

Acknowledgements

Steve Cox is represented by John Buckley Gallery, Richmond, Victoria

Daniel Dorall is represented by Dianne Tanzer Gallery, Fitzroy, Victoria

Loretta Quinn is represented by Anita Traverso Gallery, Richmond, Victoria & Harrison Galleries, Paddington, NSW



SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY

BUILDING 2: BOWEN STREET, MELBOURNE



BADDAGINNIE RUN

Supported by

Managed by the RMIT School of Art

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Quinn is particularly drawn to the vulnerability and innocence expressed by sentimentalised ‘Victoriana’ imagery of children. Her Roman Catholic upbringing and convent education, a debilitating childhood illness, and later her traumatic journey to motherhood have informed the delicacy and empathy which characterise works like *Palaimon* (2009) and *Pearl* (2010). For Quinn the past is an impermanent, fluctuating notion whose disparate references seem to murmur throughout her work.

Cox seeks to create an alignment between the recognisable elements within these works, and ponders whether there is something distinctly talismanic in the creative process itself, something capable of casting a spell over both artist and audience. We are asked to partake of, to collude in, that same secret knowledge these artists possess.

Inga Walton (April, 2010)



Outside Pages, Left to Right
Steve Cox
Chemotherapy, 2010
Acrylic on paper
70 x 50 cm

Loretta Quinn
Palaimon (detail), 2009
Plaster, aluminium, fabric and sealants
94 x 51 x 44 cm

Inside Pages, Left to Right
Daniel Dorall
Well, 2007
Cardboard, plastic, hydrocyl
20 x 20 x 4 cm

Annette Cook
The Spotted Ones, 2010
Line etching, aquatint, linocut, stencil and wash
216 x 140 cm



SCHOOL OF ART GALLERY



Arcana

ANNETTE COOK

STEVE COX

DANIEL DORALL

LORETTA QUINN

Curated by STEVE COX

TUESDAY 4 TO FRIDAY 14 MAY 2010

OPENING WEDNESDAY 5 MAY 5-7PM

FLOOR TALK WEDNESDAY 12 MAY 1-1.30PM

Curator Steve Cox reunites with fellow artists Annette Cook, Daniel Dorall, and Loretta Quinn who last exhibited together in 2006. He has chosen a somewhat oblique theme for their mutual interpretation: ***Arcana***. Mysteriously obscure, requiring secret knowledge to be understood; hard to fathom, difficult or impossible to understand; a secret known only to a select group; a secret of nature, of the kind sought by alchemists; either of two divisions in a pack of Tarot cards.

The shared themes that motivate the very process of making unites these works; the expressive compulsion which drives artists to create their own personal mythology, intellectual expression, or emotive outpouring. Cox delves into the strange ‘alchemy’ of art production itself— materials and process— the habitually private and intangible conversation between the artist and their medium. Each of these artists is interested in the conceptual and interpretive space that exists between reality, history and myth-making.

Annette Cook’s complex etchings and block prints are strongly influenced by the theories espoused by an early pioneer of biosemiotics, German biologist Jakob von Uexküll (1864–1944). He was intrigued as to how living beings subjectively perceive their environments, which led him to the concept of *umwelt*, subjective spatio-temporal worlds where individual species usually only respond to signs, or ‘carriers of significance’, within their own ostensibly closed perceptual world. These ideas have prompted a wider search for potential visual literacy that is suggested in behavioural patterns, and to imagine ‘hidden’ messages that require deciphering in order to breach the divide

between the human and animal worlds.

Her recent suite focuses on the signifiers and marks that occur on the pelts and feathers of a number of Australian native animals and birds; in particular, quolls, numbats, bandicoots and pardelotes. Cook’s extensive research into preserved anthropological specimens informs her decisions about the visual presentation, as joined pelts have a distinct correlation to the multiplicity of printmaking. She focuses on the accessorial and decorative elements of external patterning which involves repetitive cutting of the printing plates to achieve the effect of fabrication. This ‘textile’ approach produces a dense ‘fibrous’ quality to the works, allowing for metaphoric portals to emerge from the markings, which in turn suggest entry or exit points, through animal patterns, to worlds beyond.

