

Open Book / Urban Parallels

28 Apr – 13 May, 2016

Opening preview: Wed 27 Apr, 12-1pm

The photograph on a wall, often framed or impossibly glossy, asks the viewer to step back and admire, but not to touch. This joint exhibition at Ramp Gallery explores the photograph in a more tactical and, perhaps, down-to-earth way.

Open Book brings a group of commissioned photo-books, set out in the style of a reading room, into the gallery. Inviting visitors to sit, flick, rummage and enjoy. The reading of a photo-book becomes a slower experience than is often afforded in the walk through of a gallery space. Within the pages of the photo-book each artist also enjoys a heightened sense of control. The paper-stock chosen, the format, the length and the pacing of the photographs all contribute to the reading experience.

Open Book has been shown in three spaces before this (its last) outing at Ramp Gallery. Some of the pages are beginning to look dog-eared and used. This can only add to the sense of permission and enticement to take the time to experience these beautiful works.

Urban Parallels, is a type of visual conversation. As brothers, artists and researchers living on opposite sides of the world, Xavier and Reo Meade both find themselves drawn to urban graffiti and poster art as they travel. *Urban Parallels* brings together photographic images taken by each of them over 5 continents, highlighting their continued connection.

One photograph presented, the archive rummaged, one placed in response. This back and forward that occurs creates links and connections between the giver and receiver. As a viewer to the resulting pairs, connections are made bouncing between countries and continents, and referring us back to our own experiences and memories. We are reminded of the political and socially conscious potential of these images and the need for a public space to be heard.

Take your time to explore the photobooks and images in these exhibitions – and remember please *do* touch the artwork.

Wendy Richdale

Curator

Ramp Gallery

Urban Parallels /

The irrepressible human impulse to communicate with marks on walls began some 35,000 years ago in caves where a hand became the first stencil. The walls in Pompey promoted theatre plays, political propaganda or romantic personal messages and on the temple walls of the Maya, events and visions were recorded in carvings and murals. Religions were always aware of the power and influence of images in public spaces. Popes in Rome commissioned artists like Michelangelo to depict the Christian myth on the walls of the Sistine Chapel. Every culture in history has used walls to communicate, be it a poster in the streets of Senegal or the wall of a ten-story building depicting Che in the Plaza de la Revolución in Havana, murals and posters are silent comrades in social revolutions.

This impulse lives on from the Bollywood Art Project in Mumbai to Banksy in Europe; the street art scenes in Melbourne to the recent and welcome array of murals in Kirikiriroa. Urban environments are changing from a struggle for the citizen to a struggle for the consumer in an uneasy alliance with the gentrification of city centres, the historical force that took the middle class to suburbia in the 20th century to their return as upper middle class to downtown in the 21st. Municipal authorities are now opening their alleys to artists in an attempt to domesticate and sanitize the inner-city, to become another city attraction through organized mural tours (for a small fee) shifting the image of city precincts as graffiti infested sleazy warrens. This same taming principle applies to companies like Phantom Billstickers in NZ pasting posters in the right place, the designed place, the assigned place. No more vandals pasting posters on random walls in the middle of the night: it is illegal, you know? Every poster has its place, every spray can has its square meter. Thank you, and no thank you.

This impulse to reach the public is reflected in these twenty pairs of photographs. They differ from the commissioned, the domesticated, the tourist attraction; these photos are a homage to and a document of the spontaneous; the devoted; the rebellious; the abandoned — the ravages of time on a lonely city wall.

Xavier Meade

Notes:

The different formats are due to the array of image-capture devices cameras and phones. There is no cropping or manipulation.

Xavier's photographs should be credited to Xavier&Carolyna, as for decades we have been shooting together with the same cameras, sometimes telling the other what to capture to the point that sometimes we don't know who has taken any particular image.