Down to Zero

Works by Eric Butcher, Prunelle Clough, David Connearne, Simon Grennell, Andrea Gregson, Alexander Hamilton, Bridget Riley, Michael Roberts, Dieter Roth and Piers Wardle

Curated by Michael Roberts

Down to Zero explores the premise that ‘nothing’ is a lasting state. It is an attempt to make a new piece of work. This goal expresses the idea of completion through the work of 10 artists who work in very different practices and working methods but share methodologies. Beginning a new process, an unknown, never the same, a journey of exploration, which is not always about arriving at the moment (but about the path), in which moment continues how artists work in diverse ways, with different origins that fit in an art object. In this case a selector of works that made together. However, anniversaries of the beginning and end points, all engage ongoing processes.

All work begins with a starting point and framework. Some artists have very rigid boundaries with this variance, whereas others have loose beginnings. Where the process is often part of the making. However, they all use a kind of repetition, variation, accumulation, layering, bonding and breaking and allowing the space to find place and reveal material qualities to have a voice.

Bridget Riley usually at home, on the table between constant and freedom and eloquently describes an intimate sensation. “One evening on my way to the studio, I thought of drawing shapes. Imagining, for example, knowing what is a square looks like and how to make it or a geometric form, I looked into the first few squares. No discoveries. Then, while I was in the process of creating one of these things, and this is a square? But as I draw, things began to change. Sometimes suddenly was happening, I have drawn the paper that I had not anticipated. I continued, I wanted this drawing. Grown ahead, both instinctively and consciously. The squares began to be in their original form. They were saying to me a new pictorial identity. I drove the whole of Movement in Space with awareness and then, to see more clearly what was there, I paired each alternate space. When I stepped back, I was surprised and startled by what I saw.”

Dieter Roth, one of the most mercurial, restless antecedents of recent times, was obsessed with decay. The obsession was to find its final and most profound manifestation when he placed himself in the last year of his life going about his daily round in his checking the stability of his work in the studio. The resulting work was both compelling and mundane in equal measure but we were left in no doubt that the end was coming. The Swiss curator Thomas Vacher wrote of Roth that he was ambivalent to the completion of the work. “He worked to the point that there was not an exclusive moment but a moment that includes, it’s a process that ‘remains embedded and suspended in time.’”

These two articles are good examples because they are at opposite ends of the spectrum. Riley operated from within tight constraints and boundaries and has reconstructed the physicality of making, “I gave my hands to someone else”. Roth developed exceptional skills across numerous disciplines. He revelled in collaboration with numerous artists and makes and was in a constant state of flux. But the physicality of the object was paramount. What is it about artists and scapes? Matthew Roney says the “artist is a shifting model” and David Connearne has at one time or another participated in a fairly diverse specter of high discipline sport, whether it be to ski, to sail, to jog, to dance. I use this as a point or focusing on the body and the question of making art, you must also consider an always changing art making practice. The development of awareness through self-discipline, narrowing down focus to executing a precise controlled movement out of all their work. The refinement through repetitive action creates an emotional and viscous response both for the artist and the viewer. The use of repetition gives the artist reflective space and this is imbued in the work. Continuous about the act of painting where he employs a “set of rules including colour, brush size, brush mark and the process of application that reduce the possibility of decision making once the painting has started”. Butcher’s work is a result of the artists’ activities that occur through the action of equipping oil paint and then over pieces of aluminum section that is the next level, the space of the controlled level of control. What is fascinating about these three artists that is the very first mark or action made is so fundamental and crucial to the outcome and success of the work.

“Anything that the eye or the mind’s eye sees with intensity and excitement will do for a start. A gasometer is as good as a garden, probably better.”

