



LOVE, DISPLACED

LAWRENCE WILSON ART GALLERY

9 February — 11 May 2019







Christian Thompson, *Refuge* (still), 2014, single channel video: 4:19 minutes. Courtesy of the Artist, Sarah Scout Presents, Melbourne, and Michael Reid, Sydney and Berlin

LOVE, DISPLACED

*'When I was a child, I was never conscious of missing anything when it came to social connections. But all through my childhood, until my early teens, I had a daydream. It was that my parents' friends – who were scattered across the country, and who we'd only see a few times a year – would all move to live on our street, and I'd be able to go and sit with them when things were hard at home. I would have this daydream every day. But our street consisted only of other people, equally shut away, equally alone.'*¹

In a 21st century era in which feelings of empathy, connection to others and engagement with shared concerns are often filtered through subjective social media platforms and 24-hour news cycles, art can offer new and innovative modes of navigating the white noise of contemporary life towards a place of re-sensitisation, where emotional engagement is made possible. Works in the exhibition dismantle fabricated, media-driven façades that inhibit meaningful connection to others, providing insight to personal and political situations of displacement caused by familial breakdown, racial or political oppression, and the loss of traditional culture.

Love, Displaced is a film-based exhibition of work by seven artists and artist collectives. The exhibition reveals shared approaches to investigating romance and love in a hyper-self-conscious, media-saturated contemporary world. According to Johann Hari, author of the 2018 bestselling book *Lost Connections*, 'Loneliness hangs over our culture today like a thick smog.'² The artists in *Love, Displaced* examine the global village in which we live, a village that is on the one hand more connected, yet its communities more displaced, than in the entire history of humankind.

'Social media can't compensate us psychologically for what we have lost – social life. Our obsessive use of social media is an attempt to fill a hole, a great hollowing, that took place before anyone had a smartphone.'³ Ironically, each of the works in the exhibition employ the world of the screen – arguably the ground zero of today's crisis of social disconnection – as the medium through which to explore possibilities for reconnecting with each other and with the universal human need for and emotion of love.

Sometimes these worlds are digitally fabricated, the artists' creating a fantastical, imagined reality in which new types of relationships can be forged. AES+F's (Russia) *Inverso Mundus* (2015) and **Jeremy Deller & Cecelia Bengolea's** (UK, Argentina/France) *Bom Bom's Dream* (2016), for example, mix performance and animation to create aesthetically staged hyper-realities in which humans and mythological creatures co-exist. Premised on juxtaposition and impossible scenarios, and laced with black humour, the two works propose unexpected and sometimes disturbing insights to human love and relationships in a modern era of social disconnection.

Richard Lewer's (Australia) use of animation, in contrast, explores the loss of loved ones in a unique, hand-drawn form of social realism. Lewer's *Never Shall Be Forgotten – A Mother's Story* (2017) gives voice to the mother of John Pat, an Indigenous teenager from WA's Pilbara whose killing by police in 1983 was a flashpoint in race relations and is now seen as a symbol of injustice and oppression. A second, earlier work in the exhibition is also inspired by a true and tragic story from Western Australia. *Worse Luck I Am Still Here* (2014), which won the Blake Prize the year it was made and is in the University of Western Australia Art Collection, poignantly evokes the emotional devastation of lost love.



Tracey Moffatt & Gary Hillberg, *Other* (still), 2010, looped video: 7 minutes. Courtesy of the Artists, Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery and Tyler Rollins Fine Art

Jacobus Capone's (Australia) highly personal 2016 film, *Volta*, is about re-building the artist's relationship with his emotionally estranged father. It also speaks of separation and the search for connection. This melancholic, gently crafted film follows the two men on a journey to reconnection through re-learning to play the piano accordion, an instrument the artist's father had loved to play before he became a psychologically absent member of the family. Also using music as an expression of love is **Christian Thompson's** (Australia) *Refuge* (2014), in which the artist sings of brotherly love in his native Bidjara language. The song functions as a moving yet lyrical self-portrait that depicts the artist singing to camera, accompanied only by piano music, his piercing eyes engaging the viewer to convey the sense of the words he sings.

Themes of racial otherness are treated with humour in works by **Tracey Moffatt & Gary Hillberg** (Australia) and **Roe Rosen** (Israel). Moffatt and Hillberg's *Other* splices together scenes from feature films of attraction, sexual desire and love between individuals of differing backgrounds. While the work essentially critiques western culture's exoticisation of the 'other', it does so with irony and humour, creating a parallel critique of the film industry's stereotyping of race and sexuality.

On the surface, Rosen's *The Dust Channel* is about romantic and sexual desire, though at a deeper level links current world politics with mythical and political references to history. Like Moffatt & Hillberg's *Other*, it reflects upon cultural prejudice, here referencing the refugee crisis in Europe and the plight of Palestine. Set in a domestic environment, like Capone and Thompson's works it uses music as a narrative device, telling in operatic form the story of a romantic couple whose fear of dirt or anything alien in their domestic environment manifests in a perverted obsession with home-cleaning appliances.

Philosopher Tony Fry writes of our times as the 'age of unsettlement', a world divided by colonisers and the politically oppressed, by those with choices and those who have none.⁴ Works in the exhibition reach out across cultures to find new modes of interaction between people displaced from one another through background or crisis. In doing so, they co-opt the audience – deploying fantasy, song and storytelling – in filmic stories of human connection in a world plagued by the smog of loneliness and the displacement of love.

Felicity Fenner
Curator

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1. Johann Hari (2018). *Lost Connections*. London: Bloomsbury, p.89
 2. *ibid*, p.73
 3. *ibid*, p.89
 4. Tony Fry (2011). *Design as Politics*. New York: Berg, p.2



Jeremy Deller & Cecilia Bengolea, *Bom Bom's Dream* (still), 2016, Video
 Courtesy the artists and The Modern Institute, Glasgow



Roe Rosen, *The Dust Channel* (still), 2016, digital video: 23 minutes. Courtesy of the Artist and Galleria Riccardo Crespi




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Cover image: Jacobus Capone, *Volta* (still, detail), 2016, 2-5 channel video, duration: 53 minutes.
Courtesy of the Artist. Commissioned by the Australian Centre for Contemporary Art for *NEW16*

Inside Cover image: AES+F, *Inverso Mundus, Still #1-17* (detail), 2015, pigment inkjet print on FineArt
Baryta paper, 32 x 57.5 cm, edition of 10. Image courtesy of AES+F and Anna Schwartz Gallery,
Melbourne



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