IAN FRIEND: CRYPTIC ARCHITECTURE

It is often assumed that structure is the antithesis of chaos, that architecture must define itself against nature’s randomness. But things are not that simple. The Italian Rationalist architects of the 1930s, for example, argued that a mathematical equation known as the Golden Section was visible in nature. The fact that the structure of nautilus shells adhered to this formula was read as evidence that order pervaded the natural world. Similarly, chaos theory has told us that what seems like disorganized activity in nature conforms to patterns that have shape and form.

Ian Friend’s works relate to these concepts. However, in his case, ideas of structure and chaos, the architectural and the organic, are not reconciled but critique each other. Interspersed with the ellipses that appear in many of his pieces are lines that zigzag seismographically across the page. The resultant structures reveal no clear logic or geometry. The marks shatter linearity itself, alternating between a line carving a trace across a landscape and a bounded outline keeping a shape in check. Erratic loops and overlaps ensure that the status of his line remains ambiguous. We are witnessing, it seems, the derangement of structure. Beyond the line we see a pulsing tide of ink and gouache that appears to have been formed by some natural process. However, this terrain is not an inchoate morass of mere material. A careful inspection of Friend’s works reveals the countless correspondences between the areas of ink-saturated paper and accreted gouache on the one hand, and the carapace of angular lines on the other. The corroded, sedimentary surface has given rise to its own map, the geometric lines blossoming from the liquid, organic processes underneath. Line and colour, the architectonic and the organic are interlocked. Corrosion gives birth to geometry, and structure develops through entropy.

The American artist Robert Smithson, whose work Friend admires, once argued that ‘planning and chance almost seem to be the same thing’. Noting that the law of entropy dictates that all systems tend to break down, Smithson proposed structures that incorporated this principle into their design. Smithson’s earth work The Spiral Jetty (1970), which destroys classification by confusing liquid and solid, was designed to literally collapse and dissolve into the salt lake upon which it was built. In Friend’s work we are dealing less with physical entropy—for all that his works suggest processes of erosion—and more with the conceptual decay of categories which determine our understanding of the world. The geometry in Friend’s works may have resulted from the vegetable growth of organisms, but in which direction does time flow in these works? Line is not a corrective to the depredations of time, and nor is the end point of the work’s development predetermined; they are perhaps, to borrow a phrase from Smithson, ‘ruins in reverse’.

Structure’s ruination is also at stake in the physical format of these works. Across the break which defines the diptych, we become aware of the most fundamental type of structure—binary division. It is easy to overlook this caesura, just as we habitually ignore those divisions between left and right, north and south that constitute the hemispheres of our world. At times Friend’s line skims across a gap rendered almost invisible by shared layers of gouache and ink, but nothing could be more fundamental to these pieces than their separability. They aren’t one thing. Nor are they two things. In these works the most basic principle of mathematics simply founder.

Paul Virilio’s book Bunker Archaeology, which has been influential on Friend, has as its thesis the self-contradiction inherent in Nazi wartime bunkers. As Virilio points out, the heavily reinforced, defensive ramparts spelled doom for an ideology which thrived on continual expansion and rupturing of boundaries. J.G. Ballard once described these bunkers, which are still disintegrating today on the coast of France, as ‘examples of cryptic architecture, where form no longer reveals function’. If the rage for order sows the seeds of its own collapse, in Friend’s works the decay of
structures over time is shown to be the destiny and the starting point of all human endeavour. Such order as exists is not imposed arbitrarily but emerges in response to the unpredictable, organic nature of the materials and the temporal process of creating the work through accumulation and erasure. In these works, form doesn’t reveal function but it does reveal a history—of the dialogue between structure and randomness.

Dr Anthony White, Lecturer in Art History, The University of Melbourne

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*There was a time when nights were for sleeping ... deep, dreamless sleep and wake without fear.*

Ingmar Bergman from the film *The Hour of the Wolf*, 1968

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*The Pyrenean village of Aas, at the foot of the Col d’Aubisque, above the spa town of Eax-Bonnes, had its own whistling language which was unknown even in the neighbouring valleys until it was mentioned on a television programme in 1959. Shepherds who spent the summer months in lonely cabins had evolved an ear-splitting, hundred-decibel language that could be understood at a distance of up to two miles. It was also used by the women who worked in the surrounding fields and was apparently versatile enough in the early twentieth century to convey the contents of the local newspaper. Its last known use was during the Nazi Occupation, when shepherds helped Jewish refugees, Résistants and stranded pilots across the border into Spain. A few people in Aas today remember hearing the language, but no one can reproduce the sounds and no recordings were ever made. If such a remarkable language escaped detection, many other quieter dialects must have died out before they could be identified.*

