



you can't get there from here
TOM FREEMAN - - IZABELA PLUTA

The title of the exhibition *you can't get there from here*, suggests a journey, one with a point of departure (here) and a destination (there). It implies a shift of position that could be understood in different terms – a physical shift that denotes a geographic relocation; a conceptual repositioning; a psychological or perhaps emotional alteration. The idea of the journey is at the forefront of the work of Izabela Pluta and Tom Freeman, who come together for the first time in this exhibition with works that highlight common interests as well as identifying points of departure in the two practices.

The journey has practical outcomes for both – experienced through research trips – but more importantly it is about following a line or a trace, one that spans across time and not just geographical space. Tom Freeman's series of works entitled *Church windows* (2010-12) originate from a trip that he undertook, following his personal heritage back to Peterborough (UK), the site where his mother spent her youth. He traced a further line, back to a previous generation and the Kettering Library, which gave its name to a series of works from 2012-13, and where his grandfather worked as a librarian, giving rise to the family stories that Freeman grew up hearing. These travels propelled him towards new experiences of foreign places, while simultaneously leading him backwards in time to known sites of familial history.

In both series the works are underpinned by architectural references – small details of façades, suggestions of rooms, doors, windows, architraves – yet the works elude any structural solidity. Paint washes, light pencil marks, powdery charcoal, sheer paper and translucent wax, all present a very tenuous recording of a physical site. The works register impressions and nuances more than factual detail, suggesting a remembered site rather than an observed site.

Memory is mercurial in nature, it shifts, changes and is activated by varied triggers – a detail is recalled here and neglected there. In Freeman's *remembered shape* series (2014) works return to the visited sites of family significance but through a process of recollection, so the work moves further away from the actual and towards the imagined. A repeated curve, a replicated shape, the reiteration of a mark or a colour are seen dotted throughout, lending the work a sense of narrative, though the reference is now fleeting. The works draw a continuous line from the initial site of research in Peterborough, through previous works, to now forge new directions that create almost parallel histories – recalling the simultaneous storylines of Ts'ui Pên's



narrative labyrinth in the *garden of forking paths* (Jorge Luis Borges, 1941). These are histories at a remove, like the stories that become part of our memories though they are known only through photos in a family album – they form a past that we long for, tied to a history that we never lived first-hand.

Izabela Pluta takes us to similar sites of what could be termed the 'familiar unknown', through images of places that we feel we recognise, yet have never visited. An open field on the edge of a city, a scrap yard, a deserted construction site – these interstitial spaces lie between points of definition as sites of abandonment and destitution, of flux and change. Though the works lack any detail that might indicate a particular geographic location, we know and have experienced these places at some point in time. It is perhaps in this very lack of identity that we find the closest connection to these places. In limbo, their past history is disconnected from them and their future potential is out of reach. And it is in this combined lack and void that a sense of longing is triggered, but not by the image of a place that we long for, but rather by the presentation of images that in the face of loss, generate a sense of longing.

The ruin is of particular interest, and Pluta focuses not only on ancient structures ravaged by time, but also on



new buildings that were never finished. The latter presents a temporal and structural relationship that is enticingly complex, as these architectural fragments become ruins before they are even completed, and as such hold an unfulfillable future as well as a non-existent past.

In two works from 2010, *Sailing for the abyss (wall)* and *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)*, Pluta depicts two buildings that are similarly in a state of partial construction. She further challenges these structures' relationship to linear time by re-photographing the works, wrapped in tissue paper, and presenting the new works, *Re-photographed (black plastic)* and *re-photographed (wall)* (2015), as partners to the first works, forming a new pair that spans across time. This gesture sets off a circular point of reference that parallels Freeman's approach, and creates another physical and temporal layer that distances us further from the original, anonymous, partly-built structure.

In considering Pluta and Freeman's practices and how they complicate a linear understanding of time, I am reminded of an essay on Daniel Crooks that described his work as making time elastic. In the essay, author Laurence Simmons draws varied references in his discussion of our relationship to history and time, and describes the idea of a figure facing the past as it is being irresistibly drawn backwards into the future. Further, he states "Jonathan Mane-Wheoki explained that the word for 'the past' in Te Reo Maori is *mua*, which may, he suggested, be understood as 'the way we face'. The past always moves ahead of us for guidance, while *muri* the word for 'the future', he translates as 'the left behind' or the unknowable. The past is always there to be remade in the contemporary world."¹

1. Simmons, L 'Daniel Crooks: the future and the past' in *Artlink*, Vol 29 no 1, 2009, pp20-27.

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TOM FREEMAN -- IZABELA PLUTA
curated by Consuelo Cavaniglia

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55 Sydenham Road Marrickville
NSW 2204 AU
55sydenhamrd.com

Images:

Front: Izabela Pluta, *Sailing for the abyss (black plastic)*, 2010, pigment print on photo rag, 54 x 54 cm

Back: Tom Freeman *box cross*, 2013, pencil on paper, 38 x 29 cm

Inside right: Tom Freeman, *shape sculpture 1*, 2014, paper, glue, acrylic paint, porcelain, string, 15 x 25 x 18 cm

Inside left: Izabela Pluta, *Re-photographed (black plastic)*, 2015, pigment print on photo rag, 54 x 54 cm

Tom Freeman - all images courtesy the artist

Izabela Pluta - all images © courtesy the artist, Dianne Tanzer Gallery + Projects, Melbourne, and This is No Fantasy

