



# **Surface Tension**

Biljana Jancic

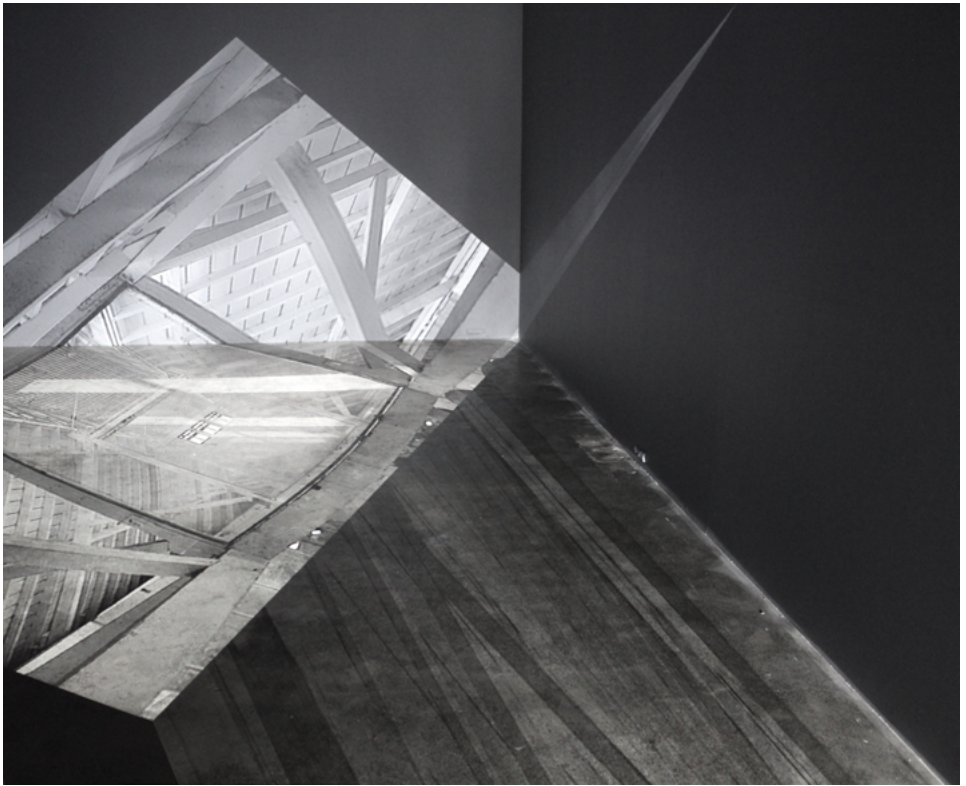






## CONTAINER

In **Surface Tension** Biljana Jancic consolidates the site-specificity of her practice with a new work structured around a series of interventions that interrogate the relationship of 'content' and 'container' at UTS Gallery. The evolution of art spaces, for display and exhibition, has a history of its own: from the residential *palazzi* of noble Italian families, to the first grand European galleries open to the public, to modernist 'white cubes' and the black and grey boxes designated for video and performance-based art. Within this mix are institutional university galleries, which function as important sites for contemporary art today. They represent over a quarter of Australian museums and have become incubators for innovative research and creative practice. Jancic's focus on the institution is evident from recent work. In **Exit Strategies** at SCA Gallery (Fauvette Loureiro Scholarship Award, 2016) Jancic delivered a dynamic superimposition of institutional spaces rendered in light. With **A Beach (Beneath)** (Primavera 2016: Young Australian Artists) surfaces of reflective industrial tape and chroma-key blue wall/floor projections recalibrated our perception of the white cube gallery at the Museum of Contemporary Art.



A brief history of this container: In 1996 the UTS Gallery was located in the new building for the Faculty of Design, Architecture and Building by Cox Richardson architects. The building reflects the 1990s trend for postmodern architecture and stands today as a curious blend of both vernacular and modernist languages. It wasn't deemed an art gallery at the time but rather (in the language of the bureaucracy) a 'mixed-use' zone for academic or commercial display. UTS Gallery has made modifications to what is, in essence, a glass box that receives light from two interlocking atriums. The space has presented challenges for its artists—in particular those working with projection-based materials. However, where others have seen limitations, Jancic has confronted the site-specificity of the gallery head-on. Her first, and crucial, intervention

was to deny any additional surfaces afforded by the modular wall system and return the gallery to an institutional *a priori* condition: glass box / polished floor / concrete column. Jancic's *tabula rasa* creates a new spatial field to engage with adjacent spaces and the wider UTS environment.

