

1ST FLOOR 24 JAN - 4 FEB 1996

SPECULAR BODIES

BROOK ANDREW AND RAYMOND PEER

JANE TRENGOVE

ANGELA BAILEY

DAVID ROSETZKY

BRETT VALLANCE

CURATED BY

LUCY ELLIOTT

1ST FLOOR 5/95 VICTORIA STREET, FITZROY 3065 WED - SUN 12PM - 6PM TEL.

9417 1562

midsumma96 
melbourne's gay and lesbian festival

specular bodies looks at the exploration of identity and its many facets. appearing in many guises, surfaces and materials reflect, hide, mask and play with the nature of appearance. a number of questions arose when putting together this show, questions such as how and in what ways a non-heterosexual existence relates to popular culture, and how masquerade - the ability to assume a false appearance - relates to identity. importantly, these are some of the questions that have come to take priority in identity politics in the last decade specifically as they relate to gay and lesbian experience and representation.

the formation of identity is crucial to a sense of belonging and existing in any given time or place. however as much theory attests, the very formation of identity is itself fraught with contradiction and complication - a knowing and unknowing. the advent of postmodernism combined with queer theory and feminism has complicated the terrain of self identification, allowing for a radical exploration into the deployment and effect of definitions and labels.

the impact of visual culture on the formation of identity has seen the burgeoning of a diverse range of visual explorations. we do not exist in a unified culture and as such we have to face and deal with an ever-mutating system of signs and meanings.

as foucault showed us, sexuality is not a natural phenomenon but is rather something that is performed, acted out, produced in and by certain cultures at specific points in time. identity and performativity go hand in hand. to masquerade both for men and women is often to achieve a normative performance.

"identity is fictional. images of us may be more common in mass culture, but the history of those images, who controls them now, and the tyranny of prescribing a single unified identity to this larger public are hindrances to reading progress into this new visibility, this lesbian chic, this marketing of gay sexuality".¹

how we perceive ourselves and how we want to be perceived are important questions. identifying as gay and lesbian deconstructs the controlling and organising dichotomies that dominate in the wider society. as such we often feel forced to prove our existence by projecting certain images or facets of our lifestyle. identity is always dependent on others of whom a demand for recognition is made. a complex array of cultural codes that signal one's sexual identity and family, work, and social status survey what it means to be a woman or a man.

heterosexuality and dominant forms of gender identity are subverted by gay and lesbian identity through the affirmation of particular codes and conventions that exist in the gap often produced by masquerade. both masculinity and femininity are elaborately designed masquerades that have come under increasing scrutiny by feminists, lesbians and many gay men in an effort to recreate ourselves as subjects rather than objects and to avoid disappearance into the presumptive universal, the unmarked "same".

lucy elliot

¹ 'Writing in a Different Light', A.Scholder, *In A Different Light*, Uni. of California 1995, p.181