

Gallery farewell Perf-ectly brash

LAETITIA WILSON

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Perf

installation view at Melody Smith

VISUAL ARTS

Perf: Alex Maciver

Melody Smith Gallery

REVIEW LAETITIA WILSON

Over the last few years the gallery business in Perth has been especially fickle. Long established galleries have closed their doors and new ones have cropped up and disappeared again.

There is also the ongoing and unfortunate migration of talented people leaving WA for the promise of the east coast.

Melody Smith, the gallery and the person, is a demonstration of both of these trends with this final exhibition at the converted Carlisle factory before the gallery closes its doors and Smith leaves for Sydney.

The show is by an artist who challenges the exodus trend. Alex Maciver is from the UK and has been based in Perth for three years. During this time he has developed a painterly practice that expands into the fields of print, sculpture, installation and performance.

The title of the show, Perf, has obvious reference to the rough slang or misunderstood pronunciation of our fair city's name. It is also a shortened version of the words perfect, perforate and performance, as three concepts that inform Maciver's work.

The artworks are about interior design, portraiture, family, the familiar, fashion (and its ridicule) and the local art scene, as well as playing with the viewer's expectations and experience of the gallery space.

The concept of the feature wall is made the subject of installation and painting.

In Flat Pack Feature Wall 1 and 2, short walls jut out from the ground, forming a semi-enclosed space. Their surfaces combine the familiar patterning of flocking wallpaper and flat planes of colour overlaid with squiggly spray paint. The colour combinations are brash, the feature wall styles clash noisily and the sprayed marks only further the disruption.

Seemingly at odds with all the works, if only for their neat, monochromatic and discrete form, is a series of pink sitting ducks, angling up the wall as reminiscent of the more familiar antique flying ducks.

They reference Maciver's own family history and also play with this history by suggesting the idiom of the sitting duck as vulnerable to attack. Another interpretation would see the sitting duck as perfectly settled in Perf.

The results of a recent residency at the Fremantle Arts Centre is on display in a series of sculptural, painted papier- mache forms that are abstractions of the portrait of a model.

Each form is given a glamorous wig of long hair, one is donned with sunglasses and they are given names such as Charmaine and Sheila. It is a brutish abstraction of portraiture.

The sculptures were drawn into the element of performance which was part of the opening night in a collaboration between Maciver and clothing label Citizens of Arcane.

Having not attended I am loath to comment - suffice to say it involved fashion and paint, humour and erotica. Garments became canvases for Maciver's free-form mark-making as the models stood beside the model sculptures.

Maciver has perforated the Perth art scene with a style that is artistically loose and conceptually layered, with meanings spanning from the personal to the more general. The works are thematically cohesive. With most of them sharing a messy, gestural approach, where the artist does not hesitate to use garish colour and sculpt lumpy forms that belie traditional tropes of aesthetics.

It would have been good to see a conclusive group show acknowledging the range of artists brought into Smith's fold.

This is, however, an apt point of closure that maintains synchronicity with many of the emerging, mid career and established WA artists who have shown their works in the gallery over the course of its three-year existence in Perth.

Perf is at Melody Smith Gallery, 69 Oats Street, Carlisle, until July 26.