



JAMES GEURTS

90 DEGREES EQUATORIAL PROJECT



90 Degrees Equatorial Project was exhibited/pre-
sented at:

Experimental Art Foundation - Adelaide 2008

Art and Cartography Symposium 2008 - Vienna University of
Technology, Vienna, Austria

ARTspace CAA 2009 - Los Angeles

New Media: The Alternative Space and Beyond

Place Markers: Artists, Technology and Landscape



90 DEGREES EQUATORIAL PROJECT

Russell Storer

Curator, Museum of Contemporary Art

Sydney, Australia

The phrase 'four corners of the globe' is an obvious antilogy, yet it's one we take for granted. It doesn't specify anywhere in particular, merely indicating an all-encompassing spatiality. If we were, however, to try and locate these magical corners, where might they be found? The word 'corner' indicates something slightly shadowy or forgotten, a dusty, neglected pocket of a place, far from the comfortable centre of things. By definition, such a place must be at the periphery of the known world, with its archaic undertones suggesting regions where the old ships were afraid to go, where strange monsters and human hybrids were rumoured to have lived, sprouting enormous horns or shading their heads from the sun with their feet.

There seems to be little in the world left unknown, yet in the usual scheme of things, informed by the news media or exotic documentaries, we tend to locate places in relation to ourselves, framing them with our experiences and attitudes and our own connections to place. The Austrian art critic Christian Kravagna recalled, on visiting an African village, that after years of absorbing images of similar villages, there seemed to be nothing strange about it; what was strange was 'the absence of a difference between the notion and the reality, between the perception and storage of images and the direct experience, which therefore could not really be direct at all.'¹ The means of organising ourselves visually tends to follow a comfortable path, conforming to what is familiar and expected, even in the most alien environments.

It is when we are forced to consciously consider this process of perception that another form of experience is opened up to us. Art, Kravagna argues, has the potential to destabilise our connection to our surroundings and establish a new set of cognitive conditions and social relations. Through this 'suspension of certainty', there is the possibility for a shift in subjectivity. In his search for the world's four corners, James Geurts offers us a different kind of frame, another mode of looking at (and for) other places, basing his method on aesthetic rather than cultural or economic grounds. Employing cartographical co-ordinates, light conditions and topography as formal systems, Geurts presents us with the bare minimum of information about 'place', structuring his work instead around a sculptural intervention at each site. Our preconceptions about these remote sites become disrupted by this surreal interloper; they become actively involved in an event, rather than being illustrations of the 'tropical', the 'peripheral', or 'the Third World'.

East Koto Padang in Sumatra, East Kango in Gabon, West Pedernales in Ecuador and East Kiritimati Atoll in the Pacific are linked only by the artist's interest in creating a visual metaphor for our rationalising relationship to the world. Through an accident of geography, they are located at 90° angles from each other around the equator. On traveling to each site, Geurts searched for a suitable location in which to place his sculpture, an internally lit triangular form featuring bold stripes of red, yellow, white, orange and black. The sculpture's minimalist aesthetic connects it to art-historical discussions of subject-object relations, although it exists here purely as something to be photographed, a performance for the camera to be reconstituted later. Its link to land art is obvious, and the artist has referenced Robert Smithson's ideas on scale in discussing the work.² Smithson's understanding of scale as determined by a conscious awareness of perception, of releasing it from the strictures of physical size into the realms of metaphor, aligns with Kravagna's 'suspension of certainty', and allows Geurts's little plastic boxes to literally frame the earth.

As a means of addressing landscape, Geurts's work highlights an awareness of it as a narrative medium, constructing places into an image. The artist's diaries relate a mythical tale of marauding bandits, stolen equipment, cancelled flights and intrusive wildlife, recalling another era of travelling before the internet and Lonely Planet had provided access to the minutest details of most of the world. A surfer, Geurts takes a deeply subjective approach to the landscape, and his works tend to be built around the rhythm of weather patterns or ocean currents, tracing the flow of the land and its interactions with people through his personal interest in how the world works. His intrepid adventures in the course of producing this work are not evident within it, but could be implied through the photographic evidence of these isolated landscapes, which we may have pre-imagined as being intrinsically alien or threatening. Geurts's images provide evidence of the 'that has been' nature of photography; that the artist was actually there in these four sites, placing his sculpture, taking the pictures.

Ultimately, though, we aren't 'taught' anything about East Koto Padang, East Kango, West Pedernales or East Kiritimati Atoll in this work (interesting that each place is defined directionally). Our expectations that other cultures are there to be learnt about or explained to us are thwarted in these simple landscape shots. Instead, these sites coalesce around this strange, colourful object, and are unified by an artificial formalist system. Yet through this, they become oddly more present. They are now simply sites to be negotiated, where human interactions have had to be shifted out of the usual touristic or journalistic or anthropological modes and into an aesthetic one, where both sides have had to reconfigure themselves in relation to each other. It is by creating this small space for perceptual transformation that Geurts is able to provide us with a refreshed image of the great diversity and ingenuity of humanity as it occupies the remote reaches of this planet.

