



This catalogue was printed in conjunction with the exhibition

# It's a jungle in here 14 October - 29 October 2011 Screen Space

Presented by Screen Space and the Australia Council  
in association with the Melbourne Festival

Live video, stop-motion animation, sound, plywood  
and vinyl construction, electronics

Coding and Interface Electronics: Matthew Gingold  
Carpentry & Engineering: Don Russell  
Sound: Finn Robertson

Additional Coding: Oliver Marriott

Thanks to Camilla Hannan, Simon MacEwan and Haima Marriott

All images of works courtesy of the artists

ISBN: 978-0-9870471-6-8

Published by  
Screen Space  
[www.screenspace.com](http://www.screenspace.com)  
+613 9012 5351

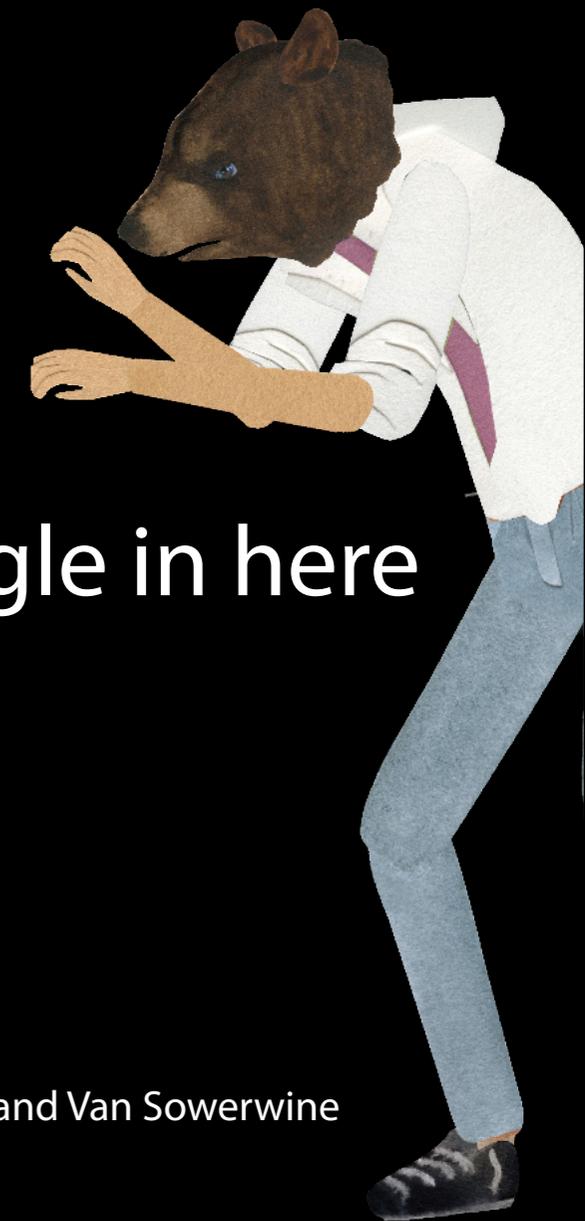
Ground Floor / 30 Guildford Lane Melbourne Australia 3000

## MELBOURNE FESTIVAL

## SCREEN SPACE



This project has been assisted by the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body



# It's a jungle in here

Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine

Commuters arrange themselves like chess pieces on the sleepy outer reaches of the rail network. A silent understanding is upheld as people maintain a brood of empty seats around them. With peripheral vision and the occasional stolen glance each sustains a mental picture of the cabin. A symptom of contemporary urban life, these instincts perhaps recall the lost circumstances of our prehistoric past, where cognisance of the tribe was paramount. Our large eyes and complex brains store hundreds of these mental maps, each inscribed with an emotional mark that recalls those times when the understanding was broken. The drunk elderly man craving conversation; the noisy teenager whose phone conversation reverberates around the carriage. These circumstances are, for a time, a great equaliser: we can sometimes share a glance with someone and confirm the anxiety with the mask of a pretend smile. We imagine ourselves leaving the train, the station we intimately know, each chess move from street to street until we're safely home. Daydreaming, the fantasy becomes reality, and holding our breath we leave that space, and the atmosphere shrinks away from another day. The homeless man lost in anger rides on to an unknown destination. How close were we to disaster, on the sleepy outer reaches of the rail network?

For over a decade artists Isobel Knowles and Van Sowerwine have explored these little wars in a series of award-winning animated films and interactive installations. Fearless explorers, they've mapped the inner sadness of our suburban dreams. *It's a jungle in here* combines sculptural, animated and interactive sensibilities to model the moment of interaction between strangers on a train. Two users sit down and place their faces into the cabinet-like installation, inside which a screen displays various animated scenes. The users' faces are mapped to those of the two main characters. Sound and touch add momentum to the scene, as one character harries the other, provoking (or not) a response.

*It's a jungle in here* ultimately aims to explore ideas of communication and self, and test the invisible barriers that govern social life. This process of subtly undermining the security of the user runs to all elements of the work. Cute, handmade sets recall children's books from the 1970s, while the delicious gentle animations establish a tempo conveying the slow passage of the train – through the windows, we see the backyards of cardboard suburbs. All of these formal elements create a foil for the demands the piece makes of the user, as we're encouraged to attack, and conversely shout to defend dignity. Soon the joke isn't funny anymore, and we're confronted with the opportunity to repeat our attack with greater enthusiasm. In a final and unpredictable flourish, a kind of magical realism floods into the scene, and characters transform into a variety of forms, cathartically venting our shared anxiety through the iconography of ancient fables.

David Surman

