

KALDOR ART PROJECTS
@ ST SAVIOUR'S CHURCH

BILL
VIOLA
THE
TRISTAN
PROJECT



Bill Viola is a pioneer in the medium of video art and is internationally recognised as one of today's leading artists. He has been instrumental in the establishment of video as a vital form of contemporary art, and in so doing has helped to greatly expand its scope in terms of technology, content, and historical reach.

For over 35 years he has created videotapes, architectural video set-pieces, sound environments, electronic music performances, flat panel video pieces and works for television broadcast.

With his long-time collaborator Kira Perov, Viola creates works that focus on universal human experiences of birth, death, the unfolding of consciousness drawing on aspects of both Eastern and Western art as well as a variety of spiritual traditions. It is this spiritual dimension that perfectly suits it for presentation in houses of worship – and in this instance in the St Saviour's Church, Redfern, a beautiful example of Romanesque revival brick architecture. When we first started considering possible locations for this project, it was the author David Malouf who suggested it as a site for Viola's work.

To realise a project, to turn an idea into reality is a wonderful feeling, an achievement only possible with the help of many committed people. The enthusiastic participation of St Saviour's community is a key aspect to the success of this project and we would particularly like to acknowledge the assistance of the warden, Robert Freeman; the parish minister, Paul Dew; and the parish administrator, Bronwyn Dean.

The success of this project is also due to the close co-operation between the Art Gallery of NSW and Kaldor Art Projects, an excellent example of public and private partnership. In particular I would like to thank the director, Edmund Capon; head curator international art, Tony Bond; curator, Natasha Bullock; and the rest of the Gallery team.

A great deal of planning and preparation was required to realise this project and we extend our thanks to Bobbi Jablonski and Gene Zazzaro of the Bill Viola Studio. Important support was provided by Graham Southern, and Stephanie Camu of Haunch of Venison, London. I also would like to thank Alison Quirke, Adam Free and the rest of the Kaldor Art Projects team for their endeavours.

I would like to thank Rupert Myer, chair and the board of Kaldor Art Projects: Jillian Broadbent, Craig Holland, Mark Nelson and Naomi Milgrom Kaldor. My thanks to the partners whose commitment and support plays an essential role in making these public projects possible: The Yulgilbar Foundation, UBS, The Balnaves Foundation and the Museum of Old and New Art (MONA). Bill and Kira flew Qantas to Australia.

Thanks must also go to the GroundBreakers for their involvement and financial support: Geoff & Vicki Ainsworth, Liz Cacciottolo & Walter Lewin, Santo Cilauro & Morena Buffon, Andrew & Cathy Cameron, David Gonski & Dr Orli Wargon, John & Michelle Landerer, Henry Lanzer (ABL), Jason & Min Lee Yeap, Penelope Seidler and Dr Gene & Brian Sherman.

I would especially like to thank my wife Naomi for her encouragement and support, both moral and financial, which made this ambitious project possible.

It is a privilege for all of us to witness Bill's genius in a magnificent setting such as St Saviour's. Bill paints and sculpts the moving image that at once is contemporary yet is in the spirit of the great traditions of visual art. Our heartfelt thanks to Bill and Kira for the realisation of this monumental project.

John Kaldor

KALDOR ART PROJECTS

Since Christo and Jeanne-Claude created *Wrapped Coast – One Million Square Feet* in Sydney in 1969, Kaldor Art Projects has invited many leading international artists to Australia.

In a 40-year pioneering tradition, successive influential art projects have played an important role in bringing groundbreaking trends to the Australian public. These events have contributed significantly to changing the understanding of contemporary art in Australia.

The aim is to operate beyond the gallery, an approach that has resulted in some of the most ambitious and memorable work of recent decades. From Jeanne-Claude & Christo to Jeff Koons, Urs Fischer to Gregor Schneider, each artist has created unique, often site-specific works that have been enthusiastically received by the art world and the general public alike. Jeff Koons' *Puppy* won the hearts of Sydney and thousands of visitors before its permanent installation at the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao, Spain.

This local engagement with leading and emerging international artists has helped to foster an appreciation of Australia in the wider international art community. For the artists selected, these projects often represent a unique opportunity to take their work a step further and at times in a new direction.

