



# HEATWAVE

YANNICK BLATTNER



# SUMMERTIME SISYPHUS

By Benjamin Crowley

Yannick Blattner hates summer. Over meetings he complains 'it's hot, I can't work in this heat, I gotta move to Melbourne'<sup>1</sup>. It's no wonder this resistance has begun surfacing in his practice. Born in Germany Blattner is a man of mixed heritage, adjusting to the life and culture of Queensland. This adaptation of identity has been a long-standing point of focus in Blattner's practice, scrutinising accepted and competing notions of Australian masculinity against his personal definitions. Topical and tropical *HEATWAVE* showcases Blattner's spreading interests in Australian culture, focusing on the temporal and phenomenological experiences of living in Queensland - including that sweet sticky heat.

Immediately recognisable, the white plastic monobloc chair is a relatively standardised utilitarian design found all over the world<sup>2</sup>. The universal design invokes nostalgia of outdoor togetherness bringing fourth memories of sunny picnics, camping trips and patio afternoons. Blattner's chair has been modified, neatly upholstered with beach towels sporting familiar designs of sunsets and surfers. The combination results in a less sweaty, less standardised, slightly more sophisticated looking chair - no doubt to be the envy of your mates. These chairs are presented as art objects, though would not look out of place in a discount variety store. Some are stacked and elevated while others are arranged in a row within a crisp white space, all within view of the shop front window. Here Blattner begins a game of form verse function and culture as commodity.

As a practical object the chairs facilitate the Australian penchant for leisure, recreation, and observation. As art they become enlightened critical objects bringing this culture into question<sup>3</sup>. Arranged horizontally the set of upholstered chairs in *Monobloc Sunset* each sport a repeating image of silhouetted palm trees. The layout creates an artificial landscape, a reconstruction of a familiar scene typically viewed and experienced while lounging in chairs of this kind. Similarly the work *Monobloc Surfers* plays the object against the image. The work presents an overlapped and equally cliché image of surfers on beach towels upholstered to chairs and stacked high. While the surfers are the glorified ideal, the chairs represent the far more prevalent lethargic spectator. Both the surfer and palm tree images are a banal and idealised reflection of a particular beach lifestyle. Superior to its original form in practicality and cultural significance, Blattner turns the universal monobloc chair into an object of a certain cultural orientation. A competitive and self-conscious culture wrapped up in projecting a





particular and permissible identity. Blattner's altered plastic chairs are an example of how he pushes and pulls objects between contexts in order to highlight the problematic parts of a culture.

Similarly to his chairs Blattner appropriates the formal and cultural significance of blow-up palm trees in order to create multifaceted allegories for political and moral meaning. The coupling of documented performance and object based work sets up a circular narrative. The scene of the performance is set with the artist blowing up palm tree inflatables one by one. Blattner repeatedly reaches for an asthma inhaler and before long he is exhausted, defeated and gasping for air. The work concludes with a row of precariously standing palm trees, several of which topple before the screen fades to black. Cunningly the deflated palm trees are presented hanging from towel racks in the gallery space, ready for the process to be repeated. It's feasible to assume the mass blowing up of palm trees would coincide with an event such as a summer pool or beach day. Melbourne viewers may find amusement in the performative preparation of a far removed subtropical summer. While the Brisbane resident will no doubt wish the fantasy of the subtropical summer was just so, and not also referred to as the cyclone season. Through his repetitive and exhaustive performance Blattner becomes a sweaty summer version of Sisyphus. Forever in preparation of the foreboding summer months; endlessly rolling the rock of the summertime trials up the hill only to enjoy the brief reprieve of winter. His performance touches on a sense of success and failure, a somewhat absurd but sincere critique on the never-ending routines of subtropical weather.

In essence the inflatable palms are really just a kitsch set design in the vein of the ornamental pink flamingo. Such an item is not a token or product of culture but a far removed superficial reflection of subtropical island life. *HEATWAVE* is a hot swirling soup of connections, disrupted narratives and loose ends. The keen observer will notice the palm tree sunset of the upholstered chairs repeated on Blattner's shirt in the performance. Alongside the performance the deflated palm trees hang from towel racks, while the absent towels are stuck to lawn chairs. Like the nauseating effects of a subtropical heatwave on a bad day, Blattner pulls the viewer into a state of conceptual vertigo between repeated patterns, symbols and cultural references. Humidity is bad but humour is the real killer.

Throughout this series Blattner seeks to demystify elements of Queensland's summer culture by pairing examples of glorified archetypes alongside the bleak reality. *HEATWAVE* is but a small cross-section of works touching on this mode of engagement. Blattner's interest in Queensland identity comes from a point of critical ambivalence and resistance, aware of the pervading implicit and explicit influences of life in Queensland and yet with an earnest desire to belong. Like a slow moving locomotive Blattner pulls the weight of Queensland towards a horizon of broadened identities and cultural permissiveness.

<sup>1</sup>Conversation with the artist, March, 2015

<sup>2</sup>Znidaric, A 2014 'The Most Successful Chair' dcrit, March 5, accessed online <http://dcrit.sva.edu/view/readingroom/the-most-successful-chair/>

<sup>3</sup>Karmasin, H 2000 'Art and Advertising' in Cantz, H Art and Economy, Munich, p. 272-275





# ZEPPELIN

284 Albert Street, Brunswick, Victoria  
P: (03) 9943 7496 | E: [zeppelinprojects@gmail.com](mailto:zeppelinprojects@gmail.com)

EXHIBITION DATES APRIL 1 - 21, 2015