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The order of the artists' family names and given names varies depending on the conventions used in their respective home countries, or the artist's own preference.

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Cover (including back cover and inside gatefold details):
Kohei Nawa
Japan b.1975
PixCell-Elk#2 2009
Taxidermied elk, glass, acrylic, crystal beads / 240 x 249.5 x 198cm / Work created with the support of the Fondation d'entreprise Hermès / Image courtesy: The artist and SCAI, Tokyo / Photograph: Seiji Toyonaga

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Subodh Gupta
India b.1964
Line of Control (1) (detail) 2008
Stainless steel and steel structure, brass and copper utensils / 500 x 500 x 500cm / Image courtesy: The artist and Arario Gallery, Beijing

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Rudi Mantofani
Indonesia b.1973
Nada yang hilang (The lost note) (detail) 2006-07
Wood, metal, leather and oil / 9 pieces: 260 x 45 x 9cm (each) / Collection: Dr Oei Hong Djien / Image courtesy: The artist and Gajah Gallery, Singapore / Photograph: Agung Sukindra

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Kim Gi Chol
North Korea (DPRK) b.1959
The Songchun River Clothing Factory team arrives (detail) 1999
Ink on paper / 135.5 x 250cm / Collection: Nicholas Bonner, Beijing

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Monir Shahroudy Farmanfarmaian
Iran b.1924
Lightning for Neda (detail) 2009
Mirror mosaic, reverse glass painting, plaster on wood / 6 panels: 300 x 200cm (each) / Commissioned for APT6 and the Queensland Art Gallery Collection. The artist dedicates this work to the loving memory of her late husband Dr Abolbasha Farmanfarmaian / Purchased 2009. Queensland Art Gallery Foundation / Collection: Queensland Art Gallery

The 6th Asia Pacific Triennial of Contemporary Art

Tracey Moffatt Plantation

In film, an establishing shot sets up a location, a scene, often an entire scenario that allows the narrative to unfold. When that first image is a point-of-view shot, as in Tracey Moffatt's photo series 'Plantation' 2009, we pay attention. A guide directing our gaze, Moffatt's protagonist appears in 9 of the 24 images and immediately tells us, even though his back is turned to us, *especially* because it is, that he wants to see the interior of the graceful white plantation house before him; even more, he longs to be inside. If lack drives desire, as the psychoanalysts tell us, this will be a story of deprivation and unfulfilled longing.¹

Who is this man? What is he doing here, what does he want? The entire suite suggests a narrative that eludes one's grasp – literally, as the man's hand holding a tree at the perimeter of two images makes plain: he can see the house but cannot grasp it or what it signifies, what he so ardently desires. As 'Plantation' unfolds, as one walks along the paired images, we see that this is not a simple story; it is profoundly ambiguous. The cane glows golden; skies become ominously red; we see glimpses of the great plantation, its glamour and squalor separating owners and workers; other-worldly lights dance unexplained; we sense an unspecified menace lying hidden.

Burning flames, ardent desire: this is a classic tale of the tropics, where beauty and grace are rooted in bounteous soil and nourished by inequity. Its dark Gothic tone recalls the literature of the American South, a distinguished modern canon with tales of passions fuelled by injustice, at once sad, dignified, and ultimately ferocious.² Wherever sugar has been planted (the Caribbean, Africa, the American South, the Philippines, northern Queensland, Fiji), the politics of the industry's economy invariably plays out to the disadvantage of its labour – usually imported, indentured men. Moffatt's man is alone, as so many were, transported without their families and left to make a future. (As a commentator recently remarked about migrant labour, 'We asked for workers. We got people instead'.)³ As the storyboard of images in 'Plantation' reveals, the protagonists in this drama, both seen and unseen, are not yet entirely aware of what is happening – they are only beginning to discover the nature of their predicament.

In 'Plantation', one is simultaneously in the past and the present. The elegant old house speaks of the authority of past generations and established privilege, of desiccated glamour under the burning sun. But the work's cinematic immediacy places us firmly in the present. There is no easy nostalgia, no faded touristic glamour for its own sake. Moffatt is an astute student of cinema, hypersensitive to its languages, conventions, genres and iconic moments. She reads them carefully, though she collects scenes from fiction as well, and 'Plantation' has been richly nourished.⁴ Here, Moffatt also borrows louche allure from vintage photography, the studied pairing of the images suggesting late nineteenth-century stereoscopic photographs, though hers don't coalesce into one image as stereotypes do; on the contrary, each

counterpoised pair offers a partial and carefully calibrated glimpse into a larger and more complex narrative. This strangely present past derives directly from Moffatt's use of old black-and-white photographs that have now been hand-coloured, printed on delicate bamboo paper and cropped in archaic vignettes. These stylistic discrepancies register subliminally, like memories.

What does this man desire so ardently, that the country eventually burns up? To belong to this place? Is it finally a question of not what, but *who* is planted – or implanted – in this unsustainable economy? The 'plantation', then, is not only a place, a house, a property; it is also a set of actions, a history that is not fully played out.

In a completely different tone, at APT6 Moffatt is also debuting *OTHER* 2009, the last in a suite of seven video works that take key themes in cinema as their topics.⁵ Witty, sexy, fast-paced, *OTHER* reminds us that popular films create compelling images of relationships across race and gender lines. In the contemporary world, people migrate, meet, love and part in unexpected ways that underline our 'other-ness', but, at the same time, also rely on our common humanity. Desires are implanted in our hearts by forces beyond our control, yet acting them out always remains our decision, our responsibility, our hope for redemption.

Julie Ewington

Endnotes

- 1 Influential theories on the operations of desire in cinema are indebted to the revisionist French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, especially in writings by Laura Mulvey and other Anglophone and French film theorists. See Mulvey's classic, 'Visual pleasure and narrative cinema', originally published in *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, Autumn 1975, pp.6-18.
- 2 William Faulkner, Eudora Welty and Harper Lee are amongst a group of authors who took American literature to international prominence by focusing on entrenched privilege in the American South and using the vernaculars of white and black Americans. Faulkner's cinematic style, rooted in theatre, transferred immediately to Hollywood, where he wrote screenplays; Lee's novel *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) became, in 1962, one of the most celebrated films of the modern civil rights movement.
- 3 Dr Khalid Koser of the Geneva Centre for Security Policy and the Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, from a conversation recorded in July at the 2009 Adelaide Festival of Ideas about borders, human rights, the economics of migration and its consequences, broadcast on ABC Radio National's *The National Interest*, 9 and 11 October 2009. Koser was quoting Swiss writer Max Frisch in 1986 on the Swiss guest worker experience.
- 4 Moffatt's favourite mid twentieth-century authors include southerners Carson McCullers, Tennessee Williams and Truman Capote. Email to the author, November 2008.
- 5 The complete series is *Lip* 1999, *Artist* 2000, *Love* 2003, *Doomed* 2007, *Revolution* 2008, *Mother* 2009 and *OTHER* 2009.



Tracey Moffatt
Australia/United States b.1960
Dptych no.2 (from 'Plantation' series) 2009
Dptych no.11 (from 'Plantation' series) 2009
Digital prints with archival pigments, InkAid, watercolour
paint and archival glue on handmade Chautara Lokta
paper / 45.5 x 50cm (each) / Images courtesy: The artist
and Roslyn Oxley9 Gallery, Sydney