

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT.

A Congratulatory Thing

On Sunday the 20th of January 2019, Elisabeth Pointon hired Auckland aerial advertising company Airbubble to fly from Papakura to One Tree Hill where it circled the area four times. After a delayed takeoff, waiting for conditions to clear, the plane departed Ardmore Airport just after 1:00 PM towing a red banner reading “SPECTACULAR.” Alongside Pointon and myself, a small team of friends and fellow artists stationed at both the airfield and One Tree Hill documented the flight.

WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT. came out of the artist-equivalent of the “what would you do if you won lotto” question, artists and friends discussing the work or projects we’d want to do if money were no object.¹ Pointon’s response was to hire a plane. The reference was to a project curated by Adam Shopkorn for the 2012 Art Basil Miami Beach fair titled *Plane Text*. It featured text works by 15 significant artists, including Ed Ruscha, Richard Prince, John Baldessari, Lawrence Weiner, The Estate of Sol LeWitt, Jack Pierson, Kay Rosen, Hank Willis Thomas, Alex Ruppertsberg, Gary Simmons, Mel Bochner, Alexis Smith, Jenny Holzer and Martin Creed – banners would be flown by three planes over four days in three hour periods. All but three artists were men and all but one where white.

Some cursory research revealed the project wasn’t as outlandishly out of reach as initially thought. A fundraising gig with Wellington musicians Ana Te Kōtiro, Alexa Casino, WOMB, and Glass Vaults covered the cost of the plane hire and travel to Auckland and back. While Shopkorn describes his intrigue in using “budget advertising for some of the most established and sought after artists”², the effort and planning

¹ It is probably important to disclose my relationship with the artist as both friend and flatmate. We’ve had many conversations about this project and our practises in general.

² Warren, Tamara. “Plane Text”. <http://lifeandtimes.com/plane-text>

required of a young, emerging artist to pull off the same kind of stunt speaks to the huge discrepancy in resources between an ARI-led project and the spectacle of large scale art fairs. Considering the implications of representation in such a work - who gets space to speak in such generously funded and public forums - Pointon’s work here becomes a meditation on art market values and the powers at play in it.

Drawing from her experiences in the workplace at a luxury car dealership, language, accessibility and representation has been a continued interest in Pointon’s practise. As a Pakeha and Fijian-Indian artist, her position in a traditionally white and masculine-led environment mirrors the experiences of many minorities in the workplace, which in turns mirrors the experience of many minorities in the art world. Pointon’s previous banner works have appropriated the cold, impersonal tones of professional email exchanges with phrases such as “Well done to all.” By scaling them up in size, disengaging them from the confines of the computer screen, superficial affirmations become imbued with genuineness and earnestness. When Pointon says “You are special.”, I’m inclined to believe it.

Likewise with “SPECTACULAR.” The plane-towed banner is at once a sarcastic mimicry of *Plane Text* while also reimagining the project as something uplifting, inclusive and encouraging. Spectacular is most obviously a critique of the money spectacle that is Art Basel Miami Beach, but it is also a self-congratulatory statement of an early career artist executing an ambitious work. Pointon’s show at the Dowse Art Museum in 2018, *Don’t miss out.*, consisting of a large advertorial blimp reading “It’s a big one.”, is similarly self-referential in regards to its own occupation of physical space as well as a reference to the significance of someone like Pointon having the opportunity to display such a work in a public institution. Fellow Wellington artist and writer Dilohana Lekamge points out that “Pointon understands that galleries don’t often make space for artists who are South Asian, brown and female, so she made the most of the opportunity by taking up as much space as she could.”³

³ Lekamge, Dilohana. “Representation and Humour in South Asian Aotearoa Art.” <http://www.extendedconversations.org.nz/representation-and-humour/>

Taking to the sky to take up even more space, *WOULD YOU LOOK AT THAT.* is a humorous reworking of a project born out of exclusivity. It’s a sharp critique, almost bratty, but the result is ultimately inviting and warm. To everyone who may have witnessed the plane on that Sunday afternoon, the plane was spectacular, the day was spectacular, and they themselves were spectacular. The banner reading “SPECTACULAR.”, and the project as a whole, is at once self congratulatory as it is congratulatory in general.

By Robbie Handcock

The artist would like to thank:

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- Rhys Parish

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Videography: Laura Duffy, Georgette Brown, Robbie Handcock

Music: “New Zealand” from LARP of Luxury (2013) by Eyeliner

play_station



SPECTACULAR

ZK-MDV



ZK-CXP

Air Auckland

air new zealand national

NAC
WINGS OF THE NATION



SPECTACULAR.

