

CONVERSATION: CLINTON GAROFANO & CAROLE ROBERTS
20 OCTOBER – 14 NOVEMBER 2006

Absolute truths are not the concern of the works in this exhibition. Clinton Garofano and Carole Roberts come together through their paintings at The Cross Art Projects to create a dialogue between Garofano's interest in Buddhist teachings on impermanence and Roberts's interest in changing energy within nature.

Garafano and Roberts have been colleagues since the early 1980s. As well as their solo exhibitions, pursuing personal areas of enquiry in contemporary art and life, they have participated in several group exhibitions. In this exhibition their works appear to sit in completely different registers— dark and foreboding from Garofano, light and animated from Roberts. However, what we are shown is not simple dualism but different aspects from the same focus of contemplation.

Garafano's work draws from personal experience, and is partly concerned with reinterpreting Buddhist teachings on impermanence and finding relevance within a contemporary context. His piece in this exhibition consists of 10 darkly painted antique frames, modest in scale. Inside each is text in a comic-strip typeface, painted with a black background on glass. Although the style of script gives a sly playfulness, characteristic of most of Garofano's work, we are left feeling unsettled.

Each frame contains a colloquial statement—'dead obvious' and 'dead serious' are examples. There is nothing more obvious than 'dead obvious' and nothing more serious than 'dead serious'. Here language is prescribing a meaning of absoluteness to the word 'death'. Death is an area rarely explored in contemporary art. In the West it almost belongs to the realm of the unmentionable, the opposite of life, beauty and happiness. Buddhist teachings regard death as just a transition point in this life. Death therefore is not absolute or finite, nor is it something that is necessarily feared. It is, however, prepared for throughout life so that you pass through death with as much ease and fearlessness as possible.

Carole Roberts's interest in spatial concerns has manifested in both her public design projects and art works, incorporating ancient architectural motifs and using primary materials such as tree branches and metals such as lead.

Primo Levi stated in *The Periodic Table*: 'lead is the metal of death. It is a metal which you feel is tired of transforming itself and that does not want to transform itself anymore.' (Michael Joseph, London, 1985, p 87.) The alchemists' dream of transmuting base metal into gold was a process they often symbolised as the purification of the soul. In the new paintings of this current exhibition Roberts has mobilized the metaphysical properties of lead of her earlier works and converted it into gold.

Roberts's 'Energy Paintings' are of intense pigments of gold, blue and pink suspended within leaf motifs that rest upon a white ground. Each colour radiates an enigmatic light and the gold shimmers with illusive qualities. Colour is used symbolically. For example, in 'Heart Garden' pink is the colour of the heart and compassion. Blue is not so much a peaceful, calming blue but a velvet ultramarine blue with the electrical intensity we associate with the French artist, Yves Klein. Roberts's gold, that noblest of metals, acts as a metaphorical conductor for healing.

As Roberts traces hundreds of curvilinear outlines of leaves onto the canvas they become a moving energy source within larger oval and circular forms. They are a matrix of ever changing particles of matter and we feel the energy swirling within. In others the energy patterns of the leaves disperse over the canvas in a slower and calmer manner—energy at a different speed. It seems we are being asked to perceive these works not through our mind, through thinking, but to sense the life within the forms themselves.

Garafano's and Roberts's works in this exhibition show us the 'beingness' of existence and, for them, that is enough.

Carole Roberts