

# photoaccess

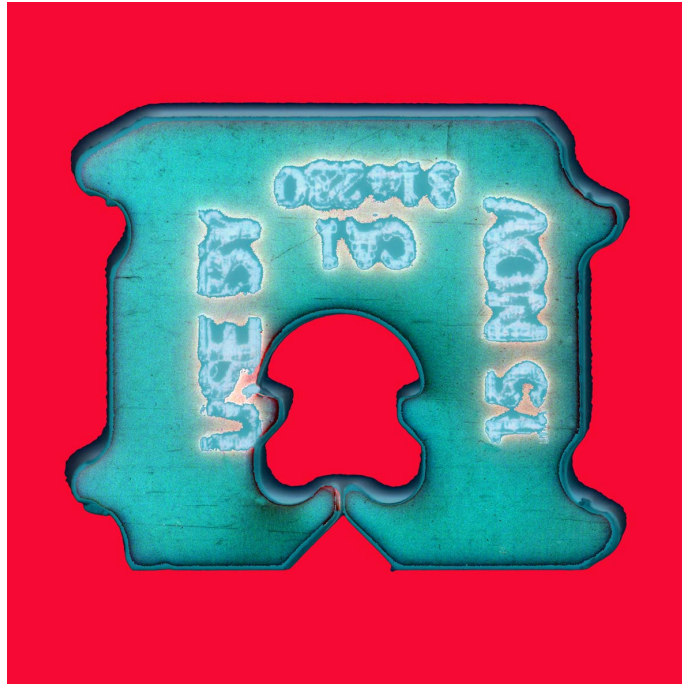
Manuka Arts Centre, an ACT Government arts facility  
HUW DAVIES GALLERY  
1–19 September 2005

## Tag

Tony Stewart

**Tag** n. a label providing identification or giving other information

**Meta Tag** n. a hidden label intended to lure a search engine



The old red tag series #1, **Untitled**, March 2005

*Tag*, Sasha Grishin

When did the ubiquitous use-by date plastic tag, employed to fasten plastic bags with perishable produce and found in every supermarket, first appear? I don't know, but it is a modern invention. Although it is examined closely by most of us on an almost daily basis, it is also taken for granted and it is often overlooked. Like the plastic bags themselves, the tag is accepted as a necessity, even if it adds to global pollution.

Tony Stewart is a self-taught artist who over a number of years has developed a fascination with this plastic tag, both as a symbol for globalisation and as a metaphor for a window into art and into different cultures. His initial attraction to its shape, the strange Greek with a key hole in the middle, led to experiments with seriality. Tags were arranged like postage stamps in an album, where the slightest variation could lead to abrupt changes in the created patterns.

Subsequently he started to digitally scan in the tag shape with its encoded emblems of date and serial number and then through Adobe Photoshop he manipulated its content and the surrounding colour fields. The tag, which was previously a minor still life object, now became a potent presence, a loaded image which operated on many different levels. John Gage's writings on colour and culture was one point of departure, Stewart's own travels was another, as well as I suspect his training in biological sciences in which he received a PhD in 1979.

This exhibition, which presents about two and a half years work, consists of three intimately interrelated series of images: *the old red tag series*, *hidden worlds* and *different realities*. While the tag shape is common to all three, the intent and purpose of the prints changes.

In the *old red tag series*, which Tony Stewart describes as consisting of 'primal tags', where the means have been restricted to form, scale and colour, an artistic statement is formulated with an absolutely minimal number of props. To see the humble red bread tag blown up to a scale of 66.5 x 66.5 cm, or alternatively 24 x 24 cm, a strategy possibly adopted from Pop Art, makes the familiar appear as unfamiliar.

The tag whose only purpose for existence is its function as an indicator of the expiry date and its use in the sealing of the plastic bag, has been rendered functionless, its common everyday banality has been reassessed as a symbol in an artwork. It appears now as a signifier of a different sort of reality, one of ephemeral objects and transient technologies.

Realised either as digital inkjet prints on Hahnemühle photo rag paper or as digital Lambda prints, the images command a considerable sense of presence, particularly when presented boldly articulated against vividly coloured backgrounds. Almost like variations on a theme, the artist subverts the severity of the image by slipping in either specific designs including clouds, floral designs, Campbell's soup cans (in homage to Warhol) or swimming pools (in homage to Hockney), onto the shape of the tag, or introduces radical changes to the brightly coloured and variously patterned backgrounds. The tag gains the status of a monumental emblem—like a technological totem.

The three prints of the *hidden worlds* series are generally twice or three times the size of works in the previous series and thrive on the idea of layered complexity. Science, technology and imagination meet and collide building up a complex palimpsest, where the viewer grows aware of the existence of different sorts and levels of reality. This idea is taken further in the *different realities* series, where the tags move into complex patterns as in *Genetic Drift 1* or into actual three dimensional space in *Louvres 4*, somewhat precariously arranged on the Perspex panes of an actual louvred window permitting changes in the perspective of observation.



