

A(GAP)E



wide, gaping, open, ajar, yawning, wide open, unlocked, unclosed, unfastened, unlatched, expanded, unsecured, off the latch, partly open, cavernous, unbolted, unbarred, fully open, half closed, free, clear, not shut, unsealed, open wide, patulous, revealed, peeled, opened, not closed, made passable, dilated, distended, wide-open, half open, slightly open, flared, huge, vast, deep, chasmal, great, big, large, immense, extensive, broad, enormous, abysmal, amazed, astounded, astonished, dumbfounded, shocked, gobsmacked, agog, thunderstruck, surprised, spellbound, awestruck, confounded, overwhelmed, open-mouthed, awe-stricken, stunned, speechless, stupefied, dumbstruck, staggered, aghast, nonplussed, floored, bowled over, taken aback, dazed, bewildered, perplexed, wide-eyed, flummoxed, disconcerted, at a loss for words, awestricken, startled, awed, shell-shocked, dumfounded, shaken, unnerved, open-mouthed, discomposed, lost for words, knocked for six, blown away, stumped, bemused, goggle-eyed, shaken up, puzzled, confused, bamboozled, thrown, marvelling, wondering, incredulous, wonderstruck, at a loss, filled with astonishment, filled with amazement, filled with wonder, filled with awe, in shock, baffled, non-plussed, stuck, dismayed, overcome, dumb, flustered, lost, staring, muddled, benumbed, jolted, addled, at sea, slack-jawed, struck dumb, tongue-tied, caught on the hop, in awe, unable to believe your eyes, caught on the wrong foot, in amazement, thunder-struck, unable to believe one's ears, horrified, enthralled, alarmed, frightened, overawed, taken by surprise, fazed, staring in amazement, hard-pressed, left speechless, put at a complete loss, mystified, discombobulated, befuddled, rattled, disoriented, dazzled, fuddled, disorientated, befogged, wildered, gaga, giddy, dopey, uncertain, dizzy, bushed, bedevilled, mazed, addlepat, hazy, distracted, dazed and confused, thrown off balance, mixed-up, awe-struck, at sixes and sevens, in a dither, breathless, beat, buffaloed, licked, knocked, knocked out, knocked sideways, clueless, beaten, muzzy, fogged, uncomprehending, muddleheaded, silly, slaphappy, troubled, zonked, raddled, addle, spacey, spaced, appalled, punch-drunk, all at sea, spaced-out, zonked-out, terrified, punchy, pixelated, discomfited, affected, groggy, blank, foxed, afraid, moved, woozy, fuzzy, rendered speechless, fascinated, impressed, emotional, vexed, struck, petrified, frozen, wonder-struck, wonder-stricken, scared, fearful, foggy, taken, spooked, stricken, vague, panicky, lost at sea, blown-away, anxious, numb, terrorised, at wits' end, not with it, terror-stricken, horror-struck, horror-stricken, scared, witless, scared to death, frightened to death, scared stiff, terror-struck, gawping, abashed, electrified, shattered, doubtful, completely, surprised, knocked for a loop, admiring, unsteady, reeling, stupid, adrift, staggering, addlebrained, awe-inspired, worried, hit for six, mortified, without ideas, had their heads messed with, round-eyed, unset, besotted, cowed, not caused to be at a stand

A(GAP)E

*mesmerized by
some / thing...*

Aleks Danko
a reflection 2016–2026



***They laughed when I told them I wanted
to be an artist. Well, they're still laughing.***

Aleks Danko 2025

'Laughter is a language with a host of different idioms: cackling, chortling, grunting, chuckling, shrieking, bellowing, screaming, sniggering, gasping, shouting, braying, yelping, snickering, roaring, tittering, hooting, guffawing, snorting, giggling, howling, screeching and so on.

It can come in blasts, peals, gales, gusts, ripples or torrents, blaring, trumpeting, trickling, swirling or piercing.

But laughter can also convey a range of emotional attitudes: joyous, sarcastic, sly, raucous, genial, wicked, derisive, dismissive, nervous, relieved, cynical, knowing, subversive, smug, lascivious, incredulous, embarrassed, hysterical, sympathetic, skittish, shocked, aggressive or sardonic, not to speak of purely 'social' laughter, which need not express the least amusement.'

Terry Eagleton, *Humour*,
Yale University Press,
New Haven and London 2019



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Architects Colin Munro (left) and Philip Sargeant (right) in the foyer of McClelland Gallery, during construction, c.1970-71, photographer unknown, State Library of Victoria. H2018. 404/48



Foreword

Lisa Byrne

Artistic and Executive Director

McClelland is delighted to be presenting *A(GAP)E: mesmerized by some / thing... a reflection 2016–2026*. For more than five decades, Aleks Danko has held a mirror to the art world and to those of us who inhabit it. His gaze remains as sharp, as mischievous and as uncompromising as ever.

This exhibition marks a significant moment in Aleks Danko's long practice: the premiere of a major new large-scale installation, *mesmerized by some / thing... a reflection*, a work ten years in the making. Anchoring a survey of work from the past decade, the installation distils everything that has defined Danko's practice, his restless interrogation of how art is made, encountered, and read; his dark humour; his refusal to let the viewer off the hook.

A(GAP)E is not a passive experience. Every work in this exhibition is incomplete without the memories, contradictions and responses that each individual visitor brings to it. The 'gap' in the title is not incidental. It is an invitation.

Danko emerged as an artist during one of the most turbulent and generative periods in Australian cultural life, when the certainties of modernism were giving way to conceptualism, performance, Minimalism and Fluxus, movements that privileged ideas over objects, process over product. That intention of radical questioning has never left Danko's work. *A(GAP)E: mesmerized by some / thing... a reflection* is the culmination of that lifelong inquiry.

In 2025, as part of the exhibition's development, Danko participated in our recently established McClelland Arts Residency program generously supported by the Graham Family Trusts. The program provides opportunities to develop and make new work, whether individually or through collaboration. Together with his partner Jude Walton, Danko delivered 'AN ECOLOGY OF OBJECTS AND ACTIONS' — four community workshops engaging participants through process-driven, performative, and site-specific creativity.

I would like to thank Aleks Danko for this intelligent and thoughtful exhibition that in reflecting his practice, also showcases the modernist legacy of McClelland's gallery design, and its unique bushland setting. Our thanks to Aleks' representatives at Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Milani Gallery, Brisbane, and writers Julie Ewington and Oscar Capezio.

Lisa Byrne
March 2026











‘A rose has no teeth’ or ‘Danko humour as anti-depressant’

Oscar Capezio

The world around us turns back into a smooth surface, without signification, without soul, without values, on which we no longer have any purchase. Like the workman who has set down the tool he no longer needs, we find ourselves once again facing *things*.

—Alain Robbe-Grillet¹

In a culture marked by ‘slop’ and a generalised ‘brain-rot’ among the populace, thinking deeply about one’s place in the world and the other beings and objects we share it with appears like a rarified pastime. Critical self-reflection is neutralised by the alienating and stupefying nature of our technologies, geared towards annihilating privacy, eroding autonomy, and fragmenting and diverting our energies into insular little attention-bubbles for the performance of the ‘self’ and the scraping of profit.

Immersed in these smooth friction-free zones—as much of contemporary life as of contemporary art—we lose our tolerance for conflict. Experiences of negation, antagonism or contradiction increasingly reveal our waning capacity to navigate difference. Instead of moving outward toward the shared world, we retreat further inward, clinging to some idea of ‘my’ freedom, ‘my’ identity and, increasingly, ‘my’ despair, ‘my’ apathy, ‘my’ depression.

This psychic brain-fog is intensified by our growing economic and material instability. Reasons for widespread despair and existential hopelessness abound, constantly threatening to boil over—or worse, become the banal anaesthetic hum of a ‘boring dystopia’.² History reveals that precariousness breeds moral panic: uncertainty fuels paranoia, and other manifestations of new market and media-fuelled forms of psychological disturbance (think ‘Reds under the Bed’, ‘Yellow Peril’, conspiracy theories and ‘cancel culture’ etc.). Our contemporary witch-hunts are spurred on by algorithms and political rhetoric that weaponise the anxiety of difference in words such as ‘terrorism’, ‘immigrants’, ‘troll’, ‘woke’, ‘chaos’, yanking humanity apart.

‘Doomer!’ you might cry. But honestly, at this point, it is difficult to tell whether a cynical attitude is a morbid symptom or an appropriate form of self-defence. In a world exhausted by progress and the concentration of power, affirmative refusal and nonsense—*HA! HA! HA!*—appears paradoxically as the most rational response. As Sigmund Freud early observed, the more we come to know, the more stupid and anxious we become, as subjects and as a society. The edge between intelligence and idiocy, mastery and mania, sense and non-sense—between clever and stupid, is today ever thin.

Aleks Danko jokes about these—life’s most serious matters. His darkly comic attitude reflects, with striking wit, the social world that surrounds him. Over the past decade, he has articulated a particular unease about how we have come to apprehend ‘things’, but especially how we apprehend one another. Sharpened by decades of observation, Danko’s work stages a meticulous interplay of social criticism as self-reflexive critique. Humour

becomes method: a satirical, meta art-criticism that draws us into the uneasy relation between *serious political resistance* and an almost slapstick *performance of powerlessness*.

In *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing*, these tensions are staged within the ‘total space’ of installation.³ Working through concrete-poetic allusion and inference, the work performs a sequence of theatrical exclamations, negations, eliminations and withdrawals with an ensemble of evocative objects. These objects stand in as actors, playing the role of alter-egos or Danko-doubles, forming a lively cast of proxies for art-making: as ‘the artist’, as ‘minimalist sculpture’, ‘the studio’ or ‘the self’.⁴ Encountered in the here-and-now of the gallery, these object-actors begin to mirror the absurdities of contemporary life and the fragile structures of meaning and anxiety through which we navigate it.

The encounter is structured as a dialogue with the artist, the artwork, the limits of language and the limits of the gallery architecture. Interpretation merges with negotiation as the audience—placed in a position of having to ‘work it out’—begins to intuit their implication within a system of inescapable rules, the logic of which may never be fully grasped. The suspicion is raised that the whole meaning of this encounter—the event/the game/the play—perhaps resides within one’s subjection to the work’s terms (to the ambiguous conditions imposed or pointed toward by the artist). Reflection, resistance and repetition are all part of the self-contradictory proposition of Danko’s work, where meaning hovers like the spectre of comprehension, as language is caught in the moment between apparition and disintegration. ‘When language begins to break down a little bit,’ artist Bruce Nauman writes:

it becomes exciting and communicates in nearly the simplest way that it can function ... If you deal only with what is known, you’ll have redundancy; on the other hand, if you deal only with the unknown, you cannot communicate at all. There is always some combination of the two, and it is how they touch each other that makes communication interesting.⁵

The word ‘agape’ exemplifies this doubleness. In one sense it describes the mouth wide open in astonishment, a bodily and *passive* response to something outside oneself; in another it denotes a form of love based on our shared humanity, an *active* volition of ethical responsibility.⁶ Both refer to an experience arising from a relation to *some / thing* beyond the self—an affection outside language and beyond mastery. Danko uses this doubleness to chart the shifting relation between the textual and the social, between the work and the viewer, between artistic intention and its uncontrollable outcomes—between what is ‘known’ and what is unknown (or unknowable). To be held agape is to be undone, to practise agape is to choose to respond despite that undoing. This tension mirrors the artist’s own position as a ‘master of non-mastery’.⁷ Danko dramatises the figure of the artist as someone negotiating the anxiety of being transparent enough to be legible, yet opaque enough to remain critical, reflexive and self-aware. ‘Danko’ the artist appears as exposed, fallible, neurotic, a clown—undone at the very point of creative risk. Rather than representing forms of positive political engagement, through his work Danko offers an alternate mode of self-presentation: a critical practice grounded in (our shared) vulnerability, (our shared)vocabulary, and the refusal of mastery.

