

Robyn McKenzie, 'Disorder of Domesticity Falls a Little Flat',
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Disorder of domesticity falls a little flat

MIKALA DWYER'S installation, *Hollowness and a Few Solids*, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art has the feel of an abandoned kindergarten playroom. The objects are placed so informally as to suggest they were simply left when it was time to go home.

In the middle of the room is an amoeba-like sculpture made out of hot-pink neoprene (wet-suit material), stretched taut over a sculpture plinth and anchored to the floor by its many-stocked feet.

Around the wall of the gallery is a line of moulded clay numerals and letters. A video plays in one corner.

Soft geometric forms, made out of dayglo-colored neoprene again, sit sagging on the floor, others made of

MIKALA DWYER

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chiffon hang limply on the wall.

There are sculptures made of corks joined together with pins, sculptures made of cardboard, an assortment of found objects, paintings, the list goes on. All the toys are out of the box: a diverse array of materials, forms and ways of working.

The installation tips its hat to the scatter pieces of the so-called "anti-form" sculptors of the late 1960s. A reaction to, if also a continuation of minimalism, these works shifted the

emphasis away from the final form of the object as a pre-determined goal, to a consideration of the sculptural possibilities of the interaction of materials and process, action and chance. Using a limited range of industrial materials, these artists were, however, bound by purist aesthetic tastes and abstraction.

Dwyer takes from them this notion of process, but along with more everyday materials, she uses everyday actions: sewing, pinning, collecting, adding on. And her interest in entropy specifically refers to a domestic environment. Her objects seem built up out of the mess of daily life, and could easily collapse back into it.

Having seen Dwyer's work in

group exhibitions, and reproductions of other installations, this, her first solo show in Melbourne, was not all I had expected. There is little relationship between the individual pieces, no contours to orient or direct the viewer. While part of the "idea", the installation lacks tension or energy.

In the catalogue, Linda Michael suggests that the coherency of this accumulation of disparate objects is "as evidence of a performance", meaning the artist's improvisational process in putting things together.

The exhibition was first mounted at Sarah Cottier gallery in Sydney last year and perhaps the same intensity of motivation is not realisable a second time around.

Robyn McKenzie

"YOU should be reading the Bible, it's the greatest book of all."

Travelling by tram to Batman Avenue, my head buried in a copy of *Morton Feldman: Essays*, I looked up to see the voice belonged to a passenger whose ecstatic expression marked her as someone who, in the words of the song, "reads the Good Book from Fri' till Monday", and every other day.

Although, heaven forbid, should Feldman ever be mistaken for a prophet of New Age music, I doubt if his writings would achieve the status of his fellow composer and friend John Cage's *Silence*, which became a bible of sorts among visual artists in the 1960s and early 70s.

Even so, with Feldman as my reading companion, I was on a kind of pilgrimage having, in a matter of days, visited many of the often not-so-sacred sites that constitute the visual arts component of the 1996 Next Wave Festival.

Later that day, on foot to 200 Gertrude Street to view *The Expanded Field*, the faint sound of a choir caused me to seek a moment of sanctuary amid the shrine-like exhibits in Anne Marie Power's *The Journey Home to Rome* at the Dianne Tanzer Gallery.

Stemming from an Australian Council-funded pilgrimage to Rome and Tuscany, and embracing aspects of her Catholic education and art studies, Power's collages of handmade paper, maps and Christian images are attached to lengths of cheesecloth and anchored to the floor by votive candles (ah, hippiedom revisited).

The bringing home of Rome is given a more obvious treatment in the "shrine" inside a garden shed, while within the group of famed etchings and mixed-media pieces forming a large cross, one finds further reasons for judging her works a trinity of craft, kitsch and Catholicism.

No doubt Power's use of fabric and embroidery techniques will bring praise from local craft groupies and see nothing absurd in her domestication of the spiritual, but I remained unconverted from a belief that the best collages are made with the least artistic intervention.

Back on the next Wave trail, with *The*

ANNE MARIE POWER, THE EXPANDED FIELD, MIKALA DWYER, NOTHING NATURAL

Anne Marie Power, *The Dianne Tanzer Gallery*. *The Expanded Field*, 200 Gertrude Street. Mikala Dwyer, *the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art*. *Nothing Natural*, *The Basement*.

ROBERT ROONEY

Expanded Field, a collaboration between Danus Kesminas, Callum Morton and Anna Nervegna, Power's exhortation to "contemplate, meditate, enjoy" is justly transferred to an installation that converts 200 Gertrude Street's interior into a temporary structure for the silent worship of sport and art — basketball, to judge from the floor markings and a modernist concern for a fine balance between yellow and blue (the golden mean?) in the wooden seating.

One enters by the side of a curved, floor-to-ceiling, plywood ramp, passing beneath the mock stadium's exposed ribbing, only to find oneself confronted by a mirrored wall before which one becomes both viewer and the viewed. Disconcerting? Yes, but there's a way to escape alongside the reception desk.

Going against the prevailing custom, the artists have dispensed with written explanations of their work, opting to fill in (rather cutely) fan magazine-style questionnaires and substitute a red and green fold-out of a scoreboard for a catalogue.

If the writing on the wall were to appear during Mikala Dwyer's exhibition, *Hollowware* and a *Few Solids*, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, it would probably spell out the message "Cuteness is no longer a sin".

Blame it on Next Wave fatigue, but here I am again sidestepping the festival — ACCA's *Serial Kids* and *Flower Show*, and other minor events — to favour an installation of assorted works that my grumpier colleagues would no doubt dis-

miss as too modishly infantile to consider.

Needless to say, her show is to be avoided by those who find no credit in being jolly. Airy and specious, Dwyer's collection of disparate objects (or sculptures, if you prefer) spreads across the main gallery floor and on to the walls with a calculated sense of disorder, permitting Plasticine numbers and letters to line skirting boards and a multi-legged, tent-like creature — which looks as though a manual on things to do with stretched pantihose had assisted its creation — to act as a centrepiece.

Elsewhere, cubes are emptied of solid geometry, becoming sagging bags or accumulations of pinned organza squares.

Leaving Dwyer's play-school fabrications, I returned to the festival with a quick trip to *Nothing Natural*, featuring technology-based works by Martine Corompt, Ian Haig, Christopher Langton and Patricia Piccinini.

For this exhibition, at least, visiting the Basement, an artist-run gallery, is like descending into the catacombs of a church of immaculate deceptions. On the walls one finds not icons or paintings of the Madonna and Child, but digital colour photographs from Piccinini's *Your time starts now ...* series, in which "the lovely Sophie Lee" is pictured with smooth, plastic perfection, holding LUMP, a "cute and adorable" computer-designed mutant child of the artist's creation, against a backdrop of artificial flowers.

In the far cell, Ian Haigh's ultra-slick iris prints, *Mighty Morphic Muscle Men*, find him playing god, generating images of hypermuscled bodies whose pneumatic exaggerations parody the bodybuilder's overdeveloped physique, which is itself a caricature of some Michelangelo-esque aesthetic ideal.

Remaining are Langton's *Ecowalker* and Corompt's *Activity Station*.

With the former, a customised walking machine, one can enjoy the sights and sounds of Yarra Bend Park without getting close to nature, while the latter enables one to share the artist's addiction to the surfeit of cute and friendly images in popular culture.