Bummock

The Lace Archive

Bummock

The Lace Archive

ftb PRESS

Residency Studio Visit, 29th July 2016

BY FIONA CURRAN

During the early stages of the project and our research residency within the Lace Archive, Bracey, Maier and Renton engaged in a 4-day art residency at hARTslane Gallery, London. This time working together at hARTslane Gallery was to focus on the artistic development of ideas from the archival objects we'd recently been researching in the archive.

Fiona Curran was invited a critical friend to facilitate a discussion about the embryotic development of the work. These are her thoughts and reflections from this time together.

Residency studio visit

hARTslane Gallery, London
29th July 2016

BY FIONA CURRAN

I found the discussion broad ranging in scope and thought there was a wonderful movement between the micro and the macro scales of the project(s). We moved fluidly and fluently from the details of the work being undertaken on the residency in response to the Nottingham lace collection, to the broader project on archives and their use by artists. Lots of questions and themes emerged throughout the day – the conversation was recorded but I have noted some of the things that I took away with me which continue to resonate.

Overall I found the experience to be an enriching one, there were lots of crossovers with my own practice and research interests and it's always a privilege to spend time talking to other artists about their ideas and methods of working. We have these shared communities of practice that we rarely have the time or opportunity to discuss.

What gets archived? Hierarchies of value, use and interpretation. Ethics of access, handling, reproduction. Interventions of the digital that at once promise open access but at the same time 'flatten' everything to the same scale and smooth surface through the screen based image. How does accessing the archive in person alter our engagement with the objects? Does the materiality of the 'object' matter? If so, Why? How do we capture or reflect that?

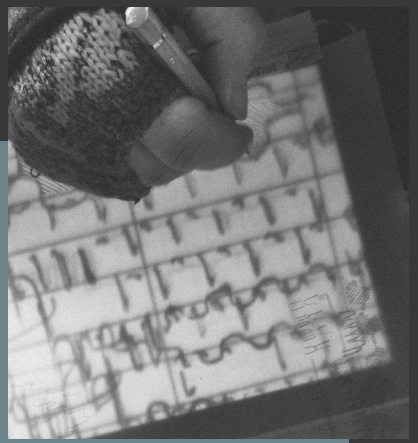
How does assessing the archive in person alter our engagement with the objects?

How we approach researching in an archive as artists and what we bring with us – are we inevitably drawn to objects that resonate aesthetically/conceptually with our own work? Perhaps naturally so, however, perhaps this is sometimes too 'comfortable' a process and we need to address what we're 'excluding' or not-seeing and why. However, archives by their very nature are usually full of things and there has to be some kind of natural selection process at work so perhaps this self-editing process has to happen. How might we disrupt that process? Would we want to?

From the conversations around the lace archive at Nottingham in particular, ideas emerged about revealing and concealing and this lace reference to positive and negative space seemed to act as a metaphor for broader discussions about seeing and not seeing, screening (between inside and outside via the lace curtain for example), and about what was being screened in and out of vision, of language and of interpretation.

Questions also arose about the digital and mechanical production processes and the place of the hand and materiality – across drawing and making. The role of tools and technology in mediating (screening?) experience but also perhaps in shaping experience and identity. Issues of authenticity, truth, legitimacy and 'cheating' emerged in relation to these questions. All of these seem to relate to the archive and questions about how something is acquisitioned, how its status is decided and its authenticity verified. Who are the gatekeepers?

We spoke about using technology and tools such as computers and pantographs and the performative aspect of these tools, how the body is involved in the production process but also how it might be physically separated from the end 'product'/ outcome (such as the digital drawing for example or the machine manufactured lace – this made me think of the Schiffli machine and its use as a drawing tool). On reflection this also seems to link to ideas around gesture and the mark, which emerged in the work of Andrew and Danica. How the mark is made and who it is made by – the handwriting from the ledger book that's scaled up so large that it mimics abstract painting and the 'heroic' gesture of the painter's brushstroke; the role of the fragment and repetition through reproduction; the mysterious hieroglyph-like marks of the mechanical lace drawings. Danica's



work focused in on this notion of transcription and it was interesting to see the difficulties she was navigating when faced with source material that already visually resembled her previous 'stitch' drawings. We spoke about the difficulties of working with archive material and how often it is so beautiful or interesting in just being re-presented rather than being interpreted further. The seduction of objects and artefacts in and of themselves can present an obstacle.

It felt as though there needed to be something that intervened in/ disrupted the transcription/ translation process. We talked about scale as something that might do this and also about the references within the images to three-dimensional forms. Danica spoke of musical notation but they also make me think of architectural and industrial design/ engineering drawings – axonometric plans for example, perhaps this links to the anamorphic drawings Danica had worked with previously?

I keep coming back to the idea of codes and encrypted language to be deciphered/interpreted with these images/plans. Perhaps 'drawing 'physically (and ephemerally) in space with materials or the body could be interesting, as though the machines the images were intended for were following the marks, graphs and plots in space. Perhaps they are like dance notations that trace body movements through architectural space? I'm not sure why but this element of performance and the performative seems to have stayed with me – it is bound up with notions of the gesture, the machine, cloth that might be worn and moved in.