As a contemporary artist, Danko moves freely through the cultural ruins of his time, constructing his art from the fragmented remnants of mediums, styles and movements. He assembles useful bits and pieces, diverting them from their original functions toward other realms of play—puzzling, humorous and conceptually pointed. A conceptual bricoleur, he

recycles not materials but ideas, poaching ‘found’ motifs and formats for ‘art’, mapping networks through which meaning and routes of understanding might be constructed. This recalls Matei Călinescu’s description of Fluxus artists as ‘specialists who survey and make do with the ruins of major battles past, probing and tinkering with history’s leftover parts’.⁸ From this method emerges an idiosyncratic and poetic form of self-portraiture, where memories, past works, motifs and readymade ideas are telescoped back into a personalised repertoire. Danko’s logic short-circuits the demands of mastery and the pressures of production; it is economical, efficient, elusive—poetic by definition. It models reception as much as construction, knowing as much as making, and reflects Danko’s alertness to new ways of doing (and thinking with) things.

In *A(GAP)E* Danko orchestrates a concrete-poetic scene of encounter. A dense ‘intermedia’ mise-en-scène of all sorts, in which the viewer becomes an active and complicit participant. Readymade words, recognisable forms, object assemblage, architectural interventions, images, gallery display furniture, a flag, mirrors, text, video, drawing, printing, painting, photography and poetry—each is chosen for its performative capacity, a strategy that relies not so much on the artist’s craftsmanship, but on the commonplace virtuosity brought by the viewer. The puzzling objects—with all their robust specificity of surface, their evocative form and pronounced sense of display—compel the viewer to decode and conclude, even as the work continually frustrates such attempts at resolution and interpretation; the field of meaning is constantly shifting underfoot.

We find ourselves in the moment, making connections we cannot fully trace, for reasons too fine to articulate. Because we are in an intuitive zone, beyond reason. This is not simply confusion, but a form of heightened receptivity—to sensation, to contradiction, to the demands of these evocative objects that think and act. Looking is dramatised, and transformed into an interactive, even risky, activity. As recognisability is deployed by Danko only to overturn it, producing uncanny doubles, and unstable pairings or resemblances.⁹ Cause and effect, and coincidence occur, however unity and direct linkage elude. Meaning emerges through the encounter obliquely, through our willingness to ‘go along with the joke’, and through the sense of humour carried into the room by the audience. This double-coded inclusiveness creates a duplicitous experience (both an event in the world and at one remove from it¹⁰) in which the usual contemplative distance collapses, subverting the ‘disinterested gaze’ into a gag, empty and absurd.

In Danko’s ‘theatre of the absurd’, the viewer is held in a state of overwhelming feeling: ‘verklemt ... anxious, worried, extremely interested, very curious ... wrapped-up, in a world of your own ... [immersed in thought]’, *mesmerized by some / thing*, held agog—open and undone.¹¹ It is in this silent and suspended state—just before language forms—that Danko locates a particular intelligence. This is the moment before we explain ourselves back into comfort, before rationalisation dulls the edges of experience. Here art’s promise provides a form of knowing that is real, complex, and powerful, even if unspoken.¹² This knowledge—which sits within the body, in the ‘(GAP)’ between understanding and its impossibility—is the curious power central to Danko’s work. Here our mastery dwindles in the face of nothingness, we confront the limits of comprehension, as reason falters and language fails. In Danko’s words, ‘the only way (I) can speak of nothing is to speak of it as though it were something’.¹³

Danko offers up this void as a pledge—‘I GIVE YOU NOTHING...’¹⁴—obliquely emphasising (via parenthesis) the gap as a potent space of slippage, silence, death—the ineffable otherness that structures human experience, the nothingness that gives life its doubleness. Danko notes that absence ‘paradoxically defines the substance that surrounds it, by virtue of its nothingness it creates’.¹⁵ Nothing more or less than everything emerges from emptiness; renewal follows negation, through death and rebirth.

In navigating these detours, the viewer returns to the encounter transformed. The reward is not resolution but recognition of the dissonance that makes such transformation possible. Often arriving with a jolt, the destabilising punchline delivered at the moment of greatest vulnerability—*HA! HA! HA!*—hits you in the guts. It provokes laughter and the very loss of self-control, opening the viewer to realise, or not, what Danko describes as ‘that complicit moment in stupidity and self-critique’,¹⁶ where we experience a sudden failure of thought and language at our very limits—experiencing, as Immanuel Kant puts it in a short discussion of laughter, ‘a sudden evaporation of expectation into nothing’.¹⁷ The force of Danko’s practice lies in this meeting point of humour and unease, where the collapse of mastery opens onto a renewed capacity to feel, respond and remain suspended—agape—before what exactly, cannot be fully known. From here (un-done) it is up to the audience to realise the work in relation to their own desires, their memories, experiences and available vocabulary. It is up to the viewer to make choices. For Danko,

People can laugh off experience only when they gain enough distance—step back far enough—to see the silly and the absurd in the everyday, when they begin to say no and start to make choices. From this perspective, the laughter can re-enter reality more confidently, for the object of fear has been disarmed.¹⁸

Here, the problem of what to do with those feelings presents itself. Perhaps we do face up to the knowing-less-ness of the encounter—seeing ourselves in Danko, and ourselves as ridiculous. Until it manifests these life-world emotions, the work of art is still very much in progress. Danko himself admits that he ‘does not seek to know all the answers; nor understand all the questions’. Like the poet and playwright Bertolt Brecht, he is insistent on playing out all possible positions and roles in a constant change of perspective, a Brechtian ‘learning-play’ (*Lehrstück*) that teaches by being acted, not by being witnessed.¹⁹ By being implicated in Danko’s theatre of discovery, we are encouraged to inhabit the world in a different way: by embodying the problem of speech, playing out its contradictions, acting up and being silly, we bear the marks of failure and nonsense clear on our sleeves, sharing them with the world and together learning from them. Engaging with Danko’s work can really only make us feel ridiculous ... or at the very least, bring about a little bit of comic relief ... *HA!*

[and, a little something more and something less, perhaps a lot more than yes ... felt, floated, photo-graphed, formalised and then, (an)atomised ... somewhere on the edge, of something and nothing ... with ... ‘Hahahaha, haha, ha, hum ...’ (said Mr. Knott) ‘Any more questions before I go to bed?’²⁰

END.

Notes

- 1 Alain Robbe-Grillet, ‘Nature, Humanism and Tragedy’, *New Left Review*, vol. 1, no. 31, May–June 1965.
- 2 See Mark Fischer, ‘No One Is Bored, Everything Is Boring’, in *k-punk: The Collected and Unpublished Writings of Mark Fisher (2004–2016)*, Repeater Books, 2018.
- 3 Danko described this moment of implication: ‘In a sense, these installation works ... require the audience’s entry into the work. They are not single objects; they are whole rooms—spaces that the viewer negotiates. There viewers deal with their place and location in a total space ...’. Aleks Danko, ‘The Moment of Aesthetic Withdrawal’, Aleks Danko interviewed by Charles Green, 24 April 1997, Melbourne, *Lightness and Gravity*, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, pp. 16–21
- 4 Numerous art critics identify an avant-garde strategy of oppositional autonomy, argued through the concepts of negation (Hal Foster), antagonism (Claire Bishop), and parody (Donald Kuspit)—a confusion of values in which negation is conceived as an affirmation of creativity and inventiveness, giving the work power despite it, which relates to Danko’s backwards form of creativity, modelled on black humour (*l’humour noir*).
- 5 Bruce Nauman, quoted in John Yau, ‘Words and Things: The Prints of Bruce Nauman’, in Christopher Cordes (ed), *Bruce Nauman Prints 1970–89*, Castelli Graphics, Lorence Monk Gallery & Donald Young Gallery, 1989, p. 10.
- 6 In his *Works of Love* (1847), philosopher Søren Kierkegaard explored the concept of agape, theologising it as a volition, as an obligatory form of love that requires a person to actively choose to love their neighbour, not based on their virtues or attractiveness, but on our shared humanity. Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, Princeton University Press, (1847) 1995.
- 7 See Michael Taussig, *Mastery of Non-Mastery in the Age of Meltdown*, University of Chicago Press, 2020.
- 8 In Natilee Harren, *The Crux of Fluxus: Intermedia, Rear-guard*, Minneapolis Walker Art Centre, 2015, p. 28.
- 9 Danko establishes a play on doubles where, in his words, ‘one thing seems recognisable on the surface, and then is subverted through labelling ... Two things sitting together, and these inversions appear when the viewer investigates.’ Danko, ‘The Moment of Aesthetic Withdrawal’, p. 17.
- 10 ‘By using people as a medium, participatory art has always had a double ontological status: it is both an event in the world, and at one remove from it. As such, it has the capacity to communicate ... the paradoxes that are repressed in everyday discourse, and to elicit perverse, disturbing, and pleasurable experiences that enlarge our capacity to imagine the world and our relations anew.’ Claire Bishop, *Participation and Spectacle: Where Are We Now?* MIT Press, 2012, p. 11.
- 11 Extracts from a work by Aleks Danko, *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing*, 2026. For more on the Beckett’s theatre of the absurd, which synergises with Danko’s use of installation, see S.Z. Abbas, ‘From Minimalism to the Absurd: “The Intent of Undoing” in Samuel Beckett’s Waiting for Godot’, *Rupkatha Journal on Interdisciplinary Studies in Humanities*, vol. 11, no. 2, 2019, DOI: 10.21659/rupkatha.v11n2.18.
- 12 This challenges the dictum that speaking is ‘thought made in the mouth’ (Tristan Tzara), privileging instead the abstract mental processes of embodied feeling over concrete communication. Inverting the hierarchy, Danko seeks for an abstract ‘knowledge’ that occurs outside of language, working at the level of emotion, where feeling and thought are inseparable.
- 13 Aleks Danko, artist statement with quotes by Samuel Beckett from Watt, for the exhibition *Are we done? I’d like to get back to staring at nothing*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 2019.
- 14 Text from Aleks Danko, *selfie portrait no.3—I GIVE YOU NOTHING*, 2022, in *SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY*, 2009–26.
- 15 Aleks Danko, ‘*SITUATION: NUTS AND BOLTS MAKE A LOVELY PAIR WHEN YOU SCREW THEM (REHEARSAL MIX)*, 1970–2008’, in *Contemporary Australia: Optimism*, exhibition catalogue, Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane, 2008–09
- 16 Aleks Danko, 2015, quoted in text for collection work, *IT’S SUCH A THIN LINE BETWEEN CLEVER AND STUPID*, 2008–2009’, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney. <https://www.mca.com.au/collection/artworks/2009.13> (viewed 2 March 2026).
- 17 Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Judgement*, trans. J.C. Meredith, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1952.
- 18 Barry Sanders quoted by Aleks Danko in ‘Life Sentences’, *SONGS OF AUSTRALIA VOLUME 16: SHHH, GO BACK TO SLEEP (an un-Australian dob-in mix)*, exhibition catalogue, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2004, p. 20.
- 19 ‘The learning-play is essentially dynamic; its task it to show the world as it changes (and also how it may be changed).’ Bertolt Brecht, ‘The German Theatre: Pre-Hitler’, in *Brecht on Theatre: The Development of an Aesthetic*, ed. and trans. John Willett, Radha Krishna, New Delhi, 1957, p. 79.
- 20 Danko, artist statement, *Are we done?* 2019.











