

HEAVY LIFTING

*it was just style,
no heavy lifting*

— John Forbes

Artists: Ben Leslie—*The Palace of Vulture*—Fontanelle, February 13th — April 10th; Roy Ananda and Johnny Dady—*Three Lists*—AEAF 24/7, various dates; *MAGIC OBJECT*—various artists—AGSA and other venues; Lisa Roet—*Heart Beat*—Australian Experimental Art Foundation, February 25th—April 4th; Matthew Bradley—*Destroyer Of Worlds*—Greenaway Art Gallery, April 13th—May 8th; Sarah Contos—*The Revenge of Alexis Colby*—AEAF, April 15th—May 21st; *Planning For Tomorrow*—Gregory Ackland, Damiano Bertoli, Deborah Kelly, Keg de Souza, and Santiago Sierra—CACSA, April 9th—May 15th; Hossein Valamanesh with Nassiem Valamanesh—*Char Soo*—Samstag Museum, October 9th—December 4th, 2015; Kate Power—*Things Between You And Me*—CACSA, Project Space, April 9th—May 15th

by Ken Bolton

WEIGHT OF THE WORLD

The girls were wearing formals

— the Shangri-las, *Sophisticated Boom-Boom*

Ben Leslie's showing (Feb 13th to April 10th) at *Fontanelle The Palace of Vulture*, made somehow for a very satisfying sculptural experience. The installation layout was clearly thought through and executed. It led the eye, and one's own movement, through the space—to have one pass by, and clock, each variant move on the theme, which was one of contrasts—between massy, heavy-looking load and angular, engineered steel framework, between weight and lightness, bulk counterposed to line, grey-white and contrasted dark, between stasis and (implied, or withheld) movement. And so on. There were not too many pieces, and every base was covered. The gallery space was intensely and brightly lit—white floor, white walls, white ceiling—so that the whole had a kind of glamour and the works a slightly elevated, too-good-to-be-true presence. The clarity (no scuff marks, no fudges) meant the eye was drawn—and never irrelevantly—to the least deviation from true or from, say, symmetry or balance.

The slender framework, in each case supporting a massive element, was metal tubing, stained a dark industrial shade. Much of it recalled gym equipment. (One looked a little like a rowing machine, others resembled the mechanism by which a gym machine would raise or lower weight.) The opposing element the structure served to support—and to resist or hold—was usually wood. It looked often, initially, to be concrete. One or two seemingly brutalist concrete pillars had ferrous rods protruding from them, suggestive of abandoned buildings. At other times this 'obdurate', heavy element in the sculptures (all of them staging the binary of bulk versus linear frame) would seem dried concrete spill, an unformed mass allowed set without particular shape or purpose. These could look muffiny, loaf-like: but above all they looked heavy.

My first thought was 'Richard Serra-meets-Anthony Caro'. Caro would of course be the metal, the 'line', the taste for interestingly unsettling asymmetries. The Minimalists like Serra were about entropy, the threat or suspense around a material's weight and propensity to fall, collapse, lean, give or not give. Leslie's work had less of the (novel in the 60s) literal about it. (For one thing, wood simulating concrete, for example). And it may not have had so entirely the swift wit of Caro. But, to a degree, it had both constituents—and it had them in combination—which made it different from these ideologically opposed forebears. And Leslie's works rewarded one for looking, rather more than Minimalist sculpture used to do—though it was a similar process of mute enquiry, and confirmation (or modification) of what the eye 'expected'. *What you see is what you get* was very much the case here, but the seeing was very pleasurable, the engagement—purely about form—intense.

But I did mean "satisfying sculptural experience" to sound a little comfortable and risible. (Hullo, folks!) **Vulture** was good, I liked it. And it was witty, but it was also like a run-through of standards, a demonstration. I've made the *dressage* jibe before. A good deal of recent Adelaide sculpture has been textbook formalism of a certain kind. This begins to return art to craft and away from much sense of

mission. Not even as idealistic as a glass-bead game: not so much a 'ravishing of the senses' as, here, a kind of calisthenics for them—routines that might be called, in an introductory way, 'This is Sculpture'.

In a kindred spirit Johnny Dady and Roy Ananda have teamed to run adroitly through a series of variations in **Three Lists**, which occupies the AEAF's 24/7 window-gallery. Variations on plane and sight-line, and determined to some degree by a 'constraint' of some sort. (There have been two showings so far, 'Standard Negotiations Of An Incline' and, the second, 'Standard Inflections'. A third is due in another month.) The fashion for the organizing or generating 'constraint' is a literary one, made popular by the Ou Li Po. I'm not clear as to what the constraint is in the **Three Lists** outings, though the 24/7 space's gallery-sheet goes some way to explaining. Or does it just assure one that there *is* a constraint in there somewhere?

