

Is it possible to think straight while orbiting?

Six Orbits Around the Blue Moon was curated by Nadine Christensen and James Lynch, and included works by Tony Garifalakis, Justine Khamara, Darren Sylvester, Robert Vinnicombe, Nadine Christensen and James Lynch. It was seen in Aotearoa at Ramp Gallery, WINTEC, Hamilton, 24 August – 16 September 2005, and The Engine Room, Massey University, Wellington, 12 – 28 October 2005.

I often think about how, roughly 430km straight up from where I'm standing is *outer space*. It would be like setting out from Dunedin and driving west; I'd make it to the small coastal town Haast in approximately 9 hours and 35 minutes, or from good old Hamilton I would overshoot Kaitaia in 7 hours 45 minutes, conditions allowing and including sensible stopping.¹

So, give me a show that includes particular linguistic triggers and I'm dressed like Sigourney, imagining new ways of assimilating atmospheric elements and waving my friends goodbye.

Six Orbits Around the Blue Moon is a synthetic system: each work sits neatly in its own flight path, quietly asking for attention, making it a mellow float through the lunar system on offer. With a range of traveling options for my viewing experience ranging from high speed reclines to frenetic suspensions, ideas are neatly packaged in a bank of landing possibilities. Although Nadine and James tell us the artists in *Six Orbits Around the Blue Moon* "...are restless" and that "They're interested in the 'Right to Escape'; in orbiting, double takes, perceptual spasms..." there is an ease here, a comfortableness, an open system with a way in – the works are happy in each other's company, as happy perhaps as their artists in the Melbournian landscape. Accidental connectivity and hedonistic accounts of belonging are almost tangible in these six works. Well, it's a kind of belonging – a system that records the uncomfortable distances and complimentary pleasures of making art on a small planet... and these works do appear to be orbiting a central hub.

My left eye doesn't work like most left eyes, which apparently means I see less *round* in things, so my spheres are *slimmer* than most of yours and I wondered with Justine's collage, whether I was stretching the bulge or shrinking the curve? Are the faces in this work a 'borg-like metaphor, claiming insect vision to argue our collective responsibility, or are they the territorial ownership of a new world, an isolated human stuck in the unending visual search for clarity / vision / understanding... truth?

The tricky perspectives within Roberts' drawing and the inclusion of splayed cardboard boxes allude to a perpetual



Top: Darren Sylvester, *Don't lose yourself in tomorrow* (2004), DVD, sound, duration 4.32 min. **Middle:** James Lynch, *Untitled* (2005), colour pencil, watercolour, tracing paper and magic tape on paper, 39 x 59.5 cm. **Bottom:** Nadine Christensen, *Verandah* (2005), acrylic on board, 44 x 60 cm. Photos: Lauren Winstone.

flux. The representations of transient locations occupied for short amounts of time are here perched for fight or flight, ready at any moment to get outta town – a useful attribute of a would-be space traveler.

Ahhh, and Tony's promise of a happy death, timely and prepared, all dressed up in 80s bling, inviting an easy slip into the underworld. Yet the actuality of the structure laughs back... not this time disco girl, the weight of you would not be sustained by this paparazzi implement of death... see how the eighties continues to let me down.

The reminders of sleep experiments and Robert Sakies' *Dreammakers* alongside the soundtrack to 'Bananas In Pajamas' all highlight that I am too old for Darren's Pikachu triggers. But I do understand the feelings of not being able to close my eyes... an almost solid connection between my optic assimilators and any electrical current emitters, or the warm breathing glow of my computer pulsing in my room while I try to sleep.

Thank goodness for the Nadine's deck chairs. I slipped into a Californian star-gazing scenario, my imagined pina colada and magazine lulling an intergalactic comfort while I wait for this all to make sense. I felt like I'd been here before, this soft waiting spot where the air is thick and reminiscent of days in hospital... or the long waiting for a reply to a difficult question.

A delicate landing into a delicate collage, and James's painting becomes the small silver ball in this visual pinball, the connector, the coagulant, the agar agar, setting the narrative into a believable form. Like those hypnogogic flashes in pre-sleep dreaming where the speed of the dream offers very little chance of understanding images, but you know they're good.

Gregory Olsen paid 20 million dollars money to hangout at the International Space Station, making him our 3rd space tourist. He circled the planet 160 times during those ten (can I really call them) days, reminding me of the likelihood that I will never get that far off the planet. I'll try and be satisfied with the subtle hover of *Six Orbits Around the Blue Moon*, knowing I have more to look forward to on my next landing in Australia, and enjoying my uncomfortable-ness at being lost in space.

Lisa Benson is a painter who still has aspirations for space travel.

Notes

1. To gather this kind of information, if you are in the Auckland area, call the Automobile Association on (09) 966 8919 and talk with Anna.



Top: Robert Vinnicombe, *Untitled #1, #2, #3, #4, #5, #6* (2005), installation view, ballpoint pen on paper and cardboard. **Bottom:** Tony Garifalakis, *One man nihilistic front (noose)* (2005), ropelight, dimensions variable. Photos: Lauren Winstone.