Based on a true story: Geoff Lowe 1972–92 and A Constructed World
1993–2012
15 November 2012 to 24 February 2013

Works are listed chronologically within each of ten exhibition categories.
Dimensions are given as height before width before depth

Collections

1. Geoff Lowe
   *Internal glossary* 1972
   synthetic polymer paint on canvas
   182 x 243 cm
   Fine Art Collection, University of Tasmania, Hobart

Geoff Lowe takes up Uccello’s discoveries in a witty and affectionate way in his *Internal glossary*, 1972, in which the entire contents of his large and cluttered studio are marshaled along the imaginary orthogonal lines that run to two separate vanishing points on the far wall of the studio. This is the place where Lowe does battle with art—rulers, stretchers, work tables, boxes and canvases all line up in dutiful serried ranks, as the spectator views the scene from a relatively high vantage point. In the painting the eyes focus on one point and then, abruptly, are moved to focus on another and, even though the painting has a taut and geometrical architecture, the contingent nature of vision is brought sharply to the forefront through this device. It is similar to Cezanne’s method in this regard.
   *Jonathan Holmes, Full frontal, Plimsoll Gallery, Tasmanian School of Art, Hobart, 2007*

2. A Constructed World
   *Artfan* 1993–2002
   magazine, nos 1–9 published by A Constructed World, Melbourne; no. 10 published by the Serpentine Gallery, London
   10 issues, each 29.7 x 21 cm
   Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

*Artfan* magazine was a ten-year publishing project including people who said they didn’t know about contemporary art writing about exhibitions. With no public funding forthcoming, it was made with the goodwill of hundreds of contributors. The publication series continues to be of interest in Europe, being shown in book fairs, museums and galleries.
   *Jacqueline Riva, 2012*

3. Geoff Lowe with Rosebud
   *Minimalist republic* 1995
   ink on paper on canvas
   173 x 92 cm
   Courtesy Geoff Lowe and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

Made with Rosebud, each person tried to paint a flat even rectangle as evenly as possible. Though simple, it’s quite difficult technically, and everyone passively paints the square in a different way. Some start it in the middle, others do it in stripes, others go round the edges first, everyone is effortlessly different in how they paint. It’s kind of a waste of time trying to be unique. We were thinking about an Australian republic.
   *Geoff Lowe, 2012*

4. A Constructed World
   *Player guitar* 1999
   electric guitar, amplifiers
   dimensions variable
   Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels
You don’t have to fear your instrument with A Constructed World because miracles are not expected from you. Or, better, miracles are welcome, but they’re not related to musical proficiency. In an exquisite set of contradictions, the arranging might be laborious, but the songs don’t need too much rehearsing; the room for improvisation is small so the performance doesn’t have to be surrounded by solid material; and finally things are fairly disciplined in order not to be too specific. It’s an uncharted musical adventure where the track list is the only reference point and your talent is measured by your degree of participation rather than the intrinsic quality of your performance. Unlearn what you have learned and make it work. Everything is just so how-you’re-not-supposed-to-do-it, it’s actually fun.

Michele Robecchi, 2012

When we met our friend, the analyst, at an early evening party I told her, ‘I keep repeating the same mistake to the point of tears’. She said, ‘That's OK, Lacan says you find yourself in errors, deceits and mistakes’. ‘What’s the difference between an error and a mistake?’ I asked. ‘I don’t know’, she said.

Jacqueline Riva, 2012
A Constructed World
*Explaining contemporary art to live eels* 2009
printed paper
2 sheets, 29.7 x 21 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World

12.
Speech and What Archive
*Medicine show* 2010
vinyl record, recorded at GRRR JAMMING SQUEAK, a public artwork by Paola Pivi,
*Sculpture international Rotterdam*, 2010
31.5 x 31.5 cm
Courtesy Speech and What Archive and Solang Production Paris Brussels

13.
A Constructed World and Etienne Bernard
*Speech objects* 2011
printed book, edited by A Constructed World and Anna Hess, published by Musée de l’Objet,
Blois, France
16.5 x 12 cm, 244 pages
Collection of A Constructed World

14.
Speech and What Archive
*Speech and What Archive part one, Speech and What Archive part three* 2011–12
newspapers, edited by Anna Hess, published by A Constructed World
2 issues: 38 x 29 cm, 16 pages and 21 x 15 cm, 12 pages
Collection of Speech and What Archive

15.
A Constructed World and DIAO
*DIAO* 2012
newspaper, published by A Constructed World and École Supérieure des Beaux-Arts,
Angers, France
38 x 29 cm, 12 pages
Collection of A Constructed World

**Doorways**

16.
Geoff Lowe
*Dance of the queen I painting* 1979
synthetic polymer paint and watercolour on paper
48.5 x 50 cm (sight)
Private collection, Melbourne

I saw this Indian fresco in a book and loved it. Someone lent me the book overnight and I hurriedly made two versions. This now serves as an entry to the next room of Indian artefacts: one-exhibition-talking-to-another.

