

INTERVIEW WITH PETER KENNEDY

Tim Johnson

CAS Braodsheet, July-August 1972

BROADSHEET : The Committee hope to increase the scope and activities of the Broadsheet and this will be helped by members providing more material for publication in the future. An editorial subcommittee has been formed to further these ends, they are Tim Johnson & John Armstrong. In this issue interviews with two young Sydney artists, by Tim Johnson have been included.

It is hoped to make this an occasional series on various art forms.

INTERVIEW WITH PETER KENNEDY.

Q. Would you describe yourself as a "luminal artist"?

A. Yes, but not to the extent that **Flavin** is, I don't see my work as being quite so austere, I'm getting away from the minimal kind of statement that was obvious in the last show - towards something that's a little more complex in the number of directions it takes - this is where prepared light comes in - not only the neon light but also with the gallery spotlights.

Q. Prepared light?

A. Doing the same thing that **John Cage** did with the prepared piano – I want to prepare light by putting objects in front of it, creating shadows, relating neon light to the shadows, to the colour of the spotlights with this taking place on both the wall and the floor.

Q. Are you still painting?

A. No, I don't think that painting is making any real progress as far as the visual arts are concerned – yet it's taking a rather dominant role – I feel that it's pandering towards a craft orientated elite craft being something- that one appreciates for its technique. I see what painting I still do as a kind of therapeutic device. It is this business of man making marks and I think this sums up what painting is all about and why I don't think it's very relevant to the moment. What I think artists like ourselves should be looking back at is not Abstract-expressionism, **Mondrian, Bauhaus**, this kind of thing at all – but happenings, which were the birth of environmental art. People like **Kaprow** – he was originally a painter. His art developed from on the wall of the gallery, off the wall onto the floor, out of the gallery into the theatre then out of the theatre into the everyday environment. He is important because his work wasn't tightly structured and you got open ended situations that could develop. **Benjamin Patterson** took this a little further in the early sixties – he was very interested in psychology and he was creating situations where he presented people with material and they had a number of choices and they could make what they wanted/ He saw himself in the role of educator.

Q Do you have an interest in music?

A. Actually music has played a much more important role than the visual arts have in the way I have diverged from the more conventional forms. Probably the thought or philosophy behind electronic music has reached a very interesting stage where there is a rift – with on the one hand the international stylists - **Stockhausen, Berio** etc - all using electronic source material, and on the other hand people like **Lamonte Young** and **Cornelius Cardew** who are quite spiritual and it's very easy to equate them with say "earth" artists; they're using very simple things.

Q How does this relate to your own work?

A. I am interested in taking an everyday object – a natural object like a tree – and preparing it in such a way that you can alter the sound quality or sound that the tree makes. I've also got a piece where you place some wire mesh over some long grass and you let grass stick up through the mesh in some places.

Q Do you think there could be more organization of artists to do this type of experimental activity?

A. I think artists should be involved in other art forms. They are exclusive and that's wrong. American artists haven't put themselves in an exclusive situation and limited themselves to painting. I was quite surprised to read of **Larry Poons** of all people taking part in happenings. **Dine, Jasper Johns**, they've all worked with **Cage** and danced with **Merce Cunningham**. At **David Ahern's** concert at **Central Street Gallery** when a **Cage** piano piece was performed the only artist there was **Tony McGillick** and he was only there I think because he had the keys to the gallery. I think it's dangerous that artists should cut themselves off like that from external stimuli because, - well in my case I've found music quite influential in my thinking.

Q Could you explain a little more about your work with light?

A. "What I am really doing is a demonstration of light manipulation from which people can assess my ability to manipulate light – and if they felt inclined they could call me in as an adviser – as a kind of architect. To do something that could be incorporated in the home and be reasonably practical. I'm saying "look you can do this and this and this with light."

Q Doesn't this new type of art need a new type of marketing system or is the present gallery set up sufficient?

A. It probably does but I'm not in a position to find other channels and other means of going about it. It's for the initiative of the gallery to reassess the whole situation but certainly the established system wouldn't cater for it because they're selling the object. Certainly the onus is on the gallery to reorientate.

The following is a procedure for a new work by Peter Kennedy.

Date: 24.6.70. Peter Kennedy.

On a windy day listen to the sound of a tree under stress of wind

Prepare the tree so as to alter its natural sound reproduction activities by restricting its freedom of movement; or in some way interfering with the tree's normal behaviour as an obstacle to the wind. In short redefine the tree's relationship to the wind.

e.g. using rope, tie the branches together or inhibit movement by fastening branches to the ground or other objects or insert various materials into the tree, taking care that whatever is used is not likely to produce its own particular sounds.

Listen for alteration in sound reproduction if successful - take into account the visual aspect

If both audio and visual co-exist without imbalance the work is a success - if not, reconsider

Note: the tree is to remain in state of preparation only for as long as the performance or performance/recording requires.

Source: Contemporary Art Society of Australia NSW Broadsheet July-August 1970 p2-4