

Homeliness

Homeliness showcases four artists employing craft inspired approaches to their respective practices. A snapshot of contemporary art suggesting a range of open-ended investigations into aspects of contemporary identity, *Homeliness* addresses the relationship between objects and our sense of place.

Many children of the 1970s and 80s will be able to recall first hand their parents' fervor over functional hand crafted objects. Growing up in this era – as did the artists in *Homeliness* – I feel a degree of distance from (and maintain a peculiar understanding of) the craft and lifestyle ambitions rampant throughout my childhood. Many recollections I have from growing up are a muddled composite involving skipping school sports to play home computer games and living outside main city centres surrounded by adults who maintained a mix of egalitarianism and self-sufficient ideals, together with a slightly ill-fitting conservative blue collar ethos.

In many small town New Zealand households during these years, weekend black and white television rugby coverage would have gone hand-in-hand with the fragrance of DB beer bottles and three-quarter empty casks of cheap gewurztraminer wine. To me it seems like a regular and happy New Zealand childhood experience and one shared by many. For the most part my sense of “homeliness” was secured by scenes like the above as well as ever present craft objects, such as my mum’s hand turned wooden loom and the typical earthy looking New Zealand ceramics of the day which were liberally distributed through the home.

It is interesting to observe that the selection process for *Homeliness* did not involve a select pick of artists being curated into a given theme for Objectspace. Instead, these four artists were all recipients of Auckland-based *Starving Artists Fund* (S.A.F) awards in 2005 and 2006. Originally conceived by Auckland artist A.D. Schierning as a conceptual art project, S.A.F. now functions as a charitable trust and administers annual awards to deserving new artists. The S.A.F. website declares that “*the name ‘Starving Artists Fund’ is an attempt to save the art world from itself. It is considered to be tongue in cheek and by no means implies that we feed anything but creativity.*” The S.A.F. award is currently the only one of its kind in New Zealand for artists that is also governed, operated and judged by a panel of artists.¹

Jacquelyn Greenbank is an artist based in Christchurch. Greenbank’s crocheted objects reference everyday objects, bringing to mind memories of op-shopping, market stalls and New Zealand living rooms. Although discovering value in found or discarded things is not uncommon, Greenbank’s observations through her chosen medium have offered refreshing interpretations of our post-colonial situation, social history and popular customs. Take Greenbank’s *The Royal Raleigh Watchers* for instance. Featured in Artspace’s 2005 new artist’s show, *Compelled*, Greenbank’s crocheted Raleigh bicycle posed the question, “*Does the British monarchy elicit even a hairsbreadth of affection in the hearts and minds of the people in Aotearoa? How tainted and twisted is colonialism’s stain?*”² Utilizing her chosen folksy craft

media for its lyrical and conceptual possibilities, *Brain* is the first work in a new series which draws upon educational children’s books. With an imaginative, fun and slightly macabre twist on this genre, *Brain* is exactly what the title implies; a brain standing in its own pool of congealed, i.e. carefully crocheted, blood.

Loren Clements is an Auckland based artist. Clements’s sound objects operate in a quasi-scientific realm. Constructed of various toys, computer joysticks and electronic flotsam and jetsam, Clements’s *Degenerate and Enable (I-III)* series produces a distinctive wall of sound art described by the artist as “*a corrupted floodgate ... capable of releasing sonic mayhem.*” The home-made “Popular Electronics” appearance of Clements’s objects belies the time and aesthetic consideration which has gone into their creation. It is one thing to take in the appearance of these works and another to listen to the sound they produce. The viewer is at once disturbed and calmed by the harmonics and toy sounds haphazardly emerging from the din of electronic bleeps and distorted frequencies.

Erica Van Zon is an Auckland artist whose work plays with “*threads of shifting memory through pastiche of objects personified via a handmade, signature aesthetic.*” Obsessively sifting among indicators and traces of European lineage both private and public, Van Zon ingeniously hand makes objects which presuppose a state of liminality, half way between reality and fiction. Van Zon’s works for *Homeliness* – for instance *Black Cat* – are inspired by film sets, books and family references. Re-creating cinematic props and propositions to be experienced first hand by the viewer, it is a crafty conceptual gesture which brings to mind a passage by French curator Nicholas Bourillard, “*the exhibition may have turned into a set, but who comes to act in it? How do the actors and extras make their way across it, and in the midst of what kind of scenery? One day, somebody ought to write the history of art using the peoples who pass through it.*”³

Andy Kingston is an artist working in ceramics and is based in Kaeo, Northland. Kingston employs a wide vocabulary in

his ceramic works, drawing freely upon local vernacular, literary and art historical sources with a humorous and irreverent touch. Kingston’s earthenware plates, embellished with various images and commentaries, are often exhibited in small groupings or installations. The textual and image based fragments resulting from these combinations are entertaining and illuminating. In Kingston’s installation of four set pieces for *Homeliness*, (each made up of multiple works) the artist appears to be introducing his own version of New Zealand art history, while the material presence of clay simultaneously suggests a feeling of folk-documented narrative.

While not implicitly an ode to the 70s and 80s, the artists and works in *Homeliness* nevertheless reference craft traditions and related media from a similar social-historical and generational perspective, albeit within the auspices of contemporary art practice. Sampling various “crafty” and hobbyist influences and delving, no doubt, into aspects of our collective psyche, the artists in *Homeliness* share an interesting approach to contemporary art which could be characterized as “object-centric.”

Matt Blomeley

01/
Starving Artists Fund.
5 October 2007.
<www.starvingartists-fund.com>

02/
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2007. <<http://www.artspace.org.nz/exhibitions/2005/compelled.asp>>

03/
Bourillard, Nicholas.
Relational Aesthetics.
Les Presses du Reel.
France. 2002. pp74,75.



01/02/03
 Loren Clements is an artist based in Auckland missiondin@yahoo.com
Degenerate and Enable I-III
 Mixed media
 2005-2007
 All works courtesy of the artist

04/05/06/07/08/09/10/11/12
 Andy Kingston is an artist working in ceramics and is based in Kaeo, Northland lipsbro@hotmail.com
Lo Fi/Low Fire
 Ceramic
 2007

12/
 Jacquelyn Greenbank is an artist based in Christchurch jacgreenbank@hotmail.com
Brain
 Mixed media
 2007
 Courtesy 64zero3 Gallery, Christchurch

13/14/15
 Erica Van Zon is an artist based in Auckland ericavanzon@yahoo.com.au
Aqua Rug
 Acrylic and Cotton
 2007

Never Fear Being Vulgar Just Boring
 Terracotta and acrylic
 2007

Black Cat
 Polystyrene, Fake Fur, plastic, nylon
 2007
 All works courtesy of the artist

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8 Ponsonby Rd, Auckland
 P O Box 68-762
 Newton
 Auckland 1032

T 09 376 6216
 F 09 376 6246
 E info@objectspace.org.nz
 www.objectspace.org.nz