

COUNTERFEIT SANCTITY / CONSTRUCTED RITUALS

The work of Kate Tucker and Carmel Seymour

Catalogue essay by Melissa Loughnan

A 1950s ceramic urn adorns my mantelpiece at home. Once a kettle, its lid has since been removed and now serves as an occasional vase; but most frequently, it sits as part of my collection of decorative vestibules. The urn was once my grandmother's kettle, it then served time as an occasional water warmer at their fibro holiday shack in Safety Beach, and now it is spending its twilight years in my possession. The age and history of the object imbues it with a quiet wisdom, a power and meaning beyond that of a static object, and of the other vestibules in its presence: this urn must have some stories to tell.

Carmel Seymour and Kate Tucker's practices explore the mystical sentiments that underpin the every day, imbuing inanimate objects with a charge of the metaphysical. Searching for meaning within their domestic surrounds, the transformative abilities of our belief systems map the artists' attempts to search and explore.

Tucker's 2009 graduating exhibition presented a large-scale installation accompanied by a series of four digital prints and a large mixed media collage. The works were re-configured and re-presented in a group exhibition in the following weeks, ARRAY, at Bus Projects, and expanded with Untitled (Buttons), an animation work, and two mixed media canvases. These works explored the notion of an expanding man-made specimen, referencing animal and plant forms rendered synthetic in their artificial, symmetrical arrangement. Tucker's Controlled Experiment work on paper series of 2010 extends this notion: mimicking the symmetrical inkblot imagery of a Rorschach. Tucker's installation practice, conversely, has morphed from an evolving specimen to a tribal artefact in the form of oversized ritualistic jewellery. The decorative artefact speaks of personal ritual: a visualised extension of the self, of the personal and the feminine. The choice to wear jewellery is inexorably entwined with personal expression and assertion of identity, whether it be a wedding band, a charm bracelet or a military dog tag. This notion of adornment and constructed ritual (and, by virtue, of constructed identity) is derived from the artist's attempt to isolate the shifting meanings of objects that are sacred to us today.

In the same graduating exhibition as Tucker's gentle grouping of works were the highly detailed, delicate works of Carmel Seymour. Seymour's paintings and drawings produced during her honours year were based on many of the concepts explored in Bruce Hood's 2009 publication *Supersense*, where she produced such pieces as *Old furniture knows something about the past*, *Sometimes when I get home things are not where I left them*, and *I sometimes think strangers are in love with me*. These work titles are questions that Hood asks his readers in order to determine their 'supersense': the intuitive method of human reasoning that leads us to supernatural beliefs. In contrast to Tucker, Seymour's works respond to the domestic rituals of a collective body. For example, what is ritual to a unified social or familial group, rather than to that of the individual.

In *Little Rituals 1* a photo realistic graphite representation of a young woman straddling a 1970s Parker-style chair is depicted. Her face is buried within the chair's cushioning, as though affronted by intense grief or longing. A small dream catcher is tied to the arm, charging the image with a sense of otherworldliness within the domestic setting. In this context, Seymour's works can be seen to explore a method of self-mythologising: attempting to unlock the hidden powers imbued in our surrounds and reveal subtle truths about our own feelings toward superstition. Her narrative works display her attempts to conjure something beyond reason; our psychological need to explore the unknown: an occult rite that exposes the faculty of the artist as magician.

Tucker and Seymour's harmonious pairing enable an exploration of beauty and ritual, the finite and the feminine, in the every day. While Tucker's works demarcate personal modes of ritual and speak of an artistic expression that is intrinsically, and physically, linked to the body and to the self, Seymour's deferential images of furniture and household objects speak more broadly of the a collective, universal or shared condition; like a jug being passed around a dinner table, or through the generations, by friends and family.

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