Letters to my Father

ROSE RIGLEY
Unspoken

Memory is elusive and imperceptible; however, to some extent, it has a grip on all of us. Indeed, it might be said that memories shape us. Memories can sometimes offer a hint to that penetrating question: Who am I? Possibly for most of us, memory is interior: our memories remain undisclosed, even suppressed. Nevertheless, commonly, many personal and family memories are contained and held in the form of physical items such as photographs, letters, diaries and objects such as, for instance, a tattered teddy bear or an old postcard. Keeping such talismans is important to us. It is a way of preserving the past and, sometimes, illuminating the present. These objects help us recall places, times, events, milestones and people; we might retrieve from our memory the smell of plants, flavours of foods, sensations of weather, feelings of warmth and cold or the intensity of an event the memories came back to him. The sweet smell of plants, the taste of this small scallop, shell-shaped cake aroused the memories of him that remain with her. While some twenty years has intervened since his passing, Rigley’s recollections of her father are very much present and enduring. The series of objects that comprise the exhibition are a conversation with Rigley’s father: these works represent words that were left unspoken and exchanges that were never concluded.

The conversations between Rigley and her father are deeply personal and utterly private. There is little indication in the works that Rigley is conveying the overt milestones of her life; those big events such as weddings and births that might figure prominently over the span of years. Rather, the works that Rigley is conveying the more overt milestones of Rigley’s works are muted and subdued, mostly nuanced whites and creams. These colours evoke silent reflection and contemplation rather than the noise and commotion of brighter and bolder pigments. Subtle hints of colour might lie beneath the white and cream layers of wax or plaster, but these are glimpsed as blushes or revealed in sgraffito scratched surfaces.

Like these fading memories, the hues and tones of Rigley’s works are muted and subdued, mostly nuanced whites and creams. These colours evoke silent reflection and contemplation rather than the noise and commotion of brighter and bolder pigments. Subtle hints of colour might lie beneath the white and cream layers of wax or plaster, but these are glimpsed as blushes or revealed in sgraffito scratched surfaces.

Letters to my Father resonates with recurrences and repetitions, which echo and reverberate across the gallery space: the reiteration conveys urgency and alludes to the sheet, possibly unending, volume of unspoken words that implore to be expressed. The plaster and paper work, The mixed blessings of writing to someone like you, presents multiples of bundled forms, closed and bound up with varied strings and ribbons, reminiscent of precious letters brimming with words and interchanges that have gone, that might have been, and are yet to be whispered to a beloved person. The body of works suggest an invocation, a hushed chant that is repeated over and over. The words must be uttered: for Rigley they are insist and lingering. The conversation is extended and will keep going, not only between Rigley and her father but also between her father and Rigley’s children and their children and so on, into the future. This unfading contact is genealogical, reaching across the family over the generations through the DNA: this is conveyed in Where are you? I-V by the coiled springs suspended beneath the shelves.

This exhibition of refined works of art choreographs materials, media, processes and structures that give visual expression to the ineffable; communicates the incomprehensible; and accesses the universal in the personal. In Letters to my Father, Rigley imparts intangible but compelling memories through evocative, transcending and haunting visual and visceral forms; and, in so doing, commemorates the memory of a cherished father.

Barbara Dover

---

Bacon for breakfast I-XIII, 2014, mixed media installation, dimensions variable

Where are you? I-V, 2014, mixed media installation, dimensions variable

COVER: Look what you made me do III (detail), 2014, mixed media installation, 156x38x38cm