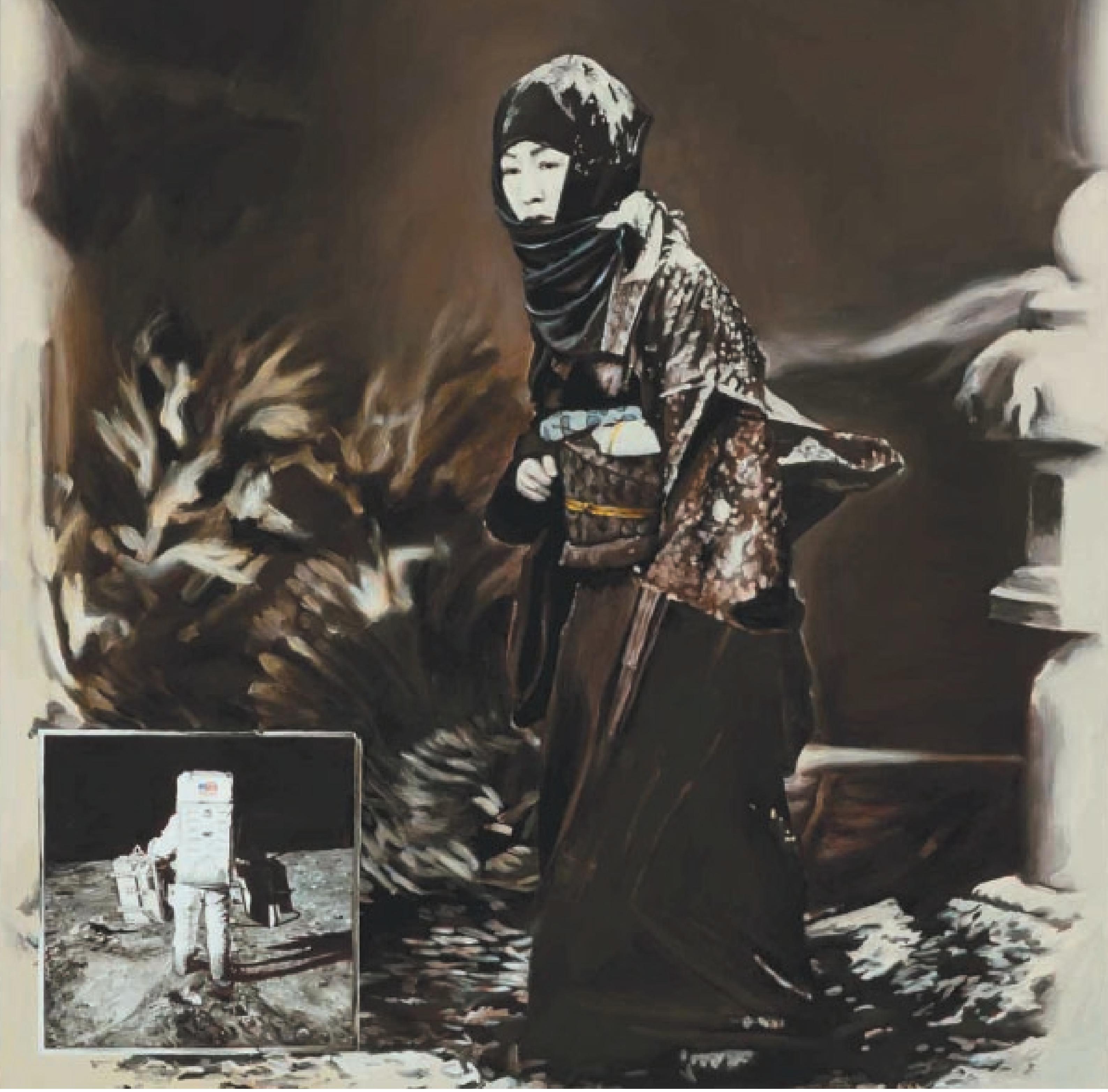

LYNDELL BROWN & CHARLES GREEN

In 1989, Lyndell Brown and Charles Green commenced working together in a lifetime collaboration. They are represented by GrantPirrie Gallery, Sydney, Arc@Span, Melbourne, and Greenaway Gallery, Adelaide. Charles Green is a Senior Lecturer in Contemporary Art at the School of Fine Arts, Classical Studies and Archaeology at the University of Melbourne, and Adjunct Senior Curator, 20th and 21st Century Art, National Gallery of Victoria.

