

jemima wyman – biography

Jemima Wyman is a Brisbane-based contemporary artist who works with installation, video, performance, photography and painting.

Jemima has exhibited throughout Australia and Internationally. Australian exhibition venues include the Australian Centre for the Moving Image (Melbourne), Museum of Contemporary Art (Sydney), Queensland Art Gallery (Brisbane), Ivan Dougherty Gallery (as parallel program to the Sydney Biennale 2004), Monash University Gallery (Melbourne), Riddoch Gallery (South Australia) and Plimsoll Gallery (Hobart).

Recent American exhibitions include New York Photo 2004, Los Angeles Municipal Art Gallery, 18th Street Art Centre, Raid Projects and Dangerous Curve in Los Angeles. In 2005, Jemima exhibited at Westbeth Gallery, (Nagoya) Japan, and screened video work in Berlin at the Directors Lounge. Jemima's most recent solo exhibition at 507Rose in Los Angeles was an interactive installation with a live performance and sound track.

In 2005 Wyman won the prestigious Anne and Gordon Samstag International Visual Arts Scholarship allowing her to undertake an MFA at CalArts in Los Angeles.

Wyman has been represented by Bellas Milani Gallery in Australia since 2001.

catalogue of works

Artworks courtesy CamLab*	<i>Lockey</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 4 mins	<i>Body Double (Coloured Suits)</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 25 mins	<i>Stories (Earthquake Girl in Woodlands)</i> , 2005 Digital video Duration 9 mins
<i>Cameltooth Curtain</i> , 2005 Digital video Duration 5 mins 30 secs	<i>Turning Turning</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 12 mins	<i>Chromatic Aberration At The Beach</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 20 mins	<i>Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories (Dazey Girl)</i> , 2005 Digital video Duration 3 mins
<i>Neo Duo</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 6 mins	<i>Coloured Suits</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 14 mins	<i>Vulva Girl</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 16 mins	<i>Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories (Hula Hoop Boy & Earthquake Girl)</i> , 2005 Digital video Duration 12 mins
<i>Ghost Which Are Not One</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 9 mins	<i>Pink Suits</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 2 mins	<i>Chromatic Aberration</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 5 mins	<i>Polymorphorous Perverse</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 7 mins
<i>Screen Tests</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 7 mins	<i>White Suits</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 5 mins	<i>Minnie Peep</i> , 2004 Digital video Duration 9 mins	<i>White Face</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 4 mins
Artworks courtesy the artist and Bellas Milani Gallery	<i>Trilogy</i> , 2001 Digital video Duration 9 mins	<i>Minnie Does LA to NY</i> , 2004 Digital video Duration 20 mins	<i>Live Whak' emall</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 10 mins
<i>Face/Body Project</i> , 1997 Digital video Duration 25 mins	<i>Body Double (White Suits)</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 30 mins	<i>Love It Or Leave!</i> , 2004 Digital video Duration 10 mins	<i>Whak' emall</i> , 2006 Digital video Duration 8 mins
<i>Pink Bits</i> , 1999 Digital video Duration 8 mins	<i>Mutant Water Rats Attack</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 8 mins	<i>Lady in Red</i> , 2005 Digital video Duration 5 mins	
<i>Oneye</i> , 1999 Digital video Duration 2 mins	<i>Body Double (Pink Suits)</i> , 2003 Digital video Duration 30 mins	<i>Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other</i>	
<i>Lightweight Poncho</i> , 2000 Digital video Duration 36 mins			

*CamLab is a collaboration between Anna Mayer and Jemima Wyman



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Cover: *Whak' emall* (detail), 2006,
still from digital video

no nonsense, great shapes:

a survey of past and recent video works by Jemima Wyman

15 august to 2 september 2006

no nonsense, great shapes: a survey of past and recent video works by Jemima Wyman



Dazey Girl (from *Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories*) (detail), 2005, still from digital video



Earthquake Girl in Woodlands (from *Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories*), 2005, still from digital video



Earthquake Girl in Woodlands (from *Catastrophe Theory: Earthquake Girl and Other Stories*), 2005, still from digital video



Lightweight Poncho (detail), 2000, still from digital video



Minnie Does LA to NY (detail), 2004, still from digital video



Chromatic Aberration (detail), 2003, still from digital video

Who's afraid of red, yellow, blue... and, um, purple, green, lilac, orange, chartreuse... and... the works of Jemima Wyman

'Colour...is a kind of bliss...like a closing eyelid, a tiny fainting spell...[and] we must remember colour is also an idea (a sensual idea).'¹

In his book *Chromophobia*, David Batchelor discusses how the fear of colour has pervaded Western science, literature and philosophy from the time of Plato and Aristotle. Seen as secondary to line and form, colour has often been considered as being superficial, decadent, deceitful and, worse still, merely ornamental. Even its Latin origin, *colourum* related as it is to *celare*, meaning to hide or conceal, betrays an etymological mistrust of colour's potential to corrupt or contaminate the purity of line and form. As such, colour has also been misunderstood as supplemental, characterised as inessential, cosmetic, and more often than not associated with the oriental, the feminine, the infantile, the pathological and the vulgar.²

Whether we entirely agree with this or not, Batchelor presents some compelling observations in respect to colour's status in Western culture, particularly when we consider that colour is characterised as "other" through its association with sexuality, the exotic, or the imaginary. And his argument also goes some way to explain the sensuous, intoxicating power of colour, so often feared by its detractors.

