ASSISTED REPRODUCTION:
OUT IN THE LIGHT

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DIG IT AL! Jim Moss

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Denise Ferris
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Andrew Hill
Martyn Jolly
Peter Jordan
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Amy McGregor
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Jason O'Brien
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DIG IT AL!

Jim Moss

In the first years of this century the Vatican chose the sixth century Spanish churchman Saint Isidore of Seville as the patron saint of cyberspace. Amongst other things Isidore is celebrated as the author/editor of the Ecologues, the western world's first encyclopedia. It's understandable that the Church didn't follow the lead of *Wired* magazine's nomination of Marshall McLuhan as its patron saint even though the media guru had embraced Catholicism on the eve of his becoming a global celebrity. After all, Isidore was already a certified Saint, and given their relative historical contexts, McLuhan is an intellectual lightweight compared with the Saint: but, on McLuhan's behalf it's fair to say that Isidore's achievements have been somewhat obscured by the passing of some fourteen hundred years and nothing that he said or wrote remains to compare with the acutely succinct resonance of McLuhan's most famously cited aphorism, *The Medium is the Message*.

Aphorisms aside, McLuhan's evolutionary premise for his theories of the media would have disqualified him from sanctification. The principal premise behind McLuhan's theories of the media is that the tools people create in turn shape us. This in itself isn't original but it does serve to remind us that as cultural beings we're products of the very ingenuity of which we are capable. Although our mammalian evolutionary cycle is very slow by comparison with our technological capabilities, the latter increasingly provides us with a parallel universe of evolutionary contexts within which we can act and be acted upon. In respect of the media, *The Medium is the Message* means that it is the totalizing effect of the medium itself and not the ostensible content of a given media that is the primary means of communication. McLuhan perceived of media as having direct input upon the human sensorium thus facilitating a range of communicative possibilities that become embedded into cognitive development. An example McLuhan gives is the light bulb effect. A light bulb creates an environment by its mere presence. It enables people to create spaces during nightime that would otherwise be enveloped by darkness. The light bulb is an example of a medium without any content.

McLuhan's message was prescient for the 1960's and '70's and is no less so today. Indeed, in the age of digital media the medium and its correlate, 'the message', have never been so inextricably one and the same thing. But it's also the case that since the very beginnings of communication the vehicle of transmission has always been very much an integral part of the message that is communicated, from basic verbal and non-verbal methods through to modern broadcasting media.

Television was once the media par excellence, the arrival of which signalled the end of the modern age and the beginnings of postmodern culture, but since the 1950's the medium of television has become ubiquitous and the message has become synonymous with infotainment. The internet and social media now comprise the leading edge of media culture and these media are the product of a new meta-media paradigm the vehicle of which is digital technology.

Metamedia is media about media. Although he originally coined the term McLuhan could not have anticipated the extent of the digitalization of the planet. But, what is digital: and why is it so effective? To answer the second question first, digital provides a means of simulating human experience of the world. Humans experience the world analogically, particularly in regard to vision, both in its physical and perceptual senses. For example, the analogue clock face shows both the time of day and an entire twenty-four hour period simultaneously, whereas, a digital clock presents only time passing but can do so with extraordinary accuracy. The ability of the digital clock to simulate (to the thousandth of a second) what we perceive analogically as the smooth movement of time can be applied to the replication of aural and visual phenomenon generally.

In response to the first part of the question, digital is the electronic application of a numerical code by which information can be stored and retrieved. Numbers have long been considered to have magical properties and of the ten numerical units from zero to nine two of these integers are crucial – one and zero. One and zero are the binary numbers and Gottfried Wilhelm Leibnitz, a seventeenth century giant of numerical computation, came to believe that binary numbers represented Creation - the number one portraying God and zero depicting the Void. Leibnitz, a sinophile, was in turn inspired by Chinese binary codes from eleventh century numerological explications of the I Ching.

The electronic switching between the binary codes of ones and zeros is the monad at the 'heart' of digital media. That the extraordinary complexity of the sights and sounds of the world can be simulated by the electronic encoding of combinations of these two integers constitutes the magic of digital media. And because of the inherent simplicity of this system the apparatus within which the simulation is generated can be fabricated extremely economically.

