

PINKY'S DREAM #1

Ted Whitaker

Pinky's Dream #1 is a multimedia artwork first exhibited within a boatshed at Back Beach, Port Chalmers, as part of "Waterlines III." The work was part of an annual site-specific exhibition curated by The Anteroom Project Space and featuring new works by Michael Morley, Morgan Oliver, Daniel Roberts, Hana Aoake, Motoko Kikkawa, Kristy Pearson, Jesse-James Pickery, Louise Potiki Bryant, Rob Thorne, Duke McDirkson and John White. The event started at dusk and finished that evening in darkness. The exhibition was part of Matariki Festival, an annual midwinter full moon and celestial celebration.

All the works in the exhibition were situated around the water's edge, with some works on boats in collaboration with the local sea cadets. *Pinky's Dream #1* was placed deep within a large boatshed with multiple rooms, tucked out the back, accessible through a small passage that opened onto a room left bare except for two 1960s hairdrying chairs and a digital projection across the length of the 4-metre room. The projection spanned the width of the wall, yet was cropped enough to allow the faded presence of the decaying yellow and green painted walls to blend with the images of the pink hair salon. The projected video features an empty, quiet and lonely salon, captured in an almost still moment apart from the reflections of cars passing on the street-side window. The camera is missing from the image of the mirror reflection, caught between the pathways of the two mirrors, emphasising the absence of humans. Audience members were invited to sit in the hairdrying chairs to view the work, which would be accompanied by an integral binaural soundtrack. Hidden within each hairdrying dome were small sets of speakers whispering the intimate and personal details of getting a haircut. The voice of a female with an American accent takes the listener from greetings through to a hair wash, scalp massage and hair-cutting experience.

The experience of *Pinky's Dream #1* passes through layers of time and place, virtual and real. The visual component depicts a place with a décor redolent of the 1960s, with few clues to bring it into the contemporary era. Beyond the soft pink wallpaper and '60s hairdryers mirrored in the video, the viewer is given clues to the technical makeup of the work. The video itself is shot in High Definition, a contemporary video format, yet the image contains little to reference the modern era. To experience the work the viewer is placed in a specific place, in the hairdrying chair; the chair itself is not comfortable, it is slightly stiff, awkward and foreign due to the placement of a dated technology within a gallery context. Although the work is not situated in a gallery, it is read as if it were. Curated by The Anteroom, this work was assigned a space over water, adding another layer site-specific to the work. The water beneath and the dated décor of the boatshed enhanced the obscurity of the work, allowing the surreal perspective to become easily accessible.

The process of making the video of the salon interior created its own challenges that enhance the mysterious element present in the work. I personally visited the salon for regular haircuts and, simultaneously, as a location scout for future film projects. The salon was a space that held many alluring properties demanding further investigation. The formal properties of the salon were initially the most captivating, through the crossing and blending of time periods. The sense of being in a time capsule is reinforced by Fatima, the owner and sole operator of the salon. Fatima sits very quietly in the space six days a week, waiting for cash-only customers who arrive on a drop-in basis only – no bookings. She does not play music, talk much or charge more than \$10 for a haircut. She is careful, gentle and polite. When I first enquired about filming inside her accredited salon, a strong resistance and lack of enthusiasm



Figure 1. Ted Whitaker; *Pinky's Dream #1* (2014), HD video, binaural sound, mixed-media installation. Photos: Angela Lyon.

were apparent. With further persistence, including offers of payments for renting the space along with help with promoting the business, I was still met with disinterest. This left me even more perplexed and inquisitive about the salon as a location, business and a phenomenon in itself.

After my third visit to the salon, I arrived with two takeaway cups of coffee and a pink lamington to share with Fatima and talk about life and her business and to follow up my earlier enquiries about filming there. Fatima was again very stand-offish, but following a series of gentle questions about the placement of my images and whether any money would be made, she became comfortable with the idea.

Pinky's Dream #1 is a work that blends realities and time periods. The work does not intend to trick or fool the viewer by its use of technology, but in its simplicity creates a sense of displacement. The title is derived from a David Lynch film that aptly combines the formal attributes of the salon with a reference to the modern surrealist filmmaking that Lynch is known for. The work pays tribute to the adjective 'Lynchian' while simultaneously existing as a 'fan' video and playing to the cult following of Lynchian themes. This is an obsessive trait that I deem ironic due to the iconic nature of the surrealist and 'meta' themes present in Lynch's work, notably *Mulholland Drive* and *Inland Empire* where film sets are present within the film, creating a layered narrative. *Pinky's Dream #1* uses the set, and the sense of suspense that suggests that something might happen that never does. The soundtrack holds the viewer captive through the near-static video that in turn drives the narrative.

Ted Whitaker is a new media artist based in Dunedin, Aotearoa. He holds a BFA and is a current MFA candidate at the Dunedin School of Art, where he also teaches within the Photography and Electronic Arts Studio. His research and art practice involve augmented reality technology and combining 'new' and 'old' media, with emphasis on the device/object and screen interface. Ted exhibits locally and internationally in cinema, project galleries and mobile phone apps. He is the curator of two Dunedin art galleries, BRUCE and V-Space. He is also the curator of DART Collective (Dunedin Augmented Reality Arts) and editor of *Black Wax*, a surf culture zine. Ted has been a member of the Aotearoa Digital Arts Board since 2013.