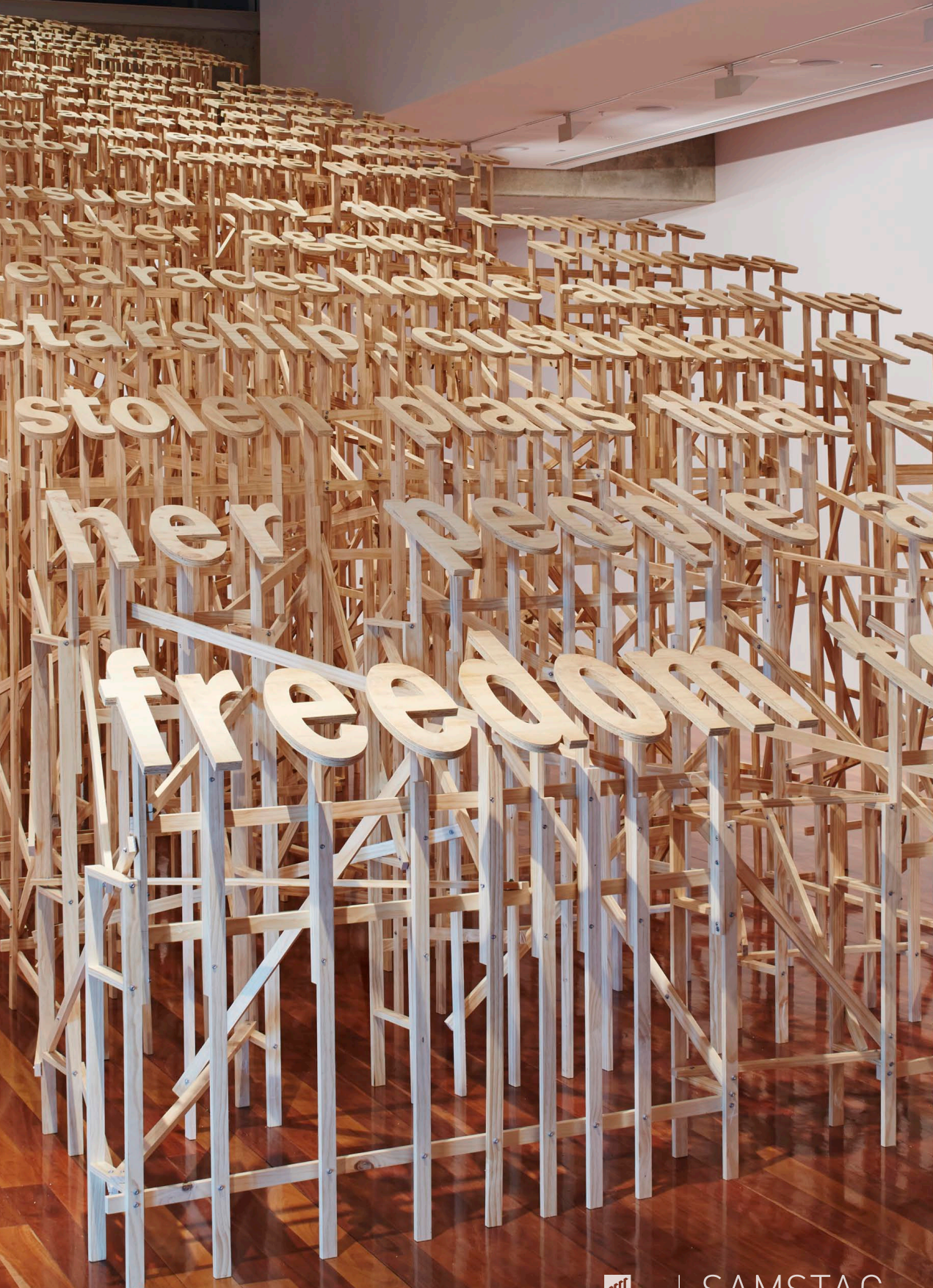


ROY ANDA

SLOW CRAWL INTO INFINITY



THIS IS HOW IT WAS DONE A LONG TIME AGO...

