

Lucy Pullen / Mitchell Wiebe

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Gordon Laurin

Lucy Pullen has for the past few years been making objects that take delight in the provocation of the untested, presented as a hypothesis on order and the relationship between science and nature. While her work varies dramatically in its final form, an analytical orientation can be isolated as a unifying thread throughout her recent work.

While studying at the Nova Scotia College of Art & Design, Pullen focused on Painting. Since completing her studies in 1994, her interests have centered primarily on sculpture, marking a clear break between her early studies and current practices. As an essentially self-taught sculptor, she has allowed herself freedom in exploring a range of working methods and sources in her work. This variety of activities is evidenced in the simultaneous investigations of geometric/social order and her continuing figurative sculptural work.

Pullen's involvement with geometry as an ordering system can be isolated in the **Perfect Solids**, which individually represent the five platonic solids. The shapes have long represented the beginnings of Pythagorean mysticism, a way of sorting the universe in strict geometric forms. As some of the basic elements of crystalline structure, they both literally and symbolically represent the basic ordering of form before atomic and subatomic discoveries. They illustrate what things are made of. For Pullen, the **perfect solids** spiritual implications are of less interest than their use as hypothetical models in understanding the material world.

Each piece is constructed from 1000 individual 4 by 4 inch acetate sheets stacked to form a cube. Using computer generated templates, each sheet has had a fractional intersection of one of the solids cut from its interior plane. Once cut and compiled, the cubes hold in negative the shape of one of the solids. Built with a corresponding number of sides, the solids are the four-sided tetrahedron, the six-sided cube, the eight-sided octahedron, the twelve-sided icosahedron, and the twenty-sided dodecahedron. These enigmatic but beautiful sculptures, while representing structural stability, are tentative and vulnerable. Moving and handling these works, thousands of loose sheets with impossibly intricate orderings, is an unsettling activity, especially when Pullen talks about the time one was dropped.

In viewing the works, their exterior minimal forms reveal this delicacy of construction but little else. Only their interior glow, created by the translucency of the acetate, provides a rough indication of the negative forms that are held within the cube. These works graciously maintain an independence; the subject of their making unseen. The **Perfect Solids** are anything but perfect. Hand-cut and stacked they reveal a natural and organic working process. Disorder as a polar force to the integrity of the solids is demonstrated directly with the Vertical splatter made from the cut out pieces. The dichotomy of the empty but ordered cubes and the random spread of the cut outs, which if sorted would create the solids in positive form, defines an entropic system. Collecting and organizing is played against random dispersal.

The activity of sorting and dispersing reappears often in Pullen's work. Her art making, often a kind of performance of making, pushes materials to their natural fault line. The point where they structurally or conceptually start to breakdown, less concerned with the strict enforcement of the plan, her working method incorporates the accidental. The **Chance Operation with Blue Buttons** and the **Vertical Splatter** point to a willingness to incorporate error and the uncontrolled event. The **Portable Library** takes up this idea presenting a mini-library of publications where our engagement with the work as an art object and as a kind of reference material section to the show is left purposefully obscure. Comprised of roughly 260 publications held in the university's main library, the **portable library** bookcases suborder the library holdings with selections linked by subject and its relevance to Pullen's other works. Theoretically at least, one could read about the influences and sources for her artistic practice here. This collection of books proposes a circulation of ideas and more particularly their inter-relationship.

The bookcases are shaped like steamer trunks, and consider an economy of collecting and traveling. In Pullen's words << A way to hold the activity of reading in high regard >>. Each about the size of a home entertainment system, the trunks present a mobile alternative to the electronic entertainment industry, symbolically, if not as actual prototypes of functioning travel libraries, they represent a way of considering practical collecting as it relates to increasingly mobile societies.

As an invitation to participation, the bookcases draw the viewer in as reader, or at least browser, similarly the **chance operation with blue buttons**, offered freely to denote membership in art viewing, engage and acknowledge the viewer as participant in the exhibition. As something between jewellery and the i.d. badge, the button is used as an indicator of social and cultural values. It announces a stance: the selection of a favorite band, sports team, of social/political position, with these buttons, found in the garbage and brought unchanged into the gallery, text and image are removed. In this emptying of meaning the patterns of dispersal and belonging are emphasized. The buttons theorize an <<I was there >> secret society of gallery people and dramatize both the exclusiveness and openness of the public exhibition.

The circular mirror **bullseye** continues this engagement, with the viewer's reflection targeted within a field of concentric circles the work generates an exchange or presence, a kind of reciprocal aiming between viewer and the work, collectively these three works act as propositions, questioning and reformulating the viewer's artwork.

Sucker, a life-sized figurative cast of Pullen in hard-rock candy, initiates a process of directly casting the body as a way to assimilate basic sculptural histories and techniques, while subverting their usual application, unlike the permanence of traditional metal casting it is dramatically affected by the environment around it. The work's structural instability and sensitivity to temperature and humidity changes cause it to variously melt, bend, fracture, and cloud, necessitating a recasting for each presentation. The recovered head, from its last presentation at the s.l. simpson gallery in 1996, is presented here alongside a bronze cast of her grandfather, h.f. Pullen. The portraits differ stylistically and technically. H.f Pullen's is a modeled representational cast from clay and Pullen's an actual body cast. Still, they are opposed primarily by the absurdity of the

juxtaposition of bronze and candy. **Sucker** concretizes both our impermanence and separation from the past through a radical material choice: a candy head that won't last.

Pullen records the body with the intent of considering its fragility, documenting the figure in the case of the sucker piece is a perishable form, our vulnerabilities: environmentally, politically, and emotionally are often noted in discussions with Pullen. She talks of meeting a woman who <<willed herself away, trying not to be there but who couldn't help being there>>, This meeting, startling for Pullen, was a source for the development of a series of works and proposals about self-effacing women. The **Legs**, part of this series, emerge from below. They have a seamless grounding with the floor and therefore aren't dismembered limbs but rather imply a body submerged. The initial novelty of their scale and playfulness is ruptured by the recognition of loss of self that they represent.

The **Infectious Idea**; the synchronous links between subjects that can be traced with careful examination drives Pullen's far ranging sculptural interests. She is forever finding threads that draw her into new areas. She describes using the novanet (the electronic card catalogue system of Nova Scotia universities) in her searches for the publications included in the bookcases in this way. In **American Sign Language** specific sign language sentences have been frozen in sculptural pieces. They reveal a fascination with representing languages in alternative forms, looking at the process by which something is known. In this way **pink noise**, which gives the actual signing position for these words, finds a direct duplication in a record featuring John Cage's <<Fontana Mix>> (1958). The record Cover Displays a wave form representation of pink noise. These two utterly different things with the same meaning allude to the subjectivity of sorting information, and the divisibility of fact. Pullen's recent work is not so much a coordinated battle with the forces of a delineated art history of sculpture, but rather a compelling and considered investigation of her own varying interests. Through its sheer anarchic exuberance, Pullen's work realizes a unique and unsettling position where the entropic spectacle of the material world is documented.