

The world is all cut-outs then

Marcus Camphoo, Clara Joyce
Jimi DePriest & Nate Wood,
Michael Snow

July 26 - 7 September
Gallery 1+2
Goolugatup Heathcote

I started thinking about this exhibition in relationship to the building it sits in – the many entries and exits, the private and public areas, histories of isolation cells and shared wards, the glass-walled airlocks, and the omission of windows through block-out blinds and false walls. Getting to know the building has coincided with my ongoing interest in the dialectics of ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ as a way to explain the tension of mood and permission.

Gaston Bachelard wrote in his philosophical epic *The Poetics of Space* that such a dialectic challenges the dream of a solitary room (the idyll of the poet, a ‘cell of intimacy’) toward a certain claustrophobia of internalisation, gated permission and narrowness. A poet appears to thrive in confinement, yet Bachelard sought the overflow beyond such enclosure: ‘in what silence does the stairwell resound?’¹

A window to the south is rough with raindrops
That, caught in the screen, spell out untranslatable glyphs²

This moment in James Schuyler’s *Hymn to Life* (from where I have also sourced the exhibition title) translates such overflow into an everyday mise-en-scène. In selecting artists and works for this exhibition, I was directed by the roughness of rain on the windows.

To quote Margarita Kontev for un Projects, Clara Joyce has ‘[crafted] a new age of painting fit for loosely circumventing the mind’.³ I remember first reading this review of Clara’s 2024 exhibition *Breathing and Chaos* and was struck by the vision of a pottering walk around the mind that nonetheless escapes the entrapment of repetitive, paranoid and prescriptive thinking. Clara paints the edge, the lens or the surface without allowing such membranes to form a limit or an inhibition.

For this exhibition, Clara shows how the rigidity of the grid and the window is negotiable. I wanted nothing more than the opening mouth of the gallery to take a deep breath in and not let the permission of a room dictate the thinking and dreaming possible with such visionary painting. The jutting L-shaped room offers a correspondence of figure and ground between Clara’s painting and Marcus’, both surfaces themselves cutting-out of the darkened gallery space. A wintery reversal of similar responsive strategies applied by Kate Moss in the previous exhibition; to move beyond a limit by coincidence or happenstance only.

Marcus ‘Double O’ Camphoo Kemarre is an Alyawarr man living between Ali Curung (Kaytetye Country) and Tennant Creek (Warumungu Country). Art centre manager Harry Price has often quoted Agnes Martin in describing Double O as painting ‘with [his] back to the world’. He paints fast, summoning portals and dimensions. I cannot help but be utterly captured by his grid-and-band compositions, and in this exhibition, Marcus anchors all thresholds, a focused and poised red and white geometry.

Once anchored, Double O stretches bands of colour and line which at once refer to the situational thresholds of the building, but also call upon, as noted by Tristan Harwood a correspondence with central desert ceremonial body painting

his canvases often approximate the stature of the human body in size and there is a certain kinetic energy [...] In the case of ceremonial dance, the picture-support is not a two-dimensional plane, but a breathing, moving, aural, oral, dancing body grounded in a specific ancestral place.⁴

The disavowal and dispossession of Indigenous people and culture is a

reiterant violence and limit-case for thresholds deeply stitched across this country. A widened portal offered by Double O is an abstract entry into different questions and approaches to such limits.



Jimi DePriest initially developed *Critical Mass* through their research of automated weaponry within military-industrial imperialism. The sculpture pneumatically powers several soft robots to inflate and deflate, mimicking an organic form grasping. The grasp functions as an allegorical motif in the work and in this exhibition as a desperation to reach beyond limits. Jimi has referred to the mechanical conditioning of military units against the intimate, warm and revolting masses which threaten the very boundaries of control that make such conditioning possible. The ‘animal’ of the masses at the gate translates into Jimi’s work as a force or tool to snatch back agency or determination from such societies of control, but also as a sincere grasp at intimacy, yearning for something beyond the sheer and fascistic control over the permission to live.

For this exhibition, Jimi has worked with composer and musician Nate Wood to program the rate and pattern of inflation, responding to the incidental sounds that the pumps make, and occasionally to the popping of the silicone robots. There is a correlation to ‘threshold’ as a term in audio production which refers to a ratio of compression that attenuates the volume of an audio signal at a given level. In Nate’s compositional work, sparsity and noise sit in the interior of rhythm and minimalist structure. Without expectation, the collaboration of these two artists appears timely, as both are sensitive to how indeterminacy and structure can engender play, drama and tragedy.

I won’t speak too much to Michael Snow’s *Solar Breath*, as Kenta McGrath has very kindly provided much depth and context to the work in his essay on the other side of this print-out. What I will mention here is the thinking behind this exhibition is indebted to the entry to art, philosophy and feeling I was afforded by someone I consider a mentor, the late Peter Mudie. Right now, I’m thinking of a particular quote he attributed to Snow and would often brandish as a form of encouragement: “hang in there – don’t look for the exit”. I re-read this recently in Mudie’s catalogue book on Snow, which accompanied a national tour of his films and works in Australia. Because of Mudie, Snow changed how I see, even out of a rough-raindropped window.

On the threshold, all at once, a scene stands out. This scene is not staged for us, it is not laid out for the attention or intention of a subject. Everything happens in an indifference to the visitor, and it even seems that it ought to remain hidden from whoever is not, already, one of a familiar circle.⁵

- Paul Boyé

¹Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 1958.

²James Schuyler, *Hymn To Life*, 1974

³Margarita Kontev, *Breathing and Chaos*, un Extended, 2024.

⁴Tristan Harwood, “In the Shadow of the Telegraph Line”, 2025.