Graham Robb in *The Discovery of France*, Picador, 2007
IAN FRIEND

BIOGRAPHY

Born 1 June 1951, England

SOLO EXHIBITIONS

2008
A voice of floating silence, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane
Thirty Years of Works on Paper 1977–2007, QUT Art Museum, Brisbane
Ian Friend, Queensland Performing Arts Centre, Brisbane

2006
Ian Friend, Stella Downer Fine Art, Sydney
Ian Friend, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne

2005
Tidal, Redcliffe City Gallery, Brisbane

2004
Biting the Air, Esa Jäske Gallery, Sydney

2003
Joy at Death Itself, Andrew Baker Art Dealer, Brisbane
Ian Friend, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
Ian Friend, Helen Maxwell Gallery, Canberra

2002
Ian Friend, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
The Oval Window, Brisbane City Gallery, Brisbane

2000
Ian Friend, Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne
Ian Friend, Austral Gallery, St Louis, USA

1995
The Protestant Affliction, Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, St Louis, USA
une violente aventure sentimentale, Lawrence Wilson Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth

1993
Ian Friend, Austral Gallery, St Louis, USA
Ian Friend, Embassy of Australia, Washington DC, USA

1992
Ian Friend, Austral Gallery at the Third Australian Contemporary Art Fair, Melbourne

1991
Ian Friend, Austral Gallery, St Louis, USA

1990
Ian Friend, Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
Ian Friend, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney

1989
Ian Friend, Christine Abrahams Gallery, Melbourne
Ian Friend, Macquarie Galleries, Sydney

1988
Ian Friend, The Institute Gallery, TSIT, Launceston, Tasmania

1986
Ian Friend, 70 Arden Street, Melbourne
Ian Friend, Cockatoo Gallery, Launceston, Tasmania

1978
Ian Friend, House, London
SELECTED GROUP EXHIBITIONS

2005–07  *Moist: Australian watercolours*, National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Araluen Art Centre, Alice Springs, NT; Perc Tucker Regional Gallery, Townsville, Qld; Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Vic; Riddoch Art Gallery, Mount Gambier, SA

2003  *Paper Matters*, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery, University of Western Australia, Perth

2001  *Australian Paper Art Awards*, George Adams Gallery, The Arts Centre, Melbourne

2000  *National Works on Paper Award*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria

1999  *National Works on Paper Award*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria

1998  *MOCRA: The First Five Years*, Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, St Louis, USA

1997  *13th Biennial Spring Festival of Drawing*, Mornington Peninsula Regional Gallery, Victoria

1990  *USA Festival of the Arts*, South Central Bell Gallery, Birmingham, Alabama, USA


1986  *8th British International Drawing Biennale*, Cleveland, England


1984  *International Print Exhibition*, Palazzo dei Leonie, Messina, Sicily, Italy

1983  *From the Figure*, Ikon Gallery, Birmingham, England


1980  *Diversities*, Ulster Polytechnic, Belfast, Ireland


1980  *Summer Show 1*, Serpentine Gallery, London, England

1977  *3rd British International Drawing Biennale*, Cleveland, England


COLLECTIONS

The British Museum, London; Tate Gallery, London; Arts Council of Great Britain, London; Middlesbrough Institute of Modern Art, Cleveland, England; Museum of Contemporary Religious Art, St Louis, USA; National Gallery of Australia, Canberra; Australian War Memorial, Canberra; Australian Embassy, Washington DC; Artbank, Sydney; National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne; Queensland Art Gallery/Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane; Queen Victoria Museum and Art Gallery, Launceston; Bathurst Regional Art Gallery, New South Wales; New England Regional Art Museum, New South Wales; Deakin University Library, Melbourne; Griffith University, Brisbane; La Trobe University, Melbourne; Monash University, Melbourne; Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane; Redcliffe City Art Gallery, Queensland; University College of Central Queensland, Rockhampton; University of Tasmania, Hobart; University of Western Australia, Perth; Geelong Grammar School, Victoria; The Hutchins Foundation, Hobart; Australian Paper, Melbourne; Robert Holmes à Court Collection, Perth
Author/s:
WHITE, ANTHONY

Title:
Ian Friend: cryptic architecture

Date:
2008

Citation:

Publication Status:
Published

Persistent Link:
http://hdl.handle.net/11343/35017

File Description:
Ian Friend: cryptic architecture

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