Polygraphics: Walking the Line

Foreword

From crime dramas to Dr Phil's pop psychology, the polygraph machine is a recognised symbol of lie detection in mainstream culture. For most people, the accuracy of polygraph testing is controversial because it is impossible to prove that deception can be adequately recorded or measured via physiological changes and, in real world situations, determining the truth is often subject to a range of different variables. While the idea of gauging truth from impulsive bodily responses is clearly flawed, possibly the most absurd element of this unreliable process is the drawn line recording the data. For, there is something very strange/sci-fi about a gyrating pen spewing out an unbroken line on a moving chart, and the conviction that this haphazard line is somehow a marker of truth/s.

In the art world, the notion of line as a purveyor of truth came into its own in the early twentieth century. At this time, through the lens of abstract painting, drawing gradually began to abandon replication and imitation by choosing to commit to the validity of what was occurring within practice (Petherbridge 2008). While the majority of artists working in this field were abstracting from reality, Paul Klee was the first to abandon this approach stating, "Drawing is like taking a line for a walk" (V&A Museum 2014). For Klee this process involved beginning with a point, extending it into a line and walking it wherever it wanted to go. In this act, he believed the artist and the line performed their own truth by liberating themselves from premeditated thoughts and actions.

Today, "walk the line" is a common drawing exercise and is often pitched as a way of freeing up the drawer to think outside of the box. Ironically, the polygraph may also be considered as an example of taking a line for a walk, except the line being walked is controlled by the limitations of the pen's movement and the shortcomings inherent in human constructed measures of truth. In our everyday vernacular, "walk the line" also has several other connotations including: to maintain an unresolved position between opposing choices, to toe the line in regard to authority or morality and to continuously walk a boundary (Wiktionary 2014). Thus as a concept, it promotes a medley of ideas concerning liberation, constraint and uncertainty.

In James Elkins' book *On Pictures and the Words that Fails Them,* he indicates that all lines and marks are highly deceptive. Lines can merge into washes, vanish into larger areas, become smudged or simply lose themselves through their disjointedness. He suggests faint apparitions often surround lines and act as reminders of drawing's artifice by disclosing traces of a history not necessarily meant to be witnessed (Elkins 1998). For Elkins, lines are both illusory and incoherent and have the potential to hinder and empower the story an image conveys.

In *Polygraphics: Walking the Line,* artists express the fallibility of line as a meaningful disseminator of truth. Taking their cue from the polygraph and the phrase "walk the line", they conceptually and visually articulate line as a human construct that reiterates unfettered, progressive, inhibited or indeterminate readings. In this conflicted setting, lines reside or extend beyond surface borders or boundaries of space, hover in virtual or non-virtual spaces, imitate and critique their own implied meanings, alter or exploit perceptions of reality and communicate inner and outer visions.

Dr Anna Nazzari is a writer and artist who works at Curtin University's School of Design and Art, in the OUA Art Studies program.

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Tori Benz

The drawings for *Polygraphics: Walking the Line* are a continuation of my on-going interest into the way drawing can depict the familiar, yet explore indescribable and intangible complexities of everyday domestic relationships. In these works the 'real' world experiences of motherhood become a site to create 'other – world' spaces, or altered states of reality.

Each drawing in this series departs from the same initial reference of nursing my daughter in bed whilst my other children laze and wrestle. Working across a series of drawings I was interested in the contrast, slippage and overlap between description and happenstance; utilising line as a thread to trace, navigate and circumscribe new meanings in each drawing.

The immediacy, intimacy and rawness of this relationship are revealed in the surface qualities of the traditional media employed; graphite rubbings, residual ink washes and erased lines are discovered within the gesso surfaces. Drafting film and glassine are layered to overlap and reveal hidden aspects of expression; dissolving and masking descriptive elements within the work, requiring the viewer to seek information within the veiled imagery.

Tori Benz lives and works in Perth, WA She completed her undergraduate degree in Fine Arts at Curtin University of Technology in 2000, returning in 2002 to complete Honours. For over a decade her practise has focused on the expressive qualities of paint and drawing to explore everyday domestic relationships. Referencing old film stills and her experiences with motherhood her work teases out the internal complexities and tensions of shared moments and memories. Benz has worked in The School of Design and Art at Curtin University as a Technical Officer and Sessional Academic since 2003.

Mother (study no 3), 2016.
Graphite & gesso on watercolour paper, 29.5 x 21.5cm

Tanisha Burtnyk

Vrij et al (2009) were the first researchers to use drawing as a lie detection tool. Pushing cognitive flexibility, they would request for someone to sketch a memory or event rather than recount it verbally. This strategy required spatial information, a salient component that could be avoided through verbal recounts, but not through drawing.

Drawing for me, is a form of gathering evidence and coming somewhat closer to the truth. This artwork attempts to make sense of conflicting accounts. Conversations with closely associated officers about local tragedies exist as a continual narrative within my life. Their verbal recounts form a parallel truth opposing my lived experience of the 'Australian Dream'. I can accept both experiences as truth (I am living it after all), yet I cannot fathom them within the same time and place.

