact with the transparency of projected film. Looking through one of Sarah Rice’s writing notebooks provoked a work that tracked one of her poems from its very first thought to a resolved outcome.

My solo works do not directly use poetry but are engaged instead with the poetics of process and materiality. They ask their own questions of the reader, questions that may actually have no answer, at least not in the foreseeable future.
1. SOLITARY READING

Tracer: you are here, 2016
Caren Florance, Owen Bullock
& Louise Curham

Letterpress, rubber stamp, sewn super8 film on paper.
Unique. 450 x 500. 20pp.

This book is a souvenir of a one-night performance of the same name for the 2016 Noted Festival in Canberra, featuring Louise’s hand-painted super-8 films projected onto my hand-printed paper ‘screens’, mounted in the inner courtyard of the Canberra Museum and Galleries. Owen responded to the films using haiku, over and through the background clatter of the super-8 projectors.

1. Solitary reading
2. Mobile words
3. Wall reading
4. Book lounge
5. Formal reading
6. Wall reading
7. Kitchen table
8. Solitary reading
9. Digital reading
crows and I
call this moment
through trees

the sky
and all of the lake
in the lake

Scrubby's gone
the intersection
smeary

Two poems from the 2009 series 'Notes to Architects': 'Pleasure Grounds' and 'Demolition'
Letterpress, various papers, thread, pole.

Pleasure Demolition, 2016
Caren Florance & Angela Gardner

The brown papers in this work come from objects used when giving or taking pleasurable things: envelopes, postpaks, grocery sacks, shopping bags, bread bags, wrapping paper. Each poem, one about shopping malls, the other about architectural demolition, has been broken down into small shards and printed back-to-back on the torn shreds. They turn hypnotically, picking up even the slightest air-current, generating multiple poetic readings.

2. MOBILE WORDS

Pleasure Demolition, 2016
Caren Florance & Angela Gardner

Two poems from the 2009 series 'Notes to Architects': 'Pleasure Grounds' and 'Demolition'
Letterpress, various papers, thread, pole.

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Question plenitude: windows and rainstorms, our strict observance of a world that is now a store of wealth, our pittance of crows, and stones, the tail ends of our journeys.

Owen Bullock

Build silhouettes: of hopfers, shouted conditions and trolleys that lack any opening to interpretation or to the story world.

Angela Gardner
Secret Life

In the taken country in the house of half only
they made me a new body of wood
melted gold onto my face
set me in the thoroughfare
as a lesson, as a warning.
They made me no tongue to speak with.
Still I did my duty
by two generations:
my words flashed straight into their eyes.

Now my labour is over
I gather with my brothers and sisters.
We stand quietly, one-legged
in the room of stopped clocks
and exchange messages.
5. BOOK LOUNGE

SA  The Future, Unimagine, 2017
Angela Gardner & Caren Florance in association with Recent Work Press
Poetry volume. 203 x 228. 48pp.

SB  Members Only, 2017
Melinda Smith & Caren Florance in association with Recent Work Press
Poetry volume. 203 x 228. 48pp.

SC  Swipe, 2015
Caren Florance, Owen Bullock, Monica Carroll, Tania de Rozario, Angela Gardner, Philip Gross, Nicci Haynes, Jacqui Malini, Paul Munden, Shags, Melinda Smith, Shane Strangis, Jen Webb
Hand-sewn zine. c. 199 x 140. 16pp.

SD  Interference, 2014. Angela Gardner, etc.
Handsewn chapbook. 210 x 130. 24pp.

SE  Tacer, 2015. Owen Bullock
Handsewn chapbook. 280 x 100. 24pp.

Small publications, produced for wider audiences than a gallery can provide. These are sold in bookstores and zine fairs. Some are part of broader projects: Members Only is a modified reproduction of 1962’s 1962: Be Spoken To, but The Future, Unimagine, is an original publication, drawing from but separate to Working Papers. The Swipe project is essentially one zine, with copies scripted by poets and artists and reproduced in short print runs.
original: caren florance

samuel strange

whigs

angela gardner jen webb

nicci haynes

melinda smith tania de rozario

monica carroll

5c
I'll start you painting flat. Objects next: modeling three dimensions until light-glamour appears on something. Garment folds, soft dark of velvet, a feather in an angel's wing. Distance then to frame — landscape a mirror — so real birds dash against it. Face and hands last, unless you count everything pulled from background by light and darkness — a stillness as it develops.

