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Lyndal OSBORNE *Ornamenta*

Sarindar DHALIWAL

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

These sculptural blossoms are the alchemical transformation of the ongoing harvest that provides the raw material from which Osborne constructs her installations. Dyed sunflower stalks, dried grapefruit shells (amongst other gathered and conserved vegetation) are covered with hand printed paper to fashion shapes that accentuate the alien and otherworldly quality of biotechnology.

owed 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



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 place the work in a discourse that registers the anxiety surrounding debate on genetic modification. The artist herself refers to the clusters of dense material that are the major components of *Archipelago* as cells or ovoids; a reshaping of imagined DNA matter that is contained in wire pods sitting on silky thin rubber bases.

Rendered unrecognizable by the artist's ministrations, the objects invite close observation and wonderment.

Somewhere, in the surfeit of all these forms, is a preserved doughnut that Osborne cooked for her young son several decades ago. In a previous work, *To the Surface Surveyed* (1997), built from hundreds of dried banana peels, the artist included the crooked stem of a squash plant grown by her mother in their Australian garden more than half a century earlier. Through this inclusion of saved artefacts from the past, grandmother, mother and son play their part in a familial thread countering the fragmentation of lives caused by the global diaspora that characterizes the modern world. The intersection of the public and private is marked by the confluence in Osborne's oeuvre of her dedicated process of collecting and the personal relationships that revolve around this activity.

The complex tissue of concerns about the manipulation of our food-stuffs, the central subject of *Archipelago*, was somewhat overshadowed

enclosed in the wire baskets, pointed out to one another all that they were reminded of by these ambiguous and intensely coloured shapes. They counted out words in unison naming their recollections of the physical universe: seashells, beaches, campfires, blueberries, teepees, Egypt, grasses and puddles. The children, despite their tender years, established that the viewer could enter the work through the associative properties that the elements in the piece are reminiscent of: unbidden fruit of an encounter with the work.

In contrast to *Archipelago*, with its sprawling structures redolent of seas, rivers, ponds, islands, and flowers, *Garden* is self-contained and orderly. Both works, though, can be seen as a laboratory of sorts into which the artist brings the reaping of her fieldwork. Her crops are the stuff of the quotidian such as the grapefruit halves and desiccated banana skins or the more arcane and esoteric: the dry rose petals from a friend's sister's funeral, rhubarb seeds and chopped dogwood. Here, she

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 40's, 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-

Lyndal OSBORNE, *Garden*, 2005. Travelling exhibition entitled *Ornamenta*. Photo: courtesy of the artist.



Lyndal OSBORNE, *Archipelago*, 2008.
Details. Travelling exhibition entitled
Ornamenta, Photo: courtesy of the artist.

toes to market. Pale blue and nut brown mottled eggs are again available as are alabaster white plum-shaped or dumpy scarlet-striated 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.' ←



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

Sarindar 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

1. Lyndal's exhibition is travelling to: Penticon Art Gallery, Penticon, 13 March–3 May, 2009; Harcourt House, Edmonton, 30 July–29 August, 2009; Moose Jaw Museum & Art Gallery, Moose Jaw, 25 March–23 May, 2010; Esplanade Arts & Heritage Centre, Medicine Hat, 25 September–14 November, 2010.