



**SPECTRA**  
Ross Manning  
Milani Gallery  
9– 23 February, 2012

“We are no longer the objects of a given objective world, but projects of alternative worlds. From the submissive position of subjection we have arisen into projection. We grow up. We know that we dream” — Vilém Flusser

As contemporary life, increasingly, is lived in virtual space, Ross Manning's work takes place in a defiantly 'real-world' context. Unpretentious materials are at the heart of Manning's practice, which stages spatial interventions via everyday objects: fluorescent tubes, ceiling fans, household twine, brown wrapping paper, and analogue overhead projectors. It is in the organisation of these interdependent entities that Manning's creations seek ways of being that are playful and reflexive, intuitive and diagnostic.

In and of themselves, the works link to the historical practices of assemblage art through the principle of collision, the sometimes-surprising combination of seemingly unrelated elements and materials. In operation, these works invite us to explore the mystery of natural phenomena, especially light, Manning's primary obsession. The wonder of optics – the source of photography and the cinema, among many forms referenced in these works – is as much a matter of concern for art as it science. But the manipulation of contingent light, in Manning's hands, shades into critique.

Manning's work threatens to lift the veil from the fetishised consumer electronics on which we are dependent, subtly repositioning the technologies that operate as the unseen 'given' in our daily lives. In place of the corporate software-hardware standards that are now so normative as to be effectively coercive, we are presented with a quiet unworking - an alternative emotion of objects. What is highlighted, throughout Manning's work, is the ongoing, unresolved question about the dynamics of power between technology and contemporary life.

The alternate techno-imaginary hinted at by *Spectra* and *Endless Sheet* varies according to the spectator's placement in relation to the object, requiring the spectator's presence for completion. Here, life enters art literally, in the kinetic animation of objects and dancing beams of light, and also psychically, through the elevation of unassuming materials charged with the energies of infinite permutation. The shifting constellations resulting from Manning's mechanical logic of contingency echo the proposal by English process-philosopher, Alfred North Whitehead (1919), that 'the energetic activity considered as physics is the emotional activity entertained in life'.

-- Danni Zuvela, January 2012