

kzn reviews

'Situation'
Vaughn Sadie at Bank Gallery
 By Peter Machen
 23 April - 28 May.

I'll admit to feeling a little disoriented when I first entered Vaughn Sadie's exhibition 'Situation' and saw two particularly tall wooden ladders bearing customised bedside lamps and occupying centre stage. But then I knew beforehand that whatever I found in Bank Gallery would throw me a little, since something that Sadie never does is trade in the obvious. I also knew – or at least strongly suspected – that once I'd wrapped my head around the work that it would, in all likelihood, deliver bountiful rewards.

If I'm making the exhibition sound particularly inaccessible, that's not entirely the case. Just because immediate meaning isn't available doesn't mean that the work itself is inaccessible, and there were several pieces on the show that had an immediacy and material joy that made them hugely attractive, regardless of what the hell was actually going on. Two works spring to mind here: *untitled (imitate the real)* and *untitled (100m sprint)*.

The former occupied Bank's anterior space but was connected to the main gallery through an electrical cable redolent of a swimming pool hose. Fifteen overhead projection screens surrounded a lightbox, the screens receiving light rather than broadcasting it; the image on the lightbox was of a dead pigeon floating on the surface of a pool with a creepy crawly in the background. Bathed in the sadness of dead media and pigeons forgotten by god, the piece had a low-key but nonetheless faintly epic post-apocalyptic feeling that perfectly echoes the zeitgeist of our times.



Vaughn Sadie
untitled (folly in failing), 2009. metal tripod, theodolite stand, 40 w clear incandescent lamp, 7 w compact golf ball globe w/wht and 10m of 0.5 mmsq x 2 co black twin flex dimensions variable.

In *100m sprint*, two scooters whose bases carry fluorescent light fittings are connected through a hundred spooled metres of electrical wire to the ceiling above, attached not by a plug but wired directly into the ceiling, a broken circle of concrete exposing the connection. But at the same time as these two pieces of visual majesty are easy to see, that doesn't equate to their meaning being transparent. The 100m piece, in particular, is so deftly formed that all my readings disappear in a background hum against my visual memory of the physical installation which, literally as I write this, brings a broad smile to my face.

Elsewhere, lights flicker and slowly die at a rate we can barely appreciate until darkness comes. Projections express their mediation as much as their content, the sound of a shuddering electrical signal is amplified, and outside, on the gallery frontage, a fluorescent simulacrum of a digital clock casts its flickering shadows onto the street. And, like much of the work shown at Bank Gallery, it's often hard to tell where the art ends and the building begins.

The notion of 'difficult' art – and also film – is something that is in itself a reflection of our global and local culture. Despite the tide of new intelligence that is supposedly flowing our way, we live in a world where everything is supposedly to be instantly understood. But understanding – at least understanding with depth – takes time because it is a process.

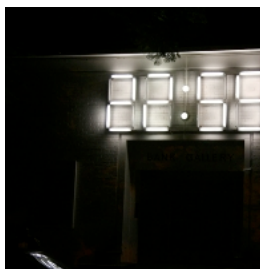
This process of is, of course, very different to the kind of modern art we sometimes see where obfuscation is the point. The opposite is true with Sadie's work. The gradual revealing that occurs is its own reward and works that initially seemed entirely enigmatic to me now seem friendly. That isn't to say I understand exactly what they mean; it doesn't mean that I have 'solved' them. Instead I have negotiated a set of meanings and associations, not all of which are reducible to words. Sadie knows that objects have their own pull on us, and it is the relationships we have with them that, more than anything else, form the discourse of the work.

I've seldom seen an artist so in love with his own work as Sadie; that's not the criticism it sounds like. This is because the affection that Sadie so clearly feels for the pieces in 'Situation' is strangely divorced from his ego, and more strangely still, actually divorced from himself as an artist.

I've seen this kind of detached but deep affection for artworks from their creators before, but with 'Situation' it's essentially different because the affection itself is part of the work.

And although Sadie – who has already masterfully proved himself in more conventional modes of art making – assembled his exhibition rather than actually making it in any conventional sense, the works are utterly imbued with his spirit. He loves these objects for their very nature as well as for the infinite dance of words and meaning they induce in his head.

'Situation' is Sadie's Masters exhibition, yet it is a remarkably mature body of work that could easily have come from an artist with many more decades of experience. He might not yet have achieved the recognition he deserves but if this body of work is anything to go by, there is little doubt that he will be come to be one of the shining stars in his generation. And if it's a star that's signalling an absurdist poem in Dadaist Morse code from another carefully considered universe, I wouldn't be remotely surprised.



Vaughn Sadie
untitled (sleep state) 2009, 28 x 600m 1/1 ip65 fluorescent fitting, day light fluorescent tubing, 335 m of 0.73 x 3c white pvc cable, 25mm x 1.6 mm aluminium squared tubing, integrated circuit 24 hr clock unit with switching relay, dimensions variable



Vaughn Sadie
untitled (imitate the real) 2009, drafting light box, 15 projection screens, 995x797mm duratran print, 30a mwi d/p isolator, 20m of 25mm PVC sprag tubing, 20m 0.75 x 2c cable, fluorescent light and galvanised wire rope, dimensions variable



Venue

Bank Gallery
 217 Florida Road, Morningside

Tel: (031) 312 6911
 Fax: info@bankgallery.co.za
 www.bankgallery.co.za

Tue-Fri 10am-5pm, Sat 10am-2pm

Page tools

✉ Email this page

🖨 Print

Bookmark with

Delicious
 Digg
 reddit
 Facebook
 StumbleUpon
 Laaik.it

What are these?