

Michael Stevenson

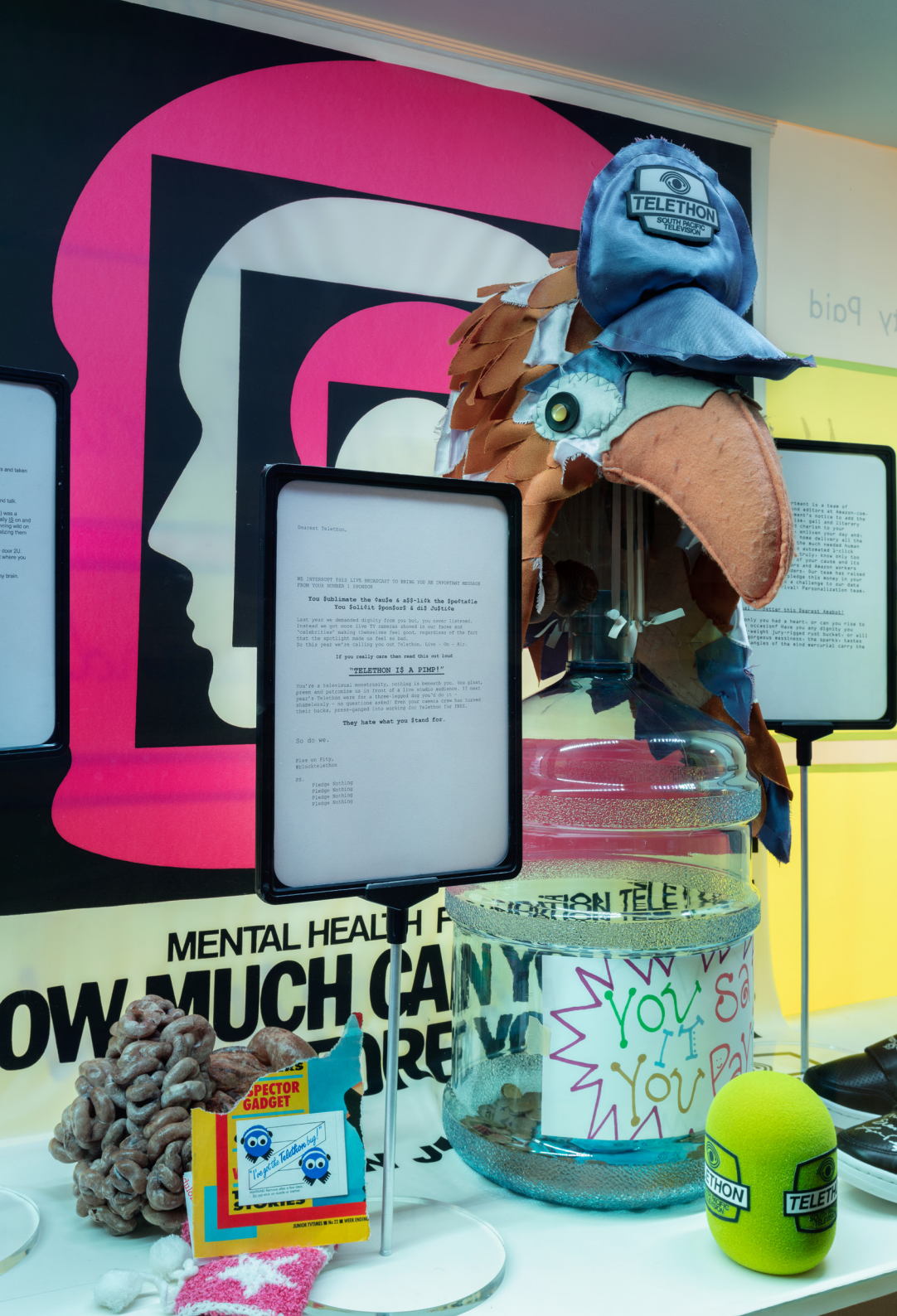
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Michael Stevenson
Installation view of the exhibition
Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief
at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2021
Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Michael Stevenson
Hold Up to Live Camera, 2021
Installation view of the exhibition
Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief
at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2021
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Michael Stevenson
The Cheap Heat
2021
(Incl. Color Television Camera Fese KC U 40, 1969/76; Zoom Lens Schnider Variogon, ca. 1967; Loan Stiftung Deutsches Technikmuseum Berlin)
Installation view of the exhibition
Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief
at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2021
Courtesy the artist; Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Michael Stevenson

Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183, 2017/21

Commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki with commissioning partners the Biennale of Sydney 2018
and Monash University Museum of Art | MUMA.

Commission supported by the Contemporary Benefactors of Auckland Art Gallery, Chartwell Trust, Auckland,
Contemporary Art Trust, Auckland Art Gallery International Ambassadors and Michael Lett, Auckland.

Installation view of the exhibition *Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief*
at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2021

Courtesy the artist, Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, and Fine Arts, Sydney

Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Michael Stevenson
Like a Fish Needs a Bicycle, 2020/21
Installation view of the exhibition
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Michael Stevenson

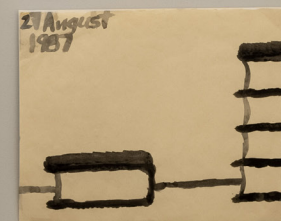
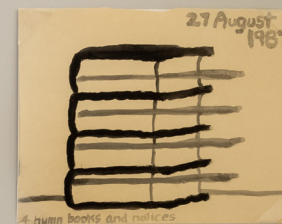
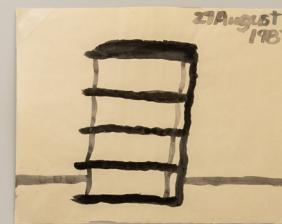
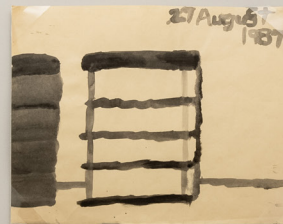
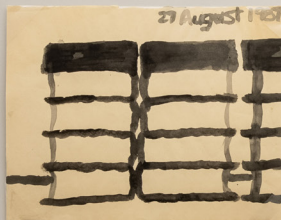
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Installation view of the exhibition *Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief*
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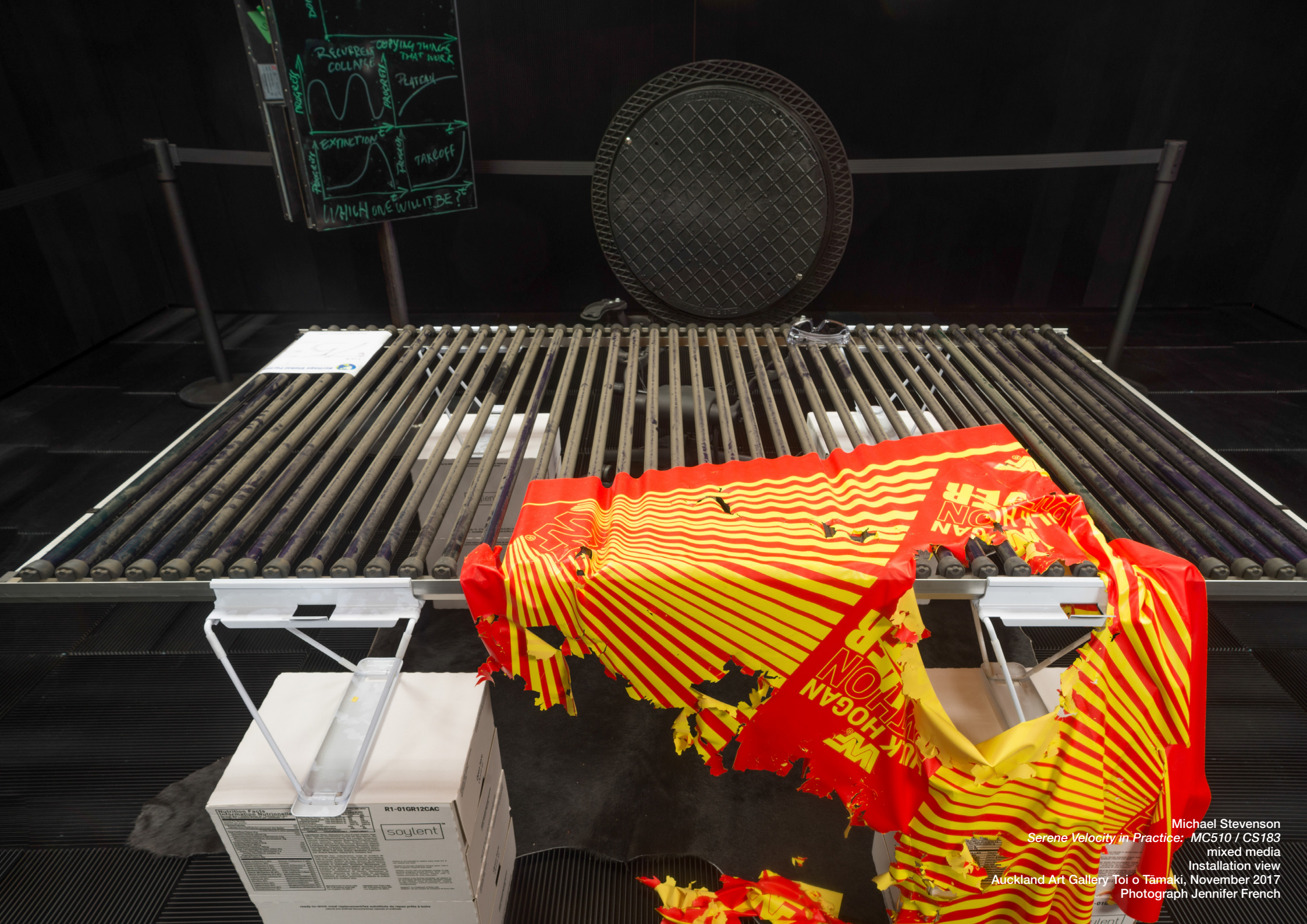
Courtesy the artist, Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, and Fine Arts, Sydney
Photo: Andrea Rossetti



