

Raafat Ishak: Recipes for aversion and strategy

Work in progress #6

Raafat Ishak: Recipes for aversion and strategy

Work in progress #6



Foreword

It's striking how much time Melburnians devote to declaring what their city could be, or was, or should be. There's a constant stream of discussion papers, reports and projections. Should Melbourne grow outwards or upwards? Should this building be preserved? Should that development proposal be endorsed or rejected? Curiously, for all of their passionate conviction none of these declarations succeed in defining our city. Although it's a very physical thing, a city can seem ungraspable; too big to be grasped in a single statement, too diverse to have a distinctive essence, too mobile to be pinned down.

In his art, Raafat Ishak captures something of this contradiction. There are suggestions that buildings and urban space might be mapped. Ishak's visual language owes something to architects, engineers and cartographers. And there are allusions to the constituent parts of urban space: private residences, public buildings, churches and institutions, utilities and roadways. The titles of his paintings often point to the discourses that might define or direct a city; he uses words like government, geography and organisation. Alongside Ishak's urban scenes are emblems of nationhood: crests, stars and flags.

But the more important visual language that Ishak uses is the language of paint: sensual, fluid and intuitive. Like a character in a novel, the paint starts to take on its own life and go in directions that its master hasn't foreseen. There is a sense of both annotation and improvisation. Here Ishak communicates the ways in which a city can be concrete and ineffable at the same time.

Raafat Ishak is a product of the 1990s, a period when political and philosophical controversies raged around the questions of who owned public space, of the possibility of a republic, of the nature of national identity. So he, too, is declaring what his city could be. He does so in a modest, seductive and rigorous way. He doesn't bang a drum, or editorialise in paint. Raafat Ishak contributes a poetic voice to the polemics on Melbourne's identity.

Our sincere thanks go to Raafat Ishak for his dedication to the development and presentation of this project, the sixth in our Work in Progress series of mid-career artist surveys begun in 2001. We are grateful also to the many lenders from Melbourne, Adelaide and Sydney who have generously loaned artworks to this exhibition. We would not have been able to realise this major undertaking without their support.

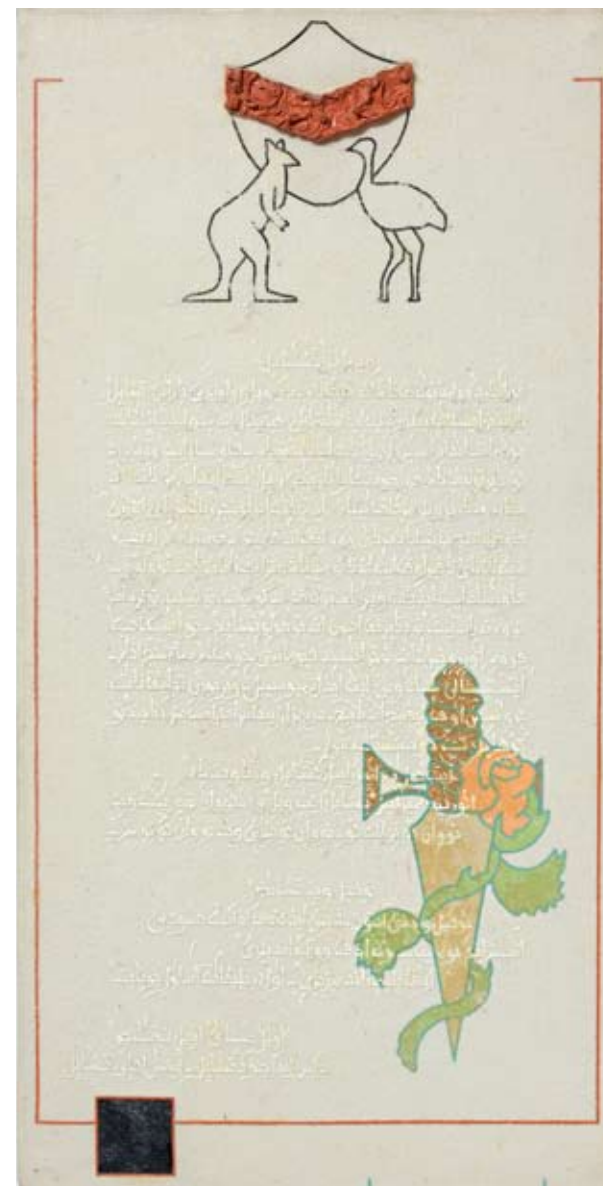
Dr Chris McAuliffe
Director



Catalogue no. 2 *Untitled* 1992 oil on canvas
41 x 21 cm



Catalogue no. 3 *Untitled* 1992 oil on canvas
40.5 x 20.5 cm



Interview

The interview that follows between the exhibition's curator Bala Starr and Raafat Ishak took place via email in April 2010. Both thought the interview model a good format to explore the oblique and subtle motifs that have provided the basis for much of Ishak's art over nearly twenty years. The interview ranges across Ishak's various working strategies such as installations and collaborative projects, as well as private studio methods. As his exhibition title, *Recipes for aversion and strategy*, proposes, Ishak is not an artist who would necessarily agree that contemporary art practices can be readily unpacked for broad consumption. Rather, he might suggest that art is part of a constantly shifting process that takes account of the political and cultural circumstances of governments and institutions as much as individuals.

Bala Starr: You have often introduced a black square into exhibitions of your work. In the current survey, an enormous black half-cube titled *Apparition of a miserable acquaintance no. 2* [cat. no. 90] rests at an angle against a wall. Was the exhibition *And government* at 200 Gertrude Street in 1995 the first time you'd used the black square along with paintings?

Raafat Ishak: The Gertrude Street exhibition was the first time I'd used the black square as an entity in itself. That was partly because *And government* was my first show. I became interested in the exhibition space as something that had to be handled as a context, or a specific given platform to activate the paintings I was working on.



Installation view, *And government*,
200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1995
Photo: Robert Colvin

I had used the black square as far back as 1987. A year before I began art school, I made a series of four paintings that were preoccupied with abstraction, particularly form, in relation to the black square. While the paintings were abstract, they were contending with a narrative, something that is in stark contradiction to abstraction. The narrative was about the black square and how it was entrapped within abstraction. The painting *Good ship* from 2000 [cat. no. 38] in the current show follows up on this idea.

In the final painting of the 1987 series, the black square is presented as something else, something that doesn't belong to a historical evolution of thought or organisation. It's like it had always been there but had the misfortune of being mixed up in bad business. Earlier in the same year I'd made two paintings that used the black cube of Mecca and idealised its centrality. The paintings were like aerial views but stylised, each image a colourful map of separate zones surrounding the black cube. I had discovered Malevich by this stage and realised the potential universality of the black cube/square and the opportunity to shift between two- and three-dimensional expression by literally alternating between the Kaaba and Malevich's black square.

Malevich is someone you were introduced to via art school or because of the influence of artists associated with Store 5 at the time?

Both, but I did come across the black square by accident, before art school, thinking such a thing could not have existed. I was fortunate enough to have been educated by exceptional artists and historians, while Store 5 influenced the way I understood how emerging artists could negotiate practice outside the confines of institutions and commercial galleries.

The 200 Gertrude Street show *And government was the beginning of your interest in seriality as well.*

It started the idea of seriality and repetition, which I hadn't anticipated before. The paintings I showed there were not specifically made for the space or for any finite installation for that matter. I was given an opportunity to contextualise my practice and their arrangement was influenced by those circumstances.

There were thirty-nine small works in the show, but I'd made at least fifty or sixty. Seriality came out of wanting to separate the black square from the paintings, to make it sculptural within a space. It made sense to emulate the Kaaba while also maintaining Malevich's square as the end-point of painting and, consequentially, Modernism. In doing so, the black square in the Gertrude show worked as an end-point in itself, a full stop with the added role of a pilgrimage site, somewhere to go to, circle, and then return. This, at least for me, implied that there is no one painting, just as there is no one person in a pilgrimage, it's a collective undertaking.

Is there a connection between your sense of the black square as ‘something that has always been there’, outside history, and your growing up in Cairo in a Coptic Orthodox family? Or is that too blunt an association to make?

I’m not even sure people in the Middle East are aware of the Kaaba being a black cube, in a historical or symbolic sense. We were surrounded by images of the Kaaba everywhere, it was a given that it was black and that it was a cube, but its aesthetic attributes and its historical significance as a pagan site were never discussed. As a Coptic Orthodox, the Kaaba had absolutely no relationship to my spiritual upbringing, or what there was of it. My personal interest in the Kaaba, still non-formal or historical at that point, was an interest in Islam and its rituals. I have strange memories of spending time alone as a child, hiding and pretending to pray towards Mecca as a Muslim.

You’ve consistently used standardised formats and scale, repetition and regularity in the organisation of your work conceptually as much as aesthetically to create certain kinds of experiences. Do the works that come off the stretcher and onto walls and floor—wall drawings and site-specific works—also follow particular principles?

The rules of installation are set by the architecture of the space. That’s what interests me in exhibiting, and consequentially informs my interest in architecture and context. Spaces provide their own rules and an inner logic prevails. It is also a way of differentiating between what is made as a private studio sequence of research, speculation and experimentation, and what is publicly realised of that process.

Seriality is a strategy I’ve arrived at purely as a tool for production, a studio system that is detached from the exhibition space and more concerned with research and speculation. Seriality is also a system of speaking in various languages, or exploring the variety of languages and dialogues that can be presented in visual form. Possibly it’s something to do with adapting from one language to another, and trying to find ways to express the same thing in various tongues. Some expressions can’t be interpreted, because languages also have their own inherent logic which relies on a unique history of interpreting meaning.

My use of seriality and repetition presumes that the visual language has many facets that imply many things. Yet, perversely and insistently, I try to work out the possibility of one image bearing the same meaning in many different forms.

Your language does come across as idiosyncratic. When working with words, do you think about how they sound or read in another of the languages in which you’re fluent [French and Arabic]?

No, I’ve never done that, though sometimes I write a title phonetically in Arabic, so that an Arabic reader would be reading English words. That’s how I generally employ Arabic text in the paintings. I try to use words that can be mistaken for something else, whether by sound or meaning. For example, the double meaning in ‘gone good government’; or ‘good government good government’, which in effect implies ‘good dog good dog’. Often, titles have very particular personal meanings, directed at a covert audience and establishing a dialogue on the periphery of the actual work.

The titles are specific. Do you think of them as having an ethical character?

I'm not entirely sure about ethical; perhaps they do in some cases. *Superficial tears for white trash* [cat. nos 58 and 59] was about recognising that there is a system for accommodating undesirables. The painting was of people in the crowd at a sporting stadium but I installed its three parts beneath a sink in an old milk bar [*Home ground*, Ocular Lab Inc., 2005]. I was implying that an antagonism towards trash (or white trash) is misguided, superficial, and self-serving. The systems that we uphold and vehemently conserve are inherently antagonistic and dependent on double standards.

Apparition of a miserable acquaintance was less complex. It concerned the black square as an unwelcome apparition, a mistimed end-point. The first time this was shown and constructed [*Home ground*] followed an unexpected visit from a friend who wanted to temporarily stay at our house. More an acquaintance than a friend, he was diagnosed with bipolar disorder and in really bad shape. He parked himself in our house and was totally miserable. The leaning cube is a reflection on that experience: a parked cube, waiting to be appropriately located. Misery and death are significant contributors in deciphering this work I think. Neither Malevich's black square nor Mecca's black cube are disputed sites. They are both positioned vertically as end-points in their own right. The leaning black cube negotiates the unresolved space between creation and production, the studio and the gallery and, more specifically, birth and death.



Superficial tears for white trash
(installation view, *Home ground*,
Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne, 2005)
Photo: Julie Davies

**Is there an ambience or tone to your use of words?
The range seems deliberately narrow.**

I don't think so—maybe—although I do narrow myself to imply some action (mutiny, apparition) or place (avenue, mount, valley, gate) and a vague description of either (superfluous, superficial). Mostly, titles are about the English language as an imposed vocabulary rather than a childhood tongue. Following a process of research and comparison of meaning and context, I generally try to make titles sound very specific so that they can be interpreted at face value while also suggesting covert or 'accidental' meanings, for example, 'tragedy' in 'strategy' or, in *Three tears for white trash* [cat. no. 75], 'tears' instead of 'cheers'.



Installation view, *Reafat Ishak*, Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne, 2007
Photo: Andrew Curtis

**But there is a sort of feeling or tone that results from
marrying titles such as *Medication Valley*, *Secession
Valley*, *Speculation Valley* and *Constipation Valley*
with paintings that communicate restraint and
elegance?**

A tone of uncertainty. Uncertainty about what is actually being looked at. This particular series, the 2007 *Valley* series [cat. nos 72–74], was based on a proposal to remove all built environment from mainland Australia and relocate it elsewhere, outside Australia. The images are of ships carrying old stadiums, accompanied by dolphins for safe passage. The passage is the valley, the associated words—medication, secession, speculation, constipation—relate to aspects of that process. They are meant to imply some kind of pain and disappointment, a tragedy of sorts, an undesired outcome.

**Can you use an example to describe the process of
coming to find the right title? What are you looking for?**

With the title for this survey, *Recipes for aversion and strategy*, I was looking for something that would encompass a wide range of ideas and thoughts—recipes—and two or more descriptive words for my practice—aversion and strategy—while making sure that the title didn't refer to one specific project, but could imply an overview of a practice. Titles are references, ways to understand the work, the process, associated meanings, the time of making and so on. I do try to provide them as veiled explanations or descriptions, because essentially—as they often have double meanings—they become welcome confusions and distractions in experiencing the work.

The mix of contexts, materials and images in your paintings and other works suggests flux and movement. You've said you are 'kind of anti-identity'. Is it unnerving to think we could have only one identity?

My issue with one identity is that it encourages complacency and convenient acceptance of given situations, and consequentially the survival of these situations. That is not to say that one cannot adopt a singular identity at a particular point of time for very particular reasons. My sense of my own identity is that it is perhaps set, developed through time, and in many ways conclusive. However, there are no adequate linguistic techniques that can identify a person or a group of people without describing a specific and restricted position. So, in a way, my 'kind of anti-identity' is more about definition and statement. Governments interest me because they need to identify and categorise to survive and be relevant. But perhaps there ought to be some distinction between the characterisation of a population for economic and bureaucratic reasons and, for example, social and cultural reasons.

I do agree that it is unnerving to think we could have only one identity, especially somewhere like Australia, where we actually can't, there are many identities—even within tightly protected non-intermarrying groups—as a result of our contemporary condition. We are too liberal and self-loving, even if we choose to be pegged down to a limited selection of characterisation strategies. We have unlimited choices and little commitment to guilt and shame. We know just about everyone and everything and, more often than not, we are characterised by a desire to transform and change: lose weight, gain weight, travel, eat better, eat strange foods, start a new career, change house, change friends, self-mutilate, and much, much more.

