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DAVID WILLS, STUDIO REPORT

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Abstract

Unprecedented levels of consumerism impose on humanity anonymous products that add little value to our lives. Mechanical reproduction produces objects with a limited usefulness but an enduring lifespan. The residue of all this production fills dumps and interrupts footpaths, but it is also increasingly being brought together and given new meaning by collectors and artists. In contrast to mass-produced objects, which are seemingly held in high regard by consumers, are handcrafted objects. Rarely appreciated by the average consumer, handcrafted objects are labours of love. Each crafted object has its own character. This report explores collecting, consumerism and waste, and notions of nostalgia, family and celebrity, and their relevance to and influence on my body of work: B3 (portraits of Bananas in Pyjamas stuffed toys). The report also touches on other completed works, such as *Family portrait*, as well as several works in progress.

I would like to thank my family for their love and support. I would also like to thank my friends for their support and encouragement. I would like to thank my supervisor, Professor Lee and Roger Wu, for their support and encouragement. I would like to thank my friend, Madeline, for her assistance and support.



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Collectors want other people to see it. Though my fascination with collecting probably started with Barbie dolls and Legos, as I have grown older the greater part of my collections have been discarded objects, often gleaned from the street.

In those who don't understand the order of my collections, it's clear I argue that clutter is considered with accumulation rather than collecting. In her book, *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault suggests that collections allow objects to be classified and measured. Foucault argues, on the other hand, between the point of the collection is finished. Foucault's theory suggests that equal level for a death as well as a "birth" in terms of classification to come into being. For me, collectors reorganize the physical objects, giving them new life while retaining their history. My collections must therefore be viewed as history.

In this paper I will attempt to articulate what drives me to collect, what things influence my process of collecting, and how collecting influences my creative work. The main body of work is 100 photographs, portraits of my collection of printed documents in Fugate's collection. I will discuss the typical index card format that project has inspired by the way they consume, reassemble and family.

The main thing I like to do is to see what I can do with the things I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.

The project is a collection of objects that I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.

1. I have collected the things I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.
2. I have collected the things I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.
3. I have collected the things I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.
4. I have collected the things I have collected and presented in my work. I will discuss the process of collecting and how it influences my creative work.

Introduction

At the end of last year it was suggested that I read *Underworld*¹. When I discovered the story revolved around a game of baseball and was some 800 pages long, I have to admit I had second thoughts. I am not overly sports-minded. Sport reminds me of childhood and of sitting in muddy puddles on fields happily waving at footballs—the ones I was supposed to be catching—as they passed by. Back then my mind was on getting home to my Lego or to my ‘flat’² to tend to my collections. There was a lot on my mind when I was reading *Underworld*: an imminent move to Canberra; a friend on the verge of suicide; a brother in strife with a Russian bride; and could I really cope with another year of living on a student income? *Underworld* offered a degree of sanity, with every page turned a new delight awaited. The following quote struck a chord: ‘I teach at UCLA. I take my students into garbage dumps and make them understand the civilization they live in. Consume or die. That’s the mandate of the culture. And it all ends up in the dump.’³

I collect what other people throw out. Though my fascination with collecting probably started with Matchbox cars and Lego, as I have grown older the greater part of my collections have been discarded objects, often gleaned from the street.

To those who don’t understand the order of my collections, it’s clutter. I argue that clutter is associated with accumulation rather than collecting. In his book, *The Order of Things*, Michel Foucault suggests that collections allow objects to be classified and reassessed. Susan Stewart, on the other hand, believes the point of the collection is forgetting⁴. Jacques Derrida suggests that equal need for a death as well as a topic⁵ is required for a collection to come into being. For me, collections reinvigorate the collected objects, giving them new life while retaining their history. My collections must show signs of human interaction.

In this paper I will attempt to articulate what drives me to collect, what things influence my choices in collecting, and how collecting influences my creative work. My main body of work is B3, photographic portraits of my collection of knitted Bananas in Pyjamas⁶ stuffed toys. I will discuss the myriad links and themes this project has exposed for me including consumerism, remembrance and family.

The more lifeless things are, the more potent and ingenious can be the mind which contemplates them.

WALTER BENJAMIN

It’s important to exhibit your mistakes. Man is not perfect. Neither are his creations.

DIETER ROTH

- 1 A novel by Don De Lillo.
- 2 At home I spent my time building environments with Lego, whereas at my flat—a place built by me and my grandfather in his backyard—my mind was on collecting.
- 3 *Underworld*, Don De Lillo, p.287.
- 4 *On Longing, Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic; the Souvenir, the Collection*, Susan Stewart, p.152.
- 5 *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida, p.29.
- 6 *Bananas in Pyjamas* is a popular and long-running ABC program for children. The main characters are B1 and B2.

Birth



B3, 2003

Eighteen months ago I went 'op-shopping'⁷ to Newcastle with a friend. In several opportunity shops (op shops) I noticed hand-knitted Bananas in Pyjamas stuffed toys. Though all were obviously modelled on B1 or B2, each one was noticeably different. When I saw the third one, I knew I had to buy it and retrace my steps to get the two I had previously seen. The next seven op shops proved fruitless that day, but this was the beginning of a time-consuming search for what has become B3. Early on I considered a send-in-a-banana scheme to save time, but soon realised I would lose the thrill of the hunt and would probably be sent distractions⁸ like coat hangers, finger puppets or factory-produced dolls.

The Bananas in Pyjamas are Australian icons, as Australian as Vegemite, the Sydney Opera House and BBQs. It was their individuality that initially struck me, the unique personality that beamed out at me from each B3 face. Different facial expressions, and variations to the colour of their 'skin' and pyjamas, denote character; one even has a bright red heart sewn underneath his pyjama top. The knitters' decisions about colour and placement of eyes, mouth and hair, all integral to the individuality of each subject, humanise what are otherwise inanimate objects.