Installation view of the exhibition
Michael Stevenson Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief
 at KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin 2021
 Courtesy the artist; Photo: Frank Sperling



Michael Stevenson
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510 / CS183
mixed media
Installation view
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, November 2017
Photograph Jennifer French



Michael Stevenson
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510 / CS183
mixed media
Installation view
Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, November 2017
Photograph Jennifer French



Michael Stevenson
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510 / CS183
mixed media
Installation view
Carriageworks, 21st Biennale of Sydney, March 2018
Photograph Zan Wimberley



Michael Stevenson
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510 / CS183
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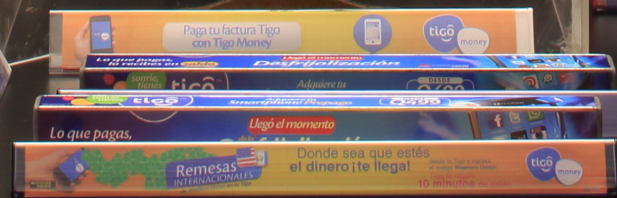
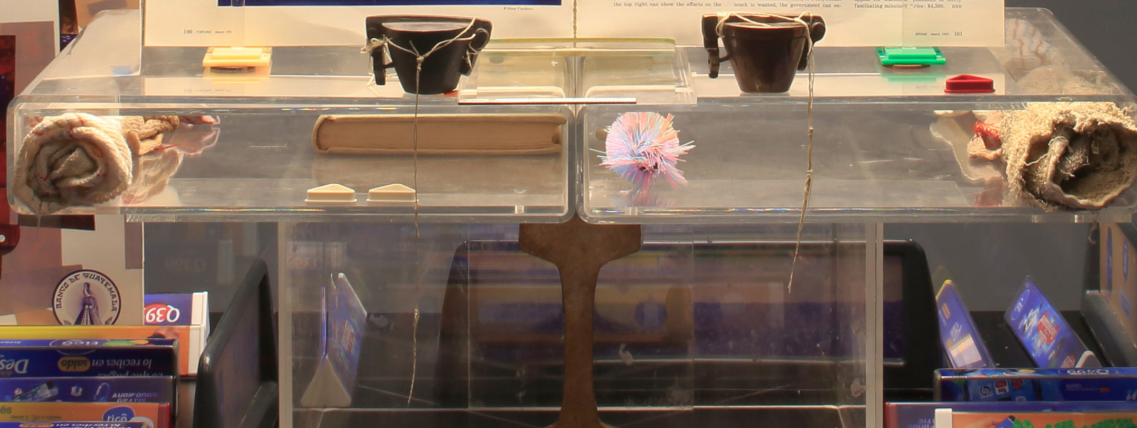
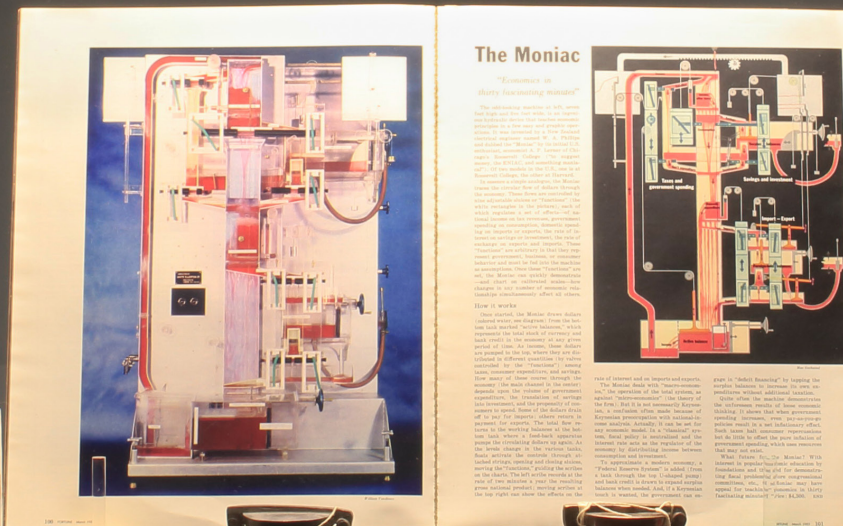
Michael Stevenson
Inside the Keep Out Shed
Installation view
Michael Lett, October 2017
Photograph Alex North



Michael Stevenson
Transparency Masters
Installation view
Art Basel, Basel, October 2016
Photograph Sebastiano Pellion di Persano



Michael Stevenson
Transparency Masters
Installation view
Art Basel, Basel, October 2016
Photograph Sebastiano Pellion di Persano



Michael Stevenson
Fortune
 2011/ 2015
 Mixed media
 1860 x 1200 x 900mm
 Installation view
 Dojima River Biennale, Dojima River Forum, Ōsaka, 2015
 Photograph Keizo Kioku



Michael Stevenson
Left Behind
2014

double-sided, illuminated advertising vitrine with changer; heliographic
prints; posters
advertising vitrine 2750 x 1610 x 1150mm; each print 1750 x 1190mm
Installation view
Berlin Biennale, July 2014
Photograph Anders Sune Berg



Michael Stevenson
Left Behind
2014

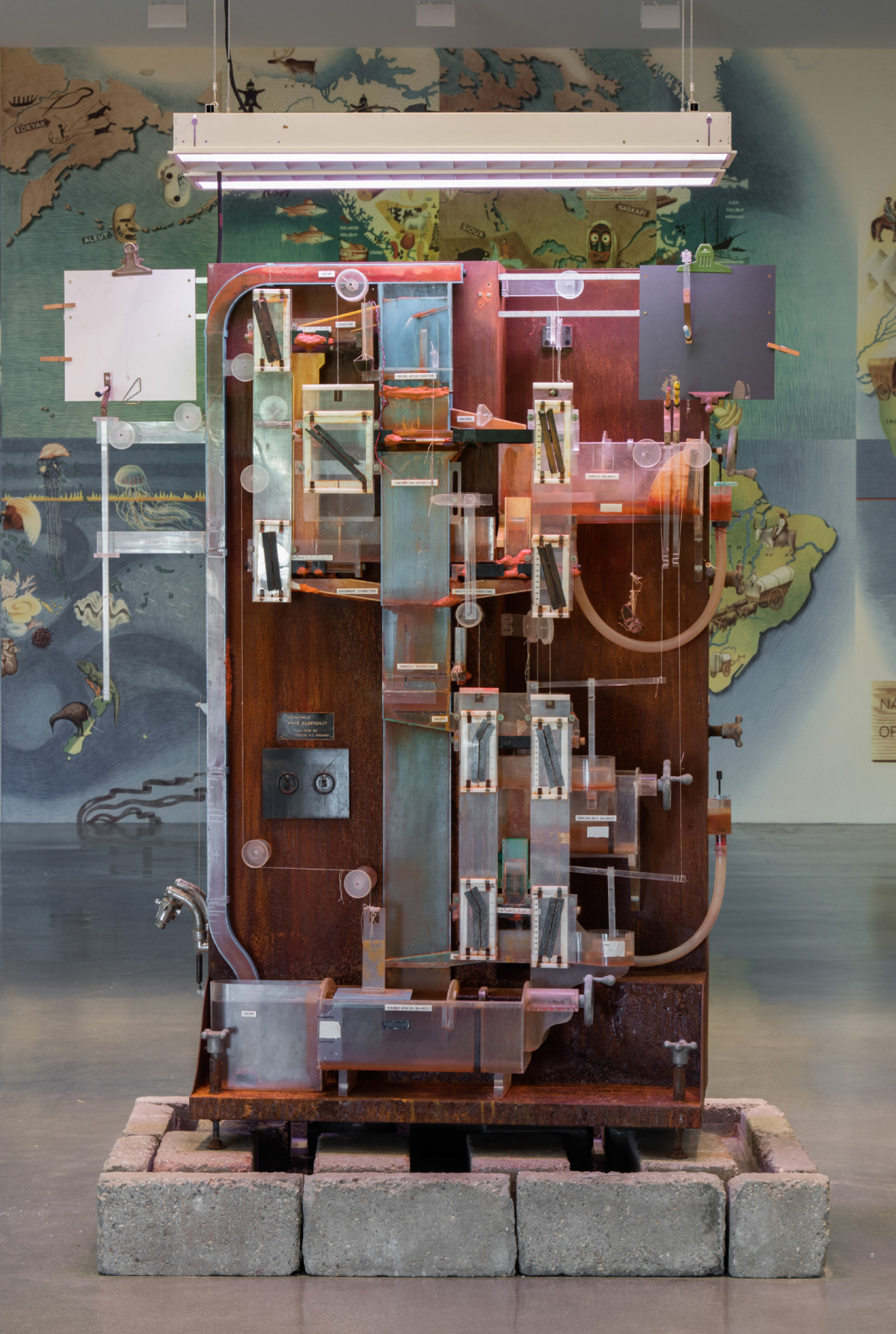
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Installation view
Berlin Biennale, July 2014
Photograph Anders Sune Berg



Michael Stevenson
Proof of the Devil
2013
Installation view
Michael Lett, August 2013
Photograph Alex North



Michael Stevenson
Proof of the Devil
2013
Installation view
Michael Lett, August 2013
Photograph Alex North



Michael Stevenson
The Fountain of Prosperity
2006

plexiglas, steel, brass, aluminum, rubber, cork, string, concrete, dyed
water, pumps and fluorescent lamps

Installation view

Regen Projects, September 2017

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Promised gift of Patricia Phelps
de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of
Gonzalo Parodi

Photograph Brian Forrest

Michael Stevenson

Born 1964, New Zealand
Lives and works in Berlin, Germany

Michael Stevenson uses historical research and reconstruction to produce installations and artworks that index social, economic, and ideological global forces. His works frequently bring viewers into contact with the material and tangible consequences of such forces and the physical realities they produce.

