

## ***The Spectral Lens***

**Carolyn Craig, Damian Dillon, Clare Humphries, Roy Lee, David Manley, Justine Roche**

*The present has ceased to be a point of transition from the past to the future, becoming instead a site of the permanent rewriting of both past of future – of constant proliferations of historical narratives beyond any individual grasp or control.*

Boris Groys

Comrades of Time, e-flux Journal 11:4, 2009.<sup>1</sup>

The delusion of contemporaneity unfolds in a contagion of excess that recycles, negates and obfuscates visual focus and certainty. We grasp at metaphors in a state of confusion aptly described as a sense of falling by Hito Steyerl in her article *In Free Fall* where she talks about our era ‘as being distinguished by a prevailing condition of groundlessness’ where ‘we cannot assume any stable ground on which to base metaphysical claims or foundational political myths’ (2011).<sup>2</sup> In an era of multi-perspectival loss (and gain) Cartesian certainty is negated. Our bodies attempt to find a stable horizon by ingesting an overconsumption of belief via the image. If we consider Kristeva’s statement that “belief itself is an image” we can understand the ocean of realities we drown within.<sup>3</sup>

Lens-based practices understand the weight of this loss as the viewfinder moves into a fetishist past aligned with an almost renaissance nostalgia –

---

<sup>1</sup> Bruno Giuliani, *Surface Encounters*, E-Flux Journal 65, 2015

<sup>2</sup> Hito Steyerl, *In Free Fall: A Thought Experiment on Vertical Perspective*, E-Flux: April 2011

<sup>3</sup> Kristeva, Julia. 1979. *Ellipsis on terror and the specular seduction*. Trans. Dolores Burdick. *Wide Angle* 3(2): 42–47

while the JPEG empire consumes the single lens apparatus in an overload and discharge of normative cultural production. The photo apparatus sits in a nebulous zone that now enters the internodal spaces of exchange as its operational reality – an endless exchange that never ends – that never settles on a certainty.

### **Frame Rate Hell**

We switch between a constant and confusing array of frame rates that challenge the brain to grasp a biological ‘real’, a temporal certainty. As I edit this article I am watching a film shot at 24 frames per second on my computer screen that refreshes at 75 Hz, under a light source that flickers at 100 Hz per second via a human eye with an average perception of 30-60 frames per second. My biological shell has developed a twitch in the left eye – it is like I can feel all these conflicting apparatus inputs in a terminal intensity. This assault on the retina further implicates the sense of a multi-perspective uncertainty of vision and ways of enunciating sight.

This excessive pollution enters the body at both a perceptual and quantum level – and as I try to focus through my camera lens, I understand its complete incompetence to deal with this era, whilst also understanding its centrality to the whole projection. A response to this excess production of the Real can be found in ideas of spectrality and diffusion as strategies to produce affect over-representation – but without discarding representation itself. Abstraction is no solution to the dilemma we exist within. These methodologies draw on both Barad and Harroway to locate embodied and material relations via ‘intra-action’, using modes of trace and mediation via the lens of other agencies so that artistic output is embedded in its social and material responsibilities.

### **Affect and reverb**

The artists in *The Spectral Lens* each use these strategies to open up a Deleuzian space of pause – one that exists in the crevices of affect as a spectral possibility to feel a sensory ground in the body – what Roland Barthes described so beautifully as ‘punctum’.

Affect and punctum allow images to operate below the excess of their

own production as contemporaneity can no longer be processed in linear pictorial capacities but requires the nuance of temporal spectrality co-mingling with the social and political to produce meaning. It generates meaning beyond socially acquired acts of exchange and taps into deeper resonance that offers a sense of knowing outside of words. Such ways of sensing are becoming more pertinent in our times than the liturgies of religion and philosophy. Lens based practices offer a legacy of possibility to deal with the multi-perspective spaces of our times to re-compose dominant narratives mediated into new entities of affect and resistance.

## Affect and Image

Roy Lee's work *The History of the Sky* emancipates Hito Steyerl's multi-perspective confusion within a critique of 4K vision to speak to the immensity of image production and consumption at a global scale of embodied situationism. How can we 'see' landscape within the substrates of surveillance and the verticality of the military machine: and how is photography implicated in this ongoing colonising act?

The American west 'captured' the land via image to commodify it into capital. We currently attempt to do the same globally to carve up the atmosphere beyond our planetary boundaries. Consider the CHIRP algorithm that processed the data collected by the very-long-baseline Event Horizon Telescope to capture the black hole image of M87. Is this a photo or a data map? Is there any difference anymore?

