

ANTHONY PELCHEN - *spent*

For close to two decades, a considerable part of Anthony Pelchen's work, across mediums, has woven together memories and images that reflect the beauty and austerity of the Wimmera. The floor installation, *Spent*, contains some 27,951 used shotgun cartridges that form a colour-coded carpet, an aesthetic totality of many parts. It is large, compelling and mesmeric like a tribal rug and takes its source from the country west of Horsham where Pelchen lives and works. It is loaded with physical associations and issues of belonging and isolation, of the dual anatomies of life and death, drought and abundance. As a boy visiting the family's land that borders the Wimmera River, Pelchen would accompany his father through paddocks and along the river at dawn. He would watch the shooter discard cartridges as the sound of the shotgun fractured the morning. It taught him the importance of stillness and the agony of disruption, the moment between life and death. This carpet is, however, much more than a patterned aftermath; it also holds a dark ontology, a metaphor for Pelchen's own drained body, a casualty of a prolonged illness. Out of this painful episode he realised 'the potency of order [that] relies on the potential for disorder', a contradiction that activates his search for spiritual and bodily regeneration. Each episodic realisation acts as a testimony of endurance that is transformed into powerful, ordered, visual installations awaiting the inevitable act of disruption.

An artist's personal history naturally inhabits their work, but with installation and collaborative performances there are many physical and psychological experiences that motivate both the artists and their audience. Pelchen's work embodies several geographies and lives, and involves a repertoire of emotive journeys. He has established a working relationship with the choreographer, dancer and performer Tony Yap for over a decade, and the film-maker Sean O'Brien, who has been documenting Yap's life and work since 2005. Each artist building an understanding of one another's creative practices and developing a use of the 'body' as a vehicle through which each filters memories, ideas and emotions.

The spatial austerity and the natural beauty of the Wimmera is Pelchen's canvas and aesthetic laboratory, and for Tony Yap, who also has links with this region, the land and the river lends itself to explorative meditations on absence, loss, death and the regenerative and mystical forces of nature. Both artists revere the spatial and visual poetics of this particular landscape. It provides a transformative setting for shared values, in which beauty, order and equilibrium starkly counter the disruptive passions of pain and sorrow, all central to their personal and collaborative productivity. A carpet of empty gun cartridges is physically disrupted by the performer and may be seen as life ruptured and spent and reorganised by chance. It is an exquisite, empathetic drama, a contemplative penetration of still life into life. Tony Yap feels the parameters of Pelchen's memories, the edges of the carpet are psychological walls he must engage with before bodily and emotionally intruding and shattering the visual order. The sense of violation, of having committed an insane crime against such harmony is replaced by the body's final surrender to majestic exhaustion.

Physically and emotionally spent, and emptied of his frenzied delirium, Yap is able to return to the original source of memory; the imprint of the black swallow is a metaphor for the fluttering heart of life.

In *Well*, Anthony Pelchen sets Yap's performance, filmed by O'Brien, into a black box so that we may look down into a darkened shaft. The visual distancing that this creates gives a sense of entering another world and we are drawn into a strangely beautiful melancholy, the gentle motion of eastern dance and meditation. As early morning mists lift and are carried along the river, the viewer is transported past reflective skies and large river gums, while the solitary figure divines the awakening world. Light plays with the earth, sky and water. Yap quotes Tatsumi Hijikata, the founder of the Japanese dance form Butoh: (the dance becomes) 'a mirror that thaws fear. The dancer should dance in this spirit ... it is the unveiling of the inner life'. I would add that the dance is a salutation and an invitation to enter outside the self and into the darkness of the river, into its vaporising mists and the sentinels of old red-gums, to roam beyond the body and among the shadows and reflections of land and sky.

Anthony Pelchen's art is grounded by the land. He recognises the flatness and the rich austerity of open

spaces, the pinnacles of the Grampians and the serpentine Wimmera River as signal points to guide his eye. But contained in his art practice is an embodiment of western and eastern concepts of energy, appearance, spiritual phenomena and the desire for order and disorder. Without one the other cannot exist.