Nokia

I'll start you painting flat. Me of One tip off until gig-glam appears on something. Hems fold ok. Run of a debt is an tag-who. Dirt them in one landscape. A new in our air for choose it. Edit and hands tip told you net. Due pulled from background by light And darkness — a rag as it find.

Iphone

I'll start you painted flat. On to be: Model the deeply into log-glam appears on something. Horns do, and Think of oil, a death in an angel's wing. Dust then in far — landscape. A wear — so teat birds dad ad it. Face and hair last, unless you count Everything put from background by light And darkness — a stillness as I development.

From ON THE FIRST ARRANGEMENT OF ‘REDEX’

[Links to text to narrative have new possibilities. Writing embraces language type-setting under the words. Combine. Action stranger than in a poem. Than a poem of mine offers. Rules of language compromised the way a new experience shakes values. Again explore. Real forms. We're. Wayfinding. The eye struggles; haptic guides. Someone asks the awkward questions. They are to be admired. Narrative time passing. I wish I had said that. She's good. Turning the page and the writing backwards, upside down. I have to re-invent my reading. Ys are a good one. Whys are a good one. Wise are a good one. ... But not without a struggle. Not as easy as spelling. Except. Except. A lone Greek word is an exception. Villify. Victory ...]
6. FORMAL READING

6A. 1962: Be Spoken To, 2014–17,
Caren Florance & Melinda Smith
Letterpress and screenprint on Magnani Avoria Vergata
paper, 2 parts, handsewn in archival Tyvek ‘ghost bag’.
Edition of 5. 505 x 357 x 14. 8 = 48pp.

A year in the life of Old Parliament House, constructed as a twelve-month cycle
of signs and rooms. Each month has a theme, with a ‘feature’ poem harvested
from Hansard or other public records and an additional anagram poem exploring
an aspect of the topic. Though all the pages there are extras anagrams, original
poems and subtle ornamentation. While the framework is screenprinted,
everything else has been set and inked by hand using letterpress printing.

PARLIAMENT

Partial men.
Male in. Past
men, part lie
(rampant lie).

Rant, lie, wup.
lie, man, pant.
Mania jiks.

Real saws pit
in a triangle
armpit lane
latrine map.

I arm planet
I use planet
man at peril
: remap at nil.
Gough Whitlam

I'm law-goth. Hug?
Ah, go with glam:
two-gal-hug him!

Might hug AWOL.

High-hay gaunt;
tough whom lug

I glow. Math? Ugh?
Might laugh. Ow.

Robert Menzies

Robert Menzies,
sterne zombie
breezes into Mz
rezones tribute
new cuz men
rezune Mz tribe
bronzes tin me
6. FORMAL READING

Working Papers: hone & torrent, 2015–17
Caren Florance & Angela Gardner
Letterpress and drawing on Gyokurya washi, unbound, housed in archival polyprop boxes. 350 x 250 x 10.

This is a playful, informal exploration into glitch, discovery, and disrupted pagespace. Angela set some letterpress type as a stream of consciousness, and two of the many possible directions were explored: delving into alternatives and torrenting text into image, both providing other avenues of meaning generation. When I finished playing with the press, a set went to Angela, who responded graphically using editorial marks, cancellation, and inanimate figuration, resulting in two versions of the same work.
7A  Touch to Activate, 2015. Caren Florance
Letterpress & offset ink on paper. Trifold. 300 x 200. 6pp.
Variable edition of 12. Light and dark variants on display.

7B  Redex, 2014. Caren Florance & Owen Bullock
130 were printed for the Parenthesis 27 Deluxe Folio.

7C  Touch 00100000, 2016. Caren Florance

7D  Proseity, 2015. Caren Florance
Hardback print-on-demand artist book of reproduced offset letterpress. 200 x 130 x 7. 24pp.