Drawings have the potential to elicit diagnostic cues to truth or deceit, and yet in this drawing the lines and marks merge in and out of the paper making it somewhat indeterminate. The work encapsulates the unresolved tension where opposing, yet truthful, narratives coexist within the same place.

Tanisha Burtnyk is a Perth based artist, with a practice founded on her personal experience of diaspora. She uses drawing to bring questionable and undetermined spaces under examination. Tanisha was born in South Africa (1988), and then lived in Zimbabwe, until her family had to flee in 2001. She finished her A-levels in England, before migrating to Australia in 2007, where she completed her BA Fine Art (Hons). Tanisha has as worked as a Sessional Academic, within the School of Design and Art at Curtin University, and is currently teaching in secondary schools around Perth.
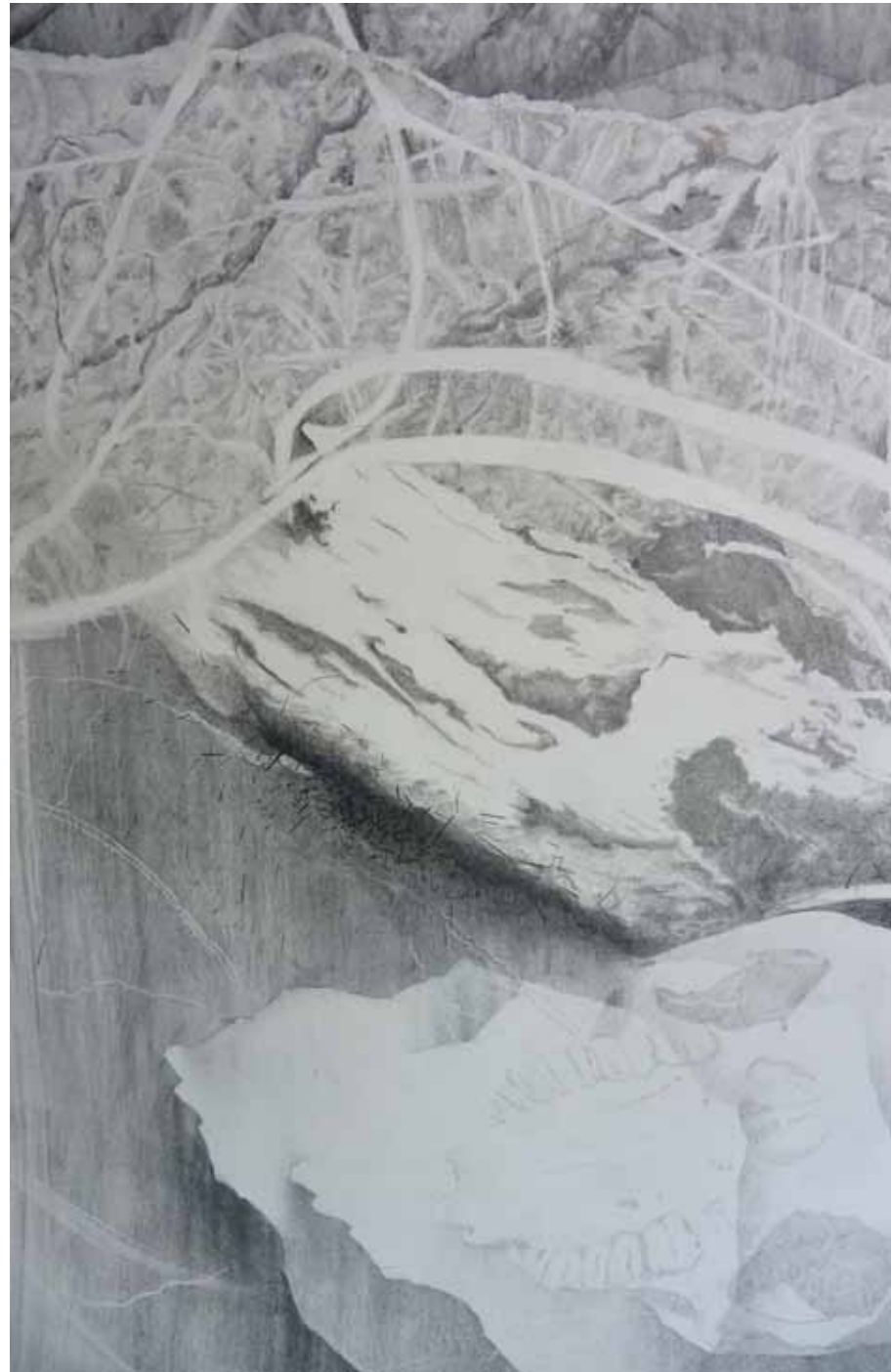
Untitled (detail),2016. Graphite on paper, 92 x 104cm

