

Whatever. Wherever. Whoever.

The Sculpture of Clare Iles

Clare Iles' work is arrangements of discarded objects at unknown sites on lay-bys, around skips, within cities. The work is documented with a digital camera. The use of recycled materials is a critique of consumerist society and an awareness of social and economic waste. There is also her interest in the story of a second hand object and its relationship to another time and space.

In 2000 Clare Iles went to Australia and drove the thousands of miles from Perth to Darwin. She became intrigued by the way the Australian Aborigines live. She watched them discreetly as she felt intimidated by the way they walked down a main street. They had a way of walking that showed their ownership of the land. Their buildings were shacks but they commanded the space around them. The way they sat in family groups on the open ground, expressed their sense of ownership of the land as far as you could see, and with their 'Walkabout', their knowledge of how far they could walk in a lifetime, and even more of the world was known through the memories embedded in the song lines of their ancestors.

In 2001 she went to the Dominican Republic in the Caribbean. As a tourist she was warned of the danger outside the perimeter of the hotel. She was made to feel scared of going away from the development of the hotel. Yet as she looked down from the privilege of the white hotel, the life she had come to see was laid out in front of her. There below the new road to the hotel was a street art gallery, crammed full of small paintings of the Caribbean palm trees and beaches, sunsets and abstracts, hung out on parallel lines across the space. The gallery was there to tempt the tourist down into the life of the island.

In 2002 Clare Iles was selected by the American conceptual artist Lawrence Weiner for the *EASTinternational* exhibition at the Norwich Gallery. As curator of *EAST I* began working with Clare to plan her installation. She had been a post-graduate student at Norwich School of Art and Design and she had done some work with the refuse collection department at Norwich City Council. She made contact with the Special Collections Department that takes away large unwanted household items of furniture and machinery by arrangement. In the days before the collection she would go round, talk to the house owners and with their



Shanty Street Gallery photograph 2001

art gallery, and she set about converting the foyer of the exhibition into a gallery of photographs of her sculptures. *The Evening News* made a double page splash: 'Is this art or a load of rubbish?' The article echoed the controversy over the work of Tomoko Takahashi who won the *EAST* award in 1997 and who was short-listed for the *Turner Prize* in 2001.

Lawrence Weiner is a life long radical and his work has always challenged values. He recognised Clare's work and gave her an *EAST* award in 2002. I talked with Clare about other references to the alternative values of the 1960s and the 1970s. Had she read Bruce Chatwin's *Songlines* on his travels across Australia and his encounters with the culture of the Aborigines? Yes, his books were important to her. Did her work relate to Arte Povera the work of Italian artists in the late 1960s? Yes. Had she read *Lost White Tribes* by Riccardo Orizio, about the Dutch in Sri Lanka, the Germans in Jamaica, the Poles in Haiti and the French in Guadeloupe who had all lost contact with their native communities in Europe?

We then started to talk about *Mass Observation* in the 1930s, the social anthropology project led by the anthropologist Tom Harrison. When he returned to England in 1936 after studying the cannibals in the New Hebrides, he persuaded a group of friends to study the class based cultures in Britain. He set up the *Work Town* project to study Bolton with Charles Madge, Humphrey Jennings, William Coldstream and Humphrey Spender. The archive is now at Sussex University.



Market photograph 2001

permission compose the items left for collection into a sculpture to photograph. The list of her sites is a kind of poem: private yard Fishergate Norwich; lay-by Europa Road Ipswich; between the railway lines Diss Station; garage forecourt Maldon Road Colchester; 56 Moulshaw Drive Chelmsford; and another lay-by off Herbert Road Harlow.

She made new work in Norwich and then we talked about how to install it. She showed me the photographs she had made in the Dominican Republic of the street



Back of Snooker Club photograph 2003 courtesy of S1 / projects, Sheffield

This started Clare Iles talking about her family, and the class tensions in her own background. Her grandmothers both moved to Essex from London. Her father's mother moved from Hampstead in the 1930s. She remembered swimming in the Thames as a child. Her father's grandmother was an East Ender, a cockney born within the sound of Bow Bells. Her father's maternal grandfather was a German which was difficult at the time of the First World War. Her mother's family are also from London. Her grandmother fostered children. Clare remembers few stories but gives off a sense of a value system that was forged in hard times and that lingered in her earliest memories of a family that still gathers for weddings, christenings and funerals.

As she talks I remember living in Islington in the early 1970s when Arsenal were in the cup final. The men and boys in all the old Islington families brought their TV sets and aerials, armchairs with their antimacassars, crates of beer and plates of sandwiches, out into the street. They sat there, in the sunshine for the afternoon shouting and cheering, watching their team win the cup, in a manner that asserted their communal ownership of their patch, their street. This was what Clare had described in her observation of the Australian Aborigines.

She studied art at Colchester Institute and she has worked on a number of projects with firstsite: *Over the River* an open exhibition organised by The Wolsey Art Gallery, Christchurch Mansion, Ipswich and firstsite, Colchester; and Harlow Library for *Art Fresh 2002* a project with 11 artists that toured Essex libraries, organised by firstsite and Essex County Council and a seven month residency at St Joseph's School in Ipswich. In November and December 2003 she made a project for S1 / projects Sheffield. Her images were made into a series of posters to display on the exterior of factory warehouses in the post-industrial Devonshire quarter of Sheffield.

This new project for firstsite is special. She has taken as her subject the redevelopment of the Hythe by the River



Hythe Demolition photograph 2003



Stakes Tiles photograph 2003 courtesy of S1 / projects, Sheffield

Colne. She has been making sculptures on the site as it is being demolished and photographing them against the maltings, the grain silo, the old light ship, the cold dock, and the building reclamation yard. In the background are the new, but oh so temporary, buildings of Tescos, B&Q and new developments of housing below the University of Essex. We drive down there to take a look. Central to the whole area is a vast scrap metal yard. Beside it is a concrete patch with about 20 small sheds. I ask what were all the little sheds for? 'Oh they were the wash houses and toilets for the Gypsy site. This used to be a big gypsy site. Now the gypsy families are all gone, split up. No idea where.' She sometimes watched them down on the Hythe, as she had watched other marginalized peoples.

Clare Iles work is not about the sites where the work is photographed, nor is it about the objects she makes the sculptures from. It is about the people whose lives, are or were, who lived there and she shows us the things they lived with. Memorials to whomever.

Lynda Morris

Curator of the Norwich Gallery,
Norwich School of Art and Design

Lynda Morris has been curator of the Norwich Gallery since 1980 and she developed the *EASTinternational*



Delivery Entrance photograph 2003 courtesy of S1 / projects, Sheffield

open exhibition which is held annually in Norwich during July and August. She has published on 20th century art history and the criticism of contemporary art. She was art critic for *The Listener* in the 1980s.

Clare Iles Biography

Education

- 2000-2001 MA Fine Art, Norwich School of Art and Design
- 1998-2000 BA Art and Design, Colchester School of Art, Colchester Institute
- 1997 BA Studio Art and History of Art, APU Cambridge (1 year)

Exhibitions

- 2004 *Clare Iles*, New Cut Gallery, Halesworth
- 2003 *Alternative Action Plan*, S1 Artspace, Sheffield
- 2002 *A Shanty Street Stall*, *Artfresh 2002*, Harlow Library, Harlow
EASTinternational, Norwich Gallery, Norwich
Over the River, Wolsey Art Gallery, Ipswich

Awards

- 2002 EAST award
- 2000 Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) bursary award for MA studies