

QAG

PHYSICAL VIDEO



GOMA

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INTRODUCTION

'Physical Video' features video art drawn from the Collection of the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA). While thematically diverse, each work engages the human body and shows how artists use physical gestures and actions to illustrate social, political and aesthetic concerns. Acts of endurance are complemented by playful exploration of elements — particularly air, water and fire — as well as objects encountered in everyday life.

Many of the works point to a resurgence in direct-to-camera performance, a process that enables artists to document themselves within the privacy of their studios. *Feeling the burn* 2006 by James Oram, and *Walking the wall* 2014 by Angela Tiatia, recall the performance-based works of the 1960s and 1970s by artists such as Dennis Oppenheim and Rebecca Horn, who used their own bodies as the primary instrument to critique conventions, often by pushing their bodies to extremes.

Other artists in the exhibition use the body as a conduit to explore history, culture and identity within larger theatrical settings. In *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam, towards the complex - for the courageous, the curious, and the cowards* 2001 by Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba, cyclo drivers drag their pedal carts across the seabed to symbolise the risk and struggle of refugees in postwar Vietnam. *Gymnasium* 2010 by Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont pits ideas of physical perfection against questions of Australian national identity, and in *Static electricity of cat's cradle* 2007 by Donghee Koo, a simple game for children simulates the awkwardness of human interaction.

Through small gestures and modes of performance, the works in 'Physical Video' invite audiences to think about the use of physicality to explore ideas beyond the action itself.



JUN NGUYEN-HATSUSHIBA
MEMORIAL PROJECT NHA TRANG, VIETNAM, TOWARDS THE COMPLEX -
FOR THE COURAGEOUS, THE CURIOUS, AND THE COWARDS 2001

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

In *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam, towards the complex - for the courageous, the curious, and the cowards 2001*, three cyclos (the three-wheeled rickshaws traditionally used for transportation in Vietnam) are seen launched like boats from a beach into the sea. The cyclo drivers valiantly pedal and drag their vehicles over the seabed in feats of strength and human endurance, their progress hampered by the rocky underwater conditions and the need to surface regularly for air. The work was filmed in the southern Vietnamese resort town of Nha Trang, the site where thousands fled the country in fear of political persecution immediately after the Vietnam–US War (1955–75); the actions of the cyclo drivers are a metaphor for the Vietnamese struggle for autonomy. In the final sequences, empty mosquito nets are strung between rock faces — a reference to the white net shrouds worn in Vietnam by family members to honour the deceased, evoking ideas of protection, containment, sleep and death.

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba / Japan/United States/Vietnam b.1968 / *Memorial Project Nha Trang, Vietnam, towards the complex - for the courageous, the curious, and the cowards* (still) 2001 / DVD: 13 minutes, colour, stereo, ed. 4/10 / Purchased 2002. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation Grant / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Jun Nguyen-Hatsushiba was born in Japan and studied in the United States before moving to live and work in his father's home country of Vietnam. His films and installations explore themes of national identity, cultural displacement and globalisation through the lens of daily life in South-East Asia.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 This work was created as a memorial to people and events of the past. How do the physical actions of the cyclo drivers emphasise the narrative?
- 2 If you were to create an artwork responding to a political event in Australia, what elements or objects would you choose in order to communicate this memory with a physical action?



SRIWHANA SPONG
COSTUME FOR A MOURNER 2010

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Sriwhana Spong's *Costume for a mourner 2010* reimagines a dance sequence from the 1925 ballet *Le Chant du Rossignol (The Song of the Nightingale)*, a choreographic poem told in one act, created by Igor Stravinsky and George Balanchine for Sergei Diaghilev's famed Ballet Russes. Spong's re-enactment of the ballet draws on the work's only remaining artefacts: the score by Stravinsky, costume designs created by Henri Matisse, and photographs of the dancers. *Costume for a mourner* is at once a dance of mourning for that which has been lost, and a celebration of the synthesis between body, costume, image and movement. Dancer Benny Ord uses his body to capture the modernist intent of the original production, conveying moments of abstract form and geometry. Spong's understated score complements the effortlessness of action.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Sriwhana Spong is of Balinese descent, although she spent her childhood in New Zealand with little contact with Balinese culture. Many of her works investigate this heritage, with a conscious irony of its ungraspable nature and 'exoticism'. She works predominantly with film and video, and occasionally sculptural installations.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 The costume worn by the dancer is a replica of the robe and headdress designed by Henri Matisse. How do the dancer's movements reflect the costume's geometric patterns?
- 2 The artist reimagined *Costume for a mourner* from the fragments of documentation left from the original ballet. Do you think the work captures the sense of melancholy inherent in this loss?

