

## *Julie Davies, Composite Portraits of Sandra Bridie*

### Collaboration between Julie Davies and Sandra Bridie 2006-2008

*Julie Davies, Composite Portraits of Sandra Bridie* is a series of photographic collages by Julie Davies of her colleague Sandra Bridie in staged images, posing or performing in front of projected documentation of her oeuvre. The work investigates the representation of the artist through the language of portraiture, the 'performance' of the artist and notions of multiplicity in practice.

For over 15 years Sandra Bridie has been inventing fictional artists. Often using her own name, but varying the birth and sometimes death dates, Bridie's numerous artists play out possible scenarios for an artist's existence within a local culture and recognisable milieu. Bridie has also created another fictional mentor/curator figure, B.S.Hope to accompany the fictional artist's creative work. B.S.Hope interviews the fictional Sandra Bridie, interrogating into the processes and biographical moments behind the work the fictional Bridie exhibits. The transcribed interviews between the two fictional entities make up the catalogue that always accompanies the artistic output of Sandra Bridie.

In *Julie Davies, Composite Portraits of Sandra Bridie*, Davies presents a series of composite photographic portraits of the fictional and actual Sandra Bridie. The portraits evolved via a collaborative process with Sandra Bridie, with Davies data-projecting a range of: textual documentation, images of Sandra's curatorial projects, and various fictional 'Sandras' (born 1912, 1955, 1970 etc) onto a stable image of the 'actual' Bridie. These images were workshopped over two years at the artists' space Ocular Lab in West Brunswick, where both Davies and Bridie are original members.

The photographic images produced for *Composite Portraits* are high-resolution, digitally printed portraits of Bridie resulting in a collaging of fictional and actual identities, whilst leaving distinct traces of their performative processes. Bridie and Davies chose to leave certain references to the computer interface of the digital projector as evidence in the photographs, allowing such screen debris as drop-down menus, toolbars and cursors to frame or interrupt the jpeg images of the documentation projected onto Bridie. The projected texture of pixel information differs from that of the actual subject resulting in Bridie being cast in strange relief by the projections and their accompanying shadows, so that we see an interaction between her real current figure in 3D overlaid by her past fictional and archival images in 2D.

*Julie Davies, Composite Portraits of Sandra Bridie* was conceived of by Davies when documenting a talk by Bridie on 'Wait', a collaborative video event with writer/artist Cynthia Troup, at Ocular Lab in December 2004. The performative actions of Bridie engaging with her own screen image or art practice became a trigger for this photographic project.

Julie Davies practice moves between teaching, Ocular Lab, collaborations with other artists and individual photographic work. Davies co-instigated *h* project Melbourne 1997-98 and is a founding member of Ocular Lab Inc 2003-9.

## Work, Endeavour, Desire:

### *Julie Davies, Composite Portraits of Sandra Bridie*

OCULAR LAB, 9–24 FEBRUARY 2008

Julie Davies' *Composite Portraits* defer to the long history of artists' portraits by imparting a pride in commitment to creative work, a pride that involves seriousness as well as playful pragmatism. Together these portraits offer a chronicle of projects undertaken by Sandra Bridie over sixteen years; that is, images of archival materials that refer to the projects in a chronological order. The materials include video stills, publications, and texts composed for gallery walls; however, they are mostly photographic snapshots relating to the theme of 'the artist at work'.

Evidently, these 'documents' have become images of images, each made visible and enlarged through a data projector, producing, in most cases, a vibrant background for the figure of Sandra Bridie. The resultant landscapes (and the height of the prints is smaller than the width) give a conceptual latitude to the theme of 'the artist at work'. Whether blurred as a spectral form, or positioned as a quiescent observer, Sandra Bridie has been interpolated as a corporeal presence before the projections. And by this figure of the artist-subject, the chronicle acquires a narrative—even an epic—scope.

*Composite Portraits* shows Julie Davies and Sandra Bridie taking pleasure in the camera's promise to reveal and authenticate the photographic subject; taking equal pleasure in its provocative power to stage the human self. Of course, Sandra Bridie's lasting practice of documenting artists both actual and fictional relies on the same play of associations. With this in mind, the photographic storyboard that comprises *Composite Portraits* might be interpreted as a joint statement concerning Sandra Bridie's view of the activities pertaining to the artist—a view capable of providing, perhaps, a 'conceptual portrait' of the artist's endeavour.

## Work

According to the images from Sandra Bridie's archive, the artist's tasks are demonstrably practical, sober and rather studious. Chiefly they consist of watching and listening; reading and writing. Such pursuits are implied by the recurrence of a certain type of conventional equipment: audio-recording and playback devices, a laptop, televisions; books, catalogues, index cards, papers and written screeds.