Stevenson received a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Elam School of Fine Arts, Auckland in 1986. Based in Berlin since 2000, his work has been included in international exhibitions including the 21st Biennale of Sydney (2018); Liverpool Biennale (2014), Berlin Biennale 8 (2014), the 6th Berlin Biennale (2010); the 2nd Athens Biennial (2009) and the 5th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane (2006). In 2003 Stevenson was selected as New Zealand's representative at the 50th Venice Biennale, exhibiting *This is the Trekka* at the New Zealand pavilion.

Significant institutional exhibitions include: *Chosen Memories*, Museum of Modern Art, New York (2023), *The Earth is Flat Again*, Muzeum Sztuki, Lodz (2021), *Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief*, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (2021); *Michael Stevenson, a solo exhibition*, Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam (2020), *Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183*, Monash University Museum of Art (MUMA), Melbourne (2019), 21st Biennale of Sydney, Carriageworks, Sydney (2018) and Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki (2017); *Signs & Wonders*, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2015), *Viewing Room: Michael Stevenson*, SculptureCenter, New York (2015), *The Chronicle of Interventions*, Tate Modern, London (2013); *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarity, and Blindness*, Portikus, Frankfurt (2012) and *Michael Stevenson*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney (2010). Since 2011 Stevenson has held a professorship in sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts, Nuremberg and in early 2023 he was artist in residence at Parehuia McCahon house in Titirangi.

AWARDS & ACHIEVEMENTS

2005
Awarded a work grant by the Senatsverwaltung für Wissenschaft, Forschung und Kultur, Berlin

2003
Selected to represent New Zealand at the 50th Venice Biennale

SELECTED EXHIBITIONS

2023
Waiting for the Other Shoe to Drop: seating proposals for a Grantmaker, Michael Lett 3 East St, Auckland (solo)
Chosen Memories: Contemporary Latin American Art from the Patricia Phelps de Cisneros Gift and Beyond, Museum of Modern Art, New York City (group)

2022
The Cheap Heat, Fine Arts, Sydney (solo)

2021
The Earth is Flat Again, Muzeum Sztuki, Łódź (group)
Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief, KW Institute for Contemporary Art, Berlin (solo)

2020
Michael Stevenson, a solo exhibition, FKA Witte de With, Rotterdam, Netherlands (solo)

2019
Modern Nature, Michael Lett, Auckland (group)

2018
This is New Zealand, City Gallery Wellington (group)
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183, 21st Biennale of Sydney, Carriageworks (group)

2017
Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, Auckland (solo)
Inside the Keep Out Shed, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Primordial Saber Tararear Proverbiales Sílabas Toni cantos Para Sublevar Tecnocracias Pero Seguir Tenazmente Produciendo Sociedades Tântricas – Pedro Salazar Torres (Partido Socialista Trabajador), Regen Projects, Los Angeles (group)

2016
Transparency Masters, Art Basel, Basel (solo)
Signs & Wonders, Carl Freedman Gallery, London (solo)
Signs & Wonders, Midway Contemporary Art, Minneapolis (solo)

2015
Signs & Wonders, Kunsthal Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (solo)
Project 35: The Last Act, Garage Museum of Contemporary Art, Moscow (group)
Group Show, Michael Lett, Auckland, (group)

Take Me To The River« Dojima River Biennale, Dojima River Forum, Osaka (group)
Viewing Room: Michael Stevenson« SculptureCenter, New York (solo)

2014

The Chronicle of Interventions, Tate Modern, London (solo)
Berlin Biennale, Dahlem Museum, Berlin (group)
Strategic-Level Spiritual Warfare, Liverpool Biennale, Liverpool (group)

2013

Proof of the Devil, Michael Lett, Auckland (solo)
Listening in the Ruins of the 20th Century, UTS Gallery, Sydney (solo)

2012

A Life of Crudity, Vulgarly, and Blindness, Portikus, Frankfurt am Main (solo)
Nueva matemática, Museo Rufino Tamayo, Mexico City Museum Tamayo, Mexico City, Mexico (solo)
Animal Spirits: fables in the parlance of our times, artist book, co-authored with Jan Verwoert, co-illustrated with the artist's mother, published by Christoph Keller editions, JRP Ringier Zürich (solo)
Generali Foundation, Vienna (solo)

2011

Michael Stevenson, MCA Sydney, Australia (solo)
The Global Contemporary Art Worlds After 1989, ZKM, Karlsruhe, Germany (group)
Un'Espressione Geografica, Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Torino (group)
Dystopia; After 4000 Years Of Sci-Fi, CAPC, Bordeaux (group)

2010

A Question of How Thing Behave, Objectif Exhibitions, Antwerp (group)
Introduction a la Teoria de la Probalidad, Etablissement d'en face, Brussels (group)
Never The Same River (Possible Futures, Probable Pasts), Camden Arts Centre, London (group)
6th Berlin Biennale, Berlin (group)
Morality: Act XI: Remember Humanity, Witte de With, Centre for Contemporary Art, Rotterdam (group)
There is No Alternative, Konst Hall C and Romanian Cultural Institute, Sweden (group)
Ou la Vie Saisie par l'Art, CAPC Musee d'art contemporain de Bordeaux, Bordeaux (group)
Last Ride in a Hot Air Balloon, 4th Auckland Triennale, Auckland (GROUP)
La Ciudad Interpretada/The City Interpreted, Public Art Project, curated by Pablo Fanego, Santiago de Compestella (group)
The Mirage of History, Kaleidoscope Project Space, Milan, curated by Yann Chateigne Tytelman Feinkost, Berlin (group)

2009

Snow Melts in the Upper Clutha, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (solo)
Introduction a la Teoria de la Probalidad, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney (solo)
The Malady of Writing, MACBA, Barcelona, Spain (group)
Heaven, 2nd Athens Biennial, Athens (group)
Michael Stevenson and Edith Dekyunt, Meyer Rieger Karlsruhe, Berlin (group)
A Despot in Flora's Garden, Simon Preston Gallery, New York (group)

2008

The Place To Be, Kröller Müller, Otterlo, Netherlands (solo)
Persepolis 2530, Arnolfini, Bristol (solo)
The Sweet Burnt Smell of History, 8th Panama Art Biennial, Panama City (group)
Göteborgs Konsthall, Sweden curated by Mats Stjernstedt (group)
Familiar Terrain curated by Gregor Jansen and Thomas Thiel, ZKM, Karlsruhe (group)
Not Quite How I Remember It, The Power Plant, Toronto, cur. Helena Rickett (group)

2007

Answers to Some Questions About Bananas, Vilma Gold, London (solo)
Persepolis 2530, Art Unlimited, Art Basel (solo)
2006 C/O The Central Bank of Guatemala, CCA Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, San Francisco (solo)
Kunstbank, (with Iris Kettner), Berlin (solo)
The Irresistable Force, Tate Modern, London (group)

2006

Asia-Pacific Triennale, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane (group)

2005

The Smiles Are Not Smiles, Vilma Gold, London (solo)
The Gift, Neuer Aachen Kunstverein, Aachen (solo)
Michael Stevenson Retrospective, Museum Abteiberg, Monchengladbach (cat.) (solo)
Economics in Thirty Fascinating Minutes, Wattis Institute CCA, San Francisco (cat.) (solo)
Saltuna, Roseum, Malmo (group)
Monuments for the USA, Wattis Institute for Contemporary Arts, CCA, San Francisco; White Columns, New York (group)

2004

Rakit, KIAD, Canterbury
Argonauts of the Timor Sea, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney (solo)
Keim (with Cornelia Schmidt-Bleek), Galerie Kamm, Berlin (solo)

2003

This is the Trekka, New Zealand Pavillion, Biennale di Venezia, Venice (solo)
To Our German Friend, Vilma Gold, London (solo)
An Evening without Immendorf, Artists studio, Berlin (solo)

2002

An Evening with Jorg Immendorf, Hyatt Hotel, Auckland (solo)

2001

The Broccoli Maestro and The Strange Voyage of Bas Jan Ader, Malksten, Dusseldorf (solo)

