

**Fourthland with
Rosalind Fowler**
I feel like doing this
2017 film



the small figure of a cow or bull with a blood-red head carries circular objects strapped to its back with red thread in a piece called *frequency 10*, 2018, mounted at eye level, as if part of an altarpiece.

The residents' performances happen in the communal garden in front of fabric backdrops with a soundtrack improvised from household objects. In one scene a woman in a sari buries an umbilical cord in a fresh mound of earth; in another, an androgynous child hula-hoops amid puffs of smoke from a bee smoker. The black-and-white images with no voice-over give it the air of found footage from a Maya Deren investigation of local witchcraft. Sometimes the aesthetic echoes the self-conscious myth-making of Ana Mendieta or Joseph Beuys; at other times it has the resourceful DIY look of a Derek Jarman movie or community videos from the 1970s. The objects become imbued with sacred weight giving the performers access to another realm of behaviour, with gestures and movements that riff on an archetypal pagan lexicon. The only surtitles appear at the end: 'What do you want me to do?' and 'I feel like doing this', which summarise the process of empowerment from bewildered passivity to desiring agency. Through 'Breadrock', an urban, architectural community has become, at least for a while, a pastoral, performative community that taps into our need for deceleration, silent exchange and an alchemy that restores dignity and belonging. ■

Cherry Smyth is a writer, poet and curator.

Melanie Jackson: Deeper in the Pyramid

Grand Union Birmingham

2 February to 21 April

Ever since visiting the first iteration of Melanie Jackson's 'Deeper in the Pyramid' at Birmingham's Grand Union, I have been trying to work out whether what I saw, read and brought home with me is an outcome or part of a process that is still continuing, and whether this distinction really matters. The exhibition will later tour to Primary in Nottingham and Banner Repeater in London, and is accompanied by a book that is displayed within the installation and a free poster backed with a text of significant length. The book, also titled *Deeper in the Pyramid*, is co-credited to Esther Leslie, professor of political aesthetics at Birkbeck, University of London, who had previously collaborated with Jackson on 'The Urfplanze', which can be seen as a precursor to 'Deeper in the Pyramid' if one considers Leslie's description of the status of the texts: 'Neither images, nor objects nor text can lay greater claim to being the core of the artwork or project.'

This suggests that a sense of disorientation is intended, and that Jackson and Leslie are purposefully reinterpreting the conventional 'accompanying text'. Here, there are paragraphs extracted from the chapters of the book, with Leslie using characteristically exquisite language to discuss the industrial, biological and cultural processing of milk. There is a generosity in being provided with something so rich and dense



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Melanie Jackson

*Deeper in the
Pyramid 2018*
installation detail



to read while moving around the installation of objects, films, walls and platforms. The exhibition feels like an environment designed to encourage and augment a consideration of the text, and evinces Jackson and Leslie's dedication to a tendrilled exploration of the subject with a body of work that the viewer can partially take with them when they leave the gallery and that will flow between sites.

A platform of stainless steel tiles is pitched too high to be a false floor, and although it doesn't look like gallery seating, it does offer a place to sit and watch Jackson's short films displayed on monitors a few feet above, and provides a tabletop on which to display copies of the book and to perch while reading. This confusion between seat, floor and table further disorients while other elements of the installation play with scale, shrinking the visitor into a micro-Alice, exploring a pastel-coloured and variously textured interior that evokes digital visualisations of the microscopic in colours and configurations that seem contrary to the aesthetics commonly associated with 'naturalness'. In this way, Jackson's false interior within the gallery recalls the contradictions and similarities between bodily and industrial processes, which are then elaborated on within the accompanying text and longer publication.

The three films refer to some well-known absurdities associated with milk – that a substance produced by one maternal body for a specific purpose is a staple of a completely different species' diet, and that this substance is now cheaper to buy than water – and then contort these absurdities. One film shows milk as a human thing flowing between breast and baby that can be abstracted and dispersed, with the maternal and infant figures depicted as cosmic, unmoored beings. In another, a white ooze is pumped out as an endless stream that collects on the floor while animal bodies are multiplied and layered on top of each other until they lose their form. The third film refers to milk's use in the early development of ballistics via psychedelic visuals reminiscent of Mark Boyle's 'Bodily Fluids and Functions' performances in the 1960s.

Jackson and Leslie's collaborative work has long been concerned with liquids, and here the ways in which

milk is separated into its constituent molecules and then reformulated for consumption is a starting point and an anchor. The image taken from one of Jackson's films that is used to promote the exhibition refers to this splitting with a representation of the colour spectrum, and how all colours combine either into white, as with light, or into grey-brown, as with paint. Separation followed by reconfiguration is also built into the format of this exhibition and project, with constituent parts that can be picked up and taken away, and an installation that will be constructed anew at each of the different venues. However, as much as the web of references in the objects and films on show successfully refer to and reflect one another – and as a physical encounter the installation provides a reinforcing environment in which to explore the texts – I'm left unsure as to whether there is additional knowledge or understanding to be gained from the sculptures and films, and will be interested to see how these are reconfigured in the next two venues. ■

Lauren Velvick is an artist and writer based in Manchester.

Cynthia Marcelle: The Family in Disorder – Truth or Dare

Modern Art Oxford 10 March to 27 May

For her exhibition 'The Family in Disorder: Truth or Dare', Cynthia Marcelle has created an installation that reads as a manifesto for the subaltern. Her first solo presentation in the UK casts light on the labour and materials which typically facilitate art exhibitions but which are normally invisible to their audiences: the work of technicians and installers, and a host of fungible materials, many of them associated with a hidden world of pre- and post-exhibition labour. To do this she has set Modern Art Oxford's two principal gallery spaces in discombobulating conversation with one another. In the Piper

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