

THE COMMON GUILD

Visual arts: Projects / Events / Exhibitions



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COMMENTARIES

Thea Djordjadze

24 September – 26 November 2011



Thea Djordjadze 'Lost Promise in a Room'

Scry, meaning to foretell the future using a crystal ball or other reflective surface, is a shortening of *descry*, an obsolete Middle English word meaning 'describe'. The word also has its provenance in the Latin verb *describere* ('write down'), which also had the meaning 'perceive'. This archaic verb has significance in relationship to the work of Thea Djordjadze, which could be said to be chiefly concerned with the language of perception. The Georgia-born, Berlin-based artist explains, in a film recorded to accompany her exhibition at The Common Guild, 'When, as a student, I lived in Amsterdam and then in Dusseldorf, I didn't understand the language and so all the time I was just watching. I think there is another language I speak better... it is an observation language, a language that is learned by seeing.'

The idea of learning by seeing recurs often in Djordjadze's practice, and is frequently linked to performative or ritualistic actions, as in her early solo performance works *Haare schneiden* (Hair Cutting, 2001), which involved the artist cutting the hair of five women and one man, and *Kaffeesatzlesen* (Reading the Coffee Grounds, 2001), which was based on tasseography, or the reading of coffee grinds, practiced by 'cup women' on Georgia's Black Sea coast. Djordjadze's reading of the future through the process of scrying or interpreting the patterns in the cup reactivates an ancient tradition, which both perceived and described the submerged qualities of things.

In the middle ages, scryers gazed into reflective surfaces in order to look into the mystic future; in this way, mirrors served as a portal to other realms. Djordjadze's positioning of her sculptural works in the grand domestic spaces of The Common Guild conducts the reflective surfaces, sunlight and shadows of this vast Victorian townhouse to disquieting effect. On the landing, Djordjadze has arranged a sculpture that resembles a bed at the foot of a huge and very beautiful mirror that has begun to deteriorate with age.

When sunlight strikes the mirror late in the afternoon, the eroded silver causes a sparkling aureole of tiny pinpricks of light to rise above the work like a gateway to an astral plane.

For the main gallery space on the first floor, Djordjadze created a work entitled *abstention from movement; while the world moves in appetency, on its metalled ways* (2011), composed using a large sky blue carpet, paint, plaster, mirrored stainless steel, clay, chicken wire, paper, cardboard and wood. The carpet marks out a territory, in which Djordjadze first orchestrates materials and the viewer then experiences as an altered bodily projection of fractured and suspended reflections. This clearing recalls those places described by Johan Huizinga, in his important study *Homo Ludens: The Play Element in Culture* (1949): 'The arena, the card-table, the magic circle, the temple, the stage, the screen, the tennis court, the court of justice, etc., are all in form and function play-grounds, i.e. forbidden spots, isolated, hedged round, hallowed, within which special rules obtain. All are temporary worlds within the ordinary world, dedicated to the performance of an act apart'.

Dr. Sarah Lowndes is a writer, lecturer and curator based in Glasgow.