

Intimate and Reflective: PUBLIC/PRIVATE: Tumatanui/Tumataiti. The 2nd Auckland Triennial

Bigger than the Biennale of Adelaide but smaller than Sydney, the 2nd Auckland Triennial was a coherent show that began with a sound theme of Public/Private and pursued it through a series of sub themes such as social space, security, mapping, intimacy and corporality, personal self exploration, and public issues like technology. The show utilised four main spaces, the largest being the Auckland New Gallery which held the majority of the works in the two levels of the old telephone exchange. The space was sensational for this type of show, capitalising on the small intimate spaces.

On the first level the works seemed somewhat esoteric; we were greeted by Lauren Lysaght's installation featuring race horse names from the bookmakers betting rings made into symbolic models derived from traditional Pākeha fairy tales.¹ Adjacent to Lysaght's *Trifecta*, Lorna Simpson's engagement with the racial and gendered roles of the body was played out in an ironic large black and white LCD projection. *Call Waiting* made in 1997, presented a scenario of telephone conversations that all become overlaid by the call waiting function. The humour and subtle gendered nature of these conversations initially confused the audience but eventually (as with much of Simpson's work) the narrative was revealed in all of its darkness.

Darkness pervaded the psychological probing in Kathy Temins' montage of video stills and grainy footage of cavorting dressed up Koala's engaging in play and intimacy, acting out zoological fantasies. John Barbour's suite of works made up of machine embroidered fabrics explored the concept of the un-made man, this was a difficult work to access without reading the catalogue essay. His exploration of power, conflict and the challenges of society that result in destitution, criminal actions or institutionalization created an extremely dower work especially with the spasmodic appearances of the word "correctional services" revealed on sections of the fabric.

After moving through these discrete rooms most of the works were presented in much larger spaces where pieces were hung adjacent or along side each other. Some of the larger works like Mark Adams large C type photographic prints of tattooed figures in domestic spaces worked in beautifully with the theme of public/private. Other smaller intimate pieces by Lonnie Hutchinson and Sangeeta Sandrasegar provided the viewers with the opportunities to dwell on subtle reflective works, but were easily overlooked in their thoroughfare location.

On initial viewing the ground floor provided a range of culturally diverse works with a fairly loose connectivity with the theme; however the show really developed a significant momentum upon entering the second level in the building. At the top of the staircase was Robert Pulie's series of mirror forms creating dissymmetry through multiple reflections. Alongside of this divided-self installation were two huge colour photographs of hospital interiors by Neil Pardington. The institution-ality harked back to Foucault's work where technology and corporality meet under the veil of the clinic and bureaucratic systems. The operating theatre was filled with equipment to the point of clutter yet the image revealed a soulless empty space, de-personalised (not private), this was even more pronounced in the *Post-Mortem Room #1*.

In the adjacent space, Margaret Dawson's installation of black and white photographic images revealed multiples of appropriated staged famous historical photographs. In particular her

¹ Zeplin, P. (2004). Private Night[mares]. PUBLIC/PRIVATE: Tumatanui/Tumataiti. Auckland, Auckland Art Gallery: 88-89.

series *All the Kings Men* explored the notion of duality of self as individuals enacted roles/poses of old portraits of either David Livingston or Bertrand Russell.

The Triennial despite its modest budget was able to draw heavily on the good name of both curators Ngāhiraka Mason (NZ) and Ewen McDonald (Aust), and the generosity of the galleries and artists themselves. In an interview with Ewen McDonald² he spoke of the intention to have a show with significant international participation and to include at least 50% of the artists from the Southern Hemisphere (NZ, Australia and South Africa). The draw card for the curators was to offer artists the opportunity a visit to Auckland and its surrounding environs in a mutual gesture of goodwill plus participation in the opening functions and the symposium.

This ploy obviously worked with artists like Laurie Anderson participating with her miniature DVD projection from 1997 *At the Shrink's*. A seemingly flippant anecdote that penetrated deeply into the raison d'être of a sub theme in the Triennial (the divided self) which revealed much about perceptual shifts and how pronounced they appear in this new century. Jenny Holzer too participated in the show with a massive banner of *THE FUTURE IS STUPID. HUMOR IS A RELEASE* hung outside the Auckland Art Gallery, this perceptive true-ism also acted a "reality check"³ in these troubled times.

The next section in the show seemed to be devoted to the sub theme of Love, Joy and Despair. Fiona Pardington presented a series of bird images along one wall and a screen based work featuring a tattoo of text based work emblazoned on a women's back, again exploring private obsessions. Unfortunately, the audio was obscured along with Senzeni Marasela ritualised doilies of Stompie Seipie by the evocative sounds of Björk in Chris Cunningham's *Art is Full of Love*. It was the intention of the Curators to implant a song in the audiences mind for them to take with them as they left the gallery,⁴ this haunting music along with the evocative robotic props and sensual animation of the two forms embracing certainly succeeded.

The sensuality of Cunningham was skewed by Polly Borland with her *The Babies* series; the fetishist fantasy of babyhood with their pale pinks and yellow costumes, toys, dummies, cots, nappies and baby powder. The accoutrements and props fail to counter the fat hairy legs, five o'clock shadows and self-conscious gaze of many of the members of this sub culture. These works of aberrance clearly fitted in with the theme of private desires.

In the next room we were greeted with Julia Morison's evocative black and white digital print on metallic paper of a solitary tree and grey background. The solitude and sublime were only challenged by the ambiguity of the title *There's too much Juice in you yet for Truth*. To the left of this work hung a series of 32 small centre fold prints, the works with their curvaceous milky frames present symmetric splayed labial forms created with some degree of technical control but also with elements of chance.

