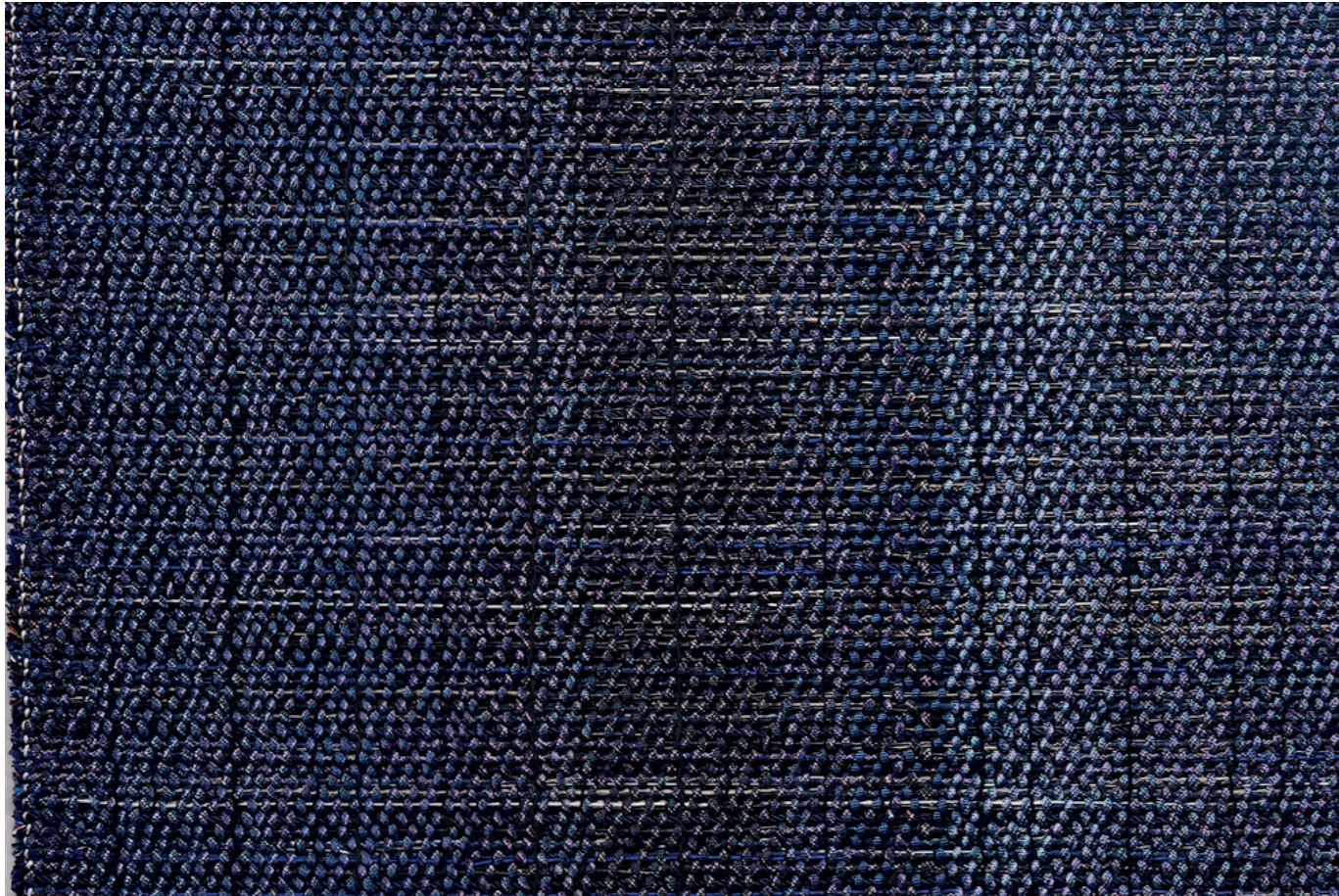




DANI MARTI

Still life in yellow, steel and mandarins



Dani Marti is an unconventional storyteller. His videos, weavings and assembled sculptures are often described as stories or portraits, but give few details about their subjects. They are essentially abstract, and evoke personal identities and states of being by means of sensation.

