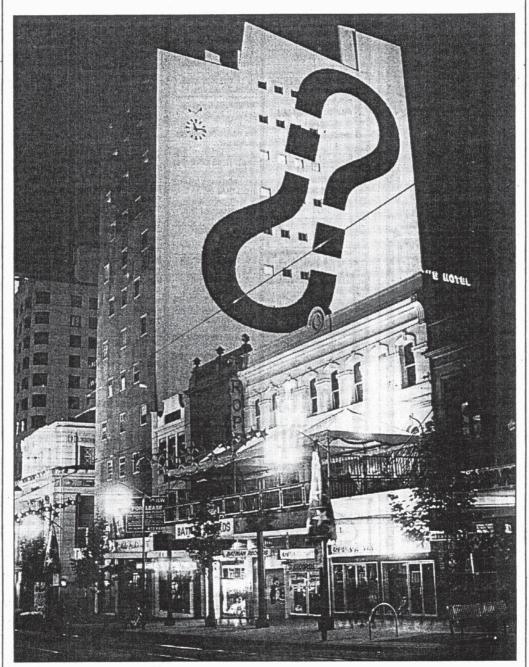
# IVIOnthly NOVEMBER 1996 NUMBER 95 \$4.30 Art M The budget cuts: it's worse than you thought Why New Zealanders do it better Barry Humphries on modernism

## **Arts** & entertainment



High light: Ian de Gruchy asks the question on the State Bank building during Experimenta.

### OFF THE wall

IAN de Gruchy's innovative street-stopper City Wall Projection on the State Bank building in Swanston St was one of the more dynamic moments of which changed the facade

the recent Experimenta festival.

Using high-powered projectors, de Gruchy created a sequence of images of the building to create an architectural theatre.

Question marks stamped on the urban exterior are somewhere between advertising and graffiti.

## TODAY 3

## **T**Architecture

# Throwing light on the subject

By SUZANNE BROWN

N a darkened room above an inner-city mechanics workshop, artist Ian de Gruchy sits surrounded by the detritus of his work. Empty film canisters and piles of slides in plastic sheets cover bench tops. Electrical cords snake and dangle from every corner. Drawers bulge, boxes are ready to burst, plugs connect to plugs like a Lego set and eight projectors sit high on a shelf.

De Gruchy is fine-tuning some of the images he will project on to the Capitol Theatre's facade on Sunday night to celebrate the Melbourne treasure's reopening and launch of the new owner, RMIT's restoration fundraising campaign. De Gruchy specialises in light projections as art installations, theatre sets and a method of transforming buildings.

He has worked all over the world for the past 20 years, in cities such as Venice, Amsterdam, Chicago and New York. Last month he completed slide projections for a major retrospective of Barbara Kruger's work in the Los Angeles Museum of Contemporary Art. His work has adorned Melbourne nightclub walls and has been included in numerous contemporary art exhibitions.

The lighting of the Capitol Theatre is on a smaller-scale project than many of his big-budget works, but it has captured his imagination and features the interconnection of many themes. Naturally enough the lighting designs began with Marion Mahony and her husband, Walter Burley Griffin, the theatre designers.

De Gruchy spent months scouring national archives and poring over Mahony's sketches. A part-time lecturer in projection and audiovisual production for RMIT's architecture department, he says he had an abundance of material from which to choose.

A selection of these images interpreted by de Gruchy will be projected on to the Capitol theatre as part of opening celebrations. The theatre's fragmented facade, with many windows and a tree marring full view, presented problems for de Gruchy. To compensate, he has chosen graphic, busy images that will catch the eye.

Inside the theatre, de Gruchy will install a nine-minute slide show of images charting some of the Griffin's and Mahony's designs, including their fascination with India.

De Gruchy says large-scale lighting installations reach large audiences and often evoke strong responses. "Projections are powerful and can transform and camouflage a building's edifice," de Gruchy says. "Art as being public is terrific. People can look at it or they can walk right past. To operate on a large-scale is really exciting." De Gruchy sees his projections as a fluid skin on a building that can alter it's structure with light, rather than simply being decoration.



Luminary: Ian de Gruchy.

## A show that lights the way

THE Melbourne Town Hall (right) will be transformed after dark from 29 December until 19 January when it becomes a "canvas" for a series of spectacular son et lumiere (sound and light) shows.

