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Barbara Pengelly
Sarah Bradpiece

19 APRIL-10 MAY 1986



IVAN DOUGHERTY GALLERY
CITY ART INSTITUTE
SYDNEY COLLEGE OF ADVANCED EDUCATION
cnr Albion Avenue & Selwyn Street
PADDINGTON NSW 2021

PRINTED BY: Sydney College of Advanced Education
PUBLISHED BY: Sydney College of Advanced Education
ISBN : 0-86398-425-8

The ceramics of Barbara Pengelly are deeply in love with their physical media, and yet, paradoxically, they could exist in a quite distinct art-form. Her spatial and emotional dynamics, the rich and quasi-mythopoeic implications of her work, sometimes have their genesis in her poetry, and sometimes prompt poems as she works on the physical forms.

Traditional sculpture was thought of as the least temporal of the arts, as defying change; its products were conceived of as foster-children of silence and slow time. This installation sculpture invites, demands or persuades movement of eye and body from its audience, and the formalised space between its components implies both real and imagined audience-time. The time of Barbara Pengelly's work is describable by the exploratory steps and eye movements of a responsive and discovering audience, and simultaneously by the answering creations of the mind.

This is not to say that the installations are in any sense allegorical. Rather, their symbolism is stimulating because elusive, because they disdain labels even as they hint at possible associations. Most such associations fold back, as it were, into the organic celebration of their actual materials - and yet those materials are the primary elements of human life and work, magically identified with every stage of human evolution and human speculation about the physical universe. As we journey through an installation, we catch a hint of solitude, or pain, or dance, or resurrection. But is that solitude (for instance) wisdom alone with its god, or the poignant isolation of a lonely spirit amid meaninglessness?

In the frame we willingly or reluctantly accept as our life, we are ourselves a fusion of primary elements. But as audience, as spirits unconfined, we see more of the game, of the confinement and joy - though perhaps never the purpose - of being human.

PROF. NORMAN TALBOT
University of Newcastle, 1986



BARBARA PENGELLY - "The Rising" - Installation Ivan Dougherty Gallery, 1986.

INSIGHT

Bright eyes screened
by static reflecting pools
Steel girders nailed crosswise
onto buildings
Frames hold houses together
Glasses reflect insight

THE RISING

Body tree rises
Stripped of earthly seasons
Rock accepts dead seeds.

Barbara Pengelly - 1986

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

'Images and Reflections' is chosen to focus thought inwards into the creative space of each individual, and to connect the internal awareness with external imagery. At the same time the work presents a contemplative structure in the form of earth, water and space. Other elements of fire and air solidify in the fired clay penetrated by space within the forms.

My intention with these installations is to release the tensions that exist between seen and unseen, thought and action, human body and the force of nature. The tree becomes the trunk, the trunk becomes the tree, body to body is returned to earth through time and space - look into space.

'Insight' invites you to look beyond the hard frame structures that we impose on ourselves and others.

'The Rising' poses two further questions, first of mankind's emergence from the earth into the body by the regeneration of resources that connect us to reality by life and death, second, of the directions which we choose to follow.

BARBARA PENGELLY
1986

INSTALLATION DESCRIPTION

1. INSIGHT

Installation using clay, wood and water. Extruded clay 'girders', penetrated clay slabs, weathered wood posts set in water.

Size: Water trough 245cm x 170cm x 7cm water depth.
4 Clay slabs 40cm x 40cm x 5cm thick.
Height of construction above water - 68cm.

2. THE RISING

Installation using clay, wire and sand. Extruded clay form with slab construction. Sculptured clay torso forms. Carved clay rock form.

Size: Clay figure construction. Height 165 cms. Diameter 60cms.
Width of slab breastplate 60cms. Small torso forms approximately 30 cms x 20 cms. (5 forms).

BARBARA PENGELLY

Studied:

1964-68 National Art School, Newcastle
1967 Studio established.
1969-72 Tour of New Zealand, Europe and England.
1971 Exhibiting member Potters Society of Australia
1983-86 Newcastle College of Advanced Education, Grad. Dip. Art and Grad. Dip. Education.
1986 Currently studying for M.A., City Art Institute, S.C.A.E.

