

A vine leaf for Ray

Impressions of the sculptor Raymond Exworth and his work.

Returning to Heather Bell Cottage after many years to meet Susie Exworth and to encounter the sheds in a more revealing way has been truly enlightening.

It rekindled vivid memories of intense conversations at the cottage table with the sculptor, visiting the sheds for the first time and visiting the lead exhibitions at the Royal Cornwall Museum, Truro.

Nevertheless I am only slightly less perplexed, as I understand a little more about the artist's modus operandi through conversation with Susie.

Although obscured by polythene then, and now seen in full light; the work lives up to what it promised all those years ago.

Moving from the shed to shed was similar to how one may experience Samuel Barber's *Adagio for Strings*: an experience that begins well and moves towards a great crescendo, stirring the imagination and the emotions.

There exists order amongst what could be perceived at first glance as chaos. Great arcs of movement are formed from small pieces of wood. Streams of consciousness appear to flow through sculpted form through time and space from what was 'then' to what is 'now.'

Beautifully modeled figures emerge from a forest of form.

Look into the eyes of these and you will see life force and the illusion

of living mind.

Countless materials form *The Circus*; steel, string, wood to name but a few. Much of the work is sculpted from plaster: a difficult material to use well. Interesting to note: a material that is processed from rock into liquid then powder to then be crystalized into intended form.

This work has no attachment to artistic movement or 'ism'. It's an entity onto itself that appears forever contemporary from the day it was formed.

There were artists that Ray admired: Michelangelo, Rodin, Kienholtz and Giacometti. Walking through these sheds, one encounters that same obsessive spirit that is present within Kurt Schwitter's *Merzbau*. There is also an enigmatic mystery and richness that haunts. I am reminded in some way of the celebrated Russian Film maker Andrey Tarkovsky.

Back to the trilogy at Truro Museum –

Home for Christmas

A Garden for No.7

The Monolith

These pieces must span a decade of working in lead. Impressions left in the mind from years ago, of how beautifully crafted these objects are.

Domestic and garden objects recreated in lead and carefully laid out on the floor in lines in an order that only the artist may know about.

Collectively an installation; the work has gravitas - quite literally weighed down by gravity and visually weighted against a history of great art and artists.

Soldered in lead sheeting amongst many objects is a huge wardrobe, a lawn mover with its blades facing the wrong way and a lead rose,

which appears delicate.

Ray inspired unusual conversation, which fired the mind intellectually and visually. The lead rose reminds me of this – of when he spoke about the delicacy of a snowflake as it falls through the air to the earth. Also once saying, ‘it’s the kernel that is the most important part of the plant not the flower.’

Most of all, it is the lead curtains that to this day, grasps my imagination with awe.

The lead curtains, heavy and voluminous; they nevertheless had the appearance that should a gust of wind blow, they would gently sway in the wind.

Conclusion

The impressions left from memories of the shows and the recent visit to the sheds has made me contemplate and ask - what is the reason behind this sculptor’s modus operandi?

Two things –

The need above all else to simply go to the studio, get on and make what he needed to make without interruption from the outside world.

Towards the end of my tour of the sheds, I was shown a bathroom basin and its support fashioned from wood. Beside lay on the ground the original broken ceramic basin.

This leads me to believe that there is an attempt, unconscious or otherwise, to fix or to re-claim from the chaos, to put back together and make right again that which was violently blown apart and destroyed by war.

The Exworth household was twice bombed in the war. An early life experience that inevitably left its mark

Is the work of Ray Exworth important and if so, why?

I believe it is and I have always done so. Anyone who has been to the sheds will understand why. When you enter, it is evident that you are in the presence of something quite indefinable yet magnificent.

With great dexterity and well-informed intelligence, Ray produced a vision so rich, unique and all encompassing - different to what has already been established.

I would challenge anyone to immerse themselves in these sheds and not have their senses and emotions moved.

However, what makes an artist's work important is not simply the quality and the impact of the work itself. Timing also plays a part and the apparatus that supports it. The apparatus decides, what is 'in' and what is 'out': this is the critical mass of art curators, journalists, collectors, museums and the dealers. The latter whose job it is to ensure and protect an artwork's monetary value.

The distinguished sculptor Michael Sandle once said that the rules of the art world are arbitrary but absolute. Lets hope that this is not true.

In Bonn where I worked as a fellow for twelve months, the former director of Bonn Kunsthalle, Dieter Ronte mentioned that

...there is an imperative need for the contemporary art world to re-learn the creative alphabet. Meaning that too much has been sacrificed to commercial enterprise reducing 'art' to a consumable commodity.

What makes the work of Ray Exworth important is that it is a lifetime's work that is not motivated by or concerned with how it may be regarded - by the apparatus. It is artistic vision in its purest form.

Lastly, I'd like to dedicate this talk in the hope that we may one day see the work of this great sculptor in an important public art institution, possibly Tate Britain's Duveen Gallery where it may be enjoyed and appreciated not just by just a few people but by the public at large.

Tim Shaw. September 2016