There is no question that love was involved in their making. Love is perhaps the most important thing in our lives. These happy little characters, presumably knitted by a grandmother or aunty with a particular child in mind, speak of love. They may have

7 Op-shopping is my favourite, all-consuming pastime and collecting is its fruit. Dedicated excursions to op shops, markets and garage sales have taken me to Newcastle, Kempsey, Wollongong, Bathurst, the Blue Mountains, Canberra, Goulburn, the Southern Highlands, Queanbeyan, the Central Coast, the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne and many places in between in search of B3.

8 I am collecting plastic cows for another project. Well-meaning friends have given me assorted cows, including one that really missed the mark: when squeezed it excreted.

Birth

been knitted for charity fundraisers or fetes. Regardless, the knitter has imbued them with love. They have been handled by humans, either by the makers or the children who have played with them, and each is associated with memories.

These discarded objects come with 'ghost' lives. I was interested in why they were made and who made them. Originally, I assumed that the mass-produced stuffed toys available from ABC shops were too expensive. Perhaps for some they were, but by and large I think B3 were made by people with a passion for knitting, a hobby enjoyed while chatting or watching television; some may even have thought the 'Bananas' could earn them a modest income. Their production values suggest an economy of means, as if they were made by people making do with what was available⁹.

Knitting requires a determined effort, commitment and patience. The knitter largely determines the character of each B3. Children add character by playing with them. Signs of age are evident: balled wool, stains, dribble; a web of DNA created by a knitting pattern. Interestingly, of the thirty-three B3s I have collected, only one resembles the pattern published in *The ABC for Kids Book of Knitted Toys*. Surely if all the knitters followed the same pattern, they would be a more cohesive bunch; at least there should be a pair of identical twins. But each knitter seems to have reinterpreted what a Banana in Pyjamas toy should look like, confirming the adage that everyone sees things differently.

Bananas are the world's most recognisable fruit. They share human DNA, are phallic symbols, and are erotic symbols of power.

According to New Scientist magazine, bananas are 'the world's sexiest fruit'. Ironically, the banana hasn't had sex for thousands of years; genetically it is a sterile, seedless mutant. Scientists believe the banana originates from Stone Age plant breeders who replanted cuttings from the stems of plants. These mutant plants had an extra chromosome that prevented seeds and pollen from developing normally, resulting in an edible, soft fruit.

What I am after is the quality of being less than because, instead of heroizing, it reveals the idiosyncrasies of the individual as errors in relation to the ideal.

MIKE KELLEY

9 A fellow student told me that her mother made knitted Bananas in Pyjamas from left-over wool. Each one was a different yellow with different blue pyjamas.

Birth



B3, 2003

Birth



B3, 2003



B3, 2003

Collecting

I attribute my interest in collecting to my grandfather. Mate¹⁰ was a working-class boy from Waterloo who lost his parents early in life. His Aunt Kate raised him. By the time his children were born, he had his own factory designing and making furniture. Much to my grandmother's dismay, Mate was a hoarder. He kept everything and was always repairing broken toys, shoes and furniture. On council clean-up days, Mate and I would drive around Sydney's southern suburbs to see what other people had thrown out. Mate always drove with his 'foot on the brake', so we wouldn't miss anything worth salvaging. Gleaning is in my blood¹¹.



Above: My grandfather.

Collections come in many varieties: art; books; toys and dolls; badges; medals, walking sticks—the list is endless. Though a system of classification should unite each item within a collection, the strength of a good collection is in its difference. Variety within a collection's categories, identifying not just similarities but differences, is key. So, for example, both Kelley and I collect toys from op shops¹². However, Kelley collects any toy, whereas my B3 collection focuses on a very specific toy.

Canberra artist David Sequeira also scours op shops. *Collection and catalogue*, 1998, is a 'parade of glass vessels catalogued by function and colour'¹³ eloquently showing his interest in notions of similarity and difference. Rather than arranged, they are classified according to use and hue. An understated elegance hides the complex nature of ordering systems, seen again in his work *Shelf (my father's library)*, 1996. This time books are the focus, but, like the glass vessels, they are still containers.



Shelf (my father's library), 1998, David Sequeira

- 10 My grandfather was known to all as Mate. No one is certain where the name came from but it stuck. Even my grandmother called him Mate.
- 11 I furnished my apartment in Amsterdam solely from furniture found on the streets, replacing items as better ones became available, ferrying them on my bike Sunday to Thursday evenings.
- 12 I discuss Kelley further on pages 14 to 16.
- 13 Michael Desmond, *David Sequeira*, p.7.

Collecting

This year I had to cull my magazine collection due to a lack of space¹⁴. These magazines had fuelled my interest in collage, graphic design, mass-media and photography. I had to make decisions about which ones to keep based on those interests. From those I discarded, I had to consider what images I wanted to keep on a page-by-page basis. As a result of this process I continued some existing collections, discontinued others and began new ones: American flags; butterflies; pink squares; make-up; cigarette advertisements; mobile phones ...

Hungarian artist Janos Sugar works in a similar manner. One of his collections, images gathered from newspapers and magazines, was of a Russian-built gun known as the Kalashnikov which resulted in the work *The Typewriter of the Illiterate*. While I was culling and reorganising my magazines, the difference between collection and accumulation became apparent to me. Accumulation tends to be unfocussed, a transient gathering of 'stuff', while a collection is more focussed and studied. Through culling my magazine accumulation, I created a magazine collection.

