

Sebastian Moody  
*&c.*

Gallery Director: Channon Goodwin  
 Design: Adam Cruickshank  
 Photography: Marc Morel

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**CREATIVE  
 VICTORIA**



Sebastian Moody  
*The View*  
 11.06.14–28.06.14

‘The View’ is a suite of conceptual paintings by Sebastian Moody. The paintings are meditations on the idea of perspective, considering this as an act that occurs simultaneously-internally and externally. Simply, the works are “thinking about looking” or “looking at thinking”.

Moody’s practice is concerned with how our values and ideas are constructed. In equal parts gravitas and humour, his art is most often presented through public text works, relational performances, and painting.

His well known large-scale public text works have appeared in swimming pools, vehicular underpasses, and building walls; elsewhere, Moody’s works have appeared in a diversity of public and private locations creating personals ads, market research campaigns, kitchen splashbacks, coffee cup ‘interventions’, pop-up bars, focus groups, hang gliders at music festivals, shopping receipt ‘portraits’.

Moody lives and works in Brisbane where he has completed a Master of Museum Studies at The University of Queensland (2009) and a Bachelor of Visual Arts at the Queensland University of Technology (2001). Sebastian’s projects have appeared at the Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Ryan Renshaw Gallery, Splendour in the Grass, Next Wave Festival 2008, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, Bundaberg Arts Centre, Livid Festival, Kings ARI, Museum of Brisbane, The Goodwill Bridge, The Queensland University of Technology Art Museum and Southbank Parklands.

Moody was also recently announced as a key artist, with Sally Gabori, who will contribute creative work to the flagship development for Brisbane’s International Airport Terminal.

[www.sebastianmoody.com](http://www.sebastianmoody.com)

I've spent a bit of time behind the scenes at galleries, museums and cultural institutions. Received correspondence accidentally in caps lock. Bolded sections of my cover letter to highlight how I've pandered to key selection criteria. Underlined sparingly. Each of these places has their own style guide, and each enforces them with conviction. When formatting artwork details, things become contradictory. The artwork date needs to be in brackets. Or on a separate line altogether. An artwork title must always be in italics, an exhibition title in inverted commas. I've been told the exact opposite to these rules. But what of the humble italic? The dictionary app on my dashboard tells me it is modeled on cursive, Italian handwriting from the 16th century. So, it references the gravitas of the Renaissance for added effect? Of the formatting options at hand, we use it the least. It seems to imbue the most and yet, not mean anything in itself. It invokes a pause, isolating and lifting. It differentiates. The linguistic equivalent of a plinth.

In Sebastian Moody's solo exhibition *The View* at Bus Projects, we see a number of paintings. One is of a giant, black zero. The other, a giant black zero, but italicised. Produced in 2014, Moody used vinyl stenciling and acrylic paint to create the symbols. Though it appears coldly mechanical, the opportunity to paint was holistic for Moody and, in a material sense, divergent from previous work. The content of the work, despite being 'nothing', occupies multiple stances and meanings at once. Known widely for public art commissions in his native Brisbane, Moody is besotted with semantics. Perhaps his most iconic text work lurks beneath the McLachlan Street underpass in Fortitude Valley. As your car whips around a tight corner, red text looms in the shadows: **THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT THE BIGGER IT GETS**. The phrase is sticky; it rolls around in my mind every time I drive past. There is a deftness and poise to Moody's text that allows projection. I freely admit my immediate thought is sexual, the advertising industry's bread and butter. That's not to deny though this work's complexity – sex is merely the first rung on a long ladder. Moody has engaged with advertising in the public realm for a number of years. His last project in Melbourne was the development of a billboard advertisement for 2008 Next Wave Festival, employing market research tools (such as focus groups) to generate a campaign that skewered the industry on its own sword, complete with a limp aphorism ("This is Now").

