

de for

In the last month or so, we have seen leaders change, [policies align](#) and disgusting decisions imposed on the most vulnerable. Decline seems to be our modus operandi. If an [empire is failing](#), how does it fall with the least possible pain?

Harriet Morgan's exhibition with the same name, *Decline* at Top Shelf above Deans Art in La Trobe Street might have been asking the same thing—an omnipresent apocalypse with a glass of champagne. Nick Austin's paintings of flying envelopes and Kate Smith's three-part painting *Art school* point to a past, a kind of neo-nostalgia: one more melancholy than the other—a nuanced picture and unrecognisable painted forms in spaceless-languid-yellow. Alex Vivian's *Dirt swatch* is a sliced soccer shirt flicked with filth and fixed with hairspray skinned over a neo-faux-doric-columned-new-bone-china-serving-dish registers painting in its past-particle-present—the ambiguity of polity evident in an array of decadence.

New improved qualities ...

... reads the text on Janet Burchill and Jenifer McCamley's painting accompanied by a chair.

Helen Johnson's video as long as a pop song has a group of nameless voices discussing Badiou and Brecht in a context that's not ours to be privy to. We see, not hear, violins played and a cat looks back at me spliced after footage of Karl Marx's grave. I look down to my phone, a 'fact' reads: other than humans, cats are the only other species which likes getting things for free. While wondering what this might mean, the analytical screen and self-conscious spoken words remain synced, 'I keep making the same point, fine, but ... I don't understand what an individual is. I don't know what it is ... ' But it is in the opening lines, 'But aren't the militants here precisely trying to prevent the young militant from taking this path', that we find the dissension and the doubling in *Decline*.

To depose is to get rid of, dismiss or displace. [De-pose](#) on the other hand, might infer a colloquial reference to the stance of someone captured on [The Satorialist](#) blog. In either form, power is undermined—that of the leader by an action or that of the image (and beauty itself) by language.

[Caligynephobia](#) is an irrational fear of beautiful women, callophobia is an irrational fear of beauty and scopophilia is the 'love of looking'.

The first may be evidenced in cinema, and the latter perhaps found in art: Abicare's objects declare a different type of decadence than that which is found in *Decline*.

Decadence (Medieval Latin for 'decay') in Abicare's work appears in the subtle arrangement of objects that point to one another and us, creating a space of suspicion between. A chair in the corner of the room. A cast of clay the size of a table-top, perforated by studio-based archery lessons framed on three sides with stainless steel and the other with bronze. Looking back at it, on the mantle above the disused fire-place rests a small framed photo of a woman wearing a beautifully made coat—the sartorial sign—that also hangs on a coat-hanger as you enter the space. In the photographic image, behind the woman modeling, hangs the perforated clay, exactly as it does now, as I the viewer stand, minus the coat, the build and the photogenic smile. The aforementioned frame is mirrored, but to scale. Before the mantle, in front of an unused fire-place, the stainless steel and bronze are echoed again but inverted. A silk wool scarf that depicts a golden retriever and her double is placed, not thrown—its material more vulnerable and volatile than the metal one usually expects to be used for a screen. From the vantage point of the chair, one sees all and all sees one.

Go-see is the models' audition, success is not predetermined. A *trophy-pose* is held by the winner, failure is for another time.

Attention to detail, these fragments from a narrative, un-timed objects re-appearing and re-occurring. Power. Desire. Target. Capture. Game in all its forms. Fair and unfair.

Love of looking. Fear of beauty.

Fear of beauty. Love of looking.

Décor starts with de.

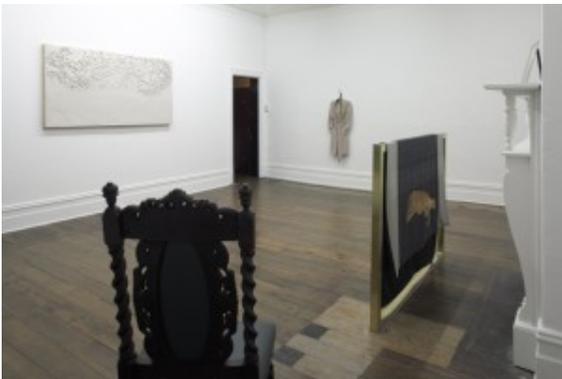
Decline ([Brent Harris](#), [Helen Johnson](#), [Luke Holland](#), [Joshua Petherick](#), [Alex Vivian](#), [TV Moore](#), [Kate Smith](#), [Dan Arps](#), [Dale Hickey](#), Kain Picken and Rob McKenzie, Nick Austin, [Fergus Binns](#), [Janet Burchill](#) and Jennifer McCamley, [Lane](#)

