

Home Invasion

works by claire healy & sean cordeiro

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Introduction

by Russell Storer

For their 1984 essay 'The Fine Art of Gentrification' Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan incisively examined the complex and complicit relationship between contemporary art and real estate.¹ The writers drew attention to the situation in 1980s Manhattan, where the run-down Lower East Side was being overtaken by development, first by artists and galleries, and then by wealthy home-owners, pushing out local residents and carving up communities. Artists were eventually summarily displaced themselves, as the rents shot up and studio spaces disappeared into loft apartments, agents, in a sense, of their own downfall.

Artists everywhere are subject to similar forces, with the fundamental need for space plunging them deeper into the hearts of cities in their search for places to live and work. In the process, as artists do, they transform their environments – the lofts, the



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glashaus, 2004

buildings, the neighbourhoods. Rendering these zones fashionable, they are then often priced out of the market, necessitating moving to more marginal areas, where the cycle begins again. Arising from their own experiences as artists living and working in inner-city Sydney, Claire Healy and Sean Cordeiro's work investigates the functions, processes and life-cycles of buildings: construction, marketing, buying and selling, shifting tenancies, garbage removal, demolition, decay. The materials and contents of buildings provide the stuff of their art as much as the exchanges, histories and meanings imbued within them.

Cordeiro's interest in agit-prop and political Pop art is a rich complement to Healy's concern for physical and institutional structures and how they operate in the world. Together they form a seamless collaboration of shared formal, conceptual and political interests. For their ambitiously conceived and immaculately produced installations, Healy and Cordeiro recover the materials and objects of consumer society and transform them into startling works of formal rigour and beauty. The elegantly ordered strata

of Cordial Home Project (2003) rendered a demolished suburban house as a massive sculpture of almost archaeological significance, while Deceased Estate (2004) bundled the contents of an abandoned studio into a monolithic ball, a monument both to waste and to the precarious and ambiguous social status of artists, marginalised from yet necessarily part of the dominant culture. As Cordeiro puts it, the work is 'a testament to the paradoxically high standard of living artists enjoy in the west and their chronic lack of housing stability.'²

As befitting a practice that questions the nature of buildings and institutions, Healy and Cordeiro also often work in the public arena, including those contexts that are not generally sanctioned by the mainstream art world. The critically derided and wildly popular Sculpture by the Sea and Sculpture in the City exhibitions have provided the platform for some of the artists' most powerful works, including the domesticated army tank of Package Tour (2003); the eerie cabin of Raiders of the Lost Ark (2003) (which featured copulating lovers surrounded by taxidermied beasts in the middle of Martin Place); and

the backyard swimming pool of Healy's Oasis (2001), placed prominently on the beach at Tamarama. The safety zone of the art gallery effectively neuters any sense of subversion or surprise; it is in these public sites that the artists best demonstrate their ability to play with expectations and value systems. Healy and Cordeiro's works retain the hermetic nature of art (you can't enter their buildings) while rehearsing the operations of exchange, construction, and renewal that function in the wider world. Their skill is in demonstrating that these endeavours are not mutually exclusive.

¹ Rosalyn Deutsche and Cara Gendel Ryan, 'The Fine Art of Gentrification', first published in *October*, no. 31, 1984, republished in Annette Michelson, Rosalind Krauss, Douglas Crimp and Joan Copjec (eds), *October: The First Decade*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1987, 151-171

² Sean Cordeiro, notes on Deceased Estate, unpublished, 2004



Deceased Estate

Glashaus, Weil am Rhein, Germany

process, 2004



installation, 2004, materials: entire found detritus from artists' warehouse

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Tollgate

Kiosk, Kleinhüningen, Basel, Switzerland

installation, 2004

detail, 2004, materials: kiosk, wood, string, light

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Maintenance

IASKA, Ballidu, Australia

installation, 2004, materials: derelict house, mdf, paint



Maintenance

by Sean Cordeiro & Claire Healy

Living in the city is a very convenient thing indeed. One of the most convenient things about living in the city is garbage removal. When we moved out of our home in Ashfield, New South Wales, we threw out two tonnes of garbage. This was accumulated in only 24 months of living there!

