



high light

**30 September – 26 November
Ipswich Art Gallery**

**selina braine, jose da silva, kim demuth,
simone hine, ben murrell, chris comer**

Ben Murrell
Untitled (wall relief) # 11 2004
Mixed Media
Courtesy of the Artist



Depth of Field *by Luke Beesley*

i

On the light

switch the slippery plastic. Or
reaching asleep

waking early morning when
the body knows the dream

best the cut of day.



ii

It occurs to me that the role of writing for a catalogue is to throw light or *shed* light on the art—to flick a switch. The balance of light in **high light** is so delicately staged. How to upset it? What a peculiar thing, to *shed* light. How might one shed light, like shedding skin? Do we let the light fall off? Or do we wiggle out of it new and bright and shining?

I see **high light** circling around such questions, returning to the scene where the light changed. **high light**, too, it seems, opposes the absolutes of ON or OFF and thrills in the ambiguity of *shedding*. Individual pieces peel away at the truth of a surface, or a culture, or an emotion, a cliché, an idiosyncrasy, to a place on the other side of the light that isn't honestly light-less or absent of light. Warm light isn't without its danger—its austerity can be suffocating, and its burn can be painful or sharp. The dark too isn't always an opposite of lightness or joy, it can be comfortable, or beautifully complete. If I'm to place a finger and name a collective inquisitiveness within **high light**, one might say that this exhibition is opened to the layers or gradients involved in the way light plays on us, or an object, or a politic. Chris Comer for example sails her "hello" through numerous emotions, each toppling into the next, though never far from a single word, in the end...



iii

*A wound gives off its own light
surgeon's say.*

*If all the lamps in the house were turned out
you could dress this wound
by what shines from it.*

Anne Carson

iv

Here Canadian poet Anne Carson darkly moves where the light is bright and plays the light/dark aesthetic. Like Selina Braine, whose art practice stems from an interest in distances, in the aesthetics of cultural politics and identity, an uncomfortable type of beauty. She concentrates on a place where the light drops away, where we, as viewers, might miss-read its echoes, where the light gathers in a soft glow. There is a piercing quality of truth in her works that stands apart from comfortable distances and ironies. In a sense they are mirages that, as we move closer, disappear to the heat and we're left with politics, smoke screens. It occurs to me that it is very difficult to talk about Braine's work without using a cliché. Often her work stands beautifully and painfully aside from cliché, almost inviting us to step into them like traps.



v

...and **high light** is playful and a pun.

The type of “high-lighting” going on is hardly that of the fluorescent yellow marker pen. **high light** contemplates a different type of ‘high-lighting’; or it mocks the idea of its simplicity by tempting us into the dimmest or brightest certainly slipperiest of ways to uncover a type of truth. In this sense **high light** is a problem for language itself. The act of “high-lighting” here is a little more or less than a verb, as if the action or the doing in the word is fleeting or ephemeral or ambiguous. What is communicated in the end through Comer’s greeting? The language seems to fall apart in our ears. In Braine’s work language is suddenly impossibly crude or endless or lost.

vi

The spring sunlight in south east Queensland stunningly stretches out slicing up buildings and wobbling along cars, rushes into windows filling a room or a kitchen or a hall or an office. Ben Murrell is interested in what happens when sunlight is absorbed, particularly by architecture. I like to think of the tendency for contemporary architecture to open up the home and let the light fill it. The wonderful weightless feathery quality that is evident in much contemporary architecture. And yet there is such resistance to the sun through history, also, in much of architecture’s stone and concrete; a history rich with the culture of sun worship.

I like to think that Murrell is working close to a certain archaeology, too, in allowing the sunlight to dust a surface, to flood a shape, to discover or re-discover light as artefact. Suddenly, in Ipswich, we are surprisingly aware the light as found object, as it’s given a physicality, or an oddity. *Untitled (Wall Relief)* for example, gives me a fleeting impression of resting fingers on a piano in a dark room; a piano that has given up to the softness of its notes and suddenly desperate to articulate shape.

