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Tasha Finn

Mapping, sensation and virtuality: a conversation with Rebecca Ross

There There is the latest exhibition to emerge from Rebecca Ross' exploration of the complex relationship between site and sensation. Using bright strips of vinyl to create a conceptual map that enfolds its viewer, the installation questions the way in which we associate place and space with memory and experience.

Tasha Finn Describe your practice and the way in which you work.

Rebecca Ross I refer to all my works as exercises in mapping. It's sort of an umbrella term for all the various objects and installations that I make. I'm really interested in site, situation and sensation and how these three interact along with ideas of memory. The way in which I work is fairly process driven. For this particular work I guess I can only anticipate an outcome. I don't map anything else out before hand. I do make what I refer to as a marquette in the sense that I'll play around with the palette and shapes but they're quite small in scale in comparison to the work. They are maps but

they aren't accurately superimposed onto the space. They're like a puzzle piece that has no particular shape - the map unfolds in response to the space. I listen to music as I'm working and in this work I have referenced that. For this work, the palette is from a previous work that is the site-based intervention (*Multicoloured Drop*). I guess my practice is the work in a way, there is no beginning or end. The idea of mapping to me sounds prevalent in a way.

TF Your exhibition *There There* evolved from a conversation with writer Sarah Moor about the paradoxes of space, place and experience. Your work indeed explores the complicated relationship between place and memory, or the impression of a place and the actual place, through conceptual mapping. Describe how you reconcile the sensational and the physical in your practice.

RR Through colour and shape and through the use of geometry. For me polarities and opposites are part of my practice. I'm interested in polarities and contradiction. Colour and shape draw these together. The physical elements allow me to carry out the physical mapping and conceptually they enable me to explore ideas of mapping and also draw upon past sensations and memories. This work draws upon the intervention called *Multicoloured Drop*. The process for that particular work was to drop coloured pompoms into the bushes. In this work I have also followed that process where I was just dropping elements.

TF What is the significance of the word intervention when you describe your work?



Rebecca Ross, *There There*, installation view, 2009 (photo: Tim Kerr).

RR For me the idea of intervention is that I usually go to a location which I might be familiar with or find on a map and I'll take some readymade material with me, sometimes chalk, builder's tape, spray cans - coloured objects that can be used very quickly and then go and alter that site and make changes and connections in that place. They're ephemeral, easily removed, but also they're left there for the unsuspecting on the bush track. I'm not sure how it is received or interacted with. Maybe a pipe cleaner or piece of builder's tape will catch someone's eye and change their trajectory to go into the work.

TF You described your work as an 'exercise in mapping'. Being that your work is often site-specific, tell me about the performative aspect of your art.

RR Whether we're conscious of it or not, everyone uses their body as vehicles to move through space and project paths. The connection of eyesight and mind to a site and the elements that I have that can channel this movement is important to my practice. With this particular work there is a sense of

anxiety because I spend all this time in the studio preparing to make the work and that's where I reconcile space. That was the grassroots of *There There* for me - being there in the studio making the work and knowing that it's going there [the gallery] but not knowing the outcome.

TF I find your work quite compelling in the way that you approach the concept of virtual reality. Each strip of vinyl you situate in the space becomes a hyperlink to a different space, place, memory or experience. In this sense, does your work aim to anchor virtuality to a physical space or is your work entirely conceptual?

RR I'm interested in the word anchor - how particular works and sites can anchor memory and how they join together. At the point of making it's consciously conceptual. I'm concentrating on being in the space with the elements and how I move around it - virtual reality is very important to this work. Virtual reality is a fairly slippery idea in a way, particularly where we're situated with technology. While emailing back and forth with Sarah we joked that it's funny how we're talking about there there when I'm here and your there and it keeps overlapping. It's like the ocean, it keeps cycling around.

TF You have chosen strips of brightly coloured and clear adhesive vinyl as your medium. How does this unusual choice of medium relate to the work?

RR My practice is very much about immediacy. Synthesis of sensation is something that I think about with my work. It allows me to channel my ideas straightaway. I use paint, but I'm not a painter. This allows me to straightaway go for it. Decisions are things that just happen, it's an intuitive process but at the same time it's very much a conscious process.

TF The surface of the wall is visible underneath the vinyl. Is this important to you?

RR It is and the idea of contours and all of these walls in the space. There are some instances where I've placed circles over marks on the wall and so I have this secret little thing, people never know about them. Particularly with the use of the clear vinyl. It's obvious that it's there, but it starts the question of what you're actually looking at - are you looking at the work or are you looking at the floor? Seeing the site underneath is a shift, it highlights the site.



Rebecca Ross, *There There*, installation view, 2009 (photo: Tim Kerr).

TF Mapping implies a sense of going somewhere, of movement and of direction. How do you deal with the apparently contradictory practice of installation, where your work is physically confined to a space?

RR This space [of the gallery] in particular is excellent because it's so containing. I haven't worked in a space where there's no view to the outside world. It made me very conscious of space itself. My studio upstairs has two windows and I often spend time looking out at the view and drawing on the sights and sounds that come from that. In here [the gallery] that sense of containment is interesting. Part of the work goes outside the door. As artists we all have to deal with the physicality of the gallery space. That's an important reason why I go out into the bush to make a lot of my work. I'm interested in the idea of residue or what is left over, which is of course a direct adaptation of such interventions. I have a ball of vinyl in my studio left over from another work. I keep the residue or I'm particular about it being documented that it's over or that it's been destroyed. I haven't quite decided what I'll do with this work when it's over.



Rebecca Ross, *There There*, installation view, 2009 (photo: Tim Kerr).

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Tasha Finn holds a degree in art history with research foci in art in new media and international contemporary art.