

SAVED IMAGES

hobbypop museum

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hobbypopMUSEUM

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hobypopMUSEUM on Main Street *Andrew Renton*

“Honey, I’ve been signifying.
Whoa, whoa, whoa.” (‘I’m Not Signifying’)

It begins with an exile. Unfamiliar surroundings. No-one is quite at home, but you unpack your things to make sense of them as best you can. There are benefits to this exile. It offers a kind of freedom and a possibility for reinvention. An opportunity to be or play someone else. Or a refreshed version of yourself. Tuned up or down.

The model, here, is the Rolling Stones, decamped to the South of France, recording in the basement of Keith Richards’ rented palace, Nellcôte, in Villefranche, on the coast. The most mythologised part of a three year gestation of what would become *Exile on Main Street*. It’s about the strange ways of collaboration, presences and absences.

A moment to step outside of yourself. There’s an expectation to make viable something that constitutes an intensified version of yourself. At the same time there’s a cumulative progression, a coming into definition. But only in one direction. You do not come and go, but move forward, leaving marks and debris along the way. No sight of return along the way, although you can assume that this roadshow proposes a journey which comes full circle.

The journey accumulates materials along the way; objects, images, ideas, sounds. There’s a question, then, as to what remains, or what is abandoned as it moves on. And who decides? How to divide or share responsibilities? Obligations?

And if it’s unclear whose obligation this is, in whose name is it speaking? Perhaps this isn’t worked out in advance. There is an openness of practice which suggests that as much as nothing is ever completed, in the same spirit nothing is

stable, and always subject either to abandonment or to an additional layer added belatedly to complicate the plot.

Who decides when something begins or is completed and closed down? Co-signatories? Or a collective name which nevertheless speaks in many voices simultaneously? And what if things refuse to close down into neat identification? How to make sense of the unfinished business, the open works?

“One of the things about exile is a lot of the stuff that we picked up on the road or along the way came out. You’ve drawn from whatever you’ve listened to since you were a child.” (Keith Richards)

It’s about a cumulative, gathering, process. This way of working takes courage because you cannot fix a set of criteria or materialities which can comfortably anticipate entering an archive at some later date. The work is unstable in its formation and cannot be eradicated, despite, because of, its processes of accretion. Little or nothing might survive in the long run. But there may be a memory of things. Second or third hand. Or a bigger picture assembled by aggregated reportage. To such an extent that you would swear you had been there.

Such accumulations are normally confined to theme or narrative, and are sited in studio, stage or gallery. Somewhere where display or performance are a given. Museum? hobbypopMUSEUM* cites the Museum in order to dismantle it before it begins. It’s never been about the museum, but it’s equally too easy to assume this is irony. Why should this not be a museum? It’s not about collecting and annotating, in the end. Or if it is, it’s a gathering of experiences or events, not an accumulation or display of objects themselves. An ongoing relationship to the narratives that the museum sets up. Itinerant museum, perhaps?

* This is a point of grammar which presents itself unresolved. hobbypopMUSEUM as singular or plural? You would tend towards singular, even though, for example, you refer to bands and football teams in the plural. This is because the hobbypopMUSEUM title wraps itself around disparate activities in ongoing and temporary conditions. It’s both looser and more encompassing than the notion of a team, covering a multitude of activities in its name. But this rationale may change along the way.

Roadshow? But another proposal could be suggested, where museum is defined through the objects, images, spaces, sounds or moods of a culture that needs to be marked, even before they are resolved. The objects produced define the hosting space rather than the other way round. Raising spectres of art history, hobbypopMUSEUM tests the waters and moves on. Only in one direction. It’s not the place for retrospection.

