



DANIEL AGDAG



Daniel Agdag: The Impossible Bottle

Moments from an unrealised film directed by Daniel Agdag,
produced by David Lynch, screenplay by Franz Kafka.



In some ways we recognise this aesthetic. In cinema we see it in such films as Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and Fritz Lang's 1927 masterpiece, *Metropolis*. It's a kind of Industrial Gothic, something imported from the Industrial Revolution and, in the process, distorted and twisted mementos from some gritty parallel universe captured in a frozen tableau.

These impossibly intricate architectural technologies, formed as they are from solid metal industrial-strength girders and massive slabs of concrete, are built to resist a harsh and alien clime. Except, of course, they are in fact meticulously formed from that most humble of materials, cardboard. But what Daniel Agdag does with cardboard essentially beggars disbelief. Armed with little more than a surgical scalpel and metal ruler, Agdag builds entire worlds, 'Impossible Bottles' not unlike the bizarre fully rigged sailing ships improbably squeezed into glass wine bottles.

Agdag is, however, by no means hamstrung by his choice of cardboard. Earlier this year he was commissioned to make a massive steel sculpture for the Hamton development at Aca-cia Place on the banks of the Yarra River in Richmond. The work will be a 2.2 metre steel-fabricated piece entitled *The Inspector*, a gothic-Victorian-steampunk work that references aspects of the history of the Yarra and a cross-section of a rail-bridge influenced by the Victoria Street Bridge and its ornamental gantries.

Cardboard is not nearly as delicate as one might assume. It has been utilised by artists as diverse as Ricky Swallow and John Nixon. Agdag's are not placed beneath glass domes for protection. The bell-jars are there to keep their odd atmospheres in place. The result creates a sense of Late Victorian *wunderkammers*, rarities to be discovered in the dusty corners of long-deserted libraries and museums.

The strange sense of a Kafkaesque world must surely be a conscious one on Agdag's behalf. Works titled *The Recorder* and *The Inspector* hint at some shadowy bureaucratic underworld, a sense that is powerfully carried through in the title, structure and graphics of his bizarre (but beautiful) sepia-drenched website, www.publicoffice.com.au and its various components: the "Department of Communication.", the "Department of Information.", the "Department of Labour.", the "Department of Commerce.", and the "PUBLIC OFFICE." Circumnavigating the hallways and shelving of this shadowy world one realizes that one has inadvertently stumbled into the same world as David Lynch's *Eraserhead*.

Agdag is a bowerbird of obsessive detail. He has said that when he traverses a city it is the detail that consumes him: "I'll look at the pipe work or a little junction box – all sorts of things, and I retain those little elements."

"There's a logic to everything I make," he says. "They're all systems in one way or another and that system has got a massive combustion chamber that spins the wheels that turn the dynamo that generates the electricity. The very final part of that is a little extension of pipes that lead to a power point at the very base of it. That's a self-contained power generating machine."*

Undeniably the devil is in the detail. Agdag is, to date, better known as an award-winning creator of stop-motion animation, and was awarded the prize of 'Most Innovative Short' in the 2007 Dendy Award's for his short film, *Paper City Architects* and subsequently won a nomination in the prestigious Australian Film Institute Awards, and he has said of these works that they could be sets for films he will never make. But, quite clearly, he doesn't need to.

There are sound machines, recording machines, maritime machines, floating machines and surveillance machines. There is an adapted technology for every function of Agdag's world. But the mad architect behind these devilishly detailed cornucopia of industrial rituals eschews the detailed schematics one would expect. As he gently slices into his cherished medium he moves straight from scalpel to machine – there are no drawings, no plans as one might righteously expect. These sculptural oddities are a form of compulsive three-dimensional sketching hinged with PVA glue. They are, in essence, more than eccentric. They are, in fact, quite mad, obsessive and unfailingly fascinating and one can almost hear their clanking and hissing and electrical buzzing and smell the lubricating oil and belching smoke of their functioning components. A strange new world of baroque industrialization.

* Interview with Ying Zhu and Gideon Egger, <http://notesontheroad.com/Daniel-Agdag-Interview.html>











WORKS:

01: 'The Decline' 2013 \$4,000
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
58.5 x 30.5 cm

02: 'The Second Fatality' 2013 \$4,000
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
58.5 x 30.5 cm

03: 'The Recorder' 2013 \$2,200
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
20 x 11.5 cm

04: 'The Exodus' 2013 \$4,000
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
58.5 x 30.5 cm

05: 'The Tide House' 2013 \$4,000
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
51 x 25.5 cm

06: 'The Inspector' 2013 \$4,400
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
58.5 x 30.5 cm

07: 'The N° 8' 2013 \$4,000
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
51 x 25.5 cm

08: 'The Elephant' 2013 \$3,500
Cardboard, trace paper, mounted on wooden base with hand-blown glass dome.
38 x 25.5 cm

(Including G.S.T)

[MARS] MELBOURNE
ART ROOMS

418 Bay Street, Port Melbourne, Victoria Australia 3207
T: +61 3 9681 8425 F: +61 3 9681 8426 E: andy@marsgallery.com.au

www.marsgallery.com.au