

17 August – 3 September 2011

## How to wrap a metre-long schlong

An (educational) interview with *Andrew Burford*

Laura Castagnini

Andrew Burford's installation *Hung* was exhibited in the Project Space of SEVENTH in August 2011. Since then I have thought about the piece often, mostly to have a private chuckle at the thought that I've seen Andrew's freckled wang through a giant penis kaleidoscope, but also to consider the position his humorous deconstruction of the phallus holds within contemporary gender discourse. I sat down with Andrew on the balcony of his Collingwood home to learn more about the power of the penis, what really goes on in the boys' locker rooms and how (and why) he wrapped a metre-long schlong.

**Laura Castagnini:** *Hung* is a well-hung penis that hangs from the roof. A 'woody' made of fake wood. We look through the 'eye' of the penis to view the kaleidoscope. Why do you love puns so much?

**Andrew Burford:** It's always fun to shove a pun in somewhere! That was tenuous I know, and I was lucky it worked with *Hung*, but it made sense conceptually for the work to be dripping in puns. I wanted the viewer to initially laugh at the big, fake, glowing wooden penis but then chuckle at the added one-liners.

**LC:** The one-liners somehow go deeper, however. The shaft of your penis is coated in a wooden veneer, but on closer inspection we realise it's actually book contact. It's faux-masculinity, like a 1970s mustachioed porn star who lives in a cabin and chops wood. Why do you 'poke' at the construction

(literally) of masculinity?

**AB:** The cheap, wood-effect contact is my favourite aspect of the work. It reminds me of being a young kid and covering schoolbooks, but this time I wrapped up a metre-long schlong. I loved how the viewer was enticed to look into the 'eye of the beast' and had to bend down to do so; they were essentially bowing to my penis and then laughing when confronted with a bouquet of dicks. But to answer your question with a question, why are we always trying to be men? What is a man anyway? Surely having a dick doesn't automatically make you manly. The idea of the big guy with the big wang being the ideal man is just so irrelevant these days, and yet it still exists within society. I'm highlighting how silly these guys look, flexing their man-muscle to command attention.

**LC:** Whereas *Hung* is almost the opposite; rather than compete with the oversized kaleidoscope apparatus you instead present a photograph of your penis head on. This self-exposure is a different ballgame in comparison to your earlier work, for example *Nudes* (2009-10), which examines other bodies. Why did you decide to put yourself in such a vulnerable position? (A bottom, if you will!)

**AB:** Well, I'm more of a top than a bottom but I get what you're saying. I have issue with artists who explore themes of nudity but are not willing to expose themselves. I'm sure I could have got some young stud with a prettier piece to pose for me, but how could I comment on masculinity if I wasn't willing to stick mine on the line? The work was about judgment based on penis size and so I thought, if I'm getting judged for my work anyway, I may as well be judged on my cock at the same time. While I was sitting the gallery I did have one viewer look through the scope three times, so I couldn't have been that much of a disappointment.

**LC:** Was that me? I stole quite a few peeks too! Although for me the viewing experience was more innocent. It fulfilled an inner childlike curiosity about other people's pink bits. I never knew you had so many freckles down there!

**AB:** My mother once said, 'seen one, seen 'em all.' I disagree; everybody's hidden bits are different in some way. Some are pretty and others not so much. I like my dangly bits, luckily. Childhood curiosity is an important reference point in *Hung*. A kaleidoscope is a toy many of us would have played with as a kid and, with its phallic shape, it lent itself quite easily to the metaphor. It is during adolescence that a boy's (nonsexual) interest in the penis reaches its peak. All we talked about at school was our penises; whether we were circumcised or not, whether we jerked off, who in the class we thought stroked the trouser snake the most and how big our member was and it was only in the changing rooms that you had the chance to size yourself up against others. I remember that Richard was crowned with the biggest in the class, but he was a year older so it was ok. Quite funny considering his name was literally Dick.

**LC:** *Hung* is, in a way, celebratory, however there aren't many other happy penises in art; in the 1970s male performance artists including Bill Flanagan and Paul McCarthy made art about their genitalia, however usually in a sado-masochistic manner<sup>1</sup>, and much of Robert Mapplethorpe's homoerotic photography is shrouded by criticisms of black exoticisation. At the same time your presentation of your own genitalia is a popular feminist practice and your peephole device invites penis voyeurism in a way traditionally consistent with viewings of the female body. Is *Hung* actually a backdoor reference to feminism?

**AB:** When women create work about vaginas they are usually empowering them, however the penis is already empowered. So I wanted to deflate it a little. Taking the piss out of the phallus and making it absurd takes away some of its self-assumed power. I suppose in a way this could be considered misanthropic but as I see it, I'm not manly because I have meat and two veg in my pants, and why should my 'third leg' lead the way for my behaviour? Claire Lambe, a Melbourne artist who has made some work surrounding the phallus in a similar vein to mine, is a good reference point for me. Her phalli are sometimes amusing and at others quite violent looking. To me her work reflects various aspects of what being a man should be and how this is meaningless. Like faking a male orgasm.

**LC:** Wow, is that physically possible?

**AB:** It could happen, the noises anyway, but you would have to be prepared with some mayonnaise or shampoo or something. I really doubt I could be arsed with all that effort.

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1 For example Paul McCarthy's video *Hot Dog* (1974) depicts the artist stripping naked and shaving his body before taping his penis into a hot dog bun, smearing his buttocks with mustard, then stuffing his mouth with hot dogs and taping his mouth closed.