

KAREN WOODBURY GALLERY

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The Space in Between
Rachael Watts

Dark elements dominate the traditional narrative thread of Matwiejew's most recent body of work, *Broken Spell*.

Wide universal concerns are voiced regarding ecology and human relationships. The connection between humans and nature is grandiosely considered, challenging the perception of human power over the environment. This connection is juxtaposed with the imaginative and organic elements characteristic of Matwiejew's practice. In this way, the free-flowing sensual nature of Matwiejew's images and film confronts literal examination.

Matwiejew successfully locates a space between reality and supposition as the jarring inconsistency of raw production techniques combined with images of natural disaster create a surreal yet palpable experience. This complex blurring of thresholds is a space that can be likened to Jacques Derrida's third space in discussion of his concept of *différance*ⁱ. *Différance* provides access to a space between meaning and divisibility, a space that exists between and beyond binary terms such as the present and the future, or the good and the bad. It is a play between two signifiers that differ, opening a space for what they represent as well as what they defer. It sets up an open temporal dimension, thus creating a constant transition and negotiation of the in-between; the third space. Matwiejew focuses on this gap, this temporal deferral, where signifiers are both attracted and opposed to each other, beyond reality and the proliferation of our information age. An immeasurable space asserting substance, beauty and a depth of character is assumed.

The digital prints and film are presented in a collage construction. The images are synthetic. The flow of film and the construction of single images are manipulated and fragmented yet these images resonate with a foreseeable reality that relates to our surrounding environment. This cut and paste aesthetic has a long history in the arts from Picasso to Duchamp to *Musique Concrete*, and finds an extension in Matwiejew's digital paintings.

Matwiejew's process consists of images photographed, collated and scanned onto a screen, then altered, cut and blended with

other imagery with the use of a 'digital brush.'ⁱⁱⁱ The artist's brush attends to each individual pixel in a painstaking method for altering colour and brightness. The resultant works are somewhere between a photograph and a painting. Matwiejew's training and earlier career as a painter is evident within her organic process of creation. The reinvention and transition of her practice has been informed by pertinent personal concerns and issues such as ancestry, sexuality and the environment. For the last six years she has worked exclusively with digital media. The intuitive and instinctive approach to her work however remains the same, with a heartfelt sincerity of emotion. This emotion has been deconstructed and detached in this process however, distancing the immediacy and directness of contact, allowing for a more channeled and concentrated approach that creates a tension of expression within the work. Matwiejew brings to the medium a new perspective, free from technical training.

The almost clumsy jump from scene to scene in her film alludes to a third space. Amidst this clunk an inadvertent rhythm develops. The unconventional blending and splicing imbues new readings outside of the storyline of love and environmental disaster. The imagery is flawed in a conventional aesthetic sense, yet it is this very aspect that enriches her work by leaving open a realm for interpretation and deeper contemplation; a space for further consideration. Described categorically as a form of digital surrealism,ⁱⁱⁱ the surrealistic elements in this work are nonetheless anchored in earthbound concerns for potential disaster.

Translation then becomes the mode of expression. To translate is to turn from one language to another, to change form, condition or nature, to transfer. This translation occurs from the frozen to the flowing movement of time expressed in the production of film and photography, from a painter's experience to a digital format. It embraces new technology, creating a dialogue with digital culture^v whilst acknowledging the computerisation^v of society and culture.

Broken Spell, is conveyed in a hybrid advanced technological format that urges us also to reconsider our relationship to nature, raising our awareness of our original and

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essential symbiotic relationship to the earth and universe. The film itself was created for a large scale presentation, and in this exhibition has found itself sitting alongside images hung on the wall. This translation from one medium to the next is enjoyable and stimulates interaction with the sonic while challenging our preconceptions of how to receive particular forms of artworks.

Confusion, fear and excitement engulf the eye. Extreme seasonal changes and natural disasters unfold as the change in mood is altered constantly. Darkness is contrasted starkly to the vivid whiteness of an icy environment. The recurrent image of the black Russian dress, symbolising death, reappears from Matwiejew's earlier film *Arabesque* suggesting grave danger to the couple portrayed in the film and photographs. This sense of danger is offset by sonic accompaniment. The threatening howling of the wind, crashing waves, ice melting, lightning and stormy weather is alternated with lighter more reassuring sounds of chimes, birds, crickets and cows, creating yet another opposition of experience. In the midst of turmoil the sun is still slightly visible. In the lighter moments depicted in the last scene of the film and in the work *Tears*, time is slowed and distilled. Autumn leaves are used as a symbol of rejuvenation and renewal, as an underlying beauty is extrapolated and resolves the turbulence of accompanying images.

Matwiejew's practice continues to evolve as her voice and vocabulary expand, and her experiments set her work apart with *différance*.

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ⁱ See Royle, Nicholas, (2003) Jacques Derrida, Routledge, London, Chapter 7 'Différance', p71-83 a discussion from Derrida's 1968 essay 'Différance'.

ⁱⁱ Described in discussion by Norbert Loeffler lecturer of Visual Art Theory and History at the Victorian College of the Arts, Melbourne, 6/05/08

ⁱⁱⁱ Interview with Magda Matwiejew, April 2008

^{iv} Trend, David (2001), Reading Digital Culture, Blackwell Publisher, Oxford, p1

^v See Tofts, Darren, (2005), Interzone: Media Arts in Australia, Craftsman House, Fishermans Bend