

The McDougall Art Annex

emovere

by

Lauren Lysaght

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The McDougall Art Annex is located in the Arts Centre of Christchurch,
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Much of the allure of Lauren Lysaght's work stems from the tantalisingly seductive materials she uses - lace, lino, snakeskin, soap, faux fur, candyfloss - and their witty juxtapositions. Their tactile textures and seemingly whimsical combinations are hard to resist. Lysaght brings a fresh, imaginative and humourous spirit to bear on the way she assembles and transforms the everyday items that make up her artworks.

Adding to the overall effect is the size of the work. It is the first time that Lysaght has worked on this scale and it is the scale, with the familiar materials put together in unexpected combinations, that creates a context full of surprises and impact.

Almost without realising it, as you are being beguiled by the materials and familiar objects, you are also taking in the work's meaning, becoming a participant in its concerns. Being hit in the face by the familiar is part of Lysaght's plan to confront you with her theme. **Emovere** means, in Latin, to disturb or to move, from an emotional point of view and Lysaght aims in this body of work to confront us with some very familiar emotions. She believes her Italian-Irish background taught her to 'free-range' with feelings enabling her to express them openly and with ease. Although common to all of us, Lysaght believes people, especially New Zealanders, shy away from strong emotion, afraid of having their feelings stirred up.

Perhaps as an extension of this behaviour, Lysaght believes current art practice encourages the production of cool academic work, based on intellectual concepts. Lysaght thinks it is possible to achieve a balance in artwork between aesthetic appearance and cerebral content. Hasn't great or meaningful art always been about this kind of equation? Maybe so, but Lysaght firmly believes that at this point in art's history, the formal elements of an artwork are all too often seen as secondary to the initial concept. She finds this extremely worrying if you consider art and artists to be society's social indicators. Are we as a people beginning to treat emotions as luxurious commodities to be managed and doled out in careful, measured amounts?

Emovere is about pure emotions, the BIG ones of course, the ones associated with life and death, love and loss, sex and romance, anger and fear, pleasure and denial. The messages, while cloaked by the layers of raillery and merriment, are tough and uncompromising. In general, Lysaght brings a blackly cynical, tongue-in-cheek, sense of humour to bear on her commentary, one that finds you laughing at the painful reminders of those all too familiar feelings.



That Old Familiar Feeling

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Happily Ever After

"Happiness is an imaginary condition, formerly often attributed by the living to the dead, now usually attributed by adults to children and by children to adults." (Thomas Szabo)

A fairytale fantasy which fails to function in the real world (where marriage is often more of a curtain-raiser than a happy ending), this piece deals with a woman who, when starting over again, finds herself faced with options and choices, and learns that being by herself can be a solution rather than a problem.

Many Burdens

Thirty cakes of sandsoap, embedded with brass catches embody the endless, eroding nature of life's daily grind. Buffeted by the relentless tides of human existence, it is tempting to simply go with the flow, rather than let yourself be worn down, but the real trick is to acknowledge the hurdles and learn to work with them.

Anger Management

"I am fascinated by the way people 'manage' anger now...I am convinced it is another 'plot' by the middle classes to keep anger 'nice'." (Lauren Lysaght)

We have all become professional "managers" of our emotions, manipulating our feelings into easily dealt with briefcases. Real feelings have no place in this corporate mode, which values productivity over personality, and control over communication.

Soft Spots

What could be cosier than a warm, cuddly kitten? Everyone has their soft spots, those secret vulnerable places we all take so much trouble to disguise. Using authentic 1950's fabric with embossed orange and blue vinyl, this escapist work celebrates all that is sweet, sentimental, snuggly and cute, and carries the viewer reassuringly into the comfort zone.

Sweet Love Suite

We are continually bombarded, on the radio and on television, with sticky, sickly expressions of love. Lysaght's candyfloss duvet is a homage to all that is syrupy, saccharine and sweet, but also a reminder that too much sugar is bad for us, and that sugar which is spun out too long habitually dissolves.

