

Huw Davies Gallery
15th July - 14th August, 2021

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Exploded View

Catherine Evans

Prompted by her own experience and digital media narratives of the event, Evans investigates our collective memory of the implosion of Royal Canberra Hospital, carried out in 1997 to make way for the National Museum of Australia.

Using a flatbed scanner, Evans manipulated screenshots from a VHS recording of the implosion (available on YouTube), then created digital negatives and contact printed them in the darkroom. The resulting works interrupt the evidential nature of the original recording, contesting its status as a singular account of the implosion and opening up recognition of how the event catalysed multiple, non-linear loops of memory and layers of meaning.



Catherine Evans, *Exploded View*, 127i, 2021, silver gelatin contact print on fibrebased paper, mounted on aluminium, 50 x 30 cm

Interfering with the Evidence

*On the shores of Lake Burley Griffin there are two memorials: one for the girl who lost her life as a result of the Canberra Hospital implosion, and on the facing shore, right next to the Museum, one for the hospital itself.*¹

In Catherine Evans' exhibition *Exploded View*, forces of time, memory and technology are present as vibrant material residues and traces. This body of work is centred on the artist's personal memory of witnessing as a teenager the 1997 implosion of The Royal Canberra Hospital, the place of her birth. This moment, captured on two minutes and thirty one seconds of VHS home video footage, and now viewable on YouTube, is the starting point for *Exploded View*. The work examines how digital media acts to distort perceptions of time in relation to place and personal and collective memory. An intimate companion to this work is Evans' fictionella *Copper* (2020), commissioned for the slow-publishing artwork, *Lost Rocks* (2017–21)². In this edition, Evans investigates the looping and linked events emanating from the Acton Peninsula in Canberra, the site of the National Museum of Australia and previously the Royal Canberra Hospital and over 20,000 years of Aboriginal history.

In *Copper*, this erudite 'back story' to *Exploded View*, Evans encounters and revisits the irreversible moments of implosion of the Royal Canberra Hospital, with the capacity to rewind, freeze, and revisit each millisecond while distanced both geographically and temporally. In *Copper*, Evans writes of her childhood recollection of both the violence and intimacy that the site of the explosion/implosion on the Acton peninsula holds for her.

But there was no implosion. The opposite happened; the hospital partially exploded and before we understood what was happening,

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*great plumes of water rose up towards the sky as the shrapnel arched towards us. Great parts of the hospital flew at high speed towards the crowd in a silent theatre of gravity and mass and the unharnessed possibilities of matter.*³

In *Exploded View*, Evans gives material form to the reverberations set in motion long before the implosion, that are still felt in the present. This work resonates with what Professor Ross Gibson describes as 'a strengthening movement of people who think and write historically, a movement where people are affirming that time might not be a perspectival line along which events recede eventually into amnesia.'⁴ *Exploded View* initially holds our attention through the artefacts of digital video—familiar visual anchors that include time notation, volume and play buttons and the framed screen of the viewing device. But something has gone awry here. The images are distorted, fluid, tampered with in some way. Puckered. Crimped. Pleated. Buckled.

Whilst video footage seems straightforward, with its conception of time as a linear, mathematically measured sequence that can be frozen, spliced and analysed down to individual pixels; in *Exploded View*, the artist intentionally interferes with this recorded 'evidence' from the past. We can imagine that a VHS artefact such as this may even have been tendered as evidence in the investigation of the implosion event that took several unexpected and irreversible turns. Rather than accepting the video recording as a singular account of this event, Evans invites us to consider other loops that it sets in motion. Reverberations that are not only seen or heard but are felt in a deeper register. Here, I am reminded again of Ross Gibson's words, that 'the present can be discerned to be a tangle of past events that are still unfolding.'⁵ By tampering with the video images, Evans subverts the pervasiveness of linear time in digital footage. In an email, she describes this interference:

By interfering with the timeline with these great fissures and ruptures, a glimpse of an alternative trajectory becomes visible, one where time might curl up or fold over on itself. Just as the layers of history at the site of the Acton Peninsula are also built on top of themselves. But all layers somehow simultaneously exist.