[Cormick](#) and [Tony Garifalakis](#)), curated by Harriet Morgan, [Top Shelf Gallery](#), Melbourne, 14 June - 14 July 2013.

Fiona Abicare, [De-pose](#), Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, 27 June - 27 July 2013.



Fiona Abicare, 'De-pose', 2013



Fiona Abicare, 'De-pose', 2013



Fiona Abicare, 'De-pose', 2013



Fiona Abicare, 'De-
pose', 2013



Fiona Abicare, 'De-
pose', 2013



Fiona Abicare, 'De-
pose', 2013



Alex Vivian, 'Dirt swatch',
2013



Alex Vivian, 'Dirt swatch', 2013



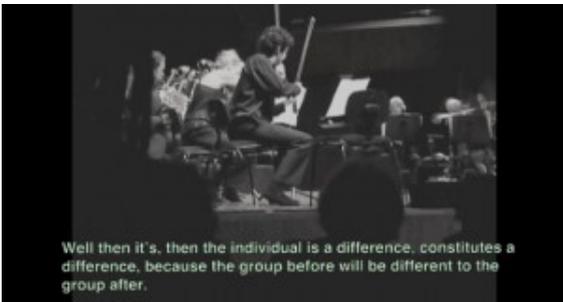
Kate Smith, 'Art school',
2013



Helen Johnson, 'Er Brecht, wir Brechen', 2008



Helen Johnson, 'Er Brecht, wir Brechen', 2008



Helen Johnson, 'Er Brecht, wir Brechen', 2008



Nick Austin, 'Travelling envelope #10', 2012



Ro Noonan's parents' fire-place guard



A Con Temporary image post on the book of face



Decline: Jennifer McCamley, 'Homage to Thierry de Cordier (I have absolutely nothing to do with the 20th century)', 1989; Luke Holland, 'Warning', 2013; Joshua Petherick, 'Gutter', 2013; Janet Burchill and Jennifer McCamley, 'New improved, qualities', 2007



Decline: Dan Arps, 'Untitled (Green ambivalent up)', 2012; Dan Arps, 'Not titled atm', 2011; Kate Smith, 'Art school', 2013; Nick Austin, 'Travelling envelope #10', 2012

Don Celender and The Kitchen

Portraiture study

If you could have your portrait painted by a famous artist of the past, or present, whom would you select? Why?

Don Celender

Picasso.

Because my eyes are on one side of my nose.

Herb Caen

Don Celender surveyed part 2 comprises series of mail-out art, where Don Celender mailed out questionnaires to various communities (general and professional) asking them to respond to a series of questions about life, work, art and death. This survey presents *Portraiture study; Art dealers' selection of artists survey, Artists survey, Ignored and neglected artist survey part 2, Aesthetic experiences survey, Art movements, Critics' choice, Organisational art movement, Corporate art movement, and Mass media art movement*. Consisting of a trail of white A4-size pages nailed onto white walls, the exhibition has a monastic

sparseness. The gallery's monochromatic walls offer numerous threads of the individual responses and non-responses to Celender's questions and their context in time and the art profession. Unrestrained by linguistic gymnastics, the ideas come through the text directly.

In 2011, for its 40th anniversary, [The Kitchen](#) presented an exhibition, *The view from a volcano: The Kitchen's Soho years, 1971-85*, showing the programming history of The Kitchen over more than ten years. The show consisted of single-channel videos and other artworks presented alongside audio and print documentation such as press releases, photographs of performances and posters from the shows. Artists included Vito Acconci, Nam June Paik, Robert Ashley and Carolee Schneeman, along with the Beastie Boys (as a group of four, including drummer Kate Schellenbach) and many more. Memorable threads were early Tony Oursler—a video of Oursler interviewing a woman about alien abductions; Bill Viola figuring out what a camera does; and discovering the neurotic Spalding Gray. Once again, the qualities of the work and their context emerged succinctly, through language that was accessible. The press releases revealed the artists' desire to lay out an idea they appeared to be grappling with and, like Don Celender's surveys, *The view from a volcano* as an exhibition managed to retain its content through time (past and present) as an archive and as individual works of art.

