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CONTEMPORARY VISUAL ARTS

NUMBER 86

709.943

EYE
Serials



AU. \$14.00 INC. GST
NZ. \$15.95

Resonance

Sara Irannejad, Sally Molloy, Mandana Mapar, Natasha Lewis Honeyman, Camille Serisier
Old Government House, Newstead House, Miegunyah House Museum, Brisbane

History, its exposure, reinvention, and the availability of contemporary commentary has long provided inspiration for artists. In recent decades, the archive has been a source of often hidden histories that detail the treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders, including evidence of atrocities and deep-seated abuse of Australia's original inhabitants. The efforts of researchers and writers, made available more widely through art has, I believe, developed the understanding and beliefs of many Australians.

However, in taking art into Brisbane's historic houses, themselves bastions of colonialism and relics of settler culture, Natasha Lewis Honeyman curated a new form of interaction for the city, and noted the precedents for disrupting historic spaces with contemporary art, which are many and international. French palaces commonly host exhibitions of contemporary art, with names from Jeff Koons (Versailles, 2008-09), Anselm Kiefer (The Louvre, 2007-08), and Zao Wou-Ki (Chateau de Nemours, 2007-08), being recent examples.

Five contemporary artists—Mandana Mapar, Sally Molloy, Sara Irannejad, Camille Serisier and Lewis Honeyman herself—responded to the historic venues of Old Government House, Newstead House and Miegunyah House Museum, all in Brisbane. The brief suggested that work be created to speak to the historic narratives within the building, but also acknowledge the 'emotive reverberations of history on the present'.¹ The project drew attention to the personal stories and experiences of Brisbane settler personalities, particularly women whose lives are little discussed in the official histories, bringing these narratives into a broad cultural conversation.

Sally Molloy researched the endeavours of James Clark, resident in Newstead House from 1894-1897. She suggested they provided 'a golden thread' for which painting provided 'a partial historical storyboard'.² Clark was known as 'The Pearl King', owner of a fleet of pearling vessels that worked in the Torres Strait, Western Australia and the Dutch East Indies. Molloy developed a 'visual anthology that takes the viewer on a metaphorical voyage'. Artist Tom Roberts acted as first mate on a Clark voyage to Thursday Island, and articles about the experience, read by Molloy, add another artistic intermediary to the interface with contemporary audiences. The paintings offered a subtle rupture to the historic house's furnishings, quietly undermining the historical narrative to create links to previously uncharted territory.

Downstairs at the same venue, Sara Irannejad focussed on two sisters, Catherine Macarthur, whose husband Patrick Leslie commissioned the building of Newstead House, and Anna Macarthur, who married Captain Wickham, who bought and extended the house. Using video imagery of the



clockwise from top: Mandana Mapar, *Through her eyes*, 2016; Sara Irannejad, *Seamless Transition*, 2016. Video with sound, 16:9, Colour, 4:07mins. Photograph Sara Irannejad; Natasha Lewis Honeyman, *Trade relations*, 2016. Detail. Digital print on 100% cotton, dimensions variable; Sally Molloy, *Portrait of a Pearl Diver (Anonymous)*, 2016. Oil on board, 59 x 59cm. Courtesy the artists.

iconic fig tree that still stands in the grounds of the house, and material from family diaries and photographs, Irannejad's multi-media work brings these women, whom she suggests were silenced (in patriarchal times) yet powerful, into slightly spooky under-the-house spaces.

Also potent is Mandana Mapar's intervention, *Through Her Eyes*, at Old Government House. Her work uses embroidery and photography, and material from the archive to bring us the lives and relationships of an early governor of Queensland, Lord Lamington and his wife Mary (known as May). Their letters to each other, embroidered into an artist's book located in May's bedroom, are extended with letters into contemporary times (contributed by Mapar's friends and colleagues). The Lamington's letters, suspended and extended by Mapar's inter-

vention, express their displacement from England, human frailties, and trace the five years they spent in Brisbane at an early stage in the colony's history (1896-1901).

Camille Serisier's focus at Miegunyah House at Newstead is *A Portrait of Leila Perry*, who lived in the house from 1885-1920. Serisier's staged photographs imaginatively reenact Perry's life, drawing together what Serisier could glean about Perry and the times in which she lived, with the perspective of the artist's own (drastically different) reality. The dearth of information means space for fictional conjecture, a void into which Serisier's work breathes life.

Showing her work in the back room of Miegunyah House, Lewis Honeyman had delved into the archive to draw out *Tablecloth, cashmere, in bril-*

liant colours, donated by Marjorie Johnstone (nee Mant), whose family enriched Brisbane with a contemporary gallery (1950-1972) and the Twelfth Night Theatre. Around it Lewis Honeyman built a cabinet of curiosities to draw attention to the journey of objects across continents, philanthropy, trade and happenstance.

This exhibition draws on little heard voices across the centuries and rejoins historical intersections with different seams, reflections on contem-

porary lives and the power and influence of the past. Attention paid to women who occupied these houses has allowed their voices and contribution to infiltrate current consciousness. What seems most challenging in the current political environment (which tends to polarise) is the layering of histories, the pause these interventions may generate, the crisscross of lives and lines, white and black, male and female, contemporary and historic, and many places in between. This is where *Resonance*

developed significant traction and created connections which continue to generate ripples across the centuries.

