

ART



Transpiration: time-lapse motion and moving colours.

Shaking loose the resonances

Triffid-sized flowers stem from Steve Carr's gallery residency.

by DAVID EGGLETON

The carnation is an iconographic commonplace that frequently serves as a generic screensaver, when not doing duty as a Mother's Day, Valentine's Day or wedding emblem. For Auckland-based Steve Carr, the key association here is Mother's Day. He has become known as an artist who revisits the toys and games of childhood in search of emotional resonances, which he shakes loose, wrings out or otherwise reveals, with a kind of hyperbolic scrutiny – by turns comic, cute, bitter-sweet.

Carnations loom as large as triffids in *Transpiration* (2014), one of just three works that make up *Stretching Time* at Dunedin Public Art Gallery, an exhibition produced in response to his artist residency by Carr – who is nothing if not master of an arch and mannered

minimalism, as well as the canny possessor of a prankster's sensibility. Say the name of the flower out loud and you can grasp how he might be said to "own" it.

Transpiration is literally that: on a giant video-projection panorama, impressively stretching 30 metres, a variation on a school science experiment takes place, with six sets of blooms being drip-fed food colouring through their cut stems, and so gradually undergoing a subtle transformation in their hues – pink, blue, yellow – as capillary action sucks up liquid.

The ruffled petals, expanding in time-lapse motion, seem to writhe and flicker, memorialising the ephemeral. Art students will have a field day picking references to flower-painting traditions, vanitas and science-fiction movies and may confidently intone such names as Andrei Tarkovsky and Andy Warhol.

But Carr's deliberately over-ripe excess and exercise in defamiliarisation is absorbing too just as mesmeristic spectacle. Partly it's the seamless looping, but the lazily moving colour alterations serve to induce

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a kind of trance, for which the tricked-up hum of fake air-conditioning acts as a mantra. These flowers on their green stalks might be drugged; gaze long enough and the mutant dyes suggest bruising, even a kind of corruption.

Also shot through with artifice is a second video work, *American Night* (2014), much smaller and more twinkly, and a homage to the mechanical robin that features in David Lynch's 80s noir movie *Blue Velvet*. Like Lynch, Carr – who grew up in Dunedin – is obsessed with what the mundane might conceal, and by intimations of the taboo, the forbidden, that might lurk in plain sight but which the "innocent eye" glosses over.

If both video works closet you in darkness and signal cinematic auteur aspirations, the third element of the exhibition, *Range* (2013-2014), suggests a perverse sports-shop display. Thirty-five new golf balls, split in half, have been lobbed up onto a white wall in an alcove area. Curious kids used to saw open golf balls to get at the gutta-percha innards. These 70 dimpled hemispheres, slyly arranged in an eye-pleasing pattern by ballbreaker Carr, reveal candy-coloured weighted synthetic resins, layered in rounds resembling bullseyes, targets, or micro op-art: tasty industrial chic. ■

STRETCHING TIME, Dunedin Public Art Gallery, until June 15.