In Marti's *Story of I am* series, tightly woven surfaces of cord and rope present the barest frame of narrative reference. Unable to project forward or read into them, we engage with the textures of the materials and the variations of the weave. Drawing on a minimalist method of reduction, Marti eschews easy visual cues to tease out a specific sensory response from us. He likens these woven surfaces to 'skins', as if he intends that we experience them as we do bodies – as active, tactile sites of repulsion and desire. Marti suggests that our story is not an objective one, but a dense history of invisibly interwoven sensation inscribed on the body.





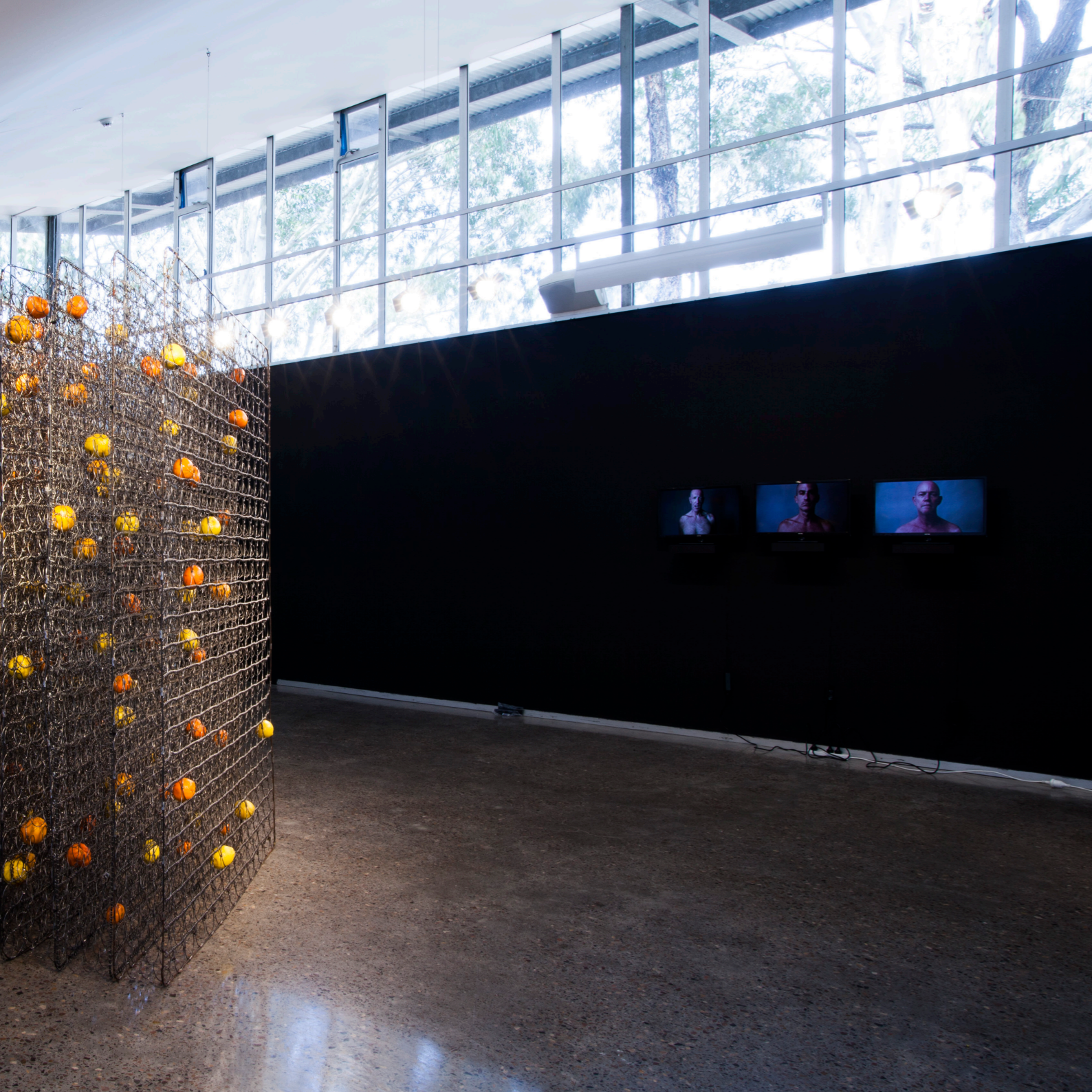
The primacy of sensation is explored in the video project *Notes for Bob*, which documents the intimate encounters between the artist and a gay blind man from New York. Deprived of vision, Bob is sexually gratified by touch and especially by voice. He explains that for him “people are their voices” and his attractions to men focus on the individual pitch and tone of a voice. In *Notes for Bob*, Marti tenderly holds his subject and sings for him, while the camera focuses on the expression of pleasure showing on Bob’s face. The viewer senses that this is an exceptional moment of intimacy for Bob, who would rarely share his unusual sexual reality with another. Made in response to this experience is Marti’s *Black Sun* sculpture. This 3.5 metre orb reflects light out of a concentration of dark matter. Constructed out of glass beads and corner cube reflectors, the idea of light out of darkness became a metaphor for connectivity for Marti, as he came to understand and share in the ecstasies of Bob’s world.



