

Janet Lilo

Hit me with your best shot

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The Physics Room

No Slacking Here

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Our daily peregrinations and constant negotiating of space is often laced with the music that blares from our car radios or through our headphones. As a kind of musical respite the soundtracks of our comings and goings create insular worlds that can ease our surroundings and give rhythm to the transitory ‘in-between’ times. Janet Lilo’s installation *Hit Me With Your Best Shot* (2013) evokes this lyrical navigation of time and space through the simple act of walking through central Christchurch. Conceived as an intentional walking project the rich multimedia installation, featuring photographic, video and sculptural components, documents the artist’s foot trek over three days in June 2013. Following the lifting of the Red Zone in the central business district, Lilo’s recorded movements insist on creating a ‘grounded’ knowledge of the city once more.

A newcomer and outsider to Christchurch, Lilo’s first impressions of the city were received from home in the West Auckland suburb of Avondale. Lilo developed a sense of locality from afar, aided by the immediacy offered in mainstream media coverage, amateur photographic blogs and back and forth emails with gallery staff. Visualising the city in this way enabled Lilo to tap into the extended social landscape of post-quake Christchurch created through the networked flows of pervasive technology and social media. Vicarious connections to sites and suburbs emerged within the mediascape and formed geographical points of interest, in particular the suburb of Avondale in East Christchurch. As a long-time resident of Avondale in Auckland Lilo was drawn to the publicity surrounding the heavily red-zoned suburb and the pending closure of Avondale Primary School which provided inspiration for her project. Envisioned as an intersuburb/interisland dialogue, Lilo charted a course using google maps from The Physics Room, Tuam Street, Central Christchurch to Avondale Primary School. Despite Lilo’s goal-oriented intentions to navigate through the city, her movements detoured from her planned path and towards a new awareness of the urban landscape.

Lilo’s fluid itinerary unfolds through her photographic montage comprised of digital and Polaroid photographs that document chance encounters with passersby and sights and spaces of the city. The montage is comprised of over 12,000 6 x 4” photographs offering a psychogeographic tableaux of life in post-quake Christchurch. Trauma of the earthquake that continues to disorient everyday life through road closures and

redirected traffic is immediately visible and tangible in the photographs. Collapsed buildings and crumbling facades pierce through a sweeping vista of vacant lots that are bordered by temporary fencing. Within this landscape the Polaroid photographs and strewn fences are poignant reminders of the ways the land has accrued new meanings as sites of loss and memorial. Other imagery denotes a landscape in transition symbolised by splatters of paint on rubble, construction workers in high visibility clothing and the mammoth excavator that clips away at a damaged building.

Casting frames over this indeterminate landscape is an eclectic collection of album cassette covers superimposed over the landscape and evoking the common sight of overlapping concert posters splashed on city walls. Originally the collection of album covers; Dido, The Marshall Mathers LP, The Rolling Stones: Hot Rocks 1964-1971, Pat Benatar: Best Shots and Audio Slave, were found in a discarded box alongside other personal items (condoms, a wrist watch and a pet collar) offering fragments of someone's life. When viewed as a personal music collection the album covers compile a soundtrack that may have once traced spaces of listening through the city. Or considered as an object trove the album covers become social and psychological reference points of the seismic activity that continues to shape the land.

As each album cover segues into the other, Lilo's montage offers a panoramic snapshot of the artist's encounters. Photographed portraits of passersby are spliced into the album covers like an old mixtape that layers old and new to create a highly personalised soundtrack. In the same manner Lilo's expanded album cover is a collage that affords a new way of seeing Christchurch through intimate portraits of locals taken at various points of encounter; the Bridge of Remembrance, destruction sites on St Asaph Street, and outside family homes. At each of these Lilo engaged in topical conversation with passersby, an exchange in which each person offered their own personal narrative - stories which gave context and meaning to the surrounding landscape. Each portrait contains a Polaroid photograph of the subject who confidently holds this record of themselves toward the camera, as if to say 'I am here'.

This sense of persistence is echoed in Lilo's moving image of a lone slackliner, a new form of tightrope walking, his teetering along the thin webbing a metaphor of life amidst continuous environmental and social change. The aerial antics of the lone slackliner also quietly recalls the leisurely memories of a public that once defined Latimer Square - a civic space that holds resonance as one of the sites where people gathered and the injured were treated after the February 2011 earthquake. Appropriating public space as his own private gymnasium the man begins to set his apparatus, methodically walking back and forth to test its tension before he mounts the line. A disorienting stream of cars zoom past as he walks the slackline, wobbling on the thin webbing and occasionally falling off. Gradually he gains confidence and proceeds to sit and bounce on the webbing to find a sense of balance, if only temporarily.

Lilo extends the video work into an interactive performance element by installing a slackline across the length of the gallery. A stripe of fluorescent yellow in the webbing - paired with the black and yellow markings of the gymnasium flooring installed below - evoke the cordons and temporary fencing that surround the city. Adding to the disorienting nature of the slackline webbing is the view of crumbling buildings and frail facades that comprise the view from the gallery windows. Missing from the installation is the 'performer' or 'slackliner' which leaves only the apparatus for challenging the audience to engage in the physical task of walking the slack line. Perhaps here is where the provocation of Lilo's title slips into a metaphorical cry of self-confidence, an exclamation that calls for a response best left to Pat Benatar: Fire Away!

Nina Tonga is Curator Pacific Cultures at Te Papa. Her current research focuses on contemporary Pacific art in New Zealand and the Pacific with a particular interest in Internet art from 2000 to present.