



Lace kitchen - De kanten keuken Christina Kerkvliet Goddard

The Dialectics of Lace

Christina Kerkvliet Goddard's installation *Lace kitchen – De kanten keuken* – is grounded in a lineage of art exploring ideas of domesticity, but as Walter Benjamin reminds us in *Art and Illumination*, this side of art has a history stemming only from the 1800s. Like Impressionist artist Mary Cassatt, Kerkvliet Goddard explores the feminine spaces of her household, but whereas Cassatt's household was in Paris in the late 1900s, *Lace kitchen – De kanten keuken* is situated in more recent times of the mid 1960s to the mid 1970s.

These were the artist's formative years. Kerkvliet Goddard is a first generation Australian of a Dutch Catholic family on her mothers' side. She grew up in the assimilationist years and lost most of her Dutch language once she commenced school. This exhibition explores memories of her heritage through the material culture of her early years, and especially her grandmother's single fronted, wooden house in Seymour in rural Victoria where the kitchen was the centre of her family's world:

The kitchen is the heart of the house, the place where growing up takes place. You are domesticated – in cooking, cleaning and doing dishes - but it is also the place where you worked. It is the place where confessions take place: it is a church. You work through your anxieties there while cleaning, eating and experimenting. You explore all those things in this one place. The kitchen is also a place of music, with the radio going, records playing - it is a place where you feel real comfort.¹

The domestic objects in this exhibition belong to the late 1960s, the dying days of modernism. None claimed status then as high art, but some including black velvet and gold fringed cushion covers of kookaburras and framed Madonnas were and still are venerated for their kitsch qualities. Yet modern art was defined by Clement Greenberg for its anti-kitsch content and by Harold Rosenberg for its anti-domestic aesthetic. In contemporary times, notions of high art v. low art and avant-garde v. domestic art are obsolete. It is refreshing to see domestic pop culture objects, some decidedly kitsch, open to interrogation, since domestic objects and domestic space are 'crucial site[s] of anxiety and subversion.'² Kerkvliet Goddard's meaning making enters the territory of cultural memory, diversity and belonging.

In the time-honoured tradition of the surrealists, the artist explores the unity of opposites through insertions into found and treasured objects. Lace, the starting point of this exploration is a key iconographic feature of Flemish domestic culture. Viewers find delicate lace patterns drilled into the hard metal surfaces of a teapot and onto a bakelite black telephone, and they observe functional objects like spoons being rendered dysfunctional through the perforated lace-work patterns inserted into their functional surfaces. Some objects in *Lace kitchen – De kanten keuken* refer to material culture, others to the spiritual culture of the artist's Dutch Catholic grandmother whose religion infused all her daily domestic rituals. The metal surface of a Fowler's Vocola preserving container has drilled into it fragments of a Psalm, testimony to a religion partly honored, partly lost. The quirkiness of the lace-work is not random; each Dutch pattern is carefully chosen for its specificity to its object. The *Boerenbont* and other patterns are those of the region of Kerkvliet Goddard's ancestry; her grandparents married in Overijssel in east Holland and they lived in Heeten in central Holland prior to emigrating.

Other lace patterns derive their designs from fabrics and wallpaper patterns of the 1960s, the latter carefully and meticulously sourced from actual fragments of the family home in Seymour. This gives the installation an archaeological feel. The holes Kerkvliet Goddard has so loving and painstakingly drilled into metal, perspex and plastic surfaces as varied as 45 RPM records of pop tunes like *Knock-knock, who's there?* are multi-valent in meaning. Holes suggest space and free up meaning; they permit the artist to transform and move through objects. As the artist commented:

Holes make spaces to represent things we can't understand, where meaning is missing and where we can invent our own fiction. Holes give space to breathe and find freedom.³

Perhaps fiction is appropriate; there are cultural gaps. The artist's family brought a language and culture to Australia of Holland as it was in 1960 – the year of their arrival; but family members found on trips home many years later their language was outdated, old fashioned. Their heritage was lost in time. Their version of Holland had ceased to exist. Also the Australian born offspring lost their Dutch language. This was difficult for the artist who volunteered 'it was frustrating to be told we were of a culture we couldn't live or be a part of. We wanted to be a part of their life and memories, but we weren't permitted. It was hard on us – there couldn't be that landscape, those emotions they had brought us up on, reminiscing about'.⁴ This loss of language and living between cultures permeates through this insightful installation. Kerkvliet Goddard's fascination for material culture and finding relationships between materials and objects - materialising objects - invites speculation and contemplation.

