

EXHIBITIONS

Spacious with a hint of plush

domus 3, UT v2
Stevie Wishart and Joan Grounds

Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide
11 May – 3 June

Linda Marie Walker

Three times *domus* has been played out in the house which is a gallery, each time [as if] for the first time. The third time – turned [as if] into a laboratory – it became a place for investigations, experiments, a space for work to be done and to unfold over time. Nothing settled-down in the collaborative work of Joan Grounds and Stevie Wishart – both as it occurred at 'the house' and as it was engaged with by students at the South Australian School of Art and the Louis Laybourne Smith School of Art and Design [at the University of South Australia which hosted their residency]. It was still, at the last performance, with the last note and the blank blue screen, only at a point where it could start up again [as if it was just beginning]. That, a continual starting-up, was the overall effect of the work, of the almost-unspoken intention it might have had, or had as a liminal thesis; those four weeks were an interlude in an ongoing conversation, as if we were overhearing private, secret, fragmentary, arcane even, dialogue: a world receding and advancing, simultaneously. The ancient and the post-present/present.

And so, it's hard to write up. It resists description, it's difficult [laborious] to remember, even though it's deep in memory, there as resonance, vertical and horizontal vibrations.

Grounds is an installation artist, Wishart is a musician/sound artist. Both are performers, although this is not exploited – one doesn't focus on them, instead the work works because they are physically present; their presence activates the work, they are its life. Or, that's when/how I saw the work, at the 'performances'. That's how I attended the work – visited, listened, watched.

Underlying my dis/quiet at my dis/ease at my dis/composure before the work – its elusion and allusion – was the desire for a word. A name, something. What was this work, what was the work working at, producing, making, evoking. 'A' word is not usually what I want. I avoid 'a' word, just in case it ties the 'thing' down, is wrong, ruinous, sad. However, to help writing, to try and work-out, or invent, what Wishart/Grounds were doing, did, might continue to do, I headed to 'landscape' [through David Toop's writings on sound] and settled-on [not down] 'scape' – perhaps thinking too of goat and grace [scapegoat, scapegrace] and of course 'escape': escaping via a word.

Grounds/Wishart seemed to make appear 'scapes' [maybe a grammar of scapes]. A soundscape for example, but not as a mere expression of instrument: the accordion, no, the bagpipes, no, I mean the hurdy-gurdy, is surely the machine for detours. It can endlessly detour, press a key, move this or that, and suddenly it's sounding all together strange.

The world, a world of sound, is mapped on the hand, the visualisation of sound, measured, spatialised [by the medieval monk Guido of Arezzo, c.1000]. And now a thousand years later this act is repeated, filmed, played back. And the instrument from around the same time is played back too, an instrument designed to interact with, alter, architectural space; the instrument

Binary Vision

My Other Lives
Liu Xiao Xian

Queensland College of Art, Griffith University
6 – 29 June

Suhanya Raffel

Liu Xiao Xian's photographic series *My Other Lives* consisted of a group of large C-Type photographs. One of the most interesting aspects of these works is how they manipulated and played with aspects of the illusive. The most obvious, overt and familiar source of the illusive, in this instance, is the historical one. The series uses as its starting point an eclectic group of 19th century Australian portrait photographs collected by the artist. The other point of departure used by Liu is the Mao Zedong quote, "History is created by humans". History, then, becomes an important conceptual frame.

Knowing that history is not a singular event, but a multi-faceted and complex series, underscores these images. There are always many stories to be told, they have occurred or do occur simultaneously and these stories are often slippery. They are hard to nail. History in its entirety is indeed an elusive thing and the effort to present fresh perspectives is due to the certainty that we will fiddle with it and continue to dig into it, compost it and change its structures.

Liu Xiao Xian makes photographs to generate his 'other lives'. He has gone about reinvesting historical images, overlaying or possibly revealing stories. He uses photography, a medium now well over a hundred years old, that has over its own history developed technological capabilities to ensure its facility for illusionistic mastery. Liu has exploited, in full, this potential in these works.

Stevie Wishart and Joan Grounds, *UT v2*, 2001 Photo Alan Cruickshank



is played in domestic dimensions, in the presence of bodies gathered to listen [in the domus]. Yet, what are we listening to. Scape? Scape is a suffix, an after-sense, e.g. streetscape, cityscape; it's also a noun meaning something stem-like – the shaft of a feather, or, in architecture, the shaft of a column. This return, or detour, back to space, architecture, this inevitability: house as space, sound as space, video as space: space-scapes.

At the final performance, lost in sound, it became clear that an idea of world [big space] was being proposed – lost in a scape of music and relentless moving imagery: it was going nowhere fast. It was not about the speed of technology; still, it used technology expediently. Everything from other times – instrument, notation, monk – had come into the present. History now.

You have to wonder: what does this combination of image/sound do [to you]. It's all music somehow; it's all memory, the braided sound of memory; [literally] not music, not images, not space, but remembrance – not of something past, but of something imagined in the past for [and of] the future and worked in the present, something so melancholy [without loss] that it's yet to come, a kind of wishing that while affirming must be treated cautiously.

In the end, afterwards, there was no object, no artefact, just time-spent. A scape [or, many scapes, as many as there were of us] of ambient sound/imagery, an ephemeral

architecture within domestic architecture which expanded space, as the other *domus* projects had; this time not outward or downward, but inner-ward, as if collapsing, imploding – an expansion that, in its compression, had no external e/scape; it became an in/scape of in/teriority [territory], an architecture of dis-memory. Dis, a prefix, meaning apart, away; an apartness from [constant] memory. A dis-scape. The prefix and the suffix join, as sounds do to air, to ear, as images do to air, to eye. Di/scape. Two scapes [gentle division], visual and aural merging ['s' missing, a letter/note]. A before and an after, in the present, at the moment.

It would take too long, in writing, to say how beautiful it would be if there was no record of this work, if it only existed in faulty-memory: di/e/scape, a matter of memorial.

No repose, no dwelling, no order: there is no domus, no domicile, no domesticating without domination, no domesticating without naming. In writing one tames, a good reason to dis-write-e-scape.

domus, the project, did the logical, the known: erased its own premise. Architecture can be anything it's 'taken' for, it has no absolute program, no domus [and much dis-ease].

Liu Xiao Xian, *My Other Lives*, 2001 Photo courtesy Stills Gallery



Mimicking the form of a stereograph, each photograph is composed to look like a diptych. Transformation sits at the heart of these images. In them, the artist as subject is seen being altered across genders to encompass both male and female forms, to be both a child and then an adult. In all the works Liu uses his own face in correspondence with the original sitter. Generated by the artist's interest in the history of the Chinese in Australia, especially during the Gold Rush of the 19th century, the choice to toy with the stereograph format suggests a desire to quote a device that was intentionally illusionistic. Stereographs were created by a camera that used two lenses set approximately the same distance apart as human eyes. The original stereographs were to be viewed through a special device that merged the two images, to create a single image that had a three-dimensional effect. In *My Other Lives* Liu draws on the symbolism of the stereograph – these double portraits tease out notions of identity within the canons of history, suggesting the other narratives that are now beginning to be acknowledged and explored. Like the photographic image, which emerges like a phantom when the paper is submerged in a developer, at the crux of *My Other Lives* is the affirmation and significance of the many stories that constitute our histories.