

SUPERPOSITION: Equilibrium & Engagement

Ryan Gander

Other Places, 2018, and other works
on Cockatoo Island

21st Biennale

of Sydney



Upside down Breuer chair after a couple of inches of snowfall, 2017
sculpture, dimensions variable
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Courtesy the artist and gb agency, Paris
Photograph: Roman März

Ryan Gander's installation *Other Places* is an alternative, fictionalised reality transplanted to Cockatoo Island, which he describes as 'an artificial landscape of untouched snow covering a re-creation of the terrain of the streets in which the artist played as a child, within which a series of sculptures, gestures and interventions have been situated'.

His re-creation of the suburban landscape includes other artworks within it – such as a video reproduction of the light in his studio, seen through a replica of a window from his studio built into a wall, and revealing the changing light of daylight, moonlight and streetlight alongside the real time light of Cockatoo Island. Transposing one space into another invites the viewer into the artist's experience and into sharing his point of view.

This landscape, however, is separated from the viewer by a wall dissecting the space. The only means of entry into this seemingly mythical space is via a small window and screen showing a live feed from ten cameras located within the adjacent room.

By transforming scenes from his daily life and personal experience, Gander recontextualises one individual's life and presents it as a story. We can engage with the artwork by reflecting on our own version of his personal narrative, which prompts us to think about our life story in a new way. At the same time, the work comments on our media saturated era, and the prevalence of surveillance across the fabric of our society.

Questions for Discussion

1. How does Gander's work test the boundaries of the artworld by asking: what is art?
2. Can you name other artists who have constructed rooms, environments or large-scale installations that deal with the everyday?
3. How does utilising the familiar tell a story?
4. Do you know how many surveillance cameras there are in your city or town? What do you think they are for? How do you feel about them?

Reference Points

In the history of Western art, artists have been transforming everyday materials into art contexts since Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque began applying found materials to the surface of their paintings in the 1910s. This experimentation with the subject matter and material of art continued with Marcel Duchamp's readymades of the 1910s and 1920s, and can be traced through dada, surrealism, arte povera, fluxus and many other art movements of the last century. Gander's work is also specifically indebted to the pop and postmodernism of the late 1980s.

Other artists who are part of this history, and who have exhibited in past Biennale of Sydney exhibitions, include: Ai Weiwei (2006, 2018), James Angus (2002, 2008), Hany Armanious (1992), Glen Baxter (1986), Christian Boltanski (1979, 1988, 1990), Georges Braque (1988), Janet Burchill (1990), Cai Guo-Qiang (2000, 2010), Aleks Danko (1979, 2010), Destiny Deacon (2000, 2008 with Virginia Fraser), Marcel Duchamp (1988, 1990, 2008), Peter Fischli and David Weiss (1990, 1998, 2008), Mona Hatoum (2006), Jeff Koons (1990), Zilla Leutenegger (2014), Robert MacPherson (1979, 1990, 1998, 2002, 2010), Patricia Piccinini (2002), Andy Warhol (1988) and Bill Woodrow (1982).

Practices and Processes

Gander's work relies on changing how we see everyday objects, and using them to point to life experiences we all share. He does this through alteration and recontextualisation: renewing the ways Duchamp worked with readymades. These are not random selections or alterations to everyday things. The aesthetic of the objects you choose to work with, and what information they bring with them, needs to be considered. For example, working with toys gives you an opportunity to say something about childhood.

Found objects

Juxtapose two objects to tell a story about your personal experience. Do you need to create a space around the objects in order to define them as a single artwork? How important is scale in a presentation like this? Another approach to working with found objects would be to combine them physically: cutting, breaking, gluing and assembling are all techniques for transforming the individual objects into an artwork. Make a series of assemblage sculptures.

Sculpture

Make a diorama of your childhood street.

Moving image

Make a time-lapse video of the view from a window. Get together with a group and show your videos simultaneously, creating a series false 'windows' on a wall.

Subjective frame:
personal experience,
responses to the world

Postmodern frame:
what is the value of
art, challenging art
conventions