

Bell Buoy

*I dip and I surge and I swing
In the rip of the racing tide,
By the gates of doom I sing,
On the horns of death I ride.¹*

Gently swaying on a wall of the gallery a lone buoy, pensive and intriguing, evokes the provocative words of Rudyard Kipling. Its poignant movements mark an imminent dread. Singing at its gates it playfully commands the eye and speaks to the audience of doom and death. With live video and projection Andrew Styan transforms the sterile white walls of the exhibition space into something else. It becomes a place, dark and foreboding, as the simple poetic splendor of sound and movement captivates...

An experienced metallurgist, Styan uses his industrial background to push an experimental and process driven artistic practice.² His work, predominantly photographic is innovative and unique. It draws from scientific research and crosses multiple mediums including photography, video, generative art, and installation. With exhibitions abundant, he is proving to be a popular artist new to the Australian scene.

Having shown in the NSW Hunter region and Brisbane QLD, he enhanced his career when he spent time at Scotland's Dundee University, investigating the beauty in natural phenomenon. An experience resulting in a collaborative work with artist Duncan Campbell titled *Wave Forms, 2013*.³ This series of 5 video installations was exhibited at the Dundee Contemporary Art Gallery as well as part of Dundee's NEoN digital arts festival 2013.

Whilst NEoN, has influenced Styan's work with its exposure to digital sounds, performance and site specific digital installation, he also draws inspiration from acclaimed artist Ian Burns and his kinetic work. Burn's assemblages like *anywhere and here, 2012*, use live video and sculpture to interrogate the screen image and its construction and representation of the truth.⁴ An integral part of Experimenta's 5th International Biennial of Media Art in Melbourne, Burns' work destabilizes the strength of moving image clichés – an approach that Styan has adopted for this most recent work *Bell Buoy*.

1 Kipling, Rudyard, Eliot, T. S. (Ed)., "A Choice of Kipling's Verse / made by T.S. Elliot with an Essay on Rudyard Kipling", Faber and Faber, London: 1941

2 "About Andrew Styan," Andrew Styan Art, accessed May 2014, <http://andrewstyan.com/about/>

3 "Wave Forms," Andrew Styan Art, accessed May 2014, <http://andrewstyan.com/2013/12/20/wave-forms/>

4 "Current Commissioned Works," Experimenta, accessed May 2014, <http://www.experimenta.org/exhibitions-projects/commissioned-works/current.html>

A small kinetic diorama is inconspicuous in a corner of the darkened exhibition space. A single lump of coal suspended, gently rotates as a fine directional light catches its malformations - minute and anything but menacing. Using live video to transform the coal and project it on the opposing wall the simple process of enlarging, speaks volumes. Is Styan purely emphasizing the power of this commodity? Or is there something more sinister at play?

Styan is all too familiar with the constant shipping of coal. His hometown, Newcastle, is the largest coal exporting port in the world making a very real contribution to the world's greenhouse emissions. This contribution and its potential to increase became the crux of his photographic series *One Percent*, 2013. A powerful work which won him "Finalist, 2013 – Ballarat International Foto Biennale Book Prize."⁵

However *Bell Buoy* differs from *One Percent* and is more than a comment on an exporters carbon footprint. The oversized projection of the tumbling coal is frightening. It resembles an asteroid on a collision course with Earth, a slow motion chimera - a figment of our imagination not possible in reality.

Dread and trepidation are at the heart of this moving work. The coal is forever tumbling and the buoy continues to swing. Constantly on loop the video installation has no resolve, stressing the anxieties and fear of the future – sheer dread. In fact the passion and anguish that Styan invokes through this work is not unlike that of Guido van der Werve's, *Nummer Acht: Everything is going to be alright*, 2007.⁶ The video work of a solitary man walking before a giant moving icebreaker is representative of the "everyman who strides the globe despite the onslaught of forces he cannot control."⁷

Existence despite our awareness of the environmental threats to our planet is a message Styan carefully embeds within the layers of this work. Will we choose to heed the warning of the red buoy? Or will we continue on in our paths of destruction like the continual loop echoing the same issue?

Styan includes a welcomed touch of humour with this piece, lifting the work beyond the artifice of the diorama. The coal's slow rotation is sporadically interrupted by sudden jumps back into space – tediously forthcoming with no arrival in sight. A stinging satire as the loop mimics the fits and starts of the climate change debate over the past 25 years.

All the while a soft lapping sound settles the stark contrast of the images. Hushed subtle nuances of nature emerge, adding a touch of reality to the work and remind the audience of the matrix that holds all life together. With each breath

5 "One for the Books," Ballarat International Foto Biennale, accessed May 2014, <http://ballaratfoto.org/one-for-the-books/>

6 Harry J. Weil "Romantic Conceptualism: A Conversation With Guido Van Der Werve." *Afterimage* 40 (March 2013): 16

7 *ibid*

we affirm our connection with all living things; we are interdependent with nature.

It is this unavoidable connection that strikes a chord with Styan. He reminds us that we are all contributors to the planet and invites us to question our own moral responsibilities. *Bell Buoy*, like much of his work, allows the same conversation to linger; are we aware of the demise of the planet? Although if we are not certain that a problem is there, then...

Bibliography

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