

'Silence'

Simple truths quietly stated linger persistently in the mind. Eleanor Wood's delicate, but very present pieces have this quality. Her work, often using the most insubstantial of materials, clearly arises out of a sensibility that is fine-tuned. Above all they demonstrate the paradox of the power of fragility.

In the work from the mid '90s, the flimsiest of tissue paper is used for the support – Asian tissue, mending tissue, lens tissue. These carry the weight of condensed layers of meaning – visually as well as linguistically. Some seem to melt at the edges into their own shadows, reminding us of something we rarely normally notice – that the interchange between reality and illusion is an everyday experience. This kind of effect relies greatly on the attention to detail in the precise choices which Eleanor Wood makes about how they are displayed – the nature of the frames, their proportions and the positioning of the work within them.

These choices are equally important in the later 'Configuration' series and they too exhibit the trademark subtlety of touch and execution we have come to associate with this artist. This time she draws inspiration from the miniscule – tiny holes in chalk-like pebbles found on the beach – while also considering the magnificence of stone circles and the immensity of constellations. On paper behind the glass, separated from us in their own relativities of space and time, similarities outweigh differences and our imaginations deal easily with the slippage in scale.

The monumental and the tenuous come together again in the 'Silent dialogues' series, though these seem much more allied to the organic – the biological or botanical. As in all the others there is a mesmeric effect produced by repetition and mirroring of images, but wax, graphite and pigments soften, merge and stain, reminiscent of cells, skin – wafer thin specimens on a laboratory slide perhaps – or delicate fossil traces. One moment we are immersed in the world of the microscopic and the next, standing back, the image in its central position on the wide plane of the paper becomes something much bigger; something that is totemic in its magnitude.

Writing about the 'Silent dialogues' series Eleanor gives us an insight into their process.

"Absences and ghosts of humble objects used in making are abandoned before conclusion. Strips of cardboard, lengths of wire, pins and tape protect the surface and interrupt the journey of the paint. Watercolor, like muddy pools overflow and go away forming islands, residues and sediments overnight as it dries and I sleep."

They record activity and log time, with sparse color as a facsimile of silence. Nothing of the manner of their execution is hidden. Every mark has its part to play and bears silent witness. We see ruled pencil lines, as in a preliminary measuring out of the territory, rust left behind by small piercing metal pins and staples, holes remaining in the paper after they have been removed, staining from small strips of cardboard used in masking against the seepage of watercolor. There is no attempt to bury the evidence. The evidence is the history, is the process, is the work. All are simple, unassuming, everyday

things leaving the frailest of traces. Yet despite, or rather because of their modesty, they have a profound effect.

Eleanor Wood's work has a quality that makes the finished pieces seem 'inevitable'. It is the sense of recognition that is the hallmark of all art that perfectly encapsulates experience.

Sara Latham Bell 2002