

Christine Borland Preserves

Exhibition 2 December 2006 – 28 January 2007

Christine Borland is one of Scotland's most internationally-recognised artists. Trained at Glasgow School of Art and part of the generation of artists that includes Roderick Buchanan, Nathan Coley and Douglas Gordon, she first came to prominence with her inclusion in Aperto at the Venice Biennale in 1993, and From Life, a solo exhibition at Tramway in Glasgow in 1994. In 1995 she was selected for The British Art Show 4, and her work has regularly been seen internationally in major group and solo exhibitions since then. In 1997 she was nominated for the Turner Prize.

Preserves brings together a selection of existing, recent and new work in an attempt to trace some of the most important themes in Borland's practice. Much of the existing work, though it has been seen before abroad, is exhibited here for the first time in Scotland. Borland's art is a rigorous, yet evolving process. Beginning with an object or idea, she probes and interrogates it. Her artistic means are extremely varied, encompassing sculpture, drawing, print-making and installation, and regularly involve the help of experts outside the field of art. Her primary subject is human identity – individual and collective, present and historical - and this exhibition presents a number of ways in which she has engaged with this.

On the ground floor, the work is primarily concerned with individual identity, approached more or less obliquely by way of the body.

Bullet Proof Breath (2001) is a hand-blown glass representation of the branching bronchia of a human lung, partially wrapped in spider silk extracted from a golden orb weaver spider. This work

began with Borland's unlikely discovery that the American military have researched spider silk as a potentially bullet-proof material. Emphasising the dual protective/destructive implications of this, here the artist uses spider silk to threaten rather than protect human health, the silk binding the delicate branches of the lungs, clogging them up and preventing their efficient working. The sculpture collects together several ideas which are important to Borland's practice, chief among these being an interest in medicine as a field of enquiry dedicated to the protection and perpetuation of the human body, and an awareness of shooting as an activity intimately, if paradoxically, connected with it.

Throughout her career, Borland has made a number of works which involve shooting or the idea of shooting, using objects which share a close relationship to the human body. This may be symbolic, as with the apple, judaeo-christian progenitor of the entire human race, or more practical, as with shoes that cannot but stand in for an absent human presence. Blanket **Blanket Used on Police Firing Range, Berlin: Repaired** (1993) was made from a blanket used to cover the sandbank behind the target on a police firing range. During the making of a different work, Borland noticed and retrieved the blanket, removed the spent bullet fragments and darned the holes. The making of the work was an act of recuperation and reparation, themes that again resonate throughout her on-going practice and which result in an intensely affective object – a blanket, used to enfold, protect and warm, itself in need of a little human kindness.

While *Bullet Proof Breath* is made with and about breath, the elusive, ephemeral stuff of life, other works in the exhibition begin with bone, that which endures. **Supported** (1990/1999) uses dust,

the archetypal expression of human beginning and ending, to reclaim a ghostly image from a human spine and hip bone. Borland makes the work by laying replica bones onto a glass shelf, then causing dust to fall on them. The bones are then removed, so that their negative image is cast as a shadow on the wall beneath. The work recalls the basic human link between bones and dust – 'dust though art, and unto dust shalt thou return' (Genesis 3, 19), 'ashes to ashes, dust to dust' (Funeral service, Book of Common Prayer). From dust, signifier of our common mortality, Borland resurrects the body, restoring it to ephemeral, fleeting new life as an image.

In **Second Class Male, Second Class Female** (1996), image becomes likeness as Borland seeks to recover the identities of individuals sold as specimen skeletons by osteological suppliers. The bronze heads of the male and female (deemed 'second class' due to the quality of their bones as medical specimens rather than for any other reason) were crafted according to the process used by the police in an attempt to trace the identity of crime victims from skeletal remains. The work restores identity and dignity to its subjects, bringing them back to light and some kind of life. A similar impulse lies behind **Cet Etre-la, c'est a toi de le creer! Vous devez la creer! (This being you must create)**. The work consists of a sequence of eighty slides taken secretly with a spy camera in the Museum of Anatomy in Montpellier in France, shown together with the spy camera and anatomical images drawn and traced from *Gray's Anatomy* before Borland's visit to the Museum, permission for which had been granted solely on the understanding that she was intending to make anatomical drawings in the space. The work reveals the Museum to be a horrific treasure-trove of human remains, taken, as Borland has commented, 'without consent and misappropriated then stolen back by (her) work'.

Upstairs, Borland turns her attention to the natural world and its place in the development of our medical and scientific understanding of humanity as a collective, social body. **The History of Plants According to Women, Children and Students** (2002/2006) is a sequence of printed plates taken from the sixteenth century illustrated herbal *Significant Notes of The History of Plants* written by Leonard Fuchs. Borland's interest in the herbal was aroused when, during research, she came across the Scottish vicar Mark Jameson, whose annotated copy of the herbal was donated to Glasgow University Library after his death. Jameson had a special interest in medicinal herbs, and it appeared that he planned to establish a physic garden near the university. Unusually, his garden was to have specialised in plants known to affect the female reproductive system, and his notes mark out plants thought at the time to be 'ecbollic' - that is those that stimulate uterine contractions. Borland's reproductions of the plates are coloured, according to 16th century custom, by a team of women.

