

Kensuke Todo
Time, distance, speed



Kensuke Todo

Henri-Joseph Focillon (1881-1943) the great French art historian wrote in his groundbreaking *Vie des formes* (1934) that artists think, see and act in a world of forms. Although best known as a Mediaevalist, Focillon was a polymath and published widely in the history of art including on Buddhist art and on the Japanese printmaker Hokusai. His broad worldview would have made him sympathetic to Kensuke Todo's need to articulate his understanding of himself as an artist and as a Japanese artist working in contemporary Australia.

To further underscore the Focillon reference, Todo spoke to me in a recent conversation (02/08/2010) of walking into St Patrick's Cathedral in Melbourne some years ago. The effect of his experiencing the physical and metaphysical structure of the imposing Gothic revival building with its soaring celestial-searching roofs and its accompanying semiotics of power and the glorification of God was a personal epiphany. Through this he realised the value of his not just accepting, but fully embracing that it was absolutely possible to be an artist working in contemporary Australia and to continue to accept and express his *Japanese-ness* and the rich traditions and connections that that culture is able to offer him in particular and personal ways.

The dogma and absolutism that characterise Western Christianity and that are so powerfully expressed in the dynamic verticals of Gothic monuments, might well be an anathema to a person nurtured in the multi-deist world of Japanese culture with its elements of Shintoism, Daoism, Confucianism and most overtly, Buddhism, operating concurrently, and happily accepting elements of the other without demur. The standing figure of Christ might even seem an aggressive foil to the relaxed and (often) sedentary and accepting Buddha. The contrast of the vertical (Western) with the horizontal (Japanese) sees further expression in the Gothic architecture alluded to above and the essential horizontality of, especially Japanese temple architecture and its accompanying rituals.

The above is by way of background but it does point to each artist's inner need to find a place that fits his soul and that that place is found through the interconnections between man, object and the environment within which these operate. For Todo it is through direct engagement with his world(s) and through the experiencing of both empirical and spiritual reality that results in the objects he creates.

The present exhibition has its creative ethos in the artist's recent (re-) visit to Japan and his travelling on newly built motorways that snaked their ways over not just the countryside but over the seas and through cities. These affirmed (amongst other things) Japanese technological acumen, but for Todo signified a more personal synergy with his own aesthetic concepts.

Todo's art is expressed through the language of sculpture and that is both (in Focillon's terms) an art about *form* and an art about how forms operate in space. That *space* is a multilayered and complex entity (or indeed set of entities). Todo's *space* encompasses his own aesthetic along with the inculcated cultural *spaces* that he now inhabits and has physically and metaphysically inhabited in the past. These spaces too are themselves multilayered and complex and (*living*) products of the ongoing processes that produced them. For Todo the work of art exists within and without of time and simultaneously within and without the cultures that populate time and that hold significance for the individual artist. Todo is concerned with the object and for him the ideal creative act is object-governed. In his art we witness the continual taking and transforming of diverse influences until the artist finds *the place that fits his soul*.

The earliest work in the present exhibition is *Elevated expressway* (2010, all works are from 2010), a work whose title enunciates the artist's formal source. This is a simple and direct piece whose physicality and (ostensible) objectivity aver the artist's deep allegiance to the primacy of the object. It sits low (18.5cm) on its base, and so to engage with the very simple spatial configuration the viewer must assume an active and cooperative stance with the work. The *expressway* does not appear to go anywhere (a mannerism/device used very effectively by the artist in his 2008 exhibition *Gradient*). This is an adroit artist's ploy. The work's very existence is of course a destination and its literal open-endedness can in fact be read as a deliberate aesthetic strategy by the artist to underscore the purposeful self-referentiality with which Todo imbues all his art. The only place you can go is back to the work itself!

Approach and departure is an elegant and eloquent sculptural intrusion. Its sinuous presence betrays the artist's understanding of the seductive power of line and its implied movement, as well as his ability to portray detachment and connection within the same work. The celebratory self-reference that appears above is beautifully conveyed here.

Junction I is exemplified by an organic lyricism that speaks of the grace of the calligraphic gesture. It is in many ways a literal transcription of a section of motorway transformed into a singularly authoritative and autonomous plastic statement. Todo does not conceal this work's source in reality but rather expresses his direct experience of that source in his particular sculptural vocabulary. Its partner, *Junction II*, repeats the transformation of the empirical into the spiritual, while its contained lyricism and controlled rhythms speak of an acute and sympathetic sculptural intelligence.

