

Australian Women's Art Register - Bulletin 33

Untitled Rooms - Review by Sarah Letch

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Since 1995, Carolyn Eskdale has been creating a series of sculptural works associated with various spaces and forms found within a house/interior. Previous installations have involved furniture ? pulled apart and reconstructed. This was demonstrated in London Room, an installation within the Grainger Museum, in which she constructed various screens out of aluminium and white, semi-transparent cloth. These screens were installed around a disused room within the museum, creating surrounding ?walls?, as to seal the contents within. These screens re-emerged in Eskdale's show, *Untitled Rooms*, exhibited at ACCA, 2001 and curated by Stuart Koop.

Although Eskdale has been involved in many large group exhibitions, this was a rather large solo show compared to this Melbourne-based artist's exhibitions over the past few years; 1997 and 1999 saw her work in the Moët & Chandon touring exhibition (within Australia) and several solo exhibitions at Temple Studio, Melbourne. Internationally, she has exhibited in London and Singapore.

These large screens ? now becoming a trademark of her work - dominated the gallery and were arranged throughout the space to form rooms, hallways and other spaces found within a domestic structure. It is hard to tell whether the structures are taken from actual or imagined rooms, however one common theme runs through this work ? the displacement of the familiar. These rooms and spaces are taken out of the home and constructed from screens of extremely delicate white cloth, making the rooms no longer functional. Although the absence of the body has been forced by the fragility of the materials, life is still evident in these works ? the material the screens are constructed out of sways gently as we walk past.

To the left of the entrance is a ?room? created with these same materials. This enclosed space features a rectangular structure contained within the walls ? which seems to be of a solidified fireplace ? highlighting a ?hidden? space. Around to the centre of the space is a corridor, which allows us to walk through to a room to the right of the gallery. The parallel walls of the hallway have hearth-like forms constructed within the frame

The ?room? on the right of the gallery has an entrance, allowing us to enter and be enclosed by the space. However, the interior is partially lined with grey, flocked felt ? also used for stuffing furniture. This lining continues around the room from each edge of the doorway and is just above head height to below the knees and forms a concave within the wall. Reminiscent of Joseph Beuys' installation *Plight*, the room resembles a cell or a sleeping chamber in its softness and silence. The materials used in this space are soft and tactile, however the fragility of the work stops us from relaxing into the deceptive environment. The silence within the room creates an eerie feel to the already tense and uncomfortable environment.

The tenseness held within this room is a feeling carried on throughout the exhibition. The material used on the screens seems paper thin, as though one small knock could tear a gaping hole into the work. It is very tempting to touch the material thus combining delicacy with danger. On the contrary, the weightlessness of the

fabric seems to act as a fog, enticing us to walk straight through it. However, absence of the body is a thread that runs through the entire show, the fragility of the materials prove impossible for a person to live comfortably within the space.

It is interesting to note that the material used to create the screens is dressmaker's interfacing. Paired with the use of furniture stuffing, Eskdale uses materials usually associated with the inside of objects, thus turning the inside out. In doing this, she is again exposing and giving importance to materials of no particular significance. Eskdale is revealing an interior within an interior.

The fabric fogs our vision, replicating the very nature of memory in its irrational reconstruction of events and objects ? in that we only see fragments of the whole scene, and our perception of space is distorted, not quite as it should be. However, it is Eskdale's method of veiling objects and spaces which only allude to the original. Not leaving any ?facts? or real surfaces, Eskdale's work seems to float within space, leaving it only up to our imagination of what may or may not have been there.

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