I'm thinking about 'the identity of the artist' in relation to your preference for small-scale works, a restricted palette and light-handed marks that map thought processes rather than declaring points of view. Your attitude and methods suggest a choice of self-restraint, temperance. What are your thoughts about independence and the place of the artist?

My independence relies on averting the question of identity, not taking much notice of it, while maintaining a stance, somewhat political and also social, of attaching little significance to identity outside the realms of government and administration. In a sense, this implies that my practice is dependant rather than independent. And I think that is true. I don't believe I work in a vacuum. Appearances can be deceiving here, because I can see very strong affinities and relationships between my work and that of my peers. As for the place of the artist, again, there must be hundreds of configurations of how artists can and can't fit within the art industry in particular, and society at large.

Having said that, artists are unique in that they have the potential for averting identity. Art is so broad, and distinctly irrelevant to everyday operational mechanisms—it doesn't influence transport, government business, policing, medicine, engineering. It is instead closely related to architecture, sport and entertainment. These are additives rather than essentials; we're fortunate to have them in the first place.

When you were studying at the VCA in the late 1980s the art receiving the most attention locally and internationally had serious scale. What did it mean to paint small then?

A certain kind of perversity to begin with. But then, I am humbled by art and artists and negotiate scale in relation to the environment in which I am motivated to make art. Often scale is dictated by economics and space, but more pertinently by ideas and the seemingly subtle requirements of reading. Portability is also important. Being able to walk and paint at the same time in the studio is important because the action of painting is predominantly an intellectual rather than physical exercise.

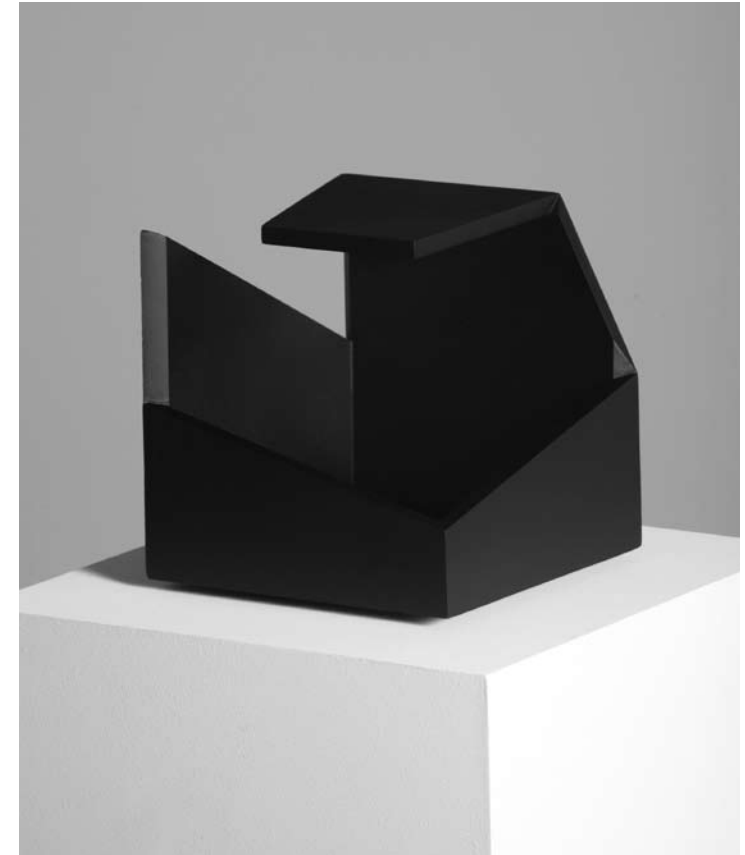
You've collaborated with other artists, friends, for more than ten years now. Do you connect your interest in systems of organisation and working with others?

I am interested in organisational principles and collaborations are an extension of that in practical and conceptual terms. My collaborations have been mostly started and pursued on the basis of connecting existing concerns or ideas.

Proposition for a banner march and black cube hot air balloon [in collaboration with Tom Nicholson, *Australian culture now*, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, 2004; and the West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, 2009] was a meeting of two disparate elements—a street march and a hot air balloon. Collaborations offer a platform for compromise and restraint; I'm interested to explore the potential for collective action and absence of authorship.

My involvement with Ocular Lab as an artist-group was an experimentation with that process. What was attractive about collaborating in a group was the potential for cross-generational dialogue, the exchange of knowledge, opinion and political positions. Ocular Lab was not a gallery as such, it evolved into a group of friends who often met over food and drink, exchanged ideas, argued over politics and identity and promoted mutual interests as artists. The space was experimental in more ways than others and supported a range of projects that would otherwise not be practical or relevant in the wider community. In a sense it was detached from the industry, self-serving and biased; we didn't accept proposals, we didn't charge rent and, more significantly, the group activated the space by staging meetings, dinners and presentations. It was not unique, but it was in essence, if not necessarily in practice, collaborative.

Catalogue no. 65
*Half a proposition for a banner march
and black cube hot air balloon*, 2006,
enamel on MDF, 18 x 18 x 18 cm
Photo: Andrew Curtis



Kit Wise looked back on your 2007 *Valley* paintings at Sutton Gallery describing them as 'unremittingly elegant'. These works are incredibly beautiful. How do ideas of what is beautiful motivate your work?

I am motivated by certain aspects and ideas of beauty in art but not necessarily inspired by it. I am however resistant to any finite interpretations of the word in the contemporary world. I think it is loosely used and applied to unspecific circumstances. It almost feels pluralistic in its use. It means everything and nothing at the same time. It is certainly a compliment of some kind but it has no inherent resonance and can't be taken at face value to mean anything in particular. Having said that, I think conventional ideas of beauty are predictable, relying heavily on a number of factors that include history, education, interpretive capabilities and methods. I don't really agree that beauty is in the eye of a beholder. Things are intrinsically beautiful because of what they aspire to be, and the methods employed to reach that goal. I am not concerned with the issue of what is and what is not beautiful. To some degree, I am interested in how and why some things are regarded as beautiful.

You've previously talked about pursuing figurative painting sometime in the future and I wonder what that might look like. What has making portraits and paintings of people, say like the 2006 series of your *Egyptian friends*, offered that's different from other approaches?

The portraits are introverted, as opposed to most of my other projects, which are essentially tools and recipes for communication. The portraits have mostly been of people I know, or am close to and, in some cases, they're of people I think I know. The portraits of school friends [cat. nos 60–64] are nostalgic in the strongest sense of the word. These are friends I haven't seen or heard from in over twenty-five years. They each gave me a studio portrait photograph of themselves when I left Egypt in 1982. I'm not clear why it took that long to miss them or feel a need for a more poignant connection with my past. Perhaps it is just that the right opportunity hadn't presented itself. In the future I have no clear plans to pursue figurative painting but I am interested in figuration and the potential of conventional painting.