Consuelo Cavaniglia
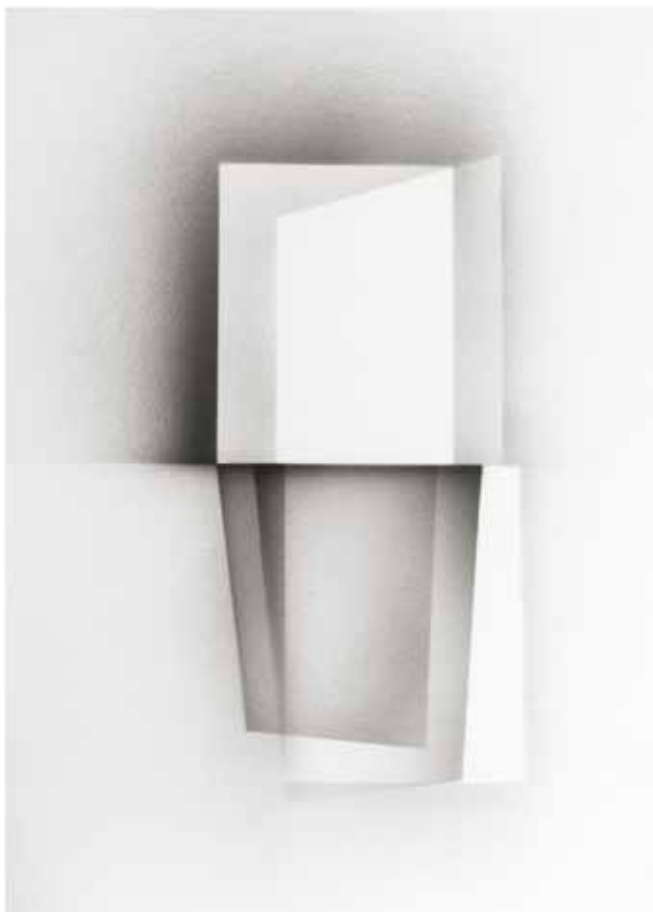
Subtle deception is a constant in my work, with simple visual illusions set up to unsettle our understanding of forms, surfaces and spaces. The works for this exhibition focus on the surface – in this case of paper – where airbrushed elements suggest that surface flatness is to be investigated further. The drawings bring about a sense of uncertainty – is the paper folded? Is it cut? Are the forms fixed or shifting? The interplay of flatness and depth is misleading.
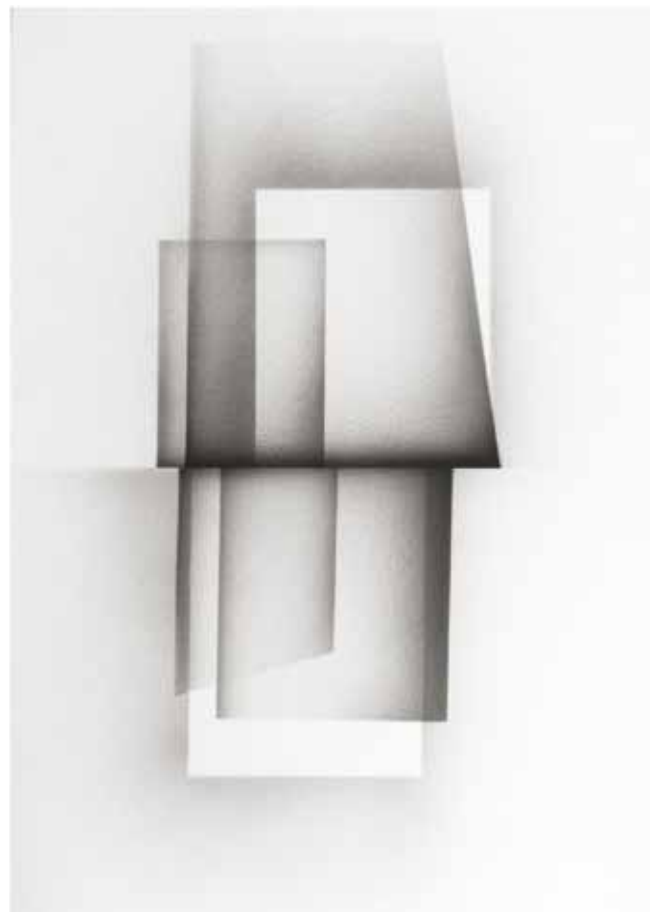
Consuelo is an interdisciplinary artist whose work focuses on how we see and understand space. Independent curatorial projects have consistently flanked her practice. Currently based in Sydney, Consuelo is a Masters of Fine Art candidate at Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. She graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree (Art and Languages) from UWA in 1993 and a Bachelor of Art (Art) with Honours from Curtin University in 2002. She has exhibited in various galleries nationally including Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts 2015; Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney, 2014; 55 Sydenham Road, Sydney, 2014; Perth Centre for Photography, 2014; Firstdraft, Sydney, 2013; Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth, 2013; and Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth, 2012.

