

# Suburban promise: 8520 S.W 27<sup>th</sup> Place

Therese Sweeney

Tickety, tickety, tickety, on it goes, a repetitive mechanical scratching. I peer down into one of 6 'hot houses' arranged in perfect symmetry. Encased in each is an electronic 2-headed rodent-like robot flashing red lights. I get the impression they're thinking and I sense their struggle. I'm reminded of a character from the children's story *Dr Dolittle*; Push Me Pull Me, the donkey with 2 heads constantly negotiating with itself.

Fernando Orellana (USA) has drawn on his childhood experiences to conceptualise many parts of this installation, his banal generic homes representing the mass produced suburbia that flourished throughout post-World War II America as indeed it did in Australia during the 1950s and 60s. The artist challenges the audience to consider the relationship between the suburban utopian dream and its dystopian underbelly, the opposing binaries of public and private. These houses however are transparent. Looking down into each house, we are presented with an opportunity to judge everyday life as the 'other' of modernity.

I witness slight variations in the robots' mechanical thinking as they move either up or down a wired line, a metaphor for humanity always having to face options. When they hit houses, the notion of 'banging one's head against a brick wall' is conjured, or the release of head-bangers at a rock concert. This is a poignant pause in the installation suggestive of the idiosyncrasies of private lives and our increasing attachment to the home as technology evolves.

The robot-rodents continue to gnaw and nibble along their 'tightrope' and I feel deflated by the rhythmic monotone of a mundane life amidst a modernist ideal which the artist subverts and reclaims by 'remixing' consumerable electronic goods to create an authentic innovation, an automated sculpture modelled and developed with the collective conscious in mind.

The 'hot houses' also have wheels, eliciting perhaps a reference to the artist's early migration experience as well as to the mobility of contemporary life, the importance of the motor vehicle and the potential for spatial transformations.

I sensed optimism in *8520 s.w.27<sup>th</sup> Place*. The robots defy sameness in Orellana's textured commentary on the themes of

production and consumerism and homogeneity versus heterogeneity. The work is perfectly positioned in the DistributedDifference exhibition at The Bank, a new art space located at Midland, a disadvantaged community positioned on the outskirts of Perth. This presented a challenge not only to the academics and cultural elites attending the exhibition but also to the local community who can appreciate that there is an existing heterogeneity and multiplicity in suburbia and that they have the opportunity to contribute to their own cultural experiences.

*Fernando Orellana, 8520 s.w.27<sup>th</sup> Place,  
DistributedDifference, exhibition, curator Jeremy Blank, The  
Bank, Midland, BEAP 04, Sept 10-Nov 12*

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