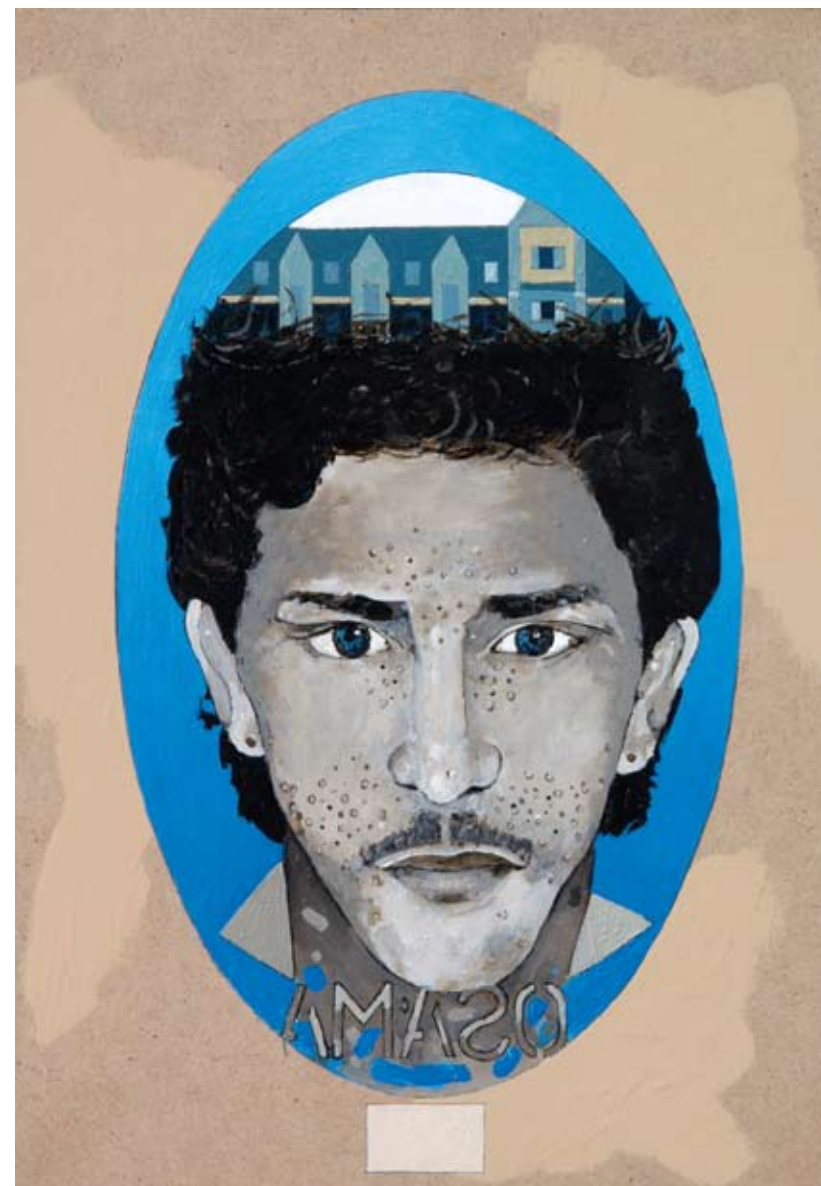
Catalogue no. 60
Ahmad Clarke (1887), 2006,
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF, 29 x 21 cm
(installation view. *Trinity nine: Ocular Lab artists at Trinity
College, Trinity College, the University
of Melbourne*, 2006)
Photo: Christian Capurro

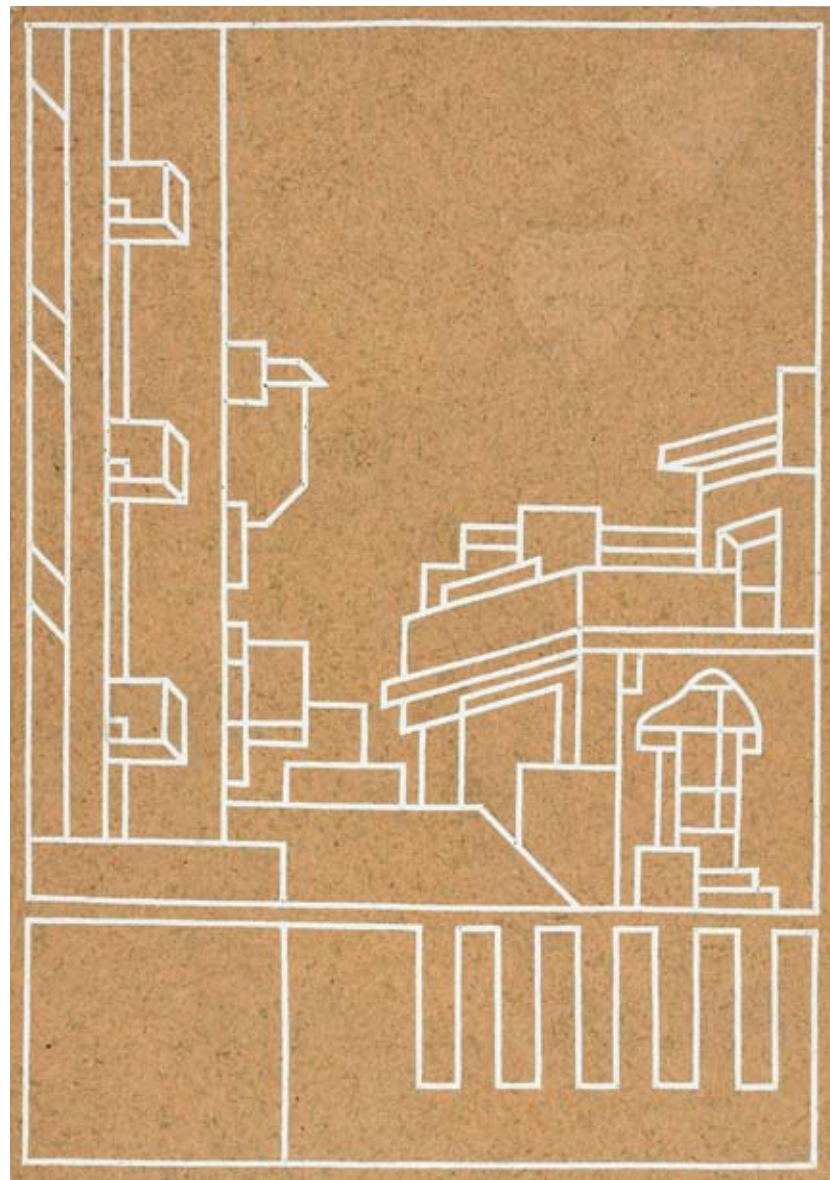
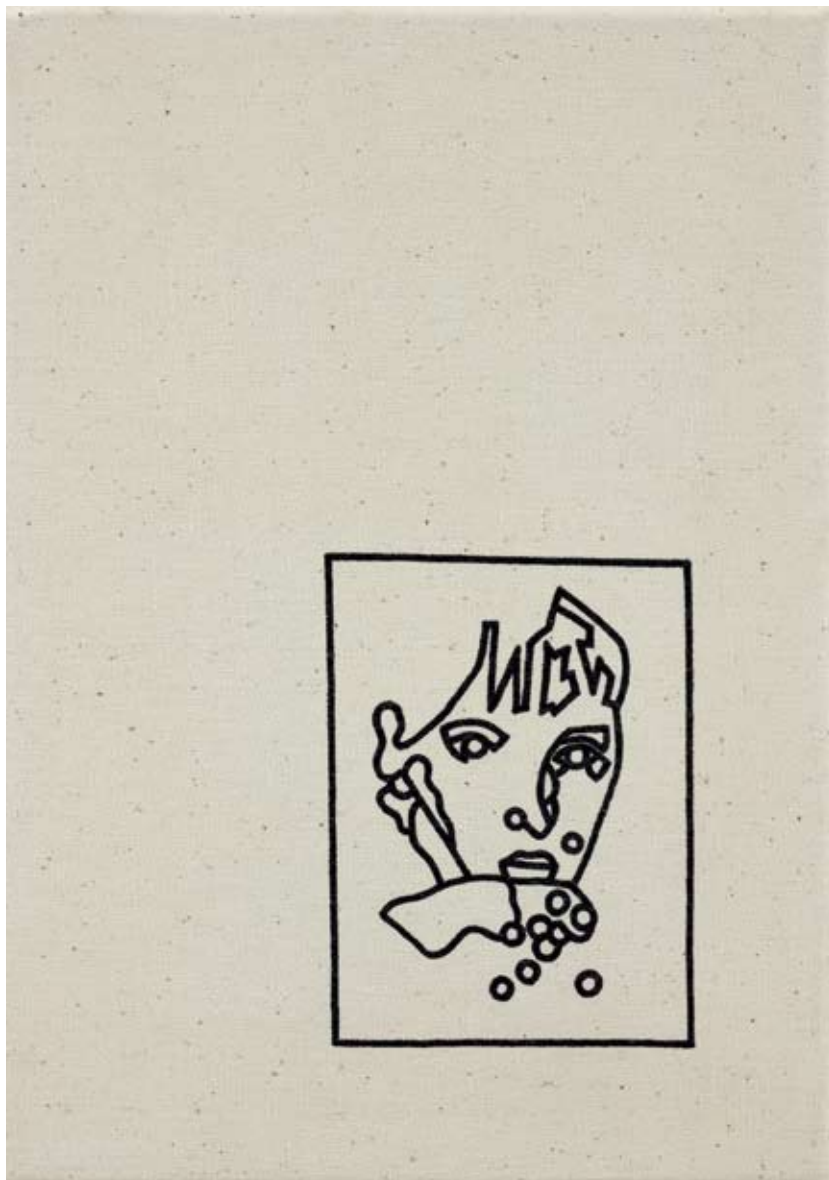
The art industry can be instrumental in that it can seem like artists need to be given a purpose—to represent a theme or be ‘made’ relevant etc. The industry can operate under its own terms, independently of artists. You’ve already said for instance that the industry at different times can fit certain artist-configurations but not others. How do you negotiate and strategise, and conduct your own behaviour in relation to the industry?

