

Vocal Thoughts

Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia

Until Sun 10 Oct

'Vocal Thoughts', curated by Peter McKay, is the fitting title of the exhibition currently showing at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia (CACSA). Peter McKay should be applauded for putting together an exhibition that boldly broaching a range of no-no topics. Within our cosy society topics such as personal confessions, complaints and insecurities, brainwashing and consumerist markets, domestic violence, prostitution and depressions are scarcely brought to the forefront, not to mention openly discussed. This exhibition includes a diverse group of video artists: Anna Davis and Jason Gee, Kate Murphy, Chris Howlett, Dani Marti, Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta- Kalleinen, and illustrator Daniel Johnston.

The exhibition begins with Daniel Johnston's twelve comic-like drawings, all of which are equal in dimension, produced with coloured texta on white card. Johnston's original style, colouration, wild storylines and fantastical characters together with provocative text such as "I love you forever in my nightmare" are an honest representation of an individuals struggle with the balance of reality. It would be remiss of me not to mention that Daniel Johnston has bipolar disorder and has led a turbulent life. His art practice has been a means for communicating some of the internal fears and anxieties that he regularly experiences. I guess you could say that Johnston's drawings have been a way of vocalising, or making heard his thoughts. The drawings often feature adaptations of well-known cartoon characters, which include Casper the Friendly Ghost, The Hulk and Captain America. These recognisable characters are often depicted in conjunction with the artists' self-produced characters, animals and monsters. The main theme that dominates this series, like all good superhero stories is the war of good versus evil. The symbolism and the confrontational text within Johnston's drawings are direct and penetrable thoughts that question human ideals of love, truth and freedom.

Close by is Anna Davis and Jason Gee's Biohead-Actualized (2008) a single screen video with headset. The Biohead-Actualized is made up of a vaudeville ventriloquist doll head floating on a black backdrop, with an American digitalised voiceover that was constructed from found sound. The doll head speaks to the viewer, as if reciting a memorised script from a self-help book. The puppets monologue reveals the dark and disturbing underbelly of a multimillion dollar making business that preys on the weak and vulnerable citizens of our society. Davis and Gee have cleverly combine two medias, the ventriloquist doll and self-help literature to expose the exploitative practices of consumerist wealth making corporations. The overall effect is immediately disturbing but ultimately revealing and somewhat comical.

Next in the sequence of works is Kate Murphy's single-take monologue video presentation The Appointment, produced in 2009. On the same line of thought as the self-help dummy by Davis and Gee this work presents a similar monologue. Yet instead this time the viewer stands face to face with a

'trained professional', otherwise known as a psychologist. The middle-aged male, has a five o'clock shadow, glasses perched on the brim of his nose and is dressed in plain office clothing. He sits with pen and paper in hand as he looks directly into the eyes of the viewer and asks, "So how has your week been?" This one-sided conversation continues, as one would imagine a therapy session to, with lots of questions about feeling, frustrations and recommended methods for coping. Unlike Biohead-Actualized, which climaxes into delirium, The Appointment ends on a positive foot when the counsellor asserts, "Good, because there is a way around".

In a similar vein of video production and montage, Chris Howlett's machinima Homesteads series combats difficult issues of domestic violence, rape, Internet stalking, paedophilia, and political conspiracy and corruption. The three video screens all individually depict scenes and adaptations from The Sims PC-computer game. The Sims montage is then matched with surreal voice recordings that are a mash-up of Dr Phil and Oprah (for the first film/screen in the series Homesteads), Kevin Rudd's interview and others about the Bill Henson case (Homesteads - part 1) and lastly interviews with American soldiers about the Iraq war and the governments corrupt motivations (Homesteads - part 2). These created dystopian environments in The Sims simulation reflect the chaos and disturbances of current affairs in our real world. The reality is mixed with super fictional to create something that is instantly more subversive and horrific. In the original Sims game as the player we would have been able to control this mayhem, to put out the fire, to stop the baby from crying etc. but in Howlett's Homesteads we are purely spectators and have no control over the built environments and narratives. This paradoxical scenario brings into question the extent to which we as bystanders can bring about change within our immediate surroundings to produce harmonious environments and seek justice.

Dani Marti's interview style films, Time is the fire in which we burn (2009) and Andrea greeted with pubescent smile (2008) are confronting and moving portraits of two different individuals, one named John and the other Andrea. The online realm is further discussed in Andrea greeted with pubescent smile filmed in Barcelona in 2004. This is a portrait of the artists' sixteen year old niece, living in Spain and meeting friends and boyfriends on the Internet in online chat rooms. This documentary style film is an honest and candid insight into how teenagers form relationships, and mature socially and sexually in the present day. The young female subject speaks openly about some of the romantic relationships that she has been involved with as a result of meeting people online. In this video the teenager confidently shares about her experiences, both negative and positive with the interviewer. However it is evident that these circumstances have sharpened Andrea's perception and intuition of people, while she remains enthusiastic about online modes of interaction and communication.

Last and certainly not least is Tellervo Kalleinen and Oliver Kochta- Kalleinen's ongoing collaborative project called Complaints Choir. This work is setup in the backroom at CACSA over a four screen projection. The installation is such that when one loop finishes on one screen another begins almost instantaneously on another screen. Each containing independently formed chamber choirs performing choral arrangements set in Singapore, Copenhagen, Tokyo or Helsinki. The Complaints Choir was initiated by Kalleinen and Kochta- Kalleinen as a way of establishing community choirs around the world in order to publicly perform 'complaints' submitted by locals as the lyrics to original compositions. The lyrics are just

common-day grievances like relationship and personal problems, environmental concerns, lack of job opportunities, money difficulties and so forth. However when these frustrations are voiced in a public forum, composed to beautiful four part harmonies they appear trivial and very humorous.

All these works negotiate forums of public and private thought. They digress into medical, political and economical investigations but ultimately question the state of humanity. 'Vocal Thoughts' is an intense, involved and honest portrayal of several individuals' personal experiences and confessions. Making the invisible, visible and the abnormal, only human.

Polly Dance

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