



everyday the possible

16 August -16 September 2011

SASA GALLERY



Sonia Donnellan, *Small Findings*, 2011, fluoro lights, 1200 x 1200mm

everyday the possible

Artists

Sonia Donnellan, Anna Hughes & Sonja Porcaro

External Scholars

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Anna Hughes, *I was once a volcano*, 2011, mixed media

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Front & Back cover:
Sonia Donnellan, *Particles of Love*, 2011,
wax, dimensions variable



Sonja Porcaro, *Felt Bed*, 2011, cement bricks, single bed mattress, felt, press studs

Introduction

In this exhibition titled, *everyday the possible*, the artists Sonia Donnellan, Anna Hughes and Sonja Porcaro investigate how 'affect' can be realised through visual art practice as a poetic expression of uncertainty.

everyday the possible is one of a series of research based exhibitions that engages external scholars to participate in the SASA Gallery's exhibition and publication programs. The external scholars for this exhibition are Dr Cath Kenneally and Dr Mary Zournazi.

Dr Cath Kenneally, critic, novelist and poet, has over 15 years experience as a national arts broadcaster, is the author of numerous poems and the novels *Room Temperature* (2001) and *Jetty Road* (2009), and regularly writes critical texts and reviews books for the Weekend Australian and Sydney Morning Herald. Dr Mary Zournazi is Senior Lecturer in the School of Social Sciences and International Studies, University of New South Wales. Mary's current research interests embrace social justice, ideas of hope, peace, cinema, culture and emotions, political love, the body and self, and issues of communal belonging. She has published many academic texts and is well known for her work on ABC radio and television.

The SASA Gallery has received immense support and assistance from many people in the development of this exhibition and the associated events and catalogue. Special thanks to Sonia Donnellan, Anna Hughes, Cath Kenneally, Sonja Porcaro and Mary Zournazi. Also to the South Australian government for generous support provided to the artists through ArtsSA.

The SASA Gallery supports a program of exhibitions focusing on innovation, experimentation and performance. With the assistance of the Division of Education, Art and Social Sciences and the Division Research Performance Fund, the SASA Gallery is being developed as a leading contemporary art space publishing and exhibiting high-quality research based work, and as an active site of teaching and learning. The SASA Gallery showcases South Australian artists, designers, writers and curators associated with Art, Architecture & Design, UniSA in a national and international context.

Dr Mary Knights
Director, SASA Gallery
Art, Architecture & Design
University of South Australia

Keep Calm and Carry On

Cath Kenneally

everyday the possible: a modest proposal and a sweeping ambit claim.

'Days are where we live./ ... / Where can we live but days?' – the question famously asked by Philip Larkin in the poem 'Days' ('Ah, solving that question/ Brings the priest and the doctor/ In their long coats/ Running over the fields.')

everyday the possible collects together a group of responses to the condition of uncertainty, three women artists evaluating notions of hope and progress. Each has made work out of a consciousness of the ever-shifting ground on which every life hops from foot to foot.

All three artists in this group exhibition cite meditation as a practice they have embraced. Anna Hughes clearly references one school with her golden Buddhism: the Zen ideal, being in the moment, is also a touchstone for Sonia Donnellan. Indeed, 'every day the possible' sounds like the sort of mental affirmation encouraged by all good yoga teachers. Any given day might be the day we achieve a lifetime's goal, or a day we simply, adequately, survive.

Is this equivocal mantra particularly a woman's take on life – one step forward, two back; advance with caution? A poem of mine compares the imagined trajectory of men's lives with that of women's

I muse on how well
men tell stories

hands to the wheel
eyes on the main
narrative drag

or metaphysical drift

...

the course so far
clearly navigable

...

