

Finola Jones

Less crushing a blow

17 April – 18 May

Less crushing a blow, a new video and sound installation by Finola Jones, especially designed for Void, Derry, features the artist's on-going explorations of the interlacing patterns of video monitor screens, projections and overlaid sound. Jones is an inveterate traveler and her footage is acquired from disparate locations; Australia to Finland, from hot to cold, from the (apparently) tropical sub-aqua to the freezing of air and water. The combination is not only extremely elemental but also very human as the sublime awe of nature is brought right back down to size by human presence and other challenging interventions. Both scale, and lens-based *verities* are challenged and the viewer is enthralled whilst simultaneously thrown off quilter. We know, and are made continuously aware that we are being visually and emotionally manipulated, but we are so tied-in that we are prepared to buy into the confidence trick – whatever *it is*, exactly, we remain uncertain, but certain in the knowledge that there is one.

In the large projected DVD work; **Steam**, (2007) the sublime visual beauty of the freezing river and glowing back-lit billowing smoke [?] stacks is heart-wrenchingly underscored by an equally sublime – but half broken by age - rendition of Bellini's **La Sonnambula**, performed by Lina Pagliugghi, set in a Swiss mountain village and ironically recorded in the sultry heat of Naples some seventy years ago. The only visible signs of life, in the entire scenario are birds – literally freezing their butts off (comically) in what remains semi-liquid, and one in flight, braving the air temperature at altitude. These dots in the landscape provide the only markers of scale. Scattered around the space are further re-iterational images of belching chimneys, some sideways or upside-down, making it appear so that the smoke, or stream, flows like a river. The viewer remains uncertain as to the status and meaning of these ambiguous images, they have their own beauty, but are they contributing to the global warming of the planet, or are they indeed themselves innocent *steam* victims of the extreme cold.

Furthering the complexity, another screen shows footage shot from a moving car, once again set in 'the freezing north', but this time we are following a truck loaded with neatly trimmed logs. There is a feeling of a chase movie here, or at least some form of documentary about illegal logging. The *attention* of the camera is momentarily caught by yet more chimneys belching smoke. They are literally everywhere, we are surrounded!

Similarly, the second projected work; **Aquarium**, (2005-7) comes with its own emotive cycling soundtrack – which itself filters through to the other room and co-mingles with Bellini's **La Sonnambula** – and is loaded with intentionally misleading signals. Initially the viewer may feel that they are looking at an enlargement of an oversized domestic or restaurant aquarium, or something similar, complete with cute baby sharks. Also the black foreground could be mistaken for the 'black banding' that occurs on a 4 x3 ratio projector whilst screening cinematic 'widescreen' format. Shockingly, all of a sudden, coach loads of tourists enter and transgressively inhabit the *banded* 'non-space' at the base of both the projected image and in front of the aquarium. The penny drops. It become apparent that the camera is situated in a darkened room, filming a monstrously large glass-screened tank, containing bloody big fish! Tourists pose in front of the glass, and photographic flashes go off, timed to illuminate the poser and freeze a moment in time, usually as a three-meter long shark passes immediately behind the subject's head. The raw quality of the footage also tells us that this is something the artist stumbled upon almost by accident, and as it was not to be easily or quickly repeated has seized the footage on a relatively low-resolution video camera, and has then consciously pushed this to near breaking-point by the works final near-cinema scale. The accompanying music emphasizes the epic nature of the 'drama', or maybe 'fiction' is the correct word.

One more layered *meaning* of the projection is further brought into question by an accompanying floor-situated monitor piece. A cat slumbers in the sunlight, a light reminiscent of that which is artificially generated as a dappled, flittered 'lighting effect' in **Aquarium**. A real breeze gentle ruffles the cat's fur, but curiously this makes us think more of the feat of animation, which commonly mimics this effect in just about every digitally-generated animation feature known to man. The warmth of 'real' light contrasts with the chill of the artificial deep, but there is an artifice here too - as there is almost everywhere with Jones' installations – in that the simple slumbering cat has been filmed twice and is 'divided up', in the manner of an Abel Gance filmic device, onto two separate screens, acting independently. The sleeping cat becomes gate-keeper, wherein the two halves of himself facilitates a capacity to work endless shifts. There is no escape from the watchful eye that will never open.