

## **Sunset Clause**

*Sunset Clause* is the first solo exhibition with Darren Knight Gallery by Melbourne based artist Natalie Thomas. Spanning a decades long creative practice, *Sunset Clause* showcases selected works from her extensive back catalogue alongside recent political posters and paintings. Poking and prodding round a withering cultural vernacular, famous names and faces abound. Narratives vie for attention, interwoven like magazine bylines. Giants from the art historical canon, Vivienne Binns, Erica McGilchrist, Louise Bourgeois, Carolee Schneemann and court jester Maurizio Cattelan guest star. 'Appropriation, how appropriate is it?' you might wonder?

The artist says:

I'm in a dream. In the austere palette of bureaucratic ineptitude I begin, rolling out a field of corporate grey like it's just business. An overlay grid of whitewash frames the Christian name of each Treasurer since 'Federation'. The relationship between church, 'state' and crime scene continues unabated. A portrait of society as a synthesized, corrupted grid of privilege, power and influence, hanging too comfortably within the genre of the Grand Historical Narrative. Resembling the cast list from an episode of suspects on Midsomer Murders, my favourite treasurers name is Cornthwaite! Part listicle, part infographic, part perception delusion, the work includes an uncanny performative element. For behind each Treasurer lies the professional opportunities and social encounters where reputations are forged, nurtured, rehearsed, fortified. Cemented. Round Boardroom tables and in Conference Rooms 'Parties' decide who is good with numbers, who has the strength of will, the audacity to meet the press and justify which of their mates gets splashed with the cash this time. Who might carry, so easily, the burden of deciding, with a flick of their pen, who is boom and who is bust.

CAPITALISM is a shrivelled carrot dangling lamely on a string.

Businessmen do their deals. 'Design the society you want' they say, not even joking. KPMG, pwc, EY, Deloitte, listed on the notepad of the hot, well dressed Executive assistant (struggling to find a rental). The boss is wearing zany socks, lamely attempting to appear momentarily more humane. The devil lies in the detail.

Don't get me wrong, Politics in the Age of Celebrity is a riveting watch. In their earnest attempts to win constituents hearts, minds and votes, politicians will do almost anything. They'll even invite Annabelle Crabb over for dinner. Photo shoots in Speedos and stilettos and fishnets. And that's just Tony Abbott and Alexander Downer. Then there's all the other little Downers. Sound bites and media grabs choreographed to make the evening news. I ponder these exploits with the rigour of many an underemployed artist searching for the clues as to what went wrong. **Shame the joke is not just on them.**

Has the capacity of art to make positive political change been over exaggerated? Or is the true revolutionary potential of art routinely stymied to uphold the status quo? Does political art mostly preach to the converted because you've got to admit we're on our way to hell in a hand basket. And there's no sunset clause. We're contractually obliged to see this thing through even when it's lose/lose. Even when you crack open the iced VoVos and dial up the chick flick with the happy ending, you end up in a post-apocalyptic hell scape.

CORPORATE and COOPERATE are spelt almost the same. By way of clarification, it is noted that CORPORATE is doing well out of any subliminal confusion with COOPERATE.

Billionaires Lindsay and Paula Fox made a huge tax-deductible donation to NGV Contemporary. The benchmark has been set. If you want naming rights on a new museum it costs \$100 million. The foyer of Fox Contemporary will house the big new KAWS bronze too big to fit anywhere else. After the generous pledge Lindsay celebrated by commandeering the NGV's Great Hall for his 86<sup>th</sup> birthday. They couldn't say no. The all-men guest list (who usually meet in secret at their men only Melbourne Club) included titans from the worlds of public private business. Representatives from both sides, the PM and Opposition leader, Victorian Premiers past and present, heads of armies and casinos and boards. All came together to cheers Lindsay at the art gallery. Nobody says no to a rich man even when it is state sanctioned sexism.

Sometimes all you can do is laugh. Powerful people hate when you laugh at them and that's why comedy thrives. Carolee Schneemann swings into my dream, just in time. 'My pussy is my medium' she says and at least someone is making sense. I tell her thanks. Carolee's pussy poses with a phone. An old-fashioned plugged-in-to-the-wall-phone from the days before phones haunted us. Erica McGilchrist talks me through the importance of an Enigmatic Entrance, skirt lifted. My vagina has been playing up. Not in the 'it's a full-moon and I'm heading out into it' kind of way. I'll spare you the details but it coincided with a round of dental visits that brought Vivienne Binns surreal vagina dentata to mind. So I painted one. Louise Bourgeois painted slightly sinister buildings subsuming human form. The removalists arrive in double denim to carry out the couch. There goes the Neighbourhood. 'In French' Louise says, 'Pet translates to animal companion' and aren't our pets doing some heavy lifting.

I used to think how I looked was more important than what I thought and I'm still not certain it isn't. 'My misspent youth as a teenage model' is a collection of modelling photos that attest to the issues. The growth and growth of Luxury Brands isn't stopping. Gucci, Prada, Chanel, Armani, Versace, Dior, Balenciaga, Bulgari. Each rendered in an especially seductive tone, the painting titled 'Art Museum launches new Program'. I sort of wish art was as popular as fashion. I like painting hair and folds in clothes so at least that is something. Sunday Reed lays splayed out on a bed, nude except for her blue hair ribbon. Amoeba like lovers, husband John Reed and ambitious young artist Sidney Nolan lie on the floor, waiting their turn. There is a complex crowd. There's always someone getting left out then cracking it.

A sunset clause is a contractual term, a condition included in some contracts of sale of property, to protect the buyer and the seller. A sunset clause lets either party end the contract if certain requirements are not met. Think of it as a ticket to walk away if things don't go to plan. LOL. The roots of sunset provisions were laid in Roman Law. The first philosophical reference to the idea of the sunset clause can be traced to the laws of Plato, who is still a big name to this day. 'What is admitted for a period will be refused after that period', said Plato. The principle was broken when Julius Caesar became dictator for life. To critically examine public, democratic institutions is a necessity in any democracy. Institutional critique is an act of love. So get critiquing.

Natalie Thomas, September 2023