



Body, Provocation Series, 2007 - 'c' type print

exhibition details

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Guildford Lane Gallery, Friday 1 August – Sunday 28 September

20-24 Guildford Lane, Melbourne

Exhibition opening: Thursday July 31, 6pm

Artist talk: Saturday August 2, 12pm

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special thanks

STEPHEN & NAOMI CRAFTI

for their beautiful space

OUR MODELS: TIM CRAFTI, ZARA LIM, ELLA HAVELKA AND COURTNEY SMITH

from Melbourne for not only their bodies and dancing talent but for their valuable time, enthusiasm and creativity of movement during the shoot

GAI MATHER

Sydney Artist, for her input on the day and creating masks for the dancers

ABI CROMPTON

the Magnart inventor and expert, for supporting not only our photographs but also the cause

JOSH ELLIS

for lending a hand with the lights

GERALD FRAPE

for his projector

DOMINIC THOMAS

at Craven Images for his expertise in helping with digital transfer

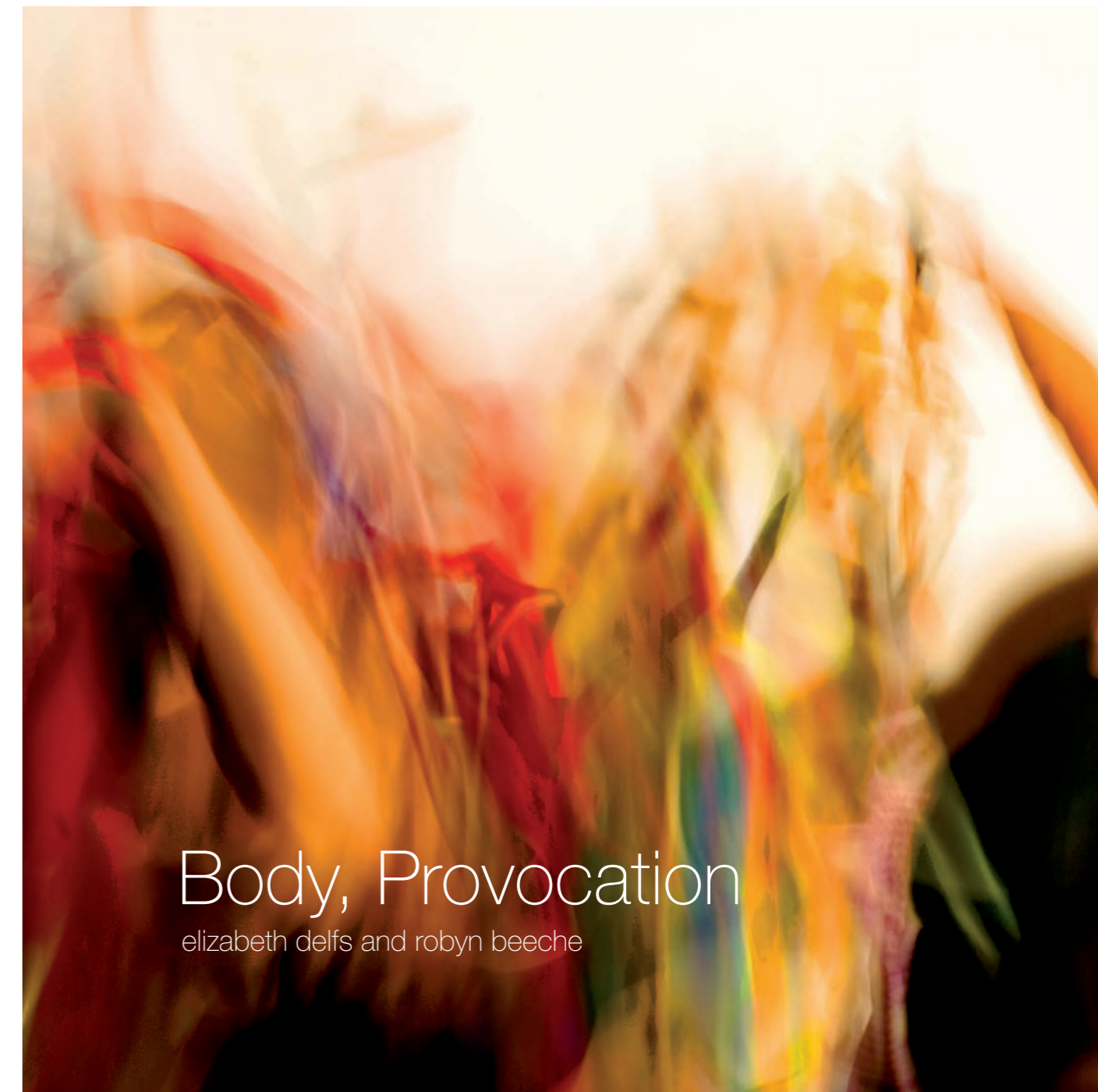
and also

SARAH JANE PELL and JUDE VAN DER MERWE

cover image: Body, Provocation Series, 2007 - 'c' type print

