

OW Dominic Redfern

Conical Contemporary Art Space
4 – 21 March 2004
by Bruce Mowson

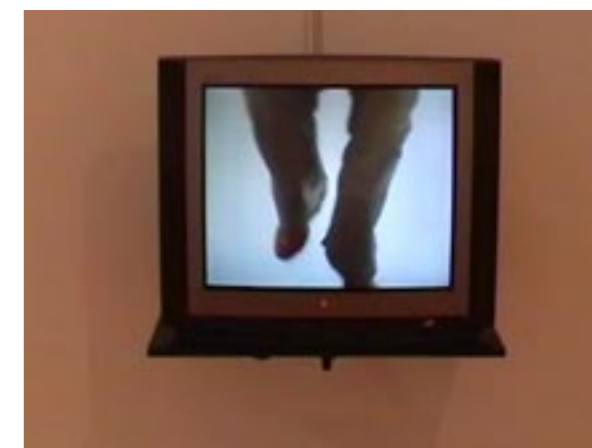


Left: Dominic Redfern
OW (Installation view) 2004
Video installation
Image courtesy the artist

Dominic Redfern is an artist working with video who displays care and engagement with the medium. This makes all of his works a pleasure to see and hear, and *OW* at Conical was no exception. In fact, I'd like to thank Dominic for not documenting himself rubbing a body part, or a surface with or without a household implement, videoing mirrors on the nature strip, taking shots of animals, or making closed-circuit video loops. To twist that locally infamous dictum – please stop with the crappily produced video art.¹

It was a real pleasure to see Dominic's video of a power socket, placed on the floor, in front of the power socket that powered the monitor. Photogenic, it was larger than life and seamlessly looped. It was tight a bundle, referring to the backstage of technology, pop imagery, self-awareness and self-reflexivity. This backstage of technology is about maintaining the 'illusion', as it is termed in theatre.

We might live in an age of technology but it is only the recent generations of home entertainment equipment that provide sockets on the front. Putting them at the back is visually neat but a complete pain in the arse with which to work. While we might like to think that this hiding of technology is merely convenient, a nice convention, or even the obvious thing to do, we could say the same about slaughterhouses or Union Carbide – keep the dirty work out of sight thanks, we're British. And what of self-reflexivity? We are not to be surprised by this, given that *OW* was by the artist who brought us the doppelganger (*Electro*, West Space 2004): himself, shockingly confronted by himself. Dominic's power plug reminded me of Warhol screen-printing dollar signs – a frank admission of where the power is coming from. Dominic serves up this video with a straight face – the TV – telling us that it's on because it's plugged in... Or at least that was all he was giving away.



Above & left: Dominic Redfern
OW (Installation view) 2004
Video installation
Images courtesy the artist

Writer's caption for the image above: The red shoes. Are they the missing blood in the bisection? Or a signifier of latent power, passion, energy, lacking in their limp movement?

The power socket video was seen on entering the space, however it shared the room with a second, more substantial piece. Two monitors were placed in a vertical configuration, in a rough manifestation of the upper and lower half of the human body. The lower half depicted a pair of legs – the artist's in fact – wearing jeans and red sneakers. They dangled in space, with a light switch in the background (hmmm). The legs were moving slowly, as if the person was lazily attempting to find traction. In the monitor above were the artist's torso and forearms – the shoulders and head hidden by, and trapped in, an air-conditioning duct. This half of the body was struggling – *OW*, get me out (!). And herein lay an obvious aspect of the work, the disjunction between the two halves of the body. On a wider stage, this is a familiar piece of pop psychology, a salient notion or myth in our society – the top half, the head, the face, the brains struggling violently, trying to do all the work, with the bottom half, the groin, the feet, the legs, suffering from neglect. A sedentary society... an intellectual elite... technocracy... couch potatoes.... Artists work with ideas and Redfern's portrayal of going nowhere, stuck in the dark, struggling against the limits is a dominant subtext of our time. It could be easily read as a literal statement (knowing that he works in an Australian university...).

Redfern's catalogue of works displays an engagement with issues of the artist's relationship to themselves and the viewer. There's a sense of latter-day Bruce Nauman – though less po-faced and more a sly wink – in Redfern's evocation of the circularity of life (and thankfully without the smarmy taste of a Bill Viola work reminding us that we should be grateful for how wonderful it all is). The West Space works, *Electro* and *Dice Man*, are now local landmarks in the exploration of self-reflexivity. They displayed deft judgement in the division between the artist staring into the mirror and the artist using the medium as a dynamic engine for philosophy, an interrogation of the medium and its socio-cultural workings. Against these works, *OW* felt like a strong minor work – well delivered but on a modest scale. I hope that this signals a period of reflection for the artist, with more of his strongest material to come.

Bruce Mowson is a Melbourne artist hiding behind your mirror with a video camera.

<note>

¹ Philip Brophy, 'Please stop it with the boring video art', *Like* #9, 2000.