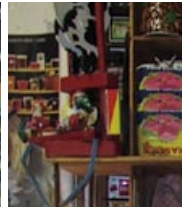
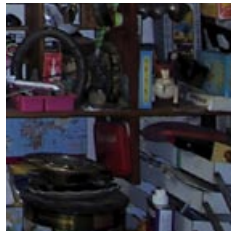
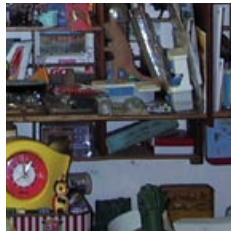
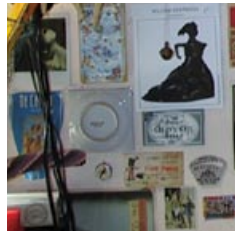
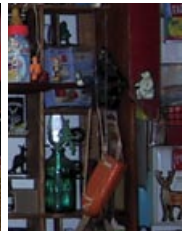
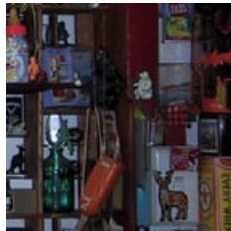
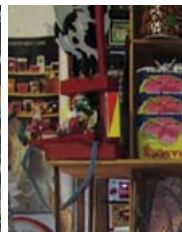
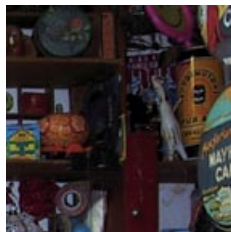
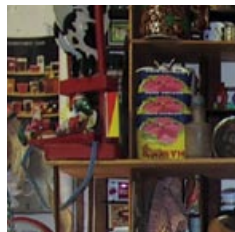


Shelf Life



curated by Daniel Mudie Cunningham

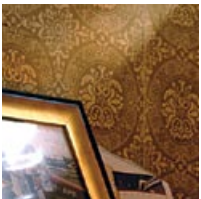
31 August – 17 September 2006



Ron Adams



Lionel Bawden



Samantha Edwards



Drew Bickford



Adam Cullen



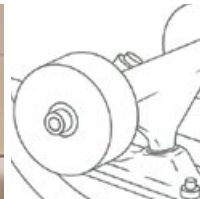
Elvis Richardson



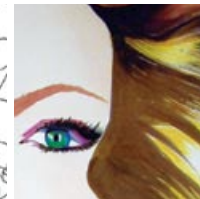
Sarah Goffman



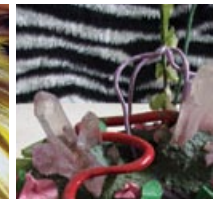
Prudence Murphy



Kurt Schranzer



Cash Brown



Kate Rohde

Images above: Details of artist's work featured in this catalogue.

COVER IMAGE: Sarah Goffman
Photograph of the artist's shelf in kitchen (c2003)

Lionel Bawden is represented by GRANTPIRRIE, Sydney
Adam Cullen is represented by Kaliman Gallery, Sydney
Samantha Edwards is represented by Galerie Emotion, Paris
Kate Rohde is represented by Kaliman Gallery, Sydney
Kurt Schranzer is represented by Esa Jäske Gallery, Sydney

The 'shelf life' of a product refers to the amount of time it can be stored before it spoils or becomes obsolete. Generally the 'shelf' in question is a retail space allotted for the display of consumer goods. Shelves, then, are temporal zones that see items coming and going according to highs and lows in consumer demand: when we want the product it gets restocked, when we don't, it goes to waste. These ideas provide a rich source of meaning for artists when the conventions of use and display, as it relates to art practice, are considered. Simply speaking: shelves speak to the things we collect, promote display and status, thereby elevating the very 'thingness' of our things. When, conversely, the whims of fashion, taste and novelty wear thin, that same shelved stuff lies dormant and abandoned, left to collect dust. As mnemonic devices, objects shelved are meaningful only because they're attached to memories that risk being eventually forgotten. And forgotten is what often happens to objects filed away, shelved out of sight. As an exhibition, *Shelf Life* showcases eleven artists whose work engages with the lives of shelves, the shelves of life, life on the shelf, shelf life.