Untitled, 2016. Pigment ink on archival paper, 51.2 x 38.8cm each

Erin Coates

Arabella Bergman is 15. She is wheelchair bound as the result of Osteogenesis Imperfecta; a congenital disorder commonly known as Brittle Bone Disease. From her vast imagination she has crafted a world of hybrid beings dwelling in the depths of the ocean. Here, she has luminescent legs of rainbow cilia, writhing tentacle and schools of tiny fish living in her brittle bones that pull her through the water. She is the watery body that carries this world. She is inside this place, and it is inside of her.

Erin works with video, drawing and sculpture, often combining elements to make immersive installations. She is interested in built environments and, by using ideas drawn from body horror and science fiction, creates works that playfully question the way we are patterned to read and use urban space. In Erin's films the screen protagonists always find new ways to physically interact with everyday spaces, by using utopic, absurdist and guerrilla strategies. Much of Erin's recent work has reflected upon the relationship between creativity, endurance and physicality and in the making of her work she has drawn on her background in rock climbing and staged a series of urban climbing interventions. She has also made a short horror film involving scuba diving on the wreck of a sunken whale chaser. Erin's creative process almost always involves collaboration with specialists from other fields, which has included engineers, architects, musicians, scuba divers and parkour performers. The exchange that results from this is a part of her approach to art making. Erin holds a Masters degree in Fine Arts from the University of British Columbia, Canada and was the recipient of a Catalyst: Katherine Hannay Visual Arts Commission, which resulted in her solo exhibition, Kinesphere, at Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts in late 2014 and the publishing of an artist's monograph. Erin's screen-based artworks have been shown in numerous film festivals, including the Paris Short Film Festival, NYC Independent Film Festival, Aesthetica Short Film Festival and Revelation Perth International Film Festival.

The Brittle Bones of Ocean Dwellers [detail from installation], 2016.

Paint pen and collage on x-ray, 29.5 x 21cm
Ink on paper, 29.5 x 21cm
Biro on paper, 29.5 x 21cm
Paint, felt pen, plastic, paper, 30 x 22 cm
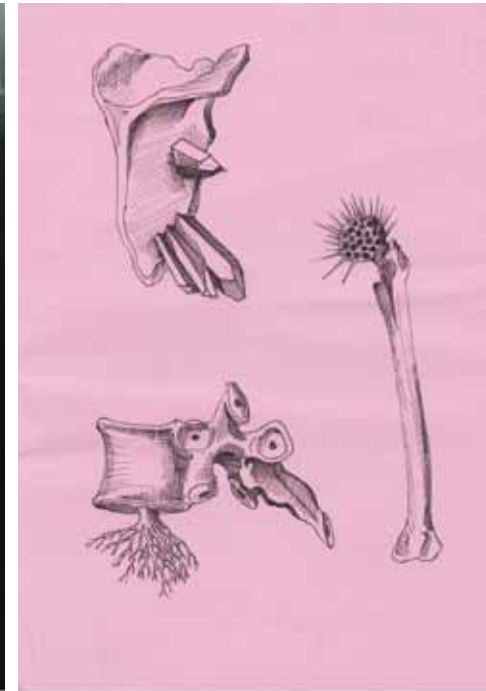
Fiona Harman

My series of drawings for *Polygraphics: Walking the Line* explore the tension of promise and reality in response to the notion of escape through the use of layered imagery. The line, in relation to these drawings, represents a split between a stereotype of paradise, and the idea of a quick escape. I have developed the drawings from a combination of three sets of imagery: pacific island holiday resorts; a community swimming pool; and a bush walk I regularly take at dusk.

The layered images in the drawings are inhibited by the use of dark, close tonal contrast. This is used to suggest an ambiguity of time and place - of being in an oneiric state where recollections of things are a little blurry and ungraspable. The use of shadows and darkness hints at a tension between what is hidden and revealed. Darkness changes the way places are experienced by creating uncertainty. Often it is what goes missing in the shadows that cause a familiar place to become strange.

I'm interested in this tension of expectation and reality. A holiday is not always the idyllic experience that the brochure advertises; weather is uncontrollable, the commute is often long and tiresome, and sometimes travelling is boring or lonely. The community swimming pool and the bush walk are activities that I associate with simple adventure and a quick escape. While the island resort represents desire, aspiration and impossibility. The drawings explore the tension between promise and reality through the layering of the images of different experiences of escape, which stir recollections and longings, and perhaps point to the shortcomings of the stereotypical getaway.

Fiona Harman is a Perth based artist whose practice investigates ways drawing and painting can allude to real and imagined experiences of the urban landscape. She received a Bachelor of Art with First Class Honours in Art at Curtin University in 2012, where she is currently a PhD candidate in the Department of Architecture and Interior Architecture, and works as a Sessional Academic and a Technical Assistant in the School of Art and Design.

