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Essay

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano are widely acclaimed for their performance-based moving image works. They have collaborated since graduating from the Victorian College of the Arts in 2001 and 2003 respectively, often performing together and more recently with others, to explore the relationship of the body with material objects, space and time. Their works emphasise improvisation, process, gesture and the sculptural.

There is no there (2015) marked a new direction for the artists as the first of their works in which they choreographed and filmed other performers. Commissioned in 2015 by the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art for the *8th Australia Pacific triennial of contemporary art—APT Live*, the artists engaged 30 female participants—from different backgrounds, fields and age groups—to perform a series of gestures and movements.

The work evolved from the artists' interest in an early 20th century performance collective, the Blue Blouse theatre. Established under the auspices of the Moscow Institute of Journalism in 1923, the Blue Blouse troupe was renowned for performances they called 'Living Newspapers' in which members acted topical news events through movement and gesture. Each performance, while designed to entertain, had a targeted political message expressing the opinions of the Soviet regime to the working class. The troupe took its name from the blue workers' uniforms in which the actors performed.

While the performances were initially devised to convey important news events to largely illiterate workers, by 1927 a Blue Blouse magazine had emerged, sharing information with a network of

5,000 companies comprising more than 100,000 members across the Soviet Union. The transcript of a speech delivered at the all-Union congress of Blue Blouseniks who gathered to mark the fourth anniversary in 1927 conveyed the theatre company's ethos: 'In its work, it focusses on issues of the day, and it is anchored in the real facts of everyday life.'¹

There is no there is a series of choreographed sequences of gestures and actions developed from single images found in contemporary newspapers. In developing the work, Gabriella and Silvana had a specific interest in the repetition of gestures and representations of gender in media imagery. The simple gestures carried out by the female performers originate from photographs of some of the most pressing and politically charged news events of 2015. These include images of Syrian migrants seeking refuge in Europe, standing together with raised arms and clasped hands; doctors covering their mouths in silent protest against the Australian Government's Border Force Act; protesters pointing aggressively at others at an anti-Islam rally at Melbourne's Federation Square; or members of the Black Lives Matter movement banding together on an America-wide day of action.

Now removed from the reporting and stories they illustrate, the actions of the performers are declarative but ambiguous, inviting us to interpret their meaning and connections with current affairs. The resulting work is a moving portrait of the social and political events of our times represented through our mass media, performed here by a collective of strong, defiant and resilient women. The series of movements and postures wordlessly communicate degrees of urgency, anxiety, enquiry and stillness.



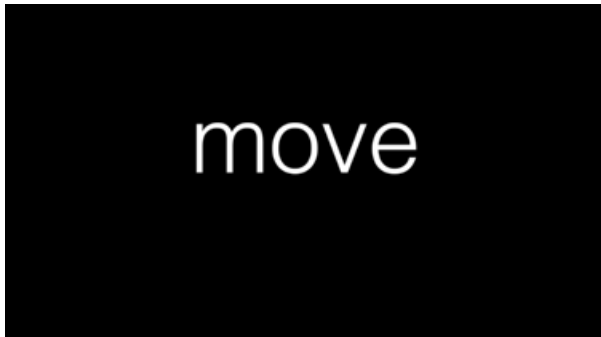
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1. Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano *There is no there* (still) 2015, single-channel High Definition digital video; 16:9, black and white, sound, 10 minutes 27 seconds; edition 2 of 3. Geelong Gallery, Purchased with funds generously provided by Geelong Contemporary, 2018.

2. Anti-Islam rally at Federation Square, Melbourne, 2015. AAP images.



There is no there is a work that looks to the past, but is resolutely of its time in response to media coverage in 2015. It is a work that has a currency today, particularly if we consider the status of journalists and news coverage globally. Politically conservative and far right wing attacks on international journalism (such as those by American President Donald Trump), the rise in prominence of ‘fake news’ and post-truth politics, and the extensive media coverage of the #metoo campaign all lend an added potency to the Manganos’ engaging work.

The title has its origins in novelist, playwright and poet Gertrude Stein’s *Everybody’s Autobiography*, published in 1937: ‘There is no there there’ is one of her two key catchphrases, and references the fact that her childhood home in Oakland, California, was no longer there when she returned in 1935 after an absence of almost 45 years.

