

TAKING THE INAUSPICIOUS
PUBLIC TOILET AS SUBJECT,
KAISER SHOWS HOW THESE
PLACES OF DESIGNED
IMPERSONALITY, DISPASSION
AND CIVIL UTILITY ARE
POSSESSED OF A SECRET,
SUBVERSIVE CHARACTER.

FRAMED IN THE LOST LANGUAGE
OF POLARI - THE SECRET
DIALECT OF CRIMINALS,
CARNIES AND CLANDESTINE
HOMOSEXUAL HOOKUPS
- KAISER'S SCULPTURAL
COLLAGES AND CERAMIC TILE
WORKS SHOW THESE SPACES AS
ALTERNATIVELY MELANCHOLY,
MYSTERIOUS, LEWDLY
LIGHT-HEARTED AND DOWNRIGHT
SORDID.

LILLY
KAISER:
KHAZI

14 MARCH - 5 APRIL 2015

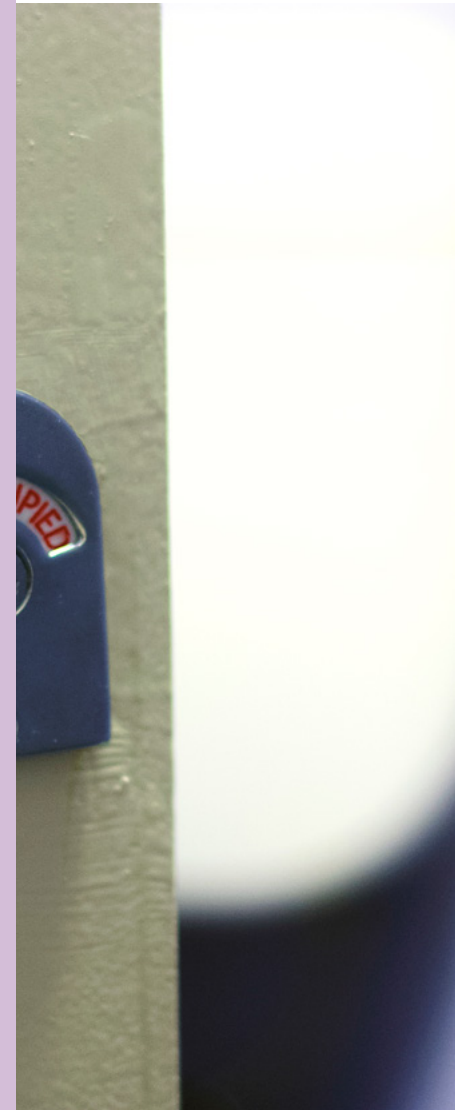


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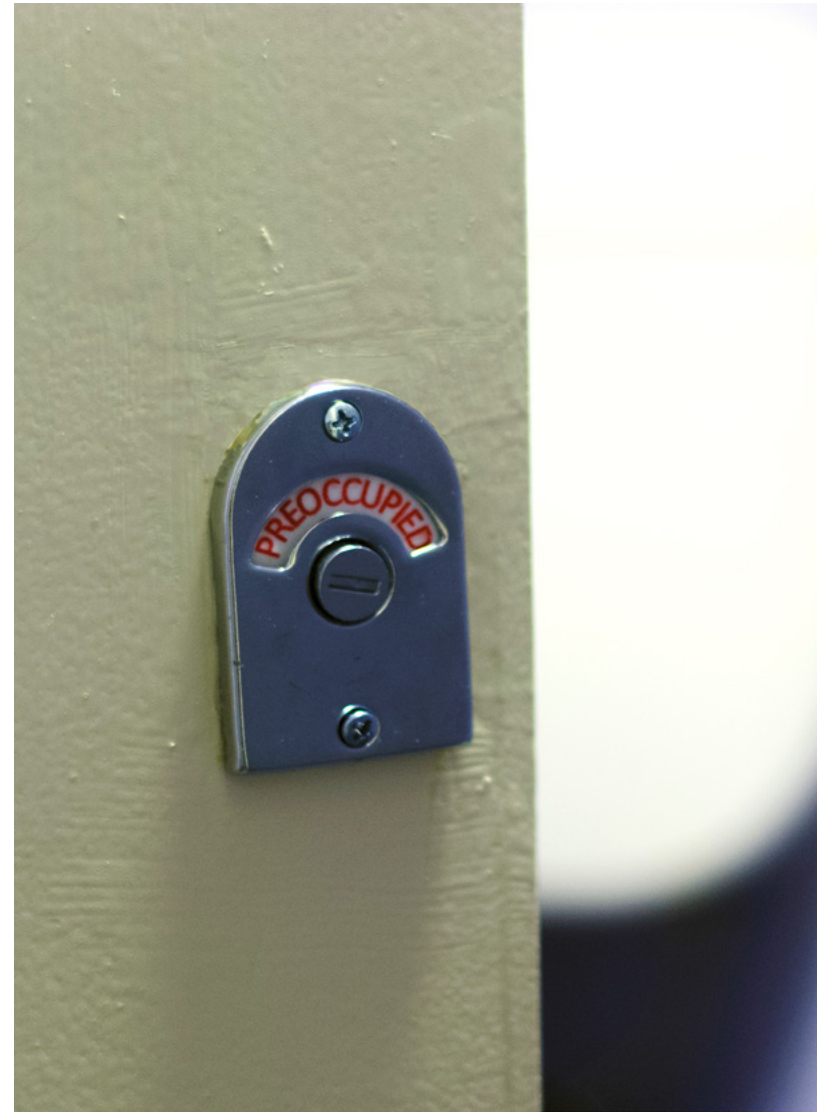
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Lilly Kaiser Omea Khazi 2014
adhesive paper, manipulated aluminium



Lilly Kaiser Preoccupied 2014
toilet indicator lock

KHAZI

No one can fail to have observed, as they enter a public toilet, that they have crossed the precipice into a dark and different world. Friends become strangers. Silence reigns. Feet beneath a cubicle are a menacing anonymity. The cistern and drain are spiralling portals to the underworld of piss, shit, public hair, blood, cum, spit, toenails and vomit.

