



No Nonsense, Great Shapes: Jemima Wyman

A survey of past and recent video works

EDUCATIONAL RESOURCE

Dazey Girl, 2005, detail digital still. Duration approx 3 mins

About the artist

Jemima Wyman was born in Sydney in 1977. She undertook her Bachelor of Visual Arts at Queensland University of Technology in 1997 returning and completing with first class honours in 2001. Since the late 90s, Jemima has been actively exhibiting paintings, video works, performance and installations. Bellas Milani Gallery in Brisbane has represented Jemima since 2001. In 2005 Jemima was one of six Australian artists to receive a Anne & Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship. She chose to undertake a two year Master of Fine Art Course at the California Institute of the Arts, (CalArts), Los Angeles, America. No Nonsense, Great Shapes features video works from her practice up to and including works from the first year of her CalArts MA.

Samstag award

The Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarships were established in 1992 through a remarkable bequest by American artist Gordon Samstag, who taught from 1961 to 1970 at the South Australian School of Art, now a part of the University of South Australia.

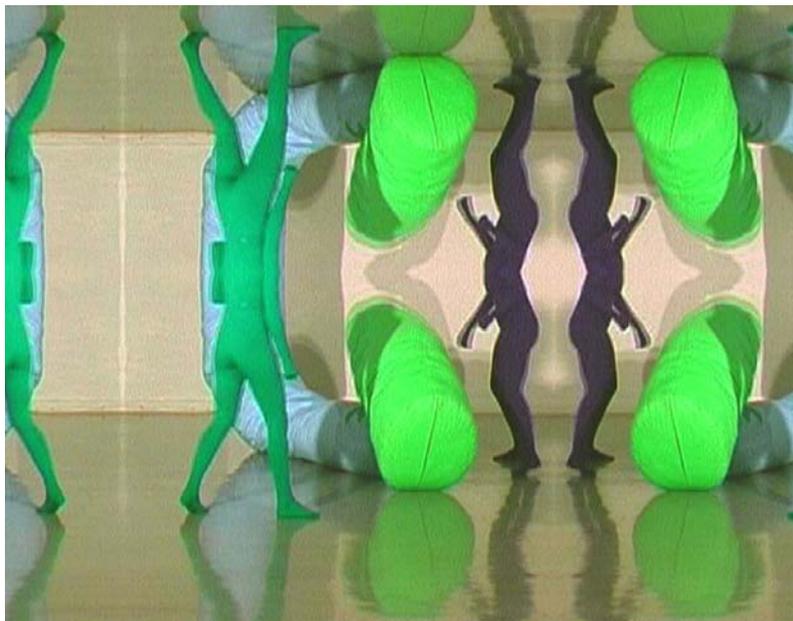
Mr Samstag's substantial Will provided funding to a number of scholarships, annually, to enable Australian visual artists to "study and develop their artistic capacities, skills and talents outside of Australia". His unique award was created expressly for the development and education of Australian visual artists, and is arguably the most prestigious of its kind. Samstag Scholarships - presented through the South Australian School of Art - pay for all the costs of twelve months of overseas study, including provision of a particularly generous stipend, return airfares and institutional study fees.

Now in their fourteenth award year, the Samstag Scholarships have become a byword for rapid, professional success and visibility. In an art world voracious for new stars, the Samstag name is renowned for identifying artists of exceptional talent and promise. The announcement of a Samstag Scholarship signals an immediate increase of opportunities and recognition from dealers, collectors, curators and art magazines alike!

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/samstag/>

No Nonsense, Great Shapes: Jemima Wyman

No Nonsense, Great Shapes is Wyman's first major solo, video-focused exhibition in Brisbane. The exhibition employs over 20 screens showing a wide range of video works over the past nine years. Wyman's work is a visual feast of colour and movement which operates to create a physiological response in the viewer.



Coloured Suits, 2001, detail digital still, duration 16 mins

Main features

Colour – Wyman manipulates scale, saturation and intensity of colour in order to affect the viewers' experience of the work. Conventional methods of colour application are aimed at assisting the viewer's comprehension of illusionary depth - Wyman subverts these methods as a means of creating a visual experience which causes the viewer to feel the work physically, like a tremor.



The slide between cognitive and physical experience is an important element of her practice. As Jemima states, 'if there was a dominant message that I was trying to communicate through the work it would be the experience of encountering the work physically'¹.

Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories (Dazey Girl), 2005, digital still

The body – Wyman views the body as a material to work with. The body in performance is used just as a painter uses paint - It is flexible and dynamic. Wyman exposes this flexibility by creating characters that are presented as both highly absurd and unnatural. This role playing functions as a means of critiquing traditional notions of the body as 'natural' and our identities fixed. Further the physical act of simulating a character emphasises our dependence on external signs such as fashion and skin colour when viewing the body.

Scale and the Viewer/artist relationship – Wyman often creates artworks that physically position the viewer within the work. Shown at the 2005 Primavera exhibition, *Scapeology*, 2005, is 180x320cm in size. This immense scale, combined with the intensity of the colour immerses the viewers' body into a psychedelic landscape. You have entered Wyman's world, thus arriving at a central theme in her practice; a visceral experience of the work.

Reworking/reuse of works – as you walk through the show you will notice that a number of works are reused, reinterpreted and re-presented in other works, or that the props from one work appears in another. This enfolding of one work into another obscures the boundaries between the individual pieces and encourages the viewer to see the works as part of an encompassing practice whilst simultaneously challenging the notion of the autonomous original artwork. For Example in *Hula-Hoop Boy and Earthquake Girl*, 2005 (below) the backdrop is the painting *Scapeology*, 2005 created with enamel based household paint using a pouring. These works do

not remain autonomous, but rather exist in the eclectic, hyperactive realm which Jemima creates for us.



Hula-Hoop Boy and Earthquake Girl, 2005, digital still, duration 12 mins

Process

The playful nature of Wyman's practice is essential to the work. The medium of video creates another space for this play. In documenting her performances the medium becomes a strategy for capturing the informal/chance moments which are inherent to live performance. It also enables Wyman to further abstract her constructed performances. Wyman uses the editing process to enhance and manipulate the documented 'real' events into surreal or dreamlike ones by colour enhancement, manipulation of speed or direction and applying filters and effects.

1. http://www.mca.com.au/general/Jemima_Wyman.pdf

Video Art

Video art emerged during the 1960s and 1970s and is comprised of video and/or audio data. Traditionally video art was (and sometimes still is) recorded on video tapes. In recent years the shift from analogue to digital technologies has changed video into electronic formats. Video art is screened in many ways - it can be projected onto walls or displayed on television and computer screens in numerous locations.

It is important not to mistake video art for film. Video art does not rely on conventions that define film such as employing actors, dialogue, narratives and plots. Compared to film, video is cheap, accessible, immediate and modern. These factors play a vital part in portraying artistic intentions. Video artists do not consider their art as a form of entertainment; rather they often consider their work to be art videos or activist driven documentaries. Many artists explore the boundaries of video as a medium and aim to subvert viewer's expectations of conventional cinema.

It is now common for many contemporary artists to combine video art with other media, within installation or performance art for example, or as a documentary aspect of artistic practice.

Performance Art

Performance art is a form which the actions of an individual or a group at a particular place and in a particular time constitute the work. It can happen anywhere, at any time, or for any length of time. Performance art can be any situation that involves four basic elements: time, space, the performer's body and a relationship between performer and audience. It is opposed to painting or sculpture, for example, where the object, not the action constitutes the work.

Although performance art could be said to include relatively mainstream activities such as theatre, dance, music, and circus-related things like fire breathing, juggling, and gymnastics, these are normally instead known as the performing arts. *Performance art* is a term usually reserved to refer to a kind of usually avant-garde or conceptual art which grew out of the visual arts.

Performance art, as the term is usually understood, began to be identified in the 1960s with the work of artists such as Vito Acconci, Hermann Nitsch, Joseph Beuys, and Allan Kaprow, who coined the term Happenings. Happenings were a performance, event or situation, meant to be considered as art, taking place anywhere, and were often multi-disciplinary, lacked a narrative and frequently sought to involve the audience in some way. Western cultural theorists often trace performance art activity back to the beginning of the 20th century. Dada for example, provided a significant progenitor with the unconventional performances of poetry by Richard Huelsenbeck and Tristan Tzara. There are also accounts of Renaissance artists putting on public performances that could be said to be early ancestors to modern performance art. Some performance artists point to other traditions, ranging from tribal ritual to sporting events. It is important to note that Performance art is not confined to Euro-american art worlds.

