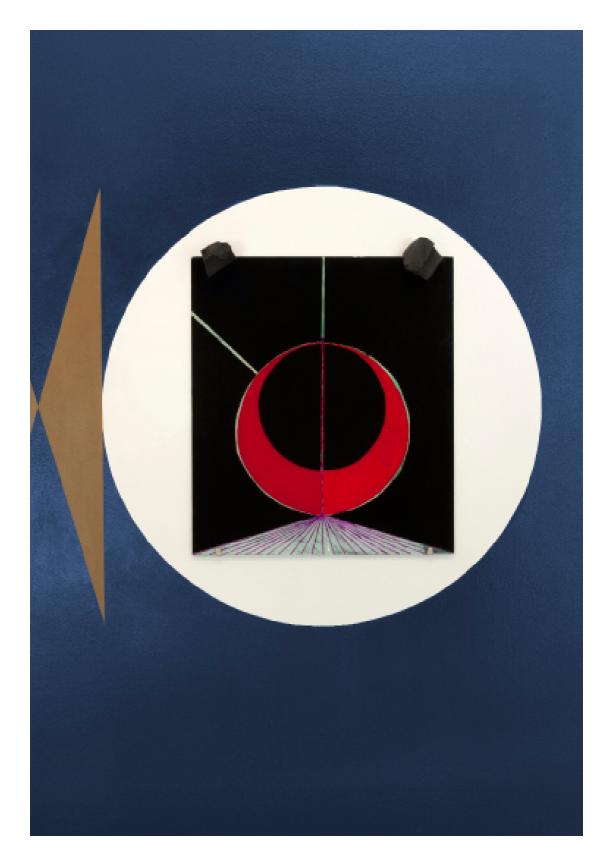
## CLARE MILLEDGE

1 FEBRUARY - 1 MARCH 2014

## ALTUS DUEL: TOTAL ENUIRONMENT





It's scrawled on the Gertrude Contemporary front window in the colour of baby's shit, a shouted, all-cap declaration:

WHENTHE

SUPPOSITORY

OF ALL WISDOM

HIIS IHI

WEATHERVANE

OF ALL SEASONS

Who wrote this? Who spoke it? What might it tell us? A first glance, it's a statement on a hiding to nothing—a fragment, an absurdity. It may also be a warning, a foretelling, a horoscope, or a moment of truth. A possibility...

Perhaps we should listen to this disembodied, railing voice...

To describe Altus Dual: Total Environment as a walk-in painting is to capture some, but not all, of its intentions. It's an environment, yes, into which we walk; a painting unfolded into the space, traversing the floor, the walls. Its geometries are created and broken by the limits of the room's dimensions. And it is filled with other, smaller paintings, half-hung, half unpacked.

Milledge paints on glass, using Hinterglasmalerei, an old technique used by Byzantine painters of religious icons. In *Altus Duel*, this association is both revered and subverted, as she asserts her own elusive iconography of full and crescent moons, witching rods and other meridians, other tangents. In this totalised space, the

window offers Milledge the same substrate, a wall-sized opportunity for her sprawling text. A soapbox of sorts. Standing inside the gallery, we see the text reversed, its (already partial) sense undone. Passers-by become implicated, even as they walk by, unheeding of the message. Milledge says Hinterglasmalerei allows her to corrupt her paintings somewhat; she might paint onto the glass and scrape the whole thing back, paint again and turn the whole thing upside down, on its head. Making sense into nonsense.

So this environment may be total, but its forms and their meanings are commensurate. *Altus Duel: Total Environment* is both provisional and complete. And this is where Milledge has us tightly in her grasp – the work is a construct which both offers and withholds meaning. We enter this painted world full of red herrings, intrigues signs and symbols and start searching for clues, guided by the artist's many moons, her texts and her symbols. Where do they lead us when the magic circle is broken and the sacred monolith upturned? It's something of an endgame, leading back to the reflecting pool of our own visage, reflected in painted glass.

There is much to enjoy in this infinite loop, however. The scatological dualities and obsessions of Georges Bataille reside here, as do the psycho-magical sensibilities of artist and spiritualist Alejandro Jodorowsky. Bataille would revel in the traversal between form and informe, figuration and dissolve; Jodorowsky in the cosmic forces implied in Milledge's symbolic realm. The artist-shaman is further implied in a painting draped in grey felt and hung from a copper rail, channelling Joseph Beuys.

Elsewhere, the costume made from a bottle cap-covered kimono lying on a toppled-over monolith suggests something more wayward, more unhinged than the ascetic Beuys. Into this environment Milledge invited sonic collaborators Baker's Delight, Joel Stern and Tarquin Manek, to perform as they wished on a heatwaye.

struck afternoon. The latter donned the kimono and played it, his bottle-top clad chest a percussive accompaniment to his guttural vocalisations. Here, *Altus Duel* became activated in a way reminiscent of pagan rituals at the solstice, but which also existed entirely outside such narratives.

As it turns out, the words on the window include statements by Tony Abbott, in Milledge's mash-up of quotes gleaned from the public realm. Abbott apparently told Malcolm Turnbull that he was a 'weather vane' when it came to his changing position on the ETS, and it is hard to forget his missive to the Liberals that 'no one, however smart, however well-educated, however experienced ... is the suppository of all wisdom' during the last election campaign. Abbott is channelled again in Lowest Common Denominator, a painting propped up against the wall near the door to Gertrude's central space. Here, two white circles mirror each other, full moons that touch. Abbott's phrase 'baddies vs baddies', made in relation to the players in the Syrian conflict, corrupts the duality by doubling the subject, dumbing down the complexity to a spagnetic western slogan.

On the same wall, a list of extinct species in the state of Victoria is recorded in War Memorial (VIC). In their performance, Baker's Delight played this list as spoken word, the tall sneezeweed, the clustered finger-flower and the small-flowered blindweed and their equally absent friends becoming more uncanny with this iteration.

There is, then, a kind of hopeless melancholy pervading the space of this work. The extinct species, the lumps of coal set out along the window ledge, the Abbott quotes and even the 'heritage' colours in *Metsän Henget (Heritage)* all point to our contemporary insanity. They infer our wilful blindness, our cringing nostalgia and our lack of regard for our future as we chop and change our convictions with the force of the wind.

We keep the colours and cherish the coal, whilst the magnificent spider orchids perish.

Perhaps the suppository of all reason is indeed the weather vane for all our seasons and we'd better start praying to the moons.

Kyla McFarlane









Gertrude Contemporary 1 February - 1 March 2014

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Gertrude Contemporary is supported by the Victorian Government through Arts Victoria, the Australian Government through the Australia Council, its arts funding advisory body, and by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.

Image captions:

Front:

Moon - Moon, 2014

Oil on tempered glass, coal

92 x 72 x .4 cm

## Inside:

Installtion view of *ALTUS DUEL: TOTAL ENVIRONMENT*, Gertrude Contemporary, February 2014.

Back, top to bottom: *Night Fury*, 2014 Oil on tempered glass, coal

Double - Headed Oracle, 2014 Oil on found mirror 86.5 cm diameter x .4 cm

SUPPOSITORY
OFALLWISDOM
HITSTHE
WEATHERVANE
OFALLSEASONS
(TONY'S TIME)
2014
Acrylic on glass window
230 x 380 cm

All works courtesy the artist and The Commercial, Sydney

Photography by Mark Ashkanasy







