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Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Cnr Middle and Bloomfield Streets,
Cleveland Q 4163

Monday to Friday 9am – 4pm

Sunday 9am – 2pm

Admission free

Tel: (07) 3829 8899 or email:

gallery@redland.qld.gov.au

www.more2redlands.com.au/ArtGallery



Redland Art Gallery is an initiative of Redland City Council, dedicated to the late Eddie Santagiuliana

Images

Cover: *Mindfulness 101* (detail) 2011, high-density polyurethane foam, fibreglass, epoxy resin, vinyl lettering and two-pack automotive paint, 1600 mm diameter x 200 mm deep. Photography by Erik Williamson.

1/4/6 *Sign Writing* assemblages 2011, salvaged scrap aluminium road signs, various dimensions. Photography by Sean Young.

2 *Pareidolia* 2009, screen print on retroreflective film on aluminium, 900 x 1200 mm. Photography by Erik Williamson.

3 *Know Thyself* 2011, laser cut, polished stainless steel with diamond etched text, 600 x 500 mm. Photography by Dan Pike.

5 *Nothing to fear but fear itself* 2009, retroreflective and reverse-cut coloured film on aluminium, 750 x 1500 mm. Photography by Erik Williamson.

© Images courtesy of Alan James.

ⁱ Concrete Poetry is defined by Wikipedia as, “poetry in which the typographical arrangement of words is as important in conveying the intended effect as the conventional elements of the poem, such as meaning of words, rhythm, rhyme and so on. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concrete_poetry James does not see himself as working within this tradition, describing his work as “more verbal than visual and with less regard for the play of images than words”. His interest is in signage, using different words in familiar media, and the resulting conceptual double-take.

ⁱⁱ Genesis 1:1.

ⁱⁱⁱ James has just produced the 400th Love Sign.

^{iv} An innovative aspect of James’ practice is his use of social networking, posting images of these signs with commentary from an international community. The result sees his signs as a performative aspect of his own life that involves anyone who wishes to contribute to their discussion, reception and experience.

See:

