

Gallery 1

Neil Pardington *The Vault*

22 April – 15 May 2010



G/1: 01



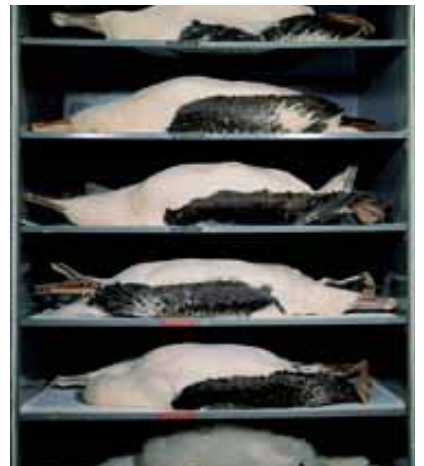
G/1: 02



G/1: 03



G/1: 04



G/1: 05

G/1: 01. *Land Vertebrates Store #1, Auckland Museum, Tāmaki Paenga Hira* 2008 (detail) Lambda / c-print on Kodak Endura 100 x 168cm Edition of 15

G/1: 02. *Natural Sciences Dry Store #1, Otago Museum* 2008 (detail) Lambda / c-print on Kodak Endura 109 x 100cm Edition of 15

G/1: 03. *Mannequin Store #5, Te Manawa* 2008 (detail) Lambda / c-print on Kodak Endura 120 x 100cm Edition of 15

G/1: 04. *Wet Room #1, Otago Museum* 2008 (detail) Lambda / c-print on Kodak Endura 100 x 120cm Edition of 15

Ornithology Store #2, Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa 2006 (detail) Lambda / c-print on Kodak Endura 120 x 100cm Edition of 15

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***Look at us through the lens of a camera,
does it remove all of our pain?
If we run they'll look in the back room,
where we hide all of our feelings.***

Editors

Neil Pardington's lush photographs taken in the collection stores of museums in New Zealand depict taxidermy, artfully coiled snake specimens in jars and limbless mannequins. Less exercises in taxonomic rigour, Pardington's photographs celebrate a bizarrely baroque abundance. They do not reflect coolly unemotional museological order or traditional classifications but illuminate the hidden quarters, vaults, of these repositories where items languish in between exhibition, sometimes forever.

Bereft of a tone of moral outrage about the fate of the creatures depicted, Pardington's images are instead imbued with a gentle humour and wit. In *Land and Marine Mammal Store #4* the deer peak their heads out of the plastic wrap as though warily surveying the lie of the land. In *Ornithology Store #2*, albatrosses lay as though in miniature bunk beds, one on top of the other, in gentle repose. Similarly *Card Catalogue #1* is a modernist homage that speaks of order, yet remains enticingly inscrutable.

Alison Kubler

The Vault

A 'camera' in Latin, is a vaulted room or chamber. *The Vault* plays on this etymological quirk – exploring the storage vaults of New Zealand's archives, art galleries and museums while considering the role of the camera as a storehouse of ideas, images and memories.

In making this series I have photographed collections throughout New Zealand – from large national to small regional institutions. This exhibition focuses on two aspects of the project – the natural history stores, in particular those of Te Papa, and a variety of mannequin stores. The natural history collections range from those for scientific study, such as albatross skins and foetal deer, through mounted heads to herds of taxidermied animals.

The mannequins are props rather than collection items, so tend to inhabit lost corners and cupboards in the museum stores. The inadequacy of their near-human forms and expressions suggest a broader narrative, with strange poignancy.

Neil Pardington

Boulevards of broken dreams...

Mannequins in photography: a long history that has impacted on artistic practice and everyday life via fashion since the Surrealists, and especially since the 1985 exhibition 'L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism'. This revealed how the diversity and innovation offered by the medium enabled not only the subversion of, but a proliferation of images aimed at undermining social conditioning.⁽¹⁾ This is the context which breathes life into Neil Pardington's recent images of mannequins, but at the same time suggests a point of departure from the many essays focused on the Surrealist's (mis)use of women.

When considered alongside the many categories of stored objects and treasures in wet rooms and vaults of museums throughout New Zealand, these former storefront dummies suggests a different focus. While alluding to the Surrealists and what could be termed a deliberate 'figurative dismemberment', Pardington's mannequins comment directly on contemporary capitalist consumption and built-in obsolescence.

These abandoned bodies whose forms no longer connect with tailor-perfection and idealised fashion-house/magazine beauty, have an eerie detachment. Sometimes statuesque and half-dressed but more often broken and stacked (saving space in crammed quarters); sometimes protectively plastic-wrapped (heads only, not those parts that could be covered by clothes) but more often dumped and scarred by paint and sticky tape, these humanoids are less revered than the other objects Pardington has brought to life from the crypts beneath natural history museums.

