



PLASTIC, WATER & THE NEW WHITE CUBE

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PINNACLES GALLERY

An exhibition of magnificent new installation works by Ayelet Anush, Laurence Backer, Jane Hawkins, Candace Miles, John Robertson, Wim de Vos, Julie Wilson-Foster and Corrie Wright. Curated by Pinnacles Gallery.



Stephen Naylor

Bringing Together the Diverse Elements of Nature and Culture

Meaning and knowledge open debates that go on forever, the name Thuringowa may not as I had assumed be an Indigenous word with a poetic meaning, but rather a historic link to the German province 'Thüringen' attributed to the 19th century surveyor John Steiglitz. In a contemporary sense though, the name Thuringowa is associated with a dynamic, youthful region growing at a rapid pace embracing the power of technology and looking towards the future. The Riverway complex seeks to recognise the new demographic of young families and couples relocating to this region, seeking opportunities but also wanting to be part of a cultural network. In acknowledgement of this, the newly relocated Pinnacles Gallery has staged *Plastic, Water & the New White Cube*, the inaugural exhibition that establishes dialogues with contemporary art, the community and this vast new space.

Contemporary art is very much a conundrum; many of the general public dismiss the crude gestures of artistic expression as childlike or lacking sophistication or at least inferior to the art of the past. Despite this antipathy, most major art galleries now engage the public in a range of experiences that deal with issues that have always been central to artists' roles, namely the articulation of one's own space. As this city grows under the pressures of new development it seems appropriate for artists to render a series of perspectives of 'where we are' and 'how our potential future may evolve'. The work may not resemble the glorious portraits of Rembrandt or the glowing skies of Turner, or even the majestic gums of a Hans Heysen, what it does do though, is to speak to us about issues of our times and our space.

The new Pinnacles Gallery is set as a White Cube of modernity, it is designed to allow maximum flexibility and not remain a static space to be periodically re-dressed with pretty objects of art. This space is active, a nexus for engagement, the curator and artists need to prepare themselves for the challenge of each exhibition. Contemporary galleries must do more than entertain; they must confront, invigorate and extend the audience.

Plastic, Water & the New White Cube is not designed to just show skills and quality objects, each work has a strong conceptual premise that addresses the cerebral notion of plastic and water. Think for a moment of what these two materials have in common. The glistening surface, liquid, permeable, glimmering, active, enveloping, concealing, containing, fluid, translucent ... the list goes on! Water is our life blood, an essential element in our survival. Plastic is often seen as a pejorative term, associated with the sham, artificial, cheap and lacking sophistication. To bring these counter terms together activates a wonderful engagement of concepts, materials, practices and skills.

The curators Louise Allgood and Anthony Edwards have selected eight artists to broaden our perceptions of primal and modern materials in a context of time, place and space. ***Plastic, Water & the New White Cube*** exposes us to the full range of mediums, forms and technologies that sculptors and other visual artists use as they offer alternative solutions and observations on contemporary space.

The artists have proposed a range of works that address the stated objectives as outlined by the curators. Corrie Wright has engaged the public through a series of anecdotes that generate 'tears' at a personal, local or even at a global level. Her work attempts to generate a poetic interplay between words and surfaces allowing the audience to fill in the gaps with their own experiences.

The aquatic theme is also taken up by Candice Miles as she laments the changing and controlling of the natural flows of the troubled Ross River. Miles projects her sentiments in the form of tears (interspersed with luscious flora), as they flow to form a metaphoric river, perhaps more akin to Dreaming Stories that we hear from our Indigenous communities. Maybe our bonds of true community become stronger through the recognition of a more metaphysical notion of land and natural phenomena.

New technology dominates much of contemporary art practice and artists of all persuasions embrace the power of the silicon chip. John Robertson utilises the moving image through digital video as an index of the cycles of the river tides and micro fauna of the Ross River. The use of micro-macro depictions of the space opens the dialogue again posing the beauty and poignancy of the aquatic. Projected images unite the audience and pose questions of permanency of the art object, reminiscent of the Earth Art debates of the 1970s.

The fragility of life is explored in the series of human sized cocoon like structures by Jane Hawkins. In this narrative work Hawkins posed questions of borders and parameters that can define space, but also shield it in some fashion. The mediums are chosen with a great deal of material comprehension, the elasticity of latex corresponds with water tension and also with the properties of plastic yet the other materials: sticks, hessian, fibreglass and eggshells all hold symbolic meanings that relate to our past and our memories. The analogy of metamorphosis must also be seen as quintessential in the work.

Perhaps the great beauty of both water and plastic is the translucency that they hold. Wim de Vos seeks to acknowledge both mediums' potential in his graphic interplay with space and the illusion of the third dimension. He exploits the narrative potential as the Perspex panels unfold into a rendering of the tropical environment with its lines and zones of vegetation and shoreline. Light too unifies the unbound book, as it rests in its aquatic pool in a blue glow.

Julie Wilson-Foster immerses her practice in the dialogue between nature and our modern throw away culture. Here she seeks to integrate the symbol of the leaf, as a life generating feature of the tree, yet its photosynthetic capacity is nullified by the recycled white plastic that it is created from. The additional use of digital technology in the form of a DVD projection brings a poetic quality to the work reinforcing the natural cycles that exist in nature and how change is inevitable 'but care must remain the utmost concern'.

Laurence Backer hones in on a similar sense of immediate gratification that is central in our contemporary existence. The three tree-like structures emit a range of sounds stimulating the senses but ultimately challenging the audience to stop and focus on what other phenomena are present when we take time to contemplate the whole environment. The audience is prompted to reflect on the transience of the spaces we inhabit, maybe to be cognisant of their changing nature.

Time can be an index of more than hours, minutes and seconds, it holds memories good and bad, like miners in an air pocket they become disembodied from real time. Ayelet Anush recognises this in her transient statements that disappear as we view them. Anush literally encodes these ice columns with inner secrets that she seeks to discard. The artist plays with the symbolic metaphors of the diminishing columns and the boat; both defy reality yet speak eloquently about their fragile status.

Plastic, Water & the New White Cube at first seems incongruous yet as these works explore each facet they become completely integrated, just as the Riverway project attempts to bring together the diverse elements of nature and culture.

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