Formalism. It sounds like a charge. Unreasonably. But the 'purely formal' has *really to deliver*—to get itself clear of that response of mere recognition that the word amounts to. In **The Palace Of Vulture** the artist had not got to naming the works. I was instructed to just call them 'Untitled'. But not 'Untitled One', 'Untitled Two', or 'blue' or 'grey' or 'calypso'. No differentiation by title. Clearly *this* guy was a formalist. The overall exhibition title didn't bear much examination: the work was clearly 'culture'.

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One entered an entirely darkened gallery space, in Lisa Roet's **Heart Beat** (February 26th—April 2nd) at the AEAF, to find at some distance an enormous, red, pumping heart and to hear, heavily amplified, the organ's pumping. Beneath the enormous heart was the cupped palm of a gorilla—which had the effect both of presenting the heart and of offering it sympathetic support. (Perhaps the ape was 'gifting' the heart to us, just as it might be said to have through evolution.)

In fact the heart was a projection, yet so advanced was the technology that it seemed rather real and distinctly three-dimensional. The animal hand *was* three-dimensional, and convincingly so, but very large, and clearly a sculpture. That issue, of real or not, was to the point: the exhibition was basically that one big gesture—and size, fact, mattered. The heart, one could read, was an amalgam of an ape's and a human heart. Lisa Roet has long focused her art on the great apes and our relationship with them (which is one of sensed kindred, of fascinating otherness, of fear and sympathy, and of 'projection'—coloured by our role in their likely extinction and their possible maintenance). Roet has followed closely the lives of specific apes—and she considers their place in our Imaginary. Relatively recently it transpired that she would be requiring heart surgery and there was for a moment the possibility that an ape's heart valve might solve her problem. Hence the image of the combination ape-human heart.

The image was a high-impact one, visually and aurally—and viscerally—as we say, metaphorically. People were affected by it. A powerful image, it might be thought able to *sustain* a number of meanings, though I think it could not claim to propose much in the way of thesis. Maybe that was work for the viewer—not so much ‘completing the work’, as Marcel Duchamp would have it, but choosing and adumbrating meanings pretty much as an act of will or self-determination. Uncharitably, one might argue that the image was powerfully afloat but dead-in-the-water in terms of proposing anything—and that the viewer might at best ‘select’ the image/the experience (or ‘like’ it, facebook-style) as visual book-mark to identify some of their (own) ideas, a banner image, linked to them mnemonically. It would probably be something ape-, human- or mortality-related.

A secondary part of the exhibition was a dvd, *‘We Are Animal’*, of people instructed under hypnosis to act like monkeys. Which they proceed to do: a lot of hooting follows, and some crouching forward as if on long-armed all fours. The voices sounded convincing enough, in the same way as the heartbeat did, and might similarly have produced emotional or physiological effects on the viewer. But this was epistemologically weak and dodgy science. (People were enacting received ideas of ape behavior—derived from who knows where—*Curious George*, documentaries, trips made once to the zoo.) Hard to prove that they were channeling simian behavior and mental patterns through some genetically shared memory. Fairly hard, too, to believe it. The exhibition catalogue noted this as a reversal of the usual tendency to attribute human qualities to the animal. True, though it is a human *idea* of what animal characteristics are that these humans then took on, and to what end?

It was the great power of **Heart Beat**’s central image that was the exhibition’s strength: not such an interesting libretto but the singer had a great voice. Viewers will remember the heart and its transfixing quality—and the drama of its placement within, and command over, the gallery space.

‘THE BABE IS WISE’

And the boys were wearing ties
— the Shangri-las, *Sophisticated Boom-Boom*

Sarah Contos (April 15th to May 21st) —*The Revenge Of Alexis Colby*—was the next AEAFF exhibition, making great play with contrasting materials, in assemblages that approach sculpture and which at other times ape collage. Lots of black and pink and white satin and silk, lots of aluminium foil and diamante. There are also projected images, and sound. Kitsch might seem to be the subject but it is

kitsch made to act out or suggest, specifically, the jousting female stars of *Dynasty*. So, a highly dramatic deployment of a repertoire of female gestures meant to be provocative, assertive, unstoppable, powerful and comically out-sized. The sculptures enact the bodily. And aim at excess. They are generally amusing, formally—almost-but-not-quite independent of the *Dynasty*-related ur-text. Too close or too tight correspondences with *Dynasty* maybe tended to close down the works, but this does not happen for the most part. Some might stand looking at for quite a long time—as amusing arrangements and compositions of brilliant materials—with just the smallest amount of the diva story as guiding, suggestive background. They looked declamatory, teasing, jaunty, cheerful. Sometimes a little monstrous. They fail when they suggest charades. Curiously, it struck me that the works as individual pieces often resembled the sort of thing got up by television art departments to be ‘modern art’—in shows like *Ab Fab*—where ‘Art’ is necessarily going to be considered inane and ineffably pretentious and therefore laughable. Contos’s pieces, though, would be able to ‘wear that’ and keep laughing.

