

Art Pick of the Week

by Kathryn Smith

Since its first appearance in August and September 2003 in Cape Town, Michelle Booth's *Seeing White* exhibition has met with a rather predictable amount of controversy, perhaps simply because of the subject matter, or perhaps Booth's presentation of deliberately banal images behind didactic text on glass leaves little room for real introspection and lots of room for people to vent their spleens in the visitor's book.

The visitor's book runs the risk of being more engaging than the show itself, but this doesn't mean the work is not important or worth considering. Booth has, rather bravely, tackled the issue of whiteness, or rather whiteness as the benchmark for "normality". She seeks to racialise whiteness, as status that is still, for the most part, taken for granted rather than questioned. While one gets the feeling that Booth is striving to portray a sense of utter banality or lack of self awareness in her subjects, her images don't quite seem banal enough.

Taken with a "brownie" camera (geddit?), her photographs of white people going about their daily lives seem to lack real observation – but then maybe that's just it.

While the exhibition raises all kinds of feelings of displacement, Booth's own position in relation to the voices of other – taken from various academic and critical texts dealing with theories of white identity that she co-opts as a "screen" through which to read the images – is lacking.

Mail & Guardian, Friday 30 January 2004.