

The particularly Australian colloquial expression *it holds up* extends across the shrouded facade of the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia for only one week. As the temporary scaffold has gradually encased the building over the past month, the work has also been built, letter-by-letter, word-by-word, unfolding sequentially for passers-by to observe and make sense of. Before too long, the scaffold will be disassembled in stages to reveal the iconic sandstone in its freshly restored state. This process will be one of disassembly for the work too, as whole words crumble; meanings shift, dissipate and eventually disappear.

Commissioned by the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority in association with the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, this temporary and temporal work exploits its material and physical site. The apparently transparent letters - huge scale adhesive digital prints produced from a large format photograph of the MCA bathed in morning sunlight - are intrinsically site-specific, literally revealing what the scaffold would otherwise conceal. The words and each letter refer to the installations own materiality - the scaffold structure that holds up the protective scrim that in turn acts as the artworks own support. The sheer size of each letter, stretching across six storeys, finds equanimity with the scale and grandeur of the site bracketed, as it is by the iconic Opera House and Harbour Bridge.

On one hand, the work serves to remind the public of the content of this cocoon-like structure - the MCA, with its charter to "present and collect innovative and ground-breaking exhibitions of contemporary art from Australia, the Asia Pacific region and around the world" - to hold up and value cultural production on a world stage. Conversely, it asks the public what they believe the function and role of the museum is, and on a bigger scale questions our cultures preoccupation with external validation from some imagined centre. Perhaps, by destabilising the hierarchical relationship between centre and periphery, we can claim our authority and find our own voice that does inherently hold up.

Mike and I met in Christchurch, New Zealand when I was there earlier this year for an exhibition at the Physics Room. We spent a long time together in the red-zone - the part of central Christchurch that had been most badly affected by the earthquakes in 2010 and 2011. It strikes me now that while we sat quietly in what would have once been a bustling city square, it wasn't the buildings that had held up - quite the contrary. Upon reflection, this work refers to a sense of longevity, durability and duration that is not found in physical things like buildings, but rather in attitudes and approaches. The work is a statement of optimism - the inverse of Yeats' ominous poetic verse - "things fall apart, the centre cannot hold."

While all these potential readings exist, ultimately the meaning of this work is in the hands of the viewers - commuters, tourists, museum visitors and city workers. Rather than introspective, this work clearly gestures outwards and moves towards the world. It doesn't shout, but offers a series of propositions that grow over time and change with interpretation. Moreover, physically, the letters, words and meanings shift and morph depending on the viewers physical vantage point - either from a ferry disembarking, the Opera House forecourt or the lawn directly in front the of the MCA. The dynamic interplay between viewer and work as they seek meaning visually, physically and poetically is akin to a dance that will hopefully continue long after the scaffold and letters has been replaced with bricks and mortar.

MH and AGS, 1st August, 2013.

Mike Hewson

Hewson is an installation artist from Christchurch. His practice is a dialogue between art and architecture, questioning the nature of our relationship to civic spaces. He distorts the existing features of sites in order to amplify the viewers experience of an environment and challenge established perceptions of space. His background in Civil Engineering has complimented his recent practice allowing Hewson to work both at a large scale and with structural materials. In Sydney, he has held a residency with the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority, and in Christchurch his installations have metamorphosed the earthquake damaged buildings in the cordoned red-zone of the CBD.

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Agatha Gothe-Snape

Agatha Gothe-Snape's practice relates closely to improvisational performance. Her work tracks our relationships to each other, to art and art contexts, and takes many forms: pedestrian performances, endlessly looped PowerPoint slide shows, workshops, diagrams, visual scores and collaboratively produced art objects. In 2013 she held solo exhibitions at The Commercial Gallery, Sydney; The Physics Room, Christchurch; and was included in two-man show *Taking Form* at the AGNSW. Recent group exhibitions include: *Contemporary Australia: Women*, QAGOMA, Brisbane and *Volume 1: MCA Collection*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney (both 2012).

Agatha is represented by The Commercial Gallery Sydney

www.thecommercialgallery.com

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