

Vera Møller
Selected biography

Born Bremen, Germany 1955; arrived Australia 1986;
lives and works in Melbourne

- 2003–06 Doctor of Philosophy (Candidate), Monash University, Melbourne
- 1995–98 Master of Fine Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
- 1993–94 Postgraduate Diploma, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
- 1990–92 Bachelor of Fine Arts, Victorian College of the Arts, University of Melbourne
- 1983 Bachelor of Education, University of Munich, Germany
- 1979–83 Microbiology Studies, Munich Technical University, Germany
- Theology Studies, University of Munich, Germany
- Biology Studies, University of Würzburg and University of Munich, Germany

Selected solo exhibitions, performances and projects

- 2006 *the softmachines*, Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane
- 2005 *the softmachines*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- 2003 *parallilli*, Sutton Gallery, Melbourne
- pseudolonia*, Jardin des Plantes, Paris
- 2002 *bush bush no. 5*, Sherman Galleries and Artbox, Sydney
- labland*, Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
- 2001 *bush bush*, 1st Floor, Melbourne
- 2000 *digit park*, West Space, Melbourne
- neo bush*, Ben Grady Gallery, Canberra and Span Galleries, Melbourne
- 1999 *birdhouse*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
- the jungle out there, Part 2*, smith + stoneley, Brisbane
- on the road*, Street Project, Scheunenviertel, Berlin and Broadway, New York
- the jungle out there, Part 1*, Temple, Melbourne
- on the road*, Street Project, Roppongi Nightclub District, Tokyo
- 1997 *tiger*, International House of Japan, Tokyo
- details from my wild life*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
- my wild life*, Studio 12, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions, performances and projects

- 2005 *Paper Moon*, Devonport Regional Gallery, Tasmania and national tour
- 2004 *The Spirit of Football*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- 2003 *A Modelled World*, McClelland Gallery + Sculpture Park, Victoria
- Cicely and Colin Rigg Contemporary Design Award*, National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne
- Helen Lenziere National Sculpture Award*, Werribee Park, Victoria
- Material Witness, The 15th Tamworth Textile Fibre Biennial*, Tamworth City Gallery, New South Wales and national tour
- North*, Bundooro Homestead, La Trobe University, Victoria
- 2002 *Crossing*, University of Art and Design Helsinki (UIAH), Finland
- Good Vibrations: the legacy of Op art in Australia*, Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne
- Hybrid Objects*, Australian Embassy, Tokyo and Melbourne
- Museum Science and Life Gallery, Melbourne
- Noxious Laughing Gas*, VCA Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne
- Sitching*, Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne
- low down: recent acquisitions of the Monash University Collection*, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne
- spacecraft 0701*, Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne
- Office of Utopic Procedures*, West Space, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions, performances and projects (continued)

- 2000 *The formguide*, Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne
- The Retrieved Object*, Linden Gallery, Melbourne
- 1999 *emblematic*, smith + stoneley, Brisbane
- natural disasters/disasters unnatural*, Monash University Gallery, Melbourne
- 1998 *Extraordinary*, smith + stoneley, Brisbane
- little black number*, 1st Floor, Melbourne
- 1997 *Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art and Nature*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney
- Wannabe*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
- 1996 *Alluring*, Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne
- Dermatology*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
- Display*, Platform 2, Melbourne
- Shapeshift*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
- 1995 *1035 Kilograms*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne
- Decadence*, 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne

