



Doppio
2007
Clodagh Emoe



A Meditation on Minerals and Bats
2007
Nina Canell



Trying to take place (detail)
2007
Linda Quinlan

A discussion of *Come Together* between the artists and Barry White.

During early discussions, the artists were offered three starting points to consider in the development of work for Come Together. The first, Richard Linklater's film Waking Life, explores various philosophical attitudes to existence through the character of a young man locked in a perpetual state of lucid dreaming.

Yes, Joanna Newsom's album of fantastic allegories and arcane symbolism, which despite its seeming detachment from contemporary reality is rooted in real events in the artist's life, was also discussed.

The final starting point, and the one to which all three artists responded most enthusiastically, was René Daumal's Mount Analogue: A Novel of Symbolically Authentic Non-Euclidean Adventures in Mountain Climbing. Published posthumously in 1952, the novel was never finished and ends mid-sentence. Through the 'interpenetration of symbols and concrete reality' the novel condenses Daumal's wide-ranging philosophical thought into the narrative of a group's journey towards a mythical mountain.

The artists had the option of either creating new work or choosing existing work that they felt resonated with these themes. In most cases, the works were created specifically for the exhibition, although some existing pieces were also included.

Barry White: The exhibition is entitled *Come Together*. How do you feel about how the three bodies of work have come together in the exhibition?

Clodagh Emoe: The actuality of putting together this exhibition enabled me to distinguish the diverse interpretations that arose from our initial point of departure. Observing the tangents that each of us took and the unforeseen crossovers that permeated the work was made possible when the work was situated in the gallery space. I feel that much of the work in *Come Together* conveys a sense of the transitional: an elusive, in-between state.

Linda Quinlan: There are a number of transformations that occur to the work by taking it from the isolation and safety of a studio situation and placing it with other works in a public context. An integral aspect of my practice is to allow myself to make a number of decisions while installing. I try to keep some space for the scope of the work to develop and experimentation to occur. Of course one does feel differently about the work and how it is effected when placing it with other pieces. It has been interesting observing the connectivity and narratives arising from the work coming together.

What, if anything, do you feel your distinct practises share?

Nina Canell: There appears to be a common interest in improvisation that occurs throughout the different stages of the processes of our practices. For me, the search or drift when locating and assembling materials and objects is vital to the artistic process and I think that this is something I share with both Linda and Clodagh. I also recognise the handling of scale. There seems to be a value in relating the object to a human as opposed to a space and an interest in how objects are negotiated and shifted by the presence of a human being.

What aspects of *Mount Analogue* influenced the development of the work and how?

LQ: *Mount Analogue* does not offer a resolved solution. The book itself was never completed, but it does provide reference points from which our exploration can begin. The responsibility falls onto the individual, and from this point of departure we must take hold and control our own understanding of the world. Much of the work I created examines how meaning is ascribed to an object and the negotiation of entry points employed or necessary to interpret an artwork.

NC: Daumal's novel provided a common starting point and a shared experience with the other artists as we were about to embark on this project. However, there are elements in *Mount Analogue* which I recognise as specifically integral to my own work, and his unique voice has added to my perspective and inquiries – there is a certain simplicity in his writing and language which allows for a beautifully open-ended way of conveying a fictional account. In short, I truly admire the paradox of how Daumal seems to reduce an event to great complexity!

CE: The tiny comma that brought an abrupt halt to the story of *Mount Analogue* caused me to shudder. Incompleteness is unsettling, unfixed positions and ill-defined entities unnerve us. It was important for me to investigate this disconcerting feeling to make sense of Daumal's novel and with it, his philosophy. Heidegger said that we are in effect unfinished projects. The view, that we are not "complete", for want of a better word, nor it seems, will we ever be, has prompted me to create the projection *Doppio* specifically for the show.

In *Mount Analogue*, the mountain represents a bridge of sorts between heaven and earth, the material world and the immaterial beyond.

Would you agree that your work in general is situated on a boundary between the material and immaterial?

CE: The notion of disorientation and the dissolution of the self has been an underlying theme that has informed my practice for a number of years. I believe that many of us are seduced by the void and the notions pertaining to it, but lack not just the physical, but more so, the mental state to truly succumb to it. Often my work tries to articulate this unfulfilled desire.

