Espace Sculpture

Lynda Osbourne: Ornamenta

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In the hushed, dim gallery, Lyndal Osborne's Archipelago seems to float on the carpeted surface of the floor like blooms from rare breeds of gigantic, exotic water lilies. The installation snakes across the room in a mnemonic of the river that runs by Osborne's house outside of Edmonton. No matter how deeply

and scientifically Osborne's investigations into the natural world of plant life inform her work, one always returns to "home:" either the locale around her residence in Alberta or the memories she has of the geography of her native country, Australia. Archipelago (2008) and Garden (2005) are the two installations that constitute the travelling exhibition entitled Ornamenta, co-curated by Virginia Eichhorn (Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo) and Linda Jansma (Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa). In their essays, from the accompanying catalogue, they firmly register the anxiety surrounding debate on genetic modification. The complex issue of concerns about the manipulation of our foodstuffs, the central subject of Archipelago, was somewhat overshadowed by an innocence that pervaded the gallery at the time I went to see the show. There was stillness in the room broken only by the sound of two small boys whispering together. They were squatting aside and staring intently into the centre of one of the cells as if it was a rock pool, something to be stirred with a stick to see what might rise to the surface. The twin brothers, entranced by the abundance of things experiments, reconfigures and repositions these gathered substances to create portrayals of places where things grow and places where they are transformed and mutated.

Garden is a representation of particular gardens in Osborne's life, both in Canada and Australia. Roots of delicate tracery painted in genteel and discreet hues of dusty pink and faded green are planted upside down, suspended into a geometric pattern recalling Eastern rugs. Cut foliage and flora scattered into gridded pathways emphasize the orderliness of the design. Treated corn cobs stand in for the hundreds of buried teeth, which the Osborne family uncovered in the 40s, in the garden of their house that was formerly owned by a dentist. Ferncliff Gardens, a nursery in British Columbia, offers over ninety varieties of peonies for sale on their website. This is a turnaround from the practices of the past when commercial growers and distributors deemed that less choice was more cost-effective and viable. Though an oxymoronic phrase, I imagine the kind of peony that might have been "bred out of existence." Perhaps the slender oblong stem, though beautifully proportioned, was unable to support the showy weight of the petals. Another may have been too frail for the wintry climes. Renewed interest in eco-diversity means organic farmers from across North America now bring dozens of strains of heirloom toma-
toe market. Pale blue and nut brown mottled eggs are again available as are alabaster white plum-shaped or dumpy scarlet-striped aubergines. Osborne's engagement with seeds, perennials and the nurturing of plants underscores the duality that is inherent in the research conducted into hybridity and the scientific mutation of nature.1

Lyndal Osborne, Archipelago, 2008.

Details. Travelling exhibition entitled Ornamenta, Photo: courtesy of the artist.

Lyndal Osborne, Ornamenta
• Canadian Clay and Glass Gallery, Waterloo
  September 21–November 16, 2008
• Robert McLaughlin Gallery, Oshawa, Ontario
  July 12–September 7, 2008

Sarinder DHALIWAL is a visual artist based in Toronto. Her practice is rooted in both painting/drawing and large mixed media installations. She is currently working on her first experimental film project, Olive, Almond & Mustard, an examination of childhood dissonance located in an immigrant experience.

NOTE