

ALLIANCE FRANÇAISE GALLERY ■ 16 OCTOBER to 06 NOVEMBER 2008

Valerie Sparks Luminist

to be officially opened by
Cr Judith Klepner, City of Port Phillip

on Thursday 16 October 2008, 6.30pm to 8.00pm

Throughout 2008 Alliance Française has hosted its first on site artist residency. Valerie Sparks, the second recipient of the City of Port Phillip Rupert Bunny Fellowship, has been based in the stables at 51 Grey Street where she has created a new work specifically for the ballroom and gallery of the main building. Over the last few years the Alliance has provided support to Valerie in a variety of ways. This has included nominating her for a residency at Cité des Arts in Paris. We are happy to have joined with her in support of this project which has allowed her to explore the potential for a large scale installation, toward the full expression of her work.

Alliance Française first became aware of Valerie's interpretation of French wallpapers through the Victorian College of the Arts graduate exhibition in 2003. Since that time she has conducted research in Paris, Rixhiem and other locations in France into the exclusively French genre of 18th century scenic panoramic wallpapers. Sitting between large scale photographic pieces and wallpapers her work involves activating the

interior surfaces of buildings, reconfiguring architectural spaces and constructing fake decorative histories. Sparks' large scale works on paper utilize digital technology to create landscapes that are visually seductive and familiar, yet disturbing and difficult to fix. The philosophical questions raised by these reconfigurations of the utopian landscapes of an earlier colonialist era are many. Through shifts in perspective and pictorial space and use of new media Sparks engages with, and problematizes these representations of exotic locations. At the same time her emphasis on the seductive quality of light picks up on the 18th century strategies for visual delight. According to Sparks:

"The new media interpretation resonates with early forms of immersive virtual reality such as dioramas, stereoscopic photography, and the creation of contained exotic environments in European glass houses and exhibition halls. As examples of early virtual reality, the wallpapers explored fantasies of travel, colonial expansion and a

fascination with the exotic. They often collapsed geographical space and time through incorporating a variety of locations into a seamless continuous image of a European garden. The lush, seductive beauty of these decorative features is compelling. In my interpretations I aim to engage with traditions of landscape painting and photography and to maintain the aesthetic of the picturesque but include an inherent sense of danger and discomfort. You know it is some kind of paradise but somehow you are not sure you want to be in it. Architectural features and walls seem to appear and disappear as they are engulfed in images of an elsewhere. In the impossibility of these disturbing hyper-real environments, people are immersed in imaginary spaces between different forms of visual logic. I am interested in how susceptible we are to allowing our eyes to be fooled"

The new work created through the support of the Rupert Bunny Fellowship focuses Valerie's lens on the natural and built environment of the City of Port Phillip, in particular the waterfront and surrounds. She has

collected countless photographs of the changes in weather and light over the course of a year and included these elements in the work to create a multi layered exploration of the changeability, juxtapositions and ruptures present in this diverse and complex urban setting. As with previous work the elements included in the spaces she has created have been taken from different locations and times of the day creating visual ambiguity and uncertainty. This work in particular reflects the betwixt and between characteristic of the time between night and day, for Valerie, one of the most haunting and beautiful times to be on the foreshore.

For those of you familiar with the building the Alliance Française gallery space had very strong architectural features. The architecture and views through the large windows play a large part in how any exhibition presents in the space. Valerie is committed to creating a site specific installation and has spent time working through how the work will respond to and incorporate these elements. At point of writing the work

is yet to be installed so we can only look forward to experiencing the environment she will create. We do know that the room will be shut down of all external light allowing Valerie to control the illumination of the work as it wraps around the entire room. Each section will be punctuated with architectural features from the CoPP. Large-scale trees will create the effect of curtains framing each section as a series of connected vignettes.

We look forward to the opening night and encourage Alliance Française members to visit the building and view the installation. We also would like to express our ongoing commitment to creating strong cultural links between French and Australian artists, cultural institutions and future partnerships with the City of Port Phillip. We are pleased to have supported this project and to support Valerie at this time in the development of her practice. The fellowship has provided an opportunity for us to enjoy a new work in response to the building that is so central to the work of the Alliance in Melbourne.

*This project has been assisted by the
City of Port Phillip through the
Rupert Bunny Foundation Visual Arts Fellowship*



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Exhibition dates:
16 October to 06 November 2008
Alliance Française Gallery
51 Grey Street ST KILDA
Tel: 9525 3463
www.afmelbourne.asn.au
Opening Hours:
Mon-Thu: 9.00am to 8.30pm
Fri: 9.00am to 6.00pm
Sat: 9.00am to 4.30pm