

2020 ADELAIDE//INTERNATIONAL
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Parallaxis

Edward Ramsey & Rupert Piccoli

University of South Australia graduate architects

Matthew Bird describes himself as a bowerbird, allured by the sheen of metal and the shape of technological oddities we associate with the Space Age and its purpose to pioneer the unknown. Bird takes an interdisciplinary approach to work as an artist, architect and educator under the moniker of Studiobird, his process of creation a speculative mode of research toward an uncertain end product.

For the Adelaide Festival, Bird was commissioned by the Samstag Museum of Art to respond to the *2020 Adelaide//International*, a series of five exhibitions by Australian and overseas practitioners exploring the role of architecture in shaping human experience. In conjunction with Dr Rachel Hurst, Senior Lecturer in the University of South Australia's Architecture Program, Bird collaborated with Master of Architecture students through a series of workshops to prepare this response. *Parallaxis* is Bird's second instalment in a planned triptych of performative encounter projects that explore the unknowable afterlife, following *Sarcophagus* (2016) which scrutinised the perversely beautiful relationship between deep-sleep and death. The groundwork for *Parallaxis* was established in *After Warracknabeal* (2019) which proposed the reincarnation of the declining Victorian town by reshaping the experience of its classical architecture to promote astro-tourism.

The multichannel moving-image work *Parallaxis* investigates the unseen temporal and physical ties between objects, people and places that endure beyond their lifetime. Bird's method of investigation is revealed in the exhibition's title, a portmanteau of the Greek 'parallax', describing the shifting perception of an object's location based on the position of the viewer, and 'axis', denoting the horizon between two points. Hence, Bird examines the power of movement and the parallax phenomenon in revealing a universal scale between locations and times. The images that play before us defy temporal stasis; simultaneously futuristic, nostalgic and present.

Parallaxis takes place in the familiar and otherworldly landscapes of the Wimmera Mallee region surrounding the town of Warracknabeal, concentrating on three foci: the Murtoa Stick Shed, Murra Warra Wind Farm, and Salt Lake Tyrrell. Here, two augmented humans—visitors from the future—seek to uncover the nature of their origin. Rolling cylindrical 'gyrocompasses'—instruments forged of elemental metal and light—they till the landscape for answers. Much like the mythological Fates who spin, measure and cut the yarn of life, the visitors appear to search for the invisible thread that ties all things together. To contextualise these landscapes, Bird has the voyagers look to the constellations, mapping Australian townships against the grid of the cosmos and in doing so stirring consciousness of their position within the universe.

To think on outer space is to expose the mind to the terrifying enormity of the cosmos beyond the canon of experience. This process is embedded in the conception of *Parallaxis*, whereby Bird and his students tapped into the 'cosmic vertigo' that ensues, beginning with a trigger word and following a subconscious kinoscope to journey to deeper meaning. This tactic has its roots in contemporary image-based research and the worm-holing through platforms such as Instagram and Pinterest prevalent in modern architectural practice.

To unearth the architectural 'afterlife' of the town of Warracknabeal and its surrounds, Bird's students journeyed through land and celestial scapes. While the aim was to learn by working closely with an established practitioner, they quickly grasped the opportunity to develop their own innovative approaches, and devised new forms of contribution, from video narratives to geographical and cosmological mappings. Their pilgrimage was punctuated by nine townships, each an opportunity to record archetypal monuments to the everyday, such as post offices, court houses and silos. In imagined architectural reincarnations of vernacular building stock, these monuments were mapped against the star Acrux, the focus for the Southern Cross and Emu in the Sky, constellations significant to both First Nations and Western cultures. The result is a survey of live drawings that tease out an alignment between the cosmos and the Earth, the divine and the everyday.

Bird summons order out of chaos, constructing a bower of oddities, twig by twig, that form the nest of *Parallaxis*. He sees the everyday as not a shroud to the sublime but rather the key to unlocking it. Proclaiming the power of the unseen and the unsearched, Bird gives voice to the mnemonic forces that shape our everyday experience among the landscape, and contributes an idea that movement and perspective can 'untangle the threads' and allow us to inhabit the present.