Is it possible to engage with histories without being burdened by them? hobbypopMUSEUM’s collective memory is greater than the sum of its parts. You aren’t talking about collaboration, although this must be discussed, but rather a starting point which precedes collaboration some time before making where there is a discourse around the shared ownership of images and objects. A shared culture, for want of a better word. But one which is alive with contradictions and uncertainties, as it is always in the state of taking shape. hobbypopMUSEUM, then, as *practice*, in anticipation of the work it is bound to make. Always on the point of making, never quite consolidating this into an archive of itself, never over-celebrating the object at hand, but constantly renegotiating objects and images in circulation, which are very often elsewhere and not to hand.

hobbypopMUSEUM begins with a gesture, meme or point of identification. The work isn’t driven by these points of departure as subject matter but rather an attempt to understand the way that these circulate within the world. They aren’t stable images which could bear too much scrutiny, but they survive all sorts of transpositions. A perpetual motion of displacement.

**“Everybody tryin’ to step on their creator.”
('Ventilator Blues')**

Let’s call it, for a moment, a meme. Something which has the ability to pass through a variety of media unscathed and untroubled by the means of delivery. It proliferates and yet becomes increasingly ownerless in that process. Unless you were to propose a kind collective ownership. It’s a strange type of nostalgia, this, because it recollects forwards, in the way that Kierkegaard described repetition. It’s full of anticipation and history, coming to you in a suspended moment of

presentness. It's never neat. The meme reiterates itself constantly in a variety of contexts and formats. Perhaps this is how conventional genres, such as painting and sculpture, are able to operate in such a contemporary context. A painting, for example, is always already a translation, self-conscious in its engagement with the parameters and restrictions of the genre.

You might understand this as a trope of perception, slowing things down in order to make them readable. The mistake of art criticism has been to assume that painting, therefore, has to sustain its art historical credentials in order to be valued. But there are things such a medium can do that propose a lighter footprint, something less immovable than art history demands. Painting or sculpture, say, as a type of critique, where conventional modes of criticism would only provoke an overdetermined reading. Works which carry their own critique with them. hobbypopMUSEUM occupies such genres if only to assert that it is not bound by them.

“Anita and I went looking at a couple of places, but Nellcôte kind of chose us immediately.” (Keith Richards)

hobbypopMUSEUM is as much about place as it is object. The roadshow reflects where it lands. As a practice, hobbypopMUSEUM inserts itself into spaces, expanding and shrinking to fit, working itself into tight corners while flowing freely wherever it finds space.

hobbypopMUSEUM encountering the ‘museum’ and also as a counter to the museum. If there is ever a brief, it is about inhabiting the space and the limitations which are set up accordingly. But the process feels closer to a notion of habitation. Installation and its processes resist distinctions between this occupation and final presentations of display. Rather there is a continuity between them. (This also combines, presumably, with the unmaking of the exhibition which follows as one continuous flow from the exhibition.)

Habitation, in the sense of coming to inhabit, make the space your own, is nothing less than an ethical engagement. It begins with gift of being hosted, a commitment to openness, without prescription. This in turn enables and

animates a space which, although temporary, is as if, in this moment, wholly occupied. Making the space your own.

Although always hosted, hobbypopMUSEUM in turn becomes a host, so completing its occupation. The space is reframed to enable a variety of roles and responses which might not have been possible or visible before. And in turn the ‘viewer’, such as you might call them, is not here for a formal reading of discrete objects, but is hosted in an embodied reading of connections. Part of this is, obviously, forming connections of their own. But space, in this context, when authorship is resisted or even undone, becomes a crucial marker to enable readings. It's not for the viewer to parse distinct practices within this context. Formal readings will prove more challenging.

Occupied space is performative. It's rarely silent and doesn't make sense as a snapshot. You can't document this without skewing the reading. Rather there is an insistence on engagement, immersion. There's no other way through it. Just as hobbypopMUSEUM occupied the space, so you too come to find your place.

“Not everyone turned up every night.” (Bill Wyman)

Bill was frustrated by the process of *Exile's* Nellcôte sessions. But he was missing the point and clearly wasn't the Stone for the job. The backstory and the received history—the quintessential ‘ur-disk’ of rock and roll all-nighters—don't quite match up. As much as the record defines its genre, you can't help but read it with that mythology of its making attached. You listen for this every time.

(Who is absent, and their gaps in the story, are as significant as marking the moves of those who turned up for work.)

