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**DAVID THORPE**  
**LOVED UNDERGROUND**

Meyer Riegger, Karlsruhe  
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*The risen April sun now shone from the sky in all its glory, warming the parturient earth. Life was springing from her fertile bosom, with buds bursting into verdant leaf and the fields a-quiver with the thrust of new grass. Seeds were swelling and stretching, cracking the plain open in their quest for warmth and light. Sap was brimming in an urgent whisper, shoots were sprouting with the sound of a kiss. And still, again and again, even more distinctly than before, as if they had been working their way closer to the surface, the comrades tapped and tapped. Beneath the blazing rays of the sun, on this morning when the world seemed young, such was the stirring which the land carried in its womb. New men were starting into life, a black army of vengeance slowly germinating in the furrows, growing for the harvests of the century to come; and soon this germination would tear the earth apart. (Excerpt from Germinal by Émile Zola from 1895)*

Concluding his 1987 essay “What is the Creative Act?” Gilles Deleuze asks: ‘What is the relationship between the struggles of man and the work of art?’. He goes on to say: ‘For me, this is the most mysterious thing, it is exactly what Paul Klee wanted to say when he said, “You know, people are missing. People are missing but they aren’t.” For Deleuze, there exists an affinity between the work of art and ‘people who no longer exist’ but it is one that, he insists, is never clear.

Naming the exhibition ‘LOVED UNDERGROUND’, David Thorpe presents a series of new pipeline sculptures and wall-hung fresco panels. Worked from the inside out, both series are rendered from scratch by hand using non-synthetic materials (mud, natural dyes, bone glue, slack lime, hazel branches, casein).

Thorpe’s pipe sections either form pairs or stand alone. Cradled intermittently along the gallery walls, there is the sense that they are somehow in waiting, and that this particular constellation poses only a moment within the patient and steady collation of a growing arsenal. Whilst still wet and pliable the pipes’ mud surfaces are worked into intricate patterns from forestry: leaves, branches and flowers twist and swirl around the pipes’ outer layers shrouding them totally as labour past congeals to become a glorious camouflage-like protective skin for the future.

Also wrought from the Earth’s base materials, Thorpe’s vivid frescos are in this way for one not of the Italian type. Picturing instances of spiralling spiked branches and robust wild fruits they sharply envisage a hybrid and fecund world, and one defiantly unknowable at that, where plant, animal and human engage in a strange yet joyful dance. With Thorpe’s unequivocal rendering that stretches colour to the very tip of each and every bud, life in this instance at least, is lived unfettered. It seems almost inevitable that the more this amalgamated world grows and summons its strength from that, or becomes, the further it moves away from the glare of human civilisation and its constraining will to categorise.

Whilst Thorpe’s frescos afford a moment of revelry in picturing how life lived fully could be, the pipes allude more to the practicalities and work of getting there. And for Thorpe, in alliance with a tradition of socialist myths and folklore, this means to first abscond from the current state of affairs and retreat to the edges. Where the pipelines of heavy industry and lurid Geopolitical games tear the earth apart with processes such as fracking, Thorpe’s give themselves over instead to domination by nature, adjusting the balance somewhat, proposing a counterpoint. They herald a function more akin to splendid arteries, channelling life to the protective enclave of the forest or to the underground where, occluded from state vision, it may gather itself afresh and prepare for a radicalised return. Henry David Thoreau’s practice of withdrawal might be recalled, which for him, saw retreat as an act of agency, a critical place to recuperate the forgotten, to recuperate from the alienated world of modernity and its attempts at a positive dialectic where objects and their meaning are forced into an inevitably constraining reconciliation by a power that seeks to control.

Thorpe’s previous works have often featured an object emanating some kind of inner glow. Whether in the

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form of light, sound or colour, the sense was often that a heart was being proposed, or more broadly perhaps, the proposition of the art object's dignified and irrefutable unknowability, its potential for an autonomy that has grown apart from enforced ideologies. With the pipe's modularity, however what we find here is a shift towards collective enterprise. They signal a willingness to abdicate individuality in order to connect, build and spread in working towards a common task from scratch.

If the pipes read as arteries, pumping blood to and from the 'heart', it seems poignant that the 'heart', in this case, is ultimately yet deferred, referred to only by proxy. A state of love, or an attitude of care, it seems, is impossibly compromised under a still capitalist situation. So what are we left with? For Deleuze at least, it seems that the work of art functions as some kind of communicate through space and time. Touching on the notion of a collective sense or space, ideas for him should be treated as "types of potentials, as consecrated potentials". Through the artwork as vessel, ideas disengage from one body and enter a collective space where they might be re-activated in a different form upon their meeting of another later in time. If Marx's notion of congealed labour can be read in a positive sense, if the labour is a happy one, a joyful one, one that endows the object with care and love, the art object, similarly, might be read more as a type of store, something to be re-activated later upon connection and engagement with a common mind. Thorpe's pipes seek to make connections and build anew. If a state of love is impossible under capitalism's gaze then the only available option is to throw oneself to the underground, even if the question of the occurrence of a beautiful meeting, in this space and time, remains open-ended, or even if, as in Klee's words, the 'people are missing'.

Gili Tal