Long, projected vocal sounds especially appeal to Bob, and as part of the extended project Marti filmed and recorded 23 men singing. While Bob was given the recording for his own private use, Marti’s audience watches and listens to the singers perform on screens in the gallery. We clearly see their faces and chests, but curiously focus on the distinctness of each voice. Marti gently encourages us to enter into Bob’s sensual universe and experience the fullness of an individual through their voice.

A significant portion of *Notes For Bob* shows Bob naked and prostrate on his single bed. The narrowness of the bed is a reminder of his limited opportunities for sexual contact. The viewer can feel the vast and sorrowful sweep of solitude that is likely to make up his days. This adds subtle poignancy to Marti’s specially commissioned installation





Still Life in Yellow, Steel and Mandarins, which comprises 17 steel framed bed mattresses, upended and positioned to form a square. The mattresses have been stripped of their padding and we look straight through their skeletal voids.

The material casings that once carried traces of bodies are gone. This is a notable difference to the impenetrable skins in the *Story of I Am* weavings. With this installation, Marti gives us a view into an interior, and taken as a whole, the closed arrangement of mattresses appears to stand in for the shell of the body. Marti entwines the subject of the bed – that site of our most intense intimacies – with the very idea of self. He suggests that our experiences of other bodies, realized or fantasized, sexual or merely affectionate, can form the structure of who we are.

