

Flossie Peitsch

HABITAT: Not Black and White

29 July – 13 September 2016

If we needed to carry our houses and belongings with us, as do the animals, this simple requirement would curb even the most expansive desire to consume and own. Dr Flossie Peitsch



House Pet, 2014, wood, mixed textiles, 140 x 100 x 64cm, \$4,700

'House Pet' greets visitors to Peitsch's latest exhibition HABITAT: Not Black and White and prepares them for an encounter with a vision in which domestic rituals, environmental concerns, carnival novelty and consumer behaviour are combined and recast to confront and challenge convention.

Within the space of the exhibition, to left and right, stark black and white reign supreme, referencing Quick Response Codes. Having identified the 'pop art simplicity' of these immediately recognisable digital signs, Peitsch enlists them in an act of admiration and subversion. If they are keys to knowledge, as Peitsch has observed, they are keys to a very specific kind of knowledge: a knowledge that is accessible only to those who possess the technology they depend upon, while being also a knowledge that liberates as it constricts, offering only simplified, codified simulacrum of reality.

Peitsch's overarching concern is to see art returned to the domestic sphere and employed as a vehicle for developing communities while encouraging individual growth. To this end she takes materials that would not be out of place in a residential environment and repurposes them.

The seven panels of 'Stardom' that hang like flags at an anarchist general assembly have an explosive energy that is at once dominating and unsettling. The once reassuring household materials they are fashioned from have been reconfigured to issue in a new way of seeing, the lineaments of which remain obscure. Perhaps a revolution of perception will emerge from the shimmering surfaces of black and white.

Peitsch has come to use almost exclusively mediums drawn from every-day life. When Penny Mulvey remarked, in an interview about art and motherhood, that Peitsch's work seemed to revolve around the every-day, Peitsch's response revealed the degree to which her work connects with and furthers a feminist agenda in working to re-contextualise creativity as it is manifested in domestic settings:

Women's crafts have been disregarded in the art world. We look upon the ability to paint and sculpt as the 'real' skills. But many women do very artistic things in their own homes, calling them 'cottage crafts'; this is quite peculiar because these skills are wonderful in their own right. It seems that it is only when the crafts are over one hundred years old and people no longer know how to do them that we recognise them as uniquely important and precious.

By employing and recasting domestic materials and inserting references to digital realms, alternate ways of seeing are forced upon the viewer at each turn. Backdrop A and B mimic sideshow tents at a carnival beneath which all manner of novelties are arranged for the consumption of the curious. In HABITAT the carnival tent contains a display of forty-six animal feet varying in size and shape. Strongly stylized with no attempt made to render the feet realistically, the collection is pure fantasy, but with a message or at least a suggestion that we could benefit from considering the point of view of creatures other than ourselves. These beguiling sculptural works that inhabit the same world as House Pet dominate the gallery space with a silent language as playful as it is uncanny.



Foreground: *Defeat 1-8*, 2013, Wood, canvas, paper, Dimensions variable, Prices variable

Midground: *Backdrop Pannel A*, 2013, Mixed textiles, corflute, 150 x 400cm, \$1,400

Above: *Encode 1-4*, 2012, Canvas, paper, 30 x 30 x 4cm, \$400 each

'Access', a somewhat less dominating work when seen from afar, becomes confronting upon closer inspection. The piece is composed of nine small canvasses arranged into a square and displayed horizontally upon a small high table. As viewers approach the table the canvasses, which have been disfigured with a knife and opened up for view, reveal nine Quick Response Codes. The work may be asking viewers to consider the possibility that what they are looking for in art is little more than a codified, prefabricated, public relations pitch, or perhaps we are being asked to look at artwork more independently, without recourse to critical commentary like the essay you are now reading. Or is the artist, as others have done before her, announcing the death of art, and suggesting the nature of what has replaced it? The meaning of the work remains tantalisingly open-ended.

Equally open-ended and suggestive are the six works in the first floor gallery. The series takes its name from the Italian musical term 'staccato' which denotes detachment and disconnection. In these works Peitsch has arranged a collection of the wooden wedges that accompany pre-

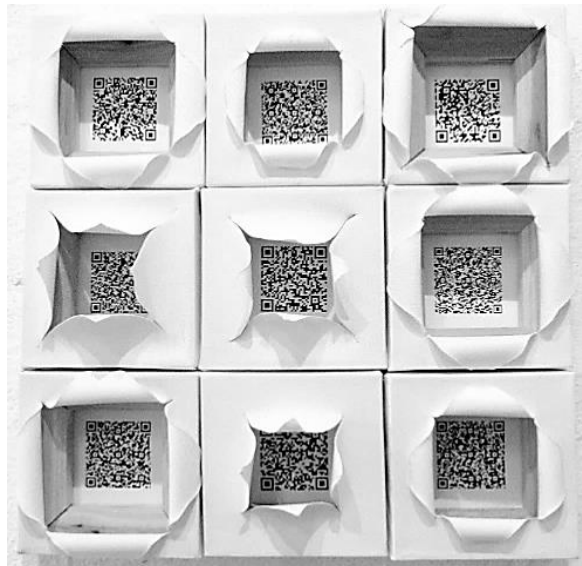
stretched canvasses. By exercising a practice not unlike automatic writing, the resulting configurations tease the viewer with potential interpretations while eluding any definitive reading and thereby frustrating and complicating the seeing process.

Taken together the works that make up HABITAT playfully enact incursions into conventional way of seeing and in doing so they ask us to remap the terrain of our lived experience as it relates to our domestic life, our existence as consumers, and our role as agents who can effect changes to our environment.

HABITAT builds on an arts practice that spans fourteen years and encompasses painting, sculpture, assemblage, collage, textile works and performance art. Originally from the United States, Peitsch now lives in Melbourne and has held solo exhibitions throughout Australia and in Chicago, Banff in Alberta and Kassel in Germany.

Peitsch graduated from Monash University with a Bachelor of Fine Art (Honours) in 2000, and in 2007 she received a PhD from Victoria University.

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Access, 2012, Canvas, paper, 10 x 30 x 30cm,
\$2,000