

# The things we talked about

**Moyra Davey, Dorine van Meel, Ruth Buchanan, Marie Shannon, Alicia Frankovich, lightreading, Hue & Cry**

Curated by Abby Cunnane

ST PAUL St Galleries One and Two

12 June – 17 July 2015

There are so many ways to remember a conversation. You might start with the tall-windowed apartment it took place in, the way voices sounded in the upholstered interior of a new car, across a swimming pool at night, or the way words sat on the page in a fax. This exhibition takes dialogue—listening, reading—as a primary currency. It sets out to consider how different visual forms afford spoken words weight, solidity, endurance, how they articulate relationships, and our sense of ourselves.

Within the space of the exhibition a number of different speaking positions are adopted. Each might be understood as an autobiographical gesture, in the sense that your conversation is in some way definitive of who you are, as is what you read, how you listen, and how you spend time in a space.

Alicia Frankovich's *Lover* (2010) is a line drawing in neon. With the sparsest of means the work implies the weight of a garment suspended from its coat-hanger, the impression left on a bed, the shape of a body, or the space where a body is not. Such absence is a condition of written correspondence; mostly, we write when someone is away and it has been too long. An individual letterform is at some level just a line—here that line is also a neon sign, a light, or a metaphor.

Ruth Buchanan's sequence of curtains divide up the gallery. Hessian, silk crepe, hand-dyed silk, they are easily moveable and semi-transparent yet compel you, as surely as solid architecture, to navigate the room according to their presence. The artist has spoken of them as editing devices, slowing or stilling the viewer's movements in a way that 'time-based' media does not. They introduce the idea of syntax, grammar, a spatial order which is readable by those who spend time in it.

Buchanan's work has consistently engaged the conditions of language, reading, research and cognition and their relationship to built spaces, suggesting that we don't just spend time in spaces, we think through them. Earlier works such as *Build a Wall or Be a Room* (2010) explore the psychology of architecture and our need for shelter, while her publication *The Weather, a Building* (2012), offers a biography of a building, the Berlin State Library. The curtains here have all had former lives in other installations; they have been reconfigured for this exhibition.

*The Aachen Faxes* (2012) by Marie Shannon records a correspondence (mostly by fax) between the artist and her partner Julian Dashper, during his residency in Germany in 1995. The faxes have been edited by Shannon so that they read as a continuous narrative, the breaks and gaps that characterise such exchanges removed, their rhythm that of a reader, and the paper converted to a monochrome screen. When it's not about the pragmatic things that must be recounted to someone familiar who is far away, the exchange is often about time. 'It's not that I'm having a bad time, as I'm not. It's just a slow time. This has to do with the way each day goes, and the sort of city Aachen is.' The slow time is also the time of the work, a pace become strange in contrast to the daily click/appear/click/appear of internet-time.

Shannon's editing is a kind of writing too; this time, from the distance of years, she revisits the everyday and specific references of the original text to construct a script for a different technology, and a different audience. Reading here is like remembering, the text a place to return to an earlier version of yourself you might otherwise lose sight of. The cello piece accompanying the text was written by Shannon and Mark Dashper.

Dorine van Meel's two video works in the show—*Instead to meet strangers* (2014) and *At least the oranges come from Sicily* (2015)—both use the voice as an instrument, providing a centre or beat. *Instead to meet strangers* recalls a letter she wrote as a teenager, to a future self. It was originally shown as a large scale installation at the Swiss Church in London, and features the prominent glass facade inside that church. In this work the site is flattened, it becomes an abstract diagram of the original, and we listen and watch partly for clues in order to make sense of the space.

*At least the oranges come from Sicily* also draws on multiple voices—written, visual, spoken. Two speakers read from a text that does not match with that on the screen, yet it is just possible to comprehend as a synchronous whole. The work is as much about listening as it is about looking, or the recognition that there's an inevitable correspondence between those two things. The artist writes, 'The autobiography is fiction because it can only be written once', and

this idea underscores the fleeting anecdotes which populate the work. The spotlight effect which moves across the writing then retreats and erases it suggests language is limited by its own materiality; what is written now may no longer feel true tomorrow.

