

A message from moving furniture

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Eva Fernandez's photographic work is well-known to Perth visual arts viewers. In her exhibition (Terra) Australia Incognita, she is depicting distressed and reassembled furniture in a series of big unframed works printed on a stark white background and installed in the long hallway gallery at the Fremantle Arts Centre.

The various chairs and couches are captured in a disarray of torn and scattered upholstery and stuffing intermingled with the addition of native flora. In some cases the vegetable matter has fused with the chairs in a futile reconstruction of the damaged object.

The pictures operate in the classic studio portrait vernacular of the early 20th century where the extraneous subject matter has been whited-out and we are left with the primary motif of the chair, positioned either in profile or facing straight at the camera lens. Taking a cue from the exhibition's title, the viewer is meant to read these battered pieces of old furniture as metaphors of post-colonial Australia given over to an endurance of reconstruction, repair and restoration.

These works raise questions about identity, construction and motivation; there is something uncomfortable in their forensic matter-of-fact approach and they challenge our assumptions of validation of presence by incorporating vegetable iconography as a solution to our national character.

Elsewhere in the FAC's cavernous complex of exhibition spaces, the Hold Your Horses creative collective of Thea Constantino, Tarryn Gill and Pilar



METAPHORIC Eva Fernandez' Deconstructed Chair 2, 2010.

Mata Dupont have been joined by composer Tim Cunniffe to present The Soloists. This is a marvellous installation which represents some of the best creative work in WA today, bringing together our best and brightest talents from across a wide spectrum of disciplines.

Taking as their point of departure the infamous story of Dora from Sigmund Freud's case notes, they have woven together a masterly work of libretto, music, performance and spectacle. This work eludes definition, being an a cappella singing ensemble, a small chamber opera and an intense narrative film. The artists exploit all of these genres and in the best definition of inter-disciplinary practice they create a new form of artistic expression.

The result is an intensity of characterisation and visual tension that is a wondrous sensorial experience which sweeps the viewer up into the tumultuous interplay of power within Dora's family group. It is as if a family photograph came to life and began to unwind in operatic torsion before your eyes. Dora was the case study that got away; she eluded Freud's analysis and his attempted cure for her supposed condition of "petite hysteria". Developed through a residency at FAC, this story of Dora has all the more resonance in a centre which had a previous life as a mental institution and whose walls are no strangers to such arcane diagnosis.

The Soloists is a gem of intelligent construction with the artists squeezing from their limited means an extraordinary experience in lighting, filmic technique, dramatic singing and an exhilarating musical score. There is not a wasted moment and the entire work appears to unfold in a captivating but brief envelope of time.

If you missed the acclaimed Heart of Gold, produced by this group at PICA two years ago, and wondered why their name has been constantly celebrated since, you must not miss this piece. ●

Eva Fernandez: (Terra) Australia Incognita and Hold Your Horses: The Soloists are at Fremantle Arts Centre until July 17.