All of this is found in settings that bear no resemblance to the messy clutter often expected of an artist's studio-retreat. Where they can be identified, the locations are predominantly indoors, orderly and quite plain: white-walled gallery spaces (that of Ocular Lab in particular), and a comfortable lounge room—spaces conducive to a feeling of equable composure, to deliberation, and to a kind of

withdrawal into the self that can follow. Therefore, in the single group snapshot [7], Sandra Bridie turns aside from the attending circle, solemnly addressing the camera instead. The superimposed figure of Sandra Bridie echoes this expression of reserve, and heightens the atmosphere of detachment in her formal stance. Overall, if the projected images point to the variety of Sandra Bridie's interests, and her diligence as a curator, more broadly they suggest sustained activity of analytical reflection.

## **Endeavour**

Witness the blue-toned, grainy introspection of the grieving Seona Hope, magnified in silhouette, at once performed and dispassionately acknowledged by Sandra Bridie [6].

Analytical reflection, or contemplation, might best describe the attitude adopted by Sandra Bridie as she poses before the archival images. Consequently, somewhat surprisingly, the *Composite Portraits* invoke a view of the artist connected with the Romantic tradition: an ideal of the artist as a solitary searcher, no less, for whom the 'self' is the prism through which to discover an imaginative continuum.

Against aspects of the same Romantic tradition, here the depicted artist returns (and returns the viewer) to *herself*—not *himself*—as the resilient focus for enquiry and creative transformation. 'Resilient' because the standing form of Sandra Bridie recognisably persists: her presence is flattened out, at times exaggerated by dramatic shadows, yet its contours and appearance are undisguised, and call to mind a figurative classicism of sorts. 'Resilient' because as Julie Davies and Sandra Bridie know so well, the technology of the photograph will never convert such a haunting into substantial information, or revelation about the artist-subject.

## **Desire**

Insistently posing the question 'who is Sandra Bridie?', Julie Davies' *Composite Portraits* promote desire for the ineffable richness of a biographical narrative, a coherent 'artist's biography'. The image with which the exhibition culminates highlights this effect, while lending the project a much wider, epic scope. In 'S. B. casts a shadow on an image from "Ten Walking Meditations ..."' [17], the background that holds Sandra Bridie's reflective gaze is no longer the close-up, indoors, but a shimmering horizon above a stretch of sea. This literal turn to a landscape, with its anonymous motifs of a distant boat on moving water, recollects to the viewer—Sandra Bridie included—a notion of the self inexorably in process, unfolding into time undocumented.

Cynthia Troup, January 2008

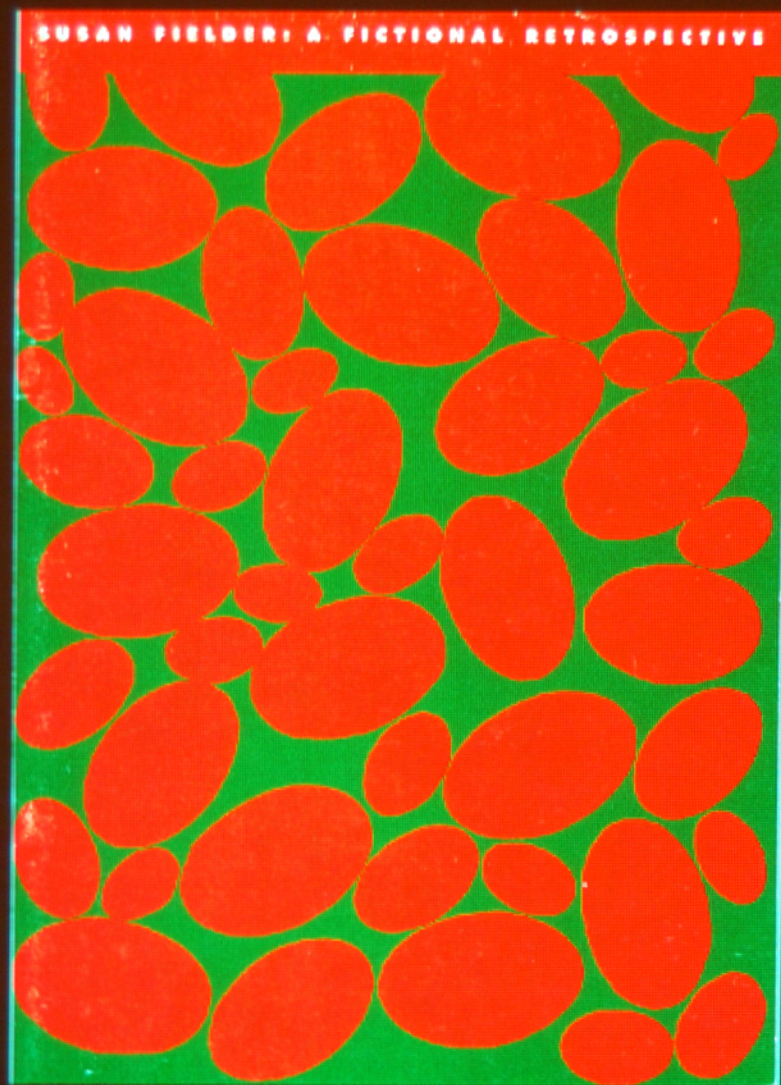
Cynthia Troup is a Melbourne-based writer and historian, and a founding member of the arts company Aphids