For all its meanings, literal and metaphoric, 'shelf life' resonates most in consumerist parlance. In *USELESS* (2006) Ron Adams embraces the literal meanings of retail slogans such as 'use less' and 'buy now,' undermining their imperatives for impulse-driven consumption by emphasising how in a perpetual present products are *useless by now*. Use value is corporeal for Cash

Brown whose *Bloodstains Are Easy to Remove* (2005) examines everyday bodies rendered obsolete by the spectacle of celebrity culture. Reassembling images from popular magazines littered with impossibly idealised body types, Brown foregrounds the grotesque underpinnings of a cut and paste beauty industry.

Kurt Schranzer's *Young Skateboarder* (2006) and *Young Machinist* (2006) enact a similar impulse to merge bodies and technologies. These erotically charged drawings of young men are made all the more potent by the incorporation of collage elements sourced from industrial treatises from the early 1900s. Substituted for a machine part, the anus becomes both sexual and commodity fetish where machine obsolescence converges with an erogenous zone capable of passing its own kind of waste.

Youth on display is also explored by Prudence Murphy and Adam Cullen. In her beguiling photo series *manœuvres* (2006) Murphy depicts her son's bath time battle scenes, evoking with eerie simplicity tensions between childhood play and grown up war games. Cullen, whose work usually veers more towards a kind of psychosocial warfare, revisits drawings he made as a child and long kept on the shelf. Adorning the pages of Brendan Behan's 1958 convict narrative *Borstal Boy* – the book itself a treasured family heirloom – are illustrations hinting at bushranger-like iconography that would later become an occasional motif in Cullen's celebrated practice.

Samantha Edwards also takes up biographical themes in *9 Cudjee Road* (2006). Documenting cluttered domestic interiors, Edwards' intimate photographs speak to narratives of loss, loneliness, isolation and hoarded waste that stem from a life left on the shelf. If shelved clutter evokes sadness for Edwards, Sarah Goffman takes delight in simulating shelf displays kept in her home. Objects collected as contextual source material for her art practice become the actual work through their careful reproduction. Handmade from trashy materials like cardboard boxes, Goffman fashions doppelgangers to stand in for her little real-world treasures.

Domestic clutter also forms a conceptual backdrop of Lionel Bawden's work. Inspired by Oprah's quest to help women 'containerise' their messy homes, Bawden plays with the idea that clean houses imply healthy minds, while mess suggests weakness and defeat. Bawden examines the formal structures of the plinth/shelf as a bounded site for sculptural display and to mock our futile attempts to order chaos. Formal shelving structures also fascinate Kate Rohde, an artist whose practice is given over to simulating museum environments and practices. *Untitled* (2005/06) are a series of shelved faux specimen dioramas drawn from natural history sources. Rohde questions institutional processes of selection underpinning modern museums, spotlighting the kinds of displays often relegated to the storeroom.

Drew Bickford takes institutional display in a different direction by probing the methods of teratology (the study of abnormal development and medical 'monstrosities'). *Teratism* (2006) presents a deformed baby preserved or 'pickled' in a jar of formaldehyde. Unlike Rohde's specimens, Bickford's jar baby continues to age in death – a 'life' not extinguished by being bottled. Two forms of 'shelf life' inform *Teratism*: the life of the freak made public spectacle and the uncanny life of the organism in its chemical womb.

A different form of terror informs Elvis Richardson's *Cold Case Canberra* (2006). Negotiating the potential terrors of memory and coincidence, Richardson revisits a long forgotten story of a girl murdered in Downer, Canberra in 1971. Projecting fragments of text through analogue slides, which in themselves suggest nostalgia, *Cold Case Canberra* reflects on the limited burst of local media coverage the murder received, how the story resonates in strange coincidental ways for Richardson who moved to Downer in 2005, and the basic 'shelf life' of social and cultural memory.

Dr Daniel Mudie Cunningham is a curator and writer based in the Blue Mountains.