Fear Stalks The Land

A menacing eagle looms, poised to strike, over the cowering creatures rooted to the ground below in a landscape which appears to be on fire. This blood-chilling incarnation of a state of extreme fear recreates that emotion within the viewer, reducing us all to the level of doomed and cringing prey.

Pleasure Pit

How do you define pleasure? Lysaght supplies us with her own answer in a work which luxuriates in its own sprawling decadence, a high-camp chasm of lusciously coloured feather dusters that invites us in to explore our own indulgences and inhibitions.

Compassionate Leave

A Louis Vuitton-like luggage set seems reassuringly ready for escape, but look closer, the bags are forbiddingly coffin-shaped. These suitcases are neat, attractive and easy-to-handle, but grief has a way of seeping out of the prettiest of packages. The modern world does not allow for the pouring out of emotion - bereavement leave is allotted in measured amounts, after which sympathy is no longer available. The imitation materials Lysaght has chosen suggest that by attempting to 'manage' death, we end up storing away only crocodile tears, rather than the genuine article.

Wall Of Denial

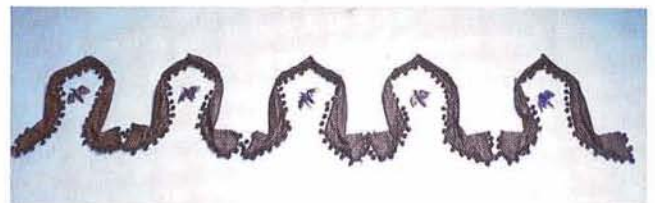
A crumbling fortress under siege, fragmented, in a state of distress, with disintegration imminent, presents a brave front to a hear-no-evil see-no-evil world which is only too happy to accept such a convenient illusion.

That Old Familiar Feeling

A compelling expression of that sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach when you are plunged from contented normalcy, a companionable old chair, into shark infested waters. The sinister, sculpted linoleum suggests that even the most well-known articles can be treacherous and reminds us that disaster is possible at any moment, often when we are at our most complacent.

Somewhere There's A Bluebird Of Happiness

There's a lid for every pot, every cloud has a silver lining. Critical of the way we are schooled to worship at the elusive and prescribed shrine of happiness, Lysaght takes a cynical look at the cliches which accompany the flying pig of Hollywood happiness. With one bluebird for every day of the week, delirious contentment seems assured, but a strange black curtain of Spanish lace hangs ominously overhead; real happiness is often not what we predict it to be, and can be found in the most unexpected places.



Somewhere There's A Bluebird Of Happiness



lauren lysaght

Lauren Lysaght was born in 1949 and is of Italian-Irish descent. She became a full-time artist in 1985, initially working with fabric, furniture, illustrative work and cartooning. Lysaght received an Arts Council Grant in 1992, and has been a guest lecturer at both Victoria University(1993) and Manchester Metropolitan University(1993). In addition to teaching and facilitating art therapy, she has been involved in numerous community art projects, including "The Art of Being a Woman" (Workshop series, Lower Hutt's Women's Centre), the Community Artists Exchange Programme (Britain) and "Ake Ake Moi Moi Ae" (Joint Artist Project, Arohata Women's Prison). Her work is held in the collections of the Dowse Art Museum, the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa and numerous private collections.

Selected Exhibitions

Solo

Out of the Woodwork / Dowse Art Museum / 1987

Now Screening / Newton Art Gallery / 1991

Hidden Agender / Bowen Galleries / 1993

You are now leaving the Comfort Zone / Judith Anderson Gallery / 1994

Embracelets / Bowen Galleries / 1995

Group

Containants / Robert McDougall Art Annex / 1990

The Skullery / Dowse Art Museum / 1992

Sacred Way / City Art Gallery / Wellington / 1992

Heroes / Artline Gallery / 1993

Artist's Books / Manuwatu Art Museum / 1993

Straight from the Studio / Bowen Gallery / 1994

Kia Ora Paora / RKS Gallery / 1995

Elvis Over Geyserland / Rotorua Museum of Art and History / 1995

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