

text + work



text + work

Stephen Adams + Tom Hackett

Lache pas la patate and Pulp

8 – 29 January 2004

Lache pas la patateé and Pulp

The exhibition features two of three installation works from Tom Hackett's highly successful textual triptych tour in 2003 which took place at PM Gallery, London, UH Galleries Hatfield and Rugby Art Gallery in 2003

With *lache pas la patateé* the viewer is presented with a sweeping configuration of approximately seventy cast concrete open books. Each book has a hollowed recess on its opposite pages to suggest the idea of a hidden compartment. In the left recess of each book lies a cast resin potato form. Embedded inside each cast potato form is a short phrase collected from a different person from the Rugby locale. This eclectic mix of maxims, aphorisms, and truisms become the centrally core of the resin potato forms and the project.

lache pas la patateé is developed out of an old Cajun saying, which translated reads 'Don't let go of the potato' meaning 'hang on in there'. It is poignant that something as humble and unpretentious as the potato, should be cited as metaphor for an essential, a fundamental, a principle. As something to hang onto. In spite of cliché, certain phrases, at specific moments,

within cultural specifics, function with quantum potency. A saying like 'Stick to your guns' or 'hang on in there', despite literal relevance can transcend into icon of optimism. Such phrases serve as the embodiment of unequivocal belief that, whatever 'it' is, 'is' achievable. Likewise other phrases simply challenge adversity and are tainted to forever serve the alter of negativity. The work considers the notion of 'economy of speech', a paring down to bare essentials. It serves to flag up phrases that are succinct, that stick. Words that become and exist as force beyond literal reading. The composite imagery of the two forms suggests the notion of an essence, a crux, a fundamental, embodied through the glistening, refracting potato form. Its location within the heavy book form, simultaneously evokes the concept of concealment and revelation, the potential uncovering of a fundamental basic, a hidden truth or agenda. The books themselves encode a sense of permanence and history, the handing down of messages and information through the ages. The slightly frosted appearance of the resin potatoes will invite the viewer to read each phrase but ultimately challenge their ability to decipher, presenting a partial glimpse, a clue, but not an absolute.

With Pulp 200 medical drip bags are patterned in a rhythmic configuration along the long gallery wall. Each drip bag contains a pulped text or piece of theory nominated by an invited contributor. Faced with a field of shredded texts held

in the bags with da dangling mass of cappilliary tubing the viewer is presented with the opportunity to be fed by the pulped, theories, opinions, thoughts, and narrative of others In actuality the final experience offers only the objects themselves and the Gallery . A space for viewer contemplation, that of the discursive and negotiated field between artwork and audience. Amongst the inescapable schism between the written interpretative and the actual. The texts as diverse in intellectual weight as they are subject generate a curious dialogue between themselves in a world where Foucault or Barthes are as likely to be cited as cultural reference points as 'Frasier' or the 'Big Brother' house.

Over the last 15 years Tom Hackett has built a trademark signature of space and site interrogation through the realisation of a significant body of works throughout the United Kingdom and beyond. From the late 1990's onwards Hackett's work evolved to incorporate various strategies of collection and contribution as part of an integral and open process. With Vertical River, Worcester City Art Gallery, 1997 Hackett Rowed continuously up and down the River Severn over a 24 hours collecting a test tube of water every 5 minutes. These were suspended creating a time based picture of the River. Life Support, Endinburgh College of Art, 1998 saw him collect exhaled air from members of the College community in rubber lung forms. With The Physical Letters, Angel Row Gallery,

Nottingham, 2000, Hackett began to conceptually interrogate the problematic between the written and verbal and the visual. Personalities from the media, arts, politics and beyond donated a short text which Hackett then converted into his own language of sculptural pictograms. This exploration of the interface between the written and the visually experienced has since grown into a core line of enquiry.

Pulp was commissioned by UH Galleries, and lache pas la patate by Rugby Art Gallery and Museum.

Tom Hackett
Artist

Lache pas la patate and Pulp

Tom Hackett's installation contains two works Pulp and Lache pas la patate. Together, they form part of The textual triptych, a work previously staged in three large exhibition sites UH gallery in Hatfield, the PM gallery and House in London and the Rugby Art Gallery and Museum.

Pulp, shows over 200 medical drip bags containing a variety of texts that have been pulped. The samples of writing that have been pulped have been donated by the public: texts which are thought to be 'either meaningful or meaningless' have been delivered or sent to a Hotmail address for Hackett to process. Lache pas la patate – roughly translated from the Cajun meaning 'don't let go of the potato' or 'hang on in there' - consists of some 70 phrases that have been preserved and encapsulated inside a resin cast of a potato.

It is appropriate to start with nothing more than a formal description, a simple account of what can be seen and the tactics used to show it. As Hackett has argued, textual interpretation of his work - and one might add textual interpretation of works of art in general - often 'close down' possibilities for the viewer. Whereas works of art bought for

private spaces are shaped by the personal inclinations of the patron, those seen in the municipal and regional galleries in which Hackett often shows his work can be seen to have other, wider responsibilities to the public. The arts often have a difficult relationship with the public at large. In this instance, however, public participation is high on Hackett's agenda and the texts used both in *Pulp* and *Lache pas la patate* have been nominated and supplied by the community. Visitors to the exhibitions thus have a direct investment in the works of art on show.