**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

17.
Geoff Lowe
*Narrative speaking to herself* 1979
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
58.5 x 45.9 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

This is a portrait of me, one of very few I have agreed to, which, although I was quite young when it was painted, looks more like I do now than I did then. It reminds me of my mother and the jumper in the painting was dark blue and beautifully knitted by Geoff’s mother. I had known Geoff since he was a schoolboy who made a very definite decision to be an artist. He had a strong painting practice and career by the time this work was painted. Geoff had
become known for his idealized generic portraits but this is very particular. This painting was in the collection of my mother, Judith Tenenbaum, until she died.

Anna Schwartz, 2012

18. Geoff Lowe

‘Impersonation’ from the series ‘Ten famous feelings for men’ 1983

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

152 x 122 cm

The University of Melbourne Art Collection. Purchased with assistance from the Visual Arts Board, Australia Council, 1985

‘In the catalogue essay for the 1988 London exhibition in which Impersonation featured, Joan Kerr wrote about the comparison between Lowe’s masked figure and Poynter’s sentry. She described Impersonation as a “bitterly comic portrait” of a white man dressed in “nigger minstrel” Aboriginal costume and posed as a Roman sentry.

Lowe’s caricatured Aborigine clearly implies that Poynter’s magnificent specimen of British Victorian manhood is no more like an ancient Roman than someone in blackface is a faithful portrait of an Australian Aborigine’, wrote Kerr. Conversely, Lowe’s primary message is that all colonial portraits of Aborigines are similarly distorted, inevitably racist and propagandist.’

I had never seen the Poynter painting. Loved Joan Kerr though and Bronwyn Watson wrote the first ever article that linked the work of Geoff Lowe to A Constructed World, no one else had until that time in The Australian on 4 September 2010.

Geoff Lowe, 2012

Impersonation is perhaps the most complex and loaded piece in the series—a white man dressed up to look like an Aboriginal. The painting was originally prompted by Lowe’s interest in the way colonial painters depicted the Aboriginal: from statuesque black Apollos on the one hand to the tree monkeys of Glover on the other. The images were mediated by the conventions, preconceived desires or derogatory bias of the one set of cultural values, focused on the other. The idea of the Aboriginal is represented in this painting by a number of superficial and clichéd generic signs taken on by the white person as a costume or disguise. This representation implies that dominant notions of Aboriginality, the persistent images, continue to be the product of a Western imagination. However, Lowe’s painting is not so much politically didactic, as an investigation of the more disinterested politic of image-making.


19. Geoff Lowe

‘Buckley’s chance’ from the series ‘Ten famous feelings for men’ 1984

synthetic polymer paint on canvas

152 x 91 cm

Private collection, Sydney

‘Buckley’s chance’ was a term used a lot when I was a kid. Buckley’s and Nunn (the name of a department store). No chance. Buckley was an escaped convict who lived with Indigenous people for a long time, even forgot how to speak English. He wrote his memoir some time after returning to settler society. John Dunkley-Smith posed for this painted-from-life in situ. I found it very hard to make anything up, so I painted from life.

Geoff Lowe, 2012

Lowe’s loosely defined, thinly painted figures and backgrounds are often rendered in a brownish-grey monochrome. This is sometimes offset by the shock of a nasty orange or purple frame. Lowe’s theme seems to be not the famous but a painterly conservation of certain vanishing concepts of manliness.

It is a man’s world of fake IDs, of false Brian Blessed beards, of whites dressed up as blacks adopting a pose of kitsch garden sculpture …

20.
Geoff Lowe
‘Piety’ from the series ‘Ten famous feelings for men’ 1984–85
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
152 x 91 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

Probably among the first paintings I saw of Geoff’s at Powell Street Gallery. My uni friends and I were impressed with Geoff’s ‘postmodernism’ at the time, the re-enactment and reinterpretation of history in his paintings, episodes that featured family, friends and colleagues dressing-up and acting out, a transparent reconstruction of events, rendering the world constructed thus. Years later Geoff would ask me to squeeze into a pair of size 8 Speedos with a picture of Uncle Fester stretched tight across the front, stand in the middle of the Whipstick Forest, and talk to camera about salvation. Callum was a tree.

