

All the years/lost & found
(as if snow, melting)



Sonja Porcaro

Six propositions on Sonja Porcaro's All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)

I.

Years lost. As a child, Sonja Porcaro recounts how she and her sister accompanied their father to Adelaide's East End Market before dawn, where they bought produce for their parents' fruit and vegetable store. Ramps, ladders, the cramped spaces of the shops and stalls, and crates and boxes packed with produce all made their impression. Later, the Adelaide Central Market would sustain and reinforce those early memories, filling the absence created by the East End market's closure. *All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)*, occupies the FELT Space front gallery, a stone's throw from the Central Market. Porcaro's installation draws on the architecture and forms of Adelaide's markets, past and present. FELT is itself based in what was originally a small commercial premises, its spaces sharing something of the confined character of many of the shops of the nearby market. Porcaro's work exploits that similarity, creating a pristine, ghostlike abstraction, in wood and Perspex, of her recollections of an architecture and place at once absent and distant in time, but that can also be found in the here and now, bustling and lively, just across Gouger Street.

II.

"Years lost are also years found." Porcaro tells me that she particularly likes this phrase. One can turn it over in one's mind, like handling a smooth stone. It has a consoling character, suggesting that while memory persists, nothing is ever truly lost to us in the stream of time. It has another significance here too: the installation is not only a reflection on Porcaro's own childhood, it is also a reflection on her experiences as a parent. First, one is the child to a parent, next one is the parent to a child – a kind of eternal return. And so, one market box, rendered in transparent Perspex, and set on wooden legs, suggests a crib, perhaps a humidifier crib. That box and another contain folded and rolled swaddling cloths tightly packed, like market produce. One rolled cloth, sitting among pastel-coloured swaddles, is black, intimating that among happier parental memories is nestled hidden grief.

All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting), Pine, felt loop 5cm diameter, 2022/23

All the colours/lost & found (for Agnes Martin), Pine, Perspex, castor wheels, swaddles (flannelette/cotton) including artist's daughter's swaddles from birth, plush felt, 96 x 60 x 40cm, 2022/23



III.

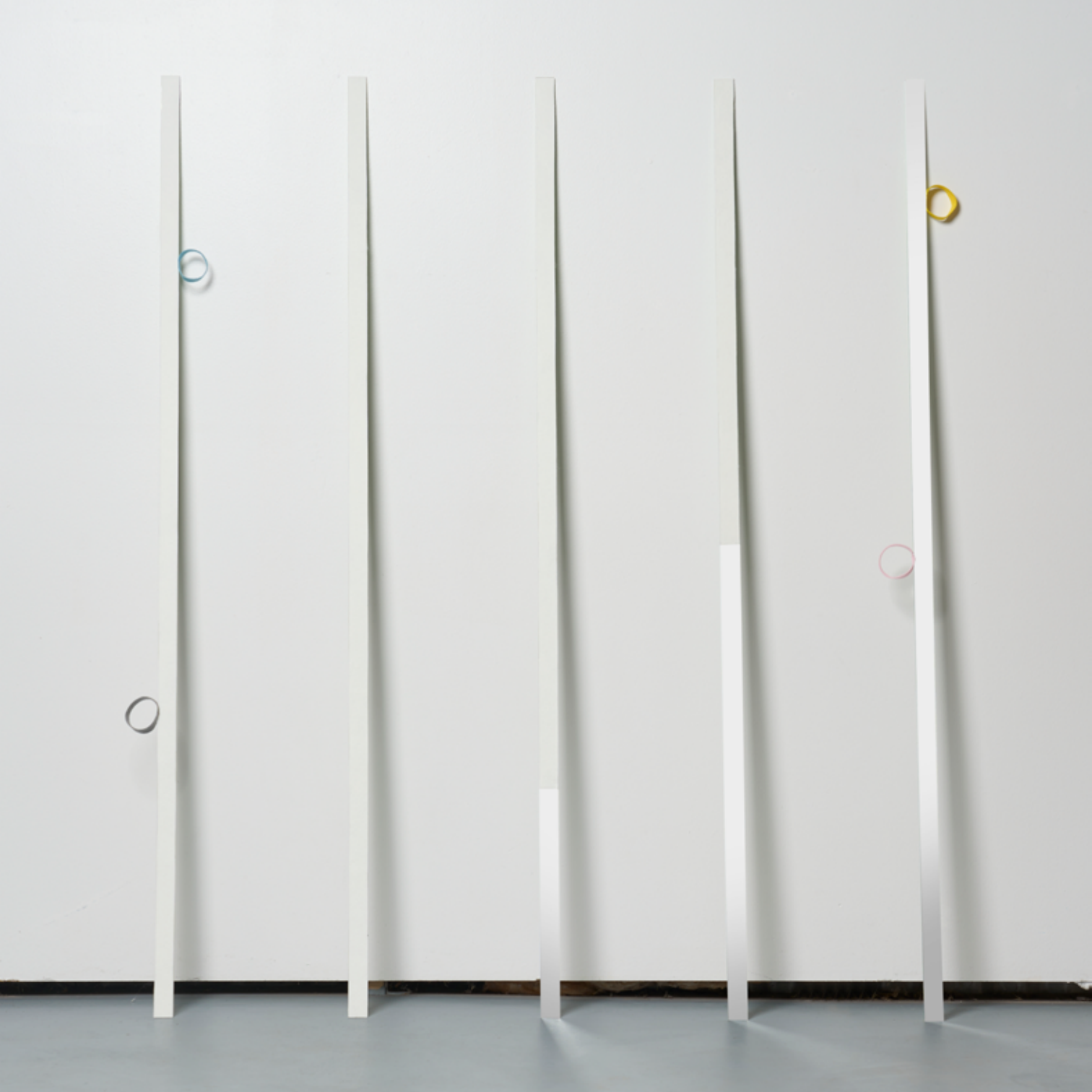
Studio talk. Since I am talking of memories, let me turn to memories Porcaro and I share. In the 1990s, we studied with George Popperwell in the South Australian School of Art's sculpture department. Two ideas that I recall Popperwell returning to in his discussions with students in the studios were 'delay' and *inframince*. These ideas, loosely adapted from Marcel Duchamp, played a role in shaping many practices in the Adelaide scene at the time. Delay, as I recall Popperwell describing it, involved holding-off, perhaps indefinitely, the viewer's final interpretation of the work.¹ Content should not be obvious, on this way of thinking, but should be sought out by the viewer. It is something like the opposite of the art that media such as Instagram propagates: instead of collapsing content into a simple hook, it opens up space for content to become complex, rich and multi-layered. To my mind, Porcaro's work exemplifies this quality, its 'cool', blank faces slowly yielding clues to its significance as the viewer engages with its details. It encourages a long process of engagement on the part of the viewer, and rewards it with complexity and significance. The other concept on which Popperwell dwelt was *inframince*, usually translated as 'infra-thin'. It is a way of describing features that are barely perceptible or present.² For Popperwell, the concept is a way of recalibrating the viewer's attention to dwell at length on minor details, accidents and ephemera, and exploiting their potential of these things to carry meaning. Together, delay and *inframince* put the viewer on a kind of drip-feed of meaning – or, a better metaphor perhaps – tease the viewer with glimpses of meaning.³