2000

Daily Practice, Lombard-Freid Fine Arts, New York (solo)
Non-Objective Brass, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra (solo)
Songs of Life: The Melbourne International Biennale, RMIT Gallery, Court House Hotel and Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
Genealogy, (with Steven Brower), Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth (solo)
Call Me Immendorff, Galerie Kapinos, Berlin (solo)
Residency, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth (solo)
Slave Pianos, China Art Objects, Los Angeles (solo)
Separated at Birth, Lombard-Freid Fine Arts, New York (solo)

1999

Slave Pianos: The Music of the City, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney (solo)
Emancipate the Dissonance, Lombard-Fried Fine Arts, New York (solo)

1998

The Gift of Critical Insight, Lombard-Freid Fine Arts, New York (solo)
Jesus Changed My Life in Eketahura, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand (solo)

1997

Pre Millennial (with Ronnie van Hout), Australian tour venues: Contemporary art Centre of south Wales, Adelaide; Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne; Darren Knight Gallery, Pre Millennial (with Ronnie van Hout), New Zealand tour venues: City Art Gallery Wellington, Te Whare Toi; Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin (group)
McDougall Art Annex, Christchurch; Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland (solo)
Alternative Ways of Seeing, (website project), Artspace, Auckland (solo)
Vehicles for artists who are no longer famous, City Art Gallery Wellington, Te Whare Toi (solo)

1996

Michael Stevenson, Darren Knight DKW, Melbourne (solo)
Art Watchdog, Trevor Smith's garage, Canberra (solo)
How NASA Mooned the Avant-Garde, Australian Centre for Photography, Sydney (solo)

1995

First Warning, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (solo)
Mike Stevenson, Darren Knight DKW, Melbourne (solo)
Video ART, Teststrip, Auckland (solo)

1994

Decline of Western Civilization Part 3 – The Mimnimalist Years, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (solo)
The Easyrider, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland (solo)
Some Latter-Day Art, Darren Knight DKW, Melbourne (solo)

1993

Badlands, Govett-Brewster Gallery, New Plymouth; Manwatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North; Darren Knight (solo)
DKW, Melbourne (solo)
Distance Looks Our Way, City Gallery Wellington (group)
Distance Looks Our Way, Auckland Art Gallery (group)
Distance Looks Our Way, Centre Civic Casa Elizalde, Barcelona (group)
New Paintings, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland (group)
Distance Looks Our Way, Centro Cultural de Caja Espana, Zamora (group)
Distance Looks Our Way, Centro Cultural de Conde Duque, Madrid (group)

1992

Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland (solo)
Distance Looks Our Way, Stelling Gallery, Leiden, Netherlands (group)
Distance Looks Our Way, Pubellon de las Arles, Expo, Seville (group)

1991

Distance Looks Our Way« Sarjeant Gallery, Waganui (group)
The Farewell and Welcome Home Club, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland (solo)
The Farewell and Welcome Home Club, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North (solo)

1990

On Angels Wings, Gregory Flint Gallery, Auckland (solo)
Rotary Greetings from Bulls« Ray Hughes Gallery, Sydney (solo)
Situation and Style, Jonathan Jensen Gallery, Christchurch (curator William McAloon) (solo)

1989

The Cross, Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland (curator John Reynolds) (group)
 After McCahon, Auckland Art Gallery (curator Tina Barton) (group)
 One Small Town, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington (solo)
 Constructed Intimacies, Auckland Art Gallery, Sarjeant Gallery, Wanganui, National
 Gallery, Wellington, Robert McDougall Art Gallery, Christchurch (group)

1988

Paintings, Manawatu Art Gallery, Palmerston North (solo)
 Paintings, Southern Cross Gallery, Wellington (solo)

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2021

Michael Stevenson, *Disproof Does Not Equal Disbelief*. KW Institute, Berlin.
 Michael Stevenson, Anna Parlane, Heike Geißler, *Michael Stevenson: Profiles in
 Serene Velocity Book II: Kayfabe Logic*. Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam.

2019

Michael Stevenson and Wendy Taylor, *Michael Stevenson: Profiles in Serene
 Velocity Book I: Cultural Dope (schematic class notes for MC510/CS183*, exhibition
 catalogue, MUMA Melbourne.

2013

Christoph Keller (ed.), Michael Stevenson and Jan Verwoert. *Animal Spirits: Fables
 in the Parlance of Our Times*. les presses du réel, Dijon.
 Laura Preston, Sophie von Olfers, Magnolia de la Garza (Ed.) *Michael Stevenson.
 An Introduction*. Portikus, Frankfurt am Main & Walther König, Köln, Germany.

2011

Keehan, Reuben, Previews - Michael Stevenson, Art Forum, January 2011, XLIX
 NO. 5, p.113
 Conland, Natasha, Looking Back/ Looking Forward, Frieze, January - February
 2011, issue 136, p.82

2010

ed. Rhomberg, Kathrin, 6th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, exhibition
 catalogue, KW Institute for
 Contemporary Art, Dumont Buchverlag, Cologne, pp.107 - 109, 2010
 'What is Waiting Out There?': 6th Berlin Biennale for Contemporary Art, exhibition
 catalogue, KW Institute for
 Contemporary Art, Dumont Buchverlag, Cologne, 2010, pp. 173
 Rosales, Esperanza, Telling Stories, Mousse, Issue 25
 Starling, Simon, 'Best of 2010: The Artist's Artist', Artforum, December 2010, XLIX,

No.4, p.97

Jasper, Adam, 4th Auckland Triennial, Frieze, Issue 132, June-July 2010, p173

2009

Jasper, Adam, 2nd Athens Biennale, Frieze, Issue 127, November-December
 2009, p 134
 Hill, Wes, Double Fantasy, Art and Australia, Vol.46 No.3
 A Concerted Overview, Kaleidoscope, Issue 1, Spring

2008

Celebration at Persepolis, Michael Stevenson, Monarchy and the 38th Basel Art
 Fair, Arnolfini and Christoph
 Keller Editions JRP Ringier, 2008
 Mahoney, Elizabeth, Michael Stevenson, The Guardian, 8 February
 Heiser, Jörg, A Shareholder and The Jackal: an artist's fables, Frieze.com, October
 17 2008

2005

Dillon, Brian, Michael Stevenson, Frieze, March 2005, p. 107
 Withers, Rachel, Michael Stevenson, Artforum, April 2005, pp.201-202
 Moulton, Adam, , Michael Stevenson, Flash Art 2005, p. 79
 Gleadell, Colin, Art Sales: building a new art hub, The Daily Telegraph, 10 April
 2005
 Fitzgerald, Michael, Remastering the Record, Time Magazine, 29 August 2005,
 pp58-9

2006

The aircraft carrier, the paddy field, the late modern institution, David Craig, 2006
 Art of the Eighties and Seventies, Städtisches Abteiberg Museum,
 Mönchengladbach, Revolver Archiv für
 aktuelle Kunst, Frankfurt, pp. 77-121, 2006

2005

Michael Stevenson, Brian Dillon, Frieze 89, March 2005
 Remastering the Record, Michael Fitzgerald, Time Australia, August 29 2005

2003

This is the Trekka, Michael Stevenson, (Catalogue for New Zealand's participation
 at the 50th Venice Biennale, 2003)

2001

von Schlegell, Mark, Michael Stevenson and Danius Kesminas, Flash Art, no.212,
 May-June 2000, pp.117-118



A POSTPONED, RADICALLY DIFFERENT FUTURE

Two classrooms connected via a covered walkway: Michael Stevenson's large-scale sculptural installation *Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183* at Auckland Art Gallery is a reflection of the construction of "learning environments," the stifling repetition of received knowledge in traditional educational institutions and the possibility of generating change with the development of new "communities of practice": a definition introduced by the Californian educational theorists Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger in their book *Situated Learning* (1991). In this conversation with Barbara Casavecchia, the artist retraces the creation of this work, while discussing the impact of studying and teaching art, visionary worldviews and creating a mass following, Roberto Bolaño's novels, as well as about the endless "tension between knowing and doing."

BARBARA CASAVECCHIA
Can we start with the title?

MICHAEL STEVENSON
Yes, sure, although I should say, *Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183* came only after lots of deliberation.

BC Does it suggest a spiritual path, or a philosophical attitude?

MS Actually it's maybe both, and maybe other more practical things besides. The piece takes the form of a campus, a campus with two classrooms, but since the courses (to which the classrooms are dedicated) are completely unrelated, I had a lot of trouble settling the matter of title. I went back to the spatial format I was developing—the campus—and then I began considering the third element, which is a covered walkway. It stands between the classrooms and unifies them. It's a bridging structure, and when walking down it you're immersed in forced, single-point perspective.

BC Like that of a camera?

