



**DANIEL CROOKS**

# IN EINSTEIN'S MIND: DANIEL CROOKS AT SAMSTAG

Soon after its establishment in 2007, the University of South Australia's **Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art** formed a close creative partnership with the **Adelaide Film Festival** that has now led to three biennial collaborative projects of exceptional artistic standard. Through this productive partnership, generously assisted by the **Adelaide Film Festival's Investment Fund**, moving-image and new-media artists of conspicuous talent have been commissioned to create entirely original projects for presentation at Samstag, timed to coincide with the Film Festival.

The first commissioned artist was Lynette Wallworth, with her marvellously interactive *Duality of Light*, in 2009, followed by Warwick Thornton's utterly surprising, iconoclastic 3D film, *Stranded*, in 2011.

Now, in this third commissioning, the Samstag/Film Festival partnership is presenting Australia's first survey of significant work by the internationally acclaimed, New Zealand-born and now Melbourne-based artist, *Daniel Crooks*. This publication celebrates the event.

However, the ambitious nature of the exhibition, and the remarkable innovation that Crooks brings to his work, warrants more. The Samstag Museum has therefore also produced a richly illustrated e-catalogue, with a long, probing conversation between Crooks and Lawrence Weschler, the distinguished American writer on visual culture. This unique publication can be downloaded, at no cost, from the iTunes App Store.

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There are occasions in an artist's career – fortunate for us all – when an unexpected invitation to present their work in a high-level context coincides happily with the artist's own plans and dreams. To be given the guarantee of generous, relatively unconditional financial support, and the certainty of a major art museum's commitment to exhibit their still-undeveloped project, is an opportunity to achieve something rare, special and ambitious. It will be a challenge of course, and unpredictable, but exciting.

At once highly original, experimental and technologically innovative, Daniel Crooks's ongoing artistic project has evolved since 1999 through a remarkable series of works. At each stage in their progress, these works have opened up new visual dimensions – aesthetically and imaginatively – each building incrementally on what has gone before. However, the central concerns underpinning Crooks's digitally-manipulated video art, and which drive the making of the work, remain constant.

Crooks speaks of his practice as concerned principally with time – or rather, motion – as a kind of bridge in representing 'time' and 'space'.

There is a certain surprise – shock even – on first encountering a Daniel Crooks video installation: it is a reaction that rapidly gives way to mesmeric engagement. In fact, the viewer typically surrenders to the scene presented, spellbound by the languid grace of the action portrayed, the elusive sense of recognition, and the growing puzzle of the work's creation. It is involuntary and immediate, a magical phenomenon of benign capture.

Whether the scene is one of trains or motor vehicles in motion, or pedestrians coming and going in public places, the moving images created by Crooks – often projected onto very

large screens – portray activities that, while fundamentally ordinary and commonplace in themselves, are so transformed by the artist's skilful digital manipulations that they become extraordinary, wonderful, and often beautiful.

Crooks's worlds are representations of alternative realities, where multiple moments in time manifest simultaneously. Eventually, the viewer grasps that things within the filmic frame – people, objects, buildings and backgrounds – have become separated from each other and then, somehow, individually reconstituted and overlaid, rather in the manner of a musical fugue. Certain elements, digitally altered by the artist, function and move in exceptional ways within the relatively static surroundings of a common, shared space. The result is mystery, an Einsteinian world of distended, stretched and ruptured shapes, elongated or accelerated times, and unlikely motional relations and trajectories. Dislocation abounds, yet harmoniously.

Crooks's process has been described as breaking up the flows of real time and space experienced in conventional film and video media, into fluid and reassembled presentations of the surrounding world. He digitally 'slices' an image or frame of a video, and stretches and spreads it across the screen in a lush digital sweep of shifting pixels.

His early video work, *Train No. 1* (2002–13), was based on one single continuous tracking shot of a moving suburban train, filmed from another train travelling in an opposite direction. It led some commentators to make the obvious link in Crooks's work to cinematic history, in this case the Lumière brother's seminal film, *The arrival of a train at Ciotat*, in which their original 1895 audience was so shocked by the moving image of the approaching train they got up from their seats to escape it.

Also in 1895, of course, H.G. Wells married time and motion in his visionary story, *The time machine*, later produced as two feature films, oddly enough both starring Australians: Rod Taylor in 1960, and Guy Pearce in 2002. One can add to this a compendium of influential

modern films that have, in different ways, anticipated (and illuminated) futuristic concepts of time, and which resonate strongly with the work of Crooks through their innovative creation of inspired visual effects. Think *Inception* and *The Matrix*, and the immersive urban environments of Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*.

