

Tamsin Green.  
*covers*

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**S**

I've been looking for a good landscape  
 Something to relax into,  
 Draw over/move across  
 I've been thinking how easy this could all  
 be, just like internet dating  
 Some origins/some originals  
 Something to look at and through  
 Impasto over frottage  
 Knowing never satisfies

Tamsin Green.

*covers*

10.06.15—27.06.15

Tamsin Green is an artist, writer and living in Melbourne. She is currently a lecturer in the Art History and Theory department at Monash Art, Design and Architecture. Tamsin received an MFA from MADA in 2009. Tamsin has exhibited widely in Melbourne as well as interstate and internationally. Solo exhibition include 'To and from the end of the world' at Conical and 'The Speed of Light' at Blindside, 'Ground' at Level Ari Brisbane, 'Still Moving Image' at Kings ARI and 'Looking' at West Space. Tamsin's work has been included in a number of group exhibitions, mostly recently 'The taste of ashes fills the air' curated by Jan Bryant at CCP. As an artist-curator Tamsin has worked across the artist run sector; co-founding Light Projects as a free project space in 2009, and curating 'Relay: repeat action over distance' at Firstdraft. Tamsin has undertaken residencies with Level ARI in Brisbane and SIM (The Icelandic Association of Visual Artists) in Reykjavik, Iceland.

## Masking Agent

“The distancing effect” or *Verfremdungseffekt* is a technique used in theatre and cinema that prevents the audience from losing itself completely in the narrative. The actor directly addresses the audience, protecting it from an entirely empathetic reading of the narrative, and in doing so animates the filmmaking or theatrical process. The actor is always in partial disguise and the mask mediates the physical and acoustic barriers between actor and audience. Contemporary art also openly operates in this tussle between proximity and distance. In an exhibition, the artist directly addresses the viewer and each artwork is enlisted as a different “mask”, in the same tradition as ancient Greek theatre. The aesthetic and structural traits of the mask found within the corpus of ancient Greek theatre also provide an analytical framework for the methodological, narrative and emotional cues proposed by the contemporary artist:

### **The open mouth**

The mouth is poised and engaged whether the actor is speaking or not. The dark void is part of a deep inner chamber within the mask, where the actor’s voice is projected through a hollowed-out cavity. Supported and strengthened by the inner chamber, the mask becomes an instrument for the actor to control. The actor’s skill is displayed through a varied application of volume and tone in the voice, where facial movements are indiscernible to an audience. The open mouth is a key feature of the tragic mask, suggesting speech suspended and perpetual participation. As for the artist, the exhibition space must be manipulated, transformed, or reconfigured for the exhibition or artwork. In the gallery space, tension is created through the relationships between apparent artistic influences, chosen materials and methodologies.

### **Small Eyeholes**

Compared with a human face, the mask is devoid of expression. The eyes in the mask are small dark holes, smaller versions of the black mouth-void. Looking out from behind the mask, the actor’s vision is impaired. The actor must ‘feel’ the stage sonically, physically and by memory. The artist’s vision is also impaired. Oftentimes the artwork is given over to a curator or gallery technician to install, and in other instances the artist will be

preparing artwork to gallery plans and recollections in centimetres. The artist must trust in his or her spatial intuition when preparing the artwork, not just in relation to the artwork's dimensions.

Where the gallery is a composite of exhibition spaces, the exhibiting artists will also be forced to trust in the curators or gallery directors, where the artist's exhibition will be (unintentionally) read in combination with another artist's work. Neither the actor looking into the darkened theatre, nor the artist observing the opening crowd, bear witness to a direct emotional reaction to the work on stage or set within the exhibition. Each must stay focused on their role as host or medium for the action.

### Choreography

Emotion is communicated through voice and choreography. Actors who played tragic protagonist roles in ancient Greek theatre wore boots or cothurnes that elevated them above other actors. The cothurnes often caused the actors to walk in a distorted or affected way, and could be read as their being crippled by tragic circumstances. The various framing devices that either raise or lower the artwork (such as plinths and hanging positions on the gallery wall) form a complex hierarchy within the exhibition space. Here in the exhibition, as on the stage, certain objects take precedence over others, colouring our experience of the narrative.

