

Jyll Bradley  
*Currency*

A conversation between Jyll Bradley and Joseph Constable  
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**Joseph Constable:** Perhaps we can start by discussing the title of the exhibition – *Currency* – and how it functions as a touching point throughout this new body of work. As you say, currency, as an idea, is both a support structure, but also a belief system. Items such as coins or bank notes hold a transferrable value; they are imbued with an innate ‘currency’. Then there is the idea of personal, artistic currency. Can you describe your relationship to this term and how it is operating throughout the exhibition?

**Jyll Bradley:** The idea of currency has evolved over a couple of years and began with a work (*Green/Light for M.R.*) that I made for the Folkestone Triennial in 2014. The structure of the work was based on a hop garden which is an intricate system of strings, poles and wires. I learnt to string the hop garden myself from an old book of patterns; it’s like drawing through space. The experience made me want to re-engage with drawing and mark-making and this new work evolves from that. So for me, this exhibition starts with a question of personal currency – literally and metaphorically the mark(s) one makes. However, the question of ‘currency’ quickly expands into one of value. The value we place in what we do or own. It is a system, as you say. I’m very interested in value systems, the relational and collectivity – it is present throughout my work. That is not only expressed through the pairings, groupings and plantings of works in this exhibition, but also through the badges that visitors to the exhibition can take away with them, which are based on a series of ‘tag’ drawings that I made with carbon paper and watercolour paint. With these small gestures, I want to set up a relational system that extends beyond the space of the gallery and the duration of each individual’s visit.

**JC:** This title – *Currency* – is also the title of a new installation that you have made for the exhibition, comprising individual ‘coins’ planted across a wall: part field, part constellation. I am interested in this tension between physical money, such as coins and banknotes, and the abstracted immateriality of finance. Similarly, there is a tension between the materials that you have used to make each ‘coin’: discs of carbon paper, each incised with individual marks, mounted on fluorescent Plexiglas. Can you talk about this distinction between the physical and the immaterial, the hand-crafted and the manufactured?

**JB:** The hop stringing patterns I mentioned earlier form the origin of this work. I started drawing fractals of them through small pieces of carbon paper, over and over. In hindsight I was looking for a new ‘line’. I cut them into circles and they resembled coins with raised markings. Then I experimented with laser cutting and mounting on Plexiglas. The tension between the precision of the coin and the hand-made marks is where I hope the potential for engagement with the work lies for the viewer. It is where its value lies too. That’s the immaterial aspect you mention. It is not easily defined.

**JC:** There is also something illusory about the Plexiglas, which holds a resonant glow when positioned against the wall.

**JB:** Yes, it is as if light is emitting from the material itself. This is why I have continued to use the material; it gives space to light.

**JC:** How does this installation relate to the new series of paintings on carbon paper?

**JB:** If *Currency* is a system of coins, then these paintings are another kind of currency; *Notes*, as in banknotes. In tandem with the way in which the 'coins' constellate and punctuate the space, these works also employ layered space in a different way; they create space within the two-dimensional. With these paintings I have gone eight times bigger than the size that I usually work with. These *Notes* also represent new mark-making. Here the line is made through masking.

**JC:** Can you speak about this interest in carbon paper and why it has become a recurrent material for you?

**JB:** The paper fascinates me because it is like handling time. When I was young carbon paper was the only way of making a copy of something immediately. I have a strong memory of my father at the table typing out poems, pressing the words through carbon paper onto a yellow sheet beneath. I'm now using this material whose purpose is for reproduction to make something unique. It's a risky business: the paper is impregnated with pigment, which means that whatever is done to it can't be undone. Returning to *Notes* I remember a time when the print from bank notes would sometimes come off on your fingers; this piece of paper that is embedded with a certain economic value would leave its residue on your hands. I was interested in what value these traces of bank note pigment have beyond their own materiality and I found a similar quality in the carbon paper. Through folding and folding until the paper comes to almost nothing I then unfold out again in order to create marked areas, lines and textures. I then use spray paint to mark the paper with various strips, which began to emulate some of the coded features that constitute the appearance of a bank note. There is something inherently fragile and unstable about this process and these materials, but this is something that interests me: when the paper cracks, becomes transparent or opaque, and when it is segmented through folding and tarnishing. It is errors such as these which make us who we are. It's about selfhood.

**JC:** The line is a key motif throughout the exhibition, specifically its relationship to time, growth and accumulation. Can you tell me about the importance of the line for you?

