

# Eddie Clemens

## Delusional Architecture

**27 February - 24 April 2010** **Hocken Gallery, Hocken Collections**

*The delusional architecture is interesting. She believes a machine called a 'terminator', which looks human of course, was sent back through time to kill her. And also that the father of her child was a soldier, sent to protect her . . . he was from the future too. . .*

- Dr Silberman, *Terminator 2* (1991).

Eddie Clemens's choice of title for this exhibition is taken from the script of *Terminator 2* (1991). The science-fiction movie starring Arnold Schwarzenegger was acclaimed at the time for its commercial success and breakthrough use of natural human motion in a computer generated character. The movie follows Sarah Connor, her 10-year-old son John, and a reprogrammed Terminator from the future as they defend themselves from a T-1000 and attempt to prevent Judgment Day, when machines will begin to exterminate humanity.

Set in 1995, eleven years after the events of *The Terminator*, *Terminator 2* shows John Connor now living in foster care. His birth mother, who had been preparing him throughout childhood for his future role as the leader of the human resistance against Skynet, has been arrested for attempting to bomb a computer factory. She is remanded to a hospital for the criminally insane under the supervision of Dr. Silberman, a psychologist who diagnoses her with 'delusional architecture'.

The exhibition's title piece, *Delusional Architecture* (2009), is made from multiple units of the same size which resemble the shape of a classic ticket booth window mounted on the wall.<sup>1</sup> Created using grey audio cable woven to suggest diamond mesh fencing, this piece draws our attention to the power of consumerism, architecture and science fiction, and their shared ability to hold us psychologically captive. The work and its fading amber LED lights recall the moment of time travel in *Terminator 2* when electrical disturbance manifests as a molten void in a metal fence.

The holes slashed in each 'fence' point to 'both the fugitive act of escape and the concept of escapism - ever-fuelled by the entertainment industry's ability to capture the popular imagination using increasingly spectacular effects and its appeal to the human need to remove oneself from the rigours of daily life'.<sup>2</sup> The cuts in the fences also reference Clemens's interest in the work of architect-artist Gordon Matta Clark, famous for his 'building cuts'<sup>3</sup>, and the slashed canvases of Lucio Fontana that date to the late 1950s.<sup>4</sup>

In *New World* (2009), a series of six photographs printed on adhesive vinyl, Clemens re-images that perennial symbol of consumerism - the supermarket trolley. By mounting small fluorescent tubes onto each image in place of the original cart handles, the work evokes the technique of irradiation used in supermarkets to prolong the shelf life of fresh produce, and suggests it as a possible method for ridding shopping carts of harmful germs and bacteria. By photographing the trolleys in a dark underground car park building, Clemens draws our attention to the sinister side of advertising campaigns that promote hand sanitisers and other hygiene products by fuelling consumer anxieties about harmful disease.

Clemens's *Fibre Optic Broom #1* and *Fibre Optic Broom #2* (2009) also suggest society's obsession with cleanliness and its increasing reliance on technology. The bristles of these two wooden brooms emit alternate red, green and blue light rays, a colour combination that follows the RGB model on which television and other screen-based electronic systems are based. The use of these specific light rays and the fibre optic thread of the bristles, juxtaposes the old technology of RGB with the more recent innovation of high-speed broadband.

An underlying reference to Dunedin student life is evident in these works which Clemens produced during his tenure as the 2009 Frances Hodgkins Fellow at the University of Otago. *The Fallen* (2009), a collection of prone wine bottles stuffed inside tissue boxes and 'spilling' shapes of white silk over the floor, alludes to student parties. The wine bottle, like the gashed fence-work of *Delusional Architecture*, also represents the human desire for escapism.

Fans, hidden inside the faux tissue boxes, generate artificial breezes to produce a ripple effect in the shapes of silk. Cut to mimic the Hocken's floor-plan, the pieces of fluttering cloth create a 'spillage' of architecture. This installation references the New Zealand cultural practice of placing boxes of tissues on the rear shelves of cars, a behaviour which Clemens investigated in his seminal work *The Phenomenon of Tissue Boxes Placed on the Rear Shelves of Automobiles* (2006). Modelled on the 'Pams' brand of tissues, the boxes display that label's black rose motif. Clemens relates this design to the practice in vineyards of planting rose bushes at the end of each row of vines. Twisted wires that snake across the floor, connecting each Quartz Reef wine bottle and tissue box assemblage to the power source, further this association by emulating the intertwined nature of grapevines.