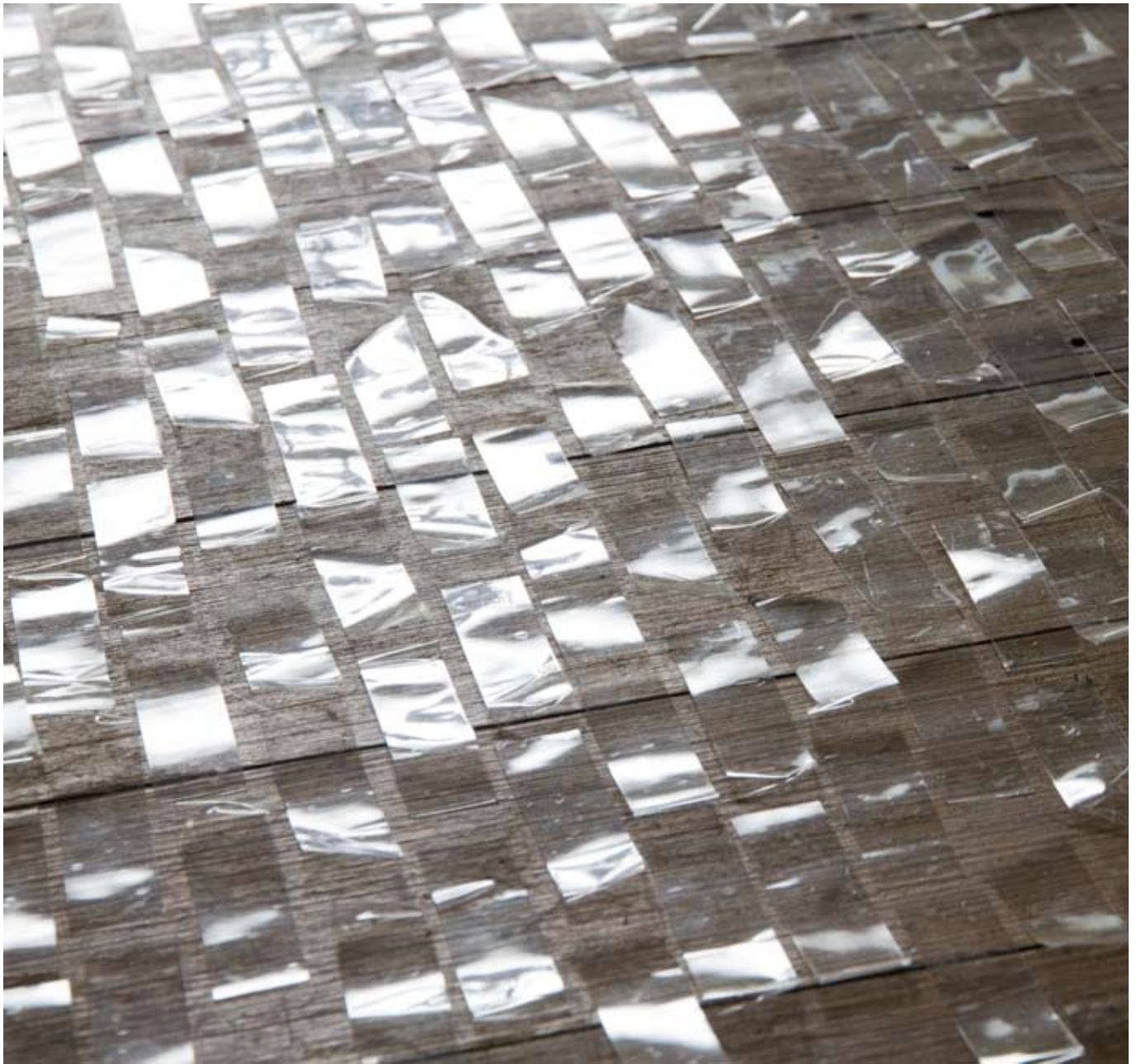
girls tell shreds of tales

...

up to our knees in
threads come loose
the view an endless ocean

of woolly tales un-
ravelling, skeins
of our lives

Sonja Porcaro sets hot-water-bottles peeking over each others' shoulders from their hiding place behind a standard, unprepossessing wardrobe, turns the backs of sets of photo-frames to us, draping them in casually arrogant fashion with old-boys' ties, refusing to disclose to the observer whether they contain happy-snaps or blank faces. Here is both amused acceptance of and lingering resistance to domesticity and Woman's Own happy-endings. Her felt-covered bed with



Sonia Donnellan, *Untitled*, 2011, sticky tape, dimensions variable

lifted, stained markings in the colours of old bruises or dried blood, posed in a waste space of concrete, raised on undressed breeze-blocks, conveys the echo of marriage rituals, the ghost of a crone's cackle.

