

# Tiny Movements: ACCA

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Tiny Movements: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)

## Johanna Billing's *Tiny Movements*: Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA)

Born in Sweden in 1973 and based in Stockholm, Swedish contemporary Johanna Billing presently has six of her film and sound projects playing at ACCA. Her work has been widely shown internationally and explores ideas of community and shared cultural experiences, particularly as felt in her generation.

She writes of her work:

*"I try to make films about things I found difficult to verbalise or talk about. I...try to connect to things that we push away inside of us."*

Her most famous project *You Don't Love Me Yet* (begun in 2002) is an ongoing invitation by Billing to artists around the world to record their version of the Roky Erikson song of the same name. She has made 200 recordings in over 20 countries, including in Melbourne at the beginning of this month. The hundreds of versions of the song, some instrumental and many in translated form, are presented to the audience to choose from and listen to on headphones sitting around a large white table in a darkened room in ACCA. The sheer scale of her project is impressive; the ultimate effect is less so for me. Erikson's song is distinctly shallow and repetitive; it begins to grate as a concept and at the end of the day becomes just 'an idea'. However, during the interview, she talks about exploring the contemporary experience of community and connectedness. And indeed, her work does create an intriguing sense of international dialogue, or a sense of a growing family of creative people linked by a single theme.

Other film works by Billings showing on a loop are *Project for a Revolution* (2000), *Missing Out* (2000), *Magic and Loss* (2005), *Where She is At* (2001) and *This is How We Walk on the Moon* (2007). In her film *Magic and Loss*, she films the packing up of a house in Amsterdam, in almost-real time. The action is not distorted by commentary and music is added only in part.

She eloquently explains her work in an interview:

*"In general, I always arrange situations that are real, in which I invite people to participate... "Magic & Loss", for example, is a real event....I invited a group of people to take part in this action, where none of them knew the space before, nor to whom the house belonged. In this specific work, I was interested in engaging with the particular situation when somebody dies and you have to pack everything away".*

In *This is How We Walk on the Moon*, Billing films a group of people sailing together on a boat in a bay. Her camera rests on the faces and movements of the people; an air of melancholy isolation within the group presides and the shots are interlaced with images of a single flying gull. The stillness of the people and the rush of the sailing boat through the water creates an arresting tension.

Billing's films are characterised by a sense of the individual, isolated within a group, and heightens a sense of 'stuckness' which can make one want to scream! Though sometimes hard to watch, Billing's success may lie in her ability to capture and communicate an overall feeling of frustration and energy that she perceives amongst her contemporary Scandinavians. The absence of speech and other communication in her films augments this tension, which is finally relieved by a moment of release: a bicycle ride; the jump off the diving board; an individual leaving a room and climbing in the driving seat of a car, seized suddenly by a sense of direction. Images from her films leave lasting impressions on my mind and carry poetic metaphorical richness. There is a persistent sense of disengagement and coolness that also typifies her work, leaving me feeling uncomfortable and cold-hearted. Perhaps this relates to her success in capturing the Northern European sensibility.

Billing says:

*"Sometimes I feel that there is so much captured inside people. I would say that my work has to do with capturing some lost emotions with which you don't have contact anymore. I think it is very much related to hidden things that we forget, or that we don't let out. And maybe this is also something very much related to the Swedish culture I belong to."*

*Billings work comes from a tradition of psychological landscapes such as Ingmar Bergman's: the interior is saturated by white light, and silent beautiful people share a land, but what is really happening beneath the surface remains unspoken.*

***Tiny Movements is showing at ACCA, 11 Sturt St, Southbank, Melbourne, until September 27. Admission is FREE. Gallery hours: Tue – Fri 10am-5pm, weekends & public holidays 11am-6pm.***

***Amelia Swan***

*Amelia Swan is a Melbourne-based arts writer. She studied History of Art at Edinburgh, Scotland and came to Australia in 1994. The latter studies gave her a background in the history of european art from ancient archaeology to the present day. Contemporary art has been her focus in*

recent writing, in particular Australian multi-media work and sound art. The intention of her writing is to support contemporary artists in Australia with responsive and descriptive writing to the end of strengthening a sense of cultural context and dialogue within Australia and internationally.

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