Lyndell Brown graduated with a M.A. (Visual Art) Victorian College of the Arts, 1992; and is currently working on a PhD at UNSW. Charles Green was awarded a PhD, University of Melbourne, 1998. Their awards include an Artist Development Grant, Australia Council, 1989; Fellowship Grant, Australia Council, 1992; Power Institute Studio, Paris, 1995; King's School Art Prize, Sydney, 1995; Asialink/Sanskriti Residency, Delhi, 1997; Arts Victoria Grant, 2002; New Work Grant, Australia Council, 2002. They were Parks Victoria “Horizons” Artists in Residence in 2002. They have held 22 solo exhibitions since 1989-most recently “Sanctuary-and other island fables,” (with Patrick Pound, at Parks Victoria Gallery, Herring Island, 2002), “Atlas” (GrantPirrie Gallery, Sydney, 2002), and “Scatter” (Arc@Span, Melbourne, 2002)-and have been included in many group exhibitions, including “Tales of the Unexpected” (National Gallery of Australia, 2002), “Photographica Australis” (Madrid: Sala de Exposiciones del Canal de Isabel II, 2002), “Indicium,” (Insa Art Space, Seoul, 2001), “The Persistence of Memory” (Nature Morte, New Delhi, 1998); “Southern Reflections: Ten Contemporary Australian Artists,” (Kulturhuset, Stockholm, touring to contemporary art spaces in Finland, Germany, and Denmark, 1998). They have worked with New Zealand artist Patrick Pound on a series of major joint works that they have shown in five solo exhibitions collectively titled “Towards a Theory of Everything” (Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney, RMIT University, Melbourne, John Curtin University Gallery, Perth, and in 2000 at the Adam Museum, Wellington, New Zealand). Their works are in many major public and private collections including the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Rockhampton Regional Gallery, Rockhampton; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Artbank, Sydney; Allen, Allen and Hemsley, Sydney; World Congress Centre, Melbourne; University of Western Sydney, Sydney; Heidelberg Repatriation Hospital, Melbourne; BHP, Melbourne; Art Gallery of West Australia, Perth; University “of Melbourne (Vizard Foundation); King's School, Sydney; Campbelltown City Art Gallery, Sydney; Trinity College, Melbourne, and private collections in Australia, United States, Spain, Germany, India, Japan, Canada. Before 1989, Charles Green held six solo exhibitions. Since 1987, Charles Green has published art criticism in Australia, Europe and the USA. He has been Australian correspondent for *Artforum* magazine, New York since 1989. He has published *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970-94* (Sydney: Craftsman House, 1995), and *The Third Hand: Artist Collaborations from Conceptualism to Postmodernism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001). In 2002, he co-curated the opening exhibition for the National Gallery of Victoria Australia, *Fieldwork: Australian Art 1968-2002*, with Jason Smith.

