

29 August – 27 September 2008

Experimental Art Foundation

Lily Hibberd



Endless Summer

(sunglasses and the spectacle of vision)



Endless Summer (sunglasses and the spectacle of vision)

Endless Summer chronicles one man's obsession with sunglasses. The monologue reproduced here accompanies the installation as a voice-over, with the man recollecting his summers past, and the story of his childhood in Croatia, as he tries on each pair.

Voice over artist Greg Ulfan

List of works

Endless Summer (sunglasses and the spectacle of vision)
Installation 37 photographs, 2 perspex screens, 35-minute audio monologue. Dimensions variable. Installation photos by Ian Hill

Endless Summer (Sunglasses portrait)
1/37 framed Pegasus prints. 48.5 x 68cm

Endless Summer (Double seascape)
Pegasus prints framed under tinted acrylic. 47.5 x 68cm.

Lily Hibberd is represented by Karen Woodbury Gallery, Melbourne.

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EXPERIMENTAL ART FOUNDATION

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Monologue for an installation

A life recollected through sunglasses by Lily Hibberd

Voice over artist: Greg Ulfan

FADE IN Sound of waves, fading out over 10 seconds

V.O. CROATIAN MAN Standing by the sea, I watch the sun vanishing over the horizon and the hour called dusk arrives. A golden haze spreads over the rippled sand dunes, tinting the white froth spitting off the waves, the shady gumtree fronds, the distant shorelines and peninsulas. **[Ardently]** I love the beauty of summer, the evenings that stretch out well past my last yawn... the slow, languid shifts in time.... The glow in my mind lasts long after the sun has disappeared, like the warmth of the sun’s rays radiating from a stone wall after dark. My longing for it stays with me all through winter’s gloom.... I bury it deep inside me as the myth of an eternal summer. **[A long sigh]** As the light fades so does the need for sunglasses. The years turn over and one pair replaces another. But when I put on a pair of sunglasses I’m present in their time past. I go back to that summer again and again.... **[Clearing throat]** I've got 37 pairs at the moment, so there’s a pair of sunglasses for nearly every summer of my life.... Each pair has its own story, as if it’s a container of the past, which is funny because they’re just plastic... inanimate. Looking deeply into their dark pools, I’m enchanted by my own image. We’re all addicted to it.... Ever since the first camera was placed in the hands of the masses, we’ve been devouring images of ourselves.... Ah, hrrrrmph, whatever! **[Pauses]** I’m devoted to sunnies in the same way that people attach their childhood home to childhood. My memory crawls into objects... curling up in their dark corners... until a nasty intruder disturbs the sleeping creature. **[Angrily]** Then I’m frightened of the memories flapping out of the containers... I freak out, bats flying out from shadowy trees in the night....

[Sound of narrator’s bag rustling] My first pair of sunglasses were aviators. I bought them before I came to Australia. My love for aviators has stayed with me from being a young kid in Croatia when the tourists used to come in on the boats. Lots of local boys worked on the overseas ferries too and they would come back wearing aviator sunglasses. All the boys getting off the boat had them... that was where my fascination started. The boys were so brown, always laughing, their heads thrown back, the sea bluer than ever, their hair slicked and styled.... Everything was so fabulous in the shiny reflections of those sunnies. **[Scratching his scalp thoughtfully]** It was the mid-to-late seventies, or the early eighties. It was before *Top Gun*, actually, and they were teardrop-shaped and rounded, with metal rims and that real elephant bone bit in the middle of them, a kind of exotic circle of ivory.

Though I was only seven or eight years old my desire for them was overpowering, **[coughing]** even erotic... they were so sexy and I thought that I would never have a pair. It wasn’t that easy to get sunglasses then. Croatia was really isolated and tensions were increasing all the time with the Nationalists being crushed by the Government. **[In a strained voice]** My family was always going to leave. It was not a happy place at that time. You could get them if you went to another country, but not in Croatia. Sometimes, because of our ties through Communism, you could get sunglasses from Russia ... somebody would smuggle them in for you.

