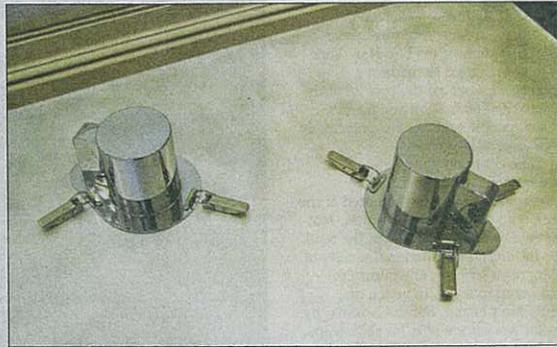


VISUAL ARTS

Ric Spencer



Heart: A production still from Alex Kershaw's video, *One of Several Centres*.



Tense: Roderick Sprigg's *Mechanical Nuisance*.

Conjuring up spirit of place

The vast, the possible and the constricted collide in the current run of shows at the Fremantle Arts Centre. Vast in the sense of Alex Kershaw's video work, possible in the sense of Constellations, curated by Marc Springhetti and all three in the sense of Roderick Sprigg's *Mechanical Nuisance*. It's a strange collection of exhibitions that has no right to work together but which at times aligns beautifully to question our sense of orientation and place.

As Sprigg's biography says, he is a farmer and an artist based in Mukinbudin whose work draws heavily on both vocations in representing the Wheatbelt landscape in a manner not quite like anyone else I've seen.

Some form of homemade conveyor-belt machinery, which doubles as a table, takes up the corridor space as you enter the arts centre. This is surrounded by photos, Jim Dine-like drawings and maquettes for what look like safety guards for hot coffee cups. A couple of these as finished products sit on top of the table; in fact they seem attached to it. Full of metaphoric potential these "safety guards", along with the drawings and photos, hint at the tension between a seemingly unlimited landscape and the constant safety restrictions that the machinery used upon it calls into existence.

The work reveals Sprigg's own balancing act of artist and farmer, calling to mind the psychological tension between the practical act and the creative one and questioning both the idea of vocation and personal expression; all this through a well-thought-out intervention with an everyday object.

In the main gallery, *Constellations* brings together Tom Freeman, Clare Peake and the collaboration



Building bridges: Tom Freeman's *Storyboard* captures young people in transition, using the visual ideas of the cinema.

Elise/Jurgen in a series of works which, like Sprigg's, test and probe, push and cajole. The idea of possibility is a strong undercurrent in *Constellation*, something it is nice to be reminded of in the current climate of economic angst.

In *Screen Test Elise/Jurgen* literally test out a screen by pushing it around and playing with its projection possibilities. The work seriously questions its own existence as a video but falls short in its installation. By leaning up against the wall we get a sense of the screen's own objectivity but the

subtlety of the work is lost in a diffusion of light from around the gallery — a back-lit screen or a darker corner may have been better.

Stronger in its use of gallery space, Freeman's extensive series called *Stand By Me* could have been a solo show on its own. There is a pivotal scene in the movie *Stand By Me* where the group of young friends on their journey of discovery are halfway across a railway bridge only to encounter a train coming the other way. Freeman takes this life-summarising moment and expands it into two bridges in his own life, one

in Fremantle and one in Bridgetown, both having family ties. Freeman takes the visual ideas of the cinema and creates a beautiful series of small dioramas or stage sets, which again push and probe sometimes personal, sometimes popular, ideas.

Peake has laid out a round table with a series of what seem to be scientific experiments as if they have been set for dinner. Circumnavigating the table, one encounters styrofoam balls balancing precariously on various props or sitting on top of blown-up bags, or dipped or swimming in something.

The balls are not the only objects. There are several miscellaneous items all encountering new ways of being — each new piece experiments with the visual language of the material while, like the other artist's works, playing humorously with the work's language of its own display.

The vast comes into being in the expansive video language of Kershaw's *One of Several Centres* showing in the back gallery. While spending time in Alice Springs, Kershaw entered into a moving image dialogue with its inhabitants.

In *One of Several Centres*, Sydney-based Kershaw shows two videos simultaneously side-by-side, as if the projection were a split screen. Two videos run together for a defined length of time, then move on to two more, and so on. The parallel videos work in tandem to reveal not only the ritual of life but also its wonderful surprises.

This all comes about through acute observation on Kershaw's part as well as a deft skill with the camera. The setting up of his shots goes beyond deliberate to consummate knowledge. In one film a woman walks her dog around and around the inside of an abandoned water tank.

In another a man goes through the seemingly futile act of laying out roll-on lawn on to the middle of a big concrete roundabout. In among these, or rather side-by-side, a busker plays on his guitar while a three-piece choir sings hymns. It's in between the images and the sounds that Kershaw finds the vast heart of the red centre.

Mechanical Nuisance, Constellations and One of Several Centres are at Fremantle Arts Centre, with the How You Make It fashion exhibition, until January 25.