Gotta laugh! Aleks Danko's everyday absurdities

Julie Ewington

Laughter. There is laughter, and then there is laughter. Are we thinking about amusement or shocked horror? About affectionate banter or satire? Slapstick or wordplay or farce? About family jokes or families of jokes? Or all the above and more?

The Australian vernacular distinction 'funny peculiar or funny ha-ha?' neatly encapsulates the multiple ambiguities teased out in Aleks Danko's perennial project. So, will we wonder, be amazed, our jaws dropped, as the exhibition title suggests? *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing?* The words 'wide, gaping, open, ajar, yawning, wide open ...' are the first of a litany of terms that greet us on a large silkscreened banner, as we step into the exhibition. Will we be 'spellbound' by what we see, as Danko tells us up-front? Will we be mesmerized? Or will we laugh out loud?

Laugh, perhaps, because no other response seems adequate in the face of what is extraordinary, horrific, unbelievable. As are many situations in today's world. '*Il faut être de son temps / one must be of one's time*': modern artists have asserted this for almost exactly 200 years, and Danko has been working with (and against) the times in which he lives for half a century. Now this body of work from the last decade continues that trajectory with energy, precision and, above all, with a constant commitment to humour. (Which is the stuff, as well as the staff, of life.)

Thinking through humour takes us to the heart of Danko's work. He often explicitly acknowledges its power; indeed, he includes statements about humour in this catalogue as epigraph and epilogue, quoting texts on its nature by English literary critic Terry Eagleton and the American Barry Sanders.¹ Well, he would, wouldn't he? 'HA HA HA HA HA HA HA HA': this from an artist who, in 1972, together with Colin Little, made *Laughing Wall*; they plastered the entire street-front of the Tin Sheds Art Workshop at the University of Sydney with screenprinted instances of the word, a work restaged in 2015 as *A (VOID) Laughing*.² In 2024, in a rat-a-tat reminder of mortality, Danko engraved HA! HA! HA! on a tombstone-like form, in *A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE—D'AILLIERS, C'EST TOUJOURS LES AUTRES QUI MEURENT—Marcel Duchamp 1887–1968* trans: *BESIDES, IT'S ALWAYS THE OTHERS WHO DIE (another self portrait)*. For Danko repeatedly acts with comic intent (and in remarkably amusing ways) in his work. But what sort of humour?

Or rather, what sorts, plural? Charles Green once dubbed Danko 'a kind of clown conceptualist', and he wears that cap with honour.³ But Danko's humour takes a variety of forms, each treated with respect. With his predilection for the comic, he asks many questions that only pose as jokes. Danko's excursions into the kingdom of nonsense include word plays, gags and games; satires enacted on and through the works of other artists, both graphic and sculptural; sly jokes at the expense of complicit viewers, fuelled equally by anarchic energy and dead serious intent. And that's the key, I think, to Danko's work: *different* forms of humour are invoked, in counterpoint. This is a convention

of comic genres, tropes, initiatives: a gaggle of giggles. And each work speaks to and across each other in a noisy assertive purposeful babble. An assault that recapitulates the incessant chatter of daily life.

Clowning, yes. For a start, there is the self-portrait “*and I, have to live with UNCLE AL*”, 2018, with the artist wearing a silly hat and a long (liar’s) strap-on nose, one of a long line of piss-taking self-portraits. But this clowning is complicated by Danko’s insistence on playing between these different comics genres and registers. Here, the so-called Selfie Portraits have cunning little texts akin to concrete poetry engraved on the mirrored surfaces, recalling Danko’s youthful essays in spoken word performance in the early 1970s, when he worked alongside poets including Richard Tipping and Robyn Ravlich. These works also invoke a long line of other mirrors, from the standard warning text on automobile side-mirrors, to Ian Burn’s interrogative mirror works of the late 1960s and early 1970s. Not forgetting the original suggestion by the eighteenth-century philosopher David Hume that human minds mirror each other, in sympathy. The first of Danko’s mirror works here introduces a foundational doubt: *selfie portrait no. 1—IT’S SUCH A THIN LINE BETWEEN CLEVER & STUPID*. Well, exactly: but who is to know where that line is? What is the status of perception anyway? In a hall of mirrors that’s always the most important question.

Jokes about perception and the nature of visuality abound. *Plinth Prop & Tilt Too (PPTT)* of 2022 is as solid as any other sculpture, constructed from galvanized sheet metal and timber, but its status is made uncertain by a sly little red prop under the tall form, tilting it off kilter. Gravity, in both senses, is undermined. (Geddit?) Danko persists in taking down art’s pretensions. The tall imposing form of *IN THE PRESENCE OF FOLLY*, 2022, is capped by a tiny cupboard, a sort of monumental head. The cupboard is strangely familiar: it was the only piece of furniture in the Daylesford house that Danko and his partner Jude Walton bought in 1984; here it is deployed, as Danko notes, ‘with the addition of a plywood pediment to give the work a neo-classical presence’.⁵ And a 2026 work using existing Corten steel plinths found in the McClelland Sculpture Park, which is titled “... *now I’m getting a little verklempt, talk amongst yourselves ...*”, picks up the implied anthropomorphism of Danko’s other sculptures. It invokes a gaggle of sculptures, or is that sculptors? And ‘*verklempt*’? The alert visitor will have noticed this delicious synonym for being overcome, borrowed from Yiddish, and found by the artist in live comedy skits online; it first appeared in the *A(GAP)E* banner. But who, exactly, is ‘*verklempt*’ here, in this three-dimensional work? Is it the artist, or visitors? Or is it those Corten steel blocks themselves—if they are not actual blockheads?

Fair question: for Danko puts viewers on notice. We are required to think through these puzzles for ourselves. By now we are implicated: we have seen ourselves reflected in the mirrors in *THE SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY*, 2009–26. Think through this particular challenge: *selfie portrait no. 4—WARNING: OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE DUMBER THAN THEY APPEAR*. Hmm. Who’s the dumb one here? Perhaps anyone who gets close enough to read the text. Yes: the joke is definitely on us. But it’s a joke we are encouraged to embrace, in a spirit of exploration, even celebration. The energy here, the verbal interrogation, the unremitting fun, especially a sense of urgency: all this suggests a participatory environment more like a funfair than a gallery, a place of misrule fuelled by the best kind of scepticism, about perception, about death, about the meaning of life.

That brings us to the carnival, the carnivalesque, and Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), the Russian philosopher and literary theorist who is pertinent in thinking through Danko’s current work. Bakhtin’s sublime *Rabelais and his World*, 1965/1968, explored the work

of the French writer Rabelais, and especially his stupendous fiction *Gargantua and Pantagruel*, 1532–52, in the context of the carnival, the determinedly uproarious Christian celebration just before penitential Lent. Carnival traditionally sustains an admirably subversive attitude towards authority and received social notions. And carnivalesque scepticism, a fundamental independence of thought, is akin to Danko’s. (No wonder Soviet authorities had misgivings about Bakhtin’s work: they knew his interest in the carnival suggested irreverence, and an opposition to authority that they could not tolerate.)⁶

Visiting Danko’s *A(GAP)E*, walking through McClelland Gallery, visitors encounter a particular itinerary. We are like a carnival crowd, walking through busy streets, encountering varied and astonishing events, performances, tableaux, statements: an assault on the senses, and an invitation to participate. Bakhtin’s evocation of the world around Rabelais drew on the writer’s attendance at great French seasonal fairs, including at the famous one at Lyon. Above all, Rabelais’s worldview was formed by the plethora of stimuli found in the streets at carnival time, when misrule reigned, and hard questions were asked in the guise of fun, using performances, images, songs, ideas, all manner of cultural forms in daily use. The languages of the time, as it were. Masks and disguises were everywhere, as they are with Danko’s work: think of *UNCLE AL*, 2018, with his liar’s nose, and more sinister, *OOMAMABOOMBA (white out edit)*, 2017, where the image in negative suggests a gasmask in a contemporary Punch and Judy show. These are just some recent masked avatars. Over the years Danko has offered many concatenations of grinning faces, simplified personae that ambiguously stand in for himself, and for everyperson.

I cannot follow Bakhtin too far down those sixteenth-century French streets, but I do think carnival’s topsy-turvy principle applies here. Many works are presented like tableaux, in shallow bays resembling booths at a fair, quasi-theatrical spaces that once sheltered mystery plays, magicians, jokesters, jugglers, all jostling for attention. Indeed, these booths are still used today in side-show alleys. This points to the persistence of the performative urge, and various performance modes, in Danko’s work: these works act (and act out). In fact, Danko has taken the entire McClelland Gallery as his stage, intervening into the successive rooms to make a black-and-white world of pushes and pulls, propositions and pitches that is one unified, site-specific *mise-en-scène*. And in the best spirit of carnival, truth is spoken to power. Loudly. One clear instance: *VOICE / VOICELESS*, a study for the larger work *What happened to the VOICE? And, at what PRICE? (Lest We Forget)*, 2025–26, which speaks to the failed Indigenous Voice to Parliament referendum of 2023, with black masks, this time, invoking a chorus of questioning voices. And this query is complicated by the bracketed final phrase, ‘Lest We Forget’, a standard refrain at regular ANZAC Day ceremonies commemorating Australian soldiers lost in battle. Here, in Danko’s work, that phrase is an indictment.

Pitches and propositions: These works are verbal actions, as well as material and spatial constructions. Carnival was (and is) loud with criss-crossing cries, proclamations, songs, appeals for attention. Noisy. Danko has worked with language since his early brushes with poetry, and his interest in different typographies was originally developed when he studied lettering in art school (as one did back in the day).⁷ The insistent rhythms in many titles recall poetic reiteration, but also music, a constant reference. Danko’s unremitting word play includes baby-like babbling—*OOMAMABOOMBA*, for example—and explosions of stuttering staccato expostulations. One more instance: in *corner / cornered / cornerwise*, 2021–26, the text *HA HA ANY HARMONY*, originally made in response to a work by Sydney sculptor Hany Armanious for the 2021 group exhibition *THIS IS A POEM*.⁸ Finally, *NO! NO! NO! NO MORE MUSEUM OF CRÉCHE ART—cut the boredom (after Bruce*

Nauman), 2019–26, with its emphatic upper-case text, shows the centrality of titles to Danko's work; it is simultaneously injunction, explanation and reference, text working with primary colours to satirise current art-museum trends.