For me the bed is an interesting site, a space where the three most significant events of human existence occur: conception, birth and death. These momentous gaps in time straddle the material world and the immaterial beyond. The strange fissure that occurs between wake and sleep is similar in this respect.

NC: A great weight of my practice is situated in and around this boundary – allowing the tangible to be (come) intangible, and consequently, the intangible to be (come) tangible. Much of our experience is just this – intangible – and therefore unspeakable. Perhaps my work is a way for me to compile an alternative sculptural vocabulary.

LQ: *We Forgot To Write The End*, the film which I made for the exhibition, began as a recreation of the only moving imagery of the Thylacine.¹ No other imagery of this animal was ever gathered or documented in the wild, only ever in captivity on the verge of its extinction. We're left to decipher its existence from material inaccurately depicting its natural behaviour or environment. This led me to think about how we can recreate or interpret something that no longer exists.

René Daumal sought a 'practical method for perfecting one's life here on this planet'. Are you interested in making work that suggests a new way of living?

NC: I would prefer to think that by making things happen, the work provides a place where relational moments can occur. Like the kind of sober lucidity that Maureen Gallace's work suggests in *The Paradise* [27],² perhaps a 'practical method for perfecting one's life here on this planet' is by dreaming – by embracing the uncertainties and possibilities of the mind.

LQ: I wouldn't say that I was offering a new way of living but perhaps presenting a way of observing or understanding the world. I'm not sure that art is a way of perfecting our world but what I can offer is a will to maintain a practice that continues to question, maintain awareness and come from a relevant critical position. The practice of searching for moments of connectivity, discovery and understanding informs my work. I became interested in the subsequent dissolution or shift of this comprehension, resulting from situations of doubt, anxiety or the voyage into the unknown.

CE: I am interested in looking at ways of loosening the insistent hold we have on the constructed notion of the self. My heroes are those who have managed to accomplish this. Two events that spring to mind would be the day in 1969 when the Italian artist, Alighiero Boetti locked the door of his studio filled with his possessions leaving everything exactly as it was. The British artist Michael Landy went one step further in 2001. His work *Breakdown*, involved the systematic destruction of all of the artist's belongings, 7,006 items to be precise.

Do you feel that there is a hopeful spirit to the exhibition?

LQ: For me the exhibition stands as a point of intersection, a place of convergence for the work to reside and rest for a time. The simple activity of people sharing a common goal and motivated to act and move forward in a constructive manner for the benefit of their vested interests suggests a sense of hope and possibility.

NC: I think there is spirit in the exhibition, but not necessarily purely a hopeful spirit. There is definitely hopefulness in the *act* of dreaming, but as we know, this does not always imply hopeful content. The manner in which one can escape from the act of seeing with one's own eyes, through experimenting with drugs as in the case of Daumal, or by dreaming as with the main protagonist in *Waking Life*, also engages with the ghostly aspects of experience which I find are equally present in the exhibition.

1. A carnivorous marsupial, native to Australia, which became extinct during the 20th century.

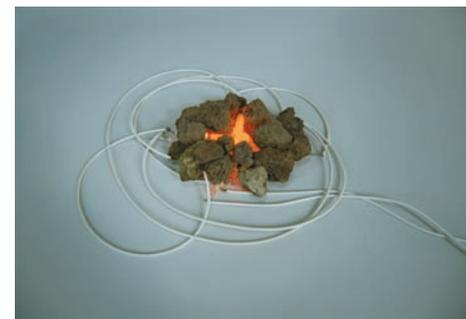
2. An exhibition of paintings by Maureen Gallace ran in Gallery 2, concurrently with *Come Together*.



We forgot to write the end
2007
Linda Quinlan



It seems that I would always like to be somewhere I'm not
2007
Clodagh Emoe



Bag of bones
2007
Nina Canell

COME TOGETHER

I

"Sleep through the rest of my days..."