Catherine Speck

Associate Professor Catherine Speck is a Reader in Art History, Coordinator of the Postgraduate Program in Art History run jointly by the University of Adelaide and the Art Gallery of South Australia and former Chair of Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre.

¹ Interview with the artist, 11 July 2005.

² Christopher Read, *Not at Home: The Suppression of Domesticity in Modern Art and Architecture*, Themes and Hudson, London, 1996, p. 16.

³ Interview with the artist, 11 July 2005.

⁴ Interview with the artist, 11 July 2005.

Christina Kerkvliet Goddard

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Selected Solo Exhibitions

2005 *Lace kitchen – De kanten keuken*, SALA Festival Exhibition Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre Inc. Adelaide, SA
2004 *Out of the blue* South Australian Museum, Adelaide
2003 *The Samorn and George Adelaide Zoo Arts Project* Adelaide, South Australia
2002 *Materfamilias* The Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia Project Space
2002 *Materfamilias* The Capital-Bendigo's Performing Arts Centre, Victoria
2002 *Materfamilias* Copper Development Centre, Westfield Towers, Sydney
2001 *Materfamilias* SmartWired Display Home, HomeWorld Display Village, Kellyville NSW
2001 *Materfamilias* Women's Health Information Centre, Royal Women's Hospital Melbourne
1999 *Remove & Shake 'Family tincture'* Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
1998 *Mixed Blessings* Sacred Heart Cathedral, St. Patrick's Chapel, Bendigo Victoria
1996 *Aria* Contemporary Art Centre of South Australia Adelaide

Selected Group Exhibitions

2004 *Fleurieu Peninsula Heritage Exhibition 'Open Borders'* Red Dot Gallery, Penny's Hill Winery, McLaren Vale, South Australia
2004 *Fleurieu Peninsula Biennale-Art of Food*, Rosemount Estate, McLaren Vale, SA
2004 *The Waterhouse natural history Art Prize*, South Australian Museum, Adelaide SA
2003 *Nexus Members' Show*, Nexus Multicultural Arts Centre Inc, Adelaide SA
2003 *Pt Pirie Art Prize*, South Australia
2001 *Bendigo Work on Paper Prize* Bendigo Art Gallery Victoria
2001 *Linden's 10th annual Postcard Show* Linden Arts Centre & Gallery, St Kilda Victoria

2000 The Fleurieu Art Prize & Touring Exhibition

Fleurieu Art Foundation & Biennale Inc SA
2000 *Celebrating the Exquisite Corpse* Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
2000 *Postcard Show 2000* Linden Arts Centre & Gallery, St Kilda Victoria
1998 *Bendigo Work on Paper Exhibition* Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
1998 *The Post - Postcard Show 1998* Linden Arts Centre & Gallery, St Kilda Victoria
1995 *Helpmann Academy Exhibition* Instiut Seni Indonesia, Yogyakarta Indonesia
1995 *Sir Robert Helpmann Academy Exhibition* Festival Centre Adelaide
1994 *Ways and Means* Union Gallery, University of Adelaide, South Australia

Awards

2000 *Project Grant : Arts Victoria - 'Materfamilias'*
1998 *Project Grant : Arts Victoria - 'Family tincture'*
1996 *The Oscars - Art Exhibitions Best New Talent: The Adelaide Advertiser's annual arts awards 'The arts end of the year'*
1994 *John Christie Wright Memorial Prize* School of Art, University of South Australia

Selected Commissions

2005 *Tour Down Under*, Stage 5 – Willunga, City of Onkaparinga Council, SA
2004 *Tour Down Under*, Stage 5 – Willunga, City of Onkaparinga Council, SA
Various private - South Australia, Victoria, USA

Collections

Blackwell Funerals, South Australia
Copper Development Centre, Sydney NSW
Celebrating the Exquisite Corpse Touring Exhibition, Bendigo Art Gallery, Victoria
South Australia, Victoria & Canberra - various private
The Netherlands - various private
Stirling Children's Library, South Australia

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