

ROWAN CONROY
ARTIST STATEMENT

ATHINA

Chapter House Lane, Melbourne, 1 March - 1 April 2012

From left window:

- . Untitled # 8, from the Series: *Athina*, 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 110 x 180 cm
- . Untitled # 5, from the Series: *Athina*, 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 110 x 260 cm
- . Untitled # 3, from the Series: *Athina*, 2010, pigment print on cotton rag paper, 110 x 260 cm

These three images from the series *Athina*, depict the high-density construction endemic to the modern day metropolis of Athens where I lived for 10 months in 2010. During this time, I became increasingly fascinated with photographing Athens from the natural vantage points of Lycabettus and Philopapou, two spurs of rock that arise in the central suburbs of Athens. From these elevated perspectives the urban landscape of Athens takes on the appearance of calcified accretion on the earth. These three images, present the viewer with a horizon-less, abstract 'all-over' rendition of Athens from on high. My interest in the organic patterns and self-organisation of the urban landscape was the motivation for this series, a subject that is not unique to Athens, but Athens exemplifies this phenomenon in a particularly stunning fashion. The high rise concrete apartment block is the most common architecture in Athens, similar designs are endlessly repeated, with minor genetic variations. In observing this I began to think how much the city is analogous to the structures made by non human life forms such as ants, corals or lichen. Humans too are colonies of organisms that grow and replicate and eventually spread across the land, in this case inhabiting every available crevice. These images are a call to contemplate the physiognomy of the built environment. The look of such urban density conjures in our minds the current concerns about sustainability, climate change crisis, and population growth. This is all the more potent given the historical weight given to Athens as the birth place of European civilisation.

The concept of photography as a means to record the archaeology of the present was central to my recent PhD research. The archaeology of the present can be defined as the recent past manifested in the physical material culture of the present. The archaeology of the present addresses the archaeological potential of everyday sites of human work and habitation and contemporary ruins. Evidence for the archaeology of the present is ubiquitous. The continual unfolding of history is witnessed in the sediment of the everyday. In these images from *Athina*, we come face to face with the visual outcome of decades of modern development, Athens' own archaeology of the present, and one that is quite distinct from its classical past.

Rowan Conroy Curriculum Vitae

Born 1982, Coffs Harbour NSW. Currently lives and works in Sydney, Australia.

Rowan Conroy is a visual artist whose practice focuses on the use of large format photography to document ancient and modern, rural and urban architecture and detritus as a means to reflect upon the archaeology of the present. He combines the use of traditional large format view cameras with the latest digital technology to produce photographic prints of great detail and clarity. Conroy has combined his interest in archaeology and the visual arts through archaeological illustration and photography, which has been made possible through 10 years of involvement on excavations conducted by the University of Sydney in Greece and Cyprus. This interest continues with Conroy working closely with the University of Sydney's Nicholson Museum and the Australian Archaeological Institute at Athens (AAIA). A melding between the disciplines of art and archaeology is the major focus of Conroy's practice and is clearly reflected in his extensive series' *the poetics of detritus* and *archaeologies of the present*, which consist of large format photographs of urban landscapes, ruins, and detritus from around the world. In 2005, Conroy received a first class Bachelor of Visual Arts (Hons 1) degree from Sydney College of the Arts. Since that time, Conroy has had six significant solo exhibitions. In September 2006, he was awarded an Australia Council for the Arts New Work Grant for Emerging Artists to produce a body of work for exhibition, culminating in the exhibition *Puratha: the sad place*. This exhibition was made possible through the New Work Grant, which enabled Conroy to travel with his large format equipment to the remote Pilbara region of Western Australia. In 2012, Conroy will be awarded a PhD in Visual Art from the University of Sydney. In 2012, Conroy received an Artstart grant from the Australia Council for the Arts towards establishing a fine art digital print studio.

Solo Exhibitions

- 2012 *ATHINA* Chapter House Lane, Melbourne
- 2011 *William J. Woodhouse Rephotography Project* Barometer Gallery, Sydney
- 2008 *Puratha: the sad place revisited* Coffs Harbour Regional Gallery, New South Wales
- 2007 *Puratha: the sad place* Sydney College of the Arts Gallery, Sydney
- 2006 *Material Culture* Peloton, Sydney
- 2006 *Lebanon: from Baalbek to Beirut* Nicholson Museum, Sydney

Selected Group Exhibitions

- 2012 *Back to the Garden* Barometer Gallery, Head On photo festival, Sydney
- 2011 *Exposed: photography and the classical nude* Nicholson Museum, Sydney
- 2011 *'a shadow of its former self'* At the Vanishing Point (ATVP), Head On photo festival, Sydney
- 2010 *The Wall*, THEARTSPACE and The Goethe Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus
- 2008 *Book for a lifetime*, THEARTSPACE and The Goethe Institute, Nicosia, Cyprus
- 2008 *The Fragile Absolute*, Delmar Gallery Trinity Grammar School, Sydney

Collections

Australia Council for the Arts Permanent Collection; University of Wollongong Permanent Collection; Delmar Gallery Trinity Grammar School; Brain Mind Research Institute; William Wilkins Memorial Art Collection; Paphos Municipality Council, Cyprus; and numerous private collections

Grants & Scholarships

- 2012 Australia Council for the Arts 'Artstart' grant
- 2010 University of Sydney Grants in Aid for W.J. Woodhouse Rephotography Project
- 2007-2010 University Postgraduate Award (UPA)
- 2006 Australia Council for the Arts New Work Grant for emerging artists.