Megan Sprague

*Atlas Shrugged, 2008, 4000 plaster figurines, DVD projection 5 min looped*

*Atlas Shrugged* is one of a series of recent works that reflects my shift in thinking about the relationship of the individual to community. The consequence of the finished work, questions not only our relationship to each other but in addition our relationship with the earth.

It was Jean-Luc Nancy that said to think the individual, the singular, first, before that of community is to think one’s existence in terms of absolutes, theoretical philosophical extremes, as atomized beings. Ultimately he believed that *there is no meaning if meaning is not shared*. An atomistic idea of an individual being, completely detached from its environment, oscillating in its own space and time, devoid and disconnected from all other atoms, individuals or its environment. In absolute terms, the individual atom shows us its meaninglessness. It has no capacity to be toward the other, it can rather only be unto itself. Nancy’s thinking does not diminish the relevance of the individual; rather the shift of focus is from thinking the individual first, to a different point of departure, the *being-with* of community.

This is the departure point I explore, the being-with of community rather than to think first from that of the individual. Four thousand individual cast figurines are juxtaposed against a digital projection of an individual, the artist, as Atlas the Greek Titan who holds the weight of the world on his shoulders. This work contrasts the individuality of the artist with the mass of the people. By drawing attention to the artist, I question the complicity I myself, an individual, and an artist play in the perpetuation of individualism.

The title of the work is borrowed from Ayn Rand’s book of the same title. In her book Rand promotes the idea that the accomplishments of one man should take primacy over the needs of the collective, and that man’s primary goal is the pursuit of happiness. ‘My philosophy, in essence, is the concept of man as a heroic being, with his own happiness as the moral purpose of his life, with productive achievement as his noblest activity, and reason as his only absolute’. Rand’s text provided the platform for her philosophical work on Objectivism. The principles underlining Objectivism i.e. economic liberalism or laissez-fair capitalism gained a lot of currency both politically and economically in the 1950’s and 60’s. Today it is once again relevant. The reference to Rand is all the more relevant as it was Rand that characterized her philosophy as ‘a philosophy for living on earth,’ grounded in reality, and aimed at defining man's nature and the nature of the world in which he lives.

*Artist Statement 2008*

Sally Tsoutas

*Flux*

*Sally Tsoutas’ bank of four images entitled Flux is an exploration of the four basic elements earth, fire, water, air, at a subatomic level.*

The artist is passionate about unified theory, and research into the connectivity of the universe. The idea that objects are not separate from one another or the whole, but are an accumulation of variously arranged subatomic particles, arranged at different densities and vibrating at different frequencies, fascinates her. Tsoutas has used grain and blur, to visually explore these four basic elements that are fundamental to all sciences, in an effort to reflect upon the notion that the elements are different types of energy, in a constant state of flux and interaction with one another.
Tsoutas takes a great interest in the work of modern science’s theoretical physicists and their efforts to shift scientific paradigm to better answer the mysteries of the unempirical. The greatest paradigm shift of all it seems though, is the realisation that some phenomena cannot be empirically proven, and yet can still exist, and that eastern science has understood this anomaly for centuries. Through her images Tsoutas celebrates the simplicity of the eastern perspective, that the elements are phases, or movements, describing relationship between phenomena.

Artist Statement March 2009

Time

Sally Tsoutas’ series of eight photographs entitled *Time* is a meditation on the residue of the moments of life. Tsoutas has been interested in the science of our existence for a long while, particularly the polarity between empirically proven phenomena and that which appears to exist but is not yet proven by western scientific enquiry. The study of energy, the elements and the nature of change intrigues her.

Tsoutas’ choice of tool for expression is the camera, which is an apparatus capable of provoking reaction and thought by capturing nothing but light upon a subject at a particular moment in time. The subject exists or existed, as did the moment, which itself passes, but the photographic impression of it is just light, far subtler than the subject itself.

Subtler still however, is the alchemy the photographer experiences at the instant the shutter is released at the chosen moment. The chaos and frenetic action that so permeates our busy working lives was the catalyst for Tsoutas to begin to notice and appreciate the beauty and renewal in the seemingly mundane, as she traversed the backwaters of our existence en route from A to B.

Spilled coffee in the corner of a dirty garage, a shopping trolley swallowed by water, and a rusty stain on an old weathered wall.

In an effort to slow it down, Tsoutas has focused on time, and the way the four elements earth, fire, water and air, work upon each other within it. This has allowed her to touch on the fifth element, which Plato called Aether, or ‘Quintessence.’ Non existent for modern science, but very much a part of ancient Greek, Indian and Chinese science and thought, ether is nothing and infinite, has no qualities (neither hot, wet nor dry), is incapable of change, and is subtler than light. Ether is a place of rest, and the domain of the higher soul.

The photographer knows of the cathartic sweetness that is felt, at the right moment, when all the elements fall into place, and a photograph is made. The paradox is that the act of preserving the moment, printing it, heralding it in a book or on a wall, in order to reflect and respond to it, denies this truth. The moment of clarity and the feeling of expansion has passed, and the brush with Ether becomes bound by thought. All that remains is the residue of the moment, which even though it is limited, has a beauty and purpose of its own.

This series celebrates pure observation, a universal action which can help to transcend our earthly manifestation and show us that which is without boundary; a purity for which humanity yearns and supposedly possesses, but seems only to be able to glimpse.

Artist Statement March 2009
Marilyn Walters

First Principle

My work is a celebration of water as the source of life arising from the pre Socratic idea of water as the First Principle, the essential substance from which all life originates and to which it ultimately returns. My paintings explore the representation of water in ancient and in contemporary cultures as well as the interaction of human communities with water in their material and spiritual lives. From the strip of white wake slashed across the sapphire harbour to the wonder of life below the water’s shimmering face; from the passage of the moon across a languid pool to the incessantly swirling waters of the Grand Canal, from the impenetrable curtain of a Sydney rainstorm to the dancing light that teases the grassy surface of the bay and pool, I am reminded of the constancy and the fragility of water.

I see in the water-like patterns carved in the stone of ancient Celtic tombs, as in the Nymphs of Monet and in Gaudi’s wondrous flowing mosaics, or indeed, in David Hockney’s playful splashes, an expression of the sacred, the mysterious, the eternal, the essential.

Artist Statement 2008