

I KNOW YOU HEARD ME, BUT ARE YOU LISTENING?

HARLEY MANIFOLD

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Hi, I'm Aaron Bradbrook the Curator of Exhibitions and Outreach at the Warrnambool Art Gallery and today I'm going to speak about some of the curatorial processes involved in the display of Harley Manifold's *I know you heard me, but are you listening?*

As a curator, wonderful opportunities arise to engage with artists on a critical and intellectual level about a number of different considerations. These can include exhibition display features like, lighting and audio, artwork selection and sequencing. As well as deeper conceptual based considerations including, and specific to Harley's exhibition, how can we create an atmosphere within the gallery setting which is reminiscent of the form and subject of the painting themselves, without overshadowing the painterly quality of the work by becoming too theatrical and dramatic, but strengthen the viewers reading, understanding, and experience of the artist and their intent.

In *I know you heard me but are you listening*, Harley and I saw this an opportunity to present his works in a way dissimilar to what viewers would expect of him. This is Harley's first institutional public gallery showing, and with that comes significant accountability from me as a curator to support Harley, and present an exhibition which strengthens his overall practice, continues to develop his reputation as an artist, and provide a platform for new opportunities for him to succeed.

Enticed by personal stories of love and connection, Harley's painted observations present the remnants of a fleeting human presence. His ethereal, empty streetscapes are often centred on a lone element – a dimly-lit streetlight or car headlamps which reflect solitary street signs.

This concept was taken into the exhibition gallery to create an experience which was similar to the one being shown by Harley in the paintings. Dimly-lit, solitary, and ethereal. To do this we painted the entire gallery a dark purple, a colour which was often used by Harley in his paintings, and de-framed each work to remove the contrast between the wall and the painting, as if to imbed the painting in the wall. Each work was dimly-lit using a variety of techniques from spotlighting smaller works to create a greater sense of grandeur and scale, to spraying lighting from above akin to a street lamp – small at the top and wide at the bottom.

Harley titles his works from conversations he has overheard in public places, for example, *Bloody Everything Talks To You These Days: Phones, Cars, Even Bloody Houses* – they are also not associated with the actual painting itself, or what he heard at the time of painting it. Harley has an interest in how title's and language can

shift the reading of a work and cement the narrative. Often exhibitions have artwork didactic panels sitting alongside each painting which states the artists name, title of the work, year it was produced etc. In this instance we did away with any didactic panels as they would be visually jarring against the purple, and conceptually because their alignment with each painting was randomly selected and not what we heard at the time, we actually recorded people saying the titles and projected this through speakers in the gallery. This was a conceptualised way of continuing Harley's interest in how titles alter readings of artworks, yet not restricting it to one work in particular, and putting the viewer in the situation of actually overhearing a conversation as the artist did, and assigning it to a painting at random of their choice.

And regarding the number of artworks on display and their sequencing, we presented a refined exhibition with minimal works. Just because you have 100 paintings doesn't mean you need to show them all. Often if one painting is a clear exemplar of your concept and technique there is no need to show five more iterations of the same. In the display we played with ideas of scale inviting audiences into small corners to view the intricate details of smaller works, and step back to enjoy the overall effect of larger works, somewhat creating a rhythm of movement in the gallery and encouraging people's engagement. We placed some images at awkward viewing angles to reinforce ideas of ethereal dreamscapes, where images are not linear and structured – like for example a painting of a floating whale.

But, overall what we wanted to create was an environment which invited audiences to indulge in a reverie of a story with no beginning or end; giving them only an illuminated path for which a stage is set to create their own narratives of what the painting represents.

I hope that's' been helpful and good luck with your VCE studies.

Aaron Bradbrook

Curator of Exhibitions and Outreach