In **Surface Tension**, the singular column, which demarcates the space, is taken as a vortex for a play of surface interventions in industrial tape and light projection. With reference to Suprematist grammar the column defies our expectations of solid/void and from this pre-determined coordinate an array of industrial tape forms radiate across the horizontal plate of the gallery. The new surfaces are architectonic and hard-edged. They (re)produce iterations of the horizontal banding of the architecture and angularity of



the visible stairwell (mapped from a vertical to horizontal plane). Beyond this, the horizontality also cites the brutalist spandrel panels of the iconic UTS Tower. The silver reinforced aluminum tape reflects the play of light in the gallery, and the blue chroma-key tape points to existing works within the UTS Art Collection such as Michael Johnson's **Untitled** (1969)—a painting that features a column of iridescent blue in the tradition of post-painterly abstraction.

Next, two intersecting trajectories of tape-based surface forms cut across the gallery floor plate: one vector in aluminium tape darts across, then folds up the far wall—sharing this surface with a large scale projection. The second, in chroma-key blue tape, crosses this axis then scales the glass envelope in denial of any termination of this axis. From afar, this blue vector seems almost to pierce the glass skin of the gallery and project itself into the space of stairwell. The projection is, at once, both image and surface in that it stretched across the gallery wall in entirety. This reveals a subtle interplay of forms: a horizontal screen-like element, through which light leaks and bleeds, with shadows of vegetation. At first glance, this surface seems a part of the architecture itself—perhaps a refraction of light through the *brise soleil* of the courtyard. The soft-edge, organic shadow forms engage with the visible atrium planting and diffuse the presence of a hard edge between interior/exterior. On closer inspection this projected image is actually two: it is folded and mirrored at its centre. In **Surface Tension**, Jancic's interventions never depart their context and in doing so complicate our reading, and sensibility, of surface, depth and materiality within the gallery space.

In **The Ends of Art and Design**, cultural theorist Stuart Kendall argues (with some conviction) that it is design, not fine art or contemporary art, which dominates contemporary visual culture today<sup>1</sup>. But *Surface Tension* complicates any neat hierarchy. With her ongoing interventions into

the spaces and surfaces that surround, Jancic both adopts and critiques the practices and languages of design. Working with surface as material she questions the authority of the designer (or architect) as the prime provider of spatial experience and surface enclosures. This complicates our expectations of both art and design and forces us to interact with the container, as the source of the content. That *Surface Tension* unfolds within the heart of the design schools at UTS, makes the work an even more stimulating and provocative assessment of the contemporary condition.

<sup>1</sup> Stuart Kendall (2011), *The Ends of Art and Design*, Nebraska: Infra-Red Thin Press.

## Alex Munt

2017

Dr Alex Munt is a Senior Lecturer in Media Arts & Production in the School of Communication in the Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences at UTS.

Previous: Biljana Jancic *A Beach (Beneath)* 2016, installation view, Primavera 2016: Young Australian Artists, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney. Silver tape, projections.

