



Maillieu, *Untitled*, 1985-1992. Wood and paint tubes. Courtesy Karen Maillieu, Melbourne

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mathematical constructs theory, recognizable.

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as non-ional in o reduce y created inite void gress the past and m of the negates ality and

spirituality. In the words of Hélène Cixous: "Her language does not contain, it carries, it does not hold back, it makes possible." Acting within the boundaries of abstract expression, for so long defined as patriarchal, rhetorical and romantic, oscillation between chaos and unity creates space for discourse and articulation.

ZARA STANHOPE

UNTITLED 93

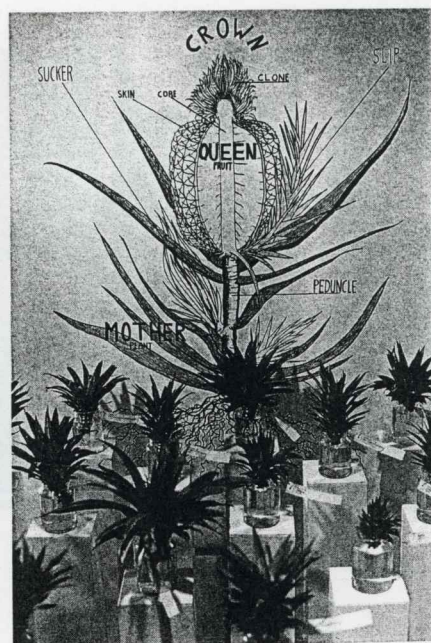
Michael Feldstead, Moko Halford, Helen Hyatt-Johnston, Anne Kay, Victoria Monk and Herb Robertson, Dhirendra McGrath, Deborah Pollard, Julie Savage

Curator: Penny Thwaite

The Performance Space, Sydney

Upon entering a group show of the nature of *Untitled 93*, we find ourselves in a realm reminiscent of Eisensteinian cinema, where connections are drawn, inevitably, between works of diverse and occasionally contradictory origin. Yet if there is a constant running through this show, it is centred around notions of visibility and invisibility boundaries and delineations of inside and outside, public and private, cross-cultural divides and interdisciplinary methodologies.

Anne Kay's *Flue*, which greets the viewer in the first gallery, is a severe pale-blue column, suspended from the sky-light at the head of the space. As you move around this object of an



Herb Robertson and Victoria Monk, *Indigenousepineapple*, 1993. Installation/performance from *Untitled 93*. The Performance Space.

oddly displaced domesticity you become aware of its function as a periscope siting you outside the confines of the gallery proper, and evoking the more hazy realm of individual memory. Julie Savage's embroidered and sewn works likewise deal with boundaries and delineations of private and public spheres, and also of high art and craft. They are understated, though not unambitious, in their questioning. However the contradictions and discriminations which they probe are silenced somewhat through their comfortable framing behind glass. This limits the potential power of the image/objects by relegating them to the safe and instantly recognisable domain of 'Pure' image.

Dhirendra McGrath also employs sewn elements in his *OH.AH!*, a humorously enigmatic work as complex as it is confused. McGrath's installation functions by re-directing the viewer's attention from the gallery's interior to a semi-enclosed courtyard beyond its perimeters. The work reminds us that the trajectory of desire is by no means a simple question of linearity, but rather that it is an intricate web of possibility echoed in the complicated lattice-work of dance steps traced on the gallery's floor. These are contrasted with large red and black cloth letters suspended in the courtyard, unprotected from the weather and emphasising delight in the immediacy of experience.

Helen Hyatt-Johnston's, *The Mark and the Void*, uses minor horror theatrics in an attempt to entice us to consider spaces normally neglected: in this case *The Performance Space's* safe. The safe, thickly sealed with dripping red wax, contains an audio loop of incessant and hysterical laughter. This cackle

is consciously grotesque. Though barely audible, it taunts and mocks the security to which we are accustomed, devouring the 'preciousness' of our accustomed Knowledge.

Mock horror prevails in Deborah Pollard's *Noddy*—dolls perched like ants upon the rim of a white enamel bathtub, all dripping with lurid pink candy. The piece bears witness to the confluence of related, though dissimilar, modes of desire: that of the adult world, de-contextualized so that it may be seen merely as an attempt to quell or to displace the more polymorphous appetites of childhood by way of a 'wholesome' and 'sanitary' commodity fetishism. Moko Halford's work, although very different in intent, also uses domestic iconography. Her wooden wax-covered beds recline elegantly with a sense of traditional *Japonaiserie*.

