

23 - 27 CARDIGAN STREET CARLTON RMIT UNIVERSITY

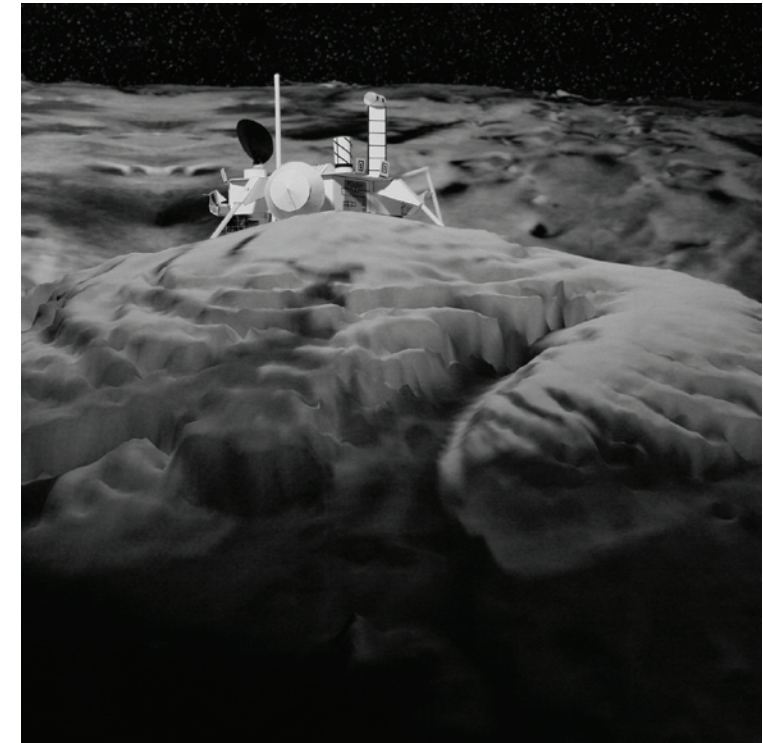
Managed by the RMIT School of Art and School of Creative Media

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TELEPHONE 03 9925 4971 **GALLERY OPENING HOURS** Monday - Friday 9.30am to 5.00pm, Saturday 12.00pm to 4.00pm



Linda Erceg
Polar 1, 2008

Linda Erceg presents a carefully constructed simulacrum of the Martian surface. In each image, a lone craft stands forlornly in the inhospitable terrain, tapping into our anxiety about personal isolation and acceptance. Both landscape and crafts have been painstakingly assembled from paper, thereby gently subverting the actual technology necessary to have made such a voyage. By presenting the imagery in nostalgic monochrome, Erceg locates it in the past — with its defunct technology of black and white televisions — and calls into question the veracity of received information.

The mythical canals of Mars are the basis for the works of Julia Powles and Phillip Allan. Allan referenced some of the earliest drawings of Mars and, in particular, the work of Percival Lowell, who was one of the first to speculate on the canals. Lowell's quaint drawings have been combined with contemporary images taken from the Hubble Space telescope, creating a visual hybrid of fact and fancy. Powles found resonance with the bleak irrigation canals of her childhood in north central Victoria. These canals were built when we still had a belief that inconvenient nature could be bent to our will. In her painting, an artificial channel, carved implacably into the featureless landscape, disappears at the edge of the empty horizon conjuring an atmosphere as bleak and empty as Mars' own.

We are perched on an insignificant atomic partical of blue in the unimaginable enormity of space. With the

arrogant self-deception of the truly lost, we debate the possible existence of life on one of the endless trillions of other specks in the black void, as if there can be, statistically, any reasonable doubt about it. Our next door neighbour, Mars, was the first focus of our anxious enquiry. Over millenia, we are destined to lilyhop blindly across our microscopic solar system from one discarded, used up planet to the next. Which, in the greater scheme of things, is probably not such a major triumph for humanity.

