

Lawrence Eng
Vancouver, Canada

Lucy Pullen
Selected Work 1998 - 2008



New Knowledge, 2006, baltic birch, piano hinges, chalkboard paint, 1.2 m – 1.8 m variable

Pullen's hinge sculptures and architectural drawings are the result of a six-week residency she undertook in Los Angeles last summer. In a recent conversation with the Straight, she spoke of her work as a direct response to the studio building in which she was then living and working. She also alluded to the contingent nature of her art: the six freestanding works here comprise two variations each of three different combinations of components -what Pullen calls "unique multiples". Folded up, each sculpture resembles a large, unopened envelope. In this form, the works can lean against the wall, like paintings. The dip into blackboard paint expands the painting idea, bringing together evocations of school (learning, pedagogy, theory) and the history of abstraction. The unfolding of the works, Pullen explains, is a form of "new knowledge"....The many ways in which the conjoined triangular and rectangular forms can be configured -up, down, in, out, with acute or obtuse angles -suggest an improvised architecture mated with a flock of origami birds. Extended wings and pointy legs consort with notions of lean-tos, tents, and tepees. This sculpture riffs on the rigors of 1960s minimalism and serialism, with added notes on modular construction and the built environment. Like many of her contemporaries, Pullen messes with materials, forms and the ways in which we perceive and process art. Flipping between the second and third dimension and wrapped in reflective material, her works seem to occupy an uncertain or precarious space.

Robin Laurence, *The Georgia Straight*, January 18 - 25, 2007



Sucker, hard candy, 1996

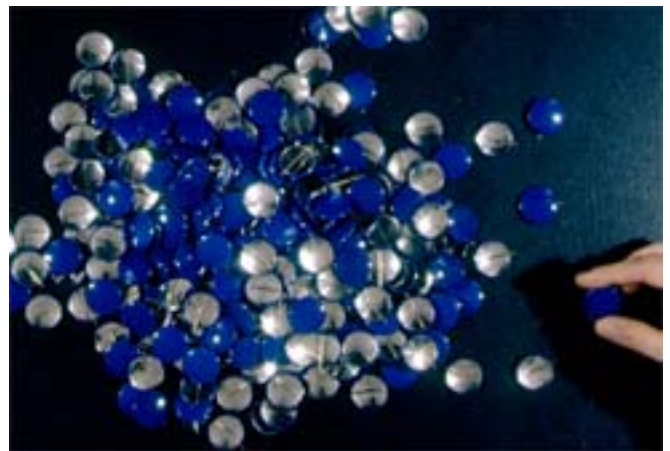


The engaging effect of the sculpture arises from the intense disjunction between the expectations that form around it as a concept and its actual qualities as a thing. Upon hearing the proposal for a life size figure cast in candy, one might imagine the work as something bright and insouciant, but it is nothing of the sort, and stands instead as a monument of disenchantment. The sculpture is colour a classic Candy Apple Red, but its mass and density make it appear very dark, almost black. Where we expect it to be translucent it is totally impenetrable. It is also impossibly heavy, it is a clothed figure, and with the generalization and conglomeration required to cast, it weighs nearly three hundred pounds. Its presence is static hieratic, and Egyptian, but at the same time it is also environmentally sensitive: when the air is humid the candy surface liquefies, and it drips a red syrup: eventually the figure stood in the centre of a sticky pool. When first displayed at Eye Level Gallery it was the only piece in the space which intensified the air of loneliness. There the figure gradually slumped, tilted to an alarming angle, and after two weeks, collapsed and broke into shards. The work stages its own demise and must be recast for each temporary showing.

Kenneth Hayes, *Recent Halifax Sculpture*. S.L. Simpson Gallery, 1996.



Portable Library, 1997



Chance Operation with Blue Buttons, 1997

Portable library, 1997 is made from two bookcases, hinged like steamer trunks and filled with books culled from the university's library. Although the subjects covered in the volumes are diverse, there is a sense of interconnectedness that makes it evident that their selection was associative rather than random, a sort of improvisational research inspired by the artist's curiosity. In many ways, portable library is a metaphor for her own practice. Another piece thematically central to Pullen's work is Chance Operation with Blue Buttons, 1997, a pile of 2000 plain blue lapel pins which visitors are expected to take and, in turn, redistribute at their discretion. Drawing upon the heritage of Dada and Fluxus, the work hijacks and subverts the meaning of the tags, which resemble those distributed by museums and galleries and function as proof of admission and thus, as cultural status symbol.

Mimi Fautley, *C Magazine*, Nov 1997



The Thing (2003), reflective material, rope and wood, dimensions variable.



Rope Swing, 2005.



Aesthetic Theory, 2005.

