



# Mathieu Gallois Flight 934-B

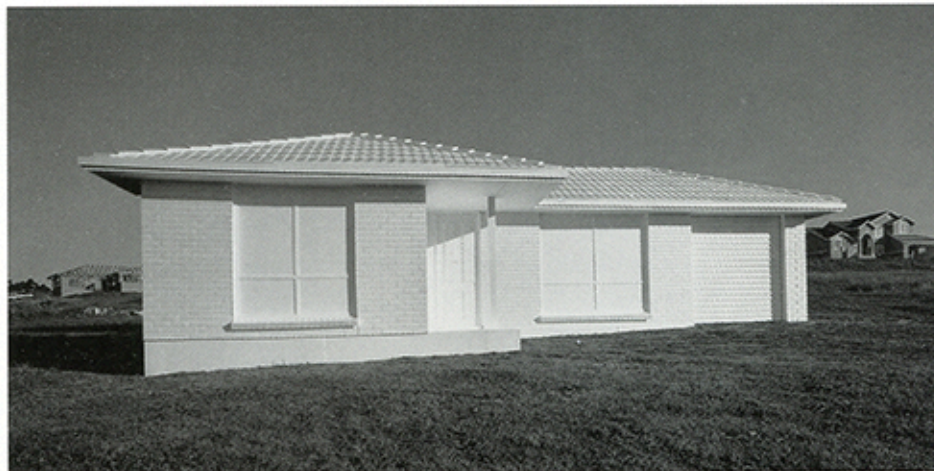
CCP Exhibition dates 24 November - 16 December 2000

*Flight 934-B* 2000. 386 type-c colour photographs.  
Mounted on aluminium. Overall size 120cm x 960 cm

Special thanks to all 386 subjects/collaborators of *Flight 934-B*; to the team at Ansett Australia for making *Flight 934-B* possible; and to Arnaud Gallois, Ben Curnow, Blair French, Andrew Sayers, Nitin Lal, Charlotte Day, Sarah Jane Barr, Helena Poropat and Angela Milic for their participation and support.

