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The Other APT: Raw Space Gallery

It's hard not to be somewhat cynical about the self-congratulatory 'diversity' at the centre of the growing calendar of art bi/tri-ennials. The -ennial has proven expedient to the global tourism circuit, keeping regional economies and a relatively moderate pool of transnational artists afloat and the *Asia Pacific Triennial* is no exception. The mediation of representation that is imperative to the 'best of' formats of these transnational art shows hinges on a categorical backwardness that can feel more than a little like a Miss World competition than a progressive art show because the little tag in parenthesis after each artist's name seems just as politically precarious now as it did forty years ago. Despite a weighty corpus of practical and critical work to the contrary, identity politics are so intrinsic to art capitalization, for both artists and institutions, that extricating ourselves from the particular and strategic politics of identification is seemingly impossible. Not that everyone wants to of course.

The binaries of one/Other remain strikingly useful and resilient despite innumerable theories of globalization and subjectivity that plot individuals as increasingly mobile and with multiple affiliations. The cosmopolitan narratives on which these trans-anything events are built highlight how migrations and movements aren't necessarily advantageous or desirable for many identities while showcasing institutional attempts at being inclusive and enlightened/ing. Once every three years, 'the Pacific' becomes a manageable and distinct terrain in which to plot these multifarious identities so that the APT sits separately from its European forerunners and any regional competition. In the process, the local and indigenous rubrics have to cover a whole lot of spatial and temporal ground.

The Other APT was instigated to flesh out that ground, acknowledging the migratory peoples that have demarcated the Pacific region both in pre and

post-colonial times. Aboriginal art¹ remains a spectacular attraction both locally and internationally, sitting between the spatial and temporal gaps that locate aboriginality in terms of its “economic and communicative potentialities”². The impact of globalization on local cultures has forged new identities but also reinforced others, whether in the name of economic and culture capitalization or social justice, proving that empowerment and disenfranchisement aren’t mutually exclusive. Somewhere between optimistic fantasies of raceless and classless nomadism and pessimistic visions of endemic and stifling disenfranchisement, sit the vagaries of contemporary subjectivity and representation. Neither one nor Other but an in-between space³.

Robb Kelly and Joseph Slade’s *Type Test* targets the dis/located junctures between identities complicated by multiple affiliations and meanings. Their self-identification as “Scottish-Irish-Jew” and “Maori-Anglo-Yugoslavian” picks apart the nuances of dividing selves into racial fractions. In questioning the logics of blood purity, their own allegiances evidence the distinction between political citizenship and cultural birthright. With the idea of an ‘authentic’ identity no longer tenable, seemingly the distinction comes in the mix.

Tim Leha’s short film *Home* interrogates similar inconsistencies of memory and bloodlineage. As the protagonist fades in and out of his own narrative, unable to belong without ever really being, he enacts the impossibility of mapping identity along racial lines when blood intermingles across borders and seas.

¹ I use this term somewhat tentatively, agreeing with Richard Bell’s statement that Aboriginal art is a ‘white thing’. More recently, Christian Thompson claimed similarly in his review of *The Art of Politics/The Politics of Art* in *Machine* 2:1.

² Terry Smith. “Public Art between Cultures: The Aboriginal Memorial, Aboriginality, and Nationality in Australia”. *Critical Inquiry* 27 (Summer 2001) 632.

³ Homi K. Bhaba has long suggested an in-between space (a third space) to interrogate postcolonial binaries while Marsha Meskimmon has drawn on the idea of the in-between-as-process in relation to gender difference in art. Deleuze and Guattari also theorised an in-between ‘non-place’ to define the passage of becoming but I am not suggesting that here. I refer to it quite simply as a theme of contemporary subjectivity and art, particularly indigenous identity/art, whereby an in-between space suggests that caught between a number of static binaries.

Maya Kanamori and Lucy Dann's *The Heart of the Journey* was the most resonant work for me. Sitting in the stifling 'new media' booth with three others, I was overwhelmed by its simple emotional verisimilitude. Openly nostalgic and uncomplicated, it tells the story of woman travelling from her community in Broome to Japan in search of a pearl diving father she has never met. A photographic ellipsis animated by dislocated aural accompaniments that test temporal realities, the voiceovers by Kanamori and Dann stitched in with their recorded conversations with fellow passengers and witnesses to their journey. They all prove meaningful facilitators of our experience of Dann's transnational journey of self-discovery. From the physical emptiness of Broome to the overcrowded streets of Hong Kong and Tokyo, Dann grows more at ease with herself, no longer either/or but some place in-between. Despite the strength of her family life in Broome, Dann seeks to bridge the space between her and her father, negotiating a series of intermediaries who, as befits Japanese tradition, must formally introduce her to each proceeding link in the journey.

Like *The Heart of the Journey*, Jenny Fraser's *Native All Stars* emphasises how the overlapping, interconnected networks that constitute our selves might not be as straightforward as they first appear. A series of individuals representing multiple communal affiliations sit dislocated from yet connected to each other, identities across borders yet united in their aboriginality. In light of our colonial past and the celebration and commodification of spectacular aboriginality in Australian sport, trade is an implicit element of historical and contemporary aboriginality.

The idea of being caught between two places resounded with me with this exhibition, particularly as a much-loved friend was tragically killed halfway between Raw Space and GOMA quite recently and his makeshift shrine still marks the transition between the two spaces; stuck between professional and amateur, tradition and contemporaneity transnational and local, big and small. We all try to mediate the spaces in-between these binaries and I can not help but imagine The Other APT in these terms. Mediating the social and cultural

imaginaries of indigeneity, it plots a landscape where tradition and disenfranchisement overlap and contradict each other and these inconsistencies intersect the exhibition's themes of place, legend, identity, politics and mutual respect.

Meskimmon, Marsha. "Corporeal Theory with/in Practice: Christine Borland's Winter Garden". *Art History* 26 (3), 2003. 442-455.