

CRITICAL INTENT

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Contemporary art has become increasingly demanding as an intellectual project and remarkably diverse in terms of source material, media, and strategic intent. A good primer is now a necessity for navigating this new visual world imbued with philosophy, science, politics, sociology, literature, and technology. While there is some drive towards a more pragmatic or tangible mediation of new art to reach across broader fields of knowledge and connect with more diverse audiences, the latest iterations of the curatorial motif may be as much a poetic insight, as an inviting feint or obfuscation. In addition, the making of images, objects, and experiences for display and communicative purposes may be a fluid process, but at the site of display spatial and technical considerations call a halt to the fluidity of ideation and imagination to require somewhat specific formal decisions. The work, as seen in the public gallery or exhibition site, is a trace of the creative process and imaginative project the artist pursues. It is rarely definitive, although it may be suggested to be the culminating gesture of a long series of exploratory events, the work is in reality a selected moment or fragment of the considerable research and practice required to produce a substantial body of work, or body of knowledge encoded in artwork.

The dialogue that exists between the conceptual and the perceptual in contemporary art practice remains one of the most compelling lines of inquiry in understanding, interpreting, and evaluating meaning and value in art work. It is one of the fault lines that runs through any meditation on contemporary art, not dissimilar to the in the palpable, productive tension between the material and the spiritual or psychological in the production of form. Understanding art is a product of our current knowledge; a condition that consists of our perceptual and neurological capacities coupled with our contextual experiences, and ignited by our research or acquired information. In this context, artwork can be viewed as both document, an articulated, recorded trace of agreed understanding produced by the artist for the viewer, and documentary, in reference to tangible, real world experience, without defining or constraining that experience, but providing a platform for potentially richer deeper and more complex engagement with the world of experience, real objects and systems, the subjectivity of the psychological and human consciousness.

One way to think about this project is to consider it in terms of three key elements of research practice that emerge from the work and concerns of the participants and their different role in the project. The structure of the project revolves around the relationship amongst art, site, and text, or more descriptively an exploration of the relationship between the images, objects and media, the exhibition space, and the discourse and language associated with the exhibition. In terms of exhibition practice, art and artists have a preeminent or pre-cursive role in producing the work for the project, but in the case of *Tactical Imaginary*, the exhibition and the language components are not necessarily secondary but complementary to the outcomes of the project and its possible or potential meanings or interpretations.

While parallel threads can be teased apart from the range of work and the concerns of each artists and the form of their work, the specific content and reference material of each artists' work is in fact not specifically related to each other. The drive of the exhibition is an account and analysis of the role of artists pursuing independent research and their relationship to the practice of research underpins this project. This in turn provides the project with sense of critical intent – a coherent structure and impetus to examine the discursive elements of the project, the context and causality of the work, its generative effects on viewers, and its capacity for expanding the meaning and understanding of issues contained in the work, through the process of exhibition and practice of critical analysis.

Tactics are a way of implementing or deploying a strategy, and strategies have clear goals or intentions. The idea of strategic intent, using familiar media and accepted systems of visualization and display, may be understood as the deployment of those techniques and materials in a precise and determined investigative practice. Like any research process, the outcome of the work may be predisposed towards particular results but cannot be defined in advance. In many fields, the protocols of proof or truth contain acceptable margins of error, which in some senses—say life or death situations or the pursuit of knowledge—remains troublingly inconclusive. In terms of art, where the concept of truth or knowledge is never ineluctable, but is subject to infinite revision and permanent, nuanced mutability, there is considerable license in this way of working. But it is not free rein. It is experimental and exploratory, but it is a method of controlled experimentation, systematic, and subject to reasonable and quite often established protocols and standards.

Imagining and the imaginary suggests a more creative or intuitive set of procedures. It is about visualizing or conjuring conceptually something that is not readily available or as yet in existence. In a positive sense, it may imply an ideal or a future orientation. It may suggest creative insight, or it may invoke memory, or be a product of longing.