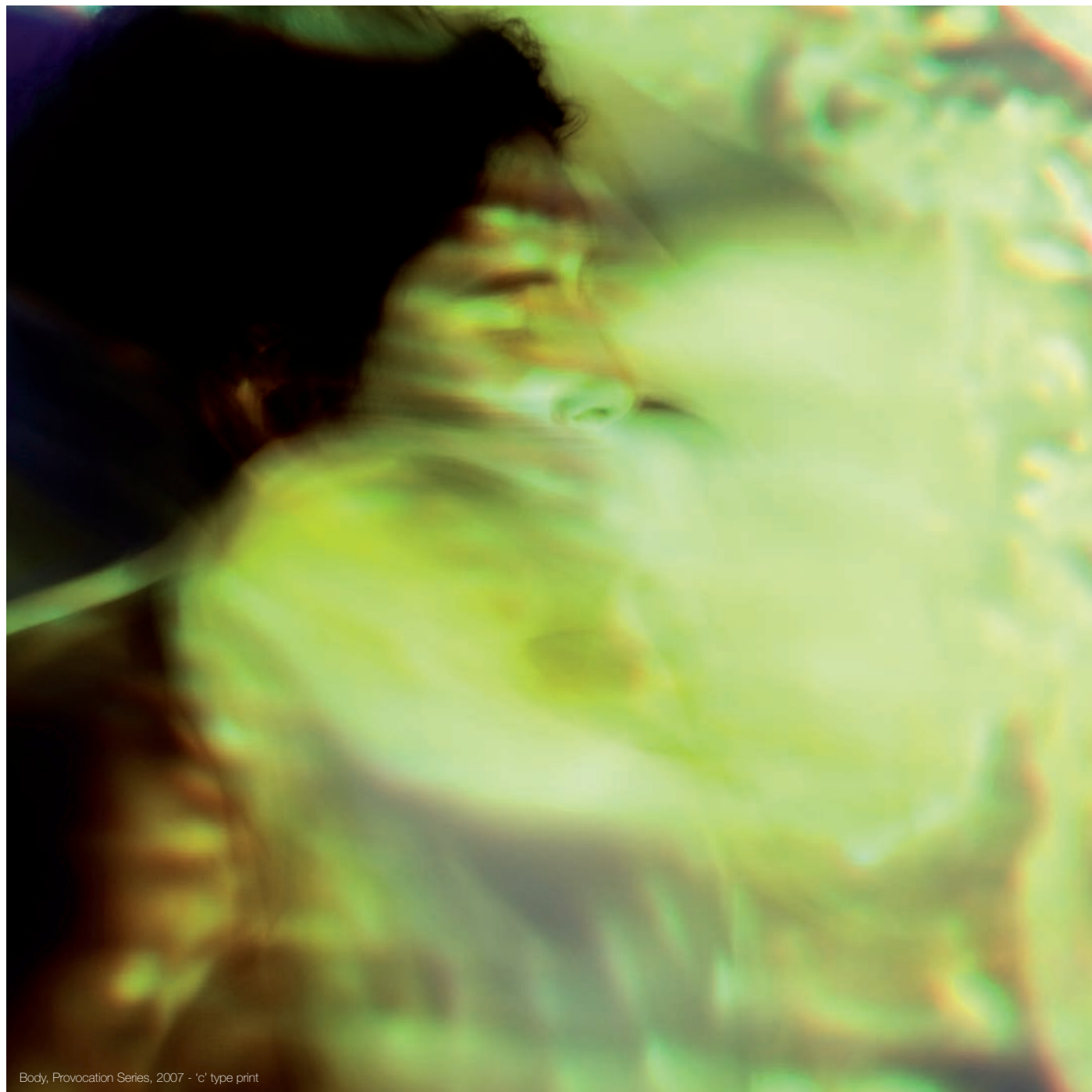


[www.guilfordlanegallery.org](http://www.guilfordlanegallery.org) | [www.robynbeeche.com](http://www.robynbeeche.com) | [www.elizabethdelfs.com](http://www.elizabethdelfs.com)



# Body, Provocation

elizabeth delfs and robyn beeche



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Sudden Provocation Eliciting Response

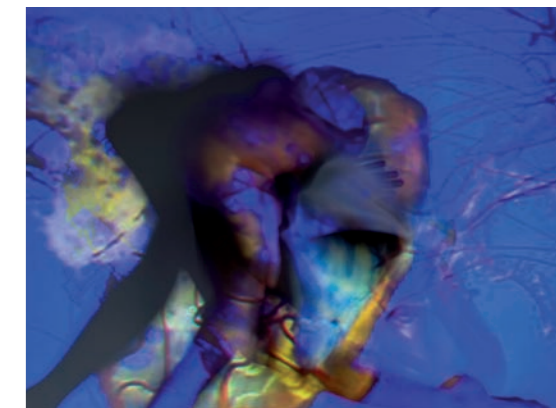
ric spencer

There are many things that provoke me; being cut off in traffic, people pushing in front of me in a line, being bumped into on the footpath. Interestingly these are all events which identify another (the other) intruding on my personal space - or at least the perceived right of it that I have identified. The body ; my body ; our body ; moves through space, it encounters others at various intervals, it cuts paths, it engages - it incites others to acknowledge its existence. For the most part the body is malleable, flexible enough to react in a reasonable manner - smart enough to learn from experience. On occasion though it encounters something so remarkable, so surprising, that it is provoked into a reaction that it before had not considered.