Stuart Koop, 2012

Lowe’s bedraggled anti-heroes pose stagily against doorways, stepping out to the viewer. Various male roles are suggested: father and son, explorer-bushie, sage or victim, Candidus-figure or native. There are cross-references between these works: about mateship, landscape, rituals.

All this art-historical backtracking might seem smartly intellectual, but that is not quite the same as making intellectual paintings, which these emphatically are not. Lowe is in danger of painting himself into a very arid corner.

Ronald Miller, ‘Another classical revival?’, The Herald, 22 August 1985

21.
A Constructed World and Speech and What Archive
Three-story paper room 2010–12
wood, paper, inkjet prints, mixed media
500 x 200 x 255 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World, Speech and What Archive and Solang Production Paris Brussels

22.
A Constructed World
Leviathan and Laëtitia 2011
single-channel SD video, 16:9 ratio
colour, sound
9:39 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

We were meeting the day of the performance at an RER station for one final rehearsal. We all gathered on the platform, excited about the play, it was fun … but someone was late, missing. We started to worry about him. Trains passed by, but we were still waiting, hoping for that very person to arrive … everybody was getting agitated. The tension was palpable. I loved and hated this hectic moment just before …

Anne Laure Sacriste, 2012

Beds

23.
Jacqueline Riva
Untitled (folding bed) 1996–97
type C photograph on wood
190 x 125 cm
Courtesy Jacqueline Riva and Solang Production Paris Brussels

Maurizio Cattelan offered us his apartment in Milan for a few weeks during the heat wave of June 1996. At night the beanbag was put aside and the bed came down.

Jacqueline Riva, 2012
24. John Nixon (editor)
A Constructed World (cover image)
*Material* 1998
printed paper
29.7 x 21 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

25. Jacqueline Riva
*Untitled* 1998, printed 2012
type C photograph
75.5 x 110 cm
Courtesy Jacqueline Riva and Solang Production Paris Brussels

26. A Constructed World
*Fresh history* 1999
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
15:16 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

Not much had been going on in our backyard since the demise of the vegetable patch (and
the one great harvest). So we were very pleased to host the hot tub. People responded really
positively to it. A Constructed World really are the best at creating an environment in which to
bring people together to talk and share experiences. I think we need more of it. Things have
got a little too quiet ...
*Charlotte Day, 2012*

27. A Constructed World
*History 3* 2000
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
6 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

28. A Constructed World
*A Constructed World salons* 2012
digital print
144 x 100 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

A Constructed World started making video salons in 1998. We introduced mattresses mainly
because our video programs were quite long and boring. We wanted the audience to sleep, to
lie around in the installation, to go in and out of the video works.
*Jacqueline Riva, 2012*

29. Geoff Lowe with Elizabeth Newman
*A constructed world* 1991
monotypes with laser transfer prints
2 sheets, each 50 x 66.5 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

30. Jon Campbell
*Ecstatic Torino (Geoff & Jacqui)* 2005
enamel on board
61 x 95 cm
Collection of Rob Furst and Linda Curtis, Melbourne

I first came across this image of A Constructed World on the invite card to their show at Uplands Gallery. Then I saw the video that the still came from, so wild and free, got me excited! I made the painting to celebrate this moment and our connection. I wanted the painting to try and capture the spirit of A Constructed World.

Jon Campbell, 2012

31.
A Constructed World with Change Is Good
_No need to be great_ 2007
laser transfer print on linen
47 x 65 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

32.
A Constructed World with Change Is Good
_Stay in groups_ 2007
embroidery on linen
47 x 65 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

33.
Jon Campbell
_Ecstatic Torino_ c. 2008
watercolour on paper
24 x 31 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

The watercolour seems a bit moodier than the painting. I can’t remember which one came first. It’s not a study for the painting. Again, I’m looking for the feel rather than accuracy. And the other thing is that it’s classic A Constructed World, ‘stay in groups’, ‘no need to be great’.

Jon Campbell, 2012

34.
Heman Chong
_A Constructed World_ 2009
screenprint on paper
118 x 83 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

stay in groups/no need to be great/stay huddled together/in plato’s cave/stay wet and warm/in the equatorial rain/no need to be great/stay in school/old or new/stay in an ikea cabinet/no need to be great/stay constructed/worlds apart/stay economically viable/twenty years apart/no need to be great/politics aside/emotions slide/stay with me/on equal parts.