Wheatbelt Oasis (snorkelers), 2016.
Charcoal and ink on arches watercolour paper, 22.3 x 15.3cm

Midnight, Island Pool, 2016.
Charcoal, ink and graphite on watercolour paper, 22.3 x 15.2cm

Anna Nazzari

Parasomnia is a short horror film documenting a woman's extraordinary ability to draw chickens in her sleep. With limited aptitude for drawing in her waking hours, the movie charts a woman's impulsive actions and bizarre nocturnal mark-making. Her frenzied and uncontained marks chronicle the untapped powers of her subconscious. It is not clear if her involuntary "walking of the line" is shaped by an active imagination, the previous day or recollections of a more sinister past.

Anna Nazzari is a Perth based artist and writer. In 2011, she completed a Doctorate of Philosophy (Art) at Curtin University. Her practice is multi-faceted and often encompasses drawing, sculpture, electronics and film. Her exhibitions and screen-based art works have been shown in Australian galleries and International film festivals. She currently works as a Lecturer at Curtin University's School of Design and Art, in the OUA Art Studies program.


The Phantom Bantam, 2016. Pencil on paper, 42 x 30cm

Ryan Nazzari

This series of paintings is representative of strange conversations. Using a cartoon speech bubble as a motif, one that projects unfinished lines of thought or incoherent language, the work talks about dead or repetitive conversations. These conversations are ongoing but never truly heard and their indiscernibility projects the possibility of lies or heartfelt truths.

Ryan Nazzari has completed a Bachelor of Arts (Art) Degree with First Class Honours. He Lives and works in Perth. His most recent group exhibition *Florid*, was shown at Turner Galleries, Perth and Downstairs Gallery Melbourne. His practice includes drawing, painting and installation.
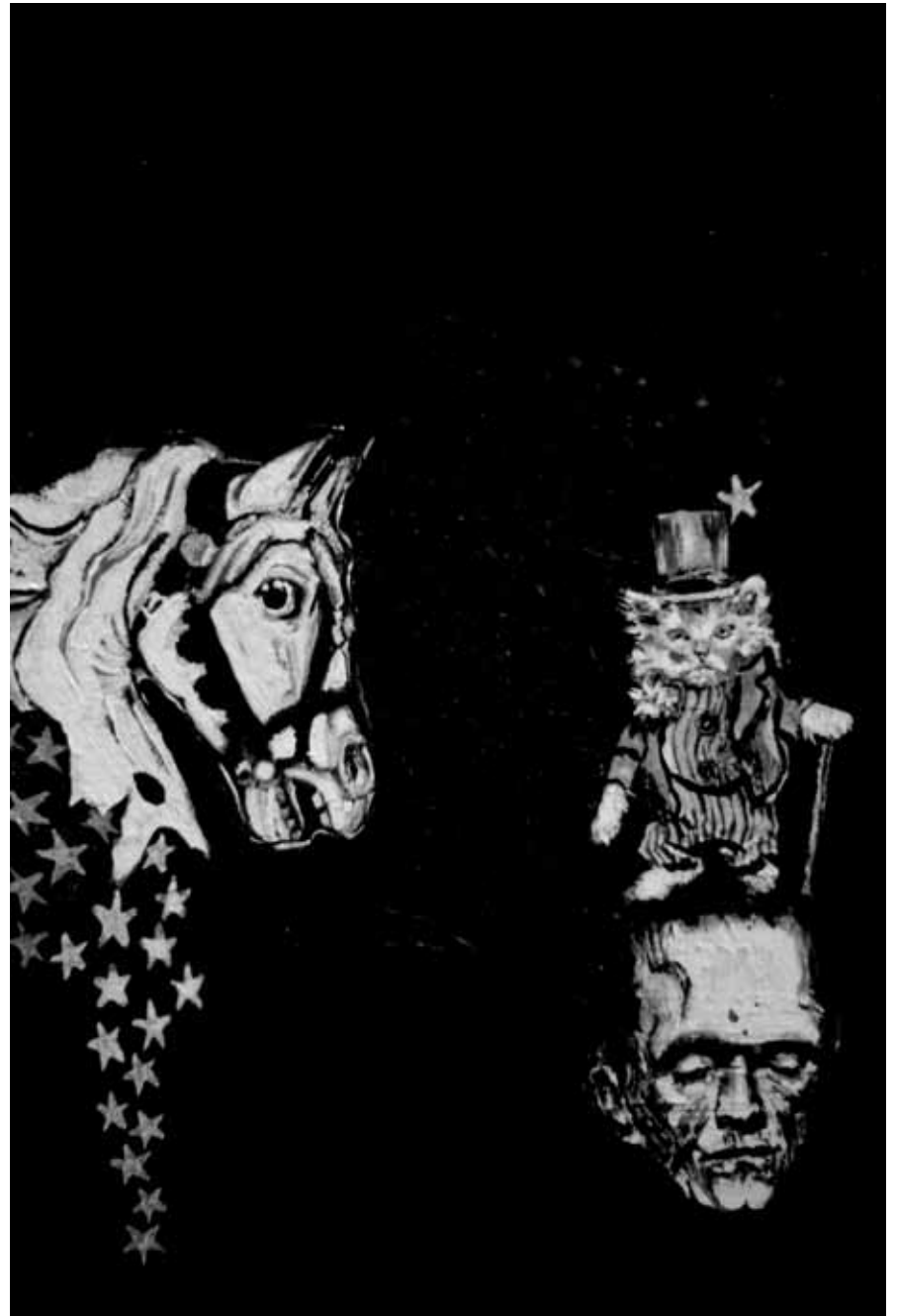
End of the Line Series (Horse, Cat, Frankenstein), 2016.
Acrylic paint on canvas, 30 x 23cm

