



CLARK BEAUMONT

SHE'LL BE RIGHT

6 - 20 OCTOBER 2012

I'll Be Your Mirror

*When did we see each other face-to-face? Not until you saw into my cracks and I saw into yours. Before that we were just looking at ideas of each other, like looking at your window shade but never looking inside. But once the vessel cracks, the light can get in. The light can get out.*¹ - John Green

*I am not what I think I am and I am not what you think I am; I am what I think that you think I am.*² - Charles H. Cooley

There is a sociological theory that says the purest, most accurate experience of self-perception can be found in the self we see mirrored back to us by others. The Looking-Glass Self and its reflexive feedback model rely on the tacit differences between projected and 'real' identities - what I think I am, what you think I am. It also acknowledges that the construction and conservation of an identity necessarily involves other people and things.

Far from didactic or self-indulgent, Clark Beaumont's identity experiments are playful and engaging. The collaborative duo swap and share identities between themselves and with other characters to draw attention to the processes of identity maintenance, pluralism and character association. Their latest video work, *She'll Be Right*, explores the role Australian visual culture and its characters play in identity formation.

Sarah Clark and Nicole Beaumont have chosen a performance moniker that represents them both in equal parts, but is simultaneously a fabricated third identity, discrete from the two 'real' selves in play. Their early video works explore notions of interchangeable identities through role-play and imitation. In *Self Portrait* the two artists swap identities and engage in an off-the-cuff, improvised spiel that essentially pits each actor against herself. *Camouflage* uses high-speed video footage to blend the two artists - both visually and metaphorically - into a single, amorphous on-screen character. Each individuals' physical traits and speech are indistinguishable from those of her counterpart. The ties that bind are represented quite literally in *Undress*; the two artists laugh as they gradually free themselves from the rope that holds them together, again separating into two individuals.

By comparison, *She'll Be Right* is a more structured and deliberate work. The piece extends Clark Beaumont's exploration of identity outside the realm of interpersonal relations to consider the more insidious forces of popular media. Four video works are displayed in the gallery, their looped footage and dialogue overlapping in unpredictable ways. Excerpts from classic mid-90s cinema - themselves examples of iconic Australiana - are selected for both their poignancy to the overarching narrative of their film and their strength as stand-alone scenes. The artists appropriate short clips by reenacting them with their own bodies and within their own environments. Each artist assumes the role of a lead character whom she expresses through studied body language, facial expression and precisely-timed movements.

This new footage is overdubbed with the film's original sound recording, creating an uncanny, comical mismatch between the novel and familiar. The effect is heightened in two of the clips where the artists' voices are replaced with those of men. Devoid of obvious visual character markers, the viewer's only cue to the scene's original source are the words spoken. Recognition

and placement of the scenes based on these cues alone draws attention to the subtle ways language enters the cultural psyche. As laconic one-liners - "over my head?"... "wake up to yourself" - are reiterated over and over again, they gradually lose their poignancy, just as classic words and phrases adopted from film and television and eventually absorbed into discourse are relieved of their original context and meaning.

She'll Be Right emphasises identity and self-understanding as social processes enabled by interaction. The processes revealed in *She'll Be Right* follow closely with Berger and Luckmann's theory of social constructivism; actions become habituated by 'actors' (in this case, actors quite literally), and "when these roles are made available to other members of society to enter into and play out, the reciprocal interactions are said to be institutionalised."³ Shaped and re-shaped by our communication with others characters - fictitious or real, identities are fluid and malleable.

Revisiting *Muriel's Wedding* and *The Castle* symbolises a return to the site of identity production. What each artist has learnt - implicitly or overtly - from the films' characters is presented as a truth. An element of Lacan's Ideal Ego comes into play as the search for the role models we seek to emulate in order to fulfill our ideas of ideal self takes place.⁴ The irony of course is the unsuitability of these characters; patriarchal figures who at once guide and ultimately prolong their families' struggles with authority and each other. While Darryl spearheads the Kerrigan's united front against the threat of losing their home, the Heslop family violently splinters under the weight of Bill's psychological abuse.

The facetious remarks that the *She'll Be Right* clips centre around are small mercies in what are otherwise often tense, emotionally-laden narratives. Humour is similarly used as a diffusion device in Clark Beaumont's performance process; awkward or confronting moments in film-making are relieved by the humour found in gender reversal, exaggerated costume and purposefully modest screen sets. Repetition and looping dislodge the scenes from their original narrative sequence even further, creating new meanings as scenes are positioned against each other.

While a typical conversation about identity may be encumbered by esoteric arguments and philosophical theories, *She'll be Right* reminds us of the playful, entertaining processes of learning and re-learning from popular media. Through the exaggerated examples of Australiana shown in *She'll Be Right*, we are encouraged to confront and acknowledge our own sites of identity production, offering a new framework for the way we approach our projected selves and engage with our mirrors.

by Emily Lush

¹ Green, J. 2010 *Paper Towns*. London: Bloomsbury

² Cooley, C.H. 1902 *Human Nature and the Social Order*. New York: Scribner's

³ Bentley, D. 2009 "Art and Deconstruction. Construction, Deconstruction and the Practices of Contemporary Art" in *Artscape* (00 Winter).

⁴ Lacan, J. 1977 *Ecrits: A Selection*. London: Tavistock/ Routledge.



She'll Be Right
Clark Beaumont
6 - 20 October 2012 | Opening Saturday 6 October 5pm

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ISBN: 978-0-9872234-9-4
Front: Clark Beaumont *The Same Again* 2012.
Above: Clark Beaumont *Camouflage* 2011.
Left: Clark Beaumont *Undress* 2010.

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