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David Cross

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DAVID CROSS'

CONFOUNDING HYBRIDITY

MARTIN PATRICK

Artist David Cross' projects have an exacting, merciless feel, yet they incorporate a particular aesthetic abundance, as if attempting to bring together an amalgam of art and cultural references and get them to explode into a panoply of manifold sensory phenomena. Artworks foisted upon the viewer, not strictly at their own expense, but as a generous admission of how much we enjoy confronting our funhouse fears and maddening nightmares. Much can be elicited from this act of confounding hybridity. As with any act of creative synthesis, I could, as a diligent professional art critic and historian, enact a dissection of its components (which I will likely still endeavour to do). But, whether verging on cliché or not, it's important to note that Cross' practice amounts to more than the mere sum of its constituent elements. Many factors enter into the mix that can't easily be discretely enumerated and archived: radical shifts in tone, associations between gestures, the sheer amount of unpredictable variables that run through so many of the pieces. As the artist himself has stated: 'the value of performance art is that it is a medium of the moment, a mode of practice that is contingent, genuinely interactive, and often visceral.'¹

Historically speaking, Cross' early art practice emerged from the crucible of late 20th Century Postmodernism, an era known for its wilful disunity, also characterised by the Poststructuralist tangles ensuing from Anglophonic appropriation of the European relativism of Derrida, et al. And in the wake of a potential downturn in the influence of 'Theory' writ large in contemporary art practice, a central problematic ensues: how to make art that's theoretically astute and informed, but not programmatic, dry as dust, so as to avoid an overly academicised pursuit more akin to the pedantic footnote than the visionary big picture. As a trained art historian, perhaps this quandary would seem even more urgent for Cross. But what's become especially significant and compelling about Cross' practice is the way

in which it both acknowledges past watershed moments of performance and body art, minimalism, and (neo-) conceptualism and sheds its direct debt, a recognition of tradition counterbalanced by a sense of contemporary experimentation; that there are now manifold ways to attack historical problems, and that perhaps they are not entirely historical, but still pressing and urgent, always already with us.

So much art is *unfunny*, and perhaps this serves too often as a default guarantor of its being considered 'consequential'. Cross' work however rarely begins without an ample dose of humour, although such humour might encompass obscure in-jokes, choice verbal play (Cross is an insightful art writer also), perverse re-arrangements and re-segmenting of realities. Cross' humour could be read as rather generation-shaped if not entirely generation-specific. Douglas Coupland's once infamous 'Generation X' being the one I am citing here, or Richard Linklater's cinematic 'Slackers', redolent of certain ironic, bemused modes of viewing one's surrounding context. (A member of this same dispersed generational clan myself, I harbour tremendous affinity with this worldview, such as it is.) But also there is in Cross' practice an inclination towards empathically investigating our intersubjective relations, however mediated and choreographed, while still keeping intellectual queries open but informed, in some ways recalling the movement of the late novelist David Foster Wallace into increasing sincerity and directness in his prose after an intense period of convoluted Postmodernist mind games.

Moreover, some awfully complex, and ultimately conflicted ideas of fun (and 'funny') and games are operating herein. How pleasurable is it exactly to be precariously balanced on some intentionally unstable architectonic devices? Especially to the degree that said devices radically diminish manifest assertions of control on the part of the viewer/participant? *I have to give myself over to these works.* Cross' artworks have a tendency of creating a state of encounter that could potentially seem disempowering, enervating even. The artist has spoken of his works as involving 'destabilising conditions', and this acts as a pointed pun as well, in that the actual material

conditions of Cross' installations can be destabilising as much as the affective dimensions and capacities of the work. Cross has a strong interest in evoking liminal states, in-between, ambiguous, polyvalent, disorientating. Some tricky intersections occur: nervous anxiety meeting hedonistic euphoria, dreamlike reverie juxtaposed with edgy abandon.