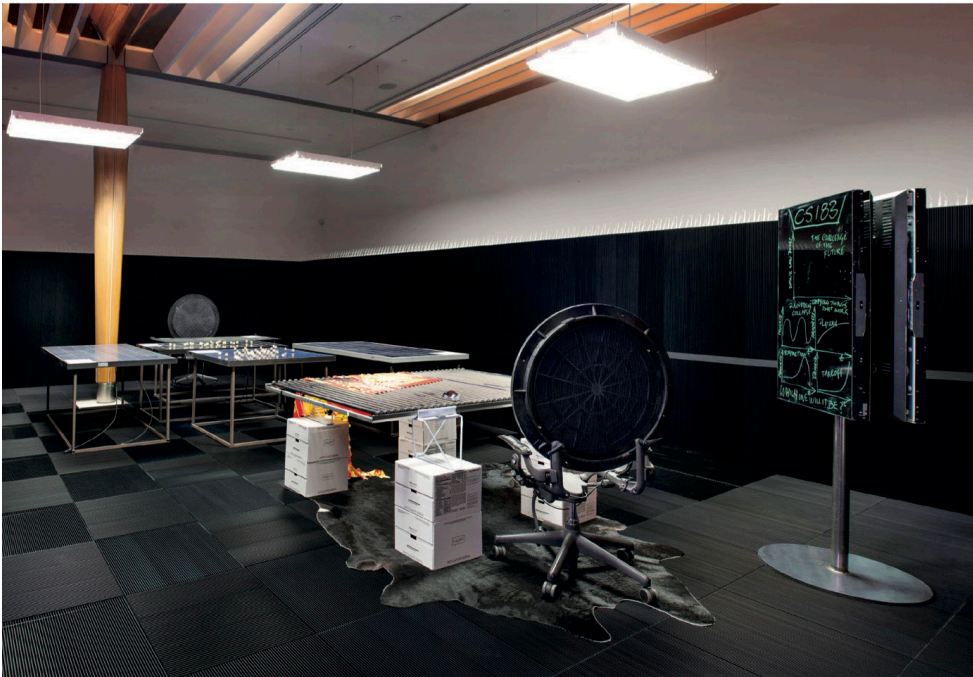
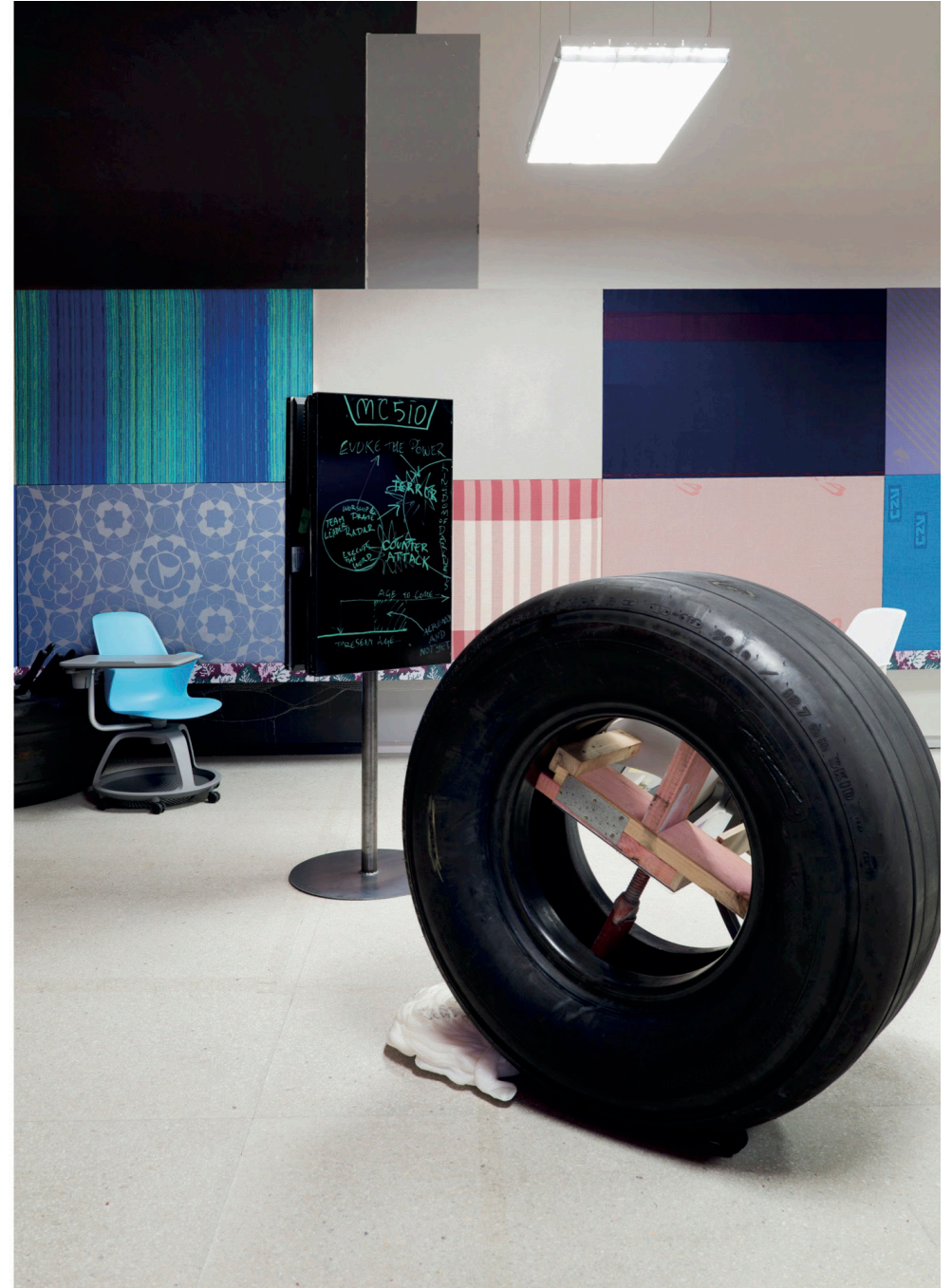
MS You could say that, yes, and here I was thinking very much of film. I have a long-term interest in structural film. I saw my first examples during my time of study and *Serene Velocity*, the landmark film from 1970 by Ernie Gehr, has always fascinated me. Like much structural film, it's epic, but in this case it's just such an ornament.

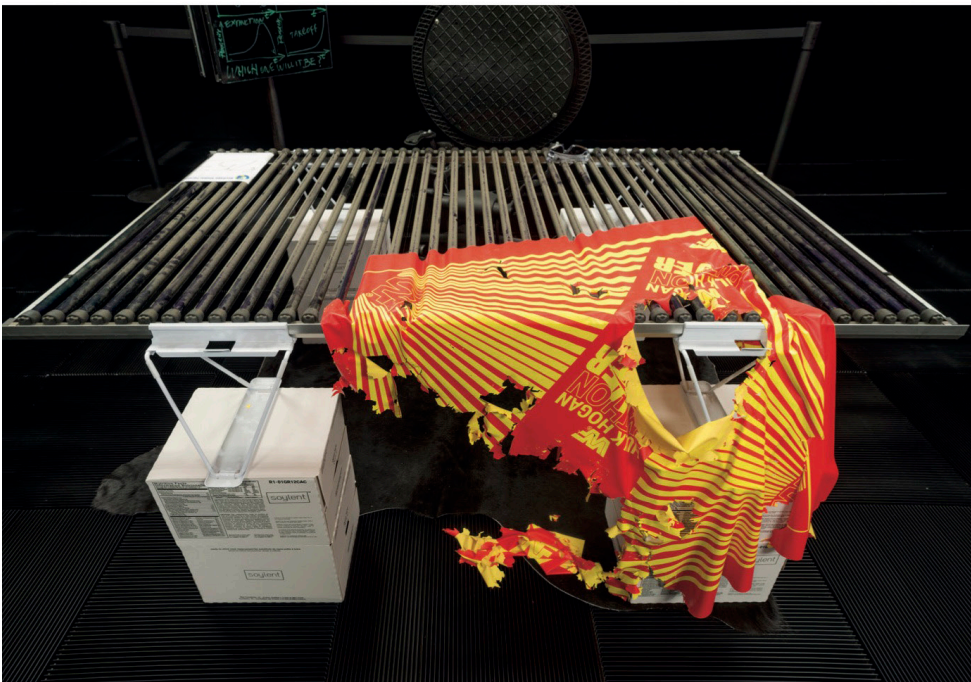
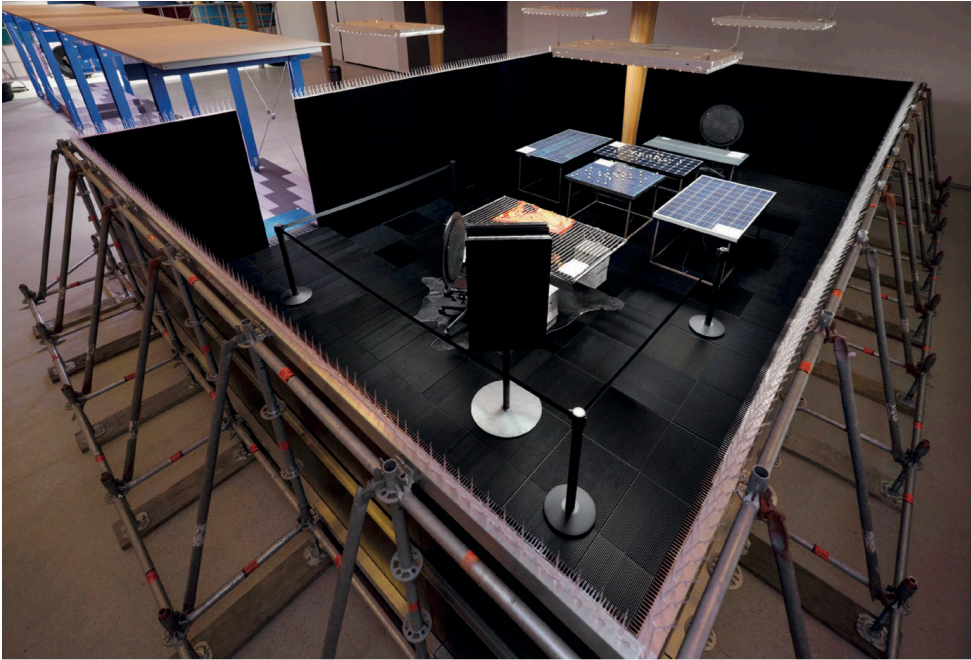
BC What do you mean?

