



# THE BACKBOOT PROJECT

MICHELE BLEVINS VICTORIA BELL BEKAH CARRAN SCOTT  
EADY MICHAEL MORLEY EMILY HAUJING BENJAMIN SMITH  
SIDNEY SMITH ESSAY SUBALINDO GRAPHICS CRAIG MCNAB  
CURATED BY ANNA MUIRHEAD

**Anna Muirhead with Su Ballard,  
Michele Beevors, Victoria Bell, Bekah Carran,  
Scott Eady, Michael Morley, Emily Pauling,  
Benjamin Smith & Sidney Smith**

## INTRODUCTION

The *Back Boot* Project happened around Dunedin, New Zealand, during 2007 and was first conceived of as “Little Politic”, an exhibition which would refer to material-specific, small objects with an emphasis on the intimacy of the small object, the double take, the second glance and the unexpected.

The *Back Boot* Project utilised a moving exhibition space in the back of a 1986 Toyota Corolla. This space operated as a vehicle for artists to locate their work outside the usual gallery sphere and to take it into public spaces. The *Back Boot* Project was primarily about space – like the gallery it had its own set of limitations and challenges. Each artist contributed their own individual projects to the BBP and could – because their work was shown in the back boot of the car – implicitly refer to other ideas concerning mobility, non-space or transitional spaces.

A poster show was the final *Back Boot* manifestation for 2007 and included A1 posters of each *Back Boot* contribution. These showed remnants of exhibitions and objects that had been exhibited from boot to gallery in pseudo-documentary fashion. The poster show was exhibited at the Blue Oyster Project Space from 13 November 2007. Anna Muirhead was the curator, Su Ballard wrote the text; other artists included Michele Beevors, Victoria Bell, Bekah Carran, Scott Eady, Michael Morley, Emily Pauling, Benjamin and Sydney Smith. Craig McNab provided graphics assistance and Sara Clark designed flyers. Su Ballard’s text is included on the following pages and the artists’ posters are included thereafter.

## Car Boot Libraries

The Ecologic Foundation of New Zealand has recently advised drivers to not “use your car boot for permanent storage. The extra weight exacts its price in extra fuel consumption.”<sup>1</sup> Despite the warning, the Australian naturalist Marilyn T Grey keeps a “car-boot library” for use on field trips.<sup>2</sup> Grey is particularly interested in threatened species such as the Squirrel Glider, Brush-tailed Phascogale, Regent Honeyeater, Swift Parrot, Pink-Tailed Worm-Lizard and the Woodland Blind Snake, who all live in South Australia’s Box-Ironbark country. With his car boot library Grey is able to travel into the wilderness comfortable in the knowledge that he can identify any inhabitant species he may encounter.

This tension between the weight of storage and the necessity of carriage is even more pronounced in the mobile libraries that still operate weekly circuits in most major towns in New Zealand. The mobile library offers an opportunity for direct physical access to visual, textual and sonic materials. The Palmerston North Mobile Library website records the history and necessary adaptations of its book bus. The increasing weight of books led first to the replacement of the bus’s wheel-base in June 1970, followed by the strengthening of its chassis in August 1971.<sup>3</sup> Key to a mobile library is a diversity of materials and resources mapped through the anticipated tastes of the visiting public. The constant repairs document the maintenance of a delicate balance between the weight of information and necessity of transport. The book bus, like the car boot library, is less an information-companion and more a mobilised and networked distribution method.

It is in this context that Anna Muirhead’s *Back Boot* Project can be located. *Back Boot* is a temporary, peripatetic and contained gallery space that challenges a sense of fixed cultural storage and data access. It is an informational container, yet mobile, and the works within are less didactic than exploratory. Despite their limited and itinerant shelf-life, the series of installations that Muirhead curated forms a new kind of car boot library. This library is paradoxically non-archival, and the collection is not readily available for loan. Temporally and spatially limited, it exists through documentation and memory. It is relational; dependent on the activities of its visitors and determined by the shifting locations of road transit. The installations that make up the library have variously inserted themselves into the fragile ecology that is the back boot.

So, how to catalogue such a library? Cataloguing is the process of finding relationships and generating order. It is a temporary, provisional activity. For the meantime, I am going to generate my own car boot library by indexing the *Back Boot Project* through a set of meta-data labels. This process of information collation based on direct encounter means that like Grey, if confronted with another, I can locate and identify, observe and document.

