

**BLUE
CIRCLES**

Julian Dashper

BLUE CIRCLES

for Gary

Campbelltown City Bicentennial Art Gallery
Campbelltown NSW Australia
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Mark Kirby

When you enter a Julian Dashper show you will more than likely see hard-edged, cool, industrial-looking work, mostly two dimensional, sometimes three dimensional. It will be immaculately finished, if it is framed then it will be framed perfectly; and it will be placed in just the right place, in just the right order. If you want self-expression, by which I mean physical evidence of the artist's hand, then Dashper's work is not for you, as Dashper shows are invariably more designed than made. This is not to say that he is not present in his work, as the carefully articulated environments are very much the essence of him; and it is not to say that the work won't be considered sensuous, as the work is invariably tantalising. But what you will mainly get from a Dashper show is a web of references and readings that conjure a florid landscape of ideas and issues, mostly about art, but also its relationships with society at large. Dashper's value for me is in how he reminds me of the pleasures that are gained from such thinking, of how beautiful thought can be.

A while ago I mentioned to Dashper an article by Thomas McEvelley, where the notion of an idea being beautiful was raised. The article was about Conceptual Art, and attempted to propose a philosophical base that linked this radical movement from the 1960s to more conventional ideas about art and beauty.¹ At the time Dashper and I were preparing a catalogue for an exhibition of his work in Den Haag and were discussing the lack of value placed on thinking as a tool during the making and experiencing of artwork. During our talk we became engrossed with the potential of the very simple notion that an idea could have an aesthetic presence, that an idea can ameliorate a response akin to the visual pleasures usually found in the arts. We discussed accountants, mathematicians, and others who

have attested to us the pleasure they feel as they perform their craft, calculate a difficult sum, or come up with a new tax dodge.

For over twenty years now Dashper has been exhibiting idea-based art, which has tended to see him catalogued as a conceptual artist. When asked, he argues that all art, is of course, idea based: "For instance a painting of a cow eating grass, is not actually a cow eating grass, it is an idea of what someone thinks a cow eating



Steve Carr installing *Untitled (Black C.V.)* 1999 in Dashper's exhibition *The Last Solo Exhibition in the World*, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin, 1999.

grass looks like. It is about cows and art, and about what that particular artist thinks good art is."² Some of Dashper's ideas are regional, some international, others personal, but all deal directly with the issues of art and being an artist. Most are controversial, or at least provoke a reaction from some quarter or other of the art community.³ Nevertheless,

Dashper is included in many prestigious museum and other collections in New Zealand, Australia, the United States and Europe, he has won several international awards and residencies, and developed a cult following that stretches from Dublin to Dunedin.

But Dashper's art is also conventionally beautiful, in that it is good to look at. A big part of this appeal is the minimal clarity of his pared down iconography. Most of this iconography has been found and his objects readymade, as with the 'O' from the Futura type face in the *Untitled* series that dates from 1990 onwards; the Little-Linko drum kit in *Untitled (The Warriors)* 1998; or the five full scale drum kits in

The Big Bang Theory 1992-93. It usually has a serial-cum-mass production quality to it, suggesting that each work may have at least one potential twin elsewhere. In this way Dashper could possibly be described as Neominimalist, a tag that would group him with a number of his international contemporaries who use comparable strategies, such as Rachael Whiteread, Felix Gonzalez-Torres and Martin Creed.⁴ Minimalism was a 1960s largely American movement with analogous visual characteristics to Dashper's. Dashper's conceptual orientation is in many ways Minimalist too, particularly the manner in which his exhibitions are frequently designed to the specifics of an exhibition space. Minimalist artists also tended not to isolate thinking away from art, and acknowledged the multi-sensory-cum-intellectual experience we have when we view it. In this approach some were influenced by the phenomenological philosophy of Merleau-Ponty, among other things. In this way Minimalism provided a bridge from Formalism (an aesthetically biased approach to art advocated strongly by the influential American critic Clement Greenberg), into Conceptual Art (which swapped concepts for aesthetics as the essential experience of art).

Dashper's and Minimalism's homogenising of formal concerns with conceptual content are an interesting conflation of one of the defining binaries of 20th century Western art, as evidenced in the contrary positions of Formalism and Conceptual Art. An earlier 20th century example of this binary in practice was Marcel Duchamp's readymades, where banal everyday objects were contextualised into art mostly on the artist's say so. The most (in)famous example is the urinal in *Fountain* (1917). Duchamp's purpose was to prioritise ideas over beauty. Dashper is regularly compared to Marcel Duchamp, but has little interest in him, and likes to recall Donald Judd likening Duchamp to someone who invented fire but never doing anything with it. This aesthetic-concept duality reached its peak mid-century, first with Clement Greenberg who, while articulating a theoretical outline for Formalism, argued that content must be avoided like the

plague; and then Joseph Kosuth, who orientated art toward a conceptually biased paradigm via Conceptual Art. As well as the fact that both arguments are more or less the same, in that each climaxes into a discussion of art about art, an interesting point is the inability of both to acknowledge the aesthetic potential of their ideas, or indeed, thought in general.⁵

This is in one sense surprising because the notion that an idea might be beautiful has been around for a while; but otherwise not unexpected as both Greenberg and Kosuth rely on the 18th century German Enlightenment Philosopher Immanuel Kant to qualify their contrasting arguments. Kant is largely responsible for the aesthetic attitude of many people interested in the arts during the 19th and 20th centuries, but at the core of these ideas is a structure that disengages any connection between idea (or cognition) and aesthetics. Kant argued that human nature is made of three components or modalities, the cognitive, ethical and aesthetic. These modalities are completely separate, to the extent that an aesthetic response which originates from the senses, cannot be articulated via a cognitive or ethical equivalent, and vice versa. You may feel something aesthetically, but you cannot know it cognitively.⁶

