

BRENDAN EARLEY

Life after Buildings

19 April – 20 May 2017

In 1971 the American poet Lew Welch parked his car in the remote Sierra Mountains and carrying both a significant reputation gained from his affiliation with the Bay Area beat poets of the 1960s and a little gun, walked into the woods. He was barely 45 and his major work, *Ring of Bone*, although written and assembled, was yet unpublished in the form we know it. Welch, although gifted, was troubled, and had always struggled with the act of writing; his seemingly, loosely-structured masterwork is as something akin to a play, a biographic outline and a statement of poetics. The collection might as such be considered a spiritual autobiography of which the title initially seems viusally imagistic, until you get to the poet's own embedded explanation of poetic purpose;

*and then heard
"a ring of bone" where
ring is what a*

*bell does*¹

Walking and finding things has always played an important part in my own practice, but when I moved to the mountains in Wicklow – building my own cabin in the woods – it became difficult to sustain this aspect of my practice and I began to confront equally direct and difficult questions. I was no longer content to find meaning in an *arbitrary* way – in the detitus of the liminal urban/industrial hinterland of cities – and during my long walks through the mountains I felt a different search had begun. It can be argued that a significant amount of art being made today is the product of a culture that has an excess of choice and new paradigms have evolved to deal with this excess. *Life after Buildings*, apparently simply, struggles with three years of questioning, what if you took all that away and were left with just a few bits of sticks and a stone?

Employing material objects, be they *in use* or obsolete, is a well-established premise in modern-to-contemporary practice. But as a mechanism for constructing 'meaning', it tends to allow only a certain type of meaning, one that is comfortable within its own orbit. Filtering, selecting and assembling have all become essential parts of my process, but which seemed to allow for *meaning* with no true alternative – another way of thinking. I needed forms that would pull my imagination beyond the strict confines of a mediated world as we've grown used to seeing and describing it. Making these drawings has been about rediscovering those primordial, or honest shapes that inhabit our unconscious (collective or otherwise) without caricature and to 'work' they had to shift into another emotional range.

Now my walks bring me through open fields and enclosed lanes where I find nothing, none of the 'waste' I once commonly employed in my work. So when I return to the studio, I draw, to make some sort of a start. Like *Ring of Bone*, this begins as a sequence of fragments, comprising of half-remembered songs, bits of books expanding slowly into something collectively more complex. This body of work, like memory, does not make firm distinctions between the recalled, the imagined, the half-forgotten, and in so-doing the drawings no longer *draw* on the observable world, but attempt to bring forth, draw-it-out – make apparent – spectral glimpses. The most common perception of drawing is as something that takes place after an observed fact, following attentively a line of description. What if drawing was more like an incantation, something that emerges in the absence of a thing itself: a manifestation which does not follow but initiates the hope of making that which could not be conceived-of from the outset. Rather than adding, describing or building, the process of drawing here strips things away, pares them down, in order to manifest a gap or space receptive to the potential of the uncontrolled or uncomphrended: "artists are mystics rather than rationalists, leaping to conclusions that logic cannot reach".² Afterall...

Building a new studio brought-on such an equivalence, a need for new making. The site for the studio is in an auspicious, idyllic place, near the river where I grew up. Now, rather than finding elements which would hint at something greater, a repaired dystopia, I'm looking to something whole, a time for the marvelous. Small revelations, of which drawing seemed the best way foward and to paraphrase the artist and writer Brian O'Doherty; I draw to see what I am thinking³. The drawings find their line in a variety of different ways to 'be'; on paper, cement, aluminium wire or embroidered on linen. Little did I know it would take me the best part of two years to make the first *successful* drawing of such a

thought, a shy scraggly line which appeared out of the debris of an aluminium armature. Bad sculpture can make good drawings it seems.

What is arrived at is invited rather than willfully (or easily) grasped. If Heidegger suggests in his essay *Building Dwelling Thinking*⁴, a clearing is made but alone it does not necessarily produce clarity. Clearing, as process, grants permission for another kind of thinking, new knowing without prescription, because a line simply has to go somewhere other than where it went before.

Brendan Earley

¹ Lew Welch; *Ring of Bone*, was originally published by Donald M. Allen's legendary Grey Fox Press, San Francisco, 1973. Welch prepared the manuscript himself, arranging all the poems he composed between 1950 and 1971, that he considered fit for posthumous publication, in roughly chronological order. Welch's body was never found.

² Sol LeWitt, *Sentences on Conceptual Art*, Art-Language, vol. 1, no. 1, May 1969, pg. 11-13; reprinted in Catherine Moseley (ed.), *Conception. Conceptual Documents 1968-1972*, Norwich Gallery, Norwich School of Art and Design Press, Norwich, 2001, pg. 82.

³ A comment from Brian O'Doherty's note books, cited; *Beyond the White Cube*, Dublin City Gallery, The Hugh Lane, 2007, pg. 151.

⁴ Martin Heidegger, *Poetry Language Thought*. Originally published; New York: Harper and Roe, 1971.