

firstdraft

Gallery 1

8–29 Oct 2020

Argileh at Wedding Cake Rock

Gillian Kayrooz

Argileh at Wedding Cake Rock is a satirical exhibition which nods to culture, place, gender and ethnicity in the digital age. The exhibition explores the intersection of experimental and documentary style photography through a series of tableaux; constructed from the nuances of Western Sydney's youth culture. The works are a reflection of both personal experience and an ongoing engagement with local personas, neighbourhoods, cultural motifs and trends.

Gillian Kayrooz is an artist from Western Sydney. She holds a Bachelor of Visual Arts (Honours) from Sydney College of the Arts, University of Sydney. In 2018 she was awarded the Create NSW Young Creative Leaders Fellowship which led her to exhibit internationally in the Asia-Pacific region. She most recently completed residencies at the Chengdu Academy of Fine Arts and the Sapporo Tenjinyama Artist Studio, ARTnSHELTER, Tokyo. In 2020, Kayrooz is a studio artist in residence at Parramatta Artists' Studios.

The artist would like to thank the Ang Household, Natalie Ang, Shaleha Deen, Alessandra Femenias, Clarissa Mei, Helen Nguyen, Ivy Perlitz, Laura Ranola, Sara Tamim, Alyssa Yang, Talia Smith, Maryanne Taouk and Sweatshop: Western Sydney Literacy Movement.

Artworks (from entrance to rear)

The Luncheon on the Grass, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Mouthing Off, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Social Shrine, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Bitch Bash, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Za'atar Sesh, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Face Down Ass Up, 2020
silk organza 40gsm
128 × 193 cm

Gallery 2
In Their Finery
Eddie Abd

Gallery 3
Ribwreck
Tamara Baillie

13–17 riley street
woolloomooloo
nsw 2011
+61 2 8970 2999
firstdraft.org.au

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West is best

Talia Smith

Picture this.

Its 1900. A group of young beautiful white women in pristine white dresses from a private school go to Hanging Rock for a picnic. There, three of their classmates and a teacher go missing. What ensues is a strange tale of hysterical women, an overbearing headmistress and shots of sun drenched landscape.

Now, picture this. It's 2020. A group of young beautiful, diverse women hang out in a suburban backyard in Western Sydney. There is argileh (shisha) and Mina bakery pizzas. A goon bag on the clothes line. The women are talking, embracing, laughing. There are shots of a sun drenched backyard.

In Gillian Kayrooz's exhibition *Argileh at Wedding Cake Rock* she, with tongue firmly in cheek, takes the trope of the frail and delicate white woman that abounds in *Picnic at Hanging Rock* and puts a little Western Sydney spin on it. The women in her works aren't helpless, they have each other, they have the strength of friendship and, in one particular image, they will look directly into the camera almost as a challenge.

Kayrooz's 'characters' in the images in her silk works are people she knows; some she has grown up with, others she has met through initiatives such as the New Age Noise program run by Information Cultural Exchange in Parramatta and some she met at high school. Kayrooz herself is from Guildford. The images were shot in her friend's backyard, one that was like a second home to the artist when she was growing up. Western Sydney is very much woven throughout every image.

Nostalgia is generally associated with age, I think of being much older and reflecting back on my life as if that reflection will bring about something insightful or revelatory about myself. But Kayrooz is still young. Nostalgia in this exhibition works in two ways, the first is a yearning or longing for the freedom of youth. In Kayrooz's words, youth to her was 'going to "parra late night" for Thursday evening shopping at Parramatta Westfield' or 'heading to the Marco Polo club one Sunday in the city' thinking you would meet people not from your area but in actuality were hanging out with the whole of Western Sydney as they had all also decided to attend that same day. The lighting in the exhibition also speaks to this idea of nostalgia, a reddish glow that emulates the kind of warmth that only Western Sydney can produce. Sticky, humid summers where it feels like the wind blowing is hotter than the sun. With no ocean nearby, the ocean instead becomes the hot tarred roads of the neighbourhood.

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(cont.)

The other way in which nostalgia works in Kayrooz's exhibition is that it is a driving force. Rather than wistfully resting on her laurels to just reflect on the past, she uses it as a celebration of the area, what it meant to her growing up and what it can mean for the youth of the area right now in this moment. Nostalgia doesn't always have to be something that can be tinged with sadness it can be something that is joyous and that is what you find in Kayrooz's exhibition.

There aren't just visual signifiers in the exhibition to set the scene of Western Sydney, a soundscape also plays through the space. Sounds of passing cars, swishing grass, birds, distant chatter. It is the sounds of suburbia, of a backyard on a hot day with your friends surrounding you. Catching up on who pashed who on the weekend, laughing at that time you fell over on your ass when drunk. Maybe your mother comes out with pizza or chicken that you all feast on, maybe she yells at you that your friends should leave now.

When listening to the soundscape I am instantly transported to the moments I have spent with friends and family. And then I think about what it means now to be connected to those times and to place. I have not lived in the town I grew up in for fifteen years and so for me an idea of place has become amalgamated with the many different locations that I have lived in. In Lucy Lippard's seminal text, *The Lure of the Local* she comments that what is important for a sense of place is what is "written in the landscape or place by the people who live or lived there. The intersections of nature, culture, history, and ideology form the ground on which we stand."¹ I now live even further away from my hometown, completely different countries in fact but sitting with Kayrooz's exhibition I don't notice that distance. Although I am not from Western Sydney, the way that Kayrooz intertwines her photographs, lighting and audio to explore these 'intersections' that make a place allow me to gain an understanding and in turn then relate my own experiences with those that she presents.

Argileh at Wedding Cake Rock may poke fun at an old tale of delicate women but the women in Kayrooz's work are anything but. They are feisty and fun, they are the true heart of Kayrooz's Western Sydney and there is nothing better than knowing that these women don't need help. In fact, they will be the ones to help you.

1. Lippard, Lucy R. 1998. *The Lure Of The Local*. New York: New Press. Pg 7

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Welcome to The Area

Maryanne Taouk

My introduction to The Area was gentle and warm, like a Western Sydney sunset. From the front veranda of my grandparents, my *gidi* and *siti*'s, home on Lackey St in Merrylands, I saw Arab women and women of colour laugh loudly, with abandon and certainty as they passed by.

This is artist Gillian Kayrooz's world.

In *Argileh at Wedding Cake Rock*, Kayrooz reflects on her life as a woman of colour in The Area, an affectionate term for a collection of south-western Sydney suburbs like Guildford, Merrylands, Auburn and Granville.

Kayrooz uses sounds from her every day, like the bass from the stereos of passing cars, backyard chatter and a kit of pigeons warbling in a tree to situate the audience in her world, immersed in the energy of her women.

Her exhibition space feels like home on a late Sunday afternoon, just before the light disappears. The gel lighting like the red from a summery Guildford sky is fixed atop the photographs as they hang delicately, one after another, from the ceiling in bed-sheet sized silk prints, tableaus of comforting yet ordinary moments.

In one photo, titled *Social Shrine*, we see nine young women, dressed in their weekend casuals – pink Air Max's, scrunchies and singlet tops – resting on each other's laps in a garage, paused in a moment of meta-cognition of who they are, and where they are. There is a conviction to the muses.

Kayrooz's girls puff on argileh, while their love and laughter radiate warmly like the coals that heat it, comfortable and welcoming in their backyard.

The exhibition is a testament to female friendship, and a guide for those unfamiliar with both the intense glow of a western Sydney sunset and the clarity of being at home in The Area.

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