



1. Still from 'Janek the Cloud', 2007, Digital Animation



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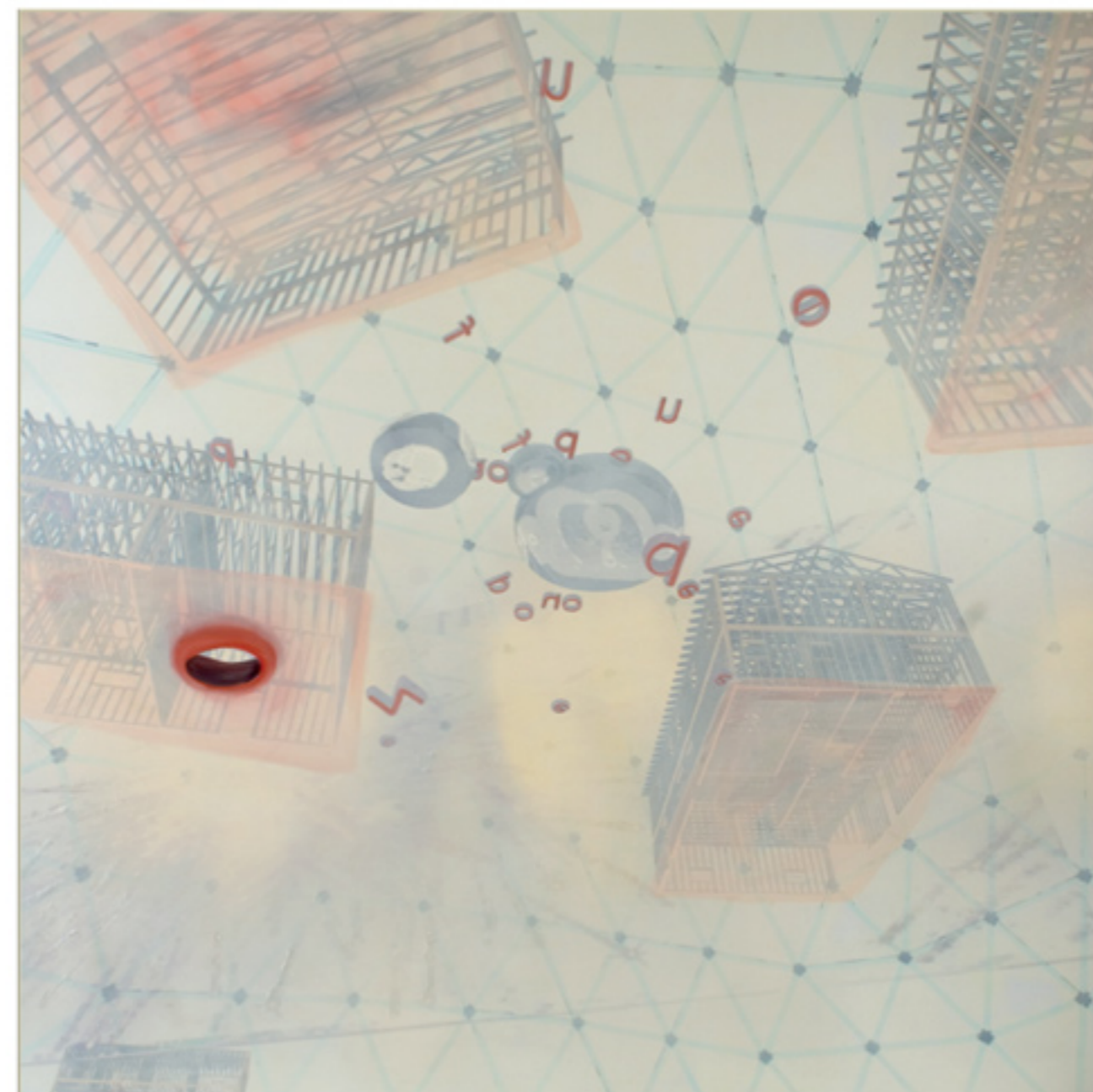
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## Notes on Programmed Feeling

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Peter Alwast is one of few artists channeling painterly inquiries through new media in Australia, and within the fixed economy of one's attention it is sometimes hard to know what to do with his incredibly media literate work.

Both animation works in Places that Don't Exist use a computer generated film camera - touching on that 20th century medium's proximity to 'total art' - as a very simple but effective device for consecrating media references, and playing out seemingly insoluble scenes of autobiographical and historical memory in painterly, theatrical video animation. Janek the Cloud, the framing work of the exhibition, cuts between an evocative moonlit vision of a snowy landscape - reanimated depictions of a 'Komoroski' painting unwillingly left behind by Alwast's parents upon their immigration from Poland to Australia - and a green characterless ground, embedded with circular discs of documentary footage channeling images of Gold Coast housing estates. Snow and



3. 'Relics', Oil on Canvas, 200x200cm, 2007

broken English consonants and vowels fall from one space across to the next, mixing conjured fictions with spatial articulations of the present. It is this trajectory that might be 'the way things go': memory's disjunction, the loss of the orienting vernacular object,

and the peculiar feeling that one gets in proximity to Harbour Town, a multinational shopping centre on the Gold Coast. The work's amorphous, omniscient narrator, a Polish cloud called Janek offers up distant, privileged musings on this reanimated autobiographical material, in contra to his literally marginal position in the history of painting, and Alwast's aphoristic games. Can a cloud really tell us anything? Do the subtitles relate to what he is saying? Etc.

Differently in Relics, the CG camera which orients viewers pans in to explore a highly stylized model of suburbia enclosed by an overarching geodesic dome - a conjured ghost of Buckminster Fuller's utopian solution to post-war capitalist expansion. Peculiar representations of fireworks, seemingly programmed to go off indefinitely, shimmer above the architectural base frames of suburban houses; tropical birds echo intermittently from inside the enclosed dome. The anti-formalist blobs which elsewhere Alwast uses to compartmentalize documentary footage within programmed landscapes, here mostly only reflect external architectural constructions upon their shiny surfaces. The only sign of life is the strange ghostly reflection of a girl on a swing, twice-mirrored; finding her is like locating a small heartbeat. As in Janek The Cloud, letters

from the English alphabet are similarly scattered like insoluble, non-native leaves upon the ground. The infirmity of this 'still life with ideals', the question of whether these architectures are articulated (i.e. systematically) to mean or to comment on social feeling, or just for effect, is constant in Alwast's work, and only further encourages a kind of dubious dwelling within it.

These recent works continue with Alwast's signature preoccupations: painting's long-standing investment in the notation of ideals, its ancient tools of virtuality, and machinic constructions of feeling (clouds, uncharacteristically, the most obvious reference here). His work is sensual in that it pays attention to the workings of objects beyond their pictorial function, and media beyond optical presentation, making room for those combinatory engagements that filmmakers commonly understand to be the extra-ordinary workings of mise-en-scene. Perspective itself generates mood; camera angles activate transitions from public space to private memory, and achieve remarkably expedient movements between sacred (the painterly image, the suburbs, home) and profane interpretations of the psychic utility of signs. And of course there is so much more that is attitudinal, and idiomatic. Alwast rarely talks about the influence of cultural history on his work, but the works in Places That Don't Exist, particularly these animations, are a slight departure. They present subtle rewards for the initiate, and interesting possibilities for an expanded notion of painting.