

## Heart

*Sunrise sunset*

*Swiftly fly the years*

*One Season following another*

*Laden with happiness and tears*

Pop melodies, musicals, paddle-pops and the good ol' times: a dose of nostalgia and sentimentality. In *Spewtiful*, Ali Sanderson and her boyfriend Ben lip-sync a soft and lingering tune - *Sunrise Sunset* from the musical *Fiddler on the Roof*. Ben's parents earnestly rehearse their show tunes in their lounge-room as their dog Chewy barks intermittently - effectively reminding us of their domestic surroundings. As the music plays, we see two lovers entrenched in the whimsical spirit of sunrises. Sanderson and Ben appear superimposed over footage of Waratah Bay at dawn, where Ali's family holiday. Their faces in profile, looming larger than life, remind us of an early eighties, stylised soft-pop video clip. Sanderson's work promotes the kind of romance found in the iconic duo of Barbara Streisand and Robert Redford.

Embracing kitsch aesthetics, *Spewtiful* creates an overwhelming sensory experience. Bands of purple, yellow, orange and sky blue envelop burning red tones. Sanderson paints a rainbow-coloured spectrum directly onto the gallery walls bordering a projection of a rising sun. Despite its resemblance to an abstract, geometric painting, the rainbow works to propel us into the gushing realm and forgotten era of idealistic musicals.

A Christmas tree wrapped in fairy lights and holding a silver tinsel angel on its peak stands over a small television, synchronised to switch on when the couple finish their soppy refrain. The television broadcasts absurd footage of a middle-aged man – Sanderson's father – wearing a musical Santa mask. We are left with a disjointed narrative: the warm and fuzzy affect of *Sunrise Sunset* is replaced by the gaudy affect of ridiculous home videos. The artist's father stands on the Sandersons' porch delivering an impromptu dance: shaking his hips and sashaying absurdly while waving his arms in the air.



As Sanderson's family is recruited to star in her home video transformed into video art, private moments are rendered perverse. Subsequently, we perceive *Spewtiful* as a world-in-miniature of the artist's personal life - comprised of, as Sanderson explains, 'just stuff that I encounter in my life and which amuses me'. The artist's sense of humour creates an affective fun-filled environment where we, the spectators, are encouraged to escape through indulgence: to leave the world of responsibility and disappointment for a landscape filled with security and the enchantment of rainbows and sunrises. Utopic visions serving to erase the tiring aspects of our existence: romance to serve our hedonistic dreams.

Moreover, the use of 'just stuff' affords Sanderson's work a sincere biographical voice that is both humorous and confessional. It is worthy to note that within Sanderson's professional trajectory, the artist's voice is something of a new and exciting element. Remember, historically Sanderson's practice is bound to collaborations, namely with Nat Thomas for the nat&ali project. As the art historian Charles Green has observed, collaborations tend to silence and distance the artist's individual identities in exchange for the 'team's' identity.'

We saw Sanderson deal with her new solo identity, and also allude to the demise of the nat&ali collaborative identity, in *Thank god for you...*, 2005: exhibited at Gertrude's studio artist's show. The work deals with the emotive-based process of losing a partner: grief and the old existentialist moment of 'who am I?'. Frolicking through country-scapes, Sanderson embarks on numerous quintessential activities for lovers: a boat ride, a picnic, a rest on a park bench and so forth. However, the artist is always alone, subsequently highlighting the absence of her partner. We can only assume that the elusive figure is Thomas, the artist's former collaborator. Through the process of acting out schmaltzy romance scenes, Sanderson effectively transfigures grief into comedy. Raw emotion is treated like play-dough: 'just stuff' to play around with. The artist's tone of voice commands that we consume her confessions with a smile and a light heartedness.



By reflecting on both *Thank god for you...* and *Spewtiful*, it becomes clear that Sanderson utilises humour to envelop the spectator with intimacy. She makes use of candour as a way to disclose intense and private emotions: her current practice is marked by this. Furthermore, this mode of artistic expression locates Sanderson alongside a train of contemporary artists who appropriate from their personal life for their art, namely the British artist Tracey Emin.<sup>2</sup> Both of these artists contextualise their lived experience within the public space of art - their tales become the subject matter for their fictional vignettes: a private realm of hopes, failures and successes exposed for our spectatorial consumption.

Exposing her private moments and wearing her heart on her sleeve, Sanderson reflects on the experience of family, Christmas, a new year and also, a fresh artistic future. The artist's innate sense of humour leading her to gently poke fun at these perplexing aspects of life. She creates an environment of excessive kitsch and cheesy sentimentality, propelling us to laugh rather than dwell on life's dramas: this is *Spewtiful*.

Veronica Tello

<sup>1</sup> Charles Green, *The third hand : collaboration in art from conceptualism to postmodernism*, University of Minnesota Press, 2001, Minneapolis.

<sup>2</sup>For a candid account of Tracey Emin's vulnerabilities see her autobiography: Tracey Emin, *Strangeland*, Sceptre, 2005, London.