MS Well, for one there's lots of symmetry. From a fixed camera position, *Serene Velocity* depicts an educational institution's corridor. There's extreme single-point perspective and space, but the image also reads as flat, as an ornament. But the ornamental presence really comes from the pulsing; the corridor jumps abruptly backward, forward, as the zoom on the lens is adjusted between frames. This conflicts the space and emphasizes something altogether flatter. The jumps are regular—every four frames—but then, to disrupt further, the zooms become increasingly extreme. It's completely hypnotic, but what's on-screen is really a mirror to what's happening in the lens. The lens is the corridor, and the lens connects the actual corridor space together with the dark space of the camera itself. I took cues from this while spatially developing my project and saw in this configuration a physical campus with two classrooms. The covered walkway then becomes the lens, bringing the classrooms together—it focuses, it zooms. In this way it's not so unlike my 2012 project for Portikus, the installation *A Life of Crudity, Vulgarly, and Blindness*, where the architecture of the building was turned into a giant internal camera obscura. The vast attic became a space for performing that was connected to the space immediately beneath—the exhibition hall, a space for viewing—via a third element, a long external shaft.

BC *Camera obscura* translates as "dark room," and, figuratively speaking, I find Gehr's film very dark. To me it almost has an element of horror, one that I'd instinctively associate with the dystopic/threatening/repressive side of education. Think of Mike Kelley's *Educational Complex*, for instance, which was also, just like Gehr's film, a device to record time and, possibly, individual memories. Are there any autobiographical references in *Serene Velocity in Practice*? I know you teach regularly.

MS You're right about all these references; that's some of the material I was working through. I'm not entirely sure Gehr and Kelley have been brought together before, but at a certain point it seemed obvious. The notion of a learning environment has long been a part of my practice, long before I took up regular teaching. My project *The Fountain of Prosperity (Answers to Some Questions About Bananas)* (2006), for example, was based on research into the MONIAC (Monetary National Income Analogue Computer), a hydromechanical computer invented in 1949 by Bill Phillips that was used in the classroom as a pedagogical aid and marketed as such. It's a dynamic model: some nine different functions, and their interrelations, can be demonstrated in a stunningly visual way. The machine uses water to model money—the water's the money—which





is then circulated and redistributed via sluices and tapped off into various holding tanks. Inasmuch as it was innovative in its ability to display data, it could not perform anything really useful beyond the classroom. My interest was in a single model that did somehow escape the classroom and was briefly put to task by the central bank of Guatemala before it disappeared.

BC Where and how did you first study art? And why do you think it's still such a relevant subject for you?

MS I see the ongoing attempt to teach practical art as a kind of flawed yet somehow time-honored investigation into the relationship between knowing and doing. I studied art myself in New Zealand in the 1980s, and since 2011 I've been teaching a class in sculpture at the art academy in Nuremberg. Like all art teaching institutions, the academy's a place where the fundamental question, How do we actually do this? looms large. My class includes those doing art teacher training as well as those doing fine arts, so in a sense exactly *how* I teach is also being closely observed. And in a way, it's this dynamic that has brought me into some of the thinking around the work, in particular the notion of how learning is situated.

BC So you're basically translating into a spatial object/container the notion that the social relationships, participative dynamics, and context where learning takes place have a strong impact on the cognitive processes?

MS In a sense you could be right, though I never approached it that way around. I began really with the courses themselves, MC510 and CS183.

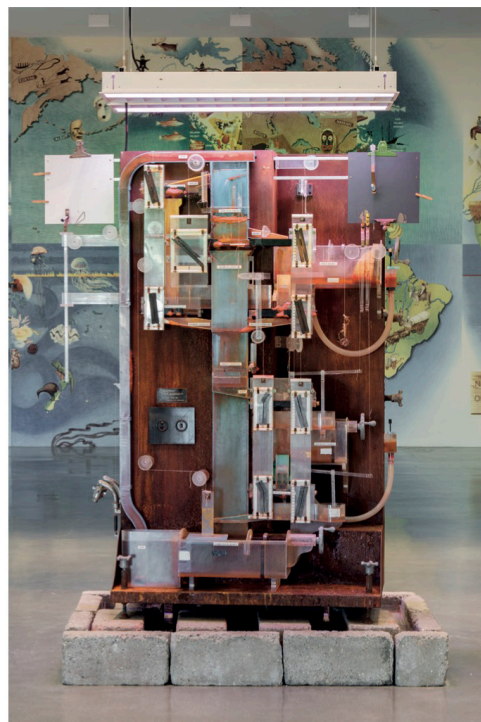
BC I'm quoting from the press release here:

MC510 was taught by John Wimber [an evangelical pastor whose ministry generated a new mass Christian movement, the Vineyard] in the winter semester of 1982 at the Fuller Theological Seminary in Pasadena, as a testing ground for his radical ideas in the experiential realm of miraculous healing and exorcism. CS183 was the Startup course taught in 2012 by Silicon Valley entrepreneur and venture capitalist Peter Thiel [the cofounder of PayPal, an opposer of political correctness in higher education, and an active supporter of Donald Trump during his campaign, as well as a member of the US president's steering committee] at Stanford University's Computer Science faculty, in which he analysed case histories of failure from the tech industry's recent past, while self-consciously modelling a future of exponential progress where miracles are worked in the space of technology.

In brief, two equally successful and visionary, but also very different, Californian courses, resulting in global mass followings. Why did you decide to bridge them?

MS I wanted to represent these actual courses, join them, and make a new higher-learning institute or some infrastructural double of some such thing in a very material way. Why I was motivated to do this was initially not a question I could answer, although they're courses that fit into my current orbits. Maybe they're courses I'd like to have studied. I drew them together, but as you just mentioned, they were taught at very different institutions, at different times. Now they stand together—one floating, the other hunkered down—two poles in a singular campus facility that insists that their common study is (somehow) essential, meaningful.

But getting back to your question. Both courses were taught by adjunct staff and in this role they manifested a very particular conflict with academia. They used this tension to endorse not merely a curriculum, but a worldview. Both questioned the authenticity of the classroom as a real learning environment, a question that almost anyone who enters teaching senses. To put it in a single phrase, you



p. 78, 79, 80, 81 - *Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183* installation views at Auckland Art Gallery, 2017. Courtesy: Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland; Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney; Carl Freedman Gallery, London. Photo: Jennifer French

p. 83 - *A Life of Crudity Vulgarly and Blindness* installation view at Portikus, Frankfurt am Main, 2012. Courtesy: the artist. Photo: Helena Schlichting
Above - *The Fountain of Prosperity (Answers to Some Questions About Bananas)*, 2006, installation view at Regen Projects, Los Angeles, 2017. The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Promised gift of Patricia Phelps de Cisneros through the Latin American and Caribbean Fund in honor of Gonzalo Parodi. Photo: Brian Forrest / Regen Projects, Los Angeles

could say this particular tension was articulated more precisely (and more sardonically) by G. B. Shaw when he supposedly said, "Those who can, do; those who can't, teach." The courses are very grand and elaborate examples of this tension, a tension between knowing and doing, and that's how I came to add "in Practice" to the title.

BC Are there further ways you felt the ideas of these courses could be associated? They both seem to focus on the good/bad (or evil) paradigm.

MS The courses are nothing less than attempts to change the world. Both are dualistic, and they then expand this into a highly developed worldview. Like all worldviews they have a particular space-time setting. Space I've mentioned, but the issue of temporality also comes into play. Both courses present something of a dissociative view of the present, or, said another way, they're discontinuous time models. So the near future they project could be, well, radically different.

BC It sounds a bit like the corridor in the film and the jumps you were describing.

MS Yes, that's it, these worldviews are played out in discontinuous time, so time's not all the same, it jumps and zooms. This idiosyncratic perspective is validated by the higher-learning institutions who hosted them (and my double) simply by the act of inclusion: listing them, assigning them real course codes like MC510, CS183, and so on. But at their heart, there's something extra to the institution, something that just doesn't belong. And there's a sense of this too in the installation, in a material disjunction. The classrooms are standard in size and shape but they're not constructed of, or furnished with, regular classroom material. What's there to be seen is extra, it's excessive, and it belongs more in industry than it does in a class. This excess of material is a kind of glimpse into the worldview. As I was saying, these worldviews are highly developed and within each course they actually identify strongholds working against the projected near future state; they resist it, they thwart it. So at the same time that the promised, radically different future remains attainable, it's suspended and placed into some kind of postponed state.

BC Early utopias were often conceived as situated in the present but dislocated in space—think of Thomas More's *Utopia* (1516)—while contemporary ones seem to focus on "thinking differently," and hence on changing the relationship between past, present, and future, as well as on altering the linearity and uniformity of capitalist empty time.

MS I see this possibility to recalibrate the timeline really as a kind of deflection. It's a way to deflect criticism, but it's more than that, it's a deferral, a long-term annulment of criticism, a removal of other viewpoints. In this sense these worldviews enjoy a kind of structural similarity. Of course they're dealing with different stuff, but there is a kind of symmetry there. If you'd put a name to it, the thing in the '510 world that actually thwarts would be definitively satanic, and then, moving through and on into the '183 world, here the thwarting is most likely the democratic state. So I think now you're seeing some of the possibilities in relating these two courses and how they open up a lot of the initial points you were making.

