

LANGUAGE OF DIS-EASE

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This exhibition* was a way of grappling with pictures of pain, fear and sadness that would allow the viewer to literally form those images themselves. Reading fictions, our imaginations provide images of the fictional landscape and characters through a relationship between the physical presence of language (written, spoken or visual) and the many meanings that can be constructed through it. In language's fluidity lies both its inherent vice and power.

For the exhibition, I wrote texts. I then asked colleagues to translate the texts into their own first language. I chose Greek, Mandarin, Arabic and German simply because I found the forms beautiful to view and/or lyrical to hear; and I had native speakers who were willing to translate my texts.

I was interested in the question of whether this manipulation of language would lead to a loss of emotion. Even within a language it is easy for the reader to be distracted, to disassociate from another's pain. For example, terms such as 'surgical strike' couch the tragedy of death in impersonal language.

The works collectively deal with personal tragedy, loss, or separation. Cultures may change, but a constant theme is our own individual knowledge of personal tragedy. However, all people filter meaning through their own experience. Translations infer the particular in the universal, while the reader and viewer remain foreign in their understanding.

The works represent a very specific and personal journey through the cultural ganglands of language and its duplicitous use. The poems are thick with grief and loss, reverting to raw emotion in a search for the universal. These emotions are the key to a shared experience of language. The act of translation assumes an outcome of universality that is rarely achieved. Adding a cache of different approaches to the visualisation of language increases the possibility of transferring its emotional impact or diluting or distorting it. My use of lavish and rhythmic emotive language, the persistent sound of a bell and the cool environment were all designed to reinforce a meditative response to the pain suggested by the words themselves.

Curator Ana Wild, wrote in a catalogue for the exhibition:

"*Language of Dis-ease* provides a chance to indulge in the multiplicities of language, to revel in its unravelling and the visual beauty that comes from its complexity and from the act of translation [...] through these lines and the rivers of type, laid out according to culturally diverse sets of hierarchies...we can see the language of language itself."

Image: *Language of Dis-ease*, (detail) acrylic and vinyl on prepared board, 110 x 900cm.
5 inset images: details of translations from the exhibition catalogue.

* The exhibition was held from 30 March to 20 May 2007 at the regional Forrester Gallery in Oamaru, New Zealand. The DVD component of the exhibition is available on the online version of this issue of the journal. See www.thescope.org

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