

Peter Garnick – Critical Commentary

From **Constructive Ragpickings**, Sofitel Melbourne 2009

Naomi Cass, Director, Centre For Contemporary Photography, Melbourne

It is this radical absence of a frame of reference for scale that contributes to the power of these images, be they large or small. This is an engaging and bodily experience. The spaces are strangely familiar and yet unknown.

This is the story of geometry, of form and tone, of structure and repetition of positive and negative forms, of light and dark, of restrained colour.

Garnick is adept in engaging repeated utilitarian markings on surfaces or numbers sprayed onto the wall, destined to be covered over once their function has been met, as part of the rhythmic structure of his compositions.

But far from a dull formula, Garnick finds pleasure and drama in positive and negative space, in robust contrasts and unexpected breaks in pattern and rhythm.

In many respects the real subject of the work is light. Absence of light, variations of light, plays of light across surfaces and light reflected.

From **Constructive Ragpickings**, Mildura 2008

Julian Bowron, Director, Mildura Regional Gallery

This work is documentary in that it observes and records a place and processes in time, albeit quite deliberately without the actors whose absence is palpable. In another sense the work is a kind of anticipatory archaeology, revealing what will soon be obliterated, buried in concrete.

These images of a Melbourne hospital building site are also quite beautiful, most of them work wonderfully as highly formal abstractions revealing the photographer's awareness of and allegiances to modern visual culture.

What makes Peter Garnick's images in this exhibition outstanding however is not their success as either documentary or abstraction. It is his acute sensibility and control of his chosen medium. These scapes of concrete, steel, light, and imagination are quite literally luminous. They are luminous and astonishing because of the artist's ability to look through the viewfinder and make his exposures while calculating that the printed image which will hang on the gallery wall can express space and light so as to achieve a small wonder.

Naomi Cass, Director
Centre for Contemporary Photography

Liquid Gold – The Art of Irrigation

Peter Garnick has a knack of being witness to periods of change, finding beauty and monumentality in man-made technology, on the cusp of re-development. I am thinking here of Garnick's two major projects with the Royal Women's Hospital in 2007.

Far from being an agent of change, this perceptive and thoughtful observer is called forth by trailblazers, and commissioned to attend to what's on the verge of being lost, in the inevitable march of progress.

Witnessing change is not a new role for the artist. However Garnick invites us to appreciate the formal qualities of fading technologies rather than aggrandising the new. In *Liquid Gold* Peter Garnick photographs irrigation hardware in Victoria's foodbowl, now over a century old and ripe for replacement. While the subject of these photographs is human activity, landscape is the overriding reference.

Garnick finds music within engineering—where repetition and structure form a rhythmic armature upon which the promiscuous ravages of moisture, oxygen and time dance across the base notes of rusty structures, or where light and water perform in counterpoint to function.

In parts of the *Liquid Gold* series Garnick's lens is seemingly disembodied, bringing us close to glorious interfaces between steel, water and light and where we lose all sense of proportion and scale. In other photographs Garnick steps back to give an idea of the broader context of irrigation and how it touches the economy of the region in the production of butter, milk and fruit.

Liquid Gold invites us to appreciate that the vast landscape of human endeavour, like that of the natural world, is made up of an infinitesimal number of smaller landscapes also worthy of our attention.

July 2011