Given the above, it would appear that in the context of the digital domain the medium is unequivocally one and the same thing with the message. However, much the same can be said about analogue photography and abstract formalist painting. In the case of the former the photograph and its referent can be seen to be equivalent, and in the case of the latter, paint is both the medium and the message. Similarly, there is little qualitative difference to discern in terms of equivalence between the medium and the message of, say, the written word and a digital image: both operate on the principle of symbolic codes.

But there is a difference in process. Pre-industrial, pre-electronic and pre-digital media are all relatively process-driven methodologies, the various disciplines of which are determined by the application of certain skill sets. The creative products of digital media are also the result of process: an artist whose medium is predominantly, or, exclusively digital is required to have an extensive knowledge of computer literacy and software application. But, unless the artist is actually writing the software much of the process has already been pre-determined; an extreme (but extremely common) case being the instantaneous image generated by a digital camera.

The digital age is in its infancy and yet its potential invokes the sublime in as much as it beggars the imagination. What incredible innovations await future generations and how will artistry evolve in a world in which simulation is increasingly the common denominator of both art and life? It's clear that McLuhan's nifty little aphorism from the age of television heralding the collapse of an art/life binary has found new traction in the digital age; and yet, it's somewhat ironic that digitalization, as a medium, presages an end to its own becoming in binary code: as simulation has no 'other'.

Maybe there's a message in this about which we should take some notice.

Jim Moss

September 2012

Jim Moss is a lecturer in art/design history & theory at the School of Art, Architecture and Design, University of South Australia. He is the author of numerous catalogues and other essays encompassing a range of topics from the European canon, focusing on histories pertaining to modernist and postmodern visual culture, in particular, those that engage with the evolution of photographic imagery.

Clem Baker-Finch

In his 1967 manifesto Sol LeWitt said that in his kind of art, "all of the planning and decisions are made beforehand and the execution becomes a perfunctory affair. The idea becomes a machine that makes the art." But I wonder if the master printers he employed to execute these works would have so happily dismissed their role and their contribution as "perfunctory."