This wasn't garbage, like beer bottles and decaying foodstuffs. Most of it was old art-works and dilapidated furniture. We aren't wasteful art-collecting furniture-trashers: it's more like a lot of the art we made and furniture we found had merely taken a detour through our house on its way to the garbage heap.

The great thing about throwing things away is that their existence disappears from your mind: into landfill and out of your sense of object permanence. If you are "tidy", you don't need to hang onto anything that links you to your past or reminds you that the laws of entropy apply to you.

Sculptors have a bad reputation for being hoarders. Even the slick design-orientated installation artists of the 21st century have a habit of picking up pieces of trash from the side of the road. The same could be probably said about farmers. They don't seem to



detail, 2004

throw much away. There seem to be limitless possibilities within the junk heaps of farmers. Something useful may be found in deceased cars that are more iron oxide than automobile, or the old farm homes inhabited by pigeons and their poo.

The thing about objects stockpiled on farms across the world is that they do not remain in stasis. Due to the scale of farming technology, if an object such as a plough or seeder is no longer useful, it will not be stored in a room or warehouse. It will be kept outside for future use.

But how far away is that future?

Discarded things left on farms aren't like the trash we get rid of in the big smoke. As city slickers, we throw away stuff, and that's the end of the story. The object's life is over for us. Waste management systems - recycling or landfill - are invisible. Discarded objects are erased from our future.

Stuff found on farms linger. After they have been thrown out, these objects take on a whole new life.

When we came to Ballidu, it was the end of dry season. Everything seemed dead. The grass was sun-bleached and almost white. The tree-branches were dry and withered. You could feel nature's power, but not in the usual sense of verdant greenery or treach-

erous fauna. We could feel nature's power against man. Our sense of time shifted to something more like geological time: slow and fast at the same time, a timescale dwarfing Human Enterprise. We were paddling boogie boarders in an ocean.

As far as we could see, we witnessed human endeavour under the immensity of natural forces. That little tyke with his finger in the dike: human creations in need of vigilant protection from the elements, nature slithering out to reclaim them whenever we turned our backs. We could see this natural force in all the disused objects around us: tyres with grass growing out of their rims, spider- and spiky lizard-infested nests in old wool-bale machines and woodpiles.

We could see this force because the past was not put out of sight.

The abandoned house on Milaby farm appealed to us most. It seemed a natural starting point. The home is the membrane between man and nature; its doors and windows the most obvious delineation between the spaces of man and nature.

Within Maintenance, we violated this junction point. Shapes extruded from the portals of the house desecrated the holy junction between inside and outside. We used Buddhist-orange, highly geometric shapes to describe a force of nature was made to escape a sentimental, anthropomorphic understanding of these forces. We hoped to describe a power comparable to that of the wasp impregnated within insect larvae.



Wasted Consumer Ritual

Gertrude Contemporary Spaces, Melbourne

installation, 2004, materials: shop fittings, bottled water, taxidermied seal, mdf, paint

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Package Tour

Sculpture by the Sea, Sydney

installation, 2003, materials: centurian army tank, milk crates, cargo pallettes, pine, cardboard tubes, deck chairs, esky, barbeque, boogie board, fishing rod, gaffer tape



work, rest, play (escape)

Imperial Slacks Collective, Artspace, Sydney

detail, 2004, materials: telegraph pole, lights, sandbags, chain





Raiders of the Lost Ark

Sculpture in the City, Martin Place, Sydney

installation, 2003

installation, 2003, materials: apalachian hut, taxidermied animals, bedset, mannequins

