

Visual arts

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When Darren met Tony

I TOOK two videos home the other night — one called *Darren and Tony*, the other *Stella and Anna*. I wasn't looking forward to either. Both were created by Melbourne artist Nicola Loder and are travelling to London as part of the Heads Up 100 festival during Australia Week. I had read about one of Loder's previous



And baby makes three . . .

works — a video of a man sitting at a table doing nothing. It sounded, well, tedious.

My doubts were confirmed when I started watching *Darren and Tony*. The two Australian men named in the title stroll on to a stark white set, introduce themselves, and strike up a conversation. The script was naturalistic, tiresomely so. But I soon realised Darren and Tony were not acting. They were talking about their own lives, *real* lives. None the less, I wasn't that interested in their ruminations. Perhaps it was their manner, never quite candid enough, too camera conscious, playing up to an image. Darren is a writer, Tony an indigenous actor. I began to

fast-forward. It seemed to take forever, endless footage of these two men, sitting, standing, walking, talking. I enjoyed watching their figures against the immutable white background more than their conversation.

Even so, I thought it an interesting work to send to London. There were no stereotypes here. This was not *Neighbours*. Tony's story, in particular, dissolved any stereotyped attitudes the viewer might harbor about the lives of indigenous Australians.

I hit eject and substituted *Stella and Anna* for *Darren and Tony*. It was the same set-up: Stella and Anna wander on to a white space, introduce themselves and start to chat. Anna has an eight-month-old, scene-stealing baby called Artan, and Stella is heavily pregnant, weeks away from childbirth.

This time, I was glued to the TV *for the next hour*, listening intently to these women's stories about pregnancy, childbirth, fathers, families, work, babies, choices. This was not a gender thing. My companion (male) was just as transfixed — and had been as impatient as I with the self-absorbed Darren and Tony. This was better than "reality TV". This was the real, unadulterated McCoy.

I confessed my reactions to Loder before she left for London **this week. She didn't mind.** Loder is keen for video art to lose its esoteric image, and wants it to be accessible. "I am more interested in the thoughts that the work promotes in the viewer than I am in my own explanations of the work," she said.

Loder has created five, one-hour long videos for Australia Week, permutations on a common theme — an insight into Australian life, as revealed through the filmed interactions of five pairs of strangers who first set eyes on each other when the camera starts rolling — *Allan and Hellen*, *Ken and Glen*, and *James and Gale*, are the others.

Loder gave her subjects no instructions. She walked away once filming began. "My intention is to remove any sense of artifice and remove myself as a potential director. It's providing a space where people can hopefully reveal each other in a pretty natural way.

"Each work is an hour long, which I think is pretty important in that the dialogue is creating a metaphoric landscape. They really traverse a lot of territory. There is a real journey taking place."

Loder says the works question stereotypes, our expectations as viewers and our desire to be entertained, and the current fascination with "reality TV".

The work of Megan Jones, Nigel Helyer, Margie Medlin, Brook Andrew and Raymond Peer will also be shown alongside Loder's, under the title *Orbital*.

Orbital curator Keely Macarow, who is also the artistic director of the Melbourne digital art group Experimenta, chose works which explored the Australian physical and cultural landscape.

Orbital is at the Lux Gallery, London, from July 2-9, and at Melbourne's Centre for Contemporary Photography, from July 6-29.