(1) Christian Kravagna, 'Political arts, aesthetic politics, and a little story about the Nachträglichkeit of experience', in *Things we don't understand*, exhibition catalogue, Generali Foundation, Vienna, 1999

(2) p.95. James Geurts, interview, *Photofile Issue 80*



90 DEGREES EQUATORIAL PROJECT

James Geurts

The earth is a sphere – in two dimensions a circle. Human beings have evolved to stand at right angles to the surface of this sphere, in turn, opening up the field of perception. We are creatures that construct angular forms and, in this project, they are represented by a square. The concept began by simply drawing a square on top of a circle. I didn't want the square to fully frame the circle or the circle to fully frame the square as in sacred geometry, but rather have them intersect so that the corners pierce the circumference evenly at four points. In exploring the conversation between the constructed square with the earth circle I set out to physicalise this interrelationship.

Having identified the symbol of the square I focused on the corners that intersect with the surface of the earth. I developed a portable sculpture in the form of a right-angle frame. I set up the sculpture at the four sites at even spatial and time intervals around the equator to then photograph. I built the sculpture from fabricated plastic to further emphasise the contrast between the 'human-made' structure and the 'natural' landscape. It took the form of an inverted right-angle made of translucent plastic with thick bands of red, yellow, white, orange and black. Inside the sculpture glowed a constant light, to also contrast to the ebb and flow of external light in the earths circling of the sun.

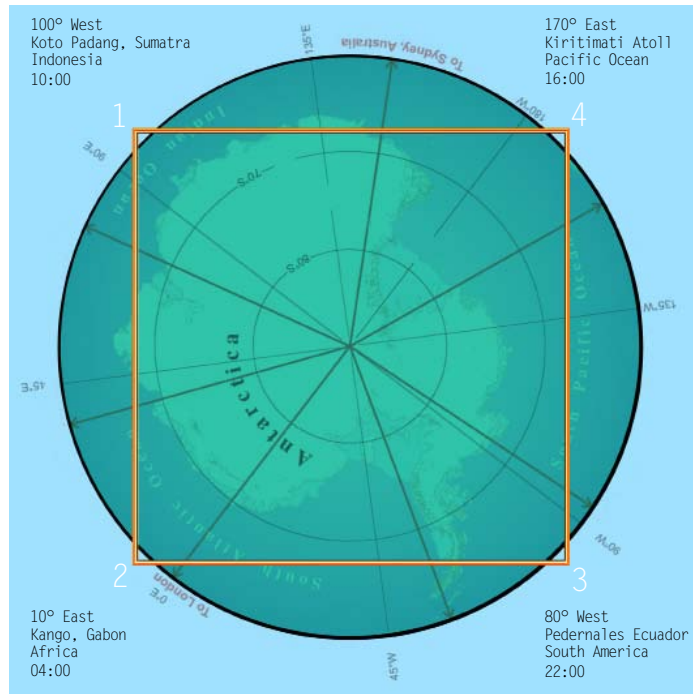
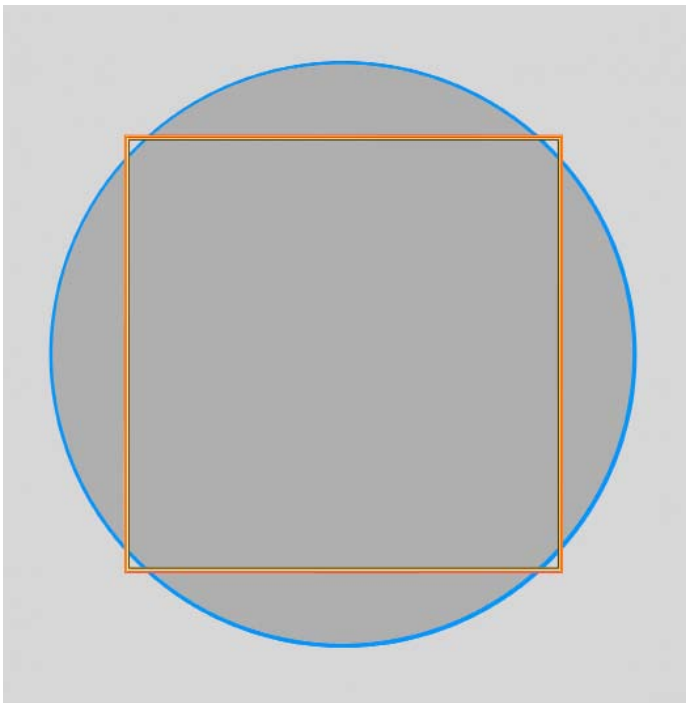
100° West: Koto Padang, Sumatra, Indonesia	10:00
10° East: Kango, Gabon, Africa	04:00
80° West: Pedernales Ecuador, South America	22:00
170° East: Kiritimati Atoll, Pacific Ocean	16:00

