

Post Memorial as Object Art:

In Sacred Remembrance

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*Singh's installation 'Life Is But A Vapour' functions as a 'in memoriam' time-piece; both as it appears and in a state of flux - living, dying and honoured.*

a translation:

- i. *Calling A Circle - He Karanga Pae McCahon House Artist Residency 2013-14 Auckland, New Zealand.*
- ii. *Life Is But A Vapour – Te Uru Waitakere Contemporary Gallery: Installation work December 2014-February 2015, Auckland New Zealand.*

**Love, Death and Remembrance:**

loving - dying - remembering

[active/passive conscious/unconscious acts].

- 1 In Singh's social practise project *Calling A Circle -He Karanga Pae* and her current installation *Life Is But A Vapour* Singh has engaged in a spiritual discourse which addresses the human experience of time, memory and loss.
- 2 Both historic and contemporary art works concerned with memorial and commemorative art in public spaces inevitably respond to collective suffering, loss and remembrance. Like-wise Singh has cultivated an evolving and public memorial project which has facilitated individuals in transforming their relationship with death through conscious and ceremonial acts of remembrance.
- 3 During Singh's McCahon House residency project *Calling a Circle -He Karanga Pae*, Singh created a therapeutic and intimate studio environment where those who responded to the project could return to the memories, grief and unconscious trauma surrounding the loss of their loved ones.

- 4 Using both readymade and natural materials provided by Singh those who engaged in the project hand crafted memorial strings imbued with their memories, emotions and intentions. By doing so, the participants were guided through conscious processes of commemoration, initiating a transformative spiritual and psychological process of healing, acceptance and release.
- 5 The memorial strings were then gathered together, and strung up from the ceiling in what was once Colin McCahon's painting studio. Singh then blessed and honoured the strings during a seven day period of sitting meditations.
- 6 Following on from this process a ceremonial burning of the memorial strings took place under the auspices of an Indic fire puja during a dawn ceremony. Traditionally the fire puja serves to purify, and release. This presented the participants with a finite process in which their deeply personal creations must be both released and surrendered.
- 7 The memorial strings were then re-memorialised into another form and rebirthed anew using the corresponding string colours and hydrangeas from the McCahon house garden and premises. In amongst a plethora of offerings, keepsakes, poetry and ornaments the memorial strings were then organically placed and strung up on Singh's living memorial wall.
- 8 Bridging both the material world and spirit realm, Singh's living wall became a multi-layered memorial site overflowing with both ready-made and natural objects such as bells, flowers and beeswax casts of religious images and deities.
- 9 Post residency Singh continues to make offerings to the wall as well as planning for its next public site of memorial and unveiling. Thus we have a material and spirited 'in memoriam' time-piece which goes beyond the memorial art as object but serves instead as a living, revisited and ever-transforming site of love, death and remembrance.
- 10 In addition, Robert George has produced a digital component to Singh's residency work which takes the form of an abstract and two channel film diptyches. This work responds to the spirituality and aesthetic of *Calling A Circle He Karanga Pae*. Simultaneously the work also revisits and



- explores the relationship history between Colin and Anne McCahon.
- 11 George has poignantly inter-woven the commemorative function of *Calling a Circle* into this film-piece through his use of Anne McCahon's life-narrative. Adjoining Singh's living memorial wall, George's film piece forms a triptych-like enclosure and installation in Singh's post-residency continuum work featured in *Life Is A But A Vapour*.<sup>1</sup>
  - 12 Part of this continuum includes the ash collected from the dawn ceremony/fire puja. The preserved ash serves as an additional memorial work. However, within the artist's Indic faith the ash is symbolic of our post-death state of liberation from both our physical embodiment and earth-bound self.
  - 13 Subsequently the receptacle and vessel which contains the ash can be likened more to a sacred chalice holding our former life. In this way death is illuminated as a transcendent and powerful transition between life and ascension.
  - 14 The ash catalyses both contemplation of our post-death identity and form, but also provides a material connection to that which was burned. A reminder we cannot remain attached nor in possession of our physical self [or another's] forever. In this way, the suspended receptacle and transparent glass vessel contains the ash which has been transformed by its own death into a memorialized form.

***Singh and the Sacred: An inter-disciplinary art form and practise.***

- 1 As an artist Singh works decidedly within the wider discipline of social practise, which emphasises community-orientated and participation based work.
- 2 Singh approaches her community-orientated projects through the facilitation of spiritual healing processes both within

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<sup>1</sup> 11.1 A still from George's film was chosen by Singh and George for the purpose of a limited edition print. This abstract work features an almost indistinguishable macro-lens subject which could be a feather, string, or a plant skeleton of some kind. Featuring the name of the installation 'Life Is But A Vapour' the print functions as a memoir and keepsake.

- and outside of the gallery space. Framed within the objectives of spiritual transformation, Singh's social practise explores the potentials of unity consciousness, individuation, sacred living and being.
- 3 In this way her work extends itself to transcendental living - towards the necessity of spiritual liberation, and freedom from suffering. Singh's works also draws considerable influence from Jungian-like individuation processes; examined through the exploration of myth, archetypes and the cultivation of self-knowledge.
  - 4 Utilising theological-based and mystical knowledge's of her combined Buddhist and Hindu [Indic] faith, Singh's work enables her audience to explore sacred living by consciously experiencing the meta-physical components of *self*, through ceremonies and rituals which are grounded in compassion and self-realization.
  - 5 Through unveiling the wisdom and principals of her combined Hindu and Buddhist spiritual life, [*such as egoless expression of one's self*], Singh is able share her awareness of the interconnectedness which exists between all sentient beings.
  - 6 This delicate spiritual ecology of Singh's practise has been cultivated from her own reverence for living and death, egoless living and divine love.
  - 7 Thus we can consider the link between Singh and her social practice as stemming from her spiritual identity; but also as one which encompasses her deep commitment to sacred living, and the promise of spiritual healing within communities of multiple-faiths situated between both Western and Eastern life-worlds.

*'Life Is But A Vapour' can be understood as a contemplative work for rethinking our relationship with death and our experience of loss - a contemplative project which cultivates social virtue and spiritual healing through transcendent practises of inter-faith.*

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**James 4:14:** whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away.

King James Version - Holy Bible.