

Layers of texture, layers of space

House-artist of the ambient intelligentsia, **Russell Mills's** coverwork has graced the likes of Peter Gabriel, David Sylvian and Harold Budd album covers. Such a foreground obscures a 20-year art trajectory anticipating many of today's mixed media collisions, pulling the palette of painting into music and performance, through to sound, video and multimedia installations.

According to the OED, the root of the word *epigenetic*, refers to things produced on and at the surface of the earth, and have been chemically altered since their formation. In conversation, Russell Mills turns to the word repeatedly in his attempts to encapsulate how he works. Another phrase, which bubbles up to the conversational foreground is, 'the primacy of process'. Mills is perhaps best known for his illustrations and design work, particularly in proximity to various leading musicians: David Sylvian, Peter Gabriel, David Toop and Brian Eno, to name only the most visible. His cover-design work for these, and Eno's 80s 'Opal' label roster of musicians, defined a certain visual ambient realm of atmospheres and textures. Yet the lifeline of his artpath has been far broader than this, and the multiple media he has put his energies into do, in part, foreshadow the convergent terrain of today's multimedia, where a disparate portfolio seems a partial prerequisite for the current crop of art media practitioners. Mills however, was already there 20 years ago. As he says, 'I'm with the generalists rather than the specialists, every time.'

Today, this repertoire covers his continued and ongoing exploration of dense, darkly-textured, earth-bound paintings and collages, some of which see life in exhibitions, others as cover artwork, and some within stage and performance work with musicians and contemporary dance and performance groups. The latter have extended into both sound and light sculptures, and on to the *Undark* recording project. These were also midwife to another pathway further into the physical 3D world in the last decade: a series of installation

pieces both gallery and public-site based – joint projects with long-term artist/friend Ian Walton. All of these are expressions of the radically democratised art-world of found objects and fragments, where everyone is an artist, à la Beuys, and everything is valid potential as an artistic material. It is perhaps not entirely surprising that this avant-art legacy of the twentieth century – every object permitted, no material forbidden – stretching from Dada and Duchamp, on via Schwitters, to Beuys and Brian Eno – spoke to those art students into music and sound, within the formative zeitgeist of punk. It permeates Mills's work through and through.

Mills passed through the glittering tail-end of British art schools, dynamic post-war flowering, for much of the seventies, first at Maidstone, and then in, as he puts it, the 'dusty corner' of the RCA's then wholly experimental MA illustration course. The latter half of this was dominated by punk, and in the final year he appears to have slipped effortlessly into the punk rock ether, designing album sleeves for the old pre-corporate neo-hippy Virgin Records. He also made a particular connection with the post-punk outfit, Wire, who had emerged out of a particularly buzzing scene centred on Watford Art College. This connection with outrunners of, in Mills's words, 'the Watford Creatives' has continued to this day, Wire being also both ex-art students, and unusually knowing in their approach to punk.

At the same time his major final year RCA project was an extended set of obliquely interpretative images springing from Eno's playfully visual lyrics. Eno had visited Mills at the RCA and the pair had struck up a friendship. This eventually resulted in their collaborative book, *More Dark than Shark* (1986), in which many of Eno's lyrics, essays, and aphorisms sit comfortably alongside Mills's painterly collages. Before its publication Mills had expanded the live performances of ex-Wire personnel art events, which were seen either as unspeakably pretentious, or incomprehensible by the music press, and of little interest to the art media. As the energy and aesthetic which had triggered punk both continued to fade and become increasingly accepted by the wider world, Mills found himself in demand for his book and cover work, with the likes of *Radio Times*, *New Scientist* and Faber all using him extensively for cover illustrations. Anticipating the kinds of convergences, that in these days of portfolio

all photos Russell Mills



Incubator#/:Loop,
mixed media, 2001

careers are common place, Mills was already continually crossing the permeable borders between design, painting and working on sound and performance live events. In the mid 1980s he became for many years one of the in-house cover artworkers for the 80s ambient intelligentsia. This has included many covers for Brian Eno's mid-80s label, Land Records; CDs for David Toop and Bill Laswell among others, as well as the memorable alchemical cover painting on David Sylvian's *Gone To Earth* and numerous book covers. Alongside Vaughan Oliver, 4AD's in-house designer (the man who made the Cocteau Twins' albums such visually compelling feasts for the eye) Mills defined a certain visual reading of the oceanic ambient soundworlds, another overlay on the accepted mantra of these being movie/landscape 'journey-type' musics. These album covers, mixing both contextually appropriate exotic and mundane found materials with richly textured colourfields, vividly evoked hallucinogenic dreamstates while also alluding to the ideas that had shaped the music within.

