

Flying Carpets

Simon Horsburgh

Conical

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by Quentin Sprague

A blank surfboard, unformed on the gallery floor, is draped in roughly painted thong straps made to look like discarded banana skins – learning to surf is a slapstick experience. A long curling waveform is repeated in curved plywood and a sheet of graph paper. You can lean in and look down the length of the frozen break. A light bulb found on the beach, washed opaque by the ocean, is sunk into a light box in the floor and lit from below so it becomes a fuzzy and perfect sphere resting on light, its impassive surface altered to contain strange possibilities. Another light bulb, attached to the wall with a bent bicycle spoke, juts clumsily into space like a bad idea. Surf wax clings to its surface in clumps. Elsewhere a photo of the same piece records a different play of ambient light on the bulb's surface, maybe late afternoon somewhere.

In Simon Horsburgh's recent work at Conical, elements roughly linked by the familiar world of surf culture are bleached out and altered by a careful, analytical approach and an odd material poetry where surfboards become flying carpets and curling waves are made from wood.

Five-tens, Six-threes and Seven-sixes (2004) is a piece where a breaking wave is rendered in a number of different materials and scales. The largest is made from plywood and propped up with bare struts against the wall, looming in scale. Smaller versions rest directly on the floor, one made more simply from ply and the other paper. It's like the big wave that threatens to dump you and the smaller ones that lap around your feet, but a messed-up version: made from hearsay for scientific purposes.

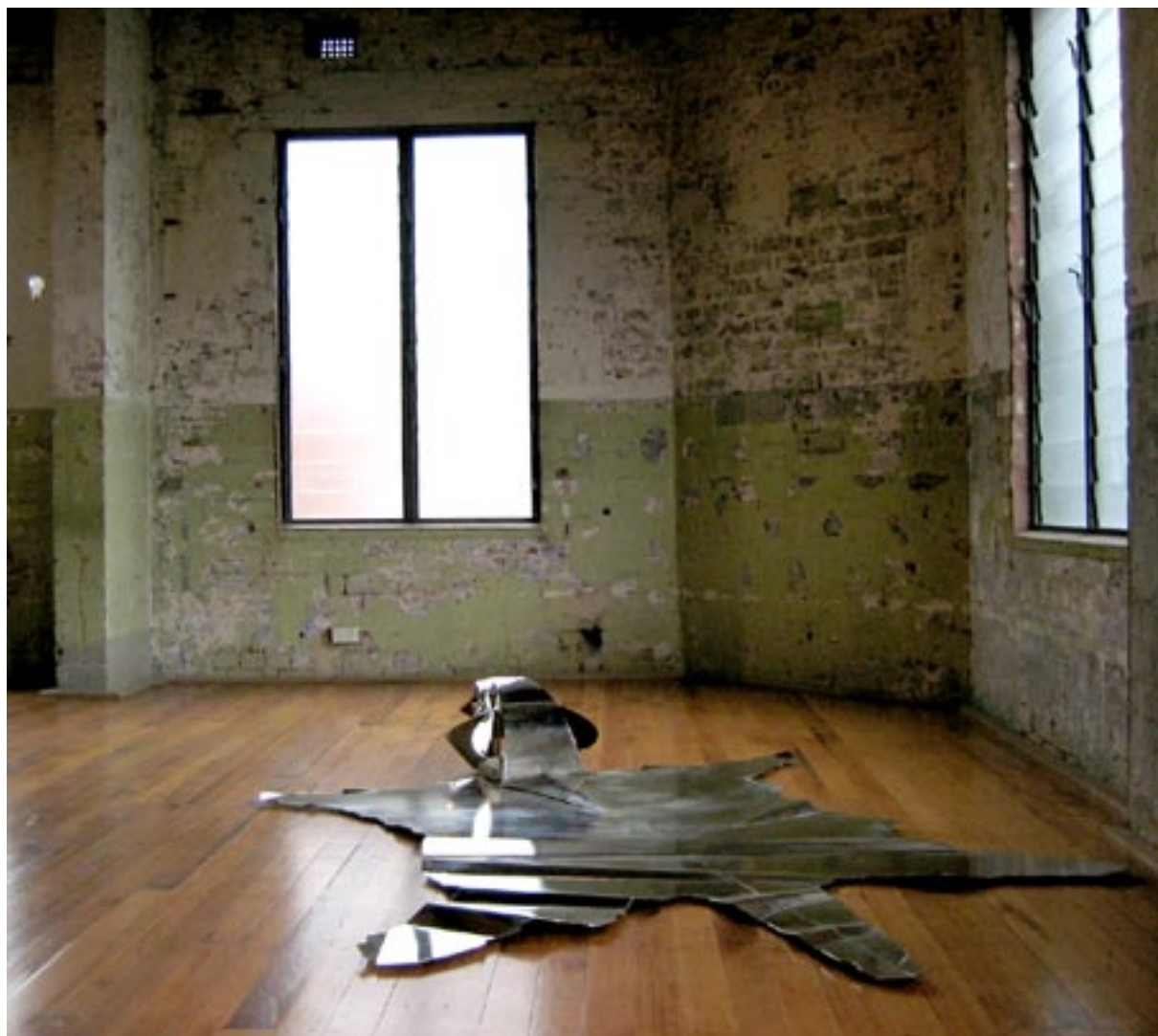
First Descent (2004) is a photo of the waveform made from lightly curved graph paper held in place by tape. The paper's blue measurement lines, extruded around the curvature of the wave, hint at a mathematical attempt to render natural form by analysing its essential properties. This approach eschews artifice in favour of laying bare the machinations of the pieces. The materials maintain an aesthetic of poverty and economy, lending works a stripped-back, reduced feeling reminiscent of model making.



*Above: Simon Horsburgh
Five-tens, Six-threes and Seven-sixes. 2004
Plywood, pine & graph paper
225 x 90 x 136cm
Image courtesy the artist*

The different levels of intervention vary greatly from piece to piece – some may seem too bare and thin next to other more densely made objects. The high finish of some of the more intensely crafted works is often partially negated by haphazard elements that serve to create unexpected rifts and departures, an approach that can result in strangely engaging pieces.

Icarus (2004) is a polystyrene block placed on the floor of the gallery. Its placement and geometric form relate to a shape caused by a chance overlapping of the electric blue insulation material viewed through the rafters directly above. This two-dimensional form has been



*Above: Simon Horsburgh
The Curse of the Chrome Tiger, 2003–2004
Nickel plated mild steel & Ajax
20 x 175 x 28cm
Image courtesy the artist*

modelled into three dimensions, its planes extended and scaled down. The model itself is impeccably formed, like a design prototype except for a rough surf wax build-up on the top. This imperfection reads like a genetic defect caused by the translation of the polystyrene from one state (a surfboard) to another (the model). The interruption to the highly finished form evidences that this translation has somehow been flawed, exposing elements of a past configuration.

Also highly finished is *The Curse of the Chrome Tiger* (2003-2004), a nickel-plated, mild steel tiger skin, modelled from hard angles and laid out on the floor like a Holden fanatic's hunting trophy. The initial perception that

this form is fanatically maintained and perfected is also contradicted, but in this case by smears of an improperly applied cleaning solution (Ajax) on the under-polished surface. This can be read as tongue-in-cheek evidence of the artist's hand or as traces of failed maintenance. This combination of the highly finished and the carelessly maintained creates an unexpected juncture that equally intrigues and irritates, eventually drawing attention to other 'imperfections' on the surface – small dings and scratches. The 'curse' of the title may be the obsessive and constant upkeep involved in protecting the perfect form from inevitable decay.

Quentin is a Melbourne based artist.