



Mirror Mirror: Then and Now



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MUSEUM



Image: Robert SMITHSON, *Rocks and Mirror Square II (detail)*, 1971, basalt rocks, mirrors, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra, © Robert Smithson/VAGA. Licensed by Viscopy 2009

# Mirror Mirror: Then and Now

Education Resource: John Neylon

## About this Education Resource

This Education Resource is published to accompany the exhibition

*Mirror Mirror: Then and Now*

14 May – 16 July 2010

Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art, Gallery 1 and Bestec Gallery 2

This Education Resource is designed to support learning outcomes and teaching programs associated with viewing the *Mirror Mirror* exhibition by:

- Providing information about the artists
- Providing information about key works
- Exploring exhibition themes
- Challenging students to engage with the works and the exhibition's themes
- Identifying ways in which the exhibition can be used as a curriculum resource
- Providing strategies for exhibition viewing, as well as pre- and post-visit research

It may be used in conjunction with a visit to the exhibition or as a pre-visit or post-visit resource.

## Acknowledgements

Education Resource written by John Neylon: art museum/education consultant.

The writer acknowledges the particular contribution of Dr Ann Stephen, Senior Curator, University Art Gallery and Art Collections, University of Sydney; Robert Leonard, Director, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane; Erica Green, Director, Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art; and participating artists.

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ISBN 978-0-9807175-1-8

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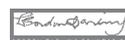
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## Year Level

This Resource is primarily designed to be used by secondary to senior secondary visual art teachers and students. Components can be adapted for use by upper primary and also tertiary students.

### About this exhibition

In the 1960s, mirrors began to be used by artists across a spectrum of international movements including Pop, Kinetic, Minimal and Conceptual Art. Mirror surfaces reflect both the environment and the viewer, 'like a visual pun on representation', as Ian Burn observed. Not just a looking glass, mirrors index the instability of perception, while inviting a viewer to participate in the purported endgame of late Modernism.

*Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* presents classic mirror pieces from the 1960s and early 1970s by major artists Shusaku Arakawa, Art & Language, Ian Burn, Hugo Demarco, Richard Hamilton, Joan Jonas, Yoko Ono, Meret Oppenheim, Michelangelo Pistoletto, Robert Rauschenberg and Robert Smithson. Alongside them are works by contemporary Australian artists – Robyn Backen, Christian Capurro, Peter Cripps, Mikala Dwyer, Alex Gawronski, Callum Morton, Robert Pulie, Eugenia Raskopoulos and Jacky Redgate – that make all kinds of interconnections and reverberations with the art of the 1960s.

*Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* is a joint project by the Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, and the University Art Gallery, University of Sydney, in association with Samstag Museum of Art, Adelaide. The exhibition catalogue has been supported by a grant from the Gordon Darling Foundation.

Samstag Museum of Art: 14 May – 16 July 2010

#### Curatorial perspectives

*Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* has been curated by Dr Ann Stephen who is Senior Curator of the University Art Gallery, University of Sydney. According to Dr Stephen, mirrors have played a compelling role in modern art.

'Artists from Manet to van Eyck and Magritte have always been fascinated with mirrors,' says Dr Stephen. 'Mirrors are a source of reflection and self-representation and artists engaged them to tease out the roles of artist, spectator and voyeur.'

'But it wasn't until the 1960s that mirrors were actually used by artists as a material. They became the medium *par excellence* of late Modernism and created all sorts of perceptual paradoxes.'

Dr Stephen says the intention of dividing the exhibition into 'Then' and 'Now' groups was to see how contemporary mirror works reverberated with the then-breakthrough works of the 1960s and 1970s, an era when the mirror 'became not just a looking-glass but an invitation to join in all kinds of risky endgames'.

'I wanted to see the correspondences that reverberate between the 1960s and now. Today mirrors appear to be a ubiquitous medium for many artists but there are fascinating links to early Conceptual art, Performance and Earthworks, which first used actual mirrors to draw attention to the specifics of location and the act of looking itself.'

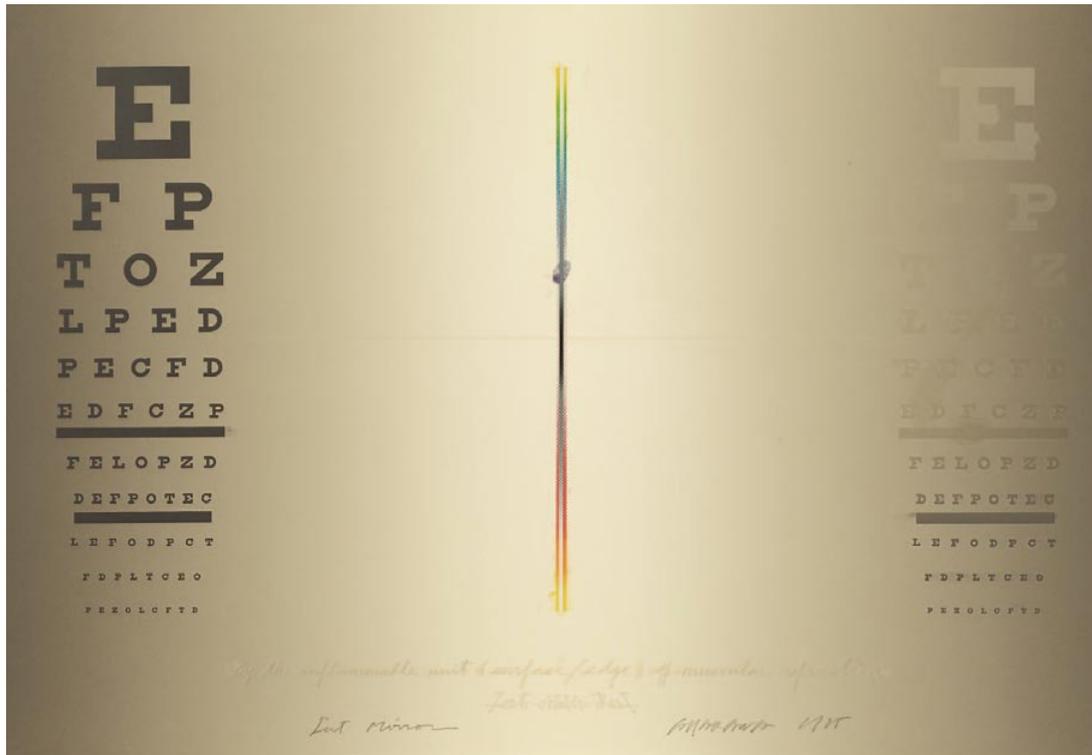
'The works in *Mirror Mirror* show artists' continuing fascination with mirrors, particularly the way they appear almost everyday but are full of conundrums, engaging the viewer and artist alike in all kinds of puzzles.'

This is a thematic exhibition. It is about the role that mirrors have played in some artists' practice over the last fifty years. It is also a survey exhibition. Survey exhibitions take many forms. Some look at the output of one or a few associated artists over a set period of time. Others are built around a theme (eg nature, emotion, memory, identity). *Mirror Mirror* has a specific theme but its time scale (1960s to the present day) gives it a strong art-historical character. If it succeeds in illuminating some aspect then it may cause people to look at a period or a type of art in a fresh way.

The 1960s and 1970s are recognised as important in terms of the focus given by artists to understanding or re-defining what art actually is – and isn't. Prior to the 1960s a lot of avant garde art still used formats such as the framed canvas or the free standing sculptural form to explore and express ideas. From the 1960s there were a number of global trends to reject tradition and conventions, even Modernism itself. The new names given to art trends such as Minimalism, Post-Object Art and Conceptual Art, indicated that the rules had changed. Everything was open to question.

## 2 Exploring the works

### Shusaku Arakawa



*Test Mirror* 1975, from the Castelli Graphics portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*, screenprint

#### Perspectives

The strategy of incorporating letters and text within pictorial works began in the early twentieth century modern era with Cubist artists, particularly Pablo Picasso, Georges Braque and Juan Gris. This idea was taken further by artists associated with the Dada movement. Art associated with Dada often incorporated texts derived from 'found' texts and forms of automatic poetry. A similar attitude to the use of text within pictorial images can be found in the work of some American and British Pop artists of the 1960s.

The artist Shusaku Arakawa was influenced by Dada. The artist has commented that a key aspect of his practice at this time, that of combining reflective materials with reversed texts, was a part of his investigation into 'the gradual erosion of objects through names'.

Shusaku Arakawa, 'Notes on my Paintings', *Arts Magazine* 44, No 2 (November 1969), p 29

#### Framing questions and further research

- There are other works in this exhibition which incorporate texts. Locate a selection and decide if this strategy is being used by different artists for a common purpose.
- Research the art movements Cubism, Dada and Pop Art with a particular focus on the way texts were used within artworks.

# Art & Language



*Untitled Painting (Mirrors)*, 1965, mirrors, canvases

## Perspectives

Art & Language (A & L) is an artists' collaboration which emerged in the late 1960s and had a major influence on conceptual art practice in the United Kingdom, the United States and Australia. Its particular influence was felt in the 1970s when it began to actively question the theoretical frameworks on which painting and sculpture's traditional pre-eminence was based. The works in *Mirror Mirror* are examples of strategies used by A & L to explore what it means to look at something, particularly a work of art.

*Untitled Painting (Mirrors)*, 1965, is an example of A & L work produced in the mid 1960s.

'They were conceived as entropic 'paintings'. A mirror is placed on a canvas so as to cover its entire surface: the paintings are therefore constructed things, forms of collage. A mirror, insofar as it is reflective has no pictorial structure of its own. Its surface, in being perfectly uninflected – blank – is inflected by whatever it reflects. The intrinsically unpictorial surface is inevitably pictorial. The mirror is then *both* a near perfect blank (an endgame painting surface) *and* something which can almost never be blank. Reflecting on this, the viewer may attempt to look not at the image reflected in the mirror but at the blank surface itself. This is a difficult task. One is required to force the abstract seeing of an aspect (the knowledge of this blank surface is there) to overcome the seeing of the contingent world reflected.'

*Art and Language* (Knokke-Zoute: Mulier Mulier Gallery, 2008), p9

## Framing questions and further research

- Do you think that the strategy of overlaying a 'blank canvas' with a mirror is an effective way to draw attention to the act of seeing as essentially about recognising or using what we know about things?
- Could this idea be explored in other ways?
- Is it possible to think about a mirror as a painting?