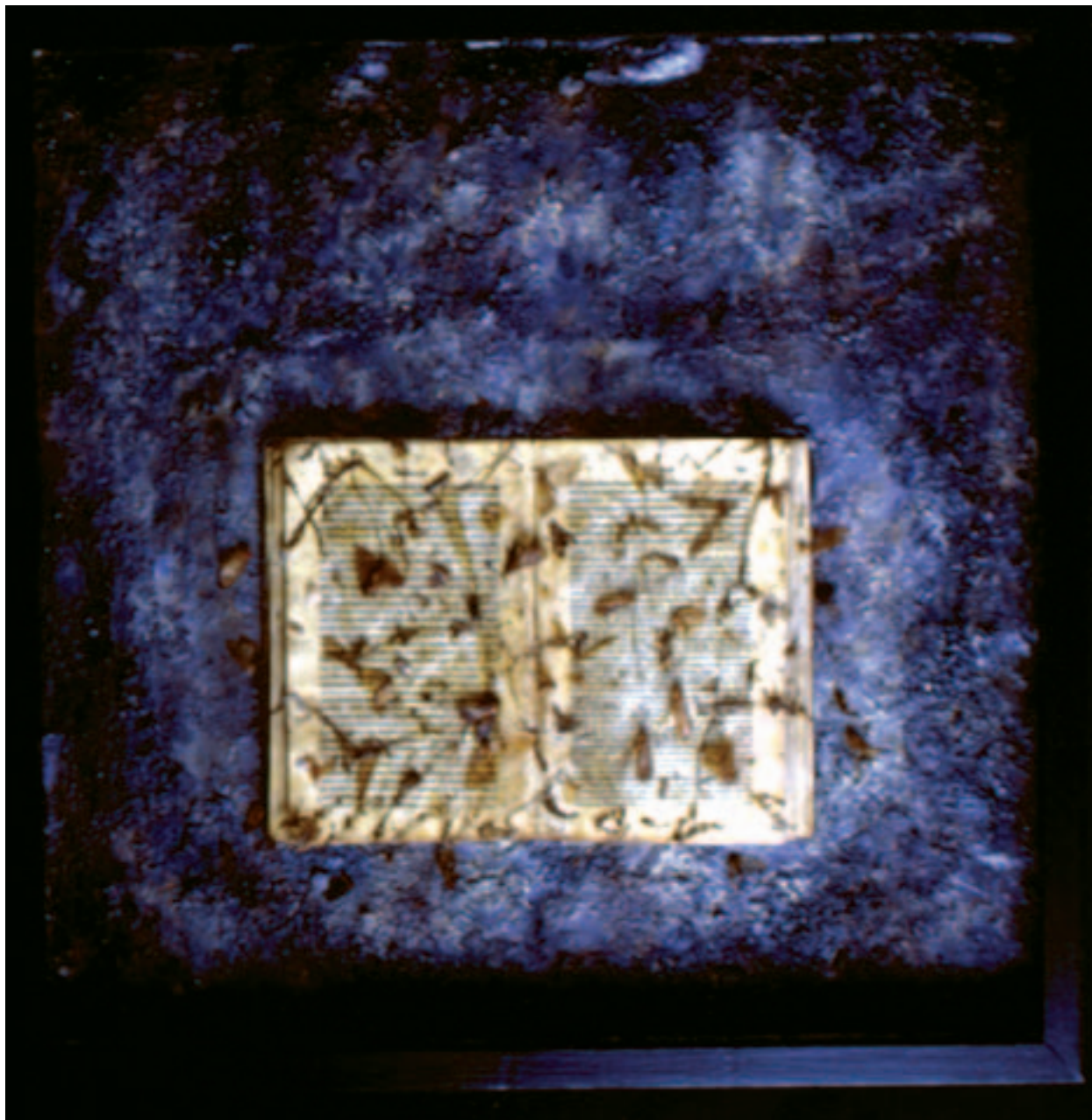
The Opal Roster, a loose affiliation of Eno's musician friends who had known and worked with each other for quite a few years, mixed in with a handful of ex-art students, defined a quieter undertow in the history of 80s contemporary music. Ambient was in part an offspring of the post-punk years, and for many who had immersed themselves first in soundworlds, and particularly electronics, it offered a way out of the impasse popular experimental music appeared to have reached. In the mid-80s with regular Opal releases, David Sylvian re-inventing himself as a solo artist, and