For some time now Dashper has been exhibiting ideas about abstract art. For him, abstraction is a kind of readymade resource, a long established idea about how art can be made. For Dashper: "Abstraction is a found object, a tradition."⁷ One of its traditional beliefs is that pure abstraction is non-representational. An underlying theme of Dashper's art is the implicit representational nature of all abstraction, of the impossibility of its own aims not to represent. For example, Dashper's abstract images frequently have a double life. At first glance they seem to refer only to themselves, simple self-contained shapes with no conspicuous genealogy. However Dashper frequently collects his iconography from elsewhere and, like Duchamp, recontextualises it as abstract art, but, unlike Duchamp,

Dashper is concerned about their aesthetic potential. His sources are as diverse as an obscure typeface or a television screen, which, when you think about it, are not so obscure as to be unrecognisable. What Dashper plays on is our expectation that an abstract artwork should be non-representational, and how from that given we shut



Installation view Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney 2000 photo : Ashley Barber

down other references, which we allow to sit unmentioned below the surface. In essence, we forgive the artwork for not meeting its own aims, for denying its own representational status.

At other times Dashper's art resembles the artwork of other abstract artists. For example his circular series, which is commonly misnamed the

target series, and the drum heads works, which consist of concentric circles of the same or differing colours, speak of the work of the American painters Kenneth Noland and Jasper Johns, among others. This type of work has developed into something of a regional style that, post-Dashper, has been claimed to have emerged into the work of other New Zealand artists, such as Ani O'Neill.⁸ O'Neill has drawn connections between the culture of abstraction and her part-Cook Island cultural heritage in circular paintings made by crocheting. O'Neill's work seems to fit into the oeuvre of Dashper, and his Noland, and so on, and so forth. However aside from Dashper, few would say that they have represented the work of the earlier artists, even though something is clearly being represented by its repetition in their work.

Dashper also argues that abstraction has become representational of itself. For some time now post-structuralist theory has argued that texts are largely written before they are scribed, that convention prefigures where an author is able to go before they start writing. A prescriptive aspect of abstract art is that an artwork should have the appearance of being non-representational. An artwork signifies itself as being abstract when it doesn't seem to look like much else. Yet this effort is doomed from the start, as in order to meet the criteria of this type of abstraction an artwork must look abstract, must resemble other abstract artwork, must represent the non-representational values of the abstract tradition. Here Dashper is working alongside his American colleague Sherrie Levine, who since the late 1970s has been challenging traditional assumptions about originality by self-consciously appropriating the art of other artists.⁹ For example, in 1981 Levine re-photographed reproductions of the important mid-20th century American photographer Walker Evans, among others, and presented them as her own work. She later repainted some of the work of famous painters in watercolour so as to make obvious the genealogy of her imagery via the paleness of her watered down versions. Levine's attitude is that nothing can be completely new as every so-called new artwork represents and is represented by the values and traditions of the particular culture it exists within. Thus, while for Levine there is no such thing as a purely original or unoriginal artwork, for Dashper there can be no such thing as non-representational abstraction. For Dashper, pure non-representational abstraction became extinct after the very first non-representational artworks were made. Thereafter, everything became linked by an indexical chain back to the original abstract objects, to become part of the indexical chain of abstract culture.

Abstract artworks represent in other ways too. Abstraction is, for example, a brand value through which artists and others are able to represent themselves. Brand values are themselves abstract, in that they are unseen and hard to identify qualities that advertisers imply

onto products so as to differentiate them from their competitors. Brand values are more fantasy and projection than real. As such, as a brand abstraction enables people to form an identity within the market place of art. This might explain why so many abstract artworks look the same but are meant to be about completely different things; and why some work that looks completely different can be about the same thing. This emphasises the important point that what is at stake is not the object, but the ideas and values around that object. Hence abstract art tends to be thought of as esoteric, contrary to what many artists intend. This is because people come to a work not knowing the ideas and values that foreground it; and they think the lack of any representational content disallows them access to the artist's subject. This esoteric element of abstract art is part of its brand image. It is seen as difficult art, art for the initiated, for those in the know, the connoisseur. The French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has shown how such qualities are given cultural, economic and social value. He suggests that by its apparent difficulty 'hard-art' is given high-cultural worth, thus becoming economically valuable, and the ability to appreciate it, a signifier of high social positioning. But to him art appreciation is a learned skill. To Bourdieu, claims that art is universal are a disguise that denies its specifically cultural heritage; and for Bourdieu, a primary purpose of art is therefore social demarcation. Abstract art is a great social demarcator.

But Dashper is no art snob. He continuously subverts the pretences of abstraction, that it is a difficult art, by inserting popular culture into it. He does this most obviously by referencing popular music, as with the numerous performances he has participated in and produced records from. These mostly 45 rpm singles often document jam sessions between him, friends, other artists, and usually involve one accompanying professional musician. These have been recorded at various venues, although mostly within his exhibitions or studio. They come inserted into limited edition covers that look as at home on the

