

# Steve Carr

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Steve Carr  
A Pillow with a River Rock  
2022  
carved marble and river rock  
435 x 650 x 140 mm









Steve Carr  
In Bloom (Dewhirst)  
2020-2022  
Cast bronze and living plants  
Installation view, Michael Lett.





Steve Carr  
A Tyre with Glass Sphere  
2022  
cast plaster, glass  
610 x 610 x 190 mm  
Edition of 3





Steve Carr  
In Bloom  
2021

bronze, living plants  
Installation view, Te Uru Waitakere, Tītirangi





Steve Carr  
In Bloom  
2021

bronze, living plants  
Installation view, Te Uru Waitakere, Titirangi





Steve Carr  
Watermelon  
2015  
(installation view)  
Wellington Arts Festival, 2020  
Photograph: Matt Grace





Steve Carr  
*Variations for Troubled Hands*  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
June 2016





Steve Carr

*Studies for Cadence I - XII (detail)*

2015

Chromira Prints on 310 gsm Rag Photographique

256 photographs, 240 x 165 mm each

edition 1 of 3









Steve Carr  
*Transpiration*  
2014

6 channel HD video  
continuous loop, installation dimensions variable  
edition of 3

Installation view  
*Bullet Time*  
Wellington City Gallery  
June 2016





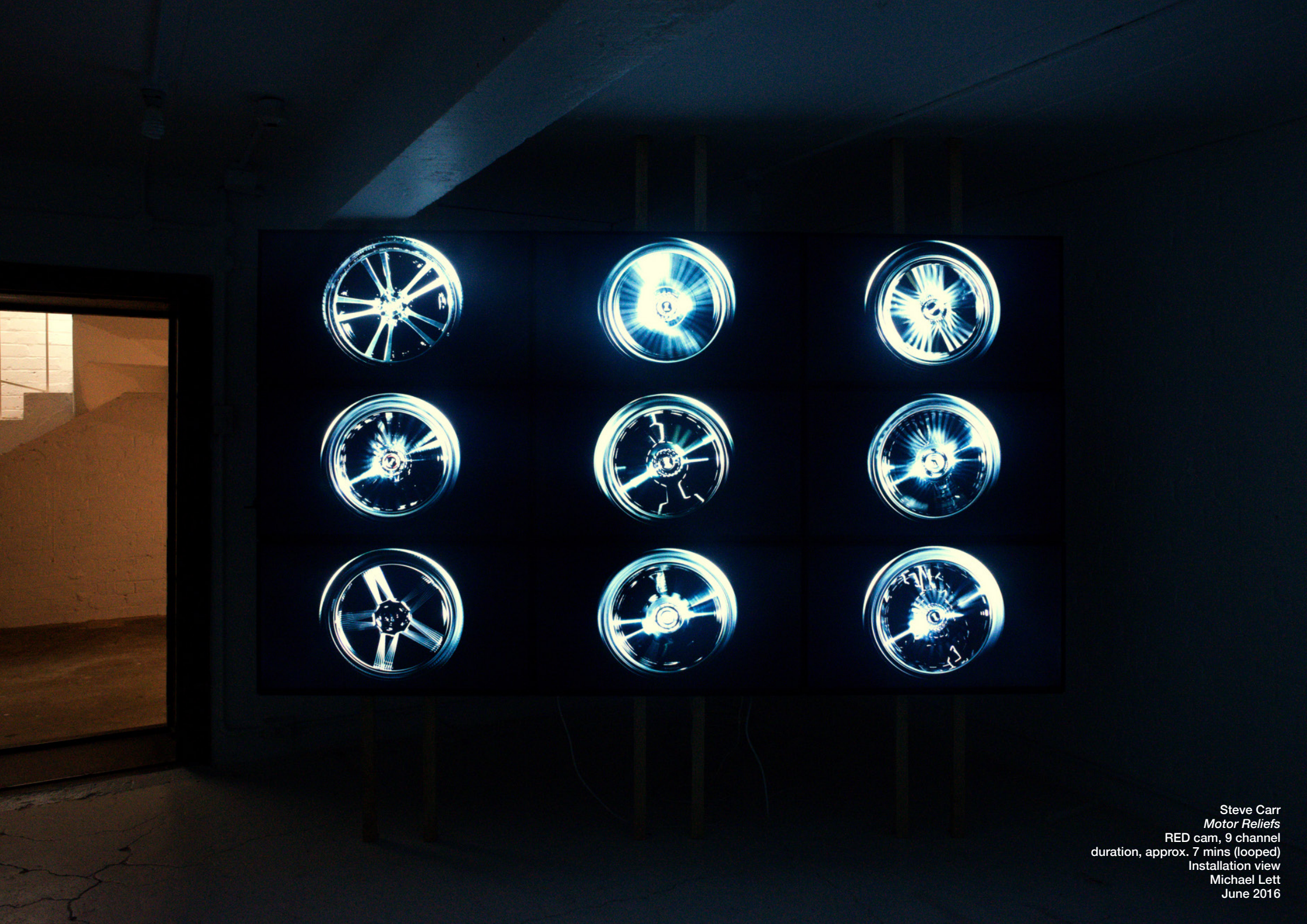
Steve Carr  
*American Night*  
2014  
HD digital video  
duration 14 mins  
edition of 3  
Installation view  
*Bullet Time*  
Wellington City Gallery  
June 2016





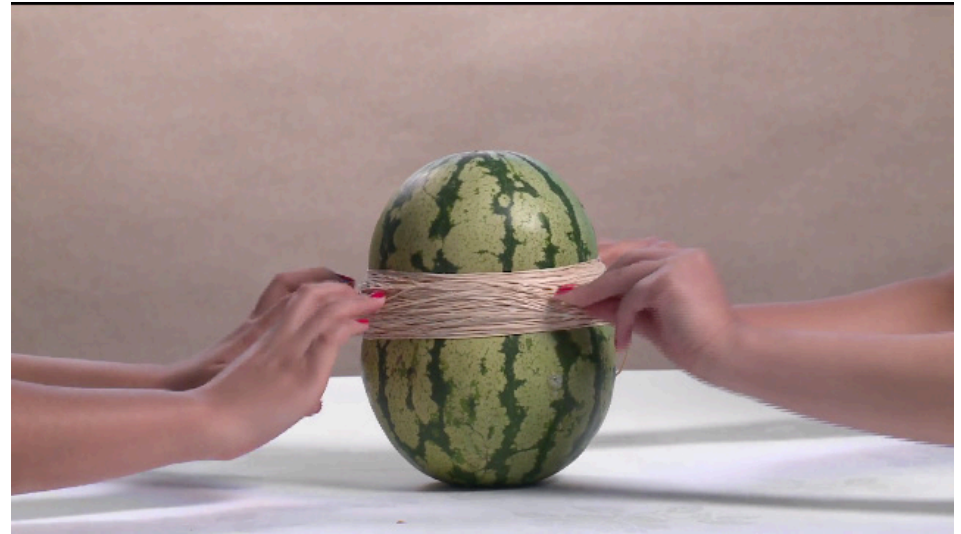
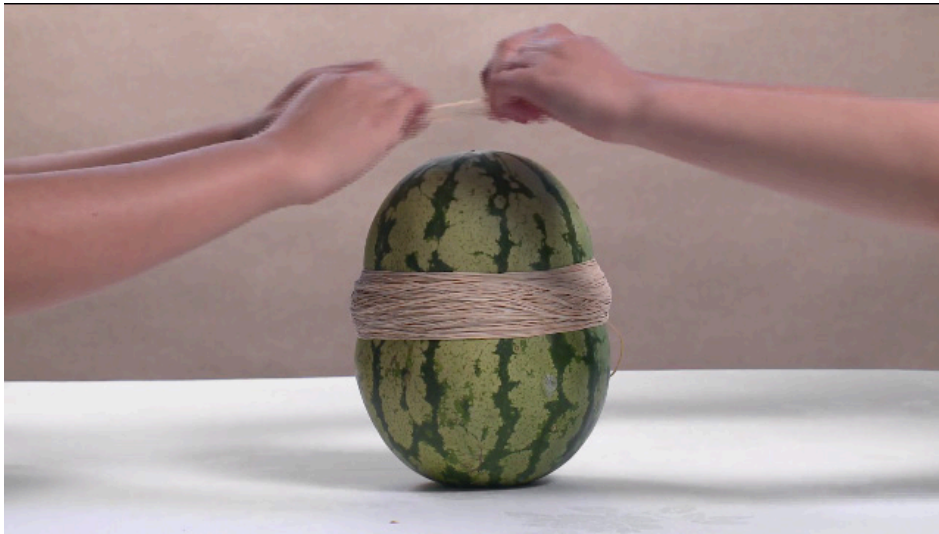
Steve Carr  
*The Song Remains the Same*  
Phantom Flex HD  
duration 2 mins, 28 secs  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
June 2016