Collectible rubbish

Like food, toys have a use-by-date; children outgrow or become bored with them. Some toys, such as Matchbox cars and Barbie dolls, go on to become collectors' items. Others are discarded, thrown out like rubbish, of no further value. Collectors have a natural interest in recycling. They search for their favoured objects, rescuing them from destruction and often presenting them in ways which allow the viewer to see the value of an item outside of its original use. Collections can offer us fresh perspectives and meanings, and old objects are given new contexts.

Many people look down on gleaners and people who buy things second-hand. My family still finds it odd that I buy clothes, crockery and whatever else takes my fancy in op shops. They find it equally odd that it is not necessarily financial hardship that leads me to op shops. Op shops offer an entertaining and surprising alternative to current fads—you never know what you might find. They are like miniature, affordable museums.

14 When I moved to Canberra I brought with me my collection of over 2,000 magazines, which I have since reduced to a few hundred. When culling, I was struck by how similar people looked, not just in advertisements but in editorial, regardless of whether the magazine was aimed at men or women, young or old.

Collecting

Everything is collectible: everything is photography

The former Head of the National Art School in Sydney, Christine Cornish, once said to me that 'everything is photography'. This year I began using a small, two mega-pixel digital camera. As well as becoming a valuable research tool, it has opened up new ways of working for me. I use this camera like a digital sketch book to freely gather images by just snapping—composing instinctively, not looking, not thinking, just taking. Not having to consider film or developing expenses is liberating and encourages fresh composition. The down side is low resolution, which limits print size. However, I have discovered that re-shooting printed photographs onto film is a workable solution and allows me to merge new and traditional technologies.

Every walk is now spent subconsciously seeking out new subjects or adding to existing digital collections. At home I index my findings for access at some future point.

DIGITAL IMAGE COLLECTIONS & RESEARCH

- ABANDONED TROLLEYS
- ARCADES
- CAR ORNAMENTS
- CHAIN STORES
- CHURCHES
- DISCARDED:
 - BANDAIDS
 - CLOTHING
 - RUBBISH
 - SHOES
 - TREETOPS
- LICENCE PLATES
- MANNEQUINS
- MY HOME
- NEWSPAPER POSTERS
- PEACE SIGNS
- SPRAY-PAINTED ARROWS
- THE NUMBER THIRTEEN



Discarded bandaids seen on the street, 2003, David Wills

Collecting



Mannequins, collection in progress, 2003, David Wills

Toy stories

What is a toy¹⁵? And at what point do we grow out of playing with toys? Judging by the Antique Toy Market held in Canberra recently, probably never if you are a male. It was full of men of a certain age presenting their treasures for sale. The main items on sale were Matchbox cars, a brand denoting prestige. Childhood memories were conjured as I recognised the ones I had once owned. What once cost one dollar could now fetch a couple of hundred dollars.



Untitled, from *Modern Romance*, David Levinthal

At the back of these stalls these men exhibited their most treasured toys in specially-designed travelling display cases. How a collection is displayed is often as important as the collection itself.

Artists and toys

Artists, especially those working with photography, have employed inanimate objects as subject matter for some time. David Levinthal breathes life into Preiser¹⁶ figures to create movement in his photographs. His *Modern Romance* series came about as a result of his interest in Albert Camus' novel *The Stranger*, which explored the absurd and seemingly pointless nature of human existence. Another of Levinthal's works, *Hitler Moves West*, is essentially about the atrocities of war, in particular the Second World War.

The Disasters of War is Jake and Dino Chapman's version of Goya's gruesome etchings of the same title. Carved plastic soldiers re-enact scenes with blood and gore. The Chapman's mannequin sculptures explore the idea of society being inundated with manufactured products, so many that the products become invisible and people no longer see. Their use of genitalia shocks us into looking, making us see.

Mike Kelley's *Craft Morphology Flow Chart* uses toys collected from US thrift shops (the American equivalent of op shops), flea markets and car boot sales. Like the Chapman's, he is interested in the unseen. Kelley's work takes shape from the trivial and the banal in everyday life, borrowing concepts from mass media and psychoanalysis. The fading of the ideal is an essential element of his work. This is an interest I share with Kelley, though the ultimate aim of our work is different. My B3

¹⁵ The *Chambers English Dictionary* describes toys as: a plaything; a thing only for amusement or look; a matter of no importance; and a dwarfbreed.

¹⁶ German-made figures often used in model trainset dioramas.

Toy stories

portraits reinvigorate the toys, intensifying their personalities through the use of a waist-up portrait composition. This approach presents them as beloved family members. Full-figure images would have emphasised their toy heritage, distracting viewers from their facial features. In contrast, Kelley is interested in reducing his toys to specimens, taking the life from them.

Kelley's work continues in the exhibition of the American Dream, I am interested in



Craft Morphology Flow Chart, 1999, Mike Kelley, installation view

Kelley discusses the commodification of artworks. In contrast to 'works of art', homemade craft items are linked to time and the embodiment of the Puritan work ethic, of long hours of labour-intensive work. His craft objects announce that 'work is its own reward'. Craft items are often associated with junk, the effort put into them not always appreciated. Kelley refers to the hours put into the production of these craft items as 'love hours' or even 'guilt hours'. He presents his *Craft Morphology Flow Chart* as a science experiment, toys splayed awaiting dissection.

The text on the right side of the page is partially obscured and appears to be a list of references or a bibliography, including names like 'The American Dream' and 'The American Dream'.

Toy stories

Unlike Kelley's toys, my B3 collection focuses on knitting. I associate knitting with grandmothers and time spent in front of the television, and therefore with popular culture and celebrity. B1 and B2 are celebrities; B3 are possibly rejects of a casting session. Kelley argues that the toy is an adult notion of what a child should be and therefore a movie star is the perfect notion for what an adult should be.

