

Chris Flanagan – The Devil’s Chord

The Devil’s Chord is the latest scenario in Toronto-based Chris Flanagan’s project of figurative, perceptual experimentation. Appearing to us perhaps as a haunted house, abandoned squat, or low budget film set, on closer investigation reveals specific olatory signs: a possessed scrabble board spelling out instructions, or messages found via reading a Dachshund rug’s upturned, tattooed ear or through listening to Madonna on an insistently ringing telephone. Requiring active interpretation, and taking its contextual logic from the 1980s, quest-based computer adventure games (along with books popular in the era, such as Charlotte’s Web) Flanagan’s work concurrently employs organizational rules and then and collapses them, revealing them as relics from a necessarily constructed past, and hence evolving, socio-political landscape.

Chris Flanagan’s earlier works, appearing in public galleries in his native Australia, have similarly paired effortless mimetic realism to unexpected strategies taken from the logics of broader popular culture. These often involve a signature temporal focus – from puppetry and the history of hip hop, stop-motion animation, horror movies and 21 st century politics. An early work, appearing in the seminal Downtown Adelaide artist run space, literally set the mono-direction of a model train set against that of a vinyl record; using an embedded stylus in a carriage to produce screeching, discordant notes. *The Devil’s Chord*, acting as the penultimate conclusion and overarching motif in this installation, was a real historical combination of notes, banned in the Medieval era as a perceived affront to divine (subsequently patriarchal) order. Enmeshing both realism and geographic specificity with an adjacent narrative trajectory, Flanagan defeats outdated beliefs through the weakness found in their own inherent inertia. The aim of such an approach is neither mere visual novelty or academic advancement of the figurative sculptural form. Rather, it represents a committed fidelity to the changing and undeniable reality of the present cultural moment.

Andy Best, 2007.

*** Written on a sick bag at 40,000 ft above sea level, emailed from Tokyo, Dec 2007

Andy Best is a London based artist and writer, recent exhibitions include the Tate Britain, National Gallery of Victoria and Heide Museum of Modern Art in Australia.