Two trees, historically symbolic, and here symbolised, complete the exhibition. The first is the apple tree under which Isaac Newton is said to have had the revelatory moment that led to the formulation of his theory of gravity. The tree, in Woolsthorpe Manor in Lincolnshire, has survived and still fruits. Borland has acquired a number of the apples, which she has turned into jelly, a traditionally feminine, anonymously domestic activity to contrast with Newton's international scientific reputation.

Newton's apple tree is joined by Hippocrates's plane tree, under which he was supposed to have taught medicine in the 5th century BC. Hippocrates's famous treatise on the history of disease is now enshrined in the Hippocratic Oath, and the Greek government makes gifts of the seeds of the tree – tree of knowledge – to medical genetics establishments around the world. The bleached leaves of one such tree, outside the Department of Medical Genetics at Glasgow University, feature in

Spirit Collection: Hippocrates (1999), currently on show at the Gallery of Modern Art in Edinburgh, and reappear in the limited edition Borland has produced on the occasion of this exhibition. In the major new sculpture **Support Work (Hippocrates 1:075)** (2006), Borland turns her attention to the tree itself, now ageing and ailing and in need of support. She has reproduced the man-made skeleton of supports that now sustains the tree, leaving us to imagine it impossibly arching above us.

Due to the associations that have collected around them, both Newton's apple tree and Hippocrates' plane tree live primarily in the imagination, and it is on this capacity of objects almost involuntarily to gather meaning to them that much of Borland's work depends. The meaning in which the artist is primarily interested is that which may help to shed light on the condition of being human. She treats Hippocrates's plane tree, as she treats bone, blankets, breath and dust, as persistently significant material from which she can bring something pertinent to human identity to light and to life. Ultimately, her work is concerned with re-visualising that which is no longer there, with finding ways imaginatively to cross back over the line dividing the body from the self, the specimen from the individual, in order that she might recuperate something of the essence of human life.

Exhibition Catalogue

160pp, hardback, 140 col. illustrations, £19.95

This major publication brings together the principal themes and preoccupations of Borland's practice. Published on the occasion of the exhibition organised by The Fruitmarket Gallery, it vastly extends the scope of this exhibition, including a tremendous range of work made between 1990 and 2006 and features essays by Katrina Brown, Charles Esche, Greg Hilty, Ian Hunt, Maria Lind, medical historian Ruth Richardson (author of *Death, Dissection and the Destitute*) and a new interview with Christine Borland by fellow artist and friend Craig Richardson.



Christine Borland has created a limited edition Edition of 100, £150 framed

The exhibition DVD is available from the bookshop priced £15.

The exhibition will tour to The Collection, Lincoln 10 Feb – 8 May 2006



For full details and a list of all events which accompany this exhibition **refer to an Events Calendar**

Available as



Artist's Talk: Christine Borland in conversation with curator and writer Katrina Brown

Saturday 2 December, 3pm. Free. Booking essential.

Making Art: Children's Workshop

Saturday 9 December, 12.30–4.30pm.

Tickets £7/£5 concession. Suitable for 8–11 year olds.

Booking essential.

An ideal opportunity to do some Christmas shopping while the kids enjoy a practical workshop. Artist Charlotte Jones leads participants to create suspended sculptures. Delivered by The Fruitmarket Gallery and The City Art Centre.

Talk: An uncomfortable art; the strategies of Christine Borland

Wednesday 17 January, 7–8pm. Free. Booking essential.

Dr Andrew Patrizio, writer, curator and Director of Research Development at Edinburgh College of Art, discusses Borland's use of research, and her dialogue with other specialists.

Ways of Seeing Gallery Tour

Thursday 18 January, 11.30am–1.30pm. Free.

Booking essential.

A guided tour of the exhibition for over 60s led by Education Manager Tracy Morgan and freelance educator Mary Keegan.

Talk: Pages from the story of healing plants in Scotland

Thursday 25 January, 7–8pm. Free.

Booking essential.

Ian Edwards, Head of Interpretation at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh has an interest in ethnobotany, which has involved fieldwork where he has collected information on traditional uses of plants and their cultural significance. In this talk he explores historic herbal remedies employed by women in Scotland.

Secondary School Group Visits

The Gallery encourages teachers attending the Secondary School Art Teachers' Workshop to book a free class visit to the Callum Innes exhibition. Assistance with transport costs, a guided tour of the exhibition and a resource pack are provided.

Reading Room

Resource material and an exhibition interpretation film presentation of Curator David Hopkins discussing the work in the exhibition is available in the Gallery reading room. The exhibition film is available on DVD from the bookshop priced £15.

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