

Recovering sense of place

Molly Samsell

The work of James Voller transposes the private into the public, asking the viewer to question the function of each. Using photographs of private interiors and exteriors pasted into public space, Voller shows a deft understanding of shifts in social and political landscapes. While early work explores urbanization specific to New Zealand, Voller's photographic interventions adroitly extend their timely message to other regions struggling with industrialism and globalization.

When discussing a photograph's ability to reference and record, David Green and Joanna Lowry engage the notion of photography as performative. "[T]he photograph can never escape its inevitable passage into history, marking as it does the irreversible flow of the present moment into the past," and Green and Lowry also note the "equally insistent experiential factor of the photograph, which is that of the *here and now*."¹ For Green and Lowry the performative photograph is one that acts as reference to both its past and present. For the viewer, the performative moment occurs when they can experience the photograph as both a record of the past and actively engage with the present.

Voller's interventions layer past and present structures such that there is slippage between photograph and real space. The juxtaposition activates the site and requires the viewer to question the newly imagined location. In previous work Voller shows his careful consideration of environment when he placed state houses in sites where they no longer exist. The viewer becomes immersed in eddies of social and political uses of land. The photographs become more than records of long-forgotten housing and take on the performative as the viewer simultaneously reflects on past in relation to the re-imagined habitat.

The photographic interventions playfully and subtly shift under the viewer's gaze such that what is overlaid and what covers the surface both seem displaced in the modern setting. The changes and rifts in urban realities explored by Voller reflect the colonial dystopia inherent to New Zealand's history. At the same time the installations universally speak to the conflict between domesticity and industrialism that encroaches our daily landscape. With what began as an inquiry into the break-down of New Zealand's 'quarter acre dream', Voller seems particularly prescient with current trends of globalization and the onset of economic instability.

¹ Green, D., & Joanna Lowry. (2003). From presence to the performative: rethinking photographic indexicality. In D. Green (Ed.), *Where is the photograph?* (pp. 57). Brighton: Photoforum.

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