



M4

UWS
ART
GALLERY
UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN
SYDNEY
8 AUGUST –
27 OCTOBER
2006

M4 MOTORWAY

Since its completion in 1993 the M4 has become the major traffic artery by which the city of Sydney can be connected to its western suburbs and the Blue Mountains beyond. To a large degree it has replaced the Great Western Highway, historically of great significance and which was the route by which the explorers Blaxland, Wentworth and Lawson cut their way through the mountains to open up the western plains for settlement. Although only relatively recent, the M4 occupies land associated with journeys and travel since white settlement. Its dominance in the landscape of western Sydney is such that its suburban environs have been redrawn and articulated as a result of its proximity. Suburbs once known only by their names, often redolent of a colonial past, are now recognised by their relationship to the Motorway.

The Motorway has become a marker by which the geography of western Sydney has been re-articulated. The historical and geographic importance of this shift should not to be under-estimated as such a demarcation has occurred only rarely since white settlement. The understanding of the importance of mapping (and the recording of these 'markers') in any history is a relatively recent historiography. Whilst it is better understood in constructs of the past, the ways by which a place is understood via maps, and the insertion of major aspects such as road infra structure is becoming a vital tool in the constructs of the history of a particular locale.¹

Quite apart from the importance of the M4 as a key component in any articulation of Sydney's geography, this exhibition, with its focus on the particular geographic and cultural locale of the M4 allows three of Australia's major cultural icons to be combined: regional landscape, cars and journeys.

Much of Australia's artistic heritage has been spent defining and re-defining the landscape; there is no doubt that landscape has been the dominant genre in Australian cultural expression. A key ingredient in this exposition has been journeys within the landscape. Traversing an often hostile space was traditionally one of the ways by which themes of Australian bush mythology were articulated. Journeys continue to play a large role in evocations of contemporary Australian culture, for example, painter John Brack, spoke of a post-war tradition amongst Australian families; "a social phenomenon important in our time – the family making an afternoon trip from the city to the nearby country on a Sunday. It is part of the pattern of the life of millions".² Whilst most of the journeys undertaken on the M4 are most likely to be the more prosaic ones of daily commutes, there is an epic component of such a Motorway trip which does not exist on a suburban street.

The key component in such undertakings is the car. Considering the position the car holds in most families it is noteworthy that relatively few Australian painters have chosen cars as a key iconography. In the early 1930s however, Sydney artists such as Thea Proctor and Syd Ure Smith were not apparently coy in being used in advertisements to sell Chevrolet cars in the prestigious art journal, *Art In Australia*. Perhaps for most artists, fears of being seen as populist have been enough to discourage its inclusion as a suitable genre.³ If the car, as a central feature of Australian art is virtually non-existent, images featuring any aspect of motorways are equally scarce. Only very few artists, such as ex-patriot Jeffrey Smart have recognised the emotive possibilities in industrial roadways.

There is no doubt, however, that motorways have changed the way in which travellers perceive the landscape surrounding them as well as providing signifiers of place. These changes centre on speed, perception, time and place. The importance of place, time and inherent dynamism are central to the theme of this exhibition and all three artists have engaged in the process of analysis.

The M4 provided the catalyst for three lecturers from the School of Communication Arts of the University of Western Sydney. All three live – as well as work – in the Greater Western Sydney region. The three share an interest in exploring work based on representations of the region's landscape and inhabitants.

Rhett Brewer's paintings in this exhibition reflect directly upon the iconography of the motorway. Cars, semi-trailers, concrete, over-passes, lighting poles and signage are all components within a modern, industrial transport system defined by one continuous ribbon of concrete. This is a world of the motorised traveller whose experience of the journey is contained within the domain of the Motorway. At first, the landscape on either side of this domain appears to pass as an adjunct to the material world of the man-made.

However, in all of these paintings there is an almost equal representation of a contradictory existence; here the contrast of the natural world is vital to the dynamism expressed by the curve of the concrete and sense of speed and mobility. Brewer's skies are the key to this dynamic; almost romantic in their scale and depiction, they serve to stand – almost as if putting the onlooker on notice – as a reminder of the world which has been replaced by the dominance of the Motorway. It is in the emotive context of the sky that the de-humanised, temporary and fragmented world of the journey takes place.

Peter Charuk's work of animation, *Overpass*, documented over several months the building of the Light Horse Interchange at the junction of the M4 and the M7. Charuk's digital installation reflects in his choice of medium, the essence of time, of change and memory. The site itself has been victim to such elements, its history rich with memories of cattle tracks, drovers, pastures and until recently wonderland big dippers. In his manipulation of layered readings, time becomes referential rather than absolute. This work refers directly – and indirectly – to such transitions; the fragmentary nature of knowing, seeing and remembering.

