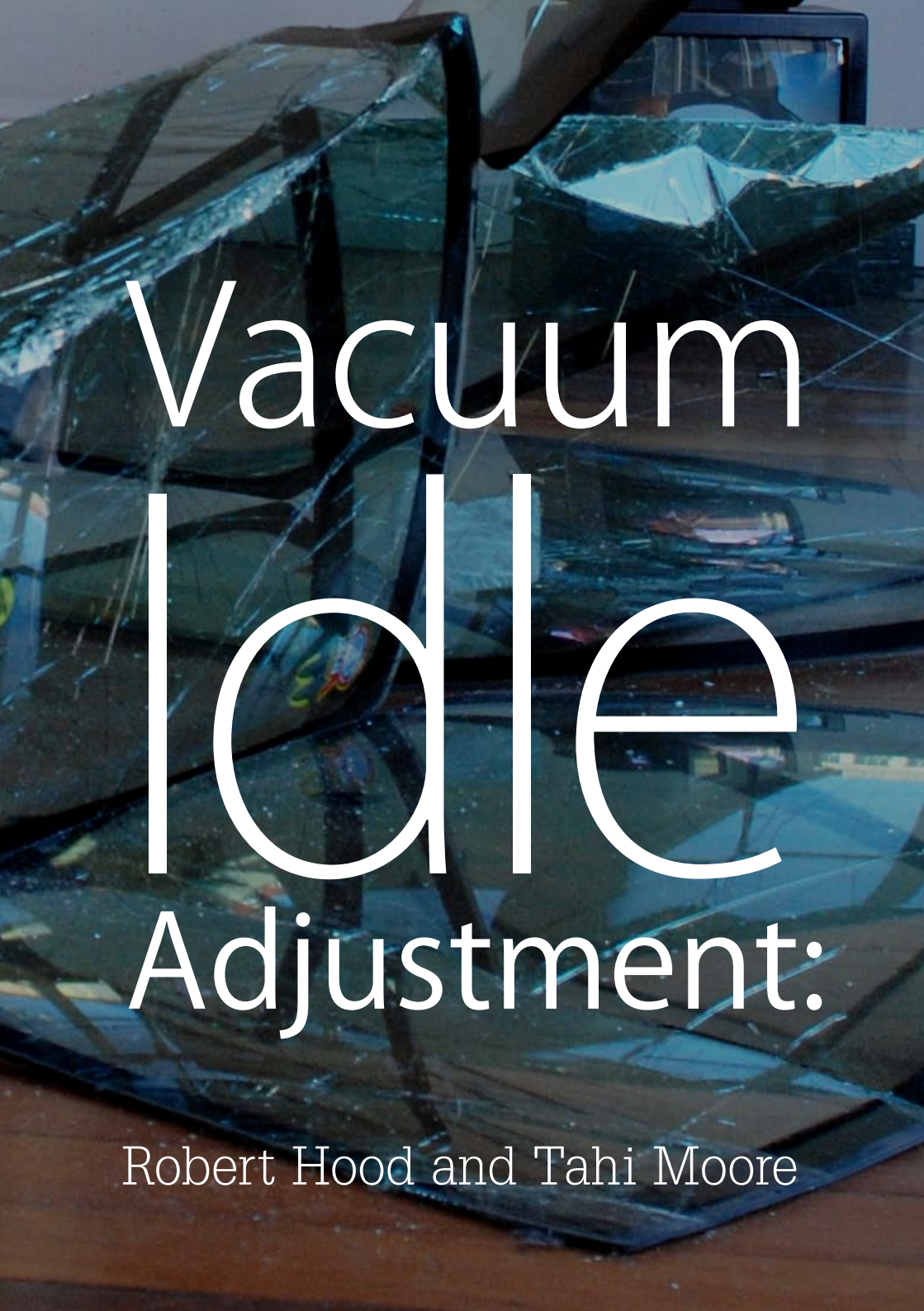

Vacuum Idle Adjustment:

Robert Hood and Tahi Moore

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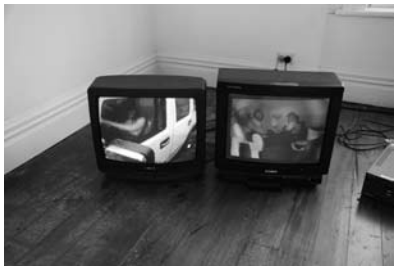


Kristen Wineera

When I asked Tahi Moore if he and Robert Hood had collaborated on *Vacuum Idle Adjustment*, he described the show as "a blind date". The two bodies of work might have ignored one another in the easy manner of strangers passing in the street, but for a rogue (curatorial) gust that entangled them, and left them to coexist in close quarters. Hood takes one side of the gallery, Moore the other. Compared to the unforced overtones left to emerge from this low stakes, low-key coupledom, collaboration would have seemed a contrivance.

Invoking the lure of the art object, but undercutting its mystique, Hood offers finite and discrete pieces that tempt individual contemplation. Tightly bunched on the wall is a collection of ephemera of the type normally found affixed to windscreens: registrations, auto glazing company cards, NZ Post and AA items, plastic card pockets. On the walls are three album covers featuring images of Stevie Wonder, Elvis and Neil Young. A plastic supermarket bag emanates from the tiny photographic mouth of each pop star, like a paradoxically suffocating exhalation. The bags billow flatly over the record covers, compressed beneath laminate or glass. On the back wall is a photo of a country road cul-de-sac bearing the calligraphic marks of well-executed burnouts.

Five mangled car windscreens, balletically balanced in a pile, form a grand centrepiece of wreckage. In the context of this show, they suggest a smack-up of forces that came from different directions, would-be ships in the night that crashed and left a spectacle. Bent into angular postures the windscreens seem surprisingly fragile, giant broken insect wings blighted by lost purpose. Their vulnerability foreshadows the cars we own, big expensive machines, as eventual detritus, and perhaps the twilight of wider car-kind, predictably guzzling itself to extinction.

On a monitor Hood shows close up footage of the back end of a pig. Its rear end entirely fills the screen so that the inscrutable movements of its tail, a short snubby rod, dominate. This act of framing effects a strangeness out of proportion to its simplicity. The intimate view of the pig's fleshy and sensate rump contradicts the inanimate grandeur of the windscreens. The tail moves about enigmatically, seeming by turns amputated, blind, penile, nosey, oddly impossible to facialise, innately funny or rude. The discipline of watching it proves effortless, a flux of perceptual urges toward abstraction (tail as object) and empathy (tail as communicator of creaturely feeling). Could the work be a joke on interpretive effort, misplaced interpretive energy? A riposte to the cliché of the discerning gaze?