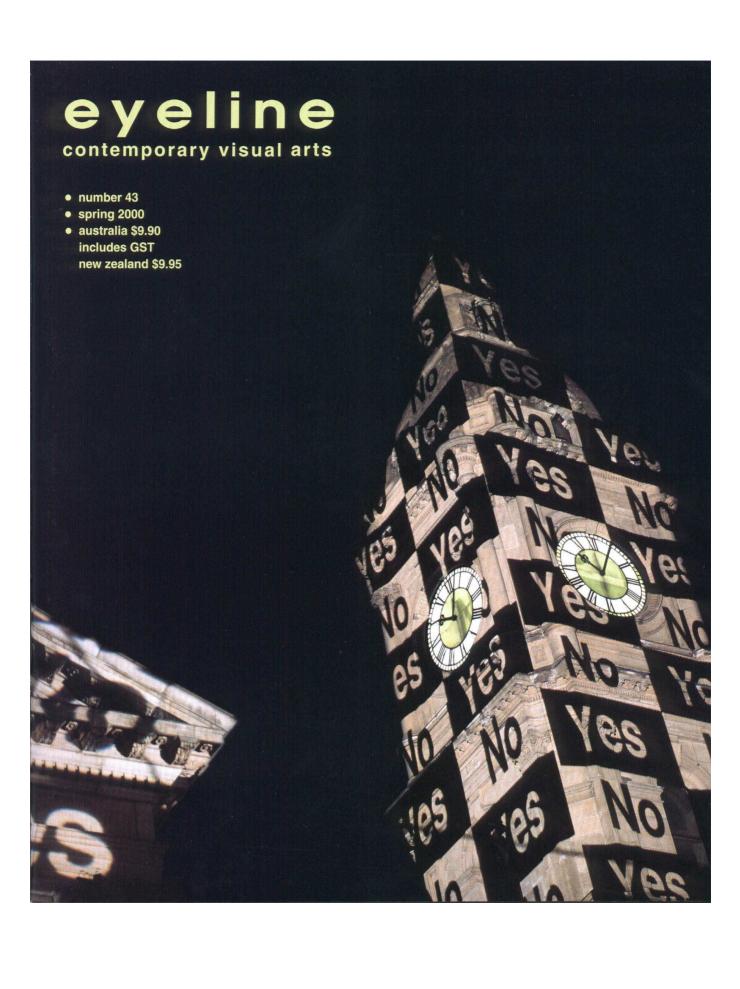
Artist Ian de Gruchy has created slide and video projections of images including trams, vintage Holdens, maps from bygone days and ominous visions of Ned Kelly in his armored suit for the shows, which will also feature a soundscape by Chris Knowles.

De Gruchy's images, exploring themes of place, memory, history and Melbourne iconography, will be projected on to the town hall facade five times a night— at 9pm, 9.30pm, 10pm, 10.30pm and 11pm.



4 TODAY.ARTS

THE AGE
TUESDAY 21 DECEMBER 1999



willingness to critique the medium of photography from within, to expand and sometimes shatter its limitations, to take the medium back to its future and forward to its past is at the core of lan de Gruchy's experiments with projections and illusions.\* He rarely exhibits inside art galleries, although many cultural institutions have been transformed by the artist's digital light-writing onto the buildings which house culture.

De Gruchy says that he sees buildings as screens. In the case of cultural institutions, such as art galleries, libraries and museums. it is clear that the artist seeks to exteriorise the concept of the culture within the building and/or to deconstruct or critique some aspect of it. The Library Projection (State Library of Victoria, 1992) converted the side of the building into a huge bookshelf by scaling-up a photograph taken in the reading room. Thus the interior was made public for the on-looker out-

In many respects Library Projection was a sentimental meditation on photography itself. The picture which was monumentalised on the side of the building was reminiscent of William Henry Fox Talbot's calotype of 1840, titled Books on Two Shelves. Once made, this connection draws out the narrative of light-writing that Fox Talbot gave to the history of photography. The metaphor of photography as lightwriting recurs throughout Ian de Gruchy's projection works, as he engages with the language and history of the photographic media.

One might say that de Gruchy is a type of magician since he exhibits in public spaces, creating illusionary entertainments for his audiences. He works with spectacle and uses architectural structures as screens. He also has worked in theatre and performance spaces, and in nightclubs in Australia and New York where his projected installations transform the way in which audiences experience the space or the performance.1 Spectators in these installations often become performers in the space created by the photographic projections. In his work for performance spaces de Gruchy has collaborated with other artists (Peter King, Mahony Masques, 1992 and Dazzle of Shadow, 1993, and Jude Walton, No. Hope No Reason, 1991) and here his role also has been to alter the viewer's experience and consciousness of physical space.