Fixed under the eye of a bank of fluoro glare, a floor-level efflorescence, fragile as paper but malleable as wax, Sonia Donnellan makes delicate blooms, cousins for her plastic lichens of a few years back. She stages a contest of self-affirmation and shy-violet retiring, beside invisible, tenacious loops of tape proliferating, out of the limelight, like cells.

Hughes offers up for our contemplation her golden goddess, lotus-posed, effusively decorated by her worshippers with gaudy and cheerful lucky symbols, gorgeous and calm, generous and loving, head in the clouds of the magic mountain of bliss, icon of enlightenment, the getting of wisdom.

'You come to this place, mid-life. ... When you turn and look back down the years, you glimpse the ghosts of other lives you might have led. All your houses are haunted by the person you might have been,' writes Hilary Mantel in her autobiography, *Giving up the Ghost*. Her novel *Beyond Black* explores life on the road for a professional 'sensitive' or psychic, a condition to which Mantel, prey to lifelong migrainous visions, can lay some claim. For Mantel, the artist's brainchildren resemble visitations from 'airside'; she sends her character '(b)ack and back ... She is back beyond a dot. She is back where all the dots come from. And still she goes back.' Having no sense of history is what leads to failures of imagination and empathy, to wickedness of all kinds: with no choice in the matter, Alison shares headspace with old-lady revenants, reunited, with her help, after an eternity's searching. They comfort her when her own past

threatens to destroy her: '(t)hey say, "Look at her hair, and look at her lovely rings, look at her frock and how she pedals the car."' Alison's cared-for ghosts are her substitutes for the handsome prince of romance.

Along with the practice of meditation, ancient cultures instruct us in the advisability of keeping in with the ancestors. In the work of these artists is both yearning for transcendence (tempered with self-directed irony) and coming to terms with being steeped in history, the coils of family and genderedness, being part of an endless narrative stream. Meditation dangles before our third eye the desideratum of stepping out of the flow while also being carried along by it. The artists in *everyday the possible* confront, with good cheer and humour, restrictions and possibilities of timebound existence, dauntlessly pursuing optimism and love.

Anna Hughes' wonderful *Ready to Roll* (2000), was an oversized, soft white soccer ball studded all over with booted baby feet innocently hotfooting it into the future. Her *In the Garden at Night* (2010) 'beech, piano hinges, mandolin parts, copper wire, gold leaf, acetate bellow, latex, diamantes, Dacron, thread, violin bridges, scrap plywood, hair, Vaseline,' was an impossible pleasure pavilion. More gleefully free and airy is this lovingly-realised Eden, mountain of dreams, home of the blessed, Parnassus, watered and green, a temperate earthly paradise for the earthbound goddess. Happily incorporated is the child's delight in a model-train landscape of *papier mache* on chicken wire or the even smaller child's mud-pie. Her stacked knitted woollen squares is another mountain, this time of women's work, beautifully multi-hued, ends left unattached. Her Jacob's ladder, skeletal and flimsy, reaches into the heavens with shaky hopefulness.



