



CASPAR FAIRHALL ACCRETION ROOM

CASPAR FAIRHALL ACCRETION ROOM

Interactive installation: Kinect motion sensor, computer, projector, and sound.

3—26 July, 2015

Moana Project Space, Perth

<http://moana-ari.com>

<http://casparfairhall.com>

Acknowledgements

Caspar Fairhall thanks Dale Buckley, Bella Snell and Guy Loudon for their invaluable help in bringing this project about. Thanks also to Helen and Marcus for their feedback and patience over months of late nights and weekends spent programming and hair-tearing.



PROJECT SPACE

In the Accretion Room



Sketchbook study, 2013, graphite on paper

I experienced a moment of discovery when first viewing *Accretion Room*. While moving through the darkened gallery on approach to the circular projection screen, there was a growing awareness that the work was gradually evolving in response to a human presence in the space.

The projection of red and white slabs suspended in a void of cyanic blue underwent a series of subtle changes, layers swelling and shrinking in response to my movements, while concealed speakers presented subtle audio cues which reinforced the suggestion that I was being monitored and recorded. *Accretion Room* had co-opted my body into a self-fulfilling interactive strategy, where in viewing the work I was inadvertently changing what I was able to see.

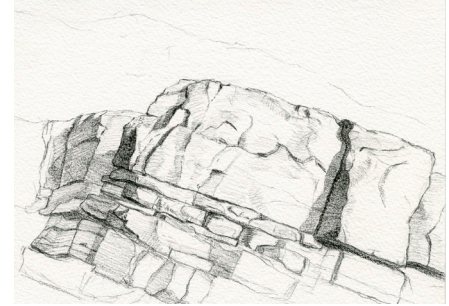
Part geophysical simulation and part poetic thought experiment, *Accretion Room* records the movements of viewers through the gallery as a stream of raw data, which is then fed into a program simulating the formation and erosion of the banded iron and quartz strata of the Hamersley Range, located in the remote north of Western Australia. The monumentally slow geological processes involved in the creation of these mineral deposits have been collapsed into real-time, with the effects of life and heat across epochs replaced by the movements of viewers in front of the work.

These movements are registered by a Microsoft Kinect—a combination camera, depth sensor and multi-array microphone capable of registering a great variety of human inputs in real-time. First produced as a peripheral for the Xbox 360 game console in 2010, the Kinect was originally marketed as a device which would revolutionise the video game industry. Allowing the real-world movements of a player to correspond to those of their on-screen character would lead to unprecedented levels of user immersion and embodiment—a decisive step closer to the simulated reality of the Holodeck from the Star Trek universe.

As with all previous attempts at digital embodiment, the reality of this ‘virtual reality’ was underwhelming. Incapable of providing the resolution or responsiveness required for a true suspension of disbelief, the Kinect has since stagnated as a video game platform. However, researchers, hackers and artists have continued to explore the possibilities of the Kinect as a powerful tool for less immersive forms of interfacing

between human bodies and electronic media. In *Accretion Room*, Fairhall has created a set of tightly-controlled parameters for interactivity and play between viewer and work, in order to engender a specific awareness of embodiment within viewers – and in doing so, avoiding several common critiques of interactive media art.

The prevailing strategies of play and interactivity adopted by media artists are frequently maligned and regarded as critically ambivalent. Frequently produced with little political content or critical reflection on the technology used to create works, interactive media art has been likened to commercial culture, in that “it infantilises, lacks critical capacity and eventually banishes seriousness itself.”¹ Further confirming this belief is the enduring perception of play as a pointless activity, “an occasion of pure waste: waste of time, energy, ingenuity, skill, and often of money.”²



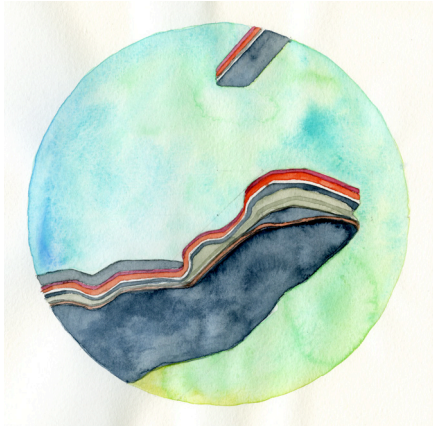
Sketchbook study, 2013, graphite on paper

The more complicated truth is that our experiences of play directly inflect our perceptions, beliefs, and thought processes.

