



MONASH UNIVERSITY MUSEUM OF ART  
EDUCATION KIT

MUMMA

SLAVE PIANOS  
PUNKASILA  
PIPELINE TO OBLIVION

5 MAY - 23 JULY 2011  
CURATOR: MAX DELANY

3 PROJECTS BY DANIUS KESMINAS AND COLLABORATORS

THE EXHIBITION

Australian artist Danius Kesminas is the brainchild behind some of the most ambitious and dynamic contemporary art projects developed in the past decade – *Slave Pianos*, *PUNKASILA*, and *Pipeline to Oblivion*.

Working collaboratively, across diverse disciplines – art, music, performance, video, publishing, agit-prop activism and opera – Danius Kesminas is among the most active Australian artists on the international stage, and yet there have been few opportunities to experience the full scope of his projects in his home city of Melbourne.

At the core of Kesminas' project, is the questioning of the art world and its products through the direct comparison of ones 'products' within the context of the 'others' culture. In this exhibition the line is blurred between authors and artists.

*Slave Pianos* | *Punkasila* | *Pipeline to Oblivion* presents three major projects by Danius Kesminas and his respective collaborators, building on recent exhibitions in prestigious international projects including the Havana Triennial, Asia Pacific Triennial, and Sydney Biennale.



## A LOOK AT THE WORKS

### SLAVE PIANOS

Boundary crossing between art and agit-prop performance – encompassing installation, concerts, opera, scores for experimental music, manifestos and much besides - Slave Pianos' projects are at once archaeological and archival, oedipal and anarchic in their examination and re-positioning of avant-garde and experimental art and music from the modernist and contemporary canon.

Founded in 1998 by Rohan Drape, Neil Kelly, Danius Kesminas and Michael Stevenson, Slave Pianos is a provocative and highly inventive collective of artists, composers and musicians devoted to the exhibition, collection, analysis, performance and re-composition of sound work by visual artists.

Slave Pianos' have developed performances with a wide range of collaborators including the Astra Chamber Music Society, Brodsky Quartet, Chamber Made Opera, Flux String Quartet, Fluxus, Krasnyi String Quartet, and the Royal Australian Navy Band; and have presented exhibitions and projects in galleries, museums, biennales and concert halls internationally including Budapest, Edinburgh, Glasgow, Kassel, Leningrad, Los Angeles, Moscow and Vilnius.

### POINTS TO CONSIDER...

- What is the relationship between music and art? What are the similarities and differences between the two practices?
- Do you recognise any of the names on the console? How do they relate to you?
- How has the piano been presented to the audience? Discuss the various meanings of execute.
- Explore the words and ideas surrounding appropriation, the 'bootleg' and 'pirating'. How might these ideas have been reflected in the exhibition?
- What is a 'slave piano'? What is the relevance of the word *slave*?
- Speculate as to how you might interpret an artwork into a music score.
- Slave Pianos are often spoken about in terms of making 'the obscure accessible'. Discuss how this might have been achieved in the work at MUMA.
- What is the 'avant garde'? Has this term changed in meaning over time?
- Look at the invitations, programs, posters and other ephemera from various Slave Pianos performances presented in the exhibition. How have they been presented and how does this affect your reading of them?
- How have research, collecting and archiving been used in the Slave Pianos project?
- Is there a difference between an archive and documentation? What is the relationship between this and the Slave Pianos work in the exhibition?



## PUNKASILA

Known as a high-octane 'post-disaster' rock band who play custom-made, hand crafted mahogany guitars, built to simulate M-16's, AK-47's and other weapons, PUNKASILA were formed by Danius Kesminas in 2005 on the occasion of a four month Asialink residency in Jogjakarta. Growing out of the optimistic moment of post-reformasi Indonesia, PUNKASILA have evolved to encompass a unique blend of traditional Indonesian crafts, homemade military outfits, machine gun guitars, pop murals and political banners, and post-disaster rock with lyrics that give voice to the cacophony of conflicting political, military, religious, cultural and bureaucratic organisations constituting the Indonesian body politic.

The name, PUNKASILA – which literally means *punk principles* – derives from *pancasila*, the five tenets devised for the unitary basis of Indonesian nationhood. Punksila wear camouflage-patterned hand-painted batik, tailored as military fatigues and play original songs which highlight the multitude of acronyms and abbreviations that describe the full spectrum of Indonesian political, cultural and religious life.

