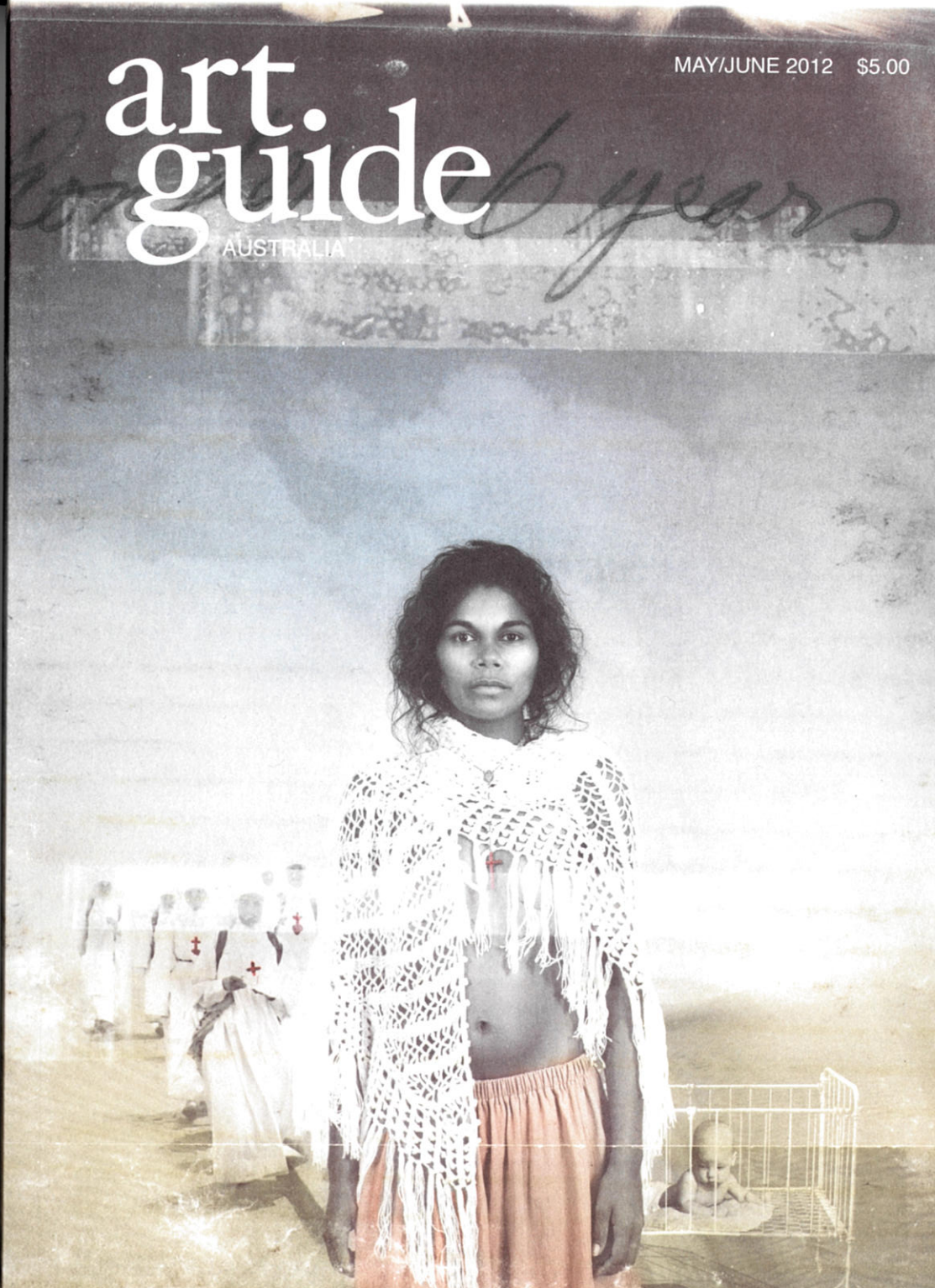


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AUSTRALIA

MAY/JUNE 2012 \$5.00



In contrast to this type of positioning, Ocular Lab's credentials were established at a methodological level – in the way they did things – rather than in the forms of art that were exhibited. By taking this approach, the Lab not only avoided jousting with windmills, it was able to pursue a genuinely experimental line of flight. Instead of making essentialist statements in the form of “this is

PROFILE

Matthias Arndt, Art Dealer on the Move

Matthias Arndt was the first West German to open a contemporary art gallery in East Berlin. Now he's coming to Sydney. By Tracey Clement.