Dr Sheridan Palmer
Art Historian/Curator
Honorary Fellow, The Australian Centre, University of Melbourne
February 2010

Installations of Spent have been previously presented in 2009 in Mildura (commissioned for the Murray Darling Palimpsest #7) and Ballarat (at the Ballarat Gold Mining Exchange Building in conjunction with Ballarat University). Each installation is site specific, with varying dimensions and colour sequences. The collaborative video, Well, is a companion work which has been shown at each location in conjunction with Spent.

The installation, Spent, is sited at Jubilee Hall, Horsham and the video, Well, at the Horsham Regional Art Gallery. My thanks to Ian Pelchen, Greg Lawes, Adam Vella/Oz Shooting, Campbell Mitchell/ Natimuk & District Field & Game Club, Rob Carter/Melbourne Gun Club, Ballarat University Horsham and to those who installed the work: Suzanne Hallett, Zoe Barnes, Rhiannon Carroll, James Levitzke, Step Arrowsmith, Tim Hoffmann, Tyler Eliot, Kellie Becker, Rheanna Mellington, Alex Williams, Lauren Ferguson, Liana Gasparini, Marlee Crawford, Ingrid Wimbury, Peter Hill, Kerry Hill, Edwin Irvine, Melissa Morris, Louise Shepherd, Rob Oliver, Graham Manwaring, Michelle Stripp, Justin McGennissen, Jerry Johnson, Roshni Puthuparambill, Nisansala Mallawaarachchi
Anthony Pelchen, March, 2010

Born 1960 in Horsham, Anthony Pelchen studied economics at Monash University and a decade later painting at the Victorian College of the Arts. Since 1992 he has exhibited widely in artist-run, institutional and alternative spaces in Melbourne, with projects in Japan and Denmark. He has been included in various national surveys of drawing and painting and undertaken residencies in Australia (including Gertrude Contemporary Art Spaces, Melbourne and Bundanon Trust, Nowra) and Japan (AKB Centre, Nigata). Projects have been supported with grants including Arts Victoria New Work Development and International Cultural Exchange. In 2008/9 he was included in Drought – Cross Cultural Collaborations, presenting cross media work at the NGV/ACMI/ Federation Square and in late 2009 participated in the inaugural Melaka Art and Performance Festival (MAP 01). In July 2010 he will take up an Asialink residency in Malaysia and again present work at MAP in November. He is represented in collections including the National Gallery of Victoria, Horsham Regional Art Gallery, John McBride Collection, Australian Print Workshop, Bundanon Trust and Artbank.

Malaysian born Tony Yap is a dancer, choreographer and the artistic director of the Tony Yap Company. His practice is one of commitment to the exploration and creation of an individual dance theatre language that is informed by psycho-physical research, Asian shamanistic trance dance, Butoh, voice and visual design. He was one of the principle performers with IRAA Theatre (1989-1996) and has worked extensively in Australia and overseas, including Agamemnon Festival, Colline Torinese, Italy, and The Trojan Woman, Vienna International Arts Festival. He was awarded a Green Room Award for Best Male Dancer for his solo work The Decay of the Angel and in 2009 received the prestigious two-year Australia Council Dance Fellowship to develop and produce a major solo work, the Buddha Body Series. In 2005 he was granted an Asialink residency to support his ongoing collaborative work in South East Asia and in 2009 was artistic director of the inaugural Melaka Art and Performance Festival. www.tonyyapcompany.com

With a Master of Art in time-based art from the University of New South Wales, Sean O'Brien is a filmmaker, sound artist, and on-line producer. He regularly creates audio and on-line features for ABC Radio National and facilitates the Asia-Pacific Field Recording Network, a collective of artists tracing environmental and cultural change in our region. His filmic work includes a considerable, ongoing investigation into the performance practices of Tony Yap and Japanese Butoh performer, Yumi Umiumare, both in documentary and poetic art forms. In 2002, his documentary Two Thirds Sky: Artists in Desert Country was launched at the Art Gallery of NSW and screened on SBS.