



# Role. Play

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## Requiem for set

A set can be an evocative grouping:

'a poem, a shoe, a bit of sand, a room, a leap,  
a lap of sea, a mackerel, a worm'

This set could reflect a scale of tangibility.  
This set could show what is perceptible at a  
certain moment in time. This set could reveal  
a magnetism of skills, practical and abstract,  
minimal and expansive.

Each artist in this exhibition advocates a set of  
aesthetic intentions and sensibilities, and visualizes  
an alternative set of intentions and sensibilities.  
The artists do not assume that the alternative  
is opposite rather than the alternative harbours  
a framework visually defined by its unique labour  
in time.

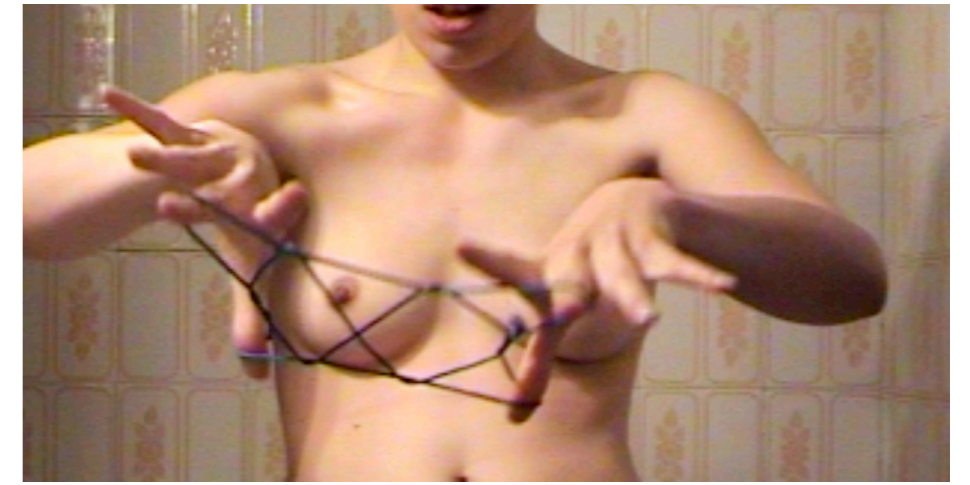
We are privy to the labour of the artworks by  
consenting to look at them. We enter the contract  
of the alternative, a contract that binds our at-  
tention to a range of temporal assertions located  
across traditions, topical preoccupations, and the  
urgent architecture of the future. The artworks  
here are intent on evoking new options for what  
it might mean to become apprentices to time,  
to become skilful temporal beings.

Requiem is understood as a mass for the dead,  
derived from *requies*/rest and *quies*/quiet. The  
works in this show suggest that to up-skill as  
temporal beings entails the invention of alternative  
kinds of rest and quiet; a breath under breathing;  
a thought under thought; a feeling under feeling;  
a body under the body.

Such an approach aims to declare our accomplish-  
ments or failures to live in the world, to look at  
the world – singularly and generally, perceptively  
and inattentively, sometimes within parameters  
of shame and dignity.

Such an approach might involve the invention of  
a ship, bearing architecture of mutiny; the accept-  
ance that bricks are heavy, and that bricks are habi-  
tation and memory; that sensitivity to tangibilities  
of body mind and emotion can provide quiet and  
give rest to exhausted aesthetic probabilities, those  
puffed and moderating meanings. The alternative to  
memory could still be memory: quietly evocatively  
grouping, coming to rest in set after set.

Vivian Lynn's '*Book fan series*' optimises the  
development of set and alternative set by evoking  
a mode of refrain. Focused as refrain, the works  
suggest both instances of repetition and fissure.  
We have an evocative grouping: paint marks on  
folded hardened paper and symmetry by folding