ARCADIA

LYNDELL BROWN & CHARLES GREEN

Exhibition dates 20 February to 28 March 2003

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FACULTY GALLERY
FACULTY OF ART & DESIGN
MONASH UNIVERSITY
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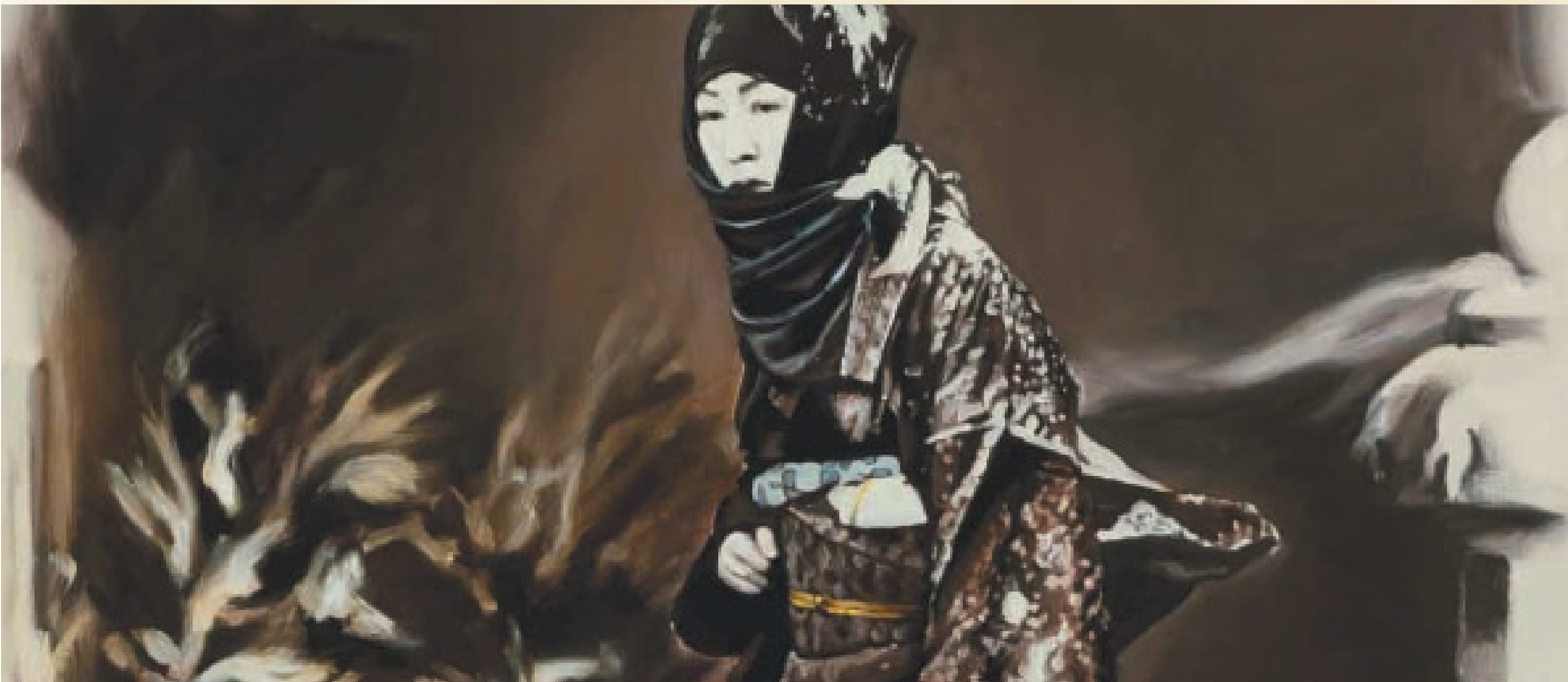
Arcadia

LYNDELL BROWN & CHARLES GREEN ARCADIA



ARCADIA

This exhibition traces a four-year transition from photographs of installations to photographic transparencies of paintings of photographed installations. This essay examines why we went to such trouble. The essay looks at the significance of such representations of representations, and at the problems that led us to such a labour-intensive system of presentation.

The first works in the exhibition date from an installation we made for the Nature Morte Gallery in New Delhi, at the beginning of 1998, where we presented a configuration of pictures and documents on a large wall, covering them with semi-transparent silk cloth from Chanderi. We arranged objects and documents of disparate origins—19th-century postcards, photographs documenting 1970s performance art, art historical texts, our own long histories as artists, and documents of colonial exchange—then photographed them under raking side-lighting so as to be able to re-present the traces of the installation later.

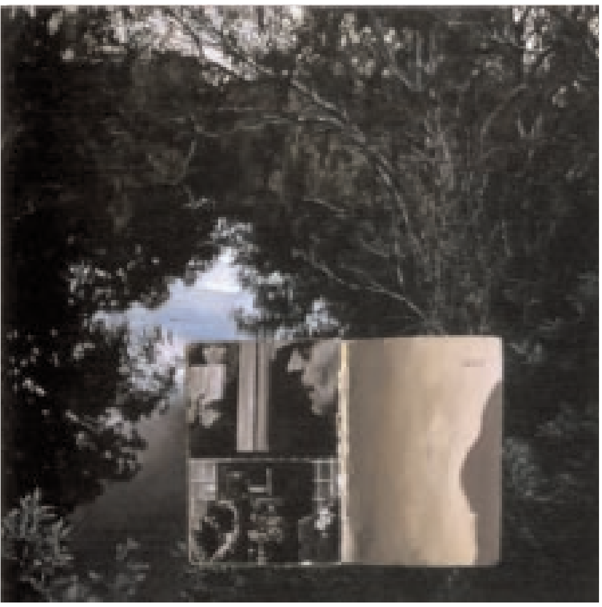
At this very start of the transition, our increasing understanding of the failure of art as information retrieval made us assess the way that our installations could inhabit the history of art, redirecting us towards the figure of American artist Robert Smithson and his theories of entropy and exhaustion. We aimed to understand the limits of the archival turn in recent art.

