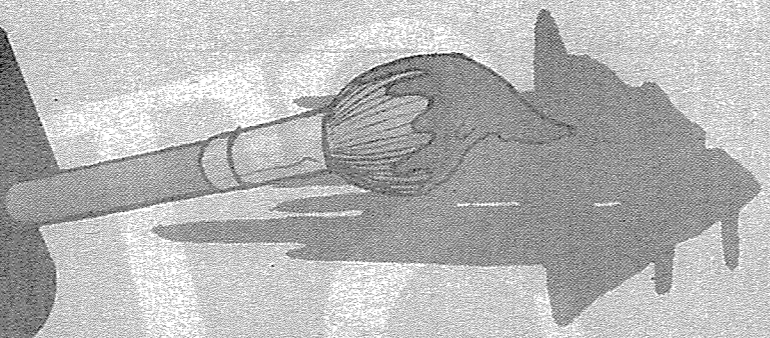


ARTS



Exhibition: Mike Nelson

LONELY PLANET

Just south of Melbourne's Yarra an architectural feat is about to be revealed. Brought to you by a man of European origins, but with a distinctly Australian name, its scale and magnitude is bound to outshine others in its field.

Those who are far from impressed with the Eureka Tower, Grollo's recent phallic enhancement on Southbank, may find something more interesting, engaging and challenging nearby, inside the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA). This Thursday sees the gallery unveiling British artist Mike Nelson's latest installation piece, named *Lonely Planet* both as a reference to the Australian-based travel guide publishers and to Australia's unique socio-political and geographical global position. Even factoring in a degree of gushing curatorial favouritism, exhibition curator Rebecca Coates' claim that Nelson's work is routinely "mind altering" is certainly enticing.

Nelson seems to have carved out a rather cosy niche for himself in the art world in just over a decade, having exhibited his maze-like installation pieces in most continents. Boxing his work neatly within an artistic genre or discipline seems a difficult and likely pointless exercise. Coates gives the impression that more important than categorisation in Nelson's work is the ethereal work of mind and memory. *Lonely Planet*, echoing a trend in much contemporary art, will really only 'exist' in the strictest sense for the relatively short two months it will be housed at ACCA, and Coates suggests that Nelson "likes the idea that at the end of a show, it often doesn't exist, but it lives on in people's minds in a visual way".

While Coates understandably does not want to give away all of the surprises in Nelson's latest project,

she emphasises the way much of his work plays on both collective cultural memory and the individual perspective of each observer, and promises that this work will offer a similar experience. This is fortunate for Melbourne art fans as it is only the second time Nelson has exhibited in this country and the first time in our city.

We can expect, as Coates says, "little talismans, or shrines or mementos that interweave" from his earlier works, as well as a range of literary and filmic references. She elaborates: "when you enter the work and you experience it, you get these sort of sensations or feelings that there's little pointers that you can pick up on or not. You very much bring your own narrative or your own experience to it." Along with the visual, spatial and referential elements of Nelson's work, audiences apparently ought not to be surprised to discover a rich contextualised sound scape and even an array of recognisable smells.

Nelson, who Coates admits was very much on her curatorial wish-list, has been working hard with crew for several weeks to build the unique architectural spaces for the exhibition inside ACCA. In terms of his aims with the work Coates says "I think it's impossible to just say one thing, but obviously one of the things is this idea of cultural travel and this push/pull that goes on. On the one hand people are searching for adventure, new horizons and new locations and on the other hand with the world opening up, it's becoming a much smaller place. It's becoming much harder to find that new experience."

Coates suggests that not only is *Lonely Planet* specific to the space of ACCA itself, but "it's also specific to an Australian experience too and that comes out of



MARGATE

the salvage materials that he uses. So when you look at the rooms and the corridors and what the spaces are made up of, there'll be resonances because we've all experienced these in our cultural experience."

As with Nelson's other work, *déjà vu* and the sensation that one has just entered a room that someone else has recently vacated are likely to be encountered. As one might imagine, Coates stresses that the work also has a strong element of play. Talking about *Lonely Planet* but also broadly about the kind of art that ACCA attracts, Coates muses, "a lot of the works, they're serious, they're great, but they're also very funny. Often good humour is a great way of expressing ideas and suggesting a possible alternative. It is serious but life's an interesting place and you've got to reflect all those possible ways of interpreting your thinking."

Unlike the 'what you see is what you get' Eureka Tower, ACCA, which not only houses *Lonely Planet*

but also inevitably helped shape it is, according to Coates, a place for patrons "with a real spirit of adventure". Coates explains "Mike's very interested in playing with that shifting scale, that what you see is not what it appears from the exterior and playing with unfolding ideas and unfolding narratives." With the exhibition opening tomorrow, Coates is confident that *Lonely Planet's* architectural constructions will provide sustenance for art fans with "the myriad of associations and interpretations they invite."

BEN CONVEY

Mike Nelson's *Lonely Planet* runs from December 21 until February 25, 2007, at the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, 111 Sturt Street, Southbank. Gallery hours: Tuesday to Sunday 11am-6pm; Mondays by appointment. Admission: Free. www.accaonline.org.au

"BEA7" 20th December 2006