



NATASHA JOHNS-MESSENGER

Working image, 2004

Natasha Johns-Messenger led the Drawing Together workshops at ArtPlay with primary school children aged between ten to twelve years during September 2004.

Children were asked to look closely and to explore the interior and exterior architecture of the ArtPlay building, and produced drawings in response to their observations. Details of the objects and space were also captured through the use of digital photography, with the resulting photographs being projected onto the ArtPlay Gallery wall for their peers to view.

The workshop offered children a rare and exciting opportunity to work with a site-specific installation artist. This experience was designed to expand the children's vocabulary of methodologies, presenting alternative approaches to those the children are used to in the school art room environment.

We are delighted to have a permanent outcome of the workshops in the form of a site-specific installation located in the ArtPlay lift. This is the work of the children working in collaboration with Natasha Johns-Messenger.

ArtPlay is a centre in the City of Melbourne that promotes creativity in children. By placing professional artists alongside children on collaborative projects ArtPlay seeks to engage young people in a dialogue about contemporary arts and culture. To find out more about ArtPlay visit [www.artplay.com.au](http://www.artplay.com.au)

RL: What at the Birrarung Marr site captured your interest as an artist?

NJM: Views of the Yarra River and the Melbourne cityscape are of particular interest to me at the Birrarung Marr site. This is because my work will pictorialise and re-locate these views inside a structure that will 'set up' real-time photographic views.

RL: What are some of the ideas central to the work you have executed for *SKINNED*?

NJM: The work I have produced for *SKINNED* uses a simple mirror mechanism to represent (re-present) aspects of the site in four real-time views. Site and participant viewers (and whatever happens to be going on at the time) become the subject matter of the work. This work also deals with stripping back (skinning?) a mode of representation to its most basic virtual manifestation, that is, the life-view/the mirror-view.

RL: How do you see those ideas and intentions relating to your practice as a whole?



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*Birrarung Look-box*, detail, 2004  
Steel, concrete sheeting, marine ply and mirror  
180cm x 100cm x 100cm

NJM: My gallery-based installation works utilise the gallery architecture and participant viewers as the subject and spectacle of the work. For *SKINNED*, I have produced an outdoor viewing structure, 'Birrarung Look-box', that relates to the surrounding space in a similar way, i.e. it is a four-way view-box that 'takes in' real-time images of the Birrarung Marr space, immediate scenery and participant viewers.

RL: How do ideas about the city or urban environment inform your practice?

NJM: My installation works centre around a response to generic urban environments (including gallery spaces). The 'idea' of urban spaces is dealt with in physical terms through rearranging its materials, and making new meanings in this way. Because I've lived most of my life in an 'urban environment', and my practice has developed in this context, it is hard to imagine my work as a site-related artist without the 'urban' reference.

RL: How do you expect non-art audiences to respond to your work?

NJM: There is a face-value element to my work, namely the spatial disorientation that is largely a perceptual response – experienced by all who approach the work. A general audience will experience this perceptual shift, without needing any art world context to understand this experience. Beyond this, the work tends to break up social spaces when two strangers look directly at each other through the work. This can be uncomfortable or fun, depending on the viewer.