Literary references, early 20th century feminism and the power of the collective also inform the Manganos’ most recent work *When mountains move* (2018), developed during the artists’ residency at the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre in Japan. Aomori Prefecture is known as ‘the blue forest’, and responding to place, the Manganos researched the *Seitō* (*Bluestocking*) magazine, Japan’s first all-women literary publication.

The first edition was released in 1911 and it was conceived as a publication to promote the equal rights of women at a time when women’s suffrage was gaining worldwide momentum (with women of the Australian Commonwealth securing the right to vote in 1902, and Japanese women more than four decades later in 1946).

When mountains move is inspired by a poem by Akiko Yosano *The day the mountains move*, published in the first edition of *Seitō* and seen as a rallying cry for Japan’s feminist movement.

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano *When mountains move* (stills) 2018, three-channel High Definition digital video; 16:9, black and white, colour, sound, length variable. Commissioned by the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre, Japan. Courtesy of the artists and Anna Schwartz Gallery.

The day the mountains move has come.
I speak, but no one believes me.
For a time the mountains have been asleep,
But long ago, they danced with fire.
It doesn’t matter if you believe this,
My friends, as long as you believe:
All the sleeping women
Are now awake and moving.

Despite having been written over a century ago, the poem’s message had a contemporary resonance for the Manganos in the #metoo movement in its questioning of existing power structures and in uniting women in protest. They worked with local Aomori women to perform a series of choreographed movements that might visually translate the poem (and extend on the poem’s various translations into English, each of which presents subtle changes and shifts, or movements). It was this concept of movement—linguistic and bodily—and particularly the movement of bodies not trained for performance that informed the final work.

When mountains move is presented across three screens comprising text, gesture realised by the body, and the landscape. In the first, a series of individual words deliver a translation of the poem, slowly building a narrative. In the central screen, solitary women carry out a sequence of considered movements: their hands move across fissures in the ground, along their body, above their head to form a mountain-like apex, and back to the earth. The slowness of their actions could be considered a metaphor for the pace of societal change in respect of women's rights in Japan. And in the final screen, gently flowing water propels petals, leaves and twigs across the frame, and droplets of water generate ripples on calm water surfaces. The blue-tinged landscape references Aomori's blue forest and the *Bluestocking* magazine (with 'Bluestocking' being a term often applied to an educated, intellectual woman, in use since the establishment of the Blue Stockings Society of England which emerged in the mid-18th century). The work's soundtrack comprises a deep rumbling sound suggestive of seismic cultural and geological shifts—quite literally the moving of mountains—under the influence of Japanese women.

When mountains move evocatively explores the power of the individual and the collective to enact change, and as with *There is no there*, highlights the enduring relevance of history to the present day.

Lisa Sullivan, Senior Curator, Geelong Gallery

1. Ya Gamza, 'On the threshold of year five', (speech transcript), Blue Blouse Magazine, Issue no. 70, 1927, p. 53 (translation, blueblouse.org)