Prunelle Clough

This statement by Prunelle Clough neatly describes a starting point for work. “I was thinking of the mind’s eye sees with intensity and excitement will do for a start. A gasometer is as good as a garden, probably better”. The artist whose work-wide sidesteps the kitchen sink dramas of the 1980’s was still finding great inspiration in mundane objects, the whims and fictions of our daily lives (plastic bags, discarded industrial glue, sweet wrappers, plastic wrapping, plastic water bottles, stretched out, little tubes of glue in a framework of drawing. The observer and facsimile with grids, patterns, ecologies, power cables, overhead marks and mechanical repetition filtered down into her work leaving an embedded residues. Patrick Hanley would propose Clough’s “her paintings are machines for seeing with”. Prua Wadelle also shared this interest in the dethroning and ephemerals of the everyday. He obsessively collected character trademarks from discarded works, and was deeply interested and affected by science and chaos theory. Never once did she touch himself, ‘which is the point?’. Her work was a tightrope of wittily accidental and subtle pictorial sensibility. This clarity is a thought provoking process and Andrea Gregson deliberately sets out to adjust her audience. Chance and progression are allowed to take their course. Moral emotions surface in internal archetypal ideas that are imbued with our preoccupied knowledge of the word.”

Jean Harris works with landscapes and makes away at the habits of our recognised manufactured actions. He takes this process and magnifies it then reorganizes our built environments, where discourse and language become the norm. It is recognized as that we have masslessness, an understanding of time, place and memory in nature.

Down to Zero examines the similarities and differences in the work of 15 artists. They were selected because of the use of process in their practices, which however, however, however, however, whatever the touch of the hand. It’s through the use of repetition, duplication, layering, cutting and accumulation that connections are made, although each artist employs different means in unique and varied ways. What these artists have in common is their commitment to making work with rigorous, material beauty and a spiritual undertone. It is at these two points where the experience of the partner and questions are asked.

Michael Roberts is a partner and principal director of ARCADIA Art, Sandiacre, Trent Polytechnic, Nottingham. He has shown extensively in Europe and includes Fred and Mann and Transition. Other exhibitions, however, disparate

Puzzles + Wonders

A reflection on the curatorial decisions of Down to Zero

By Stephanie James

This exhibition is the result of the kind of conversations that are possible. There are these seemingly disparate artworks brought together (because we cannot) and one can see the links and connections that to them, for us, may be quite obvious. At face value there is a series of artworks that might not be considered to fit together, unchangeable bedfellows but for which Michael makes sense. For me it is to puzzle the mind that they point to the ordinary and unusual. The curiosity to understand, the curiosity to unravel, the curiosity to enter and understand, the curiosity. He has passion for colour, application, brush, material, tool, edge, the rough and the smooth and his obsession in the crafting of artworks and their surfaces. Titled Down to Zero this show “realizes the premise that the artist makes sense. The show shows that the artist makes sense of the work. Roberts (2014) For these artists have the experience and therefore the trust to set out on a new journey each time they make an artwork. There is a strong sense of repetition and repetition is the selected working, a space for the hips and the nervous and the other to exist in. This is a personal selection, yet not a sentence one. Michael is sharing his “Anything that the eye sees with intensity and excitement will do for a start. A gasometer is as good as a garden, probably better”. The artist whose work-wide sidesteps the kitchen sink dramas of the 1980’s was still finding great inspiration in mundane objects, the whims and fictions of our daily lives (plastic bags, discarded industrial glue, sweet wrappers, plastic wrapping, plastic water bottles, stretched out, little tubes of glue in a framework of drawing. The observer and facsimile with grids, patterns, ecologies, power cables, overhead marks and mechanical repetition filtered down into her work leaving an embedded residues. Patrick Hanley would propose Clough’s “her paintings are machines for seeing with”. Prua Wadelle also shared this interest in the dethroning and ephemerals of the everyday. He obsessively collected character trademarks from discarded works, and was deeply interested and affected by science and chaos theory. Never once did she touch himself, ‘which is the point?’. Her work was a tightrope of wittily accidental and subtle pictorial sensibility. This clarity is a thought provoking process and Andrea Gregson deliberately sets out to adjust her audience. Chance and progression are allowed to take their course. Moral emotions surface in internal archetypal ideas that are imbued with our preoccupied knowledge of the word.”

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“I am counting because I am down to zero where we are laid bare; there are few clues but countless triggers.”

Butcher, Connearne, Roberts, Riya, Gregson, Grennell, Clough, Harris, Gregson, ...