

The Age

'Artists pay tribute to the nameless'

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By Robert Nelson

Andrew Browne, *It's All Around You*, Tolarno Galleries, Level 4, 104 Exhibition Street, until July 12.

Eugenia Raskopoulos, *Vestiges*, Arc One Gallery, 45 Flinders Lane, until June 14.

Callum Morton, *Neighbourhood Watch*, Anna Schwartz Gallery, 185 Flinders Lane, until June 28.

Laith McGregor, *Heady*, Station, 9 Ellis Street, South Yarra, until June 14.

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Andrew Browne doesn't give his works titles because they depict the nameless. His eye is drawn to things of no account - a clod, a broken tree trunk, a clump of plant sinews. These fragments of undistinguished jumble nevertheless make an absorbing experience in fine drawings at Tolarno Galleries.

A root-ball, for example, occupies most of the dark field, appearing like a ticklish ghost, alternately spiky and droopy, densely matted and hard to sort out. Each wand makes a fresh horizon upon the atmospheric backdrop of charcoal.

Browne's knots of subterranean wood are tangled and sinister. He finds subject matter that seems too obscure and twisted to draw. The confusion as form symbolises its nameless randomness.

Sometimes, however, the subjects seem a bit literal and the drawing mimics documentary photography, with recordings of a broken fence or painted words. These works are less successful, partly because they're flatter, but also because the subject can be named.

This fascination for the nameless is also explored by Eugenia Raskopoulos at Arc One Gallery. Her *Vestiges* are photographs of wrapper, handsome prints of not much, an insubstantial layer, mere rubbish, something designed for the enhancement of an internal object that it conceals and which we never see.

In her work, the thing wrapped lacks a name but so does the wrapper. Its sole purpose is to yield surprise for something else; and in the moment of revelation, when the surprise of the gift reaches its climax, it's discarded, irrelevant, never to be reconstituted with the meaning that it had.

Other artists have also explored the phenomenology of nameless gift wrappers, such as the painted wrappers of Glenys Hodgeman or the bubble wrap of Justine Varga; but Raskopoulos almost presents the flimsy crumpled sheets as protagonists rather than specimens, as if each deserves its portrait.

Besides, who is the first to do anything? Even if you wrap up sculptures, as Callum Morton does at Anna Schwartz, you'll hardly be the first to do it.

Raised upon high plinths, Morton's sculptures miniaturise Victorian statues, which are recognisable from beneath their wrappers. They're monuments like Robert Lindsay Gordon and Burke and Wills, but satirically decommissioned, stripped of their names, as if their bronze plaques have been unscrewed and the identity of the sitters is effaced by the sheaths.

Sitting in a line in the middle of the gallery, the covers are set out in a procession of the three primary colours, plus white, the key palette of modern art. Protruding from these bright beacons of abstraction, the sculptural details of feet seem quaint and amusing. The veil that spoils the detail of the original statues turns everything into modern art but paradoxically enhances the mystique of the figurative content that it negates.

The gravity of empire is transformed to tacky-tacky, and the plinths make little effort to seem authentic. They too seem nameless, without an attempt to mimic the systematic triads of base-body-head in the classical tradition. They're just slabs of horizontal boxes.

If the plinths had followed the ancient tripartite pattern, they would have had a more monumental presence as landmarks. Alas, the grey slabs are conceptually set adrift, a bit like the title for the exhibition, *Neighbourhood Watch*, which doesn't make much sense.

To go one step further, Laith McGregor has unnamed the living. Collecting portraits from a Thai street artist, he has added graphic material to the portraits, which have the effect of defacing the original sitter. Under the title of *Heady*, McGregor's drawings at Station are more than anonymous: they're renamed, which is a trick of appropriation.

Among many amusing works is a wall-sculpture of a man's head, clamping a long curtain rod in his mouth. It resembles a renaissance door knocker, except that the man wears a gibus. He's a nameless circus archetype, a gentleman rogue, a grotesque, a home-brand clown who grimaces from the wall. The artwork is called *Illusionist*, which names the absence of authenticity, the artist in a top hat.