With *THE SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY* series, we saw mirrors and messages working together. Other works treat meaning differently. In *Etched Idiot (another self portrait)*, 2014–26, the word 'idiot' is underlined, in case one misses it; it is coupled with the delicate *Embossed Idiot (another self portrait)*, 2014–26, a gorgeous intaglio where one is obliged to strain to make out the word, suggesting one's own uncertainty in reading it, or even the possibility that one does not wish to come to terms with the accusation it makes. Conversely, the two dictionary-definition works, *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing*, and *Oh, my! What a tiring day!* 2024–26, pile on synonyms to the point of confusion. *Oh, my! What a tiring day!* explicitly explores barriers to understanding, starting with 'opaque' and culminating with the work's title phrase.

Communication is rarely straightforward, and Danko explores the challenges of finding (as well as making) meaning. At first *Dyalishfoured Modernism (no more art language)* of 2019 had me stumped. The cardboard boxes are recycled: both in material and meaning—given the use of similar boxes from the early 1970s by the American Robert Rauschenberg; and 'art language' refers to the late 1960s / early 1970s Conceptual group Art & Language, but also to specialist art-critical language more generally. But I could not make out the first word of the title: *Dyalishfoured?* I should have spoken the words aloud: always the best way with poetic speech. It's a transcription, a rendering through an invented Eastern European accent of the name of Daylesford, the small Victorian town where Danko lives. Down-home modernism, then.⁹

Dyalishfoured Modernism (no more art language) is a fine example of the antic intertextuality of Danko's work. This embraces his materials, its 'thingness', as he writes, as well as the use of language, working with (or against) each other. The fragments of speech (and written references) that Danko summons are eclectic findings from a lifetime of reading poetry, novels, watching comedy performances, listening to all forms of music, and being especially attentive, I think, to song lyrics. One entire major group of works was titled *SONGS OF AUSTRALIA*, a Song Cycle that stretched to sixteen volumes between 1996 and 2007, the exact span of John Howard's prime ministership of the country. Inter alia, across this exhibition Danko quotes or alludes to (in no special order) Samuel Beckett, Constantin Brancusi, Jackie Kay, Eva Hesse, Clive Hamilton, Robert Rauschenberg, Bruce Nauman, Jamie Cullum: artists, poets, singers, political theorists. And, at times, Danko pulls his own leg: here we have David Shrigley, Michael Leunig (both ace jokers) in *No more signs necessary or when David Shrigley met Michael Leunig*, 2017–26. For if no more signs were indeed necessary, why would this work exist?

For the most part, Danko works in modernism's ostensibly straightforward black and white, with its inbuilt principle of reversibility, and only occasional flashes of red. The use of black-and-white typography is a clear signal that there must be a yes or a no, a positive or a negative, a right or a wrong answer to the questions addressed: 'It's as clear as black and white'. In the entire exhibition there is only one instance of colour, the three primary colours at that, to prove this rule: *NO! NO! NO! NO MORE MUSEUM OF CRECHE ART—cut the boredom (after Bruce Nauman)* implies that red, yellow and blue, culturally determined in European culture, belong, somehow, to a playground. Here, in this stern black-and-white milieu, these bright colours seem silly.

'Leave 'em laughing': The classic showbiz adage is surely older than the 1928 Laurel & Hardy film of the same name. It speaks to comedy's task of catharsis, an uneasy burden that suggests ongoing discomfort as much as the immediate pleasure of comic relief. But comedy is not universal. It takes as many forms as there are cities and cultures: the veteran English comic Ken Dodd memorably said, about theoretical claims that there is a universal principle underlying comedy, 'Of course, Freud never had to play the Glasgow empire on a Friday night.'¹⁰

A particular Australian location between languages and cultures is crucial to Danko's work. Growing up in suburban Adelaide, Danko spoke both Russian and Ukrainian, before coming to English when he started school; he was always equipped with other perspectives, which remain critical for his work.¹¹ The mordant Russian humour of his father, Aleksander Danko Senior, is his epitaph, and a guiding refrain for his son's work: 'As you know we are pensioners, day in day out, twenty-four hours closer to death.'¹² Crucially, Danko's twinned affections for the austere modernist and drolly subversive are grounded in Australian life. He juxtaposes everyday materials—cardboard boxes and coffee-cup holders, trestle tables, ping-pong balls, the stuff of the studio but also the home hobbyist, not to mention the home—to tie us to the emotional baggage these materials carry. 'Some-thing – it's the thingness', Danko writes. And the title of this exhibition, *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing*, emphasises that objects, things, are critical here. Danko is a sculptor, after all.¹³

However transmogrified, the sculptural objects Danko makes are testaments to experience, or, better, to ways of encountering life. When critics claim that Danko explicitly decries life in suburban Australia, though, I think they mistake the matter.¹⁴ Through his work Danko examines the character of existence—which in his case happens to that of suburban Australia as the child of migrants. Now he confronts—obliquely, playfully, wilfully—issues that face us in twenty-first-century Australia. His 2025 solo exhibition at Brisbane's Milani Gallery, was titled *MY FELLOW AUS-TRA-ALIENS (CODA): 'They took the Dreamtime and turned it into a Nightmare'... (and remember, always carry a stick) ... FOUR ROOMS*. You get the idea.

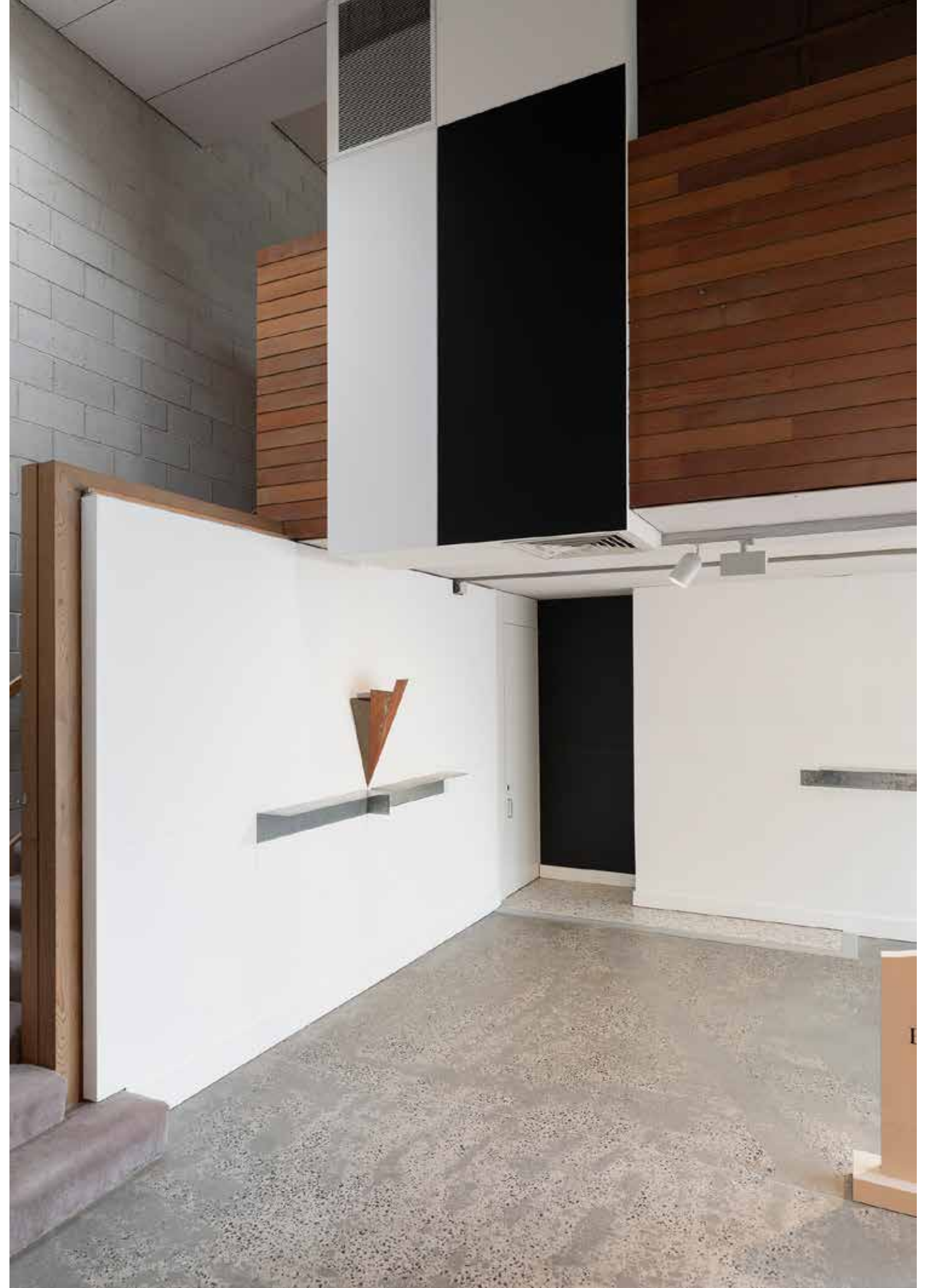
Aleks Danko's comedy is played against its own grain, a sense of terrible absurdity in human affairs that is by turn despairing and optimistic. The title of Danko's last institutional exhibition, the 2015 survey at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Heide Museum of Modern Art, was *MY FELLOW AUS-TRA-ALIENS*, borrowed for the occasion from former prime minister Howard's preferred address to the nation. Not so funny, after all; 'a simmering anger' was noted in Danko's work in 2015. It is still there, and is still necessary, today.

