

Hair At Habtie's. Bus Gallery. 27th February - 15th March 2008

Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller

By Helen Johnson

Whilst Lucreccia disentangled the bunting she and Jason had made from reproductions of 7" records, she told me stories about hanging out at Habtie's. Habtie's once tried to cut Jason's curly mop of hair and it made him giggle; he was not used to these sorts of curls, he is an African hair-styling specialist and he is accustomed to dealing with frizzier mops.

Happy's barber shop does a roaring trade; men, women and children are all welcome. It is a site which has formed from a multifarious cultural ricochet, and it feels right at home. Habtie's is a product of personal experience of place and culture, bringing in African, American and Australian influences and presences in a relaxed way; there is no need for self-conscious facilitation.

There is a TV in the corner of the barber shop. They played Jason and Lucreccia's video on it, it's a video of the barber shop itself, of people having their hair cut, getting the back trimmed with clippers, wearing clothes with silkscreened bling on them, hip-hop posters plastered on the walls in the background. The footage appears as the label of a spinning 7", a tongue-in-cheek reference to the opening credits of Happy Days, that bastion of squeaky-clean fifties optimism and white-bread American culture. At Happy's there is a sense of cultures mushrooming into and out of one another, shared origins and returns, shared newness. One woman didn't want to talk about the experience of emigrating; 'I've been here for ten years,' she said. 'I'm Australian.' A pleasant reminder that there is no longer an Australian 'type', that living culture overrides conservative political agenda in this regard.

The soundtrack to Jason and Lucreccia's video uses drop it like it's hot, the a cappella version, drawn out as a thread and stirred into other beats. Some sort of pattern begins to emerge, of cultural signifiers being transplanted and reconstituted into new versions of themselves, the bling being flattened into pictures of bling, the milieu of the barbershop being echoed on a screen and re-presented to itself. It reminds me of the way Australian painters saw abstract expressionist works in magazines and mimicked them with flat, glossy surfaces, though the original paintings were matte – they were mimicking the surface of



Exhibition view. Hair At Habties. Bus Gallery. Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller. Photo courtesy of Hubert Jnr.

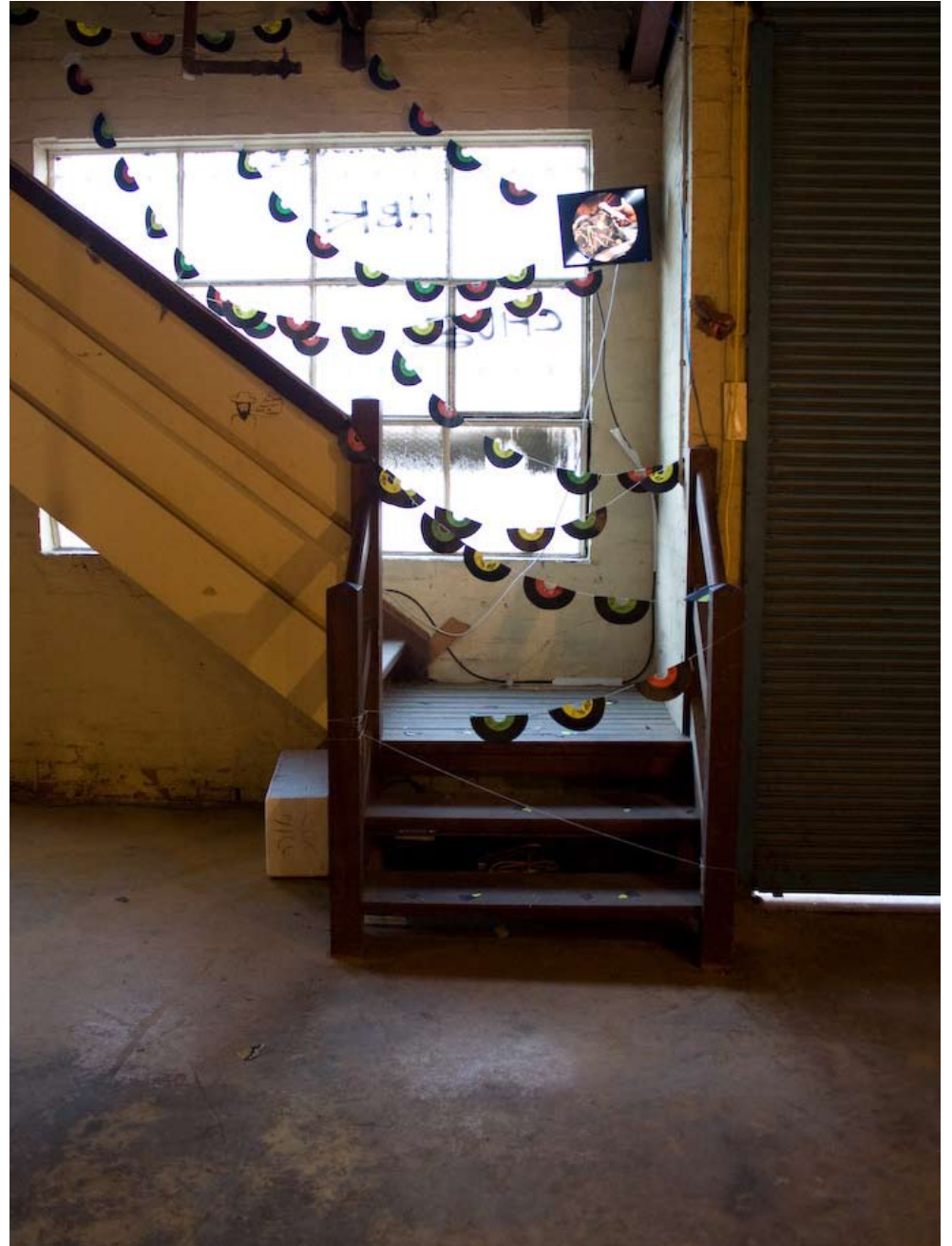
the magazine paper without realising it. Whilst some might see this as a basis for scoffing, I see it as one of the most fecund points of cultural production in Australia. It's like a distillation, an apprehension via essences and signifiers which become raw materials for cultures which are being built here, and is all the more rich and complex for that.



*Exhibition view. Hair At Habties. Bus Gallery.
Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller. Photo courtesy of Hubert Jnr.*

Jason and Lucreccia presented their video in various contexts, surrounded by the festive 7" bunting, its red, green and yellow colourscheme invoking Rastafarianism, as well of course as the Ethiopian flag. There was a performance of MCs whom they had met through Habtie's at a warehouse which became a temporary event site during the Melbourne Fashion Festival. Through this event, new connections were formed, networks extended, the work at this point operating beyond the representational or the detached commentary; it participated in the culture it was engaging with. These happy days are yours and mine. There was a performance of MCs whom they had met through Habtie's at a warehouse which became a temporary event site during the Melbourne Fashion Festival. Through this event, new connections were formed, networks extended, the work at this point operating beyond the representational or the detached commentary; it participated in the culture it was engaging with. These happy days are yours and mine.

-Helen Johnson



*Exhibition view. Hair At Habties. Penthouse Mouse.
Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller. Photo courtesy of Hubert Jnr.*



*Video Stills
Hair At Habties
Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller.*

*DTR Click + Rarefugees.
Penthouse Mouse.
Lucreccia Quintanilla and Jason Heller.
Photo courtesy of Hubert Jnr.*