But it was tough. My obsession started because I wanted to escape from all that... sunglasses are like freedom to me. **[After reflection]** Seeing them on the boys made me envious.

Most of my sunnies bring back the happy times. **[Click of sunglasses being unfolded].** This pair reminds me of my first infatuation... don’t they look funny, with the clunky, cheap silver rim? The oval shape is kind of hippy too... you know, John Lennon style.... Anyway, they’re really old; eighties I think. I was still in high school. **[Amusedly]** I’m not sure why they’re still around... a lot of my sunglasses have gone... lost on a disco floor... **[laughing]** ...a lot of them. **[Reflective tone]** Or gone in the sea... tragic little deaths, departed memories. **[Snapping back to the subject]** But some of them have decided to stay with me – these ones are from the early days, the nineteen-eighties. Actually it was nineteen eighty-six, and I was in high school, Year 12. I was going out with a girl called Betty. **[Laughing nervously]** She was spunky too. Her dark eyes were sharp; her lids firm and outlined in black.... She had fine tresses of fawny hair that fell over her brow in soft patterns and I would gently separate the pieces... my fingers all tangled in the little knots while she rested her head on my lap. My hair was long and curly, dyed black, and I always wore bandannas. It was kind of the ‘Mod’ era, with long socks.... It wasn’t a serious time for love; it was all silly at that stage. I had my first pash around then. I was at someone’s housewarming, on the floor, in the corridor. **[Snorting]** I can remember thinking they looked really cool, those little oval sunglasses. Wow, how things change, they’re so ugly... I don’t even go out with women.... But I can remember it so vividly... it was only yesterday. All those floral shirts. You would wear them, and you would wear bandannas with the long hair hanging out. **[Quizzically]** Maybe fashion affects everybody’s memories in the same way? I mean, could we all be recollecting the same past in the clothes we all wore, the songs we heard and films we saw from those times? Going to my grandmother’s house there’s the coloured crystal bowls, the decorative teaspoons hanging in a rack, the crocheted doilies under commemorative platters... every other old-timer collects that stuff but for my grandma and all of our family every stupid thing has a story. **[Portentously]** That stuff you keep in the drawer gobbles time by re-telling our old stories while always being in the present. That’s how my collection of sunnies is connected to everyone else’s... it’s a collective history but it’s really personal too.

Yeah I know it sounds ridiculous but my sunglasses are more than fashion accessories, they’re part of who I am. **[Animatedly]** They’re a blend of my memory and my body. I wear them as part of my face, part of my eyes. They belong to the guise of my body and the image I have of myself. I identify with them and they’re identified as me.... Like a movie screen, they come between the world and me. Actually, I saw a diagram in a book once that shows how it works.¹ It was made up of two overlapping triangles: one’s the realm that the eye can see and the other is the look of desire or the gaze; and the image they’re looking at is on a screen at point where the two crossover. **[Tapping the plastic surface of the sunglasses emphatically]** That screen is the same as what’s inside my mind when I wear sunglasses; I’m looking into myself, I’m introspective. And the frames around my sunnies edit the world, the same way my mind selects the best bits from my unconscious... what I see is biased. I reckon my eye is like a machine but it’s my brain that paints the picture for me,

and it’s shaded by what I believe. The tint makes it into a single picture instead of a lot of little things in space... everything looks darker.² Still, with sunglasses everything’s enhanced, I see it all in a new light. Even my mood improves **[in an affected tone]**, and I feel really happy! Without them I’m just looking.