Often with a survey or an archive, language can become a turbulent terrain where the desire to express is lost to stylisation, perhaps as a result of self-consciousness, or a perception that this type of work needs to be propped up. The Don Celender and The Kitchen exhibitions are reminders of the value, pleasure and poetics that can be gained by having work just stand—*through language*.

Don Celender surveyed part 2, [Crate Studio and Project Space](#), Margate, UK, curated by Sacha Waldron, 21 June - 11 August 2013.

[The view from a volcano: The Kitchen's Soho years, 1971-85](#), The Kitchen, New York, curated by Debra Singer, Matthew Lyons, and Lumi Tan, 30 June - 27 August 2011.



Don Celender, *Crate*, 2013



Don Celender, 'Corporate art movement'



Don Celender, 'Portraiture survey'



'The view from a volcano: The Kitchen's Soho years, 1971-85'



Jim Burton, 'John Cage event', 1973, performance. Photo: Kathy Landman



Poster



Poster



Press release

Alien in the mix: Bryan Spier at Sarah Scout Presents, Justin Andrews at Block Projects

Bryan Spier makes narrative abstraction. If this sounds like a contradiction in terms, it just might be. But it's the kind of contradiction that allows an artist to work in an impossible space and make something of it.

My understanding of what Spier means by narrative abstraction is relatively straightforward. Take his new exhibition of large-format giclée prints, *Heavy images*, currently showing at Sarah Scout Presents. In each work objects or planes are frozen yet their frame-based logic communicates a certain movement, a kind of sequential disruption that opens each composition. This is meant to be evocative; as Spier puts it: 'past and future iterations haunt them'.

In these works form becomes a kind of character, one that the mind can't help but attach to certain feelings or motivations. What might have been a relatively mute and coldly formal exercise instead begins to layer itself in a very human way.

A similar current runs through Justin Andrews's exhibition at Block Projects; a linear, human logic that kicks against abstraction's alien nature. It's worth mentioning that both artists went through the same art school, and are part of the Canberra diaspora that includes Stamm's own Trev Clay and me. But there's more to it than that. If you sit in a studio on a daily basis balancing forms and adjusting colours, it'd better have some kind of feeling.

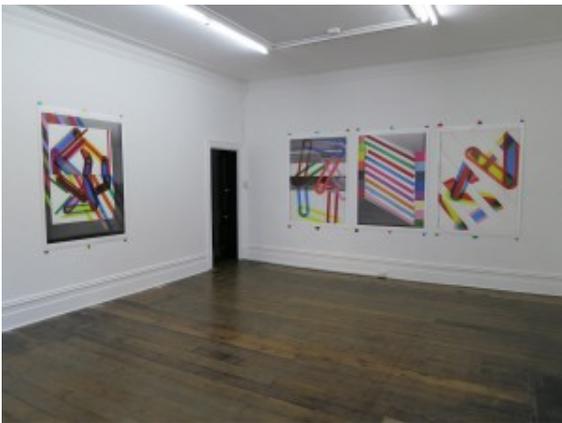
Andrews thinks about time in this new body of work, which strikes me as a similar project to Spier's. He focuses on the idea of entropy; the disintegration of an 'original' as it is copied, repeated or remembered through the prism of time passed. Andrews takes this disintegration as a positive, as if the new and uncontrollable things that occur in this process hold some kind of secret meaning.

