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JANE BURTON: I DID IT FOR YOU

Centre for Contemporary Photography, Melbourne
28 October to 17 December
Reviewed by Kyla McFarlane

Take a drive out of Melbourne and you'll quickly see that its sprawling suburbs now stretch well beyond the familiarity of Howard Arkley's Oakleigh. Now they seep out west and south-east towards a strange edge-space, where the new housing estates with their lakes and 'lifestyle' sit close to low-rent motels, factories, fast food outlets and vacant hinterland.

Whatever the reality of life in this suburban fringe it's a locale that, in our media-fuelled collective imagination, has quickly become associated with mythologies of concealment and crime made possible by its position on the city's outer limits. In *I Did It for You*, recently exhibited at Melbourne's Centre for Contemporary Photography, Jane Burton sets a nocturnal narrative in just such a liminal realm.

Her series of black and white photographs begin (or end?) with an indistinct image of a young woman, perhaps the person to whom the title of the work is addressed. Around this, hung three sequences of photographs suggestive of illicit meetings and after-dark activity. Together, these shadowy motel exteriors and anonymous figures convey a mood of undefined guilt and grubby intrigue.

*I Did It for You* certainly has the capacity to spook. Its power comes not from the direct telling of a story, because Burton has purposefully left gaping holes in her narrative.

Instead, it emerges from the mood suggested by its pervasive, leaking darkness, small pools of artificial light picking out shadowy details in the mise en scène and the selective placement of solitary players amid the gloom. As viewers, we lurk on the threshold of these scenes, assuming a role akin to a voyeur-detective.

We observed details such as a parked car or female figure appearing at a curtained window, seemingly unaware that she might be under surveillance. This veiled figure is a very familiar trope for Burton, but in this context its presence was particularly resonant.

On the wall opposite, was a picture of a man under a running shower with his eyes closed. His drenched and immobile figure suggest myriad possibilities - is the shower post-coital, or does it wash away the evidence of a crime - or both? In this image, Burton cleverly moves into the interior and our point of view shifts accordingly. And our reference points shift with it, to sources as diverse as Lady MacBeth's inability to erase the incriminating presence of blood from her hands to the shower scene in Hitchcock's *Psycho*.

Narrative and noir have always hung around the edges of Jane Burton's photographs and her work has the potential to lapse into a simple recreation of the filmic tropes it draws upon. However, *I Did It for You* is more than just a series of stills gleaned from a filmic memory. The imagined narratives that, for me, came to mind quickly and vividly in the presence of these photographs originate as much from the local mythologies of the suburban fringe as they do from our experience of the films of Hitchcock or Lynch. It's the evocation of this tangle of references, both local and global, 'real' and 'imagined', that make *I Did It for You* so compelling.

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JOHN GILLIES: VIDEO WORKS

Perth Institute of Contemporary Arts
24 November to 18 December
Reviewed by Leon Marvell

The French film-maker Robert Bresson once wrote in his notebook:

*The power your (flattened) images have of slipping into what they are. The same image*