

*Testimonies and confessions*  
 Maroondah Art Gallery  
 Ringwood  
 25 October–8 December 2012

RUTH LERNER casts an eye over an exhibition by an artist whose work embraces Australia and Macedonia.

# VIOLETA CAPOVSKA



Born and raised in Skopje, Macedonia, artist Violeta Capovska has lived in Melbourne since 1991, and continues to practice both here and in Macedonia. Over the last decade, she has extended her practice from printmaking to incorporate video, photographic and textile works. Her new show at Maroondah Art Gallery, *Testimonies and confessions*, draws together her enduring interest in psychoanalysis, and the historical and current pathologising of women's health issues and arcane nature of treatments.

Working in dual languages and cultures has, to some extent, informed Capovska's work and her interest in different approaches to the female body. In her 2011 show at the Art Gallery of Macedonia, Capovska chose to exhibit in the female section of the old Turkish baths, now a gallery, in the old part of Skopje. A place for both cleansing the soul and the body, it also facilitated intimate exchanges between women, acting in many ways as their 'talking cure'. This experience is contrasted with a very different one in Anglo-Australian culture, whereby 'cures' are often highly formalised and pathologised.

Capovska's interest in language and its implied power relationships and attitudes runs through her work. *Naming Names*, her series of linoprints, comprises female names in Latin and Cyrillic scripts set against a mesh of fine parallel lines. From heroines such as Ophelia through to Freud's patients like Anna O, Capovska pays homage to these women as well as suggesting that they may be confined by particular roles, that their names may be read as labels.

The video *Love Sick Girl* (2004) is informed by research Capovska undertook at St Vincent's Hospital, where she held a residency. Here Capovska was given access to nineteenth-century medical records and case notes for women from around Melbourne and regional Victoria. Actor/writer Olivia Davis re-enacts excerpts about women's maladies such as the injuries from backyard abortions and 'misplaced wombs'. Davis also features in the other video works *Hypnosis* (2004) and *Therapy* (2011); this ongoing collaboration links the videos, reflecting the nature of the psychoanalytic process and tracing something of Davis's own evolution.

The correspondence, moreover, between Capovska's modes of expression — video, photography and drawings — and the mediums used to record patients in early and current clinical environments, re-situates the viewer as clinician and witness. The photographs from *Love Sick Girl* are re-enactments of photographs taken by the nineteenth-century neurologist Charcot at Salpêtrière psychiatric hospital in Paris during his infamous hypnotic treatments of hysteria. The linoprints *Seance 1* and *Hypnosis 1* are based on drawings published by Bourneville, an intern at Salpêtrière under Charcot. Capovska, too, was privy to video footage of current female patients at St Vincent's and uses this technique to document Davis's own experiences in hypnosis and therapy.

Capovska's textiles create a ghostly presence. Revenants of the Salpêtrière patients, they remind us that, just as women's bodies have not changed, nor have aspects of a male-dominated medical practice. □



Top: Violeta Capovska, *Familia*, Installation, 2011, linoprint, silk organza, interfacing, dimensions variable

Bottom: Olivia Davis, *Love Sick Girl*, photograph, 20 x 20.5cm