

Interview for Artthrob March 2011-04-09

Robyn Cook: Hi Greg. Thanks for taking the time out to chat to me. I wanted to speak to you about your recent exhibition in the Netherlands at the Soledad Senlle Gallery. The name of the exhibition 'Nothing Lasts Forever' seems to suggest a degree of tragedy and possibly sentimentality. Was the intention of the work to 'look back on'? Was this in anyway related to your return to Amsterdam after a lengthy gap?

Greg Streak:

No, I don't think that it has anything to do with any geographical space but perhaps a more remote psychological and emotional one. I think the title of the show was more a placement holder for the entire body of work.

RC: 'Biopsy' is a large circular disk made up of 57 000 metal ties. The name seems to reference some malignancy, or 'rot' that has been excised. 'Glaucoma', made up of 20 000 drinking straws, similarly references the idea that 'something is wrong'. In what way does the sheer density of materiality of each work become important to the meaning of the work? The physical task of actually making the 'objects' must have been backbreaking?

GS: The simple pieces of wire that are twisted to tie pockets of potatoes etc. together form the bases of 'Biopsy'. I fed each looped end onto a similar gauge of galvanized wire and proceeded to construct a tightly woven spiral measuring around 1.2m in diameter. The entire work floats about 50mm off of the ground on a hidden steel collar. It looks like a sliver or cross section of something observed under a microscope. The 'floating' of the work was to imply that it was still under "observation". I think the repetition of much of this work, be it the scarred marks of "Infection (open)", the accumulation of straws or the building up of the spiral with thousands of tiny wire markers in "Biopsy" all lend themselves to the visceral intensity of the surfaces, without which the works would not vibrate with the sort of visual movement that they do. Much of this work is very much about experiencing in the real. The sheer intensity doesn't really come across in the images, I don't think. They are also fairly large in scale which is only really experienced when you are standing in front of them. The physical task ... yes most of these works involve a considerable amount of labour intensity, but I don't think that that is so much the point. It is more a means to an end, which was to create extremely intense surfaces through various processes, and the routes that I chose happen to involve a lot of personal involvement. In this case, there are no short cuts. It was one straw at a time, one singular wire tie at a time etc.

RC: There is something distinctly dangerous and, despite its meticulousness, 'unsterile' about 'Nothing Lasts Forever'. The razor blades from 'Underbelly' could easily slice you open as you walk past, while the metal from 'Biopsy' seems to carry the danger of tetanus. There is seemingly a disconnect between the normally sterile nature of the objects you have used, in comparison to the way you have used them?

GS: I wanted to make beautiful objects filled with a level of anxiety; seductive, repetitive detail that vibrates with distress. There are small personal details that push this concept further - for example the big carved panel called "Infection (open)", which consists of thousands of scarred incisions, is framed by the odd dimensions of 1974 x 1220 which happens to fulfill the proportions of a golden section - perfect proportion. So the idea was to have this dimension that spoke of perfect balance and harmony, filled with brutal chaos.

RC: Your work is highly detailed – every element is meticulously thought out. The colours from your show hint at the visceral drive behind your work – blood reds, leukocyte yellows. The label for each work looks like a tag from a laboratory. It is deeply evocative, and a bit

creepy, it gave me the shivers. Your work seems to be as much about the sculptural quality of the work as the creating a site for the viewer to experience the work in a deeply visceral way?

GS: I think that because of the intensity of the surfaces there appears to be a mis-interpretation of the "precision" of the works. In actual fact they are very organic in their making and not quite as decisive as they appear. I wanted the body of work to be essentially bleached of colour, as if drained of life. And where there is colour it's dark, bruised and contaminated. I think Nothing lasts forever is really a body of work that alludes to the conflicted times in which we live; a time of blatant hypocrisy, malevolence and subterfuge often masked by sugar coated smoke and mirrors. I sense that we live in a time where there is a lot wrong. The works are intimate reflections, metaphors for this abnormality and what I see as a social hemorrhaging.

RC: What was the response like to your show in Amsterdam? Any possibility of it coming to Durban?

GS: I was first at Art Amsterdam and then had the solo show after that at the Soledad Senlle. The response at Art Amsterdam was quite overwhelming. I was fortunate enough to be there during the Art Fair and have the experience first hand. A lot of interest and some potential follow up shows. Two of the works at Art Amsterdam were short listed for the SNS Bank collection via an independent committee. One work is taken into the collection. It wasn't one of mine. So I am still poor! The solo show at Soledad Senlle was a totally different experience. I had a week to set up and tweak the show which was a real luxury. Great, raw space and good response. I was recently in a group show that opened a new cultural precinct in Enschede where three works were selected by Nathanja van Dijk (a young Dutch curator). There is a possibility of a show later in the year in Portugal. The show won't come to Durban. I don't really see there being any viable options to show in Durban right now and the work is far better represented in the European context.

RC: Thanks so much Greg!