The works were photographed on location by Samit Das at IIT Delhi in December 2004.

www.mandyridley.com

THE VISUAL ARTS AND CRAFT STRATEGY

Mandy Ridley is supported by the Visual Arts and Craft Strategy, an initiative of the Australian, State and Territory Governments.
One Shanti Road is a studio space for visual arts

Public / Private
a small token

Mandy Ridley

Catalogue essay
by Anil Kumar

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by Samit Das

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by Archana Hande
Made to mark my return to India, this work originated with a desire to bring an exhibition expressing my particular Australian perspective. Plant forms from my neighbourhood, sketched during concept design for a public art project, were further developed for this exhibition to become potent tokens of my environment.

The exhibition was created in response to my experience of the last two years since first visiting India. These realisations included:
- the importance of the interweaving of family, friends and colleagues with the art-making process.
- an involvement with Public Art projects.
- a reveling in lightness and translucency.

This work explores colour, craftsmanship and pattern. Formal concerns focus around the particular qualities that hand and laser cutting technologies present. There is also an exploration of the drawn line and its translation into a three dimensional embroidered structure. The plant forms were first expressed as delicate drawings. These were then translated into embroidery inspired by Chikankari, traditional Indian white work. The drawings also formed the basis for designs inspired by traditional paper cut-outs. There is a further translation into the industrially-cut polypropylene panels.

So I find myself in India, a guest returning. Once again being warmly received, anticipating making new friends and eager to meet with those already known. I present a small token.
Site, Sight & Soliloquy ---The Tale of an Open-Ended Narrative:

SITE:

The current works by Mandy Ridley 'appear' what they are supposed not to 'represent'--to begin with.

They contain a surface--which in reality and metaphorically--seem to recalls an abstract design-pattern. Gradually, as we begin to realise that there is something more to these initially design-like-appearances, our sense might get prepared to enrich itself by understanding the very sources from where all these forms/surfaces originated.

It is not when we look at the physical reality of her works that we begin to 'understand' them. It is not when we become patient enough to know more about the 'varied sources' behind these uni-‘forms’ that we begin to ‘grasp’ these works. These facts are not untrue but half-truths and account to an appearance which is different from what it represents.

It is exactly after passing through both these stages, that we begin to realise that we are yet to make a conscious effort to acknowledge what these works can do to us i.e. if we are prepared to do so. They do provide a set of visual stimulus to the watchful eyes as much as their background provides fodder to the multi-disciplined mind, dividing the eye and the mind to a great extent. There is no heroism about this fact, which Mandy’s works themselves seem to be aware of. But, at this point wherein a thin metaphoric-line divides the ‘history-conscious mind’ from the ‘watchful-eye’, there are two factors that can provide a new meaning and a possibly fresh definition to the ‘aspect of the public’ in otherwise a private-affair called as visual arts, as far as Mandy's artistic engagement is concerned:

a) What ‘her works’ do to Mandy’s ‘artistic practise’ is split a single viewer into his/her ‘mind’ and the ‘eye’, as though they are two independent entities, thus somehow the works differentiating themselves from her overall artistic involvement. And

b) Bring about this split by a set pattern of her artistic practise in a public domain wherein the ‘surface’ of her works behave as if they are subordinates to her overall artistic practise! Artworks without a conceptual leaning are unable to do this. It is important to note that it is the modesty and deceptiveness (not deceptive modest) of the body of works that serve itself to such humility.

SIGHT 1:

To understand the above two points, let us read Mandy’s works in a particular way. Any given length of her work—generally speaking—inch-by-inch, twists, curves, recurs and after a while, if the eyes ‘will to’ and is patient enough to just look at the works again—they twist, curve and recur, once again, at any given time, in the future!

Through this journey which is similar to a drive in a ‘desert without a route map’ or a wait for something that we know never arrives, our attention is drawn onto itself—the eye’s drive to ‘mean’ what it ‘views’ and view what it wills. The best of the viewer’s effort could be this: the attention, rather than being drawn on to what is seen that twists, curves and recurs, attends itself focusing upon what is being focused! ..

A sense of visual-dejavu is sustained permanently in (a) seemingly the never changing appearance of these works (b) And the permanent attention necessary for the eye to do so.

