

Sensuousness, Seduction, Intimacy, and Joy

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Phenomenological perception, according to Edmond Husserl (1925/1977) states that 'first sense experience' *appercepts* phenomena prior to any cognitive recollection or explanation of it. It's an appealing philosophy for artists because it prioritises our senses. Within most conceptions of art, vision is favoured but is by no means the only focus. In *Surrogates for Social Touch* Michelle Vine explores *experience* in multiple ways. Her collection of readymade objects, prefabricated textures and composed or performed soundtracks vie for our sensuous attention across two rooms in Queensland College of Art's Project Gallery. Vine's *experiences* establish positivity as the bodies primary and fundamental leitmotif, supplanting pre-cognitive phenomenological experience with postmodern egalitarianism.

Within *Surrogates for Social Touch*, our seduction, at first, appears to be focused on the material of sheepskin and other 'fluffy' textures, including 'mermaid sequins' - a beguiling lenticular-like fabric that adorns children's t-shirts and notepads. In this context Vine has transformed that material into a large wall painting and attached sheepskin to a host of domestic and utilitarian objects and surfaces - a rolling pin, squeegee, eggbeater, fly swat, meat tenderiser, mannequins foot and old phone for example. Their display, in department store and workshop-style, is intended to invite inspection and, I assume, as a consequence, introspection. From this point, we are left to our, or rather Vine's, devices.

In an environment in which visitors are allowed and encouraged to touch and (consensually, we presume) be touched, our individual and shared experiences are given emotional as well as conceptual precedence. In doing so, the acts Vine wants you to perform establish the protocol for behaviours within a democratised safe space. Your body, sensually activated and more vibrantly attuned to its surroundings, exists in corporeality with others and its environment. This logic contrasts the institutional purpose of gallery contexts. Project Space is an important venue within the academic environment of Griffith University, showcasing the art of Undergraduate, Higher Degree Research Candidates, Staff and Alumni. It provides evidence of creative outputs in a context of cultural and academic competitiveness. Vine's *Social Space*, replete with its substantial inclusion of sheepskin and augmented, fetishised objects flirts with the notion that competitiveness, of which authorship is a fundamental corollary, is desirously sensual at its core. While the institutional context of Project Space is an implicit paradox for this project, Vine's exhibition provides, through individual experiences, conceptions of intimacy that not only elevate corporeality, question it.

Two elements within the exhibition signal the artist's desire to induce detailed and contemplative introspection into our comprehension of bodily experience in social contexts: Luke Jaaniste's thirty minute ambient soundscape and Vine's recorded affirmations. In the first instance, Jaaniste's soundtrack wafts over visitors who recline in Vine's sculptured furnishings - sheepskin covered cushions that are as difficult to get up from as they are comfortable. These elements combine to provide a meditation opportunity to alert the *experiencer* to their *experience* - effectively reconciling competitiveness, hierarchy and authorship within Husserlian pre-cognitive first-sense now-ness.

A second soundscape affirms the phenomenology of this meditation. Vine invites visitors to recline in a bathtub, also sheepskin lined, while listening on supplied headphones to affirmations spoken by the artist. Phrases like 'you radiate love, you are powerful beyond measure, you are enough, you are beautiful' and 'you are leadership material' whisper through the headset and contextualise a measure of Self that marks for Vine, the pinnacle of human sensuous experience. In so doing, *Surrogates for Social Touch* not only establishes an environment in which the artist venerates and celebrates the body politic in institutional contexts, it also asks you to apprehend that Body in all of its sensuousness, seduction, intimacy, and joy. In doing so our experiences distort phenomenological apperception to become socially radicalised within a safe and self-healing space.

Husserl, E 1977, *Phenomenological psychology: lectures, summer series*, trans. J Scanlan, Mertinus Nijhoff, The Hague.

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