**JB:** The line shifts throughout this exhibition; it could be a carbon line, or a line of Plexiglas luminosity. For me the line creates space to reflect. This is true with *G/raft*, which is also included in the exhibition. It is a personal work in that its size is matched to my own height with these two materials being joined together, both of which are reflected in a third. The materials – 80-year old hop pole and Plexiglas – are very difficult to physically 'graft' together due to their material properties, but I am interested in the labour involved in this process and its connection to the grafting of self. The use of mirror as a reflecting device furthers this encounter, one which is both fluid and stable at the same time. The viewer sees the work, but the work also sees the viewer.

**JC:** Yes, and I suppose that is the way that the self works as a series of fluid and fixed structures that develop and evolve. For me this work is also about meeting points and connections and how this continuously occurs within the psyche. I do, however, find it interesting that you convey something as multifaceted and complex as the self through the coolness of a minimalist aesthetic.

**JB:** I think that this is very much related to my generation, which was heavily influenced by the language of minimalism. However, we wanted to bring the personal to bear and infuse these elements with the human presence.

**JC:** Do you see this as a reaction against minimalism?

**JB:** Not so much a reaction as recognising a language that could be subverted. This is also related to the idea of queering reality as we know it. Artists such as Roni Horn and Félix González-Torres were influenced by the minimalists but at the same time combined ideas of selfhood with this language in order to destabilise our sense of the world. This is something that I have always been interested in.

**JC:** We have previously spoken about an innate optimism within your work, something that is often overlooked or misunderstood within contemporary art. How do you respond to this claim?

**JB:** I suppose that optimism within contemporary art, or indeed a celebratory tone, is quite unusual. Liam Gillick once told me that in his view optimism is a post-war phenomenon, which maybe I am suffering from! Nonetheless I think that optimism is actually a harder path to take within art because in order to make something that embodies positivity you have to find a tension. It's quite challenging.

**JC:** There is also a difference between positivity in terms of ignorance or a blind complicity, which is different to interrogating your environment and finding an innate optimism within it.

**JB:** Yes, exactly. Agnes Martin called it a 'hard won innocence', which I really identify with. It embodies both joy and tension together.

**JC:** Can we talk about the film you have made for the exhibition, which is your first foray into moving image work?

**JB:** The film (*Brigitte*) is a portrait of a sculpture I made for Strange Cargo Arts Company in Cheriton, Folkestone. Installed on the south side of their building, it is also a portrait of how space and place is created around it, both affecting and affected by its environment. The sculpture itself is colourful and geometric, like a 'tag'. Formally it's based on an espalier: a structure used for growing apples and is made of red and green Plexiglas. As the sun tracks across it during the day, the formality fractures and the colours go liquid against the old brick wall. I had a scaffold tower built beside the sculpture and we recorded it for twenty-four hours using time lapse, as well as capturing the surrounding area. Both sculpture and film are named after Brigitte Orasinski who runs Strange Cargo. In a way it's an homage to her creative energy which enlivens the building.

**JC:** Again, light is playing a key role here as an activation device.

**JB:** Yes, and the sound is also very important, recorded from the immediate area. I wanted to capture the whole world of the sculpture; light, sound, they all circle within the same orbit. The use of time-lapse photography, sound and sculpture brings my work over many years full circle too.

**JC:** This connection to orbits takes us back to this movement between the micro and the macro in your work, whether it's the connected constellation of *Currency*, the 80-year-history lifespan of the hop poles used to make *G/raft* or the detailed layering of *Notes*. It seems that your work and indeed this exhibition is hovering somewhere in between individual markings and collective mobility.

**JB:** That is true. I see it as a juxtaposition between the sublime and the everyday. In *Brigitte*, this distinction is blurred; sometimes the sculpture functions as the everyday object whilst the life surrounding it represent the sublimity, and vice versa.

**JC:** This preoccupation with place connects, of course, to your works in public spaces.

**JB:** Yes, this is why the film feels like such a good development. Whenever I have made a work in the public realm there is always a desire to capture the spirit of the place. Yet at the same time to create a work that is permeable enough to allow that place to be seen and experienced through a very different light. It's about activation of people within place.

**JC:** This brings me to the final works titled *Balance* which are quite small, maquette-like works. There's an interesting tension and sense of motion within these objects that is quite theatrical.

**JB:** Yes, these are part-sculpture, part-drawing and depend on each other to stand up. They are based on fractals of the hop patterns again. I think of them as mini stage sets somehow. Working with choreographers and set design is something I am definitely interested in. *Balance* represents a hint to the future perhaps.

Joseph Constable is a London-based curator and writer. He is currently Assistant Curator at Serpentine Galleries, London.