



all photos Hillary Powell

“Ocean Me” : Responding to a specific junk space

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“Ocean Me” is a slogan graffitied on the walls of a now drained and empty outdoor swimming pool –The Lido in London Fields, Hackney. This is a specific example of the interaction or relationship between art and site, or, “event” and “junkspace”.

The rise of the lidos in the 1920s were part of a well documented history of social reform in east London in which the reformers and sanitarians strived to create an antidote to rapid industrialisation. After the first world war housing, education and health were priorities and in the 1930s increased leisure time led to the development of mass leisure facilities such as these Lido’s and holiday camps with emphasis on fitness and national culture.

London Fields Lido was begun in 1928 and completed in 1936 . Within its red brick enclosure it housed a modern filtration plant for the Olympic size 50 foot pool and, as bathing dropped its macho facade and became a family pursuit it housed a cafe, spectator and sun bathing areas, flower beds and more than adequate changing facilities.

In the 1980s, increased need for subsidy, changing leisure patterns in society and the rise of foreign travel and tourism left the Lido’s in disrepair and debt and in 1988 the London fields pool was closed. Now, in the next Millenium it still lies closed. But not empty. Amid the burgeoning budlia overhanging the empty basin of the pool there lives a group of people termed as “squatters”.

They inhabit the changing rooms and the plant room, hold cafes on Sundays and are planting out the basin of the pool with grass. Approaching the inhabitants for permission to use this site to construct an installation they agreed and I began work on **Fleeting**.

This large scale installation involved the suspension of fifty colourfully striped deckchairs across the swimming pool in fleet formation. Viewed by night, these were lit by halogen lights with their canvas “sails” billowing in the evening breeze to the composed soundtrack of 1930’s romance tunes mixed with the echoes of swimming pools and seaside holidays past (courtesy of BBC sound effects). Within this staged and strange fleet a beautiful woman dressed in a long white dress with a red umbrella took her place in her own deckchair within the fleet remaining there swaying silently in her own world for the one evening duration of the work.

art/site



Visitors commented in the surreal character of the piece, of a subtle juxtaposition where the deckchairs should seem out of place suspended across an empty swimming pool and yet were strangely in place and out of time between the familiar and the unknown.

The already present qualities of a secret and idyllic garden were amplified along with the solitary figure's isolation or dislocation as she faced the deep end of the pool instead of the open sea..

Although there was no fixed viewpoint the circumnavigation the pool from above, glimpsing the chairs and the woman through gaps in the under.(or over) growth allowed a distance and suspension of disbelief to be retained. The issue of theatricality is central to my specific practice and it is interesting to note that such theatricality in art was shunned by Fried in the seminal text 'Art and Objecthood' as a degenerative process. He derides what he terms monumental artificiality. This artificiality is evident in the scenographic conception of architecture, object and event involved in my practice and celebrated in the various processes of the reconfiguration of the natural. Constructing fictional worlds from everyday objects in relationship to the chosen sites I aim to create a transitory environment of amplified atmosphere (linked to the *gesthamkunstwerk*) in order to expose their alternative non functional use and potential. I believe that such reaction to and action on dormant sites can rejuvenate the ideas and attitudes surrounding them and it is perhaps here that the paradox comes into play.

It is hard to deny a fundamental attraction to the derelict and when the entropic programme is interrupted by actions outside of the realm of the temporary event, the space and work develop instantaneous politics and ideologies.

In the Lido, the inhabitants have so far resisted eviction and avoided pressure-that is until now, community action groups and developers attempt to stake their claim at redevelopment. The arguments here are complex. How can this site be best "put to use"? Questions of property, function and social responsibility cannot be avoided. My original intervention was simple, it has now become part of and indeed maybe inadvertently a catalyst for increased discussion around and instability of the site.

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