



SUSAN JACOBS
Australia b.1977
Studio view, Melbourne / Image courtesy:
The artist and Sarah Scout, Melbourne /
Photograph: Jake Walker

SUSAN JACOBS

Frontier

Susan Jacobs's practice is free-floating. Her visual vocabulary changes according to context and her works have no lexicon of precise meanings. She communicates instead with lines, tones, coded symbols and empty spaces.¹ Reflecting an intuitive sensibility, Jacobs explores the latent potential of the sites in which she works as much as the materials she uses. Drawing on an array of references for inspiration — from Minimalism and land art to physics, and the philosophy of how we experience space — her oeuvre also tends towards the esoteric.

Spanning sculpture, installation, recorded actions, works on paper and site-responsive interventions — Jacobs's art amounts to a common line of inquiry, often couched within references to the conceptual and physical processes involved in drawing.² Whatever their final form, her works take shape through a cumulative process of making, a process that appears elusive, but when viewed as a whole acts as 'a chorus reciting centuries of accumulated knowledge'.³

Describing a diagonal trajectory, Jacobs's work for APT7 explores the notion of an 'ideal' point of view. Operating to suggest and undo, almost simultaneously, the sense of an 'optimum' vantage point, *Frontier* 2012 sets up a single perspective and then disrupts it — creating a 'sculptural problem' in the process.⁴ By looking through the installation, it is possible to see and experience how individual elements contribute to the whole, yet every view is necessarily one-sided. However much the perspective changes, we are always bound to one perspective — as Jacobs says: 'there is no ideal position from which to experience the structure as absolute'.⁵

Like a three-dimensional collage, a number of curious objects, both 'anamorphic and anthropomorphic' have been carefully arranged in a process akin to visual choreography. The sculptural components range in scale from roughly life-size to miniscule, and have been made using a range of materials — timber, epoxy modelling compound, iron, brass, pewter, copper, bismuth, steel, magnets, found objects, reconstituted drawings, plaster, wire. Jacobs has approached the process of making the objects — and arranging them in the gallery — intuitively to a degree, letting the materials determine form and placement. She likens her method to the way a sketch might evolve over time:

The idea of a drawing as an outline for a 'final' sculpture is considered in relation to a hierarchy between plan and action. I am interested in the immediacy of an action becoming a plan or something 'fixed', which then becomes a position to move through.⁶

Jacobs plays with the possibilities of perception as much as she experiments with materials, whether recasting, moulding or shaping them. While the objects are finished, indivisible in their own right and with an ongoing life, the effect of their installation is to set up a site of transition, a 'location where human experience and consciousness take on material and spatial form'.⁸

Frontier contradicts the usual operation of space in a gallery setting; sightlines are deliberately interrupted, spaces are dissected and the gallery is transformed into a site where the view of the work can only ever be partial and mediated. This speaks as much to Jacobs's ongoing interest in architectural intervention as it does to the idea of mark-making that leaves few traces behind. In this whirl of intersecting ideas and interests, room is created for multiple associations to emerge and for the work to simply be.⁹

Evocative of an expansive landscape, this carefully calibrated field of objects operates as a kind of three-dimensional moiré — a shimmering haze that levitates, like a mirage shifting vertically at the horizon line. Normally, we find landmarks that situate us, but with Jacobs everything is in flux. While redeploying a beloved cliché of the Western cinematic genre, here, the bow-legged cowboy squinting into the middle-distance is absent. Instead, viewers are left to consider a series of experimentations, recognising both the fundamental groundedness of the objects and their engagement with the indecipherable 'stuff' that surrounds us — physical forces, particles and environments. The overall effect is to suggest that 'while matter may be mundane, it is also imbued with metamorphic potential'.¹⁰

Susan Jacobs offers no easy answers with *Frontier*. She does, however, suggest where to begin looking, inviting us to re-examine, to rediscover, and to think about one thing in relation to another. Orientate yourself, begin here. This is a work that communicates in spatial typologies, inviting consideration of the way architecture structures our experience of an art object, yet at the same time 'muses on the distant vistas of memory, the jagged terrain of the heart, or the fantastic landscape of dreams'.¹¹

Bree Richards

- ¹ Miles Harvey, *The Island of Lost Maps*, Random House, New York, 2000, p.38.
- ² Rebecca Coates, *New010* [exhibition catalogue], Australian Centre for Contemporary Art, Melbourne, 2010, p.46.
- ³ Harvey, p.38.
- ⁴ Susan Jacobs, email to the author, July 2012.
- ⁵ Jacobs, email to the author.
- ⁶ Jacobs, email to the author.
- ⁷ Jacobs, email to the author.
- ⁸ Setha M Low, 'Embodied spaces', *Space and Culture*, vol.6, no.1, February 2003, p.9, see <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/willow/estudio_seminar/sethalow-embodied%20spaces.pdf> viewed 26 August 2012.
- ⁹ Coates, p.49.
- ¹⁰ Marni Williams, 'Art & Australia / Credit Suisse Private Banking Contemporary Art Award: Susan Jacobs', *Art and Australia*, vol.47, no.4, winter 2012, p.716.
- ¹¹ Harvey, p.38.