A self-authored text included in the show suggests he is thinking about his own history, trying to link up various interests and motivations across time: painting, music, the grainy reproductions held between the covers of a discarded art book. Artists can't arrest time, but they can at least try to make sense of it. Again, it's a

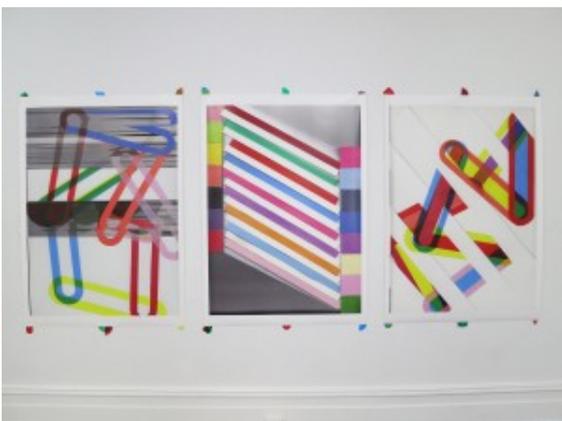
matter of feeling and thinking and doing, each of these activities following and prompting the other.

There's a pattern of making across the art world at the moment that most people involved would recognise. It's materially driven and it relies on increasingly 'minor' gestures that seem guided by a kind of post-sculptural ideology. Through this kind of work artists and, by extension, audiences are required to invest more in less. If you run with it, reduction and material repeatedly reveal sequences of minor revelations. Although people rarely seem to make the connection, all this is the stuff of good painting. It echoes in the suspended moments that Spier and Andrews both render.

Bryan Spier, [*Heavy images*](#), Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, 1-31 August 2013.
Justin Andrews, [*Block Projects*](#), Melbourne, 27 July - 17 August 2013.



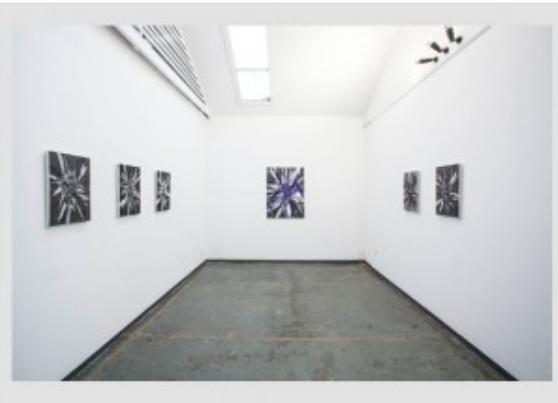
Brian Spier



Brian Spier



Justin Andrews, 'Beyond time 2', 2013, unique print on canvas panel, 39 x 54 cm



Justin Andrews

Arthur Boyd: An active witness

Lonsdale Street Roasters
Saturday 13 July, 11.05 am

Brother: What do you want to do after breakfast?

Sister: I'm happy. Whatever.

B: Good, because I've prepared an itinerary.

S: Let's have it.

B: We start with a midday tour of Old Parliament House.

S: Who are you? Clark Griswold?

B: Don't be like that. This is your first trip to Canberra. You should take the opportunity to explore the nation's political heritage, beginning with the architectural bedrock of power and—

S: No way, man. I didn't drive eight hours from Melbourne to visit parliamentary Sovereign Hill.

B: OK. How about Capital Hill? The nerve centre, the heart and soul of current policy and debate. The seat of our thriving democracy. There's an exhibition of touch-screen kiosks where you can interact with senators!

S: You'll find more heart and soul in a Nauruan mine shaft. Best minimise my interaction with senators and their seats.

B: We could do the 16 km lap of Lake Burley Griffin.

S: Old Parliament House it is.

—

Museum of Australian Democracy, Old Parliament House
Saturday 13 July, 1.05 pm

Brother: Oi. You've been in *Arthur Boyd* over an hour. Don't you want to see the *Magna Carta*? Or Malcolm Fraser's favourite biro?

Sister: Not really. Listen, thanks for bringing me here. I really, really like this exhibition.

B: What's so good about it?

S: Well. The curatorial premise is uncomplicated but engaging: 'an active

witness'. Boyd is an exemplar of the empathetic, affected artist. Dissatisfaction with the inhumanity of the world is common, sure, but how many of us possess the determination and fortitude to respond meaningfully to that frustration, to shine light in areas of darkness, throughout our entire lives.

B: How's about that picture in the next room, the one of the guy with his dick out, pissing at the firing squad. Is that an empathetic response to the inhumanity of the world?

