



The artist in the field, Brunswick, 2005
 photograph: Hari Ho
 One of a series of artists' portraits
 commissioned by Gene and Brian Sherman

Duration and memory:

The visual poetry of Peter Atkins

Collect, sort, order, position, display, group, configure, preserve. These are just some of the processes involved in Peter Atkins's assemblages of discarded treasures. Found objects are tenderly gathered, removed from their usual function and reinstated as exquisitely rendered arrangements and patterned configurations. His labour intensive activity of accumulation fuses opticality with narrative. With painstaking detail, Atkins conjugates the mundane with readymade sculpture. In doing so, found objects are rediscovered as wondrous materials revealing Atkins's ongoing interest in the nexus of design, craft, furnishing and the history of painting.

Atkins appropriates diminutive items that have caught his eye, such as clumps of coloured lint from his household dryer, deftly altering them through placement. While retaining their tactility, his assorted objects are transformed into taxonomical arrangements, like museum specimens. Travel and journeys, however, are intricately bound with his constellation of impoverished resources. His journals are chronological and annotated diaries documenting personal experiences of place as told through materials.

precious things consists of three chronological journeys to Israel, Bangkok-Cairo-Hong Kong-Melbourne and his local suburb of Brunswick. Within this new body of work, Atkins incorporates his own photographs for the first time – passport-size images of lurid neon lights in Hong Kong and Star of David graffiti in Tel Aviv. His interest in urban signage is captured in minute detail. Titles offer literal clues to place, objects and date. For example, in *Lovers Lane, Park Street. September 18th, 2005*, Atkins foraged for used condom wrappers during visits to the local park with his son, Cato. In *The Day My Mother Died. September 25th, 2005* and *My Mothers Funeral. September 29th, 2005*, handkerchiefs are placed close to fake flowers discarded in Melbourne Cemetery and retrieved, covered in dewdrops, as poignant reminders of loss, sorrow and grief.

The first panel of Atkins's *Holy Land Journal, 2005–06*, comprises overlapping, coloured outlines that delineate the changing borders of the Old City in Jerusalem. As a physical manifestation of topography, these borders allude to reclaimed land, sacred sites and the passage of time. The strata of history is embedded in this poetic entanglement of lines; its contours politicise mappings of place and displacement. Like a pilgrim, Atkins travelled from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, Nazareth, Tiberias, Haifa and Tel Aviv. With methodical precision, he rejoices in small relics of everyday existence. Used train tickets take up residence as patterns resembling the Israeli flag while glass rosary beads are reinvented as gleaming concentric circles, derived from a pattern seen by the artist on the ceiling of the Ottoman Bathhouse, Akko.

Atkins's itinerant practice is laden with the residue of stories and destinations. Walking the streets, he apprehends time to a rhythmical pace. The durational aspect of his practice slows time thereby making us more aware of daily cycles and the joy of incidental discoveries. We are reminded of Henri Bergson's notion of temporality.¹ For Bergson, real universal time is indivisible and has its origin in our consciousness of duration. Bergson insisted that public clock-time is a 'counterfeit' representation of lived experience produced by the conversion of temporal experiences into discrete and measurable instantaneous moments. Real time, by contrast, is inextricably linked with our consciousness and involves the continuous progress of the past. Similarly, Atkins's visual poetry inflects duration and memory with a meditative and hypnotic pace.

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Natalie King is a writer, curator and broadcaster based in Melbourne.

¹ For a discussion of Henri Bergson's *Duration and Simultaneity*, see Gilles Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, translated by H. Tomlinson and B. Habberjam, Zone Books, New York, 1988.