

ILLUMINATING THE SURFACE: A TALE OF CREATIVITY AND DOUBT

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MONICA LIKED TO play with light. She enjoyed cupping it in her palm, illuminating veins and lines with the angled light of her desk lamp. The underside of this illumination shadowed her forearm with elongated fingers, carving out a dark, negative space on her skin. This was her Xerox hand, parallel to her own and dancing to the same tempo. It only existed under the light of a lamp; when a switch was flicked, and billions of electrons ran the length of a wire bursting forth from the filament of a light bulb, to create a space for an appendage that did not truly exist: a ghost hand.

It was whilst staring at her faux limb that Monica first had the idea for her exhibition. But when the papers asked her about the inspiration behind Melbourne's latest *show du jour*, she simply smiled and said, 'In a dream.' This answer, both reasonable and mysterious, was rarely prodded or questioned as even journalists honour the realm of sleep, and to dissect her answer would be as rude and invasive as sticking one's nose under the sheets of a sleeping body and breathing in its night sweat. So Monica never revealed the true origins of her inspiration. In fact, she had avoided her desk lamp since the idea sparked in her head.

It wasn't until the night before the official opening, when all the presale tickets had been sold, that Monica locked the door to her study and switched on the lamp again. She rotated her hand under the angled light until black fingers crept along her wrist. They were the fingers of a limerent lover; predictably there, awaiting her return. To those favouring logic, Monica may have appeared a mere navel-gazer; but for those born with an aesthetic soul, it would be clear that the artist had taken a thought and dropped it upon the surface of her known reality. For the last six months, Monica had been working and living with the ripples from that first thought, and the further her ideas drifted, the more physical space she needed from the lamp. It was only then in the dead of night, when there was no more work to do, that she dared venture back to that first ripplet—doubt is a curious and crippling creature.

By the age of 30, Monica had established herself as one of Australia's boldest installation artists. Her last work, *Piglet in Time* was chosen by London's Serpentine Gallery to form part of their 'After the Colonies' summer exhibition. So it was no surprise that when, six months ago, Monica rang ACCA and asked the curator for a hexagon shaped space, he was more than happy to oblige. On hanging up the phone, Markus immediately discarded his egg finger sandwich and ran around the gallery, pointing at walls and jotting down notes. It was the first time since his divorce that he felt truly excited to be alive. Not simply because a light had finally shone through his cloud of grief, but because he was helping to create, when for so long all he had done was to destroy. Over the next few months Markus and Monica contacted and collaborated with the world's most esteemed galleries until *Parallax* was ready to open.

The installation featured an eclectic collection of renowned paintings: the *Mona Lisa* from the Louvre in Paris, *A Bigger Splash* from the Tate Modern in London, *The Persistence of Memory* from MOMA in New York, *The Birth of Venus* from the Uffizi in Florence, *727* from Kaikai Kiki Gallery in Tokyo, and *Nebamun Hunting in the Marshes* from the Egyptian Museum in Cairo. Each painting was streamed live onto its own wall. There was no audio, and only

a one-way transmission, but if a Florentine fly landed on Venus's nip, you would see it right there at ACCA, in high definition. These mellow-hued paintings, beamed from one art centre to another, had transcended space and their own significance, and through their projection remained real but no longer physical.

The day of the official opening, Monica adorned herself in a wig and dark glasses, and sat on a bench outside the entrance to the gallery. She spent the day flipping through pages of an old magazine and listening in on strangers' critiques. More often than not, they emerged from the gallery whispering words like 'meta', 'reflexive' and 'ego'. This filled Monica with a great sense of pride, yet she couldn't shake the feeling that she were on a boat that had set off course, and at times she had to grab hold of the bench to steady herself against the merciless undulation of the water.

After close, when the gallery had been dimmed and the last patron shooed out, Markus produced a piccolo of champagne and two flutes. He proposed a toast to the success of the opening and told Monica that she needed an agent, as international galleries had expressed their interest in taking the show on the road. Monica, still seasick from her voyage, thanked Markus and asked for some time alone in the gallery. Markus returned to his office relieved, as whilst he loved to work with artists, he never enjoyed them socially.

When Markus had left, Monica entered the hexagonal room. The main light was off but the paintings were still illuminated, some with the natural light of another time zone. She pivoted in the centre of the room, appreciating the masterpieces of Earth, then a movement on the *Mona Lisa* caught her eye. It was a shadow—a ghost hand—creeping towards the famous woman, threatening to smother her. A reasoned eye would see the hand of the Louvre's cleaner, or perhaps that of an over-zealous art enthusiast disobeying the protective rope. But Monica was not one to favour logic. She edged towards the projection, crossed her own roped space, leant before the painting and slapped the shadow away.