

Information Architecture

Scot Cotterell 2011

Drizzle on a tram window

Glass refracts and distorts familiar forms

The obelisk of a building warps from its spherical form as the lens shifts

Shadow and light yawn as though time has lapsed

Warm breath marks the morning air with puffs of steam

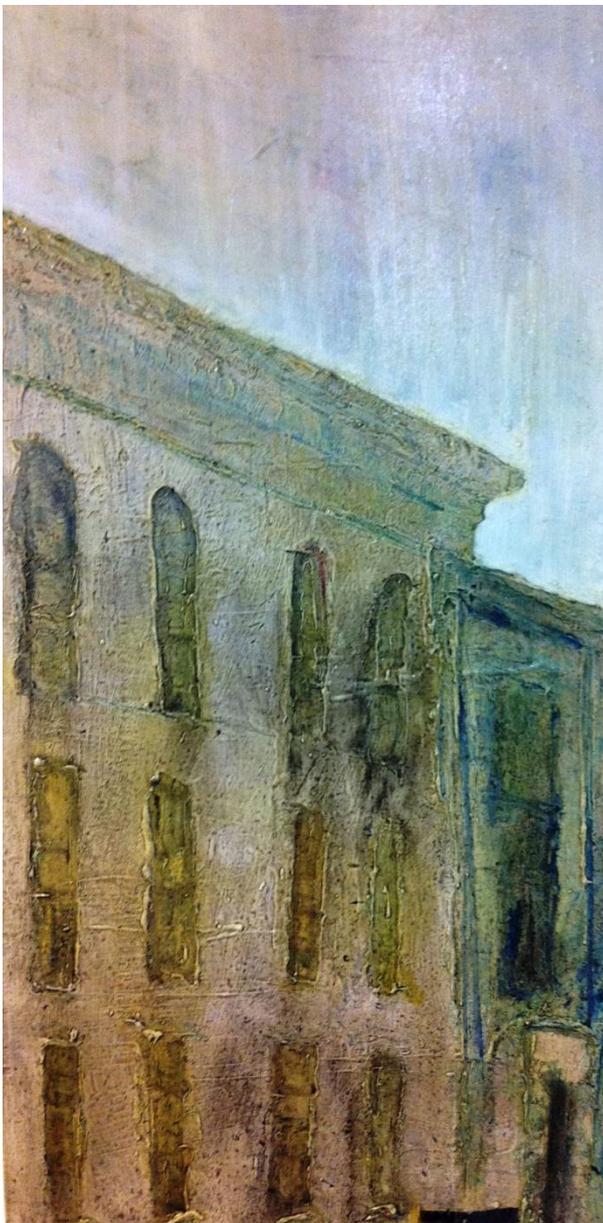
The gap between a lovers breasts, the space between here and there

Waiting, stasis

Moving, expectation

The limbo between origin and destination

The tension between document and self portrait



I first met Michael Lang a decade ago, upon my arrival in Hobart around late 2000. Our first encounter, as bohemian as it sounds was after dusk at a dumpster behind a newsagent. Both inextricably and separately drawn to the potential cache of discarded gloss art fodder in the interior crevice of the cold steel cube. A brief introduction over the hasty sorting of collage materials and the chance to scan through innumerable types of yesterday's news was the first meeting.

Michael has always self-identified as a painter; for me, until recently this seemed like an awkward pigeon-holing as for a long time it was his ideas that intrigued me more than his actual output of painted images. His approach and inhabitation of the creative space seemed far too experiential and process-based to me to have everything reduced to this static 'record-objects' he was making. His studio, at the time was in the well-trodden Salamanca district of Hobart, boxes of paint, reams and reams of differing size paper and found frames and cardboard, Hessian, blinds were all in varying stages of becoming painting. Hebel blocks were being sawn into crude anthropomorphic geometries.