Steve Carr  
*Motor Reliefs*  
RED cam, 9 channel  
duration, approx. 7 mins (looped)  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
June 2016









Steve Carr  
X  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
January 2013





Steve Carr  
X  
Installation view  
Michael Lett  
January 2013



Michael Lett



Steve Carr  
*Shuttlecock 2*  
2010  
digital photographic print  
(framed) 1090 x 1035 mm  
edition of 3



Michael Lett



Steve Carr  
*Shuttlecock 4*  
2010  
digital photographic print  
(framed) 1090 x 1035 mm  
edition of 3





Steve Carr  
*Dead Time*  
2012

7 channel installation, Phantom Flex transferred to Pro-  
Res HQ files synchronised through multiple hard drives  
duration 520 secs  
edition of 3





Steve Carr  
*Burn Out*  
2009  
16mm transferred to digital  
video  
duration 4 mins, 53 secs  
edition of 3



## Steve Carr

Born 1976 in Gore, New Zealand  
Lives and works in Christchurch, New Zealand

Steve Carr's work is frequently about precise moments of transformation, he uses lens-based practices as well as sculpture to explore and interfere with a range of materials and entities, from apples and watermelons, to balloons filled with paint, shuttle-cocks, fireworks and smoke. The artist himself often the subject of the change. He has become half-animal, a strange man-child, and a pre-teen girl. He has turned fire extinguishers into glass, bear rugs into wood, tyres into bouquets, and even himself into popcorn.

2016 -  
Joint Head of Film Studies, Ilam School of Fine Arts, University of Canterbury

2005-2015  
Lecturer, Whitecliffe School of Art and Design, Auckland, New Zealand

2002-04  
Artspace Board of Trustees, Auckland, New Zealand

### EDUCATION

2003  
Master of Fine Arts (First Class Honours), Elam School of Fine Arts, University of Auckland, New Zealand

1999  
Dunedin College of Education, Secondary Teacher Training

1998  
Bachelor of Fine Arts (Sculpture Prize), Otago Polytechnic School of Fine Arts, Dunedin New Zealand

### SELECTED SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2023  
In Bloom (IndigiGrow), Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA), Sydney, Australia  
Making Arrangements, Station Gallery, Sydney, Australia

2022  
Making Time, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

2021  
Steve Carr and Christian Lamont: Fading to the Sky, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand, CoCA Toi Moroki, Christchurch  
(Re)newel, Public Sculpture, Ilam School of Arts, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Watermelon, Mason's Screen, Wellington, New Zealand  
For Kids, Tauranga Art Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand  
Fading to the Sky, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Titirangi, New Zealand  
In Bloom, Public Sculpture, Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery, Titirangi,  
In Bloom, Public Sculpture, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
In Bloom, Public Sculpture, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand

2020  
The Fallen Man, STATION Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
In Bloom, Public Sculpture, Takutai Square Britomart, Auckland, New Zealand  
Into the Open - NZ Festival, Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand

2019  
Chasing the Light, City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Chasing the Light, City Gallery, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

2018  
Chasing the Light, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Echo, Station Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

2017  
Variations for Troubled Hands, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Sometimes it Snows in April, The National, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Variations for Troubled Hands, Ashburton Art Gallery and Heritage Centre, Ashburton, New Zealand  
A Little Faith, Screening Series, Govett-Brewster/Len Lye Centre, New Plymouth, New Zealand

2016  
Bullet Time, City Gallery Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand  
A Manual for Small Archives, CCP, Melbourne, Australia  
Stretching Time, ACMI, Melbourne, Australia



2015

Studies for Cadence, Station Gallery, Melbourne  
The Science of Ecstasy and Immortality, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

2014

Stretching Time, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Burn Out, Edinburgh Art Festival Kiosk, Edinburgh, Scotland

2013

X, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Majo, Outer Space, Christchurch City Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Open Studio, Headlands Center Of Art, San Francisco, USA

2012

First Light, Britomart Project Space, Auckland, New Zealand  
Smoke Films, Institute Of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia  
Studies In Motion, Kalimanrawlins, Melbourne, Australia

2011

Mystical Realisms; Modest Gesture, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

2010

Open Studio, ICC S-Air, Sapporo, Japan  
The Weight Of The Sun, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
The Weight Of The Sun (Part 2), S/F, Auckland, New Zealand  
Aona, Viewfinder, Nz Film Archive, Auckland, New Zealand

2009

Enchanté, Uplands Gallery, Melbourne, Australia

2008

A Shot In The Dark, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Jungle Flower (With Matt Ellwood), 257 Ponsonby Rd, Auckland, New Zealand  
Annabel, Fish Bowl Video Screening, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

2007

Girls & Boys (With Matt Ellwood), Silvershot Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
Atrium Screening, Tauranga Art Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand  
Video Easy, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Smoke And Mirrors, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Goes Nowhere Like A Rainbow, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

2006

Goes Nowhere Like A Rainbow, Te Tuhi – The Mark, Pakuranga, New Zealand  
Big Cheese, Artspace Auckland, New Zealand  
Sometimes It Snows In April, Sherman Galleries, Sydney, Australia  
Snowflakes & Mushrooms, Window, Auckland University, Auckland, New Zealand  
Selected Films, After Dark, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

2005

A Pocket Full Of Horses, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

2004

Rocktober, Parade, Auckland, New Zealand  
Spring, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Mercury Rising, Viewfinder, NZ Film Archive, New Zealand

2003

Dive, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Slicker Than Your Average, Downtown Skywalk, Auckland, New Zealand

2002

Air Guitar, After Dark, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
The Adventures Of DJ Clock - The Last Episode, Rm401, Auckland, New Zealand

2001

The Adventures Of DJ Clock - Part Two, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Massage, Light Box Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

2000

The Adventures Of DJ Clock - Part One, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Zenstix 2000, Rear Window, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand  
Steve Carr Express, Rm202, Auckland, New Zealand  
Boganne, Rm3, Auckland, New Zealand

#### SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2023

Candles and Sticks, The National, Christchurch NZ

2021

Over Easy, The National, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Ten Year Show, STATION Gallery, Melbourne, Australia



2020

Additions + Alterations, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Outgoing Despatch, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand

2019

Hold Up, Università Iuav di Venezia, Venice, Italy  
Auto Destruct, Cross Lane Projects, Kendal, Cumbria, United Kingdom  
Grotesquerie, Station Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
Auckland Art Fair, Remote Books Booth, Auckland, New Zealand

2018

All I Want to Be, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, Wellington, New Zealand  
Auto Destruct, Unit 1 Gallery, London, United Kingdom

2017

Kaleidoscope: Abstract Aotearoa, Te Papa, Wellington, New Zealand  
Moving Spaces Symposium, Whitecliffe College of Arts & Design, Auckland, New Zealand  
The Future Machine, Tauranga Art Gallery, Tauranga, New Zealand  
NY Art Book Fair, MoMA PS1, New York, USA  
Everyday Lines, Hastings City Art Gallery, Hastings, New Zealand  
Offprint London, Tate Modern, Turbine Hall, London, United Kingdom  
By Purchase, Gift or Bequest, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Your Hotel Brain, Christchurch Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Once More, With Feelings, Govett-Brewster/Len Lye Centre, New Plymouth, New Zealand  
Contemporary Photography, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

2016

Art of the Pacific: Collection Focus, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, Australia

2015

Visiting Asia, Te Tuhi, Auckland, New Zealand

2014

Great Southern Lands: Australian and New Zealand Art in Opposition and Parallel, Sydney Art Month Contemporary Art Festival, Sydney, Australia

2013

Burster Flipper Wobbler Dripper Spinner Stacker Shaker Maker, Curated by Justin

Paton, Christchurch City Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand

Freedom Farmers: New Zealand Artists Growing Ideas, Curated by Natasha Conland, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