The initial inspiration for this work is LeWitt's *Band of Colour in Four Directions*, a set of sixteen combinatorial screen-prints. My approach has been to represent LeWitt's planning and decisions—his idea—as a computer program that mechanically produces digital images which may then also be mechanically printed, so the only human involvement is to supervise the equipment. But there is no escape. The printer's skill may have been eliminated, but only by enlisting another artisan—the programmer. The intervention has merely shifted to a different step in the production of the art from the idea.
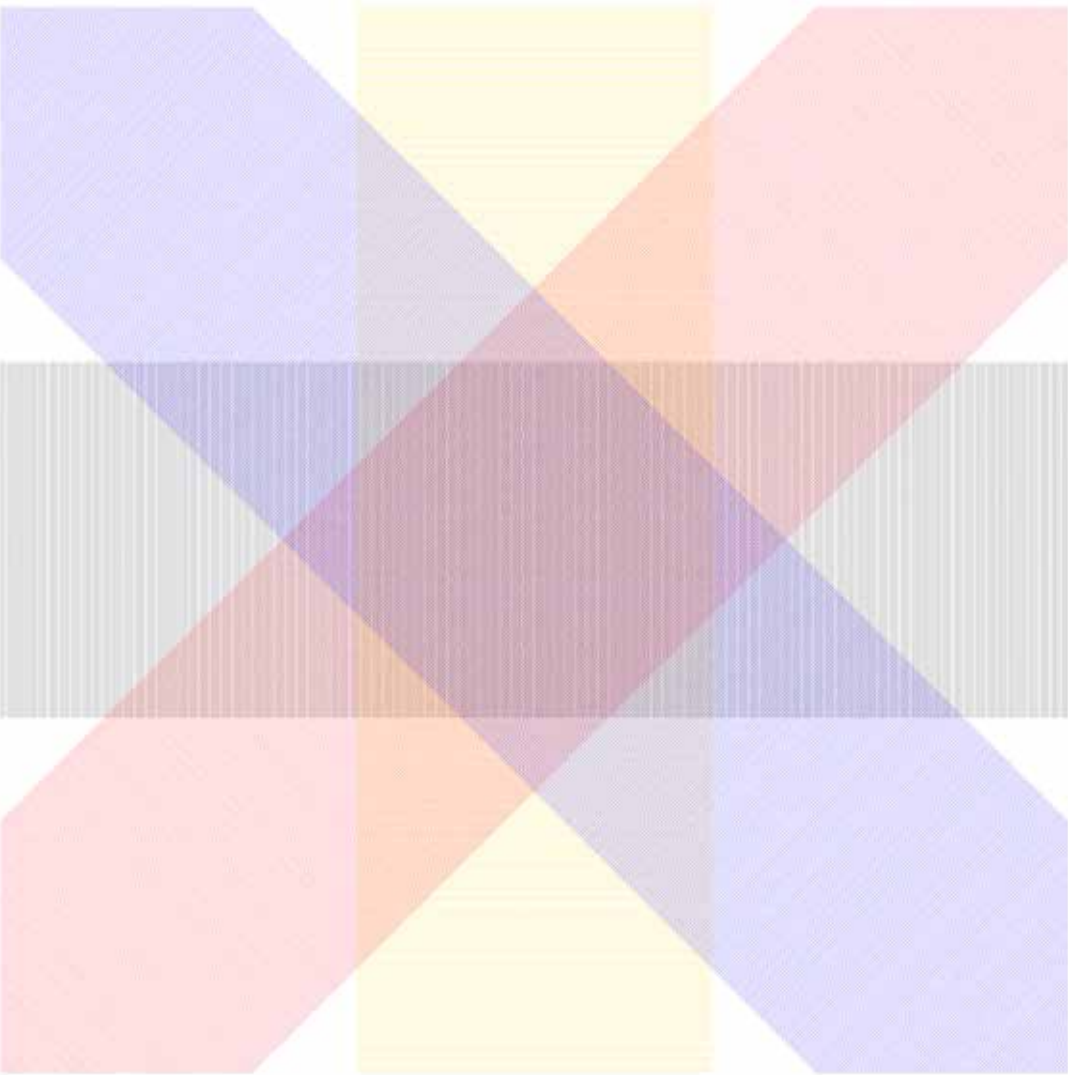
Four Bands Three Ways, 2012
three inkjet prints
110 x 110 cm each

Di Barrett

The two works are a response to what I perceive as a lack of religious dogma in the world. My intention may imply that my digital pathway is seen as leading to an increase in a faith. As a race we will have to become more aware, compassionate and possibly spiritual to save our planet, the presence of the intense digital divide will be one of a number of crucial ingredients to either eventually assist in an approach to save our globe or ultimately contribute to its destruction. I do the work you bring the meaning to the conundrum.

I do the work you bring the meaning #11, 2012
photomedia on Metallic Pearl
110 x 110 cm (unframed limited edition of 6)

Greg Donovan

The digital process in visual art practice in many respects not only translates and transfers traditional methods such as painting or printmaking to new mediums but also endorses the historical and contemporary position of these practices just as photography did to painting more than one hundred years ago.

Yet these works focus on the confusion between media and medium, translating and transposing one for the other, seeking to question the dialectic power and social function of both. In these works, not only is the surface a reproduction of another material but the images are a reproduction of a reproduction. The object as artefact, the image as a deferral to itself, both under erasure reconstituted and delivered as other.

As Walter Benjamin states in the seminal paper, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,* first published in 1936, " One of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later. The history of every art form shows critical epochs in which a certain art form aspires to effects which could be fully obtained only with a changed technical standard, that is to say, in a new art form. The extravagances --- of art which thus appear--- actually arise from the nucleus of its richest historical energies."

This work paradoxically both complements and subverts digital reproduction, on the one hand celebrating the unreal through the processes of digital transcription and on the other through the production of artefacts, the tangible, the physical act of doing, seeking imperfection and perfection within the image, simultaneously providing something of the qualities of the human presence while providing transient ethereal qualities reflected in the choice of subject under erasure.