GLENN BARKLEY

Is it too far-fetched to imagine the *Star Wars* film saga as a reflection of the great art schism between object-based and post-object conceptual art movements?

Around the time that *Star Wars* was conceived then made, roughly stretching from 1973 to its release in 1977, art was in the end game of modernity, which foregrounded the idea over the object.

There is a still image of George Lucas taken during the production of his first feature *THX 1138* (released 1970 but made late 1969)¹ which is eerily similar to a work by Australian artist Ian Milliss, *Walk Along this Line* from 1970.²

Through the making of *THX 1138* Lucas learnt to never again trust the Hollywood system and that establishing independence as a filmmaker was to be his paramount aim. Similarly Milliss' work was also about debunking another system, the art world, and after *Walk Along this Line* Milliss also went on to investigate alternative, independent ways of cultural production.

There is also a parallel with the material values of the original sequence of films, in particular in the way space is depicted as opposed to the later computer generated imagery (CGI) of the prequel films. A lot of the effects in the originals were produced using animatronics and claymation. These are real objects in real space and they belong to the lineage of the films of Ray Harryhausen and back through him to animators like Winsor McCay, especially his fabulous *Gertie the Dinosaur* in which he interacts with the animation in real time.

I remember watching the making of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope* when it was originally shown on TV.³ One of the great scenes was the footage of the making of the attack on the Death Star – all made in a car park in Van Nuys, California. The model itself sits on a wooden platform and the camera swoops around and above it. The model looks crude and handmade (and it is) and this quality makes the first three films so special. Lucas said he wanted the spaceships and spaces to look riveted together – and they are, as much from necessity as from a sense of style.⁴

By way of comparison Lucas' later prequels are in essence a post-object document.⁵ By 1997 when Lucas began thinking about the new films there was a sense the technology had caught up with his vision. Of course it hadn't and maybe still hasn't. There is an overall flatness that pervades the newer films, which is a distraction. No matter how much an image is dressed up to depict a three-dimensional object it is always flat and interleaved into the action.

Many of the failures of CGI come out of not understanding form as something in the round, which is one of the dominant themes of sculpture since people first started banging things together, moulding clay or carving into stone to try to depict the world.



Roy ANANDA, *Slow crawl into infinity*, 2014, installation view at Samstag Museum of Art
Photograph by Sam Noonan

That brings us to Roy Ananda's *Slow crawl into infinity*. It is a sculpture that recreates the initial scroll of text at the beginning of *Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope*. It starts near the floor and shoots up, 'joyfully thrust skyward',⁶ into the central void of the Samstag galleries.

Slow crawl into infinity seems to be about an attempt to articulate a relationship between an 'object' as it may exist within the flat surface of a screen and how that object may exist in the real life three-dimensional world, and the push/pull between flatness and volume is the major point of the work.

I say 'about an attempt' as I think the work is foregrounded by the way it is made – undressed rough timber, tech screws – and the artist's engagement with the material of his work. This could be both a conceptual strategy but also places the maker in the role of 'über fan', or as he described the work, 'a monument to fandom'. It has an air of making do as if lovingly built in a bedroom or garage at night.

Ananda wants you to be aware of the work as something that has been made, by a person, laboured over and over-engineered, rather than slickly extruded from a machine, or cut by a plotter or laser cutter and made good.

It reminds me of the recently revealed images, published by Peter Mayhew who played Chewbacca⁷ in the original trilogy, made during the production of the first films. It includes an image of the original scroll for *The Empire Strikes Back* being made. Now, this would be relatively simple task but then it was rather more prosaic. The image reveals the 'magic' and sleight of hand of the scroll's making, but like Ananda's sky walking text, it makes it seem all the more magical.

