

My work uncovers hidden meanings and poetics in material that is destined for quick consumption and disposal.

this shit is biblical - Emile Zile

With a myriad of media at his fingertips, Emile Zile takes as his raw material that which appears on private screens and public surfaces. Prime Time television, advertising and the blinking and splattering mediaware of our entertainment devices; as well as the transforming urban landscape - the scratches and the etchings and the stains, the corners scattered with the detritus of consumption.

Zile is an Australian artist of Latvian descent, and works with photography, video and live performance, responding to the burgeoning environment of signs and slogans. The power of his art lies in taking this Media and mediating it even further. Nothing is as it seems. Images are slowed down and reworked, thus reinterpreting the languages and codes of one way channels. He finds a new sense, often using a black humour to provoke the smiles.

Zile has a zeitgeist running throughout his work and refers to his responses as those of My Generation, a generation that is also mine. Our adolescence was witness to the power of TV, the Nineties multiplying into multiple channels and multiple frequencies, and then came the digitalization of Everything. The Internet enabled the Media to become personal, the one way channel was reversed and the chance to play with it was infectious.

No one is safe from Zile's cut and paste. Lionel Ritchie becomes freakish ("Lionel Snares", 2005) and the replaceable war reporter and news reader distorted and sinister ("6pm Personality", 2001). Even Zile himself can be the victim of an on screen makeover.

Zile's first experiments with the language of video was "The Image of Social Revolt" (1999). Taking Gil-Scot Heron's song "The Revolution will not be televised" as motivator, he isolates the line "there will be no pictures of pigs shooting down brothers on the instant replay" and does just that, mixing found footage of rioters attacking the police. These images are now universal - an event that has replayed itself all over the urbanized planet - Korea one day, Copenhagen the next. The boots and shields are the same, the only difference is the colour of the riot gear and the amount of bloodied bodies left after the tear gas has cleared.



Zile reflects the mood of the anti-globalisation and autonomous movements he was a part of at the time, but the work was, he suggests, also a transition from a media activist sensibility to a more open artistic practice.

Zile's work also examines fame and the cult of celebrity brought about by television. Live to air studio audiences are the real Reality TV. Through them, one can watch the excitement of strangers under the glare of the studio lights. It is this rush, this adrenaline of being live on

camera that fascinates Zile. It is scriptless and volatile. He says 'It is an eternal, medieval medium. When I watch this stuff I have flashes of human interaction five-hundred years ago, eternal human errors, social confusion and folly. The noise and chaos of life, the dumb, human interactions that will not be remembered, the voice that dies'.

For his installation "Springer Audiences" (2006), Zile has collected photographs of Jerry Springer audience members over the last decade - all from his own vhs collection, youtube, and TV re-runs. The faces here are silent, half Francis Bacon's Pope, half mug shot - screams of delight and anger frozen in motion. Zile says 'This is the dark, elemental edge of my work. The embalming of these noisy humans, the silencing of these audience members. Trying to locate the eternal void in this trashy material'.



Zile's interest in fame is not by chance. He had his own first hand experience on the Australian game show "The New Price is Right" at the age of 18, and later turned it into the video "Larry Emdurs Suit" (2002). Here the artist demonstrates both the banal superficiality of the stage, and the pure thrill of being on TV. The host, Larry Emdur, becomes Zile's puppet as he experiments with the medium of live TV. Here Zile is the puppetmaster, the provocateur, agitating events in motion.

He plays with the expectations of the audience and through the editing process pulls back the layers, removing the props and reveals another story. His narrative relives the now nostalgia tainted experience. There is no happy ending here. This is reality TV. But it is not just 15 minutes either, Zile's art is proof of that.

But Zile and My Generation are now also Post Tv, when everyone can be celebrity - whether its a camera phone pin up or a My Space star. The paparazzi pics now blur with the mugshots - Brittany with Bobby.

One's 15 minutes can be delayed or prolonged. Delayed when caught with a backpack on the subway by security cameras. And prolonged when it is repeated daily. A Pixelated Panopticism. Zile aims at this ubiquitous surveillance, offering himself up as its tool but connecting it with the events that provoked this era of video intrusion. In "Holy Cow" (2006), he is the camera, reflecting Australia's paranoiac state. This is a trilogy and begins with the disaster that led to the current situation - the Tower exploding - which Zile believes is embedded within the collective televisual memory of the west.

This Image is burnt on our retinas and is burning. It is My Generation's defining television moment, an epic Kennedy assassination comparison, but thanks to the internet and television, viewed by millions. Again and again. It was the prologue to many new laws, many new deportations. And especially many new images - it either added them (as storyline fodder for Hollywood) or emitted them (Spiderman gets the chop to emit the tower scenes). In "Holy Cow" - the Tower - is itself downloaded and compressed and made into an image on the desktop. It is transferred to a pocket-sized pixel and edited for the MTV/You Tube short term memory generation.

Subsequently, benign home video footage of fragile toy planes takes on nightmarish connotations, the home movie with a psycho soundtrack. The third and final episode is Zile's performance. In public he takes snapshots with the passersby in front of the Australian call for self-surveillance - The Howard governments' "Help protect Australia from Terrorism" poster adorning the subway wall. As Zile has already connected these episodes, it is a constant reminder, and a reason, for the ensuing paranoia to justify the terror to come. The climate of fear instilled. 'Like a dormant cancer, a silent source of anxiety', elaborates Zile.



This lineage of capturing the edge, also seen in Zile's numerous photographs of the street, can be traced back to his early online initiative, Cleansurface.org, "a living archive of public trouble making and street creativity". It was a groundbreaking database which documented and engaged the Melbourne (and international) street art scene, before street art was usurped, branded and sanitized in coffee table books and legitimized with corporate funding.

This appreciation of surface distortion and slogans appears again in Zile's "Graffiti Released" (2006), installed outside the Old City Watchhouse prison, which consisted of an industrial blue-light LED display spelling out the love sick desires of the formerly incarcerated. In "Photo Deceased" (2004), glamorous yet ridiculously fake fashion adverts are shown in their various states of decay, Barbie garbage and rotting lipstick kisses. Nothing is as its meant to be, it's deconstructed and broken apart, the splinters layed bare. Layers of the street

mixed in with glue and the posters from before, a flip book of civilized stories. Smiles ripped up, blown up and torn apart. From close they lose their attraction, but Zile reminds us that they may never have had any to start with.

Emile Zile's reflections are reactionary. Like a bullet aimed at a mirror, it shatters, sending replicated shrapnel flying in all directions, aggravated ripples of a propaganda reality twisted into new meanings and unearthing the unnoticed and unseen.

Joni Taylor. Berlin, March 2007