

Nice Stratigraphy

'But *Pomo* is dead' said the gallery director.

'Dead? I didn't even know it was sick...What about *Po-Pomo*?' asked the curator.

'Ah the *new* authenticity' said the gallery director.

'Long live porno' said someone pulling down their show in the background.

Stratigraphy is layering. It's time, it's stratum, it's tiers, it's seams, it's gradation. There, I've exhausted my online thesaurus. Stratigraphy means change, variety, heterogeneity, difference (remember that buzzword?) Well here's another... 'archaeology'. Stratigraphy is used in geology and archaeology to measure time. This show could have been subtitled 'The archaeology of us', but it isn't, thankfully. Archaeology, that ubiquitous term, originally (originally?) the search for a past in order to deal with the present, but often confused with an appeal to precedence or authenticity - though more often than not simply satisfying a morbid curiosity.

Originality implies authenticity and authenticity is the companion of Modernity (*Mo?*) and *Po-Pomo*. If there is a return to some of the most comical principles of Modernity why is it occurring? What is the meaning behind this return to authenticity? Politics. Anarchy of thought leads to too many questions, too much diversity leads to a dispersal of power, seeing all sides of an argument renders these same questions unanswerable, (as indeed every decent question worth asking is). If one can't have authenticity then too much is left to chance and not enough to endless justifications.

An authentic moment realised in an 'authentic' style in turn capturing an authentic moment. What if one looks at stratigraphy or layering as moments in time? One rather convincing theory of time suggests that moments repeat but each is simultaneously unique - aren't these different packets of time different layers in themselves? Can these weightless layers then be assigned a space? If they can be assigned a space (like sands through the hourglass (these are the days of our group show....) then stratigraphy (differentiation of the layers) can be used to differentiate time. Are they then not analogous to layers of meaning? For the record, *Pomo* was never intended to appear in this catalogue but there it is right at the beginning acting as an explanatory edifice, a defence, an apology, a justification for the diversity of a group show. String some words together and they'll give you a show, a grant, a reduced sentence. *Pomo*, as some would argue, is an uninvited guest, (like Global Warming) but may still have some role to play before this fairytale ends. This is all the more likely as *Pomo* is as much a way of looking at time as an epoch, a period, or a layer of time itself.

What about style? In archaeology, not to mention fashion, style is used to potentially differentiate time and space. One can walk through a group show and site each work by style. Each style has a history, a single beginning, many beginnings. Each style carries with it the baggage of its social and political foundations. This context measures time. The contexts of a life of a particular work, and its particular antecedent style, gives meaning to time.

One may look at the works in this exhibition as a way of measuring time, and as such discrete spaces that when read make meaning of time. The styles involved belong to a genealogy, each piece recalls and appeals to its ancestors. Each style sits on a certain trajectory which despite its novelty is repeated by the piece's very creation, repetition and difference. What is interesting is of all the meanings with which artists have to measure time, many chose to make theirs political. Al Hafidh's (and Dennett's) piece 'Army of Roses, Il Harib Ama' which in Arabic means 'the blind stranger' and refers to female suicide bombers. It is a sculpture collage of materials including car parts spelling out 'OIL'. Tjhung's work similarly peels back the layers of nationalism to which this country seems unhappily prone, showing what we all might fear, aside from fear itself. Tjhung writes, (*excerpt*)

"One day
Australian-born
Chinese man snaps
with fury
after watching Kochie on sunrise
and
using the methods
they showed him on tv
vents frustration
as a desperate call
for altered representation
churns into a violent mix
of emotional rebellion and
cultural implosion.
He is
ready
to
burn
for change."

Political commentary is also prevalent in Simpkin's critique of the 'leisure culture' where questions on the future of the availability of resources may unfortunately lead to answers we resorted to in the past. This jostles with his confrontation of time explicit in his throw away comment 'I might just have to liquid paper over my headphones so they look contemporary.'

Hazewinkle's piece is an elegant reading of the nature of time itself with the temporal implicated in the endless waves of a turbulent river, Rome's Tiber. A river which measures out time as it witnesses the tides of history. The work speaks of the unstoppable, irreversible aspect of time, which like many phenomena we created, we cannot control. Time also features in Bertoli's work which uses two similar words. These words can be read as an example of change which implies time as well as a play on subtle, sexual and violent difference. Detoure's work measures time, through space. Time in compact user friendly packaging. Stringer's piece is like a dream sequence. It relates to psychoanalysis, early film and the heroic period of Modernity when the psyche could be discovered, measured, classified and even healed. This is the epoch when the great discoveries of the past were made, when humanity was measured by appearance, traits and aspirations, and when the achievements of a nascent Modernity allowed murder on a truly grotesque yet highly efficient scale. It reflects on the mystery of time and the mystery of the self and the great gulf that still exists between being and self, as Stringer relates, 'A view to a world unobtainable'.

Renewal and hope, and maybe a way of appreciating the fleeting nature of authenticity is apparent in Grziwotz's work. The self portrait, the portrait and the props (deflated balloons) give us an appreciation of the 'real', the everyday, as we experience it. That is with regards to our appreciation of our own condition, hemmed in as it is on each side, yet touched by moments that even grand theory, nor accusations of irony cannot suppress. Grziwotz relates 'Marlena, my little daughter, takes a pen and draws with continuous circular gestures punctuated by sudden stabbed dots. Her image is drawn from my memory, whilst mine is an image of my refecation...'

Slipping from meta-narratives on high, after all *Pomo* is itself a meta-narrative, it diffuses over the seas to us where ideas go to die after living the high life – and burning so very very brightly - down to Johnson street Fitzroy, up the stairs of the gallery there are antiquarians of the present who feel the need to communicate their concerns while channeling a specific time and place. The artists communicate their own limited sense of place and time, with limited means to a limited audience. Anything can be used to measure time, clocks, style, fashion, movement, dots on a wall. It's the measuring that gives the meaning. It's the measuring which is the only authenticity and authenticity's only character is that of the fleeting moment amongst many in a continuum. The gallery is a culture factory pushing out novelty and therefore time.

'You're a sucker for the ethereal....and clean up all that angel of history train wreck when you're finished' said the gallery director.

Gourney Detoure © 2008

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