

Canberra Contemporary Art Space

Anne Brennan Stephanie Jones Deborah Singleton

Intersections

2 Through the Window

I am thinking about the way we search images, sometimes scanning them over and again, searching for the horror, or relief, in news photos—the dark shape of a body, survivors running away from the scene, a child's eyes—poring over details, snapshots from a decade ago, marvelling at the changes in our friends, the subtle changes in ourselves, reluctant to admit those changes—the softened flesh, the loss of that careless certainty that we were going to rule the world.

That searching is somehow always about ourselves, whether the image is a beloved painting, a distant war, or a private moment. *Remember what it was to be me* is what's really at stake, as Joan Didion says of keeping a notebook. Combing the evidence shows me the awkwardness of my late adolescence, a slow settling of a blanket of uncertainty about my place in the world, until then smugly cocooned by approval and the casual belief that things would always come right. *See there I am with my mother*—what were we to each other then, at that moment, or the first great

love smiling into the sun outside our Leichhardt terrace, *Remember how he smiled*: the things are the clues—her brooch, his hat, the house.

In Anne Brennan's *Memory Drawings* of the house she lived in as a child the rooms are represented by the corners of memory: the kitchen is the stove recess, the living room the fireplace. *Here was a photo taken, here was where we spent our time*. Writ large on the wall, blown up like David Hemmings' photograph in Antonioni's *Blow-up*, the drawings demand to be searched for clues, literally to be *read* for clues. Their soft blurred lines are *written*, inscribed with text, a seamless litany of fragments from family stories, anecdotes, memories. More clues. The words and the walls become fused, even though it may not have been here that we heard the story of our grandfather's childhood, or met our sister's first boyfriend. But the objects and the words are the evidence, squinting at the details we can feel the shock of recognition in the turn of the mantelpiece, the sound of her voice.

4 The experience is like picking up a book from childhood, unremembered in decades, and turning its pages with the wonder of having forgotten its thrill, trying to seize the raw memory that says: this is what it was like for me, this is what I felt: wanting to be able to say *this is how I became that person*.

The blurring of the lines of the drawing, the effect of the words replacing sharp architectural details with only traces, calls up the process of forgetting, the gaps and silences between the moment of hearing a family story and repeating it to a lover. Fragments of childhood, motherhood, sisterhood, chase each other through the fugitive lines of memory, *look there is the cup which now sits on the chiffonier, these are the things I swore I would never say to my children*.

In Deborah Singleton's paintings the act of remembering is cultural. Passages in her works are details from the canon of European painting, fragments carefully excised and blown up, more evidence. Here are the floor sweepings from the painted walls of Pompeii, a vase of flowers from Duccio's *Annunciation*,

a woman carrying food; overlooked objects and staffage become central in their own painting, a shift of focus on the lens and other stories come to light. Singleton's search for evidence, the visual clues which reveal what was always there, is archeological: she sifts through the canon but discards nothing, the site remains intact. *Here is where the sewing basket sat, here is where the food was laid, here is where the women worked*.

The evidence is there in the originals of the paintings, of other work, other stories, other heroes. In Deborah Singleton's painted trays the images are served to us as intrinsically creative, not peripheral to the true stories of art. The careful rendering of an embroidered sleeve, the precise arrangement of the flowers in the vase, the loving attention to the details of the dinner, is evidence of *making*. The patterns of lace, of gingham, of braided hair carry their own meanings, already enmeshed in the history of painting, part of its weave, its truths. And we can *remember what it was to be me*: we can see ourselves in the mother whose existence is signalled

6 by the sewing basket, who is not there to see the bodies of her sons brought in to their father. But she has been there.

It is the spaces as much as the objects themselves which give back their meanings to us, the place where something was, and the place where it is now. In the space of Stephanie Jones' constructed room, the gaps between the walls contain the possibilities of experience, of lives yet to be lived. We can stand in this room, its unfinished gypsum surfaces suggestive of new starts, its size a cosy space for a body, its walls apparently in the act of being raised, like an Amish barn from the ground. Although the space in its newness seems yet to bear the mark or imprint of a body, there are some clues to possible futures: some fragments for its history. Familiar objects are drawn on the walls, a few things, scattered like slippers under the bed, the bag tossed to one side as you come through the door, a missing umbrella. On the opposite walls we can look out, or perhaps further in, to the spaces of our lives, the real and imaginary rooms and corridors, plans and details we carry in our heads and glimpse sometimes through sketchy outlines and the *trompe l'oeil* of

our desires. *Which window will we look through today.*

The room that we stand in, the space we make our own may be always in flux, alternately falling down or being constructed. *Here's a house with a floor, with a wall, with a wall...there's no house anymore, anymore, there's no house anymore.* And so on. Within its walls we are shaping, making spaces, wriggling from confinement to cosiness, from frustration to confidence, and back again.

The work in *Intersections* takes us on that journey, through the spaces of our lives, turning corners, looking for signs and clues, unearthing secrets, evidence, unlocking doors, finding perhaps the madwoman in the attic, or one's mother, or oneself, in a mirror, in the glass, through the window. The scraps of lace and fragments of paper in the drawers, the scrawled name in the wardrobe, are part of the incoherence of our memories, its linings and layers, the things which keep us in touch with who we were, and who we might be.

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