The word provoke is a transitive verb - it means to cause (a person) to become angry in order to bring about a reaction. Provocation is more of an event, a happening or occurrence, it can be deliberate and inciteful; it is about annoying someone into doing something. Sometimes this can be beneficial, pulling us out of a slumber, an intervention to grasp us from a staid period of non-growth; the shock of the new. Sometimes though the consequences aren't beneficial...indeed they may be a little upsetting.

In criminal law voluntary manslaughter, as opposed to deliberate murder, requires killing in "the sudden heat of passion" with no "cooling off" period. (Criminal Law, Perkins and Boyce, 1982:95-6) In terms of voluntary manslaughter 'adequate provocation' is the trigger that sets off the sudden killing of another person. There are four types of specific provocation that are deemed 'adequate': mutual combat, assault and battery, trespass and adultery. Again all of these 'acceptable' provocations highlight the idea of intruding on someone's personal space. Indeed they intervene upon that which is our greatest right - the right for personal freedom.

We have manifested this universal right because our body is our single most defined object of ownership - it is all we came into this world with. In other words it is sacrosanct, and when this sanctuary is intruded upon we don't know how we will react. When a body is provoked and when the conditioning responses that we are so used to manifesting in given situations short circuit, there are two ways to go. The first is a flight and/or fight response - body oriented, passionate, primeval - the parameters of acceptable behaviour here are lost in a flurry of instinctual response enabling survival mechanisms. The second is a slightly more analytical response, the ability to existentialize the experience, step back, recover and learn. The second is a learned experience - learns from experience. The first has its roots in cultural memory which has become body knowledge, it's a gut response embedded in our DNA; the second requires a more complex use of our systems and, even in the heat of the moment, demands conscious neurological paths to remain open, sensing, digesting and assessing options. In the swirl of colour and movement that accompanies these shifts of time, space and physicality this is a big ask.



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Over three days in Melbourne two people, Elizabeth Delfs and Robyn Beeche, in collusion with the young ballet dancer Tim Crafti, collaborated in a studio apartment opposite the comings and goings of the Flinders Train Station. New foam architectural garments, some cut, some stencilled, were made by Delfs specifically for this collaboration. The way in which they are worn, or rather extend from the body, combined with the overlaying of projection, the element of movement that the dancer adds and the intrusion of the camera deliberately upsets the boundaries between garment, body, light and space - all the things we necessarily need to identify in order to ascertain the line between private and public, body and structure. Here the roots of pattern, as they pertain to garment making, as they pertain to movement and as they pertain to those sources of response identification so entrenched in us, are questioned, altered and manipulated in order to stretch the limits of textile art, fashion, photography and performance to their very limits.

Body, Provocation as such is a testing of the two possible responses to an incited experience. The trick to this collaboration, and collaboration is one sure way of unearthing unexpected experiences, was to, in the heat of the moment, acknowledge all the sensory input and allow both the instinctual and the analytical to operate on co-tangents. This, as anyone would know who has found themselves confronted and provoked, is an extraordinarily difficult thing to do. In its showing, the artists have asked the viewer to become co-conspirators in their act of provocation. They are inciting reaction in you - in this series of swirling, colour saturated, vaporous images lies the key to how you will react in an unsettling situation. Such is the means to good art, the unsettling of routine; the sudden rupture, the asking of ourselves serious questions concerning habitual and patterned responses.

In Body, Provocation you enter a building - it may be a gallery - you move upstairs, in no way are you pre-informed or ready for an aggressive act. It could be a cool clear day, it may be raining. Inside the building there is an atmosphere of swirling energy; tension. The lights seem bright and your eyes take time to adjust. Your space begins to be invaded; your body reacts; heat, a rush of blood, you didn't mean to do it. I remember a series of stories; each moving seamlessly into the next; were they chronological, was there a narrative, or perhaps they turned in on themselves. The first story brings back memories of oranges and greens, a darker brown perhaps - thin lines, a cut back. It's blurry but there was a circular pattern I'm sure and a hot burning sensation. The second story seemed cooler, but at the edge of my peripheral vision. The third was piercing, inviting and dangerous, the fourth austere, defiant; posturing. It was all frenetic and the gloves were off; there was sudden provocation eliciting response.

*Dr Ric Spencer is an artist, writer, father and lecturer based in Fremantle. He currently writes art criticism for the West Australian newspaper.*