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CATALOGUE OF WORKS

SEBASTIAN MOODY *Opinion Fatigue*

22 July - 27 August 2022

4/349 Montague Road
West End, QLD, 4101
onespacegallery.com.au

(07) 3846 0642
info@onespacegallery.com.au

Image: Sebastian Moody, *Opinion Fatigue (citrus steam)*, 2022, Acrylic on board, 180 x 120 cm
Photograph: Louis Lin. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery



Sebastian Moody

Opinion Fatigue, 22 July - 27 August 2022

ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

- **Exhibition Dates:** 22 July - 27 August 2022
- **Opening Event:** Friday 22 July 2022
- Exhibition Essay Text by Tara Heffernan
- **Onespace Gallery Hours:** Tuesday to Friday 10am – 6pm and Saturday 11am – 5pm
- **Gallery Contact:** (07) 3846 0642 or info@onespacegallery.com.au

Opinion Fatigue marks another turn in the wide-ranging practice of Queensland conceptual artist Sebastian Moody. In this new body of work, he fuses his love of modern painting, language, and meaning. These paintings continue in the tradition of 1960s and '70s Australian concrete poetry, which used mechanical and commercial applications of text to expand possibilities for artmaking. Unlike Moody's previous text works where the meaning of the words is central to the concept, each work problematises our logical understanding of language by moving away from poetry and closer towards abstract expressionism.

While Moody's paintings clearly reference concrete poetry, they focus less on language and sound, and more on the shapes of the punctuation, letters and clusters that they make. There is a desire to 'read' the paintings by grouping and omitting parts of the text. These clusters or 'constellations' of text that occupy the plane instead of fields of colour and brushstrokes are reminiscent of the sparse gestural scribbles of Antoni Tàpies or Cy Twombly. The paintings also carry something of the strict, rule-based processes of conceptualism. Designed in Microsoft Word, they utilise the inherent flatness and simplicity of the word processing software to expose the finite possibilities of the grid. Each point on the grid is an option to assign—or not assign—a single piece of data. This mechanical gambling aesthetic contradicts the painting's 'expressionism' and, like Fluxus artists tossing coins to make the broken and solid lines of the I Ching, reveals the random esoteric structures of the universe through chance.

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Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

Sebastian Moody's artworks draw on words in their presentation and aesthetic. His use of ambiguity and multiple meanings prompt the viewer to consider both what we think and why. Born in Sydney in 1979, Moody currently lives and works in Brisbane where he completed a Bachelor of Visual Arts at QUT (2001) and a Master of Museum Studies at The University of Queensland (2009).

Moody has been creating artworks in the public realm since 2002. His KEEP THE SUNSHINE (2015) farewells departing travellers from Brisbane International Airport and THE MORE I THINK ABOUT IT THE BIGGER IT GETS (2009) defines a tunnel in the Fortitude Valley.

His art provides opportunities for philosophical contemplation in busy urban environments. These commissioned works respond to their physical context and are sufficiently memorable to stay with the viewer. Equal parts gravitas and humour, his text is always concise and digestible. Offering statements that challenge as they reassure, Moody nudges his audience into a critical awareness of self—one that, in its honesty, cannot help but acknowledge an individual point of view that is unique in its construction and, yet, essentially common in its discursive origins.

Moody's artworks have appeared in swimming pools, personal advertisements, kitchen splashbacks, on hang gliders and banners at music festivals, inner city billboards, and as multi-storey public projections. His practice also includes relational experiments such as converting gallery spaces into bars and focus groups, working with cafes to have staff sign and number the coffees they serve, and 'loaning' his identity to an unemployed man.

Moody's projects have appeared at the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art (Brisbane), Institute of Modern Art (Brisbane), Brisbane International Airport, New York Art Book Fair (New York), Queensland Performing Arts Centre (Brisbane), Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (Sydney), Splendour in the Grass (Byron Bay), Next Wave Festival 2008 (Melbourne), Bus Projects (Melbourne), Firstdraft (Sydney), VCA Margaret Lawrence Gallery (Melbourne), Tin Sheds Gallery (University of Sydney), Melbourne Art Book Fair, Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts (Melbourne), Bundaberg Arts Centre (Queensland), Museum of Brisbane, The Goodwill Bridge (Brisbane), QUT Art Museum (Brisbane), UQ Art Museum (Brisbane), and Southbank Parklands (Brisbane).

