

Inner Circle

Edward Horne

Seventh
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by Lily Hibberd

Below: Edward Horne
Inner Circle, 2004
Installation detail, *Seventh*
Image courtesy the artist



The art of exclusion

In Melbourne's artist-run gallery scene there has been a recent proliferation of highly refined and elaborate exhibitions by emerging artists. In many cases these artists have invested a massive amount of time and money towards their exhibition, and they have chosen to mount their show without prospect of financial return, or any of the support from paid staff provided by the commercial and public gallery systems. Edward Horne's installation *Inner Circle* is one such work. Articulate and extraordinarily finished, it looks like it should be in a major institution but is flawless in *Seventh*, one of Melbourne's smaller artist-run galleries.

Inner Circle's strength as an installation is in its simplicity. Through the *Seventh* gallery shopfront window the space appears empty, other than a strange blue light. Inside, a huge circular structure is suspended at eye level in the gallery. This construction is like a gigantic halo made of wood – a band of white only 30cm in height – without any supports above or below, except where it meets the gallery walls on each side. The strange light is coming from blue fluorescent tubes concealed inside the circle's lidless rim. This large, simple sculpture is reminiscent of Minimalism, with its giant monochromatic monoliths, and yet *Inner Circle* moves beyond this reductive tradition



Above: Edward Horne
Inner Circle, 2004
Installation detail, *Seventh*
Image courtesy the artist

by presenting us with a physical dilemma. Because the structure occupies the whole gallery (its curvature bending towards you) it is impossible to walk directly into the space, but the position of the object at head-height means that you can duck under the rim and enter the circle. The dilemma resides in this act, whether to treat it as a formal object that you only look upon or to physically interact with the work. This impasse is not eased by a deliberate lack of signage; and we have become reliant on instructions to constantly provide the parameters of engagement with art, like, "Please do not touch"... "One person at a time". So Horne leaves us in a quandary, not knowing if we should limbo into the inner circle or maintain our dignity and remain outside. The consequence is that we, who are normally so 'au fait' with how to appreciate contemporary art, are confounded. At this juncture *Inner Circle* becomes a clever trick, playing on the exclusive nature of fine art. Plus, in the situation of a groovy artist-run gallery, it has potential references to art world politics such as, being in or out of the inner circle of 'cool' people... and maybe even one's inner circle of friends. Fortunately, artist-run galleries are always attended by a volunteer (who is often the artist) and in this instance the attendant is giving me a nod to indicate that I should enter.

In going beyond a formalist structure, *Inner Circle* relates to the history of conceptual works, such as Bruce Nauman's *Model for Trench and Four Buried Passages* (1977). Although there are similarities in the structural elements, such as shape, materials, and fluorescent lighting, the primary terrain that these works share is the kind of perceptual displacement that is experienced during interaction with scale models, where the physical reality and the conceptual possibility of one's body getting inside the model acts as a spatial push-me, pull-you. In addition to this, both Nauman and Horne's installations possess certain references to reality that are overcome by their fictional status as art objects. The ultimate distinction

between them is that *Inner Circle* permits you to enter its world. So, having ducked under the outer rim of the construction, the interior of the circular band is akin to a floating white orb (but is also a corral that might fence you in). The seamless, white screen is blank because this perfect stark perimeter has no visible joinery. The form is reminiscent of historic cinematic screens invented for the purposes of immersion, such as the pre-cinematic Zoetrope, virtual reality configurations, and panoramic video installations. With your head stuck in this cloud, it might be forgotten that your body is on display to the people outside the circle. This feature of *Inner Circle* is similar to an interactive piece shown in the 2001 *Space Odysseys* exhibition at ACMI. *The Visitor: Living by Number*, by the Canadian artist Luc Courchesne, was a humorous scenario as an external observer, because the participating viewer stood with their head stuck in what looked like an upside down, metal mixing bowl, whereby they became part of the work for the lookers-on. So in Horne's piece, the awareness of being seen inside the inner circle, and of your body's visibility makes you a bit uncomfortable.

An imposing monumentality is achieved in this work that in architectural terms has some obvious historical contexts. As a pure mathematical form and a perfect circle, the Romans of the 1st century would have loved this installation, and doubly so, with the circle being balanced within the square room of the gallery. In classical Italy this equilibrium of geometries reached its pinnacle in the Roman Colosseum (70-82 AD). *Inner Circle* reminds me of that building, firstly as a site of voyeurism and performance, and secondly because of another amazing feature of Horne's work, an acoustic bubble. With great expertise, Horne made the dimensions of this construction precisely so that, when you are standing in the middle of the circle, the sound of your own voice is bouncing around your head (even though there is no lid to hold it in). According to his curriculum vitae, the artist has worked with electronic sound installations in the past, but this piece is remarkable, because it operates simply and without artifice, as a miniature amphitheatre just like the Roman Colosseum.

The concept of the amphitheatre in relation to Horne's work is powerful because it combines the use of sound, theatrical performance and immersive experience, which are all important elements in the exhibition. It's curious too that old auditoriums still use the term 'upper circle' to denote the auditory space where the sound of the performance is superior for the audience... Only, in this work, the circle is a theatrical stage that provides a site for the viewer's inclusion in a live performance. And those of us deigning to remain mere spectators are irreverently excluded from Edward Horne's inner circle.