The works give a sense of uproarious vitality, and there is a suddenness to some of the works’ anthropomorphic gestures. A few pieces were not unlike, in their formal procedures, Clare Milledge in ***Magic Object***: ludic, or at least intuitive, placement of shape and colour, on a basically flat surface, analogous to the bounded rectangle of abstract painting. (For instance, her ‘*Fantasia Atmospheres (Grottoesque)*’.) Milledge’s works are painted on glass and in reverse order: so more thoughtfully lapidary—and the materials used are less febrile: rather than tinsel and tinfoil they are fibrous silk, and hessian, organic in their associations rather than... what, bulimic? stretch-limo? *Dynastic*?

Most of the ***Revenge*** pieces were lit from one or two sources at most, the light dramatically angled to catch and cast reflections from foil, beading and shiny silks. The overall installation was an Aladdin’s cave boutique of treasures and profusion. A few were on raised daises; a number were suspended; a few had their own dramatic area established, many had flanking or background screens of silver foil bunched and artfully strewn. One good small piece, ‘*Placebo*’, was left a little in the dark. But I won’t have been the only one to see it. Given a glance most pieces could hold your attention.

Dynasty. For those who have forgotten, or never knew but feel the need to know, Joan Collins played worldly Alexis Colby, and Linda Evans, as her foil, was goody-two-shoes Krystle.

A snare-drum sound track greets the viewer on entry: a fanfare—as of building anticipation, an introduction, maybe the accompaniment to 1950s old-time strip-tease. The sound enlivens the whole gallery but accompanies a loop of projected images in fast and very witty sequence.

Contos’s pieces have something of the combinatory aesthetic logic of say, Dick Watkins, of some Arte Povera, of much of the more brash non-figurative painting of the last couple of decades. Not too

dangerously pioneering, then. But amusing most definitely. *The Revenge of Alexis Colby* might culminate at the back of the gallery with the sculptural piece, 'Alexis'. But the exhibition leads one on a loose and irregular circular path, from which it is easy to deviate and wander. One might reach the culminating piece—then, having circled back to the beginning, encounter the silvery-white and tinselly 'Krystle'. 'Alexis', though, is an impressive number: a large, immensely ruched skirt of many layers—pinks and black, mauves, greys and yellows, much polka-dotted. A little like a dodgem-sized float. From the top of the skirt a smoothly sausage-pink quasi-ampersand projects, culminating in a regal little hand ('female', it goes without saying) holding an upright rod that itself culminates in a glowing red lamp. There is a lot of culminating going on in this show, the main formal theme or strategy being stagey excess, and climax, startling denouement. 'Alexis' looks pretty good: regal, triumphant, heraldic, frou-frou and funny.

'Krystle', on the other hand, looks a more simple joke. A white paragon of high-baroque blow-dried girlyness, she is suspended by a thread from the ceiling, and empowered, Lynda Benglis-style, with a dildo. (There was a good deal of sausagey tubing about the show—variously dildo-ish, phallic or vaguely intestinal.) The 'Krystle' piece's effect depends, for visual contrast, on the support of the extensive, and chiefly black and pink, bower behind it. Almost a proscenium arch. One doesn't at first notice, but Krystle's 'legs' are in the air, black shoes kicking towards the ceiling. Is she having a good time, lost in her own little world, undone? She is less confident and in-control than 'Alexis'. (Aficionados of *Dynasty* know of a famous episode in which Krystle is raped—by 'Bobby' no less. A talking point. Maybe that is the reference here.)

More an abstract composition than a persona, effigy or character, was 'Pre-Code Riot'—a flat (suspended) screen with a blonde wig hung, like an epaulette, on each corner. Draped, and extending down the flat armature like long scarves, were swatches, and the kind of draught-blocker snakes that people put at the foot of doors—in brilliant checked and diamantéed materials. (The code referred to was the old Hollywood Hayes Code—ensorious and bowdlerizing. Couples slept—in pyjamas—in adjoining separate beds; a woman took off her earrings to indicate sex was about to take place—no need to feature it. That sort of thing.) I don't think Contos is actually able to get much mileage out of the show's supposed relationship to the code issue, but a little was made of it in her formal discussion at the exhibition's opening. One of those speaking was relieved afterwards that the 'F' word had not come up. No feminism. How very Liberal Party.

