

Ruminations of Order – by [Pennylane Shen](#)

CityScape Gallery March 2013

At first glance upon viewing the exhibition *Ruminations of Order* at CityScape Gallery, one would be impressed by how open, bright and modern the space feels without the aloof and sterile sense often associated with contemporary public gallery shows. The abundance of negative space in artist Angela Gooliaff's delicate illustrations on paper paired with Rosemary Burden's cream-coloured paper cut-outs echoes this inviting feeling. However, still accents of bold colour in Judy D Shane's photographs pierce through amongst linear silhouettes in Debbie Westergaard Tuepah's sculptures. This combination of textures, shapes, colours and voids make themselves known in the visual field.

The tall ceilings and relatively small confines of the CityScape Gallery pose a challenge to any group. It is clear that the installation of the exhibition was a deeply considered task on its own. The two dimensional works create a dialogue with the sculptural ones. The monochrome white works initiate a question while the coloured textural pieces answer.

However, it is the idea of metamorphosis that conceptually stitches the work of these four artists together. Changes of materials and media, conceptions of practice and theory, as well questions of scale unify what might otherwise appear to be a too disparate group of artists. If history has proven anything, it is that art is dynamic. This might be the closest thing we have contemporarily to a definition of this elusive pursuit.

Art defies our expectations, resists our attempts to categorize and identify it, and at its best, art challenges our notions of stability and immutability. Such is the work of these four artists as they each individually question: the binary opposition of craft and art; the boundary between the written word and the sculptural space; the surprisingly still fresh argument between paint and photography; materiality; and the longstanding dialogue between the micro- and macro cosmic.

Debbie Westergaard Tuepah

Indices I, Node 6 (coil), and Incessant Notions of Data III

Installation and sculptural artist Debbie Tuepah comes from a background in marketing. Central to the pursuit of marketing in all its forms is value: the identification of value, the establishment of value, and most importantly, the transmission of value to the public. Market research, at its most penetrating, not only measures an object's value to us, but determines this value.

Amassing and analyzing data about location, demographics, spending patterns and purchase histories, an organization aims to know what we want, and what we will pay for it, before we do.

What comes first, an object that inspires our want, or our want that inspires an object? And where exactly is *the value* in this process or end product? Tuepah surely navigated these issues in her marketing work, and now relays to us as we reckon with her sculpting of mass-produced

materials – namely yarn, acrylic, and urethane - into art.

Acrylic and urethane - at once industrially synthesized products and standard art media - are poignant choices for Tuepah's reflections. She applies them in artistically non-standard ways, and in their more common terms of commercial production. Paint, for example, is not present *only* as form, line, shape, and stroke, but as acrylic *itself*; as *plastic*, and as *sculpture*. The application of paint as sheets, or as a dipped coating, against other materials, draws attention to its physical makeup and texture rather than to anything it represents. Rather than hanging mute and unyielding on the wall, these paintings invade 3-dimensional space, forcing the viewer to navigate around them and deal with their presence. Yarn on the other hand, the traditional medium often associated with folk, textile and craft art, becomes elevated to 'high' art. We, the audience, are compelled to recognize its value as yet another medium of expression, equally valid alongside its cousins of more esteemed pedigree.

Thus Tuepah calls to attention our act of evaluating - certainly aesthetically and possibly monetarily - these sculpted objects that contain, in their materials, application, and concept, a fundamental questioning of the act of placing value on anything. She calls some pieces "nodes", others "indices", networking yarn and paint into unique visual systems that thwart the kind of market systems they symbolize. For Tuepah, the nodes operate as minute data bytes of information that make up our everyday surplusage of information: we are literally enveloped by her hanging threads of information. The indices however, are more precise data visualizations of actual statistics converted into 3D form: meant to imply that while the aggregate of information may be overwhelming and incomprehensible, it's discreet packets of information are eminently approachable.

