

Self-Discovery Channel –
Anonymous secrets & found self-portraits

Renato Grome

In an ode to exhibitionism, sexual anthropology and ultimately, voyeurism, this show by the British and Sydney / Rome - based artist Renato Grome is a meeting point for the supposedly opposite spectrums of public versus private, shy versus blatant. In the unusual setting of a funky men's hairdressing salon in rough-and-tumble Darlinghurst, Grome has created an installation from a collage of mirrors, a collection of genuine adult personal ads, anonymous photos, second-hand picture frames and a "Peep Box" (or what the artist calls a 3D glory hole). This mirrored infinity cube prism also masquerades as an ever-changing public self-portrait, in which the inquisitive viewer's face is reflected to infinity.

"In some ways, the whole set-up is all about the self portrait" says Grome. "I am interested how these found 'self-portraits' – the subjects have themselves created and published their text and portraits – are simultaneously public and secret, they seem to inhabit two extreme opposites: looking into a peephole online and discovering a stranger's intimate sex life, accessible to anyone, the viewer knows more about a stranger's most intimate secrets than their own family and friends may ever know, and in some cases perhaps even their own partners may be part of".

Grome is best-known for his fluorescent photographs of flowers and inanimate objects treated like sensual human flesh. In fact, this unconventional show at Michael Joyce's Seditio men's hairdressing salon, appears hot-on-the-heels of Grome's Dollypop exhibition in May, HeadOn Photofestival, in which he presented a series of "portraits" of Barbie dolls, photographed enacting lewd and surreal scenes of lust, power and comedy. Now, as part of the Left Coast Festival, the artist provides us with a tongue-in-cheek, conceptual double-take. Has he created a Discovery Channel for adults, or a self-discovery channel? Grome also plays with the idea that while you are getting your haircut at a barbershop, you are forced to stare at your own reflection while your own image gradually changes. So who is staring back while you chat with the barber? The person you are, or the person you pretend to be? The scruffy fellow who first arrived, or the well-groomed man who leaves a while later? In this case, maybe it's really the Demon Barber of Victoria Street.

Jonathan Turner, award winning art critic/curator, Sydney and Rome

Renato Grome, SELF-DISCOVERY CHANNEL,
Anonymous secrets and collected self-portraits;

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LEFT COAST FESTIVAL
Curated by Robyn Wilson