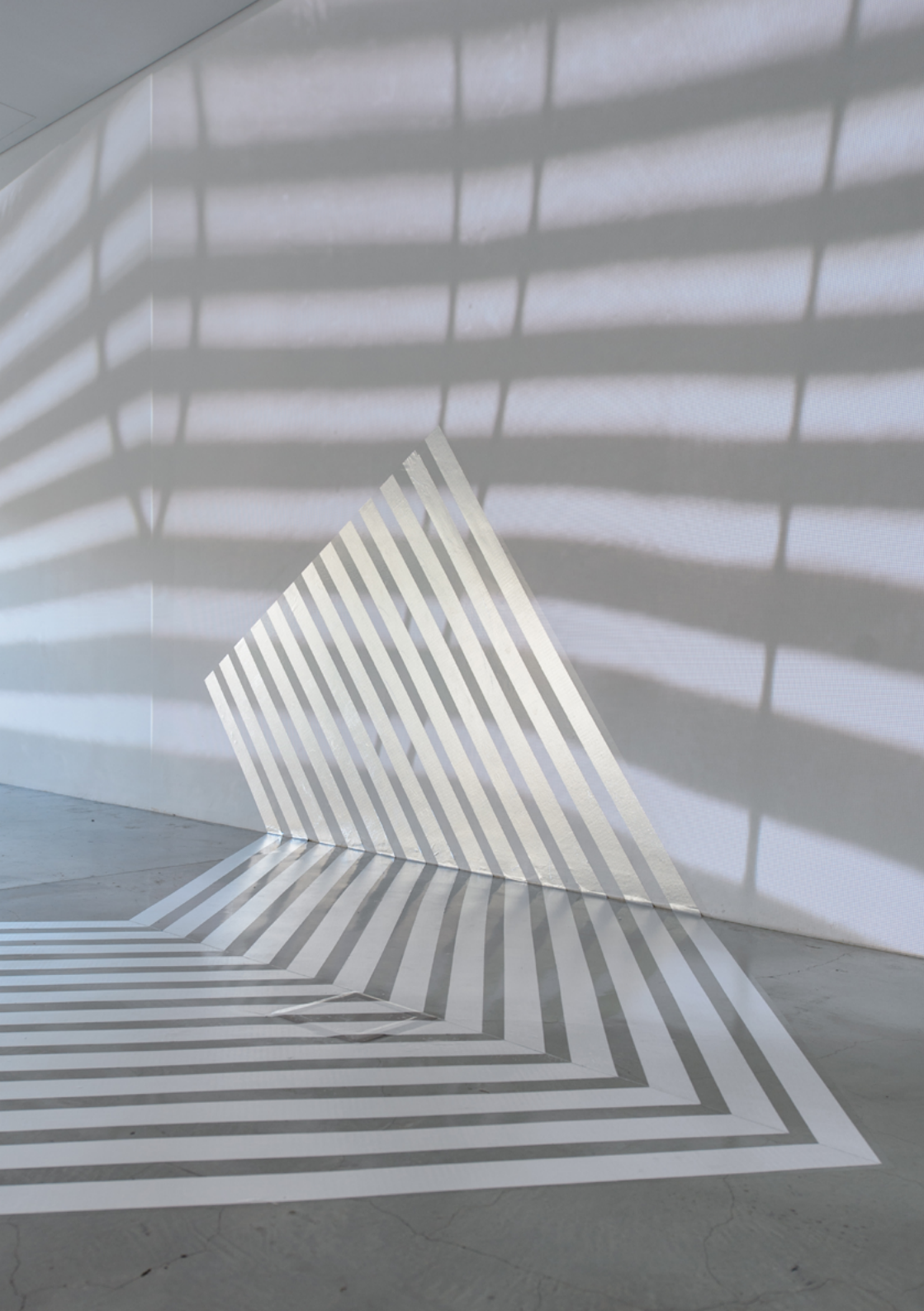
Left: Biljana Jancic, 'Exit Strategies', 2016. installation view SCA Galleries. CCTV camera, image splitter, 5 channel video projection. Photo: Kath Fries

Following: Biljana Jancic, 'Exit Strategies', 2016. installation view SCA Galleries. CCTV camera, image splitter, 5 channel video projection. Photo: Ian Hobbs

























**Biljana Jancic** (b. 1984 Osijek, Croatia. Lives Sydney, Australia) is interested in the intersections between contemporary art and architecture. She produces large scale spatial interventions that often consider the nature of the white-cube as a context. The works respond to the architecture and atmosphere of the host site by drawing attention to the existing spatial features while also seeking to reframe and complicate the existing spatial dynamics. Consequently, her works directly implicate the architecture of the gallery into the artistic gesture so that the boundaries between incursion and context become blurred.

#### *Education*

**2013** Doctor of Philosophy (Visual Arts), The University of Sydney - Sydney College of the Arts

**2008** Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) The University of Sydney - Sydney College of the Arts

#### *Selected Recent Exhibitions*

**2017** 'Surface Tension', UTS Gallery, Sydney. (Solo Exhibition)

**2016** 'Primavera', Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney. Curated by Emily Cormack.

TarraWarra Biennial 2016: 'Endless Circulation', TarraWarra Museum of Art, Victoria.  
Curated by Helen Hughes and Victoria Lynn.

**2015** 'The Cloud', with Alex Munt, Mosman Art Gallery, Sydney.

'Script', Underbelly Arts Festival, Cockatoo Island.

'An Imprecise Science', Artspace, Sydney. Curated by Alexie Glass-Kantor with Talia Linz.

'\_\_\_\_\_', Margaret Lawrence Gallery, VCA, Melbourne.

'Kaleidorama', Stills Gallery, Sydney. Curated by Josephine Skinner.

**2014** 'Through Space', Artist Space 55 Sydenham Rd Marrickville NSW 2204. (Solo Exhibition)

'Contra', Firstdraft Gallery, Sydney (Solo Exhibition)

'I Want to Change the World', GAFA Art Museum, Guangzhou. Curated by Nicholas Tsoutas and Fan Lin.

'Television', Sarah Cottier Gallery, Sydney. Curated by Matthys Gerber.

'Conquest of Space', COFA Galleries, Sydney. Curated by Andrew Frost.

**2013** 'Trap', Institute of Contemporary Art, Newtown [ICAN], Sydney (Solo Exhibition)

'Opposed', The Lock-Up Cultural Centre, Newcastle (Solo Exhibition)

'Black Square: 100 Years', Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide.

Curated by Alex Gawronski and Iakovos Amperidis.

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28 February–28 April 2017

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Ultimo NSW 2007

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