IV.

"New Year's first snow – ah – /just barely enough to tilt/the daffodil."⁴

Porcaro talks of the strips of white felt on some of her works as "snow". The connection with snow comes from the memories Porcaro has of her father describing how he and his siblings would pour a boiled red wine – *vino cotto* – over snow, to make a "form of 'ice cream' ... quite common in Italy ... amongst poorer families," Porcaro says. For her, the image of sweet ruby wine on white snow is a familial, cultural memory, that has developed a presence in her work in various ways, as she has over the years returned to longstanding themes of migration, heritage and family. Mirrored surfaces then have the quality of clear melting ice or water. The lengths of mirrored Perspex leaning against a wall, some covered or partially covered with white felt, suggest snow and ice in various states of melting. A pristine layer of "snow" seems to have settled on the edges of other works.

Right: *All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)*, Mirrored glass, felt, 150 x 150 x 10cm, 2022/23



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¹ Duchamp's conception of delay seems to me significantly different from Popperwell's, which is to say that this conception is really Popperwell's own. (Marcel Duchamp, *The Essential Writings of Marcel Duchamp*, ed. Michel Sanouillet and Elmer Peterson, London: Thames & Hudson, 1973, p. 26).

² For *inframince*, see Thierry de Duve, *Pictorial Nominalism: On Marcel Duchamp's Passage from Painting to the Readymade*, trans. Dana Polan with Thierry de Duve, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, pp. 159–61.

³ This paragraph draws in part from my essay "True History of the 'A Team': Between Adelaide's Alternative and Institutional Art Scenes, 1980–2000, in Margot Osborne (ed.), *The Adelaide Art Scene: Being Contemporary*, Mile End, SA: Wakefield Press, forthcoming 2024.

⁴ Matsuo Bashō, *The Essential Bashō*, trans. Sam Hamill, Boston: Shambhala, 1999, p. 87.

⁵ This is Barbour's *Entrails of Kings*, lead and steel, 2008. Images of the work are included in Ewen McDonald (ed.), *John Barbour: Hardsoft*, Adelaide and Sydney: Australian Experimental Art Foundation and Yuill/Crowley, 2011, n.p.





Michael Newall is a writer and researcher who works on topics spanning aesthetics, art history and philosophy. He holds honorary positions at the University of South Australia and the University of Kent, Canterbury, UK. He is co-curator (with Eleen Deprez) of The Little Machine, a gallery space showing contemporary and experimental art, Regent Arcade, Tarntanya.

Sonja Porcaro is a mid-career artist based in Tarntanya/Adelaide. Since graduating from the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia (First Class Honours, 1993) she has exhibited in spaces such as the Art Gallery of South Australia, the Experimental Art Foundation (SA), the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, the South Australian School of Art Gallery, the Australian Centre for Photography (Vic), The Performance Space and Artspace (NSW) and at Viafarini (Milan, Italy). Residencies include the Australia Council Residential Studio, Milan, Italy, the Athens School of Art Studio, Greece, the College of Fine Art, University of New South Wales and Sauerbier House (SA). Porcaro's work has been collected by the Art Gallery of South Australia and is in private collections.

Above (detail): *All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)*, Mirrored glass, felt, 150 x 150 x 10cm, 2022/23 Back cover: *All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)*, Perspex, plush felt and felt, 62 x 42 16.5, 2022/3



We recognise and acknowledge the Kurna People as the traditional custodians of the land on which we live and work, and pay our respects to elders past, present and emerging.

Sonja Porcaro would like to thank FELTspace, Uncle Mickey O'Brien, Michael Newall and Rosina Possingham (catalogue design). This project is an outcome of an 11-month Adelaide Fringe funded Residency, George Street Studios and the artist would like to thank the Adelaide Fringe, Tony Rosella and the George Street crew for their assistance and support. The artist would also like to thank the City of Adelaide for generously supporting the project. Many thanks to Peter, Inés, Dora, Remo and Veronica for their ongoing support and to all those who generously assisted with 'child minding', so this project could be realised.

Sam Roberts Photography.

Above (detail) and cover: *All the years/lost & found (as if snow, melting)*, Perspex, swaddles (flannelette), plush felt, buttons, 105 x 110 x 37.5cm, 2022/23



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