Steve Cox
Visual Arts, 2008



PROJECT SPACE/SPARE ROOM



The Mars Project

PHILLIP ALLAN

STEVE COX

LINDA ERCEG

CAROLYN ESKDALE

KELLYANN GEURTS

MEGAN MACPHERSON

JULIA POWLES

LORETTA QUINN

SIMON STEPHENSON

NATASHA VINCENT

PETER WESTWOOD

DEBORAH WILLIAMS

FLOOR TALK THURSDAY 22 MAY 12-1PM

FRIDAY 9 MAY – FRIDAY 30 MAY
OPENING THURSDAY 8 MAY 5-7PM



Phillip Allan
Mars — Corner of the Eye (detail), 2008

The Mars Project

*Mars ain't the kind of place to raise your kids,
In fact it's cold as hell.
And there's no one there to raise them if you did.*

'Rocket Man' — Elton John

*The chances of anything coming from Mars
Are a million to one, he said.
The chances of anything coming from Mars
Are a million to one. But still, they come.*

'Eve of the War' from The War of the Worlds — Jeff Wayne

*The god Mars was regarded as the father of Rome's
founders, the twins Romulus and Remus. It was
therefore believed that all Romans were descendants
of Mars.*

The name Martin means 'Man of Mars'.

*We invoke Mars whenever we speak of martial arts or
martial law.*

The month of March is named after Mars.

The planet Mars has long been the focus of our fears and aspirations. For the most part, our notions of the planet have derived from and are nourished by popular culture, in the form of cinema and pulp science fiction. But now, *actual* science has landed on the very surface of the red planet — and we find it something of a letdown. The images beamed back to NASA from Mars — and into our homes via the Internet — might have been snapped in the Mojave Desert, so 'familiar' do they seem. Overnight, the magic had gone, and we were forced to let go of the assumptions and myths we held dear; that water canals traversed its surface, or that it was a likely source of alien invasion of Earth. However hard we scrutinised the NASA data, there was not an ancient roadway to be seen; no ziggurats or crumbling temples dotted the horizon. No sign of life, or of its passing. An all too human sense of loss is felt when myths are cancelled.

Mars has recently been mooted as a possible venue for human migration and colonisation. As feeble Earth slips into overheated dotage, America's pioneering spirit is again hankering to hitch up the wagon train and move on out. There are opposing ways of looking at this. On one hand, such a venture could be said to represent the apex of human evolution and the pinnacle of intelligence — the earthlings have grown up and are ready to leave home. But the opposite argument is also valid — that the proposed migration is not as progressive as it is deeply backward-thinking — we have been lamentably unable to keep our original

planet alive and healthy, so we plan to desert it and scupper its used up, rotten hulk, like so much dead space junk.

The Mars Project is an earthling response to the red planet and its legend. Each artist has focussed on a separate area of investigation — whether through science, history, mythology or popular culture — to find a personal connection to our near neighbour.

In **Loretta Quinn's** sculpture, *Mars Junior*, a small boy in a suit of scaly armour holds a section of the earth. Terrified earthlings rush for safety, beneath a lighthouse, which has not warned of the approaching calamity. The child appears both omnipotent and vulnerable as he tests the attributes inherited from his father. But this is a terrible burden to shoulder when your parent happens to be the god of war.

Steve Cox has lovingly replicated the front and back covers of David Bowie's 1972 album, *The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars*. Cox considers the album, which is suffused by Bowie's camp theatrics and androgenous, glam-rock aesthetic, as a life-changing event. It offered the message that 'being different' was ok and that the outsider was not alone. At the time, this simple message was so outré that Bowie had to become a Martian in order to voice it.

The notion of communication through space — either to other life forms or just to other humans at the



far reaches of it — is of obvious significance. But we earthlings seem hampered by our clunky, prosaic approach to 'the other' and a touchingly naïve belief that another life form would even be interested. A recently launched info-craft was sent into orbit to emit an endless loop of earth data to anyone (or thing) who may be listening in — the choice of music was 'Across the Universe' by the Beatles. **Simon Stephenson's** sound installation was constructed on low-tech, homemade synthesizers and references a wide range of sci-fi tropes — from NASA control room voice-overs to techno wobbles, patches of space-static, beeps and spooky theramin arpeggios (such as accompanied Uncle Martin's various acts of levitation in the 1960s television show *My Favorite Martian*). The resulting sound-scape summons a range of emotions, from optimism to dread.

Deborah Williams' volcano installation is titled *686.86* — the number of solar days in a Martian year, and is constructed from the confectionary that bears the planet's name. Appropriately for a planet so loaded with metaphors of war and aggression, Mars has the largest volcano in the solar system. Olympus Mons is nearly 27 km high, three times larger than anything comparable on Earth.

Loretta Quinn
Mars Junior, 2008



Steve Cox
The Rise and Fall of Ziggy Stardust and the Spiders From Mars (Back Cover), 2008