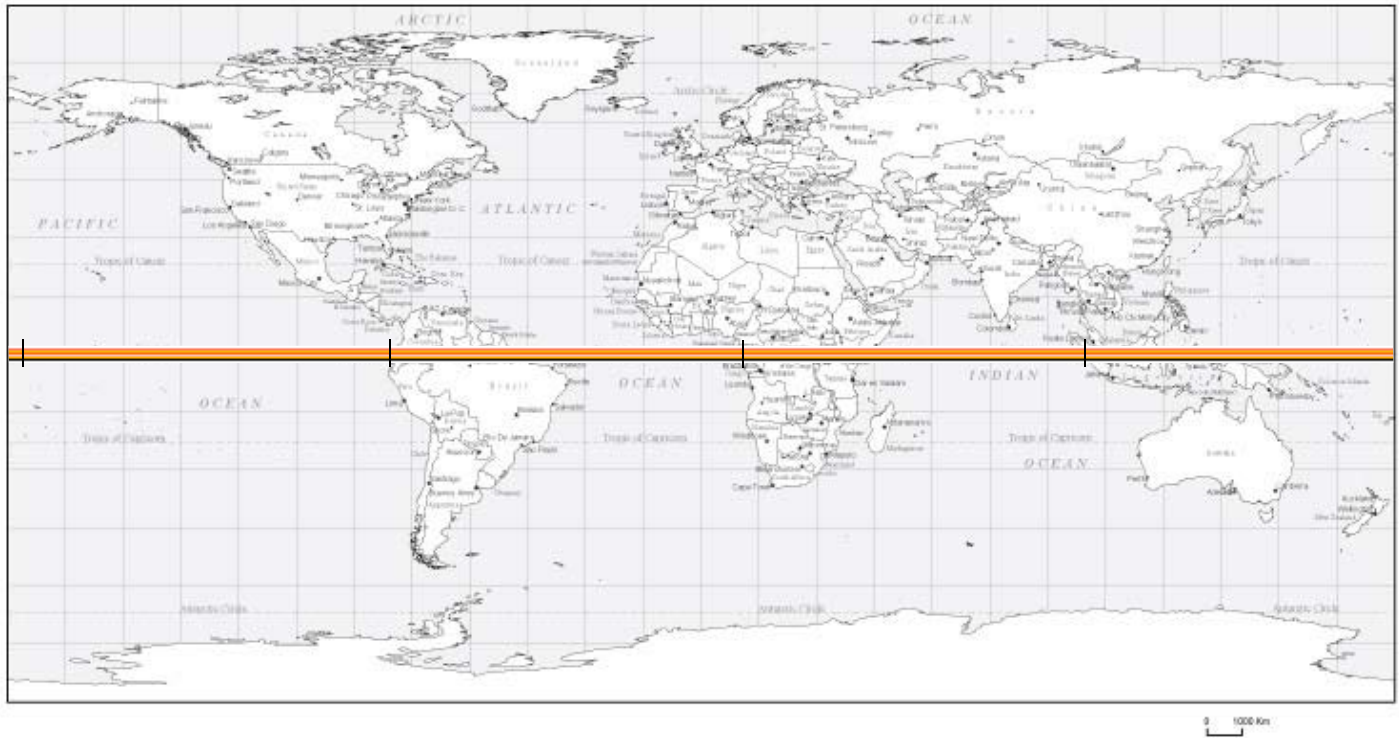
Set in these four locations, this 'line' would form a perfect square, as it appeared to penetrate the equator at four points, 90 degrees apart. I wanted to move in the same direction of the sun moving around the earth, starting from Australia, I moved to Sumatra first.

This work draws on the paradigms of psychogeography, creating a view of the environment and the human as two interdependent circulatory systems. Bodies of water, weather cycles, conceptual systems and the human as a body of water are as much subjects in my work as the sense of circulation comes through methodologically and aesthetically in the formation of this work.

90 Degrees Equatorial Project combines varying aspects of my 'expanded field of drawing practice' that emerged through diverse forms of installation, video, land-art, photography, living-monochromes, works on paper and sound.

The project as it unfolded over 6 months and was open to situations and events that arose in the course of travel and contact with the people of each location; eventually the realization of it required the use of different mediums to reflect the exchange between different rhythms, intensities, and ambiances.





