

Natural Selection

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I have secretly wished something like *Natural Selection* would have had come along a long time ago. On these little islands of the transnational global market there has been a general absence of talk not just criticism but any kind of open intelligent discussion in the visual arts.

More like a newsletter than a glossy magazine, *Natural Selection* (which is designed by guru Warren Olds) is a downloadable PDF file, created by the illustrious Auckland-based duo Gwynneth Porter and Dan Arps, as an arts review-style magazine. The idea is to bypass high printing costs by circulating the master document and the reader can put the magazine together himself or herself using someone else's printer. One could say *Natural Selection* is a virus-like program to be copied and distributed for free like bad office jokes or software from workstations to desktops and studios across local networks between Australia, New Zealand and further afield.

If we ever get a chance to meet you wouldn't think this jaded 29-year old could get into much trouble for his enthusiasm. Surprising then that my encouragement to everyone to contribute to the first issue of *Natural Selection* magazine would convince editors Gwynneth Porter and Dan Arps to extend an invitation to me to guest edit this, the second issue, to be downloaded as of June 25 2004. Three months on, here are the results of many nagging emails, suggestions and invitations.

In their article "Money Burns" A Constructed World comment on America's funny reaction to French theory. I wonder then what they would make of my statement that the nineties never happened. It's been nearly ten years since I graduated from art school in 1996. Throughout that decade Melbourne was almost completely remade through its cultural destinations, institutions, gambling and entertainment industries. Our leading cultural agencies, museums and universities have been largely re-scripted like consumer shopping malls to monumentalize these new relationships under shrinking budgets. The opportunities of pluralism that once were seemed to be staged via collectivity, collaboration and networks have given way to a centralizing of power structures, the reinvention of old hierarchies and ever increasing exercises of control over the audience: *Big Brother*, people being famous for no reason, *American Idol*, cultural gate keeping... In soliciting material from colleagues and friends for this issue I asked them to consider our relations to these new concentrations of power or to track the possibilities outside of these closed systems.

So somebody pass me that AK47 because the original New Zealand art/rockstar Michael Morley urges us to Kill our Idols (Die!). Anna Daly makes some hysterical connections between the bureaucracy of Centrelink and the work of the great Italian horror director Dario Argento. Dan Arps and Gwynneth Porter take on some of the very thin 'meta-concepts' behind the Auckland Triennial *Private/Public*. Artist Kim Donaldson offers us 10 pages of her collection of banal emails from the large institution where she works. Similarly Lyndal Walker talks about her complicated involvement in the Melbourne Fashion Festival. Scott Rigby from Basecamp gallery Philadelphia and Marc Fischer from Temporary Services Chicago discuss their practice of running galleries and multi-tasking. Kylie Wilkinson gives us a small sample of the burgeoning Beijing art scene. Justine Khamara discusses her personal relationship to the products of Kodak. Larissa Hjorth gives us a snippet of her Masters thesis on mobile phone culture. Tasmanian student Benny Walter reviews the audience appreciation of a gig at O-week. Spiro Kalantzis considers the family ties and inner conflicts between characters in his favourite TV show the Sopranos. George Huon links Op-shops, creating things and shitting. In a special insert of the *Speed Eagle* Dane Mitchell interviews art dealer Anna Bibby over her collusion as judge in the Waikato Society of Arts National Art Award. Curator Russell Storer discusses the conference *Empires, Ruins and Networks* on globalization held earlier this year at ACMI Victoria. Art dyads A Constructed World considers the new economies and values of the international art world.

A number of emerging and some established voices have provided artists' pages intermingled throughout the issue like advertisements. Billy Apple, the man

behind the MTV logo, supplies us with his own. Emerging artist Geoff Newton and 70s/80s proto-feminist painter Vivienne Binns collaborate. Elizabeth Newman continues her practice after famously stopping. As well there are contributions by Jarrad Kennedy, Kain Picken and Christopher L G Hill. Furthermore Sean Meilak responds to the brief of a fashion spread with a gouache of the couple, artist Starlie Geikie and designer Claude Maus posing on a black jaguar, continuing his interest in the glory and décor of those who draw influence.

In great oedipal tradition a number of peers review each other's work and through elaboration and exploration they take the format much further. Spiros Panigirakis discusses little known Melbourne artist Oliver Wearne, Ry Haskings recalls family holidays in the tropics with the drawings of David Keating, Bianca Hester compares her participation in Critical Mass to the recent work of Tom Nicholson, Lisa Radford talks about Blair Trethowan commissioning his mum to make a series of paintings for him and Tessa Laird gives us some cosmic insights in the work of Auckland-based artist Peter Madden.

As I sit here in front of the TV trying to finish my editorial, season three of *Big Brother* is well underway. I am appalled but fascinated by these 14 adults and their 'happy imprisonment' in a mirrored palace of advertorial-architectonic-surveillance-infotainment. 19-year old Ashley confessed a few weeks ago that she didn't know what the Vietnam War was? It will be by far the grossest of failures if 'the humus and flatbread generation', as Spiros Panigirakis calls us, is happy to be remade as hollow consumers without history and denied in determination of a future.

Most of the time it feels like the advancements that we once tried to make resulted in very little indeed. But things like *Log Illustrated* and now *Natural Selection* will live on regardless taking up space in cardboard boxes, hard drives and memories that we carry around. *Natural Selection* will never reach the overground magazine stand, but by skipping the middleman and by shedding some of our attention to even the most small and outmoded forms of production they prevent these cultural erasures before they occur.

So thanks everyone for putting in the unpaid hours, Warren Olds again for the design, Charlotte Craw for the proofing and Gwynneth Porter and Dan Arps for giving me the opportunity to present this creative community in all its complex and divergent forms. Extra thanks to Nadine Christensen for the love and hors d'oeuvres, and to MIR11 for hosting the launch. I hope you enjoy reading and browsing through the issue. Be generous and have a go with upcoming issues and spread this shit like a nasty Melbourne flu.

James Lynch