PUNKASILA features Kesminas alongside graduates and students from the Indonesian Art Institute (ISI) in Yogyakarta. The band and its circle of friends operate as a de-facto art collective whose exhibitions and concerts have been presented throughout Indonesia and Australia, and in the USA and Cuba, including prestigious exhibitions such as the 2009 Havana Triennial and Brisbane's Asia Pacific Triennial in 2006.

PUNKASILA's studio CD, *Acronym Wars*, was released in April 2007 and was followed by the limited edition DVD, *Defenders of Video Front*, featuring 19 music video clips. Punksila were the subject of a feature profile on ABC TV's Foreign Correspondent [available at [www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2007/s1924944.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/foreign/content/2007/s1924944.htm)]. *Covert Operations – The Cuba Project*, a documentary of PUNKASILA's tour to Cuba, on the occasion of the Tenth Biennale of Havana, is currently in production.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER...

- Explore the relationship between music and art in this project. What are the similarities and differences between this and the Slave Pianos project?
- What is the relationship between music and national identity?
- How has collaboration informed the Punksila project? How is it different to the process used in Slave Pianos?
- Consider the use of painting, performance, sculpture and video and compare it to the use of traditional Indonesian crafts such as wood carving and batik – how have these forms been used in this exhibition?
- What is the relevance of the acronym? How has language been used in the exhibition and what is its relationship to the idea of 'punk'?
- Academic Julian Millie has spoken about the idea of the military uniform being both a symbol of freedom and oppression. What do you think he means? How do you think this might be reflected in the work of Punksila?
- What is the relationship between art and politics? In what way is this relationship explored in the Punksila project?



## PUNKASILA: ACRONYM WARS

When performing live, Punkasila's set list is filled with songs made entirely of acronyms drawn from Danius Kesminas' reading of Australian academic Damien Kingsbury's textbook, *The Politics of Indonesia*. Below is a list of some of the acronyms Punkasila refer to alongside their word play and English translation.

**PERANG SINGKATAN:** Acronym Wars

**TNI:** Tentara Nasional Indonesia (Indonesian National Military) / Tikyan Ning Idab-Idabi (poor but Adorable)

**JAKAR/JIL:** Jaringan Kafir Liberal (Liberal Aethiest Network) / Jaringan Islam Liberal (Liberal Islam Betwork)

**MANIKEBU:** (Sperm of the Bull) / Manifes Kebudayaan (Manifesto of Culture)

**DOM:** Daerah Operasi Militier (Military Operations Area) / Da'1 Orang Muda (Young Peoples' Moslem Preacher)

**PNU:** Partai Nahdlatul Ummat (Islamic Awakening Party) / Partai Nunut Udud (Party for Taking Cigarettes from your Friends)

**KFC:** Ken Tuku Fried Chicken (Friend Chicken Available Here)

**LASKAR JIHAD:** (Holy War Warriors)

**KORPRI:** Korps Pegawai Republik Indonesia (Civil Servants Corps of the Republic of Indonesia), Korak Pringisan (Smiling Criminal, Kotoran Rakyat (Waste of the Masses)