Heman Chong, 2012

35.
Etienne Bernard
_Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear #1_ 2009
screenprint on paper
176 x 120 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

36.
Etienne Bernard
_Objects in the mirror are closer than they appear #3_ 2009
screenprint on paper
176 x 120 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

37.
A Constructed World

No need to be great (Jimmie Durham font) and Stay in groups (Jimmie Durham font) 2010 posters
2 sheets, each 84.1 x 59.4 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World

38.
Quentin Lannes
Seven nation army 2010
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
22 minutes
Courtesy Quentin Lannes

39.
Elizabeth Newman
Immaterial space isn't necessarily ethically superior 1 and 2 2011
offset lithographs
2 sheets, each 61 x 44 cm
Courtesy Elizabeth Newman

40.
Yann Sérandour
After a portrait of Friedrich Schleiermacher by Geoff Lowe (A Constructed World) and after the wall painting ‘Language is not transparent’ by Mel Bochner 2011
screenprint on paper, published by CNEAI, Paris
98 x 70 cm
Collection of A Constructed World

41.
Julien Tiberi
Riristi.mes unlimited (A Constructed World) 2011
photocopy of original ink and graphite on paper
42 x 33 cm
Courtesy Semiose Galerie, Paris

Trans-iterations

42.
Geoff Lowe
Lifeboat 1982
synthetic polymer paint on canvas, pencil on paper
17 parts: painting 152 x 305 cm, 16 drawings, each 27 x 37 cm
Collection of Bialik College, Melbourne

I think this was first seen in Slouching towards Bethlehem at Gertrude Street? Maybe. The mind and memory play tricks. Perhaps it was made this year when we are still debating the issue of so-called ‘boat people’ and feeling heavy in the heart because of the hardness of political minds and just despondent in general about the futile, point-scoring rhetoric of Australian wedge politics. Edward Said said the twenty-first century would be the era of the refugee. He was right. Climate conditions, terror, political, religious, ethnic and social persecutions will see millions displaced, dispersed and discarded. There needs to be a global position on the status of refugees, there is urgent need of a pact between all nations. Rehousing, providing asylum and protection of those in peril is our humane responsibility, it has nothing to do with borders. My father came to Australia on a boat.

Juliana Engberg, 2012

Of all of them [in the 1983 exhibition at Powell Street Gallery], Lifeboat is the one which most completely reveals the extent of Lowe’s imagination and his ability to use the past without plundering it.

Lifeboat is a large painting surrounded by 16 drawings of mythological figures. Like Böcklin,
the 19th-century Swiss painter who inspired Lowe, the artist is not satisfied with painting a straight landscape or seascape. The drawings of Pan, the Lapiths and centaurs, naiads and Tritons, the three Muses, enhance and compound the mystery of the central painting.

Memory Holloway, ‘A thicket of symbols’, The Age, 31 August 1983

43. Geoff Lowe with Rosebud
**Not touching** 1989–92
synthetic polymer paint and laser print on canvas
185 x 117 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

Rosebud stayed together for twelve years in a moving changing group, they were amazing how much they could talk about what they and one another were doing. At art school people tend to be paralyzed by professional expectations. This is not an exquisite corpse, it’s about being open to and going to one another’s spaces.

**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

44. Geoff Lowe with Rosebud
**Next to** 1989–92
synthetic polymer paint and laser print on canvas
185 x 117 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

Each person in the group Rosebud painted a flat rectangle; the first with a white border left between each one, in the second the painted rectangles are butted up next to one another and in the third people wander into, violate and are hospitable to one another’s spaces.

**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

45. Geoff Lowe with Rosebud
**Contact boundaries** 1989–1992
synthetic polymer paint and laser transfer print on canvas
185 x 117 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

Amateur and non-artists seemed to find it easier to paint when together in a group and if something they made was photographed or photocopied it appeared to make people less embarrassed or self-critical about what they had made. The photo depicts this. A psychoanalyst once said to me, ‘So groups and technology lower the tension about expressing something’.

**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

46. Jacqueline Riva
**A photograph** 1990
photograph
87 x 98 cm
Courtesy Jacqueline Riva

Like Las meninas—the artist and his retinue of assistants at court. Geoff’s high regard for politically incomparable figures is clear, in this case Irene Bolger, ‘queen’ of the nurses’ strike in 1986. Otherwise the enthusiastic amateur, the photographer, the writer, the framer, the photocopier and, of course, ourselves, all caught up in the triangulation of social relations which since Velasquez has generated the meaning and purpose of secular art.