## List of works

All photographs by Julie Davies, digital images on paper, 600 X 800mm, 2007/8

1. *S.B. poses in the frame cast by an image of the catalogue cover to 'Susan Fielder: A Fictional Retrospective' (1991)*
2. *S.B. walking past an image of 'Tangential Practice' (2006) paraphernalia*
3. *Video still: Title frame from Fictional and Actual Artists Space, 'Andrew Hurle: One Place Tokyo' (1995)*
4. *S.B. walking past an image of the installation of 'Andrew Hurle: One Place: Tokyo' (1995)*
5. *S.B. engages with an image of Seona Hope from 'Sandra Bridie b. 1955: B.S.Hope ~ Portrait of a Mentor, a fiction (French Fictions)' (1997)*
6. *S.B. reflects on an image of the grieving Seona Hope from 'Sandra Bridie b. 1955: B.S.Hope ~ Portrait of a Mentor, a fiction' (1997)*
7. *S.B. superimposes herself into an image from 'Sandra Bridie b. 1955: B.S.Hope ~ Portrait of a Mentor, a fiction' (1997)*
8. *S.B. poses in the frame cast by an image from 'Conversation with Andrew McQualter about some films by Marcel Carne' (1998)*
9. *Image from 'Conversation with Andrew McQualter about some films by Marcel Carne' (1998)*
10. *Image from photo-text 'the artist goes shopping for wool' by Andrew Preston from 'The Artist and the Writer, a fiction' (2002)*
11. *S.B. poses in the frame cast by an image from photo-text 'the artist in the tower' by Andrew Preston from 'The Artist and the Writer, a fiction' (2002)*
12. *S.B. walking past an image of a video transition from 'Wait' (2004)*
13. *Video still from 'Wait' (2004)*
14. *The exhibition text from 'Active Imagination' (2006) is projected onto S.B.*
15. *Documentation of cataloguing the Robert Schubert Collection for the Ocular Lab library (2006) is projected onto S.B.*
16. *Image of Index cards for the Robert Schubert Collection, Ocular Lab library*
17. *S.B. casts a shadow on an image from 'Ten Walking Meditations: #1 Elegy for B.S. Hope, Elwood Beach, a fiction' (2007)*















experience a bit revealing – there is no way I would initiate a project where I presented eight photographs of myself to the viewer. So regarding your question about collaboration, I don't think the work was that. I don't know how well it fits into an idea of curation either. My participation in the project was active enough, especially when it came to selecting the photos, and also in coming up with the idea of the representation of an active