Selected bibliography

- Decadence: 10 Years of 200 Gertrude Street*, exh. cat., 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1995
- Suzie Artwill, 'Congrescences', *LIKE*, no. 13, Summer 2000, pp. 32–33
- Suzie Artwill, *birdhouse*, exh. cat., 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1999
- Natasha Bullock, 'Ar'lab', *labland*, exh. cat., Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, 2002
- Justin Clemens, 'the jungle out there—where is Tarzan?', *the jungle out there*, exh. cat., self published, Melbourne, 1999
- Robyn Daw, 'An Aberrant Urge', *eyeline*, no. 40, Spring 1999, pp. 25–28
- Charlotte Day, *Wannabe*, exh. cat., 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1996
- Max Delaney, 'Skeletons in the closet: from the monumental to the model—sculpture in the collection', *Monash University Collection: Four Decades of Collecting*, exh. cat., Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2002
- Claire Doherty, *Shapeshift*, exh. cat., Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 1996
- Juliana Engberg, *low down: recent acquisitions*, exh. cat., Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2001
- Jeff Gibson, 'Australian Perspecta 1997', *Art & Text*, no. 59, November 1997–January 1998, pp. 94–95
- Ihor Holubizky, 'Vera Møller: the jungle out there', *Art & Text*, no. 66, August–October 1999, pp. 93–94
- Tristian Koenig, 'labland', *eyeline*, no. 49, Spring 2002, pp. 38–39
- Annemarie Kiely, 'Coral Relief', *Belle*, May–June 2005, pp. 83–86
- Natalie King, *Alluring*, exh. cat., Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne, 1996
- Ross McLeod and Veronica Saunders, 'Hybrid Objects', *(Inside)*, November 2002, pp. 91–112
- Paul McGillick, 'Packaging the Theme', *Art & Australia*, vol. 35, no. 3, 1998, pp. 334–335
- Andrew McNamara, 'Filling the Void', *Realtime*, issue 20, September 1997, p. 20
- Linda Michael, 'natural selection', *Australian Perspecta 1997: Between Art and Nature*, Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney, 1997
- Stephen O'Connell, *Dermatology*, exh. cat., 200 Gertrude Street, Melbourne, 1996
- Zara Stanhope, *Good Vibrations: the legacy of Op art in Australia*, exh. cat., Heide Museum of Modern Art, Melbourne, 2002

Vera Møller is represented by Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Philip Bacon Galleries, Brisbane



Vera Møller
darkrooming 2005
mixed media installation comprising
modelling materials, porcelain, plastic,
wood, Styrofoam, aluminium foil,
synthetic polymer, enamel and
oil paint, steel, glass
dimensions variable
approx. 6000 x 6000 x 6000 cm
Courtesy of the artist,
Sutton Gallery, Melbourne and Philip
Bacon Galleries, Brisbane
Photographed under construction in
the artist's East Brunswick studio 2005
Photographer: John Brash

You have stepped into an orgy of stilled life. Hundreds of tiny creatures, striped and spotted, bland and chilling, some like impossibly stippled leaves, others like bleached rictus digits, cascade down layered shelves. Some coil upon themselves like exhausted worms; others are suspended like severed hands at an execution ground. Squiggles of colour zigzag across plateaux, bedecking little armies of fronds and forests of midget plants, although the fronds and plants are so weird, so without well-defined function or end, that even the words 'fronds' and 'plants' fail to capture their sense. Masses without names, becoming just what they are beyond genus and species, gunning for you in *rigor mortis* and *rigor artis*.

Not quite a grave or junk-yard of discarded organic machines, nor a higgledy-piggledy laboratory storeroom, an insane Enlightenment *Wunderkammer*, a clearing-house, a memory-theatre, or an abstraction from the subaquatic sills and crannies of reef life but in some way resembling all of these, Vera Möller's multitudinous profusion in *darkrooming* (2006) is neither simply painting nor sculpture nor *objet d'art* nor installation. The distinction between what presents and what is presented has been deliberately complicated, the terraced plinths and lighting-system now part of the work itself. Through multiplication, grafting and compressed allusion, Vera Möller's sciophilous creations give you all this—and more!

Möller's interests have been consistent from the beginning. In a way they are also very traditional. Most generally, her practice touches upon the relation (or lack of it) between art and life. The dialectic is familiar: art is an artificial replication of life; art adds and it subtracts; art admits glamour to life, but takes life away as it does so. Art exposes something in life that wasn't obvious to start with, in a way that no other genre of inquiry can. But art is also a killer. These days, things are complicated and art and life aren't so easily distinguished, when long-defunct monsters can be reconstituted (at least in speculative fictions like *Jurassic Park*) through microscopic shreds of DNA or living tissue becomes material for aesthetic intervention.² It is in this indistinct zone—where art, life and technology intermingle promiscuously—that Möller has established her practice.