**TURBA:** Turun ke Bawah (Down to Earth), Turuk Babi (Pig's Vagina)

**KOPASSUS:** Komando Pasukan Khusus (special Force Command), Komando Pasukan Suka Susu (Milk Lovers Force Command)

**FPI:** Front Pembela Islam (Islamic Defenders front), Front Pembela Ibu (Mothers' Defenders Front)



## PIPELINE TO OBLIVION

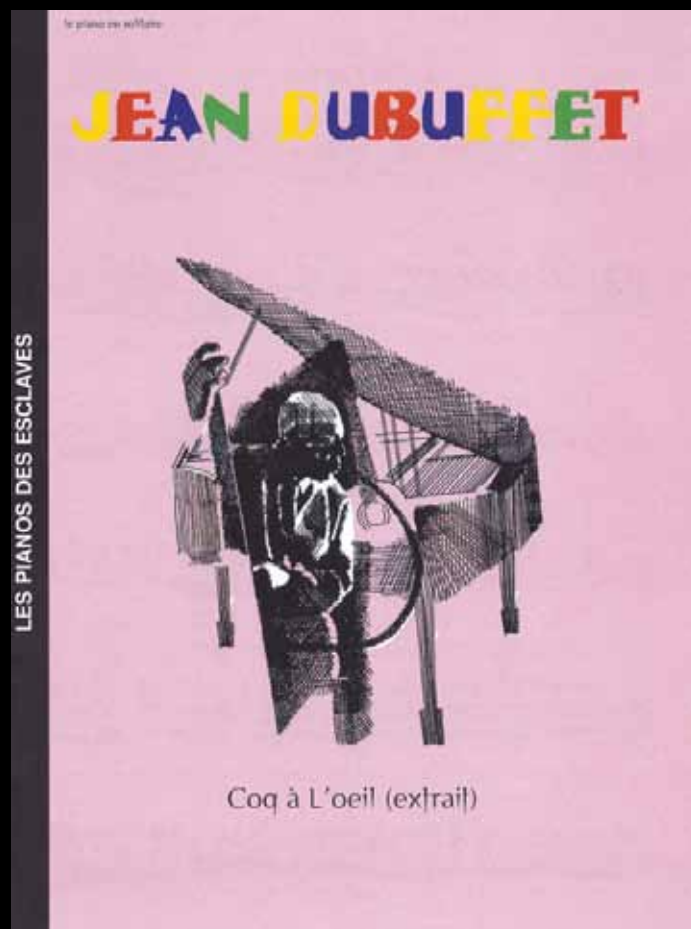
Danius Kesminas' exhibition *Vodka Sans Frontiers* was first presented at the Klaipeda Art Exhibition Hall, Lithuania, in 2005. Kesminas' project took as its starting point the then recent discoveries of illegal underground pipelines pumping vodka into Lithuania. In the brief period since Lithuania's admission to the European Union, the phenomenon has escalated.

The centrepiece of Kesminas' exhibition is a 'vodka pipeline organ'. Made from plastic sewerage pipes, the organ resembles the Lithuanian folk instrument, *skudu iai*, but is monumentalised and mechanised in the Soviet manner. This automated PVC pipe organ has fallen 'off the (distillation process) wagon'; the end product is not the liquid hard-currency of vodka, but music. Air is pumped into the pipes by a revolving barrel, which regulates the valves of the organ to play a traditional Lithuanian drinking song, *Gerkit, Broliukai (Drink Brothers, Drink)*; proffering the hair of the dog for a post-communist hangover.

In a new development of this work for MUMA, *Pipeline to Oblivion* 2011 expands upon Kesminas 2005 installation to explore the deep cultural networks, dismantled economic borders, and political implications of South-Eastern Europe in the post-communist era.

## POINTS TO CONSIDER...

- Explore the relationship between music and art in this project. What are the similarities and differences between this, *Punkasila* and *Slave Pianos*?
- As previously examined, projects by Danius Kesminas involve varying levels of social engagement and collaboration. How have these strategies been used in this project?
- Describe the paintings exhibited alongside this project. What is their relevance?
- Is there a relationship between the bootleg (*Slave Pianos*) and a 'Vodka pipeline'? How do the Kesminas projects explore borders, economics and the subversion of perceived power?
- What tune does the Pipe Organ play? How does this tune reflect on music, national identity and sociality?
- Research Fluxus and 'Happenings'. How do these historical movements and practices of art inform the practice of Danius Kesminas and the projects presented at MUMA?
- How has technology been used by Kesminas in these projects?
- What is the relationship between art and life? How has Kesminas blurred these boundaries?
- How does Kesminas use play and provocation in an experimental way? What issues does he explore by doing this?



## AN INTERVIEW WITH DANIUS KESMINAS (OF SORTS)

### ON SLAVE PIANOS:

**Simon Maidment:** Because it has been a trend with both *The Histrionics* and *Slave Pianos* that you use those music forms, whether it's rock or the composed orchestral, operatic works, as a foil to interrogate art and art history...

**Danius Kesminas:** I'm glad you both appreciate the connection between those projects, because many people are completely confused by the fact that they're utilising different musical genres, so they think they're not related, but they are and obviously so. *The Histrionics* is often misunderstood as being a negative project. There is an element of parody there, but there's a great deal which is homage, bloody oath! How else could you be so obsessed about doing all this stuff! [waves at the *Slave Pianos* transcriptions and *Histrionics* lyric sheets with their pages of footnotes]

**Mark Feary:** Well, that's what we were discussing this morning, how not just with *The Histrionics*, but with the other projects as well, there's that homage, while at the same time there's an attempt to kind of break down the influence that work has over you...

