LUST OF THE LIBERTINES

JAKE MILLAR SPEAKS WITH ARTIST BRIGHTSIDE, WHO HAS CURATED AN EXTRAVAGANT VALENTINE'S DAY SOIRÉE TO LAUNCH HER DEBUT SOLO EXHIBITION.

What do pole dancers, contortionists, performing dwarves, cocktails and art all have in common? Well, typically perhaps not a lot. But this Valentine's Day that's set to change when they all come together at Waterloo's aMBUSH gallery for the *Welcome To The Brightside Extravaganza*. And, as the show's title suggests, it's going to be pretty crazy – good crazy – but crazy nonetheless.

The evening is the handiwork of artist BrightSide (also known as Katie Bright), who has carefully selected everything from the refreshments being served on the night ("I'm a big absinthe drinker") to the promotional flyers and the entertainers on show, which are many and varied to say the least.

"This is my first solo show, so I'm coming in with a big bang. Just putting together a night of art wouldn't suffice; it had to be an event," BrightSide says. "So the exhibition extravaganza is about all the things I love and it's really about giving people an insight into the world I live in."

BrightSide had been considering an exhibition of her work for some time but wanted the evening to not only present her work, but fully represent who she is.

"Everything embodies me and the things that I love, so everything has been considered, right the way down to the alcohol sponsorships, which are not your run-of-the-mill varieties."

The opening night is set to be big. BrightSide has arranged for pole dancers, dwarves, musical groups and even a contortionist to perform, and the drinks will be served by 'muscled up' topless male waiters. Naturally.

"They're things that I'm interested in," she explains. "In terms of pole dancing, I just admire the art form and because of the naughty element in my work, it really fits well."

Holding the event at aMBUSH was a natural choice. "I actually bought my apartment because it's just across the road from aMBUSH – that's how much I love the gallery. So when it came to thinking of solo shows, the aMBUSH was the first place I looked into."

Originally from the UK, BrightSide first studied fashion and graphic design, spending a year working in Italy as a designer, before eventually arriving on Australian shores in 2003. She counts conceptual American photographer Cindy Sherman among her biggest influences and says the up-and-coming Brit artists who took part in collector Charles Saatchi's famed *Sensation* exhibition in the late '90s (including the likes of Damien Hirst and Tracey Emin) also had a strong impact on her own work.

Many of the works on show also draw on BrightSide's interests in fairytales and fancy dress, including a series of screen prints and installations that both make use of mirrors.

"Mirrors will always be involved with my work because I like the dimension of what a person looking at the mirror can bring to the work as well and whether they can identify with the characters."

Romance plays a large part in the show and it's no coincidence the opening night spectacle takes place on 14 February.

"All my work is really based on love and lust and I'm just trying to bring love back to Valentine's Day without it costing money or being a Hallmark statement.

"It's very much about my own crazy world of nonsense, where nothing really makes sense," says BrightSide. And what could be better than that?

WHAT: ***Welcome To The Brightside***
WHERE & WHEN: aMBUSH Gallery Tuesday 14 February (*Extravaganza*). Exhibition continues to Sunday 19

MADE YOU LOOK

WITH BETHANY SMALL

Okay, art, you have finally managed to come up with something I am afraid to go to. All kinds of horror and objection and Matthew Barney (go watch a bit of *The Cremaster Cycle*, you'll feel me) and Chris Burden shooting himself and Joseph Beuys in the lying persona and animal fat and so on, fine. (Disclaimer, there have been things I have been afraid of but that is mainly things in blackout rooms because when I was 13 I talked myself into being afraid of the dark by wondering how/why someone would be and reading up on it and still to this day am readily made super-uneasy by it). People strung up on hooks, paintings (hi, Chris Ofili!) made out of the poo of various things, Serrano's *Piss Christ* etc? Yup, cool, let's discuss them; I'd go see them. But this Stuart Ringholt joint previously on at Milani Gallery in Brisbane and MONA in Tasmania and coming up at the MCA co-presented by Performance Space, I am in a state of steeling my nerves and oscillating between 'I ought to even because I am so freaked out by it,' and AAAAGH NOOOOOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!11' What it is, is a piece called *Preceded by a tour of the show by artist Stuart Ringholt 6-9pm. (The artist will be naked. Those who wish to join the tour must also be naked. Adults Only.)* I think that makes pretty clear what it is, yes? So the question is one of going to the MCA, getting naked and, with a bunch of other naked people, having art talked about to you by a naked artist. THAT SENTENCE CONSTRUCTION IS NOT AS AWKWARD AS HOW I FEEL ABOUT THAT IDEA.

Now, I know, nudity in art is hardly new. Classical statues and so forth. Naked people in paintings and photos. Manet's *Olympia*. Robert Mapplethorpe with a horsewhip up his bottom. Sure. And to shift from subject to viewer participation/creation in/of work, there is Yves Klein getting people to make paintings by rolling around on stuff with the process being the work and the paintings the performative traces secondarily evoking them, and there is that guy Spencer Tunick who takes photos of huge, vast numbers of volunteer nudes in public places, c.f. the Opera House in 2010. Last year I danced in the dark (hi, Bruce!) of a bargain hotel room with a naked Sarah-Jane Norman to the strains of *Never Tear Us Apart* as part of her *Songs Of Rapture And Torture* project and was indeed frightened by the dark but intrigued and moved by the experience.

But this: sure it is meant to address embarrassment and weirdness about bodies, and I think that is a good thing, and sure the MCA is kind of a 'safe place' for me, but... getting over the sheer oddness of the human body in a group situation while being expected to react intelligently to stuff? And it is not as though bringing a friend would make it less weird. Can Bethany confound her neuroses for Art? Stay tuned.