

THE HIDDEN, THE UNSEEN AND THE INVISIBLE

As the Mundaring Arts Centre's contribution to the 2010 Mundaring Truffle Festival, *Saltirramus* takes the physical and experiential characteristics of the truffle as its curatorial starting point. As such, the aim of this year's exhibition is to consider just what it is about this obscure fungus that accounts for its perennial appeal, fascination and indeed, adoration. An irregular, warty form, the truffle rarely sees the light of day, living most of its lifetime buried under the ground. It has been described as something that God threw away, and for some, it is simply a foul smelling oddity that looks and tastes like dirt. Yet for others, the truffle clearly offers a sublime, rapturous experience. They would surely agree with Brillat-Savarin, France's famous 18th century French gastronome, who once described the truffle as 'the diamond of the kitchen'.

It is exactly within this terrain, one that speaks to the ambiguity of human experience, that the *Saltirramus* exhibition positions itself. Can art really help us understand the mystery and allure of this strange, soil bound tuber? I do believe it can. For art too, can be inexplicable, elusive, ambiguous and contradictory. The experience of an artwork can be pleasurable to the point of revelation for one person, and yet confounding to the point of rancour for another. *Saltirramus* seeks to provide a context in which to explore the possibilities such art offers. It brings together a selection of artworks that often differ in their form, approach and inspiration, yet share a common embrace of our more abstract emotions, experiences or environments.

Artists may draw attention to those small corners of the world that we often tend to dismiss as unremarkable and therefore unworthy of our consideration. Their art reminds us to stop, slow down and take a second or third look at the diminutive, the disintegrating and the seemingly inconsequential. This is art that asks us to contemplate those elements of our physical environment that are almost hidden by virtue of their quiet, commonplace and unassuming nature.

Alternatively, artists often seek to describe aspects of the world that we do not and cannot see yet know to exist. The artists' creative impulse plays an important role in such works; it is their minds' eye as much as their powers of observation that have guided their chosen medium, whether it be a pencil, paintbrush or camera lens. A nocturnal forest, suburban cloaked in night's darkness, plant life that dwells deep beneath the earth's surface – these things are impossible to see yet conjured into existence by the artists. Therein lies the mystery to these works; a slow revealing of their secret life as interpreted by the artists' ideas and imagination.

Still other artists are drawn to the completely invisible world around us. There is a fascination with the metaphysical, a line of enquiry that largely avoids attempts to represent the real world through imitation. Instead, these artists collaborate with the forces of nature, manipulating the laws of physics and working with circumstances of chance and randomness. The images they create reveal an essential structure, order and beauty; aspects of our world that are impossible to see.

Like the truffled truffle, works of art attract lovers and loathers. As a curated, group exhibition, *Saltirramus* offers the experience of a variety of artworks, some of which may be challenging and unfamiliar. My hope is that visitors will remain open to the new experiences this exhibition might offer and feel free to linger, contemplate and question the possible meanings it encloses. Like many cultural festivals conceived around a theme, *Saltirramus* offers its audience a context within which to experience a range of pleasures, both individual and accumulative. I trust that *Saltirramus* and the Mundaring Truffle Festival satisfy our visitors' sense of artisanal adventure, curiosities and desires.

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