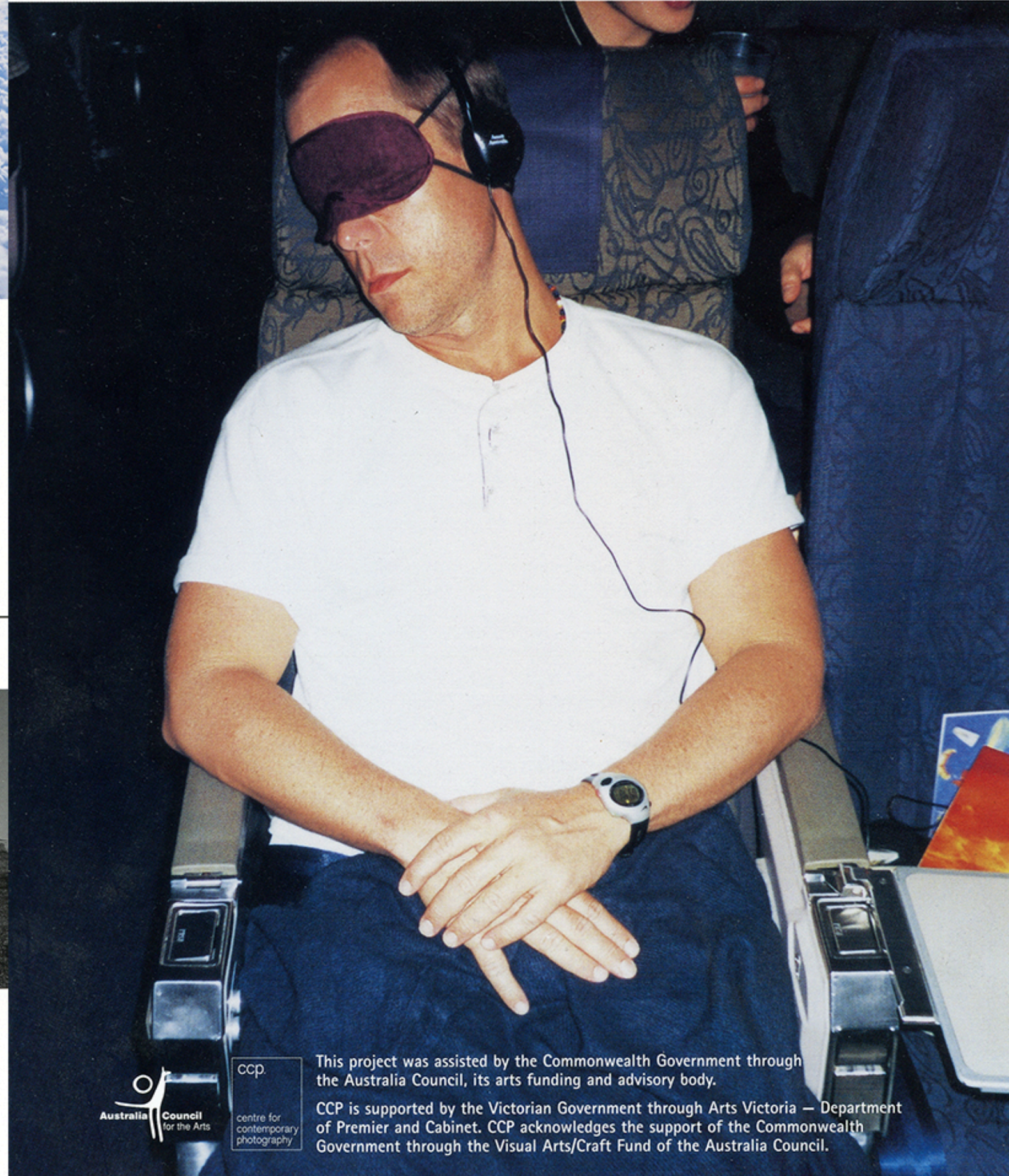
### Biography

Mathieu Gallois is an installation-based artist who resides in Sydney. He studied at the Australian National University (BA, Visual Arts with Honours) and has exhibited widely across Australia. He is currently an Australia Council New Work grant recipient.



*Frontier* 1999. Material: Polystyrene. Suburban house, scale 1:1. Lot 865, Blair Athol Neighbourhood Development, Australia.

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This project was assisted by the Commonwealth Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

CCP is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria — Department of Premier and Cabinet. CCP acknowledges the support of the Commonwealth Government through the Visual Arts/Craft Fund of the Australia Council.

# Flight 934-B



Photo: Adam Mann

## Placelessness

The transferral of the the seating plan aboard a Boeing 747 passenger jet to the flat plane of the gallery wall, in *Flight 934-B*, is disarmingly literal. Close to four hundred separate photographs — individual portraits of the passengers on a transcontinental flight — make up a composite image which is an abstraction of the aeroplane. As would seem perfectly logical, the placement of these images within such a formal matrix is determined by the place where each person was sitting on an actual flight. Yet the function of the work does not so much rest with its value as accurate documentation or description, so much as an invocation of air travel as a metaphor for the subjective experience of the individual within a public context. With its theme of travel, *Flight 934-B* represents (on one level) a vehicle of actual transportation and its regimented allotments of human cargo. At the same time it presents an aggregate of high-density but entirely private, personal spaces: a multitudinous portrait.

Works of art signify by way of invented planes that are not generally isomorphic with the plane of ordinary experience, in a literal sense, but are rather analogous enough to invoke something of the fundamental sentiment of our 'being in the world' — the way in which we 'inhabit' spaces and orient ourselves temporally. Portraiture as an established genre is one such plane, denoting the zone of personal space (as well as designating, often a person's social place). While the in-flight portraits in Mathieu Gallois' work may resemble terrestrial portraits, there is an undeniable feeling that they reveal some aspect of human experience that has not been captured in portraits before: it is the sense of the subject in temporal extensity, disjoined almost completely from direct perceptual knowledge of where one is, or where one is going. They have, as it were, a presence without perspective, inhabiting a place outside space, where the subject serves as its own location. In this sense, the passengers on *Flight 934-B* have commissioned themselves as portraits and become that portrait for the duration of the flight.

