

Gallery 1: Eugenia Lim

Gallery 2: Robert Mangion, Mark White, Fleur Brett, Mira Krulic

AV Gallery: Penelope Trotter

KINGS

ARTIST RUN INITIATIVE



Opening: 6pm Friday 24 November 2008
Closes Saturday 20 December 2008

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PENELOPE TROTTER *CLUB VISIT*

Marijke Davoy

Sitting at home on any given night, it is almost certain that you can turn on your television and observe a life totally different than your own. Our interest in people's lives and what goes on beyond closed doors is sparked by the 'STAFF ONLY' signs, and the 'You Must Be This Tall To Go On The Ride' signs, that tempt us to either disobey them, or create our own ideas of what they hide. What happens behind those doors? What goes on that is so secret that we 'normal' folk cannot be privy?

Visual and Performance artist Penelope Trotter peers through the cracks and explores these worlds in her art practice. With years of performance art under her belt, Trotter has been working on a follow up piece to her 2006 exhibition at Linden Centre for Contemporary Arts, *Narcissus of Liberty*, a work that consists of a selection of photographs and prints, conceived from viewing the exterior of one of Melbourne's exclusive single-sex clubs. The images from the show are Trotter's own imaginings of what the interior of the club would look like.

A self-confessed feminist, Trotter is constantly aware of the division of the sexes in our politically-driven society. Her work focuses on the 'historical materialism' (1) of certain clubs, looking at the way they 'have been dictated throughout time' (2) as she explores their place within contemporary society. Born from old money, the gentlemen's clubs within Melbourne have been suspected of wielding a certain amount of social power over the years, due to the wealth status of the members, although recently one of the clubs has suggested that its members may begin to include women into their ranks, a step that would have them break out of their traditions and evolve into a new kind of power collective. While a small number of the club's members were in support of this new step, the committee, for the most part, was against such a proposition, its shoes firmly planted in their aristocratic history.

Trotter's new body of work is a transition from the exploratory drawings of *Narcissus of Liberty* to an observational video piece. Trotter continues, under the guise of a young man, with the performance aspect of her practice, as she documents an expedition to one of Melbourne's men-only clubs. With her short haircut, masculine walk, puffed-out chest, and stern expression, Trotter makes a very convincing and confident-looking man. The necessity of the costume is what makes Trotter's performance so theatrical, as she uses her spy tactics to infiltrate the areas that women are not supposed to tread.

Trotter's invasive video begins with her initially walking around the city streets of Melbourne, doing her manly thing; street sounds come from all around, a few familiar faces are seen, and eventually she arrives at her destination. This introduction sets the scene for the following part of the video as the camera changes from the perspective of someone viewing the artist to the view from a pinhole camera in her tie. This transition automatically gives the sense that we are looking at something that we are not supposed to see, as the image changes from crisp clarity to a restricted, cloudy hole where shapes and objects appear. The images within the haze include a grand staircase, bookshelves, and varying pieces of furniture. The indistinguishable nature of the forms create a certain amount of excitement as we are drawn into the frantic movement of the camera as Trotter walks around within the club. The excitement is heightened also, as it actually feels like we are being let in on a secret by viewing these highly guarded areas.

The final scene cuts back to the observational camera of the opening scene, an act that makes us recoil as suddenly the image is clear and polished. Trotter is now sitting in the library, in a leather chair, feminist literature in hand, perusing the pages with obvious concentration and interest. This act, although seemingly satirical, brings back her key themes of Marxist feminism, a feminist theory concerned with the social liberation of women. This end scene reminds us that we are watching an arresting social and political documentary. It raises the questions: did Trotter in fact obtain entry into the club? And if she did, did she also manage to obtain footage of the interior, an act that is considered criminal?

Trotter's video and visual installation causes us to question the validity of the documentation. Although, at the same time, does not rely solely on the authenticity of the video in order to experience the ideas of social exclusion that Trotter is trying to convey. Her work is powerful and inspiring, as she insists on opening the doors and entering the areas that others only dream about.



Penelope Trotter, *Untitled*, video still from *Club Visit*, Kings Gallery, 2008.

1. Penelope Trotter, conversation with artist
2. Penelope Trotter, conversation with artist

28th November to 20th December 2008, Kings Artist Run Initiative

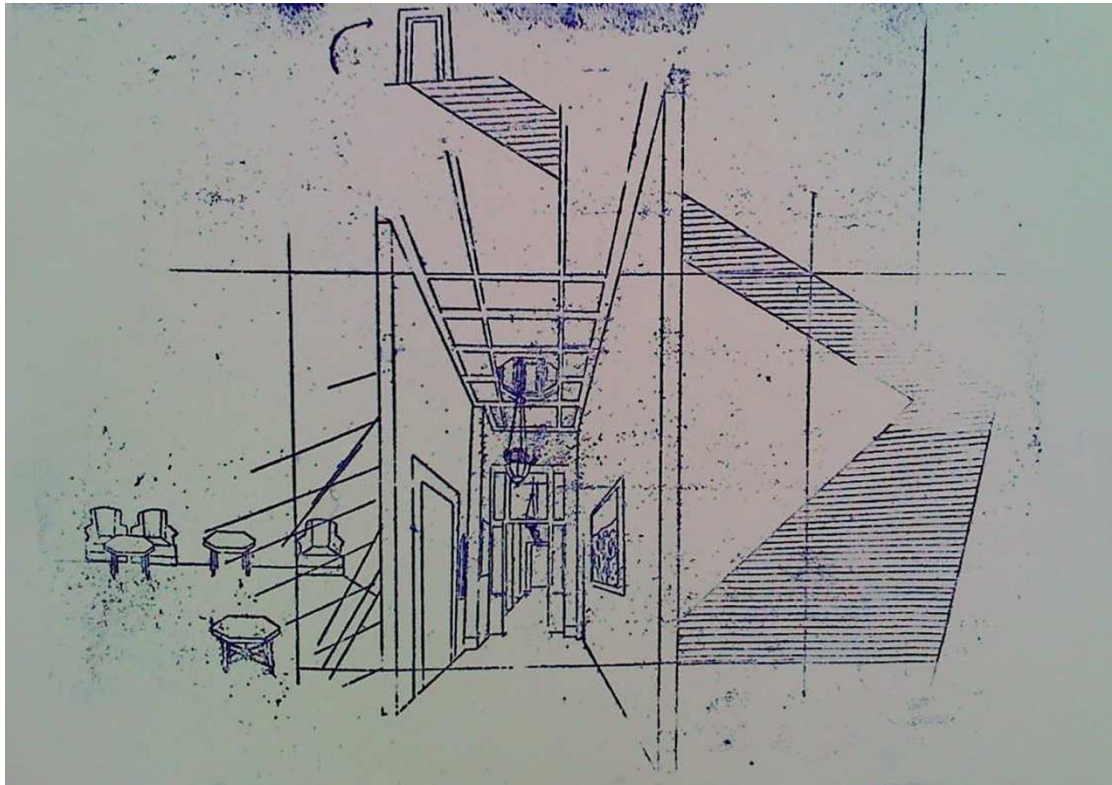
***Club Visit.* Penelope Trotter (2008)**

Plate 48.



Penelope Trotter, *Nice Interior*, photograph, 758 x 570mm, 2008.

Plate 49.



Penelope Trotter, *Imagined Club Interior*, 472 x 355mm, photo etching, 2008.