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VISUAL ARTS **ROSEMARY LAING**

A dozen useless actions for grieving blondes, Tolarno Galleries, Level 4, 104 Exhibition Street, city, until May 23
www.tolarnogalleries.com

Ross Moore Reviewer

TO PRODUCE her portrait series, *A dozen useless actions for grieving blondes*, Rosemary Laing spent a day each with local actresses, all blonde, who were asked to grieve on camera. Tightly choreographed and revealing only head and shoulders, the 12 images read as grief's own repertoire of disfiguring effects. Tear-stained, bruised, and even bearing marks of self-flagellation, the women become symbols of authentic torment. Yet they are also mere displays of cinematic dexterity. In one, the artist's hand is even clenched and wrung by the actor seeking consolation. Such speaks to the complexity of their fastidious contrivance. Some might read



Rosemary Laing balances the performative and profound.

Laing's interest as exploitative, feeding appetites for contemporary disaster imagery, or

even "victim porn". But this dismisses their invitation to observe, at unbearably close range, what Derrida called the slow repetitive work of mourning. That this is the fruit of stage direction proposes grief to be always performative, especially when the rituals are self-derived and wrought from the flesh.

The perverse joke, buried in the title that all blondes are dumb, bottle-fake, and therefore alike, recoils back to haunt with the spectre of our own projections. These women, sympathetically aligned like a Greek chorus, in collective travail, are nonetheless realised in intense singularity. Each blonde trapped in her pictorial frame is required to express her suffering acutely alone. Yet, as gallery viewer, we are also pierced by their accumulated sorrow.

Can grief be any other way? And can it be, like orgasm, faked? Laing has created an extraordinary work.