Lectures in Ceramics, City Art Institute, Sydney and TAFE, Newcastle

Exhibitions:

Group and solo exhibitions held in Newcastle and Maitland City Art Galleries, Potters Society of Australia, Sydney, Bathurst and private galleries.

Awards:

1980 Academic of Italy with Gold Medal

Publications:

1981-84 International Dictionary of Contemporary Artists, Accademia Italia
History of International Art, Profile of Contemporary Artists. Accademia Italia
Artists and Galleries of Australia. ed. Max Germain (under former name - Barbara Blaxland).
1969-73 Articles, Pottery in Australia.

Represented:

Australian collection, International Museum of Ceramics, Faenza, Italy
Newcastle City Art Gallery
private and public collections in Australia and overseas.

There is an appropriateness in Sarah Bradpiece, a British born artist, having her first important exhibition since 1983 in Australia. In the interval she has made a prolonged journey around the world (to an Australian there is nothing unusual in this but to the British undertaking such a voyage is a rarity). She travelled extensively in India and Asia, spent three months in China and Japan coming to rest for a prolonged stay in Sydney. Here she set up a studio and began to make works she had been planning during her travels. Now, some eighteen months later she is back in Australia to present a new installation.

Before Sarah embarked on her round-the-world trip she had recently completed a monumental installation at the South Bank for the 'Sculpture Show' (Art's Council, London 1983). 'Wash Station' was constructed on a large terrace overlooking the river Thames, its centrepiece was a ten metre high curved cone, clad in pink ceramic tiles. Around the outside edge of the perimeter walls fifty pink wash-basins were plumbed in like jaunty gargoyles. By approaching the cone visitors could wash their hands at built-in basins and send water down into blue channels 'drawn' into two hands washing. This last image echoed the nazca lines Sarah seen a decade previously in the Peruvian desert both in the way the viewer read the drawing and because both were reminiscent of 'irrigation' channels. Such a specific reference to a foreign and historic culture presents a contrast to the focus of Sarah's work which is both conceptually and experientially concerned with the here and now. On the other hand travel has been an important underlying influence on her work and we are likely to see this more clearly in the coming years after her round-world trip.

'Wash Station' had the proportions of a landmark not just in its ambitious scale but as a statement within Sarah's work. The budding pink pleasuredome, gleaming bathroom bright in the summer sun was an image of plenty pouring itself into a domestic pool of cleanliness. It was a grander and more dramatic recapitulation of themes Sarah had been concerned with for sometime.

Two years before she had presented a smaller but very impressive installation at the Serpentine Gallery in London. At that time she was moving into an elegant 'designer' studio flat on a new housing estate. The experience carried an image of plenty, not just in the obvious material sense but as a metaphor for the potentiality of technological development. As she began working on the installation and walked to the gallery through Kensington Gardens (a large London park) her optimism about consumerism was balanced by a reminder of the potentiality in nature. All these feelings and experiences fed into the 'Soap Garden' making it, like all Sarah's installations, not just site specific in terms of merging the spatial and cultural context of the gallery with the work but sight specific in terms of expressing her current conceptual horizons. Her complete immersion in a project and her consciousness of the totality of experience feeds a desire to communicate this to others and installations have proved the most effective vehicle for achieving this.

The 'Soap Garden' was as cultivated and orderly as a formal garden or designer planned flat. Wavy walls covered in pink bathroom tiles enclosed a pool of blue detergent from which budded pink curved cones of soap. The calm surface was broken by two colour mon-

itors showing video loops of pink cone soaps 'swimming' blindly back and forth. Sarah used these materials (as always) symbolically: in the way that Joseph Beuys uses fat and felt or Mario Merz uses brushwood, neon and glass. However, she is quite unlike them and many other artists of her generation in having no interest in allegory. So whereas Beuys and Merz imply a primeval or utopian set of relationships between humanity and its environment, Sarah says the myth is all around us: reach out and touch it. In this sense Sarah's work is materialistic and anti-nostalgic though she stresses that she is still concerned with historical continuity.

