

Opening Remarks by Richard Perram OAM

TROY-ANTHONY BAYLIS: ANITA BRYANT MONUMENTS

'Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that we are meeting today on the unceded lands of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, and I would like to pay my respects to Elders, past, present and emerging and acknowledge any Indigenous people who may be with us today.

It is a real pleasure to have been asked by Troy-Anthony Baylis to officially open *Anita Bryant Monuments*—one of two exhibitions in which Troy is featured for Sydney WorldPride 2023. The other exhibition *Linger, Dash, Talk* officially opens at Cement Fondu on Saturday, 18 February at 6pm.

Troy was born in 1976 in Gadigal/Sydney and now lives and works in Tarntanya/Adelaide. He is a descendent of the Jawoyn (Jar-Won) people from the Northern Territory and is also of Irish ancestry. His father was a member of the Stolen Generation.

Even though he has had many solo exhibitions, it was only in 2019 in *The National* at *Carriageworks*, curated by Daniel Mudie Cunningham that my husband and I encountered his infamous *Postcard* series, these large works made from laboriously re-constituted Glomesh which are both high camp and high seriousness. They recall Moonee Ponds and queered Blak Australia.

As Susan Sontag wrote in her seminal 1964 essay *Notes on Camp*: "Camp taste is, above all, a mode of enjoyment, of appreciation – not judgement. Camp is generous. It wants to enjoy. It only seems like malice, cynicism. (Or, if it is cynicism, it is not a ruthless but a sweet cynicism.) Camp taste doesn't propose that it is in bad taste to be serious; it doesn't sneer at someone who succeeds in being seriously dramatic. What it does is to find the success in certain passionate failures."

Or as Oscar Wilde said: Life is too important a thing to talk seriously about it." [Vera, or The Nihilists]

The titles in the *Postcard* series are based on connecting old mission towns, sites of Indigenous renaissance, and ordinary suburbs across the nation, but each has another queer reading so, '*To Bella Vista from Cherrybrook*' is easily envisaged as two drag queens writing to each other. Similarly '*To Crystal Brook, From Sandy Gully, via Alice Springs*'. They also recall the colonial breastplates given as badges of courage to selected Indigenous people as a way to control and divide.

Most recently in Sydney his work was seen at Casula Powerhouse in their 2021/2022 exhibition *Jamming with Strangers*.

But it is his exhibition *Nomenclatures* at the Art Gallery of South Australia in 2020/2021 that the range of his work was shown so clearly, it featured the *Postcard Series*, as well as *Nomenclatures*, a series of woven works based on the Nomenclature Act of 1917 in which German town names were anglicised, before being restored in 1935. The weaving of these two names together was added another layer by embroidering the names of Aboriginal Country over the weaving. The third series was *Tell Them Their Dreaming*, collaged on material he found in a dollar shop in Germany, they recall David McDiarmid's famous text works, such as *That's Miss Poofter to you Asshole* and as Troy put's it: *When I want your dreaming I'll give it to you*. Troy's works use popular song titles about dreaming that recall the act of dreaming as well as indigenous peoples spiritual and cultural practice: *The Dreaming*.

We now come to *Anita Bryant Monument*; to younger LGBTQIA+ people, it is a name that conjures up nothing, to people of my generation in the 1970s she was the epitome of unbridled LGBTQIA+ hatred masquerading under the guise of religion. Her claims to fame was that she was Miss Oklahoma in 1958, a religious recording artist whose hits charted, and a brand ambassador from 1969 to 1980 for the Florida Citrus Commission, which caused gays to boycott Florida Orange Juice.

The American Ridiculous playwright Ronald Tavel, best known as the scriptwriter of Andy Warhol's first sound movies, was so appalled by her actions that he wrote in 1977 *The Ovens of Anita Orangejuice: A History of Modern Florida*. in which Anita imports the gas ovens from Auschwitz to incinerate gay people.

Tavel could equate the intolerance that Bryant espoused with the intolerance the Nazi's espoused against Jews, Romani people, disabled people, Freemasons, Jehovah's Witnesses and Gay people. It is estimated that between 10-15,000 gay men prosecuted under Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code were sent to concentration camps, many of them died. After WWII, the Allies chose not to repeal Section 175 with the result that many gay men after being released were re-imprisoned to serve out the remainder of their sentence.

In a heteronormative society, it is difficult for those who identify as exclusively heterosexual to understand, let alone identify with, the concept of the 'other' in relation to gender. What one has not experienced is either ignored or, at worst, greeted with hostility.

Those who identify as 'other', or LGBTQIA+, have invariably been socialised in a heteronormative household and understand the roles that boys and girls must learn to perform to ingratiate themselves into a heteronormative world.

Between 1989 and 1999, 46 known gay-hate murders took place in New South Wales. The perpetrators of these murders were packs of young 'heterosexual' men raised in heteronormative households, who had been socialised to regard 'poofers' and 'fags' as fair game.

In a discussion around the time of same-sex marriage vote, the former federal resources minister Matt Canavan dismissed a warning from the National Mental Health Commission about the potential consequences of the campaign for LGBTQIA+ Australians; he said: 'Can't we all just grow a spine and grow up? ... The debate hasn't been that bad ... let's stop being delicate little flowers.'

At the same time, Lyle Shelton then from the Australian Christian Lobby was 'frankly sick' of being called bigoted by supporters of change.

Both men, who it is assumed are espoused heterosexuals, wanted it both ways (no pun intended) and seem to have a collective amnesia about the hatred and violence that has been levelled at LGBTQIA+ people for many years by a heteronormative society.

Troy's view of Anita in this exhibition shows the lunacy of her views and the views of people like Canavan and Shelton, yet it is the same lunacy or off the planet ideas, lies and bigotry that elected Donald Trump to the White House and gave us the Pentecostal Scott Morrison.

Anita's story has a happy ending as her image shifted from being a model Christian spokeswoman to that of a self-righteous bigot, she lost her endorsement for the Florida Citrus Commission, her show business career tanked, she was divorced from her first husband, and with her second husband was subsequently declared bankrupt.

Troy's outrageous exhibition is a warning, that while we live in enlightened times, there's enough bigotry out there, under the surface for us to keep our guards up.

And with that I declare the exhibition open.'