

# GARY DEIRMENDJIAN, HOLLOW PROMISE – CASULA

on June 12, 2014



1130AM Queens Birthday long weekend Saturday. A week into winter; behind us the dark heft of Casula's old powerhouse with its great silver tower stretching for a crystal sky, currawongs gurgling in the bush along the river. A small crowd, coffees in hand behind a flimsy temporary barricade on the edge of a riverside paddock, waiting for artist Gary Deirmendjian's latest.

Gracious to all, dressed in black, juggling contractors, curators, family members and friends, Gary calmly, almost unobtrusively, directs proceedings.

Facing off in the paddock - a 20 foot steel shipping container and a large orange excavator.

Earlier the open doors of the container revealed its contents of assembled detritus.

Now closed, the container presents as a sealed unit. A squat little strongbox, looking mighty resistant.

Brother Charles, along for the show, knowledgeable about matters of machinery, offers an opinion:

*“Looking at that excavator, I reckon it’s gonna struggle”.*

A growl, a burst of black diesel smoke and it’s on. The excavator circles, attacks, hits, retreats. Regroups and repeats. The container sits mute, unyielding. Occasionally it slides a foot or two across the grass, or gets bounced up and down. Minutes pass - the excavator acting out a macabre and violent choreography.

The grey container, insipid blue COSCO screaming irony, resolutely guards its valueless contents. Never ever give up. Even if the mission is pointless.

Slowly, ever so slowly, the excavator gains the upper hand. Agile, angry, hydraulically enhanced, it mortally wounds; a rip here, a tear there – rapaciously thrusting its toothed steel bucket, forcing open the container’s torn sheet metal, progressively shredding its integrity.

As the container yields, the excavator grows in boldness, crushing half the box near flat, mounting the ruin, pinning it to the ground with cold steel tracks – great orange arm and dangling bucket a permanent threat. A final, triumphant moment as the excavator pauses atop the crushed half of the container, remainder bent back in submission.

The resultant art object, moved to just outside the gallery, is a magnificently mangled steel box – its gizzards of other peoples discards intact, beautifully sited in repose with a kind of weary pride. Comfortable in the knowledge that it remained stoic till the last, defending a useless cargo with its life.

Out in the paddock, great excavator tracks remain, grass ripped asunder, angry scars where the container slid and bounced.

Gary’s photographs and countless other images of the day form an archive.

There’s an art crowd who had some idea what they might expect and got more than they bargained for.

An earthmoving crew probably still wondering what the hell it was they just took part in.

And then, going purposefully about his work, there’s an artist who, in a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it kind of way, has just advanced his practice.

An artist who at his best is a quiet genius.

Making art is a tough gig. A treacherous journey from vision to execution. A

thousand dangerous moments for dilution or outright derailment. A failure of nerve, a loss of conviction, a distracting idea. Can you get to the end, stand back and say *yep – it's good art?*

You can if you're Gary Deirmendjian. *Hollow Promise* is a splendid hybrid; part performance, part sculpture, part contemporary commentary.

And a thoughtful development of the themes of faith, consumerism, abandonment and decay that inform Gary's practice.

Mark McClelland

Director, Artmap Studio  
[www.artmapstudio.com](http://www.artmapstudio.com)



*Images courtesy of the artist.*