Aganetha Dyck

BRAIN IS NOT ENOUGH

GALLERY 1.1.1.

Gallery 1.1.1., School of Art, University of Manitoba, January 10-28, 1988
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School of Art, University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada
Early in 1987, Aganetha Dyck sent letters to various office buildings and institutions, including the Winnipeg Art Gallery, to be posted publicly. These letters proposed the following:

*I am an artist who is having an exhibition at Gallery I.I.I., January 10-29, 1987. My exhibition deals with habits and addictions. If you are considering stopping your cigarette habit, I have a proposal for you. If you like you may give me your last cigarette. I in turn will turn it into a work of art, exhibit it at Gallery I.I.I. and return it to you after the exhibition. There is no charge for the first 25 persons who participate.*

She then spent the summer and fall at her studio at West Hawk Lake, turning cigarettes into art. Her studio was littered with hundreds of cigarettes in metamorphosis,— on table tops, shelves, in niches and corners. The finished works are now being exhibited at Gallery I.I.I., under the title *Brain is Not Enough.*

For Dyck, the act of transforming cigarettes into art is not so strange. In her past work, for example, she gave us fried and canned buttons; sculptural hats, suspended from the ceiling out of reach of any heads; woolen clothing machine-washed and shrunk to uselessness; and shoulder pads clustered into cabbage patches. Recent works, called *Cradles,* were made of trays suspended by cheesecloth, containing found objects embedded into plaster and resin. In the works called the *Refrigerator Series,* open refrigerators displayed disgusting inedibles.

To some extent, any artist's work is autobiographical. The materials Dyck chooses—like buttons, refrigerators, sweaters, shoulder pads—and processes—like frying, machine washing, sewing, wrapping, and embedding—come from domestic surroundings. She works intuitively, which permits complete freedom to explore and to accept resolutions to technical problems. The result is *freshness.*

The wife, mother, woman, artist, usually produces constructive objects and services. However, for Dyck, the artist, the products are a paradox and they are subversive. They show objects that previously had a
function become useless by the creative act. (Is this a tension arising from the Mennonite emphasis on practicality?) Normally we think of the creative act as formative. In her art to date one feels a drive that every work is a deliberate destruction of an object's entity in order to complete its new existence. The object is so extensively attacked that only a reminiscence of its past is left. The new object created is an artifact and survives as art. The gestalt which allows for audience identification and participation mollifies the feeling that the transformation is sinister.

When a mother and wife turns into a career artist, there can be conflicts and struggles. Dyck's early works show this. The current exhibits at Gallery L.L.L. reveal in addition a new significance. The subject matter is still subversion, but in the sense that subversion is used not to destroy past functions but to offer assistance to others in overcoming a bad habit. To better understand this evolution, it is important to refer back to her refrigerator series. When these were exhibited (one in the Winnipeg Art Gallery and five in the Main-Access Gallery), Dyck was presented with a notice to move out of her downtown studio space. Where to put them after the show? She ordered the movers to take them to the city dump to be buried for future anthropologists to find and make of them whatever they wished. This dumping was in fact a courageous act which reinforced her new self, the self-confident woman and artist.

When Dyck placed the sign up asking for the "last cigarette" from smokers, she said that she did not wish to make any judgements. However, by asking for the "last cigarette", is she suggesting implicitly or even explicitly that it was a good idea to quit? In the same abrupt way she dumped her refrigerators, is she asking the smoker to throw away a heavy habit? Certainly, by offering to turn the last cigarette into art, she is reaching out a helping hand. This gesture on her part which is socially relevant is a significant departure from her previously introverted works which are self-referential.

Smoking is alternatingly described as medicinal and poisonous; pleasurable and sickening; sweet-smelling and nauseous; calming and stimulating; addictive and comforting; romantic and dirty; social and anti-social; and so on and on. That can also describe the art cigarettes.

The art cigarette sculptures, while purporting to be made from the "last cigarette" in the package given up by the smoker, were, in fact, in most cases rolled by the artist or "tailor made". They were made singly, or in sets. Some were coupled. Many were encased in resin, wax, glue, varnish and/or thread wrappings. They were sewn, tied, chained, wired and tied to other found objects such as rhinestones, costume jewelry parts, glass beads, tinsels, safety pins, metal fasteners, plastic flowers and even metal clamps and screws. Some retain the integrity of a cigarette, while many are transformed into colourful gaudy jewel-like objects or into sensuous and tactile objects. All of these could still be held between the fingers like a cigarette.