Möller was what is known as an 'army-brat'. Her father worked for the German military as an electrical engineer, at one time helping to develop the Leopard Tank.³ As going to art school was considered by her parents as tantamount to becoming a communist (Joseph Beuys' insurrectionary declarations were in the air), she ended up enrolling in biology at Würzburg University. There she learnt biological drawing from a famous lepidopterist who had compiled and drawn an encyclopaedia of the world's butterflies. Moving to Munich to continue her scientific studies, she pursued theology at the same time. She also started working in a Bavarian jazz club with the hilarious name of *Die Unterfahrt*—*The Underdrive*—where, by her own testimony, she accumulated a vast collection of pantyhose (of which more below). There she met an Australian musician, and moved with him to Australia in 1986. Germany had made her a theologian and biologist. Australia made her an artist.



Vera Möller
ducky duck (Tokyo) 1998
ilochrome photograph
760 x 1170 cm
Collection of the artist

The themes of displacement, masking, grafting, doubling, indirection and invention evident in *darkrooming* were clearly already at play in Möller's life before she entered art school.⁴ Just as jazz involves endless tiny variations on a theme, or biological drawing demands an unremitting attentiveness to tiny significant details, and the constant relocating of army life encourages a geographical flexibility, so studying art undoubtedly enabled Möller to identify, isolate and improvise further upon her concerns. Transplanted to the realm of visual art, Möller turned to more general questions of selection, seduction, reproduction and survival, combining sexual, technical, political and aesthetic inquiries.

Take *ego (relaxed). Bloomers...* (1998), which won the Murdoch Scholarship prize for that year. Made from thousands of latex gloves, the work suggested, as Alison Barclay observed in the *Herald Sun*, 'chook feathers. It could be a stomach lining. Some say it resembles a mass of condoms.'⁵ It might also be a play on a gigantic pelt, like a latex fleece or a hideous skin growth or, as the name suggests, granny's bloomers (a very large granny, the piece is 180 x 200 cm). But it isn't any of those things, and it only sort of resembles them anyway. If the name is hilarious, it is itself suggestive of a shaggy latex story. The piece provokes slightly obscene desires to touch (without actually touching) or, when engaging with art thoughts of: *look but don't touch, touch but don't touch...* In the way that the work interferes with perception you might also add: *look, but don't look*. Optical interferences, evocations of intrusive strip searches and surgical interventions aside, the work remains somehow warm, inviting, even cuddly. At once medical and domestic, hygienic and visceral, the sheer multiplication of gloves produces highly unorthodox effects.

This kind of *look-don't-look, touch-don't-touch* allegory of art is clearly crucial to Möller's practice. In her 1998/9 exhibition *the jungle out there*, Möller directed her attentions to the forms and effects of body patternings, both human and animal.⁶ The basic item in this case was not latex gloves, but black and yellow striped pantyhose. Roughly cutting off the pantyhose legs ten or so centimetres below the crotch, Möller turned the rectified apparel into a form of headgear, cutting holes for the eyes and mouth. Sporting the headgear (and sometimes also the severed leggings on her arms), Möller generated photographs of herself in a variety of situations. In one image, she screams in her balaclava, her arms encased in the leggings, one paw on her heart, the other arm extended in an ambiguous gesture. If you didn't realise that she was positioning the camera with that arm, it might look like a Nazi salute. Another image shows her staring balefully back at the camera, a kind of 'Self-portrait with balaclava and electricity socket'.



Vera Möller
labland no. 1 2002
ilochrome photograph
760 x 1020 cm
Courtesy of the artist, Sutton Gallery,
Melbourne and Philip Bacon Galleries,
Brisbane

Along with her madcap jungle mania, Möller has directed her attention to themes of the avian and alien. The *mad nellies* (1–5) (1999) are variously sized and shaped knitted constructions. Suspended, they appear as leaping box-like ghosts, eyes and mouths distended in phantom rage. There are also the *lotties* (1–3) (1998), made from wool on various supports, or *greenhouse* (1999), which, as the name might suggest, is a house-shaped knit in green wool. *birdhouse* (1999), a gigantic striped knitted tent hung in the front window of Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Fitzroy, was based on Adolf Loos' house design, unbuilt, for Josephine Baker. In Loos' modernist enthusiasm to promote Big Baker's exhibitionist antics, his pool design would have enabled onlookers to see the entertainer bathing naked. In his review of *birdhouse*, Robert Nelson remarked that the Baker house:

... *would have been an aquarium rather than a birdhouse. We associate modern architecture with rationality, though it was often driven by batty ideas. But Möller's response isn't polemical. Her construction dangles all kinds of metaphors in front of you, from the zoological to the scatological, from the history of textiles and design to the history of spectacle and sex.*⁷

This seems right: Möller is a master at compressing maximum allusiveness into a minimum of stripe.