This intelligence is exemplified in each of the works in the present exhibition and is given a particular edge in *Expressway View*. This work is 4cm high, 220cm in length and placed 155.5cm from the corner which it encloses. Its simplicity is exemplary of the adjective-less language used by Todo in all his work. But in *Expressway View* it is a strident reduction of form that is nevertheless imbued by the artist with a palpable expressive strength that encapsulates the viewer and ensures an active and almost symbiotic engagement with the work. You are invited to walk under the elegant arc (the work is placed about 180cm from the floor) and the invitation is not one to be ignored. Todo's ability to manage the (unseen) relationships between negative and positive space, between object and viewer, between object and artist, and between artist, object and viewer, is given refined expression in the reductive elegance of *Expressway View*.

In this exhibition Kensuke Todo celebrates the object in ways that allude to his diverse and multilayered cultural background and present. The works speak of the Western canon (and particularly the Modernist canon), the traditions of Japanese art, architecture and spiritual expression, and the concrete realities of living in contemporary Australia. The integration of horizontal formats with vertical meanings articulated so beautifully and eloquently by the artist with a creative vocabulary so uniquely and vehemently his own, declares a mature and refined artistic identity the nature of whose comments on his world hold relevance and meaning for all of us, not least of the value of powerful beauty as a source of enjoyment and regeneration.

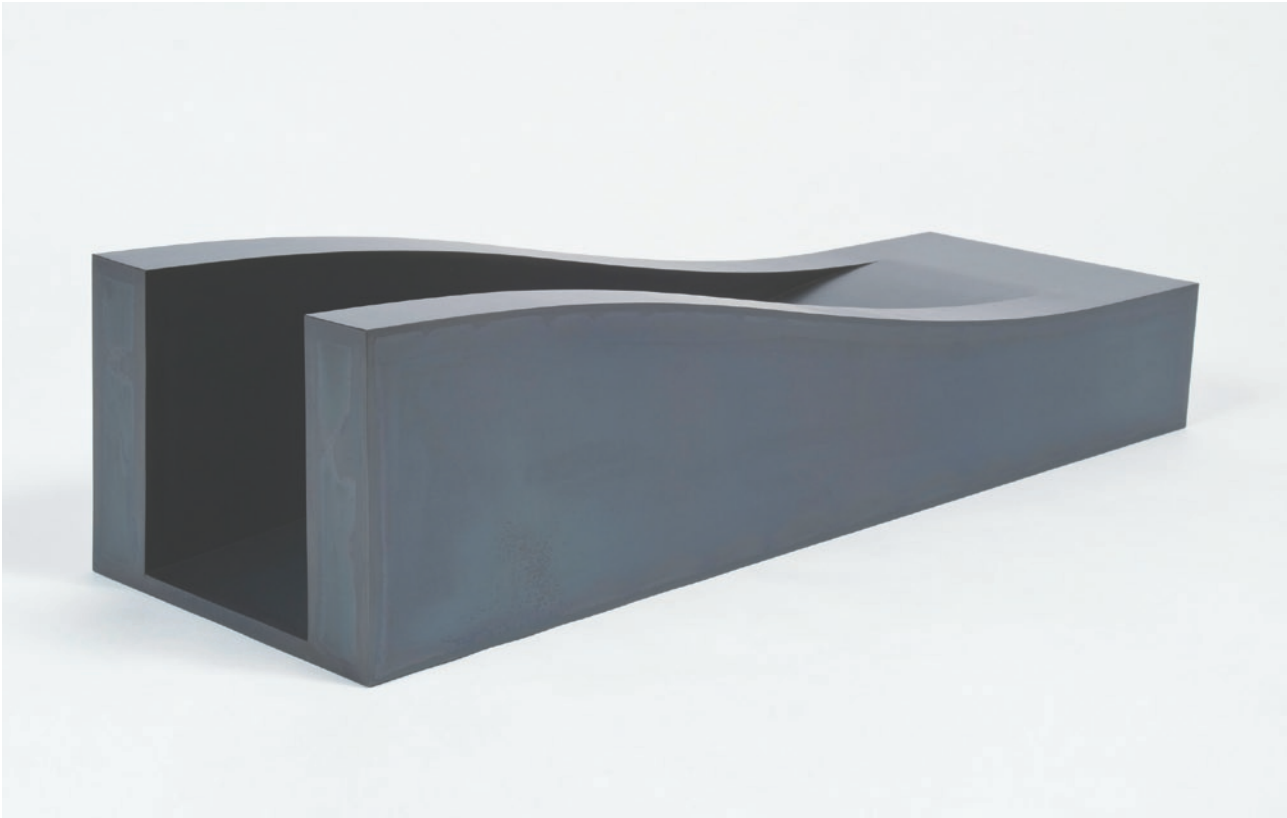
Peter Haynes | Director | ACT Museums & Galleries | August 2010