In his artist's statement, Charuk uses the words of British artist, Fletcher Benton, to express the essence of *Overpass*:

**At 70 MPH...
Flashes of colour...silver...
geometric forms in focus, out
of focus. The competition for
sublineal awareness...a spectacular
stage, the Highway. These kinetic
experiences leave their contrails
in memory as basic forms...Detroit
and Madison Avenue come
smashing together with colour
and chrome. Somewhere a man's
sensibilities are turned on to
time and space, a fourth visual
dimension. Nowhere does time
stand quiet or still...noise, lights,
speed...a restlessness has
come upon us, whether or not.
Transparent colours join and pass
behind one another in a manner of
slowness...or of slow motion...a
blur...concentrated colour of
many memories. The width of a
colour shrinks to a line and then
disappears to another colour...a
flatness, a change of flatness...the
elements of space and time.⁴**

BIOGRAPHIES

Dave Cubby's photographic installation, *Sixteen Bearded Men* of St. Marys explores another kind of relationship within the domain of the M4. At the juncture of the Great Western Highway and the M4 a strip development named St Marys was the source Cubby chose to seek his sixteen bearded men. Not this time an analysis of a particular locale within the M4, but rather a photographic homage to a group of men whose facial hair marks them as part of the perimeter, just as their suburb of St. Marys physically marks a place of demarcation. For Cubby there is a visual connection to be drawn between the scrubby landscape of St. Marys and of many of the faces who reside within it. As Cubby describes:

Although part of greater Sydney, this suburb seems always to be on the perimeter, there is wasteland that becomes scrubland and new developments that back onto small farm land and quite wild, forgotten places.

It is here, in St Marys that many of the men with beards live, a lot of men with beards, some large and lush, others patterned and plaited, short and sharp, all of which appear as scrubland, part tame, part wild. Some overgrown, forgotten or cultivated on the edge of the face: the plain. It's a masculine thing. There are legendary bikie gangs based in St Marys and a prescient drug and alcohol culture. People live on here who know where the bodies are buried at the edge of town...The beard remains a contained chaos shown on the face.⁵

In the work of these three artists the actual domain of the M4 is mediated through responses which are magical, lyrical and humorous. It has provided a catalyst through which the artist's investigations are able to move from the physical into metaphors for change, dynamism, journey and place. The concrete of the motorway is shown to possess something of a semi-permeable membrane; a membrane which allows perception and imagination to surround it creating new insights and meanings.

**Dr Pamela James,
School of Humanities, UWS**

(Endnotes)

- 1 Jeremy Black, *Maps and History: Constructing Images of the Past* (London: Yale University Press, 1997).
- 2 John Brack, *Brack on Brack, A Retrospective Exhibition, 1987* quoted in Ian Burn, "The Car, The Family, The Landscape", *Creating Australia* (Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988)
- 3 Ian Burn, "The Car, The Family, The Landscape", *Creating Australia* (Sydney: International Cultural Corporation of Australia, 1988)
- 4 Fletcher Benton, *Kinetics* (London: Hayward Gallery Lund Humphries, 1970)
- 5 Dave Cubby, catalogue notes *M4 Exhibition*, University of Western Sydney, June 2006.

RHETT BREWER

BORN: Sydney, Australia
WORKS: Lecturer in School of Communication Arts, UWS

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 81 Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney
- 81 Zanders Bond Gallery, Melbourne
- 84 Hogarth Gallery, Sydney
- 88 Breewood Gallery, Katoomba
- 89 D.C. Art, Sydney
- 93 River, Michael Nagy Fine Art, Sydney, NSW
- 94 Michael Nagy Gallery, Sydney
- 96 Paint, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
- Paint, Michael Nagy, Sydney
- 99 Creation Myths, Michael Nagy, Sydney

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 79 Selected Graduate Show, Ivan Doherty Gallery, Sydney
- 79/ Sydney City Heritage Art Prize, Blaxland Gallery
- 81 Rhett Brewer, David Hull and Graham Marchant, Penrith Regional Art Gallery
- 85 Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of NSW
- 85 4 Ways, Brisbane College of Advanced Education
- 87 Regional Accent, Penrith Regional Art Gallery
- 88 Sulman Prize, Art Gallery of NSW
- 89 Variations, Pier 4, Walsh Bay, Sydney
- 92 Australisky Vzorek, The Academy of Applied Arts and Design, Prague, Czechoslovakia
- 93 No Angels, No Trumpets, Space YZ, UWS
- 98 Bryan Nylan Collection, Penrith Regional Art Gallery
- 98 M.A. and beyond, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
- 98 I.S.I.S Symmetry, Hiafa, Israel Science in the Arts, Arts in the Sciences, Academy of Fine Art, Budapest
- 01 Intersections of Art and Science, Ivan Dougherty Gallery, Sydney
- 03/4 The Landscape Show, Penrith Regional Art Gallery