Kelley's work centres on the dysfunction of the American Dream. I am interested on commenting on Australia's identity, rather than its dysfunctions. I was able to collect so many B3s because of the popularity of the Bananas in Pyjamas in Australia. Interestingly, Aboriginal heritage, unless profitable, is largely ignored.

The world of publishing is another link between my work and Kelley's¹⁷. Where he works with newspaper covers, many of my ideas come from my years in magazine publishing and my interest in magazines. One idea I have for a future project involves creating fictitious magazine titles. I am concerned about media sensationalism, the concept of overstimulation, information force-feeding and the use of role models and non-existent characters as magazine names (for example, *Cleo*, *Ralph* and *Frank*) to influence popular opinion.

Also of interest are Christian Boltanski's lost property installations and Annette Messager's assemblages using found stuffed toys. The difference here is that my subjects were never lost, they were unwanted.

I was on a buying trip to Jamison Trash & Treasure markets hoping to find more B3. I noticed a stall of knitted toys, all new and made by a mother and daughter team. I asked if they had any Bananas in Pyjamas. Perplexed, they both shook their heads while the husband/father laughed in the background and added "you've made everything else, but no bananas, ha ha". And indeed they had made everything else. They agreed to make me a Bananas in Pyjamas toy. This is the only one that is not second-hand. When I went back two weeks later, B3 was ready. They had obviously bought the ABC Book, because Mr Squiggle was also on the table in front of me.



B3, 2003

¹⁷ My background in magazine publishing includes working on *Cosmopolitan*, *She*, *The Picture*, *New Weekly (NW)*, *Woman's Day*, *The Mag*, *Elle* and, later, for the Australian Society of Magazine Editors.

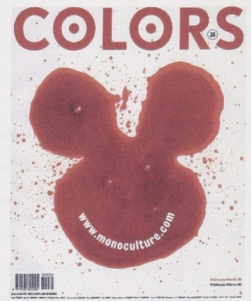
Consumption

My parents are model consumers, they love a new product. They are constantly buying the latest furniture, appliances and televisions. As kids, my brothers and I rarely went without. Our parents wanted us to have all the things they never had. We were the first on the block to have colour television, a pool, a video recorder, and Atari. We were probably also the first family to have debts other than a home loan. Most purchases were on credit: AGC, Grace Brothers, Walton's and Bankcard. My parents are not wealthy, and unless Lotto or the Scratchies¹⁸ come through, they never will be. But they do not go without. At last count they had four computers, networked together on a farm in a place called Hickey's Creek. Neither of them really know how to use them, although Mum is pretty good on the games. From an early age I learnt that you didn't really need money to get what you want, just credit and store cards. Money was almost superfluous.

Even then, in the early days of credit cards, brands were important status symbols. The saturation of our society with consumer-based imagery was brought home to me through browsing magazines. I was often unsure of what magazine I was flipping through: *GQ* or *Cleo*, *Ralph* or *Vogue*, *Vanity Fair* or *The Face*. Each magazine title supposedly targets a different demographic. For example, *Cleo*'s target audience is 18 to 25-year-old women, while *GQ* targets men between 25 and 40. However, the advertisements in each magazine use similar imagery and layouts, irrespective of the magazine's target market. It seemed that the ultimate aim of each magazine was to create a population that looked and lived the same way, irrespective of the target demographic.

Colors, itself a branded magazine (and a spin-off of another well-known brand, Benetton), tackled the subject of monoculturism in a special issue, with photographs of 'big brands' in settings (usually poor, overcrowded countries) that conflicted with the aspirational lifestyles promoted in their ads.

Countries that once had strong identities are beginning to homogenise. People are beginning to look the same; wear the same clothes, shoes and jewellery; smell of the same perfumes. The individual is fading. Marketing is increasingly more important than the physical product. For example, Tommy Hilfiger outsources all production:



Top: *Colors* 36, Monoculturism
Bottom: Bianca Talking, 1999,
Inez van Lamsweerde
& Vinoodh Matadin

¹⁸ Since Scratchies began my mother has bought five (one for each family member) per week. She saves them for Christmas and gives us each equal bundles. We spend Christmas Day 'scratching a fortune'. It is a family tradition. For the past five years I have kept all my losing tickets.

Consumption

underwear by Jockey; jeans by Pepe; shirts by Oxford Industries; footwear by Stride Rite—all labelled and marketed as Tommy Hilfiger, the 'All American' product. Naomi Klein discusses production and the power of branding on a global scale in her book *No Logo*. Generally products fall into three main strands: the top, fine, often hand-produced designer products; the middle, good quality, mass-produced and considerably less expensive versions of designer goods; and the bottom, poor quality, fake middle-class products¹⁹. Such a system is advantageous for brands, as even fakes embellished with a logo do the same job as originals—they extend the brand.

The Bananas in Pyjamas are one of the ABC's strongest brands. Characterless clones of B1 and B2 roll off production lines in the thousands. Branded cards, backpacks and t-shirts are sold in countries where their fame has grown. For example, Chiquita Brands International is the world's largest banana producer. Based in Ohio, it runs huge plantations in Latin America. Chiquita ran a cross-merchandising promotion in US supermarkets in which shoppers who bought a Bananas in Pyjamas video received a coupon entitling them to US\$1.50 worth of its bananas²⁰. Cross-promotion is not new²¹, but it is becoming more insidious and remains largely unchecked. Even I became interested in the concept of 'brand width'²² and how I could relate it to B3: how could I 'milk' the work? What offshoot products could follow?

Constant bombardment is everyday providing confusion and a myriad of questions to answer: What to buy? What to eat? What to wear? This environment suits my mode of working: I glean from junk mail, magazines and rubbish on the sidewalks²³. Though all this means there are constant demands for my attention, it also means I have more options for collecting, documenting and creating new indexes.

