

Raafat Ishak: recipes for aversion and strategy

Work in progress #6

This survey of Raafat Ishak's art spans both ground floor galleries as well as two external sites. The exhibition distinguishes the oblique and subtle motifs of Ishak's work and the idiosyncratic approach that emerged early in his career, as early as his first solo show, *And government*, at 200 Gertrude Street in 1995. Selected works from that exhibition and other series show us Ishak's interest in repetition and regularity, his questioning of ideas of beauty, identity and civics, and his use of curious titles that communicate a sophisticated but ambiguous tone.

Recipes for aversion and strategy gives us the rare opportunity to consider nearly twenty years in Australian art from the perspective of an artist who emerged in Melbourne in the early 1990s. Ishak has been involved in many of the activities characteristic of his generation: artist-run initiatives, collaborations with friends, site-specific projects, small-scale painting, art that comes off the stretcher onto walls and floor.

For this exhibition, Raafat Ishak has responded specifically to the architecture of the museum. Special projects include a reconfigured installation that was originally shown in *Correction*, a solo exhibition at a small artist-run space, Lovers, in 1999. A site-specific work is installed on the rear south-west corner of the museum's façade, and another, a collaborative work, occupies the basement windows visible from Swanston Street.

Recipes for aversion and strategy suggests that Ishak is not an artist who would necessarily agree that contemporary art practices can be readily unpacked for broad consumption. Rather, he might propose that art is part of a constantly shifting process that takes account of the political and cultural circumstances of governments and institutions as much as individuals.