

John Di Stefano (MFA, UCLA, USA; PhD, Massey University, New Zealand) is an artist, writer and curator born in Montréal, Canada. His gallery and screen-based works have been shown internationally for over 20 years, and his work has been selected by Artforum (New York, USA) in its yearly contemporary art survey. His most recent film, *You Are Here*, has been selected in official competition at the 2010 Festival International du Documentaire (FIDM) in Marseille, France. His critical writing has appeared in many publications including Art Journal (New York), and he is the New Zealand editor for Art Asia Pacific (New York). He is currently Coordinator of Postgraduate Studies at the National Art School, Sydney, Australia. [www.johndistefano.info]

Ann Shelton (MFA, The University of British Columbia, Canada) was born in Timaru, New Zealand. Shelton is recognised as one of New Zealand's leading photographic artists, most recently her work was included in *Images Recalled (Bilder auf Abruf)*, Germany's largest photographic biennale. Her work is seen regularly in New Zealand and internationally. This year Shelton received the CoCA Anthony Harper Contemporary Art Award judged by Lara Strongman. Shelton lectures in Fine Art and Photography at Massey University in Wellington, New Zealand and is currently Chair of Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington's artist-run space. She is represented by Starkwhite and Paul McNamara Gallery. [www.annshelton.com]

Martin Patrick is a Wellington-based historian and critic and Senior Lecturer in Fine Arts at Massey University.



Double Take / Time Frame received support from the Massey University, School of Fine Arts, Strategic Research Fund.

PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM

BUILDING 94: 23-27 CARDIGAN STREET, CARLTON



BADDAGINNIE RUN

Managed by the RMIT School of Art
CURATOR/COORDINATOR Stephen Gallagher
ADMINISTRATOR/WEB DESIGN Andrew Tetzlaff **GRAPHIC DESIGN** Gracia Haby & Louise Jennison
EMAIL schoolofartgalleries@rmit.edu.au **WEB** www.schoolofartgalleries.dsc.rmit.edu.au
TELEPHONE +61 3 9925 4971 **GALLERY OPENING HOURS** Monday – Friday 10.00am to 5.00pm



PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM



Double Take / Time Frame

JOHN DI STEFANO [Australia]
ANN SHELTON [New Zealand]

Curated by MARTIN PATRICK

FRIDAY 30 JULY TO THURSDAY 19 AUGUST 2010

OPENING THURSDAY 29 JULY 5-7PM

FLOOR TALK FRIDAY 30 JULY 1-1.30PM

Reconfigured Realities:

On the recent work of John Di Stefano and Ann Shelton

*We can certainly say, with Freud, that we have “surmounted” belief in the return of the dead, of animate forces in nature and even belief in the afterlife. However, the presence of the past in the cinema is also the presence of the body resurrected and these images can trigger, if only by association, questions that still seem imponderable: the nature of time, the fragility of human life and the boundary between life and death.*¹

Laura Mulvey

*People take pictures of each other/just to prove that they really existed.*²

The Kinks

How do images act to determine and configure our memories? What exactly is a memorial? When does a return to a previous spot or encounter become something new, reenacted and recreated once again? Are our memories seemingly fluid and ephemeral entities, or instead caught, trapped still images, as if individual film negatives, or those comprising a larger cinematic sequence?

I wonder about such matters when considering—and reconsidering—works of the artists John Di Stefano and Ann Shelton. Much of the strength in their particular approaches involves their shared interest in the temporal aspects of photomedia. Di Stefano and Shelton stop and slow time, carefully reconstructing and framing their images, inviting viewers to become involved in the process of relooking, reexamining, a kind of second chance, a *double take*. The artists emphasize these acts of reconstruction via their specific

and refined aesthetic choices: digital editing and printing, scale and lighting, pairing/montaging of images. Both Di Stefano and Shelton call attention to their particular working methodologies: video and film cameras as tools for initiating metanarratives, such as to interrogate the very premises upon which their artworks are based. In the current collaborative exhibition, the artists contend with closely related aspects of temporality, remembrance, and commemoration. Di Stefano and Shelton in their images record, with great subtlety, the residual and sometimes startling traces of historically and psychologically charged events and locations.

Ann Shelton’s photographic installation is comprised of works drawn from her *Public Places* (2001-03) series. In these images, Shelton records the decrepit exterior of one of the buildings at Seacliff Asylum in Otago, in which the writer Janet Frame once resided as a patient; the wooded locale near Daytona Beach where infamous US serial killer Aileen Wuornos deposited her first victim; and finally, the scene of another notorious crime in Christchurch where teenager Juliet Hulme and her friend Pauline Parker killed Parker’s mother. All of Shelton’s images are printed as doublets, as if mirrored and splaying outward from a central axis/fold, seemingly to challenge the fixity of any meanings we can belatedly ascribe to these pastoral scenes, now characterized primarily by their clarity and quietude.

