

## **As Above so Below**

**Installation at the Bergen Art Academy, Bergen, Norway**

**Borealis Contemporary Music Festival 2014**

"That which is Below corresponds to that which is Above, and that which is Above corresponds to that which is Below, to accomplish the miracle of the One Thing." This is the second statement taken from the Emerald Tablet, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, cherished in secret by philosophers and alchemists since about 800 CE. The underlying meaning, that everything which happens in one level of the universe happens in an interconnected fashion in every other, is what has motivated Dydo and Haire in this installation.

A significant feature of alchemy is the notion that the spiritual transformation of the alchemist was an essential element in the process; this has been an increasingly important part of our work as well. Art and music are like alchemy. Both the alchemist and the artist/composer (and, later, the performers and the audience) are ideally involved in a process of self-transformation. The transmutation of the elements, just like the creation of musical pieces, is a process that makes the transformation possible. The transformation of a work of art by music, or of music by a work of art, is also a similar process. So the music of this installation is itself involved in a self-transformation; the initial musical source material was written by the 17th century alchemist Michael Maier in his work *Atalanta Fugiens* (1618). This book contains fifty illustrations, each of which is accompanied by a short epigram, a longer essay, and a three-part musical score – the first multimedia work.

The visual element of this work was originally inspired by scum on a river that can be seen in these photographs, human effluent transmuted into heavenly visions of constellations following alchemists of the Silent Tradition who worked with rejected and worthless substances like *dirt, sea foam, dew, brackish water and urine*. For example urine was an ingredient in gold compounds used for medical treatments. (*Take the urine of a healthy man drinking wine moderately; put it into a gourd which you must stop close, and set into horse dung for the space of forty days.* From Dr Anthony's *Aurum Potabile* – DW Hauck.)

By recycling waste materials into the work *As Above so Below* reflects the alchemical processes of *nigredo, albedo* and *rubedo* representing these stages in their corresponding colours with chopped-up old black rubber gloves, about 100 white milk bottles and wire plaited with strips of red plastic carrier-bags or bound with red insulating tape. Nine alchemical symbols including sulphur, quicksilver, purification, reduction and distillation are contained within the shapes of this red wire. The nets from Rioja bottles represent gold and are in the form of an inverted triangle, the alchemical symbol for water relating to the river in the photographs, the beginning of this work. With gold as the ultimate goal the circle is completed and the end is the beginning.

The tangled mesh-like qualities, in both the sculpture and the photographs, express the interconnectedness of that which is above to that which is below and alongside the celestial scum are photographs of fragments of off-cuts such as wire, string, cable ties and acrylic drillings from Haire's studio, saved for no particular reason over the last three years. There are also photographs of the work itself signifying the enfolding of the work in upon itself like nesting Russian Dolls. This articulates the idea that everything contains everything else, a common thread in Dydo and Haire's work, which is reflected in alchemy. The alchemists thought that the *prima materia*, the life-force, the seed, existed in all matter and it was this seed that enabled matter to be transmuted into gold. Alchemists believed that all matter was alive and had the potential for growth and change.