From the suspended giant knits, we move down (or up) the evolutionary chain to the many extraordinary families of forms—multiples of differentiated cellular objects—that could well have been made out of play-doh.⁸ Behold *d-jungle* (2000), a platoon of horizontally-stripped black-and-white vegetal creatures that resemble Winston Churchill's famous victory salute, and which occupy their shelf as if it were a precarious beachhead. In *digit-park* (2000), finger-creatures striped in black and white verticals cluster under the Perspex hood of their display case. A horde of severed fingers advances in *fingerfeld no. 2* (2000), the harsh light throwing menacing shadows about the ensemble. In yet other works, worm-like plants bend as if before the insensible wind of art history, or fat little coils fold almost double in alien paroxysms.

In *softmachines*, her most recent exhibition at Sutton Gallery in Melbourne (2005), Möller presented small dioramas of these objects, such as *borgesium*, comprised of red and white striped flat-headed mushrooms on long thin white stalks, or *rolinette*, a pink shelf upon which a variety of odd spotted and striped digits, lumps and sprays were arrayed. There were also paintings: *pardaleo, ringlette, hommelette* and others, in oil on canvas. *collingwoodia [noxious weed]* (2004) is one such painting, in which a black and white horizontally-stripped plant extends its tendrils across a black and white horizontally-stripped ground. The disjunction between 'figure' and 'ground' in these images suggests that replicating exact colour schemes may have nothing to do with camouflage; or, rather, that camouflage may not always have blending in as its objective.⁹ Most of the other paintings offer the same disjunction: the plants are at odds with their environments, clearly not well-rooted in their soils—if at all. The eerie beauty of these paintings tips into an etiolated melancholy.



Vera Möller
kusamarama (bush bush no. 3) 2001
modelling material, synthetic polymer
paint, perspex, MDF
500 x 500 x 500 cm
Collection of the artist



Vera Möller
coockooland 2003
wool, cotton, acrylic thread,
fishing line, steel
dimensions variable
Cicely and Colin Rigg Contemporary
Design Award Exhibition,
National Gallery of Victoria 2003
Collection of the artist
Photographer: John Gollings

Möller's message is not that nature is on one side and culture on the other but that both strangely coincide at certain key points. As Möller once told Ashley Crawford, the stripe 'ranges through popular culture, architecture, street signage. It has this strange progression from the bad stripe (say, wild animals), but then it leads to this strange phenomenon when you look at council records of mediaeval cities [where] it is specified that if you are a prostitute or a musician or someone of dubious profession you are supposed to wear an item of striped clothing.'¹³ Möller is interested in pursuing the radical visual and conceptual elements that bind art and life.

Möller constantly experiments across media.

For the sequence *labland* (2002), Möller—who had discovered a litter of baby mice in her studio—photographed the little creatures in a variety of landscapes. In one image, the mice nuzzle desperately at the non-existent nipples of a cold, black-spotted ceramic form; in another, a mouse perches precariously on the edge of a striped miniature cactus. Blind, mewling, stupid, helpless, abandoned in a hostile environment without relief—I often feel much like those mice when confronted by contemporary art.

The paradoxes of exhibiting are shared by human and natural worlds alike. In the world of micro-organisms, there's no lying, only errors in communication, such as when a fleck of material goes astray, is mis-transcribed or mal-expressed. But in the plant and animal kingdoms, things are quite different. For instance, there's a massive emphasis on PR (look at me, I'm hot!), particularly during the mating season. Anyone who enjoys animal documentaries will tell you that mating is really the worst moment in an animal's life. You dance like a lunatic entertainer in your incandescent peacock finery, collect Antarctic rocks for your penguin lover, or assemble gigantic turds from droppings on the savannah—only to have your ball of poo and dung-obsessed girlfriend hijacked by another rogue beetle. Some artists will tell you that exhibiting is the worst moment in their professional life: (Aren't I attractive, please pay attention to me).