I would, for the sake of convenience, term both ‘what is seen’ and ‘how it is seen’ as spaces-without-boundaries.
SIGHT 2:

A second formal way of approaching her works might be more helpful, catalyse and even refute the above said readings all at the same time. Yet such a perception depends upon the works, giving way to an utter ‘disbelief’ in reading the surface in a particular manner (in Greenbergian terms).

While the sight surpasses those curves, twists and the bends, there is no ‘memory’ of this sojourn left afterwards. And there is nothing like an afterwards after having seen the same repeat time and again, though in varied angles. In other words, the memory of what is seen is made to exist outside itself, in another space and time while watching these works.

It is a journey undertaken to reach here and now. It doesn’t involve a movement from one point to other, while watching the surface of her works. The scale of the works meeting the anthropometrics standard (life-size of the works) ‘erases’ each portion of the ‘site’ covered by the ‘sight’ and hence a ‘memory’ of what has been covered in the immediate past becomes an intentional ‘non-entity’. It is like a portion of the work ‘pasted’ to the eye when it moves to the next physical space in the work, carrying the pasted visual of what factually exists everywhere but also existed before-forever and exists afterwards-forever.

It is a difficult position though not an impossible one. But the scale, design and background of the work intend it to be so.

The varied source and nature of Mandy’s artworks over a stretch of period further provides a third option of reading its ‘final appearance’.

SOLILOQUY:

When someone relies only on the eye (which is not ‘a part of the mind’ according to Leo Steinberg’s notion) to grasp these works, a generalisation of popular sorts result.

Mandy, or her works-to be precise-uses this end product as a means for self-introspection. Anyone, anywhere, seem to easily understand what her works’ surface is about: the simple, recurring, curvilinear abstract patterns are ‘available’ to those with a sense of sight. This is true in spite of the fact that the ‘uniformity’ of what is seen is an attempt to camouflage the ‘variety’ of what lies beneath.

It is at this point that her works takes a ‘curve’ more unpredictable than those curves that physically recur in her patterned imagery. Consider two examples of what I am attempting to drive at, while ‘watching’ and ‘sensing’ and hence ‘grasping’ Mandy’s works in two mutually non-complementary formal modes:

(a) A flower (an object) next-door is photographed (image) and turned into a drawing (trace of an image). Then it literally traverses thousands of miles, continents and countries—in order to be ‘embroidered’ according to the existing drawing (confirming the diasporic nature of an image rather than dealing with the image itself).

Mandy’s works are a result of such similar, several gestures. The layers of cross-cultural involvement during this process include geography, history of forms and technological adaptations of art, for instance, and moulding the unknown sources (lets say between Australia and Mysore) through a desired formal cast (between derivatives of Op art and Rangoli patterns).
(b) Consider another instance. The typical South Indian 'wire bags' (domestic bags made of floss) formed another source of inspiration for Mandy, 'felt' in her works more than 'applied'.

The product was functional amongst all social classes once upon a time and is now old fashioned and has become an artefact and a kitsch.

The works Mandy produced based on the wire bags were fluorescent, bright, adopted a pattern totally non-existing in the tradition of South Indian wire bag weaving! She was 'reminding' the viewer of those bags yet not 'resembling' them. Since they did not resemble that which inspired her works, she was also creating a pattern of 'reminders of memories'. The 'reminder/non-ressembler' is turned into 'memories/non-nostalgias'. The form she drew was known but not the pattern!

Open Ended Narrative:

My perception of Mandy's artistic preoccupation and not merely her work through her works, ironically so is the text above. Her works become a 'threshold', a sort of two-way mirror addressing and connecting her subject as well as the perceiving eyes.

It is an attempt to sweepingly engross everything that lies between a final product (artwork) and the attempt towards it (practise). This is where a verb becomes a noun, so to say. This in itself is no virtue but the specific results that she derives at, is:

Together her art and her public involvement divide her world into two. The more intimately, intricately she attempts to grasp them the more varied are the 'causes' (two samples of them are already described).

But this is not as simple as it seems to be because the 'mode of representation' of her non-linear, multi-layered world itself subdivides. How can one represent something when the very apparatus meant to represent it is constantly modified according to the nature of what it is supposed to represent? It is a specific question posed by Mandy due to the way she defines art. The challenge for both the artist and the onlooker is immense, but we live in no simplistic world anymore.