This same gazing out to define sight is considered by Clare Humphries via the lens (as a technology of looking) by examining how early telescopes constructed ideas of 'Australia' in the Europe—an imagination. Her research looks at celestial maps of the 16th and 17th Centuries and how they imagined the skies of Terra Australis Incognita (Latin for 'Unknown Southern Land') as 'other'. For *The Spectral Lens*, Clare has taken early European astronomical maps, and views from Greenwich, and re-transcribed them over her own observations of the Australian night sky, rotating and flipping the historical data to more accurately reflect a Southern perspective.

Damian Dillon works with these same boundaries at the level of dirt and matter. How do we construct the world with its materials and how the

operational languages of images produce ownership in real space? His works conjure the blurred spaces between nature and artifice as he grabbles with his own desire to capture the world frame rate by frame rate as a way to hold onto time – as a way to navigate mortality and loss.

My own work is trying to grapple with this same matrix of division and how the constructed world we consume via the ontologies of culture blind us to the unregulated nuance of matter. In reality, we intermingle bodies every day. My site of obsession is the prison industrial complex and the ways the scopopic landscape is constricted and neutralised in an attempt to deny the exchange of selfhood via skin cells and damp breath and sound. I reperform acts of parody and exchange that are neutralised with antiseptic boundaries and clinical separations of desire as well as baroque devices to consider the romantic apparatus that allows imprisonment to be digested by the population as an acceptable act.

Justine's series of works for *The Spectral Lens* explores the possibilities of capturing the geographical imagination and sensorial experience of place via a medium characteristically associated with objective representation. Her work references the Australian Gothic tradition of foreboding, terror, superstition and the supernatural. Such unsettling features recall the mysticism and fear often associated with wetlands. Through a series of photographic interventions on 24 tintype plates she evokes the haunting, timeless qualities, and unpredictable traces in Australia's contested landscapes, suggestive of a spectral scape.

David Manley's work considers the spectre of architecture and its initiatory power as a paradox of permanence and codified destruction. His architectural imagery operates at a subconscious level, unearthing through visual archaeology the signifiers of human conflict and technological progress; a diagnosis of the am-bivalent nature of modernity and our own embodied relations to this uncanny enterprise of 'civilisation'.

The perspective of each artist contributes to a gathering of potential ways forward toward sensing and knowing via affect as ‘we can only come into being through contact and exchange with other bodies – as lodgers, hosts, parasites, guests, and fellow travellers, swept up in the tides of each other’s oceans.’ Astrida Neimanis (2017,88)<sup>4</sup>

- Carolyn Craig

## **Artist Bios**

**Carolyn Craig** is an artist and academic working and living on the unceded lands of the Gadigal people. They hold a PhD from the Queensland College of Art (Griffith University), where they completed a double degree in Print and Photography. They currently teach at the National Art School (Sydney), where they are the Head of Printmaking. They are a member of the Asia Pacific Research Network APARN and a Director at Frontyard Projects Marrickville. In 2024, they launched SYRUP Contemporary with co-director Damian Dillon. They have published work with Runway Journal, Imprint Magazine and the Feminist Women’s Legal Journal. Their works are held in the National Gallery of Australia, National Library, Northsite Arts, Burnie Regional, Hong Kong Graphics Art Centre and others. They were awarded the Waverley Prize in 2023, The Swan Hill Prize in 2022, and the Cairns Print Prize in 2019. They have been a finalist in the Churchie, Ravenswood, Footscray Prize, JADA, JOGJA, Bangkok Print Triennial and others.

Carolyn’s practice reflects on the power and carceral systems embedded within the meritocracy myths of capitalism and the rituals of purity and contamination that remain under the surface of social exchanges. They extract trace acts developed from an autoethnographic lens using site visits, historical documents and staged ‘acts’ to develop a counter-representational practice. Their work *Who gets the rose* was developed after an interaction with a retired prison guard at Grafton Prison, NSW.

**Damian Dillon** is a Sydney based artist who works across photography, installation and video. Dillon’s Photomedia practice deconstructs digital and analogue processes to consider how representational practices over the landscape inform a postcolonial comprehension of place. Dillon has a

---

<sup>4</sup> Astrida Neimanis, *Bodies of Water: Posthuman Feminist Phenomenology*, 2017, 88.

