

Fine Arts, Sydney

Michael Stevenson

The Cheap Heat

April — May, 2022

Fine Arts, Sydney is presenting an exhibition of new work by Michael Stevenson.

The cheap heat is a term used first in live televised professional wrestling. It describes direct interaction between performer and audience and includes shout-outs, insults, flattery, and pranks – all are devised to stimulate the entertainment factor.

South Pacific Television was a short-lived second broadcast channel in New Zealand. It went to air in 1976 drawing peak audiences in its opening week for the country's first telethon: a live 24-hour broadcast charity fundraising event.

Telethons developed globally as live media events offering the viewer a new role as participant. Everything viewed on a screen is - in a sense - a show, and this open secret between content producer and audience is therefore telethon's playbook. Shout-outs, pranks, challenges and solicitations are all deployed as calls to action for charitable giving.

The Mental Health Foundation is a charity founded on the proceeds of South Pacific Television's 1977 telethon. The Mental Health Foundation telethon - in essence their IPO moment - presented a unique challenge to live TV in acknowledging the importance of this public health issue, notwithstanding its distinctly non-televisual qualities. A poster which became telethon's official visual identity inadvertently captures this conflation while presenting the concept of mental well-being from infancy to maturity.

The Cheap Heat describes a world in which South Pacific Television did not go off air in 1980. Here it continues as a mainstream broadcast channel with global reach and is host to an annual 24-hour telethon charity event for mental health. The works in this exhibition have been selected from five of these alternate reality fundraising drives between the years 2001 and 2030.

Michael Stevenson has exhibited since the late 1980s. Comprehensive survey exhibitions dedicated to Stevenson's work have been held in Berlin at KW Institute for Contemporary Art in 2021, and in Sydney at the Museum of Contemporary Art Australia in 2011. Michael Stevenson represented New Zealand at the 50th Venice Biennale, and his work has been included in large-scale thematic exhibitions including the 21st Biennale of Sydney, Dojima River Biennale 2015, 6th and 8th Berlin Biennales, Liverpool Biennial 2014, 4th Auckland Triennial, 2nd Athens Biennial, 8th Panama Art Biennial, and the 5th Asia-Pacific Triennial.

In recent years Stevenson has made solo exhibitions at institutions including Kunstinstituut Melly, Rotterdam; MUMA, Melbourne; Auckland Art Gallery, Auckland; Kunsthall Charlottenborg, Copenhagen; SculptureCenter, New York; Tate Modern, London; Portikus, Frankfurt; Museo Tamayo Arte Contemporáneo, Mexico City; and Generali Foundation, Vienna. His work has been included in many curated exhibitions at museums and institutions including Museum Sztuki, Lodz; City Gallery Wellington; ZKM, Karlsruhe; Fondazione Sandretto Re Rebaudengo, Turin; Camden Arts Centre, London; Power Plant, Toronto, and Tate Modern, London.

Michael Stevenson lives and works in Berlin, Germany.

This is Michael Stevenson's second solo exhibition with Fine Arts, Sydney.

Fine Arts, Sydney Pty Ltd

23 Hampden Street,
Paddington, NSW 2021
Sydney, Australia

+61 (0) 2 9361 6200

email@finearts.sydney

www.finearts.sydney