

# The Identity Appliance



**Geoffrey Drake-Brockman**

Goddard / de Fiddes Contemporary Art  
April 25 - May 10 1997

## Semblance of Things Past

Some thoughts and reflections triggered by "The Identity Appliance"

Today I swam in very deep water. I saw sharks, people drowning and extreme pornography. Dishonesty, beauty - walls of gas transformed, solidified - I was thrown off, pushed. I hate that. I had to redial. I was searching for "Avatars".

Creatures - 'bots' - which lurk. Virtually waiting. A series of numbers lurking. Most of us, the 'general public', watch. Mostly in ignorance we wait. Meanwhile, London prepares for 200 channels partitioned by an interactive interface in every home. My love of painting, Ruskin and the correct proportions of a gallery shattered!

I use a simple copper telephone cable. My attraction to the 'login' has never been questioned. I rarely think about it. If I am searching there is no quicker or more efficient way for me to glean information than to type a 'key word' and wait for a response. A response garnered by numbers, algorithms supplied through an international information network staffed by numbers which co-ordinate other numbers.

These are Avatars (of sorts) Bot's (think ro-Bot), numeric wizards, functioning in the electronic ether as you read this text. Their transactions can be seen as small flickering lights. These lights are electronic analogues of concept strings; grouped ideas designed to aid in the transmission of knowledge.

What of the meantime: how do we begin to understand the broader (not-so-slow) creep of information technology, and how does it relate to an exhibition in a gallery? What are the critics saying? Very little it seems, as if art had no place in the essentially populist world of electronic media.

Drake-Brockman's superbly crafted brightly painted objects defy every rule. I try to imagine Ruskin viewing one of these works, I think he would scream in fear, he would talk of evil and deception, he would leave the gallery in a state of mental and physical shock. The 'lamp of beauty' struck from the gallery... I am suggesting that this would be a useful piece of terror. Artists such as Drake-Brockman walk a difficult, often unknown terrain. Their effort involves taking many risks.

Our Anglocentric culture inherited the burden of a tired and abused Romanticism. As a consequence the culture at large is denied any potential insight art may offer, apart from the often censorial and restricting weekly reviews of *beautiful objects* and constant whingeing about the good old days.

Certainly beauty is a part of aesthetics and historically speaking it is one of art's functions. Art, however, is not only about beauty or rather we must acknowledge that the broadest definitions of beauty must include the beauty of ideas - however shocking or abrasive - and respect for the search beyond what we know.

The late Twentieth Century leaves us with many questions and few answers. Ironically, art is continually under challenged by commentators working to some agenda well outside the attendant need for a rigorous critical engagement. I would suggest that this is not in the best interests of the culture.

If the population is generally baffled by art perhaps some responsibility must lie with the critics who often fail to grapple with the changing times, take too much for granted and underestimate the public's ability to learn and participate. If a chemist were to investigate the laws of chemistry without endeavouring to ascertain the nature of fire or water, because every one has a notion of them, "sufficiently correct for common purposes"<sup>1</sup> - we would find that an inadequate response.

Generosity of spirit and the dissemination of ideas often go unflagged by the critic in favour of a politic that might be best termed prurient. In the absence of discourse, art becomes another thing; just a 'thing', a commodity.

A study of traditional Western aesthetic practice has become indifferent to the rapid flow and haste of living. It is not a search for genius. There is a need to know, to see the new for what it is. Obviously time is required to digest, contemplate and (hopefully) comprehend. This does not however negate the responsibility of the critic to search, decipher and discourse - not to be asleep at the wheel. Critics need to reassess their role in art and unstick at least some of the Nineteenth Century and early Twentieth Century glue that appears so all pervasive.

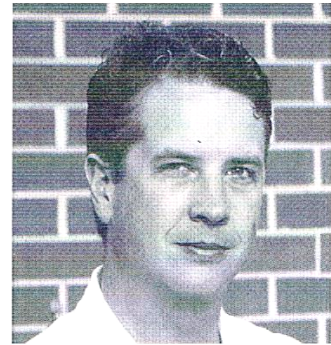
If you watch television you may accept that creative work is replaced by a fecundity of fancies: cliches with clear outcomes: 'unions are boring and nature is losing'. The World Wide Web functions a little like this, however, the level of accountability is substantially less. The plethora of existing electronic manipulation will duplicate exponentially. In the meantime culture is limping toward a world of perception, I think, unlike any previous. To assume that a smooth coalescence will occur between our Romantic past and the Romances of tomorrow would be folly.

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Perth 1997

1. After John Ruskin's critique of Mill.  
Munera Pulveris, Six essays on the elements of Political Economy.  
Preface page viii. George Allen. London 1907.