# Robyn Backen



*A Very Enchanting Thing*, 2007–09, wood, mirror, Bakelite telephone, sound

## Perspectives

'Another mirror set that alludes to Art Deco design's tricky geometry is Robyn Backen's phone booth. It triggers early media memories by using a single piece of retro-communications technology, a Bakelite telephone, with an abandoned voice from the era of black-and-white TV in its earpiece. A euphoric spin on the physics of mirror optics as 'a very enchanting thing' is delivered by the TV scientist Julius Sumner Miller, who, back in the 1960s, turned the captive living rooms of Australia into a school-room laboratory.'

Ann Stephen, 'Jumping through the Mirror', catalogue essay, *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now*, p 11

## Framing questions and further research

- Ann Stephen refers to this work in the context of Art Deco and that earlier twentieth century design trend's fascination with mirrors and other reflective surfaces. Investigate this aspect of Art Deco.
- The telephone and the archival 'sound track' belong to a distant mid-twentieth century era. Why do you think some artists locate work in the recent past? Can it be simply explained as nostalgia?
- Find out about this 'TV scientist' Professor Julius Sumner Miller. Why was his television science show so popular? What might this be saying about community interest in science at the time?
- Do mirrors excite the imagination as they once did in the 1960s 'Space Age'? Have there been any recent advances in mirror technology which cause us to think about the way they can investigate or mediate reality?

# Ian Burn



From left: *Hume's Mirror (No Object...)*, 1967, painted mirror  
*Dissipating Mirror*, 1968, mirror mounted on board, metallic paint on board, hinges

## Perspectives

Ian Burn's art practice used strategies of conceptual art critique to ask questions about the nature of art. A significant aspect of this kind of enquiry was directed at the conventions used to define what art is, and is not. In this work Burn is asking you to think about what would happen if you put a mirror into a picture frame, behind glass, as if a real work of art.

'Mirrors interest me because they separate what is seen from what is... When I first made a mirror piece, I couldn't look at it and didn't like it... it took me about six months to develop a way of thinking about it – but only by considering it the (looking) interfered too much with my thinking about it.'

Ian Burn, *Minimal – Conceptual Work 1965 – 1970*, Art Gallery of Western Australia, 5 February – 29 March 1992, exhibition catalogue, p31

'I frequently use a *Mirror Piece* to shave in. Now anyone can see this is not an art-function, but while it is functioning in this utilitarian way, it doesn't necessarily cut out its art-function. You see, it's only art conceptually, perceptually it's still a mirror.'

Ian Burn, interview with Joel Fisher, in *The Situation Now: Object or Post Object?* (Sydney: Contemporary Art Society, 1971), np

'A mirror enables us to experience ourselves in a world of experiences, and as part of that world of appearances... with the appearance of being a unified subject. Mirrors however produce reflections, not representations, thus pre-empting the possibility of pictorial interpretation.'

Ian Burn, *Looking at Seeing and Reading* (Sydney: Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1993), np

## Framing questions and further research

- What do you think the artist wants you to look at and think about when you look at his artwork?
- What do you think Ian Burn means when he talks about mirrors separating 'what is seen from what is'?
- The artist talks about the mirror in *Mirror Piece* as something which is 'only art conceptually' whilst 'perceptually it's still a mirror'. Other works in the exhibition explore this idea in different ways. See if you can find them.

# Christian Capurro



*White Breath (Passenger)*, 2009, correction fluid on two mirror wardrobe doors, reflected light

## Perspectives

Christian Capurro's multi-disciplinary practice includes drawing, photography, site-specific installations and conceptually-based processes. His work involves 'questioning the nature of image making today.' A key strategy involves erasure or the 'un-making' of images. A significant body of work has involved erasing magazine images (including the use of liquid paper and an eraser) and in the process transferring and creating new images onto other surfaces. The artist has stated that 'the idea of clearing away is more important than filling.'

Quotations from Christian Capurro in conversation with Juliana Engberg, ACCA Soundfile, <http://www.accaonline.org.au>

'Christian Capurro's mirror-works, while not exactly paintings, are painted with the awkward medium of typist's correction fluid. In *White Breath (Passenger)*, a congealed welter of small, thick, unexpressive brushstrokes covers a pair of full height wardrobe mirrors. The only parts of the mirrors left exposed are narrow bands running around the edges. Along these thin strips, fragments of movement are caught in brief hyperactive flashes, exaggerated by ambient light seen against its dense but luminous white field... The very act of covering, if nothing else, flirts with the possibility of concealment. Like all of Capurro's work, *White Breath (Passenger)* hovers between psycho-drama and phenomenological readings.'

Ann Stephen, 'Jumping through the Mirror', catalogue essay, *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now*, p 12

## Framing questions and further research

- The artist has stated that the world is saturated with images which are constantly 'pressing upon' us. Does this statement relate in any way to *White Breath*?
- Did the artist need to use a mirror to help explore or express the ideas underlying this work?
- Can you explain the artist's choice of correcting fluid as 'painting' medium?
- Ann Stephen suggests that the act of covering 'flirts with the possibility of concealment'. Do you see anything in this work which supports this possibility?

# Peter Cripps



From left: *Construction*, ca. 1975, Bakelite, plastic, glass mirrors, cardboard  
*Public Project (Fiction), Series Two, 3*, 1993, wood, acrylic paint, convex mirror

## Perspectives

A central interest of Peter Cripps's art practice has been the production and presentation of cultural objects in the context of museum culture and the art museum in particular. Key strategies for a critique of museum culture have been installations designed to create awareness of the spatial language and systems used by museums. In *Construction* small containers take the place of paintings. They are placed at unconventional positions on gallery walls. Some incorporate mirrors which unlike paintings, 'speak back' and tend to disrupt the usual 'viewer-looks-at-work-on-wall' routines. They are also visually ambiguous, appearing flat one moment and projecting out into the viewing space the next.

'Materials such as circular cardboard boxes similar to those used in packaging cheese, cardboard cylinders, tin cans and glass mirrors have been used in these constructions. The constructions are stem like and protrude abruptly from the wall just below eye level. The projection of the stems places the point of focus out into the gallery space. This conscious manipulation of the point of focus creates an unusual presence. The constructions are austere and when viewed front on they cut a series of clean shapes against the gallery wall... Two of the constructions include small glass mirrors... They intersect the stem at different angles and this placement creates a further play and a sense of movement. The reflective surface extends the physical limitations imposed on the sculpture by finite materials. The mirror refers to and reflects the environment.'

Peter Cripps, *Recession Art and Other Strategies* (Brisbane: Institute of Modern Art, 1987), p7

From 1990 free-standing constructions (such as *Public Projects (Fiction, Series Two, 3)* in *Mirror Mirror*) replaced the *Construction* series wall attachments. Inspiration for Cripps came from the constructivist towers (exhibited in Moscow 1921) created by the Soviet brothers Geogii and Vladimir Stenberg which expressed utopian ideals of progress as defined by modern technology and architecture. In Cripps's tower the convex mirror is used to 'reflect on' and critique these ideals by capturing the skeletal struts of the base and rendering them as a stylish Modernist painting of the era.

## Framing questions and further research

- Do you consider that the *Construction* wall installation is successful in creating awareness of how art galleries use display formulas? If so, how does it do this?
- In relation to *Construction* what do you understand by the statement 'The mirror refers to and reflects the environment'?
- Mirrored surfaces are a common feature of contemporary architecture. Why is this so?

# Hugo Demarco



*Métamorphose*, 1963, painted wood, chrome-plated steel, electric motor

## Perspectives

Hugo Demarco was one of the founding members of an art group, Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) established in Paris in 1960. Members of the group sought to create works which created new visual experiences and communicated a machine-like aesthetic rather than be viewed as the direct expression of an individual artist's feelings or as GRAV artists saw it, the artist's ego. A key strategy involved the use of highly reflective surfaces, mirrors, light, bright colours, optical illusions and kinetic components to engage the viewer in a visual game of seemingly endless possibilities.

Demarco's *Métamorphose* is a translucent wall-mounted box with a motorised convex mirror which bounces light off a foreground row of rainbow dowels.

## Framing questions and further research

- A significant number of artists associated with Kinetic and Op Art of the 1950s and 1960s periods used similar approaches to Demarco in their choice and use of materials (including mirrors or reflective surfaces). Investigate this period of art history from this perspective.
- Art of this kind was sometimes criticised for being 'only about optics' or 'sensational experiences'. Is this a fair criticism?

# Mikala Dwyer



*IOU*, 2009, mirror acrylic

## Perspectives

'Uncertainty is always a component of my work – I use the generative possibilities of accidents and mistakes.'

Mikala Dwyer, unpublished MA thesis, College of Fine Arts, University of NSW, p4

'Mikala Dwyer's art is about an encounter between ourselves and others. It does not resolve difference into wholeness, but keys into our intuition that self identity is an illusion. Her sculptures express desire for union through relatedness yet simultaneously present identity as changing, permeable and partial.'

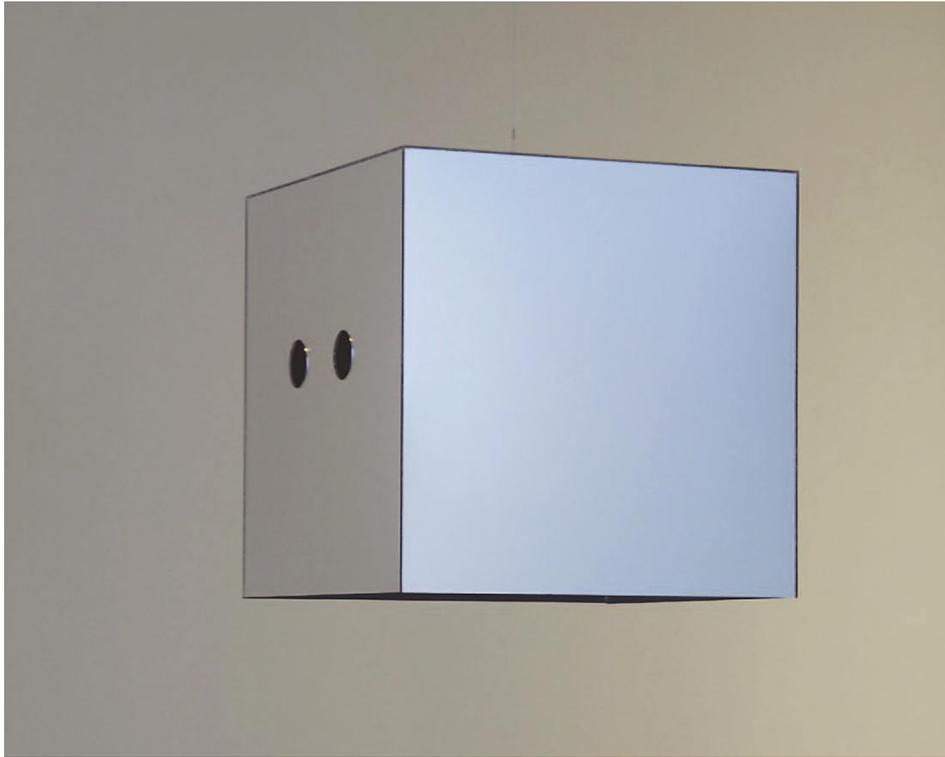
'Unfinished, beginningless, endless – Dwyer's work is made up of many parts that change with each installation – melding into each other, losing some parts, adding others.'

