

STRAIGHT UP: new works made with raw materials

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The twelve works collected here were selected for their investigation of the substances they are made from. Yet *STRAIGHT UP* is a cheekily misleading name for the show, a perverse choice for two reasons. Firstly, because none of these five young artists work quickly. Their works bear witness to the time spent painstakingly on their making, and each of the artists display a startling level of technical skill. They do not create *STRAIGHT UP* but slowly, carefully, meticulously. And secondly, because all of the pieces collected here are complex and confounding. They tell of tightly wound ideas and processes, using medium self-reflexivity as but one way into many other concerns. They aren't solely interested in their medium or technical support, but also in a range of other things. In showing these works together, I hope that their shared concern with a careful use of materials reveals something about the relationship between technical skill and technical support in a time and place in which both of these things are often disregarded. Moreover, I'm hoping that our focus on the surface of the works will in turn reveal something about their conceptual underpinnings, in much the same way that we can often only find the word or thought we are searching for when we allow our attention to shift elsewhere. None of this comes *STRAIGHT UP*; all of this takes time.

For Glenn Walls, literally decades have gone into the making of the *Going Home* series. The works revisit the artist's childhood home, inscribing on its walls teenage fantasies of modernist perfection – a linear sketch of Ludwig Mies van der Rohe's *Farnsworth House* – and adult fears of disorientation and despair. Past and future collide, and the result is at once disturbing and eerily comic. The same can be said of an intricate balsa model of a long-superseded piece of musical equipment, petrified in a permanent state of apocalyptic eruption.

If *Going Home* is an exploration of architectural space and the landscape of memory, Kane Grose's interests can be understood to centre on space of a much smaller scale. Using the humble tools of a home handyman, the artist has mysteriously hewn an unbroken chain from a solid block of builder's pine. Grose's interests in negative space are linked to a mischievous desire to bewilder and exasperate with his ability to manipulate materials. He's a trickster; he ain't *STRAIGHT UP*.

Carl Scrase's *Psychological landscape...* is assembled from photographs documenting a performance in which the artist exploded fireworks filled with fresh flowers, showering the room with countless petals of many colours. As with Walls' solidified ooze of expanding foam, the fleeting is made fixed and thus refigured. The image of a brief moment of wonder is interlaid with a photographic portrait in which petals have been placed onto the artist's eyelids to resemble bruises ripened over time into garish wounds, or gaudy makeup left over from a very big night out. Scrase recontextualises and transforms familiar materials in the spirit of embracing new possibilities: shoes that will no longer run are draped with cords of jewellery that are no longer worn; CDs that will not play are not discarded as junk but instead made to refract light like precious crystal.

CDs appear as a kind of nostalgic talisman for Dane Lovett, a mass-produced artefact of individual expression rendered emphatically personal once again through selection of context and combination. The little pile of albums Lovett has painted in *Dolphy Little* were all borrowed from his father. Piled on top of each other beneath a ceramic dolphin, they are as silent and light-faded as the synthesiser which serves as a resting place for a potted plant. All this hushed music and miniaturised nature seems analogous to Lovett's demonstration of the unassuming illusions that can be quietly created with paint: the artist morphs what at first appear to be shadows into watery drips of washed out colour; ostensibly haphazard brushstrokes are carefully flattened into a perfectly smooth surface.

Linzie Ellis interrupts the flat, matte expanse of an ink wash with a jagged line of thick, glossy impasto built from solidified oil. The juxtaposition points to the limits of what paint is capable of. A seemingly contemplative space is evoked through the use of luminous colouring, yet paradoxically an insistence on the literal physicality of the canvas is maintained through compositional symmetries, shifts in texture, and an emphasis on process.

Although all of these works reveal an interest in their technical support or medium, none of them are purely self-reflexive. They are not *STRAIGHT UP* in their use of raw materials, but full of skilful tricks and personal preoccupations.

Perhaps the Catalan 'molecular gastronomer' Ferran Adrià will be the patron chef of this exhibition. Cheers.

Roger Nelson, November 2010