## **Geoffrey Drake-Brockman**

1964 Born Woomera, South Australia  
1982-85 The University of Western Australia, BSc. (Computer Science)  
1990-93 Travel UK, Europe, USA, Africa  
1991 Study at Camden Arts Centre, London  
1992 Member Birmingham Artists Co-operative  
1993-94 Curtin University School of Art, MA (Visual Art)  
1995 Member Australian Network for Art and Technology (ANAT)  
1996 Curtin University School of Art, Adjunct Research Associate



### **Solo Exhibitions**

1988 Greenhill Galleries, Perth  
1991 The Hooper Gallery, London  
1993 *Augmentations*, Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle  
1996 *The Identity Appliance*, Goddard / de Fiddes, Perth

### **Group Exhibitions**

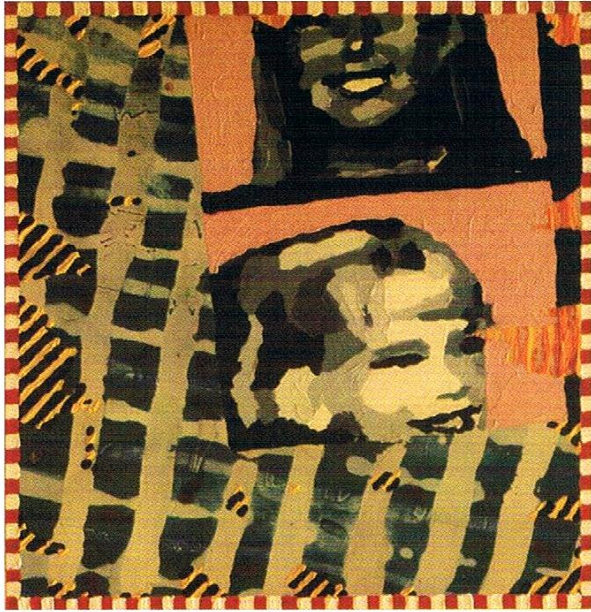
1986 *Sixpack*, Praxis, Fremantle  
1987 University of Western Australia, Perth  
1987 *Triptych*, Praxis, Fremantle  
1989 *New Works*, Green Hill Galleries, Perth  
1990 Delloiette Haskins Invitation, Perth  
1992 *Pulit 8*, Pulit Artspace, Camden London  
1993 Sir Charles Gairdner, Perth - recipient of Sir Charles Gairdner Art Award  
1994 Delloiette Haskins Invitation, Perth  
1995 *No Dinosaurs*, Museum of Western Australia

### **Collections**

The Curtin Collection  
Roy and Betty Churcher  
Private collections, Australia, UK, Sweden, Singapore

### **Publications**

1988 August 13, Bromfield D, The West Australian Weekend Supplement page 2  
1993 March 8, Bromfield D, The West Australian Weekend Supplement page 4  
1993 September 28, Drake-Brockman G, *Mapping and Orthogonal Duality*,  
Bodies of Knowledge Interdisciplinary Seminar, Curtin University  
1995 January 27, *No Dinosaurs*, Exhibition Catalogue



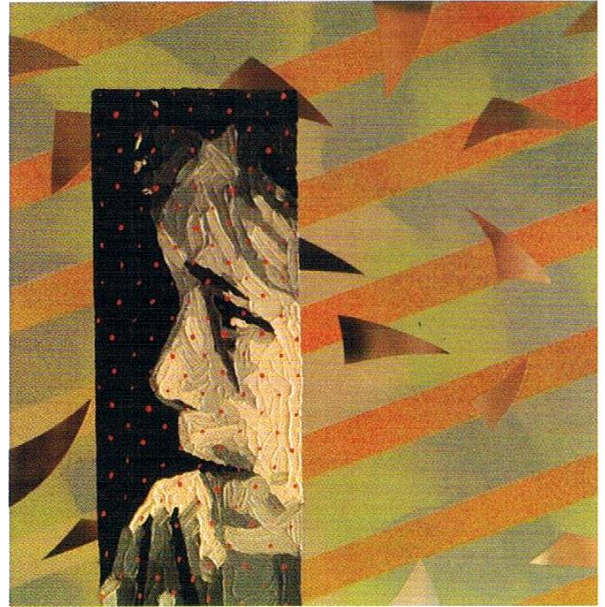
*Icon: Marcia and Cindy, 1996*  
Oil and auto lacquer on stainless steel, 20 x 20 cm



*Icon: Robot, 1996*  
Oil and auto lacquer on stainless steel, 20 x 20 cm



*Icon: Poison Ivy, 1996*  
Oil and auto lacquer on stainless steel, 20 x 20 cm



*Icon: Documentary Subject #1, 1996*  
Oil and auto lacquer on stainless steel, 20 x 20 cm

## Goddard / de Fiddes Contemporary Art

Upper Plaza QV1 Building  
250 St. Georges Tce, Perth  
(08) 9324 2460

Tues - Frid 11 - 5  
Sat 2 - 5