



Installation 188 (Detail).

Evocations and Commonalities

A Review by Dominique Nahas

THE WORLD MANDALA MONUMENT (2002), NEIL Tetkowski's eight-foot diameter structure that recalls an earthen nebula-artifact is as startling as it is numinous. It is made from a world-clay mixture of 188 samples of earth taken from different areas of the world, having been gathered by the artist over a two-year period from the member states of the United Nations. Mary Livornese's 100-year-old handprint is embedded in the centre of the disk, along with that of millennium infant Kelly Rose Tom. Thus, the memory of two centuries and the aspect of continuity are literally embodied in the piece and are an integral part of it.

Installation 188 was presented to the United Nations in 2000 while the *World Mandala* project was being created. The soils have been gathered, labelled, numbered 1 through 188 and deposited in sealed and marked containers, in order to remind all viewers of the dynamism and fragility of the concept of national identification (motherland). The samples of earth are joined together in a symbolic structure indicating twin universal drives toward what Carl Jung would call individuation through separation and unification with the Other.

To revisit Tetkowski's decade-old projects is a Janus-faced event, which allows us to look backward in time in order to evaluate how far we have come and how far we have yet to go if we are to realize the dream of worldwide harmony within difference. As Tetkowski pointed out during his works' first public presentation: "Many people that collected clay have

maintained their national identity with great pride and yet they are eager to be part of the world at large and feel like they are engaged and connected to the bigger picture of all people."

Utopian dreams are the birthright of all humans throughout time, yet such sky-bound reflections are mirrored by the realities of earth-bound existence permeated with struggles and conflicts. Much has changed since 9/11; a new cycle of distrust and strife has overwhelmed the world. And yet, as always, there is a revived optimism. As Heraclitus put it, "there is nothing permanent except change," but in Tetkowski's case it is not the flowing water of the river that remains immutably changing and changeless simultaneously, it is the aggregation of particles of clay soil gathered from all places of our planet. Writer Bill Hunt has reminded us that Tetkowski's material, clay, is at base stardust: "... its shell composed primarily of alumina, silica and iron produced by stellar annihilations aeons ago ... adapted by volcanic action and worn down by wind, water, freezing and thawing in time."

Being connected with clay and earth is Tetkowski's way of being at one with the cosmos, to see clearly that my planet is your planet and that our planet is the lived body, the receptacle of all of man's collective memories. Just as our individual human memories are located in our phenomenal bodies, so the earth's body is the continual centre of action, the "ever advancing boundary between the future and the past," as Henri Bergson



Top: *Installation 188*.
 Above centre: *Photos from each clay-gathering site*.
 Right: *The World Mandala*.

wrote in *Matter and Memory*; the lived body remains a place of meeting and transfer. This idea allows us to access two aspects of Tetkowski's work, his original intentions in *The World Mandala* and *Installation 188* and the subsequent reappearance of these epic works nearly a decade after their introduction to the world community. Commemoration is certainly a given here, a calling to remember or preserve in memory two distinctive and layered works of art that have at their core memorializing as well as ritualizing traits. In this sense, having these two works back with us in the public at hpgrp gallery New York forms a backdrop to the artist's most recent work as it re-communalizes the older work through an informal ceremony of reappraisal, reconsideration, and perhaps re-historicization. Repetitiveness is a characteristic of observance and Tetkowski's re-presentation of the past – with memories redolent of the extensive planning and preparation, making and dedication of these two works at the United Nations nearly a decade ago – allows us viewers the freedom to remember.

"Memory is a kind of accomplishment a sort of renewal even an initiation," writes William Carlos



Williams. Neil Tetkowski allows us to reaffirm the power of sharing and connectedness in the world. In that power and commitment lies the best future for the planet and all of those who dwell on her and trust in her restorative powers of renewal.

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