

REVIEWS

Minnette Vári

GOODMAN GALLERY, JOHANNESBURG, 1 MARCH 2007



Minnette Vári, *Quake*, 2007, production still from digital video installation, 3min

The disturbed relationship between the inner landscapes of the psyche and exterior realms dominates Minnette Vári's latest exhibit. That both states of existence are in a constant state of flux as they adjust to and influence each other makes for a dynamic dialogue, resulting in stimulating art – albeit disconcerting. Juxtaposing the physical with the

psychological, Vári presents the association between these two seemingly conflicting aspects of being as not only interdependent but one that requires constant negotiation.

This conceptual motif is first explored through a series of self-portraits where Vári's shifting states of mind are reflected in the unsettled visual manifestations of the self. Here facial features are not simply purveyors of emotion but are malleable forms that mimic internal conditions. No one self-portrait is identical; while Vári's characteristics are lost in loose and economic brushstrokes, others show definition. Recalling images of pigeons resting on statues in public settings, all her portraits feature a bird perched on the crown of her head. This allows the artist to emphasise her stationary physical stance, thereby drawing attention to the source of movement, her active state of mind. It is not just fluctuating emotions that mould her exterior but a shifting identity. Where a self-portrait conveys a grotesque woman marked by a destructive surge of self-loathing, another exudes confidence, showing Vári to be engaging her viewers' attention. There is even a warm and inviting portrait rendered in alluring shades of ochre that radiates contentment. Vári's identity is not fixed; she is the sum of all these portraits. The bird not only operates as a device to contrast movement and immobility but also conjures the irrational and visceral responses particular to animals. That the bird remains a permanent fixture and Vári appears inseparable from it suggests that this is a constant component of the self that influences her experiences of physical and emotional realms.

LISTINGS

- JHB Siemon Allen**
16 APR - 25 JUN 2011, Goodman Gallery/ Arts on Main
- PTA Designs of nature**
27 APR - 28 MAY 2011, Fried Contemporary Art Gallery & Studio
- BFN Gordon Froud and Lance Friedlander**
14 APR - 29 MAY 2011, Oliewenhuis Art Museum
- BFN Index: 40 Leading Works from the Sanlam Art Collection**
19 APR - 22 MAY 2011, Oliewenhuis Art Museum
- CPT Paul Edmunds**
14 APR - 21 MAY 2011, Michael Stevenson Gallery
- CPT Penny Siopis**
14 APR - 21 MAY 2011, Michael Stevenson Gallery
- MP The Artists' Press**
1 MAR - 1 JUN 2011, The Artist's Press
- EC Out Of The Wood**
1 MAR - 1 JUN 2011, Strydom Gallery
- DBN African Art Centre**
1 MAR - 1 JUN 2011, African Art Centre
- DBN Coral Spencer Domijan, Di van Wyk, Jane Oliver and Michele Silk**
18 APR - 7 MAY 2011, ArtSpace Durban

EXHIBITION REVIEWS

Gerhard Marx
GOODMAN GALLERY CAPE, CAPE TOWN

Ink, which has a similar feel to watercolour, is an apt medium for the self-portraits. It suitably captures the representations of an indistinct, organic identity. Vári's self-portraits may be characterised by confusion but one is not left with the impression that she is articulating a restless spirit struggling for certainty; rather Vári suggests that instability or movement defines existence.

A video-installation, *Quake* (2007) tackles the same topic but from the opposite perspective. Here Vári focuses on the effect of changing physical conditions on identity. Buildings may be associated with permanence but Vári presents them as impermanent structures. Here she suggests that there are no constants in the physical world. The cityscape is constantly shifting as buildings rise, fall and mutate in an instant. Although Vári's subjects have their backs turned on this mutating city and are distanced from it, their internal landscapes mirror the shifts. Once again Vári employs a medium that underpins her expression. Video proves a suitable vehicle to articulate the power the material realm wields over the psyche. The music and imagery – both deftly executed – make for a potent mix that transfixes viewers, emphasising the influence of physical realities.

Vigil (2007), also a video installation, sees internal and external realms converge. While fantasy creatures drawn from the imagination operate as markers of internal impulses, external and internal states of being are almost seamlessly integrated. In such a context one cannot identify which state of being holds influence over the other. And as such this artwork more closely resembles the actual relationship between exterior and interior conditions. Of course, for the viewer this is a terrifying realisation, because watching *Vigil* is like being trapped in a glass jar that rolls through a surreal, chaotic setting that is not situated in space and time. Control cannot be exercised in such an environment. Vári has touched on the themes that embody this exhibit before and although in this latest exhibition she is still weighing up the dynamics of the complex relationship between internal and external realities, her observations have crystallised into stimulating art that edges into unexplored territory.

Mary Corrigan

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