

onespace



Penumbra
Zoe Porter

7 – 24 February 2018

***Penumbra* by Zoe Porter**

I once described Zoe Porter's work as 'a blending of Surrealist counterculture, Mad-Max-wasteland-chic, and prog-rock assemblage...the language of a civilisation reframed by anarchy and apocalypse.'¹ Since writing that statement years ago, Porter's work has, it seems, developed a more subtle character. Where once the performances and sloshing drawings would crash into the audience (sometimes literally), there is now a sense of coolness and contemplation. It is apt that the title of the show is *Penumbra*. As any good student of painting or drawing knows, the *penumbra* is the gentle dissipation at the edges of a shadow. It is not the black centre (the *umbra*), but the diffusion of the shadow into nothingness. Although there remains a dark core in Porter's work, her recent output leaks out of the long shadow of Marlene Dumas, Francesco Clemente, Odilon Redon, Wangechi Mutu and the 1938 *Exposition Internationale du Surréalisme*, and more provocatively plies its soft edges. To return to the practical application of the term, *penumbra* has become almost epidemic with the advent and accessibility of digital painting programs and 3D rendering software. Whereas artists once used the technique strategically to indicate the elusive character of light in a work, digital artists apply the effect universally so that every surface has the smooth, artificial complexion of an airbrushed peach. By re-deploying a term that has been unfortunately mothballed (along with observational drawing), this show firmly declares its studio craft *bona fides*.

"Persistent in Zoe Porter's work is the presence of bodies. Bodies draped and wilting. Bodies disorganised and disoriented. Larval bodies and cryptic bodies. In her own words, the artist asks that we put ourselves in a mind of metamorphism, zoomorphism and anthropomorphism."



Persistent in Zoe Porter's work is the presence of bodies. Bodies draped and wilting. Bodies disorganised and disoriented. Larval bodies and cryptic bodies. In her own words, the artist asks that we put ourselves in a mind of metamorphism, zoomorphism and anthropomorphism. Perhaps these bodies are arrested and depicted in a state of becoming. But, perhaps they are also in a state of dress and undress, continually in the process of putting-on-and-taking-off-and-putting-on the performing objects that animate them (and not the other way round). It is important here to acknowledge the seductive phrase 'performing objects' coined by Frank Proschan in his semiotic analysis of puppets, masks, and ritual objects. Proschan defines performing objects as 'material images of humans, animals, or spirits that are created, displayed, or manipulated in narrative or dramatic performance'.² Zoe Porter's work is a deep and elaborate excavation and examination of the limits of the performing object and its relationship to its attendant body.

¹ Platz, 'Posing Zombies: Life Drawing, Performance and Technology', 2015, *Studio Research Journal* no. 3.

² Proschan, Frank. 'The Semiotic Study of Puppets, Masks and Performing Objects', 1983, *Semiotica* 47.

I have had the privilege to spend time in the artist's studio and participate in her studio process, and have witnessed her patient and relentless method of assembling objects, swathing the body, acting and enacting, dismantling, reassembling, shedding, gathering, and destroying. Porter's performing objects begin studio life as boxes and crates of flotsam and dross — poly-fill, felt off-cuts, tattered backdrop paper, tangled skeins of yarn, bargain-bin books, packing material, and anything that the op shop deems unworthy of its limited shelf space. When all this chaff intersects with the artist's bodies, however, it becomes an animating force capable of making bodies perform (strangely).



When I first encountered Zoe Porter's work, I didn't see the loud and dark performances but rather the works on paper. I have clear memories of the artist's studio papered from floor to ceiling with drawings and collages. The scale veered wildly from tiny characters drawn in the margins of books or on pages torn from magazines to mural-sized ink drawings that covered entire walls and spilled onto the floor. In all the works on paper, Porter fashions, re-fashions, nurtures and abandons an ever-expanding menagerie of performing objects and their bodies. In one drawing the body may be inflected by an odd set of pointed fingers or a pair of feet-become-claws, and in another the body may be completely absorbed and reconfigured by its performing objects so that its coherence is lost. In every drawing and collage (with the exception of a few of the erotic watercolours), the body presents itself to the viewer as a vehicle of display and expresses nothing so much as genuine bewilderment that it's being watched.

This latest exhibition by Zoe Porter is an excellent representative selection of her large body of work. The performances, collages and works on paper are all present and demand of the viewer a patient attention that reaches beyond the polychrome phantasmagoria and into the peculiar-familiar space at the margins of the shadow and on the boundary of body and performing object.

William Platz

Image (left): Zoe Porter, *On the Beach*, 2017, watercolour on paper, 24 x 27.5cm. Photo: Louis Lim.

Image (above): Zoe Porter (artist/installation) in collaboration with Hsin-Ju Ely (contemporary dance/*The Farm*) and Exploko (live sound), BARI Festival (2016), collaborative performance. Photo: Graeme Auchterleonie.

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onespacegallery.com.au

13a Gladstone Road,
Highgate Hill QLD 4101
Australia
+61 (07) 3846 0642

Wed to Fri: 10am – 5pm
Sat: 9am – 3pm

Gallery Director: John Stafford
+ 61 7 418 880 583
john@onespacegallery.com.au

Gallery Director: Jodie Cox
+ 61 7 410 697 503
jodie@onespacegallery.com.au

Gallery Officer: Jamie Mercer
+ 61 7 400 796 940
info@onespacegallery.com.au



Zoe Porter

Cross disciplinary artist, living and working in Brisbane.

Zoe graduated from the Queensland College of Art with a Doctorate of Visual Art (2014). Much of her work draws on philosophy, psychoanalysis, Surrealism, film, literature and notions of the 'animal in the human' in a contemporary art context. Her photographic work includes documentation from live performances in public spaces, which have been a major focus of her most recent practice. These works investigate themes of dislocation and metamorphosis that blur the boundaries between the rational and dream-like, presenting possibilities for other ways of being through a cross-disciplinary approach. Her practice traverses a range of mediums including drawing, installation, performance, video and costume which has seen her creative works and collaborations exhibited in numerous solo and group exhibitions nationally in Queensland, New South Wales and Victoria and internationally in Europe, Japan and the USA. She has undertaken several international residencies including Crane Arts, Philadelphia (2012) and Geidai University, Tokyo (2010). Her work is held in several private collections across Brisbane, Sydney and Melbourne.

Zoe Porter's Curriculum Vitae can be viewed at: www.onespacegallery.com.au/exhibition/zoe-porter/

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Image (cover): Zoe Porter, *The Vapour* from the *Apparitions* series, 2018, watercolour on paper, 64 x 57cm. Image scan: Brisbane Digital Images.

Image (above): Zoe Porter, *The Encroacher*, 2018, watercolour and ink on paper, 18 x 18.5cm. Photo: Louis Lim



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