Notes

- 1 See Terry Eagleton, *Humour*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London, 2019, and Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory: Laughter as Subversive History*, Beacon Press, Boston, 1995.
- 2 For *HA HA HA* see Glenn Barkley and Lesley Harding, et al. *Aleks Danko: My Fellow Aus-traliens*, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia and Heide Museum of Modern Art, 2015.
- 3 See Charles Green, *Peripheral Vision: Contemporary Australian Art 1970–1994*, Craftsman House, Roseville East, NSW, 1995, p. 2, and ‘The Moment of Aesthetic Withdrawal’: Aleks Danko interviewed by Charles Green, 24 April 1997, Melbourne, in Juliana Engberg, *Lightness and Gravity: Aleks Danko, Robert MacPherson, Pieter Laurens Mol, Richard Wentworth*, exhibition catalogue, Museum of Modern Art at Heide, Melbourne, 1997.
- 4 See Oscar J. Capezio, ‘DANKO-DOUBLES AND INVERSE-OTHERS: Aleks Danko’s Self-portraiture 1970–2013’, Honours thesis, Australian National University, 2015. My thanks to the author and the artist for making this text available.
- 5 Aleks Danko, email to the author, 28 December 2025.
- 6 Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and his World*, MIT Press, 2025, trans. Sergeiy Sandler, with a foreword by Caryl Emerson. Completed around 1940, the book was first published in Russian in 1965, becoming known outside Russia with the first English translation of 1968. In 1988, I wrote the text ‘Theatre of Mixed Means’ about Danko’s work *A Theatre of Mixed Means, for Taste: Work 1981–1988*, Reconnaissance, Melbourne, 1988, republished in Barkley and Harding, 2015, p. 73.
- 7 For an early account of Danko’s interest in humour, and art-school training in lettering, see his 1979 interview with James Gleeson, 12 August 1979, commissioned by the National Gallery of Australia, at <https://nga.gov.au/media/dd/documents/danko.pdf> (viewed 30 December 2025).
- 8 Aleks Danko, email to the author, 28 December 2025. The exhibition *THIS IS A POEM*, curated by Melissa Keys, was at Buxton Contemporary, Melbourne, 9 July – 14 November 2021.
- 9 Aleks Danko, email to the author, 28 December 2025.
- 10 Jonathan Coe, ‘And then there was “Playtime”’, *London Review of Books*, vol. 21, no 24, 9 December 1999, at <https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v21/n24/jonathan-coe/and-then-there-was-playtime> (viewed 30 December 2025).
- 11 About Danko’s formation in both the Russian and Ukrainian languages, see Joanna Mendelssohn, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2015/08/my-fellow-aus-traliens--aleks-danko-at-sydneys-museum-of-conte> (viewed 30 December 2025).
- 12 An installation relating to his father’s mordant humour is *DAY IN DAY OUT (second version)*, 1991, is in the collection of the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane.
- 13 An email from the artist dated 1 March 2025 cited these key ideas for the McClelland project: the title *A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing*, and ‘it’s the thingness ... and the discovery of the word “verklemt”’.
- 14 For John McDonald’s perceptive comment about Danko’s anger in the 2015 survey exhibition in Sydney, see his review ‘Matters of the Mind’, <https://www.johnmcdonald.net.au/2015/aleks-danko-and-haines-hinterding> (viewed 30 December 2025).

PLATES

McClelland, Langwarrin
McClelland room and
Elisabeth Murdoch Gallery



A(GAP)E – mesmerized by some / thing

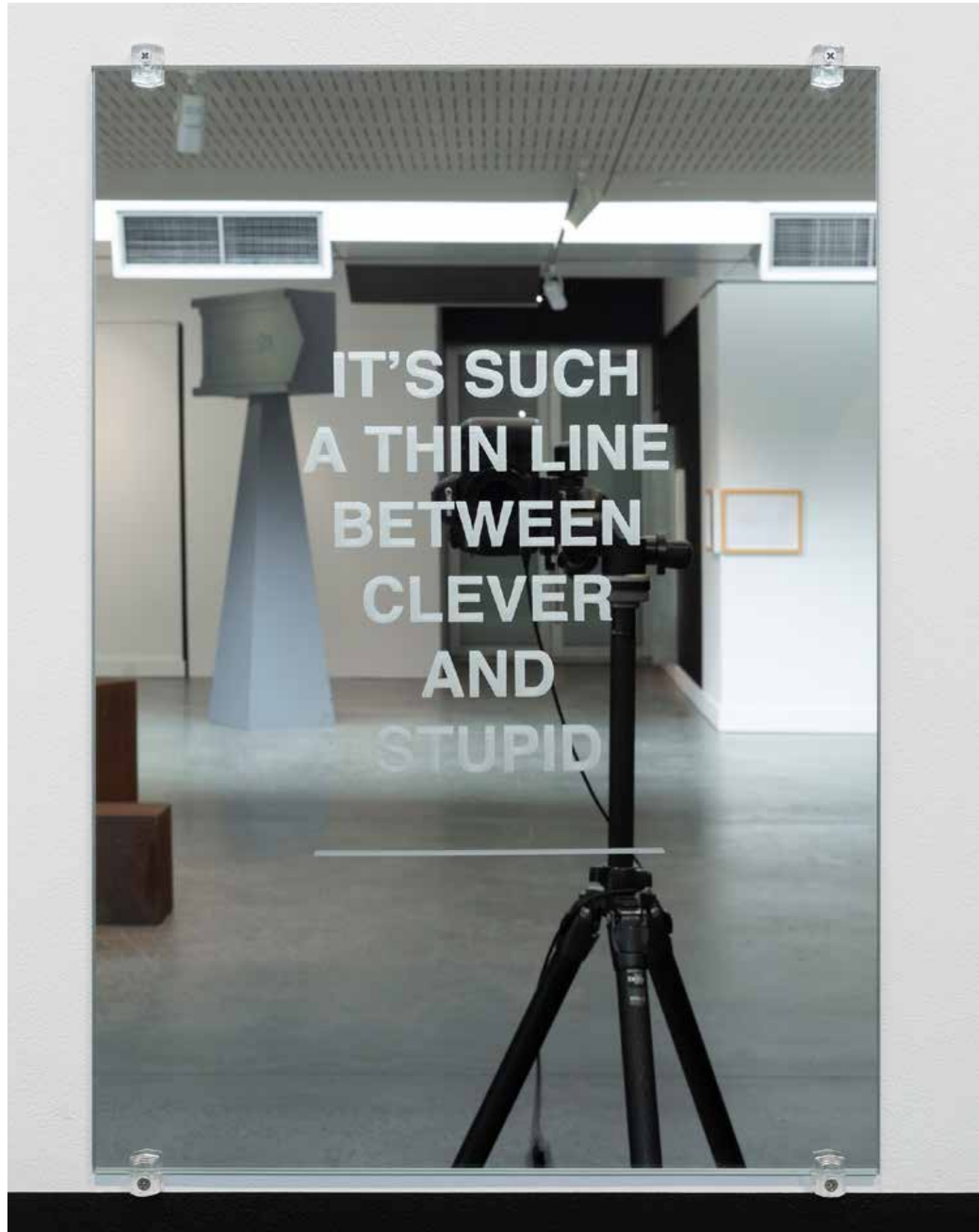
wide, gaping, open, ajar, yawning, wide open, unlocked, unclosed, unfastened, unlatched, expanded, unsecured, off the latch, partly open, cavernous, unbolted, unbarred, fully open, half closed, free, clear, not shut, unsealed, open wide, patulous, revealed, peeled, opened, not closed, made passable, dilated, distended, wide-open, half open, slightly open, flared, huge, vast, deep, chasmal, great, big, large, immense, extensive, broad, enormous, abysmal, amazed, astounded, astonished, dumbfounded, shocked, gobsmacked, agog, thunderstruck, surprised, spellbound, awestruck, confounded, overwhelmed, open-mouthed, awe-stricken, stunned, speechless, stupefied, dumbstruck, staggered, aghast, nonplussed, floored, bowled over, taken aback, dazed, bewildered, perplexed, wide-eyed, flummoxed, disconcerted, at a loss for words, awestricken, startled, awed, shell-shocked, dumfounded, shaken, unnerved, open-mouthed, discomposed, lost for words, knocked for six, blown away, stumped, bemused, goggle-eyed, shaken up, puzzled, confused, bamboozled, thrown, marvelling, wondering, incredulous, wonderstruck, at a loss, filled with astonishment, filled with amazement, filled with wonder, filled with awe, in shock, baffled, non-plussed, stuck, dismayed, overcome, dumb, flustered, lost, staring, muddled, benumbed, jolted, addled, at sea, slack-jawed, struck dumb, tongue-tied, caught on the hop, in awe, unable to believe your eyes, caught on the wrong foot, in amazement, thunder-struck, unable to believe one's ears, horrified, enthralled, alarmed, frightened, overawed, taken by surprise, fazed, staring in amazement, hard-pressed, left speechless, put at a complete loss, mystified, discombobulated, befuddled, rattled, disoriented, dazzled, fuddled, disorientated, befogged, wildered, gaga, giddy, dopey, uncertain, dizzy, bushed, bedevilled, mazed, addlebrained, hazy, distracted, dazed and confused, thrown off balance, mixed-up, awe-struck, at sixes and sevens, in a dither, breathless, beat, buffaloed, licked, knocked, knocked out, knocked sideways, clueless, beaten, muzzy, fogged, incomprehending, muddleheaded, silly, slaphappy, troubled, zonked, raddled, addie, spacey, spaced, appalled, punch-drunk, all at sea, spaced-out, zonked-out, terrified, punchy, pixelated, discomfited, affected, groggy, blank, foxed, afraid, moved, woozy, fuzzy, rendered speechless, fascinated, impressed, emotional, vexed, struck, petrified, frozen, wonder-struck, wonder-stricken, scared, fearful, foggy, taken, spooked, stricken, vague, panicky, lost at sea, blown-away, anxious, numb, terrorised, at wit's end, not with it, terror-stricken, horror-struck, horror-stricken, scared, witless, scared to death, frightened to death, scared stiff, terror-struck, gaping, abashed, electrified, shattered, doubtful, completely surprised, knocked for a loop, admiring, unsteady, reeling, stupid, adrift, staggering, addlebrained, awe-inspired, worried, hit for six, mortified, without ideas, had their heads messed with, round-eyed, upset, besotted, cowed, got caused to be at a stand, gravelled, thrown off, intimidated, disorganized, daunted, stymied, woolly, made to scratch their head, numbed out of it, up against a brick wall, without an answer, woolly-headed, not knowing if you are coming or going, woolly-minded, choky, disturbed, buried, verklemt, swamped, bowled-over, defeated, overthrown, disheartened, frustrated, run-over, swept off your feet, unable to continue, absent-minded, unbelieving, disbelieving, in disbelief, pushing the panic button, in a panic, have cold feet, in a cold sweat, agog, anticipatory, anticipant, expectant, eager, anticipating, expecting, hopeful, anticipative, awaiting, excited, anxious, breathless, ready, prepared, raring, alert, hoping, keen, on tenterhooks, in suspense, waiting, with bated breath, keyed up, on pins and needles, spellbound, captivated, fascinated, beguiled, entranced, enraptured, charmed, hypnotised, awestruck, mesmerized, riveted, delighted, enthralled, rapt, caught up, dazzled, groped, overwhelmed, transfixed, transported, amazed, awestricken, breathless, enticed, hooked, bewitched, impressed, thrilled, bedazzled, held, starstruck, stunned, won over, open-mouthed, under someone's spell, engrossed, absorbed, intent, enchanted, immersed, involved, enamoured, preoccupied, attentive, engaged, infatuated, focussed, intoxicated, wrapped up, occupied, deep, aroused, busy, observant, titillated, tantalised, ravished, hung up, lost, interested, excited, smitten, taken, abstracted, seduced, absent, daydreaming, dreaming, content, oblivious, caught up in, absent-minded, hooked on, carried away, under a spell, taken up, snowed, drawn to, intrigued, affected, captive, trapped mentally, enchanted, concerned with, obsessed, ecstatic, elated, euphoric, consumed, rapturous, exhilarated, buried, rhapsodic, into, tied up, elevated, enrapt, giddy, eat sleep and breathe, turned on, all ears, bound-up, heady, on cloud nine, distracted, over the moon, bugged, brooding, overpowered, anxious, worried, extremely interested, very curious, wrapped-up, in a world of your own, [immersed in thought]