The old red tag series #78, **Pool 2**, July 2005

Tony Stewart was trained as a scientist, and in his approach to art making there is something akin to that of a clinical investigation. It is an obsessive approach with a certain predetermined logic, where bit by bit he furthers his exploration. Although it is an enterprise of great seriousness and he does engage with broad questions of global universality and cultural specificity, the work is also laced with a great deal of humour. On a rather basic level through the auspices of the everyday supermarket expiry date tag he invites us to examine the different levels of reality which each one of us experiences in our daily lives.

Professor Grishin is Head, Art History at the Australian National University, and an author, critic and commentator on the visual arts



Different Realities #4, **Notes for a new reality 1—Star Wars Program module V—'Preemption of proto-refugees from space' or 'Kill 'em before they become a problem'**, August 2005

## List of works

		\$
1	<p><b>Hidden worlds #1</b>  <b>Untitled</b>, July 2005            Digital Pigment Inkjet Print on Roughtex paper            Image size: 98 x 98 cm; paper size: 114 x 114 cm            Edition of 25; artist's proof            (Patan double ikat cloth sample provided by Claudia Hyles)</p>	1350
	<p><b>The old red tag series</b>            Digital Pigment Inkjet Print on Hahnemühle Photo Rag paper            Image size: 66.5 x 66.5 cm; paper size: 118.9 x 84.1 cm            Edition of 25; artist's proof</p>	
2	<p>The old red tag series #3  <b>Untitled</b>, July 2005</p>	985
3	<p>The old red tag series #1  <b>Untitled</b>, March 2005</p>	985
4	<p>The old red tag series #5  <b>Untitled</b>, April 2005</p>	985
5	<p><b>Hidden worlds #2</b>  <b>Untitled</b>, May 2005            Lambda Print            152 x 114 cm            Edition of 25; 2/25</p>	1150
6	<p><b>Hidden worlds #3</b>  <b>Fallon Days</b>, July 2005            Lambda Print, wood, fabric, ceramic, paint            Image size: 182 x 72.5 cm            Artist's proof</p>	1450
	<p><b>The old red tag series</b>            Digital Lambda Print, 24 x 24 cm            Edition of 25; 2/25</p>	
7	<p>The old red tag series #46  <b>Tie 2</b>, February 2005</p>	225*
8	<p>The old red tag series #47  <b>Tie 3</b>, February 2005</p>	225*
9	<p>The old red tag series #58  <b>Snowy 5</b>, February 2005</p>	225*
10	<p>The old red tag series #30  <b>Windows</b>, February 2005</p>	225*
	* Framed price \$305	
11	<p><b>Different realities #4</b>  <b>Notes for a new reality 1—Star Wars Program module V—‘Preemption of proto-refugees from space’ or ‘Kill ’em before they become a problem’</b>, August 2005            Lambda Print            28 x 23 cm            Edition of 25; 2/25</p>	300 <sup>+</sup>
12	<p><b>Different realities #2</b>  <b>Louvres 3</b>, August 2003            Lambda Print            30 x 21 cm            Edition of 25; 2/25</p>	300 <sup>+</sup>
	<sup>+</sup> Framed price \$400	
13	<p><b>Different realities #3</b>  <b>Louvres 4</b>, August 2005            Lambda Prints, wood, metal louvres, paint, Perspex, glass            106.5 x 66 x 16 cm            (frame from a paddock by Chris Elford; louvre window from an O'Connor monocrete courtesy Judy Pearce)</p>	4500

**The old red tag series**

Digital Lambda Print, 24 x 24 cm  
Edition of 25; 2/25

14	The old red tag series #66 <b>Sky 24</b> , May 2005	225*
15	The old red tag series #59 <b>Sky 17</b> , May 2005	225*
16	The old red tag series #65 <b>Sky 23</b> , May 2005	225*
17	The old red tag series #78 <b>Pool 2</b> , July 2005	225*
18	The old red tag series #79 <b>Pool 3</b> , July 2005	225*
19	The old red tag series #14 <b>Sky 2</b> , February 2005	225*
20	The old red tag series #70 <b>Sky 28</b> , May 2005	225*
21	The old red tag series #28 <b>Sky 16</b> , February 2005	225*

\* Framed price \$305

22	<b>Different realities #1</b> <b>Genetic Drift 1</b> , July 2004 Lambda Print 152 x 114 cm Edition of 25; 2/25	1150
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**The old red tag series**

Digital Lambda Print, 24 x 24 cm  
Edition of 25; 2/25

23	The old red tag series #9 <b>Campbell's Soup 2</b> , April 2005	225*
24	The old red tag series #10 <b>Campbell's Soup 3</b> , April 2005	225*
25	The old red tag series #11 <b>Campbell's Soup 4</b> , April 2005	225*
26	The old red tag series #74 <b>Still Life 2</b> , May 2005	225*
27	The old red tag series #75 <b>Still Life 3</b> , May 2005	225*
28	The old red tag series #39 <b>Graffiti 9</b> , February 2005	225*
29	The old red tag series #32 <b>Graffiti 2</b> , February 2005	225*
30	The old red tag series #31 <b>Graffiti 1</b> , February 2005	225*

\* Framed price \$305