

Nancy Wilson Fulton

Permissions

O God, I could be bounded in a nutshell and count myself a King of infinite space
Hamlet, II, 2

On a recent drive through the Canadian Maritimes we were forced to a standstill. Hundreds of cars were backed up and idling in the heat of the day. An hour later we filed past fresh skid marks at an oblique angle to the highway; an upside-down bicycle without a rider; and a truck far away without its driver looking like it had been airlifted into a dense stand of pine trees. How did it catapult so far from the road? This enigmatic scene could have folded perfectly into the work of **David Blackaller**, whose urban street photos catch the pathos and humour of boundaries and borderlines. These photographs, which are available on *Flickr*, are works of art in their own right. A portrait of a chair whose seat is peeling off under a Greek sun is a quiet statement about a greater loss. A yellow-painted parking bay on a concrete surface is strangely positioned by the sea in Sitges near Barcelona: what rules are being applied here? What is allowed in, what is forbidden? A line of women's dress shoes on an outdoor market table lay fallow in a photo titled *stall*: noun, or verb? Two down-spouts from a gutter meet to share the same street conduit which gives them 'permission' - like a 'kissing' gate - to pass through. A road marking in different shades of white titled *Greenwich White* bring to mind Wittgenstein's loving disquisition on colour.

Colour is an important aspect of Blackaller's sculptures as well, photographs of which can also be viewed on *Flickr*. The thick-as-sauce blue on a piece called *Tail* - literally like the tip of a horse's tail whipping left and right. Or could it be a 'tell tail' on the luff of a sail, as eccentric as the descriptions of wind on the Beaufort Scale: "*Large branches in motion. Whistling heard in overhead wires. Umbrella use becomes difficult. Empty plastic bins tip over.*" The stop-sign-red resin of the wall sculpture called *Island*, with its deep channel markings. This work is tactile and evocative, for islands are simultaneously romantic and dangerous: marine spaces - lonely like Dunnet's Landing, fog-bound, in Sarah Orne Jewett's *Land of the Pointed Fir*. Be warned: the fervency of social rules required in small spaces. Where the land meets the sea permission begins.

In a recent correspondence, **David Blackaller** writes: "*I generally like art involving an economy and succinctness and which, like my work, involves finding the poetic in the everyday.*" He recalls the impact that the region near Christchurch in England played in influencing his art. Christchurch itself is at the centre of two rivers that run into the harbour - the Stour and the Avon. In ancient times the harbour was an important inland trade route, but over the centuries it has become shallower due to the build-up of tidal deltas, sand bars and long-shore drift. From satellite pictures it resembles an ancient North American Indian fishing weir built to trap fish on the turn of the tides, or a diagram of a breach birth where the tidal delta, curled in upon itself, and hemmed in by Mudeford Spit, can find no easy exit through the narrow channel known as *The Run*.

Over the years **David Blackaller** - now based in Sussex - has used walking as a meditative process for his art. "*I have a walk near my home which I do most days and have done for the last 20 years - along footpaths between fields, through the centre of fields, along edges, beside and through woods, across a stream, on grass, on stones, on sandy soil, through gates, over stiles.*" The sculptures that result from this sense of space and place seem to float like abstract maps of

self-contained worlds. Made of rickety or straight lines of wood found along the way, they are as delicate as yarrow stalks once used for divination, or pick-up sticks. In their modest simplicity they bring to mind the marvel of Inuit wooden and bone tactile maps, or Micronesian stick charts of the Marshall Islands.

In my mind's eye, the words of Seamus Heaney: "*Yet the small prevailed.*" It is most fitting, then, that in his first exhibition in the Netherlands, **David Blackaller's** work will hang alongside the art of that most serene artist of the sun and sea - **Roger Ackling**.