Video Arte Australia y Nueva Zelanda, Curated by Mark Feary, Santiago, Chile

TEZA, Curated by Mark Williams, Christchurch, New Zealand

Landscape Painting, Curated by Mark Feary, One and J. Gallery, Seoul, Korea

Playtime, Curated by Robert Leonard, Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane, Australia

Video Contemporary, Sydney Contemporary, Sydney, Australia

Architecture Of The Heart, Museum Theatre Gallery, Napier, New Zealand

As Many Structures As I Can, The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, New Zealand

Public, Private + Pop-Ups, Tauranga Arts Festival, Tauranga, New Zealand

Moving On Asia: Towards A New Art Network 2004–2013, Gallery Loop, Seoul, Korea

Moving On Asia: Towards A New Art Network 2004–2013, City Gallery, Wellington

Fx, Centre For Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Australia

Don't Hold Your Breath, Silo Park Film Screening, Auckland, New Zealand

2012

The Keys To The City, Viewfinder, NZ Film Archive, Auckland, New Zealand

NZ International Film Festival: The Artists Cinema, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

NZ International Film Festival: The Artists Cinema, Wellington Film Archive, Wellington, New Zealand

Steve Carr, Campbell Patterson & Len Lye, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

Wallace Art Trust Awards, Finalist, Auckland, New Zealand

Letter From Alice May Williams, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand

Was That Cannon Fire, Or Is It My Heart Pounding?, Enjoy Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

NZ International Film Festival, Ant!Heroes.Inc, Wellington, New Zealand

Michael Lett At Nada Cologne, Booth N20, Hall 11, Cologne-Deutz Exhibition Centre, Germany

Don't Hold Your Breath, Angelholm International Video Art Festival, Angelholm, Sweden

2011

Rencontres Internationales, Centre Pompidou, Paris, France

Rencontres Internationales, Gaité Lyrique, Paris, France

Rencontres Internationales, Haus Der Kulturen Der Welt, Berlin, Germany

Rencontres Internationales, Reina Sofia National Museum, Madrid

Rencontres Internationales, Spanish Cinematheque, Madrid

New Space, Kallinmanrawlins Gallery, Melbourne, Australia



Party Potential, Galleria, Perth, Australia  
Daydream Believer, Yebisu International Festival For Art & Alternative Visions, Tokyo  
Metropolitan Museum Of Photography Tokyo, Japan  
Bad Hair Day, Christchurch City Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Frieze Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, London, UK  
Whitecliffe Faculty Exhibition, Mont Clair State University Mfa Gallery, Mont Clair,  
New Jersey

2010

Everything Is Near And Inflorescent, Forever And Present, Michael Lett, Auckland  
New Zealand  
Naked City, The Case + Lovelab Projects, Wellington, New Zealand  
Melbourne Art Fair, Uplands Gallery Stand, Melbourne, Australia  
Spreading Blankets On The Beach, J.J. Morgan & Co, Wellington, New Zealand  
Autumn Masterpieces: Highlights From The Permanent Collection, Centre Of  
Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, Australia

2009

Brought To Light, Christchurch City Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
tinrP, Pearce Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
The Naked And The Nude, Christchurch City Art Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Unstable Institutional Memory: 10 Years At The Blue Oyster, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Liste 09 - The Young Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Basel, Switzerland  
From The Depths Of Suburbia: New Auckland Photographers, Te Tuhi Centre For  
The Arts, Pakuranga, New Zealand  
Problem Solving: Espresso Yourself, Uplands Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
Auckland Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Sculpture Court, Auckland, New Zealand  
From The Depths Of Suburbia: New Auckland Photographers, Griffith University,  
Brisbane, Australia

2008

Redlands Westpac Art Prize, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney, Australia  
The National Drawing Award, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand  
The National Drawing Award, Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand  
The National Drawing Award, Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Wunderbox, Christchurch City Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Life.Death.Thereafter, Silvershot Gallery, Melbourne, Australia  
Past/Present/Place, Colab Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark  
Videos Aus Neuseeland, Heidelberger Kunstverein, Heidelberg, Germany  
Video From New Zealand, Co-Lab Gallery, Copenhagen, Denmark  
White On White, Christchurch City Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand

Waikato Art Awards, Finalist, Waikato Museum Of Art And History, Hamilton, New  
Zealand

2007

Emotion, Baran De Bordeaux, Auckland, New Zealand  
Prospect, Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Group Show!, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Peng – Video block, Mannheim, Germany  
Lost & Found, Wellington City Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand

2006

An Other Childhood, Curated by Janita Craw, Wellington, New Zealand  
Summer Daze, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Just Painting, Auckland City Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Recovered Memory, The Fourth Goodman-Suter Contemporary Art Project, Suter  
Gallery, Nelson, New Zealand  
A Tale Of Two Cities, Gasc, Gimhae Arts Center, Busan, South Korea  
Busan Biennale, Metropolitan Art Museum Busan, South Korea  
Melbourne Art Fair, Michael Lett Gallery Stand, Melbourne, Australia  
Camp, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Works On Paper, Whitecliffe College Of Art, Auckland, New Zealand  
Performance Series, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Loop: Video Art Fair, Barcelona, Spain  
Play: Portraiture + Performance In Video Art From Australia + New Zealand, Perth  
Institute Of Arts, Perth, Western Australia  
An Outdoor Screening Of Experimental Film And Video Art, Physics Room,  
Christchurch, New Zealand  
A + P Show: Art Goes Country, Christchurch City Gallery, New Zealand

2005

Commodity & Delight: Views of Home, Sarjeant Gallery, Whanganui, New Zealand  
Nada Art Fair, Michael Lett Stand, Miami, USA  
Play: Portraiture + Performance in Video Art from Australia + New Zealand, Adam Art  
Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Don't Look Now, Mori Gallery, Curated by Scott Donovan, Sydney, Australia  
Snake Oil, Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand  
Summer Group, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Likes the Outdoors, Ramp Gallery, Hamilton, New Zealand  
High Chair: New Zealand Artists On Childhood: Auckland Festival 05, Curated  
by Janita Craw & Robert Leonhard, St. Pauls Street Gallery, AUT, Auckland, New  
Zealand



Remember New Zealand, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand  
Playing Favourites , Enjoy Public Art Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Canned Heat, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

2004

The National Drawing Award, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand  
Melbourne Art Fair, Michael Lett Gallery Stand, Melbourne, Australia  
Splendid of London, London, United Kingdom  
Show Stoppers, Jonathan Smart Gallery, Christchurch, New Zealand  
Left at The Members Lounge, Object Space, Auckland  
Remember New Zealand: Sao Paulo Biennale, San Paulo, Brazil  
Water World, Scott Donovan Gallery, Sydney  
Done Dirt Cheap, Neut Gallery, Wellington, New Zealand  
Prospect, City Gallery Wellington, Wellington, New Zealand

2003

Pressing Flesh, Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand  
Hany Armanious, Steve Carr, Stuart Shepherd, Michael Lett, Auckland, New Zealand  
Waikato Art Awards, Finalist, Waikato Museum Of Art And History, Hamilton, New Zealand

2002

Members, Old Government House, Auckland, New Zealand  
Flora And Fauna, Rm401, Auckland, New Zealand  
Tight, Rm401, Auckland, New Zealand

2001

Haunted House, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Father & Son, Curated by Nicholas Spratt, Rm3, Auckland, New Zealand  
911, Elam Sculpture Exhibition, Auckland, New Zealand

2000

Performance Night, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
The Paper Show, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Buy, Enjoy Project, Wellington, New Zealand  
Driver, Physics Room, Christchurch, New Zealand

1999

Collections, Taonga, Trash, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand  
Re-Animated, Rm3, Auckland, New Zealand  
Wallace Art Trust Awards, Finalist, Auckland, New Zealand

1998

Endless Summer, The Honeymoon Suite, Dunedin, New Zealand  
W3, The Honeymoon Suite, Dunedin, New Zealand

## CURATED PROJECTS

2012

Sampler, Auckland Festival Of Photography, Pearce Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

2011

Sampler, Auckland Festival Of Photography, Pearce Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

2009

Flicker, Auckland Festival Of Photography, Pearce Gallery, Auckland, New Zealand

2002

Honestly: New Artists 2002, Artspace, Auckland, New Zealand  
Fertilizer, High Street Project, Christchurch, New Zealand

