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In the beginning ROD created the lap pool. And the pool was plain, and unadorned: a strip of blue in a white border. And the gaze of the onlooker moved upon the face of the blue....

...right, but the fact is that this is the kind of creation that really cheeses off the average punter: a strip of tarpaulin? as art? it is not even a question of my five year old girl being also able to do it, she *wouldn't even bother to try!* (alas, the less-in-the-know are still somewhat impervious to the spartan allure of contemporary art's aesthetic succinctness).

Yet, *Lap Pool*, in all its blankness, performs a nifty trick: it activates perceptually, and conceptually, the space that surrounds it. And it does this in a commendable economical fashion, not only aesthetically (a strip is a strip is a strip) but also, and this is not a secondary consideration, logistically. The work is cheap to make, hard to damage, easy to clean and at the end of the show you can just roll it up and take it with you somewhere else. *Lap Pool* has already been presented in different guises in several venues; in mainstream galleries, sometimes on the floor (Goddard de Fiddes, 2002) other times on the wall (Museum of Contemporary Art, 2004), laid out on a suburban street (2004) or stretched on the dry bed of a moat surrounding an old Spanish fortress (Havana Biennale, 2005). Each installation constituted an original work, the blue strip functioning as a neutral catalyst activating the relationship between people and spaces, not dissimilar in this from Buren's stripes or Toroni's brush-strokes.

Lap Pool is the kernel from which developed the work presented in this exhibition. From small things big things grow, as they say, and Rodney Glick is never one to pass up an opportunity to supersize his works. Thus, when PICA offered him the main gallery space, the unassuming lap pool expanded to new, monumental proportions, almost completely covering up the floor of the three galleries on ground level. The difference between *PICA Pool* and its predecessor is more than just one of size however. *Lap Pool* is portable and intended to interact with the different sites in which it is installed, *PICA Pool* on the other hand, is completely site-specific, and only works for the one space for which it was designed. In this way the artist makes an intelligent use of the architectural peculiarities of PICA's unusual exhibition space.

Despite being almost wall-to-wall, a perambulative appraisal of the work is still possible – just – for those willing to be funnelled through the narrow path that separates the walls from the tarpaulin's external border and which trails the whole perimeter of the work. While this corralling of visitors is an amusing component of the work, *PICA Pool* is mainly intended to be visually experienced from the mezzanine, the elevated vantage point revealing the basic visual illusionism of the piece. All the key features of a swimming pool - underwater demarcations, shadows, reflections, diving boards as well as, of course, the water surface itself – are visualised by a geometric patchwork of differently coloured sections of tarpaulin. But the realism of the visual effect is tenuous; perceptually the pool is always on the verge of dissolving into an abstract geometrical pattern. The visual conundrum is similar to the famous duck-rabbit image, the only tantalising difference being that in this case the perceptual undecidability is not between two representations, but between representation and abstraction.

Here again one can pre-sense a new challenge to the impatient visitors' expectations; isn't visual illusionism supposed to be a startling, virtuosic, eye-popping and jaw-dropping flaunting of technical bravura? My five year old daughter could...and so on and so forth (these irritating pre-schoolers are a nemesis to the contemporary arts). But one of the great attractions of Glick's work is exactly the disarming simplicity of the technical means. Of course the artist, like a great many of his contemporary counterparts, habitually depends on specialist help to assist with the production process. However Glick's works always maintain a kind of do-it-yourself feel one associates with the shed-bound, Aussie male bricoleur. They are spontaneous, self-confident, unpredictable and quirky.

PICA Pool's aesthetics is typical of Glick's practice, combining a sophisticatedly ironic re-reading of the legacy of Modernist abstraction with a kind of suburban Popism flavoured with references to a distinctively Australian suburban iconosphere (one could call it Ocker Post-Minimalism). For good measure the artist also throws into this mix his customary sprinkling of oblique eschatological allusions.

Transcendental resonances are especially apparent in *Pool Party*, a work that provides a kind of post-scriptum to the exhibition. Here a halo of glittering droplets rains down from the mirror ball and over the back wall. It is a pattern created by the reflections generated by a beam of light that had been previously projected onto the ball. The artist has recorded the ephemeral traces of the light by painting over the now vanished scattering of luminous beads. It is a simple but beautifully evocative idea in which the trashy goes hand in hand with the ethereal.

But once again, one can almost hear the grumbling rising from the more restless onlookers; but what does all this mean, where is the message, the seven layers of meaning, the moral instruction, the happy ending? It is difficult to answer these questions as the semantic content of works of art tends to have the status of a promise more than an actuality. But one finds it hard to resist the temptation to associate this vast stretch of mock water with the deep seeded anxieties that, either consciously or unconsciously, trouble our sense of security in an environment threatened by the spectre of global climate change (although, this may be the furthestmost thing from the artist's mind).

Moreover in Australia the pool has always been emblematic of the way in which we negotiate, practically and symbolically, our relationship with this place. It is a domestic oasis that comforts us with the reassuring spectacle of bountiful water reinforcing the lies we tell ourself to forget the true nature of our environment (in this sense the pool goes hand in hand with that other icon of European settlement: the lawn). Maybe one can go even further. The immersion in a pool of water has an almost universal ritualistic significance of purification and atonement, symbolic connotations that clearly also work at a deeper psychological level (it is a little known fact, for example, that a very high proportion of retired mercenaries invest their savings into the laundry and swimming pool businesses). Thus, one is left to wonder whether what is to be found at the bottom of the pool might be, in the end, a desire to wash away a repressed sense of guilt that dare not speak its name.

But then again meaning in art is never quite there, being perpetually on the verge of presenting itself but always just out of our grasp, endlessly gifting us with the pleasure of the chase.

When the poor and needy seek water, and there is none, and their tongue faileth for thirst, I the LORD will hear them, I the God of Israel will not forsake them. I will open rivers in high places, and fountains in the midst of the valleys: I will make the wilderness a pool of water, and the dry land springs of water. (Isaiah, 041)