There is often a dreamlike quality to the installations which de Gruchy projects in interiors, whereas the external projections tend to foreground the spectacle of a technology which allows monumental structures to be re-written by the images appearing upon them. This was particularly apparent when the artist changed the Adelaide Festival Centre into a makeshift humpy, drawing attention to the fact that the centre was built over a site of Aboriginal settlement. More recently, the theme of reconciliation was included in his work, Transformed, which was projected on the Melbourne Town Hall over a three week period (1999-2000). In this event, de Gruchy used digital photographic sequencing to create a series of passing or moving still photographic images accompanied by a soundscape composed by Chris Knowles and Dan Witton. Transformed was a reflection on Australia's past and a meditation on our future as we enter a new millennium. Much like a critical, visual history, the picturescape reminded the spectator of the key issues that had shaped a nation. Tall ships and ancient maps gave way to images of suburbia, the city and transportation. Icons of the twentieth century recurred, underlining the progressive thrust of capitalism, whilst images of Indigenous culture and symbols of reconciliation punctuated the screen. The Sea of Hands image, which is overlaid with the names of Aboriginal tribes, was designed by Donna Brown specifically for the Town Hall projection. It is an iconic image, one that has entered the vernacular as the many hands of reconciliation become a recurrent visual symbol in our culture.2

lan de Gruchy's projection works on public buildings are compelling for a contemporary public in the same way as dioramas and lantern slide projections were popular for a nineteenth century audience. His art work is cutting-edge in terms of the technology used and it often involves social critique, but it also takes its place in the history of mass entertainments and illusionary spectacles. De Gruchy operates as a theatre or film set designer might, however his props are virtual and his environments are made with projected beams of light and often synthesised with dynamic

sound tracks. The physical make-up of the installations is laborious, requiring hundreds of images, all sequenced to create the right picture at the right time. In the monumental Transformed, images were digitised, exposed onto giant film scrolls and choreographed to create de Gruchy's short allegory of Australian history.

Other smaller installations have used more conventional, analogue processes, but like his nineteenth century colleagues Ian de Gruchy exploits the magical and performative elements of photography. This was emphasized in the installation Defying Gravity (Linden Gallery, 1997) where a large dictionary, opened to the listing on gravity, appeared to hover in mid-air. The book was contextualised visually in the grid-like perspective of Renaissance space. The illusion of the text hovering in space was an ironic representation in which the laws of gravity were destabilized by visual and physical tricks

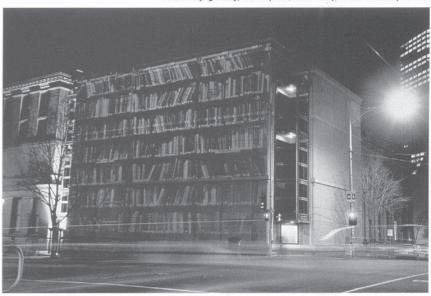
In Defying Gravity a perfect architectural grid displayed the mathematical certainty of one point perspective and the power of a fixed, monocular point of view. This territory has been rigorously criticised by critics and theorists of photography who rightly claim that such angles of vision/ways of seeing are signifiers of an unequal distribution of power, where one eye (the eye of God or 'man') oversees/looks upon the object of the gaze.3 This critique of one point perspective, a view which the camera obscura supposedly was able to re-create, has given rise to a plethora of criticism which sees the camera as a weapon, a tool of surveillance used to police people and societies.4 lan de Gruchy's photo-installations and projections take a step back from this critique and underline the performative and magical qualities of photography. In so doing they insist upon an active and engaged viewer/participant who is not always already written by a gaze that inscribes him/her into a symbolic (patriarchal) law to which s/he may neither aspire nor agree.5 The projection works use technology to create visual poems, critiques, and illusions. The ways in which they transform realities by writing photo-picture graffiti onto cultural monuments opens these spaces up. It is an exteriorisation and a critical appraisal that turns the concept of surveillance around on itself. In smaller works in gallery situations the artist's philosophy is similar, he presents tricks and virtual realities that focus on different ways of seeing or conceptualising.

In many ways Ian de Gruchy's public works have always been about everyday life. His pictures come from everywhere and anywhere. It is as if he photographs everything he sees and rephotographs it time and again. Repetition plays an important role in the visual syntax of the installations. It becomes a sort of punctuation, a place for breathing, taking count of the way in which the audience will view the work and how the images will enter into the individual and collective memory. It could be said that lan de Gruchy is a bricoleur but he also is a master of the phantasmagoria of everyday life. He collects images compulsively, looks at them over and over and finally decides on a monumental tapestry which might include: old fences, hand prints, bits of art, fragments of maps, words, segments of buildings, transportation, electric lights, altered images, masked screens-all of which come together to create photo-graphedpoems as the artist orchestrates magical screens and spectacular illusions for his audience.