Expressway view 2010 mild steel 4 x 220 x 27.5 cm



Overpass, underpass 2010 mild steel 25 x 121.8 x 186 cm



William Street, Sydney 2010 mild steel 13.3 x 16.5 x 55.8 cm



Diverge 2010 mild steel 10.6 x 58 x 73.4 cm



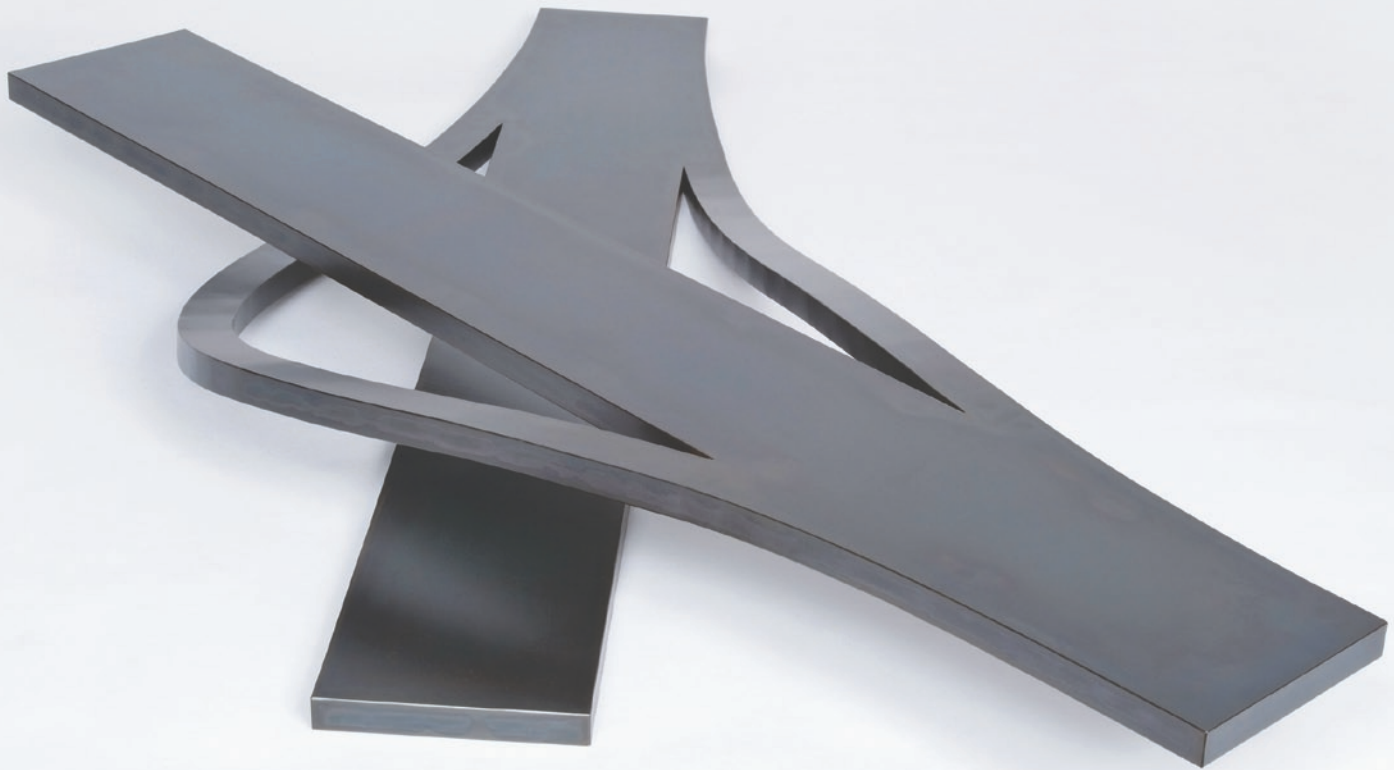
Hanshin Expressway 2010 mild steel 14 x 26.5 x 95.3 cm



