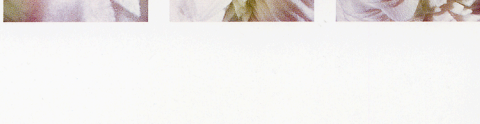


Sonja Porcaro

Under Warm Wood

Front > *Under Warm Wood* 2003 (detail) wooden table, felt, dimensions variable
 Below > *Untitled (Vienna/Adelaide 1992-2003)* black & white photograph on archival paper 50 by 75cm
 Right > *Under Warm Wood* 2003 (details) felt, dimensions variable



Under Warm Wood

Sonja Porcaro

IMPERMANENT NARRATIVES

Growing up in two languages like Sonja has, can sometimes be baffling. Memories become entangled in the shape of language itself: certain events are remembered in one language, others make sense only in another and are un-translatable. Sometimes one language is the Father rather than Mother language, the ordering principle, and the structure. As such it presides over what can be said and remembered and perhaps more importantly what must be left out. This aspect of language has been one of the main concerns in Sonja's work. Here it is explored in its connection to learning by repetition and remembering by heart.

During her childhood, Sonja watched as her parents would every morning, with gestures of love and care, display fruit and vegetables in the stalls of their shop, only to repeat, inverted, the same gestures at night to store the fruit away, and start again the next morning. Similarly, Sonja would practice, learning by repetition (privately, in another room) nice things to say in proper Italian per fare bella figura when speaking with adults, with visitors. The act of repeating, rather than what is repeated becomes, in *Under Warm Wood* an underlining motif. Repetition, its excess and the slippage contained in it, is the governing principle of the installation both in the accumulation of felt shapes, and in the supporting objects. Through repetition and slippage, meaning rather than being affirmed is constantly shifting, from the private to the public, from what is remembered to what could not be remembered. Fragments, luminous epiphanies, softly spoken stories, resonating objects, recollected fantasies, silences are alternated with gaps in memory, fissures, fractures.

The objects of this installation are rather generic, mundane, and certainly not of the kind that have narratives inscribed on the surface: tables, piles of felt shapes, a saw-horse stacked with more felt, a hoop, little fossil creatures made of pencils. A black and white photo of a forlorn elk framed in a grand European museum is the odd object out. The two bigger objects are tables, one modelled in size and colour on a dining table belonging to Sonja's parents, the other a miniature version of it. Sonja brings together the being part of a domestic, private structure of such objects with their more public face as objects inscribed in precise cultural practices. Sonja references grand institutions: the black and white photograph of an European museum questioned by the presence of a stuffed elk (in itself ironically spelling out "installation art") the legs of the table modelled on the South Australian Museum display cabinets.

Another layer is added to this first shift from private to public structure, when we consider how the miniature table, although looking similar overall to the bigger one, is built according to different proportions, as if the original proportions were remembered,

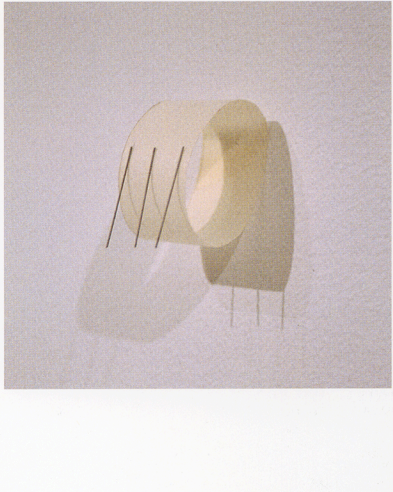
but not completely. On both tables are stacked shapes cut in felt: a pencil, a tree, butterflies, leaves, circles. The process of stacking shape on shape is akin to the process of memorising, learning by repetition, but also of layering of meanings. The shapes are at the same time warm felt as a nurturing material and as fond memories) and worn, weighted down and condensed (felt as a material made of compressed fibres as a muffling device that weights down the possibility to remember). Similarly a saw-horse is weighted down by layers upon layers of felt, evoking warmth, comfort, protectiveness, but also the power to silence and suffocate. This layering is akin to building up memories on what is already known, and it takes the work into the exploration of the formal qualities of felt. Although each of these objects alludes to childhood (and adolescence), they are not objects-souvenirs, charged with specific memories of events that have happened and deployed in a tridimensional and neat catalogue of life experiences. *Under Warm Wood* does not dwell on the exploration of memories as such, as specific autobiographical events. Autobiography as practice of discovery and revelation of an

unfolding narrative is absent from the installation. Rather autobiography here becomes an occasion to reflect on the nature and the act of remembering. In Sonja's work remembering is a double process of painstakingly putting together objects and words, of exploring the linguistic structures of remembering. Between languages and linguistic structures, lays the undetermined, the opaque, that which cannot be named and thus cannot be fully remembered. This is when memory becomes also a faculty of the body. Sonja quotes the work of Eva Hesse, Mikala Dwyer Kathy Temin and Rachel Whiteread for their preoccupation with rethinking modernism and minimalism, through a gendered perspective. Like the work of these artists, *Under Warm Wood* takes the investigation of theoretical and formal concerns of minimalism into a less rarefied arena, combining them with references to what is personal and intimate. Immense care, precise and careful gestures go in to the making of the installation. Felt is transformed in an ambiguous imagery of sexualised forms: a saw-horse with splayed legs, fragile and bold at the same time, feminine butterflies, folds, flowers, circles heaped in phallic shapes.