Hackett's point about interpretation is a good one but he can't have it all his own way: the ambitious scale of the work on show and the resonance of the images and forms he chooses demands interpretation. Indeed, the sheer ease with which it is possible to speak about the works and the kinds of ideas and agendas that come to mind when we encounter them are a litmus of their success. *Pulp*, for example, is about writing, both its importance to us in the realm of art and cultural life at large, but also its inadequacy. We have, as Hackett acknowledges, too much writing; it is both ubiquitous but at the same time insufficient, arguably no more so when it comes to art. Over the last half century, much has been written much about the inadequacy of language and its relationship to the material world.

Philosophers and psychoanalysts alike have asked if it is possible to point to a material world without an acute self-consciousness of the limitations of the tools we use to describe it – language. For the French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, language is a never-ending search for substantive meaning, a meaning that is only accessible through ... more words. Martin Heidegger, in turn, could only end the chase by striking through the word 'Being' thus: ~~Being~~. The concept and signifier Being was the conceptual baseline from which all language emerges since all other signifiers are but a substrate of the ultimate signifier 'Being'. But words are just words, ultimately there is more – albeit and illusive more – and the signifier has to be struck through, effectively the signifier must be pulped.

In making so prescient an interjection into these debates, Hackett strikes a raw nerve for all those involved in art and how to write about, and an especially raw nerve for those of us involved in art education. For some time now we have fretted about the relationship between art and knowledge, the points of difference and conjuncture between the kinds of intuitive activity that routinely take place in the studio and the forms of exegesis found in text based research familiar to the humanities. Until recently, exegesis had the upper hand. In an academic environment, the rationale used to discuss works of art was the ultimate marker of its value. Increasingly, however, the research community in the fine arts (led often by artists rather than writers) has taken a leaf from an altogether

different kind of philosophy to the one that sustains more established academic disciplines. That philosophy, typically celebrates what has been termed 'dirty research' and organic or nomadic forms of thinking that cast a sharply critical eye at narrative prose's claims to normative status. The likes of Gaston Bachelard and Gilles Deleuze – sources of sustenance for so many of those who have researched into practice - don't go quite as far as Hackett and actually pulp texts. They do however subject them to rigorous scrutiny and find a place for the senses not the intellect.

If Pulp casts a critical eye at the world of letters – real and metaphorical - then Lache pas la patate commissioned by Rugby Art Gallery finds a special place for horse-sense, the kinds of rough and ready truths found in popular aphorisms and proverbs. Appropriately, these everyday truths - again selected by the public before they are set within the resin shapes of the potato forms - are laid out on the ground. Here, as Hackett has explained, a popular expression about human endurance finds its place in the humble potato, imagery that Vincent Van Gogh drew upon in his peasant paintings of the 1880s. In Pulp, book-learning ascended beyond the mezzanine level of the University's gallery. This shop-floor perspective on the world is found appropriately at ground level. As Hackett explains, this form of wisdom embodies a certain 'economy of speech', it has, he suggests, a certain quantum potency.

With Pulp and Lache pas la patate we have the two poles of writing: venerated wisdom, distilled into essence and pumped downwards into the subjected student body and quotidian good sense laid set on the floor for all to access.

In some ways, the traditional work of the critic, art historian and perhaps librarian does not sit comfortably with Hackett's agenda. That agenda, however, is set out and explored with such lucidity that it is impossible not to make some form of interjection, albeit an inadequate one when set beside the dexterity with which Hackett treats and mistreats his subject. Thus, there is only one way to conclude an essay on works of art that prompt a simultaneous debate about the necessity and inadequacy of writing. I want to sign off not with a conventional summary of the key points raised in Hackett's work but with a promise to the artist and reader alike – an assurance that this essay forms at least one small part of the two hundred litres of textual pulp that forms Pulp.

Steven Adams
Coordinator of critical and cultural studies
University of Hertfordshire

"Tom Hackett creates bizarre site-specific installations that, when you think of it make perfect sense in a sensual and somewhat irrational fashion"
Robert Clark -The Guardian 26/4/2003

Hackett has been described as "teasing us with a disarming mix of deceptive technical simplicity and a creative spirit as wild and ranging as the star" and someone who "systematically transforms banalities into deceptively simple moments of bemused and amused wonderment"
Robert Clark - The Guardian

In reference to the title of one of the works on show Lache pas la patate Robert Clark in the Guardian describes how "The words somehow reflect the poetic depth and survivalist almost absurdist, creative ambition, couched in deceptively down-to-earth expressive forms that are typical of the artist Tom Hackett"

"Installations that play obliquely and playfully on the relationship between the 'signified' and the 'signifier', the object and its representation, in image and word"
Robert Clark -The Guardian 5/9/2003

Robert Clark



For Further information contact:

Violet McClean, Gallery Officer

text + work

The Gallery

The Arts Institute at Bournemouth

Wallisdown, Poole , Dorset, BH12 5HH

t 01202 363351

f 01202 537729

e vmcclean@aib.ac.uk

w www.textandwork.org.uk