Andrew Nicholls

My recent works explore the legacy of the Grand Tour, the legendary rite of passage for aristocratic British men during the eighteenth century, and the semi-mythical position that Italy held, and continues to hold, in the British psyche.

My *Polygraphics* drawing references Giovani Battista Piranesi, whose extraordinarily proficient and imaginative engravings of Rome were avidly collected by the Tourists. Piranesi's Rome was a semi-mythical creation. He would reorganize vistas, reconstruct ruins, and exaggerate their scale to make the monuments of the eternal city even more magnificent - a landscape of vast architectural edifices crawling with inconsequential, ant-like people.

His view of the Via Appia Antica, a playful frontispiece to his four-volume *Le Antichita Romane* (1756), is pure fantasy, reimagining the road as an impossible conglomeration of tombs, towers, monuments, statues, pillars and busts. Nonetheless, it evokes a similar dream-like, melancholic wonder to that which I experience walking along the real Appia Antica, something I have done many times. One of the first great roads ever constructed, it still runs straight as an arrow south of Rome, some 1700 years later, littered with the remnants of the tombs of wealthy Romans.

Inspired by Piranesi, my *Polygraphics* work is my own fantasy composite image of the Via Appia Antica, and draws upon several months of travel around Italy to depict an artificial landscape of melancholic desire.

Andrew Nicholls is an Australian/British artist, writer, and curator whose practice engages with the sentimental, camp, and other historically-marginalised aesthetics, and traces the historical recurrence of particular aesthetic motifs. While primarily drawing-based, his practice also incorporates ceramics, photography, installation, performance, and filmmaking. He has exhibited across Australia, Southeast Asia, Italy and the United Kingdom, and received two Creative Development Fellowships from the Western Australian Government. He has undertaken commissions for several organisations in Western Australia and the United States, and his work is represented in collections including the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Brookfield Multiplex, the City of Perth, Edith Cowan University, and the Kedumba Collection of Australian Drawings.
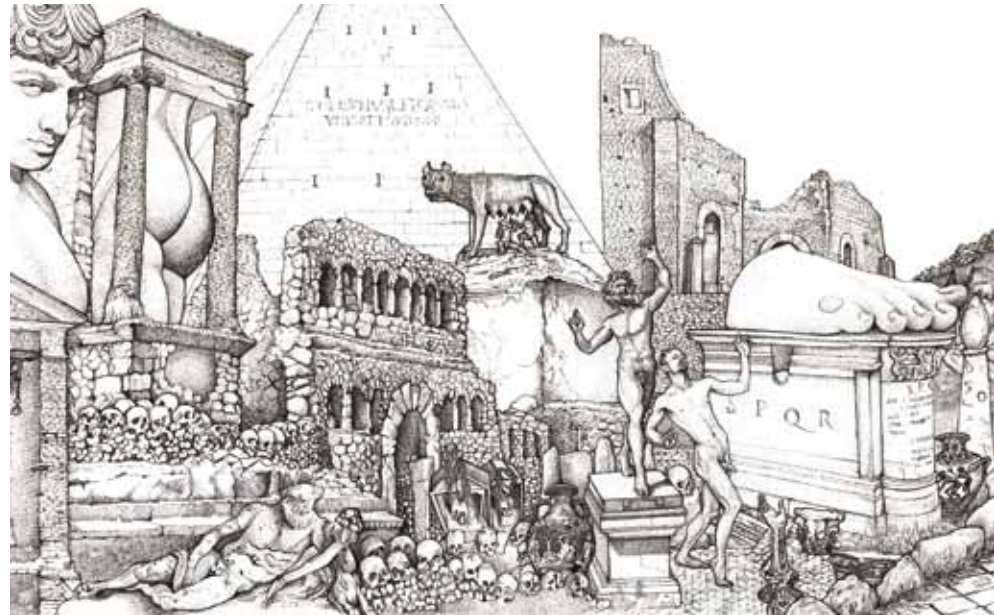
Via Appia Antica (after Piranesi)(detail), 2015.
Archival ink pen on watercolour paper, approximately 45 x 350cm

Clare Peake

Informing my practice is a philosophical enquiry into knowledge production and invention, and an interest in the materiality of thought. How to generate ideas and navigate through what we already know to arrive at what we do not, and how to conjure up something that we haven't yet thought about are overarching questions central to my practice.

