

Westerlund 2

Hannah Beehre

6 May – 11 June 2017

**THE
PHYSICS
ROOM** CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

be gone one day too. I had an idea about creating a kind of deconsecration of the space. Dislocating it as a space. It's an experiment though, we will see.

HW: The use of such iconic and strangely familiar galactic imagery and the choice to paint on velvet are both deliberate decisions that have contributed to the counterpoints which exist within the work – kitsch/high art, low tech/high tech, near/far, past/future. Could you discuss some of the decision-making that goes into building these into the work?

HB: It's strange territory for me. These nebula images have their own culture. There is a culture attached to velvet painting too, and another load of meaning when you start working with these hot tie-dyes on velvet. I'm quite intrigued by the way they meet and how one reading transforms another. But my attraction to the imagery was around the parallels I saw in these and our portrayal in classical art of heaven and hell, monsters and angels. It fitted comfortably in an ongoing investigation into a possible duplicity in the benign character of the natural physical world. The decision to work on velvet was initially a decision about the best way to render the blackness of space. Velvet absorbs the light in ways that black paint can't even begin to. The parallel with religious painting on velvet just reinforced to me that it was the correct medium for the work I wanted to make.

I know they will be read as ironic, and to a degree they are, but they are also to me these strange items of devotion, so I have this curious relationship with them - reverent and irreverent.

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NOTES ON PROCESS

A conversation between Hannah Beehre and Hope Wilson
1 May 2017

Hope Wilson: The immersive installation form of this work is an ambitious departure from your previous works on velvet – how do you think your previous experiments with perspective and scale have been challenged or expanded in this work?

Hannah Beehre: As soon as I started working with the velvet, I knew I wanted to work large. It's the content and the materiality of the work, but also something about creating a kind of vertigo in the viewer. To make you feel as though you were flying or falling.

I'm finding my relationship with these works is completely different to the smaller works. I have no simultaneous feeling for the whole as I work, as my field of vision is constantly changing... So I'm responding to whatever is in front of me... I feel I'm being prompted by the work, it's quite strange but also pretty exciting. Even installed as it is – folded around the room – it's impossible to learn all at once.

I won't really see the work until the install, which is interesting to me. It's always a bit like that though, you don't really know a show until it's hung because the space is different and people stand in a different spot to view the work, or the light is different. I have an idea of what might happen but the reality is always different and I like that because you learn things about the work that you didn't know. Working at this scale is challenging in terms of timing. With the dyes, you have a relatively short window (only about 4 hours) to work in so I needed to find ways to work quicker, particularly in the first application. I ended up buying a few 2 litre spray bottles with pumps to speed things up and save my wrists. I also decided to do away with stretchers for the work mostly because the seams would grid the work. The curtain feel is pretty sexy and works for me on a few levels.

HW: You've spoken about the importance of location for this work – as situated in The Physics Room and distinctly separate from it at the same time – could you expand on this aspect of the work? How have the site and its reorientation played into your development of this work?

HB: I had an idea I wanted to create a kind of Twin Peaks Red Room, an extra-dimensional, fictional space. I'm interested in the temporal nature of space, that this location is changing every second. 600km a second - that's the distance from Christchurch to Taupo every second. In the ten minutes you spend with the show or reading this article we would have hurtled the distance here to the moon. This head-spinning fact makes more sense to me now post-quake than it ever did. All those offices in all those buildings that are gone now, the place where someone spent so much of their working life is now just an empty space in the air above a different three story building. This building will

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Westerlund 2
Hannah Beehre
Exhibition preview: 5 May 2017
Exhibition runs: 6 May – 11 June 2017

Hannah Beehre's *Westerlund 2* reorients The Physics Room's South gallery with an immersive installation, dislocating the gallery with four walls lined floor-to-ceiling in velvet nebula.

Westerlund 2 occupies a disjunctive space between reality and un-reality. Beehre uses imagery from the NASA/ESA Hubble Space Telescope photographs of the star cluster Westerlund 2, located in the Milky Way, to blend iconic galactic imagery with an anti-monumental focus on familiar detail and scale, seen in the use of household Axminster carpet. The deliberate use of such recognisable and culturally oversaturated images contributes to the series of counterpoints constructed within the work – kitsch/high art, lo-tech/hi-tech, near/far.

Site provides an important anchor for *Westerlund 2*. Although it is situated inside The Physics Room, the work is distinctly separate from it as the reorientation of the gallery space takes primacy. Presenting the work as an installation departs from Beehre's previous works on velvet and the immediate impact of this scale aims to make the viewer extremely aware of the air in the space, the dimensions, and the location, or non-location.

Beehre utilises the highly recognisable galactic imagery for its somewhat ironic iconography to surround the viewer with a vertigo-inducing contraction of space.

Hannah Beehre lives and works in Lyttelton. She studied at both Elam School of Fine Arts and the University of Canterbury graduating with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in 2000. She has been an Olivia Spencer Bower Trust Award Recipient, Artist in Residence at Scott Base, Antarctica and most recently winner of the Parkin Prize for Drawing in 2017. Hannah is represented by Jonathan Smart Gallery.