

# Category Error

Opening speech by Tracy Murinik, 2 October 2009

As you've walked through the door, you would have been met by Joanne Bloch's fabulous list of how and how not to behave in this space (or any other), and it's a perfect starting point for an exhibition titled 'Category Error' – essentially a concept or philosophical term of that which does not conform to its prescribed category; or, like a type of malapropism, where properties of particular experience are attributed mistakenly to something else.

The seven diverse women that have been brought together in this fluid and informal temporary collective are in fact, a perfect fit. If not because they do the same thing – they all have different creative backgrounds: textile design, painting, needlework, ceramics ... and yet to look around you, the conversation flows meticulously. Each of these artists, and the work that they produce, might be defined – and there I trip myself up again – as a type of 'category error': try and box them into a particular genre of production and you're going to battle. They choose to do what they do as they do it. They're conscious of the act of categorisation, and some of them are extremely interested in that as a theme, but are also entirely comfortable to defy it, or expose generalisations as not being enough.

So am I being too obscure here? Let's consider the realm of authorised knowledge – who gets to define what: Josie Grindrod's delicate paintings and assemblages pose questions around the way in which knowledge is presented in the didactic visual displays of 60s encyclopaedias – everything meticulously categorised; Lynne Lomofsky's use of medical imagery: opaque descriptions of scientific diagnosis, strange curiosities of accumulated disease ... until they're turned into beautiful, abstract objects of aesthetic contemplation ... similarly Jane Solomon's beautiful "Positive Power", which takes the HI virus as its visual thematic and creates out of it this beautiful fabric motif which bears no stigma, as long as it remains unknown. She's described it as a type of hippie-reminiscent design. I'm interested in the fact that it also uses elements of traditional Xhosa initiation blankets ...

If categories create generalisations, then they also differentiate between similar things in minute detail. But the works on this exhibition bring a different kind of detail into play – human detail, and the possibility, or maybe insistence on human marks that are considered and attach themselves to human emotion or thought:

- Joanne Bloch's words strings – essentially, elaborate collections of beads, colour and texture, but this one, *Mala*, which inscribes in letter beads the Buddhist tara mantra which is said in times of fear ...
- Mandy Darling's extraordinary delicate embroideries of family photographs, that have been digitised and lose much of their detail before she renders them in needlework, so that they become almost generic, a type of loss made visual, and yet, with the tenuous, delicate threads that branch out from each frame, they speak of human connection and lives touched through human interaction.
- Jann Cheifitz' *If I Ruled the World* – a map of the world made out of the cardstock – usually discarded byproduct of her screenprinting which she collected over many years – a remnant of a process about her own agency and production in the world;
- Leora Lewis' incredible ceramic creations of tables and writing cases and folder files, that remember the act of letter-writing and personal mark-making as an act of communication before the advent of email ...
- Lynne Lomofsky's addition of words describing human emotion into her scientific specimen jars – insisting on inserting human detail into cold scientific territory...

These works string together in an amazingly exciting tale of being human. And making that a creative and lived starting point.