Joanna Newsom, *Cosmia*

The phone is ringing. No, not ringing: buzzing, pulsing. The squat black handset is suddenly, alarmingly animated on the bedside table — newly mobile, a living cell — its persistent, pestering vibrations shaking a half-empty glass of water that begins rhythmically clinking against the metallic base of a small lamp. The clattering and murmuring music made by this random coming-together of objects quickly wakes me from a strange and dream-filled daytime sleep that I have accidentally fallen into while vainly attempting to work at home. Bewildered, I sit up and stare stupidly around. The swaying room seems wholly alien: the air feels thicker, more liquid than it should be — as if I have woken up underwater. Reaching for the still-fidgeting phone I see that no known name has registered, the glowing display showing only an unfamiliar sequence of digits. I answer with a low, croaking "hello?" and several slow seconds pass before I hear a voice — distant, male, elderly — asking with audible anxiety, "Son? Is that you? Where are you?" It is obviously a wrong number, but for a few fretful moments I am utterly confused; the sudden, disconcerting unreality of my just-woken state-of-mind instantly heightened by these fraught enquiries. I apologise to the worried stranger on the other end of the line and hang up, learning nothing more of him, abruptly ending this odd, momentary meeting of private worlds.

However fleeting, forgettable and meaningless these minor events and vague sensations may be, their lingering after-effects shape my mood as I return to the scene of the abandoned morning's work. In the now-silent room, I gaze over scattered fragments of a writing project, contemplating my earlier optimistic efforts at piecing together thoughts on the work of three peculiarly talented artists: Nina Canell, Clodagh Emoe and Linda Quinlan. Looking again at the assorted plans, lists, notes, drafts and distracted doodles that litter the landscape of the desk (a terrain bordered by a forbidding mountain-range of largely unopened books), I see again that I have noted, here and there, a shared emphasis on eccentric combinations and transformations of objects in the work of these artists. I see that I have been drawn to highlight a common questioning of the reliability and fixity of physical forms — prompting in each case profound anxieties regarding the impact of an 'uncertain' physical world on our precarious subjectivities. And I see too that I have tentatively proposed that each of these artists in their own way strives to create or identify points of connection and overlap between what we might choose to think of as 'parallel' spheres of being: seeking correspondences between visible and invisible phenomena, encouraging 'conversations' between real and imagined realities, mapping in-between spaces between waking and dreaming worlds. But where, I wonder in these still-hazy waking moments, might such half-thoughts take me? And to what extent can I comprehend their implications?

"The idea is to remain in a state of constant departure while always arriving..."
from *Waking Life*, dir. Richard Linklater

My mind wanders back to two small photographs by Clodagh Emoe: two ambiguous images of interiors that seem, suddenly, to represent two places at once, or one place twice. The first is a view of a basic, somewhat sad and dreary, single bedroom. A pair of blood-red flip-flops and a slightly ruffled orange bedspread signal the presence of a current occupant, but otherwise this space looks barely lived-in, barely there at all. Presumably, it is temporary accommodation of some kind: functional, sparsely adorned, both homely and unhomely. Above a solitary mirror, a kitsch sign bids 'farewell!' in a florid script to the anonymous resident: a 'friendly' goodbye, but also a curious welcome for any new arrivals — a welcome made still more curious by the creepy addition of a tiny skull drawing that lends ghoulish finality to the sign's hokey send-off. The second, similarly unsettled, photograph promises a different 'domestic' view: this time from a deserted living room directly into a dense, sunlit forest. But this is a frustrated view, as any proper appreciation of the sumptuous natural scene is impeded by the blunt presence of another troubling text — an elaborate graffiti painted onto the broad windowpane that sends out an uneasy personal message: "it seems that I would always like to be somewhere where I'm not." The 'I' in Emoe's work is caught, like the image itself, between the attractions of different positions, existing restlessly in a liminal state.

Such an in-between condition may be disorientating, or productive and pleasurable in its indeterminacy, and Emoe seems to maintain, or repeatedly initiate, a restive search for ideas and experiences that might take her to such real or imagined territory. A series of purposefully unfinished pencil drawings of star systems demonstrate a hopeful but futile effort to map one's position in the cosmos; a crudely crafted cardboard model of a long outmoded Soviet space-travel simulator offers a modest vision of humbled human aspiration; a projected photomontage morphs together the faces of the artist and a close friend as they hold hands in a forest — a sly homage to the committed 'dualism' of Alighiero 'e' Boetti. Each might be understood as pairing high-minded aspiration with a type of dissolution; each implies a quest for something ultimately intangible — and on noting this strong current in Emoe's work I am, in time, taken elsewhere, reminded of other elusive subjects: my mind turning to the expeditions 'in search of the miraculous' undertaken in the recent work of Linda Quinlan. How, though, can I begin to pithily summarise the diverse and deep fascinations of Quinlan's art? In her work she travels rapidly back and forth from the mundane to the marvelous: exploring; collecting; avidly pursuing paths beyond the everyday world. One literal journey has proved particularly impactful on the development of present interests: a recent residency in Tasmania, during which she set out, for example, to study the cultural and geographical importance of wilderness on this island state (contemplating too the powerful pull exerted by vast Antarctica to the south) but also to track and film the dazzling McNaught comet as it lit the Tasmanian night sky while passing