Linda Michael, 'The Little Temple of Love for Dead Things', catalogue essay, Mikala Dwyer exhibition, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 6 December 2000 – 28 January 2001

## Framing questions and further research

- The artist has said that uncertainty is always a component of her work. Do you think this applies to *IOU*?
- Can you think of another way in which the ideas underlying this work could be explored or expressed?
- How important is the use of mirrored surfaces to the meaning of this work?

# Alex Gawronski



*Knowing Me / Knowing You*, 2008, mirror acrylic

## Perspectives

The title of *Knowing Me / Knowing You*, 2008 suggests some game being played. The words 'knowing me – knowing you' implies some mutual exchange. This idea is carried through in the work by creating an apparently closed system (a mirrored box) then leaving it open at the base so that it could be worn as a helmet. To encourage this reading the box has 'eye holes'. The companion piece, *Knowing Me / Knowing You (JANUS – Local Version)*, 2009, has an eye slit instead of holes.

## Framing questions and further research

- It has been suggested that an aspect of this work is linked to Minimal Art and that movement's preference for simple, regular sculptural forms, fabricated from natural finish, industrial materials. Research this movement from this perspective.
- It has been suggested that the action of opening up these forms (open base and holes/slit cut in side) creates some kind of contradiction such as things designed to protect can have their weak points. Do you find this idea interesting? Do you have an alternative interpretation?
- While viewing Gawronski's work do you believe you are meant to stand or pose in a particular way to get the full effect or to make it 'work'?

# Richard Hamilton



*Palindrome* 1974  
from the Castelli Graphics portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*,  
lenticular acrylic laminated on collotype

## Perspectives

The technology behind this work is the same used to create '3D' postcards. *Palindrome* was created for a group edition of artists' multiples called *Mirrors of the Mind: art on the subject of mirrors*. Hamilton's submission was created using stereoscopic lenticular printing, which involves interlacing strips from 2D images taken approximately two inches apart, onto the back of plastic prism-like (lenticular) lenses. The result is a sense of three-dimensional depth without the need for special glasses.

Hamilton comments on the effectiveness of the image, 'I touched the mirror surface and realised that the fact that I could see my physical self, as well as its reflection, made the transition between the actual and the reflected smoother; it made the sensation more spectacular while making the plane of separation more of a barrier.'

'Perhaps the most telling thing about mirrors is that they inevitably touch the ego – the myth of Narcissus says something about a particular psychological condition but it also refers to the peculiarity of everybody's relationship to reflection; we all react to our own appearance every time we see ourselves. I can't bear to sit in a restaurant facing a mirror, my reflection shocks me, it is even repellent.

While thinking about, and therefore looking at, mirrors, it seemed that there would be little distinction between a representation of a mirror and a representation of anything, in the sense that a picture of something, a photograph or a figurative painting, is a fixed reflection of a thing seen. To experience the true nature of the mirror it is necessary to be aware not only of the reflection but of the thing reflected – the more intense the appreciation of this duality the stronger the experience, and we are aware of nothing more than ourselves, hence the trip of delight or disgust...'

Richard Hamilton, 'Reflections', reply to Nicholas Calas, in *Richard Hamilton: Collected Words 1953–1982* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p 108

## Framing questions and further research

- Richard Hamilton has commented that 'Perhaps the most telling thing about mirrors is that they inevitably touch the 'ego'. What do you think he means by this? Is this idea something you can relate to?
- Why do you think the artist chose this title (*Palindrome*)?
- The artist makes the observation that there is 'little distinction between a representation of a mirror and a representation of anything'. Other artworks in this exhibition explore this idea. See if you can find some and compare strategies.
- Which self portrait in this exhibition do you consider to be the most interesting or successful?
- Richard Hamilton is critically regarded as one of the most significant British artists of the post World War II era and one of the key influences on Pop Art of this period. He worked across a wide range of media and produced a number of works which incorporated reflective surfaces. See what you can find out about him.

# Joan Jonas



*Left Side Right Side*, 1972, video, 8:50 minutes

## Perspectives

Performance has been a central aspect of Joan Jonas's practice. Her video performances presented between 1972 and 1976 cast Jonas as her alter-ego *Organic Honey*. In these works the mirror features prominently as a symbol of self-portraiture and a way of exploring the gaps between reality and illusion. *Left Side Right Side* plays on this idea of a doubling up of perceptions. The meaning of the work is compounded by the fact that the artist is playing an alter ego character while being reflected in a mirror and on camera.

'I found myself continually investigating my own image in the monitor. I bought a mask of a doll's face. It transformed me into an erotic seductress. I named this TV persona *Organic Honey*. Increasingly obsessed with the process of my own theatricality, the images fluctuated between narcissistic and a more abstract representation. The risk was submersion in solipsistic gestures. When exploring the possibilities of female imagery, thinking always of a magic show, I attempted to fashion a dialogue between different disguises and the fantasies they suggested.'

Joan Jonas, Elizabeth A Sackler Centre for Feminist Art website, Brooklyn Museum, New York, [http://brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist\\_art\\_base/gallery/joanjonas.php](http://brooklynmuseum.org/eascfa/feminist_art_base/gallery/joanjonas.php)

'From the beginning the mirror provided me with a metaphor for my reflective investigation. It also provided a device to alter space and to fragment it. By reflecting it, I could break it up. I could mix reflections of performers and audience, thereby bringing all of them into the same time and space of the performance. In addition to making a space, a mirror also disturbs space suggesting another reality through the looking glass – to see the reflection of Narcissus, to be a voyeur, to see one's self as the other.'

Joan Jonas, 'Transmission', in *Women, Art, and Technology*, ed. Judy Malloy (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), pp 117–8

'In *Left Side Right Side*, Jonas explores the ambiguities caused by her attempt to identify correctly the spatial orientation of images simultaneously played back by a monitor and reflected in a mirror.'

David Ross, 'Joan Jonas's Videotapes', *Joan Jonas: Scripts and Descriptions, 1968 – 1982*, ed. Douglas Crimp (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

## Framing questions and further research

- A writer, Katharina Koschorreck, has commented about Jonas, 'Her work is mainly about perception, like the ways in which one's feelings about one's body change according to its surroundings, the media in which it is mirrored and viewers' reactions.' Do you think this applies to *Left Side Right Side*?
- Consider recreating aspects of Jonas's performance using your own face or body as the subject.

# Julio Le Parc



*Continuel Mobil*, 1966, synthetic fabric, nylon monofilament, aluminium, painted wood, fabric, acrylic paint

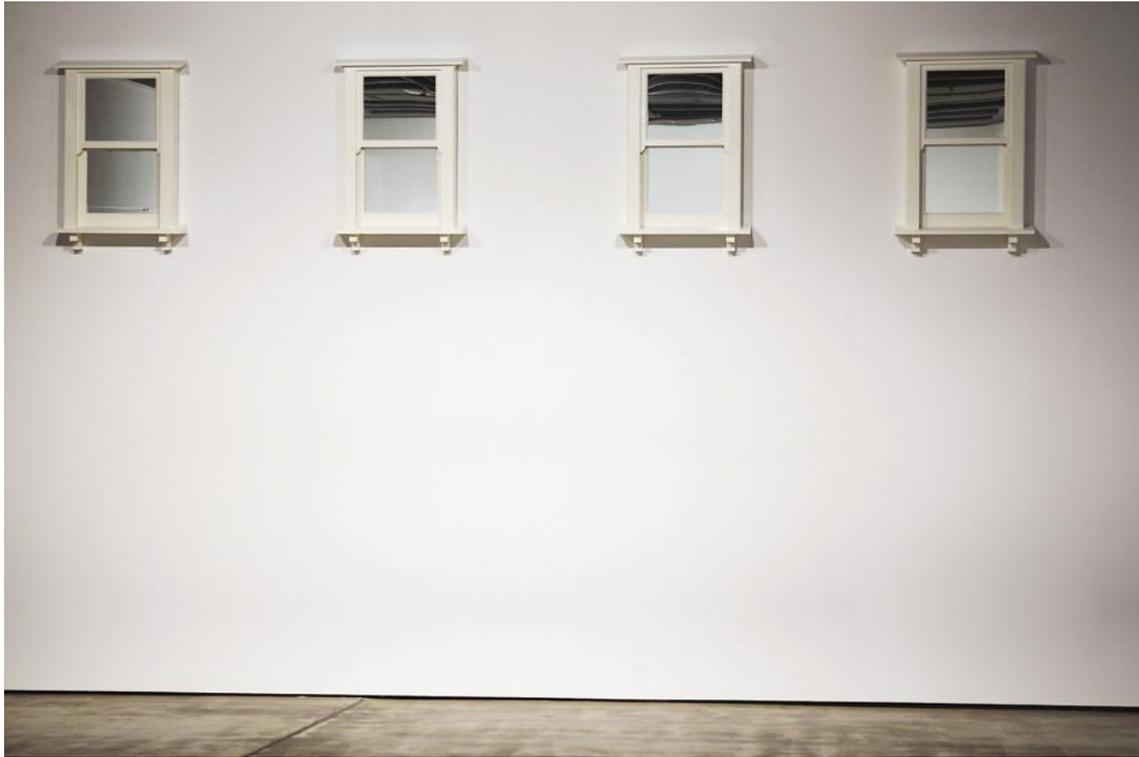
## Perspectives

Julio Le Parc was one of the members of a group of South American artists working in Paris in the 1950s and who played a major role in the launching of Kinetic art in Europe in the 1960s. Along with fellow Argentinian artist Hugo Demarco (also represented in *Mirror Mirror*) he worked as part of Groupe Recherche d'Art Visuel (GRAV) in the 1960s. Members of the group sought to create works which created new visual experiences and communicated a machine-like aesthetic rather than be viewed as the direct expression of an individual artist's feelings or as GRAV artists saw it, the artist's ego. A key strategy involved the use of highly reflective surfaces, mirrors, light, bright colours, optical illusions and kinetic components to achieve an end point of engaging the viewer in a visual game of seemingly endless possibilities. *Continuel Mobil's* translucent coloured squares of plastic are designed to move with the slightest air currents.

