

Un-resettling by James Tylor and The Waves and Control Rooms by Chris Bennie: the old and the new

July 10, 2015

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Chris Bennie, "Control Rooms" (still) Photo: supplied

Un-resettling by James Tylor. *The Waves* and *Control Rooms* by Chris Bennie. Huw Davies Gallery PhotoAccess at the Manuka Arts Centre. Until July 26.

James Tylor is an Adelaide-based artist and his exhibition is presented as part of the PhotoAccess Indigenous Photomedia Artists Program. According to the artist's statement in the room brochure, "*Un-resettling* explores the paradox of practicing (sic) traditional Indigenous culture in conservation parks, national parks and recreational bushland". The paradox is that currently Indigenous people are not free to follow traditional cultural activities in these places. The 10 photographs (each 50 square centimetres) are divided into "dwellings" and "happenings" but all are united by the absence of human presence. We are presented with the traces of past activities, of memories (actual and imagined) of those who lived in and with the pictured landscapes now proscribed to them. This is strongly pictorialised in "Un-resettling (Handprints on rock)" in which a palimpsest of two hands on bush rocks is an eloquent statement of the simultaneity of Indigenous presence and absence in contemporary Australia.

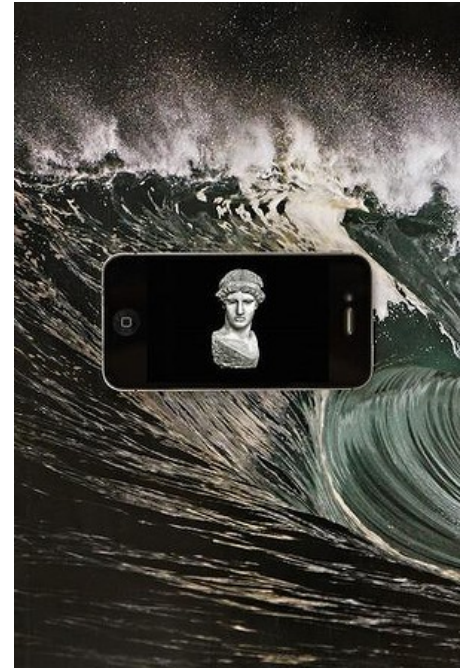
There is an air of poignancy and loss in the subject matter of this exhibition but it is also expressed in a visual language that is seductive and embracing. Tylor speaks not only of the dispossession of Indigenous Australians but does this in a language that clearly references its 19th-century antecedents. He is interested in the history of his media and particularly in how through direct acknowledgment he can make incisive contemporary comment. His use of hand-colouring on black-and-white establishes a direct relationship with much 19th-century Australian landscape photography. The difference though is manifest. Whereas 19th-century photographers (I am thinking of Alfred Abbott, Morton Alport and Nicholas Caire, for example) recorded the (relatively) newly possessed territory and its exotic flora and topography, Tylor's images are of country dispossessed, of a culture displaced. The 10 photographs are placed somewhat randomly on the gallery walls but it is a randomness that makes aesthetic sense. The inclusion of a barbed spear and a throwing stick carved by the artist from saplings sourced on Mt Ainslie adds a pointed local touch to this thematically persuasive and visually pleasing exhibition.

Control Rooms and *The Waves* were produced during a 2014 Asialink residency at Youkobo Artspace in Tokyo, Japan. *Control Rooms* is an installation that has as its thematic source the 2011 Fukushima nuclear disaster. The work is a video and is more than 20 minutes long. It is

accompanied by a sound track that speaks of the noises of technology, It is incessant and persistent and as it emerges from behind the viewer watching the screen in front, its insistent pulsations activate the space in a purposefully uncomfortable manner. It is an aural equivalent to the images that move slowly across the screen, laterally to the left and to the right, sometimes rotating, but always moving towards some unstated conclusion. As the title suggests the images are the control rooms of nuclear power plants. Banks of technological hardware and gadgets that despite their being part of our everyday world, gain in Bennie's compilation an air of menace. The multiplicity of knobs, control buttons, lights, et cetera are visual echoes of the audio component and this combination imbues this piece with an air of something inexorable, of something immanent over which we have no control. The absence of any humans reinforces all of this. While the ultimate message of *Control Rooms* may be uncomfortable, Bennie's own control of his media is consummate and this is a powerfully contrived and articulate work.

The Waves is a paean to the power of water both in actuality and in myth. Seven images of waves appropriated from various surfing magazines are expanded into large-scale inkjet prints each 100 centimetres x 150 centimetres. Within the confined space of the gallery these are visually dominating and dramatic. There is a clever use of space with six images running along one wall, and one on a wall at right angle to the others. The other wall is left blank and this allows the drama of each image individually and in combination to be fully appreciated.

In the centre of each wave a mobile device sits horizontally (for six of the images) and vertically (for one). Inset in these is a representation of a figure from the Classical world (Achilles, Dionysus, Apollo, Athene), ancient Mesopotamia (Humbaba, Gilgameshand Enkidu) and Hindu myth (Arjuna and Krsna). These give historical and cultural context to the importance of water in the world's mythologies over time. The mobile device imparts an insouciant air on contemporaneity. The wide sweep of cultural representations further underscores the endemic presence of the role and power of water in human affairs. While the mythological figures sit above the waves their insignificance is overtly present. This is an impressive display full of theatricality and inherent wit, eloquence and visual impact.








Chris Bennie, "The Waves (Athene)" Photo: supplied






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