Indigenousepineapple, the result of a collaboration between Victoria Monk and Herb Robertson, is a multi-layered work which questions the colonialist manipulation of indigenous cultures through the illusion of a Westernised image of pleasure, encapsulated by the humble pineapple. The work deals as much with Western intervention in other cultures and economies for Capitalist gain and with the 'cloning' of a market place, as it does with the underlying philosophical bases behind such gestures of control, in particular Descartes's (in)famous treatise on the divisibility of mind and body.

Finally Michael Feldstead's *Static* appears cast adrift, physically separated from the rest of the show. Feldstead's nostalgia suggests an aestheticism to which his use of a projected



Frank Osvath, *Applause*, 1993. Video installation.

image appears incidental. Then alternately, it may be that the ensuing gap (between visibility and readability) comprises the 'static' to which the title eludes. However whereas static is a charge, a spark, Feldstead's work falls flat, in which case the title might refer to the installation's silent and museological overtones and the mute immobility of an abandoned technology. Yet the work never appears other than loosely conceived, the space behind the projection in particular is an un-space—relegated void—that succeeds only in signifying an inability to signify anything in particular.

Overall *Untitled 93* is an uneven show like many of its sort. There is a slightness and ease of execution underlying various works which does not seem entirely inappropriate given the cosy familiarity of their domestic setting. However, in terms of the dynamics of the show as a whole, one's expectations are consistently undermined, which may in turn be the result of the large number of participating artists. Despite these reservations, the show offers pockets rich in potential and, frequently, a humour not devoid of wit nor irony. The inherent confusion behind certain works contributes a difficulty that is refreshing as it excludes overly simplistic interpretations and encourages viewers to stay with these works longer than they might normally.

ALEX GAWRONSKI

FRANK OSVATH: APPLAUSE

First Draft West, Sydney

Applause was a multi-screen video installation by Sydney-based media artist, Frank Osvath. It comprised twelve monitors and four VCR machines accommodated by a steel architectural structure. Each screen displayed the same sequence of computer processed video images in the form of animation. It was played as an endless loop, which was temporarily interrupted by another cycle that recontextualised the initial animation. Digitally sampled sound effects accompanied the moving imagery to underline the visual content.

The steel structure and the large scale 'high tech' apparatus, were custom-engineered to fit the small exhibition room that, in itself, determined its own oppressive spatial net in harmony with the installation. Of the two units, the zinc plated steel structure held the monitors and the second component, facing its counterpart, was packed with VCR machines. These two elements—the 'operated' and the 'operative' or 'directive'—were inter-connected with video leads protected in flexible steel tubes and firmly fixed onto the floor in parallel lines. The physical enclosure was painted white in an attempt to evoke a floating sensation, fusing minimalist asseveration and totalitarian *grandeur*.

All video screens were synchronised in an 'out-of-sync' effect. A luminous flickering charged the exhibition space with mesmerising pulsations and was the only source of illumination. It was emitted from the individual monitors under the control of the reiterative computer

animation running perpetually in its endless loop. This repetitious 'mechanical animation' forced time to be measured in units, yet paradoxically one became oblivious of its passing. Although *Applause* was seemingly enmeshed in a totalitarian *folie de grandeur*, in fact it allowed no room for such *naïveté*. For Goebbels "art ... [was] a function of the life of the people, to which meaning ... [was] given by the divinely inspired artist".¹ If in 'totalitarian art', 'form' served 'function', it was a banal but viciously effective dichotomy, for human efficiency and creativity are among the most demanding and demanded values in modern society. Osvath's own experiences are not far dissociated from such mental and social spaces: the hidden order left its dark imprints on the face of two generations of Hungarians with whom he grew up in the late 1960s and 1970s. This primordially system of form and function treated the individual as passive prototype creating an almost unbreakable barrier—the fear of change.²

The artist's current work enigmatically decodes the logico-emotional problems of the past by way of active interpretation of our present malaise. Form and function enter the realm of compromise, an intentional *coup de foudre*, an equilibrium where neither of the two assume priority. The fractured presence of the flickering screens provides a glimpse of the dysfunction of a human society increasingly narcotised in almost all spheres. Osvath is well aware of the emblematic implications of repetition used in *Applause*: it generates a timeless, but above all an entrancing quality with obvious social analogies. Ultimately, the question