The second group of photographs dates from 1999 and 2000, and these are also created from large wall-sized installations, only the most elegiac of which, *La Voix* (2000), survives—in the collection of the National Gallery of Victoria—for with that one work's exception the installations were made to be destroyed and their constituent parts re-archived after they had been photographed. They were made after fieldwork gathering resources for more installations in London (at the Warburg Institute) and New York (in the Center for the Humanities). We were interested in the mechanism by which memories are triggered, and so we were examining theories of involuntary memory and, in particular, Aby Warburg's conception of dynamograms. We wanted to see if we could demonstrate through arbitrary visual analogies the survival of pathos formula from carefully chosen image to chosen image.

The third group of images—the duraclears made from ghost paintings—dates from late 2000 onwards. We suddenly understood that the model of our art (memory as archive) could be reshaped and reintegrated through painting. We realised that the process of copying through painting, a medium we had temporarily put aside as irrelevant to our project, enabled us to create "forgotten" works, re-presenting them as if they existed. Through the precise montage of text and photography in painting we could move outside the recognizable criteria of accuracy and expression. The process of rephotography and digital reproduction, quite oddly, made the painting much more convincing due to the suppression of the authors' handiwork. At the same time, it rendered the sources—our paintings—retroactively ghostly and suddenly transparent. We were combining, through a relatively seamless but anachronistic montage method, different modes of representation, first translating these into a painting and, second, unifying the result through the gift of photographic transparency. This transparency is both literal and, as Jeff Wall points out, the defining aesthetic quality of the medium of photography.

Let's see how this doubling and redoubling of photography and painting into each other played out in one work, *Island* (2002). An astronaut stands on the dark, desolate surface of the moon. His pose—because it is a pose and he is already an actor and an iconic figure in a work of art—is full frontal, as if he is addressing an already-imagined audience, though we can't read his expression nor can we note the direction of his gaze through the reflective mask of his space helmet. Instead, we see quite quickly that our new reflected self appears in the dark glass fishbowl of his visor and on the reflecting surface of the duraclear film. We have become an astronaut-photographer documenting the scene, and we are now also space travelers.

The astronaut's ghostly, white protective clothing resembles a Renaissance aristocrat's elaborately slashed satin costume, lovingly rendered with the smooth precision we find in mannerist portraits by the Florentine painter Bronzino. The intricate folds of the spacesuit become elaborate sepia-tinted drapery, warm and cool greys interrupted by flashes of transparent gold or red. The surface of the image, both in its first incarnation as a painting and then, in its final form as a digital photograph on shiny, transparent duraclear film, looks as smooth and as enameled as a portrait by Ingres. On the space-man's chest appears a camera, its blank lens staring sightlessly back. It is yet another blind witness. On the astronaut's left wrist, we can clearly see an open notebook, but the marks inscribed across its surface are faint and completely illegible. This is the portrait of a field researcher—a sort of extra-terrestrial Earth artist—equipped with a camera, notebook and an uncanny futuristic tool-box that probably carries tools for sorting, sifting and documenting the surface of the moon. The small space module looks vaguely but insistently familiar. In the end, it inevitably reminds us of one of Marcel Duchamp's studies for *The Large Glass*, for its odd, tool-kit complexity is that of his bachelor machine.

