

Standout exhibitions

Our writers and critics look back on two of the most impressive exhibitions of 2012, exhibitions which have set tongues wagging and revitalised the critical and collector interest in these artists' practices.

PORTRAIT BY NIKKI SHORT.

19.

Eugenia Raskopoulos

The noise of language, whether articulated verbally or through the gestures of the body, is the raw material of **Eugenia Raskopoulos's** photo and video work. Raw, impassioned, politicised and sexual, her work manipulates forms and their meanings, sometimes with an implied violence or anger, at other times with a quiet potency.

Despite the noise she has been making since she emerged in the early 1980s, Raskopoulos has been something of a fringe figure, though one who has had a huge influence on the generation of artists to follow her. In 2008 **Russell Storer** curated her into *Video Logic* at the Museum of Contemporary Art – the only woman in a group show of six leading Australian artists working in the medium of video. This attests to her importance, yet she has been largely underappreciated in broader terms, inhabiting that nebulous realm of being a real artist's artist, as the saying goes.



"The fun began once my dogs Stellar & Atom joined in," says Eugenia Raskopoulos about the shoot for *Art Collector*. "As they say one should never work with animals or children as they will upstage you. Stellar ... curled up on the couch and fell asleep ... As for Atom we couldn't hold his attention for longer than a few seconds." Pictured in the background is *Lifelines* by Lynn Silverman, one of Raskopoulos's former art school lecturers and now "an extremely close friend who I adore".

In the past 12 months, however, Raskopoulos has cut through the quiet, by deservedly winning the Josephine Ulrick and Win Schubert Award, and with stunning solo shows at the Art Gallery of New South Wales and William Wright Artists Projects in Sydney.

These shows have stood out because they reveal an artist in her prime, consolidating her conceptual concerns with words and the body, but also marking a shift with her photographic investigations into the materiality of objects and their potential for poetic transformation.

Through wry art historical references to **Duchamp** and **Muybridge**, the immersive multi-channel video installation *Footnotes*, exhibited in the Art Gallery of New South Wales's project space, depicts the artist's feet as she runs down a staircase. The letters drawn on her feet in red lipstick spell the word onanism on one screen; her foot writes moist using saliva in another; while a third screen shows her standing in a pool of thick red liquid. *Footnotes* is compelling in the way Raskopolous strikes a delicate balance between imagery that is as abject as it is seductively fetishistic.

In contrast, the performing self was absent in *Vestiges* at William Wright Artists Projects, or at the very least only implied. Twelve photographs comprise this series, each one depicting paper, plastic or fabric used as wrapping for a gift given to the artist. Raskopoulos meticulously documents these forms against starkly minimal backdrops – elevating the detritus of a gift economy into totems that sit somewhere between forensic and fashion photography. As its name suggests, these unexpectedly alluring forms become the trace of an event, a marker of time and memory.

Australian Centre for Photography director **Kon Gouriotis** awarded one of these images the Ulrick and Schubert award, saying: "I kept on returning to Eugenia Raskopoulos's *Vestiges* #3 photograph because of the poetic transformation that was occurring, especially the experimentation with texture and the sculptural potential of the materials. What started off as birthday wrapping paper ended up as another shape, which is then photographed offering a new interpretation to the object. The new meaning this shift creates recognises the incomplete over the complete. It supports the possibility of other changes rather than no transformations. By acknowledging continual change, the artist is making us aware of the importance of difference."

Daniel Mudie Cunningham



“In the past 12 months Raskopoulos has cut through the quiet.”