*Private Hire* (2015), a performance by lightreading (Sonya Lacey and Sarah Rose) where individual readings drawing on a legal case over intellectual property involving Rihanna and David LaChapelle were held inside a new Maserati, took place on opening night (see lightreading's website [sonyalacey.net/lightreading](http://sonyalacey.net/lightreading) for documentation). In *Private Hire* the possibility of 'right and wrong reading', and the hyper-mediated state of contemporary communication comes into discussion. A pair of stylised sunglasses remain in the gallery after opening night, objects that speak the language of status, luxury, the manufacture of individuality and the decadent performance of privacy.

*Window/Mirror* (2015), a conversation between writer Sarah Jane Barnett and artist Ruth Buchanan, occupies the gallery's front window. The original exchange was by email—Sarah is based in Wellington, Ruth in Berlin—it comes to the space as a vinyl text on the window and a series of suspended posters that change each week during the exhibition. While the work Barnett and Buchanan produce separately is completely different, there's common ground in their interest in the materiality and mechanics of language, as can be seen in these unattributed texts. One reads, 'Where work really is a hinge in relation to something, a moving object that opens and closes, touches, squeaks, and breaks down too'; perhaps the dialogue's materialisation here is an instance of such break-down, a stopping by the side of the road to read, stretch or to look around. This conversation was conceived by Chloe Lane and Andrea Bell, editors of the journal *Hue & Cry*, who selected the fragments of conversation and handed them over to International Office to design.

In Gallery Two, *Les Goddesses* (2011), a film by Moyra Davey, centres on the story of early feminist Mary Wollstonecraft, her daughters and lovers. Wollstonecraft was an eighteenth-century British writer, philosopher, an advocate of women's rights, and the mother of *Frankenstein* author Mary Shelley. As the film progresses, narrative associations are drawn between their lives and those of the artist's sisters, recorded in still photographs from Davey's archive. Pacing her apartment with a handheld recorder, the artist narrates the story; occasionally subtitles interrupt, correcting the accuracy of her account.

Moyra Davey has very recently produced another film, *Notes on Blue* (2015), which moves through another tangle of biographies: this time those of film-maker Derek Jarman, poet Anne Sexton, writer Jorge Luis Borges, with the artist's own. Like *Les Goddesses*, the work might be described as confessional, but both are presented with a kind of atonal deadpan that makes that hard to reconcile. The space between fact and narrative contract in this telling; voice becomes both a 'place' where things fractured are brought together, and a 'time', the eternal present of the film's recording.

The significance of our ways of attending to things is the subject of social anthropologist Kathleen Stewart's book *Ordinary Affects*. She writes, 'People are always saying to me, "I could write a book." What they mean is they couldn't and they don't want to... The passing, gestural claim of "I could write a book" points to the inchoate but very real sense of the sensibilities, socialities, and ways of attending to things that give events their significance.' Speaking and listening are routine kinds of attentiveness. The 'things' spoken about in this exhibition are also mostly everyday; as simple as the arrival of the newspaper into an ordinary morning. It is the way these works pay attention to acts of speech, and to everyday things, that defines them; the ways they awake another sense of time, enable us to recognise particularities of speech, or shift the regular order of a space in a way that makes it read entirely differently.

Abby Cunnane

## Artists

Alicia Frankovich has a BVA in sculpture from AUT University, 2002; she currently lives in Berlin. She works in performance, performance-based videos, short films and sculpture. Selected recent exhibitions include *On Dynamics and Monuments*, a performance series at Kunstverein Nürnberg (2015); *Test Run: Performance in Public*, curated by Ben Roberts, Modern Art, Oxford (2015); *In Search of an Author*, curated by Chiara Giovando and Andrew Berardini, UKS, Oslo, (2015); *Le Mouvement; Performing the City*: 12th Swiss Sculpture Exhibition ESS SPA, Biel/Bienne, 2014, curated by Chris Sharp and Gianni Jetzer, Switzerland; *Framed Movements*, curated by Hannah Mathews, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne (2014).

Ruth Buchanan has a BFA from Auckland's Elam School of Fine Art (2002), and an MA (Fine Art) from the Piet Zwart Institute, Rotterdam (2007). In 2012 she was artist resident at McCahon House, Auckland, and in late 2015 will hold a residency in at the Govett-Brewster Art Gallery, New Plymouth. Recent and forthcoming projects include *Chewing Gum, Stones and Crystals* (with Shana Moulton), Bergen Kunsthalle (2015); *Or a building*, Badischer Kunstverein, Karlsruhe (2015); a solo exhibition at Kunstverein Harburger Bahnhof, Hamburg (2015); *Imaginary Accord*, IMA, Brisbane (2015) and *Ruth Buchanan / Ayse Erkmen*, Hopkinson Mossman, Auckland (2014). Artist books include *The Weather, a Building* (Sternberg Press, 2012) and *Lying Freely* (Casco Office for Art and Design, 2010).