Clemens's *Sconces* (2009) are constructed from clear plastic tubing and black plastic funnels that serve as light-shades encasing kitsch, flame-shaped bulbs. This series makes a visual connection between the wall-mounted decorative light fixtures known as sconces and the University of Oxford drinking ritual known as 'sconcing'. Both practices are couched in formal traditions that have developed over several centuries. Décor conventions dictate the proper positioning of sconces within an interior scheme (they should be hung at a certain height, in pairs and on either side of doors etc.) and sconcing demands that a person drink a tankard of ale as a penalty for some breach of accepted etiquette at formal dinners in the college hall. The contemporary New Zealand practice of consuming large quantities of alcohol using 'beer bong' made from lengths of tubing and funnels is now a familiar rite of passage for first year University students in this country. Clemens's *Sconces* suggest this shared etymology, being fashioned and positioned in the manner of wall sconces and signals a historical relationship between the Oxford ritual and the local cultural tradition.

<sup>1</sup> The form of their frame-like structures is based on a ticket window that Clemens saw displayed at the Otago Settlers Museum. This artifact was originally installed at Allanton Station, South of Dunedin, where it was the site of rail ticket purchase.

<sup>2</sup> Eddie Clemens, email correspondence with Natalie Poland, Curator of Pictorial Collections, Hocken Collections, 19 Feb 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Matta Clark's cuts radically alter existing buildings, for example, a house is cut in half vertically in order to alter the perception of the building and its surrounding environment.

<sup>4</sup> Lucio Fontana began creating slashed canvases in 1959. His cuts (or *tagli*) have the effect of drawing the viewer into space. Rather than being violent actions, he claimed 'I have constructed, not destroyed'. Together with other artists, Fontana signed *The First Manifesto of Spatialism* in 1947. That document proposed that "artworks are destroyed by time." Its signatories stated that "We spatial artists have escaped from our cities, we want to recover our true nature, our real image: a change awaited by all creation."

## Biography

Born in 1977, Eddie Clemens grew up in Rotorua, where his mother Lori Clemens' ran an art gallery. After graduating from Ilam School of Fine Arts in 2000 with a major in painting he went on to complete a Masters in sculpture at the Elam School of Fine Arts at the University of Auckland.

While still a student at Ilam his art appeared in several group shows at the High Street Project and in the exhibition *Showstoppers* at the Jonathan Smart Gallery (30 March - 15 May 2004). Before graduating he did an artist page project for *Pavement* magazine (June/July 2003) and he participated in a similar project for the Christchurch Art Gallery's *Bulletin* magazine (Dec 2008-Feb 2009). In 2005 he was a finalist in the Trust Waikato National Contemporary Art Award and in the James Wallace Trust Award.

In 2006 Clemens's won the Auckland City Public Library Light Commission with *The Pinball Lanterns*. Launched in November of 2007 and hanging in the Library's atrium café, this kinetic sculpture comprises three different sized lanterns that use pinball 'flippers' to activate sequenced LED lights.

Clemens has won several major artist awards including the Olivia Spencer Bower artist-in-residence at the Christchurch Arts Centre in 2008 and the following year he was awarded the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship at the University of Otago. In 2009 he created a work for *Let it Be Now* at the Christchurch Art Gallery (12 December 2008 - 8 March 2009), and one of his sculptures appeared in *Modern Physics*, held at Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts, Manukau City (10 October - 29 November 2009).

Clemens is represented by the Sue Crockford Gallery, Auckland and Nadene Milne Gallery, Queenstown. He currently lives in Dunedin.

## The Frances Hodgkins Fellowship

Applications for the Frances Hodgkins Fellowship close on 1 June each year. Application forms for the 2011 Fellowship will be available in March 2010. Please contact Nicola Richmond (03) 479 5793, nicola.richmond@otago.ac.nz or visit www.otago.ac.nz/otagofellows/forms.html for more information.