





Lucy Tomlins interviewed by Ellen Mara De Wachter on 10 May 2013

have a very bodily relationship with food and that physicality ties in with the kind of relationship I have to making sculpture. There are a lot of other parallels between food and the sculptural object. One of the key things that the work I've been doing around food has addressed is the multiplicity that it has and its ability to be transformative and tangential. Meat is one of the best examples of that. There's the state it's in when the animal is alive, which you can put into a category that is quite separate to its state when it is a raw material, ready for a series of transformations. The moment featured in the video is a moment of becoming, when the meat is in an in between status. It has stopped being an animal but it's not yet in that form we understand as food.

I draw from the everyday, in part to encourage a re-looking or closer looking at the things we might take for granted. By starting off with a stage we aren't so familiar with, I wanted to open up curiosity about what's going on. The meat goes through stages: it's sanitised and cut into steaks, when it's wrapped in plastic and put on supermarket shelves, it becomes a commodity with a value, which is traded. It's then taken home by someone and it becomes a raw material again. The person at home becomes the artist, who turns it into a meal. They might think about form and colour, texture and experience. The same things I would think about as an artist. I enjoy that similarity. We are all artists without realising it. I'm using food as a kind of metaphor, and I think the two things bounce back off each other.

**EMDW:** Can you talk about the structure of the video, which uses an interesting formal device halfway through?

**LT:** The video is particularly interested in the 'in between moment', in the moment of becoming and also the relationship between man and objects, the everyday material objects of our society.

Halfway through the video, there's an uncanny moment when everything starts to reverse. You go from the hunk of meat, which has been split into cuts we are familiar with, and then the butcher starts to sew the meat back into its original form. This may sound a bit macabre but I don't mean it to be such and I don't think it comes across like that when you watch it. You don't get it straight away, and the fact that there's such a smooth transition and that his actions work gracefully backwards as well as forwards is a testament to the dance between the butcher and the object.

You also notice things in the reverse that you don't in the first half: the relationship between the knife cutting flesh and the way it moves.

**EMDW:** You have created special structures to carry two of your works: the video *Meat and Me* and a found table from a stonemason's workshop. How did you develop these casings or supports and what role do they play in the finished works?

**LT:** They are a hugely important conceptual and aesthetic part of the work. I've been really interested in the notions of accidental artworks – so things that can be perceived as art but aren't created for an artistic purpose – and the 'becoming' of an artwork. Both the butcher carving and the stonemason's workbench fall under this heading.

The stone transformed from a readymade into an artwork before it was brought to the gallery. I was struck immediately by its beauty when I came upon it in a stonemason's workshop. But afterwards, I sat with it in my studio for almost a year, not knowing what to do with it or how to elevate it from an interesting 'thing' to a piece of art or something I'd feel comfortable to display or call my own. Eventually I started to clean it and to spend time with it. I got to know its physical form as I cleaned every mark and cut of stone dust that had

accumulated over years of use – I felt like an archaeologist unearthing its hidden secrets, clearing out each crevice and cut to reveal its depth and contours. It was through the attention I lavished on it that it slowly revealed itself as an art object. My role was to bring it to life, almost.

The display mechanisms are important parts of showing a purposeful intent to bring these originally everyday objects into an art space and announce them as now being art. I thought very hard about how to display the stone and what these structures should look like. We talked about placing it in the space, leaning it against a wall for example, but this would have situated it in the realm of archaeology and 'historic artefact'. I didn't want it to have this connotation; it wasn't about nostalgia, it was about elevating it to an art status.

On first looking the workbench is closest to the Duchamp tradition of readymades. In one sense it's very much about elevating the status of this object to art. But it is not to say, like I think Duchamp was, that 'hey anything can be art' but rather to say 'look at this special amazing thing' that is taken for granted; 'this is art' by accident! And it's not anointed by its position in the gallery or the audience in the Duchampian sense, but by the time and attention lavished on it by the artist – whether artistic or non-artistic labour. It's not about displaying a readymade, it's about displaying 'art' – the transformation occurred in the studio in advance of the gallery context.