Public toilets are a strange unstable borderland of public and private space. They are places of segregation too, historically by race and class and often still by gender or sex.

For artist Lilly Kaiser they are also places of secrecy, of hidden life expressed here in her work as variously mysterious and melancholy, lewdly light-hearted, sordid and subversive.

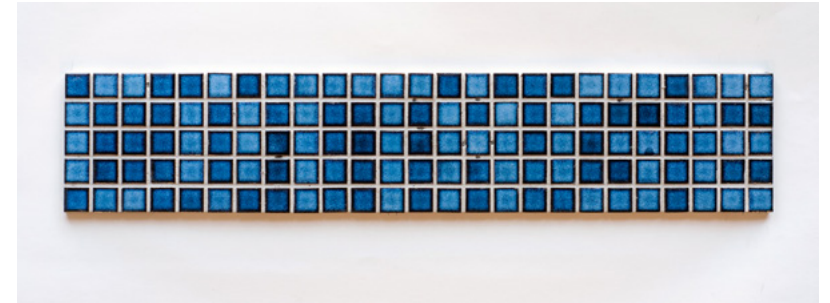
Kaiser's aluminium sculptural collage works show durable old-style fixtures and tiles of beautifully intricate but outdated design. The images have a fusty, archaic quality and the melancholic air that sometimes derives from the obviously outmoded. They depict a relative rarity in Australia - as one of the sort of places not frequently renovated or rebuilt, an old place showing the trace of its age and our remoteness to it - our European ruin.

There is a sense of anticipation in these works, but any action in them is absent or waiting. The sculptural spaces created have a mute, dampened quality, and a characteristic kind of secrecy common to Kaiser's body of work. Despite their appearance of spatial depth, the world of the works remains closed, and its human figures hidden.