BC In the installation, the two classes are positioned at the twin ends of a mirror structure. Are you also playing with heterotopia?

MS Soon after developing this formal structure, I realized the spaces I would build and furnish would have to be different, shifted, from a normal learning environment. Though they're based on the original classrooms, courses (broken into modules), and the adjunct staff who taught them, they're exotic doubles, which perhaps could resonate with what you're mentioning. In my double, however, learning would be coordinated not by the teachers or documents, but by objects. I used mirrored rooms before in a joint project some eighteen years ago, and was reminded again of the possibilities when I read

Roberto Bolaño's advice for short story writers. It's a list of instructions which I then saw as useful to resist! He says: "Be careful: the temptation to write short stories two at a time is just as dangerous as attempting to write them one at a time, and, what's more, it's essentially like the interplay of lovers' mirrors, creating a double image." I realized that this effect was exactly what I was after. This process, now played out in space, suggests that whatever is put into these two "containers" (as you rightly call them) will somehow develop relations. Or, said another way, the formal structure suggests intent, and this will play into any interpretation.

BC Well, Bolaño's *2666* (2004) is pure utopian (or, better, dystopian) fiction, which also criticizes neoliberal academia and the repressive structures of commodified education.

MS He also plays out to incredible effect a tension between a world of knowing and a world of doing.

BC If we go back for a moment to the beginning of our conversation, I can't help thinking of *Serene Velocity in Practice* as a sort of self-portrait, or maybe a portrayal of the conflicts, tensions, and dualities inherent to the very act of teaching. A reflection of the ideologies that inform and regulate the transmission of knowledge, and their dangers. Where, by being "a bridging structure," the teacher attempts to reconcile with them.

MS My practice over the last twenty years or so, there are a number of works that could in certain ways be understood as portraits. They're objects, of course, but objects embedded with a singular vision, the vision of a visionary. Many "visionaries" excel in multiple fields, often diverse ones. I guess that's part of being visionary, but in these cases it's more like a multiple personality, like they're more than one person. In their quest for change, a podium they often seek is the one in the learning institution. In this role I'd describe them as spokespersons for the intangible in practice. Their fields range widely—economics, philanthropy, mathematics are some examples. They are aviators, inventors, public intellectuals, entrepreneurs, artists, poets and so on.

In this project, two previously unrelated visionary worlds reflect on or mirror each other, so in a sense these portraits are exchangeable. Both Wimber and Thiel use the role of the unbelonging within the learning institution to present us with something not unlike institutional critique. They want the intangible made tangible. Theirs is a style and scale of success from industry, not academia. They expect the world of ideas to have applied impact. The act of joining the two is then in a sense also a form of critique. In a way this is unavoidable. It's no secret that Thiel was raised in the evangelical world, and in a sense his vision still anticipates this sense of mission irrespective of his move away from that worldview and his contemporary status as a public intellectual in Silicon Valley. So, if there's a set of mirrored portraits here, they are of classrooms in which the implausible is somehow practiced. It's "zero to one" change, or at least its promise. Anything else is better left off campus.

Michael Stevenson is a New Zealand artist living in Berlin. Significant recent projects have been seen at Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen (2015), Sculpture Center, New York (2015), Liverpool Biennial (2014), Tate Modern, London (2014), Berlin Biennale (2014, 2010), Portikus, Frankfurt am Main (2012), Museo Tamayo, Mexico City (2012). Stevenson is currently professor of sculpture at the Academy of Fine Arts, Nuremberg. *Serene Velocity in Practice: MC510/CS183* (2017) was first exhibited at the Auckland Art Gallery (2017) and will be seen at the Biennale of Sydney and MUMA, Melbourne; the project is curated by Natasha Conland. The artist is represented by Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland, Darren Knight Gallery, Sydney, Carl Freedman Gallery, London.

Barbara Casavecchia is a writer and independent curator based in Milan, where she teaches at Brera art academy. Contributing editor for *Frieze*, her articles and essays have appeared in *Art Agenda*, *Art Review*, *D/La Repubblica*, *Flash Art*, *Mousse*, *L'Official Art*, *South*, *Spoke*, among others, as well as in artist books and catalogues. She co-curated the retrospective *Maria Lai. Ricreare il mondo* at MAN, Nuoro (2014) and she's at work on the exhibition *Susan Hiller: Social Facts*, OGR, Turin (march 29–june 24 2018).



The aspirations of Citizen Thiel

Julia Teale compares and contrasts two recent exhibitions by Simon Denny and Michael Stevenson that both feature the controversial tech-capitalist and New Zealand passport-holder Peter Thiel.

Two major New Zealand artists who currently reside in Berlin have been showing new work in Auckland this summer – Simon Denny at Michael Lett and Michael Stevenson at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki. Both of these artists loosely define their practice as ‘research based’, which means that they mine information, and information technology and its ethos more specifically, for the content of their works.

Although the two shows are utterly different in timbre, they share a fascination with Silicon Valley venture capitalist and recently minted New Zealand citizen Peter Thiel. Denny’s and Stevenson’s installations do not rely on one another for context and meaning, but by exploring both I was drawn into a leviathan-like topic: cyber-technology and its ‘overlords’. All in all, these exhibitions are rich with clues and threads. They lead to information that, if taken seriously, is both bone-chilling and also downright wacky.

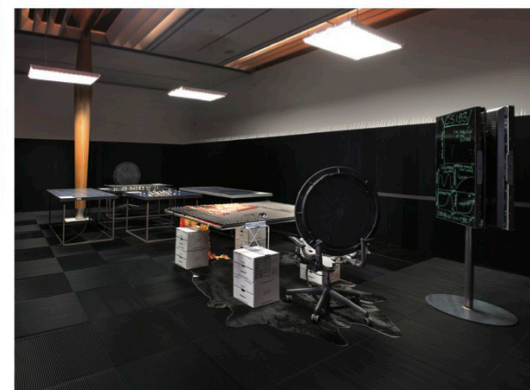
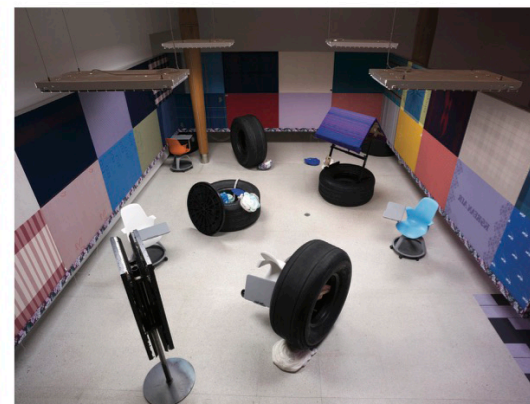
In visiting them both, a number of parallels between the shows become apparent. In *The Founder’s Paradox*, Denny overtly references Thiel’s interests and investments in seasteading, space travel and colonising Mars, longevity and New Zealand in a variety of board games. Stevenson’s references in *Serene Velocity in Practice: MCS10/CS183* are more covert, but rich with associative meanings. For instance, the positioning of the entire installation on a platform of computer cooling grids not only ‘floats’ them above ground, but also alludes to the fact that it is Silicon Valley types, largely neoliberalarians, who are most interested in the potential for colonies formed in ‘neutral’ zones to be free of governmental interference.

Both artists play Thiel’s character off someone else. In the downstairs games dungeon of *The Founder’s Paradox*, Thiel and his neoliberalarian chums figure as heroes in games adapted from online and physical board games that



Opposite: Simon Denny, *Operation*, 2017, mixed media (including resin, polystyrene, New Era cap, Adidas mesh long-sleeved t-shirt, Nike Free footwear, acrylic paint, gaming cable, wood, Apple earbud headphones, customised T-800 *Terminator 2: Judgement Day* figurine, fidget spinner, iPhone 5, Kindle paper, various New Zealand coins, novelty ‘Bitcoin’ ornamental coins, custom lanyard, neotropic powder in plastic Ziploc bag, Nike bootstraps). Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett

Above, right: Installation views of Michael Stevenson, *Serene Velocity in Practice: MCS10/CS183*, 2017, mixed media, dimensions variable, commissioned by Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki, with commissioning partners Biennale of Sydney 2018 and Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne. Courtesy of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki



pit opponents against one another to conquer and settle land. This ‘winner takes all’ approach involves defeating enemies, trading goods and exploiting natural resources by colonisation. In contrast, Denny puts the more sober, neo-Marxist political vision of New Zealand writer and scholar Max Harris into a reworking of Twister, a game that requires one or more players to contort their bodies into various positions to avoid falling.

The Twister game is represented by wall weavings that appear homespun and naive by comparison to the colourful and slick board games downstairs. However, a quick check via *Wikipedia* reveals that Twister is thought to be a universal, egalitarian game, accessible to people from different cultures and economic strata. The upshot of playing is that you’ll have to make decisions, based on the games’ different political philosophies, that will determine whether you are a winner or a loser. If you’re in any doubt as to the

seriousness of the games and competing philosophies, then Anthony Byrt’s accompanying text, *The Founder’s Paradox: A Compendium*, will lay out the real-world stakes for you.