4

170° East
Kiritimati Atoll
Pacific Ocean
16:00

3

80° West
Pedernales Ecuador
South America
22:00

2

10° East
Kango, Gabon
Africa
04:00

1

100° West
Koto Padang, Sumatra
Indonesia
10:00

- - - - -

Wednesday 22 February 2006
10.00am Koto Padang, Sumatra 100° East

- - - - -



Thursday 6 April 2006
4.00pm Kango, Gabon 10° East



- - - - -

Thursday 13 April 2006
10.00pm Perneldes, Ecuador 80° West

- - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -



- - - - -

Thursday 11 May 2006
3.00pm Kirimatti Atoll,
Pacific Ocean, 170° East

- - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -
- - - - -



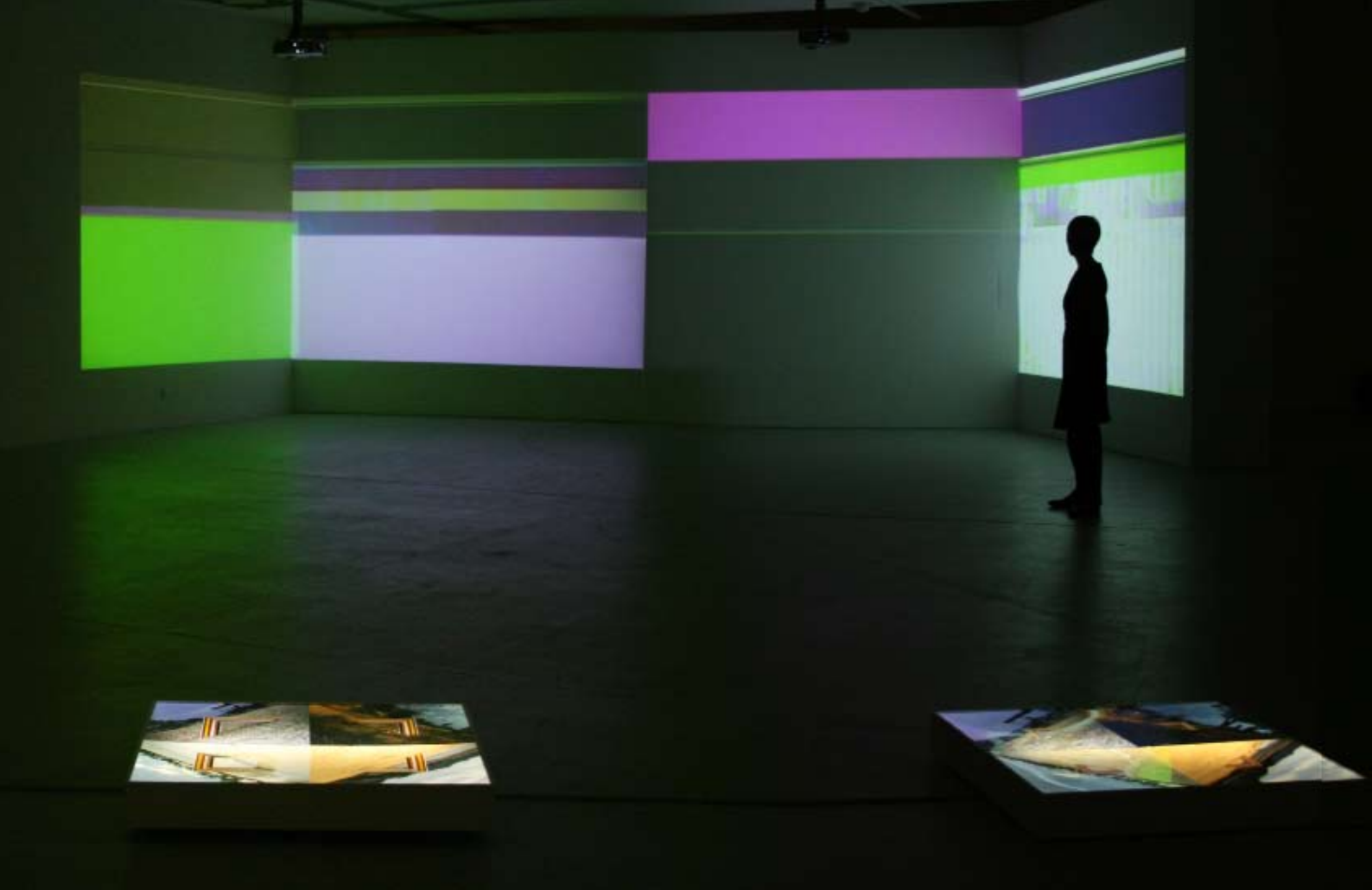












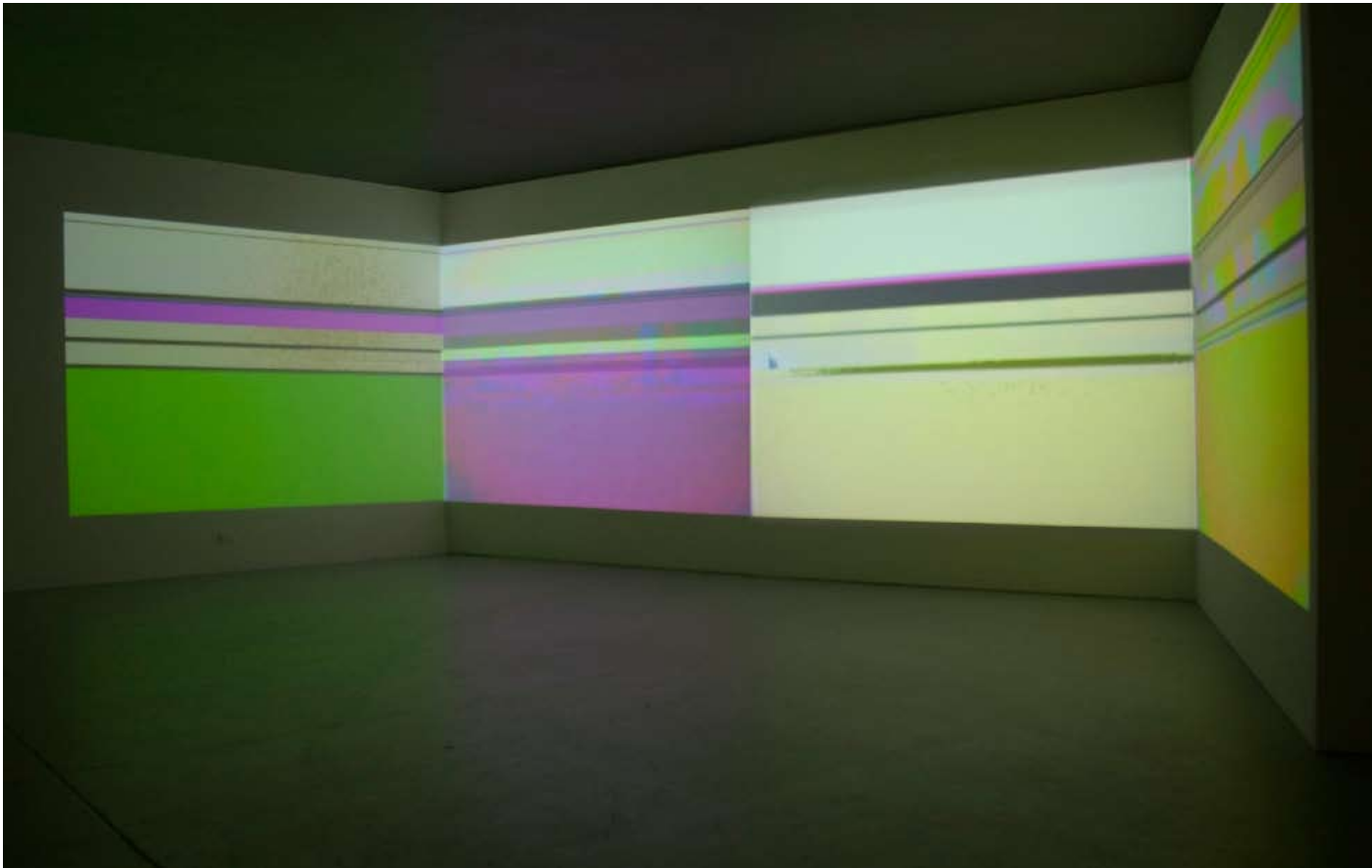
90 Degrees Equatorial Project
Installation View 1
Four Photographs with lightboxes
Four screen video
Varying durations
Varying Dimentions

