

Caroline Dear **Time To Observe**

“Water and air. So very commonplace are these substances, they hardly attract attention- and yet they vouchsafe our very existence.” Hiroshi Sugimoto

In the rapid acceleration of everyday life it seems that there are few opportunities to pause, reflect and to be in the moment. Revealing beauty in nature, human design and in the physicality of raw materials, the multidisciplinary work of visual artist Caroline Dear creates space for contemplation. Informed by ancient craft traditions, scientific enquiry and architectural design Dear explores relationships between Humanity and Nature, mindful of the minute details of life that surround, sustain and revive us.

As an artist working with nature, the balance or tensions between man-made and organic forms are skilfully articulated and distilled through detailed research and immediate tactile engagement with the natural world. Initially studying Botany then training as an architect in Dublin and Hull before working as a landscape architect in France, scientific, aesthetic and indigenous ways of seeing are integrated into Dear's conception of a “living landscape”. Described by the artist as “a natural archive holding place, people and time” the bog, moorland and seashore surrounding her studio on the Isle of Skye provide a well of inspiration, a place of sanctuary and a unique cultural vantage point of global resonance. Caroline has exhibited widely in Scotland, England, Ireland, France, Germany, Belgium, Japan, USA and the West Indies, recently undertaking residencies at Grez-sur-loing Paris, Saari Manor Finland, Cove Park Scotland and an RSA residency award for Scotland with Edinburgh Printmakers.

Throughout her career she has continued to distil her visual practice; refining techniques of construction using organic found materials, drawing with light through photography and utilising observational and poetic text in the development of 2D and 3D works; from artist's books and original printmaking to large scale sculptural installations. The transformation of raw materials and how objects gain power and meaning in their making is central to Dear's Art, exemplified by her four year investigation into the *Uamh An Ard Achadh High Pasture Cave* prehistoric site on the Isle of Skye. The subsequent body of work *Encircled By Gold* including a triptych of cloaks woven in birch, rush and buttercup, evoke ancient rituals of creation, protection and natural cycles of renewal. The visual unearthing of this ancient burial site by the artist brings the viewer into contact with a circle of traditional knowledge and understanding linked with the movement of the sun. The construction of each cloak and integrity of materials drawn directly from the land are presented as objects embedded in their unique location and in the wider context of human history. The human mark, together with our unique relationship to time as a species is ever present in the artist's work.

The introduction of structural elements; clean lines and bold form, coupled with the use of impermanent organic materials from the landscape create a frame of shifting perception in the mind's eye. Beneath the surface of the land “peat holds deep time”, absorbing changes in the atmosphere over thousands of years and creating a repository of knowledge earthed in human history. Above ground mortal time is experienced as a transient veil of light and moving shadow over sea and earth, illuminating human marks of habitation and minute details of plant life. Significantly it is the lower, unseen flora which is the foundation of the artist's engagement with the environment; that which goes unnoticed in rural and urban everyday life. Echoing the work of herman de vries Dear presents the viewer with nature, positioned spatially to invite contemplation of the relationships between objects or raw

materials and the individual/ collective mind. Orderly sequencing of random natural elements transformed by the weaving process are displayed for clarification rather than classification, creating space for wider cultural re-evaluation of our relative separation from, or connection to, the natural environment.

Experiencing raw organic materials such as moss, rush, willow, heather, moor grass and peat with all the senses is pivotal for both artist and audience. There is a felt sense in the intimacy of hand woven materials, the smell and texture of cyclical rhythms of growth and decay and the subtle tonality of changing seasons which is integral in its making. Like the work of Angus MacPhee, the integrity of materials and traditional knowledge, together with the inherent value of ritual processes of creation for individual and collective physical, psychological and emotional health is present in both the artist's creative process and the act of seeing/ experiencing the work. Driven by the purity of the material and a desire to express the unique properties and human memories associated with each plant, cultivation and sustainable harvest by the artist are governed by natural cycles of the year. This seasonal rhythm and continuity is experienced physically through weaving and sculptural construction, continually pushing the structural boundaries of the plant and creating work with the presence of a living organism, affected by air flow, natural light and shadow.

The delicacy and vulnerability of fine grasses or hair moss spun into interconnected threads form larger formal design structures, linking site specific flora to human identity on a global scale. The act of making and experiencing the work with all the senses removes what the artist describes as "filters of seeing", revealing "connections between the inner psyche and the outer physical landscape". The need to connect with something greater than ourselves or the physical art object is invoked in the crafting of each work. This fluid integration of disciplines and an awareness of indigenous language in relation to visual perception reference a different way of being in contemporary life. This internal architecture creates expanded time to observe and to be, in heightened awareness of eternal nature and human creativity as essential sources of renewal.

From the fine spun fragility of ephemeral grasses seemingly blown together by the wind to the formal deliberation of peat layers applied to a wall installation with bar code precision, Caroline Dear's exceptional work creates imaginative spaces for connection and contemplation of the natural world and our place within it.

Georgina Coburn