

Australian Centre for the Moving Image Federation Square, Melbourne, Australia

Phillipe Parreno: Thenabouts



Title : Philippe Parreno, Invisible Boy, 2010 (film still) © Philippe Parreno

Review by Hayley Haynes

In the darkened subterranean gallery of ACMI, "The Projectionist" draws the theatre curtains. Adjusting the width of the screen, the gesture is both performative and practical. "The Projectionist" announces the upcoming film and proceeds to press play.

The séance begins.

'Thenabouts' is Philippe Parreno's first retrospective of filmic work in Australia. Randomly selected by "The Projectionist", over 30 films are presented on one large screen. Like the experimental compositions of John Cage, Parreno surrenders control to chance. Visitors may encounter fragments of works including 'No Ghost Just a Shell' (1999 – 2003), 'Zidane: A 21st Century Portrait' (2006), 'Invisible Boy' (2010) and the haunting portrait that is 'Marilyn' (2012). In 'Thenabouts' the content of the show surpasses the temporal frame of any possible visit. The exhibition is intentionally too comprehensive; highlighting not only the prolific career of the artist, but more significantly the sway of time itself, reinforcing a need to accept the finitudes of life.

A multi-layered cinematic organism, 'Thenabouts' is a living, evolving performance. The exhibition is not just a platform for the artist's work, it used also as a medium deserving of its own interrogation.

It is an event.

Reality and fiction are blurred as a school of shimmering fish hover about; as equally mesmerising as they are kitsch. The space becomes a dreamlike aquarium. Reminiscent of Andy Warhol and Billy Klüver's 'Silver Clouds' (1966) (recently re-interpreted by Ai Wei Wei in 'Bird Balloon' (2015) for the National Gallery of Victoria), Parreno's fish are a recurring motif. Present in the artist's work since the mid-nineties, they also currently feature in his Turbine Hall Commission 'Anywhen' (2016), produced alongside 'Thenabouts' for the Tate Modern.

Like the fish that float, so does our attention. Thoughts drift from past to future, rarely settling in the present. Parreno is fascinated by the power of imagined future narratives to alter our daily, present realities. Notions of time and space pulse in 'Thenabouts' like the rows of lights that flicker intermittently in the dimmed space. Broken audio, at first detached from its original source is disorienting. But the fish act to ground us. Their gentle movement, dictated by subtle changes in the atmosphere, draw awareness to the unfamiliar environment in which we shift. A simple gesture with a profound purpose. Slow down. Look. Feel. Be.

Neither here, nor there, the concept of time in 'Thenabouts' is elusive. This is signalled by the title of the exhibition; a vague temporal descriptor (and quote from 'Finnegan's Wake' (1922) by James Joyce). 'Thenabouts' liberates visitors from the constraints of time whilst dissolving traditional perceptions of space. The unpredictable nature of the exhibition provides a surreal escape from the constant tick of reality and the rigidity of modern life. Encouraging slow and multiple viewings, Parreno has produced an immersive environment to heighten awareness of space, time and self. Not just the skeleton for a suite of works, the exhibition is an orchestrated work itself; a complex bricolage of sound, light, film and fish (with a thrilling dash of chance).

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