Catherine Evans is an artist whose work is invested with a material intimacy that repeatedly invites unexpected shifts in our perception. In *Exploded View*, she merges digital and analogue photographic techniques, proposing a more haptic way of recording information in the tangible threshold between. Distorting source VHS digital images with a flatbed scanner, Evans prints a series of digital negatives. These contact negatives are then pressed directly against the surface of photosensitive paper, before being exposed to light. This experimental process also bears traces of human and geological entanglements. Latent energy from past events is not only imaged in the prints but also imparted into the prints through the activation of silver, gelatin and light. Energy expended from past geological events, from mining and from the sun, are all materially present in this work. Coextensive with each other are time and materials, provoking us to reconsider the past, not as neat horizontal event-layers, but as active geological folds and glitches where ancient layers greet the present, cheek by jowl.

Mararet Woodward

Margaret Woodward is an artist, writer and publisher who with Justy Phillips collaborates as A Published Event, making long-term relational artworks through shared acts of public telling. She is also an Adjunct Associate Professor at Charles Sturt University.

End Notes

1. Evans, C. (2020) *Copper*, A Published Event: Hobart, p87.
2. *Copper*, is published as one of 43 fictionellas for *Lost Rocks* (2017–21) by A Published Event. <https://lostrocks.net/books/copper-iii>
3. Evans, C. (2020) *Copper*, A Published Event: Hobart, p11.
4. Ross Gibson, Centenary Professor of Creative and Cultural Research at the University of Canberra and author of *Basalt for Lost Rocks* (2017–21), speaking in a presentation about basalt at *Jack's Reloaded: Material as Memory*, curated by Georgia Nowak and Eugene Perepletchikov, Melbourne, March 2019. Evans' installation *Land Fall*, was also exhibited in *Jack's Reloaded: Material as Memory*.
5. *Ibid.*

List of Works

8	Catherine Evans, <i>Exploded View 1:21 / 2:31 (i)</i> , 2021, silver gelatin contact print on fibre based paper, mounted on aluminium, 50 x 39 cm	1/5	\$1500
9	Catherine Evans, <i>Exploded View 1:21 / 2:31 (ii)</i> , 2021, silver gelatin contact print on fibre based paper, mounted on aluminium, 50 x 39 cm	1/5	\$1500
10	Catherine Evans, <i>Exploded View, 1:22 / 2:31</i> , 2021, silver gelatin contact print on fibre based paper, mounted on aluminium, 50 x 39 cm	1/5	\$1500
11	Catherine Evans, <i>Exploded View, 12:37 / 2:31</i> , 2021, silver gelatin contact print on fibre based paper, mounted on aluminium, 50 x 39 cm	1/5	\$1500
12	Catherine Evans, 2020, <i>Copper</i> , A Published Event: Hobart. Published as one of 43 fictiönellas for Lost Rocks (2017–21)	Available in the shop	\$20

Catherine Evans | About

Catherine Evans is an artist working across photography, sculpture and installation. Initially trained in science and then photography, her studio and research practice is focused on geologic time and where this intersects with our own human timescales: as found in our bodies, their materiality, and our lived-histories through colonialism and archaeology.

Public Program | Artist-In-Conversation: The corruptibility of time and how we (un)do memory.

Thursday, 5th August, 2021, 6:30-7.30pm

Catherine Evans in conversation with Michael Pickering will trace the linked events emanating from the Acton Peninsula in Canberra: a site at which the National Museum of Australia, the Royal Canberra Hospital and over 20,000 years of Aboriginal history converge.

Covering topics such as YouTube, ghost stories, and the supernatural, Evans and Pickering attempt to unpick the multiple timelines that connect us to a continually shifting present.

Michael Pickering is the Senior Repatriation Advisor at the National Museum of Australia. He has worked as an archaeologist, anthropologist, and historian. He moved to the National Museum of Australia in 2001 as the Director of the Repatriation Program, later taking on the role of Head of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Program. He then became a Senior Research Fellow and subsequently Head of the Museum's Research Centre before taking up his current position.

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