



above 'Chicago View', from Rick Martin's *Breath Taking* exhibition.

Breath Taking: A Passage on the Titanic

Photographic works by Rick Martin, at the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia, Adelaide, September 1–October 1, 1995.

Review by Stanislaus Fung

Imagine an ordinary suburban house in a quiet suburb of Adelaide taken over by photographs: large photographs more than four metres wide, small ones as compact as the palm of a hand. Photographs of the Titanic, war-time snapshots taken by a soldier called "Charles" in 1941, a majestic shot of Lenin's mausoleum, a video showing street scenes from Belfast—all tainted with the exquisite charm of doom and gloom.

The photographer Rick Martin has used these images to set up relationships in the spaces of the Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia. The Titanic, built in the north of Ireland, is shown in the first room as one arrives at the exhibition, on a photographic image printed on copper above a copper fireplace standing in a small pool of black oil, possibly from the original disaster. Next is the space allocated to the soldier's snapshots. Taken together, these images of memory evoke notions of imminent doom, and stand in contrast to the last room of the show, where a video of Belfast is shown face to face with a gigantic image of Lenin's mausoleum. Here in this odd juxtaposition, viewers are given an opportunity to think about the lively fall of Soviet communism and the peace talks of Northern Ireland.

In the middle of these images of imminent death and possible survival, there is another room with three gigantic photographs of Chicago. Taken as a set, these three photographs are among the finest images of cities exhibited in Adelaide in recent years. Deserted urban scenes, they remind you of windy Chicago in March and give a somewhat modernist presence to the room which they occupy. The Titanic glides over the Atlantic towards its watery doom, the street scene from Belfast is distinguished by the sounds of a military helicopter overhead—you'd be forgiven for imagining rival Chicago gangs having a friendly pow-wow under one of those bridges in the photographs. Pity the visiting gangster momentarily attracted by the breathtaking views. In the friendly exchanges of his colleagues, he was taken out in the twinkling of an eye.

This thought-provoking show by Rick Martin is said to be the result of his sojourns from Australia to Ireland in 1994, but beyond the strictly autobiographical aspect of the work, one is led to think of Australia as a nation of 'immigrants', of photography as a constructive invention of spaces and meanings rather than as a passive recorder of architectural beauty, of places we return to again and again out of desire and memory.

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