In the work *Middle Ground: Not either of two things* I reinterpret my studio companion's steps into a simple tap routine. This action of mimicry becomes an allegory for exploring the movement between ideas and the generation of new thought patterns. With ruptures, imperfections and sometimes points of unison, this duet of sorts demonstrates the creative potential of what started out to be procrastination in the studio to becoming a study of the transition, or gap, between two disparate points.

Line in this work is interpreted as what potentially links two points, an imagined liminal space that joins two different modes of thinking. The line, an invisible threshold or middle ground, becomes the symbolic point where one idea leads to another and in this case, where one's steps become transformed into another providing a valuable tool for generating new creative possibilities.

Clare Peake (b. 1984 Geraldton, lives Broome WA) graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Art) from Curtin University in 2006 and completed postgraduate studies in Anthropology at the University of Western Australia in 2010. Clare has contributed to a number of significant shows, notably, *A Comprehension of the Farthest Points* (2013) at Venn gallery, *remix* at the Art Gallery of Western Australia (2011) and *Here&Now12* at Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery (2012). Clare's work was most recently exhibited at Bus Projects, Melbourne, 55 Sydenham Rd (2015), Sydney and *WIN/WIN* (2014) at Hugo Michelle Gallery in Adelaide.

Middle Ground: Not either of two things (film stills), 2016. Film

Alex Spremberg

The ordinary cardboard box has become an instrument of visual inquiry. The totality of the box continually eludes us. We can never see all of it; it's back remains eternally hidden from our view. These invisible parts as well as the invisible space inside the box we fabricate in our imagination. Visualizing the imagined makes it possible to engage with the gap that occurs between perception and imagination, between what we see and what we construct.

However, only from particular points of view are we able to observe how the ordinarily invisible becomes visible. This emphasis on perspective reveals how our individual viewpoint shapes our perception of the world.

Born in 1950 in Hamburg, Germany, Alex Spremberg moved to Perth in 1982. Spremberg is currently undertaking doctoral studies at Curtin University, Perth. He lectures at the Central Institute of Technology and has been a guest lecturer at Curtin University and Edith Cowan University.

The artist participated in the WA Focus series of exhibitions at the Art Gallery of WA (2016). He had a solo exhibition, *Wrong Angles*, at the Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, (2011); a survey exhibition at the Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia in 1994, Painting 1976 – 1994; as well as numerous solo shows at Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth, and Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne. Spremberg has also participated in numerous group exhibitions, both locally and abroad, including at Paris Concrete, France (2012), Fabrikculture, Hegenheim, France (2012); at Galerie Stella A, Berlin, Germany (2010, 2009, 2007, 2003); at Galerie Katharina Krohn, Basel, Switzerland, (2008, 2007); at the Regionale, Kunsthaus L6, Freiburg, Germany, (2006); at Galerie Beeld & Ambeeld, The Netherlands, (2004); and at the Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth (2003).

Alex has been the winner of the prestigious BankWest Contemporary Art Prize (2004); the Artitude Prize, Telethon Speech + Hearing (2005) and the People's Choice Award, BankWest Contemporary Art Prize (2002).

Test Object 1, 2014. Enamel on cardboard, 26.5 x 27.5 x 27.5cm

Marzena Topka

Breath, sweat and blood pressure are markers by which the polygraph device delineates truthful responses from lies. But this is only part of the picture. To counteract any nervously predisposed subject from automatically being deemed guilty, the person performing the polygraph testing punctuates their questioning with a series of control questions. Questions that are easily verifiable as true and unlikely to cause alarm in their subject such as "What day is it today?" or 'what colour is your hair?" The effectiveness of a polygraph test depends on the experience of the tester who interprets the data.

This seems to make the polygraph device obsolete and the tester indispensable. But who would nowadays want to bear the weight of responsibility for decision-making? It would be much safer to defer it to a machine. After all, machines are supposed to be impartial and rational.

Only, there is always a ghost in the machine. *Business as usual* imagines a subject turning in on themself. The paper punch hole, a standard device of any office repertoire, a device, which collects loose sheets into a single file, seems to have gone awry in the hands of an overly zealous subject. In this project, holes mark the end of the line as much as its beginning.

As keen as we may be to invent aids to compensate for our unreliable senses or use devices to restore order, we are just as quick to find holes in any system.

Marzena Topka arrived in Australia in 1983 from Poland and is now based in Perth. In her practice she insists on finding qualities that escape measurement, thereby creating spaces where such utopian notions can be breathed into being. She studied art history at the University of Western Australia graduating with a BA (Fine Art) (Hons) in 1992. Since then she completed an Advanced Diploma at Central Tafe (2003), BA (Art) (Hons) (2005) and Master of Creative Arts in 2011 at Curtin University. Marzena is a Sessional Academic at Curtin University School of Design and Art, Open Universities Art Studies.