### 335. *Human/Animal Relationships.*

Most teens desire some version of the 'back seat of the car' story. But aging populations and contoured ergonomics mean that the wide berth of a Holden is no longer available to all. Victoria Bell's installation *Horseplay* offers likely punters the opportunity to catch up on missed opportunities and re-live hidden fantasies. *Horseplay* is a strangely erotic fur saddle centred on a tartan rug. Located in a liminal space the visitor to this back boot is encouraged to picnic and frolic. Such human/animal relationships play on the essential anthropomorphism of the car. It is more than a stable; it is the horse itself.

### 324. *Terrestrial Vertebrates: Life History and Ecology.*

Without strictly adhering to *Bensley's Practical Anatomy of the Rabbit* and yet designed to satisfy a basic interest in zoology, Michele Beevors's bunnies also challenge the reproductive fumbblings of the backseat.<sup>4</sup> The film crew are on set, and *Carnage* awaits the poll results. How will the viewing public receive this cautionary tale? Beevors introduces a hierarchy of stardom to the traditional rabbit ecosystem, which is based on the formation of huge egalitarian burrows. Instead, they play close to the edge. Through the machinations of this feral brand of Hollywood, the individual may triumph. Conducting their own stunts and gambling with more than their lives, they beg the question: why did the rabbit cross the road?

### 360. *Extinction of Species.*

It is not only animal species that have limited tenure. Inflationary pressures can often render small monetary denominations extinct. Small pockets live on in the back of sofas, and collectors race to secure the final issue. Scott Eady's *Small Change (In God We Trust)* enables a coded access to the back boot. To melt a coin is a criminal offence – the question is, of which kind? It only became illegal to melt coins in the United States of America on December 14, 2006.<sup>5</sup> This is the moment at which the value of the metal surpassed the value of the currency printed on it. Interestingly, the New Zealand Mint lists the melting point of each metal used in the minting process.<sup>6</sup> Is this an encouragement? If so, Eady takes up the challenge. The result is a talisman – something to protect the driver and in which they place their trust.

### 379. *Principles of Wildlife Management.*

Like God, a general must always understand the movements of his troops. In *Petraeus* Michael Morley slows the speed of transmission but amplifies its effects. US Army Lt. Gen. David Petraeus has been heralded as "the military's warrior-scholar" because of his "adaptive thinking."<sup>7</sup> The general principles of anticipation and change come into play both on and off the battlefield. Petraeus says "The truth is not found in any one school of thought, and

arguably it's found in discussion among them...This is a flexibility of mind that really helps you when you are in ambiguous, tough situations."<sup>8</sup> Morley combines this understanding of collaborative movement with a sound track that both entices a listener to dance and makes it impossible to continue. Anticipation and change become capture and release.

#### 401. *Physiological Animal Ecology.*

Desire is a strange force. It is a momentum that kicks in from a young age and can propel people well beyond their comfort zones. Instead of fire-fighting and space travel, Ben Smith suggests that childhood desires do not need to extend further than wanting a small red car and the possibility to make a critical or creative contribution to society. Or is it simply that he shows us a desire for freedom, movement and the breath of wind on his face? This kind of physiological desire is more than procreative, as it offers an opportunity for animals to move beyond their common environment and to travel at speed.

#### 515. *Renewable Resources Policy.*

Bekah Carran's *Cosy Dell: A Portable Garden* documents another kind of desire. Taking the oil companies at their word and planting more than a tree for each leg of travel, Carran established a complete ecosystem within the *Back Boot*. The tomatoes, calendula and pansies offer a model of sustainability by emitting oxygen to combat the fumes of a not-so-modern hatchback. This is not simply utopic modelling; Carran's garden grows. Over two weeks of sustained growth, the tomatoes fruited, the flowers sprouted, and the strawberries appeared to have been pollinated by some unseen force. This literal ecology suggests that the formation of community gardens need not be in fixed locations, as *Cosy Dell: A Portable Garden* brought together groups of engaged viewers keen to tend and protect. Relationships were fashioned and ideas were seeded.

