

20 Around the galleries Dan Rule

A2 SATURDAY, OCTOBER 23, 2010

WHAT AES+F: The Feast of Trimalchio
WHERE Anna Schwartz Gallery,
 185 Flinders Lane, city, 9654 6131,
 annaschwartzgallery.com

IT'S not that this series of photographic tableaux from Russian collective AES+F is a disappointment; it's more that its source — a nine-channel, panoramic video work rendered from more than 75,000 photographs, which was a clear highlight of this year's Biennale of Sydney — was so overwhelmingly spectacular. Comprising three huge, curved screens and booming surround sound, the immersive, hyper-cinematic work merged the most unlikely melange of slick, fashion-based photographic aesthetics, stilted animation techniques and sweeping visual and sonic devices to vividly re-imagine Roman poet Petronius's *Satyricon* in a contemporary setting of gross affluence. While the vastly scaled prints, above right, that comprise the show at Anna Schwartz can hardly compete, they offer something of an entry point. Set in a luxurious island hotel, the digitally layered photographs are the embodiment of post-colonial consumerist excess and racial typecasting. Here, we see the snide representation of privileged whites at play, Asian maids and sexualised African bellboys. While playful, *The Feast of Trimalchio's* vision of the contemporary West is deeply disturbing, precisely because of its parallels to the real thing. Tues to Fri noon-6pm, Sat 1pm-5pm, until November 13.

WHAT Taryn Simon: An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar
WHERE Centre for Contemporary Photography, 404 George Street, Fitzroy, 9417 1549, ccp.org.au

THE slick, high-definition visuals of Taryn Simon's photographs defy their gritty, documentarian sensibilities. Capturing an ominous vision of Bush-era America, her



expansive series *An American Index of the Hidden and Unfamiliar* doesn't merely unearth a sinister vantage of the nation's underbelly, but renders it in shocking clarity and detail. Purportedly inspired by governmental paranoia about secret weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, Simon's work sees her gain access to and describe America's own state and cultural secrets, from Ku Klux Klan recruiting cells and military interrogation training camps, to nuclear storage facilities and the interior hymenoplasty clinics (detail pictured below). It's a fascinating and troubling portrait. However, it's not so much the subject matter but the luminous, hyper-real stylistic orientation that gives these images such resonance. Whether a rotting corpse in a field or a death row inmate's "recreation" pen, Simon's beautifully framed photographs shine a bright and unmistakable light on that which has previously been obscured from the eyes of the public, unearthing the goings-on of a superpower with an immense fear of decline. Wed to Fri 11am-6pm, Sat to Sun noon-5pm, until December 12.

WHAT Clare Rae: Testing
WHERE Beam Contemporary, level 1,
 30 Guildford Lane, city, 9670 4443,
 beamcontemporary.com.au

CLARE Rae continues her meditation on gesture and the female body in *Testing*, her latest series of performative self-portraits at new city gallery space Beam Contemporary. Acting as something of postscript to last year's show at CCP, *Climbing the Walls and Other Actions*, this suite of six compact prints sees Rae still probing the limits of physical gestures and actions (below). Half-dressed in stockings and T-shirt, she hangs, swings and contorts herself on, in and around various unadorned domestic objects and environs. In one image, she crouches in a ball atop a table, peering towards the floor as if it's a 10-storey drop; in another, she awkwardly attempts to complete a



gymnastic "bridge"; she hangs from a picture rail, her body falling in a slack arc. Where *Climbing the Walls* juxtaposed moments of agility, balance and skill against the constraints of a nondescript domestic environment, there's perhaps something slightly more sinister and desperate about this series. In Rae's earlier work, the female subject seemed enlivened by the possibilities of transcending her imposed limitations; we witnessed flashes of the body in motion. Here, her defiance seems just as stubborn, but not nearly as much fun. Wed to Sat noon-6pm, until October 30.

WHAT Mia Salsjo, Sophia Hewson:
 Dy Dykrenore
WHERE Lindberg Galleries, level 2,
 289 Flinders Lane, city,
 0403 066 775,
 lindbergcontemporary.com.au

AT FIRST glance, this would seem an unusual collaborative exhibition between oil painter Sophia Hewson and installation artist and musician Mia Salsjo. Entering the darkened Lindberg Galleries, Hewson's scrupulously rendered pair of photorealist, resin-coated oils seem a world away from Salsjo's weightless sculptures, which are crafted from lengths of fragile textiles replete with pattern-like drawings. But with time, potential continuities begin to arise. An unambiguous theme would seem that of religion's role in contemporary culture. In Hewson's key work, a young, seemingly drug-addled man is elevated to a Christ-like pose (above left), splashes of what appears to be semen dripping from his body — a plea for salvation, or a modern crucifixion for one's sins? The crude human, animalistic and ghostly forms in Salsjo's sculptures suggest a land between the living and the dead, in which we cannot rely on a higher being for salvation. Tues to Fri 11am-5pm, Sat noon-5pm, until November 6.