

PROJECT 18

Martin Boyce

2008

We are shipwrecked and landlocked

22 October – 30 November 2008

Old Melbourne Gaol, Melbourne

BIOGRAPHY

Martin Boyce creates unique environments, sampling from the vocabulary of 20th-century architecture and design, built spaces and constructed experiences of contemporary life. Using familiar designs, architectural styles, ambient lighting and poetic phrases from song lyrics and literature, Boyce creates a staged setting for the viewer. In 2011, Boyce won the prestigious Turner Prize, recognised for his outstanding contribution to contemporary art in Britain.

FACTS

- *We are shipwrecked and landlocked*, 2008, was the largest of Boyce's work to date.
- Like something between urban parkland and a desert island landscape, the work appeared at odds with the 19th century architecture of the Old Melbourne Gaol.
- The artwork was located in the exercise yard of the gaol, near the site of Ned Kelly's confinement and hanging.
- Boyce paved the ground with gravel in a clay matrix, transforming the space into a dusty desert landscape and a oasis for three geometric Martel palm trees, which also resembled windmills.
- Boyce stated of the work, "It is in the centre of the courtyard so it is an object rather than a perimeter fence."
- The overall experience of the site has been described as both familiar and unreal, Boyce explained, "From a distance it's very graphic and highly aestheticised. It has an artificial look, as if it has been dropped from the sky into this very historic site."

PROJECT 18

Martin Boyce

2008

PROJECT OVERVIEW

Martin Boyce creates unique new environments, sampling from the vocabulary of 20th-century architecture and design, the built spaces and constructed experiences of contemporary life. For Project 18, Boyce's new work, *We are shipwrecked and landlocked*, created a dramatic installation for the courtyard of the Old Melbourne Gaol. A dusty desert landscape was filled with a matrix of sculptures all developed from the same basic shapes – manipulated and reconfigured into different combinations. At once familiar and surreal, the forms recalled the modernist architecture of an urban park, colliding with the 19th-century architecture of their surrounds.

Using familiar designs, architectural styles, ambient lighting and poetic phrases from song lyrics and literature, Boyce creates a staged setting for the viewer. Sometimes eerie and desolate, futuristic and yet obsolete, his works evoke another time and place. Echoing modernist forms, his sculptures and installations recall the ideals of a forgotten era; forms and functions that have changed over time. The slippage between the ideal image of the city and the experience of urban life seems tangible in Boyce's forlorn and desolate spaces. Their original meanings eroded, this architecture becomes like a phantom or ghost of the urban landscape. Reshaped, twisted and remodelled, the forms seem at once recognisable and surreal. Like dreamscapes or noir scenes, they extend beyond the built environment to a psychological space, some recalling the constructed images of the cityscape from film and television.

In recent years, Boyce has created a series of installations that draw on the sculptural, concrete, tree-shaped forms designed by Joël and Jan Martel for the *Exposition des arts décoratifs* held in Paris in 1925. Boyce has transformed and repeated their shape in numerous configurations, from three-dimensional structures to flattened grids and decorative patterns. Like a modular design, the Martel tree became the basis of numerous variations; Boyce even fashioned a typeface from its graphic shape. The design was also the basis of *We are shipwrecked and landlocked*, 2008, Boyce's largest and most ambitious work to date. Created within the exercise yard of the Old Melbourne Gaol, near the site of Ned Kelly's confinement and hanging, Boyce paved the ground with gravel in a clay matrix, transforming the space and creating an oasis for three geometric Martel palm trees, appearing like monumental white windmills.

Winding across the centre of the space, separating these tree-like structures, a black metal fence was patterned with the geometric design of the Martel tree. Like a skeleton of the surrounding forms, it twisted and folded, casting shadows across the ground. Skewed wire-mesh rubbish bins, marking either side of the fence, were shaped in the form of the concrete leaves. Embedded in the ground, a square drain echoed the shape of the trees, recalling those designs that are regurgitated at all levels of production. The overall experience was of a site at once familiar and unreal.

Kaldor Public Art Project 18: Martin Boyce, *We are shipwrecked and landlocked*, Old Melbourne Gaol, Melbourne, 22 October – 30 November 2008

Photo: Adam Free



Kaldor Public Art Project 18: Martin Boyce, *We are shipwrecked and landlocked*, Old Melbourne Gaol, Melbourne, 22 October – 30 November 2008

Photo: Adam Free

