

THIS NEGLECTED MIRACLE

Pam McKinlay, Jesse-James Pickery and Emily Davidson

At a recent symposium to coincide with the centenary of the 1917 Russian Revolution, an exhibition titled *Art and Revolution* was curated by Peter Stupples.¹ The *Art and Revolution Symposium* sought to question the role of art and artists in the 1917 revolution, in the direction and momentum of art's agency, as well as discuss more generally the part art plays in the affairs of societies undergoing change.

What role might art and artists have in the swift surge of change? Can art lead the debate about the nature of a post-revolution future? What examples can we put forward from the past to give us some idea of the way to act as artists and theorists of the visual? What are the threats and what the opportunities for art and artists in the unfolding of revolution?²

The *Symposium* was held at the Dunedin School of Art, in Dunedin, on October 13-1, 2017, with the exhibition associated with the *Symposium* running from 9-21 October 2017. As in previous exhibitions curated by Peter Stupples, works in the exhibition also explored both aspirations and fears for the future, as well as considering the potential for art to shape points of (future) views. As Dr Louise Baillie says, "Artworks can represent for people and communities what words sometimes cannot."³ Art can particularly resonate with us when a situation is difficult to articulate, as in times of upheaval, uncertainty, pressure and change.

Down the Rabbit Hole Collective had a multi-authored art work in the *Art and Revolution Exhibition* which was a detail of a larger work and event, being prepared for 2019 around seed saving and exchange, bio diversity and food resilience. The theme of our work was a visual comment on "The Green Revolution."⁴

The installation of the artwork was intended as a form of a narrative space. "Narrative space is a broad term which is referred to in genres and settings as varied as novels and film (storytelling), theatre/drama and virtual reality (role-playing video games) and real-life environments (such as exhibitions and architecture). If, as Kant says, time and space are two of the fundamental categories that structure human experience, then narrative is how we communicate the story or sense of that experience. Narrative space is a way of organising our experiences and making meaning. Is there actually such a thing as a non-narrative space? Since the time of the Renaissance, narrative space in art has also provided a platform for continuous narrative in which several events can be shown in a single setting. However, the story need not be a story in the traditional sense—a narrative space may be a space which is used to convey or explore different themes and meanings."⁵

In this instance, the artwork was a kind of static image, intended as a story-telling tree, which included elements with which to unpack the history of The Green Revolution, its morphing into The Genomics Revolution and a starting point to explore the environmental, social and physical impacts on land and people. The story was told daily at artist floor talks. A pamphlet produced on a risograph was in the gallery at other times to cue viewers into the art work's intention.

This configuration of the **Down the Rabbit Hole Collective** 2017 included Pam McKinlay, Jesse-James Pickery Emily Davidson and Alice Anonymous, all usually of Dunedin.



Figures 1- 8 Installation view, details - Pam McKinlay, Jesse-James Pickery and Emily Davidson, *VERY. nearly. substantially. SIMILAR.* *, 2017. Shaped vine, up-cycled PTE plastic, hula hoop, muka, LED lights sneaky electronics (full beans), raku fired ceramics.

*The title of the work comes from claims made by a well-known multinational company which promotes heavy insecticide use and genomic modification and is currently at the heart of a backlog of complaints and lawsuits including new suits lodged in 2017 for a new product it launched last growing season.

PAMPHLET No. 4.

(ANOTHER TALE FROM THE 'UNDER THE TREE' SERIES - A NARRATIVE SPACE ABOUT FOOD CONTROL BY DOWN THE RABBIT HOLE)

VERY. NEARLY. SUBSTANTIALLY. SIMILAR

THE INTENSIFICATION OF AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE BETWEEN FROM THE 1930S WAS KNOWN AS THE GREEN REVOLUTION. IT INCLUDED NEW HIGH-YIELDING VARIETIES OF CROPS IN ASSOCIATION WITH CHEMICAL FERTILIZERS AND AGRO-CHEMICALS. OUR ATTEMPTS TO FEED AN EVER-INCREASING WORLD POPULATION, AND ATTEMPTS TO STAVE OFF FAMINE (AS DEFINED IN THE MALTHUSIAN TRAP) HAS LED US TO THE GENOMIC REVOLUTION. DO WE NEED TO REASSESS WHAT THE BEST WAY FORWARD IS – DO WE CONTINUE TO MINIMALISE GENETIC STOCK FOR SAKE OF YIELD, OR DO WE DIVERSIFY TO SAFEGUARD FOOD SECURITY IN A CHANGING ENVIRONMENT? CURRENT AGRICULTURAL PRACTICE FOCUSES ON BEING “WALL-STREET-FRIENDLY”. PLANT MATERIAL IS COLLATERAL AND IS COMMODIFIED IN THIS SYSTEM OF PRIVATIZATION. BUSINESS INTERESTS ARE INCREASINGLY INVOLVED IN THE PATENT LAND GRAB OF THE NEW GENOMIC LANDSCAPE, THE PRACTICE OF INDUSTRIAL SCALE FACTORY FARMING, FOOD PRODUCTION AND MONOCROPPING HAVE RESULTED IN INCREASED FOOD PRODUCTION AT THE LOSS OF BIO-DIVERSITY.

THE GREEN REVOLUTION

To control the people – control the food

To control the food – control the seed

“ Very. Nearly. Substantially. Similar ”

- promised feast or famine?

Sow not the seeds of dis-content

Reap what you sow,

This neglected miracle.

- A poem by Pam Phlaterre and Alice Anonymous in absentia.

REFERENCES

- 1 Bruce Munro, "Framing no ferment," *Otago Daily Times*, 9 October 2017, <https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/framing-no-ferment> (accessed 26 November 2017).
- 2 Call for Papers, Art and Revolution Symposium and Exhibition, <https://www.op.ac.nz/about-us/news-and-events/item/1945> (accessed 26 November 2017).
- 3 Quote by Dr Louisa Baillie in, Shane Gilchrist, "Agent of Change," *Otago Daily Times*, 13 October, 2016. <https://www.odt.co.nz/lifestyle/magazine/agent-change> (accessed 26 November 2017).
- 4 https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Green_Revolution (accessed 26 November 2017).
- 5 Pam Mckinlay, "On Caustics: A Conversation," *Junctures*, 15, <http://www.junctures.org/index.php/junctures/article/view/233/435> (accessed 26 November 2017).