

## MINDSIGHT

Surface & Shape catalogue essay

Stuart Bennett

August 2005

'Mindsight'<sup>1</sup> has been touted as an explanation in the belief of a sixth sense. A scientific attempt to categorise what is essentially a feeling or impulse. It would be intriguing to find out if those with this 'attentional mechanism'<sup>2</sup> are in some way creative. There are good reasons why some people choose to react to the world around them in a specific artistic manner. The embodiment of these responses is varied and sensory; tactile, aural, gustatory, olfactory, visual; verbal definitions that attempt to describe senses and order our reactions using the confines of language. But a creative reification of the fabric of our environment often eludes distinct classification.

So perhaps there are good reasons for suppressing this appetite to define art. Using words to say what things are can have the polar effect from what was intended. Instead of making the pertinent qualities more distinct, it deadens their imprint, imports and constructs a scaffold that hides the honest texture of the work.

Frances Priest's work is questioning and curious. It doesn't provide us with answers but provokes quiet reaction and essential movement. Space is measured, carved up, contained and re-presented. Air is coerced into collaboration with physical form. Lines oscillate just below the surface. Segments reference the recognisable and hint at the arcane. We circumnavigate the objects realising there is no front and back, wary of their apparent precarious stance.

Drawings act as a seed from which the forms germinate, gently nudged by the fabric of the artist's changing environment. Extrinsic influences from intensive research and travel hint and punctuate. Architectural skins and painted exteriors mesh to refine detailed decoration (in the true sense of the word; graceful, exquisite, harmonious) that tensely clings and burrows into elegant curved slabs. Images of ancient cloth vie with a dusty studio rag to weave their impression into the filtering mind of the maker and out onto the objects. The tools employed to encrust the forms articulate an indelible and inimitable dialect.

Poetically pushing against the immediacy of our image saturated visual culture Frances Priest creates her work with the gestation of physical process. Some are as large as she can make and the kilns can fire. Rules are established, followed and inevitably broken. The sense of movement and changing of depth in the topmost boundary of each object echoes the industry of the practice. Through this residual shift the edge between two and three dimensions is challenged.

This liminality and merging of distinctions is evident in these objects. The edge just holds them up and in; the inlaid drawing lets our eyes move from solid to air to solid with fluidity. Surface generates shape generates surface. There is a purpose but not a utilitarian one. It is neither one thing nor another, neither one discipline nor another. It is immediate, tense and particular with a weighty nod to tradition and a clear measure of where it sits.

If tested I expect Frances Priest would have 'mindsight'. Her physical response to our world is crisp and incisive, instinctively on the sensory threshold. 'I think it links to the idea of finding forms and collections of marks that have, for some indefinable reason, a sense of harmony, balance, 'rightness.'<sup>3</sup> This ability has no categorical term. So perhaps we should devolve our reaction to this body of work into instinct and impulse, appreciate the intention, accept the blurring of boundaries and be thankful of the space in our world these elegant physical statements command.

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- 1 'Ronald Rensink, based at the University of British Columbia in Canada, showed 40 people a series of photographic images flickering on a computer screen. Each image was shown for around a quarter of a second and followed by a brief blank grey screen. Sometimes the image would remain the same throughout the trial; in other trials, after a time the initial image would be alternated with a subtly different one.  
In trials where the researchers manipulated the image, around a third of the people tested reported feeling that the image had changed before they could identify what the change was. In control trials, the same people were confident that no change had occurred. The response to a change in image and control trials was reliably different.  
This could be a newly discovered mode of conscious visual perception. He has dubbed the phenomenon "mindsight".'  
New Scientist, Helen Phillips, 04 February 2004
- 2 New Scientist, Helen Phillips, 04 February 2004
- 3 From correspondence with Frances Priest, June 2005