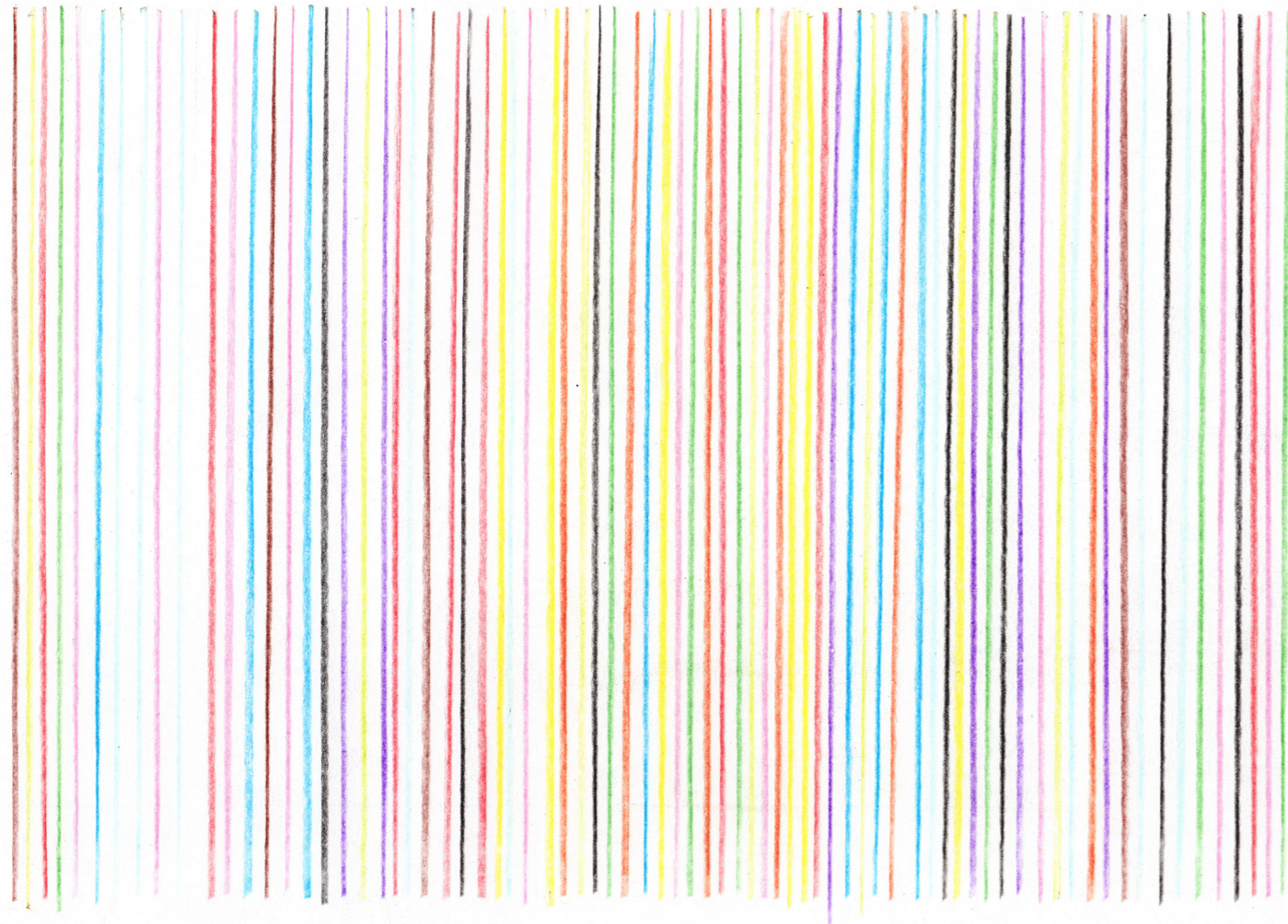


or symmetry by deliberate mark making. We bring  
to the works our memories, branded already with  
the history of the Rorschach Blot – a history of  
mental interpretation, 'unconscious' time, and  
traditions driven by indefatigable definition.

There is a sense of mutation harboured in the  
work through the visual folds, the fan squeezed  
in on both sides, inflecting hips. The implied muta-  
tion could be the design of the 'mental' element,  
or the 'set' element'. The mutation could be the  
enacted transference of memory, the idealism of  
that transference; that notion of relationship and  
connection pushed into the foreground so that

its reception might be subdued or mirrored by  
exclamations of hope and scepticism.

Just as it is improbable for two electrons to inhabit  
the same space, these works evoke an unprec-  
edented intimacy, the intimacy of memories forged  
together, fibrillating and collaborating and vying for  
the same resting place. Mutation in these works  
labours in the form of refrain and condensed  
memory, the repeated mark that is resolution  
refracted through active and passive states, linear  
and minutely curved states – memory in time, the  
intimate practice of memory both repeating and  
breaking away.



Justine Walker's '*Untitled (Rainbow)*' insists on  
capturing a bar of prismatic light that appears as  
a gentle gash on muddy coloured carpet. The  
lines of colour in the carpet itself suggest a mute  
pattern, a faint reference system, a bland code  
when compared with the purity and coolness of  
the light. But when we actually look at the image  
rather than look at it from memory, we see the  
rainbow of light act as peroxide, turning the carpet  
underneath into a solid, almost magnetically  
angled line, suggesting a morbid axis about  
which we are physically twisted.

The carpet we realize is a painting or drawing, that  
is to say it is something that we walked over in a  
distant past but now look up to from our standing  
position, on the wall. We are drawn outward by the  
bleached 'compass' of light to the corners of the  
photograph, nearing the life beyond. We are in a  
state of moving without the memory for it; we think  
but without the usual crutch of thought's applause.

Erica Sklenars' video work is titled, '*In the  
weekends I like to plant trees and imagine I am  
you*'. Hair is inserted back into an unidentifiable  
part of the body, time is reversed, and writing in  
a catalogue of the work states that it aims to be  
'uncomfortably sensual' as a viewing experience.  
The work could be seen as restorative, a micro  
performance of a visual return to a state before

disturbance. The title however suggests we attend  
to the burrowing of one identity in another –  
'imagine I am you'. We further enter the fantasy of  
a voice promising to plant trees in the weekends.

Through this voice we seek out the fallibilities  
and pleasures of entering into a fantasy defined  
by certain duration, a period of habitation (what  
the voice does during the week, for example,  
remains undeclared). What we are asked to tap  
into is rhetoric of reversal, a reversal that refuses  
habitation, or makes what habitation there is  
'uncomfortably sensual', which is how we might  
describe an experience of transformation.

I am reminded of a sea chantey called The  
Mackerel and the Worm in which an evildoer  
turns a brother and sister into insect and fish  
respectively. At the time of restitution in the  
drama, the brother agrees to return to his human  
form. The sister however, refuses to be turned  
back into a woman. Sklenars' work advocates  
for transformation?, not for the sake of a return  
to assumed order and origin, but rather the work  
advocates for transformation that opens the way  
for alternative transformation. The work seeks  
a companionable set, and aims to support the  
potential of that set, its unique labour in time.

Rachel O'Neill

- 1 Works in the Book fan series are also described as  
Mental set works on Vivian Lynn's website
- 2 The allegory of The Mackerel and the Worm is  
similarly evocative

Published on the occasion of **Role. Play**  
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Opening Celebration Wednesday 23 September, 6pm  
Artist Talk Saturday 10 October, 2pm

Cover image: Vivian Lynn, *Fan*, 1988  
P2: Erica Sklenars, *String Figure*, 2008  
P3: Justine Walker, *Untitled (Drawing Performance #5)*, 2009

Vivian Lynn is represented by Mark Hutchins Gallery,  
Wellington

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