

Unraveling from the heavens, a black scroll is adorned with the names that 16th century astronomer Giovanni Riccioli gave to the seas and lakes of the world, which he inscribed with the poetry of human emotions. We are reminded of a romantic era that was open to the wonders of the universe, the infinite possibilities and mysteries inherent in the world. With this, Mikala Dwyer's *Swamp Geometry* delves into the mysterious field of pataphysics, a science of "imaginary solutions", opposed to rationality and logic in which the absurd and surreal come into play. The show manifests as quasi experiments in a science more closely related to art where there are no rules.

You can see *Hanging Garden*, a construct that Dwyer has explored in previous work, from the street. Immediately, we are taken out of the everyday and into a world where nature is encountered via the fantastical. The soil and plants hanging in crystallized pods evokes the interaction between science and nature, or rather science's attempts to control and contain it. The piece is like walking into a sci-fi set, giving the work a slightly ominous quality that leaves you wondering what exactly is growing here and whether it is artificial or real.

A finger puppet sits on a stick which sits on a log next to a kitsch souvenir elephant that sits on a ceramic turtle which sits on a carved wooden totem, followed by a plasticine antennae cradling an amethyst crystal. Kooky life forms that gather around in a meeting, conversation - a sculptural language that extends around the circle, evolving with each object, morphing into another unexpected combination of material. The natural and artificial merge. An ongoing battle between the two played out as the circle progresses. Gathering around in quiet contemplation nearby are ghostly asteroid-like forms that perhaps inhabit these far away lands. Or are they part of an ethereal landscape whose anthropomorphic qualities connect spirits and the earth? Quietly hanging off the adjacent wall are deflated, geometric fabric shapes descending from a corresponding mask. The large deconstructed forms look like the resting costumes of the gods, each colour-coded, inscribing on them a different personality or role. There is a sense of these creatures having just been, slipping away from their shells just before you arrived, the viewer missing their supernatural circus once again.

Dwyer's work has a grungy, D.I.Y feel. There is nothing polished about the pieces, or attempts to conceal the process. It speaks of construction and assembly, giving the work a sense of time and evolution from one to the other. The kitsch appearance betrays a dark hole of philosophic potential. *Swamp Geometry* opens the possibilities of another dimension, or at least another time; unraveling a history when romance and science were compatible. Some things cannot be explained by science and rationale, the universe is too big, too infinite and we have to give some of our sense over to mysticism.

+ *Swamp Geometry* is at Anna Schwartz Gallery (185 Flinders Lane, Melbourne) until the 6th of August.

// photos by SC Taylor; courtesy Mikala Dwyer and Anna Schwartz Gallery, Melbourne.

// WORDS CARE OF SOPHIA MITCHELL // 1 August, 2008