

King for a day: 'Heavenly stems' at Neon Parc

These images are from the exhibition at Neon Parc, [Heavenly stems](#), which has just closed. I want to draw attention to it because it echoes things I have been thinking about recently, and poses interesting questions about the nature of contemporary art and curatorship.

If anyone saw the exhibition they'll know that it made a strange yet unavoidable kind of sense. It shouldn't have worked, yet it did. I'd argue that this kind of feeling, at this current moment, is exactly the kind of feeling we should expect when we look at contemporary art exhibitions, big or small.

What I've been thinking is that not enough curators get it wrong or even risk doing so. Most exhibitions seem to be about reiterating the canon, or tracing already defined relationships in ways that echo local sentiment. But good exhibitions increasingly have a spanner in the works; some unexplainable aspect that really is just about a gut feeling. Correct me if I'm wrong, but this is how artists work too: suspend judgement, close your eyes, and perhaps that odd idea that you've been telling yourself is ridiculous might just be the way forward.

I'm not going to argue for these connections, or against them, but something in *Heavenly stems* was unavoidable. Put together a faux naïve modernist, an artist who would be classified, I guess, as an 'outsider' artist (if that is still the accepted term), and a long-out-of-favor Antipodean modernist and something happens. It's not rocket science but it does disrupt an existing order. It points towards many more possible connections, all of which act against prevailing distinctions.

[Heavenly stems](#), Neon Parc, Melbourne, 14-31 August 2013.



'Heavenly stems'



Dick Watkins, 'The metaphysician', 2008, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 152 cm. Courtesy the artist and Liverpool Street Gallery



Angela Brennan, 'Jug',
2013, stoneware, 35 x 29 x
26 cm. Courtesy the artist
and Niagara Galleries



Angela Brennan



Rebecca Scibilia, 'Not titled (Red

mountain)', 2012, paint marker and marker on paper, 28 x 38 cm. Courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia



Rebecca Scibilia, 'Not titled', 2010, felt-tipped pen on paper, 38 x 28 cm. Courtesy the artist and Arts Project Australia



Dick Watkins, 'Sigmund Fraud', 1998, synthetic polymer paint on canvas, 183 x 137 cm. Courtesy the artist and Liverpool Street

Gallery