

## CONVERSATION: CLINTON GAROFANO & CAROLE ROBERTS

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Friendship is about being together and separate—much like this exhibition. Carole and Clinton have been colleagues in arms for many years now and shared many group exhibitions. Here, their works work in conjunction and opposition, their content cuts across and into one another. We see works that clearly share some starting points; there is a shared vocabulary—one subliminal, one more direct.

Roland Barthes said once about this language that we share:  
*Language is a skin. I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers or fingers at the tip of my word. My language trembles with desire.*

Speaking of desire another great philosopher, Sigmund Freud, said that the greatest desire or drive was the Death Drive. Another great conjunction and opposition *Eros and Thanatos*

Apart from shopping the only shared reality we have are physical actions such as respiration and the beginning and end of life. Behind me are Clinton Garofano's paintings of 10 Deaths; in front of me [in this audience] are possibly 40-50 deaths. The works behind me are all different, with different edges and patina, all different surfaces and reflections. The composite surfaces and textures—the beading incisions and frills, from the antique to the schmick, from gloss to matte speak of the diversity of death in life. We see ourselves in the reflective glass. But then we see text we see language writ large. The choice of language here is one of exhortation, it demands, it is ironic. There are Dada roots here with the use of text as image, image as text. There is the paradox of the elevation of low forms.

This interest in text has been apparent in Clinton Garofano's work from the very early exhibitions where he played with cartoons from various sources to the more recent shows where he has appropriated the sacred languages of Sanskrit to similar wry effect. Here the "holy text" is a form of lowly sign writing often seen in storefront windows for the sales. Perhaps these works could be viewed as homage to Robert Macpherson. However the insistent repetition of titles *Dead Serious Dead Shit Dead Obvious — dead dead dead —* takes on a meditative framework. This is a chant.

This brings us to another aspect of culture that Carole and Clinton share—an abiding interest in spirituality in particular Buddhism. Death is the beginning of all religions and spiritual orders: how to explain or to ameliorate the inevitable end of life. My interpretation is that Buddhism attempts to explode the powers of death to look to other parts of the worlds and psyche.

In Carole Roberts' work we see meticulously located canvases upon which are tremulous depictions of various leaves in mysterious configurations. Tenuously decorative we encounter repeat motifs. There are spirals and arabesques. There are half moons and diagonals. Generally the leaves are detached from the stems and trees that once held them as a unity. But this separation of leaf from stem is quite deliberate as the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius wrote: *Even Death is one of the things that Nature favours*. Blue, pink, gold on white: Carole's work looks to the ideals and sense of refinement that characterises the Classical.

Many works remind me of wreaths, for in ancient times one could only enter the temple precinct with a circlet of branches and flowers, a this circle of nature to replicate and honour the cycles of life. Eventually these natural forms were made into extraordinary gold and silver circlets. As we enter this particular temple—The Temple of Carole and Clinton—we are like initiates entering a precinct of sensory overload and deprivation. Carole's work also reminds me of the Victorian period in the lace like delicacy of the work and the almost visionary references to nature as The Source. There are echoes of Australian natural history artists like Louisa Anne Meredith or Georgiana Houghton.

At first seemingly simple silhouettes the forms start to resonate. These are pictures about energy. Energy is one of the great metaphors of the modern-mechanical electrical spiritual, speed etc. It was in the late nineteenth century that the mysteriously named Madame Blavatsky, Colonel Leadbeater and Annie Besant developed Theosophy—a mélange of East and Western mysticism designed to find the spiritual glue of the world; the things and energy that connect us. This search or spiritual quest is at the heart of Modernism: Mondrian, Pollock, Kandinsky, Modersohn-Becker, O'Keefe all had a spiritual awakening.

Confucius sagely observed: *while you do not know life how can you know about death*. This is an exhibition about the life in death, about humour, about desire and history, about Style, about the pleasures and mysteries of the Source, Nature and the Spiritual

Thanks to the artists, Kerry Crowley and to Jo Holder. Enjoy