Peter Gabriel's world ambient explorations, a particular high watermark in the evolution of ambient and the environmental was reached. Today this is all acknowledged; what appears less recognised is how it brought forth a vocabulary both of visual ambient and of the integration of myriad multi-media aspects. In both of these Mills's work was central.

'I describe it as an epigenetic mode of working,' he states in the course of a long rambling conversation, 'as it's concerned with and made in layers that combine a whole set of ideas, notions and correspondences which have close relationships with one other. These correspondences happen following an intuitive path. I've always been interested in how things can have multiple meanings – how objects are invested in possible readings. Think of literature, for instance Proust's famous Madeline biscuits, which led to a whole series of connected trigger associations. Objects can do that as well.'

'This is allied to research, When I begin a piece I don't know where the research is going to lead, no idea what the end result is going to be, and invariably I'm led down many unforeseen sideroads, and find many other sometimes more interesting things along the way.'

'Content drives the work in the first place. Mentally I just can't do something just for the sake of it, it must have an underlying meaning. It's like an epigenetic or an archeological dig into strata, uncovering fragments and slices of different layers. Finds may be of unknown origin or unknown function but they have an authenticity, which cannot be denied and they are full of potential clues which are symbolic as well as social. What resonance and relevance do these finds suggest now?'



Liquid History, mixed media, 1996

‘There are common threads that loop back, a series of themes run through; ways of approaching the thinking. But it’s only recently with hindsight that I’ve begun to recognise that these existed and that I have been unconsciously following a defined path.

‘The darkness is also epigenetic. Television emphasises the black. Sony once took out a double-page newspaper advert. On one page was a child’s drawing on a white background and on the facing page the same drawing was shown on a black background; it was clear that the picture on the black background was far more legible, more resonant. Black, light archaeological digs allow images and objects to shine out. Light comes out of darkness.

‘But it’s also about another of the threads I’ve become aware of, which concerns where I’m from.

Most of my life has been lived in the Northern hemisphere, in Northern Europe. I grew up in Ripon in Yorkshire, and so much of my life has been in the north and I’ve also lived in Germany, Northern France and Holland as well as Britain. In their character and in their art they’re all places which are predominantly dark much of the year, and yet the art of Northern Europe is concerned almost exclusively with exploring the light.

‘And in my artistic influences there’s been this leaning towards the dark, the black, from the angry anarchy of punk to the poems and writings of Beckett, to the Estonian and Polish composers Arvo Part and Gorecki, to the films of Herzog and Tarkovsky.’

Another thread that weaves its way into the work is the alchemical. ‘Alchemy, in its true sense, was about

exploration and for me it is metaphorical. And it’s about a higher understanding of life that becomes translated plastically in the work, by setting up processes where there’s no control over the outcome. Materials and substances are thrown together with a capacity for risk, and abandonment to chance. A vague certainty of what might happen is present but never guaranteed, and I never bother writing down a so-called “recipe” of a process, so as to avoid the ease and convenience of repetition.’

Alchemy, for Mills, speaks a language that both affirms and expresses the impossible. He resonates with, wants, his work to echo the ideas inferred by its paradoxical language of the impossible; the shadow of the sun; a virgin’s milk. These metaphorical category-mixes, imbued with paradox are what are meaningful for him, rather than the transmutation of base metals into gold. ‘It is’, he states, ‘a useful echo to return to all the time, to remind me of the primacy of process.’

Many of the album cover commissions have repeatedly returned to the elemental and lustre of metal, which of course is at the heart of alchemy. There is a gold leaf detail on the inner gate sleeve of the Sylvian classic *Gone to Earth*, and the cover of *BetweenTides*, or what looks like iron on the front and back covers of Harold Budd’s *Lovely Thunder*. These near-forgotten mid-80s ocean-of-sound classics all invoke a sense of the potentiality and invitation of transformation. In particular the Egyptian symbology of David Sylvian’s *Gone To Earth*, a partial rerun of the tarot imagery pre-occupying some of the Eno RCA work, framed within possibly iron or lead. While at the centre of attention is an emanation of light receding into deep, cave-dark brown’s to the edges of the piece. One of the largest canvases Mills completed, the piece was guided by Sylvian. ‘David is very hands-on in everything he does, including the cover’s language, which shone through. He had a very strong sense of what he wanted. It had to allude to alchemy as he was also very interested in alchemy as a metaphor.’

