



BOXCOPY

Now That You're Here | Olivia Lacey

In *Now That You're Here*, Brisbane-based artist Olivia Lacey examines the intersubjectivity of romantic language in popular culture by deconstructing the allure of karaoke. In recreating the space of a karaoke room, she investigates sentiments tied to the stage, as well as the limitations of appropriated, romantic dialogue as a vehicle for self-expression.

Lined with pink fringe curtain, the exhibition space immediately transports viewers to the interactive world of karaoke. Three definitive '80s songs play on loop: *Xanadu* by Olivia Newton-John, *Heaven is a Place on Earth* by Belinda Carlisle and *Africa* by Toto. Each song employs the concept of 'place' to convey an idealistic, romantic narrative. While Newton-John croons about a make-believe land that embodies the dreamlike nature of her love, Carlisle likens her ardour to the divinity of Heaven. Toto tells of a romance set against an idyllic African backdrop, though it must be noted that the lyrics are highly exoticising. There is a strong connection between the places referenced by the songs and the karaoke room as settings for idealism. Small, private and secluded, the karaoke room acts as a form of escapism; it allows people to forget the complexities of their real, everyday lives, and encourages them to let go and have fun in a simpler and more romanticised narrative created by their favourite idols. As a result, in the karaoke room, the stage is more than just a stage; it is a platform for aspiration and self-expression.

When one sings a song written by another however, a disparity is built between the desire for self-expression and the use of a language of quotation. As contended by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure, language is a previously established system imbued with inherited values that we come to inhabit. Existing outside of the self, language can thus be restrictive when it comes to expressing originality and individualism. If manipulating language is already a form of appropriation, then quoting the words of another is a further step that complicates true self-expression. Pop music contains an abundance of romantic language for the masses, but can be easily related to private experiences. When one picks a certain song at karaoke, it is often because the track bears some sort of significance to them, allowing them to express their individuality through the words of someone else. When this form of appropriation occurs, however, the voice of the artist can be in tension with that of the performer. Lacey considers this relationship through a video of karaoke-goers singing and swaying together in a beautifully awkward manner. Their awkwardness is highlighted through the use of gimmicky video effects such as mirroring and spinning; sliding transitions and sudden cuts; blatant green screen edits; and tightly cropped shots that obscure their bodies from view. As they sing hit after hit, questions of creative control and the extent to which self-expression can be achieved through the work of another are posed. The disjointed nature of the video emphasises these taut ambiguities.

In the background of one of her videos, Lacey includes clips from the 1954 film *Godzilla* and the 2016 remake *Shin Godzilla*, referencing the Japanese origins of karaoke. Inspired by her two-month residency in Japan, as well as her love of Korean and Japanese pop music, Lacey not only analyses the elements of karaoke in her work, but also proves its intercultural reach. For years, artists such as Phil Collins, Candice Breitz and Lee Bul have been utilising elements of karaoke culture in their practices to explore notions of identity. While karaoke varies in its cultural nuances, there is no denying its rising popularity in Australia. In fact, the karaoke room as an artistic platform is a concept that has also been explored by fellow Brisbane-based creative Amy-Clare McCarthy's *Femioke*, which urges participants to chant their favourite feminist anthems and reclaim misogynistic songs. As Lacey deconstructs the essential elements of karaoke, the two shows when compared effectively add to the case for multifaceted discourse on the artistic possibilities of karaoke.

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We acknowledge the traditional owners of the land upon which we operate, and pay our respect to Elders past, present and emerging. We extended this respect to all First Peoples.

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