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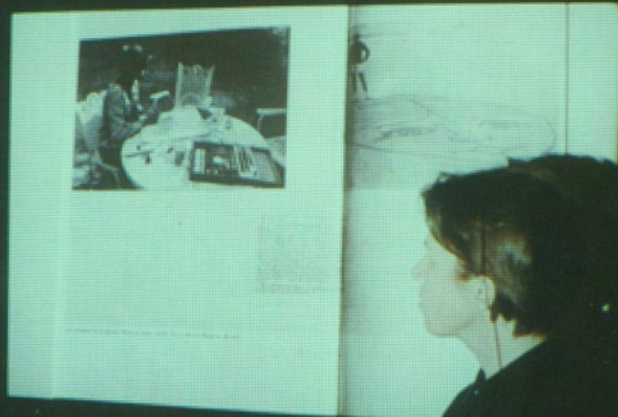
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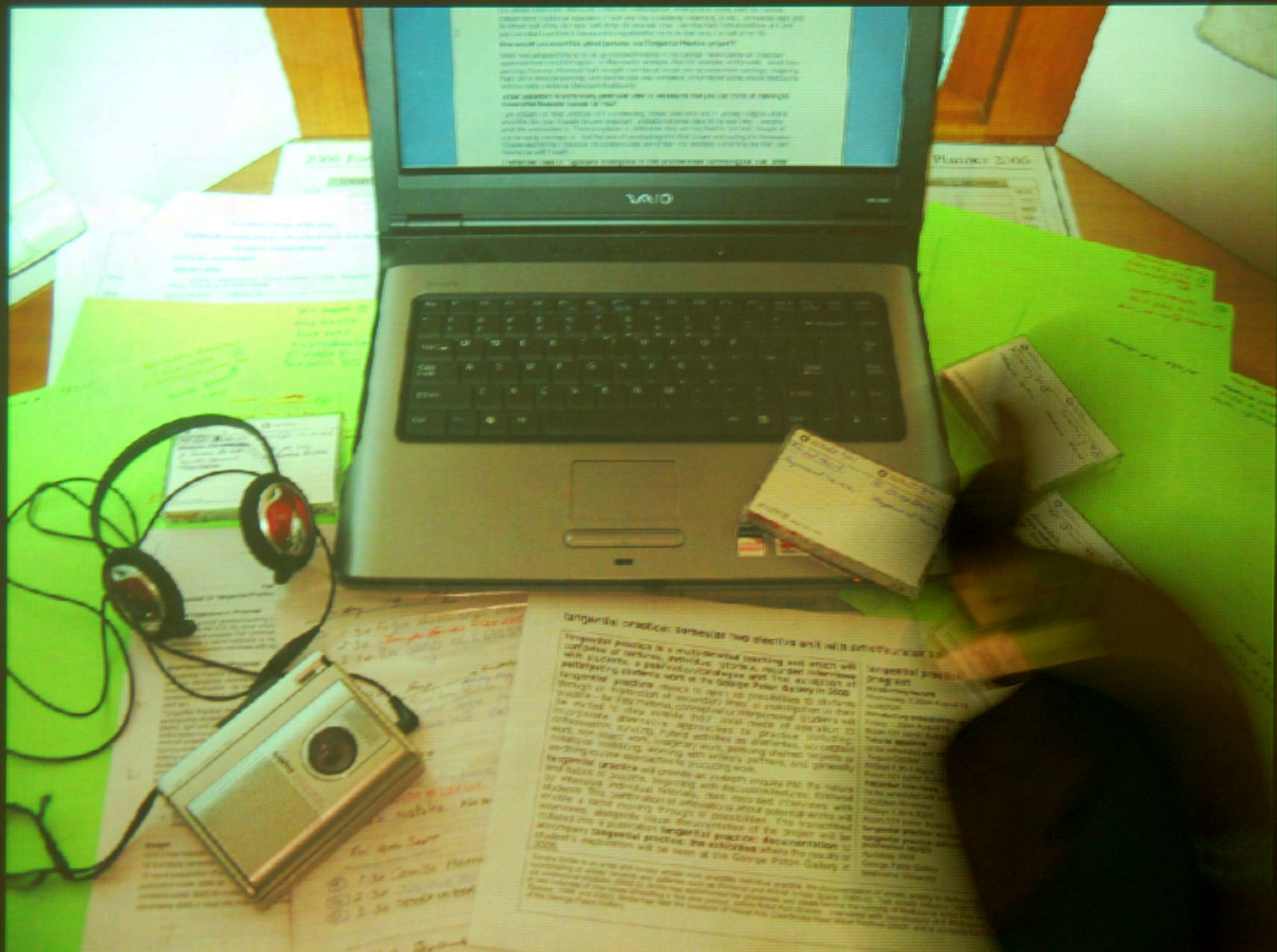
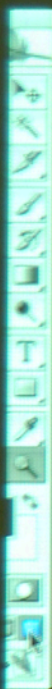














Each participant was allocated a portion of the IPS and over a two week period they worked intensively, rendering up an image of either a solo or curated exhibition imaginatively projected onto the entire IPS space. The group were encouraged to give their imagination broad rein, allowing their vision to trespass the boundaries of what would be merely possible for their show, they could propose a work with no limit on their budget, set up time, legal requirements and so on. With this in mind, a number of the conjectures presented in the space were common up artists from the dead, such as Pablo Picasso, Andy Warhol and Felix Gonzales-Torres to assist them in developing their curatorial premise.

What is presented here, are the four conjectured spaces, one allocated to each participant. Within each space we see a range of conjectures for exhibitions that could occupy the entire gallery, either as samples or fragments of a larger exhibition, or notation towards that exhibition. Due to the fast tracking nature of the project, the station







