

# daniel von sturmer

“Daniel von Sturmer’s exhibitions are formal but openly structured spaces that one can step into at any point and at any pace, and within which there are places to pause and contemplate the role that small things have in larger cycles - and by extension in the world at large.”

Justin Paton

Daniel von Sturmer is the second recipient of the Helen Macpherson Smith Commission: a partnership between the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA) and the Helen Macpherson Smith Trust, which offers a Victorian artist the opportunity to create an ambitious new work at ACCA.

## artist’s background

Daniel von Sturmer was born in 1972, Auckland, New Zealand. He completed a MA in Fine Arts at RMIT in 1999 and in 2001 was awarded a Samstag Scholarship. His work has been shown widely in group and solo exhibitions including most recently in the Australian Pavilion as one of the three Australian artists representing Australia in the 2007 Venice Biennale. Daniel currently lives and works in Melbourne.

Recent exhibitions include: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 2006; Centre for Non Objective Art, Belgium, 2006; Dunedin Public Art Gallery, New Zealand, 2005; The Walters Prize, Auckland Art Gallery, New Zealand, 2004; Hamburger Bahnhof, Germany, 2003; Reisefreiheit: Neue Kunst, Germany, 2003; Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia, Spain, 2002.

Daniel von Sturmer is represented by Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne, Australia. [www.annaschwartzgallery.com](http://www.annaschwartzgallery.com)

## inspiration and investigation

Daniel von Sturmer works in a range of media to explore the relationship between pictorial and real space, expectation and perception. He explores how we see and what we see, which includes our preconceived ideas. His works play with fundamental laws governing perception and the inertia or kinetic nature of objects.

Daniel is also interested in ‘propositions’, architectural style installations and video experiments using simple, everyday materials, which explore perception, space and time and how objects and materials can take on new meanings, depending on their context.

Daniel’s visual experiments relate to the history of painting, sculptural space, kinetics and the moving image, referencing and replaying aspects of modernism, minimalism and abstraction, in a playful and intimate way.

Daniel delights in converting the banal object into a thing of curiosity. His use of the video camera, with its capacity to zoom in and out, pan, track, enlarge and diminish as need be, allows him to make common things behave in strange ways, drawing attention to their innate, physical potential. In an age when special effects and digital manipulation are commonly incorporated into photography and video work, he retains a strong sense of truth and refrains from utilising any visual digital enhancements.

Platforms of various materials are also an important part of Daniel’s installation work. A range of purpose-built platforms support his objects and videos which accentuate both the object and the relationship with the built space in which they exist.



Daniel von Sturmer  
*The Field Equation*, 2006  
The Helen Macpherson Smith Commission  
for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art  
Courtesy the artist and  
Anna Schwartz Gallery





Daniel von Sturmer  
*Material From Another Medium*, 2001  
Centre for Contemporary Photography  
Courtesy the artist and  
Anna Schwartz Gallery

“In recent projects, von Sturmer has focused more closely on transforming the viewing conditions in the gallery space, reintroducing a sense of time, as well as shifting the viewer’s orientation away from conventional and anticipated views to ones that are unexpected.” (1)

## materials and techniques

Some of Daniel’s favourite materials have been crumpled up paper, Blu-Tack, coloured paper squares, water, polystyrene balls, planks of wood, disposable cups, sticky tape, paper clips, and plasticine etc. “Through his use of the video camera, Daniel assists these common things to behave in odd and eccentric ways, drawing attention to their innate physical potential, activating an inquisitive engagement with the viewer. The challenge for Daniel is to free his materials from symbolic associations, so that it is the viewer who projects their own meaning onto the objects. His interest is with the interplay between what the viewer sees and grapples with and in creating a greater degree of engagement and intrigue.”

(2)

Daniel explores the inherent quality of a range of materials - string as something both floppy and rigid, balls that cluster, roll and disperse. These materials, subjected to the effects of various external forces, especially gravity, encourage the viewer to think about space, scale, orientation, weight and gravity.

When Daniel is creating a work, he starts with the exhibition space and examines the entire environment. This includes the dimensions and material qualities of the floor, the walls, the ceiling and ways in which that space can be negotiated.