## Framing questions and further research

- A significant number of artists associated with Kinetic Art and Op Art of the 1950s and 1960s periods used similar approaches to Le Parc (and Demarco) in their choice and use of materials (including mirrors or reflective surfaces). Investigate this period of art history from this perspective.
- Art of this kind was sometimes criticised for being 'only about optics' or sensational experiences. Is this a fair criticism?

# Callum Morton



*Home*, 1995–96, mirror glass, painted wood

## Perspectives

Architecture and its relationship to people are central to Callum Morton's practice. He works across a wide diversity of media and formats including generating digital images of buildings and translating these into large scale sculptural works. One of his best-known works is *Valhalla*, presented at the 52nd Venice Biennale. This walk-into model of what appeared to be a ruined modernist era building was in fact based on a concrete house built by the artist's architect father. In much of Morton's work utopian dreams of a brighter future through architecture are challenged by references to human failings. An example is the strategy of illustrating the possible fate of iconic buildings such as the Schroder House in Utrecht transformed into a Toys 'R' Us shop.

*Home* belongs to a body of work made in the mid 1990s in which architectural elements such as balconies and windows were fixed on gallery walls. As with much of Morton's imagery attention to stylistic detail is subtle but holds the key to what the work might be about. The windows are broadly Federation Arts and Crafts in style while the reflective infills refer to the popularity of contemporary mirror glass architecture.

## Framing questions and further research

- Consider making an artwork which uses a similar strategy of combining styles and materials of different design periods.
- In this work the artist reduces the design values of different periods to a few objects. Is this an effective way to contrast these values?

# Yoko Ono



*A Box of Smile*, 1971, acrylic, mirror

## Perspectives

In this work the mirror returns to its domestic origins as something intimate to be held in the hand and gazed at. How you feel will decide how you look because when the drawer is pulled open the mirror inside will take a 'snapshot' of your expression. In reality it is your mouth that will be reflected. For most people that will be as a smile; perhaps a happy smile, a surprised smile or a cautious grin. It is all up to the user. Through such a simple device the idea is created that this little box holds an unlimited supply of smiles.

The Japanese-American artist, Yoko Ono, is widely known for her marriage to and artistic collaborations with John Lennon. She is an artist, musician and peace activist, widely recognised for her contribution to experimental art, music and filmmaking. In 1968 Ono and Lennon created two films in a single afternoon. One titled *Film no. 5* (52 minutes) consisted of Lennon's face in various states of expression. Today this film is better known as *Smile*.

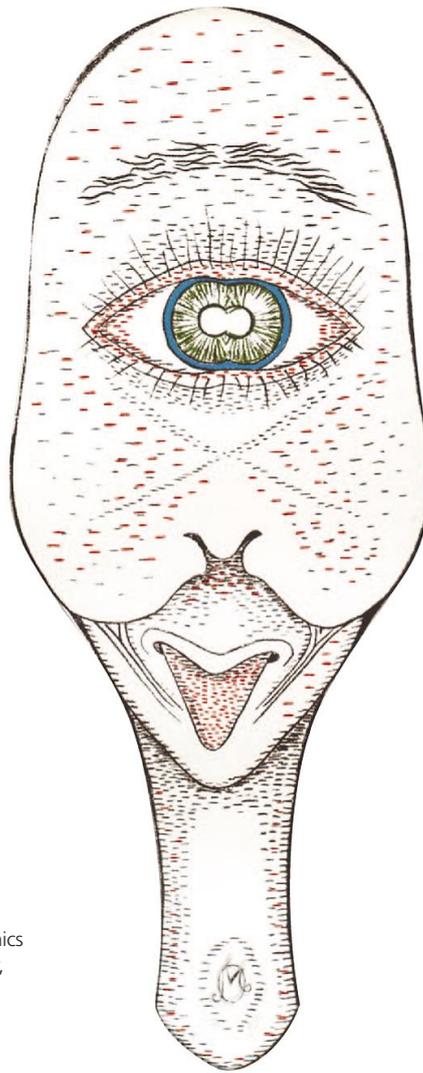
A long-term Ono project is *Smiling Face Film* which plans to include a smiling face photograph of every single human being in the world.

*A box of smile* is a multiple (unlimited) edition, published in 1984 by Reflux Editions, New York. It has a signed inscription, 'Yoko Ono '84' in silver paint on the base.

## Framing questions and further research

- This artwork uses strategies of concealment and surprise to engage the viewer. Are there other works in this exhibition which use similar tactics?
- Consider how you might use an idea like this in your own studio work.

# Meret Oppenheim



*Love of Polyphemus*, 1974, from the Castelli Graphics portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*, screenprint on mirror, licensed by Viscopy 2010

## Perspectives

The Surrealist artist Meret Oppenheim is best-known for her sculpture, *Object (Le Déjeuner en fourrure)*, consisting of a teacup, saucer and spoon, covered with fur. *Love of Polyphemus* is based on similar principles of incongruity. It is a screenprint of a hand mirror-like object on a mirrored surface. It is possible that the image may be the reverse or back of a mirror. The design is dominated by the single eye motif at the base. This may suggest a specific reference to the one-eyed Cyclops of Greek mythology, Polyphemus, who was tricked by Odysseus. If the design is inverted more obvious sexual references (the 'one-eyed' phallus) are revealed. It has been suggested that the artist's familiarity with the work of Swiss psychiatrist and thinker Carl Jung led to her to explore notions of complementary male/female sexuality in this work.

## Framing questions and further research

- Ann Stephen suggests that this work represents a convergence of two Greek tragedies, that of Polyphemus and Narcissus. Both are associated in different ways with the act of looking. Research these mythologies to better understand how they connect with this artwork.
- *Love of Polyphemus* is not the only work in *Mirror Mirror* that incorporates double takes or double meanings. Can you find any others?

# Michelangelo Pistoletto



*Lo Specchio (The Mirror)*, 1974, screenprint on steel

## Perspectives

The artist derived central ideas from an art movement, Arte Povera, which favoured making art from everyday materials such as cardboard, paper and recycled materials. In this way it was believed that the gap between art and life could be narrowed. Pistoletto's adoption of these ideas led to him to stencil and screenprint images onto reflective surfaces. The viewer thus looked at the 'art' (the applied image) and the reflections simultaneously. *Lo Specchio (The Mirror)* demonstrates a variation on this strategy with a humorous twist. The area of the mirror that should provide the reflection doesn't.

'The purpose and the result of my mirror paintings was to carry art to the edges of life in order to verify the whole system in which they function.'

Michelangelo Pistoletto, catalogue exhibition essay, Museum-Boymans – van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 22 March – 4 May 1969

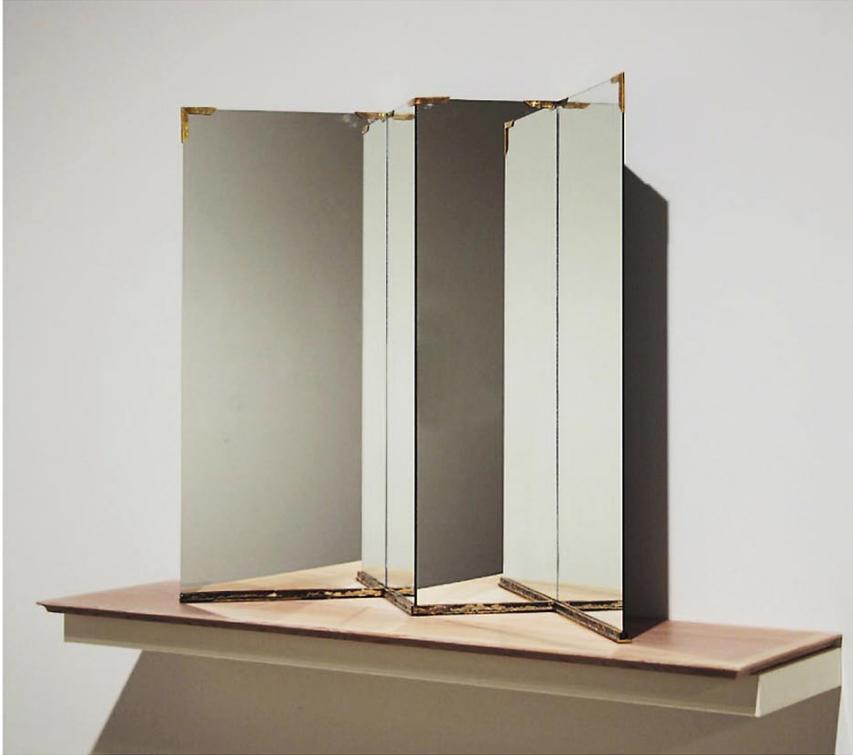
'However, the mirror and the image do not interact solely by themselves. The mirror's power of reflection draws the spectator into the game as well.'

Henry Martin, catalogue exhibition essay, Museum-Boymans – van Beuningen, Rotterdam, 22 March – 4 May 1969

## Framing questions and further research

- Why do you think Pistoletto has deliberately caused the reflective area of the mirror not to 'work'?
- There are other works in *Mirror Mirror* which play games with the viewer. Can you find them?
- Why do you think some artists want to 'narrow the gap between art and life'?

# Robert Pulie



*W*, 2007–09, mirrors, brass stand, brass clips

## Perspectives

Robert Pulie describes *W* (2007–09) as ‘a concrete pun as you are seeing two reverse-mirror-reverse reflections of yourself... mirrors at ninety degrees... maintain a true (not reverse) reflection of the viewer... because (as I learnt in high school science) the angle of incidence = the angle of reflection, and the two reflective surfaces are at ninety degrees to one another’.