Most memorable and imaginatively profound, perhaps, among representations of time and space in cinema, is Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968). The prolonged, high-speed journey of the psychedelic 'Star Gate' sequence commences along a vertical horizon of patterned light, but abruptly ends with 'Dave' unexpectedly situated in a dreamlike, floor-lit room, suggestive of an austere, but elegant, European palace. It is a brilliantly conceived, fantastic dimension of overlapping time and space. In one of cinema's most original narrative inventions, and paced with delicious slowness, Dave progresses through the abridged, remaining stages of his mortal life, to be reborn as a sentient foetus, traversing the black vastness of outer space towards his next evolutionary incarnation.

Crooks's artistic antecedents can also be traced back to the important, 19th-century photographic investigations of motion within time, undertaken by both Eadweard Muybridge and Etienne-Jules Marey, who used multiple cameras to capture movement in stop-action photographic sequences of the human body, animals and other forms. Crooks, too, is a technical innovator – quite apart from his unique digital techniques, he has designed sophisticated devices that employ precision-controlled cameras to film moving scenes from multiple viewpoints, simultaneously. He remains ardent about his first love as a student – stop-motion animation – even though he has moved on.

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For his previously unseen project at the Samstag Museum of Art – commissioned through the Adelaide Film Festival/Samstag partnership – Daniel Crooks has conceived a particularly ambitious and immersive multichannel

installation, *Pan No. 11 (cross-platform transfer)*.

The artist is again looking at that nexus of time, space and relativity: 'the railway'. Or, more specifically, the New York subway with, as Crooks calls it, a 'Piranesian' confusion of pedestrian traffic, train tracks and intersecting tunnels.

For the first time, however, his work will be displayed on a multitude of screens, entirely filling Samstag's spacious, downstairs Lipman Karas Gallery. Behaving as one, divided into angled sections and forming a kind of concertina folded into the space, they extend the dimensionality of the video image beyond the frame. The viewer, navigating around the folded screen, is offered a tangible sense of the dimensions interacting at the boundaries of the frame, and a very physical sense of time running perpendicular to space.

Precisely six years ago, in October 2007, the University of South Australia opened its lovely new Anne & Gordon Samstag Museum of Art with a splendid exhibition, *Wonderful World*. Adelaide audiences were genuinely shocked, not only by the unexpected ambition and physical scale of the gallery itself, but also by the breathtaking grandness of the inaugural exhibition. It all signalled a tremendous confidence and promise for South Australian cultural life, and the leading role the University of South Australia would take in this.

Significantly, Daniel Crooks was himself among the artists who contributed their work to *Wonderful World*, and we are especially delighted to now welcome him back, in this ambitious presentation of his truly wonderful, cutting-edge work.

We, the audience, are excited, and can hardly wait!

**ERICA GREEN**

August 2013

## LIST OF WORKS

*Train No. 1*, 2002–13  
digital video, channels variable  
16:9, colour, 4 minutes 10 seconds, each channel  
museum edition

*Imaginary Object #1*, 2007  
single-channel digital video  
16:9, colour, silent, 6 minutes 48 seconds  
museum edition

*Imaginary Object #3*, 2007  
single-channel digital video  
16:9, colour, silent, 6 minutes 38 seconds  
museum edition

*Imaginary Object #4*, 2008  
single-channel digital video  
16:9, colour, silent, 6 minutes 33 seconds  
museum edition

*Static No. 12 (seek stillness in movement)*, 2009–10  
High Definition digital video transferred to Blu-ray  
16:9, colour, sound, 5 minutes 23 seconds  
museum edition

*Static No. 14 (composition for neon)*, 2010  
single-channel digital video  
16:9, colour, stereo sound, 4 minutes 17 seconds  
museum edition

*Pan No. 8 (reverse attractor)*, 2011  
single-channel High Definition digital video  
transferred to Blu-ray  
16:9, colour, sound, 5 minutes 26 seconds  
museum edition

*Static No. 19 (shibuya rorschach)*, 2012  
single-channel High Definition digital video  
16:9, colour, sound, 6 minutes 3 seconds  
museum edition

*Pan No. 11 (cross-platform transfer)*, 2013  
5 channel digital video  
colour, stereo sound, custom screen  
18 minutes 23 seconds  
museum edition  
A Samstag Museum of Art and  
2013 Adelaide Film Festival commission

All works courtesy Daniel Crooks  
and Anna Schwartz Gallery

## DANIEL CROOKS

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Search 'Daniel Crooks' on the iTunes App store to download your free e-catalogue.