Review: ‘New 09’ at Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne

By bunyanth 0 Comments
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Tags: melbourne, sculpture, review, ACCA (australian centre for contemporary art), exhibition, installation art, video installation, new 09, charlotte day, simon yates, robert bolano, last evenings on earth, blair french, Rhabdomancy, Justine Khamara, the fabric of the particular, Marco Fusinato, Aetheric Plexus, Brodie Ellis, Noosphere, Benjamin Armstrong, Hold Everything Dear I, Pat Foster and Jen Berean, The Doing and Undoing of Things

Exhibition dates: 17th March - 17th May 2009

ACCA’s annual commissions exhibition - this year curated by Charlotte Day with new works from eight contemporary Australian artists including Justine Khamara, Brodie Ellis, Marco Fusinato, Simon Yates, Matthew Griffin, Benjamin Armstrong and Pat Foster and Jen Berean.
Simon Yates
‘Rhabdomancy’
tissue paper, wood, fishing rods, tape, string, electrical components, helium balloons dimensions variable
2009

“That’s what art is, he said, the story of a life in all its particularity. It’s the only thing that really is particular and personal. It’s the expression and, at the same time, the fabric of the particular. And what do you mean by the fabric of the particular? I asked, supposing he would answer: Art. I was also thinking, indulgently, that we were pretty drunk already and that it was time to go home. But my friend said: What I mean is the secret story ... The secret story is the one we’ll never know, although we’re living it from day to day, thinking we’re alive, thinking we’ve got it all under control and the stuff we overlook doesn’t matter. But every damn thing matters! It’s just that we don’t realize. We tell ourselves that art runs on one track and life, our lives, on another, we don’t even realize that’s a lie.”

From the story “Dentist” from the book ‘Last Evenings on Earth’ by Roberto Bolaño
The curator Charlotte Day has assembled an interesting selection of artists for ‘New 09’ at ACCA, Melbourne. It is an exhibition whose ‘presences’ challenge through dark and light, sound and light, contemplation and silence. The journey is one of here and now moments that transport the viewer to states of being that address the fabric of the particular: doubt, anxiety and enlightenment crowd every corner. The particularities of the experience (material, social, psychological and imaginative) impinge on the viewers interior states of being transcending the very physicality and symbolic realism of the works.2

On entering the gallery you are greeted by Simon Yates self-propelled figures that make up the work ‘Rhabdomancy’ (2009, above). Suspended, tethered, floating just above the floor the figures move eerily about the entrance to the gallery, startling people who have not seen them move before. They stand silent witness, a simulation of self in tissue paper searching for meaning by using a dowsing rod. The word rhabdomancy has as one of it’s meanings ‘the art or gift of prophecy (or the pretense of prophecy) by supernatural means’. Here the figures are divining and divination rolled into one: grounded they seek release through the balloons but through augury they become an omen or portent from which the future is foretold.
Justine Khamara
‘Dilated Concentrations’
UV print on laser cut stainless steel
2009

‘...cutting and slicing in order to see them better, willing them into three dimensions; an attempt to cheat death, or rather, to ward off forgetting of them as they are/were and as I was when the work was made.’

Justine Khamara

In the first gallery, a very minimal installation of two fractured faces stare out at you from the wall, my favourite work of the show. These are unsettling faces, protruding towards you like some topographical map, one eyes screwed shut the other beady following you as you walk around the gallery space. Here the images of brother and sister presence anterior, already formed subjects not through memory (as photographs normally do) but through the insistence of the their multiple here and now planes of existence. Rather than ‘forgetting’ the images authenticate their identity through their ongoing presence in an ever renewing present.3 Their dissection of reality, the affirmation of their presence (not the photographic absence of a lost subject) embodies their secret story on the viewer told through psychological and imaginative processes: how do they make me feel - about my life, my death and being, here, now.