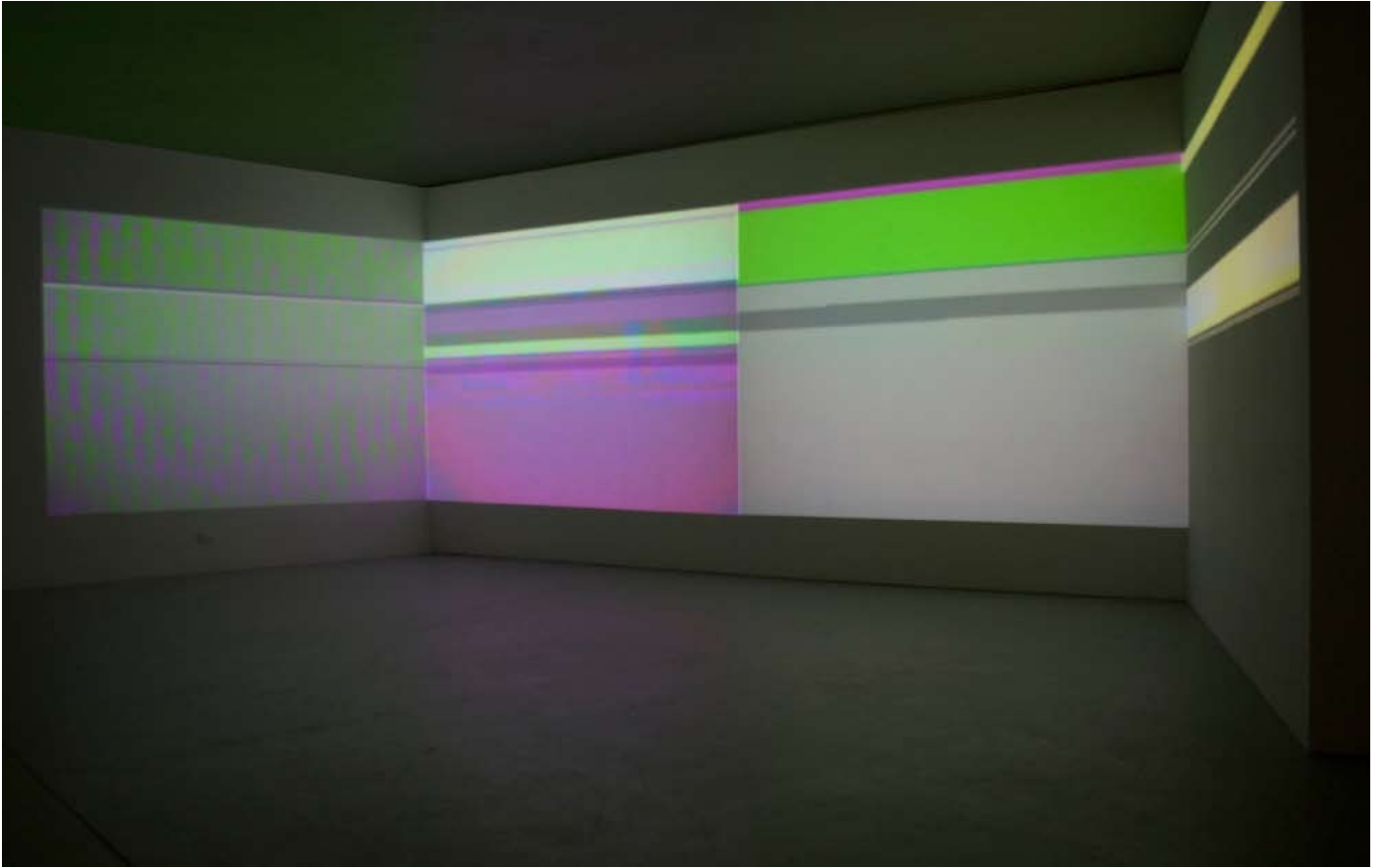


90 Degrees Equatorial Project
Installation View 1
Four Photographs with lightboxes
Four screen video
Varying durations
Varying Dimentions

