

David Cotterrell: ameliasmagazine.com : Aesthetic distance

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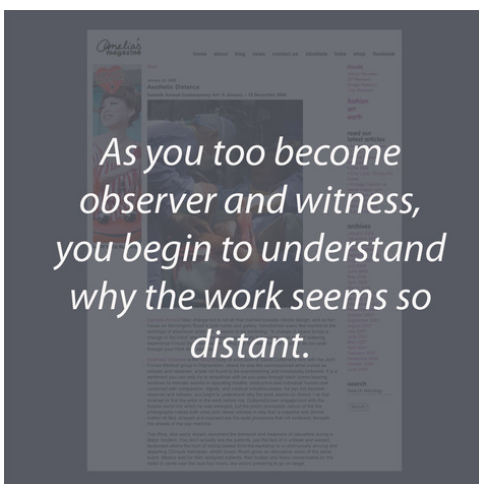
Danielle Arnaud likes change but is not all that inclined towards interior design, and so her house on Kennington Road is both home and gallery, transformed every few months to the workings of whichever artist she happens to be exhibiting. "A change in space brings a change in the mind" she tells me, and I cannot help but wonder what kind of sobering experience it must be to see the protruding and bloodied flesh of a soldier as you walk through your front door each day.

Aesthetic Distance is the second body of work born of David Cotterrell's stint with the Joint Forces Medical group in Afghanistan, where he was the commissioned artist invited as witness and observer, a task he found to be overwhelming and emotionally turbulent. It is a sentiment you can only try to empathise with as you pass through stark rooms bearing windows to intimate scenes in operating theatre, destruction and individual human cost conjoined with compassion, dignity, and medical industriousness. As you too become observer and witness, you begin to understand why the work seems so distant. I at first strained to find the artist in the work before me, Cotterrell's own engagement with the bizarre world into which he was emerged, but the photo-journalistic nature of the photographs makes both artist and viewer witness in way that is impartial and almost matter-of-fact, stripped and exposed are the quiet processes that roll endlessly beneath the wheels of the war machine.

Two films, also eerily distant, document the transport and treatment of casualties during a major incident. You don't actually see the patients, just the fact of it; a bleak and wasted landscape where the hum of slicing blades form the backdrop to a continuously arriving and departing Chinook helicopter, whilst Green Room gives an alternative vision of the same event. Medics wait for their assigned patients, their bodies and faces concentrated on the tasks to come over the next four hours, like actors preparing to go on stage. It is well worth dipping into Cotterrell's diary entries, where a more personal documentation of his own experiences are captured.

The exhibition lasts through to December, and though sobering is well worth a visit. Be sure to say hello to Danielle's chihuahua.

Author not known



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