In games and in contemporary art, the presence of play is often confused with a lack of serious purpose. The more complicated truth is that our experiences of play directly inflect our perceptions, beliefs, and thought processes. All games teach, and all experiences of play are learning ones – even if what is being learned isn’t immediately obvious. Play is make-believe, occurring in a low-stakes environment removed from reality, which works according to a set of determinate rules. Within this sphere, play rewards certain behaviours and discourages others. Play encourages expansive thinking around the rule set which governs it, and a studied consideration of the consequences of user action and interaction.

1 Palmer, D., ‘The Critical Ambivalence of Play in Media Art’, Proceedings of ISEA 2008: The 14th International Symposium on Electronic Art (2008).

2 Callois, R., *Man, Play and Games* (1961), pp. 5-6



Study for *Accretion Room*, 2015, watercolour on paper, 21 x 21cm

Accretion Room gives no easy answers as to what it teaches. Where the mechanics of video games revolve around a desire for skill-based mastery on the part of the player, *Accretion Room* operates by a different logic. While it is clear that the work changes and evolves in response to human inputs, the ability of the viewer to control these interactions is limited, and the rules which govern them are opaque. There's no opt-out to this interactive strategy. Viewing *Accretion Room* inscribes the presence of the viewer on the work itself.

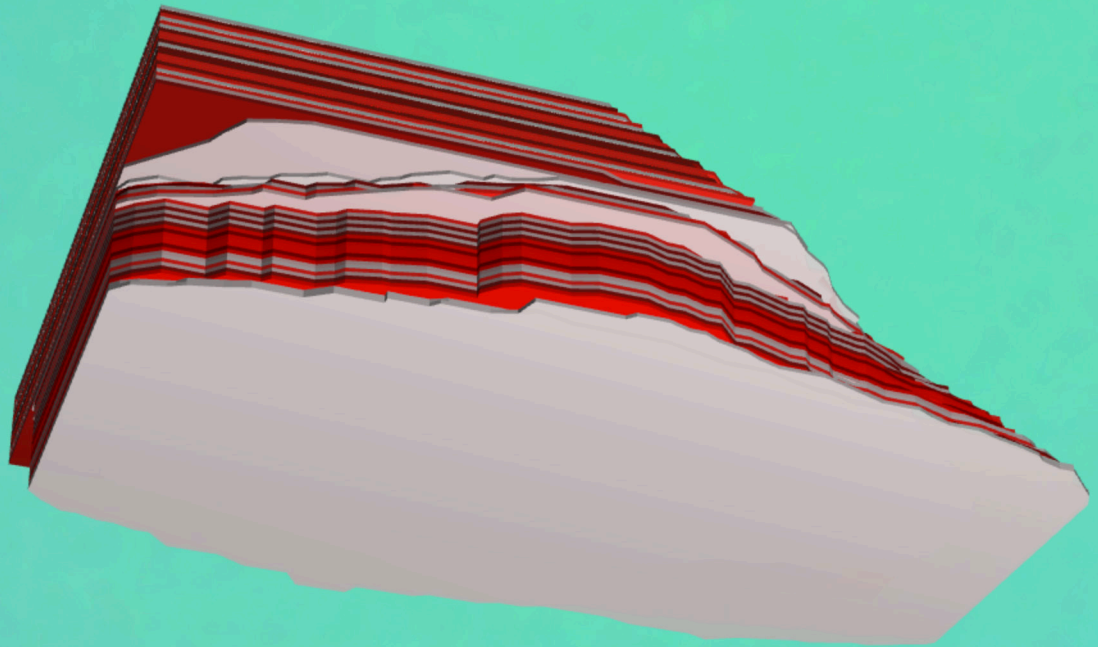
...the ability of the viewer to control these interactions is limited, and the rules which govern them are opaque...

In this process, the lidless eye of the Kinect forces us to recognise our condition of physical embodiment, and that our lives have very real impacts upon the geology of the planet we inhabit. Ecological changes which took place over epochs now occur over generations. Western Australia currently exports 474 million tonnes of iron ore per annum, mainly from the Pilbara region.

There is no opt-out to this interaction either.

Dale Buckley

Dale Buckley is an artist/writer/curator based in Perth. He is a co-director of Moana Project Space.



