

## Alexandra Opie, Artist's Statement

Why do we build our lives around this discipline, art and the study of it? Roland Barthes said of confronting an image that it is “a Sisyphean labor: straining toward essence to climb back down...and to begin all over again.”

I have been deeply influenced by the approach of the conceptual artists. Their exploration of the phenomenology of forms and customs – from materials to space and time – continues to inform my creative process. The emphasis on artwork as a direct experience occurring in the mind of the viewer has shaped my perspective. Ephemeral performance works, earth works, and conceptual explorations of video continue to be models to which I return. I depart from conceptual practices through re-investing in form, in more Romantic aesthetic considerations and in concerns with the emotional impact of artwork, positions which conceptualism largely rejected. I have also been influenced by many great writers, in particular by the sensibility of ‘the Russians’ whose interest in human dynamics and psychological states has been a source of inspiration.

My artwork exists, throughout my creative process, as a potential experience rather than as a space or an object. I seek to create artwork that evokes and reminds rather than persuades or confronts the viewer. My early training in painting and performance art informed my perspective on issues of aesthetics and particularly my ideas about audience and the sense of time held within the interaction of viewer with artwork. I am interested in creating, for viewers, a feeling of actual time, actual space, and an experience of artwork as direct presence, rather than as representation.

In form, my artwork has always bridged multiple media. I currently work in single channel and installation video as well as photography. It is my philosophy to follow the development of an idea towards the final structure it dictates. Each form offers its own set of possibilities for communication, just as each idea has properties that render it appropriate for one form rather than another. Installation is of particular interest since it gives me the capability of working with time-based media to create a direct physical experience for an audience through an unfolding set of images and sounds. Large-scale video installation allows me to create immersive atmospheres that affect viewers on multiple levels and that convey an impression rather than representation of the ideas in the work.

My studio practice is centered on a process of inquiry into subjects that surface as persistent questions. There is a Buddhist tradition of meditating on the question “what is it?” in relation to the nature of all that is encountered in life. My process is similar to this meditation. The inquiry can be in relation to memory, community, connection or life processes. The work then evolves out of the question. I take oblique approaches to subject matter, opening a thread which will guide viewers with some subtlety into certain associative territory. To this end, I often combine elements that are of disparate origin. Juxtaposition of these components allows the viewer to form an impression that surpasses the separate meanings of the elements.

I am drawn to careful study, sometimes of the miniature and close, other times of the mundane and trivial. I find that through close looking, the most ordinary becomes exquisite, and the most bland becomes grotesque. In *Murmurings* (video installation 2006) the image of a burning house is projected onto two large screens that hang parallel in space. Accompanying the epic image of a house burning to the ground is the sound of everyday thoughts. The spoken thoughts touch on the range of human experience, from idle contemplations of gumball machines to thoughts of love and loss. Nothing is more “routine” than our moment-to-moment and day-to-day thoughts; few forces in nature and in our lives are more dramatic and powerful than fire. Through pairing these elements, I explore the relationship between the mundane and the catastrophic. Tragedy gains its meaning, its impact, in part through relationship to that which is ordinary, which it disrupts. The installation creates an atmosphere where viewers can contemplate these forces as they make associative connections to their own lives and histories.

Roland Barthes relates the experience of looking for truth in an image through reference to the myth of Sisyphus, emphasizing a continuous process and the difficulty involved in undertaking to capture essence. Like Barthes, I see the repetition of process as an end unto itself. In my practice, as I move through resolution of each question, new inquiries emerge to be undertaken.