#### 630. *Ecotoxicology: Toxicant Effects on Ecosystems.*

The result of any closed ecosystem is that at some point emergent growth will occur. Small changes at the bottom of a hierarchy will mean new forms emerge: new structures, new species, new technologies. In *Untitled (The End)* Emily Pauling points to the inevitable side-effect of systemic change. At some point individual elements within the system will be left behind. A car will break down, a flower will pollinate and fruit, a book will tear, a body will fracture. Pauling offers a sombre monument to these passings. Like the car boot itself, Pauling's veneered interior conceals as much as it reveals. It is an object for transport within a space of transit. It reminds me of the revamped 1960s hearse with the number plate MORBD that cruises my neighbourhood.

#### 984. *General Collection Principles.*

For a few months a man lived in his car outside my office. Each morning he would stand outside the car cleaning something, doing his housework. We never conversed, but as I walked past on the way for a morning coffee I tried to surreptitiously read the titles of the books he had stashed hard up against the back window. He isn't parked outside any more. Now I wonder

more about the contents of his car boot library. Maybe he has read of a place to travel and simply moved.

*Back Boot* presents a library of objects in formation. Within the car boot of a small red hatchback, Muirhead has established a specific location for networked and mobilised sculpture. Like a library, the *Back Boot* is both a surface for inscription and the inscription itself. To put it another way: an object and an installation. What does this mean for sculptors who like to divide themselves along the semantic divisions of installation and object? Is it possible to continue to make “objects”? The *Back Boot* renders all objects within its bounds kinetic. And when kinetic, sculpture shifts disciplinary boundaries; it is space and time read together. Here in the *Back Boot* the object is networked, the installation is mobilised, and the library recirculates.

- 1 Based in Nelson, the Ecologic Foundation wants a sustainable world. “We believe such a world can only be created by bringing Ecology, Economy and Ethics into harmony. We can claim sustainable progress when all three are improving together – but not otherwise.” See <http://www.ecologic.org.nz/> (visited 10 November 2007).
- 2 I have taken some liberty with Grey’s statements in *The Victorian Naturalist*. See Marilyn J Grey *The Victorian Naturalist*, vol. 123(2), 2006. *The Victorian Naturalist* has been published by the Field Naturalists Club since 1884 and is issued six times a year. It accepts articles on natural history relevant to Victoria and Australia. All articles are refereed, and the aim is to have a mixture of scientific research reports, naturalist notes and articles suitable for a wide audience. See <http://home.vicnet.net.au/~fncv/vicnat.htm> (visited 12 November 2007).
- 3 Palmerston North City Libraries. “The Mobile Library, with its award-winning design, goes to 39 stops around the city. On board you will find: books (including large print), magazines, audiobooks, music CDs, DVDs, CD-ROMs and more, a friendly, personal service. Use the bus timetable to see when the bus will be in your neighbourhood.” See <http://citylibrary.pncc.govt.nz/mobile-library.html> (visited 12 November 2007).
- 4 BA Bensley, *Practical Anatomy of the Rabbit* (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1948). For broader contexts of *Carnage* and his film see “This Day in Disney History: ‘where there’s always a great big beautiful tomorrow’.” <http://thisdayindisneyhistory.homestead.com/Apr01.html> (visited 12 November 2007).
- 5 The change in law was reported on a number of news sites, see for example: Barbara Hagenbaugh “New rules outlaw melting pennies, nickels for profit” *USA Today*, 14 December 2006. [http://www.usatoday.com/money/2006-12-14-melting-ban-usat\\_x.htm](http://www.usatoday.com/money/2006-12-14-melting-ban-usat_x.htm) (visited 12 November 2007); and Quiana Burns “U.S. Mint Moves to Ban Penny Melting” *ABCNews* 14 December 2006, <http://abcnews.go.com/Business/story?id=2725597&page=1> (visited 12 November 2007).
- 6 See “The New Zealand Mint, Te Kamupene Whakanao o Aotearoa.” [http://www.newzealandmint.com/nzmint.mv?page=bullion\\_brochure](http://www.newzealandmint.com/nzmint.mv?page=bullion_brochure) (visited 12 November 2007).
- 7 Julian E Barnes “An Open Mind for a New Army,” *U.S. News and World Report*, 31 October 2005. <http://www.usnews.com/usnews/news/articles/051031/31petraeus.htm> (visited 12 November 2007).
- 8 Quoted in Barnes “An Open Mind for a New Army.”



Michele Beevors, *Carnage*, 2007.



Victoria Bell, *Horseplay*, 2007.





Bekah Carran, *Cosy Dell: A Portable Garden*, 2007.



