

SEX: slippery viewing

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Underneath the comforting intimacy of Michael Lightfoot's delicate watercolours, *Memories of India*, stands a finely crafted peep show box. Look inside and turn the lever to see 2 skeletons indulging in some mischievous love-making. Drawing on the traditions of 19th century carnival entertainment and the craftsmanship of the automata, the absurd mechanical jerks of the figures combined with the voyeurism I enact as I peek and turn creates an unexpected juxtaposition of fantasy and banality. Caught between the spirituality of the North Indian-like miniatures above it and the risqué kitsch of David Archer's *Triple X-Ray Vision*, I find myself in a slippery viewing position, one that the 2005 SEX, The Adultshop.com Erotic Art Award Exhibition suggests might characterise our experience of sexuality itself.

Admiring a flowering *Vagina Dentata* by Christopher Trotter, enjoying the languid beauty of Jacob Ogden Smith's *Modern Man Reclining* flaccidly upon a chaise longue, and fronting the bristling eroticism of Pia de Bruyn's intense drawings of *Beth and Freddie#1*, I feel compelled to question exactly what I am as a viewer, and what I may become. These subtleties are negotiated in Jason Sweeney's *Imaginary Animals* website, where viewers listen to the true life confessions of male homosexual fantasy and watch homo-erotic encounters between the artist and his interviewees. In this web mock-doco, Sweeney explores the interactions between masculinities, erotic aesthetics and fantasy, and although given free access to the site, I am placed, both as a heterosexual woman and as a computer user, outside the interactions taking place.

In Sweeney's virtual world of masked men, I am precluded from participating. However in this space I become conscious of my position as an observer, outside the circuit of desire, while also being sensitised to the erotically charged moments between the artist and his friends. Watching and sometimes straining to hear, it begins to seem inconsequential whether I am viewer or voyeur. Instead Sweeney asks us to consider how, by merging fantasy and the everyday, moments of erotic intimacy may blur and question the lines between fiction and supposed reality and so create other experiences of desire.

The corporeality of desire is explored further in Craig Boreham's *Booth*, a sensual video of a male peep show. Inverting the idea of a Mulvey-esque male gaze, Kane (the dancer) becomes an extremely sexual and finally orgasmic object for the men in the booth and the viewers in the gallery. I am implicitly caught up in the voyeurism and erotics at work onscreen, a fantasy of sexualised masculinity that gyrates, pulses and finally climaxes. As the men ejaculate, and the camera zooms in, I am reminded of the viscosity of sex, which is something that Kate Gormon's video *Thumb* also delicately demonstrates in the sounds and visuals of an "intense internal suck" (artist's statement, catalogue). Fleshy, wet lips ambiguously encircle a thumb creating a simultaneously pacifying, sensual and fetishised image that reflects on the sexualised mouth and the sensuality of the corporeal, with all its discharges and noises.

I arrive at Linda Erceg's DVD animation *Punchline* which acknowledges "the

paradoxical impulse towards intimacy and voyeurism that computer gaming shares with pornography" (artist's statement). Erceg's high quality animation design and exploration of the links between virtual cultures and sexualised representations of the body won her first prize in this year's exhibition. Using computer generated animations of 4 endlessly masturbating nude characters, whose porn star bodies are lit up with strobe lights and zoomed in on by a circling voyeuristic camera, *Punchline* exaggerates the divide between desiring viewer and the idealised image on screen. The soundtrack, a series of voices telling dirty jokes emphasises this split as each joke overlays the next, re-synching and diverging and thus heightening its impact and the tension that always goes with joke telling—will the audience think it's funny? (artist's statement). The disjunctions between soundtrack and visuals further underlines the gap between us, the 'real' viewer and the artificial object, asking us to consider how this divide reflects the discrepancies between sexual fantasy and reality.

Constantly repositioning us before its diverse mediums and themes, *SEX* explores the ambiguous intimacies of sexuality and the erotic. The exhibition goes beyond simply delineating the fluidity of these interactions, excavating the exchanges, fantasies and even ordinariness of what constitutes our experiences of sexuality.

Artrage, *SEX*, *The Adultshop.com Erotic Art Award Exhibition*, Bakery, Artrage Complex, Perth, Oct 1-Nov 13

Mimi Kelly, *Seven Stars*, photo: Patrick Schuttler

