

Mark Dean
Satellite 2003
 video still



■ Love Story

Danielle Arnaud London November 5 to December 12

Love is in the air, and turning it quite putrid. Decay and malfunction, although less desirable facets of experience, have tended to displace sentiment in art, so it is interesting to see it creeping back in, almost furtively, in a group show where artists are invited to deal with the subject of love head-on. 'Love Story' brings together work by Phyllida Barlow, Mark Dean, Oona Grimes, Lucy Gunning, Roxy Walsh and Erika Winstone, all of whom have, post hoc, selected a piece of writing that 'functions as a love story'. The texts go beyond simple romantic introspection, of course, from James Whale's *Frankenstein* to Alain Robbe-Grillet's *Jealousy*; a 17th-century tract on consumption to the ephemeral phrase: 'You have those and I'll have these'. And, naturally, the artworks are not literal reworkings of the texts. It really is a bit like falling in love, perhaps: you identify an attraction and then let the chaos of chemicals, the unconscious and the unpredictable other take over, so that the outcome is rarely close to the point of departure.

Barlow's interrelated amalgams of gloss-caked flotsam and Walsh's painted incidents of shapes and textures share a certain approach that can only be described as contingent and adaptive. There is a sense that matter leads and reason follows, the paint or pillows, cardboard box and two-by-four suggesting the way to represent a bird, a horse, a secret place. Mark Dean, on the other hand, takes an analytical splicer to Whale's *Frankenstein*, isolating and slowing right down the scene in which the young girl Maria encounters the monster, as she kneels, almost filling the screen. The audio, an apparently purely atmospheric digital buzz, is the line 'I love you' from the Sex Pistols song 'Satellite' slowed by the same, very particular, factor. There is a multivalent suspension here, of motion, duration and meaning – a fossilised love.

Erika Winstone's videos are more overtly personal. Her daughter performs a love song, singing in the dark with a torch in her mouth and her father on guitar. This is followed by Pathé news archival footage of Eric 'Battle of the Bands' Winstone and his swing quartet – the artist's father. What at first seems like an ironic revival of xylophone kitsch is as much a private eulogy as the previous home footage. There is little irony throughout 'Love Story'. The mood is not sombre but there is an earnestness, offset by the grandiloquent architecture, instead of the flighty, fickle frolics of more 'shabby' venues, as Thackeray might have called them (shabby referring to a gentleman's behaviour, as well as his dress).

Gunning's shaky video of a film of a puddle is a tender embrace; the puddle is like a rolling, flickering, flecked critter scampering in and out of clarity. Perhaps Gunning's plywood U-shaped construction, which mirrors the arch above it to create an orifice, is a beckoning den for this filmic sprite to dance into. In the next room, Grimes' letraset drawings loosen the authority of graphic solidity by means of a dotted line. The interrupted outline of a baby, floating spectrally in white space, is accompanied by poeticised fragments of medieval anatomical language: 'plebotomy ... excretion, retentions and passions of the mind'. This obtuseness must refer to the folly of humours, the ubiquitous ether and other anatomical mythologies in which love and evil have their appointed fluids and organs.

'Love Story' suggests that romance never appears fully formed, but is forever gestatory, perpetually becoming and falling away..

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