

THESE ENDLESS DAYS

These endless days
Kel Glaister
March 13 to April 5, 2008

Many thanks to:

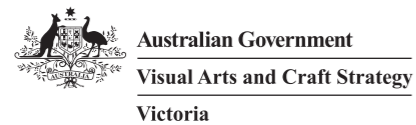
Kit Wise, Jonathon Bellew &
James Yencken, Peta Glaister,
Toni Glaister, Stephen Palmer,
Amy Marjoram, Imogen Beynon
and Tamsin Green for their
thoughts, Meg Simondson,
the City of Melbourne,
Blindside.

ISBN 978-0-9804084-9-2

BLINDSIDE

Nicholas Building
Room 14 Level 7
37 Swanston Street Melbourne
Victoria 3000
ph: 03 9650 0093
www.blindside.org.au
info@blindside.org.au

Opening hours:
Thurs-Sat 12-6pm



Kel Glaister

*Thank you for the days, those endless days
Those sacred days you gave me*

*Days I remember all my life
Days when you can't see wrong from right
You took my life
But then I knew that very soon you'd leave me
But it's alright
Now I'm not frightened of this world believe me*

Encountering the title of this installation by Kel Glaister, it is hard not to think of the somewhat sinister love-song *Endless Days* by The Kinks. Glaister's suspicious figures seem to have taken the litany to heart: wrapped in rugs, they suggest the traditional way of transporting a 'stiff' in film-noir mob lore, and we presume such a fate has befallen them. The two supposed corpses 'aren't frightened of this world' anymore because they are dead; but also, because they clearly have more pressing concerns: getting it on.

In flagrante delicto would seem the *mot juste* here:

In flagrante delicto or sometimes simply *in flagrante* (Latin: "while [the crime] is blazing") is a legal term used to indicate that a criminal has been caught in the act of committing an offense (compare *corpus delicti*). The colloquial "caught red-handed" or "caught in the act" are English equivalents. The Latin term has come to be used far more often as a euphemism for a couple being caught in the act of sexual intercourse; in modern usage the intercourse need not be adulterous or illicit.²

In both senses, whether body arousal or disposal, we are the shocked witnesses of the event. As both Freud and the Kinks suggest, such a scene may be precisely one where 'you can't see wrong from right'. Intense sexual desire thrives upon taboo, the blurring of licit boundaries that allows transgression to incite the darker drives that lurk within lust. From innocent bedroom role-play, this can extend to the full gamut of Sadeian sado-maschistic activity, where being bad is the whole point. Georges Bataille explored the correlation between sex and death in his seminal work *Erotism: Death and Sensuality* (1957), arguing that eroticism is 'a psychological quest not alien to death.'³ Contemporary practitioners such as Paul McCarthy and John Bock add to the long genealogy of artists interested in *la petite mort* – including Marcel Duchamp, Hans Bellmer and Hans Haacke. Glaister is well aware of the company she is keeping.

But to move from the corporeal back to the intellectual, and Glaister's play upon the twin meanings of *in flagrante*. We are offered the unusual situation where both definitions of the term are employed at once – a sort of double-underlining of the phrase. However, this strong emphasis results in a form that is impossible: dead bodies do not copulate (at least, outside the extremes of B-grade zombie flicks and Bataille's fevered imagination). Indeed, these bodies seemingly cannot undertake *coitus*, as we are lead to believe that they are wrapped in the rugs and therefore no skin contact is possible. Rather than increasing meaning, Glaister's extreme articulation of the signifying event *in flagrante* instead results in the complete collapse of the signified.

Yet isn't this always the case with allegory? Allegory can be defined as: 'a representation of an abstract or spiritual meaning through concrete or material forms; figurative treatment of one subject under the guise of another'⁴ We should be clear that this is the mode of language Glaister is investigating: itself taken as an allegory of language-production and signification as a whole – the arch-paradigm of most art-making.

An allegory is the most lucid and self-conscious example of a signifying chain; yet it is also the most flawed. Paul Carter explores the role of allegory in 'Other Speak: The Writing of Poetic Difference'.⁵ He quotes J. Hillis Miller's interpretation of Walter Benjamin: 'In allegory naked matter shines through. It shines through as the failure of the ideas to transform nature or thought. In this sense allegories are, in the realm of thought, what ruins are in the realm of things.'⁶ Carter goes on:

Allegory operates without a 'common horizon'. As a poetic device that foregrounds experiences of finitude, it nevertheless has to construct a meaning that is, culturally speaking, horizonless. In Kafka, as in Beckett, the horizonless experience is, in effect, the crisis of reference itself, the existential intuition that nothing makes sense, that the symbols, absorbed into the discourse of authority, have ceased to have nay metaphysical meaning beyond their power to confine our freedom.⁷

Here we are perhaps closest to Glaister's point of departure for this work. Allegory makes us acutely aware of the inherent failure of signification – and this is surely the fundamental issue for any artist, in the attempt to construct work that is meaningful. What option is left to them? One is to collapse such systems under their own weight, as Glaister's double-emphasis succeeds in doing, as an attempt to open up new horizons of possibility. For beyond the short-circuiting of meaning that allegory in particular lays bare, after the 'dumbfuck' condition of all language has been acknowledged, we artists/animals are still driven to (pro)create as a seemingly biological necessity.

When Duchamp was asked by Pierre Cabanne about the role of the erotic in his highly allegorical work *The Large Glass* (1915-1923) – often sited as the most influential art work of the twentieth century – he replied: "enormous... it's the basis of everything, and no-one talks about it. Eroticism was a theme, even an 'ism', which was the basis of everything I was doing"⁸. Glaister revisits this *origine du monde* with a knowing, heavy tread – leading us irresistibly to right where she wants us; and where we want to be.

Kit Wise

Kit Wise is a Senior Lecturer in Fine Art in the Faculty Art & Design, Monash University

1 The Kinks, *Endless Days*, 1968

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/In_flagrante_delicto

3 Georges Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, trans, Mary Dalwood, San Francisco, City Lights Books, 1986

4 <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/allegory>

5 Paul Carter, 'Other Speak: The Writing of Poetic Difference' in Scott Mcquire & Nikos Papastergiadis (eds), *Empires, Ruins + Networks: The Transcultural Agenda*, Melbourne University Press, Melbourne, 2005, p.225

6 J. Hillis Miller, 'The Two Allegories' in M.W. Bloomfield (ed.), *Allegory, Myth and Symbol*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1981, p.365

7 Carter, p.254

8 Pierre Cabanne, *Dialogues with Marcel Duchamp*, Thames & Hudson, London, 1971, p.88