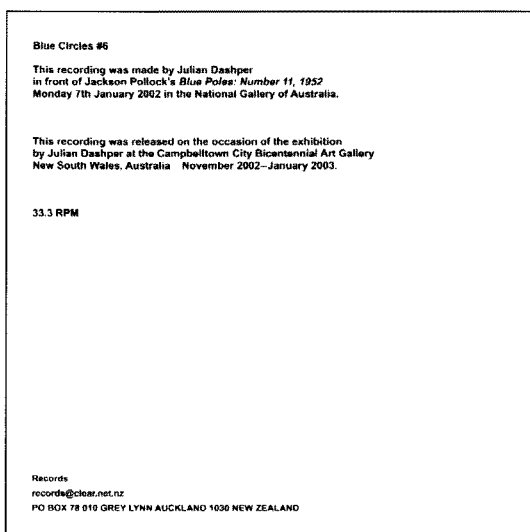
wall as in the record rack. The value of these works is not in their musical qualities, as they are more amateur than not, rather the ideas around them of the relationship between cultural genres. In a similar way Dashper has tinkered a relationship between art and sport, particularly that working-cum-lowest-class of all sports, rugby league. *Untitled (The Warriors)* 1998, simply comprising a Little-Linko drum kit, is such a work. It was first shown at the CBD Gallery in Sydney, and was played during the exhibition's last day.¹⁰ This work explores the sibling rivalry between Australia and New Zealand in art, sport and elsewhere, and suggests that New Zealand is the perennial little brother, with the psychological makeup that comes with such a role. It also pays homage to one of Dashper's other passions, the New Zealand based Warriors rugby league team that plays against Australian club sides in the competition known as the NRL. The Warriors sponsored Dashper in 1998, when they supported him with a major exhibition at The Waikato Museum of Art and History.

On saying that, Dashper nevertheless resists the 'dumbing-down' of art to simplistic press release quotations. For example, *Untitled (Interviews)* 2001-02, which consists of four different interviews with him over four hours explaining his work, is intended to bewilder, to overwhelm the viewer with artistic blather. Dashper's meticulous yet rambling explanations disallow engagement at a personal level, because there is so much of it, and because what he says is so complex. Dashper thinks of this piece as didactic diarrhoea. The interviews are frustrating and sit in contradiction to the usual expository material found in exhibitions, where we are swamped by abbreviated histories designed to the criteria of the three-second bite. Conversely, in this work Dashper also satirises the overly complex explanations that frames much art, and the coded ramble that usually couches its intellectualisation into artspeak.

The series *Blue Circles* #1-#8 2002 was made in unwitting celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the making of Jackson Pollock's painting *Blue Poles: Number 11, 1952*, and its subsequent purchase by what is now called the National Gallery of Australia in 1973. *Blue Poles*, as it is popularly referred to, is an icon of mid century high modernism, and is considered emblematic of the formal and existential preoccupations of mid-century American abstraction. It has also been the subject of controversy as to whether Pollock collaborated in its making with Tony Smith and Barnett Newman during a couple of drinking sessions, a dispute which has been caught up within other mythological-like narratives that surround the career and personality of Pollock. It was also the subject of considerable controversy at the time of its acquisition into the National Gallery of Australia collection, partly because of the radical nature (for Australia) of its abstraction, but mostly because of its cost, being some A\$1.3m. Even so, it has come to stand as a cultural icon within the NGA's collection, signifying its and

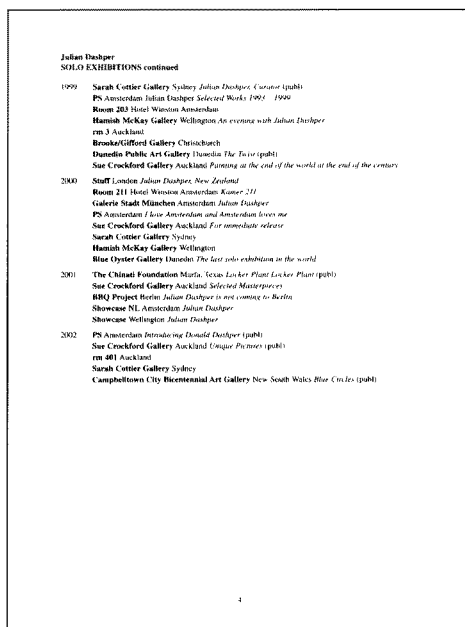
Australia's ability to acquire cultural objects of international importance, and in so doing, asserting their place on the cultural map of the Western world. Visit the NGA website and it is the first image you will see.

The *Blue Circles* series consists of eight separate recordings made in front of Pollock's painting in Canberra in 2002. Each of these eight parts has been cut into an edition of twenty



Blue Circles #6 2002
12" record cover from an edition of 20

transparent vinyl records.¹¹ They are usually displayed as paintings, pinned to the wall in a perfectly ordered sequence, or, within abstract painting look-alike dust covers, whose only iconography is a centralised blue circle.¹² *Blue Circles #6* was shown at Campbelltown in 2002, where all the recordings were played through the gallery sound system, providing viewers with the noise of other viewers scuffling around Pollock's painting in Canberra, and a perceptual link between the two works. Other than that, there is no comparison between the colourful eccentricities of Pollock's painting and the pared down, colourless and overtly ordered and minimal manner of Dashper's.¹³ In one, the emphasis is placed on an intuitive formal intelligence and an aggressive expressive impulse; and the other, a restrained, intellectual and contemplative expression of homage. This comparison is Dashper's point.



