

At the Vanishing Point: Liam Benson, Diego Bonetto, Aroha Groves, Sari Kivinen, Daniel Kojta, David O'Donoghue, Brendan Penzer, Pickafight Books, Tanya Richards, Leanne Shedlezki, 'what' and Naomi Oliver.

**At the Vanishing Point
565 King Street Newtown
5-19 April**

Opening with an eponymous theme, this new artist run space invited all the above artists to respond to the idea of "at the vanishing point." That all works were amazingly well accommodated in the gallery space of a refitted shopfront only a terrace house wide is a credit to director Brendan Penzer (and his many helpers), who must also be complimented for throwing a great opening night bash which spilled over into the back-lane in the solid tradition of inner-city terrace house parties (yes, with that rare event of food, and good food at that, in an artist run space). Oh yes, of course, in respect of the art, further praise must be lavished for mustering an array of talent of the calibre of Sari Kivenin, Liam Benson, Naomi Oliver, David O'Donoghue and Daniel Kotje et al, who have already collectively shown at most major artist initiatives around the country as far a field as PICA in Perth, Artspace, Sydney, and of course, Casula Powerhouse at Liverpool.

That much of the talent originally hails from Western Sydney where Penzer studied accounts for the strong showing of performance-based video works and installation incorporating electronics and sound. An abridged version of David O'Donoghue's *The Nerve Metre* welcomed the gallery-goer with his trademark tangle of coloured electrical cables and stacks of plastic blocks housing or transmitting the sonic components of a white noise composition. In O'Donoghue's work the cabling traces out the forms of a drawing, which 'sounds' itself. Call it live electronic drawing; the signal of sonic transmission is literally drawn out of the materials of the art's own process. Drawn/drawn out in an extended visual pun of vanishing/exhausting its source.

Daniel Kotje, known for his series of large-scale *Alien Presence* installations, which in themselves are feats of technology, media and engineering skills, proffers more intimate video works. The first, shot from the humorous perspective of a child or troll, or someone sitting in a chair, depicts the lower torsos of gallery goers abducted by the lower torso of a hairy wookie monster. This acts as a teaser, the warm-up to Kotje's much more serious piece, *Digital Flaneur*, a self portrait video piece in which Kotje, usually wheelchair bound, is falling/lurching off a wall. It's walking, or a sort of walking, which is indiscernible from stumbling/crumpling gestures in this series of overlaid Moyerbridge style video takes. Like Hitchcock's *Vertigo* it deals with semblance; did the Madeline character jump or fall into San Francisco Bay? Kotje creates an undecidable zone, or vanishing point, in which hope and failure simultaneously occupy an interchangeable ground. The overlaid action repeats in mad loops like cartoon running-on-the-spot, never actually getting beyond beginning, before beginning all over again.

Kotje's plight recalls the tragi-comedy of Samuel Beckett's characters engaged in the repetitions of mundane acts: carefully sucking stones one at a time; passing stones through the pockets of an overcoat; the armless stump of *The Unnameable* daily advertising a restaurant with a sign around his neck, knowing affection and losing it (did she put an umbrella over my head because she loves me; did she forget because she doesn't?) *Digital Flaneur* is work of ironic humour and brutal honesty, all the more poignant as the figure in the loop stumbles, and falls over and over again.

Sari Kivinen extends the performance series of her drunk and vulnerable persona, Starella. Last seen crashed out drunk on the red carpet at an Artspace show, Starella is now drunk and vulnerable in her “punch bath” swilling champagne from the bottle amidst floating fruit, her eye make-up running. This contemporary Ophelia is not metaphorically drunk, stupefied by sorrow as she slips under the water and drowns amid her bath of herbs and flowers; Kivinen’s Ophelia is simply drunk, too out of it to notice how perilously close she is to staying under as she succumbs to periodic submersion in her bath.

Stumbling through the bush it’s a similar story; we see her passed out, alone, unprotected, the self-absented from the abject body, prone in the scrub. Feminine agency, or lack of it, is here the haunting feminist question, like self-worth. McCubbin could define Australian alienation with “Child Lost In the Bush” in the nineteenth century; Henson can eroticise youth through exposing them, naked, at night, in the wilds of the scrub; Kivinen’s vulnerability is of a different order, in that the menace is self-inflicted and her alienation comes from within. Her obliteration, a kind of vanishing in which she disappears from herself, results from the carelessness of willed neglect.

Nevertheless she is from a long line of female drunks in Lautrec; a wasted green absynthe fairy strayed from a Baz Lurhman set in the self-destructiveness of alcohol abuse. Penzer has situated Starella in the tragicomedy of stumblers, her video closed in a small room with Kotje’s *Digital Flaneur*. It’s as if a fine line has been drawn between those who yearn and those who wipe out.

Liam Benson picks up the theme of feminine self-worth in a video of himself as a blonde picked up in drag. We see her slipping off her panties in the passenger seat of a car; presumably we are in the driver/voyeur position, the object of her tease. Shot in night-blue tones, the low-fi styling signals amateur video and the frisson of amateur porn. During the drive she’s been fiddling with her hair, and introspectively fondling her girlie underpants (quite large) as if the source of her feminine allure was there. Then the car stops, she gets out, and the driver follows her deep into the bush until she disappears from sight, and there she leaves us, and presumably her lover, at the vanishing point.

With the demise of artist run spaces Pelt and Loose, At the Vanishing Point promises to be an important and vibrant space for experimental sound and media artists. Location wise, at the lower end of King Street [the chimneys], it compounds the southward drift of galleries and promises to give SNO [Sydney Non-Object Gallery] at Marrickville a run for its money.

Written by Ann Finegan

Image courtesy of Sari Kivinen