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Performance_art

Performance in Video

During the 1960s, video became a more viable medium and many artists began to use video to record performance. Within this new media performance could be transformed in a multitude of ways. Within video the performance becomes abstracted and moves into a relationship with mass media.

Video and Performance in the video framework, grew from the social and sexual revolutions of the 1960s-70s. As television became the dominant medium, an increasing awareness and critique of television's imagery and the perpetuation of stereotypes (such as gender and racial) developed in a number of artists' work. Joan Jonas, Hannah Wilke, Lynda Benglis and Dara Birnbaum worked with the body to address these issues. Their works aimed to fragment the body and subvert notions of authentic womanhood. It could be said that Wyman also treads a similar path; the body in Wyman's works is rendered as a changeable object, capable of representing multiple identities and therefore readings of the female body. An element that links these art practices is an implied mocking of conventional stereotypes that appear daily on our television screens.



Vulva Girl, 2003, digital video, duration 16 mins



Lightweight Poncho, 2000, digital video, duration 36 mins

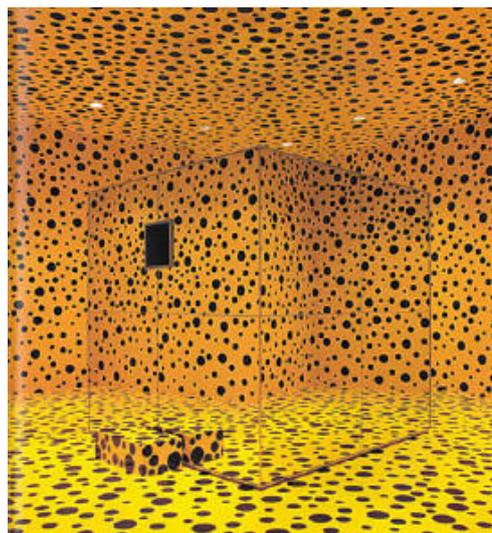


Turning Turning, 2001, digital video duration 12 mins

Influences

'Yayoi Kusama, would probably be one of the most consistently influential artists on my practice...this is for a multitude of reasons but primarily because she loves "infinity" and doesn't limit her approaches to making, viva "infinity" - Jemima Wyman⁴

Yayio Kusama



Left: *Kusama self-obliteration by dots*, 1968, performance documentation photography by Hal Reif. Right: *Kusama mirror room*, 1991, mirrors, wood, paper mache, paint, 200x200x200cm, collection Hara Museum, Tokyo

Yayoi Kusama, (born 1929) has been called Japan's greatest living artist. Born in Matsumoto, Nagano Prefecture, Kusama has experienced hallucinations and severe obsessive thoughts since childhood, often of a suicidal nature.

Early in Kusama's career, she began covering surfaces (walls, floors, canvases, and later, household objects and naked assistants) with the polka dots that would become a trademark of her work. The vast fields of polka dots, or "infinity nets", as she called them, were taken directly from her hallucinations.

She left her native country at the age of 27 for New York City, on the advice of Georgia O'Keefe. During her time in the United States, she quickly established her reputation as a leader in the avant-garde movement. She organized outlandish happenings in conspicuous spots like Central Park and the Brooklyn Bridge, was enormously productive, and counted Joseph Cornell among her friends and supporters. Although Kusama exhibited with influential artists in New York, she never achieved long term critical or financial success and returned to Tokyo in the mid-seventies. Her work shares some attributes of feminism, minimalism, surrealism, art brut, pop, and abstract expressionism, but she describes herself as an obsessive artist. Her artwork is infused with autobiographical, psychological, and sexual content, and includes paintings, soft sculptures, performance art, artist books, photo collages and installations.

Yayoi Kusama has exhibited work with Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, and Jasper Johns. In 1993 Kusama represented Japan at the Venice Biennale and a major retrospective exhibition of her work toured the U.S. and Japan in 1998 & 1999. Today she lives, by choice, in a mental hospital in Tokyo, where she has continued to produce work since the mid-seventies. Her studio is a short distance from the hospital. Kusama is often quoted as saying "If it were not for art, I would have killed myself a long time ago".

<http://www.oneroom.org/sculptors/kusama.html>

For further information of the artist visit her website:
www.jemimawyman.net