Sriwhana Spong / New Zealand b.1979 / *Costume for a mourner* (still) 2010 / *Hard Drive* (transferred from standard-definition video): 8:22 minutes, black and white, sound, ed. 3/3 / Purchased 2011. John Darnell Bequest / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist



DONGKEE KOO
STATIC ELECTRICITY OF CAT'S CRADLE 2007

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Static electricity of cat's cradle 2007 takes its title from the children's string game known as cat's cradle. In the game, string is looped on the fingers to make an elaborate weblike pattern that can be transferred to the hands of other players to be varied accordingly. Donghee Koo draws on the wonder of the game to explore ideas of conscious and unconscious forms of play. The video portrays two bodies entangled by strings, their movements controlled off screen. By transposing the game into physical form, it becomes an analogy of human interaction, as the strings are pulled to alternately bring the bodies together and apart. As the couple meet for the last time and finally embrace, the camera pulls back to reveal the puppeteer.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Donghee Koo was born in Seoul where she continues to live and work. Koo uses photography, video, sculpture and spatial installations to insert ideas of play into daily life. Her works often presents small moments rather than larger narratives, a strategy that allows her to explore the tensions created through mixing performance and video documentation.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 Donghee Koo wants the viewer to feel as though they are part of the production. How does the artist do this? Do you feel a stronger connection with the couple or the puppet master?
- 2 The artist films this work as if it were a stage play. How does the artist work with the conventions of theatre to create conflict and resolution?

Donghee Koo / South Korea b.1974 / *Static electricity of cat's cradle* (still) 2007 / HD video: 16:9, 11:30 minutes, colour, stereo, ed. 5/5 / Purchased 2011. John Darnell Bequest / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist



TARRYN GILL AND PILAR MATA DUPONT
GYMNASIUM 2010

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Gymnasium 2010 blends the glamour of 1930s Hollywood films and Broadway musical burlesque with heroic images of Australian athleticism. Populated by a cast of athletes showcasing their physical prowess through choreographed movements, *Gymnasium* questions the images used to sell the idea of the perfect Australian body. Drawing on the stylistic nature of controversial films by German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl, whose film *Olympia* 1938 was shot at the infamous 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin, Gill and Mata Dupont have combined the aesthetics of propaganda with an array of references to theatre, cinema, musicals and sport. By accentuating images and movements routinely used to depict physical perfection, the artists draw attention to the darker political and psychological undertones of their glossy images, asking 'What might be simmering beneath the gleaming white smiles?'

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Tarryn Gill and Pilar Mata Dupont were born in Perth and have been collaborating since 2001. Both are multidisciplinary artists, performers and producers with backgrounds in dance and musical theatre. Their combined practice encompasses photography, performance, choreography, film, installation and design. Across their practice, Gill and Mata Dupont have embraced the aesthetics of historical re-enactment, dealing with the depiction of the past in the present, as well as representations of the female self in relation to history and culture.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 The artists prompts us to consider hero worship in sport. What performative devices do they use to do this?
- 2 In Australia, national identity and sport are often intertwined. How do we see this shown in advertising and media?

