

obstruction but an ideological one. Mimicking the world of football culture, the banner's slogans re-evaluate the power relationships surrounding these structures with the aggressive oppositional play on words adding a dimension of derision.

Unlike the defiant and victorious incarnations of banners referenced (demonstration and peace protests, civic and political processions, feminist and religious banners) this banner insinuates the constructed nature of assumed masculine identity norms is flimsy and built using weak foundations capable of being torn down.

Hubert Algie's neons expose potent personal perspectives revealed through conflicting interpersonal relationships. Situated off-location in the Workers Window of the Workers Club, the physical dislocation of *Fear* (2009) from the other works in the gallery space raises issues of denial, or a refusal to acknowledge a fundamental instinct due to negative connotations, specifically feelings of paranoia which usually result in marginalizing difference. Yet fear manifests itself in a variety of different ways and in essence is also a productive survival mechanism, which Algie articulates with *I will never forget me* (2011). There's an intimacy suggested in the alcove of the project space, bathed in soft blue light – which conjures up feeling of a confessional or cubicle in a sex shop. Yet the insistency in Algie's neons is also oddly empty, like the mantra of a fast food franchise or church advertisement preaching Jesus saves. If there is any suggestion of

hope, it's in the attention they draw to evaluating one's own subject position.

Apocalyptic in impression, Paul Yore's tapestry *Everything Is Fucked* (2011) demands attention. Not simply because of its suggestive text, flamboyant colour and imagery, but particularly owing to the impressive and extensive labor, essential in order to fill the canvas plane. Sewn over several months, one gets the feeling the physical and mental therapy involved in such an undertaking might certainly have had Yore oscillating between what appears to be thoughts and feelings of despair and hysteria. Yore's absurd usage of a traditional material – seemingly relegated to the task of elderly woman – re-examines perceptions of convention and I am reminded of Carl Jung's famous phrase 'sentimentality is a superstructure covering brutality'. This paradoxical hard/soft interpretation in Yore's work extrapolates on the complexities of Spender's words, and highlights the tension in underscoring the significant harm often perpetuated through good intention.

So, is there any lesson to be learned from the American Marine who appeared to be simply lost in translation? Surely, we've all been there?

The works in the show demonstrate an imperative towards celebrating difference and diversity. By re/presenting familiar forms of communication, in rearticulated manifestations, the artists draw attention to the complexities involved with simply translating and comprehending language and text. When assumed modes of interaction are re-evaluated, the potential and limitations of connecting with those around us can be reexamined and those gaps between us slightly lessened.

Devon Ackermann April 2011
Melbourne based artist and curator

Paul Yore
Everything Is Fucked, 2011
Tapestry



Devon Ackermann
Hubert Algie
Ka-Yin Kwok
Roberta Rich
Paul Yore

Yeah, we've all been there

Seventh Gallery
7 - 23 April 2011

Special thank you to Dale Ackermann and Ryan Rich.

“Language [is] a paradox for human beings: it is both a creative and an inhibiting vehicle.”¹

Dale Spender’s words evoke a tense mixture of both optimism, and anxiety – a sense of hopeful uncertainty or blind faith. These words also suggest that the limitless possibilities of creative advancement are underscored by the potential damages of its construction.

The show’s title speaks to this contradiction of sorts. It comes from the paradoxical assumption of equality through ‘shared experience’ – “Yeah, we’ve all been there”. It’s true, we probably share more in common than not, however, are those slight differences too vast a gap to bridge? Who are ‘we’ exactly? And where have we ‘been’? Language forms the centrepiece of this show; specifically the complex ways in which texts are mis/translated. Through various textual manifestations the artists disclose personal experiences in either obscure or transparent ways to challenge the viewer to examine their own individual perceptions, interactions and relationships towards those around them.

In considering mis/translation I am reminded of an account by Time magazine reporter Bobby Ghosh, who wrote of his time spent in Iraq in the aftermath of Saddam Hussein’s toppling. Ghosh’s account explored the multifaceted nature of relationships between various cultural, racial and religious groups. The day after the statue came down in Baghdad’s Paradise Square, Ghosh made his way to Saddam Hussein’s main palace, with talk of Marines preparing to blast it. On arrival, Ghosh instead found a small group of Marines combing through the complex, looking for documents. A few hundred Iraqis had gathered at the main entrance, and every time a Marine emerged from the palace a cheer went up.

