

## Jarrod Van Der Ryken: to begin to hurt

Jarrod Van Der Ryken uses memories, experiences and sites from his life as starting points; bringing his life into the gallery, and subsequently giving us, the audience, a view into his life. Combined with these personal narratives however, is enough ambiguity to prevent a solely diaristic reading of the work. The layers of removal and covering turn the window into a bridge, where we can cross to a place of connection and understanding.

In this most recent work to begin to hurt (2018), Jarrod situates us directly in the centre of one of his most painful memories;<sup>1</sup> a relationship ending in the Botanic Gardens. to begin to hurt renders this memory concrete. As a general rule, we work hard to forget pain, particularly pain that stems from rejection, rather than capture it and present it to others for consumption.

And yet here we are. In the gallery is a replica of the picnic table that features in Jarrod's memory, placed in between two panoramic moving images, displayed on curved screens. On one set of screens we see two figures seated, talking at the picnic table in the park until one figure gets up and walks into the distance. The sun is setting. On the other screens, sprinklers dance around the park, while the sun rises. Light from the screens fills the space, and we know something is happening, though we might not know exactly what.

While my initial reaction to this work is to wonder why Jarrod would want to revisit this memory in such a public way, I don't dwell too much, as I think I understand. I too have mined the painful of my past to be present, and connect. to begin to hurt is present, but it is also guarded in its pared-back aesthetic and somewhat obscure content. The title provides a clue, but does it provide answers or create confusion? While I know the story behind the work, you don't, until you read this piece of writing. It is a mediated earnestness. I am grateful for this offering of self and vulnerability in the public domain, albeit cloaked in metaphor and ambiguity.

Vulnerability is such a rare gift, particularly now. In our<sup>2</sup> society, we are taught to shun and be ashamed of our inherent vulnerability. To many, vulnerability indicates weakness, and in our individualistic culture it is every human for themselves. To survive, we must develop broad shoulders and thick skin. This is such a narrow engagement with vulnerability, however. I prefer to embrace it as "the courage to show up and be seen."<sup>3</sup>

Increasingly, many of us<sup>4</sup> find it difficult to connect, to express our inner selves, to each other and to you, the viewer. This is why art is such a powerful tool, providing space for us to reach out and connect. Exhibitions have the power to become a platform from which we can feel safe in being vulnerable, as the artist and the viewer. The gallery, when treated right, can become a safe space<sup>5</sup> to show up and be seen, and even understood.

Relationships are hard. Break ups are hard. And so is making art. Combining them might just be the spoon full of sugar that helps the medicine go down. Perhaps all we can do is show up, put it all on the table, and hope for the best.

Courtney Coombs

1. from conversation between Jarrod and I in the lead up to exhibition
2. Western heteropatriarchal, cisnormative, white supremacist
3. As defined by Dr Brené Brown
4. in the most general of terms
5. scary though it might be