

Graham Fletcher, *Untitled*, ('Situation Rooms' series), detail  
Courtesy Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts  
and Melanie Roger Gallery, Auckland  
Photograph Sam Hartnett



## Graham Fletcher

Tessa Laird

FOLLOWING HIS 2009 'LOUNGE ROOM TRIBALISM' SERIES, Graham Fletcher continued to investigate modernism's appropriation of Indigenous artefacts in architectural and interior design in his recent show at Auckland's Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts. Fletcher's immaculate oil on canvas renderings of domestic perfection 1960s-style have operated as double agents – their smooth veneers and pastel palettes a foil to the discomfiting silence surrounding said artefacts, marooned and misunderstood in eerily idyllic landscapes. While 'Situation Rooms' presented a continuation of these themes, Fletcher's painting style had undergone a dramatic shift. Controlled canvases made way for free brushstrokes in oil on paper, creating light, airy images that almost looked like they were being glimpsed from a speeding car.

The new paintings proffered a heady combination of high-church and lowbrow modernism, from Mondrian's *Salon of Madame B.*, 1923, to a padded conversation pit that could have been the set of an erotic romp directed by Radley Metzger. Both interiors had been compromised by the introduction of fetish objects. What might once have operated as trophies or at least lent an exotic frisson to the décor, now exerted their own peculiar power and agency. In the conversation pit, a Javanese dog, tongue protruding, eyeballed viewers; in Mondrian's precise interior a pink monkey statue occupied a niche, gesticulating a cheeky welcome, also with its tongue sticking out.

So it was no great leap to suggest that Fletcher was doing just that – poking his tongue, as well as thumbing his nose, at high style and its complicity with colonial politics. Fletcher's postcolonial pastiches questioned provenance and privilege, while posing as pretty paintings. Like the bug-eyed carving staring at us from the concrete cartouche of a giant Slavic monument, Fletcher was having fun.

Graham Fletcher: *Situation Rooms*, Te Tuhi Centre for the Arts,  
Auckland, 11 February 2012 – 15 April 2012.

Rennie Ellis, Athol Shmith, Rob Imhoff and  
Carol Jerrens at Brummels 1975, detail  
Selenium-toned gelatin silver print, printed  
2009, collection of Robert Imhoff  
Courtesy Rennie Ellis Photographic Archive



## Brummels

Maggie Finch

THE MOOD, INTENT AND LEGACY of Melbourne's Brummels gallery was wittily encapsulated through one work in this Monash Gallery of Art (MGA) exhibition. Gathered in a shallow showcase was a selection of grungy Polaroid snaps of people partying in an otherwise empty space. Some photographs were marked with text, some with lipstick and others with alcohol. Called *Debris of surprise*, 1977, the pictures formed an event-based artwork in which Brummels director, the late photographer Rennie Ellis, invited people to gather and supplied Polaroid cameras to record what took place. As MGA curator Stephen Zagala noted, the work was in the spirit of what art theorists would identify today as a relational aesthetic experience, whereby the artwork within the social environment was of primary importance.

Since Ellis's premature death in 2003, several exhibitions have examined his photographic practice. MGA's show, however, focused on the gallery he founded in 1972 and closed in 1980, and which is often lauded as the first not-for-profit space in Australia devoted specifically to photography. The exhibition celebrated this important moment within the context of concurrent events in Australia with the founding of photography schools, curatorial appointments and photo publishing.

It emphasised Brummels as a place of opportunity for an emerging generation of photographers: Sue Ford, Ponch Hawkes and Jon Rhodes, among others. It revived unexpected pairings of work by multigenerational artists, such as erotic works by Carol Jerrens and Henry Talbot, and traced Ellis's influence as a spruiker for his 'brood'. Ellis clearly steered Brummels with a specific vision. His desire to provide new possibilities for photo practice and encouragement of artistic community was a crucial legacy of the Brummels gallery and its vivacious director.

Brummels: *Australia's First Gallery of Photography*, Monash  
Gallery of Art, Melbourne, 22 October 2011 – 22 January 2012.