I have experienced these artworks in a number of ways, sometimes in full-on participatory mode (*Lean* (2010), *Pump* (2009)), at other times vicariously through the eloquent descriptions of fellow critics, via moving or still images, or within the narratives carefully woven by the artist himself, and the accounts of participants. It is indeed something to watch the actions undertaken by visitors to Cross' work, with a unique quotient of the unexpected manifest as: uncertainty, pleasure, and curiosity intermingling. Cross' practice explores the intricacies of framing and negotiating transitions and contingencies, never wholly stable, always encompassing risk. If play has functioned as a consistent theme throughout Cross' work, he significantly explores play as labour, work, and ordeal. In his projects, participants are contracted into the schema which unfolds, which in turn usually involves contact with the sculptural installation, the site in which it is located, and with the bodies of others, at times that of the artist. This engagement is driven by examining aspects of the haptic, the contextual, and with live performance mediated through video, photography, and installation.

The artist in early performance and video installations examined the assorted modalities and impacts of the gaze often directly confronting participants in unswerving acts of engagement. Works such as *Tear* (2000) or *Viscous* (1999) highlighted the often painful affects of scrutinizing the body in ways that could be seen as abject. The eyes of the artist which could only be seen through small holes atop his red domed installation *Bounce* (2006) recalled the threatening masquerade used in such movies as the *Halloween*, *Friday the 13th*, and *Texas Chainsaw Massacre* franchises, although it was actually Cross, lying prone inside while enacting an endurance performance who was vulnerable to the movements of the participants scrambling

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onto the sculpture. More recently, this interrogation of the scopic has shifted from close consideration of the gaze towards the embodied, performative, participatory features of the work although the provisionality of vision as a means of knowledge is still central to his practice.

Cross' inflatable installations are characterised by their bold visual identity that simultaneously camouflages the complicated scenarios of interrelation, negotiation, and fear that can ensue around, on, and within their confines. Ideas of play, trust, the unexpected coexist and overlap in unequal parts of a novel performative equation. This often occurs in the staging of the more overtly competitive, sporting-style games that Cross has been configuring such as *Level Playing Field* (2013) and *Skyball* (2014). But there are clear and major differences to be discerned between 'real' sports and Cross' idiosyncratic artworks, as the artist has pointed out: 'While sport is, to varying degrees, focused on alignment of physical and mental co-ordination, it is also about beating your opponents, running faster than them, hitting more aces and cross-court winners,' as he describes it in his conversation with Cameron Bishop. 'I am, he suggests, interested in constructing scenarios that frustrate and block pure athleticism tempering physical engagement with cognitive barriers. By limiting vision, making a surface slippery, or accentuating the potential for phobias to be brought to the fore, the works neuter the performance of a pure athleticism.'²

Such performative contexts can be read as echoing literary theorist Mikhail Bakhtin's description of the significance of the 'carnavalesque' in the Medieval era: 'The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind.'³

One could argue that Cross' projects in their democratising and diminishing of entrenched cultural and social categorisations evoke a similar notion of the carnivalesque, particularly when set against the increasing inequality and polarisation of the contemporary social sphere.

Cross' variegated practice draws upon references across a wide range of the visual culture continuum: minimal, performance, and pop art alongside direct and indirect references to horror films, children's amusements, sporting events, and the occasional nod to sex toys. The projects involve intensely tactile, luridly spectacular means, the bright colouration of amusement park attractions coinciding with atmospheres of potential peril and unease. The works often revolve around building a taxonomic array of gestural actions and movements: to climb, to slide, to pull, to fall, to lean, to jump, to hold, to balance. Cross' own presence as an actual and 'imperfect' body functions as a sort of anchor to the more fantastical aspects of his early projects.

If we do play the art history game, and put some precedents and affinities on the table, they are an eccentric and diverse lot, and among the names that occur to me are Franz Erhard Walther, Paul Thek, Bruce Nauman, Cindy Sherman, Dan Graham, Mike Parr, Paul McCarthy, Robert Morris and Yayoi Kusama. I recall Morris' concise statement in his 'Notes on Sculpture: Simplicity of shape does not necessarily equate with simplicity of experience.'⁴ And in a different vein, McCarthy's comment on Disney: 'It's the invention of a world. A Shangri-La that is directly connected to a political agenda, a type of prison that you are seduced into visiting.'⁵ Or Nauman's statement on his own approach: 'Some of the pieces have to do with setting up a situation and then not completing it; or in taking away a little of the information so that somebody can only go so far, and then can't go any farther. It attempts to set up a kind of tension situation.'⁶ Cross was especially affected by seeing the 1994 Nauman retrospective at Washington DC's Hirshhorn Museum. Here he observed Nauman's ability to knit an assortment of spectacular modes with equally acute yet painful meditations on human experience.