In other objects – the hula hoop – felt becomes wrinkled skin. Pencils are combined in fossilised bones. These objects are precariously scattered across the table, propped against the wall, still looking for their permanent 'home' In fact, their precise location is a changing response to the installation as whole and to the space where it is situated.

Memory becomes a way of creating relations, between the narrating 'I' and the story, the story and the viewer between objects themselves and between objects and a 'place' is built. This finding and wording of 'place' opens up a series of questions on the very nature of home and belonging. *Under Warm Wood* is a shifting, oblique place: it contains and at the same time, it does not, tell a story through excess and repetition, obsession almost, and it condenses silences. It suggests that the core of one's place contains also its other: the diverse, the unfamiliar the estranged and the foreign.

Ilaria Vanni
 Sydney 2003



> *Still for the Hollow* 2003 (detail) mopping tape, pencil lead, 4cm diameter

Sonja Porcaro

BORN 1972 ADELAIDE
 SOUTH AUSTRALIA

ACADEMIC

1993 > Bachelor of Visual Art (1st Class Honours) SA School of Art, University of SA. 1996 > Digital Imaging (Distinction) The College of Fine Art, University of SA funded by Arts SA.

PROFESSORIAL

2002 > Artist-in-Residence/Guest Lecturer Sculpture Dept. SA School of Art, Uni of SA. > Performance Art Workshops with Linda Patterson, SA. 2001 > Guest Lecturer to Foundation Studies BA Visual Arts, SA School of Art, Uni of SA. 1999 > Resident for three months, Artspace Studio, The Gunney, NSW. 1994-1996 > Resident, Experimental Art Foundation [EAF] artists studios, SA. 1995-1996 > Elected Member Contemporary Art Centre of SA [CACSA] Board.

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2003 > *Under Warm Wood* Artspace, Adelaide Festival Centre, SA. 2001 > *Weft* EAF SA. 1999 > *Counting Under the Wait of Ink* CACSA, Adelaide. 1998 > *Lodge*, The Performance Space, NSW > *Queue*, 151 Regent St. Gallery, NSW > *algebraic (drawn still)*, Herringbone Gallery, NSW. 1994 > *trans s*, Union Gallery, SA > *Lug s/Pen d*, [RE] Gallery, SA.

SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2002 > *Fever* 12 minute reading/video projection [video made in collaboration with Toni Greenwood] as part of Moving Image, SALA Festival, Mercury Cinema, SA > *Installation Stills*, Australian Centre for Photography, Vic, curated by Guido Molinari > *Installation Stills*, Galleria, Milan (Italy), curated by Guido Molinari > *Installation Vivas*, CACSA, Adelaide, curated by Nicki Vouis > *Snowbird, Scarlet & Ambrosia*

15 minute reading/digital image projection as part of Moving Image, SALA Festival, Mercury Cinema, SA. 1999 > *Ground Up*, Artspace, NSW curated by Adam Boyd > *Wunderkinder* Top Floor SA, curated by Michael Newall > *Lux: Notes for an Electronic Writing*, CACSA, curated by Teri Hoskin > *Glovebox*, in car gloveboxes, South Gallery, NSW curated by Chris Fortescue and Simon Barney. 1997 > *Dissonance* College of Fine Art Gallery, NSW curated by Laura Jordan. 1996 > *Dul of Adelaide*, EAF SA, curated by Richard Grayson. 1995 > *Short Sharp Shock* EAF SA, curated by Michael Grimm and Dean Farrow > *To whisper-each of us-in ecstasy*, Artzone Gallery, SA, curated by Jove Winter > *mute moot collaborative installation/performance* with 5 visual artists/singers/musicians for *1st Site* as part of Take Over Arts Festival, Lion Arts Centre, SA, funded by The SA Youth Arts Board. 1992 > *Safe Text* Graduate exhibition, SA School of Art, Uni of SA. 1993 > *Contain 1991-2002* College of Fine Art Gallery, Uni of NSW [awarded participation through open competition, SA School of Art].