Overhead shadow 2010 mild steel 14.5 x 35.5 x 72.3 cm



Bridge pier 2010 mild steel 76.8 x 93.1 x 21.9 cm



Junction I 2010 mild steel 10.5 x 79.1 x 101.6 cm



Junction II 2010 mild steel 90 x 107.6 x 75.1 cm



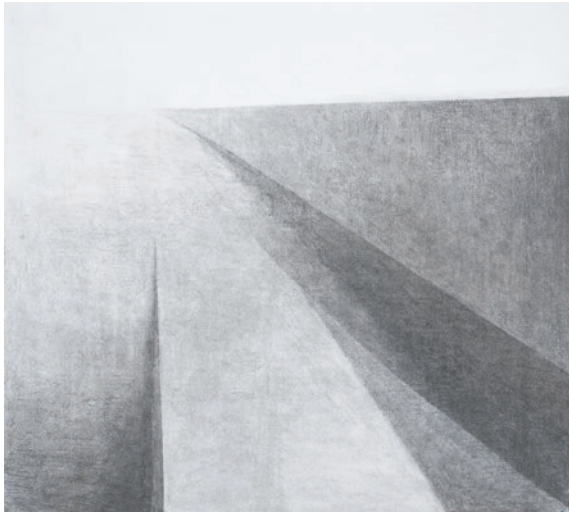
Approach and departure structure 2010 mild steel 13.2 x 126 x 17.5 cm



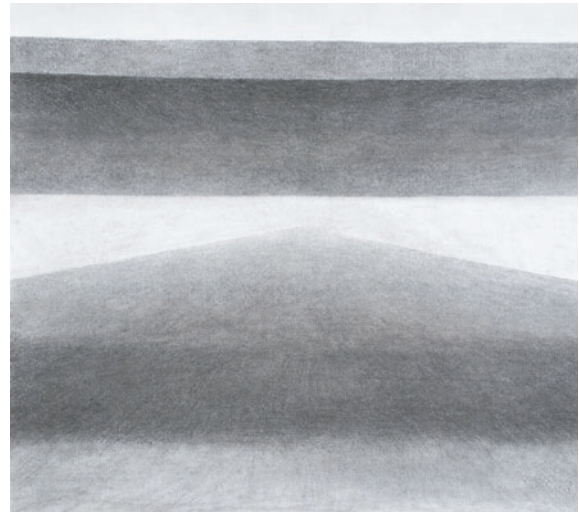
Elevated expressway 2010 mild steel 18.5 x 21.9 x 87.5 cm



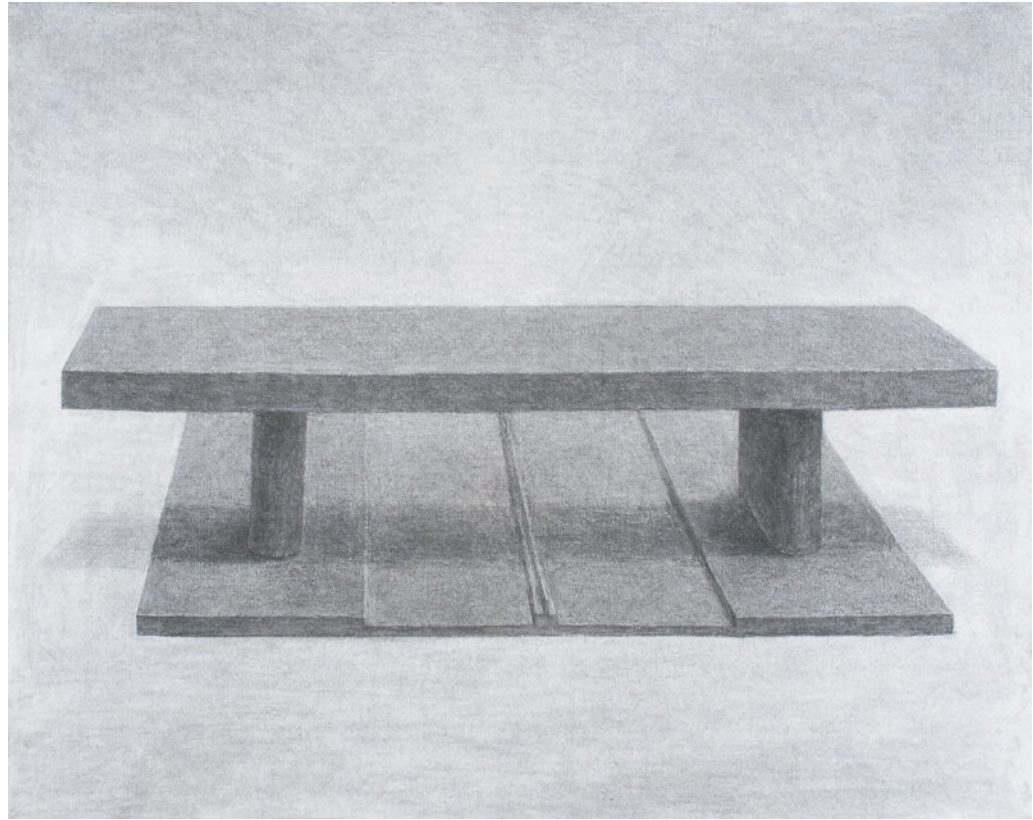
Exit and entry ramp 2010 mild steel 87 x 120.4 x 240 cm