Robert Pulie, email to Ann Stephen, May 2009

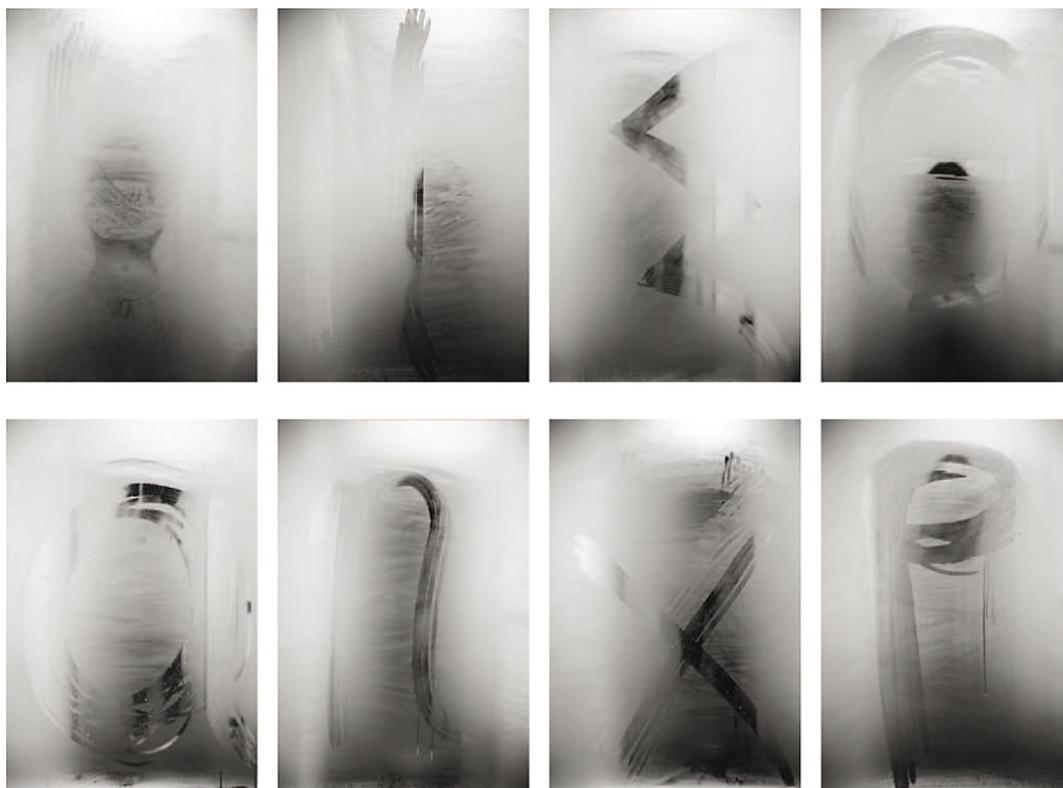
Ann Stephen comments, ‘*W* offers an uncanny experience, by allowing viewers to see a semblance of themselves as others see them, by reversing the mirror image, visually posing the conundrum of what appears to be natural. While functional and unadorned, its concertina arrangement recalls the cross-mirrored surfaces of Art Deco, a fascination that Pulie shares with Smithson – who wrote that in the ultramodern ‘of the thirties, that multi-faceted segment of time, we discover premonitions, labyrinths, cycles, and repetitions that lead us to a concrete area of the infinite.’

Robert Smithson, ‘Ultramoderne’, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flam (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966), pp63–5

## Framing questions and further research

- Do you understand what Ann Stephen means when she says that this work allows ‘viewers to see a semblance of themselves’?
- There are other works in *Mirror Mirror* which incorporate principles of mirror reversal, that is, reversing what mirrors conventionally present. Can you find them?

# Eugenia Raskopoulos



*Diglossia*, 2009, eight black-and-white photographs, licensed by Viscopy 2010

## Perspectives

In this set of images the artist has photographed her own reflection in a mirror. The mirror has been covered with steam and details of the artist's reflection are visible where the artist has drawn on the mirror surface with her finger. These details reveal a naked figure as if emerging from a shower in a bathroom. The mark making on the mirror appears to be signs or letters such as a wide 'U', an 'X' and the Greek letter 'Σ'.

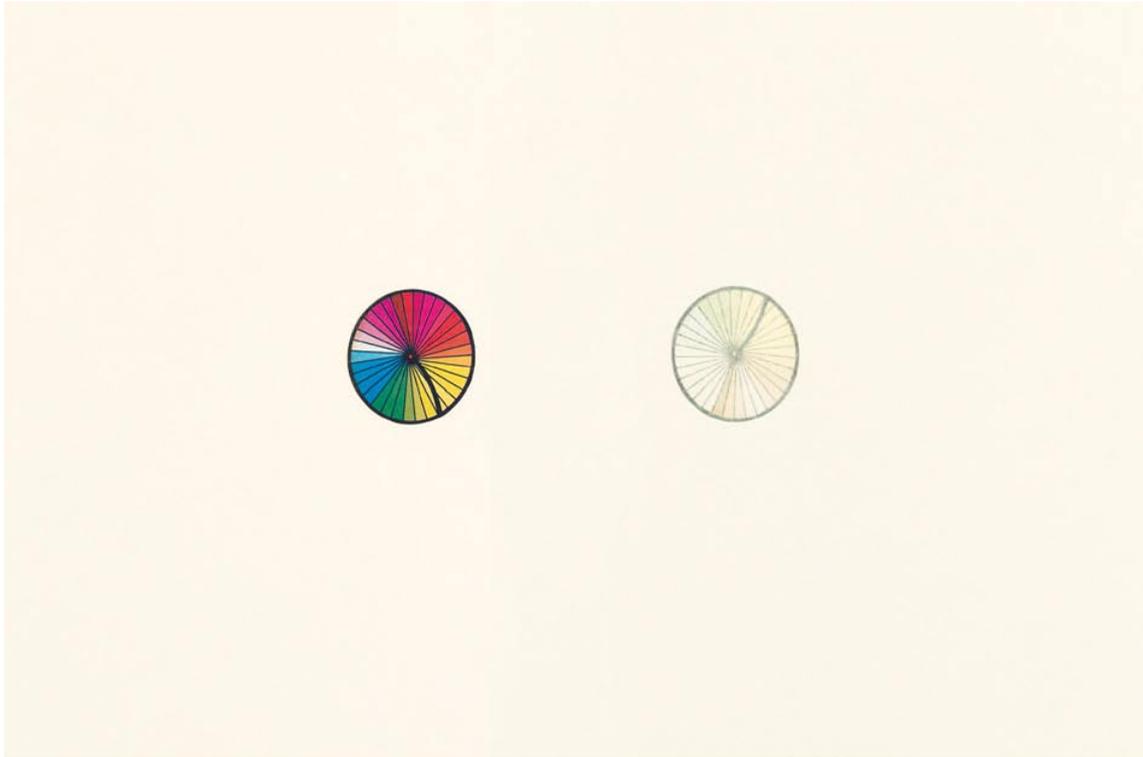
Writer Zara Stanhope suggests, 'A sensibility of fragility resides at the heart of Eugenia Raskopoulos' work. It is a condition of unreliability or possibly brittleness, arising from a confrontation with the nature of cultural codes and structures, particularly language, which her practice activates.'

Zara Stanhope, <http://www.arc1gallery.com>

## Framing questions and further research

- Research the use of bathroom mirrors in films to build suspense and tension.
- A number of works in *Mirror Mirror* incorporate text-on-mirror elements. What makes Eugenia Raskopoulos's use of this format special or different? Consider creating an artwork which involves making letters/word/designs using 'fugitive' processes and materials, as seen in *Diglossia*.
- If self portraits are meant to reveal, what might this work be saying about the artist?

# Robert Rauschenberg



*Diptych: Re-entry* 1974, from the Castelli Graphics portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*, transfer, collage, licensed by Viscopy 2010

## Perspectives

This work consists of two sheets of paper. One sheet is the transferred impression of the other. Each carries the image of a spoked wheel. The reference to the artist Marcel Duchamp's famous kinetic sculpture *Bicycle Wheel* (1913) was intentional. Rauschenberg's art practice, like that of Duchamp's, used the strategy of found objects and 'readymades' to question the nature of art and the creative act.

One sheet is in one sense the 'mirror image' of the other. But the loss of visual identity by the process of transference can be read as a metaphor for the transformation of reality or the emergence of a new reality through the art process.

## Framing questions and research

- 'The term 'mirror image' is often used to describe a variety of circumstances involving a very close resemblance. But to what extent is this term literally true? Is it really possible to achieve a 'mirror image'? Can a mirror provide this?
- Research the work of Marcel Duchamp and Robert Rauschenberg to investigate their common interest in machines and mechanisms for changing senses of reality.

# Jacky Redgate



*Light Throw (Mirrors) I*, 2009, colour photograph

## Perspectives

Jacky Redgate states that all her work deals with tradition, memory and perception. Within this her practice has continued to demonstrate a strong interest in logic, geometric systems, spatial relationships, optics and visual taxonomies. In her (2001–06) *Straightcut* series of photographs such interests merged with an exploration of how mirrors can be used to create images of objects which alter their original identity and subsumed them into seemingly abstract compositions, as if non-representational Modernist paintings. On close inspection these 'abstract' shapes, appearing in these photographs, reform as everyday items such as plastic food containers, in a shallow white space on a bench top, flanked by angled mirrors. Redgate's *Light Throw (Mirrors) I* work is an extension of these ideas. The artist set up a series of small mirrors (some silvered, circular or rectangular) on a wall and photographed the light they threw on the opposite wall. Repeat flashes were used to build up the image and create a soft focused effect.

'Redgate's staged realities have played their part in this debate on realism and truth in the photograph.'