What can the site of a crime, a murder even, tell us? Not much at all really. We might be able to ‘x’ the spot, as Ann Shelton has, but as for its actuality, the site becomes an opaque representation, unyielding of any relevant details. Shelton has freely admitted that as for the locales themselves, a measure of creative latitude is involved: ‘they could be a little bit wrong. I

followed all kinds of instructions to find these places; practicing a kind of ad-hoc detective work.’³ What is the point of Shelton’s creative investigation, then? To my mind, she calls attention to the enormous distance between once-historic events and the now almost entirely mundane settings in which they occurred. Such settings are in a sense blank, but ready to be filled in by the viewer.

Given this blankness, one might recall that Shelton’s images crucially return to historic scenes which have been in turn already represented and mediated via filmic narratives, whether those of New Zealand or Hollywood cinema. The blankness of the recorded site thus mimics the blank screen anticipating a dreamlike, mythic projection, an area of escape, transport, a flight from quotidian reality, nonetheless inspired by and imbricated within such a reality. Ann Shelton has herself stated, concerning the *Public Places* series:

What these images have in common is not their status as crime scenes. Much more specifically, these are places where egregious and ill-fated events took place, or were purported to have taken place; spaces where urban myths were born and then exported beyond through the mediums of cinema and the novel. ... Somewhat disquieting and out of kilter with seminal narratives of national identity, these are anxious stories full of panic and ghostly pitch.⁴

John Di Stefano’s projects have also investigated the complex interconnections between cinematic realities (the work of Pier Paolo Pasolini), subcultural settings (the discotheque and gay identity), and diasporic movement (*You Are Here*, 2009), most

often in clear relation to his own subjectivity. Di Stefano’s projection *Ashes [Amsterdam]* (2008) is a looped and digitally manipulated (using slow motion) video sequence in which the artist records his visit to the city of Amsterdam. There he stops at the canal-side ‘Homomonument’—the International Gay and Lesbian Monument—consisting of three triangular elements constructed of pink granite, with inscriptions including the following: “For friendship, such an immeasurable longing.”

As he lingers there, Di Stefano hears the pealing of bells from the Westerkerk church, noted by Anne Frank in her diaries, watches the canal boats pass, and by chance documents two other visitors to the Homomonument, as they have their own solemn and psychologically invested encounter, ritualistically spreading ashes into the canal. The artist has written his own acute retrospective appraisal of this situation, worth quoting at length:

As a witness, I inhabit a space of betweenness with regards to the event transpiring (spreading of ashes) and with regards to the documentary object being produced (video recording of the spreading of ashes). There is both a connection to the event and a separation from it. This entails the ability to feel or empathize as well as the sense of not fully embodying the event due to my position away from it (behind the camera and in the realm of the anonymous). ... My being-there is constituted not only in my role as camera operator, but also as a human witness with subjectivity that provides the potential to feel without being directly involved in the events transpiring before the camera. In this way my betweenness might also be described as a doubling, where an affective encounter creates meaning and engages with the performative.⁵

I would assert that aspects of *doubling*, whether actually, metaphorically, or pictorially become integral threads linking the highly sophisticated works on view in *Double Take / Time Frame*. Moreover, my sense is that viewing these works within the same exhibition context will serve to set off further doublings, coincidences, and reverberations. By distorting and transforming their images via slowness and repetition, Di Stefano and Shelton’s initially fragmentary evidence gains a new status as highly compelling and entirely reconfigured realities.

Martin Patrick

¹ Mulvey, Laura. *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2006) 53.

² “People Take Pictures of Each Other,” written by Ray Davies, *The Kinks are The Village Green Preservation Society*, 1968.

³ “True Crime: a conversation between Ann Shelton and Chris Kraus,” in Shelton, Ann. *Public Places* (Auckland: Rim Publishing, 2003) 10.

⁴ “Statement,” *Public Places*, 7.

⁵ Di Stefano, John, “You Are Here: Moving Image + Performative Acts + Documentary Paradigm,” *Performance: Design*, D. Hannah & O. Harsløf, Eds. (Copenhagen: Museum Tusulanum Press; Copenhagen University Press, 2008) 243.



Right
John Di Stefano
Ashes [Amsterdam] (still), 2008
Single channel video projection, 5 minute loop

Outside Pages
Ann Shelton
Cell, (after An Angel at My Table)
Seacliff Asylum, North Otago, New Zealand, 2003
Diptych, C Type print
1.2 x 1.5 m each panels