Much as boats and trains have symbolised, in earlier art, the experience of a subjective, 'existential' relationship to the world and to destiny, so the technological object of the jet aircraft (albeit significantly absent from the work itself) is suggestive of an existential situation, both individual and collective. It embodies the principle of placelessness — whereby the most disjointed and dispersed facets of being seem, paradoxically, assembled on a single plane — a principle that is increasingly pervasive in our lives. *Flight 934-B* thus presents us with a distinctly contemporary account of what it means to be human and a 'citizen of the world': no longer the inhabitant of a particular place, but one who belongs to no place and to every place at once. As such the portraits are intimate and very 'human' images, despite their display en masse ; for each person is on their own, essentially private journey.

Ben Curnow

## Aircraft Body/Social Body

Both aircraft and airport as quintessential mainframe processors of societal flows have in recent years become ubiquitous subjects of (and sites for) contemporary art. But rarely does the 'passenger' feature as either individuated subject or class of social organisation as here in Mat Gallois' *Flight 934-B*. Why so? Perhaps this is due to a certain incongruity introduced by the human subject that disturbs an accepted reading of the aircraft body, for example, as exemplar of French academic Marc Augé's 'non-places of supermodernity': spaces created for the processing of information, goods and human bodies in which all subjects are cast as identical data units (here passengers), all individuals contracted within specific transactions. Augé's non-places are marked by an absence of identity, relations, history or organic society — all supposed conditions of aircraft travel. It's common-place, for example, to refer to long distance air travel as some hiatus from the conditions and apparatus of everyday life — a dislocation from the regularities of time and space, a consented subjugation to an overt structuring (and restriction) of movement, social activity and sustenance, and a suspension from and between the acculturated norms of behaviour.

This is explicitly conveyed in Gallois' photographs — a uniformity of casual dress and slumped posture; of bodies withdrawn into the trebly whine of aircraft headphones or hypnotised by the video static emanating from the front of the cabin; of couples huddling against the mass; of eyes closed or masked in determined solitude; of empty seats marked and protected as impenetrable boundaries between subjects. But even if this does convey the alienating data processing of human corporeality that Augé's conception would suggest, is it really indicative of the aircraft as non-place, or of a photographic projection of just this expectation? Each body in Gallois' work is systematically spaced as a photographic unit separated by white wall. But there are no such boundaries onboard a plane — legs and arms slip out into the walkways, elbows colonise armrests, bodies clamber over each other to move about, socialise, seek sustenance and refreshment or simply to urinate and defecate. The social model of the aircraft is not so unlike that supposedly left below. There's a rudimentary spatial arrangement based on financial value. People either interact or withdraw socially depending upon existing personal predilections. People eat, sleep, read, watch, and listen because these are things people do. For sure, these now take place within a restricted, compressed and thus somewhat heightened environment, but one that remains tolerable because it is based upon existing modes of social organisation.

So, three points: First, these are not bodies suspended from time and space but rather bodies weighted by a concentrated experience of time. Second, Gallois' work bespeaks not the total dislocation of the social body from its base, but the adaptive interaction of the dynamics of that body to the compressed, irreality of the flight experience. This may not be a site of organic society, but an adaptive, transitive social body exists nevertheless. Third, inasmuch as *Flight 934-B* portrays a set of isolated figures bearing the burden of their intensified introspection, it does so via the act and form of the photograph itself — an application of visibility to their proposed interiority. On one hand the apparent lack of pose reveals in fact the most heightened sense of contemporary camera-consciousness. On the other photography acts to create of these individuals a body politic of sorts — tenuous and momentary certainly, but present nevertheless.

Blair French