**Danius Kesminas:** Yeah, it's not about killing the father, but it's not about being an orphan either! [laughs] That seems self-evident... you know what it is? It's 'value adding'... [laughs]

**Simon Maidment:** And you've turned your attention to a whole range of artists through the *Slave Pianos* project, tell us more about that undertaking.

**Danius Kesminas:** The whole *Slave Pianos* thing started in establishing a vast, but always expanding, archive of visual artists' sound works. There's always been this trajectory with artists making music. Some of this material is really obscure, I mean, basically it all is, a lot of it is on vinyl and cassette, so finding this stuff can be difficult, you've really got to dig deep, forensically. Except we're not really fans, we don't listen to it recreationally! [laughs] That's for sure, it's not for recreational purposes! So we take this sound, or noise, or even just the audio track of a video

piece, and we transcribe it as musical notation, and prepare it for an automated piano performance.

**Simon Maidment:** So anyone can 'learn to be the artist', become the artist through the learning the sheet music, like all those guitar magazines!

**Danius Kesminas:** Exactly.

Excerpted from:

**Slave to the rhythm: Simon Maidment and Mark Feary talk with Danius Kesminas**

Published in *cac* interview, issue 9-10 / spring-summer, 2008.

Available online:

<http://www.simon-maidment.com/slave-to-the-rhythm-simon-maidment-and-mark-feary-talk-with-danius-kesminas>

### ON THE PIANO AND THE AVANT-GARDE:

Perhaps it is an in-joke about 'executing' experimental music. Danius Kesminas argues, with a straight face, that the work has educational value, introducing new audiences to the avant-garde tradition. Some of the artists whose works are covered, especially those who have written cease-and-desist letters, would disagree. *Slave Pianos*' cover versions productively miss the point of the originals and insert one of their own. Thus, the group enacts a measure of revenge on the historical avant-garde, although one suspects they may be belated avant-gardists themselves, sadly doomed to repeat the unrepeatable.

Excerpted from:

**'Tomorrow Will Be the Same but Not as This Is'**

By Angela Goddard and Robert Leonard

<http://www.ima.org.au/pages/.exhibits/the-same-river-twice-part-1142.php>



### ON THE PIANO AND THE SLAVE:

The one constant in the presentation of this project is the mechanical piano – the slave if you like. The idea is that the musical notation is to be performed on the piano, because a lot of it is impossible for a human to play – even a virtuoso pianist is incapable of performing a lot of this material.

So we've devised a computer program, that is able to drive a robot, which sits on top of the keys – if you can think of the pianola, this is a sort of anachronistic prototype which we have used to develop this new equipment.

It's not essentially our complete idea – we've worked with the QRS Pianomation research division, in Florida and they've provided some of the hardware. The computer sits off stage and a disc is inserted, and this robot plays the ebony and ivory of the keys. And it's actually a question of how much the piano can endure.

Look, you may ask, why the piano? Why not the guitar, why not anything else? Simply throughout history, as a visual metaphor or an icon, the piano appears constantly – right through from Dali to Australian installation artists like Ken Unsworth. So we've taken the piano, as a model, as a repository, to return a lot of this sound work to. Clearly the piano musically is a pure form – composers from

Bach, Beethoven, Mozart wrote for the piano – so we ourselves have returned this avant-garde work to its pure musical state.

Excerpted from:

**Danius Kesminas Interview with Mark Ashkanassy (in 2000).**

Art Right Now 2

<http://gallery.discoverymedia.com.au/artzinePub/story.asp?id=292>

### ON ANARCHY AND THE FOUND OBJECT:

Mobilizing an army of artisans, from comic-strip illustrators to traditional wayang puppet makers, the show "Embedded with Punksasila" both tests the limits of Indonesian free speech and challenges Australian notions that its neighbour is a hotbed of Islamic fundamentalism. With fun and flair, Kesminas shows that much is permissible. "It's the perfect time," he says, "and in all honesty, five years ago you'd probably be put in jail for doing this." The artist nearly was, though not in Indonesia. While lugging back one of his machine-gun guitars from Yogyakarta last year, Kesminas was detained for five hours at Melbourne Airport. "You could say that I was asking for it, and I am," he says. "The project does straddle that fault line, and for me that's the interesting spot to be."