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The Cordial Home Project

Artspace, Sydney

process, 2003

Solids and Solutions

by David Burrows

It is a hot and humid Summer afternoon in Sydney but the real estate agent from Potts Point is taking ten steps to the dozen, hurrying towards his 2.00 o'clock. It is not everyday that he is invited to value a house with a view of the harbour in Woolloomooloo, a property that, furthermore, stands virtually opposite the W Hotel. The address, 'Artspace 43-51 Cowper Wharf Road', was a little perplexing. A minor complication though which soon evaporated as the estate agent calculated his percentage of a future transaction. And then his excitement doubled as he realised the address he had been given corresponded not to a three bedroom house but a fucking three storey building. He took one last gulp of his orange barley water, draining the bottle, and then entered through the glass doors.

"I thought you wanted a house evaluation?" the agent exclaimed and was surprised when told that this was indeed the case and that the house could be found in the large gallery space on the left. And to his left he found a found a compact stack of wood, bricks and tiles. He realised that each layer of this dusty lasagne had once belonged to a house that had served as somebody's residence; now the pile of stone, timbre and metal could only play host to small rodents and bugs. A minute's silence passed which was followed by a loud belly laugh. The estate agent was not a man who angered easily and he enjoyed a good joke, even when it was made at his own expense. The penny dropped



process, 2003

and he realised he was standing in an art gallery looking at art. He smiled sheepishly, wished everyone good luck with the project while handing out his card - you never know he thought - and then made to leave. But these guys were serious, they wanted to know how much he thought the house was worth.

The estate agent circled the four corners of the stack and passed judgement. "Well in my opinion it is worthless, even as scrap, though it is nicely arranged and ordered. As art, well I'm no expert but I read that a sculpture of a giant pregnant woman sold for \$900,000 the other day. This is just an ugly pile of debris and it smells foul but it is very big. One thing it has going for it is its size. Maybe it is worth a twentieth of what the museum paid for the pregnant woman, I don't know. Now if the house was still standing - in this location - then we could make some real money. We'd be talking six figures, possibly seven depending on the condition of the interior." And this is how the Cordial Home Project, an art-work consisting of the elements of a house arranged in a rectangular block between the wooden pillars of Artspace, was priced at \$950,000.

Or at least that is how I imagined a sale price could have been agreed for the Cordial Home Project. Perhaps this fantasy is not too far fetched as the cost of an artwork is abstract and fluctuates just like the market price of real estate. But to dwell on the economic value of the Cordial Home Project, despite economics being of some concern to the artists Sean Cordeiro and Claire Healy, would be to frame that work as a Duchampian gesture. Something that I do not believe the artists intended.



For the Cordial Home Project is invested with much symbolism, an investment that plays on the irony of Cordeiro and Healy finding themselves in a situation familiar to many of their generation: they are unable acquire a home of their own, a fact they have been keen to state throughout the project. And for some people, to never attain the status of 'home-owner' is to never quite achieve the status of being grown up; owning a home is the very least every middle class parent expects for their offspring. The irony is that the only way the artists could acquire a home was by taking possession of a house due for demolition and dismantling it piece by piece; an act which did not require any financial exchange but that made the newly acquired building homeless. Artspace only provided a temporary abode for the project and during the exhibition the home was only one step away from the scrap heap.

But there was more to the Cordial Home Project than a slice of real estate realism. The colossal effort of installing the 'Home' was a bigger task than Cordeiro and Healy could manage on their own. Many hands assisted the two artists. Much was made of the help given by family and friends when the exhibition opened. And in a 'Zeitgeist' newspaper article Claire Healy was interviewed as a representative of a generation that would never experience the joys of owning a property and therefore banded together with their peers to rent and share accommodation. In various ways, the Cordial Home Project is symbolic of collaboration, partnership and community that the artists value and rely on in their daily lives.