Ron Adams

USELESS (2006)
Acrylic paint on linen
71cm x 61cm



Lionel Bawden

the monsters (big biology burning hot) (2004)
Coloured Staedtler pencils, epoxy, linseed oil, on plinth-MDF, perspex, metal
Photo credit: Jamie North
Image courtesy of the artist and GRANTPIRRIE



Samantha Edwards

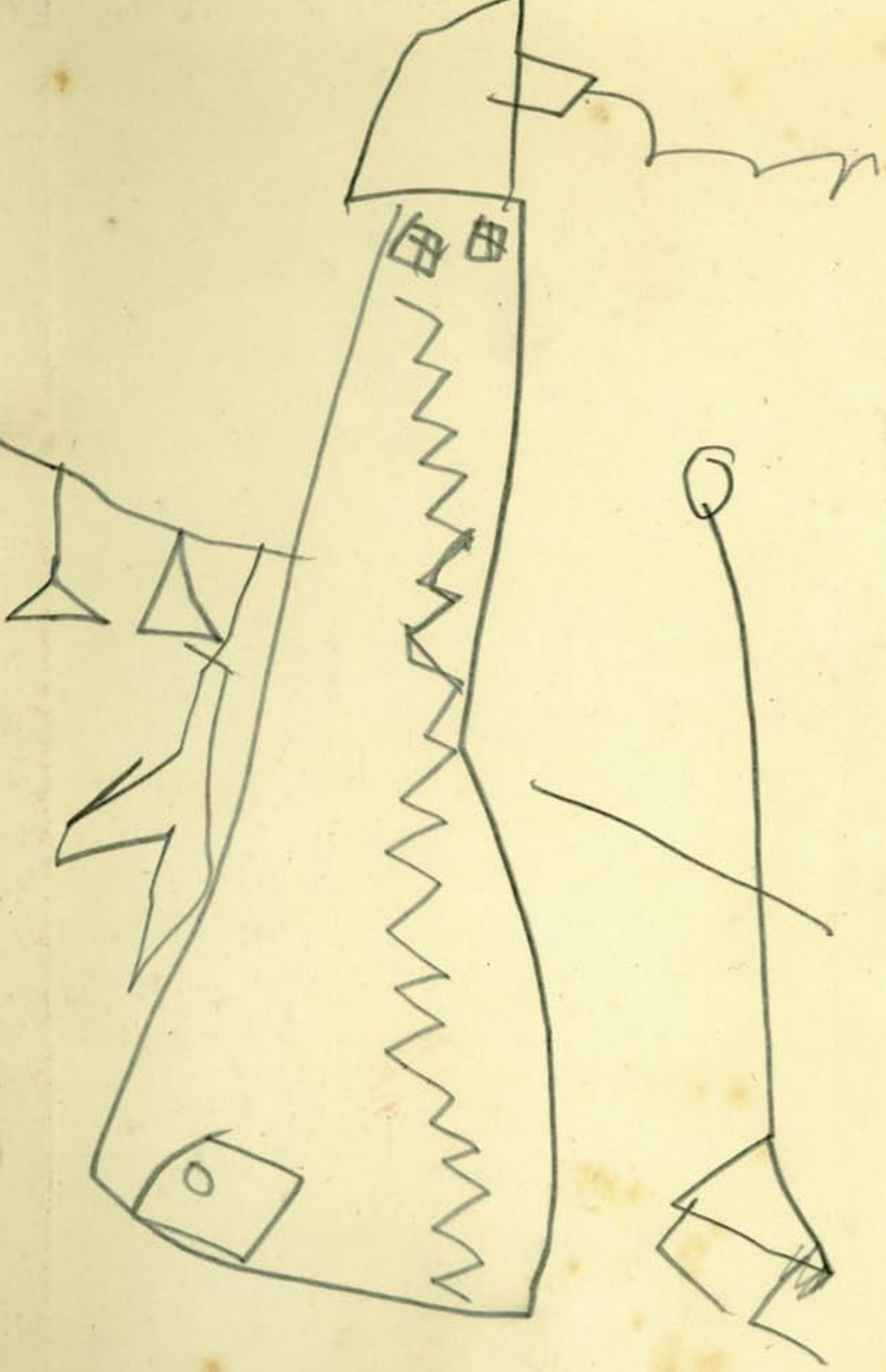
9 Cudgee Road (2006)
Series of five giclee prints on archival gloss
28cm x 35.5cm



