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## Gill Gatfield's Grass Roots by Natasa Kruscic

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In her new body of work, *Grass Roots*, Gill Gatfield explores grass as a medium and uses it to create both paintings and sculpture. The distinction between the two is not definite, as the sculpture on the lawn retains some aspects of the painting and the paintings have sculptural quality. While the works are almost relief like and three-dimensional, the individual blades of grass can be seen as brushstrokes, painted in an expressionist manner. The paintings appear as a negative of the sculpture, since what is dried out area in the sculpture is filled with green grass in the paintings and the circle of green grass in the sculpture is represented by the void in the paintings.



Gill Gatfield  
*Grass Roots*  
*Sculpture* 2006  
(maquette)  
Grass, worms,  
insects, dirt

Due to the properties of the medium the works are in flux. This aspect of the works almost defies the clean lines of the geometric forms. As the grass grows and insect life moves the lines blur and the works burst out of their given frames. In the paintings the grass expands into the void of the circle, while the dried grass in the sculpture regenerates and 'catches up' with the green grass of the circle. Slowly, the sculpture on the lawn merges with the grass surrounding it. The visual effect is that of a painting without a frame

hung on the wall of the same colour as that of the painting's background. One can imagine the work expanding and claiming the space beyond its given boundaries.



Gill Gatfield  
*Grass Roots Painting* 2006  
Edition of 3  
610mmH x 610mmW x 35mmD  
Grass, soil, thread, signwriters board

In her earlier works Gatfield has explored the idea of a canvas, painting's preparatory surface (the integral, but often overlooked part), as the work itself. Here, she takes it further. Gatfield often substitutes the term 'Grass' with 'Lawn' which has two meanings: 1) tendered grass; and 2) linen or canvas, ie. the support for painting. The lawn, which is often intended as the basis for other activities, in the way a blank canvas is meant to be painted on, becomes the focus. It is cut, covered and then exposed to form a circle within a square - an abstract painting. However, in connection with its title, the circle within the square is symbolic. The second word in the title, 'Roots', has a number of meanings - source or origin; or abbreviation in mathematics for square root, but also alludes to the sexual act in the way the word 'rooting' is used in New Zealand slang. The latter way of reading the work is reinforced by the use of organic materials.

The grass invokes the tactile, sensual qualities in the works, while the continuous change assimilates them to a performance. The ever present transience creates uncertainty, but also unlimited potential.

The paintings, made of 'ready-made' turf which is cut and stitched on the sign writer's board, if well placed and looked after would remain green and 'alive'. They could act as interior or exterior portable mini lawns. If left without water, the grass would dry out and they would turn into what Gatfield calls Dried Arrangements. Seen in this state, the works would bring new meanings to the genre of still life paintings.



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Although the works are editions and each one is made in the same way and using the same materials, each work will become unique due to the property of the materials, the context and the way they are displayed and treated.