Well.... **[Snaps one of the sunglasses cases shut. Pauses to contemplate the next pair before putting them on]** Hmmmmm. Yeah. These are great. These are one of my favourite pairs. They’re so gorgeous with their brown frames and graded lenses. **[Resolutely]** You know, the world seems sexier through a pair of sunnies. I’ve had a few good Gucci sunnies. One pair were the same ones as what’s-his-name had... Who’s the black singer-spunk? **[Hazily]** Um. Oh, he’s kind of a sex symbol, dark with dreadlocks. He’s been around for a long time. Everyone slept with him. He went out with that girl that was on the Cosby Show. Ahhhh. Oh my god I can’t believe I forgotten his name. Anyway, he had the same pair. When I think about how sexy they make me look, I’m overwhelmed with desire... both the watcher’s and mine. When I’m in love, I see my lover as an object of desire, my eyes are hungry and as I look my appetite for love grows. **[Sordid tone]** My cravings get even stronger when I think about being looked at. But it’s kind of a trick because I am more caught up in myself than I realise... it’s a trap.³ The desire is more intense with sunnies because people can’t see what I’m thinking behind the dark lenses. It’s the same kind of seduction that you get in the darkness of the cinema, or **[sniggering]** looking into a stranger’s bedroom at night.... But these ones are probably my second favourite, maybe third. They’re great. I used to go motorcycle riding round Bondi with my friend Adam and pretend it was my motorbike. It was a total fantasy... speeding down the freeway, in tight leather and dark shades. Easyrider... huh? Oh well, I loved them, and they lasted ages... for three summers. **[Abruptly]** Then I moved to Melbourne and went into studying alternative medicine, so I didn’t want to be so obvious. Each pair is the image of my mind-set and my ideals at the time and **[ruefully]** I felt this pair were making a really brash statement, when my feelings about life were changing. But later on I said to myself, “You know what? You love sunglasses, so why don’t you wear them?” Like the current Armani ones that I have. **[Dotingly]** I’ll have them for at least five summers.

Yeah... **[lacking tongue]** and sunnies are a pretty good deflection too. Celebrities love them because they hide the real you. I always say that when you put on a pair of sunglasses you can be whoever you want to be. You feel a bit detached from ordinary people, a bit cooler. Without them, you’re just you, right? **[Pauses]** But wearing them, you’re more incognito. You can play a character, you can be cheeky. It’s not like I’m hiding behind the lenses, but sunglasses give me confidence. My poise and my stature, and the way I hold myself is totally different with a good pair of sunnies. They’re kind of a mask because I’m not extremely confident when it comes to myself, so I think with sunnies on I can be more self-assured. But then again, when I hide my eyes, I could be weeping or mourning... and no one would know because sunnies make eye contact impossible. Which can be intimidating too, like those gangsters. They draw me into myself... a mirror into the soul instead of a window out... or a camera obscura. **[Shuddering, fearfully]** Then it’s all darkness and I’m in a cave... When I give over to the past, I’m a cave-dweller and my memories are shadows; fugitive, always in the process of disappearing. My mind is a murky thing, so much is lost or forgotten and in it, like in my photographs, the undead constantly roam.

[More warily] Alright, I don’t really know if they changed my life, but they can alter the course of events.... If you wore a pair of “bogan” ones for a sexy night out **[ironic, mocking tone]**, you wouldn’t do as well as if you wore those Armani ones. Would you now? **[Pondering for a second]** I often find that if I forget my sunglasses I don’t feel right. I always feel really confident in them, whether I wear casual or formal things... and some styles are more outrageous than others. It all depends on how I’m feeling. **[Pauses, going through the pile of sunnies]** Hang on, I’m just looking for a straighter pair. Oh yeah, these are the ones I’m thinking of. They belong to my boyfriend Paul. I never really wore them much, but when I met Paul five years ago he had them on. We fell in love... I bought him a new pair and I wore these ones for a while. They’re just such a classic pair with the square shape and little red insert in those wide flat arms. They’re actually a copy, they’re not real. **[Disdainfully]** I think they’re a Prada copy. I wore them when I first came back to Sydney, it was my first summer here after living in Melbourne for three years. I was getting settled with someone I loved, going for that older, classic style. I said to myself: “I’ll have them now that I’m married.” It was a curious statement, more conservative. I’m transformed by every pair of sunglasses, and when I go through my collection I can see how much I’ve changed over the years....