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ESSAY

For *Opinion Fatigue*, Sebastian Moody has produced a series of monochromatic voids punctuated by sparse bouquets of typographic symbols. Very occasionally, a lone word appears. Created via a playful navigation of a Microsoft Word document, the scatological constellations recall the all-over compositions of mid-century avant-garde painting—the canvases of Arshile Gorky, Jackson Pollock or Mark Tobey. Adhering to the rigid verticality imposed by digital technology, the typographic forms are all right-side up: a submission to the grid of culture, but one that doesn’t abandon chaos.

On one canvas, the word *rome* appears in lower-case Work Sans font. A neo-Grotesque typeface, the style derives from sans-serif variations of the eighteenth century. These were titled *Grotesque* due to their being perceived as offensive affronts to their more ornate Roman-inspired predecessors. On another canvas, loosely framed with a little dipper-like formation of colons and semi-colons, a tilde, and several exclamation marks, the word *feather* appears in italicised Times New Roman. Perhaps inadvertent, this typographic choice might serve as a subtle dig at Stanley Morison, the typographer who designed the font in the 1930s. Though he eventually relented, Morison loathed italics. He believed they should be abandoned due to their disruptive influence on the flow of continuous text. Indeed, his typography was created for efficiency: to maximise the number of words that could fit on a page while maintaining an easily readable typeface. Letters, he argued, should “neither be very ‘different’ nor very ‘jolly’”.¹

When written in the curly font, *feather* almost teases the semiotic status of the word as a signifier, blurring the distinction between symbol and icon. In its italic form, the *f* both ascends and descends—extending from the typographic baseline in both directions. On its own, the *f* might resemble the arch of a thin, free-floating feather or a quill. In the word itself, the flick of the italicised *f* corresponds with the downy tufts at the base of a contour feather. The midline carried by the horizontal strikes of the *f* and the

t correspond to the feather’s shaft, while the voluminous swirls of the *e*, *a*, and *r*, and the offshoots of the ascending letters *t* and *h*, echo the deshelled vane of a plumule. Indeed, italics create *feathery* words: words that operate as decorative plumage, indicating a title or differentiating spoken words within a text, signalling their light, ephemeral quality. As Morison feared, italics *ruffle* text, giving it literal and figurative texture.

A close observation of the canvases in *Opinion Fatigue* reveals barely perceptible bleeds, delicately feathering the edges of the elaborately stencilled white symbols: a detail that betrays their painterly status. To my mind, this painted typeface echoes techno-minimalist aesthetics, and the merging of traditional and futuristic materials and motifs exemplified by wooden digital clocks with subtle LED displays, glitched textiles, and touchscreen digital tablets with rough-textured screens resembling paper that converts handwritten text to Word documents. These gimmicky consumer products exemplify the contemporary emphasis on minimising the sensory disjunction between technology and organic textures and gestures. They cultivate domestic environments free of the aggressively sterile utility of appliances, instead favouring technologies that are covertly integrated, wireless, unseen, voice-activated or remotely controlled, an allegory of the inextricable and pervasive influence of technology today—the omnipresence of surveillance capitalism, data mining, and the concurrent hyperawareness of self-presentation mediated by clicks and keystrokes.

Concurrent with *Opinion Fatigue*, Moody’s work occupies the Open Studio—a space showcasing projects by contemporary artists in the Queensland Art Gallery | Gallery of Modern Art complex. Moody has decorated the floorspace with large typographic symbols. A pair of brackets forms an open oval as the centrepiece. The room is walled with mirrors. Furnishing the reflective light-filled space are ottoman benches that recall the shape of orange slices. The arrangement, and the orange-slice shapes, are a playful reference to *Orange Event no. 3* (1963), a Fluxus artwork by

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Bengt af Klintberg gifted to Queensland Art Gallery in the 1990s by Francesco Conz. In this conceptual piece, participants are asked to arrange the orange slices in a row—an act that transforms a spherical object into a line, imbuing an everyday gesture with creative possibility. In Moody’s large plush rendering, the arrangement takes on a new scale and interactive potential.