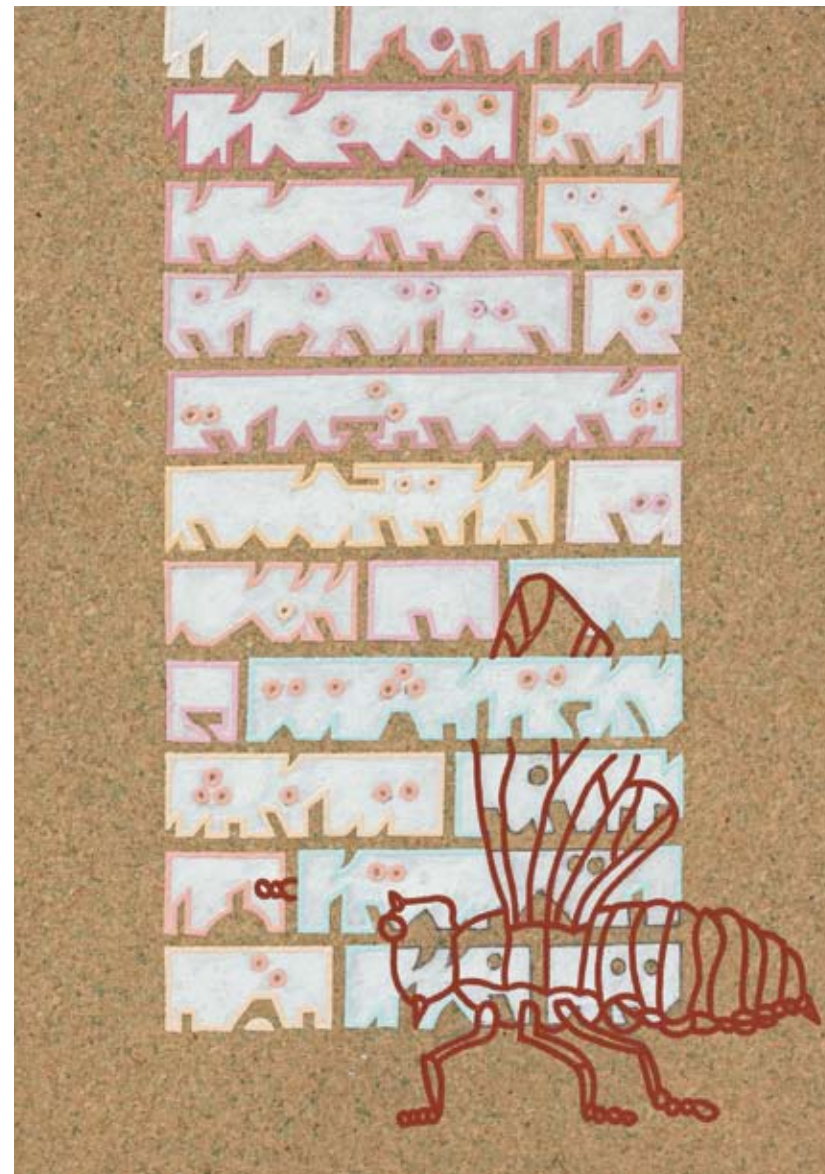
It is not surprising that the art industry is instrumental and operates under its own terms, independently of artists. There is an enormous amount of pressure from governments, funding bodies, the media and the commercial sector, to name a few, on the art industry to contextualise its interests, appease current tastes and provide definitive outcomes from its operations. I don’t think the pressure is necessarily on artists to appease the art industry or to perform certain functions towards its goals, though some strategic social behaviour does help. Having said that, I think the art industry is fundamental for artists as it provides avenues and platforms for development and relevance. A diversity of spaces and opportunities needs to be part of this equation but it is ultimately the artist’s decision to be drawn into the logic of the industry.

There are no clear strategies for negotiating the art industry. Yet there are certain boundaries that I am not prepared to cross for personal, ethical and practical reasons. The art circles I negotiate are generally cordial and generous, and based largely on friendships and mutual interests, but that is more of a choice than a circumstance I find myself in. In light of all this, it must be said that I am generally biased towards certain art and artists, I have little interest or time for the machinations of a vehemently prosaic industry and am strongly drawn to subtle yet strong relationships with individuals and groups interested in art.

Bala Starr is senior curator at the Ian Potter Museum of Art. She first worked with Raafat Ishak at 200 Gertrude Street (now Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces) in 1995 when he presented *And government*, and subsequently curated his work in an exhibition at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (1997), and in *It’s a beautiful day: new painting in Australia: 2* (the Ian Potter Museum of Art and Art Gallery of New South Wales, 2002).