**EMDW:** You have made a cast of lambs' legs and electroplated it with gold. What brought you to combine a rather visceral thing with a noble material such as gold?

**LT:** The lamb functions as the counterpoint to the other two 'accidental' works. It is meant to be the quintessential art object – opulent, extravagant, made of materials internationally recognised for

their value and status: bronze and gold. The gold plating of the bronze is again an absolute statement of intent. Not even bronze was exclusive enough, it had to be embellished again. Bronze has a very particular fine art history and is loaded with symbolism, as does gilding. The choice to gold plate over bronze is to firmly root it in the opulence of today's world rather than placing an overemphasis on its historical context.

It is not so much its visceral nature but rather the preservation and elevation of something that normally has a very temporary lifespan. The material transformation makes you reflect again on what it's doing there and its status in the everyday. I think it's rather odd to think about all the effort that has gone into casting half a dead lamb – not something you immediately associate with desire and luxury. That makes it surreal for me. I also think this transformation ties it in with the religious symbolism of the sacrificial lamb and the power that was historically invested in this humblest of animals. But I have to say, it doesn't seem to matter what material I put it in, it still shouts 'sex' – you can't get away from that. There's a grace to the sculpture, something very figurative and human.

**EMDW:** You work in many different media – this show brings together traditional sculptural practices such as casting and goldplating with new media and conceptual strategies such as using found objects. What leads you to this variety in your practice, and do you find that one approach works better than the others with your ideas?

**LT:** The material, process and concept are heavily intertwined and they seem to evolve together in a tangled knot. There seems to be about a 50:50 split between a material process and the concept it informs. I get sensory pleasure in making from working directly with materials; it's why I make art. I enjoy new experiences

and learning how to work with different materials and it also provides a wider library of information to choose from when going into my next work. Some processes are a means to an end and there is little art in them when I already have the experience of using them.

**EMDW:** You've previously made work for outdoor locations, as well as for unusual buildings and spaces. In what way has the building here at 176 Prince of Wales Road influenced the works you've made for the show, and the way you have chosen to display them?

**LT:** Sculpture, by its very nature, is rooted in the here and now and as a sculptor you can't help but be very conscious of the situation and location the work is displayed in, whether it is a white box gallery, a forest or a cathedral – all come loaded with their own histories, formal and architectural qualities to be read against and through the work.

The context of 176 Prince of Wales Road is primarily about it being a gallery. In a non-art space these works' presence and origin as non-art objects would not have had the same connotations. Showing them in a gallery became about making them very present and almost at odds with the space. They are not supposed to operate harmoniously; the opposite, in fact. I hope people question what they are doing here, why they are so big, why you are so aware of navigating your body between the artworks and the walls. And the object that should be at the top of the hierarchy in terms of art objects, the golden lamb, is almost forgotten and placed unceremoniously on the benches that make up part of the architecture of the space. What's that all about?

**Ellen Mara De Wachter:** This show consists of three very different works. The video *Meat and Me* (2012) is a silent film of a butcher at work carving a piece of meat. Food – and meat in particular – is a subject you have addressed through many of your works. Our culture is obsessed with food on so many different levels – in terms of health and beauty, cost, environmental sustainability, aesthetic pleasure, competitive cookery, celebrity chefs... What is it that you find interesting in this subject and what aspects of your research into food cross over into the world of art?

**Lucy Tomlins:** For me it really starts with the fact that food is a great leveller, or at least it should be. It's the common need that all humanity has. We

#### Artist's presentation

Lucy Tomlins  
Sunday 23 June, 3pm  
Tomlins presents 'The Butcher and the Artist', in which her local butcher, Paul Hamilton, talks about his experiences as a meat trader and gives an anecdotal history of the butchering trade. FREE

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Reverse:  
*Meat and Me*, 2012 (still)

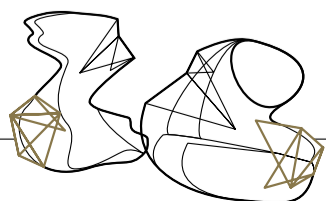
176 Prince of Wales Road  
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Opening times  
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