Tactical Imaginary is a project that is coherent in terms of the manner in which these artists pursue systematic investigations of various kinds of knowledge, information, and experience, and reconfigure and represent them through various form and media. In addition, the project also provides scope for inquiring into the nature of exhibition practice, and the effects site, space, and physical context play in constructing meaning in concert with artists' work and artefacts. And finally, there is an opportunity to engage with the relationship between art and language, between visual form/media and text.

For viewers, meaning is generated in art through perceptual encounters with the work which are in turn inevitably translated into language in order to make sense of the experience of images, sounds, objects, and space; to provide it with a conceptual framework and intellectual tradition and history that both permits and drives interpretation. The act of turning perceptual experience into coherent meaning is inextricably bound to our taxonomies of experience, our history of naming and cataloguing, and understanding the world we inhabit.

There is the making, idea generation, media manipulation and experimentation, and production of artefacts, objects, and experience. Then there is the display, the siting of the work within an exhibition space designed to facilitate viewing or engagement.

In some senses exhibitions are always documentary in nature, static or kinetic images, objects, or experiences, within a fixed frame, an immobile display space. In line with many new approaches to animating exhibitions and generating immersive experiences, the site of display is a set of conditions that can be mobilized and reconfigured to vary the experience and encounter with the work; it offers considerable scope for invention and generative discourse, like changing grammar or syntax of a text, or interpreting a music composition. Exhibitions represent completed, unchanging articles, objects, and experiences that are systematically variable within a given and constrained set of parameters, a time signature, a spatial arrangement, a display perimeter, or materials, technologies and equipment producing visual and visceral experiences within a project.

The artwork presented in *Tactical Imaginary* is disparate in terms of subject matter, but retains a close connection to the document and the documentary as a strategy for making the work. Frederico Câmara photographs globally sited zoo cages and draws inferences of containment and display of wild animals; an inquiry into the preservation and commodification of the untamed environment. Debra Dawes produces video of a meditative projection of space, the relatively huge scale of mountains, and the defining capacity of measurement, in which she performs a walk across the edges of the frame, which delineates the scope and scale of the mountain vista stretching across the horizon of the lens and the landscape. Dennis Del Favero's work is an immersive, spatially disorienting and ambient video projection room that considers key transitional access points - doors and firewalls, that enable one to pass to the other side, and return, possibly in an altered state. John Di Stefano uses a sculptural installation to distort projected video images of fragments of fascist and monumental architecture in Rome, which reflect on the culture of materialization and fetishization of powerful or destructive forms of ideology, politics, or humanity. EK.1, is the collaborative duo comprising of Emma Hicks and Kate Louise Williams. Through performance that can be both humorous and sceptical, ek.1's video and sound installation documents and projects an underlying sense of wanting or wishfulness, or even despair, in their search for the elusive depth of meaning and value in art.

Art can be deceptively accessible and intimidatingly complex or arcane. Sometimes, in its finer moments, it can be both at once. An intelligible art, one that strategically calculates and projects its visceral impact on the viewer, generates compelling, resonant form through a sophisticated and innovative manipulation of materials and media. It acknowledges and animates the subtle nuance of art history, and now also, is intimately connected to extensive fields of knowledge and research within and beyond the cultural plane, and then coded into or calibrated with the materiality and form of an aesthetic project. This unbridled proliferation of form, content, and critical intent has been the nascent trajectory of recent art.

As art bends more towards a coherent grounding in real-world experience and complex systems of codified or systemized knowledge, the nature of aesthetic experience develops new critical, theoretical, and actual possibilities. While incorporating traditional artistic strategies of representing the world and experience from a reflective, distanced, or observational perspective, the new terrain sets out to link different fields of knowledge in more direct, engaged forms of visualization, in which the art and the artists contribute to fields of knowledge by articulating new modes of experiencing, understanding, or activating knowledge. In this way, art is not a dependent project, documenting knowledge production in an aesthetic frame, contributing mostly form, and perhaps perceptual accessibility rather than actual content, but is a generative program producing knowledge in which form is endemic content within a substantive, investigative research strategy.