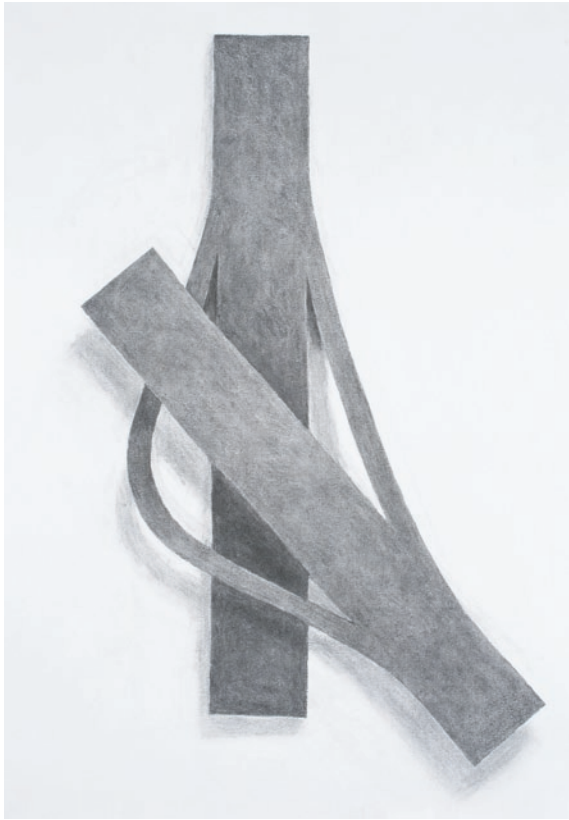
Study for Exit and entry ramp
2010 charcoal on paper 59 x 66.4 cm



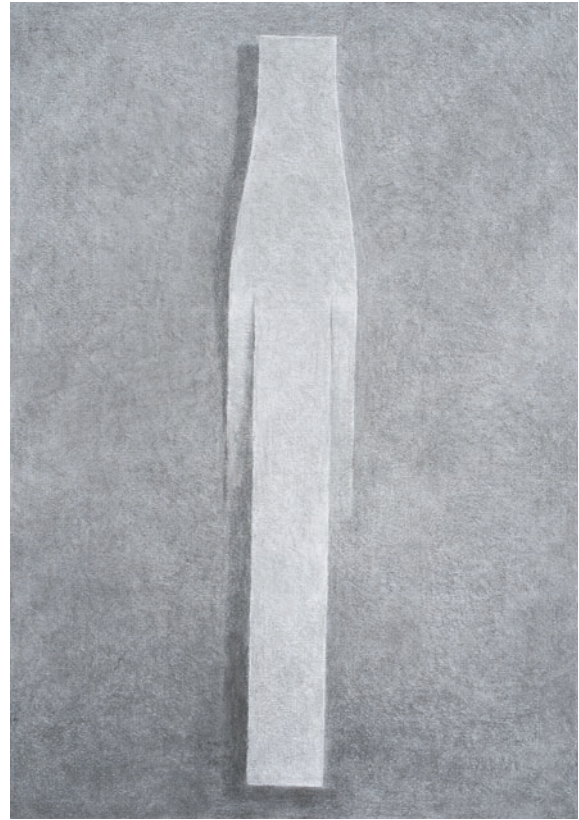
Study for Overpass, underpass
2010 charcoal on paper 59 x 66.6 cm



