

FORMS OF DRAWING

Tim Middleton

It is easy to talk about art that replicates the ready made in terms of what is lost and absent. Objects void of function and the people that would otherwise use them become traces or ghosts of the original form. Artists have used up countless hours of studio time breathing life back into objects relegated to the old, the forgotten or the soon to be out-dated 'stuff' we accumulate and drag through life behind us.

In the case of many contemporary artists working in the format (Ricky Swallow, Glen Hayward, Joe Sheehan et al.), their commitment to replication, to almost perfect mimicry of disregarded, everyday objects is what creates an often breathtaking, double-take kind of viewing experience. Sheehan's transformation of precious stones into perfect (and often functioning) replicas of found objects – a Phillips light bulb, cassette tape, or assemblage of household TV remotes possess a craftsmanship and precision which is literally hard to believe. Hayward, working predominately in wood is known for his expert hand carved replicas of domestic objects, appliances and more recently an entire office cubicle (replete with computer, phone, chair, offices dividers) lifted from the 1990 sci-fi blockbuster *The Matrix* and now touring the country.

In a 2012 article, art writer and critic Mark Amery wrote of his wariness of the sculptural strategy of the cast readymade, referring to the wearing out of artistic commentary on the not-so-disposable everyday object. He makes mention of the standard formula of the everyday object rendered in a new and perhaps surprising material "reference points emerge from the relationship between the material and the form... Then: nothing. The party trick is over".¹

Christchurch artist Tim Middleton is an artist who could be mistakenly placed in Amery's canon. Having focused

the outcomes of his degree at Canterbury University and subsequent studio practice on plaster casting using everyday objects from his life as the source, but his work lacks the desire for precision required of replication. The process of casting is ancient, the action of departure and return in which a mould is made of an object, the mould is then removed and then separately refilled with the another material, the complexity of the object determining how many parts to the mould. Traditionally the first of the moulds is made from plaster, a cheap and porous material made to be broken at the end of the process, the finished product emerging made of something more precious and stable. Middleton's process of casting, plaster from plaster, is in his words "far from an exact science and rife with a host of potential disasters and failures". His desire to embrace this kind of risk in the process of making and to respect the rough and broken edges that plaster often makes gets us closer to where his interests lie.

The first work I saw of Middleton's were what appeared to be almost chest height narrow plaster plinths, peering down through the top though revealed a dark and deep void, the form from where an object used to be. The whole work was in fact the negative cast and the rough plaster surface of the plinth bore all the layers and marks of the energy required to pour and set its significant structure. The object – a potentially plain and ordinary thing was there, but then not there at all, imbedded just out of reach and full view, in the tomb of the work.

At RAMP, Middleton presents five cast objects, each sourced from the artist's personal inventory – an amplifier, a block of polystyrene, a record cabinet, inflatable baseball bat and CD player. The works shift between easy familiarity and abstracted geometric forms but all of them in some way share the strange muted imprint of the original form. The transformation is entirely at odds with

the commercial finish of the original object but here the outcome isn't Amery's short lived 'party trick' but a documentation, a stripping of visual information that leave us with elements of line and mass, recording the gesture of a 'thing'. In other words - drawings.

The works at RAMP are only a fraction of the objects Middleton has cast. The five pieces seem to be intuitively connected, a basic sketch of an identity or a surrounding environment is implied but with no obvious hierarchy or system. And unlike other artists' works of this kind, Middleton's castings don't memorialise our inclination to collect and own possessions, rather they seem to speed up the forgetting. Objects and things that occupied spaces in our lives eventually disappear and the details of how they looked, their weight and mass and the reasons for why we owned them fade. Middleton has talked about the desire to work through his entire inventory of possessions, the action of casting (drawing) systematically - and in fast-forward - editing the originals out of his life through a process of methodical planned destruction.

Kim Paton
Curator – RAMP Gallery

Window work: Priscilla McIntosh – *In her closet*

(Endnotes)

1

Amery, M. (2012). *Joe Sheehan at Pataka Museum*. Retrieved from: <http://eyecontactsite.com/2012/09/sheehan-at-pataka-museum>.