Bachelor's degree from Sydney College of the Arts and a Master's degree from the College of Fine Arts NSW. He has received many grants and prizes, including the Blacktown Art Prize and Waverley Mayor's Prize. Artbank and Waverley Council have collected his recent work. His latest studio residencies include Sim Iceland, Megalo Print Studio and Photo Access Canberra, and recent exhibitions include Hong IK University Seoul and a major commission for the Monash Gallery of ART Melbourne. He is founding director of schmickcontemporary Gallery Sydney and the current director of Syrup Gallery Sydney.

**Clare Humphries** is an Australian artist born in Naarm/Melbourne and lived in London from 2018–2023. She completed a PhD and BFA at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology. She has lectured in substantial roles at the Victorian College of the Arts, the National Art School, the Royal College of Art, and Norwich University of the Arts.

Clare's practice examines how an intangible experience of 'aura' can be revealed through image and materiality. Drawing, in part, on Walter Benjamin's idea of aura as a strange sensation of distance brought near, Clare explores experiences of unsettled perception, where notions that appear to be opposing are brought together, such as close-and-far, or past-and-present. Working with processes that merge drawing and printmaking, she depicts objects that are in transition between one state and another or caught in a moment of suspension and haze. She is driven by a curiosity for the way encounters with things 'in-between' can produce moments of sudden aliveness that re-awaken our felt connections to the world around us, and arouse our capacity to be *affected*. Clare's work is represented in many public collections, including the National Gallery of Australia, the Victoria and Albert Museum and the State Library of Victoria.

**Roy S Lee** is a Sydney-based artist who works in photography, sculpture, and installation. Inspired by the emptiness of Australia's outback and the remnants of outdated technologies found there, Lee's recent photographic works highlight the striking contrasts between man-made structures and the enduring marks left by old technology. He reconstructs these contrasts using contemporary digital imaging and surveillance technologies.

Lee holds a B.A. in sculpture from South Korea and a Master of Arts in Photomedia from the University of New South Wales, Faculty of Art & Design, in Sydney. His work has been exhibited in both South Korea and Australia.

**David Manley** studied at the University of New South Wales Art and Design, majoring in photo-media, and graduated in 2012 with 1st Class Honours. He holds a PhD in Fine Arts and 2015 completed a Master of Fine Arts by Research. He was also a finalist in the 2011, 2013, 2015 and 2022 Bowness Photography Prize and the 2014 Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Photography Award. In 2012, he won the coveted Head On Photographic Portrait Prize. Manley was also one of sixteen Australian artists selected for the publication *Hijacked III: Contemporary Photography from Australia and the UK*. His work has been published in several journals, including *Deep Ends: The JG Ballard Anthology*, 2016 and 2019 and his work *Ambivalent Structures* was published by Emblem Books in 2014.

**Justine Roche** is a Sydney-based artist who uses the visual idiosyncrasies of alternative photographic methods and their resultant imperfections and haunting qualities to explore the sensory experience of place, the passing of time, and how the familiar can be transformed into something uncertain. Justine works with the slow and laborious analogue process of wet plate collodion and is drawn to this medium for its unpredictability, aesthetic beauty and materiality as a bespoke object.

Justine's series, *Dark Eden*, explores the emotive response to the space between the material and the undefinable, sanctuary and vulnerability, and permanence and ephemerality. These works engage with the historical, sensorial, and imagined understandings of wetlands, along with the possibilities for reframing their representation into one of protection and preservation.

## Image List

1. Roy Lee

**History of Sky**, 2022

Archival inkjet print

120 x 120 cm

\$1900

2. Roy Lee

**Temporary life on mining shafts**, 2022

Archival inkjet print

120 x 120 cm

\$2100

3. Clare Humphries

**Ekleipsis Apertura**, 2024

Archival inkjet print

85 x 40 cm

\$1100 (framed)

4. Justine Roche

**24 Hours**, 2020

Wet plate collodion on aluminium

12.7 x 15.2 cm per plate, 24 plates

\$3200

5. Damian Dillon

**Contemporary ruin #4**, 2024

High resolution uv prints on white steel,

plastic pallet, plastic crates

220 x 265 x 40 cm

\$4050

6. David Manley

**Brute**, 2023

Cardboard, cement, brick

120 x 42 x 36 cm

POA

7. David Manley

**Sound Mirror**, 2024

Archival inkjet print

25 cm

\$650

8. David Manley

**Post Traumatic Urbanist #2**, 2017

Archival inkjet print

100 x 100 cm

\$1200

9. Carolyn Craig

**Who Gets the Rose**, 2023

UV print on perspex, Welded Steel  
frame, Video on loop

Variable dimensions

\$1500 per steel frame and print

Videos POA

Supported by



**BentSpoke**  
BREWING.CO



**ILFORD**