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Victoria Reichelt: Archive

Review
KIM GUTHRIE

There is some irony in the term 'endangered artefacts' given that Victoria Reichelt's work appears to be a painted photographic facsimile. The style itself is another near-redundant form used to dazzle the untutored and too often, in less capable hands, that's all it is. But at its best the quality that stops this type of painting dead in its tracks and elevates it from being technique for its own sake is often achieved by painstaking repetition and a kitsch humour associated with the dumb ubiquity of the objects represented.

Reichelt's paintings are hypnotic visual mandalas that seduce the eye. They become

pseudo-abstract images for meditation constructed from the everyday detritus of life that, at first glance, I feel should be dismissed out of hand as just paintings of irrelevant, pointless things. But you just can't, and that is the saving grace of this work; it is commonplace and sophisticated at once – Yin and Yang. An ironic inversion of the Arte Povera *modus operandi*, a poverty of subject not means.

'Victoria Reichelt: Archive', curated by Sarah McGhee at the Tweed Regional Gallery, samples a considered selection from a twenty-year career. Victoria often works in series planning out her year of painting

in advance. At times the exhibition loses intended impact by only presenting a couple of works from a series. For example, *Yellow Ruin* (2015) and *Red Ruin* (2015) a part of a larger series painted to work through the palette of the colour spectrum. Installed in its entirety I expect this would add an important layer to the work.

It is obvious that Reichelt is a dedicated and serious artist. One has to be to produce the finely crafted paintings in 'Archive' and to make any headway in this demanding industry. Even more remarkable is that she's mother to three young children; one was securely fastened to her front

when we met to discuss her exhibition. They say women are great multi-taskers but it blows my mind that someone can juggle the disciplines of motherhood and a career as a painter of such finely rendered and conceptually rigorous work. It's an astonishing achievement, and one she paints about in the intimate self-portrait *La Mere (after Elizabeth Nourse)* (2019).

Her most recent pictures from 2019 of helium filled and deflated balloons are beautiful paintings but the least convincing for me only because Jeff Koons made helium balloon kitsch his own. Although Reichelt is coming from a completely different place; the conundrum of her young children being besotted by them but how destructive balloons are for our environment. Unfortunately, the comparison is hard to divorce.

It's Reichelt's minimal compositions that are most successful as statements of intent. In *Plastic Horror* (2018), multiples of colourful disposable plastic coffee cups that have almost been completely phased out of common use work as Photorealism, Colour Field or Op Art. The most minimal image in the show is of multiple stacked white cardboard take away food containers. All of Reichelt's pictures are precisely rendered and *Take Away Horror* (2018) was the most demanding image to paint.

After (books) (2013) talks about current concerns within our environment and the effect of rapid digital encroachment on our world as old technologies are replaced. In the painting a deer stands incongruously between shelves of books in a no longer visited corner of a library as nature begins to re-colonise. The work reminds me of the way flora and fauna reclaim abandoned spaces such as the jungle of Angkor Wat or Chernobyl. It's human conceit to believe humanity is killing the planet. As George Carlin said in his genius monologue 'The Planet Is Fine', 'It's a self-correcting system ... The planet isn't going anywhere. We are! Pack your shit folks, we're going away.' ■

EXHIBITION

Victoria Reichelt: Archive
Until 9 May 2021
Tweed Regional Gallery, NSW



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01 *Yellow Ruin*, 2014, oil on linen, 75 x 91 cm, private collection

02 *La Mere (after Elizabeth Nourse)*, 2019, oil on linen, 66.5 x 51 cm

03 *Plastic Horror*, 2018, oil on linen, 95 x 70 cm

Courtesy the artist, Jan Murphy Gallery, Brisbane and This Is No Fantasy, Melbourne