



Nathalie de Briey, *Moment*, 2001. Installation view from *So many things can happen in one minute*. Video. Dimensions variable. Photo: James Newitt.

## NATHALIE DE BRIEY

### so many things can happen in one minute (work in progress)

Plimsoll Gallery, Hobart  
7 – 29 July 2001

I heard Nathalie de Briey's exhibition long before I entered the gallery. Long drawn out wails followed by violent fits of coughing echoed around the gargantuan halls of the Tasmanian School of Art like the death gurgles of an irritable banshee. As the entrance to the gallery came into sight, I noticed a group of visitors clustered nervously around the safety of the catalogue stand, urgently gesturing to their lingering friends to hastily follow them to the exit. Regardless of the strained expressions of the others, my curiosity was sparked as I realised that although it was painfully swelling to a crescendo, the strangulated yodelling was interspersed with shouts of Yes! Yes!, No! No! I had to see the source of the shrill trumpeting for myself.

'So many things can happen in one minute' was not as visually hostile as it was tonally so. The culmination of a three month residency at the Tasmanian School of Art and part of the Scottish Arts Council's Resident in Australia program, Belgian-born de Briey presented a show both delicately whimsical and gratingly coarse. Lacing the themes of time, space and movement into four works of relatively equal impact, 'So many things can happen in one minute' was a satisfying glimpse into a promising work in progress.

In the centre of the sparse, grey carpeted gallery were two large projection screens. On one side of *Moment*, 2001, a rumpled white kite zoomed around a fathomless blue sky while on the other a youthful couple 'not yet aware of those outside (their) sphere of grace'<sup>1</sup> glided effortlessly across the floor of an empty suburban ballroom. The luscious red of the woman's billowing skirt flashed in and out of the shadowy light like a seductive beacon of romance as the couple bowed and swayed through the room. Lost in a tight embrace they danced on and on, mechanically moving toward eternity as the kite opposite pirouetted with the gusty breezes and tugged at the string holding it captive in the sky. With the kite reminding me of the wayward feather in the opening scene of Robert Zemeckis's *Forrest Gump*, the sentimental images of *Moment* hinted at a languidly fluid yet orchestrated waltz through life and questioned our conceived ideas of freedom.

Four black dots arranged in a square on the floor signalled the viewing position for *The Pink Terraces*, 2001; a looming, unfinished work of peculiar composition. Scratchy lines were etched onto the wall and marked the entry point for thousands of silver pins. Stretched over the emerging outline made by the pins were rubbery pink and tan elastic bands that created an effect similar to the woven seams of a wicker basket. Assuming the ragged skeleton of a mountain cliff, raging waterfall or streams of molten lava, *The Pink Terraces* seemed to allude to the elasticity of time, space and matter and was enough to stimulate the viewer's imagination as to what elaborate configuration the completed work might assume.

Heroic shouts of a French battle cry or a joyous oration emanated from a young woman clad in black on one of the two television screens included in the abrasively vociferous, *Voi Che Sapete*, 1999. The scene dissolved as another figure appeared on the screen directly opposite. A slight female with dark circles under her eyes violently gasped for breath before releasing a guttural moan which slowly formed into the asphyxiating sounds of vowels. Contorting her face into the look of one about to meet imminent death the figure belting out the vowels brought new light to the notion of 'suffering for your art' and after much deliberation, I understood *Voi Che Sapete* to be a video recording of an opera teacher and her exhausted student. The screen changed from teacher to pupil and the grave twenty-something came again into view. Standing with arms stretched high above her head, the woman proceeded to expel all air and sound from her body with such force that tears ran down her face and each husky wheeze was followed by the rasping cough I had heard on my way to the gallery. A sharp contrast to the vacuum of silence bordering the images of *Moment*, *Voi Che Sapete* cut like a serrated edge steak knife.

*Flipbooks*, a work in progress since 2000, was fourteen small picture books documenting various intimate scenes from Francois Truffaut's *Four Hundred Blows* and *The Loneliness of the Long Distance Runner* directed by Tony Richardson. An intriguing technique I can remember coming across as a child, each well-worn, fingerprinted book was a collection of bleak black and white movie stills which, by the flick of a hand, could be transformed into a moving picture. Similar to neatly boxed museum exhibits, the books held the secrets of a thousand shattered fragments of time converging into a narrative under the casual perusal of the viewer. Images once jerky and incoherent began to flow together the quicker one flipped and a flickering instant crystallised into a thought, experience or memory of a crowd of children, a man huddled in bed, silhouetted figures in a dark alley: the random flashes of significance in someone else's life.

'So many things can happen in one minute' was about moments. Slivers of time we let slip through our fingers, unable to comprehend their immense gravity until they are gone. As we sit and read a review or take the time to suffer for our own art, we seldom contemplate the enormity of the present. Like the dancers and kite of *Moment*, the breathless opera singers and the rubbery landscape, we are all bending and stretching in a period of constant change. Familiar moments and unique scenes twist and turn their way into the past as we trip with heavily blinkered eyes through the flipbooks of our own lives. Or trains, buses and planes, our thoughts run parallel to those of the one seated beside us however, our experiences are rarely the same. Each of us feels the moist breath of mortality prickling hot on the back of our necks as we race side by side to reach the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. We are alone yet hooked on the same fishing line. Will we ever meet?

BRIONY RHODES

#### note

1. Ondaatje, Michael, *The English Patient*, Picador, 1993, p.258.