

The main exception to these distanced views is found in a series of small prints entitled *Rituals*. This category is further divided into *Wedding Day*, *Tupperware Party*, and *Anzac Day*. Even here, despite the celebratory nature of the events depicted, there remains a sense of distance, the sense that this is resolutely an outsider's view. One reason for this is the categorization of the images, which, though not attempting to encapsulate the meaning of these events, does (in classic photo-documentary style) seem to act as a summary. Whereas they provide the highlights (the important bits), the images by Logan residents seem to suggest that every bit, every moment, is important.

Rather than being a failing, this outsider status is very much a role assumed by Stahely and Lloyd, and one that comes with the nature of their project. Roland Barthes famously wrote of the punctum of the photograph, the random detail that inspires empathy in the viewer by affirming the humanity of the subject. It cannot be constructed by the photographer, but must be construed by the viewer. In acknowledging this fact, in not attempting to imitate the punctum of the informal snapshot, Stahely and Lloyd accept the unavoidable mantle of the photo-documentalist/outsider.

In spite of the different approaches taken, one thing that runs through most of the works on show is the fact that they have the look of stolen glances. Apparently taken while no one is looking, before anyone has arrived, or after they have passed, the images by Stahely and Lloyd have a feel of distance, of otherness, even of longing. On the part of the residents, the works have the feel of moments snatched and grasped, of fleeting impressions of transient events.

They also have the look of an image that is as much given as taken, and as much shared as preserved. These are images of a particular community that, like Barthes's punctum, reach out beyond their own boundaries.

CHRIS HANDRAN

PLANT ROOM

sarah goffman, lisa kelly, carla cescon

Gallery 4A

Asia Australian Arts Centre, Sydney

22 June – 14 July 2001

The recent group exhibition *Plant Room*, by Sarah Goffman, Lisa Kelly and Carla Cescon, explored connections between hidden and transparent spaces through interpretations of city sites such as plant rooms, apartment buildings, and alleyways. In recreating and referencing these spaces through ways in which architecture can function as both a psychological and social space, the plant room became a microcosm of the greater inner city environment replete with material traces, evidencing the *stuff* of consumer based societies.

Carla Cescon created plump, silvery pigeons, oddly shaped and awkward looking, like those who have spent too much time in city parks and under the eaves of city buildings. A city pigeon's lot, it would seem, results in particular idiosyncrasies—missing legs, string or plastic bound around the feet, greasy looking feathers, malformed beaks and injured wings. Yet despite appearances these pigeons were convincingly determined in their pursuit of the safe haven of a plant room. Cescon used the impossibility of the flocking pigeons entering the two-dimensional space of the roost as a broader metaphor for an experience of social dislocation. We knew the innate behaviour of these pigeons seeking a place to occupy to be flawed—wherever they reside will be temporary, they will eventually have to move on. There was a pathetic yet bolstering sentiment in knowing that this drive to roost was nevertheless not be undermined by the changing environment in which pigeons must consistently adapt in order to survive.

Sarah Goffman worked more directly with the potential of utilitarian objects to exceed functionality, referencing generic products such as water and living plants through consumer brand names and artifice. With the text 'Add Life' in large, plastic lettering above the

work, Goffman was suggesting that places such as plant rooms exist as a foundation for the hidden machinations of industrial societies: secret, restricted rooms in which stuff exists, dormant, awaiting activation.

Cardboard boxes with useless electrical capacities by Lisa Kelly played on the idea of superfluousness. I could not help thinking of all the electrical gadgets that do the most ridiculous things, at times things you would never have contemplated and do not bother with despite your knowledge of them, gadgets destined to line second hand trash and treasure stores.

As a source of activity generation the exhibits in *Plant Room* worked with modernist interpretations of space, particularly identifiable in the preoccupation with objects that seemingly make our lives easier and therefore better. Each of the artists worked to elevate the austerity of a space beyond its pure functionality into a grandiose environment where plasticity became the scapegoat for a loss of the real as a socially sustaining force. In raising the base grossness of productivity as a sort of contemporary evil in which our ideas of the real are rendered futile, there was a sense of pervading negativity regarding what meaning the plant room does generate. In using the instinctual behaviour of pigeons to roost, Cescon's work provided a slightly more optimistic account of this existence in which the circuitous tendencies of pigeons to repeat behaviour irrespective of its ultimate failing did not divert their drive to occupy this space.

To conjure the space of the plant room in the shopfront downstairs space at Gallery 4A was somewhat of a challenge. The space does not readily lend itself to the withdrawn darkness of the plant room idea. It is extremely well lit in terms of natural light and is located within a wonderfully dynamic local community environment with an endless amount of human activity. Works within this space inevitably become objects of curiosity, feeding directly into the wealth of social activity taking place on the doorstep, which in this instance transposed the idea of the plant room as being depressing and melancholic to that of a discovery centre.

This exhibition did go some way to communicating the life of hidden spaces such as plant rooms, alleys and boxy inner city dwellings where humans and animals alike must consistently adapt to their changing architecture. In challenging the idea of what is real, each of these artists played with tensions between visibility and invisibility as a means of locating and manifesting evidence of life activity.

LISA BYRNE

WEFT
sonja porcuro

Experimental Art Foundation, Adelaide
8 March – 7 April 2001

Christopher Chapman's decision to exhibit installation artists Sonja Porcuro and Katherine Huang together was inspired. Looking through Porcuro's visually minimal installation *weft* into Huang's abundant work *systems*, it is clear that stylistically the works are very different. Whilst this difference is complementary, it is the delicate sensibility to material, space and composition with which Porcuro and Huang imbue their installations that defines the success of the juxtaposition. This delicate sensibility imparts a sense of history in the space of the gallery. In both installations there is an invitation to inspect, but also a sense of mystery, a stepping sideways.

Porcuro's installation *weft* is positioned in the first half of the gallery, pushed back so as to draw the viewer in. This is the first hesitation. The second is the sparse material existence of *weft*. A series of white and blue chalk socks strung together lengthwise and suspended from the ceiling form solid lines which only just touch the floor. As you look at them, you look through them. Their colour, tone and texture are so similar to the walls and floor that they become visually inaudible. It is only Huang's colourful installation *systems*