Somewhat surprisingly, the artist also cites the late abstract painter Ellsworth Kelly as a major influence via his engaging monochromatic abstractions. Kelly's rich visual syntax composed of deceptively simple, adjacent forms made a huge impact on the artist, as evidenced in his inflatable structures.

In Cross' *Hold* (2007) an enormous architectural maze designed for a solo performer and an individual audience member, participants climbed one at a time into the inflatable indigo structure needing to hold — and have confidence in — the always unseen performer's hand that appeared through a slit in the wall to guide them each across a high, narrow ledge to the exit on the other side. This, in turn, rather than being a group, athletic-style experience became paradoxically a very intimate investigation of the artist/viewer interrelationship, within a mammoth construction. While Cross' physical presence was once highly integral to — and indeed integrated within — such works, he has steadily begun to involve himself as a more choreographic, directorial presence. I would note that this might be related to his curatorial endeavours which have been significant to his creative identity in terms of thinking through and engaging with, on differing levels, projects that are site responsive and public in their orientation though he himself blames his less agile and resilient body.

Although Cross in many works has questioned the assumptions around both beauty and the grotesque in a very performative and individuated manner, redolent with his own wit, whimsy, and specific approach to materiality, more recently he has cast his view more towards the social body and its corresponding codes of conduct. Cross has spent years actively interrogating and problematising the relations between the so-called beautiful and the grotesque, and has acutely cited Baudelaire's aphorism: 'The beautiful is always strange'. Particularly framed through notions of difference and otherness, Cross' practice examines how our embodied subjectivities are nonetheless never fixed, singular, or continuous. Sometimes this takes

the form of a work that requires a reciprocal participation, and close contact as in *Pump* (2009), in which a smaller inflatable (that could intentionally be transported in a suitcase) allows the two performer/participants to insert their heads into openings that face one another, and control the structure via two footpumps. This exchange is non-verbal, and potentially strenuous and awkward, calling attention to each other's embodied participation and physical cues, becoming temporarily a quasi-unified being.

What Cross has in the past referred to as creating a 'Hansel and Gretel' effect with his sculptural architectural forms, a 'house of allure' is equally crucial to the understanding of a practice that recalls and reconfigures childhood fears and attractions simultaneously. The resulting effect upon the viewer often results in something far richer than one's average theme park ride, more unsettling in implications relating to perimeters, exteriority and interiority in flux, at times becoming evident as different spaces, at other times Cross' inflatable installations and scenarios summon a kind of fantasyland again evoking childhood daydreams (or sometimes, nightmares). Notions of ambiguity, horror, and the grotesque are left in eerie suspension in many of Cross' works, without any direct release of anxiety as in the resolution of standard escapist entertainment. Contrary to such formulas, Cross' practice ultimately develops its resonance through its more nuanced consideration of embodiment, experience, and immersion.

In speaking from the outset of a 'confounding hybridity', I have attempted to sketchily frame but not absolutely contain Cross' practice in its capacity to challenge our normative assumptions regarding self, identity, and the performance thereof. If cultural notions regarding beauty and ugliness are questioned and disrupted, a key strand of Cross' creative research, new questions have an opportunity to emerge that stretch our settled ideas, incorporating rather than disregarding difference. Similarly, this occurs in addressing notions of audience/participant, artist/author, conceptual/visual. By thoughtfully crafting works that intermix and entwine performance, installation,

and sculpture, Cross provokes us both seductively and uneasily. Our human associations constantly pressured by sensations that ultimately are not readily identifiable, comfortable, or safe.