Moore offers something more fragmented. A straggle of monitors placed on the floor, or atop one another, play found video. Each plays a single sequence cut from an original source (movies, TV, YouTube) and looped. There are several fight scenes, each looped to repeat the moment the fight concludes – mostly when someone gets killed. Repetition acts like a sieve, the choreography of staged violence proving denser than its emotive impact. Some scantily clad women attempt to push a jeep out of a muddy bog. In a home video, some friends lie on a bed doing cancan-like motions with their legs, fooling around. Italian economist Loretta Napoleoni talks about the economics of terrorism; she's interested in the movements of money that sustain terrorist groups, rather than their well-publicised

ideologies. Pinned to the back wall is an A4 piece of paper printed out from the Internet. Headed 'Unnerved by the Urge to Win', it contains a passage from former professional chess player Paul Hoffman's latest book, pondering "the line between acceptable competitiveness and nasty aggression".

Moore can perhaps be understood as an experimenter working in the paradigm of art. He adjusts and groups found material to open-ended effect, pursuing a form of practical enquiry and tampering that seems unmotivated by aspirations toward the theatre of art, but that pragmatically occupies, exploits and explores that theatre. In this way, seemingly by default, he manages to show up the prescriptiveness of concepts such as artist and installation, despite their endless negotiability and casual usefulness.

His assemblage of video and viewing equipment dwells in the world's sprawl of such material, rather than existing to rarify or supersede sprawl. The trailing of monitors (one of them dead) and DVD players on the gallery floor, their functional bulk asserted in equal measure to the video they deliver, adds to this sense. The use of a consistent format (looped video on monitors) and recurrent theme (aggression) suggests some form of rational exploration by Moore, but of what is hard to quantify; perhaps of sameness and variation, the literal content of each video, or both, depending on our focus.

Moore's cuts call to mind the editing we automatically deploy when giving and retracting our attention in response to information and entertainment. In this way, the delineated blade of his authorship parallels the one we wield, less consciously, as viewers. While ordinarily we accept that a video (or text) exists beyond the portion we sample, the repetition inflicted by Moore's looped selections emphasizes the un-viewed as the unknown. Repeating fragments of video take on the logic of complete artifacts, while longer edits are fragmented by the limits of our attention. This dynamic, and its particular brand of coherence, reflects the conditions of our immersion in ubiquitous manufactured content. It is a realm unable to be tackled from a position of solving or deciphering integrated intent.

Despite differences, the work of Hood and Moore performs a similar action. Both artists intervene in the accrescent mass of material we are manufacturing for our convenience, edification and entertainment. Both select, manipulate and collect elements from it, to offer pointedly unambitious objects and assemblages spiked with nonchalance. Both utilise repetition, or multiples to structure their work. An air of cranked-down artistic agency reigns, so that a viewer seeking guidance from artistic intent might feel oddly lost or unemployed. Cars, violence, pop culture, machismo and consumerism are recurrent themes.

Dotted about the gallery in an unassuming way, the work evokes the convention of display at its least coded, or most straightforward – like the laying out of goods at a market, or pinning up of a poster in the bedroom. Rather than aspiring to craft a viewing experience (the work feels palpably ambivalent in this regard), the art in Vacuum Idle Adjustment could be likened to a precipitate formed from a collusion of the artists' interests in certain systems. The systems at stake are those involved in art's operation and in our navigation of our own mass cultural produce.

Notably, the show evokes the ordinary uses and associations of found materials more than it transfigures or abstracts them. As a viewer, I become sensitized to the small but due regard my mind affords such things as car registration, auto-glazing, and randomly encountered TV. That cognitive indifference toward manufactured, oft-encountered stuff – the steady lahar of first world living – looms into view. And in tow, those of our behaviours as citizens and consumers we perpetuate passively. We are implicated in our predictable relation to the materials and content on show – cars, LPs, Elvis, plastic bags, movies, car parts, proofs of registration, farm animals, economic theory – and the systems that keep them cycling. The notion of individuality encouraged by the mantra of consumer choice (and by expectations of the art viewing experience) is subtly knocked, re-cast as an engine and symptom of cultural sameness when viewed at a remove. Concurrently, the art of ignoring what presumes to address us, but does not 'speak' to us personally, is understood by the work as a condition of modern life.

In a related way, some of the work resists or deters personal imagination. Hood's clustered windscreen-ephemera cling stubbornly to their literalness – and stymie any romanticising of the banal. Moore's looped videos reinforce surface and deflect content. Even when cast in Hood's album covers as the ethereal oral squalls of pop stars, plastic bags remain, most compellingly, plastic bags. At a point where we expect to abstract, see transformation, be accosted by a new idea, we are cast back into the evidential, familiarly coded world. The effect is one of a prompt toward objectivity from an unexpected quarter, and openness to what that might entail – our obligations to criticality suddenly afforded the same lustre as the prospect of escapism.

On its last day the show looks shabby. Glass particles mix with dust and debris on the floor. The multiple monitors collectively presage their status as unrecyclable junk. The daylight shows everything clearly, including the blemished materiality of the artwork and the gallery walls and floor. Aesthetically, there seems no hierarchy between chance and intention in the room. Everything rises to its own surface.

It is in this comfortable acquiescence to literalness that the art prospers. Immersed in the simmer of its materials' associations, it best enacts some of the riddles it references: when might we consider an object unique or generic, consider ourselves unique or interchangeable, focus on likeness and difference in related things, or abandon ourselves to the details of the particular? The effects of mass culture and production may be dived into or retired away from, but either way, they represent a condition of being for which we are not well practised – one which demands from us a paradoxical blend of openness and cynicism.

I garnered her name from Moore. The video-taped talk is based on her book Terror Incorporated: Tracing the Dollars Behind the Terror Networks (Seven Stories Press: 2005)

The Big Bull Market

Harold Grieves

The Big Bull Market was the name of the show Rob Hood had at Jonathan Smart in April of 2008. The announcement card showed a crumpled up Rolls Royce radiator grill. It looked positively smashing. Sorry, terrible joke, but for all the bravado about the current fiscal crisis it has always been assumed that it is American led, or at least it is American ingeniousness that's got us here, and yet here was the most English of assertions at the most brutish of economic moments.

"Everything's bigger in Texas" and it's no great leap to suggest America's inflated economy ballooned under the cronyism of George W. Here, in the backwaters of the neo-liberal experiment, buoyed as we are by the EFTPOS litmus test and the meddling of the '90s de-accession to inflationary pegging on unemployment gain, The Big Bull Market ought to be a yard stick we could measure our adjudication or evaluation of the whole fiscal overthrow by. The neo-knowledge economy of Helen Clark's tenure in government has recently departed, strangely bankrolled as it was by Michael Cullen's signatory offering of the NZ economy in 1999 to the Reserve Bank Act – which sustained the dismal social-cost living standards Ruth Richardson initially used to lever unemployment levels as a form of budgetary restraint in the early '90s. So yeah, sure, Hot Labour could have been modelled on Cool Britannia's re-birthing under the cultural stigma of YBAs and Brit Pop, but look what Simon Cowell did with that. And really, it takes some nerve to roll out the knowledge economy parallel to the NASDAQ innovations of Silicon Valley and the transformation of the civic sphere by the pink dollar. Especially encamped as we are in Canterbury by the Jade stadium signage as a "coincidental" homage to the home-birthing of Canterbury Flair (of course you Canterbury) under the mawkish neo-con stigma of the Crusaders Rugby Team, those butch denizens par excellence, and market savvy in the new realm of global sport franchises. So yeah, sure we're afloat in this new credit alluvial plane & don't we just deserve it.

