



Role. Play

Vivian Lynn, Erica Sklenars, Justine Walker
24 September – 17 October 2009

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Requiem for set

A set can be an evocative grouping:

'a poem, a shoe, a bit of sand, a room, a leap,
a lap of sea, a mackerel, a worm'

This set could reflect a scale of tangibility.
This set could show what is perceptible at a
certain moment in time. This set could reveal
a magnetism of skills, practical and abstract,
minimal and expansive.

Each artist in this exhibition advocates a set of
aesthetic intentions and sensibilities, and visualizes
an alternative set of intentions and sensibilities.
The artists do not assume that the alternative
is opposite rather than the alternative harbours
a framework visually defined by its unique labour
in time.

We are privy to the labour of the artworks by
consenting to look at them. We enter the contract
of the alternative, a contract that binds our at-
tention to a range of temporal assertions located
across traditions, topical preoccupations, and the
urgent architecture of the future. The artworks
here are intent on evoking new options for what
it might mean to become apprentices to time,
to become skilful temporal beings.

Requiem is understood as a mass for the dead,
derived from *requies*/rest and *quies*/quiet. The
works in this show suggest that to up-skill as
temporal beings entails the invention of alternative
kinds of rest and quiet; a breath under breathing;
a thought under thought; a feeling under feeling;
a body under the body.

Such an approach aims to declare our accomplish-
ments or failures to live in the world, to look at
the world – singularly and generally, perceptively
and inattentively, sometimes within parameters
of shame and dignity.

Such an approach might involve the invention of
a ship, bearing architecture of mutiny; the accept-
ance that bricks are heavy, and that bricks are habi-
tation and memory; that sensitivity to tangibilities
of body mind and emotion can provide quiet and
give rest to exhausted aesthetic probabilities, those
puffed and moderating meanings. The alternative to
memory could still be memory: quietly evocatively
grouping, coming to rest in set after set.

Vivian Lynn's '*Book fan series*' optimises the
development of set and alternative set by evoking
a mode of refrain. Focused as refrain, the works
suggest both instances of repetition and fissure.
We have an evocative grouping: paint marks on
folded hardened paper and symmetry by folding