Business as usual, 2016. Shirt

Polygraphics: Walking the Line

'Have you ever watched pornographic videos?' This probing question crescendos into an intensely embarrassing moment that caps off an already awkward interrogation session between Greg Focker (played by Ben Stiller) and his future Father-in-law Jack (Robert Di Nero) in the film *Meet the Parents* (2000). Adding to the unpleasantness of this interaction is that Jack has hooked Greg up to a polygraph machine, (lie detector device). Unable to escape, but mortified into silence, eager-to-please Greg hesitates, as the ink-ridden pin suspiciously oscillates. Restraining himself, he asserts 'no', as the pendulating pin flails out of control, picking holes in his answer.

Polygraph machines judge the 'truth' of one's responses to questions by measuring their physiological reactions to them. Although zigzagging lines across a computer screen now digitally depict these physiological responses (Bonsor n.d.), etched into my mind are older test procedures where violently scratching pins brand a scrolling piece of paper. Iconic ill-fated cinematic characters caught out by lie detector tests, such as Greg Focker, are no doubt at the core of these visions. The audience perceives the deceit of Greg's answer because of his awkward reluctance to address it, while the polygraph machine draws the line at his physiological reactions that literally illustrate his lie.

However, it is the very dependence on physiological measurement that fuels debate about the reliability of lie-detector tests. This is because the polygraph machine merely indicates physiological responses, but cannot translate what they actually mean for each individual and their specific situation. As the physiological reactions associated with lying are generally caused by anxiety, any number of panicked feelings could provide a 'false positive' result (Honts and Perry 1992). So, if we were to suspend our disbelief for a moment and consider the possibility that Greg had never watched a pornographic video, a general feeling of panicked embarrassment could have caused his lying lines.

Despite the precarious science underlying lie-detecting tests, the continued use of them (as seen on popular television series Dr Phil) is indicative of a Western culture that believes, to quote TV series The X-Files (1993-2002), 'the truth is out there'. Simultaneously though, the enduring effect of postmodern theory from the late twentieth-century has shown us that in a culturally diverse globalised world, different beliefs undermine objective singular truth (Luntley 1995). In this context belief is considered to be a conviction in the truth. Therefore, having a variety of beliefs co-exist inevitably implies that there are also multiple truths – making 'the' truth uncertain.

As seminal American psychologist William James suggested, when we experience doubt, or uncertainty, 'the content of our mind is in unrest' (James 1889, 332). Being cast adrift from the anchor of universal truth, how do we securely remain afloat? While the factual truth may have gone down with the ship, we can ironically still grasp at the debris of various beliefs (that originally sunk it) to keep our heads above water. Playwright Erik Ehn (in Schneemann et al. 2012) suggests that the commitment in belief silences debate, which creates an anxiety-free space. Artist and poet George Quasha goes further by saying that 'the propensity to believe is hardwired into us… [because]… It keeps things looking stable, sort of' (Quasha in Schneemann et al. 2012, 18). Belief-seeking behaviour is perhaps embedded within our human nature as it facilitates feelings of security. While 'the' truth may not be out there, we can at least rest assured that 'the beliefs are out there.'

In both conceptual and visual frameworks, using a variety of media – including painting, sculpture, performance, video, drawing and installation – most of the artists in *Polygraphics: Walking the Line* underline the uncertainty of truth and lies to critique absolute truths. Some themes explored by the artists who contribute to this philosophical stance are: blurred boundaries between truths and lies; the contribution that artificial experiences can make to our sense of reality; how absolute truths are undermined by the relativity of individual perception; and the unknown pathways that transmit information. Yet other *Polygraphics'* artists explore the affirmative powers of mark-making by using drawing as a mechanism to bring together disparate truths, which allows them to co-exist; and using drawing as a way of representing deeper truths that are not always evident in surface experience.

With the first thematic school of thought usurping the absolutisms lie detector machines attribute to 'truth' and 'lies' and the second using mark-making to affirm truths (like a polygraph test would), these two thematic approaches appear to contradict each other. The former approach is seemingly non-committal

in the way it walks-the-line between falsity and authenticity. In this sense, it could be seen to abandon the human need of seeking the security of beliefs. However, by entrusting uncertainty as a certainty within a contemporary art context, the first thematic approach draws on and reinterprets well-established postmodern philosophy that questions the validity of singular truth in a cultural context of global pluralities (Luntley 1995 and Baumgardner et al. 1999).

Much like the lines etched onto the lie detector's paper scroll, the artworks in this exhibition materialise as reflections of the artists' philosophical truths. Thus, like polygraphic machines, artists who leave their marks document their believed truths into existence, and create a map of contradictions from which to securely navigate their way of being in the world.

Dr Meredith Godley is an artist, writer and tutor at Curtin University's School of Design and Art, OUA Art Studies' Program.

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