

Niall de Buitlear

16 February to 22 March 2008

Preview 15 February 2008

The Lab, Dublin

The arbitrariness of concepts of art... has a positive social function. To claim that we must take account of this arbitrariness in our 'theorising' is not to endorse a laissez-faire subjectivism, but rather to require that the values should not be allowed to be judges on their own case. ... The signs in art carry the values of their prior social usage...

Art may disarticulate the codes we have in order to synthesise new articulations from the pieces.

Victor Burgin - *Work and Commentary*

When an important part of your practice is walking the streets, exploring the urban environment, searching for your materials, 'bookies' pens, cardboard boxes, and plastic crates, "values of prior social usage" become embedded in your work.

Following my introduction to Niall de Buitlear in 2006, I have continued to visit his studio and meet with him to discuss aspects of his work on a fairly regular basis. It is through these meetings and studio visits that I have had the opportunity to become better acquainted with his practice. Initially, what interested me was the way in which he was working – the prioritising of ideas, the seemingly arbitrary selection of concepts, the committing to a self-imposed set of rules and constraints, seeing things through regardless of duration. He was, at that time, working across a range of disciplines and media, including sculpture, drawing, photography, text, artist's books and installation. Through each he managed to embody an engagement with the relationships between the process, the materials and the resulting forms.

In his work the *Street Artifacts Series*, a set of photographs that documented the artist's encounter with partially buried detritus (fragments or objects protruding from the city streets), we can see an early pre-occupation with a kind of archaeology of the mundane, the everyday. An affiliation with the practice of uncovering, charting, collecting the things we could have played a part in the construction of. In a similar vane, his work *The Found Bookmark Archive*, consisting of a collection of 'artefacts' he had encountered, chanced upon, discovered in between the pages of library books, continues a process of recording; notating and re-presenting existing forms together in the creation of a new set of articulations.

Central to both of these works are the relationships that are formed between the found or readymade object and the processes of collation and the resulting form, the re-presentation. When talking to Niall, he explains that his sculptures are frequently built up from smaller parts, which come together to form a more complex whole in a similar way to how an organism is made up of cells. Nicolas Bourriaud, in *Relational Aesthetics*, wrote "Transitivity is as old as the hills. It is a tangible property of the artwork. Without it, the work is nothing other than a dead object crushed by contemplation... Any

artwork might thus be defined as a relational object, like the geometric place of a negotiation with countless correspondents and recipients."

Niall's *Thesaurus Generated Text Loop*, (text) series that featured in the autumn 2006 edition of Circa Magazine took pairs of words with opposite meanings such as "beginning" and "end" and using a thesaurus to create a chain of synonyms broke down the gaps between the two opposites. Employing the properties of the Thesaurus, the suggesting of alternative words and the slight slippage of the original meaning as the process, a pair of words as the (found) object and the circle as a form illustrates the interrelations of the concept. Through the work he also brings to the fore the importance of and seamless shift between play, experimentation, repetition, labour and work ethic. Again this can be seen in his series of drawings where he attempts to trace, to redraw a line around his initial self-motivated attempts at drawing a perfect circle. This series of *Ring Drawings* does not mimic the confidence, simplicity and craftsmanship of Giotto's famous demonstration: instead the drawings present us with the tangible properties of inevitable failure.

Niall's methodological approach, a forging of symbiotic relationships and resonance between the initial building blocks, the processes of manipulation and the resultant forms, appears to be shifting focus. With recent works such as *White Cube* (woven cable ties) and *Untitled* (burnt matchsticks), Niall appears to have prioritised a commitment to a primarily sculptural practice. The sculptural processes have in turn led him to a new approach to drawing involving the accumulation of simple building blocks. *Growth* (a work consisting of the accumulation of found pens over the course of a year) typifies his commitment to duration and the role of duration in his process, which is becoming more readily apparent. The transformations taking place in the resultant forms of the work have begun to take on a more organic nature. The shift in emphasis away from the rigidly conceptual practice, away from a strict set of rules in the earlier work to a more flexible, fluid approach, sign posts a new trajectory in his practice. What remains central is the use of found materials, which means in even the most abstract of his sculptural work there is some recognisable element. In this the work can be seen to embody a coexistence of the abstract and the figurative that enable his new articulations to remain tangibly rooted in the world of the everyday.

Peter Richards



Untitled, Till Rolls, approximately 200 pcs, 2007



Cover: *Untitled*, Matchsticks and Mirror, 2007
 Centre: Detail, *Growth*, Bookies pens and milk crate, 2006-2007
 Below: *Shell*, Cardboard Boxes, 2007

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Dublin City Council is pleased to invite you
 To the opening of an exhibition of new work by
Niall de Buitlear

At the Lab
 On Friday 15th February 2008 at 6pm