One successful simple picture shape was 'Panel Van Quilt'. Hanging from the ceiling, and relatively free-standing and unaided. It had something of the look of the once-dreaded Chromium Ken Reinhardt about it. CKR's regular sin was a kind of too-easy and smug pop-art glamour—much of it silver—(and a little short of meaning, aside from a perceived triumphalism. I.e., *This is hip art!*). Contos's piece had the

same fairly spare quotation of (fashionable female) image, similar graphic style, and a bit of text quoting “Bosoms are back!” Beside it was another good work—dedicated to Olivia Newton John—‘*All The Way with ONJ*’. Tears gushed forth from Olivia’s two eyes: two powerfully arcing streams of Coca-Cola cans. I eventually checked—and they were diet-Coke, which of course is funnier. The portrait image derived from an album cover, palely reproduced. The piece had powerfully arresting presence—the ‘suddenness’ I spoke of earlier—and quite energised the space about it. A few other works failed to do this, a consequence of their cave-like character which tended to effects of withdrawal and demarcation. Making my way through the haberdashery (alright, it was a ‘higher’ haberdashery), I began to notice more and more one I’d been neglecting, a large black and blue ‘cape’, almost. Slightly art-deco. What to say about it? Well-made and interesting visually, dependent on being vouched for by the theme which could not do much for it.

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Fun, but, conceptually, no heavy lifting.

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The Revenge was another exhibition in the dark—which plays up, in Contos’s case, the ‘fun-scenario’ aspect of the whole but at the expense of individual pieces within it. (The better ones survive this, and the weaker works are protected by it.) The dark as spooky or mysterious is beginning to pall as a tactic and also as a meaning, in my view. It begins to seem easy, and either cornball or childish. AGSA is apparently wedded to it. The AEF is regularly dark, though by the artists’ choice, not an imposition by the curators.

DOWN TO THE WOODS

AGSA’s festival showing was ***Magic Object***, centered on AGSA itself but with satellite shows at the Jam Factory, Samstag and elsewhere. At the state gallery ***Magic Object*** ran over two floors. The upstairs showing was a sequence of three bodies of work and largely successful: Tom Moore, Fiona McMonagle and Gareth Sansom. Downstairs there was more, but the showings were less happy. Louise Haselton, one of Adelaide’s leading artists, was badly let down—almost ‘abandoned’ I would think—to the regimen that said ***Magic Object*** (like ***Dark Heart*** before it) must be dark and mysterious, a succession of ‘worlds’ or atmospheres, moody and tenebrous. The artist has usually chosen to have her work brilliantly lit. So you can see it. Haselton does not work towards creating atmospheric ‘worlds’ but

pieces that stand alone and which can sometimes gain from each other, cumulatively, profiting from perceived difference and similarity. Again, this requires their being available to the eye.

(The work in *Magic Object* appears generally to have been photographed—for websites and publicity purposes—in good light. For the record.)

Other work downstairs seemed maybe not as strong as that above and, perhaps consequently, to have been given less curatorial attention. There was a room (*The Wake*, by artist Nell) of naïve spooky heads, many of them ingenious and laugh-soliciting. Not exactly sophisticated, but not dumb either. A lone man in a canoe or rowboat (by Abdul-Rahman Abdullah): a very old and tired cliché, usually standing for the venturing ‘human soul’. Always sort of effective, and who can vote against it, but very very familiar. If it can’t fail can it really succeed? Well, I suppose so. Like truisms can be true.

The three upstairs showings were good. Tom Moore’s glass sculptural pieces are magically novel, and thrilling almost, in their great delicacy and their sweetly naïve and neighbourly innocence and insouciance, and their profusion. They were presented in a number of ‘worlds’—landscape promontories like small, crowded coastal suburbs, the crowd being the host of busily existing (standing, rolling on wheels, on stumpy legs) figures—of delightfully improbable design. They promote good humour, and fascination—and admiration for the artist’s inventiveness and surpassing skill. Fancifully organic and animated (presenting as having soul and personality, cheerful or obdurate, jokey or tropically exotic), glass makes them deliciously unsullied and ideal—again, another world than ours.

Fiona McMonagle—showed an animation, *‘Sisterly Love’*, and some paintings and standing two-dimensional works, all, I think, in watercolour and sharing a similar aesthetic. The animation was of women dancing together in a park, with various animals visiting at intervals and the approach of two young girls—siblings, we infer, and possibly a little feral, endangered, or looking for trouble, not quite easy in relation to each other. The stills were in watercolour, in deliberately watery and faded or muted shades. In the same style were a number of pictures and stand-alone figures. These were compromised considerably by being squeezed, placed aslant, in the quasi bottle-neck between spaces where viewers had to accommodate themselves to others as they were required to pass between McMonagle’s figures in moving from Tom Moore’s room to Gareth Sansom’s. McMonagle was not given quite equal status in this arrangement. No gallery operates with endless pace. These pictures and two-dimensional free-standing figures appealed to the viewer for a proper consideration, but they weren’t placed to receive it. Were they also a little (too) stylized, such that one might excuse oneself for not attending? The stylization—along the lines of children’s and young-adult’s book illustration—had them look just slightly too knowingly sentimental and fey—as well as darkly troubled. ‘Darkly troubled’, though, is soup de jour, isn’t it? The animated projection of women dancing in the park was affecting, a vision of communality

and sharing, and acknowledgement and acceptance of each other, and almost endlessly watchable. Was McGonagle 'too stylized'? Only maybe. Like Moore's work it emanated good-will.