In earlier projects, Daniel made use of ‘camera obscura’\* and architectural adjustments to the built spaces, literally bringing the outside world into the gallery, focusing the viewing experience on the simplest of things: an angle of light or a single landmark.

Daniel transformed the gallery space and the ‘white cube’ from a place where valued objects and images would normally fit, to a place where the space and the built structure were essential to the work. Daniel makes us consider the privileges of the exhibition space, where temporarily, these theories do not apply. His interest in the white space of the gallery, and the activity within, confirms his interest in continuing aspects of Brian O’Doherty’s enquiry into the gallery space as a ‘white cube’.

O’Doherty states; “A gallery is constructed along laws as rigorous as those for building a medieval church. The outside world must not come in, so windows are usually sealed off. Walls are painted white. The ceiling becomes the source of light. The wooden floor is polished so that you click along clinically or carpeted so that you pad soundlessly, resting the feet while the eyes look at the wall. The art is free, as the saying used to go, to take on its own life. The discreet desk may be the only piece of furniture.” (3)

In an earlier work, *Gain and Loss*, 1997, Daniel’s collaborative exhibition with Leslie Eastman and Andy Thomson, transformed West Space gallery into a labyrinth of corridors, using screens and windows, camera obscura and video projections to turn the space outside-in, dismantling the various framing devices which separate a picture from its context, a gallery from its surroundings, art from ‘everyday life’.

*Cube*, 1998, at ACCA, another collaboration with Andy Thomson and Leslie Eastman, presented the viewer with a white cube, placed within the gallery space. In this work, views of the landscape outside the gallery, were projected onto the outside of the cube. Here Daniel explored ideas surrounding the gallery space as a ‘white cube’, which is a term often used by art theorists. (see Brian O’Doherty, *Inside the white cube: notes on the gallery space*. [www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm](http://www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm))



Daniel von Sturmer  
*Cube*, 1998  
Collaboration with Andy Thomson  
and Leslie Eastman  
ACCA, Melbourne  
Courtesy the artist and  
Anna Schwartz Gallery

\*The ‘camera obscura’ (Latin for ‘dark room’) was the ancestor of the modern camera. The camera was actually a large room that would be entered by the user. Light entering a small hole in a darkened room produces an inverted image on the opposite wall. Used initially to view solar eclipses, in the seventeenth century, the process was made portable by fitting a lens to one end of a box and using a sheet of glass at the opposite end to view the image. [www.acmi.net.au/aic/camera\\_obscura.html](http://www.acmi.net.au/aic/camera_obscura.html).



Daniel von Sturmer  
*The Truth Effect*, 2003  
 Commissioned as part of *NEW03*  
 at the Australian Centre for  
 Contemporary Art  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery



Daniel von Sturmer  
*Horizontal Hold*, 2004  
 Museum of Sydney  
 Part of *On Reason and Emotion*  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery



Daniel von Sturmer  
*The Field Equation*, 2006  
 The Helen Macpherson Smith Commission  
 for the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery  
 Photo: Andrew Curtis

For the work *Plane*, 2000, Daniel completely removed a section of the 1st Floor Artists & Writers Space gallery wall and replaced it with plate glass, which continued his style of intervention. This opened up the gallery spaces to one another; the solid plane of glass barred access, evoking the ‘look but don’t touch’ conditioning of the well-behaved gallery visitor.

*Science Fiction*, 2001 featured a loop of five ‘tricks’, mostly done by running the video backwards - a blob of plasticine ‘miraculously’ regained its cuboid shape; a blob of Blu-Tack leapt up to attach itself to a fingertip; the surface of the water in a glass tilted weirdly sideways as in a force field.

For the exhibition *NEW03* at ACCA, for the work entitled *The Truth Effect*, 2003, Daniel erected a tilted platform which related to the floating ceiling of the Gallery, and which changed the dynamic sense of the rear of the gallery space. The platform supported projectors and luminous screens, which presented images of colour, shape and material experiments. The angled platform functioned as a picture plane, orientating the viewer’s engagement with the work and the space of the gallery. Within this defined space, Daniel orientated the viewer as subject by staging an experiment; a play of visual and material action.