We only need run through Silicon Valley's uber residence, and no I don't mean Bill Gates' Seattle home, to see how redundant such back-washing is. I'm talking, of course, about Lady Winchester's Mansion in San Jose. Kept awake by the ghosts of the victims her husband's rifles claimed, she maintained a frenetic schedule of building additional rooms just to keep ahead of the spirits that haunted her domestic abode. The end result is akin to the suburban sprawl we see all about us, and there's no shortage of readings that belabour this architectural feat as a forerunner of suburbia gone amuck on hockey mom SUV juice (Sarah Palin's lipstick will never seem more pertinent quite shortly, but let me get back on track fast⋯)

The Big Bull Market was, significantly, the first time Hood unleashed the crystalline heap of automobile windshields he subsequently showed at Enjoy (June) and then at Artspace (September). I'm tempted to say the heap works as a consumer-codex reworking of Robert Smithson's glass piles ... But to unleash that diatribe of art-history gush well, how boring, so let me instead focus on what I think was a much less talked about aspect of the show, which I also think is perhaps one of the most prescient reminders yet, that Hood's practice is tied to a diabolical deadpan humour that is quite seriously concerned with culture. So let me, if you will, run rife on what Hood called the found campfire that was shown in the darkened

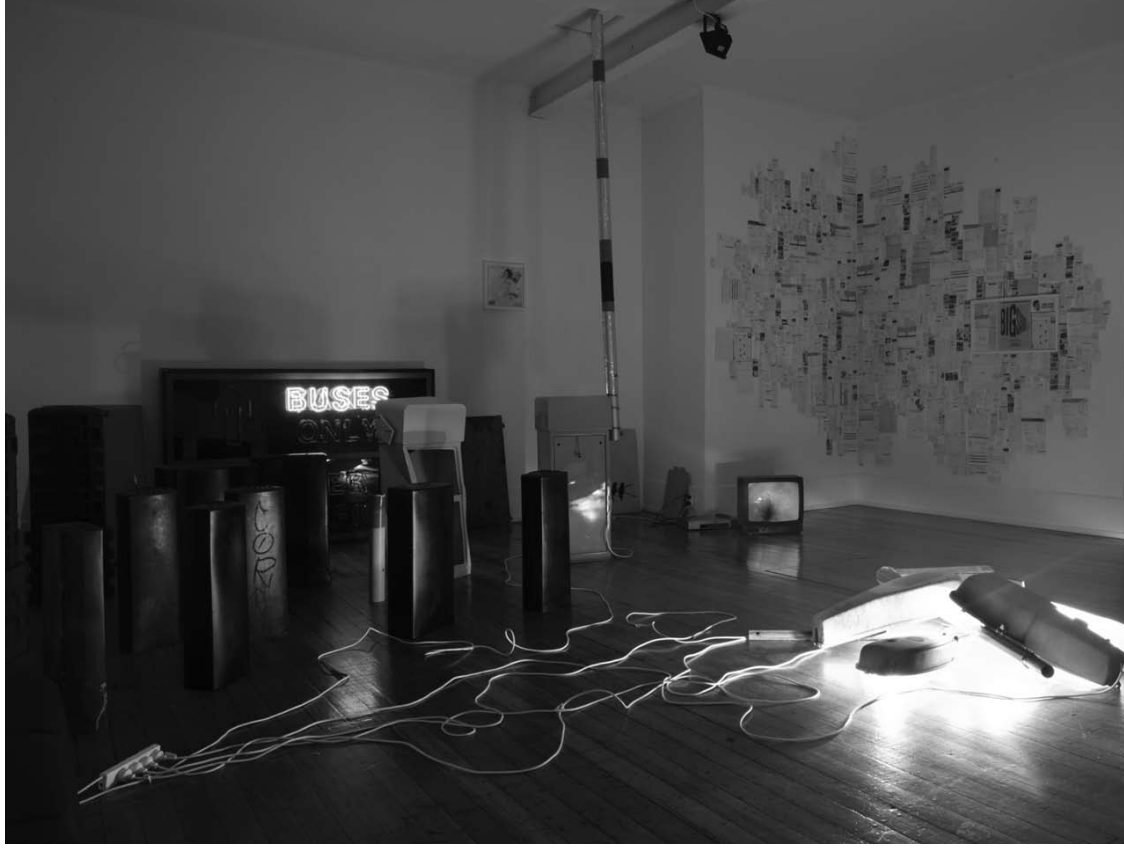
back-room of Jonathon Smart's gallery in Christchurch under the tainted yellow hue of two broken street lights and you can evaluate for yourself if it was worth it.

In all the talk about the Big Bull Market, I never once heard anyone mention the found campfire as a type of crossroads. I mean, the previous body of work by Hood to garner the type of critical attention Big Bull Market received, was a series of posters of pop stars who all gushed out plastic shopping bags as consumer debris in a moment of mock heliography via ectoplasmic symbolism gone awry. That this trophy hall of heroes was dominated by pop-blues-rock crossover acts, notably Elvis himself, ought to have been enough to run rife over the old blues myth whereby the musician is imbued with the spirit of the devil in a Faustian bargain of celebrity lure. Shouldn't we then consider the found campfire as a contingent augmentation of such heliographic endeavour, especially given its construction from streetlights and the totemic debris of the industrial street scene; electrical boxes, neon signage and broken arm barriers.

I guess the point I'm trying to make about the found campfire is, well, the way it responds to the anomalous margins of the post-industrial city. Given how insidiously the city's literal margins have become enveloped – overrun as they are by the continual development of suburbia's green-field expansion – aren't these cross-roads, literally the ones enmeshed in the city's core, especially at night when the city is abandoned of its working populace and eerily lit, well aren't these the perfect dead-end zones, the pristine cultural wilderness where one sits and waits for the devil's pact? How much of a step, then, is it to read this found campfire as a delusional moment of an incestuous culture pimping out its celebrity icons as the stargazing naivety of oblivion. Perhaps that's why Hood teamed the campfire up with a wailing wall of credit – literally 30,000 dollars of receipts – his daily stipend garnered from a year spent on the Oliver Spencer Bower Fellowship. Primed up as a group, that miscellany jumbled muffler repairs, groceries, stationary, petrol and sundry other accounts like electricity, framing costs, outsourced labour ⋯ well can't we say then that this wall typecasts the price of a year's life? This would surely mean something in conjunction with the pop stars turn, as a detoured iconography of compromise. Hell, that might explain why the Johnny Cash pin-up that also accompanied the found campfire just looked so god damn mean.

