



Chris Bennie *Tent Peg*, 2012

27th July - 18th August, 2012

In the Ryan Renshaw Window Space
137 Warry St, Fortitude Valley

www.ryanrenshaw.com.au

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Email conversation between Anna Zammit and Chris Bennie

What is it about everyday observations that fascinated you so much that you have made it the focal point of your practice?

It's the capacity for the monumental to be perceived in quotidian experience. It's the idea that complex social, existential and philosophical truths permeate in the most benign places but are unified by the guttural realness and material tactility of the world. It's the ability to translate rudimentary subjects, like a tent peg, into symbolic and metaphoric representations of existence.

Taking the banal as subject, you are able to create a paradox between the ordinary and the sublime. You romanticise the banal at the same time you critique the sublime. Are you a believer or a cynic?

Both! I'm a believer of Sublimity, both the Kantian notion of a monumental ungraspable totality of existence (and the ensuing terror that comes with it) as well as a personalised transcendental sublimity that is Zen-like. However I equally subscribe to existential conceptualisations of existence that reconcile angst, absurdity and the facticity of the world with fundamental authenticity. I have carried this dichotomy from my painting

practice in the early 2000's through to my current work in video.

For me, a picture is a highly emotional and symbolic visual phenomenon that speaks to individuals in uniquely personal and different ways *and* is an orchestrated contrivance of colour and composition. Without discounting the immensely satisfactory quality of subjective experience, materiality is the only measurable universally perceptible quality of a picture. Of particular interest to me then, is the implicit co-dependence of materiality in any form of subjective interpretation of any given thing.

I use composition as a formal device to deduce the symbolic and allegorical qualities of the material world in coherent and comprehensible ways. Any general focus on banality misses my intention to communicate the complexity of the world authentically and factually as visual metaphor. Needless to say, in general discourse, the term banality is useful to articulate a polarity that expresses the philosophical dichotomy that exists with the Sublime – however, the cynic in me simply assumes these terms are interchangeable.

We are truly a short attention span society. There is a science to the length of video art. What is it about your treatment of the subject, the length and the filmic techniques, that allows us to see the sublime in these often obscure observations?

The photographic and sculptural qualities of video are extremely useful devices that can seductively reconcile this issue. Used photographically, video's time-based nature infers that viewing is an experiential act in itself. Essentially, what is given to a viewer through video is the passing of time: an experience in which the viewer and video/picture/object implicitly share.

Your work embodies a documentary aesthetic. Since 2007, including the works made for your doctorate show at White Box Gallery, you seem to be increasing focused on filming the landscape and nature. Is this driven by a desire to create the shared experience in your work? By this, I am implying that by reducing culturally specific signifiers you are able to create this connection with the viewer.

Landscape has always featured in my work for pretty much the reasons you describe. Metaphorically, landscape functions as an archetypal universal motif in my work. It acts as a clean slate in which social, existential and philosophical concepts are weighed. No work communicates this more clearly than *A Wee Sunset* (2009), a short video in which my silhouetted figure urinates in front of a majestic sunset. The performance symbolically elevates bodily processes to monumental status through a humble conflation of absurdity and sublimity.

***Tent Peg* (2012) is a study of a beach scene. In the foreground the tension of a rope tied to a tent peg is captured, turbulent wind**

tosses sand and debris. The work criticises our value system by bringing attention to poetic nuances in the everyday. Where does this work sit within your practice?

My intention was to render the scene in such a way that the materiality and tactility of the peg, sand, wind, sun and beachscape have an almost visceral effect upon viewers. Sound has been removed from the video to subtly infer this visceral quality. Video also has a sculptural quality, not only as spatial form as in gallery contexts, but visually, in terms of the dimensional quality of the picture plane. *Tent Peg* (2012), for example, is monumental in part because of its intrinsic physical objectivity. The sculptural quality of video is embellished in large-scale projections and on LCD monitors. Audio, whether it is from the original recording, or added in postproduction, can generate additional tension. *Our Communication Recorded* (2007), *The Supernova* (2005) *The Commonwealth Perspective* (2011) and *The Western Fields* (2012) all utilize synthesized soundtracks to strengthen the symbolic and poetic potential of their subjects.

Images Top Left to Right

1. *A Wee Sunset* 2009, 1 min 49, image courtesy Sam Scoufos
2. *Our Communication Recorded* 2007, 8 min seamless loop
3. *The Supernova* 2005, 2 min 18
4. *The Commonwealth Perspective* 2011, 5 min 12
5. *The Western Fields* 2012, 13 min 37, installation view Old Space, image courtesy Sam Scoufos