Eddie Clemens - Resembling the Hazards of Life Itself

Resembling the Hazards of Life Itself is the second Bowerbank Ninow show by Eddie Clemens, including *Octagonal Fibre-Optic Broom Configuration*, a series of *Table Code* receipt works, and a found picnic table sourced by the artist. Clemens' work draws on a network of references to popular culture, history, films and literature, resulting in a practice founded on drawing connections between seemingly disparate ideas and texts. By making his works nodes in an extended informational matrix, Clemens generates an ongoing discussion around the idea that the manifestations of physical culture are themselves carriers for cryptic narratives.

The connections between these disparate elements are not immediately apparent, but this is symptomatic of Clemens' approach. Underlying narrative strands direct the placement and choice of objects: for example, the discovery of a candy-striped picnic table at the framing workshop where the *Table Code* works were being framed formed a point of connection between the production of the work and its commercial presentation; in fact, the design of the table was incorporated into the works themselves. The picnic table is used by the picture framer and his assistants on their coffee breaks, forming a connection to the idea of work and commerce present the receipt works and the *Octagonal Fibre-Optic Broom Configuration*.

The colours displayed on the *Octagonal Configuration* itself are likewise a point of linkage to the *Table Code* works, hinting at their shared references to labour and value. These works are an extension of the *End of the Waterfall* series, in which the magenta ink line that signals the end of a receipt roll for an EFTPOS machine becomes an ominous warning of impending financial disaster —understandable, considering these works were made in 2008. Whereas the *End of the Waterfall* works are a well-defined parable of material culture and its silent commentary on the complexities of human experience (and human finances), the *Table Code* series is ambiguous—their bright colours and geometric patterns echo the conventions of modernist painting, but their underlying connection to the materials of commerce complicates their status as art objects.

The *Octagonal Fibre-Optic Broom Configuration* represents the culmination of a research and development process that began in 2009. Clemens' original *First Generation Fibre-Optic Broom* was a working prototype that demonstrated a proof-of-concept of the fibre-optic bristle technology, developed with the assistance of the University of Otago's Electrical Engineering Department, software architect Dave Branton of Trimble Navigation, fibre-optic specialist Bruce Keys and industrial designer Mitch Hughes. The second generation of the *Fibre-Optic Broom* series transforms everyday objects into cybernetic compound identities, informational conduits that have the capacity for feedback and reflexivity. These works, such as the *Broom* included in the 2012 *Total Internal Reflection* exhibition at the Gus Fisher Gallery, contain three-axis gyroscopic and accelerometer technology that allows the brooms to record, as well as display information. This generation consists of both large industrial-sized brooms and hand-scrubbers, all of which incorporated the aforementioned technological improvements, allowing for a performative element to the work.

The *Octagonal Fibre-Optic Broom Configuration* is a refinement and extension of the technology used to create the first generation of fibre-optic brooms. The major advance over the first generation, also present in the second generation brooms and scrubbers, is the use of 720 addressable "smart" LEDs that can be programmed to display a range of colour as well as animations. The third generation broom heads were fabricated in Japan using a five-axis router,

from Japanese Elm (*zelkova serrata*). The 2,592 metres of fibre-optic cable used in *Octagonal Fibre-Optic Broom Configuration* were sourced from Mitsubishi, in Japan. Each bunch of 36 fibre-optic bristles was fabricated by hand, having been spooled, cut using a hot knife, and glued with araldite (two-part epoxy) before being inserted into the elmwood broom-head.

The broom as an object is inherently linked to the idea of labour, and through this, to the physical body of the broom-user themselves. Thus, the body becomes part of a cybernetic system, in which machine components and informational exchange blur the boundaries of the human. In Clemens' practice, the existence of such networks is expanded to include, potentially, the entire phenomenological universe—the system is open ended, infinitely expandable and of unlimited complexity. By chaining together eight brooms, a completed octagonal form can be created, echoing both the self-replicating brooms given life through magic in Disney's *Fantasia* and the time portals present in a number of science fictions, including *Stargate* and the *Terminator* series. Similarly to how the first-generation *Octagonal Configuration* functioned when installed at the Gus Fisher gallery for the 2012 *Total Internal Reflection* exhibition, the ring of linked brooms destabilises the space of the wall on which it hangs, suggesting the possibility of permeability.

The *Octagonal Configuration* functions as a frame surrounding an emptiness, a vacant space that may possibly also be a conduit.