



Volume ISSUE FIVE

welcome home my beautiful optimist

Bekah Carran

'For there must be good men and women in the mountains, on the beaches, in all the neglected and beautiful places, so that one day we can come back to ghostly cities and try to set them right. City is so human.'

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In the 1940s, American engineer Richard Buckminster Fuller developed the geodesic dome, a design that is now an icon of architecture. Built with humanitarian intent, he utilised newly developed scientific technology of the time to create efficient affordable shelter that could address the housing crisis, a fundamental problem of the developing world. The design was championed by 1970s counterculture movements as it complemented hippie ideals of sustainable community living, and the socially and environmentally conscious predicted dome cities would soon spread across the world. An era that saw a rise in ideas of radicalism, pacifism, and social and environmental activism, these tribes of reformists seemed to believe the dome would aid in developing the happy, harmonious society they dreamed of. In 1976, the year Bekah Carran was born, the largest and most impressive geodesic dome designed by Buckminster Fuller went up in flames. A premonition perhaps of the imminent failure of their idealistic visions, as the spirit of the reformists was fading fast under the pressures of 1980s liberal market economies. Adulterated versions of countercultural trends were absorbed into the mainstream, and as disillusionment set in amongst socially conscious citizens, narcissism and unbridled capitalism began to thrive. Dome housings' higher construction costs rendered them impractical, and instead, sprawling suburbs and the high-rise began to dominate the horizon.

Bekah Carran is a Dunedin based artist, Blue Oyster Gallery trustee and mother to Ava Flora. She believes the future looks bright.

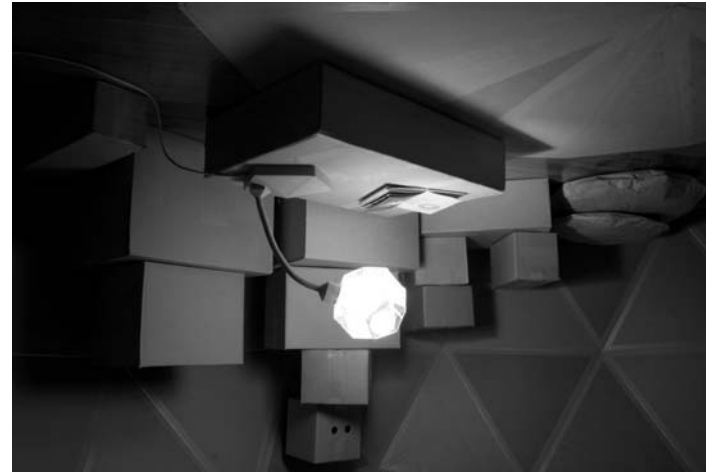
Melanie Hogg is a cautious optimist. She currently manages Enjoy Public Art Gallery.

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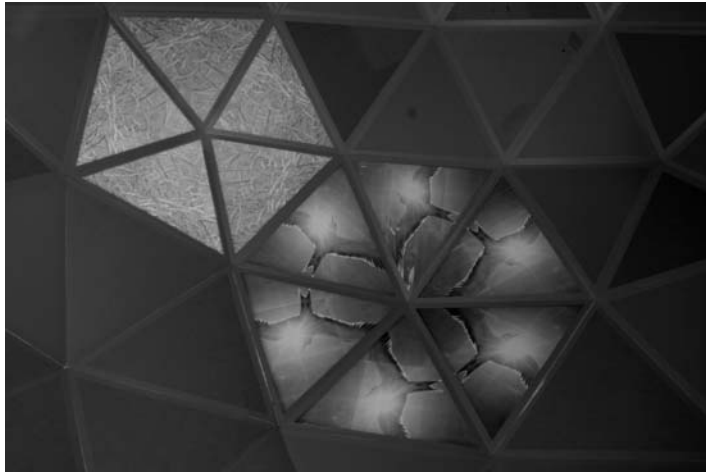


proliferation of self-help guides and new age philosophy, as we search for a simple cure to our societal malaise. Captivated by the earnestness of the hippie era, Carran is encouraging a return to reflection, conversation and optimism. Considering the changing nature of relational practices from the ardent 1970s to the more self-reflexive approach of recent times, and without implying these aspirations are attainable, welcome home my beautiful optimist suggests that the artist can provide a starting point for thinking about alternatives to our current reality. Carran's constructed world reveals the beauty in hope, however futile it may be. Melanie Hogg



It is through the lens of 1970s idealism, that we come to Carran's welcome home my beautiful optimist, a utopic dome model constructed of recycled cardboard boxes. Ducking through the minutised entrance, visitors find themselves with no view of the exterior once inside, the white cube gallery disappears. This space is softer, more homely, and works in opposition to the harsh angles and glare of the gallery. It is furnished with domestic touches, cushions, rugs and a lamp, each meticulously crafted from brown paper patchwork. The circular rug on the

floor invites us to sit, discuss, commune, and prophesise together. It is a retreat from our chaotic world, from our anxieties that are incited by frantic media hype and a heightened sense of personal global positioning. With this in mind, Carran has constructed a sanctuary that acts as an emergency shelter for fatalists, a protective environment for the paranoid. However it is only ever an illusion of security, a fiction she offers knowingly – for it is a world built from cardboard, brown paper and tape – and it is entirely impermanent.



Inside the lamps are glowing, and stacks of boxes await unpacking. On one box is a precious book filled with idyllic images of gliding dolphins, sunsets and gardens of conifers, all naïve symbols of freedom and happiness, which sits open. Gleaned from outdated encyclopaedias and yesterday's news, Carran has reclaimed these discarded items, bringing them together as a vision for the future. All text has been blanked out and the nostalgic images float freely. The textual rhetoric we are bombarded with daily is muted, as Carran invites us to dream, to let our imaginations run wild. The shrine-like feel to the installation, with its kaleidoscopic lampshades and romantic glowing wall panels with images of wheat fields and glints of sun on the crest of a bird in flight, is a space for contemplation.

With a soundtrack of falling rain audible inside this cardboard utopia, we look about for signs of dampness. It is as a reminder of the possibility the structure may collapse, a suggestion about the vulnerability of dreams. And as we listen to this patter of rain on the roof, we are faced with a choice: to rush eagerly out into the world, or to stay, tucked up in dread, fearful of stepping out. Carran celebrates the happy fool who contrasts with the current social milieu where apathy reigns and enthusiasm is scarce. In these cynical times, we strive for happiness. A commodified emotion, our pursuit is evidenced in the