



LIKE STEPPING INTO ANOTHER CENTURY...

Eva Fernandez embarks on a photographic exploration of the Midland Railway Workshops.

Western Australian artist Eva Fernandez completed a Masters in Creative Arts at Edith Cowan University in 2009, and has been practising art for over two decades. She currently works in photography and digital based media, in addition to academic and curatorial work. Eva's art practice seeks to contextualise her existence in the place/space she inhabits, including exploration of her physical environment, as well as cultural and gender identity.

In 2015, she produced a body of photographic work in response to Fremantle Arts Centre, one of Western Australia's most iconic buildings. This extraordinary series of photographs, *(era) australis incognita* drew upon the building's history as Western Australia's first income asylum, utilising found objects, furniture and native flora to explore notions of postcolonial Western Australian identity and critique the 'whiteness' of the colonial project.

FORM has invited Eva to continue her exploration in response to the Midland Workshop Site, an iconic remnant of Western Australia's industrial past. Between 2015 and 2016, she spoke with her during the lead up to her residency.

What were your first impressions of the Midland workshop site?

Walking into the site felt like stepping into another century. The dense proximity of the space is overpowering, entering the twentieth century industrial brick buildings almost a religious experience, similar to walking into a cathedral with its high ceilings and enormous cavernous spaces.

Now dormant, the walls of weathered, painted red brick and repetitive luggered structures show an undeniable presence that quietly overpowers the viewer. Just as revealing is their present state of bareness where

hundreds once worked in structures that encompass several neighbourhood blocks. As Perth is a city whose physical fabric appears to be in a state of continuous and often radical transition, there are not many structures left from this era of this magnitude.

You seem to be drawn to these types of abandoned sites as a source of inspiration. What is it about forgotten and unloved buildings (and objects) that appeals to you?

I am drawn to these spaces and objects because they appear to be in an in-between state between their original condition and imminent change. I am interested in the shifting landscape and the layering of history on these spaces as well as the loss and destruction of those histories.

These abandoned sites show the evidence of human existence and interaction, though there is an overwhelming feeling of absence in these now dormant and neglected, decaying spaces. My images attempt to pay homage to the disappearing industrial architecture of previous generations as well as the once loved objects of deceased estates.

Formerly speaking, much of the imagery comprising your recent, larger bodies of work would seem to fall within the genre of still life, yet to me they feel more like portraiture - you seem to treat items of furniture, objects, solids and even entire buildings, more like subjects (or bodies) - do you classify your work as fitting within a particular genre?

I find it difficult to categorise my work within a particular genre. I do however feel as though I treat my items of furniture, suitcases, buildings and so on, more like subjects than mere objects. This comes from the obvious evidence of interaction of the object's

structures with human beings and the character they take on with their mouldy, cracked, worn or tarnished surfaces.

Many of the objects I photograph are retrieved from abandoned houses and deceased estates which are removed from being destroyed or discarded, the beloved material possessions we keep from a deceased relative, friend, or loved one's memories and narratives. The presentation of these objects becomes as obvious as the absence of their owners. My artworks attempt to elevate the importance and meaning of these discarded and forgotten items and give them a new memorial function.

Like early post-war modern photography which was a common aspect of Victorian culture, these images represent a part of the mourning and memorialisation process and remind us of our own impermanence and mortality.

Eva Fernandez will undertake a Midland Arts Centre residency for FORM later in 2016. In the meantime, she will show works from her (era) australis incognita series as part of Divergence: The Photographers Cut.

Location: Block 4, Midland Railway Workshops

Image courtesy of the photographer's Instagram, @evafernandez