Untitled (C.V.) 2002 (detail)
20 sheets of A4 paper

Dashper's *Untitled (Blue C.V.) 2002* is a comprehensive documentation of his career to date, and explores the persona of the artist and its relation to how artwork is perceived. At Campbelltown this work was printed on blue paper, and pinned to the wall opposite *Blue Circles #6* in the manner of a painting. Dashper's resume mirrors *Untitled (Interviews) 2001-02* in the blandness of its matter of fact presentation of a twenty plus year record of international exhibitions and publications. Here, we are swamped by an artist's history and reputation that we know is extensive because of the volume and exotic geography of the



Installation view of *The Twist*
Waikato Museum of Art and History Te Whare
Taonga o Waikato, New Zealand, 1998
photo : Andrew Babe



Untitled (The Warriors) 1998

Little-Linko drum kit with vinyl drumskins
dimensions variable

photo : Ashley Barber



Recording of *Thin Ice* in front of
Untitled (O) 1990-92
Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam, 2000
photo : Stedelijk Museum



Untitled (Interviews) 2001-02 (detail)

Double DVD in an edition of 2 (with Hamish Kilgour,
Steffen Bøddeker, Wendy Katz and Simone Horrocks)

exhibition and publishing venues; and here it is suggested that it is this persona, which sits in front of work somewhat like a transparent façade, that gives his artwork its perceived value.¹⁴ Buy one of Dashper's works and you purchase the idea of Dashper the artist, the Dashper brand. Or better still, buy his curriculum vitae and you get, conflated into a pile of blue paper, an artwork plus the evidence of its value.¹⁵ In this scenario the artist has also become an idea, an abstraction. Dashper came to this work after observing artists all around the world often displaying their resumes as if to give their work validation. He has equated the experience of viewing an artist's C.V. in a gallery to that of viewing pornography, where the contemporary onlooker disguises an inquisitive or even primal nosiness behind a pretended disinterestedness.

That said Dashper's art is not everyone's cup of tea. Those who have most difficulty with him tend to be regional critics from local daily or popular publications, who want something of broad universal appeal for their broad-based readership. Their argument is interesting to look at simply because it adds to the richness of Dashper's story and the theoretical conundrums around such work. Generally, this type of criticism expresses dislike of the artist's conceptual orientation, and the 'pared-downness' of his look. To call such critics reactionary is not harsh, as they represent the aesthetic-versus-idea binary that Dashper's art so nicely conflates. In so doing, they re-direct the general community to think about art in a narrow framework by flaunting its traditional ambivalence toward conceptually oriented art, as is the nature of populist criticism. But in so doing, they close down society's choice, without our even knowing it, by scripting for us a way of approaching art that simply reifies existing expectations. An opportunity is lost, without us even knowing it existed.

- 1 See Thomas McEvilley 'I Think Therefore I Art' *Artforum*, Vol. 23, no. 10, Summer 1985, p 74-84. See also McEvilley's article 'Head It's Form, Tails It's Not Content,' reproduced in Roger Denison & Thomas McEvilley, *Capacity, History, the World, and the Self in Contemporary Art and Criticism*, OPA, 1996, p 22-44.
- 2 Conversation with the artist, February, 2002.
- 3 See for example, *Reviews: he loves me not*, Art School Press, Auckland, 2002, which is a collection of twenty seven negative reviews from the same newspaper critic, T. J. McNamara, published over a twenty year period.
- 4 An example of this connection is Dashper's residency at the Chinati Foundation during 2001, in Marfa, Texas. Donald Judd established the Foundation with a focus toward work of a Minimalist sensibility.
- 5 See for example Greenberg's essay, 'Modernist Painting' (1960), and Kosuth's 'Art After Philosophy' (1969), both republished in Charles Harrison and Paul Wood, *Art in Theory 1900-1990. An Anthology of Changing Ideas*, Blackwell, 1994.
- 6 According to Immanuel Kant's 'Critique of Judgement': 'An aesthetic idea cannot become a cognition because it is an intuition (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found. A rational idea can never become a cognition because it involves a concept (of the super sensible) correspondingly to which an intuition can never be given. To establish *a priori* the connection of the feeling of a pleasure or a pain, as an effect, with any representation (sensational concepts) as its cause, is absolutely impossible.' From Albert Hofstadter, *Philosophies of Art and Beauty: selected readings in aesthetics from Plato to Heidegger*, University of Chicago Press, 1976.
- 7 For a discussion of this see my interviews with Dashper, 'Pop's Art' & 'Luxus', published in *The Twist*, Waikato Museum of Art and History, Te Whare Taonga o Waikato, 1998.
- 8 See for example Robert Leonard's catalogue entry for the 1998 Biennale of Sydney. In *everyday*, Biennale of Sydney, 1998, p 170.
- 9 On saying that, Dashper has doubts about the credibility of this claim, and believes that he and O'Neill arrived at the circular motif simultaneously but from different routes. For Dashper, a more appropriate lineage for both might be the hard edge abstract painter Gordon Walters. Interview with the artist, January 2002.
- 9 The premise for both artists is that every artwork makes a comment on art, where according to Richard Shiff it provides 'a trace recording nothing beyond or deeper than other instances of itself.' Richard Shiff, 'Originality', form Robert Nelson and Richard Shiff, *Critical Terms for Art History*, 1996, p 110. See Levine's 'fan' web site, which links her to the 'Australian artist' Julian Dashper. <http://www.artnotart.com/sherrielevine/links.html>
- 10 It is worth noting that of Dashper's entire drum based works, this is the only one that has ever been played.
- 11 The number of recordings is coincidental and has as much to do with Dashper's American batteries stopping and starting eight times, as there being eight poles on Pollock's painting. Dashper had last charged the recorder's batteries while on a recent residency in Nebraska. Each time it started again, the recording time got smaller until Dashper's imported electricity ran out.
- 12 The size of the circle varies from each set of records, increasing in size incrementally with the decreasing length of each recording.
- 13 In fact, to Dashper's bemusement his most recent Auckland exhibition was described by McNamara as having '...as much flavour as boiled water...' T. J. McNamara, *New Zealand Herald*, Monday, September 30, 2002.
- 14 Dashper has exhibited this ongoing C.V. work in solo exhibitions in Amsterdam, London and Auckland.
- 15 Dashper has been trying to sell the copyright of his C.V. for a number of years. He asserts that a student in today's user pays educational culture would get a better return from their investment by simply swapping their name for his, after purchasing his C.V. As such, this work questions the validity of all artistic reputation.

