

IT'S INSIDE

Catherine Elwes discusses the installation *Katherine Meynell and Alistair Skinner: It's Inside* at Café Gallery Projects London, Southwark Park. 4 - 29 May 2006.

Katharine Meynell's project, funded by the Wellcome foundation, emerges out of a collaboration with her life partner Alistair Skinner whose illness from cancer they documented in videos, diaries, drawings and objects that will form the basis of a final installation that Meynell is creating. This negotiates the interdependent worlds of art and science, of visceral subjective experience and imaginative trajectories and the scientific imaging that supports established taxonomies of pathology.

Skinner and Meynell are aware of the limits of language, both scientific and artistic. They have gravitated towards abstraction. Abstraction in the sense of an excision of extraneous detail, thereby taking a stand "against the explicitness of life under surveillance." Meynell is using material transformations to achieve these levels of abstraction, a kind of tactical avoidance of the banality that illness and death have acquired through overexposure. The slow-drip surgical appliance that liberated Alistair from lengthy administrations of chemotherapy is transformed into a cast object, its weight now equivalent to the experience of having a plastic instrument permanently impaled in one's chest. The clinically precise computer generated images of the illness give way to sensual, but abstracted sequences of the camera travelling across the smooth surface of Alistair's body, giving nothing away of what lies beneath and triggering the creative inventions of the imagination. For them, this becomes an attempt to "make sense of the gap between stark images of a metastasised liver and a visceral response".

Meynell and Skinner were forced to consider the mystifying process of disease and death. Illness, the pathology of the body, is represented in our culture as an enemy within that must be fought with military zeal. Skinner did not consider his illness to be separate from what constituted him as individual. Skinner was able to externalise the changes that were taking place in his body and he asked the performance artist Gary Stevens to write a script for mutating cells. Meynell for her part is examining the territory beyond 'reality TV', when reality itself no longer makes sense, when life that can be examined comes to an end. Her work combines the scrutiny of processes that are obscure and largely invisible, that "cannot be deciphered" and the experience of "being slapped round the face with the hard reality, the logistics of living with something like cancer".

Catherine Elwes