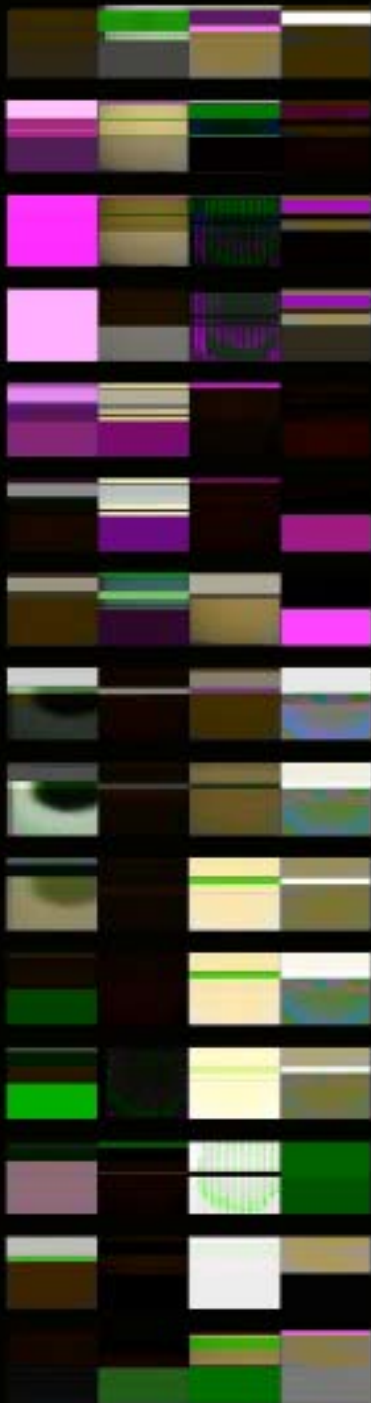
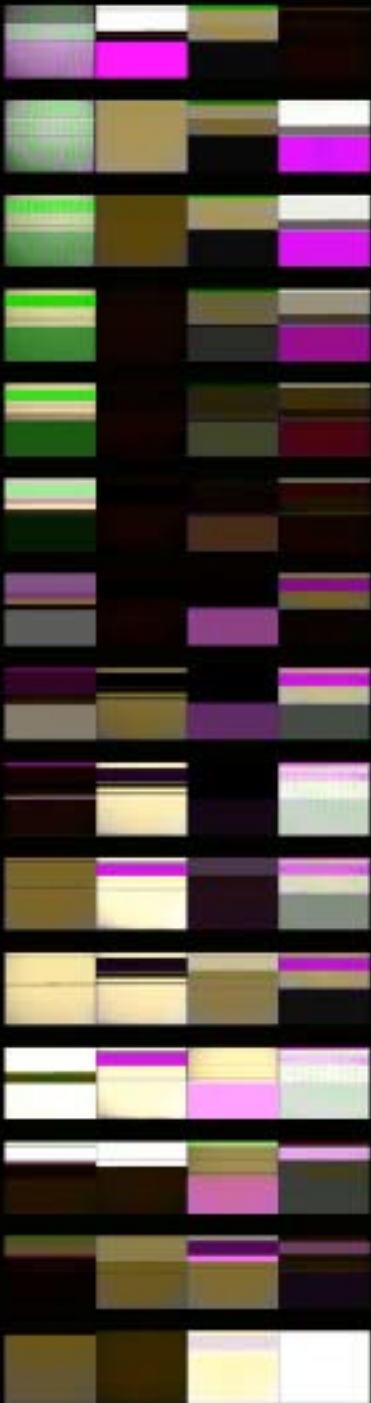
The four sites all fell directly at the west coast of each continent, and the atoll was also on a continental shelf. This new symmetry of alignment of the four coastal locations developed the four screen video work Continuum. I wanted to find a way to map the tidal forces, rhythms and perpetual motion that were constantly influencing the sites I worked with.

I set the video camera up at each of the four sites and videoed the ocean, with the illusionary line of the horizon cutting through the center of the frame. While recording I manipulated the exposed circuit board of the video camera with pressure and gesture to form colour field abstractions, moving in horizontal planes. The live, in-camera abstraction was also influenced by light, atmosphere and temperature exposed to the circuit board.





Continuum
Video Installation
Four screen video
Varying durations
3m x 12m





Continuum
Video Still
Four screen video
Varying durations
3m x 12m



0.00 DEGREES ARTISTS BOOK

This project draws continuing movement along the abstract line of zero which circles around the girth of the world. One drawing after another unfolded slowly during the circumnavigation of the project. It is presented as a closed book and an intimate experience, but allows for an unfolding in the gallery space. Drawings were continually generated in response to the place and made on found paper at each site.

The psychogeographic drawings involved experimental mapping of time and spatial movement through each of the sites.

I used transfer drawing techniques where I could take a print from one drawing to another with the use of clear tape. The front cover appears about 8 pages in and the book opens out to form a 7m line of zero or fold back on itself to form a continual loop.



Giving oneself time (of life)

Dr Linda Marie Walker

South Australian School of Art

University of South Australia

(This is what happened: a point (on land) was chosen in the world (a beginning), on a coastline, and from there three other points (on land) were chosen, each at a 90 degree angle to the one before, and each, as it turned out, on coastlines too, and then they were travelled to, framed, and photographed (surveyed in a sense, as if to attenuate time – and, as if that was possible).)

There are experiences that one never gets over – all-of-life for instance, the singular experience of being alive, and therefore being of the world, one of its infinite infinitesimal aspects. The experience of livingness (and non-livingness) is endlessly different, nuanced, shifting (like the deserts).