Biography, bibliography and catalogue of works

Biography

Born Cairo, Egypt, 1967; arrived Australia 1982, lives Melbourne

Studies

2000–06

Post-graduate Diploma, Architecture (History and Conservation Practice), the University of Melbourne

1988–1990

Bachelor of Fine Art (Painting), Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne

1987

TOP (Tertiary Orientation Program), Prahran College of Advanced Education, Melbourne

Selected solo exhibitions

2009

Responses to an immigration request from one hundred and ninety-four governments, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

2007

Raafat Ishak, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

Isle of the dead and paintings from 1985 to 1995, Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

2006

And the programme, 1st Floor, Melbourne

Raafat Ishak, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

2005

Home ground, Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

V, Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

2004

Raafat Ishak, Kaliman Gallery, Sydney

2003

Organisation for future good steps, Conical Inc., Melbourne

2002

River problem, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt

2000

Good ship, PB Gallery storeroom, Swinburne University, Melbourne

1999

Correction, Lovers, Melbourne

Gone good government, 1st Floor, Melbourne

1997

On work, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide

1995

And government, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions

2010

NEW010, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

2009

The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT6), Queensland Art Gallery and Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane

Cubism & Australian art, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Drawing folio, Block Projects, Melbourne

Proposition for a banner march and black cube hot air balloon (in collaboration with Tom Nicholson), various sites as part of the West Brunswick Sculpture Triennial, Melbourne

Visual Arts Biennial, Castlemaine State Festival, Castlemaine and District Continuing Education, Victoria

2008

Drawing the line—new perspectives in Australian abstract painting, Maroondah Art Gallery, Melbourne

Premonitions: Monash University Collection 1961–2007, McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Melbourne

Primary views: artists curate the Monash University Collection, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne

2007

Apropos—human rights in art, Bus Projects, Melbourne

Black box project, Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

Funeral songs, Mop Projects, Sydney

Ocular notes, George Paton Gallery, the University of Melbourne

Sutton Gallery Project Space, Melbourne, including collaborations with Tom Nicholson, Damiano Bertoli, Sandra Bridie, Sean Loughrey and Alex Rizkalla

The world in painting: an Asialink/Heide Museum of Modern Art touring exhibition, Heide Museum of Modern Art, and tour

2006

21st century modern: 2006 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art, Art Gallery of South Australia

Single currency, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne

TarraWarra Biennial 2006—parallel lives: Australian painting today, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, Victoria

Trinity nine: Ocular Lab artists at Trinity College, Trinity College, the University of Melbourne

2005

Ocular Lab: 12, Spacement, Melbourne

Slave, VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne

2004

A pink idea, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

2004: Australian culture now (in collaboration with Tom Nicholson), the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne

The decadence of the nude, Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

Multiple MISCELLANEOUSalliances, Clubs Project, Melbourne

Octopus 5, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne

2003

Fieldwork: Australian contemporary art 1968–2002, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne

The future in every direction: Joan Clemenger Endowment for Contemporary Australian Art, the Ian Potter Centre: NGV Australia, Melbourne

Home and away, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, and tour

Labrador, Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

Organisations, Parasite, Hong Kong; and West Space, Melbourne

2002

It's a beautiful day: new painting in Australia: 2, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne; and Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney

2001

Fan flag 3 (in collaboration with Sean Loughrey), Ocular Lab Inc., Melbourne

Mary Mary fire walk with me (in collaboration with Jonathan Nichols), West Space, Melbourne

Office of utopic procedures, West Space, Melbourne

2000

Blink (in collaboration with Sean Loughrey), Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

Microcosm, PB Gallery, Swinburne University, Melbourne

1997

Feeling machines, Stripp, Melbourne

1996

Monash acquisitive art prize, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne

Travelogue, Ian Potter Gallery, the University of Melbourne Museum of Art

1995

Decadence, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Commissions

2008

Organisation for future good steps, City of Melbourne laneway commission, Niagara Lane

2005

Untitled, Victoria Golf Club, Cheltenham, Vic.

2004

Untitled, Edmund Rice Centre Amberley, Lower Plenty, Vic.

2003

Good state, SBS Radio, Melbourne

Grants

2007

New work grant, Visual Arts Board, Australia Council

2004

Arts development grant, Arts Victoria

2001

Skills and arts development grant, Visual Arts/Craft Board, Australia Council

Selected collections

Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne

Monash University Collection, Melbourne

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne

Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane

RACV Art Collection, Melbourne

SBS Radio, Melbourne

State Government of Victoria

Bibliography

Exhibition catalogues

Bertoli, D, 'Good secret', *Melbourne Art Fair*, Australian Commercial Galleries Association, St Kilda South, Vic., 2002.

Boscutti, S, *Gone good government*, 1st Floor, Fitzroy, Vic., 1999.

Bridie, S, *Isle of the dead and paintings from 1985 to 1995*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2007.

Burns, K, 'Return of the nude', *The decadence of the nude*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2004.

Chambers, N, *Octopus 5*, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Fitzroy, Vic., 2004.

Clemens, J, '-placed' *Trinity nine: Ocular Lab artists at Trinity College*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2006.

Delany, M, 'Trinity nine', *Trinity nine: Ocular Lab artists at Trinity College*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2006.

Harding, I & S Cramer, *Cubism & Australian art*, the Miegunyah Press, Carlton, Vic., 2009.

Huppertz, DJ, *Good ship*, PB Gallery, Swinburne University, Prahran, Vic., 2000.

—, *And government*, 200 Gertrude Street, Fitzroy, Vic., 1995.

Kent, R, *Travelogue*, the University of Melbourne Museum of Art, 1996.

Lynn, V, *TarraWarra Biennial 2006—parallel lives: Australian painting today*, TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville, Vic., 2006.

MacDonald, A, 'Avenue of superfluous complaints', *NEW010*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2010.

Michael, L, *Home and away: place and identity in recent Australian art*, Monash University Museum of Art, Clayton, Vic., 2003.

Nicholson, T, 'Raafat Ishak', *21st century modern: 2006 Adelaide Biennial of Australian Art*, Art Gallery of South Australia, 2006.

O'Connell, S, *Feeling machines*, Stripp, Fitzroy, Vic., 1997.

Richards, B, 'Pathways in paint', *the 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art (APT6)*, Queensland Art Gallery, Brisbane, 2009.

Sedman, R, *Apropos—human rights in art*, Bus Projects, Melbourne, 2007.

Stanhope, Z, *The world in painting: an Asialink/Heide Museum of Modern Art touring exhibition*, Asialink, Parkville, Vic. & Heide Museum of Modern Art, Bulleen, Vic., 2008.

Starr, B, *It's a beautiful day: new painting in Australia: 2*, Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney, 2002.

Smith, D, *Drawing the line—new perspectives in Australian abstract painting*, Maroondah Art Gallery, Ringwood, Vic., 2008.

Travis, L, 'Raafat Ishak: transcontextual tendencies', *Fieldwork: Australian contemporary art 1968–2002*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne, 2003.

Tu, A, 'Give me a home ...', *And the programme*, 1st Floor, Fitzroy, Vic., 1996.

