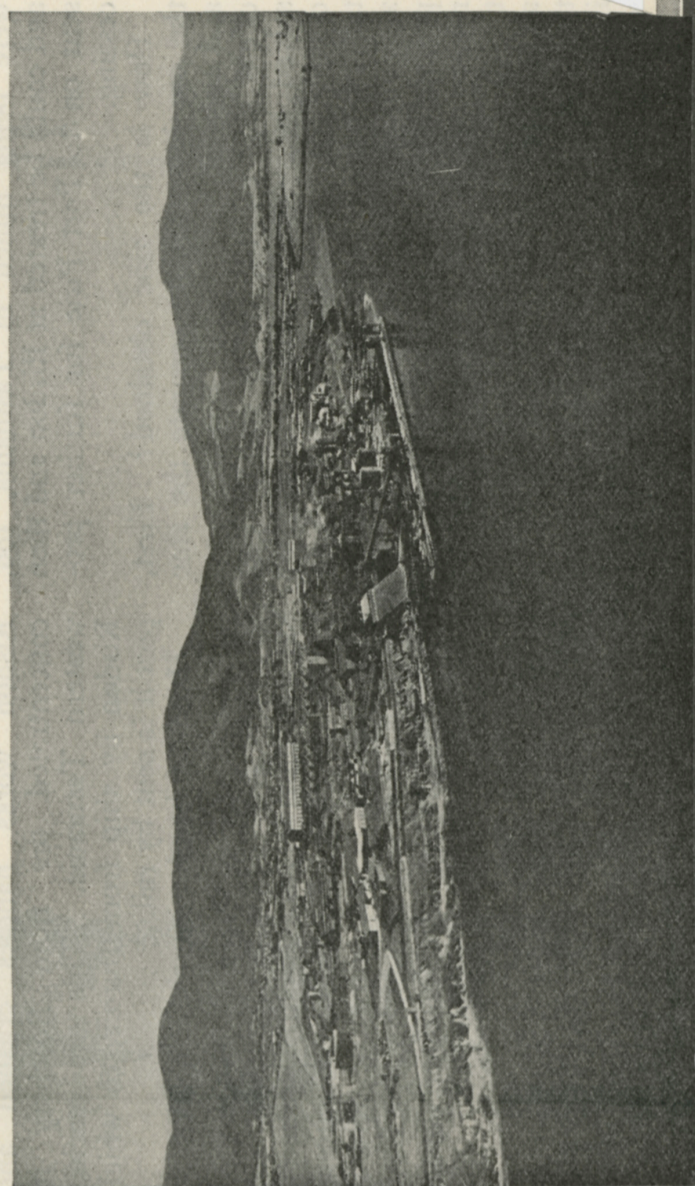


Passage (Pseudo
Biennale des Jeur
Paris 1967



S. R - 21

Working the line

Stuart likes pulling things apart. His repurposing of objects, images, and books that have nothing to do with each other rids familiar associations, reorients expected readings, and collapses formerly discrete contexts into one another.

His earlier collage projects and bound books sourced materials from publications of the mid-2000s to early 2010s, combining images of disparate subject matter. Think soft porn merging with modern works of art; press snaps of Princess Diana sharing the pages of a shooting and hunting magazine; a book on the history of Barbie combined with photo documentation of American soldiers in Iraq; or a speedboat catalogue united with graphic imagery from a commemorative book on the September 11 attacks. These visual amalgamations have pointed associations of latent violence or sexuality.

Ringholt's recent works are deliberately more open to interpretation. They also appear to have been more laborious to make. His collage series *Theatre Stills* (2017) and *Landscape and Factories* (2020) intricately interweave large monochromatic images of classical art, architecture, ornate interiors, plants, animals, landscapes, and factory floors.

In *Line Work*, a suite of collages made in mid-2021, these intricacies are intensified. They are both technical and visually complex. Sight lines are confusing; at times the combination of cuttings is so dense with content that elements appear unidentifiable or even unknowable.

Like the collage series *Landscapes and Factories* (2020), the works take their primary source material from a ten-volume encyclopaedic set entitled *Newnes' Pictorial Knowledge*, published in various editions from the early 1930s to late 1950s. With over four-hundred pages in each volume, the black-and-white illustrated plates and photographic documentation capture a range of subject matter from technology, plants, and animals, to astronomy, science, and geography.