A SWIM IN DYE

Gwynneth Porter interviews Julian Dashper about his spring 2001 residency at the Chinati Foundation in Marfa, Texas, the museum project of the late great artist, writer, architect and even furniture designer Donald Judd.¹

Julian Dashper recently described himself as a New Zealand artist who lives in Auckland and travels. He makes work that might at first look like painting or sculpture, but is in reality more about the umbrella subject of abstraction. He likes for instance the implied dumbness or quietness of abstraction in contrast to the saturation of today's instantly accessible world, and the way that abstraction can be used to politically resist the didactic museum culture we currently live in. He went to Chinati as a senior Fulbright scholar and an artist in residence to undertake research into artists' archives and the practice of archiving – something that I believe he embraces performatively – and also to consider the idea of Neominimalism. (This interview took place on St Patrick's Day, 2002, Aotearoa time.)

From having undertaken this residency in Marfa, can I assume you are a fan of Donald Judd's work?

To be honest I wouldn't say that when I first arrived in Marfa that I was some sort of Donald Judd disciple. I did and do still think that he was a very important and crucial artist and his artwork will always have a great resonance in our international culture. But since going to Marfa to live I have become an absolute fan and convert of the project he started there in Texas; although I would hesitate to say that what he accomplished in Marfa, as an architect of his own museum circumstance, was his greatest gift to the human race. To me this is not a useful way to look at Marfa. But it did deeply affect me, as an artist living amongst the works permanently installed there. I used to think that while I was at the Chinati Foundation, if it was on fire, what would I rescue first? Funnily enough, I don't think I would have taken a sculpture by someone. I think I would have taken one of the large tables he designed, not just because I like them as furniture, but

because I like the social aspect of them – how people sit around them discussing art, discussing ideas and just living in general. To me, Judd exiting New York soon after having had a very large retrospective at the Whitney Museum at the tender age of 40, and going as far away as he could in America to start a museum run by an artist, is a very interesting and unparalleled idea.

Why did he do that?

He was fed up with New York basically. In many different ways but most importantly he was looking for a way to install his own art work and the work of others on a permanent basis. He could not find this in conventional museum settings where shows still go up and down like underpants on a clothesline. Plus he was also getting too many interruptions to work uninterrupted.

But why Marfa?

In 1946 he and four other soldiers had travelled through that area on route to San Francisco 'in order to be shipped to Korea to pester the world.'² He remembered it fondly, so in 1973 he bought his first buildings in Marfa and began to change them so he could place work there permanently. Interestingly, he wrote in his complete writings from 1975-1986 that in 1974: 'Also I went to Australia, where perhaps I should have gone in the first place.'³ Mind you, years later he even said at one point when he was arguing with someone in Marfa that he wanted to move the whole project from there, brick by brick, to Europe. But ultimately, what he was looking for was an architectural situation he could more or less completely control. He bought up a lot of buildings in and around town (some with the help of Dia) and even started to buy ranches further and further out from town as well. He made his "last studio" on the most distant ranch from Marfa, where he is now buried.

Judd, as I see it, had wanted to resist the well-trodden procedure that on any spare Sunday afternoon in Manhattan you can just hop on the subway and go up to a museum and see a show and have a definable experience and then come home again a few hours later. The same behaviour as going to a movie or a ball game. For instance, these days the Tate Modern, even though it is a great museum, is also London's hottest dating place. What was remarkable about Judd was that he saw this happening to museums in the 70s. He saw a lot of things in advance. He basically pre-empted the art-as-entertainment idea. In Marfa, art unfolds in a different way. It is a different system. For me, that is where I think his

genius was. He made a different system. When looking at art there you don't ask "oh what does this mean, how will I understand this?" You simply feel pleased that you have arrived at this edge. It is completely special to be there, you just want to soak it all in after you jump off the deep end. So, in that way it is like going for a swim in dye.

This museum focuses on the work of the artist and not the other way around. I have never struck that before, to be honest.

What do you usually get when you front up to a museum?

There is usually this expectation that you are going to cause some sort of problem when you walk in the door. The museum is going to have to decode your work or try to present it to their audience in a palatable way. So you end up as an artist feeling more like you have brought something smelly in on your shoe when you come in the door with an idea. Arriving in Marfa was the complete opposite. I was immediately told I could do anything I wanted. Or not do anything if I wanted to as well. I subsequently realised that a lot of my energy for making exhibitions comes from the idea or expectation of resistance. That was a big point personally for me when I realised that.

What would your ideal artist-run museum be?

I'd buy all the houses in one street (doesn't matter where. Paris, France, or Paris, Texas. Preferably both), make lovely apartments for my artist and writer friends in some and show work simply in the others. I'd create a normal community which was nice to be in. It could have children, animals and gardens around it as well for instance. And as a result it would be an exhibition site that didn't make you feel tired when you walked in the front door like most museums continually do to people these days. Plus, surprise surprise, it wouldn't need a fortune to run it. Of course you'd be able to get parking outside as well, which is great for us 42 year olds!

Now you are a very performative soul. What non-exhibited work did you do at Marfa?

People said to me, what will you do at Marfa? Are you going to make something very permanent? An outdoor wall or something? I think it for me it was kind of stupid to do something like that. Physically permanent. Other artists would do things like this and it might be right for them, but I myself became much more

interested in other things. Like we had all this extra luggage with us for instance (what a beautiful metaphor). What were we going to do with it? How were we going to get it back home to New Zealand? How about just burying it? With their high desert climate you could come back in 10 years and it would still all be fine. And it's only stuff I use in America anyway.

