

# SWEATING THE FOUNDATIONS

110%, Liveworks Festival, Sydney, Australia, October 2018

*Sweating The Foundations* is an installation that playfully imagines the intersection of the divergent histories of the Carriageworks site, and brings them together through sculpture, action and costume. The resulting speculative space highlights the liquid and transformative nature of Carriageworks as a place where industrial and cultural labour melt into one another.

Starting its life as an engine works, this site built trains for NSW Railways for over 100 years from 1880 - 1988 and employed a vast number of workers who physically laboured in crowded, loud and fetid spaces. Today, by contrast, the building has turned its energy toward the production of thought, culture and ideas; a shift that reflects broader changes in how we each participate as workers in the contemporary world.

Throughout their body of work, 110% have been interested in the experience of the individual caught between material and immaterial labour, a position which the 'artist' typifies. As ideas take the place of products in our global systems of exchange, the emphasis on the individual increases and we are expected to give more of ourselves - not just physically, but mentally and emotionally - to our work, resulting in a situation where 'the soul becomes part of the factory'.

Ideas of competition, optimism and labour, and the various manifestations that 'work' and 'leisure' take in the post-Fordist economy have been a pre-occupation of 110%. Their earliest work 110%, from which they drew their name, involved a durational performance of a disciplined training regimen with the three artists dressed as boiler-suited cheerleaders roaming Cockatoo Island in a troupe. At timed intervals the performers would ascend a winners-podium to chant positive aphorisms at passers-by, casting a critical eye on our societal obsession with victory at all costs. Delving further into the power of aspiration *A Summit Wouldn't Do Without You* presented at Firstdraft examined the self-help psychology of achievement and New Age positive thinking. The exhibition featured video, performative actions and soft sculptures that each documented the planning and pre-visualisation of the collective's 'summit on a summit', a future moment where they would reunite on a Swiss mountain peak.

110%'s first large-scale installation *Holiday Feelings* was presented once again on Cockatoo Island and created a resort-like space devoted to rest and relaxation, offering its audience a space to recuperate from the rigors of intellectual engagement demanded by the other installations at Underbelly Festival. *Holiday Feelings* was 110%'s first work that incorporated a cast of performers, who were tasked with facilitating visitor experience. These 'hosts' interacted with the audience offering seating for repose, hand massages, mints and refreshments - laying bare the power dynamics and inherent emotional labour of spaces of leisure and the personal cost of care to those offering it and those receiving it.

*Sweating the Foundations* takes the tension between physical and emotional labour as its starting point and creates a speculative third space that again highlights the labour of care. The installation replicates the industrial architecture of Carriageworks with its columns, pulleys, scaffolding and vast scale. Aesthetically, the work also plays with the conventions of minimalism using a restrictive palette of colour, form and materials to create the sculptural work. But with their choice of oozing and unctuous materials - soft foam, moist clay and damp cloth - the artists undermine the seriousness of industry and inject a frivolity and irreverence into the work.

Across the duration of the exhibition, the installation is activated by performers, who form a 'taskforce' under the direction of a 110% foreman. These workers execute acts of maintenance and constant fine-tuning on the structure; bathing foamy columns, moistening clay with makeshift tools, and tending puddles as moisture pools on the site. These actions compound the sense of ridiculousness in the work. These pyrrhic actions make no impact on the structural integrity or functional qualities of the site, and instead show an elaborate performance of the act of caring. 110% have made the emotional by-product of so much of our working lives - the kindly worded email, the small talk and the 'friendly reminder' - the central focus of

*Sweating the Foundations.*

The detailed hand-made costumes which the performers wear are the most direct distillation of the mood and intent of the work. Taking inspiration from welder's aprons, the grey leather jerkins are fitted over flared trousers' and bell sleeves whose exaggerated proportions and light colours are purposefully designed to pick up stains, blend into the site and hinder the progress of their wearers. This anti-workwear will become increasingly marked across the course of the exhibition, a visible accretion of the evidence of labour.

*Sweating the Foundations* sculpturally interrogates the site of Carraigeworks as a transitional space where past and future come together. 110%'s slow extraction of the liquid nature of the space lays bare the dynamics labour and reveals the weight that our work has on us in the 21st Century.

**Tulleah Pearce**