

## *Forgetful Sky*

The works of *Forgetful Sky*—each powerful video or photographic vignettes, rendering facets of amnesia and traumatic memory—combine in this exhibition to present a profound essay on visual imagination. The distinct installations each dramatize an instance of embodied forgetfulness, in which the layering and embellishment of narrative serves to assist the function of memory. But memory is never simply a matter of recall, as Dennis Del Favero's work persistently demonstrates. If trauma, pain and emotional distress must pass into the narrative of memory in order to become livable, these experiences do not bear constant replay. The work of narrative—and of the visual imaginary—is to process and house such memory in ways that enable transition, allowing remembering to occur at the same time as placing trauma (which haunts the present) in a past over which the narrator has some measure of control.

Hence, *Forgetful Sky* presents memory in its complex, ambiguous and creative relationship to the past:

In *Todtnauberg*, the Jewish poet Paul Celan forgets his meeting with the German philosopher Martin Heidegger in 1967 by remembering an apology Heidegger never made. Heidegger's notorious silence regarding his collaboration with the Nazis and his much-vaunted meeting with Celan is here a counterpoint to Celan's attempt to remember those killed in the camps, including his parents.

In *You and I* a woman forgets her abuse of a prisoner by remembering the pleasure of her conquest; in *Hold Me* a man forgets his subjugation by remembering a wife, real or imagined, as he struggles to distance himself from the reality of a sexual encounter. On a projected screen, we witness the encounter through the fantasy of the woman, complicated by the voice-over, with its American accent, suggesting an American soldier questioning a prisoner somewhere in the Middle East. On a smaller screen inside a monolith in the centre of the room, we watch and listen to the encounter through the fantasy of the man as he attempts to remember the last moments with his wife.

In the photographic series *Affinity* a body forgets its dependency by remembering a fantasy of autonomy. Deploying projections of Antonio Canova's *Psyche revived by the kiss of Love* (1793), *Affinity* explores the inter-dependencies of a sexual relationship. The sculptural body here acts as a screen for early childhood memories, and for evoking an enveloping intimacy.

In *Foreshadow*, the objects we create forget our presence by looking back at our absence. This photographic series, shot in Berlin, explores the haunted quality of advertising displays. It investigates a world that doubles our own, but in doing so refuses to acknowledge our presence. While we cherish a fundamental belief in the centrality of our own sight in defining the world, we have difficulty in acknowledging that we are seen, and memorialized, by the objects we create.

Using photography and video to evoke the ways in which memories endure beyond attempts to destroy them, Del Favero equates haunting memories to *pentimenti*—the traces of an artist's original design that lie beneath layers of paint, revealed only when paintings are x-rayed during restoration. He explores the quality of living in a world haunted by its past, but, more specifically, the role of art in revealing the workings of memory and with this the innocent assumptions and denials that often obscure the nature of our own complicity.

©Jill Bennett, Sydney, October, 2009

Professor Jill Bennett is Director of the Centre for Contemporary Arts and Politics at the University of New South Wales