**Stuart Koop, 2012**

47. Geoff Lowe with Kathy Temin
**A constructed world I** 1991
synthetic polymer paint, pastel and laser print on canvas
152 x 122 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney
48. Geoff Lowe with Kathy Temin  
*A constructed world II* 1991  
synthetic polymer paint, pastel and laser print on canvas  
185 x 117 cm  
Courtesy Geoff Lowe and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

49. Geoff Lowe  
*A constructed world* 1992  
lime wash on paper and canvas  
182 x 122 cm  
Courtesy Geoff Lowe and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

One day I sat down and thought about the world and some songs came into my mind, which were: ‘You’re my world’, ‘A world of our own’, ‘He’s got the whole world in his hands’, ‘We are the world’, ‘Make the world go away’, ‘This world was made for you and me’, and ‘Around the world in 80 days’. It seems for many people, or maybe most people, the world is everything outside your door, outside your house where you live. In Frank Capra’s film *It’s a wonderful life*, this guy who owns a building society in Bedford Falls keeps being stopped from leaving the boring, provincial life because he has to attend to the everyday goings on of people there. But at one point in the movie he says that the three most exciting sounds in the world are: anchor chains, plane motors and train whistles. That these were three, I guess, resonances, possibilities that have something to do with getting away.  
*Geoff Lowe, transcript of talk with Paul Carter on ‘world’ for the New Space seminar series, 200 Gertrude Street, July 1990*

50. Geoff Lowe with Doan Chi Trung, Le Hong Thai, Tru’ong Hu’u Tan, Bui Hu’u Hung  
*How happy are those who believe without seeing* 1992  
lacquer on wood  
120 x 90 cm  
Private collection, Sydney

‘For it is one thing to adore a painting but it is quite another to learn from a painted narrative what to adore.’

I copied this in notebooks over the years from Michael Baxandall’s *Painting and experience in fifteenth-century Italy*.  
*Geoff Lowe, 2012*

Lowe took *A constructed world I* to Vietnam, along with its replica, *A constructed world II*, inviting participation from local artists. The landscape of Halong Bay and the local houses were painted by Vietnamese artists. Similarly, he worked with traditional lacquer craftsmen near Hanoi, who recreated an older painting from a photograph in an exhibition catalogue. In the lacquer simulacra, *How happy are those who believe without seeing*, 1992, pitch-black skies, shrines, and jungle replace Australian bush. The tools of representation—a hammer and camera remind us that this is a painting, that artifice creates art, and that art is work. Lowe’s insistence on images of measurement is testimony, to a desire to protect his experience against the enervating effects of cultural exhaustion.  

51. A Constructed World  
*The future* 1995  
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio  
colour, sound  
2:09 minutes  
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

52. Geoff Lowe  
*Self-portrait* 1995
I was assailed at once by the kind of odd electronic noises secret police probably employ in order to keep people awake ... The apparent source of the aforementioned irritating sound—which must drive the staff mad—is, in fact, a small red electric guitar. The piece is entitled Transvestite, for reasons which will be less than obvious to most visitors—so forming an ultimate conjunction between cross-dressing and crossed wires. What the noises apparently ‘mean’, if you can find someone kind enough to explain this, is that the artist has grown irritated by the importunate honking of car horns by transvestites anxious to exchange rather more than lipsticks with others of their kind. This irritation takes place regularly, it seems, near where the artist lives in St Kilda.


At this point in the lacquer studio at the Wooden House on Stilts in Hanoi, I began to think painting had more potential to anticipate something than document it. Getting it wrong was starting to have more appeal than mastering it.

**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

We used to go to a small café bistro in the Marais before we knew Paris at all. Mainly because you could always find a seat there. This world design is etched on a glass window inside. After a couple of years the window cracked; it still hasn’t been repaired.

**A Constructed World, 2012**

Speech and What Archive

**Paper room 2010**

wood, paper, inkjet prints, mixed media

210 x 255 x 200 cm

Courtesy Speech and What Archive and Solang Production Paris Brussels
When Speech and What Archive was invited to make a Medicine Show at Caravansérail near Paris, Marie was inspired by the venue that is a movable circus tent on a large scale. Marie decided to move all over the paper room, which was on the floor, on a ball used by acrobats and monkeys. She had learned to do it adeptly when she was a young teenager. In the weeks leading up she practised a lot but couldn’t re-master the skill. We went ahead with the performance with her not being able to balance and move on the ball and being supported by others.