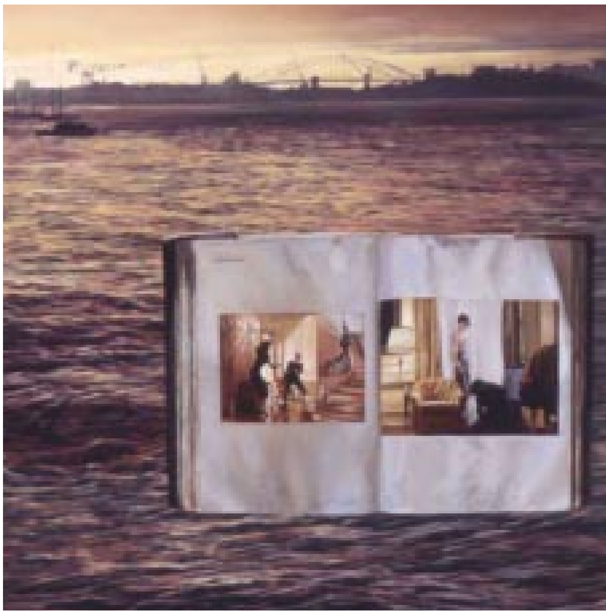


Aby Warburg, the German iconologist, would have almost certainly read this scene differently. He might have linked this lunar scene to an archaic myth of flight, perhaps including *Island* in the *Mnemosyne Atlas* panel devoted to Helios. Warburg would certainly have noted the pathos in the weightless but ponderous figure. We can, like a weightless spaceman, immediately move further into the nocturnal terrain of Warburg's iconological speculation, remembering that Earth artist Robert Smithson's attachment to B-grade science fiction movies offers a further interpretative key: the astronaut is an extra-terrestrial Earth artist locked in an eternal, entropic task, collecting moon-dust. He would not, in fact, appear out of place in Smithson's own film of *Spiral Jetty*, if we insert *Island* via a jump-cut straight out of a film by French nouvelle vague film director Jean-Luc Godard. Where would the astronaut be placed? We'd find him between the dinosaurs in the Natural History Museum and the lunar landscape of the Great Salt Lake.

Beside the spaceman, just below his notebook and in front of his gesturing hand, floats a page borrowed from a late eighteenth century book on the history of gardening, although this obscure source is nowhere indicated, nor is its quotation in any way accompanied by the ironic signals that would link it to postmodern style. The paper is palpably brittle, foxed and dry, yet its crumbling edges rhyme with the fluid folds of the astronaut's spacesuit. The engraving, transcribed patiently (perversely) into monochrome oil paint, shows a vast *jardin chinois* looming large and significant, and then we notice that the garden is set in an English landscape for, finally, we detect minute figures in nineteenth century European costume strolling across the foreground. An oriental garden has landed in England through an earlier method of space-time travel, like a spaceship. The garden's great pagoda uncannily resembles both this lunar craft and the astronaut's toolbox.

The startlingly coloured second fragment hovers above and to the left of the standing astronaut. A man and a woman confront each other against a sublime backdrop of islands, which float in a serene, blue sea. The distance between the two figures is palpable, and is signalled by contained gestures and guarded body language. This is a film-still from Godard's masterpiece, *Le Mépris* (Contempt, 1963), in which Michel Piccoli and Brigitte Bardot play a weak-willed scriptwriter and his beautiful wife. Here, they are represented at the irrevocable point in the disintegration of their relationship on the island of Capri. The facture of this painted fragment is as sensual as it is schematic, for the bold, sketchy delineation of their garments' folds combines with a general absence of precise detail. Bardot's blonde hair is the metonymic figure through which we *seek* to recognize her and, as soon as we do, we note the unsettling sufficiency of a fleeting, half-remembered arrangement of light-reflecting texture, for her face remains obscured. The monolithic, otherworldly islands in the background are inaccessible as the couple's separation is unbridgeable. These two figures—or the palpable, undeniable distances between people who are inevitably cut off from each other like islands—are the mirror of the single cosmonaut's reflection of his Other, the lunar photographer, shining back—both figuratively and literally—to us.

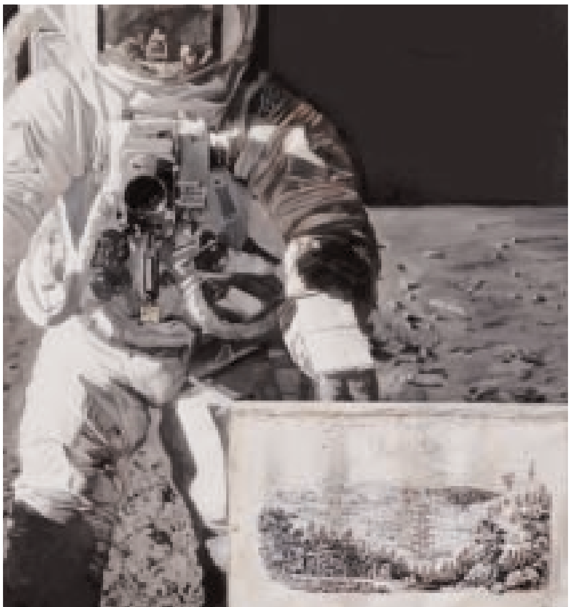
The duraclear photograph that we titled *Arcadia* was based on what is, for us, a particularly large phantom that joined the distances between islands with the constructed



