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Ilam Campus Gallery
School of Fine Arts
University of Canterbury

SERAPHINE PICK WANKERED

8 – 30 October 2014



Out for the Count

The scenes of our life are like pictures in rough mosaic, which have no effect at close quarters, but must be looked at from a distance in order to discern their beauty. So that to obtain something we have desired is to find out that it is worthless; we are always living in expectation of better things, while, at the same time, we often repent and long for things that belong to the past. We accept the present as something that is only temporary, and regard it only as a means to accomplish our aim. So that most people will find if they look back when their life is at an end, that they have lived their lifelong ad interim, and they will be surprised to find that something they allowed to pass by unnoticed and un-enjoyed was just their life—that is to say, it was the very thing in the expectation of which they lived.

– ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER

It is axiomatic of the frat house shenanigans of young dudebros that when one dudebro passes out drunk, his dudebro comrades will rearrange him into humorous poses, draw on his face or otherwise prank him for entertaining *schadenfreude* upon his waking. Frequently these are photographed for posterity. Since the advent of the Internet, and social media in particular, such images have found a home amongst the whimsical felines, memes and porn, and proliferated on sites like funnypica.com and Pinterest where Séraphine Pick has found them and used them as source material for these recent paintings. There are young women in awkward postures of unconsciousness too. There is a pathos and vulnerability in the paintings. The young women trigger the alarms of date rape. The young men are similarly prone – the case of the Kaitaia backpacker hostel owner who drugged and interfered with his young male guests comes to mind – but they also might allude to death, New Zealand’s horrific suicide rates for young men in particular. It is an artefact of still images that the missing data makes it impossible to determine whether someone is dead or merely sleeping and given the prevalence of post mortem or mourning photography in the Victorian period, one can easily be kept guessing.

In the products of the culture industry human beings get into trouble only so that they can be rescued unharmed, usually by representatives of a benevolent collective; and then, in illusory harmony, they are reconciled with the general interest whose demands they had initially experienced as irreconcilable with their own. – THEODOR ADORNO

One youth is bound up in packing tape and silly string like a badly wrapped mummy. Another hangs suspended by a coat hanger slipped into his t-shirt. Yet another lies akimbo on the floor in an improvised crucifixion and sprayed down with a fire extinguisher. Others are given new and grotesque faces of beer bottle caps, French fries and cigarettes up the nose. What do we feel; amusement, pity or disgust? The paintings are rendered in a muted, slightly muddy soft-focus and gestural style that seems influenced by a skein of Belgian painters from James Ensor to Luc Tuymans. There is also a suggestion of voyeuristic gaze and distancing loose brushwork of a Manet or Degas. These are not the lyrically surreal, delicate, weightless works of ten years ago. Instead they are firmly grounded in the objectively real, with a distinctly cynical, or at least worldly, edge. After all, binge drinking and pubic intoxication are a cause célèbre among social evils afflicting New Zealand's youth; though evidence of bottles and cans are either subtle or absent. The subject is a stance that keeps us on edge. The compositions are noticeably more fluid and natural than earlier work, but maintaining threads that were already present and being explored beside the deliriously surreal work.

*Something different is disclosed in the drunkenness of passion: the landscape of the body...
These landscapes are traversed by paths which lead sexuality into the world of the inorganic.
Fashion itself is only another medium enticing it still more deeply into the universe of matter.*
– WALTER BENJAMIN

Part of the frisson of the works, the *jouissance*, is in recognising that someone is there, but that they are not present. As a viewer, further removed by the painterly medium, we are left in an ambiguous relationship with the sleepers. “Faultily faultless, icily regular, splendidly null, / Dead perfection, no more.” (Alfred Tennyson, *Maud*; *A Monodrama*, 1855). Neither dead, nor alive – the passive subject as object. There is something almost anthropological or ethnographical about it, a manifestation of James Clifford’s “Salvage Paradigm”; the belief that it is necessary to preserve so-called “weaker” cultures from assimilation or destruction by the dominant culture. We can have no knowledge of them as people, what they think about, what they dream. Do they, for example, dream that an artist in Wellington is painting them from their on-line pictures, or do they perhaps dream that they are being looked at in an art gallery?







If I take death into my life, acknowledge it, and face it squarely, I will free myself from the anxiety of death and the pettiness of life - and only then will I be free to become myself.

