



Given the quiet monumentality of Kim Paton's **All We Have Is Now** (2005), the appropriateness of a comparative citing of Matsukage's work might at first appear questionable. Certainly, the two installations operate according to vastly disparate modes. Where Paton's work references key critical moments in arts recent history and is spare and subtle, Matsukage's installation appears overtly to the senses and is closer in orientation to popular culture. Nevertheless, the convergences between the works are unmistakable. Both interrogate the dynamics of human behaviour within the gallery environment; both implicate the viewer as an active participant in the realisation of the work; engage ideas of performance to facilitate a shift in the viewer/artwork relationship and challenge the conditions of passivity which characterise much of contemporary cultural experience, be it in the gallery, cinema, theatre or concert hall.

In registering the scenario's contradictions, the visitor to Matsukage's installation is well placed to observe that the microphone, which takes centre-stage, is, in fact, an invitation – and that they themselves have a key role to play in activating a covert potential in the work. Vocalising tentatively into the microphone at first, the viewer is rewarded by the sounds of gentle applause. Encouraged, and projecting more confidently, their *performance* gives rise to cheers.

fills the gallery the work occupies.

generates a cacophonous energy, which is strangely diffused by the silence that expressions of adulation that attend celebrity personalities, the mass of figures wall-to-wall, human-scale photograph of an all-female crowd. Animated by the Brewster Art Gallery in 2004 – a single microphone stands in space, before a from its inclusion in *Mediarena: Contemporary Art from Japan* at the Govett

In Hiroaki Matsukage's *Star 2000* – a work familiar to New Zealand audiences

<setting the stage>

A state of disorientation is made ever more acute by the ambiguous nature of the structure itself. While bearing visual hallmarks of minimalism – a movement which sought the erasure of content – the work is built to human scale and is strongly suggestive of uses relating to the body and to the world. Lit theatrically, it does, in fact, call to mind a stage. Yet the form's narrow dimensions (dictated by its locale) and unusual cantilever, extending forwards into the gallery void, set it at a remove from its referents in the real world of theatres, halls and auditoriums. In fashioning her form specifically for its site, Paton distorts real-life relationships, complicating a literal reading of the work as readymade or replica. **All We Have Is Now** shifts between territories. In doing so, it demands much of its audience and self-consciously exposes the fallibility of interpretation.

Adopting a strategy articulated in her 2003 work *Time Will Break The World* – in which Paton constructed floor to ceiling walls restricting passage to all but a 60cm corridor around the perimeter of Enjoy gallery in Wellington – the material form of **All We Have Is Now** is formally determined by the physical particularities of the gallery space in which it is located. Spanning the width of the gallery and covering almost half its length, the structure traces the margins of the exhibition space and exposes, rather than attempts to conceal its distinguishing features. Indeed, Paton's structure brings the architecture and dimensions of the built environment into sharp relief. As a singular object within the space, it monopolises the floor and delimits movement, challenging and unsettling conventional attitudes to circulation within the gallery environment. In these terms, **All We Have Is Now** is confronting and destabilising.

Comprising two principle elements – a large monochrome stage-like structure and specialist theatre lighting – **All We Have Is Now** is the first installment in the VOLUME series of site-specific works at the Physics Room in Christchurch. Faithful to divergent notions of site-specificity, the work is both a commentary on the physical conditions of place, and an examination of the gallery context, in particular the codes of behaviour it circumscribes.

<the main event>

Kim Paton is a Wellington based artist. Her first solo show, **Time Will Break The World**, was at Enjoy gallery, Wellington, in 2003. She has exhibited in a number of group shows over the last year, including **Milky Way Bar**, Hirschfeld Gallery at the City Gallery, Wellington; **The Bed You Lie In**, Artspace, Auckland; and **Clubmeet**, Blue Oyster Gallery, Dunedin. She is currently a member of the Enjoy gallery Board of Trustees.

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Even still, on encountering Paton's project one might be excused for expecting something more. Perceived as a stage – a site of activity – it appears before the viewer latent with the potential of performance. With the elapse of time, and as the promise of spectacle fades, the viewer realises that it is only they who can fulfill the performative possibility it establishes. In this context, the work functions only when the viewer actively sees the relevance of their individual presence, response, actions and time in the completion of the work. Meaning is affixed to both the object and the process of engagement.

It is no coincidence that the artist should draw parallels between distinct contexts for spectatorship, from the theatre to the gallery. On one level, the work is about the capacity of the spectator and the role of the artist as absent director. Certainly, Paton is conscious to create a space in which visitors are pointed

towards a greater awareness of themselves as viewers. Through the destabilising effects of physical proximity (to the object) and conceptual complexity, **All We Have Is Now** coerces its audiences into mindful consideration of what exactly they are experiencing. In pressing its viewers to answer the questions 'what will you do now', 'how will you respond', **All We Have Is Now** elicits a state of self-awareness and is a call to action. To this end, Paton's project is a social one, involving, as it does, an exploration of the manner in which visitors experience and engage with the contingencies established by the work. As Thomas McEvilley notes in his introduction to Brian O'Doherty's *Inside the White Cube*, the white walled gallery has a regulating effect: 'one does not speak in a normal voice, one does not laugh, eat, drink, lie down, or sleep, one does not get ill, go mad, sing, dance, or make love.'¹ It is the gallery's command on human activity that Paton's work most clearly exposes and contests.



use of industrial materials and her associated rendering of form alludes to minimalism's dismissal of craft in favour of manufacture. While imperceptible on viewing the work, Paton undermines the reference, having executed the work in its entirety – from concept and design to construction. Where minimalism sought to eradicate emotional content, Paton ushers it in. Tension is central to the experience of her work and is palpably created by means both physical and conceptual.

All We Have Is Now is a work that resists linear or definitive reading. For all its pared back simplicity it is a work which oscillates between states of being – operating simultaneously as a minimal object; an articulation of site and a reference to the world beyond the gallery. Appropriately, it is characterised by manifest contradictions – inertia and activity; contemplation and use; simplicity and complexity.

Daring its audience to step beyond the comfort zone of prescribed behaviours, it advances self-analysis and an awareness of the processes to which meaning is attached. In its presence, the viewer is unhinged, caught somewhere between subjective and objective engagement – between the audience and the stage.

Kate Griffin
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¹Thomas McEvilley cited in Brian O'Doherty, *Inside the White Cube: The Ideology of the Gallery Space*, University of California Press: Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1999 (Expanded Edition), p10.

Certainly, **All We Have Is Now** is a probing analysis of minimal art and the conceptual site-specific practices of the 1970s, which sought to expose the social, economic and political dynamics of gallery space. But, while she appropriates strategies adopted by her artistic forebears, Paton's referents are never literal or unquestioning.

The relationship of the work to minimalism exemplifies Paton's use of art - historical quotation to her own, distinct ends. At face value, her form – monumental, horizontal, monochrome – can be read as a minimal object. Closer consideration confirms the structure's relationship with the spaces of mainstream performative activity. In this way, Paton's form quietly corrupts the self-referential autonomy to which minimal art aspired. Similarly, the artist's