Sonja Porcaro, *Felt Bed*, 2011, cement bricks, single bed mattress, felt, press studs

All women are aware of the requirement of compliance: at all levels, from the earliest age, leading to an inevitable 'folded-togetherness with the other side' (Gayatri Spivak's phrase, referring to the possibility of political activism). Women are always more or less guilty about the bargains they have had to make. I sense in Donnellan's current work some breaking free that coexists with ongoing awareness of bonds. A concatenation of sticky-tape links: invisible chains, sprawling at floor-level, both present and illusory. Earlier pieces, like her transparent crocheted fishing-line alveoli or breath-bubbles ('hold/ my breath/ till she/ appears / tiny/ in/ the distance') and her slowly melting sugar baby-shoes resonated in a similar way. Delicate wax blooms speak malleability, necessary bending under pressure that does not preclude ripeness and flowering. Blazing a statement are her fluoros, the effrontery that is a woman's voice. (Prominent women fronting a recent Australian campaign to combat sexualisation of girl children in advertising have received a deluge of hate messages instructing them to shut their mouths, in tandem with pornographic, violent commands that they accept abject sexual submission.) The yellow fattiness of Donnellan's wax defiantly performs the flourishing of flesh, under the strobe of a neon gaze.

Sonja Porcaro is the youngest of these artists, battling uncertainty on a related but distinct front. Felt and concrete, hard edges and none, fairy-floss felted fibres, limp silk ties and squidgy warm hotties, formless grey foundations dotted with hopeful press-studs looking to attach, spaces and where things fit. Porcaro has been affected by Rachel Whiteread's white plaster room-moulds, containing socket-shadows of their absent furnishings. The artist and her partner have bought a first house, a space which will stand for their shared life, become their museum. Her installation is a dance of approach and backing-

away, a bid to maintain independence amidst the encroaching reality of domestic space. In these witty pieces, tagged with fluttering rags of pretty dresses, Porcaro stakes her bid to retain definition and purpose against the pull of home and hearth, Woman's Realm; to rise from the *matrimoniale* (the term you need if you're seeking a double bed in Italy) still whole and self-contained. The artist searched many garage sales before finding her paradigmatic wardrobe: trousseau, glory-box, solid, four-square repository of everyday costume, protecting and guarding from moth and burglar, the epitome of provident, settled householderdom. Faded, daggy hot-water comfort-bottles peeking from alongside promise bedroom bliss, yet there's a giving-up entailed in acceding to the siren call of Home.

As early as the second year of life, children appear ready, even desperately eager, to comfort someone who seems sad. An interest in how someone feels towards them develops even earlier. 'Disorganised attachment' is the phrase used to describe the condition of children whose early relations with a caregiver are disrupted, beyond repair in later life; for most humans, the everyday achievement is to be able to attach, to relate. Porcaro, a schoolteacher, enacts awareness of relatedness. In this work, nesting and flying solo battle it out.

Change and uncertainty are the air we breathe. We build houses and belief systems to shield ourselves from them, yet their absence is death. Certain disciplines can lift us temporarily to the top of the serene mountain, but it's a lifetime's work, taken up anew each day, to face, with equanimity, being at the mercy of what happens to us. Women's mutating bodies become foreign to them innumerable times in a lifetime.

... I plant time bombs

gypsophila and baby's breath

at a given signal, they'll rear up
I sit on the lawn, despite the damp

cross-legged, all my insides
dragged towards the centre of the earth

after all these years of hormone-rule
I can't distinguish chemical gloom

from true despair

These clinging, curvaceous sticky-tape rondels, gorgeous
young-woman goddess with her pasted-on finery beaming
defiance of the Evil Eye, hot-water-bottle household gods, are
lined up facing the future in challenge and acceptance, grasping
felicity with eyes wide open, letting go of what is already lost
and laying claim to richly-deserved superannuation benefits.

Notes:

Poem extracts from Cath Kenneally: *All Day All Night* (2003)

Hilary Mantel: *Giving up the Ghost* (2004) & *Beyond Black* (2005)

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak: *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Towards
a History of the Vanishing Present* (1999)



Sonia Donnellan, *Small Findings*, 2011, fluoro lights, 1200 x 1200mm

Small Moments are Beautiful — hope, reverie and the everyday

Mary Zournazi

stillness

Go, go, go, said the bird: human kind
Cannot bear very much reality.
Time past and time future
What might have been and what has been
Point to one end, which is always present
T. S. Eliot (2001 [1944]: 4)

Travelling by train from Montréal to New York City I look out the window at Lake Champlain, the vastness of the body of water calms me. Ever since childhood I have had a fear and fascination of water and the sea, as the train moves I sit contemplating the landscape, the sunlight reaches me through the window as the water dances in this light. I realise I am in a reverie. I sit still but I am *still* moving as the train's rhythm and the water's beauty enchants me, I become a world dreamer.