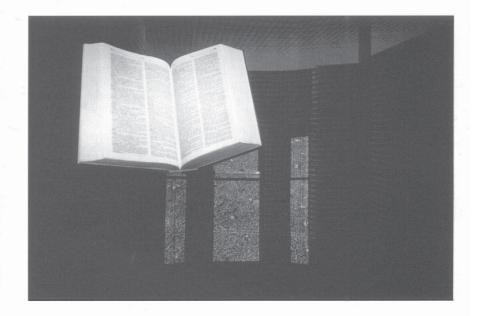
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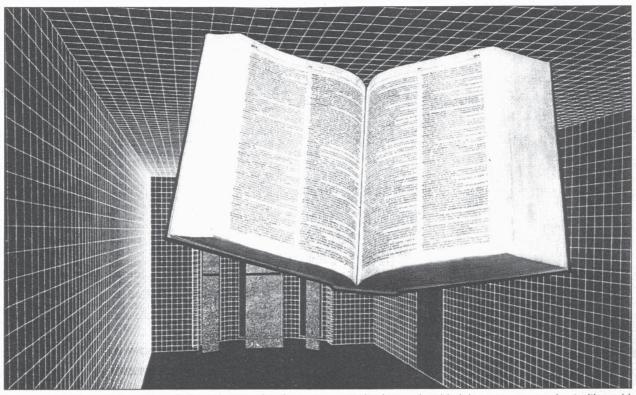
- I. Works were presented at The Kitchen, contemporary art space, and at the Limelight and the Pyramid Clubs.
- The visual image of the hand-print was the political signature of Cornoboree 2000 which saw an estimated 250,000 people walk across Sydney Harbour Bridge in a gesture of reconciliation. The crowd wore the handprint as a symbol of unity and goodwill.
- 3. Laura Mulvey was the first critic to rigorously critique the 'male gaze' in her essay 'Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema', Screen, vol. 16, no. 3, Autumn 1975, pp. 6-18. See also Geoffrey Batchen, Burning with Desire: The Conception of Photography, Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1997, especially pp. 106-108. 4. Susan Sontag was probably the first critic to seriously analyse the camera as a weapon, see On Photography, Middlesex: Penguin, 1977. See also Allan Sekula, 'The Body and the Archive', October, no. 39, 1986, pp. 3-64. 5. The idea that the subject is always already written by a language that already exists and over which s/he has little, if any, control is a fundamental concept in structuralist criticism. See especially Louis Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', in Lenin and Philosophy, trans. Ben Brewster, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971, pp. 127-186.

lan de Gruchy lives and works in Melbourne. Anne Marsh is a Senior Lecturer in Visual Culture in the School of Literary, Visual and Performance Studies at Monash University.



The projection works use technology to create visual poems, critiques, and illusions ... an exteriorisation and critical appraisal that turns the concept of surveillance around on itself.





You wouldn't read about it: a dictionary, opened to the page on gravity, hovers in mid-air in a room mapped out with a grid.

## A show full of suspense

DEFYING Gravity is a witty mixed-media installation which plays on the concept of gravity by creating a virtual space with slide projections.

The room is mapped out with an architectural grid which heightens the sense of perspective for the viewer. A huge dictionary hovers in mid-air as if it is about to flap into motion. There's an aeronautic suspense about the book itself — an alien rationality that mirrors the perspective grid.

But de Gruchy's aim is not to underline the theses of the Enlightenment or to pay homage to Alberti.

As a photographer, de Gruchy has always been a trickster. His giant City Projections have operated like vigilante images across skylines in Melbourne, Brisbane and

### REVIEW

exhibition

**Defying Gravity** 

By: lan de Gruchy

When and where: Linden Gallery until May 11

Reviewer: Anne Marsh

New York. He's a contemporary artist keen on the magic of photography.

The idea that photography is a kind of light-writing resonates throughout de Gruchy's work. He's become a kind of urban magician over the years, transforming mundane spaces with his theatrical illusions created with computer-driven

projections. Of course, the idea that photography is "flight writing" was discovered with the invention of photography in the 19th century. William Henry Fox Talbot called his photographs "sun pictures" drawn with "the pencil of nature".

Ian de Gruchy dispenses with the 19th century homage to nature by underlining the mechanical-cum-digital means of production. There is no sunshine in de Gruchy's chamber, all the light is manifested artificially.