Okay, I’ll try on another pair. **[Incredulously]** Oh, you won’t believe it. These are from Croatia.... The style is less obvious. See the transparent frames? They’re a really light brown. Wow, wearing them is like going through an old photo album; I can see all these images from the past that have nothing to do with what I’m actually looking at. But I always believe my eyes. Like I trust that the camera is telling me the truth, only the pictures they capture are kind of loaded, a memory trigger.... **[More cynically]** And sometimes they lie... because the past is not an unchanging or innocent document. The other fucking problem is that I’m always older than my portrait.... That’s why sunnies are better than photos... they’re timeless. I’m never any older when I’m wearing them. No! I’m always getting younger. **[Voice of an expert]** Think of all those inventions that have changed how we think about seeing. There’s photography, the x-ray and the scan. The lens, the telescope, binoculars and the microscope. And how can we ignore television, surveillance, cinema and home video? We encounter them every day but forget how much they’ve affected how we see. **[Authoritative tone]** One of the oldest technologies is perspective drawing. It’s not reality, none of those lines are out there in space.... But it mimics the way light is read by the eye, and it helps us believe that there’s space on a flat piece of paper. Dürer invented the camera lucida around then... the first machine for drawing in perspective, a simple piece of glass with a grid drawn over it. They make things more realistic, these devices, but they’re a trick. **[Emphatically]** For me, sunglasses are the best. They frame the world and what I see is a double reality: both pure vision and total illusion. It’s much more seductive than the photo because time is measured in light, the image through my sunnies is in real time... a time exposure. Cameras and sunnies both have lenses too... they filter and focus... and when I block out the light, my sense of time is affected. But for me the best trick is still the polarised lens. I have a couple of pairs of Polaroid sunnies and they definitely enhance reality: the sky’s bluer, the clouds more clearly defined. I’m not exactly sure how it works except there’s a split in the spectrum of light passing through the lens, making some colours stronger and, because of that, certain forms.

It’s like trying to look at yourself... it’s hard because there’s never one person in the mirror. I’ve heard it called the parallax effect, the apparent change in the position of my face in the mirror when I change my point of view. At least from my own perspective I’m absolute, even though I feel invisible... and so I swear to myself I’m not a fucking phantom. **[Perturbed]** But you’re always a split subject: a splinter in your eye, a stain in your self-portrait. I know when I’m polarising that I’m usually hiding something. It’s denial and a blind spot.... This is why I love sunglasses; they conceal me. I don’t like people commenting on my eyes, because it’s the first thing that people say. **[Cantankerously]** Everybody says, “Oh!”, because they’re big and blue and it’s like there’s always a fucking comment about my eyes. That’s why I used to wear them out in clubs and around people I don’t know. It’s true; sometimes you stand out more with them on.... But it’s how you feel, not what you think, or whether you stand out or not. You’re shielding people from yourself. That’s why blind people wear sunnies... to protect others from facing their blindness. I mean the blind guy isn’t missing anything, is he? Mirrored lenses are like that too... the person looking at you sees this crazy reflection in them, a ghost of themselves. **[Foolish tone]** The spectacle of spectacles with a spectre... **[chuckles to himself].** Check out this pair... I got these when the mirrored glasses came in. Look, you can even see my boyfriend sitting on the edge of the cliff over there. They’re from London. I reckon they’re early nineties, and you can see the aviator style carried though from the eighties. You’ll see a lot of my glasses repeat that aviator style, because it’s my favourite design of sunglasses from my early days in Croatia. But this pair came later, when I was living in London. They’re still pretty cool, with the fine metal frames. There were a lot of late nights in London and **[huffs amusedly]** I always wore sunglasses out at night. I was there for six years... London was great **[sighing and laughing].** They were a party pair. **[Sounds really happy]** Lots of pairs were lost on the disco floor in London too... **[laughing again].** These are the only ones that didn’t get lost on the dance floor.

