



Austral Avenue

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living
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Jane O'Neill, Editor
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Sadie Chandler

Works on Paper

There is a faded glamour to Sadie Chandler's imagery that prompts one to think of New York in the 1940s. As in the world inhabited by Damon Runyon's people, here every male is a guy and every female a doll.

For this exhibition the main wall of the gallery oozes forth with black and white drawings that appear to have been made with a feverish sense of urgency. The individual works vary widely in content but are united by a bold animated style. Mainly we find portraiture: Chandler's familiar coquettes with elaborate hairstyles, and their chiselled masculine counterparts. There is also an undercurrent of tragedy: houses burning, graveyards, car crashes and ominous looking nuclear power stations. There is abstraction too: playful; geometric shapes are squashed into thick frames in such a way as to render impotent any capacity to arouse contemplation. The overall effect is of a stream of consciousness that shifts unapologetically between the political and the personal.

The title *Works on Paper* might conjure expectations of delicate watercolours on Arches paper, but Chandler has drawn these works with black felt-tipped markers upon standard A4 photocopy paper. The pieces have been stuck to the wall with Blu Tac. They overlap each other in an extreme version of a salon hang. Her process rejects elaborate or expensive means. There is an economy to the simple methods employed that extends to the installation period: Chandler would only hang works to the height she could comfortably reach from standing on a chair. One of the strengths of this work lies in the artist's capacity to mimic a setting of opulent grandeur with such crude materials.

The wallpaper of pictures plastered one atop another evokes the constant inundation of imagery to which we are subject. These days it resembles the way computer screens bubble forth with layers of data. The work alludes to the impossibility of processing the extraordinary amounts of visual information that surround us. In particular, it strikes a chord with those who devote their careers to art, and is a bittersweet reminder of the exhaustion that comes

from overexposure to exhibitions. The artist applied this technique most recently in an exhibition at RMIT Gallery on the topic of Elvis Presley. In this case, the wallpaper featured a collection of Elvis-related imagery: sequined trousers, records, gravestones, sunglasses, sideburns—the effect was perfectly suited to the ubiquitous nature of the musical icon.

We see in the work an interest in, and influences from, a number of artists. There is the development of a bold graphic style as in the work of Julian Opie. There is an interest in the dominant visual nature of frames, as explored by Alan McCollum in his *Plaster Surrogates* series from the early eighties. And while the artist might reject the comparison, there is a resemblance to the striking brown and white installations of text panels by Robert MacPherson, with whom Chandler shares the capacity to execute a masterpiece a minute.

Sadie Chandler is not an artist to take herself too seriously. This is expressed through the keen sense of humour she brings to the jumbled world of caricatures, landscapes and abstract scenes within the work. Given the self-importance that is attached to so much contemporary art, such wry modesty is refreshing. What is singular about her position is that the resistance to the exploration of 'issues' through artwork is not expressed via the blank colour planes of minimal abstraction, but through an overwhelming proliferation of imagery.

There is a mystery to these installations that is not immediately recognisable. Each subject in every portrait is depicted with their eyes closed. Are they asleep, demure, or simply lost in their own thoughts? At any rate there is something withheld from the viewers. Also hidden within each installation are disembodied eyes; images based upon the eye of providence that is depicted on the American dollar note. These eyes act as a reminder that no matter how much looking we do, we too are always being observed.

—JANE O'NEILL