

# Art Collector

## ARTIST INTERVIEW: TIM SILVER

21 September 2011

Tim Silver talks to Australian Art Collector about his current exhibition at Breenspace in Sydney, which, like his 2009 exhibition *Rory*, shows us the passing of time. But out of destruction and decay, new forms emerge.



Tim Silver, *Untitled (bust) (Pine Timbermate Woodfiller)*, 2011. Archival inks on archival paper, 4 framed prints, edition of 5, each 46 x 58cm. Courtesy: the artist and Breenspace, Sydney

## **Firstly could you tell us about the work in your Breenspace exhibition?**

The exhibition features photographic documentation of a series of busts (self-portraits) cast from various putties: Timbermate woodfiller; Selleys Wood Putty; and Spakfilla.

The initial images features these busts frozen as they have been removed from their moulds. As the busts dry out and respond to atmospheric conditions they behave in a variety of ways – slumping onto their own forms, cracking up, crumbling, wrinkling and distorting.

The pristine form of the proud bust caves in on itself to produce not only a mimicry, but an exaggeration of our own ageing process.

At various places throughout the exhibition, in varying sizes, are burls of cast-pigmented polyurethane. A burl is a tree growth where some type of damage has been inflicted, where the grain of the wood grows against its natural course. These sites of damage then produce these growths, which I see as physical manifestations of trauma.

Pigmented black, they appear as shadows of their original or former selves.

## **Is this new for you, to be working with self-portraits? Why did you decide to model these busts on yourself?**

To the first question, I'm not really sure. I've been a long-standing admirer of the work of Felix Gonzalez-Torres, who worked extensively in portraiture and self-portraiture without ever literally depicting himself or others.

In many ways I believe making art is to ultimately state and hopefully communicate something of yourself.

Also, in the photo-narrative series *The Tuvaluan Project* (2007) and *Shooting Tadpoles at the Moon* (2008) I appear in character. My character in these series is obviously fictional, but at the same time, is intentionally a stand in for me as the artist. The character's relationships with others in these series becomes self referential to my own processes of interaction as a white Australian artist.

This is somewhat different in the new work. The busts are me, but here I appear as a generic stand in for any particular individual.

The fact that they are me is not a central concern of the work, they could in fact be anyone, and the inherent communication of the work would be the same.



Installation view of Tim Silver's *Everything in its right place*. Courtesy: the artist and Breenspace, Sydney.

Entropy seems like it would be pretty bleak subject matter – decay, disintegration, disorder. But then there's a point at which knowledge of that inevitability (as with death) is almost calming. How do you see it? Do you think of entropy as something morbid, for example, or more liberating?

It's strange. Some people comment on me as being somewhat cynical or pessimistic, whereas I see it as being realist or pragmatic. (But then again, as a career choice I'm an Australian artist, so there must be something optimistic about my character.)

I certainly don't see things as bleak or morbid, but neither do I see them as particularly liberating. Perhaps it is that there is some calmness in entropy. I've been intrigued when exhibiting my work that a number of people who have a Buddhist philosophy or persuasion respond quite strongly.

For myself, it's not that clear cut. It's finding beauty in these moments of demise. The depiction of entropy in my work is, after all, a heavily aestheticised experience. Through destruction new forms emerge.

This can be a skateboard made of crayon which gets kicked and breaks and but looks fantastic as it's new sculptural assemblage, or it can be the World Trade Centres, 10 years ago nearly to the day, which were breathtaking in the aftermath of their collapse. (And the surprising subtlety yet awesomeness, of those building's footprints turned into water features...)

**Your choice of material is obviously very important to the way your works function and change over time.**

Materiality is central to my work. I believe in the integrity of the materials I use, so I try not to alter them in any way.

In the current work, the various putties have no internal structures supporting the busts, no supportive skeletal forms, so to speak. And the consequence of this is evident in the outcome of these sculptures. They sag, they slump, they distort.

I'm very much interested in the application of materials to seemingly unaligned forms. This unnatural partnership is one that can produce unexpected outcomes, but also, due to the connotations we bring to the work of both material and form, they conceptually unite in poetic manner.



Tim Silver, *Untitled (bust) (Selleys Spakfilla Rapid)*, 2011. Archival inks on archival paper, 3 framed prints, edition of 5, each 46 x 58cm each. Courtesy: the artist and Breenspace, Sydney

**How do you hope viewers will engage with and respond to your work?**

Well, I hope they have some form of response, emotional, intuitive or otherwise.

I hope they engage with the both the materiality and form of the work, and the processes involved.

As to the outcomes of those responses and engagement, I don't think it's for me as the artist to determine or dwell upon too much. Some of the best responses are often the most unexpected ones.

**I understand you're generally not so keen on talking about your work. Why is that?**

Following on from my previous comment, I don't think it's necessarily the role of the artist to dictate the meanings of artworks. It's the reception of a work which forms it's meaning, but even then, possible readings can emerge and evolve over time. Meaning is, after all, contingent.

For me, art making is an investigation of sorts, and as such, I'm much more interested in finding out what others think, without my influence.

**At art school you started out studying painting. Why the shift?**

I don't see it as a shift. There are aspects of my work that are quite painterly and it responds in many ways to a history of painting, that is my educational background.

I simply found a way to express my ideas that relied more on other forms, primarily sculptural casting and photography (which both share a similarity through the taking of one surface and applying it to another).

These days, in preparing an exhibition, I am particularly attracted to the relationships between the images and the objects.

*Jane O'Sullivan*

Tim Silver's current exhibition, *Everything in its right place*, continues at Breenspace in Sydney until 8 October 2011.