Louise Martin-Chew

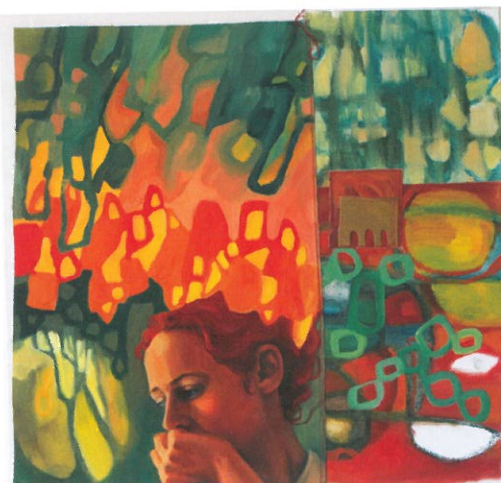
Notes

1. Natasha Lewis Honeyman, 'Introduction', catalogue for *Resonance*, 2016, p.2.
2. Sally Molloy, 'The Pearl King', *ibid.*, p.23.

Rachel Apelt: *Luminescence* Jugglers Art Space, Brisbane

Rachel Apelt comes from a big family and a creative family, where her mother was not only the provider of a rich domestic life, but also the director and stage manager, sounding board and primary audience for eagerly growing voices. Mothers as feeders of minds as well as bodies—of course! When Apelt's mother died, many years ago now, her art practice was also wounded—the figure, once central to Apelt's practice, became absent and eventually artmaking ceased altogether, (contradicting that rather persistent cliché that artmaking is fuelled by suffering and alienation). *Luminescence*, Apelt's first solo exhibition in nine years, is then a recovery, not or not only from grief and loss but, perhaps more importantly, a recovery of Apelt's conversation with her mother, that rich imaginative internal realm and protected private world of home, where the real, the imaginary and the symbolic are often felt as seamlessly interconnected. However, the exhibition does not attempt to access that realm via 'child's eyes' or even a nostalgic mature reflection. Rather Apelt uses it as a place and point of departure for gazing at her life now—her contemporary audience, existing intimacies, and the experience of female friendship.

The primary works in the exhibition are a series of portrait paintings, predominantly close-hand facial views of mature age women. In a deliberate echo of the (traditionally female) domestic realm, Apelt has treated the canvas as the fabric that it is, cutting, sewing, and stitching it together. Leaving seams evident and threads hanging, the paintings are literally pieced together as compositions of off-cuts. Though playful in feel, this common ground powerfully 'socialises' the works, expressing a sense of relationships, social circles and ways in which (particularly female) identity is bound up in managed environments. Where more traditional or typical portraiture may seek to express a subject's identity through personal associations with setting, clothing and/or personal belongings, these portraits resist identification. They better attest to the manner in which identity is presented—the social rituals of grooming and decorating, of private occasion, or even of comforting and confiding. The same tension can be felt within the faces themselves which, while reflecting strong mature and individual features with serious intent, are also painted faces, made formal and beau-



from left: Rachel Apelt, *In moonlight*, 2015. Oil on canvas on board, polyester thread, 475 x 490mm; *Moon stream*, 2016. Oil on canvas on board, polyester thread, 640 x 700mm. Courtesy the artist.

tiful as statements of social capacity. This series of work attests to the phenomenal capacity of women to manage their lives, their families, their relationships private and public, while oftentimes keeping their individual identities well guarded. It also alludes to the (higher) price women pay when they fail to meet social expectations of care provision. These women are far from being decorative backdrops, hollow vessels or passive stages for male protagonists in a Father's drama, yet they are also far from occupying centre stage. The reluctance and resistance in these works is a refreshing dimension in portraiture which so often and almost inevitably boils down to an impervious ego exercise.

Luminescence points to a serious conversation about the interplay of freedom and inhibition within the subject and what exactly these terms might mean both individually and socially, particularly for women. These women, as vividly portrayed by Apelt, feel as though they may be on the verge of something, newly alive to a sense of preference within themselves. Psychoanalyst and author Adam Philips writes,

To tell a persuasive story about inhibition we need to be as imaginative about its hidden successes as we are about its more vivid failures. ... There is something strangely reassuring about witnessing the familiar parade of one's putative failings. The free will that inhibition entails is a complicating factor. Not

only are there two things we might have done, one of which we have chosen; there are also the many things we are doing or intending to do in doing one and not the other. Inhibition turns out to be an exhibition of more than we realised. In our inhibitions—in the areas of our lives where certain things seem impossible—we are over-achievers. We are doing too much where we seem to be doing so little.¹

The two series of smaller scale works which accompany the portraits curiously resemble this 'overachievement' of inhibition, the busy posturing of a self which is avoiding conclusions. These works reflect upon Apelt's internal conversations and private struggle for a sense of identity—depicted alternately as a series of fictional female portraits, and also as iterations of an abstract symbolic shape, crystalline in form. These works may appear to be marginal, taking the form of visual notations and derivations, but they are also literally cut from the same cloth, working together to communicate a sense of environment in which the portraits swim and survive.

Beth Jackson

Note

1. Adam Philips, *One Way and Another: New and Selected Essays*, Hamish Hamilton, The Penguin Group, 2013, p.190.