

Kylie Stillman *Lilies in vessel* 2011



Kylie Stillman
Lilies in vessel 2011
carved A4 paper
45.0 x 29.7 x 20.9 cm
Gift of Newcastle Art
Gallery Society 2011
Newcastle Region Art
Gallery collection

The days of the physical book are unequivocally numbered. Already we intuit the aroma of old-worldliness when handling these archaic objects, which can impress their potential for wonder and knowledge upon us before even the first page, is turned. Artist Kylie Stillman proposes a means by which the book may be reborn, in an eloquent and innovative practice that now spans over a decade.

Stillman inverts our approach to books and other physical containers of information by suggesting alternative ways that they may unfold to us. She elaborately scalpels the endless strata of pages one by one, to reveal a treasure trove of wondrous earthly delights. The anonymous volumes of text become blocks of marble that are fastidiously fashioned into art objects, by exercising a process of selective reduction. Reborn, the books achieve a clarity of expression that transcends the printed language held therein.

Stillman acknowledges the cultural specificity of language, and works to overcome this by transforming books from mere paper and ink spots into dazzling sculptural forms.

Kylie Stillman's art is one of reduction, where presence is born of absence. In this she contradicts the equation of aesthetic materiality, where substance equals meaning. She suggests, instead, that meaning can be born of a void. Stillman explores the interiority of inert objects, specifically containers of communication such as books, to lead us towards an alternative means of approaching content. To read a book is to navigate a conventional pathway to its purpose; but to turn the book itself into an object of contemplation allows the reader to escape the clutches of the author, and to formulate an entirely new appreciation of the printed page.

For Stillman, the physical size of her donor object is of paramount significance. She questions the need for artists to construct a blank canvas, 'made to size', when instead existing objects with an inbuilt history could provide a more meaningful starting point. More recently, Stillman has extended her reach beyond books to include reams of cartridge paper, stacks of 'sale' posters and other printed materials, multiplied on a great scale.

While the essential function of Kylie Stillman's art may be non-functional, she proposes a means by which old-world artefacts may usher in a new-world cosmos. Her practice is one of transformation and transcendence, where the materials themselves become the conduits of contemplation, rather than perpetrating acts of representation. Within this process she courts error and unpredictable incidents; the act of cutting often produces imperfections that are themselves symptomatic of life's fallibility.

Stillman says her work is 'about capturing life in a static form', but it is also much more than that. By invoking hidden worlds at life-size, she at once transcends that scale, becoming greater than the sum of its parts and a measure of the size of life.

Simon Gregg
Curator
Gippsland Art Gallery, Sale, Victoria



Kylie Stillman
Rufous backed Shrike
(detail) 2008
carved book
42.0 x 32.0 x 6.0 cm
Purchased 2010
Newcastle Region Art
Gallery collection