

Remember Who You Are - catalogue essay

Remember who you are presents photographic and video work by seven Melbourne based artists whose fascination is with overlooked experiences, the presumed ordinary. The economic and technological acceleration of life in Western society allows us less and less time to reflect, contemplate. The artists in the exhibition have tried to slow time (this slowing is essential) fixing moments from their everyday lives onto photographic paper, revealing and elevating their importance. The fascination of the everyday, the simple things, the ignored things, the domestic, the personal. The true 'strangeness' of the commonplace.

As the patients in the Oliver Sacks novel *Awakenings* are stopped in the midst of their lives by meningitis, so the artists in this show have stopped to photograph what they see. It is intriguing where each person has stopped and what determines their point of punctuation. After all, the sheer volume of information that exists in everyday life at each and every instant is potentially over whelming. The 20th century philosopher Henri Bergson suggests that the human senses should be regarded as limiters to this energy that bombards our beings. The artists, like anthropologists, look closely at their ongoing visual fields. They observe their daily lives to reflect, remember and analyze. This introspection requires a substantial change in speed. In *Slowness*, Milan Kundera suggests there is a secret bond between forgetting and speed. Imagine a man walking down a street, at a certain moment he wants to forget where he is, he is pre-occupied, his pace quickens as if he were trying to distance himself from a thing still too close to him in time. Mean while a person who wants to take in his surroundings (remember) unconsciously slows down, allowing himself to open up to other layer of experience. Both people walk down the same street, yet their impressions differ. The art works appear documentary in nature yet they have no beginning, end, direction or linear narrative. They reveal moments of instability in terms of their meaning and are glimpses of the inner and outer worlds of the artists. "The perceived, by its nature, admits of the ambiguous, the shifting, and is shaped by its context."¹ There is no physiological definition of visual perception because the physiological event of seeing obeys biological and psychological laws. We learn to pass quickly from one impression to another and see things "through the spectacles of memory."² Some things we see harbor much more than the qualities presented at a given time; a particular significance – the question is what determines this significance. Something tossed away may be beautiful to someone. And the empty room is full of ghosts. The artists in this exhibition share an ongoing fascination with everyday experiences and their aesthetics. Their work considers and reflects on the ways the artists confront and navigate themselves through their everyday lives. By looking at the seemingly insignificant, each artist is revealing details from the everyday.

¹ Merleau-Ponty, m *The Phenomenology of Perception* Routledge, London, 1989

² *ibid*