

NECROPOETICS IN TAMAKI MAKAUROU

Cities have looked basically the same since the middle of the twentieth century, give or take. If you were looking for tangible-fungible proof of a ruling elite hoarding resources, squatting selfishly on currencies and capital-flows which might otherwise nourish a greater populace (who it's no hyperbole to say are drowning), then look no further than modern cities, take their daily pulses, monitor their expansions and clandestine plans to metastasise like a lethal tumour.

The things are growing but not as you know it, not as you'd expect.

It's no shocking headline that the private sector has completely undermined any semblance of the public good, the agora, the space in which democracy could flourish by being a space for the free and shared use of 'the people' (whoever and wherever that homunculus lies now). What's missed is not even necessarily a physical space but the abstract concept of such a space, whereas now there's unspoken disdain of 'public', there's contempt by the powered and monied for lives outside the fast lanes of mega-affluence and consumption.

If you can't afford to lace your saffron-loaf with gold leaf, then get out of the kitchen.

If you can't afford to travel privately during a global pandemic, then you're nothing but a parasite; one that the ultra-rich denizens of tomorrow's world (the infrastructure of which is being laid with the War on the Poor today), will quietly and nobly step over or around rather than conjuring the effort to squash you personally.

Why would they? Anything more strenuous than a bowel movement they've already outsourced.

Parasite Gallery (styled P4r4s1t3), located amidst Karangahape's shifting topography of desperation and affluence, of freedom and misery, places itself in this mix of gilded future projections and the muffled screams of the systemically immiserated. By no stretch of the imagination is this accidental.

What's in a name?

Like the titular entity whose nourishment is derived by a primal codependency, Parasite sits in a disused stairwell, one that residents pay a premium for regardless of its neglect as the foyer of a legitimate dwelling.

Since the gallery opened its doors only one year ago it has hosted a roster of local artists all prefaced by their respective identifications against the normative strictures of sex and gender. I'm loathe to use the term 'queer' here, for the word sits on the neoliberalised-rainbow of commercially fabulous identity—a sensibility that I personally know Parasite and its affiliates would feel physically ill to be associated with.

In recent years (via a proliferation of affect in which mainstream dialogues have invoked the cultural capital of 'woke'), the non-normative has been mined with mindless glee, serving a Netflix-ready, family-friendly 'queering', allegedly signalling a social upheaval that the children of sixties-era sexual liberations, and their children and their children, might be proud of. In reality, the disconnect between the culture as it's advertised and the lived realities of its queer folk is equivalent to the yawning abyss between haves and have-nots; which is to say, the possibility of inhabiting a city-scape without being member to systems of inherited wealth is tenuous, precarious. The metropole is no longer a place where vital cultural precedents can be set. Rather, it's the embattled site of naked life, where the statistically impoverished attempt to salvage something liveable from myths of cultural vitality wrapped round the urban as a fast-evaporating mist of propaganda.

Neither are these defeats at the hands of increasingly commercialised city-scapes an impersonal equation of the flows of capital. It's very personal. It's a barbaric agenda.

Parasite and its modest setting is then a litmus of where queer voices sit in this exponentially (vampirically) beige city of today. Like the layered domesticity of Bong Joon Ho's Academy Award winning film of the same name, Parasite exhibits how wounded lives contort themselves into the monstrous, are forced to mutate into a livid ugliness just to survive.

As a gallery then, Parasite's lens ironically doesn't seek to polish or refine this ugliness into something marketable, sellable. Rather, Parasite begs its growing audience to resist the prevailing aesthetic by which queerness is 'allowed' into frame.

It says, as a stable of like-minds, that the art-commodity should be bending itself to platform (permit?) queer lives as they are, and not the other way around.

Salon De La Mort, Parasite's latest group show, brings these elements into a fluid play of death and renewal; but it is gruelling and bloody renewal, without the celluloid trope of cocooning-butterfly rebirths and trauma in exchange for triumph (itself a Christ-born narrative imbuing suffering with currency, victimhood with glamour).

Nayan Patel's sculptures, seemingly romantic, present warped versions of objects normally revered with finesse in art canon, perhaps speculating on the exhaustion of more formalist approaches. Still-life abortions, if you will.

