

## Landscape for Barren Souls

Terrence Handscomb

For anyone who has lived in Los Angeles there are times when the chemical heat thickens around you. All meaning is sucked upwards leaving a stillness of such caustic viscosity that the subjectivity that defines what we are in the world is absorbed by what distinguished West Coast writer Joan Didion, calls “the quintessential intersection of nothing” in a landscape of barren souls.

Into such a place Vanderpool shuffles her bizarre collection of cluttered caustic surfaces, seductive poisonous resins, swirling self-conscious fractal distortions and primitive B-spline animations. With her own complex recipe, faux baking ingredients are carefully folded into her own stiff mix of deeply personalised domestic historicity. As she cooks up a batch of inedible gastronomic objects and interior design iconography, Vanderpool is carefully rewriting the axioms of domestic truth. With canniness or cunning (it is not clear which) Vanderpool avoids a highly politicised discourse of gender specific resentments and recriminations as she reconstitutes the failed domestic diva of her earlier artistic incarnations. With an emphasis on the sentential ambiguity of the noun that entails a moral judgement, *Once Upon a Tart* is a shrewd reconstruction of a post-feminist subject who has defiantly become trapped by her own powers of seduction.

Gone is the heroic victim of domestic servitude and the self-conscious self-deprecating orally challenged nature-spirit of her 2001 two-channel video performance *Please Take Small Bites*. Whereas a transitional subject is unmistakable in some of her recent installations, in particular *gloriouslygreedydecadentlydelicious* (2006) and *yum! yum!* (2007), Vanderpool's once failed domestic diva has now arisen to become a tenacious and somewhat exasperated domestic force. Like many women angered by circumstance and resentful of the life choices forced upon them by unfavourable social coding, this domestic diva has shaken off the shackles of voluntary domestic servitude.

Yet in Vanderpool's work there is a sense that the newly redeemed domestic goddess now sings a cautionary song of how anyone may hubristically fall into the traps of their own seduction. Vanderpool's vast complex labour-intensive interiors, bound and wrapped by weird doyley wallpaper, animated texts and designer fractals, point to an unsettlingly empty place devoid of moral substance. While there is no possible moral reparation for past errors, it is still possible for us to become drawn towards a moment of immanence in which we may recognise that the furtive ghosts of our past can become trapped in the complex patterns of our own psychological interiors. Therein, all ghosts may be thoroughly domesticated.

Didion's heroic victims are all women whose meaning in life is invariably diminished by their own femininity and empty lives. Similarly, Vanderpool bravely locates meaning in a landscape of her own emotional emptiness. As an uneasy disquiet settles on the surface of her carefully seductive moulds, Vanderpool's visual

discourse tells of how on some nutty psychological level, the indices of loss will always become attached to the surface of pretty things. At the same time however, if there is also something dangerous and wondrous to behold, there is the possibility that redemption is not the mere flipside of moral corrosion. We may have our cake and eat it too.

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Terrence Handscomb holds a Ph.D. from the European Graduate School. His work was featured in the Liverpool Biennial 2008.