Deferred 1, 2012
mixed media, archival digital inks, acrylic paint, aerosol paint,
markers, pencil on plywood
90 x 60 cms

Denise Ferris

I've collected airport floor plans from airline magazines and wanted to use them in a direct but enigmatic way. The plans outline public spaces and while emblematic of air travel suggest a subsequent environmental footprint. I am at the draft stages of working with cut-outs, line, filled spaces, scans, aerial views all referencing my travelling. I layer these with terrain photographs of shadow and snow, both phenomena that share time based fragility.

My impact is represented here, my air (and other) travel contributing to our planet's environmental changes and future challenges. These ubiquitous airport spaces, servicing entrance and exit, record my transit and expectations of continuing global access.

Carbon Confessions: Bangkok [left] & *Brisbane* [right]*, 2012*
inkjet on paper
56 x 71.5 cm each

Denise Higgins

Tap 2 is part of a body of work titled *sinkscapes* that charts 'the taken for granted' presence of domestic sinks. This digital work documents the night life of a 'familiar' cold tap….The digital image was manipulated and printed using the Oce Arizona and printed on water colour paper. Through the ANU Inkjet Research facility I can play with different substrates and grounds to heighten luminosity, colour grab and surface texture.

Tap 2, 2012
acrylic and ink on paper
76 x 56 cm

Andrew Hill

This work is about the spaces we occupy – architectural, social, imaginative – which are all digitally constructed and negotiated and which all impact upon each other, sometimes telescoping and sometimes compressing. Through these various prisms we grasp our reality and anchor ourselves within both the possibilities and the constraints of our material and imaginative lives. In this image the respective planes are separated out, then integrated back into that which lies both beneath and above.

Based upon an image that was digitally captured, digitally manipulated and digitally printed, the hand of the artist is now merged with mathematical tools, gliding blissfully through the image whilst the program calculates and transforms idle values into active reconfigurations which underpin new perceptual propositions.

Whilst the bytes of information are relationally clustered and relationally built into this new image, the mathematics which support it serves no greater role than that of the brush – albeit a smart brush - allowing me to paint elements of a captured photograph in a manner which reinforces its construction as light manipulated within a surface mere thousands of a centimetre thick. Thus the image plays with notions of flatness and depth, and the grid which floats above mirrors that which is integrated throughout.

Mystic Triptych, 2012
digital inkjet pigment on dibond
122 x 244 cm

Martyn Jolly

Hand-coloured magic lantern glass-slides are beautiful things. The photographic slides produced in Australia by the Salvation Army for their proselytizing crusades at around the turn of the last century, for instance, feature richly coloured, brush-applied patterns and highlights that sit on top of, but never exactly correspond with, the fine-grained tableau photograph below. Even the hand colouring of the slides mass-produced to advertise everything from cars to cosmetics in Australian theatres from the nineteen-twenties to the nineteen-sixties is beautiful as it charts changes in Australian graphic design. Magic lantern slides were made to be projected and experienced as pure colour dissolving in and out of perception in a darkened auditorium. Experts at collecting institutions such as the national Film and Sound Archive are now able to make detailed scans of these fragile eight-by-eight centimetre squares of glass, from which they can make either good quality enlargements on paper that enable contemporary audiences to see the fine detail of the slides, or else digital projections which approximate, at the lower resolution of the data projector and perhaps somewhat coldly, the original experience of the projection. However it may also be possible to make enlargements onto glass which can be backlit, or lit from in front, to create a new experience for a contemporary viewer where both the detail of the original colouring, and the magical experience of pure analogue colour thrown into space, can be reclaimed. I hope to be able to work with colleagues from the National Film and Sound Archive, and the ANU Inkjet Research Facility, to make some initial prints on glass, hopefully at over a metre square, to begin some open-ended experiments with installation and lighting possibilities.

Joseph Perry and the Salvation Army Limelight Department, 2012
hand-coloured glass lantern slide from Soldiers of the Cross, Melbourne, 1900 Collection: National Film and Sound Archive, Canberra, [#451414]

Peter Jordan

Made with open source software GIMP and INKSCAPE.

I like open source software and so do quite a few countries who use UBUNTU as an operating system in public computers. The French Police for example after ditching Microsoft Word for OpenOffice are now in the process of transferring over to UBUNTU from Windows and hope to have 90,000 plus workstations using it.

The image is vaguely based on pre-Christian ideas in Britain, Albion being the name of the island before it became Brittania.

God is an Astronaut, , 2012
digital image
90 x 64 cm

Mark Kimber

The Pale Mirror is a series of photographs that will explore the 'hypnogogian' state that exists between wakefulness and sleep. Using small hand built dioramas interpreted through a combination of 19th and 21st century photographic technique, I'm seeking to create works that have a 'half-remembered' quality to them, as if filtered through layer upon layer of memory and forgetfulness. Trying to build on photography's ability to manipulate 'truth' and its relationship to memory rather than it's often thought of strength to 'objectively record' I have built and photographed small sets that draw on art and cinematic history.

The images move from the analogue format of film through digital scanning to digital printing in an attempt to bridge the widening gap between the technology of another century and this one.

Empire of Light, 2012
Giclee print
40 x 40 cm

Cathy Laudenbach

This work references Australian history, Australian painting and the pictorial photography movement. In the images figures are seen in harmony with the Australian landscape.

While what they are going remains unknown and is ambiguous, the figures appear both oblivious to the camera and at one with and in the landscape.

This work continues my interpretations of the Australian bush.

Series: *figures in a landscape* 2008-2012
digital prints from negative printed onto aluminium

Amy Macgregor

I am printing on unusual surfaces using the capacity of the Oce Arizona 250 GT to print onto different thicknesses and tactile surfaces.

Sourcing images from the internet of 'cheesy' popular culture icons I experimented with printing onto bread.

I'm excited by the unpredictably of both the print outcome and how the prints onto bread will hold up over time.

Doris on White (from the *Cheese on Toast* series), 2012
UV cured print on bread
10 x 10 cm

Kevin Miller

You start reading the statement of the artist whose work hangs nearby. As a viewer you may be reading these words in an attempt to find a clue about what the work is about. It is photography and maybe you just want to know what it is a picture of? As you follow the words written here you suspect that answers will not come readily, if at all. Maybe you are not a viewer of artwork at all but actually a reader of statements about artwork and if the statement is interesting then you move to actually viewing the work. Being a viewer however you begin to look for other glues like the title, 'Blood and Bone'. Is this a clue to the content of the work or an attempt to mislead you? At this point you may pause to look at the work again. It is obviously not a traditional photographic process, using chemicals in a darkened room with the image slowly revealing itself only to be stopped before disappearing into an inky blackness. In this case you could imagine someone peering at a computer screen, adjusting levels, testing contrast and examining the colour, there may even be some manipulation involved, but this is uncertain. Then you imagine the file being uploaded to the printer in a brightly lit space. In this case the smell is not of chemicals but something closer to acrylic paint and while standing there watching the image being revealed in layers on the glass you could believe that the sound of the back and forth movement of the printer head is strangely comforting to the artist.

Blood and Bone 1, 2 & 3, 2012
digital print on glass
(3 x) 90 x 90 cm

Jason O'Brien

The most rewarding part of being in the ANU's Inkjet Research Facility is being confronted with a problem from another artist that seems unmanageable at first, but then helping it become real. It's the revelation that awakes you in the middle of the night with a potential solution that starts the process. You move from that 'it might just work' idea to the 'doing' stage. That's where we can work through it together on the printer bed, watching, morphing the process just to see what can finally come of it.

My own experiments are a combination of ubiquitous LED technology, programmable controllers and printed images on a clear substrate. I'm using the LED lights to cycle through a series of analogous and complimentary colours based on chromatic values in the digital images.

I'm treating each single image and its color range as a mediator between it and another image, and the colour output of the LED. These three agents combine to present a new scene. The transitory and subjective interpretation of these mutating landscapes is dependent on the viewer. The viewers bring their own psychophysical response to the image. In other words, we all perceive colours differently, it is yours to perceive. My work invites you to interpret each change in your own way.

Series of experiments, 2012
UV solvent inkjet prints on flexible acrylic Polymethyl methacrylate, high density polyethylene pipes, closed cell non-crosslinked low density Polyethylene Foam, Arduino™ controllers, RGB LED light sources
pipes 11 cm ø, various depths, discs 0.3 x11 cm ø

Patsy Payne

In my practice I combine traditional processes of printmaking with new possibilities associated with scientific body imaging and data manipulation to create works that question *being* in the world. I think about how experiences transform us. I also consider how science and technology mediate our existence.

Here I am representing the human form, visualising the body-shape through pattern and mark and isolating the figure. In these two images I present the body outline reduced to a web of patterned interlacing. The transparency of the image challenges ideas of gravity and materiality.

Solitude [left] & *Leaving 1* [right], 2012
digital print on BFK Rives 300 gsm
120 x 80 cm each

Olga Sankey

These works take advantage of the OCE flatbed printer's capacity to print on rigid, transparent materials. Both Pompei and the Phantom works refer to the speech bubbles from Superhero comics and in particular to the dramatic, non verbal content they sometimes contain – the AARGHs, MWAHs, EEKs etc. In some situations we are lost for words. Transparent materials allow for layering, which in turn can suggest a cacophony of sounds, suspended in time.

Pompei 2012
digitally printed and engraved acrylic sheets
120 x 150 x 225 cm

Gary Smith

My work over the past three years has explored how contemporary inkjet technologies and traditional glaze painting techniques can be layered and integrated to broaden the scope of painting. *Tanks* is typical of how I create multi-pass composite prints, that seek to utilize the inkjet facility as a painter would develop a picture rather than how a photographer would output a print.


Tanks, 2012
acrylic and pigment on canvas
115 x 240 cm
Photo credit: RLDI

Nick Stranks

My practice in the past has dealt with both cast and fabricated metal sculptures. Much of this work has concentrated on the casting in bronze of obsolete technologies, such as early mobile phones, cameras and tools. This recent work has been concerned with similar imagery but instead of casting the works I have digitally printed them onto glass using the ANU Inkjet Research Facility. These works reference and are influenced by images taken from 19th century European glass lantern slides. I am interested in using this method of reproduction to create images that will form part of a body of research that will include a series of glass negatives, digital works on paper and site specific installations. I am currently a PhD candidate enrolled the Print Media and Drawing Workshop at the ANU School of Art.

Mr Pratt (installation detail), 2012
glass, Ink Jet Image, Steel
1800 x 500 x 130 mm
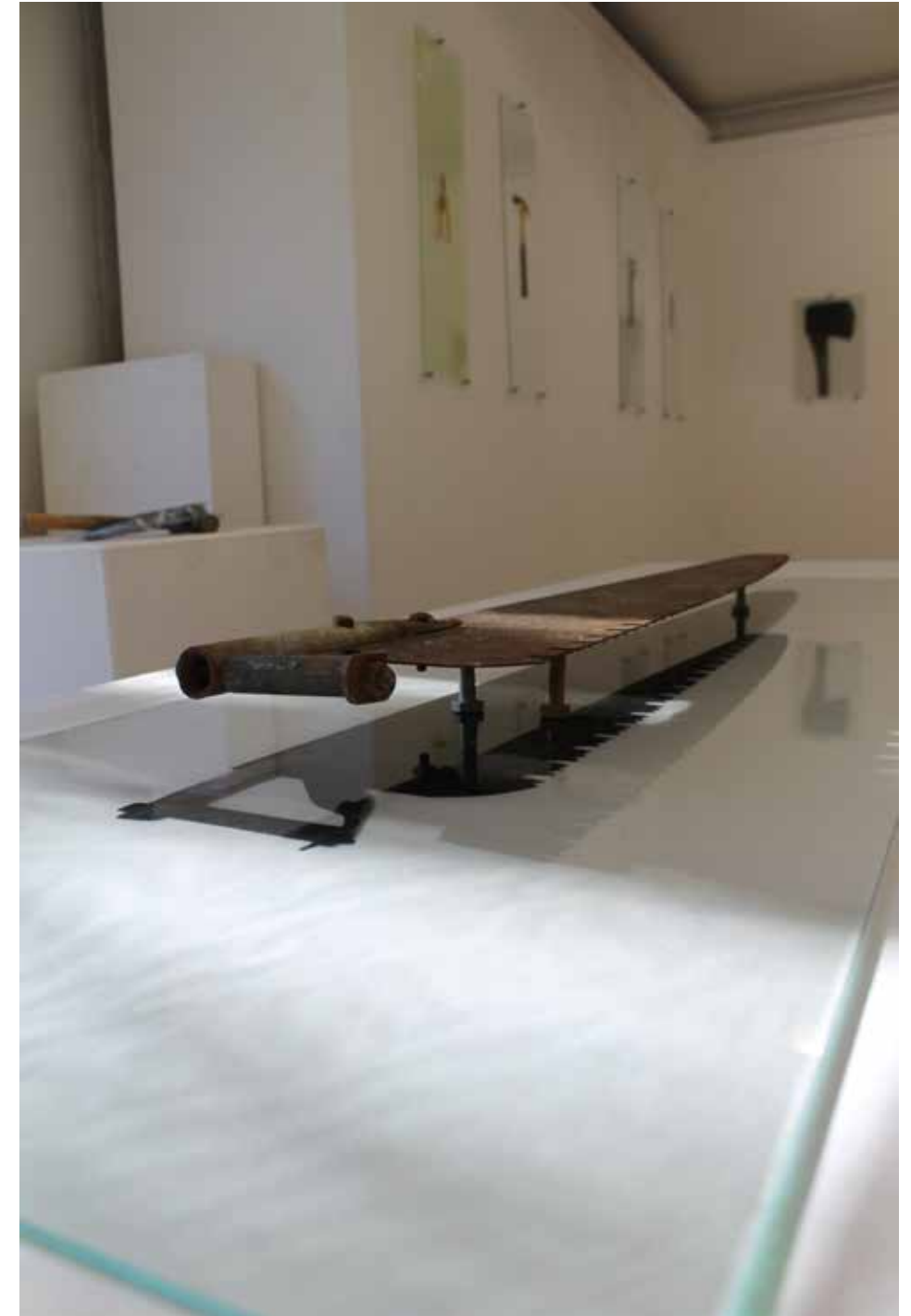
Genevieve Swifte

The possibilities of inkjet negate the intangibility of digital processes, allowing an image to attain a poetic state of materiality. A wing seems to be the antithesis of stone, I wanted the work to move, to be heard, seen and touched. The print on silk occupies a liminal state between visibility and invisibility, representation and ephemerality, stasis and the passage of time.

Upernavik 3, 2011
graphite drawing, pigment print from black and white negative on hahnemuhle
42 x 59 cm

Annie Trevillian

I thought about different concepts for my heritage project called Remnants which included :

-digital printing on shaped wood in sections to build up to a five meter high haystack supported by scaffolding (too expensive for build and remove)

-digital printing and screenprinting on the acrylic sections that make up a glasshouse (good idea for another project)

-digital printing on fencing banner fabric (too obvious as an artwork)

The polyvoile could be purchased on a roll and although it is usually use for sublistatic printing the sampling with the UV cured ink by Amy showed that it worked well for my requirements. I especially liked it because it was light, transparent and could easily be hung on fencing wire strung between the corners of the outside fence. The alternative to polyvoile is silk organza which is expensive and more easily damaged as opposed to the strength and versatility of the polyvoile.

Because of the transparency of the fabric the imagery was either hidden or obvious depending on the light and where you are standing. It definitely conveyed the idea that there was a history to the site whether hidden or known. A bit like prompting memories of people and places.

I worked closely with Amy McGregor sampling colours. Stretching the fabric taut and securing it with masking tape pre printing was very reminiscent of stretching mesh for screenprinting. I enjoy the fact that my skills from previous art making activities can be translated to different aspects of digital printing.

Amy McGregor sampling polyvoile, Inkjet Research Facility 2012