FOOTNOTES

1 <http://www.lucasfan.com/glucas/index2.html> (accessed 21/5/14)

2 <http://www.ianmilliss.com/text/textindex.htm> (accessed 21/5/14)

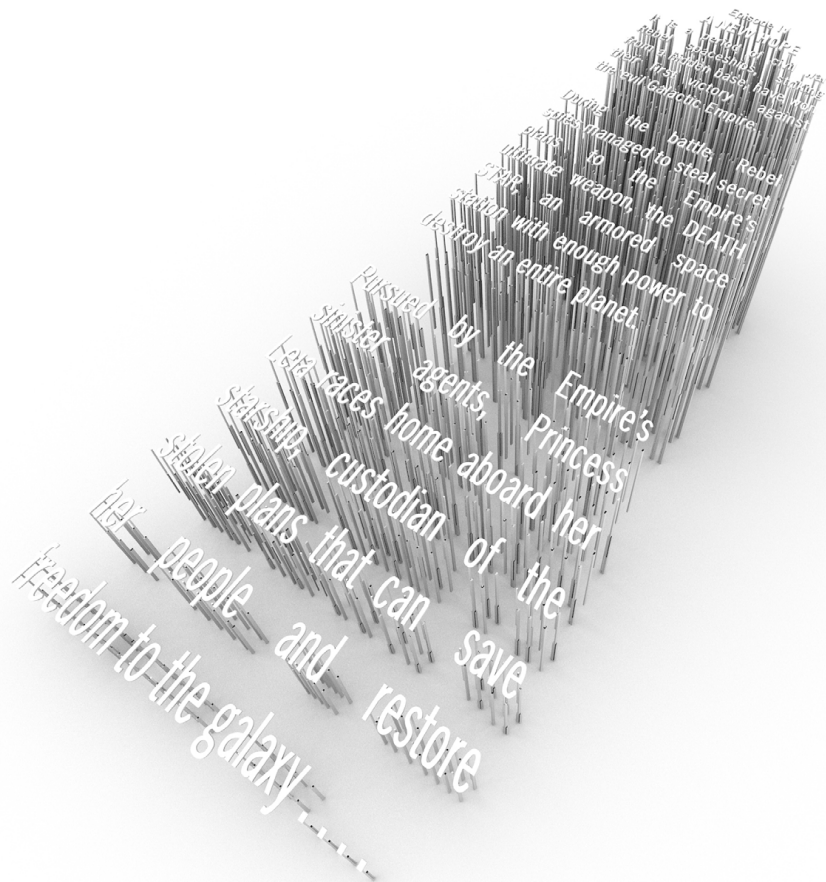
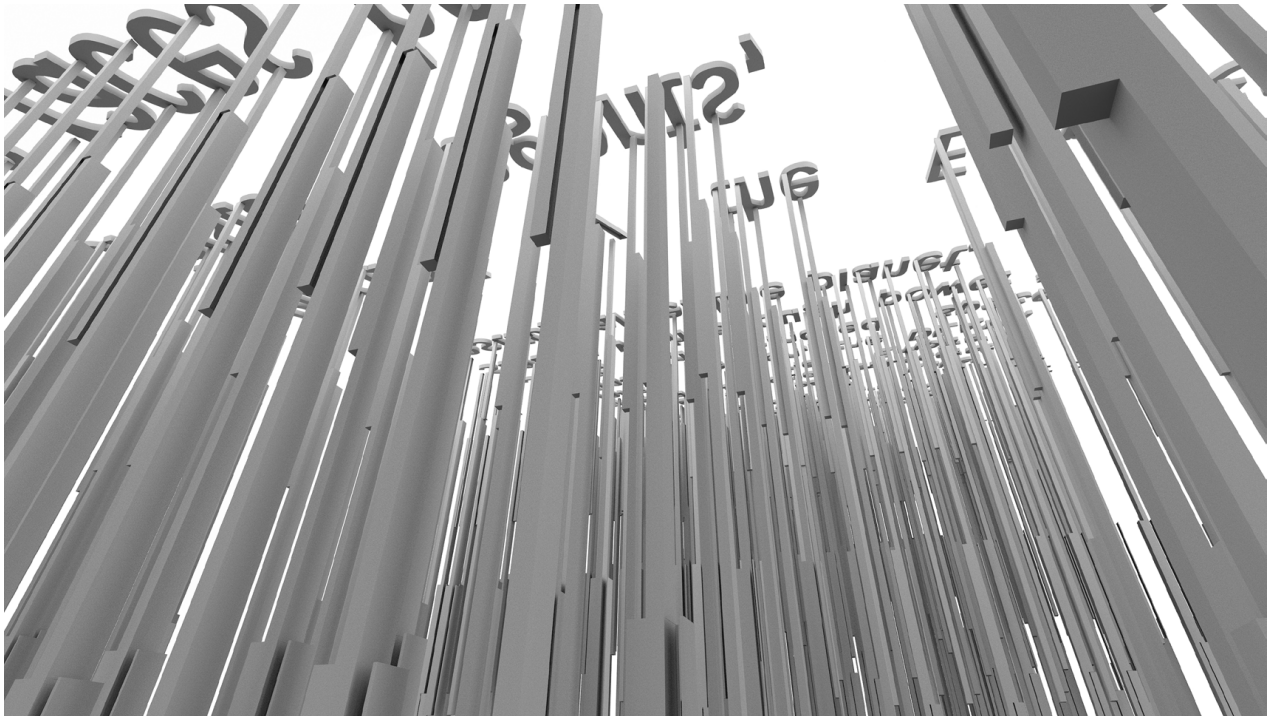
3 It is actually one of my first memories – someone rang up during the broadcast and my mum said something like 'they are watching the making of *Star Wars*'. The person on the other end must have replied 'why?' and she said (this is the bit I remember) 'they like to know all the details'. This splices in quite nicely with something Roy Ananda told me while writing this essay: *I cannot remember the first time I saw Star Wars. The first Star Wars film came out in 1977; I was born in 1980. In a weird way I feel like the original trilogy is part of my DNA. While I wasn't born at the time of the original cinema release, my mum assures me that she took me to see all of the original three films in the cinema at a young age, so perhaps we saw subsequent screenings during the '80s* (email to the author 7/5/2014)