The subjects of these collage pieces have a worn, lived-materiality, earned over years of scuffs, scratches, stains, graffiti and rust - a quality that subverts the apparent impersonality and anonymity intended in their construction and commonly associated with the public toilet.

In contrast, Kaiser's graphic mosaic works have a bright, pop character. *Gardylloo for Lallie Tappers* (2015) is playfully lewd in its saturated and opposing colours. However, these works also represent the darker hidden life of the public toilet. The words they display, while seemingly nonsensical to most viewers, are actually of the lost language of Polari - the secret dialect of criminals, carnies and, most famously, clandestine homosexual hookups.

Polari originated in Mediterranean lingua franca and trade languages, inflected with Romani and Yiddish, and was adopted by theatre workers in England in the 20th century. It allowed the counterculture to secretly communicate in public space, and enabled members to recognise one another. It came to be used in underground homosexual culture while male gay sex was still illegal (in England and Wales until 1967). Since then, it has fallen from use and is now virtually extinct.



In Kaiser's work, the language is emblematic of the subversion and exploitation of the public space by counterculture. Polari shares its hidden double life; it is open and public and is also hidden and illegal. Cheerfully lewd in form, it appears outwardly fanciful but is actually relatively sordid. In Kaiser's works, its meaning is still hidden, available only to those who understand the lost language, and even then - as in the case of *Cottage* (2015) - only if you squint.

Cottage refers to Polari term for the practice of anonymous sex with men in public toilets. The socially subversive character of the act is embedded in the irony of the term's origin - in England, Victorian squeamishness saw toilets constructed to look like country cottages.

Here there is both admiration for its subversive character, as well as a sense of bent desire for its sexually-exclusive and forbidden status. This is represented most explicitly in the artist's sculptural interventions, replacing existing toilet-stall locks. Easily overlooked, Kaiser's locks read 'preoccupied' instead of the typical 'occupied', or else various Polari sexual slang.

These works subtly reveal the double-life of the spaces, at a time when is generally considered that cottaging is an increasingly endangered practice (whether because of the happy and hard-won decriminalisation of gay sex and its reduced stigma, or through the rise of internet dating, grindr and tinder).

Kaiser's largest tile-sculpture works combine in a sort of memorialisation for the culture of cottaging, the lost language of Polari, and the materials of the mid-century public toilet. The sculptures use found and repurposed tile in a nostalgic earthy palette. The design of Polari text in these works resembles the tiling of lavatory walls, but also recalls other uses from the heroic era of modern and modernist public works such as London's tube station designs.

The public toilet is, after all, rooted in the modern period of 19th century Europe, and the new urbanised conditions of its booming cities. They are as characteristic of modernity as the boulevard or the arcade. In them are embedded the same new concepts of anonymity, visibly, access, and the public and private divide. They are symptomatic of the great public works that transformed filthy medieval cities into modern metropolises. It is said that a public loo first appeared in the Crystal Palace. In modern literature they originated one of Proust's 'involuntary memories' (and already with a cottaging subtext). Later on, Surrealists appreciated the parisian pissoirs for the way they represented old Belle Époque Paris (as well as a happy meeting of spontaneous urban energy and bodily functions). By this time, the private life of these public spaces for cottaging was well-known.

