



VERONICA SEKULES

TRASHART

by Ruthie Collins

'EVERYTIME I SIT down in the workshop to make new work I ask – can I justify this? Yes or no?' Lieta Marziali, international jewellery artist, is based in North Norfolk, Holt. Together with works by a collection of artists and makers, you can see her narrative pieces as part of TrashArt, at GroundWork Gallery, King's Lynn, from March 10th until June 2nd this season, as part of Dutch artist Jan Eric Visser's first solo show in the UK – inspiring action on waste.

Already home to a sprinkling of makers, contemporary artists and festivals, GroundWork Gallery is a welcome addition to the East Coast art circuit – a multi award nominated and award winning space for art and the environment. The creation of Veronica Sekules, former Deputy Director of the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, GroundWork Gallery is unique in the UK – all of its artistic programmes are centred around the environment. Last year it won the prestigious Nick Reeves Award for its 'outstanding' contribution to environmental arts.

A former employee of Friends of the Earth herself, Veronica Sekules herself is a leader in the field of art and the environment, author of published titles, most recently including *Cultures of the Countryside – Art, Museum, Heritage and Environment* (Routledge).

GroundWork has a growing educational and outreach programme, with a new project, *Waste Transformed*, starting this March, funded by the British Science Association. A group of local women, survivors of domestic violence, will be making works out of waste found on the River Ouse, supported by social enterprise 4 Transform and artist Jan Eric Visser. Education makes up a significant part of GroundWork's activity, with resource packs for educators available, on teaching



BIRD AFTER BIRD

art and the environment in the classroom. Plus a sparkling range of talks, projects and panel discussions.

'Someone said at the last one of these events, which was about art and climate change, that the discussion was much more positive and open than it would have been at a political meeting when things can quickly turn bitter', Veronica says. The event drew together experts from a mixture of sectors, from art to science – tackling climate change, exploring art's ability to help us reimagine our futures. Art's capacity to inspire fresh perspectives, a starting point for change, is one of her inspirations. 'I am committed to the idea of the gallery being a place of exchange, which opens them up for people, to start new conversations,' she says.

While also a champion for environmental arts in the region, GroundWork's relevance is global. With images of our seas saturated with plastic only too well known, the need for action on waste, is critical. Research fuses much of the work exhibited at GroundWork. GroundWork's show *Bird after Bird*, exhibited in Autumn 2017, has recently been awarded Arts Council funding to travel to The Steel Rooms, in Brigg, North Lincolnshire. At the heart of the exhibition – and giving it its title – is the work of another Norfolk-based artist, Jayne Ivimey, which involved months and months of research, observation, drawing in archives, at the Rothschild museum in Tring, and Norwich Castle Museum.

The Red List of bird species that are threatened and endangered is increasing at an alarming rate,



JAYNE IVIMEY, RED STATUS (CERAMIC ON TABLE) AND RED LIST (DRAWING)

day by day. Jayne's work is a moving tribute in the form of a dramatic installation of white bisque-fired stoneware effigies of dead birds, presented 'bird after bird' – not too dissimilar in feel to Ackroyd and Harvey's 'Seeing Red, Overdrawn' installation – a nod to the IUCN Red List of Endangered Species which you can see here www.iucnredlist.org. Hard hitting research-based work, that doesn't fail to provoke action.

Similarly, Lieta Marziali's work is fused with an intellectual rigour and purity that is refreshing. All her actions, as well the materials in her works, are considered – objects become a mark of emotions, of a point in time, a sense of place. Even trash. 'Trash is not just trash, but a complex conglomeration of physical and emotional capital,' she comments, referring to the themes of GroundWork's upcoming show, TrashArt.

'It is composed of the physicality of the resources that are needed to produce objects, and also of the less-talked-about energy embedded in the growth, procurement, transformation and manufacture of these resources,' explains Lieta.

Work like this invites us to slow down. To reflect. It's a little considered aspect to the environment, or to making itself – the energy that we imbue our waste with, how each object we discard marks a point in time in a person's life. The simplicity of her work leaves you feeling inspired, somehow, to need less.

'Trash also bears the physical and emotional energy invested in the labour and time of those employed in the manufacturing, marketing and selling, buying and storing, distributing, and finally disposing processes. Seen in this light, a paper item of trash might, yes, biodegrade more quickly, but is actually not very dissimilar from a plastic one.



