

THEATRE RED

Y Blue Italian & Nil by Sea

Every boundary serves three purposes.

The first two purposes are obvious: to keep people out, to keep people in.

The third I'll come to later.

Katie Pollock's plays *Blue Italian* and *Nil by Sea* are powerful and poetic. They're fascinating explorations of human movement.

Despite the nationalistic stories we tell ourselves, we've been on the move the entirety of human history. Advances in technology simply mean we're faster now and so the habit has become more obvious, and more fraught.

Why do we do it? Currently, the movement tends to be *out* of Australia if you're bored by privilege (this we call travel) or *into* Australia if you'd like the opportunity to be bored (this we call migration). For many Australians, travel has become a rite of passage. For many people outside Australia, migration is often a matter of life or death.

Directed by Rachel Chant, with set and lighting design by Benjamin Brockman and sound design by Tom Hogan, the two pieces are stunningly sensual. Leichhardt Town Hall is a big cavernous place, but it's used beautifully. There's a sea of barricades, complete with flashing lanterns, lit evocatively from the ground. There's a striking moment when the high overhead fans take on a most ominous presence. And, of course, the town hall is directly below the flight path. Usually this would be an annoyance, but here it's worked wonderfully into the pieces, the passing planes become suggestive of our drive to move.



(<https://theatrered.files.wordpress.com/2015/05/blue-italian.jpeg>)

Photo by Zorica Purlija

The cast (Jennie Dibley, Nat Jobe, Alex Malone and Sarah Meacham) do terrific work, delivering textured performances of a host of characters, creating an image of a world in flux.

The first of the two pieces, *Blue Italian*, is an intriguing meditation on travel and migration. The title refers to a design on a Royal Dalton dinner set. Amongst much broken crockery, the shattered image becomes a symbol of the refusal of the world to stand still or human society to remain stationary.

In the second of the two pieces, *Nil by Sea*, three neighbours stare at a stain on the roadway. Where did it come from? Its source is tragic; a desperate man attempting to overcome a boundary. Will the stain ever come off? Good question, and a damning indictment of our current policy on asylum seekers.

And so to the third purpose of boundaries: To define, through opposition.

This is *me*. That is *you*.

This is *us*. That is *them*.

These are boundaries we need to break down. And these two magnificently provocative pieces of theatre – anti-naturalistic, subversive, and fresh – are the sort of tools we need.

Veronica Kaye

Blue Italian & Nil by Sea by Katie Pollock

til May 17 at Leichhardt Town Hall

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