







At the Interstices of Clockwork

Elizabeth Bevan-Parrella  
Cathy Frawley  
Elizabeth Hetzel  
Tyler Rock

SASA GALLERY  
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## At the Interstices of Clockwork

Of the assorted ways in which we might describe the natural process of entropy, Robert Smithson offers both a scientific but at the same time highly poetic meditation. Where many people use the simple descriptor of a wave washing away footprints or their name scrawled in the sand with a big toe, Smithson offers us an image of a sandpit made up of one half white sand and one half black sand. Entropy for Smithson is demonstrated by the act of a child walking a number of times in a clockwork direction over time mixing or blurring the sands together. Yet when the child retraces their movement the same number of times in a counter-clockwise direction the sand is not returned to its initial pristine formation. The artificial order of the original sandpit is irrevocably transformed: never again to be ordered in terms of a black and white binary separation.

Smithson's example of how entropy functions, while clever, is also imbued with an implied critique of specific art orthodoxies of his time. Writing in the late 1960s when geometric or hard edge abstraction was the go-to language for painters (think *The Field* exhibition at the National Gallery of Victoria in 1968), his example deliberately takes aim at the messianic zeal of those artists obsessed with overcoming entropy through recourse to linearity, order and rigid demarcation. The fact that Smithson aligns infants and playgrounds with hard-edged highbrow painting highlights the work of an artist and thinker not above landing a blow in the name of nature over those seeking to rigidly control it.

Smithson's practice straddled a huge range of areas but undeniably one of his greatest legacies was the way in which he thought through in his writing and artwork the complex relationship between man made and natural properties. Specifically his work offered a sustained and often profound engagement with in-betweenness – specifically the space between minimalism and natural forces – an area that has come to be known and explored in depth since as liminality.

The work by each of the four artists in *At the Interstices of Clockwork* exists in a continuum partially set in train by Smithson and his peers working at the time to find ways of connecting nature into the ordered systems of abstraction and minimalism. Drawing together four practitioners who share a sensibility and interest in harnessing natural phenomena into carefully calibrated aesthetic and experiential studies, curator Elizabeth Bevan-Parrella has sought to explore both the representation and physical experience of specific liminal spaces as particular moments of transition. Each of the four artists including herself, work across an assortment of media but are connected by a shared attention to the equality of all things and by a distinct sense of reverie that is achieved when nature is artistically framed and harnessed in highly specific ways. For Bevan-Parella the works in the exhibition are not the gifts of excess but rather are intensities; investments in time and provisions to share that demonstrate the fragile state of all things as celebrated through symbolic play. Importantly each work shares an interest in activating time in highly specific ways through works that evoke a consciously slowed space, what the curator describes as an in-between time spent at the interstices of clockwork. Like slow food, this work seeks to concentrate the rich resonances and delicate transitions that occur in our natural world and to frame them in distinct yet uniformly concentrated forms.

The idea of reverie is central here for it suggests a level of engagement and focus that clearly exceeds both the empirical nature of scientific investigation and the more sober and dispassionate representation of conceptually focused artistic studies of natural phenomena. Each artist offers a meditation on how nature always has the capacity to exceed what we know and how we come to understand and experience its basic properties. Rather than framing nature as sublime in the grand tradition of romantic painters and in the writings of Edmund Burke, the artists seek a less grandiose but still concentrated engagement that straddles the feint divide between what might be considered mundane (nature as we think we know it) and somehow extraordinary (nature captured and framed in innovative and

profoundly compelling and potentially aesthetically complex ways).

Of course the space between these two registers is often painfully thin and it is along this fault line that the artists have rummaged, poked, and panned for that highly elusive formation (a coming together of form, content, temporal dimension, etc.) that somehow exceeds its constituent parts. In seeking to conjure highly evocative and often elusive artistic alignments, the artists employ an eclectic array of photography, video and assorted material forms to uncover moment's in-between states that speak to us in compelling ways.

Tyler Rock's moveable hanging magnifying glasses functions to both fragment panoptical vision while at the same time reflect and magnify the other works that surround it. Working with both clear and mirrored glass, his multiple viewing stations create an experience that is like a giant, if fractured 'looking' glass that pushes and pulls architectural space in complex ways. Rock's systems-based work largely with glass characteristically engages with simple experimental procedures that utilise 'natural' cycles. He is interested in the interconnection between the glass 'craft' object and broader interdisciplinary visual art practices and fields.

Elizabeth Bevan-Parrella's sculpture and works on paper speak to us about nature's effect on the materiality of forms and relatedly the specificity of place. Her fragile and delicate reassembles are remnants collected from a shady edge of the driest continent on earth. The central piece is a tangle of old farming wire offsets that make a large ball; shaped en-mass that hangs from the ceiling. This piece is carefully lit to activate the shadows as atmospheric shapes with strong linear contrast. Inspired by the writing of Bernard Cache on ideas about absolute boundaries of place, the artist presents a small object in the window of the SASA gallery. This modest but evocative work contains a surprising organic element in the form of a healthy nasturtium leaf which the artist replenishes daily. The work's power is brought about in part

through the incursion of a delicate natural component into the assertively rigid architecture of the space.

Cathy Frawley's practice straddles painting and video. She employs a moving image camera to record sequential and poetic occurrences that she happens upon on her daily walks. For this exhibition, she presents a video and photographic images of the simple natural process of drops of rain falling into a pond. While there is a temporal aspect present in the random marking of time of the water droplets, the artist is also fascinated by the abstract shapes, concentric circles that merge and dissipate in rhythmic sequences. These forms connect into a different yet related language namely modernist abstract painting. The video works simplicity for instance brings to mind natural organic shapes found in Sonya Delaunay's early modernist paintings.

Like Frawley's work, Elizabeth Hetzel also utilizes video to document simple movements of human endeavor. Her hand is shown gently but deliberately digging into the sand on a beach, making holes until they appear in abundance. This action evokes the work of a mother sea turtle as she painstakingly makes places to lay her eggs – the sea washes over the holes, turning one phase of making into inevitable disappearance. This is a poetic and strangely intoxicating work that addresses how entropy functions both as a natural process but as a profoundly compelling aesthetic of moving forms.

Perhaps it is a measure of what seems to be an increasing need for art to be subtle, nuanced and above all not didactic, that artists want and need to trawl the liminal in search of something special. At a time when aesthetics and politics seem continually waged in a battle between clarity, obscurity and the diaspora in-between, the artists in this exhibition ask of us to look for the small fracture, the strange alignment, the tenuous moment in which the system (the world as we know it) is recast and we are able to see it as the artists do in a beautifully strange new light.

David Cross

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Images:

Front: Elizabeth Bevan-Parrella, *from city to teaspoon*, 2013

Centre: Tyler Rock, *Path of light*, 2011

Back: Cathy Frawley, *Beautiful world*, 2011

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