Collaboration is seductive, troubling and untidy. Its processes don't necessarily reveal themselves in the work. And even if they did, how useful would the insight prove? The fascination of who did what is never what the work's about.

It's about making spaces. And time. Although *Exile* was recorded in the basement, there's a simultaneous non-stop party going on upstairs. Keith reports that most of the time the band missed out on this because they were busy at

work down below. Simultaneities of experience. Too many things going on at the same time. And equally, many disconnected things somehow pulling together towards one idea.

Keith reports that there was an array of locations with the labyrinthine basement of Nellcôte. Often musicians would be bashing away in their own little world within a world:

“At first, it was just a matter of exploring this enormous basement, saying, ‘What other sound is hiding ’round the corner?’ ‘Cause you’d have weird echoes going on. Sometimes we wouldn’t be able to see each other even, which is very rare for us. We usually like to eyeball one another when we’re recording.”

Collaboration, according to this way of working, isn’t always in sync. You can’t know all of your collaborators, or the moments, or the extent, of their collaboration. There are times when there’s an improvisation and this collective event is, by definition, collaborative. But there are other moments when the collaboration emerges through a sequence of interventions. Somewhere between Exquisite Corpse and Chinese Whispers. Reversing the layers of these processes is not possible. They are interdependent, without beginning or end.

(That’s probably why so many rock songs fade out at the end. It’s the only way to manage the information and continuity. The surprise is that there aren’t more songs that fade in at the beginning.)

**“,Cause you always saw the best in me.
Always saw the best in me.” (‘Following the River’)**

At some point the nature of collaboration is as much about letting go as it is about asserting oneself in the mix. Warhol complains in his diaries how Basquiat came along one day and painted a little too much over his own contribution to their collaborative paintings. Warhol thought Basquiat was being mean. In this scenario collaboration is territorial, however much the spirit of generosity is intended. There’s still signature styling wrestling within the work.

But hobbypopMUSEUM starts again from first principles. Territory is marked out, but it’s never territorial in the sense of a struggle for personal space. And this collaboration can go even further, undoing the signature to such an

extent that a painting, for example, could be recognisably painted by one artist and utterly in the spirit of collaboration at the same time.

What would these things look like outside of the installation? Would they revert to a singular ‘signed’ state. Would they assume or regain a signature identity? The question yields little reward. That’s not to say that the work couldn’t subdivide into constituent elements. It’s just that you cannot assume that those elements revert to the singular authorship of their makers.

A conceptual framework, then, which cannot help but affect the way you look at things. Collaboration not just as a (counter-)methodology for the collaborators, but also as criticality for its viewers.

**“She said, Well what do you know, there’s Slim Harpo.”
(‘Shake Your Hips’)**

Cover versions, repetitions, reworking and influences. A whole network of drives and compulsions and improvisations, which might often end up invisible in the final experience. But the catalyst is as much a part of the chemical reaction as the resultant compound, even if the material is removed at the end.

In the same way you might think of source material as dispensable. Because sources might come from one place or another. Or time. But one place or time at a time, certainly not to be fetishised. In its place, things are reworked, referred to, reconfigured spatially, to such an extent that the point of reference no longer applies. It’s not about detecting sources, but more about perceiving where the work becomes independent of those sources.

**“Grotesque music, million dollar sad.
Got no tactics, got no time on hand.” (‘Casino Boogie’)**

‘Casino Boogie’ deploys William Burroughs’ cut-up technique. Or the Stones’ approximation of it. You wouldn’t know; *Exile* feels like this throughout. Both Mick and Keith claim they resorted to the technique because they had run out of

ideas. But that's too easy an excuse. Why this song rather than any other? Why now? Perhaps exactly at this moment when the terms of collaboration were being realigned. No more or less stable than it ever was, the process was evolving. Layered, cumulative, discontinuous, anxious.

Maybe an external device in the partnership was useful to question and disrupt authorship. Things were sufficiently out of control; now was as good a time as any to take it even more so. Intentionality, narrative and continuity all gone, there's something liberating and self-critical in the process.