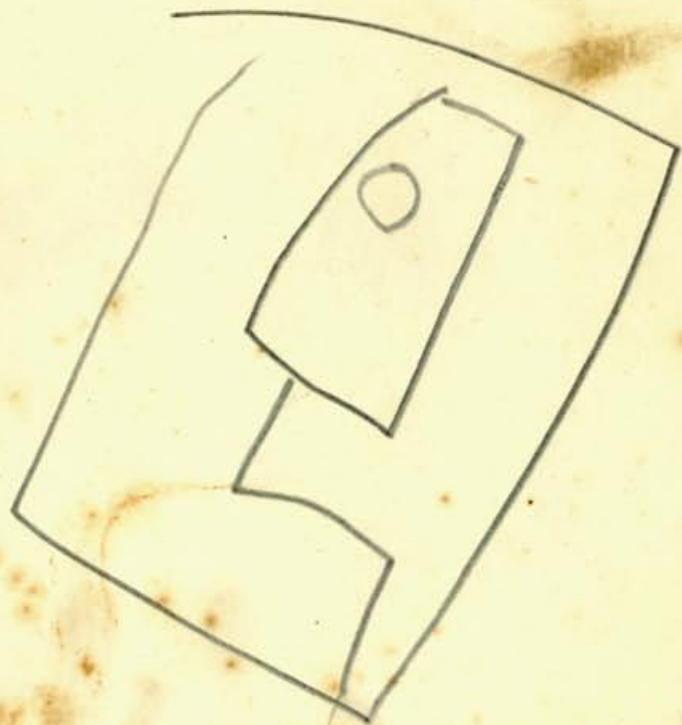
Drew Bickford

Untitled (2006)
Watercolour on paper
19cm x 30cm





To Auntie Doree
Love Mummy & Mark
1960

A small sketch of a pointed object, possibly a hat or a piece of fabric, with several horizontal lines across its width. It has a small circle at the top and a small square at the bottom.

'Shelf life' denotes the duration of a product's commercial viability, from when it is first offered for sale, to just before it begins to deteriorate. As a concept, it emerges in the context of perishable goods, hinging on the distinction between what is fresh and what is stale. How deliciously evocative of taste and the art market this is, for what's more perishable than taste! An exhibition with such a title cannot but evoke the institutional practices of the art world that dictate what shall be put on the shelf in the first place, what price tag it shall wear, and whether it's deemed 'fresh' or shop-soiled and past it. Certainly, the comparison between the trade in objects of cultural value and everyday perishables, between the supermarket shelf and the museum display case, is inescapable. So is the underpinning capitalist imperative of the shelf life: it exists to protect the manufacturer, providing a strictly limited guarantee of quality, after whose expiration the buyer takes all the risk. It is the marketing tool *par excellence*: goods approaching their use by date are commonly marked down for a quick sale. The buyer's happy, thinking they've picked up a bargain; the seller's even happier, knowing their profit margin has been protected despite the potentially compromised quality of goods sold. Past their use by date, however, goods threaten to become toxic.

The shelf is predominantly a structuring device, a pervasive means for categorising and ordering all manner of things. A shelf can represent institutionalised knowledge, as in the cataloguing of books in a library that enforces disciplinary boundaries. It can embody the accumulated wisdom of market researchers, whereby we are shepherded through the consumer maze to maximise our spending. A shelf can also act as a personalised taxonomical system, revealing the underlying hierarchies of value that structure our thinking. What we place on our shelf for public view says a great deal about how we would ideally represent ourselves; the corollary, what is kept in storage, probably says a thing or two about what we would rather repress. Generally we reserve the shelf for objects of cultural or personal worth. The shelved collections of 19th century European gentlemen, for instance, were intended to impress, intimidate or ingratiate the visitor by providing testament to that gentleman's great erudition and sophistication.

More often than not, the structuring principle outlives the phenomena it was designed to organise. Shelves are cleared, new things put on display. Or the objects are destroyed, but the shelves remain. In the aftermath of the ballot for independence in East Timor in 1999, Indonesian militias systematically torched libraries and schools; where the shelves were made of concrete or steel, they remained as testament to underlying structures, while the knowledge and cultural heritage they housed were consumed in the fire, evidence of their existence mere smoke stains and ash (as poignantly captured in Tom Nicholson's work, *After Action for Another Library* 1999-2001/2003/2006 on exhibit in the 2006 Biennale of Sydney). The shelf is often invoked as a metaphor for memory itself, where individual reminiscences are thought to be accessed like objects on a shelf. So long as we know our cataloguing system, our memory is intact. When we begin to forget where on the shelf we placed things, our memory begins to falter. When the shelves themselves collapse, we have entered the surreal and frightening terrain of dementia.

