

Patricia Piccinini – future imperfect

reviewed by Sally Cloke

In 'Still Life with Stem Cells', a hyper-realistically sculptured child sits captivated by her cavorting toys/pets – squishy pink blobs somewhere between bald baby rats and sausages. In 'Protein Lattice', hairless voles with large human ears protruding from their backs are presented as glamorous accessories in glossy fashion photographs.

In both works, Australian multimedia artist Patricia Piccinini skilfully makes the focus not so much

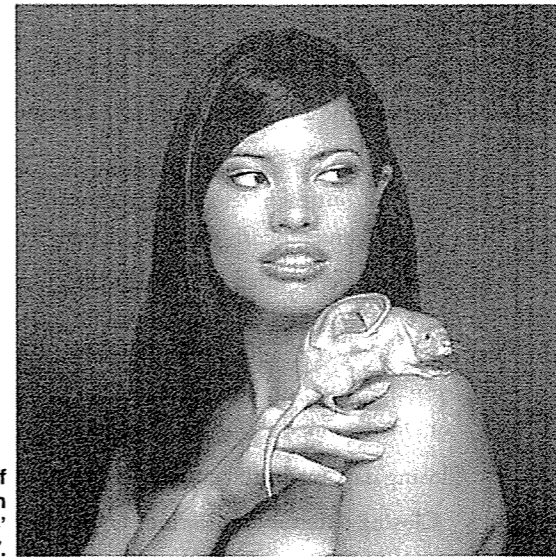
the cute/pitiful/grotesque creatures themselves as their relationship with humanity. What kind of society would accept something so unnatural so naturally? Ours – we suspect – considering how quickly we have adjusted to assisted reproductive technologies, the Internet and animal cloning *et al.*

In contrast are the video installation rooms, 'Plasticology' – 57 TV monitors showing a forest of digital trees blowing in a digital wind – and 'Swell' – three large projections of a tossing and towering sea, the waves' geometry distorted enough to be dis-

turbing and but authentic enough to induce sea-sickness. Is this a future where humanity has completely destroyed the natural world leaving only digital remnants to be called up and 'experienced' – like a 'Star Trek' Holodeck – when we feel like 'getting back to nature'?

This fascinating retrospective of some of Piccinini's recent work brings to life the issues debated on today's newspaper opinion pages, raising hard questions while remaining accessible, original and engaging art.

'Retrospectology: the world according to Patricia Piccinini' is at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Sturt Street, Southbank, until 2 March.



Detail of
'Protein
Lattice'
1997.