

Untold Treasure — Dwelling (Victorian Issue)

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An installation shot of Archie Moore's *Dwelling (Victorian Issue)* at Gertrude Contemporary.

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"All she had to do was walk across the road to the rubbish dump, and there she could get anything her heart desired – free. She thought the dump was magnificent, as anyone dirt-poor would." The home of Angel Day, the fringe-dwelling protagonist in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* (2006), was made from other people's garbage. She knew that the rubbish dump was a place of improper abundance and littered memory, where the threshold between possession and dispossession fissures. She is like the "angel of history", stopping in the middle of the storm to salvage some kind of life from the wreckage at her feet.

Archie Moore's *Dwelling (Victorian Issue)* at Gertrude Contemporary seems to recollect this aesthetics of scraps. A sense of thwarted desire pervades the Kamilaroi/Bigambul artist's large architectural installation, which rebuilds domestic spaces from, and as, the scrap yard of memory. This is what it means to live with and make sense – even beauty – out of the debris of colonialism and capitalism, dipping into the trash as if it was the only true commons. *Dwelling* is simultaneously a critique of the fucked-up world petro-capitalism has built and an eloquent assemblage of scraps that sites this experience in space and mnemonic process.

Dwelling might be a home or a series of rooms connecting a succession of homes, a patchwork of memories, sometimes speculative and sometimes from the artist's personal and transgenerational memory. There are bedrooms, a bathroom, kitchen and lounge room, a tin humpy and a schoolhouse. The (mostly) domestic interiors are assembled from furniture and low-cost building materials that either look like they've been dragged home from the dump or hard rubbish, or borrowed from a family member who just couldn't part with these old relics, as if the objects themselves had become kin.

Moore's use of the space at Gertrude, which itself is designed in a povoc-chic style – with low-cost materials, exposed beams and ducts and unpolished concrete floors – is the best I've seen. The gallery feels as though it was purpose-built for *Dwelling*, although the opposite is true. *Dwelling*, now in its fourth iteration, was made to fit for Gertrude. The exterior side wall of the installation has been given a thin and patchy paint job in a shitty '70s green and blue. Saloon doors, slightly ajar, create a passage into the artwork.

Swinging the doors open, you instantly become a participant. With no didactic panels or instructions, Moore's simple blue doors are a subtle solicitation to participate, seamlessly achieving the kind of audience engagement that most "immersive" art can only contrive at best.

The first room is dimly lit by the glare of an old fat-back television and a table lamp that sits in a shelving unit, its milky light refracted in a dust-streaked mirror. The television sits on a heavy "rustic" wooden cabinet before one of those big, sinking sofas, equally comfy and dank. It's either leather or vinyl, upholstered in the kind of fabric that your back and thigh flesh sticks to in the sweat of summer.

Promotional stickers sporadically stuck directly to walls and furniture throughout the domestic spaces read "RACQ", while another states "Castrol – For the Mining Industry", and another "Queensland Police – Friend". This is a gesture to a more naive time before smartphones and the corporate internet, when marketing had to go from hand to hand before penetrating our private spaces. The stickers are signposts, entry points at the beginning of a memory. As *Dwelling* is a space of memory, these quotidian ephemera are both specific and general, personal and social – all of them bleeding into one another.

I push through another door into a small bedroom "furnished modestly" with a single bed, a bookshelf and a massive wardrobe. A child's drawings on paper are stuck in a horizontal line across the duck-shit green walls, and one looks like an old Texta drawing depicting a human figure being shot at by an observatory-cum-war tank. It bears an award for "Highly Commended – Grade 5 Art", made out to Archie Moore. *Dwelling* exposes the artist and his child self to a vulnerability that, as you rummage through the private life of someone else's past – peering into the wardrobe, studying shelves – threatens to snap, like a rubber band stretched to its limits.

Vulnerability is more and more becoming the star under which we live. Just last month the Northern Territory Department of Housing implemented new rules for public housing tenants, meaning rental increases of more than \$200 a week for some of the country's most vulnerable, including thousands of Indigenous people living in remote communities where there are no other housing options. In the same month, news broke that public housing tenants living in Port Melbourne's Barak Beacon estate were told they'd be relocated and their homes demolished. The space of home, of memory, implodes.

At times *Dwelling* recalls the work of New Zealand-born artist Fiona Connor in its sober dedication to the reconstruction of the mundane, but it also has an enchantment that mirrors Javier Lara-Gomez who, while incarcerated in Long Bay jail, used magazine cutouts and other salvaged materials to build eloquent scale models such as *Aboriginal Cottage* (1996) and *The Electronic Shop* (1996).

Another schoolhouse-like room – with children's seats, a wooden bench and an old projector playing a video about mining – is grave. A tin humpy with a gritty floor and an old wire cot stands in the corner off to the side of the projection. The place of "education" sits right next to the humpy – a potent artefact and symbol of Aboriginal reserves and fringe camps – as a co-conspirator in the dispossession, disenfranchisement and assimilation of Indigenous communities.

Here the school is seen in stark light as part of the infrastructure of control and arguably – given the history of the Aboriginal reserve and mission system in this country as places of (re)education – also of carceralism. The tone in this space is gothic in the vein of Tracey Moffatt's film *Night Cries: A Rural Tragedy* (1989) but here stripped of the film's colour and artifice.

In a smaller room to the left of the main architecture of *Dwelling* is a camera obscura showing an inverted streetscape. We watch as cars and pedestrians pass by on the streets of newly gentrified Preston. It's a momentary reprieve between entering *Dwelling* and walking back out into the street.

Working with scraps, *Dwelling* recalls the precarity and constant threat that many live with constantly – as if, like memory, the home is fractured, mutable, fleeting. Yet there is a certain defiance, an almost vulgar beauty, in the residual failure to confirm certainty that *Dwelling* seems to embrace, like Angel Day's "seagull sentinels" sitting among the rubbish, "guarding for nothing a humpteen amount of untold treasure".