

Left: Sarah Ryan, *You can't be there*, 2001  
 Right: Sarah Ryan, *Forward thinker*, 2001  
 Photos courtesy the artist



## Spectacular! Lenticular!

*I LOVE U*  
 Sarah Ryan

Contemporary Art Services Tasmania Gallery, Hobart  
 5 May – 3 June

Diana Klaosen

Sarah Ryan, one of Tasmania's emerging locally based photographic artists, achieves with her latest show, *I LOVE U*, an impressive level of artistic resolution and sophistication. Ideally suited to the pristine space of CAST Gallery, the exhibition's elegant lenticular images provide a visual experience both satisfying and disquieting.

Sarah Ryan has made the technique of lenticular photography her own, superimposing finely ridged plasticised layers on her images, giving them the illusory three-dimensional effect of the holograph, a mildly disconcerting shifting perspective and a sense of animation as the viewer moves past them. Added to this are a deliberately cool aesthetic, a larger than life scale and resolutely emptied-out subject matter that, in Ryan's hands, sits on the edge of 'eerie meets hip'. Ryan acknowledges and plays with the appeal of glossy magazine photography, the chic minimalism of

contemporary couture, interior design and architecture – themes not always regarded as serious by the photographic cognoscenti.

In *You can't be there*, a striking indoor shot that resonates with the ambience of an upmarket advertisement or fashion photograph, a white-walled corner features a large window and spikily aggressive looking indoor plant, beneath which, on a fashionably plain settee, a slim, elegantly attired young woman reclines, limbs stylishly askew, eyes closed. A vaguely disturbing vision: it is clearly daytime – why is the chic young woman apparently asleep, her body poised as if on the alert? There are few clues – the room is stripped of further content and context, save a patch of sunlight on the carpet – and the shimmering, corrugated roofing of some unidentifiable adjacent building. The very title "You can't be there" seems to mock the viewer with this sense of enigma. Ryan's images thus deliberately exploit the style and familiarity of the glossy magazine, but subvert and recontextualise the genre, creating work that is disorientating, sometimes amusing and ultimately complete in itself.

From an impressive array of awards, Ryan's most recent major success was winning the annual *City of Hobart Art Prize* for Photo/Digital media. This year's competition was given increased profile by its inclusion in Tasmania's first truly international arts festival, *Ten Days on the Island*. Her entry, *The Real Escape*, again featured an eerie, almost empty modernist space, given a disquieting resonance by the use of lenticular technology.

The seamless artificiality of Sarah Ryan's work challenges photography's claim to objectivity or authenticity. She presents the viewer with stylised moments and scenarios, constructions where the artifice is, paradoxically, not to be detected. The flicker-effect of the lenticular gives an other-worldliness to subject matter at once banal and portentously serious. The actual blurring, the rendering slightly out-of-focus that the process achieves, serves to imbue Ryan's images with an uncanny unreadability. These are not portraits or urban landscapes as such. In some way they transcend those categories. Undeniably beautiful, their shimmering surfaces clearly add to this impression. Technically, they are evidence of an artist very much at ease with her chosen medium; one that is innovative and full of further potential.

## Faith in Relics

*Winterbodies*  
 India Flint, Agnieszka Golda, Lisa Harms,  
 Julie Henderson, Frances Phoenix,  
 Stephanie Radok, Zofia Slezziak

Royal Adelaide Showgrounds, Wayville  
 16 – 17, 20, 22 – 24 June

Maria Bilske

A popular response to the question of what constitutes art is a somewhat debased version of the institutional theory – that art, simply, is what you find in art galleries. It's funny, then, how sometimes placing things in other environments can make them look more art-like; that an object which looks mundane in an art gallery can seem reinvigorated with aesthetic interest when placed in another location. Something like this seems to go on in *Winterbodies*, where a group of seven Masters students [graduating from the South Australian School of Art] have installed their work in individual pavilions at the Royal Adelaide Showgrounds.

Lisa Harms maybe works the effect best, and gives us more than we could wish for too. There are rows of salt, carpets of leaves, frosted plastic buckets, white pillows shoved in the animals' troughs, a piano and a rusty bed-head. Then, in case we're missing something, there's audio, video and super-8 projection, and that signature white cursive text embroidered or emblazoned on everything. The use of the upright piano to refer to the eponymous Jane Campion film is perhaps a little too overt, and the piano keys piled on the floor like kindling maybe didn't need to be emblazoned with "shhh". But the sheds lend these basically clichéd conjunctions of objects some kind of aura, a strange combination of earthiness and majesty.

Opting for intimacy over the grandiose, Zofia Slezziak and Agnieszka Golda have installed their works in a row of small, cubicle-like sheds where animals sleep at



Lisa Harms, *Angles of Response [breathing space]*, 2001  
 Photo Mick Bradley

show-time. Slezziak shows found photographic transparencies, presented in small lidded boxes unevenly illuminated by fairy lights. There's audio here too – lilting melodies, and a droning voice recalling [maybe] childhood memories. The images themselves are well-chosen, but this symbolism of packing memories up in boxes is hackneyed, and their presentation has a sort of heavy-handed sentimentality. Golda works her ethnicity, quoting eastern European folk art traditions. Her installation has a celebratory but sinister carnivale-like quality – wooden daggers hang from red ribbons next to mini cow-bells, a tarred straw effigy, skulls, pomanders studded with chestnuts, lambs' brains and most memorably, a fat cow tongue which protrudes from the mouth of a wooden mask. There's a cool scatter art type of aesthetic in some of the pens, but then meticulous craftedness in others – something for everyone then.

Less well realised are Frances Phoenix's and India Flint's installations. Phoenix has sited her work in the sheep shed and makes an effort to engage with the space. She includes a mirrored plinth topped with a bale of hay [a reference of some sort to modernism, I suppose, but why?]. Another mirror, angled away from the viewer, reflects a pig's ear placed in a stall a few rows away, and on the floor Phoenix has made an anamorphic projection of a sheep, rendered in bird seed. India Flint seems to be aiming for the atmospheric – elongated white dresses hanging from the ceiling, swirls of raw cotton on the ground and pillars roughly upholstered in lamb's wool – but it doesn't seem to come together.

Julie Henderson works that angle better with her minimal installation, *Stirring Still*. Slides projected onto a hanging sheet of diaphanous fabric show Henderson sitting in the corner of a room in various positions. Recently Henderson has been making work relating to her

experiences in dance, and her postures here suggest illustrations of positions-of-the-head in dance manuals. The images are understated and concentrated, and their projection onto fabric gives them an ethereal quality, which the audio element, a strange looping mechanised melody, emphasises.

Stylistically, Stephanie Radok, alone in the Handicrafts Pavilion, is the odd one out. Her larger paintings are semi-abstract and have the rounded, rolling rhythms of landscape. The palette is warm and earthy, perhaps influenced by Aboriginal art, but also showing the rich overlaid scumbles and glazes of Venetian painting. Smaller paintings depict seedpods, and Radok also shows a series of painted plaster tablets cast from books [one faintly proclaims "The Order of Things", except it's back-to-front]. Radok makes unashamedly sensuous work which betrays a fascination for worlds to which she can only relate as an outsider.

Radok's aside, it's hard not to see a similarity of aesthetic in many of these works. Most of the artists share a faith in the capacity of readymade objects and raw materials to convey a range of meanings, or a reliance on the showgrounds architecture or atmosphere to pull the work together. Not all appear to understand that this transfiguration does not occur automatically.