Like what?

Like my big boots for the snow. And my black suit that I bought in London years ago (which said it was made in Italy on the label), that I wear to big museum openings and funerals. So we figured that if I wrapped a couple of suitcases in polythene bags and buried them there they would be fine forever (provided I don't put on weight). By being presented with everything there as permanent, I became interested in the excessive ephemerality of things. I talked about other ideas or processes that happened to me in my '100 thoughts' [see nos. 35, 36, 41, 52, 57, 62, 86 and 93].⁴ As an artist, part of my practice is to exhibit, and I like to exhibit, but it was really important to take a step outside of that and say that everything I make in the studio I am just going to throw away. It felt good. Cathartic. It felt like being a pure artist.

You are not a sculptor but you do have a sculptural history.

Maybe I was a sculpture in a previous life? I don't know. I have never liked the term painter and I have never liked the term sculptor. I just think of myself as an artist. Purely as that. I have resisted being called a sculptor because of this notion that you then make things yourself. You sculpt. One thing, talking about the notion of process, that really made me feel a lot more 'at home' after being in Marfa, was this idea of working with fabricators. Because here in New Zealand, and also most other parts of the world, if you are working with fabricators you are seen as kind of cheating. But it is really interesting to look at the way Judd worked with fabricators and assistants. Some might say that was his great gift to art history. Not so much what he made, but how he did or didn't make it, as the case may be.

I talked at great length to one of his main fabricators who told me a wonderful story about this giant piece that was shown in the old Castelli galleries on Greene Street (which is now a big long 'shit-nack' shop), one of those block-long galleries from the glory days of SoHo. Anyway, he said he made this huge plywood piece (now commonly known as the Saatchi piece) in there for Judd. It took him several

months to make and install it, all the time while Judd was living just a few blocks away. It looked incredibly simple, a huge plywood piece going down the length of the gallery, with classic Judd intersecting planes and lines. But the back had to be held together with metal straps, like a chicken run. He made a secret passage down the back of the piece, and everyday would slide through a secret door and work on it from behind, like a starfish. Of course he was very proud of it, so he told me that he said to Judd, "the opening is next week...I am about to seal the secret door...do you want to have a look behind the work? But Judd just said 'No!'" He had no interest in that part at all. For me this was one of Judd's great gifts, making fabricators visible again, and in turn almost entirely removing the hand of the artist. I've never subscribed to or enjoyed the notion that an artist is good because of the way he or she is able to make things themselves physically. I don't think that is such an interesting idea at all.

And art is about beautiful ideas you think?

Right. It's like I've also just returned from Walter De Maria's *Lightning Field* in New Mexico, and people often say to me now did you see any lightning there? Natural question I guess. But I just reply, that I can't remember if I did or not. It doesn't seem to actually matter when you're there looking at that work. It is not some joy ride at Disneyland even though I did still get completely turned upside down by it.

So, how do cowboys say goodbye Julian?

They say "I'll see you in the fall or not at all."

1. For more information about the Chinati Foundation, see www.chinati.org.
2. *Donald Judd: Complete writings 1975-1986*, Stedelijk Van Abbemuseum, Eindhoven, 1987, p 96.
3. *ibid*, p 97
4. See '100 Thoughts as an Artist in Residence at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas,' p 26-29 of this publication.

100 Thoughts as an Artist in Residence at the Chinati Foundation, Marfa, Texas.

1. I am here for two months and two weeks.
2. I think that I can say to myself that I am living in Texas at the moment.
3. I decide to work at the Chinati Foundation in apartment #13 until midday, then have lunch, and then go downtown to my studio at the Locker Plant every day.
4. I can do anything I want while I am here. I do not have to do anything if I do not want to. I can just write a poem if I want to.
5. A poem.
6. The wheel was a great invention. I think this as I ride a bike along the footpath past the very last of the Dan Flavin buildings.
7. I think of taking a tour here myself. I would be the guide.
8. El Paso is approximately three hours drive from here. It takes me two hours to get to the Tiger Travel Plaza and then one more hour to El Paso.
9. I begin to wonder if Donald Judd ever saw the tigers.
10. I think I agree that the new Dan Flavin artwork here is 'The Last Great Art of the 20th Century'. Art history, it seems, is based on such declarations and specific moments in time and this one seems to be as good as any moment anywhere that I have read about in art history.
11. Letraset seems to be a strangely old fashioned idea now. Yet I last used it myself in 1992 when working on a catalogue of my work.
12. I wonder how long you have to stay somewhere before you can say to someone that you live there. Someone says to me here that she used to live in El Paso, yet she only stayed there for two months. I think that it is perhaps an attitude. Howard Hughes used to live in a hotel after all.
13. When Marie and I drive somewhere in the car, we decide that one person should drive and the other person should wave.
14. Sometimes I feel very high up living here.
15. Exit Music. This was the final image on the screen in *Giant*. Just these words, with a sound track. I watch *Giant* on two hot and separate afternoons in the Marfa library as trains go past more often it seems than usual.
16. The trains that come through Marfa greatly impress me due to their size, speed and general significance, but I begin to have real trouble imagining that they go anywhere else after they come through Marfa.
17. I become confused as to the meaning of the phrase "Is less more?".
18. When I ask an artist who is visiting here just for the day what sort of work she makes, she says "I paint".
19. Someone who has never been to Australia, tells me that Marfa will at first remind me of Australia.
20. Someone else tells me that it has not rained here significantly for six years.
21. Sadly, for many years now, I have thought that most art on exhibition at museums around the world is presented as entertainment.
22. I have a few initial ideas to make records here. One involves a recording of the removal of the plastic off the Judd aluminium sculptures after it has not rained again overnight, and one is of me walking around the inside perimeter of the Chinati Foundation which would have to be a 12" record as it would take me 40 minutes at the very quickest.
23. Yesterday morning a car pulled up to the entrance of the Chinati Foundation and the man driving it got out and asked me if I was Donald Judd.
24. Last week I was walking across the forecourt of one of the gas stations in Marfa to buy some chewing gum for the walk home from the studio, and a bird fell out of the sky and landed dying by my feet. I guess this is how some birds die rather than always at home at night in their nests asleep.
25. One hot afternoon in that El Paso art shop again, I am out the back in the storage area and I overhear a loud conversation about life and death between a boss and an obviously recently bereaved employee. "If you could sign a piece of paper today saying you'll die at 96 years old, you'd be happy right?" the boss says.
26. Most people, when they meet me here for the first time, ask me what sort of work I make. I usually say