2000

The Paper Show, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

1999

Out Of The Blue, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand

## AWARDS AND RESIDENCIES

2019

McCahon House Artists in Residence, French Bay, Auckland

2018

The Australian Photobook of the Year Award, Memento Pro, (winner)

2014

Dunedin Public Art Gallery Residency, Dunedin, New Zealand

2013

Headlands Center Of Art Residency, San Francisco, USA

2012

James Wallace Art Trust Fulbright Award



SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

2022

Robyn Maree Pickens, "Aftermath," Michael Lett Documents, 2022

2017

Steve Carr, Variations for Troubled Hands, ISBN 978-0-9953586-3-8, Perimeter Editions 025, 2017

2018

Steve Carr, Watermelon, ISBN 978-0-473-45422-7, 2018

2016

Robert Leonard, Bullet Time Exhibition Catalogue, 2016

2015

Robert Leonard, Annabel, Eyeline, no. 82, 2015

2012

Virginia Were, "Between the Sweet and the Malevolent", Art News, Autumn 2012

2009

"New Artland, Series 2 - Episode 9, Steve Carr: Snowballs", TVNZ Channel 7, October 31, 2009

Edited by Lauren Cornell, Massimiliano Gioni, And Laura Hoptman, Younger Than Jesus Artist Directory, New Museum & Phaidon Press, 2009

Warwick Brown, Seen This Century – 100 Contemporary Artists: A Collectors Guide, 2009

Ali Bramwell, Old, New, Borrowed, Blue: 10 Years at The Blue Oyster, 2009

2007

Sarah Farrar, "A Hobo's Paradise: Popcorn Mountain, Sausages On Sticks and A Cigarette Tree", Telecom Prospect 2007 New Art New Zealand Online Catalogue, February 11 2007

2006

Edited by Manu Park, A Tale of Two Cities, Busan Biennale Exhibition Catalogue, 2006

Lara Strongman, Recovered Memory: The Fourth Goodman Suter Contemporary Exhibition Catalogue, 2006

Aaron Watson, "Lest You Be Judged", Art Zone, Issue No. 13, 2006

Ali Bramwell, "Performance Art, Whatever That Is", Online Essay, 20 December 2006

2005

Robert Leonard, Snake Oil, Chartwell Acquisitions 2002 – 2005, Auckland Art Gallery, 2005

Edited by Michael Lett, Michael Lett Year Book, 2005

SELECTED REVIEWS

2018

Louise Blouin, "Steve Carr Chasing the Light at Christchurch Art Gallery", Blouin Art International, November 07 2018

Lynn Freeman, "Steve Carr gets up-close at a fireworks display", Radio NZ, Standing Room Only, 2 September 2018

John Hurrell, "Steve Carr as Trickster", Eye Contact, October 16 2018

Charlie Gates, "New fireworks art show opens with a bang in Christchurch", The Press, September 06 2018

2017

John Hurrell, "Carr at Lett", Eye Contact, July 21 2017

Susan Sandys, "Troubled Hands", The Guardian, July 3, 2017

Mick Jensen, "Artist Showcases Film, Photographic Works", Ashburton Courier, May 25, 2017

2016

Dan Rule, "Our Pick of the Best Exhibitions in Town", The Age, April 8 2016

Robert Nelson, "Visual arts review: Gallery Deconstructs the Vegetable", The Age, April 12 2016

Sarah Catherall, "Frozen in Time – Bullet Time", The Press, March 25 2016

Charlie Gates, "Canterbury's New Melon-Popping, Apple Shooting, Poodle Grooming Film Lecturer", The Press, February 3 2016

2014

Sophie Violet Gilmore, "Steve Carr at DPAG", Eye Contact, June 13 2014

Hannah Collier, "Stretching Time" Critic Issue 9, 2014

David Eggleton, "Shaking Loose the Resonances", New Zealand Listener, 1 May 2014

James Dignan, "Art Seen", Otago Daily Times, 1 May 2014

Anthony Byrt, "Fools Gold", Art New Zealand, May 2014

Tara McDowell, "Critics' Pick", ArtForum.com, April 04 2014



Edward Hanfling, "Exhibition Review: Freedom Farmers", New Zealand Listener, 14 Nov 2014

2013

TJ McNamara, "A Collection of Sensations", NZ Herald, February 16 2013

John Hurrell, "Steve Carr Assortment", Eye Contact, February 14 2013

2012

John Hurrell, "Five Diverse Videos at Lett", Eye Contact, October 23 2012

2011

John Hurrell, "Messy Fun with Balloons and Paint", Eye Contact, August 5 2011

2010

John Hurrell, "Steve Carr's Response to Japan", Eye Contact, September 29 2010

John Hurrell, "Last Lett Show at K'rd", Eye Contact, December 22 2010

2009

Chanelle Carrick, "Art Seen: Realist Paintings", Otago Daily Times, September 19 2009

2009

John Hurrell, "The Bowels of the Burbs", Eye Contact, August 12 2009

Andrew Paul Wood, "Brought to Light", Eye Contact, December 5 2009

2008

John Hurrell, "Trophies", Eye Contact, August 13 2008

2007

"It's Pop Art - But Not as We Know It", The Dominion Post, February 8, 2007

"Popcorn Rises to New Heights", The Dominion Post, February 9, 2007

David Levinson, "Steve Carr - Smoke and Mirrors", NZ Art Monthly Online Review, February 14 2007

Aaron Kreisler, "The Fringe Factor", The New Zealand Listener, March 3-9 Volume 207 No 3486, 2007

Natasha Krusic, "Emotion", NZ Art Monthly Online Review, July 2007

Tessa Laird, "New School", The New Zealand Listener, March 10-16 Volume 207 No 3487, 2007

John Hurrell, "Non-Speaking Verbal Action", Artbash, March 13 2007

Chanelle Carrick, "Middens and Marshmallows: The Magical World of Steve Carr", NZ Art Monthly Online Review, October 20 2007

2006

Averil Overton, "Dreams and Recollections", Recovered Memory: The Fourth Goodman Suter Contemporary Art Project 2006 Exhibition Catalogue, 2006

Pippin Barr, "Stimulus-Response", Michael Lett in Wellington, December 2 2006

2005

Aaron Watson, "On The Radar(T)", Art Zone, Issue No. 9, 2005

Cassandra Barnett & Lauren Winstone, "Likes The Outdoors", Online Catalogue Essay, February 28 2005

Deborah Orum, "Remember What?", Natural Selection, Issue 4, 2005

Janita Craw & Robert Leonard, "High Chair: New Zealand Artist On Childhood", Exhibition Catalogue, 2005

2004

Aaron Watson, "Elvis, Gun's and Roses, Prince and Steve Carr", Art Zone No.5, July 2004

Emma Bugden, "Telecom Prospect 2004", Online Catalogue

Ben Curnow, "New New Zealand Art", Limited Edition Publication, Isbn 0-476-00550-7, 1 June 2004

Robert Leonard, "Pressing Flesh: Skin, Touch, Intimacy", Exhibition Catalogue, 2004

Margaret Duncan, "Showstoppers Stars Emerge", The Press, Christchurch, Wednesday May 5 2004

Sarah Farrar, "Baby I'm A Star", Show Stoppers Catalogue, Jonathan Smart Gallery

Gina Irish, "Christchurch", Art New Zealand, Number 112, Spring 2004

William Mcaloon, "Arts: The Grand Illusion", The New Zealand Listener, Volume 194 No 3349, July 17 – July 23 2004

Lucy Hammonds, "The Turning Curve, New Directions in Object Art", Left at The Members Lounge Catalogue, Object Space.

