



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 2000, and has been a practicing artist for over two decades. She currently works in photography and digital based media. Her 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 2011 Eva 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, (*terra australis incognita*) drew upon the building's history as Western Australia's first insane asylum, utilising found objects, furniture and native flora to explore notions of postcolonial Western Australian identity, and critique the 'madness' of the colonial project.

FOKM has invited Eva to continue her exploration in response to the Midland Workshop Site, an iconic remnant of Western Australia's industrial past, later in 2012, and spoke with her during the lead up to her residency.

What were your first impressions of the Midland workshop site?

Walking into the site is like stepping into another century. The sheer enormity of the space is overpowering. Entering the twentieth century industrial red brick buildings is 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 huge steel structures have an undeniable presence that quietly overwhelms the viewer. Just as revealing is their present state of barrenness 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 continual and often radical transition, there are not many structures left from this era or 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 antiquated buildings (and objects) that appeals to you?

I am drawn to these spaces and objects because they appear to be in an inert 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 these 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, luggage, saddles and even entire buildings, more like subjects for bodies...do you classify your works 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 inert objects. This comes from the obvious evidence of interaction of the objects or

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 rescued from being destroyed or discarded. The beloved material possessions we keep from a deceased relative, friend, or lover evoke 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 gives them a new memorial function.

Like early post-mortem 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 Atelier residency for FOKM later in 2012. In the meantime, she will show works from her (*terra australis incognita*) series as part of Divergence: The Photographers' Cut

Location: Block 2, Midland Railway Workshops

Images from the series (*terra australis incognita*), © Eva Fernandez.

