

Restoration

The Restoration series of works by Rose Farrell and George Parkin continue their engagement with renaissance perspective drawing and medical history.

Rose Farrell and George Parkin create photos the old fashioned way. They load the camera with film, place the camera on a tripod and open the shutter on a subject in costume set amongst painted scenes dressed with the artists handmade props. The subject plays or performs a role, surrounded by symbolic objects which decorate each set - perhaps to give some clues as to the character of the subject. This production process is little different from the studio based, staged photography of the 1890s.

The construction and staging of the photographic work of Farrell and Parkin is not hidden or concealed from the viewer. The substantial size (260cm x 200cm) of each work in the Restoration series, not only draws attention to the staging tricks of the artists but it necessitates the photograph itself being made up of two sheets of paper with a visible overlapping join. The join in the cloth of the back drop is visible too. There is a delightful clumsiness in the staging of these photographs, including the padded-disembodied hands of the doctor, or the padded angel that appears in the Corset maker.

Recently when I purchased a well known brand of fruit juice, I found under its lid a statement that proclaimed that Leonardo da Vinci (an artist with wide interests including perspective and medicine) - could write with one hand whilst drawing with another. This banal encounter is a rather clumsy segue to recall a conversation with George Parkin. Parkin in discussing the production of Farrell and Parkin backdrops, revealed that as he is right handed and Rose left. This means they can both paint the same cloth at the same time. George went on to compare the marks made by Rose (on the right hand side of the backdrop) and those (neater - George jokes) ones that he made. The process of production of the works is important.

Many of the medical technologies pictured in the work of Farrell and Parkin are based upon the theories of Galen (129 – 210 AD) scholar, surgeon and philosopher, herbalist and personal physician to the emperor Marcus Aurelius.

Galen was the most influential and versatile medical author of antiquity.

Much of the work of Farrell and Parkin shows us how little the world has changed, dislocated shoulders are still manually stretched and popped back in just as Galen practiced with his traction device. The body of 2008 is the same as the body of 1408. As Robert McFarlane wrote in the Sydney Morning Herald, "these passionate Melbourne artists remind us, uncomfortably, that we live in the 21st century but are historically only moments away from the ancient world that shaped us."

This linking of the practices of medicine today with that of the past is also seen in their interest in Chinese medicine. In "Tongue Diagnosis" 2002, the artists provide us with an amusing self portrait, both displaying their tongues (each day for 30 seconds for 99 days) so that any signs of illness or disease may be discerned by a practitioner of Chinese medicine. Chinese medicine like Western medicine is little changed from its early Muslim influences. The recent video work of Farrell and Parkin is a new and exciting parallel to their photographs.

The deliberately clumsy qualities that reveal rather than conceal the artists method of production are mirrored by the play or distortion in perspectives in the backdrops which are derived from the drawings of Jan Vredeman de Vries, 1527-1606. In the *Castrato* the perspective in the gatehouse building are 'not correct', while in *The Goldsmith* perspective shifts are also evident. Note also in *Castrato* the use of various column styles and the odd fence or wall in the background of this work.

Farrell and Parkin are not the first artists to place figures or staffage upon the art of Vredeman. Artists contemporary to Vredeman such as Bruegel painted figures sometimes figures "in an erotic embrace" as well as Bruegel's more usual peasant figures which also featured atop scenes painted by Vredeman in the country playhouses and retreats of the wealthy from Antwerp. The Goldsmith and Corset maker of Farrell and Parkin's photographs may well have served the same Masters as Bruegel and Vredeman.

The Restoration series adds to the artist's already considerable body of work using a performative and constructed photography. Like other bodies of their

practice, the Restoration Series, is enigmatic, not simply read, but humorous and engaging.

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