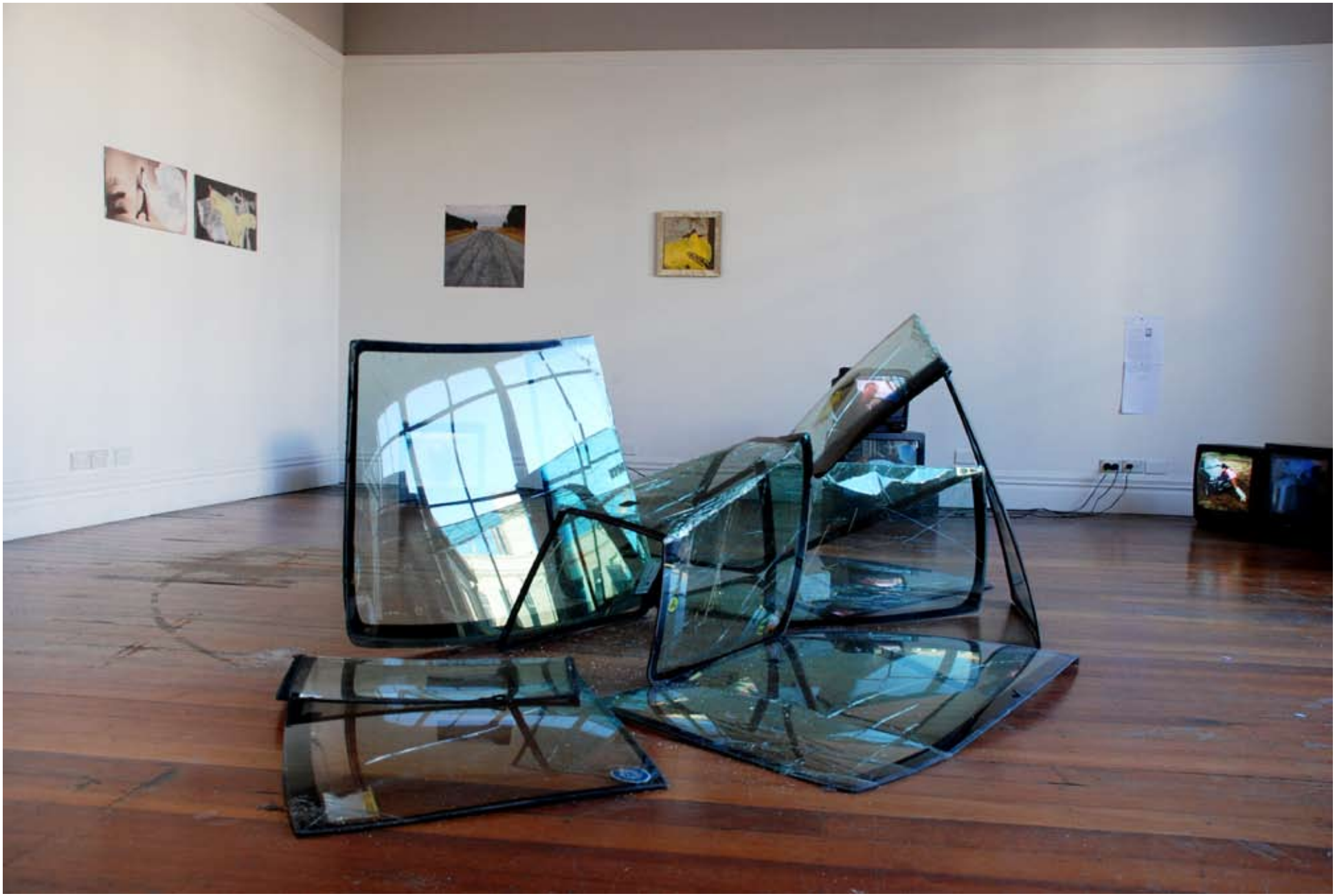
What I'd like to suggest then, is that perhaps the found campfire was a sort of provisional waiting room. That might explain the two videos Hood positioned to keep you company, where a streetcar burnout (literally) faced off against a pig's tail doing an odometer workout. That ought to have every bit of purchase on this cross-road salvation. I mean shit, didn't Jesus cast the souls of the condemned into the flesh of the pig and isn't Hood cashing in on the banality of the burn-out, especially his "burn-out" photos, which, yes lets face it, owe a huge debt of gratitude to Richard Prince's up-state series? Actually, if you are looking for lineage on this, Robert Venturi's reading of Ed Ruscha is particularly useful – he suggested Ruscha "pioneered" the method of "dead-panning the material so it speaks for itself".

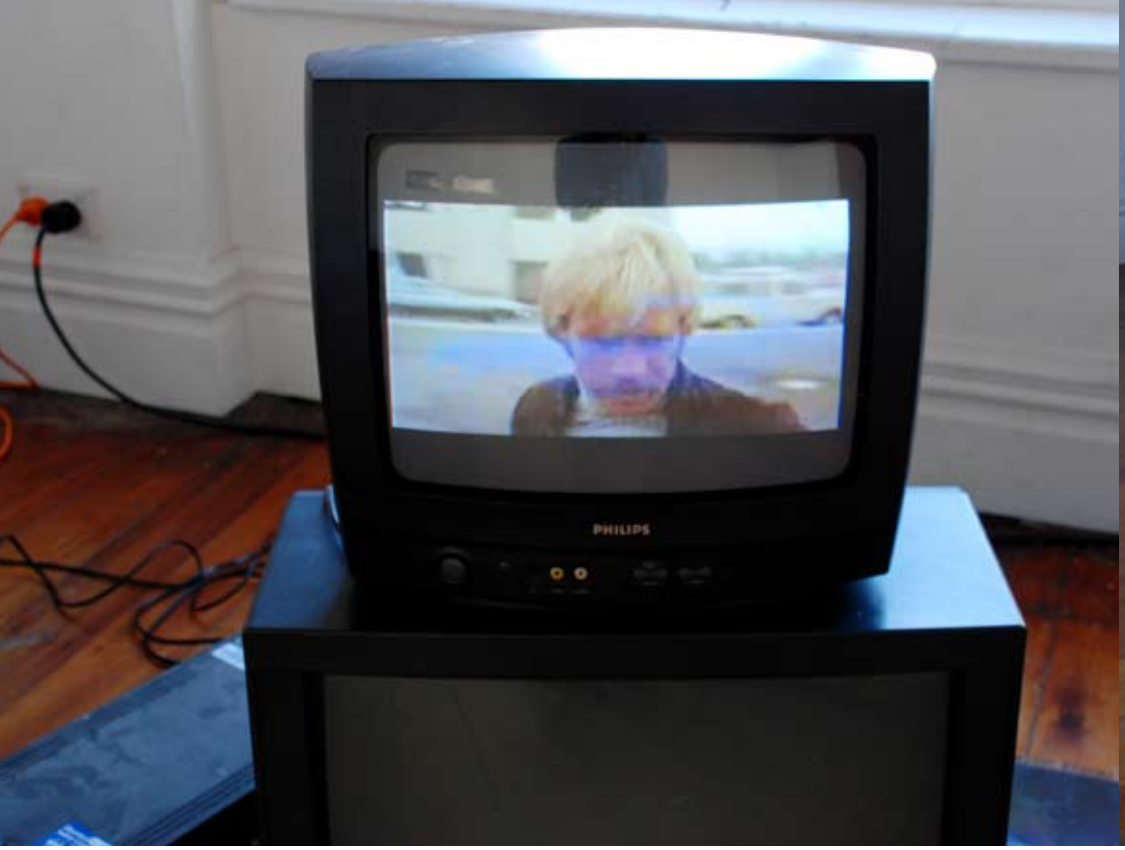
So if we are, and I suspect Hood is, letting the material speak for itself, then shouldn't we be paying attention to the site where Hood lays down this hypothetical tableaux? I mean isn't this improvisational zone – the found campfire, sandwiched as it is between the tilt-slab office parks of the technological quarter and the



