

Sara Lindsay

Serendip: Tapestry and Works on Paper 1997 – 2006

This exhibition surveys approximately ten years of work by Melbourne based artist Sara Lindsay, incorporating a selection of intricate woven pieces and delicate works on paper. Representing only a small selection of works produced during this period, the pieces reflect Lindsay's interest in exploring both the formal considerations and personal associations conjured by the medium of textiles.

For Lindsay, fabric, in both its historic and material presence is linked to her own journeys of self-discovery. Everyday patterns, such as the seemingly innocuous gingham, are interrogated for their rich history in both eastern and western cultures. In other works, striped or line based patterns become a metaphor for journeys of discovery. Employing a mapping pen – an instrument traditionally used for cartography – Lindsay has produced works on paper that are simultaneously decorative and meditative. The patient construction consistent across all of Lindsay's oeuvre is of vital importance to how one reads and interacts with this delicate, time-based aesthetic. Drawing also on aspects of English abstraction (painters such as Ben Nicholson come to mind), Lindsay unashamedly celebrates the formal possibilities of irreducible geometry.

In recent years, the artist's focus has shifted to Sri Lanka where her grandfather once worked and died in the country's tea plantations. After travelling there in 2005, Lindsay has developed works derived in part from colours and dyes produced by local species of tea. Staining caused by tea reappears in later works, symbolising the lingering, even indelible, power of the past. Like much of Lindsay's works, these pieces may be read as decorative surfaces or as artworks laden with personal and social histories. Either way their quiet yet persistent presence is worthy of thoughtful exploration.

Lindsay demarcates the philosophical precepts of her practice by enquiring, somewhat rhetorically:

Why, when the image was apparently so simple, and could be woven in jacquard form or indeed printed, did I continue to pursue such a time consuming practice? Why is it that so many people tell me how patient I must be and how do I possibly find the time? Why do I make the time and what does time mean to me?

Clearly, this steadfast refusal to accommodate a hastening of time – for many the defining trope of contemporary life – returns Lindsay's work to the culture and traditions of the hand made. In short, her work is a statement about how one exists in the moment and the quality of consciousness one invests in the act of making and being. This meditative, Zen-like posture can be linked also to Lindsay's sojourn in Japan in 1981, where she studied the traditional technique of Kasuri weaving at the Kawashima Textile School, Kyoto. According to the artist "This experience had a profound effect on my way of working and seeing." Evidence of both Lindsay's time consuming practice and her acute attention to detail can be seen in works like the delicately coloured and scroll-like 'Cinnamon and Roses'. Lindsay explains how this work evolved from a series of line based drawings:

The delicate striped drawings – taking their name from the Japanese word Shima, meaning stripe as it pertains to textiles – were inspired by the faded photographs of my grandmother's fine muslin dresses worn in the hot climate of her colonial home, Ceylon. These drawings lead to the making of the tapestry 'Cinnamon and Roses'. The tapestry can be described as a timeline or bloodline, documenting the life of my elderly mother; recording the births, marriages and deaths that have occurred during her lifetime – and commenting on the passing of time and the fading of the colonial past.

Through the process of weaving this work I entered into a rich and informative dialogue with my mother, tracing her fascinating life as the daughter of a British tea planter in Ceylon, now Sri Lanka – 5 cm of weaving representing one year of her life.

Lindsay is by no means the first to incorporate the passing of time into the medium of textiles, the convention having numerous historical precedents, including works like the famous Bayeux Tapestry, with its grand narratives of knightly conquest and valor. Yet Lindsay's work is far from the figurative traditions of such medieval textiles, combining instead the temporal with the abstract and the decorative. Works like 'Cinnamon and Roses' do not immediately alert the viewer to their narrative origins, appearing instead as a quiet expanse of subtly differentiated colours and occasional patterns, suggesting, in the manner of tree rings, the effects of the surrounding environment on the course and progression of the work itself.

During the development of this exhibition the artist occasionally voiced her concern about the resolution of some of the pieces. The truth however is that process is close to the surface of Lindsay's work – so much so one is especially aware of the hand that guides their making and in the case of the composite works on paper, the act of choice in arranging the compositional elements.

In light of her fascination with the exploration of small details, it is easy to understand Lindsay's interest in the work of the Sri Lankan writer Michael Ondaatje* – all the more so in the context of Lindsay's own connections to Sri Lanka and the works inspired by her recent journey to the tea plantations in the country's hinterland.

Damian Smith
Curator, Maroondah Art Gallery
December 2006

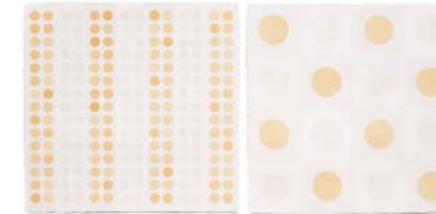
* Ondaatje's work has at times been compared with a fine tapestry in which "there are so many interesting corners within each piece that it is hard to gain a broad perspective of what is before you". Anthony N. Chandler, Michael Ondaatje, <http://www.themodernword.com/scriptorium/ondaatje.html>, 27 July 2001

Ararat Regional Art Gallery

14 February – 23 March 2008

Carnegie Gallery, Hobart

31 July – 7 September 2008



Untitled #1a, 1b (Darjeeling, Nuwara Eliya) 2005-06
Gouache and tea on paper
56 x 56 cm each
FRONT

Trade: Lacquer Jade China Spice 2005-06
Gouache on paper – 75 parts each 18 x 38 cm
72 x 575 cm



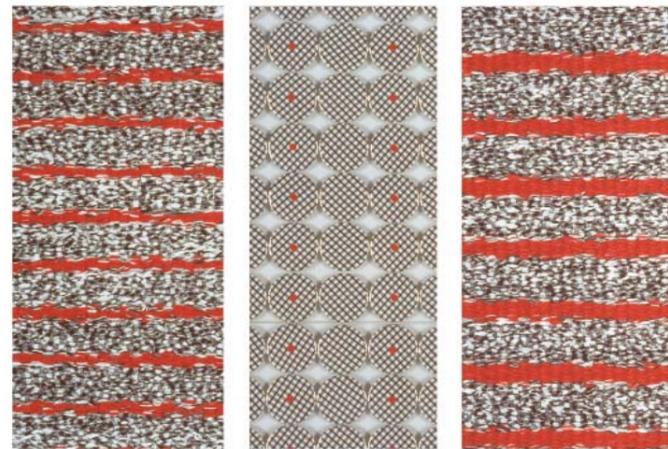
maroondahartgallery



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Photography by Jeremy Dillon

Sara Lindsay is represented by Stephen McLaughlan Gallery, Melbourne



Pulse 2001-2002 (detail)
Woven tapestry, mixed media
cotton, paper, acrylic, acetate, metal
119 x 394 cm



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serendip:

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Cinnamon and Roses 2004 (detail)
Woven tapestry and mixed media construction
cinnamon sticks, rose petals, linen, lace, muslin
(dyed with tea and turmeric), cotton, silk
39 x 449 cm



Cinnamon and Ticking #4 2006
Woven tapestry and mixed media construction
cinnamon sticks, cotton, paper
8.5 x 102 cm



Trade: Lacquer Jade China Spice 2005-06
Gouache on paper – 75 parts each 18 x 38 cm
72 x 575 cm

Parampara (from generation to generation) 2005
Mixed media collage
cinnamon sticks, paper, gouache, silk
69 x 232 cm

