

SUE LORRAINE: PRECISELY



Installation view, 2017, *The Apron*, *Dragonfly brooches*, *The Lost Brick Course*, *Never Long Enough*, photo Grant Hancock

SUE LORRAINE: PRECISELY

In *Precisely*, Sue Lorraine addresses herself to the things her father Hans left behind when he died at the age of 89. Through this modest collection of objects, Sue distils a tender posthumous conversation with a man who in life was difficult to know.

At the heart of this work is its title. Not *Precise*, you may have noticed, but *Precisely*. Precision is invoked here in its other senses of rightness, of completeness, of agreement, without an absolutist insistence on accuracy. It's about a manner of working, then, an approach. It focuses on action rather than outcome, suggesting a process of coming into being, and of coming to terms.

To do things precisely is a shared characteristic of both Hans and Sue, and she uses this as a sort of *lingua franca* in their shared conversation. In *Perspective Model*, the space of the viewer is elided with the two-dimensional space of the wall through the agency of Sue's perfectly soldered grid of steel wires, angled so that it marks out a perspectival grid drawn and painted on the wall behind it. The watery green and blue rectangular panes on the wall converge upon their vanishing point, creating a third illusory space.

The work is a reference to Hans's professional life as an architect, and to the collection of beautiful watercolours that he made over the course of his life. Sue's careful craftsmanship holds the work together, evident both in the meticulous soldering of the grid and in the weeks of research required to find a way to prime the wall so that the watercolour used in the wall drawing would behave like it does on paper.

The hours spent in the careful making of this work contribute as much to its meaning as the final outcome. The time spent drawing, testing, soldering, painting, considering, adjusting and re-adjusting is a temporal space of extended reverie. It is a space outside everyday time, mirrored in the drawn space on the wall, a space in which through reverie, the dead and the living can find, for a time, a shared place to be.

The Lost Brick Course refers to a technical drawing made by Hans as part of his practice as an architect. Sue had always intended to use the drawing in the exhibition, but when the time came to consider how to use it, it had vanished inexplicably and refused to be found. Sue has re-created it here as an embroidery on a man's handkerchief, indistinguishable from the ones Hans habitually carried. The embroidery is compelling, with its meticulous stitching as fine as the clear black line of a Rapidograph pen. But the thing you notice most are the long, trailing threads that hang down from the final rows of stitched bricks like hair.

The reference to loose ends, to unravelling, to unfinished business is obvious, but there is another way to read them too. Each hanging thread is a reference to Sue's painstaking re-inscription of her father's drawing, which took so much longer to make than the original would have done. Each deliberate stitch is a conscious re-enactment, a re-creation of her memory of the drawing. Each thread suggests – even invites – the possibility of being taken up again, of continuing the recreation. In this sense, the work could be read as a metonym for memory itself, an acknowledgment that remembering is an act of will, an engagement with the past that takes place in the present.

Whilst the decision not to use Hans's actual possessions in *The Lost Brick Course* was forced on her, in the end Sue has made the same decision for most of the work in this exhibition. The *Dragonfly* brooches, for example, refer to Hans's habit of carrying a blue Staedtler Mars Technico clutch pencil with him wherever he went. Sue has a handful of them, all bent because of his endearing habit of carrying them in his back pocket and sitting on them.

The pencils the brooches are made from are not his, but they might as well be, since it is the freight of association with those ubiquitous implements that is the point of the work. No-one who knew Hans will fail to remember him whenever they see one, and now neither will you. Thus, in creating substitutes for the original objects, Sue moves away from their highly charged status as relics, opening up the space of association in a way that allows us all to enter.

There is however one work here that uses something that belonged to Sue's father. *The Apron* recreates the cotton apron embroidered with his initials that Hans made whilst interned as a young man in Hay and Tatura, somewhere between 1940 and 1942. In place of the cotton, Sue has used the vinyl top of Hans's drafting table. In doing this, she has effected a transformation which mirrors Hans's own, bringing together the displaced German Jewish refugee and the man he was to become: the Australian citizen who changed his name from Lowenstein to Lorraine, who went on to study architecture in Melbourne, to have a family and to live a long and irreproachable life.

How well, in the end, do we know anybody? In life our knowledge of the people we love is always contingent on the assumption that we will have more time: time to ask another question, to seek an explanation, to say something else, to be together again. The most painful thing about death is that there is no more time, only the things left behind and memory. In *Precisely*, Sue Lorraine takes these two things and through the agency of her careful labour slows the rush of time to create a space in which Hans can be invoked in the present and his modest yet extraordinary life acknowledged and honoured.

ANNE BRENNAN
Canberra, 2017