

Ghosts of past continue to wield power in Crescendo at ACCA

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Crescendo

Australian Centre For Contemporary Art

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Inexplicably, a man with a broom is sweeping the rocky surface of a mountainous outcrop. He isn't a young fellow and his unathletic actions suggest that he's been doing it out of habit for a long time, as if his routine each day is to ascend the mountain to keep its peak clean.

This image from a four-channel video by Julian Rosefeldt called *My home is a dark and cloud-hung land* from 2011 sets a keynote for *Crescendo* at ACCA. At times it satirises the German reverence for nature, where the duty owed to the purity of forests is discharged with obsession. The sublime grandeur of a landscape doesn't always belong to a romantic feeling but may be aligned with household anality.

The idea that the collective ghosts of Germany are most touched with sickness when most obsessed with hygiene is unsettling. As Melbourne has recently been entertaining scruples over Wagner, who propounded music would be purer if cleansed of Jewification (*Verjuedung*), we increasingly feel the ghosts of sublime experience should be called to account.

The title *Crescendo* appeals to music and its compelling role in video as our century's "total artwork", as if the new Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk*. But the exhibition is more about ghosts, the workings of myths through history and their shady agents in politics.

We see the ghosts of the dictators, with Hitler dominating, in Markus Kahre's animated installation *Nightwatch* of 2011-13. Along with good people who unwittingly had unhappy effects on history, such as Einstein and Churchill, the ghostly personages are montaged into a cafe that you almost enter. The black-and-white figures have fuzzy edges so that they blend into space; but in this case the blur also assists the spectral horror of these white doom-lords who sit and declaim in the same locale that might have been frequented by poets.

I get a similar feeling from Rodney Graham's film of a Rheinmetall typewriter. More beautiful than any Apple computer, this icon of industrial design from a company that would also produce armaments in the fascist period might have been used for poetry or mortal propaganda, which sometimes uncannily converge.

Graham's film from 2003 shows the hero of desktop engineering being showered with powder, as if staging a symbolic narrative. As the curator Juliana Engberg says, "We feel the chill of the eastern front". The title *Rheinmetall/Victoria 8* contains military associations and also the very brand combines the key material of industry (metal) with the mythologised river, whose name sounds exactly like the German word for clean (*rein*).

Ghostlier still are the witnesses of the murder of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht, killed in Berlin by reactionary forces on this day 95 years ago. An installation of image and video by Ana Torfs documents the interrogation of bystanders who took in the final minutes of the influential communist leaders.

Called *Anatomy*, the work from 2006 is a chilling expose of the powerlessness of ghosts. The key characters are missing and, as Mieke Bal says, the testimony of the witnesses seems to incriminate them because the interrogation treats them like accomplices. In a historical anatomy theatre to the side, isolated individuals judge the case, which is still

inconclusive, resistant to autopsies, the dirty unfinished business of political history.

Chasing multiple ghosts, Guido van der Werve goes on a personal athletic pilgrimage from Warsaw to Paris, which retraces the journey made by Chopin, the artist's favourite composer. But the odyssey extends to tracking down the ghost of Alexander the Great, whose campaigns and empire went as far as India and ended in Babylon.

More could have been made of the fact that Alexander himself chased ghosts - appropriately megalomaniac - which have also been the subject of art, as in Panini's painting *Alexander the Great at the tomb of Achilles* from around 1718.

The ghosts of theatre in Hans Op de Beeck's *Parade* of 2012 are poignant in this regard, given most performances repeat another, which is closer to a now-unreachable original. And Dorothy Cross takes performance back to a geological epoch in her *Stalactite* of 2010, where ghosts belong to the very dawn of birdsong.

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This story was found at: <http://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/art-and-design/ghosts-of-past-continue-to-wield-power-in-crescendo-at-acca-20140114-30svk.html>