Most of the train ride to and from Montréal I spend writing parts of this essay in a kind of reverie, reverie is often thought of as *inattention* and without memory, reverie is what connects us to the world, the intimate moments where beauty radiates and memory and imagination join. Reverie as I use it here is not a dream nor a day dream in the usual sense, it is the experience of the world through imagination and creativity, it is what enables us to 'create what we see', to be fully alive and present in the moments that enchant us in the everyday. In reverie, there is a different order of embodied time and experience, a different space of love.

Through this kind of reverie I respond to the installation works of Sonia Donnellan, Anna Hughes and Sonia Porcaro. These artists invite us to consider hope and uncertainty, intimate and affective spaces, bodily memories and love. My encounters with the individual pieces as well as the collective works ask me to respond through a poetics of reverie and hope. The artists engage with my previous dialogues on hope as they distil the affective realm of hope, uncertainty and the everyday through their visual expression and creative practice.¹

Over the last decade, my thoughts and musings on hope have moved toward the contemplation of time and the sacred, it seems to me that the poet and philosopher Gaston Bachelard's *Poetics of Reverie* (1969 [1960]) brings us closer to the intimacy of time and space where there is a generative kind of hope. In this context, hope arises out of the potential of each and every moment as well as the universe as it is imagined and lived. Hope is a kind of 'perpetual stillness', what is 'still and still moving' in the thrust and movement of the everyday. And in our hopeful reveries we can create the world in the midst of sorrow as well as joy. Bachelard writes:

One dreams in front of his fire, and the imagination discovers that the fire is the motive force for a world. One dreams in front of a spring and the imagination discovers that water is the blood of the earth, that the earth has living depths.
(Bachelard 1969 [1960]: 176).

In some ways, hope is the energy that inspires; it is a trust that accompanies us as well as the courage that descends in the midst of darkness. Etymologically speaking, to inspire links to the words breath, spirit and life, hope is energy and inspiration,



Sonia Donnellan, *Particles of Love*, 2011, wax, dimensions variable



Sonja Porcaro, *Landscape*, 2011, felt, frames, plate holder & ties, dimensions variable

the breath of life. But this hope should not be confused with *desire* and *hopes* which are so easily frustrated, hope exists in the moments of presence and lived experience as well as in the waiting.

T. S Eliot writes:

I said to my soul, be still, and wait without hope
For hope would be hope for the wrong thing; wait without
love
For love would love of the wrong thing; there is yet faith
But the faith and the love and hope are in all in the waiting.
Wait without thought, for you are not ready for thought:
So the darkness shall be the light, and the stillness the
dancing.
(2001 [1944]: 17).

II

metaphysics of the unforgettable

Bain Schubert is a beautifully restored pool from the 1920s in Montréal, its architecture is partially art deco but with the practicality of a public piscine. I swim there when I can. As I immerse myself in the water, it feels soothing. I stretch my arms out, I start to swim freestyle, I feel free and buoyant, cleansed by the water that is becoming the sea. I move into the deep end without realising it.

I start to panic.

This fear disassociates me from the body that swims through the water, I start to lose my rhythm, I *fear* myself drowning. I am a child lost in the waves. It's the panic that takes hold; I am trapped in time, I'm cut off from the present.

If only her arms would hold me.

But her arms do not stretch far enough or cannot embrace me in the crashing surf, I do not know if it is my mother or sister who has lost in me in the surf but my body feels itself drowning.