earnest proletariat manufacturing district – somehow inflected by the broken windshield heap which lets face it, isn't at all an accumulation of accidents. These aren't near misses, nor accidental spills, but perhaps something far more inevitable and ominously prescient. Doesn't this crystalline heap, wandering as it does into its periodic upheavals, its dissolution of fragments, its merging of glass into a quasi-primordial soup, well isn't this the territory where the transmutation of death begins? Doesn't then, this signal a type of cross-roads? Is it a periodic melting by which the Big Bull Market toys with something larger than the follies of consumer society? Doesn't it go beyond the banality of leisure, bargaining, trading off the overwhelming organisation of daily life into the hyper expedient ploys of low-cost sales ⋯ Shit, doesn't it somehow, just like the malaise spewing forth from the pop musicians, signal something far more caustic, something so entrenched within the fabric of the bargain that we need the devil to be able to see it? Lady Winchester thought she did, that's why her house resembled a vast delusion, and it seems a conspiracy that we don't see it in the complete structure of our daily lives.

Though often attributed to the Robert Johnson industry, this myth actually runs much deeper as even a cursory gloss through the writings of Richard Meltzer or Jon Savage will tell you.

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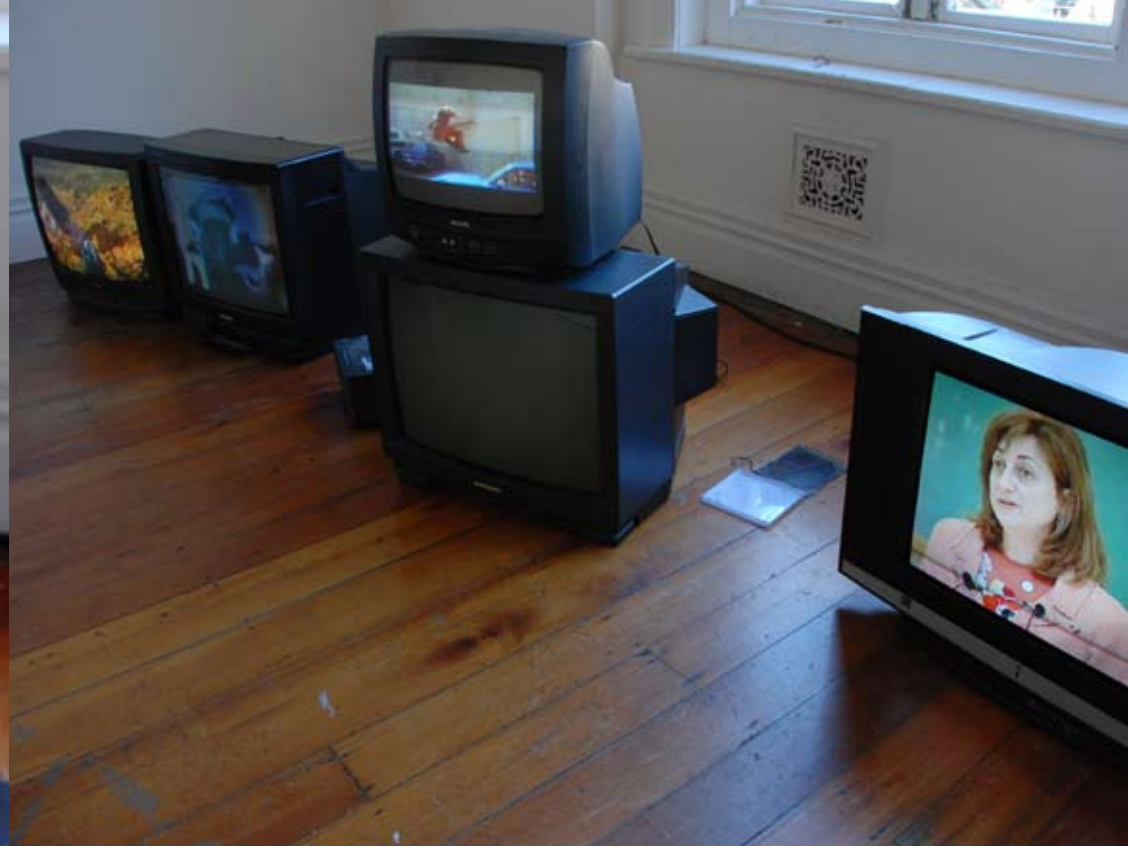
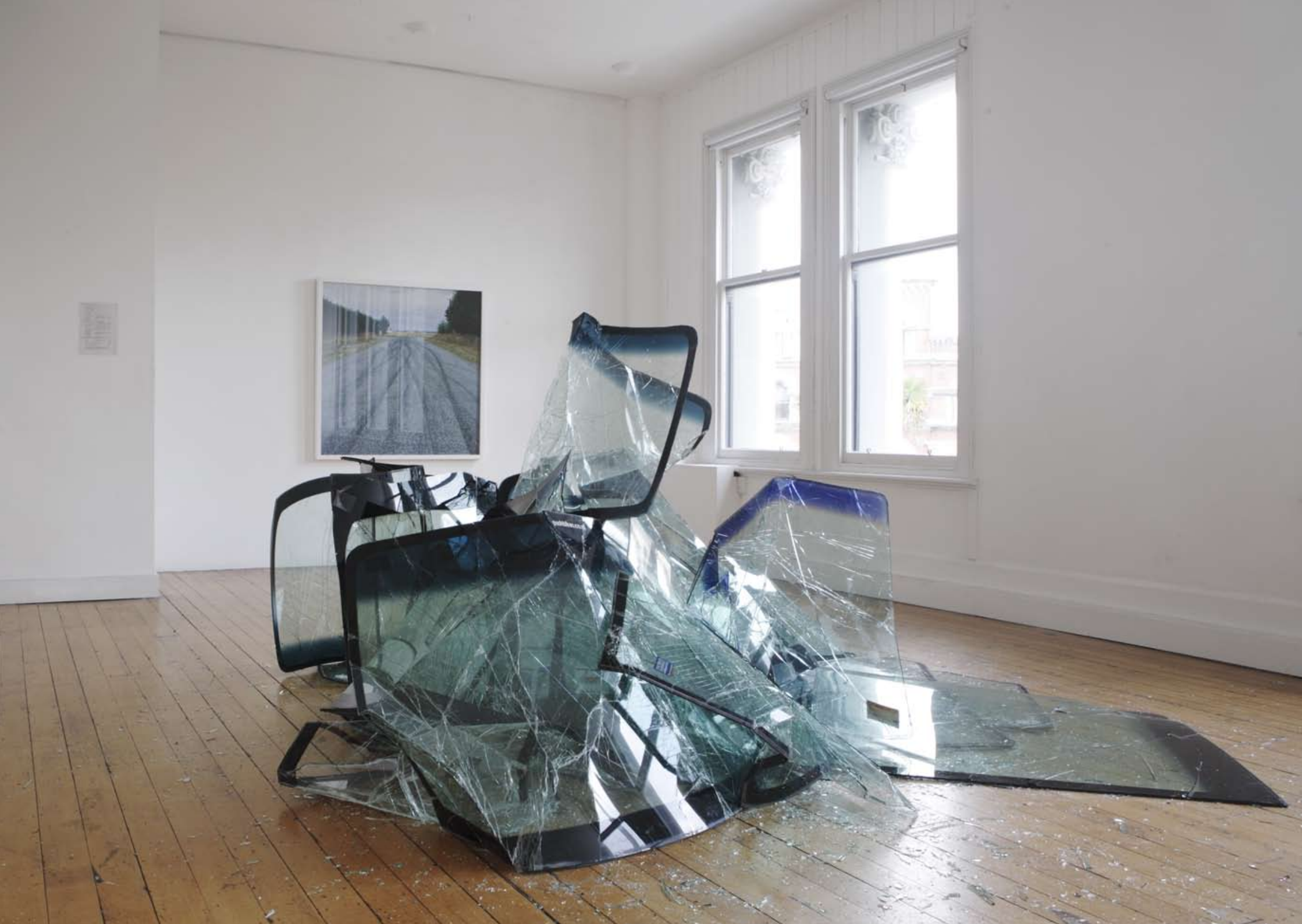
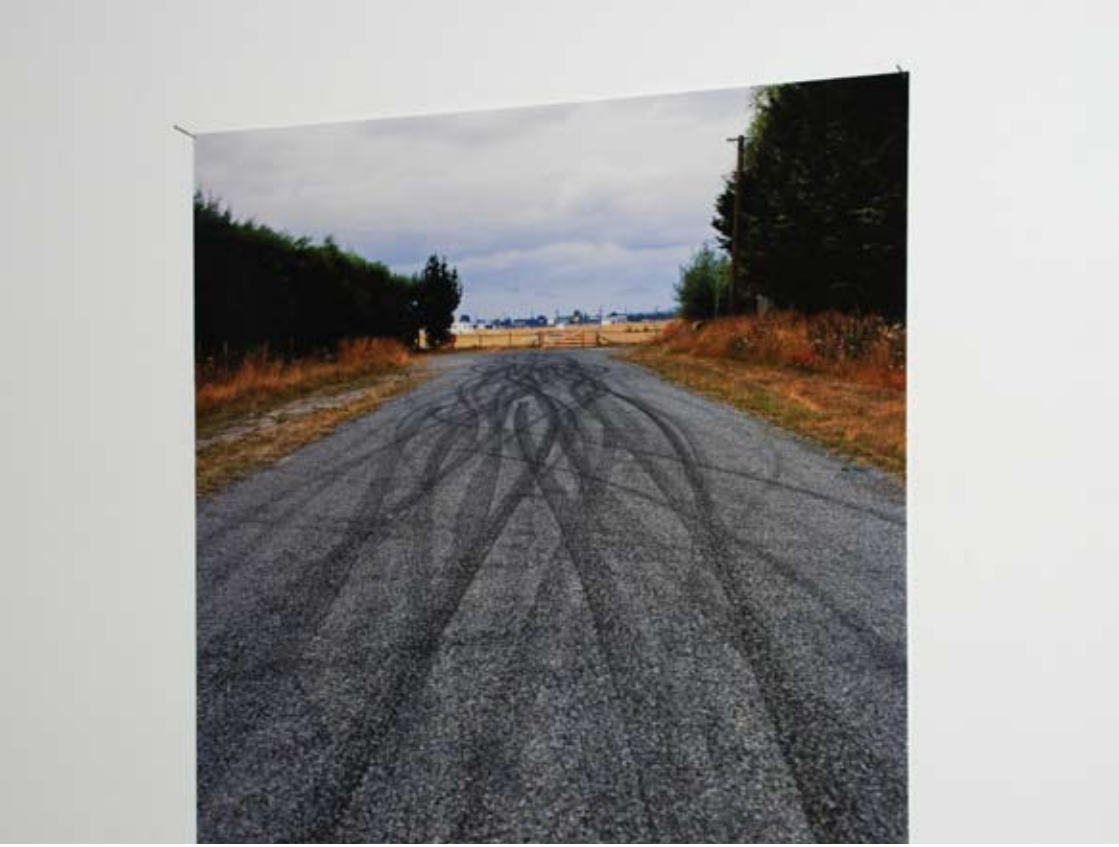
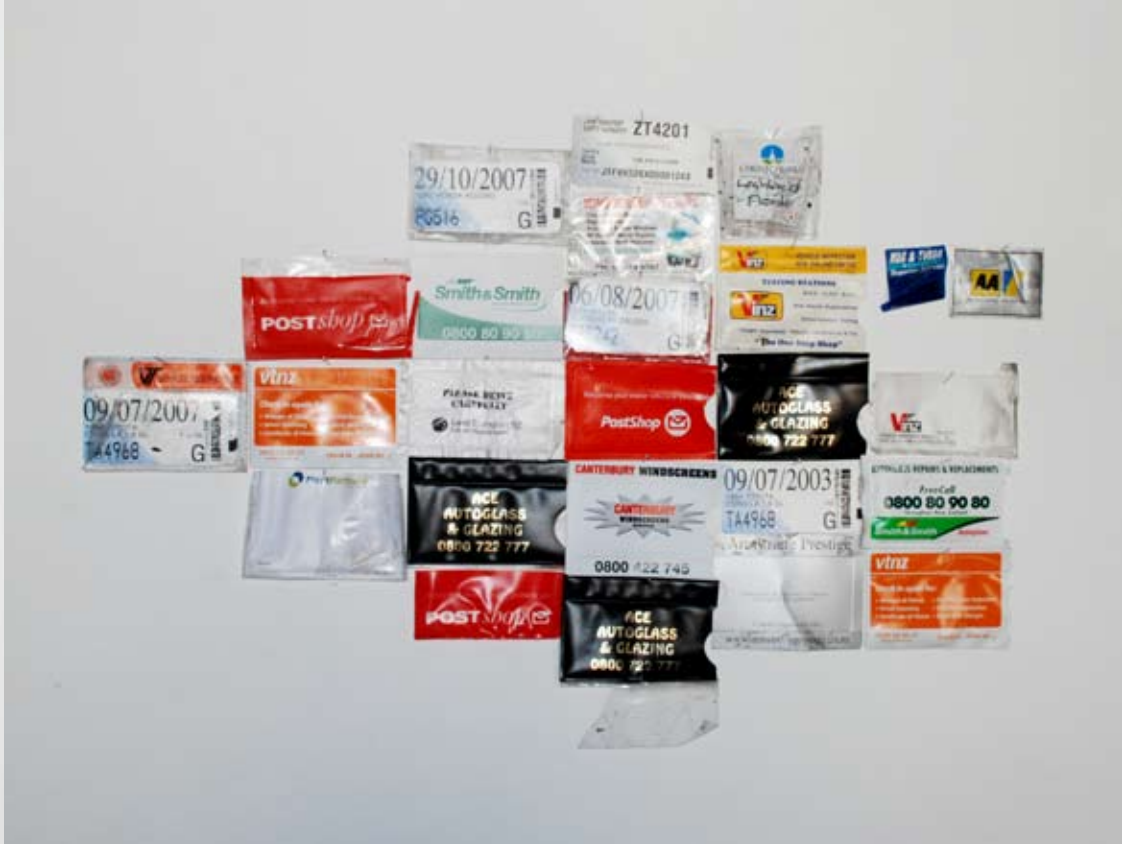