It (the life, the work, the writing) won't be a matter of degrees in the end, or even at the beginning (and hardly ever in the middle), it will be a matter of framing, of setting-off again and again, of colour, of light, of sand and mud and love and hate and pain and time and due, and the touch of the thing itself (heart, sky, sea, birdsong, traffic, sunshine); intuition, the effort, the act, the shape, is the method (of watching the screens 'be-themselves'). It is bitter-sweet to leave home, to look at the world as a mass of lines to follow, as continuums, convergences, as bundles and shimmers and gleanings and scatterings. You can see in the four framed-landscapes that proportions are not identical – despite the low perspective, they each have propensity for their own accent, their own dialect. Each picture/showing of the 90 degrees is resistant to being only a number, or being numbered as a degree (there is no surface appearance that confirms or proves that). And yet they, those places, or grounds, are real – real-fictions; a human body went expressly to find 'compositions/composites', to find what is (always) right before the eyes, and also (almost magically) invisible (the body needs to follow the eyes, it needs to take into itself the facts which overwhelm it) – as if everything 'looks' the same (and is the same). The 'composite' is the thing that awaits violence; and it is merciless about 'propositions' (do not under any circumstances propose what the composite might be, what it does or doesn't do). What am I for, might, as an idea, slightly tear the composite, and you would wish it would rip it to shreds (the edges of the framing bear witness to the impending tear); instead, most likely, minor, imperceptible, repairable (external) damage. Intuition suggests a method of difference or division: a dividing of the composite into tendencies (e.g. two), writes Deleuze. (Desert Islands, p. 36/37) And, why not two thousand. "This method is something other than a spatial analysis, more than a description of experience, and less (so it seems) than a transcendental analysis. It reaches the conditions of the given, but these conditions are tendency-subjects, which are themselves given in a certain way: they are lived." (Deleuze, *ibid.*) This, the given, as a sense of tending, is like an every present other-realm, a universe of one's making, a force that must open 'glimpses' – and not abandonment or banishment, but the feeling of 'hereness', of the exactness of the presence of being-here (its wetness, hungerness, joyfulness, fearfulness, lightness ...) Toward 'what' given does one (one's work) tend ... now we are dreaming.

On the screens, colour is a substance moving toward some unknown momentary other substance – a moment that might reveal a face, a tree, an ocean, a house. This constant changing is substance too (change + moment + colour) – three substances together in time doing anything in particular (that is, with intention), like regulating or implicating; instead being with each other toward whatever might (eventually) come into focus. Although here too there is no promise, nothing might focus, ever. And yet something (and this might be a flicker), in the movement, will suggest the merest recollection – as if, as I gaze, I detect an event, a feeling, a mood, a dream (and now you are dreaming; it is time to dream ...).

This, overall, is delicate work; it slips past categories (film, photography, installation, documentary) almost silently, touching them carefully nevertheless (and necessarily, as they are critical energetic references), as the work works back into the world – not to represent it, this would be redundant – with the difference (unending differences of tone, tension, texture, taste, threat, time (and other language plays) the world has given, with its givens, with its incredible sorcerous strangeness (the world is undreamable). This is like asking: what is it to dream work(s)/writing(s)/self(s) into existence; or what is it not to dream ... into existence ... the equator (the great circle round the earth, equidistant from the north and south poles, the non-line that draws the top and the bottom toward the centre), equatorial forces, pushing, pulsing, pulling; the equatorial climate falls roughly between latitudes 5 degrees north and 5 degrees south, this is saturated climate, a climate where air is thick as mud, anyway thick enough to knead, a substance, like the climate of the screens – a gentle insistent kind of saturation, here climate, saturation, becomes internal (the whole body kneads); the working out from the earth and the working in to the earth is a back and forth movement, a giving to the given, part of a continual process that breaks and cuts and cracks and splits, and yet because one pays (can pay) attention to the process (of falling apart) these acts/volitions are associative, directional, unimagined). So so difficult, and funny, and simultaneous – as is the odd mission of carting around a ‘framing’ device to precise places on the equator so as to push it into the ground for the sole purpose of photographing it ‘there’. What form of story-telling is this, what dreams-of-departure are at stake, what type of departure is imminent – as departure appears unavoidable (travelling so as to depart, departing so as to travel), as a type of beginning, a quiet, terrible, beginning – the throwing down of ‘order’ (the right angle) in order to see, to bring into view, as in a dream (mildly, faintly) something entirely otherwise, as a chance, perhaps.

“Ah! What do I call ‘force’? It is a matter of intensity, radiations, the physical emissions of the dreaming soul, of degrees of delight, almost always tragic. According to the state of the matrix, the dreams are naturally more or less apt to rise in the scale of the passions. If I stopped dreaming? I shuddered, I would crumble to dust.” (Cixous, *Dreams I Tell You*, p. 5)



RESIDUE

A 2mx2m square of low reflective paint, painted directly onto the gallery wall which acts as a conduit for the shifting light in the gallery space and brings the various components of the exhibition together through reflection and absorption. This breathing square shifts as you move around the space at times disappearing altogether. It acts as a form of residue from the spatial experience of travelling to the 4 points and brings the gallery walls back into the work.