world of memory. The ghost painting we made for this photograph was about six feet by six feet. There are two spatial layers: the floating, trompe l'oeil books, and the Sydney Harbour sunset, seen from McKell Park at the tip of Darling Point, to which we walked most nights while we were living nearby in Elizabeth Bay. Our reading of the open book pages starts sumptuously and relatively lightly, as we register two Arcadian scenes borrowed from Claude Lorrain's golden paintings. These are, in fact, images of passivity and mental absorption: on the left, we see the Rape of Europa; on the right, a detail from the London National Gallery's exiled Psyche. The eye moves skywards to the right, towards an open book upon which we see two film-stills copied from Jean-Luc Godard's great film *Prenom Carmen*. Here, passivity and mental absorption are reversed. The woman is the aggressor, gangster, murderer and hero; her ruthlessness makes *Prenom Carmen* the vengeful daughter of the passive Europa. Above her, there's yet another open, trompe l'oeil book. Its illustration shows the great 20th century modernist theorist Walter Benjamin, who wrote on the nature of history and who used ruins as a metaphor to explain the way we understand fate, working on his last project, the Arcades Project. He faces an aerial view of a ruin, but the ruin was in fact built during the 1970s by our friends, French artists Anne and Patrick Poirier, who make wrecked model cities as art. Finally, at the end of the spiral of books, there's a page showing an Indian miniature painting of the world of souls adrift on a vast river of life: a king and his whole kingdom swept along on the current of time. We set the pages against the acidic sunset of Sydney Harbour, looking toward the polluted city skyline across the water. We see a chain of metaphors linked together in a matrix of allusions and metaphors. We see arcadia transmuted into fate. This, of course, was always arcadia's other side.

We all hold memories of fate and arcadia together in our heads without the aid of ancient mnemonic systems—without the imaginary Classical statues and alcoves that Frances Yates once described, the renewed efficacy of which new media theorists over-optimistically argue. In Christopher Nolan's film noir, *Memento* (2000), an amnesic, avenging killer, Lenny, relies on an elaborate, atlas-like chart of Polaroids and cryptic captions to tell him where he lives and "remind" him of the networks of places, people and connections that structure his obsessive quest across Los Angeles for revenge. We live in a post-mnemonic period, used to coping without the help of Yates' Memory Theatre techniques. We surround ourselves with the systems that replaced Memory Theatres—with archives and indexes—to remind us where and why we are, even though we pride ourselves, except in weaker moments, that we don't need mnemonic crutches. We are all Lenny. The notion that we discover or uncover our identity and our memories is epistemologically limiting and has disastrous consequences. A person's identity—or, equally, the contents of her memory—is something she determines rather than detects.

LYNDELL BROWN



front cover: Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Woman in Snow* (detail), 2002-2003, lightjet print on duraclear film, 104 x 104 cm. Courtesy Arc@Span, Melbourne, and GrantPirrie, Sydney.

inside fold: Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Woman in Snow*, 2002-2003, lightjet print on duraclear film, 104 x 104 cm. Courtesy Arc@Span, Melbourne, and GrantPirrie, Sydney.

far left: Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Ruskin (for Douglas Green)*, 2002-2003, lightjet print on duraclear film, 104 x 104 cm. Courtesy Arc@Span, Melbourne, and GrantPirrie, Sydney.

left: Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Island* (detail), 2002, lightjet print on duraclear film, 104 x 104 cm. Courtesy Arc@Span, Melbourne, and GrantPirrie, Sydney.

above: Lyndell Brown and Charles Green, *Arcadia* (detail), 2002, lightjet print on duraclear film, 104 x 104 cm. Courtesy Arc@Span, Melbourne, and GrantPirrie, Sydney.