

shift

D e b o r a h C r o w e



complementary contradictions

*To dissimulate is to pretend not to have what one has. To simulate is to feign to have what one doesn't have. One implies a presence, the other an absence.*¹

Jean Baudrillard

Suspended between floor and ceiling, projected and drawn; repositioned and then re-projected onto wall surfaces to explore two and three dimensional modes of artistic presentation, *shift* is an amalgam of sculpture, drawing, installation, presence and absence and between all of these.

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The element of the 'between' – belonging to neither opposition, but incorporating them and all other shades of grey, gaps and opportunities between and around – has been an on-going concern for Deborah Crowe. In reference to earlier work and this notion of the between, Mark Kirby commented on the artist's desire to actualise:

*objects which are not this or that, but maybe this or that, which exist in the difference between one and the other.*²

Shift explores the illusion of totality created by the assumption of the binary opposition as 'fundamentally truthful'. Instead, assumed oppositions are contrasted against each other in a manner which is more inclusive of what is between these. Sculpture becomes drawing; that which appears light also incorporates various weights, and the absence of a recognisable body, in turn, implies that of one which is partially present or missing.

The establishing forms are monochromatic and subtle in colouration. Sometimes they have been painted white, nearly fading into the white walls of the gallery; sometimes enhanced in black, standing in stark contrast to the white architecture of the gallery walls. They act as a statement about the space in which they inhabit, an exploration of the elements of sculpture and space.

Central sculptured elements float in space, seemingly weightless. They are related to the yoke – a harness which usually functions as a support for weight. The light airiness of the open weave of the

structure – made from wire and nylon – betrays the actual weight.

Closer inspection reveals the forms are strung from one point. In some cases, gravity drags down the malleable material, emphasising the physical burden of the weight being carried. Physically the forms are not delicate, nor are they fragile; visually they are.

central sculptured elements float in space, seemingly weightless

They seem to encapsulate an absent body – one of equivalent size, mass and significance. However the objects are not wearable, they, only in their reference to the wearable, denote a possible wearer – encapsulated or overwhelmed.

From some of the forms long strands of nylon and wire extend. The fluidity of these filaments contrasts against the order and control of the weave. The extensions exaggerate the total forms' verticality and further imply and reference the body and, indeed, a series of human presences.



To whatever the viewer chooses to relate the objects, there is always the blurred dichotomy between the beauty of the forms and the implied discomfort of being contained.

One of the components of traditional sculpture that is liberated in *shift*, is that of mass. It is neither contained nor abolished. Crowe has denied the forms the benefit of mass by subtracting the elements which allow it to contain. Their solidity – perhaps that of the body – is removed, they become almost secondary to the shadows that are thrown, so that what remains expresses the essences of form.

One of the ‘present’ essences is shadow, created to suggest relationships between the actual and implied. They act as an exploration of the elements of the space, impinging on the wall surfaces and forming a metaphorical bridge between the visible and the invisible.

*The shadow is culturally and psychologically, a potent symbol – a projection of the body, in an area of darkness defined by surrounded light, without volume or detail.*³

Light projected through the sculptures accentuates the seemingly ethereal light-

ness of the objects focusing attention on the gaps in the weave and amplifying the weight of what is absent. Projected images on the walls of the space become shadowy figures inhabiting the gaps, the in-between spaces.

between the visible and the invisible

The viewer is encouraged to visually and psychologically merge the absent mass of the sculptures and the ever present shadowy embodiments of the figure to create connections between the two very different modes of existence.

A dialogue between the formed and formless individuals is encouraged and the viewer becomes more than an independent onlooker. The viewer enters the installation and unconsciously becomes part of it. Presence and observation is sufficient to create a gentle movement of the suspended forms, and in the act of observation, one becomes part of the conversation.

