



“... a series of objects, each made at a different time, and all related as replicas based upon the same original form, describe through time an appearance of motion like that of the frames of a film, recording the successive instants of an action, which produce the illusion of movement as they flicker past the beam of light.”  
George Kubler, *The Shape of Time* (1962)

A montage of reproductions of three central objects: 1) the monumental instance of Maya architecture in Uxmal, The House of the Governor, 2) Walter Burley Griffin and Marion Mahoney's Pyrmont incinerator, and 3) the Canon NP6030, an early example of that standard item of office hardware, the photocopier. Is it possible to define a consistent taxonomic principle binding these disparate objects together? 1) Built around 900 AD, located in the great Maya site in north-western Yucatan territory; although its precise function remains unclear, experts argue it probably served as a dwelling place for the ruler of Uxmal and his family, a space for public gatherings, as well as a setting for astronomical observation. 2) Completed in 1936, incinerated the waste of Sydney's human population until its closure in 1971; was finally destroyed in 1992 despite calls for its conservation. 3) Produces paper copies of documents. This particular model was released in March 1993, part of the ongoing NP line commenced in 1968; digital duplication technologies emergent in the late 1980s have rendered analogue photocopying increasingly redundant.

There is no readily apparent chronological link between these three objects; nor is it possible to detect any ostensible connection between the functions served by each. The montage does, however, underline a series of formal continuities between them. This is achieved largely through the sequencing of similar details of each, often distorted in scale so as to suggest a comparative mode of analysis. Profile-shots of the Canon, appropriated from its operating manual, are spliced with long-angle documentary photographs of the incinerator in order to reveal the crisp rectangularity of both. The photocopier appears as a work of monumental architecture; the grey-scale reproductions giving the photocopier's plastic casing a concrete immensity. Forensic close-ups of details of the triangular grooving of the House of the Governor are juxtaposed with the incinerator's distinctive step-fretted tiling from which the Griffins drew inspiration. Overgrown by tundra shrubs and trees, ravaged by furnace heat and external conditions, the latter's resemblance to the former is disorientating, as though the spirit of the earlier building has been exhumed in the Griffins' Modernist structure. A long perspective is often followed by successive magnifications of details from the same image, until they lose their legibility, their indexical quality dissolving into blurred gradient, revealing the grain of the photocopied pages.

Including snapshots, archaeological photographs, excerpts from textbooks, a user's-manual, and a contact sheet, the montage is akin to sifting through a dossier. In the context of this exhibition, the photocopier appears not only in its everyday sense as a specific technological apparatus for the duplication of documents from which the montage is assembled. Also, in a broader sense, it is presented as a cypher for the relayed replication of objects and events through history.

The theme of technological and historical replication is extended through the sculptural centre-piece of the exhibition, a concrete cast of a Canon NP6030 photocopier. Lit by a single fluorescent tube, the photocopier is depicted as an entropic ruin; chips, cracks and fissures across its body, flakes of concrete and dust and scattered piles of sediment surrounding its base. Its charred insides evoke an act of arson perpetrated on a defunct technology—forecasting its future demolition—this, in combination with its upright concrete geometry, lends it the appearance of a miniature Pyrmont incinerator. Despite the photocopier's increasing obsolescence due to burgeoning digital technologies, the logic of historical replication of forms continues unabated. Scanning the tiles salvaged from the expired incinerator currently in storage at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney, the second projected work appears to emulate the internal vision of a photocopier. Through the numerous traversals performed by the dolly-mounted camera, which rolls in a series of back and forth movements, and the illumination of the tiles by a single beam of light attached to the camera, the viewer comes to occupy an alien point of view internal to the anatomy of an otherwise familiar technological device.

Mangan's borrowing of the title of the fourth chapter of George Kubler's *The Shape of Time* indicates a preoccupation, shared with the American art historian, with the way in which forms are replicated through history. According to Kubler, the singular configuration of signals projected from the past onto the present at every moment functions to delimit the range of formal possibilities for action and innovation open to the artist. In the conglomerate of historical resonances between the three central objects presented, Mangan's work seeks to demonstrate how multiple histories—signals from the past—resonate within and between a set of otherwise unrelated forms. Through the resuscitation and recombination of seemingly dead histories, his work reveals the mysterious manner in which forms beget forms according to an historical logic of replication. Mangan splices together the three objects in a way that seeks to replicate, on a microscopic scale, this same logic. Echoing throughout the gallery, the incessant click-and-whir of a photocopier scanning an unknown document saturates the collected visual contents of this exhibition, its machinic staccato binding together some kind of coherent whole. The looped soundtrack also corresponds to an automated mode of movement through space: the invisible tireless traversal of the photocopier's lamp shifting beneath its glass surface. The repetition of the scanning process of each tile resembles a single frame of a film, its motion prolonged and subjected to repeated reversals in direction. Like the blackened photocopied image of the incinerator, copied and recopied by Mangan to the point of its own destruction, the exhibition reveals the life of forms beyond their imminent demolition.

David Homewood

# Some Kinds of Duration

Nicholas Mangan

Centre for  
Contemporary  
Photography

Melbourne, Australia  
10 February - 1 April 2012

## List of works

*Some Kinds of Duration* 2011

Mixed-media installation:

High definition single channel video, colour, silent, 6:48; high definition single channel video, black and white, sound, 5:05; concrete, fluorescent light, carbon; and A4 paper, carbon toner, Canon NP6030 photocopier glass plate, fluorescent light.

## Image credits

1. Palace of the Governor, Uxmal, Yucatán, Mexico. Photographer unknown.
2. Pyrmont incinerator, Pyrmont, Sydney, Australia. Image courtesy of Powerhouse Museum, Sydney. Photographer: Penelope Clay, 1992.
3. *Some Kinds of Duration*, installation (detail), 2011.
4. Demolition of Pyrmont incinerator in 1992, Pyrmont, Sydney (video still). Videographer unknown.
5. A selection of the salvaged ornamental concrete tiles from the Pyrmont incinerator. Powerhouse Museum Archives, Sydney, Australia, 2011. Artist documentation.

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