Left image:
Simone Hine
Woman and Red Object 2005
Red handbag, DVD, LCD monitor
Courtesy of the Artist

Right image:
Simone Hine
Woman and Red Object (Detail) 2005
Red handbag, DVD, LCD monitor
Courtesy of the Artist



high light works pivot off subjectivity. Jose Da Silva's recent work has pinpointed the complexity within sexual pleasure, or the impossibility of a purely uncomplicated absolute sexual pleasure or ecstasy. The ecstasy is not always a bright light, but more a palate, or perhaps not such a brightness or *unbrightness* at all, but a sliding place between the two where the opposite of what we might associate with a pure ecstasy or joy is very much a part of pleasure as well. We carry our psychology to the bed and it is shaped by the hands and desires of others, too, isn't it? Da Silva attempts a rich expression of the personal, of an idiosyncrasy and violence in gay intimacy. There is a clear emotional thread through Comer's "hello", also. And it is dressed in complexity. In this light we sense vulnerability through Da Silva's light boxes, with their interior sensitively exposed. There is an emotive brazen introversion at work with Da Silva's art, also, however illogical or impossible that language may seem.

The glow of Da Silva's and Simone Hine's work intersects at the cinema. I have an image of a woman watching movies with a metaphorical scissor, sifting through the celluloid for a way to clip the light away from the screen. Or let's replace the "scissor" with the word "light" and offer an opportunity to isolate objects and scenes and actresses to bring the peculiar fetishes of the cinema to the spotlight. When Hine allows the light to wrestle with the portrayal of "actress",

Kim Demuth
Man Hole 2004
Mixed Media
Courtesy of the Artist



where are we led? Through Hine we see the thin contrivances of the cinema, the waving hands of men around a role. To go out on a limb, as we circle between Hine's works, we are offered a chance to re-adjust the spot, the studio lighting, flooding the pupil, cheekily flooding the masculine detail.

Kim Demuth is interested, very much, in the pun. Ironically he uses the light to tempt us to nothing at all, and yet so simply! Invited into the quite slickly sexualised tunnels or cracks, on the surface he offers a game for the imagination to colour-in. It says it's here and then it's not. Try to hold it and it's gone. You're invited and don't be stupid. They're tricks or jest. And the imaginary tunnels underneath the gallery floor, through walls, just hover with the whimsical, though the delicate blue lighting of his hand and foot prints belie complete easy comfort. Their placement, quite a distance from each other, seems not without pain or violence, disembodiment, perhaps an echo then of Comer, or Da Silva, and beautiful, even, and weightless, there is a sense of the a rip, or tear, that runs back through Demuth's smirks and tidies them up or down.

Which brings me back to shedding, it wiggles out of the light. The light offers the illusion of the object, though the heart of these works is found in the act of disrobing, the act of removing themes, almost. The task of the onlooker then is to step between the endlessness. To dress in none of the answers.

vii

to go asleep/wake

up off the light

viii

In thinking through **high light** I'm reminded of the minutiae in David Brooks' short fiction. Here a sentence is taken from his short story *The Passenger* from his 1997 collection *Black Sea*. A sensitive protagonist contemplates the very human and idiosyncratic response to a painting: 'the wall of the room where the window is like a painting by Mark Rothko, rectangles of pale that are the first light—the light before light—through curtains, or the dream, the unshadow, as it filters in about the edges of a blind.' **high light** seems slyly aware of its art history, though it pushes aside the ideals of Abstract Expressionism, for example, and the theatre of Mark Rothko's beauty. Brooks, too, seems to comment just to the side of Rothko through the veil of light. What's interesting is his description of the character of light or "unshadow", and the way he refers to place just to the side of—or below, or nearby—a consistent threat of reality. I see **high light** working this way too, with an awareness of the rapid movement of 20th century art and notions of beauty and yet thoroughly aware, along the way, of their own pitch or character or surface, their humour. The descending layers of Demuth's crisp libidinous crack echoes Frank Stella. For Comer there are references to Rembrandt and paintings flooded with a type of golden, almost divine, bubbly brook type light. The sitter or subject almost squirms around Rembrandt's illusion of light—nothing is quite static. The art—the heart of it—fizzes in the slipstreams.

Brooks, David. *Black Sea*. 1997

Carson, Anne. *The Beauty of the Husband*. 2001

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