Marie Shannon works in photography, video and drawing. Recent exhibitions and publications include *Aachen, Germany, 1995*, Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington (2012); *What I am Looking at at the Moment* (photographs and artist's text) in 'Liquid States', *Reading Room* Vol. 4, eds. Wystan Curnow and Simon Ingram (Auckland Art Gallery, 2010) and *Love Notes*, curated by Heather Galbraith, an off-site project of City Gallery Wellington (2010). Her work is held in the Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki and Te Papa Tongarewa collections, and can be viewed online at CIRCUIT: Artists Film and Video Aotearoa New Zealand ([circuit.org.nz](http://circuit.org.nz)).

Dorine van Meel completed her MFA in Fine Art at Goldsmiths College in 2014, and recently held the Nina Stewart Residency at the South London Gallery. Selected exhibitions include *Between the Dog and the Wolf*, South London Gallery, London (2015); *Wilderness*, a group exhibition at New Shelter Plan, Copenhagen (2015); *...instead to meet strangers who might change our minds*, Swiss Church, London (2014); *A Space of No Exception*, a group exhibition at Sokol Space, Moscow (2014); *Luminous Flux*, a group exhibition at Arti et Amicitiae, Amsterdam (2014). Van Meel was also the curator of *Does Not Equal*, a group exhibition on feminism at W139 in Amsterdam (2015).

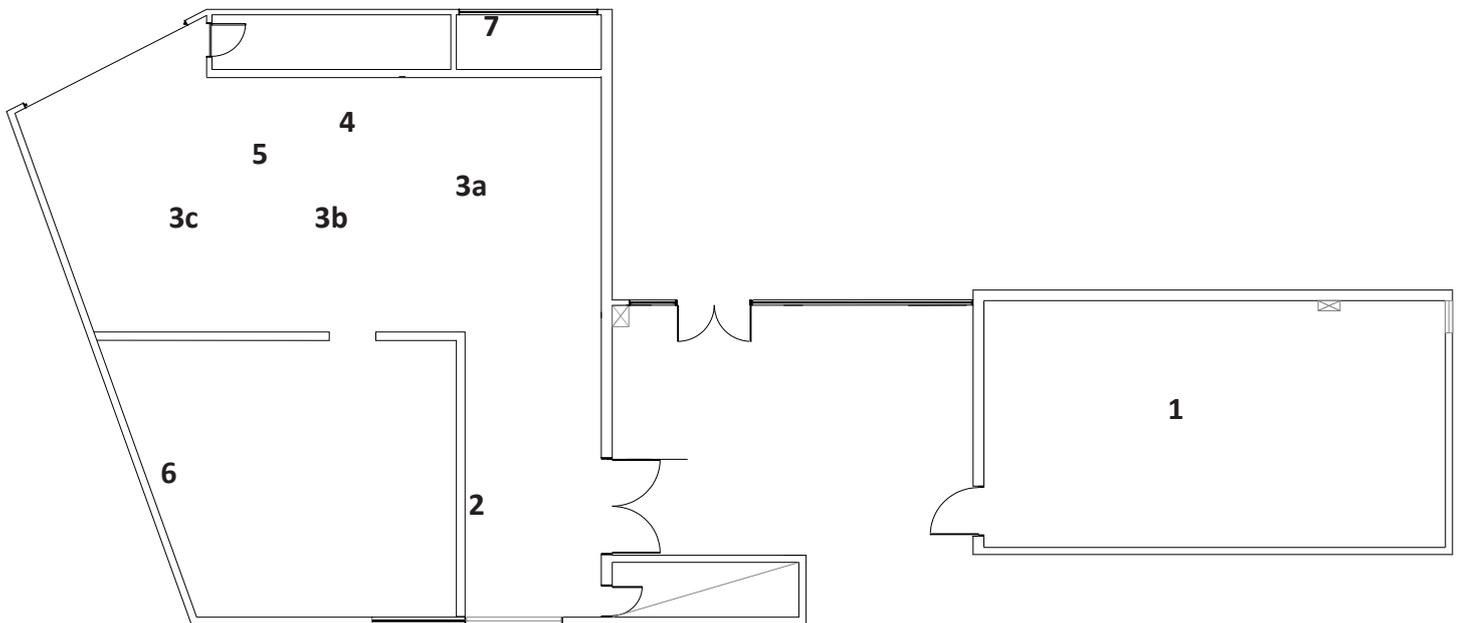
lightreading is a collaboration between Sonya Lacey (Wellington) and Sarah Rose (Glasgow). They have been working together since 2009, mostly on performance and publication projects which connect ideas around design, display, information and intellectual property. Recent works include *Script for Private Hire* (2014), a moving image pagework for the *Unstuck in Time* publication, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts; *Private Hire* (2014), a performance commissioned by RM Gallery as part of International Artist Initiated, Glasgow. They have participated in residencies at the Banff Centre, Canada (2011), and Seoul Artspace Geumcheon (2012). In 2009 lightreading curated an exhibition on behalf of Newcall Gallery for the *Artspace New Artists Show*, which included the three-part project *Put it where it was not* between the libraries at Artspace (Auckland) and FormContent (London).