Gareth Sansom is a painter with a large body of work behind him. He showed work that was of a piece with earlier paintings, but maybe his game has lifted still higher? These three or four pieces were very good. They are abstractions that incorporate, or are driven by, figurative elements (cartoonish figures, signs, quotation, and a number of styles, some text) and high-keyed colour. Plenty of pink, for example, perhaps an effect of his one-time immersion in Indian art. 'Pink is the navy blue of India,' some fashion pundit said. The figurative details, necessary to the painting—grit around which the works are built, I would guess—do their work but end up not being where they eye moves to, to gauge meaning.

'*A universal timeless allegory*' has passages that recall thirties Picasso but evenly in the mix with Pop and the brutality of some 80s German painting. Its large overall structure is wonderfully managed, a highly energized abstraction, carrying—too active to be characterized as 'suspended' within it—incidental, individual sketches and graffitied scenes and, well, 'incident'. These latter seem to convey—to 'export'—meaning to the whole—though they are less visually interesting than the large non-figurative passages that should, you might think, be of less importance but are so cleverly handled, marshalling space and the juncture or crossing of one space into another, one space against another. They also work effects of surface and depth. 'Movement' within the painting, or 'development'—managed by these passages—seems therefore authoritative and dramatic, and unarguable, irresistible and fore-ordained. 'That's history.' A history the smaller figures and details seem swept up in, tiny players within it.

The passages on the left of '*A universal timeless allegory*'—in which the pinks, green, yellow and red are brought together, knitted as much as demarcated, and where a confounding depth is married to flatness by an overlain, diagram box- or coffin-shape—can be stared at forever. The distribution of yellow rectangular shapes across the painting is arbitrary, though compositionally entirely calculated, and makes the painting sing. '*Pius IXth*' shows the same skill, though different painterly muscles are employed, or in different proportion. Sansom's paintings seem to absorb and bear meaning, without one being always able to name those meanings, or demonstrate their claim. Another triptych had a sort of Op-art centre that I couldn't quite live with—though I expect the artist intended it to be testing.

Haselton and Tom Moore were also on display at the Jam Factory's ***Magic Object*** showing, along with Heather B Swann, Chris Bond, Abdul-Rahman Abdullah, Fiona McMonagle, Tarryn Gill, Nell, Rosie Hannam. A suite of works related to 'the shell'—complementing a large and impressive exhibition of jewellery made with shells by Lola Greeno. Moore's stuff, as it did at AGSA, looked terrific—though it was displayed here more soberly, piece by piece rather than as an assemblage, and a few were of a kind that would not have sat easily in the narrative fantasy at AGSA. They showed some further sides to

Moore's range. One was larger and not dependent on colour at all. Louise Haselton's three 'Double Terminators' had been shown some years before. They looked fine in the Jam Factory display cases, but they have a much greater impact and genre-confounding oddity when shown as art-proper.

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BOSOMS WERE BACK in a predictably big way at SAMSTAG, where Juz Kitson was showing along with others. I'm not much taken with Kitson's work—see Formguide 14.2 'Method For Form's Sake', for my thoughts on its faux-Voodoo, Rider Haggard exoticism. Many liked other aspects of that exhibition, and liked Juz Kitson too, probably, but I was not struck by it.

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A BIENNIAL WE HAD TO HAVE? OI VEY!

It has to be said: the 'magic' theme is, um, not a very heavy one—scarcely to be taken seriously except as only-figuratively-meant: *artists*—you've got to love them, etcetera. AGSA cut free from the Enlightenment, in fact from critical thought, long ago. 'Magic'—the 'wonder' of art. The Gallery swings from portentous to glib as its preferred two poles, premonition and entertainment. Premonition as entertainment. Escapism as reassurance. But, then, would I prefer 'a staid institution', as state galleries were once supposed to be? to be bored rather than irritated? Like 'formalism' the word 'escapism' begs a lot of questions. Around ***Magic Object*** it does suggest itself.