Kaldor Art Projects's goal is to build on the successes of the past with an extended program of groundbreaking projects through which to share the passion for contemporary art with the Australian public.

www.kaldorartprojects.org.au

ST SAVIOUR'S ANGLICAN CHURCH, REDFERN

The suburb, Redfern, is a place of political, spiritual and cultural significance for Aboriginal people. The Gadigal peoples, of the Eora nation, occupied the Sydney basin as the traditional owners of the land Redfern is built upon. The Aboriginal ministry from the Crossroads building in George Street is a ministry to Indigenous people that St Saviour's began over 30 years ago. The church was designed by architects A & C Blakett and built in 1885. The style is Victorian Romanesque and consists of a lofty nave, shallow chancel, low side aisles, an organ loft, vestry and three porches. The west elevation has a fine Gothic rose design sandstone mullioned window whilst sandstone is used for attached columns and corbelled brick supports.

This project, to be held in conjunction with an exhibition at the Art Gallery of NSW, is warmly welcomed as a wonderful way to promote this beautiful brick church, its congregation and the local community it serves. St Saviour's mission is expressed simply as 'a community of ordinary people striving to live for Christ by loving God and loving our neighbours'.



THE TRISTAN PROJECT

‘The wound is the place where the light enters you.’ *Rumi*

Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde* is the story of a love so intense and profound that it cannot be contained in the material bodies of the lovers. In order to fully realise their love, Tristan and Isolde must ultimately transcend life itself. This theme of the spiritual nature of human love is an ancient one whose roots can be traced out beyond the specific medieval origins of the Celtic legend, and deep into the Hindu and Buddhist traditions of Tantra that lie submerged in the Western cultural unconscious. Following the theatrical performances in 2005, a selection of the video material from the opera, in addition to other footage, was reworked to create a series of video art works independent of Wagner’s music. Sound was added to some of these pieces and they were shown in museum and gallery exhibitions. Three of the large-scale works presented in Sydney are from this series.

Fire Woman 2005

Fire Woman is an image seen in the mind’s eye of a dying man. The darkened silhouette of a female figure stands before a wall of flame. After several minutes, she moves forward, opens her arms, and falls into her own reflection. When the flames of passion and fever finally engulf the inner eye, and the realisation that desire’s body will never again be met blinds the seer, the reflecting surface is shattered and collapses into its essential form – undulating wave patterns of pure light. *Fire Woman* is a projection installation with images displayed on a large vertically oriented screen. Four channels of surround sound fill the space.

Tristan’s Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall) 2005

Tristan’s Ascension describes the ascent of the soul in the space after death as it is awakened and drawn up in a backwards-flowing waterfall. The body of a man is seen lying on a stone slab in an empty concrete room. Small drips of

water become visible as they leave the ground and fall upward into space. What starts as a light rain soon becomes a roaring deluge, and the cascading water jostles the man’s limp body and soon brings him to life. His arms move of their own accord and his torso arches upward amidst the churning water. Finally, his entire body rises off the slab and is drawn up with the rushing water, disappearing above. The torrent of water gradually subsides and the drips decrease until only the empty slab remains, glistening on the wet ground. The image sequence is projected onto a tall, vertically oriented screen mounted on the wall. A specially configured 4.1 surround sound system arrays the sound in the vertical dimension of the space.

The Fall into Paradise 2005

The Fall into Paradise begins as the tiniest point of illumination possible in video, a single pixel of light at the centre of a black screen. Imperceptible at first, the luminous point begins to grow and slowly change. After some time it becomes apparent that the light is actually an image of two persons intertwined, clinging to each other and growing larger as they inexorably move towards us. As they approach closer, their distinct identities are revealed: a man and woman clothed and locked in an embrace with arms encircling each other. Without warning they crash through a previously invisible surface and plunge into a pool of water in a turbulent explosion of light and sound. Their dark, silhouetted forms rush towards us, nameless and faceless and, reaching equilibrium, begin their ascent back up to the surface in a cloud of luminous bubbles. There, as the turbulence subsides, their dark bodies languidly float against a background of undulating wave patterns, illuminated by piercing rays of white light. The image sequence is projected in 4:3 aspect ratio onto a large screen mounted to the wall, and six speakers of a 5.1 surround sound system immerse the viewer in a multi-dimensional soundscape that commences at the moment of impact.