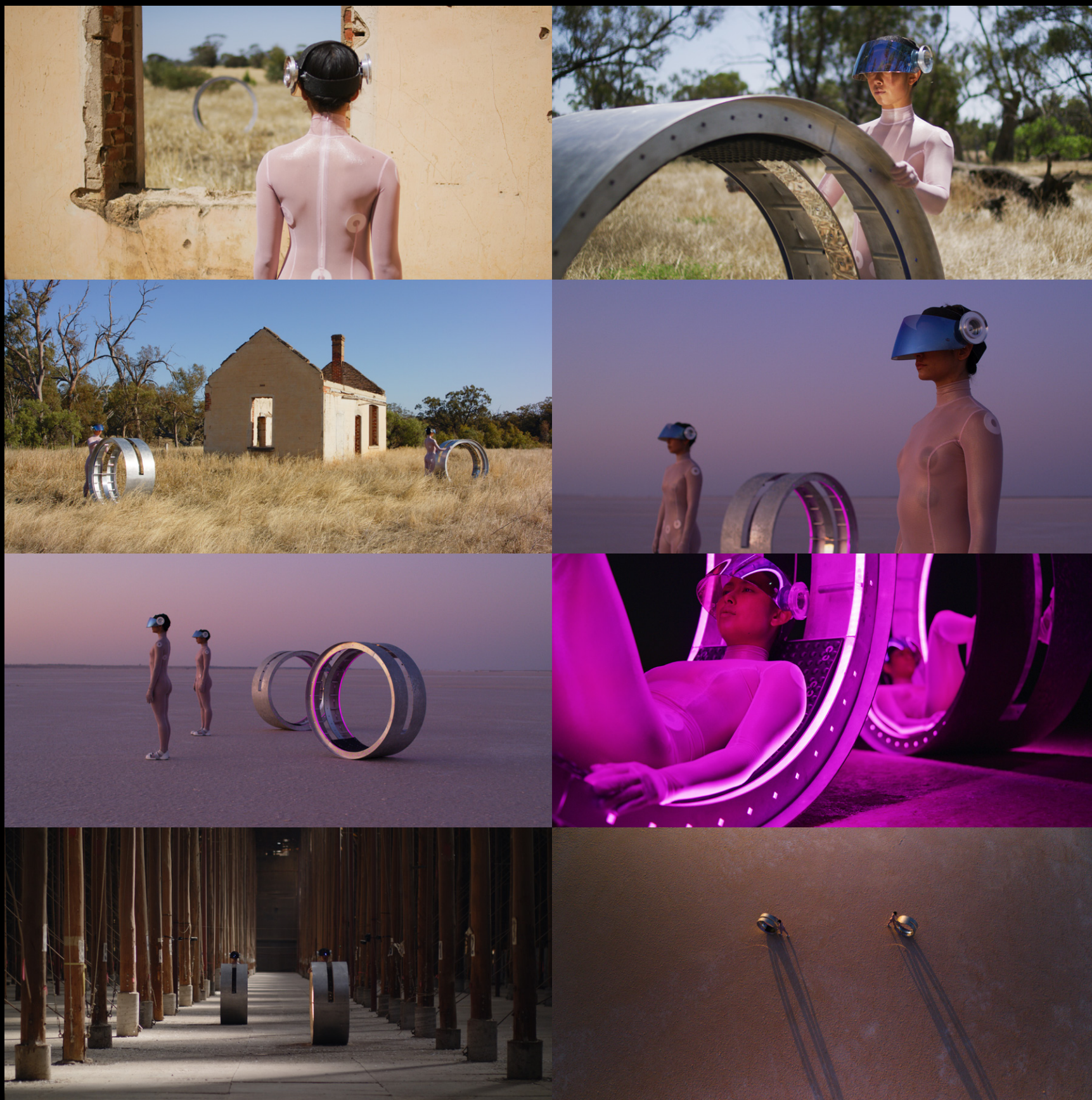


Image: Matthew BIRD, *Parallax*, 2020, stills by James Wright.

**MATTHEW BIRD WITH STUDENTS
FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA /
PARALLAXIS /**

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The human desire to understand our earthly position has held enduring fascination. Across time we have mapped, surveyed and measured as a way of knowing. *Parallaxis* plays upon these desires, considering the potential for architectural processes and measurements to act as a foundation for structures of understanding. In the multichannel moving image, we witness two bodies moving across a landscape. They work with cylindrical instruments, appearing to gather data from the terrain, each revolution marking a paradoxical attempt to pin a position through perpetual movement. Filmed in the surrounds of the small Victorian town of Warracknabeal, on the wheatbelt between Adelaide and Melbourne, *Parallaxis* draws on the architecture and landscape of the northern Wimmera and southern Mallee as a means by which to explore the ways we navigate, hold and alter space.

A Samstag Museum of Art project by Melbourne-based artist and architect Matthew Bird in collaboration with University of South Australia Master of Architecture students, led by Senior Lecturer Rachel Hurst, in response to the *2020 Adelaide//International* and presented as part of the Adelaide Festival.

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