"Five Up Front", The Press, Christchurch, Wednesday April 7, 2004

Sue Gardiner, "When You Open the Third Drawer Down...", Art News, Autumn 2004

T J McNamara, "The Galleries: Art of Saying One Thing and Meaning Another", New Zealand Herald, 17 March 2004

Mini International, "Auckland in Focus", August 25, 2004

2003

Jon Bywater, "Schmucks Looking at Girls", The Listener, 17 May 2003

"Wild at Art", Pulp Magazine, Issue 34, August / September 2003

Melinda Williams, "Sure to Rise", Pavement Magazine, Issue 60, August / September 2003

Louise Poppelwell, "Art Space with A Difference", NZ Herald, April 3 2003



# ARTFORUM

## Steve Carr

DUNEDIN PUBLIC ART GALLERY

30 the Octagon

March 8–June 15

Steve Carr's solo exhibition comprises three works, but the six-channel video projection titled *Transpiration*, 2014, is the showstopper. Large-scale hyperrealistic carnations are strewn across two gallery walls—a pastel spectrum of baby blue, pink, and yellow—their quivering tissue-paper petals much larger than life. The effect is exhilarating and just a touch embarrassing, since the carnation is a lowly flower, ubiquitous and a bit tacky, and offers longevity over beauty.

Carr revels in offering the viewer the iconic and the imperceptible, the instant gratification and the *longue durée*, so things are not how they first appear. These luscious images eventually reveal movement, a glimpse of a petal folding or fluttering, and the carnations' colors change, too, each pink, yellow, and blue slowly deepening. Carr has filmed a classroom science experiment with a time-lapse camera: Place a white carnation into dyed water, and the flower absorbs the water through its stem, adopting its dyed color in the process. The work's points of reference are as avant-garde as they are populist: for instance, Warhol's flower paintings that were in turn inspired by Jean Cocteau's 1959 film *Testament of Orpheus* (thus Carr returns the flower imagery to its cinematic roots).

But the video installation on view is astonishing for its perceptual rather than metaphorical effects and is, ultimately, a gift for the patient viewer. Time sped up, then slowed down, and presented in high-definition lushness hints at other orders of perception. This is true as well for the two works that bookend *Transpiration*. They include a wall of perfectly gridded prototype golf balls for pro golfers, sliced in half to reveal their multicolored concentric interiors, and a small video projection of a mechanical bird set in front of a theatrical backdrop, filmed over the course of a day, but now condensed into seemingly artificial cycles of light and shadow.

— Tara McDowell



Steve Carr, *Transpiration*, 2014, six-channel video projection, color, 15 minutes looped. Installation view.

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*Annabel* 2007. Still, HD transferred to DVD. Duration 1hr 10mins. Courtesy the artist.



*Annabel* 2007. Still, HD transferred to DVD. Duration 1hr 10mins. Courtesy the artist.

## STEVE CARR: ANNABEL

ROBERT LEONARD

In America, before the 1920s, cigarettes were a male thing. Few women smoked. It was seen as slutty and unladylike. But, as tobacco companies recognised that women were an untapped market, they set out to change the culture. They enlisted the help of Edward Bernays, a public-relations mastermind and a nephew of Sigmund Freud's. He asked psychoanalyst A.A. Brill what women's unconscious motivation to smoke might be. Brill said that cigarettes were symbols of masculine empowerment, little penises, and that 'penis envy' could drive women to smoke. Armed with this insight, Bernays staged an intervention during a 1929 New York Easter parade. He organised for a group of fashionable debutants (not too pretty, not too plain), to join the parade, then to all light up simultaneously. He tipped off the press, saying the women were

suffragettes lighting 'torches of freedom'. The press took the bait. The photographers were waiting. It was free promotion and an early instance of psychoanalysis being used to shape desires (before the fact) rather than simply analysing them (after).<sup>1</sup>

Big tobacco cashed in on the association between smoking and feminism. They recruited modern heroines, like trans-Atlantic aviatrix Amelia Earhart, for endorsements. Smoking was linked to female strength, defiance, and emancipation, and also promoted as a way to stay slim. They created special brands for women, shaping and styling cigarettes and packs 'for the feminine hand', turning them into seductive props.<sup>2</sup> Even after 1964's damning Surgeon General's Report, Virginia Slims (introduced in 1968) could still be promoted as defiance of patriarchy: 'You've Come a Long Way, Baby'. Today, in the affluent west, women are as likely to smoke as men, achieving a dubious form of equality.

As we all know, tobacco's fantasies contrast with its realities: stained teeth, bad breath, enhanced cellulite, emphysema, heart disease, lung cancer, gangrenous toes, botched babies, *etcetera*. On average, smokers lose more than ten years of their life to the habit, yet smoking remains a defiant, 'supermodel' thing to do. Although Linda Evangelista ended up in hospital with a collapsed lung in 1991 and quit, she soon returned to smoking. And in 2011, Kate Moss lit up while on the runway during National No-Smoking Day, joyously defying a ban on catwalk smoking.

The sight of attractive, young women smoking has long provided a nexus for compelling but contradictory ideas we have about sex and gender, glamour and power, illness and death. Auckland artist Steve Carr plays on it all in his 2007 video *Annabel*. It's Carr's longest video to date, an epic single take of one-hour-and-ten-minutes duration—a portrait of a young woman chain smoking. Annabel is slender, with high cheekbones, and long chestnut hair, cut in a fabulous fringe. She has bedroom eyes and full lips. As she smokes, she works through a repertoire of acquired gestures: holding her cigarette like this, like that, bringing it to her mouth, sucking on it, inhaling, exhaling, blowing smoke, looking bored, thoughtful, pensive, eyes watering slightly. The already sedate, flattering lighting is only enhanced by the accumulating haze—a subtle veil of smoke. The woman says nothing, but she becomes a screen onto which we can project our speculations as to what she might be thinking, including what she might be thinking about us watching her in the future. Of course, we can never know what she's thinking, only speculate.

*Annabel* positions the viewer as a voyeur. The camera remains static throughout—like a surveillance camera. The filmmaker could have been present during the filming, or not (perhaps he ducked out for a cigarette). Although we cannot know if Annabel was being watched at the time, she is completely aware of being filmed. She avoids making eye contact with the camera, which perhaps shows how conscious of it she is. As a medium close-up, *Annabel* recalls Andy Warhol's filmic portraits, his *Screen Tests* of glamorous sitters, some of whom enjoyed a cigarette, cigar, or joint while being filmed.<sup>3</sup> But

equally, it recalls smoking-fetish pornography (lots of good stuff on YouTube).

They say that smoking's erotic appeal is tied to its prohibition, which is probably why, looking back to the 1920s, women smoking is sexier than men smoking. If many men find smoking women sexy, for a few it is acutely, exquisitely so—it is a fetish called capnolagnia. Most capnolagnists would agree with Brill that cigarettes are little penises, enjoying the female smoker as a 'phallic woman'. However, everything contains its opposite. Their number also includes 'black lung' or 'lung damage' fetishists, a sadistic sub-group who get their kicks from the thought of women being damaged by the habit.

Carr wrote a blurb to accompany *Annabel* on the *Circuit* website. It is written in the third person: '*Annabel* documents the performance of one of



ANNABEL IS ABOUT OUR SEEING OURSELVES, IN TURN, AS ARTIST, AS VIEWER, AND AS SUBJECT... CARR'S WORK PROVIDES OPPORTUNITIES TO MEDITATE UPON THE NUANCES, MECHANICS, AND POLITICS OF THESE DIFFERENCES.



*Annabel*, 2007. Still, HD transferred to DVD. Duration 1hr 10mins. Courtesy the artist.

Carr's students engaged in the act of attempting to smoke an entire packet of cigarettes one after the other. Like a naughty child being caught [smoking] for the first time and made to smoke the entire packet as punishment, the viewer is witness to Annabel's endurance and eventual failure.<sup>4</sup>

The blurb tells us things we could not deduce from the video itself (notably, that the sitter is one of Carr's students) and suggests that we might consider her chain-smoking here as aversion therapy or as reliving a childhood punishment. After reading the blurb, I felt like a creepy teacher, perching on a hot student I'd held back on detention. The blurb places me in the role of her punisher, albeit benevolent (it's for her own good, of course). The pretext that she is being punished provides an alibi for my scrutinising her; her hair, her fingers, her lips.

A telling feature of Carr's blurb is a grammatical error. The first part of the second sentence — 'Like a

naughty child being caught for the first time and made to smoke the entire packet as punishment' — should have been tacked on the end of the first sentence, so it refers to Annabel. But Carr made it part of the second sentence, which is about the viewer. This Freudian slip suggests that, while viewers may see themselves as punishers, we may also identify with her as punished, somehow sharing in her punishment through empathy. So, as much as I might take pleasure in Annabel's slow poisoning, I can also identify with her, as if this is an ordeal we go through together. Perhaps it is 'hurting me more than it hurts her'.