A Constructed World, 2012

Elevator

Geoff’s 1997 Contemporary Art Archive installation—‘a montage of images, references, times and places’ as I described it then—was like walking into one of his paintings, as if peeking behind the scenes and witnessing his thinking and working processes—a key objective of the CAA project. Hendrix, Mary and Fester were there in one form or another; the double-necked electric guitar; speaker boxes, figurines and other assorted objects; and a blue tarpaulin with silvery swirls representing the hole in the ozone layer, a key motif from his painting at the time. The exhibition marked a key moment in Geoff’s shift away from painting and toward collaborative installation and performance with Jacqui. The poster published for the occasion featured him dressed as Fester singing the blues.

Sue Cramer, 2012

A weird and unexpected consignment arrives via the MCA goods lift. Clunky metal doors part
like stage curtains revealing a mobile theatre, a wild mix of medievalism, howling blues, punk rock and retro TV. Bald, capped and black-eyed, Geoff makes a compelling Fester cast as rock star or evangelist, an anti-heroic caricature of manhood. He opens his gown to reveal his stigmata or beat his chest. The door-curtains close and the tableau vivant departs. My memories are hallucinatory like the grainy photos and video of the event.

Sue Cramer, 2012

64. A Constructed World
History no! 2000
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
4:41 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

... the elevator door opened and a loud and clear cry of someone came from it. ‘History, NO!’ a woman shouted. And she shouted again, ‘Historia, NO!’

The cry continued ... visitors and artists came out of their studios, walked through the hall, and approached the area of the elevators where we were standing, now mute. During that time, about five seemingly attenuated minutes, the elevator’s door remained open and the cry was heard incessantly, sometimes shouted in English, sometimes heard in Spanish. But one couldn’t see the face or the body of the woman performing as a gigantic megaphone made out of corrugated cardboard completely dominated the elevator’s space.

Sofia Hernandez Chong Cuy, 2012

‘The hole’ and ‘Young for you’ 2012
single-channel HD video, 16:9 ratio
colour, sound
12:57 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

Empirical paintings

66. Geoff Lowe
Interior 1 1971
synthetic polymer paint on board
53 x 74 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

67. Geoff Lowe
Still life with face mask 1971
synthetic polymer paint on board
28 x 38 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

68. Geoff Lowe
We picture facts to ourselves 1977
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
160 x 198 cm
Collection of Broken Hill Regional Art Gallery, NSW

Painted in the middle of a nervous breakdown in highly politicized and drug-ridden Fitzroy.
Trying to hold on to reality (through Wittgenstein).
**Geoff Lowe, 2012**

69. Geoff Lowe
*Interior* 1979
synthetic polymer paint on board
2 panels: 152 x 213 cm
RMIT University Art Collection, Melbourne

70. Geoff Lowe
*Background I (Camberwell quarry)* c. 1981
synthetic polymer paint on canvas on plywood
35.6 x 56 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

I met Geoff on a 96 St Kilda tram trundling down Fitzroy Street one evening in the mid-'70s; the same age, we were still fired by an optimism generated from the '60s and the walls we had run into had not stopped us. I discovered the quarry while working with a builder on a house that overlooked it and showed it to Geoff. It seemed to satisfy his want for huge amounts of detail and a natural stage for his dramas; we drew there together quite a bit in the first half of 1980 before I headed overseas to study.
**Tony Mighell, 2012**

71. Geoff Lowe
*Date* 1986
alkyd resin on canvas
105 x 205 cm
Collection of John Nixon, Melbourne

Talking Heads: 77 is the debut album by American new wave art rock band Talking Heads. Recorded during 1976 and '77 at Sundragon Studios, New York, and released on 16 September 1977 on Sire Records. Eleven songs including 'The book I read'. The record cover features bright green typography in Times bold italic on an orange monochrome background.
**John Nixon, 2012**

72. Geoff Lowe
*First 1 & 2* 1988
alkyd resin on canvas
2 parts, each 50 x 100 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

73. Geoff Lowe
*Inherited models* (2) 1995
laser print on rice paper on synthetic polymer paint on canvas
152 x 122 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

74. A Constructed World
*The darkness of your past* 2003, printed 2012
vinyl on wall
14 x 30 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

75. A Constructed World
*Treesex* 2012
costumes, mixed media
dimensions variable
Death above

76. Geoff Lowe
_Fisher miller skull_ 1984
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
24 x 30.5 cm
Collection of Chris Dyson, Melbourne

A determined skull
Eye socket shades
A city of teeth

*Chris Dyson*

Geoff Lowe, perhaps tongue-in-cheek, does a dry and anti-heroic analysis of a skull, with medical labeling. Skulls are traditional; but this year, death is really in.