The plush seats also resemble pillowy renderings of round brackets. The gentle curve of the syntactical symbol echoed by the seat offers a similar promise of containment—a punctuation of the space and psychological suggestion of intimacy. Notably, in their malleable arrangement, these 3D brackets rarely face each other to form a closed pair, suggesting an infinite openness to deeper contemplation, or the impossibility of the clean containment of ideas. Upon entry to Moody’s Zen waiting room, visitors are invited to push a button to receive a freshly printed, machine-generated four-word poem, as if printing a ticket at a transit station. But there’s no obvious external factor to punctuate time spent here, only Moody’s invitation to reflect.

The machine-generated poems in the Open Studio space comprise four words printed list-like. This minimal composition has been used by Moody before, albeit in different configurations. In his 2020 exhibition *Pause*, Moody presented a series of paintings displaying disjointed words increasing in size as the stanza descended. Appropriating the format of the Snellen eye chart, a device used to measure visual acuity, Moody questions what is seen and unseen, and how the material manifestations of words—their arrangement, and the space they take up—helps determine meaning and interpretation.

Reflecting on his invention of Times New Roman, Morison speculated what William Morris may have said of the innovation:

As a new face it should, by the grace of God and the art of man, have been broad and open, generous and ample; instead, by the vice of Mammon and the misery of the machine, it is bigoted and narrow, mean and puritan.²

This imagined retort captures Morison’s utilitarian posturing against the conjured ideals of the socialist figure of the Arts and Crafts movement. Though the reign of tightly spaced Times New Roman has been compromised by the digital age, where space is ample in the infinite virtual landscape, the mean and puritan misery of the machine has returned in other ways. Moody’s 2020 series came at the close of a decade where—aided by social media and its reductive, gimmicky prose—language became a battleground for everyday people. A sublime over-ascrption of power was afforded to words, while stiflingly literal interpretation eclipsed the potential gulf between speech and action, the complexities of context, and the traps of rhetorical dogma.

In *Opinion Fatigue*, Moody has largely abandoned words for typographical symbols and punctuation marks—marks that give order to written language. They help shape meaning, provide context, and order ideas. In internet speak, which favours directness and sloganistic simplicity, these details have been gradually jettisoned, though they return in the chaos of coding, password fodder, or emoticons created via typographic approximations of iconic signs. Even in the most inelegant font, these free-floating symbols possess an alluring minimal aesthetic and degree of ambiguous creative potential, liberated from the rigidity of didactic meaning-making.

Tara Heffernan

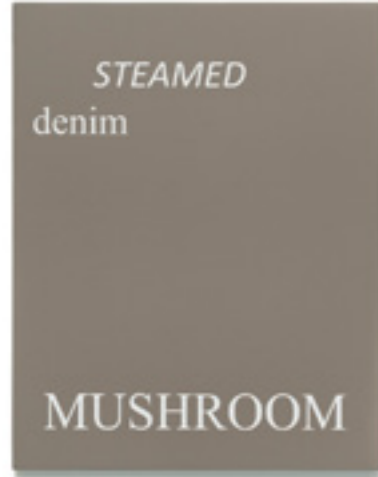
Tara Heffernan is a blind art historian. She is currently completing a PhD (Art History) at the University of Melbourne on the work of postwar Italian artist Piero Manzoni.

¹ Stanley Morison, *First Principles of Typography* (1936: reis., London: Cambridge University Press, 1967), 8.

² Stanley Morison, *A Tally of Types* (1953: reis., London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 107.

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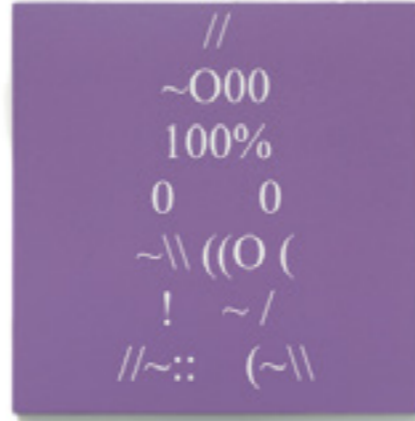
Sebastian Moody
Steamed mushroom, 2022
Acrylic on board, 51 x 40 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (study 3), 2022
Acrylic on board, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (study 2), 2022
Acrylic on board, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

