

ART YEAR ZERO

Michael Newall, Andrew Hill, Louise Hasleton, Katie Moore, Bridget Currie, Linda Marie Walker, John Barbour, Christian Lock, Olga Sankey, Paul Hoban, Doreen Inhofer, Toby Richardson
Curator Andrew Best

South Australian School of Art Gallery, Adelaide
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A show of work by teaching staff of the South Australian School of Art/Louis Laybourne-Smith School of Architecture and Design responds to the premise of *Art Year Zero*—the jettisoning-of-history ideal that countless social, political and cultural revolutionary groups have embraced. The theme can be seen in part as a reference to the school's recent abandonment of its previous campus for the subsequent alignment with its parent University of South Australia, situated in both the 'arts hub' of Adelaide's West End and within the perimeters of its 'Cultural Mile'—and perhaps the questionable insertion of a second institutionalised gallery space in the local visual arts platform.

Curator Andrew Best's theme was inspired by a painting by Michael Newall, supporting Newall's inclusion in the show which would otherwise be odd, given he hasn't been a member of staff for almost a year. Newall's 'year zero' borrows the form of Delacroix's *Liberty Leading the People*, itself a celebration of another revolutionary 'beginning'. Newall's vision however takes place in a matriarchy, depicted by an all-female version of *Liberty*. At number one in the catalogue of works and hung at the entrance to the gallery, *Untitled* seems positioned as an introductory colon to the rest of *Art Year Zero* although the rudimentary sketch on a square of cardboard, featuring Newall's peculiarly flabby-faced cartoon figures, has none of the gravitas of the original and presents no real alternative to the status quo.

Teaching in the South Australian School of Art emphasises the seeking out of a work's conceptual basis above all else, a mentality which seems to manifest itself in a high proportion of artists producing object-based work. Surprisingly, here the only free-standing works are Bridget Currie's *Pitch: Black and Self-titled*, of which only *Pitch*, a swathe of shimmering black fabric edged with tassels



draped over a table, has any real presence. *Self-titled's* dark green T-shirt implores 'take me back to 1965' in iron-on letters, and is left to lie forlornly on the floor. In a crowded room the work becomes invisible, the imprint of a few dusty footprints indicating that it was stepped on more than once [although this seems more a reflection on the opening-night crowd rather than the work itself]. These pieces are a serious departure from Currie's usual work. Though bolder, in a clumsy way, they seem less imbued with spirit than the soft white fabrics of previous works, which were all pulled threads and delicate tracery. However, in the spirit of revolution the 'Year Zero' seems an appropriate time to reinvent oneself.

More robust, less plaintive than Currie's objects is the contraption that footnotes Paul Hoban's work, a crude but elegant apparatus of tape-bound textas and paintbrush clearly used in drawing/painting *Untitled*. This link between making and the made [also the maker] is a reminder of the awkward translatory processes behind each art work. Andrew Hill's large painting *Untitled City West Landscape #26* integrates actual fluoro lights in place of a painted depiction, the acid yellow globes bringing a vibrancy unrealisable in the painted surface. The mosaic of painted squares vaguely spells out a city skyline seen from on high, Hill's use of pixelation interspersed with large areas of matt black bringing a ruminating moodiness to the work.

Much that is presented in *Art Year Zero* is a continuation of each artist's main, known body of work. Katie Moore's work in particular seems to have realised a kind of consummation. *Staff I*, *Staff II* and *Stones* have Moore's trademark fake finishes, the same references to myths or fairy tales with all their delicious juxtaposition of happy innocence and inherent danger, but suddenly the long 'wooden' staffs and the innocuous 'rocks'—both made of plaster covered with Contact—seem to encapsulate the sense of all that Moore's work has so far explored. John Barbour's *A Prayer* and *Untitled*, with their soft fabrics embroidered with text, are also similar to much of his previous work, though here they appear too pale and weak for the end of the long exhibition space, whimpering for 'a prayer/somebody/please'. In the larger context of Barbour's work it seems that while the different words or texts stitched onto the fabric would intimate important shifts in meaning, to the viewer who is not as intimately involved with each item they begin to appear similar and the differences elided. All this is especially pronounced next to the scarlet work of Linda Marie Walker, with its red-bound books of writings that pierce the heart in a way Barbour's texts do not.

What is apparent in *Art Year Zero* is a range of individual concerns being quietly and thoroughly worked through, happily avoiding the self-aggrandisement and jockeying that could be expected from a group of professional artists all working within the one institution. It is important for teachers to display themselves in this way, to open up their own work for public and critical viewing. And it should matter, not least to the students themselves, what kind of work their teachers produce. These are the people who judge and influence them, who are currently at the head of a system that co-opts students into an enclave that in turn continues to produce more of the same kind of artists, as well as more of the same kind of teachers. For while student-hood may constitute a kind of year zero in itself, after the revolution life returns to what once was, change effected just as ineffectively as all other revolutions that called for a blank slate from which to start anew.