

# Christian Capurro

The Australian artist Christian Capurro makes images disappear. His practice is a method of making by unmaking that begins with the seductive fantasies of the mass media, and arrives at near-blank pages through a process of erasure and obliteration. In Capurro's hands the cacophony of values and imagery in glossy magazines becomes formless, an ambiguous space held open within an image-saturated world.

Using a rubber eraser and correction fluid, Capurro strips away and overwrites the surfaces of lifestyle, fashion and pornography magazines. Each day he erases for as long as he is physically able. Gripping the page with one arm, and rubbing with the other, he works standing up in order to apply maximum pressure to the page.<sup>1</sup> This process, which divests the sheet of its visual content, generates an image elsewhere in the magazine: a faint, inky transfer formed under the physical force of erasure.

The series *Compress (pit of doublivores)* 2006–07 is made using the above method. At first this sequence of 14 drawings appears to be a collection of blank pages. On closer inspection, however, subtle images begin to appear, with figurative shadows in warm white and bleached colours emerging on the surface. These figures are imprinted by the pressure of the artist's hand erasing an image on the reverse of the same page. Capurro has described the process as one in which 'two magazine pages come together face to face'.<sup>2</sup> As he applies his weight to one page, the ink from that page is transferred, imprinting itself onto the next 'host' page.<sup>3</sup> These drawings are not erasures, but rather the residue of images erased from elsewhere in the magazine.

*Compress (pit of doublivores) I*, for example, is a network of layered forms. One layer is made up of residual figures transposed in ink from another sheet, echoing the bodies that proliferate in the mass media. These receding, highly suggestive shapes are all that remain of Capurro's source material, and they are on the verge of disappearing into, or emerging out of, the paper. Plastered over these nebulous forms is another shape rendered in white correction fluid. Against the warm white hues of the disappearing bodies, the whiteout is tinged with blue and covers what could be barbed wire or a twirling ribbon spiralling down the centre of the page in low sculptural relief.

These drawings have a quiet yet intense presence. When installed, the subtle contrast between cool and warm whites is evident. Each page is torn down the edge where it was once bound into a magazine. The correction fluid used to veil parts of the image sits up

on the surface of the page like scar tissue. Under its weight, the page is taut and takes on a sculptural dimension.

The drawings in the *Compress* series all have evidence of the presence of the artist. The physical nature of Capurro's method registers his body in gestural traces and subtle, seismic impressions. As the theorist Brian Dillon has written:

Erasure is never merely a matter of making things disappear: there is always some detritus strewn about in the aftermath, some bruising to the surface from which word or image has been removed, some reminder of the violence done to make the world look new again.<sup>4</sup>

The 'bruising' that erasure brings about is discernable in the *Compress* series. The pages seem wrought, giving the appearance of having been lived on and imparting a sense of the time it took the artist to efface and, alternately, imprint the imagery.

The method of erasure has an historical precedent in the form of the palimpsest. A palimpsest is a page that has had its contents repeatedly erased – a medieval practice designed to conserve materials by writing, scraping away and rewriting texts on a single sheet of vellum. Erasure is also linked to the work of 20th-century artists, most notably Robert Rauschenberg and his *Erased de Kooning drawing* 1953.

Capurro's exhaustive routine removes the commodified bodies that are shaped by and perpetuated in the popular media. As he has explained: 'To invest [mass-media imagery] with such prolonged and drawn-out attention, and manifest that investment as an absence at the heart of the thing, seemed to me an appropriate, even necessary inversion'.<sup>5</sup> Describing his process as the 'fastidious labouring of the body against the image',<sup>6</sup> Capurro suggests that the practice of erasure works against the image-saturation of society.

Yet Capurro's iconoclasm is born of fascination with the image, and demonstrates its subtlety and persistence. Despite his work of erasure, images linger on the page; rather than disappearing, they come to life. Being neither indelibly present nor completely effaced, the *Compress* series presents drawings that the viewer must work to see. Like a Rorschach test, their tenuous shapes will not resolve into definite images – they are open to imaginative projection, and yet elude definition.

## *Compress (pit of doublivores)* 2006–07

1 of 14 works on paper drawn under the pressure of erasing other images, then corrected magazine pages with erasure, correction fluid, ink and pins  
30 x 22 cm approx each

1. Megan Backhouse, 'When what's left is more', *Age*, 14 Feb 2007, p 17

2. Christian Capurro, 'Compress', christiancapurro.com/archives/compress.php (accessed Jan 2011)

3. Capurro, 'Compress'

4. Brian Dillon, 'The revelation of erasure', *Tate etc.* issue 8, autumn 2006, tate.org.uk/tateetc/issue8/erasurerevealed (accessed Jan 2011)

5. Christian Capurro, 'A little too much time on my hands: (un)making of "Another misspent portrait of Etienne de Siro"', christiancapurro.com/archives/capurro\_amped\_tak\_2006.php (accessed Jan 2011)

6. Capurro quoted in Bridget Crone, 'The ruined body', *The ruin*, Ian Potter Museum of Art, University of Melbourne 2005, pp 13–14