⁵Jean-Luc Nancy, “On the Theshold”, 1994.



According to Michael Snow, *Solar Breath* (2002) is a film in which '[c]hance and choice coexist.'¹ The claim seems to border on the obvious: the same could be said of countless other films, including much of Snow's own body of work. In fact, one could reasonably argue that chance and choice coexist in virtually any artwork, regardless of the degree of control the artist claims to have exercised or relinquished. Yet in the case of *Solar Breath*, Snow's statement couldn't be more apt. Here, chance and choice aren't just present – they depend on each other, shaping one another in fragile equilibrium.

The film's subject is an unusual phenomenon Snow observed inside his remote coastal cabin, where he and his wife, Peggy Gale, spent part of their summers. It unfolds in a static shot framing two adjoining windows – one open, the other closed – before which hangs a white cotton curtain. For the most part, the curtain behaves as expected: it filters sunlight, sways in the breeze and at times flaps high enough to reveal glimpses of the yard beyond (where some evergreens, stacks of firewood and a solar panel come into view). But every so often, it gets pulled back with surprising force, *slapped* against a near-invisible flyscreen and held there – each time forming a unique pattern of creases and folds – until the wind lets go. This cycle repeats uninterrupted, without cuts, for the film's 62-minute duration.

Solar Breath was made possible by the extended recording capacity of video – a medium Snow embraced, though not typically for this kind of candid observation. Granted, there are precedents in his career: *Dripping Water* (1969), a 16mm collaboration with Joyce Wieland comprising a 10-minute shot of its namesake, or *Sheeploop* (2000), a video installation whose title likewise describes its content and structure. But rarely was Snow's approach as restrained as simply framing a shot and leaving the rest to chance. By and large, his filmed work was marked by a conscious effort to disrupt time, fracture space and foreground its own construction. No such intervention occurs in *Solar Breath*.

Though designed for the gallery (projected at 79 inches wide, matching the dimensions of the actual window), *Solar Breath* is also notable within Snow's oeuvre for the extent to which it intersects with broader cinematic lineages. Its affinity with the avant-garde's durational experiments is readily apparent, while its openness to chance reflects the ideals of documentary's observational tradition. Moreover, the emphasis on quietude, atmosphere and the everyday resonates with the so-called 'slow cinema' – a contemplative strand of art film that rose to prominence at the turn of the century. (In a parallel universe, *Solar Breath* could slot seamlessly into a film by the likes of Lisandro Alonso, Abbas Kiarostami or Apichatpong Weerasethakul.)

Windows, as it happens, are also among the most enduring and versatile metaphors in cinema. They often evoke the act of watching and being watched; serve as thresholds into other worlds (social,

historical, psychological); and are frequently likened to the materials and mechanisms of the medium itself (filmstrips, projector screens, the cinematic frame). *Solar Breath* flirts with many of these associations but distinguishes itself in one crucial respect: its window isn't meant to be looked through so much as it is to be looked *at*. Tellingly, the film's rich array of oppositions – stillness/movement, flatness/depth, transparency/opacity, symmetry/asymmetry, to name just a few – all derive from a window whose view is 'compromised' from beginning to end.

As per Snow's statement, the film's central tension lies between what the artist could and couldn't control. This is exemplified, among other things, by the brief but suggestive glimpses of the solar panel, whose presence contrasts with the otherwise rustic scenery. Constructed of metal, silicon and glass, this device requires careful positioning by human hands to function – yet its usefulness ultimately depends on the weather, something entirely beyond human control. In this instance, the panel also powered the camera's battery via a cable threaded through the window. In more ways than one, *Solar Breath* wouldn't have existed had the sun and sky not cooperated.

That said, Snow isn't simply equating chance with nature and choice with everything else. The phenomenon captured in the film might be an accident of nature, but it relies on the alignment of other, non-natural elements – a cabin, a window and a curtain, for starters, all built or designed by Snow or Gale – for it to occur in the first place. Only then does artistic choice come into play: by waiting, watching, listening, framing and recording, the event can be preserved as image and sound, rendered usable for art (or whatever else). And even then, a mere mortal like Snow could never predict when or how the wind would blow, much less what it might do to a curtain. Given the rarity of the event – it was seen only once or twice each summer, and sometimes not at all – the fact that it was captured was, in itself, a stroke of luck.²

Chance governs choice at every stage, and yet only choice can make that chance visible and audible for others to contemplate, marvel at or be bored by. It really is, as Snow says, a *coexistence* – in the truest, loveliest sense of the word.

- Kenta McGrath is a writer and filmmaker. He teaches in Screen Arts at Curtin University.

¹ Snow, Michael. 2005. "Life and Art. About Solar Breath (Northern Caryatids)". In Michael Snow: Souffle Solaire/Solar Breath, 11. Montréal: Galerie de l'UQAM.

² *Solar Breath*, incidentally, followed several aborted attempts over the years, when the light wasn't right or the wind failed to produce the desired effects.

Goolugatup Heathcote acknowledges the Bibbulmun people as the Traditional Owners of the land on which we stand and pay respect to the Whadjuk people, and Elders past, present, future. Sovereignty was never ceded.

♥ Thank you to Robert and Rachel at AGWA for their assistance with loaning Snow's film. To Clara for her enthusiasm in making new work (and Hugo for packing). Thank you Jimi and Nate for labouring over a fresh take on Critical Mass. To Harry, Toni and Arlpwe Art Centre and 00 for the interest and loan. Thank you Kenta for your insight. Bruno, Luisa, Jess, Jana, Lauryn and Thom for all the support here at Goolugatup. ♥