

Chloé Wolifson

Independent Arts Writer & Curator

Melbourne Art Fair, Spring 1883, & NotFair, 2014

Last week I ventured to Melbourne for the [Art Fair](#) and its various official and unofficial satellite events. I was commissioned by RAVEN Contemporary to write about the inaugural Spring 1883 in the context of MAF and NotFair, which you can read [on their site](#). I didn't have the time or word count to include my highlights of the other goings-on so, as much for my own benefit as for the curiosity of others, here are my thoughts.

Venturing into the Royal Exhibition Building for the Melbourne Art Fair as a member of the media was a strange feeling, as, for part or all of each Fair from 2006 to 2012 I attended to work at the stand of Darren Knight Gallery. Although I missed the visitor interaction that comes with 'manning the booth', I did not miss its attendant exhaustion, and it was wonderful to be able to take time to survey the Fair and return to galleries and works for slower, quieter consideration. Gallerists work hard at fairs and unfortunately don't get this opportunity.

Apart from my old stomping ground [DKG](#), a number of stands and works made an impression amongst the maelstrom. Ryan Renshaw Gallery's solo presentation of [Sam Smith](#), whose work seamlessly moves between video and sculpture to explore the structure and possibilities of cinema, was exceptional.

[The Commercial](#), like many galleries, chose to do a number of hangs over the duration of the fair. At the time I visited they were showing a group hang including one of [Archie Moore's perfume portraits](#) (which I experienced while on the [4A Curators Intensive](#)) and a lovely painting by [Mitch Cairns](#).

I had a quiet encounter with [Saburo Ota's](#) work at COHJU Contemporary Art. The artist collects seeds and delicately presents them under fine Japanese paper in the manner of postage stamps. Discovering microcosmic works like these within such a macrocosm of the art world can be a sort of rest for the brain.

I enjoyed the [Bradd Westmoreland](#) paintings at Niagara Galleries, which in some ways spoke to the paintings of [Ken Whisson](#), which featured both at Niagara and at Watters.

Annandale Galleries once again showcased their prize artist [William Kentridge](#) (a triptych of video flipbooks was particularly appealing), however I was more pleased to encounter a number of [Robert Motherwell](#) lithographs and a small painting studding their stand. Modernism endures.

Anna Schwartz Gallery's presentation of [Erwin Wurm](#) was surely designed to be a crowd pleaser, but it did work very well as visitors wove in and out of the surreal figurative sculptures and photographs.

Pearl Lam, whose Hong Kong gallery I [visited](#) in February, was making her first appearance at the Melbourne Art Fair as both a gallerist and as [keynote speaker](#). Lam decided to bring her galleries to an Australian fair for the first time, after visiting MAF's new sister fair [Sydney Contemporary](#) in 2013. In the Pearl Lam Galleries stand, amongst some bombastic eye-popping work by [Joana Vasconcelos](#), I revisited the work of [Zhou Yinghua aka Mr Chow](#), and also enjoyed the subtle abstractions of [Loreta Saez Franco](#) and [Qin Yufen](#).

I visited one of my several editors, Dan Rule, at the stand for his enterprise [Perimeter Books](#), and treated myself to the small publication [Diagrammatic writing](#) by [Johanna Drucker](#).

Simone Hine and Kyle Weise of Melbourne's [Screenspace](#) had curated the new [MAF Video](#) programme. Kyle was a fellow 4A Curators Intensive participant so I was looking forward to checking out the program and it did not disappoint. On the day I visited, works grouped under the mantle of [Quotidian Rhythms](#) were playing. Sonia Leber & David Chesworth's *We are printers too* occupied the theatre space, while a number of shorter pieces played in the booth. Tim Woodward, Nicole Breedon and Jacqui Shelton's works in particular displayed endless and sometimes impotent actions, and sat in that intriguing space between humour and utter frustration.

I wrote in depth about [Spring 1883](#), and briefly about [NotFair](#), in the RAVEN piece referred to earlier. As I said, Spring provided an opportunity for dealers and artists to play with the elaborately decorative, domestically-scaled environment of the suites of the Hotel Windsor. The site-specific installations and salon hangs did this most effectively, and there were many highlights. The intimacy of the spaces made for an interesting art-viewing experience, both in terms of the works themselves as well as interactions with the art dealers and fellow visitors.

It was good to see Sydney artists (and sometimes collaborators) [Paul Williams](#) and [Christopher Dolman](#) represented in the mix at NotFair. The location, a council-owned unrenovated building in Collingwood, couldn't have been further from the Hotel Windsor, and both satellite fairs play different roles in providing an alternative to the large commercial focus of the main event. NotFair felt like a pop-up artist-run gallery, except the mix of older and younger artists, organisers and attendees gave it a really dynamic feeling beyond the cliquy, art-school feel ARIs can sometimes have.

It's not a trip to Melbourne without a visit to the NGV. The [David McDiarmid](#) exhibition *When this you see remember me* has been widely appreciated by those in the contemporary art world. Despite the bright colours, glitter and booming celebratory soundtrack I still found it to be a melancholy show. This was both because of its exploration, through both artwork and archival material, of a bygone and seemingly braver era (some of which took place during my childhood in inner Sydney, now a very different place), and also obviously because of its necessary but sad memorialising of the fight against HIV/AIDS.

The [Sue Ford](#) retrospective nearby was also rooted in archive. Ford's photographs of herself and others over decades are a reminder of the simple power of the photograph to capture and record the passing of time.

Over at NGV International, the large-scale video works of Chinese artist [Wang Gongxin](#) were on show. Projected onto tall vertical screens, they echoed traditional Chinese scroll paintings with contemporary subjects. On the other end of the scale were the works on paper of Romantic artist [William Blake](#). Small and

delicate, these pieces don't often make it out onto display so this exhibition of the gallery's complete Blake collection is a rare chance to peer into his world.

Melbourne art week is always an exhausting but rewarding time, when, to paraphrase Roy Slaven & HG Nelson, too much art is barely enough.



Melbourne Art Fair, Royal Exhibition Building, 2014. Photograph: Chloé Wolfson

This entry was posted in Reviews, Words on 21/08/2014

[<http://www.chloewolfson.com/index.php/melbourne-art-fair-2014/>].