[A few seconds pass as he puts down one pair and tries to choose another] Hold on, here’s an old pair. Wow... these were probably the first pair of sunnies I had after leaving Croatia.... They’re about 30 years old. I didn’t buy them, they were given to me when we first arrived in Australia. Some pairs last, but then some years you can have four or five pairs in one summer. And they’re still here. I don’t know how they’ve hung around for so long. Maybe they’ve lasted because I didn’t wear them much. Look at them, that wrap-around shape and the roundness, they’re terrible. **[Mockingly]** They really are “bogan” glasses. At that time, someone gave them to me because we couldn’t afford to buy sunglasses and I wore them because that’s all I had. They totally change you, sunglasses. Even just having them on, you’re a different character. I mean this pair is like, “How ya doin’?”. And that other pair would be the ones I would put on if I was going to Bankstown or St Albans so I wouldn’t get bashed on the train... **[laughs]** change station and change glasses. And that pair would be for going out in Paddington. And this pair are “Cronulla”... “The Shire”. You gotta have a pair of sunnies for each suburb. Style always has meaning... and a message. The problem is if someone gets the wrong message. Some people look totally shady in them.

I wonder which ones they are...? **[Muttering and fiddling with the sunnies]** Oh yeah.... I had this pair around the time of *The Matrix*. It was, it really was. But I couldn’t get the ones he had, so I got the most similar thing

to Neo’s. I only wore them for a little while, until I realised they looked really terrible, and then they went into the drawer. See how they sit up on my nose? I look fucking ugly in them. And the lenses, they’re really far apart too. **[Reticently]** They were sort of expensive. I forget how much they were. They might have been about 239 dollars. But that’s cheap for me. **[Upbeat tone]** It was around *The Matrix* time so people would comment because you were wearing the same wireless style. It wasn’t because of *The Matrix* but that was where I saw them. **[In a mock-camp tone]** Oh ‘gorgeous’, let me tell you, I’m constantly changing my sunglasses, so I thought, “Hmmm, a small pair...” **[Normal voice]** It was a different shape to what I normally wear.... I wore them riding a lot as well, on a bicycle. It was a different sort of look. It was during study time, so I was moving away from a focus on fashion. Not nerdy but more plain, down-to-earth, not: **[gripping woman’s voice]** “oh here he comes with those sunglasses”. It was about going for something was not so fashion-conscious. **[Confessing embarrassedly, as if exposed]** Okay, I have to admit it now, they definitely were bought because of *The Matrix*. I guess I thought that was cool for a minute, it was another fantasy.... Just like everyone else, I was seduced by the image of Neo. But I wore them after that because I didn’t think that they looked so trendy, because they weren’t so in-your-face. **[Chuckling]** Finally, I decided they were real “bogan” glasses, so I never wore them again. They lasted less than one summer. I guess it’s the same as when you’re in love, things look sexy while you think they’re cool. And looking into the future, you’ll see things how you wish they could be.

I’ve always loved sunglasses. I used to wear them even if it was raining. **[Coily]** But that was a long time ago. I would drive with them on, whether or not it was sunny. I would just automatically put sunglasses on in the car. I remember buying a pair when I first bought my car, just to have “car glasses” **[bemusedly]** ... shocking... shocking.... I know I’ve got way too many pairs of sunglasses but when I look through them I see into the past, so as a collection of memories they’re priceless to me. It’s the same as hearing a favourite song from back then.... How’s that old Chisel one go? “I’m on the outside lookin’ in whoah, whoah, whooahh”. You put on your old sunnies and go, “Wow, that was a wild time” The funny and crazy moments come back to me, repeating time after time like the classic Ray-Ban aviator-style I first saw the boys wearing in Croatia. I’ll always love them, because with all the passing years the remembrance of my endless summer gets sweeter every time.

FADE OUT sound of waves crashing

Notes

1. Jacques Lacan’s diagram for the seminar titled “What is a picture?” (1998) *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, (trans. Alan Sheridan) Vintage, London, p.106.

2. Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s idea of adumbration or shading (the term being *abschattung*, following Edmund Husserl) iterated in *Phenomenology of Perception* (1945) as a determination that our perception of things is a transcendental coherence of a whole series of appearances, yet is infinite and always changing in relation to the subject.

3. Jacques Lacan, “When in love, I solicit a look, what is profoundly unsatisfying and always missing is that: You never look at me from the place from which I see you.” ibid, p.103.