There also seemed to be an interesting theme that emerged around language and logic in relation to this notion of interpretation and deciphering. How the written text in the ledger was indecipherable – perhaps due to the handwriting being illegible, perhaps because we no longer know how to 'read' the information in our contemporary moment or perhaps because the writer meant for it to be hidden or written in code for example in order to safeguard industrial secrets. Do we want/need to know or are the questions this raises and the uncertainties it leaves us with more interesting?

Colour also emerged as a key theme, particularly in relation to the decorative and ornament. The longstanding debates around colour as a 'distraction' from something more serious, as something highly gendered when coupled with pattern, and as a physical/material force when paint is mixed and remixed by hand, how it

interacts with different surfaces and other colours. In Lucy's work we talked about the use of the knitted pieces from the archive with their synthetic 1970s colour and ideas of taste and kitsch. How in one historical period or one culture the opulence of colour, pattern and shine can signify wealth, and in another poor taste or 'trying too hard.' Where do the borders lie and when and how do they shift? In Andrew's work the deliberate decision to reject the unruly colour sample in favour of a monochrome grid pattern played into ideas around order, logic and containment all of which mimic the larger archival themes. We also discussed architectural references in relation to Lucy's work and to the archive itself – I thought about the human body as a form of architecture in relation to the lace and knitted fabrics and we talked about the re-presentation of the archive space itself. Again in terms of authenticity – the archive boxes in the Kubrick archive replaced with new ones for example. What happens when the technology develops and the whole infrastructure for storage and containment is outmoded and superseded? Do the containers of the archive become part of the archive? And what about the architecture of the archive itself as a container? – The economies of scale from the box to the room to the building. It was interesting to reflect on this in relation to the scales of the project again and the micro scale of the residency space today and its effects on the work being made – to the exhibition space of the show for this stage of the project – to the final exhibition space for the whole project. It felt like boxes within boxes and it seemed inevitable that although you may be approaching each stage as a discreet element of a larger whole, that there will inevitably be 'contamination' – boxes are going to get mixed up! There's something about this notion of slippage across the five archives that intrigues and excites me (particularly as one is not actually decided on yet – could it be an imaginary archive? Perhaps one from a work of fiction for example).

Personally, I don't think I could keep the stages so discrete. I would want to see what happens when lace comes into dialogue with (or contaminates) mathematics and Kubrick for example and vice versa.

So much to think about, I would love to carry on the conversation over the journey. Thank you for inviting me to be involved at this stage.

Contributors

BIOGRAPHIES

Pennina Barnett is a writer on visual culture and a Founding Co-Editor of the journal Textile, Cloth and Culture. She co-curated The Subversive Stitch Revisited: the politics of cloth, an international symposium at the Victoria and Albert Museum in 2013. Formerly Senior Lecturer in Art at Goldsmiths, University of London, she led the critical studies programme for undergraduate Textiles. Current research focuses on cloth, memory and repair as metaphors within contemporary art practice.

Andrew Bracey is an artist based in Waddington. His practice hovers on the fringes of painting, as bridges over and expands into installation, curation, sculpture, drawing and animation. Solo exhibitions include Isherwood Gallery, Wigan; Usher Gallery, Lincoln; Nottingham Castle; Manchester Art Gallery; Transition Gallery, London and firstsite, Colchester. He is Programme Leader of MA Fine Art at The University of Lincoln.

Dr Fiona Curran is an artist based at Wysing Arts Centre in Cambridge. She holds a PhD from the Slade School of Fine Art and is a Senior Tutor in Mixed Media Textiles at the Royal College of Art, London. Fiona's work on the poetics and politics of landscape space spans gallery, site and written text. Her public commissions include works for Gibside, Gateshead; Kielder Art & Architecture, Northumberland; Art Across the City, Swansea; The Royal London Hospital; Danson House, Bexleyheath Park and Tatton Park, Cheshire.

Janis Jefferies is an artist, writer and curator, Professor of Visual Arts and Research Fellow at the Constance Howard Gallery, Goldsmiths, University of London, which she founded. She is a pioneer in the field of contemporary textiles within visual and material culture on the international stage, and has exhibited and published widely.

Danica Maier completed an MFA in painting before receiving an MA in Textiles. Her work uses site-specific installations, drawing, and objects to explore expectations, while using subtle slippages to transgress propriety. Maier is an Associate Professor in Fine Art at Nottingham Trent University, where she runs the Summer Lodge, an annual 2-week artists' residency.

Lucy Renton studied Fine Art at St. Martin's School of Art and the Royal College of Art. She has exhibited widely, in Europe, UK and beyond, working in a range of modes and media including sound, performance, film, video and more recently sculptural installation. Member of research faculties at the Universities of East London and of Kingston, she co-curated artist residency and symposium 'inside inside' as part of the 3rd Istanbul Design Biennale in 2016.

Dr Sian Vaughan is a Senior Lecturer in Birmingham School of Art at Birmingham City University. As a former Keeper of Archives, she has a long-standing interest in the conceptualisation and methodology of the archive in relation to creative practice. She is an art historian by training whose broader research interests concern the pedagogies that underpin research in art and design and the modalities of interpretation and mediation of public engagement with contemporary art.