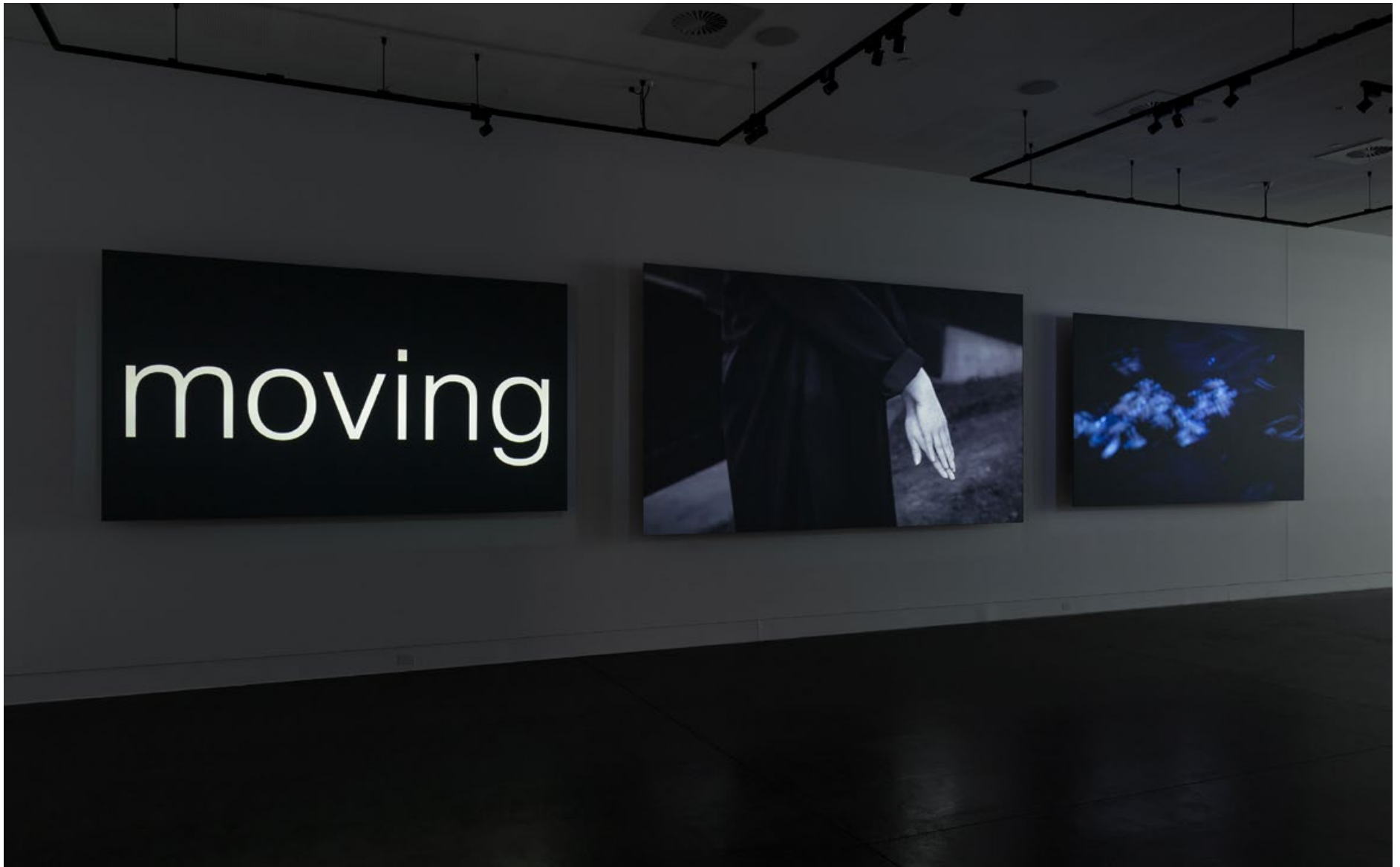
There is no there—Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano, installation view, Geelong Gallery, 2018.