Indeed colour by its very nature is wonderfully polysemic - red does simultaneously connote both love and violence, and a purple patch can leave you ecstatic, or dazed and confused. It is celebrated and prominent in "both childhood and pre-literate cultures, as well as in adults who undergo a loosening of conscious control due to autism, regression, [and] psychosis, or to a poisonous delirium or a drug-induced intoxication... colour is a factor appealing to the deeper non-rational layers of personality."³

It is important to recognise how these complex manifestations of colour play out when engaging with Jemima Wyman's art practice because it is an absolutely essential component of her ideas, materials, and forms. Colour appears in her artwork as the fundamental stuff of her thoughts, movements, and working processes, and in this sense it is in many ways much more than merely a prosthetic interface to the world; it is a necessary site of inhabitation and potential articulation.

Wyman's art practice occupies the charged zones of the in-between, those slippery regions between self and other, painting and performance, installation and audience, between actual and mediated spaces. The work can be resolutely hyperactive, wildly eccentric, sometimes desperately funny, and yet equally provocative and confronting. But perhaps more than the many other constitutive elements that make up her practice, it is colour that provides the connective tissue through which her multiple concerns are woven together.

It seems that for her, colour is a way of simultaneously collapsing and expanding space, of testing not only the limits of how we conceive of corporeal space, but of also exploring the interiority and exteriority of psychological spaces as well. So across the spectrum of her practice, colour activates both visceral and temporal sensations, and it can be all consuming or strangely liberating; it is both methodology and mystery.

And it is because of this polysemic potential that colour is the idea, the material, and the form, that moves seamlessly across the various spatial and temporal "folds in the flesh of the world"⁴ that Wyman's practice occupies. Whether it is engaging with her large-scale paintings, installations, performances, or video projections, it is colour that makes its intoxicating presence most keenly felt, often in a delirious mix of child-like or hallucinogenic memories, that can simultaneously induce arousal, anxiety, or nausea.

There is no doubt that across all these gestures, she cranks up the potential of her palette-cum-mixing desk to eleven until it sets off a chromatic meltdown of sorts. There is perverse disregard for the formal rules of using colour in any media, and there is as little evidence of her sensitivity to its judicious use by either the atelier artist, or MTV VJ. In this regard, her work certainly does appear to be the product of a consciousness that really has been loosened, one emancipated from the often-claustrophobic demands of aesthetics or style. It does appear to have found its natural place in the unencumbered delights of play, or the

mysterious spectrum of the irrational.

Because she employs colour in this unfamiliar way it also serves to locate, to visually activate and emphasise, other important aspects of the work. Of primary concern here are her ongoing explorations into the notion of a subjectivity-in-process, a kind of open-ended psychic structure where she can investigate the possibilities of what might constitute an "authentic" identity, without the constraints of judgment⁵. Accordingly, these explorations are also both unruly and ambiguous, because the various personas she inhabits are constantly undergoing a process of self-transformation. Whether they are acting out a dramatisation of desire, be it a blind asexual clone stumbling through a technicolor landscape searching for, well, who knows what?, or Earthquake girl tripping through the fields of a feminine hygiene advertisement, it is colour that most spectacularly registers these madly polyphonic narratives. And it does this with all the intensity of a cuttlefish firing up its chromatophores in a lurid display of sexual excitement, abject fear or territorial dispute.

Her work also vividly demonstrates the arbitrary nature of colour as a symbolic system, because prolonged immersion in it can reconfigure our expectations about how colour is supposed to behave. Although we may not know what the hell is going on when first encountering the work, after a while you seem to get a sense that there is some underlying logic to this peculiar mix of practices. And that logic seems somehow to be embedded in the rainbow colours of her psyche. So across the entire kaleidoscope

of her practice, from the painting to the totally immersive environments, from the lame acting, occasional burlesque, and buffoonery of the performance work, to the psychedelic meanderings of her digital worlds, a logic seem to be generated through the colours that are the unseen and inexplicable prism of her mind.

What at first appears to be a promiscuous use of colour starts to reference certain spaces and environments that we do recognize, but can't easily identify with. This is because of the chaotic chromatic aberrations, the often disorienting and destabilising kinesthesia, which they invoke. But with closer scrutiny we find that there are ways into Wyman's World, and it is through this splendidly animated colour-wheel of hers, resembling as it does a mash-up of the electronic and virtual palettes of late 20th and early 21st century screen culture. It is a riot of remixing, where *Playschool* vs. *Aeon Flux*, *The Teletubbies* vs. Tina Turner and *Minnie Mouse* vs. Pipolotti Rist. And by shining her light on this, her practice reiterates just how important the mediated environments of screen culture have become in shaping the physical and psychological spaces we occupy.

Jemima Wyman's art practice does this, and a whole lot more. Her work amply demonstrates the power of an imagination not constrained by the dull rhetoric and uniform tones of the "arts industries". It positively illuminates what an art practice can be; innovative and inventive, challenging and confounding

enough to resist orthodoxy, and above all, one that unashamedly celebrates difference. Because of this her standing as an artist has been recognised, both nationally and internationally, as exemplary. She has been represented nationally at the highest level in surveys such as *Prime* at QAG, in *Primavera* at MCA, Sydney and she has been awarded a Samstag scholarship to undertake post graduate study at the prestigious CalArts art school in Los Angeles.

This survey of nearly ten years work is a testament to the tenacity and commitment Jemima Wyman has shown to achieve those goals as an artist. This is particularly significant in a time when an ever more conservative cultural agenda is imposed upon artists, one that looks to homogenize the very difference that Wyman's practice rejoices in.

Mark Webb
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