*A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE
- D'AILLEURS, C'EST TOU-
JOURS LES AUTRES QUI
MEURENT (Marcel Duchamp
1887-1968) trans: BESIDES,
IT'S ALWAYS THE OTHERS
WHO DIE (another self portrait)
2024-26*







IT'S SUCH
A THIN LINE
BETWEEN
CLEVER
AND
STUPID



NOTHING
STUPID
BEYOND
THIS
POINT





THE SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY 2009–26

*IT'S SUCH A THIN LINE
BETWEEN CLEVER & STUPID*

NOTHING STUPID BEYOND THIS POINT

I GIVE YOU NOTHING

*WARNING: OBJECTS IN MIRROR ARE
DUMBER THAN THEY APPEAR*

THUMB IN BUM AND MIND IN NEUTRAL



Embossed Idiot (another self-portrait) 2014-26



Etched Idiot (another self-portrait) 2014-26

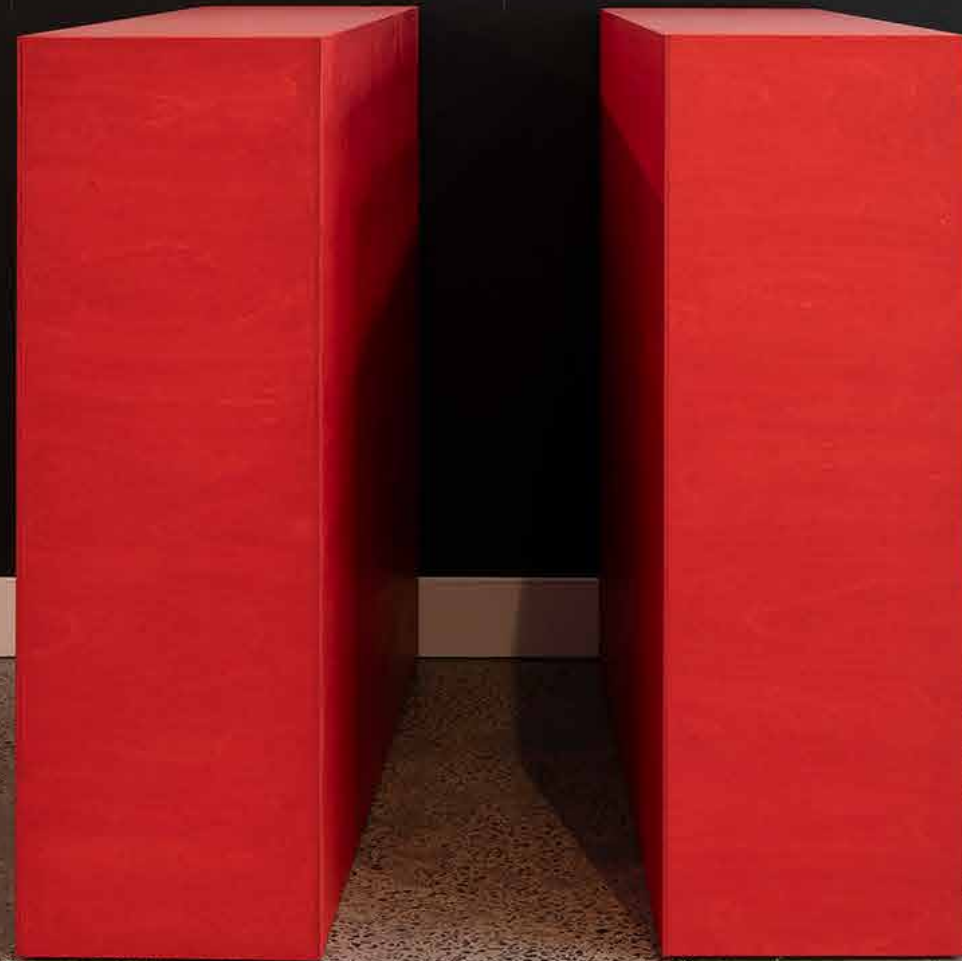




VOICE / VOICELESS
study for *And! What*
happened to the VOICE?
And at What PRICE?
(Lest We Forget) 2025/2026



A(GAP)E



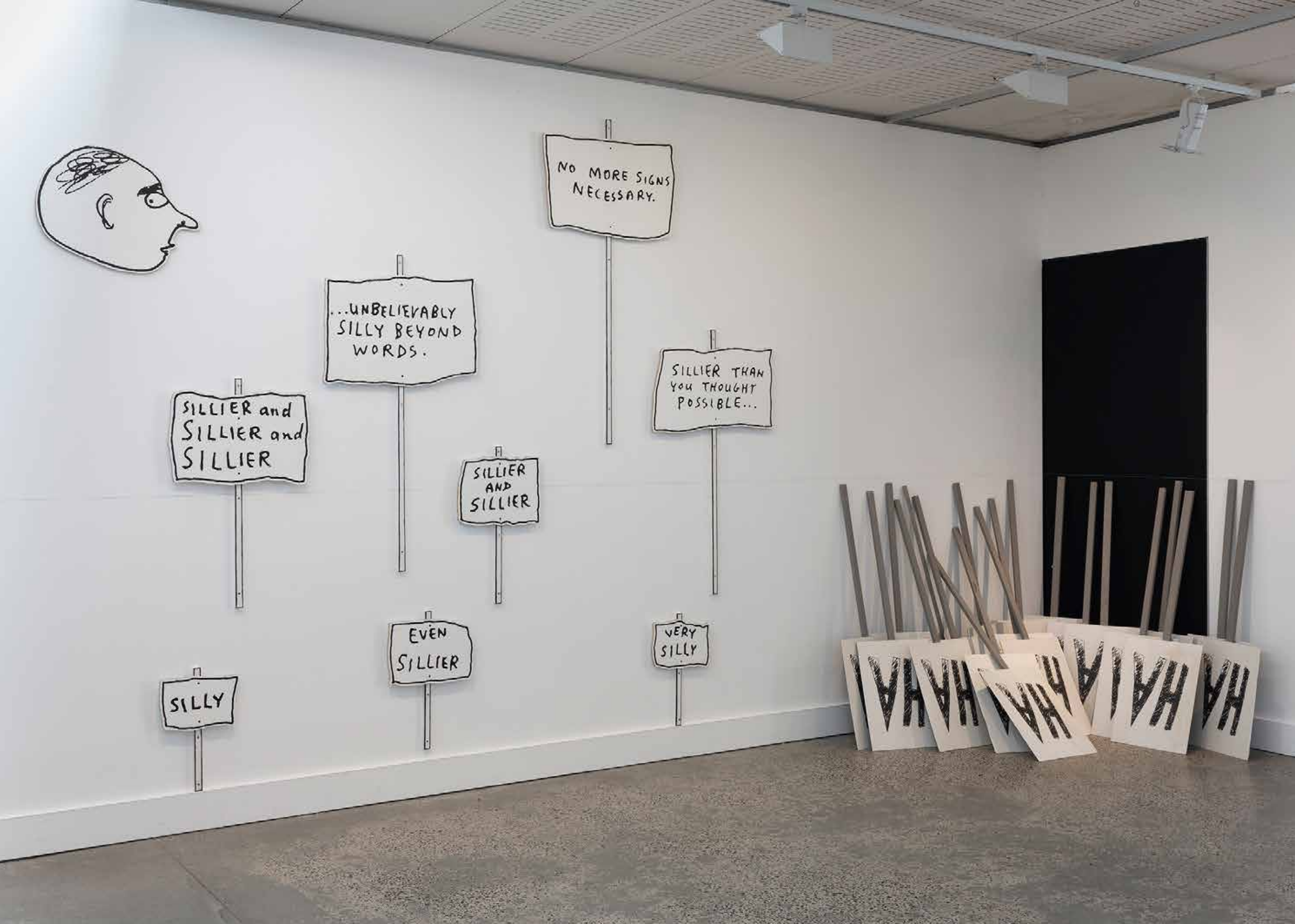


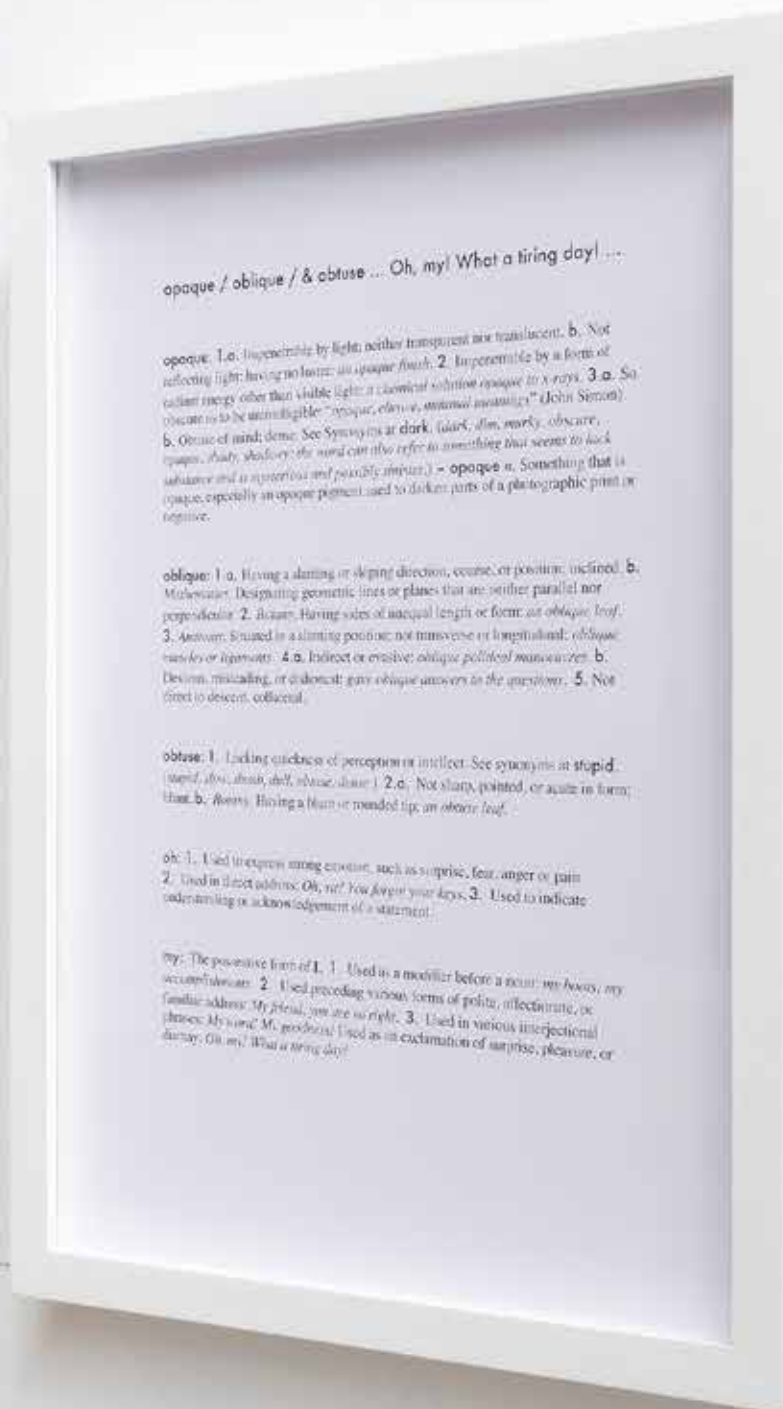


*"... now I'm getting a little
verklemt, talk amongst
yourselves ..."* 2026









opaque / oblique / & obtuse ... Oh, my! What a tiring day! ...

