

Managed by the School of Art and School of Creative Media

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**OPENING HOURS** Mon – Fri – 9.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm to 5.00pm

Thursday 9.30am to 12.30pm and 1.30pm – 8.00pm

**LINDA ERCEG** gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria, Louiseann Zahra and Olivia Gleeson at RMIT Project Space and Scott McIntyre for his support and encouragement.

Vocal Actors: John Francis Howard, Helen Hopkins, Sharyn Oppy

Video Actors: John Francis Howard, Helen Hopkins, Louise Morris, Robert Reid

Interactive Programming: Robin Fox. Sound Recording and Editing: Scott McIntyre

Carpentry: Brian Scales. Internet Programming: Tony Holzner. Catalogue Essay: Steve Cox



**PETA CLANCY** thanks Panos A. Ioannou and the Cell & Gene Therapy Research Group, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute (MCRI), for scientific help and support of the artist's residency during 2002-2003. Bob Williamson and Anne Cronin who also supported the artist's residency at MCRI. Sarah List & Roy Robins-Browne from Microbiology & Infectious Diseases at MCRI for scientific assistance. The artist gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Australia Council for the Arts, Arts Victoria and Rhino Signmakers T: 03 9334 5655, Louiseann Zahra and Olivia Gleeson at Project Space/Spare Room, Cynthia Troup, Grace McQuilten and Xain Milke. [www.petaclancy.com](http://www.petaclancy.com)  
Peta Clancy is currently undertaking a 'Doctor of Philosophy' at the Faculty of Art & Design, Monash University.



These projects have been assisted by the Australian government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

RMIT Project Space/Spare Room gratefully acknowledges the support of Anna Moretti (web design), Darren Sylvester (design), Simon Stephenson (installation), Olivia Gleeson (gallery) and the 2nd year students from the Diploma of Visual Arts.



**Peta Clancy**  
*Untitled* from the series  
*Visible Human Bodies*,  
duratran, perspex, weathertex,  
electrical/lighting, 80 (diameter) x 15cm

#### THE LATENT IMAGE: NEW LIFE DRAWINGS BY PETA CLANCY

For the *Visible Human Bodies* project, Peta Clancy created images using 'life' as her drawing medium. That is, the figurations of the human body were drawn using living bacteria, which was delicately introduced onto a ground of nutrient agar. The artist photographed the bacterial growth as it became visible after incubation, and then as it slowly subsided in each Petri dish. Clearly, this work can be described as a contribution to that contemporary 'biological art' which is 'resolutely engaged in the manipulation of life forms'.<sup>1</sup>

Clancy's specialised method was made possible through a residency at the Cell and Gene Therapy laboratory at Melbourne's Murdoch Childrens Research Institute, where living bacteria are used for the controlled production and modification of DNA. By observing, adopting, and documenting an experimental procedure that is focal in current genetic research, the artist subjects this procedure to a kind of aesthetic scrutiny. Yet because Clancy's 'manipulation' is premised on the activity of figure drawing, each image also tests the relevance of this highly traditional artistic practice to the twenty-first century laboratory environment.

Throughout the history of academic art, naturalistic figure drawing has featured as a principle and basis for praiseworthiness; it has been inseparable from prescribed models for imitation. In the Italian Renaissance, figure drawing was elaborately theorised as the discipline which could best demonstrate an artist's accomplishments of mind, eye, and hand. A corollary to this discipline was the study of human anatomy, ideally through first-hand experience of anatomical dissection: the sixteenth-century statutes of 'the first formal academy of art', the Florentine Accademia del Disegno, required that an annual dissection be held at the hospital of Santa Maria Nuova.<sup>2</sup> In the broadest sense, then, Clancy's pursuit of figure drawing acknowledges a history of formal alignments between the realms of medical science and art; between their specialist activities and spaces.

Academic training in art has emphasised figure drawing as a strategy for visualising the correlation of anatomical layers to the functional 'whole' body. This conceptual heritage, or convention, informs Clancy's 'new life drawings', which literally—though precariously—return an impression of the exterior body to the microcosm in each Petri dish. As such, Clancy's work bears witness to a topical anxiety about the increasing abstraction of elements of the biological body for the purposes of gene therapy research, and medical innovation.