Curator Daniel Mudie Cunningham has chosen a particularly fertile theme for this exhibition, offering artists and viewers alike an opportunity to muse on the links between categories and knowledge; memory and structure; shopping and gallery hopping; obsolescence and state of the art; cultural value and worthlessness; public display and private identity. *Shelf Life* suggests that perhaps we should rethink, even invert, the cultural status of the shelf stacker.

Dr Jacqueline Millner lectures in the School of Humanities and Languages, University of Western Sydney, and writes widely on Australian contemporary art.

Centre spread

Adam Cullen

Borstal Boy (c1969/2006)

Scanned drawing from book

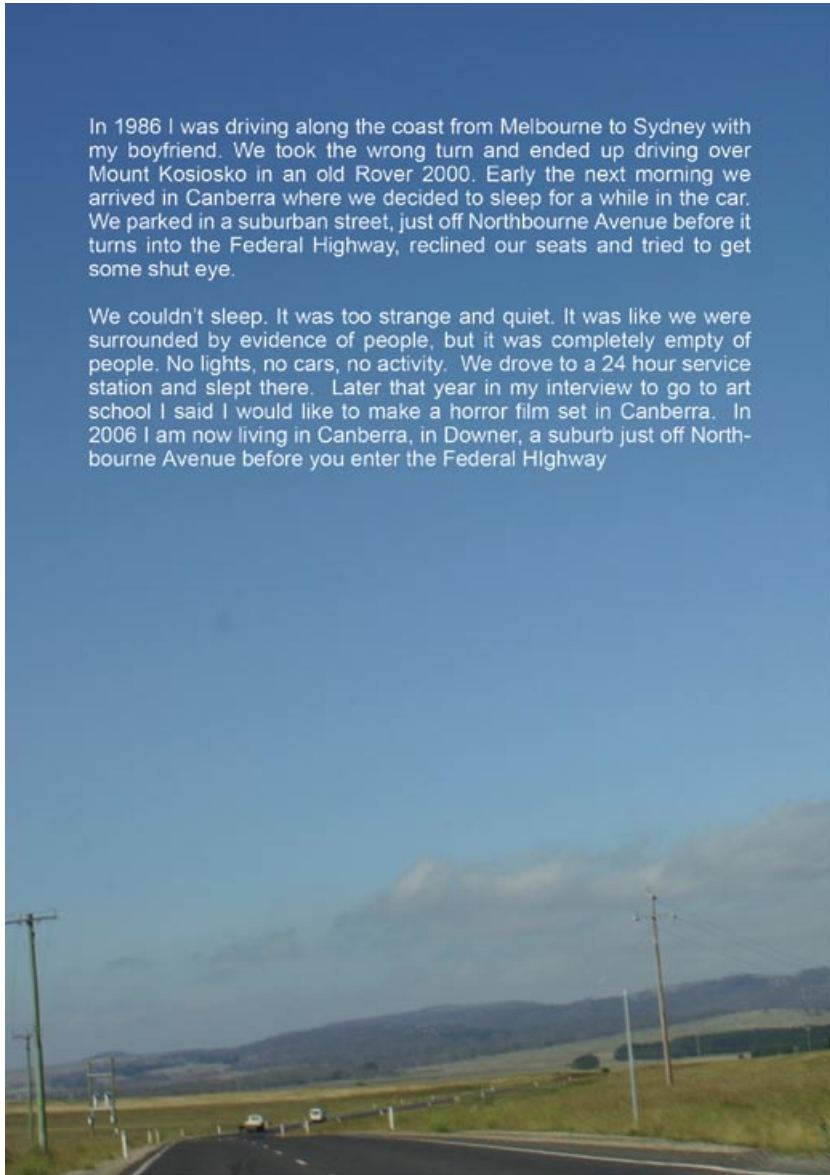
21cm x 30cm, edition of 3 archival digital prints on paper
Image courtesy of the artist and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

Elvis Richardson

Cold Case Canberra 1971 – 2006 (2006)
Digital print
21 cm x 29.7cm

In 1986 I was driving along the coast from Melbourne to Sydney with my boyfriend. We took the wrong turn and ended up driving over Mount Kosiosko in an old Rover 2000. Early the next morning we arrived in Canberra where we decided to sleep for a while in the car. We parked in a suburban street, just off Northbourne Avenue before it turns into the Federal Highway, reclined our seats and tried to get some shut eye.