It's not the first cultural fault line he's straddled. In 2002, he made it into the *New York Times* for exhibiting the compacted car wreck of expatriate art critic Robert Hughes, who'd narrowly survived a collision in Western Australia. For *Post-Traumatic Origami*, Kesminas placed 68 kg of crushed metal in a plastic vitrine with a beer can and fishing reel, among other objects. He still laughs at the memory: "Robert Hughes is really the champion of Modernism. Here he is in a cube. It's perfect." Nor was it much of a leap from his court-jestering with The *Histrionics*. Smashed Nissan or song by the Knack – Kesminas sees both as found objects for him to "sculpt."

Excerpted from:

**Exploding with Laughter By Michael Fitzgerald**

Tuesday, May. 01, 2007

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1616236,00,h=tml#ixzz1ld8Dvlg>



### ON LANGUAGE:

Elsewhere in the show, machine-gun-shaped guitars carved from mahogany stand sentinel alongside bespoke batik military fatigues, which Kesminas says are key "because in a way the project is all about camouflage." All sorts of things are "hiding behind the acronyms."

Excerpted from:

#### Exploding with Laughter

By Michael Fitzgerald

Tuesday, May. 01, 2007

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1616236,00.html#ixzz1ld8DvIbg>

Punkasila's method is to take familiar Indonesian acronyms and reinterpret them. So, Kopassus (the Indonesian army's Special Forces) becomes 'Milk/Breast Lovers' Military Force' (Komando Pasukan Suka Susu). ISI becomes 'Indonesia likes Inul' (Indonesia Suka Inul). RPKAD (the army's special reserves) is reinterpreted as 'Let's have sex! But the child will be yours' (Rampung Kenthu Anake Duwekmu). 'Punkasila' itself is a play on the Indonesian national philosophy of Pancasila, the five principles.

Excerpted from:

#### M16s for punks

Julian Millie

Inside Indonesia 90: Oct-Dec 2007

[www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47](http://www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47)

### ON PLAY:

Kesminas conceived the Punkasila project without any self-consciousness about ethnic or cultural difference, then entrusted the execution of the project to the irrepressible energy of Yogya's art students. It suits Kesminas to be ignorant about Indonesian culture, for it allows him, with the help of his collaborators, to fully realise the potential for cross-cultural misunderstanding. The whole thing becomes a game with meaning that causes much surprise. Kesminas sends

the collaborators out and watches as the ripples of reproof, humour, confusion, laughter and crankiness spread out.

Excerpted from:

M16s for punks

Julian Millie

Inside Indonesia 90: Oct-Dec 2007

[www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47](http://www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47)

### POSSIBILITIES FOR MAKING...

- What is your favourite song? Reinterpret this song as an artwork or.... What is your favourite artwork? Reinterpret this artwork as music.
- Examine the systems of power related to your life and cultural background – how might you question or make fun of these systems in an artwork. Map these systems out.
- Brainstorm places that are important to your personal identity and history. Research these places and make work that examines what you find out.
- What is a personal archive? Collect data to produce an archive that reflects a personal interest of your own. Find a way of presenting this to the class, e.g. in book form, a vitrine, a time capsule or video.
- Examine the ways you can make work through collaboration. Choose an idea to respond to, research the idea individually and collect the information. Use the knowledge of the members of the group and then generate ideas of how you might 'play' with some of these ideas. Document your responses through video and performance.

## KEY TERMS

**Acronym:** an abbreviation of several words that often makes a pronounceable word itself, eg. NASA.

**Agitprop:** a combination of the words 'agitator' and 'propaganda' and refers to political propaganda usually disseminated through art, literature, drama etc. The term originated in Soviet Russia.

**Anarchic:** without law or systems of order or control.

**Appropriation:** a practice used in art, literature and music where elements from past works are borrowed and used in the creation of new works.

**Artisan:** a skilled worker or craftsman of objects that are strictly functional and/or decorative.

**Avant-garde:** meaning 'advanced guard' this term refers to works or people that are considered innovative, experimental or 'ahead of their time' and usually refers to the pushing of boundaries or questioning of the status-quo.

**Bapakism:** literally translates to 'fatherism'. An Indonesian system of social status in which the hierarchy is determined by the number of personal ties/loyalties in a network.

**Batik:** traditional Javanese method of printing on cloth via a method of wax resistance.

**Biennale:** something that takes place every two years.

**Bollywood:** derived from the names Bombay and Hollywood. Used in reference to the Indian film industry, specifically the Hindi based industry in Mumbai, one of the largest film producers in the world.