- that I make all sorts of things, but with a recurring emphasis on reductive and conceptual thinking in my practice and often work that relates to unique photography and the language of contemporary painting. I also go on to say that I have a small record company that makes extremely limited editions of vinyl recordings which involve artists, and never musicians, making noise and other related events. Then twice people asked me next, if I brought the cats at the Chinati Foundation with me from New Zealand.
27. The more I think about it the more I realise that most people have a primal attraction to color. I have suspected this for about 12 years.
 28. Locker Plant is written twice on the windows of the Locker Plant. I decide that I will call my exhibition, Locker Plant Locker Plant.
 29. For the first time in my life I have a hat that fits.
 30. I like to put things on walls at 1500 to the middle of 'the thing', but for the first time in many years I have been considering the notion of putting things on the floor as well. I wonder if this means I am now making sculpture.
 31. Somehow a single stretcher bar interests me. It almost feels figurative.
 32. I decide to write 'Exit Music' somewhere.
 33. I think a lot about putting a large sheet of colored paper on the train tracks in Marfa and then filming or recording a train running over it.
 34. I record the train whistle and then play it back very loudly through giant speakers to the next train as it comes through Marfa.
 35. I make a record where I ask someone to read aloud the article from the New York Times 'The Last Great Art of the 20th Century'. These become the words on the cover of the album as well.
 36. I declare to myself, that the shadow of the Claes Oldenburg & Coojse van Bruggen work on the side of the Flavin building #3 is my own work but only during the season of Spring and between the hours of 6 and 7pm. I then go and buy a postcard of my new work.
 37. I finally decide that living somewhere is not to do with actual time spent living somewhere but to do with intention. For example not having a plane ticket to fly away.
 38. I truly understand for the first time that the first lights in the night sky are planets and not stars.
 39. I decide to call something small that I make in Marfa 'Giant Part 2'.
 40. When one is an artist in residence there are certain practical problems that one has to have a position to solve. For instance, when buying art supplies to equip the studio does one buy materials that will be made into final envisaged artworks (which is a similar emotion at times to buying a model aeroplane in parts waiting to be assembled). Or do you simply buy materials that interest you at the time and can be thought of as supplies (much like groceries or cheeseburgers are sustenance to allow you to go on and do more later).
 41. I think to declare one hot afternoon, that all white rectangles on railroad wagons going past in the far distance from the east to the west, seen from the Chinati Foundation, are an artwork by myself.
 42. I think of the Chinati Foundation in January with a covering of snow.
 43. After two weeks, I notice the dead bird still on the forecourt of the gas station as I walk past to buy more chewing gum on the way home.
 44. I become momentarily confused, when talking to someone, as to the different identities of the two artists Richard Tuttle and James Turrell.
 45. I wonder what gives a person more right or authenticity to call themselves an artist. Working in a studio or having exhibitions?
 46. The empty canvas I purchase from the Marfa thrift store costs twice as much as the canvas that has a painting on it from the same pile.
 47. My next purchase from the Marfa thrift store is a small empty wooden frame with the word JUDD written in capitals on the top left corner. It leans to the left when I balance it upright on the floor.
 48. I begin to spend long periods of time in the art shop in El Paso balancing canvases on the floor before finally buying the three that balance the best.
 49. I think about again, for the umpteenth time, the difference between Minimalism, Postminimalism and Neominimalism. The words themselves begin to look like the trains going through Marfa.
 50. I feel awake, in the same way as they said they were in the movie Thelma and Louise.
 51. I remain surprised at how many large motorbikes come through Marfa.
 52. I make a recording of the Dan Flavin hum from the tubes and play it in the Locker Plant to myself. I

