Benjamin Forster  |  Clementine Barnes  |  Tanya Dyhin  |  Leahlani Johnson

25 September – 12 October 2013
Artist talks 2pm, 12 October 2013

Gallery 4

Passing Parades
Leahlani Johnson

Passing Parades explores the contradictory nature of time within the installation environment. Presenting several pieces that simultaneously critique time’s ephemeral, moving and static character. The exhibition period of three weeks provides a theatrical backdrop for the staging of plant based works that grow and fade, the looped and fixed duration of the moving image and stilled sculptural elements carrying the marks from a past moment in time. The installation provides a space to fuse unlikely gestures and craft hybrid forms, in turn revealing a more malleable form of time.

Materials
Main space:
Gymea lily, wax flower, ceramics, acrylic on glass, cardboard, paper, one channel video (projection)

Wall Collage:
Various plants and flowers, paint

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Poetics of Time
Leahlani Johnson’s Passing Parades

Time and space have often been thought together – space-time – indeed vital for one another’s existence. Time influences how we understand and engage with space, as an ‘ongoing open production’ of interconnected objects, subjects or experiences over a temporal duration. Time guides our interactions with the world, touches us physically and has personal, cultural and economic worth – the hours of a working day, minutes of a film, events slotted into our calendar, the time expected of us, the years of our life. Conversely, time is often imagined in a linear and spatial way in order for the human mind to conceive and thus represent it – the past is behind us, our subjectivity is in the present, and the future stretches out ahead of us as ‘moments in the experienced passage of time’. When people or groups are lacking it is spatialised – they are ‘behind’ or ‘catching-up’ on an imagined horizontal line, or the time it takes to journey from one city to the next, we visualize in a geographic but time marked context. Within virtual platforms and communication technology, time has somehow exploded, fast-forwarded and become instant, and in doing so reducing space’s authoritative reach – we can now cover large expanses of space in seconds, spend our time on multiple things or with various people simultaneously, and images too are being produced at an unprecedented speed. So how as artists do we portray time?

Time in all its contradictory manifestations is what Leahlani Johnson explores and makes visible in her beautifully inquisitive installation Passing Parades (2013). Johnson comes to time through her own desire to understand, and grapple with, its often hurried and oppositional nature that winds through her life and art practices – painting, ceramics, installation and moving image. Viewed through her eyes as foremost a painter, Johnson manipulates time into both material and canvas to create the installation space – employing it as a self-referential medium to investigate it’s own rhythm. Passing Parades takes us into an immersive theatre of time, one that creates a hybrid interplay of subtle shifts that respond to the gallery over the three-week exhibition period. Within which, time’s complexity is explored through ephemeral, static and motion driven concepts of time amidst a diverse stage of materiality – ceramic objects, moving image, plant based collage and light – their relationship to one another, and the audience, in this contrived environment. As it is within space we see ‘the necessary production of change through practices of interrelation’ that enables the ‘existence of difference and meeting up of those differences that make time’.

Ephemeral time – fleeting and part of a cycle that will gradually reveal time through slight alterations and shifts. Johnson introduces flowers, leaves and stems collected from gardens, markets and those growing wild along the side of the road – a gesture itself that takes the artist time. Petals and plants are cut and re-shaped like pages of paper, then stuck and pinned to create a detailed wall-based collage that sees Johnson responding directly to the site over the install period. Here, they will be left to wilt, decompose and crumble, evolving over the duration of the exhibition. An approach that illustrates within the gallery time’s inevitability through the use of these biodegradable ‘drawing’ materials that wear nature’s indicators of time – the withering leaf, the sickly sweet smell of rotting pollens, the darkening of veins and shriveling of stalks. Other flowers Johnson has preserved in her fantastical giant flower press – itself a traditional pastime for conserving a cherished private moment or milestone – defying the ephemeral and irreversible characteristics of time.

Static time – a stillness and focused engagement with an object or place, to ‘spend time’. Here a collection of delicate ceramic pieces glazed in ivory tones, which during the technical phases of their crafting involve gradual, calculated time and patience, and of the viewer require quiet contemplation. Hand built vases offer a connection with the flowers and evoke the memory of the artist’s touch through shape and fingerprints. Other’s capture everyday items in their form through the ‘burn-out’ process – in which the porcelain encased object is destroyed by the extreme heat of the kiln, leaving only it’s trace within it’s ceramic residue. Clay’s durability as a material, and ceramics role as functional objects that is often present at private or public occasions, means they allude to, and carry, a sense of this past use within their form, one that is imbued with memories from previous owners and the spaces they’ve inhabited – the studio, home and now this gallery. The audience’s relationship and familiarity with the ceramic object, calls for a reflection on both their own and other past narratives.

Time as movement – periodic motion has historically been used to map time and navigate space – the casting of shadows on sundials, lunar clocks, stars in the night sky or the time spent travelling. In the installation this is expressed through a looped video projection, a medium itself that is defined and structured by a vocabulary of time. The moving image displays a plant’s shadow in delayed slow-motion gently swaying in the wind – creating patterns that develop juxtapositions between the different components of the work, and the audience’s physical interaction with the installation. Reminding us of the paths we move through, along which we come into contact with various sights, sounds and people and then move on, leaving them behind. And even if, like the repetition of the plant’s image as it loops again and again to the same corner of the gallery, we return to that exact point, at the very same second, our experience will never be identical as the multiplicities of trajectories in time and space are continually fluctuating together, making one another.

Passing Parades offers a poetics of time that gently suggests ways to think about its resonance, by immersing ourselves in the all-encompassing nature of time.

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(Included quotes from D. Massey. For Space. SAGE Publications. London 2005)