



Making beautiful music

VISUAL ARTS



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Of Art and Music at the John Curtin Gallery brings together three separate shows which collectively discuss the impact music and art have on each other, as part of the Perth International Arts Festival.

The combination of music and visuals erupts in many different ways — MTV and YouTube have changed their relationship for ever — but this is no partnership in its infancy. There is considered opinion today that Aboriginal rock painting and music together provided an ages-old cinematic experience.

In this sense the narrative possibilities of music and art are not only full of potential but become pivotal to our knowledge of history. Of Art and Music is curated in such a way as to explore the Festival's theme of history and in doing so makes us aware of the inherent, very physical, very bodily understanding of both music and art that seems to be born into each of us.

Of Art and Music is divided into three installations: Janet Cardiff's *The Forty Part Motet*; Brian Blanchflower's *Tursiops* and *Glimpses (An Earth History)* together with Roger Smalley's response *Diptych (Homage to Brian Blanchflower)*; and Adam Geczy and Peter Sculthorpe's collaboration *Paris Requiem*.

Cardiff's installation of 40 speakers is set in a circle and immediately reminded me of some sort of ancient monolithic rock sculpture. The work is impressive just in its visual impact, including

the massive amounts of wiring that slowly increase in volume as they snake around the floor, but the sheer audacity and ambitiousness of the sound recording immediately outweigh this when you begin to understand what is taking place.

Each of the speakers literally stands in for a person, or rather that person's voice, in what, after some initial chattering, becomes a full-blown choir recital. The choral music for this piece was written by Thomas Tallis in the 16th century and through Cardiff's innovative recording now lives and breathes as a mobile cathedral experience. This is emotional and uplifting yet, in her replacement of the person with technology, Cardiff cleverly, and disturbingly, asks us why we respond to the residue of an act in the same way we might to the real thing.

Walking around and through the speakers, and hearing the individual voices, is sensational. What develops is a slow, evolving narrative between artist, technology and audience that somehow ignores the fact that the work is a translation; rather the time is spent becoming familiar with each voice in what is essentially a 40-layer track.

Walking from Cardiff's piece into the collaboration between Blanchflower and Smalley takes a bit of adjustment. Far from an immersion, this installation separates the music from the visual work that has inspired it, providing a listen and look experience which is more contemplative than emotional.

The two Blanchflower works in

themselves are considerably different; *Glimpses (An Earth History)* is an epic painting on a big horizontal canvas while *Tursiops* is a collection of painterly objects inspired by an encounter with a dead dolphin at Cheynes Beach in the south of our State. Smalley's inspired musical response to these works is heard in headphones as you sit on a couch.

Of the three shows in *Of Art and Music*, this installation reads as the most traditional form of visual art inspiring a musical response but the relationship between the works is very subtle.

Geczy and Sculthorpe's suite of symphonic works in *Paris Requiem* is going somewhere else. This is not the Paris most of us might be familiar with but the staid outskirts of suburbia shot in a slow, deliberate fashion and pitched together with fascinating and, at times, epic music. *Paris Requiem* paradoxically sweeps the viewer along.

Wonderfully composed and thoughtfully edited, the subject matter intentionally risks sucking the emotion out of the work yet the loneliness and disconnection of suburban living is palpable.

Paris Requiem reads like a kind of anti-epic that in the end reconstitutes common ideas of the relationship between visuals and soundtrack.

Of Art and Music is at the John Curtin Gallery at Curtin University of Technology until April 3.



Always have Paris: Adam Gecky and Peter Sculthorpe's Paris Requiem challenges the relationship of sound and vision