Michael Desmond, *Jacky Redgate 1980 – 2003*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia Inc., 2005, p31

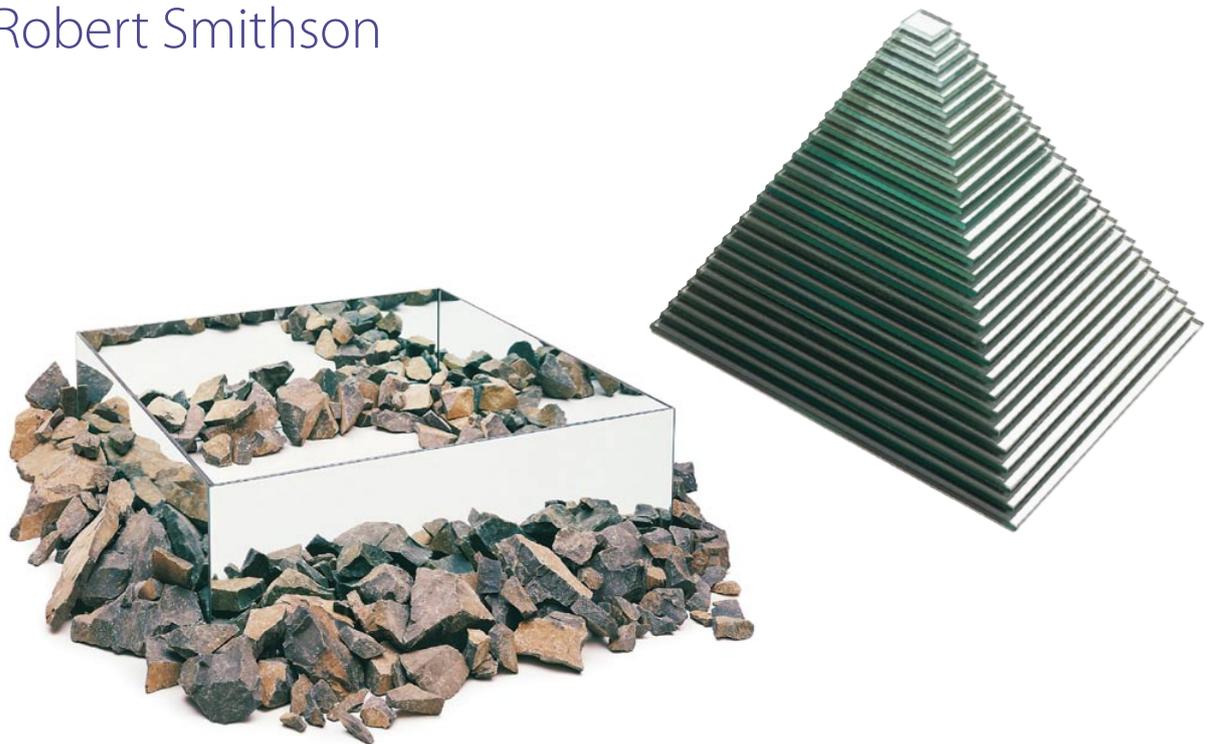
'In her ongoing project to document and critique the different systems of visual discourse, she maintains an awareness of the subjective power of the object.'

Desmond, *ibid*, p 34

## Framing questions and research

- In this work a photograph has become a substitute for a mirror. Does this suggest that the original 'image' (the mirror which captured the original data) is the 'true' or most reliable image of this event?
- Is this image out of focus or is there another explanation for its fuzzy appearance?

# Robert Smithson



From left: *Rocks and Mirror Square II*, 1971, basalt rocks, mirrors, licensed by Viscopy 2010  
*Untitled (Mirror-Glass Quarter-Stepped Pyramid)*, 1969, mirrors, steel, felt, licensed by Viscopy 2010

## Perspectives

Robert Smithson is best known for his large-scale earthwork *Spiral Jetty* (1970). But his work extended across a very broad range of media and formats. His approach to making art was very experimental and included the use of non-traditional materials and locations. Smithson's interests, particularly language, paradox, mapping and entropy, are evident in his style of working which encouraged viewers to think in terms of dualities rather than single interpretations and to accept paradox as the norm rather than the exception. Mirrors played an active role in early structures and were an integral part of his *Site/Nonsites* and *Displacements* projects of the 1960s. *Rocks and Mirror Square II* is characteristic of the artist's work of the late 1960s period in which rocks and earth were aligned with mirrors. The origins of such work and crystalline-like structures, such as *Untitled (Mirror-Glass Quarter-Stepped Pyramid)* can be traced to a childhood interest in nature and geology in particular.

'...If one wishes to be ingenious enough to erase time one requires mirrors not rocks.'

Robert Smithson, 'Incidents of Mirror-Travel in the Yucatan', *Artforum* (September 1969)

'The commonplace is transformed into a labyrinth of non-objective abstractions. Abstractions are never transformed into the commonplace. All dimensionality is drained off through the steep angled planes. The works feed back in infinite numbers of reflected 'readymades'.

Robert Smithson, 'A Short Description of Two Mirrored Crystal Structures', 1965, in *Robert Smithson: The Collected Writings*, ed. Jack Flann (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1996), p 328

## Framing questions and research

- *Untitled (Mirror-Glass Quarter-Stepped Pyramid)* can be read as a solid, regular form. But the reflective surfaces tend to 'break up' the object. Why do you think the artist has done this?
- Smithson was interested in the idea of opposites such as solid and void, complete and incomplete, condensed and expanded. How has he explored or expressed such ideas in these works?
- The idea of entropy was central to the artist's thinking. Find out what this word means and consider how these works might contain references to it.

### 3 Exploring the exhibition: Themes

Exploring the exhibition extends beyond looking at individual artist's work to identifying and considering relationships between various works in the exhibition. An effective way to do this is to see *Mirror Mirror* as an exhibition made up of groups of works with similar thematic links.

The thematic options for *Mirror Mirror* are negotiable because any reading of works is constantly deflected by the strategies and formats the artists use; and of course those tricky mirrors!

#### Theme 1: Mirror versus Painting

Most mirrors and canvases are flat and things 'appear' on their surfaces. For these reasons they can both be considered as 'blank canvases' on which reality of some kind is captured or represented. A number of artists are very interested in this idea. Artists in fact have been very interested in the whole issue of flatness in pictorial art for at least the last one hundred years and arguably longer. The fierce debates between representation and abstraction have disappeared with time but some artists continue to explore territory related to perception or how we look at everything, including art. By referring in some way to painting (or pictorial art) in their work they raise questions about the way we look at things and why we believe we can make a distinction between art and everything else. Inserting mirrors and setting up mirror-based experiences is often a strategy to create awareness of looking as a complex and very subjective process.

#### Examples

**Ian Burn:** *Mirror Piece*, 1967

**Michelangelo Pistoletto:** *Lo Specchio (The Mirror)*, 1974

**Jacky Redgate:** *Light Throw (Mirrors)*, 2009

**Eugenia Raskopoulos:** *Diglossia*, 2009

**Christian Capurro:** *White Breath (Passenger)*, 2009

#### Theme 2: Spectator Sport

Because the role of the spectator or viewer became a priority interest in later twentieth century art practice, viewer-engagement strategies are frequently used. There are a number of artworks in *Mirror Mirror* which take the form of visual games or puns built around the perception that mirrors 'always tell the truth'. But do they? And if so, do they tell the whole truth?

#### Examples

**Mikala Dwyer:** *IOU*, 2007

**Joan Jonas:** *Left Side Right Side*, 1972

**Yoko Ono:** *A Box of Smile*, 1971

**Meret Oppenheim:** *Love of Polyphemus*, 1974

**Robert Smithson:** *Rocks and Mirror Square II*, 1971

**Art & Language:** *Untitled Painting (Mirrors)*, 1965

### Theme 3: Reality

The idea of reality having many 'realities' can be traced from Cubism (with its multi-viewpoint depictions of objects) and Surrealism (which held that dreams and the subconscious mind represented a more central reality than that of the world of appearances). By the later twentieth century 'reality' took centre stage as Postmodernist ideas questioned the systems and basis on which society functions (such as beliefs, political and commercial systems, values, national and individual identity). Taking a position that it is not possible to separate art from the wider 'visual environment' many artists based their practice on a critique or exploration of the way mass media has created a 'hyperreality' based on an endless circulation of signs. The capacity of mirrors to provide false readings and create double meanings make them ideal devices to explore the idea that we are constantly living in a 'hall of mirrors', seeing ourselves and our desires endlessly reflected in mass media advertising and digital communication networking.

#### Examples

**Robert Smithson:** *Rocks and Mirror Square II*, 1971

**Joan Jonas:** *Left Side Right Side*, 1972

**Richard Hamilton:** *Palindrome*, 1974

**Robert Pulie:** *W*, 2007–09

**Robyn Backen:** *A Very Enchanting Thing*, 2007–09

### Theme 4: Texting

Placing texts or single letters within works of art became a routine strategy in early twentieth century Modern Art as a way of layering works with additional information and also disrupting any illusionist space the work might contain. In the later twentieth century, art and texts regularly appeared within the single work partly in recognition of the broader reality that images and text are an ever-present reality of urbanised contemporary life. In a number of works in *Mirror Mirror* the inclusion of text is usually an indication of the artists' intention to distract or deny the viewer from any clear meaning or to suggest that multiple or layered readings are possible.

#### Examples

**Shusaku Arakawa:** *Test Mirror*, 1975

**Mikala Dwyer:** *IOU*, 2007

**Art & Language:** *Drawings (Typed Mirrors)*, 1966–67

**Ian Burn:** *Hume's Mirror (No Object...)*, 1967

### Theme 5: Unreal

Implicit in all the above themes is the idea that there are alternative, parallel or complementary views of reality. When the gap or misalignment between one set of views and another is extreme, disruption or instability will occur. This situation can be read as a broad metaphor for a belief that in contemporary life the truth may be out there but nothing is certain. In this context mirrors are ideal mechanisms for challenging our grasp on reality.

#### Examples

**Ian Burn:** *Hume's Mirror (No Object...)*, 1967

**Ian Burn:** *Dissipating Mirror*, 1968

**Peter Cripps:** *Public Project (Fiction)*, Series Two, 3, 1993

**Peter Cripps:** *Construction*, ca. 1975

**Hugo Demarco:** *Métamorphose*, 1963

**Julio Le Parc:** *Continuel Mobil*, 1966

## 4 For teachers

### Planning a successful group visit to *Mirror Mirror*

#### Year Level

The Resource is designed to be used by secondary – senior secondary visual art teachers and students.

#### Pre – exhibition Background briefing

Inform the students about the origins and content of the exhibition.

Refer to the Curatorial Frameworks section in this Resource.

The primary focus in briefing students should be the fact that most modern forms of art are experimental, are not concerned with representation for its own sake and often require the viewers to bring their own thoughts and feelings to the process of making meaning. Things that can be identified in the works are often symbolic rather than literal.

#### Suggested activities

- Look at examples of contemporary art (reproductions/videos) which explore themes similar to those identified in this Resource (see Exploring the Exhibition).
- Use examples identified in the 'Mirrors in art' section this Resource to discuss the tradition of illusion in European art.
- Introduce artists and ideas associated with Minimalism and Conceptual Art.

#### In the exhibition

This session will involve students being involved in some group and individual analysis and response. Scribing is optional but will be useful for on-site reporting and post-visit research.