77. Geoff Lowe
_Untitled_ 1986
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
100 x 200 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

78. Geoff Lowe
_There is a hole in the ozone layer_ 1988
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
174 x 127 cm
Collection of Roslyn and Tony Oxley, Sydney

The mother spider created the earth in gaseous state and then sent her twins, one using sound to grasp at the inside, the other to shape the outside. Elsewhere is here. Humanity makes the opposite of photosynthesis, they take oxygen and make light. Man’s words are God’s dividends. Neutrinos don’t know they have passed through the earth. Photons bombard our retina. The man is star dust, a fallen angel who remembers heaven.

*Fabrice Reymond, 2012*

79. A Constructed World
_The death of Fester_ 2000
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
5:36 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

80. A Constructed World
_Sex and death_ 2006
alkyd resin and oil on canvas
2 parts, 190 x 209 cm and 190 x 206 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

81. A Constructed World
_Le feu scrupuleux_ 2008
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
6 minutes
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

82.
A Constructed World
*Second last second chance* 2009–12
wood, tarpaulin, iPod, headphones, mixed media
dimensions variable
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

83.
Speech and What Archive
*Xmas card* 2010
photograph
15 x 21 cm
Collection of Speech and What Archive

84.
Speech and What Archive
*Kill the speech* 2011
single-channel SD video, 16:9 ratio
colour, sound
3:15 minutes
Courtesy Speech and What Archive and Solang Production Paris Brussels

85.
A Constructed World
*SWA skeletons* 2011
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
212 x 200 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

86.
A Constructed World
*Australian fable* 2012
fibre-tipped pen on glass in found frame
80.7 x 93.5 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

After the political controversy ignited by John Howard saying that refugees had thrown their children overboard Australia had quite a bad reputation. In Italy people often referred to it and it was embarrassing. We made a video work of the waters parting which was a companyed by this text.

87.
A Constructed World
*Death globes* 2012
synthetic polymer paint and collage on paper
4 parts, each 14–19 cm diameter
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

Hippie materialism

88.
Geoff Lowe
*Still life (with bullock’s heart) into landscape* 1972
synthetic polymer paint on canvas on plywood
30 x 46 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

89.
Geoff Lowe
In the mid-’70s I was living in a house with David Odell who was a PhD candidate in set theory. At the time he told his supervisors at the Mathematics Department at Monash University that he hated the abstract paintings they had on the walls there and that he knew a much better artist with better paintings, so they invited him to bring something in, which they hung.

After two years David went to Cornell in the US and the department wrote to me to say they wanted me to take the painting back. I avoided them for a long time. When I became better known my gallerist advised me to gift it. Successive directors kept writing to me asking to send it back, they didn’t want it. Finally I was appointed to the board of Monash Museum and made an awkward negotiation to gift it, and still the next director wanted to return it. Then two years ago it surfaced in a group show as part of the collection. By then I was living in Europe and a young artist emailed me to say what an astonishing painting it was.

Geoff Lowe, 2012

90.
Geoff Lowe
Sequence in measurement I 1974
oil on plywood
91.5 x 122 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

Lowe is a painter of tough peasant faces with cynical eyes and nude bodies that bend at the joints like lay figures. Their harsh intrusion into studio interiors, precisely painted in schemes of dark brown, green and rubbery greys, with objects and furnishings placed as immaculately as the paraphernalia in a scientist’s laboratory, produces an eerie effect. One thinks of the Belgian Delvaux, and his silent nudes walking in courtyards. Lowe, who prefers to paint peasants rather than palaces, may be described as a poor man’s Delvaux.

Alan McCulloch, ‘Ambiguities in today’s drawing’, The Herald, July 1975

91.
Geoff Lowe
Meaning and excellence 1983
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
2 panels: 128 x 231 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

The eponymous title of an exhibition of Australian art in Edinburgh. Like a motto. Trying to generate opposites between rewards and being immersed or embedded in experience.

Geoff Lowe, 2012

92.
Geoff Lowe with Stephen Bush
The nature of love 1988
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
188 x 305 cm
Collection of Elaine Baker and John Cruthers, Sydney

Lowe describes a generalized urban periphery in the familiar terms of a scrubby littered landscape, using thin paint, bold brushstrokes and sharp but dull colours. This is a purposeless landscape, a stage where various modes of encounter between things and beings take place. In The nature of love, two herds of naked women stare out, one lot copied from the inside cover of a Jimi Hendrix album, the other from the front cover of a 1967 copy of Pix. In the foreground a female figure is painting a small out-of-scale nubile boy into the picture. One of the chief modes of visual entry into these tableaux is via the figure of a prone male, described from an aerial perspective, falling out the front of the picture plane. Electric guitars, love placards, embroidered cushions and so forth litter the scene.

