

THE PARADE OF PLANETS

As this piece shifted and grew I channelled Vadim Abdrashov's 1984 film, 'The Parade of Planets'. This soviet sci-fi ushers a group of culturally and professionally distinct men (all recently dismissed from military training) through dream-like situations and encounters. Bound by unspoken means these unlikely travellers confront dead relatives, mingle with a town consisting only of women and momentarily consider life without jobs, keys and repercussions. This non-linear and lyrical film loosens social, geographic and physical conventions, paving the way for unbound spaces of reverie that use metaphors and symbols rather than words to "drive messages through"¹. And yet the characters in the film are not entirely unaware of their fantastical predicament, they are neither participant or bystander, inside or outside; they exchange glances and inhabit a quasi-reality that finds them verbally recalling and questioning events as they unfold. One character, after swimming with the group to a small island, repetitively announces in amazement that he cannot swim, and yet he must have forgotten that he cannot, because obviously now he can. The way these men flicker 'nonchalantly' between states of alienation and celebration within their circumstance is unsettling. As these cyclic 'self-reflexivities' resist catharsis they emulate unrest and erode the social and military frameworks, concepts of justice and themes of happiness, freewill and mateship.

While some of these motifs may or may not be specific to Sculpture 16, this show similarly aligns an otherwise unlikely team of people and builds simulations and encounters that playfully and purposefully inform, loosen and build perspective to our realities. The works on show self-consciously imagine, interrogate and hold on to meaning in fluid and complex ways and their materiality and treatment speak loudly to our bodies, minds, histories and technologies. These works paraphrase years of study and act as fleeting apparitions of the larger networks, communities and realities through which each artist moves. From bull kelp to mass-produced pine, to light, wire and sprockets, contemporary weaving practices, projection, sound, recycled and second hand things, the slapdash and laboured, embroidery and construction, electronics, the organic, wire, craft glue and much much more, this exhibition take us through a fantastic range of materials and processes. It is a smorgasbord of ideas, an assault to the senses, and a long exercise outside ourselves.

Statements from the artists reveal that **Cailin Graham's** open-ended performances, videos and sculptures promote spaces that allude, seduce and alleviate rigid foundations of sexuality, identity and the body. **Anthony Elliott Baker** combines the spaces of video, performance, sculpture and sound to explore limits of body, language and integrities of meaning. **Felicity Scarce** mentions making space, and **Deborah Eddy** binds 'gendered' materials and methods to protest a lack of space or visibility of women in society. And while I keep inserting the word space, I wonder if the ethos of the artist is a little like the ethos of the squatter? The Australian Museum of Squatting (AMS) is an online resource who describe their museum project as "a celebration and documentation of Australians putting abandoned and disused property to good use"². Whether to prevent homelessness or in protest, squatters highlight the imbalances between a people's right to occupy a space and the powers and ideologies that define, police and prescribe them. The AMS document conflicts in these areas as far back as the 1920's and we read of greedy land-lords, unfair evictions, unemployed resistances and fights to save homes and landmarks held dear. Iain McIntyre also frames squatting as a form of "direct action" promoting societies that are self-reliant and develop their "own solutions to the problems we face"³. Similarly to the way growth rings in coral record the environmental oscillations they endure, the AMS paint cities as revolving

doors to the oscillating bodies, histories and ideologies that eternally occupy and re-define them. The works in Sculpture 16 are similarly capsules for mapping and housing these narratives and act not only as barometers but as agents of the 'ulterior'. They attempt to irritate, unravel, weave and deal with patterns, blank expressions and straight lines, hoping to tip the scales of moral and physical balance. **Sarah Channer** elegantly describes this process in her artist statement, comparing her process as a "struggle with the desire to understand, to fix, to heal and to change what is observed".

Yet sometimes what we observe is not what we expect. A 'parade of planets' is a configuration of visible planets in a line. Many of us have already missed two this year that saw Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn align in Jan/Feb⁴ and then again (in a slightly different formation) in mid August⁵. Now back to the film:

'The Parade of Planets' climaxes with pickets of elderly faces blankly fixed to the sky. They await this 'planetary parade' behind a fierce orchestral soundtrack, and as drums and trumpets bang against the doors of their unmoving expressions what appears before them is unexpectedly, EARTH!

Gerard Murphy uses mechanics and electricity to disassociate viewer and object. His works act as independent ecosystems and play out quizzical actions away from our bodies. In short-circuiting ideas of control and response and between physics and the physical, Murphy churns existential metaphors of our place and agency within grander schemes. **Jeanette Stok** is also interested in the structures and histories hidden behind all we enjoy and take for granted. Beginning with intricate wire embroideries she meditates on the networks of the everyday and the micro and macro systems that build and bind our realities, whether social, historical or biological. Icelandic Singer-songwriter, Björk mentions that women in themselves are "the glue"⁶ that holds things together, however Stok leaves these patterns open for reuse and alteration. **Mandy Quadrio** questions the strength of binding mediums that hold spaces together. A Palawan Woman from North East Tasmania, Quadrio equips ambiguous hand-made forms with biting titles that not only unlock personal and cultural landscapes but present narratives that confront historical inaccuracies, racism and the gaps and silence in Australian culture that still under-mine sovereignty for Indigenous Australians.

