



Cecile Heystek



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Text by Jan van der Merwe



At first glance, one is drawn to the familiarity of the objects in Cecile Heystek's sculptures. They are simple utensils needed to carry out basic tasks: a bucket, a cushion, a pot, a bowl, a spoon, a tap. The shapes of these objects are well-known. For many generations their designs have remained unchanged. The shapes are beautiful because they are honest and representing them in any sculptural form would already give the viewer enough to look at and to contemplate. We are offered much more.

Heystek has reproduced the objects by carving them out of chunks of wood. They become a kind of trompe l'oeil and thus are taken out of their familiar context and made a part of contemporary discourse. In one sense, the sculptures are fake objects and can be admired for the skill of

Image: (previous and facing page) The Grand Central Water Tower in Midrand and its surroundings. This landmark was the chosen site for a public installation: *Treading Water*, that formed part of the National Water Week celebrations in March, 2001.

the copy, almost like curios. In the seventies they would have been categorised into a genre called three-dimensional illusion, but while they do seem to carry meanings conjured up by this reference, they are more contemporary and Heystek's illusionism goes far beyond a witty optical game. She has forged it into a personal tool through which she is able to explore important and relevant issues.

The present exhibition is the echo, on a more intimate scale, of a site-specific event that took place at the Grand Central water tower. This tower is an award-winning architectural project and is described as "a contemporary monument for water and for life." As a landmark in the urban landscape, it represents everything that is progressive, dynamic and uplifting in our society: our ability to care for ourselves, solve problems and address basic needs. This tower is the backdrop the artist chose for her suspended galvanized buckets, whose shapes allude to the cone of the enormous water container. The buckets are a reminder of another, less urban way of life, almost a corrective to that "contemporary monument".

Image: Fear, 2001

Medium: Cypress, galvanized bucket with attached protractor and rope



When one considers the contents of each individual bucket, one is drawn out of the public sphere into a very intimate zone. The allusions are less obvious and the poetry more personal, the meanings layered. Inside the buckets are carved wooden pillows. The softness and intimacy associated with a pillow suggest the presence of human beings. They are, in Cecile's words, "very personal objects ... comforting emotional sponges". The buckets take on a less literal meaning, they protect and conceal as well as contain and are carriers of hope, fear, despair, warmth, dreams; one is enticed to read closely and to unravel the poem in one's own way, looking again at the ropes that attach and bind: a lifeline, lift, web, connection.

Wood is an organic material: hard as well as vulnerable. The "hard pillow" seems an amusing reversal of Oldenburg's Soft Toilet or even Dali's limp watches. Humour and wit are implicit in Heystek's objects.

Image: Grief, 2001

Medium: Jacaranda, galvanized buckets and spring balance







Heystek's art is also rooted in the indigenous wood-carving tradition of South Africa which has been given new momentum by artists like Peter Schütz, Jackson Hlungwane, Noria Mabasa, Claudette Schreuders and many others. Heystek discovered wood in her fourth year as an art student and says of this medium: "It's more feminine than for example steel – it is more giving and is easier to work with. The moment you oil it, it comes to life, and the cracks don't bother me – I leave the wood to shape itself" (Pretoria News, 2 July 2002).

Cecile Heystek obtained a Bachelor's degree in Fine Arts with distinction at the Pretoria Technikon (now TUT) in 1996. She was awarded a merit prize at the ABSA Atelier competition in 1997 and in 2002 received 3rd prize at the Ekurhuleni Fine Art Awards. Her work appears in several national as well as international, private and corporate collections. She has taken part in a variety of group and solo exhibitions and in 1998 she was resident at the Cité Internationale des Arts in Paris for two months.

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Image: (page 10) Displace, 2001
Medium: Cypress, galvanized bucket and water level

Image: (page 11 and 15) Hope, 2001
Medium: Jacaranda, galvanized bucket and flour scoop

Image: (page 12) Love, 2001
Medium: Wild olivewood, galvanized bucket, cold water tap and hot water tap

Image: (this page) Grief, 2001
Medium: Jacaranda, galvanized buckets and spring balance



⊕ - Graskop

⊕ - Dullstroom

⊕ - Pretoria - Tshwane

⊕ - Irene - Tshwane

⊕ - Richmond

⊕ - Cape Town