While her source of inspiration can arguably find no common audience from any specific cultural or geographic location the final representation of them seems to be deceptively easily recognised by anybody and everybody, which in itself is ironic and paradoxical! The variety of the sources and the commonality of the viewing patterns are both teasingly deceptive.

To put the whole argument in a nutshell, Mandy's artistic engagement is all about grasping her experiential world into a 'chart' while being aware of the impossibility of such an attempt! The resultant artwork is all about it. To create a set of mocking uniform visual-sensations that hints at a 'teasing pattern' for the audience to grasp them. They seem to identify it but might or might not have experienced the process it underwent. The overall exercise divides us into what we earlier thought could be one, the mind, the eye, the body and possibly the soul. The more and more we look into each of the multi-layered world the less and less we know about all of them ('in' as well as 'out' of Mandy's art). But as far as Mandy is concerned, what a strategic methodology she adopts to bring this fact into limelight!

The notion of public is to perceive art, but here even the difficulty to do so also finds a creative expression!

H.A.ANIL KUMAR
Curator & Art Critic
Acknowledgments

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Mandy Ridley
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Lives and works in Brisbane, Australia.

Education
Master of Arts (MFA), Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane 2000

Selected solo exhibitions
2005: Public / Private - a small token, One Shanti Road, A studio space for visual art, Bangalore
2002: Pincushion paintings Soapbox gallery, Brisbane
In celebration Gallery 4A, Asia-Australia Arts Centre, Sydney Performance Centre, USQ & Craft Queensland, Brisbane
2001: Chinatown souvenirs (on not knowing) IMA, Brisbane, Toowoomba Regional Art Gallery, & Regional tour Managed by QAC
2000: Chinatown souvenirs (on not knowing) Gallery 4A, Sydney
On not knowing- Patterned works 1996 -2000 Palace Gallery, Brisbane
1999: From the folk art collection Ivory St. Window, Craft Queensland, Brisbane

Selected group exhibitions
2003: Falling in love SOAPBOX Gallery, Brisbane
2002: Khoj 2002 International Artists Workshop Open day, Mysore India
2002: Conrad Jupiters Art Prize Gold Coast Art Centre Yellow children's art exhibition, Hands On Art, Brisbane
Surface Paradise Gold Coast Art Centre
2001: Conrad Jupiters Art Prize, Gold Coast Art Centre Members show Gallery 4A, Sydney
2000: Hard Felt: art - texture Bond University, Gold Coast Mucking about in the Backyard Global Arts Link, Ipswich Willoughby City Art Prize, Sydney Rom -antics Perc Tucker Gallery Townsville

Awards:
2000: Arts & Museums Development Programs of Assistance, Arts Queensland Commendation in Painting, Churchie Emerging Art Exhibition 2000

Grants:
2002: Australia - India Council, travel grant to attend Khoj Workshop in India.
2004: Australia Council New Work Established, Grant

Public collections:
ArthBank; Brisbane City Gallery; Gold Coast City Art Gallery; Griffith University

Commissions:

Artist residencies:
2002, Australian representative, Khoj International Artists Workshop, Mysore India
2004 / 2005, AsiaLink, selected for India Residency

Selected publications:
Dec/Jan 2003, Betsey Brennan “Living craft” Vogue Living;
Dec 1, 2002, Aditi De “The concerns of 24 minds” The Hindu;
Nov 17, 2002, Marta Jakimowicz “Art & Life Encounters” Articulations, Deccan Herald;
Nov 16, 2002, Debbie Rodgers “In search of self” She Deccan Herald;
October 20, 2002, “Helping artists widen their canvas” The Hindu;
September 2002, Art to Lunch, 4ZZZ, Interview with David Broker, Brisbane;
Eyeline Autumn / winter 2001, p. 45,Alison Kubler “Mandy Ridley: Chinatown souvenirs (on not knowing)”;
Object 4.00 Fresh 2 - From the North East Chinatown Souvenirs’ p. 96;
August 9, 2000, Victoria Hynes Galleries, Sydney Morning Herald;
Autumn 2000 vol 29 no 1 p17, Sean Kelly “Essentialism gets up” Broadsheet;
David Broker “Belinda Giddins, Mandy Ridley & Sandra Selig: Parlour” Artlink V 17 No.4 p. 86.