The pathos of the show is continued with the next work ‘Noosphere’ (2008) by Brodie Ellis (the noosphere is best described as a sort of ‘collective consciousness’ of human-beings).4 In this work a video above the clouds is projected onto a circular shape on the ceiling in a darkened room. The emotional and the imaginative impact of the message on the audience is again disorientating and immediate. The images look across the clouds to vistas of setting suns, look down on the clouds and the sea and land below. The images first move one way and then another, disorientating the viewer and changing their perspective of the earth; these are alien views of the earth accompanied by heart beat like ambient music. The perspective of the circle also changes depending on where the viewer stands like some anamorphic distortion of reality. On a stand a beaded yoke for a horse adds to the metaphorical
allegory of the installation.

In the next gallery is the literal climax to the exhibition, Marco Fusinato’s ‘Aetheric Plexus’ (2009). (Aether: medium through which light propagates; Plexus: in vertebrates, a plexus is an area where nerves branch and rejoin and is also a network of blood vessels).

Consisting of scaffolding that forms a cross and supports large numbers of silver spotlights with visible wiring and sound system the installation seems innocuous enough at first. Walking in front of the work produces no effect except to acknowledge the dull glow of red from the banks of dormant lights trained on the viewer. The interaction comes not in random fashion but when the viewer walks to the peripheries of the gallery corners triggering the work - suddenly you are blasted with white light and the furious sound of white noise for about 15 seconds: I jumped half out of my skin! Totally disoriented as though one has been placed in a blast furnace or a heavenly irradiated crematorium one wonders what has just happened to you and it takes some time to reorientate oneself back in the afterlife of the here and now. Again the immediacy of the work, the particularities of the experience affect your interior states of being.

Benjamin Armstrong
‘Hold Everything Dear I’
2008

After a video installation by Matt Griffin you wander into the next gallery where two works by Benjamin Armstrong inhabit the floor of the gallery. And I do mean inhabit. Made of blown glass forms and wax coated tree branches the works have a strange affect on the psyche, to me seemingly emanations from the deep subconscious. Twin glass hemispheres of what look like a brain are surrounded by clasping synaptic nerve endings that support an egg like glass protrusion - a thought bubble? a spirit emanation? These are wonderful contemplative but slightly disturbing objects that have coalesced into shape only in another form to melt and disappear: molten glass and melted wax dissipating the very form of our existence.
Pat Foster and Jen Berean
‘Untitled’ from the series ‘The Doing and Undoing of Things’
aluminium, safety glass, steel cable
2009

Finally we come to the three part installation by Pat Foster and Jen Berean (above). On the right of the photograph you can see three aluminium and glass doors, closed, sealed leading to another gallery. What you can’t see in the photograph is the three pieces of gaffer tape stretched across the glass doors, like they do on the building sites of new homes. No entry here. Above your head is a suspended matrix of aluminium and glass with some of the glass planes smashed.
Pat Foster and Jen Berean
‘Untitled’ from the series ‘The Doing and Undoing of Things’ (detail)
aluminium, safety glass, steel cable
2009

Clean, clinical, safe but smashed, secure but threatening the matrix presses down on the viewer. It reminded me of the vertical standing shards of the World Trade Centre set horizontal suspended overhead. Only the steel cable seemed to ruin the illusion and seemed out of place with the work. It would have been more successful if the matrix was somehow suspended with fewer tethers to increase the sense of downward pressure.

Finally you sit on the aluminium benches and contemplate in silence all that has come before and wonder what just hit you in a tidal wave of feelings, immediacies and emotions. The Doing and Undoing of Things.

“A work of art reminds you of who you are now”

Kepesh from the film ‘Elegy’

An interesting journey then, one to provoke thought and emotion.

The fabric of the particular. The pathos of the art-iculate.

My only reservations are about the presence, the immediacy, the surface of it all. How persistent will these stories be? Will the work sustain pertinent inquiry above and beyond the here and now, the shock and awe. Or will it be like a meal one eats and then finds one is full but empty at the same time. A journey of smoke and mirrors.

M Bunyan

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Opening hours:
Tues - Fri 10 - 5pm

ACCA website


3. Ibid.,

4. "For Teilhard, the noosphere is best described as a sort of collective consciousness of human-beings. It emerges from the interaction of human minds. The noosphere has grown in step with the organization of the human mass in relation to itself as it populates the earth. As mankind organizes itself in more complex social networks, the higher the noosphere will grow in awareness."

From the concept of Noosphere on Wikipedia.

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