



R E M E D I A L

11 November – 24 December 2017

 PERTH INSTITUTE OF
CONTEMPORARY ARTS

W O R K S

REMEDIAL

11 November – 24 December 2017

Sophie Cassar | Claire Milledge | Shana Moulton | Pakui Hardware | Jess Tan | Anicka Yi | Curated by Andrew Varano

Remedial Works takes as its starting point the idea that human bodies in contemporary global societies are now placed within a dense ecology of materials, surfaces, objects and substances, that can be equally poisonous or reparative. While recognising that we live as part of systems of industrial production and consumption—usually inescapable for single individuals—the exhibition asks in light of this, what possibility still exists for remediation and healing?

Whispering Pines is a video series by Shana Moulton which follows her alter ego, a hypochondriac named Cynthia, on her quest to find perfect health and happiness. Cynthia takes the promises of new age, beauty and consumer products to their logical conclusions, reframing pharmaceuticals, medical devices, probiotic food and make up pads—amongst other things—as mythical and magical objects able to render the body and mind stable and well.

Cynthia is used as an example to describe a contemporary subject—or market—which has emerged alongside the invention of the ‘wellness’ industry, a product and service category which sits somewhere between the medical and beauty industries and which doesn’t seek to remedy illness but rather looks to optimise health and something more vague, referred to as ‘well-being.’

The implication of such an industry is that there is always room for improvement and that bodies, even while not sick, are never truly well. Moulton’s videos draw out the absurdity of this, demonstrating that the endpoint of such thinking is not necessarily that we are promised perfectly functioning bodies, but more that we desire to escape or transcend bodies themselves.

Here scientific pursuit and spirituality become confused, as the treatment of a bout of irritable bowel syndrome or fibromyalgia becomes an opportunity for Cynthia’s body to become stripped away completely, leaving her weightless, invisible, a clay lump of energy sitting in a calm perpetual stasis. Wellness is recast as an epic narrative, alluded to by a refrain in one film, ‘constant craving has always been.’¹

Weightlessness is also a motif used by Sophie Cassar in her work, however she is quick to remind us of “Weightlessness as an idealised and aestheticised end-point for sick girls to reach, but *you can’t overthrow capitalism on an empty stomach.*” In her work *Plaster the Body with Disney*, she repurposes helium foil balloons which are often found in hospital stores as gift alternatives for patients whose immune systems are too suppressed to receive flowers.

She employs an almost adolescent strategy of customisation, mummifying the thin shiny surfaces of the balloons in collectible stickers, an act that thickens the skin of the balloons, adds weight to them and makes the objects somehow more corporeal. Cassar’s work stems from her experiences with childhood cancer and serious hospitalisation, but as well as being autobiographical it is also concerned with representations of sick women and girls online and in popular culture.

Accustomed to often having worked in bouts between treatments from her sickbed, Cassar employs a collage-like practice to her artist books and films to explore the agency of sick women and girls through the lens of ‘cute.’ While cuteness is commonly mistaken as an infantilising aesthetic, absent of power and tied to consumption, Cassar uses it to devastating effect. She demonstrates the power of cute to both reclaim subjectivity and physical territory as well as the ability of cute to speak critically of death and desire in deeply meaningful ways.

The Lithuanian duo Pakui Hardware is concerned with the connection between materials and the economy and how the body is being reshaped through technology. Their sculptural works *On Demand* appropriate NASA satellite footage of the surface of Mars, which they have then reshaped into organic and anthropomorphic forms. The surfaces collapse macro and micro viewpoints, simultaneously resembling organs or the skin of a body as well as strange planetary landscapes. They are reminiscent of both laboratory microscopy imaging and the photography used by mining prospectors, suggesting that both distant planets and the genome are frontiers for the extraction of commodities and value under capitalism.

A mundane science fiction³ is also invoked in Anicka Yi’s 3D film *The Flavor Genome*, which follows the journey of a flavour scientist into the Amazon in search of a legendary and rare shape-shifting orchid said to have exceptional psychotropic qualities. In this film Yi explores the chemical basis of flavour perception and speaks of how new essences can be synthesised from nature. Rather than seeing this merely as the introduction of possible new experiences for consumption, Yi explores it as a possibility for the emergence of a post-human consciousness.

With perception extended and reassigned in new ways, a human-animal-plant hybrid consciousness is hypothetically made possible and bodies and land are again conflated. But here this is further problematised as the legacy of the Amazon as a site of pharmaceutical and gastronomical colonisation is made inseparable from our very consciousnesses.

An imaginary microcosmic dreamscape is built by Jess Tan in her work *recurring dream (silent reading time)*, a slippery assemblage which manages to allude to bodies, a landscape and emotions all at once. This layered installation work is constructed from an ecology of materials widely abundant in contemporary global cities; glitter, bouncy balls, fake flowers, Plastimake, sunglass lenses, foam, denim, aromatherapy oils, chocolate pebbles, fake crystals, hair and so on.

Tan often strips away the intended use value of objects and materials, opting to explore the physical properties of objects at surface value, then recombining these materials in novel ways equally beautiful and abject, provisional and finely crafted. In a similar vein to Sophie Cassar, objects are repurposed and collaged and a personal territory (subjective and physical) is constructed. Tan’s work suggests a grounding escape to an inner sanctum, a place of repose or calm, where the objects become thoughts and emotions divided, contained and kept stable, yet somehow still mysterious. In a way the work operates as a portrait of a body, but it is also an exploration of what we are drawn to and how we read meaning—escapist fantasies in particular—into things and their combinations.

Many of the artists in *Remedial Works* are showing works that transition from one realm to another – or rather sit with one foot in both. Whether this is science and spirituality, sickness and wellness, earth and body, lucidity and dream, many of the works seem to play with transitions between states of perception. This is engaged with most directly, however, by Clare Milledge, whose practice has for many years worked with the idea of the artist-shaman, or the idea of an artist working as a conduit between visible and invisible worlds.

Milledge presents materially dense and expansive and intentionally open-ended installation works that are used to present visionary possibilities, offering to audiences a ‘gift of sight.’ In her work, materials are used as psychomagical⁴ tools to allow this transference between artist and audience to occur. Her work *Strigiformes; Binocular, Binaural* combines data about bird populations, Tinder, expansive painting and performance to create a ritualistic event, intentionally left ambiguous to invite the audience to read themselves into the work. In doing so Milledge draws a connection between material and the theatrical act as a potential psychologically reparative process.⁵

Andrew Varano

List of works:

Sophie Cassar

Plaster the Body with Disney, 2017
Mixed media

Minnie Mouse Goes to the Hospital, 2017
Digital video without sound

Untitled (iPhone footage), 2017
Digital video without sound

Minnie Mouse AirWalker Balloon, 2017
Foil Balloon, helium

Pakui Hardware

On Demand, 2017
UV prints on PVC pentaprint film, tripods, spring clamps, silicone, ceramics

Jess Tan

recurring dream (silent reading time), 2017
Mixed media

Shana Moulton

MindPlace ThoughtStream, 2014
Digital video with sound

Swisspering, 2013
Digital video with sound

Lyrical, 2012
Digital video with sound

Anicka Yi

The Flavor Genome, 2016
Single channel 3D video with sound

Clare Milledge

Strigiformes: Binocular, Binaural, 2017
Silk, metal, silicone, horsehair, miscellaneous textiles, head torches, acrylic, makeup, sound, performance, wood, whips.

Clare Milledge’s installation incorporates a video that can be streamed to your device via www.strigiformes.video



WORKS