
Living Pictures /

What is missing?

Video Installation, 2010

Installation vidéo, 2010



This is a video about lack. People who live in the outer suburbs often have the impression that they aren't as 'good' as those they see from afar, living in the cities themselves. They often feel excluded. This can lead to all sorts of feelings of isolation and uncertainties about identity.

In 2007, I was invited by the Museum of Contemporary Art in Sydney to work on an experimental art project, C3 West, which involved collaborations between artists and commercial enterprises. Australia had just had a change of government and the new Prime Minister had launched an important campaign of ideas. I chose to work with the Penrith Panthers, a rugby team from the western outskirts of Sydney, an area characterised by pockets of poverty.

The history of the Panthers fascinated me. Created just after the First World War, the team is one of the few worldwide to function like a political program. Every year since 1919, the Panthers have shared their revenues with the community to help with health, education and culture. Initially, they sold tax-free beer. In the 1960s, they opened a number of gaming rooms. As part of my collaboration with C3 West and the group Urban Camping, I proposed to the Panthers that I "bring their utopia up to date", a utopia made shaky by the pressures to privatise their profits.

I began with one of my Living Pictures on the idea of what's missing, which later allowed me to use the popular form of a short video to highlight the internal conflicts between Penrith and the Panthers.

Penrith is a satellite city for the middle class. Some of the teenagers are so bored that each week they meet up between the commercial centre, the cultural centre and the Council – the city's only important buildings – to fight among themselves, sometimes to extreme levels of violence.

I have strong memories of filming an Aboriginal man who talked about his unbelievable childhood in the prison-schools reserved for them. There was also a Mexican woman who, after suffering a violent kidnapping in a taxi in Mexico, sought refuge with her husband in Australia. But she didn't cope with her new Australian world well; for her, it had lost all sense of culture, and she dreamed instead of learning to speak the language of birds. Or the story of a young teenager, who advocated Nazism and rape under the pretext that Penrith had been invaded by outsiders...