With *Annabel*, real-time duration is crucial. It is a meditative work, a little vanitas. It cross-references our reflection upon it to smoking itself, as a reflective activity. It gives us time to enjoy looking at Annabel, to cruise her with our eyes, and to think about what is at stake in this, for us, for her. It lets us ponder beauty and addiction, desire and death. Its duration allows us to work through contradictory insights, accumulating them, rather than having one erase or supersede the others.

It is interesting to watch *Annabel* alongside another Carr video, *Smoke Train* (2005). Here, a young mother entertains her young daughter on a domestic back doorstep. As mum enjoys her cigarette break, she modifies the pack so she can use it to puff out smoke rings to entertain the toddler. We are drawn to this magic, nostalgic, loving scene, but also disturbed by the way mum (who should know better) inducts her wide-eyed daughter into the joys of the filthy habit. Shot on film, *Smoke Train* looks as though it could have been made decades ago, before there were such taboos around smoking.<sup>5</sup> Viewing *Annabel* through *Smoke Train*, we might fantasise that Annabel is that little girl, now grown up, facing the consequences.



*Smoke Train*, 2005. From the series *A Pocket Full of Horses*. Still, 35mm transferred to DVD. Duration 1min 55secs. Courtesy the artist.

One of Carr's perennial concerns is pleasures—innocent and guilty. Mostly these pleasures are gendered and many are sexual (albeit sublimated). In his videos, he has a pillow fights with little girls in their jammies; he smashes up a panel van with skater boys; he drinks Tiger beer with a 'throng of models' in a jacuzzi; and, in scuba gear, he watches bikini girls swim around him in a pool. In his more recent videos, Carr's pleasure is often abstracted in the form of cars doing burnouts, paint-filled-balloons bursting, and the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge being obliterated by bullets in orgasmic slo-mo. Carr shares pleasures with the people (and the things) in his videos; he also shares these pleasures with us, his audience. However, his pleasures, their pleasures, and our pleasures are never exactly the same, even if they overlap and reflect one another.

Pleasures may involve identification, but it is one thing for a punisher to identify with his victim, another for the victim to identify back. Identification does not mean equality; indeed, it can mask inequality. *Annabel* is about our seeing ourselves, in turn, as artist, as viewer, and as subject; but it is also about the difference between being Annabel and filming her, the difference between being Annabel and watching her, and the difference between filming Annabel and watching a film of her. Carr's work provides opportunities to meditate upon the nuances, mechanics, and politics of these differences. In a relay of compromised identifications, we may share a cigarette, but we can never fully become the other. We can never get inside her head, can never know her. Nor she us. In the end, Carr's *Annabel* highlights loneliness: hers, ours. After making *Annabel*, Carr quit smoking. ■

#### Notes

1. With apologies to Adam Curtis, from whose 2002 BBC television documentary series, *The Century of the Self*, I lifted this account.
2. In 1937, New Zealand's own Rita Angus, freshly-separated from her husband, would defiantly brandish a cigarette in her famous self portrait, to signal her feminist independence and modernity. The painting is in the collection of Te Papa, Wellington.
3. Made between 1964 and 1966, Warhol's screen tests were each about four-minutes long—a single roll of film. A number of subjects—including Marcel Duchamp—smoke during the filming. In 1964, Warhol also made a feature-length film of Henry Geldzahler smoking a cigar. While the camera was running, Warhol apparently walked off to make phone calls.
4. [www.circuit.org.nz/film/annabel](http://www.circuit.org.nz/film/annabel)
5. For Carr, *Smoke Train* is genuinely nostalgic. His own mother showed him the trick when he was a child. Significantly, here, he has chosen to have his role played by a little girl, complicating (or simplifying) our relays of identification.

Robert Leonard is Chief Curator at City Gallery Wellington.





## Fool's Gold

### The Recent Films of Steve Carr

ANTHONY BYRT

Huge carnations hover in half-dozen clusters on the wall. Their wavering reflections pool on the polished floor. They start their lives looking like balls of cotton rags—white, bunchy, frayed. Then, colour starts to gather at their fringes, and grows into a slow leach that turns them yellow, or pink, or blue. The flowers' inner folds wobble slightly, and there is a more general sway at their outer limits—a kind of jetlagged, peripheral rocking. Single petals slowly peel away from their bulbs; minuscule movements (it is impossible to know exactly when and where they will occur) that turn into sublime shocks, and come with the heartbreaking awareness that you may not catch another one for hours. And yet for all that, there is still the sense that maybe nothing is happening. A young woman walks into the flower-filled room, and is convinced she is seeing a still image. Even when she sees a petal move, and wonders aloud whether the flowers are changing colour before her eyes, she maintains it is all a ruse.

Steve Carr's 2014 *Transpiration* is the culmination of his ten-week residency at the Dunedin Public Art Gallery. There is nothing special about his flowers, which are just shop-bought blooms. The process being witnessed is pretty basic too. The carnations are sitting in unseen pots of coloured water, sucking it up

through their stems. It is a primary school magic trick, a way to teach kids about natural science, as well as a cheap device florists use to stain their stock. Carr has shot the process over 24 hours with a time-lapse camera, then stitched it together into a seeping loop of around 15 minutes, which runs forwards and back so that we witness the flower's inhalation and exhalation as a constant, tidal pulse.

The banality of the work's origins is also transformed by the weight of art history. Although the flowers are not painted, they are thick with paint. Their ragged edges are like the final drags of a brush before it breaks from the surface. The white on black is as stark and luminescent as Manet (one of the greatest flower painters), or Chardin, or even Velázquez. Carr's carnations are also a clear nod to Andy Warhol's *Flowers*, and to the film that caused the Pop artist to make them: Jean Cocteau's *Testament of Orpheus*, in which, in the final scene, a white rose lands in a pool of blood and turns deep red. From Cocteau to Warhol to Carr; a complicated family lineage that reaches through classroom science experiments, through Pop and Impressionism, all the way back to seventeenth-century still-lives. Except that Carr's flowers are never still.

Carr has also filled the room with a low drone, which hums just below the gallery's air conditioning units and video projector fans. This is punctuated

(opposite) STEVE CARR *Transpiration* 2014  
6-channel installation, Sony XD, duration 15 mins (looped)  
(Photograph: Max Bellamy)

(right) STEVE CARR *American Night* 2014  
Single channel film, Blackmagic 4K, duration 15 mins (looped)  
(below) STEVE CARR *Air Guitar* 2001  
Single channel film, VHS, duration 11 mins 24 secs

every 15 minutes by the bright chirps of a mechanical bird, coming from a television screen in one corner. In *American Night* (2014) the little bird perches on a fake branch against a background of spring blossom. It is so obviously a set-up that it initially seems incongruous alongside Carr's floral illusion. But as the screen's artificial day disappears into false night, it becomes clear that here too we are witnessing a 24-hour cycle shrunk to a handful of minutes. As the sun comes up, the little bird lets off its frenetic tweet; a few seconds of fake birdsong. As with *Transpiration*, Carr is riffing here on one of the great final scenes of modern cinema, this time David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*, when a fake bird closes out the auteur's bizarre dreamscape.

In the time it takes us to watch the bird's daily cycle, everything is new, different, and somewhere else: blues are white and whites are pink and some yellows have turned so bright they are almost phosphorescent green. It is a remarkable installation, maybe the best Carr has ever made; the strongest evidence yet of his ever-increasing ability to control, and re-invent, the complex interaction between filmic materiality and cinematic time. He seems to have an innate ability to match the tool to the job, whether it be 16mm film, HD video, the crappy camera on his old MacBook, time-lapse photography, or the revolutionary Phantom camera. Crucially though, Carr's videos are never about cameras and the tricks they can pull. They are about screens, in the same way that paintings are about screens: material things that act as images, as windows, and as defeaters of sensible time. The result is the same too; like great painting, Carr's work is about bodily exchange, affect, and what happens to our experience of the space around the work—like the young woman who swore she had seen a mirage—when we walk away from it.

Such readings—such elevations, even—depart from the standard wisdom about Carr. His work is usually seen as charming and cheeky, underpinned by a boyish taste for exhibitionism. He first came to prominence, for example, with *Air Guitar* (2001), a video presented for his final student exhibition at Elam School of Fine Arts. In it, Carr acts out a stadium-rock fantasy, miming, with remarkable accuracy despite the stone-silence, a classic track from guitar god Joe Satriani's album *Surfing with the Alien*.