The cover artwork to *Lovely Thunder*, another work released in 1986, sets two further interiors, another molten strata crack, and on the reverse a rust forest of naked branches, onto a larger span of submarine-deep mottled inky texture. Two years before, a seabed of poppy seeds is set against a ground of lightly dusted watercolour residue, partially covered by a wavy royal blue watercolour wash, Budd and Eno’s *The Pearl*. Two years later Roger Eno’s 1988 *Between Tides* reveals delicately applied found materials, snaking wires and lines of sand – what look like the remnants of a timepiece, or an ancient loudspeaker system. There is nothing in the way of obvious literal activity in these pieces, but through a subtle mixture of texture and suggestion, they summon up a world beside the everyday, yet out of everyday materials. This is the repeated constant in

these works, how any material can be brought to use, and this will happen several times, setting in flow a collage of relationships. Implicit is a testament to the recyclability of the world, letting one imagine an environmental art world that uses everything available, rather than defined by self-imposed boundaries. Today, Mills says that at the time he was tired of literal work, and ‘was moving away from the figure. I was getting into the background, away from the foreground, so there were pictures that suggested human presence, say a foot departing from the picture’s edge, trying to disappear completely. It was a way of avoiding the purely abstract whilst abstracting the everyday. Each piece would still contain its stories.’

The range in the colourfield he’s been drawn to are predominantly earth colours. Ochres and umbers, the rust metal colours. He rarely uses green: ‘a very difficult colour to work with’. If you look at the older works and the newer, there has been, alongside a disappearance of narrative, a progressive interiorisation, be it tunnelling into and under the surface of things, the interiors of the built, and inner spaces of the irrational.

One project that has been brewing for quite some time but is yet to surface, is a site-specific installation in Newcastle-Upon-Tyne. Originally timed to coincide with the *Black Ice* exhibition of recent Mills’s and Walton’s paintings and assemblages, the site specific installation *Static* is currently suspended in arts bureaucracy aspic. The planned centrepiece is an inverted leafless tree resembling the veins of a heart hanging from the roof of a three storey former engineering factory on North Tyneside’s Fish Quays – the one-time heart of the now decimated fishing industry.

‘The tree offers the obvious metaphor of “roots”: the rootedness of place and the aspirational possible. There’s going to be an intermittent slow cascade of smoke that will envelop the tree, and a film will periodically be projected onto the smoke. The film will be a seamless series of pieces showing process, continually changing, including film taken at the Swan Hunter shipyards of sparks flying from grinding machinery, of rope-making, and waterfalls and fire filmed backwards, treated so as to suspend time. There are also to be 20 rusted shovels, their gold-leaf tipped blades continually turning, suspended from the ceiling, whilst the floor will be covered by crushed sea-shells.’ The sound dimension of the piece is to be manifested by another elaborate assemblage of machinery: 10 CD players, each carrying unique palettes of found sounds, ranging from transformed recordings made in the Orange call centre, the Newcastle Metro and Swan Hunters, and an electrical sub-power station. There’ll also be two microphones on the actual fish quays picking up the random acoustic chitter-patter of whatever’s happening in real time, feeding it through to a pre-set sequencer into the abandoned factory as another stream into the ever-



Stage set for London Contemporary Dance Theatre, 1987

changing sound-collage brew. Together, all these constituent parts will be in continual dynamic motion, echoing the sea – a stone's throw from the warehouse.'

He and Ian began by exploring why the city happened here. Realising that the power that had driven Newcastle's emergence had been water, they dug deeper through the recent industrial sediments of shipping and heavy industry, to the buried rural past. They also looked forward to the emerging post-industrial economy of the ubiquitous call centres and how the Geordie personality is apparently coping with such dramatic changes in their occupational opportunities. Mills notes that 'the character they've cultivated has allowed it to survive, although in the most unlikely blue-collared places.' At present Mills is unsure as to whether this project is on or off, although as of last word additional funding is being sought and other venues are being researched whilst talks with curators at Newcastle's gleaming new art factory, Baltic, are also in progress.