GRANTS/AWARDS

2001 > Arts SA Project Grant [Leadership] to develop new work. 2000 > Two week residency, Athens School of Art studio, Delphi Annex. 1999 > Australia Council Visual Arts/Craft Fund [Development Grant] for Milan Studio Residency, [Italy] Sept-Dec 2000 > Pat Corrigan Artist Grant, managed by NAVA with financial assistance from Australia Council. 1996 > Arts SA Project Grant for six month Artist-in-Residence, College of Fine Art, Uni of NSW to research and develop the cross-over between digital imaging and installation. 1995-1996 > SAYAB Studio Grant for the EAF artists studios. 1995 > SAYAB Project Grant for *mute moot* collaborative installation, Lion Arts Centre, SA.

CURATORIAL PROJECTS

1996 > Curator of *polar.Madlove* exhibition of 5 local and interstate artists, North Adelaide School of Art, funded by Arts SA. 1994 > Assistant Curator to Teri Hoskin and co-designer and writer for *lacuna* catalogue, a visual art exhibition/writing project of 12 women, Prospect Gallery, SA, funded by Australia Council Visual Art/Craft Fund.

COLLECTIONS

Private collections, Adelaide, SA. Anita Lever and Katy Batha, College of Fine Art, University of NSW acquired from exhibition *Contain 1991-2002*.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

2003 > *Blaze* 'Visual Art 1990-2002' published by CACSA Australia inc. [ed] A. Cruickshank, p63 [images of artists work from *Counting Under the Wait of Ink* 1999] CACSA. 2001 > S. Minney (Weft) *Eyeline* #46 Spring p52 > G. Radok 'Entitled' (Weft) *The Adelaide Review* #211 April p32. 2000 > G. Molinari *Emporio* exhibition brochure > A. Main & N. Vouis *Installation Stills* catalogue essay. 1999 > A. Boyd *Ground Up* catalogue essay > D. Everlett 'Suspensions [gatherings]' (*Counting Under the Wait of Ink*) *Broadsheet* Vol 28 #3 Spring p19 > J. Neylon 'Mixed Metaphors' (*Counting Under the Wait of Ink*) *The Adelaide Review*, #189 June p33 > T. Hoskin 'Objectives-Pending' *Counting Under the Wait of Ink* catalogue essay. 1998 > G. Andrew Frost, review of Herringbone Gallery/artists [including image] *Australian Art Collector* Issue 5 Jul-Sep p26-28. 1996 > K. Bolton 'Visual art commentary' (*Short Sharp Shock*) *Qtis Rush* #11 p192. 1995 > J. Steffensen 'Flows and intensities' (*Short Sharp Shock*) *Broadsheet* Vol 24 #3 Spring p17 > S. Radok 'The private is political' (*To whisper-each of us-in ecstasy*) *The Adelaide Review* #137 April p30. 1994 > M. Stephens 'the fractured territory of art' (*trans s*) *Broadsheet* Vol 23 #2 Winter p30 > D. O'Halloran 'A humorous way of understanding space' (*trans s*) *The Advertiser* 23 March.

WITH CONTRIBUTIONS BY ART ST

2000 > *Mist Ensemble Logic* p19 [ed & published] T. Hoskin, SA published with assistance from the New Media Arts Fund of the Australia Council. 1999 > ... *A line to its plane (waiting (at) the Arrival)* *Broadsheet* Vol 28 Summer p10-11 > *Ambrosia* writing/art piece, 4th issue *trAcE* on-line journal at trAcE, ledl C. Sheffield, <http://trace.ntu.ac.uk/frame4/porcaro/amb.html> > *Mist in Lux: Notes for an Electronic Writing* [ed] T. Hoskin, published by CACSA, also on-line Electronic Writing Research Ensemble [EWRE] website. URL: <http://ensemble.va.com.au/lux/>. 1998 > *Incognito* review [C. Farmer J. Hardman and C. Fletcher], *The Performance Space 1997-98 Year Book* p47/48 > *Plumb (with grace)* writing/art piece in *Ensemble Logic* *Chorography* at the EWRE URL: <http://va.com.au/ensemble>, curator T. Hoskin, funded by The New Media Arts Fund of The Australia Council. 1997 > *dry point. that too artist's page* [digital image/text], *Broadsheet* Vol 26 #1 Autumn p16. 1994 > *Algebraic* [writing piece] and *Cherry Picker* image p25-27 *lacuna* catalogue [ed & published] T. Hoskin SA, with assistance from the Visual Arts/ Craft Fund of the Australia Council.



Left > *Untitled* 2003 (detail) saw-horse, felt, dimensions variable
 Above > *Under Warm Wood* 2003 (detail) wooden table, felt, dimensions variable



Left > *Untitled* 2003 (detail) saw-horse, felt, dimensions variable
 Above > *Under Warm Wood* 2003 (detail) wooden table, felt, dimensions variable

The work for this exhibition was produced while undertaking an Artist-in-Residence program at the South Australian School of Art, University of South Australia, during 2002. Sonja would like to thank the staff and students at the School of Art, in particular Steven Carson, Studio Head, Sculpture and Installation [who initiated the Residency] and Trevor Christofis, Sculpture Technical Officer, for their ongoing support and assistance.

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