

Oblivion Pavilion



First published on 13 May 2008. Updated on 20 Aug 2008.

Imagine you wandered into Luna Park after hours. Maybe there's just been a fire, and most of the rides are out of order. There's a carny there, near the ticket booth for the roller-coaster. He's toothless and something for parents to steer kids away from, but he offers to buy you an ice-cream if you'll take it behind the ghost train and feel it rubbed up under your netball skirt. That's what going to Oblivion Pavilion is like.

Oblivion Pavilion is the new show at Roslyn Oxley curated by Amanda Rowell, drawing on the cream of the young Sydney art scene (it showed previously at Gertrude Street Gallery in Melbourne). It plays on the way that installation art has become a sort of Theme Park for grown ups, in which the middle classes cavort under conditions of sensory overload. It's also a giant allegory for the human mind.

In practical terms, that means there's a conveyor belt constantly and senselessly carrying a brick to the top of a track that it noisily rumbles down (that's a sculpture by Marely Dawson). As backdrop, there's a giant panoramic painting by Tim Schultz that sits on the overlap between Surrealist art and Kitsch. The carny reappears in the form of Matthew Hopkins' nasty man made of wood off-cuts. He's waiting for you to join him in the back room, with the ice-creams who have melted into ghouls.

Hopkins also appears in a video installation wearing a grotesque clown mask. He's waving a claw hammer at his own head in desperate comedy, stopping only when the steel hits him.

There's a look of discomfort and resent in his eyes each time he repeats the performance, and it's genuinely disturbing to watch. Agatha Gothe-Snape's letter installations combine to spell out "ego" or "enough", depending on how you encounter them. Her work, like all the pieces, cheekily straddles the fence between very, very good and totally cringe-worthy.

The catalogue is a sort of neo-dada peep show designed by the Duke Magazine hustlers Emily Hunt and Raquel Welch, and is available at the entrance. It's more of a trophy than a map, but you're going to get lost anyway.... just for fun.

By Adam Jasper