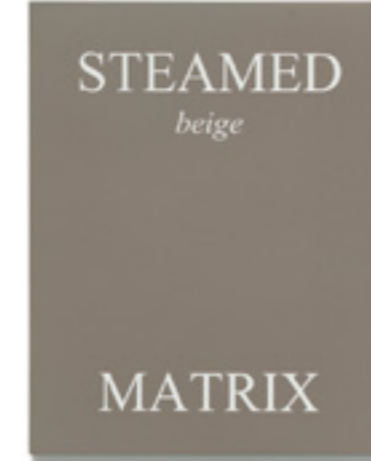
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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (myselfffff), 2022
Acrylic on board, 60 x 45 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
Beige Matrix, 2022
Acrylic on board, 51 x 40 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
Fatigue Opinion, 2022
Acrylic on board, 76 x 65 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (va.se), 2022
Acrylic on board, 60 x 45 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (study 1), 2022
Acrylic on board, 30.5 x 30.5 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.



Sebastian Moody
(vase), 2022
Acrylic on board, 51 x 40 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

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Sebastian Moody
Constellation (rome), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 60 x 45 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

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Sebastian Moody
Constellation (untitled), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 60 x 45 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery



Artwork Detail: Sebastian Moody,
Constellation (rome), 60 x 45 cm.
Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image
courtesy of the artist and Onespace

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (rhyme smoke), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 100 x 100 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (chain wave paper spell), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 100 x 100 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery.

rhyme smoke

Artwork Detail: Sebastian Moody,
Constellation (rome), 60 x 45 cm.
Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image
courtesy of the artist and Onespace

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (black feather), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 120 x 120 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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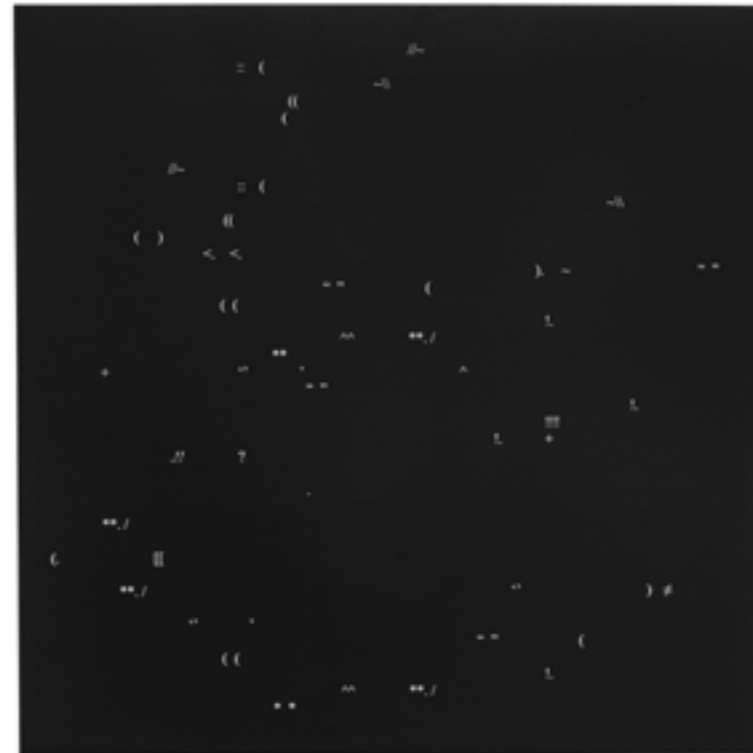


Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (flower moooooon), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 120 x 120 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (untitled) 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 120 x 120 cm

Photograph: Joe Ruckli. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (db 69), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 120 x 120 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery



Artwork Detail: Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (soft australia), 2022
Acrylic on Marine Plywood, 180 x 120 cm
Photo: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the
artist and Onespace Gallery.

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (citrus steam), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 180 x 120 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (world peace taste), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 180 x 120 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (smooth mammal), 2022
Acrylic on marine plywood, 180 x 120 cm

Photograph: Louis Lim. Image courtesy of the artist and Onespace Gallery

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Sebastian Moody
Opinion Fatigue (soft australia), 2022
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+61 7 3846 0642

Tues to Fri: 10am - 6pm, Sat: 11am - 5pm

Gallery Director, John Stafford: john@onespace.com.au

Gallery Director, Jodie Cox: jodie@onespace.com.au

Gallery Contact: info@onespace.com.au

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