

An encounter with time

Juliet Darling's 'WAIT'

David Malouf, Sydney

Juliet Darling, *Bondi*, 2015, still from 'WAIT', 3-channel video loop; 5 mins 56 secs duration, edition of 8 + 2 APs; image courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney



Juliet Darling, *Mona Lisa*, 2015, stills from 'WAIT', 3-channel video loop; 6 mins 13 secs duration, edition of 8 + 2 APs; images courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

The monosyllable that provides the title for these three video artworks, for all its simplicity, is complex and ambiguous.

As an imperative it asks us to be patient; to reject our natural impatience to grasp, take in and move on, so that some other form of experience may emerge.

This is essentially the stance of the maker or artist. As Kipling puts it in his advice to the writer on how he should attend to his 'demon': 'drift, wait, obey'. It is the state of consciousness that any serious work of art, or work in general, demands; the patient attention that the artist offers all of us as a way of reading or viewing what he has made.

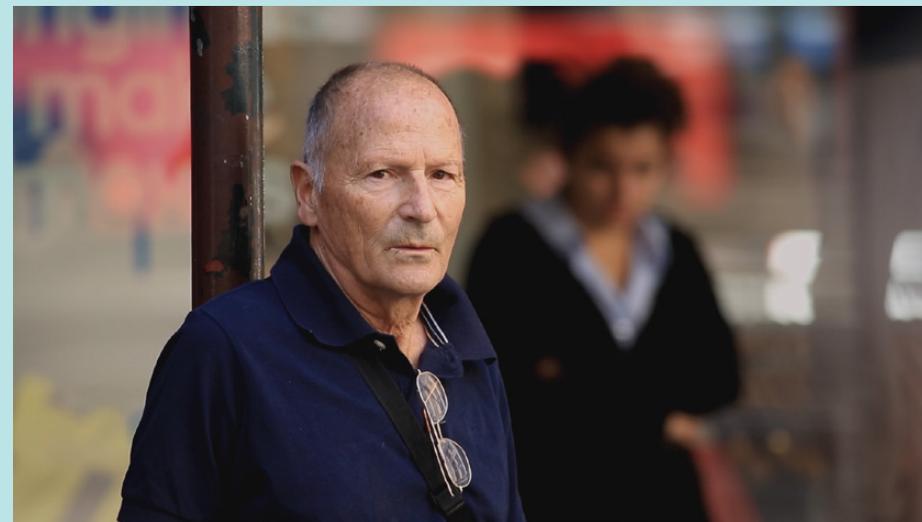
It is this matter of viewing that is the subject of the first of these videos, and the work on view is one that famously, or infamously, draws the largest of crowds; a work so well-known to us, without our ever having actually laid eyes on it, that the real test of seeing it is how to separate the real painting from the one we already 'know'.

The focus here is on the hectic scramble of arms, heads,

hands as a crowd in front of the *Mona Lisa* attempts to take the picture in – the majority of them, in the most superficial way, by using their iPhones rather than their eyes, and less to capture and record the image than to capture the occasion; including, if they can manage it, themselves and *La Gioconda* in the same frame.

These figures are violently active (the very opposite of the *Mona Lisa* herself, whom we never see). They can't wait to snap their smiling image and be done. But among them are a few who are entirely still. They are bringing the whole of themselves to the occasion, and trying, with intense concentration, to encounter what is there. To let it engage with them. It is their stillness and intensity that Juliet Darling's camera engages with.

This is a human comedy, in which the utter seriousness of the few seems heroic. They gaze, they wait, they turn away. Then, not quite satisfied, some of them turn back. In its contrast between busy inattention and the quietness of attention



Juliet Darling, *Town Hall*, 2015, stills from 'WAIT', 3-channel video loop; 10 mins 54 secs duration, edition of 8 + 2 APs; images courtesy the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney

this is the most 'active' of the three pieces.

But 'wait' in its other form is a noun. It refers, as in 'a short wait' or 'a long wait', to a suspension of time and action in a period of expectation, of waiting. And it is this that *Bondi* and *Town Hall* explore.

The subject of the first is the surfer's business of waiting for the ocean to deliver, in its own time, a wave that can be 'caught'. Long moments of subjecting human time, with its mixture of impatience and quiet expectation, to time as the sea regulates it.

In the second, the focus is the more strictly human business of waiting for the arrival, at a scheduled meeting, of another: a first meeting, a reunion of friends or lovers or of briefly separated family members or partners. It is the intense psychological life of the various figures that the camera chooses to stay with now – anxiety as the minutes pass, the calm and pleasurable assurance of expectation, subdued impatience. We watch and identify for a time with the expres-

sions and body language of these strangers who have become (in another form of meeting) fellow-lingerers and friends.

This is the longest of the three pieces. Its triumph is that it never becomes merely 'documentary', its intimacy is never intrusive. An essential musicality or pulse (and this is equally true of *Mona Lisa* and *Bondi*) ensures that once we have subdued ourselves to its rhythms, we too are prepared, without resistance or concern, to drift and wait.

Mona Lisa, *Bondi* and *Town Hall*, the three digital video artworks that comprise 'WAIT', first screened at Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney, from 29 October to 21 November 2015; *Mona Lisa* was subsequently shown at the Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne, from 16 December 2015 to 4 February 2016, and is screening as part of Art Basel Hong Kong's film sector, curated by Li Zhenhua, 24–26 March 2016; David Malouf's text was first published in the catalogue that originally accompanied 'WAIT' and is reproduced here courtesy the author, the artist and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery.