



Detail from Geoff Weary, *Faraway*, three video/photographic works, 1988-91.

**FARAWAY**

Video and photography  
by Geoff Weary  
Art Gallery of New South  
Wales, Sydney.  
1 Nov – 15 Dec 1991  
Australian Centre for  
Contemporary Art,  
Melbourne.  
10 June – 12 July, 1992

Geoff Weary's period as artist-in-residence, Tokyo, happened to coincide with the death of Emperor Hirohito. The end of the Showa era provoked a mood of national retrospection and the inevitable welter of media pastiches covering the long (1926-1989) and

controversial history of his reign. Weary's tripartite video "Faraway" and the accompanying wall panel of 21 unframed photographs, are his response to the experience of Japan under these circumstances. Back in Sydney, after manipulating and weaving together the sparse radio, film and video footage he collected in Japan, and adding some sombre classical music, he has produced a dreamy, brooding, somnolent art video.

Although the video is presented as three separate works, covering three different subjects (the kamikaze suicide pilots; the vigil of mourners at the death of the Emperor; the world of Japanese business) at three different sites (the war museum at the Yasukuni Shrine; the Imperial Palace; and the Tokyo Stock Exchange), the material is all similarly slowed down, and shrouded in mist and haze, so that the overall impression is of blurred indistinctness, a lack of definition and clarity, which can be interpreted as the product of the artist's romantic, aesthetic sensibility and/or as a statement on the unreadability of Japan.

It is no accident that the artist, as an Australian, should fix his gaze on three threatening images of Japan – the suicidal-military complex, the veneration of the Emperor, and the tentacular commercial superpower – for they are deeply

entrenched in our national psyche. But his gaze is diffuse, rather than direct, and he defuses the threat by his aesthetic strategies. It could be construed as inspired perversity to produce beautiful, dreamy images out of a spinning yen coin and the outstretched arm of a bidder at the Tokyo Stock Exchange, but the treatment of the beautiful, youthful faces of the suicide pilots borders on beatification, if not a disturbing form of necrophilia prevalent among western romantics.

The exhibition is accompanied by a most impressive catalogue, produced with the financial assistance of the Australian Film Commission. Printed in imperial purple and gold, and sheathed in a delicate white dust cover which looks like a cross between

parchment and Japanese rice paper, it provides detailed credits of the video productions and a fine essay by John Conomos entitled "Vapour Painting". The catalogue essay offers the reader a lengthy, sensitive and sympathetic appreciation of the video art of Geoff Weary, and a detailed description of the *Faraway* project.

Freda Freiberg