

TELECOM PROSPECT

11 FEBRUARY > 29 APRIL

2007 NEW ART > NEW ZEALAND

Gallery Three: Fiona Amundsen, Steve Carr, Octavia Cook, Simon Denny, Janet Lilo, Gina Matchitt, Michael Morley, Nova Paul

Objects from and images of everyday life abound in this gallery. Some are not what they seem or what you might expect. Manipulation of materials and the removal of objects or images from their regular context prompt us to look anew and reconsider the world around us.

Fiona Amundsen takes photographs of familiar environments using a strict methodology—photographing at the same time of day, using consistent equipment, light levels and compositional alignment. Through following this regime the artist seeks to negate the inclusion of extraneous or ‘emotionally loaded’ information. Her approach draws from conceptual art practice and also from the traditions of documentary photography and anthropological fieldwork. The sites are unpopulated, placing emphasis on the infrastructure: the architecture of the buildings and landscape. The ‘Garden Place’ series includes two bodies of work from 2003-04 and 2006-07 of civic squares, forecourts and public spaces in New Zealand and Australian cities. These spaces are accessible 24/7, are built to withstand all weathers, and have been designed to both host but also ‘manage’ the public. The five works presented here (half of a series of ten) are of sites in Auckland.

Steve Carr plays with his food or, rather, he re-configures representations of food to explore the little spaces in between the big events in our lives. The actions represented for this exhibition are all incidental activities that the artist draws to our attention. We are presented with a *Popcorn Mountain*, the weight of the popcorn equaling the weight of the artist. Tempted to jump into the pile, we hold back due to a concern of what may be lurking inside. A looped film entitled *Cigarette Tree* pictures an elaborate and contemplative game. The action unfolds in real time as we calmly watch the plastic cavity slowly fill up with smoke. Leaning against the wall sit five *Sausages on Sticks* each carved from a single piece of cherry wood. Their materiality is playful, their shape is cartoon-like and they elicit memories of camping or beach bonfires. Their whittled exterior offers a reading that is heartening, or horrendous, depending on whom you imagine may be doing the carving.

Octavia Cook’s jewellery looks kind of familiar until, that is, you look a little closer. Different media are used to create the cameos: resin instead of agate or coral, laminated colour photocopies are set in silver, the cracker rings are 18ct and 9ct gold with real and fake emeralds. Cook is constantly catching us off-guard, mixing the intimate with the official. The five funeral brooches (which draw on the Victorian tradition of funeral jewellery) are dedicated to deceased Cook family cats. The *Cook & Co Family Rings* feature the artist’s Mum, Dad, sisters and a self portrait; the double-sided giant cameo brooch pairs up Octavia with Queen Elizabeth II. The fictional company Cook & Co has been developed as a brand for much of Cook’s output and the policy chain clearly outlines its aims.

Simon Denny makes work from objects he has found, bought, gathered and made. He brings components together and sets up relationships between things. The accumulation of these objects forms an ad hoc spatial scenario. Very often these gatherings are precarious: cause and effect is fine tuned and poised to tumble, which only emphasises the fleeting fragility of points of contact. *Short Traditions* continues this investigation of action and reaction with this stack of unlikely objects creating a new series of associations, revealing the poetic within the most rough-shod and banal of materials.

Janet Lilo's four videos are part of a much larger and ongoing suite of works investigating the importance of hip hop music to a group of family members, friends and acquaintances living in or around the Avondale area of Auckland. Different styles of filmmaking are combined: colour and black and white footage, raw one-to-one interviews where the voice of the interviewer (Lilo) is evident, conversations between small groups of people, emcee *acappella* performances to camera, mid and long shots of Riversdale Park where kids skate, hang out and practise wet *lavalava* whipping techniques (a rising 'display sport' requiring deft skill), through to polished shots of emcees performing their tracks, mixed and treated in a music video-style. Janet Lilo's involvement with both her interviewees and with the subject matter is personal, enabling a privileged access to their performances and opinions.

The five bags by Gina Matchitt rework high-street and industrial-park icons of our consumer culture. The companies the artist has selected all have a major profile in our cities and towns and she has re-worked their brands with Māori translations: *Te Wharewhero* (*The Warehouse*), *Waipiro Kingi* (*Liquor King*), *Tatauraro* (*Countdown*), *Kiwi Mo Heihei* (*Kiwi for Chicken*) and *Takupe A Tiaki* (*Pak n Save*). These businesses are renowned for their value-for-money and broad spread of outlets. While the carry bags found in most of these stores tend to veer towards the thin plastic variety, Gina Matchitt's versions are incredibly sumptuous using soft buckskin leather, lush fabrics and top quality sheepskin and possum pelt.

Michael Morley has a dual-practice; he makes paintings and sound works (the latter as a member as the band 'The Dead C' and under the solo moniker of 'Gate'). The connection between image and sound (or rather silence) in his paintings is significant. The most literal example is his painting of a record player with needle placed mid-song: *There Is No-One What Will Take Care Of You* (the title of the first Palace Brothers LP). The image is mute yet alludes to the full-blare of sweet-melancholy through an amp and speakers. Two diptychs *Midnight Cowboy* and *The Lost Weekend* are double-vortex, split perspective explosions of colour bringing cinematic and psychedelic drug references into the equation. One of a series of paintings of buildings with a charged significance is *Empire* which features the gargantuan Sony Entertainment HQ in Culver City, Los Angeles, an important site within the entertainment culture industry of the United States. As the artist has stated: 'Silence plays some part here; the silence of complicity, of deals unknown, of the politics of Hollywood, a world that could be said to be hermetic for those within, but almost certainly for those without'.

Nova Paul's 16mm film *Pink and White Terraces* (shown in the gallery as a DVD projection with occasional 16mm film screenings) reflects on the delicate construction of domestic environments and public places in the Tamaki Makaurau and Manukau cityscapes. Using an optical process technique 'three-colour separation', the film makes visible several moments simultaneously. In red, green and blue layers, colour-coded auras hold a record of time like a geological accretion. In and out of phase, actors and environment focus and fade, making palpable filmic time, and gently unfolding the politics and poetics of the sites explored.

Gregor Kregar's suite of works 'Matthew 12:12' has a range of manifestations in different spaces during this exhibition. A live sculptural installation in Civic Square takes place 30 March – 1 April 2007 with twelve sheep in brightly coloured woolly jumpers grazing within white picket-fence enclosures. A set of twelve photographic 'portraits' of sheep taken during an earlier staging of the work are sited at the entrance to this gallery and will be joined from 26 March – 15 April 2007 by a video work playing in Square². The work grew out of the artist's consideration of the way industrial rearing of livestock has shaped the landscape, and to a certain extent the culture, of Aotearoa, and the verse in the Holy Bible Matthew 12:12 'How much better is a man than a sheep?'. When the work was developed the ratio of people to sheep in this country was 1:12. This suite of work shares an absurdist sensibility and probes our attitudes towards the woolly creatures that have formed a mainstay of our economy and play such a prominent role in our 'public' cultural identity.

For more information on these artists and to find out about events during 'Telecom Prospect 2007' go to: www.telecomprospect2007.org.nz

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