Interesting, equally, that they didn't want to try it again.

"Drop your reds, drop your greens and blues" (‘Sweet Virginia’)

Somewhere between ahistorical mediation and a new mythology images emerge in the hobbypopMUSEUM. No anxiety over figuration, this appearance is all the more radical because of the way that it embraces the image without wishing to appropriate it. Images a priori, always already in circulation. The job is somehow to unpack one version of their many narratives. Again, like the gathering and saving of images, narrative is cumulative and grounded in a non-linear fashion. Nevertheless there's a story to be told. It's hobbypopMUSEUM's version of events. Or your version.

Events. Not the always belated event of the found or saved image, but the event of finding and saving. This gathering of images and objects and sounds and spaces is in a sense curatorial, where there is no expectation of permanence to be assumed. It's all performative. Even the most materialised of elements emerge from a transparency of performance. Process is always rendered visible if not immediately available. That is, you can see the process of making within what is made. Nothing is hidden.

This transparency is another ideological seam within the work. The self-evident 'madness' of things activates the site of collaboration, without revealing who does what. That's not important. But the processes of materialisation are crucial. It's useful that they follow the lines of well-defined genres. Authorship and medium aren't at stake. Indeed, it's an economical shorthand to play within

established ground rules for genres you know too well from art history.

But neither is this a retrospective nostalgia. Inhabiting genre offers the opportunity for scenarios to coalesce momentarily, without overdetermination. You wouldn't want an image to have to sustain itself in isolation—it couldn't bear the scrutiny—but within these generic devices, there's a formalism of making that offers the object or image both time and space for contemplation.

And just as process is made available, even if you witness the event of making after the event, so too figuration is an ethical priority here. It renders visible, sustains the event, even after the event.

"You could almost go into it and find something you don't know, which is always interesting in a piece. Also, it doesn't have any unity of time and place." (Mick Jagger)

Then there's a question of how much you remember from this process of making and where it sits with what has been left behind.

Documentation is itself a form of performance. Deeply subjective, it's a version of the lived experience that often takes precedence over the work of art itself. And if the work of art is about securing an ephemeral or transient image, so its documentation proposes another legacy where forgetting might play a substantial part. If you cannot remember that you bore witness to something, the work would still insist you were there. The potential for a double forgetting renders the work somehow autonomous, without origin. It's no longer about reading for sources or correlatives, but about an encounter with something unencumbered by its history. That's not to say it is without history, but there's a signifier that is open for business, freed from its sources.

For hobbypopMUSEUM this form of appropriation is much less an engagement with singular precedents, but proposes that such resources are a given. They're always already there. There's no need to ratify them by the gestures of appropriation.

In many ways the practices of hobbypopMUSEUM have long anticipated internet search algorithms. Aby Warburg might be a spiritual guide, before it all, with a critical rhetoric of equivalence and atemporality. Art history doesn't begin

to cover it; it's more a methodology that refuses linear correlation. But what if that flow were disrupted? What would take its place? How would you connect the discrete objects?

Perhaps these works are only resolved within a new time frame? This is the critical framework of hobbypopMUSEUM, where it's as much a process of making sense as it is of making, demanding time and context.

Could you think of hobbypopMUSEUM, therefore, as a form of ring-fencing, securing spaces and passages of time to allow critical reading, if not freeplay?

“Weird echoes going on.” (Keith Richards)

Never or rarely about where you are, but rather a summation or interim account of where you've been or are planning to go next.

And there's a mythology which accumulates on the road. Through hindsight and reportage, which is rarely 20/20, often rose-tinted. But the mythology mainly emerges through a process of self-critique. It could be self-mythologisation or its opposite; an undoing of the self.

Again, this is about inhabiting genres. To some degree it's a case of bringing the world to yourself through a feat of imagination. But mostly there is a condition of being in-between. Charlie couldn't get a decent cup of tea in France. Bill's twiddling his thumbs. Mick and Keith think rock and roll immortality lies in taking on the great genres that are not their own.

No-one is quite at home. ■

Sydney, January 2019