**Codification:** the systematic organisation of a set of rules or meanings.

**DIY:** abbreviation of do-it-yourself. In art this may refer to the use of low-fi, banal and everyday materials.

**Fluxus:** is an international network of artists, composers and designers who have blended media and disciplines since the 1960s.

**Guerrilla:** a member of an unofficial armed force that generally challenges the authority or power of an established or stronger force usually through means of sabotage.

**Installation:** the way in which artworks are installed or placed in the gallery. This can be done to question a viewer's perception of space or the objects or works themselves.

**Irony:** in speech the intended meaning may be expressed through the use of words that are opposite in meaning. In art, images and artistic styles may be used with the intent to critique or question.

**Parody:** a work that mocks or makes fun of another work.

**Plesatan:** loosely translates as wordplay in Javanese. Plesatan is an Indonesian word game that pokes fun at 'official' language.

**Performance Art:** a scripted or unscripted artwork performed to an audience in both gallery and non-gallery contexts.

**Portmanteau:** a blend of two or more words to form a new word, usually combining both sound and meaning, eg. smog.

**Post-communist:** a name used to refer to the political and economic transition of former communist states, usually in Europe or Asia.

**Postmodernism:** a late-twentieth century concept that reacted against Modernism, challenging traditions and concepts such as progress, originality and history. Humour, irony and appropriation are common tactics and/or stylistic features of postmodernism.

**Recodification:** the changing of the systematic organisation of a set of rules or meanings that allows the original meaning to be carried over but a different message to be communicated.

**Sub-Culture:** a group of people within a culture which differentiates them from the larger culture to which they belong.

**Supranational:** extending beyond the established borders or scope of any one nation.

**Synaesthesia:** a condition where one type of simulation creates the sensation of another, eg. the hearing of a sound produces the visualisation of a colour.

**Triennial:** an event held every three years.

**Utopia:** an ideal place, world or state, generally considered to be envisioned rather than actual.

\*\* Thanks to Julian Millie for his contribution in clarifying Indonesian terms and definitions for this glossary.

## OTHER LINKS AND RESOURCES

### Danius Kesminas

<http://www.darrenknightgallery.com/artists/kesminas/artist.htm>

### Slave Pianos

<http://www.slavepianos.org>

### Punkasila at Darren Knight Gallery

<http://www.darrenknightgallery.com/artists/kesminas/punkasila/about.htm>

### Authentic punk, handmade with attitude in Indonesia

Kevin Murray

Craft Unbound, Mar 7th, 2010

<http://www.craftunbound.net/medium/world/authentic-punk-handmade-with-attitude-in-indonesia>

### Exploding with Time

Michael Fitzgerald

May 1st, 2007

<http://www.time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1616236,00.html>

### M16s for punks

Julian Millie

Inside Indonesia 90: Oct-Dec 2007

[www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47](http://www.insideindonesia.org/content/view/621/47)

### The militaristic act Punkasila

By N Ambarwati

posted 5 May 2007

<http://www.artsmangement.net/index.php?module=News&func=display&sid=707>

### Punkasila

<http://www.pineappleonut.org/index.php/2010/12/27/punkasila/>

### Resistance

edited by Vanessa Bird & Harriet Edquist, The Culture of Landscape Architecture, Edge Publishing, Melbourne, 1994

### Show #18: Sold on Soylent (Sculpture's Back In Town) in Fluent Collaborative

By Alison Hearst

<http://www.fluentcollab.org/mbg/index.php/reviews/review/107/65>

### The Everyday (Documents of Contemporary Art)

by Stephen Johnstone (Editor)

MIT Press, 2008

### The Archive (Documents of Contemporary Art)

by Charles Merewether (Editor)

MIT Press, 2006

### Appropriation (Documents of Contemporary Art)

by David Evans (Editor)

MIT Press, 2009

### Fluxus

By Jon Hendricks & Thomas Kellein

Thames and Hudson, New York, 1995

### Fluxus experience

By Hannah Higgins

University of California Press, Berkeley, 2002

### Celebrate art

Integrated Education. Baulkham Hills, N.S.W, 2009

### Art right now 2

By Martin Shub

Discovery Media, Sydney, 2000

### De overkant = Down Under: den Haag Sculptuur 07

Art Data distributor, Rotterdam, 2007

### Slave Pianos / Punkasila / Pipeline to Oblivion: 3 Projects by Danius Kesminas and Collaborators

By Max Delany & John C. Welchman

Monash University Museum of Art, Melbourne, 2011