And I kept forgetting that it was supposed to be a ***Biennial***. If so it came in, then, a little under weight, 'light on', and tending toward craft—a distinction AGSA is happy to forget or regard as superseded. (The most effective part of the argument for parity between art and craft was always "Be nice!", as if it was mean to crafties and designers to deprive them of that status. The population as a whole can live with it, but not them. Most art is pretty much a failure—by its own standards. Most craft succeeds, often superlatively. Auden's *Poetry changes nothing*, is a complaint. No one complains, *Vases change nothing*. There are different expectations.) ***Magic Object***—what a crafty name—hardly seemed like a survey of Australian art, a selection of what was best, or of a significant new trend. And *Wunderkammer* was always a weak thesis and a weak paradigm: collections of curiosities to impress the folks in the schloss next door. Much of the art just slipped past the eye, unobtrusive, pleasant, 'ineffectual'? Sansom, more and more, seemed like an odd-man-out.

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Matthew Bradley, at Greenaway Gallery, proves himself to be, again, one Adelaide artist who is almost always reliably interesting and surprising. ***Destroyer Of Worlds*** is a spare but memorable show, of four parts. The first, like an attending guardian or presiding *herm*, we meet hung on the wall near the entrance. It is '*Andromeda*', a chromium-shiny, pale gold sculpture of slightly art-deco appearance and which turns out to be cast from a shin-and-leg guard, knee to ankle in length. "Turns out to be"—well, one mightn't guess it, but the clues are there. Its effect is quite aura-heavy and obscurely hieratic.

It stands apart from the rest of the exhibition—also made, most of it, of cast objects, in grey (scarred and stained and dirtied greys and grey-blacks). The second element of '***Destroyer***' has a space to itself. '*Remnant*' looks like a long, thin land-to-air missile. It is one menacing line, at rest on the ground, in three more or less abutting parts. Evil and dangerous and barbed, and cruel and functional—ireading as 'spent' but still seeming to threaten.

The middle floor space of the gallery is given to a third part, '*The Year Of A Thousand Suns*', a constellation of objects, implements, used to do the casting—and so associated with flame, heat and burning.

Exhausted, heavy-duty and once-futuristic industrial is a look or a trope Bradley has played with before: future worlds, lost worlds, our present future imaginatively revisited as a subsided or subsiding past. "Remnant" was the key concept. It attaches easily to the ashy grey of the cast objects, and to the discarded look of the machinery that made up the '*Suns*'. (All these point to an Imaginary supplied by *Mad Max*, *Star Wars* and other scenarios ... *Planet Of The Apes*).

This notional ruined future feeds in strongly to the fourth and main part of ***Destroyer Of Worlds***—which is a long shelf, running at a comfortable, approximate eye-height—a line of cast '*Vessels*'. These might hold (or might once have held) liquid, be drunk from, poured from. They remind most often of empty, high-ordnance shells—bullets, missiles, spent cartridges—but some are more vase-like, more decorative. They seem steam-punk, perhaps, but more often gothic, oriental, medieval and sci-fi. They have gravitas and presence, a kind of quiet solemnity. It counts against them a little, for me, that this should derive from our general familiarity with 'the movies', but maybe I am wrong: I guess the movies *are* symptomatic of our premonitions about coming failure, apocalypse, trashed culture/trashed planet and so on. Maybe Hollywood *should* do our thinking for us? Destroyer does not greatly advance this thinking, but it gives it another kind of poignancy.

Bradley's '*vessels*' look good: stark, but softened by their seeming 'history', by their softly burred and burnt surfaces. The artist, self-taught in this, is making a hundred of them, all cast and fired himself, on his own self-made equipment. Their endlessness (one hundred is a big figure) gives them some added

allure—as ‘idealistic project’, an ‘obsession’ or whatever. Though ‘obsessions’—claimed or advertised (even ‘remarked’)—are something of a turn-off, the last decade or so—the mere mention of obsession, as a persuader. But only ‘something of’ a turn-off. ***Destroyer Of Worlds*** was an exhibition of interesting work. Maybe the overall gesture came up a little short—as an idea less strong than the sequence of ‘vessel’ pieces that it framed and introduced.

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Looking through the *Adelaide Review*—I know, I know, *Why?* you’ll ask—I saw that arts writer Jane Llewellyn had the foresight to review David Griggs’ next Greenaway show two weeks or more before it opens and a week or so before Matthew Bradley’s show there has finished. Although, “to be fair”, for once, a little, it turns out to be more a *profile* of the artist, whom she may have even met, or an interview. Not a review. Regularly in writing *FormGuide* pieces I wonder about whether to go with the present tense—often the show is on as I do the writing—or the past tense because the show is over, or I know it will be, by the time I ‘go to print’. Jane, ever felt the attraction of the future tense? It would sound wonderfully authoritative.

One of Llewellyn’s aperçus was/is/will-have-been: “Griggs’ painting style has evolved thanks to living in a fast-paced city such as Manila.” (But to be fair one more time, this may be Llewellyn paraphrasing something the artist will have told her.) Applying the Llewellyn/Griggs logic you might wonder at times, Could Adelaide be such a slow city its art is going backwards?