All that is not solid condenses to stone



Strata IV, 2013, watercolour on paper,
42 x 42cm, private collection, Perth

In 2013 I was fortunate enough to have a residency in Cossack, a ghost town in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. (The residency was part of the prize for winning the Cossack Art Award in 2012.) While there, I came across striking red iron oxides in stratified rocks, interleaved with layers of quartz.

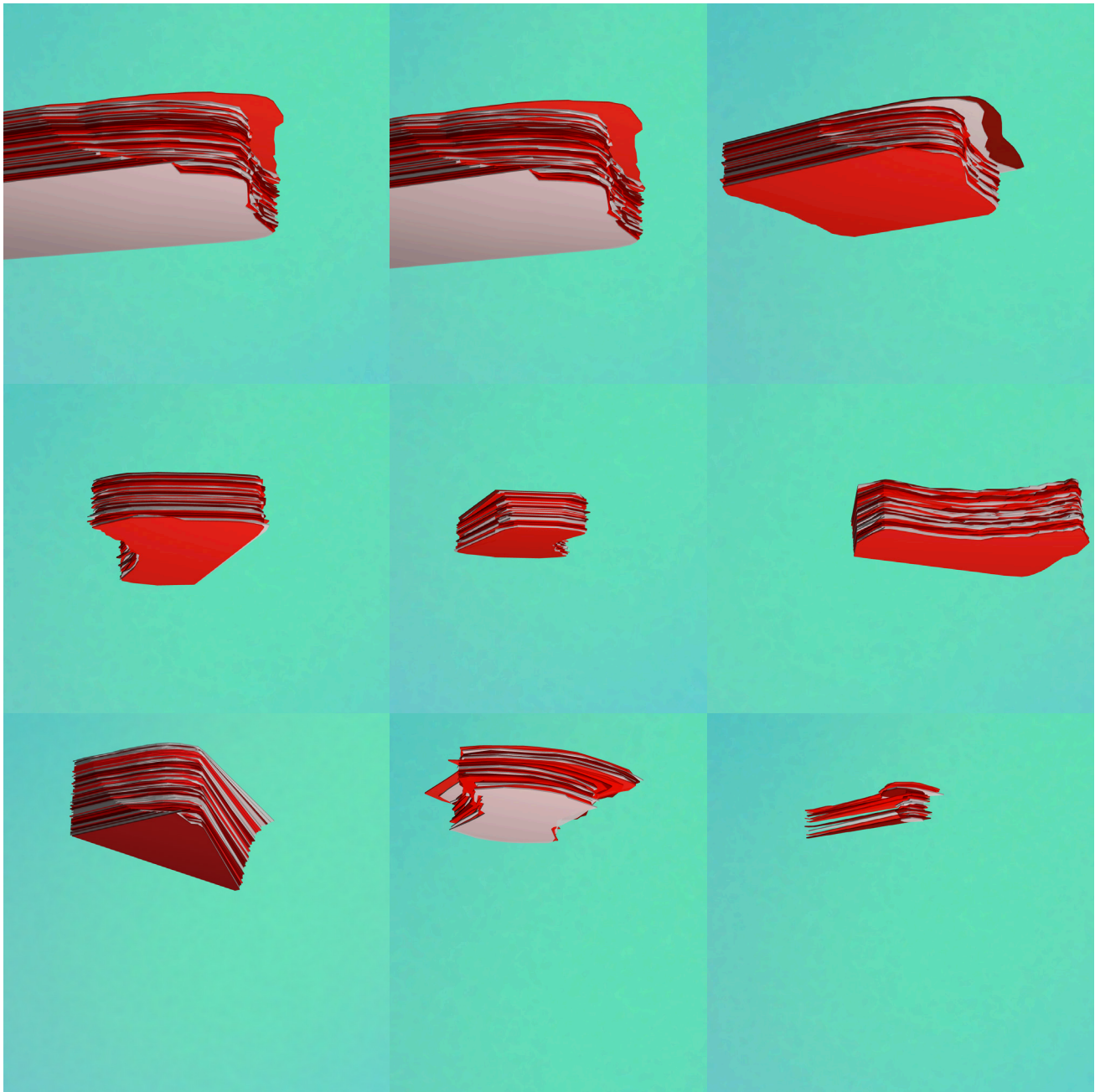
These rock formations were not only beautiful, but puzzling: as a painter, I'm very familiar with iron oxides, and it didn't fit with my (admittedly poor) understanding of the origins of sedimentary rocks. Further, they were bent and twisted in extraordinary ways—suggesting a very ancient origin. The explanation turned out to be surprising.

