



venetian series I
acrylic on canvas
23 x 30 cm



suojiacun village - beijing series
digital print #3
30 x 40 cm



venetian series II
acrylic on canvas
76 x 102 cm



dorsoduro sestiere - venetian series
digital print #1
30 x 40 cm



beijing series II
acrylic on canvas
23 x 30 cm



suojiacun village - beijing series
digital print #2
30 x 40 cm

Kate Anderson

surface tensions in venice & beijing

Housed in the Venetian Treasury of San Marco, a petit blanc-de-Chine incense burner, an object of little artistic merit but immense historical import, is something about which authorities to this day disagree. Known portentously as the Marco Polo Vase, this pear-shaped oddity as legend tells us, entered the city when that most famous of outbound sons returned, all the way from Cathay, where for seventeen years he had served in the court of the great Khubla Khan. Whether the item is indeed a thing of antiquity, old already when Polo first acquired it, or as others have suggested, an object produced some two centuries after the return of the fated adventurer, is something that we might never know for sure. Either way this vitreous piece of finery, the likes of which has attracted much scholarly debate, stands for something much, much bigger, and that is the moment when Asian objects of desire entered the markets, palaces and courts of Renaissance Italy and Europe. 1295 was the recorded date of Polo's return, which as far as Europe was concerned, Polo being by no means warmly welcomed, marked the point in time when China and Venice were inextricably linked. For several centuries hence, the East / West polarity remained as a point of unchallenged referral. If not entirely accurate, for indeed both those regions were influenced by places north and south, it was certainly a neat set of co-ordinates. By today's standards however, jet-setting and post-colonial they be, such discourse is long past its use-by date.

Like many a contemporary artist, Kate Anderson has been a frequent visitor to both of these locations. Sydney-based, her sense of place is by no means limited to a single city alone. Unsurprisingly, as her recent exhibition reveals, Anderson has been struck, not so much by what separates her ports of call, but by the uncanny nature of things which resonate from place to place. Neither is her interest fixated,

as so many are, on those grand or civic statements as displayed in the architectural monoliths encountered in her journeys. Instead her attention has been focused at daily life on the streets, ranging in this instance between Beijing in the East and Venice in the West. While we glimpse these places in the travel guides, Anderson, an occasional out-of-season sojourner, has alighted on the gritty undercurrent of their lesser byways and canals. Venice, that amalgam of light and lagoon, is a place also festooned with graffiti. There are tensions here, captured in Anderson's photography that the casual visitor might otherwise choose to ignore. So too in Beijing, where the authorities are nowadays keen to impress the visitors! When the Olympics rolled into town the city had a makeover on a scale never before seen or required. Where the grass wouldn't grow spray paint was applied and belching factories were closed for the entire event! Anderson however was not concerned with the sport. Here the quaint old Chinese studios, captured so delightfully by the artist, are now all but gone. Newness, that irresistible creature of modernity, has gripped the Asian giant in a way that the Red Guards, as they set to destroying the 'olds' of Empire past, might once have triumphantly applauded.

Anderson is not only a photographer. Her paintings, which in this exhibition intersperse her photos, stem in part from an interest in techniques once perfected by the Venetian master Tiziano Vecelli (1490 – 1576), otherwise known as Titian. About as far as you could get from contemporary photography, Titian was a master of the veiled glaze. Exploring this methodology Anderson's canvases employ carefully overlaid pigments, built up like the walls and surfaces that her photos also capture. By way of contrast the paintings are more robust in their use of vivid hues, which may easily be read as a diurnal shift in light as a fancy on the part of the artist. One

senses too that the discourse here is not only across locations, but also dispersed through time: the fleeting moment of the camera and the longer look of the painter. What I enjoy about Anderson's practice in fact is the way the artist explores time, place and connection in a way that seems almost casually done. This is not an overt procedure but one that is intuited and sensed. Places may be remote but their kinship is one that we somehow know to be true. As a reflection of our modern world where indeed interconnection is rising, these works are an apt précis of the times.

Damian Smith, 2010

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dorsoduro sestiere - venetian series
digital print #4
30 x 40 cm

Kate Anderson

surface tensions in venice & beijing

paintings & photogaphic works

21 July - 4 August, 2010