

Visual Art

No Show, Carriageworks' lively group exhibition of emerging and experimental art, is full of unexpected gems.

Treasure hunt

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When Carriageworks went into voluntary administration during the Covid-19 downturn last year, many artists lost work and Sydneysiders were robbed of one of their best venues. The rescue was protracted and involved both public and private funds.

The New South Wales government's Covid-19 rescue packages for artists were famously far smaller, and came far later, than support from other state governments: a double insult in view of the fact that Sydney rents are much higher. When Restart NSW was announced, Carriageworks jumped with *No Show*, a group exhibition of 11 artist-led initiatives. Featuring more than 50 mostly emerging and experimental artists, it is the ideal event to animate the cavernous foyer in the fallow period between the Sydney Festival and The National.

This is work from the coalface. Curated by Aarna Hanley, *No Show's* small, modular spaces favour discrete work. It's full of unexpected treasures. A solo show from ANKLES gallery in Alexandria features conceptual painter Ella Sutherland. *Whether the Weather* continues her manipulations of typography and meaning, the crowning glory a tiny picture at the top of an outer wall with a biro poking through it.

Next door in the space occupied by Firstdraft, one of Sydney's most established artist-run institutions, is an elegiac floor work by Jazz Money. Stencilled in white on the cement, partly obscured by dirt, are elliptical phrases about the colonisation of this site, once a sacred Gadigal hill. Amy Claire Mills' colourful, tactile banners lift anti-ableist messages to the universal, with

attention to craft and an ear for the pithy.

An infectious techno soundtrack compelled me to Boomalli, Australia's longest running Aboriginal artists co-op. Rubyrose Bancroft's claymation *The 7 Deadly Sins* beguiled me with its artless combination of humour and menace. *The Spirits Are Restless*, Barkindji artist Maddison Gibbs' mobiles, dangle over the gallery and down a corridor. Fauna-like shapes on cardboard and coloured Perspex, they come alive in the afternoon sun.

In Our Neon Foe's presentation, Priscilla Bourne's *Horatio* is a kitschy bust of a man wearing a three-cornered hat and holding a little boat made of plywood. Dented with fingerprints and with paint slapped on haphazardly, the bust could be read as testament to a growing enthusiasm for decolonisation.

In WAYOUT ArtSpace, a regional initiative, Greg Pritchard's *Home Bulla* - an assemblage of items on timber shelves - is worth a look, but displays like this are incredibly difficult to cohere. Michael Petchkovsky provides the compulsory tech-boy entry with a camera that projects laser outlines of the viewer.

Runway Journal presented Divine, a theme that risks the hackneyed. But the quality and contrast of the work is excellent. Diego Ramirez' eccentric video *The Perfect Ever* manipulates old Mexicana/westerns with sci-fi references. *Delara* by Elham Eshraghian-Haakansson is a beautifully shot montage of a young boy breaking up a pomegranate, a well, and a strange dance by a masked collective.

This leaves Running Dog as the only space dedicated to writing. It has a minimalist elegance that reflects its online platform. There is a long table painted with text, scattered with artfully folded Letters from the Editor, and a monitor of scrolling articles. The micro-residencies it is conducting for *No Show* don't literally take place here, leaving the space free for anyone to occupy. Founding editor Naomi Riddle knows the value of



Carriageworks' *No Show* animates one of Sydney's best visual arts venues. Zan Wimberley

producing more with less, and her letters - crafted as poetic polemics - are keepers.

The video program *Radical Ecologies*, curated by Lauren Carroll Harris of Prototype, has the luxury of a huge bay. The works include Sam Smith's *Lithic Coda*, which uses a 1970s space film aesthetic for a weird meditation on geology and time. Hannah Bronte's *The Sweet Suits* - one of her shorter, pop pieces - features strong Black women in extravagant pink outfits floating among tropical foliage. Tiyan Baker's documentary - filmed in the artist's mother's ancestral Bidayuh village in Sarawak - is a fascinating look at the breakdown of traditional jungle life but marred by terrible sound.

Lots of masculinity was on display in 5 from 5 from PARI, a new space in Parramatta. Leila el Rayes' four-screen video shows a group of men on a rug in a garage, smoking shisha, playing dice and riding in and out on motorbikes, before an audience. Richmond Kobla Dido's *Men Do Not Cry* was like an antidote, with young African-Australian men lamenting men's enculturated inability to cry. The stills are positively homoerotic. But the best thing about PARI was their decision to paint the walls yellow, a masterstroke that vibrantly subverts the white cube. I can see why architects Yousofzay and Hart's design was chosen for the galleries with its demountable recyclable materials, but I found it aggravating. Grey felt may provide good insulation, but as a colour and texture it sucks energy from the work hung on it.

All around on windows and mirrors - easy to miss - are charming decal drawings of running water and washing hands, by Tom Blake of Firstdraft.

The show is bookended by a folkloric touch from performance artist Skye Saxon's tarot readings, housed in Studio A, a social enterprise for artists with intellectual disabilities, and Camperdown artist-run institution KNULP's cool rejection letter of participation.

This letter is framed beside the returned \$5000 fee requesting it be put towards Carriageworks' Covid-19 debt to workers. It refers to the fact that Carriageworks honoured the fees it owed to artists scheduled to exhibit during the downturn, but art workers who do other forms of work, such as installing exhibitions in big institutions, are still owed tens of thousands of dollars by Carriageworks.

Which brings us back to the beginning. The NSW government could have bailed out Carriageworks if even a tiny fraction of public money were given to culture. The space wouldn't have become so dependent on the corporate dollar since opening 14 years ago if the government didn't charge Carriageworks and other companies that reside there such exorbitant rent. I like KNULP's statement for bringing this problem to the public eye, even if it's just the tip of one of late-stage capitalism's many icebergs.

I also like the fact that Carriageworks itself is a bit vexed by KNULP's conceptual non-exhibition.

"It's a bit white," one of the white staff grumbled.

"What do you mean?" this white writer asked (thinking: Uptight? Entitled? Precious? Smartypants white?)

"Naive."

He went on to be defensive about the bind that voluntary administration placed on Carriageworks.

He needn't be. They've done a great job. Go see the show. Appreciate the work. And ponder the subtext: "funded by the NSW Government". ●

No Show is at Carriageworks, Sydney, until March 7.

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