4 Compare this to the prequels where everything looks a bit shiny and when grubby, look completely contrived.

5 And also as film itself. This is another neat comparison between the world of 'high' art and that of film. At the moment there is a crisis brewing with regard to contemporary arts' recent history. Funnily enough not with early video and film, which has problems yet is still is object-based, but with works made ten years ago using digital compression files, many of which are now inaccessible. One hopes the lessons learnt in properly compositing and archiving the high-cost, high-profit capabilities of the *Star Wars* franchise might trickle down to the art market. This is interesting and relates somehow: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyhO2uRA4FM>

6 Artist statement, *Slow crawl into infinity*

7 Mayhew, in the anarchic spirit of amateurism that is part of the original series' charms, was an orderly in a hospital before auditioning for the role as Chewbacca. His website is worth checking out amongst all the Lucasfilm digital bling, as it appears as though he may have made it himself, or the son of a family friend made it. The title of this essay comes from Mayhew's caption for the above-mentioned image.



Roy ANANDA, *Slow crawl into infinity* (preliminary drawings), 2014, digital images
 Digital rendering by Jason Oaten-Hepworth. Images courtesy the artist and dianne tanzer gallery + projects, Melbourne

Roy Ananda Slow crawl into infinity

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installation view at Samstag Museum of Art
Photograph by Sam Noonan

LIST OF WORKS

Roy ANANDA
Slow crawl into infinity, 2014
plywood, pine and fixings
5.06 x 6.68 x 10.21 m