We tend to think of the slow processes of geology as existing independently of life. However, this is an illusion: the interactions between our planet and the life that lives on and within it are complex.

The banded iron formations I encountered in the Pilbara are the first of two striking examples of this interaction between life and the planet. Around 2.3 billion years ago, the first photosynthesising life in the oceans caused iron oxides to precipitate to the sea floor—building the Hamersley Ranges, from which both iron ore and the deadly asbestos at Wittenoom have been extracted. So this ancient phenomenon has a very tangible impact on our life in Australia today. More importantly, the same organic process completely changed Earth's character. The oxygen we breathe and the resulting blue skies we live under entirely owe their origin to what scientists refer to as the *great oxygenation event*.

In our own time we have human impacts on the planet. These profound changes, including, but not limited to climate change, have led many scientists to propose we name our epoch the *Anthropocene*.

Accretion Room is not an illustration of these processes: instead it takes elements from both to form a work that runs in parallel to them. Visitors to the installation are an integral part of the work; as you move around the space, the work responds, eroding and accreting, changing shape. The resulting formations are intrinsically unpredictable, unstable, and constantly changing. Much like Earth itself.



Caspar Fairhall *Curriculum vitae*



Strata I, 2013, watercolour on paper, 10.5 x 21cm, private collection, Perth



Strata III, 2014, oil on Belgian linen, 133.5 x 133.5cm

Education

- 2012 Master of Fine Arts, College of Fine Art, University of New South Wales
- 1993 Bachelor of Arts (Visual Arts), WA School of Visual Arts, Edith Cowan University
- 1990 Diploma of Fine Art (Painting), Claremont School of Art

Collections

- Artbank
- Art Gallery of Western Australia
- The University of Western Australia
- Edith Cowan University
- BankWest
- KPMG
- Chamber of Commerce, WA
- Liz and Lloyd Horn Collection
- Shire of Roebourne
- City of Bayswater

Awards

- Cossack Art Award 2013—Invited Artists category
- Cossack Art Award 2012—Best Overall artwork
- City of Bayswater Art Award 2012

Solo exhibitions

- 2015 Accretion Room, Moana Project Space, Perth
- 2012 Folded cosmos, COFAspace, University of New South Wales, Sydney
- 2008 Simultaneous, Sequential, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
- 2004 Transmission, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
- 2001 New work, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
- 1998 Projector, Gomboc Gallery, Perth
- 1996 First solo exhibition, Gomboc Gallery, Perth

Selected exhibitions

- 2015 artCollectiveWA down south, Holmes a Court Gallery, Cowaramup
- 2014 Artist Open House Fremantle, private residence, Fremantle

2014 City of Busselton Art Award, ArtGeo Gallery, Busselton (commendation)
 2014 Minnawarra Art Awards, Perth (commendation)
 2013 Le Salon Scintillant: Gotham Studios, Moana Project Space
 2012 Synechdoches, Moana Project Space
 2012 Joondalup Invitation Art Award, Perth
 2011 4, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
 2010 Joondalup Invitation Art Award, Perth
 2009 Joondalup Invitation Art Award, Perth
 2008 Linden 1968, Linden Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne
 2006 30 Years On, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
 2006 Joondalup Invitation Art Award, Perth
 2006 Melbourne Artfair, Galerie Düsseldorf booth
 2006 Material Witness, Contemporary Art Centre South Australia, Adelaide
 2005 Shelf Life, Galerie Düsseldorf (Festival of Perth exhibition), Perth
 2004 Invisible Cities, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art
 2003 BankWest Art Prize, Perth Institute of Contemporary Art
 2003 Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Annual Art Exhibition, Church Gallery, Perth
 2001 House and land package, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, Perth
 1999 In the studio, from the studio, Galerie Düsseldorf, Perth
 1999 Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Annual Art Exhibition, Church Gallery, Perth
 1997 Sir Charles Gairdner Hospital Annual Art Exhibition, Perth
 1995 New work, Gomboc Gallery, Perth
 1994 52 New, Blaxland Galleries, Sydney
 1993 Seven Perth Artists, Gallery Hakuzen, Nagoya City, Japan
 1990 Theoria, Delaney Galleries, Perth



Pilbara landscape study, 2013, watercolour on paper, 10.5 x 21cm



Pilbara landscape study, 2013, watercolour on paper, 10.5 x 21cm