within a measly thirty million kilometres or so from our sun. Such grandly ambitious concerns gradually, inexorably, combine in Quinlan's work with more commonplace factors: so, for instance the unimaginable energy of competing, converging inter-planetary forces is representationally condensed as a set of small, muted paintings — the source for these elegantly diagrammatic depictions being a second-hand physics text found in a Hobart thrift store. Or, there is the mysterious case of the Tasmanian Tiger: a wilderness animal hunted into extinction by settlers, but one that remains an enduring focus of routine lore and speculation as sightings of the nocturnal creature continue to be reported. Moved and intrigued by a 1934 photograph of the 'last' of these odd, striped dogs (the term 'tiger' is aptly inaccurate) Quinlan has fantasised a life for this lost beast, creating a haunting short film that allows us to observe the behaviour of another indigenous canine. Touchingly, the film is entitled 'We forgot to write the end'...

This open-endedness is a marked tendency of Quinlan's wide-ranging practice. (Other titles easily confirm this uncontroversial assessment: 'I don't think they'll ever catch us', or even 'I can hardly sit still'.) A principle of unorthodox connectivity — of unexpected coming together — is advocated; and this essential, playful policy is most strikingly apparent in her compelling combinations of found and constructed objects. These sculptural works have, at times, a wonderfully goofy austerity, setting in play tensions between the specific objecthood of these simple, often fragile, forms but also (contradicting minimalism, maybe) between the abundant or uncertain cultural associations of the assorted materials. However physically 'fixed' these 'things' may appear to be, they become loosened by the flux of spontaneous reinterpretation. Perhaps also, however, it is not an especially bold interpretation that allows me (as I continue to prepare my own slender responses) to note a near automatic correspondence between these tactics, these aesthetic predilections, and the shape-shifting, synergetic, seductively puzzling sculptures and installations created by Nina Canell. These works are alive with the excitements and anxieties of unlikely connections, the multi-sensory stimulations of Canell's objects and environments seeming to have their source in an unusually heightened instinct for ambiguity and paradox — there is a weighty whimsicality, an eccentric seriousness to all that she does — so that again we find ourselves in a state somewhere beyond the firm ground of the familiar world. The recent work 'Bag of Bones' is typical in its intimate outlandishness: a few handfuls of volcanic rocks (found on the slopes of Vesuvius) are clustered over orange neon bulbs while white electric cables curl around and away like wisps of low-lying smoke: the 'fire' we can see here, the burning heat we might sense, are obviously illusory, yet this modest arrangement of mostly solid things is clearly conceptually molten. Another new work (planned to be placed in close proximity to the last) is identified as *A Meditation on Minerals and Bats* and

fleetingly turns — through a process of imaginative, associative alchemy — a set of hanging maracas, bizarrely and beautifully covered in knitted socks, into two sleeping bats. Maybe again, in this meditation on visual, material and crucially *sonic* potential the strange mid-air objects can also be mentally re-imagined as a set of suspended microphones. And maybe not. That there is no definitive reading or meaning or status that can be guaranteed for these curious sculptures — and so too for worldly phenomena more generally — would seem to be a proposition that is highly valued. In *The Case of the Homesick Cattle* a more literal process of transformation takes place, but it is nevertheless artfully, scientifically 'magical'. Making elaborate use of the humdrum domestic buckets and basins that Canell has expressed an odd enthusiasm for, this work involves a process of irrefutable physical change brought about through the coming together of matter and energy — sonic signals (unheard by the human ear) buzz repeatedly into pools of water, creating a pulsing, vibrating effect that causes the water to evaporate and yet somehow linger over the collection of containers as a delicate mist. The altered atmospheric conditions of the exhibition space — the subtle, ongoing climate change — might well alert us to the certain instability and unavoidable impermanence of our lived surroundings: delighting or disturbing us as the solidity of the waking world shimmers before our eyes.

