

TRANSIT

Ross Byers is the fifth emerging artist to receive a solo commission at the Devonport Regional Gallery. The commission allows artists the opportunity to research and produce work under the mentorship of a curator.

Byers' compelling exhibition is the result of rigorous research. Extensive drawings and 3D productions have been created to finetune his practice, and shape the objects of his imagination and thoughts. It has been a fascinating process working with Ross on different phases of the project — from organising timelines and discussing ideas to studio visits and collating information for the exhibition.

I am sure that *Transit* will appeal to a wide audience, and that Ross's workshops and talks will allow an opportunity for further discussion and feedback on the exhibition. Deb Malor's accompanying essay is an insightful response to Ross's process and work, and I thank her for enthusiastically embracing this project. I also congratulate Ross on the level of professionalism he has demonstrated in the production and presentation of *Transit*.

Ellie Ray
Director

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BIOGRAPHY

Ross Byers completed a Bachelor of Contemporary Arts at the School of Visual and Performing Arts, University of Tasmania, Launceston, in 2002. During that time he also undertook a student exchange at the University of Hawai'i, Mānoa Campus in Honolulu. In 2006 Byers completed a Master of Fine Arts and Design at the School of Visual and Performing Arts, University of Tasmania, Launceston. From late 2010 until 2012, Byers undertook a residency in Glasgow in the United Kingdom. Byers has been included in several group exhibitions in Australia and internationally, and has undertaken five solo exhibitions. *Transit* will be his sixth. Byers has completed commissions for public sculptures and conducted workshops in Australia and overseas. Earlier this year he completed an arts@work AIR (Artist in Residence) program at Hellyer College, Burnie.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

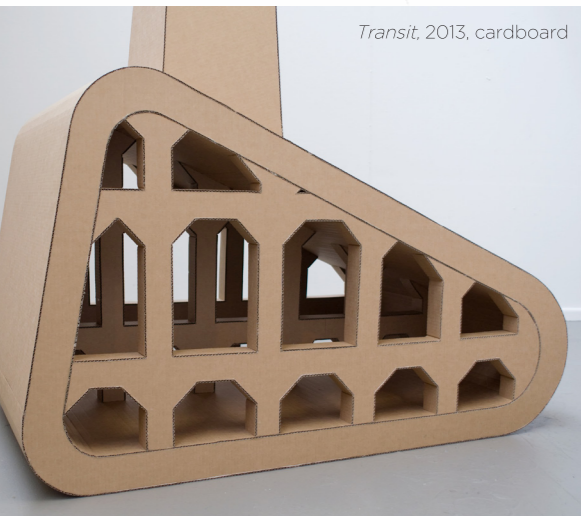
Ross Byers would like to thank David Hamilton, Deborah Malor, Mary Machen, Ellie Ray and the DRG staff for their assistance and support with this project. Ross would also like to acknowledge the teachers and mentors who have guided and supported him throughout his university studies and early career in the arts.

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TRANSIT:
ROSS BYERS
SOLO COMMISSION
EXHIBITION
2013



Transit, 2013, cardboard





Network, 2013, cardboard

STORIES IN FORM

Talking to Ross Byers about his art is like taking a journey along a path where every divergence offers the promise of something more, of a transition from one level of understanding to another. He talks around his work, rather than directly to it. Listen, as the layers build, tales are told, and a wider narrative develops. Watch, as romantic flights are grounded in pragmatic action, imagination in craft.

Byers is, as he himself has observed, a man of stories.

Those who see in Byers' eccentric cardboard shapes something of Dr Seuss's *The Cat in the Hat* can be assured that the dynamic objects in this collection owe something to that childhood character. The use of cardboard only adds to the ramshackle madness of form, seemingly always in movement, a wonderfully illogical juxtaposition of the precision of the mechanical with the temporary and the vernacular.

The idea of play is important to Byers' work. Play moves the functional processes of craft into the realm of art. In this body of work, Byers responds to both childhood memory and to the childlike quality that is inherent in play. But the work, like his stories, is multi-layered. Byers' assertion that 'Before materiality comes thought', suggests a process that recalls the ideas of Richard Sennett (*The Craftsman*, 2008), who wrote



Ebb, 2013, cardboard

of the abilities required of a craftsman: making a matter concrete, reflecting on its qualities and expanding its sense.

Drawing is at the core of Byers' creativity and allows the transition of ideas and materials into form. The process commences when he attempts to catch the ethereal, materialising his thoughts in his journals — each drawing having the potential to become the precursor to a sculptural object. Against this apparently intuitive yet deliberate thinking, is a calling up of craft, through which the initial images are interpreted as engineering drawings in preparation for making. Finally, when a sculptural form has been completed, a drawing

is made that captures its new existence, the outcome of thinking, drawing, making, of work certainly but also of play.

The ritual of thinking, planning, drawing, cutting and assembling is one of simplicity, of paring back. It is also something that Byers applies to his own life, which is irrevocably his art and remains in a perpetually transitory state. The need for a stabilising ritual within this constant movement might have some origins in an intense, perhaps obsessive childhood experience of religion, a sparseness of external form that belies the passions within. The gallery-as-container for forms restrained by a ritualistic practice (thinking, delineating, incising and repeating) is a familiar space, where each component is observed in a childlike way — not simply reiterated and fragmented but now playful and relational. Ritual is materialised in towers and buttresses, perpendiculars and curves, each reduced to what is necessary to fulfil a function.

So the Gallery space, with its ecclesiastical origins, cradles Ross Byers' individual forms which, in turn, complement the architecture. Components talk to each other, recognise familial connections and play on formal relationships. In their simplicity life, art and architecture become family, each extending the hand of welcome and of making.

Dr Deb Malor, 2013

LIST OF WORKS

Network, 2013, cardboard, 210 x 120 x 120 cm
Tilt, 2013, cardboard, 295 x 235 x 90 cm
Transit, 2013, cardboard, 265 x 151 x 92 cm
Ebb (triptych),
 2013, cardboard, 69 x 109 x 52 cm each
Flow (triptych),
 2013, cardboard, 69 x 109 x 52 cm each
Lay: Ode to Rachel Whiteread,
 2013, cardboard, 25 pieces 42 x 29 x 35 cm each
Untitled drawings (multiple),
 2013, ink on paper, 29.7 x 21 cm each



Flow, 2013, cardboard