

Stefan Gevers Felt works

Melbourne sculptor discusses his soft passions with Kevin Murray (Director Craft Victoria) (02-Jun-2003)

How did I become interested in felt and what is it like to work with?



In 1999, after returning to The Netherlands to finish my Arts Degree in Visual Arts and Mixed media, the opportunity came to travel to Spain. Amongst all the beautiful Art and History I came across the Spanish artist Eduardo Chillida in the Rien Sofia in Madrid where they were having a retrospective of him covering nearly all his life. By chance and great luck there was another major exhibition also running at the Guggenheim in Bilbao. Granite sculptures full of light and space, the sometimes giant iron sculptures that were made in shipping yards, delicate drawings and paper collages so finely constructed with his workman's hands.

But what opened up my eyes were the works with felt. Enormous pieces of industrial felt draped like monumental wall hangings with prints on them. I was so impressed by his handling of diverse materials that, in hindsight, it became a defining point for me.

Having worked the previous year on paintings using the skin and 'cuts' as inspiration, and making sculptures from wax with the appearance of skin, it soon became clear to me that experimenting with felt was the next step. Directly after returning to Melbourne and starting all over again, (having moved countries several times, I am getting used to finding a space to work and getting back to my art very quickly) I found the right kind of felt and began some studies.

Felt had the right qualities that reminded me of skin, it is hairy, soft, has marks that resemble skin blemishes, stretch marks and so on. Logically, I continued with my previous ideas that I had been pursuing as paintings and made sculptures inspired by the human body. With titles like "Kidney Failure" and "Voice Box", my first exhibition of felt (Mass Gallery June 2000) was quite direct. I used heavy grade cotton to stitch the works in a blanket stitch, and used some inserts of coloured felt and leather.



The felt I use for sculptures also has another life as car bearings, conveyer belts, etching blankets, and many other purposes. People use it for their environment and are dressed in it. My original motivation was to translate the body, skin and all its unique qualities into a felt sculpture, but now it has become the original intention of the felt, as an aid to industry, that inspires me. This is certainly the motivation for "Felt 2002" (Smyrnios Gallery May, 2002). It felt great to let myself dive into a new direction of industrial and mechanical forms. It took a little while to let go of the body as inspiration, but it has opened up a whole new world. It is refreshing to concentrate on something different.

Where do you source your felt?

The Felt I am using I believe is made in South Africa by a large company and imported by one of the two companies in Melbourne. It is industrial felt designed for car bearings, conveyer belts etc.



Couhnhian Gallery, Brunswick 2005

Do you have to form it into shapes?

The felt must be stretched around a base, made from MDF, Acid free cardboard and with help of glue and nails put together. It is necessary to make a plan and drawings before cutting the felt to the right size and shape, so it fits exactly around the frame. I have to make sure it is precise to the millimetre. There is not really an opportunity to change the design once you start cutting and making the frame except for some colour details I can change in the end. Before deciding on the right design a lot of sketching and drawing has been done. For larger works I do make models on a small scale first.

What it is like as a material to work with and do you make the felt your self?

Making felt in the quantities I am using and the thickness would cost a lot of time, which I would rather spend on making new work. The stitching together of the sculptures and applying paint is a time consuming matter! There might be a moment though when I do require certain shapes that I may have to make myself, but not at this stage.

Unlike painting were I feel I have to make decisions every moment, the putting together of the sculptures just takes time and gives me time to relax and think about the work. It is almost meditative and is creating many new ideas.

Stefan Gevers is a Melbourne artist