All this made me think of something I read over a decade and a half ago, an angry paragraph written by Jean Baudrillard about a young generation who 'practised solidarity with the greatest of ease' and who were no longer ashamed of or troubled by capital and its accumulation. I realised that he was writing about my own generation and those people a bit older than me. In fact I came to think of the generation that practised 'solidarity with the greatest of ease' as those artists often cited as yBa. The solidarity symbolised by Cordeiro and Healy's project is of a different kind, formed from a shared feeling of disempowerment and the knowledge that for certain ambitions to be realised collaboration and community is necessary.

The complexities of the processes involved in constructing the Cordial Home Project and its attendant symbolism and themes has its precedents in the work of other artists. Dan Graham's analysis of housing in *Homes for America* comes to mind, as does the work of Rachel Whiteread who cast the space of an East London house, a monumental example of her practice of negative formalism. However, it is Gordon Matta Clark that I first thought of when I encountered the Cordial Home Project. Matta Clark trained as an architect and thought of his practice of slicing and cutting up buildings as a critique of a kind. The artists only selected buildings that were uninhabited and due for destruction, he was not happy with the architectural practices of his contemporaries who ignored the life span of buildings and also that many structures did not out-live either their designers or inhabitants. What struck me when I first saw the documentation of Matta Clark's work was that the act of carving and slicing, as beautiful and as breath-taking as the results were,

seemed to express the artist's dissatisfaction with things. Not exactly a violent protest but a statement of his desire to re-draw the Euclidean space of a building and that building's relationship to its exterior and the space of the city.

It is at this point, when I made the comparison with Matta Clark, that I began to consider what might be found beyond the symbolism of the Cordial House Project. I should come clean and say that it is not the expression of dissatisfaction that interests me in an artwork but the form of that expression. What excites me about art is not an allusion to the state of things but the suggestion of what does not exist. This is what I value most in Matta Clark's work. My concern for the form of an expression might be considered old fashioned by some but it is an approach I apply when encountering all works of art.

The Cordial Home Project was perhaps not much to look at and the details of the building and its contents, clues to previous owner's life and times, were hidden in the interior of the structure; but this was something I welcomed as it avoided any suggestion of the humanism evident in Rachel Whiteread's work which sentimentalises the traces of time passed in a domestic space. It was the weight of the piece that impressed most, a dirty mass of second-hand building materials presented in the useless state of an artwork. The impression was one of a negative expression.

Except I remember that the artists stated that they wanted to discover the essence of a house. I am far too skeptical to believe that a house can have an essence or for that



detail, 2003

matter, to believe in essences much at all; but I liked the idea that the artists wanted to reflect upon the status, comforts and security offered by a house, even if this interest in essences was at odds with the artist's declared project of deconstructing the home. But it is the title of the piece that opens up the work, that suggests that the material exhibited by Healy and Cordeiro could be anything other than an inert mass of junk that reflects a dire circumstance of everyday life.

'Cordial Home', of course, implies not just a warm and welcoming 'Home' but a condensed substance that can be reconstituted as a place to dwell in. A solution of some sort is needed for that reconstitution to occur but what that solution might be remains elusive. It is not just a question of pumping mortar or air into a collection of bricks and wood. This is where the real interest and impact of the work lies, with the work's missing ingredient. That no solution is suggested by the artists and that a solution is difficult for the viewer to imagine makes the Cordial Home Project less of a proposition and more of an allegory about the need for change. I have a feeling that the negative aspects of the work outweigh the other elements such as collaboration, an aspect of the work celebrated by the artists. But then whether solutions can be found for the concerns raised by the Cordial Home Project is not necessarily for Cordeiro and Healy to say to but something for society at large to confront.

Claire Healy Curriculum Vitae

Education

2000 - 2004 Master of Fine Arts.

College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales

1993 - 1997 Bachelor of Fine Arts, honours.

