



# Race to the stars

**A**delaide artist Darren Siwes' exhibition of large colour photographs comes at the end of his residency at the Church Gallery in Clarendon. Siwes recently completed an MA at Chelsea School of Art, London, in which he was able to trace the history of ideas about class and racial difference from Plato through European history to the eugenic policies of the US, Hitler and the Stolen Generation in Australia.

His art is a way of articulating this interest and drawing attention to the issues at stake. The photographs are taken at night with artificial lighting using time exposures. He has placed himself and his wife in each of these photographs. They include ones taken in England, Ireland and Australia.

In the European photographs his wife, Naomi, is placed in the foreground while he stands well back. This reflects his wife's pure European ancestry and his own part-Aboriginal descent. The figures also vary in solidity. In the European works his figure is faint and transparent, as though his identity and presence is under question.

The works are also full of allusions in their titles and images. The Black



Simon Gilby

and White Manor of Jenny Ticks is a photograph of an English Tudor manor house whose black and white pattern plays with ideas of colour-based racial divisions.

Jenny Ticks is a pun on genetics, one of the issues that arises as soon as we look more closely at prejudice. Both figures in this work are in Victorian costume, giving a ghostly suggestion of the way identity is haunted by the presence of the past.

Even in photographs of suburban Perth the ghost-like presence of the figures lends an ethereal quality to the image. Here, of course, his figure is in the foreground while his wife's identity is less certain. His own transparency even in Australia refers to the attempt to eradicate Aboriginal cultural identity by the colonising powers.

In the recent works both he and his wife wear gold masks, an allusion to Plato's categorisation of class into gold, silver and iron. In Plato's time the artist as an artisan would belong to the iron class, but, argues Siwes, since Renaissance times they have been moving up and now occupy a position in the top or gold strata of society.

The work of Siwes draws us into this debate and focuses attention on race, history and identity. Like many artists, he preserves a sense of ambiguity in his images so that the viewer has freedom to interpret. Judging by this show, he is a young artist of great promise.

**S**imon Gilby's first solo show for 12 years at Gallery East is called Orbit. This name is taken because several of his sculptures make reference to the astronauts of the Apollo Mission.

Gilby is interested in this subject because it allows him to explore the relationship between the human being and the technology that we have produced. These works all depict a pure-white, naked man about 40cm high. The metal wire paraphernalia of technology are imposed on his body, sometimes resting on it, sometimes penetrating it, sometimes distorting and adulterating it.



Darren Siwes

In Apollo I: Grounded, the bowed figure of the astronaut sits in a chair. Wings sprout from his back while a wire wheelchair sits on his shoulders. These two additions to his body suggest the contradictory nature of advanced technology, both enabling us to transcend our biology while at the same time bringing us up against the very real limitations that our body imposes.

In Apollo II Moth, the astronaut's disembodied head floats inside his space helmet as words spill out from his mouth in a black stream of

signifiers. This suggests the alienating effect that technology has on us, severing the connection between our thinking and our feelings.

Town Crier is a standing man whose pristine white body has been covered in newsprint. His hands hold his disembodied head as letters sprout from it on short wires and join with other letters to form words while he shouts his news.

On his shoulders rests the framework of a building, from which sprout several communication

aerials. The work beautifully conveys the familiar feeling of being overcome by too much information.

The disjuncture between the beautifully realised bodies of Gilby's naked men and the metallic wire constructions of technology is well captured. As metaphor for our relationship with technology, the works are well articulated but in the end I felt dissatisfied. The aesthetic disjuncture, on which the work hinges, undermines their unity and, for me, is too great a price to pay for their meaning.