While this was happening, Mills's and Walton's erstwhile journey from their home near the Lake District town of Ambleside to Newcastle, wound along a ghost road across the full range of uncertain futures that presently overwhelm much of Northern England. If it covers the twilight skylines of heavy industry and manufacturing, through the landscape of post foot and mouth farming, and the virtual themepark of Lake District tourism, so his work straddles a different series of connections and boundaries. This melding of traditional 'art' practice to new media, performance and installation, and the ambiguous legitimacy of the electronic and ambient incarnation of rock which remained for many years outside the hierarchy of taste cultures of the high art world.

On the one hand there is an unclassifiable character to the broad brush strokes of the media Mills works with; unborn categories waiting for the establishment art to catch up and provide names for. On the other hand, and from a perspective somewhat outside art canon orthodoxy, there is a consistency to the Mills mixed-media art career journey.

Mills sees no break, no firewall of category anxiety, conceptual or practical, between arriving from live

music performances, and finding himself working in the site-specific and installation firmament. The main music context was originally a free-floating project with post-punk outfit Wire, whose members, Graham Lewis and Bruce Gilbert, gave a series of experimental gallery performances through the early 80s.

'It was the last fling of the art school mentality. On one side there were art school types who knew about performance and new media, and they brought that knowledge to bear in this world of music, recontextualised and revamped in a live situation. On the other it was to do with technology, where lighting and sound decks were getting cheaper and affordable. I'm not sure if there's a direct correlation with mixed media and installation art which began to emerge later in the decade. With me it just happened, it wasn't really conscious, a continuation of the ideas we've been working on, which comes out of experiences. Most people do one thing, while I do a wide range of things, and I also bring people in who each do one thing, and put them together and see what happens. Essentially it isn't a new idea of course, but its processes and context are necessarily different.'

The transition from 'live' stage pieces (as much to do with the avant-art end of post-punk, as of the gallery-based art world) to removing and reassembling these within a context comprehended within an art lexicon, began with a sculptural piece for the old Grizedale sculpture park, long before revolution set in there. The piece, *Shintin* was a homage to the founder of Merz, Kurt Schwitters, who made his home in Ambleside in later life. Mills relished working on the piece with Walton, Schwitters being another of their heroes, which alluded to the assemblages and readymades and more importantly his proto-installations, the *Merzbau*, that preoccupied Schwitters for many years. Although commissioned to mark the anniversary of his hundredth birthday and fortieth deathday, Mills recalls *Shintin* as a 'minute thing', which ended up being colonised by an extended family of field mice.

This was in 1987, apparently long before he had an inkling of removing himself and family to Ambleside, a few miles over the hills from Grizedale in 1992. But if the Grizedale piece anticipated how part of Mills' work was to unfold, it was also on the cusp of becoming recognisable within the emergent field of installation and sound-sculptural artwork. Since then, across the 90s, a significant portion of his time has been devoted to other installations, seeded in the world of contextually anchored ambient music, but constructed for galleries and site-specific public art contexts, and subsumed into the burgeoning mixed-media art constellation, and appearing generally to be apprehended within its theoretical language and frame of mind. In the last five or so years there has been an intermittent collection of pieces, the majority of which have



Russell Mills + Ian Walton, Still Moves, 1999

been in regional venues. 1996's Carlisle sound installation, *Measured in Shadows*, was followed by a contribution to the imaginative avant-rural Schwitters homage: 1999's Artbarns project, across the Valley of Bowland. This piece, *Still Moves*, mixed a bricolage of materials: 20 open, empty suitcases seemingly floating skywards in a barn, with a 1940s valve radio adapted to ceaselessly search out static signals. And another of Mills's ambient intelligentsia collaborators, David Toop, approached him for the South Bank's foray into sound-art: *Sonic Boom: The Art of Sound*. Mills's and Walton's contribution, *Mantle*, was alone in the Hayward's concrete recesses in alluding to the rural, with an urban savvy installation weighted with sheeps' fleeces. The wool sat alongside the wider, post-80s, post-industrial palette – reflective, shining mirrors, foundry metals, but it was there none-the-less. Mills talks of this piece considering the importance and relevance of the Wordsworthian imperative of nature underwriting the evolution of culture, a theme revisited again in the *Republic of Thorns* installation in 2001. This recent work extended the net further. The spoken word of Grasmere's Wordsworth Trust's then resident poet, Paul Farley, was woven into new media, through a CD-ROM, whilst the installation was literally built out of the old; a stairway of books clad in earth, a stone turning in a bowl, both shaping the other simultaneously, rounded off with ghetto-blasters, and videowork.

