



placing lace

Lace—Contemporary Perspectives
CRAFTWEST Gallery, Perth, Western Australia
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Good or bad, institutions always mirror the dilemmas of those they serve. In recent times CraftWest, the Centre for Contemporary Craft in Western Australia in King Street Perth oscillated between the twin poles of the craft establishment's creed so quickly that it found it hard to be clear about its objectives. On the one hand, objects made on the assumption that the conventional basis of the crafts as ornament and function embodies a superb act of making, formed the back bone of its shop displays and sales. On the other, an old fashioned, avant garde creative context from which function has vanished predominated in its formal exhibitions—a species of meta-craftwork in which the disciplines of making played no part. This was not a recipe for long term success.

The revamped CraftWest opened with a bang and a good dinner recently. It is clear that incoming director Lynda Dorrington has chosen to reassert the notion of quality and the well made object as her first priority in both shop and gallery space. To survive, craftmakers must be able to sell their work regularly and CraftWest must attract the corporate sector and collectors. Ironically, *Lace*, the recent CraftWest Gallery show with work by Michael Brennand Wood from the UK, Suzumi Noda from Japan, Pilar Rojas (originally from Spain) and Pamela Gaunt and Anne Farren from Australia, highlights many of the difficulties of the bipolar approach to presenting the crafts.

Brennand Wood and others talk of 'recovering' lace as if this were simply a matter of reiterating the pre-industrial patterns of sixteenth or seventeenth century lace without recognising that the pre-industrial communities that made such luxury trade possible were impossibly stultified. Indeed, all craft practices presuppose a specific community of makers and consumers that must be engaged if the craft in question is

to be reanimated. The most contemporary experiences of lace are either of the industrially produced net curtains, through which one spies or is spied upon, or of the erotic implications of lace as a visual screen in lingerie, an equally industrial product.

Only Anne Farren in her *Imprints 2001* has taken on these issues in a way which engages contemporary experience and the delights of making in a unified work. Two tiny lace torsos, one black, one white, sensual tattoos awaiting flesh, hang in front of contrasting delicate but bulky kimono like layers of fused silk. Fat, thin, black, white, collide in a conjunction of craft, passion and anxiety which raises one's sense of the delicacy of the materials to an almost intolerable, fetishistic pitch.

Pamela Gaunt does a lot with tradition and old lace. There isn't far to go between inserting stamps and other nostalgic objects into lace and making lace from the objects themselves. Gaunt offers a wall of old LPs turned to lace—their circular shape easily invokes a lace-making hoop. Intriguing as they are however, the ventilated vinyl ultimately asserts its chunky black toffee-like presence as a bad pun.

Gaunt's remaining colleagues all attempt to bridge the twin poles of contemporary craft with varying degrees of irony. None of it is convincing. It is as if, after nearly two centuries of trying, the crafts have yet to come to terms with their post-industrial roles. Sooner or later craft makers must acknowledge that they do their best work within a conventional basis of superb making.

endnote

Lace touring—contact CraftWest for details on tel: +61 (0)8 9227 7505 or email: cw@highway1.com.au

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