



Sebastian Di Mauro, *Cuore*, 1995. Pigment, acrylic paint, pastel, acrylic medium. 120 x 47 cm.

But elsewhere the frictions of migrant discourse take a more productive turn, revealed in the consistent exploration of linguistic difference through puns, word plays, colloquialisms, malapropisms, and the like. It is from this perspective that Conomos' obvious affection for Chico Marx—the quintessential migrant who murders language to his own ends—can be understood. As can the luminous presence of the neon signs—substituting library for library, inevitable for inevitable, chocolates for chocolate, and so on—which celebrate the difference that *accent* makes in the relation between a word and its sense.

The appearance of *Night Sky* at ACCA offered Melbourne audiences a welcome chance to see this important work, which has previously been shown in Sydney, Brisbane and Adelaide. It is to be hoped that we won't have to wait as long to see Conomos' current project, a more ambitious autobiographical/ landscape video called *Autumn Song*.

scott mcquire

### sebastian di mauro and fay aldre

The Beatty Gallery, Sydney

From time to time the reviewer is forced to acknowledge that the work of art is difficult to explicate. The age-old criticism of art criticism is that to organise the work of art into easily understood principles is to falsify it. But the visual product in art was not born from a visual absolute. Even if pure visuality is a bogus concept, the use of words to assess the structure and sense of a work of art runs the risk of devolving into a meditation on a variety of things external to the work itself. But this mode of approach, when used judiciously, testifies to the fact that what is visual in visual art is an opening to a broader field: sensation. As poets for well over a century have been aware, even the sight of words, letters, has a strange allure. And it is not uncommon to register the smell of a book, its cover, its type-setting and the colour and texture of the pages in the overall apprehension of meaning.

In the exhibition under consideration both sets of work, by Fay Aldred and Sebastian Di Mauro in separate parts of the gallery, partook of these principles. Neither series of works can be said to be works on paper, rather works in paper. Using the same tactile and material presence of paper that, say, distinguishes different editions of the same novel, Aldred and Di Mauro purposely obscured the words and figurative images in their pieces to concentrate on pattern, texture and undulation. Nevertheless bits of sentences, remnants of images or their tracing made the viewer self-consciously decide whether the purpose of these works was to divulge a secret or simply to take pleasure in the surfaces themselves.

Aldred's series consisted largely of works entitled *Elle Fell* (all titles of both artists' work were set in lower case, for no discernible reason) collages from strips of women's magazines (presumably *Elle* magazine) overlaid with paint or ink. The collages were so thick that the paper looked almost hand-made, and they were affixed directly to the wall without backing, letting the work freely buckle and curve. The surfaces connoted walls of buildings after repeated scrapings and reapplications of posters, an indecipherable composition of fragments, glue and pigment. They were works which toyed with the media (but no longer visible memory) left underneath billboards. The medium was purposely that of the teenage glossy. Each piece was built from coarsely shredded pages, built up like *papier mâché*. These magazines, piling up with the months, issue upon issue, with their jarring injunctions to conform to a preordained system of beauty were, in Aldred's reshaping of them, a somewhat mournful reference to perhaps the frustrations of the domesticated housewife, or even of the expectant patient in the doctor's waiting room, who no longer takes in anything, seeing nothing other than a kaleidoscope of patterns and colours. Paint colour was limited to orange, red and dark pink except in the works where the ink of a felt-tip pen gave an obsessive pattern of little doodles. Although these latter works exuded the same fretfulness of the painted work, they bordered on being precious and irritating. Some had a boldness that others lacked, but monotony took over. As a whole, the dominant sensuous aspects begged the question—at

what point did the purposefulness of art production end and the endless production of art objects take over?

Di Mauro's work was also set on thick paper which, sadly, was framed and backed and behind glass. Perhaps, though, the artist had little choice, governed by the exigencies of his media. No part of the surface of these small and narrow works was left untouched by a raw deep blue pigment, dispersed with jagged swatches of paint which had then been worked over with more pigment. Blue, already a recessive colour, was made deeper by the chalky absorptive quality of the surface. At points parts of sentences and simple designs were inscribed into the heavy surface which, because of heavy application of the materials, was imbued with an added depth. One immediately thought of the notorious 'Yves Klein Blue' with its luminosity that for years was a kind of signatory device for the artist. The brilliance of the blue, heavy on the surface, had its own pulsating space. Thus Di Mauro treated the paper as a skin.

Sex and touch were the central concerns: the series was called *Pages from the Mute Book*, written in Italian. The only qualm with the exhibition is a slight one. The works were not openly cultural or racial, so that the Italian stood out as quaint (if the exhibition had been in Italy, would the titles have been in English?). And if they were pages from a book, and since each piece dealt with a pre-linguistic awareness, why have titles at all?

Two coterminous metaphors were explored. First the mute book of the body itself, carrying its marks of memory in hair, sweat, moles, wrinkles, flaking skin. Second, a straying from the work of Klein who used the blue as an extension of himself—Di Mauro treats the paper as a satellite of his own body. Each mark on the surface, therefore, was enacted as if it were one of the infinitesimal changes occurring in the artist himself. In this way a very private narrative was taking place, of the seamlessness between the artist and work in the act of making, where physical acts occur for a brief period as thoughts. For the beholder, the story of this 'mute book' was divulged in the very act of looking, and read as one would read the slightest impulse from a neighbouring body.

adam geczy