This year he showed a collection of works *Extended Wings* alongside a further installation piece *Cleave!Soft Bullets* at Cumbria's largest arts complex, Kendal's Brewery Arts Centre. He has also been working on the third in the series of *Undark* albums, and a three CD remix set of the soundscapes, from installations from 1994 to the present. The plan is that these CDs will appear as part of a book documenting this side of his work. For the soundscape and *Undark* recording Mills is accompanied by the Ambleside based guitarist and sound engineer, Mike Fearon, along with original *Undark* collaborator Tom Smyth. This latest *Undark* album includes sound samples sent in from his vast and well connected network of musician friends. Among these are Brian and younger brother Roger

Eno, Bill Laswell and partner Gigi, Nils Petter Molvaer and Ryuichi Sakamoto, just heading up the list. David Sylvian may add vocals further into the project, whose recent *Camphor* album Mills also did the art design for. 'It's all going well and potentially we have a great, interesting album in the offing,' he says. 'We're naturally restricted by time and the fact that, of our choosing, we're working alone without label support.'

Locally however it is the Merzbarn project, which appears to be particularly galvanising him. This has grown out of *Shinti,n* itself a homage to Kurt Schwitters's last work the *Elterwater Merzbarn*, which remained unfinished at his death in 1948. Mills and Walton were invited early in 2001 to sit on Ambleside's small museum committee at The Armitage Museum and Trust – to develop a major lottery funded building project dedicated to Schwitters and his life in Britain particularly Ambleside. Mills envisages the centre investigating in depth all aspects of the 'collage principle', with the necessary technology to hand to establish links with museums, galleries, libraries and archives relating to Schwitters's way of doing. The early plan has a rolling programme of commissions, bringing in artists, writers, musicians, and so on, creating contemporary responses to the paradigm and legacy that



Russell Mills + Ian Walton, Republic of Thorns, 2001

Schwitters – perhaps inadvertently – left to the region. All this would be housed in a new building, innovative and radical in itself, reflecting the work and ideas of the man who has inspired it. There are hopes to persuade the current custodians of the Merzbarn, Newcastle's Hatton Museum, to allow it to be returned to Ambleside, although he admits this is a 'total longshot'. Even so, if only part of this project is realised it could remake his adopted hometown's cultural profile, becoming an end destination for Schwitters aficionados the world over.

Mills's work is surely deeply engaged with the processes of the world, from the slow geomorphological changes of nature, and the land, to the sediments of

change through history and time, and the man-made world of things, objects and artifice. To this, he has brought an enduring fascination with how these can be agents of potential transformation, for himself, and for the onlooker, which in one language can be described as the alchemical. This is distinctive to another artist immersed in the transformative power of the alchemical, Susan Derges, whose photographic immersion is embedded within an ecological world view, so that the photographic divide between the observed



and observer disappears. As far as objects are concerned Mills doesn't seem to be engaged with drawing upon any of the consequences between the possible alchemical relationships of his materials, be it the gold leaf, a crow's nest of wirings, or a collection of soiled books. The alchemy resides in what can happen to those materials during the process of creating the work, rather than seeing alchemy in the indivisible whole. If Mills's world is uneasy with its holistic neighbour, this nevertheless reveals how wide-ranging the influence of alchemy – the transformation of the unconscious – has been across recent generations. Think how his world of alchemy bridges the similar immersions of others, including Derges and Sylvian and the German artist, Anselm Kieffer. For each however the unconscious terrain being transited is very different. In Sylvian's case a journey into the Egyptian Blue Nile, appears to have paralleled a personal psychological journey, its apparent endpoint being eventual peace and resolution at the feet of an Indian Guru; Kieffer is different again, born out of Germany's post-war denial, and Kieffer's attempts within his painting to ritualise coming face to face with, a kind of absolving purification of that denial.