To the extent that consumption takes on a symbolic role, and to the degree to which commodities become valued for their 'aura' of symbolic meanings and values rather than their use of exchange value, we may speak of a qualitative change in the nature of commodity consumption. Commodities have become 're-enchanted'. In contradiction to Benjamin's thesis (1968), mass-produced commodities have reacquired an aura of symbolic values.

ROB SHIELDS, LIFESTYLE SHOPPING,
THE SUBJECT OF CONSUMPTION

19 *No Logo*, Naomi Klein, p.24.

20 See Russell Baker's article in *The Bulletin*, December 23, 1997

21 For example, *Woman's Day* is owned by ACP Publishing, which also owns Channel 9. A recent hit was *The Block*, a program about cheap flat renovations and how to attain a high price for little effort. *Woman's Day* ran full page 'articles' each week about *The Block*, thinly-disguised advertising for Channel 9.

22 A good example of brand width is Kit Kat chocolate bars. Recently Kit Kat reinvented itself and launched a range of off-shoot products: Kit Kat White; Kit Kat Orange; Kit Kat Caramel; Kit Kat Mint; Kit Kat Dark; Kit Kat Chunky; Kit Kat Bites; Kit Kat Ice Cream; and Kit Kat flavoured milk. The term 'brand width' basically means saturating the market. Cadbury Chocolates followed suit with ice cream, flavoured milk and even cake mixes.

23 Sydney is great for useless, unwanted objects left on the footpath and if I miss anything about Sydney it is that.



Queanbeyan Arcades, 2003, David Wills

Consumption TIME

The photography of English artist and collector, Martin Parr, looks at banality and the ordinary in mass-society. His images are often humorous, sometimes repulsive, but always engaging. Parr is a prolific photographer. He attributes his obsessive nature to his father, who was an avid bird watcher. I find his dedication as a photographer and collector inspiring.



West Bay, Dorset, 1997, Martin Parr

The history of spinning is a long one, with people engaged with it, firstly using water wheels and later by hand. One lady even asked me to 'take good care' of the loom. Dutch author Gerrit Klaas writes about the history of the Netherlands. He took Rotterdam from a detailed history of that city, noting how sea in the 16th and 17th centuries had led. The Industrial Revolution with its new 'Death of the Village in 1784' Europe which looked at the changing face of villages. He with particular reference to communities, mass-production and, to a degree, the passing of community. This could be a village anywhere in the world. Where people were once self-sufficient, they are now reliant on mass-production. But just for business but for local use. When the very used to produce enough for their own needs, they now produce on a mass scale and have had to change their farming methods to meet the needs of large busy consumers. These farms are now run as businesses and so a

The use of technology and the...
 with becoming things...
 movement and nearly a...
 production...
 getting a...

...is working because...
 'Mortuaria' from Communist...
 commercial after seeing...
 an hour for his business were a...
 symbol of the West. Before...
 the Berlin Wall came down...
 houses were removed in East...
 Germany. They were only...
 available once a year. After the...
 wall came down they became...
 readily available. For Berlin...
 houses communist great...
 together with a group of...
 friends, she gathered against...
 houses becoming readily...
 available in East Germany...

The passing of time

Op Shops are like temporary museums with purchasable, constantly changing exhibitions. These archives of treasured memories have seen changes in the past few years. Smiling, chatty, elderly volunteers have been replaced by younger, hipper staff, presumably paid, canny when it comes to pricing merchandise. The prices in some Sydney op shops wouldn't look out of place in an antique store. Eftpos and credit cards have replaced battered metal cash boxes. Surveillance cameras, like those used in larger department stores, monitor customers.

Change has been rapid, especially in Sydney. My old local St Vincent de Paul store introduced Designer Sale Nights after a swish renovation. Prices rose immediately. New, specially-designed glass cabinets showcased desirable items. This once humble op shop, once for those short on cash, is now more likely to be frequented by those with cash to burn.

To a degree, B3 laments the passing of the character of some op shops. St Vincent de Paul and Salvation Army shops have become like chain stores. A friendly smile and chat in these places is less forthcoming these days. Whereas a purchase may have once triggered a memory in the person behind the counter and a subsequent story, these days you are more likely to get a standard 'Can I help you?'. However, I must say that whenever I took a knitted Banana in Pyjamas toy to the counter, sales assistants engaged with me, fondly telling me tales about their kid's or grandkid's favourite toy. One lady even asked me to 'take good care' of the toy.

Dutch author Geert Mak writes about the history of the Netherlands. His book *Amsterdam* gives a detailed history of that city, noting how particular trends and customs have faded. Mak followed *Amsterdam* with *Jorwerd, Death of the Village in C20th Europe*, which looked at the changing face of village life with particular reference to consumerism, mass-production and, to a degree, the passing of community. This could be a village anywhere in the world. Where people were once self-sufficient, they are now reliant on mass-production, not just for luxuries but for food as well. Where farmers used to produce enough for their own needs, they now produce on a mass scale and have had to change their farming methods to meet the needs of large dairy companies. Their farms are now run as businesses and as a

In the era of technology, our life risks becoming always more anonymous and merely a function of the production process.

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Beatrix (a visiting lecturer in Photomedia from Germany) commented, after seeing B3, on how for her bananas were a symbol of the West. Before the Berlin Wall came down, bananas were rationed in East Germany. They were only available once a year. After the wall came down they became readily available. For Beatrix, bananas represented greed. Together with a group of friends, she protested against bananas becoming readily available in East Germany.

The passing of time

result they must conform to business regulations, keeping ahead of the market and technological advances.