Dyck's sensibility for light and dark themes in the past is present in these works. They are simultaneously beautiful and disturbing. Many are metaphoric: cue tips (reference to smoky poolrooms), chains and plastic syringe parts (to bondage). They may be used merely for adornment, to complete an ensemble, or as conversational pieces, at social gatherings, or to evoke some psychological behaviour. Numerous interpretations are possible. She leaves the viewer to create their own response from memory and expectation. Or just hold them and fidget with them to calm anxieties.

In her past works, Dyck destroyed the functional object partly because the artist is in conflict with the practical demands of society. In this case, for once, the artist and society agrees. She is destroying objects without function.

Grace E. Thomson
Winnipeg
Aganetha Dyck

Citizenship: Canadian
Born: September 12, 1937.
Address: 121 Dunrobin Avenue, Winnipeg, Manitoba, R2K 0T3.
Phone—Studio: (204) 667-3056.

Education
1974-76 Prince Albert Community College, Prince Albert, Saskatchewan.
1980-82 University of Winnipeg, Art History

Selected One Person Exhibitions
1984 “This Summer’s Canned Buttons”, Upstairs Gallery, Winnipeg.
1986 “Cradles”, Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg.

Selected Group Exhibitions
1975 Gallery on the Roof, Regina, Saskatchewan.
1977 “Manitoba Decorative Arts”, Ukrainian Cultural and Educational Centre, Winnipeg.
1986 Expo 86, Canada Pavilion, FOOTNOTES.
1986 “Another Prairies”, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto.
1986 Convergence ’86, John Black Aird Gallery, Toronto.
1987 “A Multiplicity of Voices”, University of Manitoba and Plug In Galleries, Winnipeg.

Related Work
1983 Slide Lecture, University of Saskatchewan, Joan Borsa’s class.
1985 Mentor for the M.A.W.A. program, Winnipeg, Manitoba.
1986 Public slide lecture, Plug In Gallery, Winnipeg.
1986 Max Dean Et Al Group, Finalist, Tribute to Human Rights Commission, Ottawa.
1987 Slide lecture, University of Manitoba.
1987 Slide lecture, Concordia University, Montreal.
1987 Acquisition Committee, Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1984 Traveled to Paris, France. Toured Holland and Germany.
Detail; Brain is not enough
Detail; Brain is not enough
Awards and Grants
1977 Canada Council Explorations Grant.
1979 Manitoba Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant.
1981 Manitoba Arts Council, Visual Arts Grant.
1983 Manitoba Arts Council, Senior Arts Grant.
1985 Canada Council Arts Grant “B.”
1985 Leon A Brown Award, Winnipeg Art Gallery.
1986 Manitoba Arts Council, Senior Arts Grant.

Collections
Canada Council Art Bank
Saskatchewan Arts Board
Winnipeg Art Gallery
Private Collections in Canada, United States of America, England, and Germany.
Artspace, Winnipeg.

Selected Bibliography
1975 Regina Leader Post, review, Gallery on the Roof, December.
1979 CKND TV Guest Artist on “For Art’s Sake” with Kevin Evans.
1979 CBC TV coverage of installation at Norman MacKenzie Art Gallery, October 24, with Lorna Jackson.


Western People Magazine, “Responding to the environment: Winnipeg artist Aganetha Dyck uses the ordinary to create art”, by Sigrid Dahle. Pages 14 and 15. August 22.

Vanguard, September, Susan Whitney Gallery, review by Joan Borsa. Page 30.


Winnipeg Free Press, article by Adrian Chamberlain, regarding the “Cradles” exhibition.

“Another Prairies”, Harbourfront Gallery, Toronto, Catalogue.

“Another Prairies”, Globe and Mail, John Bentley Mays.

1987 “A Multiplicity of Voices”, Catalogue, Sigrid Dahle, University of Manitoba.


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Refrigerator, 1986

In My Father's Garage (the button jars in the cupboard) 1984