

Blind Ned

(Various writings about the performative video installation, "Blind Ned")



... According to a recent poll, 91% of people view Ned Kelly as the victim of unfair land regulation and an unjust society; being more or less forced into crime, he died a reckless and audacious hero for a cause. The truth of the matter is still contested but it's no longer the point, since evidently the legend or myth has become separated from actual events such as the repeated assaults and thefts, which escalated, into the shooting of a policeman. Films, books, paintings, and regular news stories all take great licence on the matter, such that an image or perception of Kelly freely circulates irrespective of whether or not he shot Constable Lonigan in self-defence.

It's an image perpetuated by Kelly himself - signing his Euroa letter on the run with "a sweet goodbye from a forced outlaw" - but it's since been loaded with the abundant anti-institutional, larrikin sentiment for which Australian culture is renowned; Kelly has become a symbol of the oppressed rising up against the privileges of class. Curiously, Sidney Nolan's Kelly series from 1945 shows the figure in metal armour, but it appears to be an empty facade, little behind it to substantiate the popular views of Kelly's heroics. John Reed described the series in 1946 as 'a mature statement to cover both the landscape and man in relation to the landscape', returning the original story to its elemental components of place and identity. In essence, the Kelly legend provides this narrative potential for all who wish to argue its provenance. Beyond the truth of the matter, in retelling the story, we express what we think about law and order, the Australian landscape, men and masculinity, class and nationality, and, indeed, all the themes which accrue to the story. It's the same with Greek mythology, from which we endlessly extrapolate the meaning of Western civilisation through poetry, opera, drama, all kinds of stories which, in retelling the tales of the Pantheon, reprise the role of desire, revenge, death, etc, in more recent culture. In this sense Derek Kreckler reprises the myth of Kelly as a figure who speaks directly to the Antipodes, a character forged in the difficulty of European settlement of already occupied lands, and who continues to represent the irresolution of the rights of those settlers to still be here. Indeed, Kelly was caught between two sets of laws: the unspoken, sacred sovereignty of Aborigines which was first of all occluded by a declaration of terra nullius}; and the legislated, proprietary rights of the most privileged colonists. No doubt, many people still identify with the battler Kelly caught in the middle. Kelly himself describes his lack of choice in the course of action he follows: "Circumstances have forced us to become what we are, outcasts and outlaws".

Kreckler's video presents him stumbling through the bush, a hopeless figure estranged from his natural context. Meanwhile various national animal symbols of Australia are scattered about, stuffed, motionless. The whole dysfunctional ensemble is viewed beyond a white picket fence, which demarcates a domestic, settled space, as if we are looking on from our own front yards or looking into somebody else's. Like Oedipus or some other mythical Greek figure, Ned has been blinded, a metaphor for disempowerment. The environment about him is dead, now merely decorative, redoubled by the pretty English picket-frame for the scene. Ned appears to us like an apparition, a rare sighting of endangered wildlife recorded on scratchy old film stock; a relic of the past. In the background, we can hear Kreckler imitate by mouth the sound of an old film projector, a pathetic attempt to re-animate the failing legend. Kreckler brings these motifs into intriguing, elliptical relation to reflect on the settlement of Australia, to recast the stories of bushrangers and aberrant fauna - of a lawless world turned upside down - and ultimately to question the sustainability of the remnant colonial culture in Australia which, though it persists in the retelling of one legend or another, also dissipate each time to reveal new, slowly changing attitudes.

Stuart Koop

From *RED 01*, Australian Centre for Contemporary Art (ACCA), Melbourne (2000)

remove...

Derek Kreckler's "Blind Ned" is a museum-style display. Behind a civilised white picket fence are a stuffed kangaroo and joey, dingo and wombat, and in the background a video depicting an armoured Ned Kelly stumbling about in the bush with a white cane as if blind. Animals and outlaws, victims of colonialism, become museum pieces. The Kelly video is made to look like an early piece of cinematography, in the same way that the stuffed animals look 'authentic'. Is our sense of history so poor? The work speaks of our colonising and collecting propensities, and our false heroes.

Chris Reid

Eyeline 44, Eyeline Publishing Limited QUT, Brisbane (2000)

...There is something of this style of humour in Derek Kreckler's "Blind Ned" [1997-1998] too. Behind a collection of taxidermied native animals, a loop of film is projected on a cinematic scale. The subject, dressed in iconic Kelly-style armour, brandishes a white cane as he stumbles through the bush towards the camera, where he dissolves and reappears in the background to begin the journey again. The unsettling experience of glass-eyed animals staring out of the darkness is heightened by this absurd repeat performance by a blind Ned Kelly. ...Kreckler succeeds in shifting the anxiety onto the viewer.

Maria Bilske

Broadsheet 31.1, Contemporary Visual Arts Projects South Australia (2002)

Landscape of Contradictions

... Derek Kreckler also straddles dual disciplines, albeit the more closely related ones of the visual and performing arts. "Blind Ned" reproduces his popular and critical success from Sydney's 1999 Australian Perspecta. Unlike the brash 19th century figure of folklore, Kreckler's Ned Kelly is blind and faltering. The ardent republican appears to have lost his way, while it is the stuffed native animals which appear strangely alert.

Writer unknown, *Adelaide Advertiser*, DATE December 2000.

Derek Kreckler toys with an arcane notion of spectacle in his installation “Blind Ned” in which looped 'footage' that looks as though it was made at the birth of cinema, depicts a blind Ned Kelly, his white stick totally ineffectual in the scrub, tentatively moving forward, only to suddenly vanish and then reappear at the beginning of the loop. The installation also comprises a tableau of a couple of stuffed mammals, a kangaroo and a wombat. The use of these absurdly 'authentic' props, along with the counterfeit look of the DVD loop and muted lighting, combine to create a surrealistic mytho-poetic twilight, an antipodean Gotterdammerung of simulacra and repetition.

James Moss, Vol2 #1 *Artlink* (2000)



Derek Kreckler, “Blind Ned”, 1999. Single channel DVD.

Courtesy of the artist.

There were some great shows this year, many of which we tried to review, others that we simply couldn't get to. Among the really good shows was **Derek Kreckler's** *Downstairs at the Performance Space*. We kept thinking, next week, next week, and then when we got around to it, it was over. The last year at the Performance Space has seen some excellent, extensive one person shows – **Tony Schwensen's solo outing** at the start of the naffly named *Who's Afraid of The Avant Garde* series springs to mind – and Kreckler's show was a beauty. Someone commented recently about the work of **David Haines** that they just didn't get it, that whatever it was supposed to be “about” eluded them. They might well say the same for Kreckler's work because, like Haines, it deals with associative meanings and poetic readings for its impact. A big six channel DVD installation called “Antidote” presented views of a waterfall, water slowly falling at various speeds, the sound of the crashing reverberating around the room. It was landscape, pure and simple, but somehow the work also evoked the history of landscape photography and cinematic spaces, dicing up the outside for our indoor pleasures. It was camera obscura meets DV Cam. Another work in the show, “Blind Ned”, purported to show ancient film of **Ned Kelly** in armour walking through bush with a blind man's cane. It was so simple, yet so rich, it was difficult to know where to start. If all else failed, you could just feel the work, and it was amazing.

The Art Life Team (2005)

http://artlife.blogspot.com/2005_12_01_artlife_archive.html