This lived memory feels like an eternity but is only a split second in time, I start to correct my stroke and my rhythm returns, the water is no longer fearful and deadly, but calm and buoyant again. I immerse myself once more in the movement and the freedom of the water; I am at threshold of a new experience. At the threshold of reverie, I am no longer a fearful child that is drowning, I move toward my childhood with a loving and gracious look, and it is the *I* who becomes immaterial in the memory, I can see the depth of the experience more fully and more truthfully as *I* let go of the past that so malfunctions in the present. In other words, I feel the potential beauty of the water once again.

Reverie transforms experience through a different opening of imagination and memory, it gives the *real* its place by growth and imagination. Even more so, reverie moves beyond regret, even when reverie is touched by melancholy and sadness of lost love and yearnings for childhood. As Bachelard writes:

Softening, erasing the traumatic character of certain childhood memories, the salutary task of psychoanalysis, returns to dissolve those psychic concretions formed around a singular event. But a substance does not dissolve in nothingness. In order to dissolve the unfortunate concretions, reverie offers us its calm waters, the obscure waters which sleep at the bottom of every life. Water, water always comes to calm us. In any event, the restful reveries must find a substance of repose. If night and its nightmares

are the domain of psychoanalysis, the reverie of the beautiful times of repose only needs to be maintained by a consciousness of tranquillity in order to be positively salutary. (1969 [1960]: 128).

In this world of reverie the yearnings for childhood emerge from a different point of origin. For Bachelard, childhood is an archetype of the human soul that eternally lives. The *state* of childhood then it is not childhood as given object, but a state of awareness or presence that moves toward reverie. In the same way, Bachelard notes ‘recounted’ mothers or fathers have nothing to do with our real fathers or mothers but through the depth of archetype and the opening of reverie we can move beyond the limits of the history and family. He writes:

To meditate on the child we were, beyond all family history, after going beyond zones of regrets, after dispersing all the mirages of nostalgia, we reach an anonymous childhood, a pure threshold of life, original life, original human life. And this life is within us – let us underline that once again — remains within us (1969 [1960]: 125).

Childhood then is simply the reminder of the ‘glory of living’; it is a state of wonder. And it is from this glory the soul is born time and again through a gentleness and calm.

Bachelard cites the poem *The Mirror of the Native Sky* (1898):

Gentleness of the past which one remembers
Across the mists of time
And the mists of memory.

Gentleness of seeing oneself as a child again,

In the old house of stones too black

... ..

Gentleness of recovering one’s thinner face

As a pensive child, forehead against the windowpane ...

(1969 [1960]: 129).]

For Bachelard, reverie conducted in the tranquillity of the day and in the peace of repose are the workings of feminine states of the soul. Drawing on Jungian terminology of *animus* (masculine) and *anima* (feminine) Bachelard writes that anxiety and projection belong to the realm of the *animus* (dreams – the nocturnal worlds) and that reverie without drama, ‘without even history gives us true repose, the repose of the feminine’. Both archetypes are available in each and every human soul, but it is the *anima* that is the path of poetry and reverie of the soul:

There we gain gentleness of living. Gentleness, slowness, peace, such is the motto of reverie in anima. It is in reverie that we can find the fundamental elements for a philosophy of repose (1969 [1960]: 20).

It is from a state of repose, the *anima* of creative works that I encounter the artists, their installations and visual language; it is from this place of stillness and openness that I imagine this text.

III

cosmic reverie

For Bachelard, the beauty of the world can be clearly seen through reverie. All reverie is a state of *becoming real*, images and visual practice of this kind belong to the universe of experience. He writes poetic reverie is cosmic reverie, cosmic reverie is

[...] an opening to a beautiful world, to beautiful worlds. It



Anna Hughes, *I was once a volcano*, 2011, mixed media



Anna Hughes, *I was once a volcano*, (detail) 2011, mixed media

gives the I a non-I which belongs to the I: my non-I. It is this 'my non-I' which enchants the I of the dreamer and which poets [and artists of all kinds] can help us share (1969 [1960]: 13).

In cosmic reverie, the world is not an object; there is no aggressiveness of a penetrating look, the world dreamer is a contemplating subject. The world then can be seen in its beauty and light. As Bachelard further writes:

The world wishes to see itself; the world lives in active curiosity with ever open eyes (1969 [1960]:185).