Popular in the pre-Wikipedia age, *Newnes* was a resource for self-education, where one could learn how a cricket ball was made, look at a colour cutaway of an early passenger aircraft, or study the latest mechanical looms. Here, these encyclopaedic pages are sliced up by Ringholt, rearranged, and meticulously assembled to create new pictorial formations radically divorced from their original context, reimagining meanings they used to have.

The backings used in *Line Work* are sourced from a hefty, seven-hundred-page exhibition catalogue *Occupying Space: Sammlung Generali Foundation Collection* (2004). It's the type of art book you'd find stacked up on a marble coffee table or in the packed bookshelf of a bibliophile. Small fragments from these pages appear on the edges of the collages indicating the page number they were taken from. The page numbers conveniently provide each work's title: 498, 554, 334. You get the gist. It's an easy and practical way to archive the work: just look at the number.

In all works, the backing is an unknown picture support for the black-and-white photograms that appear on its surface. In *Page 414*, a fragment of text appears to the left of the page:

Passage (Pseudo
Biennale des Jeu
Paris 1967

An anonymous collector stands underneath the text, staring at the collaged scene. His upright posture reflects the straight edge of the picture plane. The traditional horizontal axis of the landscape in the upper left is also turned upright, as if one were positioned in front of the earth and viewing its spherical easternmost edge. A team of fishermen working on a trawler are flipped the other way, sailing upon the ocean on the opposite side of the planet. Everything lines up and appears anchored according to the vertical edge of the easel in the reproduction of Diego Velázquez's *Las Meninas* (1656), which provides a kind of vanishing point to all the picture's relations. The edge of the wooden fish box on the trawler sits flush with the bottom of the painting's canvas while the light reflected on the bellies of reptiles floating underwater mimic an aerial view of a small industrial town above it. There are also lines of leakage from this grid-like lattice. The crinoline of the five-year-old infant Margaret Theresa merges as if one body with the fishing net of the trawlers outrig.

Beyond the double meaning of the series title, the semantics of the word "line" operate within and around the chosen cuttings for each collage. In one instance, a military pipe band marches in line towards a clowder of disinterested cats in a neighbouring clipping; uniformed groups of people literally shuffle in line around the white lines of a racetrack; close-up photographs of choir boys in procession appear to be shepherded into line; labourers are seen working down the line helping each other carry the load.

Ringholt tells me about what he's found:

Occasionally the collages create a proposition such as in a factory scene; a cutting was needed to extend the factory floor and I used a section of a war memorial image. It put a gravesite inside a factory which seemed fitting considering many men would have died in the factories represented in *Newnes*. Would it be suitable to conjoin cemeteries and factories as a real going concern? A remarkable OHS invention? A new way to bury the dead? If in fact cemeteries and factories merged in the future, what would have changed psychologically in that culture?

Formally, some lines turn into X-shaped formations across the page of the collages. A short list of contributing elements includes tree branches, pipes, shooting stars, rims of ships, wires, cords, bird nests, pulleys, fences, and highways. In the middle of *Page 554*, a hand grasps a pole (javelin?) morphing into four images to create an elongated "X": the edge of a running track, a metal fence, the lip of a shipping dock and an elongated hook where an open vent spews out a fiery-looking substance.

In *Line Work*, "X" expresses the minimal relation between two straight lines, which can meet only at one point. "X" also denotes what is under erasure, crossed out, or otherwise undefined. The unknown = x. Through this unknown X the many juxtapositions and accumulations of images appearing in *Line Work* are brought into a common relation, as if all their elements belonged together only in the connection of lines.

Chelsea Hopper
28 July 2022

This text is in conjunction with *Line Work*, a solo exhibition featuring a suite of collages by Stuart Ringholt at 99% gallery, Suite 703, 37 Swanston St, Melbourne from 5-27 August 2022.

Chelsea Hopper would like to thank Stuart Ringholt, Paris Lettau, Helen Hughes, Victoria Loizides, Tara Heffernan, and Amici Studio for their generous support with this exhibition.

99% gallery acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional custodians of the land on which it operates, the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples of the Eastern Kulin Nation.