Scott Eady, *Small Change (In God We Trust)*, 2007.



Michael Morley, *Petraeus*, 2007.



Emily Pauling, *Untitled (The End)*, 2007.



THE BACK BOOT PROJECT

BENJAMIN SMITH & SIDNEY SMITH WHEN I GROW UP I WANNA BE AN ARTIST WITH A RED CAR 2007

Benjamin Smith & Sidney Smith, *When I Grow Up I Wanna Be An Artist With a Red Car*, 2007.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Back Boot* Project was an umbrella project of the Blue Oyster Project Space and had assisted funding from Dunedin Creative Communities. The *Back Boot* Project would especially like to thank **Cara Paterson** for her assistance and support.

The *Back Boot* Project was curated by **Anna Muirhead** who is a sculptor on whom an MFA Degree will be conferred by Otago Polytechnic in December 2008. Muirhead is currently the William Hodges Fellow at the Southland Museum and Art Gallery in Invercargill, New Zealand. Her continuing project *Evergreen* focuses on constructed environments, the garden and the landscape.

**Su Ballard** contributed a text fiction-critique entitled “Car Boot Libraries” to the BBP. Her writing is included in these artists’ pages and an excerpt was exhibited as a wall-piece in the poster show. Su Ballard is Head of Electronic Arts and senior lecturer in Art Theory in the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic, Dunedin. Her research focuses on digital aesthetics, visual culture, sound, and media ecologies. She holds an MA in Women’s Studies from the University of Otago and completed her PhD through the Centre for Contemporary Art and Politics at the University of New South Wales, Sydney. Su is also a curator, writer, and musician.

**Michele Beevors** contributed *Carnage* to the BBP. She is a senior lecturer and Head of Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin. Michele holds an MFA from Columbia University and an MArt (Visual Arts) from The Australian National University School of Art. She has exhibited in the US, Australia and New Zealand.

**Victoria Bell** contributed *Horseplay* to BBP. She is a practicing artist and an MFA candidate. Currently a lecturer in Textiles at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art, she relocated to Ōtepoti Dunedin from Ōtautahi Christchurch after receiving the Olivia Spencer Bower Award in 2005.

**Bekah Carran** contributed *Cosy Dell: A Portable Garden* to the BBP. She is a sculptor who exhibits regularly in New Zealand. Carran received a BFA from the Otago Polytechnic School of Fine Art in 1998; was the Olivia Spencer Bower Artist-in-Residence in Christchurch in 2003 and was a Physics Room Artist-in-Residence in 2007. Carran is a selected artist for the pending *One Day Sculpture; a New Zealand-Wide Series of Temporary Artwork* for late 2008. She is the mother of Ava and Sadie. Carran lives and works in Dunedin, New Zealand.

**Scott Eady**’s work for the BBP is entitled *Small Change (In God We Trust)*. He is a sculptor who exhibits regularly in New Zealand. He holds an MFA from Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, and was the winner of the Wallace Award in 2003. He is currently a lecturer in Sculpture at Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin.

**Michael Morley** holds a Bachelor of Arts from the University of Otago and a Masters of Fine Arts from the University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Morley has a national and international profile as a musician and painter. He lives and works in Dunedin. His contribution to the BBP is called *Petraeus*.

**Emily Pauling** is a sculptor who exhibits regularly in New Zealand. She holds a Post-graduate Diploma in Fine Arts from the School of Art at Massey University, Wellington. She is currently working in Melbourne, Australia and her contribution to the BBP is called *Untitled (The End)*.

**Benjamin Smith** is an artist who completed a BFA, majoring in Sculpture in 2006 at the School of Art, Otago Polytechnic. He currently lives in Glasgow, Scotland, where he is developing a research-based practice that explores processes of othering by dominant cultures. He also likes to climb mountains. His daughter, **Sidney Smith**, contributed the drawing for their contribution to the BBP called *When I Grow Up I Wanna Be An Artist With a Red Car*. Sidney is an aspiring artist who was born in Dunedin in 2003. When she grows up she wants to be an artist with a red car.

**Craig McNab** is a candidate in the Master of Fine Arts Programme at the Otago Polytechnic School of Art in Dunedin. He has photographed in a subjective documentary style for some twenty-five years and is currently undertaking a project that involves the nocturnal transit of city space. Craig provided graphics assistance for the BBP. **Sara Clark** created the flyer designs for the project.