Ambivalence, multiplications, inversions, mimicry: if there's any reasonable analogy between Darwinian evolution of natural forms and the un-natural forms of art, it's that the success of each evolutionary development cannot be ensured in advance, nor restricted to a single meaning (as the uses of each new fin or claw or orifice cannot be limited to a single function). Not only is each innovation founded on accident but it can always find unexpected uses, as well as lead to unforeseen disasters. Moreover, species don't evolve alone, they require continuous interactions with an entire ecology for their success. Keep your tendrils crossed that another asteroid isn't going to hit, or hope that the ozone layer will hold for another couple of decades or that the delightful purple tree-frog won't croak just yet. Yet, despite disappearances, there's no *end* to evolution, in all senses of the phrase. It will go on indefinitely, without any predetermined goal, without any real intelligence, and without any real justification but with a hell of a lot of risk on every creature's part. The same goes for art. Success is subjective, at best a fleeting and dependent state. Selection remains a mystery. No intelligent designer on or off the planet can predict which variation will survive and prosper.¹⁵

So artists also need camouflage (you're not looking at me, you're looking at something else!) as well as skills of misdirection (look at me pretending to do something, so you miss the real thing, just as birds simulate a broken wing to draw attention away from nestlings) or to call on plain aggressive defensiveness (i.e., I'm so ugly you should back off now, because I would be only too happy emptying my poison sacs into your foot). All this display may or may not be based in a real capacity; but just 'cos it's lying to you doesn't mean it's not absolutely serious as well. And just 'cos it tells you it's lying doesn't mean you don't have to believe it. As Möller says, 'If you see a tropical fish, light blue with red dots on the Barrier Reef, it means, 'Don't approach me, I'm poisonous' but if you show up in the same pattern as a party girl it means 'Aren't I attractive, please pay attention to me.'¹²