Every morning I go for a walk at the base of Mont Royal, a hillside mountain that looks over the city of Montréal. Montréal takes its name from Mount Royal or Mont Réal in Middle French, a three headed hill as its heart or so the train map tells me. At the top of Mont Royal is a large luminescent cross marks the summit and the cemetery which lies behind it, on the side of a mountain trail is a park bench where I sit to take in the air, trees and birds; it is a beautiful spot. As I pull out my notebook to start writing, I hear rustling of leaves, I can't quite place the sound, I stop what I'm doing and look up at a tree. I see some branches move and then from the tree trunk various heads appear simultaneously but from different angles.

I am sitting below a family of racoons. I am told racoons are rarely seen during the day, they scrounge for food and garbage at dawn or dusk and it is even more rare to see racoon cubs (or kittens as they are also called). I am grateful for this first ever encounter with racoons in such a beautiful spot as well as to be able to sit still and observe them without haste or interruption.

All in all there are four racoons, three racoon cubs and their mother, the racoons make their way down a forked tree trunk — all three cubs climbing backwards down the trunk, occasionally on top of each other, some times across each other but mostly entangled amongst themselves. Their mother follows them. Between moments of uncertainty as the cubs seem to fall but somehow recompose themselves the cubs and the mother look at me: I don't know what they see but they are curious. I am laughing at the courage of these young cubs and their sheer beauty and inquisitiveness.

In this encounter, I experience a moment of joy in the stillness of the forest, the world surrounds, leaves continue to rustle as I sit and observe the racoons. The writer and philosopher Martin Buber writes that all real living is meeting, that is, genuine dialogue arises out of lived experience, and it is the sphere of the sacred and the everyday:

I can neither experience nor describe the form which meets me, but only body it forth. And yet I behold it, splendid in the radiance of what confronts me, clearer than the clearness of the world which is experienced. I do not behold it as a thing among the 'inner' things nor as an image of my 'fancy', but as that which exists in the present. If test is made of its objectivity the form is certainly not 'there'. Yet what is actually so much present as it is? And the relation which I stand to it is real, for it affects me, as I affect it (2004 [1937]: 16).

And it is through open encounters and genuine meetings that the wonder and joy of the world and dreamer become one.

As Bachelard notes:

One has never seen the world well if he has not dreamed what he was seeing. In a reverie of solitude which increases the solitude of the dreamer, two depths pair off, reverberate in echoes which go from the depths of being of the world to a depth of being of the dreamer. Time is suspended. Time no longer has any yesterday and no longer any tomorrow. Time is engulfed in the double depth of the dreamer and the world. The World is so majestic that nothing any longer happens there; the World reposes in its tranquillity. The dreamer is tranquil before a tranquil Water. Reverie can become deeper only by dreaming before a tranquil world. *Tranquillity* is the very being both of the World and Its Dreamer. (1969 [1960]: 173).

In the light Bachelard's cosmic reverie and primordial yearnings, he suggests the phenomenology of perception must stand aside for the *phenomenology of creative imagination*. It is in this shift that we can experience the world in its duration, its living image and energy because the soul he states 'does not live on the edge of time. It finds its rest in the universe imagined by reverie' (1969 [1960]: 15).

IV *atmosphere*

In his earlier work *The Poetics of Space* (1969 [1958]), Bachelard notes the home is the site of most archetypal of memories, the cellar, the garret, the bedroom, the attic as well as cupboards and drawers are all intimate spaces of a primordial kind. It is in the intimacy and embodied experience of these spaces that our memories come alive, but Bachelard reminds we must give memory its atmosphere so as to give it the *right* tension of

reminiscence. And the right tension might correspond with memories of the seasons, of the first colours of experience.

As Bachelard suggests:

What sun or what wind was there that memorable day? (1969 [1960]: 116).