S: It's satirical. It's one illustration within the artist's career-long commitment to exposing the debauchery and grotesqueness of war.

B: Hmmm.

S: See this work, *Nebuchadnezzar being struck by lightning*. Nebuchadnezzar is a figure from the Old Testament. Boyd frequently drew on myth for inspiration. But here, in this painting, the latent subject matter is grander even than the biblical content.

B: Do you think he's pissing, or ... you know ... *ejaculating*?

S: Who?

B: The guy in the picture, in front of the firing squad.

S: Why would he be ejaculating?

B: Why would he be pissing?

S: War is absurd. There's no place in it for your sophisticated brand of Socratic questioning. Now, pay attention. He painted the work in front of you after witnessing a Vietnam war protester set fire to himself in London.

B: Jesus.

S: This is Boyd's timeless exploration of political and human folly. It is as powerful an evocation of hubris, anguish and guilt as you will see in a painting. Take another look, before we go.

B: The work is a powerful symbol of humanity's vanity and failure during a time of crisis.

S: That's very good!

B: I'm just reading from the brochure.

S: Right.

B: Says here that Bob Hawke chose Boyd's *Interior with an open door, Shoalhaven* to decorate his office. He thought it was 'well suited to moments of inner calculation'.

S: I bet an advisor chose the work, and wrote that response for him.

B: Would you take that gig? Senior Cabinet art consultant?

S: Sure. I know just the works I'd hang.

[Arthur Boyd: An active witness](#), Museum of Australian Democracy, Canberra, 8 May - 29 September 2013.



Arthur Boyd, 'Nebuchadnezzar being struck by lightning', 1968-69, oil on canvas



Installation view of 'Arthur Boyd: An active witness', showing two illustrations from his series 'Spare the face, gentlemen, please', 1993

To be outside, to be inside, to be free, to be bound, to be

Walking up to Kate Newby's ceramic wind chimes at *Between being and doing*, a group show at Utopian Slumps, I was aware that I wouldn't be able to hear them clink in the wind from inside the gallery. I was talking to the curator about another piece of Newby's in which she traced two outdoor desire paths to where they each met and then filled the worn cross-path puddle with concrete. I thought it was an interesting action. The way Newby's art works for me is its play on landscape; it wants to be outside and doesn't really seem to need the gallery. Don't get me wrong; it looks good in the gallery and brings the outside in, but it's transient, ready to roam.

Last Wednesday night, Melbourne [Nite Art](#) happened and roam it did—a bunch of drunk women broke one of the chimes by using their hands to emulate a devastating wind. As the gallerist came to the rescue they fled with the broken chime. Out it went. I thought it was poetic in a weird way as Newby's romance is elsewhere already. Off the grid.

Free feudal barter store, Christopher LG Hill's Studio 12 show at Gertrude Contemporary, has Hill filling the space with his own work; publications, paintings, sculptures, records, toys, collages, Asian milk drinks. The wooden lattice that covers the floor is like a tilled field from which the objects shoot upwards. Some things are more mulched down than others but these parts give nutrients to the work as a whole and there are some juicy fruits to be taken. Everything in the show is up for grabs and free. I took a mirror-tiled bust of an adolescent home.

And then there's new work by Melinda Harper at Block Projects. Her paintings strike me as rich, like she needs what she paints. Each feels executed as though the finest things in life cost a bit but not heaps; cadmium red and yellow, cerulean blue, studio rent.

Harper's painting style is nonchalant and frank. The aesthetic action versus its perceived monetary value; greasy tendrils of oil paint that crisp up where the masking tape hasn't sealed thoroughly; the coolness of her one coat of oil paint. The work is not over-prepared like a lot of bad flat designer painting of the moment, it has soul. It's done as it needs to be.

[*Between being and doing*](#) (Kate Newby, Joshua Petherick, Sriwhana Spong, Alex Vivian), curated by Brooke Babington and Melissa Loughnan, Utopian Slumps, Melbourne, 27 July - 17 August 2013.

Free feudal barter, [Christopher LG Hill](#), Studio 12, Gertrude Contemporary, Melbourne, 25 July - 23 August 2013.

[Melinda Harper](#), Block Projects, Melbourne, 23 July - 17 August 2013.



