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Tim Silver, Untitled (blow up), 2014, video, 15 mins, looped. Collection of Andy Davey & Grant Galvin.

PREVIEW

Tim Silver

[by Dylan Rainforth](#) | Posted 15 Dec 2015

Tim Silver has a way of reminding us that nothing lasts forever. Human bodies give way, give up and give out. Even the oldest of trees eventually dies, while mountains crumble to dust. Some time in the future, even the universe might end. Previously Silver, a Sydney-based artist, made a full-length sculpture of himself lying prone on the floor. Cast in putty, the figure dried out and crumbled to dust during its two-month exhibition in the 2012 Adelaide Biennial.

For *Talking to the Shadows*, an exhibition of recent work at the McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery, he filmed his head exploding in super slow motion. Cast from Huon pine dust, his face appears to implode as, over five minutes, dust and fragments of the figure are sent flying in glorious HD across a background as black as the Big Bang.

"I grew up in Tasmania," Silver says. "So there's a slight Tasmanian reference through the exhibition with the Huon pine dust, Huon pines being unique to Tasmania.

"Obviously they're one of the slowest growing pines in the world so to then make this sculpture out of them that you then destroy in an instant goes against the centuries it's taken to get to this point."

While the sculpture might be destroyed in an instant, the video lasts some time longer. And then there is the idea of it that lives in our minds. Until those too are gone.

As you can see, it can be a disconcerting thing to think too closely about Silver's work.

As well as dramatising impermanence, Silver also works with the reverse side of the mirror, making (relatively) permanent sculptures from what he calls "overlooked or incidental forms". In particular, he's paid attention, in two series, to the burls and stumps of trees.

A burl is a part of a tree where some kind of stress – such as an injury or fungus – causes, in Silver's words, "the grain of the tree to grow against the tree's natural inclinations, so they create these amazing textural forms.

"They're prized by woodworkers; a lot of woodworkers use them for turning because they have amazing textures to them."

The artist has created casts of these burls in pigmented polyurethane, unusual not-exactly-sculptures that emerge as amorphous forms from the gallery walls.

"It plays into that idea of the formless, where something is both and neither representational nor abstract; and they sit in these weird in-between space of something you recognise but which is sort of abstract.

"The title of the work is *Untitled (trauma)* and I see the burl itself as the physical manifestation of the idea of trauma."

Elsewhere in the exhibition, another kind of trauma is given physical form. *Talking to the Shadows* also includes a number of casts of tree stumps, reminders of the damage wrought by the Dunalley bushfires in Tasmania from late 2012 to April 2013. Silver has cast these in rusted mild steel and bronze.

"My mum still lives down there and I went back to help her out after the fires. I just became interested in the remnants of the stumps of trees... so I ended going back down there and casting them in situ and brought the molds back to Sydney and have turned them into two unique series."

Silver says he was interested in “using these monumental materials for something that is the remnants of a disaster”.

“I’m kind of interested in that idea of things falling apart.

“I guess there are some permanent aspects to this exhibition that anchors it in those overlooked or incidental forms, which to me are quite amazing and stunning in themselves but which are often overlooked forms.”

Talking to the shadows

Tim Silver

McClelland Sculpture Park and Gallery

13 December 2015 to 21 February 2016



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