Approaching Tuepah's sculpture entitled "Node 6", one may initially interpret it as a mass coil of computer cables, intimately coordinating and transferring the mountains of information flowing through their innards. When we discover that these vessels are actually yarn dipped in acrylic and coiled amongst each other, these initial tech-heavy, corporate-oriented perceptions gradually meet with more homely images of the cottage industry and their textile products. The stuff of life flows through the hidden centers of this coiled form. The underlying nest representation emerges, seen as nurturing and feeding us rather than simply connecting us. In the end, the plasticity of the piece is counterbalanced by its evocation of the nest as someplace comfortable and comforting, an icon in the natural world. We too, assemble places of comfort with detritus, memorabilia, collections of our identity. For us, Tuepah evokes nothing less than home.

Tuepah's artwork raises questions about our surrounding economic atmosphere, but also what role it plays in making our domestic comforts possible. Through the creation and presentation of her works, she manages to question the most basic notions of utility, production efficiency, and cost as well as what role they play in the interwoven nature of our lives, pursuits, products and passions.

Rosemary Burden
Butterfly Factory

Wood is chewed by insects into paper. Humans make books from paper, and words into books. Books disintegrate. Their component words represent to our eyes things other than ink, paper, or letters. Butterfly. Cocoon. Colony. Swarm. Waspish. Words are not paint or sculpture, nor is ink; but what they have in common is the ability to affect our perceptions, knowledge, and experience to usher in the appreciation of things not actually there. All inhabit the realm of imagination. But, it is precisely in the realm of imagination that reality has its beginning. Idea becomes hypothesis, hypothesis becomes experiment, and experiment becomes reality. Language symbols share a property of atoms, in that only a small number of them (26 letters in English, and 112 elements in the known universe, counting the extra 20 we synthesize) can combine to create a vastly greater number of, shall we say, things.

Rosemary Burden's *Butterfly Factory* meditate on sequencing, reconfiguration, growth, processing and decay paralleled in nature and artistic creation. While Burden does not belabour her interests in physics, biology and chaos theory in the execution of this work, her floating paper sculptures are grounded in a reverence for the multivarious, permeable, and microcosmic that make up any larger whole. She works backwards through the processes that put books together in the first place, releasing pages from their binding and then pressed shapes from their pages, capturing words and letters along the way as she transforms them into the realm of sculpture.

While Burden skillfully avoids heavy-handedness, there is a striking interplay of labour and levity in her work. She has clearly reflected at length on the aesthetic relationship between airiness and weight. Particle physics tells us that the actual solid material within a block of metal actually only comprises the "size" of a fragment of a grain of rice, given the proportionately vast amounts of empty space within any atom. Burden's processes cannot be anything less than painstaking, yet her pieces fly with play, transience, fragility, chance, and the void itself.

The paper butterflies that emerge in dense swarms from her accordingly emptied volumes, if stacked, would take up a mere corner of a reading desk. If somehow reverted to their wooden origins, they would comprise a still smaller block. Shakespeare appointed the poet as one who "*gives to airy nothing a local habitation and a name.*" A butterfly – real or paper – weighs little more than the air suspending it. Words too, travel as virtually weightless marks on paper, and are still lighter when released through the spoken word into the air itself. Aware of these materials and the particles composing them, Burden is consciously filling gallery space with space. As the printed book faces extinction, she releases new sculptural life through their systematic reshaping and reimagining.

Judy D Shane
The Painted Photograph

Painting and photography have challenged each other's boundaries since the inception of the daguerreotype. The earliest trend was for each medium to claim opposing turf – photography asserting unprecedented verisimilitude and detail while painting furthered its own, well, painterly aspects via impressionism and subsequent abstraction. Colour, form, brushstroke and visual interpretation defied likenesses and claimed the expressive and metaphysical as its own.

Another trend emerged as artists in each discipline realized they could take the best qualities of either medium to improve their own. Photographers accumulated tools and techniques in their exploration to the farther reaches of abstraction, while painters used photographic sensibilities, photographs themselves, and even photo development processes to mimic and, in the best cases, reclaim fine representational accuracy.