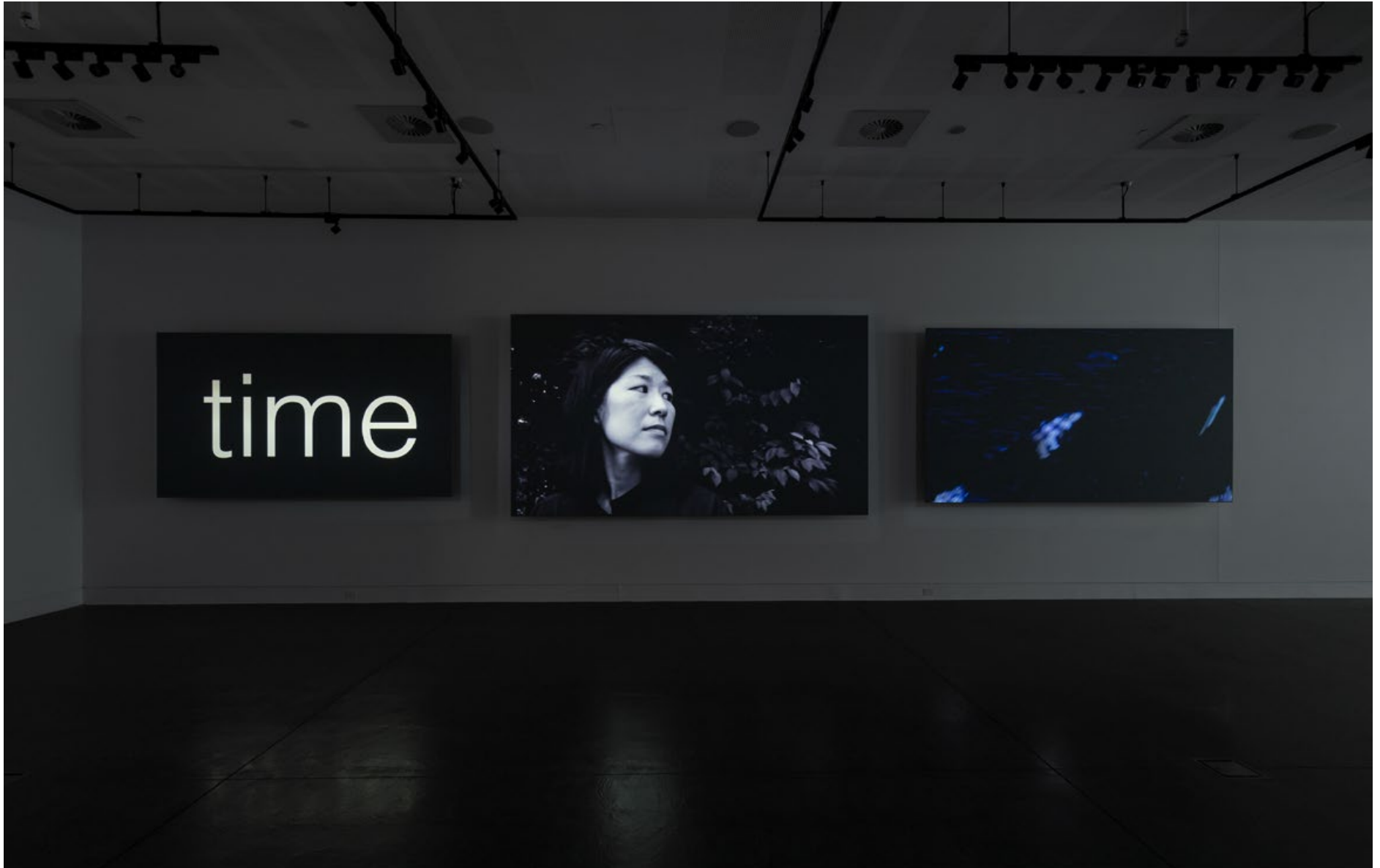
Installation views — Geelong Gallery













List of works

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano

There is no there 2015

single-channel High Definition digital video;

16:9, black and white, sound

10 minutes 27 seconds; edition 2 of 3

Sound composition: Daniel Jenatsch

Performers: Sophia Cohen, Tina Cornac, Pip Finkemeyer, Carol Grenfell, Mai Gryffydd, Rose Kennedy, Meg Kolac, Xani Kolac, Marina Dora Martino, Belinda McClory, Cassandra McGufficke, Sara Naomi, Tiffany Parbs, Hannah Peggie, Annamaria Plescia, Debbie Pridmore, Jeannie Rowbotham and Vanessa Thomas

Costume: Anna Macfarlane

Colourist: Kali Bateman

Geelong Gallery

Purchased with funds generously provided by

Geelong Contemporary, 2018

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano

When mountains move 2018

three-channel High Definition digital video; 16:9,

black and white, colour, sound

length variable

Sound composition: Marcus Skinner

Performers: Emiko Ebina, Shiho Fujikawa, Junko Goto, Emiko Kurashima, Toshie Mitsuhashi, Makiko Okada, Shinobu Takahi and Akiko Wakayma

