

Poetic Licence

17 - 26 November 2016

Exhibition
Labels

POETIC LICENCE

**Kate Blackmore, Igor Grubić, Karrabing Film Collective,
Meiro Koizumi, Khaled Sabsabi, Artur Żmijewski**

Poetic Licence draws together contemporary artists who explore ethically complex situations. Featuring moving image and installation across the disciplines of art, cinema and documentary, and examining diverse social and political contexts, these works reveal the complications and contradictions of humanity.

Poetic Licence explores how artists employ aesthetics, trauma and taboos in the retelling of historical events, and questions the ethical lines of investigation and response. These works prompt us to consider the autonomy of both artist and subject, and the ways in which these relationships might be productive and problematic, deeply compelling subjects for contemporary art.

Intended to provoke rather than simply inform, each work takes critical aim at the role of contemporary art to exemplify or negotiate power structures, subverting popular discourse and reflecting alternative narratives.

Kate Blackmore

Girls 2014

Two-channel HD video installation, 21.15 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Courtesy: The artist

Girls 2014 begins with the wistful “When I was young...” an indication that one has to grow up fast in Claymore, a South Western Sydney public housing estate. Described by one source as “the most disadvantaged community in Australia”, Claymore is plagued with drugs, alcohol addiction and crime.

The four fourteen-year-old subjects in *Girls* are both street-wise and innocent; they understand the endemic failures of the system that places them in this marginalised situation, yet their unguarded presentations to the camera are disarmingly sweet. Bullying, violence, suicide, sexism and ineffectual authority figures are just some of the subjects broached by the work. But rather than presenting the young women as simply victims of the welfare state, Blackmore attempts to capture their agency, ambition and the poignancy of their transition from adolescence to adulthood.

Kate Blackmore is a Sydney-based video artist whose work draws on documentary and anthropological conventions and often takes the form of multi-channel video installations that contrast naturalised presentation with more formal cinematic concerns of light and shade,

figure and ground, time and sound. Blackmore uses forms of representation that develop from the frictions between and engagement with social and political realities.

Igor Grubić

East Side Story 2006-08

Two-channel video installation, 14 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Collection: The artist

Courtesy: Laveronica Arte Contemporanea, Sicily

The first screen of Igor Grubić's two-channel video installation *East Side Story* 2006–08 shows television footage of participants at gay pride events in Belgrade, Serbia, in 2001 and Zagreb, Croatia, in 2002 being subjected to verbal abuse by passers-by and violent physical abuse coordinated by neo-Nazi groups. The resulting scenes are often distressing and frightening.

The second screen is a re-enactment of these events through the medium of dance. The four dancers perform in the same locations and interpret the events by mirroring movements and gestures from the television footage.

The title *East Side Story* refers to the 1950s American musical *West Side Story*, which dramatises the rivalry between teenage street gangs of different ethnic backgrounds. Grubić's work highlights the connections between extreme right-wing nationalism and the persecution of sexual minorities in the context of the former Yugoslavia.

Igor Grubić is an artist and activist who produces multi-disciplinary work engaging with the society within which

he lives—Croatia in the former Yugoslavia—and its once Communist, now neo-liberal, government. By its nature politically and socially engaged, Grubić's work often uses media footage as a means to inform and propagate his practice.

Karrabing Film Collective

When the Dogs Talked 2014

Single-channel video, 33.53 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Courtesy: Karrabing Film Collective

When The Dogs Talked 2014 blends documentary and fiction to produce a thoughtful yet humorous drama that examines the everyday obstacles of structural and racialised poverty that exist in society, as well as the dissonance of cultural narratives and social forms.

While a group of Indigenous Australian adults deal with bureaucracy relating to overcrowding in their government housing, their children follow them on a journey to re-enact the travel of the Dog Dreaming.

Listening to music on their iPods while walking through country, boating across seas, and navigating technology and communication breakdowns, the group discusses why these ancestral narratives matter and how they relate to their contemporary lives.

