PROJECT 13
Ugo Rondinone
2003

Our magic hour
25 June – 31 August 2003
Museum of Contemporary Art, Sydney

Clockwork for oracle
28 January – 7 March 2004
Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne

BIOGRAPHY

Swiss artist Ugo Rondinone is based in New York. Over the past decade he has refined a vocabulary of languid figures, candy-coloured forms and melancholy landscapes. Rondinone's diverse practice transforms everyday objects and cultural clichés into works that waver between euphoric and depressed states. His installations integrate trademark elements: fuzzy spray-painted target painting, mandala design, fibreglass sculpture, video environments and sounds that he himself has created out of tape-loops.

FACTS

- Rondinone draws from the history of art, music, literature and film. Resonant figures and objects such as clowns, mirrors, targets and windows exist in dreamy, atmospheric installations, where time slows down and vision diffused.

- *Our magic hour* was Rondinone's first solo exhibition in Australia. The sculpture of the same name appeared atop the MCA, resembling a downturned smile.

- At the time, *Our magic hour* was the largest in a series of multicoloured neon signs that Rondinone had created around the world.

- Clowns were positioned inside the gallery space, lying down, slumped on beds and against the wall.

- Rondinone's 'target' paintings provided a quiet place for meditation and reflection; stillness in opposition to action.

- *Clockwork for oracle* was held at ACCA in Melbourne the following year, including a selection of works exhibited in Sydney amongst others.

Kaldor Public Art Projects

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PROJECT OVERVIEW

Over the past decade Ugo Rondinone has refined a vocabulary of languid figures, candy-coloured forms and melancholy landscapes. For Project 13, Rondinone presented two solo exhibitions, his first in Australia. In addition to a configuration of works in a variety of media, he created ambitious new sculptures for each of the two venues, in Sydney at the Museum of Contemporary Art and in Melbourne at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art. Both exhibitions were realised as Kaldor Public Art Projects in partnership with Naomi Milgrom Kaldor.

From the rooftop of the Museum of Contemporary Art, shaped like a rainbow in neon colours, the words *Our magic hour* beamed in an arc, shining across the harbour. This message, also the title of the exhibition, heralded the carnival figures inside and, like a down-turned smile, its melancholy ambience. The largest of a series of multicoloured neon signs that Rondinone has created around the world – Rome has *Kiss tomorrow goodbye*; London, *Hell, yes!*; and New York *A horse with no name* – its pronouncement was double-edged, a saccharine cheer that soon evaporated into disenchantment.

Inside the museum, configurations of clowns as sculptures and in video were accompanied by Rondinone's pastel-coloured 'target' paintings of concentric circles, drawing the eye with their hypnotic radiance. In a small side room, the photographic series *Sleep*, 1999, was hung as a wall-to-wall installation of 165 photographs. Two solitary figures, a beautiful young girl and boy, each comb the same washed-out beachside landscape, seeming to walk endlessly yet never meeting.

In Melbourne the following year, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, the exhibition *Clockwork for oracle* was curated by Juliana Engberg and presented in connection with the Midsumma Festival. It displayed some of the works shown in Sydney – the photographic installation *Sleep*, a selection of paintings and a clown sculpture – along with a new video installation and a large new work created for the exhibition. A monolithic sculptural wooden X, titled *Twentyfourhours*, 2004, was fitted with small speakers, echoing the sound of breath, in and out, in an endless loop. On either side of the sculpture, tribal masks lined the walls. Cast in rubber, moulded from wooden reproductions sold on street stalls in Paris, each one is subtitled with a month from the lunar cycle as part of the series *Moonrise*, 2004.

A new video work filmed in Paris, *Clockwork for oracle*, 2004, was also displayed for the exhibition in Melbourne, presented as three walls of 24 monitors each. As in *Sleep*, two figures, male and female, walk endlessly and alone across the landscape. This time the figures are set inside a cityscape of intersecting lines and patterns, a kaleidoscopic whirl of architecture that transforms around them as they move through the grid.

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Rondinone, *Our
magic hour,* Museum
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Photo: Nick Bowers

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Photo: John Brash