Kate Newby



Kate Newby



Christopher LG Hill



Christopher LG Hill



Melinda Harper



Melinda Harper

John Aslanidis—New York noise

JN: By 2003 you'd established the premise that you apply now, where you effectively paint intervals of sound or noise, right? Your paintings are non-objective in a way that correlates with artists such as Stephen Bram and Michael Graeve and reminds me in some senses too of Karl Wiebke. Though you've not exhibited in a focused way with any of these artists, have you?

John Aslanidis: I use sonic intervals. Bram uses a different methodology with a series of perspective points to orientate the surface. The connections with Wiebke would be in the paint surfaces and the material ways these unfold. By 2003 I felt I'd gone as far as I could in Australia. I'd studied in Sydney before moving to Melbourne, but the 1990s were a pretty lean time. Don't get me wrong, there were a lot of good times, but artists emerging didn't really get to consolidate (professionally and historically) back then. In terms of institutions I just had to go somewhere else.

JN: Your first solo exhibition in New York was in 2003 although you were already being regularly included in group shows.

JA: I'd been making trips as often as I could since 1999. In New York things were different—contemporary art plays out there in a different way. Exhibiting remains very important and of course there are just so many more galleries that the scene has scale and ebbs and flows in a way you notice. In New York too I feel there has always been a basic respect for the potential of studio practice and that hasn't changed.

JN: The early exhibitions in New York and particularly your recent collaborations with Brian May led to new shows in Berlin? In the Berlin work, the wall of noise Brian May composed is played aloud in the space along with your painting. How did the collaboration work exactly?

JA: The sound is generative. Brian works with different software and calibrates the sound to colours and intervals in the painting. He measures the colour frequency in sound. The premise seems very simple but the outcome becomes quite complex where the sound warps against itself and across the painting. The sound recreates, it regenerates in an expanding loop, and the painting resonates in a similar way—visually or conceptually. The paintings have no edges in this sense or exist as a contingent proposition; every work is a cast of the same proposition.

JN: The system you use persists from painting to painting.

JA: The original idea was to achieve structure and consistency in terms of thickness and density and viscosity etc. Because I was working with these intervals I didn't have to think about the painting as a whole, it composed itself or simply unfolded. Earlier on I didn't correlate it explicitly to sound although it is a

parallel that is very close now. I still use the same piece of scrap paper from years ago where I first plotted the system design and compositional intervals.

JN: It's not so easy to account for the cross-over between sound effects and the abstraction of the painting. For me they are different types of thinking or sense that are converging. You were a resident at Location One in New York for a while too in 2011. How did this go?

JA: That year at Location One there were a number of us using sound which culminated in the end-of-the-residency exhibition curated by Claudia Calirman. A little while later I was included in *Sound and vision* at McKenzie Fine Art in Chelsea—that was with Gilbert Hsiao, Daniel Hill and Laura Watt. The great thing about that exhibition was the opportunity to meet with Daniel Hill. He is a musician and we were both interested in the movement between conceptual and perceptual thinking. This is the cross-over you are speaking about I think. The next year Daniel included me in an exhibition he co-curated with Ron Janovich called *Emergence and structure*, dealing with emergence theory. It toured through university museums in southern states.

JN: The Berlin shows were different initiatives?

JA: While I was at Location One there was a lot of interest in the Berlin work, which had gone ahead before I'd arrived there. Gilbert Hsiao had introduced me to Matthias Seidel and we organised to show the sound/painting collaboration with Brian May at Matthias's gallery dr. julius in April 2012. Matthias Seidel later included me in *FutureShock OneTwo: Internationale neue Konkrete* as well.

After dr. julius I went back to New York and was talking to Juan Puentes at White Box. I wasn't even sure I would end up showing there but through the gallery was meeting a lot of nice people. Eventually I had to fly back to Australia but just on my way out Juan offered that we actually show. So we came back later the same year and set up with just the one painting and Brian's generative sound piece. I'd always wanted to have this show in New York and just put one painting into this big space and I think we did pretty well.

This is an edited version of a conversation in [John Aslanidis](#)'s studio, August 2013.

Sonic network no. 9, White Box, New York, April 2012, and dr. julius, Berlin,

October 2011