

**A short line between three points**

**Matt Hinkley, Aubrey Tigan, Karl Wiebke**

**Curated by Quentin Sprague**

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Can you tell me about these names – and how to pronounce them?

Aubrey Tigan (tee-gan?)  
Karl Wiebke (wee-eb-Kay?)

Karl is German – he trained in Hamburg in the 1970s and was peers with artists like Kippenberger, Polke and Blinky Palermo before immigrating to Perth in Western Australia in the early 1980s. He recently told me he had no real reason to do this, other than wanting to go somewhere far-flung, which Perth was. You pronounce his name more like Wib-KA – I hope.

I only know a little about Aubrey Tigan. Tig-an is how I pronounce it. He was from the Bardi/Jawi peoples of Northern Western Australia; coastal country about 200km above a town called Broome. I attach here a short article on him from the newspaper – the idea that these objects, Rigi, which is what the carved pearl shells are called, were once traded from the coast to the desert, gaining significance as they went, is what grabbed me.<sup>1</sup> Beyond, of course, the fact that the work we have for the show – ‘Honest man Rigi’ – is so pared back in design – just vertical lines, and so striking in relation to the other works.

There has been work done on Rigi, more broadly, as an historical form – there’s a book by an anthropologist, Kim Akerman, but I haven’t been able to find it.<sup>2</sup>

I think the key here, for this show, is to acknowledge the historical significance of Rigi as a form – that they have this intense history as exchange objects that pre-dates European settlement in Australia – but that the work in the show shouldn’t be defined solely in this way. It was made very much for an ‘art’ market, a little less than a decade ago, so was intended as a different kind of exchange item: one that adheres to contemporary social patterns rather than historical ones.

Plus its design and name refer not to ‘traditional’ or inherited ideas (as in the interlocking ‘key’ design referenced in the article) but to contemporary equivalents; Aboriginal land claims and the division of mining royalties: basically the importance of being honest in these kinds of transactions – another kind of exchange, in a way.

Makes me wonder if objects, art objects in particular, can impart a kind of moral or ethical framework.

That there’s a certain responsibility in making them, looking at them, placing them into relationships with other objects, seems true.

And the size of all the works – small.  
Are you thinking of them as potent things like how keys work? Or as Maps?

Or simply convenient for you to transport here for this apartment show?

I think of Dan Arps once, deciding what works to include in a show predicated on him being able to carry them to the space as he did not have access to a car at the time.

What did you think of Peter Wollen’s chapter where he mentioned the size of works being determined by what could fit in a tourist’s suitcase?<sup>3</sup>

And Matt Hinkley? (Hink-lee)

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1  
Nicolas Rothwell, *Secrets of a master carver*, *The Australian*, March 9, 2006.

2  
Kim Akerman with John Stanton, *Riji and Jakuli: Kimberley pearl shell in Aboriginal Australia*, Northern Territory Museum of Arts and Sciences, Darwin, 1994.

3  
Peter Wollen, *Raiding the icebox: reflections on 20th century culture* (Chapter 7, ‘Into the future: tourism, language and art’), Indiana University Press, 1993. (Note: the chapter was loved, very much so, but not read until after this discussion took place).

Size-wise, it's a bit of all of the above really. I've wanted for a while to make a 'small' show. If we accept that curating provides a way to 'think' that shares aspects of other modes of research or making or whatever, but is also unique, then it is particularly slow – due to logistics mainly, and to programming – which can be frustrating because ideas get old fast, as you know. And you really only know how something works when it's in the space.

So this project seemed like an opportunity to think faster: to follow a gut feeling about how three works might interact, and run with it. So accepting the limitations as opportunities seemed important. As soon as I realised that the show would be best if it fitted in carry-on, it made sense – they'd have to be works that carried a certain intensity, which I think they do. Although I wouldn't say I'm an advocate of always taking the convenient option, here it struck me as something I could work with that would ultimately benefit how these works could 'speak'.

You could say each work unlocks another in a new way but that might be taking the key thing too far...

Matt's work was a touchstone really. Small things enclose you in an entirely unique way, and he's taken that to this sort of end point, where they are literally tiny.

It always seemed to me that his objects make sense only in relation to themselves, as if he has simply followed the logic of his practice and as it folded in on itself he echoed that materially. So now you have these objects that are essentially imprints of absent 'originals'. I'm confounded by them, in a good way.

I have been thinking about the movability of things: the way that an object is informed by its context and how it changes when it is removed.

Curating or artwork gains strength from this fallibility. It has the potential to be reunited with a context – historical, linguistic, site; and change the way it exists in front of us. This idea that you look at something differently when you know the specific conditions in which it was produced is so interesting. Titles can be so revealing in this way.

On the other hand I like to think about things as fractal and infinitely divisible. The idea that however small or partial a fragment is you can get a sense of the whole picture, if you look close enough.

Both.

Are these mutually exclusive?

The definition of Conceptualism on Wikipedia is a theory that exists between nominalism (that every case is unique and specific) and realism (that there are truths and general ideas).

My tummy hurts cause I am getting too personal so scratch that.

I like how your work goes back to objects and makers; I like how it stands in the face of oversimplistic press about the exploitation of Australian indigenous artists and instead uses this unique situation of cultural collision to tell stories. I know you probably can't take compliments.

We just had an earthquake here while I was typing.

Can we go back to Karl's work and this idea of him moving to somewhere far flung and something picking stuff up as it goes? This is a nice way to think about an object. Somehow less top down and singular.

Sure, Karl and I spoke recently about how the work in the show, which is called 'Buildings B/8', was made in increments, roughly daily, over a two or three-year period I think. 'Accrued' rather than 'painted', perhaps, which seems a perfect echo of what you just wrote.

Anyway, I don't know if you can see this in terms of painting now in Melbourne or LA or wherever – maybe specific practices, here or there – but Karl's shares something of the clarity of the best modernism – a kind of very human idealism – at times starry-eyed, but totally seductive when it's real.

Makes sense in context, when you think about sensibility and where that might have come from for Karl as a maker. I'm not sure I see 'place' in his work though – it seems more hermetic than that, but I might be wrong. I'll have to ask him.

I guess too that there's something of this in the Sergio Rodrigues 'Sheriff Chairs' you have refurbished for the space: that idea of the 'counter modern', ie: something imported but reworked locally, tracks this idea that as something moves through different contexts it changes, or adapts. Less 'top down' in approach, as you say.

That's right, what started as a vague idea to restore a pair of chairs that Jane Berman showed me turned into a complimentary exhibition seating for the work you have selected. Rodrigues was a Brazilian designer who took Modernism and repurposed it, employing local craftsmanship and using materials like Jacaranda and Cowhide. And then this story 'accrues' another twist when these particular chairs arrived in Los Angeles in the 1960s where their frames have been refinished, leather straps replaced and cushions reupholstered locally here in Miracle Mile.

And also this idea of 'accruing' is funny. The whole gallery is coming together in this way, both on purpose as I bring in different influences, but also as I remove furniture from the space, traces of past events and activities become more present; scrapes, holes, different coloured paint repairs.

From a conversation between Fiona Connor and Quentin Sprague, undertaken via email, April 13, 2015.