Active since 2008, the **Karrabing Film Collective** is a grassroots media group that seeks to integrate past ways of life into contemporary struggles to educate children, create economically sustainable cultural and environmental businesses, and support homeland centres. Through screenings and publications, film-making provides a means for Karrabing to articulate self-

organisation and social analysis within the context of contemporary art.

Meiro Koizumi

Double projection (when her prayer was heard) 2013

Two-channel video installation, 13.18 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Collection: The artist

Courtesy: Annet Gelink Gallery, Amsterdam

Meiro Koizumi's *Double projection (where silence fails) 2013* and *Double projection (when her prayer was heard) 2013* explore the culturally charged figure of the Japanese kamikaze pilot, giving multiple sides of two stories and of Japan's post-World War II national identity.

The first story centres on Mr Itazu, the last living kamikaze pilot, who is enveloped by guilt at having survived the war. Now an old man, he was one of the very few who spoke publicly about his wartime experience, and feeling that he had dishonoured his position. The second story depicts Mrs Nagura, who believed her boyfriend had died on a kamikaze mission during the war, but later discovered his death wasn't considered heroic and denied official recognition as a kamikaze pilot. A sense of failure, especially of having failed their partners, whether in battle or in romance, has remained with these subjects over the years.

Koizumi himself is heard interrupting and instructing his subjects, and also has them perform the characters of their lost partners, thereby demonstrating the emotional manipulations inherent in both testimonial and memory.

Meiro Koizumi is a multi-disciplinary artist who investigates the boundaries between the private and the public, especially in Japanese culture. His videos are often based on performances and constructed scenarios, placing characters, played by himself or others, in awkward situations.

Khaled Sabsabi

Corner (installation view) 2014

Two-channel video installation, 29.56 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Collection: The artist

Courtesy: Milani Gallery, Brisbane

Corner 2014 reflects on connection between communities, bringing into focus an understanding of how diverse geographies are intertwined through the movement of people and through spiritual practice.

Focusing on aspects of Sufism, Sabsabi reveals how faith and learning form the cornerstone on which their culture is grounded. The work also captures an annual ritual that marks the start of Spring, where the cheek of a participant is pierced by a steel skewer.

This work was developed as Sabsabi travelled through Lebanon, Syria and surrounding areas throughout 2011, which coincided with the protests and uprisings of the Arab Spring in the Middle East and North Africa.

Khaled Sabsabi spent his childhood in Lebanon and moved with his family to Australia in 1978, settling in multicultural Western Sydney. He specialises in multimedia and site-specific installations, often involving people in border zones or on the margins of society. In 2003, he returned to Lebanon for the first time, which led to his reengagement with the region and its people. He

continues to work across borders, culture and disciplines to make artworks that challenge extreme principles and actions.

Artur Żmijewski

Repetition 2005

Single-channel video, 39.17 minutes (looped), colour, sound

Collection: The artist

Courtesy: Galerie Peter Kilchmann, Zurich

Commissioned for the 2005 Venice Biennale, Artur Żmijewski's video *Repetition 2005* documents a re-enactment of the 1971 Stanford Prison Experiment conducted by Professor Philip Zimbardo, which studied human behaviour under prison conditions. Isolating a group of volunteers playing roles of inmates and guards, the experiment tested, firstly, the patterns determining how people behave in a new situation, and secondly, the different perceptions of a given situation by people of the same background who are forced to play different roles (here, inmates and guards). Zimbardo's experiment had to be abandoned after six days, as both groups descended into sadism, violence and degradation.

For the re-enactment, Żmijewski assumed the pseudo-scientific role of the social researcher, staging the experiment in a space equipped with one-way mirrors that was filmed by five manual and several night-vision cameras. As well as the 'inmates' and the 'guards', other participants included psychologists, a former prison inmate, and a sociologist involved in prison system reform. The experiment lasted seven days, but the result was somewhat different from Zimbardo's. After

descending into barbarism, the guards had a change of heart; together with the inmates, they walked out on the experiment.

Artur Żmijewski is a contemporary Polish artist renowned for his confronting documentary videos that frequently examine mechanisms of power and oppression. His provocative works are often concerned with the disruption of the body through imprisonment, illness or disability, while also examining mechanisms of control, memory and collective trauma.