

Teelah George: Meatworks Mens Qrtrs

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Heading home from art school I often ride past the windows of OK Gallery in eager anticipation of what the guys are serving up for their next show. Continuing its string of engaging and challenging offerings, (since their greatly appreciated opening in 2011) the immaculate walls of OK gallery have again been adorned with a visual feast from the left of centre, this time from our own backyard...

In her first solo show at OK Gallery, emerging West Australian artist Teelah George presents a series of works completed in a recent residency at Fremantle Arts Centre. In *Meatworks Mens Qrtrs*, a documentary style investigation of her family heritage, George explores her grandfather's experience working at an abattoir near Wyndham in the early to mid 1900's.

Armed with archival photographs, familial history, and a memoir by Ken Mellowship titled *Wyndham – with a ton of salt*, George set about a re-visitation of the life of 'Jacko George' through her artistic practice. Mellowship's brutal story of life on the station is translated through George's abstract, semi fictitious portraits of the characters he depicts.

The immediacy of her hand in these paintings conveys a sense of hurriedness to record an impression threatening to slip from memory. The empty, haunting stares of men such as Len 'The Horse' Phillips, or Ted Scott 'The Hygenic Butcher' instills a vague familiarity, aligning the viewer with her subject's plight. Her palate is subdued and thin mixtures of oils and enamel merge and run on board in an ugly flatness that belies none of the brutality of these men's craft.

On the opposite wall of the gallery hang two framed large format photocopies the artist has worked back into with toner, graphite, oil and enamel. Beneath the artists gestural marks we see an aerial view of the abattoir in black and white. George's poetic mark making imparts a sense of the grubby, masculine nature of the subject with great confidence.

On the floor below are two freestanding and one wall-supported sculpture constructed from papier-mache, ink, enamel, ceramic, graphite and aluminium foil. Colloquially titled 'Shit on a stick, piss in a cup' the works give form to an old family description of dinner in Wyndham. In synthesis with the wall works, the pieces are roughly shaped with an apparent carelessness that again brings an air of ambiguity and distance from her subject. A half unraveled roll of aluminium foil appears to have been burnt or stained and rerolled to climb the wall, its rawness somewhat disturbing.

Working within this very personal frame of familial exploration George has presented a moving exhibition of works that evidence both her artistic maturity and sensitivity to subject. *Meatworks Mens Qrtrs* is a strong body of work,

indicative of her willingness to explore a variety of media and confidence in the act of painterly abstraction. Bringing a raw and gritty angle to her work, George's *Meatworks Mens Qrtrs* is an inspiration to emerging artists looking to move beyond the polished, well-trodden routines of artistic practice in Perth.