

## Exhibition Review: Touchstones at The Platform Gallery

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### TOUCHSTONES AT THE PLATFORM GALLERY



Beneath the bustle of Flinders Street Station lies an unexpected exhibition space.

Below the platforms, in the belly of Melbourne's iconic transport hub, is a chilly subway filled with the soft sounds of a crooning busker, the buzz of a barber's electric razor and the smell of two-dollar coffees. This is Degraves Street Subway and this is the home of Platform Gallery.

Platform is not an elegant art gallery. In fact, it's quite the opposite. One of four current exhibitions belongs to photographer, Abby Storey, and amongst the discarded polystyrene coffee cups, upturned plastic crates, litter and chewing gum, you'll find Storey's latest work, Touchstones. An ongoing collection, this exhibition features fourteen new works, each framed in white and encased behind a sliding glass panel.

I asked Abby how she got involved with Platform Gallery. "I met one of the curators through a former exhibition in which my work featured. I really love the space here, the grungy-ness of it but also the idea that a large percentage of the people who see the work



displayed at Platform would quite possibly never go into a more traditional gallery. I love how public the artworks are when on display there.”

And she’s right. Some people idle by slowly, looking at each photograph individually, passing comment on each, perhaps even touching the glass. Others, in a rush to get to their destination, merely steal a glance at one image, not even noticing the others.

I take a closer look at an arresting image of a teddy bear wrapped in plastic, followed by a simple but striking shot of a tree standing on parched parkland. Storey’s imagery feels familiar and everyday but also slightly unnerving. An old man in a red hat and scarf stands by me for a moment, baguette in hand, and scratches his head.

Abby says her style stems from documentary photography but it is definitely not documentary. “I try to make pictures that ask more questions of the viewer than they answer; images that don’t make immediate or obvious judgment. “I like the way that one can combine images to create a narrative, yet a different combination tells a different story. This says something about the inherent lack of absolute truth in photography.”

A stubbly busker in sunglasses and old NY cap playing Spanish guitar provides our background music. He nods graciously as someone drops a coin into his red fur-lined case.

On the opposing wall, fellow exhibitor Lizzie Hall displays her collection of crocheted tanks titled ‘Girls Don’t Like Small Tanks’. Each woollen tank fits into the palm of your hand and is filled with chickpeas, gently mocking the military world. These floppy ‘hackytanks’, lined up neatly behind the glass, are Hall’s “contribution to the war machine”.

It’s chilly down here so I keep moving. I’m drawn towards Storey’s photograph of a fox-fur stole draped over a wooden coat hanger. Its texture and depth and the simple composition makes me smile. “I still work with film, primarily because I really like the results from my lovely old Hasselblad camera. The square format seems to work with the way I see,” she says. On where she finds her inspiration, “it comes as much from day-to-day life and my concerns and interests, as it does from research. I find humanity, our rituals, routines and idiosyncrasies an endless source of inspiration about which I want to make pictures.”

Born in New Zealand and now a resident of Melbourne, I asked Abby what she likes about the city. “I love the vibrancy of the city, all the fantastic galleries, the myriad of festivals... and I love the little hidden treasures that I keep finding in small streets and laneways.” As I look at the lonely double bass case leaning up against the cold, grubby wall, the sleepy-looking students sipping at their coffee and the couple strolling through the passageway arm in arm, I realise that Platform Gallery certainly is one of those hidden treasures.

Details:

Touchstones

An exhibition of photographic artworks by Abby Storey

Girls Don’t Like Small Tanks

An exhibition by Lizzie Hall

Showing until the 31<sup>st</sup> of July 2010

Platform Gallery, Degraives Street Subway, Melbourne

Abby Storey is a contemporary photographic artist based in Melbourne. Her photography can be found on her website: [www.abbystorey.co.nz](http://www.abbystorey.co.nz)

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