1. Cross, David. 'Some Kind of Beautiful: The Grotesque Body in Contemporary Art' PhD Thesis, Queensland University of Technology School of Visual Arts, 2006, 20.
2. Bishop, Cameron, 'David Cross in Conversation with Cameron Bishop', *Drain* (Special issue on Athleticism, 2015): <http://drainmag.com/david-cross-in-conversation-with-cameron-bishop/>
3. Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and His World*. Trans. by Helene Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984, 10.
4. Battcock, Gregory, ed. *Minimal Art: A Critical Anthology*. New York: E.P. Dutton, 1968, 228.
5. Weissman, Benjamin, 'Paul McCarthy', *BOMB* 84 (Summer 2003): <http://bombmagazine.org/article/2564/paul-mccarthy>.
6. Kraynak, Janet, ed. *Please Pay Attention Please: Bruce Nauman's Words*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 2003, 182.



Title*Bounce***First exhibited**

2005

Media

Performance /

Installation

Commissioner

Wellington City

Art Gallery,

New Zealand

Curator

Sarah Farrar

/ Bounce

...I feel certain that I will be unable to scale the steep slope of the inflatable structure before me. My body is not built for climbing, nor running and jumping, the best way to get to the top of this shiny red hill. I wonder briefly if I have more of an affinity for the physicality of the work — its pleasantly round shape and the gentle rolls formed by seams in the material — than an attraction to it as a plaything.

BOUNCE, 2005

CINDY BAKER

I feel certain that I will be unable to scale the steep slope of the inflatable structure before me. My body is not built for climbing, nor running and jumping, the best way to get to the top of this shiny red hill. I wonder briefly if I have more of an affinity for the physicality of the work — its pleasantly round shape and the gentle rolls formed by seams in the material — than an attraction to it as a plaything.

This is why I brought David Cross and his work, *Bounce* (2005), halfway around the world to Canada. It was not for the challenge of trying to mount the work, but because my feelings of inevitable failure are borne out of similar reasons why Cross created the work — an interest in inadequacy of the body, or, rather, of inadequate bodies. My research into the taboo body in performance is what led me to Cross' work and a need to see it in person; it is the kind of art that cannot be understood absent a firsthand experience.

After several humiliating tries, and with the helping hand of someone who has already made it to the top, I have finally conquered Bounce. I am sweaty, huffing and puffing — flushed from embarrassment, exertion, and excitement. I'm afraid that I'm too heavy for this work; I move cautiously and tenderly, but I'm too excited not to play.

This drive to explore is the core of *Bounce*: compelling a reaction, it makes performers of all who encounter it. Even the choice *not* to engage physically is a conscious and embodied one, a decision as performative as any kind of active engagement. Cross doesn't prescribe the nature of the audience's interaction; in *Bounce*, the freedom to explore is self-evident. He approaches the audience as a 'worthy adversary'. This antagonistic egalitarianism with which he approaches the audience is a more honest form of interaction than that which strives for an 'authentic' artist/audience connection; antagonism allows for critique from within.¹ By giving all (potential) participants the same authority as the audience that he has as the artist, any engagement becomes a valid approach to the

work. In engendering the production of new forms of knowledge, the artist cannot predetermine where those forms originate. However, the goal of egalitarianism does not necessarily suggest selflessness or generosity; critical engagement should meet critical response. In his writing, Cross suggests that the ambivalence of those who do not respond enhances the experience of the social context of the work for those who *do* respond. Ambivalence is a valid engagement and helps set up a dynamic framework for the performance.²

I'm standing back and watching the public's reaction to and interaction with Bounce, which is set up in a prominent location beside the city's main downtown bus stop. A substantial minority of the audience is part of the art-going crowd, but most of participants are here by chance, attracted by the block-long bank of windows showcasing the bright red, shiny structure, and the telltale carnival hum of the air compressor issuing from within. Curious window shoppers, commuters waiting for their next connection, summer strollers, and parents tugged in by excited children peek inside to ask what it's all about and if they really, REALLY can just jump right in (or on, to be precise.) Bus drivers, after their third, fourth, fifth pass of the scene, stop in to ask what's going on. The lack of an admission fee arouses suspicion by passersby (the adults, at least). They feel as though we are somehow trying to trick them — and we are.