Brooch (2018) by Lieta Marziali, "Norfolk Fields: Of the Alchemy of Before, Between and Beyond"

Materials: sheep's wool, shotgun cartridge case, wood, rusty wire, 18ct gold, iron, stainless steel



Brooch (2013) by Lieta Marziali, "Round The Bend"

Materials: zinc-cast toy car, aerosol can top, jar lid, copper, base metal stud earring, brass, stainless steel

Three Mourning Brooches (2013) by Lieta Marziali, "Lost", "Gone Before", "Beach Road". Materials: copper, beach-combed building material, vintage faux pearls



And this is why reducing, well before reusing and finally recycling, is at the very core of building a deeper and more sustainable ecology. I not only employ mostly reclaimed materials, but also strive to reduce the amount of all materials and tools I use in an increasingly minimal and low-tech approach to making. All of this while keeping in mind that my own work could, one day, become somebody else's trash.'

There's an almost spiritual ethos to her Lieta's process, that's not too dissimilar to veganism, which she has also made the journey to embrace. Every act, every choice of material, is consciously considered – not simply in making, but in life, too. These facets to human life are key to Lieta's process, as a jewellery artist. Not simply on a personal level, but a social one, too: being aware

of who makes the clothes we wear, the computers we use, in a world marked by throwaway culture, somehow, becomes radical.

'It's about practising what you preach. I don't just think about the environmental issues, but also the immediate environment that I'm in. The field. The birds feathering their nests. Out foraging I might think, 'this wool, the birds need this', I don't hoard what I don't need,' she explains.

As well as having a rolling programme of shows throughout the year, GroundWork also sells works by artists and makers. 'I like mixing media and including what people would call crafts and makers. There can be the perception that crafts can't be engaged with ideas, but they do. It's part of my Sainsbury's background that most of the world's art can be sat on, eaten, etc.'



STODY, NORFOLK

The works are rigorously selected by Veronica, not so much for their homespun appeal, but for artistic excellence and ability to stimulate fresh thinking and ideas.

'I think the gallery is a great addition on a national level. Setting out as it did to highlight environmental issues, it showed a pioneering attitude not only in its vision but its great desire to be a catalyst for change,' says Lieta. 'And the choice of location feels part of that ethos of valuing an often misjudged town and its people, themselves an integral part of the larger environment.'

Veronica established GroundWork Gallery in King's Lynn, partly because of the need for action. The need to encourage cross-collaboration and debate across sectors. But also, a long running love for the city. 'I've always liked the town and wanted to do something', she says. Lynn itself is enjoying a resurgence of growth and has long had a loyal arts community, yet its potential as a location for thriving contemporary arts can be overlooked.

'Kings Lynn is tainted with this opinion that it doesn't have a great deal going on here. It's great seeking out new places like this. Taking the children I teach somewhere like this would be fantastic,' comments Lorna Karman, an artist and educator from Norwich, visiting the gallery with her mother for Fire & Ice, GroundWork's climate change themed show, in Autumn 2017.

Norfolk's natural landscape is a huge influence on Lieta work. 'Looking back, there is so much of Norfolk that is imbued in so many of my pieces,' she says. Lieta moved to the UK from Italy twenty four years ago, but it was only when she settled in Norfolk that she really felt at home. In fact, it was while attending a stained-glass class, after moving



to Norfolk with her partner, that Lieta realised she wanted to do more with this process of 'making'.

'There was something about the place that just felt right, and it did so very quickly, even before we had time to explore the area properly. Learning about a slower pace of life, taking us back into the countryside and beach, having to learn about the rhythms of the tide. We were very much not city people anyway (in fact, we had been working outdoors as archaeological excavators the year before!), but being immersed in this landscape made us feel as if we "knew" this place, as if it belonged to us before we belonged to it. And without Norfolk, my art practice would not have happened. In fact, both our lives changed completely to the point that my partner also retrained and became a landscape historian, specialising in Norfolk's lost villages and medieval churches. Being in Norfolk has (re-)taught me about "being" and feeling in a space and time wherever I happen to be.'

Indeed, here's hoping that as GroundWork Gallery's traction increases, Norfolk's potential as an emerging arts scene for the UK – its joyous, slow pace of life, abundant with a sense of possibility for makers and artists, plus the public alike, will not go unmissed.

For more information, visit:

www.lietamarziali.co.uk

www.groundworkgallery.com

Images courtesy of Lieta Marziali and GroundWork Gallery



TITCHWELL BEACH