

self-abnegation of the feminine wallflower. The solution, under the circumstances, was a kind of egotism in quotes. To play the game of exhibiting as a game might name the two options while steering a path between them. For Nolan, then, exhibiting becomes not so much a matter of showing her work as showing off.

Rose Nolan, *With All One's Might and Main*, Project Space, RMIT, Melbourne, 24 July – 10 August 1996.

Chris McAuliffe

NARELLE JUBELIN

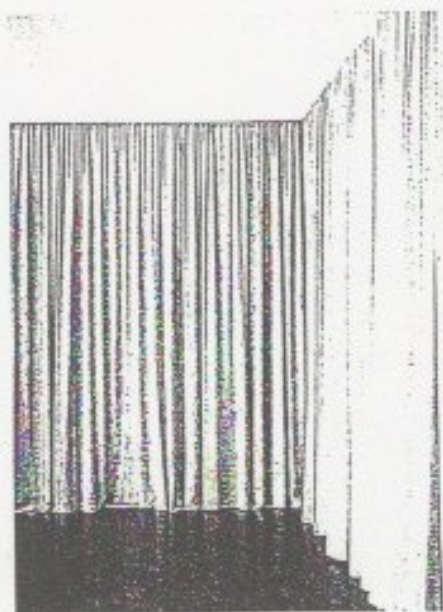
Literary, theatrical, decorative: these three qualities are among those most derided in the modernist canon. If they have been resuscitated in postmodernist discourse, a certain wariness still attends their use, especially when that use is motivated primarily by reactive impulses. In *The fabric workshop and museum, Philadelphia 1995–1996 (and hence written – curtain)*, Narelle Jubelin's most monumental yet formally her simplest work to date, these qualities are not only integral but pronounced. Jubelin employs them not to countermand modernist precepts but as a means of prising open some of modernism's canonical tenets at key points where they underwent rigidifying closure or fixity.

Enveloping most of the gallery wall is a sumptuous pink curtain, its surface covered with a quotation from an early modernist benchmark, transposed here in Jubelin's handwriting. The greater part of the text is taken from Penelope/Molly's final monologue in James Joyce's *Ulysses*, the manuscript of which now reposes in Philadelphia, the city in which the curtain was fabricated. As the curtain falls in loose folds, only fragments – isolated phrases – of the blocks of handwriting, which have been mechanically printed onto the velvet, are legible. Given that the script was created by leaching colour from the surface rather than by overprinting, the text becomes far more than a decorative embellishment: it is an integral part of the cloth, embodied within it.

By masking what is beyond or behind, the curtain transforms the space from an ostensibly neutral white-walled gallery into a theatrical setting. In concealing that which lies beneath, it recalls certain procedures adopted by museums when displaying fragile material, such as textiles, which must be protected from light: dense, opaque cur-

tains customarily shield such items until a viewer pulls them back to scrutinise the fragile artworks otherwise at risk. Here, however, there is nothing to reveal. In divesting the wall of its function, the curtain usurps its role. In replacing the wall, the artwork becomes, literally, a curtain-wall. Via this deft and skilful manoeuvre, one is led back, once more, to one of the high points of the modernist vocabulary – in this case, to the cornerstone of Mies van der Rohe's architecture, the glass wall, which achieved its most celebrated realisation in his Barcelona Pavilion.

An acute attentiveness to methods of display, together with an implicit critique of the arbitrariness of exhibiting conventions, marked much of Jubelin's early work. Recently she has married this to an engagement with architecture, design and city planning, and specifically with certain landmarks in the history of modernist practice. Reference to the Barcelona Pavilion is woven into Jubelin's work in multiple ways: her curtain is hung level with the height of the walls of its forbear; its configuration matches one of the perimeter walls of the pavilion; and its colour approximates closely that of the formerly red, now faded, curtain by the German designer Lilly Reich, an integral but little known component in Mies van der Rohe's building.



NARELLE JUBELIN, *The fabric workshop and museum, Philadelphia 1995–1996 (and hence written – curtain)*, (detail) screen-printed bleached rayon, dimensions variable.

Using as a catalyst some element within the cultural, social or historical context that generates her project, Jubelin typically re-examines these landmarks by a series of subtle and oblique gestures that, in cutting them down to scale and shearing away the accumulated rhetoric that often artificially inflates them, restores much of the original complexity. Her favoured tools are methods and means associated with women and the feminine now wielded to feminist ends. Penelope's nightly unravelling of her weaving while awaiting the long-overdue return of her husband, Ulysses, was a gesture of duplicity and cunning comparable to those for which he was roundly acclaimed. In Joyce's retelling there is little doubt that in this relationship the guile, the imperus and determining hand ultimately reside with Molly, the narrator with the omniscient overview whose story weaves and re-weaves the past as a series of contending open-ended memories.

Similarly, Reich's contribution, although generally unacknowledged, is one that has been anonymously replicated in most subsequent re-statements of the master's architecture: drapes adorning the glass walls of the Berlin Museum of Modern Art, and many other related buildings, however, usually take the form of an apologetic afterthought rather than a debt consciously acknowledged. Re-weaving these occluded contributions as she inverts given roles and relationships, Jubelin examines the intricate histories attending the founding points of early modernism, exposing its aesthetics as more complex and contradictory than currently acknowledged.

Yet a third component, extracts from the diaries of George Worgan, a First Fleet surgeon, has been incorporated as if into the seams of this vast curtain – for these notations and abridgments lie between blocks of Joyce's text. By requiring the viewer to take on board yet another conceptual framework, Jubelin risks overloading her work in ways that seem extraneous and forced. Worgan's contribution, a qualification and elaboration of the other two intertwined discourses, seems fussy rather than enriching, countering not only the elegant clarity of the work and its mode of presentation but also the eloquent mirroring of symmetrically posed protagonists.

Narelle Jubelin, *The Fabric Workshop and Museum, Philadelphia 1995–1996 (And Hence Written – Curtain)*, Mori Gallery, Sydney, 25 July – 10 August 1996.

Lynne Cooke