

Thrash

A Physics Room touring project

curated by Emma Bugden for the Experimental Art Foundation

Dan Arps, Nathan Pohio, Ella Reed, Julaine Stephenson : 28 June – 28 July

Christchurch is a weird mix of old money, white power gangs and gluebag kids, set against a new influx of rapid migration, largely Asian and Pacific, and the growing strength of Ngai Tahu as a major financial and cultural force. Suffering, as always, from the perpetual drift north (Auckland, Melbourne, London) of a generation of 20 somethings, Christchurch continues to regenerate itself, and its artists.

Pigeon holed as conservative, Christchurch certainly retains close links with its historic, colonial past. Local school kids are taught about the 'first four ships' (ships bringing English settlers to Lyttelton harbour) rather than the Waka we were taught about up in sunny Northland. Enmeshed in a strong painterly tradition, and with more than a nod and a wink to the old Masters, the city's public arts institutions have a distinct regionalist focus. The Physics Room works to broaden connections and dialogue with artists and writers on a national and international scale, providing a conduit for the local arts community, and offering a more inclusive view of contemporary arts and culture which celebrates difference and debate.

Given the geographical location of the gallery the emphasis on electronic and print publications has been imperative to The Physics Room's survival and growth, as have the growing networks of project spaces and galleries throughout the world that we draw on. When thinking about spaces in Australia to work with, Adelaide seems an obvious suggestion, and the Physics Room and the EAF have shared an informal friendship for some time. Often described akin to Adelaide, sharing a flatness in scale, with grids aplenty (same town planner!), and sharing both the civic status of 'sister cities', and a tendency to be the butt of everyone else's jokes, Christchurch and Adelaide seem inextricably linked.

Back to regionalism. Entrenched in Christchurch's art success stories are brooding landscapes, a fascination with the sparseness and barrenness of the plains, and an abiding fixation with the dark, the bleak and the just downright miserable. In contrast, the artists in Thrash mix up humour and satire in generous scoopings, informed by both the stark aestheticism of an art historical minimalism and the throwaway consumerism of contemporary pop culture. Discursive, often oblique or throwaway, their work focuses on the ordinary stuff of lives, finding humour and critique in the everyday matter and transforming the mundane and unseen.

Part scavenger and part hobbyist constructor, Dan Arps creates sprawling installations which colonise space, crawling up walls, hanging off windows and ceilings, and spilling out doors. From meticulous cardboard and paper constructions to warehouse buckets and \$2 shop detritus, Arps gathers material seemingly randomly, yet each installation is painstakingly built up and layered. For *Thrash* Arps has built a kit-set scaffolding, a DIY construction site for the modern art boy. Entitled *The Museum of X and Dolphins and some drawings towards a base for the world*, this work contains elements of his ongoing series *The Museum of X and Dolphins*, which displays a growing archive of artifacts, all containing an 'X' or 'dolphin' theme to them. Rife with references to both museological and art historical practices, particularly seminal proto conceptual art works, the artist has described these pieces as 'poor imitations...executed as directly as possible with simple means'.

Minimal to the point of barely there, much of Ella Reed's work plays on subtle interventions which tease and often perplex the viewer. Her work in *Thrash* is willfully obscure, a small monitor perched on a shelf in the gallery bookstore, playing movies with a barely audible soundtrack. Offering assistance to those of us so often torn between attending gallery openings and just staying at home to watch the telly, this work slides sideways somewhere between simulation and reality. Mounted high on the wall in the manner of a TV at the chippie, and set at an angle so that both visitors to the store, and bookshop staff can view it easily, videos can be personally selected by individuals to enhance their experience of shopping and art viewing.

Ngai Tahu artist and filmmaker Nathan Pohio's work is infused with an enjoyment of the vagaries and idiosyncrasies of those around him, from his own rally car driving cousins to social smoking in the current political climate. Highlighting bizarre obsessions and quests, his work is a playful celebration of the weird and wonderful in us all. In *Sleeper*, two monitors face off against each other, one showing a close-up of the artist's nephew sleeping, his child's face innocent and unexposed. The other monitor plays a continuous shot of the boy's ceiling view, day glo stars and planets lit against the dark. Capturing a moment in time with his unerring instinct for a gentle yet biting humor *Sleeper* is a work which is playful and touching.

Julaine Stephenson often works outside gallery constraints, the guerilla tactics of her practice including 'the illegal roving bar', a temporary drinking venue located in a condemned Cinema in Christchurch's Square, presided over, and operated by the artist, and a work installed in the warehouse show *Canvass* (Christchurch 1999) where the artist politely glued a \$2 coin onto the floor and watched with glee while visitors to the show tried to pry it off the floor to pocket.

Creating a whimsical tableau of danger and intrigue, Julaine presents a snapshot in the lives of her ongoing saga about soft toy creations Sugar and Candy. In a previous gallery episode Sugar, in a spate of greediness, was found ripping superfluous pieces of body adornment off Skater girl (AKA Candy). Unsatisfied with the recent spillage of blood, the pint sized femme fatale then called in the heavyweights to rid her world of the scourge of Candy. Now Sugar has discovered haute cuisine and the ancient art of the Ta-ke-a-way. Sugar's still out for a piece of Candy!

Emma Bugden

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