

Andrew Purvis – Guest Opening Speaker

Cynthia Schwertsik and Rosina Possingham's collaborative exhibition – How to Exit Reality is upstairs. These two artists use materials that are extravagantly mundane: the office chair, the dental retainer, QR Codes.

These are not just elements of the prosaic everyday; they are emblematic of the tedious, repetitive chores which sap us day in, day out. Answering emails, performing our routines of dental hygiene, checking-in to facilitate Covid-19 contact tracing.

What Cynthia and Rosina do with these materials however works entirely counter to these expectations – their artistic methodology takes the everyday and turns it on its head. As the exhibition title suggests Cynthia and Rosina offer us strategies for How to Exit a Reality.

As Cynthia writes of her own work, Peri Urban Progress, the chair – walk is like moving through the suburban environment in an open top two seater, un motorised, but elevated - she becomes a 'visitor' someone who has placed themselves outside, a better vantage point for considering, critiquing, querying and making fun of what we consider "reality".

Some of this may be Cynthia's experience as a migrant – she confided to me once how alien she found the empty, silent suburban streets of Australia – where socialising and family life was removed from public view and performed in expansive back yards – A far cry from the town squares of denser European cities where communities would come together.

But this is also the experience of the artist – to place oneself outside of society, to wilfully forge a different path from everyone else, because only at the end of that path might we find something new to show to the world – something no one has thought or done or seen before.

Assisted in a sequence of new performances by Rosina Possingham, these new films shift from being idiosyncratic, individual acts of resistance against a soul-deadening drudgery; and become mystifying rituals acted out with deadpan sincerity.

Why do these two grave diggers meet by moonlight, to turn the earth and infer fistfuls of dental retainers, which glitter like glow worms against the dark soil?

What arcane purpose is served by the cremation of two dining chairs and an old boot? - These performances are very much about letting go of things, how we can say goodbye, permanently to the things we cling on to. Wedding shoes. Our two artists come to inhabit a cluttered cabinet in the middle of nowhere, emerging and departing only moments before the furniture self - combusts.

This particular performance called to mind the magical wardrobe from CS Lewis' Narnia novels – in which a heavy, Victorian, mothball scented piece of furniture conceals a portal through which the young protagonists are able to exit their war ravaged reality and be transported to a realm of pure imagination.

All the artists in these exhibitions perform this feat – using their talents and hard – won skills to create work which transports us.

Whether that be to places that exist only in memory; to domestic shelters which offer refuge in the face of the global pandemic; or to whimsical other worlds where everyday tasks are performed in strange new ways.

As you enjoy these exhibitions and the whole SALA season, remember that a lot of this work is for sale. An artwork on your wall is as nice as a window, though it offers a view through to places richer and stranger than your back yard.