By the twenty-first century, transmigrations of painting and photography, sprung by the advance of digital media and editing technologies and, along with the increased validity of multi-media forms, had rendered their borders so porous as to defy distinction. Post-produced photographs, painted hyperrealism, art-historical-referential photo-conceptualism; these art forms are so familiar to the art world now as to appear commonplace.

What denotes Judy D Shane's contribution to the ongoing multilogue among the inter-splintering arenas of painting and photography is the breadth of her reach between them. If we can place non-representational abstraction on one end of a spectrum and detailed realism on the other, the abstraction of a brush stroke exists to represent nothing but itself. While at the other end, maximum resolution and detail is delivered to us through the camera's lens. Shane bends this spectrum into a circle giving us both ends at once.

From the title *The Painted Photograph* onwards, Shane's series knowingly revolves the order of these media's mutual influences. We are looking in fact at photographed paint. And yet, the photographed brushstroke – itself highly rendered in both the painterly *and* the digital sense – is cut, copied, and juxtaposed in a field of other such images. Her composited artworks are thus both brushstroke and pixel. The power of editing has been introduced to both painting and photography.

As with Pollock and Riopelle, the textures, viscosity, dimensionality, movement, and accidents of both form and colour inherent in the nature of paint itself become the subject in Shane's pieces. However, along with the means and vocabulary of abstract expressionism, and the physical tool of the camera, Shane has equipped herself with the digital tools of cut, copy, layer and crop. In most paintings, however non-representational, the dried paint has finality as a record of the artists' gestures. In Shane's work, the finished stroke regains fluidity through digital manipulation. The artist takes on the ultimate role of composer: her gestures swung to sorting, shuffling, copying, and arranging. Elements of chance and pattern are controlled through the

intrusion of the editing suite, and the gap (whether it exists any longer) between the painting and photograph is bridged.

Shane becomes both creator and destroyer of worlds. Her overall visual effects provoke a stimulating disorientation between opposing poles of discipline and luck, manual and mechanical, finish and start, dimensional and flat, variety and repetition, photograph and paint. Neither the painted nor photographed world can remain stable in her work; the tenets that comprise bedrock in their genres are called into question until they shatter. Our perceptual maps are set to re-charting; shifting these opposing poles to the point where they unite in the formation of a new world.

Angela Gooliaff
Ruminations of Order and
Mis-Under-Stand-ings(s)

Immediately upon entering the gallery three panoramic drawings of an ant trail greet the viewer at the door. They lead down the narrow corridor and into the gallery space. These true-to-life size meticulous drawings are by artist Angela Gooliaff. The exquisitely framed, white on white pieces are connected by a trail of ants drawn directly onto the gallery wall. Playful, yet carefully calculated and cold to the eye, the title of piece *Delicate, but Determined* is more than fitting.

Angela Gooliaff's body of work, interspersed throughout the exhibition, seems to concern itself with dualities; the micro and the macro, civilization and primitivism, order and chaos, destruction and creation - concepts historians, physicists and philosophers alike have grappled with for as long as their disciplines have existed. Staring into what seems like a limitless void of Gooliaff's perfect circle comprised of a multitude of ants, one is engulfed by these ideas. In the mass of repetition, configurations emerge, linger for a moment, dissipate, only to reconfigure in an endless procession.

There is a clear reference in these strands of ants to DNA patterns; the reference is layered, as if we are viewing those microscopic patterns from a distance to see the macroscopic biological forms they create. Meanwhile, these patterns are comprised of those most systematic and pattern-forming creatures – ants. Gooliaff deeply embraces the spirit of this show in her commitment to draw us out of the time pressured over-stimulus concomitant with current day systems. Draw she does – each ant is skillfully rendered, even to serve as a single unit in a much larger visual pattern. These larger patterns are composed carefully and beautifully – recalling crop circles (specifically referenced in one title, and including the suggestion of a far distant vantage point), Fibonacci's golden sequence, and that exemplar of balance between intricate detail and overall form – the mandala. Gooliaff's macro-compositions would thus be striking even if comprised of dots, or other simpler 'pixels'; but, by taking the far greater pains to articulate satisfyingly detailed insects, both the micro and macro retain their interest value, as opposed to one overwhelming the other. By taking the far greater pains to articulate each moment in the pattern as a complete visual unit – a satisfyingly detailed insect – Gooliaff deftly interweaves the visual interest of the whole with that of each part. An artist who chooses to work in fine detail enters an alternate time frame, during which a small area of canvas or paper becomes the meditative focus of minutes, even hours. The artifact of this process – the work of