Harnessing the spectacle is one of the strategies contemporary artists have come to employ to draw attention away from the fact that their work is capital-A-art (stodgy, intellectual, literally 'work'), thereby tricking an unsuspecting public into engaging with — and understanding, and delighting in — concepts and ideas that they may otherwise have thought too difficult or boring to bother with. And because of the content of the piece — the literal contents of the inflatable object — we are tricking the audience in more ways than one. *Bounce* would not be the work that it is without the attractive playfulness being balanced by the repulsive horror that exists right below the

surface. The piece is not as happy and carefree as it first appears; its shape, that of a giant mask, gives an indication as to the true nature of the object and that which is waiting to be discovered by those who have what it takes to reach the summit.

1. Bishop, Claire. 'Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics.' *October* 110 (2004): 51-79. 65-67.

2. Cross, David. 'Some Kind of Beautiful: The Grotesque Body in Contemporary Art.' PhD thesis. Queensland University of Technology Creative Industries Research Centre School of Visual Arts. 2006. October 18, 2012, 103.





Title*Hold***First exhibited**

2007

Media

Performance / Installation

Commissioner

Litmus Research Initiative,

Wellington,

New Zealand

Curators

Bec Dean

(Performance Space, Sydney)

Angharad Wynne-Jones

(Arts House, Melbourne)

/ Hold

... While the physical challenge of the work was immediately manifest, what became apparent later was the work's challenge to human perception of signs, forms and structures within a total body consciousness, causing me to question more than once, 'Where does following instruction stop and common-sense kick-in?'

HOLD, 2007

BEC DEAN

David Cross' *Hold* was a performance project that held the material and physical promise of grand spectacle, but delivered its opposite. The performative action of *Hold* — that of two people holding one another — was centred within a towering, blue inflatable structure. When the work was presented in 2011 for Performance Space it was installed in the Carriageworks' largest performance venue — the only space that could contain it. The material economy and aesthetics of Cross' work invoked communal, playful activity, as only gigantic, inflated vinyl objects can. But this was a play of opposites, of push and pull, of give and take, and of altered expectations.

In spite of its imposing size and bold aesthetic, *Hold* was an intimate architectural context for an intense one-on-one interaction between performer and participant. As a condition of showing the work, Cross insisted that no information about the nature of the experience should be conveyed to visitors through marketing or didactic material before they entered the cavernous space, alone. In this restrained and precisely intentioned way, *Hold* diverged from any project I have worked on before or since and served to amplify (for myself anyway) just how much the physical experience of contemporary art practice is preceded and mediated by a virtual one. Risk, for one thing, is always disclosed, and in the so-called 'nanny state' of Australia with its strict health and safety laws dominating all of our encounters with culture, audiences are used to being primed with conditions and appropriate modes of behaviour before they even approach it.

Hold was promoted only with three questions:

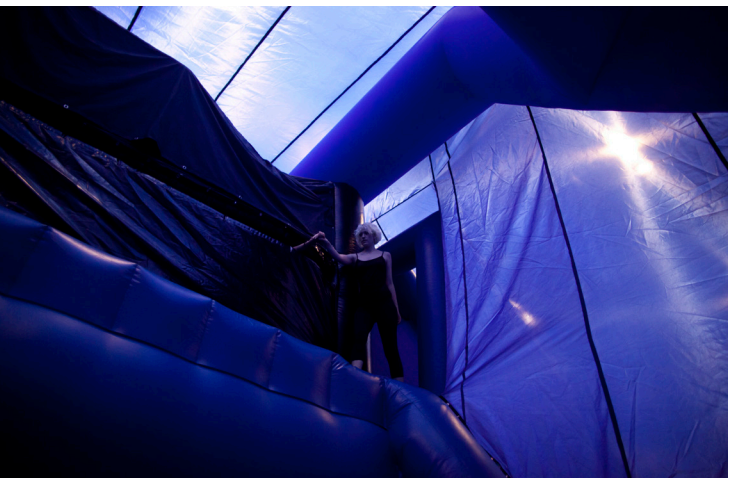
1. *Would you trust a total stranger?*
2. *Would you help a stranger in return?*
3. *Would you enter an artwork designed to test our fears of dark, tight spaces and our limits of trust?*

The questions while brief in nature, elucidated the major risks associated with participating in the project; to

trust and to be trusted in return and to confront fears one may or may not have. The questions also disclosed the reciprocal nature of the performance, and the challenge of participation as a test. In programming this work, I was privileged to all of its intricacies and I wish I had been able to encounter *Hold* without so much knowledge and only the questions to guide me. Armed as such, would I have ascended the ziggurat-like form by the steps on the left hand side? Would I have taken the hand offered to me, which appeared, disembodied through a cleft in the vinyl material? Would I have found my way through to the lightless passage on the other side? Would I have stopped or reciprocated? Jumped down onto the pillowy base of the structure? Or fallen?

