

SQU ARE

John Curtin Gallery

12 - 30 March 2007

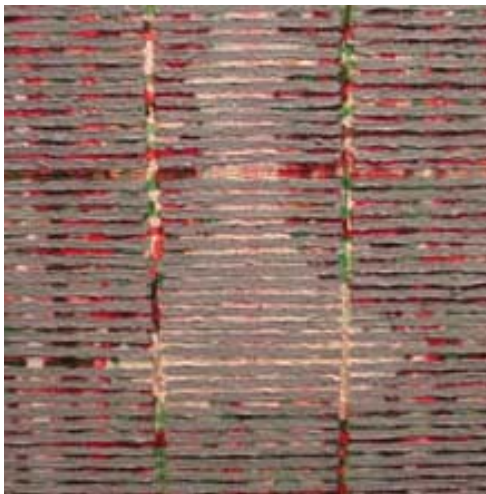
SQU ARE

An exploration of the square format in Western Australian art and design.

Although our analytical tools for understanding and interpreting art and design have increased considerably over the last decade, we too often take for granted certain basic choices artists and designers make when planning their work. *SQUARE* examines one of those assumptions by exploring shape and, in particular, the decision to adopt the square format.

In the face of a conspiracy of rectangles where almost every traditional and current format for art, design and the presentation of images is rectangular - A4, foolscap, magazines, books, the screen (television, computer or film etc) - artists and designers still revert to the square format for the design potential it offers.

With the CD and the Long Playing Record, the square does have one natural ally but, in general,



Jurek Wybraniec, *Counter onslaught (images from the Western horizon)*, detail, acrylic and oil on masonite, 1991, 300 x 300mm each

sanctioned formats deny the square. What is it then about a square format that attracts artists and designers and how is it used to advantage in the creation of creative work?

Using works from the Curtin University of Technology Art Collection and some additional borrowed works from private collections, this exhibition investigates various themes and topics to determine: what benefits accrue from the adoption of the square format; what meanings can be mined from its associations and history; and how the design constraints and possibilities it brings can enhance certain readings.

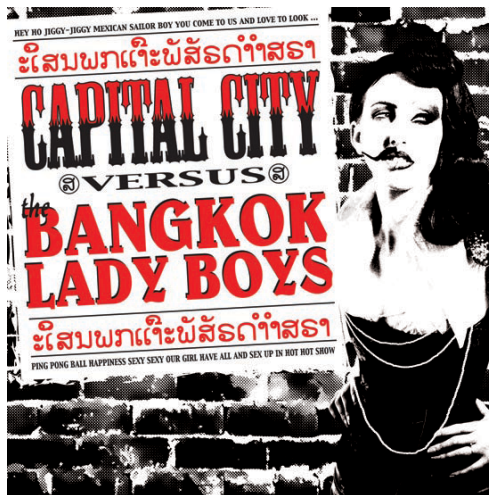
To develop these themes, various categories of picture making and art production are examined. For example, with the genre of landscape, artists employ the

more common long rectangular format as a device that pre-supposes extension out to the sides and to a lesser extent up into the sky and down towards the viewer's feet. The illusion of space has been created in Western art through the conventions of perspective where we read back into a picture with vanishing points directing our eye to the site of maximum distance. Generally in this system objects that are higher in the picture plane are further away, those closer are lower down and objects in our peripheral vision move outwards away from us.

On the contrary, the square truncates. A square format imposes a sense of stasis and constraint that limits the flow outward and each artist who tackles the 'square landscape' must find their own solution to engage and energize the eye. Margaret Woodward in *Elovera Hillside* disrupts the sense of stability by letting the major elements of the composition literally tumble out of the bottom right-hand side of the picture with the speed and energy of a waterfall, while Guy Grey-Smith in *Above the Sea* creates a springing tension from the spray of foam that pushes the dark way up under pressure between the heavy weight of the dark forms hovering above.

Similarly in portraiture the vertically oriented rectangle is favoured, but for some artists the challenge of the square format offers exciting possibilities. Vlast Zanolis's portrait of *Margaret Sailor & Child* and Fred Gilbert's self-portrait both exploit the centrality of the image within the square.

The square format also implies a grid; the formal organizations of flat geometric shapes that



Lucas Bowers, *Capital City versus the Bangkok Ladyboys*, inkjet print, 2007, courtesy of the Artist

imply the expansive field of the grid outside their rectangular frame. It is this device that Jurek Wybraniec and Sandra Leveson exploit in their works in this exhibition.

Within the alchemical tradition, the notion of 'Squaring the Circle' has a particular significance and numerous artists with works in the Curtin Collection make reference to this reading. Brian McKay acknowledges that history while simultaneously adopting the sense of stability that it offers. In his large painting *M.W.S.* he incorporates those ideas with Bauhaus design principles which have been a central component of his artistic practice.

For artists and designers who create covers for CDs and LPs of local recording artists, the square is a given. Lucas Bowers finds the challenge of the square both exciting and intimidating as he searches for something that will attract the eye in the vast array of competitive images in a rack. Identifying the image that will self-select in the viewer's eye and also meet the requirements of the record company executive and the musicians demands a capacity to continuously innovate and re-work.

Through a limited selection of works from the Curtin University of Technology Art Collection, this exhibition examines some of the key themes that underscore the choice of the square format, its popularity in local art and design practice, and its reference back to earlier traditions of picture-making.

Ted Snell
Curator

LIST OF WORKS

All works Curtin University of Technology Art Collection unless otherwise stated.

Gary Aitken
Things are not always as they appear
chalk, ink, watercolour, acrylic, handmade paper,
1993, 600 x 600mm

Lucas Bowers
Blood red saviours of fashion
inkjet print, 2007
courtesy of the Artist

Lucas Bowers
Capital City - Bad Money
inkjet print, 2007
courtesy of the Artist

Lucas Bowers
The Cure for Communism
inkjet print, 2007
courtesy of the Artist

Lucas Bowers
Capital City versus the Bangkok Ladyboys
inkjet print, 2007
courtesy of the Artist

Lucas Bowers
Tokyo 2040 reformed
inkjet print, 2007
courtesy of the Artist

Fred Gilbert
Self Portrait
oil on canvas, 1981, 1210 x 1230mm

Guy Grey-Smith
Above the sea
oil paint on composition board, 1968, 1200 x 1200mm

Jack Jampijinpa
Emu Dreaming
acrylic polymer paint on canvas, 1987, 912 x 922mm

Janaki Lennie
Jungle
oil on board, 1994, 460 x 460mm

Sandra Leveson
Optic lenses
silkscreen print, 1030 x 1030mm

Brian McKay
M. W. S.
oil on canvas, 1978, 1610 x 1610mm

Margaret Woodward
Elovera Hillside
oil on canvas, 1980, 1850 x 1850mm

Jurek Wybraniec
Counter onslaught (images from the Western horizon)
acrylic and oil on masonite, 1991, 300 x 300mm each

Vlase Zanalis
Margaret Sailor and child
oil paint on board, c.1968-1973, 750 x 750mm

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