A suggestion is that students in this session try two things: engage with the work of an individual artist and with one of the exhibition's themes.

For this to happen it would be useful if the students had access to the *Mirror Mirror* Education Resource prior to visiting the exhibition. This could allow students to make focussed selections before arrival.

On arrival briefly assemble students and focus up on the broad themes of *Mirror Mirror*. Reminders regarding gallery behaviour protocols. Distribution of REFLEX research sheet or other material prepared by the teacher.

#### Tasks

- 10 minutes    Small groups (4–5 students) take time to view some works. During this time it is better if students all have some specific tasks (suggest select from REFLEX menu).
- 10 minutes    Regroup and sample some group's responses/findings. Focus students on tasks to follow.
- 20 minutes    Release group as individuals or small groups to engage in research tasks (such as selecting from REFLEX menu).
- 10 minutes    Regroup and view selected works using students' research and responses as primary focus.

A useful close-out exercise involves giving students time out for a last look with some specific tasks in mind.

This could be:

- Choose one work which interests you most and think about one thing within it or an aspect that you could talk about later or perhaps use in individual art work.

Note: In on-site and follow up discussion direct students' attention to key questions including:

- Why do different artists see things in different ways?
- How important is the choice and use of art mediums in expressing ideas?
- Are some works more effective or interesting than others in dealing with the theme/subject?
- What does 'to interpret an idea or subject' mean?
- What kinds of devices or systems of communication do artists use to interpret a theme or subject (eg use of symbolism, distortion, illusionism)?

## Post visit

Post exhibition options primarily consist of sharing and analysing the information gathered during the exhibition visit. This information might be:

- Data generated on-site using proformas
- Individual opinions (shared)
- Different task or theme groups reporting findings

## Curriculum connections

### General Key Competencies

Actively engaging with artworks within this exhibition will support Key Competencies development as follows:

- KC1 Collecting, analysing and organising information: REFLEX tasks require students to use a number of strategies to collect and organise data on individual works and groups of work
- KC2 Communicating ideas and information: REFLEX tasks require students to scribe, debate and report findings
- KC4 working with others in teams: REFLEX tasks involve students working in teams

### Essential Learnings

Thinking: The power of many of the images will cause students to stop and think about the way we perceive the world. The *Mirror Mirror* artists as a group demonstrate a high level of ability to critically evaluate, plan and generate ideas and solutions.

Communication: Analysing works or reporting and debating findings related to viewing works will require students to make effective use of language and writing skills. Analysing and responding will also allow students to learn more about art as a powerful form of communication. Many works in the exhibition are concerned with ways in which 'reality' is created or perceived and ask viewers to debate the consequences.

### Visual Art specific outcomes

*Mirror Mirror* offers unique opportunity for art teachers and students to:

- Expand knowledge of the diversity and content of contemporary art practice
- Learn about:
  - Different kinds of art practice
  - Different kinds of art-based methods and materials
  - Where artists get ideas from
  - Ideas important to contemporary artists
  - The impact of new and emerging technologies
  - The links contemporary art practice has with art of the past
- Develop skills in:
  - Engaging with, analysing, responding to artworks and communicating about them
  - Visual thinking, problem solving and using imagination

## **Year Level application: Years 8 – Senior Secondary**

### **Visual Arts Years 8 – 10**

- Particular focus: understanding why artists use different methods and styles, learning to analyse and respond to a diversity of artworks, developing an understanding of the role of art and artists in society, generating ideas for arts practice

*Mirror Mirror* has special value in exposing students to the diversity of art practice within contemporary society as well as offering ideas for arts practice, arts analysis and response and resourcing an understanding of art in social context.

### **SACE Visual Arts Studies and Art Practical**

*Mirror Mirror* is an excellent resource for teachers and students looking for ideas which can be applied to studio work, seeking to understand aspects of modern to contemporary art practice and sharpening skills in engagement with, analysing and communicating about recent art. Possible outcomes include:

#### **Art Practical**

- Exploring themes in the exhibition to see how artists explore similar ideas in different ways
- Studying how and why artists use different materials, techniques and formats to achieve results
- Studying how and why artists develop an individual style of practice
- Understanding how artists develop and resolve concepts
- Resourcing ideas for studio practical work

#### **Visual Study**

- Investigating works in terms of visual thinking and creative problem solving
- Analysing works to gain knowledge of conventions, codes, styles and strategies used by particular groups of artists
- Extending knowledge of influences impacting on contemporary art
- Investigating contexts in which art is made
- Developing skills in responding to challenging works of art
- Developing skills in communicating about challenging works of art
- Gaining insights into the practice of contemporary Australian artists

## 5 REFLEX Get started student group visit activities

The following tasks are designed to support/initiate structured viewing and engagement for students in the exhibition. They can be undertaken in any order and are suitable for individual and small group work. Implicit in some tasks is the idea that students or groups will report findings and discuss works with others.

Scribing is not necessary to undertake these activities but some of these tasks could involve scribing to support on-going post-visit work.

### Think about

When you find yourself wanting to look at some works in particular do think it is because the image or subject is interesting or is it because of the artist's technique or way of interpreting the subject?

If the building was burning and you could save one work from this exhibition, which one would you save and why?

Is there a particular work in this exhibition that contains or is saying things that you agree with or disagree with strongly? Talk to someone else in your group about what you've found.

### First and last impressions

What did you think about when you first came into the exhibition and looked around?

Was there any work in particular you wanted to look at or return to and look at again?

Why do you think this happened?

Is there a work in this exhibition that you think you will remember or find hard to forget?

Before leaving check out the exhibition one more time to see if there's an idea or technique in a work that you could try when you get back to school.

### Easy?

Which work was the easiest and which work was the hardest to make – and why?

### Analysis and response (individual work/s)

Choose any work that attracts your attention and apply any or all of the following questions:

Are the visual qualities of this work appealing in any way?

Would this idea have been better expressed in a different way?

Can you see any kind of connection between this kind of art and others you know about?

What do you think this work is about or might be saying?

Has this given you an idea for something you could make as part of your art studies?

Select one work that appeals in some way and tell someone else your reasons for your selection.

### Analysis and response (the exhibition)

Write a review of the exhibition which explores the links or relationships between the works.

Choose one of the themes suggested in this Education Resource and review the exhibition from this perspective.

Are there other themes (not identified in this Resource) which could apply to this selection of work.

Write a press release for this exhibition.

Compare two or more works which appear to be exploring similar ideas in different ways.

## 6 Further research

### Curatorial frameworks

Ann Stephen's curatorial essay 'Jumping through the Mirror' is extensive and for any art student unfamiliar with the complexities of later twentieth century contemporary art practice and theoretical debate it does require some unpacking. But once its basic framework is understood the reasons why the artworks have been selected and what individual works might be concerned with or are saying will begin to emerge.

The following summary is intended to act as a guide to reading this essay and those of other contributors (Keith Broadfoot and Andrew McNamara) in the exhibition catalogue.

### Mirrors in Western art – a long tradition

For centuries artists have used similar strategies or been interested in a common set of ideas. Mirrors, for example, have fascinated artists because they represent things and at the same time require us to think about the viewer and the circumstances of the viewing.

'Mirrors have long haunted Western art. Throughout the history of painting – in works by those such as van Eyck, Parmigianino, Velázquez, Manet, and Magritte – mirrors have been used to reflect upon representation, puzzling out the intersecting roles of artist, spectator, and voyeur.'

### Mirrors in twentieth century art

In late nineteenth to early twentieth century Western art there was a crisis in representation. Impressionism primed audiences to think about looking as a retinal process. Cubism in particular, with its multiplicity of views of a common object within a single image broke down the idea that art was essentially about representing the 'true' object from a single viewpoint. Surrealist artists who favoured unconscious over conscious perception created images which destabilised reality or presented alternative worlds in which the normal rules of how reality should 'behave' did not apply. Mirrors or the mirrored image were for Surrealist artists the means to demonstrate that alternative ways of representing reality existed.

'Mirror is the surface *par excellence* of late Modernism. Its paradoxes confound the illusion of transparency – indexing the instabilities of perception, while offering the possibility of reflexivity. As "(Ian) Burn observed, a mirror produces not only an event or a piece of self-conscious theatre, but also deflects visual attention away from the object itself.'

### Exhibition focus

'*Mirror Mirror: Then and Now* extends beyond the company of 1960s and '70s international Minimal-Conceptual artists by including contemporary Australian artists who reference and play with their legacy. It considers some of the implications of stepping into the zone of low-visibility that a looking-glass offers.'

### Exhibition structure

The exhibition is comprised of two groups of work:

*Mirror Mirror – Then and Now* features fifteen multi-faceted mirror pieces from the 1960s and 1970s by artists including Yoko Ono, Richard Hamilton and Ian Burn.

Of this group Ann Stephen comments:

'Early mirror pieces had a quality of stealth and deception. Mirrors enabled shock encounters by stalking their unsuspecting audiences.'

A key feature of this kind of work was the emphasis placed on the role or response of the viewer. This had the effect of moving away from the idea of the 'art work' or 'work of art' and towards the idea of 'art as object' or 'object art'. This implied that the 'art' existed somewhere in the space between artist, object and viewer. Art made within these frameworks tended to take on an elusive quality which means that that could not easily be 'read' in terms of meaning. Artists used strategies such as layering different possible meanings, using less conventional formats, such as kinetic components, industrial materials, incorporating texts and using mirrors to parody or deliberately deflect any possible links with traditional pictorial art (including Modernist painting). However there was never a single style or 'look' to such works. Exploration even included recognition that the TV/film monitor could be regarded as a kind of mirror. Not in the literal sense (ie you can see your face in its reflection) but metaphoric in the sense that whatever appeared on the screen was a reflection of an individual's reading of what it represented or meant.

Ann Stephen makes an important distinction:

'Looking back across this spectrum of historic mirror pieces – from the hypnotic optics of Kinetic Art to the metaphysics of Neo-Dada and Surreal – it becomes clear that it was only in Minimal and Conceptual practices that mirrors came to mark a crisis.'

The crisis that Stephen is referring to is about the act of seeing. From the later twentieth century this idea is central to debates about the nature, purpose and meaning of art – as a visual 'thing'. The fact that the viewer or spectator was drawn into the formula automatically changed the way artists and others began to think about art. It became harder to see it as a private contract between artist and artwork. It opened up the idea of art as some kind of dynamic, a verb rather than a noun, something one does, an event, a happening, a continuum, an experience, a dialogue – anything but an object or 'thing'.