Inside Saddam’s office, Ghosh found a Marine taking down one of the Iraqi flags that hung next to the dictator’s desk. The Marine asked his Kurdish interpreter to translate the green Arabic lettering that ran through the middle. Ghosh recounted how he never knew why the Kurd lied replying “It says, ‘Saddam Hussein’” (It actually read, “Allahu akbar” or “God is great”).

On hearing this, the delighted Marine took the flag out to the main portico brandishing it at the crowd of Iraqis. Firing up a Zippo lighter he announced to the crowd with a triumphant look, “This is what we’ll do to Saddam!”

The Iraqis were aghast. None of them understood English and all they could see was a lanky, blonde American Marine about to burn their national flag. Some shouted at the Marine however he mistook their anger for enthusiasm. Whooping it up in his southern nasal drawl “Yeah! We’re gonna fry his ass!” Ghosh and his interpreter were able - only just - to stop the Marine from setting the flag alight. When Ghosh explained what the Arabic writing really said the Marine turned pale. “Oh shit man, I didn’t know” was his response “Can you explain that to them”. He thrust the flag at Ghosh and ran back inside.²

This simple anecdote speaks not only to the well-documented ignorance of the American Armed Forces in their misguided assumptions, but more interestingly, to the peculiar mis/translation of the Kurdish interpreter. As someone privileged in comprehending the language it begs the question as to the motives behind the false translation. With matters concerning translation, notions of trust, truths and accuracy are fundamental.

Sister, can you help? (2011) documents the process by which Ka-Yin Kwok negotiated assisting her cousin Ying in obtaining a tax file number in order to work in Australia. Having recently arrived from Hong Kong, Ying struggled to connect with Kwok via texts and Facebook; due to her limited English. Similarly, Kwok’s limited understanding of

Chinese text provided another obstacle. Both however, do speak and understand Chinese and therefore connected over the phone. The dual video installation simultaneously presents the events of Kwok’s conversation with her cousin on one screen juxtaposed with Kwok’s translated recounting of the conversation to her boyfriend on the other. Using documentary techniques Kwok explores and highlights the complexities of human relationships. In including herself in the narrative, along with a strategically placed microphone, the viewer is made aware of the video’s construction and Kwok complicates and questions her dual relationship as both participant and director with the subject in her film. Our engagement with the work therefore, operates on our willingness to trust Kwok, as both creator and interpreter. Regarding the private and public, Kwok interrogates perceptions concerning privilege and entitlement, raising questions about authority where language and culture are concerned.

Extrapolating on constructed notions of cultural identity *Lesson Five: Australian Citizenship Test* (2011) emphasizes the absurd nature of ‘passing’ in order to qualify and be accepted into what is often presented as a pseudo-utopian society. Through adept examinations surrounding concepts of authenticity and validity with regard to constructed notions of ‘Australian identity’, Roberta Rich challenges and questions hegemonic constructions. Rejecting notions of a unified culture, Rich subverts perceived and assumed ‘Australian identity’ using humor to articulate repressed issues, particularly the denial of indigenous culture and education. Employing her mother, a migrant of South Africa to perform the constructed test in Afrikaans, Rich underlines the complexities overlooked in the reductive homogeneity of standardized assessment.

Challenging ideas mythologizing Australian masculine identity, my banner *People Like You Need To Fuck With People Like Me / People Like Me Need To Fuck With People Like You* (2011) cuts a swathe through the gallery space, acting not only as a physical



(top to bottom)
Ka-Yin Kwok
Sister, can you help?, 2011
Multi-channel HDV installation

Hubert Algje
Fear, 2009
Neon light

Roberta Rich
Lesson Five: Australian Citizenship Test, 2011
Single channel DV installation

1. Spender, D. (1988, 3rd edition, first published 1980) *Man Made Language*, London: Pandora Press, p141.
2. Ghosh, B. “Iraq: Missed Steps: The mutual ignorance between Americans and Iraqis at the start of the war would lead to tragedy”. *Time*, December 6, 2010, p. 31-33.