For the work *Horizontal Hold*, 2004, Museum of Sydney, part of *On Reason and Emotion*, for the 14th Biennale of Sydney, Daniel presented a room lit brightly within the Museum, which was clearly visible from the street outside. Inside, a projection of tendrils of shredded paper, continuously crawled from right to left inside the space, taking on a strange alien-like form. This continual shredding of paper, pertinent to the site, in Sydney’s main business district, commented in part on the greed and excesses of the business community and the shredding of important documents.

In the work *Screen Test*, 2004, ordinary objects slid, bounced, and knocked into walls according to an alternative gravity. Projected onto a corner-shaped screen, the pictorial space of this synchronised video, extended the two-dimensional plane of the video image into the space of the gallery, disorientating the visitor.

In *The Field Equation*, 2006, Daniel responded to the voluminous gallery at ACCA, by fragmenting the space, creating a field of plinths at varying heights which supported a range of objects, videos and projection screens. The work encouraged the viewer to enter the gallery space and move around it, to find different viewpoints. Connections between objects and videos changed at different vantage points. Some elements such as balls, reappeared in different works and in different states of being i.e. individual polystyrene balls, filmed and projected onto one of the small screens, which raced at high speed toward the viewer, also appeared in real space in a clustered form, looking like part of a science experiment.

Like the work of the Renaissance artists, Alberti and Brunelleschi, if you placed a screen across the opening in front of *The Field Equation*, and viewed Daniel’s work as a foreshortened picture, you could see abstract principles of geometry with grids and viewing points. Unlike painting, however, the animated screens and objects could be viewed from a number of angles, not necessarily from one frontal position. For *The Field Equation*, the exhibition space became a field of experience; both abstract and real and a kind of landscape which you could wander through and experience moments of both mobility and stasis, thought and contemplation. (4)

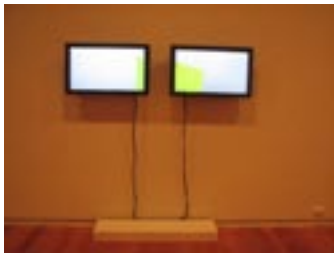
Daniel describes *The Field Equation* by saying, “I like to think about the objects as propositions, about the way we experience things. We have knowledge of them by their uses and functions - we know what to do with string or if we can invent something else to do with it, and it’s that inventive moment which I think is interesting.”(5)

In 2007, Daniel von Sturmer was selected to represent Australia at the 52nd International Art Exhibition, Biennale di Venezia, 2007. His work *The Object of Things*, 2007, included a wooden platform which flowed across the interior space of the Australian Pavilion, supporting a range of video screens, creating a sense of space, scale and orientation through experiments with gravity and weightlessness, movement and stillness.

Professor Richard de Marco, Demarco European Art Foundation, said: ‘In all my years of visiting the Australian Pavilion, since the day it opened, I believe that Daniel’s exhibition reveals its true beauty and elegance as a space. It is indeed a



Daniel von Sturmer  
*The Object of Things*, 2007  
 Australian Pavilion  
 Venice Biennale  
 Courtesy the artist and  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery



Daniel von Sturmer  
*Folded Space*, 2006-2007  
 (installation views)  
 dual screen synchronised DVD  
 Collection, Geelong Gallery  
 Gift of the Helen Macpherson  
 Smith Trust as part of the  
 Australian Centre for  
 Contemporary Art, 2007  
 Image courtesy the artist and  
 Anna Schwartz Gallery

pavilion with a difference with a thought provoking exhibition tailor made to every unique aspect of its interior.'

Lance Fung, curator of the *SITE* Santa Fe Biennale 2008 said: 'Daniel's exhibition challenges the visitors with its architectural elegance and unique integration of media and objects. In Daniel's work the representation of objects has shifted to a minimal ethereal thread unifying the unique and two levelled pavilion.' (6)

Daniel's recent work *Folded Space*, 2007, gifted to the Permanent Collection of the Geelong Gallery and currently on exhibition, is a dual channel video piece which shows a series of colour sheets moving across from one to the other of two wall mounted screens. In this deceptively simple experiment with colours and planes, Daniel graphically explores how we perceive proximity and depth, also confounding the relationship of the video space, with the framing device of the screen space and with the real space of the white gallery wall. (7)

## curriculum links

Visit the Venice Biennale site at: [www.australiavenicebiennale.com.au/content/view/23/45/lang,en/](http://www.australiavenicebiennale.com.au/content/view/23/45/lang,en/) to download the education kit and podcast on Daniel von Sturmer.

