



## Fly me to the Moon

Luke Devine  
Lorraine Heller-Nicholas  
Tatjana Plitt

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Australian Government



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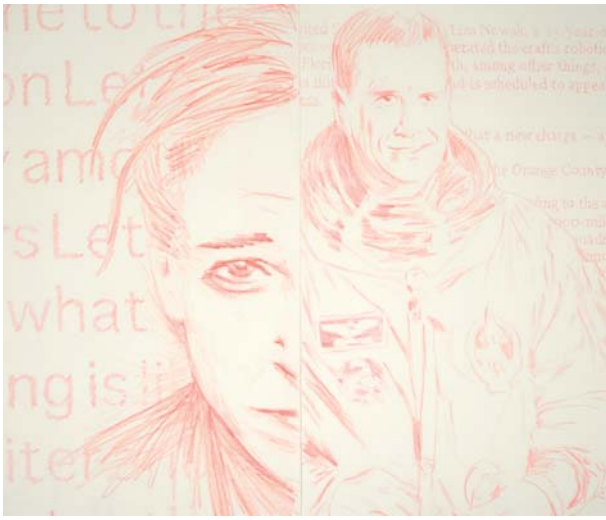
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Luke Devine, Stripped video stills, 2006, 3mins 45sec

*He fell in love  
– nothing to do  
with apples,  
rosebuds or  
curls – just pure  
madness.*

*Theokritos, Idyll  
11 (The Cyclops)*



Lorraine Heller-Nicholas, *Fly Me To The Moon*, 2008, pencil on paper. 50cm x 70cm (x2)

In Lorraine Heller-Nicholas's *Fly me to the moon*, a real-life crime of passion, is rendered in soft pencil in a manner reminiscent of American painter Elizabeth Peyton's pop-portraiture. However, unlike Peyton's innocuous celebrity portraits, Heller-Nicholas has chosen to outline gently the mug-shot of a woman (and astronaut) who drove across America in space diapers to accost her female rival in a love-triangle situation at NASA. Beside her is the subject of her obsession, and behind both of them text from the reports of the incident. A question arises as to whether they actually had a relationship, or whether it was all in her imagination. Also, if she is intelligent enough to be one of the few female astronauts, what could have pushed her to such a breaking point?

The inspiration for Heller-Nicholas's *Come fly with me* is a Canadian crime in the 1940s when a man decided to side-step securing a divorce by bombing the plane his wife was on (and killing an extra twenty people) so that he could run away with a 19 year-old cigarette girl. An answer to the previous question that presents itself is that these criminals-in-love have extended elements of the psychological state that we all experience when in love, such as infatuation, to a level far beyond the norm. This implies that within the state of being in love itself there resides the potential, the seed perhaps, of madness. Such an observation echoes critic Slavoj Zizek's comments that since love demands that one individual is privileged above all others, in a formal sense it is essentially violent and dramatically evil<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Zizek!, Dir. Astra Taylor. *Hidden Driver Productions*, 2005.



Tatjana Plitt, *To Tame a Wild Heart*, 2007, Type C Print, 50.8cm x 70cm

Tatjana Plitt is also interested in portraying real people in love, but focuses on the way in which romantic narratives – specifically the narratives of *Mills and Boon* novels – measure up against the reality of romance. There is also an interrogation of the way in which consumption of such stories, filled as they are with dashing, chisel-jawed men and buxom women, shape our experience of passion, when it actually happens to us in real life.

The process Plitt employs is interesting: she finds volunteer couples who are willing to allow her into their homes, then shows them a selection of *Mills and Boon* covers and asks them to pick a favourite to replicate. She then selects clothing from their wardrobes, and finds the nicest part of the house to shoot.

In *To Tame a Wild Heart* a young couple is caught on the stairs, caught in an embrace that suggests an element of conflict. The girl has turned her face away from the boy's as if to resist the kiss he is trying to give her. Despite this, she is leaning against him, her hands on his stomach, suggesting, along with the effect of the lighting drawing forward their bodies' contact, that what is important here is the lover's push-and-pull game of seduction. At the same time, the girl's pink tights and trainers, and the boy's hoodie and jeans remind us that these are real people, not romantic archetypes. A pitfall of this brand of portraiture is that it could have rendered the subjects ridiculous in their attempts at mimicking poses of grandiose love, but to Plitt's credit this is not the effect at all. Rather, there is a tenderness at the core of each photograph that pays respect to the real love that each couple has held, if not in this very photo, elsewhere in their lives.



Luke Devine, *Stripped* video stills, 2006, 3mins 45sec

In his video piece *Listerine*, Luke Devine presents us with a hetero-sexual couple, the woman slowly feeding the male tokens – Listerine strips – as he gazes at her, practically begging for each next mint.

The inversion of the typical relationship power dynamic, the dominating man having been usurped by a powerful woman (and vice versa), could suggest the liberation of the sexes from the by-now dull prescribed roles. However, the apparent tension between the couple, and the way in which the man's need for these tokens (described by the artist as "the delivery vector for desire") intensifies conjures a sort of impending doom. As the couple change location and costumes, moving from sitting on the grass wearing all-white, to a laboratory location in which the woman is scientist (signaled by the lab-coat and glasses) and the man is naked laboratory subject, it is hard to see where the interaction can progress: the man being further and further degraded by his need.

Perhaps this is the fundamental dynamic of a particular relationship. However, this oedipal conflict most likely presents as the psychological bones of a variety of male-female societal, familial and sexual relationship in which the woman is in a position to exercise, and even abuse, power. The woman's assumption of the dominant role, signaled most strongly in the last image of the woman's finger disturbingly entering the man's mouth, leaves the normally impenetrable hetero-sexual male finally compromised.

*Fly me to the moon* brings together Lorraine Heller-Nicholas, Tatjana Plitt and Luke Devine, three Melbourne artists and friends whose work explores love and romance, and the often astounding psychological and social implications of this human phenomenon. Love, in the works presented, is represented as something that is often better (safer, healthier) in the abstract than in actuality.