

# BENJAMIN CROWLEY SOLO SHOW

03.8.18 - 18.8.18

## EVERY SINGLE DOOR IS A DOORWAY INTO A NEW DIMENSION

When I first caught sight of the floor plan of *Benjamin Crowley Solo Show* I was struck by his plan to assemble a line of doors diagonally across the space. This dynamic cut across the room is reminiscent of another recent work by Crowley that offers a good entry point into the way he approaches art making where he stalks territory somewhere between formalism, minimalism, and the existential.

Crowley's video installation *Untitled (bed sheet)* (2016) was exhibited at MAAP SPACE in Brisbane as part of his artist-in-residence project. In this work, a looped black and white video image fills the limits of the camera's frame with a single object without background. It is a worn bed sheet, slightly moving in a backyard breeze. I assume it is an outdoor breeze because the casual light and shadows behave with natural and uncontrived careless movement. In the gallery that same sheet hangs diagonally across the exhibition space, clearing the floor by about 50cm, held up by a neat taught stainless-steel wire. The suspended bed sheet is simultaneously the technical support (the projection screen), the object (fabric), subject (bed sheet), and the content of the moving image.

The plain bed sheet is a minimalist gesture, an industrial product, and a domestic commodity temporarily introduced into the gallery to become the aesthetic focus. As the support for the projection, the independent meaning of the bed sheet is extracted through its function as a projection screen. On the other hand, it is at the same time the object with a subjective history as a support for sleeping, perhaps it may even retain DNA, traces of bodies that have pressed against it. To complicate the combination of representation further, it is the subject of the projection where it is reintroduced, reanimated, onto its own evacuated surface. A speculative conundrum of coexisting realities, past and present, emerges existentially when our body inadvertently interrupts the projection causing our silhouette's inclusion into the work: our silhouette blocks the projection and so exposes the 'naked' real sheet as our shadow. If this is not enough to contend with, the projection leaks through the weave to articulate the video image of the sheet on each side, turning the concept of one side and the other into a single view, flattening the concept of difference of one side and the other while still retaining an irreconcilable tension more confounding than an archetypal mirror dilemma.

By choosing to cut through the space on a diagonal rather than simply across by breadth or depth, Crowley puts aside theatrical stage conventions that would orientate the viewer as an 'audience' to be in 'front' or invited 'behind the scenes': instead he implies geometry and sculptural form. Due to the symmetrical split by the diagonally hung sheet/screen in the space, there is no hierarchy of front and back. In the same way, there is no hierarchy of screen or projection. Crowley has unified the materials in an uncanny way.

The passive sheet in the gallery is animated through the projection of its own subtle movement recorded in another location and time, thereby merging the real and the virtual object. However, this is a tentative and unstable situation due to the possibility of the real sheet (the projection surface) potentially moving. There is a strain to detect real movement, to look closer at the image that seems to fully animate the ‘dead still’ sheet. There is also a strain to discern between the real sheet and the projected image that draws the viewer closer and closer, until close enough to be pushed back by the stale smell of the fabric.

The reductive approach within the installation heightens our acuity, amplifying the significance of each detail, encouraging a mindful first-hand experience of our moving body in the entire space.

It is armed with a heightened visual acuity that Ben Crowley’s new work, *Every single door is a doorway into a new dimension* (2018), is best approached. The work utilises eighteen old and used, industrially produced, domestic doors that are shut and rigidly joined at the sides to construct a wall. The wall of doors is installed diagonally, cutting centrally through the gallery, while still allowing space at either end to move around and explore. In an email, the artist explained ‘I’m overtly using systems to organise content in a particular way, promoting a method of arrangement that competes with the content’. Crowley has placed the doors in an ascending order according to the door handle height – from the lowest to the highest.

The door handles have been removed and replaced with electrically wired yellow light bulbs rendering the wall of doors as a surreal dysfunctional proposition. Like *Untitled (bed sheet)*, each door is a mass-produced industrial object, implicated in innumerable personal lives with unknown histories and interactions. Each door wears unique traces of past events evidenced in paint and timber chips, scratches, cracks, holes, worn surfaces and violent marks, abstract representations of people coming and going. The doors that were transgressive portals between two spaces, two rooms, or between the inside and outside of a house are now physically impenetrable. The wall between ‘us and them’ offers some views through original glass inserts or randomly smashed through peep holes that appear to be authentic features of the found readymade doors.

Unlike *Untitled (bed sheet)* where the meaning of ‘front’ and ‘back’ was democratised, this work presents a definite front and back side through the unconcealed rear timber framework constructed on one side to support the doors upright and rigid. The apparent theatrical stage set of the wall of doors is neutralised because the supporting structure is clearly evident from the entry of the gallery, purposely made visible through the diagonal placement. The doors physically ‘wall off’ the idea of transgression that is inherent in the concept of a door, however standing directly in front of any one door, may incite another experience.

It is necessary to explore Crowley’s work through physical interaction and movement. This is sculptural work that benefits from close attention to detail and immersive spatial awareness. *Every single door is a doorway into new a dimension* provokes speculation and imagination to reconcile the concept that a door might in fact be a wall to be walked around.

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