Listen to and download MP3 files on Daniel von Sturmer talking about his work at ACCA's soundfile page: [www.accaonline.org.au/SoundFiles](http://www.accaonline.org.au/SoundFiles).

## victorian essential learning standards

- How does Daniel von Sturmer communicate his ideas in his work?
- Explore the way in which von Sturmer's work examines particular ideas in relation to art history; for example, abstraction etc.
- Compare and contrast von Sturmer's work to other installation artists.
- Von Sturmer's work reflects the way in which contemporary artists utilise ordinary, everyday things. Create a work using a range of ordinary objects from your classroom.
- Look at the game called 'Mousetrap' and then construct a collaborative installation from found objects that explores ideas surrounding gravity.
- Research the history and development of perspective in art.

## vce level

### art

- Explore the way in which von Sturmer has developed a distinctive style in his work.
- Examine the objects, techniques and media in von Sturmer's work and how each element conveys meaning.
- How important do you think the display and layout of von Sturmer's installations are to interpreting his work?
- Explore the art historical links in von Sturmer's work in relation to minimalism, modernism and abstraction.
- Explore the way in which von Sturmer's ideas relate to 'camera obscura' and gravity.
- Refer to the formal elements in art e.g. point, line, shape, space, value (light and dark), colour and texture, to analyse and discuss the way in which von Sturmer presents and communicates his ideas.
- Critically analyse the work of von Sturmer, using two interpretive frameworks (for e.g. historical or postmodern) to interpret some of the meanings and messages and to support your personal point of view.

- Compare and contrast von Sturmer's work to the work of two other artists of your choice, pre and post 1970.
- How do you think von Sturmer's work compares to the work of other artists who are interested in space and minimalism?
- Compare and contrast the work of von Sturmer to the work of other contemporary installation artists.

## studio arts

- Identify and discuss the broad sources of inspiration Daniel von Sturmer has used in the production of his work.
- Identify and discuss the materials and techniques von Sturmer uses in the production of his work.
- Identify and discuss signs and symbols used in von Sturmer's work and the way in which they convey meaning.
- Analyse the aesthetic qualities of von Sturmer's work and the way they contribute to the communication of ideas and the development of style. Compare this with the work of another artist from a different period in art history.
- Discuss the range of difficulties which you think von Sturmer may encounter in developing and creating his work.
- Explore the role of the public gallery in presenting significant works of art by contemporary artists, which may defy the public's perception of what they understand 'art' to be, like Daniel von Sturmer.
- What are some of the issues facing artists whose practice deals primarily with ephemeral art such as installation art? Discuss this in relation to the sale, storage, maintenance and longevity of this type of art.
- Gather a range of commentaries on von Sturmer's work from reviews, press clippings, art history texts etc. Critically review the concepts and ideas behind his work based on your own and a range of other viewpoints.
- Explore the 'notion of the 'white cube' and the work of other contemporary artists who are interested in the gallery space as an important part of their work.

## further research

[www.danielvonsturmer.com](http://www.danielvonsturmer.com)

*The Field Equation* catalogue, ACCA, 2006

Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube: notes on the gallery space*.  
[www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm](http://www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm)

A DVD on the Venice Biennale (produced in partnership with Arts NSW) may be ordered from Venice Biennale 2007 Administration, Australia Council for the Arts.  
Phone: +61 2 9215 9004 Email: [venice2007@ozco.gov.au](mailto:venice2007@ozco.gov.au)

- (1) Charlotte Day, Associate Curator, ACCA
- (2) Juliana Engberg, Artistic Director, ACCA
- (3) Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the white cube: notes on the gallery space*.  
[www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm](http://www.societyofcontrol.com/whitecube/insidewc.htm)
- (4) Charlotte Day, Associate Curator, ACCA
- (5) *The Age*, 2006
- (6) [www.australiavenicebiennale.com.au/content/view/23/45/lang,en](http://www.australiavenicebiennale.com.au/content/view/23/45/lang,en)
- (7) Charlotte Day, Associate Curator, ACCA