Moyra Davey lives and works in New York City. She works in photography, video and writing. Recent exhibitions include *Moyra Davey*, greengrassi, London and *The Revenants*, Wilfried Lentz, Rotterdam (both 2015); *Ornament and Reproach*, Murray Guy, New York; *Burn the Diaries*, Museum Moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig, Institute of Contemporary Art, Philadelphia, and Camden Arts Centre, London (all 2014). Her video *Notes on Blue* (2015) was commissioned by the Walker Arts Centre and can be viewed online through the month of June.

Sarah Jane Barnett is a writer, reviewer and creative writing tutor. Her poetry collection *A Man Runs into a Woman* was published by Hue & Cry Press in 2012. Barnett's work has appeared in publications including *Landfall*, *Sport*, *NZ Listener* and *Southerly* (Australia). Two of her poems were also selected for Best New Zealand Poems in 2007 and 2010. She is currently completing a PhD at Massey University, Wellington.

*Hue & Cry* ([hueandcry.org.nz](http://hueandcry.org.nz)) is a literary and art journal, and a publishing press based in New Zealand. It is edited by Chloe Lane and Andrea Bell, and designed by The International Office ([the-international-office.com](http://the-international-office.com)).

# Floorplan



## List of works

### 1. Moyra Davey

#### *Les Goddesses*, 2011

HD video, 61 minutes

Courtesy of the artist and Murray Guy, New York

### 2. Alicia Frankovich

#### *Lover*, 2010

coat hanger, neon

Chartwell Collection, Auckland Art Gallery Toi o Tāmaki

### 3a and c. Ruth Buchanan

#### *An Image of a Solid (2 parts)*, 2013

hand dyed silk, hand dyed sisal rope, hessian, steel eyelets and turnbuckles, coated steel connections

Courtesy of the artist and Hopkinson Mossman Gallery, Auckland

### 3b. Ruth Buchanan

#### *A Wavy Line*, 2011

silk crepe, powder coated steel

Courtesy of the artist and Hopkinson Mossman Gallery, Auckland

### 4. Marie Shannon

#### *The Aachen Faxes*, 2011

digital video, sound, 7:10 minutes

Director: Marie Shannon

Sound: Mark Dashper

### 5. lightreading

#### *Private Hire (sunglasses)*, 2015

blown glass, silver coated

With special thanks to Patrick O'Connor and Sarah Smuts-Kennedy.

### 6. Dorine van Meel

#### *Instead to meet strangers*, 2014

single channel video, 5:04 minutes

Composition in collaboration with Vicky Steiri

Voiceovers by Alison Ballance and Therese Ladegaard Henningsen

### 6. Dorine van Meel cont.

#### *At Least the Oranges Come From Sicily*, 2015

single channel HD video, 8:47 minutes

### 7. Hue & Cry with Sarah Jane Barnett and Ruth Buchanan

#### *Window/Mirror*, 2015

posters, vinyl text

Edited by Chloe Lane and Andrea Bell

Designed by The International Office