Ed Ruscha's serial book *Real Estate Opportunities* (1970) details properties for sale in Los Angeles. All the properties are unappealing, all have degenerated into disrepair, and he does not try to hide it. I often thought of his gasoline station paintings while considering how I would shoot B3. I was interested in the way Ruscha presented these stations as they were, in a documentary style.

In Susan Stewart's preface to her book *On Longing* she describes her interest in 'the social disease of nostalgia.'²⁴ For me, this apt phrase relates to fads. Many discarded items are forgotten fads. In a way, the B3 toys I have collected represent the passing of a fad. Children have outgrown and no longer play with them, reducing the toys to invisible clutter. When the child grows into an adult, they may become nostalgic for their lost toy, not just as an object but as a memory of the cherished person who made it.

My working hypothesis was that any reasonably long memory—like every collection—is more structured than it seems at first. I think that a collection of photographs, taken apparently at random, or postcards chosen on the spur of the moment, reaching a certain size, will start to draw a route, a map of the imaginary country inside us. By systematically looking through all these images, I am sure to discover behind the apparent disorder a secret map, like one of those treasure maps in stories about pirates.

CHRIS MARKER, DIRECTOR OF *SANS SOLEIL* (1982)



Stills from *Sans Soleil*

²⁴ Susan Stewart, *On Longing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), p. 151.

²⁴ *On Longing*, Susan Stewart, p. 151.

Portraiture

August Sander's *Citizens of the Twentieth Century* is an extraordinary collection of portraits of the German people in the early twentieth century. It has been an immense inspiration. I never tire of looking at these portraits, surveying the depth of emotion within. Though the subject matter of my B3 series and Sander's work are worlds apart, I have striven to bring to my portraits this same depth of emotion. By employing a traditional family portrait mode of representation, I have attempted to instil in each B3 a strong sense of happiness and love.

Ghost portraits, the everyday unseen

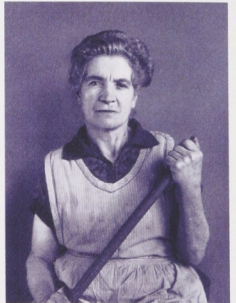
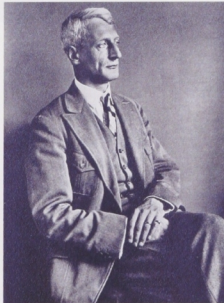
Once, while culling magazines, I watched the movie *Seven*. Brad and Morgan²⁵ were tracking down people who had borrowed a certain book. The records were available on a kind of black market. Fascinating stuff, an interesting notion about privacy. What portrait can be painted of a person by the books they have borrowed from a library? Sequiera also plays with this idea, his 'book' works mirroring himself and his father. What do the titles of my favourite books tell about me: *Underworld*; *Amsterdam*; *Pigs*; *Jorwerd*; *The Death of the Village in Late C20th Europe*; *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds* ...

An offshoot study followed: I photographed bookmarks left behind in library books, salvaged by diligent librarians who had made a collection box for them. The librarian said I could photograph them, as long as I did not photograph any names, did not remove them from the library and did not interfere with anyone using the library.

I have not purposely pursued self-portraiture before. Over the past few years I have kept credit, phone and membership cards that I have owned or used. These cards reveal a part of me that relates to economics, permissions and rules. My personality and physical appearance is secondary in this collection. The data on the cards creates a kind of 'phantom portrait' of me. In a way, B3 is also an unplanned self-portrait. They are as much about me and my habits as they are about their creators and the kids who played with them. Human interaction is integral to the life stories of B3 and many other collections I have been working on this year (such as bandaids left on footpaths, old mannequins trying to sell clothes in shop windows, rubbish and discarded clothing).

²⁵ Brad Pitt and Morgan Freeman. I can't remember the names of their characters in the film. They are the sort of actors I find difficult to disassociate from their celebrity.

Portraiture



From *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, August Sander

Portraiture

Shirts and hangers

In my work, *Family portrait*, I played with the idea of using inanimate objects to expose character. I used coathanger covers—some knitted, some crocheted, one even created using plastic bread bags—made by Nan to bring her back to the present. I have hung my collection of shirts, which reveal something of my character, on these coathangers. Music that I associate with different periods of my life is played in the background. Sound recordings of my mother telling stories about my grandmother are played in the foreground. These audio overlays contribute to the ambience of the work. Nan and I are not photographically depicted at all. Our characters are exposed through the objects we have come into contact with, which reflect our choices of colour, style and material, and my mother's stories.



Stills from *Family portrait*

Family stories

The concept of family has become more important to me over the past eighteen months. Knitting is a pastime I associate with family, and this is something that may also have drawn me to B3. The image to the right shows my grandmother in her early twenties, walking down the main street of Katoomba with her mother, knitting. Nan was always knitting something: booties, coat hangers, tissue-box covers, rugs, slippers, gloves, even telephone covers. My mother knitted too, mostly oversized jumpers. In the 1970s, popular weekly magazines like *Golden Hands* offered patterns, tips and ideas for any number of knitted creations.

Lillian²⁶, an aunt in her mid-fifties, is also a collector. Among her collections are show bags from the Royal Easter Show (collected since the 1950s), cards sent to her by relatives when she was a little girl, used gift-wrapping paper, fridge magnets and souvenirs from others' travels. I will probably never know why she collects, she rarely answers questions. I think, like watching television, it is something to do. To this day I still do not understand why she keeps all the money she has found in one money box, and the money she has won from Scratchies in another.