Choreography for the stage is the familiar made unfamiliar, laden with symbolism. The bend of a knee, the jerk of a neck, the wave of a hand, all renewed and perhaps exaggerated within the context of the narrative. Overacting can be necessitated by the mask's theft of more natural facial expressions and reactions. Nuance in gesture is apropos of nuance within the artwork. Restraint is often contemporary art's trademark, a quiet attrition where storytelling is reduced to a phrase, a word, or an essence. Nuance is more successfully incorporated into an exhibition narrative where meaning operates on a number of planes simultaneously, including the symbolic, the conceptual, the material and the painterly.

As an extension of the mask, male actors wore a *prosterneda*, a wooden structure attached to the front of the chest to imitate breasts when playing female roles: a gendered exaggeration for conveying character. This extension, rather than diminution, of the female character is possible to read

through the exhibition space. Just as the theatrical audience is provided with embellishments to negotiate gender on the stage, the audience for the exhibition can be provided with codified abstraction in order to read gendered narratives through the artwork. The difference is that the artist is not 'playing her gender in drag', but is manipulating the masculine-art-historical to construct her own narrative.

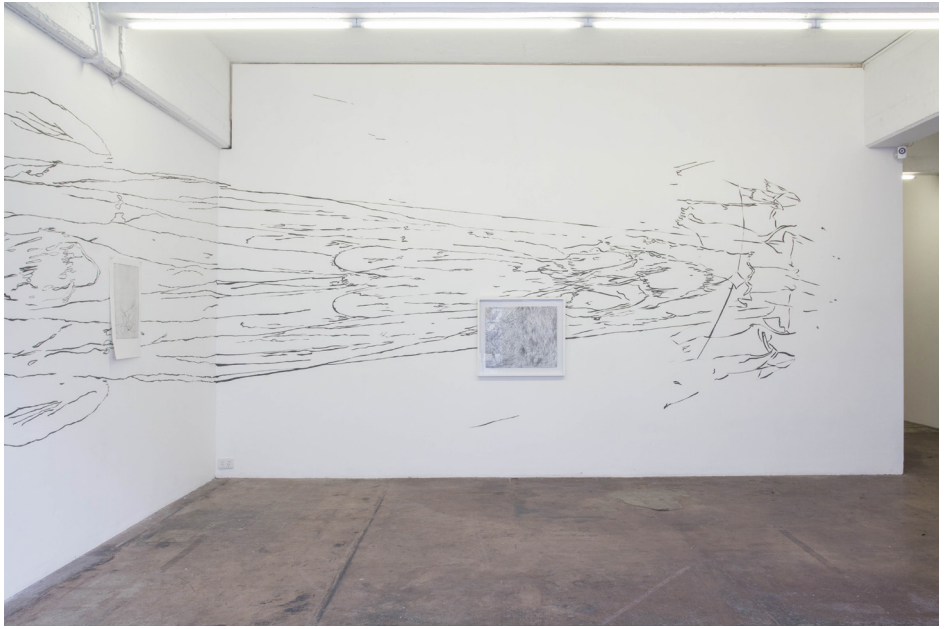
### **The Chorus**

The chorus - the collective character - wears identically designed masks so that the group of actors is read as 'one'. Here, the mask becomes a pattern in repeat. The aesthetic doubling and mimicry speak to complex interrelationships of any grouping, despite its united front. Directing action and providing commentary, the chorus is a pattern with power. The main actor hypokrites (literally the one who answers the chorus' questions) must negotiate between action, audience and chorus. The chorus can provide incisive commentary on a moral conundrum or lead the actor and/or the audience astray. In a sense the chorus should not be entirely trusted. This subterfuge is congruent with the tension created by an actor directly addressing the audience and speaking through a mask applies complex indirection. The artworks within the exhibition are also 'groupwork', pushing and pulling the duplication and reinterpretation of narratives, methods and materials.

The exhibition audience is also a collective character that can lead the artist astray with its commentary. It comments on elements of the exhibition or artwork that are not entirely there or overlooks the exhibition entirely despite being positioned within it.

### **Epilogue**

For Green, Covers speaks to a dance of interplay - where the landscape interlocks with the short story, and again with the line drawing. Like an actor, Green is less interested in the text itself, but rather its function as a potential directive and disguise. The artwork is not merely a translation of the text, but rather a transmission of it, partially revealed and partially concealed at all times. Like the player behind the mask, the artist pushes her voice through and adopts various gestures for the artwork to tell the 'exhibition story' or 'stories'. Here too the artist is animating the broader story of her practice, within the bounds of the gallery space.



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

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