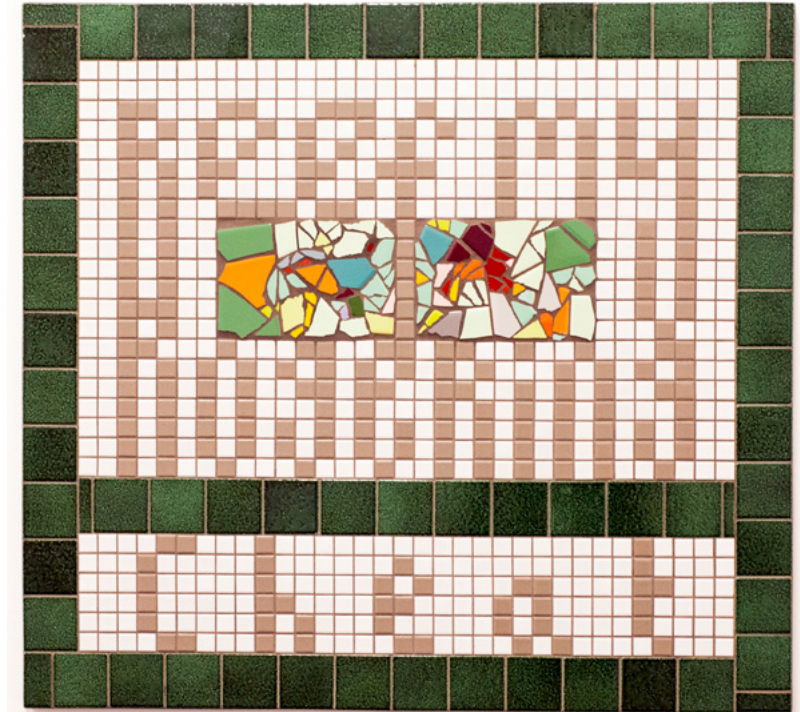
Eventually in cities like Paris these public toilets have been made scarce. Paris has now almost completely replaced its pissoirs with Sanisettes. Known in Australia as the superloo, these seem the ascendent form and future of the public toilet. Even as the stainless steel, tile, and porcelain of our mid-century public toilets disappear to plastic automation, its subversive anonymous spatial status will continue.

Guy Loudon

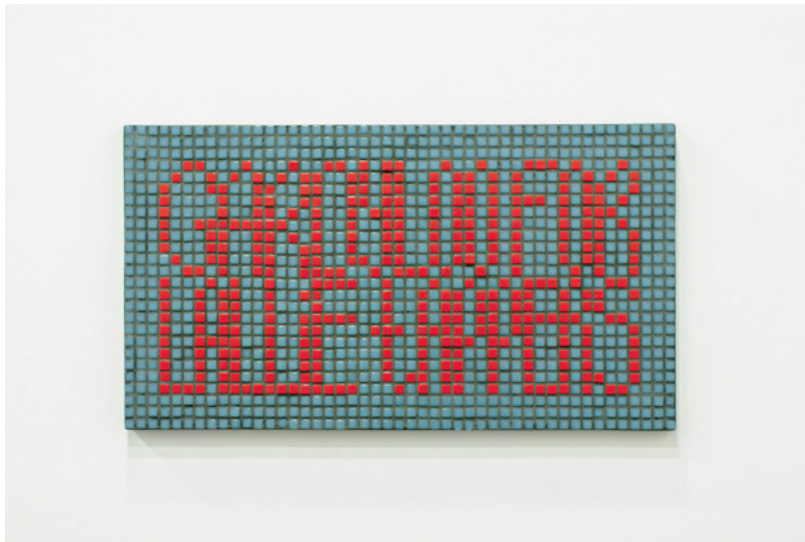
Guy Loudon is an artist based in Perth. He is a co-director of Moana Project Space.



Lilly Kaiser is an emerging Australian visual artist. Born in Perth in 1990, she graduated from Curtin University in 2012 with a Bachelor of Fine Arts. Since 2012, Kaiser has shown in group exhibitions across the Perth area and participated in a residency at the Fremantle Arts Centre. Kaiser's work involves sculpture and collage. Moana is proud to present her first solo exhibition.



Lilly Kaiser *Reef my Rogering Cheat* 2015
ceramic bathroom tiles, grout, plywood support



Lilly Kaiser *Gardylou for Lallie tappers* 2015
ceramic bathroom tiles, grout, plywood support



Lilly Kaiser *Dona Khazi* 2014
adhesive paper, manipulated aluminium