Journal, magazine and newspaper reviews and articles

- Blakston, A, 'Around the world in creative ways', *The Age*, 24 July 2004.
- Chapman, C, 'Respect', *Broadsheet*, vol. 26, no. 1, 1997.
- Claburn, A, 'Hybrids all, let us rejoice', *The Australian*, 12 July 2002.
- Coslovich, G, 'Home is where the art is', *The Age*, 23 November 2009.
- Crawford, A, 'Raafat Ishak', *The Age*, 5 March 2006.
- , 'Raafat Ishak', *Australian Art Collector*, no. 35, 2006.
- , 'Raafat Ishak', *Australian Art Collector*, no. 31, 2005.
- , 'In the eye of the beholder', *The Age*, 6 September 2003.
- Gaynor, A, 'Decadence of the nude', *un Magazine*, no. 1, 2004.
- Grishin, S, 'Has the APT lost its way?', *Art Monthly*, no. 227, 2010.
- Hill, K, 'Looking with Alibrandi', *The Australian*, 25 July 2009.
- Huppatz, DJ, 'Raafat Ishak: personal archive', *Art/Text*, no. 67, 1999.
- Makin, J, 'Critic's choice', *Herald Sun*, 29 October 2007.
- McKenzie, R, 'Painting into electronic age', *The Age*, 26 April 1995.
- Nelson, R, 'Putting nature back into things made of brick and steel', *The Age*, 30 August 2007.
- , 'Octopus 5', *The Age*, 21 July 2004.
- Palmer, D, 'Australian culture now', *Art & Australia*, vol. 42, no. 2, 2004.
- Richards, B, 'In conversation with Raafat Ishak', *Artlines*, no. 4, 2009.
- Richardson, P, 'Octopus 5', *Artlink*, vol. 24, no. 3, 2004.
- Stephens, A, 'Capturing Australia's spirit is a harder task than drawing on clichés', *The Age*, 26 January 2010.
- Tutton, S, 'Raafat Ishak's passage to safe harbour', *Eyeline*, no. 67, 2009.
- Watts, R, 'Compartmentalised beauty', *Broadsheet*, vol. 38, no. 4, 2009.
- Wise, K, 'Emerging artists', *Frieze*, no. 112, 2008.

Artist's writing

- Ishak, R, *Ocular Lab retrospective projects #3: Sally Mannall*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2008.
- , *Sandra Bridie: Ocular Lab retrospective project*, Ocular Lab Inc., Brunswick, Vic., 2007.
- , *River problem*, Townhouse Gallery, Cairo, Egypt, 2002.
- , 'Good dog good dog', *Countryside: spaces and places*, exhibition by Sean Loughrey, 1st Floor, Fitzroy, Vic., 1999.
- , 'On work', *Brand new II*, Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Parkside, SA, 1997.

Raafat Ishak is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne.

Catalogue of works in the exhibition

All dimensions given as height before width before depth

1. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
40.5 x 20 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
2. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
41 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
3. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
40.5 x 20.5 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
4. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
40.5 x 20 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
5. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
41 x 20.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
6. *Untitled* 1992
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
7. *And government no. 1* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
8. *And government no. 2* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
9. *And government no. 3* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
10. *And government no. 6* 1992–93
oil and blackboard paint on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
11. *And government no. 9* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
12. *And government no. 12* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
13. *And government no. 13* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne
14. *And government no. 16* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison, AO, Melbourne

15. *And government no. 38* 1992–93
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison,
AO, Melbourne
16. *And government no. 7* 1993–95
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of the Marshall
family, Melbourne
17. *And government no. 28* 1993–95
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of the Marshall
family, Melbourne
18. *And government 1995*
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of the Marshall
family, Melbourne
19. *Untitled 1996*
oil on canvas
30 x 30 cm
Private collection, Canberra
20. *Untitled 1997*
oil on canvas
30 x 30 cm
Collection of Geoff Newton,
Melbourne
21. *Untitled 1997*
oil on canvas
40 x 20 cm
Collection of James Mollison,
AO, Melbourne
22. *Untitled 1997*
oil on canvas
40.5 x 20 cm
Collection of the artist
23. *Good government good government 1997*
oil and cardboard on wooden
stretcher
29.5 x 21 cm
Collection of A Rizkalla and
J Davies, Melbourne
24. *Good government good government 1998*
oil and pencil on canvas, and
oil on wooden stretcher
30 x 21.5 cm
Collection of A Rizkalla and
J Davies, Melbourne
25. *Good government good government 1998*
oil on canvas
30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne
26. *Good government good government 1998–99*
canvas board on wooden
stretcher
29 x 21 cm
Collection of Richard Peterson,
Melbourne
27. *Good government good government 1998–99*
cardboard on wooden
stretcher
29 x 21 cm
Collection of Richard
Peterson, Melbourne
28. *Good government good government 1998–99*
oil on canvas on wooden
stretcher
29 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne
29. *Good government good government 1998–99*
oil on chipboard
29 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
30. *Good government good government 1998–99*
oil, pencil and rabbit skin glue
on canvas
29 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
31. *Good government good government 1998–99*
pencil, cardboard, adhesive
tape and oil on canvas
30 x 21.5 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne
32. *Good government good government 1998–99*
rabbit skin glue and
cardboard on canvas
30 x 21 cm
Collection of the artist
33. *Gone good government 1999*
oil and rabbit skin glue on
chipboard
29.5 x 21 cm
Collection of Sean Meilak,
Melbourne
34. *Gone good government 1999*
oil on chipboard
30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne
35. *Untitled 1999*
found postcards (featuring
paintings by John Brack
and Giotto) and AFL card
(featuring Barry Round)
postcards: each 10.3 x 14.9
cm, AFL card: 8.8 x 6.4 cm
Collection of the artist
36. With Amanda Ritson
Untitled 1999
oil on canvas
20 x 26 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
37. *Good grief 2000*
oil on canvas
30 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
38. *Good ship 2000*
oil and cardboard on
chipboard
60.5 x 51 cm
Collection of the artist
39. *Untitled 2000*
oil on chipboard
30 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
40. *Castlemaine Library 2001*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 38 cm
Collection of Peter Braithwaite,
Sydney
41. *Untitled 2001*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 38 cm
Collection of Peter Braithwaite,
Sydney
42. *Good connection 2002*
oil on canvas
30 x 22.5 cm
Collection of Johan van
Schaik, Melbourne
43. *Good love 2002*
oil on canvas
29 x 21 cm
Collection of James Mollison,
AO, Melbourne
44. *Good security 2002*
oil and rabbit skin glue on
canvas
29 x 21 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
45. *Good work 2002*
oil on canvas
29 x 21 cm
Collection of Victoria Huf and
David Franzke, Melbourne
46. *Mutiny 1 2002*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 39 cm
Private collection, Adelaide
47. *Mutiny 2 2002*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 39 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
48. *Mutiny 3 2002*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 39 cm
Monash University Collection
Monash University Museum
of Art, Melbourne
49. *Mutiny 4 2002*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 39 cm
Collection of the artist
50. *Mutiny 5 2002*
synthetic polymer paint on
chipboard
50 x 39 cm
Collection of Kate Barber and
Steven Rendall, Melbourne
51. *Morning gate 2003*
synthetic polymer paint on
MDF
40.5 x 25 cm
Private collection, Melbourne

52. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of Adrienne Hearn, Melbourne
53. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of Adrienne Hearn, Melbourne
54. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of Bruno Imeneo and Elizabeth Magree, Melbourne
55. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of Martin Paten and Helen Bodycomb, Victoria
56. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of Martin Paten and Helen Bodycomb, Victoria
57. *Organisation for future good steps* 2003
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
19 x 12 cm
Collection of the artist
58. *Superficial tears for white trash part 1* 2005
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
75 x 9 x 24.5 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
Purchased through the Heide Foundation 2006
59. *Superficial tears for white trash part 2* 2005
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
65 x 35.5 x 24.5 cm
Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
Purchased through the Heide Foundation 2006
60. *Ahmad Clarke (1887)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF
29 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
61. *Ashraf Behan (1935)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF
29 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
62. *Osama Bishops (1878)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF
30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
63. *Saad Cowan (1963)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF
30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
64. *Yasser Jeopardy (1958)* 2006
synthetic polymer paint and oil on MDF
30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
65. *Half a proposition for a banner march and black cube hot air balloon* 2006
enamel on MDF
18 x 18 x 18 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
66. *Mount Bias* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
65 x 50 cm
Janet and Michael Buxton Collection, Melbourne
67. *Mount Captivity* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
65 x 50 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
68. *Mount Moderne* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
65 x 50 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
69. *Mount Rupture* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
65 x 50 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
70. *Three dimensional compulsions* 2006
synthetic polymer paint on plastic and MDF
130 x 30 x 30 cm
Collection of Sandy and Peter Geyer, Melbourne
71. *Responses to an immigration request from one hundred and ninety-four governments (detail)* 2006–09
oil and gesso on MDF
39 parts (nos 1-39 of a total 194), each 30 x 21 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
72. *Medication Valley* 2007
oil on canvas
60 x 40 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
73. *Secession Valley* 2007
oil on canvas
60 x 40 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
74. *Speculation Valley* 2007
oil on canvas
60 x 40 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
75. *Three tears for white trash* 2007–10
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
10 parts, each 80 x 60 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
76. *Ascent, descent and congratulations* 2009
oil on canvas
70 x 40 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
77. *Ascent, descent and congratulations* 2009
oil on canvas
70 x 40 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
78. *Ascent, descent and congratulations* 2009
oil on canvas
70 x 40 cm
Private collection, Melbourne
79. *Proposition posters* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
3 parts, each 60 x 41 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
80. *'Untitled no. 1' from the series 'Emergencies, accidents and congratulations'* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Collection of Seldon Gill Consulting Pty Ltd
81. *'Untitled no. 7' from the series 'Emergencies, accidents and congratulations'* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
82. *'Untitled no. 8' from the series 'Emergencies, accidents and congratulations'* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
83. *'Untitled no. 9' from the series 'Emergencies, accidents and congratulations'* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
84. *'Untitled no. 11' from the series 'Emergencies, accidents and congratulations'* 2009
synthetic polymer paint on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton Gallery, Melbourne

85.
*'Untitled no. 13' from
the series 'Emergencies,
accidents and
congratulations' 2009*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

86.
*'Untitled no. 14' from
the series 'Emergencies,
accidents and
congratulations' 2009*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

87.
*'Untitled no. 15' from
the series 'Emergencies,
accidents and
congratulations' 2009*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

88.
*'Untitled no. 18' from
the series 'Emergencies,
accidents and
congratulations' 2009*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

89.
*'Untitled no. 19' from
the series 'Emergencies,
accidents and
congratulations' 2009*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
60 x 42 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

90.
*Apparition of a miserable
acquaintance no. 2 2010*
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
300 x 300 x 150 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne

91.
With Sean Loughrey
Fan flag 7 2010
synthetic polymer paint
on MDF
5 parts, each 79 x 147 cm
Collection of the artists

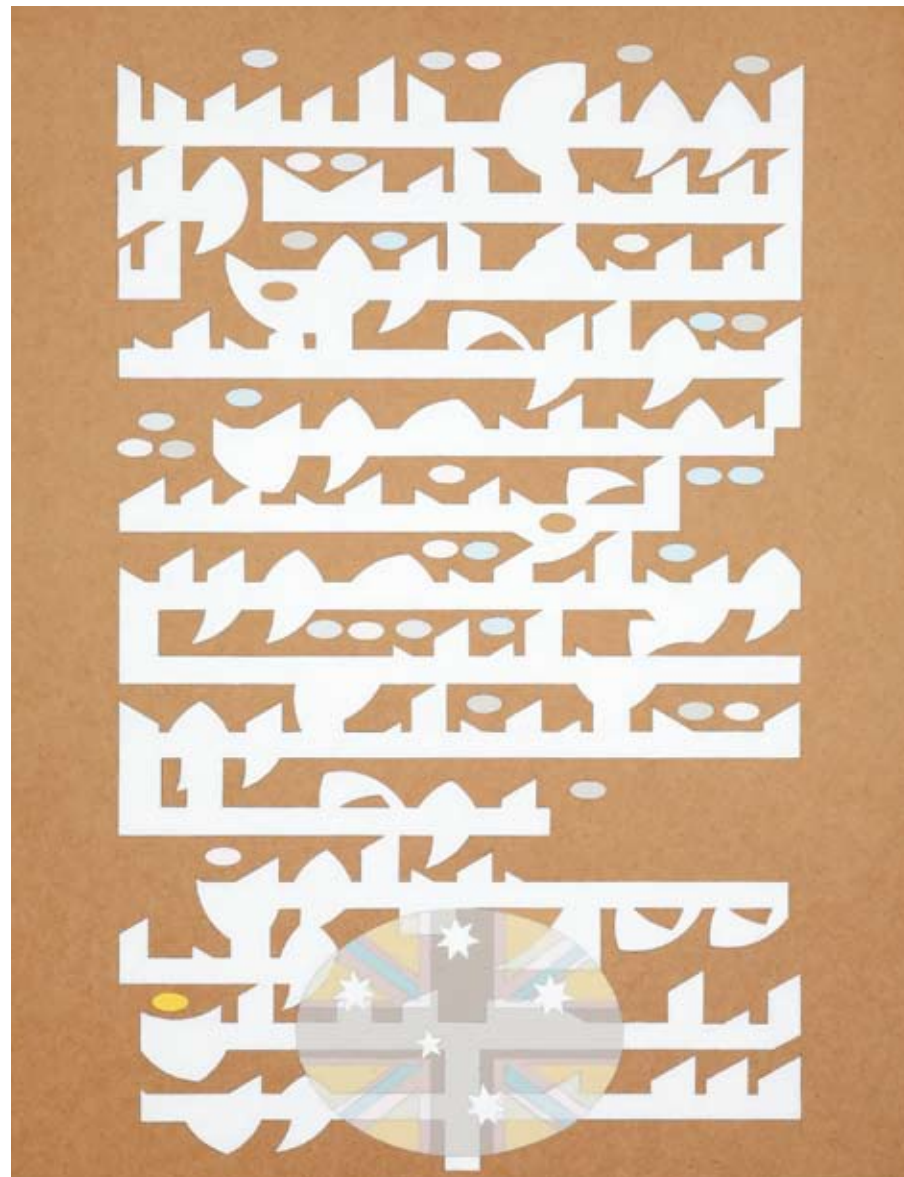
92.
Fireman no. 2 2010
synthetic polymer paint
on wall
approx. 300 x 150 cm
Collection of the artist

93.
Untitled 2010
pencil on wall
approx. 29 x 21 cm
Collection of the artist

94.
*Recipes for aversion and
strategy 2010*
applied vinyl on wall
approx. 435 x 378 cm
Courtesy the artist and Sutton
Gallery, Melbourne









Raafat Ishak: recipes for aversion and strategy. Work in progress #6

Published by the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne, on the occasion of the exhibition *Raafat Ishak: recipes for aversion and strategy. Work in progress #6*, 26 May to 25 July 2010.

Text © 2010, the Ian Potter Museum of Art, the University of Melbourne
Images © 2010, Raafat Ishak

This catalogue is copyright. Apart from fair dealing for the purposes of research, criticism or review as permitted under the *Copyright Act 1968*, no part may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted by any means without the prior permission of the publisher.

ISBN 978-0-7340-4174-6

Photography pp. 6, 7, 26–29 and 45
by Mark Ashkanasy
Design by 5678 Design
Printed in Australia by Market Printing

The Ian Potter Museum of Art
The University of Melbourne
Victoria 3010 Australia
Email potter-info@unimelb.edu.au
<http://www.art-museum.unimelb.edu.au>

Patron
Lady Potter AC