College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales

Selected Exhibitions

2004 Deceased Estate, Glashaus Gallery, Weil am Rhein, Germany
Tollgate, Kunst Kiosk Kleinhungingen, Basel, Switzerland
Redneck Dreaming, The Lake Project, (TAV) Gallery, Taipei
Maintenance, From Space to Place, IASKA, Kellerberrin, Australia
Wasted Consumer Ritual, Cult Classic, Gertrude Contemporary Space, Melbourne
Work, Rest, Play(escape); Imperial Slacks Collective, Artspace, Sydney

2003 Package Tour, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi, Sydney
Raiders of the Lost Ark, Master Major and (e)merging, Martin Place, Sydney
The Cordial Home Project, Artspace, Sydney
Dusk 'till Dawn, Mirage, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth

2002 Right Here Right Now, Slacking off, Imperial Slacks, Sydney
You Know You Want To, Playground, First Draft, Sydney
Domestic Bliss, Positive Overkill, Imperial Slacks Gallery, Sydney

2001 Oasis, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi, Sydney
Jump Ship, Period, Blau Grau Gallery, Sydney
Location to Die For, Kudos Gallery, Sydney
Fixed Address, Temporary Fixtures, Artspace, Sydney
ShitHouse, Imperial Alliance, Imperial Slacks Gallery, Sydney
Formica Tower, National Helen Lempriere Sculpture Award, Werribee, Victoria

2000 Scuffstuff, Grey Matter Contemporary Art, Sydney
Makeshift, Downwardly Mobile, Imperial Slacks Gallery, Sydney
Cistern, Eighteen is Enough, Herringbone Gallery, Sydney

1999 Cistern, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi, Sydney
Great Sights of the World, Absorbtion, Ava Galleries, Hymeji, Japan

1997 Vascular Papilla, Artspace, Sydney

Sean Cordeiro Curriculum Vitae

Education

2004 Master of Fine Arts.

College of Fine Arts. University of New South Wales

1997 Bachelor of Fine Arts, honours.

College of Fine Arts. University of New South Wales

Selected Exhibitions

- 2004** Deceased Estate, Glashaus Gallery, Weil am Rhein, Germany
Tollgate, Kunst Kiosk Kleinhuningen, Basel
Redneck Dreaming, The Lake Project, (TAV)Gallery, Taipei
Waiting at Habbo, Asian Traffic, Gallery 4A, Sydney
Maintenance, From Space to Place, IASKA, Kerribellin, Australia
Wasted Consumer Ritual, Cult Classic, Gertrude Contemporary Space, Melbourne
Poo Shirt, Do Not Tumble Dry, Victoria Galleries, Sydney
Work, Rest, Play; Imperial Slacks Collective, Artspace, Sydney
- 2003** Package Tour, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi, Sydney
Raiders of the Lost Ark, Master Major and (e)merging, Martin Place, Sydney

Don't Leave, Mirage, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth
The Cordial Home Project, Artspace, Sydney

- 2002** Project x, Sculpture in the City, Martin Place, Sydney
Right here, Right now, Slacking Off, Imperial Slacks, Sydney
Kami, Childhood Show, First Draft, Sydney
\$hop & \$ave, Hatched, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art, Perth
Project x, Helen Lempriere Sculpture Award, Werribee Park, Melbourne
- 2001** \$hop & \$ave, Gallery 4A, Sydney
Location to Die For, Kudos Gallery, Sydney
Delusions of Reference, Period, Blau Grau, Sydney
Welcome to the Lucky Country, Imperial Alliance, Imperial Slacks, Sydney
- 2000** Bourge Tucker Man, Downwardly Mobile, Imperial Slacks, Sydney
I Fight Evil with Evil, Eighteen is Enough, Herringbone Gallery, Sydney
Muc, tTRANSFIX, Sydney Fringe Festival, Performance Space, Sydney
- 1999** Alone, Sculpture by the Sea, Bondi, Sydney
Mono Mono, Absorption, Ava Gallery, Himeji, Japan

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Photographs

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Raiders of the Lost Ark, The Cordial Home Project

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The Artists: Tollgate, Wasted Consumer Ritual

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