Tarryn Gill / Australia b.1981 / Pilar Mata Dupont / Australia b.1981 / *Gymnasium* (still) 2010 / Single-channel HD video: 4:07 minutes, black and white, sound, ed. 5/10 / Purchased 2011. Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist



JAMES ORAM
FEELING THE BURN 2006

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Feeling the burn 2006 explores two connected actions — the striking of a match, and the controlled intake and release of breath. The work draws on the artist's interest in ideas of physical risk and repetition inspired by the performance-based works of the 1960s and 1970s, where small actions were often representative of larger ideas. In *Feeling the burn*, Oram offers the potential for the match to ignite something further with each strike, but instead he lets it burn down to his fingers. The viewer is drawn into the performance as we too hold our breath until the flame is extinguished, feeling both fascinated and complicit in the act.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

James Oram is a New Zealand artist who works across moving image, sculpture, drawing and installation. Oram often places himself in the centre of the action, his conceptual performance pieces in particular drawing on his interest in risk, repetition, and ritualised actions in the everyday.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 How does the combination of the match strike and intake of breath create tension in this work? Would it be as effective if only one of these actions were shown?
- 2 How does the repetition of lighting and extinguishing matches impact how you view the work?

James Oram / New Zealand b.1980 / *Feeling the burn* (still) 2006 / Digital Betacam: 19:27 minutes, colour, sound, ed. 1/2 / Purchased 2008. The Queensland Government's Gallery of Modern Art Acquisitions Fund / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist



ANGELA TIATIA
HEELS (FROM 'AN INVENTORY OF GESTURES' SERIES) 2014

ABOUT THE ARTWORK

Angela Tiatia's 'An Inventory of Gestures' series, including *Walking the wall* 2014 and *Heels* 2014, presents the artist performing repetitive actions of physical and symbolic endurance, articulating her personal experiences of migration, displacement, and racial and gender stereotyping.

In *Walking the wall*, the artist embarks on a project of walking up and down the wall until it is no longer physically possible. Dressed in high heels and a black bodysuit, Tiatia confronts a Samoan cultural taboo by revealing her sacred *malu* (tattoo) and thus identifying her family heritage. She simultaneously embraces — to the point of exhaustion — symbols of female sexuality in mass consumer culture.

In *Heels*, she explores high heels as a visual cultural marker of both femininity and sexual availability. Tiatia remains on her toes after stepping out of the shoes, and then attempts to hold this position for as long as possible. The work is a reference to Siva Samoa, a dance where performers rise to their toes, but it also critiques the ways we adopt and perpetuate regimes of power.

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Angela Tiatia was born in Aotearoa, New Zealand, and currently lives and works in Sydney. She draws on colonial themes to explore perceptions of the Pacific and its people, and her installation, performance and video works confront the stereotype of the Pacific body as both exotic and erotic — often her own body becomes the site of this conflict between the sacred and the uninhibited. Tiatia's performances act as portraits of her individual experience while also reflecting on contemporary society.

FOR DISCUSSION

- 1 In both videos, an action is repeated to the point of physical exhaustion. How does this repetition explore ideas of stereotype, gender, power and consumerism?
- 2 The artist uses her own body to create this work, which communicates a personal journey. How does her costume, body adornments, actions and the space enhance the meaning?

Angela Tiatia / New Zealand/Australia b.1973 / *Heels* (from 'An Inventory of Gestures' series) (still) 2014 / Single-channel HD video: 1:50 minutes, looped, colour, sound, 1/8 / Purchased 2015. Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery / © The artist

TOURING VENUES

Lockyer Valley Art Gallery, Gatton
4 July – 12 August 2018

Banana Shire Regional Art Gallery, Biloela
17 August – 28 September 2018

Cairns Art Gallery
1 December 2018 – 3 February 2019

Grassland Art Gallery, Tambo
9 February – 24 March 2019

Lapunyah Art Gallery, Chinchilla
29 March – 8 May 2019

Stanthorpe Regional Art Gallery
16 May – 30 June 2019

Logan Art Gallery
2 August – 7 September 2019

Hervey Bay Regional Gallery
14 September – 20 October 2019

Gympie Regional Gallery
20 November 2019 – 11 January 2020

The Centre Beaudesert
17 January – 18 March 2020

Butter Factory Arts Centre, Cooroy
27 March – 3 May 2020

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Acknowledgment of country

The Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (QAGOMA) acknowledges the Turrbal and Yugara (Jagera) peoples who are the traditional custodians of the land upon which the Gallery stands in Brisbane. We pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders past and present and, in the spirit of reconciliation, acknowledge the immense creative contribution Indigenous people make to the art and culture of this country.

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QAGOMA
TOURING

