

Justene Williams



Albertina Viegas

Tonkin's morphing faces and bodies are a critique of the spooky aspirations of modern genetics. "The thing that appeals to me about physiognomy is that it suggests that these characteristics are essential and predestined. In these works I'm making parallels between physiognomy and genetic science because I think a lot of the stuff that's coming out of genetics is going to look just as ridiculous."

To create his installations, Tonkin develops his own software, a process that can take years: "To generate the image of a square of paper falling through space I had to evolve mathematical programs that simulated the properties of gravity, elasticity and natural movement." When asked if the lengths required for technology to re-create nature are somewhat preposterous, Tonkin is good-humoured. "Yes," he says simply, "this is expensive work and thankfully there has been generous funding for new-technology artists, without which the completion of my projects would have been impossible."

#### Jennifer Turpin, 37

Artist-scientists and multi-disciplinary inventors seem to have come and gone with the likes of Thomas Jefferson and Leonardo, but Jennifer Turpin is also one of that breed. Since making her first major water sculpture in 1988, she has taken this nebulous element to its experimental extreme.

"Water," she insists, "is not the subject of my work, it is a vehicle instead for the emotions." Known for creating veils of water that trickle down wire like diamonds, or a sculptural contraption built out of ladders and an old elevator cage that responded to the tides of Sydney Harbour, Turpin in her more recent collaborative work has taken her ideas into the public domain. For Waste Services NSW at the Homebush Bay Olympic

Games site she designed a "field" of solar flowers which bend their 6-metre stems towards the sun to charge the water purification plant below.

If the project goes ahead, the artists involved imagine portholes in the ground to make sure the machinations of the process are visible. "Water," Turpin says, "has been demoted since ancient times; we've driven it underground with sanitation and plumbing. Instead of being channelled before our eyes as a sacrament, it has become an invisible force."

Turpin uses water as the symbol of what she regards as our "buried" attitudes about nature. Her latest public art project (created in partnership with artist Michaelie Crawford) is the illumination of a tunnel between the Downing Centre (formerly Mark Foys) law courts and Museum railway station in Sydney. Illuminating the ground-floor windows of the former department store and glowing beneath the ground in the public walkway will be a sculpture built from light.

Although Turpin will exhibit her "private" work mid-year at Sydney's Sherman Gallery, she views as central the environmental sculptures she does in conjunction with bodies such as the Australian Conservation Foundation and Fairfield and Sydney councils.

"Sure, these projects involve all sorts of practical issues like public safety and longevity, but I love finding ingenious ways to work with standard items," she says.

#### Mike Stevenson, 33 (not pictured)

Imagine entering a video store where the subject of every rental film is the Australian art world.

Thrillers, comedies, documentaries and sex scandals bearing titles such as *I Was a Conceptual Artist*, *My Dinner with Carl Andre*, *The Auty Report* and *Sex, Lies and Minimalism* were all available at

Mike Stevenson's last Melbourne show.

Stocking the shelves with art world paranoia, private jokes about infighting and general mud-slinging at the older generation, Stevenson irritated more than one or two living artists. In person, he is no less volatile but speaks in a whisper that gives you the feeling the gallery partitions are thin. Using conspiracy theories and cult religions as his raw materials, Stevenson takes late 20th century neurosis (from the Branch Davidians of Waco, Texas to the Unabomber) and unleashes them into the very tight and often suffocatingly pretentious hothouse of the Sydney and Melbourne art establishment. His work serves to fry the sacred cows that art critics are too timid to touch.

For those oblivious to Stevenson's rarified content, his drawings, in graphite and pencil, have breathtaking realism. Appropriating the grainy black-and-white documentation of '70s concept artists, from a distance they look like photographs. Get closer and the facade dissolves into nervous, meticulous markings, the detail of which reveals an artist immersed in parody not just for its own sake. "I've got a lot more respect for the work I address than is apparent," says Stevenson.

#### Justene Williams, 27

Justene Williams uses a camera but would not call herself a photographer. Deliberately random, out-of-focus and cheaply processed, her work is about dispersing the image rather than about crystallising it.

