

Body and spirit in the frame

VISUAL ARTS

Andrew Varano: Final Shavasana

Venn Gallery

REVIEW LAETITIA WILSON

A considered rawness characterises this exhibition by Andrew Varano. Titled *Final Shavasana*, this show is a series of drawings and sculptures that hover about questions of mind and body, fitness and spirituality.

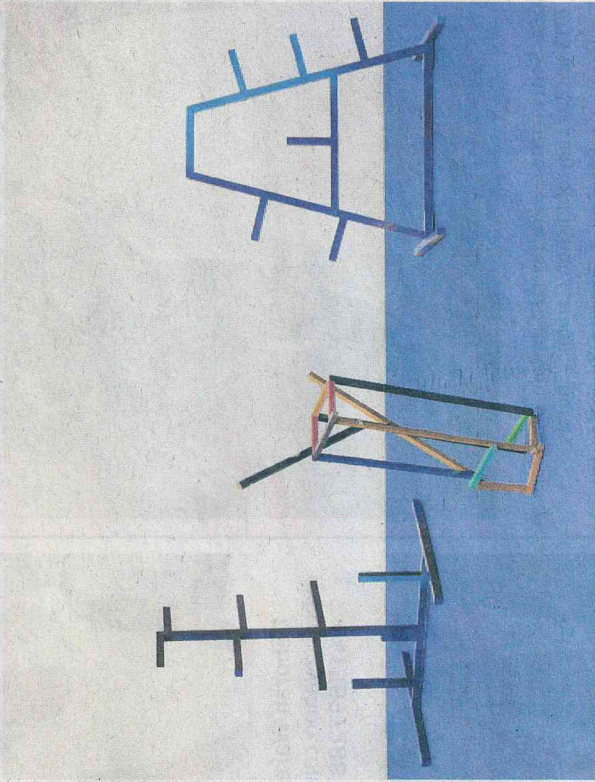
The structure of a large frame, painted in muted colours, dominates the west end of the gallery, attached to which are 21 drawings. Initially, only the back of the framed drawings are visible, making for an abstract structure of colour and white rectangular form.

When circling this arrangement the gaze is drawn away from abstraction and toward the figurative representation of classic nude life drawings on the front.

The nudes carry an angular embodiment of the shape ideal for 80s fashion. Their poses are somewhere between yoga and gym-workout and auras of colour emanate from parts of their bodies. They are simple works that perhaps do not warrant such an elaborate display structure.

Simplicity can be deceptive, however, and there is no doubt more is at play than initially meets the eye.

Varano is known for wafting into the heady realms of



Static: Andrew Varano's Final Shavasana Installation.

conceptualism. He is also known for making kinetic works — they literally move — but in this exhibition the works are static and merely suggest movement of a structured nature. Continuing the idea of the aura, a glow oozes from a nearby platform topped by blue foam matting, on to which are placed eight colourfully painted structures made from balsa wood sticks.

These too, hold a deceptive naivety. With titles such as *Weight Tree*, *Propped Skeleton* and *Raised Verticals*, there are suggestions of weightiness, of gestures of holding or lifting. At the same time they are materially light and the blue in combination with the lighting and their colour

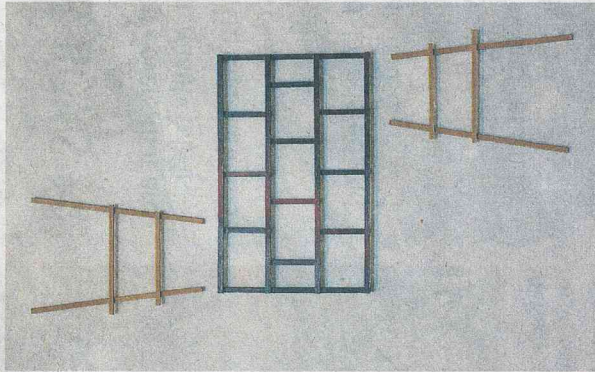
palette renders them somewhat ethereal.

This recalls the aim of the Shavasana pose in yoga to feel the weight of relaxation while ascending to a greater lightness of being.

One of the works, *Skeleton and Mending Wall*, is a number of wood sticks combined geometrically to prop up a wall of sorts. This title reminisces on the

1914 poem *Mending Wall* by Robert Frost, which questions the need for walls and proposes the notion that “good fences make good neighbours” is an outmoded ideology.

Walls have certainly not lost popularity today but the *Mending Wall* in Varano’s interpretation is



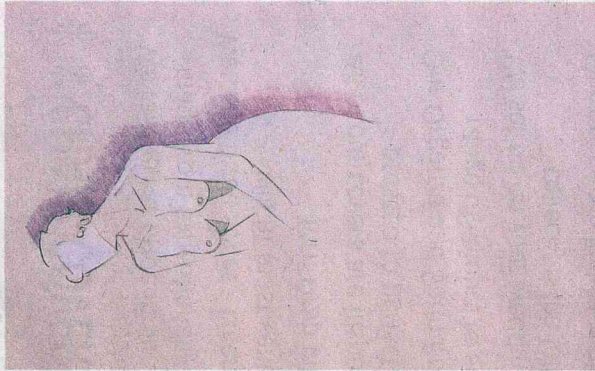
Weight: Common Mood 2013.

a mere gridded frame, utterly permeable, more the idea of a wall, more of a quasi-barrier, than a functional wall. This is much like the theoretical nonsense of the Cartesian divide between body and mind.

The body is directly implied in these wood assemblages, suggesting the bones that support the flesh, the way they move, their awkwardness, poise and complexity.

One titled *Bust* taps into the art historical tradition of the bust while resembling a weight scale with two Turkish eyeglass pendants hovering on either side.

This could be considered crass, but it sits comfortably in light of the overall installation and the



Auras: Final Shavasana (2).

themes of weight, movement, body and psychology.

The Shavasana is a conclusive pose, it is temporary and meant to engender a profound sense of rejuvenation following a session of body work.

Thinking of this in relation to Varano’s art practice, this show comes after the closure of the OK Gallery and his role as co-director. It is a period of consolidation and weighing things up.

It will no doubt be interesting to see in which direction Varano’s practice will head following the *Final Shavasana*.

■ *Final Shavasana* runs until November 22 at Venn, 16 Queen Street, Perth.