Both my grandparents were great storytellers. Quite often a story is what would get Lillian to do something she didn't want to do. Until quite recently, Lillian bought *TV Week* religiously the day it went on-sale. Nan had wanted Lillian to get rid of her collection of *TV Weeks* for a long time. Lillian would have nothing to do with this and if Nan went too far with a suggestion the waterworks started. After years, Nan finally came up with a winning story²⁷ and the culling of the *TV Weeks* began. By the time I found out what was happening it was too late; only a few pre-1980s' *TV Weeks* were salvaged. I felt a little saddened, because here was this great collection that so much effort had gone into over the years, one that could well have started from the very first issue of *TV Week*, but now it was gone forever.



Above: My grandmother (left)



Cover of and page from *The ABC for Kids Book of Knitted Toys*; *Golden Hands*' cover

²⁶ Due to three illnesses in quick succession when she was a young girl, Lillian didn't grow up intellectually. She is an eight-year-old woman.

²⁷ Nan told Lillian she had received a letter from the council saying that magazines caused ant and rat infestations and that the council said everyone should throw out their old magazines. This was quite acceptable to Lillian.

Process and presentation

Initially my instinct said 'use a primary colour scheme' for the B3 portraits. I went through the motions, experimenting with blue, lime-green and yellow backgrounds. I tried red velvet drapes, which took them into David Lynch²⁸ territory, while red brick overstated suburban ideals. White was too mugshot-like and black too cold. Except for flat red, all the backgrounds diminished the ability of the viewer to focus on B3. I toyed with video, reinstating a process I used last year that involved filming the toys for twenty seconds and rephotographing them from a TV monitor onto 645²⁹. It took the bananas back to TV-land, it was too obvious, and it diminished their sense of love. I considered video projections and an installation-based format, but decided against them for the same reasons. Someone suggested taking them to a professional portrait studio; a good idea but expensive. It would have made a humorous home-movie, documenting the day I took my children to have their photographs taken. In the end there was no question: framed, loved and physical prints were the only option.

I asked myself: 'What reaction do I want from the viewer? Do I want them to laugh or smile? To nod in recognition and pass by? To stay and consider each image individually, looking for differences and similarities? How could presentation help?'. I looked for reference points and considered other options such as a book or a set of cards. The way Neil Selkirk presented the series *1000 Faces on 42nd Street*³⁰ appealed to me. I found the lack of styling in the photographs alluring: wrinkles, acne, and bad make-up were there for all to see. The faces that really caught my attention were the older ones. Their lines exuded character, they told a story, eyes deep with memory. It intrigued me because I was considering my own aging process at the time.

But I also considered the shortcomings of this series. A thousand faces in one hit is still a lot of faces. Boredom set in as I flicked the pages.

B3 are playful by nature. Early on I toyed with calling B3 'Bechers in Pyjamas'. This stemmed from the fact that other artists seemed so serious about the Bechers' work. Last year, works by the Bechers generated considerable discussion among friends of mine who are artists. Some praised the work, others criticised it, but everyone was

A Korean friend of mine arrived in Australia when she was eight. Her family had fled Korea and spent two years in Iran. We often have long, involved, sometimes humorous conversations. One time we were talking about ideas of culture and race. As an Anglo from a family where generations on both sides were born in Australia, I have no knowledge of what it is like to grow up living in a conflict of cultures. When I first met her she thought of herself as Australian. She didn't feel a great bond with her parents. She said she felt like a banana, yellow on the outside, white on the inside. It took me a few seconds to get what she meant. It is something I have never forgotten.



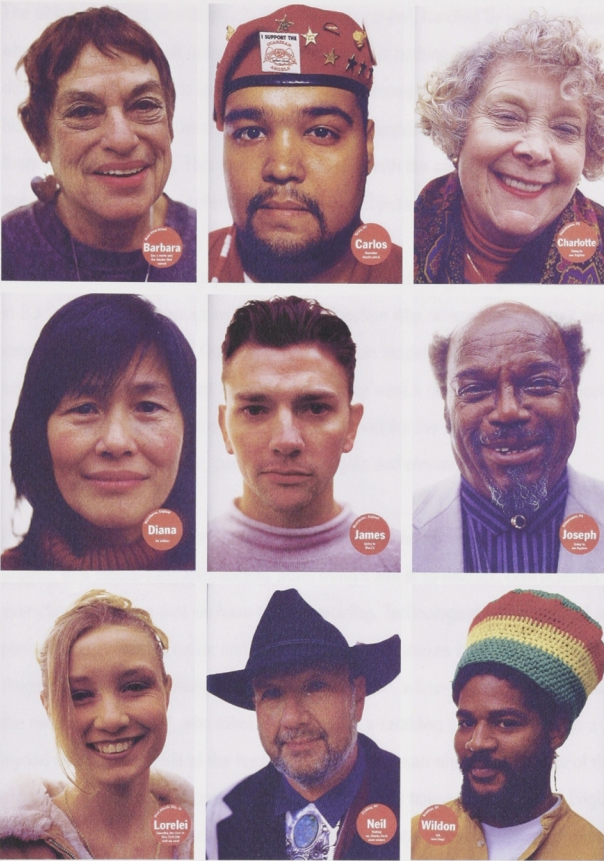
My life as a banana, 2001, David Wills

28 Hollywood film-maker, most famous for *Eraserhead*, *Blue Velvet* and the television series *Twin Peaks*.

29 A film format ratio of 6cm x 4.5cm.

30 A historical record of New Yorkers before reconstruction began on Times Square in 2000, and so pre-September 11, the event that now places everyone, everything and every subsequent event in time. September 11 is an archiving mechanism.