Paraphrasing their own thesis-statements, Patel seeks to inhabit and explore the nebulous border separating art and consumerism, attesting to the porous (parasitic?) proximity of the two, where the party line is often an elitist posture of Art grandstanding over a commerciality which contemporarily (ironically) sustains it.

Patel's Crossword triptych continues this theme of atrophied consumerist forms, seeding the banal idiom of sudoku-like grids with their own unwieldy detail. Where a generic crossword might generate noise for the casual participant, Patel proffers the format as more meaningful, suggesting that they hold little regard for the usual stratifications of high and low culture; further suggesting that a profundity of meaning can be exhumed even from the modest pixels of what, for most, is the canvas of a throwaway pastime.

Finally, Patel explores the holographic persuasions of Time itself in an aptly-titled installation, Clock. Simple enough (a dartboard painted with a handleless clock-face, a dart just shy of its target embedded in the wall), the work nonetheless echoes theorist Zygmunt Bauman's critical analysis of neoliberalism's warping effect on temporal perception as a whole. Known for chronicling the fluidly adaptive ability of a neoliberal lens to tack market-value on just about anything, Bauman's slim work Retrotopia breaks down how History, as canon and genre, actively abbreviates select events into fictitious signifiers by which the past-present-future are affectively packaged and then consumed. Patel's work riffs on this with deceptive simplicity, engaging with neoliberalism's preference for timelessness in which all times are freely available (as affect) simultaneously. Especially in times of crisis, where the collective cultural response is to cleave to a mythic past, faculties by which we might otherwise navigate a more promising future are perhaps inadvertently stifled.

Artist Aliyah Winter's video work Rage is exactly that, a carrion call to a vanguard of similarly thwarted (gendered) expressions. More to the point, it's a call to other expressive-bodies negotiating cumulative (normative) gravities denying life itself to 'marginalia'. Those gravities are a heady mix, compounding narratives around gender, pleasure, desire, narratives harrowingly confined by their instrumentality to labour, work, leisure; an instrumentality which has historically served military-industrial-medical complexes that pose society carte-blanche as nothing more than a pool of (human) resources by which it might reproduce itself ad nauseum.

What's more, in conjuring a 'primal feminine,' Winter pits themselves against the tidier representations of trans-ness which 'woke' culture has disseminated as hot-topic, as if trans

struggles could be smugly boiled down to a two-hour Netflix special and thereafter peddled as proof of progress. As if we only had an appetite for trans femininity when primed and plumped on a red carpet.

By its nature, video work can't help but gather resonances from visual culture, allowing for more popular registers to bleed into the art lens; a lens that normally vacuums itself with impenetrable knowing from the commons of 'pop'.

One of the registers that video inadvertently encloses is cinema, and it is perhaps unconsciously that Winter's *Rage* resembles Sandra Bullock's climactic emergence from a swamp in Alfonso Cuarón's celebrated *Gravity*. That film sought to revise the phallogocentric romanticising of masculinity in Kubrick's 2001 *A Space Odyssey*, reversing the pioneering (imperialising) vector of the masculine-hero archetype moving out from earth to colonise worlds. Rather, Bullock's character realises the futility of violent individualism, compared to re-earthing with the body as a mattered site of Will, literally crash-landing back to earth, scrambling out of a pit of mud in a laughing celebration of her tethered-ness. Another register Winter's work finds cross-fertilisation with is music, specifically the visual accompaniments to the late Sophie's debut album *Oil of Every Pearl's UnInSides*. Like Winter, Sophie's visual occupations here are water, and taken together, the artists seem to be conjuring the possibilities of a post-gender world, one in which the dimensions of gendered expression are not binary, but oceanic.

As a whole *Parasite's Salon De La Mort* (roughly translating as *House of the Dead*) brings together artists who realise fully the quandary we exist in as disposable 'marginalia'—not just as artists negotiating the divergent edicts of an art world that simultaneously aggrandises and blocks the queered subject, but also as citizens of a vampiric city actively disabling our attempts to establish the urban as *turangawaewae* (a place to stand). If in order to survive I'm optioned with being a vampire or a parasite, I know which one I'd rather be.