

The inside eye

Andy Jackson

Andy Jackson is a writer and is currently working on a collection of poems.

From the city's maelstrom of activity, I ducked down a minor street into a minor laneway, past industrial rubbish bins and hospitality drones sucking back cigarettes and into the eye of the storm: the pure white dungeon that is Spacement. The noises and smells of the city disappeared as I entered Self Made Man. Curator Kerrie-Dee Johns' motif is the dandy, and with it artifice, subversion and celebration. The dandy has an identity thrust upon him that cannot be refused, only presented back to the world in exaggerated form. Overacting, the dandy demonstrates that identity is always a playing of roles, seducing his audience with suggestive irony and meticulous attention to detail.

In Chris Bond's *The Hitchcock-Feldmar Affair* the 8 glass-framed memoranda from Hollywood studio executive Warren Feldmar to Alfred Hitchcock appear aged and worn. Each memo, a day or 2 apart, contributes to a narrative culminating in the death of a woman. The clues are at times hilarious and at others disturbing, sometimes both. Alfred becomes AH and then "that man." Fingerprint smudges appear—is that blood? Feldmar grows aggressive to the point of paranoia. Is he the killer? Veiled behind this story of rapid psychological disintegration is Bond's meticulously constructed mockery of the 'dream factory.'

The modest dimensions of Melanie Katsalidis and Jonathan Podborseck's *10100 10010 00101 00101* hide its larger significance. The shape, not much more than a foot high, is of a tree, but it's also an icon, divided into 3 segments which seem to represent the natural world (or rather our response to it), the scientific quest, and cultural endeavours. Approaching this serene work, I felt as I did with Ricky Swallow's *Killing Time*—the skill is breathtaking, while the emotional weight of the work is its focus. *10100...* is more explicit in its intentions—the self that it expresses is indistinguishable from its political and cultural context. One segment includes a richly ironic quotation, a poetic meditation on trees and their meaning, but also haunting in its broader application: in part, it says, "Civilisation grew from exploiting, destroying, venerating and looking back..."

I carried this reflection with me to Garrett Hughes's *My Vestige*. In the centre of a display of stuffed birds, a framed bird skull and small Victorian side tables is a large photographic print of a man and a

woman, behind them a screen like patterned wallpaper or carpet, behind that, an English country estate. The man's hand is plunged into the woman's bloody side. She is mostly naked, with the half-drugged look of the archetypal victim. As with Peter Greenaway's films, the imagery is unnerving, almost overwhelming. Hughes, like Greenaway, insists on closing in on visceral realities, showing our civilised icons up to their wrists in blood. As I inched closer and examined its details—the faces as unaffected as any portrait, the bodies composed of re-collaged parts in a kind of Frankensteinian jigsaw—I grew more and more aware of the constructed nature of the image. Hughes whispers to the viewer that the idea of man as hunter and penetrator is not the only construction of power.

In the 3 four-foot square photographs included here from his Gates of Tambo series, Christian Thompson poses as Andy Warhol, Tracey Moffatt and Rusty Peters (a Gija man from the Kimberleys who took up painting at age 60 after a working life as a stockman). In their embodiment of fame, recognition and cultural heritage, these artists might be Thompson's natural role-models. He plays them straight, casually, as if expressing an affinity. But, especially as Moffatt, in profile, taking a photograph, wearing lipstick, he simultaneously becomes the focus. As an Indigenous man, Thompson knows that art is never considered merely on its own merits, but also by reference to the artist's personal history and the way the dominant culture permits and shapes each 15 minutes of fame.

The 'dandies' of Self Made Man secure positions from which the foundations of our identities can be glimpsed—the dread of an ever-proximate madness, the flight from nature through its destruction, the compulsory and regulated nature of fame. Leaving this composed but disturbing space, I re-entered the city-storm on the lookout for turbulence.

Self Made Man, curator Kerrie-Dee Jones, Spacement, Melbourne, Feb 1-26

Andy Jackson is a writer and is currently working on a collection of poems.

RealTime issue #66 April-May 2005 pg. 13