

DISAPPEAR HERE

Marilyn Schneider

February 28–April 6, 2019

Opening February 28, 6pm

Artist Talks April 6, 1–3pm

Art critic Robert Hughes argued that “architecture is the only art that moulds the world directly. Of all the arts, architecture is the supreme expression of politics and ideology.”

Yet, we have become conditioned into the belief that the architectural environments in which we live our lives are a fait accompli. Static, immovable spaces formed by processes from which the public itself is disengaged or excluded. However, architectural environments are not a given. They are indeed shaped by people, culture, politics and ideology.

Likewise, the exhibition spaces embody in which audiences experience art are ideologically constructed environments. Yet they are rarely subjected to quite the same level of critical interrogation as the art they present, notwithstanding the powerful, inseparable influence of these constructed spaces on our response to that art. The triumph of the ‘white cube’ conception of exhibition space has arguably caused audiences to overestimate the neutrality of this spaces, and to underestimate the influence of curators, designers, architects and other agents aside from the artist who shape their experience of art.

Marilyn Schneider’s installation Disappear Here invites us to question these suppositions by revealing the constructedness of both architectural spaces and exhibition environments.

Schneider’s work is presented to its audience on moveable rectangular partitions. The colouring of these partitions mimics that of the Verge gallery’s walls. The simple, but highly refined frames in which her paintings are suspended reflect the mindfulness with which Schneider herself observes the architectural world around her. These partitions act as an extension of the gallery’s own architecture, but they are mounted on wheels, allowing their positions to be reconfigured by the exhibition visitor. In this way, Schneider empowers her audiences to reconfigure the architectural environment around them according to their own preferences and aesthetics. The visitor’s experience of the exhibition is not pre-determined. The visitor is afforded a degree of empowerment and agency in the shaping of public space with which he or she may not be unfamiliar in everyday life. The visitor is invited to reshape the environment that has been created by both the architect and the curator and to feel unbound by the prescriptions and authority of either.

VERGE GALLERY



The paintings mounted on these partitions examine in close detail, the assembly instructions for the interior ornamentation of a 'blockbuster' exhibition of historical European art. Often, such exhibitions are performed in environments imbued with a sense of theatricality. The design of these historical blockbuster exhibitions frequently evoke the aesthetics of the historical period from which the exhibited works originate. But whose experience of these periods are evoked and what signifiers of it are called upon? What do we choose to remember of the past and what do we disregard? In bringing these works together and creating the stage on which they are presented, curators and exhibiting institutions construct a particular, subjective version of the past. In so doing, they choose to recall certain aspects of the past whilst disregarding others. In making these choices, curators and institutions respond to and inform contemporary cultural dialogue. Yet to many, the authority of the curator is often a silent, invisible force in these spaces. Schneider draws our attention to the literal act of construction by depicting the assembly instructions for chandeliers used in the ornamentation of an exhibition space. In so doing, she reminds us of the constructedness of the past that they are intended to evoke. What is the association between the opulence signified by a chandelier and the 'masterpieces' of the Dutch golden age which shared the same exhibition space? What meanings are being constructed through this association, and why?

We live in a time of disconnection between the practice of architecture and the people whose lives it affects. Many of the most contentious current public debates in Sydney today revolve around architecture and public space. The threat of demolition of the brutalist building, 'Sirius'. The inexorable rise of glass and concrete towers of Barangaroo. The unaffordability and unsustainability of the Australian suburban idyll. The loss of the heritage places. The public largely feels disempowered to participate in discourse relating to architecture and planning until a crisis point has been reached. The public has been denied not only a seat at the table at which decisions are made, but also the vocabulary to participate in the discussion.

Therefore, there is a timeliness to Disappear Here. It may be read as an effort to restore agency to the public in the shaping of the public domain. Schneider's work empowers its viewer with critical awareness of the constructedness of both architectural and exhibitionary environments. It is only when citizens are equipped with the critical awareness of the architectural worlds they inhabit that they will be empowered to challenge, engage, negotiate and moderate the forces that shape them. Schneider strives to equip her audience accordingly. She encourages us to heighten our architectural consciousness and to challenge our own presumptions of disempowerment in the formation of public space and public memory. Never has there been a more important time to do so.

— Guy Betts

VERGE GALLERY



Works (mobile)

Prawn cocktail, 2019,

gouache on stretched canvas, primed pine, screws, wheels, acrylic paint,
147 x 270 x 120cm, (50 x 70cm canvas size).

Visual Comfort & Co, 2019,

gouache on stretched canvas, primed pine, screws, wheels, acrylic paint,
52 x 220 x 50cm, (50 x 70cm canvas size).

148-8PLC-A/90005803, 2019,

gouache on stretched canvas, primed pine, screws, wheels, acrylic paint,
118 x 270 x 120cm, (50 x 70cm canvas size).

Works (hung)

Maximus, 2019,

gouache on stretched canvas,
50 x 70cm.

#7624160064, 2019

gouache on stretched canvas,
50 x 70cm

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