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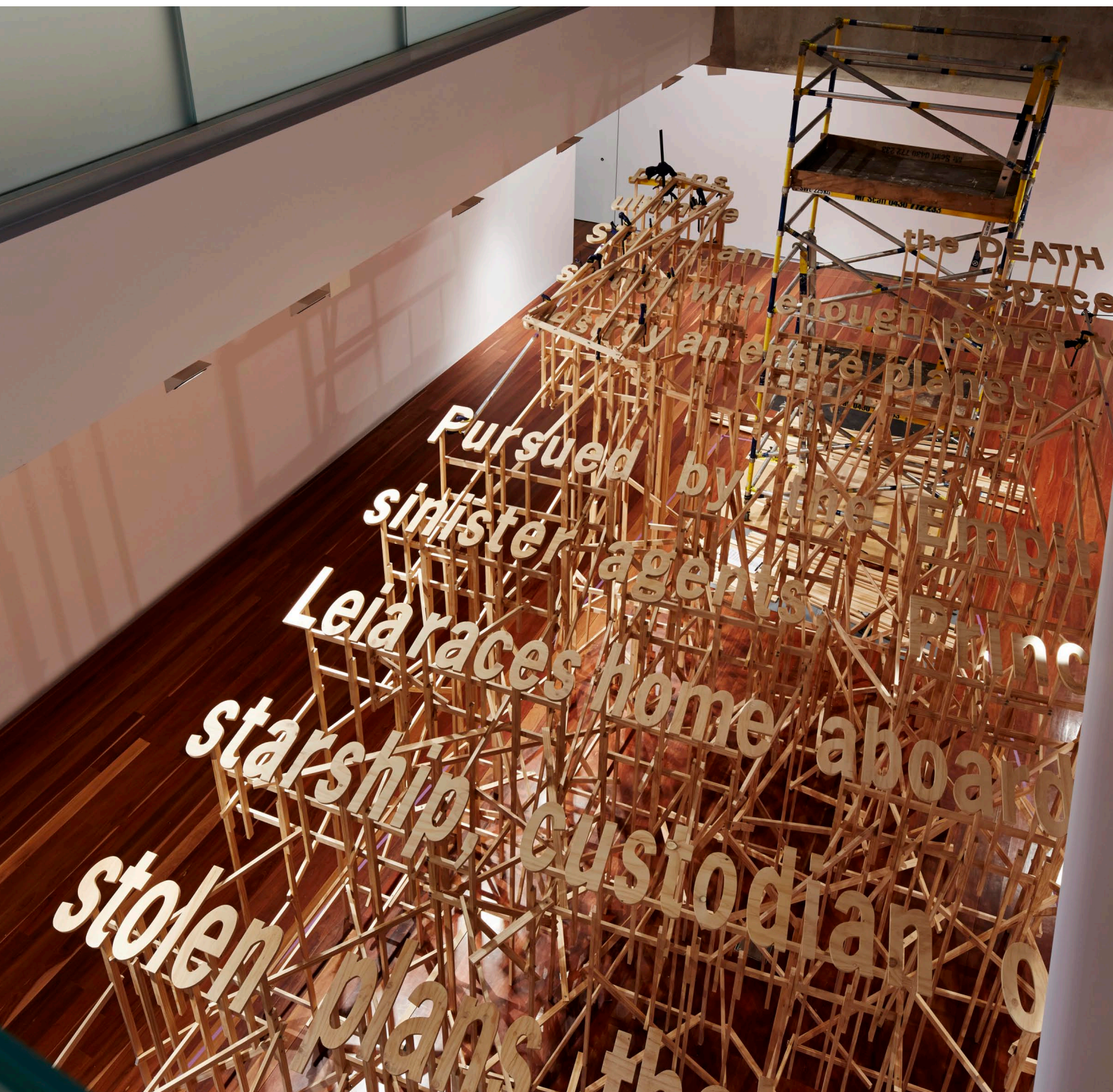
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Roy ANANDA, *Slow crawl into infinity*, 2014, installation in progress at Samstag Museum of Art
Photograph by Sam Noonan