Eloise Lindsay, ‘Geoff Lowe—“What binds things together”’, Eyeline, no. 8, 1989
I’d never really painted a series of paintings before and what I wanted to do is paint the same subject four times and see what changes would happen without really pushing it at all. It interested me the idea that without the electrostatic photograph of the ozone layer, did we have a hole in the ozone layer? But apparently there are other ways of showing that it’s there without the photograph, but the other thing about the hole in the ozone layer that seemed to be of interest is in a sense its representation is very much a ray of light from God, which in a way when I first painted in another painting from these ones I thought this was some kind of inversion of that but if you divest yourself of that narrative, of an annunciation, or being touched through a hole in the sky, it functions in a comparable way, in that the light through the hole in the sky has a message about nature.

Geoff Lowe, transcript of talk with Paul Carter on ‘world’ for the New Space seminar series, 200 Gertrude Street, July 1990

Geoff Lowe’s visits to Vietnam, in 1991 and 1992, are reflected in three groups of work: straightforward drawings and gouaches of Hanoi, Halong Bay, and the Mekong River; the banners and posters he made to advertise his exhibition in Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City; and, finally, complex paintings that hybridize the experience of Vietnam. In these, he memorializes two types of cultural milieu: those of an Edenic assembled world of friends and family; and the constructed world of nostalgia, which for Lowe exists as a series of memories of the ’60s and ’70s. Lowe’s impressive paintings, A constructed world I (Sergeant Pepper’s Lonely Hearts Club Band), 1992, and A constructed world II (Bay gio), 1992, are tableaux of a staged world of friends, artists and, in the latter picture, his Vietnamese hosts. Both paintings pastiche the Sergeant Pepper cover. In the first painting, instead of rock stars, Lowe’s children pose in fancy pirates’ costumes; in place of ’60s photomontage, we see a collection of self-portraits by Lowe’s associates.


I remember this work from an exhibition at Whanki Museum in Seoul. It was the perfect touring work—like a jack-in-the-box. Earlier paintings of Tower Hill, with figures ‘acting out’ in the landscape, have become a set-piece for live performance. You can see the remnants scattered across the blue tarpaulin modelled loosely on Tower Hill. It’s still best resolved through single-point perspective, but you come across it more like a campsite—or even crime scene—than a picture. I recall the live performance, the screaming guitar and my gorgeous wife dressed as Uncle Fester in a push-up bra caterwauling into the night. Created a few

A Constructed World
Universal love/unconditional regard 1996–2012
tarpaulin, wood, acrylic, found objects, mixed media
400 x 500 cm (variable)
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels
issues over dinner with our hosts …

Stuart Koop, 2012

97. Geoff Lowe with Esther Lowe, Ruby Lowe and Lewis Miller
Universal love/unconditional regard no. 3 1996
synthetic polymer paint, oil and laser transfer prints on canvas
2 parts, 182 x 122 cm and 188 x 117 cm
Courtesy Geoff Lowe

98. A Constructed World
Scenes from the Whipstick Forest 1998
single-channel SD video, 4:3 ratio
colour, sound
37 minutes
 Courtesy A Constructed World

Singing for A Constructed World was a terrific exercise in incongruity: Lou Reed, Uncle Fester, wounded Christ, me; New York set lyrics of ‘Street hassle’, the scrubby bush of the Whipstick; private, long-held singing aspirations, my voice.

Julie Spencer, 2012

99. A Constructed World
Altamont 2009
photograph
106 x 216 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

In a previous conversation, you mentioned that Altamont was an event famous enough to be known to everyone in the group, and that this general knowledge allowed you to realize the staging without a history lesson. However, in your work you often propose the acceptance of ‘not knowing’ as a strategy for working together in a group. In this way you are able to introduce unfamiliar or complex ideas to untrained participants. How did ‘knowing’ and ‘not knowing’ interrelate during this event?

Joseph del Pesco, 2010

100. A Constructed World
Monkeys on a boat 2012
synthetic polymer paint on canvas
187 x 234 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

Repetitions and re-occurrences

101. A Constructed World
Repetitions and re-occurrences 2012
lambda prints
10 prints, each 35 x 35 cm
Courtesy A Constructed World and Solang Production Paris Brussels

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