In my encounter with these installation works and the artists musings, the spaces of intimacy and reverie emerge through the still points in time; the works and the atmosphere that surrounds them offers me a space of contemplation and it is in this space that the cosmic reverie resounds. Reverie allows us to create what we see through the imagined universes given in a moment that are touched by feeling, memory and hope. In this exhibition space, we can gracefully inhabit the artists' world of reverie and visual poetry.

At the still point of the turning world. Neither flesh nor
fleshless;
Neither from nor towards; at the still point, there the dance
is
T.S Eliot (2001 [1944]: 5)

Footnote:

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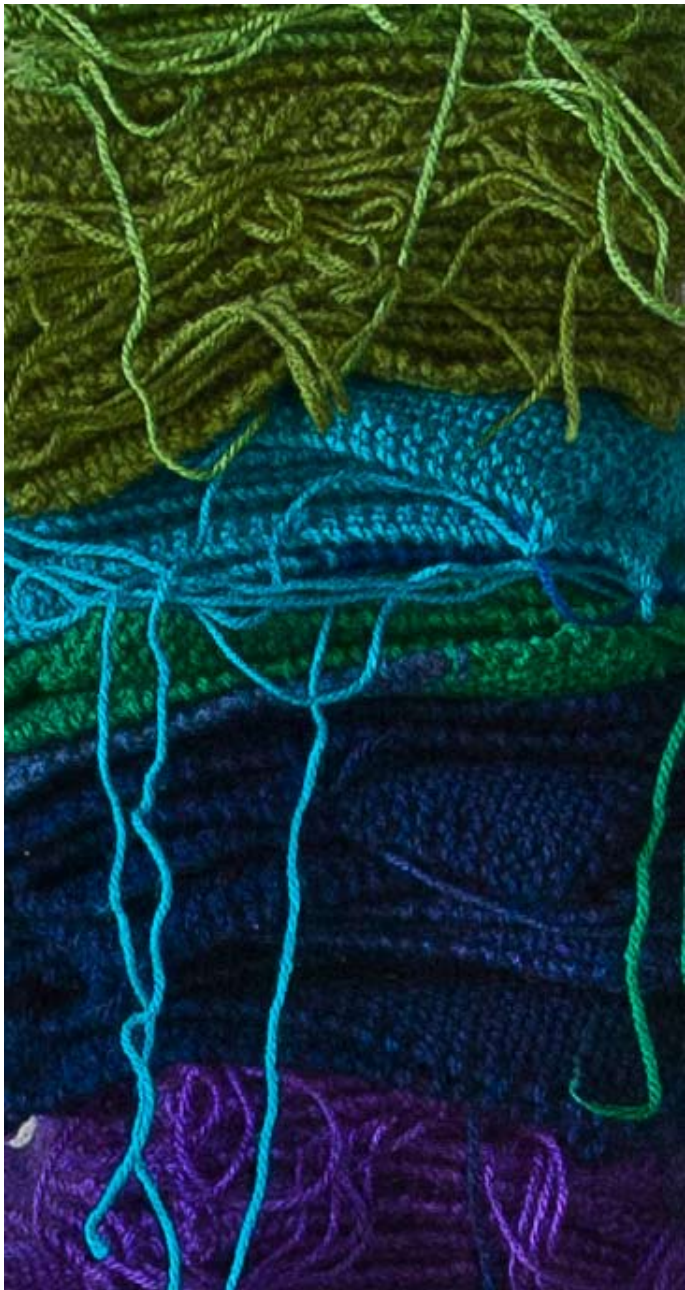
Sonja Porcaro, *Untitled (pocket)*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable



Anna Hughes, L to R, (a) *tempt II*, 2011, (maquette) pine, masking tape & *tempt III*, (detail) modelling clay, found object



Sonja Porcaro, L to R, *Untitled (Wrap)*, 2011, *Untitled (pocket)*, 2011, *Wardrobe*, 2011, *Wardrobe (detail)*, 2011, mixed media, dimensions variable



Anna Hughes, *Invention*, 2009-2011, (detail) wool, steel rod, mdf



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