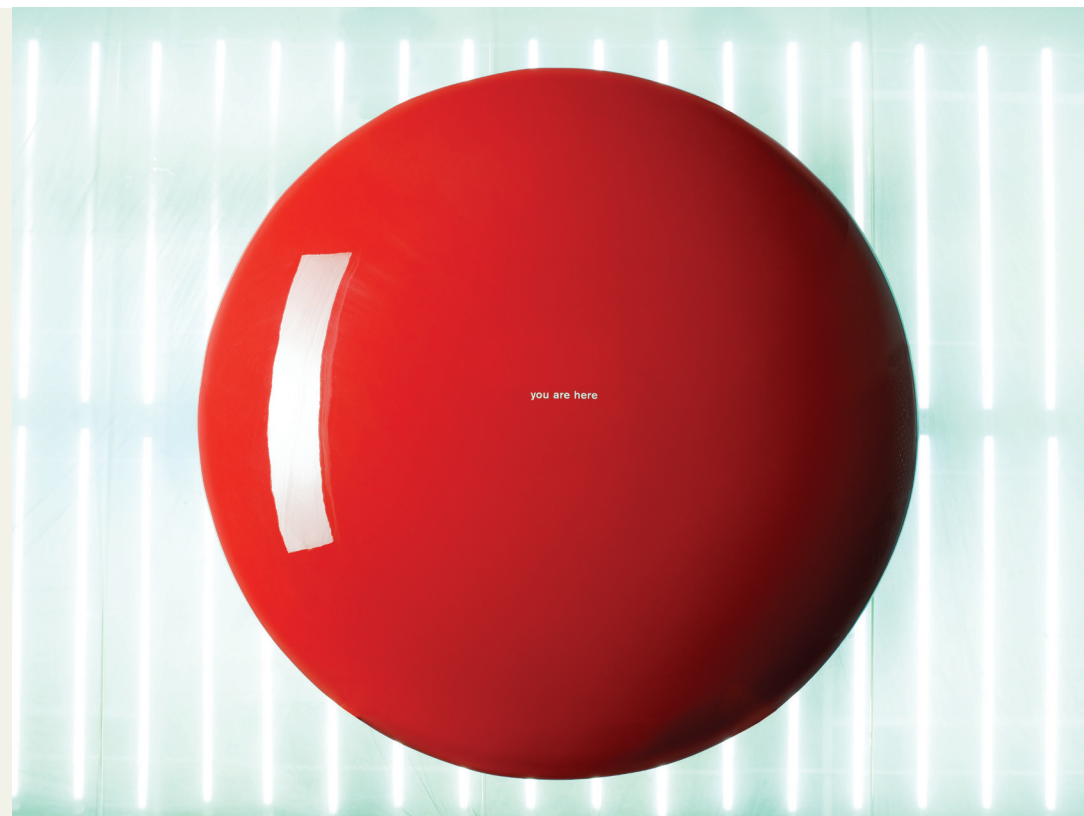
signs-of-life.com.au

[facebook.com/SignsOfLifePage](https://www.facebook.com/SignsOfLifePage)

lovesign.com.au

[facebook.com/LoveSignPage](https://www.facebook.com/LoveSignPage)

^v “Pareidolia” is a term used to describe our tendency to perceive patterns, meaning or significance in the random, meaningless or insignificant. From signs-of-life.com.au



TEXT-BASED ARTWORKS by ALAN JAMES

Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland

Sunday 4 December 2011 –

Sunday 29 January 2012



There is a circular argument that begins to tap out a rhythm in my mind when I think about art and text, words as images – detours into concrete poetryⁱ – and fast turns into a chicken and egg argument, only silenced by the authoritative, “In the beginning was the Word ...”ⁱⁱ However, if we are thinking about the artistic trajectory of Alan James, the Word was “LOVE” and its meaning is distinctly secular.



Alan James has been playfully utilising words as an aesthetic element since 2003. He describes what he produces as “verbal artwork”, with its genesis closer to writing than visual art. “Their conception and my motivation are in what they say, how they’re read, what they mean. I think language is the basis of who we are and how we got here.”

A freelance copywriter by trade, his initial artwork used the familiar iconography of the STOP sign, overwriting it with the word “LOVE”. *Stop! In the Name of Love* (2003) has been produced as a numbered multiple, achieving many fans and international distribution on the way.ⁱⁱⁱ

In the intervening years, James has added new works to the Love Sign. He cites artistic inspiration in the work of Rosalie Gascoigne, registering her constructions as meditations, attempts to find beauty and meaning in her landscape and environment. While he says, “No one can touch her shirt tails” in terms of an artistic legacy, he shares an interest in reflecting on his own surroundings. “I’m interested in finding the profound and poetic in the bland statements all



around us, even if it’s the ordinary sights and signs of the Moorooka Magic Mile.”

What becomes clear is that deadpan humour is integral to the creation, promotion, reception and sharing of these works.^{iv} James asks us to look again, to think, to interact meaningfully with the world around us. Art prompts our mindfulness, reminding us that commonplace urban sights may be more than they seem. With a sideways nod to Magritte, this is evident in his *Pareidolia*^v (2009) – a sign in the familiar black on yellow that reads, “THIS IS NOT A SIGN”.

More recently, *Mindfulness 101* (2011) utilises the archetypal way-finding phrase “YOU ARE HERE”, which appears like the dot on a map in the centre of a large red circular sign. In its resonance, this glowing, pulsating object evokes Anish Kapoor’s meditative receptacles of colour. Bulging out from the wall, it nudges the viewer’s sense of the here and now.

Nothing to fear but fear itself (2009) reads “HERE BE DRAGONS”, a phrase used historically by cartographers to describe uncharted waters or lands (and sometimes just secret places).



James overlays this concept with the fantastic in contemporary life, using the format of the red freeway sign that usually reads, “WRONG WAY GO BACK”. It claims an imaginative space in our lives, a prompt that credibility must be personally thought through, and notes the primacy of the individual to assess danger or risk (as opposed to the collective regulation of the nanny state). Moreover, it prompts us to question public prejudices and fears.

Within *Sign Writing* (2011), his most recent series of textual assemblages, recovered words from discarded and dissected road signs find new life and meaning. They flag an *arte povera* instinct, garnering poetry and personal philosophy from what has been discarded in the council road works skip. James delivers the familiar with an unexpected opportunity to see the ordinary anew.

Along the way, from the roadside to the art gallery, “signs of life” abound. The *Signs of Life* exhibition at Redland Art Gallery, Cleveland brings James’ various text-based artworks together for the first time.

Louise Martin-Chew
October 2011