

Lucy Pullen, A Thousand Miles of Dust & Ashes
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Lucy Pullen produces works in a wide-ranging number of media. Drawing, sculpture, photography, and actions are only some of the disciplines she has recently explored. Linking this eclecticism is a practice the artist calls 'conceptual materialism'. Her works are often formally independent of one another, and appear determined from an internal logic that lead to idiosyncratic ends. A strong sense of humour draws Pullen's work together, with an interest in word play, puns, and an adventurous use of technique developing the possibilities of everyday materials.

In an artists' bookwork, *Little Cockroach Press #12, (1999)* published by *Art Metropole*, Pullen, in collaboration with artist Sandy Plotnikoff, considered the performative and sculptural possibilities in the vast amount of discarded and secondhand goods on offer in a Value Village thrift store. The two artists took photographs of one another as each donned successively more layers of garments. One photograph, for example, shows Pullen wearing eight turtle neck sweaters; in another she's sporting sixteen baseball hats. The spontaneous and offhand nature of Pullen and Plotnikoff's 'action' retains an impromptu, unrehearsed quality, and as such, the two act not so much as performance artists or even pranksters but as facilitators between ideas and a given set of circumstances.

This allows one understanding of the term 'conceptual materialism'. Much of Pullen's work presents evidence of the artist working collaboratively with materials. Pullen consistently finds hidden potential toward unforeseen ends, and manufactures works that invite reception through a spirit of generosity. The viewer is drawn into the nuances and possibilities of objects and ideas through a sense of humour and surprise.

In ***Sucker*** (1996), the artist cast a life-sized statue of herself in rock candy, the same material found in a child's sweet. The double entendre and self-mocking humour of the title suggest the artist is at the mercy of forces of which she is *acutely* aware. While appearing to obey the traditions of heroic portraiture, the work itself is temporary. *The first version of this work melted and collapsed*, necessitating its remanufacture. *The second cracked internally as the candy cooled*. *Sucker* plays with our expectations of monumental sculpture and historical associations of permanence, stability, and achievement. Pullen doesn't so much undercut these expectations *exacerbate them*. **Sucker** is a sculpture, in the 'sweetest' of materials, that in excess becomes horrific.

In ***Snowmobile*** (2000) Pullen carved a small car to scale out of a snow bank in the suburbs of Philadelphia. Here again, a life-sized replica of an actual object is rendered in an ephemeral, transient material. Humour, again is at work. Is it a car covered by snow? Or just snow? Like **Sucker**, the work's temporary nature bears witness to the

possibilities of materials that, while in no way permanent, have inherent, unexploited possibility. On the simplest level, the massive, carveable nature of the matrix of a snow bank is acknowledged and made use of.

In **Snowmobile**, however, Pullen uses the documentation of her temporary work as a work of its own—a postcard multiple featuring a photograph of the ‘car’. Originally an afterthought that would allow others to see the sculpture, the photograph became the work. With this the artist argues the photograph *is* the work, and the snow mobile acts much like a staged tableau. The importance of this idea to Pullen’s practice is articulated in a recent photograph *Flash* (1999) seen here at the Contemporary Art Gallery. In this cibachrome, Pullen poses wearing a dress made of light sensitive fabric.

Pullen uses the same light sensitive fabric in **The Thing** (2003), a tangled mass of ropes ‘slipcovered’ with the material. Pullen calls the fabric her ‘bronze’ both for its metallic sheen as well as for the material weight it imparts to objects clothed in it. Pullen says the sculpture “kicks a hole in the photograph”, by which she refers to the fact any image of the sculpture on photographic film will be solarized due to light reflecting off the luminescent material, as occurs in **Flash**. The two works point to Pullen’s case by case distinctions between sculptures she realizes *only* to be photographed, sculptures that are distinct *when* photographed, (or as the artist puts it, “work that performs on film”), and photographs or documents *of* sculptures.

Her interest in light sensitivity is also in the forefront in a large suite of drawings titled **Portal** (2002). Pullen draws the viewer into a complex interplay between the object and its method of production. Long doodles on silver reflective paper, the seven round drawings appear on first glance and from a distance, as though they are manufactured through a technological process. Like a computer screensaver that utilizes a randomizing program, the drawings maintain a fluid, unrehearsed quality. On close inspection, however, it becomes clear the lines are hand drawn. Their dimensional and hypnotic qualities raise allusions with the works of artists such as Eva Hesse and Jackie Winsor, whose formalist sculptures often employed laborious wrappings and entanglements of objects. Hesse described her working method, for instance, as “making time” and “perceiving time” so that “form grows out of process.” **Portal** achieves a similar effect. An immediate impression of drawings that seem quickly but complexly produced mutates under a closer and more considered view. ‘Fast’ skids to a slow crawl, and what was unfathomable becomes fantastically simple.