Big Bull Market by Robert Hood at Jonathan Smart Gallery 11 April – 10 May 2008.
Photographed by Mark Gore



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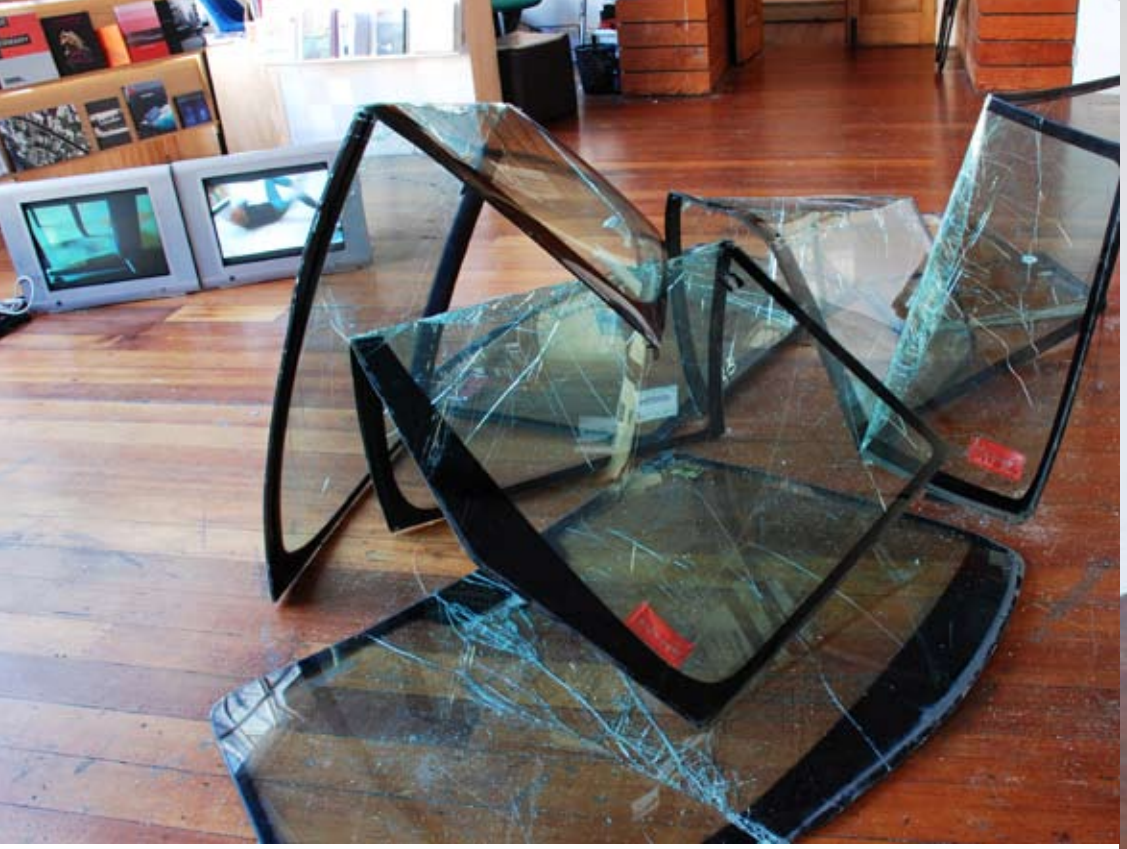
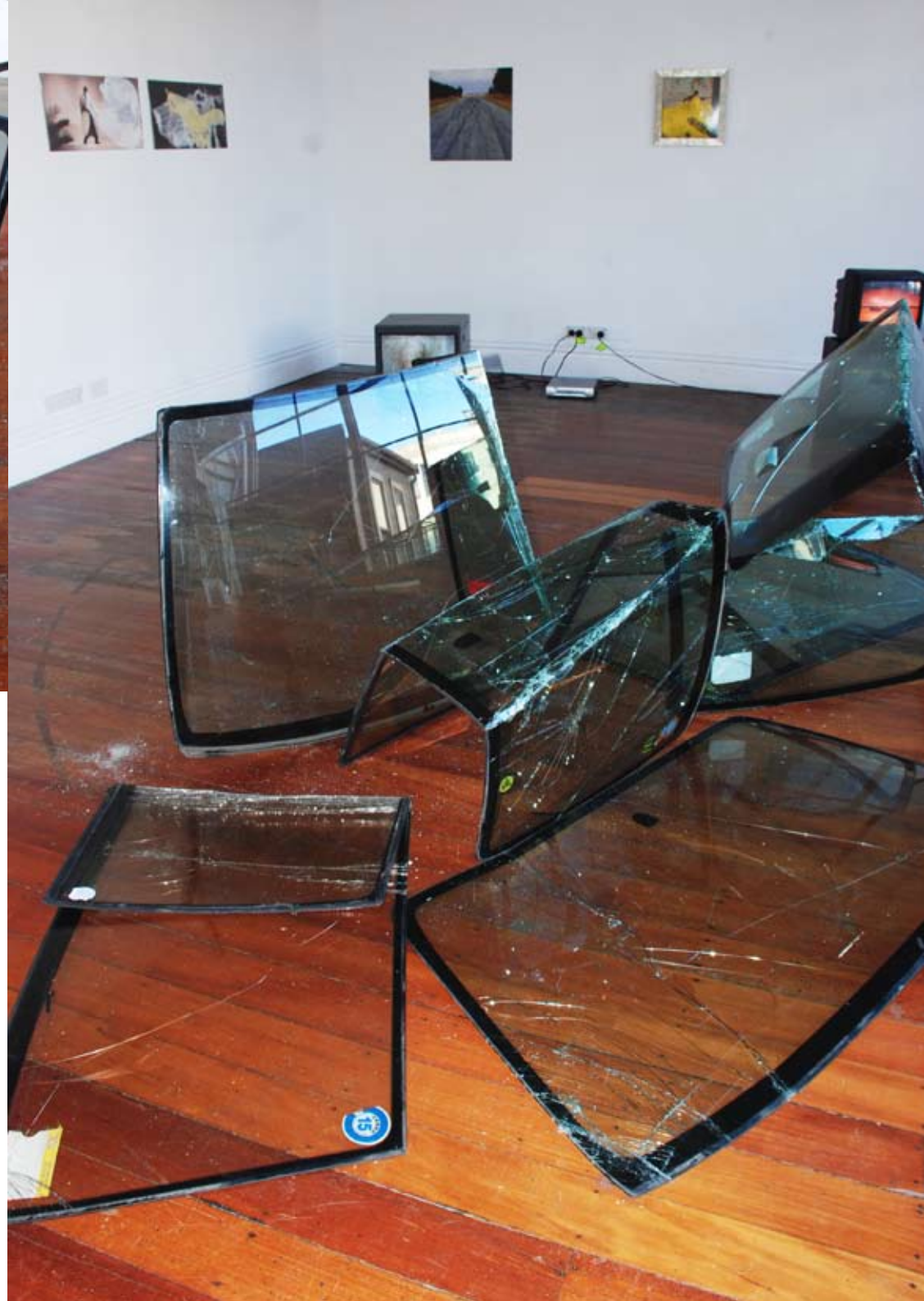