THE PAST PERFECT

This might be the spot to note that one of the best things I saw last year, I saw too late to include in what I was writing. So, definitely past tense. It is hardly urgent to make amends: almost everybody did see it and liked it as much as I did. I refer to the Valamanesh film (made by Hossein and his film-maker son, Nassiem Valamanesh) capturing the long day’s cycle of activity from the centre of a covered market in the Iranian city, Arak. This was *Char Soo*. It was great for so many reasons. It was modestly straightforward as a procedure—time-lapsed passages of film showing on four screens, each of them focused on one of the four intersecting paths into and out of the centre of the market and shot from the point of intersection, over the whole working day, from early morning to late at night. So it placed the viewer at that centre, able to look in each of the four directions that led into or emanated from it. A separate screen for each of the four directions, four aisles or alleys. (“Char Soo” means four sides.) It showed the market slowly opening: in part, a shortcut route for workers crossing that part of town; then stall-holders arriving and rolling up the metal security shutters on their stalls, setting out their wares—as

quickly passing commuter-crowd numbers increased and finally became shoppers—stopping, bargaining, examining—and a lunch-time crowd.

One saw an abundance of types and of styles of dress, ages etc. And the film had a kind of calm, universalist feel to it as a metaphor: these were people, simply; at the centre of the market was water in a small pool, in traditional fashion, above it the high, arched brick ceiling. (Both elements having conventional meanings, as the elements of the earth: water, the heavens; the four sides indicating the world's varied extent.) And, without searching for it, the film allowed sentimentality, curiosity, generalising interpretation, fixation on detail, plus pathos and all the rest, to feed in or be attributed to the action, as the viewer might permit themselves. A microcosm. The light changed, the rhythm changed, the classes and occupations of people varied with the time of day—from early morning shift-workers, to more usual workers, shoppers for the day, or week, and shoppers for lunchtime, merely, or time-killers; stall-holders were steeling themselves for the day, animated or business-like, patient or otherwise, and then closing up shop, then after-hours use as a straightforward wayfare, then final close after the last few strays passed through.

Other works of Valamanesh's accompanied the four-screen film, of a sort he has exhibited before (at Greenaway Gallery a year or two back). These were recreations of the remembered tiling pattern of particular ceilings in his past, a kind of testimony and possibly a nostalgic longing. They are a collage made of regular, small rectangles of lotus leaf and represent a vaulted ceiling. We see one similar in *Char Soo* at the market's centre, though I think Hossein Valamanesh's reconstructions recall a mosque's remembered ceiling. Also in the gallery was a small screen showing the artist's hands repeatedly rolling an infinity sign. This too, or something similar, Valamanesh has shown at Greenaway: I think it was a gesture, a practice, perhaps a tic almost, he remembers as his own father's. The small film is hypnotic. But it is the recollected ceilings—'*Architecture of the sky*'—I found most compelling. It is hard to say why, but they have care as both their method and their expressive content. Very sombre and not clearly 'expressive' as the term is normally used. There was nothing negligible about this work.

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THE HEAVY LIFTING—DONE?

Planning For Tomorrow at CACSA promised to engage with urgent issues. None outside the Liberal Party or the old Country Party doubts that they are urgent. So ***Planning For Tomorrow*** was not bringing us the news, or not as an exclusive or a revelation. It presented, in its first rooms, posters, a banner, and down the hallway, landscape photos. Posters, a banner. *Now there's an idea. Has that ever been tried before? Because it just might get us out of here!*

The catalogue essay had it that the work 'interrogated' Neoliberalism and capitalism. No it didn't—it simply decried it and protested against it. Well, I too feel that way. So how has the exhibition changed things, for me, or for you? (Or are artists just needing to say they stand on the right side of the argument too? Better than standing anywhere else, granted.)

There was no interrogating going on, beloved as the term is in the arts 'industry' and its marketing of itself—(where column inches bear measuring, but not inspection—to say nothing of 'interrogation'). Nor did the work "examine the collapse of ideological and political systems—actual, imagined, desired—be this via events or through ... consideration of confrontation with capitalism and neo-liberalism." It showed images of these systems' failure and of their being opposed: Kelly made a serious joke in inverting an old leftist slogan; Bertoli was able to do no more than re-run *Autonomia's* slogans. Admittedly my Italian is sadly deficient.