In shift I am interested in creating an environment which presents a series of contradictions – a spacious yet crowded environment where light woven forms

suggest a heaviness. A space where the viewer experiences actual three dimensional forms and their shadow drawings alongside traces of these in previous arrangements; an environment that is still, yet contains movement.⁴

Drawing is another essential aspect of the installation. Not drawing toward the final production, but drawing created by the cast light and emphasised by graphite marks. They denote the trace of a previous incarnation – a memory of something left behind. They occupy a space on the walls connecting the formal architectural boundaries with the suspended forms.

The shadows are fixed by the lighting angles and operate as a pathway to a dimension of sculpture which is not always easily recognised or apparent. The 'graphic' memory, or reference, becomes included into the space between the current form and its projection, referring to a past presence that still holds relevance.

Through the use of light and shadow Crowe explores the interminable, indeterminate, cyclical nature of emotion and memory. To shift is to be in the position

to reassess and move, and the artist has used this physical action, to record and discuss the substantial and insubstantial vagaries of psychological shifts.

referring to a past presence

The zone between polar opposites and between assumed or presented generalities is a fruitful zone for personal interpretation. Between the tangible and the intangible is an area which may not be clear. It offers ground which is contradictory, ambiguous or simply exclusive.

Truth lies somewhere in understanding hierarchies, established modes of thinking and analysing these in accordance with one's own unique place in the discussion.

A contradiction is not necessarily a full stop, but allows endless opportunities for further readings. Contrasts become guides to understanding that contradictions are not necessarily opposite assumptions, but can co-exist, be complementary and inclusive.

Rhoda Fowler



1. Baudrillard, Jean, *Simulacra and Simulation*, translated by Sheila Faria, The University of Michigan, 1994 p3

2. Kirby, Mark, 'Deborah Crowe at Fingers' *World Sculpture News*, Vol 5. No2. Spring 1999 p74

3. Johnson, Pamela, 'Seeing Things, Caroline Broadhead's Illusions' *Fiberarts*, Vol 26. No 1. Summer 1999 pp41-42

4. Crowe, Deborah, Interview with Rhoda Fowler, 12 April 2000

DEBORAH CROWE was born in Dundee, Scotland in 1963. Having graduated from Glasgow School of Art, with a BA (Hons) in Design and a Post Graduate Diploma in Embroidered and Woven Textiles, she emigrated to New Zealand in 1986.

Crowe has exhibited in group and solo exhibitions in the UK, Canada, Australia and New Zealand in a variety of contexts. Crowe's work has received a number of awards and is featured in various publications.

SELECTED RECENT EXHIBITIONS

The Emigres II, Te Wa/The Space, Wanganui, 2000

Risk: Transformative Processes, Suter Gallery, Nelson, Collective authorship

Glory, Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt 1999/2000

Deborah Crowe collared, Fingers Contemporary Jewellery, Auckland, 1999

HeadHandsHeart. CoCA, Christchurch, 1999

Smokefree Fashion Awards, Michael Fowler Centre, Wellington, 1997 & 1998

PaperWeight, Archill Gallery, Auckland, 1998

Fashioning Textiles, toured throughout Canada, 1997

COLLECTIONS

Te Papa Tongarewa, Museum of New Zealand, Wellington, New Zealand

The Dowse Art Museum, Lower Hutt, New Zealand

Nelson Polytechnic Art Collection, Nelson, New Zealand

Glasgow School of Art, Glasgow, Scotland, UK

SELECTED RECENT PUBLICATIONS

Risk: Transformative Practices, Suter Gallery, Nelson, Collective authorship

Object 3/99, 'Collared' by Andrea Daly, pp66-68

World Sculpture News Vol 5, No 2 Spring 1999, 'Deborah Crowe at Fingers' by Mark Kirby, pp73-74

Art New Zealand No 87, Winter 1998, 'Art as Fashion, Fashion as Art' by Mark Kirby, pp34-37

Involved in tertiary art education for the last 12 years, holding teaching, administration and advisory positions, Deborah Crowe currently lives in Auckland and is a Senior Lecturer at Manukau School of Visual Arts.