The materials in the 'Soap Garden' represent a hierarchy of technological development: soap, a simple product; detergent, a more advanced washing material; and the monitor, high-tech. They are all shaped to evoke images of potential (budding soaps) and life (the pool). The connection between washing and progress is not so strange nor is it new: 'cleanliness is next to godliness' is an old adage of self-improvement. For this reason to see Sarah's work as a kitsch comment on a consumer society misses the point; she wishes to explore more basic structures within social development. In fact washing is only one theme within a broader range of references linked by water that concerns her. It is the water of life, tapped into a fountain of youth, sunk in a well, piped to a tap, poured into a bowl to wash or into a cup to drink. The contrasting image of water in deep, dark untamed oceans does not attract her because it is too primeval to disclose its relationship to humanity and it is in this area that her interest lies.

The optimism and emphasis on potentiality in Sarah's work has meant she has so far been

ignored by British critics for whom work which falls outside the trend for neo-expressionist, neo-nostalgic, neo-apocalypse art has little meaning. Sarah confirmed her opposition to this fashion with an installation in a Cambridge University gallery (Kettle's Yard, 1982) at the moment when English television viewers were lapping up a lavish adaptation of Evelyn Waugh's 'Brideshead Revisited' and with it a transparent nostalgia for long-lost pre-war 'Varsity' days. Regarding this as an indication of a sterile environment and given a very cool, stark space in which to work Sarah made an installation with three very long 'marble' slabs on each of which were placed five giant clear jellies with pink cone soaps and fragments of photographs of serving girls preserved inside them. Visitors were, as always when confronted with Sarah's work, surprised and fascinated. In its initial stages the work shared the classically restrained and orderly vocabulary of forms particular to Sarah's work but when the visitors returned (and many of them did) they found the jellies were turning from clear aspic to leathery furry pools stained purple with the photographic dye. The warning that preservation does not halt disintegration was the unpalatable message for the 'Brideshead' devotees.

Commenting on her travels to Peru and Brazil thirteen years ago Sarah remarked: 'It's always the signs of your own culture that you remember'. This could easily be adapted to describe people's attitude to art and prompts the question: will Australians (and in particular the critics) be more open than the British art scene to work that is concerned with potential and is essentially optimistic?

ANN COMPTON
December 1985

With thanks to Lewis Biggs for reference to an unpublished article on Sarah Bradpiece, 1983.



SARAH BRADPIECE - "Soap in Aspic" - Kettles Yard Gallery, Cambridge, England 1982

SARAH BRADPIECE

Born England, 1954.

Studied:

1971-72 West Surrey College of Art & Design, England
 1973-74 Central College of Art, Theatre Department, London
 1975-76 Two years painting in Peru and Brazil
 1977-78 Hornsey College of Art - B.A. Fine Art, London
 1979 Chelsea College of Art - M.A. Fine Art, London

Solo Exhibitions

1982 "Garden Restaurant" - Arnolfini Gallery, Bristol

Group Exhibitions

1980 "About Time" - Institute of Contemporary Art, The Mall, London
 1980 "Soap Service" - Third Eye Gallery, Glasgow
 1981 "Soap Garden" - Serpentine Gallery, London
 1982 "Soap in Aspic" - Kettles Yard Gallery, Cambridge
 1982 "Sheets" - Camden Arts Centre, London
 1982 "Greater London Arts Award Winners", London
 1982 "Table D'Hote" - St. Paul's Gallery, Leeds
 1983 "Washstation" - 'The Sculpture Show', Hayward Gallery, London

Awards

1981 Greater London Arts Association Award
 1982 Greater London Arts Association Award

1984-85 Travelling around the world on a self-financed project entitled "The Water Carrier".

Sarah Bradpiece acknowledges the assistance of The British Council.

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