

Into a Mirror Darkly

Curator Dr Louiseann Zahra-King

Excerpt from the catalogue essay for *Into a Mirror Darkly*, a trilogy of exhibitions bringing together Greer Honeywill (AUS) and Carole Shepheard (NZ)

she had many offers of marriage #2

Like many other contemporary artists including Louise Bourgeois, Christian Boltanski and Rosemarie Trockel, collecting is a major component of Honeywill's practice. The museum and the process of collecting have become significant artistic methodology generating practice that is inclusive of the work of the detective, the anthropologist, the historian, the amateur collector, the museum curator, the scientist and the conservator. Honeywill is a gleaner of the refuse of others, scouring markets, antique and Op Shops, and involving others in the quests to locate both material and narrative¹. Honeywill has been collecting second-hand birdcages for some time. Emptied of their feathered, whistling occupants the silent, empty cages are rendered somewhat useless and are quickly bundled into sheds where they are left to rust before being abandoned to hard-rubbish days and the jumble of second hand shops and markets. The birds that have occupied Honeywill's cages remain as rather sinister yet beautiful reminders of their internment.

In *she had many offers of marriage #2* Honeywill transforms the School of Art Gallery into a shadow labyrinth, a shifting, elusive dramatic space rendered in capricious shadows cast by theatre lights, filtered through the clutter of second-hand bird cages. The cages line the gallery floor. Shadows flicker as one moves around the space. The solidity of the walls becomes ambiguous, and negative and positive space invert as one finds oneself in a virtual maze. Like the large-scale shadow installations of Eulalia Valldosera Honeywill's installation is premised on the power of absence. It is the shadow, the absence of light that generates the threat – there is nothing to fear – it is only a shadow – but how threatening nothing can be.

Honeywill fills the gallery space with the ominous apparition of an architecture of the heart over which can be heard the plaintive lyrics of '*Falling in love again*', sung by Marlene Dietrich which fill the silence of the empty cages and suffuse the space with a sense of tragedy². One hears Dietrich intoning, "*Falling in love again, what am I to do, never wanted to, can't help it.*" and one is assured as to both the inevitability and hopelessness of romance. In Honeywill's accompanying video work misunderstanding and the absurdity of comprehension in a milieu of love and desire is defined by the incomprehensible and insistent programming text that fills the screen, writing and then overwriting itself. It's nonsense. A wordless language that is overwhelming and ludicrous in the context of the powerful, though seemingly absurd, emotion that Dietrich sings of in '*Falling in love again.*'

This is a project suffused with romance, a romance that is lost in the moment of its making.

Romance is fragile – dying quickly and being replaced, somewhat clumsily, with its more robust yet gauche derivative – the romantic. Honeywill works with the carcasses of romance, the discarded embodiments of sentiment that are the accoutrements of

¹ In 1999 Honeywill engaged in a project where she advertised in her local newspaper for donations of used food graters to construct an artwork. She received many responses to her request and the collected graters were used to construct *Embrace 2000*.

² Marlene Dietrich. *Falling in Love Again* (Holländer-Connelly)

romance and love and memory, constructing worlds that generate a glimmer, a flicker of that exquisite, poignant moment.