

DAN MOYNIHAN

22 MARCH - 27 APRIL 2013

LOST IN SPACE



THE GREAT PRETENDER

Blokes in Hard Yakka overalls. Dudes in hoodies. Ham and cheese sarnies. Meat pies. Coles sauce bottles. Big Ms. Calendars with cute chicks. Calendars with cute kittens. A skeleton. Freddie Kruger. Young Dan. Comedy spectacles. A big schnozz. Movie seats. Cinema carpet strewn with popcorn. Doughnut with chomp mark. Palm trees. Perfect sand. Perfect sunsets. Windcheaters. Frozen peas. A Sony Discman. Fridge door. Air-con unit. Dripping tap. Tap with 'hot' written in texta above it. Kitchen sink. Sugar soap. Ajax. Buckets and mops. Smeared tiles. Fake bricks. Wood struts.

These are the kinds of things I think of when I think of a typical Dan Moynihan installation. In one interview, when asked what his influences are, Moynihan nominated 'inappropriate text messaging, the radio, driving a shitty car'.¹ This is a nice summation of his *modus operandi*. Moynihan is an artist strongly oriented towards the vernacular. His artistic palette is comprised of the stuff that surrounds most of us, most of the time.

In this respect, his exhibition at Gertrude Contemporary is no different. In the Front Gallery Moynihan has faithfully and very expertly restaged a section of street frontage from McIlwraith Place in Melbourne's CBD. It's a delightful forgery, satisfyingly close to the original but – with its scale miniaturised down to roughly half-size – also clearly announcing itself as fake. Here, recreated in all its forlorn and faded glory, is Mitty's, a fairly ubiquitous corner newsagency. All details have been painstakingly reincarnated: the façade's brown bricks rendered from polystyrene and spray paint; the glass louvres speckled with fake dust; the '\$20 million Powerball' poster a facsimile of the original's dodgy digital graphics. Part of the pleasure for the viewer is relishing Moynihan's evident skill in such fakery: he is a great pretender. Moynihan works at Bunnings so he knows about materials, knows how to fake stuff, for real.

Fake it 'till you make it

Contemporary art insiders will also immediately recognise the building as the home of the commercial gallery Neon Parc, the occupant of the second floor. A small trip up the flight of (slightly wobbly) stairs leads – as in real life – into the gallery space of Neon Parc. In Moynihan's rendition the gallery space looks empty but a room sheet informs us that the gallery is presently showing Dan Moynihan's exhibition *Lost In Space*. The office is empty but the presence of a gallerist implied by the 'engaged' sign on the bathroom door, the faint sound of a trickling cistern further building the speculative narrative.

Basically it all feels right but wrong – the way that sets do. There is a sense of verisimilitude but also simultaneously – and paradoxically – a sense of pretending. This doubling of the space is a curious feeling, a kind of ghosting. In this installation, you can be here but also there, at once. For many, this nesting of one well-known commercial gallery space inside another well-known public contemporary art space is a curious conflation of different art strata. On a structural level, it is a spatial puzzle, a strange 'art babushka'. It can also read as a form of institutional critique: the enfolding of a commercial gallery within a public art space provokes rumination upon how the art world works and how its different spheres of influence coalesce.

It is also a wry comment on the vagaries of the artistic career. Being an artist can be an anxious business, all the eternal wondering about whether you'll 'make it', whether you will get picked up by a good gallerist (like Neon Parc) or whether you will get a show at a key space (like Gertrude Contemporary). Moynihan is refreshingly frank about all this. The rules of cool usually require artists to remain coy about their desires and anxieties, but here Moynihan unabashedly (and proactively) performs his ambitions and, by doing so,

reveals and refuses the expected angst. He is (quite literally) faking it 'till he makes it. But, then again, maybe (metaphorically speaking) faking it is making it.

Gyprock 'n' roll

At some level, all construction is a version of pretending. All the world is – most definitely – a stage. Our houses are stage sets that we perform our lives within; our cities are big set designs that we stage our societies upon. The gallery space is a particularly heightened version of this 'pretend space', especially the white cube model, which presents a veneer of neutrality in order that artists may easily stage their tableaux within it.

