


Arts House in association with Melbourne Festival presents

A photograph of a person with short, curly hair, seen from behind, walking on a blue inflatable structure. The structure consists of a series of connected, padded sections that form a path. The person is wearing a black tank top and black leggings. The background is dark, and the overall atmosphere is mysterious and immersive.

David Cross Hold

ARTS HOUSE

ARTS HOUSE, MEAT MARKET
FRI 19 – SUN 28 OCT 2012

DURATION: 15 minutes

CREATIVE

An artwork by **David Cross**

Free Artist Talk with David Cross (**Hold**) and Jeff Stein and William McClure (**Impasse**) – Arts House, The Warehouse, Thu 25 Oct, 6–7pm, followed by drinks till 8pm. RSVP to artshousesvp@melbourne.vic.gov.au. Hosted by Melbourne-based artist, writer and curator Phip Murray.

davidcrossartist.com

Hold has been supported by Litmus Research Initiative and Massey University College of Creative Arts, Wellington, New Zealand; and supported by the City of Melbourne's Late Night Programming Initiative

Image: **Alex Davies**

ABOUT HOLD

Hold is part reality-TV ordeal, and part extreme performance art engagement. A highly immersive, multi-sensory architectural experience, **Hold** draws participants into a dynamic relationship between play, interaction and phobic space as they push through an assortment of physical and psychological barriers.

Hold creates an uncanny yet intimate one-on-one encounter between the audience member and an unseen performer. Crucially, it also demands unusual levels of physical and psychological interaction as you navigate a spatially complex and disorientating pathway – all while being suspended above ground by air!

DAVID CROSS

Based in Wellington, New Zealand, artist David Cross has exhibited extensively in New Zealand, Australia and Eastern Europe. His performance/installation work *Viscous* was included in *Perspecta 99* in Sydney and subsequently shown at ACCA in Melbourne in 2000. He has performed at international live art festivals in Poland and Croatia, and was selected as a New Zealand representative at the Prague Quadrennial in 2011. His work *Bounce* was included in the New Zealand survey of performance, *Mostly Harmless*, at Govett Brewster Art Gallery in 2006. More recently he was commissioned by the National Institute of Experimental Art/ City of Sydney to develop *Drift*, a large-scale public art commission for Sydney's Taylor Square (2011); and his installation *Lean* was included in *The Aberrant Object* at Wellington City Art Gallery (2012). This is the fourth showing of **Hold**; it has previously been seen in Wellington, Dunedin and as part of *Liveworks* at Performance Space (Sydney) in 2010. Cross is Associate Professor in Fine Arts at Massey University, New Zealand.

TEETERING – DAVID CROSS'S HOLD

Pleasure and ordeal are sometimes separated by a fine line. Think bungee jumping, fairground rides, or one-on-one performance – often these experiences balance us on an edge; a place of intense ‘feeling’ that challenges the way we see ourselves. **Hold** is an experience, an encounter – a *Gesamtkunstwerk* and bouncy castle rolled into one. Its creator David Cross has always been interested in immersive environments, “drawing audiences,” Cross says, “into what appear to be playful inflatable recreational structures, only to insert unforeseen and potentially disturbing components or performative scenarios”.

In creating **Hold**, the aim was to explore the notion of ‘trust’, in particular.

“Part of this relates to my interest in creating the circumstances in which an audience member might be disarmed, unguarded, and above all challenged to reflect on their limits and thresholds,” says Cross. “Having [previously] made a number of works that a multitude of people could engage with at the same time, I was also interested in creating a very large installation that required a one-on-one engagement.”

Hold requires each participant to enter its large blue inflatable structure and then to figure out how to proceed; experiencing the intimacy of the work alone and unmediated.

“Maybe it is a carry-over from my interest in performance art – and in particular, live work that viscerally and conceptually challenges our understanding of self. I have a sense that we naturally create a protective boundary and distance from objects and people that ensures a certain equilibrium and safety – but the trade-off from this is a propensity not to engage; not to reflect in a profound way on our fears, phobias, pleasures etcetera...”

“There is always a trade-off between the simple childish pleasure and joy of inflatable structures (bouncy castles), and something more risky and uncertain. The work tries to penetrate that protective barrier, but in unexpected ways.”

The word ‘trade-off’ comes up frequently with Cross, pointing repeatedly to that point of uncomfortable (or pleasurable)

balance. Physically creating the structure depended on a trade-off too: Cross worked closely with a designer to create what he calls “such a large inflatable work that had to do very particular things, with only air providing the armature”.

“All of my works begin with a potential scenario, a challenge or an ordeal that I plot for the audience, that I then try and wrap an architectural structure or apparatus around... There was a lot of back-and-forth between me and the designer: I am trying to describe the experience and what has to happen in the work, and he is trying to ensure the structure can do everything I need, including a sufficient level of safety.”

In creating a new artwork, there’s always a risk that the structure won’t work once it’s built, says Cross. It’s a measure of New Zealand manufacturer Canvasland, he adds, that **Hold** functions as intended.

In an earlier catalogue essay for **Hold**, Cross devoted considerable space to the notion of the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the ‘total work of art’. It’s a concept with complex and sometimes fraught associations – from Wagner’s opera to Disneyland. What interests Cross is the way multi-sensory spaces can operate to engage, activate and confuse all of the senses at once – “in interesting ways”.

“There is the whole history of totalitarian spectacle that also exists in [the concept of *Gesamtkunstwerk*],” Cross qualifies, “so I would not unconditionally valorise it. But I guess I am compelled by a scenario that is completely immersive and removes us temporarily from conventional spaces and experiences.”

Hold seems to bring together a form that invites child-like freedom – the inflatable play-structure – and the kind of wariness or fear that we learn as we grow up, always calculating risk and consequence.

“Certainly I am interested in risk and how our propensity for risk shifts as we get older. I am also fascinated at the malleable boundary between pleasure and fear, and how we come to define and respond to each.”

Ultimately, Cross says, he hopes **Hold** allows participants “to experience an unguarded moment – and maybe, just maybe, learn something about themselves.”

Urszula Dawkins

THANK YOU

Deanna Smart, Angharad Wynne-Jones, Shane McGrath, Carolyn Eccles, Heidi Kenyon, Ellie Boekman, Edie Cross, Heather Galbraith, Bec Dean, Litmus Research Initiative, Massey University College of Creative Arts Research Fund, Canvasland International, Wade Kenchington, Adrian Aderhold, Bindi Green; and to volunteers Kelly Alexander, Bree Anastasi, Hilary Bowman, Megan Dennis, Ashlea English, Amandine Francette Evans, Ciara Glover, Ryan James, Bronwen Kamasz, Heidi Kenyon, Shane McGrath, Gina Moss, Mark Pritchard and Renae Shadler

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Arts House presents contemporary arts in programs encompassing performance, exhibitions, live art, residencies and other activities that nurture, support and stimulate cultural engagement. We value work in which artists at different stages of their careers, as well as our diverse audiences and communities, are actively involved in creating an imaginative, just and environmentally sustainable global society.

Arts House’s programs include two curated public seasons of multidisciplinary work each year. From 2013, approximately half of this work will be selected through a new Expression of Interest process. We seek artists who are responding to the urgent issues of our time in imaginative and surprising ways, taking artistic risks and offering multiple ways for audiences to engage with or co-author their work. For more information, please contact us on (03) 9322 3720 or visit artshouse.com.au.

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Arts House is a City of Melbourne contemporary arts initiative