In this sense the mannequins are more objet trouvé (or a ready-made) than a reference to the perverse and disturbing images of contemporary artist/photographers like Cindy Sherman whose work reveals the enduring impact of Surrealist photography. If Bellmer was commenting on wartime disfigurement as much as critiquing fascist German notions of the perfect Aryan body through his reconstructions of fragmented/contorted and doubled dolls (or poupees); and Sherman's images have a particular feminist twist,⁽²⁾ then Pardington's photographs of 'out-of-work' mannequins stripped to the core and left in the glare of bare neon tubes, draw attention to ubiquitous notions of 'the body beautiful' and the capitalist, 'spin-doctored' consumer culture that promotes and thrives on them. The disturbing aspect of Pardington's matter-of-fact mannequin photographs is an allusion to our own dispensability in the workplace.

Bellmer, Sherman and others used photographic constructions to focus on the social ramifications of a 'body politic': Pardington's focus on human substitutes expands this to embrace a particular socio-political dysfunction. Cast aside, past their 'use-by' date, these stand-in women (unable to be 'botoxed' and resuscitated for public display) now lie idle, just one step away from the rubbish tip – any future employment contingent on the off-chance of some historical relevance. Once models of a particular look, a certain style, a bygone era, their survival is now dependent upon a costume exhibition or museum 'drama' within which they could live again – stand-ins, for real humans who have long since passed away.

Ewen McDonald

Notes:

- (1) L'amour fou: Photography and Surrealism, curators Rosalind Krauss and Jane Livingstone, 1985.
- (2) "Even though I've never actively thought of my work as feminist or as a political statement, certainly everything in it [draws] from my observations as a woman in this culture". Fuku, N., 'A woman of parts', Art in America, June 1997, p 80.

Gallery 2

Francesca Rosa *Car Bodies*



Impermanence and the everyday

Cyclic forces are at play in the universe, acknowledged or otherwise. They permeate all aspects of contemporary life: the climate change debate and the global financial crisis being two of the more popular in the media at the moment. Truth be told, everything can be defined by impermanence – some things less obvious than others. As conscious intelligent entities, humans are obsessed with these cycles of change – technology only making this more pronounced. One answer as to why this obsession exists, may lie in being the only known species aware of its pending demise.

This demise has an analogous hand at work in the photographs of Francesca Rosa. By her own admission, Rosa approaches her subjects with a 'forensic fascination'. The series forming the basis of this exhibition is 'Car Bodies'. Ten photographs drawn from a collection of one hundred or more, depict derelict vehicles of numerous makes and models 'found' in the rural and suburban landscapes of Far North Queensland. Although originally objective in intent, Rosa acknowledges her somewhat "obsessive quest to document as many cars as possible" as a "sympathetic response to the demise of each car".

Importantly, the value of these works don't just lie in their aesthetics, or the formal elements of the photographs. They act as stand-ins for their forgotten drivers, passengers and admirers. Just as these cars are in a constant state of change (only halted for a moment in the photograph), the metaphor for this entropy in a broader sense and the inescapable truth of existence cannot be overlooked. Their stories are not their own.

They speak to the experience of their passengers, of the triumphs and the failures, the break-ups after a date, the tentative fondling of newfound love in the back seat. It is in their forgotten histories that the true value of these objects lay. And it is in this found state of disregard,

one that sits in stark contrast to the mobility they once afforded, that they become markers of history – both the collective and individual.

Transcending the individual they equally speak to Australia's odd affinity with the automobile. The car is an icon of Australian identity, depicting class, status and even a set of beliefs or aspirations. They are more than utilitarian objects. They are statements of intent, ritual objects used in bizarre initiations, a means of escape and objects of desire. Rosa's 'archive of experiences', depicted through images of cars in the landscape, beautifully captures and repositions these objects in relation to our own memory. Of your family, friends and life told through a cultural relationship to the auto, these photographs embody endless stories and associations.

It is clear that Rosa is a skilled technician whose lens frames her subject with empathy, instilling a sense of forgotten beauty and newfound life into these off-casts of contemporary life. But it is in her approach informed by ideas of the forensic that allows the viewer to see through the image, locating them as historical objects – part of an ongoing cycle of change.

Tony Stephens

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G/2: 01. *Holden Ute, Ettly Bay Road 2007*
Lambda print 60 x 60cm Edition of 5 + 2 AP

G/2: 02 *Chrysler Valiant Ute, Silkwood Japoonvale Road 2007*
Lambda print 60 x 60cm Edition of 5 + 2 AP

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Window

Sean Rafferty *The Arcadia Project*



G / W: 01 *ET IN ARCADIA EGO* 2010
Digital collage 10 x 15cm



Gallery:

86 George Street Redfern
NSW 2016 Australia

T +61 2 9699 9033
E info@grantpirrie.com

www.grantpirrie.com

Tony Stephens
Director

Antoinette Bailey
Gallery Manager

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