opaque: **1.a.** Impenetrable by light; neither transparent nor translucent. **b.** Not reflecting light; having no lustre: *an opaque finish*. **2.** Impenetrable by a form of radiant energy other than visible light: *a chemical solution opaque to x-rays*. **3.a.** So obscure as to be unintelligible: “*opaque, elusive, minimal meanings*” (John Simon). **b.** Obtuse of mind; dense. See Synonyms at **dark**. (*dark, dim, murky, obscure, opaque, shady, shadowy; the word can also refer to something that seems to lack substance and is mysterious and possibly sinister*.) – **opaque n.** Something that is opaque, especially an opaque pigment used to darken parts of a photographic print or negative.

oblique: **1.a.** Having a slanting or sloping direction, course, or position; inclined. **b. Mathematics.** Designating geometric lines or planes that are neither parallel nor perpendicular. **2. Botany.** Having sides of unequal length or form: *an oblique leaf*. **3. Anatomy.** Situated in a slanting position; not transverse or longitudinal: *oblique muscles or ligaments*. **4.a.** Indirect or evasive: *oblique political manoeuvres*. **b.** Devious, misleading, or dishonest: *gave oblique answers to the questions*. **5.** Not direct in descent; collateral.

obtuse: **1.** Lacking quickness of perception or intellect. See synonyms at **stupid**. (*stupid, slow, dumb, dull, obtuse, dense*.) **2.a.** Not sharp, pointed, or acute in form; blunt. **b. Botany.** Having a blunt or rounded tip: *an obtuse leaf*.

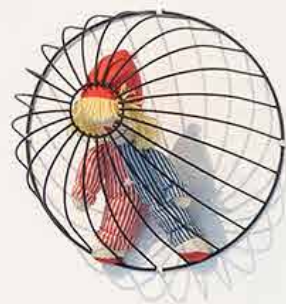
oh: **1.** Used to express strong emotion, such as surprise, fear, anger or pain. **2.** Used in direct address: *Oh, sir! You forgot your keys*. **3.** Used to indicate understanding or acknowledgement of a statement.

my: The possessive form of **I**. **1.** Used as a modifier before a noun: *my boots; my accomplishments*. **2.** Used preceding various forms of polite, affectionate, or familiar address: *My friend, you are so right*. **3.** Used in various interjectional phrases: *My word! My goodness!* Used as an exclamation of surprise, pleasure, or dismay: *Oh, my! What a tiring day!*

Aleks Danko, 2021

(sourced from the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language, Third Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, New York 1992)





PREVIOUS

*NO! NO! NO! NO MORE
MUSEUM OF CRÉCHE ART –
cut the boredom (after
Bruce Nauman) 2019–26*













HA HA – ANY HARMONY?

(Im)Materiality

... how long will I remember this work?

On the matter of art

... how long will other people remember it?

The medium

... is it better than works that are similarly styled?

And the message

... is it better than the blank white wall upon which it hangs?

The dematerialisation of art

... do I love this work, and, if so, how long would I love it?

Living in the age of 'post'

... how much will I think about it?

Lost matter

... how much would I miss it?

Absolute concept

... how often does this work surprise me?

Concrete Universalism

... how many words can I write about it?

Thinking objects

... how much should I pay for it?

Conclusion

... how much should I sell it for?

Notes

... what would I trade it for?

References

... how deep is its historical reference?

Quality

... and, what does it mean, and does that meaning matter?

'Sorry for having to make you suffer' ...

(after Dave Hickey, *Some Things Are Better Than Others*)



*UH-OH from On Top of the
World* project 2022
with Stewart Russell
and John Wardle





Sutton Gallery
Melbourne



EMPTY VOID FILLER,
installation view, Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne, 31 August to
28 September 2024



EMPTY VOID FILLER,
installation view, Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne, 31 August to 28
September 2024











"Are we done? I'd like to get back to staring at nothing" installation view, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne, 25 May to 22 June 2019







*WAIT ... I think this is where I lost
my HULA-HOOP*, installation view,
Sutton Gallery, Melbourne,
26 May to 24 June 2017





Milani Gallery
Brisbane











*[AS.YET.MAYBE.] NOT A TITLE ... in, over,
beside, next to, between, in front of, behind,
through, by, with, for, up, to, against ...
are they still touching? ...*, installation view,
Milani Gallery, Brisbane, 5 to 26 February
2022









Heide Museum of Modern Art
Melbourne











HEIDELBERG VIC
TELEPOIN
MELBOURNE 1969
LET'S WALK A SKY TOGETHER STOP
AND HAVE SILENT WORDS STOP
SOMETIME SOON STOP
LOVE SSTOP
(TELEPOIN 1969) "HEIDE"

HEIDELBERG VIC



TELEPOEM

MELBOURNE 1969

LETS WALK A SKY TOGETHER STOP
AND HAVE SILENT WORDS STOP
SOMETIME SOON STOP

LOVE SSTTOP

(TELEPOEM 1969) "HEIDE"

AUSTRALIAN POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

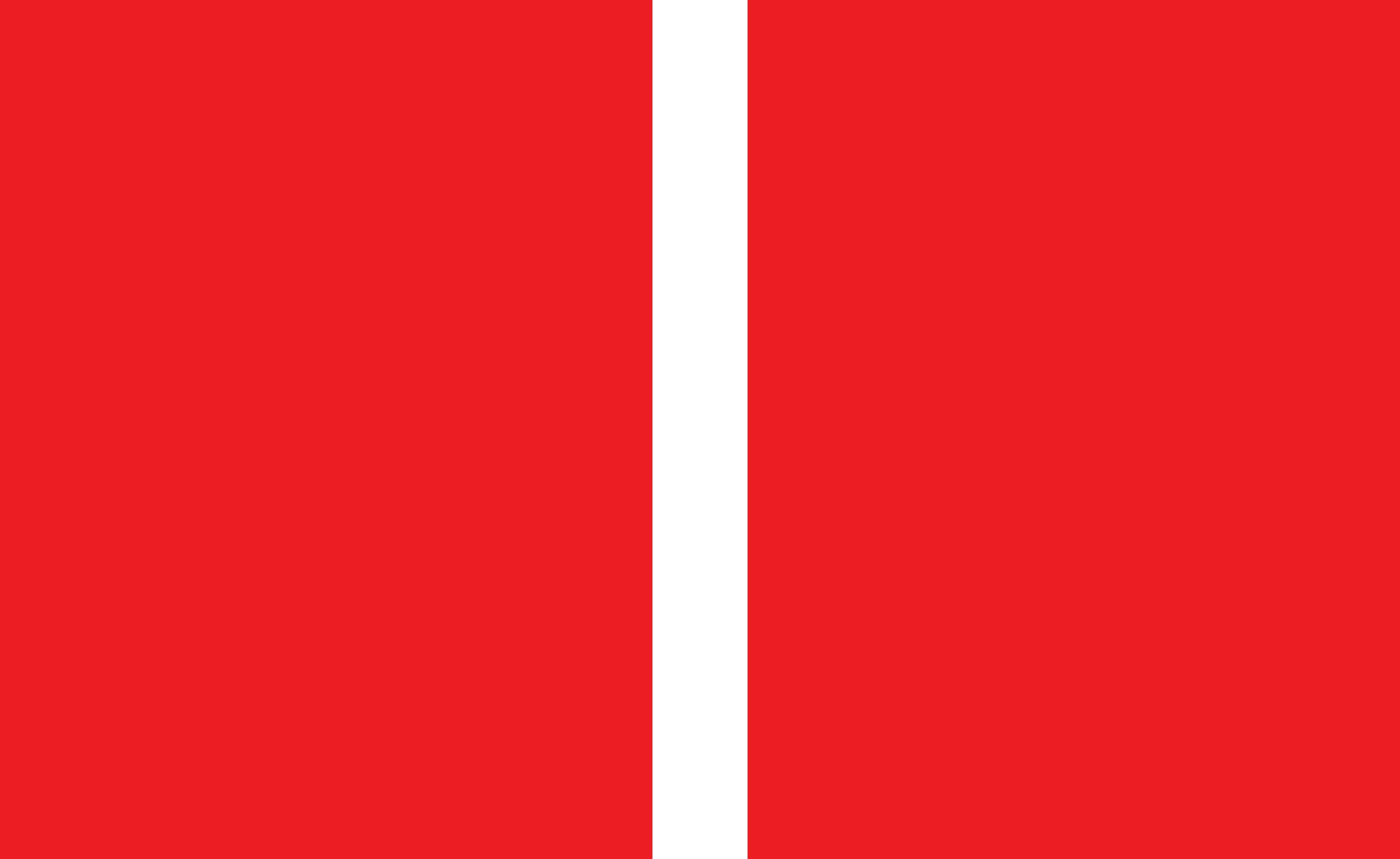
AUSTRALIAN POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

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AUSTRALIAN POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM

AUSTRALIAN POST OFFICE
TELEGRAM





List of works

- 1**
A(GAP)E – mesmerized by some / thing
2026
silkscreened banner, synthetic fabric
248 x 170 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 2**
**A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE –
D’AILLEURS, C’EST TOUJOURS LES
AUTRES QUI MEURENT (Marcel
Duchamp 1887–1968) trans: BESIDES,
IT’S ALWAYS THE OTHERS WHO DIE
(another self-portrait)** 2024–26
plywood, timber stain, oil paint,
galvanized steel shelf with empty frame,
galvanized steel, brass
6 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 3**
A FAMILY RESEMBLANCE 2024
study, framed drawing, pencil
frame 107.5 x 77 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 4**
OOMAMABOOMBA (white out edit)
2017
framed photolitho print with whiteout
frame: 36 x 38.5 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 5**
THE SELFIE PORTRAIT GALLERY
2009–26

