

Defying perceptual passivity

Dominique Angeloro encounters Derek Kreckler's latest work

In Derek Kreckler's new 6-channel DVD installation Antidote, the walls of the Performance Space gallery are doused in large projections of falling water. In some cases the idyllic waterfall scenes are reminiscent of the kind of kitsch imagery you might find as the backdrop to a deodorant commercial or in the foyer of a health retreat. Other video sources survey the water spray in close-up, revealing patterns that cut across the projected screens like the streaky grain of scratched celluloid.

Possibly it sounds like work you've seen before; an immersive video installation of the nature-is-so-beautiful variety. But the experience it produces is something quite different, subtly disordering your everyday modes of perception in ways that are difficult to shake off.

As groups of viewers flow into Antidote, interesting things begin to happen. It is as if the installation has unseen zones of intense gravitational pull, causing viewers to cluster like barnacles in certain pockets of the room. This curious migration pattern seems to be motivated by the audience's desire to keep their shadow clear of the projected footage. Kreckler, however, appears to anticipate this attempt and deliberately sets out to frustrate it.

Instead of minimising interference by suspending the projectors from the ceiling, the projectors are installed at ground level. This has the effect of entrapping large areas of floor space within their throw. Although some visitors delighted in the opportunity to guide their silhouette through the water-walls, most viewers pooled at the vantage points where they produced the least interference.

What this installation scenario pulls into focus is the tendency for viewers to treat the moving image as a window onto the world. In other words, we'd rather peer into the intact image than have to reflect on the messy existential issue of how we're positioned in relation to it.

With Antidote, however, Kreckler allows no such reprieve. The waterfall scenery may be sourced from the natural world, but he unhinges the familiarity of the footage by setting it at different speeds. The rhythms of the various channels clash, creating a shared audio track where dilated and compressed timeframes wash up against one another. These jarring shifts in velocity also occur within each channel, preventing viewers from getting swept up in the hypnotic flow of a single image stream.

The shifts in the scale of the imagery also effect a gentle disorientation. In particular, the longer you stare into the closeups of water, the more they take on the properties of abstract patterns. The very images of waterfalls that had initially seemed banal, ultimately turn out to be strangely compelling and charged.

In the catalogue, Kreckler says of this installation, "After a while I hear dogs barking, horses running, people screaming and gun shots; sounds not included; it is then I know that I am home." Home for Kreckler would seem to be that place where perception throws off its passivity and reality becomes a site of potential transformation.

It is not surprising that he turns to sound for this dynamic, considering that hearing is a far more malleable sense than sight. We often become aware of the way we cut our own mix of the sounds we hear, tuning into familiar frequencies and disregarding others. What is fascinating about Antidote is the degree to which the installation introduces this uncertainty into viewing. It is packed with perceptual booby-traps ready to wrong-foot your usual modes of interaction with the world.

Antidote is the standout work of the exhibition Derek Kreckler: Downstairs: recent and new work in photography and video. The show is the latest instalment in an impressive series of exhibitions curated by Blair French (now Director, Artspace), concentrating on the work of significant contemporary Australian artists. Also in this exhibition is the not-so-recent video Blind Ned

(1998). In this silent single-channel work, bushranger Ned Kelly blindly navigates his way through the Australian landscape, stuck in an uneasy, unending loop.

Kreckler's stunning photographic installation *Holey #4* (2005) also sports its own type of blind spots. Here, a photograph of a beach landscape is partially blocked out by a number of large circles planted across the image.

Corresponding with these "holes" are four vinyl balls lying on the floor beneath the photograph. The balls are wrapped in the missing areas of the beach, as if the 3-dimensionality of the landscape has literally popped out of the image.

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