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Screen Space  
[www.screenspace.com](http://www.screenspace.com)  
+613 9012 5351

Ground Floor / 30 Guildford Lane Melbourne Australia 3000

SCREEN SPACE

# Transformer

Ms&Mr  
Benjamin Ducroz



**ARTS  
VICTORIA**



the Australian video art festival  
**CHANNELS**  
SEPTEMBER 18-21 2013



*Transformer:*  
*Altered artefacts and anti-chronology*

In our murky post-medium age, video and cinema continue to morph and bind. On the one hand, cinematic video installations are now *de rigueur* at international biennales and on the art world circuit – high production values, film-star handsome actors and high polish – as evident in the work of Doug Aitken, Yang Fudong and locally, the works of David Rosetzky. At the same time, installation artists such as Shirin Neshat and Pipilotti Rist now make feature films, extending their thematic and visual universe into the cinema space; and film directors such as Agnes Varda and Warwick Thornton now work extensively as video installation artists.

But, from a present tense already far accelerated beyond the cinema/video divide, *Transformer* brings together the sophisticated and singular practices of two Australian artists (yet three people) working at the forefront of moving image installation. Welcome to a space with no digital nostalgia for an analogue past, containing worlds of parallel possibilities outside, within and beyond the portal of the screen.

Entering Screen Space, a process work by Benjamin Ducroz hints at the elusive nature of chasing clouds and the hard labour that goes with frame-by-frame animation in 40-plus degree heat. The parched landscape of Roebourne in the Pilbara region of Western Australia provides the setting for a delicate and infinitely looped animation of a geometric form, hand-cranked against the hot, desert sky. Ducroz's process of chasing clouds, hand-animating against the elements, was a meditative and solitary one. A contemporary creation story of sorts, the artist says, "in the beginning, moving image apparatus were hand cranked. A sequence of frames would present themselves in fast succession – giving the illusion of movement. The same principle applies today".

Shifting attention to the main gallery, we see another portal into the atmosphere – Ducroz's mobius-like work *cumulo* (the outcome of all that painstaking animation) – projected onto a life-size monolith as we enter the space. Ducroz deftly navigates the high-tech and the handmade in a captivating body of work that considers human perception and movement in urban and remote landscapes through tightly choreographed and dexterous stop-motion. In *cumulo*, horizon lines rotate, storm clouds amass and recede to a haunting minor-key soundtrack by single-signal (the result of Ducroz's ongoing audio collaboration with Nic Whyte), underscoring the endless turn of a kinetic sculptural form, powered by the human hand in a harsh landscape seemingly devoid of human presence.

Good things come in twos, or threes – or is it infinite loops? In the case of artist Ms&Mr (the performative practice of nova Milne), past, present and future began to collapse upon first meeting as teenagers in 1998. Ms&Mr insert rips in time, throwing particles of personal history together with collective references from science fiction, occult narratives and theoretical physics. This process in turn leads to the creation of altered artefacts and the exploration of multiple subjectivities and ever-metamorphic relationships. The materiality of video, film and moving image memories are the conduit for their increasingly sophisticated parsing of language (visual, linguistic) and time. Their lexicon includes both self-initiated and scientific concepts and practices such as *retroactive collaboration*, *retrograde motion*, *time-dilation*, *polychromic gestures*, *augmented relationship* and *amorous meetings* between 'the artist as youth' and their present day selves that are only possible with the magic of video and time manipulation, and control. With wry humour and technicolour mastery, Ms&Mr/nova Milne travel back and forth through time, playing lusty adolescent-meets-adult versions of other selves. One thinks of a polymorphous Man and Woman from *La Jetee*, only in this instance, consistently outsmarting death, becoming immortal. Living and looping to witness their own constant

rebirth, a virtual symbiosis is actualised beyond linear time. Memories, childhood and time are not sacred, but material to be manipulated with infinite and abstract possibilities.

Since 2006, nova Milne have altered and performed through and with their own archival childhood drawings and tampered, to great effect, with VHS home videos, super 8 and found footage as part of their ongoing *Videodromes for the Alone* series. In *Videodromes for the Alone: Amputee for the Neurotic Future*, Ms&Mr rewrite their own history according to the novelist J.G. Ballard's dictum that "nothing is real until you put it in the VCR". The organic/mechanic sleaze of Cronenberg lurks around every corner: in the deep crimson-wash of *Amputee of the Neurotic Future 1988/2012* (the petroleum-fuelled 3-channel work installed for *Transformer*), the 'artist as youth' enacts a faux-brutal accident through VHS melodrama, a collision that fuses flesh with metal. Welcome to a 4-dimensional world, an uncertain future of celestial animations and Ballardian dimensions.

**Eugenia Lim, July 2013**

***Transformer is the artist commissions exhibition for Channels: The Australian Video Art Festival, running 18-21 September 2013. Channels is a new international biennial showcasing contemporary video practice across its many, mutant forms.*** [www.channelsfestival.net.au](http://www.channelsfestival.net.au)

**Ms&Mr**

nova Milne have collaborated since their chance encounter as teenagers in 1998, and more formally since they first exhibited/performed with the generic conjunctive title Ms&Mr in 2003. The artist has exhibited in several curated projects and festivals in public galleries, non-profits and museums, including at the Art Gallery of New South Wales, MCA Australia, Artspace (Sydney), Kadist Foundation (Paris), and their work is held in collections including the Centre Pompidou (Paris). In 2005, their graduating work earned them the Helen Lempriere Travelling Art Award. They've been the recipients of several international residencies including at the The Cité Internationale des Arts (Paris), Artspace (Sydney), & Bemis Centre (USA). In 2013 they were awarded the Anne & Gordon Samstag scholarship for the ISCP Residency Program in New York in 2014.

**Benjamin Ducroz**

Benjamin Ducroz currently lives and works in Melbourne. Inspired by the forms, patterns, and movement found in nature and the built environment, Benjamin works with found objects and visual abstraction to create dynamic videos and animations.

Made with a blend of stop motion animation and computer graphics, his fast-paced works have a vibrant choreographic style. Benjamin's work has been exhibited in galleries and festivals nationally and internationally. Including the Shanghai World Expo 2010, Asian Art Biennale (Taiwan), Australian Centre for the Moving Image (Australia), F5 festival (USA), Recontres Internationales (Paris/Berlin/Madrid), \_D/art Festival (Australia) and Next Wave Festival (Australia) and Onedotzero (U.K).

**IMAGE CREDITS**

(Cover) Benjamin Ducroz, *Cumulo*, HD video installation, sound (singlesignal), 2013

(Internal) Ms&Mr, *Videodromes for the Alone series: Amputee of the Neurotic Future 1988/2012*, 3-channel HD video installation, sound, 2013