Bill Viola

The installation works in the two exhibitions are derived from the four-hour long video that Bill Viola created for a new production of Richard Wagner’s *Tristan und Isolde*, directed by Peter Sellars. It was first presented as *The Tristan Project* in three separate acts in December 2004 at the Walt Disney Concert Hall with the Los Angeles Philharmonic, and went on to receive its fully staged premiere at the Paris Opera in April 2005. The video was produced by Bill Viola Studio (executive producer, Kira Perov) in collaboration with the National Opera, Paris; the Los Angeles Philharmonic Association; Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts (where *The Tristan Project* was presented in May 2007 at the Avery Fisher Hall); and James Cohan Gallery, New York, and Haunch of Venison, London (where the individual installations were first exhibited). Esa-Pekka Salonen conducted the opera in all three theatre venues.

ART GALLERY OF NSW
AND KALDOR ART PROJECTS PRESENT

BILL VIOLA THE TRISTAN PROJECT

Art Gallery of NSW
Contemporary Project Space
10 April – 27 July 2008
• *The Fall into Paradise* 2005
video/sound installation, 9.58 mins
colour high-definition video projection,
5 channels of sound with subwoofer (5.1)

Kaldor Art Projects @
St Saviour’s Church, Redfern
9 April – 17 May 2008
• *Fire Woman* 2005
video/sound installation, 11:12 mins
colour high-definition video projection,
4 channels of sound with subwoofer (4.1)
• *Tristan’s Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall)* 2005
video/sound installation, 10:16 mins
colour high-definition video projection,
4 channels of sound with subwoofer (4.1)

All works lent by the artist, courtesy of
Haunch of Venison, London with thanks
to Graham Southern & Stephanie Camu
All *Tristan* images © and courtesy of Bill Viola
& Kira Perov, photos by Kira Perov

Created and directed by Bill Viola
Executive producer: Kira Perov

Performers:
The Fall into Paradise 2005:
John Hay, Sarah Steben
Fire Woman 2005: Robin Bonaccorsi
Tristan’s Ascension (The Sound of a Mountain Under a Waterfall) 2005:
John Hay

Producer: S Tobin Kirk
Production manager: Genevieve Anderson
Director of photography: Harry Dawson
Camera assistant: Brian Garbellini
Assistant director: Kenny Bowers
Stunt coordinator: Tom Ficke
Gaffer: Bobby Wotherspoon
Key grip: Chris Centrella
Special effects coordinator: Robbie Knott
Production designer: Wendy Samuels
Art director: David Max
Wardrobe stylist: Cassendre de le Fortrie
Post-production supervisor: Michael Hemingway
On-line editor: Brian Pete (LaserPacific Media Corp)
Colourist: Mike Sowa (LaserPacific Media Corp)
Sound designers: Mikael Sangrin, Becky Allen
Sound mixer: Tom Ozanich

BILL VIOLA received his Bachelor of Fine Arts in experimental studies from Syracuse University in 1973. During the 1970s he lived for 18 months in Florence, Italy, as technical director of production for *Art/Tapes/22*, one of the first video art studios in Europe, and then travelled widely to study and record traditional performing arts in the Solomon Islands, Java, Bali, and Japan. From 1973–80 he performed with avant-garde composer David Tudor as a member of his Rainforest ensemble. In 1977 Viola met Kira Perov, his wife and collaborator, when she invited him to show his videotapes at La Trobe University, Melbourne. Three major installations and videotapes were shown in New York at the Museum of Modern Art in 1987, and Viola’s first large exhibition of works toured six venues in Europe beginning in 1992. Viola represented the USA at the 46th Venice Biennale in 1995 premiering an ensemble of five installations titled *Buried secrets*. In 1997 the Whitney Museum of American Art organised the travelling exhibition *Bill Viola: a 25-year survey*. *Bill Viola: The Passions* was exhibited at the J Paul Getty Museum, Los Angeles in 2003 then travelled to London, Madrid and the National Gallery of Australia, Canberra. Viola created his most recent work, *Ocean Without a Shore*, for the intimate 15th century chapel of San Gallo for exhibition during the 2007 Venice Biennale.

Bill Viola Studio director: Bobbi Jablonski
Bill Viola Studio curatorial assistant:
Gene Zazzaro

ART GALLERY OF NSW
Curators: Tony Bond & Natasha Bullock
Coordinator: Natasha Bullock
Registration: Charlotte Cox
Design: Analiese Cairis

KALDOR ART PROJECTS
John Kaldor, Adam Free, Alison Quirke,
Elizabeth Flynn, Daniel Barnacoat

ST SAVIOUR’S, REDFERN
Robert Freeman, Paul Dew, Bronwyn Dean
Project construction: Tom McKim,
ArtServicesNSW
AV install: Steve Henry, Richard Boxhall

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