### Exhibition outcomes

'By bringing these mirror-works together, strange new correspondences reverberate between these 1960s and contemporary artworks. In returning to an era when the mirror became not just a looking-glass or a readymade, but at its most extreme implied an invitation to the viewer to join in all kinds of risky endgames, the exhibition asks whether that game is not yet over. The crisis of late Modernism is now thoroughly contaminated with multiple forms of eccentric abstraction and the metaphysical, as mirrors have become part of a recurrent vocabulary for a new generation. Perhaps this is the cost (or achievement) of Minimal and Conceptual Art: that it has allowed practices to emerge from the breaking open of what once seemed a highly circumscribed set of possibilities.'

Quotes from: Ann Stephen, 'Jumping through the Mirror', catalogue essay, *Mirror Mirror: Then and Now*

### Mirrors in art

Over the last 500 years mirrors have been used in artworks as:

- visual devices to control and direct the gaze of the viewer
- symbolic objects
- mechanical devices or aids to assist the artist in making works of art
- visual devices or strategies to explore perception or of the act of looking at something
- extensions of paintings
- active components within multimedia artworks

There are a number of well known examples of mirrors being used or referred to in some way in paintings.

**Jan van Eyck** (c 1390 – 1441), *The Arnolfini Portrait*, 1434

This painting is believed to depict the Italian merchant Giovanni di Niccolo Arnolfini and his wife Giovanna Cenami. A feature of the painting is the intense illusionism, particularly in the rendition of details and in conveying a sense of light. An item of special interest in the image is a round, convex mirror on the wall between the two figures. Two figures are caught in the reflection, standing at the doorway to the room. One of the figures may be the artist, van Eyck. The mirror has been used as a device to insert the artist into the work. There has been speculation that the mirror may have symbolic meaning; the eye of God blessing the marriage vow; a spotless mirror symbolising the purity of Mary the mother of Jesus.

**Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez**, (1599 – 1660), *Las Meninas*, 1656

Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez was a Spanish painter who was the leading artist in the court of King Philip IV. This is perhaps the most famous 'mirror painting' in the history of art. It has become famous because it appears to be partly about the process of 'reading' a work of art. As a court painter Velázquez's duties required him to paint the royal family and members of the court. The king and queen's daughter, the Infanta, is shown in the foreground. But is she the true subject of this painting? The reason this is not clear is because the artist has introduced some clever visual games involving reflections. In the background there is a framed unit in which the king and queen appear. Is this a painting or a mirror? Whatever the viewer decides significantly changes the meaning of the work. The presence too of the artist standing in front of his canvas looking towards the viewer might suggest that he's working on the painting that we happen to be looking at right now. Which sort of makes us the artist. That's what mirrors can do – play with our sense of reality.

**Édouard Manet** (1832 – 1883), *Le Bar aux Folies-Bergères*, 1882

Manet is closely linked to the French Impressionists but in fact never exhibited with the group. The style of his art avoided the broken brushwork bright colour palette of his younger contemporaries. His depictions of modern life have the rock-hard scrutiny of an artist he much admired, Velázquez. From this artist and others he learnt to capture significant moments or human dramas with a psychological edge. Like Velázquez he deliberately used pictorial devices such as frames, doorways and mirrors to set up a visual game which hinted at thoughts and feelings behind the façade of appearances. *Le Bar* is one of his best-known and critically acclaimed works. In it the mirror running the length of the bar creates a 'world within a world' which encourages the viewer to feel that he or she is standing in the crowd, looking at the barmaid who is looking back – a kind of visual 'loop tape' designed to raise questions about the real subject of the painting.

**John Brack** (1920 – 1999), *Now and Then*, 1986

This Australian artist famously made a series of paintings in which playing cards or pencils and pens appeared to be acting out epic human dramas such as battles and parades. *Now and Then* shows some pens and pencils on a table top possibly reflected in a mirror on the wall above. But the objects below and above do not entirely 'match up'. Three playing cards which appear below and are repeated above (in the 'reflection'). But they carry different letters. Perhaps the idea of time is being explored in a different way? Think about the title 'Now and Then'. These are time words. Now look to see where the words made by the alignment of the cards – 'Now' and 'Then'. If you have based your reading of this work on the belief that the upper section is in fact a mirror image you now have to decide where the 'real' cards are located. How does this visual game connect with the idea of time?

**René Magritte**, (1898 – 1967), *The Living Mirror*, 1928

The art of Magritte, a Belgian Surrealist artist, constantly plays with reality and illusion. A number of his best-known works combined realistic depictions of everyday objects with inscribed texts which appeared to contradict the truth of the image. One work famously featured a pipe with the words 'ceci n'est pas un pipe' ('this is not a pipe'). Through this strategy the artist intended to confront a reflexive reading of an image of an object as the object itself. He also intended to refresh an understanding of familiar things by stripping them of their name tags. These works became known as the 'Ceci n'est pas' series. He constantly incorporated into his paintings devices and structures including mirrors, stage settings, curtains and easels to create some confusion between objects and their depiction. In *The Living Mirror*, the human eye has been imagined as a mirror (reflecting the clouds) and also a camera-like device (with black shutter/iris) returning the viewer's gaze like a CCTV black bubble.

## 7 List of works

### Shusaku Arakawa

*Critical Mistake*, 1971  
screenprint on acrylic  
23.4 x 22.4 cm

JW Power Bequest, University  
of Sydney, managed by Museum  
of Contemporary Art, Sydney

*Test Mirror*, 1975  
from the Castelli Graphics portfolio  
*Mirrors of the Mind*  
screenprint  
75.4 x 108.8 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### Art & Language

*Untitled Painting (Mirrors)*, 1965  
mirrors, canvases  
two units, 34.5 x 21.5 x 7.5 cm each  
Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke-Zoute

*Drawings (Typed Mirrors)*, 1966–67  
typewriting on mirralon  
three units, 12.5 x 29.2 cm each  
Mulier Mulier Gallery, Knokke-Zoute

### Robyn Backen

*A Very Enchanting Thing*, 2007–09  
wood, mirror,  
Bakelite telephone, sound  
204 x 55.5 x 55.5 cm  
courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### Ian Burn

*Mirror Piece*, 1967  
glass over mirror in painted  
wooden frame, notes and diagrams  
mirror 52.7 x 36.6 cm  
thirteen sheets, 27.5 x 21.3 cm each  
Queensland University Art Museum,  
Brisbane

*Hume's Mirror (No Object...)*, 1967  
painted mirror  
60 x 60 cm  
Ian Burn Estate, Sydney  
courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane

*Dissipating Mirror*, 1968  
mirror mounted on board,  
metallic paint on board, hinges  
two panels, 36 x 27 x 3 cm each  
Ian Burn Estate, Sydney  
courtesy Milani Gallery, Brisbane

### Christian Capurro

*White Breath (Passenger)*, 2009  
correction fluid on two wardrobe  
mirror doors, reflected light  
two units, 180 x 100 x 3.5 cm each

### Peter Cripps

*Construction*, ca. 1975  
Bakelite, plastic, glass mirrors, cardboard  
three units, approx 11 x 27.5 cm each

*Public Project (Fiction), Series Two, 3*, 1993  
wood, acrylic paint, convex mirror  
320 x 92.5 x 64 cm  
courtesy Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne

### Hugo Demarco

*Métamorphose*, 1963  
painted wood, chrome-plated  
steel, electric motor  
35.5 x 35.5 x 17.5 cm  
JW Power Bequest, University  
of Sydney, managed by Museum  
of Contemporary Art, Sydney

### Mikala Dwyer

*IOU*, 2009  
mirror acrylic  
80 x 180 x 30 cm  
courtesy Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

### Alex Gawronski

*Knowing Me / Knowing You*, 2008  
mirror acrylic  
35 x 35 x 35 cm

*Knowing Me / Knowing You  
(JANUS: Local Version)*, 2009  
mirror acrylic  
38 x 38 x 38 cm

### Richard Hamilton

*Palindrome*, 1974  
from the Castelli Graphics portfolio  
*Mirrors of the Mind*  
lenticular acrylic laminated on collotype  
59.6 x 44 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### Joan Jonas

*Left Side Right Side*, 1972  
video, 8:50 minutes  
courtesy Electronic Arts Intermix, New York

### Julio Le Parc

*Continuel Mobil*, 1966  
synthetic fabric, nylon monofilament,  
aluminium, painted wood,  
fabric, acrylic paint  
99 x 40 x 9 cm  
JW Power Bequest, University  
of Sydney, managed by Museum  
of Contemporary Art, Sydney

### Callum Morton

*Home*, 1995–96  
mirror glass, painted wood  
four units, 120 x 84 x 15 cm each  
Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

### Yoko Ono

*A Box of Smile*, 1971  
acrylic, mirror  
5.3 x 5.3 x 5.3 cm closed  
11.2 x 5.4 x 4.7 cm open  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### Meret Oppenheim

*Love of Polyphemus*, 1974  
from the Castelli Graphics portfolio  
*Mirrors of the Mind*  
screenprint on mirror  
47.6 x 18.6 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### Michelangelo Pistoletto

*Lo Specchio (The Mirror)*, 1974  
screenprint on steel  
100 x 70 cm  
JW Power Bequest, University  
of Sydney, managed by Museum  
of Contemporary Art, Sydney

### Robert Pulie

*W*, 2007–09  
mirrors, brass stand, brass clips  
72.3 x 72 x 32 cm

### Eugenia Raskopoulos

*Diglossia*, 2009  
eight black-and-white photographs  
142 x 95 cm each  
courtesy Arc One Gallery, Melbourne

### Robert Rauschenberg

*Diptych: Re-entry*, 1974  
from the Castelli Graphics  
portfolio *Mirrors of the Mind*  
transfer, collage  
two sheets, 38 x 56.8 cm overall  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

### Jacky Redgate

*Light Throw (Mirrors) I*, 2009  
colour photograph  
155 x 124 cm  
courtesy Arc One Gallery, Melbourne  
and William Wright Artists Projects, Sydney

### Robert Smithson

*Untitled (Mirror-Glass Quarter-Stepped  
Pyramid)*, 1969  
mirrors, steel, felt  
17.8 x 30.8 x 30.8 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

*Rocks and Mirror Square II*, 1971  
basalt rocks, mirrors  
36 x 220 x 220 cm  
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra