



**Prudence
Murphy**
Future
Forms



Prudence Murphy

Future Forms

Sydney

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MOP Projects
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13 August – 5 September 2010
Counihan Gallery In Brunswick
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This page:

Master Blaster (detail) 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

Cover image:

To the treehouse (detail) 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

www.prudencemurphy.com

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Prudence Murphy

Home is where the art is.

One of the signs of otherness that photography has long offered is a shift of scale: those close-ups of monumental capsicums for example, or the graspable smallness of snapshots. This is also the piquancy of toys and scale models and those distant views, from hills and from the air, which seem to reduce whole cities and landscapes to scale models of themselves.

A toy speedboat is a projection of a real speedboat, made small enough for a child's hand and imagination to grasp. A real speedboat is a projection of a toy speedboat made large enough for an adult's hand and imagination to grasp.

Prudence Murphy's current series of 17 photographic prints (*Future Forms*) occupies this in-between space, a kind of Gulliver in Legoland, where imagination crosses with reality, and adult and child swap places. Here little desiring machines made of Lego blocks seem suspended in the state of almost happening. Found in a play box these modular shapes are then set and deliberately angled in the never-never of a graduated grey backdrop. It is a grey that is interstellar, even metaphysical, making the very poised images – *Hovership*, *Trailer*, *Sentinel* etc. – look chaste and seem full of mysterious promise, or threat. I especially love *To the treehouse* with its ladder into the nothingness. (Isn't there a family resemblance to de Chirico's shadow of a girl rolling a hoop with a stick into an empty piazza?)

In play we shape the world, like a kid with a box of Lego bricks, acting out our relation to the world. It's what every artist does. Against the professional dexterity of virtuoso Lego modelling (all those realistic lunar modules, Doges' Palaces and Guggenheim Museums that seem to suggest the whole world is Lego-compatible), these little assemblages have an improvisational, hybrid feel made out of a clash of Lego product lines. (Note the scorpion making do as a wheelhouse in *Galleon*, and the medieval headgear atop the space age helmet in *Master Blaster*). They remind you that we patchwork our own coherence out of the chaos of the world's material, and then undo the process.

Lovingly observed domestic life is Prudence Murphy's speciality. Home is where the art is. Her roving eye lights on a cascade of diverse subjects and objects and has been focusing on her own patch: kitchen, bathroom, living room, bedroom. There's the big things that happen in life: Kabul, separation, Alzheimer's, Haiti, global domination, death. That sort of thing. Then there are the things we do or think about everyday. It's more likely that we're going to come up with TV movie-of-the-week responses to the big things because we haven't had practice with them. But observing the little things we come to interesting conclusions about them, we've orbited around them so many times. Band-aids, eyelashes, shaving, baby shoes. "Intimisme" was art history's word for it. Bonnard and Vuillard etc. But that suggests untroubled idylls of tireless bliss among luminous fruit baskets in halcyon spaces. Nor is it domestic in the sense of today's glossy lifestyle pieces on, for example, different storage jars for pasta. Rather these works - like her potent *manoeuvres* (2006-08), which depicted the leftovers of a child's bath time play with toy soldiers under giant taps - gently hints at less welcoming themes: the militarisation of everyday life. But it's all done with zero-pomposity, and Murphy's trademark compassionate, mordant pop wit. Her "intimisme" is to focus tenderly on what comes before or after or falls in between decisive actions. It's as if you were watching a film noir, not for the smash-bang plot, but for how the gangster's trim their moustaches. So from the vroom-vroom boy energies of *Future Forms*, Murphy has looked at the oldies as well. In *The Male Grooming Series* (2007), she takes serial exposures of her father and other men sprucing up, shaving, washing and combing. In consecutive images that recall the frame-by-frame analysis of kinesics experts shooting everyday acts, Murphy pays another homage to the small: measured in thousandths of a second. During those self-involved instants, as the men peer into the bathroom mirror doing their daily ablutions, their rubbery faces look not quite the same and not quite different. From shot to shot, the camera reaches into temporal fissures

revealing expressions that reveal vacuity, confusion, wonder, vulnerability, even terror. Grooming captures those touching, humming, suspended moments mid-thought, when you're trying to align the aerial inside your head and the vision you're getting is part angel, part demon.

Crafty and rigorous and splendidly accessible Murphy's homage to the small and intimate, may not be solving global domination, or trying to mend the flat tyre on the Fiery Chariot, but she's breathing vitality into the everyday, that halfway house between nightmare and utopia, where most of us spend our time.

George Alexander

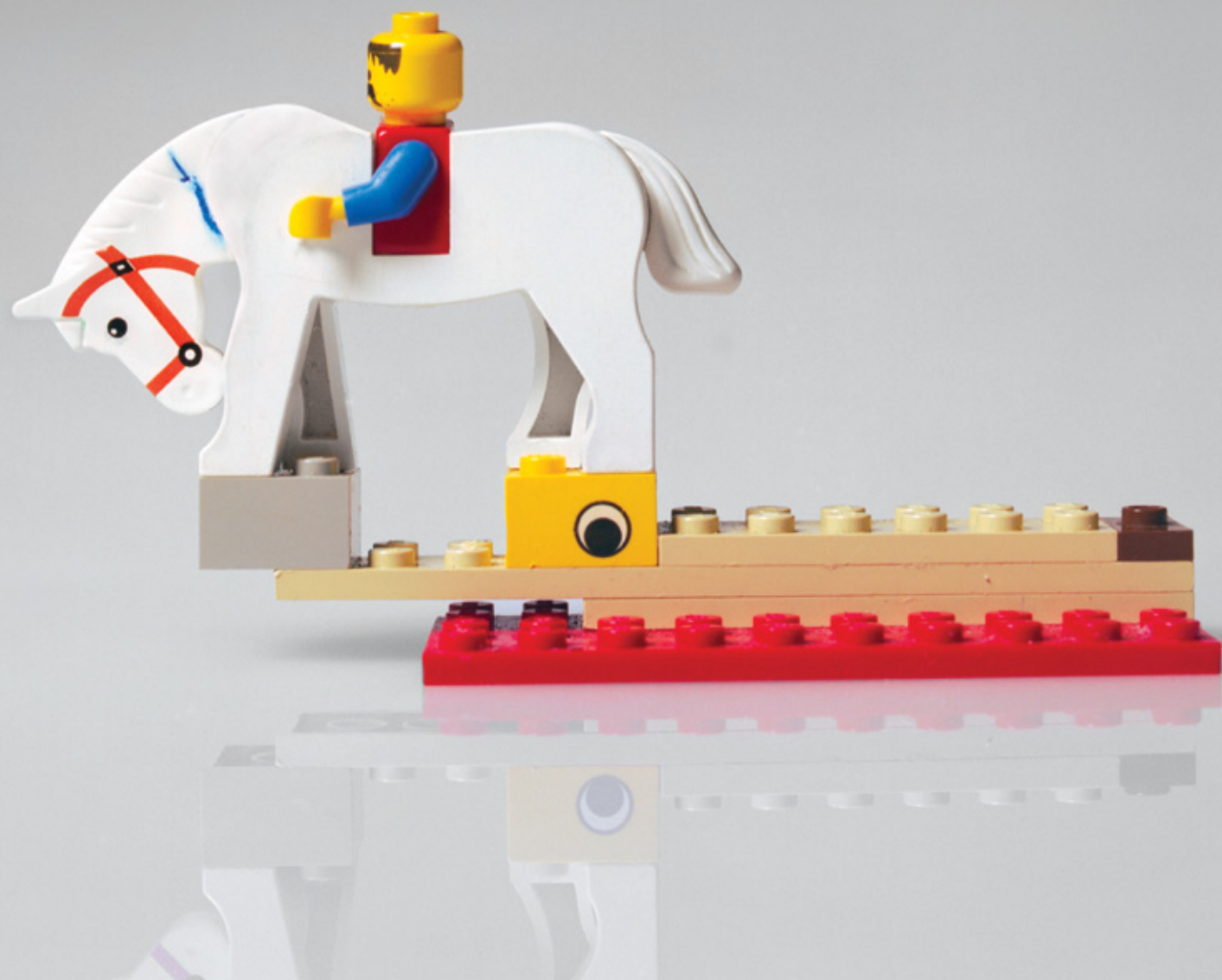
George Alexander's novel *Slow Burn* was published in 2009 by UWA Press.



Hovership 2009
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm



Tall car 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm



Previous page:

Sentinel 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm



This page:

Speed boat 2009
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

Island 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

Galleon 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

Tracker 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

Trailer 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm

The lookout (detail) 2010
Archival pigment print
110 x 135 cm





manœuvres #2 2006
from *manœuvres* 2006-08
Archival pigment print
71 x 101cm



manœuvres #6 2006
from *manœuvres* 2006-08
Archival pigment print
71 x 101cm



dress code (Monday – Sunday) 2006
Archival pigment prints
19 x 13 cm each

