

YOUR INVITATION
TO ATTEND THE
OPENING OF
DEVOID
6PM – 8PM
THURSDAY
24 SEPT 2009

NATALIE RYAN
DEVOID
GALLERY 2
GRANTPIRRIE
24 SEPTEMBER –
24 OCTOBER 2009

Image: *Devoid Matter*
(medium black deer) 2009
Taxidermy foam casts,
prosthetic eyes,
synthetic fibres,
wooden board
89 X 59 X 89cm



01



02



03



**TAXONOMY TO
TAXIDERM...
AND ALL THAT
LIES BETWEEN**
ESSAY BY
KELLY FLIEDNER

Images:

01: *Devoid Matter (black hare)* 2009
Taxidermy foam casts, prosthetic eyes, synthetic fibres, wooden board
51 X 38 X 51cm

02: *Devoid Matter (white baboon)* 2008
Taxidermy foam casts, prosthetic eyes, prosthetic jaw and tongue, synthetic fibres, wooden board
100 X 60 X 100cm

03: *Devoid Matter (black hare)* 2009
Taxidermy foam casts, prosthetic eyes, synthetic fibres, wooden board
51 X 38 X 51cm

Photography:
Andrew Barcham

There is something to be said for the shrewd ingenuity of Natalie Ryan's sculptures; caught between scientific objectivity and artistic subjectivity, a lingering presence of beauty is found through her striking velvet forms of manipulated beasts. This alien visual enquiry or small inventory of the animal body is defined by its awkward condition between death and life and is at once intriguingly adherent to the practice of taxidermy and also a critique of it. The clinical, dissected and anatomical approach to the carcass or cadaver together with the spiritually fatalistic or therapeutic connotations of the body in relation to its own inexorable death, frames Ryan's image of the corpse as an uncanny one; familiar and yet foreign.

Taxidermy is a supposed extension of life, either a ritual that pays homage to keeping the memory of a living beast in tact or acting as a cruel souvenir, it erases the abject image of the corpse by presenting it as alert and sentient. This presentation however, ultimately belies its own reality and is exactly why taxidermy has such a chilling presence. Ryan further manipulates this contradictory display of death by removing all surface indications of character and in doing so, mocks the

tradition of both worshipping the relic and esteeming the kill. As death constantly hovers over the installation, the strange animals with their small, round and gleaming eyes stare into the space around them, provoking a strongly visceral response where the audience doesn't quite insinuate themselves within the picture but strongly empathises with the melancholy subjects.

Ryan, who studies medical drawing, denotes each of her forms with zoological veracity as the objective rules and techniques of clinical taxidermy are interrogated. The actual structure of each work is an internal cast of an animal, taken after its refuse has been removed and then crafted into a solid mass to stretch the skin of the animal. This original cast is used for subsequently deceased animals of each particular species over and over again. It is converted into an armature of one size fits all and becomes a rather mysterious process where an animal skin is at once reduced to the mould of its species but given individuality through its surface properties. Ryan's sculptures however are unable to escape the collective model – they remain purely as casts and are never given the satisfaction of external characteristics.

The absence of context for each animal surreptitiously

reintroduces imagination and subjectivity. The intimate patterns and groves of muscles sheltered by velvet capture the viewer's attention in a way that contradicts the scientific constraints and the ideal of objectivity that it seems to have imposed upon itself. This classification restabilises the ancient definition of science as the outcome of visual interrogation, arising from the primal driving force of knowledge, wonder. The fragile beauty and cautious reverence of each sculpture is captured by the thin line dividing observed reality and a poetic imagination inherent in taxidermy. The handsome and alluring velvet skin substitutes for tails, ears and feet, and while imperfect, are stunning replications of taxidermy's usually erudite taxonomy of form.