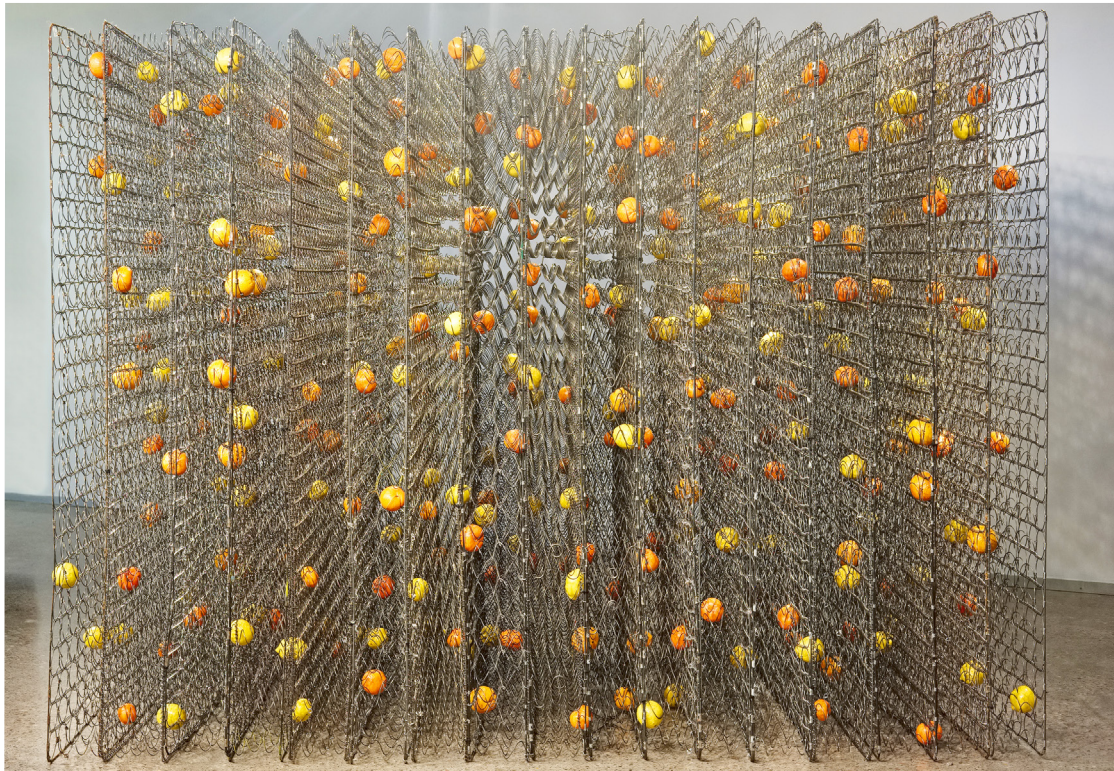
Deposited into the coils of the frames are lemons and mandarins. Their bright yellows and oranges hover like planets in a miniature cosmos. Marti has left them to decay for the duration of the exhibition, recalling *Vanitas* still-life painting of the 16th and 17th centuries. Literally translated as ‘emptiness’ in Latin, *Vanitas* symbolically refers to the futility of earthly goods and the transience of life. Like our own bodies, these fruits have skin and flesh and seed, and lose their allure with time.

Emptiness seems an odd theme for Marti to take up, interested as he is, in the embodiment of vitality in material form. However, central to all Marti’s work is the idea there is no such thing as a durable and intact portrait. We are as mercurial as we are briefly incandescent, and we only exist fully in moments of intimate connection: the obliterating beauty of a voice, the tender press of flesh.

Scott Millington

October 2016





FRONT COVER

Still life in yellow, steel and mandarins
2016
mattress frames, mandarins, lemons
202 x 150 x 275 cm

BACK COVER

Still life in yellow, steel and mandarins
2016
mattress frames, mandarins, lemons
202 x 150 x 275 cm

PAGE 1

The story of I am (notes in blue and indigo blue) 2016
polyester, nylon, leather, suede, sisal
on aluminium frame
170 x 170 x 6 cm

PAGE 2

ROOM VIEW
Black Sun
2016

The story of I am (notes in blue and indigo blue)
2016

PAGES 3 & 4

VIDEO STILLS AND ROOM VIEW
Notes for Bob
2012-16
8 screen video installation

2:1, 5k uhd video
This project has been assisted by the
Australian Government through the Australia
Council, its arts funding and advisory body.

PAGES 5 & 6

ROOM VIEW AND DETAIL

Still life in yellow, steel and mandarins
2016

Notes for Bob - black wall

Photographs by Jon Reid, Dani Marti and Alberto Gallego.

Dani Marti is represented by Arc One Gallery, Melbourne, Dominik Mersch Gallery, Sydney and Greenaway Art Gallery, Adelaide.