Appearing without warning, then disappearing just as quickly, pop-up shops evoke images of tiny boutiques stocked with either uber-hip objects of desire or super-cheap designer knock-offs. German gallerist Matthias Arndt may be calling his first show in Australia a pop-up exhibition, but don't be fooled. Despite the rough and ready look of his temporary gallery space in Sydney, which Arndt describes as an “aesthetic of emergency”, there is nothing provisional about his massive, temporary exhibition of international art. Arndt knows exactly what he is doing.

Arndt developed his business acumen early. By the time he was 19 he had already graduated from a high school specialising in business and completed a banking apprenticeship. But his real love was art. As Arndt explains, “In my very romantic and sentimental beginning, I was dreaming of course of being an artist. Until I found out two things: it requires a lot of talent and a tremendous amount of focused time alone. I was far too communicative.”

Instead, Arndt used his natural talents, (manic energy, a gregarious nature and keen

who we are”, Ocular Lab asked the *creative* questions: “how, when and where might contemporary art exist?”

The exhibition *Ocular Lab Inc.* runs until 5 May at Margaret Lawrence Gallery, Melbourne. (This is an excerpt from *Hostings: Ocular Lab Inc. 2003–2010*, published by Surplus to coincide with the exhibition. Reprinted with permission).

business instincts) to become one of the most respected art dealers in Germany. “I had a financial education, but not a financial background,” Arndt says, “I succeeded because I didn't have the means to fail.” He opened his first gallery in Kassel in 1990 and in 1994 he moved to Berlin where he became the first West German to open a contemporary art gallery in the former GDR zone of East Berlin.

In 2012, after 250 exhibitions, 80 international art fairs and 50 publications, Arndt was ready for something new. “In this global market”, he says, “we gallerists have to do things differently.”



Vik Muniz, *The Sower (Zunbi)* aus der Serie: *Pictures of Garbage*, 2008, digital C print, 136 x 106cm. Number AP 1/3 from an edition of 3.



Gilbert and George, *KILLINGS*, From *London Pictures*, 2011, 6 panels, 151 x 190cm.

While he still retains his “white cube” in Berlin, the eponymous ARNDT, he is excited by the freedom and flexibility of having no fixed gallery abode in Australia.

Of course, this doesn't mean Arndt expects it to be easy, but he has faced new markets before. When Arndt started in Berlin there wasn't really a demand for what he was doing. And luckily for him, it has never just been about the bottom line. “I'm not driven by the money,” he explains, “I'm driven by the content, because art can change the world. It's as simple and as romantic as that. If I didn't think that way, if I didn't work with artists who challenge us, I couldn't justify working in this business. I'd have to do environmental work or charity.”

Despite now having a home just outside of Melbourne, Arndt chose Sydney for his first antipodean venture, another example of his good business sense. Arndt specialises in international art and his gallery has popped up at a time when the eyes of both the local and international art world are on the city.

His first show, *Migration*, featured works by 33 emerging and established artists, including well-known European figures Georg Baselitz, Joseph Beuys, Sophie Calle, Gilbert and George, and Thomas Hirschhorn, the Americans Robert Mapplethorpe and Bill Viola, and numerous artists from China and South East Asia. This show opened in March, strategically timed to coincide with the reopening of the MCA. Arndt's second show, which encompasses highlights from *Migration* alongside two solo shows – films by the German artist Julian Rosefeldt and works by a yet to be confirmed Chinese artist – opened in April and will still be on when the 18th Biennale of Sydney launches in June. As Arndt puts it, “for the first time I have the feeling I have come to the right place at the right time.”

Arndt's Sydney exhibition space is at 9 Jenkins Street, Millers Point, Sydney, until 10 July. Open by appointment only. arndtberlin.com