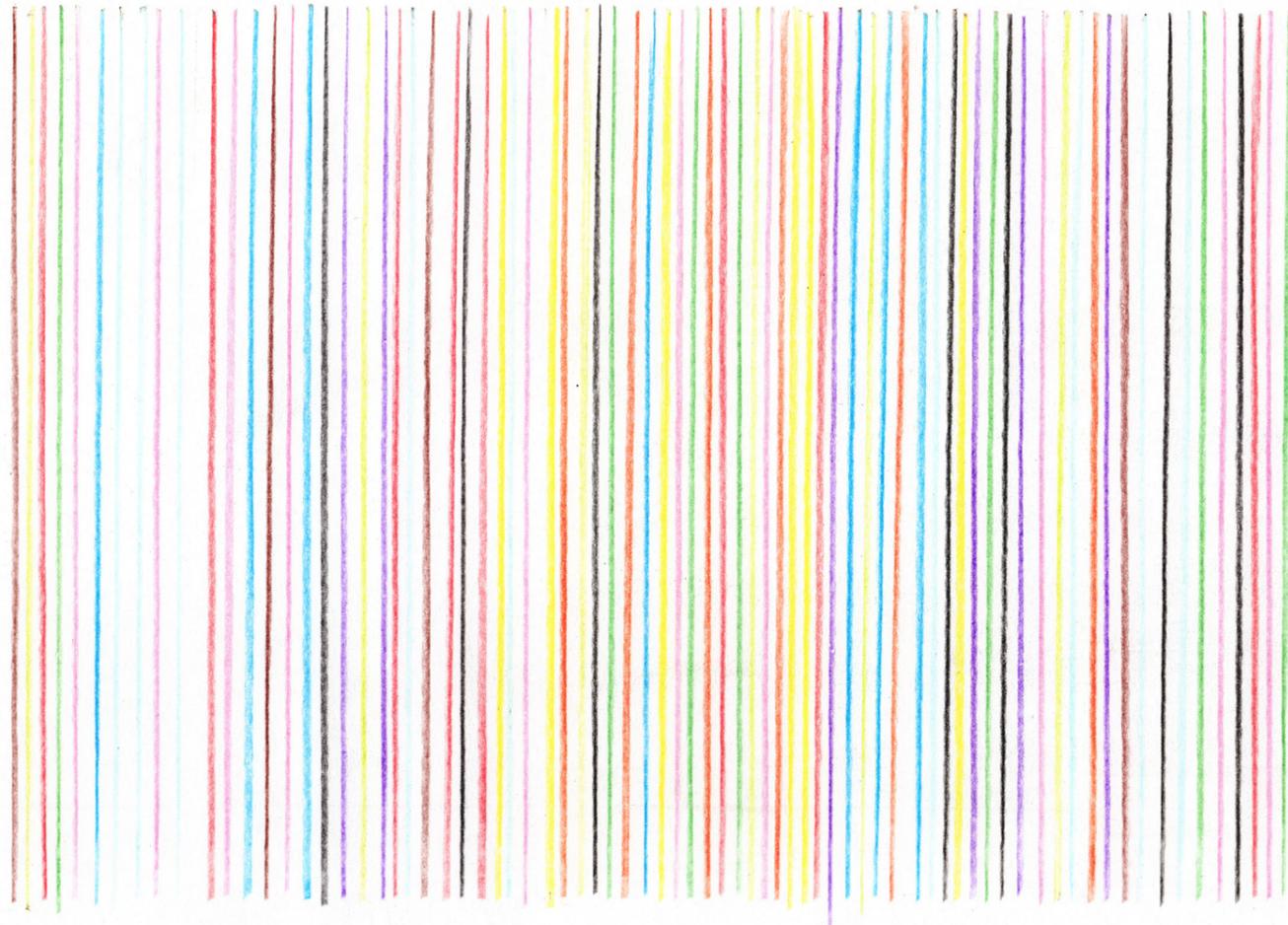


or symmetry by deliberate mark making. We bring
to the works our memories, branded already with
the history of the Rorschach Blot – a history of
mental interpretation, 'unconscious' time, and
traditions driven by indefatigable definition.

There is a sense of mutation harboured in the
work through the visual folds, the fan squeezed
in on both sides, inflecting hips. The implied muta-
tion could be the design of the 'mental' element,
or the 'set' element'. The mutation could be the
enacted transference of memory, the idealism of
that transference; that notion of relationship and
connection pushed into the foreground so that

its reception might be subdued or mirrored by
exclamations of hope and scepticism.

Just as it is improbable for two electrons to inhabit
the same space, these works evoke an unprec-
edented intimacy, the intimacy of memories forged
together, fibrillating and collaborating and vying for
the same resting place. Mutation in these works
labours in the form of refrain and condensed
memory, the repeated mark that is resolution
refracted through active and passive states, linear
and minutely curved states – memory in time, the
intimate practice of memory both repeating and
breaking away.



Justine Walker's '*Untitled (Rainbow)*' insists on
capturing a bar of prismatic light that appears as
a gentle gash on muddy coloured carpet. The
lines of colour in the carpet itself suggest a mute
pattern, a faint reference system, a bland code
when compared with the purity and coolness of
the light. But when we actually look at the image
rather than look at it from memory, we see the
rainbow of light act as peroxide, turning the carpet
underneath into a solid, almost magnetically
angled line, suggesting a morbid axis about
which we are physically twisted.

The carpet we realize is a painting or drawing, that
is to say it is something that we walked over in a
distant past but now look up to from our standing
position, on the wall. We are drawn outward by the
bleached 'compass' of light to the corners of the
photograph, nearing the life beyond. We are in a
state of moving without the memory for it; we think
but without the usual crutch of thought's applause.

Erica Sklenars' video work is titled, '*In the
weekends I like to plant trees and imagine I am
you*'. Hair is inserted back into an unidentifiable
part of the body, time is reversed, and writing in
a catalogue of the work states that it aims to be
'uncomfortably sensual' as a viewing experience.
The work could be seen as restorative, a micro
performance of a visual return to a state before

disturbance. The title however suggests we attend
to the burrowing of one identity in another –
'imagine I am you'. We further enter the fantasy of
a voice promising to plant trees in the weekends.

Through this voice we seek out the fallibilities
and pleasures of entering into a fantasy defined
by certain duration, a period of habitation (what
the voice does during the week, for example,
remains undeclared). What we are asked to tap
into is rhetoric of reversal, a reversal that refuses
habitation, or makes what habitation there is
'uncomfortably sensual', which is how we might
describe an experience of transformation.

I am reminded of a sea chantey called The
Mackerel and the Worm in which an evildoer
turns a brother and sister into insect and fish
respectively. At the time of restitution in the
drama, the brother agrees to return to his human
form. The sister however, refuses to be turned
back into a woman. Sklenars' work advocates
for transformation?, not for the sake of a return
to assumed order and origin, but rather the work
advocates for transformation that opens the way
for alternative transformation. The work seeks
a companionable set, and aims to support the
potential of that set, its unique labour in time.

Rachel O'Neill

- 1 Works in the Book fan series are also described as
Mental set works on Vivian Lynn's website
- 2 The allegory of The Mackerel and the Worm is
similarly evocative

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Opening Celebration Wednesday 23 September, 6pm
Artist Talk Saturday 10 October, 2pm

Cover image: Vivian Lynn, *Fan*, 1988
P2: Erica Sklenars, *String Figure*, 2008
P3: Justine Walker, *Untitled (Drawing Performance #5)*, 2009

Vivian Lynn is represented by Mark Hutchins Gallery,
Wellington

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