

# ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

Nov 28 to Dec 19, 2009

Opening: 6-8pm Fri Nov 27

Artist's Talk: 2pm Sat Nov 28

## ART IN THE AGE OF MECHANICAL REPRODUCTION

DREW PETTIFER

### Dedicated to Dad

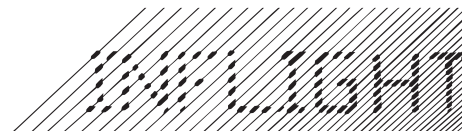
The artist would like to thank Jared Davis, Shae Nagorcka, Benjamin Creek,  
his family and the team at INFLIGHT.

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237 Elizabeth St, Hobart  
Gallery hours: Wed-Sat 1-5pm

Do you remember if anyone ever taught you how to act in a gallery as a child? Did your parents explain the etiquette of the art space in hushed tones? Or did the space of art seep into your consciousness through culture? Maybe an episode of the Simpsons? Possibly a 'thought provoking' documentary on the ABC at 10:30PM? Or did you learn through mistakes? Got tackled to the ground by a security guard after just trying to touch one of Peter Booth's works in the National Gallery just a little bit?

The point is that we all understand the mechanics of the gallery space. There's an accepted noise level, probably several areas which are obviously out of bounds, possibly even barriers preventing you from approaching a work too closely. You try not to shout, you don't jump over the barrier and you don't just bust into the offices behind the front desk. Most of the time spaces and works fit neatly into these parameters. Things are hung on walls, projected from ceilings and anchored into the ground. The paths of engagement with the work are clearly marked. So what then, of a work whose purpose spans the grey areas between space, work and viewer?

Drew Pettifer, with *Art in the age of mechanical reproduction*, provides us with a key, a door, to perceiving the power structures of these spaces of discursive current. We should note, however, the title. Setting aside discussions of Benjamin's text momentarily, let us focus on the "in". This is a work both issuing from and conceived within a space of mechanical reproduction – one should not mistake this as a revolutionary call to the destruction of power barriers (Pettifer is a bit smarter than that). Rather, consider this work as cultural archeology; Pettifer has the means to peel back the discursive barriers that surround the idea.

That art has been disposed of Aura, stripped of its wider generative influence (according to Benjamin) and sociocultural history, is well documented. We have lost our zero referent, the original is meaningless and the transcendent experience of art (presumably only ever encountered by those modernist heroes of yore) has been diluted with the cheap cola of democratized production. But let us consider the literal mechanics of Pettifer's work. The viewer has unlimited access to the means of production – they can create as many copies as they please. Following this, the photograph and the negative from which the copies have been taken will be destroyed, leaving only the photocopied. What has Pettifer provided us with here? A type of re-Aura-ing machine? Or (as seems more likely) an experience of process and creation that literalizes an experience of power?

Power, at the end of the day, is what art is all about. Power over the idea, the created, the portrayed, the represented. Anyone who tells you different is in denial. Because what is the creative act, other than an

expression of power? And this is the true joy in experiencing Pettifer's work; we, the viewer, are now the creator. This type of interactivity and privileging of the spectator is nothing new, but Pettifer provides us with a mechanism – that of the photocopier – with which to frame our experiences. Merely drawing on a wall, while providing agency, does not provide the vicarious sense of "creation". That alchemical power that any artist or writer has felt; when ideas or words take on a momentum and structure of our making.

In this way, Pettifer provides the viewer with an experience of space and art that comes closer to a true expression of democratization than many bearing the tag of interactivity have come before it. And gratifyingly, *Art in the age of mechanical reproduction* does not finish by speaking down to us on a material level. Undoubtedly, the viewer leaves the gallery with a work of art, but it is also a photocopy. The viewer leaves the space with an ephemeral footprint of their generative power. There are no claims to the original, in that all spectators must understand that every image produced is the original. The image degrades, the toner runs out, the print heads wear down.

Remember, Pettifer has given you Power. Don't waste it.

Shae Nagorcka, November 2009