My presence around the entrance to the work afforded insight into the multiple ways in which audiences read and responded to the object. While the physical challenge of the work was immediately manifest, what became apparent later was the work's challenge to human perception of signs, forms and structures within a total body consciousness, causing me to question more than once, 'Where does following instruction stop and common-sense kick-in?'

In his preliminary writing on the work, Cross referred to the Wagnerian term, *gesamtkunstwerk*, the total work of art — the core characteristic of which being its transformative powers, even if briefly felt by the 'spectator'. From my own experience however, the work rendered its affect powerfully in the opposite direction, which was to make one — through a process which untethered individuals from the comfortable, social occasion of art — more acutely aware of one's vulnerable selfhood. *Hold* amplified the frailty of my body, its potential for injury, the consequences of personal choices I made and my ability to comprehend and support the weight and strength of another human. It was a sensitising and dissembling experience, and one which stripped-away the previous expectations I held of my embodied cognition.





Title

Retard

First exhibited

2006

Media

Performance / Installation

/ Photography

Commissioner

Show Gallery,

Wellington,

New Zealand

Curators

Eugene Hanson

Jenny Gillam

/ Retard

... this work was at least partly about failure, in so much as it was inevitable that someone was going to collapse at some stage, and failure's always more entertaining than success

RETARD 2006

MIKE TING

It's a strange thing to know that one is both the object and subject of an art exhibition, still stranger that one can't see the audience, that your almost naked, can barely hear anything and your trying to hold a physically strenuous and somewhat moronic looking pose. As one of the collaborators on *Retard*, myself and the other two performers only got a proper idea of what we were to do when we turned up at Show, the gallery hosting the work. The bright colours of the inflatable props couldn't conceal the fact that our three poses were reminiscent of being put in stocks, three bodies ready for experimentation and judgement, three adults wearing plastic nappies being consumed by David's relentlessly cheerful but somewhat sinister looking inflatable sculptures. Still, all part of the course for contemporary fine art I thought!

As I recall the three of us were in situ before any of the audience was let in. I could just hear them enter the gallery space as the noise from the air pump made it seem like you were on the inside of a vacuum cleaner. I had been studying 'classic performance art' such as Abramovic, Beuys, Ono, etc, and had come to the realisation that to do performance you had to, paradoxically, not perform. You had to be almost deadpan, stoical, foreground the idea and not you the performer. Absolutely no acting required here then. But with *Retard*, the physical restraint and the lack of eye content made me aware that the requirement of this work was to become a docile body with no real ability to exert any form of agency or resistance. This is where I think the title of the work comes into play, the 'holding back' of not just physical freedom but the individuals full expressive freedom. I was familiar with David's work of course and knew that endurance would play a major part, so my goal if you can call it that was to simply maintain balance as long as possible, to not fall over. And this work was at least partly about failure, in so much as it was inevitable that someone was going to collapse at some stage, and failure's

always more entertaining than success. I became aware of myself trying to 'perceive' the audience as much as they were perceiving us, yet I also knew that they weren't really seeing us as individuals so much as experiments. I think because of this reversal of spectatorship I never felt vulnerable in any way, but this no doubt was aided by being in a gallery situation, and in a highly public place with a more diverse audience I'm certain that I would have felt quite differently.

A feeling of disorientation was becoming more and more apparent. I really didn't know if I was holding the sculpture upright or not, and I recall pushing the object forward at one stage to see if the audience's reaction would help me regain my bearings. I heard a murmur but nothing indicative, then I tried pulling the object back but was rewarded with the same reaction. There was little conception of time and as it turned out I was the first one to collapse. Vaguely recall a head rush, people supporting myself and the sculpture, and a middle aged woman inquiring into whether or not I had done martial arts.