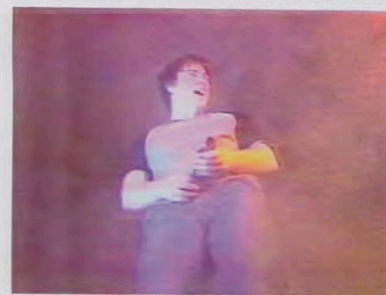
Things start as one would expect in any teenage boy's bedroom, but then Carr dials the hubris up to ten; as a smoke machine shrouds him in a starstruck fog he grows in confidence and strut, even letting off a couple of Pete Townshend-style windmills before returning to his phantom solo. As funny as it is, Carr's silent performance hones in on a second layer of teenage male fantasy—all the bucking, thrusting, and



straining make it clear that this is, more than anything else, a wank video. Watching Carr pounding away at his absent axe becomes both ridiculous and awkward; he turns us into his collective mum, walking in at the worst possible moment.

This willfully untoward sexuality did not pass in a hurry. In 2002, he made *Pillow Fight*, in which he and a group of teenage girls have a pyjama party and smash each other with pillows, sending clouds of feathers into the air. In the same year, he borrowed an ice-cream van for *Mr Whippy*, in which he parks up outside a primary school and serves up free cones to little kids. Not long after came *Dive Pool*: a beautiful film shot underwater of Carr in a scuba mask, watching bikini-clad women swim past him while he sucks in oxygen—evenly, mechanically—from the tank on his back. Ostensibly, there was nothing wrong with any of these acts, except of course, that *everything* was wrong with them; Carr used plausible deniability to infect childish innocence with an implicit deviancy. For some critics, the cumulative effect tipped past the early humour of *Air Guitar* and into a more corrupt space. Rather than backing down, Carr, ever the comedian, made one of his funniest and most awkward films in response: *Tiger Girls* (2004), in which he sits in a spa pool filled with attractive young women and proceeds to do absolutely nothing—except drain several bottles of Tiger Beer.

This focus on Carr's juvenility blinded many observers to the deeper forces at play in his work. There is no question that his early games, performances and gags were adolescent. But they were also important steps in his attempt to master a more general, archetypal condition: Carr is, above all else, a trickster. In his brilliant book *Trickster Makes*





*This World*, Lewis Hyde shows us that the trickster is, in every culture in which it appears, a force for cultural change. Central to this is the trickster's power to step across the thresholds between gods and men, and life and death, unencumbered or deliberately negligent of the rules that dictate behaviour in each. For example, a trickster might steal fire from the gods, giving us mortals our first and most important technology. But he is also responsible for the forces that keep us rooted in our own mortality; most notably, our desires—our need to eat, to drink, to fight, to love, to fuck, and so on. His mischief reminds us that we are only flesh and bone, and that our bodies are both contingent on, and vulnerable to, our appetites (little wonder then, that Carr's early works were full of food, booze, and sex).

In order to cause cultural change, tricksters often have to change themselves—they are shapeshifters. Right from the start, Carr underwent a series of magical transformations for revelatory ends. In *Air Guitar*, he becomes a masturbating Satriani. In *Tyson* (2002), he becomes half-animal, squaring off with his pet dog over a tennis ball. In *Cowboy and Indians* (2004), he becomes a disturbing man-child, and in *Pillow Fight*, a teenage girl.

He is also a transformer of material. He has turned fire extinguishers into glass, bear rugs into wood, and routinely smashes open spheres and circles to reveal the secrets inside: corn kernels exploded into popcorn, apples destroyed by a slow-moving bullet, elite golf balls sliced in two, the grease-stains left in pizza boxes. This magic is often accompanied by an inability to resist showing us how his tricks are done. In *Table Cloth Pull* (2007) for instance, we see him fail a 'Magic 101' task miserably; in *Smoke Train* (2005), a mother teaches her five-year-old daughter a smoking trick; and in *Turkey Shoot* (2009), we watch raw poultry transform, at the hands of a magazine stylist, into a

mouth-watering yet still uncooked roast. Even the steam emanating from it is fraudulent; it is cigarette smoke turned into photogenic plumes by a little baster.

The interconnectedness between these mercurial forces—sex, mischief, humour, magic, illusion—came to a head in one of Carr's finest works; his 16mm film *Burn Out* (2009). On an early West Auckland morning, a young man in a black car does exactly what the title suggests. But rather than jump-cuts and heavy-metal, as one usually gets on YouTube videos of burnouts, Carr's event is shot at distance, against lush Henderson bush, with no sound. There is a rough, transformative physicality to the action: rubber turning into smoke for no good reason other than for its beautiful grandeur. But it is also an empty, dislocated act of masculinity—there are no girls, no guitars, no open beer cans. Halfway through, an elderly man comes out to see what is going on. He leans in through the passenger window and says something to the driver, then raises a hand and walks away—embarrassed or satisfied with what he has discovered, we will never know.

It is, in many ways, *Air Guitar* redux; there is smoke, circles, humour, solitary romance, hopeless bogan endeavour. Except what we are witnessing this time is not a fantasy or a jack-off but a tangible transformation (rubber combusting into smoke) that acts as a stand-in for the artist himself—a kind of self-portrait through material. This is a vital shift; in his early works, Carr himself took us across moral and magical thresholds, but with *Burn Out* and everything since, he uses matter undergoing extreme change to lead us over material boundaries instead.

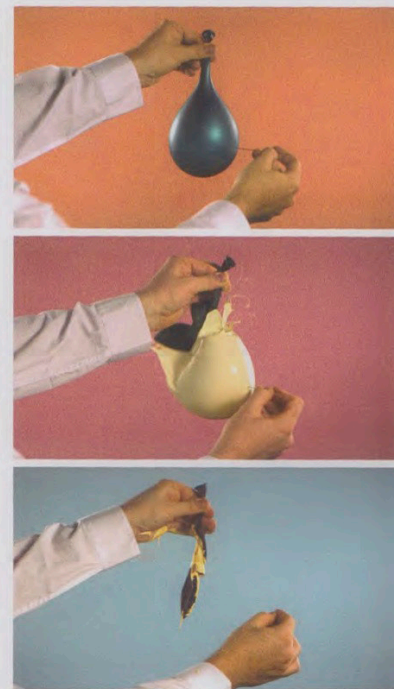
Nowhere is this clearer than in *Screen Shots* (2011).

Across nine monitors arranged in a three-by-three grid, we see the artist's hand slowly pricking paint-filled balloons against a coloured background. As

the pin slips in and each balloon peels back, there is a brief and wondrous moment in which the paint holds its shape and wobbles in mid-air before coming apart. Once again, Carr transforms a childish pleasure (blowing up a paint bomb) into something erotic and sublime. The explosions are filmed using a Phantom camera, which is capable of shooting high-definition footage at more than 5,400 frames per second. It is designed to show us things our eyes were not meant to see. Here, Carr uses it for exactly that purpose, though whether we are meant to read the slowed-down explosions as successes or failures of control is unclear. It is important to note that Carr does not use the Phantom here to get off on its technological capabilities, but rather to create an image of total bodily empathy. His balloons, and the illicitly exposed paint they contain, hang like organs and burst with human release. To over-emphasise this, they are presented on 32-inch screens, which provide a 1:1 scale between the artist/magician's hand and our own. Carr cannot resist a dig at art history here either, crashing the absurdity of Abstract Expressionism's drippy masculinity into its fussy, industrial Other—the pristine Minimalist grid.

In *Dead Time* (2012), Carr uses the Phantom to mine even more deeply into art history. Seven screens hang, like still-life paintings, in a row. On each, a single apple is suspended from a string against (like his later flowers) a black ground. The inspiration for his composition is obvious and unhidden: the paintings of the Spanish master Juan Sánchez Cotán. Each apple is just different enough for us to realize that it is not the same image repeated seven times. Then we are forced to wait, and wait. But for those patient enough to stick with it, the payoff arrives—a William Tell succession of explosions as each apple is obliterated, one after the other, by a single bullet that traces visibly across the screens. By stretching an event that lasts a few seconds to several minutes, Carr allows us to witness not just action, but total, painterly disintegration. Towards the end, the last flecks of apple flesh look like stars spread across black space—a Big Bang that tricks us into thinking, just for a moment, that we are staring into the heart of the universe.