The virtual aspects of Defying Gravity are complemented with real objects floating in space. Newton's apple falling from the tree, used by the scientist to demonstrate gravity, recurs throughout the space. There is a sweet smell of fruit which wafts

through the air as the viewer peers into the room.

The dictionary, opened to the page on gravity, also lists graphic, graphology and graven image. It's a clever twist since the chance inclusion of "graven image" seems to encapsulate the illusionary construction in the room. It's there but it's not there. Our senses get confused at the same time as our minds become enchanted.

There is definitely a sense of wizardry in the installation. But it is an art practice committed to experimentation and public access.

Anne Marsh lectures in Visual Art at Monash University.

## **METROARTS**



FOR A COMPLETELY different experience, do not miss *Defying Gravity*, Ian de Gruchy's installation at Linden.

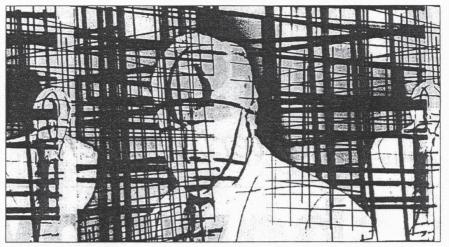
A weighty dictionary floats in space in a darkened room, the walls adorned with a grid of projected lines of light.

On the floor, a black plastic sheet is littered with autumn leaves. We peer through a blocked door into the constructed cavernous space, the dictionary open at the page from "grapheme" to "gravity" — embracing graph paper, grapple, grass, grate, grave, gravitas and gravitation.

Like a cryptic crossword clueconstructor, de Gruchy teases us with words, but there are no anagrams or synonyms here, just a string of words in alphabetic order that somehow shape the way we read this witty, playful and imaginative work. For me, it seemed to bury, mourn and also revive the practice of lexicography, if not the whole linear logocentric tradition.

lan de Gruchy's Defying Gravity, at Linden Gallery, until Sunday. Review by **Freda Freiberg** 

## Arts and entertainment



Grid lock: Ian de Gruchy's Camera 2: Projecting Space dissolves images before the eyes.

# Filling space with images

#### By ANNE MARSH

A S SPECTATORS walk into the gallery, they are transformed into participants. Bodies moving in and around the environment alter the visual land-scape.

The floor is awash with images. Skewed grids are disorienting as they dissolve before the eyes, changing into golden rock and shattered glass.

The installation, one of three by projection artist Ian de Gruchy, provides an opportunity to experience the projected environment.

Most of de Gruchy's projections have been on an architectural scale — transforming the facades of city buildings, museums and libraries — or visual environments created for performance works.

Projecting the Floor uses 19 projectors to create a theatrical space. But in many respects the space is meditative because the time sequencing is slow.

De Gruchy's work has rarely been seen inside the gallery. Most of it can be described as public art, in that it is in urban spaces, where people just come across it or it is an element of a theatrical production.

This exhibition includes Documentation Piece,

### REVIEW

photography

lan de Gruchy

Camera 2, Projecting Space

Where and when: Centre for Contemporary Photography; October 5-November 4

which covers work from New York, in 1984, to the most recent architectural transformations.

In June, de Gruchy projected musical instruments and scores on to the Queensland Performing Arts Theatre, changing it into a lyrical photographic collage for the Biennial.

For the Adelaide Festival in 1988, he transformed the Festival Centre into a humpy and his Library Projection (State Library of Victoria, 1992) converted the side of the building into a bookshelf by scaling-up a photograph taken in the reading room.

All the projections are ephemeral events: some are lyrical, poetic or funny, others are subversive.

The Adelaide Festival humpy, for example, changed the architectural space for high art into a monumental shack. It was a reminder that the Festival

Centre was built over a site of Aboriginal settlement.

City Wall Projection last year used the State Bank Building in Swanston Walk as a subversive billboard. The silhouette of a tree loomed high in the cement jungle, a shadow of another place outside the urban hustle and bustle.

The architectural projections are spectacular and, like the performance works, exploit the magical qualities

of photography.

Works with Peter King and Jude Walton have used the illusionistic qualities of multiple slide projections, with images refracted through water and mirrors.

Surfaces glide in and out of one another, creating a fluid progression and an architectural interior from images and light.

In the small loading bay behind the gallery, de Gruchy creates one of these photographic illusions. The area is black, except for the projected photographs. Titled Defying Gravity, the rocks in the room appear suspended in space: weightless bodies or hallucinations which cannot be believed.

Camera 2: Projecting Space is an unconventional exhibition. Photographs are a means to an end, constructing environments and transforming city skylines.