I now learn that planetary alignments don't actually 'line up'. And what sounds all too familiar is Dr. Christopher Baird stating that "unlike in the movies" planets "swing in different orbits" and "hang a little tilted" and that waiting for an alignment to occur is like "waiting for a swarm of flies circling your head to all line up"⁷. Despite the seductive nature of straight lines piercing our night's sky and scientists extending makeshift balls along taut pieces of string, I guess the naked eye does tend to oversimplify things. And as shifting perspectives awaken pattern and illusion so does a Caligo butterflies wings that display spots as owl eyes.

Michelle Vine considers pattern and perspective when manipulating Australian botanical records from archives in Germany. In erasing lines of metadata from these records, Vine ruminates on mugshot museological systems that flatten our living, breathing and feeling ecosystems into patriarchal depictions of knowledge and understanding. Alternately the contortionist interventions of **Matthew Newkirk** reinvent debris that completely ignore straight lines. His works combine high and low sensibilities and sit somewhere in-between modernist sculpture and something cooked up in Homer Simpson's garage. **Merete Megaritty** also prefers the curvatures of tactical experience, developing environmentally friendly works that build monuments from things usually found in the 'compost'. Largely assembled from the remnants

of dead trees and foliage her works both inhabit and relay microcosmic possibilities and setup intimate conversations with our environmental debates. Björk also mentioned that "If you can make nature and technology friends, then you can make everyone friends; you can make everyone intact"⁶. **Tessa Bergan** similarly befriends the untamed spaces of landscape and the body with mass produced objects, technologies and displays of control. She fantasises and explores the repercussions of these spaces on one another. In using the ocean as a constant theme she understands the need to continually reassess and accommodate the tides.

Felicity Scarce not only spoke of 'making space' but 'unravelling shame'. Here I start to think of space as something one can't just 'tack on' or 'tear off', and I also think about doorways. I briefly caught a video work by Judith Hopf titled: The Conception of Youth. The film presents a montage of old film stock depicting manicured gardens, free ranging cats and chickens, moody skies and palm trees. The video proceeds to introduce a giant egg (a person in an egg suit peering from a facial cut-out) meandering peacefully yet purposefully up and down stairs and around sprawling aisles of glass and cement. The egg proceeds through what appears as a museum, library or institution of some sort, only to be repelled by the first doorframe it attempts to enter. It re-attempts a number of times, bumping and shuffling against the frame, all before wandering off, its shell still intact... **Alicia Hollier** deals with frameworks in a different manner by pulling apart the destinies of objects in preference for the broken and anonymous nature of the 'part'. Her works generate suspense and intrigue within their ambiguities, operating more like puzzles in the way they repeatedly shuffle and reassess our networks for valuing, re-remembering, knowing and understanding.

In opposition now to all the unravellings, **Kim Williams** embodies holistic activities that exemplify weaving and storytelling practices. In exploring and performing her Wakka Wakka/Kullilli culture, Williams assembles delicate handmade forms that celebrate the people and landscape to whom they are indebted and dedicated. These works also speak in both past and present tense, reiterating the unyielding continuation of Indigenous weaving practices and knowledge, and an ongoing testimony that this land was not empty or uncared for before European settlement. **Gemma Keeffe** also binds and weaves but in a more personal style that finds her knitting intricate structures from wire that describe bodily organs and functions. Keeffe's works repli-

cate a dance between her hands-on sculptural manipulations of material, and its resistance to it. Keeffe also experiments with movement and light, inviting audience participants to project shadows through her works, shortening the distances between inside and outside, artist, audience and object. Lastly, **Claudia Moodoonuthi** uses painting, photography and sculpture to weave and describe the fabrics that makes up Indigenous life, law and culture. Claudia folds her experiences and knowledge with that of her Elders and Aunties and while her works speak of the importance of memory, history and culture they reiterate the role of art in instigating and continuing these community and family ties.

Now in an attempt to conclude this patchwork, I'll satisfy Brisbane's obsession with space more generally and mention the influx in artist run initiatives here in the woodwork. It's promising to see artists actively looking for independent solutions to their needs while embracing the endless possibilities that existing spaces have to offer. It'll be interesting to see how the artists from Sculpture 16 negotiate their own bodies and practices through the spaces yet to come. - **ERIKA SCOTT**

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Anthony Elliott Baker
Tessa Bergan
Sarah Channer
Deborah Eddy
Cailin Graham
Alicia Hollier
Merete Megarrity
Claudia Moodoonuthi
Gerard Murphy
Matthew Newkirk
Gemma Keeffe
Mandy Quadrio
Felicity Scarce
Jeanette Stok
Michelle Vine
Kim Williams

Sculpture 16

Queensland College of Art Graduate Showcase

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