

SPECTACLE

by SHAE ROOKE

Essay by Grace Slonim

Shae Rooke: 'Spectacle' 2016
5.44min HD video with sound
Sound Design by Garth Sheridan

Perhaps one of the most interesting and important battles that Australian artists have fought has been for the right to be herald as equal to their Western contemporaries. This is caused both by those who still hold Australia as a provincial backwater town, as well as from those from within who seek ratification and accreditation beyond Australia's borders. For even though Australia has strategically aligned itself within the boundaries of the political West, her artist's and their work still sit on the periphery of the Eurocentric powerhouse of art making and art acceptance.

This international domination has obviously shifted throughout the ages, with the power surge now caught between the fading out of New York and ignition of Berlin. Yet for many white Australians since English settlement, the call from London has prevailed. For it wasn't until Fred Williams (an Australian born painter) began to paint the Australian landscape differently to his predecessors in 1940s, and exposed the land through his paintings as unique to itself and worthy of the viewer's attention. This was in contrast to the early bush scenes previously depicted by English painters that were rendered by superimposing their Colonial homeland onto their depictions of Van Demon's land.

Shae Rooke has encapsulated this critical and complex debate in her simple alignment of a holographic image of a Northern-hemisphere tree located within an Australian landscape in her work 'Spectacle'. As the hologram twirls to reveal its compressed though colourful seasonal migrations, the stoic environs of the lush gardens and golden paddocks remain unaffected. With the subtly of a breath, the wind moves through the gardens and stirs a resting magic. Their softness of aesthetics are at odds with the flamboyant and shifting hologram, causing a rapture in what would otherwise be a peacefully still image. Whilst not necessarily an attempt by Rooks to suggest that Australian landscape will remain impervious underneath the paints of Colonial superimposition, the comparison is striking.

Filmed on location at her latest residency in Cowwarr, Gippsland, Rooke has rendered the aesthetic juxtaposition of the two landscapes as a springboard for interrogation into our own landscapes and how we perceive them. The rupture of the hologram speaks of Rooke's inquiry from her wider context of work into the not quite perfect amalgamation of urban and rural environments. Rooke toys with constructed perspectives in 'Spectacle' in an attempt to bar the viewer from complete immersion into the work. And yet, polar opposites are still attached on the same spectrum, and so the viewer is allowed back into the world of 'Spectacle' through careful and deliberate observation of the similarities and echoing separations: the shape of fabricated holographic tree mirrors the silhouette of the living gum; the split screen presentation mirrors the rupture within; and the accompanying audio mirrors the video though has been harvested from a separate garden.

With gentleness to her work, Rooke delicately invites the viewer into a platform of contemplation. Through still and poetic images, she renders worlds with worlds to call ours into question, and yet tactfully steers clear from accusation or condemnation. Instead, she offers the viewer a chance to consider what their landscape means, and from where it has been constructed. Offering us the opportunity for accountability without guilt, Rooke's 'Spectacle' can allow the viewer the chance for it be their catalyst for growth.

Exhibiting at Seventh Gallery | seventhgallery.org
Opening Night: 6pm - 8pm 31st March
Gallery Open: 31st March - 15th April. Tues - Sat 12 - 6pm

Shae would like to thank Cowwarr Art Space (where Spectacle was filmed) for their warm support and welcome during an artists residency in 2015, Seventh Gallery for their assistance with install and exhibition space , Garth Sheridan for the sound design and tech genius and Grace Slonim for writing this essay.