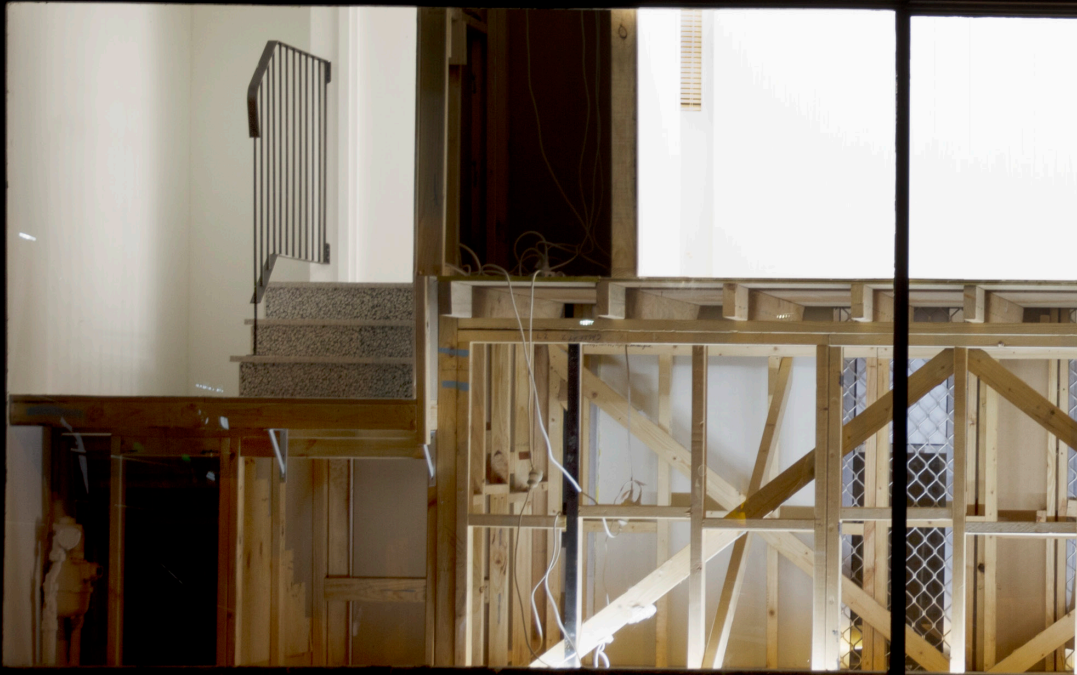
Here, Moynihan calls this bluff. A recurring motif in his work is a 'reveal' of the behind-the-scenes. While Moynihan's exhibitions frequently incorporate an elaborately staged set piece, he also delights in showing you the joists and struts required to stage the fiction. At some point in every installation, Moynihan quits pretending; he gives things away, pulls the curtain back, stages the big reveal. This time, Gertrude Contemporary's high profile window space has become the 'back stage area', with Dan perversely choosing to focus on the relatively nondescript support structure of wood struts and joinery. Above this, passers-by can catch a glimpse of legs seemingly elevated up and into the ceiling void. All this manifests Moynihan's love of the absurd, but it also demonstrates his real delight in construction. Moynihan is a certified carpenter who spent a decade working on ships before attending art school. Another favourite quote from Dan: 'Terminator X speaks with his hands and so do I.'²

Moynihan told me that his original proposal to Gertrude Contemporary was called *All Jokes Aside*, a proposal that he later substituted with *Lost In Space*. Nevertheless, some of the initial sentiment remains here. The jokes have been pushed aside: *Lost In Space* has more homage and less shtick than many of Moynihan's other works. It has an interesting gentleness to it, an emptying out, a paring back. Moynihan considered different possibilities for filling the gallery space of his 'faux Neon Parc'. The obvious thing was to seize his (possibly only) opportunity to have a solo show or, alternatively, to invite the artists commercially represented by Neon Parc to make some 'mini work' for his miniaturised exhibition space. Yet, ultimately, it seemed preferable to him to leave the space empty, to put the focus on space. To think about what space means generally or what these spaces mean specifically; to conflate spaces and confound space and, in doing so, to let everyone be lost in space for a while.

Phip Murray

¹ Susan Gibb, interview with Dan Moynihan to accompany his exhibition *Proper Arrangements* at Society gallery, Sydney 2011, accessed at <http://www.welcome-to-society.com/Proper%20Arrangements>.

² Ibid.





GEHTAUDE /
CONTEMPORARY



DAN MOYNIHAN
LOST IN SPACE
8 FEBRUARY - 9 MARCH 2013

Gertrude Contemporary
8 February - 9 March 2013

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Image captions:

Dan Moynihan, *Lost in Space*, install shots, Gertrude Contemporary, 2013.

Photo credit: Jake Walker and Christopher Day

The artist would like to offer “a massive thank you to all who gave their time and energy to help me realise the work. It wouldnt be what it is without you.

i am forever grateful, thank you.””

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