Commissioned by the Aomori Contemporary Art Centre, Japan

Courtesy of the artists and Anna Schwartz Gallery

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano

Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano

working collaboratively since 2001

Gabriella Mangano

Born Stanthorpe, Queensland, 1972;
lives and works in Melbourne, Victoria

Education

2001 Bachelor of Fine Arts (Drawing),
Victorian College of the Arts,
Melbourne

Silvana Mangano

Born Stanthorpe, Queensland, 1972;
lives and works in Reykjavik, Iceland

Education

2003 Bachelor of Fine Arts (Drawing),
Victorian College of the Arts,
Melbourne

Selected solo exhibitions

- 2018 *Tomorrow and tomorrow*,
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 2015 *Lux*, Ramp Gallery, Hamilton,
New Zealand
- 2014 *Visible structures*, Dunedin Public
–15 Art Gallery, Dunedin, New Zealand
- 2014 *Of objects and sound*, Anna Schwartz
Gallery, Sydney
- 2013 *Hidden spaces, ready stages*,
Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne
- 2011 *Shapes for open spaces*,
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne
- 2010 *Neon*, Studio 12, Gertrude
Contemporary, Melbourne
- 2009 *In the stillness of shadows*,
Anna Schwartz Gallery, Sydney
*Gabriella Mangano and Silvana
Mangano*, Monash University
Museum of Art, Melbourne
- 2008 *If...so...then*, Perth Institute of
Contemporary Arts, Perth
- 2007 *If...so...then*, Centre for Contemporary
Photography, Melbourne

Selected group exhibitions

- 2018 *Figuratively speaking*, Centre for
Contemporary Photography,
Melbourne
- 2017 *Call of the avant-garde: Constructivism
and Australian art*, Heide Museum of
Modern Art, Melbourne
*Multiple future: Yebisu International
Festival for Art & Alternative Visions*,
Tokyo Photographic Art Museum,
Tokyo, Japan
*Reenacting history: collective
actions and everyday gestures*,
National Museum of Modern and
Contemporary Art, Seoul, South Korea
Re-enactments, Museum of Contemporary
Art and Design, Manila, Philippines
The shape of memory, The Lock-up,
Newcastle
Green room: material politics, Institute of
Modern Art, Brisbane
- 2016 *Dancing umbrellas: an exhibition of
movement and light*, Heide Museum of
Modern Art, Melbourne
Indeterminate states, William Wright artists
projects, Sydney
Sixth sense, National Art School Gallery,
University of New South Wales, Sydney
Video oediv, Campbelltown Arts Centre,
Campbelltown

2015 –18	<i>Light moves: contemporary Australian video art</i> , a National Gallery of Australia, Canberra touring exhibition, touring to: Museum and Art Gallery of the Northern Territory, Darwin; Cairns Art Gallery, Cairns; Broken Hill Art Gallery, Broken Hill; RMIT Gallery, Melbourne; Academy Gallery, Launceston; Geraldton Art Gallery, Geraldton; Bunbury Regional Art Gallery, Bunbury; Nautilus Art Centre, Port Lincoln; Mildura Arts Centre, Mildura; and Wangaratta Art Gallery, Wangaratta	2013 –14	<i>Shifting lines</i> , Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand <i>As many structures as I can</i> , The Dowse Art Museum, Wellington, New Zealand <i>The wandering: moving images from the MCA collection</i> , A Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney touring exhibition, touring to: Ararat Regional Gallery, Ararat; Cairns Regional Gallery, Cairns; Glasshouse Port Macquarie, Port Macquarie; Artspace Mackay, Mackay; Devonport Regional Art Gallery, Devonport; Rockhampton Art Gallery, Rockhampton; eMerge media Gallery, James Cook University, Townsville; Drill Hall Gallery, Australian National University, Canberra; and Wollongong City Gallery, Wollongong	<i>PICA salon</i> , Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth <i>Identity VIII</i> , Nichido Contemporary Art, Tokyo, Japan <i>Contemporary Australia: women</i> , Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane	
2015 –16	<i>8th Asia Pacific triennial of contemporary art (APT8)</i> , Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane <i>Lurid beauty: Australian Surrealism and its echoes</i> , National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne			2011 <i>Short sharp shocks, Australian artists film: London Australian Film Festival</i> , Barbican, London, United Kingdom <i>Slowness</i> , Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne	
2014	<i>Crossing paths with Vivian Maier</i> , Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne <i>Whisper in my mask: TarraWarra biennial</i> , TarraWarra Museum of Art, Healesville <i>Impact</i> , Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth	2013 2012 –13 2012	<i>More light: fifth Moscow biennale of contemporary art</i> , Moscow, Russia <i>Inside running: the sport of art</i> , Fremantle Arts Centre, Fremantle <i>A curious nature—the landscape as theatre in contemporary photography</i> , Geelong Gallery, Geelong <i>Ten years of things</i> , University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane <i>Basil Sellers art prize</i> , Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne <i>All our relations: 18th Biennale of Sydney</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney	2010 2010 –11 2010	<i>21st century: art in the first decade</i> , Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane <i>Duetto</i> , Australian Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide <i>Time/lapse</i> , Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts, Perth <i>Love, loss and intimacy</i> , National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne <i>Before & after science: 2010 Adelaide Biennial of Australian art</i> , Art Gallery of South Australia, Adelaide <i>The trickster</i> , Gyeonggi Museum of Modern Art, South Korea