Process and presentation



From 1000 Faces on 42nd Street, Neil Selkirk

very serious about it. I wanted to have some fun with B3. I did consider white frames in three-by-three grids similar to the way the Bechers presented their work, but decided that this approach was unsympathetic to my subjects. I realised that the best configuration for hanging the portraits was in a straight line on a wall. These anthropomorphic characters needed to be presented as treasured family members, or like a line-up of the country's Prime Ministers on the walls of the Halls of Parliament, in gold frames.

Conclusion

The objects I collect almost always have been discarded, handled by unknown humans whose invisible spirits sit in the background. There is nothing more exciting than discovering a discarded treasure. Duchamp championed the use of the found object, his ready-mades being the result. Many artists recompose found objects, imbuing them with new meaning. This method fits perfectly with the concept of recycling. I spend considerable time collecting both physical objects and photographic evidence.

*I wanted to see you there
but without despair*
COLD FEELING
UNDERGROUND LOVERS

Politics seems to filter into my work, quite often unconsciously, though it is less evident in B3 than in some previous works such as *Question Why*, where ideas of trust and censorship came into play. Our current political role models sanction untruths, seemingly teaching that trust has little value. They want a one-size-fits-all monoculture that is easily swayable, a direction that lacks respect for the individual and for humanity. By its very nature, portraiture highlights and elevates the individual.

B3 was actually a distraction. At conception I was looking for celebrity dolls for another project. In a media-saturated society, advertising's aim is to distract. Distraction is an everyday occurrence that we have trouble avoiding. Technological advances, and a plethora of new books, music and other products, also makes it difficult to focus. *The Rings of Saturn* is essentially a book about distraction, a free-flowing journey through the mind of the writer³¹, who takes the reader on a rambling adventure through a myriad of scapes: the life of the herring; silk worms; a man who builds models of the great halls of Rome; an eccentric who lives in a country house in the south of England and makes his servant watch him eat his meals in silence. These seemingly disparate tales highlight the complexities of society and human nature. It reminded me of the individual and the importance of diversity. It reminded me of B3.

An artist working today needs to know far more than those before. In a rapidly-changing society, especially one obsessed with images and information, it is a constant battle to stay on top of everything: technology, rules and regulations, entertainment, the history of art, and so on. More than ever, people need to be a 'jack-of-all-trades', incredibly well-organised and perpetually aware (or should that be alert?). This trend will continue to grow with each generation.

Collecting is more than a distraction for me, it is a 'lifestyle'. Every day I consider new things to collect, new portraits to make.

31 W.G. Sebald, a German writer

Reproduction credits

- 10 Mate, my grandfather, family photo collection
David Sequiera: *Shelf (my father's library)*, 1998, from *David Sequiera* catalogue
Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra 1998
- 14 David Levinthal, *Modern Romance*, St Ann's Press, Los Angeles 2000
- 15 *Craft Morphology Flow Chart*, 1991, Mike Kelley, *Mike Kelley 1985-1996*
Jose Lebrero Stals, Consorci del Museu d'Art Contemporani de Barcelone, Barcelona 1997, pages 56-57
- 17 *Colors*, number 36, Benetton Srl, Italy
Bianca Talking, 1999, cibachrome in plexiglass, Inez van Lamsweerde & Vinoodh Matadin,
Deichtorhallen, Hamburg 1997, plate 4
- 19 Martin Parr: *West Bay, Dorset*, from Williams, Val, *Martin Parr*, Phaidon Press Ltd, London 2002 1997
- 21 *Stills, Sans Soleil*, Chris Marker, VHS 1982
- 23 August Sander, *Citizens of the Twentieth Century*, from top left:
Abiturient (high school graduate), Köln, 1926, plate 380; *Angehöriger der (member of the)*
"Leibstandarte Adolf Hitler", Köln, 1938, plate 245; *Arbeiterkinder (working class children)*, Köln, 1932, plate 373;
Bärenführer (musician with a bear), Westerwald, plate 364; *Bauer (farmer)*, Westerwald, ca. 1931/32, plate 68;
Bauerin (farmer's wife), Westerwald, 1914, plate 5; *Blinde Kinder (blind children)*, Düren, ca. 1930/31, plate 423;
Der Maler (painter) Franz Wilhelm Seiwert, Köln, 1928, plate 323; *Dienstmann (door porter)*, München, 1928, plate 382;
Filmschauspielerin (film actress), Rosy Barsony, ca. 1931/32, plate 306; *Handlanger (hod-carrier)*, Köln, ca. 1928, plate 120;
Junger Nationalsozialist, (Young National-Socialist), Köln, 1936, plate 244; *Kellnerin (waitress)*, plate 387;
Mediziner und Theologe (Physician and theologian), Professor Dr. Karl Barth, Köln, 1929, plate 208;
Politikerin (the politician) Rosa Wolfstein-Fröhlich, Frankfurt, ca. 1928, plate 293;
Putzfrau (cleaning woman), Köln, 1928, plate 389.
- 25 Nan, my grandmother, family photo collection
Book cover and page, *The ABC for Kids Book of Knitted Toys*
Harper, Virginia (Ed), ABC Enterprises, Sydney 2001, cover & page 20
Golden Hands, Part 5 (3rd Edition), Marshall Cavendish Limited, 1967-1972
- 27 *1000 Faces on 42nd Street*, powerHouse Books, New York 2000

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Artists

The Bechers, Sophie Calle, Wim Delvoye, Marlene Dumas, Simryn Gill, Cherry Hood, Mike Kelley, David Levinthal, Martin Parr, Ed Ruscha, August Sander, David Sequiera, Gillian Wearing

Films

Bowling for Columbine; The Gleaners & I; Mon Oncle; Playtime; Russian Ark; Sans Soleil; Travelling Birds; Winter Sleepers

Television

CNN/N; Crank Yankers; Halos and Horns; The League of Gentlemen; The Life of Mammals; Six Feet Under