**IT’S SUCH A THIN LINE BETWEEN
CLEVER & STUPID**
sandblasted etched mirror,
plastic mirror clips
edition 3 of 10

**NOTHING STUPID BEYOND
THIS POINT**
sandblasted etched mirror,
plastic mirror clips
edition 7 of 10

I GIVE YOU NOTHING
sandblasted etched mirror,
plastic mirror clips
edition 8 of 10
- 6**
and I have to live with UNCLE AL 2018
framed photolitho print
frame: 36 x 38.5 cm
edition 19 of 20
Courtesy the artist
- 7**
Etched Idiot (another self-portrait)
2014–26
framed etching print
frame: 32.5 x 34.9 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 8**
Embossed Idiot (another self-portrait)
2014–26
framed embossed print from
an etched plate
frame: 32.5 x 34.9 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 9**
**VOICE / VOICELESS study for And!
What happened to the VOICE? And
at What PRICE? (Lest We Forget)**
2025/2026
two framed ink and cotton bandage
drawings, wooden relief, acrylic paint,
galvanized steel
4 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 10**
**BEWARE: SCULPTURE’S ENEMY (debit
or credit)** 2022
galvanized steel, timber, acrylic paint
224 x 75 x 52 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 11**
A(GAP)E 2026
flag, silkscreened synthetic fabric, two
block plywood forms, timber stain
3 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 12**
**No more signs necessary or when
David Shrigley met Michael Leunig**
2017–26
acrylic paint on plywood, silkscreened
paper on wooden placards
29 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 13**
Oh, my! What a tiring day! 2024
framed laser print
frame: 44.8 x 32.4 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 14**
The Elf in Danko 2026
plywood, timber, acrylic paint,
plaster cast
62 x 30 x 28 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 15**
verklemt 2026
framed colour laser print
frame: 44.8 x 32.4 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 16**
**NO! NO! NO! NO MORE MUSEUM
OF CRÉCHE ART – cut the boredom
(after Bruce Nauman)** 2019–26
felt, plywood, synthetic polymer,
galvanized steel, analogue clock
approx. 24 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 17**
TAPE MEASURE LAUGH (a self portrait)
2022
framed photolitho offset print
frame 60 x 45 cm
edition 36 of 10
Courtesy the artist
- 18**
corner / cornered / cornerwise
2021–26
yellow acrylic painted framed laser prints
2 parts: each 42 x 57 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 19**
UH-OH from *On Top of the World*
project 2022
with Stewart Russell and John Wardle
video
Courtesy the artist
- 20**
**Dyalishfoued Modernism (no more
art language)** 2019
recycled cardboard, Masonite clipboards,
plywood, C-type photograph,
wooden chairs
9 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist
- 21**
Plinth Prop & Tilt Too (PPTT) 2022
galvanized sheet metal, acrylic paint,
ink on timber
157 x 48 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 22**
In the presence of Folly 2022
galvanized sheet metal, wooden
cupboard, plywood, acrylic paint
2 parts: overall 288 x 120 x 64 cm
Courtesy the artist
- 23**
**“... now I’m getting a little verklemt,
talk amongst yourselves ...”** 2026
corten steel plinths with white
Chinagraph pencil floor drawing
6 parts: dimensions variable
Courtesy the artist and McClelland

ALEKS DANKO
born Adelaide, Australia 1950

2016–2026

**INDIVIDUAL AND
COLLABORATIVE EXHIBITIONS**

2026

A(GAP)E – mesmerized by some / thing,
McClelland Sculpture Park+Gallery,
Melbourne

2025

MY FELLOW AUS-TRA-LIENS (CODA)
“... They took the Dreamtime and turned
it into a Nightmare ...” (and remember
always carry a stick) *FOUR ROOMS*,
Milani Gallery, Brisbane

2024

EMPTY VOID FILLER, Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne

2022

KLIK! KLAK! VERTI-KLAK!, Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

[AS. YET. MAYBE.] NOT A TITLE ... in,
over, beside, next to, between, in front
of, behind, through, by, with, for, up to,
against ... are they still touching? ..., with
Nigel Lendon, Milani Gallery, Brisbane

2019

*“Are we done? I’d like to get back to
staring at nothing”*, Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne

2017

*“Wait ... I think this is where I lost my
hula-hoop”*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

2015–16

Aleks Danko: MY FELLOW
AUS-TRA-ALIENS, Museum of
Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney;
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2025–2026

Kaldor Public Art Project 38, Thomas
Demand: The Object Lesson, Art Gallery
of New South Wales, Sydney

2025

ASSEMBLE: Orange Festival of Arts
1965–1987, Orange Regional Art
Museum, Victoria.

2023–25

Interfacial Intimacies, Latrobe Regional
Gallery, Morwell, Victoria; South East
Centre for Contemporary Art, Bega,
NSW; Redcliffe Art Gallery, Queensland;
Museum of Art and Culture, Lake
Macquarie, NSW; Plimsoll Gallery,
University of Tasmania, Hobart.

2024

Shadow creep: works from the collection,
Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria

APW 40X40, Australian Print Workshop,
Sydney Contemporary Art Fair

Heide Modern: A Space Between, Heide
Museum of Modern Art Melbourne

MATERIAL CONCERN, Res Arts Project
Space, Melbourne

2023

brick vase clay cup jug, (curated by Glenn
Barkley), Art Gallery of New South Wales,
Sydney

40 x 40, Australian Print Workshop,
Melbourne

It’s not you, it’s me, The Fiona and Sidney
Myer Gallery, University of Melbourne,
Melbourne

2022

Listening to music played backwards,
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

XXX: Celebrating 30 years of Sutton
Gallery, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

2021

This is a Poem, (curated by Melissa
Keys), Buxton Contemporary, University
of Melbourne

Connecting the World Through Sculpture:
From the Ground Up, Monash University
Museum of Art, Melbourne

2019–20

Making Art Public: 50 Years of Kaldor
Public Art Projects, Art Gallery of New
South Wales, Sydney

2019

Manifesto, Margaret Lawrence Gallery,
Melbourne

2018–19

Power and Imagination: Conceptual Art,
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

Beyond Reason: Exploring the logic
of the imagination, QUT Art Museum,
Brisbane

2018

works from an anonymous collection II,
Sutton Projects, Melbourne

2017

9 X 5 NOW, Margaret Lawrence Gallery,
Melbourne

2016–17

MCA Collection: Today Tomorrow
Yesterday, Museum of Contemporary Art
Australia, Sydney

2015–16

Howard Arkley (and friends...), (curated
by Anthony Fitzpatrick and Victoria Lynn),
TarraWarra Museum of Art, Melbourne

PRIZES, GRANTS, COMMISSIONS

2025

Development grant, Creative Victoria.
Artist residency, exhibition, and public workshops at McClelland Sculpture Park+Gallery, Langwarrin, Victoria

2022

Commission, *On Top of the World* project, Wardle Studio, Melbourne.
Artist's flag, in collaboration with Stewart Russell, Spacecraft Studio

2021

Commission, *Moments of mind...a breath in time... (in memory of Sweeney Reed)*, site-specific installation. Doll's House, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

2016

Residency (with Jude Walton), *The Terence and Lynette Fern Cite Internationale des Arts Residency*, Paris, France

COLLECTIONS

Art Gallery of Ballarat, Victoria
Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide
Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth
Artbank, Sydney
Australian Film Commission, Sydney
Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
British Museum, London UK
City of Adelaide
City of Melbourne Art Collection
City of Port Phillip, Melbourne
Flinders University Collection Adelaide
Geelong Art Gallery, Victoria
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
John Kaldor, Sydney
Mildura Arts Centre, Victoria
Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne
Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney
Muswellbrook Regional Art Centre, New South Wales
National Film Library, Canberra
National Gallery of Australia, Canberra
National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
Newcastle Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales
Parliament House, Canberra
Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston
Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane
Shepparton Art Gallery, Victoria
South Australian School of Art/ University of South Australia, Adelaide
Transfield Art Collection, Sydney
University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane
Tasmanian School of Art, University of Tasmania, Hobart
Wollongong Art Gallery, Wollongong

Acknowledgements

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At Milani Gallery, Brisbane: Josh Milani, Director, for his ongoing support and Henry Taylor for exhibition installation.

At Heide Museum of Modern Art: Lesley Harding, Director, for the Doll's House site-specific commissioning of *Moments of mind ... and a breath in time ... (for Sweeney Reed)* 2021.

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Thank you to Creative Victoria in supporting this artist-in-residency and the *A(GAP)E* exhibition at McClelland.

And at home my partner Jude Walton for her infinite patience, wisdom and encouragement, and the fact that she says "... and I have to live with uncle AL ..."

'... I call Freud the father of stand-up comedy because, through jokes, he articulated an acceptable way for the discontent, or marginal malcontent, to break the law, to upset the status quo, with impunity. In this way, the comic has affinities with the outlaw. Every comic is a social 'scofflaw' who could be charged with breaking and entering — with breaking society's rules and restrictions, and with entering people's psyches. What the joker steals are secure, familiar ways of thinking and feeling. But the joker is a remarkably cordial generous thief, leaving behind a valuable treasure called pleasure ...'

Barry Sanders, *Sudden Glory – Laughter as Subversive History*, Beacon Press, Boston USA, 1995



A(GAP)E—mesmerized by some / thing ... Aleks Danko
a reflection 2016–2026

McClelland
Saturday 14 March – Sunday 14 June 2026

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gravelled, thrown off, intimidated, disorganized, daunted, stymied, woolly, made to scratch their head, numbed out of it, up against a brick wall, without an answer, woolly-headed, not knowing if you are coming or going, woolly-minded, choky, disturbed, buried, verklempt, swamped, bowled-over, defeated, overthrown, discounted, frustrated, run-over, swept off your feet, unable to continue, absent-minded, unbelieving, disbelieving, in disbelief, pushing the panic button, in a panic, have cold feet, in a cold sweat, agog, anticipatory, anticipant, expectant, eager, anticipating, expecting, hopeful, anticipative, awaiting, excited, anxious, breathless, ready, prepared, raring, alert, hoping, keen, on tenterhooks, in suspense, waiting, with bated breath, keyed up, on pins and needles, spellbound, captivated, fascinated, beguiled, entranced, enraptured, charmed, hypnotised, awestruck, mesmerized, riveted, delighted, enthralled, rapt, caught up, dazzled, gripped, overwhelmed, transfixed, transported, amazed, awestricken, breathless, enticed, hooked, bewitched, impressed, thrilled, bedazzled, held, starstruck, stunned, won over, open-mouthed, under someone's spell, engrossed, absorbed, intent, enchanted, immersed, involved, enamoured, preoccupied, attentive, engaged, infatuated, focussed, intoxicated, wrapped up, occupied, deep, aroused, busy, observant, titillated, tantalised, ravished, hung up, lost, interested, excited, smitten, taken, abstracted, seduced, absent, daydreaming, dreaming, content, oblivious, caught up in, absent-minded, hooked on, carried away, under a spell, taken up, snowed, drawn to, intrigued, affected, captive, trapped mentally, enchanted, concerned with, obsessed, ecstatic, elated, euphoric, consumed, rapturous, exhilarated, buried, rhapsodic, into, tied up, elevated, enrapt, giddy, eat sleep and breathe, turned on, all ears, bound-up, heady, on cloud nine, distracted, over the moon, bugged, brooding, overpowered, anxious, worried, extremely interested, very curious ... wrapped-up, in a world of your own ... [immersed in thought] ...