art - radiates the stillness and patience so clearly invested in its making. The artist has stepped aside from our usual modes of bustle and created a rewarding arena for us viewers to do the same.

A further duality embedded in the title *Do We Eat the Red Ones Last* involves destruction and creation. Gooliaff mentions in her artist statement that the themes in her work often “mirror human behavior, question established socially acceptable ideas.” Along with a lighthearted reference to the Smarties candies and our tendency to save the “best for last”, the title nods to another tendency, shared by ants and human alike: the practice of weeding out our weakest members for the greater good of the strong.

Another dark theme involving life and death hovers over this apparently light work through Gooliaff's use of spirals and circles. Her use of spirals, as a last example, is without accident - these thin and expansive forms, applied in context with ants, compel a dark resonance. In an ant colony, individuals follow the scent trail of pheromones left by those in front, to retrieve food or building materials, conquer new land, or return home. The behaviour is innate, efficient, and key to over 100 million years of species survival (we Homo Sapiens been around for well less than one percent of that time). Occasionally, though, the scent trail becomes confused, possibly mixed in with trace scents from previous colonies; each ant follows the one ahead of it in a continuous, massive circle, until all die of exhaustion. There is no shortage of metaphor here in the image of a complex and accomplished society falling prey to the very patterns on which it thrives. Overall, Gooliaff has smuggled considerable depth and gravity through her deceptively light, spacious handling of graphite on paper.

Concluding Statement

Each of the artists in *Ruminations of Order* has emerged from involvement in complex systems that surround us – markets and marketing, photography and digital media, language and writing and even the meta-cycle of life and death – to offer us a release from these. Significantly, their means of release from systems is to invent new ones. This gesture ultimately affirms our affinity with – and place within – orders, patterns, particles, and interconnections that are fundamental to the natural world of which we are a part. These artists complement our essential tendencies to be affected by our surroundings, and to affect them ourselves. It is no coincidence that metamorphosis – a process where elements of nature respond to, and then influence other elements of nature – plays consistently through this work. Paint becomes photograph, and then photo collage of “paint”; marketing / business modes morph into conceptual art and sculpture; text becomes shape; butterflies emerge not from caterpillars but from book pages; old becomes new; ant-sized micro scales become macro; shapes of individuals are patterned into shapes of groups.

Not only are we part of systems; we are as innately builders of them. Language, learned behaviours, work processes, communities and inventories of our surrounding resources - these are essential to our species survival, and to our creativity and vitality. However, as a species we have reached a point of over-saturation. Certain organizational systems are not clearly serving us, while too clearly petition us to serve them. Rosemary Burden, Judy D Shane, Angela Gooliaff,

and Debbie Tuepah invite us back to a present experience in which our natural kinship with systems is honoured and rewarded.

In the still space of a gallery we can engage with the moment of aesthetic and personal connection to their work. This work complements our own enjoyment of designing, compiling, processing, and ordering, by featuring these elements as the main focus of viewing. We are not being persuaded, market-analyzed, targeted, or even presented with an image (as art materials, and words in books, typically do), beyond the visual properties of the materials themselves. These materials exist in their own right, and if they reflect anything, it is their right to exist as such.

Each of the artists in *Ruminations of Order* embraces artfully one of the basic purposes of a gallery space. They offer us a stepping out from the mundane, the of-the-world, which is still, as William Wordsworth lamented over two centuries ago, "too much with us." They draw us to the present and create new spaces, new worlds, for us to be ever exploring and ever still questioning.