Steve Cox uses childhood fables, invented narratives, and ideas of sorcery and magic to explore the abiding tension between superstition/religion, and rationalism/science. Motifs derived from children’s book illustration and kitschy cartoon anamorphism are applied by Cox to make the works seem somehow familiar, but otherwise distorted and other-worldly as if part of an hallucination or nightmare. His stream-of-consciousness approach allows the chance and accident of flowing paint to suggest imagery, and direct how the painting will eventually be resolved. The grotesque witch of *Nancy* (2005) reflects the archaic belief that servants of the Devil manifested various physical deformities to indicate their spiritual corruption. *The Witch’s Chair* (2009) refers to a favoured instrument of torture employed by inquisitors to compel confessions from accused



women before the forces of persecution, ignorance and mass hysteria exacted their dreadful toll and the victim was burned. In stark contrast, *In the Cave of the Axolotl* (2009) represents the intellectual triumph of Darwin’s theory of evolutionary biology (1859), and the liberation from religious tyranny it conferred.

Images randomly extracted from a calendar of works by the German photographer Wilhelm von Gloeden (1856–1931) feature in *The Death of God* and *In Parenthesis* (both 2002). Best known for his homoerotic ‘pastoral’ nude scenes of Sicilian youths posed in ‘Classical’ attitudes in reference to ancient Greece and Rome, von Gloeden’s images act as a quasi-historical pastiche or fiction. Cox utilises them as the basis from which to suggest further divergent layers of artificiality and interpretation. The photographic image, with its implied verisimilitude, is doubly subverted— the original ‘meaning’ yielding to Cox’s newer contrivance.

Daniel Dorall’s academic background in architecture influences both his more recent works on paper and the intricate miniature sculptures from which they derive. Based on the City of Melbourne grid, church floor plans, and more interpretive maze structures, Dorall hand builds extraordinarily precise micro-worlds using cardboard, sand, plastic and tiny figurines. Small though they are, these deceptively charming vignettes ambush the viewer with often perverse scenes of distress, cruelty, quiet despair, and pathos. For *Well* (2007), a bucolic scene of sheep grazing peaceably on manicured grass belies the mute drama of a little girl stranded at the bottom of a disused well. Fretful and clutching her teddy-bear, she has only the oblivious sheep for

comfort; the claustrophobic confines serve to heighten the sense of bleak isolation and mounting panic.

The psychological terrorism and dread associated with indiscriminate acts of violence is one Dorall revisits with *Target* (2010). A man with a shotgun holds a woman hostage in the middle of a verdant maze as people try to flee through a narrow passage in the surrounding wall. The work is constructed in the shape of an archery/rifle range target, or rifle targeting scope, to convey the sense of being hunted, confined, or trapped. Dorall’s contained scenarios act as random pages from an evolving story book— though they owe more to Roald Dahl than to Disney. As such, a sanitised or conventional ‘happy ending’ is eschewed in favour of ambiguity, fatalism, twisted humour and a certain gleeful malevolence.

There is a strong element of nostalgia and wistful melancholy within Loretta Quinn’s sculptures. She explores, celebrates, and preserves ideas of a ‘halcyon’ past through the abiding themes of landscape, the iconic structure, and the figurative. Her use of found objects and discarded curios alludes to the hoardings of eccentric private collectors, and dusty museum specimen boxes guarding obsolete artefacts. In *Drift* (2010) three sailing ships embedded in resin, crusted with sand and shells, act as vessels of the unconscious, towing certainties and conventions out to sea towards an imaginary archipelago. Tiny figures populate the decks lost in quietude- an ocean of silent contemplation stretching forth like a scatter of dreams on the surface of the foamy sea.