Things were energetically rummaged, pulled-out, explained and set-aside in quick succession. He was working towards the *Psychostasy* (2001) exhibition, a series in which an archetypal unidentified male protagonist appeared in various guises and pictorial realms. There seemed to be some sort of order, though decoding it seemed neither appealing nor necessary for an understanding of the things he was making. They were simple, humble objects defined not by a wish to reproduce the world around in any real documentary fashion, nor were they designed as awe-inspiring on any conscious level, they were not large, technically impressive, obsessive, obscure or complex in the ways that I normally revel in.

The works simply *were*, and you were there with them. Not *in the presence of*, or *witnessing*, or *deciphering*.

Just *with*.

Right now, Tuesday 14th June 2011. I am in Hobart at my studio in an old run down dance hall, its cold and the heater barely keeps up. My desk faces a corner and a cube of winter sunlight is visible through the window in my periphery. On the floor, next to my desk, propped against the wall is a fragile, small Lang painting that has been in my collection now for around 7 years.

It is around the size of an A3 piece of paper, a thin, flimsy brown wooden frame holds in its edge a thick, warped oily piece of paper held in with a mixture of varnish, age, dust and minimal masking tape.

An awkward, make-shift colour scheme of light brown, dark brown, psych-ward green and royal blue radiate inwards from the edge forming a rectangle with accents that at once make it two heads facing one another, two bodies standing in close proximity, an aerial map from above, a strange island of blue caught between abstraction and figuration. Never quite becoming any one thing.

The texture of this picture protrudes outwardly from the surface of the paper in undulating peaks and valleys evoking the skin of which ever object used to stamp it, potentially a sculpture of the same form. The surface has rippled, the paint cracked. Dust and cobwebs have colonised the cracks.

Two weeks ago: I was in Footscray with Lang, drinking dark stout and smoking cigarettes to work on this essay. We did a number of things; he showed me through the backyard studio, paintings outdoors, exposed to the elements. Several canvasses, arranged in series of differing sizes, all landscape, or more specifically; urban landscape. All Melbourne scenes. All rendered on some consistent substrate or in some consistent mediums, or both.

We recorded a discussion about the work over a couple of hours, re-visited ideas over a few days and flaneured around Langs new home town digesting the experience of it all.

The process that I sat and watched unfold in Langs studio a decade ago, the sorting, sifting, recording, filtering and mark-making had crystallised in this current body of work around the commute, the unstable state of the traveller, the repetitive complacency inherent in the daily bus/tram/train combo of inner city life. The oddity and difference of the flat, networked and expansive

sprawl of Melbourne by comparison to the undulating and diverse horizon line encapsulating Langs compact native home Hobart. The contrast between time-scales and distances.

Lang is into information management now, into cultural caches, he's a librarian painter – the archiving of memory in a non-linear fashion is what the paintings are concerned with on a visual level. They transfer scenic snapshots, cropped and coloured through Lang's experience, projected through the haze of memory onto the canvas. Further to this, their depth and viscosity – the layers of paint, primer, erasure and rework that cluster on the surface in growths and splatters records the layered experience of documenting this psychological response to an unfolding electric journey through an increasingly familiar environment. It is as though the trace image is compressed, given weight by its repetitive inscription on the picture plane.

Lang's pictures contain and enact epic loops of recording and representing - decoding and encoding. Layering, repetition, time, weather, the path from beginning to end: be it production cycle or commute time. The effect of one on another.

As the passing flicker of the light through a train window encodes itself on the retina and is decoded by the brain as the passing of us through a fixed landscape, Lang's work compresses the passing of time; by wresting it from memory and fixing it on a surface.

The will of the fleeting moments that Lang evokes, to remain nebulous and unfixed, to *not* be captured are evident always in the furtive lines, the unformed shapes, the hazy textures and murkiness of the picture plane, and indeed in the artists' own trembling hand.

Scot Cotterell's work is inter-disciplinary and concerned with responses to technology and media. His work uses sound, video, image and object to create environments that reflect upon cultural phenomena. Scot has curated exhibitions for CAST, Inflight ARI, Academy Gallery and Boiler Room: National Improvisation Laboratory. Cotterell is currently chair of Inflight Artist Run Initiative and lectures sessionally at the University of Tasmania. Scot is represented by Bett Gallery Hobart.

<http://www.scotcotterell.com>