*Transpiration*, then, is more than a one-off victory over time and space; it is the culmination of an intense period of magical experimentation. Carr's carnations are the sorts of things a clown might use to squirt you in the eye. But they are also paintings, bodies, organs demanding a slow release, and things experiencing their own death, over and again. This is Carr's alchemy: his ability to turn the basest of materials—apples, balloons, carnations, tyres—into gold. The great sophistication of his recent works lies in his recognition that the forces of material transformation



in which he is so interested—combustion, explosion, degradation, disintegration, transpiration—are, like cinema, entirely contingent on time, and that the tools of his trade give him the ability not only to witness change, but completely alter our experience of it. Carr has always tested our patience, and he has always been a Fool. But now, he is also a magician, and a generous one at that, who allows us to breathe underwater, see the universe in a shattered apple, walk into a painting, and disappear with him into clouds of smoke.



(opposite) STEVE CARR *Dead Time* 2012  
7-channel installation, Phantom Flex, duration 520 sec  
(Photograph: Jarrod Rawlins)

(above) STEVE CARR *Screen Shots* 2011  
9-channel installation, Phantom Flex, duration 26 min 22 sec (looped)

(right) STEVE CARR *Burn Out* 2009  
Single channel film, Super 16mm, duration 4 mins 53 secs





## Steve Carr, X, Michael Lett, 31 January – 2 March 2013



Steve Carr, *Dead*

*Time* (2012), 7 channel installation, Phantom Flex transferred to ProRes HQ files synchronised through multiple hard drives, duration 520 seconds, edition of three

The passing of time is a slippery experience, difficult to pin down and usually different in retrospect. Thinking back, there are usually milestones, key markers that help you plot a path from one fixed point to another with lesser events positioned before or after with reference to cause-effect relationships. This is Auckland gallerist Michael Lett's 10th year in business, an occasion he has chosen to observe with a survey of works by Steve Carr, the artist whose exhibition *Dive* inaugurated the gallery in 2003.

It's uncommon to present a gallery history, especially in the commercial realm, but a 10-year artist survey is an established format, like a rite of passage, confirming the artist's path from emerging to established, with a tidying up of early experiments that will conveniently fall just prior to the survey's timeframe. There was a time when artists such as Milan Mrkusich were given a public gallery survey every 10 years, coralling works into tidy groups that form an orderly career path, from figurative landscapes to colour-field abstraction.

These days most artists would be lucky to get such heavy canonical treatment by public galleries, and would be reluctant to see their work so prescriptively laid out, opting instead to present a major new project or commission. So, it is shrewd that Lett has pre-empted Carr's institutional canonisation and presented his own decade of criss-crossing paths and motifs. A cynic would presume commercial or careerist motivations from an artist-dealer initiative, but a (presumably)

first-person account provides an intriguing picture of the artist's current interests, filtered through prior projects.

One of the exhibition's central works is *Popcorn Mountain* [1], first exhibited in 2006 and based on the artist's own weight. Presumably, the artist and the work have expanded in the intervening years, adding a further temporal and autobiographical dimension. Whereas Felix Gonzales-Torres famously represented his late lover with a weight-matched pile of sweets that diminishes in a Eucharistic fashion as the pile is consumed, Carr recreates himself in an ever-expanding mass, produced in explosive style.

*Popcorn Mountain* was also exhibited in *Prospect 2007*, causing NZ Listener reviewer Aaron Kreisler to remark on the light relief it provided as agenda-less art, shown alongside Carr's finely carved cherrywood *Sausages on Sticks* (2007), which makes elaborate objects from the rugged blokey constructions of a campfire bbq. Like many of the artist's works at the time, there is a nostalgia invoked for childlike gameplay and indulgence. But also a recurring investigation, especially in video works, of bodily interactions and performance.



Steve Carr, *X* (2013) installation view

In *X*, alongside *Popcorn Mountain* there is a new photographic series, *Fireman's Boots*, showing seven empty pairs of boots with overalls around their ankles, a suit without a body, looking like the remains of a hasty departure; pants quickly dropped and vacated. The mental image of seven firemen running around off-camera in their undergarments is hard to resist. As always, the title is oddball yet deadpan, and there is a suggestion of formalist play – variations on a theme but more akin to Richard Maloy's butter mounds or Hany Armanious' negative castings from peppercorn piles than the serial works of Sol LeWitt or the Beckers. But there is also a growing exploration of negative space, which wasn't always apparent but now seems conspicuous when combined with his early glass works, including one of a series of transparent fire extinguishers and an exquisitely



delicate cluster of cherries, ghostly traces of absent objects made from scientific blown glass. In the office, his first video *Air Guitar* (2001) is showing – the artist mimes a lengthy guitar solo in complete silence.

In the second room, another example of quite literal performance residue is a gridded series of forty-nine framed pizza box lids, complete with grease stains and encrusted cheese, resembling painterly variations in fleshy tones – these are probably responsible for the enlarged pile of popcorn. It's a prosaic counterpoint to the cosmic carnage of the exhibition's showpiece, a new seven channel video installation, *Dead Time* (2012), perfectly synched to show seven apples, lined up on separate screens across the wall and successively blown apart by a single bullet. At least, we're led to believe it's a single bullet passing from one screen to the next, leaving a trail of high-definition, slow-motion devastation. It's a classic image that opens up hidden worlds through the slowing down of time, like exploding water droplets and hovering hummingbirds. A Muybridge moment for the HD generation. But Carr amplifies the event through multi-screen repetition, creating a gratuitous action that is as much Tarantino as it is Attenborough; an elaborate campfire party trick, if the adjacent pile of popcorn is anything to go by.



Steve Carr, *X* (2013) installation view

With looped video works, there is always the question of whether you need to watch from the beginning to get the full pay-off at the end, and just how much you need to see. With *Dead Time*, there is no question of whether you have watched enough. For most of its eight minutes, the apples hang perfectly still, almost suspended in time and allowing plenty of opportunity for an audience to gather, like the well-rehearsed teaser routine of a busker. The apples are clearly all different, not just a sequence repeated seven times to create the illusion of something more complex – there is plenty of time to take in these details as Carr allows anticipation to grow. If you look away or wander off for a moment, you could easily miss the critical moment – you either see it or you

don't.



Steve Carr, *Dead Time* (2012), 7 channel installation, Phantom Flex transferred to ProRes HQ files synchronised through multiple hard drives, duration 520 seconds, edition of three

As the bullet enters the fruit, the skin breaks apart, imploding like the membranes of the nine balloons depicted in 2011's slow-mo study, *Screen Shots* [2] (represented here as bronze casts of deflated balloons), allowing the flesh to burst outwards and vaporise into small particles that hang and swirl in the air, forming what could be tiny galaxies. It's a transformational chaos that echoes back to the domestic cosmology of his popping corn, a profound aestheticisation of everyday mess. It's tempting to even see his porcelain *Donuts* (2007) as black holes or orbiting constellations.



Steve Carr, *Dead Time* (2012), 7 channel installation, Phantom Flex transferred to ProRes HQ files synchronised through

*multiple hard drives, duration 520 seconds, edition of three*

Carr's works are usually revealed in concise groupings of two or three, and although there is usually a hint of mischief, the underlying intent and connections can often be enigmatic. Like the work of fellow trickster Michael Parekowhai, the finish is so meticulous it almost disguises the ordinariness of the material, transforming them into hypnotic objects of wonder – like a magician at a child's party. So it is interesting to see how these performances have fluently shifted between film, photography and sculpture, recontextualising materials that can be traditional, esoteric or plain wacky. And it is revealing to see a large quantity of cherry-picked (ahem) works in playful and revealing configurations that allow for a range of cross-readings, which would be lost in a more formal chronology.

- Andrew Clifford

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**Source URL:** <http://circuit.org.nz/blog/steve-carr-x-michael-lett-31-january-%E2%80%93-2-march-2013>

**Links:**

[1] <http://www.window.auckland.ac.nz/archive/2006/03/onsite.html>

[2] <http://www.michaellett.com/artist/?artist=Steve+Carr&info=work&show=mystical+realism%3B+modest+gestures#>