

## The Roving Eye

### Gigantic Art Space

John Ewing

*The Roving Eye*—a collaboration between the lower Manhattan gallery Gigantic Art Space (GAS) and Advance, a nonprofit organization promoting Australians abroad—features works in all media by 12 Australian-born artists. Some are participating in temporary residencies in the United States, others live in New York and elsewhere abroad and the rest continue to reside in Australia.

Though the exhibition's press materials argue that "roving" (i.e., travel) is central to the Australian identity, the notion of a "roving eye" is even more intrinsic to the experience of being an artist. Among this particular group, all the senses seem to be roving—over surfaces, spaces, subjects and a wide range of artmaking practices. Therefore, the vague, provocative title serves more to stimulate the gallery visitor than to link the exhibited work in a meaningful or revealing way. But so what? (That is, if the work is interesting, and most of it here is.)

Lionel Baldwin and Gulumbu Yunupingu create objects that are compelling beyond their dazzling material effects. Baldwin's "monsters" are crafted from Staedtler-brand colored pencils excoined into blocks and carved into seductively lumpy, biomorphic forms, then polished smooth and sealed with linseed oil. Consequently, the works' aggregated surfaces are a fascinating landscape of bumps, hexagonal shapes, and dots of color that shift and stretch with the carved topography. Yunupingu draws on traditions of bush myth and astronomy in works painted on large rectangles of eucalyptus "stringybark." This thick, rough and slightly convex material is the visually crude support for sophisticated pattern networks of lines and circles depicting the spiritualized heavens above Australia.

Painters Janaki Lennie and David Serisier contemplate open space in works where the concept of "open" has clearly nothing to do with a void. Lennie, a Melbourne-born artist living in Houston (and former reviews editor for ARTL!ES), paints lush, surreal skies framed by tree branches, radio towers and slivers of buildings. Though these foggy, smoggy skies are the "subject" of *Breathing Space 110, 112*—here, an opalescent, pea-green soup with pools of painterly illumination from streetlights—the content at the edges of these paintings exerts a compelling tug at the eye, drawing the viewer into gorgeously rendered suggestions of living things and civilization. Serisier's *Untitled Khaki Diptych* and *Untitled Grey Painting* depict equally complex spaces, though abstract and suggestive of actual



Lea Rekow, *Memory Box*, 2006  
 Design: Stephan von Muehlen  
 Sound: Hank Schroy  
 Plyboo, DVD player, mirrors  
 11 inch cube

space between marks—the works' lattice of vertical and horizontal daubs of contrastingly colored oil paint resolve into an overall, uniform sense of expansiveness, with a lively, complex energy below the monochrome surface hum.

Photography plays a multifaceted role in the show. Max Pam's *South India Journal* series is the most straightforward, with documentary-style images of daily life from that locale printed in extra-vidid inkjet colors. Aaron Seeto is known for sneaking albumen prints on metal (i.e., cutlery) into enigmatic works—here a shallow shelf holds two small Daguerreotypes (a grimacing face, a pair of hands), actual printing type spelling out phrases and a sculptural work with a plaster-cast fist. Across another gallery wall is David Sequeira's *Seeing Things Series*: this is made up of many small, white-framed, black-and-white photographs of Gothic and Renaissance church architecture overlaid here and there with Delaunay-style circles and other Orphism-inspired, geometric forms painted in brightly colored gouache. Darren Sylvester is represented by a single work, *Let*

*Hopes and Dreams Be Things We Can Achieve*—a large-scale photograph of an orange-coated couple standing hand in hand next to a pair of pine trees on the edge of a frozen lake, facing a craggy mountain range in the distance.

In this equal-opportunity show, video also makes an appearance. Tina Gonsalves' beautiful *Somewhere in Between, version 4* (*Studies of Translocation series*) is a dreamy, hypnotic meditation on time, sound and movement featuring an ocean horizon that undergoes myriad shifts in color and focus to a synthesized soundtrack of voices, musical tones and water sounds. Rodney Glick and Lynette Voevodin's *Western Desert* is far less successful. This 60-minute, two-channel projection shows a distorted, frozen but jerky image vaguely recognizable as a landscape on one side—next to it is a distorted image of the moon, slowly arching across the night sky. This ponderous, rather insipid visual content is accompanied by a soundtrack of road recordings—cars, voices, radio music and ambient sounds mixed into a fairly indistinct wash of noise.

If Edwina White's *And she walked a crooked mile*, a collage of hand-drawn cartoon characters, is the most titillating ingredient in *The Roving Eye*, Lea Rekow's *Memory Boxes* are the most engaging. These three, captivating little works—video kaleidoscopes, essentially—are nicely constructed out of Plyboo with openings for viewing. Inside, one views a tiny monitor presenting a steady, continuous scene (i.e., a hummingbird at a flower, a sun-dappled view of a road and trees from the driver's seat and a flock of black, flying birds against the sky). What makes these scenes remarkable are mirrors that have been placed in the boxes to multiply the image, either in a panopticon effect or, in one case, a more traditional kaleidoscopic effect with a knob to turn by hand. The panopticon is best—a little internal theater with the suggestion of a much larger space in miniature that curves around and out of sight (with the viewer's reflection included). Thrilling moments like these produced by Rekow are treasured art encounters, wherever they may pop up.