

Preview of *Lackness*, (Lou Hubbard, Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces) *Photofile*, 86, Mar-June 2009, 12.

Lou Hubbard, Lackness
Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Front Gallery, Fitzroy- Melbourne,
March 3 - April 4, 2009

Lou Hubbard goads materials, poking, pressing and manipulating them until they relent. Sometimes she records this as filmed phenomena. Other times Frankensteinian ornaments that no longer serve their function, are directly displayed in all their transmogrified glory. Both these approaches are deployed by Hubbard in her new exhibition *Lackness* at Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces.

Captured in a relentless close up, long hair is pushed aside to expose a tumour-like mound. With sickening yet perversely seductive impact, fingers prod and tweezers grab at chunks of hair growing over the swelling. This is a familiar revulsion: who hasn't compulsively gouged out an in-grown hair, spurred on by an internal frenzy?

Yet in Hubbard's video, entitled *Bore Me*, any visceral repulsion is partly undercut by the absurd elasticity of the scalp, obviously made of rubber. This clear artifice perhaps makes fun of the idea the video will provide some sort of concrete emotional truth. We are absorbed by Hubbard's compulsive portrayal, yet are we being played by her devious sensitivity to the material substance?

A similarly unstable conflation of affect appears in the sculptural component of *Lackness*. From trials and challenges that seem compulsive due to the obscurity of motivation, comes a strange assemblage of combines including glass shower screens awkwardly balanced on empty glass light shades. These screens hover above the floor like specimen slides and the down-turned light fittings become dense pockets of matter ready for our observation. Reinforcing this suggestive yet illogical progression of objects are the tall floor lamps that stand sentry, bathing light over the disconnected relations.

"The sculpture grew into a spine of tumours under the lights of an operating theatre," explains Hubbard. Still, there remains an openness; a lack of narrative enforcement. Documented through this idiosyncratic aftermath, Hubbard's activities appear persistent yet steeped in playful obscurity. There is perhaps a sly humour behind this. We feed off her compulsion and become compelled by floor lamps perched nonsensically on crystal fruit bowls.

Next to this, on a monitor placed directly on the floor, Hubbard's fingers continue to maul the lump, highlighting its unnervingly parasitic quality. Then, akin to a low-fi horror movie, something bursts partly out from the skin. It is the hatching of what seems to be a red glass eyeball. The emerging orb expands our vision that until now has been locked into the hairy topology. We see reflected off its surface the video camera's silhouette, two lenses engaged in a stare-off.

The camera's visibility seems typical of the artist's rudimentary filmmaking style where incidents like a knocked tripod can remain lodged in sequences of continuous time. Although, Hubbard is careful with her construction of carelessness, using it to exploit the raw material transitions she forces out before the camera. Uninterrupted filming seems balanced by her subtly choreographed actions, while the still camera work evokes a lone, eccentric demonstrator.

Hubbard now introduces a claw-like metal scalpel into the tug of war with the rubber scalp. This test of material tension is reminiscent of an earlier video *Hack, Made in Paris*, (2006) shown at Kings ARI & The Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, in which Hubbard, who is invisible outside the frame, uses strings to manipulate a small rubber horse. Dragged through an evolving obstacle field of assorted items such as rulers and a lurid green whisky bottle, the rubber horse awkwardly contorts.

We really should not have compassion for the horse as it involuntarily bends and spasms, nor feel joy when the horse is tortured. However, this weirdly amusing battery of tests stirs both these responses. This confused allegiance is provoked by the marionette element; as we watch intently the handled horse expresses both the bodily extension of Hubbard's off screen presence and the innate traits of its own material personality.

The horse's wacky gymnastic capabilities become a charged dynamic of the pathetic and comical. This dynamic is replayed, albeit more covertly, in many of Hubbard's other videos where filmed objects act as abstracted marionettes. Although, a manipulator would not normally crush its charge the way Hubbard attacks the wig in *Bore Me*.

Hubbard bores unrelentingly at the protruding red bulb embedded like a leech until, as the sense of anxiety escalates, rupture finally occurs and the orb is dragged free covered in waxy globs. Even now, with the excision of *Bore Me* complete, any expected sense of release and resolve is not forthcoming. Instead, the swept-aside hair is perfunctorily placed back over the lardy residue, as if concealing evidence.

The tinkling of a piano, replacing the snapping sound of the artificial scalp, fades out. Then, within moments, the video loops and the extraction repeats- the procedure becomes an arrested segment like the gory high-note of a fairy tale or legend. This sense of unalleviated tension echoes the persistence that flows through Hubbard's practice. She persists in training and occasionally just harassing objects and she equally moulds the viewer into a predicament, where they are challenged by narratives that can never achieve neat closure. Perhaps this is also why we feel such an acute connection to the objects she toys with and mangles.

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