2009 –10	<i>Twinset</i> , Christchurch Art Gallery Te Puna o Waiwhetu, Christchurch, New Zealand	2007	<i>Materiality</i> , Gippsland Centre for Art and Design, Gippsland	2010 –11	Studio artists, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne
2009	<i>What I think about when I think about dancing</i> , Campbelltown Arts Centre, Campbelltown <i>Square 2</i> , City Gallery Wellington Te Whare Toi, Wellington, New Zealand <i>Double take: Anne Landa award for video and new media arts</i> , Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney <i>Once more with feeling</i> , Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne <i>I walk the line: new Australian drawing</i> , Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney		<i>Move on Asia: video art in Asia</i> , LOOP gallery, Seoul, South Korea 2005 <i>Salon de freehands</i> , Seventh Gallery, Melbourne	2009	<i>University of Queensland National artists' self-portrait prize</i> (finalist), University of Queensland Art Museum Brisbane <i>Double take: Anne Landa award for video and new media arts</i> (finalist), Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney
Awards, commissions, grants and residencies					
		2018	Aomori Contemporary Art Centre residency, Aomori, Japan	Collections Art Gallery of New South Wales, Sydney Art Gallery of Western Australia, Perth Chartwell Collection, Auckland, New Zealand Geelong Gallery, Geelong Monash University Collection, Melbourne Museum of Contemporary Art Australia, Sydney National Gallery of Australia, Canberra Queensland Art Gallery Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane University of Queensland Art Museum, Brisbane University of Wollongong, Wollongong Private collections in Australia and Italy	
		2017	Asialink BankART1929 residency, Yokohama, Japan Y Residency, Athens, Greece Career development grant, Australia Council for the Arts		
2008	<i>The new fresh cut</i> , Institute of Modern Art, Brisbane <i>Scanned and drawn</i> [Centre for Contemporary Photography project room], Melbourne Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, Melbourne <i>Group show</i> , Gallery 9, Sydney <i>Drawing a conclusion</i> , Hell Gallery, Melbourne and Peloton Gallery, Sydney <i>The Ergas collection</i> , Gallery 9, Sydney <i>A selection of recent acquisitions</i> , Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne	2014	ISCP (International studio & curatorial program) New York residency, supported by the Dame Joan Sutherland Fund and the Dr K David G Edwards and Margery Edwards Charitable Giving Fund		
		2013	Digital arts residency, Arts Centre Melbourne, Melbourne Skills and arts development grant, Australia Council for the Arts		
		2012	<i>Basil Sellers art prize</i> (shortlisted), Ian Potter Museum of Art, Melbourne		

There is no there — Gabriella Mangano and Silvana Mangano

A Geelong Gallery exhibition
8 December 2018 to 10 February 2019

Curator

Lisa Sullivan, Senior Curator, Geelong Gallery

ISBN 978-1-875237-10-4

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Silvana Mangano

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Publisher Geelong Gallery, 2018

Catalogue design Geelong Gallery

Photographer

Andrew Curtis pp. 5–11

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