Culture Crash

Rudolph Hudsucker

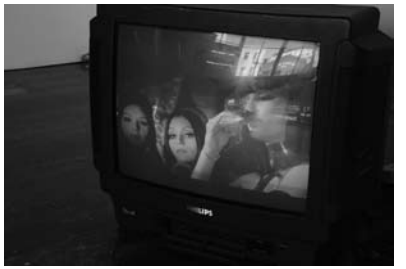
Sifting through the debris of TV culture, artists Tahi Moore (Auckland) and Rob Hood (Christchurch) have made a collision. In their two-man show at Enjoy in June 2008, the artists invited their audience to enter into the mind of a car, a fictional projection of male adolescent behaviour. Yes, we were forewarned, this would be slightly "boyish".

For a change, it's always nice to go to a show when the artist or artists and their intentions are invisibly positioned. When Time Magazine proclaims this year's all about "YOU", it's time to start looking around for something else.

First impressions being first impressions, the exhibition greeted the viewer/participant with Hood's jagged sculptural invention made of bent, cracked and shattered car windscreens, a stacked house of cards or inevitable collapse. This is not nostalgia but confrontation with nostalgia, boyhood lies and propaganda, from the glossy posters plastered across bedroom walls to the text on a box of cereal.

Chuck Norris has been making waves in recent times, firing up the ever-politicised Evangelical community. Throughout the ridiculous United States' primaries, everywhere you saw well-spoken Republican Mike Huckabee – a self-styled 'populist' candidate who equates homosexuality with bestiality – to his left would be a grinning Chuck Norris, a kind of kind of quasi-spiritual action-hero sidekick.

But for those who haven't continued following the career of the easily forgettable Norris, there's only one image that sticks out – wedged into our memory banks – that of the eighties action hero who could fly like a bat. In Tahi Moore's video sculpture we see classic Norris soaring through the air and karate kicking through a car windscreen,

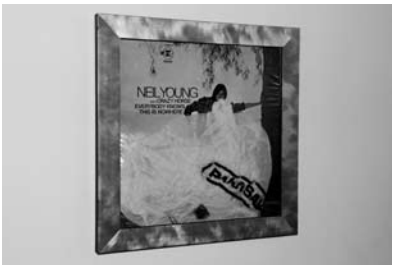


snapping his enemy's neck behind the car wheel, a scene, snatched by Moore, which he winds up and repeats: action replay ad infinitum.

This is brilliant minds gone amok, art in provincial New Zealand.

Moore presents his works as if in a stare-down with banality. Running images are doubled and looped into submission. The repeated scene from History of Violence of a Viggo Mortgensen viciously stabbing a gangster through the hand gains almost an erotic or hypnotic allure. One remembers, director Cronenberg himself had a thing for metal cars and autoeroticism.

This is art about reading and re-reading, a chance to channel surf through our logged-up memories and catch a glance at official narratives gone by. Hood and Moore offer tantalising near conclusions but will take a rain check for a sermon on doubt. Nothing raises one's spirits like smashed glass.



Tahi Moore

Don't know if it's any good or true. Maybe a bit. A method for writing is to start with a declaration of war, usually manifest disinterest, and fight to the end. Winning or surviving isn't important as long as you can get to the end.

I usually act out of boredom and dissatisfaction. Dissatisfaction the most.

Fuck.

Possibly a big problem when trying to describe something, is being suspicious of descriptions, when you've seen truth and accuracy being generally ignored. Mad people can hang onto feelings of true knowledge and try to tell people of this long after any sane person would have realised nobody was interested and moved onto some equally quixotic idea that people around them also share. Yeah I'm saying that pretty much all ideas are bullshit, even the true ones, but if someone else thinks the same stuff, you can have a normal conversation.

I'm trying to second-guess if you're going to be interested in this and read through to the end. The great thing about stand up comedians' DVDs is the material has already gone through a series of public edits, so you're just watching the stuff that gets laughs.

Artists shouldn't be indulgent. You get this great thought or material or idea or whatever and then it doesn't work out but you keep indulging its failed outcomes, like your talented child that can't play the piano. I do that too, with importance. If something's important, it's worth getting out right? But no, oh fuck. I'll show someone something important and they're not interested, so it turns out not to be important.

Changing tack.

It's better to not think a lot of the time. The unconsidered life being not worth bothering with, okay, so you consider stuff for a bit, and then do some stuff, and then it turns into something or something else or someone else or goes somewhere, or it peters out and you do some other thing and see what happens. Someone else can work out what it means later if they're interested.

The best music is a funny thing. Who's serving who here? You put on something to listen to while you're doing something else. Some people came round the other day and I was trying to put on good music, because of my thing with indulging important stuff. It wasn't good.

Making a show is a lot of struggle for something that you might spend less than half an hour with properly once it's done. Lots of games involve a lot of pain and hard work that you wouldn't want to do in real life. Like going to the gym in Grand Theft Auto, giving yourself OOS working the running machine or the stair climber or whatever it is to get your guy fitter, although you can get him to drive off in any car sitting around. I must have some quixotic ideas about work. I think most people share it though. Is work still freedom after the end of the age of enlightenment? Or do we just need to be careful about trying to get ideas to work in places they wont. Like Adorno's no poetry being about stuff you put universal trust in, coming round to bite you in the bum later on; even if he thought people would actually stop doing poetry at the time.

I only discovered that success and failure were invented ideas the other day. When you take it out, the whole life/death thing makes a bit more sense. You know, not having this idea that death is a failure that wipes out all of life's successes. Or something similar.