

THE INTERVENTION OF RED

Robert Baines

Claes Oldenburg declared:
"I have just had an insight
red is redder than green, meaner than yellow,
and bloodier than black"¹

Red is available for the visual artist to investigate, to position and to rework. Within a series of objects/artefacts the writer as a goldsmith has sought a spiritual representation of red.² Not confined to its colour, the historic use of red has been applied to convey the Christ figure.

A recent group of works, *The Entropy of Red*,³ pursued a personal subject in the form of a table, a crown and a trumpet. A primary condition of this is that it is Christological.⁴ This exegesis on the condition and spiritual metaphor of red was materialised predominantly in red coloured silver. These quite large objects were complex and included very fine structures.

Another group of works, *The Intervention of Red*, is a jewellery account and as a document offers a view into cultural descriptions of history. This collection of work was partly built during a Senior Fulbright research project at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York during 1997. The project investigated ancient technology by selecting pieces from the Greek and Roman collection and making copies based on the known technology of the same era.

The jewellery pieces have their own historical/cultural location, positing a style that is integral with their chemical and methodological basis. Each work is "authenticated" by its stylistic and material data by the historian, curator and the material scientist. The archaeological "correctness" is upset in the jewellery pieces of *The Intervention of Red* by the intrusion/inclusion/interruption of the colour red, and furthermore by the possibility of its substance. The material condition of red is not confined to any historical period.

The conveying of love and sacrifice with the vehicle of red has antecedents since time immemorial and particularly in the Christ figure.

Though offering unconditional love, the shedding of blood for the remission of sin seems a central condition in the Christian context. Not confining the repeated sin offering to the Tribe of Israel, Christ offers himself as the sacrifice "once and for all." Portraying Christ in the colour and substance of red in the jewellery artefact becomes the major premise. The locating of red into historical locations via the jewellery object becomes an opportunity to place Christ into previous and seemingly unlikely cultural locations.

The inclusion of red becomes an impediment and an upheaval within the orthodoxy of the classifier. The substance of the red has no specificity to the time location. Substances of glass, plastic, foil, paint and found objects become a confrontation and a vehicle for colour, offering new advantages for signage for what pre-exists.

Not drawn to the preciousness of some gem set jewel but to the intrusion into something that was previously "correct", the observer is called to a new preciousness: the richness of plastic, glass, Coca-cola. This is a confrontation of what is initially alien which then leads to an accommodation bringing a new configuration. A rearrangement with changed structures occurs in order to comply with what was once an impediment. Surviving history becomes a vehicle for the contemporary planting of a new ideal from another time, and this places the past within the reach of a vicarious now.

A pseudo history this is not and neither is it the formulating of a new myth, but it does ask the question, what if? There is a new instruction of what if. The invasive red changes the form of the object as it contorts in order to house the red. With the implant comes exaggeration. This historically incorrect jewellery becomes an offering of a (new) conversion to a (new) believing.

Is this the invention of a new tradition or merely the instruction of what if? The history remains, unchanged, but played with. Making a new jewellery is expansive, and "to make it new" does not mean to erase the past, but to transport the work of the present back into the past.

REFERENCES

¹ Notes, New York, 1961, Coosje van Bruggen, *Claes Oldenburg: Mouse Museum/Ray Gun Wing*, Rijksmuseum Kröller-Müller, Otterlo Museum Ludwig, Köln, 1979. p.17.

² This was the first part of a three part series titled, AAA,.....REDEVENT, 1994-5. The second part was the group, REDLINE, which was first shown at Lauraine Diggins Fine Art, December 1996 while the third group *The Intervention of Red* was shown at Galerie Biró, Munich in September, 1997. A later group was built in 1997 titled *A Vesseled History* which won "The Colin and Cicely Rigg Award" at the National Gallery of Victoria of that year.

³ "The Entropy of Red-Table", private collection; "The Entropy of Red-Crown", National Gallery of Victoria; "The Entropy of Red-Trumpet", Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

⁴ The first group to identify this was "The Visible Likeness...", 1979-1981, Georges Gallery, Melbourne and Robin Gibson Gallery, Sydney.





