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Ms&Mr
Benjamin Ducroz
Transformer: Altered artefacts and anti-chronology

In our murky post-medium age, video and cinema continue to morph and blend. On the one hand, cinematic video installations are now de rigueur at international biennales and on the art world circuit – high production values, superstar handsome actors and high polish – as evident in the work of Doug Aitken, Yang Fudong and locally, the works of David Rosetzky. At the same time, installation artists such as Shirin Neshat and Pipilotti Rist now make feature films, extending their thematic and visual unities into the cinematic, and film directors such as Agnès Varda and Warwick Thornton now work extensively as video installation artists.

But, from a present tense already far accelerated beyond the cinema/video divide, Transformer brings together the sophisticated and singular practices of two Australian artists (yet three people) working at the forefront of moving image art. Welcome to a space with no digital nostalgia for an analogue past, containing worlds of parallel possibilities outside, within and beyond the portal of the screen.

Entering Screen Space, a process work by Benjamin Ducroz hints at the elusive nature of chasing clouds and the hard labour that goes with frame-by-frame animation in 40-plus degree heat. The parched landscape of Roxebourne in the Pillbara region of Western Australia provides the setting for a delicate and infinitely looped animation of a geometric form, hand-cranked against the hot, desert sky. Ducroz’s process of chasing clouds, hand-animating against the elements, was a meditative and solitary one. A contemporary creation story of sorts, the artist says, “In the beginning, moving image apparatus were hand cranked. A sequence of frames would present themselves in fast succession – giving the illusion of motion. The same principle applies today.”

Shifting attention to the main gallery, we see another portal into the atmosphere – Ducroz’s mobius-like work cumulo (the outcome of all that painstaking animation) – projected onto a life-size mobile as we enter the space. Ducroz deftly navigates the high-tech and the handmade in a captivating body of work that considers human perception and movement in urban and remote landscapes through tightly choreographed and delectable stop-motion. In cumulo, horizon lines rotate, storm clouds amass and recede to a haunting minor-key soundtrack by single-signal (the result of Ducroz’s ongoing audio collaboration with Nic Whyte), underscoring the endless turn of a kinetic sculptural form, powered by the human hand in a harsh landscape seemingly devoid of human presence.

Good things come in twos, or threes – or is it infinite loops? In the case of artist Ms&Mr (the performative practice of nova Milne), past, present and future began to collapse upon first meeting as teenagers in 1998. Ms&Mr insert rips in time, throwing particles of personal history together with collective references...