FOOTNOTES
1. 'Sciophilous' denominates things that 'thrive best in shade or conditions of low light'; a 'sciophyte' is a plant that prefers shady conditions. Vera Möller's *darkrooming* also connotes the emergence of photographic images after a chemical bath with the lights off. For reasons discussed in this essay, Möller's use of biological science is an absolutely fundamental aspect of her work. I have marked this relationship by drawing occasionally on relevant technical terms; these terms are my attempt to convey and specify just how Möller tampers with art and life.
2. New research suggests it may soon be possible to clone a woolly mammoth from retrieved DNA. If this is the case, then species extinction is not always forever. As for life as the object of aesthetic intervention, this age-old practice has itself received a face-lift in our era of mass botaxing and laser eye surgery.
3. While Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein were watching a parade of World War I armaments, Picasso turned to Stein and expressed his admiration for the camouflage designs on the tanks. In a strange twist of self-confirming aesthetic-military history, it turns out that the creator of the camouflage had himself been influenced by Braque and Picasso's cubism. See Stephen Kern, *The Culture of Time and Space: 1880–1918*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1983, pp. 302–3.
4. She has completed undergraduate and postgraduate work at the Victorian College of the Arts, and is currently enrolled in a PhD at Monash University.
5. Alison Barclay, 'Vera's Pinned Egg', *Herald Sun*, 2 May 1997, p. 70.
6. *the jungle out there*, Temple Studios, Prahran, Melbourne, September 1998; smith+stoneley, Brisbane, March 1999.
7. Such connections are drawn by the artist herself. In an article by Megan Backhouse, Möller is cited as saying: 'You can find a photograph of my aunts and uncles on German beaches in striped shirts, when at the same time in concentration camps you have Jews and homosexuals who have to wear a striped uniform', Megan Backhouse, 'Artist wears her stripes', *The Age Review*, 26 May 2005, p. 7. As I write this, the following appeared in an article courtesy of Reuters: 'A little striped fish is helping scientists solve one of the biggest mysteries in biology—which genes are responsible for differences in human skin, eye and hair colour', M. Fox, 'Colour it amazing: a little fish may reveal why people come in different hues', *The Age*, 17 December 2005, p. 17.
8. J. Clemens, 'the jungle out there, *the jungle out there*, Lurchi, Melbourne, 1999 unpaginated.
9. Robert Nelson, 'Art of Bafflement and Meaning', *The Age*, 20 September 1999, p. 6.
10. Möller's dedication to exploring the dispositions of multiple objects stimulates thinking about the variety of collective nouns for such multiples and their movements: masses, crowds, hordes, groups, collectives, swarms, tribes, parties, bands, troops, troupes, etc.
11. In his classic essay Roger Caillois demonstrates that, far from functioning adaptively, what seems to be defensive camouflage in animals should rather be considered a kind of 'imaginary captivity by space', Roger Caillois, 'Mimicry and Legendary Psychasthenia', in A. Michelson et al. (eds), *October: The First Decade, 1976–1986*, MIT Press, Cambridge, 1987, p. 70.
12. Conversation with the artist in her studio, 18 September 2005.
13. Ashley Crawford, 'Science and Art caught in an otherworldly embrace', *The Age*, 26 March 2003, p. 6.
14. 'Lamella', for instance, is a technical term from biology: 'A thin plate, scale, layer, or film; any of the individual layers in a lamellar structure, as in some bones, shells, metals, rocks, etc.; *spec.* a) any of the radiating gills of an agaric; b) *Zoöl.* any of the sheets of tissue in the gill of an animal; c) *Bot.* any of the photosynthetic membranes in a chloroplast; d) *Ornith.* any of the fine plates in the bill of a lamellirostral bird.' *The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*. But it is also a concept from Lacanian psychoanalysis: 'The lamella is something extra-dermal, which moves like the amoeba. It is just a little more complicated. But it goes everywhere. And as it is something—that is related to what the seed being losses in sexuality, it is, like the amoeba in relation to sexed beings, immortal—because it survives any division, any scissiparous intervention. And it can run around... Well! This is not very reassuring. But suppose it comes and envelops your face while you are quietly asleep... I can't see how we would not join battle with a being capable of these properties. But it would not be a very convenient battle... It is the libido, qua pure life instinct, that is to say immortal life, or irresistible life, life that has need of no organs, simplified, indestructible life.' Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, A. Sheridan (trans), Penguin, London, 1994, pp. 197–198.
15. 'In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been pointed, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the "history of the world"; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die. Someone could invent a fable like this and yet they would still not have given a satisfactory illustration of just how pitiful, how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect, looks within nature; there were eternities during which it did not exist, and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened'; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense' in R. Geuss and R. Speers (eds), *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 141.

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15. 'In some remote corner of the universe, flickering in the light of the countless solar systems into which it had been pointed, there was once a planet on which clever animals invented cognition. It was the most arrogant and most mendacious minute in the "history of the world"; but a minute was all it was. After nature had drawn just a few more breaths the planet froze and the clever animals had to die. Someone could invent a fable like this and yet they would still not have given a satisfactory illustration of just how pitiful, how insubstantial and transitory, how purposeless and arbitrary the human intellect, looks within nature; there were eternities during which it did not exist, and when it has disappeared again, nothing will have happened'; Friedrich Nietzsche, 'On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense' in R. Geuss and R. Speers (eds), *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 141.

Why this attraction to fantastic, inhuman, alien, otherworldly environments? Möller's work is resolutely conceptual, drawing on specialist knowledge of both science and art. At the same time, it can be so low-tech you can imagine kiddies cranking it out in crèche creativity classes. The colour patterns range from the lurid to the sophisticatedly subtle, exploring the survival value of small differences; yet the interminable multiplication of almost-indistinguishable critters implies the significance of points of difference has become irrevocably obscure at best, nugatory at worst. If there's one message you might take away from your encounter with Möller's work it's this: if art, like life, is inscrutable, it's certainly inventive.

JUSTIN CLEMENS IS THE ART CRITIC FOR THE MONTHLY. HE TEACHES AT DEAKIN UNIVERSITY.



Vera Möller
ringlette 2005
oil on canvas
920 x 760 cm
BHP Billiton Collection



Vera Möller
Bill Posters will not be prosecuted 1999
bill board poster
2400 x 7000 cm
Federation Square Hoardings Project
Curated and administered by Australian
Centre for Contemporary Art,
Centre for Contemporary Photography
and Gertrude Contemporary
Art Spaces, Melbourne

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