Does it mean much to say that Bertoli's posters were not very good? Even if they had been, have posters helped much lately? Where? And have they helped much *except* where they related to specific issues? Maybe they are just part of the overall push, part of the general effort. (But hand-drawn, as these were?) Deborah Kelly's old-style union banner is an effective joke, an irony, that all can assent to. "The Rich United / Will Never Be Defeated". Sure. Is this the goad we need to devise a means of *breaking* their unity, because it certainly isn't, in itself, the solution or the necessary mechanism. I doubt it means to be droll in telling us we might as well abandon hope, which is another reading.

Greg Ackland showed some reasonable landscape photos picturing what we lose when it is degraded; and, further, some visual images of warning or fateful prognosis: rope alight and burning 'at both ends', a crashing plane, a light bulb suspended over a toaster (*'Time's Arrow'*).

Santiago Sierra's *'Destroyed word'* was more imaginative, and more interesting and affecting, in a gallery-experience sort of way. It has been exhibited here before, a year or two back, at Greenaway. A long frieze of scenes, each a moving image, and suggesting a letter of the alphabet: they are made a little difficult to read, as the objects within are being destroyed or dismantled, or are simply scenes of waste and destruction. The word spelled out is Kapitalism. Though for a while I kept seeing—appropriately enough—'apocalypsim', which was clearly not really in there. *'Destroyed Word'* is mesmerising to look at, involving partly on the level of decipherment but mostly at the level of identifying the particular scenes and fitting them into a picture (our picture) of the global political scene. The work is handsomely schmick: grey, machined—like an expensive capitalist product, a memorial perhaps, to itself, to capitalism as it appears here in summary. The scenes within are stark and 'ongoing'—like the global capitalism they portray.

Keg de Souza's film, *'If There's Something Strange In Your Neighborhood'*, of displaced, squatting urban poor dealing with ongoing ghettoisation and imminent further displacement by Indonesian authorities, was more interesting: containing specific information, dealing with a more specific issue, or with an issue as it was somewhere specifically manifested. Against which it was 'protesting', sure—but it was interesting, added something to our store of ideas and our store of instances, doing so at a more micro level than, say, decrying deforestation (for example) wherever it occurs. *We already*—the art can assume—*do that*.

I am not saying Art shouldn't publicly wring its hands. That is what *Planning For Tomorrow*, in the main, does. Along with the rest of us.

De Souza showed mostly monologues (answers to questions) about living in the particular, current, established squat—which is jerry-built upon two old city graveyards of Yogyakarta, one Chinese, the other Javanese. Narrow alleys, bad plumbing and power, and small, insubstantial dwellings. The poorer population are not wanted, a minor obstacle in the way of government sponsored gentrification for the much richer, more entitled, more presentable middle class. The poor squatter communities, living between and among old graves and grave-sites, sometimes incorporating them into their structures, have to deal with many ghosts, sometimes needing the services of a local ghost-mover to re-settle them. Their attitude to the ghosts is practical and sympathetic.

There is a great deal of visual incident and detail—of housing, greenery, facial types, glances shared between people nearby etc. The interviewees, always speaking in-situ, usually have near them large, old and ornate framed mirrors, which I assumed to be to do with the ghosts (seeing them, speaking to them, protection from them, perhaps)—and the viewer is interestingly engaged with the visual information, the account of the ghosts and their issues, and with accounts of the people's own negotiations with the authorities, of the latter's imagined plans, and rumoured next moves. The community appear to believe in the ghosts and deal with them matter-of-factly and 'philosophically'. What this means is an interesting confusion for the viewer, with various possibilities at a literal level—ghosts? or symptom, a psychic effect of their own precarious situation? But there are also possibilities as to its meaning at an allegorical level: the Westernised, Indonesian, capitalist world is dealing with these people as if the latter are ghosts. In this respect the community come across as far more humane than the government. De Souza's training is architectural and her interests cover the politics of urban spaces and a practice of working co-operatively with communities and other artists.

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Kate Power (April 9th—May 15th) seems a particular inflection of the contrast-the-materialities tactic currently running in Adelaide. The CACSA Project Space allows generally for only a small show. Power uses it, in ***Things Between You And Me***, to place four largish sculptures, in soft-toy sort of materials or, in two strong cases, soft-opposed-to-hard (a la Ben Leslie): these last two I liked as formally striking. One had a cage-like metal grid in which was enmeshed a soft, amorphous white shape: softy versus the angular. Another had two bulbous shapes, probably of some weight, in a stretching, lycra-ish material, again conflicting with or agonising within a harsher metal framework. In the case of this piece the two softer parts appeared to pull against each other. There were also moving-image pieces. One, *'The Desiring Machine'*, was made up of a grid of small moving images that seemed 'intimate', self-revelatory, shyly revealing: in one, a gold-gloved hand repeatedly draped material over a breast-like shape, another repeatedly fingered a slit. A tease, an invitation? Coyly daring. All of it well made. I don't think 'coy daring' counts against it as a mean remark: the effect of the work was gentle and solicitous.