By contrast, with Mills there remains the question-

ing, sharp edginess of punk, and post-punk, the ethics of which were to foreground the social, whilst ignoring the environmental. Those who bought into the answers punk offered, have often remained radically indifferent to the environmental contention that resolving issues of social justice are intimately entwined, and dependent on resolving environmental dilemmas. In a further stage of this, by the mid-nineties the era of punk was a useful mythology for BritArt; while the environmental was too marginal and too 'soft', at best ignored, or alternatively easy pickings for casual denigration, in the hard thrust of making it in the new London art bubble. This isn't to say there is any residue of punk Marxism to Mills or his work, it doesn't give off

any sense of politics beyond a sense of instinctive connection with the grittier northern working class, 'no bullshit, straight talking' art and music world common across its widespread communities. The concerns are other.

Mills's work begs the question of new media's and other material's relationship with alchemical transformations. Is it possible that the alchemical marriage, of making 'gold' our states of mind out of the materials of the everyday, is really credible? How much is the word only a cipher, and the

deeper elements of the alchemical drops away? It is clear on any normal lexicon of art environmentalism that Mills is not specifically an ecological artist although his ideas do embrace sincere ecological concerns. He is suspicious when I mention the Boyle family: 'I admire the craft, how they did what they did, but as an artform I find it to be detached and void of emotional engagement and as such it leaves me cold. It seems to be saying how do we emulate a micro-piece of ground. I can't see it as art and can see no point in expending energy on trying to merely replicate the already known.' And similarly, Goldsworthy is largely demoted to decorative craft, 'it has to be applauded, and in an eco-educational way it has had a terrific effect in opening up an awareness of our environment for huge swathes of the general populace, which sadly, Richard Long has never had. School children will know about Goldsworthy, but none of them will have heard of Long.' Not completely surprisingly he relates more to the confrontational and in his words, 'paradoxically meditative' face of earth art heralded by the somewhat theory-bound but undeniably powerful and influential world of Robert Smithson. 'Because what he was doing was transformative, taking everyday poor things, the



Axis, mixed media, 2001

humble everyday which are taken for granted and transforming them into something new but with the added dimension of a social context. He confronted and collaborated with corporations who were abusing the land in their search for mineral wealth, and using the scars they created made something new out of it all, works that critiqued the corporations as well as opening our eyes and minds to our environment.'

And yet in many ways there is much which the communities which Mills, twenty first century baton holder to the Dadaist tradition of Duchamp and found world of Schwitters, and the traditionally understood environmentalist art core share. More, in some senses, than divides. Both have removed themselves from the centre, and both are fascinated by process, but argue at the details of the focus of the process, since to the other it appears deceptively different. Both often relate to transformation and the alchemical; and both, perhaps most significantly, respond to looking to the detail of the still world. One of nature, the other of the everyday, yet sharing the insight that beauty can be easily uncovered in either, in that attention to the stillness of the more than human nature. But also in the throwaway flotsam of the apparently everyday, which imbues an equal measure of sensitivity to the still world of physical real life. He says as much himself, 'A lot of the ideas are from the land, and from nature. I use the land as a metaphor to dig into, into its layers, and into its archeology. This also relates to the poetic works of Seamus Heaney and that so-called scientific madman, Rupert

Sheldrake and his theory of Morphic Resonances, which goes back to Goethe and naturphilosophy, and his theory of colour, and from there to Beuys and Kieffer. With the theory of colour it's complicated, and yes, black is a non-colour, but it depends if you're talking about pigments or light, or printing inks and the processes of light and colour mixing. For me in most instances black is still the best to enable illumination.'

A last word might be taken from outside the Western tradition, from Japan, which has been another signal influence on Mills. In conversation he refers to *In Praise of Shadows*, an essay on aesthetics by the Japanese writer, Junichiro Tanizaki. Its main concern, Mills maintains, is an allusion; in describing the collision of the shadows of the traditional Japanese interiors and the dazzling light of the modern world Tanizaki is posing questions of a deeper philosophical cultural dilemma. What would have happened, Tanizaki asks, if the Japanese, and not the West, had invented the electric light bulb? Its answer is that a far subtler relationship to our surroundings might have evolved. A more caring, thoughtful philosophy acknowledging the shape and textures of shadowland, could have developed. It is to this subtler relationship of illumination, the shadow play of light to dark which Mills's work has been committed to unearthing.' OL