



Kate Kendall, Hugo Race and David Chesworth.

PICTURE: RODGER CUMMINS

An erudite, disorienting interrogation of art's process

PERFORMANCE RICHTER MEINHOF-OPERA ★★★

By David Chesworth
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Cameron Woodhead Reviewer

IN THE late 1980s, German painter Gerhard Richter exhibited a series of 15 paintings titled *October 18, 1977*. They were based on photographs of

dead leaders of the Baader-Meinhof Gang, a group of left-wing terrorists who tried to overthrow the German establishment.

The controversial paintings brought accusations of hagiography. Yet these paintings represent a vanishing, none more so than his three portraits of the corpse of Ulrike Meinhof, *Dead*. Each version is vaguer, the body distorted by a corona

of myth. In *Richter/Meinhof-Opera*, David Chesworth puts Richter and Meinhof side by side. A multimedia installation with forays into music and voice, it's an interrogation of art's process, dramatising the ways in which art's subject (and so often the terrorist's object) lies forever beyond its grasp. Opening with a glamorous Meinhof (Kate Kendall) reading from her manifesto, it dissolves

into an expressionistic sequence intended to capture the psychic effect of Meinhof's solitary confinement. Kendall shuffles towards the audience, emitting muted screeches against the harsh scraping of an industrial soundscape, while parts of Meinhof's revolutionary tract are flashed up on a wall. Enter Richter (Hugo Race), whose painstaking approach to art is sung. The lyrics, here, can



be turgid, but intriguing connections appear in performance. The most successful scene — a duet between Richter and Meinhof, where Richter proclaims his art free of ideology, while Meinhof sings

lines from Brecht's *The Measures Taken* — gestures hauntingly towards aria.

Richter/Meinhof-Opera is a cerebral engagement with the politics of artistic creation. If some of its concepts can't be realised without pretension, it remains a cultivated, erudite and disorienting journey.

The winner of *The Age Critic's Award* will be announced on October 26