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Perth International Arts Festival: Dark matter

[Laetitia Wilson: Dani Marti, Black Sun](#)



Time, 2013, Dani Marti, Black Sun
photo Rhianna Nelson

Visceral is one of the first words to spring to mind when experiencing the works of Dani Marti, peering into layers and layers of necklaces, circular mounds of twisted reflectors, fecund protrusions of scourers and densely woven rope. The show really hits home, however, with the video works that are uncompromising in their almost abject viscerality.

Currently showing at Fremantle Arts Centre is a solo exhibition by Marti titled *Black Sun*, the first time his work has been seen here in such depth and diversity. The title refers to both the literal and metaphorical layers of darkness within the works, which hold you with their physical materiality and psychological resonance.

The exhibition includes a number of works from the series *Mother*. Here Marti has collected thousands of necklaces and painstakingly woven them into dense tapestries. The traditional feminine craft practices of weaving and macramé he was taught as a boy in Spain come to fruition here, reclaimed as contemporary art. The necklaces are intentionally selected as personal and intimate objects, having been worn so close to the skin. The works have stories and memories embedded in them. Together they also constitute a kind of memorial portraiture of women, acknowledging their history and a mother—Marti's own. In the same room, on the floor, a television monitor displays a [video work titled Llorana](#) in which Marti's mother is recorded listening to a piece of music, immersed in it to the point of tears, releasing her anxiety about her impending death.

Already with this abstract series of bead works and the related video, there is a sense of the intimate, of tangled flesh and personal relationships. Marti's broader practice revolves around questions of identity, the self and the many possible threads of experience, struggle and existence. The relationship with his mother is a central theme, as are relationships in general. Marti is fascinated by their formation, their various idiosyncrasies and the disclosure of moments of intimacy.



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Notes for Bob (video still), Dani Marti, Black Sun
photo courtesy the artist and Fremantle Arts Centre

In a project titled Notes for Bob [a work developed during an Australia Council residency in New York in 2012; Eds], Marti sought out a gay, blind man for the purpose of exploring intimacy and acknowledging sexuality despite disability. He met Bob, who became sexually aroused by a close embrace when sitting on Marti's lap and guiding the artist to sing specific notes. The resulting video is physically confrontational and potentially ethically troubling—do we have the right to gaze upon such vulnerability? Deeply sensitive in the way it is filmed, it is technically, cinematically exquisite and in its quasi-documentary style Bob appears as the one in control with Marti submissive to his demands.

This project extends to another room occupied by a series of yellow and white polyester and nylon abstract works. Here a sound element is added, where the notes that so appealed to Bob are sung by 21 gay male volunteers, aged 17-72, in New York. As part of his engagement with Bob, Marti made this recording and gave it to him, gifting him the experience of ongoing stimulation and connection with the gay community.

It is this kind of complex, interwoven, fetishistic narrative of personal entanglements that drives many of Marti's works, making them both brutal and aesthetically striking. He effectively communicates a sense of closeness to his subjects, to the point of claustrophobia. For the Black Sun exhibition a new work was commissioned. Titled Prelude 1, it is a large, bulging circle of customised corner cube reflectors [three-sided glass prisms; EDs] and glass beads. It conveys the layers of darkness, layers of shimmering black that are alluded to in the idea of a black sun. Its clash of beauty and ugliness makes it both attractive—because of its dark pearly allure—yet repulsive, given its writhing, medusa-like materiality.

The obsessiveness in Black Sun gets under your skin, forcing a confrontation with the very real presence of bodies in the world. The works traverse multiple paths of meaning from the maternal relationship to the darker realms of various sexual encounters. Marti refers to his practice as Baroque Minimalism. The word Baroque originates from the Portuguese term 'barroco' or Spanish 'barrueco,' both of which translate as misshapen or imperfect pearl. This image of a pearl, all shiny and opulent, as distorted and flawed, is a fitting point of entry for considering Dani Marti's works. They exhibit all the drama, exuberance and tension of the Baroque within the tight frame of Minimalism—outrageous excess contained.



Pleasure Chest, detail, Dani Marti, Black Sun
photo courtesy the artist and Fremantle Arts Centre

Dani Marti, Black Sun, Fremantle Arts Centre, 7 Feb-28 March

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