

Visual arts

Andrew Harper



A house of mirrors

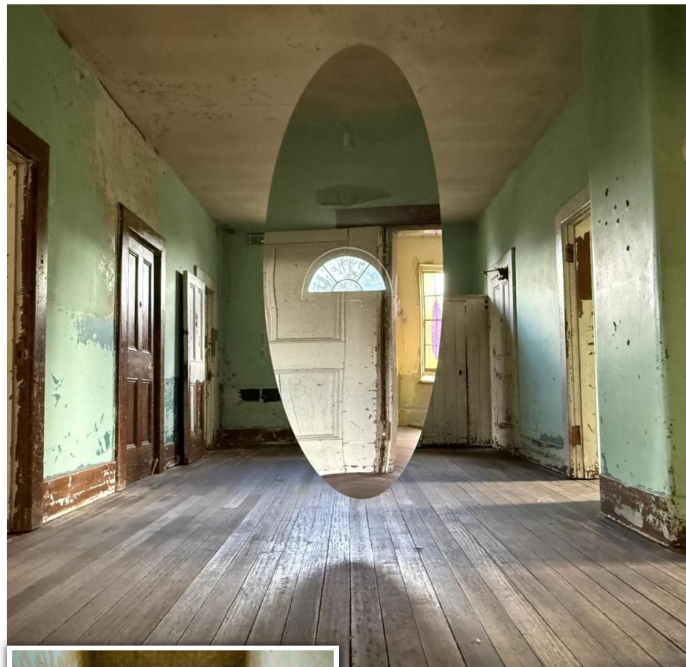
OPEN THE DOOR
 Brigita Ozolins and
 Dean Stevenson
The Ladies Cottage
 Willow Court, New Norfolk
 Until May 3

We have a problem, here in Lutruwita/Tasmania. We don't have enough non-commercial spaces where artists can experiment a touch. However, we do have a lot of heritage buildings, and sometimes it's thought to be a good idea to put art into these spaces. It does solve a problem, but it's not always a good thing – indeed, it can be a disaster. Heritage spaces are hard to use – there can be not enough light, and the heritage nature of the building means you cannot just bung more light in, or at least, not so discretely. Some heritage spaces are just astonishing – filled with beautiful decay, old architecture, strange and eerie graffiti, chipped paint and the overwhelming resonance of history. Your art better be good, or the space will devour it. I can think of many shows I've been to that were installed in heritage buildings where the conversation was dominated by the reaction to the space, with the art coming second.

I do not know if Brigita Ozolins and Dean Stevenson had that issue in mind when they were cooking up *Open The Door*, but the problem was totally dissolved by the eerie intensity of this transportive, compelling work.

The interior space of the Ladies Cottage at Willow Court is as overpowering as a you might feel a heritage space could be. Willow Court is a Site of Conscience, part of a globally recognised network that works with sites of trauma and human rights abuses. Willow Court is a complex place, and it's hard to not be aware of the elephantine presence of its history. Ozolins and Stevenson were very aware of this, and it's a noteworthy achievement that there is no descent into outright horror here. Rather, there's a duality invoked and created with mirrors, chalk writing on the walls and a meticulously crafted narrative composition that drifts about the space.

Large, long oval mirrors hang throughout the building, on both floors, sometimes



Some of the pieces in Brigita Ozolins and Dean Stevenson's *Open the Door* exhibition, above and left, being showcased in *The Ladies Cottage*, at Willow Court. Pictures: Supplied

alone, sometimes clustered. They are visible, but have no frames and seem to float in space, performing a glacial dance that floats reflected light about the building. They capture the building's structure, distorting and expanding it with apparent portals to a place that is nothing like Wonderland.

I can't emphasise enough the astonishing effect of this: the building itself is stretched and distorted by the floating reflections, becoming larger and stranger. I saw this on a gloomy day, and looked into a mirror whose physical presence was overwhelmed by what it was reflecting – which looked like it

was part of the room, but no room looks like that. In the short seconds before I realised, there was genuine vertigo: I felt a visceral moment of disquiet.

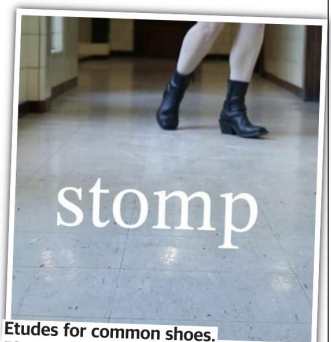
There's more, too: elegant cursive script unfurls across walls and floors, quoting Swiss psychiatrist Carl Jung. Empty chairs stare out of windows. The music swells, then collapses into a strange, animal plucking of discord. And through it all, a brief wash of beautiful rainbow light drifts across paint-flecked walls. *Open the Door* meets the demands of the Ladies Cottage and its knotted, teeming history and respects it. Ozolins and Stevenson see the trauma here, yet there is survival and dignity too. The decision is made to honour, not pity, and the result is art that is utterly seductive and entrancing.

ART OF NOISE

SHOOE TOONES
 Alison Pryke and Jaslyn
 Robertson
Good Grief Studios
 Argyle St, Hobart

Shoes that make noises? Sure, Alison Pryke and Jaslyn Robertson have that angle totally covered. Pryke has been making fanciful footwear for some years now, Robertson is a composer with an interest in opera, and their show features shoes, video of people making sound with shoes, or with things on their feet like traditional comedy rubber chickens, and there's an object or two you might stand or stomp on that will also make sound. This is a simple and playful concept, but there's a remarkable level of skill here – the shoes are decently made or adapted for noise making, and are interesting objects in their own right.

What's impressive about this is that it was done and it all works; video evidence of people activating the boisterous footwear is spontaneously hilarious and more importantly, a rather delightful moment of community exchange based around something that sounds a bit silly (and the sounds are quite silly), but in execution is something that's been committed to in a professional manner, and is in fact a lovely, chaotic moment of sound art that anyone could participate in, and get some actual joy out of. I'll be keeping a close eye on these shoes for the next time there's a noise festival, because it looks completely brilliant.



Etudes for common shoes. Picture: Supplied