Looking at the documentation of the work now I'm reminded of a famous case study by Freud on Daniel Paul Schreber. Daniel's father Moritz wrote over thirty books on childhood education and believed in strict childhood and teenage discipline, going to the extent of inventing braces and devices to ensure correct posture and prevent masturbation, traumatising both Daniel and his brother who later committed suicide. Deleuze and Guattari in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972) make reference to Schreber being a 'body without organs', that is to say, a body of potentiality, a virtual body, although in Schreber's case that potentiality took the form of delusion and paranoia, and he died in an asylum in 1911. *Retard* and its connecting tubes looks like both a life support system and something that sucks the life out of the body in equal measure. The sterility of that most wipeable of fabrics, vinyl, aids this medical view, a vision of a psycho/physical lab that rewards closer scrutiny with only more disturbing visions.





Title*Pump***First exhibited**

2009

Media

Performance /

Installation

Commissioner

Performance

Studies

International

Zagreb, Croatia

Curator

Chris Braddock

/ Pump

... Its simplicity is enviable.

Cross pulled it out of his suitcase in front of me. Reciting its overall dimensions, he excitedly demonstrated how it folded open. Then, in no time at all, he carefully rehearsed re-packing the sculpture with tube and foot pedal attachments nestled alongside.

Pump could be a travelling performance artist device and, perhaps, a miniature version of David Cross' artworks. Its simplicity is enviable. Before its inaugural appearance on the 25th June at the 2009 Performance Studies International (*psi#15*) in Zagreb, Cross pulled it out of his suitcase in front of me. Reciting its overall dimensions, he excitedly demonstrated how it folded open. A bright yellow rectangular inflatable provided two identical head portals for Cross and any willing participant. Then, in no time at all, he carefully rehearsed re-packing the sculpture with air tube and foot pedal attachments nestled alongside. I recalled a moment in Werner Herzog's film on *Antarctica Encounters at the End of the World* when Libor Zicha from the former Soviet Union demonstrates his survival backpack, pulling out an inflatable canoe and folding it back to nothing again. These characteristics rub off on the meaning of *Pump*: peripatetic, tenacious, speedy, operational and playful.

On the day, Cross was itinerant — searching out the best spot with premium exposure to potential participants and passers-by. Within moments performer and device were activated and ready. His head in place but pumping on his own, Cross kept the device two-thirds inflated. To maintain full inflation (and the single viewing tunnel linking each others' right eye) performer and participant needed to pump together. Each exchange continued for as long as each participant could pump. However, with lengthy solo intervals, the performance continued for close to three hours until Cross could barely stand.

Pump could be a colour-field sculpture enlivened with bodies (many of Cross' artworks suggest the minimalist colour-field painting of Ellsworth Kelly). The body's impact with inflated vinyl is key. It's important to grasp the effort of pumping, the air pressure on your head, that too much pumping causes pain, the feeling of sweat against your

cheeks, of monocular vision that limits depth perception, of yellow vision, of keeping your balance, of smelling the previous participant, of feeling a spectacle and so on. This intensive performing together *with* the material object provokes a visceral and uneasy synergy.

Franz Erhard Walther's diary entry of 1969 referring to his *1st Work Set* comments, 'informal modeling by means of several bodies/ expanding the center/ two sculptural bodies with unseen space in between/ moveable pedestal field/ actions on two pedestals/ position-moving bodies in space'.¹ Walther's post-minimal and process-driven sculptural installations simultaneously provoke and are provoked by performance. This territory is Cross' primary commitment. Grafting onto Walther's words — Cross models with a playful participation of bodies, expanding whatever a spatial or bodily center might mean. He creates sculptural bodies redolent with unseen spaces of play, fear, desire, discomfort and endurance. During the Zagreb performance of *Pump*, a young woman struck up a mesmerizing exchange with Cross. The two pumped in measured rhythmic unison for at least half-an-hour. I saw action on two human pedestals or Constantine Brancusi's *The Gate of Kiss* in performance. This is sculpting performance and performing sculpture — bodies as moveable pedestal fields of action.

1. Walther, Franz Erhard (2011), *Dust of Stars: A Drawn Novel, 71 Selected Memories* (Kunstmuseen Krefeld: Distanz). p.249