Touch to Activate meditates on the temporal space between author and reader. When reading Redex, it is a book; the translucent paper allows multiple views and multiple readings as it turns in the hand. Without the hand, it is a folded print. Touch 00100000 asks the reader to puncture it, create space, be a co-author. Proseity meditates on the poetics of the page, the prosaic textblock as a zone of intensity.
8. SOLITARY READING

Shared Rooms: Poems by Anna Akhmatova with Translations by Natalie Staples and Imitations by Rosemary Dobson and David Campbell, 2002
Caren Florance

Four poems in the original Russian by Akhmatova, each with three versions: one literal translation and two transcreations by respected Australian poets. They live in a drawer, and can be rearranged in any order, removing any sense of hierarchy.

From Anna Akhmatova, Northern Elegies, The Third

Natalie Staples (literal translation)
Me, like a river,
The harsh epoch turned.
They have supplanted my life.
Into another source,
Past other things it began to flow,
And I do not know my own shores.

David Campbell
Me, like a river, the harsh age turned aside.
How many songs of mine, unwritten, sing
Inward, I may shelve of songs denied.

Rosemary Dobson
This epoch turns my life
As though a stream were turned
To flow through foreign lands.
I long for shores I know.

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Rosemary Dobson
This epoch turns my life
As though a stream were turned
To flow through foreign lands.
I long for shores I know.
9. DIGITAL READING

Vitreous Syneresis (I see you sometimes), 2014
Caren Florance & Sarah Rice.

Vitreous syneresis is an eye condition in which the clarity of the vitreous humor is altered and produces the symptoms of fine, blurry black spots that seem and float in the periphery of vision. They appear, often causing distress and confusion, and then either disappear or linger, depending on various factors. Often the sufferer can learn to ignore them, in the way that we only notice the feeling of our clothes on our body if we let ourselves think about it.

Sarah’s poem, Vitreous Syneresis, explores the traces of relationships as they fade from your life, and the sense that a memory is following you, haunting you, when in fact it is you, yourself, carrying the trace of experience and emotion through time and place. This work explores every stage of the poem from first spark to final state.
Vitreous Synecesis
arranged by Caren Florance

dead blood black spot
You are my Eye Fixer
fading
not fast enough for my liking
green still around the edges

After-glow only occurs
in a cesspool the dark

it is the present trace of
the recently absent
but not in the air

present trace of the recently absent
a haunting in the blackness

I fix my eye on you

don't stop staring
I fix my eye on you

present trace of the recently absent
a haunting in the blackness

trajectory

forget that it is you

dragged this way and that
by my shifting gaze
Biographical/Education

Born in Wagga, Australia
Lives and works Canberra, ACT

1989 BA (English/Classics), ANU
1992 MA(Pass) (English), UNSW Canberra
2002 BA(Hons), Printmedia & Drawing, ANU SOA
2013 – PhD, CCCR, FAD, U of Canberra

Solo Exhibitions:

2017 Reading Spaces, East Space, ACT
2016 Letter Evi, CCCAS City, ACT
2012 Handset: Letterpress Poetry Broadcasts, UNSW Canberra Library, ACT
2010 Print, Otakou Press, University of Otago Library, Dunedin, NZ
2009 Pressings: Recycling Bookwork, Megalo, ACT

Selected Curations:

2016 Material Poetics (with Jen Webb), ANCA, ACT
2013 Broad, ANU SOA Foyer Gallery, ACT
100% Books by Canberra Artists, Watson Arts Centre, ACT
2009 Books to Hold or Let Go, Craft ACT

Selected Group Exhibitions (from 2010):

2017 Beauties and Beasts, Belconnen Art Space, ACT
Edge, ANU School of Art Foyer Gallery, ACT
Amplify & Multiply: Activist Ephemeria, Cobum Gallery, Colorado US
2016 Libris Award, Artspace Mackay, QLD
Love is in the air, CCCAS, ACT
Seeking Refuge, Tuggeranong Arts Centre (TAC), ACT
The EnCYClopedia of Forgotten Things, Belconnen Arts Centre (BAC), ACT
Tracer (for You are Here Festival), CMAG, ACT
Speak Uneasy, Smiths Alternative (for Noted)
2015 Artists Books, Henglu Gallery, Hangzhou, China
Artists Books + Zines Saved my Life! Spectrum Project Space, ECU, Perth
Traces & Hauntings, BAC, ACT
Between the Sheets, Gallery East, Perth WA
Freemantle Arts Centre Print Awards, Freemantle Arts Centre, WA
Small Publishers, Brenda May Gallery, Sydney NSW