- call the recording 'Buzz'.
53. As the toilet is not working in the Locker Plant, I choose to urinate on the same weed outside in the back courtyard several times every day. I notice that while the dirt around the plant remains constantly moist the weed does not die. I wonder if I have discovered something.
 54. I consider that if it wasn't for Donald Judd I wouldn't be in Marfa today.
 55. I wonder if I set alight sheets of colored paper whether the flames will be colored as well.
 56. I decide to always bend my knees when making art on the floor.
 57. I think one day to myself, that all cats at the Chinati Foundation can be declared to be moving sculptures by Julian Dashper.
 58. I consider giving myself over to the life of the mind.
 59. Due mostly to the internet one must now assume that it is possible and highly likely that an artist 'has seen everything' when exhibiting their own artwork. This makes a significant difference to the life of an artist from 10 years ago.
 60. Deltitnu. I try looking this up on the internet.
 61. The idea of burying something (such as my excess luggage) somewhere at the Chinati Foundation continues to appeal to me. I would wrap it inside two heavy black rubbish bags with the ends tied up securely in knots.
 62. I consider inventing a name for the particular color that all the buildings are painted at the Chinati Foundation.
 63. I remember that one of the things that I don't like about most installation art that I see exhibited, is the very academic or formulated relationship that the artwork has to creativity and architecture. It seems to have no currency anymore.
 64. I note that the words like and love are separated by only 2 letters.
 65. The thought goes through my mind that if the Dan Flavin Marfa project was the last great work of the 20th Century, what was the last great work of the 19th Century?
 66. Then naturally I consider deeply for some time, what was the first great work of the 21st Century?
 67. I think again about water running in Marfa, then the thought that I have had for many years which is to make an artwork just by leaving a tap running.
 68. I continue to admire people who are about 10 years older than I am and seem to have achieved 'inner peace'.
 69. Then I find out that someone I have met here is 60. I had thought that he was more likely to be in his early 50's.
 70. I am aware that sometimes I say Martha when I mean Marfa and have to think every time that Marfa has no vineyard whenever I mention the word.
 71. When I wade carefully across the Rio Grande one very hot afternoon, I call out when I reach the middle of the river that this is how I sometimes feel living in New Zealand. It seems like a good thing to say at the time.
 72. I am told that, without doubt, the Chinati Foundation is in the desert. The Chihuahuan Desert.
 73. I begin to take extra care when composing emails to write that I am really enjoying living in the desert as opposed to living in the dessert.
 74. A train going through Marfa at exactly 7:00 am seems to sound its horn in a more musical way than usual, as if the engineer is aware that he will be waking people up and is trying to do this poetically. It does not feel artistic.
 75. People who visit here often ask me how I applied to come here. I do not know if this is because they think that I have come from a long way away to get here or if it is because they want to make an application to come here themselves.
 76. I begin to realise that it is nearly time to start cleaning out the studio and turning it into a gallery. The subtle change feels extremely significant to me.
 77. I still feel like a sort of inventor when I enter the studio each day but feel I am now working at inventing something different. An exhibition.
 78. I realise again that most people look at art in terms of what they already know and have seen.
 79. I feel a sense of peculiar pride that I am still somewhat confused as to which coins are which in American currency.
 80. I then feel a sense of momentary disappointment the next day, when I am not offered a job in Marfa

- making coffee.
81. I reaffirm to myself, that I do not make music in the same way that chefs do not make art.
 82. I am thinking that Leo will soon be starting school in New Zealand and if he continues on to University he may well be studying for the next 20 years.
 83. Then I will be 61.
 84. I am wondering if I should take more photos here.
 85. I have thought a lot about the role of an artist's residency. It can be like a lecture or an exhibition in which one comes to a place and makes an example of one's previous work for discussion and dissemination. Or it can be different from this and involve the artist simply being somewhere and reacting according to their feelings at that time. There is no truth either way, but the issue is interesting to consider when arriving as an artist in residence somewhere.
 86. I decide that Pathfinder is a wonderful name for a Jeep brand and briefly consider it as a name for the color of all the Chinati Foundation buildings.
 87. I finally decide today to myself, on another year of only drinking red wine.
 88. Leo and I start to chat about the word abstract. I tell him that this can mean that something is beautiful on the inside as well as the outside. He says he likes abstract. I begin to think of 'the abstract' in the same way that I think of 'the German' or 'the Italian'.
 89. The haircut that I choose to have in Marfa is called a high and tight. In New Zealand I would call this a short back and sides.
 90. For a very brief moment I imagine an exhibition of my work in May of this year at the Locker Plant where I write 'Art' on one wall and 'Architecture' on the opposite wall.
 91. At the El Paso art shop for the third time I buy more stretcher bars each of differing sizes, so as to make sure I cannot make single square or rectangular shapes from them.
 92. I continue to think of the stretcher bars and other items that I buy at the El Paso art shop as found objects. I consider to myself that I have merely found them in an 'art shop'. This excites me more and more every day.
 93. I think hard every day of a name for the Chinati color. Chidobe or Chinaty seem the best solutions.
 94. I think aloud about what someone has said to me in New York in January of this year. If an artist does not edit their archive while they are alive, anyone in the future working with it would have no idea as to what the artist felt was important and what wasn't.
 95. I consider again, that perhaps it is the institution's responsibility to retain correspondence with artists and not the artist's.
 96. I wake up deciding that the Dan Flavin Marfa project, for some reason today, means more to me about electricity than light or color.
 97. I change from Pepsi to Dr. Pepper.
 98. Hot wind. I feel this in my hair late at night as I walk around the farthest perimeter of the Chinati Foundation. Tonight it is too late even to wear a hat. Hot wind, it almost sounds like a rock album or the name of a covers band.
 99. I tell someone in the entrance to the Chinati Foundation that my exhibitions 'become a matter of what you don't show rather than what you do show'.
 100. Since 1980 Julian Dashper has been exhibiting regularly throughout New Zealand, Australia and Europe. His artwork takes many shapes and forms as its vocabulary, but has been to date primarily concerned with the language, meaning and re-presentation of contemporary painting, the conceptual use and misuse of photography/reproduction/music as a unique medium and the changing role of the artist in relation to art institutions. In 1996 he co-founded the Sydney/Auckland based record company Circle Records, which releases limited edition records by visual artists worldwide. His most recent record on this label is a 12" one sided clear vinyl recording entitled *Thin Ice*, which is a 23 minute recording of an unrehearsed monologue by a curator colleague in front of a painting by Dashper *Untitled (O) 1990-92*, hanging in the permanent collection of the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam. Dashper is based in America during 2001, working as a senior Fulbright scholar. This exhibition, LOCKER PLANT LOCKER PLANT is the first exhibition of any kind of the work of Julian Dashper in America.

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