- 04 Three Colours White, Brenda May Gallery Sydney

PETER CHARUK

BORN: Sydney, Australia
WORKS: Lecturer in School of Communication Arts, UWS

Selected Solo Exhibitions

- 82 Recent Work, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
- 87 Le Cirque, Chameleon Gallery, Hobart
- 92 Le Cirque en Images, Mark Julian Gallery, Sydney
- 93 Peculiar Actions/Generic Props, Space YZ, UWS
- Peculiar Actions/Generic Props, Allen Street Gallery, Sydney
- 94 The Dance of Death, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
- 97 Men's Work, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane
- 00 Men's Work III, Iron Hans, Stills Gallery, Sydney
- 03 Kustom Kars, Stills Gallery, Sydney
- 05 Aqualux II, CSRIO Marine Research Gallery, Hobart

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 00 25th Shell Fremantle Print Award, Fremantle WA
- Interiors, Art Gallery of NSW
- Urban Futures 2000, University Art Gallery, Johannesburg, SA
- 01 Hazelhurst Art Award 2001 Art on Paper, Hazelhurst Regional Gallery
- Island Postcards, State Library of Tasmania
- 02 one fine day, Block Gallery, Sydney
- The Mandorla Art Prize, Western Australia
- Field 2.1@ Casula Powerhouse Drive>in Gallery, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
- Placescapes Goya Galleries, Melbourne

- 03 Zero Light, School of Art Gallery, ANU, Canberra
- beckett on vinyl, Mortuary Station, Sydney
- 04 Auto Fetish: mechanics of desire, Newcastle Region Art Gallery
- d>art04: Australian Screen, Sydney Film Festival
- 05 Western Front Contemporary Art from Western Sydney, Blacktown Arts Centre
- Books 05, Noosa Regional Gallery
- Conrad Jupiters Gold Coast City Art Prize, Gold Coast City Gallery
- World Year of Physics Art Prize, Macquarie University, Sydney
- Anti Sedition Laws, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
- 06 Magical Realism, Art Gallery of NSW
- Exlibre, Artspace Mackay

DAVE CUBBY

BORN: Oldham, U.K., moved to Australia in 1974
WORKS: Senior Lecturer in School of Communication Arts, UWS

Selected Solo exhibitions

- 76 Recent Work, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney
 - 88 New Subject Matters, Photospace Gallery, Canberra
 - 94 Art and Kindness, First Draft Gallery, Sydney
 - 95 Art and Kindness, The Foyer Gallery, UWS
 - 00 Damp, The Foyer Gallery, UWS
- #### **Selected Group Exhibitions**
- 83 Perspecta, Art Gallery of NSW
 - 86 Biennale of Sydney, Penrith Regional Art Gallery
 - 88 National Photographic Exhibition, Albury Regional Art Centre
 - 89 Shopbankriver, Albury Regional Art Centre, NSW Australia.
 - 90 Between Lectures - A Private Obsession, University of Newcastle, NSW

- 92 Erotic Newcastle, 249 Gallery, Newcastle, NSW
- 96 National Printmedia Acquisitive, Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre
- 97 Arcade II, University of Derby, University of Brighton
- 98 Arcade II, The State Gallery, Novosibirsk, Siberia, Russia
- 99 Tree, Stream, Rock, Albury Regional Art Centre
- Australian Portfolio Exhibition, Vardy Gallery, University of Sunderland UK
- 4 Ways Around a Frame, The Australian Centre for Photography and Albury Regional Art Centre.
- 00 Australian Definition, 'Shenzhen City Art Gallery, China
- Suburbia, Museum of Sydney.
- 01 Federation of a Nation, Who Makes It? Travelling exhibition, regional and metropolitan galleries across Australia
- In Scattered Company, Huntingdon Gallery, Massachusetts College of Arts, Boston USA, 221 Gallery, List Centre and Brown University
- Providence Rhode Island USA
- China through Australian Eyes, Shenzhen City Art Gallery, China.
- 03 Somewhere Else, Phototechnica Gallery, Sydney
- Photographers for CANTEEN, Customs House, Sydney
- 05 No War, Mori Gallery, Sydney
- Not Quite the Sydney Opera House, Museum of Sydney
- 06 Citibank Photographic Portrait, Art Gallery of NSW

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M4

- ARTIST ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**
- Front cover (top)
Peter Charka
Stills from Video "Overpass"
2006
Image reproduced courtesy of artist
- Front Cover (middle – left)
Dave Cubby
Bearded Men of St Marys, John Haennesy
Digital Print
39 cm x 29 cm
2006
Image reproduced courtesy of artist
- Front Cover (middle – right)
Rhett Brewer
Passing Truck
Oil on canvas
90 cm x 165 cm
2005
Image reproduced courtesy of artist
- Back cover
Rhett Brewer
M4 Homeward
Oil on canvas
90 cm x 46 cm
2005
Image reproduced courtesy of artist