– MARTIN HEIDEGGER

‘Now, Kitty, let’s consider who it was that dreamed it all. This is a serious question, my dear, and you should NOT go on licking your paw like that—as if Dinah hadn’t washed you this morning! You see, Kitty, it MUST have been either me or the Red King. He was part of my dream, of course—but then I was part of his dream, too! WAS it the Red King, Kitty? You were his wife, my dear, so you ought to know—Oh, Kitty, DO help to settle it! I’m sure your paw can wait!’ But the provoking kitten only began on the other paw, and pretended it hadn’t heard the question.

Which do YOU think it was? – LEWIS CARROLL

Pick rose to public attention and acclaim in the early 1990s as part of a wave of artists who graduated from the University of Canterbury School of Fine Arts in the late 1980s and basing themselves in Christchurch in the first half of the ‘90s. This loosely rhizomatic grouping included Tony de Lautour, Peter Robinson, Shane Cotton and Chris Heaphy, with Bill Hammond as a sort of older doyen and Saskia Leek as a late protégé. In 2009 Pick was the subject of a large touring survey exhibition put together by Christchurch Art Gallery. These were artists known for collecting the signs and symbols of identity from the collective Jungian New Zealand unconscious, sharing and swapping them, and assembling them into visual problem solving machines – syntagms of identity. Pick is a cataloguer, a snapper up of unconsidered trifles for her bricolages of the ephemeral and nostalgic. The jumble is gone, but the desire to record what might otherwise be discarded, is still there, primarily as an excuse to put paint onto canvas and create these wonderful, magnetic paintings.

ANDREW PAUL WOOD

LIST OF WORKS

- Tape* 2013, Oil on canvas, 900 x 700 mm
- Coat Hanger* 2013, Oil on canvas, 900 x 700 mm
- Dusted Man* 2013, Oil on linen, 500 x 600 mm
- Gutter* 2013, Oil on canvas, 400 x 400 mm
- Back Seat* 2013, Oil on linen, 300 x 405 mm
- Two girls* 2013, Oil on canvas, 350 x 455 mm
- Pile Up* 2013, Oil on linen, 400 x 500 mm
- G String* 2013, Oil on canvas, 355 x 455 mm
- Stack of Cards II* 2013, Oil on linen,
400 x 500 mm
- Hallway* 2013, Oil on canvas, 400 x 500 mm
- Fetal position* 2013, Oil on canvas, 300 x 400 mm
- Decorated portrait 1* 2013 , Oil on canvas,
500 x 400 mm
- Decorated portrait 2* 2013, Oil on canvas,
400 x 300 mm
- Decorated Portrait 3* 2013, Oil on canvas,
450 x 350 mm
- Peach Stack* 2014, Oil on canvas, 655 x 560 mm
- Grey Stack* 2014, Oil on canvas, 655 x 560 mm

CATALOGUE IMAGES

- Dusted Man* 2013
- Peach Stack* 2014
- Tape* 2013
- G String* 2013

Front cover: *Gutter* 2013

Back cover: *Coat Hanger* 2013

S  raphine Pick was born in Kawakawa, Bay of Islands in 1964. She graduated with a BFA from the School of Fine Arts, Canterbury University in 1987 and went on to graduate from Christchurch Teachers’ Training College in 1991. She won the Olivia Spencer Bower Residency in 1994, was the Rita Angus Artist in Residence in 1995 and the Frances Hodgkins Fellow in 1999. She was a painting lecturer at Elam School of Fine Arts from 1997 to 1998. She is represented by Hamish McKay Gallery, Wellington, the Michael Lett Gallery, Auckland and the Station Gallery in Melbourne. She was recently involved in producing the title sequence of stop animation paintings for Jane Campion’s BBC TV series *Top of the Lake*. She lives and works in Wellington.

Andrew Paul Wood is an art and culture writer, translator, poet, educator, broadcaster and historian.

His most recent publications were two translations of the the refugee German-Jewish poet *Karl Wolfskehl, Under New Stars: Poems of the New Zealand Exile* (2012), and *An die Deutschen/ To the Germans* (2013), both with Friedrich Voit of Auckland University, and *Quietus: Observations of an Altered City* (2013) with photographer Doc Ross. He is currently finishing a PhD at Canterbury University on Pick and her contemporaries in the 1990s, working on a documentary on the pavlova, and lives in Christchurch.

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Ilam Campus Gallery is the University of Canterbury’s public exhibition space, connecting staff and students with contemporary art communities internationally, nationally and locally.



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