2014 Biopop: Design for the People, MoAD, ACT
(on display for 12 months)
Minor of the World: Books and Ideas, State Library of Victoria, VIC
Woodsmith, Mrs Gallery, Canberra, ACT
Zinestars, TAC, ACT
Open Books Plus, Logan Gallery, QLD & UNSW Canberra Library, ACT
Unruly Orchestration, BAC, ACT
2013 Book Art Object: UNSW Canberra Library, ACT
Book Art Object at Impact 8, Dundee, Scotland
Shaping Canberra, ANU School of Art Gallery
Inhabit, Craft ACT
Intensity of Purpose, CMAG, ACT
Libris Award 2011, Artspace Mackay, QLD
Community and Context, MADA Gallery, Monash University Caulfield, VIC
2012 Merchants of War, Damien Minton Gallery, Sydney NSW
Lessons in History II: Democracy, Grahame Galleries, Brisbane, Qld
2012 Freemantle Arts Centre Print Awards, WA
Transit of Venus, ANU Photospace, ACT
Freak of Nature, King Family Space, Un of Colorado in Boulder, USA
World Material, ANCA, ACT
2011 Book Art Object at Impact 7, Monash Caulfield, VIC
2010 Print Big, Megalo @ the Fitter’s Workshop, Kingston ACT
Libris Awards, Artspace Mackay, QLD
Paper Work; Brenda May Gallery, Sydney NSW
If There’s a Truth, ANCA, ACT

Awards and Residencies

2015 ANCA Art Writing Award ($3000)
2014 MoAD/Craft ACT: Bespoke Project Residency ($10,000)
2012 Non-acquisitive Award (acquisition), Freemantle Arts Centre Print Award Supported by Little Creatures Brewing ($10,000)
2011 artsACT Artists-in-Schools, O’Connor Co-operative, ACT, Postmark Mail Art ($20,000)
2010 Printer-in-Residence, Otakou Press, Otago University Library, Dunedin NZ

Collections:

British Library, UK
National Art Library, Victoria & Albert Museum, London
Sanhansh Contemporary Art Museum, China
UNESCO Noma Concoures, Japan
University of Otago Library, NZ
National Gallery of Australia
National Library of Australia
State Library of Queensland
State Library of Victoria
Monash University Rare Books Collection
Melbourne University Rare Books Collection
University of Queensland Library
University of Sydney Library
ACT Heritage Library
Canberra Museum and Galleries
Artspace Mackay
City of Fremantle Art Collection
UNSW Canberra
Petre Harel/GIW Collection, ANU
E-ABS Collection, ANU
National and international private collections

Bibliography

About

By


Professional memberships

CraftACT (Accredited Professional Member)

Australian Book Design Association (ABDA)

UC Centre for Creative & Cultural Research (CCCR)

Print Council of Australia (ACT Rep 2011–2015)

ANCA Board (2010–2015)

Craft ACT Bookbinders’ Guild (Editor 2007–2015, Vice-President 2012–2015)

Bibliographical Society of Australia & NZ

Megalo Print Studio & Gallery

NZ Association of Handcraft Printers
Melinda Smith won the Prime Minister’s Literary Award for her fourth book of poems, *Drag down to unlock or place an emergency call*. Her work has appeared widely in Australia and overseas. She was Poetry Editor of the *Canberra Times* from 2015 to mid-2017. Her latest collection, *Goodbye Cruel*, was published by Pitt St Poetry in 2017.

Angela Gardner is an award-winning poet with four books: *Parts of Speech* (UQP, 2007), *Views of the Hudson* (Shearsman, 2009), *The Told World* (Shearsman Books, UK, 2014) and *Thing&Unthing* (Vagabond Press, 2014) as well as two fine press books *twelve labours* and *The NightLadder* (both lighttrappress 2009). She edits at www.foame.org and is a visual artist with work in both national and international collections.

**READING SPACES**

Caren Florance (etc)

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