With a sense of not knowing where to look next, Teresa Margolles *Sounds of the Morgue* was one of the least visual works in the show. This did not reduce its graphic nature as we eavesdrop, through this sound installation, into the autopsy of some poor soul in Mexico City. We heard the noise of the handsaw removing the top of the cranium and then the sound of some highly viscous liquid seeping onto a metallic surface. After this Catherine Rogers black and white photographic ink jet prints of domestic interiors seemed rather innocuous despite

² Telephone interview with Ewen McDonald. 20th April 2004

³ Reality Check was the initial theme proposed by the curators to counter the first Triennial's Paradise premise.

⁴ *ibid*

the subtle beauty of representational spaces.⁵ Unfortunately the space acted more like a corridor as the audience was drawn towards the clacking 8mm projectors of Kao Chung-Li.

The Taiwanese artist was represented by two looped projections, the first explored a solitary artist painting a model WWII aeroplane that continually morphed its form on the canvas into a crucifix. The other work *The Castle* explored war/peace and birth/death in a poetic montage of animated drawings edited alongside actual filmed war footage. Underpinning the installation was an edited section of an US official discussing the virtues of war to uphold peace, intimating the withdrawal of some private rights for the public good. This work was particularly haunting in its poignancy.

Astute curatorial control positioned the work of et al. (also known as Lillian Budd and Merylyn Tweedie). I was told that there had been some controversy with the work, drawing on its dour appearance of grey trolleys and two large port-a-loo obelisk's with scrawled text asking 'why are they here?', 'who they have come for?' and 'when they will leave?'.

As a bonus the Triennial had forged an alliance with the two Auckland University Galleries broadening the potential spaces to present more site specific works. At the George Fraser Gallery, which is generally utilised by students from the ELAM School of Fine Arts, Thando Mama from South African presented a screen based work entitled *Box-In* 2003, whilst Louisa Bufardeci orchestrated a series of semi interactive mapping projects with a group of students that were planned to evolve over the duration of the Triennial.

The Gus Fisher Gallery hosted some very significant works, the first being Callum Morton's digital prints of architectural structures and his fabulous work *International Style* 1999; featuring a scaled model replica of the infamous *Farnsworth House* by Mies van der Rohe only this one lights up and screams! William Kentridge's *Ubu Tells the Truth* 1997, explored the truth commission in South Africa showing a series of animations of surveillance, power, violence and innocence. His animated drawings and strong narrative straddled fantasy, pathos, horror, comedy and drama and make his work a genre in itself. Jane & Louise Wilson from the UK had been lured to undertake a residency in Christchurch and where able to show their 1997 video installation *Stasi City*. The work employed four LCD projections into two corners which were synced together to create a chilling flow of images.

The other gem at the Gus Fisher Gallery was Yuan Goang-Ming's 1998 installation *The reasons for Insomnia*. Here we saw a stark room dimly lit with a solitary bed; by touching the bed post the LCD above the bed begins a series of harrowing projections. First the pillow rises as if it were a lung inhaling and exhaling, then a red spot grows from the foot of the bed spreading its blood taint across the white sheet and eventually over the pillow. A ripping sound pierces the room as the sheet is torn in a single slash, and then a shadow emerges from the bottom corner creeping under the sheet towards the pillow. Following this the light dims and as if a scanner is activated, a brilliant bluish tinged light moves across the sheet then back in the opposite direction. The final violation was the two dark spots that appear mid way down the sheet, they grow as the sound of crackling flames become louder then the flames begin to consume the sheet growing broader then disappearing without a trace.

The final location in the Triennial was ARTSPACE which was located about a 1 km away from the other venues at the opposite end of the city precinct. Here the Curators had chosen to

⁵ Lefebvre, H. (1991). *The Production of Space*. Oxford UK, Blackwell Publishers. Reference to symbolic space and that of the oneiric.

expose the soft underbelly of public/private aspect of social space.⁶ Big questions were being explored especially the baggage associated with suburbia as a western paradigm. Sean Snyder (USA/Germany) in his work *Shanghai Links* created a site specific video installation based on the contrived suburb (Pyongyang) that was created in Shanghai. The belief that a western suburb in this Chinese city would attract investors to spend 5-10 million dollars on a single home that was “completely western” (even to the point of shipping the components over to China in containers) was utterly flawed and is apparently now bankrupt.

The other works at ARTSPACE continued to critique relationships to place and how social spaces can be manipulated through zoning and planning regimes. Ava Seymour, Emily Mafilio and Jakob Kolding seemed to work on similar themes exploring social issues and locations such as suburbs, apartment blocks and the grunge of inner city zones (yet uncolonised by the upwardly mobile). Much of the work focused on sub-culture manifestations such as skate boarding, tattooing, porn shops, graffiti, domestic violence and the omnipresent surveillance camera. The global sense of space explored in Louisa Bufardecì' *Governing Values* 2003-4 could stand in as the epitaph for the Triennial. The reductive nature of representing the world through obscure official statistical data⁷ shifts our perceptual understanding of our spatial relationship to whole, giving the private individual only semblances of identification of who we now are.

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⁶ I am referring to the Lefebvre concept of Spatial Practice where space is conceived (experienced) as a range of discernable phenomena including buildings, town planning, commerce, and interrelationships between people and objects.

⁷ Derived from social facts from the internet Troup, C. (2004). *The Scope of Governing Values. PUBLIC/PRIVATE: Tumatanui/Tumataiti.* Auckland, Auckland Art Gallery: p 36.