While Denny’s work maps out the geographies and rules of these various games, and identifies their key players, Stevenson transports us into two interconnected enclosures in which he has assembled a collection of objects. Here, the ideological foundations of two ostensibly separate worldviews collide and intermingle, separated only by a short corridor. The title of the work leads you directly to a business course, known by the code CS183, that Thiel taught at Stanford in 2012 and to a spiritual-mystical course – Mission class 510 – offered by evangelist preacher John Wimber that began in the 1970s at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Stevenson’s pairing of Thiel with Wimber is referenced by the lectures they each gave, and the two spaces representing



Opposite, far left: Michael Stevenson, *Classroom furniture* for CS183, from *Serene Velocity in Practice*, 2017. Courtesy of Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

Installation details and views from Simon Denny, *The Founder's Paradox*, 2017. Courtesy of the artist and Michael Lett

Opposite: *Fourth Way Silhouette Twister wall weaving: Spinner*, 2017, custom-woven cotton weaving, texts from Max Harris's *The New Zealand Project*

Above: *Ascent Hero Portrait Projection (Lord Tybalt)*, 2017, royalpainting.com commissioned painting (oil on canvas), UV print on canvas, custom stretchers

Right: *Founders Board Game Display Prototype*, 2017 (foreground), and *Founders Box Cover projections and Box Lid Overprint* (on wall)



them could be seen to be classrooms or lecture theatres. But aesthetically these spaces are more akin to the ominous-looking headquarters of SPECTRE in the Bond movies. The villainous SPECTRE organisation was invented by author Ian Fleming in the 1970s in a bid to depoliticise his bad guys and adroitly sidestep the political polarisation of the time. Its members were drawn from crime syndicates globally and met in an underground data-gathering centre in the Sahara Desert.

The spectre of SPECTRE resonates with Thiel's real-life vision for the future. He seems to seek a utopia of absolute freedom for (certain) individuals, where governments, nation states, fiscal restraints like taxes and social welfare are left behind in the rubble of the Western world. He invests the fortune he's amassed from venture capitalism and information technology in ventures that work towards this grandiose neoliberal heaven. Thiel is the founder of PayPal but also of Palantir Technologies, a company which produces surveillance software sold to governments and corporations to crunch our online dealings, from Facebook to Trade Me. The parallels with Fleming's fictional SPECTRE are disturbingly close. By contrast, Denny offers us a 'dungeon-delving adventure' in which the libertarian heroes aim to defeat the monsters of democracy – fair elections, transparency, independent journalism, tax redistribution and so on. Denny also depicts Thiel as 'Lord Tybalt' from the game *Ascent* – and not surprisingly his powers include "developing wormhole software that anonymously harvests nation-state data".

The dark nature of Thiel's enterprise is reinforced in *Serene Velocity in Practice* by the black manhole cover that provides a backrest for the lecturing mogul's chair. This

cover represents a portal to a labyrinth hidden underground, where our sewers and internet cables run and keep above-ground needs met – a metaphor for underhand dealings. A mask of Hulk Hogan also appears in the Thiel classroom, referring to Thiel's power and inclination to destroy those who cross him. Using Hogan's sex-scandal video as the pretext, in 2016 Thiel bankrolled a ruinous lawsuit against Gawker, the media company which had outed him as gay. The lawsuit was a vicious assault on the culpable media outlet, and only more chilling for its deception.

Strange nutritional enhancement products also appear in both works. Denny's full-figure sculpture of himself, *Operation*, includes recesses in which items are stored. One of these is a Ziploc bag of nootropics – consumable powders distilled from plants for enhancing the mind and energising the body. *Serene Velocity* features Soylent, a nutritional shake infused with nootropics and beloved in Silicon Valley as a complete meal replacement. Its name refers ironically to *Soylent Green*, a 1970s sci-fi movie set in New York in the year 2020. Due to extreme overpopulation, the citizens consume a substance called Soylent, which toward the end turns out to be largely made of 'surplus' humans.

Today's Soylent is entirely vegan. Arranged by Stevenson in a space that also includes solar panels, quails' eggs and a cowskin mat, it could suggest that we may indeed need to resort to something like this product as the habitats that support animal-based food diminish and global warming takes hold. Or perhaps Stevenson is alluding to the fact that Thiel and others – such as British libertarian Lord William Rees-Mogg – have invested in swathes of land in New Zealand, a strikingly underpopulated country with a record of embracing globalisation and the selling off of state

assets. It is not lost on me that Thiel's interest in New Zealand came only after he gave up on his initial investments in the Seasteading Institute because they were too costly.

Both exhibitions feature similar rhetoric: that a break from the past is needed to achieve a kind of 'transcendent state'. Denny provides this in the form of a game called *Ascent*: Above the Nation State, while Stevenson alludes to it via his Wimber classroom. John Wimber taught that miracles occur through worship and faith in the supernatural. He referred to his radical beliefs as 'spiritual warfare' against a Western worldview that is too rational and thus faithless. The tapestry of different airline blankets and massive airliner tyres that dominates the Wimber room, suggesting 'lift-off', underscores the notion of transcendence. For Thiel, conversely, miracles happen via monopoly capitalism, investing in research to extend life, warring against democratic rights and creating a 'super society' of sovereign individuals living free from governmental restraints.

While the overarching theme of *The Founders Paradox* – the precarious consequences of choice – is represented by a Jenga game, it is the title of Stevenson's work, *Serene Velocity in Practice*, and the corridor between the two enclosures, that brings home the most haunting message for the viewer. In his title, Stevenson calls back to Ernie Gehr's *Serene Velocity* (1970) – a silent film that rapidly switches between different perspectival shots of a corridor, giving the optical illusion that we are perpetually progressing along it. With this reference Stevenson suggests that Wimber's 'faith' – which included brazen claims to heal the sick and continues to harvest vast sums of cash for its global Vineyard Church from the sale of videos, books and online

material – is no different from the illusions crafted and sold by Thiel and his tech cohort. As media theorist Marshall McLuhan observed, "The effects of technology do not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily and without resistance." It seems we are all now altered – there has been much in the news lately about disillusioned Silicon Valley denizens expressing their discomfort about the degree to which they can now manipulate the perceptions of end-product users for financial gain. The result? Deleterious effects for society as a whole.

Together, these two extraordinarily rich works by Stevenson and Denny pose serious questions for New Zealand. If Denny's games were constructed from the fantasies of a random individual without means, these questions would have little weight. We could play along, laugh to ourselves about the implausibility of it all, and in the end the winners and losers would pack up the game and head off to bed. The trouble is if Thiel and his ilk are playing the game in real time, there are real consequences for the average New Zealander. If we fellow-citizens are present at all in Thiel's arena, it appears that we're merely material to be played, like Denny's plastic counters, cardboard maps and laminated playing cards – or else we are nothing more than data points, to be crunched, manipulated and mined.

The Founder's Paradox by Simon Denny was at Michael Lett from 18 November to 22 December 2017. *Serene Velocity in Practice*: MC510/CS183 by Michael Stevenson was at Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki from 12 November 2017 to 6 February 2018, and a new iteration will appear at the Biennale of Sydney 2018 from 16 March to 11 June.



2003

Michael Stevenson

This Is the Trekka
Venice Biennale

Lifting the hood on New Zealand national identity, Michael Stevenson discovered ... Czechoslovakia!

Stevenson's 2003 Venice installation centred on the Trekka, New Zealand's only 'homegrown' production automobile, made in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Back then, New Zealand was an economic monoculture, dependent on exports of processed grass (meat and dairy) to earn foreign currency—it was crucial to diversify into manufacturing. The economy was also highly regulated and protected, and new cars were hard to obtain. And so a fledgling homegrown car industry was born.

Auckland businessman Noel Turner built his Trekkas on Skoda engines and chassis imported from Czechoslovakia. Promoted as suitable for farm work, these two-wheel-drives looked deceptively like British four-wheel-drive Land Rovers. Basic and boxy, they were assembled in small workshops. In all, only a few thousand were made. The dream of New Zealand cars vanished with the local assembly of Japanese cars in 1970s.

New Zealand was a tiny market and a domestic car industry was always a pipe-dream. Nevertheless, the Trekka fulfilled a psychological need, symbolising a desired self-reliance. It epitomised both Kiwi-can-do and a dread of being left high-and-dry by sea changes in the global economy. It spoke of a nationalist desire for cultural independence and self-sufficiency in the face of real economic interdependence.

Stevenson's project takes the form of a belated Trekka trade display. Above a restored Trekka hangs a sign with the old 'New Zealand Made' kiwi logo on one face and the Czech equivalent on the other. As it rotates, it equivocates: the Trekka doesn't know where it's coming from. Stacked butter cartons—recalling Warhol's *Brillo Boxes*—evoke the mythic butter mountain, fantasised stockpiles resulting from unfavourable terms of trade.

The project touches on art politics. Back in the day, Trekka-style industrial nationalism mirrored New Zealand's artistic nationalism: local art was typically celebrated as authentically homegrown even though, as Stevenson quips, 'key components were sourced overseas'.

The project also speaks to the Venice Biennale as the art world's ultimate trade show, with national pride on the line. Perversely, the New Zealand artist comes to market with an imitative product, designed for domestic consumption decades earlier and now long out of production, countering the triumphalist presentation of kiwis 'punching above their weight'. It was only our second Venice outing and we were already taking the mickey.

RL

Michael Stevenson *This Is the Trekka* 2003–5