Darlington Arts Festival

Arts Review

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Darlington Arts Festival

Noticeably absent this year from the Darlington Arts Festival and the associated exhibition of artworks in the Darlington Hall were any artistic renderings by the bastion of Hills residing 'arts masters'.

Commended and awarded artist photographer Richard Woldendorp holds the fort, yet no visual mention is afforded the viewer of the gun toting, cigar smoking sophisticates who have made this a mentionable event in the past.

With a committee larger than a football team and a two dollar entry charge (catalogue included) it would be fitting to suggest that the enthusiasm to dish up a serving of fine art to the viewing public has not been lost. As a first time visitor to this integral part of the Festival however, questions beg answers. The first cringe occurred with the 'raffle for print' offer at the front door or was it the glazed glitch of a smiling cow teapot that I encountered teetering precariously on its knee height podium?

Maybe it was the intrigue that a viewer displayed contemplating the fire extinguisher housing unit at the nearest exit, oblivious to the swirling visual metaphors adjacent or could it have been the sheer volume of visual material presented that overwhelmed me and caused my overload button to trip and turn off my 'grin and bear it' resolve.

Whatever happened …? In fact, has something gone astray somewhere? Since when does an artwork deserve having the prize card and sold sticker stuck over the prime viewing angle … on the work itself? What on earth has happened to the 'room to breath' principle crucial to any self-respecting curator? Can three deep hanging be substantiated except for gallery archives? What the hell was going on at the time when the painting adjacent to the red fire engine was afforded two inches from its nearest rival? Why were some of the best works in this show cloistered on the Mezzanine i.e. the students?
Some pleasant memories stuck thankfully and these deserve a mention. Inta Goddard presents her latest trade-in complete as humour breathing filter feeder. Deon Schafer does more than spill the beans with award winning tenacity and Patricia Goff pulls out some gems from memory lane, punching strokes and whirls into an otherwise disarray of landscape musings. The Simpson's chess board drew a grin with its pathetic figures poised to transverse the psychedelic interpretations of a game grid. Now for the other nine tenths.

Numerous pastel puke panels were placed for easy Frisbee lessons and the consideration by some contributors to afford themselves glam frames to trap their content didn't go unnoticed. The usual secondary curriculum dictate complete with Pop and Op plopped its weary head amongst some very sad efforts in the surfing department. 'Twould seem the latest craze is to expose all of your body these days evident by the fashion frenzy the students prop at the side door. I staggered out of this form-meets-function-meets-funk expose bewildered.

The decision upon escape was whether to have Devonshire Tea with the Soroptomists, ride a camel unaided, chug down a quick one at the beer tent or check out the mind numbing rumble down at the 'new' skaters area at the bottom of the oval. The last option seemed the most inviting.

Three hours later, as the twittering of the Hills faded to the thumping-hip-hop-meets-grunge-thrash in the skate bowl, the Worn Out Worn Art parade blew most punters away and all respect and shout outs go to Jenny Kerr, Rip-It-Up and crew for the cool show they pulled off – yo word up!

Puppets and puppies milled the grassed terrain till sleepy heads returned to their nests (groovers are still revellin” in the mosh pit though ). Get the picture? Some say they are worth a thousand words.

Never fear, see you here next year.