On a broader level, Moody's work deals with the legacy of conceptual, and to a lesser degree minimalist, art today. Ian Burn, one of the key figures in conceptual art's own conception, likened the movement's position as replacing "the customary visual art object constructs with arguments about art..." Arguments, as outlined in Adrian Piper's important 1996 Ian Burn Memorial Lecture, are inherently "the sort of thing that can occur only in written or spoken language".<sup>1</sup> Burn's interests, like Moody's, lie in power relations, commodity production and

how these characteristics act or play out within the art world. For Burn and his collaborators within the collective Art & Language, putting language and specifically text to work, became the grounds for a resistance of tradition. It also became a way to push against the permutations of the market proper and the art context in general. It was socially driven, like Burn, separatist in nature.

That was the 1960s and 70s – the heyday of this style of resistance. Today, as Moody understands, we live in an age where the market cannot be escaped; it has become a gas. Politics has been similarly aerated, leaving its musk across most platforms. Even buying a coffee comes with an ideological kick.<sup>2</sup> Through contactless payment systems and micro-transactions, the point of purchase has been tapered until the act is barely apparent. At the same time, the very work that attempted to escape the market's pull decades ago is now fuelling it.<sup>3</sup> Value is both abstracted and also more apparent. In *The View*, Moody engages combatively with the typical, bigoted argument against the value of conceptual and minimal practice – that there is 'nothing to see' or that there is 'neither content, nor skill' apparent. For Moody, his work tells us to look away from the subject and instead consider the system of its creation, claiming "nothing is a response to an attitude".<sup>4</sup> In his words, his practice considers "the politics of value". As Moody's previous projects have identified, language and the systems that define its use are both manipulative. Numbers are one of the last objective systems and a shared truth.

*The View* was first exhibited in Brisbane at K.O.M.A., an art space above the Ksubi boutique in the upper class James Street precinct in February 2014. When Ksubi closed its stores in mid-February due to bankruptcy, debt collectors seized Moody's pieces as valuables.<sup>5</sup> When I heard about this a few weeks afterwards, I had two thoughts. Firstly, Boris Groys' wise words that the last line of defense of what is and isn't art is the police.<sup>6</sup> And secondly, that we've made some progress as a society if conceptual art is being detained for its value. Today, 'nothing' is something.

1 Adrian Piper, 'Ian Burn's conceptualism', *Art in America*, December 1997, pp. 2 Accessible online: <http://www.darkmatterarchives.net/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/IANBURNartmarket.pdf>

2 Slavoj Žižek, *First As Tragedy, Then As Farce*, London: Verso, 2009, pp. 53

3 Donald Judd's *Untitled*, 1989 (Bernstein 89-1) sold at Christie's New York in May 2013 for just over USD \$4 million, <http://bit.ly/1psKetw>. Similarly, Joseph Kosuth's *One and Three Coats* 1965 cleared USD \$145,000 in November 2011, <http://bit.ly/1psKicW>

4 Email correspondence with artist

5 'Ksubi closing its doors' *Inside Retail*, 13 February 2014, Accessible online: <http://www.insideretail.com.au/2014/02/13/ksubi-closing-doors/>

6 Boris Groys, *Art Power*, Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 2008, pp. 37







# Not only but also

Bus Projects is an independent arts organisation dedicated to supporting the critical, conceptual and interdisciplinary practices of Australian artists. Since its establishment in 2001, Bus Projects has acted as a space to produce, present, discuss and engage with contemporary art. In addition to its core gallery-based program of exhibitions, events and residencies, Bus Projects collaborates with a range of artists and like-minded organisations to produce projects off-site and within the public realm. Through this diverse programming, Bus Projects continues to be a crucial convergence point for art, artist and audiences.

This exhibition and publication series, *Not Only But Also*, invests in the creation of innovative works by 24 young and emerging Australian artists and writers, forming an integral part of Bus Projects' inaugural artistic program in its new galleries on Rokeby Street in Collingwood.

Sarah Byrne  
Juliet Rowe  
James L Marshall  
Joseph Breikers  
Sam Cranstoun  
Meredith Turnbull  
Veronica Kent  
Kenzee Patterson  
Sebastian Moody  
Kate Mitchell  
Catherine or Kate

**B**

**U**

Bus Projects,  
25-31 Rokeby Street,  
Collingwood,  
VIC 3066 Australia.  
*[busprojects.org.au/](http://busprojects.org.au/)*

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