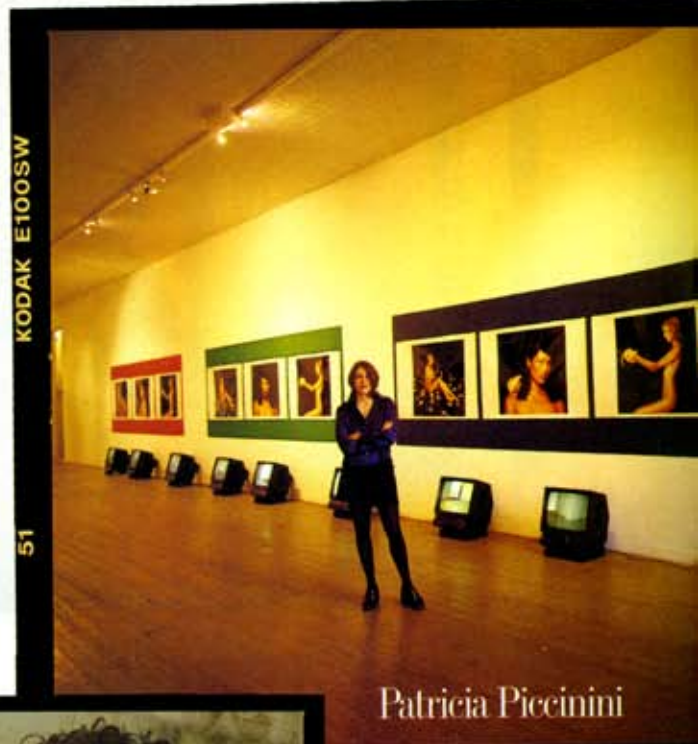
"This is arbitrary photography, as opposed to expertise photography, and for that reason it was kind of weird being included in a major show like *Photography is Dead* at the MCA," she says.

Having used her camera as a "diary" since college, Williams's earliest subjects were gleaned from middle Australia - the Pool and Spa Show, the pinball arcade or the Bridal Fair. "A lot of my work stems from the fact that I worked in shopping

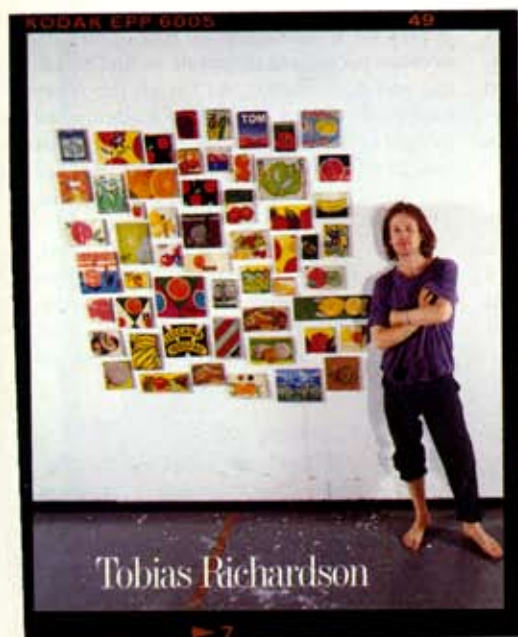




Jennifer Turpin



Patricia Piccinini



Tobias Richardson



Craig Wise

"There's something about the poetry of the overlooked," the artist explains a little wryly. "There's an epic transitoriness to my work: it's there and then it's gone."

#### Patricia Piccinini, 31

Patricia Piccinini has an unusual background for a computer artist: she spent her first year out of the Victorian College of the Arts drawing corpses and body parts in a pathology lab. Preoccupied by science, particularly genetics, Piccinini noticed the gulf between 21st century subject matter and the graphite pencil or paintbrush in her hand.

"I found," she says, "making paintings about this material was anachronistic. Genetic structure was being discussed in terms of microscopic photography and 3-D diagrams, all of which were computer-generated. If I wanted to speak about those ideas, I had to adopt the same language."

The project that has absorbed her for the past three years could best be described

as *Toy Story* meets George Orwell. Marketing a fictional product called L.U.M.P. (Lifeform with Unidentified Mutant Properties), Piccinini has created lurid C-type photographs from her computer "paintings".

Using genetic engineering as her allegorical base, the artist chose Sophie Lee as the face of her mock advertisements and admits that the L.U.M.P.s went cutesy (modelling bows and little caps) to increase sales. This year also sees the release of a full-scale L.U.M.P. CD-ROM. For those who are repulsed by Piccinini's travesty of the future, the artist has a simple defence. "My work is quite ambiguous and it's not particularly moral, but I do believe in medicine and that's why I question it."

#### Clinton Nane, 25

Sassy, irreverent and razor-sharp, Clinton Nane whips through the average supermarket aisle like a cultural tornado. What he finds in everyday packaging of candy wrappers and laundry detergents are the cracks in the surface of the global village. Nane's speedy collages freeze-frame mass cultural stereotypes such as the anglicisation of Disney's *Pocahontas*, the implicit insult of "Wonder White" bread and Cathy Freeman running triumphantly across the back of a Kellogg's cereal box.

For Nane, quick-fire revisionist history is central to the job: "I take popular images into my own hands, including images of indigenous peoples produced

little terrifying in that even though it looks like it's possible to enter or inhabit it, you can't," says Morton. "Kafka-esque space is impossible to enter, both physically and psychologically. I want my work to convey the same sense of impossibility despite its appearance to the contrary."

Fabricated to scale by professional carpenters, Morton's awnings, windows and shop hoardings have, so far, found only one collector and are not yet housed in any permanent Australian collection.