III

"I was aware of his thought like a force as palpable as heat, light or wind. This force seemed to be an exceptional capacity for seeing ideas as external facts and for establishing new connections between what seemed to be utterly disparate ideas"
René Daumal, *Mount Analogue*.

At the peak of a pile of books on my chaotic desk there is a copy of *Mount Analogue* — the somewhat obscure short novel left agonizingly unfinished when the tragically youthful French writer René Daumal died of tuberculosis in 1944. I have read this strange, incomplete novel several times now and still find myself (or lose myself) struggling to comprehend its wild logic, agonizing over the implications of its extraordinary claims. This same, slim volume has been recently studied by Nina Canell, Clodagh Emoe and Linda Quinlan as the three artists prepared to show their work together and so Daumal's tale has remained a rewarding, unexhausted resource as I have made efforts to draw out what might be the core characteristics of the parallel realities constituting this exhibition's 'multiverse'. Central to this dizzying novel fragment is a singular vision of a fantastical realm that is, adeptly and paradoxically, made 'real'. With great imaginative and intellectual legerdemain, Daumal spins a yarn that brings us on a journey to an undiscovered country — a new world hidden within the known world — a land where a mystical mountain is said to offer a sure connection between earth and the heavens. By any ordinary reasoning, the proposed destination is an 'impossible' one — a vast island terrain not featured on any map, its central peak reaching higher than any other on the planet — and yet the philosophical explorers imagined by Daumal conceive of a way to not only turn long-standing symbolic cultural associations of mountains into natural certainties, but also to map co-ordinates for the invisible. They perfect a plan to bring incompatible worlds together and yet as they set sail on a ship called *The Impossible* we can never be quite sure if their mission is profoundly absurd or absurdly profound. It is a narrative that we may choose to read as both "magically untrue and magically more than true" (as the critic James Wood has said of imagery in the writing of Joseph Roth) or we may decide, in the way of an old argument offered by Tertullian concerning religious faith, that we should believe *because* it is absurd. Like the works of Canell, Emoe, and Quinlan though, the questions need not — can not — be properly resolved; everything hangs like the 'concluding' moment of *Mount Analogue* on a moment of doubt, on an unending pause, on a sentence that finishes with a comma,



The case of homesick cattle (detail)
2007
Nina Canell

Installation view
2007
The Douglas Hyde Gallery



Drawings and wall sculpture by Clodagh Emoe. Floor and hanging sculptures by Nina Canell.



DVD projection and sculptures by Linda Quinlan



List of exhibits for *Come Together*

Nina Canell

The Case of the Homesick Cattle
2007
Buckets, pots, basins, mist machines,
250 litres of water, polythene
Courtesy the artist and
mother's tankstation

Bag of Bones
2007
Neon, stones
Private collection

A Meditation on Minerals and Bats
2007
Maracas, knitted socks, string
Private collection

Wintersun, Sleepy Tongue
2007
Bone, neon
Courtesy the artist and
mother's tankstation

Clodagh Emoe

Work no. 02, The Transient
Communion
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 03
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 04
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 04x
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 06.9
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 07
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Work no. 11
2007
Pencil on paper
Courtesy the artist

Space Simulator
2007
Mixed media
Courtesy the artist

Doppio
2007
Slide projection
Courtesy the artist

It Seems as if I would always
like to be Somewhere Where
I'm Not
2006
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

The Farewell
2006
Photograph
Courtesy the artist

Linda Quinlan

We forgot to write the end.
(Filmed on location at Beaumaris
Zoo, Tasmania, the site where the
last Thylacine died in captivity)
2007
DVD projection
Courtesy the artist

I don't think they'll ever catch us
2007
Cement, plaster, metal, gold thread,
Sculpture, glass, Bakelite necklace
Courtesy the artist

I can hardly sit still
2007
Wood, oil paint, Perspex,
watercolour painting
Courtesy the artist

Trying to take place
2007
Wood, paint, leather, rabbit
fur, porcelain, cardboard,
Bakelite, resin, modelling wax,
Polaroid
Courtesy the artist

We made time
2007
Fibreglass, paint, modelling wax,
cement, metal
Courtesy the artist

Things surround us
2007
Oil paint, balsa, wood, copper
Courtesy the artist

It begins on those last days
2007
Leather suede, resin, feathers
Courtesy the artist

Colophon

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And you,
what do you seek?

René Daumal

