

RE: RE-

Renewal

What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.¹

Oh Ecclesiastes, ye old prankster, if you really think so, then why use that word? We are cursed with the word 'new'. When chasing after it, it seems as ungraspable as time. When trying to ignore it, we lose our sense of direction and falter in our self-appointed human task as agents of change. In the arts, we left the avant-garde for dead, but could never quite let go of the quest for newness. "No, I'm not interested in creating something *new*" Caroline says, "Yet... isn't that what I'm supposed to do, as an artist; to create new symbols and signs?"

The dilemma is pressing for the artist. After all, we are *creatives*; we define ourselves by our drive to create. And, supposedly, creation is helplessly conjoined with the spectre of the new. But, isn't 'creation' as slippery a word as 'new'? Absolute creation - the changing from nothing to one - is a mythical, at best divine, property. Human creativity, on the other hand, has always been an at least threefold process. Production was always accompanied by destruction: a mosaic is created by the breaking of glass, a drawing by sullyng of the paper and dispersal of the graphite. And before either can happen, there is collection of the materials. *Collection, destruction and production* - these are the dialectical components of most creative acts. And increasingly, we have come to upgrade the former two as equals to the latter.

Reconnect the act of making to its sister acts of laboring, consuming, attending, the acts that make the world, over and over again. Shift from the new to the renewed; recognize the world has no lack of things, only of attending to things; shift then from production to maintenance.²

Retrieval

Caroline Inckle tackles the expected predominance of *production* by revelling in the act of collection. She is excited by the world that already exists, and her practice is defined to a large extent by what she gleans on walks around her rural studio. Still, she makes a point of defining her particular brand of collecting as *retrieval*.

[to **retrieve**:
1. to locate and bring in
2. to call to mind again
3. to rescue, to restore, to revive]

Yes, there is an emphasis on *locating and bringing in* material, but she's never content to use the gallery as a dumping ground for found objects; there is always an urge towards making.

¹ Ecclesiastes 1:9

² Rebecca Solnit, 'Landscapes of Emergency' in *Ann Hamilton* (University of Washington, 1992) p. 50

But here, making is understood less as a process of transcending the material in search of “new symbols and signs” and more as a way of reaching out to the original object. In her photocopies and prints she is *attending* to sticks and stones; asking us to call their simple beauty to mind again. In her casts of tree trunks she is performing a rescue operation; an art of salvaged goods.

*The creative act becomes an unravelling, recouping the old rather than augmenting the new.*³

Representation

How, then, to transmit this hands-on reconnection with an existing world to an art-audience? How to avoid ending up with a pale, dead copy of nature? This is a tricky path to follow. Representation is a horse cadaver that’s been kicked many a time. But when Caroline uses the word representation, she attempts to wrestle it from the grip of a traditional Platonic mimesis, and give it a meaning more akin to that of relocation. What was already present is given a renewed presence. Her clay slip casts of stones are less images or imitations than they are physical traces of the stones themselves. And when the work edges in on traditional sculpture, as in the case of a bronze cast, it is presented next to the original object; as if to remind us that the art object is not there as a substitute for nature, but as a heightened aspect of it.

To push the point home, and to add a sardonic twist to it, Caroline places four squares of astro-turf on the gallery floor. Here, the bright green plastic strips are most definitely intended as an imitation of nature, but that act of imitation is not Caroline’s. Instead, this is in some sense the purest act of representing an original in the show, where her hand is responsible for a mere reconfiguration of the material at hand. And while the small patch of artificial greenery certainly fails at any credible representation of the nature of grass, it excels at representing – or maybe re-enacting – human nature.

Repetition

In an approach similar to that of representation, repetition is a tool Caroline uses to heighten rather than dilute the experience of the object. In a literal interpretation of the word, Caroline’s stone-prints constitutes *another petition* on behalf of the object. “If you didn’t see it before; on the river bed, or on the shelf next to the bronze cast, will you look closely now, as it reappears again and again along the walls of the gallery?”

Crucial here is the format of the series, and that of repetition in different constellations. In accordance with the true etymological meaning of the word⁴, one loses count and is instead drawn to observe the difference between sequences and relearn the identity of the object. By re-representing the stones, Caroline again emphasises collection – now both as process and presentation – over production of a “new sign” for stone.

*Accumulation, like isolation, is a mode of exhibiting the thing as itself rather than as a vehicle to somewhere else.*⁵

³ Rebecca Solnit, 'Landscapes of Emergency' in *Ann Hamilton* (University of Washington, 1992) p. 44

⁴ Latin: repetitio = uncountable

⁵ Rebecca Solnit, 'Landscapes of Emergency' in *Ann Hamilton* (University of Washington, 1992) p. 47

Reproduction

Apart from helping to shed the last vestige of symbolism from the art object, repetition also sets up a rhythm, a direct analogy to the cyclical nature of natural time. Revisiting the object means returning to its origin, just as this text now returns to its beginning: "What has been done will be done again." And in the dialectics of creativity it is now clear that it's not the thesis of collection and the antithesis of destruction that result in production; it is all three components that come together in the synthesis of *reproduction*. But it is only in the shortcomings of language that 'reproduction' could ever be reduced to mean a mere copying of an object. Rather, it is the organic sense of the word reproduction that prevails: the constant renewal of life.

Thus the creative acts of the prefix *re-* aim not at detachedly talking about an already complete creation; rather, they denote an active participation in a work that can never be completed. What is new is not to be found in the details; it is in the total, ever-changing configuration of matter. So, Ecclesiastes, old fool; there is something new under the sun. It is the world.

The persistence of its processes refuses a state of completion, refuses teleological arguments, shifts from the noun of the made to the verb of making.⁶

Petter Yxell
1 Royal Terrace
August 2014

⁶ Rebecca Solnit, 'Landscapes of Emergency' in *Ann Hamilton* (University of Washington, 1992) p. 50