Study for Overhead shadow 2010 charcoal on paper 59.1 x 75.5 cm



Study for Junction I 2010 charcoal on paper 84 x 59.4 cm



Study for Exit and entry ramp 2010 charcoal on paper 84 x 59.4 cm

Kensuke Todo

Born 1975, Kyoto, Japan

Education

2004 Master of Arts (Visual Arts), Canberra School of Art, ANU, Canberra
2002 Master of Visual Arts, Canberra School of Art
2001 Bachelor of Arts, Kyoto Seika University, Japan
1999-2000 Exchange program, Canberra School of Art

Solo Exhibitions

2010 *Time, distance, speed* King Street Gallery on William, Sydney
2008 *Gradient* King Street Gallery on William
2006 *confined spaces* king street gallery on burton, sydney
2004 *Ambiguity* M16 Gallery, Canberra
2000 *Kensuke Todo: The works in Australia* Gallery ITEZA, Kyoto, Japan

Selected Group Exhibitions

2010 M16 Artspace, Canberra
2009 *Prometheus Visual Art Award* The Prometheus Foundation Gallery, QLD
Woollahra Small Sculpture Prize Redleaf Council Chambers, Sydney
City of Hobart Art Prize Tasmania Museum and Gallery, Tasmania
Phoenix Prize Canberra School of Art, ANU, Canberra
2008 *Compositions* King Street Gallery on William
Canberra Contemporary Art Space, Canberra
Wilson HTM National Art Prize Sophie Gannon Gallery, Melbourne; Grantpirrie Gallery, Sydney; Jan Manton Art, Brisbane
2005 *Sculpture 2005* Defiance Gallery, Sydney
2004 *33rd Alice Prize* organized by the Alice Springs Art Foundation
The Annual 6" Miniature Sculpture Show 2004 Defiance Gallery, Sydney
Horizons Foyer Gallery Canberra School of Art, ANU

- 2003 *The Annual 6" Miniature Sculpture Show 2003* Defiance Gallery, Sydney
Witnessing to Silence: Art and Human Rights Foyer Gallery, Canberra School of Art, ANU
New Sculpture New Contemporaries, Sydney
- 2002 *Oxygen* Main Gallery Canberra School of Art, ANU
- 2001 *Final Graduate exhibition* Kyoto Art Museum, Japan
- 1999 *Gulaga 8 Foyer* Gallery Canberra School of Art, ANU

Commissions & Awards

- 2009 Phoenix Prize
- 2008 Wilson HTM National Art Prize- Highly commended
- 2005 Bronze gum leaf for Blue Gum Community School, Canberra
- 2004 Graduate residency, Canberra School of Art, ANU
 Emerging Artist Support Scheme M16 studio residency and exhibition

Collections

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Artbank, Australia | Canberra Museum and Gallery |
| Arthur Roe Collection, Melbourne | Jackson Lalic Lawyers, Sydney |
| Bathurst Regional Art Gallery | Resolution Capital Ltd, Sydney |
| Blue Gum Community School, Canberra | |

Bibliography

- 2009 Cerabona, Ron: 'Space and spirit win religious art prize,' The Canberra Times, Apr 11
- Norris, Yolande & Broker, David, 'Artnotes: Final Phoenix', Art Monthly, Issue 219, May
- 2008 Dunn, Jackie: Across the country, state by state, Artbank Catalogue, March
- Ham, Sofie: Wilson HTM National Art Prize Finalist Exhibition, ArtsHub Australia, Feb 6
- Wellington, Robert: 'The shape of things to come,' Art Market Report, Issue 29
- Wilson HTM National Art Prize, artworkers, Feb
- Street Shift, Wins Wilson HTM National Art Prize, artworkers, Feb 14
- 2007 Bevan, Robert: Art & Events, Australia Vogue Living, Jan/Feb, p74
- Adolph, Fiona: Artbank, Insite Magazine, p50
- 2004 Barron, Sonia: 'Steely shapes of nihilism,' Canberra Times, Dec 14



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