They gleam from their lightboxes, but these drawings 'reveal' nothing of an interior architecture of bones, muscles, or veins. The outline of the bodies does, however, suggest a classicising aesthetic; in one case, the model of the classical, limbless fragment. By their dramatic contours and colours, the bacteria drawings call to mind precious cameos after the antique, which extreme magnification shows suddenly imperfect. Their thin layers are blistering, dispersing, perishable.

Confronting the viewer with the laboratory 'stuff' that is serving to investigate our biological future, these images are a provocation to imagine new strategies for a twenty-first century figure drawing, and new alternatives to the anatomical paradigm privileged by academic traditions in art.

#### Cynthia Troup

Cynthia Troup is a Melbourne-based writer and art-historian, and a founding member of Aphids ([www.aphids.net](http://www.aphids.net)).

#### THE LATENT IMAGE: NEW LIFE DRAWINGS

*is dedicated to the memory of Panos A. Ioannou.*

1. Dominique Lestel, 'The Artistic Manipulation of the Living', *Art Press*, no. 276 (2002), pp. 52–54, (p. 53).
2. Karen-edis Barzman, *The Florentine Academy and the Early Modern State: The Discipline of Disegno* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.1; p. 163.



## PROJECT SPACE LINDA ERCEG VOX VIRTUA

## SPARE ROOM PETA CLANCY THE LATENT IMAGE: NEW LIFE DRAWINGS

OPENING NIGHT CELEBRATION THURSDAY 9 JUNE 6–8PM  
MONDAY 6 – FRIDAY 24 JUNE 2005

*Why must I be so lonely / when so many people pass me by?  
I've been waiting for oh so long now  
and yet I'm unable to answer why  
I can't be made to give up now  
Can you find room for me in your heart somehow?  
I want to be loved / I just want to be loved.*  
**Elvis Costello** *I Wanna Be Loved*

*But her friend is nowhere to be seen  
Now she walks through her sunken dream  
to the seat with the clearest view  
and she's hooked to the silver screen.*  
**David Bowie** *Life on Mars?*

We all want love. But it's confusing these days. And very often 'love' means 'sex'. The once-clear boundaries have been swept aside. Pornography is now mainstream. In 2001, rap gangsta Snoop Dogg released *Doggystyle*; an X-rated video that interspersed his music clips with five hardcore sex scenes. In a disproportionate number of music videos, women are presented as the property of pimps - prostitution as institutionalised fashion statement. The mass media is now awash with images that were once only accessed by the most dedicated sleaze connoisseur. Visual references now spring straight from the source; a chocolate biscuit campaign features a naked woman enswathed in an orgasmic spume of cream - the all-important 'money shot' of porn, taken to the high street. Recently, on the prime time show, *X Factor*, Mark Holden gleefully referred to fellow judge John Reid's 'pearl necklace', revelling in the *double entendre* of that descriptive porno phrase.

The Internet is responsible for this democratizing of the once taboo. A conservative estimate has it that pornography accounts for 75% of all downloads. A quick tap across the keyboard and absolutely *any* image or video can be accessed by the average, tech-savvy 13 year old. In the face of this, the very *notion* of censorship has become ludicrous. The Internet has also forever changed interpersonal relationships, many of which are now entirely initiated and conducted - if not actually

consummated - online. Anyone who has chatted to a stranger in cyberspace will attest that part of the fun is the complete anonymity, and the fact that age, appearance and gender are no longer immutable; we can change them on a whim. Safely behind our monitors, we have the freedom to re-imagine ourselves - if only for the duration of our online session. But what are the implications of this freedom? If the boundaries are gone, there is no telling who we *really* are anymore, or indeed what *is* reality? And in this new terrain, how do we negotiate the rocky road to love and personal relationships? We are making it up as we go along. There are no roadmaps anymore, but we still seem to be a long way from home.

Linda Erceg makes her art against the backdrop of these new anxieties. Her *oeuvre* slips between what we find acceptable and that which makes us highly uncomfortable. Each of her past exhibitions has dealt with some aspect of this dichotomy. In *Skin Pack* (2000) she explored the inherent violence and misogyny of many computer games; in an empty chamber, digitally pared back, stiletto-heeled *uber*-babes blast each other to bloody pieces with giant guns, for the sheer mindless pleasure of doing so. Here was Freud's *Eros & Thanatos* writ large. Erceg appropriated the visual tropes of both pornography and game culture and subverted both by highlighting the law of diminishing returns inherent in the pursuit of the pleasure principle. Increasingly, she has worked with our shifting notions of privacy in the public arena.

