

*Spin-doctor (some notes on KNOWMORE (House of Commons)) Feb. 2009*

A small, semi-enclosed, darkened space, set in the Infozone at the State Library and inside, a round table, that seems, on the surface, much like many others in the room. What can this tent-like construction possibly mean, erected in the midst of all this public one-on-one concentration, and what is this brightly lit table that it harbours? What kind of strange fare will be served on its surface? What kind of culinary rituals and interactions will be required to partake in such a session? Or is it another kind of table altogether designated for other kinds of engagements - a ouija board or crystal ball maybe?

For the past seventeen years Keith Armstrong's work has focussed on engagement and interactivity. He speaks of "embodied practice" – of work that invites the viewer to behave as a participant - transforming them into an essential element of the work itself. Like so much of his previous work, *KNOWMORE (House of Commons)* has involved deep collaboration in the process of its making and also invites collaboration as an integral aspect of experiencing it. This in itself makes this work stand apart in a place where the search for knowledge often appears isolated and non-engaged. In an information age, the gap between information availability and learning may still be great.

Armstrong sees libraries as a kind of portal – as places where the possibilities of individuals engaging in embodied learning through interactive experiences may offer the most viable pathways towards learning, as opposed to the mere collection and collation of information. This artist uses the term "ecosophical" (literally translated as 'wisdom of the dwelling') to describe the necessary interconnectedness between all of the ecologies for which we must learn to develop custodial practices – ecologies of the economic, the societal, the political, the social, the designed world and of the image – all of which interact to impact upon our current shared crisis of Climate Change.

Once we enter the artist's space, it becomes evident that we are in an immersive environment that is super-sensitive to our presence, alive with responsive light and sound. The way



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we negotiate this space - and each other - has a direct bearing on the images and sounds that can be willed into appearing. Even during the briefest encounter it becomes apparent that this is no ordinary table. If you approach it, the images on its surface jump, twitch and dance. And if you spin it entire worlds come into orbit. There is a dense cosmology implied here – one in which five environments eclipse, overlay and overlap. It is a deep mix of ecologies where sense and memory come into play – where associations are as poetic as they are rational.

Here unicellular organisms seem to mutate and transform; at a different level sub-aquatic forms flip and flow and elide transformation. At another level again, a central ‘nest’ spins out to become an entire vortexical universe. And deeper still, there is a possibility of entering a quite different grey, ghostly world – a shrouded, clouded place where ‘knowledge’ and ‘information’ have been codified within a mysterious, grided taxonomy. Floating high above this world, it is difficult to tell whether you might have entered a kind of Google-Earth GPS environment, and are hovering above an ordered graveyard. But as the spin of the table recedes you descend closer, to where the encryptions become legible and the work’s keystone emerges – a kind of arcane database of outdated microfiched registrations, texts, images and diagrams. But this allusion of entering a ground-zero of order is short-lived, for these images and data begin to reveal a world that is as fluid and poetic and open to interpretation as the more biomorphic worlds “above” it.

In this work ‘information’ is presented as a kind of ‘spin’ – a series of bytes and images and takes that are understandable according to how you participate – thereby making all the difference in the outcome of the reading. There is also a sense that the locus of control shifts and bends and morphs and mutates according to the choices that you make. And the question about the extent to which any possibilities to ‘know more’, as a precursor for ‘learning’, might be compromised by any over-emphasis on amassing data and ‘information’ hangs in the balance like a threatened life form.

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