We couldn't sleep. It was too strange and quiet. It was like we were surrounded by evidence of people, but it was completely empty of people. No lights, no cars, no activity. We drove to a 24 hour service station and slept there. Later that year in my interview to go to art school I said I would like to make a horror film set in Canberra. In 2006 I am now living in Canberra, in Downer, a suburb just off Northbourne Avenue before you enter the Federal Highway



Sarah Goffman

Polkinghorne Shed (2005)
Graphite on paper
20.5cm x 14.5cm



Prudence Murphy

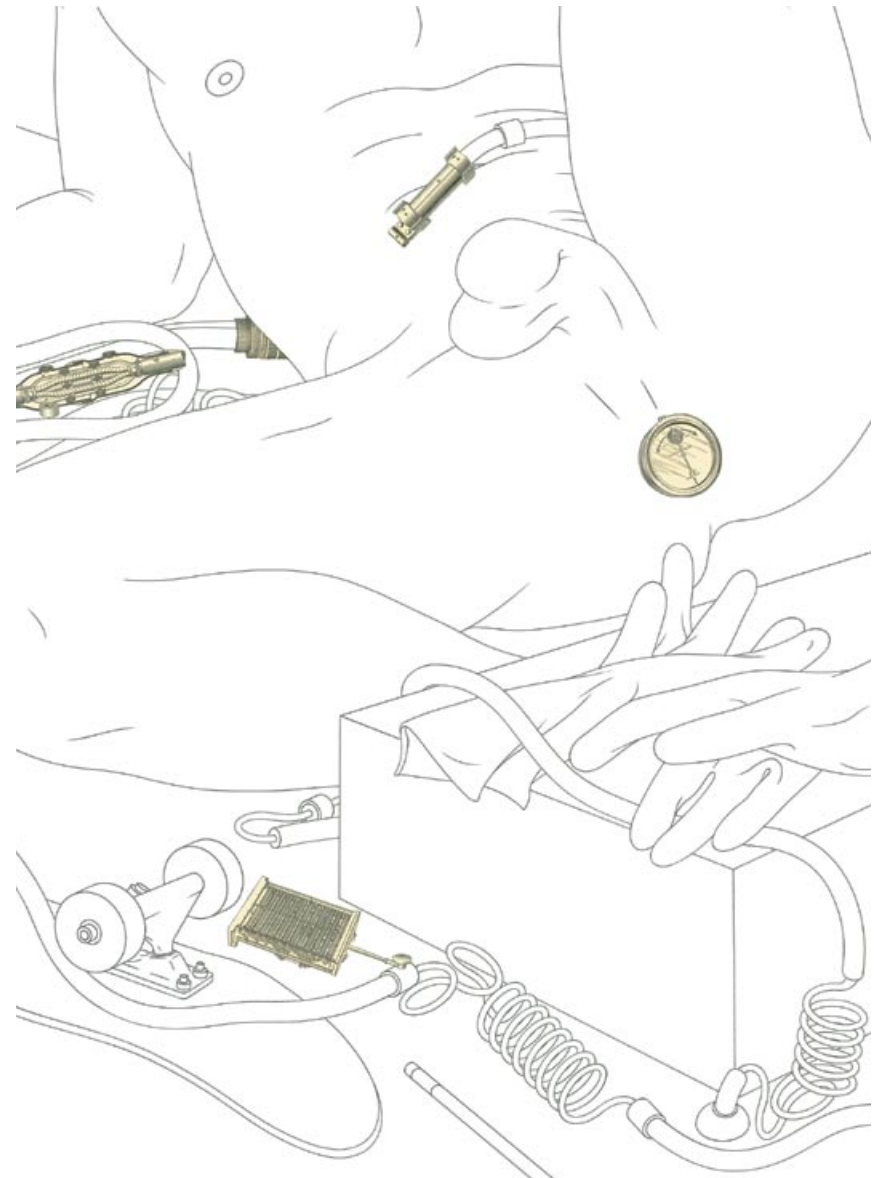
manœuvres #2 (2006)
Pure pigment print on archival paper
75cm x 50cm



Kurt Schranzer

Young Skateboarder (2006)
Ink and collage on paper
76 x 56 cm

Image courtesy of the artist and Esa Jäske Gallery, Sydney



Cash Brown

Bloodstains Are Easy to Remove (2005)
Ink and pencil on 300gsm arches
77 x 55 cm



Kate Rohde

Untitled (2005/06)
Mixed media

Image courtesy of the artist and Kaliman Gallery, Sydney