In *Skin Club* (2002) she pushed this to the limit: in a darkened room, a series of life size, shamelessly naked cyber-humans regaled the viewer with personal sex stories of an increasingly bizarre and disturbing nature. The chairs in the installation were cunningly 'wired' to detect any discomforted shift of the viewer's body, and the storytellers would pause to berate the listener if they walked out. This tapped into the usually unflappable *galleriste's* deepest anxiety - the potential for loss of cool in front of other *galleristes*; 'should I stay, or should I go?' Next, she produced *Punchline* (2003), which most directly accessed the high gloss world of commercial

hardcore pornography. For this, Erceg created four cyber porn stars in Hollywood-plastic style, two girls-vacant-eyed and unnaturally enhanced, and two guys-self-adoring and massively hung. Each of these performs in isolation; rotating endlessly through the four or five basic porn moves. The soundtrack is a litany of decidedly un-PC jokes, apparently recorded at a party. Pornography, usually privately consumed, is imbued with the power of our directed obsessions. Its very nature demands that we personalise it to a marked degree; by stylising it and presenting it in public, Erceg made pornography anodyne, and by so doing, she revealed its mind-numbing predictability.

In *Urban Legends* (2004), she staged an exhibition, which consisted entirely of the correspondence between a woman and the men who had contacted her through a swinger's magazine. Erceg had discovered the letters in a rubbish bin. The men's letters were pinned to the wall, as found - some with photographs of the correspondent attached. They were arranged around the woman's initial advertisement - over which, Erceg had fixed an enlargement of the frankly gynaecological photo the woman had originally sent in. Viewers of the exhibition were torn between the visceral pleasures of reading the very private proclamations of interest, many of them urgently sexual, and the knowledge that simultaneously they were violating individuals' privacy. Once again, Erceg had made the private very public. But this time the viewer was directly complicit, and the more one read, the deeper one was implicated, becoming a partner in Erceg's 'crime'. For many, it was an unsettling experience that broke all the rules of what was morally and ethically acceptable. But that was the point.

In her piece *Vox Virtua* (2004), Erceg successfully blurred the demarcations of art and reality, the private and the public. This exhibition came out of her personal experiences with a popular Internet dating service, and the title of the show was her actual log in name. Erceg joined up with the site, placed a personal ad and made contact with a number of men over several months. Her original concept for the piece was to display her own introductory video along with those of the men who used the site. The result would have been a deepening of

her preoccupation with 'the private' and 'the public'. At the final hour, however, fears of legal action resulted in pressure for her to present a truncated version of the work, which featured only her own video.

And now Erceg presents the interactive *Vox Virtua* (2005). She has written two female and two male protagonists. Each is a member of the art world. Each is searching for love (or what might be a useful substitute for it) via Internet dating. Ostensibly, we are watching their introductory videos. Face to face, we are offered an illusion of privacy and intimacy, but each character is flawed. They will be familiar to anyone with even a cursory brush with the arts industry and, as such they are ciphers for the fears and specific insecurities of the area - money worries, career worries, age worries, creativity worries. We are addressed directly by each of them in turn and our responses to their questions direct the action one way or another.

The viewer has entered into a highly artificial zone where 'absolutes' such as honesty, reality and morality have become fluid; we find ourselves playing along in order to keep the conversation going. Do we tell a lie in order to keep the conversation alive, or do we tell the truth, knowing that our answer will curtail it? For how long will we allow ourselves to be manipulated? We have begun to play a character. With this neat twist, Erceg poses the questions: What *is* honesty? And how *real* is our presentation of ourselves to others? These are questions of particular relevance in the Internet age. As each of the fictional characters begins their introduction, we sense their vulnerability. We feel recognition and sympathy, even rapport. But as their true motivations are revealed, we gradually feel pity, then disgust, and then amusement. Their hidden agendas have become painfully obvious; 'Ms Noma' is after financial support. The reptilian 'Woody' is after young flesh. The stern 'KT41' wants to have a baby. And the emotionally fragile 'Pacman' is overcome by a terrifying burst of emotion. We recognise these people. We know them as well as we know ourselves - but how well is that, after all?

**Steve Cox** 2005  
www.voxvirtua.com