In *Rope Swing*, at right, a photograph of two girls swinging from a tree, Pullen wrapped the long rope of the swing with the material; it looks as if the girls are swinging from a bolt of lighting. *Aesthetic Theory* brings reading to light, with one book on a shelf illuminating the rest of the collection. Lecture turns the metal armrests of a university classroom into a starry sky. For Pullen, who has studied at Cooper Union, the Nova Scotia College of Art and Design and the Tyler School of Art at Temple University, and now teaches at the University of Victoria, her literal re-insertion of the aura into her images is no accident. It's a playful response to the influential German theorist Walter Benjamin and his notion that with the mechanical reproduction of art comes the loss of artistic authenticity - what he calls the aura. With the exhibition *Everything is Illuminated* (whose title is, in fact, taken from Jonathan Safran Foer's bestselling novel; like Bowie, he received a letter from the artist) Pullen is using her flashy auras in an installation made up of 11 photographs, nine wrapped and thus brilliant ladders and 1004 astro-neon-pink-marbleized bouncy balls scattered across the gallery floor. I'm principally interested in the viewer having agency," she explains. "I want there to be a reciprocal relationship between the beholder and the beheld." By grouping the ladders in sets of two, three and four, the viewer is forced to physically maneuver through the installation, driving an ever-changing perspective and luminescence.

Julie Dault, National Post, May 20, 2004



Lucy Pullen produces works in a wide-ranging number of media. Drawing, sculpture, photography and actions are only some of the disciplines she has recently explored. Linking this eclecticism is a practice the artist calls conceptual materialism. Her works are often formally independent of one another, and appear determined from an internal logic that leads to idiosyncratic ends. A strong sense of humour draws Pullen's work together, with an interest in word play, puns, and an adventurous use of technique developing the possibilities of everyday materials.

Reid Shier, catalogue essay for *A Thousand Miles of Dust and Ashes*, Contemporary Art Gallery, 2003.



Reflective material covers an object. When photographed, the object is consumed by a burst of white light and disappears. This series of black and white conceptual photographs began in 1999, born out of an asynchronous collaboration with Will Rogan, between San Francisco and Halifax Nova Scotia. Ideas develop in time. Despite proximity and geography, an exchange of material, words, images and ideas over time, allowed the work to grow.

Silver, as metallic substance or as a colour, as it relates to use and exchange value, and even exhibition value. Silver is central to Lucy Pullen's *A Thousand Miles of Dust and Ashes*, an exhibition curated by Reid Shier at the Contemporary Art Gallery in Vancouver. The melancholy and sheer grandeur (dare I say sublimity) of the title belies the modest and idiosyncratic quality of the works on display: a silver print of the artist in a reflective silver skirt (*Still(Flash)*) a rope sculpture (*The Thing*) covered in the same silver material that the skirt was made, and a series of double line drawings on circular grounds of metallic paper (*Portals*). The connotations of ruination, even apocalypse, of the title are at odds with the quasi-scientific/futuristic tone of the works themselves.

These works defy product-oriented art practices. A sense of process and discovery are evinced by an attention to materials. Like an alchemical experiment or a geological vein, the metallic, reflective quality of silver runs through all the work. The alchemical relates to this sense of discovery and of the "magical" (I am thinking here of the invention of photography and the idea of drawing with light). An other-worldliness emanates from the silver print. Photographing the silver reflective material of the skirt using a flash at night produced this effect; her skirt becomes this empty hole of glowing light, acting as an opening through which the viewer enters or gets sucked in (like the door in *Poltergeist*). The snake-like sculpture, "The Thing," a meandering tangle of ropes that rise and fall in defiance of gravity, recalls Laocoon being strangled by sea-snakes. The viewer's gaze, likewise, gets caught up in this sinuous, reflective, tangled mass—a cross between an Eva Hesse and a Jackie Winsor. The silver "snakeskin" covering these ropes is so artificial that one ends up thinking more about what lies beneath this skin, as if the ropes acted as the musculature of the sculpture. While largely abstract, the works refer to figuration; even *Portals*, the series of meandering double line drawings made by the artist's hand automatically, seem to have unconsciously taken on the form of plant-life or breasts.

In the sheer eclecticism of the exhibition, one wonders what relation these works have with one another, besides silver. A vague sense of exploring the fundamentals of time and space, in the most abstract, scientific sense, seems to permeate the work: exposure time, capturing impressions of reflective light onto film; the flattening or swallowing up of a three-dimensional body by a glowing void; the phenomenological aspect of *The Thing* and its dependence on perambulation, with its multiple positive and negative entrance points in space; the illusion of three dimensionality using simple drawn contour lines on a flat surface. All of these basic sculptural, drawn, and photographic elements reflect back on the mediums themselves: flatness, light, dimensionality, and defiance of gravity. In a way, the spectre of modernism seems to have returned, or rather the work reminds us that it never went away, or that it can return from the future, or that future and past fold in upon themselves, as explained by quantum physics and science fiction.

Marina Roy, *Review A Thousand Miles of Dust and Ashes*, CAG, Vancouver, BC, March 14-April 27, (in *Canadian Art Magazine*) Fall 2003.



Exception, hand-cut U.S. currency, 1998.