

Maravillas, Francis, University of Technology, Australia

Re-imagining the South: Austral/Asian Horizons in Contemporary Art

In this paper, I examine the ways in which the complex, transcultural work of ‘Asian’ artists in Australia have unraveled some of the spatial and temporal assumptions that underlie the conventional narratives of Australian art and culture. Through an examination of the diverse work and practice of these artists – such as Kate Beynon’s reworking of popular graphic formats (cartoons, graffiti, Japanese manga and calligraphy) in her work across various media, Guan Wei’s use of video game graphics in his cartographic paintings and Suzann Victor’s refiguring of Asian iconography through her site-specific kinetic installations – this paper seeks to bring into view a set of vectors that intersect with the making and remaking of the paradoxically located entity of ‘Australia’. In particular, I show how presence and work of the variously constituted Asian artistic diasporas in Australia foregrounds the complexly entangled histories and spatialities of both ‘Australia’ and ‘Asia’. I argue, moreover, that the critical and geographical trope of the ‘South’ – understood as both a mode of location and an epistemic category – not only offers a framework for understanding the constellation of differences and multiplicity in Australian art; it also represents a crucial site for articulating a transcultural politics of mobility and spatiality, one that attends to the ways in which ‘Australia’ may been imagined not as an enclaved territory but as an evolving cartography, the shifting outlines of which opens up new horizons of possibility for rethinking the spatial and temporal coordinates of Australian art, culture and identity.