

Threads that connect

Art has the power to express and challenge cultural norms through both realistic and symbolic expression. (Jung 1968)

Catherine Johnstone and Caroline Phillips' conceptual installation work connect, reflect and interconnect through their shared working of recycled steel, as well as, in the case of Caroline Phillips, custom made stainless steel, and through their application of colour. Both artists are concerned with art that deliberately aims to challenge sensorial perceptions.

Colour according to Luce Irigaray is 'like melody in a way... more capable of passing from a form to another space or time'.¹ In Catherine Johnstone's piece entitled *Signs and Traces* we are taken to a form and 'other space'. This site specific piece connects to the history of the site, once a cannery, which is now the gallery. Catherine Johnstone's piece takes us to this other space and time through the circles of lusciously painted red recycled steel cans arranged as dinner plates, with white recycled steel can knives and forks. This work tests our connectedness to the ritual and tradition of food and the space in which food is served. We are psychologically exiled by the art and the connectedness to the ordinariness of the ritual of eating.

The colour white contrasted against the red food cans is echoed in the story in the video installation of Muslim women. Ifa, the woman who speaks, tells the story of her Uncle who was killed through war while astride his white horse. This present time space for Ifa echoes to the past in Caroline Phillips' work *Warped*; this work created from iridescent pink industrial polyester twine macramé is woven cylindrically with the resultant sculpture conjuring a tubular woven vortex. A vortex that would if it were to be unwound, lead to a starting point. That starting point is the idea of making something organic through knotting and weaving, something that aesthetically gives pleasure and joy yet connects to the uncertain time in which we live.

Evocative of Ariadne's ball of twine standing for the otherworldly connection to overcoming the Minotaur, Caroline Phillips' weaving links both in colour and in subject matter to Catherine Johnstone's work, whose feature installation work *Signs and Traces* is about the separating of 'pink'; that is, red and white. Catherine Johnstone's red and white spray painted cans of food hark distantly back to Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*, yet this dinner party invokes associations of the thread of war in women's lives, and to a place where the war Minotaur must be made speechless.

Steel; reverberated in the steel can walls of Catherine Johnstone's installation is a hard war constituent that both women confidently appropriate and work. It differs starkly from the macramé woven fabric, linking to the 13th century Arabic weavers' word meaning "fringe" and first appearing in Babylonian and Assyrian carvings. *Sequential Steel* by Caroline Phillips explores both rubber and steel in the three steel sequential cone objects, each reflecting hanging 'chainmail' like, treated rubber. Both rubber and steel are natural elements, an object to object co-existence though contrasting in their essence.

Both Caroline Phillips' and Catherine Johnstone's work source the symbolic agent that connects states of being to one another - 'relatedness'. Caroline Phillips' *Warped* of 'iridescent pink' is the colour of joy; of the feminine, the feminist and the sign for hope. Catherine Johnstone's *Signs and Traces* challenges cultural clichés through the exploration

¹Irigaray Luce, *Key Writings*, Edited by Luce Irigaray, Continuum, London 2004. P. 99

of women's lives and food connections. Muslim women living in Melbourne today look out at the viewer challenging us to see them as women of the world that occupy domestic, cultural and social spaces and who navigate daily the universal banalities of life that all of us must traverse. That hope is echoed in Catherine Johnstone's work through Ifa's words, yearning for a world that sees all women connected and interconnected through time, space and imaginably food.²

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² A global connection can be seen in the multimedia project, 'Covered' by The Hon. Jocelyne Scutt:
http://theburqahdebates.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=43&Itemid=61
<http://jocelynneascutt.cgpublisher.com/product/pub.177/prod.219>